# SCHLEGEL'S "DIALOGUE ON POETRY" AND PLATO'S "SYMPOSIUM"

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*In his reflection on poetry, Friedrich Schlegel, the founder of early German Romanticism, used philosophical ideas and concepts from the very beginning. On the other hand, for the purpose of reflecting on poetry, in the literary periodical* Athenäum *he soon introduced the literature-like genre of the fragment instead of the usual form of the treatise. His essay "Dialogue on Poetry" (1800), however, is written in the form of a dialogue whose entire staging – that is, speeches on certain themes followed by discussions about them among a selected group of persons – is reminiscent of Plato's Symposium (ca. 380 BC). Yet Plato's Symposium is a talk on the Beautiful, whereas Schlegel's "Dialogue" is a symposium on poetry. This is also where a significant difference lies between the two dialogues from the point of view of intellectual history.*

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The invitation to the colloquium "on the dialogue of literature and theory" opens up the history and genres of this dialogue from Romanticism to the present as a first field of work. As the first in this field – or, better put, midfield – a famous name is mentioned (or so it appears): Friedrich Schlegel. The title of the colloquium and its introductory words thus lead us to reflect on the creative response of literature to theoretical "ideas and concepts," as well as on theory's reaching for literary representational modes in the last two hundred years; that is, on the action from the field of theory that goes along the border and crosses into the field of literature, and the other way around. It is a reciprocal action in which the role of pioneer was presumably played by the younger of the Schlegel brothers.

However, it goes without saying that theory circumscribes the field of literature and says what literature is, and not the other way around.

Therefore, the first question that arises is: what actually is theory? Or, more accurately: from which concept of theory did Schlegel proceed, being himself one of the first writers on literature, if not the very first, who in early Romanticism, at the beginning of modern (self)understanding of literature, crossed the border of theory towards literature and poetry, respectively?

He proceeded from a handed-down concept, and this concept overlaps with the concept of modern science.

In this conceptual acceptation, theory is *a whole of assertions that set a certain objective field and represent its object within it*, re-presentation being the basic mode of treatment of this object. As a whole of coherent, ordered assertions, it is simultaneously *a system*. Theory is thus not a single vision, but a continual seeing, a being-seen of the object preserved in a system of coherent assertions – a knowledge of it. The theory of literature, for example, objectifies, posits literature as the object of its treatment in the field of language, and is in this way a permanent knowledge of the object "literature" that belongs to modern science, while this is, because its regions and objects of treatment are multiplying, a constantly growing totality of such "regional" theories and, as such, "a theory of the real," as Martin Heidegger defined it (Heidegger 46 ff.).

Schlegel, however, departed somewhat from the inherited concept of theory at the very beginning of his career in literary theory. Facing the first offshoots of historicism in the 18th century, he realized that a new view of theory was needed, and found a way of looking that sees theory differently and, owing to this changed vision of theory, also looks at its object differently. This way of looking proceeds from a reflected, turned-towards-itself vision that came to see its own situatedness in time or history, and thus from a newly acquired awareness of this situatedness and its indispensability in the conception of theory. From now on, the object of theory would no longer be one and the same for all time, but time and again an object within a respective historical horizon drawn around it by a historical view. The object becomes *that which shows and how it shows itself, which is therefore visible within the horizon of historical time*, that is, in its historical shapes, although Schlegel – and I shall stress this immediately – also preserved an interest in the unshowable.

We have nearly forgotten that history – that is, the historiography of certain national, in particular Romance literatures, such as Italian, Spanish, Portuguese and Provençal – began with the studies of the brothers August Wilhelm and Friedrich Schlegel, and that, as far as Classical literature is concerned, the two of them transferred the value stress from Roman literature, on which it lay in the Renaissance and in Classicism, to Greek literature. The two also introduced the distinction between Classical (ancient) and Romantic (modern) literature, although today we are no longer aware that this distinction is actually the origin of our awareness of literary modernity. All this is the work of their pioneering historical consciousness, yet the theoretical in Friedrich Schlegel is far from being in complete opposition to the historical. On the contrary: *the conceptual substratum of theory is preserved in Schlegel's concept of the system*.

