

Symphilosophie

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Symphilosophieren with Unknown Friends

On the Meanings and Possibilities of Symphilosophy

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an invitation to think about the meaning of *symphilosophieren*, to understand how it works, and what it describes. It is divided in three parts. In the first, I focus on the processual, the communicative and the persuasive aspects of symphilosophy (which enables me to think of symphilosophy as creating the conditions of possibility for experiencing beauty in the Kantian sense). I then consider some of the ways in which the meaning of symphilosophy is articulated in the published texts, paying special attention to the notions of parabasis and romantic irony. Finally I draw attention to the disparity between the private and public spheres when it comes to the participation and involvement of women. In particular, I turn to Dorothea Schlegel's novel *Florentin* with the purpose of showing how it offers new questions and insights that help us to re-think what it means to do *symphilosophy*.

Keywords: symphilosophy, Dorothea Schlegel, Friedrich Schlegel, romantic irony, Florentin, women & romanticism

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article invite à réfléchir à la signification du *symphilosophieren*, à comprendre son fonctionnement et ce que ce mot désigne. Il y a trois parties. La première partie est dédiée aux dimensions processuelles, communicationnelles et persuasives de la *symphilosophie* (ce qui me permet de concevoir celle-ci comme créatrice des conditions de possibilité de l'expérience du beau au sens kantien). J'examine ensuite les différentes manières dont le sens de la *symphilosophie* s'articule dans les textes publiés, en prêtant une attention particulière aux notions de parabase et d'ironie romantique. Enfin, je souligne le décalage entre les sphères privée et publique en ce qui concerne la participation et l'implication des femmes. Je me tourne notamment vers le roman *Florentin* de Dorothea Schlegel pour montrer comment il soulève des questions et offre des perspectives inédites, nous aidant ainsi à repenser ce que signifie « faire œuvre de *symphilosophie* ».

Mots clés : symphilosophie, Dorothea Schlegel, Friedrich Schlegel, ironie romantique, Florentin, femmes & romantisme

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1. The Beginning of Something New or The Epistolary Outburst in the *Frühromantik*¹

In his article on *Symphilosophieren*,² Kurt Röttgers has a very specific question in mind when he turns to the phenomenon of symphilosophy. His question has to do with figuring out the extent to which symphilosophy may help in our efforts towards the academic practice of interdisciplinarity. Röttgers' analysis relies very much on an understanding of symphilosophy as the articulation of a more or less specific scientific agenda or *Wissenschaftsprogramm*, whose main or most fruitful characteristic is that it seeks to break conventional divisions among the disciplines.³ In a clear attempt to remain level-headed, Röttgers justifies his position as being the only rational way of approaching the phenomenon of symphilosophy, that is to say, the only way to take the question of symphilosophy seriously and avoid falling into some kind of romanticized vision of a past that never took place, where science, friendship and joy went hand in hand.

At a first glance, it seems that Röttgers focuses primarily on the results, on the texts, rather than on the processes leading to those publications. When he opens his article asking: "What did people in Germany do between 1750 and 1850 [...] under the concept of *Symphilosophieren*?", his immediate response is: "Naturally, they founded a journal: in this case, the journal *Athenaeum*." And when sketching a broad understanding of symphilosophy, he searches for the articulation of a clear *Programmatik*, that is to say, he seems to be thinking of symphilosophy in terms of specific philosophical positions and arguments, rather than a collective activity or practice. In general, Röttgers appears to be quite dismissive and sceptical about the whole idea of a truly collective work. He claims for instance that the *Athenaeum Fragments* were more the result of "cutting and rearranging a collection of aphorisms" than a truly collective effort, and he insists that in reality, things were not as cheerful as the Romantics pretended it to be. He writes: "What appears to be the free communion of minds following a delightful meal was, in essence, the result of Friedrich Schlegel's editorial work."⁴

And yet, at the same time (and this is what I take to be the most valuable part of his analysis), Röttgers acknowledges that many of these texts were a

¹ I would like to thank Laure Cahen-Maurel and Michael Forster for creating the opportunity to rethink and reconsider the importance of symphilosophy.

² Kurt Röttgers, "Symphilosophieren," *Philosophisches Jahrbuch* 88 (1981).

³ Röttgers focuses especially on the works by Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis, and Johann Wilhelm Ritter.

⁴ Röttgers, "Symphilosophieren," 90-91.

sincere attempt to reproduce the conversations, the philosophical encounters, and literary exchanges that these authors were participating in. In this light, for instance, he refers to the *Gemäldegespräche* of the second volume of the *Athenaeum* by Caroline and A.W. Schlegel. And he also acknowledges that something new and different was taking place within a small circle of authors, which involved not only seeking new ways of thinking and writing, but also of relating to one another, what he calls new forms of sociability or *Gesellschaftlichkeit*. Indeed, the attentiveness to these aspects enables Röttgers to highlight the processual character of *symphilosophieren*, as he claims, for instance, that it does not make sense to think of the practice of *symphilosophieren* as the putting into motion of an idea, but rather that the ideas regarding symphilosophy must be seen as “moments of self-understanding in a process belonging to a longstanding practice with a programmatic intent. They are result and project at the same time.”⁵

The following paper is an attempt to take this view a step further, by suspending (temporarily at least) the need to identify theoretical principles, methodological guidelines, and ideal objectives – including the ideal of a collective work, that somehow holds together and gives unity to what otherwise would appear to be a cacophony rather than a symphony of voices.⁶ Thus, I propose to focus first and foremost on the idea of symphilosophy as a shared communicative practice in which thoughts and ideas emerge and become articulated in ways that are unexpected and in some sense defy traditional conceptions of authorship and creativity more generally. Even if in the end, these ideas were also articulated in terms of a collective project, or a program, I take these goals or thoughts themselves to be the (contingent) result of a process that was already taking place, but taking place at other levels, more affective levels perhaps, and which cannot always be translated into a specific goal that goes beyond communication itself. In other words, I explore the notion of symphilosophy by considering it not as an ideal, but as capturing something about the way in which authors such as Caroline and August Schlegel, Schleiermacher, Dorothea and Friedrich Schlegel, Ludwig

⁵ Röttgers, “Symphilosophieren,” 92. I have loosely translated this passage from the original German that reads: “[D]ie Ideen sind damit auch immer Momente der Selbstverständigung in einem Prozeß einer in programmatischer Absicht angefangenen und andauernden Praxis; sie sind jeweils Resultat und Projekt zugleich.”

⁶ I take this ideal of unity to be underlying Lacoue-Labarthe’s and Nancy’s understanding of symphilosophy in their groundbreaking study of German Romanticism, *L’Absolu littéraire* from 1978. As much as my approach is very similar to theirs, I believe that on the whole they take symphilosophy to describe an ideal, rather than a practice. This does not mean that they neglect the dimension of a practice and experimentation, but they do this in connection primarily to the fragments and the fragmentary aspect of the published texts.

Tieck, Friedrich Schelling and Novalis were actually engaging with one another in the late 1700s and early 1800s.

