

Symphilosophie

International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism

Romantic Aesthetics and Freedom

Volume 5 (2023)



Internationale Zeitschrift für philosophische Romantik

Rivista internazionale sulla filosofia romantica

Revue internationale de philosophie romantique

Symphilosophie 5 (2023)

<https://symphilosophie.com>

Editors-in-Chief — Direction Scientifique — Responsabili intellettuali — Herausgeberinnen:

Laure Cahen-Maurel
Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn
Internationales Zentrum für Philosophie NRW
Institut für Philosophie
Poppelsdorfer Allee 28
53115 Bonn
laure.cahen-maurel@uni-bonn.de

Giulia Valpione
Università di Trento /
Università degli Studi di Padova
Dipartimento FISPPA
Piazza Capitanato, 3
35139 Padova
giuliavalpione@gmail.com

Email: editors@symphilosophie.com

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Symphilosophie is published annually — *Symphilosophie* paraît une fois par an — *Symphilosophie* viene pubblicata con cadenza annuale — *Symphilosophie* erscheint einmal pro Jahr.

ISSN 2704-8152

SYMPHILOSOPHIE 5 (2023)

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Volume 5 (2023)

Romantic Aesthetics and Freedom

Romantische Ästhetik und Freiheit

Esthétique romantique et liberté

Estetica romantica e libertà

Editors-in-Chief

LAURE CAHEN-MAUREL & GIULIA VALPIONE

Guest Editor

ANNE POLLOK

Associate Editor: David W. Wood

Assistant Editors

Marie-Michèle Blondin, Luigi Filieri, Manja Kisner, Cody Staton, Gesa Wellmann

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Editorial

This fifth issue of *Symphilosophie* attempts to cast fresh light on an essential topic of romanticism – aesthetics and the philosophy of art. In the field of the history of philosophy, early German romanticism has long been primarily understood from the standpoint of a “metaphysics of art.” That is to say, the idea that art alone provides access to the absolute, an absolute conceived as the supreme philosophical challenge of all post-Kantian systems.¹ Some critics stigmatize this as an exorbitant speculative pretension: the sacralization of the essence of Art with a capital A, i.e. one expressed in the form of a kind of onto-theology, which remains indifferent to the reality of actual works of art.

In the domains of aesthetics and literary criticism, interest in romanticism has frequently focused on the current’s original interplay between philosophy and literature; indeed, that is one of the hallmarks of *Frühromantik*. Here too the question of the absolute has been at the heart of numerous debates. In France especially, at the height of structuralism, semiotics, and deconstruction, early German romanticism was read as the theorization of what Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe called the “literary absolute”: a conception of literature immersed in the autotelic and reflexive movement of its own production.² The intransitive dimension of romanticism was emphasized, in which the work of art was established at once as a fragment and a totality detached from the world. To employ the well-known Schlegelian image, the work of art is a hedgehog, a microcosm “autarkically closed in on itself, to mimetically replay an entire world that is forever lost.”³

The question of the artist and the act of creation have been marginalized by these types of readings. Moreover, the principle of the articulation between liberty and art entails the risk of an aestheticization of politics, as

¹ See for instance the work of Manfred Frank, in particular *Einführung in die frühromantische Ästhetik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1989); Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003); and Jane Kneller, *Kant and the Power of Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

² See Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Jean-Luc Nancy, *L’Absolu littéraire. Théorie de la littérature du romantisme allemand* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1978).

³ Olivier Schefer, *Poésie de l’infini. Novalis et la question esthétique* (Brussels: La Lettre volée, 2001), 83-84.

Walter Benjamin has shown.⁴ It is also a phenomenon that deserves to be rethought.⁵

This year's volume 5 of *Symphilosophie* seeks to bring some of these issues into sharper focus. In this regard, the main research dossier is placed under the sign of freedom, examining *inter alia* the social effects of artistic expression, especially with respect to the women of the romantic era.

We would like to warmly thank Anne Pollok (Universität Mainz) for guest-editing this issue on "Romantic Aesthetics and Freedom." Among others, Anne Pollok's research focuses on the philosophical anthropology of the German Enlightenment. She has published a monograph on Moses Mendelssohn⁶ and is interested in the role of aesthetics in Schiller's and Kant's philosophical representations of human vocation and *Bildung*. She is also co-editor (with Courtney D. Fugate) of the series: Bloomsbury Studies in Modern German Philosophy. More recently, her work has turned to Ernst Cassirer's philosophy of culture⁷, and to the practice of literary writing and salons as an emancipatory means for women. Here she has published several articles on women writers associated with early German Romanticism, including: Henriette Herz, Rahel Levin Varnhagen, and Bettina von Arnim.⁸

The core of the main thematic dossier is eight new research articles. This dossier not only deals with art in general in relation to the question of freedom, but also with specific arts, such as music, literature, and poetry. It contains contributions on a number of major German figures in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries: Karl Philipp Moritz, Friedrich Schiller, J.G. Fichte, and Hegel. Of course, this is not to label these thinkers as romantics. Rather, these authors allow us to better measure the inheritance and impact of romantic aesthetic thinking and artistic values. We are grateful to the contributors for their innovative research: Jane Kneller, Christoph

⁴ See for example Benjamin's reflections on fascism in *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, in W. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, eds. R. Tiedemann and H. Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1990), vol. I/2, 431-508.

⁵ Thanks to G.V. for this indication.

⁶ Anne Pollok, *Facetten des Menschen. Zur Anthropologie Moses Mendelssohns* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2010).

⁷ See Luigi Filieri, Anne Pollok (eds.), *The Method of Culture: Ernst Cassirer's Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2021).

⁸ Among others, see Anne Pollok, "A *Wunderblume* and Her Friends: How Bettina Brentano-von Arnim Develops Individuality Through Dialogue", *Hegel Bulletin* 43 / 3 (2022): 418-437; "The Role of Writing and Sociability for the Establishment of a Persona: Henriette Herz, Rahel Levin Varnhagen, and Bettina von Arnim," in *Women and Philosophy in 18th Century Germany*, edited by Corey Dyck (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 195-209; and "Bettina Brentano von Arnim", in *The Oxford Handbook of Nineteenth-Century Women Philosophers in the German Tradition*, eds. Kristin Gjesdal and Dalia Nassar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024) (in press).

Haffter, Allen Speight, Karolin Mirzakhani, Francesco Campana, Robert König, Caecilie Varslev-Pedersen, and Barbara Becker-Cantarino.

★

This 2023 issue also includes four research articles in the “Miscellaneous” or “Varia” section, by Norman Sieroka, Anama Kotlarevsky, Felix Alejandro Cristiá, and Alexander J. B. Hampton. It is no exaggeration to say that these texts present ground-breaking findings and offer a welcome expansion of *Symphilosophie*’s scope, this time in the direction of English Romanticism (Blake and Coleridge) and the ancient Greeks, and the question of cosmography, which we have little covered until now. Lastly, this issue has four book reviews, and our usual bulletin of recent publications, calls for papers, and information about upcoming conferences and events.

★

As readers of *Symphilosophie* know, one of our editorial policies is to publish new translations of the primary philosophical texts of German romanticism. Primary sources are the raw material of research work. That’s why we attach great importance to rendering them into one or other of the working languages of our journal. Our goal has been to try and make available at least one previously unpublished translation per year.

The present issue contains five such translations, three accompanying the main thematic dossier, and two in the miscellaneous section. In connection with the topic of romantic aesthetics and freedom, Anne Elizabeth and Jan Oliver Jost-Fritz have translated into English a new excerpt from Caroline and August Wilhelm Schlegel’s dialogue *The Paintings* (1799). This is part of a project to produce the first complete English edition of this essential romantic text on art. Our sincere thanks go to them for their introduction and translation. Then follows David W. Wood’s translation of some of Novalis’s studies and fragments on the fine arts. We have also benefited from Christoph Haffter’s collaboration in introducing, compiling and co-translating a selection of Bettina von Arnim’s texts on music, which are presented here for the very first time in French. We thank him for his valuable work.

We are also delighted to be able to publish Marlene Oeffinger’s previously unpublished English translation of August Ludwig Hülsen’s “On the Natural Equality of Human Beings” (1799). Forty years after the *Konstellationsforschung* research carried out by Dieter Henrich and Manfred

Frank, it is to be hoped that this first-ever translation will help provide an impetus for more philosophical work on Hülsen, a lesser-known but still key figure in German romanticism. The next translation in the miscellaneous section is the second half of the “Introduction” to Friedrich Schlegel’s Lectures on *Transcendental Philosophy* (the first translated half of Schlegel’s “Introduction” appeared last year in *Symphilosophie* 4). This rendering of Schlegel’s crucial primary text into English has been carried out by Joseph Carew. This first-ever integral English translation will doubtlessly stimulate further work on the philosophical foundations of German romanticism.

★

In line with the principal title of our journal, the following pages once again furnish evidence of symphilosophy and what it means to symphilosophize. We will just add here a few more remarks to those made in previous issues about the creation and significance of the German word *Symphilosophie*.⁹ Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis did not coin this evocative expression from out of the blue. For the term itself has an ancient Greek heritage. Aristotle already uses it in Book IX of his *Nicomachean Ethics*. In a passage dedicated to the common life of friendship, Aristotle provides various examples of individuals socializing together: alongside those who come together to drink, play dice, or hunt, there are people who meet to study philosophy together and delight in the feeling of a life in common (IX, 12, 1172 a 5). The specific Greek word here is: *συμφιλοσοφεῖν* (*symphilosophhein*). The Romantics of the Jena circle were not unaware of this passage¹⁰: not only was Schleiermacher privately translating this book of Aristotle’s *Ethics* as early as 1788 / 1789¹¹, but the use of the verbal form *symphilosophhein* is common among certain ancient Greek authors after Aristotle. Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis simply reintroduced the turn in the age of philosophical modernity, coining what is still a neologism for the German language. We kindly thank Denis Thouard – editor of the book *Symphilosophie: F. Schlegel à Iéna* (2002)– for reminding us of the Aristotelian paternity of the term.

★

⁹ See *Symphilosophie* 1 (2019): 5-7, and *Symphilosophie* 4 (2022): 513-550.

¹⁰ A complete translation of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* had appeared in German in 1791 by Daniel Jenisch: see *Die Ethik des Aristoteles, in zehn Büchern* (Danzig: Ferdinand Troschel, 1791), see especially 357-358.

¹¹ See Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Anmerkungen und Übersetzung zu Aristoteles: Nikomachische Ethik 8-9* (1788 / 1789). In *KGA* 1.1, ed. Günter Meckenstock (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1983), 1-80, especially 80.

The photograph on the cover of this issue also refers to a legend of Greek antiquity: the story of Iphigenia. It is directly linked to the saga of the Tantalids, a myth that abundantly inspired Greek poets and tragedians, from Homer to Euripides, via Hesiod, Aeschylus, Pindar and Sophocles. Long overshadowed by the male descendants of Tantalus, Agamemnon and Orestes, it wasn't until Euripides' theatre play that the figure of Iphigenia and the legend of her sacrifice became the subject of drama. This takes place in two distinct episodes. Firstly, on the shores of Aulis, where she initially submits and then is saved from sacrifice. Secondly in Tauris, where she is held as a priestess in the temple of Artemis.

Iphigenia, the female figure deprived of her freedom of movement, did not remain the Greek Iphigenia throughout cultural history: our modernity re-appropriated her legend. This occurred in France with Racine's play *Iphigénie en Aulide* and Gluck's opera of the same name; while in Germany, her plight gave rise to one of the masterpieces of Weimar classicism, Goethe's *Iphigenie auf Tauris*, published in 1787. "Iphigenie auf Tauris" is also one of the German choreographer Pina Bausch's first major works. Choreographed to Gluck's opera, it premiered in 1974 at the Wuppertal Opera House, where Pina Bausch had just taken over as director. The cover image of *Symphilosophie 5* is taken from a 2010 performance at Barcelona's Liceu opera house.

Bausch's choreography is a series of *tableaux vivants* bathed in a Rembrandt-style light. The latter in turn brings into relief the sculptural beauty of the dancers' bodies. A whole host of elements link the image of Iphigenia to the *Sacrifice of Isaac*, a picture painted by Andrea del Sarto in 1529 / 1530. The version hanging in Dresden's *Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister* is commented upon by Caroline Schlegel in the excerpt of *The Paintings* published in this year's translation section. Beyond the central motto of sacrifice – with both cases we are situated at the crossroads of two eras of artistic consciousness, the ancient and modern eras. As Jan Oliver Jost-Fritz notes in his introduction below, Caroline Schlegel's commentary on this Italian Renaissance work (which she explicitly describes as the "Laocoon of Christianity") is a contribution to the famous "Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes." Initiated in France by Charles Perrault in the previous century, the quarrel was reinterpreted in Germany not (unlike in France) as a modern reformulation of the rules of poetic art (of tragedy), but as drawing up an antithesis (that is to be overcome) between the naturalism of the ancient Greek world and the humanism of the modern world in the Christian era. What German historians have dubbed the inaugural *Romantikertreffen*, occurred in the climate of these issues. From 25-26 August 1798, the Jena

LAURE CAHEN-MAUREL

romantics met for a joint visit to the Royal Galleries of Painting and Sculpture in Dresden. They visited the Sculpture Gallery at night by torchlight in order to better and more concretely experience the life inhabiting a sculpted human body. This decisive romantic scene conjures up the later chiaroscuro choreography of Pina Bausch's *Iphigenie auf Tauris*.

★

As 2023 draws to a close, our editorial team is undergoing a double change: the departure of Manja Kisner and the arrival of Luigi Filieri. We would like to express our deepest gratitude to Manja for her availability and commitment to the journal over the last four years. We wish her all the best for the continuation of her philosophical work and research. We would also like to thank Luigi for agreeing to be part of our team and look forward to his contribution to this symphilosophical publication.

Lastly, we would once again like to thank our guest editor, our associate editor, and assistant editors; as well as all the contributors to this issue for their articles, translations, and book reviews; and all the external reviewers for their invaluable expertise.

★

We conclude this editorial with the announcement that the main thematic dossier of next year's sixth issue will be coordinated by our editorial team: Marie-Michèle Blondin, Luigi Filieri, Cody Staton, and Gesa Wellmann. Since the year 2024 marks the tricentenary of Immanuel Kant's birth, next year's issue of *Symphilosophie* will be devoted to the Kantian legacy of romantic philosophy. For more information, see the Call for Papers on our journal's website.

Bonn, December 2023

On behalf of the editors, Laure Cahen-Maurel

Editorial

Die fünfte Ausgabe von *Symphilosophie* befasst sich im Hauptteil mit einem unumgänglichen Thema der Frühromantik – dem Thema Ästhetik und Philosophie der Kunst. Wir möchten dabei ein etwas anderes Licht auf das Thema werfen. Im Bereich Philosophiegeschichte wurde die Frühromantik lange Zeit hauptsächlich unter dem Gesichtspunkt einer „Metaphysik der Kunst“ betrachtet, d.h. der Idee, dass nur die Kunst den Zugang zum Absoluten ermöglicht, einem Absoluten, das als höchste philosophische Frage der nach-kantischen Systeme verstanden wurde.¹ Und bisweilen wurde sie vor diesem Hintergrund als exorbitant spekulativer Anspruch stigmatisiert, als die Sakralisierung des Wesens der Kunst in Form einer Onto-Theologie, der die gegenständliche Realität der Werke gleichgültig sei.

Im Bereich Ästhetik und Literaturkritik hat sich das Interesse an der deutschen Romantik meist auf die originelle Überschneidung von Philosophie und Literatur konzentriert, die die Frühromantik kennzeichnet. Auch hier stand die Frage nach dem Absoluten im Mittelpunkt der Analysen. Vor allem in Frankreich, auf dem Höhepunkt des Strukturalismus, der Semiotik und der Dekonstruktion, wurde die Frühromantik als Theoretisierung dessen gelesen, was Nancy und Lacoue-Labarthe ein „Literarisch-Absolute“ nannten, nämlich eine Konzeption der Literatur, die in der autotelischen und reflexiven Bewegung ihrer eigenen Produktion gefangen ist.² Die Betonung der intransitiven Dimension der Romantik etablierte das Werk sowohl als Fragment als auch eine von der Welt losgelöste Totalität, ähnlich dem Schlegelschen Fragment-Igel, einem Mikrokosmos, der „autark in sich geschlossen ist, um mimetisch das Ganze einer für immer verlorenen Welt nachzuspielen“.³

Die Frage nach dem Künstler, der Künstlerin und dem Akt der Schöpfung wurde von diesen Lesarten, unter denen die romantische Ästhetik in jüngerer Zeit zu leiden schien, an den Rand gedrängt. Außerdem birgt das Prinzip der Verbindung von Freiheit und Kunst die Gefahr einer Ästheti-

¹ Wir verweisen zu diesem Thema auf die Arbeiten von Manfred Frank, insbesondere *Einführung in die frühromantische Ästhetik*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1989; Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003; oder auch Jane Kneller, *Kant and the Power of Imagination*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

² Siehe Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Jean-Luc Nancy, *L'Absolu littéraire. Théorie de la littérature du romantisme allemand*, Paris: Le Seuil, 1978; *Das Literarisch-Absolute. Texte und Theorie der Jenaer Frühromantik*, aus dem Französischen von Johannes Kleinbeck, Wien: Verlag Turia + Kant, 2016.

³ Olivier Schefer, *Poésie de l'infini. Novalis et la question esthétique*, Brüssel: La Lettre volée, 2001, p. 83-84.

sierung der Politik, wie Walter Benjamin gezeigt hat.⁴ Es ist auch ein Phänomen, das es verdient, neu überdacht zu werden.⁵

Die Ausgabe 2023 von *Symphilosophie* versucht, einige dieser Fragen stärker in den Mittelpunkt zu rücken. In diesem Zusammenhang steht das Themendossier unter dem Motto „Freiheit“, um insbesondere die sozialen Auswirkungen des künstlerischen Ausdrucks, vor allem für Frauen der romantischen Ära, zu hinterfragen.

Um die Überlegungen in diese Richtung zu lenken, haben wir uns an Anne Pollok (Universität Mainz) gewandt, der wir für ihre Bereitschaft, dieses Dossier zu koordinieren, herzlich danken. Anne Polloks Forschungsschwerpunkt liegt auf der philosophischen Anthropologie der deutschen Aufklärung: Sie hat eine Monographie über Moses Mendelssohn⁶ veröffentlicht und sich mit der Rolle der Ästhetik in den philosophischen Darstellungen der menschlichen Bestimmung und Bildung bei Schiller und Kant beschäftigt. Sie ist außerdem (zusammen mit Courtney D. Fugate) Herausgeberin der Reihe *Bloomsbury Studies in Modern German Philosophy*. In jüngerer Zeit hat sie sich auf Ernst Cassirers Kulturphilosophie⁷ und die Praxis des literarischen Schreibens und des literarischen Salons als Mittel zur Emanzipation von Frauen konzentriert. Sie hat mehrere Artikel über Schriftstellerinnen veröffentlicht, die mit der Frühromantik in Verbindung gebracht werden: Henriette Herz, Rahel Levin Varnhagen und Bettina von Arnim.⁸

Das Dossier umfasst acht Beiträge. Sie befassen sich nicht nur mit der Kunst im Allgemeinen im Zusammenhang mit der Frage der Freiheit, sondern betrachten auch einzelne Künste wie Musik, Literatur oder Poesie. Das Dossier enthält auch Erweiterungen zu wichtigen Figuren des Denkens über Kunst in Deutschland in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. und der ersten

⁴ Siehe z. B. Benjamins Überlegungen zum Faschismus in *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, in W. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, hg. v. R. Tiedemann und H. Schweppenhäuser, Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1990, Bd. I/2, S. 431-508.

⁵ Dank an G.V. für diesen Hinweis.

⁶ Siehe Anne Pollok, *Facetten des Menschen. Zur Anthropologie Moses Mendelssohns*, Hamburg: Meiner, 2010.

⁷ Siehe Luigi Filieri, Anne Pollok (Hg.), *The Method of Culture: Ernst Cassirer's Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2021.

⁸ Siehe u.a. Anne Pollok, „A *Wunderblume* and Her Friends: How Bettina Brentano-von Arnim Develops Individuality Through Dialogue“, *Hegel Bulletin* 43 / 3 (2022), S. 418-437; „The Role of Writing and Sociability for the Establishment of a Persona: Henriette Herz, Rahel Levin Varnhagen, and Bettina von Arnim“, in *Women and Philosophy in 18th Century Germany*, ed. Corey Dyck, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021, S. 195-209; und „Bettina Brentano von Arnim“, in *The Oxford Handbook of Nineteenth-Century Women Philosophers in the German Tradition*, eds. Kristin Gjesdal and Dalia Nassar, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024 (im Druck).

Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts: Karl Philipp Moritz, Friedrich Schiller und Georg Wilhelm Hegel. Es geht nicht darum, die letztgenannten Autoren den Romantikern zuzuordnen. Die Erwähnung dieser Autoren ermöglicht es lediglich, besser zu ermessen, was das ästhetische Denken von der Frühromantik erbt, der spontan die Förderung neuer künstlerischer Werte zugeschrieben wird, und inwiefern es dieses Erbe überwindet oder verleugnet. Allen Beiträgern des Dossiers, Jane Kneller, Christoph Haffter, Allen Speight, Karolin Mirzakhani, Francesco Campana, Robert König, Caecilie Varslev-Pedersen und Barbara Becker-Cantarino, sei an dieser Stelle für ihre innovative Forschungen herzlich gedankt.

Die aktuelle Ausgabe enthält außerdem vier Forschungsartikel in der Sektion „Varia“, von Norman Sieroka, Anama Kotlarevsky, Felix Alejandro Cristiá und Alexander J. B. Hampton. Es ist nicht übertrieben zu sagen, dass diese Beiträge bahnbrechende Erkenntnisse präsentieren und eine willkommene Erweiterung der Tragweite der Zeitschrift bieten, diesmal in Richtung der englischen Romantik (Blake und Coleridge), der alten Griechen sowie der Frage der Kosmographie, die bislang in *Symphilosophie* wenig behandelt wurden. Hinzu kommen vier Buchbesprechungen sowie ein Bulletin mit Neuerscheinungen und anstehenden wissenschaftlichen Veranstaltungen.

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Die redaktionelle Politik von *Symphilosophie* besteht darin, Übersetzungen von Quellentexten aufzunehmen. Die Quellen stellen das Rohmaterial einer Forschungsarbeit dar. Deshalb legen wir großen Wert darauf, sie in eine unserer vier Arbeitssprachen zu übertragen; und wir haben die Zeitschrift mit dem Ziel begonnen, jedes Jahr mindestens eine unveröffentlichte Übersetzung zu veröffentlichen.

Die vorliegende Ausgabe enthält gleich fünf davon, drei begleitend zum thematischen Dossier und zwei außerhalb des thematischen Dossiers. Im Zusammenhang mit dem Thema romantische Ästhetik und Freiheit haben Anne Elizabeth und Jan Oliver Jost-Fritz einen neuen Auszug aus Caroline und August Wilhelm Schlegels Gespräch *Die Gemälde* (1799) ins Englische übersetzt. Dies ist Teil eines Projekts zur Erstellung der ersten vollständigen englischen Ausgabe dieser grundlegenden romantischen Schrift zur Kunst. Wir danken ihnen herzlich für ihre Einführung und Übersetzung. Es folgt David W. Woods Übersetzung einiger Studien und Fragmente von Novalis über die bildende Kunst. Christoph Haffter hat zudem bei der Einführung, Zusammenstellung und Mitübersetzung einer Auswahl von Bettina von

Arnims Überlegungen zur Musik, die hier zum ersten Mal auf Französisch vorgelegt werden, mitgewirkt. Wir danken ihm für seine wertvolle Arbeit.

Wir freuen uns auch, dass wir unter den „Varia“ die bisher unveröffentlichte englische Übersetzung von August Ludwig Hülsens Schrift „Über die natürliche Gleichheit des Menschen“ (*On the Natural Equality of Human Beings*, 1799) von Marlene Oeffinger veröffentlichen können. Es ist zu hoffen, dass diese Übersetzung dazu beiträgt, etwa 40 Jahre nach der sogenannten „Konstellationsforschung“ von Dieter Henrich und Manfred Frank einen neuen Anfang für die philosophische Arbeit an Hülsen, einer weniger bekannten Figur der deutschen Romantik, zu machen. Zu dieser Übersetzung kommt die zweite Hälfte der Einleitung in Friedrich Schlegels *Transcendentalphilosophie* (deren erste Hälfte im vergangenen Jahr in der Ausgabe 4 von *Symphilosophie* erschien). Diese Übertragung von Schlegels wichtigem Primärtext ins Englische wurde von Joseph Carew vorgenommen. Diese erste vollständige englische Übersetzung wird zweifellos weitere Arbeiten zu den philosophischen Grundlagen der Frühromantik anregen.

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Auf den folgenden Seiten ist wieder einmal von „Symphilosophie“ die Rede. Dies ist für uns die Gelegenheit, Bemerkungen zu ergänzen, die in früheren Ausgaben der Zeitschrift zur Wortschöpfung gemacht wurden.⁹ Friedrich Schlegel und Novalis haben den Ausdruck nicht aus dem Nichts geschaffen. Denn der Terminus selbst hat ein antikes griechisches Erbe. Aristoteles verwendet ihn bereits in Buch IX seiner *Nikomachischen Ethik*. In einem Abschnitt, der dem gemeinsamen Leben in Freundschaft gewidmet ist, führt Aristoteles verschiedene Beispiele für das Zusammenleben von Menschen an: neben Individuen, die sich zum Trinken, Würfeln oder Jagen treffen, gibt es Menschen, die sich zusammenschließen, um gemeinsam zu philosophieren und daraus das Gefühl eines gemeinsamen Lebens zu gewinnen (IX, 12, 1172 a 5). Das griechische Wort lautet: *συμφιλοσοφεῖν* (*symphilosophiein*). Den Jenaer Romantikern war diese Passage sicherlich nicht unbekannt¹⁰: Nicht nur übersetzte Schleiermacher privat dieses Buch der *Ethik* des

⁹ Siehe *Symphilosophie: Internationale Zeitschrift für philosophische Romantik*, Bd. 1, 2019, S. 5-7, und Bd. 4, 2022, S. 513-550.

¹⁰ Eine vollständige Übersetzung von Aristoteles' *Nikomachischer Ethik* durch Daniel Jenisch war 1791 auf Deutsch erschienen: siehe *Die Ethik des Aristoteles, in zehn Büchern*, Danzig: Ferdinand Troschel, 1791, insbesondere S. 357-358.

Aristoteles bereits 1788 / 1789¹¹, sondern die Verwendung der Wortform *symphilosophie* ist bei einigen antiken griechischen Autoren nach Aristoteles üblich. Friedrich Schlegel und Novalis führten die Wendung im Zeitalter der philosophischen Moderne einfach wieder ein und prägten damit eine Wortneuschöpfung für die deutsche Sprache. Wir danken Denis Thouard – Herausgeber des Buches *Symphilosophie: F. Schlegel à Iéna* (2002) – dafür, dass er uns an die aristotelische Abstammung des Begriffs erinnert hat.

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Auch das Titelbild dieser Ausgabe verweist auf eine Legende aus der hellenischen Antike: die Geschichte der Iphigenie, die direkt mit der langen Tantalidensage verknüpft ist, einem der Mythen, die die griechischen Dichter und Tragiker von Homer über Hesiod, Aischylos, Pindar, Sophokles bis Euripides am meisten inspiriert haben. Lange Zeit stand die Figur der Iphigenie im Schatten der männlichen Nachkommen des Tantalus, Agamemnon und Orest, doch Euripides machte sie und die Legende von ihrer Opferung zum Thema des Dramas, das in zwei verschiedenen Episoden erzählt wird. Zunächst an den Ufern von Aulis, von wo sie von den Göttern entführt wurde, um sie vor dem Opfer zu retten, dem sie sich aus Liebe zu ihrem Vater zu unterwerfen bereit war. Dann auf Tauris, wo sie als Priesterin im Tempel der Artemis festgehalten wurde, da die Göttin Mitleid mit Iphigenie hatte und beschloss, auf das Opfer zu verzichten.

Iphigenie, eine Frauenfigur, die keine Bewegungsfreiheit genoss, blieb nicht die griechische Iphigenie: Unsere Moderne hat sich ihre Legende wieder angeeignet, in Frankreich insbesondere mit Racines *Iphigénie en Aulide* oder Glucks Oper, wie auch in Deutschland, wo sie mit Goethes *Iphigenie auf Tauris*, die 1787 erschien, zu einem der Meisterwerke der Weimarer Klassik wurde. *Iphigenie auf Tauris* ist auch eines der ersten großen Werke der deutschen Choreografin Pina Bausch. Es wurde nach Glucks Oper choreografiert und 1974 an der Oper Wuppertal uraufgeführt, deren Leitung Pina Bausch gerade erst übernommen hatte. Das Titelbild dieser fünften Ausgabe von *Symphilosophie* stammt von der Wiederaufnahme des Stücks an der Liceu Opera in Barcelona im Herbst 2010.

Bauschs Choreografie ist eine Abfolge von lebenden Bildern, die in ein Licht à la Rembrandt getaucht sind, das wiederum diese Tänzerkörper von skulpturaler Schönheit formt. Ein ganzes Bündel von Elementen verbindet

¹¹ Siehe Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Anmerkungen und Übersetzung zu Aristoteles: Nikomachische Ethik 8-9* (1788 / 1789). In *KGA* 1.1, hg. v. Günter Meckenstock, Berlin: De Gruyter, 1983, S. 1-80, insbesondere S. 80.

das Bild der Iphigenie hier mit del Sartos Gemälde *Abrahams Opfer*, in der Version der Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister in Dresden, die Caroline Schlegel in dem von uns veröffentlichten Auszug aus dem Gespräch *Die Gemälde* kommentiert. Über das Thema – das Opfer – hinaus befinden wir uns in beiden Fällen an der Schnittstelle zweier Epochen des künstlerischen Bewusstseins, der antiken und der modernen. Wie in der Einführung von Jan Oliver Jost-Fritz betont wird, ist Caroline Schlegels Kommentar zu diesem Werk der italienischen Renaissance, das sie als „Laokoon des Christentums“ bezeichnet, ein Beitrag zu den Debatten der berühmten *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes* (Streit der Alten und der Modernen). Der im vorigen Jahrhundert in Frankreich von Charles Perrault initiierte Streit wird in Deutschland neu interpretiert, und zwar nicht mehr, wie in Frankreich, um die Regeln der Dichtkunst (des Trauerspiels) im modernen Zeitalter neu zu formulieren, sondern um eine (zu überwindende) Antithese zwischen dem Naturalismus der antiken griechischen Welt und dem Humanismus der modernen Welt im christlichen Zeitalter aufzustellen. Unter anderem um diese Fragen drehte sich das, was deutsche Historiker als das erste Romantikertreffen bezeichnen: Am 25. und 26. August 1798 trafen sich zum ersten Mal die Jenaer Romantiker zu einem gemeinsamen Besuch der Königlichen Gemälde- und Skulpturengalerie in der sächsischen Hauptstadt. Sie besuchten die Skulpturengalerie bei Nacht und Fackelschein, um das Leben, das in einem Körper wohnt, durch die plastische Modellierung einer konkreten Fülle besser zu erfahren. Wenn man an diese Szene denkt, stellt man sich das gleiche rembraneske Helldunkel vor, aus dem Pina Bausch die lebenden Bilder ihrer Iphigenie auf Tauris schöpfte.

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Zum Ende des Jahres 2023 kommt es zu einem doppelten Wechsel im Redaktionsteam der Zeitschrift: Manja Kisner verlässt die Zeitschrift und Luigi Filieri kommt hinzu. Wir möchten Manja unseren tiefsten Dank für ihr Engagement in den letzten vier Jahren aussprechen, in denen sie bei der Zeitschrift mitgewirkt hat; und wir wünschen ihr alles Gute für die Fortführung ihrer eigenen Arbeit. Auch Luigi danken wir herzlich für seine Bereitschaft, in die Redaktion einzutreten; wir freuen uns sehr auf seine Beteiligung zu dieser symphilosophischen Veröffentlichung.

Abschließend möchten wir noch einmal unserer Gastherausgeberin, unserem Mitherausgeber und den Redaktionsassistenten sowie allen Autoren dieser Ausgabe für ihre Artikel, Übersetzungen und Buchbesprechungen und allen externen Gutachtern für ihr wertvolles Fachwissen danken.

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Wir schließen dieses Editorial mit der Ankündigung, dass das Themendossier der nächsten Ausgabe von unserem Redaktionsteam koordiniert werden wird: Marie-Michèle Blondin, Luigi Filieri, Cody Staton und Gesa Wellmann. Da sich im Jahr 2024 der Geburtstag von Immanuel Kant zum dreihundertsten Mal jährt, wird die nächstjährige Ausgabe von *Symphilosophie* dem kantischen Erbe der romantischen Philosophie gewidmet sein. Weitere Informationen finden Sie im Call for Papers auf der Website unserer Zeitschrift.

Bonn, Dezember 2023

Im Namen der Redaktion, Laure Cahen-Maurel

Éditorial

Pour la thématique du cinquième numéro, *Symphilosophie* a choisi de projeter un éclairage quelque peu différent sur un pan incontournable du romantisme : l'esthétique et la philosophie de l'art. Dans le champ de l'histoire de la philosophie, le premier romantisme allemand a longtemps été principalement appréhendé du point de vue d'une « métaphysique de l'art » ; c'est-à-dire de l'idée selon laquelle seul l'art donnerait accès à l'absolu, un absolu conçu comme l'enjeu philosophique suprême des systèmes postkantien¹. Ce que d'aucuns ont pu stigmatiser comme une prétention spéculative exorbitante, la sacralisation de l'essence de l'Art avec un grand A sous la forme d'une onto-théologie indifférente à la réalité effective des œuvres.

Dans les champs de l'esthétique et de la critique littéraire, l'intérêt pour le romantisme s'est le plus souvent porté sur le croisement original entre philosophie et littérature, qui marque la *Frühromantik*. Là aussi, la question de l'absolu a été au cœur des analyses. En France, surtout, au plus fort des années du structuralisme, de la sémiotique et de la déconstruction, la *Frühromantik* a été lue comme la théorisation de ce que Jean-Luc Nancy et Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe ont appelé un « absolu littéraire » : une conception de la littérature prise dans le mouvement autotélique et réflexif de sa propre production². L'accent mis sur la dimension intransitive du romantisme établissait l'œuvre aussi bien comme fragment que comme totalité détachée du monde, à l'image du fragment-hérisson schlegélien, microcosme « clos autarciquement sur lui-même, pour rejouer mimétiquement le tout d'un monde à jamais perdu »³.

La question de l'artiste et celle de l'acte de création ont été marginalisées par ces types de lecture, dont l'esthétique romantique a pu paraître souffrir à une époque plus récente. D'autre part, le principe de l'articulation entre liberté et art comporte le risque, comme l'a montré Walter Benjamin⁴,

¹ Nous renvoyons sur ce sujet aux travaux de Manfred Frank, en particulier *Einführung in die frühromantische Ästhetik*, Francfort, Suhrkamp, 1989 ; Andrew Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2003 ; ou encore Jane Kneller, *Kant and the Power of Imagination*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007.

² Voir Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Jean-Luc Nancy, *L'Absolu littéraire. Théorie de la littérature du romantisme allemand*, Paris, Le Seuil, 1978.

³ Olivier Schefer, *Poésie de l'infini. Novalis et la question esthétique*, Bruxelles, La Lettre volée, 2001, p. 83-84.

⁴ Voir notamment les réflexions de Walter Benjamin sur les fascismes, dans *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*, in W. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, éd. R. Tiedemann et H. Schweppenhäuser, Francfort, Suhrkamp, vol. I/2, 1990, p. 431-508.

d'une esthétisation de la politique. C'est aussi un phénomène de qui mérite d'être repensé⁵.

Le numéro de 2023 voudrait prêter attention à certaines de ces questions. À cet égard, le dossier thématique se place sous le signe de la liberté pour notamment interroger les effets sociaux de l'expression artistique, avant tout pour les femmes de l'ère romantique.

Afin d'engager la réflexion dans cette direction, nous avons fait appel à Anne Pollok (Universität Mainz), que nous remercions beaucoup d'avoir bien voulu coordonner ce dossier. Les recherches d'Anne Pollok portent sur l'anthropologie philosophique des Lumières allemandes : elle a publié une monographie consacrée à Moses Mendelssohn⁶ et s'est intéressée au rôle de l'esthétique dans les représentations philosophiques de la destination et formation humaines, chez Schiller et Kant. Elle est également directrice (avec Courtney D. Fugate) de la collection « Bloomsbury Studies in Modern German Philosophy ». Plus récemment, ses travaux se sont tournés vers la philosophie de la culture d'Ernst Cassirer⁷, ainsi que la pratique de l'écriture et du salon littéraires comme moyens d'émancipation pour les femmes. Elle a publié plusieurs articles consacrés à des écrivaines associées au premier romantisme allemand, Henriette Herz, Rahel Levin Varnhagen et Bettina von Arnim⁸.

Le dossier rassemble huit contributions. Elles ne portent pas seulement sur l'art en général, en rapport avec la question de la liberté, mais considèrent des arts particuliers comme la musique, la littérature ou la poésie. Le dossier contient aussi des élargissements vers des figures majeures de la pensée sur l'art en Allemagne, de la seconde moitié du XVIII^e et de la première moitié du XIX^e siècles : Karl Philipp Moritz, Friedrich Schiller et Hegel. Il ne s'agit pas de ranger ces derniers parmi les romantiques. Mais évoquer ces auteurs permet de mieux mesurer ce qu'hérite la pensée esthétique du romantisme, auquel on attribue spontanément la promotion de valeurs artistiques nou-

⁵ Merci à G.V. pour cette indication.

⁶ Voir Anne Pollok, *Facetten des Menschen. Zur Anthropologie Moses Mendelssohns*, Hambourg, Meiner, 2010.

⁷ Voir Luigi Filieri, Anne Pollok (dir.), *The Method of Culture: Ernst Cassirer's Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Pise, Edizioni ETS, 2021.

⁸ Voir Anne Pollok, « A *Wunderblume* and Her Friends: How Bettina Brentano-von Arnim Develops Individuality Through Dialogue », *Hegel Bulletin* 43 / 3, 2022, p. 418-437 ; « The Role of Writing and Sociability for the Establishment of a Persona: Henriette Herz, Rahel Levin Varnhagen, and Bettina von Arnim », in *Women and Philosophy in 18th Century Germany*, éd. Corey Dyck, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2021, p. 195-209 ; et « Bettina Brentano von Arnim », in *The Oxford Handbook of Nineteenth-Century Women Philosophers in the German Tradition*, éd. Kristin Gjesdal et Dalia Nassar, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2024 (sous presse).

velles, et ce en quoi elle dépasse ou renie cet héritage. Que l'ensemble des contributeurs du dossier, Jane Kneller, Christoph Haffter, Allen Speight, Karolin Mirzakhani, Francesco Campana, Robert König, Caecilie Varslev-Pedersen et Barbara Becker-Cantarino, soient ici vivement remerciés pour leurs contributions originales.

Le numéro de 2023 comprend en outre quatre articles de recherche dans la section « Varia », par Norman Sieroka, Anama Kotlarevsky, Felix Alejandro Cristiá et Alexander J. B. Hampton. Il n'est pas exagéré de dire que ces textes présentent d'importantes découvertes et offrent un élargissement bienvenu vers le romantisme anglais (Blake, Coleridge), les Grecs anciens, ou encore le thème de la cosmographie, peu traités jusqu'ici dans *Symphilosophie*. À cela s'ajoutent quatre recensions d'ouvrages ainsi qu'un bulletin des parutions récentes et des manifestations scientifiques à venir.

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La politique éditoriale de *Symphilosophie* est d'intégrer des traductions de textes sources. Les sources constituent la matière première d'un travail de recherche. C'est pourquoi nous accordons une grande importance à leur transposition dans l'une ou l'autre de nos quatre langues de travail ; et que nous avons lancé la revue avec pour objectif de publier au moins une traduction inédite par an.

Le présent numéro en comporte cinq, trois en accompagnement du dossier thématique et deux hors dossier thématique. En rapport avec la thématique de la section principale, Anne Elizabeth et Jan Oliver Jost-Fritz ont traduit un nouvel extrait du dialogue des *Tableaux* (1799) de Caroline et August Wilhelm Schlegel. Ils projettent d'établir la toute première édition-traduction anglaise de l'intégralité de ce texte essentiel du corpus romantique sur l'art. Nous les remercions vivement pour l'extrait dont ils nous offrent la primeur. Suit la traduction par David W. Wood de quelques fragments et études brèves de Novalis sur les beaux-arts. Nous avons également bénéficié de la collaboration de Christoph Haffter pour constituer un choix de textes de Bettina von Arnim sur la musique, que nous donnons pour la première fois en langue française. Christoph Haffter en présente le contenu et la portée. Nous le saluons et le remercions pour son travail précieux.

Nous nous réjouissons également de pouvoir publier, parmi les « Varia », la traduction anglaise inédite, par Marlene Oeffinger, d'un écrit d'August Ludwig Hülsen, « *Über die natürliche Gleichheit der Menschen* (Sur l'égalité naturelle des êtres humains) » (1799). Espérons que cette traduction contribue à donner un nouveau départ aux travaux sur Hülsen, figure moins

connue du romantisme allemand, une quarantaine d'années après les recherches dites de *Konstellationsforschung* menées par Dieter Henrich et Manfred Frank. À cette traduction s'ajoute la deuxième moitié de l'Introduction aux Leçons de Friedrich Schlegel sur la philosophie transcendantale (la première moitié de l'Introduction a paru l'année dernière, dans le numéro 4 de *Symphilosophie*). La transposition en anglais de cet écrit crucial de Schlegel a été réalisée par Joseph Carew. À n'en pas douter, cette première traduction intégrale en langue anglaise stimulera d'autres travaux sur les fondements philosophiques du romantisme allemand.

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Dans les pages qui suivent, il est question, encore une fois, de « symphilosophie ». C'est l'occasion pour nous de compléter des remarques faites dans les précédents numéros de la revue au sujet de la création du mot⁹. Friedrich Schlegel et Novalis n'ont pas créé l'expression de toutes pièces. Le tour se trouve déjà chez Aristote, dans un passage du livre IX de l'*Éthique à Nicomaque* consacré à la vie commune dans l'amitié : Aristote y donne en exemple, à côté des individus qui se réunissent pour boire, jouer aux dés ou chasser, ceux qui s'unissent pour étudier la philosophie de concert et en tirer le sentiment d'une vie en commun (IX, 12, 1172 a 5). Le mot grec est : *συμφιλοσοφεῖν* (*symphilosophhein*). Les romantiques du cénacle d'Iéna n'ignoraient certainement pas ce passage¹⁰ : non seulement Schleiermacher avait entrepris de traduire en privé le livre IX de l'*Éthique* d'Aristote dès 1788 / 1789¹¹, mais l'emploi de la forme verbale *symphilosophhein* est fréquent chez les auteurs de la Grèce antique après Aristote. Friedrich Schlegel et Novalis n'ont fait que réintroduire le tour à l'âge de la modernité philosophique en forgeant ce qui se donne comme un néologisme pour la langue allemande. Ce rappel de la paternité aristotélicienne du terme nous a été fait par Denis Thouard, qui a dirigé l'ouvrage collectif *Symphilosophie: F. Schlegel à Iéna* (2002). Nous l'en remercions chaleureusement.

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⁹ Voir *Symphilosophie. Revue internationale de philosophie romantique*, vol. 1, 2019, p. 5-7, et vol. 4, 2022, p. 513-550.

¹⁰ Une traduction allemande intégrale de l'*Éthique à Nicomaque* d'Aristote par Daniel Jenisch était parue en 1791. Voir *Die Ethik des Aristoteles, in zehn Büchern*, Danzig, Ferdinand Troschel, 1791, en particulier p. 357-358.

¹¹ Voir Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Anmerkungen und Übersetzung zu Aristoteles: Nikomachische Ethik 8-9* (1788 / 1789), in *KGA* 1.1, éd. Günter Meckenstock, Berlin, De Gruyter, 1983, p. 1-80, en particulier p. 80.

C'est à une légende de l'antiquité hellénique, là aussi, que renvoie la couverture de ce numéro : l'histoire d'Iphigénie, qui se rattache directement à la longue saga des Tantalides, un des mythes ayant le plus abondamment inspiré les poètes et les tragiques grecs, de Homère à Euripide en passant par Hésiode, Eschyle, Pindare, ou encore Sophocle. Longtemps restée dans l'ombre des descendants masculins de Tantale, Agamemnon et Oreste, il aura fallu attendre le théâtre d'Euripide pour que la figure d'Iphigénie et la légende de son sacrifice deviennent le sujet du drame, en deux épisodes distincts. D'abord sur les rivages d'Aulis, dont elle fut ravie par les dieux pour être sauvée du sacrifice auquel elle avait accepté de se soumettre par amour pour son père. Puis en Tauride, où elle est retenue comme prêtresse du temple d'Artémis, la déesse ayant eu pitié d'Iphigénie et décidé de renoncer au sacrifice.

Iphigénie, figure féminine ne jouissant pas de liberté de mouvement, n'est pas demeurée l'Iphigénie grecque : notre modernité s'est réappropriée sa légende, en France avec notamment l'*Iphigénie en Aulide* de Racine ou l'opéra de Gluck, comme en Allemagne, où elle a donné lieu à un des chefs-d'œuvre du classicisme de Weimar, l'*Iphigénie en Tauride* de Goethe, paru en 1787. *Iphigénie en Tauride* est aussi une des premières œuvres majeures de la chorégraphe allemande Pina Bausch, chorégraphiée sur l'opéra de Gluck et créée en 1974 à l'opéra de Wuppertal, dont Pina Bausch venait de prendre la direction. L'image en couverture de ce numéro de *Symphilosophie* est tirée de la reprise du spectacle au Liceu Opera de Barcelone, à l'automne 2010.

La chorégraphie de Bausch est une suite de tableaux vivants baignés d'une lumière d'écorchés à la Rembrandt, qui sculpte, à son tour, ces corps de danseurs d'une beauté sculpturale. Tout un faisceau d'éléments relie l'image ici d'Iphigénie au *Sacrifice d'Isaac* peint par Andrea del Sarto en 1529/30, dans sa version de la Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister de Dresde que Caroline Schlegel commente dans l'extrait que nous publions du dialogue des *Tableaux*. Au-delà du sujet – le sacrifice –, on est dans les deux cas à l'articulation de deux époques de la conscience artistique, antique et moderne. Comme le souligne la présentation de Jan Oliver Jost-Fritz, le commentaire par Caroline Schlegel de cette œuvre de la Renaissance italienne qu'elle qualifie de « Laocoon de la chrétienté », est une contribution aux débats de la fameuse « Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes ». Initiée en France par Charles Perrault au siècle précédent, la querelle est réinterprétée en Allemagne non plus pour reformuler, comme en France, les règles de l'art poétique (de la tragédie) à l'âge moderne, mais pour dresser une antithèse (à surmonter) entre le naturalisme du monde grec antique et

l'humanisme du monde moderne, à l'ère chrétienne. C'est notamment sur ces questions que s'est joué ce que les historiens allemands ont baptisé le *Romantikertreffen* inaugural : pour la première fois, les 25 et 26 août 1798, les romantiques d'Iéna se rencontraient à la faveur d'une visite commune des Galeries royales de peinture et de sculpture de la capitale saxonne. Ils visitèrent la Galerie de sculpture de nuit, à la lumière de torches, pour mieux éprouver la vie habitant un corps par le modelage plastique d'une plénitude concrète. À l'évocation de cette scène, on imagine le même clair-obscur rembranesque que celui dans lequel Pina Bausch a puisé pour créer les tableaux vivants de son *Iphigénie en Tauride*.

★

En cette fin d'année 2023, un double changement intervient dans l'équipe de rédaction de la revue, avec le départ de Manja Kisner et l'arrivée de Luigi Filieri. Nous tenons à dire notre profonde gratitude à Manja pour sa disponibilité et son engagement envers la revue durant ces quatre dernières années. Nous lui souhaitons tout le meilleur pour la continuation de ses propres travaux. À Luigi nous adressons également nos vifs remerciements pour avoir accepté d'intégrer la rédaction et nous nous réjouissons de la perspective de sa participation à cette production symphilosophique.

C'est ici l'occasion de remercier une nouvelle fois notre rédactrice en chef invitée ; notre rédacteur en chef adjoint et nos assistants éditoriaux ; l'ensemble des contributeurs du présent numéro pour leurs articles, traductions ou recensions d'ouvrage ; ainsi que tous les relecteurs externes à la revue pour leurs précieuses expertises.

★

Pour clore cet éditorial, nous avons le plaisir d'annoncer que le dossier thématique du prochain numéro sera coordonné par notre équipe de rédaction, Marie-Michèle Blondin, Luigi Filieri, Cody Staton et Gesa Wellmann. L'année 2024 marquant le tricentenaire de la naissance d'Emmanuel Kant, ce dossier portera sur l'héritage kantien de la philosophie romantique. Pour plus d'informations, on se reportera à l'appel à contributions figurant sur le site internet de la revue.

Bonn, décembre 2023

Au nom de la rédaction, Laure Cahen-Maurel

Research Articles

Abhandlungen

Articles

Saggi

Symphilosophie

International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism

Introduction: Romantic Aesthetics and Freedom

A Note on Gender with Reference to Dorothea Schlegel's

Florentin

Anne Pollok^{*}

When I agreed to serve as guest editor for this volume 5 of *Symphilosophie*, I decided to follow a passion of mine, and that is exploring the philosophical relation between the artist and the exercise of freedom through their creation of works. This is an issue that pairs well with the original approaches to aesthetic form in Romanticism (the fragment, irony, the genre of the letter, and the custom of letter-reading as an uptake from *Empfindsamkeit* and *Aufklärung*, but with its own twist¹), a topic which influenced theories of aesthetic expression and art as a symbolic form in the twentieth century. The realization of freedom through art can also be seen as a way of *emancipation* – as one part of the quest by outsiders, e.g. women intellectuals, to participate in current discussions, developing a voice of their own that could change, in turn, the public perception of them as active participants in philosophical discussions.

Instead of boring the reader with mere repetitions and summaries of the wonderful contributions to this volume, I will, in section 1, reference key points of these papers to show their import on how art can be seen as a realization of freedom, and, in section 2, connect them to one instance of an attempted combination of artistry and freedom as an act of emancipation. Since I think that these phenomena are best approached from the sidelines, I will limit myself to an almost failed attempt at artistic realization of freedom through an androgynous character: Florentin from Dorothea Schlegel's novel

^{*} Doctor of Philosophy, *Wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin*, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, Saarstraße 21, 55122 Mainz, Germany – apollok@uni-mainz.de

¹ Elsewhere I put forward the argument that Bettina von Arnim's work from the 1830s is also an apt representation of early romantic writing, see Pollok 2024, 145.

of the same name. I hope that my notes can serve to elucidate the philosophical underpinnings of what **Barbara Becker-Cantarino** discusses in her contribution, and can thus be seen as another instance of *Symphilosophie*.

1. Freedom through Art

Let us start from a notion of freedom in the tradition of the Enlightenment as a balance between sensibility and reason. Romanticism should not be understood as a straightforward counter-movement against Enlightenment or Rationalism, as it continues to strive for a unification of sensibility and reason. As Friedrich Hölderlin exclaims: “We cannot deny the drive to free ourselves, to ennoble ourselves, to progress into the infinite. That would be animalistic. But we can also not deny the drive to be determined, to be receptive; that would not be human.” (Hölderlin, *Hyperion*, HSA 3:194) The middle position between the animalistic and the angelical: humanity, still needed a better framework. And this is also the main interest of an author who is mainly connected to German Classicism, but whose aesthetic works emerged in the 1790s during his time as a professor of history in Jena, *the* place of Early German Romanticism: Friedrich Schiller. His aesthetic battles with Kant are grounded in his early involvement in the search for a mediating power between mind and body, inspired by the “philosophical doctors”², and are decisively heightened by the new “philosophy of the subject” by Karl Leonhard Reinhold and, most prominently, Johann Gottlieb Fichte. One of Schiller’s main interests, the aesthetic play that enables the realization of the whole human being, had an impact on the Romantics as well. For this volume, **Caecilie Varslev-Pedersen** discusses his take on artistic creation as a necessary step away from the violence of modern (fragmented, abstracting) reason to enable freedom through aesthetic semblance and play. Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis chose a similar route in their take on the relation between art and philosophy, as **Robert König** argues. The full breadth of our experience must not be fixed by rational or concept-based systems but can only “shine through” in the artistic formulation of it. It is noteworthy that this undertaking is essentially intersubjective (as König argues in part 5 of his essay).

² “Vernünftige Ärzte”, see on this in particular Wolfgang Riedel’s study from 1785, but also a more recent article in the *Palgrave Handbook on the Philosophy of Friedrich Schiller*. Schiller’s own anthropological interest is keenly reflected in two of his medical dissertations, the *Philosophy of Physiology* from 1779, and the *Essay on the Connection of the Animal and Spiritual Nature of Humanity* from 1780.

Romantic philosophers sought to establish the foundations for humanity in all its intricacies, in its connection of reason and sensibility, its reliance on free imagination, its fragile intersubjective constructions in politics. Freedom, then, is always understood as *human* freedom – a mode of being that is neither ignorant of nor unfettered by restrictions and binding forces, but that deals with them consciously as a means to beautiful form, a mode in which we are being bound and still autonomous. Schiller’s notion of aesthetic play, in which we are fulfilling the demands of our sensible as well as intelligible aspects without letting one take over and consume the other, gives shape to this idea. For the Romantics, the expression and realization of freedom thus happens most decisively through romantic *form*.

The peculiarity of romantic form might have its roots in one central article of enlightened faith: the concept of perfection. The Romantics do not dismiss this notion, but argue that a connection is possible between beauty, truth, and goodness (as Hegel made part and parcel of his system, see the paper by **Francesco Campana**). But its predominant form in our human world is that of longing, of lack, of desire. Romanticism is like the *daimon* Eros, mitigating and conversing between the mundane and the ideal world; an Eros that is fully aware of being lacking in several ways, but also being gifted with the only capacity to make up for this lack: their imagination, the desire for unity made manifest.

The form of romantic irony, the fragment, or romantic poetry reflects this dynamic structure. Through art, we make reason transcend itself in an infinite act of reflection, both of itself and its object; and in this back and forth, in this space in-between, we find something “higher” (F. Schlegel, *Athenaeum Fragment* #116), we find who we truly are. Irony is then the balance “between self-creation and self-destruction” (F.S., *Critical Fragment* #28) – it constructs a world but is also skeptical about the capacity of representing anything to the fullest. Perspective is crucial, as it alone can instantiate character – but it also always endangers an apt representation of the whole. **Karolin Mirzakhani** likens this search in its dynamic structure to a “conversation” (see Mirzakhani 2020, 257), and treats us in this volume to an in-depth discussion of romantic irony and its relation to the *Vocation of Man* in Friedrich Schlegel’s fragments and his essay aptly entitled “On Incomprehensibility”. Ultimately, romantic form becomes a reflection on freedom: the dream of a successful integration of the individual in the whole without losing sight of itself. The artist as genius strives towards this expression with the full knowledge that we will never finally reach its fruition, but that we have to keep trying.

Incidentally, the starting point of our striving is also more akin to a *task* than an immediate given. To give form to our expression, we need to give form to ourselves, we must establish ourselves as autonomous agents. Most romantic authors double as representatives of German idealism, which predominantly occupies itself with developing a notion of a self not just as an empirical being, but the fundamental, self-positing starting-point (and sometimes also end-point) of a philosophical system. Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* as a "Grundlegung" of Kant's fundamental principle of the synthetic unity of the apperception, but also Hegel's system of the absolute, even Schelling's theory of myth, all aim to show how the self comes to be what it is and do the work that it does – or even: the work that it should do. In his *Fichte Studies* Novalis takes the self-constitution as a subject to be reliant on symbolic representation; with this, he showcases a keen sense for the artistic potential of the original *Thathandlung*. Constituting oneself as a subject, as a central perspective without which there would be no content, no substance to the world, cannot work without representation, a first and fundamental "standing in" of an image for a barely intelligible notion – the moment the "I" posits itself *as* an "I", the utterance of identity, so Novalis, already presupposes something that is indeed *not* identical with its very expression or statement. The "I" cannot even be itself without representing itself, and without already relating to the world (see Mitchell 2020, 146).

This means that by the very act of self-representation, we initiate the fundamental divide between what is me and what represents me (apart from the even further "what is not me", the "Nicht-Ich" in the strict sense). Within the very process of self-instantiation and then subsequently self-realization we see a form of "standing in for", "symbolizing x"; an artistic means of reference. And this fundamental role of reference is reflected in the crucial place that artistic expression of oneself and one's life takes on in many idealistic and romantic theories, and occupies many a discussion about various artistic genres (such as music, as **Christoph Haffter** discusses in his contribution). With **Jane Kneller's** reading of Novalis, we even could go as far as argue that every citizen ought to be an artist, so that we can realize an ideal democracy that expresses and safeguards the freedom of its citizens. To "romanticize" ourselves in this way, we do not hide in the clouds of mere imagination, but we oscillate between the realm of imagination and reality, as the later works of Bettina Brentano-von Arnim illustrate quite delightfully. Another author who thought about this relationship is Karl Philipp Moritz (see **Allen Speight's** discussion). Of particular interest for him is the structure of artistic imitation, which can never mean any act of representing something without the artist themselves not being changed within the very

act of artistic formation. To realize art, then, becomes tantamount to realizing oneself through an act of commitment.

This could also mean that we must have the freedom to turn our lives into art. And this artistic reimagining of our personalities and our lives comes at a cost. By romanticizing, we might enable the flight of imagination, we might infuse reality with the transcendent; but we also need to develop a new form of mutual honesty.

Let me explain this with a contemporary sideline: In the 2023 series *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, the heroine Midge Maisel loses her husband, with whom she just reconnected, again when he witnesses her stand-up routine, in which she is making fun of their relationship. The first separation between the protagonists sets the series in motion: the husband, Joel Maisel, seeks to realize himself as a comedian; he isn't as good with jokes, but at least he can break with traditional expectations by starting an affair, and by dumping his unsuspecting housewife, the aforementioned Midge. She, caught up in all her traditional role-expectations, is devastated and has to reinvent herself: incidentally, she does so as a comedian, and a far better one than her former husband. But still, over the course of the season, the former couple reconnects – until, see above, the husband witnesses Midge's stand-up routine. "I cannot live as a joke", he cries. And, to be honest, I can relate. Using a relationship to craft ruthless jokes might work for your audience, but it also does something to the relationship: it devalues it. You belittle the other person when you are the one making the jokes and getting the laughs for it. We can, of course, also understand Midge – she finally lives her dream, after having learned the hard way that being the perfect housewife is not really cutting it. She obviously could not trust her husband to love her forever, but instead she needs to create something by herself that helps her realize her dreams. She reinvents herself, and with this, also develops a new way to look at her surroundings (including her unfortunate former husband). This is her own creation in crucial regards (of course, she cannot fully control the level of her success, but even there she can make very informed guesses). And so, she turns life into art – which heightens her art, but also has the aforementioned fatal impact on her real life: the reunion with the former husband does not happen.

Is this a hidden death sentence for the romantic requirement of romanticizing our lives? I do not think so, even though it helps to cast a realistic light on its dangers.

First of all, Joel Maisel's feeling of betrayal is two-sided: on the one hand he is dumbfounded that his life and his mistakes are fodder for a foreign audience. On the other, he has to admit that his former wife is in fact much

better than him, and *that* is (at least according to the design of this scene) the final and decisive straw. By trying to realize his dreams, he actually helped her realize hers.³ His indignation that his life was turned into art is not the sole factor of his decision to turn away from his old life for good.

But what about Mrs. Maisel turning life into art? What could be seen as a violation of privacy and a devaluation of another person (even if this person made stupid mistakes), is, under Romantic lights as practiced by the likes of Friedrich and Dorothea Schlegel, rather a claim to artistic self-realization. This works best if both parties are in on the game, and with this, we leave the 21st century and come back to the dawn of the 19th. Friedrich's *Lucinde* (1799) contains details that could be (and were) read as reference to the real life of these two lovers turned married couple; it is tempting to read Dorothea's *Florentin* (1801) in the same vein.

However, there is this fact that these two authors shared many a thing, but not their gender, and therefore, do not enjoy the same social standing. Whereas the publication for Friedrich Schlegel could indeed be seen as an act of self-expression, issues were more complex for Dorothea Schlegel's work. **Barbara Becker-Cantarino's** essay brings us more insight into the relationship between Schlegel and Friedrich Schleiermacher. I will, therefore, be relatively short about those aspects and concentrate on Dorothea Schlegel's aesthetic expression of freedom (or its lack) in her *Florentin* (1801). This offers a new facet to Becker-Cantarino's discussion (see there sections 6 and 7), or so I hope.

2. An expression of artistic freedom – but where did freedom go?

Born Brendel Mendelssohn in 1764, around the year 1794 Moses Mendelssohn's second child began to use Dorothea as her first name, perhaps to sound more genteel.⁴ In 1783 she is married off to Simon Veit, a friend of Mendelssohn's and a participant in the famous *Morning Hours*. Unfortunately, Simon Veit's intellectual talents were not as deep as this participation would suggest. As her letters attest, Dorothea felt deeply alone in the marriage. In 1797 she met Friedrich Schlegel at her friend Henriette Herz' salon – and the rest is famous lore of any historical account on Early German Romanticism: she divorces Veit in 1799, marries Schlegel in 1804, the same year that she also – though the divorce document forbade this as well as the marriage – converts to Protestantism. With the divorce, she loses

³ Spoiler alert: turns out her former husband is really good at accepting his losses and comes to accept his fate over the course of the subsequent seasons. But this is beside the point here.

⁴ See Stern 2004, 70.

custody of her older son, and with the marriage and conversion, of her younger surviving son as well. It is worth noting that Henriette Herz and Friedrich Schleiermacher are the most ardent defenders of her unusual step.⁵ In 1808 she converts to Catholicism. Dorothea Schlegel dies 1839 in Frankfurt am Main, in the household of her younger son Philipp.

In her unhappy marriage and later under Schlegel's demanding personality, but also born out of the *Tugendbund* that she created in her earlier years in Berlin with her friends (among them Henriette Herz and Wilhelm von Humboldt⁶), Dorothea Veit slowly gains (or, concerning the former factors, is forced into) a new self-image that demanded a change in her life. It is noteworthy that it is Schleiermacher who is with her at the time of her deepest (psychological and physiological) crisis in the early summer of 1798. While her boyfriend is frolicking about in Dresden together with his brother and his sister-in-law Caroline,⁷ Dorothea Veit stays at home, ill and confused. She knows that she has to come to a decision about her unhappy marriage to Simon Veit. Schleiermacher, as instructed by Friedrich, stays with her and helps her to reflect on her situation, as she acknowledges five years later.⁸ We can safely assume that Schleiermacher did not talk her into remaining in her marriage, since, as he argues, only a marriage bound in love is a true union,⁹ and must not become the "grave of freedom and of true life"¹⁰ for either side. In a true union, both parties' personalities should benefit and be thus heightened: the man "gains clarity of character; the woman self-assurance [*Selbstbewusstsein*],¹¹ extension [*Ausdehnung*], development of all spiritual seeds [*geistige Keime*], gets in touch with the whole world."¹²

Relieved, Dorothea parts from Simon – and step by step, from many aspects of her former self. In 1799, she can finally say: "I have acted

⁵ See Wilhelmy 2000, 75: A marriage without love is morally inferior to a "love without marriage".

⁶ See Pollok 2020 and 2021.

⁷ The ever-fascinating Caroline Michaelis married August Wilhelm Schlegel in 1796, and became Caroline Schelling in 1803. It is safe to say that in 1798 Friedrich was still quite infatuated with her as well, an endless source of insecurity for Dorothea, see Stern 2004, 90.

⁸ As she writes, he eased her anxiety about her future – she had already decided on the divorce but kept feeling the existential weight of this decision. Schleiermacher helped her not merely to endure this, but rather to take action herself (see her letter from 10/28/1799, Landsberg ed., 283–4).

⁹ See Daub 2012 about the metaphysical dimensions of marriage for Schleiermacher and Schlegel; Dorothea Schlegel's letter to Brinckmann from 2. February, 1799, Landsberg ed., 276, and Stern 2004, 94–95.

¹⁰ Cit. Stern 2004, 95.

¹¹ *Selbstbewusstsein* contains the dimension of self-assurance and self-consciousness, but in the present case the former seems prevalent.

¹² Cit. Stern 2004, 95.

according to my convictions; that I haven't done so thus far is unforgivable, I can only offer as my defense that I have not really known my rights before, that the friends whom I told about my situation did not agree with me, so that I feared that I would have to stay all by myself."¹³

Schleiermacher mentions Friedrich's preference for everything that is "great" (*groß*), "fiery" (*feurig*) and "strong" (*stark*),¹⁴ unerringly characterizing Dorothea with these terms as well. Matters are more complicated, though. Dorothea Schlegel combines in a rather stunning way a number of differences, contradictions even, in one person. She is highly intelligent, has a keen sense for literary quality – but can also be very judgmental and tends to stick to her judgment quite stubbornly. And despite her quest of freeing herself from her first marriage, she all too happily returns to marital dependence, more true to herself intellectually, but far less accepted socially. In short, the new position she gains might put her in a more liberal and inspiring intellectual environment, but it also isolated her and put a lot of weight on her shoulders; a weight that she does not always seem willing to take.

Her inner 'greatness' and energy allowed her to master a plethora of challenging roles: both Dorothea Schlegel and her sister-in-law Caroline Schlegel work as their respective husband's secretaries; they copy their writings, translate texts for them, support their work as editors, do the proof-reading, while also holding up the household, taking care of the children, etc. Friedrich Schlegel's life as a free author (he was apparently unfit for any other job) took its toll on Dorothea; Schleiermacher describes it as a continual fear of shipwreck¹⁵ that she could endure solely because of her inner strength and energy (and a good deal of devotion to boot).

Despite this display of inner strength, there are two reasons Dorothea Schlegel's life does not lend itself to being a perfect exemplar of a female way of realizing freedom. On the personal level, there is her willingness to lose herself in her adoration for her new husband; Becker-Cantarino (see section V) cites various letters in this regard, whose level of willingness for self-sacrifice might be abhorrent to a fair number of modern feminists (myself included). This somewhat also spread into her life as a writer, as Schlegel mostly kept denying her authorship. After *Florentin* appeared anonymously in

¹³ "...ich habe nach meiner Überzeugung gehandelt; daß ich es bis jetzt noch nicht getan habe, ist unverzeihlich von mir, zu meiner Verteidigung kann ich nur das einzige anführen, daß ich bis jetzt meine Rechte eigentlich gar nicht kannte, die Freunde, denen ich mich entdeckte, nicht meiner Meinung waren, so daß ich fürchtete ganz allein stehen zu müssen" (to Gustav von Brinkmann, 2. Feb 1799, Landsberg ed., 277).

¹⁴ Letter to his sister, 31. December 1797, Landsberg ed., 25–59.

¹⁵ In a letter to Charlotte, 23. March 1799, Landsberg ed., 310.

1801, she published (either anonymously or under pseudonyms) a few translations¹⁶ and a few original pieces in Friedrich Schlegel's journal *Europa*. But apart from that, she “undertook no more independent writing from 1807 until her death in 1839.”¹⁷

A quick look at *Florentin* and its stance towards gender is also unsatisfactory, at least under a straightforward reading. This fragment of a novel¹⁸ portrays an ‘artist of life’ marked by an inner restlessness that is reminiscent of the protagonist in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* (1795–96).¹⁹ But instead of the bourgeois Wilhelm, Schlegel chooses a rather obscure character with a supposedly dark past and even more mysterious connections to his surroundings, including hints at an unhappy love affair (maybe even two). Instead of a female counterpart to Friedrich's *Lucinde*, Dorothea Schlegel tries out a type of hero who is hard to pin down, whether in terms of sexuality or in term of his past (and future). The leading motifs of the novel can be portrayed as three pairs that each showcase a particular source of tension: freedom vs. longing, love vs. responsibility, and identity vs. role-expectations. If read with a bit more ironic outlook²⁰, Schlegel's judgment concerning then current reading and gender expectations emerges more clearly: only if we understand the flower Florentin as the counterfoil to the mimetic (i.e. traditional, non-romantic?) Wilhelm and the phallic “Turmgesellschaft” can we digest the (mis)representation of gender in this novel as a form of critique.

Freedom and longing: In the novel, Schlegel paints Florentin as the counterfoil to several characters. There is his sister, a compliant girl who submits herself to the authority of the church. Even when her brother jumps in to rescue her, she prefers to do what she is told, and not even tries to take her situation into her own hands. In contrast to this (and underscored by Florentin's failed attempt to ‘rescue’ his sister), Florentin does not stick to any rules but his own. His constant wandering from place to place is also depicted as a motion of apparent freedom that, however, only gains its true

¹⁶ It remains a subject of discussion how many of the translations her husband actually authored, see Stern 2004.

¹⁷ Becker-Cantarino 1995, 93; see also the overall negative judgment by Eicher 1997, 11 and 18.

¹⁸ The title page promises to be the first volume; however, a sequel never materialized – this could partly be blamed on Dorothea's reluctance to keep up with Florentin's anti-Catholic rants after she herself had chosen this faith, but it seems more likely that the obscure ending was satisfying enough even to the earlier Dorothea to keep this novel in its fragmentary state.

¹⁹ See Becker-Cantarino 2000, 139–41. She stresses in particular Schlegel's implicit critique of the narration of masculinity in Goethe's novel.

²⁰ Becker-Cantarino (2000, 135) calls the novel a parody; and it seems that this reading is the only way to avoid disappointment.

worth when it acquires a direction: first he just flees from his previous life, but then he decides to spend his time with his new friends, at the court of the Count of Schwarzenberg, at whose estate Florentin stays for the majority of the novel's narrated time. Or, towards the end of the novel, Florentin decides to stop being the plus-one and plans to go to the nearby city to meet with Clementine, Schwarzenberg's sister. It remains unclear what kind of relationship he might have had with her previously, but Schlegel lets her faint once she sees Florentin. With even this riddle remaining unsolved throughout the second part of the novel, the reader follows Florentin on his route to meet a few more acquaintances, but rather abruptly the novel ends after a duel between him and the fiancée of one of these acquaintances. Florentin just disappears, as if he has become one with the surrounding forest.²¹

As free as Florentin seems to be, there is an undertone of incompleteness, striving, and longing in his actions; they are in that way truly erotic in that they are born out of a lack. His ultimate disappearance destroys any hope for closure, or for a keener sense of direction. To the reader, this does not appear as an act of freedom (in search to compensate for the lack), but rather leaves them in confusion.

Love and responsibility: Instead of taking responsibility by understanding love as a commitment, the reader first gets to know Florentin as a character who rejoices in living in the moment. But another female counterfoil rectifies that. When Florentin learns of his wife's pregnancy (which he recounts to his friends, and so the reader learns about this only some chapters into the novel) he develops a strong attachment to his unborn child and experiences for the first time what it means to put another person ahead of himself. After having discovered later his wife has aborted the child out of vain concern for her figure, he nearly kills her, and, having lost a sense of inner direction, flees. The honest, responsible, and quaint love between his friends, Juliane and Eduard at the Count of Schwarzenberg's estate, serves as an idyllic counterfoil to Florentin's resultant rootlessness and restlessness. It should also be noted, however, that this stable and reliable love appears as a watered-down version of Florentin's dream of an all-encompassing relationship. Reliability has its cost.

Identity and role-expectations: With Florentin, Schlegel created a masterpiece of a vague character. The reader never knows who exactly Florentin is; he only ever introduces himself with his first name, claiming that nobody would know his family anyway. Neither his name, nor his attributes

²¹ The reader knows that Florentin instructs a servant to wait for him in the forest to aid his departure. However, the vanishing act leaves both readers and Florentin's friends questioning the reality of their encounter.

or his appearance are clearly gendered, and neither his past nor his connections ever help to tie him down. Schlegel does not limit this subtle blurring of gender-demarkations to Florentin alone, though, and here things get icky. In one rather telling episode, Florentin's friend Juliane agrees to dress as a boy so that she can join Florentin and Eduard in a joyful outing. However, this adventure quickly becomes a farce. They end up in a thunderstorm that scares timid Juliane nearly to death. Soaking wet, they hide in a servants' hut, where Juliane decides to never make use of such props again. Thus chapter 12 closes with the statement: "Juliane had experienced her dependency and had to admit to herself that she should not dare to deal [with life] outside of her limits, without her bonds [*Bande*] and her artificial comfort [*erkünstelte Bequemlichkeit*]." ²² A call for emancipation surely sounds different; in particular as this stands in explicit contradistinction to Schleiermacher's *Idee zu einem Katechismus der Vernunft für edle Frauen* (published in fragments in *Athenaeum* in 1798, see here Becker-Cantarino, section V). In its second article of faith (*Glaubenssatz*), Schleiermacher calls women to live in order to "make themselves independent of the limitations of their sex" (ibid.). Juliane, faced with a rather minor obstacle, promises herself to do just the opposite. We can assume that Schlegel's contemporaneous readers were sensitive to this contrast. We might read this as Schlegel's critique of the 'typically female' gender role: Juliane is too naïve, too dependent on others, too sensitive to ever dare again to get out of her wonderfully convenient box.

In contradistinction to the female characters, Florentin, the "child of fate", seeks to create his own life, but also ends up having to re-design himself with every new situation: as the brother, the lover, the friend. On the one hand, this could be understood as referencing Schlegel's need to reinvent herself as being the daughter, the wife, and the beloved; but in its non-directedness and final indecision, on the other hand, it seems less an apt candidate of a counterfoil to *Lucinde*, but rather bears echoes of the *Tugendbund* and its changing liaisons. Adaptability in itself is not enough to create an enduring personality. As such, Florentin appears as a literal nobody who can fit in anywhere, who is not tampered by cultural differences or class distinctions. Such a character could serve as an image of a modern individual. Within the novel, though, this it does not move *beyond* Schiller's critique of modern man; in the reader's impression, the character remains shattered. In

²² "Juliane hatte die Erfahrung ihrer Abhängigkeit gemacht, und musste es sich gestehen, dass sie es nicht so unbedingt wagen dürfe, außer ihrer Grenzen, und ohne ihre Bande und ihre künstelte Bequemlichkeit fertig zu werden" (end of chapter 12). I thank David W. Wood for his helpful comments on my translations. All remaining mistakes are, of course, mine.

short, it does not offer much more but a mildly ironic commentary on then-current overused images in novels. The aesthetic play cannot quite develop as fully as it should. If the only option is to vanish into the unknown, both for the protagonist and his creator, then there is yet not enough imaginative room for the new. And at first, history agreed with Dorothea Schlegel by simply forgetting her and her work. But however unpolished her creations might have been (and incomplete in light of what she could have created, had she not decided to ‘serve’ her second husband to the brink of self-denial), Schlegel showcases the guts that it takes to be herself. Other female romantic authors such as Bettina Brentano-von Arnim, Karoline von Günderode, Sophie Mereau, Ottilie von Goethe, and many more show how to walk this path even further, but all this deserves other volumes on their own.²³

With this volume, let us hope that we can shed some new light on the ways in which art and freedom are conceptualized in their rich interdependence.²⁴

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²³ I should also mention that a more thorough appreciation of Dorothea Veit-Schlegel’s oeuvre will be possible due to the work at the Friedrich und Dorothea Schlegel Forschungsstelle at the JGU Mainz, but also through the work of the DFG project “Romantikforschung” at the Goethe-Universität Frankfurt/M. See also the upcoming volume edited by Martina Wernli, *Mit rasender Freude dichten. Das Werk Dorothea Schlegels neu lesen* (Stuttgart: Metzler, in press).

²⁴ My special thanks goes to my great fellow discussants at the workshop on woman philosophers, organized by Corey Dyck at Western University in London, Ontario, in 2017, and, and the interested crowd at my presentation at the SWIP conference in Dublin, Ireland in 2018, at the *Women in Philosophy Lecture Series*, organized by Alice Walla in Bayreuth, 2021, and at our mini-workshop in preparation for this volume in February 2023.

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Symphilosophie

International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism

Novalis: The Art of Democracy

*Jane Kneller**

ABSTRACT

Novalis developed a “romanticized” account of the state that he intended to be compatible with the ideals of a democracy. Although influenced by the model of intellectual and poetic sociability shared with friends in the Jena circle, Novalis’ view of politics was still unique in many ways. It was premised on the view that artistry and shared artistic practice are a necessary condition of a thriving state and should be developed in *every citizen in every sector* of the population. This entailed the radical proposal that the philosophy of any government, conceived as a civil society whose aim is to promote increasingly greater political and social freedom for its citizens, must commit to making *every citizen an artist*. The aim of this article is to explain and ultimately to defend this radical proposition as reasonable and important, both in the context of Novalis’ own time and for democracies now.

Keywords: Novalis, art, democracy, state, romanticizing, politics

RÉSUMÉ

Novalis a romantisé l’État en une vision qu’il voulait compatible avec les idéaux de la démocratie. Bien qu’influencée par le modèle de sociabilité intellectuelle et poétique partagé avec ses amis du cercle d’Iéna, la vision politique de Novalis est inédite à bien des égards. Partant du principe que l’art et la pratique artistique commune sont une condition nécessaire à la prospérité de l’État, Novalis assigne à *chaque citoyen, dans tous les secteurs* de la population, le devoir de les développer. Il avance en cela la revendication radicale d’un engagement de tout gouvernement, conçu comme une société civile dont l’objectif est de promouvoir une liberté politique et sociale toujours plus grande pour ses citoyens, à faire de *chaque citoyen un artiste*. L’objectif de cet article est de rendre raison de cette position et, en dernière instance, de prendre parti pour elle comme étant raisonnable et importante, à la fois dans le contexte de l’époque de Novalis et pour les démocraties d’aujourd’hui.

Mots-clés: Novalis, art, démocratie, État, romantisme, politique

* Professor Emeritus, Department of Philosophy, Colorado State University, Fort Collins, CO 80523, United States - Jane.Kneller@colostate.edu

1. Introduction

The activity of “romanticizing” associated with the philosophical movement now known as Early German Romanticism was first named, defined, and practiced by Friedrich Schlegel and Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis). Together the two friends developed the concept of ‘romanticizing’ into a philosophical practice characterized by sharing and developing ideas in a sociable, artistic practice that they labeled “symphilosophy”, that is, philosophy done together with others. Both embraced the practice of “romanticizing” as the method of inquiry for understanding and expanding all the domains of philosophy, including social and political philosophy, and the practice was extended in the mid-1790’s to become a part of the famous Jena circle.¹

Novalis’ own views on politics and political freedom are encapsulated in the slogan: “The world must be romanticized”. France’s new democracy was in its infancy and events there were being closely followed by the Jena romantics. They were supporters of the revolution, and clearly, the prospects for future democracies in Europe were tied to the success of the French model. However, the violent excesses in France during the period of revolutionary turmoil were of real concern to these intellectual “bystanders” as Kant referred to those outside France who were watching hopefully for peaceful and humane outcomes to the revolution.

At this crucial time for politics in Europe, Novalis developed a “romanticized” account of the state that he intended to be compatible with the ideals of a democracy. He was influenced by the model of intellectual and poetic sociability shared with Schlegel and their cohort of artist and philosopher friends in the Jena circle, but at the same time, Novalis’ view of politics was unique in many ways. It was premised on the view that artistry and shared artistic practice are a necessary condition of a thriving state and should be developed in *every citizen in every sector* of the population. For

¹ Novalis was more the philosopher of the two, as Schlegel himself pointed out. Novalis was the better trained philosopher and was more committed to exploring the philosophical ramifications of what it would mean to “romanticize” the world in practice. He had studied Kant in Jena with Karl Leonhard Reinhold, one of Kant’s most famous students. Novalis also wrote an important set of philosophical notes now known as his “Fichte Studies”, in which he explained and critiqued Fichte’s influential theories. (Cf. Manfred Frank’s well-known defense of the philosophical value of these notes which he called “the most important philosophical contribution to early German romanticism” in *Einführung in die Frühromantische Ästhetik: Vorlesungen* (Surkamp Verlag, Frankfurt: 1989), 248, Lecture 15; and my discussion of Novalis’ defense of Kant against both his former professor, Reinhold and his critique of Fichte. (“The Poem of the Understanding” *The Palgrave Handbook of German Romantic Philosophy*: ed. Elizabeth Millán Brusslan (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 19 – 40.

Novalis that entailed the radical proposal that the philosophy of any government, conceived as a civil society whose aim is to promote increasingly greater political and social freedom for its citizens, must commit to making *every citizen an artist*. My aim in what follows is to explain and ultimately to defend this radical proposition as reasonable and important, both in the context of his own time and for democracies now.

2. Romanticizing: Philosophy “Exponentialized”

To begin, a few comments about Novalis’ philosophical method are in order. Novalis famously summarized the activity of “romanticizing” in a set of fragments where he characterizes it as a two part “operation”.² “The world must be romanticized,” he proclaimed:

In this way one rediscovers the original meaning. Romanticizing is nothing but a qualitative potentializing. The lower self is identified with a better self in this operation. Just as we ourselves are such a qualitative potentializing. This operation is still quite unfamiliar (unbekannt). Insofar as I give the common (Gemeinen) a higher meaning, the ordinary (Gewöhnlichen) a mysterious appearance, the known the dignity of the unknown, the finite the appearance of the infinite – then I romanticize it... The operation is reversed for the higher, unknown, mystical, unending – these are logarithmized.

This fragment is often cited to underscore the view that German romanticism is a poetics of the mysterious, the other-worldly, the uncanny, and so forth, especially in the work of Novalis. It was not. His version of romanticism was far more nuanced, and this persistent caricature misinterprets what Novalis was doing. There is really nothing mysterious about what Novalis calls “the operation” of romanticizing. It is an *activity* - he uses the term almost always as verb, not as an adjective. Romanticizing is a nuanced practice that is not only for educated poets. It is a way of engaging one’s world that may be practiced by individuals together with others, in the midst of their daily lives. It involves envisioning a higher reality for individuals and for societies. Novalis points out that humans by their very nature strive to enact their highest potential: “*we ourselves are such a qualitative potentializing*” means that we human beings have a drive to become civilized. Although we are *already* “potentialized” compared to earlier times, we are still not members of a fully mature civilization. He characterizes this romantic potentializing as an ongoing process that should be carried out self-consciously, and that should

² This claim dates from the winter and spring of 1798. (*Novalis Schriften*, 2: “Poëticismen”, 545 #105).

consciously develop the process of elevating our visions in theory and in practice, through philosophy and in art.

At the same time, it is crucial for Novalis, that the process of romanticizing is not unidirectional. The act or 'operation' of romanticizing is not only a matter of elevating the ordinary to something better ("the lower self to a higher self" for example): it is also to be used as a de-mystification of the thing at issue. In this latter form of romanticizing, we view the fantastic or unattainable as ordinary and within reach, so that what was once visionary is normalized in our thought. As Novalis puts it, "*The operation is reversed for the higher, unknown, mystical, unending – these are logarythmized.*"³ That is, they become ordinary, known, calculable, so that today's vision can therefore become tomorrow's reality, fully defined and rational. Romanticizing is thus not starry-eyed, head-in-the-clouds poeticizing, but rather, it is a deliberate, thoughtful practice of alternating between philosophical inspiration and practical research and application of what is already known; it is the practice of alternating between artistic vision and inspiration on the one hand, and on the other, of normalizing that vision: "lowering" it by bringing the vision back down to earth, embodied and familiar.

In the fragment just prior to proclaiming that "The world must become romanticized!"⁴ Novalis invokes Socrates, reminding his readers that the Socratic philosophy is the art of looking for the truth everywhere, beginning in the place where one is, namely, in the ordinary and everyday. For Socrates, he says, philosophy is "everywhere or [it is] nowhere," so that if one is determined to seek the truth about something one must first orient oneself. The Socratic method, Novalis says, is the art of seeking the truth by starting with what is already given, and from there carefully and precisely attempting to determine the truth about what is being investigated.⁵

For Novalis romanticizing is a two-part operation that is a balance between the grounded and "fact based" scientific model on the one hand and the imaginative elevation of the ordinary in magical moments of transcendent clarity. This is the sense in which, for Novalis, philosophy - the love of wisdom - itself is an *art*: the art of discovering truth in the specific places and

³ Basically, he invokes the notion of a logarithm as a mathematical metaphor for any scientific procedure that is clearly defined to yield a precise answer to a clearly defined question. Technically, a logarithm it is a quantity representing the power to which a fixed number (the base) must be raised to produce a given number. For example, $2^3 = 8$; therefore, 3 is the logarithm of 8 to base 2, or $3 = \log_2 8$)

⁴ *Novalis Schriften* II: p. 545, #105.

⁵ "*Poëticismen*" #103.

spaces where we find ourselves.⁶ This is also what makes travel so important in Novalis' literary work. The travelers find themselves by discovering what are for them at first extraordinary things and occurrences that, in the course of time spent with them, become less alien, more familiar and recognizable. If the traveler is curious and open-minded they are eventually *understood*. In the course of their travels, observant and open-minded people gain insights into "the extraordinary" that expand their knowledge and generally open up new ways of thinking about themselves and the world around them. They return with a heightened knowledge and appreciation not only of the "other," but of their own home, which they now see in a new light. This alternating between mystification and demystification is illustrated by the travels of the young journeyman in Novalis' allegory, "The Novices of Sais" as well as his novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*. My aim in what follows is to explore the way in which Novalis' model of romanticizing would play out in the cultivation of the citizenry in a democracy.

3. Political freedom: Romanticizing democracy

When Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel proclaimed that "The world must be romanticized" they intended it as a genuine demand, not merely a slogan for their own work.⁷ It was a rallying cry for the enactment of a revolutionary new form of artistic and philosophical practice, and had consequences for their views on everything from interpersonal relationships to religion to politics. If the *world* must be romanticized, clearly politics would have to be as well. Novalis believed that 'romanticizing the world' would have implications during his own time for defining the nature of the state moving forward, and to some extent, away from, the French revolution. That did not mean, however that Novalis rejected democracy, but rather, that any democratic state would have to take a different approach from that of the French in order to properly imagine and enact a state that would take its citizens seriously. He even went so far as to see it as an outgrowth of Christianity because: "It begins with the ordinary person...It is the seed of everything democratic."⁸ "Freedom and equality united is the highest characteristic of the republic, or genuine harmony."⁹ "Laws will exist – As

⁶ II: p.545, #103. The art of finding the truth in any given place and of determining precisely the relationships of the given to the truth.

⁷ *Poeticismen, Schriften*, vol. 2, p. 545.

⁸ III. p. 651, *Fragmenten und Studien*, 1799.

⁹ III. p.284, AB #249.

long as the members are not yet perfect, they will need laws, and the more truly cultured the citizens, the less they will need them.”¹⁰ And also:

*It seems that we have once again stumbled upon the conflict between monarchy and aristocracy—and democracy. The political problem might be one of the major problems, with its true solution drawing innumerable inferior solutions in its wake...The seed of solution lies in a mixed government.*¹¹

This suggestion of a “mixed government” from 1798 appears to be Novalis’ final position, and one that he came to well after he had written the essay *Faith and Love*, which he dedicated to the new king and queen of Prussia. That essay was written in 1797 and is effusive and filled with flattery especially of the young new queen. It appears on the surface of it to be an apology for monarchism. It is therefore important to examine it more carefully to understand why it is not.

As mentioned earlier, Novalis, and his circle of romanticizing compatriots were, at least at its inception, defenders of the French Revolution and of democracy. As time passed and the aftermath of the overthrow of the monarchy grew ever more violent, Novalis distanced himself from France’s government. As we saw, however, Novalis did not condemn the very concept of democracy broadly construed, and his position was more nuanced as a result, as the mention of a mixed government in the *Allgemeine Brouillon* suggests. Novalis position seemed to be simply that the French model could not and should not define future democracies. In a piece entitled *Faith and Love* written on the occasion of the coronation of Friedrich Wilhelm III to the throne in Prussia in 1797, Novalis argues that the new King and Queen (Luise) are now capable of instituting a new, truly enlightened regime and he launches into what is clearly a critique meant to include the fledgling efforts of the French revolutionary model.

Modern states have been run like factories, Novalis says, giving the example of Prussia since Friedrich the First, who successfully bureaucratized and militarized the state.¹² Yet such reforms, Novalis argued, are “mechanical”. They treat citizens as cogs in the operation of the state who are fundamentally driven by self-interest. These reforms are predicated, he says, on the assumption that “raw self-interest” is enough to “bind everyone”

¹⁰ III. p. 284, AB#250.

¹¹ AB. #661; Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, edited and translated by David W. Wood (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2007), 123.

¹² *Faith and Love*, #36. p. 45. *The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics*, edited and translated by Frederick Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

together in the social contract.¹³ He argues that this conception of governance in the end cannot sustain a healthy state because it fails to even recognize, let alone nurture, the higher natures of its citizens. That is, it fails to elevate the citizens' capacity for love for others. In a word, it undermines their natural propensities for sociability.

Failure to recognize and nurture the fundamentally social aspect of human nature is therefore a failure to safeguard the healthy maturation of the state over time. He says:

*As necessary as such a mechanical administration may be for physical health, strength, and efficiency in a state, a state goes to ruin when it is governed only in this manner.*¹⁴

What Novalis calls the “mechanical” approach assumes that the self-interest of the state and the self-interest of its individual citizens will be reciprocally promoted by what we might now call a culture of ‘rugged individualism’ which argues that a state that promotes the welfare of self-interested individuals, will thereby promote the health of the state. Novalis vehemently denies this assumption, arguing that “raw self-interest” knows no boundaries, is ultimately irrational, and therefore cannot be systematically regulated and enforced. In the end it does more damage than good. He says:

*[Raw self-interest] admits of no limitation, though the nature of every political organization demands this [limitation]...this formal acceptance of common egoism as principle has done untold damage.*¹⁵

Novalis argues that in a state that is founded on the assumption that the best way to further citizens' well-being is to encourage individuals to compete against each other to get ahead, crude self-interest becomes a “passion” and a form of gambling. Everyone is fighting to outsmart and deceive the other, he says, but sooner or later everyone loses, including the “expert” gamblers who eventually and inevitably themselves fall prey to their own tactics. As Novalis puts it: “*By being deceived one learns how to deceive, and the tables are soon turned.*”¹⁶ Eventually the winners also become losers, and where the driving motive of every citizen is to win the battle to come out on top, be it in terms of class-standing, power over others, or just in terms of amassing greater and greater personal wealth - where that takes place - Novalis argues, universal cultural uplift is impossible. Simply put, adopting common egoism as a

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid. p. 46

guiding political principle leads to a morally damaged citizenry and a weak democracy.

For Novalis, the successful state requires that its citizens are properly nurtured and trained to be just and honorable people:

*Enduring happiness comes only from the just man and the just state...Selfless love in the heart and [the maxims of selfless love] in the head...that is the eternal basis of all true, indissoluble union. What is political union but a marriage?*¹⁷

Throughout his writings on politics, Novalis argues that states need a person or persons (“personalities”) who are not themselves political and therefore can act as independent models of civil conduct. In an enlightened citizenry, opposing factions can disagree while still standing united in their commitment to civility and respect. Such a model should be situated outside everyday politics, above the partisan fray of lawmakers and judges and administrators. In *Faith and Love*, Novalis claims that the appropriate model for the state is a healthy family, and the ideal role model of such a family in the state can be a king/queen.

In his introduction to *Faith and Love* for the *Novalis Schriften*, Richard Samuel explains that Novalis was particularly moved by the new queen, praising her goodness and her beauty, and calling her “an angel” who accompanies the king “with her beneficent geniality” and “with her love she is the sublime representative of the king’s heartfelt love for his people.” Samuel points out that Novalis would have read accounts in the newspapers, and he had also been deeply moved by descriptions of a marble statue of the royal couple in which the queen was characterized as the “ideal of beauty expressed in a marble figure.” Ultimately, Samuel suggests, the figure of the queen may have served as a moment of “crystallization” for Novalis of his concept of the “poetic state”.¹⁸

This makes sense. He believed that the conduct of a healthy state depends upon the highest aspirations of its people being embodied in the public culture. Novalis believed that *personalities* were required to capture the spirit of democracy suited for their own country. For Novalis in his own revolutionary time, the king and queen figures could still find a place in a democracy by serving as personifications of that culture. The power they relinquished in government was transferred to an important role in the production and reproduction of public culture.

¹⁷ Ibid. p. 46. *Novalis Schriften* 2, p. 476. Again, Novalis is alluding here to the new King and Queen of Prussia.

¹⁸ Ibid.

There is no denying the fact that Novalis' invocation of the royal family as role model, taken together with his glorification of medieval culture, appears quite conservative. And it is true that he was very concerned about the mechanical, soul-less and selfish politics that he feared would overtake nascent democracies in his time. Yet to read this as an expression of anti-democratic sentiment could not be further from the truth. Frederick Beiser makes a strong historiographic case for reading this "romantic medievalism" of the early German romantics more charitably, and I would argue this holds especially for Novalis. Beiser argues that even though it now sounds antiquated, nostalgic and conservative, for Novalis and the romantic circle, this was simply a way of expressing important communitarian ideals:

*Ultimately, romantic medievalism was an expression of much deeper political ideals – ideals that are all too contemporary: the demand for community, the need for social belonging, the insufficiency of civil society and 'market forces.'*¹⁹

This is certainly true for Novalis, who remained firmly committed to a government that did not ignore the social and creative character of its people. When Novalis speaks of the role of the king and queen in the state, he is referring to them as role models of enlightened domestic and social relations – *not* as rulers and lawmakers. When he claims that:

*The conduct of the state depends upon the public ethos. The **ennoblement** of this ethos is the only basis for the genuine reform of the state. The king and queen as such can and must be the principle of the public ethos.*²⁰

Novalis is simply pointing out that the way a state conducts itself is determined, for better or for worse, by its characteristic spirit, that is to say, the way it manifests itself in its beliefs and aspirations. He recognized that not only self-interest, but also prejudice, xenophobia, and lack of motivation and education give rise to a generally benighted society. Role models that offer concrete examples of values and higher moral achievement are needed to motivate and inspire the general public. This, and only this, is what Novalis is suggesting the king and queen can bring to a democratic state.

To be sure, Novalis' focus on royalty, taken together with a sexist "complementary counterparts" account of marriage that assigns woman's domain exclusively to hearth and home, and assigning to the man the domain

¹⁹ Frederick C. Beiser, "Introduction" to *The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics*, xxix.

²⁰ *Faith and Love*, #28.

of civic duty, does suggest an underlying conservatism in his thought. As for his alleged monarchism in this piece, however, that criticism is wrong.

Novalis' appeal to the King and Queen is in fact not intended as a defense of monarchy. The praises he lavishes upon them have to do with their social roles as public figures, not with their politics.²¹ Novalis, as we will see, is careful to leave politics aside in the midst of his praise of their moral virtue and social grace. *Faith and Love* may be an occasional piece, but it is also more than that. Novalis is making a larger point, and one that is compatible with a defense of those values in a democracy. His larger claim here is that the conduct of the state requires more than an independent legislature, executives and courts of law. It also depends on the nature of its public culture and the public figures who represent it.

Moreover, in this same passage it becomes clear that the role model he *really* has in mind is an *artist*, and indeed, that his reference to the *truly* royal personage is to a person with the talent to inspire and encourage all citizens to exercise their own creativity and to bring their *own* individual artistry to their work, *whatever* that may be. In *Faith and Love* the reference to nobility was intended as a shout-out of encouragement to the reform-minded new King and Queen of Prussia on the occasion of their coronation, and, to be sure, Novalis believed that this particular royal couple was genial enough for the two of them to be excellent cultural role models. But having made this bow to the new monarchs, he sets them aside and returns to his central point, namely, that any state that hopes to succeed in the long run requires an *artistic* director or directors for the development of artistry in *each and every* citizen. Shifting from talk of the royal couple, he offers an institutional solution for elevating the public culture in any state, including democracy, namely, that of insuring that every citizen is trained by an *art educator*:

*The true prince is the artist of artists, that is, the director of artists. Every person should be an artist. Everything can become a fine art.*²²

This is a remarkably radical claim. Novalis is not saying that every person should become a trained musician, painter or sculptor. Rather, his point is that *every occupation* can become a fine art in its own right. That is, citizens should be connected to their work, identified with it, not *alienated* from it. Their work should be meaningful to them, so that they not only aim to do it

²¹ It is true, also, that Novalis and his cohort were certainly relieved to have a more moderate and capable monarch taking the place of the corrupt and tyrannical Frederick William III.

²² *Faith and Love*, #39. This is another application of his view of the ubiquity of genius in human beings: it is to be found everywhere, and what we label the genius of genius is the person who can take this to a higher power, as it were.

well, but artistically: with passion, care for detail and beauty, such that they take pride in their “product”, whatever it may be. The sense of pride that they take in what they do for a living will elevate their labor and its products so that it is not a stretch to call those products “works of art” and it is in this sense not hyperbolic to claim that in such a state, “Everything can become a fine art”.

Of course, the conditions for this kind of unalienated, self-fulfilling labor do not arise spontaneously in a democracy. It requires that the state has a vision and the will to find a way to implement that vision across the various vocations, from healthcare to carpentry to education, manufacturing and also to the traditional fine arts. For Novalis’s vision of the ideal state to be fulfilled, some version of his notion of a “true prince” — an artist who creatively trains artists for every vocation — would have to be introduced. This minister of vocational art would require a ministry or institute of artists in every field to recruit and train new members for all vocations and crafts, and these in turn would have to be mobilized and deployed into the citizenry in order to, as Novalis puts it, “*create an infinitely diverse theater where the stage and audience, the actors and spectators are one.*”²³ Whatever this were to look like, it would have to be supported by a national commitment to its universal implementation, just as in our own time universal health care and other programs for the well-being of the citizenry is supported by the state in the more enlightened democracies.

To be clear, Novalis’ “infinitely diverse theater” would not simply be a ministry of culture, although such institutions are important for promoting fine arts education and cultural heritage preservation. As important as those were to Novalis, his vision is much broader. It intended to reach out to and ultimately pervade the whole of society. In his own words:

*Freedom and equality united, is the highest character of the republic, or genuine harmony. A perfect constitution—Determination of the body politic—the soul politic—and the spirit politic—renders every explicit law superfluous. For the laws are self-explanatory if the members are precisely determined. Laws will exist as long as the members are not yet perfect members—and not yet precisely determined—With true culture the number of laws generally diminishes.*²⁴

In sum, Novalis envisions a government that creates and supports a culture of citizen-artists that is completely inclusive: *every* citizen should be trained

²³ Ibid. Just as an aside: This happens to also embody the early romantic view that art should be ironically self-aware, as for instance, in Tieck’s use of romantic irony in *Der Gestiefelte Kater*, which plays with depicting the audience to the show as part of the show.

²⁴ AB.#250-#251, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 37.

and valued as an artist in their own field. This is not merely an aspirational goal for Novalis. The individuals within a state can and should be educated to bring creativity to their calling, whatever that may be. Universal art education, that encourages and trains people to be creative is necessary to ensure that every citizen is ennobled. The figurative “King / Queen” model may be archaic now, but the need for a broad-based artistic education and artist mentors whose job it is to nurture creativity and artistry in *every* citizen and in every occupation is as current as can be. Novalis is clear: “*Every person should be an artist. Everything can become a fine art.*”²⁵ This is his way of romanticizing the state, of elevating it towards an as yet unknown, as yet ideal, stage, in keeping with the romantic mandate to promote a progressive alternation between, on the one hand,

a qualitative potentializing. The lower self is identified with a better self in this operation. Just as we ourselves are such a qualitative potentializing. This operation is still quite unfamiliar (unbekannt). Insofar as I give the common [Gemeinen] a higher meaning, the ordinary [Gewöhnlichen] a mysterious appearance, the known the dignity of the unknown, the finite the appearance of the infinite – then I romanticize it...

And on the other hand, as we already saw,

The operation is reversed for the higher, unknown, mystical, unending – these are logarhythmized.

That is, they are brought down to earth, demystified, and seen as ordinary, realizable tasks for a healthy society in which labor of all sorts is properly valued and rewarded. In this way the idea of turning one’s work into a labor of love, and in that sense also into a work of art, is a bit less utopian, easier to imagine and therefore more realizable.

3. “Coloring” political freedom and equality: Individual self-expression in a romanticized democracy

*Everything national, temporal, local, individual, can be universalized and thus canonized and generalized. Christ is such a provincial figure who has been ennobled. This individual coloring of the universal is its romanticizing element. Thus every national and even every personal god is a romanticized universal. Personality is the romantic element of the I.*²⁶

²⁵ Ibid. It also prefigures Marx’s views in alienated labor in capitalism.

²⁶ II. 616 #425: *Ergänzungen zu den Teplitzer Fragmenten.*

For Novalis, not only every religion but also every state is defined by what he calls its “individual coloring”, that is, by the personality of its individual citizen. The fundament of Novalis’ romanticized account of the state is his conviction that the character of any state is necessarily determined by the individual character of *each and every citizen*. If a democracy is to be more than a monochrome mechanism for self-interested individuals to protect their egocentric wants and needs, it must be re-imagined in light of a higher vision of what humanity can be at its best. It must be enlivened by recognition of the personal and social needs of its citizens, and determined by the needs of real individuals from all walks of life, all callings and all aspirations in all their great diversity. Every citizen is an individual whose talents and character contribute to the personality of the state. Democracies at their best are rainbows reflecting all the ‘colors’ of their citizenry.

This passage is crucial for understanding Novalis’ ideal of romanticizing in a democracy. He mentions “Christ” in this passage to illustrate an ideal religious teacher who was enobled by a higher power and at the same time a human personality with unique characteristics that those around him could understand, love, and emulate. In *Faith and Love* Novalis is contrasting this romantically ‘exponentialized’ teacher with the idea of God as a kind of religious abstraction or mystical being that mere mortals could never fully understand. Christ in this passage represents an enobled *human* teacher who was assigned the task of being a teacher of teachers.

Turning from religion to the context of the state, Novalis calls for an elevated “director of artists” who will romanticize democracy – bring it to life, as it were. Novalis argues that human beings can learn to turn the products of their labor into artworks:

*Instinct is art devoid of purpose—Art, without knowing how and what one makes. Instinct can be transformed into art—through the observation of artistic activities. Thus what one makes, may at length be made and learned in an artistic fashion.*²⁷

Just as in the Christian religion a citizen was elevated not to legislate or judge or administer, but to teach a ‘gospel of love’, the parallel in the democratic state would be an artist – or artists – “enobled” by the state to train other artists to themselves become trainers, until in the ideal case every citizen is an artist. Just as “God” can appear in a thousand “personalities”,²⁸ so too in the state,

²⁷ AB# 270, emphasis added; *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 40.

²⁸ AB: #398; *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 61.

*The theory of the mediator may be applied to politics...The more brilliant and lively the members—the more lively and personal the state. The Genius of the state shines forth from every genuine citizen of the state—just as in a religious community a personal God reveals itself, as it were, in a thousand forms. The state and God, as with every spiritual being, do not appear in isolation, but in a thousand, diverse forms...*²⁹

Novalis' conception of an artist of artists, that is, of an artistic director of the state, is of a mediator between the state and its citizens, and the more the director, or group of *directors*, succeeds in uplifting citizens to the level of artists in their individual work, the more the state itself is enlivened and gains personality. Moreover, guided by their democratic ideals and their respect for the citizens in all their diversity, these teachers not only help to uplift the citizens, they are themselves uplifted as the state becomes more and more identified with all its people. Ideally, they *become* the state, but in the realizable ideal, enlightened / romanticized citizens will at least know that the state belongs to all of them:

*A perfect constitution...renders every explicit law superfluous. For the laws are self-explanatory if the members are precisely determined. Laws will exist—as long as the members are not yet perfect members—and not yet precisely determined—with true culture the number of laws generally diminishes. ...Laws are the compliment of deficient natures and beings...Once we have more closely determined the essential being of a spirit, we will have no more need of spiritual laws.*³⁰

The ideal, fully romanticized goal is that each and every citizen becomes an artist of their own life's work. Clearly, democracies can and should aspire to this ideal. The state should, Novalis argues, appoint artists to teach and train all citizens to be artists, thereby creating in individual citizens the ability to turn their work into a *work of art*. He calls for recruiting an "artist of artists" to train their compatriots to turn "jobs" into callings, so that, in his words, "*What one makes, may at length be made and learned in an artistic fashion.*"³¹ With purposive intent and expert training, there are myriad ways in which a citizenry can manifest its *collective* genius in diverse and *individual* ways. This is the sense in which for Novalis "*Poësie is the basis of society (Gesellschaft), as*

²⁹ Ibid. This also succinctly captures Novalis' cosmopolitan leanings. For an excellent overview of his cosmopolitanism see Pauline Kleingeld, "Romantic Cosmopolitanism: Novalis's 'Christianity or Europe'", *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 46, no.2 (2008): 269-84.

³⁰ AB: #250; *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 37.

³¹ AB #270; *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 40.

*virtue is the basis of the state.*³² On this view, democracies should fundamentally be institutions that aim to bring sociability as well as civic virtue together in each and every citizen. This is what democracy looks like — when it is romanticized.

4. Objections

At this point, a couple of concerns should be mentioned, both of which have been raised succinctly in a recent paper by Matthias Löwe, *Poetische Staaten: Frühromantik und Politik*.

*At the core of the early Romantic view of politics and society is... the vague idea of a community of love and brotherhood, a community of “throne-worthy” individuals who act not out of egoism but rather, out of love.*³³

But this vague idea of a community of love and brotherhood, Löwe argues, is in tension with a fundamental task of democracy, namely, adjudicating conflicts of interest between individuals freely pursuing their own self-interest. This feature, as we saw earlier, appears to be in tension with Novalis’ ideal *romantic* model of a society that, Löwe argues, is centered on a communitarianism that

*is not democratic but also not autocratic, rather it is a nebulous idea [von Nebelkerzen umstellte Idee] that can be used in connection with divergent forms of political organization...*³⁴

It is true that Novalis did not in the end embrace democracy as the only appropriate form of government, but neither did he reject it as a form of government. Moreover, democracy is not by definition based only on possessive or laissez-faire individualism. Nothing precludes a democracy from embracing communitarian values. In the short time that Novalis was following events in politics, the details of what democracies could look like were not yet in sight. It is not surprising that Novalis argues that democracy in the form he knew it – the then struggling French model – could legitimately be described solely in terms of managing human egoism. Nevertheless, and his high praise for William III’s morals notwithstanding, Novalis did not *prefer* monarchy to democracy. I have argued already that the point of *Faith and*

³² II: *Poësie*, 37

³³ p. 55: *Poetische Staaten: Frühromantik und Politik*. In *Romantisierung von Politik: Historische Konstellationen und Gegenwartsanalysen*, Athenäum, pp. 45-58, 29 Apr. 2022. (“Throne worthy” here refers to Novalis’ comment”).

³⁴ *Ibid.*

Love was not to advocate for monarchy, but rather to make a compelling case that artists and artistic training could serve as a humanizing interface between government and the public at large. They could, in other words, serve as creative, social mediators of the public ethos. Although Novalis generally spoke of mediators as interfaces between the divine and ordinary people, he also argued that a mediator of a different sort, an “artist of artists”, could appear in a state where “Art is the complement of Nature.” And where “Freedom and equality united, is the highest character of the republic, or genuine harmony.”³⁵

Novalis suggests that the notion of an artist of artists would be needed in democracies if they are to aim for more than adjudicating conflicts of interest between individuals motivated only by their own self-interest. It is true that Novalis is light on detail, and yet the proposal that programs run by people who value and promote the uplift of sociability among all citizens are precisely what is needed to change these “mechanical” models of citizenship to incorporate more caring and community models in a democracy. As we saw, Novalis’ *Faith and Love* was addressed in praise of a monarch who was reform-minded and concerned with restoring positive, social values to the state. Novalis advocated on behalf of these goals, but he did not call for the elimination of procedural justice models. He reserved his critique for states that were run *only* “mechanically”, aiming to produce freedom and equality without concern for the social third pillar of the French revolution: “brotherhood”. Nowhere did he suggest that a higher kind of democracy was impossible.

A second issue raised by Löwe is that romantic ideals of community values are compatible with less savory forms of government. This may be true for some states, where communitarian models are narrowly tied to a set of religious beliefs and practices, and in a diverse democracy, especially a multicultural one, there will be tensions that must be adjudicated fairly and equally in terms of competing conceptions of the good. Yet Novalis’ insistence on an *independent* social role that artists would play in bringing forth an artistic mindset in citizens would allow them to appreciate some cultural differences. Certainly Novalis vision is of a state that calls on romanticizing artists who are by nature bold and innovative dreamers who eschew entrenched ideas and practices and often challenge the status quo. Many non-democratic governments would ban the “difficult” ones outright so that the vision of an independent artist of artists would be impossible. In short,

³⁵ III. AB #248, 249.

Novalis extremely expansive view of artistry does not square at all well with what would be the rigidly circumscribed values of a communitarian state.

Postscript

A little over a century later, in Berlin in the fall of 1922, Thomas Mann appealed to Novalis in a lecture to students in Berlin in which he affirmed his commitment to German democracy, and implored the educated youth in his audience to do the same and reject fascism.³⁶ In the course of the lecture, Mann presented his idea of a uniquely *German* democratic republic. He knew that pro-democracy sentiments were unpopular with the students themselves, but believed that he might persuade these young men to embrace democracy in the face of clear signs that the alternative would be Germany's slide into fascism.³⁷

To bolster his argument for a political shift away from these ominous trends he drew on Novalis. Appealing to Novalis' support for the French Revolution as well as his argument in *Faith and Love* for the need for every state to develop its own version of democracy based on the characteristics or unique "coloring" of its citizens, he argued that love of the German national feeling should draw on uniquely German art and sentiments, admonishing them that

If our national feeling is not to fall into disrepute or not to become a curse, it will have to cease being a vehicle for everything warlike and brawling. Instead, corresponding with the (German) Nation's artistic and almost sentimental sides, it will be ever more unconditionally understood as the object of a cult of peace.

Mann's defense of democracy came too late, and the students were not convinced. The 'warlike and brawling' had taken hold of a significant sector of the national psyche. The conditions for even considering an early German romantic embrace of German democracy were fast disappearing. Even if it were not too late, Mann did not himself fully grasp the nature of Novalis' utopian argument. What Mann failed to understand was that the 'coloring'

³⁶ That is, to reject fascism. Mann delivered this speech out of deep concern for this trend in Germany at the time. Open displays of anti-semitism were on the rise, and two recent high-profile assassinations of moderate pro-democracy politicians (Matthias Erzberger, the former finance minister who endorsed the treaty of Versailles and Walther Rathenau, a wealthy industrialist appointed Minister of Reconstruction in 1921, then Foreign Minister in 1922, were both assassinated by right-wing extremists.)

³⁷ "Let me say it openly...my aim is to win you over to the side of the republic and what is termed democracy, and what I term humanity." (Thomas Mann: *Von Deutscher Republik*, 1922).

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of the democratic state that Novalis spoke of was not simply a matter of German heritage and the elevation of what was uniquely German in some halcyon past. In defending his notion of a poetic state, Novalis may have used German examples (it was after all a piece written for the new Prussian King and Queen) and he may have believed that the French model of democracy was on the wrong track. Yet Novalis's message made it clear that a *romanticized* democracy would have to embrace, nurture, and value *all* its citizens, in all their colorful diversity.

Symphilosophie

Revue internationale de philosophie romantique

La libération musicale

Actualité d'un problème romantique

*Christoph Haffter**

ABSTRACT

Romantic thought put forward an idea that still haunts philosophical aesthetics today: that art is a fictitious realization of freedom. This article takes a closer look at this romantic idea, based on two contemporary variants: Georg Bertram's conception of artistic freedom as *immanent* to social practice, and Christoph Menke's notion of artistic freedom as *transcending* social practice. This enables us to understand the enthusiastic discourse of the Romantics on music – especially in Bettina von Arnim, Wilhelm Wackenroder and Ludwig Tieck – as a precursor to the transcendent conception of freedom. According to this conception, music expresses an interplay of forces animating the depths of the self. I suggest a revision of the self-expression paradigm by identifying four characteristic features of romantic musical aesthetics, which can be articulated within a model of differentiated expression of subjectivity. This model makes it possible to link the Romantic idea of self-expression with the quest for freedom in general.

Keywords: aesthetics of music, philosophy of art, theory of subjectivity, critical theory

RÉSUMÉ

La pensée romantique a mis en avant une idée qui hante, aujourd'hui encore, la philosophie esthétique : l'art serait une réalisation fictive de la liberté. On approfondit cette idée romantique en partant de deux variantes contemporaines : la conception exposée par Georg Bertram d'une liberté artistique *immanente* aux pratiques sociales et celle que l'on trouve chez Christoph Menke d'une liberté artistique *transcendant* les pratiques sociales. Cela permet de comprendre le discours enthousiaste des romantiques sur la musique – notamment chez Bettina von Arnim, Wilhelm Wackenroder et Ludwig Tieck – comme précurseur de la conception transcendante de la liberté. Selon cette conception, la musique exprime un jeu de forces animant les profondeurs du soi. Je suggère une révision du paradigme de l'expression de soi en identifiant quatre traits caractéristiques de l'esthétique musicale du romantisme, qui se laissent articuler au sein d'un modèle de la subjectivité comme expression différenciée de trois moments, le singulier, le particulier et l'universel. Ce modèle permet de faire le lien entre l'idée romantique d'une expression de soi et la quête de la liberté en général.

Mots-clés : esthétique musicale, philosophie de l'art, théorie de la subjectivité, théorie critique

* Docteur en philosophie, *Wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter Forschungsstelle Musikphilosophie*, Philosophisches Seminar der Universität Basel / Hochschule für Musik FHNW Basel, Petersgraben 27, 4051 Bâle, Suisse – c.haffter@unibas.ch

La pensée romantique a mis en avant une idée qui hante, aujourd'hui encore, la philosophie esthétique. Dans sa forme la plus simple, l'idée se présente ainsi : l'art serait une réalisation fictive de la liberté. Une tension travaille néanmoins cette vision de ce qu'est l'art. Le propos a une teneur positive en ce sens qu'il en établit l'autonomie. Le romantisme serait alors l'expression révolutionnaire de la conception moderne de l'art, selon laquelle la production artistique doit se libérer des restrictions apportées par l'usage, des contraintes sociales, des fonctions représentatives, religieuses et commerciales : l'art étant une réalisation fictive de la liberté, il lui est essentiel de briser les chaînes de la convention, de rompre avec les traditions, de s'affranchir de la servitude. Mais, en même temps, le propos a un sens négatif : si la liberté se manifeste dans l'art, elle s'y réalise seulement de façon fictive. Or, une réalisation fictive de la liberté n'est pas une réalisation du tout. Pire : l'art feint de réaliser la liberté alors qu'il n'en produit que l'apparence, il n'est qu'une pseudo liberté.¹ L'idée romantique d'un art libéré révèle alors son côté conservateur : elle célèbre la liberté artistique aux dépens d'une libération réelle, elle glorifie un affranchissement illusoire pour garantir que rien ne change. Le double versant de la formule résume, ce faisant, la postérité contradictoire du romantisme historique : la veine révolutionnaire d'un art émancipateur d'une part, qui lie les utopies du romantisme d'Iéna aux manifestes des avant-gardes ; la veine réactionnaire de l'art comme bastion d'irrationalité de l'autre, qui conduit du Biedermeier aux antimodernismes soutenant les ravages du XX^e siècle.²

Dans les réflexions qui suivent, je voudrais approfondir ce problème romantique à partir de deux solutions contemporaines : la conception exposée par Georg Bertram d'une liberté artistique *immanente* aux pratiques sociales et celle que l'on trouve chez Christoph Menke d'une liberté artistique *transcendant* les pratiques sociales (section 1). Cela permettra de comprendre le discours enthousiaste des romantiques sur la musique – notamment chez Bettina von Arnim, Wilhelm Wackenroder et Ludwig Tieck – comme précurseur de la conception transcendante de la liberté, centrée autour de l'idée de l'expression musicale d'un jeu de forces dans les profondeurs du soi (section 2). Cette conception pâtit d'une indétermination fondamentale. Deux difficultés s'ensuivent : l'une, philosophique, concernant le rapport à

¹ Pour une critique contemporaine de cet point, voir Oliver Marchart, *Conflictual Aesthetics. Artistic Activism and the Public Sphere*, Berlin, Sternberg Press, 2019.

² Sur le rapport qu'entretient le romantisme musical avec la politique en particulier, voir Katherine Hambridge, "Music, Romanticism, and Politics", in: Benedict Taylor (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Music and Romanticism*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2021, p. 92-109.

la liberté ; l'autre, historiographique, touchant à la difficulté qu'il y a à relier l'esthétique musicale du romantisme à une pratique concrète de la musique. J'adopte alors le parti de compléter le motif de l'expression de soi par une lecture « métaphysique » du contenu de la musique, la prise en compte de l'attitude de la *Sehnsucht* ainsi que du fantastique, afin d'identifier quatre traits caractéristiques de l'esthétique musicale du romantisme (section 3). Toutefois, ces traits se contredisent. Pour surmonter les contradictions, je suggère un modèle de subjectivité conçue comme l'expression différenciée de trois moments, le singulier, le particulier et l'universel (section 4). Ce modèle est ce qui permet de faire le lien entre l'idée romantique d'une expression de soi et la quête de la liberté en général.

1.

Le problème que nous héritons du romantisme est le suivant : comment articuler la liberté de l'art à la liberté tout court ? Autrement dit : dans quelle mesure la manifestation de la liberté dans le domaine des apparences, de la fiction et de l'illusion peut-elle être solidaire avec, voire contribuer à la conquête de la liberté dans la réalité sociale ? On se souvient des raccourcis post-modernes : la vie réelle étant indistincte du monde des simulacres, la production de fictions et la construction sociale de la réalité coïncideraient.³ Mais cette simplification n'est plus guère convaincante aujourd'hui : les crises multiples que nous traversons rappellent la nécessité de distinguer le réel de l'imaginaire pour penser la complexité de leur rapport. La solution du problème passe par l'élaboration d'une conception de la réalité de la liberté, de façon à pouvoir montrer comment la liberté de l'imaginaire est à même d'y contribuer.

Dans la période récente, deux réponses au problème de l'articulation de l'art et de la liberté se sont distinguées dans les débats germanophones. La première – d'inspiration hégélienne – postule que la liberté se réalise *dans* des pratiques sociales d'un certain type.⁴ Une pratique sociale est un nexus de comportements habituels, guidés par des normes, des valeurs, des identités et des institutions collectivement acceptées. Une telle pratique est libre si elle offre la possibilité de repenser et de réviser ses propres normes. L'art peut s'inscrire dans le cadre des pratiques collectives de liberté s'il est conçu lui-même comme une activité intersubjective de réflexion sur les

³ Voir, à ce sujet, Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacres et Simulation*, Paris, Éditions Galilée, 1981.

⁴ Voir Georg W Bertram, *Kunst als menschliche Praxis. Eine Ästhetik*, Berlin, Suhrkamp, 2018. Pour l'espace anglophone, on se reportera à Robert B. Pippin, *After the Beautiful: Hegel and the Philosophy of Pictorial Modernism*, Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press, 2015.

normes pratiques : dans les activités de production et de réception artistiques, les sujets renégocient, corrigent ou réaffirment – plus ou moins consciemment – les normes et les valeurs, les identités et les institutions régissant, de manière générale, leurs comportements. Cette liberté a pour paradigme la délibération parlementaire. Dans cette perspective, l'art en général pourrait alors être dit libre puisqu'il ne se soumettrait pas à des prescriptions préalables, mais mettrait en œuvre une réflexion collective sur ces prescriptions. La limite d'une telle conception *immanente* de la liberté sociale et artistique est évidente : elle présuppose que la pratique sociale en question soit déjà libre. L'autonomie de l'art se réduit ici à l'intégration de l'art dans l'autonomie collective des pratiques sociales.

Or, il est possible de remettre en question ce présupposé quelque peu édulcoré. Selon le deuxième modèle avancé dans le débat contemporain qui a lieu en Allemagne, les pratiques sociales façonnant le capitalisme contemporain ne seraient pas le fruit d'une libre négociation collective, mais seraient soumises à l'exploitation, à la domination et à la violence ; et l'adhésion collective aux normes sociales, largement due à la crainte et au conformisme. Les travaux de l'École de Francfort et ceux menés dans le sillage de Michel Foucault tendent à montrer que les rapports de domination se prolongent jusque dans l'image que l'on a de soi, les valeurs que l'on poursuit, les habitudes et les compétences que l'on acquiert. La constitution de soi en tant que sujet, avec son identité morale et ses capacités normées d'agir, de sentir et de penser, serait alors le produit d'une subjectivation policée, un assujettissement aux formes socialement acceptées. Selon cette conception, les pratiques existantes ne sont pas libres.⁵ La liberté n'existe que, et que partiellement, dans les moments rares d'affranchissement, quand le tissu des normes, valeurs, identités et institutions qui gouvernent nos vies ordinaires est déchiré. Le paradigme de cette liberté transcendant l'existant est le mouvement révolutionnaire. Dans le cadre d'une telle conception transcendante, la liberté est toujours libération : une personne est libre dans la mesure où elle se libère des pratiques sociales de domination. La libération, ainsi conçue, est nécessairement *asociale*, elle est le mouvement par lequel on brise les chaînes sociales de la discipline et du contrôle.

Si l'on accepte cette vision amère de la réalité sociale, l'apport artistique à la liberté réside précisément dans son pouvoir d'interrompre le *nexus* des pratiques sociales avec ses normes et ses révisions immanentes. Christoph Menke propose même, en ce sens, de fonder la possibilité de toute forme de

⁵ Voir Christoph Menke, *Theorie der Befreiung, Erste Auflage*, Berlin, Suhrkamp, 2022.

libération dans l'expérience esthétique de la *fascination*.⁶ Dans l'expérience de la fascination, quelque chose nous attire au point que nous nous affranchissons, momentanément, des formes de subjectivités établies (avec ses normes, ses valeurs, ses identités et ses institutions) afin de commencer quelque chose de nouveau.⁷ Ce qui nous attire ainsi dans les œuvres d'art, c'est, selon Menke, une force esthétique au fondement du soi, qui se manifeste dans l'apparence énigmatique de la beauté artistique.⁸ Les formes sociales de la subjectivité s'avèrent être, par suite, la domestication, le façonnement d'un jeu pré-subjectif de pulsions et d'intensités, qui nous tourmente dans les profondeurs obscures de nous-même et surgit dans le détournement esthétique de l'ordre des conventions qui nous fascine. Ce jeu de forces proprement esthétique sous-jacent à la forme sociale du sujet et la subvertissant est une conception strictement négative : il est impossible de lui attribuer des déterminations positives. Car la force esthétique consiste précisément à subvertir toute forme de détermination, de fixation et d'identification socialement préétablie. Elle déjoue toute tentative de capture rationnelle.⁹ Et c'est la raison pour laquelle elle peut jouer le rôle de déstabilisateur anarchique que présuppose toute forme de libération.

La liberté de l'art et la liberté tout court seraient ainsi liées par le mouvement de libération qui leur est commun : l'affranchissement de l'art de ses fonctions sociales est solidaire de la quête de la liberté, puisque celle-ci n'existe pas autrement que sous la forme d'une libération continue, toujours recommencée et présupposant l'expérience esthétique de la fascination. La liberté de l'art est la libération de la force esthétique résidant au fond du sujet normalisé, une force qui fascine en ce qu'elle déjoue les formes établies de l'ordre social.

Si la première solution au problème – la liberté immanente au social – peut être dite classique, l'idée d'une liberté qui transcende le social, autrement dit : la libération asociale moyennant la fascination esthétique, reprend, elle, clairement à son compte des éléments essentiels de la pensée romantique. Plus précisément, c'est dans un certain courant de l'esthétique musicale du romantisme allemand que cette conception asociale de la libération artistique a été développée le plus nettement. La musique se prête

⁶ Pour une conception similaire, fondée sur la notion d'enthousiasme, cf. Gunnar Hindrichs, *Philosophie der Revolution*, Berlin, Suhrkamp, 2017.

⁷ C. Menke, *Theorie der Befreiung*, p. 184-196.

⁸ Voir Christoph Menke, *Die Kraft der Kunst*, Berlin, Suhrkamp, 2013; et aussi *Kraft: ein Grundbegriff ästhetischer Anthropologie*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 2008.

⁹ Ma reconstruction recourt au vocabulaire deleuzien afin de souligner une proximité qui n'est pas rendue explicite par Menke lui-même. Cf. Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon, logique de la sensation*, Paris, Éd. du Seuil, 2002.

à une telle conception parce qu'elle ne représente aucun contenu clairement défini, bien qu'elle entraîne son auditoire dans un mouvement intense. Et ce sont les romantiques qui ont fait de cette force énigmatique de la musique le signe de sa dignité philosophique – avec tous les problèmes que cela engendre.

2.