At first – that is, between 1793 and 1795 – the young Schlegel was still reflecting on "the possibility of an objective system of practical and theoretical esthetic sciences" (KFSA 1, 358).[1] The systemizing or, more accurately, the theoretical-systemic conception of Schlegel's esthetics and poetics is embodied in drafts from 1795, which were preserved in his papers under the title "On Beauty in Poetic Art" ("Von der Schönheit in der Dichtkunst"), and which he metonymically named "the poetic Euclides" (cf. Behler 97), using the name of this great systemizer of antique geometry that, through his reshaping, became a model of the scientific system. In these drafts the establishment of "the true concept of the beautiful" (= esthetics) comes first. It is followed by "a theory of judging the beautiful" (= criticism) and "a doctrine of art genres" (= technique), as well as poetics as a theory or doctrine "of the peculiar character of poetry" and its kinds – dramatic, lyric and epic, etc. – which comes last (cf. KFSA 16, 5). Schlegel, however, did not finish his drafts, but changed his view of theory and tried to arrive at a theory of poetry through its history. He therefore began to study the history of Greek poetry and, in his letters to Novalis and his brother August Wilhelm in 1794, wrote nearly the same: "The history of Greek poetic art [of Greek poetry] is the [complete] natural history of the beautiful and of art."[2] Further on in his letter to Novalis he adds that we have been "without a true theory of the beautiful" until now, and in the letter to his brother he remarks "that is why my work is – esthetics" (KFSA 23, 204).

Hence, in Schlegel's eyes it would be an illusion for theory to attempt to fix its object – art or poetry, poetry as a succus of art – outside its becoming in history, in abstract timelessness: *the only possible theory of poetry* (and of art or the spiritual in general) *is its history*, a contemplation of its historical change. It should, however, be an integral contemplation that grasps the becoming of its object from a certain point of view – that is, from our "now" to which the becoming has come – and expresses it in its historical connections: a project that Schlegel himself ironically named, with a "no" to theory that is simultaneously a "yes," "the historical system" (cf. Behler 116). Also belonging to the circle of this project are the conceptions of great esthetics from the Romantic period, particularly Hegel's and Schelling's esthetics which are no longer "a theoretical system."

After abandoning his work on the theoretical system or pure theory – that is, theory irrespective of history – Schlegel turned his working attention from the theory of the beautiful to the history of poetry, *from the beautiful as such to the concrete shaping of the beautiful in poetry*, that is, in Greek poetry. His essay entitled "On the Study of Greek Poetry" ("Über das Studium der griechischen Poesie"), which he wrote in 1795 and which, after being published two years later, made him famous, introduces such a "historical system," a series of oppositions developed between Greek and modern poetry. To say only what is most relevant: for a newly opened historical view, Greek poetry is a presentation that is beautiful in itself, hence a beautiful presentation of that which already shows itself first of all, a demonstration of the phenomenal, the sensible, or the finite, whereas modern poetry is not concerned with the beautiful anymore, but is driven by

the interest in *das Interessante*, in what is "full of interest" and rouses the interest: the infinite.

At this point, however, I would like to say a little more about another of Schlegel's essays, entitled "Dialogue on Poetry" ("Gespräch über die Poesie") from 1800. This essay is a *dialogue*. Schlegel had already come close to the literary representational mode in his literature-like fragments, which were published in the literary periodical *Athenäum* between 1798 and 1800, but with this dialogue he actually moved away from the scientific, or theoretical, treatise and its monological asserting and proving of assertions. In general, the dialogue is mimetic; it provides no speech about a chosen subject that would not have been placed within the action, but moves – not only, but also – in the element of presentation, sharing this element with mimetic, presentational arts such as poetry or painting. The dialogue is already like this in Plato. It presents a talk as a dramatic event, as well as the characters of those that take part in it.

Plato is not the only philosopher that wrote dialogues, yet he is the only one among them that wrote only dialogues, and Schlegel read all of them in the original Greek when he was sixteen. It is therefore not surprising that Schlegel's "Dialogue" is similar to Plato's "Symposium" with regard to both composition and speech structure.

Written in about 380 BC, "Symposium" happens to be framed within a narrative, as are some of Plato's other dialogues. In this case, the narrative is a report on a symposium organized at a concrete event, a victory won by Agathon's tragedy, and "Symposium" is actually framed by it not only once, but twice. It is, in turn, particular in that it mostly does not take place as a talk, as an intellectually intense exchange of words in which Socrates usually questions his co-speaker, but is really structured like a symposium – a collection of speeches on a selected theme. Likewise, Schlegel's dialogue is also framed by an introductory consideration and a report on a fictional group of friends and their decision to talk, whereas the main texture of the dialogue is again made up of speeches, each of which is bordered by a discussion among the members of the symposium group on a selected current theme in connection with the poetry treated by each of them.