So, what happens if we focus only on the communicative dimension; i.e. on the activity of communicating *for its own sake*? And what does this kind of approach look like? – To address these questions, I propose to pay special attention to the letters. For the letters are the closest evidence we have left of such communicative practice. In the letters they wrote to each other incessantly they shared their ideas, their work, their thoughts and feelings, their sharpest reflections, and the most mundane ones too. I take the letters to be something like the true laboratory, the hidden factory of the ideas that would later appear elaborated in the published works. Due to the nature of this paper, I will only refer to a limited number of letters, and focus mainly on one aspect that I find both important and that has not received enough attention, namely the extent to which the Jena Romantics and Early German Idealists were aware of the fact that they were doing something special and new. What I am interested in more specifically is the very particular way in which they conveyed the sense that the sheer uniqueness of what they were experiencing was something, not only that they *could* share, but that they *had to share*. (A further aspect of the letters that is important for my paper is the way in which the presence of women was much stronger in the epistolary exchanges than in the published texts, which might suggest that they were doing a lot of the work, without taking the credit – but I will come back to this later.)

There is an undeniable excitement in the letters they write that is utterly contagious. Even when what they are discovering is not really new at all; such as Spinoza's *Ethics*, or the green in the Spring, as we will see in the following examples. The more philosophical question I seek to raise by paying attention to this urgency, though, has to do with exploring the idea that perhaps what they were saying on a theoretical level was an attempt to translate or translocate what they were experiencing and communicating at other levels. It is ultimately about understanding the role that the act of communicating itself played in their literary and philosophical productivity.

a) Spinoza

Schelling's famous letter to Hegel from February 1795, conveys very well this sense of discovery as well as the urge of sharing and communicating. In this letter, Schelling aims to transmit to Hegel how reading Spinoza has helped him understand better his own position *vis à vis* the relation between dogmatism and criticism, Spinoza, Kant and Fichte. It, thus, represents something like the core of what Schelling develops in his *Philosophical Letters*

on *Dogmatism and Criticism* from the same year. I propose that we focus on the enthusiasm with which he writes and presents his main insights:

I have, in the meantime, become a Spinozist! Do not be surprised. You will soon hear how. For Spinoza the World (the object *par excellence*, in contrast to the subject) was everything – for me, it is the I. [...] Philosophy must proceed from the Unconditioned. The question then arises: where is this Unconditioned – in the I or in the Not-I? Once this question is decided, everything is decided. For me, the highest principle of all philosophy is the pure, absolute I – that is, the I insofar as it is a mere I, not yet conditioned by objects, but posited through freedom. The alpha and omega of all philosophy is freedom.⁷

Scholars, such as Manfred Frank, have often emphasized the way in which Schelling explored different styles and genres: dialogues, essays, letters, treatises, a novel etc. This is certainly one of the reasons why he has been described as a *Protean* thinker. Similarly, it has been argued that Schelling's very particular aesthetic sensitivity and stylistic richness, his way of exploring and experimenting with different forms of expression or *Darstellungsformen* are some of the reasons why he can be regarded as the most Romantic of the German Idealists. Without wanting to contest these readings in any way, I propose to emphasize the tone and the pathos of Schelling's private letter to Hegel; because it is precisely this tone and pathos that are replicated in his *Philosophical Letters on Dogmatism and Criticism*, which were published that same year in the *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft deutscher Gelehrten*, edited by Fichte and Niethammer. Indeed, in his published *Philosophical Letters*, Schelling portrays two opposite philosophical positions, each of which expresses itself with grandiloquence and excitement, and in the end, one could argue, Schelling postulates a resolution infused with the pathos of Sophocles' *King Oedipus*, which he interprets as the instantiation of the triumph of freedom through the heroic acceptance of necessity.⁸ This sug-

⁷ My translation: "Ich bin indessen Spinozist geworden! Staune nicht. Du wirst bald hören wie? Spinoza war die Welt (das Objekt schlechthin im Gegensatz gegen das Subjekt) – Alles, mir ist es das Ich. [...] Vom Unbedingten muß die Philosophie ausgehen. Nun fragt sich's nur, worin dies Unbedingte liegt, im Ich oder im Nicht-Ich. Ist diese Frage entschieden, so ist Alles entschieden. – Mir ist das höchste Prinzip aller Philosophie das reine, absolute Ich d.h. das Ich, inwiefern es bloßes Ich, noch gar nicht durch Objekte bedingt, sondern durch Freiheit gesetzt ist. Das A und O aller Philosophie ist Freiheit". Quoted in Manfred Frank and Gerhard Kurz, *Materialien zu Schellings philosophischen Anfängen* (Suhrkamp, 1975), 126.

⁸ In Schelling's *Philosophical Letters*, the themes that Schelling discusses from Spinoza's *Ethics*, the identity (and tensions) between freedom and necessity, the idea of a unity between nature and god, all of these themes are arguably activated, dramatized and brought to life.

gests that Schelling was not merely choosing the epistolary format or *Darstellungsform* for his philosophical thoughts, as the result of some sort of random creative experimentation with different styles and forms of writing, but rather that he was emulating something quite specific as well as private or personal, *but which he must have believed was essential to the process of thinking itself*. (Or at the very least, he must have believed it had been an essential part of his own particular journey of philosophical discovery). In other words, my claim is that Schelling's *Philosophical Letters*... (and I would include here all the texts from this period that emulate the epistolary or conversational) are both a reflection of a dynamic process that was taking place on a private level among peers and friends, and an expression of a desire to share this experience with others, to crystalize it in a way. The published texts are the manifestation of an underlying process that had already taken place or was taking place, and without which they would not have come to be. This something that was taking place and that these authors were in one way or other trying to communicate or present to broader audiences, is, I believe, symphilosophy.

b) The Colour Green

I come thus to my second example, which is an extract from a letter by Dorothea Schlegel to her friend Rahel Varnhagen (née Levin) from April 1800, where she urges her to come and visit her in Jena:

You need only forgo all other diversions and amusements – such as art, poetry, wit, the lovely and varied natural world, and the most enchanting spring your imagination ever painted [awaits you, KH]! Carpets of green velvet stretching up the gentle hills, embroidered with violets, cowslips, and primroses, and interwoven with a thousand fragrant herbs; every tree in glorious bloom; heaps of lilacs and lilies of the valley; a willow – unlike any I had ever known before – whose blossoms smell of orange, growing everywhere across the meadows and hills. A lively, rushing river, clear as a mirror; warmth lasting from one morning to the next; air that settles softly, balmy and blue, around you, resting upon the mountains like a blanket; and for a change, a few hours of the warmest, most beneficent rain, and a shade of green of which the people of Berlin have no idea – no, absolutely no idea – that is what I can promise you here. It is a brand-new experience for me to discover that a spring truly and genuinely exists on earth. Just come!⁹