Le mouvement romantique est, au premier chef, un mouvement littéraire.¹⁰ Si la musique joue un rôle éminent dans la pensée romantique, c'est en tant que thème d'un discours littéraire dans lequel une certaine conception de la subjectivité trouve à s'énoncer. L'enthousiasme romantique pour la musique prend son sens dans l'opposition avec les *philistins* : les maîtres d'école qui tiennent un discours technique, expliquent la musique d'une manière quasi-mathématique, parlent de proportions, d'intervalles, de types d'accord et de rapports harmoniques. Ils incarnent la rationalité calculatrice du monde désenchanté et s'ils possèdent l'intellect, ils manquent d'esprit. Contre ce discours du *Verstandesdenken*, les romantiques font l'éloge de l'inspiration, du mouvement passionnel et de l'élévation spirituelle. Les lettres semi-fictives de Bettina von Arnim en sont l'exemple paradigmatique.¹¹ Dans son échange avec G nderode, le personnage de Bettina rapporte qu'elle se plie   des le ons de contrepoint qu'elle ne comprend gu re et qui lui sont dispens es par un philistin. En revanche, quand elle  coute une symphonie de Beethoven, son esprit s'exalte :

Mais qu'en est-il de la symphonie de Beethoven qui s'en est suivie ?
Veux-tu parcourir avec moi l' tendue de cette for t d'oliviers aux troncs
uniformes, au feuillage de velours, baignant dans le vent qui fait onduler
leurs voiles verts et entendre doucement   ton oreille le pas solitaire et
silencieux dans l'herbe scintillante ? Viens ! Vois le soleil dans sa
carapace de feu, ses fl ches lanc es vers l'azur  ternel. Port e par la
houle, sous toi bient t la mer infinie vacille. Le vent creuse le talus des
vagues, ouvre la voie aux dieux argent s qui s'unissent   toi, s'enivrant

¹⁰ Je me concentre ici sur le romantisme allemand. La question se complique de fa on fascinante d s qu'on l' tend aux g n alogies tr s diff rentes qui ont dessin  le paysage musical romantique en France, comme l'a bien montr  Emmanuel Reibel dans *Comment la musique est devenue romantique: de Rousseau   Berlioz*, Paris, Fayard, 2013. Pour un aper u europ en, on se reportera   Paul Hamilton (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of European Romanticism*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2019.

¹¹ Les lettres dont sont faits les romans  pistolaires de Bettina von Arnim, au nombre desquels il y a *Die G nderode* (1840), se fondent sur des  changes r els qu'elle a eus avec les personnes figurant dans ses livres. Mais la majorit  de ces lettres sont l'invention de l'auteur.

des rythmes célestes nés de ta poitrine. Tout dans l'univers, maintenant si proche, vibre à ton unisson. Mais bientôt la mer capricieuse, toujours changeante, s'éloigne. Son jeu d'ondes glisse d'une couleur à l'autre et captive ton regard. Elle pénètre tes sens, langoureuse puis ardente, souriante, sanglotante, éblouissante puis de nouveau recouverte d'un voile – effleurement furtif comme le regard enflammé des yeux d'un aimé ; tu ne peux le saisir ni t'en détacher. Le ciel est sans nuage, son souffle chasse doucement devant lui des vaguelettes, innombrables, l'une après l'autre ; toutes se brisent sur le rivage dans un léger soupir. Ah ! doux moment qui domine la mer des passions ! Ta respiration s'arrête ; tu voudrais retenir, entièrement et pour toujours, ce qui à chaque instant ne cesse de t'échapper.

Qu'est-ce que l'âme dans l'océan de la musique ? Éprouve-t-elle la peine, connaît-elle les délices, elle si merveilleusement mobile ? La pensée jamais ne peut la suivre. Ressent-elle en retour tous les émois ? Aime-t-elle quand nous aimons ? Son écume est-elle flattée quand nos larmes s'y mêlent ? Oh, comme je voudrais me jeter dans l'eau de lagunes vert émeraude, sentir nos deux âmes sœurs emportées insensiblement à travers la haute mer jusqu'à cet océan, la barque les bercer harmonieusement jusqu'à la dernière note. Et là, ce serait le même air calme, la même pureté du ciel, le même souffle, doux, intact, la même lumière qu'en esprit, dans l'ivresse provoquée par la douce oscillation des sons qui font battre la poitrine. Mais l'océan se soulève brusquement ! Dans un mugissement, tu entends le grand esprit de la création émettre un son qui ramène tout à lui. Puis son souffle enfle de nouveau, provoquant un frisson dans ta poitrine, avant de puissamment rouler son écume en une ascension et une descente infatigables contre les vents qui, en s'agitant dans l'abîme, la refoulent en grondant. Oui, c'est l'océan de la musique de Beethoven. Les notes montent de ciel en ciel, de plus en plus audacieuses à mesure qu'elles redescendent, et tu te sens protégée sur ce rocher isolé, au-dessus de ce double son, cernée par ces ouragans furieux, ces vagues qui montent sans fin jusqu'à ton cœur et sans fin refluent pour, se chevauchant l'une l'autre et pourtant se divisant à nouveau dans l'océan solaire de l'harmonie, revenir sans cesse te submerger avec une puissance renouvelée. Enfin, toutes les voix qui se languissent et s'agitent dans une joyeuse confusion de cris de joie, de nostalgie et de mille autres sentiments – toutes, sur un seul signe discret de sa main de maître, clament à l'unisson : à présent, c'est assez !

Ah, qu'en est-il donc en ton cœur ? Avoue ! La musique n'est-elle pas un océan à qui Beethoven commande ? Ne sens-tu pas que l'indomptable passion est de l'ordre du divin, au principe même de toute création. Ne penses-tu pas que Dieu est pure passion ? Qu'est-ce que la passion, sinon une vie augmentée par le sentiment que le divin est proche de toi, que tu pourrais l'atteindre, te mêler à son flux ? Qu'est-ce le bonheur, la

vie de ton âme, si ce n'est la passion. Comment la force de ton action s'accroît-elle ? Combien de révélations en toi, dont tu n'avais pas encore rêvé ! N'est-il pas vrai que plus rien ne pèse ? Que la passion met en mouvement ton corps ? Tu n'as plus ni soif ni faim. Tu vois bien, tu commences déjà à te nourrir de l'air ; léger comme un oiseau, tu surmontes l'insurmontable. Et tu lances au loin des flammes de ton immortalité. Elles embrasent l'Éternel, qui se voue à toi : il se déverse dans le grand océan en flots de passion, fait briller au ciel les étoiles qui t'éclairent de leur lumière, et quand l'éclat de la nuit pâlit, les lueurs de l'aurore apparaissent, radieuses. Oui, c'est la raison pour laquelle l'erreur commise par les Pères de l'Église de croire que Dieu est sagesse en a heurté plus d'un : *Dieu est passion*. Il est grand, il prend tout dans son sein, en lui toute vie se reflète comme dans l'océan, de lui émane comme un courant de vie toute passion, jusqu'à la dernière, le repos suprême.¹²

Dans l'expérience musicale, le sujet se libère des fixations, des identités, des contraintes de la vie profane avec ses besoins corporels, du monde désenchanté, dénué d'esprit, pour s'élever à un monde spirituel, divin. Mais ce monde-là n'est pas ordonné, il n'a pas de structure intelligible, il se présente comme un océan déchaîné par la tempête, comme un jeu de vagues qui jaillissent, tourbillonnent et retombent, projettent le sujet dans des directions contraires et l'entraînent dans une danse violente. C'est l'expérience du fond passionnel de l'âme, du jeu des forces esthétiques, pré-subjectives, qui déforme et rend fluide toute la structure identitaire et normative du sujet que les nécessités de la vie sociale ont durcie et pétrifiée. La libération musicale est l'expérience d'une liquéfaction du sujet.

Les lettres de Bettina von Arnim à Günderode paraissent en 1840. Le mouvement romantique se tarit alors, mais persiste sur le mode de la rétrospection. Ainsi les lettres semi-fictives d'Arnim sont-elles datées du début du siècle, du temps de l'amitié de jeunesse entre les deux autrices. Ce regard en arrière vaut pour programme de l'œuvre entière de Bettina von Arnim. Il ne s'agit pas, ici, de la vision romantique de l'histoire qui idéalise le Moyen Âge, mais de la tentative de revitaliser le présent en retrouvant, au milieu des déceptions de la restauration, l'élan d'une jeunesse qui aspirait à un autre avenir. Arnim dédie son œuvre aux étudiants – le cercle des admirateurs de la gauche hégélienne – et invoque l'esprit d'un romantisme utopique, le romantisme de la première heure qui a émergé autour de 1800.

¹² Voir, dans le présent numéro 5 de *Symphilosophie* (2023), la traduction que nous donnons d'extraits de Bettina von Arnim sur la musique : *Günderode. Extraits choisis sur la musique* (1840), traduits et annotés par Laure Cahen-Maurel et Christoph Haffter, avec une introduction de Christoph Haffter, p. 237-247, ici p. 245-246.

Son discours sur la musique doit être compris dans ce contexte : elle révoque, presque littéralement, des idées élaborées quarante ans plus tôt par Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder et Ludwig Tieck dans les *Épanchements d'un moine ami des arts* (*Herzensergießungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders*) et les *Fantaisies sur l'art* (*Phantasien über die Kunst*).¹³ Dans l'historiographie de l'esthétique musicale, ces textes sont principalement retenus comme preuve de la nouvelle importance que la musique instrumentale, surtout symphonique, acquiert autour de 1800. Mais, avant tout, on y retrouve la même polémique contre le discours scientifique sur la musique qui essaie de la capter froidement à l'aide de calculs algébriques en analysant les œuvres comme s'il s'agissait de machines, d'un métier à tisser.¹⁴ À l'encontre de cette objectivation désenchantée, l'auteur promeut une compréhension immédiate de l'essence de la musique par le sentiment qui brise le carcan du raisonnement expert :

Lorsque toutes les oscillations intimes des fibres de notre cœur – tremblant de joie, exultant de façon extatique, battant fiévreusement le pouls dans une adoration dévorante – font toutes éclater par un cri unique le langage des mots, comme s'ils étaient le tombeau de la fureur du cœur –, alors elles ressuscitent sous d'autres cieus, dans les vibrations de ravissantes cordes de harpe, ainsi que dans une vie future, avec une beauté transfigurée, et elles célèbrent leur résurrection sous des formes angéliques.

Des centaines et des centaines d'œuvres musicales expriment la joie et le plaisir, mais en chacune chante un génie différent, et pour chacune de ces mélodies, des fibres diverses de notre cœur sont touchées. Que veulent alors les raisonneurs timides et hésitants qui exigent pour chacune de ces œuvres une explication sous forme de mots, sans comprendre que la parole ne peut en épuiser tout le sens, comme pour une toile ? Essaient-ils de mesurer le langage le plus riche à l'aune du plus pauvre et de fondre en mots ce que les mots méprisent ? Ou n'ont-ils jamais rien senti sans mots ? N'ont-ils rempli le vide de leur cœur que par des descriptions de sentiments ? N'ont-ils jamais perçu, dans l'intimité de l'âme, le chant silencieux, la danse muette des esprits invisibles ? ou ne croient-ils point aux contes ?

Un fleuve qui coule me servira ici d'exemple. Aucun art humain ne peut, au moyen de mots, représenter l'écoulement d'un fleuve varié et ses

¹³ Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, *Werke: Herzensergießungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders / Phantasien über die Kunst*, hg. von Markus Schwering, Taschenbücher zur Musikwissenschaft 153, Wilhelmshaven, F. Noetzel, 2007.

¹⁴ W.H. Wackenroder, *Phantasien über die Kunst für Freunde der Kunst*, in: *ibid.*, p. 208.

mille vagues, ici plates, là gonflées, impétueuses et écumantes. Le langage ne peut que *compter* et *nommer* misérablement les changements, mais il est incapable de rendre visibles les modifications régulières des gouttes d'eau. Il en va de même pour le fleuve mystérieux qui s'écoule dans les profondeurs de l'âme humaine : la parole compte, nomme et décrit ses transformations à l'aide d'une matière étrangère ; la musique au contraire nous présente le fleuve lui-même. Elle saisit résolument la harpe mystérieuse et trace dans ce monde obscur certains signes magiques en une succession précise – et les cordes de notre cœur résonnent, et nous comprenons leur timbre.

Dans le miroir des sons, le cœur humain apprend à se reconnaître ; c'est par le moyen des sons que nous apprenons à *ressentir le sentiment* ; ils donnent à de nombreux esprits rêvant dans les recoins secrets de l'âme une conscience vivante, et ils enrichissent notre intériorité par de tout nouveaux esprits magiques du sentiment.

[...] L'essence de toute poésie consiste à *condenser* en masses solides et variées ces sentiments qui, dans la vie réelle, s'égarer au hasard ; elle divise ce qui est uni, réunit fermement ce qui est divisé et, au sein des plus étroites frontières, s'abattent des vagues plus hautes et plus agitées. Mais où les limites et les sauts sont-ils plus nets, où les vagues s'élèvent-elles plus haut que dans la musique ?

Mais dans ces vagues ne s'écoule jamais que l'essence pure et *informe*, le mouvement et la couleur et aussi, surtout, les mille changements des sentiments ; l'art idéal, d'une pureté angélique, ne connaît dans son innocence ni l'origine ni le but de ses émotions, il ignore la corrélation de ses sentiments avec le monde réel.

Et pourtant, en dépit de son ingénuité, par la puissance magique qu'il exerce sur les sens, il met en branle toutes les légions merveilleuses et grouillantes de l'imagination, qui peuplent les sons d'images enchantées et transforment les émotions amorphes en formes déterminées des affections humaines, qui défilent ensuite sous nos yeux comme les images chimériques d'une fantasmagorie magique.¹⁵

La métaphore de l'innommable mouvement des vagues relie le dynamisme de la musique au jeu des forces passionnelles au fond de l'âme. L'expérience de ce champ dynamique nous élève, selon les auteurs, au-dessus du monde profane inerte, du tombeau qu'est le langage raisonnable, et nous emporte

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 211-213 ; *Fantaisies sur l'art*, « V. L'Essence intime et particulière de la musique et la psychologie de la musique instrumentale actuelle », in : Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, Ludwig Tieck, *Épanchements d'un moine ami des arts* suivi de *Fantaisies sur l'art*, édité et traduit par Charles Le Blanc et Olivier Schefer, Paris, José Corti, 2009, p. 229-231.

vers l'espérance d'une résurrection. Cette image caractérise la musique comme l'expérience d'une libération asociale. L'autonomie de l'art musical s'exprime ici dans l'idée d'un affranchissement de la réalité morne des rapports sociaux. Pourtant, la musique n'est pas non plus conçue comme un monde à part qui n'aurait aucune signification extra-musicale. Au contraire, elle est l'expression la plus intense de la vérité du sujet. C'est pourquoi la libération musicale est, dans le discours romantique, intimement liée à la libération de la subjectivité, ou plus précisément : à la libération de ce qui anime le sujet en son fond tout en étant constamment réprimée par les formes de subjectivation établies.

3.

Si le discours enthousiaste sur la musique célèbre l'innommable, il en pâtit également. D'une part, la libération promise reste entièrement abstraite : les raisons pour lesquelles il faudrait accorder une importance normative au jeu de forces singulier d'une personne sont loin d'être évidentes. On pourrait tout aussi bien considérer que celle-ci subit les effets de ce jeu de pulsions comme une hétéronomie intérieure. On ne parlerait alors pas de libération, mais simplement de dysfonctionnement. Un jeu de forces irrationnel n'est pas, en soi, source de liberté.

D'autre part, la rhétorique de Wackenroder, Tieck et Arnim peut paraître quelque peu outrancière, compte tenu du gouffre qu'il y a entre l'importance démesurée qu'elle accorde à l'expérience de la musique en général et l'absence quasi-totale de spécification de ce qui est expérimenté. Il semble que ces auteurs aient été parfaitement indifférents à la manière dont sont créées les œuvres musicales particulières. Le récit du vécu occulte la musique même.¹⁶ Cela n'est pas forcément le fait d'une faiblesse de ces auteurs, mais bien une conséquence de leur conception esthétique : si l'art est la manifestation d'un jeu de forces indéterminable, qui brise les formes établies, alors aucune forme ou catégorie descriptive ne compte – elles sont toutes l'affaire des *philistins*.

Or cela pose un problème à l'historiographie du romantisme en général. Carl Dahlhaus souligne que le discours esthétique et la production musicale autour de 1800 sont en décalage : l'esthétique romantique est contemporaine d'une production musicale qu'on identifie ordinairement comme étant *classique (de Vienne)*, alors qu'il n'existe pas de discours classique compa-

¹⁶ Une exception notable est le cas d'E.T.A. Hoffmann, qui procède à des spécifications musicales très précises.

nable.¹⁷ À l'inverse, la musique que nous avons l'habitude d'appeler romantique apparaît seulement au moment où le romantisme en tant que mouvement philosophique et littéraire se tarit. On pourrait alors être tenté d'y voir une simple confusion d'appellation, et dire que l'esthétique romantique est l'esthétique de la musique dite classique. Mais la situation se complique encore : le discours esthétique du romantisme est loin de ne s'intéresser qu'à la production de son époque. Bien au contraire. Wackenroder, Tieck, Hoffmann et Arnim se réfèrent, souvent de manière oblique, aux musiques aussi anciennes que les œuvres de Palestrina. Il faut donc conclure que l'esthétique musicale du romantisme ne correspond pas à un certain type de composition que l'on pourrait qualifier de « romantique ». Il s'agit plutôt d'une conception romantique de la musique en général : pour l'esprit romantique, toute musique est romantique.¹⁸ Cela dit, certaines formes musicales réaliseraient plus pleinement l'idéal romantique de la musique en général – par conséquent, la musique romantique désignerait moins une époque qu'un caractère esthétique dont certaines musiques sont davantage douées que d'autres. Mais alors, quels en seraient les traits ?

Quatre motifs dominent la littérature sur le romantisme : l'expression de soi, la « métaphysique », la *Sehnsucht* et le fantastique. Que la musique soit l'expression du soi – de l'artiste, d'un personnage fictif ou de l'auditeur, peu importe – est une idée que le romantisme partage avec les courants littéraires de l'*Empfindsamkeit* et du *Sturm und Drang* qui l'ont précédé. En musique, l'expression de soi s'oppose à la représentation des affects.¹⁹ Jusqu'au milieu du XVIII^e siècle, les traités sur la musique énumèrent les différents types d'affect que la musique – typiquement basée sur un texte – est capable de représenter à l'aide d'un catalogue de procédés spécifiques. Ce qui est décisif est l'idée de *type* affectif : ce sont des émotions, sentiments, affects ou passions distincts mais suffisamment généraux pour que l'artiste puisse les représenter d'une manière caractéristique et que l'audience soit en mesure de les reconnaître.²⁰ L'expression de soi rompt avec ce cadre. Si ce sont toujours les affects, sentiments, émotions et passions qui intéressent, ils

¹⁷ Voir Carl Dahlhaus, *Klassische und romantische Musikästhetik*, Laaber, Laaber-Verlag, 1988, en particulier p. 86-97.

¹⁸ Voir la solution proposée par Benedict Taylor dans "Defining the Indefinable: Romanticism and Music", in B. Taylor (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Music and Romanticism*, p. 3-16.

¹⁹ Voir Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht, « Das Ausdrucksprinzip im musikalischen Sturm und Drang », in *Musikalisches Denken: Aufsätze zur Theorie und Ästhetik der Musik*, Taschenbücher zur Musikwissenschaft 46, Wilhelmshaven, Heinrichshofen, 1977, p. 69-112.

²⁰ Dans la même veine, voir Karen Leistra-Jones, « Music, Expression, and the Aesthetics of Authenticity », in B. Taylor (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Music and Romanticism*, p. 214-228.

ne sont plus représentés de manière distincte et reconnaissable, mais dans un flux, un enchaînement et un mélange si particuliers qu'ils finissent par exprimer une singularité vivante – le ressenti d'un soi unique avec toutes ses ambiguïtés et ses contradictions. Eggebrecht souligne l'importance, dans le *Sturm und Drang* musical, de l'idée d'un écoulement, voire de l'idée que la vie sentimentale d'un sujet éclate brutalement et immédiatement dans l'œuvre – et la forme quasi-improvisée de la fantaisie chez Carl Philip Emmanuel Bach et Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart en est le corrélat formel.

L'expression de soi est au fondement du romantisme, mais la notion s'y transforme d'une manière particulière. Wackenroder et Tieck, Schlegel et Novalis, ou encore Hoffmann et Arnim lui confèrent une dimension que Carl Dahlhaus appelle une « métaphysique de la musique instrumentale ». ²¹ Dans la conception romantique, l'œuvre d'art ne se contente pas d'exprimer des états d'âme ; elle n'imité pas un vécu psychologique. Le romantisme se distingue de ces prédécesseurs par l'idée que l'œuvre d'art porte en elle une aspiration philosophique : elle exprime l'absolu. La notion romantique de *musique absolue* est alors comprise en un double sens : en tant qu'indépendance de la musique instrumentale – son affranchissement du texte – et en tant que contenu métaphysique, l'articulation d'une totalité inconditionnelle. Mais la notion prétentieuse d'absolu porte à confusion. Si elle évoque évidemment la notion chrétienne d'un dieu créateur ou la notion métaphysique d'un autre monde, purement idéal, il me semble décisif de comprendre cette notion, en contexte romantique, dans le sens précis qu'elle prend dans la philosophie après Kant. L'idée de l'absolu désigne, dans ce contexte, la condition, elle-même inconditionnée, de l'intelligibilité du monde sensible. L'absolu est ce qui fonde et rend possible la compréhension rationnelle du monde. Dans la philosophie post-kantienne, dont le romantisme fait partie, il y a une multiplicité de façons de concevoir cette condition inconditionnée. ²² Ce que tous ces modèles ont en commun est l'idée que l'absolu doit être pensé comme une totalité, une connexion ou synthèse intégrale de toutes les conditions particulières de ce qui est pensable. Chez certains, c'est la notion de subjectivité qui remplit cette fonction d'intégration totale : la subjectivité absolue est alors conçue comme ce qui synthétise toutes les conditions d'intelligibilité de tout ce qui apparaît dans le

²¹ C. Dahlhaus, *Klassische und romantische Musikästhetik*, p. 12.

²² Voir Eckart Förster, *Die 25 Jahre der Philosophie: eine systematische Rekonstruktion*, Klostermann Rote Reihe 51, Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klostermann, 2018 ; voir aussi Christoph Haffter, „Grenzen der Reflexion. Pragmatismus, Idealismus und Frühromantik als Formen unendlicher Philosophie“, *Symphilosophie*, n° 1, 2019, p. 75-104.

monde sensible.²³ Sans entrer dans les détails et les apories d'une telle conception, pareille notion de la subjectivité ne coïncide pas, à l'évidence, avec la notion d'un moi personnel doté d'une biographie singulière, de vécus et d'états d'âme contingents. La subjectivité en tant que condition inconditionnée de l'intelligibilité du monde n'est pas un sujet empirique ou personnel, mais une subjectivité transcendantale : la conscience de soi – le *je pense* qui accompagne toutes les pensées possibles – comme condition formelle du pensable. Cette notion de subjectivité pure désigne quelque chose de radicalement impersonnel et d'universel, au cœur de la pensée. Mais c'est exactement depuis ce point radicalement impersonnel au fond du sujet que découle la possibilité de la liberté : la liberté du sujet de déterminer ses pensées et ses actes en réfléchissant sur le bien-fondé de leurs raisons.

L'enjeu philosophique consiste à rendre, à son tour, intelligible cette condition de toute intelligibilité : comment prouver la validité du principe de toute preuve ? Comment comprendre ce qui est présupposé dans tout acte de compréhension ? Comment connaître la condition de toute connaissance ? Devant ce défi, non seulement les romantiques recourent à l'idée que la connaissance de la condition inconditionnée, si elle est possible, ne peut pas procéder de la même manière que la connaissance du conditionné : elle ne procède pas par raisonnement conceptuel, ni par preuve empirique. La validité, l'existence, l'actualité de la condition de l'intelligibilité sont connues sur un mode non-conceptuel qui porte les noms les plus divers : intuition, sentiment, conscience, foi, évidence de soi.²⁴ Et c'est à ce moment précis que l'art entre en jeu : l'art vient en aide à la philosophie au moment où celle-ci touche à ses limites.

Si l'expression de soi prend une dimension métaphysique dans l'esthétique musicale du romantisme, c'est au sein de ce champ de problèmes philosophiques relatifs à la question de l'absolu qu'il faut la comprendre.²⁵ L'expression de la subjectivité n'est plus, dès lors, la restitution de certains épisodes contingents d'un vécu personnel. L'ambition de la musique serait plutôt d'exprimer – à travers la multiplicité des affects, des sentiments, des passions et des atmosphères – une subjectivité radicalement impersonnelle qui fonde l'intelligibilité du monde. Cela se manifeste musicalement dans la

²³ Voir Dieter Henrich, *Fichtes ursprüngliche Einsicht*, Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klostermann, 1967.

²⁴ Voir Manfred Frank, *Einführung in die frühromantische Ästhetik: Vorlesungen*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1989 ; et aussi „Unendliche Annäherung“: *die Anfänge der philosophischen Frühromantik*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1997.

²⁵ Pour une discussion approfondie de ce rapport, voir Tomas McAuley, “Music in Early German Romantic Philosophy”, in B. Taylor (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Music and Romanticism*, p. 165-182.

tentative de composer des œuvres qui construisent en elle-même une synthèse de moments contradictoires, en réunissant les affects, les sentiments, les impressions et les images les plus divers de façon à ce qu'il en résulte une intégration totale. Même le discours enthousiaste en témoigne : ce qui fascine, c'est l'aptitude de la musique à parcourir les nuances et les intensités les plus éloignées sans perdre pour autant le sens d'une continuité, d'une nécessité et d'une cohérence du tout. Aller aux extrêmes, relier le plus hétérogène, réunir le contradictoire : tel serait le programme implicite d'une musique véritablement romantique de l'absolu. L'emballement romantique pour les symphonies du classicisme viennois en donne l'exemple le plus évident. D'où l'insistance d'E.T.A. Hoffmann sur la cohérence formelle de la 5^e symphonie de Beethoven, sur la puissance d'intégration qu'il désigne du mot allemand dénotant la faculté de réflexion qui contrôle l'enthousiasme : *Besonnenheit*.²⁶

Cependant, l'enthousiasme métaphysique n'est qu'un versant de la philosophie romantique. Il est toujours accompagné, ou plutôt contrecarré, par le doute, notamment chez Friedrich Schlegel et Novalis. Car le problème de l'absolu, tel que nous l'avons esquissé, repose, au fond, sur le constat que l'absolu n'est pas connaissable conceptuellement. C'est le scandale intellectuel entraîné par la philosophie de Kant, qui rejette les preuves rationalistes de l'existence de Dieu. Les modes non-conceptuels de la connaissance qui s'y substituent n'atteignent jamais à la certitude d'une preuve. L'espoir mis dans le pouvoir de l'art est intimement lié à cette insatisfaction, à la conscience de l'impuissance de la raison à comprendre son propre fondement. Par suite, les synthèses artistiques, les constructions de totalités contradictoires en apparence sont hantées par le pressentiment de leur insuffisance. La connaissance de l'absolu ne s'achevant pas, les œuvres d'art non plus n'arrivent jamais à s'affirmer entièrement : elles restent nécessairement approximatives, inachevées, fragmentaires. La notion de *Sehnsucht* en rend compte. En tant que caractère musical, la *langueur* de l'absolu corrige l'enthousiasme de l'intégration : c'est la césure, l'abandon soudain, l'interruption qui fait retomber les ambitions, renoncer à la dernière confirmation, qui ironise l'euphorie et relativise la capacité de la subjectivité à maîtriser le monde. C'est la raison pour laquelle le musicologue Becking – témoin suspect, j'en conviens – proposait de restreindre la notion de musique romantique aux œuvres de Franz Schubert et de Robert Schumann : l'absence de gravité, de pesanteur affirmative, le renoncement au contrôle

²⁶ E. T. A. Hoffmann, *Schriften zur Musik: Aufsätze und Rezensionen*, hg. von Friedrich Schnapp, München, Winkler, 1977, p. 36 sq.

formel, l'errance harmonique sont des qualités perceptibles dans la *Sonate en Ré Majeur* de Schubert, par exemple, ou dans la pièce *Warum ?* des *Phantasiestücke* de Schumann. Contrairement à Becking, qui interprétait ces qualités comme une rêverie insouciant, le signe d'un subjectivisme impuissant, coupé du monde réel, René Michaelsen a, plus récemment, perçu dans la facture de la musique de Robert Schumann le scepticisme philosophique, le doute qui travaille la composition en son sein.²⁷

L'insistance sur le doute comme trait caractéristique du romantisme projette une lumière encore différente sur le programme musical d'une expression de soi. Dans la perspective sceptique, les apparences évoquées par la musique, figures, ambiances, mouvements et images, prennent une consistance irréelle : elles apparaissent comme des illusions, des fabulations, des fictions et des fantômes peuplant l'âme. La subjectivité s'exprime alors en projetant une danse macabre d'esprits sur le ciel nocturne de la conscience. C'est le dernier motif – le fantastique – qui vient compléter notre esquisse des traits romantiques de la musique.²⁸ La fameuse recension de la 5^e symphonie de Beethoven par E.T.A. Hoffmann le mobilise d'emblée :

La musique instrumentale de Beethoven nous ouvre elle aussi le royaume de l'immense et de l'incommensurable. Des rais incandescents zèbrent sa nuit obscure ; nous apercevons des ombres titanesques qui ondulent comme des vagues, resserrent autour de nous leur cercle et, destructrices, ne nous laissent que la torture de cette nostalgie sans fin où tout l'élan joyeux qu'exprimaient à l'instant des accents d'allégresse, sombre et s'anéantit ; nous ne vivons plus que dans cette douleur qui engloutit sans les détruire l'amour, l'espérance et la joie, et veut faire éclater notre poitrine en unissant toutes les passions dans un *tutti* formidable – et nous sommes des visionnaires émerveillés.²⁹

Dans ces lignes comme dans le reste de la recension, la notion plurivoque de *Geist*, l'« esprit », est employée au pluriel : *Geister*. Elle ne désigne donc pas le domaine des idées, de l'intellect ou de l'idéal – domaine de la métaphysique idéaliste – mais fait référence au champ sémantique du spiritisme : voir des esprits est l'affaire des voyants, de ceux qui communiquent avec le monde des spectres, des âmes errantes, des démons et des fantômes. L'imaginaire évoqué par Hoffmann est celui de la nuit de Walpurgis. Le répertoire

²⁷ René Michaelsen, *Der komponierte Zweifel: Robert Schumann und die Selbstreflexion in der Musik*, Paderborn, Wilhelm Fink, 2015.

²⁸ Voir Francesca Brittan, "Music, Magic, and the Supernatural", in B. Taylor (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Music and Romanticism*, p. 127-145.

²⁹ E.T.A. Hoffmann, *Schriften zur Musik*, p. 36 ; *Écrits sur la musique*, trad. B. Hebert et A. Montandon, Lausanne, L'Âge d'homme, 1985, p. 39-40.

fantastique est intimement lié à la critique du monde désenchanté qui regarde la nature comme un mécanisme, le vivant comme une machine et les affaires humaines comme un calcul utilitaire. La figure fantastique du revenant est l'apparition réifiée d'une revendication de justice qui, depuis le passé, hante le présent. Avec le spectre revient tout ce que la raison calculatrice réprime, ignore et exclut injustement, mais ce refoulé du monde désenchanté fait retour sous une forme irrationnelle, méconnaissable, déformée. Si la subjectivité romantique entend dans la musique une danse de spectres, il faut y voir la conjonction de deux intuitions complémentaires : d'une part la conscience du caractère fictif des contenus musicalement représentés, conséquence de l'attitude sceptique accompagnant l'enthousiasme pour l'absolu ; d'autre part, la conviction que les figurations de l'imaginaire, les fantasmes et les rêves ne sont guère détachés de la réalité, qu'ils en sont plutôt des témoins travestis, des reflets indirects. Il y a donc, pour les romantiques, une véracité du fantastique qui dépasse l'imitation vraisemblable du monde empirique, une vérité de fiction, que l'on cherche en vain dans les faits empiriques. On est ainsi arrivé aux antipodes de notre point de départ : l'expression de soi immédiate sous la forme d'un écoulement de l'âme – le programme du *Sturm und Drang* – fait place à la mise en scène d'apparitions consciemment fictives figurant les témoins indirects de réalités réprimées.

4.

Afin de relier entre eux ces traits contradictoires de l'esthétique musicale du romantisme, je suggère une révision de la conception traditionnelle selon laquelle l'esthétique romantique est centrée autour du problème de l'expression de la subjectivité. Cette idée reçue nécessite d'être révisée, car la notion de subjectivité est plus complexe qu'on ne le croit souvent. Elle se différencie, d'un point de vue interne, en trois moments : un aspect singulier, un aspect particulier et un aspect universel.

Le moment de la singularité subjective désigne la constellation de traits, de propriétés ou de vécus qui rend une personne unique. Cette singularité personnelle est un fait contingent. C'est pour cela que la singularité d'une personne ne saurait être exprimée au sens strict du terme. La singularité est étrangère au rapport intérieur / extérieur : elle est à la surface, elle se montre tout simplement, elle s'exhibe. L'expression entre seulement en jeu lorsque la subjectivité singulière se lie à une forme de subjectivité particulière. Être un sujet particulier signifie alors incarner un type de sujet, un rôle social collectivement reconnu : une identité pratique avec ses capacités, ses habitudes, ses valeurs, ses normes et ses institutions correspondantes. On

retrouve ici la notion de sujet utilisée par Christoph Menke à la suite de Michel Foucault : on devient sujet par un processus social d'assujettissement sous une forme de subjectivité particulière. Dans l'art, c'est le répertoire des styles, des techniques, des figures rhétoriques et des tournures de phrase reconnus et reconnaissables, que l'on s'approprie au cours de la formation. La maîtrise de formes particulières de subjectivité résulte donc de l'appropriation par l'éducation et l'entraînement : contrairement à la singularité subjective, le moment de la particularité subjective n'est pas un fait mais un acquis. Un comportement expressif peut émerger de la relation entre ces formes particulières et les traits singuliers de la personne qui s'est appropriée ces formes. La singularité apparaît alors comme une intériorité s'exprimant à travers, et contre, les formes extérieures de la subjectivité. En raison de son potentiel déstabilisateur et déformant, la singularité peut, dès lors, être conçue comme un jeu de forces animant et subvertissant toute forme de subjectivité particulière ; et on peut voir dans cet ébranlement des formes sociales la pré-condition d'une libération. Mais la facticité de la subjectivité singulière interdit d'y voir la manifestation d'une liberté. Le jeu de forces dans les profondeurs de l'âme, tout comme la constellation unique de traits à la surface du corps, sont des faits contingents, *brute facts*. S'ils font éclater les contraintes d'un rôle social, il y a bien conflit, mais celui-ci n'a rien de libre. Afin de rendre compte de la possibilité de la liberté, il faut inclure le troisième aspect de la subjectivité qui désigne quelque chose d'universel : la conscience de soi, impersonnelle et transcendantale. C'est l'instance de réflexion, la source d'une possible critique des formes de subjectivation et, par-là, le point d'ancrage d'une détermination de soi dans les pensées et les actes. Tant que l'expression de la subjectivité renonce à cette dimension radicalement universelle et impersonnelle, tout lien avec un projet de libération reste illusoire.

On est ainsi en mesure, pour conclure, d'articuler entre eux les traits de l'esthétique musicale du romantisme, à travers le prisme de ce nouveau modèle d'expression de la subjectivité. Pour les romantiques, la musique met en scène un processus de libération au sein du monde désenchanté dominé par la raison instrumentale. Cette libération se produit dans la liquéfaction des formes particulières de subjectivité, grâce à laquelle se manifeste un jeu de forces singulier animant les profondeurs du sujet. Les formes particulières perdent alors leur gravité réelle, elles se transforment en figures fantastiques, en ombres fictives attestant d'une manière détournée l'existence de ces singularités réelles que les formes particulières de la subjectivité répriment et excluent. Mais cette déstabilisation asociale des formes de subjectivité sociales est, à son tour, fondée dans une instance de réflexion transcen-

dantale : la conscience de soi radicalement impersonnelle, qui tend vers un fondement absolu de l'intelligibilité du monde. Seul cet aspect de la subjectivité entretient un lien intrinsèque avec la liberté : la détermination de ses pensées et de ses actes n'est libre que dans la mesure où elle s'avère justifiée dans la réflexion critique. La liquéfaction dynamique des types de subjectivité apparaît alors comme un moment du processus de réflexion auto-critique. N'aboutissant jamais à une certitude, à l'instar d'une démonstration conceptuelle, cette réflexion artistique est hantée par le doute en même temps qu'elle aspire à son achèvement. Si la musique des romantiques exprime la subjectivité, elle nous la fait expérimenter en tant que totalité complexe, conflictuelle et contradictoire, auto-critique et inachevée. C'est en ce sens, et non pas comme l'exhibition musicale de contingences personnelles, qu'elle peut être solidaire d'une quête de la liberté en général.

Symphilosophie

International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism

Karl Philipp Moritz' *Götterlehre* and the Freedom of the Artwork and Artist

C. Allen Speight *

ABSTRACT

Karl Philipp Moritz has been heralded as the “first to have combined in his work all the ideas” (Todorov) that came to determine the romantic aesthetic—above all, in the new attention Moritz directed to the artwork as a self-signifying totality and to the creative power of the artist. This paper offers a re-exploration of the relation between these two sides of Moritz' interest in the freedom of art, examining them through the lens of his own roles as author and interpreter of myth in his *Götterlehre oder mythologische Dichtungen der Alten*.

Keywords: Moritz, aesthetics, freedom, myth, Todorov

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Karl Philipp Moritz wurde als der „erste gepriesen, der in seinem Werk alle Ideen vereinte“ (Todorov), die die romantische Ästhetik bestimmten. Dieses Lob bezieht sich vor allem auf die Aufmerksamkeit, die Moritz dem Kunstwerk als einer selbstbedeutenden Gesamtheit widmete sowie auf seine Untersuchung der schöpferischen Kraft des Künstlers. Dieser Aufsatz bietet eine erneute Untersuchung der Beziehung zwischen diesen beiden Aspekten in Moritz' Interesse an der Freiheit der Kunst und untersucht sie im Hinblick auf seine eigene Rolle als Autor und Interpret von Mythen in seiner *Götterlehre oder mythologischen Dichtungen der Alten*.

Stichwörter: Moritz, Ästhetik, Freiheit, Mythos, Todorov

* Professor of Philosophy, Department of Philosophy, Boston University, 745 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, Massachusetts 02215 – casps8@bu.edu

1. Introduction

Although he remains still far less known than many other central figures in the development of German aesthetics, Karl Philipp Moritz (1756-93) is an important source for understanding key shifts that open up in the aesthetics of the romantic age. Tzvetan Todorov in fact heralded Moritz (as opposed to a range of other possible options, including Herder, Rousseau, Vico and Shaftesbury) as the “first to have combined in his work all the ideas” that came to determine the aesthetics of romanticism. For Todorov, Moritz’ importance for romantic aesthetics could be seen especially in the new attention he directed toward two aspects of freedom in artistic engagement: the *artwork as a self-signifying totality* and *the creative power of the artist*.¹ This paper offers a re-exploration of the relation between these two sides of Moritz’ interest in the freedom of art, examining them particularly through the lens of his own roles as author and interpreter of myth (and of the artistic modes of its creation and re-creation) in his *Götterlehre oder mythologische Dichtungen der Alten*.

This paper will first explore the two claims that lie behind Todorov’s assessment of Moritz’ importance for Romantic aesthetics—the first concerning the freedom of the artwork and the second concerning the freedom of the artist—as they appear in two crucial texts by Moritz. § 2 will explore his 1785 “Attempt to Unify All the Fine Arts and Sciences under the Concept of ‘That Which is Complete in Itself’” (“*Versuch einer Vereinigung aller schönen Künste und Wissenschaften unter dem Begriff des in sich selbst Vollendeten*”).² § 3 will examine his 1788 essay “On the Artistic Imitation of the Beautiful” (“*Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen*”).³ After examining Moritz’ claims in these two essays, § 4 will show how the relationship between these two claims about artwork and artist plays out in Moritz’ *Götterlehre oder mythologische Dichtungen der Alten*—frequently cited as a forerunner to Romantic appropriations of mythology by Schelling, Schlegel, and others.⁴ The key argument pursued here is that Moritz sees Greek mythology as an

¹ Tzvetan Todorov, *Theories of the Symbol*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 6.

² Karl Philipp Moritz, *Beiträge zur Ästhetik*, ed. Hans Joachim Schrimpf and Hans Adler (Mainz: Dietrich’sche, 1989), 3-9; English translation by Elliott Schreiber in *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association* 127.1 (2012): 94-99.

³ English translation in J.M. Bernstein, ed., *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 131-144.

⁴ Karl Philipp Moritz, *Götterlehre oder mythologische Dichtungen der Alten* (Berlin: A.W. Schade, 1816). There is a nineteenth century English translation of the *Götterlehre* by Charles Frederick William Jaeger, *Mythological Fictions of the Greeks and Romans* (New York: Carvill, 1830) [reprinted by Forgotten Books (London 2018)].

ideal poetic point of fusion between the two sides of his claims about freedom, a point which has a number of important ramifications, including how we are to understand the relation of differing artistic genres and the relation between ancient and modern conceptions of art's relation to life. These questions (§ 5) emerge especially in Moritz' encounter with two singular artists: Goethe, who took great interest in Moritz' two essays on aesthetics during their time in Rome, and whose influence is reflected in the *Götterlehre* and other publications that Moritz pursued following his Italian sojourn; and Asmus Jakob Carstens, a friend of Goethe's whose collaboration produced the *Götterlehre*'s extraordinary illustrations of mythological subjects.

2. The Artwork as "Complete in Itself"

Published in 1785, Moritz' "Attempt to Unify All the Fine Arts and Sciences under the Concept of "That Which is Complete in Itself" (*Versuch einer Vereinigung aller schönen Künste und Wissenschaften unter dem Begriff des in sich selbst Vollendeten*) is credited with offering a classic formulation of the notion of the "intransitive signification" of artworks—that works of art signify nothing outside themselves.⁵

Dedicated at its first printing in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* to Moses Mendelssohn, Moritz' concise nine-paragraph essay initially situates itself within a familiar set of earlier eighteenth century attempts to give an account of the *unity* of the fine arts.⁶ Moritz' essay begins with a discussion of the *pleasure* we take in works of art and how it can help distinguish the beautiful from the useful. When it's a matter of *usefulness*, he argues, one regards an object merely as a means to one's own comfort or convenience:

The merely useful object is thus not whole or complete in itself but only becomes so by achieving its end in me, or by becoming complete in me. But when regarding the beautiful object I roll the end out of myself and back into the object itself: I regard it as something that is not complete in me but is rather *complete in itself*, that thereby constitutes a totality in itself and affords me pleasure *for its own sake*.⁷

⁵ Todorov, *Theories of the Symbol*, 162.

⁶ The initial dedication to Mendelssohn did not appear in later editions. On Moritz' sources and intellectual debts, see the wider discussion in Alessandro Costazza, *Schönheit und Nützlichkeit: Karl Philipp Moritz und die Ästhetik des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1996).

⁷ Karl Philipp Moritz, "An Attempt to Unify All the Fine Arts and Sciences under the Concept of "That Which is Complete in Itself," 97.

Der bloss nützliche Gegenstand ist also in sich nichts Ganzes oder Vollendetes, sondern wird es erst, indem er in mir seinen Zweck erreicht, oder in mir vollendet wird. Bei der Betrachtung des Schönen aber wälze ich den Zweck aus mir in den Gegenstand selbst zurück: ich betrachte ihn, als etwas, nicht in mir, sondern in sich selbst Vollendetes, das also in sich ein Ganzes ausmacht, und mir um sein selbst willen Vergnügen gewährt; indem ich dem schönen Gegenstande nicht sowohl eine Beziehung auf mich, als mir vielmehr eine Beziehung auf ihn gebe.⁸

Moritz argues that works of art that give us pleasure involve an *internal purposiveness*: “I must find so much purposiveness in its individual parts that I forget to ask, What is actually the point of the whole thing? In other words, I must find pleasure in a beautiful object only for its own sake; to this end, the lack of external purposiveness must be compensated for by inner purposiveness; the object must be complete in itself.”⁹

Although Moritz’ claims here are sometimes taken to be forerunners of Kant’s notions of disinterestedness and purposiveness-without-purpose in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, as well as the later notion of “art for art’s sake,” there are reasons to distinguish these later claims from Moritz’ argument for the artwork’s “completeness in itself.” Paul Guyer, for example, reads Kant’s notion of “subjective” or “formal” purposiveness as “probably a repudiation” of Moritz’ conception rather than as a successor to it: “What Moritz actually held is that the ‘internal purposiveness’ of a work of art is an intimation of the perfection of the world as a whole, and that we enjoy it precisely as such an intimation.”¹⁰

Interestingly, Moritz’ language seems to suggest a position that does not seem predicated on a division between subjective and objective sides of aesthetic experience at all, but rather one that makes a case for their inherent interrelationship and reciprocity.¹¹ Moritz’ notion is that as aesthetic

⁸ Moritz, *Beiträge zur Ästhetik*, ed. Hans Joachim Schrimpf and Hans Adler (Mainz: Dietrich’sche, 1989), 3.

⁹ Moritz, “An Attempt to Unify,” 99.

¹⁰ Paul Guyer, *A History of Modern Aesthetics: Volume I: The Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 412. On the issue of disinterestedness and its connections to the notion of autonomy, see also the cautionary discussion in Mattias Pirholt, “Disinterested Love: Ethics and Aesthetics in Karl Philipp Moritz’s ‘Versuch einer Vereinigung aller schönen Künste und Wissenschaften unter dem Begriff es in sich selbst Vollendetes,’” *Goethe Yearbook 27* (2020): 63-81.

¹¹ I follow here the argument of several readers of Moritz’ essay who have emphasized the relationality and process-oriented character of Moritz’ claims here, including Pirholt, Edgar Landgraf (“Self-Forming Selves: Autonomy and Artistic Creativity in Goethe and Moritz,” *Goethe Yearbook 11* (2002): 159-76), and Erdmann Waniek (“Karl Philipp Moritz’s Concept of the Whole in his *Versuch einer Vereinigung*,” *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture 12* (1983): 213-222).

spectators our *regard* for the artwork as being *complete in itself* is something that evolves precisely from an interactive relationship with it. As he nicely puts it, we “roll back” the purposiveness inherent in art *to the object itself*: this way of describing the relationship suggests both that, while there is something original in the object itself that must in some way be *returned* to it, my own action of returning that purposiveness is nonetheless a crucial aspect of the experience I have with beauty.

Moritz' essay emphasizes this relationship between spectator and artwork further in his account of the correlative *need* between work and spectator. On the one hand, he argues, one does not contemplate a work of art *because* one needs it—one needs it only insofar as one can contemplate it (*man braucht es nur, insofern man es betrachten kann*). On the other hand, the beautiful work of art *needs us* in order to be recognized (*erkannt*), as Moritz memorably points out—for why else do we feel displeasure if an excellent performance is given to an empty theater?

We can easily exist without contemplating beautiful works of art, but they cannot very well exist as such without our contemplating them. So the more we are able to do without them, the more we contemplate them for their own sake, in order, through contemplating them, to give them their true, full existence. For through our growing recognition of beauty in a beautiful artwork, we magnify its beauty, as it were, and endow it with ever more value. Hence our impatient demand that everyone pay homage to what we have recognized as beautiful...¹²

Wir können sehr gut ohne die Betrachtung schöner Kunstwerke bestehen, diese aber können, als solche, nicht wohl ohne unsre Betrachtung bestehen. Je mehr wir sie also entbehren können, desto mehr betrachten wir sie um ihrer selbst willen, um ihnen durch unsre Betrachtung gleichsam erst wahres volles Dasein zu geben. Denn durch unsre zunehmende Anerkennung des Schönen in einem schönen Kunstwerke vergrößern wir gleichsam seine Schönheit selber, und legen immer mehr Werth hinein. Daher das ungeduldige Verlangen, dass alles dem Schönen huldigen soll, welches wir einmal dafür erkannt haben...¹³

If Moritz' argument here regarding *need* opens up a set of claims crucial for the relation between *artwork and spectator*—including, as he develops it, the importance of a correlation between aesthetic disinterestedness and a selfless form of love—there is a further elaboration of the relation between *artwork and artist* that will become crucial for his later essay on imitation.

¹² Schreiber, *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association* 127.1 (2012): 98.

¹³ Moritz, *Beiträge zur Ästhetik*, 4-5.

The latter part of the essay imagines a dialogue with an artist about the proper understanding of pleasure and purposiveness in art that provides a helpful context for Moritz' sometimes misconstrued image of the empty theater:

If pleasure were not *such a subordinate goal*, or rather only a natural consequence of beautiful works of art, why would not the genuine artist attempt to spread this pleasure to as many people as possible rather than sacrifice to the perfection of his work the pleasant feelings of many thousands of people who have no sense for its beauty?—If the artist says, 'But if people like my work or find pleasure in it, I have achieved my purpose,' I answer, On the contrary! Because you have achieved your purpose, people like your work; or the fact that people like your work *can perhaps be a sign* that you have achieved your purpose in the work itself.¹⁴

Wenn das Vergnügen nicht ein *so sehr untergeordneter Zweck*, oder vielmehr nur eine natürliche Folge bei den Werken der schönen Künste wäre; warum würde der ächte Künstler es denn nicht auf so viele als möglich zu verbreiten suchen, statt dass er oft die angenehmen Empfindungen von vielen Tausenden, die für eine Schönheiten keinen Sinn haben, der Vollkommenheit seines Werks aufopfert?—Sagt der Künstler: aber wenn mein Werk gefällt oder Vergnügen erweckt, so habe ich doch meinen Zweck erreicht; so antworte ich: umgekehrt! Weil du deinen Zweck erreicht hast, so gefällt dein Werk, oder dass dein Werk gefällt, *kann vielleicht ein Zeichen* sein, dass du deinen Zweck in dem Werke selbst erreicht hast.¹⁵

In looking at the essay as a whole, the key for both the artwork / spectator and artwork / artist relationships would seem to be Moritz' overarching emphasis on inner purposiveness as what makes an object "complete in itself": "In other words, I must find pleasure in a beautiful object only for its own sake; to this end, the lack of external purposiveness must be compensated for by inner purposiveness; the object must be complete in itself."¹⁶

This keynote of Moritz' early essay is echoed elsewhere with reference for our interest in Moritz' ultimate claims about ancient art and mythology. In his essay *Über die Allegorie*, Moritz holds up beauty's completeness in contrast with allegory (or hieroglyphical expressions on works like obelisks or pyramids), which he thinks signify *something else (allos)*: "The genuinely

¹⁴ Schreiber, *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association* 127.1 (2012): 99.

¹⁵ Moritz, *Beiträge zur Ästhetik*, 7.

¹⁶ Schreiber, *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association* 127.1 (2012): 99.

beautiful (*das wahre Schöne*) consists in the fact that an object just means itself (*bloss sich selbst bedeute*), signifies itself (*sich selbst bezeichne*), contains itself, is a *whole that is complete in itself*. An obelisk means—the hieroglyphs on it mean—something *outside* it (*nach aussen*) which are not itself and receive their value solely through this [external] meaning...”¹⁷

3. The Artist and the Role of Imitation

There are substantial internal connections between Moritz' 1785 “Concept of ‘That Which is Complete in Itself’” essay and his 1788 essay “On the Artistic Imitation of the Beautiful” (“*Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen*”). The earlier essay, concerned as it is with the question of *unifying* the arts, had begun with the insistence that the principle of the “imitation of nature” could no longer serve as “the ultimate purpose of the fine arts and sciences” and both essays address the importance of pleasure for parsing the relations between beauty and utility.

The “Imitation” essay takes Moritz' argument somewhat further in terms of the role of the artist. It begins its discussion of *bildende* imitation with what it means to *ethically* imitate someone. Socrates, for example, became the aspirational goal of ethical imitation for philosophers across a range of Hellenistic schools of philosophy, but the path of following a command like “imitate Socrates” is different from what an actor would need to take into account in imitating the *actions* of Socrates onstage (as presumably some actor with Aristophanes' lines for the *Clouds* must have done in 5th century BCE Athens).

Not only must we distinguish between imitating someone's *actions* (in the sense of copying the way they walk or talk) and imitating someone's *character* (in the sense of following their way of life), but we must also think about the difference in imitation as it involves ethical and aesthetic matters. A key distinction for Moritz in this regard seems to be that (unlike the ethical imitation of the good), the beautiful “can't enter us through imitation” but must be *created or produced out of us*:

[I]nsofar as it distinguishes itself from the noble, which is only understood as out in opposition to the inner, the beautiful cannot enter us through imitation—it must, if it is to be imitated by us, necessarily be created out of us... Genuine imitation of the beautiful distinguishes itself from the moral imitation of the good and the noble primarily

¹⁷ Karl Philipp Moritz, “Über die Allegorie,” in *Schriften zur Ästhetik und Poetik*, ed. Hans Joachim Schrimpf (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1962), 113.

because, according to its nature, it must strive not, as the other does, to create something within itself but must create out of itself.”¹⁸

Das Schöne aber, insofern es sich dadurch vom Edlen unterscheidet, daß, im Gegensatz gegen das innre, bloß das äußre Schöne darunter verstanden wird, kann durch die Nachahmung nicht in uns herein-, sondern muß, wenn es von uns nachgeahmt werden soll, notwendig wieder aus uns herausgebildet werden... Die eigentliche Nachahmung des Schönen unterscheidet sich also zuerst von der moralischen Nachahmung des Guten und Edlen dadurch, daß sie, ihrer Natur nach, streben muß, nicht wie diese in sich hinein-, sondern aus sich herauszubilden.¹⁹

Moritz’ language of beauty in terms of *creation or production* here—which echoes the language of the “*Vereinigung*” essay’s notion of our “rolling back out of ourselves” a purposiveness into the beautiful work of art itself—opens up a new understanding of the role of the artist: breaking free of a limited, copyistic notion of “imitating nature” in favor of a notion of the artist as imitating in the sense of taking up nature’s productive / creative force: as Todorov puts it, Moritz’ innovation is to change the subject of the verb “imitate” (and hence what is imitated): it is now the *artist*, not the *work*, that imitates and he imitates nature not as a *product* but as a *productive principle*: one should speak of *construction*, not imitation—the artist has a power to *form*, a *Bildungs-kraft*.

In the context of this essay, Moritz thus does not completely leave a notion of mimesis behind, but it is understood in a broader way in the sense of a poesis that is rooted in the power of nature: “The creative genius’s horizon of active power must be *as extensive as nature itself*” and “each beautiful whole coming from the hand of the artist is thus an impression in miniature of the highest beauty of the whole of nature; *mediated* through the hand of the artist, it recreates that which does not immediately belong to the great plan.”²⁰

Moritz’ account of what the creative artist in this new sense of non-copyistic imitation does is above all to *penetrate* to nature’s being:

Whoever has been impressed by nature with a sense of the creative power in his whole being, and has received the impression of the *measure* of the beautiful in his eye and soul, cannot content himself merely to observe it; he must imitate it, strive after it, eavesdrop on nature in its

¹⁸ Moritz, “On the Artistic Imitation of the Beautiful”, 134.

¹⁹ Moritz, *Beiträge zur Ästhetik*, 66, 67.

²⁰ Moritz, “On the Artistic Imitation of the Beautiful”, 141.

secret workshop and make and create with blazing flames in his heart, as nature itself does: he does this by penetrating the inner being of nature, to the very spring of beauty itself...²¹

Wem also von der Natur selbst der Sinn für ihre Schöpfungskraft in sein ganzes Wesen und das *Maß* des Schönen in Aug und Seele gedrückt ward, der begnügt sich nicht, sie anzuschauen; er muß ihr nachahmen, ihr nachstreben, in ihrer geheimen Werkstatt sie belauschen und mit der lodernen Flamm im Busen bilden und schaffen, so wie sie: Indem seine glühende Spähungskraft in das Innre der Wesen dringt, bis auf den Quell der Schönheit selbst...²²

These passages emphasize several themes that will be key for Moritz' *Götterlehre*. The creative artist's powers must be seen as being reflective of the natural order of the cosmos—yet *also* not understandable just in allegorical terms but as active and reciprocal productive forces within the world. And those creative powers are precisely ones that must be understood as parts of a productive force (*Bildungskraft*) that at their best strive to get at nature's secrets—descriptions that influenced both of the artists whose influential treatments of mythological figures such as Prometheus inspired Moritz' *Götterlehre*.

4. Art and Artist in Moritz' *Götterlehre*

Moritz' *Götterlehre oder mythologische Dichtungen der Alten* was published in 1790, one of the key works that followed the Italian journey he shared with Goethe.²³ It is striking that interpretation of Moritz' text has turned especially on the role of central oppositions in that work: Elliott Schreiber has traced the opposition between competing aesthetic demands of “containment” and

²¹ Moritz, “On the Artistic Imitation of the Beautiful,” 139. “Nature... could only plant the sense of the highest beauty in the power of action, and could only make the mediated impression of this highest beauty palpable in the imagination, visible to the eyes, audible to the ears, because the horizon of the power to act encompasses more than the outer senses, the imagination and the power of thought,” Moritz, “On the Artistic Imitation of the Beautiful,” 140.

²² Moritz, *Beiträge zur Ästhetik*, 73.

²³ In addition to the *Götterlehre*, Moritz published also a travelogue of his Italian journeys and a remarkable exploration of life in antiquity he titled *ANTHOUSA oder Roms Alterthümer: Ein Buch für die Menschheit* (1791). On the latter, see Carl-Friedrich Berghahn, “‘Kostbarste Ueberreste’. Das Bild der Antike in Karl Philipp Moritz' *Anthusa*,” *Zeitschrift für Germanistik*, NF 16 (2006): 623-632; and “Anthropologie und Ästhetik in Karl Philipp Moritz' Italienischen Schriften (Reisen eines Deutschen in Italien, *Götterlehre*, *ANTHOUSA*),” in *Aspekte der Romantik in Europa. Ein deutsch-italienisches Symposium*, Sonderband der Germanisch-Romanischen Monatsschrift, ed. Renate Stauf and Cord-Friedrich Berghahn (Heidelberg 2005), 25-45.

“free play,” for example, and Alexander Hampton the opposition between the transcendental and immanent.²⁴ In this section, I want to use the discussion of the previous two sections to emphasize the opposition—or perhaps better the inter-action—between the two sides of the poetic encounter that are central to Moritz’ notion of freedom: the artist and the art work.

Key to both sides of this opposition is understanding the role of *Phantasie*, which Moritz places at the center of the initial section of the *Götterlehre* as a whole. This initial section is focused on what Moritz called the correct “point of view” (*Gesichtspunkt*) required for exploring mythological poetry (*mythologische Dichtungen*). Mythological poetry, Moritz argues, must be understood above all as a *language of imagination* (*Sprache der Phantasie*)—and, taken in this sense, it will “constitute a world for itself” and at the same time be “lifted above the connection to actual things” (“Die mythologischen Dichtungen müssen als eine Sprache der Phantasie betrachtet werden: als eine solche genommen, machen sie gleichsam eine Welt für sich aus, und sind aus dem Zusammenhange der wirklichen Dinge herausgehoben”).²⁵

These initial claims—which Moritz says will provide the guiding thread (*Leitfaden*) through the “labyrinth” of ancient mythological works—set up a twofold consideration about mythological poetry and its “completeness”: on the one hand, imagination creates a “world for itself” that has its own totality (the key claim of the first of the earlier essays discussed), but it is a world that is construed precisely in terms of its being lifted above “actual things.”

Such is precisely the imaginative appeal, Moritz says, of myth: on the one hand, since it concerns the prehistory of human experience, it can be explored with greater imaginative freedom (imagination can here “reign without resistance” in her own realm), but on the other hand, insofar as it does shape the human world that follows, mythological poetry cannot be viewed as “mere play of wit (*blosses Spiel des Witzes*).” Thus the ancient stories are “not a mere dream or hollow poetic production”, but gain through their connection to ancient events “a weight which prevents them from dissolving into mere allegory.”²⁶

²⁴ Elliott Schreiber, *The Topography of Modernity: Karl Philipp Moritz and the Space of Autonomy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012); Alexander J.B. Hampton, “Moritz and the Aesthetics of the Absolute,” in *Romanticism and the Re-Invention of Modern Religion: The Reconciliation of German Idealism and Platonic Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 108-132.

²⁵ Moritz, *Götterlehre*, 1.

²⁶ Moritz, *Götterlehre*, 2.

Moritz might also have said that the territory of *mythologische Dichtungen* involves a *religion* of imagination as well: the *Gesichtspunkt* frames from the start the differing theological perspectives that ancient Greek and Roman myths take. Imagination affords itself a wide *Spielraum* which avoids abstract metaphysical ideas, Moritz claims—a point he emphasizes in terms of a consideration of traditional God-predicates that are not attributable to any of the gods in the polytheistic Greek and Roman canons (infinity, omnipotence, omnipresence).

The inheritance of the “completeness” essay is clear in Moritz’ emphasis on the self-signification of mythological poetry—something that he now connects to being able to see what a work portrays holistically and at a single glance: “that these tender blossoms of poesy may not be blighted, it is necessary to take them at first just as they are, without any regard to what they may signify (*bedeuten*), in order to behold, as much as possible at one single view, the whole of them (*mit einem Überblick das Ganze zu betrachten*).”²⁷ And Moritz also returns to the opposition between beauty and allegory: “A true work of art, a beautiful product of imagination, is something finished and complete in itself; it exists for, and carries its value in itself, as well as in the well-arranged proportion of its parts; while, on the other hand, mere hieroglyphics or letters may be ever so ill-shaped, provided they point out the thoughts of the writer. The man who, after the perusal of Homer, should ask, what the *Iliad* means, and what the *Odyssey* means, must certainly have been little touched by their sublime poetical beauties” (*Ein wahres Kunstwerk... ist etwas in sich Fertiges und Vollendetes, das um sein selbst willen da ist, und dessen Werth in ihm selber*).²⁸

The inheritance of the “imitation” essay and its expansion of the artist’s task as going beyond copyistic imitation is also clear, but Moritz, the friend and traveling companion of Goethe, pursues this side of mythological poetry in a way that defers to the poet. After his initial account of the *Gesichtspunkt* of his study, Moritz now asks that the reader allow “a poet who, in the most faithful strains, has sung the praise of fancy” be the one to “lead us into her domain.” The appeal to Goethe comes first in the form of his poem “Die Göttin,” which praises imagination as the “companion” which alone has allowed human beings to rise out of the realm of mere necessity to one of freedom:

Let us all praise the old venerable father, who has granted to mortal men
so fair a companion... For to us alone he has united her with heavenly

²⁷ Moritz, *Götterlehre*, 2.

²⁸ Moritz, *Götterlehre*, 3.

band... All the other poor races of prolific earth... wander and feed in the blind enjoyment, as well as the dull pain of momentary, limited life, bent under the yoke of necessity...²⁹

Lasst uns alle
Den Vater preisen!
Den alten, hohen,
Der solch einer schöne
Unverwelkliche Göttin
Den sterblichen Menschen
Gesellen möglichen! ...

Alle die andren
Armen Geschlechter
Der kinderreichen,
Lebendigen Erde
Wandeln und weiden
Im dunkeln Genuss
Und trüben Schmerzen
Des augenblicklichen
Beschränkten Lebens,
Gebeugt vom Joche
Der Notdurft.

While allowing Goethe's poem to frame the issue of poetic *Phantasie* and its emergence, Moritz is nonetheless not shy to outline his own account of artistic production, both drawing on the "imitation" essay and in some ways also going beyond it. The key section of the *Götterlehre* in which Moritz opens up this question is entitled *Die Erzeugung der Götter* ("The Production of the Gods"), which immediately follows his insertion of Goethe's poem about *Phantasie*. The "production" in question is of course not only *theogonic* in that it traces the emergence of powers in the early shaping of the world, but also—if *Phantasie* herself is one such power—*poetic* or "*plastic*" in the sense that Moritz aims to give an insight into how the artist and poet work as well.

Thus, in language reminiscent of the "Imitation" essay's encouragement that the artist must "make and create... by penetrating the inner being of nature," Moritz traces in his account of the *Erzeugung der Götter* how "out of strife and sedition among the primeval beings, beauty *develops and forms itself*." It is true, Moritz says, that where the eye of *Phantasie* can't penetrate there is chaos, night and darkness, yet the sublime imagination of the Greeks carried even into this night a faint glimmer, which gave charms to its very

²⁹ Moritz, *Götterlehre*, 6.

terrors: thus “in the very first outset of these *mythologische Dichtungen* the opposite extremes of things are brought together; beauty and loveliness being united with the terrors of night and darkness. Form and beauty must arise out of shapelessness and deformity; light must spring from darkness.”³⁰

Moritz' linkage of the theogonical and the poetic / plastic tasks involved in ancient mythology allows him to expand on the critique of copyistic imitation that the “imitation” essay had offered. As Schreiber has suggested, Moritz now offers in the *Götterlehre* a stance that goes beyond the critique of imitation in the earlier essay in two key ways. First, while the earlier essay had carefully distinguished imagination from the *thätige Kraft* of nature, the *Götterlehre* no longer makes such a distinction but links imagination itself much more closely to sublime and primal powers. Second, while the earlier essay had argued that there was an appropriate sense of artistic “imitation” (just not a “copyistic” one), the *Götterlehre* now goes beyond this point. Imagination could not be *imitative* in its engagement with the primal forces in this world but must somehow engage the task of how they emerge in its own wrestling with the chaos and terrors present in the world.

These expansions beyond the “imitation” essay point toward a much higher engagement on Moritz' part in the *Götterlehre* with the *sublimity* of art's power, as opposed to its engagement with beauty. As Moritz' theogonic account renders it, this is precisely the fight between the earlier titanic forces that held sway in the time of Uranus and Saturn and the emergent Olympian deities like Jupiter who have greater clarity on their side. Moritz in fact views the central fight between Jupiter and the Giants—where “power is in sedition against power”—as “one of the sublimest subjects which plastic art can make use of” (*Macht ist gegen Macht empört—einer der erhabensten Gegenstände, den je die bildende Kunst benutzte*).³¹

And it's at this point that the link Moritz wants to draw between the theogonic and poetic tasks of the *Götterlehre* is suggestively opened up again by a turn directly to the work of an artist. But while it is Goethe's *poetry* that introduces the entire *Erzeugung der Götter*, Moritz turns in his account of beauty's ongoing *development* to the plastic arts, in particular to the work of the artist Asmus Jakob Carstens, a friend of Goethe who had assisted Moritz in preparing illustrations for the *Götterlehre* of the ancient mythological scenes he discusses. Carstens played a significant role in the shaping of the published form of the *Götterlehre* (despite the work's focus on *Dichtungen*, its subtitle nonetheless emphasized the role of the visual arts in it: *Mit fünf und sechzig in*

³⁰ Moritz, *Götterlehre*, 9.

³¹ Moritz, *Götterlehre*, 15.

Kupfer gestochenen Abbildungen nach antiken geschnittenen Steinen und andern Denkmälern des Alterthums), but the relation between poetry and visual arts in the book is one that still deserves more exploration.³²

The first of Carstens' illustrations, which Moritz incorporates into the frontispiece for the *Götterlehre*, is a rendering precisely of the "sublimest" scene of the battle between Jupiter and the Giants (see *Illustration 1* below). Moritz places this illustration without commentary at the start of the volume and only in the section on *Die Erzeugung der Götter* makes clear that the scene shows that "the ancients did not ascribe to their gods immense magnitude. Intellectual power (*das Gebildete*) had always with them the preference over corporeal bulk (*vor der Masse*), and the monstrous beings that Phantasie created, rose into existence, only in order to be vanquished by the divine power of intellect, and to sink down under their own shapelessness (*Unförmlichkeit*)."³³

On the frontispiece, immediately below the sublime rendering of the battle between Jupiter and the Giants, Moritz placed the contrastive portrait of Saturn (*Illustration 2* below), who represents only after his overthrow a golden age, a "happy period, when mankind lived in a state of perfect equality, and all things were in common" ("this fiction is extremely beautiful and attractive, because of the unexpected transition from war and destruction to peace and the quiet exercise of justice and benevolence"). Saturn appears sometimes as a symbol of all-destroying time (see the gem with him and his scythe) and sometimes as a king in quiet Latium; so what's related of him is "neither mere allegory nor true history, but both are mixed and blended together according to the laws of fancy" (*beides zusammengenommen nach den Gesetzen der Einbildungskraft verwebt*).³⁴ Carstens' illustration thus captures both the time-consuming father whose icon is the scythe, but placed against a ship which Moritz thinks indicates his tutelary connection to a specific Italian locale.

Moritz' appeal to both the poetic and visual arts raises a number of questions about how we should think through the relation between his claims about the freedom inherent in the self-signifying artwork and the freedom inherent in the artist who goes beyond the notion of merely copyistic

³² On Carstens' role in the execution of drawings made from ancient gems in Lippert's Dactyloteca and the private collection of von Stosch, see Frank Büttner, "Asmus Jakob Carstens und Karl Philipp Moritz", *Nordelbingen, Beiträge zur Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte* 52 (1983): 95-127; Ulrike Münter, "Gebannter Bilderrausch. Bild und Text in Karl Philipp Moritz' *Götterlehre*", in *Karl Philipp Moritz in Berlin 1786-1793*, ed. Christof Wingertzahn, Ute Tintemann (Hannover-Laatzten: Wehrhahn, 2005), 39-56.

³³ Moritz, *Götterlehre*, 16.

³⁴ Moritz, *Götterlehre*, 18.

imitation to explore her own creative power. His second appeal to Goethe's poetry—one which, in this case, Moritz actually *pairs* with Carstens' visual renderings—is helpful in that exploration.

Following his treatment of the *Erzeugung der Götter* and the war of the Titans and Olympians, Moritz turns in a third section precisely to a moment that brings together his theogonic and poetic interests—namely, the *Bildung der Menschen*, the shaping of humankind, that is the subject both of Goethe's famous "Prometheus" poem and of Carstens' renderings of the god who stole fire and *technē* from Jupiter for the use of human beings. Moritz' account of Prometheus offers an opportunity to bring together the related themes of the freedom of artwork / artist and the theogonic / poetic. In Moritz' treatment of Prometheus, we can see an artist in action scaling and re-scaling its presumably complete achievements—thus allowing us to see more closely the relation between the freedom of a produced object (ourselves!) that could have "completeness in itself." If we look at the key images of Prometheus from Carstens' illustrations (*Illustration 3* below), we see in the first instance a rendering of Prometheus precisely as a *sculptor*—one who, notably, is not looking off to any model to copy what he is producing (despite the fact that Moritz emphasizes in his text that Prometheus creates human beings "in the gods' image"). Moritz draws both on Goethe and Carstens' rendering for his description:

Prometheus took a piece of earth, a portion of clay still impregnated with divine particles, moistened it with water, and formed man after the image of the gods, so that he alone raises his look to heaven, while all the other creatures bend their eyes to the ground. This representation shows that fancy could not ascribe even to her gods a superior form to that of man, because there is indeed in universal nature... no being deserving of this preference...

Prometheus is represented, upon ancient works of art, as an artist engaged in his professional employment, with a vase standing at his feet, and before him a human *bust*, on which he seems to bestow the most intense consideration, in order to bring it to perfection...³⁵

Moritz' Prometheus is both shaped by Goethe's and Carstens' renderings but is distinctive in its own way, since it opens up a reflective inquiry about the role of artistic formation that addresses the issues of artwork / artist freedom and theogonic / poetic activity. But Moritz' account also opens up further questions that Moritz acknowledges are not at all settled by the Promethean

³⁵ Moritz, *Götterlehre*, 22.

myth. On the one hand, Prometheus is, as both Moritz and Goethe see it, a figure of artistic freedom (in Goethe's case, decisively against a godhead for whom he has disdain), yet that freedom as a transgressive action is followed by suffering and vulnerability in Prometheus' punishment. The remaining illustrations on the same page show the vulnerability and suffering that Prometheus' transgressive actions on behalf of humankind bring in their wake: Pandora and her box, the vulture eating Prometheus' liver.

The development of the Prometheus theme shows that, despite Moritz' emphasis on art's "completeness" and irreducibility to moral allegory, there is nonetheless a kind of wisdom that it offers—about the presence of conflictual strife in the world, the role of hope, and (as Moritz concludes this section) the enduring need for tragedy, a topic which is central to his aesthetics.³⁶ The openness of art to the inclusion of these themes is the focus of the final section of this paper.

5. Moritz on Completion, Creativity and Wisdom: Ancient and Modern Meanings

This final section begins with a return to Moritz' initial framing of the *Gesichtspunkt* of the *Götterlehre* and the issue of "completion." As Moritz had put it in that initial section: "All that a beautiful work of fancy signifies lies in itself."³⁷ But he then follows this claim of completion with an interesting qualification: despite its completion and essential self-signification, a work nonetheless "reflects, in its greater or smaller compass, the relations of things, the life and fate of man, and teaches wisdom, according to Horace, better than Crantor and Chrysippus."³⁸

Moritz' appeal to Horace's assessment might seem strange at first glance, given that it makes a claim of poetry's relation to wisdom by reference to two ancient philosophers who might be thought of as embodiments of the sort of allegorizing and commenting that Moritz viewed as destructive to the imaginative freedom of poetry—namely, the later-generation head of Plato's Academy first associated with writing commentaries on the master's dialogues and the head of the Stoic school which developed thoroughly allegorical readings of the Homeric poems.

³⁶ On the notion of the tragic in Moritz, see Alessandro Costazza, *Genie und tragische Kunst: Karl Philipp Moritz und die Ästhetik des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1999), and Franco Cirulli's account of Moritz' "tragic theo-aesthetics" in *The Age of Figurative Theo-Humanism: The Beauty of God and Man in German Aesthetics of Painting and Sculpture (1754-1828)* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2015), 5.

³⁷ Moritz, *Götterlehre*, 4.

³⁸ Moritz, *Götterlehre*, 4.

And indeed Moritz does go on to say in the next section that all such considerations about a wisdom that poetry can offer must be secondary to the self-signifying experience of poetic beauty: poetry can teach better because it gives grace and charm to instruction, he claims, but it would be frivolous to seek instruction in mythological poetry, since there “man is of so little moment, that he in general, and his moral wants (*seine moralischen Bedürfnissen*) in particular, are totally disregarded” and in fact often appears in myths as nothing but the sport of the gods, who are by no means “moral beings (*Wesen*).”³⁹

Yet the *mythologische Dichtungen* of the ancients do seem to open up a certain kind of wisdom for their human listeners and readers.⁴⁰ What sort of wisdom is that? Moritz emphasizes issues of enduring conflict and human and divine vulnerability that raise questions for the “completion” of artistic creativity and production in the Prometheus myth. Thus, even though Moritz holds that the *schöne Kunst* of the ancients had as its chief feature the overcoming of shapelessness and enormity, there is something of the sublime and formless that retains a power.

Although the Olympian gods replace the Titans—the youthful Apollo emerging in place of the sun god Helios, for example—there is something of the ancient force behind the emergent power. Thus, as we look at the renderings of Apollo, the image of Helios, Moritz says, “still shines through, uncertain and wavering, so that imagination, in poetical works, often confounds them.”⁴¹ We can also see this in the attempts by the younger gods to avoid powers that will threaten them: as Moritz recounts it, Jupiter married Metis, but to prevent a child who combined her prudence and his strength he instead had Minerva; he was also warned for similar reasons about marrying Thetis. “In this manner the mightiest being, as it is represented in these fictions, always dreads a still mightier one. With the idea of an entirely unlimited power every poetical fiction ceases, fancy having no farther scope (*Bei dem Begriff der ganz unumschränkten Macht hört alle Dichtungen auf, und die Phantasie hat keinen Spielraum mehr*).”⁴²

³⁹ Moritz, *Götterlehre*, 4.

⁴⁰ See in this connection Pirholt’s discussion of Moritz’ indebtedness to the Shaftesburyan and Baumgartenian traditions with respect to the close relation between the moral and aesthetic. Moritz’ goal aesthetically may not be completion in the sense of something given once and for all but rather must involve “a kind of dialectical relationship between subject and object” (Pirholt, “Disinterested Love,” 73).

⁴¹ Moritz, *Götterlehre*, 17. See Schreiber’s helpful discussion of this image in connection with his account of the Moritzian conflict between the aesthetic demands for “containment” and free play in *The Topography of Modernity*, 58.

⁴² Moritz, *Götterlehre*, 20.

From the stories of Jupiter's fight with the Giants and the punishments Jupiter gives Prometheus and humans, Moritz thus draws wisdom about human (and artistic) limitation and vulnerability—a point which may seem in conflict with his sense of art's "completion in itself." Yet just as Moritz has traced the *Erzeugung* of the gods in the ancient world in parallel with the emergence of *Phantasie*, so we might find a similar parallel in the exploration of art's resonance for the future. The freedom associated with art in a contemporary polyvalent world must take into consideration the place of vulnerability and limitation Moritz saw in ancient mythology.

Many have read Moritz' *Götterlehre* as a sort of updated textbook on ancient mythology. Yet his own engagement with the questions of art's role suggests a different stance. Moritz' insistence that art could not any longer be understood in terms of copyistic imitation has an important application in terms of modern artists' understanding of their work in light of the ancients. The two artists contemporary to his own time whose work Moritz drew into the *Götterlehre* are both examples of how imaginative freedom involves the possibility of seeing something new even in taking up ancient images and themes. Carstens' illustrations had offered Moritz a clean, modernist line for the age of popular lithographic reproduction. Goethe's *Prometheus*—framed, like the *Gesichtspunkt* of Moritz' *Götterlehre*, in terms of specifically modern theological conflicts—is a reimagination of the importance of the ancient god associated with human capacities in the arts and sciences for a contemporary world reconstruing its own sense of power and limitation. And likewise, it might be said that Goethe's *Iphigeneia at Tauris* (the metrical version of which Moritz' work on German prosody may have had an influence) is a work which goes beyond the attempt to appropriate Euripides' play and to capture instead an image of humanity. Moritz' engagement with Carstens and Goethe suggests that he sees the task of the *Götterlehre* in similar terms, as exploring precisely the concerns that had shaped his earlier essays with the freedom of artwork and artist in the modern world—concerns that, as has been seen, open up the realm of the aesthetic to an ongoing exploration of art's power as well as its vulnerabilities and limitations.

Illustrations



Illustration 1. *Frontispiece—Jupiter fighting the Giants.*



Illustration 2. *Frontispiece—Saturn.*



Illustration 3. *Prometheus.*

Symphilosophie

International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism

Ironically, I Am Free

How Friedrich Schlegel's Early Romantic Fragments Enact the Logic of Faith in J.G. Fichte's *Vocation of Man*

*Karolin Mirzakhan**

ABSTRACT

Schlegel's essay "On Incomprehensibility" (1800) makes a case for the value of incomprehensibility by utilizing the same logic as "Faith" in Fichte's *Vocation of Man* (1800). Schlegel argues for the necessity of incomprehensibility by referring to a point of strength that must be left in the dark, but which is necessary for all our systems of meaning. If we demand that everything be scrutinized by the understanding, we would destroy this point of strength. In Fichte's *Vocation*, this point of strength is articulated as the free acquiescence to the natural standpoint, or the free will as a moment of faith (and not knowledge). I will argue that Fichte's text functions like a sermon that moves his reader toward this recognition of freedom, to feel it for herself; like faith, the irony that performs the striving for the Absolute in Schlegel's fragments cannot be understood without, in the process, destroying it.

Keywords: faith, irony, vocation, freedom, Friedrich Schlegel, Johann Gottlieb Fichte

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Schlegels Aufsatz „Über die Unverständlichkeit“ sucht den Stellenwert der Unverständlichkeit durch eine ähnliche Logik zu begründen, wie Fichte dies für den Glauben in *Die Bestimmung des Menschen* unternimmt. Schlegel argumentiert, dass die Notwendigkeit der Unverständlichkeit sich auf einen Kraftpunkt bezöge, der im Dunkel gelassen werden müsse, der aber für alle unsere Bedeutungssysteme notwendig sei. Wenn wir den Anspruch erheben, alles vernünftig zu untersuchen, zerstören wir diesen Kraftpunkt. Bei Fichte stellt sich dieser Kraftpunkt nicht als Wissen dar, sondern als das freiwillige Beruhen auf der sich uns natürlich anbietenden Ansicht oder als die Willensfreiheit im Moment des Glaubens. Dabei werde ich argumentieren, dass Fichtes Text wie eine Predigt konzipiert ist, um das Gefühl der Freiheit bei der Leserin zu erwecken. Ähnlich dem Fichteschen Glauben kann die Ironie, die bei Schlegels Fragmenten das Streben nach dem Unbedingten vorbringt, nicht verstanden werden, ohne sie dabei zu zerstören.

Stichwörter: Glaube, Ironie, Bestimmung, Freiheit, Friedrich Schlegel, Johann Gottlieb Fichte

* PhD, Senior Lecturer of Philosophy, Kennesaw State University, 402 Bartow Ave., Kennesaw, GA 30144, USA – contactkarolin@gmail.com

1. Introduction

In 1799, due to the atheism dispute [*Atheismusstreit*], Johann Gottlieb Fichte was forced to resign from his professorship at Jena and move to Berlin where Friedrich Schlegel had found him housing.¹ It was during this first year in Berlin (in 1800) that he completed the *Vocation of Man* [*Die Bestimmung des Menschen*] as a response to the atheism dispute.² In this essay, I will examine Friedrich Schlegel's *Athenaeum* fragments and his essay "On Incomprehensibility" ["*Über die Unverständlichkeit*"] (1800) via the lens of this contemporaneous work by Fichte.³ In his fragments, Schlegel makes many explicit references in defense of Fichte, e.g., that Fichte's entire philosophy is concerned with religion,⁴ that Fichte is a master of form,⁵ and that the charge of atheism is ridiculous insofar as there have never been any true theists.⁶ Beyond these explicit references to Fichte, I will argue that Schlegel's essay "On Incomprehensibility" makes a case for the value of incomprehensibility by utilizing the same logic as "Faith" in Fichte's *Vocation of Man*.⁷ Schlegel argues for the necessity of incomprehensibility by referring to a point of strength that must be left in the dark, but which is a necessary support for all of our systems of meaning, even our own happiness (and, we might add, our vocation as human beings). Schlegel proclaims that if we were to demand that everything be scrutinized by the understanding, we would destroy this point of strength. This point of strength, I will argue, is articulated as the free acquiescence to the natural standpoint in the *Vocation of Man*, or the free will as a moment of faith (and not knowledge). However, I contend that this

¹ Peter Preuss, "Translator's Introduction," *The Vocation of Man*, trans. Peter Preuss (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 1987), viii.

² Yolanda Estes, "Commentator's Introduction: J.G. Fichte, *Atheismusstreit*, *Wissenschaftslehre*, and *Religionslehre*" in *J.G. Fichte and Atheism Dispute (1798-1800)*, translated by Curtis Bowman, commentary by Yolanda Estes (Farnham, England; Ashgate Pub. Ltd, 2010), 3.

³ References to the fragments are cited according to their number and abbreviated as follows: AF = *Athenaeum* Fragment, CF = Critical [Lyceum] Fragment, I = Ideas. References to the original German are from Friedrich Schlegel, *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, ed. Ernst Behler, Jean Jacques Anstett, and Hans Eichner (Munich: F. Schöningh, 1958). English translations are from Friedrich Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments*, trans. and ed. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1971).

⁴ KFSA II, p. 266, I 105.

⁵ KFSA II, p. 213, AF 281.

⁶ KFSA II, p. 268, I 118.

⁷ References to the *Vocation of Man* in the German are from *J. G. Fichte-Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, ed. Erich Fuchs, Reinhard Lauth, and Hans Gliwitzky (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1962-2012). Hereafter, references to the German will be abbreviated to GA. References to the English translation are to Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The Vocation of Man*, trans. Peter Preuss.

moment of freedom is one that Fichte must move his reader toward, to awaken in her, so that she can feel it for herself. Like the feeling of faith in the *Vocation*, the irony that performs the striving for the Absolute in Schlegel's *Athenaeum* writings cannot be understood without, in the process, destroying it. What is revealed through the tension enacted by irony is felt, but not known. In the process of attempting to comprehend irony, the understanding would dissect and destroy it. Irony is the appropriate technique for approximating the Absolute, insofar as the Absolute, like irony, is incomprehensible, i.e., it exceeds our methods for comprehending it and our structures of knowing, which would only limit and condition it.⁸

I will begin by sketching some key movements in the three books of the *Vocation of Man*, with special emphasis on the initial act of faith in Book III. Then, I will turn my attention to Schlegel's essay "On Incomprehensibility" to argue that it invokes a structurally similar act of faith in its 'defense' of the *Athenaeum* journal's ironic fragments. With the structure of the *Vocation* and "On Incomprehensibility" in mind, I will then examine Schlegel's fragments in order to argue that the fragments enact freedom through their irony and are thus performative in nature. Given what I have said above about free will, the fragments do not provide knowledge of the free will (in Fichte's terms, attempting to provide knowledge would entail a process that would result in a ladder with no highest rung),⁹ but rather, via their wit and irony, the fragments enact freedom as an imperative, as an act of positing. The analysis of the irony of the fragments is not disconnected from my interpretation of the essay "On Incomprehensibility" insofar as the very moment I cite above defending the virtues of incomprehensibility can, and ought to, be simultaneously read as ironic. The very moment in the text in which Schlegel appears to be alluding to the role of faith (in Fichte's terms) is also an ironic utterance in which freedom is enacted in this thoroughly ironic essay. The ironic utterance, like the act of faith, is a foundation that is an activity. In the final section, I will address a crucial difference between the texts in question, namely, the contrast between the dramatic closure at the end of the *Vocation* and the open-ended nature of Schlegel's fragments (and indeed early German Romantic *Symphilosophie*).

⁸ Novalis famously makes this claim in his first *Pollen* fragment. For more on my interpretation of "romantic irony," see: Karolin Mirzakhani, *An Ironic Approach to the Absolute: Schlegel's Poetic Mysticism* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2020), and Karolin Mirzakhani, "Romantic Irony," in *The Palgrave Handbook of German Romantic Philosophy*, ed. Elizabeth Millán Brusslan (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 255-269.

⁹ GA I/6, 256.

2. *Vocation of Man: Called by Voices*

The trajectory of Fichte's *Vocation of Man* [*Die Bestimmung des Menschen*] can be followed via the interjection (or lack thereof) of voices. The German *Bestimmung* can be translated as calling, vocation, purpose, or determination and contains within it the root word “*Stimme*”, or voice. Thus, we could say that there is an etymological connection between determination or purpose and a sense of being called, i.e., called upon to do something or be something. This connection between calling and voice is also found in the English translation of the title, in which vocation is derived from the Latin “*vocatio*” (calling), which is connected to the verb “*vocare*” (to call) and the noun “*vox*” (voice), all of which are derived from the same Proto-Indo-European root, which means “to speak” [*wekw-*]. Thus, in the language of vocation, there is already a connection to voice, and, in the *Vocation of Man*, this voice is directly linked to how I determine my calling.¹⁰ The *Vocation of Man* is divided into three books, each with a different relation to voice, and therefore a distinctive relationship to one's calling.

In each book, the reader follows an “I” [*Ich*] that is trying to determine its vocation for itself. The “I”, Fichte tells us in the preface, is the reader. And, that reader is, according to Fichte, anyone “at all capable of understanding a book.”¹¹ I will refer to this “I” (or the reader) as the protagonist of the *Vocation of Man* throughout this essay. In the preface, Fichte tells his reader that the purpose of the book is to “attract the reader, to engage his interest and powerfully *move* him from the sensible to the supersensible” [emphasis mine].¹² This book must move the reader to the position laid out in its third section, for it is not a position that anyone can be persuaded of – nor one that Fichte would profess to be able to convince anyone of through argumentation. Each of us, as the reader, must place ourselves in the position of the “I” and must feel the truth of this position in our inmost soul. In another defense written by Fichte in the aftermath of the *Atheismusstreit*, “Appeal to the Public,” he claims that he and his opponents have both arrived at the principles of their thinking, “not by means of thinking itself but rather by means of something that is higher than all

¹⁰ Cf. Günter Zöller, ““An Other and Better World”: Fichte's *The Vocation of Man* as a Theologico-Political Treatise,” in *Fichte's Vocation of Man: New Interpretive and Critical Essays*, ed. Daniel Breazeale and Tom Rockmore (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013), 19–32. In addition to addressing the German and Latin roots of the title of Fichte's book, Zöller traces the origin of Fichte's title to the 1748 work of a Lutheran clergyman named Johann Joachim Spalding; Spalding's work was titled “Considerations on the Vocation of the Human Being” [*Betrachtungen über die Bestimmung des Menschen*].

¹¹ Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, 1-2; GA I/6, 189-190.

¹² *Ibid.*

thinking.”¹³ According to Fichte, that which is higher than thinking is what he can “justifiably call ... the *heart*.”¹⁴ It is the fundamental role of the heart that unites Fichte and his opponents, but it is also because the heart is the means by which they each reach their respective conclusions that neither can convince the other. Thus, to appeal to the public, Fichte must appeal to the heart of his readers – it is their hearts that must be moved to the conclusion in the final sections of the *Vocation*. In the final section of this paper, I will address the stylistic means Fichte employed to move the reader to the culminating position of “Faith,” as well as how this choice results in a reversal from the open-ended yearning for answers that characterizes much of the book to a halting of all yearning and questioning.

3. A World of Objects Devoid of Voice: Doubt

Book I, or “Doubt” [*Zweifel*], unfolds a deterministic view of the world; the protagonist “takes hold of” nature as it hurries past.¹⁵ In this case, nature takes the form of determinate objects, which have a definite number of properties (no more, no less) as a result of a “strict chain of necessity” [*Naturnothwendigkeit*].¹⁶ The question “What is my vocation [*Bestimmung*]?” is answered through the language of determinate objects wherein the protagonist concludes that she too must be a determinate object like those others she is examining and that, therefore, she too, like them, is devoid of agency or free will. Determinate objects have a discrete number of properties, and they come to have those properties (and not any others) through a series of causes; for any of an object’s properties to change, the entire causal series would have to change. In examining objects of nature as they rush past – trees, plants, flowers – our protagonist finds that she is a determinate object just like them and that all her actions, thoughts and feelings are simply the result of external natural forces; if she is determined by the forces of nature, then she is not self-determining and she is therefore not free. Book I is appropriately devoid of a voice that intervenes in the protagonist’s search; the lack of voice is fitting since “Doubt” takes materialism as its starting point and consequently does not consider an inner, subjective or spiritual aspect to the objects it investigates. By the end of “Doubt,” however, the protagonist is in a state of despair. Her heart is torn apart by this system of hard determinism, the very same system that sets her mind at ease. Our

¹³ J.G. Fichte, “Appeal to the Public” in *J.G. Fichte and the Atheism Dispute (1798-1800)*, 118.

¹⁴ J.G. Fichte, “Appeal to the Public,” 118.

¹⁵ Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, 5; GA I/6, 192-93.

¹⁶ Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, 11; GA I/6, 199.

despondent protagonist is faced with a system that has great explanatory power, but which destroys free will. She *yearns* to be free. In the final passages of “Doubt,” she asks whether it is love that must be subordinated to knowledge, or whether knowledge must be subordinated to love.¹⁷ This yearning of the heart, which poses the question regarding the place of love in relationship to knowledge, is not incidental, but rather acts as the motor of the entire work; it is the yearning for freedom that will move our protagonist into the next stage.

4. The Appeal of a Voice Like My Own: “Knowledge”

Book II, “Knowledge” [*Wissen*], takes place around midnight when a spirit [*Der Geist*] visits our protagonist. With the entry of *Der Geist*, the spiritual or mental aspect of the protagonist enters the scene. The protagonist says that this voice appeals to “my own understanding” [*Er beruft sich auf meinen eignen Verstand*].¹⁸ Here, the invocation of the language of “voice” is noteworthy in two ways: first, the voice makes an appeal; the language of “appeal” is significant because knowledge is about justification and therefore this voice appeals to reasons to believe each of its claims (i.e., the rungs of the ladder of knowledge); second, the voice of *Der Geist* is directed toward the “understanding” and therefore to the protagonist’s mind, rather than her heart. The conversation that unfolds between the protagonist and *Der Geist* – a personification of mind – takes the form of a Socratic dialogue in which *Der Geist* only asks questions and in which *Der Geist* claims not to show the protagonist (the *Ich*) anything. Rather, *Der Geist*, merely demonstrates the errors of the deterministic worldview presented by the protagonist of Book I. By the end of Book II, “Knowledge,” the protagonist realizes that all knowledge is merely a dream or a shadow-copy of reality and that she cannot get to the things themselves (and therefore cannot act).

According to the logic presented in “Knowledge,” I think that I perceive things, but all I can know (immediately, strictly speaking) is that my own condition has been modified. I then posit a cause for this modification by using the law of thinking, i.e., the law of cause and effect. This means that the object that I posit as the cause of the modification of my condition is merely the result of a necessary law of my own thinking. Furthermore, I only know this law of thought immediately; it is by way of this law, the law of cause and effect, that I come to know anything at all, and therefore, the law itself cannot be the object of knowledge. Even the notion of a unified “I” that

¹⁷ Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, 26; GA I/6, 214.

¹⁸ GA I/6, 215.

posits these objects is merely the result of the same process of positing, i.e., I think, I feel, or I sense, and then I posit that there is an “I” that has these thoughts, feelings, or sensations. The activity of positing an “I” is no different from positing a determinate object (e.g., a green pear), which is the cause of the modifications of my condition, such as “I see green,” “I taste tart,” and so on. The “I” is produced by the same inner law of thought, the law of causality, which attaches a cause, in the form of an object with properties, to a modification of its own condition. The positing of a cause, in the form of a determinate object, happens for each modification; only this time, the determinate object is the “I” (and not the “green pear”). If each instance of the “I” is the result of this inner law of thought, which posits a cause for each modification, the protagonist is forced to conclude that there is no unified “I” that undergoes change.

By the end of “Knowledge,” everything – including the “I” – is determined to be merely an extension of the mind of the protagonist. There is no world, no body, and thus no possibility of acting in a world. And, moreover, the very positing activity of the protagonist is not free. In the course of the conversation with *Der Geist*, the protagonist realizes that she simply *must* posit an object due to the inner law of her own thinking, i.e., the law of causality. Furthermore, even the act of positing an object in general is a result of the characteristics of her own existence as an Intelligence. As an Intelligence, the “I” is a being that only comes to know itself through its reflective activity, i.e., by the separating of a subject (that reflects) from an object (the content of its reflection). Therefore, not only are the objects that the I posits the result of an inner law of thinking, but the very activity of positing itself is merely a result of the very structure of the I as an Intelligence.

The transition from taking determinate objects as the starting point (in “Doubt”), to taking the mind [*Geist*] as the starting point in “Knowledge,” was, in part, an attempt to quell the heart’s yearning – to rescue the self from its fate as an object amongst objects, deprived of free will. However, what the protagonist finds out at the end of Book II is that knowledge does not and cannot provide her with access to a world (as the sphere of her activity), or the ability to freely act. Even the activity of positing is not free, because it is determined by her being as an Intelligence and the law that governs her thinking. Knowledge cannot provide the means to fulfill our vocation as it merely provides a shadow copy – or worse: “a fabulous dream” with nothing that the dream is about.¹⁹

¹⁹ Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, 64; GA I/6, 251.

5. A Voice That is Me: Faith

At the opening of Book III, or “Faith” [*Glaube*], the protagonist’s heart is yearning for something more than mere shadow images, i.e., a world that exists beyond mental presentations and that does not solely depend on her activity of representing. She longs for a world that really exists and in which she can fulfill her vocation.

At this point, a second voice intervenes. This voice, unlike the voice in “Knowledge,” does not make an appeal to the understanding, but rather it “rings out in my inmost soul [*so ertönt es laut im Innersten meiner Seele*].”²⁰ This voice is me; it is present anytime I collect myself and reflect upon what I am. Unlike the voice in Book II, which was characterized as separate from the protagonist through its personification as *Der Geist*, this voice is inseparable from me. The language of “inmost soul” not only indicates that this voice is ‘closer’ to me, but also that the voice is appealing to a different aspect of my being, and, although the language of heart is not used explicitly in this sentence, there is a sense that this voice is a metaphorical way of speaking about the yearning of the heart that has been present throughout the entire book. Later in Book III, this “inner voice” is described as “conscience” [*Gewissen*].²¹ This voice of conscience calls out to me and tells me that my vocation is not merely to know, but to act; further, it does not merely tell me to act in general, or provide abstract commands, but it tells me to act in concrete ways and assures me that those actions will produce effects.²²

The obedience to *this* voice, which tells me my vocation is to act, results in the “voluntary acquiescence in the view which naturally presents itself to us.”²³ This “voluntary acquiescence” is “no knowledge”, Fichte clarifies, but rather “a decision of the will to recognize the validity of knowledge.”²⁴ In an act of faith, a decision is made to give credence to the natural view. Beyond this initial act of faith, Book III contains many instances of faith, ending with several pages, which David W. Wood describes as a “sermon.”²⁵ I will return

²⁰ Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, 106; GA I/6, 253.

²¹ Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, 75; GA I/6, 261.

²² Ibid. For an account of how the drive to freedom in the *Vocation* is revealed as a feeling (as well as the connection between Faith [*Glaube*] and the positing of the will), see: Marco Ivaldo, “Faith and Knowledge and Vocation of Man: A Comparison Between Hegel and Fichte,” in *Fichte’s Vocation of Man: New Interpretive and Critical Essays*, 273–85.

²³ Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, 71; GA I/6, 257.

²⁴ Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, 71; GA I/6, 257. “Der Glaube ist es; dieses freiwillige Beruhen bei der sich uns natürlich darbietenden Ansicht, weil wir nur bei dieser Ansicht unsere Bestimmung erfüllen können... Er ist kein Wissen, sondern ein Entschluss des Willens, das Wissen gelten zu lassen.”

²⁵ David W. Wood, “Fichte’s Conception of Infinity in the *Bestimmung des Menschen*,” in *Fichte’s Vocation of Man: New Interpretive and Critical Essays*, 155–71.

to this notion of the “sermon” at the close of *Vocation of Man* and its stylistic significance in the final section of this essay. However, I want to first focus on this initial moment of faith, i.e., the transition from “Knowledge” to “Faith” in which the protagonist hears the voice of conscience ringing out in her inmost soul; this voice tells her that her vocation is to act, and not merely to know. This voice’s message is articulated through a command – it speaks in the form of imperatives. Given the commandment of conscience, the protagonist decides to adopt the natural standpoint, not because she knows that that standpoint is the true one or that it can be justified, but rather because it is the only standpoint that allows her to fulfill her vocation, i.e., to act. This voice leads the protagonist out of the world of mere representations, the shadow copies that constituted knowledge, and into a world that is a sphere of her activity.

Although our protagonist briefly wonders about the source of the voice, she quickly asks whether she will disobey its call and says she will not. To disobey this call, to ignore the voice, is to ignore my own self; this voice rings out in my inmost soul; it is united with me, not separate. The protagonist quickly rejects the possibility of doubting the voice. In a later section, I will return to doubt as one instance of circularity, a shape, which the *Vocation of Man* rejects outright.

By obeying the commands of the voice of conscience, the protagonist freely selects the natural standpoint, or the view that naturally presents itself to us. This view includes the following elements: the fact that there is a world that is as it appears to me; that this world is the sphere of my activity; that I can act in this world; and that those actions have consequences. According to Fichte, we are all “born in faith”, i.e., with this belief in the natural view, and most people never question the natural standpoint because of their “interest” in the world; good people remain within the natural standpoint because they have an interest in bettering the world, whereas most people do not move beyond the natural view because they have an interest in the sensible enjoyment of the world.²⁶ Unlike most people (and even the good person), however, our protagonist does question the natural standpoint and, through the movements of “Doubt” and “Knowledge,” she tests out two systems: the system of “Doubt” that began with material things (objects of nature rushing past) and the system of “Knowledge” that began with the mind (and the perception of its own condition). After weighing these two options and realizing that neither allowed her to fulfill her vocation, the

²⁶ Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, 72-73; GA I/6, 258-59.

protagonist freely adopts the natural standpoint in an act of faith.²⁷ It is only insofar as I accept the natural standpoint that I am able to fulfill my vocation. The “I” does not choose the natural standpoint because it has been proven or it is known to be the case, but rather because it will allow her to obey the voice of conscience that commands her to act.²⁸ This voice [*vox*; *Stimme*] that calls out to me tells me that my vocation [*vocatio*; *Bestimmung*] is to act. Only a voice can tell me my vocation because I am a being who is both subject and object, mind and body, spiritual and material. The voice here is not literal, but a metaphorical device for understanding that my calling is derived from the spiritual aspect of my being; and yet, as voice, this calling still depends on my embodied or material aspect for its full expression, i.e., to act out its commands. The metaphor of voice combines the spiritual element of the self (from “Knowledge” and the protagonist’s conversation with *Der Geist*) with the material element of the body (in “Doubt”). Furthermore, because the source of the voice cannot be traced, its commands cannot be justified. If I could know its source or if its commands had a knowable cause, the voice would be constrained, limited – by something other than itself – and therefore my will would not be free.

By the end of Book III, the natural standpoint, which begins as the common sense way that most people interact with the world, entails the following: first, that I am compelled to believe the world as the sphere of my activity is exactly as it appears to me; second, that my actions have consequences; third, that my willing has consequences (if not in this world, then in the next); fourth, that since much of what I will does not come to fruition in the sensible realm, there is another, supersensible realm, in which my will is an effective force and in which the Supreme Will, as the law of that realm, ensures that my willing has effects.²⁹ The acquiescence to the natural standpoint is not justifiable; it is not a result of deduction proper that would guarantee the certainty of the knowledge of this standpoint. Rather, in a crucial transition in the opening of Book III, the protagonist makes the decision to believe in the view that naturally presents itself, to remain in the natural standpoint (against the sophistry that might make her abandon it). It is the act of faith, or “the decision of the will” to adopt the natural standpoint,

²⁷ Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, 73-74.

²⁸ For more on the account of “decision” in the *Vocation*, as well as how “longing” is contextualized see: Elizabeth Millán, “*Bestimmung* as *Bildung*: On Reading Fichte’s *Vocation of Man* as *Bildungsroman*,” in *Fichte’s Vocation of Man: New Interpretive and Critical Essays*, 45–55.

²⁹ Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, 104.

which raises the natural standpoint's knowledge claims to the status of certainty.

6. Faith in Schlegel's "On Incomprehensibility"

I now turn my attention to Schlegel's short essay "On Incomprehensibility." This essay was prompted by criticisms of the *Athenaeum* fragments, and it is apparently written with the goal of clarifying the meaning of his ironic fragments for those who charged them with being incomprehensible. The essay, as I have argued elsewhere, is not an unironic attempt at parsing out the misunderstandings of the *Athenaeum* for its critics, but rather it is an ironic treatise on irony.³⁰ It begins by 'attempting' to clarify the meaning of the fragments by using one fragment as an exemplar of the type of misunderstanding that may have occurred: *Athenaeum* fragment 216 in which Schlegel uses the term "tendency" to refer to the "French Revolution, Fichte's philosophy, and Goethe's *Meister*."³¹ Schlegel begins by parsing out the multiple meanings of the word "tendency," which may have led to this misunderstanding, and then talks more generally about the irony found within the fragments (as well as the definitions of irony in the fragments). However, the essay changes tone and task when Schlegel announces that irony is to be found everywhere within the fragments and that to explain the irony would do violence to the fragments, and to the aims of the *Athenaeum*. Explaining an ironic statement, by way of breaking it apart and parsing out the two contradictory meanings, would destroy the statement's irony. Furthermore, the resulting direct statement would do less, rather than more, than the original, ironic utterance. To put it differently, by "explaining the joke," the power of the fragments to convey multiple meanings at once is flattened out. And, as a result of this flattening out, the fragments cannot accomplish their aim of striving toward the Absolute.

Rather than explaining the irony of the fragments unironically, Schlegel's essay engages the reader in an ironic exploration of the meaning of irony that both obscures and clarifies the meaning of the fragments. In the essay, Schlegel goes as far as to provide an ironic system of irony, which contains various forms of irony, such as coarse, fine, extra fine, dramatic and

³⁰ Karolin Mirzakhani, "Irony and the Possibility of Romantic Criticism: Friedrich Schlegel as Poet-Critic," in *Critique in German Philosophy: From Kant to Critical Theory*, ed. Maria Del Rosario Acosta Lopez and J. Colin McQuillan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2020), 173-184.

³¹ Friedrich von Schlegel, "On Incomprehensibility (1800)," in *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 300.

the irony of irony. The form of irony at the zenith, or perhaps nadir, of the system, the “irony of irony,” is a description of what is going on in this essay itself: irony has taken over and it is no longer clear what parts of the essay are ironic or unironic.³² Moreover, it seems as if the author himself has lost control over the irony of the essay.

After beginning to clarify the irony of the fragments and then declaring that doing so would be a violent act, Schlegel cautions his reader:

But is incomprehensibility [*Unverständlichkeit*] really something so unmitigatedly contemptible and evil? Methinks the salvation of families and nations rests upon it. If I am not wholly deceived, then states and systems, the most artificial products of man, are often so artificial that one simply can't admire the wisdom of their creator enough. Only an incredibly minute quantity of it suffices: as long as its truth and purity remain inviolate and no blasphemous rationality [*frevelnder Verstand*] dares approach its sacred confines. Yes, even man's most precious possession, his own inner happiness, depends in the last analysis, as anybody can easily verify, on some such point of strength that must be left in the dark, but that nonetheless shores up and supports the whole burden and would crumble the moment one subjected it to rational analysis. Verily, it would fare badly with you if, as you demand, the whole world were ever to become wholly comprehensible [*verständlich*] in earnest. And isn't this entire unending world constructed by the understanding [*Verstand*] out of incomprehensibility [*Unverständlichkeit*] or chaos?³³

Although, on face value, this passage reads as an earnest plea with his reader to stop attempting to make everything comprehensible, I argue that, like the rest of the essay, it is an ironic treatment of irony. Schlegel tells his readers that it would “fare badly” to use the understanding to comprehend [*verstehen*] what has been created out of incomprehensibility [*Unverständlichkeit*], and, moreover, that the entire structure of human meaning would “crumble” if we subjected it to analysis by the understanding. However, in his usual tongue-in-cheek manner, Schlegel also says that even our own happiness “depends in the last analysis, as anybody can easily verify” on this point of strength. Within a statement about the danger of rational analysis, Schlegel invokes the very language of analysis; and, what is more, he invokes a notion of a final, or ultimate, analysis. He provides the reader with a conclusion that would be derived from analysis – that the structure would crumble – in the course of a paragraph in which he is warning us against this very analysis. He

³² Schlegel, “On Incomprehensibility (1800),” 303-304; KFSa II, 370.

³³ *Ibid.*, 305; KFSa II, 370.

follows this statement up immediately with the phrase “as anybody can easily verify”; however, he has just told us that this very fact cannot be verified by the human understanding, and, even if that is the case, it can certainly not be “easily” verified by anyone. To risk doing violence to the irony of this passage a bit more, I am arguing that Schlegel’s use of irony in this passage on the dangers of incomprehensibility, or his ironic warning, gives the reader a glimpse into the very foundation he warns us we cannot know.

In order to more fully appreciate Schlegel’s critique and warning regarding the understanding, it is necessary to clarify what he means by the understanding. In Critical fragment 102, Schlegel distinguishes between two forms of reason: the thin, watery kind [*die dünne and wäßrige*] and the thick, fiery kind [*eine dicke feurige Vernunft*].³⁴ Although Schlegel uses the term reason or “*Vernunft*” in both cases, the former, the thin and watery kind of reason, can be applied to the activity of the understanding in the above quote, as that force which breaks apart what it seeks to know; that is, in order to comprehend the whole, the understanding destroys it.³⁵ The latter, the thick and fiery type of reason, is what makes the ironic fragments witty; it is a synthetic force that brings together previously unrelated thoughts (as in when Schlegel defines wit as the sudden meeting of two friendly thoughts after long separation). It is the thin, watery form of reason, or the activity of the understanding, that is at issue in the passage from “On Incomprehensibility.” We ought not attempt to make everything in this world comprehensible, and, moreover, that doing so would be dangerous – fatal to our systems and structures. However, I would argue that the point of strength that Schlegel references is not a fact that could even be scrutinized by the understanding and then destroyed; it is, rather, more appropriately described in the terms of Fichte’s appeal to faith in the opening of the third book of the *Vocation of Man*. This point of strength that ought to be left in the dark, must, rather, be left in the dark; it must, rather than ought to be, left in the dark because it *cannot* be brought to light via the understanding. This “point of strength” is not a fact, but rather an act – the act of faith that recognizes the validity of knowledge. What cannot be investigated – because it is no knowledge – is the moment of faith, i.e., that voluntary acquiescence that shores up the entire structure. It is not simply that we ought not investigate what “shores up” the entire structure, but rather that we cannot investigate it because it is an article of faith. To put it in other terms, it is the heart, the yearning or longing itself,

³⁴ Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 155. KFS II, p. 159, CF 104.

³⁵ I am following Alison Stone’s interpretation of this fragment from her article “Friedrich Schlegel, Romanticism, and the Re-enchantment of Nature”, *Inquiry* 48, no. 1 (February 1, 2005).

that holds up the system, and therefore, cannot be known. If one does not have “it” – like an understanding of the ironic fragments – then one cannot come to “get it” via rational arguments.³⁶

The essay, “On Incomprehensibility,” is, at one level, about the virtues of incomprehensibility – after all, shouldn’t the fragments remain incomprehensible? Isn’t there something good about incomprehensibility? Isn’t there something bad about everything becoming, as we wish, comprehensible? And, shouldn’t a classical text *never* be entirely comprehensible?³⁷ At this register, the essay serves as a warning: be careful with the extent to which you analyze using the understanding; you may end up destroying the very thing that you wish to understand. However, in the same gesture, isn’t Schlegel explaining something about our systems of meaning? Doesn’t he provide us with some understanding even as he warns us about its overuse. Is this passage, which reads as a direct warning, actually, like the rest of the essay, written with the tongue firmly planted in the cheek (“*as anyone can easily verify*”)?

Because of its irony, the passage from “On Incomprehensibility” that I quoted above can operate on multiple registers simultaneously. However, its irony cannot be parsed out, broken up, or dissected in order to be understood; it is, rather, understood immediately and all at once, like the witty idea that Schlegel describes in Critical fragment 96, whose “meaning should be immediately and completely clear as soon as it’s been hit upon.”³⁸ Likewise, in Critical fragment 108 (and reprinted in “On Incomprehensibility”) Schlegel characterizes Socratic irony as “the only involuntary and yet completely deliberate dissimulation”; with Socratic irony, it is “equally impossible to feign or divulge” and “[to] a person who hasn’t got it, it will remain a riddle even after it is openly confessed.”³⁹ Supporting this claim, Schlegel writes, in *Athenaeum* fragment 78, “usually incomprehension doesn’t

³⁶ In Fichte’s Lectures “Concerning the Difference between the Spirit and the Letter within Philosophy” he is acutely aware of the relationship between the spirit and letter and the role that the letter plays in awakening that which cannot be directly communicated. Spirit, which he defines as the “productive imagination,” is the source for all representation, but it is a source that cannot be conveyed directly, i.e., it cannot itself be represented because it is the source for all representing. In those lectures, much like the closing pages of the *Vocation*, Fichte’s employs language that will awaken spirit within his audience. Spirit can only be awakened, not pointed to; any pointing to the productive imagination already invokes the productive imagination, as the source of all representing. To put it in other words, it (the productive imagination) is beyond reach, because it is doing the reaching.

³⁷ KFSA II, p. 149, CF 20. Schlegel also quotes this fragment in his essay “On Incomprehensibility.”

³⁸ Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 154, CF 96; KFSA II, 158, CF 96.

³⁹ Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 155-156, CF 108; KFSA II, 160, CF 108.

derive from a lack of intelligence, but from a lack of sense [*Sinn*].”⁴⁰ The ironic utterance is not like the voice of the spirit [*Der Geist*] in Book II of the *Vocation of Man*, which appeals to the protagonist’s understanding; it is more like the ringing out in the inmost soul of the protagonist that occurs in Book III, “Faith.” If, in the attempt to understand irony, I break apart its component parts – the overt meaning of the statement and the hidden meaning of the statement – I immediately reduce or destroy the power of irony as a linguistic utterance that can capture, in one and the same breath, what is / what is not. To put it rather unironically, irony both says what it says (the explicit statement) and what it does not say (the hidden meaning); it is the union of what is said and what remains unsaid (but is meant). Irony can be realized immediately and fully, but it cannot be explained without thereby, in the process, destroying the irony of the statement.

The feeling for irony, which requires sense rather than intelligence, is analogous to the feeling of our protagonist in Book III of the *Vocation*. Fichte attempts to express this feeling – our link to the supersensible realm, to our freedom — in the language of a yearning, an urge, a longing, and “a drive to absolute independent self-activity.”⁴¹ Using these various terms to evoke the feeling of the heart, Fichte can only approximate this drive, which is inseparable from who I am at any moment when I collect myself. By anthropomorphizing this calling as the voice of conscience, language uses metaphor in an attempt to point to this drive. However, language can never capture that which lies beyond our systems of meaning, and yet is the source for their validity.

Additionally, both the act of faith and the ironic utterance cannot be “understood” because they are wholes rather than parts. In the act of faith, the protagonist is not merely a determinate object amongst other objects (as in “Doubt”), nor merely a subject that “thinks up the object” (as in “Knowledge”), but instead, the protagonist, as an embodied will, is both spiritual and material, and affirms this union in the act of faith. As soon as thinking or reflection is applied, the subject-object split is created within the I, i.e., the “I” as the form of reflection itself and the “I” as the content of that reflection. To avoid this split, the I must be an acting I and its action the movement of faith. Likewise, irony presents a whole, which is fractured as soon as the ironic utterance is parsed out, broken apart, or analyzed. In analyzing irony, the unity of what is / is not gets split apart and, through

⁴⁰ Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 170, AF 78; KFS II, 176, AF 78.

⁴¹ Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, 68; GA I/6, 254. For an account of this drive, see: Daniel Breazeale, *Thinking Through the Wissenschaftslehre: Themes from Fichte’s Early Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

direct communication, the elements of the ironic utterance are reified; the understanding “things the unthinged” and eliminates the ironic fragments’ ability to convey the absolute. Discourse destroys the absolute and turns it into what it is not.

7. Irony as Faith in the Fragments

In this section, I want to briefly explore how my claims about the structural similarity of “On Incomprehensibility” and the *Vocation of Man* can be applied to Schlegel’s fragments. In *Athenaeum* fragment 53, Schlegel writes, “It’s equally fatal for the mind to have a system and to have none. It will simply have to decide to combine the two.”⁴² Frederick Beiser has interpreted this fragment to mean that we both need structures in order to have any kind of inquiry at all, but that those same structures can place limits on our inquiry; therefore, we must both have some kind of framework, or regulative ideal, even as we know it cannot be reached. Beiser contends that the aim of this ideal is to “goad our striving.”⁴³ For the purposes of this project, however, I would like to focus on the language of decision in this fragment – i.e., as it is equally fatal to both have/not have a system, the mind must “simply *decide*” to have both [emphasis mine]. The holding of both is a *decision* of the mind, and not a conclusion to a line of reasoning. Thus, this fragment, and its language of decision, mirrors the protagonist’s decision in “Faith” to acquiesce to the natural standpoint; faith is a “decision of the will” to recognize that standpoint.⁴⁴ And, likewise, in this fragment, the mind decides to have a system and not have a system; it decides to affirm incompleteness, not to deduce it. The mind decides to affirm both because it would be fatal to do otherwise, just as the protagonist in the *Vocation* decides to affirm the natural standpoint because it cannot fulfill its vocation otherwise.

In *Ideas* fragment 28, Schlegel writes, “Man is Nature creatively looking back at itself.”⁴⁵ In Book I, “Doubt,” Fichte presents a nearly identical claim: “In man, its greatest masterpiece, [Nature] returns into itself to look at itself

⁴² Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 167. KFSa II, p. 173, AF 53. “Es ist gleich tödlich für den Geist, ein System zu haben, und keins zu haben. Er wird sich also wohl entschließen müssen, beides zu verbinden.”

⁴³ Frederick C. Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative: The Concept of Early German Romanticism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 34. “If romantic irony is indeed directed against any claim to completion or closure, that is only because its aim is to goad our striving, to intensify our efforts, so that we approach closer to the ideal of a complete system.”

⁴⁴ Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, 71; GA I/6, 257.

⁴⁵ Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 243, I 28; KFSa II, 258, I 28.

and observe itself: it duplicates itself in man as it were, and its mere being becomes being and consciousness in union.”⁴⁶ In the context of “Doubt,” this statement means that we, as human beings, are simply a development of nature; we are the highest development in that we have the capacity for self-reflection, but that capacity is not free. Rather, this capacity for self-reflection is merely the result of evolutionary processes that have reached a pinnacle in the human being. In his fragment, Schlegel includes the term “creatively” and therefore asserts that the human being is not merely a determinate object in nature that has the capacity to reflect upon itself because of the chain of strict necessity that led to her having this capacity; instead, human beings creatively, and thus freely, determine how we do that activity of reflecting. The fragment is a performance of the freedom that it describes; it is a positing. Like the fragment about the mind’s decision to embrace having a system and not having a system, this fragment asserts the role of creativity in our reflective activity as human beings – thus performing or enacting the free activity that it describes.⁴⁷

This free act, as a performance of the fragments, is also enacted by their wit, which is crucially tied to the brevity of the fragments. Schlegel writes in *Athenaeum* 120 that wit is often not taken seriously because “its expressions aren’t long and wide enough.”⁴⁸ He continues on in the same fragment to describe wit “like someone who is supposed to behave in a manner representative of his station, but instead simply *does* something.”⁴⁹ This characteristic activity of wit is also defined as its sociality in the fragments. Wit is social insofar as it is marked by the *activity* of joining previously disconnected ideas.⁵⁰ Wit is characteristically active – it performs the playful combining that distinguishes romantic philosophizing.

But, Schlegel tells his readers, wit cannot be analyzed: “The flame of the most brilliantly witty idea should radiate warmth only after it has given off light; it can be quenched suddenly by a single analytic world, even when it is meant as praise.”⁵¹ As I argued earlier, our attempts (including mine in

⁴⁶ Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, 15; GA I/6, 203.

⁴⁷ In his *Athenaeum* fragment 168, as an analogy for thinking about the best philosophy for the poet, Schlegel presents a ranking of philosophies in terms of how well suited they are for the orator; at issue in this ranking of philosophies is, in part, whether they would prohibit the orator from making decisions. Schlegel decides, after surveying the options, that the only philosophy left for the poet is a “creative philosophy,” which “originates in freedom and belief in freedom.” Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 183, AF 168.

⁴⁸ Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 176, AF 120; KFSa II, 184, AF 120.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ For these descriptions of wit, see Schlegel’s *Kritische* (Critical) fragments 9 and 56. KFSa II, p. 148, CF 9; KFSa II, p. 154, CF 56.

⁵¹ Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 145, CF 22; KFSa II, 149, CF 22.

this very essay) of “explaining the joke” destroy its power – they quench the flame. Wit cannot withstand analysis, because analysis, the thin and watery sort of reason (or the way that the understanding operates in “On Incomprehensibility”) seeks to know by breaking apart, and therefore, performs the opposite operation of wit’s chemical bonding. If it is true, as Schlegel claims, that poetry can only be criticized by way of poetry,⁵² then perhaps wit can also only be approximated by way of wit and an analysis of wit destroys its very function and does not allow us to get any nearer to it.

8. Faith’s Closure and Romantic Irony’s Openness

In this section, I will address a crucial difference between the role of faith in Schlegel and Fichte. Whereas Schlegel’s fragmentary, ironic writings leave the reader with the inexhaustible task of an unending pursuit of possible meanings, Fichte’s protagonist in the *Vocation of Man* closes the book on her investigation in the final pages of “Faith.”

The final pages of “Faith,” in the *Vocation of Man*, close the book by shutting off any further investigation. There is a supreme sense of closure in the *Vocation*; it is “supreme” in the sense that it is the relationship to the supreme infinite will that causes the protagonist to rest, to stop questioning – even if the object of that questioning is the profound evil found in the world. This relationship to the supreme infinite will is revealed to the protagonist through her acquiescence to the natural view. For Fichte’s protagonist, the supreme infinite will speaks to her when it “bends down toward” her through the command of conscience; in a reciprocal motion, I (or, the protagonist) “raise myself to it” through my obedience.⁵³ The voice of conscience – the voice that tells me my vocation is to act (and to act in specific ways in line with its commands) – is my tether to the supersensible realm. Through her obedience to this voice, the protagonist raises her existence to a higher, loftier level. And, it is through this obedience, that Fichte’s protagonist finds peace, calm, and repose.

Although it was the heart’s yearning that moved our protagonist from “Doubt” into “Knowledge” and finally to “Faith,” the heart’s yearning all but disappears by the end of the book when our protagonist realizes that Reason’s plan is working through her (via her obedience to the voice of conscience). Even though she may often find that plan incomprehensible, she will not question it. Earlier, I referenced David W. Wood’s incisive description that the closing pages of “Faith” read like a “sermon.” In these

⁵² KFS II, p. 162, CF 117.

⁵³ Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, 107.

pages, the protagonist repeatedly claims not to know or comprehend the plan of reason, but nonetheless to have found a profound kind of peace; the text becomes repetitive – it is as if the protagonist is convincing herself of her own inner calm. The protagonist says that “all puzzles from my existence are solved”,⁵⁴ that she “will rest content”,⁵⁵ and she is “satisfied” because her mind has “perfect harmony and clarity.”⁵⁶ A yearning to know her vocation is replaced with “calm devotion.”⁵⁷ This aforementioned harmony, satisfaction and contentedness, is not based on comprehension but rather the protagonist repeatedly states that she does not comprehend that which “transcends” all her thought and is “hidden” from her.⁵⁸ She remains calm because even those “events which seem so sad to me could, in the plan of the eternal one, be the nearest means to a good result.”⁵⁹ Any evil that occurs is part of the grand plan of reason and therefore ought not bother me (amongst the evils of oppression and natural disasters that Fichte names, we might add his loss of his professorship at Jena as something beyond his control and part of the plan of reason). Our protagonist remains unmoved by any external events as she is only concerned with her duty to obey the voice of conscience, a duty which is her vocation. Whereas, at the beginning of the book, the search for vocation is open-ended, by the conclusion, the protagonist has closed off all possibilities by affirming a peace in knowing that she is to follow the plan of reason. This plan is conveyed to her through the voice of conscience. She cannot know that plan; it will often seem incomprehensible to her; but, she must obey nonetheless. Why obey? Because this voice is me; it is one with me; and it is ringing out in my inmost soul. At this point, the previous movements of the text – and their respective voices – are conceived of as voices of “limited cleverness” and even what was previously conceived of as enlightenment is now described as mere sophistry.⁶⁰

The tone of the book changes from a restless questioning to a calm repose, from a deep desire and yearning to understand one’s vocation on one’s own terms to a complete relinquishing of control and the urge to know. The central role of the heart, and the heart’s yearning, is replaced by vision, which becomes “spiritualized” [*meinem Blicke vergeistiget*].⁶¹ These spiritualized eyes recognize the plan of reason in all things and do not even question

⁵⁴ Ibid., 111.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 112-113.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 115.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 117.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 115-116.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 118-119.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 116, 119.

⁶¹ GA I/6, 307.

evil in the world.⁶² With the recognition of this new, lofty vocation (lofty because it is dictated by the commands of conscience, the tether to the supersensible realm) the heart is now “closed” to the desire for earthly things.⁶³ Whereas the heart had been the guiding force for the book up to this point, the eyes take precedence in these last pages, and all the unrest of both the heart and mind that had occupied our protagonist are gone and replaced with calm, repose, and certainty. I’ve included some examples of the language of Book III in the previous paragraph to convey the repetitive tone of these final pages, which carry on long after the argument of the book has already been made. In the last sections of “Faith,” Fichte adapts the mode of a preacher and these final pages read like a sermon; however, I would argue that this format of a sermon makes sense given Fichte’s comments in the preface – i.e., his goal was to *move* the reader from the sensible to the supersensible. I contend that, throughout the text, this movement is happening at the level of the heart. The initial yearning for answers prompts the protagonist’s journey at the beginning of “Doubt”; and, at the end of each section, her heart’s dissatisfaction with the system that has been presented goads her forward. The “I” – or the reader – must feel her own freedom in the act of positing that is faith by the time that we get to Book III, otherwise the text fails altogether. Likewise, Fichte cannot provide arguments to prove the existence of the supersensible realm – a realm that guarantees my existence has meaning – but rather he must find a way to make the reader feel that this realm and this plan exist. If not, there will be no calm, no certainty, and no resolution by the end of the book.

This format of a sermon on the grand plan of Reason – working itself out through finite beings – mirrors Fichte’s description of nature in the second section of Book III. Fichte views nature as opposed to human beings and as an opponent that must be defeated by us and organized to reflect reason. Once we arrive at peace within and among states, he argues, human beings can work together as one collective toward our combined enemy: nature.⁶⁴ Humanity’s goal is a complete domination of nature through which nature would submit to the commands and laws of reason. Nature, in the end, becomes a reflection or echo of man – a servant to his needs. Fichte’s

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, 120.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 89-90.

depiction of the mastery and control of nature presents an initial blueprint for the closure that will take place at the end of Book III.⁶⁵

The domination of nature also occurs through Fichte's rejection of circularity throughout the *Vocation*. Fichte finds a state of affairs in which I am merely born to eat, drink and procreate until I reach the grave to be repugnant.⁶⁶ He calls this circle [*Zirkel*] a mere game [*Spiel*].⁶⁷ By the end of Book III, a linear plan of Reason has replaced any circularity found in the natural rhythms of nature, which Fichte refers to as a circle-dance [*Cirkeltanz*].⁶⁸ In both instances, natural cycles, such as birth and death, or the rising and setting of the sun, are characterized through language (of dance or play) that minimizes their significance. Fleeting worldly existence marked by the cyclical repetitions of the sensible realm have been superseded by the eternal life offered by the supersensible realm. Now that our protagonist recognizes the plan of reason in all things, her spiritualized eyes can see "constant progress" in terms of a "straight line to infinity."⁶⁹ The ability to see this "straight line" also fits with the protagonist's calm repose at the end of "Faith"; whereas doubt and uncertainty might be conceived as a circular movement folding back on itself, faith contains a conviction that no longer questions, but rather trusts that the great plan of reason is always on the move, forwards, towards progress.