Furthermore, the authorial anonymity of Platonic dialogue is preserved in Schlegel's dialogue. In the introduction we read: "The present talk should set completely different views against one other, each of which can show the infinite spirit of poetry in a new light from its own point of view" (Schlegel, "Gespräch" 281). Different interpretations attempted to recognize the opinions of Schlegel's contemporaries in the views of the speakers, but without success. This is why all statements return to the author of the dialogue, who nevertheless remains without a clearly distinguishable voice in a multitude of voices, *an author without an authorized text*. It would be best to simply say: in Schlegel, as in Plato, there is a talking about this and that. So, by choosing the dialogue and using the possibilities of dialogizing, Schlegel has abandoned the monological theoretical manner of speaking and the ordinary theoretical treatment in general: in his dialogue *he does not posit poetry as an object, but sets different views of it against one*

*another* and in this way, by many-sighted or many-voiced approximation, removes poetry itself from objectification.

Yet, on the other hand, is there a talking about this or that in Plato? Does theory exist in Plato? Is it possible to separate theory from the many-voiced texture of Platonic dialogue, a systematically organized knowledge that can also be taught to others, a doctrine? A theory of ideas, perhaps, that would be the nucleus of Plato's idealism?

At this point I would like to refer to Gorazd Kocijančič, who published his – and indeed the very first – complete translation of Plato's works into Slovene in 2004. One of the basic findings that he repeats in his accompanying incentives to the reading of Plato's dialogues is that Plato's dialogically structured thought cannot be reduced to any monological thesis or doctrine, not even to the theory of ideas.

In the philosophical talk staged by Platonic dialogues, the way to the goal is not walked through to the end; knowledge is not reached. Socratic dialectics is the guiding of a co-speaker to the point where he becomes aware of his ignorance, which Socrates, on the other hand, is aware of all the time. The sense of the famous saying "I know that I know nothing" is not that Socrates, the wisest among men of his time, was ignorant about things within the reach of human knowledge, but that knowledge of what really exists is not possible. Socratic dialectics thus guides the co-speaker along the paths of thought so as to bring him to *aporía*, to "waylessness" and/or to "embarrassment" – that is, to unknowingness with no way out. The dialogue paves the way of thought to what is Plato's concern, yet this is not reachable by knowledge, nor is the development of thought in one dialogue in accordance with the development of thought in another.

Nonetheless, the dialogue is a way. Kocijančič says: "Here we can only prepare the way. The dialogue is therefore a guiding along the way, step by step, to the goal that is behind Socrates' unknowingness…" (Kocijančič, "Platonova filozofija" 808). It is *a preparing of the way without a goal, an indicating of the unknowable goal itself*. And Socratic dialectics is nevertheless a majeutics, a midwifery that helps to give birth to what is immortal in man (i.e., his soul), for that which surpasses him as a mortal being – although what is born can also be stillborn. Namely, what dialectics prepares us for, though does not carry us to, can never be reached without a radical caesura, but with a leap in *exaíphnes*, in a certain "suddenly," which is a temporal ecstasy or ec-stasy out of time. *With a seeing which, despite being the seeing of reason, is nevertheless not discursive.*

Heidegger lays the stress on the pulling-out-move of modern science as "a theory of the real," on its "positing" intervention in the object: theory pulls out a certain entity and sets it in an object by giving the entity to itself in *Vor-stellung*, in its own re-presentation. In his opinion, it is no coincidence that the Latin word *contemplatio*, which is a translation of *theoría* from Greek, was translated into German as *Betrachtung* 'contemplation' as early as the Middle Ages, yet etymologically stems from the Latin word *tractare* 'to treat' 'to deal with' (cf. Heidegger 55–56). As contemplation, theory is already a dealing with. In Plato, however, *theoría* is *a pure, non-discursive, nontreating looking: a seeing.*