⁹ My translation: “Nur tun Sie Verzicht auf alle andern Zerstreungen, und Vergnügungen: als Kunst, Poesie, Witz, eine liebliche mannigfaltige Natur, und den liebenswürdigsten Frühling den sich Ihre Einbildung je mahlte! Grünsamtene Teppiche die

There is a similar sense of urge and excitement in many of the letters within the Jena circle of this period – no matter what it is they are talking about. It really feels like they felt that they had discovered a totally new meaning for what it is to be truly alive, a new way of seeing and being in the world; a new way of combining life and thought, living, loving and writing with wit, joy and depth. This also seems to be the way in which they were perceived by others. As the Austrian author Caroline Pichler describes in a text dedicated to Dorothea Schlegel from 1839, everybody in Vienna was eager to see and meet the Schlegels; and their home, as had been the case in Jena, became the meeting point for writers and educated people of the time.¹⁰

There is something very compelling about the way in which thoughts and insights are being transmitted in these letters. If we were to think of them following Longinus' distinction in his *Treatise on The Sublime* or *Peri Hypsous*, we could say that, more than argumentatively convincing, they were *persuasive*. Sometimes it feels like every statement is an invitation or a demand to experience the world differently, from a totally new and unique perspective. But a perspective that can be shared and elaborated or modulated together; a perspective that emerges from within the text. And, as a reader, you just want to ride along with them. This is perhaps why the notion of *symphilosophy* is most adequate to describe what happens in these texts. Because it is not a matter of proving or showing what is 'objectively true', like it was for Spinoza or Descartes, for instance (whose letters to Princess Elisabeth are, by the way, a great counter-example to the epistolary exchanges from the Jena circle). And it is also not about presenting (or imposing) one's own personal taste. It is more like finding, or tapping into an unknown but shared necessity: the necessity to feel the world anew. Or – one might venture to say borrowing Kant's formulation – what is going on in these letters is the elaboration of a 'universal subjectivity' that enables us to perceive and make sense of reality

sanften Berge hinan mit Veilchen, Schlüsselblumen, und Primeln gestickt, und tausend wohlriechende Kräuter durchwirkt; Alle Bäume in der glorreichsten Blüthe; Flieder und Maiblumen in dicken Haufen; eine Art Weiden wie ich sie noch gar nicht kannte, deren Blüthe wie Orange riechen, stehen allenthalben, auf allen Wiesen und Bergen. Der lebhaft rauschende Fluß wie ein Spiegel, hell; warm vom Morgen, bis wieder zum Morgen; eine Luft die sich weich, lau, und blau um einen her lagert, und auf den Bergen wie eine Decke ruht; zur Veränderung einmal ein paar Stunden des wärmsten wohlthätigsten Regens, ein Grün von dem die Berliner keinen Begriff, nein, keinen Begriff haben – Das ist es was ich Ihnen allenfalls hier versprechen kann. Es ist für mich eine nagelneue Erfahrung, dass es einen Frühling wirklich, und wahrhaftig auf Erden gibt. Kommen Sie nur!“. Letter from 28 April 1800, quoted in N. Immer (ed.), *Dorothea Schlegel. Romantische Herzenskultur. Briefe und Literatur* (Weimarer Verlagsgesellschaft, 2014), 39.

¹⁰ Immer, *Dorothea Schlegel*, 17-25.

in a radically new way: as an ongoing work of art. The world seen from the perspective of art. And, hence, it is not so much about being right or wrong, but about the interaction itself, the *hin und her*, the play between author and reader through the text that can only take place among equals, among peers, among friends. It is about creating a space in which the project of sharing and re-inventing a whole new world of meaning could emerge and be actualized. And if we agree that one of Kant's (implicit) points in his *Third Critique* is that it is quite possible that no real aesthetic judgment of the beautiful has ever been made, or that beauty is something that has never really been perceived as such, we could say that *symphilosophieren* (understood now as the occupation of a truly universal subjectivity; a perspective that enables us to experience the world as art) is the proof that there was at least once beauty in the world. Or to put it differently, *symphilosophieren* is the condition of possibility for an aesthetic experience to take place.¹¹

In an earlier letter to Rahel Levin, D. Schlegel wonders if she has already got the *Athenaeum*, and asks: "is it not as thorough as it is entertaining, as dignified as it is witty?"¹² – The extent to which the answer to that question may be affirmative, I believe, is an indication of the extent to which the theoretical work was able to mirror and articulate this new point of view, this new way of living that they were discovering for themselves. In other words, one could perhaps venture to wonder to what extent the published works, the theoretical works were not in some way responding to issues (needs, desires, experiences) that were taking place at other not purely theoretical, but more vital, affective levels. In the end, as Hegel would put it, philosophy "as the thought of the world" only appears later.¹³

2. From the Letters to The Published Work: The Addressee, Parabasis and Romantic Irony

In this *hin und her*, in this endless interaction established between the text and the reader / writer, the other, the addressee becomes essential. Even reading these texts today one can feel the importance of the task, and the directness of the invitation, which is why, the experience of reading the Schlegels, Novalis, Tieck or Sophie Bernhardt for instance is so different to reading Descartes (as so many authors have pointed out). In the first case, to refuse

¹¹ I owe this interpretation very much to Thomas Kisser, even though he may not have put it like this.

¹² Letter from 10 April 1800, quoted in Immer, *Dorothea Schlegel*, 38.

¹³ This is a thought that Hegel expresses often, most notably at the end his *Preface to the Philosophy of Right* from 1820.

to play along, to refuse the invitation and the challenge (in Gadamer's sense¹⁴) is to refuse the possibility of creating a new world of meaning that has the promise of leading to change and transformation. It is refusing a possibility of a new form of living and experiencing the world. In the second case, that is to say, if we don't fully follow the cartesian method, for instance, the problem remains a theoretical problem. It is for Descartes after all about knowing with absolute clarity and certainty, not about creating a new world of meaning (in fact, Descartes is even willing to give up on meaning altogether if it is required by his newly found method of truth).

As pointed out by Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, this distinctive form of address, this request of the reader's engagement and involvement is manifest in the Jena Romantic writings in a variety of forms, both in the critical as in the literary pieces. One of the most distinctive literary devices through which this request is crystalized is the so called *parabasis*, which the Romantics not only used but also promoted. Parabasis is as a direct reference to the audience within a play, and because it causes an interruption within the play it is more common in comedy than in other genres. For many scholars, though, the use of parabasis (for instance by Aristophanes) had long been a reason for criticism: it was considered destructive, in the sense that it betrayed the play's own fictitiousness. But already in his text *On the Aesthetic Value of Greek Comedy* from 1795, Friedrich Schlegel argues that parabasis is in fact a most wonderful device, the use of which can only be encouraged. The idea underlying Schlegel's argument, and which his brother, August Schlegel, also develops in his later *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, is that such interruptions are instances of self-awareness: the play becomes aware of itself and shares this awareness with the audience, who becomes the accomplice, and hence, co-creator of the very fictionality that is being unveiled. Moreover, against the idea that the use of parabasis betrays 'ineptness' (*Ungeschicklichkeit*), Schlegel argues that it is testimony to "measured carelessness and exuberant liveliness (*besonnener Mutzwill, überschäumende Lebensfülle*)."¹⁵

Ludwig Tieck's *Puss-in-Boots (Der gestiefelte Kater)* from 1797 offers a perfect example of this form of self-interruption that does not destroy, but instead ends up constituting the very character and playfulness of the play

¹⁴ I am thinking of Gadamer's essay "Die Aktualität des Schönen" from 1977, where he describes the experience of the work of art as a process of hermeneutical identification, initiated by the work, which he sees as challenging the spectator to enter into some form of hermeneutical 'play', where what is at stake is precisely the identification of the work of art as such.