This lack of movement and the rejection of circularity, at the end of the *Vocation of Man*, is in direct contrast to the unending yearning and striving for the Absolute found in Friedrich Schlegel's early German romantic fragments. Irony, a key device of these fragments, ensures that their meaning will never be fully formed, that – like a cultivated work – they will always be open to new interpretations by their readers. The tension created by irony is never eliminated, but rather it is a necessary component of philosophy understood as an active process of symphilosophizing.

In Schlegel, and early German romantic philosophy more broadly, there is a mistrust and rejection of closed, all-encompassing systems. The early German romantics are critical and skeptical of philosophy's desire for closure. Schlegel presents this critique throughout his fragments; in one instance, he writes in *Athenaeum* fragment 43 that philosophy is far too linear

⁶⁵ For a critical assessment of Fichte's view of Nature, see: Elizabeth Millán, "Bestimmung as Bildung: On Reading Fichte's *Vocation of Man* as *Bildungsroman*," in *Fichte's Vocation of Man: New Interpretive and Critical Essays*, 45–55.

⁶⁶ Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, 81; GA I/6, 267.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ GA I/6, 307.

⁶⁹ Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, 122.

and not yet cyclical enough [*nicht zyklisch genug*].⁷⁰ In another fragment, *Athenaeum* 54, he writes that the person who thinks they are a philosopher has stopped becoming one;⁷¹ philosophizing is an activity without end. Philosophy is not a static identity category, a possession, or a destination.

This quintessential romantic incompleteness is also achieved through the irony of Schlegel's fragments. The ironic utterance is characterized by its openness to multiple meanings; or better yet, irony is the literary technique that makes possible the open-ended philosophizing that marks the early German romantic period. Irony is the technique by which the early German romantics resist the closure of the philosophical systems of their contemporaries. Irony resists closure by positing multiple, often contradictory, meanings at once.

In Schlegel's definitions of the term, irony is characterized as a doubling or multiplying of meanings; in this multiplication, the reader is moved away from a definitive interpretation of the text, and therefore irony provides a distance that brings the reader closer to the Absolute. For example, Socratic irony is described via a series of couplets – it is both serious and playful, deeply open and hidden, at the same time.⁷² Likewise, when describing the good writer, Schlegel invokes the language of self-restriction and freedom, but he emphasizes that the good writer is the one that is not too close to the subject matter nor too far away from it; her relationship to the material is similar to a good conversation – able to be cut off at any time. The effective writer needs to maintain the appropriate amount of restraint because, without self-restraint, she will be controlled by the world; but, if she has too much restraint, the process of creative activity cannot take place. Therefore, the good writer is the one who dwells within the tension between too much and too little self-restraint.⁷³ In another definition of irony as the “form of paradox,” irony names the linguistic technique that is capable of holding a contradiction without allowing either term to be diluted by the other or conflated into the other.⁷⁴ In each of these instances, irony makes possible a tension between contradictory ideas, and therefore, the ironic writer is the writer who is most comfortable with abiding in tensions without needing to resolve them. Framed from the perspective of the reader of the fragments, it is irony that shows the reader that she has tried to capture the text, to pin it down to one meaning. Irony then turns this interpretation of the text against

⁷⁰ KFSa II, p. 171, AF 43.

⁷¹ KFSa II, p. 174, AF 54.

⁷² Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 155-156, CF 108; KFSa II, p. 160, CF 108.

⁷³ KFSa II, p. 173, AF 53.

⁷⁴ KFSa II, p 153, CF 48.

the reader and, by turning on her, it resists her attempts at closure and shows her the folly of her ways.

This sense of tension can be found not only in the content of the fragments, but also in their form. Each fragment is like a hedgehog, Schlegel tells us, separate and isolated from the surrounding world.⁷⁵ As hedgehogs, the fragments are individuals, but they are also connected to each other. The fragments are surrounded by space, which exhorts their reader to pause before continuing on to the next one. The meaning of the fragments is found in the relationship between the fragments and between the fragments and their reader – a reader who will, hopefully, know how to read them and who will not find them incomprehensible. This reader is attentive to the pauses and to the myriad possible meanings that arise in different configurations.

In their form, the fragments also enact the resistance to closed, all-encompassing systems that characterizes romantic *symphilosophie*. There is no foundational fragment, no final fragment, and no perfect ordering of the fragments that would arrive at a complete system. The fragments can stand on their own, like the hedgehog they are compared to, but they also function in relationship to each other. Their meanings rely on their being read together, and on the reader's relationship to them. She brings the breath that enlivens them; she tends the soil that allows these seeds, in Novalis' terms, to be nurtured and cultivated.⁷⁶ The fragments cannot function without the reader and therefore they are always incomplete on their own.

9. The Heart, or What is Left Unsaid

In "On Incomprehensibility," Schlegel ironically conveys that which is at the 'base' of our systems of knowing, but which cannot be known. To the reader willing to be patient with this text, he is giving her a glimmer of something beyond our structures – there is a glimpse, via irony, into a groundless ground, or a ground more properly conceived of as an activity. I am arguing that this groundless ground is akin to the feeling that prompts the moment of faith in Fichte's *Vocation of Man*. There is a yearning at the 'base' of our

⁷⁵ KFSa II, p. 197, AF 206.

⁷⁶ In *Pollen* fragment 104, Novalis calls the fragments "literary seed houses"; like seeds, many will not germinate. However, he ends that fragment by calling the reader's attention to the possibilities of even a few of the fragment seeds germinating. In Logological fragment 100, Novalis writes simply that "Everything is seed." Novalis, "Miscellaneous Remarks," in *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 213, #104. Novalis, "Novalis, Miscellaneous Observations and Logological Fragments," in *The Bloomsbury Anthology of Aesthetics*, ed. Joseph J. Tanke and Colin McQuillan (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), p. 315, #100.

systems of knowing, but even though that yearning makes possible those systems, it cannot be known — it is, like the witty fragment, destroyed the very moment it is analyzed. Both authors gesture to what cannot be known but is felt and both defend themselves against being misunderstood by their critics, not by appealing to logic and understanding, but rather to what lies beyond the understanding. Schlegel tells his readers that the misunderstanding of irony is not so much the result of incomprehension, but the lack of sense. Fichte directly states in his “Appeal to the Public” that he and his critics share an appeal to the heart, which cannot be realized through rational arguments; less directly, he appeals to the heart as a narrative device through the *Vocation*.

In the *Vocation of Man*, a yearning motivates the protagonist’s search for her vocation. This yearning is the clue to that vocation: the yearning of the heart is the yearning to act and it tells me (by way of the anthropomorphized voice of conscience) that my vocation, my purpose, is to act, and not merely to know. In order to act, I must believe in the natural standpoint, for only that belief makes my activity possible. What my yearning to know reveals, for both authors, is that what is unknown, and never to be known, grounds our systems. In Schlegel, this means that there is, at once, a system and not-a-system (that which is outside the system yet makes it possible). This groundless ground is something each author’s reader must be moved toward – either via emotional appeal (through a sermon) or via irony; but, either way, ‘it’ remains a riddle or a mystery if it is not arrived at by that reader.

However, Schlegel and Fichte diverge with regard to the completion or closure of the system presented in their works. Because of their irony, Schlegel’s fragments and his essay “On Incomprehensibility” remain open-ended. Schlegel presents the reader with multiple instances of irony as a holding together of contradictory opposites through the fragments and the essay. The reader is held in a tension and that tension is never resolved. However, Fichte resolves any tension that is created by the heart’s yearning or the protagonist’s questioning through the protagonist’s faith in the plan of reason. This plan unfolds out of the free choice to adopt the natural standpoint – i.e., there is a world like the one I perceive, that same world is where action takes place, and those actions have consequences. The voice of conscience, which is immediate and united with me, assures me that those actions have consequences; if those consequences do not occur in this world, then they must come about in the next. Actions are guided by laws, and therefore that other realm (the supersensible realm) must also have laws that govern the actions of wills (in this case, ensuring that willing takes place). That law must also be a will (because it cannot be heteronomous to the will)

and therefore that law which ensures the willing of all wills takes place is the Supreme Will.⁷⁷ The commands of reason are given to me by the voice of conscience – my link to the supersensible – and my duty is simply to obey even as I do not comprehend those commands.

Fichte's *Vocation* is full of voices, perhaps to a fault; unlike Schlegel's writings, which, through their irony, leave room for what cannot be said, Fichte's protagonist has the final word through her repeated appeals to the plan of Reason.⁷⁸ In Schlegel's warnings about the human yearning to comprehend the incomprehensible, he utilizes irony and therefore allows the meaning of his essay to be incomplete – to be open to a future reader in whose mind and heart the meaning of the essay will continue to germinate. Fichte, on the other hand, says so much at the end of the *Vocation* that he leaves no room for the unsaid. Anything unsaid, unnamed, or incomprehensible is simply a part of the grand plan of Reason that quells my yearning and sets my heart to ease. The protagonist's eyes are "spiritualized" and all wonder has left her senses, mind, and heart.⁷⁹ There is no space left for the reader or for the unknown – everything has been explained away; everything that I see, think, or feel is the result of the plan of Reason and I must simply believe it to be so. While the *Vocation* begins with yearning and the task of an open-ended investigation that will not cease until the protagonist determines for herself her own vocation, it ends by sealing itself off to any further questions. Unlike the romantic fragments, which, through their wit, brevity, and irony, leave the reader to endlessly contemplate their meanings, the *Vocation* offers very little to the reader who is not compelled by the move to faith in the opening pages of Book III. Indeed, it also offers very little to the one who is compelled, since she must simply "silently obey" reason's commands.⁸⁰

10. Conclusion

I have argued that the irony in Schlegel's essay "On Incomprehensibility" and the wit of his fragments mirror the activity of faith in Fichte's *Vocation of Man*. Faith is no knowledge and cannot be known. If it is not felt, it too, like

⁷⁷ Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, 104–106.

⁷⁸ I am reminded of Nietzsche's "Dying Socrates" in *Gay Science* aphorism 340. Whereas Schlegel presents the figure of an ironic Socrates in Critical fragment 108 (irony is tied to wit and therefore brevity), Fichte seems to be the figure of the Socrates who said too much at the moments before his death. And while Book II of the *Vocation*, "Knowledge," does present a Socratic figure (who only asks questions and does not grant you anything you do not yourself know), that figure is jettisoned by the end of Book II and replaced with the tone of a preacher full of conviction.

⁷⁹ Fichte, *Vocation of Man*, 122.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 91.

irony, “remains a riddle even after it is openly confessed.”⁸¹ Yet, without faith, knowledge’s validity cannot be recognized and our structures of meaning – our very vocation – would have no support. Both irony and faith gesture to ‘some-thing’ that cannot be understood, that defies our understanding, and that would be broken apart and thereby destroyed by our attempts to understand. However, this ‘some-thing’ is necessary to “shore up” our structures of meaning. What is at the ‘base’ of our systems cannot be the object of our scrutiny because ‘it’ is beyond the reach of our understanding. However, ‘base’ is only an approximation, a metaphor, for thinking about a ground that is an activity. Irony provides its careful readers access to that which is beyond our structures of knowing without at the same time destroying that “point of strength”; unlike the thin and watery sort of reason, or the activity of the understanding, irony is not destructive because it does not seek to know by cutting apart, but rather, like the thick and fiery type of reason, it performs a chemical process of combining previously disconnected – even contradictory – ideas in a way that produces something more than the sum of their parts. By attempting to understand irony, we reduce it to its parts, and thus we no longer gain access to that which exceeds the sum, and which is intuited, or felt, in the ironic gesture. Analogously, by attempting to understand “faith,” we reduce it to knowledge and thereby destroy our ability to fulfill our vocation.

⁸¹ This is a reference to Schlegel’s definition of Socratic Irony found in Critical fragment 108. Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 155-156, CF 108. KFSa II, p. 160, CF 108.

Symphilosophie

Rivista internazionale sulla filosofia romantica

La libertà della poesia tra primo romanticismo e Hegel

*Francesco Campana**

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to investigate the relationship between freedom and poetry (*Poesie*) through a comparison between the perspective of early Romanticism, specifically Friedrich Schlegel, on the one hand, and Hegelian philosophy on the other. While the terms may appear similar at first glance, for Schlegel, freedom is an essential factor enabling the conceptualization of poetry as the central element in the new mythology project. Meanwhile, for Hegel, freedom permits poetry to indeed occupy a position as the most universal art among the particular arts, but also a potential source of danger if not understood in the proper way. Due to the shared linguistic medium, this risk may result in the transformation of poetry into either the prosaic realm of everyday language or the realms of religion and philosophy (which is one of the possible interpretations of the end of art thesis). In this way, from the specific vantage point of the freedom of poetry, some of the distinctive general features of the two philosophical perspectives come to light.

Keywords: freedom, poetry, early Romanticism, Schlegel, Hegel

ABSTRACT

Il presente contributo intende indagare il rapporto tra libertà e poesia (*Poesie*) attraverso un confronto tra la prospettiva del primo romanticismo e, in particolare, di Friedrich Schlegel, da una parte, e la filosofia hegeliana, dall'altra. Sebbene i termini possano apparire a prima vista simili, per Schlegel, la libertà è un fattore essenziale che consente di concepire la poesia come elemento centrale nel progetto di una nuova mitologia. Per Hegel, invece, la libertà permette alla poesia certamente di occupare la posizione di arte più universale tra le arti particolari, ma costituisce anche una potenziale fonte di pericolo, se non viene intesa nel modo corretto. Dato il comune mezzo della rappresentazione linguistica, il rischio è quello di far sconfinare la poesia nel regno prosaico del linguaggio quotidiano o negli ambiti della religione e della filosofia (si tratta di una delle possibili interpretazioni della tesi sulla fine dell'arte). In questo modo, dallo specifico punto di vista della libertà della poesia, emergono alcuni dei caratteri generali distintivi delle due prospettive filosofiche.

Parole chiave: Libertà, Poesia, Primo Romanticismo, Schlegel, Hegel

* Marie Skłodowska-Curie Postdoctoral Fellow, Università degli Studi di Padova / New School for Social Research, New York, Dipartimento di Filosofia, Sociologia, Pedagogia e Psicologia Applicata, Palazzo del Capitano, Piazza Capitaniato 3, 35139 Padova, Italia – francesco.campana@unipd.it

1. Hegel e il primo romanticismo

Il rapporto tra Hegel e il primo romanticismo è notoriamente segnato dall'aspra critica che a più riprese il primo muove al secondo. Il fulcro della critica hegeliana consiste nell'identificare la prospettiva della *Frühromantik* con l'espressione di un soggetto che, in un'exasperata versione del pensiero fichtiano, si percepisce come assoluto, vede nel mondo un prodotto del proprio sé e, per questo, concepisce la realtà circostante come un terreno a disposizione della propria particolare volontà. Si tratta di una critica che individua nell'ironia romantica, intesa nei termini della manifestazione massima di questo soggettivismo, il suo bersaglio principale e trova nella presunzione di un arbitrio totale l'illusione velleitaria di una modernità portata oltre i possibili e auspicabili limiti.¹

Questa lettura è stata più volte analizzata e messa in discussione, mostrando come rischi di essere parziale e derivi probabilmente da una generale restituzione successiva del pensiero primo-romantico.² Inoltre, l'analisi dei diversi corsi di estetica di Hegel ha fatto emergere come, anche all'interno dello stesso pensiero hegeliano, tale critica si presenti in modi differenti e subisca delle evoluzioni.³

¹ Per due ricognizioni d'insieme sull'interpretazione hegeliana, che ha avuto grande influenza e ha prodotto un dibattito piuttosto ricco, si vedano il classico O. Pöggeler, *Hegels Kritik der Romantik* (Bonn: Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, 1956) e il più recente J. Reid, *L'anti-romantique. Hegel contre le romantisme ironique* (Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2007). Rispetto alla critica hegeliana alla nozione romantica di libertà, intesa in chiave complessiva, si veda A. Braune, "Hegels Kritik der romantischen Freiheit", in *Romantik und Freiheit Wechselspiele zwischen Ästhetik und Politik*, a cura di M. Dreyer e K. Ries (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2014), 181–197. Il presente articolo è stato scritto durante un periodo di ricerca come assegnista presso l'Istituto Italiano di Studi Germanici di Roma, che ringrazio.

² Quella fatta in seguito da August Wilhelm Schlegel (cfr. F. Rush, *Irony and Idealism. Rereading Schlegel, Hegel, and Kierkegaard* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 206–207). Per ciò che riguarda i limiti di questa lettura, il primo a sottolineare l'aspetto costruttivo-oggettivo e non solo distruttivo-soggettivo dell'ironia romantica è stato Benjamin nel suo *Der Begriff der Kunstkritik in der deutschen Romantik*, a cura di U. Steiner, in *Werke und Nachlaß. Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2008), 86–94 (trad. it. di C. Colaiacomo, *Il concetto di critica nel romanticismo tedesco*, in *Opere complete I. Scritti 1906-1922* (Torino: Einaudi, 2008), 416–421). Sull'interpretazione benjaminiana e la problematicità della critica hegeliana, cfr. K. H. Bohrer, *Die Kritik der Romantik. Der Verdacht der Philosophie gegen die literarische Moderne* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1989), 25–38 e 138–181.

³ Questi sviluppi risultano, a volte, per certi versi sorprendenti. Nell'ultimo corso sulla filosofia dell'arte del 1828-29, per esempio, Hegel distingue esplicitamente un concetto di ironia sul piano pratico, che egli continua a criticare aspramente, e un concetto di ironia legato alla dimensione estetica, che invece integra addirittura nel suo concetto di ideale dell'arte. Ho discusso l'evoluzione della critica hegeliana al concetto di ironia romantica,

Non c'è dubbio che uno degli elementi più problematici che Hegel riscontra nella *Frühromantik* risieda nel senso che questa attribuisce alla libertà che, per la critica hegeliana, corrisponderebbe in questi autori all'arbitrio più sfrenato e che, in realtà, si sviluppa anche diversamente e in modo più articolato.

In questo breve contributo si intende porre a tema il concetto di libertà da un particolare punto di vista, ovvero quello della poesia (*Poesie*).⁴ Essa, infatti, tra le arti particolari, ha un ruolo fondamentale sia per il pensiero del primo romanticismo che per la prospettiva estetica di Hegel. Nello specifico, per quanto riguarda il primo romanticismo, si prenderà qui in considerazione la posizione di Friedrich Schlegel risalente agli anni che precedono il 1800, ovvero la posizione che ha segnato in misura consistente la strada per il movimento in esame. Si vedrà come, da una parte, i concetti di poesia elaborati da Schlegel e da Hegel presentino diversi caratteri in comune, che spesso derivano dalla nozione di libertà. Dall'altra parte, si risconterà tuttavia come, proprio il modo in cui attraverso la poesia questa idea di libertà viene interpretata, produrrà delle profonde divergenze tra le due visioni: per Schlegel la libertà della poesia è l'elemento che consente a quest'ultima di muoversi anche oltre i confini dell'ambito letterario, al fine di riconfigurare in termini generali i saperi e le pratiche; per Hegel, invece, l'aspetto della libertà consente alla poesia di essere l'arte più universale tra le arti particolari, ma la avvicina anche ad altri ambiti della conoscenza, da cui tuttavia deve rimanere distinta, se intende rimanere poesia. Attraverso la comparazione delle due proposte si potranno perciò evidenziare alcuni tratti peculiari che, partendo dal punto di vista particolare dell'arte poetica, coinvolgono la più complessiva visione filosofico-artistica di entrambi i pensatori.

2. Libertà e universalità della poesia

Nel novero delle arti, quella poetica è l'arte di riferimento per la maggior parte delle proposte estetiche tedesche a cavallo del 1800. Sia tra le concezioni che sviluppano un vero e proprio sistema delle arti che in quelle dove non è presente un'esplicita configurazione gerarchica delle arti nei

fino all'ultimo corso di lezioni, in F. Campana, "La concezione hegeliana dell'ironia e il corso berlinese del 1828-29", *Studi di estetica* 48, IV serie, no. 1 (2020): 129-145.

⁴ Nel presente contributo il termine "poesia" corrisponde al tedesco "Poesie", con tutte le implicazioni tecniche e la complessità che esso porta con sé.

termini di un insieme strutturato, l'opera d'arte letteraria viene messa perlopiù al centro e al vertice dell'insieme delle arti particolari.⁵

Questo vale anche per due pensatori così diversi come Schlegel e Hegel. Tanto nella filosofia dell'arte schlegeliana che in quella hegeliana, il termine *Poesie* ha un significato complesso; esso include certamente l'opera d'arte letteraria, ma non corrisponde con esattezza al campo semantico del nostro "poesia", raccogliendo in sé, per un verso, gli altri generi letterari e svolgendo, per l'altro verso, una funzione che va oltre la mera dimensione letteraria e artistica. Nella prospettiva di entrambi gli autori, il posto preminente è conquistato dalla *Poesie* in ragione di determinati caratteri, che in generale si rivelano simili e che derivano soprattutto dall'utilizzo della parola come *medium* precipuo. In entrambe le proposte il concetto di libertà ricopre una funzione assolutamente centrale. Tuttavia, proprio l'interpretazione e la valutazione di questa libertà e degli elementi che la accompagnano mostrano il differente sviluppo dell'elaborazione teorica dei due pensatori.

a) Schlegel

Nella prospettiva di Schlegel, il concetto di poesia si viene sviluppando nel corso degli anni e, con variazioni anche significative, si definisce negli anni precedenti al 1800 con caratteri che, pur nell'evoluzione costante, ritornano più volte nei vari testi.⁶

Già in un testo come *Sullo studio della poesia greca*, la libertà della poesia si accompagna all'universalità che la fantasia poetica consente di ottenere:

La poesia è un'arte *universale* [*universelle*]: la *fantasia* infatti, cioè il suo organo, è incomparabilmente più affine alla libertà e maggiormente indipendente dall'influsso esterno. La poesia e il gusto poetico, rispetto

⁵ Sui sistemi delle arti particolari nell'estetica tedesca del XIX secolo, si veda, per esempio, M. Titzmann, *Strukturwandel der philosophischen Ästhetik 1800-1880. Der Symbolbegriff als Paradigma* (Fink: München, 1978). Cfr. anche F. Campana, "From Poetry to Music. The Paradigms of Art in German Aesthetics of the 19th Century", *Aesthetica Preprint* 116 (2021): 213–237, soprattutto 220–224.

⁶ Per uno studio complessivo sul concetto di *Poesie* nel primo romanticismo, con particolare riferimento al periodo di *Athenaeum*, si veda C. Lee, *Poesiebegriff der Athenäumszeit. Theoriebildung der deutschen Frühromantik* (Paderborn-München-Wien-Zürich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2005). Sui caratteri generali della poesia, anche in relazione al concetto di libertà, e sul suo essere filosofica non per il fatto di veicolare contenuti filosofici, ma per aver assunto su di sé le forme e le modalità proprie della filosofia, si veda M. Ophälders, "Poesia della poesia. Riflessioni su Friedrich Schlegel", in *La poesia filosofica*, a cura di A. Costazza (Milano: Cisalpino, 2007), 185–202. Cfr. anche M. Vero, "Dalla poesia trascendentale al linguaggio geroglifico. Sull'estetica di F. Schlegel e Novalis", in *Il velo scolpito. Dialoghi tra filosofia e letteratura*, a cura di D. Manca (Pisa: ETS, 2013), 95–106.

al gusto plastico, sono perciò più profondamente corruttibili, ma anche *infinitamente più perfetibili*.⁷

Qui la poesia viene messa a confronto con altre arti, specificamente quelle figurative, sia dal punto di vista del materiale che da una prospettiva più generale. Ne vengono sottolineate la maggiore possibilità di manovra e l'indipendenza, che la rendono sì fragile, ma anche passibile di continuo perfezionamento e potenziamento, che è l'aspetto che poi prevale, alimentando il carattere di libertà.

In seguito, la poesia come arte libera ritorna a più riprese nell'opera schlegeliana e si presenta sotto diverse forme. Il concetto di libertà è una caratteristica che Schlegel attribuisce specificamente all'individuo della modernità⁸ e, in generale, permea il suo pensiero di tutti gli anni che precedono il 1800, ponendosi come elemento ricorrente e costitutivo dei riferimenti chiave che egli attribuisce nel complesso alla sua epoca, vale a dire la Rivoluzione francese, la *Wissenschaftslehre* di Fichte e il *Wilhelm Meister* di Goethe.⁹ Data l'importanza attribuita e la sua pervasività, la libertà non può non riguardare anche l'elemento poetico. L'agire libero fa parte della filosofia creatrice del poeta¹⁰ e la poesia, nello specifico, viene equiparata a un discorso repubblicano, le cui parti sono come liberi cittadini che concorrono alla sua realizzazione¹¹.

Libera è anche poi la poesia nella celebre descrizione del frammento 116 di «Athenaeum», dove la poesia romantica è presentata come poesia universale progressiva:

[...] essa può anche librarsi, più di tutto, nel mezzo, tra il rappresentato e chi lo rappresenta, libera da ogni interesse reale e ideale, sulle ali della

⁷ F. Schlegel, *Studien des klassischen Altertums*, a cura di E. Behler, in *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, Bd. 1 (Paderborn-München-Wien: Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh / Zürich: Thomas-Verlag, 1979), 265; trad. it. di G. Lacchin e M. Bianchetti, *Sullo studio della poesia greca. I Greci e i Romani. Saggi storici e critici sull'antichità classica*, a cura di G. Lacchin (Milano: Mimesis, 2008), 66.

⁸ Cfr. A. Stone, "Friedrich Schlegel, Romanticism, and the Re-enchantment of Nature", *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*, 48, no. 1 (February 2005): 3–25, 10–14.

⁹ F. Schlegel, *Charakteristiken und Kritiken I (1769-1801)*, a cura di H. Eichner, in *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, Bd. 2 (München-Paderborn-Wien: Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh / Zürich: Thomas-Verlag, 1967), 198 (*Athenaeum*, Fr. 216); trad. it. di E. Agazzi, *Athenaeum 1789-1800*, a cura di G. Cusatelli (Milano: Sansoni, 2000), 181.

¹⁰ Ivi (*Athenaeum*, Fr. 168); trad. it. 174–175.

¹¹ Ivi, 155 (*Lyceum*, Fr. 65). Sul repubblicanesimo nel pensiero schlegeliano, a partire dal saggio *Versuch über den Begriff des Republikanismus* e andando anche oltre, e sulla derivazione kantiana, che riecheggia anche in questi passaggi, cfr. K. Behrens, *Friedrich Schlegels Geschichtsphilosophie (1794-1808). Ein Beitrag zur politischen Romantik* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1984), 81–159.

riflessione poetica, può potenziare via via questa riflessione e moltiplicarla, come in una fila interminabile di specchi. [...] Esso [il genere poetico romantico] solo è infinito, come è anche il solo ad essere libero, e riconosce come sua prima legge, che l'arbitrio del poeta non debba avere a soffrire alcuna legge che lo sovrasti.¹²

Qui la libertà della poesia costituisce un aspetto fondamentale della visione programmatica esposta nel frammento e determina l'universalità grazie alla quale la poesia si pone come elemento unificante e attivo.¹³ Una simile nozione di poesia, infatti, non solo comprende lo spettro dell'opera d'arte letteraria, ma si confronta in modo decisivo con le altre discipline della conoscenza, in particolare filosofia e retorica, mescola i piani e ne produce di nuovi in una tensione dalla forte carica utopica che va oltre i confini del sapere e intende così riconfigurare i caratteri del moderno.¹⁴ In questo senso, la libertà della poesia universale progressiva è una libertà che si autoalimenta nel processo di riflessione su se stessa, di espansione sempre in divenire e di potenziale moltiplicazione all'infinito.¹⁵

¹² F. Schlegel, *Charakteristiken und Kritiken I (1769-1801)*, 182–183 (*Athenaeum*, Fr. 116); trad. it., 168. Sulla questione della libertà del poeta come arbitrio, si vedano le interessanti considerazioni presenti nell'introduzione all'edizione critica: quello del poeta è sì arbitrio, ma arbitrio controllato, frutto di disciplina e studio, e, in un certo senso, ordinato (H. Eichner, *Einleitung*, in F. Schlegel, *Charakteristiken und Kritiken I (1769-1801)*, IX–CXX, LXIV e sgg.).

¹³ Un commento analitico al celebre frammento 116 e ai caratteri della poesia universale progressiva è presente in ivi, LIX–LXIV. Sul passo qui citato del frammento 116, si veda inoltre Ophälders, "Poesia della poesia. Riflessioni su Friedrich Schlegel", 199–200. Anche negli anni successivi Schlegel continuerà ad attribuire alla poesia i caratteri di universalità e di centralità rispetto alle altre arti. Ad esempio, si trovano espressioni in questo senso nelle pagine della rivista «Europa» (cfr. F. Schlegel, *Ansichten und Ideen von der christlichen Kunst*, a cura di H. Eichner, in *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, Bd. 4 (München-Paderborn-Wien: Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh / Zürich: Thomas-Verlag, 1959), 78).

¹⁴ Rispetto alla prospettiva di Schlegel, Stone parla di un processo di «re-enchantment» della natura ad opera della poesia romantica, nel senso di un rinnovamento sul piano epistemico e su quello politico compatibile con i valori moderni della libertà, della critica e dell'auto-critica, dell'egualitarismo e della secolarizzazione (A. Stone, "Friedrich Schlegel, Romanticism, and the Re-enchantment of Nature"). Cfr. H. Hühn, "Mythology and Modernity", in *Romanticism, Philosophy, and Literature*, a cura di M.N. Forster e L. Steiner (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 173–192, in particolare 181–182.

¹⁵ F. Schlegel, *Charakteristiken und Kritiken I (1769-1801)*, 157 (*Lyceum*, Fr. 87). Bernstein ripercorre in modo dettagliato i passaggi sul rapporto tra poesia e libertà nelle opere di Schlegel degli anni qui presi in considerazione, sottolineando, tra le altre cose, come essi costituiscano, almeno in parte, uno sviluppo della proposta di Lessing (J.M. Bernstein, "Poesy and the Arbitrariness of the Sign. Notes for a Critique of Jena Romanticism", in *Philosophical Romanticism*, a cura di N. Kompridis (London-New York: Routledge, 2006), 143–172). Si vedano anche D. Dahlstrom, "Play and Irony: Schiller and Schlegel on the Liberating Prospects of Aesthetics", in *The History of Continental Philosophy. Vol. 1: Kant*,

b) Hegel

Anche in Hegel la poesia trova nella libertà e nell'universalità alcuni dei suoi aspetti più rilevanti. Tuttavia, le possibilità che vengono riconosciute come proprie dell'arte poetica sono interpretate in un modo in buona misura differente rispetto a Schlegel e viene loro attribuita una funzione che, in definitiva, restituisce al concetto di poesia un profilo molto diverso.

Utilizzando termini e concetti che sembrano in un primo momento ritornare, anche qui la libertà è un attributo proprio del poeta – e più in generale dell'artista – e la poesia rispecchia tale caratteristica, esprimendola al massimo delle possibilità.¹⁶ Nel sistema delle arti hegeliano, infatti, la poesia si presenta come l'arte più compiuta¹⁷ ed è all'apice di un processo di spiritualizzazione, che si dispiega dall'arte più vicina alla materia, ovvero l'architettura, alla poesia, che è l'arte più spirituale, passando, nell'ordine, per scultura, pittura e musica¹⁸. Questo processo di de-materializzazione che procede verso lo spirito è inteso da Hegel nei termini di una liberazione che rende la poesia l'arte universale:

Kantianism, and Idealism: The Origins of Continental Philosophy, a cura di T. Nenon (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 107–129 e G. Cecchinato, “Ugly and Interested Art. Modernity, Freedom and Democratization of Taste in F. Schlegel”, *Revista de Estud(i)os sobre Fichte* [En línea], 15 (2017), (ultima consultazione: 10 november 2023), URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/ref/756>, che invece evidenziano il legame con il pensiero schilleriano. Per un recente confronto tra l'elaborazione fichtiana della nozione di riflessione e lo sviluppo schlegeliano del medesimo concetto in rapporto a quello di poesia si veda, invece, N. Suzuki, “Ironie in der Wissenschaftslehre: Reflexion und Glaube bei Fichte in romantischer Perspektive”, *Fichte-Studien* 43 (2016): 290–297.

¹⁶ Il ruolo del concetto di libertà all'interno della filosofia hegeliana dell'arte, considerata in termini generali, è uno degli aspetti messi a fuoco dall'interpretazione di Moland, secondo la quale la libertà non va intesa solo in termini socio-politici, ma trova il suo fondamento al livello della nostra esperienza sensibile e delle nostre capacità percettive e immaginative. Da questo punto di vista, l'arte, intesa in senso hegeliano (soprattutto per ciò che riguarda l'analisi delle arti particolari presente nell'*Estetica*), può aiutarci ad ampliare le nostre possibilità in questo senso (L. Moland, *Hegel's Aesthetics: The Art of Idealism* (Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 14. Cfr. anche F. Campana, “La posta in gioco. Arte e libertà in Hegel”, *Pólemos. Materiali di filosofia critica e sociale*, 10, no. 1 (2017): 86–101.

¹⁷ Cfr. G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophie der Kunst oder Ästhetik. Nach Hegel. Im Sommer 1826. Mitschrift Friedrich Carl Hermann Victor von Kehler*, a cura di A. Gethmann-Siefert e B. Collenberg-Plotnikov con la collaborazione di F. Iannelli e K. Berr (München: Fink, 2004), 197; id., *Philosophie der Kunst. Vorlesungen von 1826*, a cura di A. Gethmann-Siefert, J.-I. Kwon e K. Berr (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2005), 222; id., *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Kunst II. Nachschriften zum Kolleg des Jahres 1826*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 28,2, a cura di N. Hebing e W. Jaeschke (Hamburg: Meiner, 2018), 844.

¹⁸ Cfr. Id., *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik III*, in *Werke in 20 Bänden*, a cura di E. Moldenhauer e K.M. Michel, Bd. 15 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 232; trad. it. di N. Merker e N. Vaccaro, *Estetica* (Torino: Einaudi, 1997), 1081.

Essa è l'arte universale [*allgemeine*], quella che tutto abbraccia, quella che si è elevata alla più alta spiritualizzazione. Perché in essa lo spirito è libero in se stesso, si è sciolto dal mero materiale sensibile e lo ha abbassato a segno di sé. Il segno, qui, non è simbolo, ma segno interamente indifferente e privo di valore, nei confronti del quale lo spirito è la potenza determinante.¹⁹

I caratteri di universalità conferiti dalla libertà che le è propria consentono alla poesia di attraversare pienamente e in modo più riuscito di qualsiasi altra arte le varie epoche e le varie forme artistiche identificate da Hegel nel simbolico, nel classico e nel romantico (pur essendo la poesia, di partenza, un'arte romantica).²⁰ La trasversalità di un'arte che è, tra tutte, l'arte totale è il marchio di tale libertà.²¹

Diversamente dalla proposta schlegeliana, tuttavia, queste possibilità della poesia, che ne fanno l'arte più vicina al concetto compiuto di arte, non sono viste da Hegel in termini del tutto positivi. La poesia non si fa carico, in Hegel, di guidare, andando anche oltre se stessa, le tendenze moderne della conoscenza. Essa è sì un'arte eccezionale, ma ha una funzione secondaria rispetto ad altre sfere del sapere, rimane comunque un'entità di confine e, di questo confine, deve tenere assolutamente conto. Che la poesia diventi altro da sé, andando oltre sé, per Hegel è solo un rischio, non un'opportunità. Dal momento che essa, unica tra le arti particolari, condivide con le altre forme dello spirito assoluto, ovvero religione e filosofia, il *medium* della rappresentazione linguistica, bisogna fare in modo che la libertà della poesia non la renda qualcosa che essa non è, facendola scadere nei territori estranei della prosa:

[...] la poesia si presenta come quell'arte particolare in cui l'arte stessa incomincia al contempo a dissolversi e raggiungere per la conoscenza filosofica il suo punto di passaggio alla rappresentazione religiosa come tale ed insieme alla prosa del pensiero scientifico. I confini del mondo del bello sono [...] da un lato la prosa della finitezza e della coscienza comune, da cui l'arte si slancia verso la verità, e dall'altro le sfere

¹⁹ Id., *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Kunst I. Nachschriften zu den Kollegien der Jahre 1820/21 und 1823*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, 28,1 (Hotho 1823), a cura di N. Hebing (Hamburg: Meiner, 2015), 255; trad. it. di P. D'Angelo, *Lezioni di estetica* (Bari-Roma: Laterza, 2007), 44.

²⁰ Cfr. *ivi* (*Ascheberg 1820/1821*), 187. Cfr. anche G.W.F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik III*, 233; trad. it., p. 1081.

²¹ Cfr. S. Vizzardelli, "La trasversalità estetica della poesia in Hegel", *Quaderni di estetica e critica* 1 (1996): 41-66.

superiori della religione e della scienza, in cui essa passa a cogliere l'assoluto in modo meno sensibile.²²

In Hegel la poesia non ha quel carico utopico e trasformativo che si ritrova nelle parole di Schlegel. Il rischio di corrompersi, che anche il pensatore primo-romantico individuava, è preso in considerazione da Hegel con tutta la serietà del caso. La poesia diventa quindi l'arte più rilevante, tanto per quanto riguarda il suo essere arte rispetto alle altre arti, quanto nel tutelare la forma spirituale a cui appartiene, quella artistica appunto, tra la prosa del quotidiano e quelle della religione e del pensiero.²³

3. Conclusioni

Rilevare i caratteri comuni del concetto di poesia tra la prospettiva di Hegel e quella del primo romanticismo (rappresentata dallo Schlegel degli anni attorno al 1800) e mostrarne i differenti sviluppi a partire dal concetto di libertà, consente di vedere come, pur sovrapponendosi più di quanto forse si immagini per ciò che riguarda i termini di partenza, le strade che le due visioni prendono siano poi effettivamente divergenti.²⁴

Il modo di concepire la libertà della poesia di Schlegel conferisce a quest'ultima delle potenzialità illimitate, che egli ascrive alla particolare versione della poesia romantica come poesia universale progressiva. Si tratta

²² G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik III*, 234–235; trad. it., pp. 1082–1083 (modificata). Per delle letture della concezione hegeliana della poesia, si vedano, tra gli altri: P. Szondi, *Hegels Lehre von der Dichtung*, in *Poetik und Geschichtsphilosophie I* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), 267–511 (trad. it. di A. Marietti, *La teoria hegeliana della poesia*, Torino: Einaudi, 2007); F. D. Wagner, *Hegels Philosophie der Dichtung* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1974); A. Hirt, *Versus. Hegel et la philosophie à l'épreuve de la poésie* (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 1999); M. A. Werle, *A poesia na estética de Hegel* (São Paulo: Humanitas, 2005); M. Ophälders, "Poesia e morte dell'arte", in *L'estetica di Hegel*, a cura di M. Farina e A.L. Siani (Bologna: il Mulino, 2014), 213–228; N. Hebing, "Poesie", in *G.W. F. Hegel: Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, a cura di B. Sandkaulen (Berlin-Boston: de Gruyter, 2018), 227–255. Ho provato a dare un'interpretazione della peculiarità e delle potenzialità dell'opera d'arte letteraria nella concezione hegeliana in F. Campana, *The End of Literature, Hegel, and the Contemporary Novel* (Cham: Palgrave, 2019), soprattutto 127–182.

²³ Vieira Da S. Filho propone un'analisi dell'estetica hegeliana a partire da questi due concetti (A. Vieira Da S. Filho, *Poesia e Prosa. Arte e Filosofia na Estética de Hegel*, Campinas: Pontes, 2008). Cfr. anche D. Emundts, "Hegel und Prosa: Zur Anerkennung der Prosa als Ausdrucksform der Moderne", in *Prosa. Geschichte, Poetik, Theorie*, a cura di S. Efimova e M. Gamper (Berlin-Boston: de Gruyter, 2021), 205–224.

²⁴ La questione della libertà della poesia può perciò rientrare in quella storia di assonanze inattese e radicali divergenze tra i due. Szondi descrive questo rapporto nei seguenti termini: «Ciò che caratterizza il rapporto di Hegel con Schlegel, e con il romanticismo in genere, è quella mescolanza di affinità ed estraneità, di prossimità e distanza, che è sempre stato il miglior alimento di un'esacerbata inimicizia» (P. Szondi, *Hegels Lehre von der Dichtung*, 331; trad. it., 59).

di una poesia che è libera di muoversi tra i domini della letteratura e della conoscenza, spingendosi fino al superamento di confini interni ed esterni, in un continuo ripensamento creativo dei differenti campi di riferimento. Secondo Hegel, invece, la libertà della poesia è innanzitutto una libertà dalla materia in vista di una graduale conquista della dimensione spirituale. Anche nella sua prospettiva questo aspetto consente alla poesia di avere innumerevoli possibilità, ma ciò che egli sottolinea in modo netto sono anche i pericoli che ne derivano. La libertà della poesia, nell'eccezionalità di questa arte particolare, non deve spingere, per Hegel, la dimensione estetica oltre se stessa: la poesia è limite ultimo e speciale, non deve confondere i confini e dare adito a cattive infinitezza, se si vuole ancora concepire come tale e non come altro da sé.

In questa differenza, che descrive un particolare molto limitato, seppur rilevante, della filosofia dell'arte dei due autori si ritrova probabilmente la differente strada che, in termini generali, essi attribuiscono all'arte nella modernità: quella che consente a Schlegel di concepire l'utopia di una mitologia, da ripensare senza sosta e riproporre come nuova, e quella che conduce Hegel a intendere l'arte, nella modernità, come qualcosa per noi di passato. Si tratta, per quest'ultimo, della cosiddetta tesi sulla fine dell'arte, che non annulla nostalgicamente le possibilità dell'arte nel moderno, ma le ridetermina in modo meno centrale rispetto al passato, spingendo l'attenzione verso la rappresentazione della vita quotidiana oppure esponendo l'arte al rischio di trasformarsi in qualcosa che appartiene più alla sfera della riflessione che a quella estetica.²⁵

²⁵ Proprio il rifiuto dello Hegel berlinese rispetto alla possibilità, auspicata peraltro in gioventù, di ripristinare una nuova mitologia nei termini di una "Mythologie der Vernunft" è alla base della critica alla concezione dell'estetica hegeliana come un'estetica classicista (cfr. A. Gethmann-Siefert, "Hegels These vom Ende der Kunst und der ‚Klassizismus‘ der Ästhetik", *Hegel-Studien*, 19, 1984, 205–258). Un interessante confronto tra la prospettiva schlegeliana e la tesi sulla fine dell'arte, invece, si trova in J. Korngiebel, "Hegel, Schlegel e la «fine dell'arte»", in *Fine o nuovo inizio dell'arte. Estetiche della crisi da Hegel al pictorial turn*, a cura di F. Iannelli, G. Garelli, F. Vercellone e K. Vieweg (Pisa: ETS, 2016), 195–211. Korngiebel concentra la sua analisi sul tardo Schlegel, quello dopo la conversione (quindi non sulla soluzione della nuova mitologia nello specifico), soffermandosi sul ruolo della poesia alle pp. 200-201 e sulle affinità e differenze tra la sua prospettiva e quella hegeliana alle pp. 208-211. Per una recente analisi complessiva delle due alternative, ovvero fine dell'arte o nuova mitologia, si veda M. Farina, "Mitologia e fine dell'arte. La critica romantica e l'estetica di Hegel", in *L'estetica tedesca da Kant a Hegel*, a cura di L. Filieri e M. Vero (Pisa: ETS, 2017) 153–166.

Symphilosophie

Internationale Zeitschrift für philosophische Romantik

„Der große Gedanke, daß alles poetisiert werden soll“

Zu den philosophischen Grundlagen der Transzendentalpoesie

Robert König^{*}

ABSTRACT

The article discusses to what extent Friedrich Schlegel's and Novalis' concept of "transcendental poetry" captures the artistic act as an expression of human freedom. It then explores the philosophical foundations and implications of this concept. The first part raises the problem of freedom in its general relation to the artistic act. The second part then presents the romantic concept of "transcendental poetry" and examines it as a unifying apex of aesthetics and philosophy in the form of the poetic *fragment*. The third part will then address the necessary philosophical foundations of this by examining its genesis primarily from the perspective of Kant and Fichte. There, a logic of free imagination is established as basis of transcendental poetry. The final part then harvests the fruits of this foundation by indicating some interpersonal, social, ethical, and educational aspects of artistic acts on the ground of the now philosophically conceived transcendental poetry.

Keywords: transcendental poetry, fragment, freedom, schematism, artistic creation

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Der Beitrag fragt, inwieweit das Konzept einer *Transzendentalpoesie* bei Friedrich Schlegel und bei Novalis den Kunstakt als Ausdruck menschlicher Freiheit fasst, von welchen Grundlagen her dies zu denken ist und welche Folgerungen zu gewinnen sind. Der erste Teil wirft allgemein das Problem der *Freiheit* in ihrem Verhältnis zum *künstlerischen Akt* auf. Der zweite Teil wird sodann als Antwortvorschlag den romantischen Entwurf einer *Transzendentalpoesie* darstellen und untersuchen. Sie bildet in der Form des poetischen *Fragments* einen vereinheitlichenden Gipfelpunkt von Ästhetik und Philosophie. Der dritte Teil wird sodann die notwendigen philosophischen Grundlagen dieser Transzendentalpoesie thematisieren, indem ihre Genese vor allem von Kant und Fichte her in den Blick genommen wird. Dort wird eine Logik der freien Einbildungskraft als ihre Basis etabliert. Der letzte Teil des Textes erntet sodann die Früchte dieser Fundierung, indem er auf dem Boden der nun philosophisch begriffenen Transzendentalpoesie interpersonale, soziale, ethische und pädagogische Aspekte des Kunstschaffens gewinnt.

Stichwörter: Transzendentalpoesie, Fragment, Freiheit, Schematismus, Kunstschaffen

^{*} Dr., Institut für Philosophie / Institut für Byzantinistik, Universität Wien – robert.koenig@univie.ac.at

1. Einleitung

Der vorliegende Beitrag thematisiert aus Sicht der *romantischen Poetologie* den Akt des Kunstschaffens als Ausdruck menschlicher Freiheit. Er erörtert, von welchen philosophischen Grundlagen her dies zu denken ist und welche Folgerungen auf dieser Basis zu gewinnen sind.

Zunächst wird daher im ersten Teil die Frage gestellt, was in solch einem Horizont der Begriff *Freiheit* überhaupt zu bedeuten habe und was ein *künstlerischer Akt* sei, der sich ins Verhältnis zur Freiheit setzen können soll.

Der zweite Teil wird sodann zur Beantwortung dieser Frage das romantische Konzept einer *Transzendentalpoesie* darstellen und untersuchen, wie es v.a. von Friedrich Schlegel in den *Athenaeums-Fragmenten*¹ und Novalis in den *Fragmenten*² aus dem Jahr 1798 (primär den sog. logologischen Fragmenten) skizziert wurde. Solch eine Transzendentalpoesie erweist sich dabei zunächst als Tummelplatz, auf dem die angespannte Beziehung zwischen Freiheit, Kunstakt, manifester Wirklichkeit und poetischem Symbol *philosophisch* verhandelbar wird. Sie bildet dergestalt einen vereinheitlichenden Gipfelpunkt der romantischen Ästhetik und Philosophie, die man, so wird der vorliegende Text ebenso zeigen, transzendentalpoetisch gar nicht voneinander trennen kann.

Der dritte Teil wird sich zur Fundierung dieses Ansatzes den notwendigen philosophischen Grundlagen der Transzendentalpoesie widmen, indem ihre Genese vor allem von Kant und Fichte her in den Blick genommen wird. Hierin wirft sich nicht nur ein klärendes Licht auf diese Poesie selbst, es zeigt sich obendrein, dass ihr Ansatz ohne seine gleichzeitige philosophische Einholung unwirksam bleibt.

Der letzte Teil des Textes erntet sodann die Früchte jener Vereinigung von Poesie und Philosophie zur *Transzendentalpoesie*, indem er deren stets auffordernden, fragmentarischen und synthetischen Charakter als Boden für interpersonale, soziale, ethische und pädagogische Aspekte des Kunstschaffens gewinnt. Auf diese Weise zeigt sich das Konzept Schlegels und Novalis' als Grundlage einer zwischenmenschlich bedeutsamen und sich selbst poetisch herausfordernden Freiheitsermöglichung.

¹ Ich zitiere „Athenaeums-Fragmente“ nach: Friedrich Schlegel, *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe. Erste Abteilung: Kritische Neuausgabe*, Bd. 2. München, Paderborn, Wien: Schöningh 1967 [EA 1798], S. 165-256. In den Kurzzitaten wird jeweils die Nummer des Fragments angegeben.

² Ich zitiere die „Fragmente des Jahres 1798“ nach: Novalis, *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 3. Herrliberg, Zürich: Bühl 1946 [EA 1798], S. 11-141. In den Kurzzitaten wird jeweils die dortige Seitenzahl angegeben. Die Fragmente finden sich ebenso in der Historisch-Kritischen Ausgabe: Novalis, *Novalis Schriften*, Bd. 2. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 1965.

2. Die Frage: Wie hängen Freiheit und Kunstakt zusammen?

In dieser Eingangsfrage liegen zwei Herausforderungen. Einerseits soll der Kunstakt als Manifestation von Freiheit *begriffen* und andererseits die Freiheit als verwirklicht im Kunstakt *dargestellt* werden. Die beiden Worte *Begriff* und *Darstellung* sind nicht zufällig gewählt. Denn was in der Darstellung vor sich geht, soll *begriffen* sein und was ihr Begriff ist, soll *dargestellt* werden. Solch ein komplexes Wechselverhältnis ist angesprochen, wenn sich die Frage aufwirft, ob und inwiefern das Kunstschaffen selbst eine Darstellung von Freiheit sei.

Mit Friedrich Schlegel ist dieses Wechselverhältnis von Akt und Ausdruck deshalb zunächst so bestimmt, dass darin künstlerische Schaffenshandlungen „sich selbst in jeder ihrer Darstellungen mit darstellen“ können sollen.³ Die näheren Erläuterungen zu diesem Aufwurf folgen im nächsten Teil. Vorerst diene er nur zur ersten Charakterisierung des Problems. Ein Kunstakt, der sein eigenes hierdurch begreifbares *Aktsein* in seinem *Agieren* zugleich mit darstellt, ist ein Akt der Freiheit. Denn Freiheit wird dort durchgeführt, wo das Handeln mit seinem Ausgedrücktsein in Konkordanz geschieht und derart die jeweilige Ausdrucksform ihrem eigenen Handeln verfügbar und *frei* gestaltbar wird. Der Kunstakt wird auf diese Weise zunächst *frei von* jeweiligen äußerlichen Vorgaben, Gesetzmäßigkeit oder Erwartungen, die sich nicht aus ihm selbst ergeben. Er wird aber zugleich *frei zu* seinen eigenen Maßgaben, Durchführungsarten und Erscheinungsweisen. Diese Einheit des Aktes mit seinem Ausdruck *ist* die Darstellung von Freiheit im Kunstschaffen. Sie lässt sich nicht vorab in Regelgebilde bringen, sondern ist – mit einem kantischen Wort – pure Selbstgesetzgebung⁴ und obendrein *Ausdruck und Darstellung* dieser Selbstgesetzgebung des Handelns.

Es wird sich daher zeigen, dass die künstlerische Tat aus dem Blickpunkt romantischer Poetologie weit entfernt davon ist, bloß einen spezifischen Bereich des menschlichen Handelns zu betreffen. Vielmehr bedeutet sie eine umfassende *Requalifizierung* unseres gesamten Weltbezuges, indem die Einheit von Handlung und Darstellung in einem jeden Phänomen der Welt bis zu einem gewissen Grade aufgesucht und evaluiert werden kann. Die Welt gerät dergestalt insgesamt in den Stand, eine Welt des Kunstaktes zu werden. Der prinzipielle Ausgangspunkt dieser Requalifizierung liegt in der angedeuteten Selbstreferenz des eigenen Darstellungshandelns, das sich

³ Schlegel, „Athenaeums-Fragmente“, 238.

⁴ Von den vielen Stellen, in denen Kant eine solche Figur überlegt, sei angegeben: „Es gehört aber ein vernünftiges Wesen als Glied zum Reiche der Zwecke, wenn es darin zwar allgemein gesetzgebend, aber auch diesen Gesetzen selbst unterworfen ist.“ (Immanuel Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1976 [EA 1786], B 75).

im Akt seiner Durchführung zugleich selbstgesetzgebend den Rahmen und die Weisen seines Ausgedrücktwerdens erzeugt. So etwas wäre also eine *Freiheit* des Kunstschaffens zu nennen, die sich aber nicht in relativistische Willkür verliert, sondern zugleich an den Möglichkeiten und Grenzen ihrer Darstellungsformen ihre eigenen Möglichkeiten und Grenzen findet.

Die Gestalt solch eines ästhetischen Handelns soll sich mithin allein seiner Durchführung selbst entnehmen lassen. Sie muss umgekehrt aber ebenso die Bedingungen und Grenzen ihrer Durchführung enthalten, darstellen und anschaulich machen. Die *Darstellung* im Kunstwerk kann daher, so lautet der Anspruch, niemals so etwas wie eine bloß ästhetische Draufgabe zum dargestellten Inhalt sein, sondern wird zugleich zur prinzipiellen Möglichkeitsbedingung des Inhaltes selbst. Dies wird der noch näher auszuführende Schritt ins *Transzendente* sein. Der Inhalt wird nicht nachträglich ausgedrückt, er *bedingt sich* zugleich an seiner Ausdrucksmöglichkeit. Umgekehrt werden sich Darstellungs- und Ausdrucksform immerdar allein und ausschließlich den Vorgaben ihres spezifischen Inhaltes entnehmen können, wenn sie *frei* genannt werden sollen. Ansonsten bleiben sie äußerliche Vorgaben, die mit dem Inhalt selbst nur nachträglich zusammengefügt werden und sich nicht *genetisch* aus ihm ergeben.

Dieses dialektische Verhältnis bildet mithin das eigentlich *logische* Problem, wenn nach der Beziehung von Freiheit und Kunstakt gefragt wird. Es muss daher ein Akt gefunden werden können, der als künstlerisches Tun zugleich die eigene *Freiheit* darstellen kann. Gelingt dies, dann gewinnt sich der Inhalt unmittelbar mit seiner ihm möglichst *adäquat werdenden ästhetischen Form*. Hierdurch gehen Logik und Ästhetik des Kunstaktes in eins zusammen. Das ist der Weg, den die ästhetische Philosophie der Romantik über große Strecken beschritten und besonders im *Fragment* solch eine adäquate Ausdrucksform des angezeigten dialektischen Verhältnisses gefunden hat. Denn das *Fragment* taugt besonders als Ausdruck einer multiformen und zugleich selbstreferenziellen Weise, in der sich die Freiheit gerade aufgrund der fragmentierten Offenheit der Darstellung mit darstellen kann.

Die nun folgenden Auseinandersetzungen der Brüder Schlegel und Novalis' entstammen also selbst bereits dem Anspruch, die Freiheit des Kunstaktes mit zum Ausdruck zu bringen. Solch ein Anspruch wird sich in seiner Logik im Laufe der vorliegenden Darstellung aber erst mit darstellen und gewinnen müssen, um Geltung zu haben. Zuerst sei er im nächsten Teil daher aufgeworfen und im darauffolgenden Teil sodann logisch fundiert.

3. Die Antwort: Das Konzept einer *Transzendentalpoesie*

Im romantischen Denken existiert ein Vorschlag, welcher sich der diffizilen Forderungen annimmt, die im ersten Teil aufgegriffen wurden. Er firmiert in den *Athenaeums-* und *Logologischen Fragmenten* unter dem Begriff *Transzendentalpoesie*.

Es handelt sich, wie bereits angedeutet, bei der Transzendentalpoesie um die Forderung einer „Poesie, die [...] in jeder ihrer Darstellungen sich selbst mit darstellen, und überall zugleich Poesie und Poesie der Poesie sein“⁵ könne. Die Mitdarstellung des Kunstaktes in seiner Ausführung ist es, was die transzendente Poesie zugleich zu einer beständigen Poesie der Poesie macht. Zum Verständnis dieses Ansatzes ist zunächst wichtig, dass er von Kunstwerken als individuellen Ausdrucksakten ausgeht. Denn nicht nur soll „das Produzierende mit dem Produkt“⁶ bloß einmalig oder allgemein dargestellt werden, sondern diese Tateinheit beider sich in vielfältig individuellen Formen ereignen können. Schlegel nennt daher im eben zitierten *Fragment* selbst die Form des *Fragmentes* als adäquate transzendentalpoetische Ausdrucksform. Es bringe einerseits seine eigene Einheit mit der von ihm vollzogenen Darstellung zum Ausdruck, weist andererseits aber durch die fragmentarische Form ebenso sehr auf die Pluralität der Ausdrucksformen hin. Transzendentalpoesie wird nicht in einer festgelegten Form vorgetragen, sie ist eine fragmentarische Poesie pluraler Formen, in denen sich in der Vermittlung von Akt und Ausdruck die Freiheit vielfältig und wiederholt zur Erfahrung bringt. Alle Formen dieser Vielfalt tragen aber zugleich den gemeinschaftlichen Anstrich einer Poesie der Poesie, in welcher als stets selbstreferenzieller Poetisierungsleistung zugleich das allgemeine Signum und die Logik der vielfältigen transzendentalpoetischen Fragmentarien liegt.

Solch eine *plurale Universalität* finde einerseits in einem grundlegenden „Sinn für Fragmente und Projekte“ Niederschlag, welcher der „transzendente Bestandteil des historischen Geistes“ sei,⁷ der aber andererseits im „Fragment“ als „eigentliche Form der Universalphilosophie“ zugleich nur eine „lanx satura“, „fermenta cognitionis“ und am Ende „Randglossen“ bleibe.⁸ Hierin drücken sich Allgemeinheit und Individuation zugleich fragmentarisch aus und öffnen sich dem beständigen Verweis auf diejenigen Inhalte, zu denen das Fragment *universale Randglossen* bildet. Daher müsse

⁵ Schlegel, „Athenaeums-Fragmente“, 238.

⁶ Ebd.

⁷ a. a. O., 22.

⁸ a. a. O., 259.

ein Fragment neben seiner Öffnung auch „gleich einem kleinen Kunstwerke von der umgebenden Welt ganz abgesondert und in sich selbst vollendet sein wie ein Igel.“⁹

Bärbel Frischmann fasst auf diesem Boden übersichtlich die Grundcharakteristika der Transzendentalpoesie wie folgt zusammen: es gehe in ihr „nicht um die Abbildung der Wirklichkeit“, sie stelle eher „das Produzierende mit dem Produkt dar“, mache „so das Subjekt als entscheidende Kunstinstanz geltend“ und habe „selbst philosophisch-reflexive Kompetenz“.¹⁰ Vor allem vom letzten Aspekt aus wirft sich ein erstes Licht auf die fortwährend philosophischen Implikationen der Transzendentalpoesie, die „im System der transzendentalen Gedanken zugleich eine Charakteristik des transzendentalen Denkens enthielte“¹¹ und auf diese Weise einmal mehr ihr eigenes Tun in dessen Vollzug mit darstellt. Tanehisa Otabe weist deshalb darauf hin, es handle sich bei transzendentalpoetischen Fragmenten stets sowohl um Gerichtetheiten auf ein zu öffnendes Ausdrucksziel hin als auch um Überbleibsel aus einem lange schon erreichten Gedanken.¹² Das Fragment ist der Nachhall einer bereits gefertigten Entwicklung, die nunmehr zur zielhaften Wiederentwicklung aufruft. Frischmann verortet die wesentlichen Merkmale eines solch fragmentarischen Werkwerdens des Werkes daher in seiner dialektisch bestimmten „innere[n] Konstruktion“,¹³ die es wesentlich nur von sich her gewinnt.

Es handle sich deshalb bei der Transzendentalpoesie insgesamt, so Schlegel weiter, nicht so sehr um eine spezifische literarische Textgattung oder überhaupt bloß um bestimmte Texte oder Werke. Vielmehr liege sie in der Forderung, „dass alles poetisiert werden soll“ und in einer „Mischung aller Kunstarten“ hin auf „eine Poesie“, wie es auch nur „eine Philosophie“ gebe.¹⁴ Das Poetische besteht in der Pluralisierung der Formen, die in ihrer Vielfalt überhaupt erst auf die universelle *eine Poesie* hinweisen, welche in ihnen allen am Werke ist. Die Universalität dieser Poesie schlägt sich umgekehrt, so der Anspruch, jedes Mal in der Selbstreferenzialität jeder besonderen Form als ihre Poesie der Poesie nieder. Man mag an dieser Stelle obendrein an Novalis' Parallelisierung mit der Philosophie denken, die ebenso allein dort ihren Ursprung habe, wo sich das Philosophieren selbst

⁹ a. a. O., 206.

¹⁰ Bärbel Frischmann, *Vom transzendentalen zum frühromantischen Idealismus*. Paderborn, München, Wien, Zürich: Schöningh 2005, S. 310.

¹¹ Schlegel, „Athenaeums-Fragmente“, 238.

¹² Tanehisa Otabe, „Friedrich Schlegel and the Idea of the Fragment: A Contribution to Romantic Aesthetics“, *Aesthetics* 13 (2009), S. 61f.

¹³ Frischmann, *Vom transzendentalen zum frühromantischen Idealismus*, S. 309.

¹⁴ Schlegel, „Athenaeums-Fragmente“, 239.

philosophiere.¹⁵ Poesie und Philosophie rücken im transzendentalpoetischen Fragment in größter Nähe zusammen.

Von hier aus ist es daher nicht verwunderlich, dass auch Schlegel im Hinblick auf diese bloße Fragmentpoesie zugleich und wiederholt mit Begriffen wie „höchste Art“, „Universalität“, „rein“ oder „vollständigste Poesie“ operiert.¹⁶ Denn die vielfältige *Mischung aller Kunstarten* ist in ihr nicht ein bloßes Aggregieren, so als würde man künstlerische Koinzidenzen übereinander aufhäufen. Ihre in ihnen allen pulsierende Universalität liegt in ihrer jeweiligen transzendentalpoetischen Selbstreferenz, d.h. in demjenigen Einheitspunkt, von dem her sie alle als „Produkt“ ihres je genuin besonderen und eigenen „Produzierenden“¹⁷ erscheinen und dieses Produzierende mit darstellen.¹⁸ Es handelt sich hierbei um den Ausdruck eines logisch-geistigen Verhältnisses im Werk, das man wiederum die Freiheit nennen kann. Der *genuine* Charakter eines jeden Werkes *ist* das anschauliche Widerspiel dieser Freiheit. Von hier aus ließe sich deshalb mit demselben Recht sagen, der transzendentalpoetische Einheitspunkt der Pluralität ist die sich in einem jeden Kunstakt darstellende Freiheit seiner Selbstreferenz.

Gerade in den *Athenaeums-* und *Logologischen Fragmenten* lässt sich die Pluralität des Kunstaktes an zahlreichen Stellen zeigen. Untersuchen doch diese selbst poetischen Fragmente zugleich die transzendente Wirkungsfähigkeit unterschiedlicher poetischer Formen, sei es als Thematisierung von Text- und Kunstgattungen, sei es als Reflexion unterschiedlicher Gestaltungen wie Zynismus, Ironie, Humor und dergleichen, sei es letztlich unter Hereinnahme einer Theoretisierung von Kognitions- und Emotionsfunktionen wie Langeweile oder Einbildungskraft und transzendentallogischen Formen wie Idealität oder Realität.¹⁹ Allesamt werden sie als poetische Akte verstanden, gleichgültig ob sie Kunstwerke schaffen, erleben oder reflektieren.

¹⁵ Novalis, *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 3, S. 53.

¹⁶ Schlegel, „Athenaeums-Fragmente“, 247.

¹⁷ a. a. O., 238.

¹⁸ Die Begriffe *Produzieren* und *Produkt* im Kontext der Philosophie weisen frappante Parallelen zur zeitgenössischen Transzendentalphilosophie eines Kant, Fichte oder Schelling auf. Schon in §1 von Fichtes *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* (1794) taucht der Begriff „Product“ auf und verdichtet sich ab da (vgl. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*. Hamburg: Meiner 1997). Ebenso schon in den Frühschriften Schellings, vgl. etwa *Vom Ich als Prinzip der Philosophie* von 1795 (Leipzig: Fritz Eckardt 1907), §15. Wir sagen hier *Parallelen*, weil die fragmentarische Form bewusst nicht mit traktathaften Zitationen, sondern randglossenhaften Verweisen operiert. Die Namen jener Denker kommen immer wieder vor, ihr Denken wird jedoch nirgends systematisch abgehandelt.

¹⁹ z.B. Schlegel, „Athenaeums-Fragmente“: 2, 16, 110, 111, 225, usf. oder Novalis, *Gesammelte Werke* 3, S. 21, 24, 25, 60, 66, 67 usf.

Besonders markant zeigt sich dieser universale Zugang etwa dort, wo die *Mathematik* als poetisches Tun qualifiziert wird, das seine eigene Poesie in seinem individuellen Akt offenlegt: „Die Mathematik ist gleichsam eine sinnliche Logik, sie verhält sich zur Philosophie, wie die materiellen Künste, Musik und Plastik zur Poesie.“²⁰ Eine *sinnliche Logik* sein zu können, stellt das Mathematische durch seine Ausführung als poetische Form von sich selbst dar. Schlegel greift übrigens in diesem Zusammenhang unausgesprochen in die philosophischen Grundlagen von Transzendentalität, näher hin diejenigen Kants, zurück.²¹ Am Beispiel der Mathematik zeigt sich einmal mehr der universelle Anspruch, *Poesie* in je besonderer Weise in jedwedem Handeln auffinden zu können, insofern dieses Handeln sein eigenes Sichausdrücken mit ausdrückt. Ein jedwedes Tun wird durch seine potenziell an ihm ausdrückbare Selbstreferenzialität zu einem poetischen Tun qualifiziert. Ein weiteres Beispiel jenseits von Textgattungen wäre die *Religion*, von der Schlegel sagt, „nichts ist je religiös, was nicht ein Produkt der Freiheit ist“.²²

Alledem korrespondiert, dass die universelle Form des Kunstaktes, Schlegel nennt sie „Schönheit“, niemals „bloß für einen gegebenen Gegenstand“²³ gehalten werden könne, der – so wohlgefertigt er auch sein mag – jener Selbstdarstellung des Freiheitsaktes entbehrt. Denn genau jener Akt ist es erst, den alle Kunst in ihrer Vielfalt immer wieder zum Ausdruck bringt und allein im Ausdruck wiederholen kann. Wird er im Werk bloß als gegebene Eigenschaft oder dergleichen aufgefasst, verliert sich jeder transzendente Zugang und das Werk ist bloß hingestelltes Ding. Demgegenüber findet im universalpoetisierenden Kunstschaffen die andauernde Wiederholung dessen statt, was Schlegel das *transzendente Faktum* nennt.²⁴ Dieses Faktum ist die *Freiheit* des Schaffens. Von ihr her

²⁰ Schlegel, „Athenaeums-Fragmente“, 365.

²¹ Die erkenntnisleitenden Formen sinnlicher Anschauung schlagen sich bei Kant in der Fundierungsleistung mathematischer Naturwissenschaften für den Begriff des Gegenstandes nieder. Deshalb fragt Kant am Beginn seiner Logik der Erkenntnisbegründung in den Worten der *Prolegomena*: „Wie ist reine Mathematik möglich?“ und „Wie ist reine Naturwissenschaft möglich?“ (vgl. Immanuel Kant, *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik, die als Wissenschaft wird auftreten können*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1977, §§6–35). Für die Beantwortung beider Fragen spielt die Theorie der Sinneswahrnehmung durch raumzeitliche Formen eine zentrale Rolle. Deshalb mag auch Schlegel auf den Begriff einer „sinnlichen Logik“ kommen, der bei ihm aber zugleich über die kantische Philosophie hinausgeht. Denn für Kant würde so etwas wie eine „sinnliche Logik“ einen äußerst problematischen Begriff darstellen, indem er streng zwischen Sinnlichkeit und Verstand (Logik) trennt. (vgl. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1977, B 74).

²² Schlegel, „Athenaeums-Fragmente“, 233.

²³ a. a. O., 256.

²⁴ Ebd.

ströme auch die Einheit der Philosophie und der Poesie: „Und welche Philosophie bleibt dem Dichter übrig? Die schaffende, die von der Freiheit, und dem Glauben an sie ausgeht, und dann zeigt wie der menschliche Geist sein Gesetz allem aufprägt, und wie die Welt sein Kunstwerk ist.“²⁵ Die Welt wird Arena freier und sich versuchender kreativer Selbstreferenzialität, welche als im Kunstschaffen stets miterscheinende Poesie der Poesie zugleich transzendental das Gesetz des menschlichen Geistes ausdrückt. Frischmann merkt daher an, es könne sich bei der Rede von einer „Poesie der Poesie“ eine Parallele zur philosophischen Konzeption eines transzendentalen „Wissen[s] vom Wissen“ bei Fichte ergeben.²⁶ Es handelt sich im Gesetz des menschlichen Geistes um das *transzendente Faktum*, das selbst mit in die Ausführungen eingeflochten werden können muss. Widrigenfalls würde das, was in den hier besprochenen Fragmenten behauptet wird, selbst seiner poetischen Bedeutung und Funktion entbehren. Die Form des *Fragment* fordert in ihrer bruchstückhaften und zugleich selbstreferenziellen Durchführung ihre transzendente Adäquatheit für den durch sie aufgeworfenen poetischen Inhalt. Kurzum, sie fordert sich als *Freiheitsausdruck*.

Insgesamt lassen sich mit Schlegel die hier versammelten Forderungen daher als eine „romantische Poesie“ bezeichnen, die zugleich „progressive Universalpoesie“ sei.²⁷ Das Verhältnis von Fragment und Universalität vermittelt sich durch die Beifügung „progressiv“. Sie ist eine genetisch-organische Poesie, die sich in beständiger Selbsterkundung und -entwicklung befindet, *indem* sie hierin Ausdruck der Freiheit bleibt. Der Ausdruck *organisch* tritt besonders bei Novalis in den Vordergrund, der die Organizität der Transzendentalpoesie als eine in steter Entwicklung befindliche „künftige transzendente Poesie“²⁸ begrift. Ernst Cassirers Analyse der Sprachauffassung der Romantik weist vermehrt auf die zentrale Bedeutung solche einer symbolischen Logik des *Organischen* hin.²⁹ Der in ihr liegende genetische Charakter romantischer Poesie ist ein stets der Zukunft gewidmeter, indem sich poetische Formen je wieder als der selbstreferenzielle Ausdruck ihrer eigenen Darstellungshandlung gewinnen können sollen. In solch einer vielfältigen Gewinnung besteht die Progression einer individuierenden Universalpoesie. Vom „größten Systeme der Kunst“

²⁵ a. a. O., 168.

²⁶ Frischmann, *Vom transzendentalen zum frühromantischen Idealismus*, S. 310.

²⁷ Schlegel, „Athenaeums-Fragmente“, 116.

²⁸ Novalis, *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 3, S. 25.

²⁹ Ernst Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen. Erster Teil: Die Sprache*. Hamburg: Meiner 2010, S. 95–97.

enthalte sie daher alles „bis zum Seufzer, dem Kuß, den das dichtende Kind aushaucht in kunstlosen Gesang.“³⁰ Im folgenden Passus formuliert Schlegel die vielleicht durchdringlichste Darstellung dieses Anspruches. Diese Poesie

kann sich so in das Dargestellte verlieren, daß man glauben möchte, poetische Individuen jeder Art zu charakterisieren, sei ihr Eins und Alles; und doch gibt es noch keine Form, die so dazu gemacht wäre, den Geist des Autors vollständig auszudrücken: so daß manche Künstler, die nur auch einen Roman schreiben wollten, von ungefähr sich selbst dargestellt haben. Nur sie kann gleich dem Epos ein Spiegel der ganzen umgebenden Welt, ein Bild des Zeitalters werden. Und doch kann auch sie am meisten zwischen dem Dargestellten und dem Darstellenden, frei von allem realen und idealen Interesse auf den Flügeln der poetischen Reflexion in der Mitte schweben, diese Reflexion immer wieder potenzieren und wie in einer endlosen Reihe von Spiegeln vervielfachen. Sie ist der höchsten und der allseitigsten Bildung fähig; nicht bloß von innen heraus, sondern auch von außen hinein; indem sie jedem, was ein Ganzes in ihren Produkten sein soll, alle Teile ähnlich organisiert, wodurch ihr die Aussicht auf eine grenzenlos wachsende Klassizität eröffnet wird. Die romantische Poesie ist unter den Künsten was der Witz der Philosophie, und die Gesellschaft, Umgang, Freundschaft und Liebe im Leben ist. Andre Dichtarten sind fertig, und können nun vollständig zergliedert werden. Die romantische Dichtart ist noch im Werden; ja das ist ihr eigentliches Wesen, daß sie ewig nur werden, nie vollendet sein kann. Sie kann durch keine Theorie erschöpft werden, und nur eine divinatorische Kritik dürfte es wagen, ihr Ideal charakterisieren zu wollen. Sie allein ist unendlich, wie sie allein frei ist, und das als ihr erstes Gesetz anerkennt, daß die Willkür des Dichters kein Gesetz über sich leide. Die romantische Dichtart ist die einzige, die mehr als Art, und gleichsam die Dichtkunst selbst ist: denn in einem gewissen Sinn ist oder soll alle Poesie romantisch sein.³¹

Erstens taucht in diesem Passus einmal mehr der Gestus selbstreferenzieller Individuation auf, der die Darstellungsweise mit ihrem Inhalt vereinigt. Solch ein *Einmal Mehr* hat dabei methodischen Charakter, indem sich der universale Charakter in fragmentierter Form immer wieder ausdrücken muss. Das Fragment ist kein abschließender Traktat. Zweitens ist der nochmalige Hinweis auf den organischen Werdenscharakter der romantischen Poesie entscheidend. Sie ist beständige Aufgabe ihrer eigenen Darstellung und der Darstellung des Darstellens und kann daher niemals als eine abgeschlossene Gattung eingefangen werden. In dieser *offenen, freien*

³⁰ Schlegel, „Athenaeums-Fragmente“, 116.

³¹ a. a. O., 116.

Transzendentalität wurzelt es, dass die romantische Poesie „die Dichtkunst selbst“ sein soll – nicht etwa eine bestimmte Spielart derselben. Frischmann nennt so etwas mit Recht den stets „nur approximativ und nur symbolisch“ vorgehenden Charakter des transzendentalpoetischen Werkes.³²

Der deshalb immerzu spezifisch-fragmentarische und zugleich universal sein sollende Aufwurf jener Poesie ist bis jetzt allerdings weiter nur eben dies: ein wiederholter Aufwurf und eine Forderung. Die romantische Poesie konstruiert sich in den untersuchten Fragmenten als Programmanspruch. Kann aber nicht *dargestellt* werden, inwieweit sich dieser bloße Anspruch auch *transzendental* fundieren und sich dieserhalb die *Transzendentalpoesie* ebenso zu einer *Transzendentalpoetologie* entwickeln lässt, handelt es sich weiter um bloße Aufwürfe und Forderungen. Ihr fehlt dann die *Poesie ihrer eigenen Poesie*. Aus diesem Grund muss nun der Begriff des Transzendentalen selbst in den Blick genommen werden, den wir bisher bewusst unerläutert ließen.

4. Die Begründung: Die Logik der Transzendentalpoesie

Der Begriff *transzendental*, wie er von Schlegel und Novalis verstanden wird, entstammt ursprünglich der Philosophie Immanuel Kants. Von dort aus mag er – auch vermittelt durch Kants Nachfolger – seinen Einfluss auf beide entwickelt haben. Kant selbst wird deshalb von Schlegel mit anerkennendem Gestus als „der Kopernikus der Philosophie“³³ gewürdigt und allein in den *Athenaeums-Fragmenten* häufig besprochen. Für Novalis gilt ähnliches. Nikolaus Lohse hat gezeigt, wie auch er in poetologischen Versatzstücken seines Denkens immer wieder direkt von Kant her beeinflusst war.³⁴

Wir interessieren uns nun vor allem für die *poetische* Funktion, die im ursprünglich kantischen Konzept der *Transzendentalität* liegt. Schlegel und Novalis nehmen dessen Aufklärung, ihrer eigenen Poetik entsprechend, in *fragmentarischen* Andeutungen vor, die mit gerade so viel philosophischem Hinweis befüllt sind, dass nun der Rest von denjenigen Denkern her angegangen werden kann, auf die sie verweisen. Wir werden gleichsam durch die Provokation der unausgeführt bleibenden fragmentarischen Form dazu provoziert, die zugrunde liegenden philosophischen Systeme aufzusuchen und deren Begriffe in poetische Bewegung zu bringen. Auf diese Weise sollen jene Systeme eine Fundierungsleistung ermöglichen, deren die fragment-

³² Frischmann, *Vom transzendentalen zum frühromantischen Idealismus*, S. 309.

³³ Schlegel, „Athenaeums-Fragmente“, 220.

³⁴ Vgl. Nikolaus Lohse, *Dichtung und Theorie. Der Entwurf einer dichterischen Transzendentalpoetik in den Fragmenten des Novalis*. Heidelberg: Winter 1988, 85ff.

arische Poesie bedarf, um ihre Aufwürfe als *transzendental* zu rechtfertigen. Dass also, wie Jan Urbich ausführt, „weder Friedrich Schlegel noch Novalis eine solche Theorie systematisch entwickelt und dargeboten“ haben, wodurch ein auffordernder „Experimentalcharakter ihres Denkens impliziert“ sei,³⁵ ist weniger ein Problem, sondern mehr der freie Zug ihrer fragmentarischen Poetik.

Wohlan, Kant sagt uns also: „Ich nenne alle Erkenntnis transzendental, die sich nicht sowohl mit Gegenständen, sondern mit unserer Erkenntnisart von Gegenständen, insofern diese a priori möglich sein soll, überhaupt beschäftigt.“³⁶ *Transzendental* ist ein Erkennen also, wenn es seine Inhalte auf eine ganz bestimmte Weise in den Blick nimmt. Es beschreibt oder rekonstruiert sie nicht bloß als etwas Gegebenes, sondern nach der Frage, wie die erkannten Gegenstände ursprünglich (hier: a priori) überhaupt *als diese Gegenstände möglich* sind. In anderen Worten ist die transzendente Betrachtung eine solche, die nach den im Betrachten liegenden Möglichkeitsbedingungen des Betrachteten fragt. Die Tätigkeit des Betrachtens selbst gibt die mitdarzustellenden Formen vor, in denen ihm das Betrachtete sodann auftreten kann. Diese vorausgesetzten Formen zu untersuchen, heißt *Transzendentalphilosophie* zu betreiben. Das ist Kants vielgenannte kopernikanische Wende in der Philosophie. Er sagt an berühmter Stelle: „Der Verstand schöpft seine Gesetze nicht aus der Natur, sondern schreibt sie dieser vor.“³⁷ Erst dadurch wird die Natur eine erkennbare Natur *für uns*. Das Erkennen selbst integriert den Gegenständen diejenigen Grundgesetze, an deren Hand die Gegenstände dem Erkennen sodann *seine* Gegenstände werden. Durch derlei ursprüngliche Voraussetzungen requalifiziert das Erkennen die Gegenstände zu sog. „Erscheinungen“³⁸ für uns, über die hinaus wir bloß mutmaßen und nicht tatsächlich etwas *wissen* können.

Dieser Akt der Requalifikation kann nun von Schlegel oder Novalis her *poetisch* genannt werden. Denn ihm wohnt zugleich eine „symbolische Konstruktion der transzendentalen Welt“³⁹ inne, von der Novalis als Kernkompetenz der Transzendentalpoesie spricht. Der Begriff einer „symbolischen Konstruktion“ ist dabei entscheidend. In ihm geht das

³⁵ Jan Urbich, „Friedrich Schlegels frühromantischer Symbolbegriff“, *Athenäum – Jahrbuch der Friedrich Schlegel-Gesellschaft* 23, hg. v. U. Breuer, N. Wegmann. Paderborn, Wien, München, Zürich: Schöningh 2013, S. 77f.

³⁶ Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B 25.

³⁷ Kant, *Prolegomena*, §36.

³⁸ Mit diesem Begriff beginnt die *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* bereits in ihrem ersten Paragraphen und er bildet von da an einen der Schlüsselbegriffe der kantischen Philosophie (vgl. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B 34).

³⁹ Novalis, *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 3, S. 26.

kantische Konzept der Erscheinung auf. Wo nämlich bei Kant der Begriff „Erscheinung“ noch meist auf den Gegenstand mathematischer Naturwissenschaften restringiert ist,⁴⁰ nimmt er bei Novalis überhaupt den Charakter des „Symbolischen“ an. Hierdurch reformuliert sich das *Transzendente* zu einem Akt allgemein symbolischer Konstruktion *jeder* Erfahrungswirklichkeit. Dies heißt es mit Schlegels oben zitierten Worten, dass der menschliche Geist sein Gesetz allem aufprägt. Auf solch einer poetischen Erweiterung des kantischen Erscheinungsbegriffes gründet Violetta Waibels Hinweis, dass die „von Schlegel thematisierte Selbstreferentialität [...] in der von Kant initiierten Transzendentalphilosophie nicht in gleicher Weise anzutreffen“⁴¹ sei. Sie dehnt nämlich deren Anliegen einer Fundierung des wissenschaftlichen Erkennens bei Kant zum Anliegen einer symbolischen Einholung der ganzen Welt aus.

Die symbolischen Erscheinungen selbst sollen *als transzendente Symbole* den Vollzug ihres eigenen Aktes *darstellen*. Transzendente Erfahrungsermöglichung wird zur symbolischen Konstruktion ihrer eigenen Tätigkeit in deren Vollzug. Das heißt es in Schlegels Worten, in allem eine Poesie der Poesie zu betreiben, und die kantische Welt der Erscheinungen als eine jederzeit *poetische Welt* zu identifizieren. Wegen dieses philosophischen Grundbaues nennt Novalis die Transzendentalpoesie eine Mischung aus Philosophie und Poesie und fügt hinzu, sie enthalte durch ihre allgemeine Konstruktion der Wirklichkeit zum Symbolischen insgesamt und „überhaupt das Transzendente“.⁴² Die hier beanspruchte Mischung aus Philosophie und künstlerischem Tun nimmt Lars-Thade Ulrichs berechtigt in den Blick, wenn er im Kontext seiner größeren Studie zur Transzendentalpoesie darauf hinweist, sie sei eine Kunst, die „Erkenntnis vermitteln“ könne und bewirke so, dass „das ‚Schöne‘ auch ‚wahr‘ sein“ könne und führe hierdurch zu einer geradezu platonisch geprägten Zusammenführung dieser beiden Kategorien. Damit sei, so Ulrichs, einer reduzierten und bloß „emotivistischen Ästhetik“ von vorneherein ein Riegel vorgeschoben.⁴³ Auch Klaus Vieweg deutet fruchtbar auf die gleichberechtigte und ergänzende Synthese von Kunst bzw. Poesie und Philosophie im ästhetisch fundierten Erkenntnisakt in der Schlegel’schen Fragmentarik hin und zieht dabei

⁴⁰ Eine spätere Erweiterung des Erscheinungsbegriffes findet erst in der *Kritik der Urteilskraft* statt, wo – ganz ähnlich diversen romantischen Ideen – von einer *Natureteleologie* die Rede ist, die nicht mehr allein mathematisch-naturwissenschaftlich, sondern ästhetisch und religiös orientiert wird. (vgl. v.a. *Kritik der Urteilskraft*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1974, §§61ff.)

⁴¹ Violetta Waibel, „Transzendentalpoesie im Kontext des Deutschen Idealismus“. In: *Handbuch Literatur und Philosophie*, hg. v. H. Feger. Berlin: Springer 2012, S. 47.

⁴² Novalis, *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 3, S. 26.

⁴³ Lars-Thade Ulrichs, *Die andere Vernunft*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag 2011, S. 262.

Parallelen zu Nietzsche und Derrida.⁴⁴ Solche Bezüge mögen zwar klärungsbedürftig sein, denn sowohl zumindest bei Nietzsche scheint ein gewisser Überhang zum Ästhetischen gegenüber dem Begrifflichen vorzuliegen, doch bieten sie weitreichende Anknüpfungspunkte. Das Transzendental-symbolische ist jedenfalls ein Symbolisches, das die Genese seiner Symbolizität mit zur Erscheinung und damit ebenso zur *Erkenntnis* zu bringen bestrebt ist. Es operiert mit der stets mehr oder weniger gelingenden *Mitdarstellung* seiner eigenen Möglichkeitsbedingungen. Der künstlerischer Akt wird auf diese Weise ein Akt der *Ermöglichung* von Erfahrungswirklichkeit mitsamt der (stets fragmentarischen) Darstellung dieser Ermöglichungsleistung. Er ist in kantischer Sprache jener Akt, durch den die jeweilig individuelle Art und Weise des *Erscheinenkönnens* der Erscheinung selbst in der Erscheinung erscheint. So etwas heißt symbolische Konstruktion der transzendentalen Welt.

Lässt sich allerdings in diesem Kontext nicht ausdrücken, *wie* die hier beanspruchte Symbolwerdung der Welt durch Poesie möglich ist, bleiben wir weiterhin in Behauptungen und Forderungen stehen. Zum Eingang in diese komplexe Frage ist in Erinnerung zu rufen, mit welchem Verweis Schlegel sein längeres Fragment zur Transzendentalpoesie beginnt: sie sei eine Poesie, „deren eins und alles das Verhältnis des Idealen und des Realen ist“⁴⁵ sowie als Universalpoesie eine solche, die „zwischen dem Dargestellten und dem Darstellenden, frei von allem realen und idealen Interesse auf den Flügeln der poetischen Reflexion in der Mitte schweben, diese Reflexion immer wieder potenzieren und wie in einer endlosen Reihe von Spiegeln vervielfachen“⁴⁶ könne. Diese Formulierungen beinhalten zunächst die von Kant her angedeutete Transformation von Gegenständen zur Erscheinungen. Nun ist mit Blick auf das Verhältnis des Idealen und Realen zu klären, welcher Logik diese Transformation folgt.

a) Schematismus und Symbolwerdung

Kant führt zur näheren Erklärung der Logik jenes Verhältnisses einen zentralen und in der Kantforschung vieldiskutierten Begriff ein: das transzendente *Schema*.⁴⁷ Er bietet den Schlüssel zum Verständnis transzendentalpoetischer Symbolwirklichkeit.

⁴⁴ Klaus Vieweg (Hg.), *Friedrich Schlegel und Friedrich Nietzsche. Transzendentalpoesie oder Dichtkunst mit Begriffen*. Paderborn: Schöningh 2009, S. 10.

⁴⁵ Schlegel, „Athenaeums-Fragmente“, 238.

⁴⁶ a. a. O., 116.

⁴⁷ Das transzendente Schema tritt in der *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* erstmals als Konzept zur Lösung des Problems der Vermittlung von Sinnlichkeit und Verstand im Erkenntnisakt auf.

Nach Kant fungiert ein transzendentes Schema für das Erkenntnisvermögen als „Methode“, „einem Begriff sein Bild zu verschaffen“⁴⁸. Das Schema ist also weder Begriff noch Bild, weder Form noch Inhalt, weder Darstellen noch Dargestelltes, sondern die *Methode* ihrer Vermittlung. Es ist die sich mitdarstellende *Methode* der Darstellung des Dargestellten. In der Idee einer *Methode* sehen wir den Schlegel’schen Gedanken einer *Progressivität* der Poesie und in der Sprache Novalis’ denjenigen des *Organischen* auftreten. Nicht ein bestimmtes, festzuhaltendes Bild in einer bestimmten Gestalt, kein definierter Begriff oder Theoriebau ist das *Schema*, sondern die sich mitdarstellende Gestaltungstätigkeit selbst im Verlauf ihrer eigenen Ausführung, das Erscheinen des Erscheinens, die Poesie der Poesie. Es lässt sich daher überhaupt kein starres Schema der symbolischen Konstruktion von Wirklichkeit beschreiben. Seine dynamische Progressivität wird nur aus dem sich durchführenden Darstellungsprozess als dessen Verfahren gewonnen und kann nicht in einem einfachen Bild, einer einfachen Vorstellung oder einem definierten Terminus festgehalten werden. Wenn überhaupt, so kann man sagen, das Schema *leuchtet im Akt des Ausdruckes auf*, es ist *Phänomen* im ursprünglichen Sinne: Sich-Zeigendes. Waibel weist in diesem Kontext mit Recht auf den beständigen Versuch der Transzendentalpoesie hin, das Unsagbare zur Sprache zu bringen, ohne es in ein bloßes Konstatiertwerden umzufunktionieren.⁴⁹ Auch Urbich betont, dass bei Schlegel der Symbolbegriff „die Bedingungen und Ausschlüsse der symbolischen Leistungen indirekt offenlegt“.⁵⁰ Das Schema ist in dieser *Indirektheit* das oben in Schlegels Worten angedeutete frei in der Mitte Schwebende zwischen Dargestelltem und Darstellendem und hiermit der eigentliche und stets nur *indirekt* darstellbare Gegenstand der Transzendentalpoesie. Denn es ist das *poetische Verfahren*, das sich als Ermöglichungsbedingung der ausgedrückten Symbolwirklichkeit zeigt. Es ist der universal freie Grundlegungsakt, der sich in jeder Requalifikation der Wirklichkeit zum Symbolisch-Poetischen auf eine je genuine anschaulich-aufleuchtende Weise eines jeden Symbols wiederholt. Dies ist es, was Schlegel mit der poetischen Vermittlung des Idealen und Realen im Auge hat: die transzendental-schematische Erscheinung von Symbolizität in jedem Symbol.

Die Hauptfrage lautet, wie letzterer auf erstere angewendet werden könne. Das Schema fungiert dabei weder als sinnlich wahrnehmbarer Gegenstand noch als gedachter Begriff, sondern als zwischen beiden stehendes Vermittelndes. (vgl. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B 176ff.)

⁴⁸ Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B 179.

⁴⁹ Waibel, „Transzendentalpoesie im Kontext des Deutschen Idealismus“, S. 48ff.

⁵⁰ Urbich, „Friedrich Schlegels frühromantischer Symbolbegriff“, S. 119.

b) Schema und Sprache

Schlegels Rede vom „Schweben“ deutet nun von selbst bereits auf einen anderen einflussreichen nachkantischen Entwickler des transzendentalen Denkens hin, nämlich Fichte. Wo Kant von einem „Schema der Einbildungskraft“⁵¹ spricht, redet Fichte von einem produzierenden „Schweben der Einbildungskraft“⁵² in ganz ähnlicher Funktion. Ives Radrizzani hat mit Recht auf die philosophischen Hintergründe und Einflüsse hingewiesen, die Schlegel und Novalis in Fichtes *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* fanden und v.a. aus seiner „Auffassung des transzendentalen Denkens“ auf die „Ästhetik zu übertragen“ unternommen haben.⁵³ Radrizzani beerbt damit die umfassendere Bearbeitung dieser Beziehung, die davor schon von Roland Heine vorgelegt wurde und in der von Fichte her v.a. Novalis' Idee einer symbolischen Konstruktion als einer inmitten zwischen Ich und Nicht-Ich schwebenden Tätigkeit begriffen wird.⁵⁴ Christoph Asmuth hat in diesem Kontext gezeigt, wie v.a. Novalis dazu kommt, Fichtes Konzept der schwebenden Einbildungskraft mit einer „poetologischen Umdeutung“ zu versehen, die letztlich die „Poetisierung der Wissenschaft“ zum Ziele habe.⁵⁵

Über die *Wissenschaftslehre* hinaus äußert sich dieser Zusammenhang dort, wo Fichte die kantische Lehre vom transzendentalen Schematismus in seiner vergleichsweise wenig beachteten Schrift *Von der Sprachfähigkeit und dem Ursprung der Sprache* mit dem Sprechakt zusammendenkt. Aus Sicht der romantischen Poesie formuliert er darin schon einige Jahre vor Schlegel und Novalis so etwas wie ein Manifest des Transzendentalpoetischen:

Es mußten also auch Zeichen für jene Vorstellungen aufgefunden werden. Diese Zeichen finden sich, bei übersinnlichen Ideen aus einem in der Seele des Menschen liegenden Grunde, sehr leicht. Es giebt nämlich in uns eine Vereinigung sinnlicher und geistiger Vorstellungen durch die Schemate, welche von der Einbildungskraft hervorgebracht werden. Von diesen Schematen wurden Bezeichnungen für geistige

⁵¹ Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, B 180.

⁵² Fichte, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*, S. 155ff. (GA I 233ff.).

⁵³ Ives Radrizzani, „Zur Geschichte der romantischen Ästhetik. Von Fichtes Transzendentalphilosophie zu Schlegels Transzendentalpoesie“, *Fichte-Studien* 12, hg. v. K. Hammacher, R. Schottky, W. H. Schrader. Amsterdam, Atlanta: Rodopi 1997, S. 181.

⁵⁴ Roland Heine, *Transzendentalpoesie. Studien zu Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis und E. T. A. Hoffmann*. Bonn: Bouvier 1974, dort besonders: S. 42-92.

⁵⁵ Christoph Asmuth, „Das Schweben ist der Quell aller Realität – Platner, Fichte, Schlegel und Novalis über die produktive Einbildungskraft“. In: *System und Kontext. Frühromantische und frühidealistische Konstellationen*, hg. v. Rolf Ahlers. Lewiston, Queenston, Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press 2004, S. 366f.

Begriffe entlehnt. Nämlich das Zeichen das der sinnliche Gegenstand, von welchem das Schema hergenommen wurde, in der Sprache schon hatte, wurde auf den übersinnlichen Begriff selbst übertragen. Diesem Zeichen lag nun freilich eine Täuschung zum Grunde, aber durch dieselbe Täuschung wurde es auch verstanden, weil bei dem andern, welchem der geistige Begriff mitgeteilt wurde, an dem gleichen Schema auch der gleiche Gedanke hieng. — So muß, um ein recht auffallendes Beispiel zu geben, die Seele, das Ich, als unkörperlich gedacht werden, in so fern es der Körperwelt entgegengesetzt ist. Wenn es aber vorgestellt werden soll, so muß es außer uns gesetzt, folglich unter die Gesetze, nach welchen Gegenstände außer uns vorgestellt werden, unter die Formen der Sinnlichkeit gebracht, und mithin im Raume vorgestellt werden. Hier ist ein offener Widerstreit des Ich mit sich selbst: die Vernunft will, daß das Ich als unkörperlich vorgestellt werde, und die Einbildungskraft will, daß es nur als den Raum erfüllend, als körperlich erscheine. Diesen Widerspruch sucht der menschliche Geist dadurch zu heben, daß er etwas, als Substrat des Ich, annimmt, das er allem, was er als grobkörperlich kennt, entgegensetzt. Also wird der Mensch, wenn er noch gewohnt ist, Materialien zu seinen Vorstellungen vorzüglich durch den Sinn des Gesichts zu erhalten, zu einer Vorstellung des Ich, einen solchen Stoff wählen, der nicht in die Augen fällt, den er aber sonst wohl spürt, z. B. die Lust, und wird die Seele Spiritus nennen.⁵⁶

Die poetische Vermittlung des Idealen und Realen kommt hier unter den Namen des sinnlichen Gegenstandes und des übersinnlichen Begriffes zum Ausdruck. Ins Verhältnis werden beide wiederum durch das Konzept des *Zeichens* gesetzt und stehen damit in innigem Zusammenhang mit Novalis' Idee einer „symbolischen Konstruktion“.⁵⁷ Heine denkt auf dieser Basis v.a. die „Symbolsprache“ in Novalis' Fichte-Rezeption als das Vehikel der ganzen Transzendentalpoesie.⁵⁸ Frischmann hat überdies den Einfluss der Fichte'schen Theorie der Einbildungskraft als Vermittlerin des Idealen und Realen auf Schlegels Konzeption ausgewiesen. Schlegel betone darin, so Frischmann, ein „organisches Verständnis des Ideals“, das nicht bloß eine Sammlung voller „Fantome“ sei, sondern das im Vermittlungspunkt von

⁵⁶ Fichte, „Von der Sprachfähigkeit und dem Ursprung der Sprache“, *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft deutscher Gelehrten* 1, Nr. 4 (1795), S. 299f. (GA VIII, 322f.).

⁵⁷ Überhaupt stellt die Rede von der Vermittlung des Idealen und Realen bei Fichte und ebenso schon beim frühen Schelling ein zentrales philosophisches Kernproblem dar. Vgl. Fichte, *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre*. Hamburg: Meiner 1997 [EA 1794]), §8, II; Schelling, *Vom Ich als Prinzip der Philosophie*. Leipzig: Fritz Eckardt [EA 1795], §15.

⁵⁸ Heine, *Transzendentalpoesie*, S. 75ff.

„Einzelheit und Allgemeinheit“, den auch wir betonen, seine Realität gerade als „deutungsoffen“ (für uns: fragmentarisch) beibehalten könne.⁵⁹

Aber nicht nur sprachliche Ausdrücke wie „transzendental“, „Ideales“, „Reales“, „Einbildungskraft“ oder „Schweben“ spiegeln das Gepräge etwa eines Kant, Fichte oder, worauf Ulrichs hinweist,⁶⁰ Gedanken des *Ältesten Systemprogrammes des Deutschen Idealismus* im Konzept der Transzendentalpoesie. Von Fichte her wird vielmehr in der zitierten Stelle die *Logik* des transzendentalen Symbolaktes *poetisch* denkbar. Fichte spricht nämlich davon, dass die Sprache aus ihren stets zunächst der Sinneserfahrung nachempfundenen Zeichen Schritt für Schritt die Symbolisierung für das Nichtsinnliche gewinnt. Diesen Übergang nennt er von Kant her *Schemate*. Sie sind ein Verfahren der Vereinigung des Idealen und Realen durch die poetische Funktion des in diesem Verfahren entstehenden *Zeichens*. Schritt für Schritt findet in solch einem progressiven Prozess die Konstruktion der Symbolfunktion der Sprachzeichen und mit ihr die transzendente Konstruktion der symbolischen Welt im Ganzen statt. Im Sinne einer solchen Progression darf einmal mehr auch eine Parallele zu Cassirer gezogen sein, der ebenso von einer Progressivität selbstständiger Symbolindividuationen ausgeht.⁶¹

Nun bleibt aber noch die Frage übrig, auf welche Weise nicht nur die Symbole entstehen, sondern umgekehrt unsere Erkenntnisart der Welt durch diese gewonnen Symbole ermöglicht wird. Diese Frage ist gleichbedeutend mit derjenigen, ob die Transzendentalpoesie ihren eigenen poetischen Akt *zur Erscheinung bringen* könne und sich somit tatsächlich als Poesie ihrer eigenen Poesie erweise.

In der Ausdrucksweise Fichtes ist nun die zentrale Operation, mit der eine transzendentalschematische Symbolsprache verfährt, die *Täuschung*. Was er Täuschung nennt, ist kein bloßes Falsum, sondern beinhaltet den affirmativen Akt der Requalifikation der Welt zu einer Welt der Zeichen. Aus Schlegel'scher Sicht wird die Welt hierdurch überhaupt als eine poetische Welt zugänglich. Wie ist diese transzendente Täuschung ins Symbolische hinein zu verstehen? Der im Symbol liegende Schematismus ermöglicht als *Vermittlungsverfahren von Idealität und Realität* eine Konfrontation mit potenziell mehr oder weniger *angemessenen Ausdrücken*. In anderen Worten

⁵⁹ Frischmann, *Vom transzendentalen zum frühromantischen Idealismus*, S. 205.

⁶⁰ Ulrichs, *Die andere Vernunft*. Berlin: Akademie Verlag 2011, S. 262ff.

⁶¹ Vgl. Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen. Erster Teil: Die Sprache*, S. 23, wo Cassirer darauf hinweist, die Symbolgebung sei als je „frei entworfene[s] Zeichen“ der Ort, an dem der Geist „zugleich sich selbst und die eigene Gesetzlichkeit seines Bildens erfaßt.“ Deshalb müsse die „Leistung jeder einzelnen [symbolischen Form] an ihr selbst, nicht an Maßstäben und Forderungen irgendeiner anderen gemessen werden.“ (a. a. O., S. 22).

werden wir durch die transzendentalschematisierende Requalifikation von Wirklichkeit zu Symbolen gewahrt, dass diese Symbole adäquater oder inadäquater zur Darstellung ihres eigenen Requalifikationsverfahrens taugen. Sie können in anderen Worten: *täuschen*. Wir bemerken also unsere jeweilige potenzielle *Getäuschtheit*, indem die Erfahrung der Authentizität und Gelungenheit des Symbolaktes, d.h. des poetischen Fundierungsaktes, auftritt. *Indem* wir wissen, dass unsere Symbole stets mehr oder weniger unangemessen bleiben und ihren eigenen Akt nie vollständig zum Ausdruck bringen, erhält die Welt erst ihren *progressiv* poetischen Symbolisierungsaufwurf. Erfahrung wird hierdurch zur romantischen Erfahrung in Schlegels Sinne. Denn sie gewinnt denjenigen *progressiven* Charakter, in den sie durch den stets wirklichkeitsfundierenden Täuschungsakt ihrer Schemate hineingeführt wird.

Symbolische Konstruktionen (Novalis) bzw. schematische Zeichen (Fichte) ermöglichen und fundieren durch die Logik ihrer eigenen zur Erscheinung gebrachten *Unangemessenheit* überhaupt das Bedürfnis, Erfahrung zu symbolisieren und stets weiter symbolisch zum Ausdruck zu bringen. Sie fassen die poetische Offenheit unserer Erfahrungswirklichkeit als notwendiges Prinzip der Wirklichkeitsgestaltung. Keine Wirklichkeit kann mehr als bloß definitiv gegebene gefasst werden. Eine solche Wirklichkeitsauffassung wäre *unpoetisch* zu nennen. Denn sie operiert abseits von jener progressiven Täuschungshandlung mit dem Zugang schlichter Faktizität ohne Transzendentalität, d.h. mit starrer Vergegenständlichung. Täuschung ist solch einer Erfahrung dann nur mehr ein Auszuschließendes anstatt, wie der Transzendentalpoesie, ein Möglichkeitsbedingendes. Letztere requalifiziert demgegenüber die Welt zu einer symbolischen Welt, mit der sodann organisch und progressiv umgegangen werden kann. Hierin manifestiert sich zuletzt auch diejenige Handlungsfreiheit, die aus dem Blick der Fragmente Schlegels oder Novalis' eine *poetische* Freiheit genannt werden kann. Deren transzendentale Einbeziehung von Unangemessenheit als Ermöglichungshandlung von schematischer Symbolerfahrung stellt also das „Produzierende mit dem Produkt“⁶² dar. Die Lehre vom transzendentalen Schematismus ist mithin schon von Kant, mehr aber noch von Fichte her, ein Schlüssel zum logischen Verständnis der Anliegen einer Transzendentalpoesie.⁶³

⁶² Schlegel, „Athenaeums-Fragmente“, 238.

⁶³ Die Lehre vom kantischen Schematismus in einer transzendentalen Sprachphilosophie zu positionieren, ist übrigens nicht allein ein Phänomen bei Fichte. Prominent tun dies etwa auch Herder (vgl. *Metakritik zur Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. Hamburg: Meiner 2022, S. 112ff.), Reinhold (vgl. *Das menschliche Erkenntnisvermögen, aus Dem Gesichtspunkte des durch die Wortsprache vermittelten Zusammenhangs zwischen der Sinnlichkeit und dem Denkvermögen*,

Was Kant und Fichte philosophisch das Schema nennen hat seine Analogie in demjenigen, was Schlegel oder Novalis das *Fragment* nennen. Denn das Fragment zeigt sich als der poetische Ausdrucksversuch, das transzendente Schema *als Schema* zur Darstellung zu bringen. Es soll als ein stets nur indirekt darstellbares Phänomen gerade durch die fragmentierte Form sowohl *aufleuchten* und *durchscheinen* können als auch aus täuschender Unangemessenheit zur weiteren Poetisierung provozieren.

Zur näheren Erläuterung dieser Überlegung können zunächst Fichtes eigene poetische Beispiele dienen. Er greift etwa die Erkenntnisfunktionen der Raumwahrnehmung und der ihr entnommenen Vorstellung eines Innen und Außen als eine transzendente Täuschung auf, an deren Hand die poetische Rede über so etwas wie eine Seele entstehen kann. Die Seele ist nicht tatsächlich *innen* oder *außen*. Solche Täuschungspoeme dienen aber der Einbildungskraft zur indirekten Darstellung ihrer Schematisierungsleistung. *Transzendental* wird diese Poesie sodann dort, wo sich eben dieser schematische Täuschungscharakter mit ausdrückt und derart die Zeichenoperation der Sprachhandlung selbst mit dargestellt wird. Es muss also, so Fichte an oben zitierter Stelle reichlich ironisch: „durch die Täuschung verstanden werden“. Dies geschieht transzendentalpoetisch darin, dass *die Täuschung* verstanden und sodann mit ihr progressiv symbolisch umgegangen wird.

Auf solch eine Weise wird, wiederum mit Schlegels Worten, die Erfahrung „in jeder ihrer Darstellungen sich selbst mit darstellen“⁶⁴ und, in Novalis' Ausdrucksweise, zum *Symbol* werden.⁶⁵ Die Transzendentalpoesie stellt diejenige Poetisierung der Welt dar, die letztlich alles Transzendente überhaupt als eine poetische Symbolhandlung erfasst. Diese Handlung provoziert sich durch die Einbeziehung ihres eigenen stets unvollkommenen Täuschungscharakters in die unablässige Aufforderung ihrer weiteren möglichst angemessenen Symbolisierung, d.h. *Poetisierung*, hinein. Wojciech Hamerski hebt den progressiven Charakter solch einer „eternal incompleteness of the ‚romantic kind of poetry“⁶⁶ hervor und spricht deshalb mit Recht von

untersucht und beschrieben. Kiel: Akademische Buchhandlung 1816, S. 3ff.) oder Schleiermacher (vgl. *Hermeneutik und Kritik*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1977, S. 460).

⁶⁴ Schlegel, „Athenaeums-Fragmente“, 238.

⁶⁵ Hierin scheint übrigens auch der ganze erkenntniskritische Zug der kantischen Transzendentalphilosophie in seinem *poetischen Gewande* auf, indem erst die Symbolwerdung der Erfahrungswirklichkeit so etwas wie eine Grenzziehung des Erkenntnisvermögens im Rahmen dieser Symbolhaftigkeit – etwa einer Rede von der Seele – ermöglicht.

⁶⁶ Wojciech Hamerski, „The Poetical Poetics of Friedrich Schlegel“, *Forum of Poetics* 3, (2016), S. 6.

„fragmentary poetics of impossible poetry“.⁶⁷ Diese *unmögliche Poesie* findet aber in der aufgegriffenen und affirmierten Unmöglichkeit erst ihr Potenzial.

Wollte man von Fichtes Beispiel aus weitere Beispiele für die affirmierte Schema-Getäuschtheit anführen, so kann man transzendente Poesie bis in unsere Poeme für Erkenntnishandlungen verfolgen. Was meint etwa die deutsche Sprache, wenn sie von einem *Verstehen, Vernehmen, Erfassen, Begreifen, Anschauen, Wahrnehmen, Erfahren* und so fort redet? Sie entnimmt auch derlei Begriffe zunächst solchen Handlungen, die einer sinnlichen, ja körperlichen, Realität zu entstammen scheinen, idealisiert sie aber zu Symbolformen, deren transzendente Dimension genau dann aufscheint, wenn der Täuschungscharakter solcher Begriffe mit eingeräumt und dargestellt wird. Es erscheint dann, dass ein Begreifen nicht wirklich ein *Greifen*, ein Verstehen nicht wirklich ein *Stehen* oder ein Vernehmen nicht wirklich ein *Nehmen* im körperlichen Sinne ist, diese Schemate aber dazu dienen, das in ihnen nur symbolisierbare *Verfahren* selbst symbolisch auszudrücken. Auch unsere eigene Rede vom *Einräumen* und *Darstellen* bildet hierin – ebenso wie das Wort *bilden* – selbst solche sinnlichen Schemate zur progressiven Täuschung in ihre Symbolpoesie hinein. Was ist das für ein *Raum*, der *einräumt*, für ein *Stellen*, das *darstellt*? Sie sind schematische Verfahrensanweisungen, symbolisch zu agieren und diese Symbolhaftigkeit darin mit auszudrücken, dass sie sich als *unangemessene Täuschungen* zeigen, von denen her die Wirklichkeit *angemessener* ausgedrückt zu werden hat. Wenn also das Wort *transzendental* die Bedeutung von *erfahrungsermöglichend* hat, so ist die Transzendentalpoesie die Ermöglichung einer je angemesseneren Ausdrucks- und Darstellungsweise von Wirklichkeit, die ihr eigenes Ausdrücken- und Darstellenskönnen mitinkludiert.

Die hier exemplarisch bedachte progressive Poetisierung von sprachlichen Erkenntnisausdrücken stellt freilich nur ein Beispiel für die symbolische Konstruktion der transzendentalen Welt dar. Poesie reicht als *Universalpoesie* überall hin, wenn sie transzendente Form erhält. Sie bildet nicht mehr nur eine bestimmte Kunstform unter anderen, sondern fasst alles Erscheinende als potenziell schemato-poetisches Fragment auf. Sie konstruiert auf diese Weise mit universalem Gestus die vielfältigen täuschenden Schemate. Von deren je einbezogener Unangemessenheit und Täuschung wird dabei zugleich der *Imperativ* zu weiterer Symbolisierung und weiteren poetischen Gestaltungsformen vernommen.

Die Logik in der Transzendentalpoesie bietet daher nicht nur eine Vermittlung von Idealität und Realität, sondern auch von Universalität und

⁶⁷ a. a. O., S. 8.

Individuation an. Der Begriff *Vermittlung* weist dabei stets auf die schematische Form eines *Verfahrens* hin. Transzendentalpoetische Symbole sind Handlungen und Verfahren, nicht gegebene und bloß äußerlich beschreibbare Gegenstände, Termini oder Rezepte. Hierin liegt ihre organische Progressivität, d.h. ihre in transzendentaler Täuschung fundierte Offenheit und Freiheit, deren Ausdruck sich in der universellen Fragmentierung der Wirklichkeit darstellt. Das Wirkliche je als Fragment zu Erkennen und auszudrücken, wäre die poetisch adäquate Form des transzendentalen Schematismus. Solche Fragmente erlangen dadurch aber umgekehrt selbst eine plurale Form, sodass aus poetischer Sicht etwa auch Werke wie die *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* oder die *Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre* als symbolprovozierende Fragmente gewonnen werden können.⁶⁸ Von hier aus erlangt sich sodann eine Philosophie des poetischen Fragmentierens als eine Kernaufgabe der transzendentalen Logik.

5. Die Folgen: Interpersonalität der Transzendentalpoesie

Die im vorliegenden Text vor allem von Kant und Fichte her rekonstruierte Logik der Transzendentalpoesie wirkt sich in einem weiteren Schritt ebenso sehr auf die *Werke* wie auf interpersonale bzw. intersubjektive Beziehungen der *Poet:innen* aus. Sie ist im nicht-trivialen Sinne eine *zwischenmenschliche Poesie*, welche nun skizziert werden soll.

Die Forderung, mit der auch alle Fragmente zur Transzendentalpoesie selbst beseelt sind und die deshalb insgesamt das stets offene Fragmentarische des Transzendentalpoetischen kennzeichnen, enthält immerdar ein *Sollen*. Durch Einbeziehung schematischer Täuschung wird nämlich zugleich dargestellt, dass die je progressiv angemessenere Darstellung ein *Gesolltes* aller Poet:innen ist. Es *soll* angemessen symbolisch poetisiert und wegen der schematischen Indirektheit je weiter poetisiert werden. Transzendentalpoesie beinhaltet als Poesie der Poesie daher immerzu *Imperative*.

Dem entspricht erstens in ihren Werken wiederum ihre *fragmentarische Gestalt*, insofern das Fragment der vermittelnde Ausdruck ihrer Progressivität und Imperativität ist. Denn das Fragment ruft und fordert durch seinen un abgeschlossenen Charakter plural und organisch auf, weiter zu

⁶⁸ Dies korrespondiert dem Ansatz, den Schelling im *System des transzendentalen Idealismus* aufwirft, an dessen Ende als Gipfelpunkt der Vermittlung des Idealen und Realen das Kunstprodukt als ein Endliches steht, an dem zugleich das Unendliche, ein Freiheitsprodukt, an dem zugleich die Natur zur Erscheinung kommt. (vgl. Schelling, *System des transzendentalen Idealismus*. Hamburg: Meiner 2000 [EA 1800], S. 283ff. OA 452ff.). Philosophische Werke geraten auf diese Weise selbst in die Frage, ob sie nicht vielmehr transzendente Poeme anstatt formale Traktate sind.

fragmentieren, zu komplettieren, zu korrigieren, zu innovieren, zu reduzieren und so fort. An diesem Prozess nimmt mithin nicht zuletzt der vorliegende Text teil und erweist sich deshalb ebenso als transzendentalpoetisches Fragment. Schlegel führt diese Poesie deshalb mit Rückgriff auf das *Sollen* als etwas ein, das nicht nur selbst sein „sollte“,⁶⁹ sondern dem „alles poetisiert werden soll“ – und zwar „keineswegs als Absicht der Künstler, sondern als historische Tendenz der Werke“⁷⁰ selbst. Der imperativische Charakter gehört objektiv dem Werk an, nicht nur einer subjektiven Forderung – das hat die logische Fundierung im letzten Punkt nachdrücklich darstellen sollen. Farida Israpova weist in diesem Kontext mit Recht darauf hin, das Historische des Werkes im Sinne Schlegels sei als „genetisch“ zu verstehen und betreffe die Mitdarstellung seiner Entstehung, nicht etwa sein Vorhandensein als zufälliges geschichtliches Resultat.⁷¹ Jeder Erfahrungsinhalt wird potenziell Kunstwerk, indem er einsichtig macht, dass er selbst die Forderungen nach transzendentaler Darstellung seiner genetischen Verwirklichung ist. Das heißt es, dass es „nur Eine Poesie geben solle“⁷² und dass „alle Poesie romantisch sein soll“.⁷³

Doch dass das Werk selbst der Imperativ zu einer transzendentalen Gestaltung von Erfahrungswirklichkeit ist, schlägt zweitens auch auf die Schaffenden zurück. *Schaffend* ist dabei zunächst jeder Mensch in genau demjenigen Maße, das ihn die Vermittlung des Idealen und des Realen durch den Schematismus des sich darstellenden Darstellens durchführen lässt. Ein jedes Tun ist mithin bis zu seinem je genuinen Grade ein poetisches Tun, insofern es seine Poesie auf transzendente Weise mitdarstellt. Die Welt ist voll von vielfältigen transzendentalen Poesien, die miteinander im progressiven und organischen Verhältnis der Universalpoesie stehen. Hierdurch handelt jeder Mensch poetisch, insoweit er Symbolschaffender in einer transzendentalen Welt ist und jedwedes Handeln mehr oder weniger sich und sein eigenes Sichdarstellen zu schematisieren in den Stand gerät. Novalis setzt angesichts dieser in die eigene Selbstreferenz des Schaffenden reichenden Poesie der Poesie mit dem Begriff des *Genies* hinzu: „Ohne Genialität existierten wir alle überhaupt nicht. Genie ist zu allem nötig. Was

⁶⁹ Schlegel, „Athenaeums-Fragmente“, 238.

⁷⁰ a. a. O., 239.

⁷¹ Farida Israpova, „Die Transzendentalpoesie Friedrich Schlegels und die Poetik der künstlerischen Modalität“. In: *Die russische Schule der Historischen Poetik*, hg. v. D. Kemper et al. Paderborn: Fink 2013, S. 252.

⁷² Schlegel, „Athenaeums-Fragmente“, 239.

⁷³ a. a. O., 116.

man aber gewöhnlich Genie nennt, ist Genie des Genies.“⁷⁴ Die Schaffenden beziehen sich in freier transzendentaler Konstruktion auf ihr eigenes Schaffen, das sie nicht etwa aus Rezept- und Regelbüchern gewinnen, sondern dem sie ihre Selbstgenese aufprägen und demgemäß selbst zu dem Gesetz werden, das sich geistig allem aufprägt. Frischmann sagt daher zurecht, diese „Poesie“ mache „ihren Dichtungscharakter mit den Möglichkeiten der Dichtung selbst deutlich“ und könne nicht aus einer „allgemeine[n] Ästhetik und Literaturtheorie“ abgeleitet werden.⁷⁵ Das Genie ist nicht eine bestimmte poetische Form, sondern alles Poetisieren ist eines von Genie, nämlich ein solches, das sich die Welt zur Angelegenheit von Symbolisierung, Organik und Progressivität macht.

Gleich den transzendental offenen, fragmentierten Symbolhandlungen requalifizieren sich auch die Handelnden selbst zu aufeinander Bezogenen. Sie werden hierdurch „die Poesie lebendig und gesellig“ und „das Leben und die Gesellschaft poetisch machen“.⁷⁶ Diese Poesie „ist der höchsten und der allseitigsten Bildung fähig; nicht bloß von innen heraus, sondern auch von außen hinein; indem sie jedem, was ein Ganzes in ihren Produkten sein soll, alle Teile ähnlich organisiert, wodurch ihr die Aussicht auf eine grenzenlos wachsende Klassizität eröffnet wird.“⁷⁷ Sie sei daher nicht nur Philosophie, sondern auch „Gesellschaft, Umgang, Freundschaft und Liebe im Leben“.⁷⁸ Die ganze Welt transzendental zu poetisieren, holt den oben beschriebenen Imperativ des Fragments in die Menschen und deren Umgang selbst hinein. Romantische Poesie ist nicht nur eine Frage von Werken. Ihr wird der Mensch in seinem Tun selbst zu einem und *dem* transzendentalen Werk. Denn er stellt sich als ein *Fragment* dar, das um seinen ihm angemessenen Ausdruck bemüht ist. Ein jeder wird hierdurch Geselle eines Gesellen und alle bedürfen wiederum fragmentarisch des je anderen, um sich progressiv und organisch weiter zu gestalten, zu entwickeln und auszulegen. Solch eine „Dezentrierung der Subjektivität“, die Silvio Vietta bei Schlegel betont,⁷⁹ greift sozialpoetisch um sich. Die Poesie wird zugleich *Ethik*, weshalb sie ebenso sehr „durch keine Theorie erschöpft werden“⁸⁰ kann, sondern

⁷⁴ Novalis, „Athenaeums-Fragmente“, 283. (Dieses Fragment wurde von Novalis beigetragen.)

⁷⁵ Frischmann, *Vom transzendentalen zum frühromantischen Idealismus*, S. 311.

⁷⁶ Schlegel, „Athenaeums-Fragmente“, 116.

⁷⁷ Ebd.

⁷⁸ Ebd.

⁷⁹ Silvio Vietta, „Transzendente Texttheorie und Dezentrierung der Subjektivität bei Schlegel und Nietzsche“. In: *Friedrich Schlegel und Friedrich Nietzsche. Transzendentalpoesie oder Dichtkunst in Begriffen*, hg. v. K. Vieweg. Paderborn, München, Wien, Zürich: Schöningh 2009, S. 13–25.

⁸⁰ Schlegel, „Athenaeums-Fragmente“, 116.

jederzeit *Handlung* bleibt und als Poet:in „kein Gesetz über sich leide“ als das, „allein frei“ zu sein.⁸¹ Wenn Novalis daher davon spricht, es sei der höchste Akt, sich selbst zu überspringen,⁸² so liegt diese Selbsttranszendenz in der eigenen transzendentalpoetischen Fassung als Symbolhandlung verborgen. Durch sie erreicht sich der Mensch als ein poetisches Fragment, das in ständiger Aufforderung und Interaktion mit anderen poetischen Fragmenten steht und solch eine Wechselwirkung als seine notwendige Möglichkeitsbedingung erkennt.

Diese Erkenntnis liegt aber in einer Revolution der ganzen Wirklichkeit, die man eine Revolution zur *Freiheit* nennen könnte. Dadurch revolutioniert sich aber nicht nur das Wirkliche, sondern auch das Wirkende – der poetische Mensch. Sein Tun wird eine Angelegenheit von Verantwortung, intersubjektiver Reflexion, fragmentarischen Angeboten und Auseinandersetzungen in unterschiedlichsten Formen.⁸³ Wer sich im Umgang mit den transzendentalen Möglichkeitsbedingungen seines eigenen Handelns als selbstreferenzieller Poet begreift und hierdurch die Welt als eine für ihn symbolisch auffordernde gewinnt, erfährt an sich selbst den Imperativ, dies Symbolische weiter zu erkunden, zu entwickeln und darzustellen. Ein solcher Imperativ kann, wenn er transzendental sein können soll, in Kants Worten nur ein *kategorischer* sein. Ein kategorischer Imperativ ist aber stets ein solcher, dem es im Sinne einer Universalpoesie um die Organik des Ganzen zu tun ist, welches er in seinem eigenen fragmentarischen Tun widergespiegelt sieht – weshalb es übrigens sein mag, dass die Spiegel- und Widerspiegelungsmetapher mehrfach in Schlegels Ausführungen zur Poesie auftritt.⁸⁴

Den Umgang mit der Wirklichkeit also zum poetischen Symbolhandeln zu revolutionieren, heißt zugleich, sie zur Angelegenheit eines kategorischen Imperativs der transzendentalen Geselligkeit zu erheben. Die hieraus entstehende poetische Intersubjektivität drückt dann eine Möglichkeitsbedingung der Wirklichkeit selbst aus. Wie wir miteinander handeln, ist mithin wiederum nichts als die Darstellung dessen, was wir sind. Auf diese Art gewinnt die transzendente Rede von einer Darstellung des Darstellens im poetischen Akt ihre zugleich ethische und fortan interpersonale Dimension. Das Handeln selbst ist transzendentalpoetischer Ausdruck seiner der durch es geforderten Wirklichkeit. Diese Wirklichkeit wird auf solch eine

⁸¹ Ebd.

⁸² Novalis, *Gesammelte Werke*, Bd. 3, S. 53.

⁸³ Schlegel gibt etwa auch „Witz“ und „Humor“ als solche Formen an. („Athenaeums-Fragmente“, 116)

⁸⁴ a. a. O., 116, 238.

Weise Gegenstand umfassender wechselseitiger Verantwortung. Moralische, soziale und künstlerischer Akte geraten in genau diejenige progressive Universalität, von der die romantische Poesie spricht und die nur als eine zugleich *transzendente* Poesie möglich wird. All dies wurzelt im Potenzial einer schematisierenden Requalifizierung der Wirklichkeit zum poetischen Symbol, auf dessen Basis sie überhaupt ermöglicht anstatt bloß beschrieben oder abgebildet wird.

Von hier aus nötigt sich eine romantische Transzendentalpoesie ebenso ihre Rolle als *Pädagogik* ab. Denn sie ist Angelegenheit einer „allseitigsten Bildung“⁸⁵ schaffender Menschen. Diese Bildung beginnt aber dort, wo Menschen einander überhaupt dazu befähigen, sich als Symbolhandelnde einer durch sie anhand von *Darstellung* mitbedingten und -ermöglichten Wirklichkeit zu begreifen. Eine derartige pädagogische Leistung wäre ebenso die Aufgabe der Transzendentalpoet:innen, die sich selbst als unablässig „im Werden“ und „nie vollendet“⁸⁶ betrachten, d.h. eben als *fragmentiert*. Sie agieren als Pädagog:innen nicht schulmeisterlich, sondern *durch Poesie* auffordernd, einladend, gesellig und achtsam. Denn der Bildungsbegriff einer Transzendentalpoesie muss auf ihrem vielfältigen Darstellungshandeln aufbauen und auf diese Weise immerdar berücksichtigen, dass einem jeden Menschen auf seinem bestimmten Standpunkte poetisch begegnet werden muss. Die Selbstreferenzialität der Symbolhandlungen trägt auch zwischenmenschlich je das individuelle und freie Gepräge des Handelnden selbst. Sie kann nicht umgebogen, sondern will zu transzendentaler Poesie herangeführt sein. Deren Pädagogik muss also, wegen des stets werdenden und fragmentarischen Charakters aller Poet:innen, eine Individualpädagogik sein. Dies schließe *vice versa* auf die organisch wachsende Geselligkeit unter sich und einander mehr und mehr als Schaffende erachtenden Menschen zurück, die ihre transzendente Verantwortung für die Wirklichkeit erkennen, an- und ernstnehmen.

Hierin wurzelt sodann auch Schlegels Idee einer *Symphilosophie*, die zugleich interpersonale *Sympoesie* zu sein hat: „Vielleicht würde eine ganz neue Epoche der Wissenschaften und Künste beginnen, wenn die Symphilosophie und Sympoesie so allgemein und so innig würde, daß es nichts Seltnes mehr wäre, wenn mehre sich gegenseitig ergänzende Naturen gemeinschaftliche Werke bildeten.“⁸⁷ Entscheidend ist der hier eingeführte Begriff der *Ergänzung*, der nochmals den fragmentarischen Charakter von einander sympoetisch auffordernden und einladenden Naturen markiert.