Plato's "theory" is therefore by no means a contemplative dealing with the real, with this or that phenomenon, but a seeing of that other that does not show itself; which, then, does not show itself to the mortal eye. It is a seeing of eide; that is, of ideas or of "the seenness," as the word *idéa* is translated by Kocijančič, or of what gives itself to the seeing and makes it possible at all, because it is present in it precisely as the seen. And as a culmination of philosophical life that breaks the horizon of time in an ecstatic "suddenly," it is prepared, through a guiding to waylessness, by dialectics. Dialectics is thus a preparation for the ascent of man's soul beyond that which shows itself to the bodily eye, and is only for (this) appearance's sake, to what becomes visible to the highest in the soul itself, to the eye of reason. To what really is. To what is only "a premonition of thought" and cannot be spoken of discursively, but still needs to be spoken of.

Thus even Socrates cannot properly formulate what Plato's true concern is in philosophic-conceptual terms, because it resists formulation insofar as it exists only in the nondiscursive receiving of reason. Certainly, Plato pleads as much as he can for the philosophical way of life that Socrates is embodying and is nothing but an uncompromising "living-towards" the transcendent, yet he agrees only with the direction of Socrates' formulating and not necessarily with the formulated itself.

As already observed, in Platonic dialogues, a thought about the same thing can develop differently: it is not only the philosopher that is capable of *theoría*, but, in another constellation of thought, also the artist, who according to modern understanding is nothing but an artisan.[3]

As a nondiscursive seeing, *theoría* in Plato is before *poíesis*, before "creating," if this is broadly understood to mean a bringing from non-being to being – before the artistic creating as well. Every art is poietical, that is, creative in the broader sense, and certain arts receive an instruction immediately from the seen in seeing itself, informing it in the element of logos. In the narrower sense, however, *poíesis* is poetry. In Plato, first of all, this can be an art, the creating of which is a production of verses ("Symposium" 205b–c); second, an art that is not a bringing from non-being to being through eidos or an idea that can be seen by *theoría*, as is tablemaking or chairmaking, but through *eikón*, an external image or appearance of a created thing, such as painting ("The Republic" 596b–602c); and third, a divinely inspired and, therefore, *maniké*, "raving" or raved-by-god art ("Phaedrus" 245a). The third possibility is the best for poetry, but it is Socrates that says, precisely in "Phaedrus," that poetry cannot present what the soul sees in the super-heavenly place (247c): "The place beyond heaven [*Hos dè hyperouránios tópos*] – none of our earthly poets has ever sung or ever will sing its praises enough" (Plato 525).[4]

Whereas Plato has Socrates speak about the soul's seeing the super-heavenly place in a way that Socrates simultaneously renounces this seeing to the poet, he himself actually articulates *the philosophical myth*. The thought in the background, which is also indicated in some of Plato's other dialogues, is that only the seeing of a philosopher can deliver itself from the stream of time and, in timelessness, join the seeing of a not-yet-embod-

ied soul in eternity, for constant "theory" can only be the seeing of a soul before birth. Yet this seeing – a soul's seeing of the super-heavenly place, as the sphere of eide is called here – is no longer shaped by the poetic, but by Plato's own myth. Or, more accurately: *Plato's myth is not the myth of a poet, but it is nevertheless poetic*. Namely, in presenting only "the circumstances" of a soul's seeing in the pre-birth sphere, it does not discursify it. The philosophical *mýthos* thus shows itself as a special *lógos*, a risky, empirically uncovered, creative word about the insensible existence of the soul.

Yet the sphere of eide is not the highest that is strived for by the soul in its seeing. This is still beyond the sphere of eide, "beyond the essence [*epékeina tês ousías*]" ("The Republic" 509b),[5] beyond the whole of eide as the eternal paradigms of things. Its name is The One in "Parmenides," the idea of Good or the Good in "The Republic," and the Beautiful in "Symposium."

On the whole, "Symposium" is a collection of praises to eros, and yet, in the culmination of thought reached in Socrates' speech, it becomes a speech on the Beautiful. This speech has an additional framework, because here Socrates primarily resumes his talk with a priestess, Diotima. Epitomizing Diotima's words, he does not, however, identify eros with the beautiful as did the speakers before him, but defines it as precisely that which lacks the beautiful (and thus also the good), and is consequently merely striving for it. Eros is not what is loved, but that which loves – a love of the beautiful. Even more, as a wish for the beautiful, it becomes *a wish for the Beautiful*: after waking up alongside a beautiful body, eros ascends from it to beautiful bodies, and from these to beautiful works and, again, from these to beautiful doctrines, until it finally reaches the Beautiful itself. *The ascent of a wish thus ultimately becomes a way of "theory,"* a reaching out towards "the wide ocean of the Beautiful "the wide ocean of the Beautiful" [*tò polù pélagos tetramménos toû kaloû*] (210d).[6] A seeing of the Beautiful: the Good: the One.