¹⁵ F. Schlegel, 'Vom ästhetischen Wert der Griechischen Komödie', *Kritische Schriften und Fragmente. Studienausgabe* in 6 vols, edited by E. Behler and H. Eichner (Ferdinand Schöningh, 1988) vol. 1, 11.

itself. In his *Puss-in-Boots*, not only is the audience constantly being addressed by the actors, the play also refers to itself *as a play*, and even the poet / author appears on stage to discuss his work:

Fischer: How can you write such plays? Why haven't you acquired any culture?

Author: Grant me just a minute's hearing before you condemn me [...] ¹⁶

Puss-in-Boots is really a very funny piece. The way it is able to enact self-reflection and critique, bringing the audience and the author together in the play itself is remarkable. But there is also something slightly haunting about it. The idea that an author can be utterly misunderstood, the anxiety of finding oneself alone in one's own creation, with no echo or response from the audience but rejection, is not exactly pleasant. The line between this being funny or just very sad and isolating is extremely thin and fragile. This seems to be thematized at the very end of the play:

Müller: You really ought to have gone home.

Author: Only a few more words, with your permission. – My play has been a flop –

Fischer: To whom are you telling that?

Müller: We've noticed.

Author: Perhaps the blame does not lie entirely with me. –

Schlosser: On whom else then? – Who is then at fault for my being still somewhat crazed?

Author: I made the attempt to transport you all back to the remote feelings of your childhood years so that you might experience the fairy-tale here presented without your looking on it as something more important than it intended to be.

Leutner: That's not so easy my good man.

[...]

¹⁶ "Fischer: Wie können Sie solche Stücke schreiben? Warum haben Sie sich nicht gebildet? / Der Dichter: Vergönnen Sie mir nur eine Minute Gehör, ehe Sie mich verdammen." Ludwig Tieck, *Puss-in-Boots*, trans. Gerald Gillespie, (Peter Lang, 2013) 54-55.

Prompter: Try to speak a few verses, Author; perhaps then you'll get more respect from them.

[...]

Author:

(Toward the parterre)

Public, is your judgment to instruct me even in some measure, show that you understand me even in some measure.

(Rotten pears and apples and wads of paper are thrown at him from the parterre)

Author: No, the gentlemen out there are better than I am at farce. I withdraw.¹⁷

To be sure, the end of the play can easily be interpreted as a satire and critique of the kind of public that would be hostile to such a piece. But in doing this, Tieck is also exposing a certain vulnerability and isolation that is a direct consequence of the radicality of his aesthetic ambitions. These ambitions are the result, among other, of a new way of engaging with and thinking about art and the relation between creator / spectator in general that involves and depends on the openness and availability of the addressee. In other words, Tieck was not the only one struggling with this problematic. In fact, this preoccupation constitutes a theme in its own right, and is a recurrent theme in the published texts and the private letters alike.

In numerous letters, Friedrich Schlegel asks his friends if they have read his *Lucinde*, and what their thoughts are about it. For instance, in a letter to Caroline Schlegel from July 1799, he writes:

I await letters impatiently. Hopefully, they will have already answered everything that I still wish to ask – about all of you, but especially about Hardenberg [...] Why hasn't he written to me? Does he no longer want to do anything for the *Athenaeum*? Does he still care for us? What does he say about Fichte and the elegy? Has he gained any new insight regarding *Lucinde*?¹⁸

¹⁷ Ludwig Tieck, *Puss-in-Boots*, 139–141.

¹⁸ My translation: "Mit Ungeduld warte ich auf Briefe. Hoffentlich wird schon alles darin beantwortet sein, was ich noch fragen möchte, über Euch alle, besonders aber über Hardenberg [...] Warum schreibt er mir nicht? Will er gar nichts mehr fürs *Athenaeum* tun? Liebt er uns noch? Was sagt er zu Fichte und zur Elegie? Ist Ihm über die *Lucinde* ein Licht aufgegangen?". Friedrich Schlegel an Caroline Schlegel ca. 1. August 1799, in *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, Band 24, III, (Schönhingh 1985), 304 [letter 193].

In a different way, but arguably responding to the same concern, in her text *Lebensansicht*, which appeared in the second volume of the *Athenaeum*, Sophie Bernhardi emphasizes the importance of the other, the recipient of her letter – which isn't really a letter, but an essay. She does this by highlighting their absence:

It is comforting to imagine that I am writing to a dear friend who understands me completely – to whose heart I entrust these pages – even though I am writing only for myself, because it does me good to give voice to certain feelings and thoughts of my soul.

[...]

“Farewell, my dear friend” – I would like to say – yet I cannot even smile at this folly; for in my thoughts, I have addressed everything to a being who understands and loves me. And thus I send these pages out into the world; and whoever reads my words with love, for them they are written.¹⁹

Bernhardi's essay is another example of how choosing the epistolary format is more than just a literary experiment, and also more than just another way to address the reader; in this case it is a direct invitation to form a special bond with the author, a bond of complicity and friendship that is based on openness and love. This longing for a reader who can truly understand one, and the likelihood that she does not exist, or not *yet*, is certainly one of the underlying motivations for F. Schlegel's claim that one has to *create* one's own readers.

Interestingly, this very peculiar activity through which one shapes one's own reader, not by the means of overwhelming them or manipulating them, but by engaging them in a special relationship in which they are also active,

This letter can also be found in the TU Darmstadt Portal des deutschen Briefes im 18. Jahrhundert: <https://tueditions.ulb.tu-darmstadt.de/v/pa000023-0253>

¹⁹ My translation. “Es ist tröstlich, daß ich mir einbilde, als schrieb' ich an einen teuren Freund, der mich durchaus versteht, an dessen Herz ich diese Blätter niederlege, da ich doch nur für mich schreibe, weil es mir wohl tut, manche Gefühle und Gedanken meiner Seele auszusprechen [...] Lebe wohl, mein teurer Freund, möcht' ich sagen, und kann nicht einmal über diese Torheit lächeln, in Gedanken habe ich doch alles an ein Wesen gerichtet, das mich versteht und mich liebt, und darum reiche ich diese Blätter öffentlich in die Welt, und wer meine Worte mit Liebe liest, für den sind sie geschrieben.” These extracts correspond to the very beginning and the end of Bernhardi's essay, which appeared in the second volume of the *Athenaeum* journal: https://www.deutschestextarchiv.de/book/view/schlegel_athenaeum_1800?p=217 , 205-215

is what F. Schlegel in his *Lyceums-Fragmente* from 1797 characterizes as *sympphilosophieren*:

The analytic writer observes the reader as he is; and accordingly he makes his calculations and sets up his machines in order to make the proper impression on him. The synthetic writer constructs and creates a reader as he should be; he doesn't imagine him calm and dead, but alive and critical. He allows whatever he has created to take shape gradually before the reader's eyes, or else he tempts him to discover it himself. He doesn't try to make any particular impression on him, but enters with him into the sacred relationship of deepest symphilosophy or sympoetry.²⁰

What becomes clear from this is that the idea is not to gather friends who think the same, or see things in the same way. Nor is it about transferring or acquiring a content of knowledge. But rather, it is about engaging the reader in a process of thought and mutual transformation. Reading and understanding are active events, and in order for them to take place, there must be a flow, a communication between the reader and the text, a certain intimacy must emerge, and a certain tension as well. What F. Schlegel is describing is a very particular relation: one that includes enticing the other, but not imposing oneself on the other. If a harmony does arise (if there is *Übereinstimmung*), it is not by eliminating tension and difference, opposition or resistance, but by including these from within: the text itself must become this movement.

This thought appears also in a later passage from the *Athenaeum Fragments* attributed to Friedrich Schlegel that reads: "Philosophers who are not opposed to one another, are related merely by sympathy, not symphilosophy."²¹ *Sympphilosophieren* cannot be reduced to just feeling or thinking the same. In a similar way *Athenaeum-Fragment* 118, also attributed to F. Schlegel, argues that all the characters in a novel should have their own

²⁰ "Der analytische Schriftsteller beobachtet den Leser, wie er ist; danach macht er seinen Kalkül, legt seine Maschinen an, um den gehörigen Effekt auf ihn zu machen. Der synthetische Schriftsteller konstruiert und schafft sich einen Leser, wie er sein soll; er denkt sich denselben nicht ruhend und tot, sondern lebendig und entgegenwirkend. Er läßt das, was er erfunden hat, vor seinen Augen stufenweise werden, oder er lockt ihn es selbst zu erfinden. Er will keine bestimmte Wirkung auf ihn machen, sondern er tritt mit ihm in das heilige Verhältniß der innigsten Symphilosophie oder Sympoesie." F. Schlegel, *Lyceum-Fragment* 112, in *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe Band 2: Charakteristiken und Kritiken I (1796-1801)* (F. Schoningh 1975), 157. English translation in *Friedrich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments*, trans. P. Firchow (University of Minnesota Press 1971), 155-156.

²¹ *Athenaeum-Fragment* 112, in F. Schlegel, *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe Band 2*, 182.

personality, so to say, and *not appear as if they were revolving around one individual, like planets around the sun*.²² This fragment in particular is interesting because while explaining how to create characters in a novel or a '*gebildeten Gedicht*', F. Schlegel also puts forward his view of how we should relate to one another, that is: how we should construct our social reality. Aesthetics and ethics go hand in hand. What we can see, in any case, is that what is at stake is the construction of a space in which there is room for a variety of relations and a plurality of beings. A space that is open for everything except destruction. This will continue underlying his later projects, such as the journal *Europa* from 1803.

What is most relevant about these passages for our analysis, however, is to see the extent to which theory is responding to the demands, needs and desires emerging from the experience of a very specific communicative practice, the main characteristic of which might well be that identities are not pre-determined but construed with and through others.

It is in this light also that we can read what might be the most characteristic feature of F. Schlegel's theoretical work, namely the notion of romantic irony. For, it is through irony, after all, that the text is most easily detached from pre-established meanings, and initiates its own movement with the reader. Irony allows for tension or resistance to emerge, and at the same time hints towards some form of reconciliation, or perhaps a new point of view from which the tension itself is dissolved, or can be at least dealt with in a different way. Irony enables the author to point at the thought that there are no solid truths or univocal interpretations; that meanings are not given in advance, but rather emerge as a process through which the text is animated by a new reader. Irony is also the means through which the text is able to reflect on its own limitations, undermine itself, question itself without capitulating. For, at the very moment in which it touches upon its own finitude, it also invites the reader to continue exploring other directions and possibilities. This is something that becomes very clear in the famous *Athenaeum Fragment* 116 on Romantic Poetry. Even if the notion of irony itself is not mentioned explicitly. Reading it, one can recognize the essence of irony in the movement that the fragment creates, by saying and unsaying, through the hovering between the opposites, object and subject, and the image of a poem reflecting on itself, again and again to a higher power as through an infinite succession of mirrors.

²² *Athenaeum-Fragment* 118, in F. Schlegel, *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe Band 2*, 183, English translation in *Friedrich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments*, 176.

But, the value of irony lies not only in the fact that it is the perfect means of saying and un-saying. The value of irony lies also in the way it gives value to pleasure. To sensual pleasure, to the affects.²³ Through irony the text reaches us on an affective level as well. Ultimately, though, and I think that this is something that we sometimes forget, the movement that irony introduces in a text (by addressing and soliciting the reader in a specific way, as it says and unsays, as it plays with the different meanings that a text or a word can carry and evoke) is important because it is also what infuses the text with life. Irony is what will make the relationship between the text and the reader alive. Indeed, if we look at the passages we have read so far, we will find that the notion of life and other related terms (*lebhaft*, *Lebensfülle*, *Lebensansicht*, *lebendig*, and so on) are very frequent. To such an extent that we could say that the key to understanding what *symphilosophieren* is about has to do with understanding that the demand is not only that the theory be compatible with life, but that the text itself should reflect and embody this liveliness, that the text be ‘alive’. For F. Schlegel, in any case, this will become a (if not the) definitive criterion to determine if a piece can be thought of as art or not:

Works whose ideal doesn’t have as much living reality and personality for the artist as does his mistress or his friend are best left unwritten. At any rate, they don’t become works of art.²⁴

3. The Unheard Voices: Dorothea Schlegel’s *Florentin*

To be sure, the use of irony does not always have the results one hopes for. In his text *On Incomprehensibility* (*Über die Unverständlichkeit*), which appeared in the same volume of the *Athenaeum* as S. Bernhardt’s *Lebensansicht*, Schlegel thematizes the extent to which the use of irony has also had the opposite result that he intended: not only have many readers failed to engage in the process he was inviting them to explore, they basically just failed to understand him altogether. Irony has, thus, a double side to it: it can be what enables the emergence of a special communication between author and reader, but also can be the cause of the most serious misunderstandings.

²³ I have explored the relation between joy and irony in K. Hay, “On the Roots of Romantic Irony and the Pleasure of Being (Mis)understood,” *Human Affairs* 33, no. 4 (2023): 428-438.