⁸⁵ a. a. O., 116.

⁸⁶ Ebd.

⁸⁷ a. a. O., 125.

Das Gesellige hat dergestalt eine transzendente Prinzipienfunktion, deren allgemeine Berücksichtigung nicht eine nachträgliche Hinzufügung zum Weltpoetisieren ist, sondern die geradezu der *Logik* dieses Poetisierens als notwendige Bedingung angehört. „Alle Menschen werden Brüder“,⁸⁸ ist der Wahlspruch der Transzendentalpoesie. Sie ist, so Frischmann, wesentlich der Idee der freien „Akzeptanz einer pluralen geistigen Kultur, deren Werke je für sich sinn- und gehaltvolle Schöpfungen darstellen“ gewidmet, „die nicht mehr an ein übergreifendes Ideal einer allgemein-verbindlichen Ästhetik gebunden sind“.⁸⁹ Aus dieser Hinsicht ist zwar der Warnung Stefan Matuscheks rechtzugeben, dass die transzendentalpoetische Überformung politischer Realität auf Ideale hin zu gefährlichen Ideen einer politischen „Heilserwartung“ führen kann,⁹⁰ aber nur wenn sie missverstanden wird. Denn Transzendentalpoesie bleibt stets fragmentarisch-beweglich und verfängt sich nicht im Ideal von starrer Vervollständigung. Sie gewinnt vielmehr im Umgehenlernen mit dem eigenen Symbolisierungspotenzial als transzendente Akt der Realitätsgenerierung zugleich den Handlungsspielraum der jeweiligen Verbrüderung. Diesen Spielraum frei zu erkunden, zu entwickeln und zu evaluieren, ist der gemeinsame Imperativ, den das Poetische an alle Menschen ausspricht, die fortwährend als Schaffende begriffen werden.

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⁸⁸ Friedrich Schiller, *Ode an die Freude*, 1808, 1. Strophe.

⁸⁹ Frischmann, *Vom transzendentalen zum frühromantischen Idealismus*, S. 313.

⁹⁰ Stefan Matuschek, „Poesie und Prosa der Europa-Idee. Novalis’ *Die Christenheit oder Europa* und seine modernen Leser“. In: *Schönheit, welche nach Wahrheit dürstet*, hg. v. G. Kaiser, H. Macher. Heidelberg: Winter 2003, S. 181ff.

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Symphilosophie

International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism

The Matter of Freedom

Schiller on Sacrificial Rationality and the Emancipatory Potential of Art

Cæcilie Varslev-Pedersen^{*}

ABSTRACT

This article examines Friedrich Schiller's view of freedom associated with artistic creation and practice. First, I show that when Schiller attempts to understand the violent outcome of the French Revolution, he finds that modern reason has performed a 'sacrifice of the natural,' i.e., it has sacrificed sensuous materiality, need, desire, feeling, and imagination for the sake of progress of civilization. I argue that Schiller's conception of freedom in artistic creation ought to be understood as a realm beyond the violent 'sacrifice of the natural,' since art is able to vindicate sensuous and material nature by making it appear dignified, and that paying attention to the language of sacrifice allows us to see how his conception of freedom is significantly different from that of Kant. Finally, I discuss how art can institute real political freedom if artistic creation produces nothing but semblance.

Keywords: Schiller, sacrifice, aesthetic semblance, freedom, nature

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieser Aufsatz behandelt Friedrich Schillers Idee der Freiheit im Zusammenhang mit künstlerischer Schöpfung und Praxis. Es soll gezeigt werden, dass Schiller in seinem Versuch, die blutigen Errungenschaften der Französischen Revolution zu verstehen, zu der Erkenntnis kommt, dass die moderne Vernunft ein „Opfer des Natürlichen“ beigebracht habe, d. h. ein Opfer des Materiellen, des Bedarfs, des Gefühls und der Imagination, mit dem Ziel eines Fortschritts der Zivilisation. Dabei soll die These vertreten werden, dass Schillers Begriff der Freiheit der künstlerischen Schöpfung als eine Sphäre jenseits des gewalttätigen „Opfers des Natürlichen“ verstanden werden muss, weil die Kunst die sinnliche und materielle Natur zu rehabilitieren vermag, indem sie diese als erhaben darstellt. Weiter wird gezeigt, dass die Sprache des Opfers auf den bedeutsamen Unterschied zwischen dem Schillerschen und dem Kantischen Freiheitsbegriffes hinweist. Schließlich wird die Frage einer möglichen Verwirklichung der politischen Freiheit durch die Kunst erörtert, die insofern als problematisch erscheint, als dass die künstlerische Schöpfung nichts als Schein produziert.

Stichwörter: Schiller, Opfer, ästhetischer Schein, Freiheit, Natur

^{*} Associate Lecturer in Philosophy, University of Copenhagen, Faculty of Humanities, Department of History, Karen Blixens plads 8, DK-2400 Copenhagen S, Denmark – cvp@teol.ku.dk

1. Introduction: “sacrificing the natural”¹

According to a widespread modern understanding of pre-historic sacrificial rituals, sacrifice consists in making an offering to the god(s) in the hope of receiving something in return—for instance, the offering of an ox for the sake of receiving a good harvest.² This type of sacrificial ritual has a *violent* element since it involves the destruction of a thing, the killing of an animal, or even the murder of a human being. It also has an *economic* element insofar as it amounts to an exchange of one value for something deemed to be of greater value. In their *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, written in the 1940s in response to the threat of fascism, Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer offer a seminal critique of Enlightenment rationality. Part of this critique revolves around the structure of sacrifice. They argue that, despite the Enlightenment’s ethos of progress—which would imply that the world of myth, to which archaic sacrifice belongs, were a thing of the past—the structure of sacrificial ritual survives in the Enlightenment conception of reason and the self. The only difference is, Adorno and Horkheimer claim, that sacrifice and its violent economic logic has been internalized in the subject. According to Adorno and Horkheimer, the Enlightenment subject establishes itself as an independent and self-mastering unity through a sacrifice of its sensuous desires and inclinations. However, as they point out, since the sensuous or the natural is a constitutive part of the human being—indeed, it is the material condition of human life and flourishing—this self-formation is a contradictory endeavor.³ When human natural need and desire are sacrificed, the basis of human flourishing is undermined. Adorno and Horkheimer go as far as to say that “the institution of sacrifice [*Institution des Opfers*] is itself

¹ I want to thank Jay M. Bernstein, Veronica Padilla, Kelly Gawel, Mithra Lehn, Philip Schauss, and Joel De Lara for our discussions of Schiller’s aesthetics and politics, while we were teaching the Aesthetics course at the New School; these discussions inspired me to write this paper. I also want to extend my gratitude to Aaron Goldman for offering brilliant feedback on a draft of the paper.

² At least this is how sacrifice has commonly been interpreted in the West. As Jean-Luc Nancy mentions, we do not in fact know the meaning of prehistoric sacrifice. We have no knowledge of the forms of life to which these practices belonged, and whether sacrifice had one or many functions. Jean-Luc Nancy, “The Unsacrificeable,” *Yale French Studies* 79, Literature and the Ethical Question (1991), 25–26.

³ “The identical, enduring self which springs from the conquest of sacrifice is itself the product of a hard, petrified sacrificial ritual in which the human being, by opposing its consciousness to its natural context, celebrates itself,” Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 42; see also 41–43.

the mark of an historical catastrophe, an act of violence [*Gewalt*] done equally to human beings and to nature.”⁴

The year 1794 was a turbulent one in Europe, as the French Revolution gave way to the barbarous ‘Reign of Terror.’ Far from bringing about the rational freedom it promised, the revolution had resulted in excessive violence. This prompted Friedrich Schiller to write 27 letters, originally addressed to his patron, the prince of Schleswig-Holstein-Augustenburg Frederick Christian II, in which he sought to grasp the significance of these events. In these *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795), Schiller, searching for the causes of the failure of the revolution, looks back at the development of civilization as a process driven by modern reason.⁵ He discovers that reason has effectuated a “sacrifice of the natural [*Aufopferung des Natürlichen*]” (L IV.3, translation modified), and he detects such a sacrifice in the formation of the modern rational subject. Claiming that “[w]e disown [*verleugnen*] nature in its rightful sphere,” Schiller goes on to describe the history of civilization as a history of the sacrifice of sensuous materiality (L V.5). And although he believes that such sacrifice had been necessary—indeed, he writes that “there was no other way in which the species as a whole could have progressed”—he agrees with Adorno and Horkheimer that civilization has undermined the possibility of realizing its own aims, namely human happiness and flourishing (L VI.11).⁶ Accordingly, Schiller anticipates core elements of the analysis, developed by the two members of the Frankfurt School, of the sacrificial structure of Enlightenment reason and the formation of the rational subject. And much like Adorno and other members of the Frankfurt School will later do, Schiller proposes the radical idea that art conveys a vision of modern political freedom. He asserts, famously, that in order for modern subjects to be able to institute freedom, they would need to undergo an aesthetic education.

This article examines Schiller’s critique of the sacrificial structure of modern rationality, as well as the connection he draws between aesthetics and freedom. By articulating the kind of freedom associated with the aesthetic practice and experience, which Schiller imagines to be the antithesis of the sacrifice of the natural in modernity, I seek to read him as anticipating

⁴ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 42.

⁵ Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man: In a Series of Letters* (L), ed. and trans. by Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967). I refer to this work in brackets within the body text by citing paragraph numbers in roman numerals and section numbers in Arabic numerals.

⁶ For a perceptive but incomplete account of the connection between sacrifice in Schiller and in Adorno and Horkheimer, see Robert Hullot-Kentor, *Things beyond Resemblance: Collected Essays on Theodor W. Adorno* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 33–34.

the critical impetus later found in the Frankfurt School.⁷ To be sure, Schiller is usually perceived as a Kantian, and thus as a supporter of the rationalist Enlightenment project—and for good reasons: he is explicit about his allegiance to Kant, (e.g., L I.3).⁸ Yet, while Schiller agrees with Kant that only actions determined by reason—in contrast to uneducated desire or inclination—are autonomous, he also proposes a historical thesis with political implications; namely, that the sacrificial-economic form that reason takes on in modernity is a source of oppression.⁹ As I will discuss, despite his own proclamations of allegiance, Schiller develops a conception of freedom that differs significantly from Kant’s since it involves a reciprocal, rather than hierarchical, relation between reason and nature. The main claim I will defend in this article is that, to Schiller, freedom in artistic creation can be understood as overcoming the violent sacrifice of the natural in modernity, because art makes possible an experience of nature as something dignified. My focus will be on grounding this claim in a reading of the *Letters*, and thus, except for a few remarks, I will not explicitly address the connection between Schiller and Adorno & Horkheimer’s respective critiques of Enlightenment.

I am not the first one to draw attention to Schiller’s analysis of the violence of reason; yet I argue that to grasp the full scope of this analysis, we

⁷ The connection between Schiller and the Frankfurt School is well-established, but the literature often focuses on the relation between Schiller and Herbert Marcuse. For a recent account, see Claudia Brodsky, “Schiller and Critical Theory,” in *The Palgrave Handbook on the Philosophy of Friedrich Schiller*, Antonino Falduto and Tim Mehigan, eds. (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023).

⁸ The *Letters* are often taken to be a response to Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, published four years prior. Schiller is often conceived as being strongly influenced by the Enlightenment and as belonging to Weimar classicism; yet some newer scholarship places him within German idealism. See Henny Blomme, Laure Cahen-Maurel, and David W. Wood, “Introduction: Friedrich Schiller, a German Idealist?,” *Les Cahiers philosophiques de Strasbourg*, 52 (December 8, 2022): 7–25. The latter categorization would, as I do, group him together with other important precursors to 20th century critical theory, most prominently, GWF Hegel.

⁹ My reading differs in emphasis from Frederic Beiser’s impressive *Schiller as Philosopher*, in which Beiser, controversially, argues that while Schiller follows Kant in many respects, his view on morality is superior to that of Kant. Frederick C. Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher: A Re-Examination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 125; 129–34. My account is closer in spirit to María del Rosario Acosta López’ idea that Schiller is engaged in *historical-political*, rather than *transcendental*, critique of modernity. María del Rosario Acosta López, “On the Aesthetic Dimensions of Critique: The Time of the Beautiful in Schiller’s *Aesthetic Letters*,” in *Critique in German Philosophy: From Kant to Critical Theory*, María del Rosario Acosta López and J. Colin McQuillan, eds. (Albany: SUNY Press, 2020). In turn, I am sympathetic towards Acosta López’ project of establishing Schiller as “a philosophically relevant thinker.” María del Rosario Acosta López, “The Violence of Reason: Schiller and Hegel on the French Revolution,” in *Aesthetic Reason and Imaginative Freedom Friedrich Schiller and Philosophy*, María del Rosario Acosta López and Jeffrey L. Powell, eds. (Albany: SUNY Press, 2019), 59.

need to examine the sacrifice of the natural that Schiller attributes to modern rationality, along with the way such sacrifice constitutes the modern subject. This is a topic that has not received sufficient attention in prior scholarship.¹⁰ Inspired by another prominent thinker associated with the Frankfurt School, Walter Benjamin, Maria del Rosario Acosta López has recently developed an interesting reading of Schiller's idea of the aesthetic as a form of critique, which "interrupts" or "suspends" the violence exerted by reason, while instituting a new form of pregnant time.¹¹ In this article, I point to a different way that the aesthetic realm can function as critique. It may initially seem perplexing that art should be able to overcome the sacrifice of the natural, since Schiller defines the product of artistic creation as aesthetic semblance (*ästhetischen Schein*) (L XXVI.5). Since art is semblance, it does not literally reconcile reason and nature in freedom, it merely makes an appearance of doing so. Yet I argue that it is precisely because art, and specifically art beauty (*Schönheit*), transcends reality, i.e., because it consists in semblance, that it has a critical function and an emancipatory potential.

The article is divided into three parts. I will, first, explain Schiller's view of modernity as an age characterized by a fragmentation that is expressed at both social and individual levels. The genesis of this fragmentation, we will see, derives from the violent logic of modern reason (or the "form drive," as Schiller calls it). Secondly, I will analyze Schiller's idea of artistic creation or practice, paying special attention to the triple analogy between an artisan, an artist, and a statesman from Letter 4. Finally, I will discuss the question of how art can institute freedom in the world if artistic creation produces nothing but semblance.

2. The Loss of Nature

In this first section, I will reconstruct what I take to be Schiller's claim, in the *Letters*, that the development of civilization is a history of the sacrifice of the natural. As mentioned, the most prominent goal of the *Letters*, Schiller writes, is nothing less than "the construction of true political freedom" (L II.1). Yet in all spheres of modern life, he finds thoroughgoing fragmentation and unfreedom.

On a social level, Schiller observes fragmentation between citizen and government, and between different classes (L VI.7; L V.4–5). Each class has

¹⁰ For a recent article that explores Schiller's critique of the violence of modern reason, yet without analyzing sacrifice and the formation of Enlightenment subjectivity explicitly, see Acosta López, "The Violence of Reason."

¹¹ Acosta López, "On the Aesthetic Dimensions of Critique, 89–93.

proved unable to act politically so as to institute freedom. The “lower classes” struggle to fulfill even their most basic needs, while the “cultivated classes” are sedated by decadence (L V.4–5). Schiller explains this class divide with reference to a twofold subjection. The lower classes are subjected to their own instincts since their members have to compete with one another for satisfying their fundamental needs and often resort to physical violence. The upper classes live in an overly artificial culture divorced from the natural condition of humans. They are subjected by culturally created artificial desires.¹² Hence, in this class division, nature and culture are severed from one another, and both manifest excessive forms.

At first glance, Schiller seems to be stating that the problem of fragmentation is symmetrical, i.e., that reason and nature are harmed equally by fragmentation. Yet if we read carefully, we see that, according to at least one dominant line of thought in the *Letters*, the cause of fragmentation is reason, which is also the motor of civilization. For instance, Schiller emphasizes that the decadence of the upper classes is an “even more repugnant spectacle” than the brutality of the lower classes, since “here culture itself is the source” (L V.5). While the lower classes are constrained by nature, and the upper classes are constrained by culture, it is ultimately culture itself that has instituted the harsh split between the two groups: “It was civilization itself which inflicted this wound upon modern man” (L VI.6). In a later letter, we see that, although Schiller is fully aware of the “pernicious effects [of] an undue surrender to our sensual nature,” he emphasizes that the “nefarious influence exerted upon our knowledge and upon our conduct by a preponderance of rationality” is the true problem that the modern world is facing (L XIII.4n). The modern age has “become a stranger to the world of sense, and [lost] sight of matter for the sake of form” (L VI.10). Nature (the senses, feeling, and imagination) has yielded to rationality that dominates all spheres of life.

We can get a better understanding of this by looking to the fragmentation of the human soul and its cognitive faculties. Schiller conceives of the sensuous and the rational parts of human nature as drives.¹³ The

¹² Schiller writes that “[c]ivilization, far from setting us free, in fact creates some new need with every power it develops in us” (L V.5). He thus anticipates the critique of culturally produced unnecessary, and false desires that we find in Hegel, Freud, and the Frankfurt School. See Adorno and Horkheimer, “Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 94–136.

¹³ The idea of a form drive (*Formtrieb*) and a sensuous or material drive (*Stofftrieb*) is one that Schiller adopts from K. L. Reinhold. See Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher*, 130n39, and Sabine Roehr, “Freedom and Autonomy in Schiller,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 64, 1 (2003), 121–22; 128–129.

sensuous drive compels us to satisfy bodily desire, to change, to perceive, and to materialize our abstract ideas (L XII.4). The *formal drive* compels us to bring unity into the manifold of sensations, to form a consistent self as a unifying pole of representations, and to give form to matter (L XII.4). Parallel to the fragmentation at the social level, Schiller claims, modern civilization has caused a split between the form drive and the sense drive such that modern individuals are internally at odds with themselves:

the inner unity of human nature was severed too, and a disastrous conflict set its harmonious powers at variance. The intuitive and the speculative understanding now withdrew in hostility to take up positions in their respective fields, whose frontiers they now began to guard with jealous mistrust; and with the confining of our activity to a particular sphere we have given ourselves a master within, who not infrequently ends by suppressing the rest of our potentialities. (L VI.6)

In modernity, the form drive and the sense drive have been divorced and positioned as opposites, and this results in internal subjection, a “master within.” This subjection, which results from the sacrifice of the natural at the individual level, is also twofold. To understand this, let us first consider theoretical understanding, which, Schiller argues, exerts a form of violence. He writes that in the process of theoretical understanding the “intellect must first destroy the object of the inner sense,” it must “torment” nature, and “bind” the sensuous phenomenon in the “fetters of rule” (L I.4). Developing a chilling mutilation metaphor, he continues, writing that reason must “tear the fair body [of nature] to pieces” and preserve only a skeleton (L I.4). Yet in tearing sensuous material apart in this way, “natural feeling cannot find itself again in such an image” (L I.4). Schiller claims that modern reason dominates sensuous matter to such a degree that it can only find its own structure in it (L XIII.4n). That is, the form drive reduces multifarious sensuous experience to a one-sided abstraction.

Leaving the issue of theoretical reason, we see that, in the sphere of moral or practical life of modern individuals, Schiller detects the same kind of symbolic violence that reason (the form drive) exerts upon the senses. Here, one difference between Kant and Schiller’s views on the role of reason in moral life becomes clear. For Kant, we act freely insofar as we subject our will to the moral law. This means that I act morally, and thus autonomously, if my action is motivated by duty (practical reason) instead of inclination.¹⁴

¹⁴ In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant writes that “[f]reedom in the practical sense is the independence of the power of choice from necessitation by impulses of sensibility.” Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge,

Moral rational action is therefore a mode of self-expression, according to Kant.¹⁵ By contrast, for Schiller, the demands placed on the individual by moral reason appear as an oppressive force, because morality requires that the subject sacrifices its own inner nature.¹⁶ As mentioned, much like Adorno and Horkheimer, he believes that modern reason's overcoming of the violence of the brute instincts results in a new form of violence enacted by reason itself. This has political consequences, Schiller shows. In the sphere of knowledge, the violence that reason inflicts on nature will result in a neglect of the sensuous multiplicity given in experience. In a similar way, if we follow reason rigidly in the moral sphere without consulting our emotions, we will neglect the other person, since, Schiller argues, emotion enables our "feeling our way into the situation of others, of *making other people's feelings our own*" (L XIII.4n, emphasis added). Schiller is convinced that we can only develop generosity and empathy through the cultivation of our sensibility. Because modernity's sacrifice of nature blocks our empathy for the sufferings of others, it ultimately forecloses true political acts of solidarity, as the 'Reign of Terror' evidenced.

We have now seen that Schiller detects fragmentation both at a social and at an individual level, and that, in both spheres, he observes a sacrifice of the natural performed by reason. As I read Schiller's critique, the problem is not rational activity in itself, i.e., that theoretical reason subsumes sensuous particulars under universal categories, and that practical reason issues universal action-guiding imperatives. Rather, Schiller's real concern is that this kind of abstract rational activity has become the *dominant cultural force* in

UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), A534/B562. Commenting on a philanthropist who chooses to be generous to others, despite his cold and callous temperament, Kant claims that it "is just then that the worth of character comes out, which is moral and incomparably the highest, namely that he is beneficent not from inclination but from duty." Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Mary J. Gregor (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 12 (4:398–99). In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, we find the following formulation: "to perform [an] action only from duty without inclination—then for the first time action has genuine moral worth." Immanuel Kant, *Philosophical Writings*, ed. Ernst Behler (New York: Continuum, 1986), 66. See also Roehr, "Freedom and Autonomy in Schiller," 123.

¹⁵ For an expressivist reading of Kantian autonomy, see Christoph Menke, "Autonomy and Liberation: The Historicity of Freedom." In *Hegel on Philosophy in History*, James Kreines and Rachel Zuckert, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 159–76, esp. 161.

¹⁶ Beiser argues that the dispute between Schiller and Kant does not concern whether a specific moral action ought to be motivated by inclination or duty. The difference between them is rather that Schiller's theory involves the development of the *whole person*, which requires a non-hierarchical relation between reason and sensibility, whereas Kant is concerned, more narrowly, with *moral character*, which has the moral law as its overarching telos. Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher*, 175–79, 184–87.

modernity. The dominance of reason in the modern era has brought about enormous social and scientific progress, but this has happened at the expense of nature, feeling, and passion. This is a problem, Schiller argues, since the triumph of the form drive has led to a sacrifice of individual happiness for the sake of the progress of the species. Referring to the fragmentation of the sensory and rational faculties in modern individuals, he writes that “however much the world as a whole may benefit through this fragmentary specialization of human powers, it cannot be denied that the individuals affected by it suffer under the curse of this cosmic purpose” (L VI.14).

Considering the history of (Western) civilization, Schiller finds the narrative of progress that the Enlightenment purports to be dubious. From an inter-generational perspective, there is a current of regress in the midst of progress:

And in what kind of relation would we stand to either past or future ages, if the development of human nature were to make such a sacrifice [*Opfer*] necessary? [I.e., a sacrifice of happiness for individuals of the present.] We would have been the serfs of mankind; for several millennia we would have done slaves’ work for them, and our mutilated nature would bear impressed upon it the shameful marks of this servitude. And all this in order that a future generation might in blissful indolence attend to the care of its moral health, and foster free growth of its humanity. (L VI.14)

The happiness of previous and current generations is being sacrificed—as a utilitarian pawn—to the generations of the future. Here, Schiller anticipates Adorno and Horkheimer’s diagnosis that the instrumental or economic aspect of archaic sacrifice, which Enlightenment modernity claims to have left behind, is still at work in the logic of civilization. Schiller’s verdict is that insofar as civilization progresses by advancing the form drive at the expense of the sense drive, it *simultaneously regresses* by destroying the conditions for the realization of its own ambitions of freedom and happiness. He insists that as long as fragmentation endures, we cannot be fully human: “the antagonism of the faculties and functions is the great instrument of civilization—but it is only an instrument; for as long as it persists, *we are only on the way to becoming civilized*” (L VI.12, emphasis added). Without a connection to their senses, feelings, imagination, and poetic nature, Schiller writes, individuals fall short of being “happy and complete human beings” (L VI.14).

Modern human beings are thus faced with a task: just as they have freed themselves from the violence of nature, they need to free themselves from the violence of reason. According to the reading I have articulated in this section,

this would require a vindication of the sense drive so as to integrate sense and reason. The political ideal of true civilization, which Schiller stipulates, is one of wholeness: the overcoming of the sacrificial relationship within class society, between reason and sense, individual and community, and the present and the future. The term that he uses to describe this ideal of self- and world-integration is “reconciliation.”¹⁷ But what will such a reconciliation look like? In the next section, I argue that, for Schiller, the process of artistic creation is able to vindicate the sense drive and convey a vision of freedom in which nature is not sacrificed.

3. Faking Freedom in Artistic Creation

We have seen that Schiller views modernity as an age marked by fragmentation, and that he searches for a model of unification of both the rational and the sensuous faculties, and of individual and society. As the Jena Romantics, such as Friedrich Schlegel, will also do, he looks to Ancient Greece for a radical antithesis to modernity. While Schiller does not believe that a return to the Greeks is possible or desirable, he does view the Greek polis as a paradigmatic example of unity and harmony.¹⁸

In the *Letters*, Schiller expresses this contrast between Greeks and moderns with a metaphorical juxtaposition between an organic lifeform and a machine. He likens the modern state to a mechanical unity. Individual citizens are like replaceable machine parts (the word Schiller uses is *Bruchstück*, i.e., a fragment broken off of a whole) connected through external relations (L VI.7). Modern society is governed by a utilitarian economy insofar as “means [have been separated] from end” so the individual citizen is reduced to an instrument of the state (L VI.7). Indeed, “utility is the great idol of our age,” Schiller writes (L II.3). Hence, the sacrificial logic of reason is also at work in the relationship between citizen and state. By contrast, Schiller characterizes the Greek polis as a living organism held together by

¹⁷ At times, Schiller uses the Christian term *versöhnen* (L XIV.6; XXVII.7), but elsewhere he uses *vermitteln* (L XIII.1), *vereinigen* (L XXIV.3), and *vereinbaren* (L XIV.3). It might be the case that the term *Versöhnung* has come to be associated with Schiller’s *Letters* to such a high degree because it is the term that Hegel uses to emphasize the achievement and shortcomings of Schiller in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*. GWF Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, Vol. 1, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford & New York: Clarendon Press, 1998), 62.

¹⁸ Despite his strong interest in the Greek polis as an ideal, Schiller comes to have reservations about what he views as Schlegel’s uncritical obsession with the Greeks, his “Graecomania,” and he eventually has a fallout with both Schlegel and his brother A. W. Schlegel, thus parting ways with two of the most central figures of the Jena Romanticism. Ernst Behler, *German Romantic Literary Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 39.

internal relations between part and whole. The Greek citizen had a relative degree of independence but was an essential part of the community as a whole (L VI.7). Moreover, on an individual level, the intellect and the senses worked together in harmony, and thus Greek individuals were not internally fractured (L VI.3). In sum, in pre-modern Greek society, there is no sacrifice of individual sensuous faculties.

In his 1795–96 *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*, Schiller compares the Greek and the modern artist. Aligning with the narrative of decay from the *Letters*, he draws a distinction between nature and culture, which he maps onto a distinction between the ancient Greek world and modernity. Modern culture has lost the natural unity of the Greek world. Consequently, the artistic processes of the Greek artist and the modern artist diverge.¹⁹ Schiller writes that “[f]or [the Greeks,] culture had not degenerated to such a degree that nature was left behind” (NSP 195). For that reason, the Greek artist imitates nature in an immediate way with an attitude of naivety. By contrast, “nature has disappeared from [modern] humanity” (NSP 194). Moderns long for the completeness and happiness that belonged to nature (NSP 192). Schiller argues that, save for a few exceptions, modern poets have an attitude toward nature that is sentimental rather than naïve. This means that “as nature eventually begins to disappear from human life as an *experience* and as the (acting and feeling) *subject*, we see it ascend in the world of poets as an *idea* and *object*” (NSP 196). That is, the artist of the modern world, for whom natural unity is lost, has to assume a mediated or reflective attitude toward nature and approach it as an ‘object,’ i.e., as something distinct and at a distance from the subject. Because of the fragmentation between subject and object, the modern artist will have to rediscover nature through the artistic process, whereas the Greek artist is immediately in touch with nature (NSP 195). Yet if artists are as alienated from nature as the rest of the moderns, how can they vindicate sensuous materiality?

We can begin to think about Schiller’s response to this challenge by considering the three-term analogy he draws in Letter IV between 1) the artisan (*mechanische Künstler*), 2) the artist (*schöne Künstler*), and 3) an imagined pedagogue or “statesman-artist” (*pädagogischen und politische Künstler / Staatskünstler*, who is to construct a state through a program of aesthetic education (L IV.4). The analogy compares three kinds of creative processes, and three relationships between form and matter. Schiller first considers the artisan. When creating a product, the artisan

¹⁹ Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller, “On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry,” in *Essays*, trans. Daniel Dahlstrom. Walter Hinderer and Daniel Dahlstrom, eds., The German Library, 17 (New York: Continuum, 1993). I refer to this text in the body text as NSP.

lays hands upon the formless mass in order to shape it to his ends, he has no scruple in doing it violence [*Gewalt*]; for the natural material he is working on merits no respect for itself, and his concern is not with the whole for the sake of the parts, but with the parts for the sake of the whole. (L IV.4)

Hence, in the creative process, the artisan treats matter in much the same way as reason treats nature in modern civilization: violently. To the artisan, matter has no intrinsic dignity. It is a non-essential means that must be sacrificed for the sake of the end product. As in the machine-like state described above, the parts of the product are subordinated to the whole.

The artist is a more complex figure than the artisan. Like the artisan, the artist does violence to matter: “for the material he is handling he has not a whit more respect” (L IV.4). However, the artist creates *aesthetic semblance of non-violence*. This is still a subjection of matter to aesthetic form, i.e., it is still a sacrifice of the natural. Yet it appears otherwise. Schiller writes that “the eye which would seek to protect the freedom of the material [*die Freiheit dieses Stoffes*] he will endeavour to deceive by a show of yielding to this latter” (L IV.4). In a work of art, matter is shaped according to the artist’s concepts or ideas, resulting in aesthetic form, but the material appears to be free and not subjected to form.²⁰ This appearance of a reciprocal relation between form and matter, part and whole, in art is what Schiller calls beauty (*Schönheit*) (L XVI.1). Art beauty is, for Schiller, the contemporary correlate of the harmony and unity of the Greek polis. As mentioned above, he views the Greek polis as an organic unity between individual and community (L VI.2). There is a structural affinity between Greek society and a beautiful work of art insofar as, in the work of art, each material part is an indispensable part of the whole. We could not remove a piece of the work of art without the work and its meaning changing in an essential way. Hence, here there is no instrumental relationship where a part could be sacrificed for the sake of the whole, as there is in modern reason’s subsumption of the particular to the universal. In short, in the work of art, the material is essential and indispensable, and it appears to be released from form.

This ideal relationship between whole / part and form / matter is also accentuated in the third moment in the analogy, the statesman-artist. This figure differs from the artist in the sense that the kind of reciprocity between

²⁰ In the so-called *Kallias Letters*, Schiller defines art as “freedom in appearance.” Johann Christoph Friedrich von Schiller, “Kallias or Concerning Beauty: Letters to Gottfried Körner,” in Jay M. Bernstein, *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, trans. Stefan Bird Pollan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 151.

part and whole that we find in art beauty must be *made actual*. Schiller writes that the “consideration he [the statesman-artist] must accord to [*the material’s*] *uniqueness and individuality* is not merely subjective, and aimed at creating an illusion for the senses, but objective and directed to its innermost being” (L IV.4, emphasis added). The reciprocity that beauty displays is only actualized when “the whole serves the parts [and] the parts are in any way bound to submit to the whole” (L IV.4). In the case of the statesman, the material is of course not letters, stone, or clay, but an actual human individual, and the statesman-artist must pay attention to the “material’s” uniqueness and individuality. Schiller’s suggestion for how the statesman is to cultivate each individual is an aesthetic education in which the individual is confronted with art beauty.

Through the tripartite analogy, we learn that, although art is only semblance, it can convey an experience of matter as having intrinsic value, integrity, and authority, since matter is essential to the significance of the work. Art shows nature as a form of non-violent and, seemingly, free materiality. For an example, let us look at Schiller’s description of the sculpture *Juno Ludovisi*:

It is not grace, nor is it yet dignity, which speaks to us from the superb countenance of a *Juno Ludovisi*; it is neither one nor the other because it is both at once. While the woman-god demands our veneration, the god-like woman kindles our love [...] The whole figure reposes and dwells in itself, a creation completely self-contained, and, as if existing beyond space, neither yielding nor resisting; here is no force to contend with force [...] we find ourselves at one and the same time in a state of utter repose and supreme agitation, and there results that wondrous stirring of the heart for which the mind has no concept, nor speech any name. (L XV.9)

In this quotation, Schiller describes both a work of art, *Juno Ludovisi*, and the aesthetic experience of this sculpture. He uses a metaphor of a communication between human and divine, which refers to an experience of a reciprocal relationship between matter and form in the work of art. Here, there is no violent subjection of matter to form (there is “no force [*Kraft*] to contend with force”). Because of this, the sculpture allows the viewer to experience the ‘divinization’ of matter, i.e., matter as a realm of freedom. In this experience of art beauty, materiality has “grace” and “dignity,” and we find that, in appreciating these features, our sensuous faculties are more competent than our reason (“the mind [*der Verstand*] has no concept, nor speech any name”). The aesthetic experience, which is the outcome of the

artist's creative process, is not an intellectual experience; it is an intense and satisfactory sensuous experience ("a wondrous stirring of the heart"). A sensuous experience of what? I would claim that the work of art offers the viewer a sensuous experience of what a world without a sacrifice of the natural would feel like.²¹ On my reading, then, Schiller claims that the beauty of the work of art can vindicate the natural.

4. Freedom Without Sacrifice

My contention is that, on Schiller's account, art provides an experience of matter as essential. His radical idea is that this aesthetic experience affects the human soul. The interaction with art beauty elicits a relation between the form drive and the sense drive in which the latter is not sacrificed. This is a form of freedom.

Despite Schiller's own declared agreement with Kant—and despite the fact that he, at times, refers to a more Kantian conception of autonomy—we find a distinct concept of freedom in the *Letters* that cannot be reduced to autonomy understood as rational self-determination, which, as mentioned, Schiller takes to involve the possibility of a violence enacted by reason itself.²² Bearing on his idealized view of the Greek polis, Schiller's conception of freedom revolves around an idea of wholeness. Freedom consists in an equilibrium between the form drive and the sense drive:

²¹ On Jacques Rancière's Schiller-inspired account of aesthetic politics, the aesthetic experience is able to shift what he calls the current "distribution of the sensible" (this is the structure, in any community, that determines what can be perceived, said, and thought, and what is invisible, unsayable etc.); just as Schiller believes that the aesthetic is able to challenge the fragmented hierarchical order of the modern world. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2010), 40; see also 23. Rancière also makes the more general point that the "politics of aesthetics comprises a new sphere of visibility, where the products of art are the objects of a specific experience that annuls the hierarchy of human activities as well as the hierarchy of subjects and forms of representation." Jacques Rancière, "The Aesthetic Heterotopia," *Philosophy Today* 54, SPEP Supplement (2010), 20.

²² Several scholars agree that there is more than one concept of freedom in the *Letters* (and that these are not necessarily mutually compatible). Schiller seems to claim at once that the *form drive* is the locus of freedom (i.e., that freedom is a property of reason), just as Kant sees it, and that freedom is a property of human nature as a whole. See Roehr, "Freedom and Autonomy in Schiller," 129, Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher*, 152–53. Roehr identifies two concepts of freedom in Schiller: 1) the Kantian concept of autonomy, and a further concept than those already mentioned, namely, 2) the concept of "neutral free will" (the will is 'neutral' in the sense that it is neither part of reason, nor of sensibility, but comprises a distinct genus). Roehr, 121. Beiser further identifies what he calls "aesthetic freedom" or "active determinability," which are his terms for the freedom that arises from the reconciliation of the form and the sense drives. Beiser, 232–34.

[Freedom] arises only when man is a complete being, when both his fundamental drives are fully developed; it will, therefore, be lacking as long as he is incomplete, as long as one of the two drives is excluded, and it should be capable of being restored by anything which gives him back his completeness. (L XX.1)

This implies that freedom requires a *reconciliation* of the two aspects of the human soul, sense drive and form drive. Famously, Schiller terms the transformative process, in which the form drive and sense drive mutually constrain and set each other free, the play drive (*Spieltrieb*) (L XIV.3).²³ He writes that the “[e]xclusive domination by either of his two basic drives is for him [i.e., the human being] a state of constraint and violence, and freedom lies only in the co-operation of both natures” (L XVII.4). Indeed, “as soon as the two opposing fundamental drives are active, within [the individual], both lose their compulsion [*Nötigung*], and the opposition of two necessities gives rise to freedom” (L XIX.12). Hence, when a reciprocal relation (*Wechselwirkung*) between the two drives is brought about through the experience of art beauty—such as in the example of *Juno Ludovisi*—the two “work in concert” (L XIV.3).

Schiller makes the strong claim that play is the essence of humanity: “man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and he is only fully a human being [*ganz Mensch*] when he plays” (L XV.9). Hence, despite Schiller’s thoroughgoing critique of Enlightenment as being itself the cause of fragmentation, he is still inspired by the Enlightenment’s own idea of the “whole human being” (*den ganzen Menschen*).²⁴ Consequently,

²³ The concept of play likely has roots both in Kant’s *Critique of the Power of Judgment* and Lessing’s *Laocoon*. (Beiser also mentions F. W. Ramdohr as a possible source. Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher*, 142–43.) It is somewhat ambiguous whether Schiller thinks the play drive is a third drive or rather the harmony between the two drives. Schiller does, for instance in L XV.7, talk about “satisfying the play drive,” which perhaps indicates that it is a separate drive. Gregg Horowitz argues that the play drive, in being a *drive*, is a distinct source of claim-making that “expresses demands on the world.” Gregg M. Horowitz, “The Residue of History. Dark Play in Schiller and Hegel,” *International Yearbook of German Idealism*, 4, (2006), 190–91. For my reading, this ambiguity is not crucial, since I assume that ‘play,’ whatever else it is, is also a term that designates the unique conception of non-sacrificial freedom, which Schiller is struggling to conceive.

²⁴ Walter Hinderer argues that Schiller’s understanding of the trope of the whole human being derives from the Enlightenment physician’s philosophy, which Schiller picked up as a medical student in his youth. The conception of the human being as a psychophysical unity, in which the body is not passive, but makes an active contribution to the actions of the soul, is, Hinderer claims, the foundation of Schiller’s distinct anthropology. This emphasis on the active body further supports my reading that Schiller is interested in making his age reappraise the natural as not just a passive component of human nature. Walter Hinderer, “Schiller’s Philosophical Aesthetics in Anthropological Perspective,” in *A Companion to the*

as we have seen, he rejects the Romantic idea that fragmentation is an ineradicable feature of the modern world and maintains a hope for a reconciliation of reason and nature, and self and world.²⁵ But why did he choose the term “play” to designate this experience of reconciliation, and how more exactly does play overcome the sacrificial rationality of modernity?

Schiller defines aesthetic play as that which is neither arbitrary nor necessary (L XV.5). A possible way of reading this seemingly paradoxical statement is to think of play as *non-arbitrary* insofar as it is an activity structured by its own internal norms. Although these are often tacit, children’s play is governed by its own rules and norms. Hence, play has a structure or lawfulness and is not arbitrary. On the other hand, play is *non-necessary* in the sense that it can only begin once our physical needs are satisfied. Play is an excess beyond need. We can see this even in animals, Schiller insists. When animals are not strained by outer compulsion, the birds sing and the lion roars (L XXVII.3). “An animal [...] may be said to be at play when the stimulus is sheer plenitude of vitality, when superabundance of life is its own incentive to action” (L XXVII.3). Schiller is of course aware that animal play is caused by instinct (and is thus, strictly speaking, necessary). Yet, he claims, the overabundant “physical play” in nature anticipates human “aesthetic play.” Aesthetic play is an excess not only beyond physical need, but also beyond moral demands. It “imposes no kind of constraint either from within or from without” (L XV.5). Play is a fully free activity in the sense that even if play has its own *internal* rules and ends, it has no *external* ends. Hence, in play, means are not sacrificed to external ends since it is “at once its own end and its own means” (L XXVII.3). Here the economic or utilitarian logic of modern life is suspended in an aesthetic experience.

Yet Schiller not only claims that art can heal the fragmented human soul; he also argues that art has a potential for moral and political emancipation, i.e., that it can possibly heal the fracture between individual and world. The reconciliation of form drive and sense drive through play,

Works of Friedrich Schiller, ed. Steven D. Martinson (Rochester, N.Y: Camden House, 2005), 29 and 33.

²⁵ On the differences between Schiller and the Jena Romantics, specifically Friedrich Schlegel, with respect to the question of whether fragmentation is a permanent feature of the modern world, see Daniel Dahlstrom, “Play and Irony: Schiller and Schlegel on the Liberating Prospects of Aesthetics” in *The History of Continental Philosophy*, ed. Alan D. Schrift (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 128–29. Dahlstrom highlights the contrast between Schiller’s harmonizing play and Schlegel’s irony, and the latter’s idea that aesthetic semblance reproduces “the *endless* play of the world” (italics added).

Schiller claims, possesses the marvelous “pledge in the sensible world of a morality as yet unseen” (L III.5). We saw above that a resurrection of the sense drive was necessary for “making other people’s feelings our own” (L XIII.4n). At the end of the *Letters*, Schiller connects this thought with his concept of play. He describes how ornamentation, adornment, and play develop in complex early civilizations. His thesis is that it is precisely in this desire for beautiful and ‘useless’ ornamentation that culture erupts from brute nature (L XXVI.3). It is when humans begin to produce ornamentation, art, and adorn their own bodies, and in this way deal with natural materials playfully—without any external end—that we can talk about genuine human culture. In such civilizations, there is no need to care about one’s physical appearance, except for the reason that one “wants to please” the other. From the aesthetic needless desire to please the other, non-instrumental solidarity develops (L XXVII.5).²⁶ That is, human empathy springs from aesthetic play brought about by beauty.²⁷ It takes the form of spontaneous desire to appear pleasing to the other. Schiller argues that reciprocal human relationships develop in previous civilizations when the individual is “willing to concede freedom, because it is freedom [i.e., another free human being] he wishes to please” (L XXVII.7). Play thus transcends instrumental relationships. The play drive brings about the harmony between the form and the sense drive and makes the individual aware that her sensuous nature ought not to be sacrificed. Once sensibility can be imagined as a legitimate need to be satisfied, political passion for duty toward the other will be ignited.

Michael Hardimon has suggested that we read Schiller’s conception of freedom as being at home both in oneself and in the world.²⁸ To be at home

²⁶ Jay M. Bernstein also emphasizes this point. Jay M. Bernstein, “Significant Stone: Medium and Sense in Schiller,” in *International Yearbook of German Idealism* (2008) (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2009), 175.

²⁷ I thus disagree with Acosta López that it is unclear “how beauty—at least the notion of beauty developed in the *Aesthetic Letters*—can be related to [...] commonality or inter-humanity.” She argues that we need Schiller’s notion of the sublime, which he develops in other texts, most notably *Grace and Dignity*, in order to account for this relation. María del Rosario Acosta López, “‘Making Other People’s Feelings Our Own’: From the Aesthetic to the Political in Schiller’s Aesthetic Letters” in *Who Is This Schiller Now? Essays on His Reception and Significance*, Jeffrey High, Nicolas Martin, and N. Oellers, eds. (London: Boydell & Brewer, 2011), 193. The sublime in Schiller, she claims, is closely related to the idea of *Mitleid* (sympathy or identification), which the spectator feels while experiencing a tragedy. Thus, sublime tragedy bridges the gap between art and social feeling (i.e., between aesthetics and morality).

²⁸ Being-at-home in the world is of course most commonly associated with Hegel’s conception of reconciliation, but Hardimon argues that this concept has roots in Schiller.

in the world means not to be separated from the world, not to feel divorced from its institutions, one's own work, one's peers, and one's community. Considering Schiller's work in the context of the aftermath of the French Revolution, we should, I think, agree with Hardimon, that Schiller has a wide-reaching idea of freedom in mind. What is at stake, as I have suggested, is freedom from the violence and domination of modern reason, a freedom from sacrifice of the natural. This freedom, were it to be actualized, is not only the unity of individual human nature; it is also the realization of a social world in which human needs are met. However, this world is, as Schiller states, "*yet unseen.*" How can it be realized? How can we proceed from aesthetic education to political freedom?

5. Semblance as Critique

As mentioned, Schiller believes that the semblance of reciprocity in the work of art can in fact bring about a reconciliation in the soul by eliciting the play drive. Once the play drive is elicited and the subject is transformed by art, moral and political work can begin. Frederick Beiser locates Schiller's political project within the republican tradition descending from Machiavelli and Montesquieu through Rousseau and Ferguson, because of what he views as Schiller's focus on moral virtue, and the idea that a good state cannot arise before citizens have developed a virtuous character.²⁹ Yet we could perhaps also view Schiller's focus on the reform of the soul as a precursor to the neo-Marxist idea that taking oneself as a political agent and a collective subject (which is what modern subjects cannot because of fragmentation) is a precondition for being able to institute radical political change. Yet it is not wholly clear what the step from the aesthetic education of the soul to the realization of true political freedom in the world is supposed to look like. If play produces a new subject—a subject in which the division of sense and reason are, at least temporarily, interrupted—how will this subject change the world?

Notoriously, in Letter XXVII, Schiller outlines the blueprint of an *aesthetic state*. How this letter should be interpreted is debated, and the notion of the aesthetic state has been met with much skepticism. A common worry is whether the aesthetic state leaves enough room for difference, disharmony, and non-identity. Consulting the text will not aid us much: the final sections of the *Letters*, in which Schiller sketches the virtues of the aesthetic state, is

Michael O. Hardimon, *Hegel's Social Philosophy: The Project of Reconciliation* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 105–6.

²⁹ Beiser, *Schiller as Philosopher*, 125.

marked by ambiguity. It is unclear whether the aesthetic state is meant to be an institutional blueprint of a mode of government, and, consequently, if Schiller in fact thinks that reality *itself* must become aesthetic. This idea seems to stand in contrast to Schiller's claim that the work of art itself is semblance. The work of art is an object in the world consisting of form and matter. Yet, Schiller is adamant that form and matter are not literally reconciled in art, but merely appear to be so.³⁰ In the very last paragraph, however, Schiller asks, "does such State of Aesthetic Semblance really exist? And if so, where can it be found?" He answers that it only exists as a *need* in "every finely attuned soul," and perhaps is only realized in a few circles of intellectuals (L XXVII.12). This evidences that aesthetic reconciliation is an internal reconciliation, or a metaphor for a state of harmony in the individual soul, though one which contains a need or a drive for outer institutional reconciliation. I will not be able to offer a convincing solution to these vexed tensions in Schiller's text here. Rather, as a conclusion of my article, I want to make a few remarks indicating the emancipatory potential of the artistic creation of semblance.

To Schiller, it is exactly the human capacity to produce—and derive sensuous pleasure from—the phenomenon of semblance that Schiller finds to be such an astonishing and unique feature of human beings as a species (L XXVI.7). Semblance is remarkable, first of all, because it transcends the real. Aesthetic semblance (*ästhetischen Schein*) is like an illusion, but in contrast to logical semblance (illusion proper), it does not deceive us (L XXVI.5). Rather for something to count as aesthetic semblance, it must be "honest," when it "expressly [renounce] all claims to reality [*Realität*]" (L XXVI.11).³¹

³⁰ Anne Pollok writes that, according to Schiller, "[t]he moment we forget about the ideality of our form-giving (i.e. the fact that we do not create a thing itself but only its semblance) is the moment we succumb to logical semblance. In other words: the moment the artist aims to establish an aesthetic state in reality, she forgets about her limits and creates a dictatorship of mere ideas." Anne Pollok, "A Further Mediation and the Setting of Limits: The Concept of Aesthetic Semblance and the Aesthetic State" in *Friedrich Schiller: Über die Ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen in einer Reihe von Briefen*, ed. Gideon Stiening (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2019), 225. György Lukács' criticizes Schiller's solution insofar as he thinks it implies either a form of apolitical rationalism or a dangerous mythologizing of politics: "either the world must be aestheticized [which] is just another way of making the subject purely contemplative and to annihilate 'action,'" or "the aesthetic principle must be elevated into the principle by which objective reality is shaped." György Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2013), 139–40.

³¹ Pollok points out that there is a tension in the *Letters* since Schiller speaks negatively about semblance in Letter X, whereas, as I am emphasizing here, he speaks favorably about semblance in Letter XXVI. It was nevertheless a common view among the Romantics that aesthetic semblance "gives birth to truth and untruth simultaneously," she argues. Anne Pollok, "A Further Mediation and the Setting of Limits," 223–24.

Works of art do not pretend to be any more than imitation or fiction. This unrealness of semblance, rather than making us conflate appearance and reality, allows us to distinguish appearance from reality (L XXVI 4).

Semblance is also “autonomous,” Schiller claims, in a sense that other things in empirical reality are not (L XXVI.11). As we saw above, human beings in early civilization produced appearances out of sheer overabundance of resources—only to please the eyes of one another (L XXVII.5). In accordance with this account, Schiller writes that the aesthetic semblance of the work of art is constrained neither by physical laws nor by moral laws (L XXVI.4). As mentioned above, the work of art has an internal lawfulness, yet is not subjected to an external purpose, neither physical nor moral.

It is in this in-between status of semblance—its simultaneous reality-transcending quality (or fakeness, if you will) and autonomy—that the political potential of aesthetic semblance lies.

[I]ndifference to reality and interest in semblance [*Schein*] may be regarded as a genuine enlargement of humanity [*Erweiterung der Menschheit*] and a decisive step towards culture. [...] The reality of things is the work of things themselves; the semblance [*Schein*] of things is the work of man (L XXVI.4).

Hence, our ability to abstract from reality is “a genuine enlargement of humanity.” To bring out the full implication of this, we could say that our capacity for producing and appreciating semblance is our most political capacity—indeed, it is what makes us political beings—since it allows us to free ourselves from the given and conceive of a different future. Aesthetic semblance allows us to develop the “unlimited potential” of the imagination, i.e., to *play with possibilities* (L XXVI.4). Through our exploration of semblance, we are able to imagine things otherwise. We could even say that the play drive is a drive toward making things otherwise. If we follow this line of thought, we can view aesthetic semblance as a form of *critique*. Because aesthetic semblance makes us able to distinguish appearance from reality, it can make us aware of the antagonisms in the modern world and inspire us to change reality.³² Yet in distancing us from reality, art does not convey an

³² Although he does not frame Schiller’s project in terms of critique, I think Horowitz argues something along these lines as well. Horowitz believes that the play drive is indeed a distinct third drive, which moves the human being to strive to fulfill the gap between the real and the ideal. That play is a *drive* indicates that something is yet to be achieved, and that there is a disharmony between status quo of political reality and human demands. Hence, he thinks, Schiller’s project is essentially future-directed. The play drive incessantly compels us to strive for a regulative ideal of reconciliation that is different than the *status quo* and never reached. Gregg M. Horowitz, “The Residue of History,” 190–92.

abstract experience or idea, but a sensuously satisfying experience of human sensuous materiality as essential and indispensable.

The sensuous experience we get from aesthetic semblance is intense and forceful, yet it is temporary: “beauty, or aesthetic unity [...] *momentarily* takes place” (L XXV.6, emphasis added). For this reason, I think we read Schiller most sympathetically by emphasizing that the work of art can function (only) as a stand-in for a kind of political reality in which the individual is reconciled with the social world. Art beauty serves as a temporary experience of political freedom. It offers a glimpse of a world in which the sacrificial tendency in modern reason has been overcome, yet it does not instantiate this freedom itself in concrete social or political institutions. The beautiful semblance of the artwork functions as a form of critique of the status quo, but the promise of a society in which the material condition of human life has been re-authorized is still to be fulfilled. It is exactly because it is semblance that art can convey a political vision of a freedom which does not involve a sacrifice of nature. In this way, Schiller offers us a unique and radical account of artistic creation as a critique of the subjugation of the natural world and the sensuous aspect of the human being. I believe that this critique of the sacrifice of nature resonates strongly with challenges in our present.

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Symphilosophie

Internationale Zeitschrift für philosophische Romantik

Dorothea Veit und Friedrich Schleiermacher im Gespräch über lebensweltliche Fragen um 1800

Eine Skizze

*Barbara Becker-Cantarino**

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieser Aufsatz weist den Einfluss von Schleiermachers Philosophie der Liebe (und Ehe) auf sowohl Leben und Werk Dorothea Veit-Schlegels auf. Auf der einen Seite erscheint „Madam Veit“ als die perfekte Verkörperung von Schleiermachers Aufforderung an die Frauen, sich zu befreien und ihre Talente zu verwirklichen; auf der anderen Seite scheint sie dies zu verneinen, indem sie sich selbst allein als begeisterte Anhängerin und Bewunderin ihres zweiten Ehemanns, Friedrich Schlegel, stilisiert.

Stichwörter: Scheidung, Freiheit, Liebe, Weiblichkeit, Unabhängigkeit

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the influence of Schleiermacher's philosophy of love (and marriage) on both the life and the work of Dorothea Veit-Schlegel. On the one hand, "Madame Veit" exemplifies Schleiermacher's call for women to free themselves and realize their talents, on the other hand, Veit mainly models herself as an ardent follower and admirer of her second husband, Friedrich Schlegel.

Keywords: divorce, freedom, love, femininity, independence

* Professorin Emerita für Germanistik, The Ohio State University, 6703 Ladera Norte, Austin, TX 78731 – becker-cantarino.1@osu.edu

1. Die Gesprächspartner: „Ich kann mich nicht auf der lumpigen Mittelstraße herumtreiben“ (Dorothea Veit)¹

Brendel Mendelssohn (1764-1839) war als 18jährige von ihrem Vater standesgemäß 1783 mit dem sehr wohlhabenden Kaufmann und Bankier Simon Veit (1754-1819) verheiratet worden, und hatte nach dem frühen Tod ihres Vaters (schon 1786) und der Geburt ihrer vier Söhne² sich den Geselligkeiten in den Privathäusern der jüdischen Oberschicht Berlins zugewandt.³ Seit 1794 nannte sie sich ‚Dorothea‘, trug bald ihre Haare lang und offen, was gegen die Sitte für jüdische Frauen verstieß. Ihr Ungenügen in der Ehe mit Veit und an der gesellschaftlichen Enge ihres Hausfrauenlebens in der jüdischen Oberschicht Berlins hatte sie verschiedentlich vertraulich artikuliert, u.a. schrieb sie an Freundin Rahel Levin am 6. Juni 1793: „Ich kann mich nicht auf der lumpigen Mittelstraße herumtreiben, und die halbverwelkten Blumen mit Mühe und schweißbedeckter Stirne aufsuchen, die dem seligen Glück in seinem Taumel entfallen“.⁴

Im späten 18. Jahrhundert hatten sich in Berlin zahlreiche aufklärerische Vereine und Gesellschaften für junge Männer (zumeist jeweils getrennt für christliche und jüdische) und parallel dazu eine ‚familiale Geselligkeitskultur‘ besonders auch in den Stadtpalais der wohlhabenden jüdischen Familien gebildet.⁵ Seit den 1780er Jahren wurden auch junge Intellektuelle, Akademiker und Künstler, zumeist Christen, in die Häuser mit eingeladen, wie u.a. in den Salon des gelehrten Arztes Marcus Herz und den musisch-literarisch orientierten seiner Frau Henriette (1764-1847), wo auch gemeinsames Lesen gepflegt wurde. Daran konnten nun auch nun die Töchter-Generation der jüdischen Aufklärung in Berlin,⁶ eine kleine Gruppe

¹ J. M. Raich, *Dorothea von Schlegel geb. Mendelssohn und deren Söhne Johannes und Philipp Veit. Briefwechsel im Auftrage der Familie Veit herausgegeben* (Mainz: Kirchheim, 1881), Bd. 1, S. 9.

² Moses 1787 (lebte 6 Monate), Jonas Veit 1790-1854, Abraham 1791 (lebte 11 Monate, starb an den Blattern), Philipp Veit 1793-1877.

³ Historisch fundierte Biografien: Carola Stern, „*Ich möchte mir Flügel wünschen*“. *Das Leben der Dorothea Schlegel* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, first 1990 in various editions) und Heike Frank, ... *die Disharmonie, die mit mir geboren ward, und mich nie verlassen wird Das Leben der Brendel/Dorothea Mendelssohn-Veit-Schlegel (1764–1839)* (Frankfurt a.M.: Lang, 1988). - Das lückenhafte Archivmaterial zur Beziehung von Veit und Schleiermacher erlaubt keine spekulativen Thesen, ich betrachte meine Überlegungen in diesem Aufsatz als ‚Skizze‘, als Deduktion aus den vorhandenen Schriften.

⁴ Raich 1881, 9 (wie Anm. 1).

⁵ Vgl. Thekla Keuck, *Hoffjuden und Kulturbürger. Die Geschichte der Familie Itzig* (Göttingen: V & R unipress, 2011), bes. S. 343–363 zu dem musikalischen Salon der Itzigs.

⁶ Christoph Schulte, „Die Töchter der Haskala: Die jüdischen Salonnières aus der Perspektive der jüdischen Aufklärung,“ in *Die Kommunikations-, Wissens- und Handlungsräume der Henriette Herz (1764-1847)*, hg. Hannah Lund et al. (Potsdam: V & R unipress, 2017),

von gebildeten, privilegierten Frauen, teilnehmen,⁷ darunter auch Madam Veit. Im Salon ihrer besten Freundin Henriette Herz⁸, die ihre Freundin Brendel „ein mit glühender Einbildungskraft begabtes Mädchen“ und „hochbegabt“ nannte und deren Begeisterung für die moderne Literatur, die ihr einen Einblick in die ‚andere Welt‘ vermittelte, lernte die damals dreiunddreißigjährige Veit 1797 Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher und Friedrich Schlegel kennen. Veit war bald mit dem sieben Jahre jüngeren Schlegel in eine glühende Affäre verwickelt. Schon 1798 bemühte Dorothea Veit sich um ihre Ehescheidung von ihrem Mann Simon, die dann am 4. Januar 1799 vom Rabbinatsgericht ausgesprochen wurde. Die Bestimmungen der Scheidung, die für die damalige Zeit relativ milde für die Frau ausgehandelt wurden, sollten Dorothea Veits gesellschaftliche Stellung regeln:⁹ Sohn Jonas blieb beim Vater, der sechsjährige Sohn Philipp konnte für vier Jahre bei Dorothea bleiben, musste aber dem Vater zurückgegeben werden, wenn sie sich wiederverheiratete oder die Religion wechselte. Veit behielt ihre Mitgift, ebenso musste sie auf den väterlichen Erbanteil verzichten; dafür überließ Veit ihr jedoch 1.000 Taler und 3.000 (für die Söhne), die er anlegte und ihr davon die Zinsen bezahlte, jährlich etwa 400 Taler. Eine eingeschränkte ‚Revenue‘, aber genug zum bürgerlichen Leben. Als geschiedene Frau verlor Dorothea Veit außerdem ihr Anrecht auf bürgerlichen Status in Berlin.

2. „Aus dem bloß lernenden in das anwendende Leben.“¹⁰ Schleiermacher und die Frühromantik

Der aus Breslau gebürtige Theologe Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) wurde Veits Freund und Berater. Schleiermacher hatte eine pietistische

S. 57-70. Schulte gibt einen guten Überblick über die reiche Forschungsliteratur zu den jüdischen Frauen in der Berliner Aufklärung und Romantik.

⁷ Hierzu u.a. Natalie Naimark-Goldberg, *Jewish Women in Enlightenment Berlin* (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2013), die Kapitel zu Briefen, Publikationen, Leserschaft, Geselligkeiten in Badeorten und Familien, Akkulturation, Emanzipation und Konversion zeigen das kulturelle Leben in der jüdischen Oberschicht in Berlin.

⁸ *Henriette Herz. Ihr leben und ihre Erinnerungen*, hg. von J. Fürst (Berlin: Wilhelm Hertz/Bessersche Buchhandlung, 1850), S. 108, 110. Herz hat leider ihren intimen Briefwechsel mit Dorothea vernichtet; ihre posthum veröffentlichten *Erinnerungen* sind von mehreren Editoren stark überarbeitet worden.

⁹ Vgl. Stern, Biografie, S. 97-120 und Deborah Hertz, „Dorothea Mendelssohn Schlegel“, in: *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia* (Jerusalem: Jewish Women’s Archive–Shalvi Publishing, 2006).

¹⁰ Schleiermacher an seinen Vater, J.G.A. Schleyermacher am 4.3.1789, KGA [=Kritische Gesamtausgabe von Schleiermachers Werken, Berlin: De Gruyter, 1985 (künftig zitiert als KGA, Abt., Bd., S.)], Abt. V, Bd. 1, S. 114.

Erziehung im Pädagogium der Herrnhuter in Niesky und deren Seminar in Barby genossen und studierte (dann aber gegen den Willen seines Vaters) in Halle evangelische Theologie. Dort beschäftigte er sich auch besonders mit den Schriften Kants. Er war nach Anstellungen als Hauslehrer der Söhne des Grafen Friedrich Alexander von Dohna im ostpreußischen Schlobitten und als Hilfsprediger in einer Kleinstadt in der brandenburgischen Neumark seit 1796 (der reformierte Prediger) an der Charité in Berlin. Er hatte Zutritt zu den geselligen Kreisen Berlins durch Alexander Graf von Dohna (1771–1832), einem älteren Bruder seiner Schüler in Schlobitten, erhalten, u.a. zur „Mittwochsgesellschaft“ (vermittelt durch den dänischen Diplomaten Carl Gustav von Brinkmann, 1764–1847) und zum literarischen Salon von Henriette Herz.¹¹ Mit dieser Konnexion wurde er bald ein enger Freund und Vertrauter von Madam Herz, Madam Veit und Friedrich Schlegel. Schleiermacher nahm den ewig in Geldnöten steckenden Friedrich Schlegel 1797 in seine (mit freier Kost und Logis verbundene) Predigerwohnung am Berliner Charité-Krankenhaus auf und lebte mit ihm in einer scherzhaft als ‚Ehe‘ bezeichneten symbiotischen Hausgemeinschaft.¹² Er betrachtete diese Jahre als eine Zeit „wo man aus dem bloß contemplativen Leben in das geschäftsvolle, aus dem bloß lernenden in das anwendende übergeht.“¹³ Schleiermacher prägte (mit Spinoza) die frühromantische Auffassung von der Religion als ‚die Anschauung des Universums‘ und eine ‚Schwester der Poesie‘ mit seiner Schrift *Über die Religion. Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* (1799).¹⁴ Er publizierte für seine Zeit innovative Gedanken zur

¹¹ Schleiermachers Beziehung zu Herz, die schon 1803 Witwe wurde, war literarisch produktiv, sie war seine kritische Leserin (wie auch Veit) bei der Abfassung seiner Schrift *Über die Religion. Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* (1799), die Schleiermacher schlagartig berühmt machen sollte; auch späterhin blieben beide in Kontakt; siehe Marjanne E. Goozé, „Geist und Schönheit der alternden Salonnière Henriette Herz,“ in *Geschlecht - Generation - Alter(n). Geistes- und sozialwissenschaftliche Perspektiven*, hg. von Hella Ehlers und Marieke Bohne (Münster, Westf.: LIT Verlag, 2011), S. 36–58.

¹² Kurt Nowak, *Schleiermacher und die Frühromantik. Eine literaturgeschichtliche Studie zum romantischen Religionsverständnis und Menschenbild am Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht, 1986), S. 109. Schon lange vor der Bekanntschaft mit den Frühromantikern hatte Schleiermacher dichterische Versuche unternommen, weitere Skizzen dann in der Berliner Zeit erwogen, die er auch wegen seiner beruflichen Anspannung nicht ausführte, sondern sich religiösen und philosophischen Essays mit Fragen der Individualisierung und Totalität zuwandte, ebd., S. 112.

¹³ Siehe Anm. 10. Bester Zugang und Übersicht in Schleiermacher Digital: Briefe in der Druckversion 1774–1807: https://schleiermacher-digital.de/briefe/detail_xql?id=S1123171&view=k. Neueste Übersicht über die reiche Schleiermacher-Forschung in: *Schleiermacher Handbuch*, hg. von Martin Ohst (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017).

¹⁴ Conrad Cramer, „‘Anschauung des Universums‘. Schleiermacher und Spinoza“, in *200 Jahre "Reden über die Religion": Akten des 1. Internationalen Kongresses der Schleiermacher-*

Komplementarität der Geschlechter,¹⁵ war Ideengeber für Schlegel, Beiträger von Fragmenten zum *Athenaeum*¹⁶ und vermittelte zwischen dem Verleger und Schlegel (besonders nach dessen Abreise aus Berlin). Anders als Schlegel ging Schleiermacher jedoch dem arbeitsreichen, wenig prestigeträchtigen Beruf eines Predigers an der Charité nach, damals das Armenkrankenhaus von Berlin und Ausbildungsstätte für preußische Militär-Chirurgen, während Schlegel als Student und Literat selbstbestimmt lesen, schreiben und reisen konnte.

Schleiermachers Beziehungen Herz, zu Friedrich Schlegel (und seine Freundschaft mit Eleonore von Grunow, die mit einem Kollegen verheiratet war) erregten indes Aufsehen, und sein Interesse an Spinoza gefiel seinem Mentor, dem Oberkonsistorialrat, Hof- und Domprediger Friedrich Sack nicht. Er ermahnte Schleiermacher: „Ich [...] verachte die, nach meinen Einsichten, verabscheuungswerthe (so genannte) Philosophie, die an der Spitze des Universums kein sich selbst bewußtes, weises und würdiges Wesen anerkannt“, womit besonders Spinoza und Vertreter des Pantheismus gemeint waren. Ebenso fürchtete Sack die Intellektuellen, die die Französische Revolution begrüßt hatten: „Empörend und verderblich erscheint mir die revolutionäre neue Schule, die mit frevelhafter Hand alles umstürzt und niederreißt“.¹⁷ Nach Konflikten mit dem Kirchendirektorium infolge von Schleiermachers zahlreichen Eingaben zu Verbesserungen der Charité (bessere Behandlung und Besoldung der Bedienten, mehr Armen- und Invalidenfürsorge), wurde er 1802 als Hofprediger in die hinterpommersche Provinz nach Stolp versetzt. Nach der Publikation theologischer und philosophischer Schriften erhielt er eine Professur in Halle (1804), kehrte dann nach der Niederlage Preußens 1806 und der Auflösung der Hallenser Universität 1807 nach Berlin zurück, wo er als Pfarrer an der Dreifaltigkeitskirche und Professor der Theologie an der neu gegründeten Universität und als Akademiemitglied (beides seit 1810) wirkte.

Gesellschaft, 1999, hg. von Ulrich Barth and Claus-Dieter Osthövener (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2000), S. 118-141.

¹⁵ Vgl. Andreas Arndt in *Wissenschaft und Geselligkeit. Friedrich Schleiermacher in Berlin 1796-1802*, hg. von Andreas Arndt (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2009), S. 4–5.

¹⁶ Schlegel hat „aus Aufzeichnungen Schleiermachers, um das *Athenaeum* zu füllen, Passagen herausgesucht, die durch ihre originelle Gestaltung dann zum geistigen Eigentum Schlegels wurden“; Nowak, *Frühromantik*, S. 114 (wie Anm. 12).

¹⁷ Brief von Friedrich Samuel Gottfried Sack an Schleiermacher, Ende 1800/Anfang 1801, Nr. 1005 in KGA, 5.5, S.3-5.

3. „Ich wollte, ich könnte mit Ihnen sprechen.“¹⁸ Die Briefgespräche

Schleiermacher hatte schon bei den Scheidungsverhandlungen für Dorothea Veit mit dem Ehemann [Simon Veit] verhandelt.¹⁹ Er wurde Madam Veits Ratgeber, besonders nach dem Erscheinen von Schlegels Roman *Lucinde* Ende Mai 1799, der als Autofiktion, „als ästhetisch misslungen, allzu persönlich, vor allem hinsichtlich der Person Dorothea Veits, die allgemein als die lebensweltliche Vorlage der Lucinde Figur galt,“ verrissen wurde und besonders Veits guten Ruf vernichtete.²⁰ Schleiermacher blieb einer der ganz wenigen Freunde, die (außer Henriette Herz, Rahel Levin und Schwester Henriette) sich weiterhin verständnisvoll für Veit zeigten. Er verstand Veits prekäre Lage, als er seiner Schwester Charlotte über seine Freundschaft mit Schlegel berichtete: „Das Auffallende und Verwerfliche, was ihre [Madam Veits] Handlungsweise in den Augen der Welt hat, bekümmert mich sehr tief und ist ein Gegenstand ernster Sorge für mich, eben weil sie und Schlegel mir so lieb sind.“²¹

Als Schlegel Berlin im Herbst 1799 verließ und zum Bruder August Wilhelm nach Jena ging, folgte ihm Veit (am 6.10. 1799) nach und setzte ihre vertrauliche Aussprache mit Schleiermacher in etwa 40 Briefen, von unterschiedlicher Länge, Form und Inhalt aus Jena bis 1802 fort. Weitere neun folgten aus Paris bis April 1803,²² und ein letzter langer Brief aus Köln von 1806. Die Gegenbriefe an Veit sind *nicht* erhalten, abgesehen von zwei eher unbedeutenden von 1800;²³ einige Echos auf Schleiermacher finden sich in Veits Briefen und in parallelen, sehr vielen Briefen Friedrich Schlegels an Schleiermacher, zumeist ohne dessen Gegenbriefe, von denen alles Auffind-

¹⁸ KFSa [=Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe, Berlin: Paderborn et al.: Schöningh, 1985], Bd. 26,1, Nr. 96, S. 92.

¹⁹ KFSa, 24, Nr. 160, S. 266, Veit an Schleiermacher am 8. April 1799. Madam Veit konnte in eine eigene Wohnung (in der Ziegelstraße) in Berlin ziehen, wo Schlegel und Schleiermacher sie ungestört besuchen konnten.

²⁰ Vgl. Manuel Bauer, *Schlegel und Schleiermacher. Frühromantische Kunstkritik und Hermeneutik* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2011), S. 259. Sogar Bruder August Wilhelm verurteilte die „thörichte Rhapsodie“ und hatte vehement von der Publikation abgeraten, doch das Honorar und der Autorstolz lockten.

²¹ Schleiermacher an seine Schwester Charlotte am 27. Dezember 1800; KGA, 5.4, Nr. 997, S. 37.

²² Zu den erhaltenen Briefen Veits kommen noch ihre Nachschriften zu Friedrich Schlegels Briefen, einige „Zettelchen“ und „erschlossenen Briefe“, deren Text nicht überliefert ist. - Dagegen sind die Briefwechsel Dorothea Veits mit Henriette Herz und der Mendelssohn-Familie „gänzlich verschollen“; Hermann Patsch in der Einleitung zu KFSa, Bd. 25, S. LXXIX.

²³ KFSa, 25, Nr. 81, S. 142, vom 19. Juli 1800 und Nr. 126, S. 208-209 vom 6. Dezember 1800. - Schleiermachers Brief von 1803 (s. unten) war an Friedrich Schlegel in Köln gerichtet; KFSa, 16.1, Nr. 93, S. 89-91.

bare in nun sogar zwei kritischen Editionen²⁴ mit Kommentar publiziert ist. Dort wird nur sehr selten auf die persönliche Lage Veits und nur gelegentlich auf ihre Rolle als literarische Zuarbeiterin Schlegels Bezug genommen.

Briefe, eine Fortsetzung der Salongespräche aus den privaten Geselligkeiten, waren auch für Veit das wohl wichtigste Medium der Orientierung im persönlichen Austausch: „Mit dem Schaum der Briefe bin ich noch immer meiner Meinung; den Hauch, den Athem, den letzten Gedanken vor dem versiegeln, der ist mit eingesiegelt, und gehört dem, an dem [sic] es gerichtet ist – dies ist nur meine eigne Empfindung dabei.“²⁵ Briefe waren mehr als nur Plaudereien, sie ersetzten das Sprechen über die eigenen Gedanken und lebensweltliche Probleme. Noch 1803 wünschte sie: „Ich wollte, ich könnte mit Ihnen sprechen, theuerster Freund, das heißt, ich *hörte* sie sprechen. [...] Wissen Sie noch, lieber S., wie Friedrich nach Dresden gereißt war, und Sie im Thiergarten mit mir spazieren gingen, und mir zuredeten? [...] Daß ich nur geängstigt wäre von der Ahndung daß, nun mein Schicksal unwiderstehlich beschlossen sey, nicht mehr auszuweichen. [...] Es war das Erstemal, daß ich mir bestimmt bewußt war und was ich wollte, und was ich thun müßte.“²⁶ Damit erinnerte Veit an ihr Erwachen des eigenen Bewusstseins und ihrer Wünsche, an ihre ethische Orientierung im Gespräch mit Schleiermacher. Gegenseitiges Vertrauen und Verständnis kennzeichnen dann auch den Austausch über lebensweltliche und ethische Fragen in Veits Briefen an Schleiermacher, dessen *Reden über die Religion* Veit schon Anfang 1799 zu lesen begann. Sie bedankte sich bei Schleiermacher mit aufklärerischer Metapher dafür, „daß [ihr] viel neue Lichter damit aufgehen werden.“²⁷

4. „Beschäftige Dich nützlich“.²⁸ Mendelssohns Tochter

Veit erscheint schon in den 1780er Jahren als selbstbewusste, zielstrebige und ethisch verantwortliche Frau in ihrer Familie; als Älteste (von 6 Geschwistern) etwa ermahnte sie 1788 die jüngere, unverheiratete Schwester Henriette, als diese sehr unglücklich darüber war, dass sie mit der verwitweten Mutter aus Berlin weg in die Provinz (nach Neustrelitz) ziehen musste: „Beschäftige Dich nützlich [...] Lerne zu, soviel Du kannst; sei

²⁴ Die KGA (wie Anm. 10) von Schleiermacher ist abgeschlossen; in der KFSA (wie Anm. 18) fehlen noch einige Brief- und Kommentarbände für die Jahre nach 1808.

²⁵ KFSA, 24, Brief 151, S. 249. Brief vom März 1799.

²⁶ KFSA, 26,1, Nr. 96, S. 92 (wie Anm. 18). Paris im April 1803; Veit erinnert an ihr Gespräch im Tiergarten 1798, als Schlegel nach Dresden gereist war.

²⁷ Veit las hier die ersten drei Bogen von Schleiermachers *Reden*; KFSA, 24, Nr. 152, S. 252.

²⁸ Raich, Dorothea von Schlegel Briefe, S. 1 (wie Anm. 1). Brief vom 15. September 1788. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=pst.000004993391&view=1up&seq=11>.

Nothleidenden behülflich, so viel Du vermagst, mit Rath, Trost oder Geld. Hör nie auf, Dich selbst zu vervollkommen, bessere beständig [...] der einzige Weg zur Glückseligkeit ist immer besser werden; alles übrige ist außer uns und kann uns nur solange beglücken als es neu ist.“ Das riet Brendel und ermunterte sie, jeden Abend „getreu aufzuschreiben, nicht allein was Du gethan und Dir begegnet, sondern auch was Du gedacht und gefühlt hast“.²⁹ Zu Brendel Veits aufklärerischen Werten im Gefolge von Vater Mendelssohn, gehörte also das Streben nach nützlicher Beschäftigung, Nächstenliebe, Selbstprüfung und Vervollkommnung, Bildung, Tagebuchführung und eine gewisse Ergebenheit „in alles Übrige“ – durchaus großbürgerliche Wertvorstellungen des aufgeklärten späten 18. Jahrhunderts ohne explizite religiöse Bindung an die jüdische Religion,³⁰ wohl aber auch die Werte der von Vater Mendelssohn vertretenen Haskala (jüdischen Aufklärung). Mendelssohn hatte auf guten *deutschen* Sprachkenntnissen bestanden³¹ und auch Musik und Theater gehörten zu Veits kultureller Bildung ebenso wie die *private* Beschäftigung mit Lektüre, Schreiben, Literatur, Musik und Geselligkeit, die die Akkulturation an die Berliner gutbürgerliche, christliche Gesellschaft begünstigten und dem Assimilationsdruck um 1800 entgegenkamen.³²

5. Die „Disharmonie die mit mir geboren ward.“³³ Veits Entscheidung für Friedrich Schlegel

Nach Veits Scheidung wegen eines christlichen Liebhabers gab es für sie kein Zurück, sie blieb beharrlich bei Schlegel; es war eine selbstbestimmte Entscheidung *für* ihre Liebe, ihre Gefühle, eine Entscheidung für Friedrich Schlegels Person *und* seine kulturelle Welt. Es war keine Ablehnung *alles* Jüdischen, denn Veit hatte nur ihre Konventionsehe, die ihre Gefühle und kulturellen Interessen nicht befriedigte, als ‚Sklaverei‘ und ‚Schiffbruch‘ bezeichnet. Sie sprach von ihrer Scheidung als einer „innere[n] nothwendigkeit“, denn sie nahm erst „nach manchem Schwanken, und Zweifeln“ das

²⁹ Siehe Anm. 28. Neu-Strelitz wurde damals zur Residenzstadt des Herzogs von Mecklenburg-Strelitz ausgebaut; die unverheiratete Schwester Henriette musste mitziehen.

³⁰ In Veits Generation erhielten Töchter keinen Religionsunterricht, sollten nicht Hebräisch lernen oder die Torah studieren, was ausschließlich Männersache war.

³¹ Das Erlernen des Deutschen förderte die Akkulturation der Jiddisch sprechenden Juden in Preußen; Mendelssohn übersetzte die Tora ins Deutsche zunächst zum Gebrauch für seine eigenen Söhne.

³² Vgl. Ulrike Wels, „Überschreitungen in nuce – Überlegungen zum religiösen Selbstverständnis der Henriette Herz,“ in *Die Kommunikations-, Wissens- und Handlungsräume*, hg. von Hannah Lund et al. (Potsdam: V & R unipress, 2017), S.187-218.

³³ KFSa, 26,1, Nr. 96, S. 93.

Risiko auf sich, dass die Scheidung von Simon Veit auch ein Bruch mit ihrer Familie bedeuten würde, wie die vielen „Contestationen, Scenen“ mit ihrer Mutter, Familie und Freunden das sofort signalisierten: „Aus diesen [sic] Schiffbruch, der mich von einer langen Sklaverey befreit, habe ich nichts gerettet als eine sehr kleine revenue, von der ich nur äusserst sparsam leben kann, vielen guten, frohen Muth, meinen Philip [den jüngsten Sohn, der durch eine private Absprache mit Simon Veit bei ihr bleiben durfte], einige Menschen, mein Klavier [...] wie eine freygelaßne, die nun erst etwas ihr eigen nennen darf, nachdem sie sich selbst angehört“.³⁴

Wieweit Veit das persönliche und gesellschaftliche Risiko dieser Entscheidung, damit auch ihre Herkunftsgesellschaft und Religion zu verlassen, voraussehen oder einschätzen konnte und ob, wie Familie und Freunde argwöhnten, Schlegel ‚ihr den Kopf verdreht‘ habe, sie nur *eine* unter seinen vielen Liebes-Affären sei und sie als Entré in die jüdische Oberschicht und deren Geld benutze – das mag dahingestellt bleiben. Veit blieb bei ihrer Entscheidung und sah die Gestaltung seines und ihres Lebens dann als ihre Lebensaufgabe an. 1803 verteidigte sie ihre Entscheidung und dankte Schleiermacher für seinen „sanften eindringlichen Trost“ und „sein festes Zureden“, sie glaube sogar (oder gab mit rhetorischem Understatement, dem weiblichen Bescheidenheitstopos, vor), dass sie „ein Hindernis“ sei, das Schlegel „am Fortkommen hindre“; denn „mein Schicksal war es von je her, mich quälen zu müßen, und nun muß er unter der Disharmonie die mit mir geboren ward, und mich nie verlassen wird nun muß er auch darunter leiden!“³⁵ Dies schrieb sie an einem kritischen Punkt des gemeinsamen Lebens mit Schlegel, als alle die großen Karriere-Erwartungen und literarischen Pläne Schlegels in Paris gescheitert waren. Dazu kam, dass die Eroberungskriege Napoleons die Menschen verunsicherten und die Lebensaussichten der aufstrebenden bürgerlichen Intellektuellen und Literaten bedrohten. 1803 setzte Napoleon die Auflösung des Heiligen Römischen Reiches durch sowie die Neuverteilungen von Gebieten und Herrschaften (u.a. kamen alle linksrheinischen Territorien zu Frankreich, Kirchenbesitz wurde zerschlagen) in Gang. Auch

³⁴ Sie schrieb an den befreundeten, in Paris weilenden Diplomaten Karl Gustav von Brinkmann (dem Schleiermacher seine *Reden* gewidmet hatte) am 2. Februar 1799: „Seit 3 Wochen bin ich, nach vielen Contestationen, Scenen, - nach manchem Schwanken, und Zweifeln - endlich von V. geschieden, und ich wohne allein“; KFSa, 24, Nr. 133, S. 223.

³⁵ Siehe Anmerkung 33. Brief von der ersten Hälfte April 1803. In dem Brief oszilliert sie zwischen Klagen „es will nichts, nichts gelingen“ und Hoffnung „wir bleiben in Paris, bis sich uns eine Aussicht zu einem sichern Einkommen zeigt“, und sie bittet um Hilfe: „Schleiermacher denken sie sich etwas aus für ihn, er selber bietet die Hände zu manchem hier wozu der Entschluß ihm hart ankam“ (KFSa, 26,1, Nr. 96, S. 93).

Schleiermacher klagte in anderen Briefen aus dieser Zeit, damals schon in Stolp (seine Briefe an Veit sind nicht erhalten), oft über die unsichere Lage und meinte sein baldiges Ableben zu erahnen.

Trotz ihrer inneren ‚Disharmonie‘ hing Veit an ihrem Leben: „Aber zu jener Disharmonie gehört auch mit dazu, daß ich [...] nun doch noch fester an der Erde klebe und mich von eitlen Hoffnungen nicht rasch losreißen kann; ich finde noch zu viel Seligkeit in dem Leben mit Friedrich und mit Philipp.“³⁶ Mit ‚Disharmonie‘ meinte sie wohl auch ihren Zwiespalt, den Dualismus von Gefühl und Verstand in ihrem Leben und auch (aus ontologischer Perspektive) ihre ‚schicksalhafte‘ Geburt als Frau *und* Jüdin. Und sie schickte sich in ihr ‚Schicksal‘ und räsionierte über ihr sorgenvolles Leben: „Aber mit mehr Ruhe sehe ich schon die Abnahme meiner Kräfte. [...] Ich denke ich werde wie mein Vater sterben, nemlich aus Schwäche, ohne Schmerzen, ein bloßes Erlöschen; diese Vorstellung hat weiter nichts bittres für mich.“³⁷ In dieser stoischen Haltung gedachte sie ihres Vaters Mendelssohn. Es war eine Affirmation ihres väterlich-jüdischen, aufklärerischen Erbes *und* eine selbst gewillte Entscheidung für Friedrich, aber auch für ihre Gefühle, für ein selbstgewähltes Leben.

6. „Der Grund auf die [sic] Ewigkeit der Liebe ruht.“³⁸ Veit und Schleiermachers Liebes-Konzept

Veit suchte Orientierung in dieser Gesellschaft (der jungen Literaten und Intellektuellen) und verlangte nach Teilhabe: „Ihr macht mich mit Euch ganz confuse“ schrieb sie Schleiermacher im Frühjahr 1799.³⁹ Sie war zunächst etwas verunsichert, konnte sich erst langsam in den ironischen Spielereien und codierten Witzeleien⁴⁰ der ‚philosofierenden‘ Freunde zurechtfinden, die über sie als Objekt redeten. Sie fühlte sich zunächst als Außenstehende, Schlegel warf ihr (scherzhaft?) ‚Unverständlichkeit‘ vor. Dann verortete sich Veit, indem sie sich Schlegels Vision einer Lucinde, einer Lichtbringerin, anschloss und sich als ideale Geliebte inszenierte. Besonders die ganz frühen

³⁶ KFSa, 26,1, Nr. 96, S. 93.

³⁷ KFSa, 26,1, Nr. 96, S. 93-94.

³⁸ KFSa, 25, Nr. 71, S. 123. Brief vom 16. Juni 1800.

³⁹ „Schlegel meint, *capricen* hätte ich, auch Charackter, aber doch keinen *capricen* Charackter. - ist das nicht mystisch [...] Daß Ihr mich aber so verwickelt findet [...] bin ich denn nicht bis zur Platitüde einfach?“, dann gespielt gleichgültig: „mich soll es von nun an nicht weiter kümmern“; KFSa, 24, Nr. 151, S. 249, Brief vom März 1799. Ein Brief über ‚Veits Charakter‘ ist nicht erhalten.

⁴⁰ Mit „Lebt wohl! Das heißt: seid witzig,“ schließt sie ihren Brief im Dezember 1798 an Schleiermacher; KFSa, 24, Nr. 128, S. 217.

Briefe Dorothea Veits an Schleiermacher⁴¹ sind voller Bewunderung, Anbetung, Begeisterung, gefühlvoller Hingebung, Mitleid, Mitgefühl, Fürsorge für Schlegel: „Der vortreffliche! Er ist ganz Liebe und Hoffnung und Glück [...] und göttliche[m] Enthusiasmus [...] „mir zagt es ein wenig im Innersten Herzen und [...] fürchte, ich werde mich nicht ganz von der Angst befreien, daß ich zu gering für (den) Herrlichen bin!“⁴² Sie will Friedrich „einen Tempel bauen – er ist doch ein Gott, wo nicht mehr“.⁴³ Sie betet den Geliebten, auch sprachlich in religiösen Metaphern an und stilisiert sich als Liebende (mit den seinerzeit von einer Frau erwarteten Minderwertigkeitsgesten) *und* als Verehrerin des genialen Dichters. In späteren Aussagen ist der ekstatische, theatralische Ton echten Gefühlen gewichen, wenn sie von ihrer Ankunft in Jena schreibt: „Friedrich, der mir immer lieber wird, jemehr ich andre neben ihn [sic] sehe“⁴⁴ und noch 1806 in einem letzten Brief beteuerte sie auf Schleiermachers Anfrage hin ihre „unwandelbare Liebe“ und wie „unheimlich reich“ sie in ihrem inneren Leben sei: „Ihrem [Schleiermachers] freundlichen Forscher Blick wird nichts neu, und nichts unbekannt an mir erscheinen, für den, der mich so kennt, bleibe ich die *Alte*.“⁴⁵

⁴¹ Veits erster, früher Eindruck von Schlegel im September 1797 war jedoch zwiespältig, einerseits fand sie „liebenswertig an diesem Menschen“ seine „Bescheidenheit, und sein Selbstgefühl“, aber sie tadelte seine „Arroganz“ und „Impertinenz“ und sie verglich ihn mit dem gewissenlosen, geistreichen Verführer Vicomte de Valmont in Chaderclos' Libertinage-Roman *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1782). Der an Rahel Levin (Varnhagen) gerichtete Brief mag eventuell auch Veits Eifersucht auf Rahel zeigen, da Schlegel auch Rahel den Hof machte; KFSa 24, Brief Nr. 9, S. 14 und Kommentar S. 325. Er zeigt auch, wie gezielt Schlegel sich um die Gunst der jungen (verheirateten) Damen von Stand bemühte.

⁴² KFSa, 24, Nr. 151, S. 249, Brief vom März 1799.

⁴³ KFSa, 24, Nr. 186, S. 297, Brief vom Sommer 1799.

⁴⁴ KFSa, 25, Nr. 10, S. 15, Brief vom 11. Oktober 1799. - Eigenartig mutet Schlegels Reaktion an, die Veit bei ihrer Ankunft in Jena so beschrieben hat: „Aber wie mein Herz klopfte, als ich nun [...] ausstieg und fremd war, und Friedrich endlich die Stufen herab kam, leise und bedächtig, als wäre er gar nicht ungeduldig“ (ebd.). - Friedrich Schlegel hatte am Vortag an Schleiermacher berichtet: „Wie groß erst die Ungeduld dann die Freude über Dor[rothea] war, kannst Du denken“, eine der ganz seltenen Aussagen über seine Gefühle für Dorothea; KFSa, 25, Nr. 9, S. 11, Brief vom 10. Oktober 1799.

⁴⁵ KFSa, 26,2, Nr. 136, S.147-151. Brief vom Dezember 1806/Januar 1807. Der Brief ist nach der Besetzung Berlins durch die Franzosen nach der verlorenen Schlacht gegen Napoleon bei Jena und Auerstedt im Oktober 1806 geschrieben worden. Dorothea Schlegel bedauerte die traurige Lage der ‚Beamten aller Stände‘ in den von Frankreich eroberten Ländern, rät dringend Schleiermacher zur Annahme eines Rufes (er hatte seit 1804 eine Professur in Jena) nach Bremen und Preußen zu verlassen, deren naive Anbiederung preußischer Intellektueller (wie Woltmann und Müller) an Napoleon bei dem Pressburger Frieden (Dezember 1805) und die frankophile Haltung in der Berliner Gesellschaft sie tadelt. Sie spricht vom katholischen „verratenen verlassenen Süden“, dem „verkannten, verstoßenen Theil unsres Vaterlandes“ durch den (preußischen) „Aufruf unter protestantischer Fahne“ von Sachsen-Weimar. Der ihr bekannte Kanzler Friedrich von Müller und

Veits Inszenierung als Liebende *und* Verehrerin des genialen Künstler-Liebhhabers war eine Melange aus Versatzstücken romantischer Weiblichkeitsvorstellungen und Geniekult, eine Kombination aus der zeitgenössischen philosophischen Debatte über Weiblichkeit einerseits und literarischer Ideologie andererseits. In dieser Verortung war Schleiermacher, dessen bevorzugtes Ideenfeld Religion und Ethik waren, aber besonders sein Liebes-Konzept dürfte auf Dorothea Veit eingewirkt haben. In Schleiermachers Text *Idee zu einem Katechismus der Vernunft für edle Frauen* (den er unter den Fragmenten im *Athenäum* von 1798 anonym veröffentlichte), plädierte er für die „sittliche und geistige Selbstentfaltung der Frau und deutete eine entsprechende Vision der Beziehung zwischen Frauen und Männern an“.⁴⁶ Er übertrug die androgyne Sicht aus der christlichen Tradition auf die derzeit als Faktum viel diskutierte Geschlechterpolarität und interpretierte diese ‚vernünftig‘ als Liebe *gleicher Seelen*. Schleiermacher formulierte dies in seinen *Ideen zu einem Katechismus der Vernunft* so: „1. Ich glaube an die unendliche Menschheit, die da war, ehe sie die Hülle der Männlichkeit und Weiblichkeit annahm“. Deshalb, so der 2. Glaubenssatz, soll die Frau leben, „um zu sein und zu werden“, soll glauben „an die Macht des Willens und der Bildung, [um sich] dem Unendlichen wieder zu nähern, [um sich] aus den Fesseln der Mißbildung zu erlösen und [sich] von den Schranken des Geschlechts unabhängig machen“.⁴⁷ Er ermutigte die Frau: „Merke auf den Sabbath deines Herzens, daß du ihn feyerst, und wenn sie dich halten, so mache dich frey oder gehe zu Grunde“. Schleiermacher wies auf das Herz, die Gefühle, die innere Stimme hin, auf die die Frau hören solle und sich von äußeren Dingen befreien, denn die Alternative ist wenig attraktiv: „oder gehe zu Grunde“. Hier klingen christlich-androgyne, pantheistische und freiheitliche Tendenzen (des revolutionären 1790er Jahrzehnt) an; es sind moralisch-ethische Vorgaben für das weibliche

Goethe-Freund verhandelte mit Napoleon, erreichte Fortbestand vom Herzogtum, wurde als Geschenk geadelt. Der erwähnte Karl Ludwig von Woltmann, Resident am preußischen Hof für Oldenburg und mehrere Freie Städte, gab 1800 die Zeitschrift *Geschichte und Politik*/ab 1813 *Deutsche Blätter* heraus. Dorotheas Brief beruht auf ihren Gesprächen mit Katholiken in Köln und ist auch ein Echo von Schlegels Politik.

⁴⁶ Elisabeth Hartlieb, *Geschlechterdifferenz im Denken Friedrich Schleiermachers* (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter 2006), S. 112. Vgl. auch die theologischen Studien: Patricia Ellen Guenther-Gleason, *On Schleiermacher and Gender Politics* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press/Harvard Theological Studies, 1997) und Ian G. Nicol, *Schleiermacher and Feminism* (Lewistown, PA: Mellen Press 1992), bes. S. 277-307: „Love as reconciling agent.“

⁴⁷ *Athenaeum* I, 2, 1798, S. 109-110.

Individuum, oder genauer: für „edle Frauen“, deren „Beruf doch einmal die Liebe ist“.⁴⁸

Schleiermachers Liebes-Konzept bestärkte Dorothea Veit in ihrer Liebe, sie knüpfte im Sommer 1800 direkt an Schleiermachers *Vertraute Briefe über die Lucinde* an, deren eigentlicher Gegenstand die Liebe zwischen den Geschlechtern war, wofür der Roman den Anlass bildete: „Die Liebe soll auferstehen, ihre zerstückten Glieder soll ein neues Leben vereinigen und beseelen, daß sie froh und frei herrsche im Gemüth der Menschen“,⁴⁹ schrieb Schleiermacher in der „Zueignung an die Unverständigen“,⁵⁰ die er den „Senat der Erhalter“, die „Mumien“ nannte. Dorothea Veit begrüßte die „Absicht der Briefe“ als eine „[f]ürchterliche Rache [...] das Flammenschwert das den Unverständigen an [sic] Eingang des Paradieses entgegen blitzt“.⁵¹

Veit zeigte genuines Verständnis für Schleiermachers Schrift: „Die L[ucinden] Briefe sind weiblich [...] transcende[n]tal mädchenhaft!“⁵² Die *Briefe* haben Veit „manches in der Lucinde [...] besser verstehen lernen, wenigstens ihm klar und bestimmt seinen Platz angewiesen wo ich es hinzu tun habe“; besonders gefielen ihr Eleonorens Fragmente: „der süße Kern“, in dem sie identifikatorisch eine ihr vertraute weibliche Perspektive sehen konnte.⁵³ Und sie entwarf eine Antwort an ‚Leonore‘: „In Lucindens Namen und in ihrer Seele [...] würde ich sagen [...] eben weil der Grund auf die [sic] Ewigkeit der Liebe ruht, darum muß sie entsagen können ohne Furcht die Liebe zu zertrümmern. Sie muß entsagen wollen können, oder sie darf nicht besitzen wollen. Außer das Lucinde Julius Geliebte ist, ist sie auch noch ein freyes Wesen, wer nicht entsagen *will*, der *muß* es endlich.“⁵⁴ In ihrer Lektüre

⁴⁸ *Vertraute Briefe über die Lucinde* (Lübeck u. Leipzig: Bohn, 1800), S. 26. Schlegel besorgte den anonymen Druck bei Wesselhoeft in Jena, im Bekanntenkreis wurde die Autorschaft erraten. Erst 1835 wurde die Schrift von Gutzkow wieder gedruckt und die Jungdeutschen waren erstaunt, dass der ‚ehrwürdige Schleiermacher‘ (der prominente Theologe und Prediger lebte bis 1834 in Berlin) diese Schrift in jungen Jahren veröffentlicht hatte; vgl. Hans Dierkes, „Die Problematische Poesie. Schleiermachers Beitrag zur Frühromantik,“ in *Internationaler Schleiermacher-Kongreß*, hg. von Kurt-Victor Selge (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1985), S. 62-98.

⁴⁹ *Vertraute Briefe*, S. 10. Schleiermacher konzipierte mit den fiktionalen Schreiber-Figuren ‚Friedrich‘ und ‚Leonore‘ ein ideales Paar, an denen er seine Idee von der Leib-Geist-Einheit in der Liebe, die ethisch gut, d.h. sittlich und zweckfrei ist, darstellen konnte.

⁵⁰ *Vertraute Briefe*, S. 7-11.

⁵¹ KFSa, 25, Nr. 71, S. 122. Brief vom 16. Juni 1800. Veit spielt an auf sexuelles Begehren als ‚Sündenfall‘, als Grund der Vertreibung Adams und Evas aus dem Paradies an, als Gott den Erzengel Michael mit dem Flammenschwert zur Bewachung vor das Paradies stellte.

⁵² KFSa, 25, Nr. 62, S. 102. Brief vom 28.-30. April 1800.

⁵³ KFSa, 25, Nr. 71, S. 123. Brief vom 16. Juni 1800.

⁵⁴ KFSa, 25, Nr. 71, S. 123. Brief vom 16. Juni 1800 (wie Anm. 38).

von Schleiermachers Text interessierte Veit besonders die weibliche Stimme. Sie riet dieser (als Antwort auf Schleiermacher) mit Schlegels *Lucinde*-Figur, dass sie ‚freiwillig entsagen wollen‘ können müsse, „eben weil der Grund auf die [sic] Ewigkeit der Liebe ruht“. Veit stand, wie sie selbst auch bemerkte, auf Kriegsfuß mit dem Gebrauch von Dativ/Akkusativ besonders bei Präpositionen, sie versteht hier ‚Ewigkeit‘, ein Begriff aus der jüdisch-christlichen Tradition, als Urgrund bez. Begründung der wahren Liebe.

Veits ‚Antwort‘ in diesem Brief an Schleiermacher zeigt einmal Veits Verinnerlichung von Schleiermachers transzendentelem Liebeskonzeptes. Andererseits scheint Veit vage von dem Begriff der ‚freiwilligen Entsagung‘, dem „sie muß entsagen wollen können“, verunsichert zu sein. Die Frau als „freies Wesen“ muss freiwillig entsagen, der Liebe oder dem Liebhaber? Schlegels witzig-spielerisches Geplauder in seiner *Lucinde*-Fiktion spricht von einer ewigen Liebe ohne Angst vor Vergänglichkeit, weist dann aber auf die alternde Frau: „wenn Jugend flieht und wenn ich [Lucinde] Dir [Julius] entsage wie Du der größern Liebe einst entsagtest“.⁵⁵ Die Fiktion verlässt die spielerische, fiktionale Diskursebene und tritt in die ‚wirkliche Welt‘ mit Altern und Genderspezifika (zumindest für die Frau) ein und raunt weiterhin von „der größern Liebe“, der Julius entsagt habe – Vertraute des Schlegel-Kreises sahen darin eine Anspielung auf Schlegels Beziehung zu Caroline, der Frau des Bruders August Wilhelm. Mit dieser war Dorothea Veit in Jena bald verfeindet.

Doch auch im Lichte solcher beunruhigenden Konkurrenzverhältnisse und angedeuteten Limitationen beruhigte sich Veit mit Schleiermachers Gedanken an die völlige seelisch-körperliche Verschmelzung in der Liebe, „deren Grund in die Ewigkeit ruht“, und sie akzeptierte die Unterordnung und Anpassung der ‚idealen‘ Geliebten‘ als ‚freies Wesen‘ an den geliebten Mann. Sie machte sich in ‚der ‚wirklichen Welt‘ freiwillig ‚zum Werkzeug des Mannes‘, übereignete nicht nur ihr ‚Geschlechtsorgan‘, sondern ‚widmete ihm auch ihre Arbeitskraft und ihr Leben – ganz im Sinne der im 18. Jahrhundert geforderten Geschlechterrollen und der von den Romantikern gelebten Rollen Schlegel sprach von der ‚Selbstständigkeit‘ der Frau, überspielte rhetorisch die Asymmetrie der Geschlechter, der weiblichen und männlichen Position um 1800, mit romantischer Ideologie. Schlegel jedenfalls war der Liebhaber vieler Frauen, vor und während des gemeinsamen Lebens und dann Ehe mit Dorothea Veit, und der geniale Dichter. Fast entschuldigend lautet ein Fragment (von A.W. Schlegel) im *Athenaeum* „Dichter sind doch immer Narzisse,“ (I,2, S. 35), das Friedrich Schlegel in

⁵⁵ Aus dem Wechselgespräch „Sehnsucht und Ruhe“ aus der *Lucinde*, KFSa, 5, S. 78-80.

der Darstellung der Geschlechterbeziehungen in der *Lucinde* ironisch durchspielte. Veit wies eine Kritik an der männlichen Julius-Figur (in der *Lucinde*) zurück: „Den zweiten Mißlaut, den Friedrich [in Schleiermachers *Vertrauten Briefen*] will im Duett [zwischen Lucinde und Julius in „Sehnsucht und Ruhe“] gefunden haben wag ich nicht in Julius Namen zu widersprechen, darüber hängt der undurchdringliche Vorhang der Individualität, den auch Lucinde wohl niemals hinweg zu heben vermochte, und aus heiliger Ehrfurcht lieber zurücktrat.“⁵⁶ Veit wollte Schlegels Kunstwerk, den Roman und den genialen Dichter nicht kritisieren, aber sie erkannte, dass die ironische Spielerei im „Duett“ lediglich überspielt, dass im Alter eine Frau dem Mann entsagen sollte, und damit Schleiermachers Konzept der ‚Ewigkeit der Liebe‘ entgegenstand. Mit Schlegels Ironie waren Gender-Probleme im ‚wirklichen Leben‘ nicht zu erfassen, zu begreifen und rational anzusprechen, schon gar nicht zu lösen. Dagegen halfen Schleiermachers Schriften und Gespräche Veit bei der Sinnsuche und Selbstbegründung. Schleiermachers ethische Konzeption der ‚Geist und Körper‘ umfassenden Geschlechter-Liebe mit dem Ausblick auch auf die Kreation eines neuen Lebens, die religiös in der christlichen Tradition begründet war, konnte ihrem Handeln eher eine fruchtbare Richtung verleihen. Liebe solcherart verstanden erwies sich als sozialisierend und menscheitskonstituierend, eine typische, doch nicht originäre Ideen-schöpfung der Frühromantik, die sich in den 1790er Jahren allgemein durchgesetzt hatte.⁵⁷ Auch wenn längere Passagen zu philosophischen Fragen in Veits Briefen an Schleiermacher eher selten sind, so zeigen sie doch Veits geistige Auseinandersetzung mit ethischen Grundsätzen um 1800 und ihre eigenständige Erörterung der Paradigmen und Sinnsuche für ihr Leben, für die Schleiermachers Schriften ihr einen Weg wiesen.

7. Die „freigelassene“.⁵⁸ Künstlerin im Kreis der Romantiker

Noch im April 1799 hatte Madam Veit Bedenken über die Veröffentlichung ihrer Gefühle in ihrem Verhältnis zu Schlegel geäußert: „Oft wird mir es heiß, und wieder kalt ums Herz, daß das Innerste so herausgewendet werden soll [...] aber die Liebe? – ich denke aber wieder: alle diese Schmerzen werden vergehen, mit meinem Leben, und das Leben auch mit, und alles was vergeht, sollte man nicht so hoch achten, daß man ein Werk (drum) unterließe, das *Ewig* seyn wird. – Ja dann erst wird die Welt es recht

⁵⁶ KFSa, 25, Nr. 71, S. 123. Brief vom 16. Juni 1800.

⁵⁷ Vgl. Nicol, *Schleiermacher and Feminism*, S. 136-140 (wie Anm. 46).

⁵⁸ KFSa, 24, Nr. 133, S. 223.

beurtheilen, wenn alle diese Nebendinge wegfallen.“⁵⁹ Veit tröstete sich mit dem Gedanken, dass Schlegels Kunst ein solches Opfer erfordere, eine Verschmelzung ihres ‚Romans‘ mit seinem Kunstwerk für Nachruhm in der Ewigkeit sei. Veit stellte damit das ästhetische, geistige Schaffen des männlichen Genies als unvergänglich dar im Gegensatz zu ihrer realen, zeit- und ortsgebundenen Welt. Sie gab dem Werk des Künstlers Schlegel den Vorrang über ihre eigenen Gefühle und Person, die nur ein ‚Nebending‘ seien. Das erscheint (heute) als eine konfuse Vermengung der romantisch-literarischen Ideologie, wie sie die selbsternannten Genies wie Schlegel propagierten, mit Veits eigenen erotischen Gefühlen für Schlegel. Sie bezog daraus jedoch ihren ethischen Selbstwert und konnte so ihre Bedenken hinsichtlich der gesellschaftlichen Schwierigkeiten für die ‚wilde Ehe‘ mit Schlegel beruhigen.

Veits Briefe an Schleiermacher aus Jena spiegeln zunächst die ‚freygelassene‘⁶⁰ auf dem Weg ihrer Assimilation wieder im sog. ‚Romantikerhaus‘ in Jena, das Bruder August Wilhelm mit Frau Caroline (Michaelis-Böhmer) angemietet hatten, wo auch Schelling einzog und die jungen Romantiker und Literaten zu Besuch kamen. Veit genoss die Geselligkeit, die zahlreichen Treffen mit den interessanten Freunden und Besuchern des Kreises. Sie war besonders stolz auf die Aufmerksamkeit, die Goethe ihr, als Tochter des großen Mendelssohn, schenkte, „ein heller Punkt in meinen Lebenslauf! Goethen habe ich gesehen! und nicht bloß gesehen; er [...] hat mich mit einem auszeichnenden Blick begrüßt, als ihn mein Name genannt wurde, sich freundlich und ungezwungen mit mir unterhalten.“⁶¹

Veit beteiligte sich enthusiastisch an literarischen Geselligkeiten und Spielen, dichtete selbst und begann mit dem Schreiben eines eigenen Romans schon im November 1799, zwei Monate nach ihrer Ankunft in Jena, während sie auch mit Geldsorgen und dem Verkauf ihrer Berliner Möbel beschäftigt war und über schlechte Gesundheit klagte. Ihr Roman *Florentin* (1801) kann als Konversions-Narrativ gelesen werden: im Geschlechter- und Kulturtausch zeigte der Roman in der Florentin-Figur einen Familien- und Heimatlosen, der zu der feminin codierten Figur Clementina echte Zuneigung erlebt und sich an der christlichen Kunst und Musik erbaut, aber in Clementinas christlicher Welt keine Heimat und Ruhe findet, sondern weiterwandert.⁶² *Florentin* ist ein fiktionaler Gegenentwurf zu *Lucinde* aus

⁵⁹ KFSA, 24, Nr. 161; S. 266. Brief vom 14. April 1799.

⁶⁰ Siehe Anm. 58.

⁶¹ KFSA, Bd. 25, S. 26. Dorothea Veit an Rahel Levin in Berlin, 18. November 1799.

⁶² Vgl. mein: „Das Trauma der Konversion: Brendel/Dorothea Mendelssohn-Veit Schlegel,“ in *Mit rasender Freude dichten. Das Werk Dorothea Schlegels neu lesen*, hg. Von Martina Wernli

der Perspektive Dorothea Veits, aus einer doppelten Marginalität heraus als Jüdin und als Frau. In der Florentin-Figur thematisierte die Autorin Entfremdung und Mangelersfahrung statt glühender Vereinigung in der Liebe. Sie parodiert Schlegels Konzept einer erotisierten Liebesreligion als höchste Kunst und lässt schließlich den Protagonisten ohne weitere Erklärung sich entfernen, verschwinden. Florentin, dessen Eltern im Dunkeln bleiben und dessen rätselhafte Herkunft und Kindheit nie aufgeklärt werden, dieser Fremdling Florentin sucht sein ‚Vaterland‘. Er gedenkt „das Land mein Vaterland zu benennen, wo ich zuerst mich werde Vater nennen hören“.⁶³ Sohn und Vaterland bleiben für Florentin jedoch in unerreichbarer Ferne; eine Abtreibung - eine Variante des Themas Liebe / Mutterschaft - hat Florentin sogar um eine mögliche, erhoffte Vaterschaft betrogen, und am Ende des Romans ist Florentin „nirgends zu finden“.⁶⁴ Die Suche nach ‚Vaterland‘ endet nicht mit der Ablehnung des Vaters, noch mit einer Art ‚Vatermord‘, um selbst Meister zu werden wie im Bildungsroman. In der Darstellung von Liebe und Geschlechterbeziehungen, ihrer produktiven Auseinandersetzung mit der Liebesreligion Friedrich Schlegels versuchte die Autorin Veit Liebe aus einer anderen, einer Außenseiterposition zu gestalten. Florentins Abstammung ist mysteriös, er ist vaterlos; statt liebender Vereinigung mit einer idealen Partnerin wie in der Lucinde, hat Florentin nicht die Erfüllung seiner Liebe in Juliane gefunden. Anstelle einer Neubegründung verlässt der Charakter die Bühne des Romans mit einer expliziten Unbegründetheit, in eine neue Freiheit ins Unbekannte (Amerika?), als Losgelöstheit von allen Bindungen und Fundierungen.

Über ihren Roman Florentin schrieb Veit ihrem Vertrauten Schleiermacher: „Es ist ein tolles Buch, ich bin aber recht neugierig, ob es Ihnen und Jette [Henriette Herz] gefallen wird“.⁶⁵ Und als im Oktober 1800 der Band gedruckt vorlag, schickte sie ihn „mit klopfendem Herzen und erröthenden Angesichts“ an Schleiermacher,⁶⁶ der seinen ersten Eindruck schilderte: „Jetzt kann ich Ihnen nur sagen daß er ein sehr niedliches Buch ist, daß Vieles darin mir sehr vorzüglich angelegt und ausgeführt geschienen hat, daß die Sprache etwas eigenthümliches hat, was ich noch nicht zu

(Stuttgart: Metzler, in press). Dort Hinweise auf die zahlreichen, vielfach redundanten Interpretationen zum *Florentin*, die auf Androgynie, Patriarchatskritik, Narzissmus, Genderfragen und mehr.

⁶³ *Florentin. Ein Roman*, hg. von Wolfgang Nehring (Stuttgart: Reclam 1993), S. 17.

⁶⁴ *Florentin*, S. 191.

⁶⁵ KFSa, 25, Nr. 68, S. 117. Brief vom 2. Juni 1800.

⁶⁶ KFSa, Bd. 25, Nr. 115, S. 195. Brief vom 31. Oktober 1800. Dorothea war leise darüber enttäuscht, dass ihr Roman *Florentin* nun nicht anonym (was auf ihre Verfasserschaft gewiesen hätte), sondern unter Schlegels Namen publiziert wurde.

charakterisieren weiß“.⁶⁷ Veit dankte Schleiermacher: er habe „recht viel Ergötzliches über [den] guten Sancho Florentin“ gesagt. Doch sie reagierte auch etwas verärgert über andere Kritiker: „Der arme Mann muß sich doch auch wieder viel gefallen lassen, von dem ihm nichts träumte so lange er als Idee mir im Leibe heruhmspukete, habe ich ihn wirklich und wahrhaftig, gebähren, und in die wirkliche Wirklichkeit bringen müssen, damit er [...] condempniert wird?“⁶⁸ Sie erwiderte Schleiermacher etwas enttäuscht, als er ihre Stanzen nicht genügend lobte: „Wie können Sie, mein Freund! Sich so sehr über meine poetischen Fortschritte verwundern? Habe ich es nicht immer gesagt, und darauf getrotzt, daß ich noch etwas werden könnte wenn es mir wohl ginge? Hätte ich meine Freyheit umsonst erlangt?“⁶⁹ Ihre eigenen literarischen Arbeiten fanden jedoch wenig Beachtung und als Veits literarisches Talent – im romantischen Autorkonzept des männlich kodierten Genies – nicht gewürdigt wurde, stellte sie dann, auch aus finanziellen Sorgen um beider Lebensunterhalt, ihre Schriftstellerei ganz auf Zuarbeit für Schlegel um – bis 1810 sind allein zehn Bearbeitungen und Übersetzungen zu verzeichnen, alle unter Friedrich Schlegels Namen erschienen, abgesehen von Veits ständigen editorischen Zuarbeiten als ‚secrétaire‘.⁷⁰

8. „Hätte ich meine Freyheit umsonst erlangt?“⁷¹ Zurück zur ‚wirklichen Welt‘

Die komplexen Ansprüche und unlösbaren Konflikte von Religion, Gesellschaft, Familie und Individuum beherrschten Veits Leben, nachdem sie die Liaison mit Schlegel eingegangen war. Es drängten auch die „weltlichen Sorgen“, sprich: die Gläubiger. Veit musste sich der Geldbeschaffung widmen – alle Briefe (aus Jena) an Schleiermacher enthalten zahlreiche Anweisungen zum günstigen Verkauf ihrer Möbel in Berlin, zur Bezahlung oder Beschwichtigung von Schuldnern, zu Geldforderungen an Verleger und Freunde, zur Beschaffung von Darlehen und Vorauszahlungen aus Veits ‚sehr kleinen revenue‘ von Simon Veit, die Schleiermacher sogar auf seinen eigenen Namen aufnehmen sollte, als Simon Veit ihr keinen Kredit mehr geben wollte: „Nun mein lieber S[chleiermacher] ich dächte

⁶⁷ KFSa, 25, Nr. 126, S. 208. Schleiermacher an Dorothea Veit in Jena, am 6. Dezember 1800.

⁶⁸ KFSa, 25, Nr. 161, S. 255. Brief vom 16. April 1801. Der Brief mit dem späteren Urteil Schleiermachers ist nicht erhalten.

⁶⁹ KFSa, 25, Nr. 37, S. 56. Brief vom 3. Februar 1800. Veit kränkelte oft.

⁷⁰ Vgl. mein: „Dorothea Veit-Schlegel als Schriftstellerin und die Berliner Frühromantik,“ in *Arnim und die Berliner Romantik: Kunst Literatur und Politik*, hg. von Walter Pape (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2001), S. 123-134.

⁷¹ KFSa, 25, Nr. 37, S. 56.

doch, Sie bedenken Sie nicht länger, und borgen von Veit das Geld!“⁷² Sie klagte, bettelte, schmeichelte, vertröstete, fragte begierig nach Neuigkeiten aus Berlin und von ihren Bekannten, bestellte Grüße und hatte weitere Aufträge: „Ich bin beschämt daß ich Ihnen so viel für mich zu thun, und zu denken gebe [...] mit diesen Sorgen der wirklichen Welt.“⁷³ Schleiermacher scheint die vielen Aufträge Veits aus Jena gutmütig und gewissenhaft erledigt zu haben – auch Schlegel benutzte ihn als literarischen ‚Secretair‘ - seine leider nur zwei erhaltenen Briefe vom Juli und Dezember 1800 klingen sachlich in der Erledigung der finanziellen Aufträge, sind knapp und in Eile geschrieben und zeigen Spuren der räumlichen Entfernung und wachsenden persönlichen Entfremdung. Mit einer leicht ungeduldigen Aufforderung endet Schleiermachers Dezember-Brief von 1800: „Treiben Sie nun den Friedrich zum Plato, und was die Hauptsache ist Kinder, seid recht glücklich“.⁷⁴ Schleiermacher hatte durchaus Verständnis für Schlegel und Veits Situation, er selbst war „in lauter verzwickten Verwirrungen“, in der Gesundheit, im „Beutel, in den bürger[lichen] Verhältnissen und Gott weiß worin sonst“.⁷⁵

Veit stilisierte sich von nun an in Jena ironisch als ‚Handwerkerin‘, die dem großen Künstler ‚Brod schaffen‘ will auch ihrer Familie gegenüber, die den brotlosen Künstler verachtete, der auf Dorotheas finanzielle Hilfe rechnete: „Wie kann man von einen [sic] Künstler verlangen daß er mit jeder Messe ein Kunstwerk liefere, damit er zu leben habe? [...] Den Künstler [Friedrich] zum Handwerker herunter drängen, das kann ich nicht, und es gelingt auch nicht. Was ich thun kann liegt in diesen Gränzen: ihm Ruhe schaffen, und selbst in Demuth als Handwerkerin Brod schaffen, bis *er* es kann.“⁷⁶

Schon im Januar 1800 hatte Veit von Jena aus ganz still die Möglichkeit bei Rahel Varnhagen sondiert, sich wieder in Berlin aufzuhalten und mit Rahel zusammen zu wohnen,⁷⁷ und auch mit Schleiermacher begann sie ihre Wohnungsfrage in Berlin Anfang Februar 1800 zu erörtern: „Meiner eigenen Neigung nach wünscht ich irgend ein stilles Hinterhäuschen zu bewohnen, wo ich einen weiten Himmel vor mir sehe, nicht weit von irgend einem Thor, kann es ein Gartenhaus sein“, das müsse aber auch in Schul-nähe (für Sohn

⁷² KFSa, 25, Nr. 43, S. 70. Brief vom 10. März 1800.

⁷³ KFSa, 25, Nr. 39, S. 64. Brief vom 14. Februar 1800.

⁷⁴ KFSa, 25, Nr. 126, S. 209. Schleiermacher an Dorothea Veit, am 6. Dezember 1800.

⁷⁵ KFSa, 25, Nr. 131, S. 215. Schleiermacher an Friedrich Schlegel in Jena, Brief vom 10. Januar 1801. Zu Schleiermacher arbeitsreicher Tätigkeit als Prediger, Armenfürsorger und seiner Auseinandersetzung mit kirchlichen

⁷⁶ KFSa, 25, Nr. 39, S. 63. Brief vom 14. Februar 1800.

⁷⁷ KFSa, Bd. 25, Nr. 32, S. 49. Brief an Rahel Levin vom 23. Januar 1800.

Philipp), Theaternähe (für Friedrich) und möglichst auch in der Nähe zu Friedrichs Bruder August Wilhelm liegen, eventuell komme nur ein *Chambre garni* infrage.⁷⁸ Träumte Veit von einer Rückkehr nach Berlin, von einer Idylle dort im Gartenhaus, ohne Konversion oder Heirat, aber doch ein Leben mit Friedrich zwischen oder mit Romantik und Haskala?

Als im Frühjahr 1800 die zerstrittene Jenaer Hausgemeinschaft zerfiel,⁷⁹ bat Veit ihren Freund Schleiermacher um Vermittlung in ihrer Auseinandersetzung mit ihrer Mutter und Simon Veit. Sie war enttäuscht von Schleiermachers [leider nicht erhaltenen] Antwort: „Sie [Schleiermacher] hätten keinen Respekt für meiner Gründe, sich nicht taufen und trauen zu lassen“ und forderte Achtung für ihre Absicht „noch mittelbar Einfluss auf die Erziehung ihrer Kinder zu haben“. Sie war besorgt um ihren Sohn, „er ist von so zarter, reizbarer Natur, daß ich ihn jetzt noch nicht weggeben kann“.⁸⁰ Bei der Scheidung hatte sie Veit versprochen, bei Wiederverheiratung und Konversion den jüngeren Sohn Philipp dem Vater zurückzugeben und müsse sich deswegen „dises Glück“ (der Taufe und Heirat) versagen: „Sie kennen unsere Lage so gut als wir selbst,“ schrieb sie an Schleiermacher, „wie sehr wir uns selbst so gebunden, und in Unsern bürgerlichen Verhältnissen so geschnürt haben daß wir kaum atmen können, und daß uns dadurch alles wie verschlossen in der Welt ist.“⁸¹ Sie suchte eine „gute Pension“ für Philipp und erwog Trauung und Konversion (Brief vom 11. April 1800), wenn Schleiermacher das leiten würde, aber dabei das

⁷⁸ Brief vom 14. Februar 1899; KFSa, Bd. 25, S. 62.

⁷⁹ Veit hatte schon im einer „Republik der Despoten“, die sich immer zanken und dem „Wirrwar“ an Schleiermacher berichtet; u.a. in KFSa, 25, Nr. 39, S. 64.

⁸⁰ 11. April 1800, KFSa, Bd. 25, Nr. 56, S. 93. – Wie schwierig ihre Lage war, zwischen dem (damals 6-jährigen) Sohn und ihrer Konversion und Ehe mit Schlegel wählen zu müssen, zeigt auch Schlegels eigennütziger Standpunkt: Friedrich Schlegel wollte Philipp nur dann behalten, wenn es eine endgültige Lösung war: „Friedrich kann allerdings viel für ihn thun, und er will es auch sehr gern [,] nur, sagt er, müßte ihn Philipp überlassen bleiben, und er nicht immer in Furcht seyn daß man ihn zurücknimmt; diese Zweifel entfernen sein Herz von den Knaben.“ Veit an Schleiermacher, 16. Juni 1800. KFSa, 25, N. 71, S. 121.

⁸¹ KFSa, 25, Nr. 56, S.94, 11. April 1800. Vgl. Andreas Kubik, „Warum konvertieren? Anmerkungen zur Taufe Dorothea Veit und Schleiermachers und Schleiermachers Haltung dazu“, in *Christentum und Judentum. Schleiermacher-Archiv, 14* (Berlin: De Gruyter 2015), S. 405–416. Kubik untersucht die Position Schleiermachers zur Konversion der Juden in dessen zwei Schriften von 1799, sieht bei Veit keine religiöse Motivierung, sondern praktische Überlegungen für die bürgerliche Eheschließung. – Zur rechtlichen Situation vgl. Hermann Patsch, „‘Als ob Spinoza sich wolle taufen lassen‘. Biographisches und Rechtsgeschichtliches zur Taufe und Trauung Rahel Levins,“ in *Jahrbuch des Freien Deutschen Hochstifts* (1991), S. 149-178. Friedrich und Dorothea Schlegels (spätere) Konversion zum Katholizismus steht im Mittelpunkt des Sammelbandes: *Figuren der Konversion. Friedrich Schlegels Übertritt zum Katholizismus im Kontext*, hg. von Winfried Eckel und Nikolaus Wegmann (Paderborn u.a.: Schöningh, 2014).

„allerstrenge Geheimnis“ bewahren würde,⁸² und flehte Schleiermacher an: „Nehmen Sie sich unserer an, lieber S.“ Er solle mit Simon Veit klar und deutlich reden, dabei Fichte und (Graf Alexander von) Dohna zu Rate ziehen und ihre Mutter davon benachrichtigen: „Etwas ordentliches aber muß geschehen, damit wir für uns allein existieren mögen, denn wir sind beyde nicht gemacht unter fremden Schutz zu stehen“. Schleiermacher solle durch seine Rhetorik Veit dahinbringen, „daß er es einsähe, wie wir, arm wie wir sind, gar nicht ohne eine Verbindung fertig werden können.“⁸³ Und zwei Monate später (am 9. Juni 1800) klagte sie: „Unsre Plane gehen, auch eben noch nicht geordneter, durcheinander“, ⁸⁴ und versuchte nochmals, ihre Familie zu bewegen: „Alles wäre entschieden, wenn [Veit] sich bereden ließe mir den Philipp zu lassen, auch wenn ich mich mit F[riedrich] trauen lasse [...] Friedrich wünscht uns vorzüglich darum verheirathet zu sehen, damit wir bey Charlotten [F's Schwester in Dresden] leben können“.⁸⁵ Denn die Konversion sei „doch nur etwas äußerliches! [...] aber auch als solches will ich es nicht ganz verwerfen, nur kann man keinen innern Vortheil davon erwarten“.⁸⁶ Schleiermacher konnte Simon Veit und Mutter Fromet Mendelssohn nicht umstimmen. für eine gemeinsame Wohnung in Berlin and für die finanzielle Unterstützung von Schlegels Karriere weiterhin Dorothea Kredit zu geben und zu bezahlen; Dorothea Veit reagierte zunächst verärgert und herablassend über Simon Veits emotionale Versuche, sie zur Rückkehr (vermutlich auch in die jüdische Gemeinde) und Trennung von Schlegel zu bewegen: „Wenn ich doch nur niemals von V[eit] seine Erbärmlichen Hoffnungen etwas hören sollte!“⁸⁷ Dorothea Veit scheint nicht an eine Trennung von Schlegel gedacht zu haben, ihre verzweifelte Suche nach einer Geldquelle für ihr gemeinsames Leben mit Schlegel *und* für seine Karriere blieb erfolglos; Schleiermacher riet beiden ebenfalls zur Eheschließung, bot wohl auch Dorotheas Betreuung bei der Konversion an (das geht aus Dorothea Schlegels Briefen hervor), aber eine Rückkehr nach

⁸² KFSa, 25, Nr. 56, S. 94. 11. April 1800.

⁸³ KFSa, 25, Nr. 56, S. 95, 11. April 1800.

⁸⁴ KFSa, 25, Nr. 69, S. 119, 9. Juni 1800.

⁸⁵ KFSa, 25, Nr.71, S. 121. Am 16. Juni 1800.

⁸⁶ KFSa, 25, Nr.71, S. 121. Am 16. Juni 1800. Zu Simon Veit (1754-1819) s. auch Hazel Rosenstrauch, *Simon Veit. Der missachtete Mann einer berühmten Frau* (Mannheim: Persona Verlag, 2019). Veit gewährte für seine Zeit großzügige Scheidungsbedingungen, unterstützte Dorothea und Friedrich vielfach mit Geld, ertrug später mit Toleranz die Konversion seiner zwei Söhne zum Protestantismus und dann zum Katholizismus.

⁸⁷ KFSa, 25, Nr. 77, S. 134. Brief vom 4. Juli 1800. Dorothea Veit teilte Schleiermacher mit, sie habe die Briefe der Mutter und Veits verbrannt, nicht einmal Schlegel gezeigt; die Familien- und Freundesbriefe zu Heirat und Konversion wurden nach ihrem Tode weitgehend vernichtet und sind verschollen (s. Anm. 8 und 22, oben).