²⁴ “Werke, deren Ideal für den Künstler nicht ebensoviel lebendige Realität, und gleichsam Persönlichkeit hat, wie die Geliebte oder der Freund, blieben besser ungeschrieben. Wenigstens Kunstwerke werden es gewiß nicht.” *Athenaeum-Fragment* 117, in F. Schlegel, *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe Band 2*, 183; English translation in F. Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel’s Lucinde*, 176.

Once again, we are confronted with this danger of solitude, isolation, and the profound sense of being misunderstood, and remaining, as it were, un-alive.

On the other hand, though, there is no reason why one could not undo such fatality. One might attempt to use irony to resuscitate a text, revisit it, or even to rescue it from the solitude of having been forever misread, misunderstood, or merely unseen. For the last part of my paper, I propose to sketch out what this exercise might look like and what kind of consequences it may have in our understanding of symphilosophy both as a practice and as the articulation of theoretical standpoints. And for this, I propose to revisit a text written by one of the figures of the Jena Romantics who has been perhaps the most unfairly treated of them all: Dorothea Schlegel and her novel *Florentin* from 1801.

Dorothea Schlegel has indeed been the target of the harshest criticisms from men and women alike. She has been criticized for being ugly, for being insecure about her writing, for being blindly devoted to her husband. At the same time, it has also been widely acknowledged that she was incredibly bright and well educated, witty and cultivated, that she was a great entertainer, that she was the main breadwinner, a devoted mother and later grandmother, and basically ran all practical matters in the household to ensure that her husband could dedicate himself to his writings and lectures. Her letters are a testimony that this was the case. As Marthe Helfer argues in an article from 1996, it seems strange to believe that someone who was so educated, and had such a reputation of being able to entertain lively conversations with all the intellectuals of the time, would have nothing to say.²⁵ And yet, for a long time her novel *Florentin* seems to have been ignored and forgotten, if not openly rejected. And although I am not the first one to attempt to revisit it with new eyes, it was not until the nineties, with Helfer's article, that an attempt to re-evaluate this piece was seriously endeavoured. Since then there have been a number of studies devoted to this task in what might be called a (collective) effort to respond to a call by a text from the past that requests to be loved and understood, as S. Bernhardt may have put it.

Reading D. Schlegel's novel and the literature dedicated to it, it becomes clear that there is something unusual about it. First of all, it is difficult to decide what genre it belongs to. It seems to fit into the tradition of the Romantic *Bildungsroman*. But as Helfer has rightly pointed out, if we read it like this, we cannot but agree that it fails. As a *Bildungsroman* it is a bit of a disaster (as we will soon see). One can of course see this as its strength,

²⁵ Martha B. Helfer, "Dorothea Veit-Schlegel's *Florentin*: Constructing a Feminist Romantic Aesthetic", *The German Quarterly*, vol. 69, no. 2 (Spring: 1996): 144-160.

as Helfer does. *Florentin* is then to be understood as a parody, a critique or deconstruction of a genre that (if we take Novalis' *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* published posthumously in 1802 as the pinnacle of the Romantic *Bildungsroman*) had not reached its peak yet. Helfer writes: "I want to suggest that the dullness of Veit-Schlegel's novel, its lack of originality, is of considerable theoretical significance for feminist criticism: *Florentin* lures its readers into a sense of complacency by imitating its literary predecessors, yet ironically masks the fact that its self-abrogating structure undercuts the very discourse that it mimics", and "*Florentin* sets into play a never-ending series of metonymic displacements that undermines the totalizing masculine discourse."²⁶

This line of interpretation is certainly helpful in that it gives us something like a unifying principle and a clue as to how to interpret and make sense of the novel. It also gives us a clear sense as to how exactly D. Schlegel was engaging with her counterparts – F. Schlegel in particular, and thereby contributing to the Jena Romantic aesthetic theory. According to Helfer, *Florentin* constitutes a feminist response to F. Schlegel's *Lucinde*, and it construes a "feminist Romantic aesthetic" in its own right, which is characterized by what Helfer calls "metonymic displacement and absence."²⁷ Women are absent in D. Schlegel's *Florentin*, argues Helfer, in the sense that they do not fulfil what would be expected women would do (in such a novel). In a sometimes nonchalant other times scandalous way the women in the novel fail to play the roles that society, and perhaps more importantly the genre of the *Bildungsroman* itself, imposed on them (Eleonor, for instance leaves her children to be taken care of by others for 14 years to join the army). Moreover, what is also absent, according to Helfer, is *Bildung*: "the novel ends with Florentin disappearing without discovering who he really is or learning anything substantive about himself."²⁸ Helfer convincingly shows how Florentin – the character – "constantly disrupts the dominant male discourse mimicked by the novel, and this is why he cannot complete his search for self-definition."²⁹ As much as I agree with the idea that the richest way of reading *Florentin* is in terms of irony, parody, subversion and (feminist) critique, what remains unclear and quite intriguing, though, is that it should have taken almost two centuries to pick this up. How could it have taken so long to get the 'joke'?

To be clear, the fact that it has remained unseen and misunderstood is not necessarily a bad sign. On the contrary, within the very logic of Romantic

²⁶ Helfer, "Dorothea Veit-Schlegel's *Florentin*", 149-150.

²⁷ Helfer, "Dorothea Veit-Schlegel's *Florentin*", 146.

²⁸ Helfer, "Dorothea Veit-Schlegel's *Florentin*", 150.

²⁹ Helfer, "Dorothea Veit-Schlegel's *Florentin*", 157.

irony and symphilosophy, as we have seen above, one could argue that being difficult to understand is a pre-requisite to become a truly symphilosophical text, after all, symphilosophy was never about gathering friends who think the same, or see things in the same way, but about engaging in a process of mutual exchange and transformation. I believe that addressing the question as to why it has taken us so long to engage with this text will help us understand better what is so particular about D. Schlegel's novel, and how it relates to *symphilosophieren*.

In her article, Helfer does not really address this question. But she does rely on and refer to works by Luce Irigaray and Judith Butler. In fact, one of her main claims is that D. Schlegel enacts what Irigaray will later describe as the "impossibility of writing (as) woman",³⁰ so that the only means she has to produce a counter-discourse is by disrupting (through inner ruptures, self-contradictions, parody etc.) the given discourses. In other words, one could argue that the reason it has taken us so long to understand D. Schlegel's novel is that we did not have the right theoretical framework to do so. So that, in the end, Hegel was wrong, for it is not the case that philosophy comes after reality, but rather reality is always already entangled with a given ideology (in this case patriarchy) and not even the greatest philosophers are able to see what is right in front of them, even if it is bluntly obvious. From this perspective, then, what D. Schlegel was trying to express and convey could not be widely understood and properly appreciated until *we* were truly ready to see and understand it, i.e. until *we* had a more developed feminist theoretical background. This line of thought makes sense, especially if we consider that the academic 'we' has predominantly been (and arguably continues to be) infused with patriarchal values and pre-conceptions, while what D. Schlegel was conveying, by paying attention to other realities and perspectives, was a critique and questioning from within. It is only natural that these critiques remain unseen from the "half-blindness" that privilege affords.³¹ On the other hand, not all scholars who engage with D. Schlegel's novel highlight its (proto-)feminist content; but the fact that they do take *Florentin* seriously, against inherited prejudices, may not have been possible without feminism, its victories and its struggles.³²

³⁰ Helfer, "Dorothea Veit-Schlegel's *Florentin*", 157. Helfer refers to Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter with Carolyn Burke, (Cornell UP, 1985).