Berlin war nicht möglich. Schlegel gab dann auch seine Verachtung der bürgerlichen Ehe auf, denn er wünschte die Heirat ‚vorzüglich‘ deshalb, damit sie beide bei seiner Schwester in Dresden wohnen könnten, das jedenfalls berichtete Dorothea Veit an Schleiermacher. Außer diesem praktischen Zweck, die Wohnungsfrage bequemer und billiger zu lösen, sind keine weiteren Erörterungen zu religiösen oder persönlichen Fragen im Briefwechsel aus Jena überliefert worden (auch nicht für Schlegel). Die Realität machte ein gemeinsames Leben in einer ‚wilden Ehe‘ für eine geschiedene Frau und Jüdin in der *gehobenen* Gesellschaft mit *geringem* Vermögen nicht möglich, so dass Veit dann die Heirat mit ihrer dazu notwendigen Konversion anstreben musste.

9. „Wir reiten dem Schicksal entgegen schnell“.⁸⁸ Paris, Taufe und Heirat

1802 veranlasste die „massive Verschuldung“ Friedrich Schlegels in Jena und auch überall bei seiner Familie, Freunden, Bekannten und Buchhändlern, nach einem neuen Wohnort zu suchen, zunächst in Dresden bei seiner Schwester, dann in Paris.⁸⁹ Mit einem flüchtigen gemeinsamen Reisebrief an Schleiermacher verabschiedeten sich Friedrich Schlegel und Dorothea Veit mit dem Schiller-Zitat: „Wir reiten dem Schicksal entgegen schnell“.⁹⁰ Im November 1802 schrieb Veit endlich einen ausführlichen Brief an Schleiermacher, beklagte sich zunächst: „Man hat uns hier so wenig beigestanden, daß wir noch nicht einmal haben dazu gelangen können uns trauen zu lassen,“ und zeigte ein neues Interesse: „Uebrigens lese ich hier in Paris als ein Gegengift viel in der Bibel; [...] man ist wohl nicht gescheut, wenn man jemals glaubt die Bibel hinlänglich gelesen zu haben. Ich lese mit Aufmerksamkeit beide Testamente; und finde nach meinem jetzigen Gefühl jetzt das protestantische Christenthum doch reiner und dem Katholischen weit vorzuziehen; dieses hat mir zu viel Aehnlichkeit mit dem alten Judenthum, das ich sehr verabscheue. Der Protestantismus dünkt mich aber ganz die Religion Jesu zu sein und die Religion der Bildung; im Herzen bin

⁸⁸ KFSa, 25, Nr. 263, S. 263.

⁸⁹ Vgl. Johannes Enders, *Friedrich Schlegel Handbuch. Leben – Werk – Wirkung* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2017), S. 12.

⁹⁰ KFSa, 25, Nr. 263, S. 263. Brief vom 22. Mai 1802. Veit zeichnete mit „So weit war ich, Dorothea, Secretair“ und dürfte den Brief in Schlegels Namen, wie so viele unmarkierte Briefe, geschrieben haben, von denen das Original verschollen und die Überlieferung über Abschriften Unbekannter gelaufen ist. – Der Brief enthält Schlegels unklare Aufkündigung des Plato-Projektes und „Lügen“ über seine angeblichen Arbeiten dazu, s. den Kommentar auf S. 684-685.

ich ganz, soviel ich aus der Bibel verstehen kann, Protestantin“.⁹¹ Doch die Freunde hatten sich entfremdet. Mehrere Monate später schrieb Schleiermacher an Friedrich Schlegel: „Ihr armen Menschen in welchem Zustande seid Ihr [...] zu wissen daß du was eigentlich so leicht herbeizuschaffen sein sollte als Geld, alle Pein könnte hinweggenommen werden. Ich bin vielleicht in einer andern Art eben so unglücklich, aber ich habe doch das Gefühl daß mir nichts Aeußerliches in der Welt helfen kann und dieses ist mir sehr tröstlich und aufmunternd“; er bat Friedrich „doch ja alle [seine] Kräfte zusammenzuhalten um sie der Sorge für ihr [Dorotheas] Gemüth zu widmen.“⁹² Schlegel ging auf Schleiermachers leise Ermahnung wohl nicht ein, es gibt jedenfalls keine Aussagen darüber, dass Friedrich sich um Dorotheas seelisches Wohlbefinden oder ihre Ängste und Nöte mit ihrer Konversion und Taufe in irgendeiner Weise gekümmert hätte. Schleiermacher hatte sich langsam aus der Freundschaft zurückgezogen, auch nach einem zu langen und zu anspruchsvollen letzten Besuch Schlegels bei ihm in Berlin und besonders wegen Schlegels Rückzug aus der gemeinsam begonnenen Plato-Ausgabe, bei der Schlegel ihn „ausgebeutet und belogen“ hat.⁹³ Damit versiegte der rege Briefwechsel mit Schleiermacher.

Friedrich Schlegels Briefe aus Paris an andere Literaten und Verleger sind voll von literarischen Plänen, Ankündigungen, Verhandlungen mit Buchhändlern, Werbungen für seine Projekte, „Unterhandlungen, Verabredungen und Contracten“ und Sondierungen für eine gehobene Anstellung; mit verwirrender Geschäftigkeit strebte er nach einer „allgemeine[n] und dauernde[n] Existenz“.⁹⁴ Schlegel wollte sich nun nicht mehr als Dichter, sondern als Gelehrter etablieren, kündigte überall sein ‚indisches Werk‘, seine Sprach-, Kunst- und Manuskriptstudien an, die er in den reichen Pariser Bibliotheken und den neu zugänglichen Kunstschatzen fand, die von den Napoleonischen Truppen aus Ägypten, Italien und Spanien geraubt

⁹¹ KFSa, 26/1, Nr.58, S. 48-53, hier S. 49, 51-52. Brief vom 20./21. November 1802.

⁹² Schleiermacher an Friedrich Schlegel in Köln, 15. März 1803; KFSa, 16.1, S. 90. Schleiermacher hatte derzeit mit der verheirateten Eleonore Grunow ein Liebesverhältnis, deren Scheidung abgelehnt wurde.

⁹³ Das Urteil stammt vom Schlegel-Kenner Herrmann Patsch, *Friedrich Schlegel Handbuch*, S. 287 (wie Anm. 89). - Schleiermacher hatte seiner Schwester von der Entfremdung berichtet. Schlegels der Besuch „ist mir ziemlich theuer gewesen, weil er so unerwartet lange gedauert hat und weil Schlegel zu seinem großen Unglück ziemlich reich ist an kleinen Bedürfnissen und Verwöhnungen.“ Schleiermacher bedauerte seinen Zeitverlust, dass der Endzweck des Besuchs (die gemeinsame Platon-Ausgabe) nicht erreicht worden sei und alles, was ihm an Schlegel „fremd ist und mir widerstrebt noch gewaltiger kräftiger und deutlicher als zuvor“ hervorgetreten sei; KFSa, 25, S. 652. Kommentar zu Brief Nr. 230 von Schlegel an Schleiermacher vom 4. Februar 1802.

⁹⁴ KFSa, 26.1, Nr. 77, S. 744, 76. Friedrich Schlegel aus Paris an August Wilhelm Schlegel in Berlin, 15. Januar 1803.

nach Paris abtransportiert und ausgestellt waren. Bei dieser hektischen Betriebsamkeit hatte Schlegel „Arbeiter“ im Hintergrund: „Meine Frau fängt an das Altfranzösische besser zu verstehen als ich. Vor der Hand würde *sie* arbeiten“. Auch wüsste er noch „eine junge deutsche Gelehrte [gemeint war die Hausgenossin und Freundin Helmina von von Hastfer, später verh. Chézy] zum Mitarbeiter“, versicherte Schlegel dem Buchhändler.⁹⁵

Dorothea Veit konnte dank ihres jüdischen und Berliner Netzwerkes den Aufenthalt in Paris arrangieren. Schlegel und Veit gaben sich dann in Paris als verheiratet aus. Bald beschwerte sich Friedrich, dass „unter andern auch [Simon] Veit [ihn] um das kleine Vermögen [seiner] Frau [betrügt], was aber doch jetzt einen großen Wert für [ihn] hätte. Er stiehlt es auf gut jüdisch.“⁹⁶ Schlegel forderte die Herausgabe von Veits Erbe von deren Mutter, obwohl Mutter Fromet Mendelssohn noch lebte. Um den Widerstand der Familie zu überwinden, sollte Dorothea sogar die Familie täuschen und vorgeben, sie wolle sich scheiden lassen und selbständig machen, dazu brauche sie das Geld.⁹⁷

Dorotheas Veits Taufe und Heirat in aller Stille in Paris 1804 waren schließlich ein notwendiger Schritt; sie hatte sich mit der Bindung an Friedrich Schlegel längst für seine Welt entschieden und die formale Konversion bis 1804, so lange wie möglich hinausgeschoben, erst 1806 brachte nicht die Mutter, sondern Friedrich Schlegel Veits Sohn Philip mit zurück nach Berlin zu Simon Veit. Dorothea hatte nun ihren jüngeren Sohn bis zum Eintritt in ein Internat betreut und ihre Verpflichtung bei der Scheidung erfüllt. Auch die Zeiten hatten sich geändert: während der Freiheitskriege konvertierten fast alle noch lebenden Mitglieder ihrer Familie, der Mendelssohns und der jüdischen Oberschicht in Berlin. Simon Veit konvertierte zwar nicht, hat aber Dorothea und ihre Söhne lebenslang großzügig finanziell unterstützt und deren Konversion gebilligt. Dorothea Schlegel kehrte nie wieder nach Berlin zurück.

⁹⁵ KFSa, 26.1, Nr. 122, S. 120. Friedrich Schlegel an Siegfried August Mahlmann, August 1803; Schlegel bot hier dem Leipziger Verleger deutsche Bearbeitungen von „alten Dichtungen“ wie „Geschichte des Zaubers Merlin“ oder „die des Königs Artus“ an, die dann Dorothea fertigstellte und unter Friedrichs Namen erschien. In weiteren Briefen verhandelte Friedrich ebenso für Dorotheas deutsche Übersetzung von de Staëls Roman *Corinne*, die dann fast gleichzeitig mit der französischen Originalausgabe ebenfalls unter Friedrichs Namen erschien.

⁹⁶ KFSa, Bd. 26.1, S. 102. Friedrich Schlegel aus Paris an Rahel Levin, 3. Mai 1803.

⁹⁷ Dorothea schrieb darüber erst, als sie 1804 ihre Taufe mitteilte: „Man *ändern* weiß machen *musste*, daß wir uns nemlich trennen wollten“, an Charlotte und Emmanuel Ernst, am 6. April 1804; KFSa, 26.1, Nr. 148, S. 156.

10. Dorothea „schuf selbst Großartiges und Schönes“.⁹⁸ Die Würdigung von einer Zeitgenossin

Den weiteren Pariser Aufenthalt finanzierte schließlich Dorothea mit einer Fremdenpension⁹⁹ in ihrer repräsentativen Wohnung im früheren Holbachschen Hôtel zusammen mit Hilfe der befreundeten Helmina von Hastfer (später verh. von Chézy). Helmina bewunderte Dorotheas Veits „vorsorgliche[n] liebende[n] Sinn“, mit dem sie „die Häuslichkeit ihres stillen wohlgeordneten Lebens angenehm zu gestalten wusste. Immer war’s bei ihr heimlich und traulich, angemessen und freundlich. Musterhaft und angestrengt übte sie häuslichen Fleiß. Noch heute verstehe ich nicht, wo und wie sie die Zeit zum Schreiben fand [...] Friedrichs Wäsche nähte und instand hielt, war auch die Copistin aller seiner Schriften und schuf selbst Großartiges und Schönes“.¹⁰⁰ Dorothea habe damals an der Fortsetzung des *Florentin* gearbeitet, für die *Europa* geschrieben, am „Merlin“ gearbeitet, eine große Korrespondenz geführt, Zeit für Paris, Konzerte und Theaterbesuche gehabt, die Abende durch Geselligkeit und Vorlesen bereichert; Friedrich Schlegel sei „unharmonisch“, Dorothea habe „Licht in das Chaos seines Innern“ gebracht und in Schlegel „Großes und Herrliches“ erweckt.¹⁰¹ Auch wenn Dorothea Schlegel keine große Schriftstellerin, schon gar nicht eine ‚philosophische‘ Autorin oder eine emanzipierte, autonome Frau wurde, sollte sie deshalb nicht *aus heutiger* Perspektive bedauert oder gar übersehen werden. Sie konnte ihr Leben mit Friedrich Schlegel selbstbestimmt in ihrer Zeit gestalten, nicht zuletzt mit Schleiermachers geistigem Austausch und emotionaler Hilfe und lebensweltlicher Unterstützung. Nach schwierigen Jahren in Paris und in Köln, die dennoch ihre geistig-literarischen Interessen vielfach befriedigen konnten, mit der Konversion zusammen mit Friedrich Schlegel zum Katholizismus 1808 (ihre Söhne folgten 1810), und Schlegels Anstellung als Hofsekretär und Diplomat in Wien konnte sie endlich in einer geachteten gesellschaftlichen Stellung leben. Wie die Clementina-Figur in ihrem Roman *Florentin* fand Veit im (katholischen) religiösen Ritus und Kunst einen Lebenssinn. Sie unterstützte und begleitete ihre Söhne in deren

⁹⁸ *Unvergessenes. Denkwürdigkeiten aus dem Leben von Helmina von Chézy. Von ihr selbst erzählt* (Leipzig: F.A. Brockhaus 1858), Bd.1, S. 261.

⁹⁹ Vgl. Dorotheas Brief an Simon Veit, 15. Oktober 1803 (KFSA, 26.1, Nr. 135, S. 133-135), in dem sie erleichtert und zufrieden über ihre „Pensionäre“ berichtete, den britischen Marineoffizier und Indologen Alexander Hamilton, den Altphilologen und Orientalisten Gottfried Ernst Hagemann aus Hannover und die Brüder Boisseree: „drei junge Leute aus Köln [...] lassen sich von Schlegel ein Privatissimum über Poesie und Philosophie lesen [...] sehr reiche Leute“, S. 134.

¹⁰⁰ Siehe Anm. 98.

¹⁰¹ Ebd., S. 259 f.

BARBARA BECKER-CANTARINO

Künstlerlaufbahn als ‚Nazarener‘ in Italien und Deutschland - Philipp Veit wurde der erste Direktor des Städelschen Museums in Frankfurt. Und sie erlebte glücklich deren Familiengründung. Ihr Leben (und Arbeit) für und mit Friedrich Schlegel, für ihre Söhne und Familie, ihre Liebe zu Musik und Hinwendung zum katholischen Glauben war ‚glücklich‘ und ‚großartig‘ im Sinne des 19. Jahrhunderts, wie die oben zitierte zeitgenössische Stimme der Helmina von Chézy deutlich zeigt.

Translations

Übersetzungen

Traductions

Traduzioni

Symphilosophie

International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism

The Paintings

Conversation

(1799)

Caroline and August Wilhelm Schlegel

An Excerpt translated by Anne Elizabeth and Jan Oliver Jost-Fritz

Introduction by Jan Oliver Jost-Fritz*

Written by Caroline and August Wilhelm Schlegel in the fall of 1798, the dialogue “Die Gemähle. Gespräch” portrays the visit of three fictional characters – the poet Waller, the painter Reinhold, and their mutual friend Louise – to the Dresden Art Gallery. While there is no need to identify the fictional visitors with real-life individuals in order to fully comprehend the significance of the text within the emergence of modern discourses on visual arts, it is more than likely that Caroline and August Wilhelm drew on experiences and discussions during their own visit to Dresden.¹ The dialogue, which according to the subtitle rather deserves the genre designation “conversation,”² is one of three longer texts in dialogue form in the

* Associate Professor of German, Department of Literature and Language, East Tennessee State University, 1276 Gilbreath Drive, Johnson City, TN 37614, United States – JOSTFRITZ@mail.etsu.edu

¹ See August Wilhelm Schlegel, *Die Gemälde. Gespräch*, edited by Lothar Müller (Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 1996), commentary, 175-6.

² The lack of an authoritative voice distinguishes the Schlegels’ text from the genre of the Socratic dialogue, which, at least in rhetorical terms, is aimed at unfolding the truth advocated by Socrates. The dialogue “Die Gemähle,” on the other hand, confronts a multiplicity of opinions and observations, without ascribing a privileged authority to any one. While “conversation” is not a term for a distinct genre, the term appears in the title of all three extensive dialogic texts in the *Athenaeum*. Nonetheless, in keeping with genre tradition I will refer to the text as dialogue. On the Socratic dialogues and rhetoric, see Brain Vickers,

Athenaeum, and one of the few texts in this central organ of early German Romanticism that is exclusively concerned with the theory and practice of the visual arts. Published in the second volume in 1799, the dialogue is placed between August Wilhelm's "Die Sprachen," which critically engages with Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock's linguistic writings, and Friedrich Schlegel's "Gespräch über Poesie;" the order is certainly more of a coincidence, but "Die Gemähde" fits well between a text that departs from earlier concepts of a national language and literature and a text in which one of the central theorems of early Romantic aesthetics, the "New Mythology," as well as the guiding principle, the idea of transcendental poetry, are articulated. By addressing the impact of the visual arts on the imagination, the dialogue explores vital links between language, poetry, and aesthetics at large regarding the Romantic distinction from both pre-Romantic as well as Classicist positions.

The years between 1797 and 1800 are characterized by an intense work relationship between Caroline and August Wilhelm Schlegel; to Novalis, Caroline writes from Jena, on January 4, 1799: "We are diligent and extremely happy. I have hardly come out of Wilhelm's room since the beginning of the year."³ While the other two extensive dialogues in the *Athenaeum* have a single author, "Die Gemähde" is a truly dialogic work, a collaboration between Caroline and August Wilhelm, even though the table of contents in the second volume of the *Athenaeum* only lists "W.," the acronym for August Wilhelm. Scholarship has not always recognized this fact, and has often designated August Wilhelm as the sole author.⁴ It was, however, August Wilhelm who drew attention to the shared authorship; in a letter to Johann Wolfgang Goethe, August Wilhelm writes, referring to his wife:

Since you certainly recognized the female hand [in the dialogue, JFF], I may all the more confide in you that my wife had her share in it. Most of the descriptions of paintings, and that concerning Raphael, are by her; she therefore asks for your leniency if you should find it too poetic

Defense of Rhetoric (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 83-147; the reception of the philosophical genre is, with a slightly different trajectory than here, surveyed in May Mergenthaler, *Zwischen Eros und Mitteilung. Die Frühromantik im Symposion der "Athenaeums-Fragmente"* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2012).

³ See Douglas Stott's translation of Caroline's correspondence, <https://www.carolineschelling.com/letters/volume-1-index/letter-219/>.

⁴ See for instance Lothar Müller's otherwise excellent edition of the text (Schlegel, *Die Gemälde*, 165-196).

and not artistic enough. I tried to determine the perspective through the conversational parts.⁵

The lack of the “artistic,” which here means a supposed absence of deep theoretical knowledge of the visual arts in aesthetics and practice, needs to be read in the context of the concept of “dilettantism” which Goethe developed together with Schiller around the same time August Wilhelm and Caroline composed their dialogue;⁶ however, when Caroline then provides the character of Louise with a voice that combines both enthusiastic description as well as clear and complex traces of the theoretical discussion about the visual arts in the second half of the 18th century, this can certainly also be understood as a critical commentary on the gendered theory of aesthetics in Weimar Classicism, which had generally attributed a merely subordinate role to women in the process of aesthetic production and reception. “Die Gemählde,” by contrast, compositionally and performatively demonstrates that gendered assessments of the arts are constructive only in an equitable exchange of individuals of both genders; “only when men and women act together,” as Margaretmary Daley writes, “and not only write silent composition but also converse with spontaneous and informed but not erudite words about painting, only then will a full appreciation and critique of visual art be possible.”⁷ Accordingly, the style of the dialogue is not essayistically focused on ideas and scholarship, as are most texts in Goethe’s simultaneous *Propyläen*-project, but lively and engaging, relying more on poetic strategies than discursive ones. The balance of conceptual passages, ekphrastic descriptions, and subjective judgements about paintings by the three fictional characters, however, is inconspicuous only on the surface; both the selection and description of paintings (which would have been Caroline’s task) as well as the conversational strategies and various theoretical framings point to the conceptually significant and rich tensions between Classical and Romantic aesthetics.

⁵ August Wilhelm Schlegel: Digitale Edition der Korrespondenz [Version-07-21]; <https://august-wilhelm-schlegel.de/version-07-21/briefid/4219>.

⁶ On “dilettantism” see Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke nach Epochen seines Schaffens. Münchner Ausgabe*, edited by Karl Richter et. al. (Munich: Hanser, 1985-1998), 6/2.151-176, and Paul Fleming, *Exemplarity and Mediocrity. The Art of the Average from Bourgeois Tragedy to Realism* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2009), 76-119.

⁷ Margaretmary Daley, “The Gendered Eye of the Beholder: The Co-ed Art History of the Jena Romantics,” in *The Enlightened Eye*, edited by Evelyn K. Moore and Patricia Anne Simpson (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 93-110. Daley references Friedrich Schleiermacher’s *Toward a Theory of Sociable Conduct*, which was published in the same year as “Die Gemählde,” but unknown to the Schlegels. Conceptual parallels between the Schlegels’ and Schleiermacher’s dialogue merit further exploration in the future.

For the following translation, I have chosen a passage which, on the one hand, is a good example of the intertwining of ekphrastic description and theory-guided discussion, and, on the other hand, illustrates the aesthetic-historical thrust of the dialogue: the discussion of Andrea del Sarto's "Abraham's Sacrifice" (see illustration 1 below).⁸ This passage also provides an opportunity to reflect on the gender dynamics of the text, which have a direct impact on the concept of Romantic criticism presented. After giving a detailed description, Louise calls del Sarto's painting the "Laocoön of Christianity," a designation that was not always made explicit, but nonetheless has a long tradition in scholarship, dating back to mid 17th century commentaries.⁹ Del Sarto had studied the Laocoön group (or rather a copy of the group in Florence), and had used sketches of one of the sons for his rendering of Isaac;¹⁰ research takes this as an allusion rather than a direct influence. Nonetheless, the great similarity of the boy's facial features and the manipulated proportions of father and son, which are also found in the sculpture group, are indeed striking; moreover, the statuesque character of del Sarto's composition is also conspicuous, and may have had a significant role in the reason why Caroline Schlegel chose this painting in the first place. After all, "Die Gemählde" commences with a discussion of distinctions between plastic arts and painting, which leads directly into the underlying concept of an aesthetics of the visual. Curiously, Johann Daniel Fiorillo, Schlegel's authority on art history, does not mention the parallel;¹¹ since Louise, however, makes the connection to the Laocoön discussion quite assertively, it can be assumed that this interpretation would have resonated with the audience of their times, not least since Laocoön had been the central paradigm of any discussion of the visual arts since Winkelmann and Lessing. Louise's allusion does not seem to invoke the media-semiotic aspect that was extensively explored in Lessing's *Laokoon*; rather, she makes a subtle comment on the problem of Classicist aesthetics, which will be briefly considered here in order to better understand the art-theoretical and aesthetic-historical argument of the dialogue.

⁸ For the painting, see the reproduction at the end of this introduction, and for more details, see the website of the Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister (Dresden Art Gallery): <https://skd-online-collection.skd.museum/Details/Index/405016>.

⁹ See Joseph Imorde, "Gehorsam und Begnadung. Die 'Opferung Isaaks' als gemalte Kunsttheorie," in *Isaaks Opferung (Gen 22) in den Konfessionen und Medien der Frühen Neuzeit*, edited by Johann Anselm Steiger and Ulrich Heinen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006), 399-413.

¹⁰ See *Gemäldegalerie Dresden. Alte Meister. Katalog der Ausgestellten Werke* (Leipzig: Seemann, 1992), 346.

¹¹ Johann Daniel Fiorillo, *Geschichte der zeichnenden Künste von ihrer Wiederauflebung bis auf die neuesten Zeiten. Erster Band: Die Geschichte der Römischen und Florentinischen Schule enthaltend* (Göttingen: Rosenbusch, 1798), 1.320-23.

Louise begins her description of the painting by focusing on the compositional characteristics as well as the materiality of the medium, coloring and shading; in a second approach to the painting, however, she shifts the ekphrastic mode from its orientation towards rhetorical evidence of the visual impression to a narrative empathy with the visualized event. This ekphrastic strategy may in itself be conventional.¹² Here, however, it serves a metapoetical purpose in the presentation of the argument, as it at least in tendency indicates a shift from the visual to the narrative. In other words, Louise's discussion of the painting marks a paradigm shift from an understanding of art based on materiality to a transcendental ideal. Johann Jakob Winckelmann, for example, underpinned his theory of art entirely by the materiality of the ancient sculptures he so admired, above all the "Laocoön" and the "Apollo of Belvedere."¹³ When Isaac in del Sarto's painting now steps down from the pedestal of sculpture, as it were, to take on a changed, more transcendent form in the medium of painting, antiquity is also left behind as the normative benchmark for contemporary art. Thus, what at first glance appears to be a passing remark turns out in retrospect to be a conceptually decisive clue. Louise's commentary is a direct contribution to the *Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, which here – without the dialogue being an actual promotion of religious art (its tone is much less enthusiastic than for instance Tieck's and Wackenroder's celebration of religious art in the *Herzensergießungen*) – is rendered in a Christian iconography of redemption and oriented towards an eschatological end, which similarly Friedrich Schlegel reconceptualized as an allegory of progressive universal-poetry.¹⁴ The replacement of sculpture by painting, and then in the self-referential context of the dialogue "Die Gemählde" as text and poetry, is a plea for Romantic modernity. Only later does August Wilhelm Schlegel make this point much more explicitly: "the spirit of the entire ancient arts and poetry is statuesque, just as the modern is picturesque," as he writes in his Vienna lectures.¹⁵ This has far-reaching consequences, as generally the

¹² Yvonne Al-Taie draws a clear distinction between the ekphrastic descriptions given by Louise and Waller, only Waller's, her argument goes, employ poetic strategies to a significant extent, see *Tropus und Erkenntnis. Sprach- und Bildtheorie der deutschen Frühromantik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 2015), 251.

¹³ See Simon Richter, *Laocoon's Body and the Aesthetics of Pain. Winckelmann, Lessing, Herder, Moritz, Goethe* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 38-61.

¹⁴ Hans-Robert Jauss. *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1973), 75.

¹⁵ August Wilhelm Schlegel, *Ueber dramatische Kunst und Litteratur* (Heidelberg: Mohr und Zimmer, 1809), 1.15. The term "statuesque" for Schlegel's "plastisch" seems to be a coinage by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who heavily borrowed from Schlegel's lectures for his own theory of aesthetics in the *Biographia Literaria*; the term is here used instead of the more literally "plastic," since it refers more clearly to the materiality of the artform.

materiality of sculpture around 1800, as Catriona MacLeod has demonstrated, is in retreat from its position as the foundational principle of beauty.¹⁶

August Wilhelm's apology for the lack of "the artistic" in the dialogue, thus, is in itself an ironic self-assessment that Goethe surely saw through. After all, Caroline's and August Wilhelm's dialogue seems to have inspired him to finish his own dialogue on the visual arts, "Der Sammler und die Seinigen," for the *Propyläen*.¹⁷ Nonetheless, while the discussion of del Sarto's "Abraham" in itself does not provide theoretical insights directly, it is in passing that a more conceptual framework for the understanding of painting and sculpture unfolds in front of the readers' eyes. Classicist aesthetics defined beauty as exclusive perfection-in-itself;¹⁸ Louise, by contrast, contextualizes what used to be a self-contained sculpture in the temporal unfolding of a significant event, in a situation of heightened and dynamically changing emotional states, which can no longer be captured in the static materiality of sculpture; in the decades around 1800, various attempts are documented to compensate for the perceived deficiency of the static nature by the practice of viewing sculptures at night by torchlight, which was to produce an enlivening effect. In fact, in August 1798, August Wilhelm and his brother Friedrich toured the sculpture gallery in Dresden accompanied by Novalis, guided by Wilhelm Gottlieb Becker, the gallery's director.¹⁹ Louise's point, however, is slightly different; not only must a sculpture be enlivened by special lightning, producing an "as if"-effect, but the visual impression must be embedded in a concrete historical situation; she explicitly points out that Abraham's grip around Isaac's hands *is about to* loosen, thereby transforming the statuesque body into a narrative sequence spanning from sacrifice to redemption, as manifested in the composition of the group. With regards to the statuesque, August Wilhelm had elaborated this in more detail in his later *Kunstlehre* (1801-02), where he contends that particularly in groupings, sculpture lacks true coherence compared to

¹⁶ See in this regard Catriona MacLeod, *Fugitive Objects. Sculpture and Literature in the German Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2013).

¹⁷ See Johannes Grave, *Der ideale Kunstkörper: Johann Wolfgang Goethe als Sammler von Druckgraphiken und Zeichnungen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 425.

¹⁸ Karl Philipp Moritz, "Versuch einer Vereinigung aller schönen Künste und Wissenschaften unter dem Begriff des in sich selbst Vollendeten," in *Sämtliche Werke*, edited by Conrad Wiedemann et. al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023), 3.3-10.

¹⁹ Schlegel. *Die Gemählde*, commentary p. 175. On the practice of viewing sculptures under torchlight see Sarah Betzer, *Animating the Antique. Sculptural Encounter in the Age of Aesthetic Theory* (University Park: Penn State UP, 2021), 81-120.

painting, where “painted air,” the medium of painting itself, provides coherence and unity of the image.²⁰

Louise’s brief remark about the “Laocoön of Christianity,” thus unfolds its complex significance for the dialogue less as a theoretically elaborated interpretation of del Sarto’s painting than as an indication of how the reader is to understand Louise’s intellectual role in the dialogue in the first place. In research, the character has often been described as an art enthusiast, while the theoretical focus of the dialogue is seen in the contributions of the two male characters, Waller and Reinhold. Although recent scholarship in particular emphasizes a larger role, including a conceptual one, for Louise’s contributions, ultimately the attribution of primarily descriptive writing to Louise and theorizing writing to the other two characters replicates the idealist dichotomy of matter and form that underlies the gender theory of Fichte and Humboldt, for example. This is not the place to address this specific issue in more detail; I would like to conclude this introduction, however, by just pointing out that the description of del Sarto’s painting follows the description of two paintings with the subject “Flight into Egypt.” What all three paintings have in common is that they deal, however remotely, with the subject of motherhood and fatherhood, and for this reason alone they point to a certain gender dynamic in the dialogue. When Louise rejects male conceptions of motherhood towards the end of the text,²¹ she simultaneously ironizes the erotically charged interpretation of the “Sistine Madonna” which is present in the comments of her male interlocutors, and had found its climax in the Romantic discourse in Wackenroder’s *Herzensergießungen*.²² To what extent this, too, has aesthetic significance for the dialogue that ends with an extensive description and poetic appropriation of Raphael’s “Sistine Madonna” and other paintings of a similar subject cannot be discussed here. Crucial to note, in any case, is that the most aesthetically significant remarks in this particular section of the dialogue, the contextualization in the Laocoön debate, and the dismissal of Vasari’s positive assessment of the landscape background in del Sarto’s painting come from Louise, who consequently seems to have the most theoretically informed attitude towards this painting: not only is she able to justify her admiring judgement, but she is also aware of the historicity of every

²⁰ August Wilhelm Schlegel, *Kritische Ausgabe der Vorlesungen* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1989), 1.288.

²¹ Schlegel, *Die Gemählde*, 118.

²² Wilhelm Wackenroder, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe. Historisch-kritische Ausgabe*, edited by Silvio Vietta and Richard Littlejohns (Heidelberg: Winter, 1991), 1.55-58.

interpretation, and thus underpins her critique with two major principles of Early Romantic criticism.



(ill. 1) Andrea del Sarto, *Abrahams Opfer*, 1529/30. Oil on poplar wood, 213 x 159 cm. Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Dresden.

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The Paintings

Conversation¹

Louise. Among many excellent paintings, none appears so picturesque to me, and particularly in such a noble way, as Andrea del Sarto's Abraham. Abraham stands behind the low sacrificial stone or altar, which is positioned at an angle in the picture. His head is tilted back and turned in the direction of the angel. He extends the right arm with the knife, to complete the sacrifice; the left arm reaches across the chest, behind the son's head, and holds the son's bound hands together on his back, about to loosen his grip. The left leg has anchored itself firmly to the ground with a step to the side, and touches the edge of the stone on the same side below the knee. The other leg is partly hidden behind the stone and the boy. He wears a violet-gray undergarment with voluminous, pushed-up sleeves which leave only the hands uncovered. Over this a robe of beautiful yellowish red, also in a more regular form; it goes around the back, and has wide openings from which the sleeves emerge; at the neck, it folds down like a collar, comes together at the chest, and is gathered up towards the back. The legs show through the grayish clothing, from the knees down they are bare with the feet in sandals. The boy is naked. He kneels with the left leg upon the altar, with the right he stands upon the ground. The face turns forward, with frightened eyes he looks straight ahead. Since everything is taking place behind his back, he senses more than he could know. Indeed, the mouth is wide open in fright, and the eyebrows stretch too strongly upward in the corners by the nose: nonetheless, the nobility of the features remains completely recognizable. The lower body is drawn-in from fear, without frantic convulsion: since he has his hands on his back, the beautiful body becomes fully visible in soft shadows. The shoulders that are pressed forward are of an indescribably soft and melancholy expression; in this posture, the back protrudes a bit over the arm in the

¹ The translation is based on the original edition of 1799 (see Schlegel. *Die Gemählde*, 51-56); the text has been translated into French (1988); however, so far only the first few pages are available in an English translation by David W. Wood in *Symphilosophie 2* (2020): 199-205, <https://symphilosophie.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/dossier-traductions-NEW-29-dec-planches.pdf>

front, and this, as it were, completes the mortal agony. Not merely a cold, perfect drawing, it has crossed over into warm life. Pain and beauty hold themselves in a poignant balance, and the heavenly boy does not tear one's heart apart, as the herald from above already floats down as a rescuing younger brother, and just reaches the father's ear and eye. Abraham has not yet comprehended the words. He looks upward, as if startled away from his undertaking, which he had begun with force and desperation; a trace of displeasure ennobles his face. He has gray hair (on the beard it is almost white), without being an old man. The man's most magnificent force shows in his figure, in the sinews of the neck and the hand that grips the knife. The left arm that stretches darkly over the red robe, and the other arm that reaches out in foreshortened form, create an admirable effect, since both beautiful colors contrast each other, without glaringly standing out. The one thing about the strong figure that perhaps appears a bit less dignified, is the left leg, which stands to the side with all too noticeable emphasis. The coloring of the boy's body is modest, kept a little pale, as if the innocent blood that is to be spilled has retreated; nonetheless, not a lifeless rendering. The angel fills out the small space between Abraham's head and the upper corner of the painting, and is a winged child that brings good news. One could imagine the angel being larger and more somber: but the picturesque contrast benefits from the variety of the three figures. The background landscape can be taken merely as a colored woodcut.

Andrea del Sarto has presented Abraham as the Laocoön of Christianity. It was not just that Laocoön's sons were on his mind as he drew Isaac; no, it is more their concept and spirit. This is not the devout Abraham in long garments, who in painful humility sacrifices his dearest to the God of Love. In him, faith is mighty, because he himself is mighty. Might brought forth obedience in him.

Reinhold. Do you know that you just described a very famous painting, whose history is extraordinarily remarkable?²

² After it passed through the hands of several different owners, it came to Dresden from the gallery of Modena. In the register of artworks that had been seized by the French Republic, the "Sacrifice of Isaac" by Andrea del Sarto is listed. One should see the one that the General Pommereul delivered and mentioned in the appendix to his translation of *Milizia, De l'art de voir dans les Beaux-Arts*. This piece is a copy that king August III acquired in Italy, in order to assure himself of the authenticity of the Modena painting, but which he immediately discarded upon comparison. In the Seven Years War, the painting came into Prussian hands, and thus into the cabinet of the hereditary Stadthouder [Wilhelm V, Prince of Nassau]; from there the error made it into the French edition. Maybe art lovers wish that this register might contain more errors like this one [footnote by the Schlegels].

Louise. That does not concern me, as long as I do not err in considering it as a true masterpiece.

Reinhold. Andrea made the painting in order to reconcile with Francis the first of France, who was upset with him, because Andrea, under the pretense of purchasing paintings for Francis in Florence, took money from him, but instead forgot his task amid his passion for his wife, spent all of the money, and did not return to France at all, despite the king's loving attempts to secure the painter's services for himself. I am convinced that Francis, whose connoisseurship has not been matched by any other French king since, could not have withstood the touching sight of Isaac. However, this reconciliation did not happen, as Andrea died in the meantime. Vasari describes the painting painstakingly with the strongest words of praise, and also understood Abraham's character as you do: the living faith and the steadfastness that made him unhesitatingly ready to kill his son are divinely expressed in the elderly man. But how have you dared to attach so little value to the landscape, which Vasari says is so superbly made that the real landscape in which the story transpires could neither be more beautiful nor any different?

Louise. If someone would judge in such a manner today, we would, with all due respect, find it a little silly.

Reinhold. Well, well... Vasari was just as little a philosophical critic of art, as he was a critical historian: his intentions were, however, honest and eager; thus, sometimes it happens that he praises the wrong things. That he did not know what constituted a good landscape can be held against him as little as it can be held against his master Andrea for not having a better handling of aerial perspective. This genre developed later: Titian first laid the foundation for the art of landscape paintings.

Symphilosophie

International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism

Studies in the Fine Arts and Five Fragments on Art

Novalis

Translated, Introduced, and Annotated by David W. Wood*

The first of the following two short texts was written by Novalis in September 1798, just after his joint visit to the Dresden Art Gallery on 25-26 August 1798 with many of the other members of the Jena romantic circle.¹ Given the title: “Studien zur bildenden Kunst” (Studies in the Fine Arts) by the editors of the Novalis, *Schriften (Historisch-kritische Ausgabe: HKA; cf. vol. II: 648-651; nos. 474-487)*, it remains a highly terse series of fourteen notebook entries. This compact text is translated below in its entirety. It was obviously not intended for publication in its present form and requires annotations.² Indeed, Novalis strove to rework these notebook entries himself, writing to Caroline Schlegel on 9 September 1798:

The letter on the antiquities has become recast. Besides an archaeological supplement, I'll send you a romantic fragment —The Visit to

* Dr. phil. in the history of philosophy (Université Paris-Sorbonne & LMU Munich) – david.wilfred.wood@gmail.com

¹ The communal visit to Dresden in 1798 also artistically stimulated other participants of the group. This is especially the case for Caroline Schlegel and August Wilhelm Schlegel, who subsequently penned *Die Gemälde* (The Paintings). The latter text was published in the romantic journal *Atheneum* in 1799. A new translated excerpt from *The Paintings* can be found in this year's issue of *Symphilosophie* 5 (2023): 229-239.

² See above all Jürgen Balmes's commentary on this text in volume three of Novalis, *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe*, eds. Hans-Joachim Mähl and Richard Samuel (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1999). I have been considerably helped by his commentary.

the Antiquities—I'm quietly counting on your interest. (HKA IV: 260-261).

Yet the brief “Studies in the Fine Arts” do not appear to be identical with the fragment “The Visit to the Antiquities”. Nevertheless, they may have formed the basis for it. These studies reveal *in nuce* some of Novalis’s thoughts on art which became more developed and transmuted in poetic writings, like the *Hymns to the Night* and the *Disciples at Sais*.

Some of these further reflections on art can also be detected in the second short collection of poetic-philosophic fragments translated below, which I have called: “Five Fragments on Art.”³ *Inter alia* these Five Fragments contain Novalis’s thoughts on celebrated visual and poetic works of art such as Raphael’s *Sistine Madonna*, the Laocoon sculptural group, or Goethe’s *Fairy Tale*. Fragment 1 specifically labelled “Archaeology” aligns in part with the “archaeological supplement” mentioned in the letter to Caroline Schlegel; Fragment 3 recalls the Dresden Art Gallery visit by referring to the angel at the base of the *Sistine Madonna* painting; while Fragment 4, with its further reflections on religious art, the Madonna, and telescopes, is perhaps even identical with the aforementioned “The Visit to the Antiquities”. In any case, this particular Fragment 4 on artistic “perfection” has clearly been polished by Novalis into a beautiful literary jewel.

³ These entries are originally numbered as 52, 382, 434, 737, 745 in Novalis’s 1798/99 encyclopaedia project, *Das allgemeine Brouillon*. The present translations are updated and revised versions of ones I published earlier in the volume: Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007).

Novalis

Studies in the Fine Arts

1. <The *Horen*¹, from *Gries*.>²

2. On the sensations of *thought* in the *body*.

3. *Antiquities*.³ The Madonna.⁴ / The human being is a self-given historical individual. Humanity in stages. As soon as humanity attains the highest stage, the highest will suddenly be revealed and integrated. / View of human history – of groups – nations – societies – individual people. / Elevation of mechanics. Fichte's intellectual chemistry. Chemistry is a *passionate soil*. Chemistry is the rawest and first formation. / *Descriptions of paintings* etc.⁵ / On *landscape painting* – and painting compared to sculpture in general. / Everything has to be simultaneously *squared* and *not squared*. The uses, usage, is infinitely gradual – hence, the measurement. Landscapes – *surfaces* – *structures* – *architectonics*. *Landscapes* with caves. Atmospheres, landscapes with clouds. The entire landscape ought to comprise *one individual* – Vegetation and inorganic nature – fluid, solid – *masculine* – *feminine*. geognostic landscapes. Variations of nature. / Shouldn't sculpture and painting be symbolic? / For the poet, the art gallery is a storage room of all kinds of indirect stimuli. / *Necessity* of all works of art. / Every art work has an *a priori* ideal – has an accompanying necessity to *exist*. This permits a genuine critique of the painter. / Series of Madonnas. Series of heroes. Series of sages. Series of geniuses. Series of Gods. Series of human beings. /

Antiquities force us to treat them as sacred relics. /

¹ The *Horen* was a journal edited by Friedrich Schiller, 1795-1797.

² Johann Diederich Gries (1775-1842), translator. He visited the Dresden sculpture and art galleries in August 1798 with Novalis and other members of the Jena romantic circle.

³ *Antiken* = antiquities, in the sense of ancient works of sculpture.

⁴ Reference to Raphael's painting of the *Sistine Madonna* in Dresden.

⁵ Cf. *The Paintings*, by Caroline and August Wilhelm Schlegel (see translated excerpt in this volume 5 of *Symphilosophie*).

Special kinds of *souls* and *spirits*. Who inhabit trees, landscapes, stones, and paintings. A landscape ought to be viewed through the lens of dryads and oreads. A landscape should be felt, like a body. Every landscape is an ideal body for a special *kind of spirit*. / The sonnet. / *Wit*. / The sense for *the ancient world* – awakened by antiquities. /

4. Poets borrow all their materials, right up to the *images*. / On Friedrich Schlegel – etc. / Character, sense. /

5. Eternal virgins – born women. / Fichte’s apotheosis of the Kantian philosophy. / *Thinking* about thinking clearly teaches us to bring thought under our control – because we learn to think what and how we want. / Internal, utterly distant and infinite universe – analogy with the external world – light – gravitation. /

6. Do all human beings have to be human beings? Beings that are entirely different to humans could exist in human form. / As someone virtuous, the educator is the indirectly positive principle of the art of education. / *universal skill in writing*. / On *multi-thinkers* and solitary thinkers – Friedrich Schlegel, for example, and Fichte. / Trivialisation of the divine and apotheosis of the banal. / We have progressed beyond the age of universally valid *forms* - / Influence of the material of sculpture on the figure – and their *effect*. Shouldn’t the attractive and stronger effect of *more subtle and rarer matter* be *galvanic*? / *Compulsion* is a stimulus for the spirit – there is something about compulsion that is absolutely stimulating for the spirit. Medical application of fortune and misfortune. / On neutralisation – complicated illnesses – localized illness – systems of generation. / All doubt, all need for *truth* – solution – Knowledge is the consequence of *rawness* and *over-education* – symptom of an imperfect constitution. Thus, all scientific *education* aims at making us skilful – training – All scientific *healing* and the *restoration* of health, where one has no scientific needs. /

7. Revolutionizing and revision of mathematics. / Letter to Schlegel senior on art and antiquities.⁶ *Poems* / Letter to Friedrich Schlegel. / Fichte’s

⁶ See Novalis’s letter to A.W. Schlegel, 24 February 1798: “I happily accept your invitation regarding the fine arts” (HKA IV: 252).

synthesis – genuine chemical mixture. Hovering.⁷ / Individuality and generality of human beings and illnesses. / On necessary *self-limitation* – infinite versatility of the educated intellect. – One can draw upon everything – twist and turn everything, however one wants. / The *power of genius*. / Headings of the main masses in letters etc./ On *tints* – and *tones* – analogically moral. / On the correct state of dialogue. On experimenting genius. / The actual businessman has less need of knowledge and skills than of historical spirit and education. / Spiritual *métier*. / On mechanics. / *Scholarly conferences* – their purpose. / Weddings are mostly separations. / Mimicry in *notes*. / Wit on the whole. / Experimental religion and philosophy. / How do everyday *interactions* affect me in the Brownian sense? / Stimulus *becomes* something stimulating. – etc. Physiology. / Concept of neutralisation. Is the *neutral* the highest – negative neutral, positive neutral and their synthesis / On the transformation of history into tradition. The latter is higher.

★

8. Everything visible clings to the invisible. – The audible [clings] to the inaudible. The tangible to the intangible. Perhaps the conceivable to the inconceivable –.

The telescope is an artificial, invisible organ. / receptacle. /

The imagination is the marvellous sense that can *replace* all our senses – and which we already greatly have in our power. If the external senses appear to stand entirely under mechanical laws – then the imagination is clearly not bound to the present time and to contact with external stimuli.

9. Herder's *Sculpture*. page 7. We teach those born blind and those who have had their sight restored to visibly recognise their feelings. – They often forget the significance of the symbols of feeling – until their eyes have been trained to view *spatial figures* and coloured images as *the letters of earlier bodily feelings*, to quickly bring them all together and to *read* the surrounding objects.⁸

⁷ Hovering = *Schweben*; the hovering or oscillation of the productive imagination is a Fichtean term and concept. For Fichte, the imagination is that 'marvellous' faculty of the mind that is able to synthesize antitheses in cognition. See the next fragment number 8.

⁸ This is mostly a literal and paraphrased excerpt by Novalis taken from Herder's text on sculpture (presented here in small font). See *Plastik. Einige Wahrnehmungen über Form und Gestalt aus Pygmalions bildendem Traume* (Riga: J.F. Hartknoch, 1778), 7. This passage of the book in Herder concerns among others Diderot's famous 1749 text *Lettre sur les aveugles* and the sightless English mathematician Nicholas Saunderson (1682-1739).

10. The unity of the image, form, and pictorial compositions rests on solid relations, just like the unity of musical harmony. / Harmony and melody. /

11.	Space.	Sculpture.	Sight.	Surface.
	Time.	Music.	Hearing.	Tone.
	Force.	Poetry.	Feeling.	Body.

Herder.⁹

12. Our body is a *part of the world* – a member, or better said: It already expresses the *independence*, the analogy with the whole – in short, the concept of the microcosm. This member has to correspond to the whole. There are as many modes as there are senses – the universe is wholly an analogue of the human being in the body – soul and spirit. The latter are the abbreviation, the former the elongation of the same substance.

I will not and should not work arbitrarily in general upon the world – I have my body for this – I modify *my* world through the modifications of my body. Through non-effectiveness on the *vessel of my existence*, I likewise indirectly fashion my world.

13. The tree can become a radiant flame to me – the human being a promising flame – the animal, a transformative flame.

14. Everything that is perceived is done so according to the measure of its repulsive force.

Explanation of the *visible* and *illuminated* – according to the analogy of sensitive heat. So too with tones. Perhaps with thoughts as well.

—

⁹ This is another reference by Novalis to Herder's text on sculpture (cf. previous note).

[Five Fragments on Art]

1. **ARCHAEOLOGY.** Galvanism of antiquities, their *matter* – Revivification of the ancient world.

Wondrous *religion* which hovers around them – Their history – the philosophy of sculpture – gems – human petrifications – painting – portraiture – landscapes. – The human being has always expressed the symbolic philosophy of his being in his works, his acting, and his forbearance – He proclaims himself and his gospel of nature. He is the messiah of nature – antiquities are simultaneously *products of the future and of prehistory* – Goethe contemplates nature like an antiquity. – Character of antiquities – epigrams – antiquities are from another world. – It is as though they have fallen from heaven. Something on the Madonna. In conclusion, some poems. The study of antiquities must be *scholarly* (physical) and *poetic*. Is there a central antiquity – or a universal spirit of antiquities? Mystical sense for forms. Antiquities do not touch just one sense but all the senses, the whole of humanity.

2. **THE THEORY OF ART.** (Painting) Sculpture therefore is nothing more than the figuristics of music.

Remarkable expression: in the highest *momentum*.¹

(Painting) Sculpture—objective music. Music—subjective music, or painting. We should be able to *impress everything* (necessary) acoustically, to make it into a silhouette, to encipher it. *Lines* are fixed movements. The circle arises through the central oscillation of a plane.

Poetry is prose among the arts. Words are acoustic configurations of thoughts.

Every instrument on the whole is an inherently harmonized system of sounds. Minor instruments—Major instruments—everything has its own fundamental vowel. The human voice is, as it were, the principle and ideal of instrumental music.

What really makes the sound, the body or the air? Isn't the elastic fluid the vowel, and the body the consonant—the air is the sun—and the bodies are the planets—the former is the first voice—the latter is the 2nd.

Geometry and mechanics are related to one another, like sculpture and music. (chemical motions, chemical inhibitors.)

¹ *im höchsten Schwung.*

All method is *rhythm*. If we take away the rhythm of the world—then the world also disappears. Every person has his own individual rhythm.

Algebra is *poetry*.

Rhythmical sense is genius.

Fichte hasn't done anything else than discover the rhythm of philosophy and expressed it in a verbal and acoustic manner.

3. **POETICS.** Poetry is the youth among the *sciences*. – When it was a child it may have looked like the angel below the [Sistine] Madonna, who presses his finger so significantly to his mouth, as though wary of this frivolity.

4. Everything perfected does not express itself alone – it also expresses an entire (co)related world. Thus, the veil of the eternal Virgin floats around perfection of every kind—dissolving under the slightest touch into a magic fragrance, to become the cloud chariot of the seer. It is not antiquities alone that we behold – It is at once heaven, the telescope – and the fixed star – and therefore a genuine revelation of a higher world.

Moreover, we shouldn't believe too rigidly that antiquities and the perfected are *made* – made in the sense in which we usually designate something as made. They are made like the beloved through the appointed sign of a friend in the night – as a spark is made through contact with a conductor – or the star via a movement in the eye. In precisely the same way as the star appears and penetrates into a *telescope* – so does a *heavenly form* appear in a marble figure.

(Poetic theory of telescopes – the star etc. is a spontaneous being of light – the telescope or eye is a receptive being of light).

With every touch of perfection the work leaps from the master into far more than the expanses of space – and with the final touch, therefore, the master sees the work that is supposedly his, become separated from himself by a chasm of thought – whose breadth he can barely comprehend – and which only the imagination, like the shadow of a giant intelligence, is able to bridge.² At that moment when it ought to have become entirely his, it became much more than he, its creator – and he became the unwitting instrument

² This is a reference to Goethe's 1795 *Fairy Tale (Märchen)*, published in Schiller's *Horen* journal. In this mysterious tale, the shadow of the giant functions as a bridge across the river at dawn and dusk. Among others, the character of the giant is inspired by the mythological Greek hunter Orion. Apart from the figure of the Man with the Lamp, Hardenberg-Novalis obviously had a penchant for the universal status of this character as he cites it a number of times in his writings.

and property of a higher power. The artist belongs to the work and not the work to the artist.

5. Laocoon – *sensuousness* of this sculptural group. The simple sensations of the children have become compounded and intensified in the father. Reflections on serpents – and the nature of serpents. Only One serpent – disregard the other serpents. Different groups of serpents. Laocoon, as a member of a series – as a study – not as a work of art – a mere scientific work of art. 2 satyrs, seizing 3 nymphs etc.

The serpent is (visible) sensible venom. Serpents don't need to devour, but only bite – inject venom and imbibe – only kill and imbibe life.

(Mechanical penetration, chemical penetration – living penetration – all three simultaneously.)

It is an *immoral* work of art. *Virgil's religious depiction of Laocoon* is a fortunate sleight of hand that turns Laocoon into a victim – or an eradication of the harmful by means of the harmful.

Mightn't it be possible to imagine a more comprehensive, i.e. a more elevated moment in the Laocoonian drama – perhaps there, where the greatest suffering passes over into intoxication – resistance into surrender – and the highest life into stone?

(Shouldn't the sculptor *always* seize the moment of *petrification* – and seek it out – depict it – and solely be capable of portraying this moment?)

The greatest works of art are *disagreeable*³ – They are ideals that can only approximately please us – they *ought to* become – aesthetic imperatives. The moral law too should only exist approximately – and be a formula of the (will's) inclination. (Ideal willing – infinite willing. In accordance with its character, we cannot conceive of reaching the unattainable – it only expresses the ideal sum of the entire series, so to speak, and consequently, it is apparently the final element – the type of every element – and indicated by every element).

³ *ungefällig.*

Symphilosophie

Revue internationale de philosophie romantique

Günderode

Extraits choisis sur la musique

(1840)

Bettina von Arnim

Traduits et annotés par Laure Cahen-Maurel* et Christoph Haffter**

Introduction de Christoph Haffter

Die Günderode (1840) de Bettina von Arnim (1785-1859) est une œuvre paradigmatique de la symphilosophie romantique. Elle se présente comme une correspondance entre deux philosophes-poètes, un dialogue entre deux femmes qui confrontent leurs idées, leurs sensibilités et projets existentiels dans une recherche commune de la vérité. Le texte entremêle argumentation rigoureuse, spéculations libres, anecdotes quotidiennes et formes poétiques. Cette correspondance fictive, rédigée par Bettina von Arnim, se fonde sur ses échanges réels avec son amie d'adolescence Karoline von Günderode. Les deux faisaient partie du cercle romantique de Heidelberg autour de Clemens Brentano (le frère de Bettina von Arnim), Achim von Arnim (son futur époux) et Georg Friedrich Creuzer (l'ami intime de Karoline von Günderode) dans les premières années du 19^e siècle. Le roman épistolaire, élaboré trente ans plus tard, transforme ces amitiés vécues en une œuvre d'art, qui, à son tour, est porteuse d'une métaphysique en même temps que d'un art de vivre. Selon Alison Stone, Arnim y développe une métaphysique

* Docteure en philosophie, *Wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin* (collaboratrice pédagogique et scientifique), Internationales Zentrum für Philosophie NRW / Institut für Philosophie der Universität Bonn, Poppelsdorfer Allee 28, 53115 Bonn, Allemagne – laure.cahen-maurel@uni-bonn.de

** Docteur en philosophie, *Wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter Forschungsstelle Musikphilosophie*, Philosophisches Seminar der Universität Basel / Hochschule für Musik FHNW Basel, Steinengraben 5, 4051 Bâle, Suisse – c.haffter@unibas.ch

vitaliste à travers la confrontation avec la pensée idéaliste de G nderode.¹ Les deux philosophes partagent la pr misse de la *Vereinigungsphilosophie*, la conception m taphysique d'une unit  originaires, diff renci e en individualit s et domaines s par s poss dant une tendance naturelle   la r union. L' change symphilosophique et la cr ation artistique en commun sont con us comme le prolongement de cette tendance omnipr sente et naturelle des  tres s par s   aspirer   l'unit  primordiale. Or, l'id alisme de G nderode con oit cette r conciliation m taphysique comme une transformation de la mati re en esprit : ce n'est qu'en affranchissant la vie de sa condition mati rielle qu'elle retrouvera une unit  spirituelle. L'aboutissement de la tendance unificatrice serait alors la mort. Arnim s'oppose   son amie en d fendant la possibilit  d'une synth se r conciliatrice *dans* la vie mati rielle et sensible. L'exp rience de l'inventivit  toujours renouvel e dans la nature est, pour elle, la preuve de la puissance cr atrice de la mati re et la promesse d'un d passement *immanent* des s parations. Les positions m taphysiques se refl tent dans les temp raments et les formes de vie des deux protagonistes : G nderode [*sic*] insiste sur l'importance des  tudes syst matiques et de l' ducation formelle ; elle critique vigoureusement la distraction de son amie, qui touche   tout et se perd dans les vagabondages de l'esprit. Arnim, quant   elle, admire la discipline de son amie et la regarde comme un mentor. N anmoins, elle d fend clairement aussi sa propre vitalit  indomptable, en r volte contre toutes les r gulations acad miques de l'expression artistique et philosophique.

Cette opposition impr gne  galement la pens e musicale de Bettina von Arnim. Pour elle, la musique v ritable est la continuation de la cr ativit  musicale de la nature : les harmonies bouleversantes des orages, la polyphonie des insectes, l'ondulation des eaux et des vents sont les mod les d'un dynamisme qu'elle retrouve dans la musique instrumentale. Ces puissances sonores s'opposent radicalement   la discipline acad mique   laquelle elle doit se plier pendant les cours de contrepoint. Dans les lettres   son amie, Arnim se pr sente comme un  tre naturel, na f mais d bordant de vie, qui ne se laisse pas assagir : « Je ne veux pas me rendre ma tre [de la musique], je veux me laisser ma triser par [ses] flots », d clare-t-elle en r ponse aux le ons de th orie musicale². Or, l'identification du soi f minin   une nature na ve et r calcitrante est probl matique tant qu'elle est oppos e   un pendant masculin suppos  rationnel, comme c'est le cas dans les lettres semi-fictives d'Arnim   Goethe intitul es * change de lettres avec un enfant*. Avec G nderode,

¹ Alison Stone, « Bettina von Arnim's Romantic Philosophy in *Die G nderode* », *Hegel Bulletin* 43 (3), 2022, pp. 371-394.

² Voir *infra*, p. 247.

en revanche, c'est une femme qui incarne la contrepartie de la naïveté naturelle d'Arnim : Gûnderode représente la réflexion systématique et la rigueur d'esprit. Ce n'est qu'en assimilant pour une part la sagesse de Gûnderode qu'Arnim va trouver, au fil de ce roman épistolaire, une assise stable sans pour autant sacrifier son affirmation d'une vie créatrice.

À travers la confrontation littéraire des projets existentiels, Arnim tente de comprendre les choix ayant façonné les vies réelles de ses personnages. Karoline von Gûnderode s'est donné la mort en 1806, après avoir rompu ses liens d'amitié avec Bettina von Arnim. Plus de trente ans plus tard, au moment où elle retravaille ses lettres de jeunesse, Arnim est, quant à elle, engagée dans les cercles de la gauche hégélienne de Berlin : elle publiera *Dies Buch gehört dem König*, livre dénonçant les conditions de vie misérables du prolétariat ; et elle fera usage de son influence politique pour soutenir la révolte des tisserands de Silésie, en 1844. La *symphilosophie* d'Arnim est en cela fidèle à l'esprit révolutionnaire des débuts du romantisme – du romantisme d'Iéna –, à une époque où le mouvement s'était, depuis bien longtemps déjà, tourné vers la restauration.

Les extraits du roman épistolaire *Gûnderode* que nous proposons ici en traduction française sont centrés autour de la pensée musicale d'Arnim, qui non seulement composait elle-même, mais échangeait avec des musiciens accomplis de son époque comme Ludwig van Beethoven, Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, Robert Schumann (auquel elle continuera de rendre visite après qu'il fut interné à l'asile d'aliénés de Colditz), Joseph Joachim et Franz Liszt. La conception de la musique qui se profile dans ces lettres est intimement liée à la philosophie de la nature et à l'engagement émancipateur qui soutient toute l'œuvre d'Arnim. La pensée musicale est, elle aussi, portée par l'idée d'une libération naturelle.

Extrait 1¹

À Günderoode

Offenbach², mai 1805

Ne sois pas inquiète pour ma santé : j'ai encore toute ma tête ; je ne peux m'empêcher de rire avec mon ombre, profilée sur le mur. J'escalade l'escalier de trois bonds, je vole, je redescends, j'atteins le rideau de peupliers derrière lequel flotte au vent quelque chose de blanc. – À l'endroit où nous avons enterré Spitz l'année dernière, le vent faisait danser un papier au clair de lune ; je voulus l'attraper mais il s'envola aussitôt par-dessus le mur du jardin. Avec le bon Spitz je n'avais pas peur la nuit ; il aboyait, comme il l'avait toujours fait, pour éloigner les fantômes de mon chemin. « Monsieur Piano », Hofmann [sic]³, est toujours notre voisin ; cette nuit, comme d'habitude, il déroula au galop allongé ses gammes ascendantes et descendantes d'accords enharmoniques alors que j'étais couchée ; je renonçai à mon sommeil et, avec joie, engageai dans la musique mes sens, qui s'agitèrent aussi rapidement. – Il m'est impossible de saisir la musique par l'intellect, comme les philistins : je dois ressentir les choses. Avoir les sens bercés par la musique, m'abandonner comme si je somnolais. C'est alors seulement que les pensées surgissent, rapides – comme filent les étoiles dans le ciel, souvent. Cela m'afflige de ne pas pouvoir penser ce que je veux, de ne pouvoir faire autrement que de me laisser égarer par tout, comme au marché, où l'on va et vient de la boîte à images au spectacle de marionnettes, à l'ours qui danse ; de m'y amuser avec les tziganes sur la rive du Main alors que le bateau du marché crache des philistins et que les musiciens ivres les en chassent par leur musique tonitruante. Toutes sortes de choses me passent par la tête, mais quand je veux écrire, il n'y a plus une idée dans l'air, la plupart des mots sont superflus, je dois les biffer comme dans cette lettre. Dans l'écoute de la musique, je suis concentrée, les pensées ne s'agitent pas en tous sens, elles

¹ Les extraits qui suivent sont tirés de l'édition de Walter Schmitz, telle qu'elle apparaît dans le premier volume des Œuvres et Correspondance de Bettina (ou Bettine) von Arnim, *Werke und Briefe in vier Bänden, Band I*, Francfort, Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1986, ici p. 392-393.

² Localité où séjourne la grand-mère de Bettina von Arnim, Sophie von La Roche (voir *infra* note 5), qui l'élève après la mort de sa mère lorsqu'elle a trois ans. Bettina von Arnim passe une partie de son adolescence dans la demeure de sa grand-mère à Offenbach.

³ Philipp Carl Hoffmann (1789-1842), auprès duquel Bettina von Arnim prend, à Offenbach, des cours de piano et de théorie musicale.

sont calmes, elles contemplant intérieurement la chose qui me contente. L'âme grandit, le bourgeon s'ouvre, absorbe la lumière de la lune. – Je passai un moment à écouter dans mon lit ; lorsque survint l'orage, je bondis hors du lit et m'assis contre la fenêtre. – La musique accorde tout, elle fait tonner son flot puissant à travers la nuit étoilée, puis étire sa danse pour saluer à chaque vague la fleur fleurissant secrètement sur le rivage. Quand arrivent les nuages emportés par le vent impétueux, ils sont comme envoûtés par son souffle ; la pluie roule ses perles sous son pas dansant, poussée à travers la nuit noire sous les filets lumineux de la foudre, se ruant à travers l'obscurité en ondulations sonores – tout cela est un hymne de musique ; rien ne contredit, ni ne dérange l'éveil silencieux des sens. C'est ainsi que je passai la moitié de la nuit – une vie comme il n'y en a pas de meilleure et comme il n'y en aura pas de meilleure avec le temps. [...]

Extrait II⁴

À Günderode

Samedi

Ah, que la journée d'hier fut radieuse ! Les moustiques et les scarabées l'ont passée à danser et à bourdonner ; ils savent se repaître du plaisir des sens. Je les ai écoutés, assise parmi les herbes hautes, sous la tenture qui couvre la blanchisserie. La vieille cousine l'a arrosée plusieurs fois dans l'ardeur de midi ; il a fallu du temps pour que l'eau filtre goutte à goutte et me rafraîchisse. J'écoutais, en bas, la répétition des symphonies qui résonnaient à travers le bosquet jusqu'à mon oreille inculte, la frappant d'étonnement devant tout ce qu'elle ne pouvait comprendre. La musique, qui transporte ses notes à travers les airs et déverse sur nous toute la puissance de la révélation avant de s'évanouir, nous ne pouvons, quand elle s'est tue, la faire revenir. Soit que je suis, je me prends à penser qu'il faudrait être au désespoir de n'en avoir rien retenu après qu'elle s'est tue. Il en sera ainsi encore plus d'une fois : *un son résonnera, je ne le saisirai pas*. Hier, je me suis entretenue avec grand-mère⁵ ; elle a prononcé cette phrase : « Ce que

⁴ Bettine von Arnim, *Werke und Briefe in vier Bänden*, vol. 1, p. 399-401.

⁵ Sophie von La Roche (1730-1807), femme de lettres considérée comme la première femme écrivaine de profession et financièrement indépendante d'Allemagne. Proche de Wieland, elle tint un des tout premiers salons littéraires de l'époque des Lumières, qui comptait, entre autres habitués, Goethe, Jacobi et Lavater.

l'intellect ne saisit pas, le cœur le comprend ». – Je ne comprends pas, à mon tour, ce qu'elle veut dire.

Ce matin, Hofmann me dit : « Le saut harmonique simple, c'est quand, entre deux accords successifs, on entend une harmonie en esprit. » Mais ce n'est pas dans mon esprit que j'entends cette harmonie ; je suis toute pénétrée de ce que je sens, non de ce que je comprends. – Crois-moi, la musique agit, enthousiasme, ravit, non du fait que nous l'entendions, mais par la puissance d'harmonies intermédiaires inaperçues ; ce sont *elles* qui, par leur pouvoir spirituel inaudible, font la continuité de l'esprit physique, audible, de la musique. *C'est cela* l'immense effet sur nous : nous sommes attirés par ce que nous entendons vers ce qui ne s'entend pas. *Un* son nous rend tous les autres proches, et tous chaque son particulier. Mais je peux l'avouer : une idée m'est venue, assurément, pendant la répétition musicale – celle de la création du monde par Dieu. Je comprends à présent le sens de la fameuse parole divine *Que cela soit*. Sans l'un, plus rien ; sans tout, l'un n'existe pas. Toute la création surgit en un souffle : feu, terre, air, eau ; toute vie, tout être naît de l'union de ces quatre esprits, qui sont la vie de l'univers. Les quatre éléments, quant à eux, naissent d'eux-mêmes dans l'esprit, qui est fait de leur fusion. La musique est l'auto-engendrement de ces quatre éléments fusionnés. Dans tout être vivant, ces éléments s'engendrent eux-mêmes ; c'est cela l'esprit, la musique. L'animal aussi est doué de musique ; il est pénétré sensuellement par l'eau, l'air, la terre et le feu, par leur esprit qui naît en lui. C'est la raison pour laquelle il est tant excité par la musique : ses sens, dans la musique, sommeillent, rêvent ; tout a un droit égal au divin, à ce que, en toutes choses, l'auto-engendrement des quatre éléments élève jusqu'à l'esprit.

J'ai couché cela sur le papier ; j'ai ces lignes sous les yeux et je ne sais pas ce que je voulais dire. En plein jour les légions de pensées se dispersent. Mais hier, sous la tenture où le soleil perlait sur moi à travers les gouttes d'eau accumulées, piégée dans le filet de toutes ces herbes en fleurs, cela m'était clair : non, ce n'est pas ce que nous percevons avec les sens qui est la véritable jouissance, mais bien ce qui meut nos sens – nous pousse à vivre ensemble, à créer ensemble : c'est cela la vie, la volupté – être actif ! Mais c'est assez : l'emprise des esprits sur moi était puissante quand la musique résonnait ; leur appel était clair : prends un violon, participe à ta façon, selon ce que tu ressens, fais en sorte de contribuer au déploiement du courant d'harmonie, de l'augmenter, de t'affirmer en faisant éclater ton enthousiasme – et là, dans ces hauteurs, que ton être se dilate, que tu t'éprouves toi-même dans chaque son par l'affinité de ta voix avec eux. Si quelqu'un était capable de comprendre l'harmonie et de la mettre en œuvre rationnel-

lement, ce serait le maître secret du monde, à l'insu de tous ; l'univers entier lui semblerait *une* symphonie ; toute l'histoire du monde tambourinerait, sifflerait, claironnerait pour son plus grand plaisir. Oui, je comprends ! Certes, je ne l'énoncerai pas ainsi à Hofmann, mais je lui présenterai le premier, le deuxième et le troisième degré des tonalités voisines ; et comment tout m'est soumis pour me servir, comment je peux conférer la domination à tout, puis la reprendre, et comment je règne donc toujours, tant que je nage dans le courant de l'harmonie divine.

Adieu ! Je sors mes pinces comme un crabe du fond peu profond de mes perceptions et saisis ce que j'attrape en premier pour m'arracher à ma propre incapacité de comprendre.

Extrait III⁶

À Bettine

[...] Ce qui te stimule un instant, ce pour quoi le feu qui t'anime se rassemble vraiment, tu le disperses aussitôt avec toute l'application possible et l'abandonnes aux quatre vents. Tu ne peux nier que la musique corresponde à tout ce qui en toi demande à être stimulé. Tu me l'as toi-même écrit : ton propre esprit vital t'exhorte constamment à te saisir d'un violon, à rendre le courant des harmonies plus intense, sans quoi tu ne saurais être heureuse. C'est peu ou prou ce que tu m'as écrit il y a quatre semaines, et aussi que tu as la sensation que la musique est l'esprit originaire de tous les éléments, qu'elle seule éveille l'esprit en l'être humain, que l'esprit ne peut qu'être musique, et d'autres pensées grandiloquentes de ce genre, mais qui t'ont déjà – à ce que je vois – échappé entièrement. Où est donc à présent ton esprit musical originaire ? Je ne veux en aucun cas me mettre en travers du cours de ta vie, mais que tu ne veuilles même pas pratiquer un art par amour d'un esprit qui vient à ta rencontre par des voies secrètes, que tu chéris tant, dont tu penses qu'en tout, c'est lui et lui seul qu'à jamais tu aimeras ; que tu ne veuilles fournir aucun effort, ne lire aucun livre, mais seulement te promener, grimper sur les toits et flâner sur des sentiers brumeux suspendus au-dessus des haies,

⁶ Bettine von Arnim, *Werke und Briefe in vier Bänden*, vol. 1, p. 470-471.

inventer des religions flottantes, c'est véritablement malheureux ! J'étais tellement disposée à essayer sur toi tout ce que Clemens⁷ me présente comme étant mon devoir, mais tu ne me rends aucun compte et tu dévides très vite, comme un papillon, le fil de ta pensée qui t'entraîne bien au-delà de toi. – Combien de temps resteras-tu encore dehors ? [...]

Extrait IV⁸

À Gûnderode

[...] Je n'en ai pas fini avec la musique, ce n'est pas encore devenu une de mes vieilles marottes. Je suis sincère et la vertu de la vérité est la seule qui excite mes nerfs ; elle régit mon esprit comme une femme son foyer. Si à plusieurs reprises je t'ai fait part de l'effet considérable que la musique exerce sur moi, c'est que tu peux t'imaginer que je ne me suis pas arrêtée là ; mais engagée sur des chemins encore déserts, sans débouché, et qui me restent obscurs, sans but et sans solution, que pourrais-je dire de plus ? La manière qu'ont les virtuoses d'apprendre à connaître la vie intérieure d'une musique est d'étudier uniquement ses parties individuelles, et dans leurs conversations savantes sur la musique ils s'écoutent beaucoup parler. Mais je ne me laisse pas non plus mystifier par elle. Voilà que surgissent dans ma pensée une vision romantique et une autre de nature spirituelle. L'une me donne des états d'âme, l'autre m'apporte une révélation. Pas plus tard qu'hier fut jouée dans le bosquet, entre autres morceaux nouveaux qui ne m'excitaient pas du tout, une symphonie de Frédéric II⁹. En tête, il monte son cheval, héroïque, dans ses bottes rigides aux éperons rutilants ; de toutes parts, la même clameur : il doit galoper hardiment au-delà de l'humanité timide ; bientôt, sans remords ni regret aucun, il n'a plus face à lui, pour lui faire front, que la

⁷ Clemens Brentano (1778-1842), frère de Bettina, poète, écrivain et figure majeure du deuxième romantisme allemand (*Mittlere Romantik*), dit de Heidelberg.

⁸ Bettine von Arnim, *Werke und Briefe in vier Bänden*, vol. 1, p. 472-483.

⁹ Frédéric II de Prusse (1712-1786), dit Frédéric le Grand, monarque éclairé auquel Kant rend hommage dans son opuscule *Qu'est-ce que les Lumières ?* Passionné de musique, le roi compose lui-même plusieurs œuvres, sonates, concertos, symphonies ou encore marches militaires. Le commentaire ironique que Bettina von Arnim fait ici d'une des quatre symphonies qu'il a composées reflète l'engagement de l'écrivaine. L'année de la publication du roman épistolaire *Die Gûnderode* (1840) est aussi celle de l'avènement au trône de Frédéric-Guillaume IV, petit-fils de Frédéric II, dont Bettina von Arnim admirait les vues plus libérales et dont elle espérait des réformes politiques et sociales. Trois ans plus tard, déçue, elle fait paraître *Dies Buch gehört dem König (Le Livre dédié au Roi)*, ouvertement adressé au nouveau roi de Prusse pour l'inciter à agir sur les problèmes sociaux de son temps, notamment à combattre la pauvreté.

musique, l'unique muse ; sa monture l'a transporté dans le désert le plus désolé loin des humains qu'il dirige d'un coup de sifflet, comme une meute de chiens. Alors il se prosterne devant la seule toute-puissante, il reconnaît l'immense vide de son âme, il cherche à mettre un baume sur tous ses maux ; impatiente et tendre, la tête couronnée s'incline, confiante, sous la bénédiction et baise humblement les traces laissées sur son passage. Il retourne auprès des siens à la fin de cet *adagio* pour flûte, purifié, consolé, comme si rien ne lui était arrivé, dans la brillante vibration des violons et des hautbois. Mais je sens comment l'art conduit à la sagesse. Dans ces lieux où plus aucune main ne se tend, plus aucune bouche ne s'ouvre, où aucune pensée ne s'aventure, la musique apparaît en prêtresse ; le cœur se brise devant elle, implorant il avoue ses fautes, veut s'accuser de chacun de ses manquements, désire être accueilli tout entier dans son sein. Oui, la musique fait fondre l'or et l'acier, il n'est pas de casque si bien enfoncé sur la tête ni d'armure sur la poitrine qu'elle ne traverse ; et le roi comme le vassal lui prêtent serment.

Mais qu'en est-il de la symphonie de Beethoven qui s'en est suivie ? Veux-tu parcourir avec moi l'étendue de cette forêt d'oliviers aux troncs uniformes, au feuillage de velours, baignant dans le vent qui fait onduler leurs voiles verts et entendre doucement à ton oreille le pas solitaire et silencieux dans l'herbe scintillante ? Viens ! Vois le soleil dans sa carapace de feu, ses flèches lancées vers l'azur éternel. Portée par la houle, sous toi bientôt la mer infinie vacille. Le vent creuse le talus des vagues, ouvre la voie aux dieux argentés qui s'unissent à toi, s'enivrant des rythmes célestes nés de ta poitrine. Tout dans l'univers, maintenant si proche, vibre à ton unisson. Mais bientôt la mer capricieuse, toujours changeante, s'éloigne. Son jeu d'ondes glisse d'une couleur à l'autre et captive ton regard. Elle pénètre tes sens, langoureuse puis ardente, souriante, sanglotante, éblouissante puis de nouveau recouverte d'un voile – effleurement furtif comme le regard enflammé des yeux d'un aimé ; tu ne peux le saisir ni t'en détacher. Le ciel est sans nuage, son souffle chasse doucement devant lui des vaguelettes, innombrables, l'une après l'autre ; toutes se brisent sur le rivage dans un léger soupir. Ah ! doux moment qui domine la mer des passions ! Ta respiration s'arrête ; tu voudrais retenir, entièrement et pour toujours, ce qui à chaque instant ne cesse de t'échapper.

Qu'est-ce que l'âme dans l'océan de la musique ? Éprouve-t-elle la peine, connaît-elle les délices, elle si merveilleusement mobile ? La pensée jamais ne peut la suivre. Ressent-elle en retour tous les émois ? Aime-t-elle quand nous aimons ? Son écume est-elle flattée quand nos larmes s'y mêlent ? Oh, comme je voudrais me jeter dans l'eau de lagunes vert émeraude, sentir nos deux âmes sœurs emportées insensiblement à travers la

haute mer jusqu'à cet océan, la barque les bercer harmonieusement jusqu'à la dernière note. Et là, ce serait le même air calme, la même pureté du ciel, le même souffle, doux, intact, la même lumière qu'en esprit, dans l'ivresse provoquée par la douce oscillation des sons qui font battre la poitrine. Mais l'océan se soulève brusquement ! Dans un mugissement, tu entends le grand esprit de la création émettre un son qui ramène tout à lui. Puis son souffle enfile de nouveau, provoquant un frisson dans ta poitrine, avant de puissamment rouler son écume en une ascension et une descente infatigables contre les vents qui, en s'agitant dans l'abîme, la refoulent en grondant. Oui, c'est l'océan de la musique de Beethoven. Les notes montent de ciel en ciel, de plus en plus audacieuses à mesure qu'elles redescendent, et tu te sens protégée sur ce rocher isolé, au-dessus de ce double son, cernée par ces ouragans furieux, ces vagues qui montent sans fin jusqu'à ton cœur et sans fin refluent pour, se chevauchant l'une l'autre et pourtant se divisant à nouveau dans l'océan solaire de l'harmonie, revenir sans cesse te submerger avec une puissance renouvelée. Enfin, toutes les voix qui se languissent et s'agitent dans une joyeuse confusion de cris de joie, de nostalgie et de mille autres sentiments – toutes, sur un seul signe discret de sa main de maître, clament à l'unisson : à présent, c'est assez !

Ah, qu'en est-il donc en ton cœur ? Avoue ! La musique n'est-elle pas un océan à qui Beethoven commande ? Ne sens-tu pas que l'indomptable passion est de l'ordre du divin, au principe même de toute création. Ne penses-tu pas que Dieu est pure passion ? Qu'est-ce que la passion, sinon une vie augmentée par le sentiment que le divin est proche de toi, que tu pourrais l'atteindre, te mêler à son flux ? Qu'est-ce le bonheur, la vie de ton âme, si ce n'est la passion. Comment la force de ton action s'accroît-elle ? Combien de révélations en toi, dont tu n'avais pas encore rêvé ! N'est-il pas vrai que plus rien ne pèse ? Que la passion met en mouvement ton corps ? Tu n'as plus ni soif ni faim. Tu vois bien, tu commences déjà à te nourrir de l'air ; léger comme un oiseau, tu surmontes l'insurmontable. Et tu lances au loin des flammes de ton immortalité. Elles embrasent l'Éternel, qui se voue à toi : il se déverse dans le grand océan en flots de passion, fait briller au ciel les étoiles qui t'éclairent de leur lumière, et quand l'éclat de la nuit pâlit, les lueurs de l'aurore apparaissent, radieuses. Oui, c'est la raison pour laquelle l'erreur commise par les Pères de l'Église de croire que Dieu est sagesse en a heurté plus d'un : *Dieu est passion*. Il est grand, il prend tout dans son sein, en lui toute vie se reflète comme dans l'océan, de lui émane comme un courant de vie toute passion, jusqu'à la dernière, le repos suprême.

[...] [Hofmann] veut que j'apprenne à écrire des mélodies. Cela m'est beaucoup plus difficile que tout le reste ; aucune de mes pensées ne tient ni

ne dure, et quand il m'arrive d'en saisir une par un bout, elle se déchire en deux et je ne parviens pas à retrouver l'autre moitié dans sa forme première. Alors je trouve bien un autre bout, mais comme ce n'est pas la première idée que j'ai eue, je m'inquiète qu'elle puisse être fausse et il m'est tout à fait impossible de trouver la mesure. [...] Hofmann est d'une patience indicible avec moi, il pense que cela viendra ; dès que j'aurai pris l'habitude d'écrire, je deviendrai maître en la matière. Cela me chagrine profondément qu'il dise cela : je ne veux pas me rendre maître en la matière, je veux me laisser maîtriser par ces flots de musique dont j'ignore s'ils peuvent avoir quelque valeur pour une autre oreille. Mais cela ne fait rien, ils me parlent en me faisant entendre des accords grâce auxquels je me sens pleinement vivante, unie à la nature jusqu'à ne plus faire qu'une avec elle. Voilà ce qui m'entrave. J'ai l'impression de chercher à tricher à coup de formules inspirées. – Oui, ce sera difficile d'apprendre. Et pourtant, dans ce désert qu'est mon absence de talent pour la musique, je suis pleine de bonne volonté et fais mon possible. Et, si je veux apprendre, il me faut dire adieu à l'esprit, le principe qui m'anime ; mais je me dis que ce n'est que provisoire, que l'esprit reviendra, et alors je me sens prête à faire mes adieux et à mourir pour apprendre.

Miscellaneous

Varia

Varia

Miscellanea

Symphilosophie

International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism

Romanticism and System in Coleridge and Schlegel

Alexander J.B. Hampton *

ABSTRACT: Friedrich Schlegel and Samuel Taylor Coleridge share strong structural affinities in the path they followed in developing their Romantic philosophies. What connects them is a common concern with systematicity in an age of convulsing systems. This examination begins by outlining the problems of systematic thought in the 1790s and continues with what each of the two young authors believed to be the appropriate grounding principle for systematic thought, with Schlegel turning to beauty and Coleridge to religion. Both initially adopted the positions of contemporary philosophers, respectively Fichte and Hartley to secure the ground for their philosophical positions. However, Schlegel and Coleridge both became disillusioned with contemporary philosophy and instead developed new kinds of systematic exposition that recognized the impossibility of certain foundational principles, whilst nevertheless recognizing the reality of their absolute ideals as an object of approximation. This article compares the paths of both thinkers towards this independently arrived at, yet remarkably similar conclusion, in the early development of their careers.

Keywords: Schlegel, Coleridge, Fichte, Hartley, system, Romanticism

RÉSUMÉ : Il y a entre les philosophies romantiques de Friedrich Schlegel et de Samuel Taylor Coleridge de nettes affinités de structure quant à leurs élaborations. Ce qui les relie, c'est une préoccupation commune pour la systématisme à une époque où les systèmes sont en crise. On commence par mettre en évidence les problèmes que pose la pensée systématique dans les années 1790. On montre ensuite ce que chacun des deux jeunes auteurs pensait être le fondement adéquat d'une pensée systématique, Schlegel se tournant vers la beauté, Coleridge vers la religion. Ils ont d'abord chacun repris à leur compte les positions de philosophes contemporains, respectivement celles de Fichte et de Hartley, pour asseoir leurs propres positions philosophiques. Néanmoins, ils ont tous deux perdu leurs illusions à l'égard de la philosophie de leurs contemporains et développé de nouvelles formes d'exposé systématique tenant compte de l'impossibilité de certains principes fondamentaux, tout en reconnaissant la réalité de leurs idéaux absolus en tant qu'objet d'approximation. Cet article compare le cheminement des deux penseurs vers cette conclusion à laquelle ils arrivent chacun indépendamment, mais de manière remarquable-ment similaire, au début de leur carrière.

Mots-clés : Schlegel, Coleridge, Fichte, Hartley, système, romantisme

* Assistant Professor, Department for the Study of Religion, University of Toronto, Jackman Humanities Building, Room 303, 170 St. George Street, Toronto, ON M5R 2M8 – a.hampton@utoronto.ca

1. An Italian Postlude

In 1805 a somewhat aimless and practically penniless Samuel Taylor Coleridge entered the city of Rome. Ostensibly, he was returning to England after a year's work as a civil servant in Malta. He had decided to take the long way home. From Sicily, he made his way up the Italian peninsula with the intention of travelling overland back to Britain. In reality, he was procrastinating; home was anything but inviting. Back in England were unwanted commitments, mounting debts and an unhappy marriage. A slow return which took in the classical monuments and Renaissance sculpture of Italy was a far more attractive option, but for the fact that Napoleon's armies were now advancing from the North. Yet in Rome, Coleridge stopped and stayed, and there he came into contact with the German colony centred at the residence of the Prussian minister to the court of Pius VII, Wilhelm von Humboldt.

The splendid residence of the brother of the famous adventurer scientist Alexander overlooked the Trinita dei Monti and the Spanish Steps, and it was there that Coleridge met Johann Ludwig Tieck. The two immediately formed a friendship and together they discussed German Idealism, Böhme and Shakespeare. Just four years earlier Tieck had been in Jena, a principal member of the *Frühromantik* circle there, among whom was of course, Friedrich Schlegel. Sadly, no real record of the Italian conversation survives. Perhaps it was thrown into the Mediterranean on Coleridge's return to England, as had been done with his Malta notes when a Spanish privateer boarded their ship and Coleridge claimed to be an American. However, Tieck's sister, also at Rome, would later write to Wilhelm August Schlegel of the remarkable Englishman at Rome who knew so much about the current German literature.¹

This proximity between Friedrich Schlegel and Samuel Taylor Coleridge was greater than this chance closeness in the Caput mundi. Both share a similar journey and ultimate conclusion in the development of their respective Romantic positions. What connects them is a common concern about systematicity in an age of convulsing systems and the problem of locating a grounding principle for systematic thought. Systematic philosophical thinking, it was assumed, required a grounding principle, whether it be God, nature or the self. The problem with which Schlegel and Coleridge struggled was how systematic thought could be true to the human condition, which lives and acts in the particular, yet thinks and dreams in the universal,

¹ Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Darker Reflections* (London: Harper Collins, 1998), 53.

and whose commitments and realities were manifold, yet whose ideals and desires were unifying.

This examination begins with the state of the Enlightenment in the 1790s, its key themes of freedom and reason, and the crisis in their systematic elaboration. It continues with what each of the two young authors believed to be the appropriate grounding principle for systematic thought, with Schlegel turning to beauty and Coleridge to religion. Both initially thought they had found in the contemporary philosophies of Fichte and Hartley respectively, a suitable systematic framework, but both became dissatisfied with these philosophical positions. It was out of this dissatisfaction that they arrived at a new kind of systematic exposition that did not base itself on any single objective certainty and therefore did not construct a complete system. Rather their Romantic systems were based in human finitude and its constant state of striving toward an ideal that could never be fully attained. This examination compares the paths of both thinkers towards this independently arrived at, yet remarkably similar conclusion, in the early development of their careers. In illustrating the development of this position, we find an alternative to readings of Romanticism which understand it as advocating a non-systematic or irrational anti-Enlightenment position, or a kind of proto-Postmodernism.² Rather, what marks out the early development of Schlegel and Coleridge is that they both developed new kinds of systematic exposition that recognized the impossibility of certain foundational principles, whilst nevertheless acknowledging the reality of their respective absolute ideals as objects of approximation.³

2. Enlightenment, System and Romanticism

The complex relationship between the Enlightenment and Romanticism is beyond the scope of this examination, yet it is possible to argue for the

² Examples of such an approach include Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Jerome Christensen, *Romanticism at the End of History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988); Paul De Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984); Azade Seyhan, *Representation and its Discontents: The Critical Legacy of German* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Kathleen M. Wheeler, *Romanticism, Pragmatism, and Deconstruction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993).

³ As such, the paper is in agreement with the interpretations of Romanticism offered in Frederick C. Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative: The Concept of Early German Romanticism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), and more fully elaborated in my *Romanticism and the Re-Invention of Modern Religion: The Reconciliation of German Idealism and Romantic Platonism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

continuity of two major concepts—reason and freedom—between the two movements, at least in the case of Coleridge and Schlegel. The Enlightenment had claimed reason as the sole arbiter of truth, providing individuals with the right to criticize all beliefs. In the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* Kant characterized his epoch by this very faculty:

Our age is the genuine age of criticism, to which everything must submit. Religion through its sanctity and the state through its majesty commonly seek to exempt themselves from it. However, they thus arise just suspicion against themselves and cannot lay claim to that sincere respect that reason grants only to that which has been able to endure its free and public examination.⁴

Connected with this faculty was freedom, the right of all individuals to think for themselves, to determine their actions, and to develop their powers. Freedom and reason were intimately connected, and their mutual growth constituted for Kant “the human being’s emergence from his self-incurred immaturity.”⁵

Driving forward and uniting these two principles was the overarching belief in the power of systematic thought, which promised the ability to articulate the complexity of all understanding within a whole composed of parts. The model for the systematic organization and articulation of knowledge ostensibly began with Aristotle’s division of knowledge into such subjects as metaphysics, physics, ethics, politics and biology, which were united internally and in toto through fundamental concepts and ideas such as plausibility, reflection, classification, relation and observation. At the close of the eighteenth century, systematicity had renewed importance with the exponential advances made in fields such as physics, biology, chemistry and geology. Not simply understanding, but rationally ordering these advances was fundamental in removing humankind from ignorance and advancing freedom in the logic represented by Kant. Systematicity was the fundamental connection between reason and freedom. As knowledge expanded, the power of reason advanced in its ability to comprehend the whole. Likewise, as reason grew with the power of knowledge, so did freedom by its liberating thought from superstition and ignorance. “Human reason is by its nature

⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, ed. Wilhelm Weischedel (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), Axii, 13. All further references to Kant will note the Prussian Academy number only.

⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 29 vols., ed. der Königlich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: Reimer, 1902), VIII, 35.

architectonic,” wrote Kant, “that is, it considers all knowledge as belonging to a possible system.”⁶

The Enlightenment principles of freedom and reason, however, came into conflict with each other, exposing a fundamental problem with its systematic mode of thought. Reason was increasingly identified with a complete scientific naturalism that was expressed through mechanistic explanation. This paradigm of rational systematicity, based on the principle of sufficient reason, when fully elaborated, resulted in the exclusion of both final causes and freedom. In this sense, reason came to undermine its own promise of freedom within a cause-and-effect determinism. Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi offered the most popular articulation of this problem, equating the determinism of rationalistic thinking with fatalism and ultimately nihilism.⁷

This gap between theory and practice did not only manifest itself theoretically, but practically. The exercise of freedom had led to chaos. Politically this was particularly evinced by the events in France, which following the revolution grew increasingly anarchic, culminating in the Terror. The exercise of freedom had not led to the maturity and improvement of the human condition but to a seemingly irrational pandemonium. Nor was the systematic exposition of reason leading to increasing unity. Rather, the same facts were conceptualized and systematized in mutually exclusive, but rationally coherent ways. This produced antinomies of reason, in a development that grossly paralleled the development of mutually exclusive sectarian doctrine in the sixteenth century.

The response, especially in Germany, was to see these problems as a crisis of systematicity, of the way in which reason and freedom were developing in the thought of the age. Karl Leonhard Reinhold, the great popularizer of Kant’s attempt to address this crisis, explained that this problem uniquely characterized his age:

The most conspicuous and characteristic feature of our age is the convulsion of all hitherto familiar systems, theories, and manners of

⁶ I. Kant, *KrV* A474/B502.

⁷ Jacobi first equated rationalism with nihilism in 1799 against Fichte; previously he had equated it only with fatalism and egoism against Mendelssohn (*Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi Werke: Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, ed. Walter Jaeschke (Hamburg: Meiner, 2004), III, 44; Peter Jonkers, “Jacobi’s Response to Religious Nihilism” in *Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi and the Ends of the Enlightenment*, ed. Alexander J.B. Hampton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023), 124-38, and Alexander J.B. Hampton, ‘Jacobi and the Romantics’, 267-285, in the same volume.

thinking, a convulsion the breadth and depth of which the history of the human mind can show no example.⁸

One response to this condition was to reject rational systematic thought outright. This was the position struck by *Sturm und Drang* in the 1770s, which was characterized by a fervent Rousseauian naturalism and the celebration of genius; its literature and music displayed an emotional enthusiasm and the rejection of convention and authority. The explosion of emotional energy that characterized the movement found its greatest expression in the dramas of Klingler and Lenz, the novels of Moritz and the young Goethe, and the theory of Herder and Hamann. The *Stürmer und Dränger*, like Karl Moor in Schiller's *Die Räuber* pronounced a "Pfui! pfui! über das schlappe Castraten-Jahrhundert [Tut, tut, on this feeble castrated century]."⁹ In place of speculation, they valued emotion and action.

William Blake and the radical religious Dissenters of late eighteenth-century London were perhaps the closest equivalents in Britain. Both Blake and many Dissenters rejected the corrupting influence of church doctrine and natural theology, favouring a return to prophecy and direct communion with God.¹⁰ Blake's proclamation in *Jerusalem*, that "I must Create a System, or be enslav'd by another Man's; / I will not Reason and Compare: my business is to Create," was far from being a call for all to participate in a project of measured rational system building. Rather, it was a radical incitement to personal creative prophecy and self-autonomy against both established religions, Lockian empiricism, and Deism.¹¹ Every individual, through the recovery of a prophetic poetic genius, would henceforth "converse with God & be a King & Priest in his own house."¹²

Yet neither of these campaigns forcefully sustained themselves. Goethe, the author of *Werther*, the greatest *Sturm und Drang* novel, took a position in the Saxon-Weimar civil service, and Lenz, the movement's other great proponent, succumbed to insanity and eventually death. With these developments, the anti-systematic movement in Germany had run its course. Correspondingly in Britain, the radical rhetoric of Blake and fellow Dissenters grew increasingly impossible with the country at war with France

⁸ Karl Leonhard Reinhold, *Briefe über die Kantische Philosophie*, ed. R. Schmidt (Leipzig: Reclam, 1923), I, 24. Quoted in Frederick Beiser, *Hegel* (London: Routledge, 2005), 21.

⁹ Friedrich von Schiller, *Sämtliche Werke*, 12 vols. (Leipzig: Hesses, 1890), II, 503.

¹⁰ Jon Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the Culture of Radicalism in the 1790s* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992).

¹¹ William Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (New York: Anchor Books, 1988), 153.

¹² *Ibid.*, 615.

and freedoms severely limited. Blake found himself accused both of spying and later on trial for sedition. From these conditions, Romanticism emerged as a more measured response to the crisis of Enlightenment. It would champion both freedom and reason, and would do so systematically, at least in the case of both Schlegel and Coleridge.

Both thinkers realized the need for, and the problem inherent in, systematic thought. Schlegel's fifty-third *Atheneumsfragment* expressed the challenge succinctly: "It is equally deadly for the spirit to have a system and not to have one. It will thus have to decide to join the two."¹³ Coleridge articulated the aim of his system in a way that also recognized the problems inherent in systematicity:

My system, if I may venture to give it so fine a name, is the only attempt I know, ever made to reduce all knowledges into harmony. It opposes no other system, but shows what was true in each; and how that which was true in the particular, in each of them became error, because it was only half the truth. I have endeavoured to unite the insulated fragments of truth, and therewith to frame a perfect mirror.¹⁴

For Schlegel, this concept of systematicity would be articulated through his concept of *Wechselerweis* and the genre of *romantische Poesie*, whereas for Coleridge it would take the shape of a trinitarian epistemology and a language of symbols.

Inherent in each of these statements is the recognition that the discursive performance of a rationalized system will always fall short of, and never do justice to, the ideal of an unconditioned and complete system. What marks Schlegel and Coleridge is that they regarded system as a process, as a regulative concept that is centred upon individuals and their reality as opposed to an abstract totality, beyond the finite scope of the individual. There is, as Coleridge commented concerning his own system, a "contrast between the continuous and systematic character of Principles, and the occasionally & fragmentary way, in which they have hitherto been brought

¹³ Friedrich Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel Kritische Ausgabe*, 35 vols., ed. Ernst Behler, Jean Jacques Anstett, and Hans Eichner (Munich: Schöningh, 1958-), II, 53, 173. All further references to *Kritische Ausgabe* will be indicated by KA, volume number, fragment number if applicable, page number.

¹⁴ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Table Talk*, vol. 14, ed. Kathleen Coburn and B. Winer, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 16 vols., (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), II, 147. All further references indicated as TT.

before the Public.”¹⁵ Or alternately as Schlegel put it: “every proof is infinitely perfectible,” making the task of philosophy not one of systematic totality, but infinite striving towards that ideal.¹⁶

This recognition does not mean that systematic striving is merely contingent.¹⁷ Rather, as this examination will illustrate, concomitant with systematic striving and the regulative ideal of system, both Schlegel and Coleridge came to develop a conviction in philosophical realism. This connected them to the very tradition that the Enlightenment, and indeed much early modern thought since the development of the *via moderna* and Reformation had sought to overcome. This realism is that of the Platonic and Christian Platonic traditions. It is the belief that ideals (transcendentals, divine ideas) are real intelligible realities that transcend the particulars that instantiate them (whether that be objects or human minds), and furthermore that these ideals resolve themselves into a unity, the One, the Absolute, or God.¹⁸ It is this Absolute or God that is the goal of their respective romantic forms of infinite approximation or striving.

3. Early Convictions

In March 1772 Friedrich Schlegel was born at Hannover just five months after Coleridge. Aesthetics were a matter of concern in the Schlegel household from the beginning. Schlegel’s father, Johann Adolf Schlegel, a clergyman, had been a co-founder of the *Bremer Beiträge*, a group of literati who argued for more aesthetic freedom against the restrictive Classicism of

¹⁵ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 6 vols., ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), VI, 714. All further references to *Collected Letters* indicated as CL. Cited in Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Opus Maximum*, ed. Thomas McFarland, Nicholas Halmi, *Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. 15 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), lxxiv. All further references to *Opus Maximum* indicated as OM.

¹⁶ KA XVIII, 9, 518.

¹⁷ The Platonic nature of this conclusion is considered in relation to Coleridge in Douglas Hedley, *Coleridge, Philosophy and Religion: Aids to Reflection and the Mirror of the Spirit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 6, in relation to Schlegel in Frederick Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative: The Concept of Early German Romanticism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 67, and in relation to German Romanticism in general in Alexander J.B. Hampton, *Romanticism and the Re-Invention of Modern Religion: The Reconciliation of German Idealism and Platonic Realism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

¹⁸ For a more substantive elaboration of this see Hampton, *Romanticism and the Re-Invention of Modern Religion* (2019), 13-29.

Gottsched.¹⁹ Friedrich's uncle, Johann Elias Schlegel, had been a successful dramatist and an early exponent of Shakespeare at a time when the English playwright was largely unknown to the German public.²⁰ In preparing for university entrance examinations, Schlegel found himself enamoured with classical literature, reading the major Greek dramatists and the works of Plato.

He entered the University of Göttingen in 1790, and then Leipzig the next year — a move which allowed him to be closer to the largest collection of plaster casts of classical art north of the Alps. Ostensibly studying law, Schlegel read widely, if indiscriminately, and learned modern languages. His letters during this period indicate a restless and frustrated spirit, and by June 1793 he wrote to August Wilhelm about the impossibility of submitting himself to the profession of law. Instead, he had resolved to become a writer and scholar of classics.²¹ During the next year and a half, Schlegel would read classical scholarship intensively with the intention of producing a three-volume study of classical poetry. This would include the philhellenic aesthetics of J. J. Winckelmann, as well as the idealist aesthetic philosophy of Immanuel Kant. It is the claims of these two thinkers that would structure the demands of Schlegel's Neoclassicism.²²

Winckelmann's work had tremendous influence in art history and his views were lauded and emulated by many, including Schiller and Goethe, the latter comparing him to Columbus in discovering art as a new living thing.²³ The most important of Winckelmann's works for Schlegel was *Gedanken über die Nachahmung der griechischen Werke in der Malerei und Bildhauerkunst* (1755). Though Winckelmann was concerned with the visual arts, the aesthetic principle that his works advocated had poetic and indeed philosophical import that interested Schlegel. Winckelmann argued that the Greeks did not attempt to create the extraordinary in their artistic production, as the Egyptians did, nor were they content with the aesthetic realism and preoccupation with originality that characterized modern art. Instead, Winckelmann maintained that the Greeks turned to nature, which they were

¹⁹ The elder Schlegel also published a German translation and commentary of the French aesthetic philosopher Charles Batteux's *Les beaux-arts réduits à un même principe*. Only one of his works, a hymn, has been preserved (Karl Bertheau. "Schlegel, Johann Adolf." *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, 56 vols., ed. Rochus von Liliencron, et al. (Leipzig: Duncker & Humblot, 1875-1912), vol. 31, 385-387.)

²⁰ Johann von Antoniewicz, "Johann Elias Schlegel", *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 31, 378-384.

²¹ KA XVIII, 103-04.

²² Hampton, *Romanticism and the Re-Invention of Modern Religion*, 114-36.

²³ Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York: Norton, 1966), 296.

closer to than the moderns. Yet, they did not merely attempt to copy nature. Rather, they engaged in a process of idealization that strove to find, in all of the instances of individual beauty, perfect beauty.²⁴ In doing so, Winckelmann argued, “they purified their works of all personal affections, which deduct [the] spirit from true beauty.”²⁵

The other major influence upon Schlegel was Kant’s *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (1790), the last of the philosopher’s three critiques to carry out his project of developing a critical philosophy. Kant sought to examine the faculties of the mind (cognition, pleasure and displeasure, desire) and their corresponding cognitive faculties (understanding, judgment, reason).²⁶ The third *Kritik* argued that judgments which concern the beautiful are made independent of the concepts of the understanding and the moral law of reason, and in this way they are autonomous.²⁷ Kant characterized this situation of non-conceptual cognition as the free-play of the faculties of the imagination and understanding. Imagination grasps the object yet is not restricted to any definite concept of the understanding. It is this conceptual disinterestedness that results in pleasure.²⁸ For Kant, “The beautiful is that which, without a concept, is cognized as an object of a necessary delight.”²⁹

The difficulty for Schlegel was that both of the arguments offered by Winckelmann and Kant came into conflict. Winckelmann had argued for a realist position in that the portrayal of beauty was not mere imitation, but involved the attempt to reproduce its ideal form. Contrary to this, what made art autonomous and free in the nominalist framework of the Kantian proposal was its subjective conceptual disinterestedness, meaning the impossibility of an objective standard for the beautiful. Schlegel desired both, holding that the possibility of a Neoclassical aesthetic depended upon the actuality of an objective autonomous ideal of taste upon which judgments of true beauty could be made.

This tension between an aesthetic ideal and aesthetic subjectivity is outlined in the most important work from Schlegel’s Neoclassical period, *Über das Studium der Griechischen Poesie* (1795), which was originally intended

²⁴ Monika Schrader, *Laokoon “eine vollkommene Regel der Kunst”: Ästhetische Theorien der Heuristik in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2005) 20-21, 24-24.

²⁵ Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums*, cited in Schrader, *Laokoon*, 26.

²⁶ Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Alvi/Blviii.

²⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, ed. Wilhelm Weischedel (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), A229/B232.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, A27, 28/B27, 28.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, A67/B68.

to be an introduction to a much larger study. In this work, Schlegel both outlines his poetic ideal and diagnoses the problems of modern literature. For Schlegel, Greek poetry represented the beautiful itself, in its harmony, order, restraint and proportion. “Greek poetry,” he wrote, “encompasses the whole of human nature in uniform completion.”³⁰ In doing so it embodied what Kant had theoretically required of beauty, *viz.* “in the case of the Greeks alone was art equally free of the constraints of necessities and the lordship of understanding.”³¹ At the same time, it was the historical ideal that Winkelmann had described: “The history of Greek poetics is a general natural history of poetics; a perfect and legislative intuition.”³²

Against this ideal Schlegel indicted what he variously referred to as modern, Romantic, or interested literature, on a number of charges. The first of these charges was that such literature does not concern itself with beauty, but rather attempts to make art serve didactic moral or discursive scientific ends.³³ This lack of aesthetic concern is further characterized by a lack of self-restraint, where each writer strives to be more interesting than the previous.³⁴ A second line of argumentation is the constant confusion and mixture of genres present in Romantic literature.³⁵ “So confused,” Schlegel writes, “are the boundaries of science and art, of the true and the beautiful, that even the conviction of those unchangeable eternal boundaries has largely begun to falter. Philosophy poeticizes and poetry philosophizes.”³⁶ Rather than the ideal and the objective, modern poetry is distinguished by the particular and the interested. For Schlegel, “lack of character seems the singular characteristic of modern poetry; confusion its common measure, lawlessness the spirit of its history, and skepticism the result of its theory.”³⁷ Despite this criticism, however, Schlegel does not dismiss modern poetry outright. Betraying the inner tension that would soon cause his neoclassicism to waver, and perhaps the influence of his father and uncle, he describes Shakespeare admiringly as the apex of modern poetry.³⁸ Ultimately, however, modernity was, for Schlegel, like Hamlet: full of conflict, and unable to act decisively because of its lack of an ideal.

³⁰ KA I, 276.

³¹ KA I, 275.

³² KA I, 276.

³³ KA I, 220.

³⁴ KA I, 219-20, 238.

³⁵ KA I, 219.

³⁶ KA I, 219.

³⁷ KA I, 222. These are, of course, among the very characteristics that Schlegel would come to praise (see below).

³⁸ KA I, 249.

In response to this, Schlegel sets for himself the task of creating a science of aesthetics to determine a deduction of the universal and necessary qualities of beauty. Two early outlines from 1795 illustrate a desire to derive the nature of art, not from theory alone, as Kant had done, nor from history, as Winckelmann had done, but from both, and in doing so arrive at the *a priori* principles that would guide a new modern poetry.³⁹ In the concluding pages of *Über das Studium der Griechischen Poesie* Schlegel writes that aesthetic theory has reached a point where an objective outcome to the aesthetic problem cannot be far away. There remained, after Kant's critical philosophy, the problem of an aesthetic skepticism, but now he writes, the philosophy of Fichte seems able to carry out the Kantian project to its completion in propounding an absolute ground upon which to rest objective claims. In a letter describing Fichte as "the greatest metaphysical thinker now living," Schlegel tells his brother August Wilhelm that Fichte is "the kind of intellectual Hamlet had sought in vain."⁴⁰ Fichte was to be the hero of Schlegel's Neoclassical aesthetics.

For Schlegel, the project of Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* held out the possibility of establishing the objective universal and necessary principles to ground his Neoclassical aesthetics. Fichte's system claimed to have discovered the first principle of reason outside of the ground of experience in the absolute I. What Fichte was in essence carrying out in the *Wissenschaftslehre* was an extension of Kant's transcendental deduction. In the deduction, Kant had established the objectivity of the subjective conditions of the possibility of experience (i.e. the applicability of the intuitions of space and time and the categories of the understanding) to objects of experience.⁴¹ For Fichte, a true principle of first philosophy did not express itself as a fact of content (*Tatsache*), but as a fact of action (*Tathandlung*):

If philosophy begins with a fact [*ThatSache*], then it places itself in a world of being and finitude, and it will be difficult for it to discover any path leading from this world to an infinite and supersensible one. If philosophy begins with an act [*ThatHandlung*], then it finds itself at the

³⁹ See KA XVI, *Von der Schönheit in der Dichtkunst*, 3-14, 15-38, esp. 8.

⁴⁰ XXIII, 248.

⁴¹ Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A89/B121, A93/B126. In the second *Critique*, Kant provided a deduction for morality, and in the third a deduction for aesthetic pleasure and teleology.

precise point where these two worlds are connected with each other and from which they can both be surveyed in a single view.⁴²

According to Fichte's assertion, self-consciousness, the ground of all knowledge, had to be self-positing and he articulated his conception of a self-positing absolute I in three logical propositions: identity, contradiction, and synthesis.⁴³ Identity is presupposed in each act of consciousness, yet this is a fact, not the self-positing of the I. Therefore, the I must posit itself, but in so doing it also posits a Non-I, since in the act of self-positing there is an active I that perceives itself as an object of consciousness, and therefore a Non-I. From this arises the contradiction that the I cannot be both I and Non-I. Despite this, in self-consciousness, we are aware of ourselves as identical to the I which we posit and also that the object positing the I cannot be identical with the I. The synthesis to this problem occurs in knowledge which recognizes the transcendental unity of I and Non-I. In this unity, the I posits itself as determined by the Non-I and the I posits the Non-I as determined by the I.

The fundamental assertion of Fichte's reasoning is that "The I purely posits itself."⁴⁴ For Fichte, the I begins with a self-positing rather than a fact of consciousness. As Schlegel saw, and Fichte intended, this allowed Kant's transcendental deduction to be grounded on an act as opposed to a fact of experience, giving foundational objective validity to the claims of experience. If Fichte's system could accomplish this, it could also determine the first principles of beauty, providing aesthetic criticism with the objective ground necessary for Schlegel's Neoclassicism. With Fichte, Schlegel wrote, "there can be no serious doubt about the possibility of an objective system of a practical and theoretical science of aesthetics."⁴⁵

If a commitment to beauty guided Schlegel's philosophical search for an objective ground, Coleridge was guided by a commitment to religion. Five months prior to Schlegel, Coleridge was born, in October 1772. Coleridge was first educated by his father, a clergyman, until his death when the young Coleridge was nine. Under his father's tutelage, Coleridge was brought up

⁴² Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, ed. R. Lauth and H. Jacob (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1962-2012), I.4, 468. *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings (1797-1800)*, trans. and ed. Daniel Breazeale (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), 51.

⁴³ For this interpretation of Fichte I rely heavily on Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert, *Friedrich Schlegel and the Emergence of Romantic Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 72-74.

⁴⁴ "Das Ich setzt schlechthin sich selbst" (Fichte, *Gesamtausgabe*, I, 2, 259).

⁴⁵ KA I, 358.

under the doctrine of the established church, yet his father also stressed a devout and deeply personal faith that involved a sense of individual moral responsibility.⁴⁶ At the same time, Coleridge read precociously, notably romantic stories and tales of magic. He became so involved in these books that his father once resorted to burning some of them. Tracing his manner of thought to his early years, Coleridge would later reflect:

From my early reading of Faery Tales, & Genii &c &c—my mind had been habituated to *the Vast*—& I never regarded *my senses* in any way as the criteria of my belief... Those who have been led to the same truths step by step thro 'the constant testimony of their senses, seem to me to want a sense which I possess—They contemplate nothing but *parts*—and all the parts are necessarily little—and the Universe to them is but a mass of *little things*.”⁴⁷

Throughout his career, Coleridge would refer to this intuitive sense of transcendence, manifested for him in classics and folklore, nature and the sublime, and most of all in a sense of moral responsibility and creaturely connection.

After his father's death, Coleridge was sent to study at Christ's Hospital, a charity school in London. Here his habituation to the vast seems to have been fed by his reading, if not his educational experience. Charles Lamb recalled the “inspired charity-boy” as unfolding “in thy deep and sweet intonations, the mysteries of Jamblichus, or Plotinus (for even in those years thou waxedst not pale at such philosophical draughts), or reciting Homer in his Greek or Pindar.”⁴⁸ However, Coleridge also came into contact with Enlightenment rationalism through the writings of Voltaire. After reading the French *philosophe*, Coleridge declared himself an unbeliever, and received a sound beating at the hands of the schoolmaster. Coleridge later claimed this to be the only just flogging he ever received while at the famous bluecoat school.⁴⁹

Coleridge went up to Cambridge in 1791, destined to follow his father into the ministry. Later he would refer to this period as a kind of “religious twilight” that was “made up of the Evangelist and Deist philosophy.”⁵⁰ At

⁴⁶ J. Robert Barth, *Coleridge and Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), 2.

⁴⁷ CL I, 354.

⁴⁸ Charles Lamb, *The Works of Charles and Mary Lamb*, ed. E. V. Lucas (London: Methuen, 1903), II, 21.

⁴⁹ John Beer, “Coleridge, Samuel Taylor (1772–1834),” *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5888>], Accessed 2 Feb 2023.

⁵⁰ CL I, 78.

Cambridge, he found his religious belief tested by both Continental-inspired rationalism and Dissenting religious claims, particularly Unitarianism. He came to adopt Unitarianism largely because it responded to the requirements of natural and rational theology, freeing him from the demands of both systematic religious thought and the defence of the increasingly questioned doctrine and creeds of the historical Church.

In his reading at Cambridge Coleridge was exposed to several rationalist theologians including Joseph Butler, William Paley, Joseph Priestly and David Hartley, all of whom engaged in the evidential exposition of rational theism. In his Bristol lectures on revealed religion, delivered after leaving Cambridge without taking a degree, Coleridge can be seen as relying heavily on this reading. The task of composing the lectures had the effect of requiring Coleridge to more fully explicate his own religiosity. Though the lectures display an inevitable degree of immaturity and inexperience, they reveal Coleridge's attempt to reconcile two opposing forces, the first of these being the habituation to vastness that had been instilled in him since childhood. The second was the rational, even skeptical, spirit of reason, present both in Britain and especially active on the revolutionary continent and to which was central the ideas of freedom and individualism.

One of the best examples of Coleridge's attempt to reconcile these opposing forces can be found in his long poem *Religious Musings*. Coleridge began this work on Christmas Eve 1794 and finished it for publication two years later. It is here, more than in the Bristol lectures, that we find Coleridge trying to find his own religious self. Throughout the latter half of the 1790s, he repeatedly refers to it in both his publication, *The Watchman*, and in his correspondence. "I rest for all my poetical credit on the *Religious Musings*," he reported to his friends.⁵¹ In the work, all of Coleridge's readings, his beliefs and his enthusiasms are collected. The poem expresses his sympathy with the French Revolution and his hopes for the furtherance of social justice. From the spirit of these revolutionary times, Coleridge writes, "Sprang heavenly Science; and from Science Freedom" (l. 225). This optimism is expressed in a millenarian context: "Yet is the day of Retribution nigh: / The Lamb of God hath open'd the fifth seal: / ... The hour is nigh / And lo ! the Great, the Rich, the Mighty Men, / shall be cast to earth" (l. 303-12). The freedom of science will act as the purifier of religion, casting out the "Fiends of Superstition... / The erring Priest" (l.135-36). Coleridge continues:

⁵¹ CL I 97, 203, 205 cited in Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Poetical Works*, ed. J. C. C. Mays, *Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vol. 16 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 173. All quotations from *Religious Musings* are taken from this edition. All further references indicated as PW.

And curse your spells, that film the eye of Faith,
Hiding the present God; whose presence lost,
The moral world's cohesion (l. 142-44)

Here the Nonconformist critique of tradition and authority is raised to accuse the superstitious ceremonies of the historical church of obscuring the moral message of Jesus, "Of Him whose life was Love!" (l. 29), and whose sacrifice promises universal redemption.

The problem which Coleridge addresses in the poem is one of the fundamental problems of the age and the central problem for Coleridge — that of reconciling religion with reason and the advancement of freedom. This required, or Coleridge thought, a rational systematic elaboration of faith that would objectively ground it in accord with the thought of his day. For Coleridge, the greatest possibility of this reconciliation lay with the philosophy of David Hartley. Though Coleridge later came to repudiate Hartley's philosophy, most explicitly in the sixth and seventh chapters of the *Biographia Literaria*, the importance of Hartley's philosophy through the 1790s cannot be dismissed as a mere flirtation with associationism. In a letter to his friend Thomas Poole in 1796 Coleridge famously referred to Hartley, after whom Coleridge had just named his firstborn son, as "that Great master of *Christian* Philosophy."⁵² As late as 1801 he still included Hartley in a list of "deep metaphysicians" along with Zeno, St. Paul, Spinoza, Kant, and Fichte.⁵³ What lay behind Coleridge's adoption of Hartley was the need to address faith from a scientific, rather than a theological position. The contemporary values for judging truth demanded analysis in terms of cause and effect and necessary connection. This kind of empirically minded form of verification had become accepted wisdom, and Coleridge's Nonconformist optimism coupled with his faith in the freedom of science was such that he believed laws for the experience of faith could be given in the same manner as laws for the experience of motion.

In as many words this was Hartley's task. Hartley, like Coleridge, was a devout Christian and the son of a clergyman. He, too, desired to reconcile his faith with his understanding. Scruples precluded him from signing the Thirty-Nine Articles and he entered medicine rather than the clergy. His *Observations on Man* (1749) was his most comprehensive attempt to address the understanding-faith problem. The work treated the human mind scientifically and sought to explain mental events in terms of laws like those

⁵² CL I, 236.

⁵³ CL II, 768.

Newton had developed for physics. This was, however, far from advancing a materialist philosophy like those that would soon be propounded by the likes of Julien Offray de La Mettrie and Étienne Bonnot de Condillac. Rather, such laws aimed to provide proof of the validity of moral and religious ideas. If they were determined with the same necessity as the laws of the physical world, their objective validity could be argued for in a systematically coherent rational way.

Near the beginning of *Religious Musings*, in a section called Christ's prayer on the Cross, Coleridge addressed the central dilemma of faith — transcendence. The transcendent by its nature is beyond naming. Yet in order to make even this claim the unnamable is named "transcendent," placing another barrier between individuals and God. Any statement about God generates the aporia that the subject must be named to affirm that it is beyond naming.⁵⁴ The mystic response to this situation is apophasis, unspeaking or speaking-away, often carried out in poetical form. In mystic apophasis, the self enters a dialectic which unspeaks both the self and the named God, in an attempt to reach a state prior to the reflexive distinction between self and other, a state antecedent of the pronoun.⁵⁵ Coleridge, describing Christ as having freed the self from fear and idolatry, articulates this state of mystical discourse:

Strong to believe whate'er of mystic good
Th 'Eternal dooms for his Immortal Sons.
From HOPE and firmer FAITH to perfect LOVE
Attracted and absorb'd: and center'd there
GOD only to behold, and know, and feel,
Till by exclusive Consciousness of God
All self-annihilated it shall make
GOD its Identity: God all in all!
We and our Father ONE! (l. 37-44)

At line forty-three, Coleridge adds the following footnote referring to self-annihilation: "See this demonstrated by Hartley, vol. 1, p. 114, and vol. 2, p. 329. See it likewise proved, and freed from the charge of Mysticism, by Pistorius in his Notes and Additions to part second of Hartley on Man, Addition the 18th, the 653rd page of the third volume of Hartley, Octavo

⁵⁴ Michael Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994), 2-4.

⁵⁵ Alexander J.B. Hampton, 'The Poetics of Mysticism', ed. Edward Howells and Mark McIntosh, *The Oxford Handbook to Mystical Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 241-64.

Edition.”⁵⁶ Here, at this crucial point in the poem, Coleridge refers his reader to Hartley to support his point, rather than justifying it through a mystical, scriptural, or theological source. Furthermore, he remarkably claims that the passage’s blatant mysticism can be, in fact, free of such a characterization.

Hartley’s *Observations on Man*, which Coleridge directs his reader to, sets out a rational schematization of religious experience such that self-annihilation and union with God can be rationally supported. In the initial sections of *Observations*, Hartley overcomes dualism with the notion that events in the mind and the brain correlate through vibrations.⁵⁷ From this, he develops a doctrine of association where certain sense experiences are associated with clusters of ideas which include pleasure and pain.⁵⁸ For Hartley, knowledge of God is associated with pleasure, and since the mind associates pleasure and pain with their causes all pleasure is ultimately associated with God.⁵⁹ The first passage that Coleridge cites refers to this relationship. Since God is the source of all good, he “must, at last, take the place of and absorb other Ideas, and HE himself become, according to the language of the scriptures, *all in all*.”⁶⁰ The second passage to which Coleridge refers elaborates this same argument in algebraic terms. The third reference which Coleridge provides refers to a third volume of elaborations on Hartley’s arguments by a German Reformed clergyman.⁶¹ In this gloss, it is argued that the self-annihilation to which Hartley refers cannot be dismissed as religious enthusiasm. Rather, it is the result of natural self-interest which desires that which is pleasurable. Therefore, the pure love of God that exists in self-annihilation is “deduced from the fundamental laws of the human mind.”⁶² As a result mystical union is not an irrationality, but a psychological fact arrived at through rational systematic analysis. The kind of self-annihilation to which Coleridge points therefore is the result of a process initiated by the experience of pleasure which the mind then associated with its ultimate cause in God. In this manner, religious experience is accounted for objectively in an external source and systematically explained within empiricism.

⁵⁶ PW, I, 176.

⁵⁷ David Hartley, *Observations on Man*, 3 vols. (London: J. Johnson, 1791), I, 33-34.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, I, 74-5, 343.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, II, 13.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, I, 114.

⁶¹ The section to which Coleridge is referring is a sixteen-page gloss (Hartley, *Observations*, III, 653-69). For a discussion of Hermann Andreas Pistorius (1730-95) see Hoxie N. Fairchild, “Hartley, Pistorius, and Coleridge,” *PMLA*, 62.4 (1947): 1010-1021.

⁶² Hartley, *Observations*, III, 669.

Religious Musings foreshadows within its lines two further developments which would come to undermine this rational empirical version of religious belief. The first of these is evinced in the poem's style, which constantly destabilizes itself through the use of footnotes like that just examined. No fewer than thirteen notes of various lengths provide elaboration, supporting examples and clarifications from sources that range from philosophical treatises to Hansard. However, this should not be interpreted as a lack of faith in the poetic genre *per se*, but more of the methodological genre upon which the poems' positions are being elaborated, that is, an empirical rational systematicity. The second foreshadowing of the position to come is Coleridge's focus on a personal, rather than a metaphysical, accounting of religion. For Coleridge, proof of God does not lie with rationalistic arguments for the existence of the deity, but with an internal source that manifests itself in feeling.

4. Disillusionment

In 1795 Schlegel was criticizing Romantic literature and commending Fichte as the philosophical ground for a new Neoclassical aesthetics. However, in 1798 he had embraced the seemingly undisciplined and anarchic form of Romantic literature and was repudiating Fichte along with all foundationalist philosophies.⁶³ Two major events caused Schlegel's reversal: his contact with the Jena *Grundsatzkritiker*, and his meeting with Fichte himself.⁶⁴

In Jena, in the early 1790s, a group of young thinkers began to coalesce around the philosopher Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer. Together they were reacting to the attempts of post-Kantian Idealists such as Karl Leonhard Reinhold and Fichte to base Kant's critical philosophy on self-evident principles. Their focus on first principles, *Grundsätze*, gave their movement its name.⁶⁵ Following his contact with the group, Schlegel spent the winter of 1796 undertaking a detailed examination of Fichte's philosophy, and his various criticisms illustrate the influence of Niethammer and his circle.⁶⁶

⁶³ Schlegel's use of Fichte was not restricted to aesthetics. In his *Über den Begriff des Republikanismus* (1796) he used a Fichtean first principle to deduce the principles of republicanism (KA VII, 15-16).

⁶⁴ Novalis is often cited as one of the major influences in converting Schlegel from Fichte. However, in their correspondence, it is Novalis who credits Schlegel (KA XXIII, 371-72).

⁶⁵ For a treatment of Niethammer and the *Grundsatzkritik* see Richard Fincham, "Refuting Fichte with 'Common Sense': Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer's Reception of the *Wissenschaftslehre* 1794/5", *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 43.3 (2005): 301-324.

⁶⁶ For a detailed account of Schlegel's *philosophische Lehrjahre* see Manfred Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung: Die Anfänge der philosophischen Frühromantik* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1997),

Schlegel claims that nothing justifies the abstract absolute postulation of the I. As an abstract analytic proposition Schlegel argued that it is not Absolute, but essentially empty.⁶⁷ Furthermore, the first principle of the I is impossible to justify: “What Fichte assumed as agreed and self-understood, one can almost always boldly contradict.”⁶⁸ It is equally possible to assert a contrary intuition as first principle.⁶⁹ Schlegel also objects to Fichte’s “empirical egoism,” which limits the self to its own sphere of introspection, ignoring its historical situation.⁷⁰ The result is a self-contained system signifying nothing: “The *Wissenschaftslehre* is just as rhetorical as Fichte himself; with regard to individuality, it is a Fichtean representation of Fichtean spirit in Fichtean letters.”⁷¹ More damningly Schlegel writes: “Fichte is like a drunk who does not tire of mounting one side of a horse, and transcending over it, falling off the other side.”⁷²

Schlegel’s meeting with Fichte was no less disconcerting for him. Though he found the thinker congenial when not behind the lectern, Schlegel discovered him to be wholly unwilling to muddy his philosophical theory with the consideration of history. In a letter, Schlegel reported to a friend that Fichte “said to me he would rather count peas than study history.”⁷³ This is hardly the answer that the author of *Über das Studium der Griechischen Poesie* would have wanted to hear, for the promise of that work was to marry the historical example of Greek poetry with an objective Fichtean foundation. The result of Schlegel’s meeting with Fichte was such that in January of 1797 he was writing to that same friend with the news that “I have categorically separated myself from the teacher of the *Wissenschaftslehre*.”⁷⁴ The conclusion of the *Grundsatzkritik* was a fundamental antifoundationalism that first principles and a system of reason could only ever be a goal to which one could eternally strive.⁷⁵

Lecture 21, 569-593 and Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert, *Friedrich Schlegel and the Emergence of Romantic Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007), 95-116.

⁶⁷ KA XVIII, 71, 512.

⁶⁸ “Was Fichte als ausgemacht und s.[ich] von selbst verstehend voraussetzt, kann man fast immer ganz dreist widersprechen” (KA XVIII, 126, 31).

⁶⁹ KA XVIII, 51, 510.

⁷⁰ KA XVIII, 31, 508.

⁷¹ KA XVIII, 144, 33.

⁷² KA XVIII, 138, 32.

⁷³ KA XXIII, 333.

⁷⁴ KA XXIII, 343.

⁷⁵ For this reason, Manfred Frank has called the *Grundsatzkritik* a re-Kantianization of epistemology (Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung*, 505).