³¹ For the notion of half-blindness see A. Stewart and F. Pratto, "Group Dominance and the Half-Blindness of Privilege", *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 68, no. 1, (2012): 28-45.

³² See for instance F. Corey Roberts, "The Perennial Search for Paradise: Garden Design and Political Critique in Dorothea Schlegel's *Florentin*," *German Quarterly* vol. 75, no. 3, (2002): 247- 264; and Laurie Johnson, "Dorothea Veit's *Florentin* and the Early Romantic Model of Alterity," *Monatshefte*, vol. 97, no. 1 (2005): 33-62. Both authors

Another (complementary) answer to this almost two-hundred-year delay would be to say that the text is not as unified and one-sided as Helfer makes it to be. Helfer invites us to read *Florentin* as a parody, and emphasizes its self-defeating character, but in her analysis it is not always clear to see how exactly this parody works. Is it supposed to be a funny parody, or is it a parody only because it fails? It seems to me that in general terms Helfer is inclined to see it is a failure *tout court*. (She quite openly states that it is dull and unoriginal.) From this point of view it is not surprising that its parodic dimension would remain unseen. But what if something else were going on? – In the last part of my paper, I propose to develop a slightly different approach by paying attention to four different moments in the novel in order to highlight what I would tentatively call moments of oddness or short-circuits in the sense that Alenka Zupančič develops in her book on comedy and philosophy, *The Odd One In*.³³

Unlike Tieck's *Puss-in-Boots*, for instance, where the reader can never really forget that she is partaking in a comedy, with D. Schlegel's *Florentin* it is not as straightforward, and there is much more room for misunderstandings. I believe it would be wrong to say that *Florentin* is written entirely in the register of parody. There are moments that are reminiscent of a Shakespearean comedy, others are closer to Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* or Schlegel's *Lucinde*. The one thing that is recurrent and constant are moments of self-disruption: sooner than later something disruptive and quite unexpected occurs that leaves the reader wondering, not knowing exactly what has happened. Idyllic scenes or trains of thought are interrupted constantly, but it is not always funny – or rather: it is difficult to see from what perspective these moments could be funny. Sometimes these intrusions are just odd; odd in the sense that it is unclear how to register them: is it comical? Is it sarcasm? Is it dramatic? Is it serious? ... What is interesting, however, is that these disruptions are not disruptive enough to destroy the narrative fiction. Even if it sometimes does feel like the story and characters are disintegrating before our very eyes, there is still a story that is being told, with a beginning and an end (unlike Aristophanes' *Frogs*, for instance, which is really divided in two parts that seem totally unrelated). In fact some of these disruptions are so subtle they could easily be attributed to clumsiness or a strange, uncultivated taste. How these disruptions affect the rest remains unclear. And yet, I would argue, these many instances where something

agree that D. Schlegel constitutes a feminist response to F. Schlegel's *Lucinde* and Romantic theory in general.

³³ A. Zupančič, *The Odd One In* (MIT Press: 2008).

strange occurs may be what the novel is really about. Perhaps we have to assume that there are several narratives going on at the same time, many of which still need to be deciphered, and that D. Schlegel is hovering above and between them all. I will briefly present four of these decentring moments.

1. When Florentin addresses his horse

The book begins with what could be a perfectly bucolic scene. Florentin is in the forest with his horse. But he is lost and somewhat desperate: he is talking to himself, complaining and expressing how much he would rather be somewhere else, but also understanding that it is now too late to turn back. This is already a rather strange way to start. But it gets even stranger, as he addresses his horse and says:

Let me embrace you, my white steed ... you are a royal beast – a beast fit for kings! What do we both lack to be immortalized in history – you as a paragon of loyalty and submission, I as an example of benevolent condescension – save for me possessing a throne and you being my subject? You are surely filled with wonder and delight, and without a doubt, you feel supremely happy to be ridden by me – and by no one else – until the very end of your faithful life! Do you perhaps suspect that I made your burden somewhat lighter solely so that you would not collapse under the strain and perish before I could do without you? I know it, to be sure, but you shall never find out, for you are meant to be happy; you shall certainly never be disturbed from the comforting belief that, in your unreasoning nature and humble contentment, you are a happy creature.³⁴

I take this to be one of the most powerful passages in the novel because of the way in which it does so many things without saying much. There is something comical about the scene (and one might be reminded of the

³⁴ “Lass dich umarmen Schimmel”, sagte er, “du bist ein königliches Tier! ein Tier für Könige! Was fehlt uns beiden, um in der Geschichte verewigt zu werden, du als ein Muster der Treue und Unterwürfigkeit, ich als ein Beispiel von menschenfreundlicher Herablassung, als dass ich einen Thron besäße, und du wärest mein Untertan? Gewiss bist du ganz verwundert und froh, und ohne Zweifel fühlst du dich überaus glücklich, gerade von mir und von niemand anders bis ans Ende deines treuen Lebens geritten zu werden! Ahndest du etwa, dass ich deine Last bloß deswegen etwas leichter machte, damit du mir nicht völlig unterlägst, und darüber zu Grunde gingest, ehe ich dich missen kann? Ich weiß es freilich, aber du sollst es nie erfahren, denn du sollst glücklich sein; du sollst, gewiss nie in dem klugen Glauben gestört werden, dass du in deiner Unvernunft und demütigen Genügsamkeit ein glückliches Tier bist.” D. Schlegel, *Florentin. Ein Roman. Fragmente. Varianten*, edited by L. Weissberg, (Ullstein-Werkausgaben: 1987), 11.

opening scene of Aristophanes' *Frogs*), but soon enough it stops being funny. On the one hand it is a vindication of those who are oppressed; and there are good reasons to assume that D. Schlegel is thinking of the oppression suffered by women. Not only because referring to women as horses was common in all social classes, but more significantly because the very idea that those who are oppressed are in fact happily devoted to their oppressors is arguably a very specific aspect of women's oppression. Nevertheless, what is fascinating about this little passage is not only that it overtly disrupts the belief that women are unaware of the injustices they suffer (under the name of love, dedication and care), but more importantly that it disrupts the possibility of believing that the oppressors themselves may be unaware of the oppressions they inflict. Even a sweet young man with an unmanly name like Florentin knows!