In 1794 Coleridge wrote “I am a compleat [sic] Necessitarian—and understand the subject as well almost as Hartley himself—but I go further than Hartley and believe in the corporality of *thought*—namely, that it is motion.”⁷⁶ Furthermore, in 1796 he refers to “the most unintelligible Emanuel Kant.”⁷⁷ However, in 1801 Coleridge would write of his being engaged in a transcendental deduction of his own:

I have not only completely extricated the notions of Time, and Space; but have overthrown the doctrine of Association, as taught by Hartley, and with it all the irreligious metaphysics of modern Infidels — especially, the doctrine of Necessity. — This I have *done*; but I trust, that I am about to do more — namely, that I shall be able to evolve all the five senses, that is, to deduce them from *one sense*, & to state their growth, & the causes of their difference—& in this evolvment to solve the process of Life & Consciousness.⁷⁸

Several important intellectual events occurred in Coleridge’s life in the intervening years between 1794 and 1801, not the least of which was the productive period he spent with Wordsworth and the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads*. However, what seems most decisive in terms of Coleridge’s philosophical development was the 1798-99 trip to Germany and the shift in Coleridge’s reading following that journey.

In characterizing his philosophical orientation in 1796 Coleridge wrote: “I do not particularly admire Rousseau — Bishop [Jeremy] Taylor, Old [Richard] Baxter, David Hartley & the Bishop of Cloyne [George Berkeley] are my men.”⁷⁹ Upon his departure for Germany, Coleridge’s major intention was to become familiar with the general intellectual environment. He was especially interested in advances in physiological psychology and Biblical criticism — aims that somewhat match the disparate list of Coleridge’s “men” whom he named before his departure. Yet upon his return from Germany, the impression made by Kantian and Spinozistic thought is evident in the shift in his reading. After 1800 Coleridge not only turned to the detailed study of German Idealism, but also to Neoplatonic and mystic thought and away from his native empiricism and rational theology. Notebook entries and marginalia show him reading Giordano Bruno, Marsilio Ficino, Proclus, Plotinus, Plato (particularly *Parmenides* and *Timaeus*) and Böhme.

⁷⁶ CL I, 137.

⁷⁷ CL I, 284.

⁷⁸ CL II, 706.

⁷⁹ CL I, 245.

The aspect of Kantianism which Coleridge would later describe as having “took possession of me as with a giant’s hand” was its transcendental idealism, particularly that it offered a rational and systematic way to account for faith, but did so in a way that made its source internal rather than external.⁸⁰ Coleridge’s own Copernican revolution was to realize that an empirically based account of faith, such as the one he had championed through Hartley in the *Religious Musings*, discarded all a priori internal evidence for Christianity.

The total externalization of Christianity is easily seen in Locke’s *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, where he argues that we are obliged to believe “those holy men of old who had revelations from God” on the basis that mankind has been provided with “outward signs that convince of the Author [i.e. Locke] of those revelations.”⁸¹ This can especially be seen in the work of William Paley, whose writings were on the undergraduate reading list at Cambridge. In his *A View of the Evidences of Christianity* (1794), Paley argues that God chose to reveal his will to the early Christians by performing miracles and that the credibility of this revelation rests on whether there are good reasons for believing that these miracles occurred. For Paley, it is reasonable to assume that God, the creator of natural laws, would be able to suspend them at a point of His choosing and that the Scriptures provide a reliable witness to such instances. To this end, his *Horae Paulinae* (1790) outlines the many consistencies between Acts and the Pauline Epistles attempting to illustrate that neither account was falsified.⁸²

With his own Copernican revolution having taken place, Coleridge now realized the problematic nature of his philosophical commitments, and how contrary it was to his own religiosity. An empirically based faith was dangerous because it was forced to turn entirely outward for its source and therefore was solely dependent upon miracles and their testimony giving rise to bibliolatry, the turning of scripture into an idol. It was contrary to his sense of religion because it contradicted his own intuitive sense of transcendence. For Coleridge, Kant, in making the structure of the mind independent of the external world, could account for those aspects of the self, including his own predilection to vastness that the Hartleian system had reduced to passive external sources and the consequent association of ideas. The deduction of

⁸⁰ *Biographia Literaria, or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, vol. 7, 2 parts, *Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 16 vols. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), I, 153. All further references indicated as BL.

⁸¹ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 705.

⁸² William Paley, *Natural Theology and Horae Paulinae*, (New York: American Track Society, 1865).

the “one sense” that Coleridge excitedly mentions in his 1801 letter is the deduction of that habituation to the vast without which “the Universe... is but a mass of little things.”⁸³ By 1801 Coleridge was adopting a Kantian-inspired epistemology, just as Schlegel had done. It held out the possibility for articulating religion in a way that did not attempt to ground it in objective rational theology or history but in an internal process.

5. Towards Romantic Systems

The project of the *Grundsatzkritik* was a return to the self in the spirit of Kant’s critical philosophy. From Fichte, Schlegel maintained the active *Tathandlung* of the I, but it was this very activity that undermined Fichte’s own foundationalist claim of a complete system built upon the first principle of the self. The assertion of the I becomes, for Schlegel, not a fundamental principle, but a regulative one:⁸⁴

The *I ought to be* must also be able to be demonstrated analytically and for itself, independently of the I=I. The construction of the sentence is purely practical, the deduction is transcendental.⁸⁵

In this brief observation, three important idealist terms are being applied to a renewed understanding of the I: transcendental, practical and analytic. Elaborating how each of these terms redefines the I and the system based upon it, provides insight into the grounding of Schlegel’s new Romantic system. First, the statement “I ought to be” is the result of a transcendental deduction. That which is transcendental is defined as that which is necessary for the possibility of experience, as the I is. The transverse of this statement is also true, that the I is known through its process of experiencing. This observation reverses Fichte’s assertion of a *Tathandlung* back to a *Tatsache*. Second, that the statement is purely practical indicates that the reasoning that has led to this statement concludes in action rather than a proposition of a new belief. Furthermore, it is by its nature a criterion for every moral agent who cares to concern themselves with the I. Third, the statement of the imperative I must be able to be demonstrated analytically and independently of the I=I, which does not refer to a Kantian analytic judgment (i.e. a judgment in which the predicate is already contained within the concept of the subject, such as a buck is a male deer). Rather, it is used in a second

⁸³ CL I, 354.

⁸⁴ This regulative reading of Fichtean foundationalism was commonplace among the *Grundsatzkritiker* (Beiser, *Hegel*, 23).

⁸⁵ KA XVIII, 187, 36.

sense, also Kantian, as a reflective ascending movement from one proposition assumed to be true to its ground. When this is done in the case of the I=I, the proposition is revealed to be hypothetical, and therefore since it cannot be absolutely justified, yet is nevertheless transcendental and practical, it takes the form of the imperative “the I ought to be.”⁸⁶ Thus Schlegel writes:

The analysis must be led as high as possible until: *That I ought to be*. Fichte’s extension of the science in Kant was nevertheless only an ingenious idea, not a methodological discovery. Philosophy is only then in good standing if it does not need to count on ingenious ideas only ingenious power, but can nevertheless progress on a safe methodological path.⁸⁷

It is from this claim that Schlegel is able to conclude: “In my system the final ground is actually a reciprocal proof [*Wechselerweis*]. In Fichte’s it is a postulate and an unconditional proposition.”⁸⁸ For Schlegel, the analytical demonstration of the I becomes an imperative—a Romantic imperative.⁸⁹

In the *Wechselerweis* there is an infinite variety of possible ways to analytically assert the ought of the I and organize and explicate a system of knowledge around it. This means that no system can claim overriding ascendancy. The only overriding claim is the ought. At the same time, it affirms the possibility of system, but one that is based not on first principles, but on process. It is this reasoning that is behind Schlegel’s claim: “It is equally deadly for the spirit to have a system and not to have one. It will thus have to decide to join the two.”⁹⁰ What Schlegel is here saying is that systems that build upon supposedly solid foundations do so by imposing arbitrary limits. However, at the same time, some manner of system is necessary because unity and coherence are essential to all knowledge, and it is in the context of a system that this is achieved. Schlegel requires philosophy to be less linear, and more cyclical.⁹¹

This circle system finds its clearest expression in Schlegel’s aesthetics, particularly as elaborated in *Gespräch über die Poesie*, a mixed dialogue in prose work. The text gives us a glimpse into the discussions that were held at the home of August and Caroline Schlegel in the latter part of 1799, which

⁸⁶ Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung*, 864, and Manfred Frank, *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism*, trans. Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 191.

⁸⁷ KA XVII, 17, 519.

⁸⁸ KA XVIII, 22, 520.

⁸⁹ KA XVI, 586, 134.

⁹⁰ KA II, 53, 173.

⁹¹ KA XVIII 133, 31.

functioned as the social focus for the Jena Romantics. Most importantly it introduces an aesthetic, cyclical, non-foundationalist system organized around the realist philosophical concept of 'poesie'. The book's preface offers an expanded elaboration of the concept, and in doing so expresses a new and essential development in Schlegel's thought. Schlegel distinguishes between the narrow literary use of the word, and a broader definition of the concept, which connects it to the tradition of philosophical realism. Of this broader sense of poesie, Schlegel provides a descriptive definition which connects it to notions of the Logos and anima mundi. He describes the 'unformed and unconscious *poesie* which stirs in the plant, and shines in the light, smiles in a child, gleams in the flower of youth, and glows in the loving breast of women.'⁹² Schlegel goes on to describe Poesis as the 'poetry of the divine [*Gedichte der Gottheit*]'.'⁹³ As the animating force of all creation, it is consequently the motive force behind creaturely reality as well as aesthetic production. The result of this metaphysical assertion is that human creative activity participates in divine creative activity.

Schlegel's earlier concern with providing an objective foundation for aesthetics here finds a resolution of sorts in the dynamic unfolding of divine creativity, a creativity in which human activity directly participated, and in which human aesthetic activity was granted a privileged role. This would have the result of drastically altering Schlegel's concept of poetics, and particularly his evaluation of Romantic poetry. What Schlegel had previously criticized in modern literature, that it was not concerned with an ideal objective beauty, that its authors were constantly striving to surpass what preceded them, that it mixed genres, and that it confused the boundaries between science, philosophy and ethics, now appeared as strengths. Its eclecticism and its continued striving were exactly what Schlegel's new concept of system demanded. Romantic poetry was not merely equal to classical poetry, it was superior. It manifested a constant yet never-fulfilled progression toward the truth, an endless approximation of the ideal in all its conceivable forms. In the most famous of all of Schlegel's fragments, the *Atheneumsfragment* no. 116, he characterizes this infinite striving:

Other forms of poetry are completed, and are now capable of being completely analyzed. The Romantic form of poetry is still in the state of becoming, that is its true essence; that it eternally becomes, and can never be completed. It can never be exhausted through any theory, and only a divinatory criticism would dare to try to characterize its ideal. It

⁹² KA II, 285, 54.

⁹³ Ibid.

alone is infinite, just as it alone is free; and it recognizes as its first law that the will of the poet can suffer no law over itself. The Romantic kind of poetry is the only one which is more than a kind, that it is, as it were, poetry itself: for in a certain sense all poetry is or should be Romantic.⁹⁴

Schlegel finds that his reflections on poetry extend far beyond the bounds of poetics. Because poetry's striving is unbound by any abstract and arbitrary academic division, and because it is an imperative, with the full Kantian weight of that word, it extends into all fields of existence. "The Romantic imperative," Schlegel writes, "requires the mixture of all forms of poetry. All nature and all science should become art. Art should become nature and science."⁹⁵

In Romantic poetry Schlegel claims to have found a system and a genre which expresses the human condition, one which responds to the demands of systematicity, reason, and freedom. Romantic poetry recognizes the irresolvable conflict between living in the particular and thinking in the universal. It recognizes the contention between the conditioned and the unconditioned, and that any attempt to know the unconditioned falsifies it by making it conditioned. At the same time, it recognizes the necessity of striving for the unconditioned because we can only approach the truth if we strive for the ideal. Romantic poetry creates forever anew, and in doing so "hovers at the midpoint between the portrayed and the portrayer, free from all real and ideal self-interest, on the wings of poetic reflection."⁹⁶

In *Religious Musings* Coleridge had operated under the view that the individual's internal knowledge must conform to the reality of external objects. In *Dejection: An Ode*, a poem written six years after the publication of the *Musings*, Coleridge would describe how the objects of the external world, in this case, a gathering storm, necessarily conform to the individual's own internal faculties:⁹⁷

Though I should gaze for ever
On that green light that lingers in the west:
I may not hope from outward forms to win
The passion and the life, whose fountains are within.

⁹⁴ KA II, 116, 183.

⁹⁵ KA XVI, 586, 134.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Cf. Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Bxvi.

O Lady! we receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does Nature live: (l. 43-48)

Dejection is a poem about several things occurring in Coleridge's life in 1802: most especially his troubled relationship with Sarah Hutchinson with whom he was in love though married to Sarah Fricker), but also his response to Wordsworth's *Immortality* ode, and most evident in these lines, his struggle to work out a new epistemology that would express his religious feelings.

Coleridge came to hold the position that religiosity was something that formed the way the individual experienced the world and the self, not something that was gained from experience. This way of conceiving religion was attractive to Coleridge's desire to account for religion psychologically, appealing neither to the rational argument of the Deists, nor the evidential arguments of churchmen like Paley. At the same time, this also meant having to systematically account for a third term in addition to the self and external reality. These were the transcendental aspects of cognition that made experience what it was. These could be deduced in the same manner that Kant had deduced the categories of the understanding and the practical moral laws. Transcendental deduction was a method that allowed one to justify the possession and employment of pre-theoretical concepts and how those concepts, which are not obtained from experience, relate to objects.

When Coleridge wrote "the pith of my system is to make the senses out of the mind—not the mind out of the senses, as Locke did," he differentiated his transcendental idealist standpoint from that of the empirical.⁹⁸ Empirical deduction concerns itself with facts traceable to experience. This was the method set out by Locke and Hume and followed by Hartley. Transcendental deduction differs in that it concerns itself with the legitimacy of experience. The difference between these two approaches can be illustrated with cause and effect. Hume's aetiology argued that there is no reason to believe that causation is something that actually exists: "We are never able, in a single instance, to discover any power or necessary connection, any quality, which binds the effect to the cause, and renders the one an infallible consequence of the other."⁹⁹ For Kant the question was not to ask whether such concepts had an empirical source, but whether such concepts were transcendental, that is whether they constituted an antecedent condition under which something can be thought as an object in general. In such a case all objects of knowledge necessarily appear under such concepts if they were

⁹⁸ TT, II, 179.

⁹⁹ David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 63.

to be cognized at all.¹⁰⁰ Therefore cause and effect is a justifiable transcendental category because it plays a necessary role in our cognition of the external world.

The effects of either approach go beyond just epistemological theory and have a direct bearing on the concept of the self. In the empirical model, the self does not differentiate itself from experience, rather it is, as Hume argued, identified with that experience: “For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other.... I can never catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception.”¹⁰¹ For Coleridge, the idealist model served as an alternative where the self existed in relation to both the external world and to a religious intuition which was not expressed objectively, but experientially, as in Schlegel’s system.

This marks a fundamental shift in Coleridge’s thought from what might be called the binary logic of his rational empiricism to the triune logic which would come to structure his later thought. Coleridge claimed this mode of thought originated in 1796. He wrote in the *Biographia Literaria*: “I was at that time and long after, though a Trinitarian (i.e. *ad normam Platonis*) in philosophy, yet a zealous Unitarian in Religion.”¹⁰² However, an examination of the notebooks reveals that this three-part thinking is better placed as starting in 1801, after he had returned from Germany and after the focus of his reading had shifted to Idealism, Neoplatonism and mysticism.¹⁰³ Coleridge continued to develop it as he worked on his *Logic*, and most fully elaborated it into a philosophical phenomenology in his incomplete *Opus Maximum* manuscripts.¹⁰⁴

The underlying difference between these two approaches was between reason and the understanding.¹⁰⁵ The empirical dyadic model operated upon the understanding alone. This faculty deals with the individual’s experience of the world, taking that which is furnished by the senses, and classifying and generalizing it into comprehensible impressions. It analyzes and abstracts

¹⁰⁰ Kant makes this argument for concepts of the understanding at A93/B125 in the first *Kritik*.

¹⁰¹ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 252.

¹⁰² BL I, 179-80.

¹⁰³ Coleridge’s formal conversion to orthodox Trinitarianism can be dated to February 1805 (*The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn, 5 vols. (London: Routledge, 2002), II, 2444, 2445, 2448).

¹⁰⁴ See Murry J. Evans, *Sublime Coleridge: The Opus Maximum* (London: Palgrave, 2012).

¹⁰⁵ For a more thorough treatment see Alexander J. B. Hampton, “The Struggle for Reason: Childhood Development of Triadic Self-Consciousness in the *Opus Maximum*,” *The Coleridge Bulletin*. 26 NS (2005), 45-55.

what would otherwise be the chaos of experience into cause and effect.¹⁰⁶ It is, Coleridge explains, “the power of imagining the shortest possible line between two points,” the logic of association or causal connection.¹⁰⁷ Alternately, reason is a faculty that is associated with this third logical term, “bearing the same relation to spiritual objects, the Universal, the Eternal, and the Necessary, as the eye bears to material and contingent phænomena.”¹⁰⁸ That is to say, reason is concerned with that which an individual is conscious of in an intuitive, super-sensory manner, most notably moral intuition in contrast to the cause and effect of the understanding.¹⁰⁹ It is “the power of the universal... the Source and Substance of Truths above Sense.” Furthermore, “it is an organ identical with its appropriate objects. Thus, God, the Soul, eternal Truth, &c. are the objects of reason; but they are themselves *reason*.”¹¹⁰ In the sense Coleridge describes, reason is the “representative of the infinite” invested in the finite nature of the individual.¹¹¹

Coleridge argues that reason is dependent upon the understanding for its expression. The understanding can exist without reason, yet when it does so, as illustrated by Hume, it has no sense of itself apart from experience. Coleridge explains the relationship as follows:

Understanding and Experience may exist without Reason. But Reason cannot exist without Understanding; nor does it or can it manifest itself but in and through the understanding, which in our elder writers is often called *discourse*, or the discursive faculty, as by Hooker, Lord Bacon, and Hobbes: and an understanding enlightened by reason Shakespeare gives as the contra-distinguishing character of man, under the name *discourse of reason*. In short, the human understanding possesses two distinct organs, the outward sense, and “the mind’s eye” which is reason.... In this way we reconcile the promise of Revelation, that the blessed will see God, with the declaration of St. John, God hath no one seen at any time.¹¹²

In this passage, Coleridge makes two important claims about his tripartite epistemology. The first refers back to Coleridge’s Hegel-like conception of

¹⁰⁶ OM 86-7, Samuel Taylor Coleridge. *The Friend*, ed. Barbra E. Rooke, vol 4 in 2 parts, *Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 16 vols. (London: Routledge, 1969), I, 156. All further references indicated as F.

¹⁰⁷ OM, 6.

¹⁰⁸ F, I, 155-56.

¹⁰⁹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection*, ed. John Beer, vol 9. *Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 16 vols. (London: Routledge, 1994), 26. All further references indicated as AR.

¹¹⁰ F, I, 155-56.

¹¹¹ OM, 87.

¹¹² F, II, 156-7.

his own system, that is, it “opposes no other system, but shows what is true in each.”¹¹³ Here the great British Empiricists are not enemies, but allies in the expression of reason. This brings up the second claim of this passage, that it is through the articulation of the understanding that the transcendence of God which no one can see is reconciled with the promise of revelation, and this occurs through the symbol.

Throughout Coleridge’s writings, there is an interest in the question of how an idea becomes something that can be more or less objectively communicated. For Coleridge, an idea is supersensuous in that it arises mentally, not from sensuous experience. As a result “an IDEA in the *highest* sense of that word, cannot be conveyed but by a *symbol*.”¹¹⁴ All language engages in moving an idea from internal subjectivity to discursive objectivity: “all language is utterance, i.e. Outer-ance, and with Outness the imagination necessarily associates a sensation of reality [with it].”¹¹⁵ The result of this is a symbol which is the combination of both reason and the understanding. The symbol acts, Coleridge explains, as a “reconciling and mediatory power, which incorporating the Reason Images of the Sense, and organizing (as it were) the flux of the Senses by the permanence and self-circling energies of Reason, gives birth to a system of symbols, harmonious in themselves, and consubstantial with the truth, of which they are conductors.”¹¹⁶

That symbols are “consubstantial” brings the model of the Trinity directly into play. The Son is consubstantial with the Father in that they are of one and the same substance. Just as Christ is the incarnation of God, the symbol is the incarnation of the idea. Furthermore, just as Christ as Logos is God’s creative presence in the world, the symbol is the individual’s creative presence in the world for Coleridge. Finally, what makes this possible is the imagination, which Coleridge famously defines as “a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM,” meaning that just as God has the power of self-creation (the “I will be what I will be” of Exodus 3:14) the imagination has the power of self-creation in asserting the ideas of reason which have their source in the activity of the self, not the passivity of experience.¹¹⁷ “Symbols,” Coleridge writes, “are the translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal. It always partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible; and while it announces the whole, abides itself as a

¹¹³ TT, II, 147.

¹¹⁴ BL, I, 156.

¹¹⁵ OM, 312.

¹¹⁶ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lay Sermons*, ed. R. J. White, vol 6, *Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 16 vols. (London: Routledge, 1972), 29. All further references indicated as LS.

¹¹⁷ BL, I, 304.

living part in that Unity, of which it is the representative.”¹¹⁸ In this manner, the transcendent reality of ideas share in a community of ideas with the temporal world of the understanding, their “outer-ance” allowing them to be the subject of objective discourse.

Yet they are not fixed, though they are always consubstantial with the transcendent ideas of reason, their expression in the understanding is subject to flux: “We can neither rest in an infinite that is not at the same time a whole, nor in a whole that is not infinite. Hence the natural Man is always in a state either of resistance or of captivity to the understanding, which cannot represent totality without limit.”¹¹⁹ It is in this way that Coleridge reconciles the promise of revelation and the invisibility of God. Religion is therefore best expressed in a genre that forms a symbolic system that engages in a process of endless striving. “Christianity,” Coleridge writes, “is not a Theory, or a Speculation; but a *Life*. Not a *Philosophy* of Life, but a Life and living Process.”¹²⁰

6. Conclusion

This examination moves from the pre-Romantic lives of Coleridge and Schlegel, only to the development of the early forms of their Romantic thought. It demonstrates the fascinating correspondence between their two parallel lives. These concurrent developments would continue as both thinkers moved into the mature stages of their Romantic thought. For Schlegel, this can be located in many of the lectures he delivered later in his life when resident in Vienna. Particularly in his development of a *Lebensphilosophie*, which elaborates and distills many of the early elements discussed here into a practical philosophy. This is reinforced in his other later lectures which consider literary genres and the dialogical character of the nature of language.¹²¹ For Coleridge, this is especially true of the triune logic which he articulates as a systematic framework in his *Opus Maximum*, particularly in fragment three, which takes up the realist tradition of the divine ideas and their relation to creation, and fragment two, which examines the ethical grounding for personhood in the Absolute.¹²² In the case of both thinkers, these later developments have often been unfairly characterized as a

¹¹⁸ LS, 30.

¹¹⁹ LS, 60.

¹²⁰ AR, 2.

¹²¹ Friedrich Schlegel. *The Philosophy of Life and Philosophy of Language in a Course of Lectures*, trans. A. Morrison (London: H. G. Bohn, 1874).

¹²² The philosophy of the *Opus Maximum* is the subject of a detailed essay I plan to publish in the near future.

conservative ossification of the ideas they developed in their younger years. However, in the context of this examination, they are better understood as a further development and refinement.

Schlegel and Coleridge were among the most influential Romantics in their respective nations, defining the movements that those following them would either take up or challenge. The development of their early Romantic positions arose from an initial desire to establish an unconditioned ground for systematic thinking in an age when systematic thinking was becoming increasingly problematic. In realizing that foundationalism was not possible within the philosophical climate of their day, they also came to the broader and more substantive conclusion that the discursive nature of a rationalized system will always fall short of, and never do justice to, the ideal which one seeks to make its ground.

The systems that they proposed were instead based upon this insight: that their respective ideals could never be wholly obtained, but instead had to be an object of continuous approximation. For both Schlegel and Coleridge, the forms in which this kind of infinite striving is achieved, the eclecticism of Romantic poetry and the consubstantiality of the symbol, are not static but instead infinitely perfectible in their striving to approximate an ideal. The respective dynamism of the Romantic *poesie* and the symbol are not indicative of any contingency in terms of what they express. Rather, their instability of conceptual articulation is representative of the nature of the unconditioned truth that lay behind them. This ultimately places the respective Romantic philosophies explored here in a position that seeks to unify the conceptual achievements of German idealism with the perennial tradition of philosophical realism.¹²³

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¹²³ Thank you to David W. Wood, James Vigus, and the anonymous readers who improved the final version of this article.

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Symphilosophie

International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism

Making a Theme Audible

Imparting Non-Discursive Knowledge in Natural Philosophy by Means of Poetry and Aphorism

*Norman Sieroka**

ABSTRACT: This paper is about poetry as a vehicle for imparting knowledge in natural philosophy. It discusses the epistemological and cultural background against which early Greek thinkers such as Parmenides and Empedocles composed in verse, and it explores the rationale why poetry was thought to be a preferred means for transmitting important and often non-discursive knowledge about nature—in other words, how poetry was meant to make “a philosophical theme audible,” to prompt an insight that organizes a large field of experience. Much later, related assumptions find a (last) heyday in Goethe’s attempt to write a *Naturgedicht* in the vein of Lucretius. Even though new insights especially from classical German philosophy influenced Goethe, his reasons for writing nature poetry show striking continuities with those of his ancient peers. The paper ends with a brief look at later attempts to “make philosophical themes audible” in the context of an ever-increasing fragmentation of knowledge.

Keywords: nature poetry, early Greek philosophers, Goethe, imparting knowledge, intuitive understanding

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG: Dieser Aufsatz beschäftigt sich mit Poesie als einem Instrument zur Vermittlung von Wissen in der Naturphilosophie. Es wird der erkenntnistheoretische und kulturelle Hintergrund erörtert, vor dem frühgriechische Denker wie Parmenides und Empedokles in Versen schrieben, und es wird untersucht, warum die Versform als bevorzugtes Mittel zur Vermittlung wichtiger und oft nicht-diskursiver Erkenntnisse über die Natur angesehen wurde. Es geht insgesamt darum, wie Poesie „ein philosophisches Thema hörbar“ machen sollte, um eine Einsicht hervorzurufen, die ein großes Erfahrungsfeld strukturiert. Sehr viel später finden ähnliche Überzeugungen eine (letzte) Blütezeit in Goethes Versuch, ein Naturgedicht im lukrezischen Sinne zu schreiben. Auch wenn neue Erkenntnisse vor allem aus der klassischen deutschen Philosophie auf Goethe einwirkten, zeigen seine Beweggründe, weiterhin Naturdichtung betreiben zu wollen, auffallende Kontinuitäten zu den Denkern der Antike. Der Aufsatz endet mit einer kurzen Darstellung späterer Versuche, weiterhin „philosophische Themen hörbar“ zu machen, während gleichzeitig die Fragmentierung von Wissen zunimmt.

Stichwörter: Naturgedicht, frühgriechische Philosophie, Goethe, Wissensvermittlung, intuitiver Verstand

* Professor of Theoretical Philosophy, University of Bremen, Institute of Philosophy, Postfach 330 440, 28334 Bremen, Germany – sieroka@uni-bremen.de

“All our attention must be directed to
listening in on nature’s procedures.”
(Goethe)

1. Introduction

Why worry about using poetry to impart philosophical knowledge? Isn’t this simply an odd cultural convention found in the fragments of some early Greek philosophers? The following is meant to suggest that it is not. Historically, the use of poetry was not a quirk; rather, it can be understood as a struggle for finding a way of expressing philosophical insights—more specifically, of finding a way to induce intuitive, certain, and often non-discursive or even tacit knowledge about nature. Moreover, this attempt was not restricted to the early Greek era. The belief that poetry is an appropriate medium persisted throughout Western history from antiquity to the modern period.¹ To show important continuities and changes in this history, the present paper will focus on the two “ends” of this history: the works of some of the early Greek philosophers and of Goethe, whom I take to be the last important exponent of writing nature poetry with this special philosophical ambition. I will conclude with some brief remarks on the aftermath of all this—in particular, on some of the more recent attempts to employ aphorisms and fragments, instead of scholarly prose, for imparting knowledge in philosophy.

By discussing this historical development, the present paper aims to shed light on the following three issues of current philosophical relevance.

First, the paper is meant to add to recent discussions of Goethe’s natural philosophy. Here Eckart Förster has distinguished between a Schellingian-type natural philosophy and a Goethean approach.² As it will turn out below, the adherence of the latter to something like a *scientia intuitiva* fits in strikingly well with the idea of using poetry as a means of conveying philosophical knowledge about nature.³

¹ The point is not to deny that philosophical poems about nature do have discursive or propositional content. Lucretius’ *De rerum natura*, for instance, obviously contains genuine arguments and even demonstrations. However, the point is that there are other aspects (aspects of persuasive power, experiential immediacy, etc.) which are non-discursive, which are important in the context of gaining knowledge about nature, and which figure prominently in poems. See also Hadot 2004, 201–210, where he discusses poetry as a specific means to unveil secrets about nature.

² Förster 2012 and 2014; see also Haag & Wild 2013.

³ Thus, this paper touches on topics important in the context of romanticism (such as the general relationship between the human subject and objects of nature). However, the paper is not meant as a scholarly contribution to the ongoing debate about the extent to which (or

Second, on a more general level, the use of specific genres or writing styles in philosophy is of interest in relation to questions about the discursiveness and propositionality of knowledge. This has been discussed especially in relation to the aphoristic and fragmentary styles of Nietzsche and the later Wittgenstein, and thus outside a specific philosophy of nature.⁴ However, philosophically inspired nature poetry is similar in character here. To put it in terms of the earlier Wittgenstein, instead of *saying* that such and such is the case, aphorisms, fragments, and poems are meant to *show* something.⁵ They impart intuitive rather than discursive knowledge—a knowledge neither strictly demonstrative nor conceptually inferred but that, once grasped, comes with subjective certainty and covers an infinity of cases and transitions.⁶ A large field of experience is suddenly organized by a kind of induced “aha” moment. The recipient, as it were, immediately recognizes a specific situation and, without actually being in that situation, is confronted with an experiential context that might challenge her or his worldview. Thus, such insights are not about lengthy and nit-picking exposures to textbook knowledge but about an intuitive knowledge of “how to go about things.” In this sense, the knowledge gained might even be claimed to be non-propositional: It is indeed a (tacit) *knowledge of* rather than (explicit) *knowledge about* something.⁷ Thus, by writing fragments, aphorisms, or poems, philosophical authors often aim for such challenging contexts which bring about experiential, sometimes even therapeutic or revisionary, changes in the recipient.

Third, a closer look at the relation between poetry and natural philosophy is illuminating in the context of discussions of orality and literacy. Standing at the edge of literacy (at least in the Western tradition), early Greek philosophers put their insights into verse for obvious reasons; in particular, to make them memorable and to keep the content stable in dissemination.⁸ But these are not the only reasons. Poems rely much more on rhythm and meter than other literary genres. They are more intimately related to sound,

the exact period for which) Goethe might be classified as being either a romantic or an anti-romantic. See, e.g., Bohm 2003.

⁴ See Gabriel 1990 and 2013; Brandt 1985; Frank & Soldati 1989.

⁵ See Wittgenstein 1984a (*Tractatus logico-philosophicus*), 6.522 (“Es gibt allerdings Unaussprechliches. Dies zeigt sich”; “There is indeed the inexpressible. This shows itself”). See also the distinction between “apophantic logos” and “narrative myth” in Gabriel 2013, 7.

⁶ See Frank & Soldati 1989, 31–2.

⁷ See Polanyi 1968.

⁸ See Holenstein 2004, 20, for a brief cross-cultural comparison of the historical relationship between natural philosophy and orality, especially about the groundbreaking role played by the Indian *sutra*.

and the recipient is meant to “get into the groove,” as it were. As will be discussed below, there is a perceptual immediacy involved, which has to do with integrating—or “harmonizing” in the original sense of the term—the message into one’s everyday life. This is different from drawing fine-lined (note the visual, rather than aural, connotation here!) conceptual differences. Accordingly, instead of sticking to Wittgenstein’s term “showing,” one might use a phrase from Cassirer and say that the poetic form is used to “make a theme audible.”⁹

What I mean by “making a theme audible” then is a specific way of making something perceptible. It is not the only way of doing so, but one with special qualities. It involves exposing someone to a domain of phenomena by means of exemplars. Here is nothing like *the* single fundamental case to be shown once and for all, but rather the drawing of attention to the possibilities inherent in individual but various cases. This is where the analogy to music and audition lies: Being exposed to different, but related, sequences of tones, one suddenly perceives them as variations of one another and recognizes a common or underlying theme. Notably, this common theme need not exist separately, need not be written down once and for all, and might be transient in the sounds. (Think of a jazz performance where a standard is played and “varied upon” without “the original” theme ever being played explicitly: One still recognizes the piece and hears what is played as variations.)

This third issue is connected to the second, since such a transient harmonization and integration is not primarily meant to provide propositional truth. It is also linked to the first issue, since for Goethe sound and meter were means to stipulate—or rather: to put into resonant vibration—the relevant (non-discursive) knowledge capacities. Before turning to Goethe, however, let me start off by sketching the background of poetic writing in the early Greek era.

2. Early Greek Poetry: Background, Aims and Scope

Writing in verse might have been an obvious choice in the days when Homer and Hesiod were *the* authorities and models for any kind of philosophical and scientific enquiry.¹⁰ Moreover, long speeches given in prose are difficult to remember and are likely to give rise to instable proliferation. So presenting ideas in poetry made sense in a world where few could read and fewer

⁹ Cassirer 1944, 71. Cassirer uses this phrase in the context of his symbolic forms but unfortunately does not develop the aural connotations.

¹⁰ See Horster & Reitz 2005; see also Most 1999, 342–50 and 356.

possessed books. Most of the people who encountered the works of early Greek philosophers such as Xenophanes, Parmenides, and Empedocles probably *heard* them.¹¹ They were read to, and for words read out loud, rhythm and meter aid auditors' comprehension and memory.¹² However, such a general observation does not do justice to the philosophical issues of special concern for these early Greek philosophers. It has been convincingly argued that any attempt to account for the presenting of their ideas in poems not only has to talk about the content but also about the literary genre they chose (and about where and how their poems were presented).¹³

Next, it does not come about by chance that those early Greek philosophers who wrote in verse were the ones who were particularly concerned about the fallibility of human knowledge. According to the then received view, *certain* knowledge or "truth" (*alétheia*) is the possession of the gods, whereas humans are typically confined to "mere opinion" (*dóxa*). Thus, for human insights or convictions to become certain, some transmission between the divine and the human sphere is needed. This transmission would require inspiration by a god or a muse.¹⁴ Indeed, the Latin term "inspiration" (Greek: *epí-pnoia*) means "breathing into" and carries both a worldly-physical and a figurative sense,¹⁵ as well as acoustic and aural connotations of resonating air columns and of making themes audible. Thoughts and ideas can be transmitted by inspiration and, putting it the other way round, being inspired means having access to all-embracing (divine) knowledge.

But how to prove that divine inspiration has taken place? Indeed, what counts as external evidence is the form in which knowledge is presented: namely, it has to be sung, spoken, or written in verse. This mode of presentation differed strongly from ordinary daily discourse and prose texts in which people exchanged "mere opinions."¹⁶ "Truth," however, would make itself audible in verse, since no human being would be able to "speak" in perfect verse without divine intervention.¹⁷ Accordingly, the invocation of

¹¹ See Havelock 1966; Lord 1960, 94 and 130–8; Ong 2012, 136–44; Goody 1977, 36–51 and 112–28.

¹² See Ong 2012, 36–57.

¹³ See Most 1999, 332–62. Besides, the myth of Orpheus might be invoked here as well, namely as exemplifying an old and common belief that poetry has a special power over natural objects.

¹⁴ See, e.g., *Iliad* 2.484–6; *Odyssey* 8.479–81, 12.187–91, 22.347–8; *Theogony* 24–8, 36–9, 104–9.

¹⁵ See Naddaf 2009 and 2012, 188. See also Snell 2011, 127.

¹⁶ See Aristotle 1984 (*Poetics*) 1449a26–8 where he claims that hexameters are furthest away from ordinary speech.

¹⁷ Erren 1967, 11.

the muses within a poem had a licensing function to demonstrate one's teaching abilities and of the trustworthiness of the content presented.

The presentation of an inspired content always has a pedagogical or didactic purpose as well.¹⁸ The aim is to charm the listener (if not to cast a spell on him or her) and to thus facilitate imparting the lore by means of meter, rhythm, and repetition. The aim is, as it were, to make themes resonate in the recipient. Content-wise, individual cases or exemplars are presented, but are meant to be variations of some much more wide-ranging "truth." This was true already for the epics of Homer and Hesiod, where the deeds of the gods and heroes were understood as paradigm cases for providing social and moral orientation, and it stayed true in the case of the three early Greek philosophers to whom I turn in a little more detail now.¹⁹

Xenophanes (ca. 570–470 BC) was a poet with his own theoretical interests and who, unlike other classical rhapsodists who only recited Homer, composed his own verses.²⁰ And unlike early Greek philosophers such as Anaximander or Anaximenes, Xenophanes used this popular medium to shape controversial public discourse, especially at symposia.²¹

Xenophanes's nature poetry partially survives and presents a colorful mixture of topics. He is sometimes sneering, especially in his famous critique directed against the implausible anthropomorphism of the Homeric gods.²² This critique is an instance of his general attitude toward human knowledge.²³ He was the first among the early Greek philosophers to prominently maintain such a sceptical attitude and to champion a negative path towards knowledge. He often excludes the implausible by providing a *reductio ad absurdum* based on exemplary cases; claiming, for instance, that "horses were able to draw with their feet and produce the works which men do, horses would draw the forms of gods like horses."²⁴

Xenophanes's scepticism also extended to his understanding of divine inspiration. In his view, the muses and gods no longer simply transmit truth to the poet. Instead, humans must search for, uncover, and grasp knowledge. Unlike the oral epic poet of previous times, who was merely a "singer" (*aoidós*), Xenophanes understood himself to be a "poet" (*poietés*) in the literal

¹⁸ See Snell 2011, 128, and see *Theogony* 96–103.

¹⁹ E.g., DK22 B57, B40 and DK21 B10 (DK = Diels & Kranz 1951–2) show Heraclitus' and Xenophanes' general ambivalence about Homer and Hesiod and illustrate the subtle relationship between poetry and true knowledge.

²⁰ See Gemelli 2005, 118–34.

²¹ See Kahn 2003, 156.

²² See, e.g., DK21 B15, B23, B24. See also Otto 2013, 312; Wöhrle 1992.

²³ See, e.g., DK21 B34, B35.

²⁴ DK21 B15.

sense of being a “creator” or “author.”²⁵ Of course, poets would still depend on the graciousness of the gods and muses, but attainment of certain knowledge now required intellectual effort, both careful observation and rational thought.²⁶

Similar ideas appear in Parmenides (ca. 540–480 BC). In the tradition of Hesiod and orphic singers, he wrote a poem using epic hexameters and presented it, as far as we know, among like-minded people and the political elite of Elea.²⁷ This poem is one of the first and surely one of the most impressive examples where a single and closed poetic form was used to provide a *historía perì phýseos*; that is, a general and comprehensive “enquiry on nature” encompassing the origin, growth, and result of all of nature, including cosmogony and anthropogony.²⁸

Parmenides’s poem falls into three parts: (i) the proemium, (ii) a part on truth (*alétheia*), and (iii) a part on opinion (*dóxa*). The proemium describes, notably in the first-person perspective, a journey from night to light, ignorance to knowledge.²⁹ Since Parmenides is the traveller in the poem as well as its author, he is not “a mere singer.” He has a heavenly guide, Dike, who in the second part of the poem reveals to him divine and unshakable truth.

Being the traveller, he also becomes the equivalent of a Homeric demigod such as Achilles or Odysseus. Those who read or heard the poem could thus see Parmenides as a source of divine and all-embracing knowledge. However—and this mirrors the sceptical attitude we already saw in Xenophanes—this inspired knowledge is not simply revealed but must be scrutinized: The goddess explicitly asks the traveller to “judge by reason the too much contested argument which has been given by me.”³⁰ This effort at judging carries over to the recipient of the poem. This, in turn, implies that Parmenides assumes a special capacity for knowledge in humans that goes beyond simple, and unreliable, sense intuition and by means of which humans can apprehend truth.³¹

²⁵ See Nagy 1996.

²⁶ See DK21 B18 and Naddaf 2012, 190. See also Naddaf 2009, 107, and Snell 2011, 129–31.

²⁷ Here I rely on a personal conversation with Christoph Riedweg.

²⁸ DK28 B1. See Naddaf 2005, 11–35. Especially the comprehensiveness (and essentiality) of their efforts is also something that is shared by Homer, Hesiod, and the early philosophers just mentioned (see DK22 B50, DK31 B6, and, as for Xenophanes, Plato 1997, *Sophistes* 242c-d; see also Most 1999, 348).

²⁹ DK28 B1.1–3 and 22–31. The details of the interpretation of this “epistemic journey” are highly contentious but fortunately not of importance for present purposes.

³⁰ DK28 B7.5–8.1.

³¹ See Snell 2011, 134–6.

Regarding this capacity, note that the proemium itself hardly provides rational arguments or clearly statable (discursive or propositional) knowledge at all. Having said that, it hardly reads like a standard piece of poetry either. Some scholars have emphasized its strongly performative (and indeed acoustic) character. Repetitions and other tropes are used in a way similar to their uses in prayers and meditations.³² Following this interpretation, Parmenides intended the proemium (if not the whole poem) to induce in the recipient a kind of (religious) experience. Other scholars, approaching the poem from a more aesthetic perspective, have charged Parmenides with a lack of poetic talent.³³ Strikingly enough, they then take the clumsiness of Parmenides's verses as evidence in favour of the special epistemological function of his poetry. For why would Parmenides write about natural philosophy in verse if he obviously lacked the ability to provide his listeners with an adequate degree of poetic pleasure? In any event, both interpretations agree that Parmenides deliberately chose to present his ideas in poetry, and that his doing so relates to his epistemological effort to impart a kind of (non-discursive) knowledge.

This missionary character of the poetic form becomes even more prominent in Empedocles (ca. 495–435 BC). Acting as a wandering seer and healer in a presumably orphic tradition, Empedocles explicitly claimed divine inspiration and even declared himself to be an immortal god or fallen daemon.³⁴ Once more, the implicit assertion here is that, by invoking the muses, the poet is in the highest psychic state of inspiration and takes part in an all-embracing (divine) knowledge. In addition, Empedocles explicitly claimed that it was his duty to give that knowledge to humans who, in turn, are again assumed to have a special knowledge capacity which goes beyond mere sense intuition.³⁵

Moreover, the knowledge is meant to induce in the recipient, in a kind of initiation, both theoretical knowledge about the natural and divine elements in nature as well as practical knowledge about how to properly live and act in this world.³⁶ The first kind of knowledge is covered in Empedocles's *peri phýseos* ("On Nature"), whereas the second is treated in his *katharmoi* ("Purifications"), which provide concrete instructions in verse for, among other things, ablution and diet. As famously known from the Pythagoreans, rhythmical sounds are taken to be the proper medium for such

³² See Gemelli 2008.

³³ See Wöhrle 1992, 17.

³⁴ See DK31 B3, B112–3, B131 and B146; see also Riedweg 1995 and Primavesi 2005.

³⁵ See DK31 B114–5 and Snell 2011, 136–7.

³⁶ See Riedweg 1995.

acts of purification, since they lead to harmony with the world.³⁷ Metric poetry, like music or rhythmical sound in general, is meant to get one into resonance or unison (*harmonía*) with the whole world and to purify one's soul.³⁸

Thus, in Empedocles the poetic form does not only warrant the certainty of the presented knowledge; it also initiates a sublime state of "cosmic harmony" in the recipient.³⁹ Many rhetorical figures, especially his skilful repetitions and comparisons, fortify the impression that Empedocles's poem functions not only as a presentation but also as an instance of putting his own doctrine into practice.⁴⁰

In sum, in creating their poems, the poets among the early Greek philosophers were not merely following a convention or making their doses of medicine easier to swallow. Instead, the form allows for a special kind of information transfer and to thus make up for certain deficiencies in standard human insight ("mere opinion").⁴¹ Thanks to the mediation by the muses as the direct genealogical link between humans and gods, certain and infallible knowledge ("truth") is on offer.⁴² Thus, it is the special evidential status that is made audible by verse. Moreover, poetry is a more direct means of expression than prose. A poem, especially when sung, conveys existential relations in an immediate fashion, making them immediately audible instead of depicting them in an abstract treatise. The focus is on holistic expression instead of terminological differentiations. For this purpose, it must be sung, since the aim is to get the auditor into resonance; to move the recipient, as it were, inside instead of putting something in front of him or her.⁴³ And this is, as far as we know, what happened in the case of the three philosophers mentioned.

Finally, note that also Heraclitus, who did not write in verse, pursued a similar goal with his opaque aphorisms which are full of alliterations, catchy phrasings, pregnant comparisons, and so on. Given that Heraclitus famously claimed that nature "loved to hide",⁴⁴ such an approach might be considered particularly apt for a *historía perì phýseos*. Again, the idea is then to expose the recipient to striking exemplars and to, thus, make a common theme audible.

³⁷ See, e.g., Riedweg 2008.

³⁸ See also Plato 1997 (*Timaios*) 47d.

³⁹ See Gemelli 2012.

⁴⁰ See, e.g., DK31 B25 and Most 1999, 357.

⁴¹ See also Plato 1997 (*Phaedrus*) 267a according to whom the use of *written* prose might even weaken one's memory and receptiveness for divine inspiration (*ibid.*).

⁴² See, e.g., Schadewaldt 1978, 299; see also Wöhrle 1992, 9–10.

⁴³ See Schadewaldt 1989, 26–36.

⁴⁴ DK22 B123.

As Heraclitus himself puts it: the *lógos*, the great (structural) principle underlying all of reality, is to be “heard”.⁴⁵

3. Didactic Poems and Transparency of Content in Antiquity

After the era of the early Greek philosophers, poems continued to be important for imparting knowledge. In particular, from the fourth century BC onward so-named didactic poetry served as a means for presenting sophisticated knowledge in a systematic, coherent, and comprehensive fashion.⁴⁶ This could have been, for instance, practical knowledge about farming and fishing, theoretical knowledge about geography and medicine, as well as general philosophical knowledge in the all-embracing sense of a *historía perì phýseos*.

Roughly speaking, a didactic poem functions like an enlarged and systematized (or “harmonized”) collection of mnemonics. Even though society became more and more literate, the ability to memorize adequately remained of central concern.⁴⁷

By the same token, didactic poetry also fulfilled Horace’s famous request, that poetry should both instruct (*prodesse*) and delight (*delectare*).⁴⁸ At times didactic poetry has even been claimed to constitute a separate genre, different from lyric, epic, and dramatic poetry.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, throughout most of ancient and especially later history, didactic poetry suffered from a bad reputation. Aristotle, who famously defined poetry in terms of *mimesis*, emphasized that versification alone is insufficient for something to count as poetry.⁵⁰ This claim clearly applied to the works of Xenophanes, Parmenides, and Empedocles—even more so since they aimed at presenting their own stance, speaking in their own terms, instead of imitating or emulating someone else’s stance or thoughts.

However, the question whether didactic and early Greek “poetry” really deserves that name is not my concern here. Instead, I am interested in the epistemological presuppositions and implications of versifying in philosophy, and I will continue to use “nature poetry” to describe the efforts of Xenophanes, Parmenides, and Empedocles.⁵¹ And what is striking here is the specific linkage of the presentation to its content: Xenophanes, Parmenides,

⁴⁵ See DK22 B1.

⁴⁶ See Effe 1977, 11.

⁴⁷ See Effe 1977 and 2005; Blümer 2005, 45–68.

⁴⁸ Horace 2010 (*Ars Poetica*) 333.

⁴⁹ Effe 1977, 11–9.

⁵⁰ Aristotle 1984 (*Poetics*) 1447b13–20. See also Fabian 1968.

⁵¹ See Volk 2005. Siehe auch Horster & Reitz 2005, 8; Fabian 1968, 71–2.

and Empedocles are all personally concerned about the knowledge they present and they use verses as a didactic-epistemological means to enable the recipient to attain a new way of experiencing the world.

To draw on a distinction from literary theory, such presentations might be classified as “factual” or “issue-related.”⁵² However, there are other forms of presentation in didactic poetry as well.⁵³ Especially during the Hellenistic era, there were authors such as Nicander for whom the poetic presentation was of primary interest and the content secondary. Then there are also more intriguing cases where the (surface) content is used to establish knowledge and insight on a more profound level. The most important example here is Aratus’s *Phainómena* which treats astronomical and atmospheric appearances.⁵⁴ Other than it might appear at first glance, this work was not meant as a guide for navigators and farmers. Instead, the poem is a general facilitation in favour of a stoic worldview, in which natural phenomena function as signs disclosing the great causal nexus of the whole of nature. Hence, even though the details are quite different from an “issue-related” presentation, this is a further case in which the poetic form is used to offer a special kind of philosophical knowledge—a further case in which doctrines are not stated discursively, but where there are certain themes and motives “audible in the background.” Thus, it is the exercise and duty of the recipient to listen carefully and to grasp things by him- or herself. Accordingly, the invocation of the muses by the poet, which still occurs, plays a less important role.⁵⁵ The horizontal transfer of knowledge from one person to another becomes more important than a vertical subordination to the divine—though the issue about the warrant of that knowledge remains.

During the Roman Empire, the most important didactic poet about nature was, of course, Lucretius (ca. 99-55 BC). In his poem *De rerum natura*, he provides an issue-related presentation of a unified and comprehensive *historía perì phýseos*, starting from cosmogony, going to anthropogony, and ending up with advice on how to live. The work is an amplification of the Epicurean doctrine as a means for salvation. It aims at destroying religious superstition and taking away people’s fear of death.⁵⁶ By talking about nature and by being written in an intuitive and easily accessible fashion, the poem

⁵² See Effe 2005 and 1977, 30–3.

⁵³ See *ibid.* and also Wöhrle 1998.

⁵⁴ See Erren 1967; see also Wilson 2015, 66–72 and 110–4, and Effe 1977, 24–6.

⁵⁵ Wilson 2015, 43–4 and 107–8.

⁵⁶ See Lucretius *De rerum natura* 3.971–6.

aims to get recipients “into the groove,” to have them lead their own lives in harmony with nature.⁵⁷

Thus, the poetic form is a psychological instrument for, as it were, philosophical camp-formation and proselytism. In this respect it resembles the work of the early Greek poets: the whole work has a missionary character, employs a first-person perspective, and does battle with false idols.

Given the tight frame of this paper, it seems justified to skip over the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Early Modern Period.⁵⁸

4. Goethe's Various Attempts to Write Nature Poetry

Moving to the Modern Period, one of the last great poets providing something like a *historía perì phýseos* is Goethe. Throughout his career, he tried several literary genres to present his insights and approaches in natural philosophy. In this section I will give a broad overview over these various attempts, with a more detailed discussion of the philosophical implications in the next section.⁵⁹

In 1781 Goethe announced his intention to write a “novel about the universe.”⁶⁰ A little later he started thinking about lyric poetry being the right medium to communicate knowledge about the most general aspects of nature. Possibly thanks to his intensive engagement with Herder's famous essay “Vom Lukrezischen Gedicht,” Goethe took *De rerum natura* as the prime source for guidance for such an enterprise.⁶¹ In 1789 Goethe wrote a fragment in Lucretian verse: “Jussieus Klassen der Pflanzen.” This is Goethe's preliminary practice for writing a bigger and more comprehensive poem, a “grand poem of nature” (*grosses Naturgedicht*), which was always “at the back of [his] soul” and which would contain astronomical discoveries, along with other topics.⁶²

Goethe wrote his main attempt toward such a single grand poem in 1798–1800. In his correspondence with the Lucretius translator Karl Ludwig von Knebel, Goethe wrote about “an attempt to represent the intuition of nature ... rhythmically,”⁶³ and he stated that he was aiming at “the big work

⁵⁷ See Effe 1977, 70–1, and Mahlmann-Bauer 2005, 116.

⁵⁸ For a comprehensive history of didactic poetry from antiquity to the modern period, see Albertsen 1967. See also Fabian 1968.

⁵⁹ References to Goethe follow Goethe 1887–1919 (*Weimarer Ausgabe*; abbreviated as “WA”).

⁶⁰ Goethe WA IV/5, 232 (letter to Charlotte von Stein, 7 December 1781).

⁶¹ See, e.g., Goethe WA IV/9, 78–79 (letter to Stolberg, 2 February 1789). Goethe's numerous references to Lucretius are systematically collected in Bapp 1926.

⁶² Goethe WA I/35, 84 (“Tages- und Jahreshfte” 1799).

⁶³ Goethe, WA IV/13, 200 (letter to Knebel, June 1798).

on nature” for which he “couldn’t do better than turning my inventory into a poem.”⁶⁴

At least part of this natural philosophical “inventory” was indeed put into verse during that period: namely in Goethe’s two didactic poems, “Metamorphose der Pflanzen” and “Metamorphose der Tiere,” which are written in hexameters and elegiac distiches, and which deal with the origin, growth, and transformations of plants and animals.⁶⁵

The scope of action of the “Metamorphose der Pflanzen” is a walk through a garden by the speaker and his beloved. This setting immediately advances the intuitive and emotional, rather than abstract or purely discursive, character of the encounter of nature and—given the classical ancient associations of eros and pedagogy—also the educational and missionary intention of the whole poem. Here are a few lines from the poem (verses 1–8 and 63–68):

The rich profusion thee confounds, my love, 1
 Of flowers, spread athwart the garden. Aye,
 Name upon name assails thy ears, and each
 More barbarous-sounding than the one before—
 Like unto each the form, yet none alike; 5
 And so the choir hints a secret law,
 A sacred mystery. Ah, love could I vouchsafe
 In sweet felicity a simple answer!
 ...
 Turn now thine eyes again, love, to the teeming
 Profusion. See its bafflement dispelled.
 Each plant thee heralds now the iron laws. 65
 In rising voices hear the flowers declaim.
 And, once deciphered, the eternal law
 Opens to thee, no matter what the guise—⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Goethe, WA IV/ 14, 52–3 (letter to Knebel, 22 March 1799); see also WA IV/14, 9–10 (letter to Knebel, 22 January 1799). For further original quotations and source citations see also Nisbet 1986, 105–11, Albertsen 1967, 362, and Jaeger 2007.

⁶⁵ See Goethe, WA I/3, 85–7 and 89–91.

⁶⁶ Translation by Douglas Miller. The German original reads as follows: “Dich verwirret Geliebte die tausendfältige Mischung / Dieses Blumengewühls über dem Garten umher, / Viele Nahmen hörst du an und immer verdränget, / Mit barbarischem Klang, einer den andern im Ohr, / Alle Gestalten sind ähnlich und keine gleichet der andern / Und so deutet das Chor auf ein geheimes Gesetz, / Auf ein heiliges Rätsel. O könnt' ich dir, liebliche Freundin, / Überliefern sogleich glücklich das lösende Wort! [...] / Nun Geliebte wende den Blick zum bunten Gewimmel, / Das verwirrend nicht mehr sich vor dem Geiste bewegt. / Jede Pflanze verkündet dir nun die ew'gen Gesetze, / Jede Blume sie spricht lauter und lauter mit dir. / Aber entzifferst du hier der Göttin heilige Lettern, / Überall siehst du sie dann, auch in verändertem Zug.”

What is encountered first is a profusion or rather “crush of flowers” (*Blumengewühl*, verse 2). There is no simple and effable rule underlying the lifespan of a plant, but close observation allows one to intuit an “iron,” or rather “eternal” (*ewig*), and “secret law” (verses 6 and 65). Nature, and in particular each plant, is experienced as process-like and “becoming” (*werdend*, verse 9), instead of being made up of strictly separated and individually nameable parts (verse 3). Each plant is experienced as being continuously in transition or transformation but still forming a closed unity with an inner identity (verses 66–8). The word *metamorphosis* in the title refers to these transformations; and, of course, proves Goethe’s adoration of Ovid. Note also the multiple references to hearing in this process of gaining new experience and knowledge (“assails thy ears,” “barbarous-sounding,” “choir,” “heralds,” “rising voices hear ... declaim”).

According to Goethe, each phase of a plant’s (six-stage) circle of life is a transformational state or variation of a leaf; and the circle as a whole is then understood as an actualization of the idea or concept of a leaf (verses 63–70).⁶⁷ Once this is apprehended by the recipient of the poem, he or she will recognize the idea of a leaf in these variations in any plant. The general becomes graspable in the particular; or, to put it in terms from above: variations do make the theme audible. What is more, toward the end of the poem (verses 70–80) the recipient is shown analogies between vegetable and human prosperity. The changes undergone by human beings in terms of their feelings and mutual relationships are variations of the leaf states (seed, blossom, fruit). Thus, by intuitively understanding plants, we also grasp something about ourselves. And this is possible because—just like plants—we are part of nature and because there is an overall harmony or resonance.

Goethe thus seeks the fundamental comprehensive structure of nature (from plants to humans) in a synthetic fashion. His natural philosophical attempt transcends the then predominant analytic Linnaean system of classification.⁶⁸ Classification is surely an important task, but it remains only half the battle of gaining comprehensive knowledge about nature. According to Goethe, a further step is needed from static taxonomy to dynamic

⁶⁷ See also Goethe, WA II/7, 282–3: “Alles ist Blatt, und durch diese Einfachheit wird die grösste Mannigfaltigkeit möglich. [...] Ein Blatt, das nur Feuchtigkeit unter der Erde einsaugt, nennen wir Wurzel; ein Blatt, das von der Feuchtigkeit ausgedehnt wird, pp. Zwiebel [...]. Ein Blatt, das sich gleich ausdehnt, einen Stiel.” (“All is leaf, and through this simplicity the greatest diversity becomes possible ... A leaf which absorbs humidity exclusively underground is called a root; a leaf which is expanded by humidity is called a bulb. A leaf which lengthens itself uniformly is called a stalk.”)

⁶⁸ See, e.g., Pörksen 1986, 72–80.

morphology.⁶⁹ For him, a special type of intuitive grasp is needed, namely that of the “primordial plant” (*Urpflanze*) as a kind of living principle underlying every existing plant. And Goethe identifies that principle with (the circle of life of) a leaf. All parts of the plant can be understood as moments or stages of the development of a leaf, each being a variation of the other and of a common theme.⁷⁰ There is no actual primordial plant “out there” which could be put in front of me. However, in the process of being confronted with exemplary cases, I start seeing all plants, and all their developmental stages, as variations of one another.

In Goethe’s “Metamorphose der Tiere,” too, the recipient of the poem is meant to undergo a process of observation and contemplation leading to an intuitive, synthetic grasp of certain relational aspects of nature. By the end of the poem, the recipient should be able “to re-conceive” (*nachzudenken*, verse 57) productive nature with respect to the origin, growth, and transformations of animals. More specifically, Goethe aims “to establish a type against which all mammals would have to be proven for similarities and differences; just as I had previously searched for a primordial plant (*Urpflanze*), I now strived for finding the primordial animal (*Urtier*), which in the end means: the concept, the idea of animal.”⁷¹ So, again, his aim is to grasp a “primordial appearance” or “primordial phenomenon” (*Urphänomen*) within a domain of nature or natural experience.⁷² By means of a series of observations a necessary connection between the different parts and single occurrences is recognized. The observations now appear as variations of a common theme and provide knowledge about all possible individual occurrences and parts. The most striking example and indeed exemplification of this type of scientific work are Goethe’s own investigations in osteology. Seeking the relevant series and transformations in and of cranial bones, Goethe himself found (or at least he claimed to have demonstrated the presence of) the intermaxillary bone in humans.⁷³

The “Metamorphose der Tiere” starts off with the phrase “Dare you ...” (*Wagt ihr...*) and ends with “certainty” (*Gewissheit*). Thus, as it was for the early Greek poets, the aim is to lead the recipient of the poem to immutable and certain knowledge. Moreover, Goethe even claims “the lips

⁶⁹ See also Sewell 1960, 191–8, 222–9 and 253–5.

⁷⁰ See Nassar 2011, 75.

⁷¹ See Goethe, WA II/6, 19–20 (“Hierbei fühlte ich bald die Notwendigkeit einen Typus aufzustellen, an welchem alle Säugetiere nach Übereinstimmung und Verschiedenheit zu prüfen wären, und wie ich früher die Urpflanze aufgesucht, so trachtete ich nunmehr das Urtier zu finden, das heißt denn doch zuletzt: den Begriff, die Idee des Tiers.”)

⁷² See Goethe, WA II/11, 148 (letter to Knebel, 16 July 1798).

⁷³ See Wells 1967.

of the Muse” as the warrant for this indeed “lovely complete certainty” (verses 59–61).⁷⁴

Given Goethe’s aim to write a single all-embracing poem about nature and natural philosophy, one might wonder about other poems he wrote on related topics. For even though the origin and growth of plants and animals would be important parts of his enterprise, the project of a comprehensive poem of nature should encompass other topics as well, especially physics and cosmology. Indeed, Goethe repeatedly emphasized their importance as well as his intention to versify on what he took to be the “primordial phenomenon” of all physics: magnetism.⁷⁵ Goethe even went as far as to claim that polarity, as it occurs in magnetism, is a “symbol” for all experiencing of nature. This latter thought as well as the general reliance on magnetism nicely illustrate Goethe’s adherence to the *Naturphilosophie* of Schelling during that period.⁷⁶

However, after 1800 Goethe abandoned the project of writing a single all-embracing poem of nature in a Lucretian vein. The strengthening diversification and deepening of scientific inquiry worked against such a unified project.⁷⁷ But this did not mean for Goethe a full renunciation of his effort toward writing nature poetry.

The next work to be mentioned is indeed *Faust*, Goethe’s famous *Weltgedicht*. Based on its metric form and some of its philosophical notes and implications, it is sometimes claimed to stand in the tradition of didactic poetry.⁷⁸ In particular, his claims that all elements of nature bear a secret inner relationship to each other and that each human is a microcosm reflecting the macrocosm are reminiscent of his ideas about primordial phenomena. Moreover, even though *Faust* is a single poem, the fragmentation of knowledge is a prominent theme in it. Famously, Faust claims that, after studying philosophy, jurisprudence, medicine, and

⁷⁴ Goethe, WA I/3, 91: “Hier stehe nun still und wende die Blicke / Rückwärts, prüfe, vergleiche, und nimm vom Munde der Muse, / Daß du schauest, nicht schwärmst, die liebliche volle Gewißheit.”

⁷⁵ See, again, Goethe, WA II/11, 148: “Der Magnet ist ein Urphänomen, das man nur aussprechen darf, um es erklärt zu haben; dadurch wird es dann auch ein Symbol für alles übrige, wofür wir keine Worte noch Namen zu suchen brauchen.” (“Magnetism is a primordial phenomenon, which one is allowed to pronounce only, to have explained it. It thus becomes a symbol for all that remains, for which we need not seek for words nor names.”)

⁷⁶ See Schelling SW I/2 and I/4, passim.

⁷⁷ See, e.g., Goethe in a conversation with Boisserée, 3 October 1815 (discussed and quoted in Nisbet 1986, 110).

⁷⁸ See, e.g., Böhme 2000. For a different interpretation see, e.g., Albertsen 1967, 28.

theology, “I stand, no wiser than before.”⁷⁹ So the point is, again, that for comprehending the world, (propositional) textbook knowledge is insufficient. Moreover, the means to overcome fragmentation is strongly reminiscent of the metamorphosis poems. Not unlike the “crush of flowers” encountered in the garden, Faust now undergoes a “crush of experiences” in different constellations such as Auerbach’s cellar or Walpurgis night to learn and apprehend life as a whole.⁸⁰

A little later, about 1815, Goethe once more reflected on the problem of writing a single unified poem of nature versus producing fragments about natural philosophy. Remembering his earlier efforts, Goethe now maintained that the two metamorphosis poems show that the classic (unified) form of didactic poetry is “too much constrained” and that one should better pick up “single thoughts [...] which can be later arranged to form a whole.”⁸¹ Or, to put it into the phrasing from above: maybe the two metamorphosis poems, together with other poems, can be read as variations which make a common theme of nature audible.

Five years later, Goethe adjusted his own efforts accordingly. When asked to return to the project of versifying in a Lucretian manner, he did not come up with a single unified poem but compiled some of his earlier poems and added some newly written ones covering additional topics in natural philosophy. This collection, finished presumably between October 1821 and May 1822, finally appeared in 1827 under the title *Gott und Welt*.⁸²

Even though this collection has no closed poetical format, it is very much indebted to systematic aspects of a versified version of a *historía perì phýseos*; that is, a presentation of the origin, growth, and result of nature in a broad sense. This indebtedness can be most easily shown by a quick run through the single poems, which cover all core areas of natural philosophy, from cosmology and physics to biology and anthropology.

The collection starts off with a proemium advocating a typically Goethean synthetic-qualitative (rather than analytic-quantitative) method in natural enquiry.⁸³ Next, there are four poems on cosmology which all stress the transitory and process-like character of nature. One of these poems,

⁷⁹ See Goethe, WA I/14, verse 359 (*Faust*): “Da steh’ ich nun, ich armer Tor, / Und bin so klug als wie zuvor.”

⁸⁰ See again Goethe, WA I/14, and also Böhme 2000.

⁸¹ Goethe in a conversation with Boisserée, 3 October 1815; here quoted from Albertsen 1967, 364.

⁸² See Goethe, WA I/3, 71–111. For the discussion see Seele 2008.

⁸³ See Goethe, WA I/3, 71: “Du zählst nicht mehr, berechnest keine Zeit. Und jeder Schritt ist Unermeßlichkeit.” (“You no longer count the moments or calculate the time. And every step is infinity.”)

“Weltseele,” was written between 1798 and 1802 and was strongly influenced by a work of Schelling bearing the same name (and to which I will come back below).⁸⁴ The poem describes the creation of the world, from an initial emanation of light, followed by the genesis of planetary systems and the Earth’s atmosphere, to the origin of organic life, and ending with “the first pair” of humans—all understood as a huge, single, and evolving process.⁸⁵ The other three poems of this group treat, among other things, the change of seasons and the maturation and degeneration of fruit as well as of human beings. All these poems contain various allegories and personifications so as to evoke a certain feeling of closeness, if not kinship, with the physical objects described. And this might now be interpreted as forming part of Goethe’s intention to, as already quoted, “represent the intuition of nature rhythmically.” Different objects, phenomena, and experiences are in tune or resonance in the sense of being understandable as variations of one another.

The subsequent group includes the two metamorphosis poems, embedding them into a kind of dialogic arrangement known from classical comedy (parabase, epirrhema, antepirrhema). Once more, one of the main issues here is the relation between the general and the particular.⁸⁶ That is, the issue is how to understand something as being an exemplar, or a variation, of an underlying theme. (I will come back to this below.)

Next, there are three poems on the theory of clouds, one of which, “Howard’s Ehrengedächtnis,” comes close to classical didactic poetry. This poem is based on the insights of the British amateur meteorologist Luke Howard, who had provided a classification system for clouds. Goethe now interprets (or rather “dynamizes”) this typology in terms of a life cycle of a single cloud.⁸⁷ That is, Goethe takes clouds to be like living organisms, exhibiting an inner force or gestalt drive. In referring to Howard, Goethe acknowledges again the importance of the intermediate step of analysing and naming phenomena. To a naïve observer, the sky may be filled with a “crush” of clouds—just like the “crush of flowers” in a garden, but thanks to Howard, this crush resolves into a distinguishable order. Now it is Goethe who takes

⁸⁴ See Sørensen 1996, 280–3.

⁸⁵ See Goethe, WA I/3, 77–8.

⁸⁶ See, e.g., Goethe, WA I/3, 84 and 88; that is, “Parabase,” verses 5–6: “‘Tis the eternal One and All, variously revealed” (“Und es ist das ewig Eine, das sich vielfach offenbart”); “Epirrhema,” verses 1-2 and 9-10: “Students of nature, make this your goal: Heed the specimen, heed the Whole ... What’s alive cannot be One, it’s always manifold.” (“Müset im Naturbetrachten, immer eins wie alles achten; [...] kein Lebendiges ist ein Eins, immer ist’s ein Vieles”).

⁸⁷ See Goethe, WA II/7, passim. See also Nisbet 1996 and Wellbery 2013.

the second, synthetic step of showing each cloud to be in permanent metamorphosis, always exhibiting a variation of the common underlying primordial cloud phenomenon. Terminological categorisations, such as Howard's or Linnaeus's, are important to begin with, but then the point is to understand the transitional and transformational character of all appearances.⁸⁸ Finally, the life cycle—the atmospheric rise and fall, as it were—of a cloud serves as an analogy for human cognitive capacities and with the upward striving of the creative mind. Thus, towards the end of the poem we once more, just as in the case of the “Metamorphose der Pflanzen,” learn something about the transformational character of human capabilities which, just like clouds, are parts of nature and thus stand in relations of resonance and harmony.

The collection *Gott und Welt* ends with three poems on color theory. These poems are aimed at Newton's theory of light and color. Once more, Goethe opposes a view which analyses or dissects things into elements and types without acknowledging the unity of a field of phenomena. According to Goethe, Newton just disintegrates the field of color, vision, and light by talking about corpuscles, polarization, and so on.

Looking at the collection *Gott und Welt* as a whole, it is evident that Goethe always aims at an intense and emotionally involved contact with the subject matter. Besides this, *Gott und Welt* covers all major areas of natural philosophy in the sense of a *historía perì phýseos*. The collection provides an account of the origin, growth, and result of nature—covering cosmology and atmospheric phenomena as well as organic life and visual perception. Moreover, the poetic form is meant to “rhythmically transform” recipients or to “make underlying themes audible.” It is not about imparting textbook knowledge but about encouraging something of a transformative character. Thus both the early Greek philosophers and Goethe seem to aim for a state of mind transcending discursive knowledge. The early Greeks aim to transcend “mere opinion” and make (divine) “truth” audible; Goethe aims at an intuitive and tacit knowledge made audible by poetry. But how exactly do Goethe's poetic attempts relate to his theoretical claims in and about natural philosophy?

⁸⁸ See, e.g., Goethe, WA I/3, 97 and 102; that is, “Atmosphäre”, verses 5–6: “To find yourself in the infinite, you must distinguish and then combine” (“Dich im Unendlichen zu finden, musst unterscheiden und dann verbinden”); “Wohl zu merken”, verses 1–4: “And when we have discerned, then we must restore living ingredients to the separated again and enjoy a subsequent life.” (“Und wenn wir unterschieden haben, dann müssen wir lebendige Gaben dem abgesonderten wieder verleihn und uns eines Folge-Lebens erfreuen”).

5. Goethe's Natural Philosophy: Primordial Phenomena and Intuitive Understanding

Goethe's poems about aspects of nature usually start off with a great (and confused) profusion or "crush" of phenomena, whether of clouds or flowers. Next, to handle this profusion, the phenomena are classified into a handful of types. Finally, those types become recognized as the lawfully changing temporal stages or variations ("metamorphoses") of a single underlying theme, the *primordial phenomenon*. This phenomenon is understood in terms of a general gestalt drive, an inner ability to develop a certain form and go through a whole transformational life circle. Moreover, since humans are themselves part of nature, the reported findings often resonate with everyday life. Findings about plants, animals, and clouds find their analogies in claims about human capacities and capabilities. Thus, as with the early Greek philosophers, Goethe's nature poetry often includes guidance how to properly live a life.

Notably, the grasping of the *primordial phenomenon*, which marks the last and decisive step in gaining knowledge about nature, is fundamentally active, and it calls for action on the part of the recipient. Instead of adding more items to a heap of facts, the recipient is urged to comprehend the phenomenon as a dynamic whole. The nature poem's purpose, right from the beginning, is to "in-spire" the recipient—in the original sense of the ancient loanword.

Next, it is striking how Goethe avoids a coherently trimmed terminology because, arguably, such a terminology would hinder an adequate access to the initial crush of natural phenomena. Instead, the diversity in nature is reflected in a shifting and varying diction.⁸⁹ Cognate terms and synonyms are used as variations on a common theme, as it were. Instead of simply "naming" an object, each expression emphasizes something slightly different—just as any individual plant or animal evolves a little differently. This wealth of terminological perspectives leads to mutual clarification. Structural analogies become visible and foster the recipient's grasp of the common theme, the primordial phenomenon.⁹⁰

Gott und Welt prompts something similar on the level of the poems themselves. Instead of presenting a single comprehensive and all-embracing poem, Goethe provides various poems not only about different aspects of nature but also in different forms and metres as well as with varying speakers and addressees. The collection appears as a "crush of poems." As in the case

⁸⁹ See Pörksen 1986, 81–5. See also Böhme 2000.

⁹⁰ See again Pörksen 1986, 81–5.

of the plants, the recipient might then come to recognize classificatory orders and structural variations in those poems and grasp them as a kind of “meta-metamorphoses.” Thus, for the attentive and involved recipient, the collection as a whole might make the theme of a “grand poem of nature” audible.

These considerations gain further evidence by looking at Goethe’s own reflections on didactic poetry, which appeared in 1827, the same year as *Gott und Welt*. In his short essay “Ueber das Lehrgedicht,”⁹¹ Goethe claims didactic poetry should be placed between poetics and rhetoric, and he notes that it is often used for the sake of popularization. A didactic poem is thus an instructive work of art, adorned “with rhythmic euphony and ornament of the power of imagination.”⁹² It allows uniting the opposed elements of “knowledge and power of imagination (*Wissen und Einbildungskraft*) ... in a living body.”⁹³

To better understand Goethe on the power of imagination in didactic poetry, it helps to briefly look at his philosophical background, which was shaped by what is now called classical German philosophy (especially Kant, Fichte, and Schelling) and also by Spinoza. The focus here will be first on Schelling and then on Kant, for around 1799, when Goethe made his early efforts in writing didactic poetry in the vein of Lucretius, Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* itself was at its height, and Goethe’s interaction with Schelling its most intense.⁹⁴

Already in his 1798 work *Von der Weltseele*, Schelling maintains that “the individual objects of nature constitute ... a continuous self-encircling chain of life in which each link is necessary for the whole” and that these objects are “the individual modes of intuition (*Anschauungsweisen*) of the general organism.”⁹⁵ This is strikingly similar to what Goethe will say only a little later about transitions and transformations (“metamorphoses”). In his *Darstellung meines Systems der Philosophie* from 1801, Schelling in turn picks

⁹¹ See Goethe, WA I/41(2), 225–7.

⁹² Goethe, WA I/41(2), 225–6 (“mit rhythmischem Wohlklang und Schmuck der Einbildungskraft”).

⁹³ Goethe, WA I/41(2), 227 (“ein Werk aus Wissen und Einbildungskraft zusammenzuweben [...] in einem lebendigen Körper zu verbinden”).

⁹⁴ See Plath 1901. References to Schelling are to Schelling 1856–61 (*Sämmtliche Werke*; abbreviated as “SW”).

⁹⁵ Schelling, SW I/2, 373 und 500 (“Von dieser Seite betrachtet, bilden die einzelnen Dinge der Natur nicht eine unterbrochene oder ins Endlose auslaufende Reihe, sondern eine stetige, in sich selbst zurückkehrende Lebenskette, in welcher jedes Glied zum Ganzen notwendig ist [...]. Der Organismus ist nicht die Eigenschaft einzelner Naturdinge, sondern umgekehrt, die einzelnen Naturdinge sind ebenso viele Beschränkungen oder einzelne Anschauungsweisen des allgemeinen Organismus”).

up this Goethean terminology by claiming that “the parts of an organism as well as the organism as a whole must be thought of as originating from *metamorphosis*.”⁹⁶ Or, to provide an example from the inanimate part of nature, Schelling maintains that the planetary system originated from a metamorphosis based on the polarity of magnetic forces. According to Schelling “all physical bodies are merely metamorphoses of iron.”⁹⁷ This is not the occasion to judge the sensibleness of these claims. Instead, it is important to see the connection to Goethe’s already mentioned efforts to versify about magnetism and about the evolution of the planetary systems in his poem bearing the Schellingian title “Weltseele.”

In his 1800 *System des transcendentalen Idealismus* Schelling acknowledges that poetry plays an important role in natural philosophy.⁹⁸ He even writes a (rather weary) quatrain in the vein of the “Metamorphose der Pflanzen.”⁹⁹ Afterwards, in his *Philosophie der Kunst* from 1802–3, he affirmatively discusses his ambition for composing a single and all-embracing didactic poem about “the nature of things” in a Lucretian vein.¹⁰⁰ The form of such a poem would not be an arbitrary additive to beautify the content, for Schelling understands the content to be “poetic itself” and the poem itself to be “the reflection of the universe into knowledge.”¹⁰¹ Referring also to the poetic efforts of Xenophanes and Parmenides, the universe is understood here as a *kósmos* in the original sense of the term. It is a developing order which culminates in human art and culture, with indeed the genre of didactic poetry being at the high end of this self-organizing development. Didactic poetry reflects—or one might say, is in resonance with—the universe (nature) in the sense that it provides universal knowledge and depicts its harmony.¹⁰²

Notably, Schelling considers that, given the increasing fragmentation of knowledge, a didactic poem might be able to cover only some limited aspect of nature. For him this is legitimate if that aspect comprises other and general aspects of nature; that is, if that aspect stands out as a variation of an

⁹⁶ Schelling, SW I/4, 207, my emphasis (“Die Organisation im Einzelnen sowohl als im Ganzen muss als durch Metamorphose entstanden gedacht werden”).

⁹⁷ Schelling, SW I/4, 157 (“Alle Körper sind blosse Metamorphosen des Eisens”).

⁹⁸ See Schelling, SW I/3, 628 (“Was wir Natur nennen, ist ein Gedicht, das in geheimer, wunderbarer Schrift verschlossen ist”).

⁹⁹ See Nisbet 1986, 110.

¹⁰⁰ See Schelling, SW I/5, 662–7.

¹⁰¹ Schelling, SW I/5, 666–7 and 664 (“Es gibt daher kein wahres Lehrgedicht, als in welchem unmittelbar oder mittelbar das All selbst, wie es im Wissen reflektiert wird, der Gegenstand ist. Da das Universum der Form und dem Wesen nach nur Eines ist, so kann auch in der Idee nur Ein absolutes Lehrgedicht seyn, von dem alle einzelnen blosse Bruchstücke sind, nämlich das Gedicht *von der Natur der Dinge*”).

¹⁰² See again Schelling, SW I/5, 664.

underlying theme, as an exemplary case for nature in general. Arguably, the polarity of iron would be such an aspect for Schelling. Also think again of Goethe's metamorphosis poems and how, toward their ends, he moves from botany and zoology to broad reflections on human capabilities.

To better understand some of the philosophical background of these claims and how they relate to the imparting of (non-discursive) knowledge, it is helpful to remember Kant's distinction between two sources of human knowledge, namely intuition and understanding, which are both finite.¹⁰³ Combined non-discursive forms of these two sources—that is, intellectual intuition (*intellektuelle Anschauung*) and intuitive understanding (*intuitiver Verstand*)—cannot exist according to Kant. This is because they would suppose infinite mental capacities which finite human beings necessarily lack.¹⁰⁴

Recently, these notions have been discussed intensively by Eckart Förster in his systematic reconstruction of classical German philosophy.¹⁰⁵ According to Förster, progress in philosophy after Kant is synonymous with an explication of one of these non-discursive sources. In this sense, Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* can be viewed as a transcendental philosophical attempt to provide a more fundamental philosophy of subjectivity by promoting and defending the notion of intellectual intuition.¹⁰⁶ In contrast, Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* was bound to fail because he also tried to base it on intellectual intuition. Schelling thereby did not see that, in contrast to a theory of subjectivity, a theory of nature must be based on intuitive understanding.¹⁰⁷ Following Förster, the most advanced natural philosophy directly after Kant was indeed Goethe's attempt, which was partially based on Spinoza's notions of a *natura naturans* and a *scientia intuitiva*.¹⁰⁸

So, what is this so-named intuitive understanding? It is a holistic or integral grasping of something and, hence, is to be distinguished from the creative or productive looking (*Hinschauen*) of intellectual intuition.¹⁰⁹ Intuitive understanding goes from a (structure-endowed) whole to its properties or parts. The paradigm case of such an understanding is that of an organism: its parts appear as necessarily connected to form a whole, and it is only in relation to this whole that one understands the functions and purposes of the parts. Again, this is where the discrepancy with Kant lies: For Kant

¹⁰³ See Kant 1781/87 (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*), A19/B3 and A50–1/B74–5.

¹⁰⁴ See Kant 1790/93 (*Kritik der Urteilskraft*), A335–50/B339–54 (=§§76–7).

¹⁰⁵ See Förster 2012.

¹⁰⁶ See Förster 2012, 185–223.

¹⁰⁷ See Förster 2012, 226–51.

¹⁰⁸ See Förster 2012, 253–76. See also Amrine 2011 and Lange 2011.

¹⁰⁹ Förster 2012, 103–9, 172–82, 250–1, 257–60, 272–6.

understanding is always discursive and goes from the parts to the whole, never from the synthetic whole to the parts.¹¹⁰

As already discussed, for Goethe, intuitive understanding is at work not only in the case of plants but also in many other areas of what today is called natural science—including animals, planets, clouds, and color phenomena. According to Goethe, all of nature is to be understood intuitively: by grasping fundamental structural features as being different stages or metamorphoses of a primordial phenomenon. The point is that by means of such a grasping an infinite manifold (a great profusion or “crush”) of possible instances is intuitively given, but without there being theorems or propositions about the *primordial phenomenon*.¹¹¹

Nature poetry then is meant to spark such a grasping. Poetry, as already mentioned, is surely not the only possible prompt for organizing and illuminating a large field of experience, but it is one with special qualities. Given that a poem cannot itemize a functionally infinite manifold of instances, it must present one or a few as exemplars. And the recipient must grasp such an exemplar as exactly that: as something standing for a whole infinite manifold. The recipient has thus gained some tacit knowledge about “how to go about things” in a given domain of nature. He or she has grasped, as it were, the underlying theme and is now able to recognize other cases and examples as being variations of that theme. The recipient has gained an intuitive understanding.

Goethe explicitly criticises Kant for denying the possibility of an intuitive non-discursive type of understanding in humans.¹¹² After quoting the relevant passage from Kant’s *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Goethe claims that an intuitive way of comprehending is indeed possible when it comes to judgments about nature. Based on his own experience doing natural philosophical investigations, Goethe thus speaks of an intuitive power of judgment (*anschauende Urteilskraft*).¹¹³

¹¹⁰ See, again, Kant 1790/93 (*Kritik der Urteilskraft*), A335–50/B339–54 (=§§76–7); see also Förster 2014, 52.

¹¹¹ See Goethe, WA IV/42, 167 (letter to von Buttel, 3 May 1827): “Ferner ist ein Urphänomen nicht einem Grundsatz gleichzuachten, aus dem sich mannigfaltige Folgen ergeben, sondern anzusehen als eine Grunderscheinung, innerhalb derer das Mannigfaltige anzuschauen ist.” (“Furthermore, a primordial phenomenon is not to be regarded as a principle from which manifold consequences result but is to be regarded as a basic phenomenon within which the manifold is to be viewed.”)

¹¹² See Goethe, WA II/11, 54–5.

¹¹³ Goethe’s short essay (WA II/11, 54–5) indeed bears the title “anschauende Urteilskraft” and the quoted passage is, again, Kant 1790/93 (*Kritik der Urteilskraft*), A345–7/B349–51 (=§77). See also Hindrichs 2011 and 2013.

Notably, one might argue that already for Kant, the power of judgment is neither strictly propositional nor discursive but a kind of knowing-how.¹¹⁴ Being the knowledge of how to judge, the power of judgment, for Kant, is an a priori readiness to synthesize; and it is spontaneous in the sense that it automatically organizes unstructured input in a yet unprecedented way.¹¹⁵ Thus, at least for Goethe an intuitive power of judgment is at play when confronted with a “crush” of flowers or other natural phenomena. It is this power which makes the common theme audible and which leads to an immediate, spontaneous, and receptive understanding which, technically speaking, provides itself with an intuition. According to Goethe, natural phenomena can be grasped in such a fashion, even though their temporal extension usually transcends the limits of a unified sensual intuition (just think of planets and plants here). Thanks to the integrative power of judgment, a unified knowledge of a progression is gained, a general sense of its direction and all its transitional states.

Note also the structural resemblances here to the workings of the power of imagination (*Einbildungskraft*). In so-called “free play,” although the power of imagination reaches out for a concept which is meant to fully grasp the phenomena under consideration, the power can never be sure of its concept. There is no exhaustible list or series of final judgments, but instead an “unutterable fullness of thoughts” (*unnennbare Gedankenfülle*).¹¹⁶ However, whereas Kant discusses this exclusively in the context of aesthetic reflection, Goethe now applies it to the context of natural philosophy (which, for Kant, would not be the place for a “free play” of cognitive capacities). Besides, and as already mentioned, Goethe relates this power directly to the notion of intuition and also to didactic poetry.¹¹⁷

Two additional remarks about these two integrative powers of judgment and imagination:¹¹⁸ First, note that these powers keep the mind in check, so to speak. Otherwise, as Kant emphasizes in his *Anthropologie*, searching for similarities in a crush of phenomena might easily become a process of arbitrary association and “silliness.”¹¹⁹ This is exactly the problem which

¹¹⁴ See, e.g., Kant 1781/87, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A69/B94, A50/B74, B132.

¹¹⁵ Whereas, e.g., in Descartes and Leibniz innate ideas provide a stable basis for judgment, Kant’s view on the power of judgment is much more procedure based. And one may argue—though, admittedly, this is a controversial claim within Kant scholarship—that this a priori readiness to synthesize occurs not only on a discursive or conceptual level but also on an intuitive and non-discursive one (see, e.g., Hanna 2006, Ch. 1).

¹¹⁶ Kant 1790/93 (*Kritik der Urteilkraft*), A325/B329 (=§53).

¹¹⁷ See “Entwurf einer Vorrede zu Knebels Lucrez-Übersetzung” in Goethe, WA I/42(2), 448–52.

¹¹⁸ Regarding the functional similarities between these two powers see also Centi 2001.

¹¹⁹ See Kant 1798 (*Anthropologie*), §46. See also Gabriel 2009, 35–47.

Goethe addresses when, in the “Metamorphose der Tiere” (verse 59), he says that one must not “rave about” (*schwärmen*) but “see” (*schauen*) the primordial animal. Second, this also nicely reinforces why for Goethe, other than for Kant, this goes along with an *intuitive* understanding.¹²⁰ It is not that some individual transitions are known (or “seen”) discursively. All concrete intermediate states form a kind of dense series, and the transitions from each state to the next are all immediately grasped at once.¹²¹ Thus, all possible stages of a plant, to stay with this example, and all its infinitely many transformations are intuitively grasped at once and are grasped in their structural ordering as being variations of a leaf—where “leaf” is now understood as a primal phenomenon, not as a concrete specimen nor as a principle for deriving scientific propositions.

Accordingly, the knowledge which is thus gained is not discursive. Even though one can describe any series of experiments or observations by discursive means, the transitional and transformational relations between the single phenomena are graspable only intuitively. Of course, this is not to deny the importance of those numerous comparative and serially ordered observations that form the basis for such a transition or transformation; nor is it to deny that this new grasp then applies to individual cases and implies the ability to single out invariant aspects. However, it is only from the grasped totality that the single case is truly understood. There is, as Goethe claims, “nothing behind the phenomena, they themselves are the theory”: “the general and the particular coincide, the particular is the general as it appears under various conditions.”¹²² The proper intuition of a particular instance immediately gives a “clear view” (*Übersicht*) over the whole array of possibilities.¹²³ Or, to put into my own terms from above: The common

¹²⁰ Notably, both capacities, the power of imagination and the power of judgment, relate to understanding. Thus, allowing for an *intuitive* understanding would be expected to have an impact on both powers. See also Förster 2012, 259–63, and Förster 2014, 54.

¹²¹ Since audition is an important theme of this paper, the following aural phenomenon might emblemize some (surely not all) important aspects of such a transition or transformation: If clicks (or simple beats) are presented at a rather slow rate, they are heard as such; that is, as individual clicks (or beats). However, if the presentation rate increases, at some point the clicks are no longer perceived as individual clicks but as a continuous tone with increasing pitch. Maybe this phenomenon exemplifies, as it were, a “crush of sound-bits” which, after a series of separate individual (and pitch-less) perceptions, gives rise to a new kind of continuous perception (namely an ongoing tone with an increasing pitch).

¹²² Goethe, WA II/11, 131 and 129 (“Man suche nur nichts hinter den Phänomenen; sie selbst sind die Lehre”; “Das Allgemeine und Besondere fallen zusammen: das Besondere ist das Allgemeine, unter verschiedenen Bedingungen erscheinend”).

¹²³ See Goethe, WA I/35, 87 (“eine Anschauung der einzelnen Gestalt und eine Übersicht des Ganzen”).

theme is made audible by means of variations, and there are indeed nothing but variations (of variations).

What happens in the recipient then is a change in his or her propositional attitudes and convictions, a “gestalt shift” so to speak. This change, however, is itself nothing propositional. According to Goethe the workings of the intuitive powers of judgment and imagination are something one cannot speak of directly.¹²⁴ Also, remember Goethe’s terminological variations here: For him a single word can never replace what is to be grasped. There is no single concept to be pinned down. Instead, various cognates are needed for, at best, a discursive approximation. Thus, those words should rather be understood as variations which make the common theme audible. Hence, writing poems about or in natural philosophy is not just idle padding. It is meant to induce something in the recipient which transcends the standard distinction between science and art.¹²⁵

This, however, leads back to Kant’s worry about arbitrary associations. How can one be sure to be really “seeing” (*schauen*)—or, for that matter, hearing—rather than merely “raving about” (*schwärmen*)? This, I think, can only be answered with reference to subsequent scientific work. If Goethe finds the premaxilla bone based on his ideas about continuous transitions and every animal being a variation of an *Urtier*, then this indicates that he really “saw” something. However, if this remains the only successful application and if, based on later knowledge about anatomy and evolution, Goethe’s finding appears to be just a lucky coincidence, then, of course, one will have to call him a “dreamer” (*Schwärmer*).¹²⁶

6. Grasping by Analogy and Making Themes Audible

Poems and aphorisms often appear to be nothing more than an entertaining way to convey information to the recipient. They may be charming ways to present something, often providing some catchy (and hence easily memorizable) phrases which allow for handy instant comments.¹²⁷ This is particularly true for early Greek philosophy with poets such as Xenophanes, Parmenides, and Empedocles and aphorists such as Heraclitus. However, memorability is not the only reason for using poetry and aphorisms and by

¹²⁴ See Hindrichs 2011, 58.

¹²⁵ See, e.g., Goethe, WA II/6, 139, and WA II/11, 51.

¹²⁶ The same holds true, of course, also for current and non-poetic cases where scientists “rave about” more or less all natural phenomena as being variations of a common theme (think of slogans such as “it from bit” here).

¹²⁷ Fricke 1990.

no means the historically most persistent nor the epistemologically most relevant one.

The early Greek poets, as discussed, were engaging in a *historía perì phýseos*; that is, an enquiry into the origin, growth, and result of nature. Later nature poets, most famously Lucretius, turned out to be working on the same kind of single and comprehensive literary framework. Finally, Goethe also fit into that tradition even though with him the development more or less came to an end, which was, roughly speaking, due to the immense increase and fragmentation of scientific knowledge. Goethe's later attempt to cope with this new situation was to abandon strict unity and to provide his audience with a collection of poems—poems different in form and style, poems about different areas of science, but together still covering all main areas of a proper *historía perì phýseos* and still meant to induce knowledge by means of intuitive understanding. Those poems are meant as variations which, taken together, still make a common theme audible.

Accordingly, the insights and knowledge presented in Goethe's as well as in the early Greek poems are in part non-discursive and non-propositional. Not everything can be laid out adequately in a rational argument; rather, there are “things” that can be made audible to the recipient in a way that prompts a change or new dimension in her or his experience. Accordingly, it is the lively report of an individual experience, rather than a formal inference, which is used as such a prompt.

By the same token, the experiences or cases presented in a nature poem are meant to be *exemplary* ones. What is presented are one or maybe a few variations but never *the* variation nor *all* the (infinitely many) variations. The point is to display and grasp the general in the particular—to grasp the common theme or what Goethe called the *primordial phenomenon*.

However, how to know what an example is, and isn't, an example of?¹²⁸ Fortunately, there is at least one branch of human knowledge where it is evident that individual cases can “exemplify” general properties: mathematics. And maybe it is not by chance that the two periods under consideration here, namely the formative period of Greek philosophy and the period of classical German philosophy, saw huge advances in the mathematical description of nature. Maybe the success of mathematics was taken to be partially due to the specific way it gains insights.

In mathematics something general can be shown (even proven) by investigating only a single case—such as, for instance, proving the sum of the

¹²⁸ On “exemplification” see, e.g., Goodman 1976, 52–7. See also Gabriel 2009, 46, and Kant 1798 (*Anthropologie*), §44, on the notion of “wit” (*ingenium*).

angles of *any* triangle to be 180° (in Euclidean space) by examining only one triangle. Once the individual case is grasped, it is evident that it applies to any possible case.

Comparing this to natural philosophy, what differs is the propositional content. Having grasped the mathematical proof, one knows *that* the angles sum up to 180° . In the case of natural philosophy, one is also shown something (plant samples, say) and one also grasps something, namely the primordial phenomenon. However, this “being shown something” or “grasping something” does not result in a propositional content in the same sense. There is no final botanical theorem and, in this case, “being shown something” is not equivalent to being shown “something to be an X” or “that X is the case”.

To put things into a nutshell: In the case of natural philosophy, there is an underdetermination problem—and exemplarity is supposed to be the remedy. The worry is that underdetermination might easily lead to a “silly” (to pick up Kant’s term) overflow of associations. Hence, Xenophanes, Parmenides, and Empedocles implicitly claimed a special mental capacity of humans, namely the ability to exemplarily grasp and scrutinize divine inspiration. Later, Goethe proclaimed a human capacity of “intuitive understanding” or “intuitive power of judgment.” In both cases, however, this mental capacity is meant to grasp the infinite in the finite. For Goethe as well as for the early Greek poets, there exists a specific human capacity which allows us to grasp something as being exemplary.

This capacity works like a “hidden compass” in an immediately given natural environment which then appears in a somehow harmonized and integrated fashion.¹²⁹ The accuracy of this hidden compass, however, can never be proven directly or by discursive means. This is also what drives those thinkers towards writing poetry. Non-discursive claims cannot be made directly. So alternative forms of presentation are sought, here rhythm and meter appear as particularly promising ways to, as it were, make things resonate and make underlying themes audible. Nature poetry thus gives rise to something in between cognizing propositional content and sensing (hearing) temporal pattern.¹³⁰

Just to repeat a point from above: This is not meant to say that poetry is the only means for prompting non-discursive knowledge. Of course, being an apprentice in a lab is an outstanding way to gain a lot of non-discursive, especially tacit, knowledge. And there are other genres of literature as well.

¹²⁹ See Gabriel 1990, 15.

¹³⁰ See Lerdahl 2001.

The reading of a textbook or of, for instance, Darwin's *Origin of Species* can be "inspiring" and might also prompt non-discursive knowledge. Arguably, however, it is not as strongly intended as in the case of poetry, where rhythm and meter are the immediate vehicles to "make a theme audible."

Note also the different auditory qualities when reading out loud texts of different genres. The way prose is read out loud usually differs from the way a poem is. And this seems true for reading out loud as well as for silent reading to oneself. Arguably, one's inner voice when reading a poem sounds different from the way it sounds when, say, reading a textbook, and an internally read verse seems closer to a heard utterance than to a written manifestation of a proposition.¹³¹ Also note that, in comparison with other sense modalities, hearing is particularly aggregative and harmonizing, synthesizing rather than analysing.¹³² Thus, the idea of "making a theme audible" in natural philosophy really reaches to the level of the perceptual.¹³³ Or, as Goethe himself put it in 1823: "All our attention must be directed to *listening in (abzulauschen)* on nature's procedures."¹³⁴ That is, by means of careful listening we experience the fundamental structure of nature and are even able to, as it were, recite and predict natural phenomena.

All these aural connotations nicely link up not only with Goethe's natural philosophy but also with what has been said above about the early Greek philosophers. However, to not ride roughshod over important differences here: Of course, Goethe no longer lives in a primarily oral society, and by his time the general conditions for producing (memorable) poems had changed substantially.¹³⁵ Next, the occasional invocations of muses in Goethe do not fulfil the same function as in Parmenides and Empedocles. Goethe surely thinks differently about the divine origin of rhythmically presented knowledge and about the human capacities involved. However, an important part of the epistemological and "missionary" background remains the same: The main concern is still to impart non-discursive knowledge in relation to the origin, growth, and result of nature; to make a common theme audible and to initiate in the recipient an "aha" moment in the sense of an active grasp of natural phenomena organizing a large field of experience. Differences, however, lie in the specific nature of that non-discursive knowledge or common theme: In the case of the early Greeks, what is at stake

¹³¹ See Ong 2012, 32 and 71–3.

¹³² See Fiumara 1990 as well as Sieroka 2009 and 2015.

¹³³ See Hillebrandt 2022, entitled "Reading with the Ears" (*Mit den Ohren lesen*), even though the book focusses on poets not discussed in the present context.

¹³⁴ Goethe, WA II/7, 76, my emphasis ("Unsere ganze Aufmerksamkeit muss aber darauf gerichtet sein, der Natur ihre Verfahren abzulauschen").

¹³⁵ See Goody 1977, 26–7.

is especially the evidential status—that, what is heard, is “truth” rather than “mere opinion”—and this status cannot be convincingly claimed by prosaic means. In the case of Goethe, the point is about intuitive understanding—about grasping infinitely many (possible) phenomena all in one sweep—and, similarly, this cannot happen in terms of propositional claims.

7. Aftermath: Current Replacements

Considering contemporary literature, two ways of writing come to mind as possible modern successors or replacements of nature poetry: works of popular science and philosophical aphorisms and fragments.

Like popular science today, nature poetry was often used as a handy tool for providing a wider audience with scientific insights in a digestible form. This was true for Hellenistic didactic poetry and is also a hallmark of pre-Goethean German didactic poetry during the eighteenth century. The works of poets such as Gottsched and von Haller are mostly efforts to popularize scientific knowledge for mathematically uneducated laypersons.¹³⁶ Thus, modern popular science may be viewed as a partial replacement of such poetry—even more so, since grasping by analogy plays a fundamental role in both genres. Given that contemporary scientific theories often go far beyond everyday knowledge and experience, popularization frequently implies the building up of analogies. This build-up is a very delicate enterprise in which, at least ideally, the role of the popularizer is like that of the muses in antiquity. He or she has to warrant the truth and mediate between a domain of higher (scientific) knowledge and the down-to-earth everyday understanding of laypersons.¹³⁷ Moreover, popular science texts often show didactic and rhetorical features that are congenial to didactic poetry rather than academic publishing. The imagery used in the analogies is often very strong and sometimes even stirring, there is often an extended use of emotional adjectives and verbs, and sometimes the reader is even addressed directly. As in nature poetry, the point is to involve the recipient on an immediate experiential level—to, as it were, strike a chord with him or her.

Philosophical aphorisms and fragments can be viewed as possible successors or replacements for nature poetry as well. This is because they, too, react in a specific way to the fragmentation of human knowledge. Writing self-sufficient aphorisms or perspectival fragments is a way to counteract the

¹³⁶ See Albertsen 1967, 159–315.

¹³⁷ See Tetens 2006, 241.

build-up of a single, unified, and comprehensive theory.¹³⁸ Authors that immediately might come to mind here are Nietzsche and the later Wittgenstein.¹³⁹ It comes as no surprise that the former was strongly influenced by the early Greek philosophers. Heraclitus, as already mentioned, had a very prominent aphoristic style (and was indeed hoping to make the *lógos* audible). Nietzsche picked up on that, and it allowed him to find a new language for, often non-discursive, philosophical insights. Again, the presentation is meant to strike a chord with the recipient – it is indeed full of aural allusions and poetic elements¹⁴⁰ – and to impart something of therapeutic character, helping people to lead their lives.

Wittgenstein's fragmentary style is not so much indebted to an engagement with early Greek philosophers, but some of his philosophical convictions closely resemble those of Goethe. On the one hand, this is due to the general missionary or therapeutic character of the *Philosophische Untersuchungen*.¹⁴¹ On the other, the concrete aims and the methodological means for achieving them are strikingly similar to Goethe's. Wittgenstein refers to Goethe even explicitly. Just like Goethe—who was talking about gaining a “clear view” (*Übersicht*) by putting phenomena into a serial order, investigating their transitional character, and then intuitively grasping the primordial phenomenon—Wittgenstein aspires a “clear” or “perspicuous representation” (*übersichtliche Darstellung*) which “produces just that understanding which consists in ‘seeing the connexions.’ Hence the importance of finding and inventing intermediate cases.”¹⁴²

¹³⁸ On the distinction between fragment and aphorism see Frank & Soldati 1989, 34.

¹³⁹ See, e.g., Nietzsche 1988, vol. 3 (*Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft*), and Wittgenstein 1984a (*Philosophische Untersuchungen*).

¹⁴⁰ For instance, *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft* (Nietzsche 1988, vol. 3) starts with a “Prelude in German Rhymes” (*Vorspiel in deutschen Reimen*) and ends with “Songs of Prince Vogelfrei” (*Lieder des Prinzen Vogelfrei*); “listening” and “listening to someone” (*hören, gehorchen*) are very prominent concepts in *Also sprach Zarathustra* (Nietzsche 1988, vol. 4), especially in part II; and fifteen years after writing *Die Geburt der Tragödie* Nietzsche criticises himself for *not having sung* the content of that book (“ich hätte *singen* sollen”—Nietzsche 1988, vol. 1, 15).

¹⁴¹ See Wittgenstein 1984a (*Philosophische Untersuchungen*), §309: “Das Ziel der Philosophie – der Fliege den Ausweg aus dem Fliegenglas zeigen” (“What is your aim in philosophy? To show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle”). Notably, a similar therapeutic mission is already present in his *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (Wittgenstein 1984a) when he distinguishes between saying and showing—see Section “Introduction” above. At this early stage, however, there are neither obvious and immediate stylistic consequences, nor does the reference to Goethe play a prominent role.

¹⁴² Wittgenstein 1984a (*Philosophische Untersuchungen*), §122 (“Die übersichtliche Darstellung vermittelt das Verständnis, welches eben darin besteht, dass wir die ‚Zusammenhänge sehen‘. Daher die Wichtigkeit des Findens und Erfindens von Zwischengliedern”). See also Wittgenstein 1984b (*Bemerkungen über die Philosophie der Psychologie*), §950: “Naturgeschichte beschreibt, sagen wir, Pflanzen und Tiere. Aber könnte es nicht sein,

So, once more, this is about grasping a profusion of cases all in one sweep, about prompting the organization of a large field of experience. This grasping, again, is not a cognizing of propositional content but a sensing of pattern. So maybe, instead of “perspicuous representation,” “making a theme audible” is indeed the more suitable phrase for the underlying aspiration. And examples of such “themes” that could be “(transiently) heard” rather than “(manifestly) seen” would be Parmenides’s *alétheia*, Heraclitus’s *lógos*, and Goethe’s *Urphänomen*.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Richard Allen, Christoph Riedweg, Georg Mohr, Karl Ameriks, Rafael Ferber, David W. Wood, and two anonymous referees for all their helpful and encouraging remarks on earlier variations of this paper.

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daß Pflanzen in allen Einzelheiten beschrieben worden wären, und nun erst jemand daherkäme, der Analogien in ihrem Baue sieht, die man früher nicht gesehen hatte? Daß er also eine neue Ordnung in diesen Beschreibungen herstellt. Er sagt z.B.: ‘Vergleiche nicht diesen Teil mit diesem; sondern vielmehr mit jenem!’ (Goethe wollte so etwas tun). Und dabei spricht er nicht notwendigerweise von Abstammung; dennoch könnte die neue Anordnung auch der wissenschaftlichen Untersuchung eine neue Richtung geben. Er sagt ‘Sieh es so an!’ – und das kann nun verschiedenerlei Vorteile und Folgen haben.’ (“Well, natural history describes, say, plants and animals. But could it not be that plants have been described in all their detail, and then someone turns up and notices analogies in their structure that nobody had noticed before? So he imposes an order on these descriptions. He says, e.g. ‘Don’t compare this part with that; rather, with this other one!’ (Goethe wanted to do some such thing.) And in so doing, he is not necessarily speaking of descent, but nevertheless the new way of arrangement might also give scientific investigation a new direction. He says ‘Look at it in this way!’—and this may have advantages and consequences of different kinds.”)

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Symphilosophie

Revue internationale de philosophie romantique

« Théorie du vrai ciel »

Le Brouillon général de Novalis comme cosmographie de l'invisible

Anama Kotlarevsky*

ABSTRACT: This article argues that Novalis's theoretical fragments, in particular *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, by their very structure indicate a manner of reading, or more precisely, furnish a *vision* of the philosophical principles that underlie Novalis's entire romantic work. In line with the Novalisian principle of qualitative exponentiation, the image of the written sign extends to the image of the fragment, then to that of the draft (*brouillon*). This sets the scene as it were for a veritable "architectonic of the visible" world. An architectonic of this kind opens up a space for understanding the romantic stakes that require the perpetual reciprocity of contradictory phenomena – e.g. visible, invisible; ideality, materiality; rationality, sensibility. This formal and aesthetic approach to the *Brouillon* reveals the totalizing aspirations of Novalis's philosophical romanticism on the one hand and highlights his heuristics on the other: that there are infinite ways of *seeing* magical idealism-realism. I conclude that the *Brouillon* is a romantic *cosmography* – a writing about the inner invisible universe.

Keywords: Novalis, *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, cosmography, image, aesthetics, visible, invisible

RÉSUMÉ : Le présent article avance l'hypothèse selon laquelle les fragments théoriques de Novalis, et notamment *Le Brouillon général*, indiquent par leur forme même une manière de lire les principes philosophiques régissant l'œuvre romantique de Novalis, ou plus précisément qu'ils les *donnent à voir*. L'image même du signe écrit, étendue à l'image du fragment, puis à celle du brouillon en vertu du principe novalissien d'exponentiation qualitative, met en scène une véritable « *architectonique* du visible ». Cette architectonique-là ouvre un espace de compréhension des enjeux romantiques qui exige une perpétuelle interaction de phénomènes contradictoires – visible, invisible ; idéalité, matérialité ; rationalité, sensibilité... Une approche formelle et esthétique du *Brouillon général* permet, selon nous, de mettre en évidence l'aspiration totalisante du romantisme de Novalis ainsi que son heuristique : elle montre l'infinité des manières de *voir* l'idéalisme-réalisme magique. Nous en tirons la conclusion que le *Brouillon général* est une *cosmographie* romantique : l'écriture de l'univers intérieur, invisible.

Mots-clés : Novalis, *Le Brouillon général*, cosmographie, image, esthétique, visible, invisible

* Boursière de l'*Istituto Italiano per gli Studi Filosofici* de Naples, Palazzo Serra di Cassano, Via Monte di Dio, 14, 80132 Napoli, Italie / Master 2 en philosophie, École Normale Supérieure (ENS), 45 rue d'Ulm, 75005 Paris, France – anama.kotlaf@gmail.com

1. Introduction

50. ENCYCLOPÉDISTIQUE. La physique transcendantale est la première science mais la plus inférieure. [...] Elle s'occupe de la nature avant qu'elle ne devienne nature – dans cet état où mélange et mouvement (matière et force) sont encore un. Son objet est le chaos. Transformation du chaos en un Ciel et une *terre* harmonieux. / Concept du ciel. Théorie du vrai ciel – de l'univers intérieur. / Le Ciel est l'âme du système solaire – et celui-ci est son corps¹.

Le fragment ci-dessus est tiré du *Brouillon général*, un ensemble de fragments rédigés par Novalis entre 1798 et 1799. Le poète et philosophe (entre autres) désigne ce projet de construction panthomatique par le terme d'*encyclopédistique*, qu'il modèle, précise et complexifie sans cesse comme un noyau autour duquel tout gravite. *Encyclopédistique*, le mot dérive évidemment d'encyclopédie mais, ici, ce qui importe ne réside pas tant dans la substance de la définition que dans les *relations* entre chacun des fragments. Le néologisme *Encyclopaedistik*, « Novalis l'a forgé en le démarquant à la fois de l'encyclopédie en tant que produit (*Encyclopädie*) et de l'encyclopédie en tant que genre (*Encyclopädik*), conformément aux trois termes allemands différents employés par lui². » Cette distinction permet de souligner l'infini qualitatif de la méthode heuristique de l'encyclopédistique par rapport à la thésaurisation des savoirs que recouvre, quant à elle, l'idée d'encyclopédie. L'*encyclopédistique* est une science de la découverte qui vise à devenir une science universelle et absolue. Cette science serait rendue possible précisément parce qu'elle agit d'après un principe de relation, d'abord entre tous les domaines de la connaissance, puis de la connaissance à l'inconnu qu'elle pourrait faire advenir, découvrir comme tel.

Le fragment 50 du *Brouillon général* relie l'encyclopédistique à un système cosmique. En postulant un concept de *ciel*, Novalis renvoie à toute une tradition de la science et de la physique. La diversité des influences de Novalis est trop étendue pour en dresser tout le tableau, mais pour comprendre la *théorie du vrai ciel* dont il est question, il est d'abord nécessaire de regarder l'histoire de l'astronomie et l'évolution de la conception du monde, ou pour reprendre le mot de Koyré, celle du passage d'un *monde clos* à *l'univers infini*.

Le traité de Kant, *Histoire naturelle générale et théorie du ciel* de 1755, sur les mouvements régissant l'univers d'après les lois de la mécanique

¹ Novalis, *Le Brouillon général*, fragment 50, trad. O. Schefer, Paris, Allia, 2000, p. 30-31.

² L. Cahen-Maurel, « Vers une "science totale" : l'encyclopédistique vivante de Novalis », *Klesis – Revue Philosophique*, n°42, 2018, p. 86.

newtonienne, semble sous-jacent à la théorie novalissienne du « vrai ciel » explicitée dans la section qui suit (section 2). Cette théorie vise, moyennant l'encyclopédistique du *Brouillon général*, l'harmonisation de l'infini de l'univers intérieur de l'esprit avec l'infini de l'univers extérieur. La troisième section montre l'importance de la combinatoire dans l'économie de l'encyclopédistique, où des phénomènes contradictoires sont en perpétuelle interaction. En découle la question de la fixation écrite de ce mouvement de la pensée : la cosmographie de l'invisible, soit, littéralement, l'écriture ou la description de l'univers intérieur, se donne dans la forme en devenir du brouillon (section 4). Enfin, l'article s'achève par une réflexion sur la magie et la possibilité de déchiffrer une telle écriture cosmique, mobile (section 5).

2. Le « vrai ciel » : apparitions et relations des mondes

Les principes de la science moderne s'ancrent en réalité dans une atmosphère hermétique. De la Renaissance jusqu'au début du XVII^e siècle, l'aspect magique a été indissociable du scientifique et c'est même sous l'impulsion de ce rêve de magie que des scientifiques tels que Copernic et Newton ont cherché à percer les mystères de la nature. C'est pour arriver à opérer avec ces forces magiques de la nature qu'ils se sont tournés vers des sciences dites rationnelles telles que la physique et les mathématiques³. La révolution copernicienne du passage à l'héliocentrisme provient *aussi* d'une quête mystique : « la magie se tourne vers le nombre comme clé potentielle des opérations. Le nombre est l'instrument principal dans les opérations par lesquelles les forces de l'univers ont été mises au service de l'homme⁴. » Si l'héritage alchimique est sous-jacent à l'idée d'un système cosmogonique de la connaissance, avec sa *théorie du vrai ciel* Novalis renvoie également à la physique newtonienne, véritable révolution à laquelle Kant a consacré un essai, dont on peut faire l'hypothèse que Novalis l'a lu, étant donné le connaisseur de l'œuvre kantienne qu'il était. Dans son *Histoire naturelle générale et théorie du ciel, ou Essai sur la constitution et l'origine mécanique de*

³ F.A. Yates, *Science et tradition hermétique*, trad. Boris Donné, Allia, Paris, 2009, p. 69 : « Newton ne s'est pas simplement intéressé à l'alchimie [...] il a consacré davantage de temps et d'énergie à sa quête hermétique qu'à ses travaux mathématiques. Il a collectionné les livres d'alchimie, il s'est appliqué à décrypter les procédés scientifiques qu'il se figurait cachés dans les mythes alchimiques, et il a travaillé sans relâche à expérimenter dans les fourneaux d'un laboratoire, les recettes qu'il croyait avoir déchiffré dans le langage mystérieux des alchimistes. [...] c'était là l'entreprise d'un savant à l'esprit religieux qui cherchait à découvrir l'ordonnance divine dans la matière. »

⁴ S. Lippi, « La magie *scientifique* à la Renaissance : un paradoxe ? », *Cliniques méditerranéennes*, n°85, 2012/1, p. 77-89.

*l'univers d'après les lois de Newton*⁵, Kant cherche à harmoniser physique et métaphysique, soutenant la finalité théologique des lois de la matière. Embrassant la révolution de la physique newtonienne qui démontre le mouvement en orbite des astres d'après la loi de gravité, Kant souligne la nouvelle compréhension possible du système solaire. Si Galilée avait déjà observé la constitution de l'univers en infinies particules⁶, la force d'attraction newtonienne en justifie l'unité. Kant rappelle cette géométrie cosmique : « Les étoiles fixes, nous le savons, s'amoncellent toutes vers un plan commun, et forment par suite un ensemble régulièrement ordonné, qui est un monde de mondes⁷. » Plus loin, il établit une méthode de démonstration à diverses échelles, distinguant des strates de mondes :

Pour rendre plus claire l'exposition de notre hypothèse cosmogonique, nous laisserons d'abord de côté la formation de l'Univers infini, et nous nous bornerons au système particulier de notre soleil. Après avoir examiné la formation de ce système, nous appliquerons les mêmes principes à celle *des mondes d'ordre supérieur*, et nous comprendrons ainsi dans une même doctrine la création de tout l'Univers⁸.

Impossible de ne pas songer en écho à la pluralité des mondes chez Novalis. À plusieurs reprises, il est question de monde *inférieur* : le monde naturel, sensible et déterminé, dont je fais aussi partie, et de monde *supérieur* : la sphère de la subjectivité et de la spéculation. Le monde chez Novalis est le fait de subjectivités totalisées. L'unicité garantit la vérité de la diversité. La pluralité des mondes est la somme du monde de chacun mais c'est aussi ce produit, ce champ commun sans cesse mélangé, sans cesse renouvelé. À l'image des étoiles fixes constituant la voie lactée, chaque entité est un microcosme en soi, une subjectivité et la partie d'une totalité plus grande, à l'infini⁹.

⁵ Voir E. Kant, *Histoire naturelle générale et théorie du ciel, ou Essai sur la constitution et l'origine mécanique de l'univers d'après les lois de Newton* (1755), trad. C. Wolf, Paris, Gauthier-Villars, 1886. Essai rédigé, donc, plus de 25 ans avant la première *Critique*.

⁶ Galilée, grâce au premier télescope (lunette, 1609), est en mesure de le prouver « visiblement » pour la première fois, mais des traditions antérieures en émettaient déjà l'hypothèse (atomisme, bouddhisme, chamanisme...).

⁷ E. Kant, *Histoire naturelle générale et théorie du ciel*, p. 57. Nous citons l'essai d'E. Kant pour justifier nos propos, aussi désuet soit-il vis-à-vis des avancées de la recherche scientifique ; la source étant potentiellement celle de Novalis, c'est elle qui a pu influencer le philosophe romantique, il en va ici de la justesse généalogique plutôt que de la exactitude de la théorie scientifique.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 70-71. Nous soulignons par l'italique.

⁹ Il est également intéressant de noter que dans la théorie romantique de Novalis « seuls l'âme ou l'esprit peuvent *apparaître* – par conséquent, toute apparition est un être *commun* – un être animé » (frag. 479, trad. p. 125). Cela signifie que l'apparition phénoménale dans

Le mouvement en orbite des astres et surtout la loi d'attraction (variable selon la masse et la vitesse des corps en jeu) semblent miroiter dans le perpétuel jeu d'interactions réciproques entre les membres du système épistémologique fragmentaire de Novalis. L'idée du jeu des forces entre elles peut également être reconduite à une seconde source d'influence, celle de la pensée du hollandais Hemsterhuis. Dans ses *Hemsterhuis Studien*, Novalis stipule que : « 20. La force d'inertie, qui limite la force d'attraction, est l'excès de la force conductrice sur l'équilibre des attractions, ou les forces génératrices du cosmos – Cet excès est la base de la morale et de la vertu¹⁰. » Le programme d'une morale cosmique demeure toutefois source de surprise puisque « la face morale de l'univers est aussi inconnue et incommensurable que celle du Paradis¹¹. » Dès lors, comment concevoir un système du monde ?

D'après « la baguette magique de l'analogie¹² », pour reprendre l'expression de Novalis, le système heuristique du *Brouillon général* forme une cosmogonie de fragments à l'image du système cosmogonique établi par la physique moderne, dont les lois valent elles-mêmes à différentes échelles de taille et de masse de ses corps constituants. En termes novalissiens, *Le Brouillon général* serait l'univers en puissance, infini grâce à l'infinité des relations possibles entre ses membres. Dans cette mise en relation, le poète et philosophe cherche une nouvelle *forme* pour agencer les signes (graphème-images) dans les marges du visible. « Je ne peux comprendre le monde, c'est-à-dire lui ressembler que si j'ai moi-même un monde formé en tête¹³ », un univers intérieur. Les formes de l'esprit sont donc pour Novalis une véritable *cosmographie* de signes mentaux, d'images informes et invisibles dans le réel mais présentes idéalement, d'où la puissance de la langue qui les donne à voir par abstraction. En effet, Novalis, au fragment 50, poursuit en ces termes :

le monde réel et objectif est non seulement le fait d'une subjectivité animatrice mais aussi que toute subjectivité est une apparition objective. S'il y a un aspect idéaliste de la connaissance, il y a aussi un pan empirique et physique. Rappelons aussi que Novalis écrit au frag. 143 : « L'homme n'est pas seul à parler – l'univers aussi *parle* – tout parle – langues infinies. / Doctrine des signatures » (trad. mod. p. 49). Ou encore au frag. 407 : « MÉLANGE. [...] La formation de l'esprit est co-formation de l'esprit du monde – et donc *religion* » (trad. p. 99). Ce qui signifie bien que les subjectivités animatrices sont multiples et leur mélange est universel, infini et en perpétuel devenir.

¹⁰ Novalis, « Hemsterhuis Studien, Sur les désirs », *Das Philosophische Werk I*, Munich, C.H. Beck, 2001, p. 361.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Novalis, *Europe ou la Chrétienté*, in *Œuvres complètes*, trad. A. Guerne, Paris, Gallimard, 1975, p. 248.

¹³ *Ibid.*, frag. 377, p. 91.

La *facture* est opposée à la *nature*. L'esprit est l'artiste. / Facture et nature mélangées – séparées – réunies. C'est de cet état premier que traitent physiques et poétiques transcendantes – la physique et la poétique pratiques ont affaire au moment de la séparation – leur réunion est l'objet de la physique et de la poétique supérieures.

La philosophie supérieure s'occupe du mariage de la nature et de l'esprit¹⁴.

La langue, véritable *technè*, conditionne le devenir du sens en prenant place dans les marges de l'imagination ; elle excède le cadre de l'image en ce qu'avant tout elle fait image. La langue est alors l'outil de mesure de la vraisemblance entre la « nature avant qu'elle soit nature », c'est-à-dire le chaos¹⁵, et l'idée de nature comme image phénoménale produite par les facultés de l'esprit. Or, « l'*eikos*, le vraisemblable, est toujours susceptible d'être plus vrai que le vrai. C'est même là le ressort et la supériorité de l'invention poétique : “ le rôle du poète est de dire, non pas ce qui a eu lieu réellement mais ce qui pourrait avoir eu lieu dans l'ordre du vraisemblable ou du nécessaire” *Poétique* 9 1451a 36-38¹⁶. »

Le concept de ciel ne serait autre que l'image vraisemblable et nécessaire de l'infini, une pure image en perpétuel devenir (comme les phénomènes météorologiques¹⁷ qui modifient incessamment le ciel, comme les infinités d'astres et de systèmes). Une image dans laquelle, le vrai (essence inaccessible et invisible qui borde l'image) s'accorde à la vraisemblance du visible. Le *vrai ciel* s'interprète donc peut-être comme la cosmogonie *vraisemblable* que Novalis cherche à mettre en place dans son projet encyclopédistique.

En écho aux lois du mouvement newtoniennes, qui établissent la cause d'un mouvement dans l'action des corps les uns sur les autres¹⁸, Kant dans sa *Théorie du ciel* énonce que :

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, frag. 50, p. 30-31.

¹⁵ De toute évidence, elle ne peut être définie comme chaos que depuis la perspective du sujet, rappelons que Novalis est un héritier du cadre transcendantal.

¹⁶ B. Cassin (dir.), *op. cit.*, définition *Eidôlon*.

¹⁷ Soulignons que le concept de météorologie est récurrent chez Novalis.

¹⁸ I. Newton, *Principes mathématiques de la philosophie naturelle*, tard. Marquise du Châtelet, Paris, A. Blanchard, 1966, « Lois du Mouvement », p. 14 : « Première Loi : Tout corps persévère dans l'état de repos ou de mouvement uniforme en ligne droite dans lequel il se trouve, à moins que quelque force n'agisse sur lui, et ne le contraigne à changer d'état. [...] Loi III : L'action est toujours égale à la réaction ; c'est-à-dire que les actions de deux corps l'un sur l'autre sont toujours égales et de sens contraires. »

[...] la *variété des genres d'éléments* est un fait capital pour la mise en mouvement de la matière et l'organisation du chaos, car elle détruit l'immobilité qui aurait été la conséquence de l'homogénéité des éléments, et le chaos commence à se façonner autour des points de plus forte attraction. Cette variété des éléments est sans aucun doute infinie, car la nature se montre partout sans limite¹⁹.

Cette *variété des genres d'éléments*, Novalis la met symboliquement en acte dans la composition de fragments issus de toutes les disciplines : de la théorie de la digestion à celle des nuages, du fragment lyrique aux équations mathématiques, de la géologie à la théologie... C'est en se revendiquant de la tradition mathématique des *ars combinatoria* que Novalis parvient à établir des relations inédites entre les diverses polarités en jeu, engendrant une pensée infiniment mouvante. Pour mettre en mouvement la pensée, la voir à l'acte, Novalis, à l'instar de la loi de gravitation, joue de la réciprocité des éléments. La question de la réciprocité est chez Novalis religieuse – c'est-à-dire qu'au sens étymologique, il est question de relier tous les multiples. Fragments, membres ou satellites activent donc la cosmogonie épistémologique romantique. *Le Brouillon général* en livre la forme écrite, la cosmographie.

3. La pensée en puissance

Le principe de relation réciproque au cœur de la méthode romantique de Novalis se réclame de l'*ars combinatoria*, emprunté à Leibniz même si la tradition des arts combinatoires remonte aux premières grandes civilisations. Souvent liés au mysticisme, les premiers systèmes combinatoires sont utilisés pour la divination. Un des premiers exemples qui fait date est celui du *I Ching* en Chine vers 800 avant J.C. Il convient de citer aussi les textes du *Pratisakhyas* sur le sanskrit, qui donnent les systèmes d'arrangements grammaticaux des textes religieux védiques, puis la quête d'un langage divin qui a émergé dans le judaïsme avec la Kabbale. Dans la lignée de la Kabbale, qui révèle l'enjeu même de la potentialité infinie et intrinsèque au hasard, les combinatoires deviennent une source de spéculation plus rationnelle : on y voit la possibilité d'une science suprême. Raymond Lulle (1232-1316), dans l'*Ars Generalis Ultima*, établit un système de roues concentriques permettant de générer toutes les combinaisons possibles par un procédé mécanique : ce principe logique vise à l'universalisation d'un système mathématique. Puis Leibniz, dans son *De arte combinatoria* (1666), aspire à établir une langue

¹⁹ E. Kant, *op. cit.*, p. 68, 69.

absolue capable de tout exprimer à travers la combinaison de plusieurs éléments de base. Novalis reprend cet outil mathématique de l'*ars combinatoria* qui permet de déployer devant soi l'ensemble des configurations possibles que peut prendre une combinaison d'éléments. On comprend facilement que cet art provienne de traditions mystiques et divinatoires : il serait la condition pour concevoir la totalité des possibles en tant qu'outil universel et absolu. Dans *Le Brouillon général*, Novalis use d'un procédé similaire où toutes les possibilités coexistent effectivement sur le même plan, mais contrairement aux traditions mystiques, la finalité est une mise en relation subjective de ces éléments ou membres (*Glieder*).