2. Casual remarks and random conversations

There are many remarks that seem to be part of the description of a given scene, but that suddenly feel slightly exaggerated, or a bit 'off'. It is difficult to show this without quoting longer passages. For the sake of brevity, I refer only to two very specific passages:

a) After a lengthy and detailed description of how welcome Florentin feels in the Schwarzenberg family, D. Schlegel writes:

Here, for the first time, Florentin observed the children's true, deep love for their parents, and the parents' respect for their children's rights. *No one denied their own self to please the other*; everything existed side by side in perfect harmony.³⁵

After Florentin's address to his horse, it is difficult to imagine these lines were written candidly. At the very least the negative sentence "no one denied their own self to please the other" is strange. It introduces an inevitable doubt. Was it or was it not all harmonious and idyllic? Could it be that some thought it was, while others were only pretending? Or is the point to question whether this type of idyllic harmony is *necessarily* based on some people pretending they are not aware about the fact that others are engaging in self-denial in order to please them?

³⁵ My italics. "Hier zum erstenmal bemerkte Florentin die wahre innige Liebe der Kinder zu den Eltern, und die Achtung der Eltern für die Rechte ihrer Kinder. *Keiner verleugnete sich selbst, um dem andern zu gefallen*, es bestand alles vollkommen gut nebeneinander" (D. Schlegel, *Florentin*, 16).

b) A few pages after this, Florentin has a conversation with Eleonora and the count that Florentin himself finds strange.

‘Believe me,’ said Eleonore, ‘the man who is speaking so belligerently and wildly right now has to shoulder quite a few domestic worries.’ – ‘It certainly befits a man,’ the Count replied, ‘to be the helper of a woman who dares to be her husband’s companion in the field.’ – ‘How so? May I ask?’ asked Florentin. – ‘Nothing, nothing,’ cried the Countess, ‘do not listen to him.’ [...] ³⁶

In this example the reader is left again as clueless as Florentin. Could it be true that the count helps the countess with the household? – And why is it relevant for the novel? And if it is, why is it left aside? As readers we cannot but continue reading. But we cannot do it in the same way; we cannot pretend that we have not read these lines. All we can do is ask ourselves: what is going on?

3. Florentin and Eduard try to get Juliane drunk

There is a passage in which Juliane, Eduard and Florentin are going for a day-trip. (They wanted to go away for a few days, but Juliane’s parents did not think this was appropriate, which comes across as them being overly protective). After a long walk they decide to take a rest and sit on a blanket. They started joking and singing and took out some wine: the men became livelier and they wanted to convince Juliane to drink the wine but this time “without mixing it with water.” Juliane however did not want this. Then:

The high spirits and mounting recklessness [*Mutwille*] ³⁷ of the two men began to frighten her; she now deemed their undertaking unmeasured [*unbesonnen*] and extraordinarily daring. In her fear, the two men seemed like utter strangers to her; she was terrified at being so completely at their mercy. For a moment, she could not even recall the nature of her relationship with them; she trembled and turned pale. Eduard noticed her fear. ‘What do you fear, lovely angel? You are with me, you are mine!’ He embraced her somewhat impulsively. ‘Let me go, Eduard!’ she cried, twisting out of his arms. ‘Not that tone... Do not speak to me

³⁶ “‘Glauben Sie nur’, sagte Eleonore, ‘der Mann, der jetzt eben so kriegerisch und wild spricht, muß manche häusliche Sorge übernehmen.’ – ‘Es geziemt dem Manne allerdings’, erwiderte der Graf, ‘der Gehülfe einer Frau zu sein, die im Felde die Gefährtin ihres Mannes zu sein wagt.’ – ‘Wie das? darf ich erfahren?’ fragte Florentin. – ‘Nichts, nichts’, rief die Gräfin, ‘hören Sie nicht auf ihn! [...]’” D. Schlegel, *Florentin*, 19.

³⁷ This is a term that F. Schlegel uses positively as “besonnener Mutwille” to describe the use of parabasis, as we saw earlier. See footnote 15.

at all right now; your words only heighten my fear... I am so frightened...
I do not know why' —.³⁸

What is most striking about this passage is the way in which it conveys the sense of fear (unlike for instance Voltaire's *Candide*, where the numerous atrocities suffered by him and other characters are so overly exaggerated that it all comes across as quite unreal and fictive). Juliane is genuinely terrified, and she is as surprised as the reader. It is totally unexpected, and yet, arguably quite a plausible scene, but a scene that had / has hardly been narrated before, especially not from this perspective and with this frankness. The scene is resolved as Florentin sings a song and then proceeds to tell his story, as he had promised to do. But the novel does not tell us how to make sense of this scene.

To be sure, my selection has not been random; I have selected passages that are especially significant if they are read under a feminist lens. What these passages have in common (and there are plenty more) is that in a rather inconspicuous way, they give voice and place to experiences that so often in reality and literature remain unsaid and unknown. These 'disruptions' bring forth perspectives that on the whole had remained silenced. It is the perspective of the women, the mothers, the sisters, the daughters, lovers, who had to navigate a world narrated by men, and in whose narratives they appeared only partially; unreal. To such an extent that these disruptions work as reality checks, as they unmask the falsity or disingenuity of those hegemonic narratives. And still, D. Schlegel does not seem to explicitly (want to) give these moments any special protagonism. They are not embedded in any meta-explanation, philosophical theory or monologue. They come and go as we continue reading, searching for the 'main' narrative. They don't seem to have any consequences either. It is almost as if they had not been said. But they linger in the background. And somehow along the way something changes, something cracks open. Somehow along the way it is no longer possible to go back to what Röttgers calls the "idealized dreams" and "mythical self-portraits",³⁹ that we may find in Novalis' *Heinrich von*

³⁸ "Die Ausgelassenheit und der steigende Mutwille der beiden fing an sie zu ängstigen, sie fand jetzt ihr Unternehmen unbesonnen und riesenhaft kühn; die beiden Männer kamen ihr in ihrer Angst ganz fremd vor, sie erschrak davor, so ganz ihnen überlassen zu sein; sie konnte sich einen Augenblick lang gar nicht des Verhältnisses erinnern, in dem sie mit ihnen stand, sie bebte, ward blaß. – Eduard bemerkte ihre Angst. 'Was fürchtest du holder Engel! Du bist bei mir, bist mein', er umarmte sie mit einigem Ungestüm. – 'Lassen Sie mich, Eduard!' rief sie, sich aus seinen Armen windend; 'nicht diese Sprache ... Sprechen Sie jetzt gar nicht zu mir, Ihre Worte vergrößern meine Furcht ... ich bin so erschreckt ... ich weiß nicht warum?'" D. Schlegel, *Florentin*, 40.

³⁹ Röttgers, "Symphilosophieren," 91.

Offerdingen or Schlegel's *Lucinde*. To put it differently: these passages demand to be explained, demand to be understood. These feelings and ideas demand to be thematized.

One of the purposes of my paper was to understand the ways in which a text such as *Florentin* may help us redefine or re-imagine what symphilosophy really is. I hope to have showed that what *Florentin* tells us in any case is that the story of symphilosophy has not reached its end yet; that there are still many conversations and exchanges to be had, many theoretical points hidden in between the lines that need to be articulated. And, finally, that by engaging in this process we may not only be gaining a better understanding of what Jena Romanticism was really about, but also in some way participating in the very practice of *symphilosophieren*.

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