L'encyclopédistique de Novalis découle de cette méthode combinatoire et l'associe à un processus d'harmonisation des possibilités. L'enjeu étant de « faire naître [la vérité] au gré des relations multiples et souvent inédites²⁰», l'encyclopédistique de Novalis cherche donc à *créer* les conditions de possibilités pour faire interagir les divers pôles. Ces membres qui composent l'encyclopédistique sont autant les parties du processus de synthèse que le résultat de cette synthèse, ce sont des « microcosmes en puissance²¹». Dans ce processus de synthétisation, qui n'est autre que le principe magique, se dessine une unification du divers, « le genre d'unité d'un paysage ou d'un discours, où tout est lié indirectement par secrète référence à un centre d'intérêt ou de perspective qu'aucun repère n'indique d'abord²². » La synthèse est particulièrement significative dans la mesure où elle doit se comprendre comme le principe d'unité qui contient toujours les deux polarités opposées ; l'unité chez Novalis explique la pluralité et la pluralité présuppose toujours un tout. La synthèse harmonise les pôles contradictoires sans jamais les confondre, il ne s'agit pas d'une unité homogénéisée. Ce n'est pas une unité figée, lisse, c'est une unité polaire au sein de laquelle l'absolu est un concept actif, générateur de liaisons. En s'intéressant aux membres composites d'un tout, Novalis cherche à décentrer le problème philosophique, à l'aborder du dehors ou à l'inverser : l'interstice qui sépare, singularise chaque aphorisme ou membre agit comme révélateur de leur portée significative, une portée lisible comme une image, par sa *forme*. Et de même que dans une pellicule, où le positif ne peut être révélé que grâce au négatif, il faut chercher la philosophie de Novalis dans le silence établi entre chaque fragment, ce silence ou cet espace qui garantit la condition même d'une mise en relation, d'un dialogue en perpétuel mouvement. Cette méthode inversée est le processus de la méthode critique comme l'entend

²⁰ O. Schefer, « Encyclopédie et combinatoire », in Novalis, *Le Brouillon général*, p. 15.

²¹ Novalis, *op. cit.*, frag. 1012, p. 257.

²² M. Merleau-Ponty, *Signes*, Paris, Gallimard, 2018, « La philosophie et le dehors », p. 213.

Novalis et qui permet d'opérer la synthèse entre l'expérience du réel (ou les phénomènes de la vie) et celle d'une perspective épistémologique inaugurée par l'idéalisme transcendantal où la question de la vérité se joue dans le rapport de l'esprit humain à lui-même.

Pour Novalis il faut penser l'homme comme une totalité productrice de vérité dans son rapport réflexif ou réciproque à la nature. Si la vérité doit provenir du sujet et doit être créée à partir des infinies connexions entre les expériences, c'est le sujet qui, dans la mise en relation des savoirs, produit une vérité correspondant à son propre cadre rationnel – nous sommes dès lors dans la représentabilité. La leçon est directement héritée de l'idéalisme kantien inauguré dans la *Critique de la raison pure* où la connaissance est synthèse de représentations. C'est la définition même de la philosophie que donne Kant : « la science du rapport de toutes connaissances aux fins essentielles de la raison humaine²³. » Si la raison se prend elle-même pour indicateur c'est que sa possibilité de connaître se limite à sa propre production, à sa propre faculté de représentation, car « ce que les objets peuvent être en eux-mêmes, nous ne le connaissons jamais, même par la connaissance la plus claire du phénomène de ces objets, seule connaissance qui nous est donnée²⁴. » C'est dans cette perspective que Novalis peut énoncer que « l'ipséité est le fondement de toute connaissance²⁵. » Dès lors on comprend que toute connaissance est le fruit d'un processus réflexif. C'est-à-dire que dans le réceptacle que constitue l'esprit, les données de l'expérience demeurent extérieures, ainsi dans la constitution d'un savoir objectif, le sujet se rapporte toujours symboliquement à des phénomènes extérieurs. Le réel défini par les romantiques est bien celui qu'avait suggéré Kant, à savoir la conjonction entre la structure sensible de l'esprit et les phénomènes. Dans cette continuité le romantisme novalissien cherche à postuler la nature comme finalité unifiante : « la nature est l'idéal. Le véritable idéal est à la fois possible, réel et nécessaire²⁶ ». Cela revient à dire que cette nature idéale est le point de convergence entre l'idéalisme et le réalisme. Mais dans le cadre d'une connaissance purement réfléchissante, comment se rapporter à cette nature idéale ?

Novalis cherche à produire les conditions de possibilité de nouveaux jugements contingents. Cette contingence doit s'entendre comme condition de possibilité d'une unification finale des connaissances. En composant

²³ G. Deleuze, *La philosophie critique de Kant*, Paris, PUF, 1991, p. 5.

²⁴ E. Kant, *Critique de la raison pure*, Paris, PUF, p. 69, « Remarques générales sur l'esthétique transcendantale », § 8.

²⁵ Novalis, *Le Brouillon général*, frag. 820, p. 225.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

d'après des fragments, Novalis cherche un accès à la totalité. De ce fait, il s'inscrit dans ce que Kant définit comme la faculté de juger réfléchissante : « La faculté de juger en général est la faculté qui consiste à penser le particulier comme compris sous l'universel. [...] Si seul le particulier est donné, et si la faculté de juger doit trouver l'universel <qui lui correspond>, elle est simplement réfléchissante²⁷. » C'est précisément ce principe de réflexion sur lequel la théorie de la connaissance romantique de Novalis s'est fondée parce que la pensée réflexive garantit non seulement un principe de connaissance immédiate (intuition sensible du donné) mais aussi une forme de la pensée elle-même, ou une forme de la forme qui garantit l'expérience de l'accord entre le réel et ma subjectivité. C'est-à-dire « une faculté [qui] se donne ses propres lois²⁸. »

La réflexivité gagne toute sa puissance lorsqu'elle se tourne vers ce qu'elle ne parvient pas à représenter, à savoir ses propres limites. L'organisation du système de la connaissance doit, pour Novalis, être sans finalité systématique. C'est ainsi que dans la forme même du brouillon en tant qu'il est symbole de la pensée inachevée, encore mouvante, apparaît une théorie de la présentation du savoir :

Le système de la science doit devenir le corps symbolique (le système-organe) de notre intérieur - Notre esprit doit devenir une machine sensiblement perceptible non pas en nous, mais hors de nous.

/ Devoir inverse avec le monde extérieur²⁹ /

L'idée d'inversion avec le monde extérieur explicite qu'en réalité le sujet, pour connaître, doit se placer précisément aux limites de la connaissance, dans l'incommensurable, l'informe, dans ce qui échappe à la réflexion. La méthode novalisienne est donc une expérimentation où la pensée, parce qu'elle peut se représenter sous la forme négative de ses propres limites, prend cette même limite pour fondement. Dans cette confrontation avec l'inaccessible vient se nouer pour Novalis la possibilité de *représenter la vérité* :

820. À proprement parler le criticisme [...] est cette théorie qui, pendant l'étude de la nature, nous renvoie à nous-même, à l'observation et à l'expérience interne et pendant l'étude de notre soi qui nous renvoie au monde externe. [...] Nous comprenons naturellement tout ce qui est étranger seulement en nous rendant à nous-même étrangers - en nous

²⁷ E. Kant, *Critique de la faculté de juger*, Introduction IV, trad. A. Philolenko, Paris, Vrin, 1984, p. 27.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

²⁹ Novalis, *Le Brouillon général*, frag. 69, p. 36.

modifiant - en nous observant. Nous voyons à présent les véritables liens de l'articulation entre le sujet et l'objet, nous voyons qu'il y a également un monde extérieur en nous, qui entretient avec nos intériorités un lien analogue, tout comme le monde externe hors de nous est lié à notre extériorité, et l'un et l'autre sont également reliés comme notre intérieur et notre extérieur³⁰.

Le criticisme, comme l'explicite Novalis, engage la compréhension des choses sur un mode réciproque ; c'est-à-dire que chaque concept est lié à et se comprend par son opposé. C'est un principe d'*estrangement* pour reprendre le concept de Ginzburg : le changement de perspective, la prise de distance sur un objet, c'est déjà la tentative de s'extraire du cadre purement subjectif et de participer à façonner de nouveaux aspects de l'objet en question. Chez Novalis, les pôles contraires sont la démonstration de leurs propres existences : parce que j'existe en tant que sujet qui possède un monde intérieur, je suis en relation directe avec le monde externe, puisqu'il s'oppose et donc se lie à ma subjectivité. Ce criticisme, c'est aussi la conscience même d'une philosophie critique où le terme de critique signifiait pour les romantiques « objectivement productif, créateur en toute lucidité³¹. » Benjamin va même plus loin en affirmant que « sous le nom de critique, les romantiques ont tout à la fois avoué l'inéluctable insuffisance de leurs efforts et cherché à la désigner comme nécessaire³² ». L'aporie transparait dans l'idée d'un système de réciprocité où l'entreprise critique semble toujours retomber en elle-même, c'est-à-dire que le sujet ne peut s'extraire du cadre réflexif mais son regard se porte inévitablement vers le dehors, vers ce qui le dépasse sans jamais pouvoir l'atteindre.

Le fragment 924 du *Brouillon général* nous semble pouvoir élargir les conditions épistémiques du système de Novalis :

924. [...] La libre méthode de génération de la vérité peut être encore considérablement élargie et simplifiée – et surtout améliorée. Voici à présent l'authentique art de l'expérimentation [*Experimentirkunst*] – la science de l'empirisme actif. La théorie est issue de la tradition. (Toute théorie se rapporte à l'art – à la praxis.)

On doit pouvoir rendre la vérité partout présente – la représenter partout (par un sens actif, productif)³³.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, frag. 820, p. 224.

³¹ W. Benjamin, *Le concept de critique esthétique dans le romantisme allemand*, trad. P. Lacoue-Labarthe et A.-M. Lang, Paris, Flammarion, 2002, p. 88.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 89.

³³ Novalis, *Le Brouillon général*, frag. 924, p. 243.

Les notions de *sens productif*, de *génération*, d'*empirisme actif* et celle d'*art de l'expérimentation* renvoient toutes à l'idée que la vérité serait le produit d'une activité volontaire. Cette conception établit la vérité comme le produit d'une subjectivité, ce qui d'une certaine façon est le cas puisque le sujet novalissien est producteur de son monde mais à cet écueil il faut opposer qu'en vertu du principe de réciprocité, ce même sujet, s'il est en mesure d'être actif, est tout autant en devoir de se laisser affecté par le monde sur un mode passif. Précisément, la passivité peut être chez Novalis un vecteur de vérité : passif, je suis le réceptacle de ce qui m'est extérieur. Si la vérité novalissienne est le produit d'un libre-jeu des facultés du sujet qui active une relation harmonieuse entre différents pôles, elle est aussi le résultat d'une coïncidence ou concordance *aussi bien dans l'objet que dans le sujet* (nous soulignons les termes de Novalis). Cette concordance-là implique donc le fait d'une vérité de l'objet qui m'est extérieur. Or, reste à savoir comment y accéder. Comment faire coïncider une vérité que je génère avec ce qui m'est inconnu ?

La seule condition de la connaissance, au sens où Novalis l'entend, semble donc être la pensée de la pensée ou l'auto-connaissance. Si c'est effectivement par la négative que peut apparaître la vérité, elle demeure dans le cadre de la représentation, nous sommes donc toujours face à une *image* du réel. C'est un rapport esthétique au monde que présuppose le penseur romantique. Si la théorie de la connaissance novalissienne n'est compréhensible qu'à l'aune de ses limitations, c'est parce que c'est précisément dans ces limites que *s'harmoniseraient* les contradictions. Toute connaissance aboutirait dès lors à une action dans le réel, une action qui ramène le sujet à ce qui lui est extérieur (le monde hors de soi) et tout à la fois, à l'expérience de sa propre faculté créatrice (du monde en-dedans de soi) où « la réflexion s'élargit sans limites et la pensée formée dans la réflexion devient une pensée sans forme qui se tourne vers l'absolu³⁴. » L'aspiration à l'absolu se traduit donc par ce mouvement médiateur qui fait coïncider les polarités constitutives du monde. La vérité advient dans la concordance des polarités antagonistes et multiples qui constituent précisément cette unité scientifique. Cette unité, Laure Cahen-Maurel le démontre parfaitement dans son essai sur l'encyclopédisme novalissien³⁵, ne s'obtient que grâce au principe d'action réciproque [*Wechselwirkung*]. À l'image des fragments qui contiennent *en puissance*, le principe mathématique de potentiation est essentiel pour comprendre le mode opératoire de la philosophie de Novalis. « La

³⁴ W. Benjamin, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

³⁵ Voir L. Cahen-Maurel, « Vers une "science totale" : l'encyclopédisme vivante de Novalis ».

potentiation est une opération arithmétique qui ne vise pas à produire des grandeurs mais à découvrir le rapport liant des grandeurs entre elles, l'ordre qui les engendre et par où elles font série et forment un tout³⁶. » L'opération agit à plusieurs niveaux. Chaque concept agit, d'une part, avec son opposé (relation horizontale) et peut, d'autre part, se subdiviser ou se multiplier à l'infini (relation verticale) : il est alors la coïncidence totalisante (puisque chaque unité contient en elle la pluralité). Mouvement organique où la pensée elle-même s'expérimente à l'aune de ses limites.

En mettant l'accent sur les membres composites d'un tout, Novalis cherche aussi à penser les problèmes philosophiques de façon critique, c'est-à-dire à les inverser sur un mode dialectique, à les aborder *aussi* du dehors : l'interstice qui sépare, singularise chaque aphorisme ou membre agit comme révélateur de leur portée significative, une portée lisible par sa *forme*. L'encyclopédistique, loin de viser à systématiser la connaissance cherche entre autres à en présenter les virtualités. Or cette virtualité est rendue possible en grande partie par la faculté de l'imagination à mettre en image, à imaginer la nature et l'inimaginable³⁷. Novalis aspire à l'unification entre fond et forme, entre visible et invisible et il nous semble que *Le Brouillon général* donne précisément à voir la tension qui unie l'image et sa virtualité. La forme est indissociable du fond mais nous voulons nous attarder sur la forme comme symbole de la théorie : la forme est une partie intégrante de l'organon épistémologique. Contrairement au fragment schlegélien conçu comme une entité indépendante, le fragment de Novalis est, nous le rappelons, un membre en tant que « variation du Tout³⁸ ». C'est dans cette variation entre les parties d'un tout qu'*apparaît* une vérité comprise comme production inédite de connexions. Le membre ou fragment novalissien s'entend comme *mise en image* ou apparition visible de l'ensemble du système vivant, infini et insaisissable.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 97-98.

³⁷ Je suis en effet bien en mesure de me représenter par la négative mon impossibilité à imaginer l'inimaginable, comme l'infini par exemple. C'est là toute la leçon de la philosophie transcendante.

³⁸ Novalis, *Poéticisms*, frag. 119, in *Semences*, trad. O. Schefer, Paris, Allia, 2004, p. 150.

4. Le brouillon : une cosmographie de l'informe

Rien de plus beau qu'un beau Brouillon. [...]
Un poème complet serait le poème *de* ce Poème à
partir de l'embryon fécondé
– et les états successifs, les interventions
inattendues, les approximations.
Voilà la vraie Genèse... Épopée du Provisoire³⁹.
Paul Valéry

La théorie de l'image prend une importance spécifique avec le verset biblique qui dit de l'homme qu'il a été créé « à l'image et à la ressemblance de Dieu » (Genèse). Pourtant, Dieu est l'Invisible par excellence. Comment être à l'image de l'invisible ? Nous nous heurtons d'emblée au problème de la représentation : comment l'image se rapporte-elle à son modèle ? L'écriture concentre l'envergure de ce problème : le graphème n'est-il pas la forme visible du son invisible, de la parole ? La valeur visuelle de la langue dans l'écriture est sous-estimée. Or, dès lors qu'il y a formation symbolique dans la lettre, elle présente une piste de réflexion importante. Ne pourrait-on pas y chercher l'origine de l'image abstraite ? À en croire le travail quasi archéologique de Pierre Bergounioux sur *Le corps de la lettre*, la valeur du signe gagne au travers de la forme écrite toute sa richesse suggestive. N'oublions pas que l'écriture naît d'une nécessité économique : avec la sédentarisation des peuples émerge le commerce et la nécessité de garder les comptes en mémoire. Écrire a donc pour fonction première une fonction mnémotechnique, bien que cela soit discuté par Platon dans le mythe de Theuth. L'impossibilité de tout retenir force à recourir à la faculté d'imagination qui forme et produit des signes par analogie afin d'évoquer ce qu'il ne faut pas oublier, bien qu'il soit impossible de le retenir : c'est sur le système de dettes que s'échafaude la force du signifiant. Il en découle que l'écriture renvoie toujours à une forme d'absence, c'est la forme restituée de ce qui n'est pas ou plus là devant soi. Elle est en ce sens une image au sens de l'*eidôlon* grec, « un visible qui donne à en voir un autre⁴⁰ », du visuel porteur d'illusion. Ainsi, dans les entailles en forme de coins, de clous..., gravées au stylet dans la pierre, le recours au signe émerge comme visualisation de la parole :

³⁹ P. Valéry, *Cahiers*, éd. Judith Robinson, Paris, Gallimard, coll. « Bibliothèque de la Pléiade », t. II, 1974, p. 1118.

⁴⁰ B. Cassin (dir.), *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies : Dictionnaire des intraduisibles*, Paris, Seuil, 2004, entrée « Image ».

Lorsqu'aujourd'hui nous traçons un A, c'est la tête inversée du taureau, *aleph*, en hébreu, qui pointe ses cornes. B, c'est *bet*, la maison à toit plat du Moyen-Orient, C, le cou flexueux du chameau, *gimel*, D, la porte, *dalet*, et ainsi de suite, seulement l'homme ne voit plus lorsqu'il lit, des bêtes à cornes ou à bosse, une maison, une porte. Il entend des sons a, b, c, d... Les hommes ont fermé les yeux sur la profuse, l'infiniment diverse et captieuse splendeur du monde pour écouter. Quoi ? Mais le souffle de l'esprit, la parole⁴¹.

Si le graphème est effectivement une image de la parole, de la langue orale, c'est une image qui fonctionne par abstraction. Le processus d'abstraction souligne un paradoxe crucial pour comprendre la valeur d'image que peut revêtir le graphème. L'induction abstractive aristotélicienne vise à unifier une multiplicité d'expériences, elle est donc un procédé qui vise à rassembler. Au contraire, l'abstraction mathématique consiste à « dépouiller l'image ou la représentation d'une chose de ses traits individualisant⁴². »

Lorsque Novalis énonce au fragment 648 : « Une *architectonique* du visible – et une physique expérimentale de l'esprit – un art de l'invention des plus importants *instruments* de mots et de signes se laisse ici pressentir⁴³ », on comprend mieux que la méthode combinatoire soit loin d'être un outil anodin ; elle crée des constellations inédites. Il est intéressant de noter à ce propos que la méthode combinatoire se retrouve à chaque degré ponctuant *Le Brouillon général* et, par conséquent, notre propre réflexion. La théorie de la connaissance de Novalis s'appuie sur l'idée d'une production de vérité rendue possible par la coïncidence de fragments et c'est la même méthode qui accorde les lettres et les mots pour leur donner un sens dans une phrase, dans une grammaire qui les subsume. Cette méthode de la combinatoire est très proche du processus d'abstraction tel que défini précédemment, à la différence près que la combinatoire, comme son nom l'indique, combine les polarités en *rassemblant et dépouillant simultanément*. Le graphème agit doublement. Il *produit* une image dès lors qu'il est utilisé en tant que synthèse d'une expérience : c'est-à-dire que l'abstraction subsume les expériences phénoménales sous une image unifiée par la faculté d'imagination en son sens kantien. Le graphème est donc producteur d'images en ce qu'il évoque par schématisation l'irreprésentable : un son, un sens... Ainsi s'ancre dans la matérialité la fulgurance de la langue orale. Bien sûr, la représentation opère aussi d'après les phénomènes visibles, la tête inversée du taureau dans le A pour reprendre l'exemple de Bergounioux. Pourtant, d'une manière qui n'est

⁴¹ P. Bergounioux, *Le corps de la lettre*, Paris, Fata Morgana, 2019, p. 34.

⁴² B. Cassin (dir.), *op. cit.*, entrée « Abstraction ».

⁴³ Novalis, *op. cit.*, frag. 648, p. 179.

paradoxale qu'en apparence, dans l'image "manuscrite⁴⁴", la main de l'homme déforme le perçu à dessein de construire une image dans laquelle l'artifice traduit les règles de l'optique. Or dans le signe écrit, « le but est de marquer sur le papier une trace de notre contact avec un objet et un spectacle en tant qu'ils font vibrer notre regard, virtuellement notre toucher, nos oreilles, notre sentiment du hasard ou du destin ou de la liberté⁴⁵. » Cela nous mène à l'autre versant du graphème en tant qu'il *fait* image⁴⁶, il est évocation symbolique de l'irreprésentable. Étymologiquement, le symbole est ce qui relie en rendant présent, il semble donc que le symbole relève de la culture : il est un outil qui prolonge le champ de vision en rendant *présent* symboliquement un objet absent, ou indirectement visible. En ce sens, le symbole est ce qui relie, à condition qu'il dépouille du moindre trait individualisant. En effet, le symbole, dès lors qu'il fonctionne par analogie, opère comme signifiant unificateur. Le graphème pourrait alors se considérer comme image symbolique et abstraite. Mais peut-on réellement dire qu'il n'est qu'une image ? Loin de vouloir minimiser la puissance évocatrice de l'image, il semble réducteur de vouloir limiter le mot à sa valeur d'image. L'un et l'autre sont pourtant en étroite relation, c'est indéniable. Mais comment cela opère-t-il ?

La pensée dans le romantisme de Novalis étant réfléchissante, la seule perspective de connaissance est celle du sujet. Aussi le rapport à l'image est-il conditionné par le sujet. Si c'est une nuance cruciale, on pressent lorsqu'il en fait mention au fragment 685 que s'il n'est pas question de confondre essence et apparaître, on ne peut pas s'en tenir uniquement à les séparer ou à les opposer :

Toutes les superstitions et les erreurs de chaque époque, de chaque peuple et de chaque individu reposent sur la confusion entre le symbole et le symbolisé – sur leur identification – sur la croyance en une représentation véritable et complète – sur la relation de l'image à l'original – de l'apparence à la substance – sur la conséquence d'une ressemblance extérieure – sur une harmonie et une connexion interne complète – en bref, sur la confusion entre le sujet et l'objet⁴⁷.

⁴⁴ Nous entendons toute image tracée par la main de l'homme directement et non pas l'image photographique par exemple.

⁴⁵ M. Merleau-Ponty, *La prose du monde...*, p.207.

⁴⁶ « Faire » s'entend ici dans son sens passif : il n'est pas question d'un faire qui se rapporterait à une technique productive, mais d'un faire qui s'apparente à une essence passive, donc "faire image" au sens de faire acte de présence.

⁴⁷ Novalis, *op. cit.*, frag. 685, p. 190.

L'homme doit se penser comme une totalité productrice de vérité dans son rapport réflexif ou réciproque à la nature. Rappelons que la vérité doit pouvoir se *représenter*, ce qui équivaut ici à la présenter par analogie avec l'expérience immédiate que le sujet peut faire du phénomène : c'en est l'image sensible ou la synthèse noétique. Mais l'image intuitive ne peut produire de vérité que mise en relation avec d'autres images. Là où l'image devient *active*, c'est bien lorsqu'elle a pour référent un objet autre qu'elle-même : elle produit un symbole par réflexion de la nature phénoménale – nous sommes dès lors dans la représentabilité de la chose. Le symbole produit ou active des relations entre les images synthétiques et occasionne l'expérimentation de la pensée, pensée qui demeure réflexive. Seulement, comment parvenir à dessiner une image où symbole et symbolisé sont à la fois en harmonie et clairement distincts ?

Le Brouillon général, en l'état dans lequel il nous est parvenu, porte tant et si bien son qualificatif de "brouillon" que le moyen a dévoré la fin : le titre est à l'image de la forme et ne l'a jamais dépassée, embrassant cet état d'inachèvement auquel le brouillon est voué. Il semble que la forme même du brouillon incarne le processus qui relie le signifié au graphème, le fond à la forme. N'oublions pas que le terme même de brouillon se rapporte au travail préparatoire : c'est donc déjà une forme *préalable*, une forme en devenir. Le brouillon relie l'informe de l'immatériel de la pensée à une forme visuelle, mais sans être tout à fait à l'état figé de l'œuvre : c'est donc un pur devenir. C'est là qu'apparaît le premier état, la genèse de la forme visuelle, c'est encore le moment où le processus se donne à voir son propre mouvement. Et si, d'après Henri Focillon, « la conscience humaine tend toujours à un langage et même à un style. Prendre conscience, c'est prendre forme. [...] Le propre de l'esprit c'est de se décrire constamment lui-même⁴⁸ », alors le brouillon serait la forme primaire par excellence de description visible du devenir invisible de la pensée. Mais peut-on vraiment admettre une représentation de l'invisible ?

Si l'on considère la méthode combinatoire à différentes échelles, le graphème donne à voir, en tant qu'il symbolise, et permet de faire apparaître à une échelle plus large la coïncidence du signe avec le signifié comme processus de signification. Le brouillon agit comme une scène de théâtre, temporalité et spatialité d'un événement coexistent et pourtant le sens n'émerge que dans le *passage* d'un acte à l'autre, l'ellipse de l'irreprésentable se fait garante de ce sens. C'est là que l'imagination s'active. L'écriture d'une œuvre à son stade préparatoire de brouillon n'est plus tant une représen-

⁴⁸ H. Focillon, *Vie des Formes* [1943], Paris, PUF, 2019, p. 66.

tation, comme l'est le graphème, qu'une apparition. « Si nous nous attachons [...] au lien entre *phantasia* et *phainesthai*, ce n'est pas d'abord vers les images mentales visuelles, "pictoriales", que nous sommes renvoyés, mais bien plutôt vers ce qui relève de l'apparition, du devenir apparent, de la présentation d'une entité extérieure ainsi mise en lumière, voire de la simple présentation des choses réelles⁴⁹. » La *phantasia* garantit l'unité entre une forme et son image. Ce n'est donc pas tant une représentation du visible qu'une part laissée à l'invisible, à l'immatériel et à l'inimaginable dans l'impossibilité même de les représenter. Le brouillon en ce qu'il cherche encore à donner sens, à se former, est précisément la mise en acte de la technique. Le graphème prolonge par la technique l'intuition de la faculté d'imagination en produisant non plus une image synthétique (représentation des phénomènes), mais une image abstraite, une image qui est le produit du processus d'apparition d'un sens dans la coexistence des fragments plus encore que dans leur succession. En effet, le brouillon *active* le passage de l'invisible au visible non pas tant en le représentant visuellement mais en le laissant apparaître *entre* les images abstraites que sont les graphèmes. Il faut préciser que l'apparition n'est aucunement associée à l'idée de commencement, il ne saurait y avoir de commencement dans le brouillon novalissien, tout est question de passage, devenir, transformation. La condition même de la formation est effectivement l'association, facteur producteur par excellence. Pourtant un problème se pose : dès lors qu'il y a association, il y a instabilité du sens.

Mais peut-on alors véritablement parler d'image dans le brouillon ? S'il y a effectivement une part visuelle de la langue écrite, dès lors que l'on n'est plus à l'échelle du graphème mais bien à celle de la page, est-il encore question d'image ? De plus, s'il est question d'association, on ne peut se passer d'une diversité du donné qui servirait de matière première au processus d'association. Or, d'où vient précisément ce donné ? En effet, bien que je sois conscient du mouvement de ma pensée, du *perpetuum mobile* de ma production de sens, je ne suis pas plus en mesure de pénétrer l'essence de l'objet, du symbolisé, dans la diversité qui compose la page du brouillon. Si la *phantasia* garantie l'unité du visible sous la forme du symbole, il n'en demeure pas moins un véritable hiéroglyphe dont la grammaire variable est toujours à déchiffrer, car après tout, « le langage ne reste énigmatique que pour celui qui continue de l'interroger, c'est-à-dire de parler⁵⁰. » Or, qui mieux que le poète serait-il en mesure d'interroger la langue ?

⁴⁹ B. Cassin (dir.), *op. cit.*, entrée « *Phantasia* ».

⁵⁰ M. Merleau-Ponty, *La prose du monde...*, p. 165.

5. Déchiffrer : images et virtualités

La tâche du philosophe est à mettre en rapport avec celle du poète, et pour Novalis, l'une et l'autre disciplines sont complémentaires. Il en donne le plus grand témoignage dans les *Disciples à Saïs*, dont l'*incipit* nous ouvre un nouveau pan d'hypothèses pour mieux comprendre le caractère insaisissable de toute forme :

C'est par des chemins divers que vont les hommes. Qui les suit et les compare verra d'étranges figures prendre naissance. Figures qui appartiennent, semble-t-il, à cette grande écriture chiffrée que l'on aperçoit partout : sur les ailes, sur les coquilles des œufs, dans les nuages, dans la neige, dans les cristaux, et les pétrifications, sur les eaux qui gèlent, à l'intérieur et à l'extérieur des roches, des plantes, des animaux, des hommes, dans les étoiles du ciel, sur les plateaux de résine et de verre frottés et mis en contact, dans les courbes de la limaille autour de l'aimant et dans les surprenantes conjectures du hasard. On pressent dans ces figures les clés de cette écriture secrète, sa grammaire, mais ce pressentiment lui-même ne se laisse pas réduire en formes fixes et se refuse, semble-t-il, à devenir une clé plus efficace⁵¹.

Une constellation de signes construit ici le monde, à la manière d'une architecture lyrique. La sémiotique du paysage, parce qu'elle est une écriture singulière, semble être édifiée dans une grammaire que seul le poète peut déchiffrer. En outre, du terme paysage « dérive [de la racine étymologique] "pala", le pieu, et "pagina" qui était à l'origine un terme d'agriculture pour nommer une vigne plantée et dessinant un rectangle. C'est par métaphore qu'une colonne d'écriture est devenue une page⁵² ». Les figures que décrit Novalis laissent des traces, des empreintes, des signes infinitésimaux dans le paysage que le poète agissant comme un chasseur enregistre, interprète et classe. L'idée d'un livre de la nature, d'après Carlo Ginzburg, trouverait son origine dans le protocole des chasseurs qui reconstituent « les formes et les déplacements de proies invisibles à partir d'indices minimes. [...] Le chasseur aurait été le premier à "raconter une histoire" parce que lui seul était en mesure de lire une série d'évènements cohérents dans les traces muettes (sinon imperceptibles) laissées par les proies⁵³ ». Ainsi les significations que l'on pourrait tirer des figures de la nature ne sont-elles reconnaissables qu'à l'état de trace, il y a irrémédiablement une distance avec le visible, de même

⁵¹ Novalis, *Les Disciples à Saïs*, trad. G. Roud, Paris, Fata Morgana, 2002, p. 25-26.

⁵² A. Rey, *Dictionnaire historique de la langue française*, Paris, éd. Dictionnaires Robert, 1992, étymologie du mot « paysage ».

⁵³ C. Ginzburg, « Signes, traces, pistes. Racines d'un paradigme de l'indice », *Le débat*, 1980, n.6, p.3-44, p. 10.

que le chasseur traque sa proie et cherche à s'en rapprocher. Le déchiffrement des significations laissées à l'état de traces visibles ne peut de ce fait être autre qu'une construction : l'architectonique du visible commence à s'édifier. Et cet édifice trouve ses fondations dans les formes de l'esprit, c'est une véritable *Bildung* : terme qui, « issu de *Bild*, "image", signifie d'abord la création, la fabrication, le fait de donner une forme. Le passage à l'idée de formation intellectuelle, puis d'éducation serait venu de la langue mystique où *einbilden* désigne l'acquisition d'une représentation imagée, instaurant une parenté de fait entre *Bildung* et *Einbildung* (imagination)⁵⁴. La *Bildung* avant de prendre son sens goethéen d'éducation spirituelle et intellectuelle est avant tout un processus de création : une *tekhnê*. C'est une technique qui relève de toute évidence des aptitudes de l'esprit, mais cela nous dirige vers l'idée que le brouillon en tant que figuration de l'émulation de la vie de l'esprit relève effectivement de l'image ou plutôt d'une fabrique de la pensée par images. Parce qu'il y a possibilité de créer des associations, de façonner un sens tiré de combinaisons inédites, on peut déchiffrer les signes du monde et s'y rapporter par le biais de l'imagination. On peut alors suivre Novalis lorsqu'il assure que « mots et sons sont de véritables *images* et des *expressions* de l'âme. *Art du déchiffrement*⁵⁵. »

L'écriture du brouillon fait image parce qu'il garantit une forme dont la condition même est de chercher à se dépasser elle-même. Précisons. Toute image est par définition délimitée à l'intérieur d'un cadre (même symbolique), c'est-à-dire qu'elle est limitée dans son aptitude à représenter. Ce qui dépasse du cadre n'appartient plus qu'à la faculté de l'imagination puisqu'il est inexistant ou invisible : l'esprit peut y projeter des possibilités, imaginer les virtualités hors-cadre, mais cela relèvera toujours d'une possibilité, nécessaire certes, mais sans être une réalité essentielle. Dans la langue, la circonscription du mot n'a lieu que dans un cadre symbolique, c'est son sens qui le délimite. Or nous l'avons vu, le propre de l'association inédite d'idées ou d'images est de permettre l'apparition d'un sens nouveau ; un sens dont la virtualité était présente mais pas encore cadrée dans un champ visuel, dans notre perspective. Ainsi l'écriture est la continuité directe du dessin enfantin où il n'est pas surprenant de voir des temporalités différentes coexister "irrationnellement" dans un même espace. La singularité même du langage, c'est d'être une image hors de son cadre, ce qui assure le passage continu du visible à l'invisible. En effet : « Une chose ne devient *évidente* qu'à travers la représentation. [...] on ne comprend le Non-Moi que dans la mesure où il

⁵⁴ B. Cassin (dir.), *op. cit.*, entrée *Bild*.

⁵⁵ Novalis, *Le Brouillon général*, frag. 1044, p. 261.

est représenté par le Moi et que celui-ci en devient le symbole⁵⁶. » Ce serait donc dans la représentation du non-être qu'apparaît l'être, autrement dit, il faut en passer par l'image pour sortir de l'image, pour explorer ses marges incommensurables, ou ses excès. Cette idée découle en réalité de l'esthétique transcendantale et de l'expérience du sublime comme ce qui excède les limites de la faculté à imaginer.

Si le sublime est effectivement la négation de l'image, l'impossibilité de se représenter une chose passe encore par la représentabilité en négatif. Il est donc possible en réalité de lire de manière sémiotique cet unimaginable car il fait signe vers la part irréductible en moi de suprasensible, vers l'essence métaphysique. Novalis en tire donc l'idée que la pensée, parce qu'elle peut se représenter ses propres limites *ex negativo*, prend cette même limite pour fondement. Dans cette confrontation avec l'inaccessible vient se nouer la possibilité de *figurer la vérité*. Pourtant, connaître une chose par son envers, à la manière du procédé de la photographie argentique où le négatif est la condition de visibilité du positif, cela semble encore insuffisant pour Novalis. À ce stade de notre réflexion, l'un permet la représentation de l'autre, là où il y a évidence de l'image, c'est la pure intuition du réel. Or ce qui importe au penseur romantique, c'est l'unification entre ce négatif et ce positif, la simple représentation de la vérité est une condition qui rend possible la connaissance, mais, pour Novalis, le dessein demeure la *praxis* : la « vérité consiste en une harmonie et une concordance intérieure et spécifique – une coïncidence – et par conséquent une articulation authentique et en une *action* authentique – aussi bien dans l'objet que dans le sujet⁵⁷ ». Si la théorie de la connaissance novalissienne n'est compréhensible qu'à l'aune de ses limitations, c'est parce que c'est précisément dans ces limites que s'aboliraient les contradictions. La fin de toute connaissance serait alors une action qui dépasse le cadre de la raison, action où l'imagination fait signe vers le suprasensible ; autrement dit, là où « la réflexion s'élargit sans limites et la pensée formée dans la réflexion devient une pensée sans forme qui se tourne vers l'absolu⁵⁸. »

Si l'on admet avec Kant que le jugement réfléchissant est la faculté qui me permet de me présenter à moi-même ma prétention à l'absolument grand, comment puis-je être en mesure de dépasser la limite même qu'impose la représentabilité qui conditionne ma possibilité d'expérience du réel ? Novalis lit dans la réflexion transcendantale un acte de magie : « Magie = art

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 29, frag. 49.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, frag. 881, p. 234.

⁵⁸ W. Benjamin, *Le concept de critique esthétique dans le romantisme allemand*, p. 63.

d'utiliser à volonté le monde des sens⁵⁹. » Si, comme on l'a vu, la notion de magie a pu être empruntée à des traditions ésotériques, on voit que la définition de Novalis engage également une dimension subjective qui se veut volontaire, active. La magie implique une véritable maîtrise artistique, au sens de maîtrise technique, qui d'emblée pose une relation entre la force volontaire déployée par le sujet et sa relation au monde empirique. Novalis établit l'équivalence de problèmes telle que : « (Les jugements synthétiques *a priori* sont-ils possibles ? = Existe-t-il une intelligence magique, *i.e.* une raison magique⁶⁰ ?) » La première question est empruntée directement à la philosophie critique transcendantale où l'imagination transcendantale est la faculté de l'esprit qui, en schématisant, permet une connaissance *a priori* du monde sensible. Pour Novalis, est magique tout signe produit par l'imagination créatrice, c'est-à-dire tout signe idéal :

Une *pure* pensée – une *pure* image – une *pure* sensation sont des pensées qui n'ont pas été *éveillées* par un objet correspondant etc. mais plutôt qui sont nées en dehors des lois mécaniques. [...] L'imagination [*Fantaisie*] est une semblable force extra-mécanique. (Magisme ou synthétisme de l'imagination. La philosophie se révèle ici entièrement comme un idéalisme magique⁶¹.)

La magie est la condition de possibilité d'unification entre ce qui me dépasse et ce qui me constitue en tant que sujet vivant : c'est ce qui relie l'idéal et le réel dans une réflexion infinie et donne à l'imagination un accès au suprasensible. L'imagination est donc force extra-mécanique au sens où comme la nature elle obéit à des lois organiques, des lois irréductibles à un mécanisme limité. La magie est donc un *acte* de synthèse qui unifie les données du monde à l'infini. Cette synthèse signe une condition de possibilité de l'expérience de l'incommensurable : « Toute unification de l'hétérogène conduit à l' ∞ ⁶². » Novalis a, dans le sillon kantien, la garantie que je ne me résume pas à ma dimension sensible : l'imagination créatrice dans le cadre d'une pensée réfléchissante marque pour Novalis la possibilité de faire interagir les choses entre elles grâce à une *praxis* active ou performativité de l'imagination. L'idéalisme magique vise donc à parvenir à se mêler au monde ontologiquement comme le prescrit la méthode critique. Pour Novalis, *connaître* exige *être*. Il y a une exigence de transformation de soi pour comprendre l'autre et nécessairement cette transformation participe de

⁵⁹ Novalis, *Poéticisms*, p. 143, fr. 109.

⁶⁰ Novalis, *Le Brouillon général*, frag. 775, p. 212.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, frag. 826, p. 226.

⁶² *Ibid.*, frag. 953, p. 246.

la construction de soi : « 820. [...] Nous comprenons naturellement tout ce qui est étranger seulement en nous rendant à nous-même *étrangers - en nous modifiant* - en nous observant⁶³. » Je peux agir sur le monde en interagissant avec lui mais même si j'aspire à une action sur la totalité des choses, elle ne relève pas de mon ressort et ne devrait pas non plus relever de ma volonté : le sujet ne saurait prendre un rôle divin. La totalité elle est la somme en expansion⁶⁴. L'action subjective est tout d'abord communication [*Mitteilung*] avec le monde parce que je suis en mesure d'expérimenter par analogie ce monde qui est à la fois autre et semblable, à savoir : un mélange commun. Dans la théorie romantique de Novalis, on l'a vu, « seuls l'âme ou l'esprit peuvent *apparaître* – par conséquent, toute apparition est un être *commun* – un être animé⁶⁵ ». Cela signifie que l'apparition phénoménale dans le monde réel et objectif est non seulement le fait d'une subjectivité animatrice mais aussi que toute subjectivité est une apparition objective. S'il y a un aspect idéaliste de la connaissance, il y a aussi un pan empirique et physique. Le corps est une sphère exclusive de ma liberté d'expression sensible, c'est tout un langage significatif qui s'y déploie, un langage physiologique puisque « nous ne pouvons percevoir l'intérieur de l'âme de la nature qu'à travers des pensées, de même que l'extérieur et le corps de la nature seulement à travers des sensations⁶⁶ ». Il y a donc un langage propre à la pensée et un langage propre aux sensations, l'un et l'autre peuvent communiquer de façon à générer une compréhension réciproque du monde – la langue dessine une cosmographie épistémologique qui s'accorde aux lois physiques et mathématiques de l'univers où tout s'échelonne, opère selon diverses variations du tout.

La concordance ou analogie du principe de réciprocité dans le système heuristique de Novalis et la loi de gravitation nous portent à la conclusion que les membres constituant la cosmogonie épistémologique du *Brouillon général* agissent *en puissance*, c'est-à-dire qu'ils obéissent à la même loi d'attraction qui régit les mouvements des astres dans l'univers. Ce principe de puissance est un outil mathématique que Novalis applique esthétiquement au sein de sa théorie. Il y a réciprocité entre le système épistémologique et celui du cosmos puisque la compréhension du monde, nous l'avons vu, exige une *facture* de ce même monde *en puissance*. L'approcher esthétiquement

⁶³ *Ibid.*, frag. 820, p. 224.

⁶⁴ On notera que les théories scientifiques contemporaines démontrent une expansion constante de l'univers ; les intuitions novalisiennes sont loin d'être infondées scientifiquement, bien qu'elles prennent aussi racine dans un pan mystique et ésotérique.

⁶⁵ Novalis, *Le Brouillon général*, frag. 479, p. 125.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, frag. 820, p. 224.

permet à Novalis de dessiner une cosmographie fragmentée garantissant alors un mouvement virtuel au sein même de son système : rien n'est figé ou fini. Les sciences naturelles sont poétiques et inversement, l'astronomie relève de la physique autant que de l'esthétique, rien n'étant uniquement en soi ou pour soi mais bien le produit d'un mélange constant. *Le Brouillon général* se présente donc comme un espace de dévoilement en renouvellement perpétuel, ce qui lui permet aussi de s'actualiser et d'apparaître encore aujourd'hui en avance dans sa compréhension des choses. Ce n'est peut-être que fortuit, mais l'expansion dont fait souvent mention Novalis est étonnement en adéquation avec les théories de la recherche actuelle en physique où l'univers est en expansion, c'est-à-dire que l'espace et le temps se dilatent ou encore que nous serions tous poussière d'étoiles comme l'énonce Hubert Reeves. Est-ce cela, le *mariage de la nature et de l'esprit*⁶⁷ : une concordance des formes qui donne à voir et donc permette de comprendre en même temps ontologiquement, métaphysiquement et physiquement le jeu de réciprocité du tout et de ses membres ; des membres au sein du tout ? *Théorie du vrai ciel*, cette formule, sceau sous lequel nous avons placé l'ensemble de notre essai condense, bien que mystérieusement, le jeu de passage du visible à l'invisible comme gage de complexité du réseau du monde, où même ce qui est connu est encore à découvrir et où la réciproque est toujours en jeu, dans toutes les modalités infinies du possible. C'est ainsi que *Le Brouillon général* de Novalis se fait cosmographie d'un cosmos en puissance.

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⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, frag. 50, p. 30-31.

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International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism

The Poetic Genius of Early Romanticism

Manifestations of the Imagination in William Blake, Friedrich Schiller, and Friedrich Schlegel

*Felix Alejandro Cristiá**

ABSTRACT

Romanticism, more than being a cultural movement that spread mainly through Europe, represented the freedom of the creative spirit or *Genius*. Contrary to the deterministic nature of Neoclassicism and French Enlightenment that threatened to overshadow human imagination, Romanticism ideal sought a way to transcend the limitations of reason through individual improvement. This essay aims to analyze the concept of Genius (as found in Herder, Novalis, and especially in William Blake, Friedrich Schiller, and Friedrich Schlegel) as the highest manifestation of the imagination, which, tending toward its own concepts of infinity, seeks to place itself beyond the need of achieve an aesthetic-historical synthesis of knowledge.

Keywords: Romanticism, poetic genius, Friedrich Schlegel, William Blake, progressive universal

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Die Romantik war nicht nur eine kulturelle Bewegung, die sich hauptsächlich in Europa ausbreitete, sondern repräsentierte die Freiheit des kreativen Geistes oder *Genies*. Im Gegensatz zur deterministischen Natur des Neoklassizismus und der französischen Aufklärung, die die menschliche Vorstellungskraft zu überschatten drohten, suchte das Ideal der Romantik nach einem Weg, die Grenzen der Vernunft durch individuelle Verbesserung zu überwinden. Dieser Essay zielt darauf ab, den Begriff des poetischen Genies (wie er bei Herder, Novalis und insbesondere bei William Blake, Friedrich Schiller und Friedrich Schlegel zu finden ist) als höchste kreative Manifestation zu analysieren, die sich, zu ihrem eigenen Begriff der Unendlichkeit tendierend, jenseits der Notwendigkeit, eine historisch-künstlerische Synthese des Wissens zu erreichen, zu verorten sucht.

Stichwörter: Romantik, poetisches Genie, Friedrich Schlegel, William Blake, progressive Universalpoesie

* Independent scholar. Writer, M.A. in Philosophy, University of Costa Rica. Address: 44 Irvine Turner Blvd, Newark, NJ 07103, U.S.A – cristiabatista@outlook.com

1. Introduction

In the maxim that closes one of his early works, *There is No Natural Religion* (1788), William Blake stated: “He who sees the Infinite in all things, sees God.”¹ Within every human being resides infinite worlds, emanating from the inner God from whom all creative manifestations come. The Poetic Genius represents this faculty of Imagination to create. Such is the revelation that the English poet brought: “As all men are alike (tho’ infinitely various), So all Religions, &, as all similar, have one source. The true Man is the source, he being the Poetic Genius.”²

For Friedrich Schlegel, artwork –specifically poetry–³ is characterized by a moral and philosophical unity where human beings embody God through art. Blake, for his part, was a profoundly spiritual man, although not according to Christian religious orthodoxy. He believed that Genius manifests itself through poetic illumination, another face of what he calls ‘Divine Humanity.’ During the early Romantic period –between the last decade of the 18th century and the first years of the following one– the idea of unity predominated as a constant quest, which unavoidably resulted in incompleteness. Schlegel’s notions of ‘progressive universal poetry’ illustrate this endeavor. For him, self-construction is a perpetual need for a constant going out of oneself and return that drives us to transcend the world of presumed opposites.

To understand why authors from different parts of Europe shared similar concerns, it is crucial to consider the political and cultural events that occurred throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. The French Revolution, the radical rationalization of human thought, and new looks at ancient cultures influenced how ‘Western society’ understood the world. Although the Romantic Movement arose mainly from England and Germany and later spread through Spain, France, and other countries, the expansion of these new ideas was progressive, and there is no precise delimitation of the exact

¹ William Blake, “There is no natural religion,” in *Poems and Prophecies* (London: Everyman’s Library, 1991), 6. I want to express my gratitude to Dr. Lorenzo Boccafogli, who studied at the Peter-Szondi-Institut für Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft. Thanks to his insights, I’ve had the opportunity to contribute to the historicization of the poetic genre.

² Blake, “All religions are one” (1788), Principle 7, in *Poems and Prophecies*, 8.

³ In this regard, Szondi says that Schlegel “outlines the program of a *romantic*, i.e. through a type of poetry that only emerged in modern times, the novel, as a *progressive universal poetry*.” Peter Szondi, “Das Naive ist das Sentimentalische. Zur Begriffsdiagnostik in Schillers Abhandlung,” in *Schriften. Band II* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2011), 65. Original: “[Schlegel] entwirft das Programm einer *romantischen*, d. h. durch eine erst in der Moderne entstandene Dichtart, den Roman, hervorgebrachten Poesie als einer *progressiven Universalpoesie*.” All translations from the German are my own.

period of its flowering. On the other hand, even though Blake –one of the authors we will focus on– did not speak German, or the German thinkers did not delve deeply into the English works of the time, both parties were already reading works of modern intellectuals.

Such resemblances become a little less surprising when we recognize that Blake was actually quite well read in the philosophical and literary works that interested his contemporaries. He was especially attracted–like Tieck, Schelling, Novalis and others of the Jena circle–to the writings of Jacob Boehme.⁴

In addition to the above, we can mention the influence that Blake could have received, both in his written and pictorial work, from his friends Henry Fuseli⁵ and Johann Kaspar Lavater, who grew up in Zurich and translated many texts from German (Lavater even traveled with Goethe down the Rhine).⁶ Likewise, Coleridge’s translations of the work of Friedrich Schiller contributed to English Romanticism. In England, fiction writers and poets also arose in opposition to Empiricism. They promoted an exaltation of the capacity of the power of imagination and beauty in the formation of human experience. That gave rise to a particular artistic and cultural penchant for the grotesque, the imaginative, and fanciful freedom of the imagination, as well as for an exaggerated and anachronistic recovery of the Gothic, and later for darkness and horror. On the German side, it is relevant to note the influence of some of Shakespeare’s characters, such as Macbeth, and the repercussions that Wieland’s translation of the English playwright’s works had for the pre-Romantics, so the intellectual influence was definitely reciprocal. Therefore, to address these connections, we will endeavour to establish the philosophical parallels concerning the imagination found in the ideas of Blake and those of the early German Romantics, particularly Schlegel, based on a concept that can be found in both: that of Genius.

In this essay, I consider *Poetic Genius* as the concept that best embodies the romantic ideal, representing the highest imaginative manifestation that does not aspire to a synthesis of historical and artistic knowledge but rather goes beyond the need to achieve any synthesis. My remarks begin, in the first place, by discussing the concept of Genius found in the early works of William Blake and its possible similarity to Friedrich Schlegel’s idea of ‘Universal Progressive Poetry’ and other notions of Genius of pre-

⁴ Leonard M. Trawick, “William Blake’s German Connection,” *Colby Library Quarterly*, 13 (4) (1977): 230.

⁵ Johann Heinrich Füssli (1741 – 1825), a Swiss painter.

⁶ Trawick, “William Blake’s German Connection.”

Romanticism and early German Romanticism. Secondly, we will analyze how the tension between the ancient and the modern conception of art is carried out in the literature, as in the case of Schiller's work, which could have influenced him to aspire to a synthesis of knowledge. Finally, we will consider how *Poetic Genius* represents an impulse that does not tend to a final synthesis of artistic forms or an absolute but tends toward its own concept of infinity. Thus, these authors warn that excessive analysis does not create art but mere rhetoric. Instead, Schlegel tells us in fragment no. 117 of the *Critical Fragments*:

Poetry can only be criticized by way of poetry. A critical judgment of an artistic production has no civil rights in the realm of art if it isn't itself a work of art, either in its substance, as a representation of a necessary impression in the state of becoming, or in the beauty of its form [...].⁷

Not in vain, Antoine Berman claimed that “[t]he romantic program consists in transforming what is historically only a tendency into a self-conscious intention [...]”.⁸ That is the reason why Poetry represents the ideal of placing oneself beyond the attempts to explain everything within the limits of the philosophical tradition, greatly influenced in its time by Kantian epistemology. Differences between Blake and the pre-Romantic thinkers begin to emerge at this point. While the latter start from Kant to address a counterproposal, Kant does not serve as the foundation for the English poet's vision at all. Additionally, Blake's rejection of empiricism is more radical, distancing him from the so-called natural religion or natural philosophy, which he compared to the means of Satan.⁹ In contrast, the pre-Romantic thinkers had embraced the ideal of achieving a synthesis between art and science. However, from an aesthetic point of view, similarities can be found. Let's remember that for Kant, a theoretical systematization of aesthetics is not possible since it is related to taste, so it is an individual experience.¹⁰ For the German Romantics, the latter was insufficient to account for aesthetic experience, and even for understanding the truth. For this reason, its main

⁷ Friedrich Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 157.

⁸ Antoine Berman, *The Experience of the Foreign* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1992), 74.

⁹ “Jerusalem: To the Deists.” William Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 201.

¹⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Thinkers such as Novalis, Schiller, Fichte, Schelling, or the Schlegel brothers would analyze art by emancipating it from Kantian logic and epistemology, relating it to action rather than judgment. Thus, for Kant, the aesthetic judgment is immediate and free, whereas, for the romantics, the aesthetic experience implies reflection, it is not immediate.

object of reflection is found in itself, encompassing all literary genres. “Romantic poetry is a progressive, universal poetry,”¹¹ exclaims the *Athenaeum* fragment no. 116, and “knowledge is not a deduction”¹² but an experience.

2. The Poetic Genius and the Progressive Universal

Early German Romanticism (*Frühromantik*) aimed to found an artistic and intellectual movement that fostered the search for inner truth outside any doctrine established by excessive reasoning. In this way, the issues about the confrontation with ‘the other’ became a topic of interest. In other words, the tension between one’s own –and national– identity and the foreign one, a process that places great merits on the formation or education of oneself (*Bildung*), which we could well understand as a life dedicated to trial and error through artistic production. The creative manifestation, and as William Blake would say, the imaginative one, is the only possible way to bring us closer to the divine beyond the limits established by language and reason. For the English author, art that imitates nature is inferior to art that comes from pure imagination, where the material conditions of space and time do not exist. How should we understand the concept of Divinity in this sense?

Karl Wilhelm Friedrich von Schlegel, in fragment no. 44 of the *Ideas*, states: “We cannot see God but we can see godlikeness everywhere —first and foremost in the heart of a thoughtful man, in the depths of a living human creation.”¹³ Though Schlegel and Blake were separated by language and sea, in addition to the fact that it would be an error to affirm that Blake had an affinity with most of the ideas of German Romanticism, their thoughts nevertheless pointed to similar goals regarding creativity. As seen in the previous Schlegel fragment, Blake says that “the Poetic Genius is the true Man, and that the body or outward form of Man is derived from the Poetic Genius. Likewise that the forms of all things are derived from their Genius [...]”¹⁴ Our task in this article will be to understand how this *Genius*

¹¹ Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 175. We must remember that the fragments of the *Athenaeum* were written by various thinkers, such as Novalis, Schleiermacher, Friedrich & August Wilhelm Schlegel, as part of the *Symphilosophie* experiment of collective writing.

¹² Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 664.

¹³ Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 245.

¹⁴ Blake, “All Religions are One,” Principle Ist, in *Poems and Prophecies*, 7. Blake will use ‘Imagination’ instead of *Genius* in his following works, referring to ‘true man,’ an active creative faculty of the spirit. Friedrich Schlegel used ‘enthusiasm’ or ‘inspiration,’ as we will see, with a similar connotation.

manifests itself and to what extent Blake's conception of Genius is similar to that of the German Romantics.

The literary scholar Peter Szondi, in his study of poetry in Schiller,¹⁵ argues that the representatives of the *Sturm und Drang* literary movement,¹⁶ which can either be considered as the transition between Weimar Classicism and Romanticism, or as pre-Romanticism, "took the concept of genius from English art theory of the 18th Century and from Diderot concerning the moment of originality."¹⁷ However, the concept of genius that can derive from the empiricist tradition is still related to the idea of individual artistic genius and creative production. On the other hand, the Romantic project places genius as the ability to expose the limits of reason.

William Blake has been considered both as pre-Romantic and as an influence of English Romanticism. He referred to the *Poetic Genius* in his early works (1788-1795). For the literary theorist Northrop Frye, Blake seems to have coined the term Poetic Genius from his reading of the English pre-Romantic poet Thomas Gray, who related it to liberty,¹⁸ and Blake, in turn, related it to the imagination. In his mature works, especially in his 'prophetic books,' Blake most frequently employs the terms 'Imagination' or 'Spirit of prophecy' with a similar meaning, as the latter is more closely related to his integral and mature vision of what he considered the 'real world,' where art and religion are two ways to express the divine. With this in mind, our English author chose the "infernal method"¹⁹ to capture his visions, which allowed him to make relief engravings that brought together the poems and color images, later known as 'illuminated printing.'

¹⁵ Peter Szondi, "Das Naive ist das Sentimentalische. Zur Begriffsdialektik in Schillers Abhandlung," For a philosophy of history through artistic production, Szondi emphasizes *Frühromantik's* concept of discontinuity instead of the idea of continuity of the national (German) tradition, promoted mainly by authors such as Heidegger and Gadamer.

¹⁶ Before Novalis or Hölderlin, who would search for a sense of collective consciousness, the pre-Romantics had declared their opposition to the extreme reasoning of the Enlightenment by exalting individual freedom and sentiment. Among the pre-Romantics were Johann Gottfried von Herder and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who would influence the thought of Jena Romanticism or early German Romanticism (*Frühromantik*). This early Romanticism can be separated thematically from the German romantics who would arrive soon, whose concerns were more literary than philosophical, coming closer to the English romantics. Among these may be mentioned E. T. A. Hoffmann and Ludwig Tieck.

¹⁷ "[Ü]bernahmen aus der englischen Kunsttheorie des 18. Jahrhunderts und von Diderot für das Moment der Originalität den Begriff des Genies." Szondi, "Das Naive ist das Sentimentalische. Zur Begriffsdialektik in Schillers Abhandlung," 78.

¹⁸ Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A study of William Blake* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969).

¹⁹ Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, "A memorable fancy," in *Poems and Prophecies*, 52.

One of the crucial ideas to understand the thought of the English author is that there is no *real* division between body and soul except what he calls Reason and Energy, which are the two elements that make up the human being. “Man has no Body distinct from his soul; for that call’d Body is a portion of Soul discern’d by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age.”²⁰ Following this thought, what is normally understood as Good is a passive element that obeys Reason (identified with *Heaven*), and Evil is the active element that arises from Energy (identified with *Hell*). Therefore, the English poet, as if he were a prophet of ancient times, will exalt the reconciliation between these that happens within the human being, especially in: *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, which was how he named his book of revelations, biblical interpretations, aphorisms and even ironic parodies, which was written between 1790 and 1793. These visions should not be taken solely as a manifestation of imagination as something unreal, as Andrew Bowie mentions with regard to the concerns of early Romanticism:

In the Romantic conception art can be regarded as reconciling in the realm of appearance what is unreconciled in reality, and thus as a form of ideology. Art does so, though, because it grants freedom to the imagination, allowing it to move beyond the world of what there is to a world of as yet unrealised possibility.²¹

Schlegel stated that “[e]very thinking part of an organization should not feel its limits without at the same time feeling its unity in relation to the whole.”²² How to overcome those limits? “Where philosophy stops, poetry has to begin.”²³ Thinkers like Schleiermacher, Novalis, or Schlegel had warned that mere philosophical knowledge is incapable of accounting for the absolute, but poetry can get close to it. “Philosophy too is the result of two conflicting forces—of poetry and practice. Where these interpenetrate completely and fuse into one, there philosophy comes into being; and when philosophy disintegrates, it becomes mythology or else returns to life.”²⁴ However, although these authors approached mythology from the critique of poetry – an issue that we will address in the next section, they did not set out to create a mythology. Blake did. Mythology speaks the language of the absolute, distant, and fragmentary at the same time. Mythology is, in this way, poetry.

²⁰ Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, “The voice of the Devil,” in *Poems and Prophecies*, 46.

²¹ Andrew Bowie, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 14.

²² Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 245. *Ideas* fragment 48.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Athenaeum* fragment 304. Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 245.

*Urizen*²⁵ represents what is done rationally in Blake's mythology, perhaps commonly understood by the optimistic idea that reason tends towards good and law and tries to separate itself from mere impulses. These last, however, are the source of creativity (identified by *Los*). In 'A Memorable Fancy' (a section of the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*), Blake says: "As I was walking among the fires of hell. Delighted with the enjoyments of Genius, which to Angels look like torment and insanity, I collected some of their Proverbs [...]."²⁶ From the abyss of the senses, the *Hell* where convulsive productive energies converge (which we could identify with the 'enthusiasm' that Schlegel speaks of throughout his works), Reason establishes a radius, that is, a proportion, to mark the scope of what is understood, an attempt at assimilation and ordering. There is an attempt at unity that does not finish joining, an expectation of overcoming not reached and that will never be reached. The radius of knowledge is gradually expanding, a conception we can recognize as the 'progressive universal' of the early German romantics. The problem is that *Urizen*, in a certain way, a parody of a God understood by reason through the establishment of time and space, separates nature (reality) from consciousness. Science from art. But the Genius is beyond this separation.

Johann Gottfried Herder, one of the leading pre-Romantic thinkers, inspired by the works of Shakespeare and Rousseau, helped develop the concept of genius by detaching it from the English and French empiricist tradition and making it a topic of discussion in the *Sturm und Drang* movement. In his essay *Shakespeare*, referring with a certain melancholy to ancient Greece (which we will arrive at a little later), he says:

And if now in this changed time, changed for good or ill, there arose an age, a genius who created dramatic works from this raw material as naturally, sublimely, and originally as the Greeks did from theirs; and if these works reached the same goal by very different paths; and if they were essentially a far more multiformly simple and uniformly complex

²⁵ According to Blake's cosmivision, *Urizen* is one of the four main forces (*Zoas*) that make up the universe and represents an ordering principle identified with reason. It is opposed to *Los*, the abstraction of the imagination and time. "Four Mighty Ones are in every Man; a Perfect Unity," said Blake in *Vala (The Four Zoas)*. Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 300.

²⁶ Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, "A memorable fancy," in *Poems and Prophecies*, 47. In this passage, Blake parodies Dante's journey.

entity, and thus (according to all metaphysical definitions) a perfect whole [...].²⁷

Antoine Berman mentions that genius, along with reflection, is the category that “best represents the romantic perception of the subject,”²⁸ and the *Sturm und Drang* movement “had developed the notion of artistic genius as a tempestuous, unconscious, and natural force, engendering works as one engenders children in the ecstasy of desire.”²⁹ These conceptions of genius present similarities based on similar pursuits, for instance, advocating for a religious character of literature. Novalis, for his part, used the concept of genius to designate someone capable of being many people at the same time, coinciding with Blake in the idea of totality. “Genius is nothing but spirit in this active use of the organs. Up to now we have *had* only single *genius*—but the spirit is to become total *genius*.”³⁰

The *Poetic Genius* implies constant self-improvement, a process where Reason descends to *Hell*, again and again, to take what it can from the impulses and return to build something new: a creation. “Without Contraries is no progression,”³¹ the English poet affirms, “and Negations,” the scholar Michael Kirwan adds, because “[c]ontraries are opposites whose interplay generates understanding and energy; these can exist even in eternity; negation refers to separation and ultimate alienation from God.”³² This constant encounter and reunion that we can identify with the romantic ‘progressive universal’ manifests itself in ultimate poetry, an end in itself beyond any categorization. The foundational *Athenaeum* fragment no. 116 says of this:

The romantic kind of poetry is still in the state of becoming; that, in fact, is its real essence: that it should forever be becoming and never be perfected. It can be exhausted by no theory and only a divinatory criticism would dare try to characterize its ideal. It alone is infinite, just

²⁷ Johann Gottfried Herder, *Selected Writings on Aesthetics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 297.

²⁸ Antoine Berman, *The Experience of the Foreign*, 78.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Novalis, no. 28 of the “Logological Fragments II,” in *Philosophical Writings* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), 76. Italics in the original.

³¹ Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, “The Argument,” in *Poems and Prophecies*, 46.

³² Michael Kirwan, “‘A Candle in Sunshine’: Desire and Apocalypse in Blake and Hölderlin,” *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 19 (2012): 192. Negation in Blake implies an exposition of all the parts of the same nature to their extremes to overcome both towards a prior unity.

as it alone is free; and it recognizes as its first commandment that the will of the poet can tolerate no law above itself.³³

Genius contains the Divine Humanity, the supreme inner state that includes all other imaginative states and processes;³⁴ and Imagination is the faculty of the spirit to experience it and transcend the finitude, that is, in fact, the conscience for Blake.³⁵ Hence, we can understand Poetic Genius as a divine imaginative faculty, the mediator between both worlds, Heaven (reason) and the abyss (impulses). Descending and returning makes the artist transcend and expand to a greater extent the radius that reason tries to impose on him/her in the material dimension. The inner genius attempts to transcend by building a self that will manifest on the outside, mobilizing from the implicit to the explicit, a getting out of oneself that never reaches a particular being. In this way, we can identify one of Schlegel's main ideas, since: "Every good human being is always progressively becoming God. To become God, to be human, to cultivate oneself are all expressions that mean the same thing" (*Athenaeum* fragment no. 262).³⁶ Related to this, it is worth mentioning what Gadamer underscores about the concept of *Bildung*: "it evokes the ancient mystical tradition according to which man carries in his soul the image of God, after whom he is fashioned, and which man must cultivate in himself."³⁷ Finally, for Blake, Imagination is a divine faculty of the human being; it is the image of God.

Later we will return to the religious character of the poetic manifestation. Before we must ask: if art through Imagination tries to overcome the opposites without succeeding, but Genius refers to the attempt, where does the desire to achieve a progressive universal poetry come from? To answer this question, we need to focus on classical antiquity and how the new philological studies around this contributed to the birth of literary criticism, the skepticism about the scope of philosophy in terms of how to reach knowledge, and of course, self-reflection.

³³ Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 175.

³⁴ Kathleen Raine, *Golgonooza. City of Imagination: Last Studies in William Blake* (Hudson, N.Y.: Lindisfarne Press, 1991).

³⁵ As he recorded in the letters addressed to Rev. Dr. Trusler in 1799: "I find more and more that my style of designing is a species by itself, and in this which I send you have been compelled by my Genius or Angel to follow where he led." William Blake, *The Letters of William Blake* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), 57.

³⁶ Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 200.

³⁷ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 10.

3. A Look at the Ancients

For the romantic thinkers, there was an opposition between modern thought and their simplified image of the Classical World. Although they presented both views as opposites, they aimed to overcome this confrontation by creating artworks that resulted in a new path. If we go back to Archaic Greek antiquity, where the responsibility for the education of the youngest was in the hands of the poets, and the written word did not yet exist in the practical sense that we give it today, the great epics were memorized, recited and transmitted orally for generations. According to some authors such as Schiller, whose influence is notable in early Romanticism, we could speak about “natural poetics,” where the words ‘myth’ and ‘history’ did not exist with the differentiated connotations that characterize them in modern times.

William Blake showed great interest in the Greek world, both for its sculpture and its worldview, to the point of stating that his purpose of being alive was “to renew the lost art of the Greeks,”³⁸ although he retracted this stance later in his life. One of the first books to bring Blake into this culture was Füssli’s translation of Winkelmann’s *Reflections on the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks*. However, a spirit of peaceful rebellion like Blake would be disappointed to admit that the Greeks were people who glorified war. He even goes so far as to affirm that “a warlike State never can produce Art.”³⁹

Blake later disparaged Greek art as “mathematic” rather than truly imaginative, but in the 1790’s he was an enthusiastic Hellenist (in an 1800 letter to George Cumberland, for example, he welcomes “the immense flood of Grecian light & glory which is coming on Europe”). Winkelmann’s book, which did much to revive an appreciation of classical art both in England and in Germany, must have affected the young engraver’s tastes.⁴⁰

The ancient world, particularly the Greeks, was an idealized reference, mainly due to the exhaustive philological work done by different thinkers from both Classicism and Romanticism. The modern human being exists between a past that will not return—which we can only incompletely

³⁸ Letter addressed to Dr. John Trusler, August 16, 1799. Blake, *The Letters of William Blake*, 57.

³⁹ Blake, ‘On Virgil’ (1818), in *Poems and prophecies*, 333. To complement, let’s take a look at the fragment of one of the poems belonging to the so-called *MS. Book* (1800-1803):

*’Twas the Greeks’ love of war
Turn’d Love into a Boy
And Woman into a Statue of Stone,
And away fled every joy.*

⁴⁰ Trawick, “William Blake’s German Connection,” 233.

reconstruct, and an uncertain future. For these authors, the Greek world represents a society that lived in a certain balance and acceptance with nature. In this way, its artistic manifestations were the exaltation of this balance, carried out within a context that, from the point of view of a radical modern historicity of artistical forms, it would be 'unconscious of itself.' The modern human being, on the contrary, is not much more than an accumulation of fragments oriented towards extreme rationality that suffocates the creativity intrinsic to his / her spirit. "Many of the works of the ancients have become fragments. Many modern works are fragments as soon as they are written"⁴¹ (*Athenaeum* fragment no. 24). Despite this, it can also be inferred that genius harbors a "fragmentary genius," as Schlegel said in no. 9 of the *Critical Fragments*.⁴²

What we now know as mythology could be understood as a manifestation of the creative spirit of the ancient human being, a world that, despite coming to a certain extent from the imagination, should not, therefore, fall into the error of burying it within the unreal, since this becomes poetry, and in this way becomes cultural identification, identity. A deified world with an origin that is at the same time the ideal of the ancients: the so distant Age of Gold. In fragment no. 85 of the *Ideas*, Schlegel says of this conception: "The kernel, the center of poetry, is to be found in mythology and the mysteries of antiquity. Sate the feeling of life with the idea of infinity, and you will understand both the ancients and poetry."⁴³ According to Kirwan, in contrast to German romantic poets such as Friedrich Hölderlin, "Blake preferred to construct his own smoky mythological system rather than resort to classical or syncretistic paradigms."⁴⁴

Michael Kirwan mentions several similarities between the ideals of Blake and Hölderlin, for instance, a religious unification from which, however, the Christian elements stand out in the end. The scholar quotes René Girard when referring to the project that Hölderlin, Hegel, and Schelling had: "This was the construction of the 'new mythology' that was required by philosophy but would have to be realised by poets: a mythology that would combine 'monotheism of reason and the heart, polytheism of imagination and art.'"⁴⁵ Kirwan also highlights that Hölderlin's poetry is full of gods; it tends to deify everything. However, the German poet realized the imminent failure of this goal, due to the difference between the archaic spirit

⁴¹ Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 164.

⁴² Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 144.

⁴³ Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 248.

⁴⁴ Kirwan, "A Candle in Sunshine," 195.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 183.

and that of the modern (Christian),⁴⁶ a conclusion that may have been inspired by his admiration of Schiller, a thinker we will delve into later.

How could these modern and fragmentary individuals understand the ancient world whose reality is determined by the Garden of the Hesperides, the nymphs, and the gods? Perhaps the answer can be found in the work of art. If we follow Blake, we could suppose that art and poetry could once again unite nature and the sciences through imaginative and productive experience, as will happen in his renewed world, where “[t]he dark Religions are departed & sweet Science reigns.”⁴⁷ We know that Blake despised empiricism and mechanistic materialism, so what did he mean by a ‘sweet science’? Perhaps we will find the answer by contemplating the creative impulse of the ancients, and once again we come closer to the German thinkers of his time. The goal of the Greek work of art rested on the representation of a collective ideal, a part of a common ritual, as Walter Benjamin recalls:

Originally the contextual integration of art in tradition found its expression in the cult. We know that the earliest art works originated in the service of a ritual—first the magical, then the religious kind. It is significant that the existence of the work of art with reference to its aura is never entirely separated from its ritual function. In other words, the unique value of the “authentic” work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value. This ritualistic basis, however remote, is still recognizable as secularized ritual even in the most profane forms of the cult of beauty.⁴⁸

How to reduce the distance between a work erected as part of a collective ritual, of which little can be understood about its original function, and the current use of art? Here arises the modern work thought of as a reproduction, where the technique has been imposed on the creative intellect. But just as Benjamin predicted a dark future for art as reproduction,⁴⁹ which in an attempt to ‘update’ the work would contribute to the destruction of its

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ “Vala (The Four Zoas).” In Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 407. Amanda Jo Goldstein highlights the fact that in Blake’s post-apocalyptic morning narrated in *Vala*, the word for what presides over the new world, is ‘science,’ and not ‘poetic genius’ or ‘imagination.’ Amanda Jo Goldstein, *Sweet Science: Romantic Materialism and the New Logics of Life* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017).

⁴⁸ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Technical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 223-224.

⁴⁹ It should be noted that Szondi considered Benjamin and Lukács heirs to the historicization of the poetry genre inaugurated by Schiller and passing through Schlegel, Hölderlin, and Hegel. Szondi, “Das Naive ist das Sentimentalische. Zur Begriffsdiagnostik in Schillers Abhandlung.”

millennial significance, the early romantics similarly became aware of this. Blake despised art that tried to imitate nature, considering it inferior to one that springs from the Imagination since the former was enclosed within finite things, not eternal.⁵⁰ Novalis said: “As civilization advances his attempts begin to lose the quality of genius—but they gain in utility—whereby he is led into the error—of generalizing entirely from the premises [...]”⁵¹ And he also tells us: “The former are infinite, but uniform—the latter limited—but diverse. The former have genius the latter talent—the former ideas—the latter skills. The former are heads, without hands, the latter hands, without heads.”⁵²

Blake was sure that the ancient Poets “studied the genius of each city & country, placing it under its mental deity,”⁵³ but then a system was formed, and the unity was lost. In this sense, looking at the past to understand how we are in the present also leads to the conclusion that the past should not (and cannot) be reproduced, “And hardly allowed to wake the dead;”⁵⁴ hence the aporia that affects the fragmentary perception of the modern. How to create something new if what is presumably known is all the old? How to replicate the ancient vision if we can only create in the present age and based on interpretations? Due to unknowns such as these, different authors dedicated themselves to the task of studying and analyzing the types of artistic creation since ancient times, carrying out classifications, for example, of literature, and opening new doors to the philological occupation.

Friedrich Schiller, in his essay *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* (*Naive and Sentimental Poetry*, 1795), analyzes how Genius manifested itself in antiquity compared to modernity, but from a different perspective from that of the study of literary genres of normative intention that had been developing with Classicism. “With this, Schiller bids farewell to the traditional poetics of the genre, which does not know the historicity of literary forms, and introduces the historicization of the poetics of the genre [...]”⁵⁵ approaching poetics from a philosophy of history that would influence Schlegel’s and Hölderlin’s theories and even impact Hegel. For Schiller, the ancient poet is naive, like a child; he tries to imitate nature. The sentimental poet seeks an ideal; he / she is nostalgic and speculative; the reflection comes

⁵⁰ Blake, *The Letters of William Blake*.

⁵¹ Fragment no. 18 of the “Logological Fragments I.” Novalis, *Philosophical Writings*, 52.

⁵² Fragment no. 13 of the “Logological Fragments I.” Novalis, *Philosophical Writings*, 50.

⁵³ Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, “A memorable fancy,” 50.

⁵⁴ “Und kaum erlaubt, Gestorbene zu wecken.” Hölderlin, from the poem *Germanien*.

⁵⁵ “Damit verabschiedet Schiller die überlieferte Gattungspoetik, welche Geschichtlichkeit der literarischen Formen nicht kennt, und leitet jene Historisierung der Gattungspoetik mit ein [...]” Szondi, “Das Naive ist das Sentimentalische. Zur Begriffsdiagnostik in Schillers Abhandlung,” 80.

from him / herself, not from the outside. To better understand this tension-relation between ancient (naive) and modern (sentimental) poetry and how these would give rise to romantic poetry in an attempt to reach absolute poetry, it is worth dwelling on what Schiller tells us regarding the ancients:

What determines their character is precisely what is lacking for the perfection of our own; what distinguishes us from them, is precisely what they themselves lack for divinity. We are free, they are necessary; we change, they remain a unity. But only if both are joined one with the other—if the will freely obeys the law of necessity, and reason asserts its rule through all the flux of imagination, does the ideal or the divine come to the fore. *In them*, then, we see eternally that which escapes us, but for which we are challenged to strive, and which, even if we never attain to it, we may still hope to approach in endless progress.⁵⁶

It is not in vain that Blake accentuates this contrast, particularly in his *Songs of Innocence and of Experience. Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul* (1794), two collections of poems that thematically complement each other. True humanity –Divine Humanity– would reside in the unification of the naive and the sentimental. Romantic poetry lies in the attempt to achieve this synthesis but emphasizes the attempt, not the synthesis as such, because it is unattainable for us. The sentimental poet seeks to return to the naive through reflection, until becoming something else (a third category) when art has returned to nature, in Schiller’s thought. Therefore, Poetic Genius arises when the observing and the speculative genius meet constantly but do not merge, so the role of the mediator is still to be clarified.

But now the poet is assigned the task of equating an individual state to the human whole, consequently to base that state absolutely and necessarily upon himself. Hence, every trace of temporal dependence must be removed from the moment of inspiration, and the subject itself, however limited it may be, may not limit the poet.⁵⁷

However, Schiller still does not abandon the influence of Kantian categories,⁵⁸ which affects his concept of genius. Let us remember that, for Kant, nature gives the rules to art, while the genius (in this sense, the artist)

⁵⁶ Friedrich von Schiller, *Naive and Sentimental Poetry and On the Sublime* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1966), 85.

⁵⁷ Schiller, *Naive and Sentimental Poetry and On the Sublime*, 157.

⁵⁸ For Kant, as he wrote in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, there will always be three categories for each class to avoid dichotomy. The third category would be the result of combining the two previous ones.

is convinced that it creates freely.⁵⁹ “Genius, as Kant understands it, is a ruse of nature. No different is the goal that Schiller imposes on the spirit that has passed through culture.”⁶⁰ Schiller does not notice a contradiction in his explanation of the naive and the sentimental. Throughout his work, he shows naive and sentimental poetry in an antagonistic way but on other occasions suggests that what is opposed to the naive one is *reflection*, being the sentimental a third category: the *ideal*. This is problematic because, by suggesting a third category, the sense that the ideal is unattainable is lost. However, the next generation, as part of the early romantic movement, would return to this concern.

As mentioned, this conception hindered the optimal development of the exposition on the naive and the sentimental, presenting both on many occasions as opposites and, in other cases, as complementary. Nevertheless, what Schiller seemed to want to point out is the Sentimental as a recovery of the ancient through reflection, being the result, no longer *the sentimental*, but *the ideal* (only poetic). Although he does not clarify this thought (dialectical, in a Hegelian sense), he would surely inspire Schlegel’s literary theory. Indeed, it is worth paying attention to Schiller’s birthday letter to his friend Goethe in August 1794: “*just as you passed from intuition to abstraction, you also had to turn concepts back into intuitions and transform thoughts into feelings, since only through these can genius produce.*”⁶¹

From the contributions of Schiller, Schlegel will classify the poetry of nature as natural or artificial.⁶² “Naive is what is or seems to be natural, individual, or classical to the point of irony, or else to the point of continuously fluctuating between self-creation and self-destruction.”⁶³ But for this work to be beautiful, poetic, and ideal –he tells us later– “The beautiful, poetical, ideal naive must combine intention and instinct. The essence of intention in this sense is freedom, though intention isn’t consciousness by a long shot.”⁶⁴ Peter Szondi, in his reading of German Romantic genre theory, points out that natural poetry is subjective or objective according to how Schlegel posits it. Nevertheless, the mixture of

⁵⁹ Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*.

⁶⁰ “Das Genie, wie Kant es versteht, ist List der Natur. Nicht anders ist das Ziel beschaffen, das Schiller dem durch die Kultur hindurchgegangen Geist setzt.” Szondi, “Das Naive ist das Sentimentalische. Zur Begriffsdiagnostik in Schillers Abhandlung,” 78.

⁶¹ “[S]o wie Sie von der Anschauung zur Abstraktion übergangen, so mußten Sie nun rückwärts Begriffe wieder in Intuitionen umsetzen, und Gedanken in Gefühle verwandeln, weil nur durch diese das Genie hervorbringen kann.” Quoted by Szondi, “Das Naive ist das Sentimentalische. Zur Begriffsdiagnostik in Schillers Abhandlung,” 90. Italics in the original.

⁶² As has been stated in the *Athenaeum* fragment no. 4.

⁶³ *Athenaeum* fragment no. 51. Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 167.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

the subjective-objective is not possible in the natural formation among the Greeks.⁶⁵ Would this union be the highest achievement of Romantic literature, which would find its zenith in the novel (understood as an object of poetry) and in the philology of philosophy, in Schlegel's terms?⁶⁶ The Poetic Genius, the one who would bring the instinctual closer to the intentional, or as we saw at the beginning, reconciles Heaven and abyss, transcends the confrontation between two aspects of the same world, elevating it towards a new conception of infinity.

4. The Door to Infinity

How do the romantic ideal and Genius, as the imaginative manifestation of an almost religious character, complement each other? Religion is another notable element for these authors, although not in an institutional or political sense, but as a way of approaching what Blake called 'Divine Humanity.' As we have seen, for the English poet, inspired by the mystical thought of Jakob Böhme and the immaterialism advocated by Berkeley, all religions have the same source, the *Poetic Genius*, the *True Man*. In other words, in a manner reminiscent of Novalis, this notion pertains to a shared faculty attainable by any individual who has cultivated discernment to remove the veil that establishes the limits of reason.

According to Blake, when the genius that the ancient poets possessed was overshadowed, and the divine was separated from the sensible things, "thus began Priesthood, Choosing forms of worship from poetic tales."⁶⁷ This provides us with an important fact: we must consider that Blake grew up in an environment of religious dissent. Let us not forget the influence that Swedenborg exerted in his early life, and our English poet leaned towards radical religious ideas (in the sense of a spiritual and prophetic preponderance) that were not under the institutionalized doctrines of the Church. Similarly, Trawick reminds us: "In Germany the corresponding wing of religion, Pietism, which itself had many interconnections with English dissenting sects, was influential both on the *Frühromantiker* and on their *Sturm und Drang* predecessors."⁶⁸

One of the ideas of the Enlightenment, influenced by Locke,⁶⁹ is that human beings are miniature gods: we create things, and by having this

⁶⁵ Szondi, *Poetik und Geschichtsphilosophie II. Studienausgabe der Vorlesungen, Band 3*.

⁶⁶ Bowie, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory*.

⁶⁷ Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, in *Poems and Prophecies*, 50.

⁶⁸ Trawick, "William Blake's German Connection," 230.

⁶⁹ John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

creative capacity, we also have the authority of knowledge to produce them. In Romantic thought, this conception of the human being as an image of God prevails to a certain extent due to our ability to create (Divine Humanity as a source of creation). But unlike the Enlightenment, it does not focus on the material work produced but on the ability itself, coming from the imagination. We are an image of God, not because we create things, but because we *create*. Following Blake, who, by the way, despised Locke, the Creation in its entirety is the Imagination of God. Our author seems to focus on the creative capacity rather than on what is created, and this makes more sense when we return to the German romantic ideal of forging oneself (*Bildung*).

This religious thinking influenced the desire of many romantic authors to imagine their identity, their collectivity, and their nation as a cultural community. To illustrate this, in the poetry of Friedrich Hölderlin, all the elements that we have been analyzing converge: identity as a cluster of fragments, nostalgia for a past that does not belong to us, the unification that never occurs, the creative impulse in constant reformulation and uncertainty about our place in a growing global community. This confrontation can be perceived, for instance, in the poem *Patmos*:

*Mir Asia auf, und geblendet sucht'
Ich eines, das ich kennete, denn ungewohnt
War ich der breiten Gassen, wo herab
Vom Tmolus fährt
Der goldgeschmückte Pactol
Und Taurus stehet und Messogis,
Und voll von Blumen der Garten,
Ein stilles Feuer; aber im Lichte
Blüht hoch der silberne Schnee;
Und Zeug unsterblichen Lebens
An unzugangbaren Wänden
Uralt der Epheu wächst und getragen sind
Von lebenden Säulen, Cedern und Lorbeern
Im Zwielight, Menschen ähnlich, da ich gieng
Der schattige Wald
Und die sehnsüchtigen Bäche
Der Heimath; nimmer kannt' ich die Länder.⁷⁰*

⁷⁰ Friedrich Hölderlin, "Patmos," in *Fünf Gedichte* (Pisa: JsQ, 2008), 60-61. "Asia on me, and blinded searches / I one that I knew, because unknown / Was I from the wide alleys, where I descended? / Drives from Tmolus / The gold-adorned Pactol / And Taurus stands, and Messogis, / And the garden is full of flowers / A silent fire; but in the light / Silver snow blooms above; / And stuff of immortal life / On inaccessible walls / Ancient the ivy grows

Thinking about the juxtaposition of places, the confrontation of times, in that unification attempt that is still fragmentary, gives rise to what Antoine Berman (in his study on *The Experience of the Foreign* about the work of romantic translation) calls an ‘infinite versatility’ and, indeed, the capacity of the Genius. Infinite versatility “is also the ability to be everywhere and to be many [...]. As such, it formulates an entire new view of *Bildung* [...];”⁷¹ a thought that could have influenced Hegel in his concept of freedom as the ability to be oneself in the other.

How is this religious thinking conceived concerning knowledge found in other intellectual fields of the time, such as physics? As Bowie says: “A central aim of early German Romantic thought was to bring together in a new synthesis the increasingly specialised knowledges that were developing in both the natural and the human sciences at the end of the eighteenth century.”⁷² This is where German thinkers distance themselves from Blake’s thought, for whom there is nothing more than an explicit clash between science and art. That was one of Blake’s statements to the point that Kathleen Raine claims that he “is the only English poet whose central theme is the confrontation of science and imagination.”⁷³ The separation between mind and nature leads to the preponderance of material science over spirituality. Blake maintained that we should return to the original unity, that is, the internal and external worlds unified by the first principle of creation, Imagination or *Genius*, the creative divine faculty of the human being, leading to a “sweet science,” a thought also found in the English romantic poet, Coleridge.⁷⁴ For this reason, the “work of art, understood as the manifestation of a unification of necessity and freedom not possible in any other realm of human activity, played a vital role in Romantic approaches to such a synthesis.”⁷⁵

However, when the philosophical analysis tries to isolate each object and study it in a particular way, it usually leads to the error of classifications.

and wears away / Of living pillars, cedars and laurels / In the twilight, human like as I walked / The shady forest / And the longing streams / of home; I never knew the countries.”

⁷¹ Berman, *The Experience of the Foreign*, 78.

⁷² Bowie, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory*, 13.

⁷³ Raine, *Golgonooza. City of Imagination*, 9.

⁷⁴ As Coleridge said in 1817: “There are evidently two powers at work, which relatively to each other are active and passive; and this is not possible without an intermediate faculty, which is at once both active and passive. (In philosophical language, we must denominate this intermediate faculty in all its degrees and determinations, the IMAGINATION [...]). Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 88-89.

⁷⁵ Bowie, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory*, 13.

Speculation often involves a false dichotomy, whose extremes look even more distant for anyone who gets carried away by excessive reasoning, hence the criticism of philosophy in the claim that it can account for true facts. For example, the concepts of finite and infinite are apparently contradictory to each other, but if we see them from Schlegel's perspective, the infinite is nothing more than the finite in constant change. In the romantic poetic work, which is nevertheless also philosophical (to live poetically implies, therefore, to live philosophically), to achieve or to consummate are not qualities of the infinite. "Not art and works of art make the artist, but feeling and inspiration and impulse"⁷⁶ (no. 63 of *Critical Fragments*).

We have hinted at some aspects of early Romanticism concerning the search for an ideal from the confrontation between historical moments in art. If we consider the early Romantic conception of totality or the universal, the artistic process implies creation, distancing from the self, and finally, 'self-annihilation' and the impulse starts all over again. The artwork would host all these stages, but distancing does not imply the negation of creation, just as self-destruction is not the negation of distancing. The universal is a constant approach to the absolute. It is the attempt to unify all the supposedly contrary moments, but not their absolute synthesis. Art distances itself from the artist, and the latter, immersed in the artistic process, forgets her/himself. But art is not the mediator between the world of the senses and that of reason, but the artist—who possesses the poetic faculty. However, art is the testimony of what remains of the impulse, as stated in fragment no. 44 of the *Ideas*:

A mediator is one who perceives the divinity within himself and who self-destructively sacrifices himself in order to reveal, communicate, and represent to all mankind this divinity in his conduct and actions, in his words and works. If this impulse is not present, then what was perceived was not divine or not really his own. To mediate and to be mediated are the whole higher life of man and every artist is a mediator for all other men.⁷⁷

For Schlegel, the mediator between unity and multiplicity in poetry takes the form of allegory, "which 'results from the impossibility of reaching the Highest by reflection'."⁷⁸ Let us remember that Genius manifests itself in

⁷⁶ Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 150.

⁷⁷ Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 245.

⁷⁸ Bowie, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory*, 68.

Imagination;⁷⁹ it is basically productive and immediate. Reflection comes later, with contemplation; hence the aesthetic judgment is not immediate. The work, therefore, brings together intention, enthusiasm (inspiration), and criticism. That is why the work of art, and especially poetry, is at the same time philosophical. Regarding this, Berman argues referring to Schlegel:

The formal structure of reflection (the movement by which I pass from “thought” to “thought of thought,” then to “thought of thought of thought.” etc.) provides a model of *infinitezation*, to the extent that this passage is conceived as an *elevation*: It is a structure of corridors, stories, staircases, gradations, and the elevation may be considered simultaneously as an ascension, a potentiation (*Potenzierung*), and an amplification (*Erweiterung*). Thus its concrete and positive plenitude is manifested.⁸⁰

If we return to Blake’s statement that *Poetic Genius* is the true source, then the work is the mediator between the artist and the viewer; and in the same way, the artist is that between the artwork and the genius. “Only someone who has his own religion, his own original way of looking at infinity, can be an artist” (*Ideas* fragment no. 13).⁸¹ To put it another way, the artist is the one who opens the doors to infinity, whereas art or poetry only shows them. The artist can access infinity during the creation process, while the viewer can only get an idea of this concept by contemplating the work of art. For Blake, self-examination precedes self-annihilation to transcend the “false body” that encloses Spirit:

To cleanse the Face of my Spirit by Self-examination.
To bathe in the Waters of Life; to wash off the Not Human
I come in Self-Annihilation and the grandeur of Inspiration [...]⁸²

In a similar sense, Schlegel says that being a mediator implies a certain sacrifice, self-destruction. “Join the extremes and you will find the true middle”⁸³ (*Ideas* fragment no. 74). A middle that should not be confused with consummation.

⁷⁹ It is worth quoting Blake once again when he tells us: “The Eternal Body of Man is The Imagination.” ‘*⌈ & His Two Sons Satan & Adam,*’ in *Poems and Prophecies*, 335.

⁸⁰ Berman, *The Experience of the Foreign*, 76.

⁸¹ Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 242.

⁸² “Milton”: ‘Book the Second.’ Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 142. As mentioned in *Jerusalem*: ‘Chapter 4,’ the water of life comes from the four rivers of life (Ibid., 257), referring to the four senses (*Annotations to Berkeley’s Siris*. Ibid., 663).

⁸³ Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 248.

5. Epilogue: Towards an Ideal

In fragment no. 139 of the *Ideas*, Schlegel says: “There is no self-knowledge except historical self-knowledge. No one knows what he is if he doesn’t know what his contemporaries are, particularly the greatest contemporary of the brotherhood, the master of masters, the genius of the age.”⁸⁴ But some thinkers would later affirm that the self-conscious spirit would mark the end of history, an issue with which Friedrich Schlegel or the pre-Romantics would surely not agree.

From the perspective of other philosophical traditions, such as Empiricism or Idealism,⁸⁵ when a final point is reached, and the fragmentary reflections that presumably did not dare to form a theoretical systematization are collected and become part of a philosophical system, we will probably also see an end of the history. And in the case of Hegel, who read Schlegel, such a view possibly influenced his judgment regarding aesthetics, suggesting the death of art. For the philosopher of mature Idealism, the beauty of art is superior to that of nature because it is a creation of the spirit in its self-conscious character. The beauty of art “is beauty born of the spirit and born again, and the higher the spirit and its productions stand above nature and its phenomena, the higher too is the beauty of art above that of nature.”⁸⁶ This overcoming of nature, rather than a return to it, seems to have a pre-Romantic influence. However, Hegel tries to go further: to liberate the spirit of the sensible in favor of the rational; not a fragmentary but an absolute totality.

Nevertheless, the romantics of the early period, well aware of this possible path, decided to embrace the fragmentary inheritance, preventing themselves from falling into the naive thought that human creativity must necessarily reach an end or a systematization. Perhaps this led to their interest in self-reflection and fragmentary and collective writing. Such is the vision of thinkers like Blake, Novalis, and Schlegel, and the ideal of progressive universal poetry. For this reason, Szondi is convinced that Friedrich Schlegel will be given his rightful place as one of the most original thinkers of the turn of the century, but who at the time was overshadowed by the criticism of

⁸⁴ Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 254.

⁸⁵ It should be noted that Peter Szondi studied the relationship between German Idealism and pre-Romanticism from the point of view of the philosophy of art. Peter Szondi, *Poetik und Geschichtsphilosophie II. Studienausgabe der Vorlesungen, Band 3* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1987).

⁸⁶ G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, Vol. I (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 2.

Goethe, Schiller, and Hegel himself for possibly having turned to a certain conservatism in his mature years.⁸⁷

The long-awaited synthesis is not completely consummated in an absolute; its response lies in the attempt at unity. “EVERY Poem must necessarily be a perfect Unity [...],”⁸⁸ William Blake stated in *On Homer’s Poetry* (1818). A unity that, from the vision of the English poet, aims to accept the two sides of the same nature without the interference of divisive human morality. This unity can be understood as the reconciliation of the external and internal worlds through art in an attempt to capture what the artist received from the Imagination. The result is allegory, since “the mystery of a momentary beginning or transformation can only be divined and it can only be divined in allegory,”⁸⁹ as Schlegel asserts. It is about aspiring to the ideal, not reaching it. “The sense of the holy is the experience itself. Indeed, the holy exists only in being experienced,”⁹⁰ affirmed Raine about Blake’s worldview. The work of art, as well as poetics, remains as the testimony of this constant approach to the absolute, to some extent, a return to the source. The viewer can get a sense of infinity through the artwork as a piece of pure imagination, but the creator experiences the infinity during the act of creating; that is to say, the opposites are blurred, and the artist ascends as a mediator. At that moment, the artist, as creator, becomes the *Poetic Genius*. After all, as Friedrich Schlegel claims: “All philosophy is idealism, and there exists no true realism except that of poetry.”⁹¹

⁸⁷ Szondi, *Poetik und Geschichtsphilosophie II*.

⁸⁸ Blake, *Poems and Prophecies*, 332.

⁸⁹ Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 104.

⁹⁰ Raine, *Golgonooza. City of Imagination*, 28.

⁹¹ *Ideas* fragment no. 96 (1800). Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 250.

Symphilosophie

International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism

On the Natural Equality of Human Beings

(1799)

August Ludwig Hülsen

Translated, introduced, and annotated by Marlene Oeffinger*

What follows is a complete translation of August Ludwig Hülsen's contribution to the third issue of the *Athenaeum* published in 1799. August Ludwig Hülsen (1765 –1809) may be a lesser-known but by no means unimportant figure of German idealism and early German Romanticism. The son of a pastor and expected to become a clergyman himself, Hülsen left his theological studies at the University of Halle in his early twenties to pursue instead philosophy at the University of Kiel, under the tutelage of Karl Leonhard Reinhold. It was through Reinhold that Hülsen encountered the writings of Immanuel Kant and Johann Gottlieb Fichte, and fascinated by Fichte's work on the *Wissenschaftslehre*, in 1795 Hülsen moved to Jena to study under Fichte. In 1796, Hülsen garnered Fichte's attention as well as that of Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis through the publication of what would be his only book, the *Preisschrift*.¹ In response to the question posed by the Academy of Sciences in Berlin on the progress of metaphysics since Leibniz and Wolff, Hülsen argued in his *Preisschrift* that Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* and transcendental philosophy could not be dissociated from its history and called for "a foundation for the systematic formulation of a speculative

* PhD in Molecular Biology (Edinburgh), M.Sc. (Vienna); PhD candidate in English Literature, Department of English, Concordia University, 1400 Blvd De Maisonneuve Ouest, Montreal, QC H3G 1M8, Canada – marlene.oeffinger@concordia.ca

¹ A.L. Hülsen. *Prüfung der von der Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin aufgestellten Preisfrage: Was hat die Metaphysik seit Leibniz und Wolff für Progressen gemacht?* (Altona: J.F. Hammerich, 1796).

history of human culture”², addressing questions concerning the historicity of logic and reason prior to Schelling and Hegel.

Moreover, Hülsen questioned the position of the critical philosopher, considering it as one divorced from any real existence of the human being, claiming that only a practical self-reflecting capability will enable reason’s historical development and the history of philosophy will only begin once reason achieves the integration of its reflective knowledge in a systematic manner – to judge synthetically.² Further writing on the incompatibility of systematic and unsystematic thought in his 1797 *Philosophical Letter on Popularity in Philosophy*³, Hülsen contended that this discordance had detrimental consequences for the communal relations of human beings, creating not only opposition among human beings but also an atomized community, and thus preventing moral coordination.^{2,3} Instead, a reconciling of the critical and the popular approaches, “to popularize critical philosophy and to transcendentalize popular thought”², in Hülsen’s view, would enable a redetermination of the concepts of ‘philosopher’ and ‘human being’ into a universal concept of the ‘human being’, which he saw as an essential precondition in establishing an account of humanity’s true moral vocation.³

It is this universal concept of the human being that is at issue in his essay “On the Natural Equality of Human Beings”, which was initially published in the first issue of the second volume of the Jena Romantic journal *Athenaeum* in 1799.⁴ In this essay, Hülsen argued for a restoration of harmony between the critically thinking and the practically acting human being as one in which intellect, senses, and emotions are inseparable, in order to bring forth a reconciliatory concept of moral agency. Hülsen drew on the Fichtean *Tathandlung* (‘act’) as an inner cognitive act that is not empirical but rather underpinned a person’s consciousness and moral agency.⁵ He considered any such act, including the positing of ‘*ich bin*’ (I am), as reflexive self-knowledge insofar as it denoted an acting agent as well as a product of a non-self-conscious practical act of self-positing. He claimed that the arising self-reflection, as an acquired critical ability, enabled a qualitatively different

² Cf. E. Posesorski, *Between Reinhold and Fichte: August Ludwig Hülsen’s Contributions to the Emergence of German Idealism* (Karlsruhe: KIT Scientific Publishing, 2012).

³ This essay was published in Fichte’s and Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer’s co-edited *Philosophical Journal*. A.L. Hülsen, “Philosophischer Brief an Hrn. von Briest in Nennhausen. Erster Brief. Ueber Popularität in der Philosophie”, *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft deutscher Gelehrten*, 7. Band, Heft 1 (1797): 71-103

⁴ A.L. Hülsen, “Ueber die natürliche Gleichheit der Menschen”, *Athenaeum*, 2. Band, Heft 1 (1799): 151-180.

⁵ See D. W. Wood, “Fichte’s Absolute I and the Forgotten Tradition of Tathandlung”, in: *Das Selbst und die Welt: Beiträge zu Kant und der nachkantischen Philosophie* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2019), 167-192.

insight into thinking activity and transformed the non-self-conscious act of positing into a concrete object of self-conscious judgment and allowed a person to attain self-determining knowledge of his practical and active relation to his holistically self-positing objects – self and world – as he sought reason in himself and his actions alone. This “sense that perceives within us”⁶ is what Hülsen regarded as an innermost part of a human being’s essence which remained so by virtue of his very nature⁴; hence, the concrete self-conscious acts of judgment laid bare both a person’s unquestionable membership in the human species and his individuality as a concrete manifestation of reason. As reason provided a common and universal ground of unification and true moral vocation for all practically acting human beings, no real inequality could exist among humanity in Hülsen’s view.

Moreover, for Hülsen, our reflective capacity further enabled us to finally transform into an evolutionary agent of a logical-historical character. While time is signified by humanity’s own free acts as “a departing and returning of the spirit [*Geist*] into itself, where multiple and different moments of time only express the manner of our actions”⁷, the temporally spaced emergence of transcendental instances of self-reflective knowledge and judgments through these free acts make the emergence of a cultural order possible, in which past and future are joined within humans through the relation of their actions. Building on both Reinhold’s *Elementarphilosophie* and Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*⁸, Hülsen moves beyond them, laying the foundations for a speculative history of human culture and a history of philosophy as it is taken up by Schelling and Hegel.

Hülsen’s ideas were highly regarded by his contemporaries, foremost among them Friedrich Schlegel, which led to his brief association with the Jena Romantic Circle. This included two contributions to the *Athenaeum*, the essays “On the Natural Equality of Human Beings” and “Reflections on

⁶ “[..] daß der Sinn, der in uns wahrnimmt.” In: “Über die natürliche Gleichheit der Menschen”, *Athenaeum* 2/1 (1799): 152-180.

⁷ “[..] ein Ausgehen und Zurückkehren des Geistes in sich selbst, wo also mehrere und verschiedene Zeitmomente nur die Art und Weise unsers Handelns ausdrücken.” In “Über die natürliche Gleichheit der Menschen”, *Athenaeum* 2/1 (1799): 152-180.

⁸ Both Reinhold and Fichte declared the need for a more “scientific” and systematic version of transcendental idealism. Reinhold’s *Elementary Philosophy* sought to build a critical philosophical system that determined the ground for all the other propositions of the system, in particular the principle of consciousness. Envisioning an equally radical yet foundational system, Fichte grounded his *Wissenschaftslehre* or “Doctrine of Scientific Knowledge” on the concept of subjectivity, or the “pure I,” to reconcile freedom of a moral agent with necessity, to be part of a world.

Nature on a Journey across Switzerland.”⁹ Schlegel called Hülsen a “Socratic”¹⁰ philosopher, “absolutely original, spiritual, almost obstinate.”¹¹ And while Novalis counted Hülsen among the five most important philosophers of his time¹², this significant figure of German idealism has all but been forgotten. None of his works have been translated into English until now – possibly due to what Novalis called Hülsen’s often heavy and obscure style of writing; “poetic yet ponderous”, in Schlegel’s formulation.¹³

⁹ A. L. Hülsen, “Natur-Betrachtungen auf einer Reise durch die Schweiz”, *Athenaeum* 3/1 (1800).

¹⁰ In the *Athenaeum* Fragment #295, Schlegel alluded to Hülsen having provided a Socratic answer to the question posed by the Academy of Sciences in Berlin on the progress of metaphysics. Hülsen was known to often present his work in lectures; no written transcripts have survived. F.W. Schlegel, “*Athenaeum Fragmente*” In *Athenaeum* 1. Band, Heft 1, 1798.

¹¹ F.W. Schlegel, Fragment 236 in “*Philosophische Lehrjahre.*” *Fragmente der Frühromantik: Edition und Kommentar*, edited by Friedrich Strack and Martina Eicheldinger (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2011), 110-121.

¹² Written in 1798, in Fragment #25, Novalis writes: “I would like to name Baader, Fichte, Schelling, Hülsen and Schlegel the philosophical directorate in Germany. An infinite amount is still to be expected from this Quinquévrat. Fichte presides and is Gardien de la Constitution.” [Baader, Fichte, Schelling, Hülsen und Schlegel möchte ich das philosophische Directorium in Deutschland nennen. Es laßt sich noch unendlich viel von diesem Quinquévrat erwarten. Fichte praesidirt und ist Gardien de la Constitution.] “*Logologische Fragmente.*” *Fragmente der Frühromantik: Edition und Kommentar*, edited by Friedrich Strack and Martina Eicheldinger (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2011), 330-338 (Novalis HKA II, 529-530).

¹³ *Fragmente der Frühromantik: Edition und Kommentar*, edited by Friedrich Strack and Martina Eicheldinger (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2011).

On the Natural Equality of Human Beings

(1799)

August Ludwig Hülsen

In the communication of our thoughts, we always suppose that we speak to people to whom we can make ourselves understood.¹ This is the presupposition we take as the basis for all our experience, and which, for this very reason, cannot be negated by any singular experience.

This is nowhere more evident than in the general complaint about misinterpretation and misunderstanding, which in itself would not even be possible if that initial presupposition did not exist. Yet overall that complaint interferes very little with our social goals, and, on the contrary, often increases and enlivens the very effort to unite our spirit [with those of others].

This is a fact of history, of both ancient and modern times, and it would be beneficial for our strivings if human beings [*die Menschen*]² took note of it and thus conceive of the entirety of their experience in relation to every aspect of their acting spirit as truth of that spirit [*Geist*]. The often harsh and unkind form of communication should not hinder us in this, for it is in itself a deception, which we must interpret as part of a higher truth. Where communication takes place among rational beings [*Wesen*], this condition of a presumed intelligibility applies as part of common purpose, and in scrutinizing this purpose I must create the possibility of an ever more pure and beautiful form of our social relationship as a whole.

I state this to preface the following investigation, in order to place my own purpose in doubt at once and remind the judge of the intention of his own judgment.

¹ The original German version of this text is entitled “*Über die natürliche Gleichheit der Menschen*” and was initially published in the Jena Romantic journal *Athenaeum* 2 (1): 152-180, in 1799.

² In the original German text, Hülsen uses the terms *Mensch* (singular) and *Menschen* (plural) to describe human beings in their context as social beings and in contrast to (*Lebe-*) *Wesen*, beings capable of reason. Hence, it should be kept in mind that “human being” and “human beings” in the text are to be interpreted in this sense.

Everywhere the human being [*der Mensch*] is the object of our observation. For every possible phenomenon is determined by him, and every apperception hence a touch of his spirit that invites us to look at it, thereby leading us back to our own free actions.

But we also comprehend the human being only in so far as he comprehends himself, and everything that we assert about him can therefore only contain its truth through him and in him. This is the capacity to reason [*Vernünftigkeit*], a capacity that would be meaningless if not for the relationship of our own actions through which we become alive in the whole extent of our existence [*Daseyns*]³. As conscious as only human beings are, so conscious is every one of all determinations of their essence [*Wesen*]⁴ as themselves in their own free acts. And the natural equality of human beings resides in this reciprocal relationship of free action.

Out of this concept, I establish the main argument of the entire investigation for now; a mere cue on where to focus one's attention. For in order to get to the true content of a concept, it cannot be considered as *a priori* given, but instead we must go back to its initial object and let it arise before our eyes through actual intuition; then, it appears as the result of repeated contemplation and is in itself nothing other than the free and steadfast gaze with which we regard our own acts.

The human being, whose work and deeds I observe in order to get to know the relation of his life within him, is everywhere among humans through the associations of nature, and is therefore only truly a human being in the relation of his existence to an enduring lineage.

³ *Daseyn*, archaic spelling of *Dasein*. In the Eighteenth Century, the word was largely used to describe the present time or *Gegenwart*. During the mid-eighteenth century, it gained an additional meaning denoting 'existence' [*Existenz*]. The Adelung dictionary, the first and for Hülsen's time authoritative dictionary of the German language, connects these terminologies describing *Existenz* as "a concept that is as incapable of a definition as the words being, thing, being and others. You are there, you must therefore fulfill the purpose of your being [*ein Begriff, der so wenig einer Definition fähig ist, als die Wörter Seyn, Ding, Wesen und andere. Du bist da, du mußt also den Zweck deines Daseyns erfüllen*]" (see Adelung, Johann Christoph, *Grammatisch-kritisches Wörterbuch der Hochdeutschen Mundart*. Ausgabe letzter Hand, Leipzig 1793–1801). Hülsen alludes to this connection between present and existence in his text, denoting 'existence' and 'life' in its entirety, as state of the human being in nature defined through his action in the present moment. *Daseyn* is rendered into English as "existence" in the present translation.

⁴ The German noun *Wesen* can refer to either the whatness or ownmost characteristic of a being or thing, translated here as 'essence', or to (*Lebe-*)*wesen*, a being capable of rational thought, translated as 'being' throughout the text (see also footnote 2 above).

But I find him first and foremost as acting and efficacious only in a social circumstance which we call the State [*Staat*]. Born and educated within it, he bears all the determining attributes that characterize him as a social being [*Wesen*]⁵ in the first place, and hence I must first observe him within this circumstance in order to be able to ascertain his natural condition.

The initial question is not how a connection between people can exist, which is deemed natural in itself, but rather how one that is ineffectual at expressing the nature of our essence is possible at all. First, I will only consider how human beings imagine their social relations, a concept in which they can still err; accordingly, I consider this notion of a social state – the one we call State – expressed in the possible equivalence of all individuals as parts to a whole. The equivalence of the parts is consequently the equivalence of the whole with itself, and therefore a harmonious activity which is not contained in any individual part alone. The parts of the whole thus behave merely like organs, which mutually inter-act with one another and re-act to each other, and only through their difference produce and maintain the harmony of the whole.

The difference between the individuals as parts of a whole is consequently their mutual relationship in the State, which determines their participation and activity in it and, therefore, makes an inequality among them a necessity.

Yet the size of the whole and the degree of difference required in the relationship of its parts to completely realize the notion of a State is not predictable. Most theories, as far as I know, regardless of their position presuppose the State, and experience teaches us only what has already happened and must therefore itself be evaluated carefully and in accordance with a higher principle. Without doubt, the difficulty of the matter lies in following:

This wholeness which we call society in the State is not only determined by the parts, but the parts are also determined by the whole insofar as each part is born in and educated by the State. The whole, however, does not exist, think nor act unless each individual part does, and society therefore ceases to be organized as parts to a whole. As long as society is organized as parts of a whole, the State's participation in the determination of its relations remains; yet as the State is negated in terms of an intrinsic ability to think and act, it does not truly determine, and, consequently, the relation of the parts to the

⁵ Hülsen is referring again here to (*Lebe-*) *Wesen*, a being capable of reason and living in a society or State.

whole presents only the unpredictable and the flawed within society, which will always conform to circumstances that emerge as the commanding ones out of the conflict of forces.

Therefore, it is through the relation of human beings as parts to a whole that the efficaciousness of each for the whole is determined, and this alone is the purpose of the activity of all.

But the human being cannot exist in this manner without losing his capacity to reason; he needs to take agency and equate his actions with himself as they are really his own, and so he lives within society not as a part but as a whole in himself.

Out of this arises a conflict for society as each individual's actions are determined by the relations within the State, wherein the human being does not represent the whole, while, simultaneously, each necessarily considers their actions as pertaining to themselves, in whose sense they embody a veritable whole.

This particular wholeness is not comparable to any other, rather, out of the own condition of its free acts arises the necessary demand that all difference (between parts, or people as part of society) ceases. Insofar as such differences emerge out of the conditions within the State, we observe an unequal struggle between human beings for prosperity and a higher spiritual culture everywhere. Thousands of them may appear as if in a slumber of their existence, where even the idea of a better life barely moves their heart or warms their rigid breast.

This inequality among human beings, however, is as necessary as society itself, and, rather than criticizing it, it is important to consider it calmly in order to understand its uses. It is part of the circumstances of actual life, where its intention is no less than to rouse our thoughts to a stage of heightened contemplation for the benefit of social life. Besides, human beings have always attempted to measure their reality against their inner desires and demands, and generally considered their actual life as a disturbance of nature.

Nevertheless, the idea of a possible equality among human beings has always been of such great interest to the imagination that even its contradiction in actual experience could not prevent its inclusion among the maxims of faith, at least from a religious point of view.

Among all peoples of this earth who still conceive of their origin beyond the fact of history, exists a legend of an original Golden Age of the world: a state of most intimate harmony and love, where the disturbance of reality, inequality rooted in varying relations within a society, did not yet exist; a

beautiful and harmonious springtime of life, when an innocent mankind was happy and content, and only peaceful deities walked among them.

This legend, which had been passed down to the descendants of those fortunate ones and has always been held sacred, was intimately connected with the belief in a future in which heavenly peace would again return to mankind, and joy and harmony would dwell among us undisturbed once more.

In that manner people sought comfort and reassurance for the present in images of a beautiful past and future. Only on the latter two rested their eye with quiet pleasure, while the former was harshly reproached for every joy.

However one-sided this idea of our lost and future happiness may be, it is the least peculiar that equality among human beings could not be separated from the idea of a happy and peaceful life. Therein appears a certain necessity of reason, which calls on us to reflect, and which, upon closer examination, might demand more of us than to merely occupy ourselves with an idle play of the imagination; any discussion of it on the ground of supposed experience is tantamount to a superfluous reminiscence. Only once our belief in the past and the future is no longer mere hearsay, will we feel justified in abandoning the written word and seek reason in ourselves and our own actions alone.

It is certain, however, that mere belief in a past when people still lived happily and contentedly in a state of innocence and childlike harmony could neither truly delight us nor provide any comfort if we did not sense, deep within us, a future in which that beautiful age that once was will return with all its virtues and joys. This connection is in itself necessary, as no one would understand their feelings at a happy and benevolent memory otherwise if they had not interpreted it with such imagination.

Yet one thing is certain: gazing solely into the future takes us back to the past, while both the future and the past in themselves have their origin and full determination solely in the present. This is what determines our interest in everything beautiful [*allem Schönen*] and true [*Wahren*], which poetic imagination presents to us in such delightful images. It is, however, nothing else than the feeling of our free efficaciousness [*freie Wirksamkeit*] by which the world is just that for which we form it. How we shape and arrange it makes the world itself our life, and only those will not have acknowledged this fact for whom their own imagination remains a mystery.

It is hence the mere nature of our spirit that makes the condition of time necessary. We can never think of the human being without him being the one who thinks, and his every determination of time therefore acquires truth

solely through his acts. Yet he himself exists and lives only in and through his actions, and, consequently, does so exclusively in the condition of the present moment. Every determination of time within him must thus express this condition as it can have neither truth nor certainty otherwise.

We do not know the least of a future as future, because its intuition as such is impossible and would not be intelligible if we would not make it comprehensible for ourselves through a general condition of time and in the intuition of the real [*Anschauung des Wirklichen*], within which it is both true and purposive, and should be no different from the present, but rather represent the very same and thus should be perceived and considered as such.

Yet the present contradicts our desires and demands and does not hold what we are looking for; nonetheless, it is in the present that we continue to strive for our desires with a vital exigence and force of our actions, because the future is nothing other than our own eternal freedom, which we express in our reality in order to realize ourselves as free and eternal beings. Therefore, everything we might seek and demand is necessarily nothing else than our own free acts as real intuition and, consequently, always and eternally the present.

This is inconceivable to those who do not simultaneously behold the creator within a creation: as we strive to understand our desires and demands within the circumstances of reality, without tying the experience of the latter to ourselves, the connection of occurrences will immediately take us back to the past until the imagination finally gains leeway and, from that moment on, we contemplate our more delightful future life in the smiling images of our memory.

This is the significance of all those imaginations through which people have always tried to understand their most radiant feelings. Often times, they appear to us only as an amusing game, and we call them dreams of imagination until we realize that our most cherished treasures – veracity and conviction – are contained and preserved within them.

The past, therefore, has such a high interest for human beings only for the sake of the future, and the future only for the sake of the present. Consequently, the future, with all its possibilities, is nothing more than a simple yet necessary requirement of the present, and which we must understand as such insofar as to not continue searching for it outside of ourselves, in the empty void.

This is the condition of all time. Time is our own free act, a departing and returning of the spirit into itself, where multiple and different moments of time only express the manner of our actions. Only in this way, is there a past and future that do not contradict themselves, for they are joined within

us through the relation of our actions, which reach forward and backwards into their own infinity.

Whoever understands himself through this concept, comprehends and exalts his intimate pleasure in the poetry of a past and future life; for these are nothing without their relation to the present and cannot be understood any other way according to their possibility.

Our belief in a future should, therefore, rest upon truth and certainty through our actual deeds, and the idea of a future equality among human beings is thus either practical and intervenes in our active life, or it has no meaning at all and cannot be justified even in this absence.

It can, however, also be assumed, that inequality among human beings also arises from our mutual actions; yet if we do not want to enable an antinomy of reason at this point, but also explain the unreasonable via reason, it will only require an accurate understanding of such possible inequality and our idea of it must immediately reveal itself as mere illusion.

Any difference in judgment does not change the matter and is only superficial. For we observe one and the same thing with one and the same reason and have already been so wise as to believe our own eyes and ears. Therein all discord will be resolved in the end, as soon as we have convinced ourselves that it is not the pupil that sees or the eardrum that hears, but that the sense that perceives within us is the very same as the innermost part of our essence. If, therefore, human beings as human beings [*Menschen als Menschen*] are equal, they must remain so by virtue of their nature, which they can never lose. For the existence of free beings is always originary and therefore remains eternally the first embrace of a loving nature.

Nevertheless, it is important for all of us to balance our mutual determining judgements where possible, and it is precisely this firm and tireless endeavor that is the surest proof of the harmony of our spirits, which we may only perceive in order to express it immediately in our actions.

The answer to the question on the natural equality of human beings is a determining judgment about the original relationship of humans. Ours is therefore an inquiry into this relationship to ascertain its foundation and verity.

Up to this point, I have only shown how the idea of a natural equality ought to have arisen, and while, inevitably, it could be interpreted only with regards to a past and future, in order not to contradict itself in itself, it can, however, really only sustain its truth in the fleeting moment of life that is the present.

From this I draw the following conclusions that will guide us further. First, the condition of time is only a relation of the moment in which we act. If we do not act, we do not exist, and time does not exist for us. The actual moment is made real only through its relation to a past and a future, for it is precisely in this relation that our actions exist. If the natural equality of human beings is to maintain its truth in the moment of life, it is not enough for it to be imaginable; rather, it should not contradict itself insofar as it truly expresses the conditions of our life and thus inevitably exists as we exist as human beings. It is therefore important not to look at our original condition as one-sided, not as lost in the past or only existent in the future, but through the relation of the moment as lasting and eternal: then we will be able to understand all phenomena of life only through one and the same lens and thus watch every inequality among human beings disappear before our eyes as mere object of a one-sided judgment and, consequently, an illusion.

It is with this consideration in mind that I look at the human being, and I receive him as I find him: as singularity in the full scope of his existence, for he himself is his entire sphere, and thus all determinations within him can only have truth through this relation to himself. His whole relation within the sphere of his existence is therefore necessarily none other than the relation to one and the same consciousness, and it is within this sphere that we must observe the human being in order to get to know him.

In this conception, I do not abstract from the human being as an individual; on the contrary, it is this image of him I have before my eyes: because where another may exist in the vicinity of the Milky Way, I do not know, and hopefully no one else does either. But even the human being as individual is not determined by anything other than himself, and it would be a vain pretense to try to deduce him without this relation by mere abstraction. He is therefore to be thought of only insofar as he thinks of himself, and hence only existent in the one and same free self-activity [*Selbstthätigkeit*]. All his actions are therefore nothing more than a continuation of his own self-determination, and, consequently, an extension of every determination towards infinity. Here, then, every goal we set ourselves appears to be relative and infinite at the same time; we establish the differences, but we do not do so comparatively for several individuals, but in each one by relation to their own actions. Therefore, we simultaneously cancel out these differences and assert of each what we assert of everyone; not by considering a potential future but through the relation of each moment as actual and immediate and, consequently, as an overall necessity.

This concept embodies the complete image of the human being in the original and hence permanent relation of his existence. But it, and with it our

conviction, can only become apparent to us if we guard against the misconception that the human being is in time, instead of time existing in him and being determined by him.

If time is in the human being and its entire condition determined by his actions alone, we can only compare him to himself, and, consequently, must consider everyone's free acts within the same sphere of freedom and thus always relate these acts as a striving towards infinity, towards the human being himself, the infinite. Thereby everyone preserves their own eternal timeline, which, in all its self-referential aspects, is one and the same for everybody, otherwise infinity would not equal the infinite.

But the human being within the circumstance of his own existence is the human being among human beings. He is no different from whom he truly is, and all his acts and deeds are therefore an expression of this circumstance. Everyone, then, within the circumstances of their existence comprehends all others, and everyone in this circumstance represents the order of the whole, which is one and the same in each and everyone. Therefore, no human being is ahead of or behind the other, and no human being more or less than the other; rather, each one is naturally equal to themselves, as a human being among human beings. The existence of the many, therefore, intervenes in the existence of the one through the condition of his reality, and every comparison always returns to a weighing of the human being against himself, as it has no significance otherwise.

This arises out of the human being's reality as a social being with and around others. It is therefore primary and embedded in the nature of our innermost essence, and, for this very reason, it remains eternal and unchangeable as it includes the whole sphere of our free existence, and, consequently, can never be annulled by any action.

If it is eternal and unchangeable, then everything human beings did for their unity must rest within the framework of this condition, and, consequently, every connection must be located within it and explicable by it.

The general judgement of an inequality among human beings is hence an illusion, which arises from the fact that we want to isolate the human being who exists only within the structure of a society, and thus erase the presupposition required for the judgement in the course of the judgment itself.

I am only realized as a human being among human beings, and what I am as such is therefore in my essence one and inseparable. Now, if I would seek to abstract my existence and put in its place that of another, then this very action would automatically negate itself, for otherwise I could not

proclaim the assumed other as more or less than I am, ahead of or behind me. I thus refrain from doing so because the very abstracting from my own existence represents in that moment a determination of my existence and, consequently, is itself part of my reality. Accordingly, no action releases me from my sphere, which is essential if it is to encompass the actual existence of the human being among human beings in its entirety.

Our judgement of an actual inequality among people is, however, in itself a reality, and if it is to be an illusion, then we must at least ask how such a misconception is possible if equality among human beings is a necessity. The answer is as follows.

For one, the assertion of inequality among human beings would be impossible if it were not based on the judgment of a necessary equality, for without this standard we would not be able to determine what comprises inequality. If, therefore, we establish the latter, by necessity, we also demonstrate the former, and the assertion of the former must consequently be derived from that of the latter. This confirms the above requirement that in the original and lasting circumstances of human beings all other provisions must be contained, and I provide the following explanation.

Every circumstance of human beings arises from their own free actions, and the determination of the same by intuition and judgment is, consequently, a determination of these free actions. Every circumstance then becomes a practical determination and cannot be understood in any other way than in the necessary intensive and extensive expansion of itself.

Our actions are based on the intuition of ourselves and only thereby become actions. Hence, intuition and intuited are not to be separated and are in themselves one and the same. It is by the same manner that we comprehend our circumstance, and such as it is, it is only through a continued determination, and, consequently, only as interrelation of our practical existence as a whole. Understood this way, it is free and complete in itself, and its every aspect signifies the whole infinite connection between our acts and effects. No human being can act outside of this interrelation, and every action maintains its truth only in relation to its completion.

“In this original condition of our free actions, every human being strives for the freest mastery and the fullest enjoyment of the whole of nature. Yet no one can encompass its entirety by themselves and can only do so as human being among human beings, through all others. Consequently, everyone must realize that idea of the individual, which in turn is only

⁶ Hülsen places the following two paragraphs in quotations, however, they do not appear to be citations from another text.

possible through the complete harmony of their conceptions of the world and their exercise of power upon it.”

“The State and its constitution are attempts to accomplish this unity and mastery of nature and are — because there is no absolute failure — at least partly successful. For as long as the world has existed, there has been no ruler and no servant, but society striving for unity with itself, and that is the import of all that we see.”

It is our actions themselves, therefore, on which the most intimate and profound union of the human being with human beings is based, and none are possible that would contradict this *per se*. Therefore, any assertion of inequality among human beings can only occur as a consequence of the purpose of our actions; and where we keep this purpose as object in mind, the assertion becomes impossible.

Hence, we misinterpret our own active existence as our need to be most intimately connected to the human being. We seek and want for nothing else, as consciously as we act. Yet as consciously as we act, we also cannot look for it anywhere else but in the actual intuition; here, however, we will never find it if we do not at the same time understand the object of our actions. Nevertheless, we challenge intuition because we could not act otherwise, and, in the end, since we are unable to find our own active existence in the human being, we ultimately apprehend only an idea [*Gedankenwesen*]⁷, towards which we believe we must direct all our future striving.

In this way, we considered our object realized and our demand fulfilled; human beings are unequal and must be so by virtue of their reality, which is thus and not otherwise, a fact we determine in accordance with equality, which we place external to ourselves, and which is not part of our nature.

Nonetheless, it is our nature and remains so eternally in all circumstances. The illusion, therefore, does not prevent us from acting freely and autonomously; and as freely acting beings who receive our determination in ourselves only through ourselves, we ourselves are not only our own end in itself but have already reached this end in every sense. Indeed, our end exists nowhere but in the present moment of our actions, that is, in all time, and the point in time is thus determined by the relation of our acts; the latter in themselves then are our end in itself, as an eternally in themselves continuing free extension. Thus, there can be no higher law for us than our actions, and its expression is as follows: to act and create and work within the harmony of our own powers.

⁷ A literal translation is “beings or entities of thought” and Hülsen refers here to *entia rationis*, or objects which exist only within the mind and emerged through an extension of rational thought via imagination.

The idea of ends outside of ourselves is hence based on the original relation of our actions. We desire and seek the human being as free and complete being; however, he achieves such state only as acting being and hence does not exist in any other form than in and through his acts. That idea (of ends outside ourselves) has therefore a sublime meaning as long as we do not sever the human being from his own actions: for now, we cannot sever him from ourselves either, as we, the two of us, exist in the most intimate unity.

This unity is as real as human beings themselves, and only we are allowed to see it, and must acknowledge and honor it. Nature has provided each one with our essence so that we should freely find each other in this intimate closeness. He who feels it in their bosom, loves human beings and seeks them out, and to those he finds and recognizes, he relinquishes his entire essence, who and what he is. Thus, we offer ourselves equally [*das Gleiche*] and are equal [*das Gleiche*], and this exchange of our spirit becomes in every sense a radiant emulation in the striving for the same ends. It is primordial and encompasses every aspect of our free actions. No one can therefore sever the thread of one's existence, which is tied to an infinite lineage; and in this determination, everyone is hence only living essence through themselves insofar as they are simultaneously also determined as such through their whole lineage.

Such is the connection of our spirit through the bonds of nature. Everyone belongs to us as we to ourselves, for all are the condition of an active existence of all. He who beheld this in its luminosity and clarity, understood the existence of the eternal within his chest, and the calm earnest search for truth and destiny became an uninhibited and clamorous feeling of his true existence. This is the soaring sense of a moment when the heavenly joy lifts our bosom, and our eye shines with the purest delight of life. It is in this moment that our existence reaches through the infinite points in time that are connected in the sensation of the present, and our essences are one, and above us, in the wreath of stars, we espy the image of our beautiful union. So the human being walks eternally in the harmony of a god; for who does command his life, which is only life within and through himself? And where does nature end in its infinity? The human being is our God, through whom we exist and remain, and if one were to perish from this circle of life, joy would be silenced in all of us. Therefore, whoever you are, grief-stricken human being, without you no higher heaven beckons to anyone, and no eternal love fills their bosom; and this is the creation of a more delightful life, where your lament will fall silent, and your eye will wander reconciled among the stars.

Let no one ask, however, where and when this will take place. — The earth rests in the midst of the infinite blue sky, and no sun in the universe circles in higher spheres, for every distance of the luminous flux is a measure of our eye, and therefore the splendor of the one sky that our gaze traverses; and our *when* is always *now*, for within ourselves rests the eternity which we call forth with free might, and everything is therefore reality as the world which we understand through our free and eternal actions.

Everyone asks themselves: what is the human being among human beings according to his free efficaciousness? Let the answer teach them to honor their radiant circumstance and to elevate their efficaciousness within its sphere. Everyone delights once they unraveled the foolishness and dried their tears. But at the bottom of his heart, he does not want to laugh as long as even one remains who cries. In the quiet seclusion of his own being [*Wesen*], he awakens a higher longing for the human being and does not seal off his breast so that his desire becomes clamorous, and everyone recognizes within it their own. Only among human beings is he human, and a radiant sphere encompasses the whole species. Therefore, everything that he himself is, should become reality within the illuminated circle of life through his free acts and not remain concealed from the participating and spirit-lit eyes of human beings. Let no one be fearful to look at the human beings around him, if only to interpret their strivings. It is still one and the same nature in which we live and are, and we would not exist at all if we ever had—or could have—stepped out of its circumstance. That is why this state—the state of nature—is enduring and inevitable, forever encompassing our efficaciousness in its entirety, and for which, consequently, all our institutions are purposed. In it, the human being is a family-man, and whatever garment clothes us, and whatever thought of existence elevates or diminishes us, there are no other kinds of human beings to be found anywhere than parents and children. Therefore, we can never seek and want for anything other than to realize the ideal of the family-man, and to bring peace and joy into our homes. It is enough, then, that this circumstance exists and that we are only eternally efficacious and active in it. When we judge the human being, we must only look at these works and deeds, and we will approach him gently and lovingly, and not reassure ourselves about the appearance of freedom. The encouragement to all that is great and beautiful lies within reality. It alone awakens our mind to the richness of life, and everything we seek through a perfected form stands there and beckons us to the perfect deed. Thus behold the eternal altars of peace, the temples of the goddess of abundance, and the dwellings of joy all across the flower-crowned earth. I know they do exist, and so does everyone who told themselves what this

reality signifies. Everything we see around us and above us lies within the sphere of our existence and is our existence; and if we always keep this in mind, everything will appear to us free and complete in itself, because we do not understand it any other way than in and through our actions, which is an acting in itself and therefore free and complete.

Thus, everywhere human beings exist in the original condition of their existence through their relationship in nature, which is their spirit's intuition and truth. I know nothing greater and more sublime than this signification of nature. No branch greens and no stalk blooms; these are the living signs that in their light our eyes should meet, and our spirits should recognize each other. In their germ rests an everlasting green and an eternal blossom, and that is why our determination remains eternal in them. Wherever we look, there is the human being's touch in every formation and growth, in every rain and the life of wandering figures. But this touch becomes touch only in the free observation of our spirit in nature, in nature's reformation through unconditioned symbols and words within it. This is how human beings found one another, and how we still find each other in an intimate community. For the word is a representation of our radiant circumstance in a free bond, and so we call out to one another with every syllable's sound: You are my essence, as I am yours.

This truth is an expression of our entire active life, in whatever context we may think of it. Upon recognizing this truth, we cannot help but to resolve any doubt and bring peace and harmony into the confused spectacle of life. In this respect, I know of no greater deception than the privileges we concede to human beings based on the mere conception of thought. We forget the actual human being, the human being of actions, and substitute him with a 'being of pure thought' [*Gedankenwesen*], an idea without object. The actual human being of actions is the family-man, who is everyman by circumstance of nature. Whatever we effect by virtue of our actions, therefore, has an essential connection to the actual human being, since there is no other who exists, or acts. Hence, the State is only an institution in nature, and its conditions mean nothing if their principles are not grounded in nature. Why do we want to decorate ourselves with bells, so that we may recognize ourselves as beings of one and the same spirit [*Wesen eines Geistes*]? Do we not visibly walk in the light of heaven? Do we still require these signs and symbols to be able to rejoice in the human being? Leave the signs and symbols their meaning but let us refrain from transforming them into creatures who dishonor the human being while we simultaneously forget all about him. No human being will ever be more worthy than another, regardless of how he positions himself, that is certain; it is only mere opinion

that can elevate or diminish us, while we remain what we are, eternally and always in one and the same condition of nature.

There is otherwise no *'in front of'* and no *'behind'*, no *'more'* and no *'less'* other than in relation to our own actions, and, consequently, only in the comparison of each one with himself. But each one compares themselves only in their own circumstance to the human being, i.e., they consider their own condition as essential in each and every one; and, so, the human being is me, a freely acting being, and every appearance of life a touch of their equal and eternal spirits, a touch that expands, grows, and becomes ever more intimate throughout all spaces of heaven.

Therein lies the greatness and sublimity of the human being, that none can be exalted above the other, but each one only beholds themselves in all, regardless of how many times the appearance may rattle them; for the truth of the human being is only one truth, and it shines forth victoriously from every distortion as soon as our eye knows how to find and interpret it.

Accordingly, everything we may desire and demand is the human being in a practical relationship with the world, and therefore one and the same as the human being among human beings. Therein, every possible extension exists as certain and necessary, and, therefore, in everything we observe, we always see only the greatest and most excellent – not as prospective, but as actual and in the present moment. For what is, that is; and he who sees clearly is able to behold it since our intuition and cognition are not separated in themselves but belong to the same breath of our active life.

I say this with free and firm conviction and say it first of all to those who honor contemplation and examine and judge with an unbiased eye. Many like to content themselves with witty remarks without even knowing their own purpose, and these human beings, I gladly confess, are the most difficult to contend with as they tend to look for sources of amusement in everything — except in themselves. But even they may believe that there are no distortions in nature, and everyone laughs only out of joy and pleasure as long as they find themselves consciously touched and move their lips into a visible expression of their inner selves. If only human beings could first understand that they should never wrest anything from a word that they themselves did not imbue it with, then they would be more cautious in their judgments and not make presumptions based on mere hearsay and hence on habit and prejudice. Everyone must justify their entire experience within themselves, and should this remain possible, then they must hold up every appearance with all its interconnections, that is, in their true and essential relations, before their eyes. Only then they can pass free and impartial judgment. But this is precisely where human beings fail. They tear

something, which is real only in the context of the whole, cleanly out of that very context, and are left with nothing but their empty thought, which they then proceed to judge in an equally empty manner.

But if all human beings are equal, I hear myself say, why is it nevertheless sufficient for you to deal with one infinitely more often than the thousand others? Anyone may take this particular action as an opportunity to argue, and, without doubt, those who believe to have to assert an inequality among human beings will use it as their justification.

I answer this, however: I know well that through only *one* person, I am always in connection with all others. Because all people are *one* and another *one, and so on*. For that very reason no one is a human being in actuality without the connection to all the others, which therefore remains necessarily the very same as connection of rational beings through their essence, that is, as connection of all with everyone, and of one with all. In this determination, it becomes a reciprocal touch of our spirits, free through the individual relationship of each and every one, and, therefore, always a practical relationship.

Hence, we understand our inter-actions only through our own actions and within the condition of time, which is determined by these acts. The most intimate friendship would therefore be non-existent if we wanted to sever it from our whole circumstance; for it is only possible within this circumstance, and only within it does it gain a greater and more elevated significance. The general love of the human being is a love of the individual, and it is based precisely on the attitude with which we honor the whole lineage of our species in each one, which once again would be impossible if our attitude were not accompanied by the idea of a necessary equality of the human being. We return to it in every contact. Every reality, therefore, has no other meaning than that of the most intimate community of all our essences. Only as such is this reality our own active existence which in itself cannot separate them, but in all possible actions must remain eternally the same.

Symphilosophie

International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism

“Introduction” to *Transcendental Philosophy* (1800-1801)

Part II

Friedrich Schlegel

Translated, introduced, and annotated by Joseph Carew*

The translation that follows is the second half of Friedrich Schlegel’s Introduction to *Transcendental Philosophy*, a lecture course that he gave in Jena between 1800-1801.¹ A translation of the first half was previously published in last year’s issue of *Symphilosophie*.² Both installments are part of a project of translating the lectures for the first time in English. Here, in the second half of the Introduction, Schlegel continues the task that he previously sets forth: the development of a distinctively post-Kantian philosophy capable of reconciling the conflicting priorities and interests of metaphysical realism and transcendental idealism—that is to say, the seemingly mutually incompatible systems of Spinoza and Fichte.³

* Instructor, Department of Philosophy, University of the Fraser Valley, Building D, Room D3095, 33844 King Road, Abbotsford, British Columbia V2S 7M8 – jstephencarew@gmail.com

¹ Friedrich Schlegel, *Transcendentalphilosophie*, in *Friedrich Schlegel – Kritische Ausgabe seiner Werke*, ed. Ernst Behler, Jean Jacques Anstett, and Hans Heichner (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1958–), 12: 1-105. The pagination in the body of the translation refers to the critical edition. Each page break is marked by “|.” In notes, the lectures are cited as *Transcendental Philosophy* followed by the pagination.

² Friedrich Schlegel, “‘Introduction’ to *Transcendental Philosophy* (1800-1801): Excerpt,” trans. Joseph Carew, *Symphilosophie* 4 (2022): 451-468.

³ For a breakdown of the historical context surrounding the lectures, including the history of the transcript itself, and their relevance to early German Romanticism and German Idealism, see my Introduction to the previous installment.

The first half of the Introduction broaches the metaphysical and epistemological themes that shall occupy Schlegel, the tropes of early German Romanticism (*Frühromantik*): our consciousness of the absolute; our yearning for it; the relativity of truth; the symbolic nature of knowledge; and the infinity of philosophy—to name but a few. The first half also gives us a taste of the new constructive method that he shall be applying to explore them—one that, taking inspiration from physics and mathematics,⁴ cannot help but recall to mind the efforts of rationalism⁵ and which seem, at least on the surface, quite far from the aphoristic character of the philosophical writings and the suggestive character of the literary achievements that the Romantic movement has become known for. However, although the first half broaches many of the prototypical metaphysical and epistemological themes of early German Romanticism, and furthermore already puts on display Schlegel’s distinctive spin on them, it is in the second that we start to see, in detail, the intentions, ambitions, and originality of the lectures as a truly systematic work that comprises metaphysics, epistemology, moral and political philosophy, and philosophy of religion.

Schlegel’s intentions and ambitions are clear from the very outset of the second half of the Introduction where he discusses the relationship of consciousness and the infinite, namely, the absolute. Schlegel reiterates and expands on the claim advanced in the first half, where it is expressed largely in the register of *Naturphilosophie*, that there is no question of the two being related externally but also adds a pivotal and trailblazing twist. The reconciliation of Spinoza and Fichte is not to come about, so he wagers, by fully committing oneself to the position of transcendental idealism, single-mindedly concerned with consciousness as it is, and thereby contending that the absolute is constitutively out of our cognitive grasp (at which point there would, of course, be no need to reconcile them at all, it being impossible to do so). Nor is it to come about by simply finding some way to bypass Kant’s Copernican revolution so that we may reaffirm a full commitment to the position of classical metaphysics, which abstracts entirely from consciousness so as to move beyond it and catch hold of the absolute in itself. To use Schlegel’s language in the lectures, what we have to seek is, quite to the contrary, the midpoint of the two positions, a new position that he dubs

⁴ “Hence, the *method* according to which we will proceed will be the method of *physics* or *mathematics*.” *Transcendental Philosophy*, 3.

⁵ Cf. Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, in *A Spinoza Reader: The Ethics and Other Writings*, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley (Princeton: Princeton University Press), I, Appendix.

“divination.”⁶ This is because, for Schlegel, if the absolute has given rise to us, then our consciousness has to be internal to it—but that requires, in turn, that we revise our conceptions of both consciousness and the absolute, that is, of the human being, nature, and how they relate to one another. Here’s where the aforementioned twist, which will have far-reaching, fateful consequences for Schlegel’s project as well as for the history of philosophy, comes in—a twist that has an anthropological and theological dimension.

Let’s start from the human side. If consciousness is part and parcel of the absolute—neither some epiphenomenon nor some ontological nullity—then, so goes Schlegel’s argument, this forces us to radically rethink what it is to be human. First of all, this entails that the absolute has gone through a long, long journey, a lengthy cosmic development, in order to reach the point of becoming conscious in and through us. But consciousness does not (how could it?) come out of the womb of nature fully formed. Put metaphorically, when the first human being opens its eyes, the absolute does not simply then, at that very same moment, gain self-awareness. Consciousness has to have a history—an education (*Bildung*)—as it, too, goes through a long, long journey of its own, slowly elevating itself above the throes of a merely animal existence, gaining new types of knowledge as it grows, eventually getting to the standpoint of reason. Interestingly, Schlegel does not end the journey of consciousness here. Schlegel’s history of consciousness is not the odyssey of spirit as it returns to itself, finally discovering that it is reason itself, rationality incarnate.⁷ Schlegel is not Hegel, even though his *Transcendental Philosophy* plainly anticipates Hegel’s own 1807 *Phenomenology of Spirit*. (Hegel may have attended Schlegel’s lectures, though no one knows for sure.) The last epoch of the history of consciousness for Schlegel is therefore not the epoch of reason, the era of modernity in other words, but the epoch of the understanding, by which he means the coming into existence of “a conscious universe,” something that he relates back to the ancient conception of a cosmic *nous*.⁸

To make the same point in Hegelian parlance, Schlegel’s account of the odyssey of spirit is the odyssey of spirit returning to the absolute, finding its home within it. While the second half of the Introduction does not go into concrete details about what this entails for us, both as individuals and communities, nor for morality and politics, Schlegel does make explicit that

⁶ *Transcendental Philosophy*, 26.

⁷ I am borrowing the phrase “the odyssey of spirit” from the subtitle of the second volume of Harris’ monumental commentary on the *Phenomenology*. See H. S. Harris, *Hegel’s Ladder* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1997), 2 vols.

⁸ *Transcendental Philosophy*, 13n12.

these considerations fundamentally change the vocation of the human being (*die Bestimmung des Menschen*).⁹ They provide us with a new Romantic imperative. In 1797, Schlegel formulates the latter in the following terms: “The Romantic imperative demands the blending of all poetic forms. All nature and science should become art—art should become nature and science.”¹⁰ But now it runs, to expand on what Schlegel says below, thus: *we should, by casting ourselves into the absolute, and in an infinite, never-ending process, live our lives such that we destine ourselves to be a self-expression of the absolute.*¹¹ But that implies, at the same time, that the journey of consciousness is also the journey of the absolute, its own education as it were. The absolute can only fully become itself in and through the consciousness of itself—a consciousness of the universe (in both the subjective and objective genitive) that plays out in philosophy, the sciences, and the arts, as Schlegel here makes clear,¹² but will also play out in morality, political institutions, and religion. As Schlegel puts it, quite strikingly, what is at stake in this process is nothing other than *the realization of the divine*,¹³ indeed its very self-realization, itself an infinite task, that we have been gifted to play a major role in.

So, it goes without saying that the metaphysical stakes become quite high in the second half of the Introduction. But they also have stark epistemological ramifications for the age of idealist system building. Schlegel is, we shall recall, taking inspiration from the constructive method of physics and mathematics, which is already evident in the first half. But now his appeal takes a new and decisive direction. To say that consciousness and the absolute are intimately connected is to say that their identical journey—the journey from the infinite to the finite and the finite to the infinite—is what constitutes nature. As such, “the one and only science is,” as Schlegel argues, “natural science.”¹⁴ The approach that he mobilizes to penetrate nature even leads, so he claims, to a system that is “a scientific whole” and “complete in itself.”¹⁵ Nevertheless, that system, even if self-subsistent and self-contained in a sense, is also open. This is not only due to the fact that the system, the building blocks of which are problems, theorems, axioms, and constructions, is only ever an approximation (*Approximation*) of a truth that constitutively exceeds it. It is also due to the fact that nature is, by definition, open-ended. This is a point worth tarrying with.

⁹ *Transcendental Philosophy*, Addendum, 20.

¹⁰ KA, 16: 134, no. 586.

¹¹ *Transcendental Philosophy*, 20.

¹² *Transcendental Philosophy*, 17.

¹³ *Transcendental Philosophy*, 21, 25.

¹⁴ *Transcendental Philosophy*, Addendum, 21n8.

¹⁵ *Transcendental Philosophy*, 18.

Nature, as a realization of the divine in which we, like all things, participate, is unfinished, Schlegel maintains. As he puts it later in the First Part of his *Transcendental Philosophy*, “The Theory of the World,” “*the world is still incomplete* [...] This proposition [...] is extraordinarily important for everything. If we think of the world as complete, then all of our doings are for naught. However, if we know that the world is incomplete, then it is certainly our vocation to work together on its completion.”¹⁶ As a result, the relationship between nature and history—that is to say, *its* history and *our* history since there is no fundamental difference between the two, a history that is *still in progress* with no guaranteed outcome—becomes center stage in Schlegel’s system. This puts a great cosmic responsibility on our hands, stressing our profound duty towards nature. It also indicates a historical rupture *in media res*, even if Schlegel and his audience could not have been aware of it. Sometimes people refer to Kierkegaard as the paradigmatic case of so-called “post-idealist thought.” After all, he does expressly argue for the impossibility of a system of existence insofar as existence is always in becoming.¹⁷ It has as well become commonplace to refer to Schelling, once the idealist system builder *par excellence*, as the philosopher who caused idealist system building to fissure in his development of positive philosophy.¹⁸ However, we already see here, some 40 years prior to Kierkegaard and almost 30 years before Schelling’s creation of positive philosophy, traces of that fissure in Schlegel’s lecture course. All of this just goes to prove the depth of the originality of Schlegel’s *Transcendental Philosophy*—not just as a moment, perhaps short-lived, in Schlegel’s own philosophical development, as he would soon convert to Catholicism and leave behind much of his Romanticism, or in the history of German Idealism or the history of continental philosophy, but as a unique and compelling system in its own right.

¹⁶ *Transcendental Philosophy*, 42.

¹⁷ “When existence is a thing of the past, it is indeed finished, it is indeed concluded, and to that extent it is turned over to the systematic view. Quite so—but for whom? Whoever is himself existing cannot gain this conclusiveness outside existence.” Søren Kierkegaard, *Journal JJ*, in *Kierkegaard’s Journals and Notebooks*, ed. Niels Jörgen Cappelørn et. al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007-2020), 2: 118-119.

¹⁸ Cf. Walter Schulz, *Die Vollendung des deutschen Idealismus in der Spätphilosophie Schellings* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1954).

Transcendental Philosophy

Friedrich Schlegel

Introduction (Part II)

ADDENDUM CONCERNING THE ELEMENTS OF PHILOSOPHY: *CONSCIOUSNESS AND THE INFINITE.*^{1,2}

| 20

The two elements “consciousness” and “the infinite” can once again be split up into their elements. We take what is given to us—we take, therefore, the *one, positive factor*—and search for *the negative factor* through the opposite.

Concerning the infinite, nothing is more familiar to us than *the undetermined*.

Of the infinite nothing is known to us but *the undetermined*—this is, therefore, the *positive* element. Its opposite is “the determined,” and this is the negative element of the infinite. The formula for this could be a *definition* of the infinite,³ namely, “The infinite is a product of the undetermined and the determined.” A proof for this is not needed, but an explanation is. *If the undetermined is to become actual, then it must go out of itself, and determine itself.* (In application, this could mean that *the divine had created the world in order to present itself.*)

The negative element or *consciousness* consists, once again, of the two elements “I” and “not-I.”

Here we can provide no definition, but we can provide a *deduction*. It goes like this: *the determined keeps on determining itself until it, in determining itself, can destine itself to be the undetermined;*⁴ in this manner, the I arises. The

¹ *Transcriber’s Note:* *The infinite* is the positive element, and *consciousness* the negative.

² The transcript of the lectures places the addendum here, just before Schlegel’s outline of the history of consciousness. The critical edition of Schlegel’s works, however, places it in the middle of his discussion of method below where a reference is made to it in the body of the transcript (see below, *Transcendental Philosophy*, 20). In so doing, it not only changes the original pagination of the transcript but also relegates the addendum to a mere footnote. Given both these considerations, I have chosen to put the addendum back where it originally was.

³ *Transcriber’s Note:* As the positive element, the infinite has to be *defined*; it cannot be *deduced*—in any case, deducing presupposes something.

⁴ *sich zum Unbestimmen bestimmt.* In this context, “*bestimmen*” carries the meaning not only of “to determine” but also of “to destine.” See footnote 5.

vocation of the human being, its determination,⁵ could also accordingly be expressed in the following manner: *the human being shall, by casting itself into the undetermined, determine itself indefinitely⁶ and, in determining itself, shall destine itself to be the undetermined.*

(The different stages of consciousness are the epochs of the return to the undetermined.)

The concept of consciousness that is in the deduction is objective. It makes consciousness intelligible to us even outside of it.

| 21

Now, if we connect the middle term of the two elements, “reality,” with the elements that have been derived, then we obtain the following: *real is the determined in the I and the undetermined in the not-I.* Put differently, this means that *real is the freedom present in nature and the necessity present in the human being.*

The formulas for what we have just stated are: $I = \text{not-I}$, and $a = x$. *And the synthesis: $a = I$. ($x = \text{not-I}$ is the formula for all non-philosophy.)⁷*

Here is what follows from the synthesis: *the freedom present in nature is equal to the necessity present in the human being.*

If we attach the predicate of the infinite to consciousness, or connect consciousness and the infinite, then what arises for us is what we call “thinking.”

If we connect *reality* with *thinking*, and then on top of that connect thinking with consciousness, then we obtain a type of *knowledge*. The latter is a real thinking with consciousness. By contrast, *the infinite being connected with*

⁵ *Die Bestimmung des Menschen*. This fixed phrase is highly significant. It is a slogan for a common constellation of philosophical questions and concerns in the German Enlightenment that address the essence of the human being (its core “determination”) and its intrinsic purpose (its “destiny” or “calling”), playing on the different connotations of “*Bestimmung*.” The phrase first occurs in the title of a short pamphlet by Spalding in 1748, which then undergoes multiple editions in the decades to come. It also subsequently occurs in Fichte’s book of popular philosophy in 1800 of the same name. For these texts, see Johann Joachim Spalding, *Die Bestimmung des Menschen. Die Erstausgabe 1748 und die letzte Auflage von 1794*, ed. Wolfgang Erich Müller (Waltrop: Spenner 1997) and Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *The Vocation of Man*, ed. and trans. Roderick M. Chisholm (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956); *J. G. Fichte-Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, ed. Reinhard Lauth, Walter Jacobs, Hans Gliwitzky, and Erich Fuchs (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt: Frommann-Holzboog, 1962–2012), I/6. For a discussion of both and related texts in the context of post-Kantian philosophy, see George di Giovanni, *Freedom and Religion in Kant and His Immediate Successors: The Vocation of Humankind, 1774–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) and Anne Pollok and Courtney D. Fugate, eds., *The Human Vocation in German Philosophy* (Bloomsbury, 2023). The latter contains an English translation of the first edition of Spalding’s pamphlet.

⁶ *ins Unbestimmte*. This can signify both “into the undetermined” and “indefinitely.”

⁷ *Transcriber’s Note*: Synthesis is the best term for this reversal of the poles. The synthesis is: *there is no not-I except the infinite*; and *there is nothing determined for the infinite except consciousness*. The formula for reflection is “ $I = \text{not-I}$.” For speculation, however $a = x$.

consciousness gives us *the pure concept of the divine*. If we once again connect this with reality, then—*nature* arises. Facing thinking stands the divine, and facing knowledge nature. Hence, the proposition “One can only think the divine, but one cannot know it; and one can know nothing except nature.”⁸

Nature is the middle term between *reality* and *the divine*. Its infinite task is that of *realizing the divine*.

[THE HISTORY OF CONSCIOUSNESS:
EPOCHS OF ERROR.]

| 11

Epoch I.

Consciousness at the simplest or lowest position of honor.⁹

Sensation.

If you were to divide sensation, as a phenomenon, into its factors (elements), then the positive factor (or element) would be *desire*, the negative element *anger*, and the point of indifference *fear*.

Infinite progressions take the midpoint as their starting point. The minimum is *envy*, the maximum *wonder*.

Wonder is the root of the *feeling of the sublime*.¹⁰ It can be something very crude, stupid. And I am rather sure that all *striving toward the ideal* takes envy as its starting point.

These passions, affects, or *sensations* that we come across in the first epoch give rise to error, mind you. (They concern merely an individual.) This epoch is, accordingly, an *epoch of error*. The error is—and herein lies the character of the epoch—that one entirely underestimates¹¹ individuals. The categories of causality, quality, and quantity, appear real.

| 12

Epoch II.

Intuition.

This, too, is an *epoch of error*. The distinguishing feature of the error of this epoch is *that one mixes up different spheres*.

⁸ *Transcriber's Note*: Hence, the one and only science is natural science.

⁹ *Dignität*.

¹⁰ Schlegel is playing on a claim, first advanced by Plato in the *Theaetetus* (155d) and then again by Aristotle in the *Metaphysics* (982b), that philosophy begins in the experience of wonder (θαυμάζειν, *thaumazo*).

¹¹ *verkennt*.

Epoch III.

Representation.

Here, too, only errors are committed. *One thinks in a merely formulaic way, without reality.* This epoch is, however, the site of the surface appearance of the understanding. Error is already entirely theoretical.

Now, this epoch, *the last epoch of error*, coincides with the 1st *epoch of truth*, which comes next.

EPOCHS OF TRUTH.

Epoch I.

Insight.

This epoch is the transition to truth. Hence, it could therefore also be described as the “epoch of principles.”

It is through the amalgamation of the epoch of representation and the epoch of insight that *dogmatism* arises. It searches for reality in merely formulaic thinking. It only searches for principles.

There is, in the *epoch of insight*, still a high margin of error, but even so it is the transition to truth. Since this epoch is concerned with principles, it also strives toward a type of knowledge. The character of this epoch is *determinacy*.

| 13

Epoch II.

Reason.

This epoch of truth, the second one, is concerned with the *cognition of the infinite*. It is, therefore, the *epoch of ideas*.

What we come across in this epoch is positive truth. It is also *the epoch of cognition*.

Here, *idealism* is possible. The character of this epoch is *clarity*. In this epoch, error is still possible, but the error is merely a misunderstanding in that one, to wit, depicts anything that exists as “persisting” and dismisses *what is active*; or one accepts *only activity* and dismisses anything that is substantial.

It may seem that, with this epoch, the history of consciousness has come to a close; as consciousness reaches its highest stage, that’s just how it is, and, to this extent, this is the last epoch. But still, the whole has not yet come to a close with this epoch. Consciousness has to return to itself once again, and

it can only then close its sphere. That's why there is yet another epoch that takes place. This is the

Epoch III.
*Of the understanding.*¹²

This epoch is a return of all epochs. It is here that we first comprehend the whole world, the whole, this being not yet the case in the epoch of reason. It is here that we first *interpret* everything. Hence, the character of this epoch is also *distinctness*.¹³

An essential feature of this epoch is that it is the epoch of the symbol.

Critique of idealism.

The fact that there is a history of human understanding follows from the deduction of consciousness. That is to say, consciousness is a return of the determined to the undetermined. The first epoch—*sensation*—is the epoch that is attached to animality. *The epoch of reason* is the highest epoch. But the circle has not yet come to a close with it. It is only with *the epoch of the understanding* that the circle is brought to a close; the latter is also the *highest* epoch.

Each epoch denotes a certain position of honor that consciousness occupies in its return to the undetermined. | 14

Sensation is a merely individual affair.¹⁴ Intuition is already becoming theoretical; abstraction is already occurring. [This] is even more so the case with representation. In general, the following is something to note: error becomes increasingly theoretical, just as much as truth becomes increasingly practical.

The epoch of insight takes, as its starting point, the phenomenon, and strives toward a type of knowledge. Now, since it takes the phenomenon as its starting point, it assumes that the categories of “causality,” “quality,” and “quantity” are real—precisely because it takes, as its starting point, the finite.

¹² *Transcriber's Note:* The understanding is the *highest consummation of the mental and intellectual faculty* [*geistigen und denkenden Vermögens*], that which the ancients used the term “νοῦς” (*nous*) to express. The understanding is a universally embracing [*universelles*] consciousness, or a conscious universe, or something of the like.

¹³ *Deutlichkeit.* To note is that Descartes's notion of clarity and distinctness is translated into German as “*Klarheit*” and “*Deutlichkeit*.” It is related, etymologically, to the word “to interpret” (*deuten*).

¹⁴ *individuell.*

But, in the end, it realizes that it has taken something false as its starting point, and, in this manner, the error is annihilated.

Striving toward some kind of knowledge is a *universal dualism*.

Dualism concerns some kind of knowledge, whereas realism¹⁵ wishes to have truth.

Dualism only deals with the *empirical approach*; realism, in contrast, only deals with *theory*. Its character is *identity*, just as the character of dualism is *duplexity*. There exist, in *dualism*, only *two activities*, and no substance. The only thing to be found in *realism* is a *single, indivisible substance*. Now, dualism and realism are *the two elements of idealism*. Dualism is the *negative element*, realism the *positive element*. What actually stands in opposition to *idealism*¹⁶ is *dogmatism*.¹⁷ It arises when the *epoch of insight* does not begin in the spirit of truth. That which is just the negative is taken for the one and only thing that is real, and what is truly real is not taken into account. Now, dogmatism is concerned with searching for principles. For it, the categories come forward as real. It, too, can be brought to a higher stage.

Dogmatism—since, in its view, principles are what is highest—can indeed unify these principles and subordinate them to one principle *qua highest* and *ultimate*, but it also can adopt multiple principles as first principles just as consistently; and that being so, we see how *dogmatism* borders on *mysticism*. That is to say, mysticism believes that multiple principles have been

| 15

¹⁵ *Transcriber's Note*: Here, there is no question of this being some type of empirical realism. This realism is entirely transcendent. It deals with *one indivisible whole*, the *infinite*. When it appears in isolation, realism can only be absolute skepticism. It has no core meaning [*Gehalt*], no content, at all because it is something absolutely positive; its form could be nothing but absolutely indirect or negative.

¹⁶ *Transcriber's Note*: Idealism will always clash with dogmatism because dogmatism often impinges on idealism. As for the ranks of the dogmatists, one can take Jacobi and Kant as representatives of its system.

¹⁷ Schlegel is intervening in a then-ongoing discussion about dogmatism vs. criticism, herein “criticism” is synonymous with “transcendental idealism,” as the two main systems of philosophy. The distinction was first introduced by Kant in *The Critique of Pure Reason*. According to Fichte in the First and Second Introduction to *An Attempt at a New Presentation of the Doctrine of Science (Wissenschaftslehre)*, these are the only two logically consistent systems. Schelling, too, weighed in on the battle in his *Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*. See Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, ed. and trans. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 117; *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, ed. The Royal Prussian (later German) Academy of the Sciences (Berlin: Georg Reimer, later Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1900-), 3: B xxx; Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings (1797-1800)*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1994); *GA*, I/4. Friedrich Wilhelm Schelling, *Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*, in *The Unconditional in Human Knowledge: Four Early Essays (1794-1796)*, trans. Fritz Marti (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1980; *Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schellings sämtliche Werke*, ed. K.F.A. Schelling (Stuttgart: J.G. Cotta, 1856-61), 1.

revealed to it as originary principles. However, it is quite easy to realize that the presupposition of multiple principles kills all method.

The elements of dogmatism are empiricism and egoism.

Dualism refers to the *empirical approach*. *Realism* is concerned with *theory*.¹⁸ They relate to one another like the spirit and the letter.

Now, if one connects dualism and theory, then the outcome is a science that does not take phenomena but rather the elements as its starting point. This is *mathematics*. The latter is, as it were, a type of *a priori dualism*.

Mathematics is supposed to take *elements* as its starting point, and everything else has to be produced from them. The elements for geometry would be the point (.) and the straight line (—). The elements for arithmetic would be 1 and 0.

If one, however, connects *realism* and *the empirical approach*, then the science that is the outcome of this operation has to be the science that is the furthest removed from mathematics; this will be *historiography*.¹⁹ It is a type of *empirical realism*. Since, however, realism here is transcendent, then this *historiography* will only deal with *what is absolutely empirical*. It only refers to ὄντως ὄντα (*ontos onta*, real beings or what is truly real).²⁰

Dualism is concerned with *elements*, *realism* with *substance*. The character of dualism is *duplexity*. The character of realism is *identity*.²¹

If one connects once again the *elements* and *identity*, so that therefore the two activities have to be made identical, have to be integrated into one, then the outcome is what is called a “sphere.”

If one connects, however, *substance* and *duplexity*, then the outcome is the *individual*.

Realism is concerned with substance or *persistence*, dualism with elements or *changeability*.²² Now, if one connects the *sphere* with *persistence*,

¹⁸ *Transcriber's Note:*

dualism — realism
 empiricism — theory

¹⁹ *Historie*.

²⁰ This phrase is used by Plato to make a distinction between ultimate reality and what comes and ceases—that is to say, between the unchanging, eternal world of Forms and the changeable, temporal world discovered by the senses. The phrase originates from the *Phaedrus* (247e).

²¹ *Transcriber's Note:*

elements — substance
 duplexity — identity

²² *Transcriber's Note:*

| 16

then the outcome is what one understands by a “schema.” However, the individual connected with *changeability* gives us *education* or a *becoming*. *Schemas* are the products of *mathematics*. Education is the content of all *history*. The *condition of history* is an *ideal*; the latter is what it refers to.

The condition of mathematics is a *symbol*. (Those four elements of mathematics [that I just mentioned] are symbols.)

Mathematics and *history* are now to be reconsidered as two elements the point of indifference of which is *physics*.

Physics lies between mathematics and history. It will therefore be possible to find evidence in physics for what we discover in mathematics and history.

The *features of mathematics* are *schemas*, its *conditions—symbols*. *What it deals with* are: *spheres*. *Its method* is—*constructing*.

History.

Its *features* are: *education*.

The condition: *the ideal*.

What it deals with: *the individual*.

The method: *characterizing*.

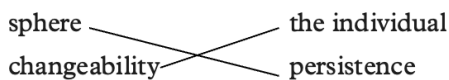
Now, if one connects *schema* and *individual*, then the outcome is a *phenomenon*. But connecting *education* and *sphere* gives us *epochs* (periods).

Furthermore, if you connect *the ideal* and *constructing*, then you obtain a type of *approximating constructing* or *experimenting*.

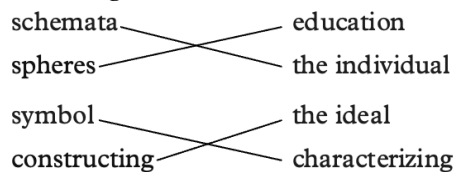
And if one draws yet another connection between *symbol* and *characterizing*, then what we subsequently get is a type of *interpreting*.²³

Now, all these concepts are applicable to *physics*.

It is easy to realize from the foregoing that physics is ranked the highest among the sciences since it is the point of indifference of mathematics and history, just as idealism lies in the point of indifference of dualism and realism, and mathematics and history are derived from dualism and realism. What we have said earlier also follows from the foregoing, namely, that physics is the first of the sciences *because all science is natural science*.



²³ *Transcriber’s Note*: We therefore get:



If we had the desire to apply this scale of the sciences that we have derived to the *arts* as well, we would therefore have every reason to do so: *we are supposed to be constructing philosophy*, but this happens *by developing the consciousness of humanity*; now, however, the fine arts belong to consciousness, naturally.

But this application would put us here far afield. We will restrict ourselves to the following comment: *the visual arts* correspond to *dualism*, *music*, however, to *realism*.

The duplexity of the *visual arts* is: *sculpture* and *painting*.²⁴

In light of what has been previously said, one can see *the energy of idealism*. It towers above all *as the highest sum total of truth*, and extends to everything; everything is conditioned through it.

The sciences were derived from the elements of idealism. It seems as if *idealism* and *physics* coincide. How do they differ? Since all *reality* is a result of *consciousness* (as pure form) and of the *infinite*, so *consciousness* is to be regarded as the *negative* or *minimum* of reality; the infinite, by contrast, is the *positive* or *maximum* of reality.

Consciousness is the originary reflection on the infinite, a reflection that is, however, unconscious.

The perception of the minimum as the originary root of the universe (of the maximum) is *intellectual intuition*.

Now, the difference between idealism and physics is as follows:

The philosopher (idealism) deals with the minimum and the maximum, and physics deals with the finite terms that lie between reality and the elements in an infinite progression of proportions.

We took *consciousness* and the *infinite* as our starting points. We then sought the *subjective conditions* that are necessary in order to arrive at the consciousness of the infinite. These are things that we had to construct, and in so doing we came to *the history of human understanding*. All of this then

²⁴ *Transcriber's Note*: If one lumps together all the epochs of error—for instance, under the umbrella term “sensibility”—and if one synthetically posits them with idealism (or the highest sum total of truth), then one gets the concept of poesy. (This is how Fichte establishes the concept.)

resulted in a *critique of idealism*, and here we were led to an *encyclopedia of the sciences*.

| 18

Concerning method.

How does *method* differ from *system*? Method is the *spirit* and system is the *letter*.

System is the *organization of philosophy*, method its inner life force.

Philosophy is a mathematics of consciousness, a history of the cosmos, and a physics of the understanding (which one could call “logic”). *Method* and *system* refer to the physics of the understanding.

System. One can say nothing more about it than this: *it is a scientific whole that is complete in itself*. It is based on *matter* and *form*. *Principles and ideas are the matter of philosophy; form is its unity*, the negative factor of which is *harmony*, and the positive factor *consistency*.

Now, if one connects the negative factor of matter (ideas) and the negative factor of form (harmony), no feature of the system here ensues; the exact same thing is the case when one connects the two positive factors, *principles* and *consistency*. But if one connects the positive factor of the one and the negative feature of the other—for instance, connecting *consistency* and *idea* gives us what we are to understand by “symmetry.” The idea comprehends the whole, and consistency is concerned with a purpose. And *harmony* connected with *principles* gives us *continuity*.

Therefore, the continuity of principles and the symmetry of ideas are the characters of a system.

The principle that expresses the relationship of the whole to its parts and of parts to their whole is what one has to search for in art. It is this that is the architectonic. That is to say, there lies between *the visual arts* (*qua* negative element) and *music* (*qua* positive element) nothing else but *architecture*.

The system should present a whole of philosophy. The *method* should bring forth this whole.

To this end, we have, in order to bring forth the whole, *four elements* as well. That is to say, philosophy begins with *skepsis* and *enthusiasm*. Furthermore, there is a tendency in philosophy for it to be concerned with *the absolute* and with *reality*. Thus, *skepsis*, *enthusiasm*, *something absolute*, and *reality* are the four elements that the *method* of philosophy will emerge from for us. That is to say, if one connects *skepsis* and *reality*, then we obtain nothing other than what one understands by the term “experimenting.”

The *method* of philosophy is, therefore, first of all a type of *experimenting*, | 19
but what direction does it take? This is what we get as a result when we connect
the two other elements, *enthusiasm* and *something absolute*.

What we get as a result from this cannot be summed up in a single
word. It is the fact that: the *direction that the method takes is circular; to be more*
specific, it takes the center as its starting point, and refers back to the center.

Furthermore, we discovered these as elements of the method:

Analysis synthesis abstraction.

Now, if we transpose abstraction into analysis, then we acquire the
concept of “the discursive” (*raisonnement*). If we, by contrast, transpose
analysis into abstraction, then we get the concept “intuitive.” Now, let’s
connect these two concepts with the medial concept (synthesis). Thus, the
concept “discursive” connected with [the concept] “synthesis” gives us
reflection. And the concept “intuitive” connected with [the concept] “syn-
thesis” gives us *speculation*.²⁵ If one connects once again *reflection* and
speculation, then one gets *allegory*.

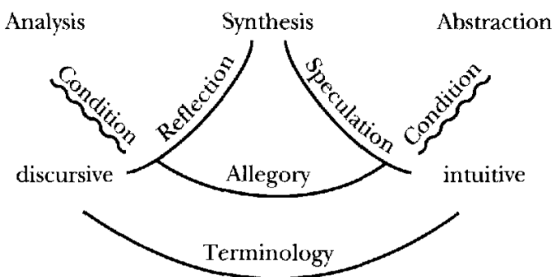
The matter of all speculation is the *ideal*. Reflection presupposes a
phenomenon. Allegory is the appearance of an ideal.

Reflection and speculation are the forms of all *thinking*; merely allegory,
therefore, issues from thinking.

Furthermore, if we connect *discursive* and *intuitive*, then we obtain
terminology. Here the task is *to render visible what is discursive*. (However, one
should not here think of “terminology” in terms of how we normally
understand the word. It denotes here concepts that contain, as it were, some
kind of contradiction. Take, for example, *intellectual intuition*, *transcendental*
standpoint, *objective free will*,²⁶ and so on.)

Now, if we look once again at abstraction, then the one character that
it has is *producing*. The other, opposing character is *demonstrating*. If we | 20
combine this once again with what we got earlier (refer to the example

²⁵ *Transcriber’s Note:*



Analysis is the condition of *reflection*, *abstraction* the condition of speculation.

²⁶ *Willkühr*.

[discussed in] the addendum). To be specific, we gave a *definition* of the *infinite*, and a *deduction of consciousness*.

Now, if we combine *producing* with *deducing*, then *constructing* is the medial concept.

(This is the method of *mathematics*.)

By contrast, if we combine *demonstrating* and *defining*, then *characterizing* is the medial concept. (This is the method of *history*.)

The method of physics is *experimenting*. (It arises by combining skepticism and reality). And in this manner, we are once again back where we started—thus, at our destination.

The character of the synthetic method is that it strives toward the midpoint.

| 21 The method of idealism is a type of *combinatory experimenting*; its direction is either *centripetal* or *centrifugal*, meaning that it moves towards the center and from the center.

(*Remark*: It would be better said if one called philosophy “experimental” or “central” philosophy than transcendental philosophy because doing so simultaneously takes its method into account; [and] since, moreover, this term is tautological, all true philosophy being transcendental philosophy.)

Method is the negative of philosophy, *system* the positive.²⁷ The conditions of a system are *continuity* and *symmetry*. The method used is a type of experimenting, and the direction it takes is centripetal and centrifugal.

| 22 Every middle term is to be considered as an infinite progression to both elements. We always encounter, therefore, a *minimum* and a *maximum*.

Now, we had *analysis* and *abstraction* as the two elements whose middle term is *synthesis*. Now, were we to seek the minimum of synthesis, this would be *reduction* (where multiple phenomena are referred to a single one). The maximum is something that we can only reach through approximation. The maximum itself is, therefore, only *approximation*.

What lies between system as the positive element and method as the negative, as their middle term, is *syllogism*.

“Syllogism,” as it is to be here understood, expresses something whole, something complete in itself. A whole of the functions of the understanding. *But the smallest possible whole*. In addition, a system is also a whole, but it can

²⁷ *Transcriber’s Note*: The matter of philosophy is discovered in its method. Its form, namely, *unity*, is discovered in the features of a system—thus, in continuity and symmetry.

contain a whole complex of syllogisms. (A *syllogism* is, as it were, a small system, and a system a big syllogism.)

Since syllogism is the intermediate between system and method, so it has to be possible to also locate a minimum and a maximum of it. We discover these, namely, (1) the *minimum* if we connect philosophy's tendency [to be concerned with the absolute] and its matter in such a way that we obtain *real principles* and *absolute ideas*; taken together, these give us *the transcendental standpoint*; this is the *minimum or the conditio sine qua non of a syllogism*. 2) The *maximum*, by contrast, we will discover when we connect what philosophy begins with and its form, namely, *skepsis*, enthusiasm and consistency, harmony. — When consistency and enthusiasm, harmony and *skepsis*, are connected, taken together this gives us *pure understanding*; this is the maximum. Thus, this amounts to the following:

System syllogism method.

The minimum is the transcendental standpoint, the maximum pure understanding.

General comment: Concepts will be proven; no concept is used, or at least is only used provisionally, until we have discovered its reality. “To prove” means “to show the reality of something.”²⁸ Every proof is, accordingly, *historiographical*. There is no such thing as a *logical* proof because nothing real emerges from a rational discourse.²⁹ Now, just as *concepts* require *proof*, so *propositions* require an *explanation* and no proof. A proposition consists of two concepts; now, if the concepts are proven, then the proposition needs no proof, but certainly does need some explanation of how the two concepts are connected. One discovers concepts in more ways than one, and one can therefore also prove them in more ways than one. (This claim goes against what one typically says:

| 23

²⁸ *Sache*.

²⁹ This comment, made some 16 years before Hegel would publish the second part of his *Science of Logic*, anticipates the late Schelling's critique of the latter and even aspects of his distinction between positive and negative philosophy, as do other parts of Schlegel's *Transcendental Philosophy*. According to Schelling, Hegel's absolute idealism fails precisely because it attempts, from within the register of the concept, to deduce the existence of nature as the necessary externalization of the Absolute Idea. For Schelling, however, the existence of nature is a brute fact (a mere *that*, as he puts it); philosophy must, therefore, take raw existence as something given and primary, which requires idealism to radically reorient itself and challenges its rationalist proclivities. This then leads to his so-called positive philosophy, which first and foremost concerns itself with the history of existence, both natural and human, as a history of the divine in its becoming. Schlegel performs a similar move in turning to historiography construed as the “absolutely” empirical study of history of the divine in the process of being realized.

“Truth is one.”) Spinoza and Fichte do this often. In addition, this is something that is very natural and already follows from the concept of the experimental method. In this manner, there must be, for instance, an infinite number of proofs of the infinite.

We encounter *three moments* in philosophy.

- 1.) *Objective free will.*
- 2.) *Intellectual intuition.*
- 3.) *The transcendental standpoint.*

Objective free will and intellectual intuition are the two elements, and the transcendental standpoint is the point of indifference.

*Objective free will*³⁰ is the *conditio sine qua non* of philosophy. What arises from it is intellectual intuition, and through the continuation of both arises the transcendental standpoint.

We attained the solution of Problem II only through approximation, namely, through *abstraction*.

Originary abstraction is the business of free will, but free will is purely and simply objective because it is concerned with all that is the condition of anything objective. The highest unity is searched for; anything subjective is removed.

We should abstract from everything that cannot be the midpoint of philosophy. Now, since philosophy is concerned with the absolute and reality, we should abstract from all relative reality. This happens *by us positing absolute reality*. If we, however, posit absolute reality, then we are still left with ourselves. Now, we can, and indeed have to, also once again abstract from individual consciousness; but the originary form of consciousness is something that we cannot abstract from. What is, therefore, left over, outside of the infinite, is still consciousness, *which encompasses consciousness as a whole*.

Result of the originary abstraction. The absolute elements of reality are *consciousness* (not construed empirically, but rather as the consciousness that makes empirical consciousness possible in the first place) and *the infinite*. All elements are invisible; thus, this is even more so the case with the absolute elements. The recapitulation of originary consciousness as a whole—when the latter comes to consciousness, that is, when the originary consciousness *intuits* and *understands*—is *intellectual intuition*.

³⁰ *Transcriber's Note:* Objective free will is the action of originary abstraction.

The absolute thesis of all philosophy cannot be proved; there is purely and simply nothing that goes beyond it; it contains its proof in itself. And because of this, the *first* and *ultimate* thing in philosophy is not a faith of any kind, as is usually assumed, but *a type of knowledge pure and simple*, albeit admittedly *a type of knowledge that is of an entirely sui generis sort, a type of infinite knowledge*.

All faith contains something uncertain—the opposite can still be possible; but this is not at all the case with the absolute thesis of philosophy. When viewed intrinsically,³¹ it is absolute; its certainty cannot be increased or decreased. Anyone who has seen the truth just once can never lose it again.

But when viewed extrinsically,³² this inner intuition of the truth cannot be presented in such a way that it, as it were, can be learned. One cannot prove it, or one can infinitely prove it. A philosopher only has *faith in themselves*. But this is no postulate. To have faith in oneself means to have faith in one's ideal. Whoever has faith in themselves is someone who forms an ideal of themselves and makes this into the focus of their life, its midpoint.

Faith is the *intermediate* between *knowledge and what stands in opposition to it*. The *minimum* of faith would be *having an opinion*, the maximum—*cognition*. Cognition is the highest. One can only cognize *one thing; thinking and knowing are here one thing*. What one thinks is also what one knows, and what one knows, one thinks. *Cognition is knowing's and thinking's highest position of honor*.

The reality of the infinite can only be cognized, not proven.

Through abstraction, we solved Problem II.

The action of the abstraction is *objective free will*. This is the *conditio sine qua non*, the formal, the negative. The positive, the material, is *intellectual intuition*. *The latter is the consciousness of the consciousness of the infinite*. Understanding and intuition are contained in intellectual intuition. The transcendental standpoint is the midpoint between the two. This is the point that elevates us above anything individual. *We move out of ourselves* if we elevate ourselves to this point.

(Our *self* is a reverberation of the infinite.)

Through *intellectual intuition*, we have discovered that one cannot abstract from *consciousness* and *the infinite*. These, therefore, are the two elements that we, from a transcendental standpoint, can experiment with. One could call the experiments “transcendental experiments” because they

³¹ *Innerlich*.

³² *von außen*.

are only possible at such a point; their tendency is completely and utterly synthetic.

The elements that we are experimenting with are therefore:

Consciousness *reality* *something infinite.*

Consciousness is, in a manner of speaking, + a – a ... a zero in the process of becoming and vanishing.

The infinite is a 1 raised to a limitless power or potency³³ every which way. If these elements are also actually elements, then one will have to be able to transition from one to the other.

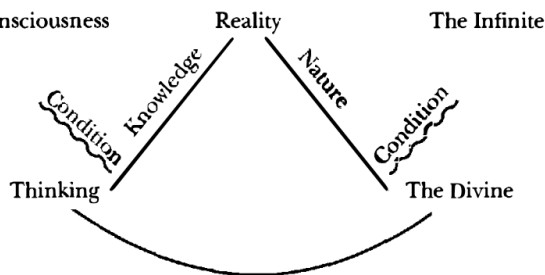
Consciousness arises from *the infinite if the infinite becomes infinitely finite. And if in the consciousness of the I and of the not-I [...],*³⁴ *and the unification of both has been achieved, the infinite* arises. The first attempt to obtain new concepts from these two first concepts is made by us transposing one into the other. If we, therefore, transpose the infinite and superimpose it on consciousness, then we obtain a new concept, namely, “an infinite consciousness” or the concept “thinking.” If we, however, transpose consciousness into the infinite and superimpose it on the latter, thus [obtaining] *a conscious infinite*, then this is the concept of “the divine.”

Now, if we connect these new concepts with the first *medial concept* “reality,”³⁵ so that we are therefore connecting 1) *thinking* with *reality* under the condition of the one primordial element, *consciousness*, then we obtain a type of *real thinking with consciousness* or a type of *knowledge*. 2) If we connect *the divine* with reality and center this connection through the *infinite*, then we obtain a *real divinity with infinity* or, which is the same thing, *nature*.³⁶ Were

³³ *eine gränzenlos potenzierte 1.* Schlegel is drawing on the language of Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie*, which describes nature as a creative process of becoming in which its underlying, dynamic forces, what Schelling refers to as “potencies” (*Potenzen*) are continually raised to a higher power in a quasi-mathematic manner (*potenziert*)—such that, ultimately, there is no radical qualitative distinction between the inorganic and the organic, in that the latter is just a quantitatively larger expression of what is already, inchoately but in principle, in the former.

³⁴ The transcript unfortunately lacks the rest of the clause.

³⁵ *Transcriber’s Note:*



³⁶ *Transcriber’s Note:* *Nature* is, as it were, *a divinity that has become actual.*

we to summarize this concept in a proposition, it would run: “It is the infinite task of nature to realize the divine.”

What comes about as a result of the combination is the fact *that one is incapable of thinking of anything other than the divine*. No further concepts can be derived from thinking of the divine. If you wish to designate it with a single word, then I would wager that there is certainly no more fitting word for it than “divination.”

Furthermore, one can see from the derivation of the connection between the concepts *that one can know nothing but nature*. *That’s why every science is a natural science, and natural science invisibly begins with divination and ends with it*.

In addition, the concept “divination” still refers to two other concepts. That is to say, if we connect *consciousness* and *nature* with one another, *with knowledge centered*, then we get the concept “reflection.” Furthermore, if we connect *knowledge with the infinite, with nature centered* (put differently, where nature is the condition or what is only possible through nature), then we obtain the concept of “speculation.”

Reflection and *speculation* stand opposed to one another; lying between the two as the midpoint, and as the Alpha and Omega of natural science, is *divination*.

If we were going to stray from the midpoint and cling to one or the other, then we would obtain the standpoint of *reflection* or, on the other side, the standpoint of *speculation*, and, in this manner, we obtain *the Fichtean system or that of Spinoza*.

Now, we have to, in order to obtain new concepts, go back to the method. The first thing we began with was *analysis*. (Breaking a phenomenon down into its elements.) Therefore, we also should resolve the two phenomena, *consciousness* and the *infinite*, into their elements.

The familiar element of the infinite is the *undetermined*. What comes about as a result of it through opposition is the second element, *the determined*. The infinite therefore consists of the undetermined and the determined. The infinite goes out of itself, and determines itself. This is a *definition of the infinite*.³⁷ We have to define it because it is the positive. The definition is genetic.

Consciousness, as the negative, is something that we will have to deduce. The elements of consciousness are *I* and *not-I*.

³⁷ *Transcriber’s Note*: The *idea of principles* is contained in the definition.

The *deduction*³⁸ [goes like this]: the determined keeps on determining itself until it, in determining itself, destines itself to be the undetermined and, by casting itself into the undetermined, determines itself indefinitely; in other words, this means that *consciousness is a history of the living organism up to the highest pinnacle of human sophrosyne*,³⁹ *of the understanding*.

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Should we *define* or *deduce* reality? We can neither define nor deduce it; rather, we [have to] search for an intermediate. This intermediate can be called a “criterion.” It is a definition of what it is not and a deduction of what it consists of or a specification of what it is deduced from. In order to acquire real concepts, we have to now connect the elements of consciousness with the elements of the infinite, and indeed in such a way that we connect the positive element of the one with the negative elements of the other—*thus, the undetermined with the not-I, and the determined with the I*. Now, what comes about as a result of this is the fact that *real is what is free* in nature and what is *necessary in the human being* (that is to say, what is necessary in the human being is what *persists* in it; and what is free in nature is what is *living* in it). This stands in stark opposition to dogmatism.

Knowledge is broken down into *theory* and *the empirical approach*. *Theory* is concerned merely with *ideas*; what is missing here are *principles*, but it has to proceed according to *a principle*. *The empirical approach* is concerned with *principles*. What is missing here are *ideas*. If it is to actually be an empirical approach, then it has to proceed according to *an idea*.

The results with regards to theory that we have now obtained through transcendental experiments are: *the first originary concepts are consciousness and the infinite*—these are *a priori* concepts.⁴⁰ Everything has to be derived from these two concepts. The connection between these two concepts can be summed up in a single proposition: “The positive and the negative are one thing.” This is the law of identity, which we will name “the ultimate truth.”

The way the proposition is formulated is *so* indeterminate because it also means so many different things. That is to say—*we should connect the two concepts* (in this manner, the proposition becomes a rule); then, *they are connected*; all separation is relative, is a delusion; *they have to be connected, their connection has to be completed. This is the content of idealism*.

³⁸ *Transcriber’s Note*: The *principle of ideas* is contained in the deduction.

³⁹ *Besonnenheit*.

⁴⁰ *Transcriber’s Note*: These are the ideas that theory is concerned with. The empirical approach takes dualism as its starting point, but its end result is identity.

(The first concepts for dogmatism are *quantity* and *quality*; the highest basic, foundational principle is *causality*. For idealism, by contrast, the first concepts are *consciousness and the infinite*, and the highest *basic, foundational principle is the law of identity*.)

As for the middle term “reality,” *the minimum is reflection* (the combined effect of consciousness and the infinite). *Reflection is different from consciousness due to the fact that it is an actual consciousness, whereas the latter is only form.*

The *maximum* of reality is the *universe*. The infinite is only the form. It can only gain reality via consciousness. If we abstract from the four concepts, then we obtain a new middle term—the *understanding* (“νοῦς” [*nous*], as the ancients put it).

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The understanding is an infinite consciousness, a conscious infinite, a reflected universe, a universally embracing reflection.

One can refer to philosophy as “the doctrine of the limits of human cognition.” The law of identity is the *ultimate truth*, the *infinite* and *consciousness* are the *first concepts*.

First concepts are what theory takes as its starting point, and *the ultimate truth* is what every *empirical approach* ends with. Theory is the treatment, the presentation, of ideas. It has two concepts in its possession (one can call them elementary ideas), and it is from the latter that it derives everything.

The two concepts are the principle of ideas, and the ultimate truth is the idea of principles.

Every empirical approach is concerned with principles; what is usually missing in it is a *guiding idea*. The basic, foundational principle of identity can be the lodestar because it tells each empiricist what the result of their investigations will be.

Now, what comes about as a result of this is the following corollary for philosophy:

“Philosophy is complete when all concepts are transcendent and all propositions are identical.” (This is, however, only the ideal pursued by philosophy, something that is never achievable.)

“Transcendent” specifically [applies here] because, in order to grasp these concepts, one has to not only go out of oneself, but rather one also has to go out of all experience. *The concept of the infinite is transcendent.*

The infinite consists of the elements of the *undetermined* and the *determined*. The *undetermined* goes out of itself, and determines itself. *It has the tendency to determine itself.* Now, the determined, as what stands in opposition to the undetermined, therefore also has the opposed tendency—

consequently, *the determined has to tendency to return to the undetermined*. It only expresses this tendency through the determinability of the determined. This determinability itself has to be, once again, undetermined, since the determined has the tendency [to] return to the undetermined, hence to determine itself indefinitely by casting itself into the undetermined. *The character of all things determined is therefore an undetermined determinability*. Now, from the tendency of the determined to keep on determining itself and return to the undetermined, there arises *self-determination, the essence of consciousness*.

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If it is verified that the reality of the finite is a delusion, then the question of the subjective conditions for the opposite crops up. What clutter must be removed so that the human being can be restored to its originary state?

It is impossible for us to assume that any *common sense*—an *understanding* that one could qualify as *sound*⁴¹—exists outside of philosophy. Ordinary common sense, so-called sound understanding, is merely concerned with the finite, hence with delusion, with error, with the mother of all prejudices. Any such understanding is therefore not sound, but rather completely and utterly sick and corrupt. It does not rub shoulders with philosophy at all. It has no point of contact with the latter, period. What we refer to as claims of sound understanding are, at best, the cross-section of an era. And if one now compares this spirit [with that of] different countries, or different ages, it often stands in direct contradiction. How is that possible if this is a claim made by *sound* reason? Evidence can be found in the history of consciousness to the effect that sound understanding takes error as its starting point and that it is, as such, not sound but rather sick and corrupted.

But the human senses can also be made sound—not, however, through the path of understanding, but rather through another path. That is to say, they can be through the path of art. The highest expression of the force of the senses is art, and *the correspondence of idealism and art is perfect*. It is just not possible to point out an artwork where the two concepts of bringing the infinite to consciousness and carrying consciousness forward into the infinite are not established as the ultimate, basic, foundational principle.

(According to dogmatism, we can never reach the point where we can show artists their true value.)

⁴¹ *gesunden Verstand*. Schlegel is playing with this fixed phrase, which denotes “common sense” but literally means “healthy understanding.”

And on that note, the *Introduction*, which constitutes a self-subsistent whole, has come to a close, and we may now transition to building the system. However, since we have to, by virtue of the method specified in the Introduction, connect the philosophy of reflection and the philosophy of speculation, we should, since Fichte and Spinoza have established these two philosophical systems, preface this by saying a few things about these two philosophers. We shall, in the course of our investigations, find ourselves sometimes adopting the standpoint of one and sometimes adopting the standpoint of the other. But, since there exists such symmetry,⁴² and parallelism, between the two, we can also often take them together. This symmetry also validly applies to their outward appearance.⁴³

Both, no matter how independent and original they may have been [as thinkers], had their predecessors. Fichte had a Kant, and Spinoza a Descartes.

Now, what is purely theoretical in their systems—and thus what in them is valid, what in them contains the spirit of each—can be roughly expressed by the following propositions.

The spirit of the Fichtean system is: “The object is a product of the creative power of imagination, and everything in consciousness is an unconscious reflection occupying different positions of honour.”

The spirit of the Spinozist system is contained *in the doctrine of the infinite and the two spheres, attributes, or modifications of the infinite, namely, of extension and thinking.*

What is subjective, an individual affair, in their systems, or really the letter of them (albeit admittedly the letter the richest in spirit)—in short, what does not pertain to the essence of the [respective] system is: in the case of Spinoza, *his view of love*; and, in the case of Fichte, *his view of self-sufficiency*.

Both emerge from the spirit of the systems and are intimately connected [to them]. What can be ranked higher in a system where the highest state achievable by a human being is *peace [of mind]* than *love*?⁴⁴

What can be ranked higher than *self-sufficiency* if, in a system, activity is ranked the highest? Self-sufficiency consists, in Fichte’s view, in the degree to which one is self-determining. *A human being is only whatever they themselves determine themselves to be.*

⁴² *Transcriber’s Note:* The symmetry between both philosophers is the symmetry of genius. It does not detract from either’s independence [of thought].

⁴³ *Äußern.*

⁴⁴ Schlegel is referring to the notion of “*animi acquiescentia*” that, so Spinoza argues, the intellectual love of God leads to. See Baruch Spinoza, *Ethics*, Vp42s.

Among the ranks of the ancients, only Plato and Aristotle provide us the data for a history of philosophy, and, among the ranks of the moderns, only Spinoza and Fichte do.⁴⁵ Plato searched for a way to unify a Heraclitus with a Parmenides. Heraclitus was committed to dualism and Parmenides to realism, taken in terms of how we earlier specified these systems. But Plato was more favourable to realism all the same. In the practical domain, he searched for a way to transpose the Socratic system into a Pythagoras.

A philosophy can endorse others and be thoroughly original all the same, as holds true, for instance, in Plato's case.

Concerning the writings of Spinoza and Fichte.

The *Ethics* is written clearly and distinctly. It was first published posthumously by one of his friends, but he had already finished it several years before his death. As for his other writings, there is only one more worth mentioning: *On the Method and the Improvement of Understanding*,⁴⁶ which, although indeed unfinished, is nevertheless good for a warm-up.

The essentials of the *Ethics* are already wrapped up in the first Book. The last four Books can be regarded as a history of consciousness. It is natural, in accordance with his system, that he begins with matter, and that being so, the Introduction—that is to say, to be precise, the history of consciousness—only comes afterward. *His system is a type of knowledge of the infinite.* The Introduction also contains what is an individual affair, what is subjective, namely, *love for the divine.*

End of the Introduction.

⁴⁵ *Transcriber's Note:* Between Spinoza and Fichte there lies, in the middle, Leibniz, such that he, as it were, touches on both. So, we see that the history of philosophy, as well as its method, also consists [in the synthesis of opposites].

⁴⁶ Schlegel or the transcriber gets the title slightly wrong. For the text, see Baruch Spinoza, *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect*, in *Complete Works*, ed. Michael L. Morgan, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2002).

Book Reviews

Rezensionen

Recensions

Recensioni

Symphilosophie

International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism

Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher, *Herméneutique. Pour une logique du discours individuel*, Présentation, traduction et notes par Christian Berner, Villeneuve d'Ascq, Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2021, 286 p. ISBN 978-2-7574-3237-2

Ce livre a un premier mérite, qui est de taille : Christian Berner y propose en effet, de tous les textes de Schleiermacher touchant l'herméneutique, une traduction française qui prend en compte les avancées de l'édition critique d'un certain nombre de manuscrits dans le tome IV de la 2^e section de la *Kritische Gesamtausgabe (Vorlesungen zur Hermeneutik und Kritik*, hrsg. von W. Virmond unter Mitwirkung von H. Patsch, Berlin/New York, De Gruyter, 2012). Ainsi qu'il le précise dans sa présentation (p. 27), cette nouvelle traduction vient remplacer celle qu'il a lui-même donnée de l'herméneutique de Schleiermacher il y a plus de trente ans sous le même titre (*Herméneutique. Pour une logique du discours individuel*, éd. du Cerf, Paris, 1989). Outre qu'elle tire profit des améliorations de certains manuscrits que l'édition critique apporte effectivement grâce à un déchiffrement et à des corrections qui les rendent plus lisibles, cette nouvelle traduction comporte un texte supplémentaire, un manuscrit sur la critique datant probablement de 1826 (p. 221 à 232).

Ce volume a, en outre, le mérite d'assortir les textes de Schleiermacher d'une excellente présentation. Christian Berner commence par retracer l'histoire de la réception philosophique de l'herméneutique de Schleiermacher (p. 12-19), avant de faire le point sur le sens et la place de son herméneutique dans l'ensemble de sa pensée (p. 20-27). Il fait ensuite état du statut de chaque texte (p. 27-33), avant d'en présenter l'essentiel du contenu ainsi que les apports, et de faire apparaître quelques évolutions (p. 33 à 51). En présentant ces textes dans l'ordre chronologique de leur probable rédaction, Christian Berner nous donne à voir la progressive constitution de l'herméneutique schleiermachiennne. De fait, comme il convient de le rappeler d'abord, c'est dans des manuscrits dispersés qu'on la trouve : notes de cours, notes marginales, ébauches de système, conférences ou discours. Voilà qui peut sembler, sinon contradictoire, du moins paradoxal de la part d'un auteur qu'on tient généralement pour le père fondateur de cette discipline. Mais comme le souligne Christian Berner dans

la 1^{re} partie de sa présentation, le paradoxe est plus apparent que véritable, tout dépendant qu'il est d'une certaine réception de son herméneutique, celle qu'a lancée Dilthey qui voit dans cette dernière l'acte de naissance de l'herméneutique philosophique (p. 12-14). En vérité, Schleiermacher n'a jamais fait de cette dernière une discipline majeure, et s'il l'a enseignée, c'est avant tout en vue d'interpréter les textes bibliques, et particulièrement néo-testamentaires. En même temps, et c'est là sans doute ce qui explique la légende diltheyenne, il aura eu l'audace de mettre sur le même plan les textes sacrés et les textes profanes, de ne pas réserver aux premiers un traitement différent du traitement des autres (texte II, p. 81) – d'où le fait qu'il se soit attaché à penser, au-delà de l'herméneutique spéciale des textes bibliques, l'herméneutique tout court c'est-à-dire « générale » (p. 82) : les règles de la première ne sont pas différentes de celles de la deuxième. C'est dans cette perspective que nous sommes invités à aborder l'ensemble de ces notes disparates : en toutes il est question d'une science certes « auxiliaire » (p. 21) mais qui n'en est pas moins en même temps générale avant d'être spéciale. Sa délimitation est donc un vaste chantier que déploient sous nos yeux ces manuscrits divers où leur auteur complète et ajuste son discours pour s'acquitter d'une tâche dont il mesure le fait qu'elle est « très difficile » : celle de délimiter ou « d'assigner son lieu » à ce qui « n'existe pas encore sous sa forme générale » (texte IV, § 1, p. 163). Tout l'enjeu de ces textes tourne autour de cette tâche : comment situer cette science dans l'édifice entier de la philosophie ? Si elle n'est pas majeure, elle mérite cependant une place non négligeable qu'il s'agit de cerner.

Derrière le caractère formel et fastidieux que revêt l'entreprise de délimitation, transparaît un ensemble de thèses intéressantes que fait bien ressortir le concepteur de ce volume dans la dernière partie de sa présentation.

Comme discipline « technique », l'herméneutique est une méthode et, en tant que telle, un art, précisément l'art de comprendre, sachant qu'interpréter est bel et bien comprendre et non pas divaguer, projeter, forcer le sens des textes. Comme toute pratique, elle a des règles, et comme telle, elle requiert une certaine intelligence pratique, ou la capacité d'accommoder chaque règle aux singularités. Comparée aux deux autres disciplines techniques que sont la politique et la pédagogie, elle a ceci de propre qu'elle les rend praticables, rendant pleinement possible la réalisation effective de l'esprit, la concrétisation de ses principes éthiques. En cela, Schleiermacher a pris toute la mesure de l'importance du langage – ce qui se voit encore au rapport essentiel qui unit, selon lui, l'art de comprendre (l'herméneutique) à l'art de discourir (la rhétorique) et à l'art de penser (la dialectique) : le

schéma [pensée → discours ou pensée manifeste → interprétation ou pensée parvenue à la conscience] montre, certes, la dépendance de la rhétorique et de l'herméneutique par rapport à la dialectique, mais aussi bien la dépendance inverse de « tout devenir du savoir » philosophique par rapport au discours et au fait de le comprendre (texte IV, § 3 et 4, p. 164).

À lire Christian Berner, le lecteur est d'ailleurs alerté sur le fait d'une tendance à vrai dire générale de Schleiermacher à imbriquer les actes ou les opérations : ainsi de l'herméneutique et de la dialectique (p. 26), mais c'est le cas aussi de l'herméneutique dans son rapport à la critique philologique (p. 21 ; IV, Introduction, § 4, p. 164), tout comme dans son rapport à la rhétorique (p. 41). Cette tendance se retrouve au cœur de l'herméneutique qui, pour Schleiermacher, est en réalité une pratique composée. Dans ses toutes premières notes (I, p. 59), s'il distingue en effet la compréhension de l'universel c'est-à-dire de la langue (« de ce qui est commun à l'écrivain et au lecteur ») et la compréhension du particulier, c'est-à-dire de la pensée de l'auteur qui se coule dans la langue (« de ce qui est propre à l'écrivain en le reconstruisant [en tant que lecteur] »), c'est pour les juger inséparables. Même chose dans les notes de cours de 1819 (IV, *Herméneutique*, § 6, p. 165). Complémentaires, elles le sont pour autant qu'aucune d'elles « ne peut être achevée pour elle-même » (II, p. 82) : chacune « présuppose » l'autre (p. 83), « on ne peut pas comprendre une chose dite sans comprendre ce qui est le plus général, mais pas non plus [sans comprendre ce qui est] le plus personnel et le plus particulier » (I, p. 63). C'est ce que Christian Berner ne manque pas d'indiquer dans sa présentation (p. 35, p. 40, p. 43, etc.), parlant de « cercle herméneutique » pour désigner « l'interaction des divers aspects de l'interprétation » et souligner qu'elle est « multiple et s'élève en spirale vers la généralité » ; si l'on ne peut comprendre le mot qu'à partir de la proposition, celle-ci qu'à partir du discours, sa singularité qu'à partir de la langue, le détail à partir du tout, l'inverse est aussi vrai (p. 47-48). À cet égard, on pourrait se demander jusqu'à quel point Schleiermacher n'a pas retenu quelque chose de la veine romantique de ses *Discours sur la religion* (1799), d'après laquelle le tout miroite dans ses parties (voir IV, 1^{re} partie, § 4, p. 186 sq. sur le lien organique / mécanique).

Christian Berner appelle, en outre, l'attention sur des changements de lexique, et en particulier touchant l'opération de compréhension de ce qu'il y a de particulier : Schleiermacher la qualifie tantôt de compréhension « technique » – c'est, notamment, le cas dans la première ébauche « systématique » de 1805 (II, p. 82) –, tantôt de compréhension « psychologique », pendant que l'autre opération, celle de la compréhension de l'universel, est toujours qualifiée de « grammaticale ». Christian Berner

montre également que Schleiermacher affine progressivement ses analyses, en distinguant au sein des deux opérations, une approche « quantitative » où l'herméneute s'attache à mesurer l'exactitude des termes, et une approche « qualitative » où il s'attache plutôt au ton, à la manière (p. 37, p. 39). De texte en texte, les contours se précisent, des dimensions nouvelles émergent : ainsi du « style » dès la première ébauche ; ainsi des « deux méthodes permettant de reconnaître la singularité » du style, l'intuitive ou la divinatoire et la comparative ou discursive, que l'on trouve distinguées dans les notes de cours de 1809-1810 et celles de 1819 (p. 40, p. 43-44) ; ainsi de la « décision « séminale » qu'il s'agit de chercher pour saisir l'unité du discours dans ce qu'il a de singulier, de propre à un auteur (p. 43 ; V, p. 218).

J'ajouterai, pour finir, qu'à l'arrière-plan de tous ces textes, et tel un palimpseste, Schleiermacher propose une théorie de l'erreur et de la non-compréhension, laquelle affleure à de nombreuses reprises (I, p. 56 ; II, p. 82-84 ; III, p. 119 ; IV 172).

On pourra regretter que ne soit indiqué aucun vocable allemand tant dans le texte traduit que dans sa présentation ; on regrettera, en outre, l'absence en fin de volume d'une bibliographie. Mais parce que ces deux manques sont très certainement dus aux normes éditoriales de la collection où est paru ce livre, on n'en fera pas reproche à l'auteur du volume, spécialiste reconnu de la pensée de Schleiermacher : on se réjouira plutôt du fait qu'il ait mis toute sa science au service d'une version française de tous ces textes épars en fonction des derniers apports de l'édition allemande.

Alexandra Roux
Département de Philosophie
Université de Poitiers

***The Early Writings of François Hemsterhuis, 1762-1773, Vol. 1 of The Edinburgh Edition of the Complete Philosophical Works of François Hemsterhuis*, edited by Jacob van Sluis and Daniel Whistler, Edinburgh University Press, 2022, 182 pp. ISBN 9781474486651**

***The Dialogues of François Hemsterhuis, 1778-1787, Vol. 2 of The Edinburgh Edition of the Complete Philosophical Works of François Hemsterhuis*, edited by Jacob van Sluis and Daniel Whistler, Edinburgh University Press, 2022, 198 pp. ISBN 9781474488082**

In the poem *To Goethe, on his Producing Voltaire's "Mahomet" on Stage*, ten years after François Hemsterhuis' death, Friedrich Schiller wrote 'appearance should never attain reality, and if nature conquers, then art must retire'.

There are myriad sentiments like this that could "sum up" Hemsterhuis' thought. Even those that appear to say radically different things might somehow fit. Such is the shifting, elusory nature of the work presented in these two volumes of translation. Hemsterhuis' continuing struggle for articulation is an anticipatory echo of the romantic fragment, a necessarily incomplete piece that nonetheless implies the whole. The work presented in these volumes suggests a multi-faceted, sometimes mercurial assemblage of thought that complicates its surface chronology. Hemsterhuis moves through aesthetics, metaphysics, historical analysis, and even a form of proto-phenomenology. Rather than strictly ordered arguments and corollaries, his writing is made up of flows, hints, sketches, that never seem to want of addition. Before Wittgenstein made a point of including style in the wheelhouse of philosophical substance – something often sadly lacking from contemporary philosophy – Hemsterhuis seems to revel in the liminal spaces of intellectual and literary experimentation.

This new edition is comprised of three volumes. The two covered in this review, 'The Early Writings 1762-1773', and 'The Dialogues 1778-1787', compile Hemsterhuis' officially published writings, the third being a collection of unpublished work and correspondence.¹ Each volume is accompanied by a series of essays about different facets of Hemsterhuis' philosophy. In the upcoming third volume, which the authors kindly shared with me for this review, there is some discussion of these biographical chapters into which Hemsterhuis' work has been arranged. Life chronology

¹ To be published in November 2023: *The Philosophical Correspondence and Unpublished Writings of François Hemsterhuis*, edited by Jacob van Sluis, Daniel Whistler (Edinburgh University Press). (Editors' note).

is an established foil for examining philosophical thought. Born in Franeker in 1721, the young François spent his early career somewhat in the shadow of his philologist father, Tiberius, the sr. to François' longstanding jr. or 'le fils'. It wasn't until Tiberius became chair at Leiden University in 1740 that he started experimenting with the Dutch Newtonianism popular at the time. Optics, insectology, studies in medicine and military engineering; it was these diverse and seemingly disparate pursuits that shaped a younger Hemsterhuis into an instrumental, yet wildly exploratory figure.

One other, perhaps even more significant shift mentioned repeatedly in the three volumes, is Hemsterhuis' encounter with German salonist Amalie Gallitzin, with whom he shared consistent correspondence after their first meeting in 1775. Gallitzin's inspirational force is clear, with Hemsterhuis exclaiming in a 1786 letter that their discussions made him realise that 'to familiarise men with beautiful philosophy', one first had to remove it 'from the weighty husks of the school which concealed it'.²

This yearning for transcendence, for a pure philosophy that could edify future generations, recurs in various ways through Hemsterhuis' writing. Without wanting to colour him too much in external commentary, it is clear that for Hemsterhuis, science, philosophy, and poetry all sit in close proximity. His reverence for nature, and for the works of art that strive to capture it, pre-empts Kant's analysis of beauty in the third *Critique*. But where Kant sought strict and defensible limits to such an analysis, Hemsterhuis is somewhat more unbounded. Philosophy, scientific knowledge, and the systematising tendencies of the human intellect all derive from what Schelling would call the 'universal ocean of poetry', striving for its perfection, which is itself a striving for the perfection of nature. This 'poetic turn' in Hemsterhuis' work, as Whistler calls it, might seem at odds with the former's more grounded, empiricist adjacent observations. Nonetheless, Whistler's project in his recent book on Hemsterhuis, is to 'extract a Hemsterhuis who is relatively speculative (even if sometimes uncomfortably so), a Hemsterhuis for whom philosophy is a voyage into remote epochs to discover 'unknown lands'.³

This kind of romantic voyage gives us a way in to the relevance of reading Hemsterhuis today. His influence on both coincident and subsequent movements in European philosophy cannot be understated, especially given the relative lack of Hemsterhuis scholarship – at least in English speaking contexts – up to this point. Romanticism is not just a useful

² Daniel Whistler, *François Hemsterhuis and the Writing of Philosophy* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), xi.

³ *Ibid.*, xiii.

frame for approaching Hemsterhuis; it is indebted to his so-called poetic turn, a late evolution of his thought that sought to merge aesthetics, metaphysics, and a deliberate use of literary devices. In Germany, the Jena school busied itself studying the ancients, attempting to craft their own lens through which to re-evaluate, reconfigure, and hopefully synthesise ancient Greek thought with a rapidly changing modern context. Kant's role in this flurry of activity around the turn of the 19th century is well known. The strict limits Kant placed on metaphysical knowledge and the attempts by figures like Schelling, Goethe, and the Schlegel brothers, is part of the German idealist canon. But in Hemsterhuis, the Jena Romantics found a shared concern for the specificities of presentation, an eternal gesturing toward an inaccessible absolute, and the *sui generis* poetic ground of all philosophical investigation.

All of this can seem dizzying. Chaotic threads without a centre. Hemsterhuis' 1772 essay 'On Man and His Relations', the penultimate essay included in volume one of this collection, offers a robust and fairly direct presentation of Hemsterhuis' metaphysics. While grounded firmly in sense experience, this is neither a blunt empiricism, nor a kind of reverse engineered idealism, (*à la* Kant). Instead, as the original editor's announcement that introduces the essay makes clear, Hemsterhuis seeks to demonstrate that 'reason alone, by making use of simple experiments and abstracted from the alterations which imagination and prejudices often give rise to, can never lead us to systems of materialisms and libertinage' (vol. 1, p. 88). Given Hemsterhuis' own introductory line, where he purports to be writing about 'the nature of man', and 'those things which are outside of him', it is clear from the outset that Hemsterhuis is not friendly toward systems of thinking. While the observations in 'Relations' could be arranged into something like a systematic presentation, they are instead left bare, unaligned with any scholastic ideology.

Hemsterhuis' language reflects this dissatisfaction with following the tradition of a philosophical school. His seemingly unproblematic use of 'matter' and 'ideas' to describe the relation between experience and objects, could equally be read as a devout idealism or a stubborn empiricism, depending on the inclinations of the reader. The repeated use of 'organ' as a frame of reference for sensorial mediation did not go uncriticized, notably by Diderot, who noted that such terms 'work badly in a text where one works strictly' (vol. 2, p. 4). The Parisian intelligentsia would apparently not tolerate this unfashionable way of writing. These kinds of objections reveal precisely why Hemsterhuis is so intriguing, especially in a contemporary Anglo-philosophical moment that occupies itself largely with policing

“proper” terminology. The freedom with which Hemsterhuis describes the physical scaffolds of experience – and so, by extension, knowledge, science, experiment – can be disarming for its casual nature. And yet this casualness generates a larger commentary on the excessive ornamentation of philosophical presentation. The ground of Hemsterhuis’ philosophical position is simple, it is the soul’s ‘absolute goal’, for ‘the most perfect and intimate union of its essence with that of the desired object’ (vol. 1, p. 80).

This is the recurring of Hemsterhuis’ philosophy, a yearning for something already established as impossible. Any union between souls and objects can only be undertaken by way of organs, the quasi-tragic necessity of finitude and partiality that Kant prized, and Schelling tried to peer around. It is this endless yearning that is central to all human experience, and its grounding as such in ‘Relations’, hints at the poetic turn still to come.

Hemsterhuis’ poetics is not naïve sentimentalism, despite its apparent founding in ‘the Princess’ that was Amalie Gallitzin. Hemsterhuis mentions beauty in the same breath as rigour. He works by analogy, without denying the reality inherent in that relation. His early experiments in optics demonstrate this. Hemsterhuis’ insistence on the telescope and the microscope as the basis of organological thinking pre-empts Schelling’s bold and strange identity-philosophy, including the latter’s philosophy of art. But where Schelling’s experiments were largely hypothetical, conducted in the abstract space of transcendental ideal-realism, Hemsterhuis’ were practical, concrete investigations into what connects the largest with the smallest, the interior with the exterior. The connection between art and nature is one of always incomplete striving for Hemsterhuis, but that does not make it doomed or melancholic. Rather, incompleteness is what lends value to the experiment. Hemsterhuis anticipates Schelling’s claim in 1799 that experiments are productions of phenomena, and he does so with a basic observation so often lost on philosophers; the ceaseless movement of history.

The importance of historical movement can be seen more acutely in Hemsterhuis’ aesthetics. In his ‘Letter on Sculpture’ from 1769, Hemsterhuis uses the specificities of sculpture as a form of fine art as a vehicle for wider observations on art’s place in human life. Central to his prizing of sculpture as the highest art (a common interest of European aesthetics at the time), is the notion that art is valuable because it presents to the soul the ‘larg[est] number of ideas in the smallest possible space of time’ (vol. 1, p. 63). This formula does not appear from nowhere; Hemsterhuis again bases his claims in his studies of optics, in the biological mechanisms that govern how, and what, we see. This issues some intriguing results, particularly the notion that beauty is objective and subjective at the same time. There is no

meaning to the beauty of an object without someone to experience it, but there are measurable standards by which beauties can be compared, as demonstrated in, for example, Hemsterhuis' drawings of two vases. While these geometrical rules for beauty might come across as overly strict or reductive, they all sit on top of a more basic human desire represented in artistic work. The impetus of artistic endeavour lives in the same yearning mentioned above, a yearning for the connection of isolated bodies with something eternal, a yearning to move from the temporal to the eternal.

The scientific method is a continual source of inspiration for Hemsterhuis, and his thoughts on art and beauty are no exception. At the core, scientific and aesthetic experiments are the same, they both gesture toward the same inscrutable absolute that will occupy the Romantics for decades. As Sonderer points out in his introductory essay, for Hemsterhuis 'the work of art becomes, as it were, an experiment for and of itself' (vol. 1, p. 18). This might seem at odds with the nihilistic tendencies of contemporary art's most obscene iterations, but in an artistic context where automated and "intelligent" technologies play an increasingly determinative role, perhaps this is scope for reconciling the illuminated artistic genius with the brief-following executor of artistic intent.

Relatively little has been said of the second volume included here. That is not to deny its importance, nor its similarly high editorial quality. It will no doubt be felt by some, this author included, that the dialogue is a slightly awkward philosophical form. It should be noted, however, that in spite of its sometimes cartoonish appearance, Hemsterhuis makes uncommonly good use of dialogue form, particularly when it comes to the interlocutor figure, who is usually little more than a device to elicit long monologues from the speaker. Hemsterhuis complicates things, and in the dialogue *Simon*, for example, introduces a plethora of characters and inter-referential recollections. The characters in each dialogue are much more than vehicles for a direct, one-sided argument, and their complexity reveals something of the later, poetic Hemsterhuis: a concern for fictional worlds. The elaborate nature of dialogues like *Simon* are perhaps the most romantic of Hemsterhuis' works, in the sense of investing heavily in an attempted union between form and content, a place where, as Friedrich Schlegel put it, 'poetry would become philosophy, and philosophy would become poetry'.

The presentation of these volumes is expectedly excellent. The editors' experience with pulling understudied thinkers into the Anglophone context is well established at this point, and their treatment of Hemsterhuis is no exception. The essays that accompany these translations are all astute and appreciative commentaries, which help lend important context to the

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material itself. While each essay focusses on a different aspect or specific text, they are all threaded through with the same overarching sense that I hope to convey in this review; that Hemsterhuis presents us with a persistently attractive conundrum. How are we to reconcile these seemingly disparate elements of human experience, the beautiful with the analytical, the systematic with the chaotic, that which is remembered with that which is anticipated?

Anyone interested in learning more about Hemsterhuis, or indeed about the history and continued importance of 18th and 19th century European philosophy, should read these volumes, introductions and all. This is another large step in the editors' already impressive repertoire of under-explored or marginalised figures in the mainstream modern European canon of philosophy, one that can perhaps encourage a re-examination of what philosophy is concerned with doing, perhaps even with something as romantic as a philosophical spirit.

Luke R. Moffat
Department of Sociology
Lancaster University

Dalia Nassar, *Romantic Empiricism: Nature, Art, and Ecology from Herder to Humboldt*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2022, 328 pp. ISBN 9780190095437

Dalia Nassar's rich and compelling *Romantic Empiricism* sets out to argue that the central term of her title is not an oxymoron but refers to "a philosophical tradition that deserves renewed attention today" (1). This tradition, which stretches from Herder to Goethe to Alexander von Humboldt, "developed a distinctive methodological approach to the study of nature—an approach that drew significantly on the arts and aesthetic experience" (1). Nassar wants to reclaim this aesthetic-scientific mode of knowing for modern thought, in particular with regard to the ecological crisis of the twenty-first century. Following a brief introduction, the first chapter turns to Kant to outline the problems Nassar convincingly shows Herder, Goethe, and Humboldt to take up, namely "how can we develop a natural history that takes account of nature's diversity without overlooking the significant relations between various beings? And how can we grasp organization within nature?" (9) As Kant articulates, mechanical causes cannot *explain* everything in nature, in particular the relations between the parts of forms of nature—this requires

reflecting judgment (20-21). Famously, Kant designates the kind of reflecting judgment required here as having an analogical structure. Nassar's analysis illuminates a difference in Kant between two kinds of analogy: a first type based on shared properties of two objects, versus the second, which comes from the *way* a thinker reflects on the objects (23-25). This second kind of analogy applies both to Kant's presentation of beauty as a symbol of morality, Nassar explains, and to the perception of organisms or the organization nature writ large in the same way as a work of art: "we can experience and think organization in nature *only through* symbolic presentation." (27) Further, in the Antinomy of Teleological Judgment, "Kant is also assessing the significance of analogical reflection and symbolic cognition in our understanding of nature. In short, he is determining the place *and* the limits of analogy in knowledge." (43) It is worth highlighting Nassar's skill in explicating Kant's work and its import—in clear language, she incisively explains the problems Kant raises and why they are central to Herder, Goethe, and Humboldt.

Nassar sees Kant as opening these questions, in particular the difference between explanation and observation, without, however, fully exploring the possibilities of the latter as a mode of (we will learn) embodied, affective, and ethical knowing. Pursuing the question of analogy's role in knowledge, she reads analogy in Herder as "a crucial means by which to expand and deepen our understanding of the natural world" (55); indeed, based on a discussion of Herder's "Treatise on the Origin of Language," Nassar demonstrates that for Herder, "knowledge itself is anagogic," and as such, "we [humans] are essentially *interpretive* beings" (55). The key problem for such interpretation is that of nature's wholeness. Herder first works out his hermeneutics in the interrelated arenas of works of art, the human individual's relation to her culture, and finally with regard to language and living beings as such. Considering Herder's early essays on Thomas Abbt and on Shakespeare, Nassar deepens the well-known view that Herder calls for artists to be understood as in and of their times to show how for Herder, the "world" or culture of artist is not abstract and external but something the artist lives in and senses, shaping and shaped by the artist's work (62-63). Nassar turns to Herder's notion of the "world" / "circle" in a threefold sense: of the work itself, the hermeneutic circle of the interpreter, and the world of the author; she then extends the idea to Herder's essay on language, where the animal develops its capacities in response to its world (67ff).

Nassar's treatment of Herder's "Essay on the Origin of Language" is a tour de force; after outlining prior thinkers' positions on the topic, she shows that Herder rejects a historical account of how language developed, one that

imagines pre-linguistic humanity, and strives instead for a synchronic account, in which he describes and observes the characteristics of human beings that make plausible the emergence of language as a response to their environment (69). The idea of world or circle (“Kreis”) is crucial here, as for Herder, there is an “intimate relation between the animal and its environment, such that its abilities fit or map onto what Herder calls the animal’s ‘circle’ or ‘world” (70). Moreover, the smaller and more specific a creature’s circle or world, the more precisely its capabilities (including its senses) develop in response (70). Thus, whereas bees are suited to beehives, roaming mammals who traverse broader areas are not as specialized, and human beings are the least specialized of all, because “the human being does not live in any one environment but can inhabit a multitude of geographic contexts. Human capacities are, accordingly, not aligned with any particular context” (71). Without a defined context and skills to match it, the human being is unskilled, weak, and has dull senses in contrast with other animals; nor do humans have an “animal language” like the communication between, say, wolves or deer. Based on the analogy of the human and her environment with the reciprocity of the animal and its world, language and reason may plausibly be considered to develop to allow the human being to navigate its open, indeterminate world. Nassar’s account has the powerful advantage of not requiring Herder to explain (or fail to explain) how human beings made the transition from natural, animal-like language to conventional language with its artificial signs, a stumbling block for theorists who rejected the divine origins of language (83).

Herder’s famous example of the person who recognizes the sheep on its second appearance as “the bleating one” thus is not a fable of pre-linguistic man but an example of how, “in light of the lack of fitness between human capacities and any one context, it is *intelligible* that human beings find some other way of making sense of their world” (74). In particular, this making-intelligible occurs through “*Besonnenheit*” or “taking awareness,” such that “a human being takes awareness, becomes interested in the phenomenon as a phenomenon, because she is not determined to see the phenomenon in a particular way. Language, in turn emerges through taking awareness” (75). Nassar turns to “On Cognition and Sensation in the Human Soul” to consider the question of how sensation is related to language and language to cognition (80), elucidating Herder’s view of cognition as cooperation between the senses (79). Moreover, the process by which cognition “unif[ies] and transform[s]” the senses and enables language is analogical: “What the mind is doing, then, is *forming* an object through an analogical process. By seeing the sensation *as* an image, it *forms* the image; by seeing the image *as* a

concept, it *forms* the concept” (80). Herder thus makes two key (previously unrecognized) contributions (and Nassar’s contribution is thus to identify them). First, Herder “transforms the very process of understanding,” to a more expansive view of understanding as the result of “concrete description, comparative analysis, and analogy,” which enables him to see “a dynamic relationship between a living being and its world, a relationship of mutual and ongoing influence” (84). And, second, Herder deepens Buffon’s rather superficial account of climate to the idea of “world,” which “displaces the abstract idea of nature with a notion of nature as ... a context of reciprocal and ongoing influence among its inhabitants” (85). This, per Nassar, makes Herder an ecological thinker, and she emphasizes the emergence of Herder’s interpretive method from his engagement with works of literature (85).

Chapter Three, “The Science of Describing: Herder, Goethe, and the *Hauptform*” takes as its starting point the shared “hope” of Buffon, Kant, Herder, namely the: “hope of establishing a coherent and meaningful account of natural order and diversity” (96). Nassar provides a historical-contextual overview of the debates on form versus force emerging from mechanical philosophy and continuing in the debates over epigenesis as the context for Herder’s and Goethe’s views. Perhaps surprisingly, given that the traditional interpretation of Herder holds that he views force (*Kraft*) as a key principle of nature, Nassar asserts his valorization of *form*: “In contrast to those who posit an unknowable force as a means of ‘explanation,’” he argues that we cannot see forces but their “effects and forms [*Wirkungen und Formen*]” (87). For Herder, forms both differ from and “reiterate” each other (93), enabling the viewer to find “meaning (lawfulness) in what at first sight appears meaningless or chaotic” (93). On the basis of such continuities—which are internal to the organism, not from an external system of classification—Herder arrives at idea of *Hauptform* or prototype (of, say “a land mammal”). This *Hauptform* appears only in and through its variable instances, and is therefore not present as such in the world; hence, for Herder, the need for analogical reflection to help “see how this one form re-emerges (variously) in different beings.” (94) Nassar does not mention, however, that Herder extends this to *human* types that, despite his rejection of the term “race” per se, appear to be both environmental and heritable, phenotypical and intellectual, leading to some of his most repugnant statements about Africans, Greenlanders, and the Chinese in the *Ideen*. Indeed, although she later references “skin color” in discussing the distinction between “cause” and “condition” (189) and contrasts Herder and Goethe with comparative anatomists Blumenbach, Camper, and Soemmerring (all of whom played key roles along with Kant and Herder in

establishing the concept of race) Nassar does not address the violent aspects of this epoch's efforts to find an order in nature. One could, and I think should, argue that these systems are a perversion of the dynamic yet coherent conception of nature that Nassar wants to reclaim from Herder, Goethe, and Humboldt; but Kant and Herder, at least, did not see them this way.

The *Hauptform*, Nassar argues, is a dynamic rather than static conception of form, one that focuses on the ways and conditions in which something appears “rather than why it appears (the causes of its appearance)” (95); Goethe and Herder share this view such that Goethe takes up Herder's *Hauptform* as a “key scientific tool” (97). Goethe explicitly connects his discovery of the intermaxillary bone in humans to Herder's *Ideen* (97): he could find the intermaxillary bone when other comparative anatomists did not because he was guided by the idea of a *Hauptform*, and understood that if the bone appears in humans it will appear differently than in animals, fitting human context and capabilities (98). Goethe thus shares with Herder a “hermeneutics of natural forms” that underscores the importance of the researcher's standpoint and so requires new “organs of perception,” such that (especially for Goethe) scientific knowledge also entails self-education and self-transformation (103). Nassar expands on this point in Chapter Four, “Aesthetic Education and the Transformation of the Scientist,” noting (as the chapter title suggests) that the self-transformation required is “an *aesthetic education*” both as “education of our perceptual capacities” and as “education *in and through art*” (106). Examining Goethe's collection *On Morphology*, Nassar shows how this adds an ethical dimension to the project of knowledge, as it requires “knowing well” and transforming the self to do so (105). She outlines, further, Goethe's coming to see a “link between ...scientific knowledge, artistic practice and technique, and self-knowledge,” in part through his engagement with the visual arts and artworks (110). In order to show how Goethe conceives of seeing and knowing *well*, Nassar draws on Goethe and Schiller's unfinished “On Dilettantism,” which outlines three steps of “learning to see”: a “general impression” of the whole, followed by “differentiation” that perceives its components and parts, and then a “return from differentiation to the feeling of the whole,” which Goethe and Schiller hold is an aesthetic process (115). (One service of Nassar's here is to take Schiller seriously as a philosopher.)

This, in turn, guides Nassar's reading of *On Metamorphosis* and its quest for a mode of representing nature and its processes. For Goethe, representation needs to follow object progressively or developmentally (117-8); thus the essay “Metamorphosis of Plants” “performatively traces the sequential development of the plant: it proceeds step by step, focusing on a

different part of the plant in each step” (118). Goethe’s strategy here likewise strives to transform the reader and “her way of seeing the world” such that she can “begin to undertake investigations herself” (123). The essay’s (and Goethe’s broader) emphasis on transformed and transforming seeing raises the question what he means by “seeing”—perhaps most famously in his encounter with Schiller where he claimed to be able to “see” an idea, his “symbolic plant” (128). Goethe later distinguishes between seeing with the eyes and with the “eyes of the mind [*Augen des Geistes*],” which “always have to work in a living union with the eyes of the body” (129); Nassar explains that Goethe thus presents a view of knowledge as “collaborative...based on a dialogue between the knower and the known” (130). Only through the relation of the eyes of the body and of the mind, experience and idea, can the observer overcome the challenge (outlined in “The Experiment as Mediator between Subject and Object”) of losing the relation to the whole while focusing on individual parts (131).

As Nassar shows, for Goethe, the answer to his question, “how can we wed experience and idea such that the two inform and complement one another?” is that it cannot be done in discursive argumentation, but instead only in poetry. Poems resolve problems of reconciling parts and wholes, sequential unfolding and unified perception through the recursiveness of poetry, as Nassar demonstrates in a reading of “Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen” (she makes the wise decision to reprint the entire poem in German in the main text, with translation in a footnote and brackets within the text). She shows convincingly that the poem not only has the kind of part/whole structures and relations that Goethe perceives in organisms, but that it explicitly calls attention to the problem of seeing unities and particulars in nature. This is entirely convincing, and yet because *all* poems, in varying ways, work with self-referential and recursive structures, the question arises as to what extent this argument can be particular to Goethe. Does it apply to all poems about nature? All of *Goethe’s* poems about nature, or his poetic oeuvre in its entirety? Only poems that thematize part/whole relations? We might, indeed, extend this line of questioning to Nassar’s more general claims about the affinities between “the practices of the arts” and “those of science”—does *all* art viewing or practice train the eyes and mind in such a way? Nassar omits, further, the erotic/sexual dimension of the poem, in which the development and reproduction of plants is mapped onto the “Paar” of the poet and his “Geliebte” (Nassar uses the translation “friend,” whereas the one she cites, by Frederick Turner and Zsuzsanna Osvàth, has “my love” [268]), the development of whose own relations culminate with “Hymen,” the god of marriage. This matters because Goethe places plant reproduction

and (suggested) human reproduction in parallel, weaving the human being as natural and social organism into his poem to *perform* the relation of human being and all of nature.

In the book as a whole, Nassar does not address how art-making practices come from and shape human responses not only to nature but to history, culture, convention, and other artists. Thus for example Goethe's choice to use elegiac distiches in "The Metamorphosis of Plants" not only "mirrors the expansion and contraction of the plant's development" in the alternation between hexameter and pentameter but also writes itself into the entire tradition of the elegy and form and genre: as poem of exile and love poem (Ovid), didactic poem (Lucretius), and philosophical poem (Schiller). Of course, a single volume cannot say everything there is to be said about a poem, but the fact that the relation to poetic tradition has no place in Nassar's account is revealing. I am further interested in how the relationship to tradition might shape what Goethe (and Herder, and Humboldt) say about nature, humans, and knowing and whether we might derive further insight from this relation.

In Chapter Five, "Intuitive Judgment and Goethe's Ethics of Knowledge," Nassar continues her investigation of the ethical import of Goethe's recasting of epistemological questions and the responsiveness of the observer it requires. She takes up Goethe's "notion of intuitive judgment" as important for a modern environmental ethics because he raises "questions concerning our relationship to and responsibility toward the natural world" (148). Goethe reacts to but adapts Kant's conception; for Goethe, "Intuitive judgment is focused on appearance and the ordering and presentation of appearances." (153); the activities of ordering and tracing connection between and within organisms are this kind of judging, seeing "with the mind's eye," in Goethe's terms. To grapple with how intuitive judgment apprehends the natural world without reducing that world to atomized parts or abstract schematics, Goethe introduces the idea of the "archetypal or pure phenomenon (*Urphänomen, das reine Phänomen*)" (156). The *Urphänomen* relies not merely on perceiving forms but, as Goethe's morphological thought teaches us, "the formation of form, the ways in which the different parts *transform and are transformed by and in relation to* one another." (159). This involves a mode of perception that oscillates between forms and in the self-reflection of the knower in her "ability to see and discern unity in the multiplicity" in a kind of "*collaboration* between knower and known" (161). The *Urphänomen* comes not from material nature nor from human mindedness but the relation between human being and nature, such that it is "both real and ideal at once." (162) Nassar outlines once again the continued

relevance of Goethe's (and, as we will see, Humboldt's) approach to nature, which has an ethical import because "knowledge involves and draws on the individual scientist's capacities and judgments—and her willingness to transform those capacities in light of the task at hand" (166). This, for Nassar, renders Humboldt and Goethe an important corrective to traditional environmental ethics, as they avoid "apply[ing] principles derived from human ethical norms ... (sometimes problematically) ... onto the more-than-human world" (173) by returning to the concrete phenomenon and working in relation with and to the object (172). Nassar describes this as "collaboration" (168-69), but the term strikes me as the kind of anthropomorphizing she otherwise strives to avoid. I would argue that one can have responsibility as "an epistemic virtue" and knowledge "*for the known*" (174) through Goethe's understanding of knowing as self-transformation through the object as fellow-being, without attributing human-like activity in "collaboration."

The sixth chapter, "Organism and Environment: The Aesthetic Foundations of Humboldt's Ecological Insight" articulates what Alexander von Humboldt adds to (or how he goes beyond) Nassar's prior interlocutors: "While Humboldt's predecessors (including Buffon, Kant, Herder, and Goethe) had recognized that living beings are affected by their environments, they had not considered how living beings themselves affect their environments" (177). The fact that Humboldt does so, and that he was able to do so because of the aesthetic of his thought, helps Nassar reveal "a crucial and largely understudied *aesthetic element* at the very heart of ecology" (179). She shows that like Goethe, Humboldt develops a kind of "thinking observation" (180) that unites thought and perception, rule and sensory experience (180); Humboldt also shares Goethe's attention to form and insistence on the inseparability of "ethical and scientific questions" (181). For Humboldt, Goethe solves the "problem of metamorphosis" through "the notion of an 'ideal form'" (182); Humboldt views this notion of form as providing the key to resolve the competing claims of unity and diversity, an idea he works out first in considering landscape painting (183). And Goethe's concept of relational form will become central to Humboldt's ecology, with the distinction that Humboldt "mov[es] beyond individual forms" to emphasize the relation of individual beings to "their relations in the wider world." (184)

As Nassar explains, precisely this kind of characteristic and meaningful interrelation of elements of the natural world is what Humboldt calls the "physiognomy of nature": "Humboldt contends that it is through the physiognomy of plants that we can go on to develop a physiognomy of *nature*—that is, an understanding of the context, regions, or environments in

which the plants grow.” (192) To comprehend the characteristic physiognomy of a given region, Humboldt attends to “reappearing forms,” including the different ways forms appear in different geographical areas; the similarities in types of plant or differences within a single plant species in different places reveal the relations between form and context (193-4). Nassar emphasizes again the importance of landscape painting for Humboldt as an aesthetic model for depicting and comprehending the way individual and context appear and mutually shape one another (196-7). Her overview of Humboldt’s conifer, grass, and myrtle forms as they change from region to region succinctly exemplifies how his approach illuminates the way “form—as persistent as it might be—is *also* sensitive and plastic, growing in dialogue with its context” (203). Plants, for Humboldt, offer the clearest view of the way forms collaborate to make up an entire landscape or region, because they are more fixed in their locations than animals; because plants are reasonably static in their respective regions, and because of the reciprocal relation between individual and context, plants in fact shape the region in which they appear: “A region *is* what it is (cool and humid, for instance) because of the kinds of plants within it” (208). Humboldt thus extends Goethe’s understanding that living beings’ “environments are the conditions in which they develop. To this Humboldt added: living beings are *also* the conditions in which environments develop.” (210)

Nassar opens Chapter Seven, “Humboldt and the Art of Science” with a letter of Humboldt’s to Schiller, in which the former celebrates Aristotle and Pliny for having “connected human aesthetic sense and education with the description of nature” (cited 212). Nassar links Humboldt’s interests with Schiller’s *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Humanity*, in particular the latter’s argument that artworks can overcome human diremption by harmoniously engaging “both our sensible and rational sides,” (214-15), while “for Humboldt, the aesthetic experience of nature plays a crucial role in the realization of both *scientific* and *moral* ends ... by aesthetic experience, Humboldt means the direct experience of being in nature as well as the indirect experience of nature through works of art.” (216) Humboldt makes clear that artworks are not merely tools for observation but that the emotional, embodied experience of art is key for understanding nature (218), and he turns to literary works to exemplify what he calls “truth to nature” as combined perceptual (in the robust sense of meaningful perception) and emotional experience (219). Literature, in particular, can balance the subjective-emotional and objective-perceptual aspects of “human participation in nature,” thus linking Humboldt’s arguments in *Kosmos* to broader eighteenth- and early-nineteenth century debates over the merits of various

art forms, from Lessing onwards (223-24). Influenced again by Schiller, and in particular his “Elegy” / “The Walk [*Der Spaziergang*],” Humboldt points to poetry as particularly able to “depict a dynamic or living nature” (226; 228-230), inspiring him to write essays with a “leading idea” and “vivid detail” along with feeling to achieve “truth to nature.” (232) Nassar then draws on this to analyze the contemporary problem that many or even most people know about the climate catastrophe, but do not act; she suggests that “know[ing] in an embodied and visceral way” “has the potential to move and motivate use.” (240-241) Human forgetfulness of our participation in nature has proven disastrous (242).

Nassar makes an insightful, erudite, and persuasive case that “the romantic empiricist approach challenges us to think differently about the practices and ideas of knowledge, and about the relationship between epistemology, ontology, and aesthetics” (245). At the same time—precisely because her argument is so compelling—I found myself wondering about the steps *between* the transformation of individual knowers and the averting of ecological disaster. More broadly, Nassar’s account does not address the social or the political, although I do not think her views here would preclude their role in the epistemological, aesthetic, and ethical questions she raises. Her story of how Herder, Goethe, and Humboldt offer resources to combat modern environmental catastrophe still awaits a discussion of what human beings as part of their environment do *together*. In both aesthetic and scientific cases, then, we seem to have a perceiver almost always alone with the perceived, although Nassar does address the question of the responsibility a knower who knows well or badly to her community, as well as to herself. While I agree that the virtues of knowing well are “social and ethical ones” (171), as well as the ethical responsibility of the knower “to the phenomena that are to be known” (172), I missed an account of the ways social activity or political organization of knowers together might put into action an environmental ethics derived from “epistemological and ontological questions, and in *their* ethical status” on a scale sufficient to address the climate catastrophe (173). This is, I think, beyond Nassar’s scope here, but I hope that she will build on the ethical questions she elucidates so convincingly here to envision how *communities* of human beings in collaboration with nature might transform our world through an ecological ethics on the scale required to mitigate the mass death that is beginning to seem inevitable.

Hannah Vandegrift Eldridge

Department of German, Nordic and Slavic+
University of Wisconsin-Madison

Joanna Raisbeck, *Karoline von Günderrode: Philosophical Romantic*, Cambridge, Legenda, 2022, 259 pp., ISBN 978-1-83954-025-7

Serious research into German women philosophers of the long eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is experiencing a true revival. There have been excellent studies in the last decades (e.g. by Katherine Goodman, Petra Wilhelmy-Dollinger, or Ruth Whittle¹), but I am under the impression that the last years have seen an ever-widening web of researchers devoting their time to a rediscovery of this aspect in the history of philosophy. The translations of key texts into English definitely helps², and the spark has carried over into numerous conferences and handbooks.³ The present study fits very well into this landscape – and it will hopefully contribute to a thorough rewriting of the history of European thought in these periods.

It is hard to review a book as excellent as this one, but at least I can try to recapitulate the main reasons why this book is well worth the read for anyone interested either in the literature of Romanticism (and its philosophical implications), the dissemination of Spinozism, or women philosophers of the early 19th century.⁴

Raisbeck's study on Karoline von Günderrode (1780-1806), with the apt sub-title or characterization "Philosophical Romantic" promises (and delivers) to fill in a lacuna of Romantic scholarship: to pay justice to the breadth and complexity of Günderrode's oeuvre not by a critical focus on particular themes, but under a more encompassing idea that manages to offer a glimpse into the development of Günderrode's thought as well as a cohesive reading of the entire material. Raisbeck does not discuss all of Günderrode's

¹ Katherine Goodman, *Dis/closures: Women's Autobiography in Germany between 1790 and 1914* (New York et al.: Lang, 1986) and, together with Elke Frederiksen, *Bettina Brentano von Arnim: Gender and Politics* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995); Petra Wilhelmy-Dollinger, *Die Berliner Salons, New Edition* (Berlin, Boston: de Gruyter, 2000); Ruth Whittle, *Gender, Canon, and Literary History. The Changing Place of Nineteenth-Century German Woman Writers (1835-1918)* (Berlin, Boston: de Gruyter, 2013).

² *Women Philosophers in the Long Nineteenth Century. The German Tradition*, edited by Kristin Gjesdal and Dalia Nassar, with translations by Anna C. Ezekiel (Oxford: OUP, 2021). See too Anna Ezekiel's translation of Günderrode's *Poetic Fragments* (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 2016). And her translation of Günderrode's *Philosophical Fragments* should also be available soon at Oxford University Press.

³ *The Oxford Handbook of Nineteenth Century Women*, ed. by Kristin Gjesdal and Dalia Nassar (Oxford: OUP, 2024), but also the *Palgrave Handbook of German Idealism and Feminist Philosophy*, ed. Susanne Lettow, Tuija Pulkkinen (Cham: Springer / Palgrave McMillan, 2022).

⁴ A side-note: most translations are from Raisbeck herself who has, as I happen to know first hand, an excellent grasp on my native tongue. The study of this interesting thinker and writer is in very good hands here, as the discussion of a wide range of primary and secondary literature also attests.

works at length, but chooses a representative selection for each period. Unfortunately, there are not too many, as Günderrode's period as an active writer is fairly short, i.e. from around 1799 to 1806. As the main narrative thread, Raisbeck reflects on Günderrode's take on the *Pantheism Controversy* from the 1780s, an event that cannot be underestimated in its importance for the development of Romanticism. Günderrode's metaphysical understanding of the world informs her earlier works such as the *Studienbuch* (1799-1800), but then also fictional texts such as the drama *Hildgund* (c. 1804-5, sometimes referred to a "poetic fragment"⁵), all the way up to her mature work in *Melete* (1806).

This focus also helps in bringing her interest (that she shared with other major Romantic thinkers, among whom this book will hopefully guarantee Günderrode a proper place) in the overlap of religious and poetic concerns into view.

Raisbeck also showcases the breadth of influences on Günderrode's oeuvre, ranging from the Jena Romantics (Schlegel and Schlegel, Schleiermacher, Fichte) to Neoplatonism (Shaftesbury, Hemsterhuis, see also chapter 5, 138-9), but also Herder's and Schelling's philosophies of nature. It is, again, her take on Spinozism that gives these various views a common denominator, a take that Raisbeck declares to be "*the* most consistent adherent of pantheism and panentheism in Romanticism and in the period more generally." (227)

How to bring together poetry, tragedy, and philosophy? Most of Günderrode's oeuvre is not in dry prose, yet she still is a poet as well as a philosopher. Metaphysical concepts play a decisive role in her literary work, and thus, the interplay of these two areas need to be taken into consideration in any attempt to assess her oeuvre. "[H]er philosophical interests should not be considered as conceptual, nor is her literary work a mere vessel for representing concepts" (2). To avoid such simplifications, Raisbeck

⁵ Raisbeck (68) denies reading this work as a fragment but interrogates the abrupt ending. This treatment is commendable in that it avoids a boring statement such as "we will never know since the author did not want us to know", but challenges the reader to come to terms with a tension between our own expectation (the semantic closure: "Hildgund kills Attila", p. 69) and the "formal non-closure" (69). Instead of leading Hildgund to face the realistic consequences of tyrannicide which would have manifested her agency, but also put her back into dependency in the chaos to follow the killing, "Günderrode shifts these concepts of autonomy, the ability to self-determine, and liberation into an unreal subjunctive mood. Their symbolic confirmation in Attila's death is denied. What remains is merely the desire for autonomy and liberation, which finds expression in the intensity of unconsummated hope, with the conditions of its possibility being unknown." (69) And thus, by leaving the reader hanging, she achieves the most realistic impression of all: as female agents, we really do not know where our acts will bring us.

considers their interplay, on the one hand, from a metalevel of how Romanticism as such has been conceptualized over the last three decades⁶, and, on the other hand, on a historical-conceptual level concentrated on G nderrode’s own writings (overall, the latter part receives a tad more detailed discussion). It comes as no surprise that the work of a woman intellectual differs from those of the canonical Romantics such as Novalis or the brothers Schlegel. Women were not allowed at universities, hence their studies (if existent at all) were far more eclectic. However, this allows us better to see the full breadth of Romanticism, as this perspective lightens the “over-commitment to philosophy” (4) that previous research focused on. For good reason Friedrich Schiller and Jean Paul count among G nderrode’s most favorite writers in her youth (see on Schiller’s influence 53-4, for instance, on Jean Paul, for instance, and his *Giannozzo*, 136), as these two happened to put far more stake on literature than philosophy proper.⁷ And, accordingly, it is their artistic take on human reality which is more suffused with dreams and hopes than abstract thought, that her philosophical stance stems from. With Schiller, she wants to allow us to flee reality with beauty. But with Jean Paul and the Jena Romantics, she espouses how art and poetry can lay the ground for a true religion, or at least a proper re-enchantment of the world.

The **first chapter** lays the groundwork for appreciating the reception of G nderrode’s thought, mainly through Bettine von Arnim and Christa Wolf. The **second chapter** does quite some more philosophical heavy lifting and introduces the Spinoza debate into the discussion – this offers the framework in which Raisbeck is going to interpret G nderrode. The **third chapter** gives us a first taste of Raisbeck’s knack to bring philosophy and poetry in G nderrode’s writings together. With the drama “Magie und Schicksal” (1805) it also sheds light on G nderrode’s involvement with politics.⁸ The fear of Spinoza’s alleged commitment to fatalism (Jacobi) is reflected in the “*Schicksalsdrama*” per se: how is agency possible amidst the overpowering force of history? This is further expanded by a look at the dramatic fragments (on “*Thatmenschen*”, 49) *Nikator* and *Hildgund*, in which the actions of the protagonists are tied back to an inner voice: the divine operating within the individual. At the end of the chapter, Raisbeck

⁶ She mainly mentions the work of F.C. Beiser, D. Henrich, and M. Frank who established the Jena Romantics as a philosophical school in its own right, p. 3.

⁷ Just think of Schiller’s famous dictum that it might have taken him ten years to read and understand Kant, yet it took him ten more to forget about all this again.

⁸ On which Anna Ezekiel also wrote a fascinating paper in *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 30 (2022), 666-86.

accordingly thematizes the dangers that come with reliance on such a voice: it looks good as long as it is against “bad” people, but the line of justification (“an inner voice told me so!”) is rather weak, or at least is in desperate need, with Rousseau, on the assumption of the inner good of human beings (78). However, as Raisbeck stresses, this dangerous outreach at least has the benefit to counterweigh Spinozistic fatalism: through the active realization of their inner voice, the characters as “individual[s] relate to the whole as an equal, rather than as its disempowered subject[s]” (78).

With her critique of Bonaparte with “Der Franke in Egypten”⁹ Raisbeck shows in **chapter four** how Günderrode also goes against utopian hopes connected with this form of self-empowerment, but also in its inner connection to (a purified, 87) religion. This is particularly reflected in “Mahomed, der Prophet von Mekka” (1805), that recasts the legitimacy of divine prophecy (in particular in its connection to human agency, seen under a Spinozistic light) in a much broader framework: “In ‘Mahomed’, esoteric forms of divining knowledge – magic, Kabbalic mysticism, ancient mysteries – are given equal credence alongside the three Western monotheisms. This reinvigorates the Neoplatonist and Hermetic notion of perennial philosophy and *Prisca theologia*: all religions and secular knowledge systems are, at their core, expressions of the same stable divine truth given to man in antiquity.” (88) With the even more speculative “Geschichte eines Braminen” (1804/5), Günderrode also includes allusions to J.J. Spalding’s *Bestimmung des Menschen* (after its first publication in 1748, it was surely still well known at the turn of the century after eleven legal editions, many illegal ones, and several translations) – both were in search for a notion of the religious that stemmed from the individual, not any overarching tradition (see 114, 117). Overall, this gives her attempt to bring the universal and the individual closer together some meat to work with.

Her fight with Kant and the relation of subject and object that finds its way in her “apokaliptisches Fragment” is the subject of **chapter five**. The individual is merely the universe’s mirror, but one that can see (here Raisbeck brings the ambivalence in the expression “sehender Spiegel” to the fore, which Günderrode uses in one of the most important poems, “Des Wandrers Niederfahrt”, in allusion to the Leibnizian monad). Ultimately, for the sake of insight into the whole we have to move away from mere individuality, towards the whole of nature – which comes to full fruition in the discussion of *Melete* (1806) in **chapter six**. The last two chapters locate Günderrode’s

⁹ Which in its more banal setting showcases Napoleon’s fall from grace after the praise in an earlier poem from 1799, “Buonaparte in Egypten”, see p. 82.

late works among the work of Schelling and among Romantic thought more generally (**chapter six and seven**), which, as already mentioned, helps to distinguish her stance. But this comparison also shows that G nderrode does not give up on the individual completely, but attempts to see how only through the individual (artistic) lens the whole can ever be seen at all.

A feature that I find most noteworthy in Raisbeck’s study is, along with her exceptional conceptual clarity, her deft hand in bringing philosophical, metaphysical, and poetic concerns together with an analysis of the structural elements in G nderrode’s writings. Just to take one example, her interpretation of “Adonis Todesfeier” (see chapter 6, 164-9) stresses the importance of repetition that brings about an impression of closure even where there is none. In the respective theoretical texts, Raisbeck shows how G nderrode argues for the importance of repetition for the development of ritual¹⁰. Thus, in both philosophical argumentation and literary allusion she shows how the changing and transient can borrow a feeling of permanence by its very structural organization.

Another instance of a fruitful conceptual interpretation of poetry serves as an introduction to chapter five’s discussion of G nderrode’s reception of Kant’s philosophy. In the poem “Vorzeit, Neue Zeit” (c. 1800-2), Raisbeck shows how G nderrode incorporates her critique of modern rationalism in the very structure of the contrasting first strophe and the two closing triplets: whereas the first strophe recasts the ‘olden days’ of enchanted feeling and thinking, in which heaven and hell were clearly present in our very lives, the closing two triplets¹¹ destroys the old order – quite literally so –, and shows that the disenchantment of the world is still facing the troubling human need for a religion¹². This need, in her understanding of Kant (for her sources, see 127, for instance, Diefenbach and Kiesewetter), is in danger of being reduced to a ‘rational faith’. For G nderrode, any assumption of a first principle cannot just come from our observation of a chain of events or the assumption of a “prima summa”   la Diefenbach (as it could not for Kant, either), but presupposed a subjective principle – and it is this principle that she sees in a deep tension, as neither our understanding nor imagination is fully equipped to expand our consciousness in a way that it can actually yield objectively certain knowledge about ourselves and the world. We are, in short, still

¹⁰ Here one is tempted to think of the much later work by Susanne K. Langer on ritual and myth, for example in her seminal trilogy *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling*, 1967, 1972, 1982.

¹¹ In the edition by Christa Wolf (*Karoline von G nderrode. Der Schatten eines Traumes*, Hamburg: dtv 1997, 65) the poem is not rendered in two strophes (as Raisbeck has it), which destroys the symmetry of the poem. On the other hand, this might as well have been intended.

¹² See also pp. 132-34 on “Der Dom zu C lln“, from the same time.

caught up in the need for a quasi-religious foundation of our very selves. The artist can at least point us to this “rupture between individuality and totality” (140), the ground for our desire to be whole again (mirroring the Platonic idea of Eros). Consequently, “Ein apokalyptisches Fragment” shows how this conflict comes to its tragic conclusion, as the invulnerability of the individual, the Leibnizian monad, can only expand itself to actually reflect the cosmos in full consciousness (and in Leibnizian terms, this would indicate a god-like ability to reflect the cosmos clearly and distinctly) at the cost of its own limited being. And so, the possibility to bring together individuality and universality is only possible as a limiting case which factors more into Günderrode’s tragedies than her philosophy. In the end, it is the loss of individuality which is to be preferred, as Raisbeck shows (chapters 3 and 5, e.g. 148-54). Not having “to surrender individuality” (151) remains a goal – and a dream, that can reveal itself in quasi-mystical moments of insight (154-5), but that also comes with a necessary element of (individualistic) defeat (156, 229).

With a deeper appreciation of Günderrode’s philosophy, we also gain a fascinating alternative to the various attempts to justify human singularity. For her, as is also reflected in the more famous fragment “Idee der Erde” (1805)¹³, humans and other beings are not utterly distinct, and hence we require a new philosophy of *nature*, not of man. What might be seen as a setback for philosophies interested in the normative, might as well be an interesting development for any ecological understanding of nature, a direction of thought taken to be born out of Goethe’s *Naturphilosophie*, but, as shown here, nascent in far more diverse lines of thought. Günderrode’s position is also not without tensions, as Raisbeck shows in reference to alternative views, held by Georg Forster, Friedrich Stolberg, or Schelling. Human desire and human reality remain unresolved; a feature that proved fatal for Günderrode herself.

„Die unvermischten Schätze wollt’ ich heben
Die nicht der Schein der Oberwelt berührt,
Die Urkraft, die, der Perle gleich, vom Leben
Des Daseyns Meer in seinen Tiefen führt.“ (*Des Wandrers Niederfahrt*)

Günderrode gives voice to an inner desire in us human beings that deserves our full attention, however fruitless our longing for its realization might be.

¹³ See, for instance, its discussion by Dalia Nassar, “The Human Vocation and the Question of the Earth: Karoline von Günderrode’s Philosophy of Nature”, *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 104.1 (2022), 108-30.

ANNE POLLOK

With this book, we are given the chance to discover the breadth of its poetic reformulation.

Anne Pollok
Philosophisches Seminar
Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz

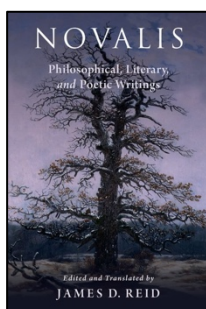
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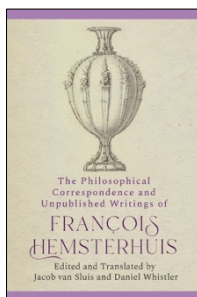
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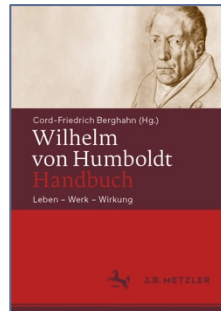
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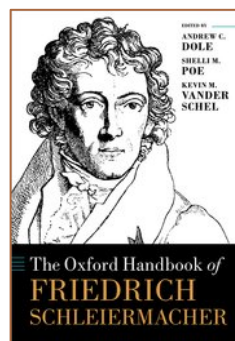
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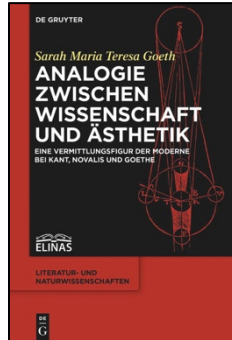
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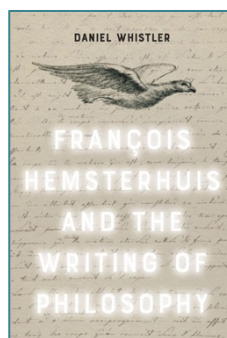
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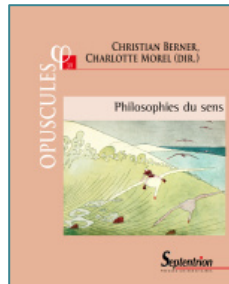


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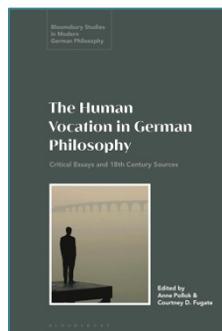


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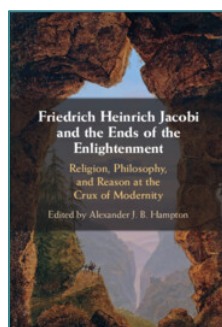
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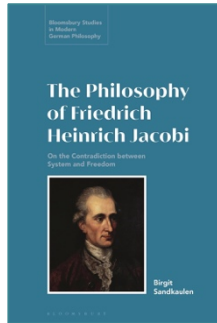
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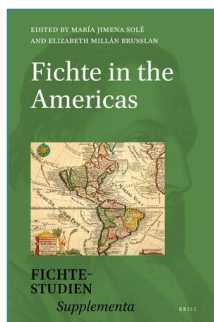
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Submission deadline: 15 September 2024

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Further information: <http://www.fichte-gesellschaft.org/internationale-j-g-fichte-gesellschaft/>

CFP: Special Issue on “The French Revolution”, *SGIR Review*

Editors: Lara Ostaric (Temple University) and Joel B. Lande (Princeton University)

Submission deadline: 15 January 2024

Further information: <https://www.thesgir.org/cfp---sgir-review-2023.html>