Poetry is therefore less than theory: for Plato *theoría* is an act of receiving the self-revealing Beautiful, but poetry is not the privileged place of its revelation.

Precisely here, in the realm of the relation between the transcendent "object" of a platonically envisioned theory and poetry, lies the big difference between Plato's and Schlegel's dialogue from the point of view of *Geistesgeschichte*: Plato's "Symposium" is essentially a dialogue on the Beautiful, whereas Schlegel's "Dialogue" is a symposium on poetry. What does this mean – a dialogue on poetry instead of on the Beautiful?

To answer this question, we must return not only to Schlegel's understanding of theory, but, first of all, to his understanding of poetry as developed in his "Study."

Schlegel's historical view does not orient itself according to the ecstatic "suddenly" of Platonic seeing, but, proceeding from its own situatedness in time, according to the historical horizontal instead of the vertical that leads out of history. For Schlegel, theory is still knowledge, a being-seen of the historically seeable preserved in coherent assertions. Yet, as already

observed, in his "Study" he discovers that, in contrast to Greek poetry, modern poetry has an interest in the unshowable, and consequently, though proceeding from the handed-down modern concept of theory, he himself retains an interest in that which in Plato is "an object" of *theoría* – that is, which is seeable only to the eye of the soul, provided its dialectical training and ecstatic ascent have taken place.

According to Schlegel, the source of Greek poetry is a myth, and its spring, the place where it sprang up for the first time, was Homer. Homer was the first to form the myth poetically, and so his two poems were "the most beautiful blossom of the most sensible age of art" (Schlegel, "Über das Studium" 179), an age in which nothing that does not already show itself (or present itself, or appear) has a place in art or poetry. However, when Schlegel comes to Sophocles – who, in his opinion, surpassed even Homer and everyone else in Greek poetry in the mastery of presentation – he says:

> Of course he does not mix in his presentation anything *that cannot be presented* [*nicht dargestellt werden*]*, that cannot appear* [*nicht erscheinen kann*]. […] The kingdom of God lies beyond the esthetic horizon, being only an empty shadow without spirit and power in the world of phenomena. And, indeed, the poet, who […] thinks he can withdraw with a scanty satisfaction that makes possible a view of punished evilness, or *by merely a hint to the other world*, proves the smallest possible measure of artistic wisdom. (169–170; emphasis V. S.)

Hence, all that Greek poetry needs for its presentation presents itself in the esthetic, sensible horizon. Greek poetry finds all of this in "the world of phenomena," in nature, which simultaneously means the sensible world and, as Schlegel says in accordance with contemporary philosophical vocabulary, "finite reality" (89). It is therefore always only the finite without the infinite that is presented in Greek poetry. However, the old, Greek understanding of *phýsis* as "emerging" – that is, an emerging into a showing-of-itself, along with the emerged – shines through Schlegel's connecting of nature with the presenting or showing. His conclusion that "the tendency towards infinite reality came into being due to *the loss of finite reality* and the shakenness of the perfect form" (53; emphasis V. S.) can thus be understood to mean that which became interesting for modern poetry through this loss was *the unshowable*. On the other hand, because an interest in the unshowable can only be realized in a presentation uniting the supersensible with the sensible or, to use the concepts of philosophical metaphysics, the infinite with the finite (i.e., *the unshowable with the showable*), Schlegel also critically touches on the deficient presentation of poetry after Classical antiquity, which emerged within the framework of Christian tradition, inasmuch as this poetry indicates the unshowable "by merely a hint to the other world," without spreading out graphic imagery. Namely, by this hint to "the kingdom of God" it becomes a term of New Testament "metaphysics" in this context, designating the invisible world, which is both opposite and superior to the world of phenomena.

However, the future realization of interest in the unshowable is essentially discussed in the "Dialogue."

In this essay, the emphasis lies on the poetic presentation of the unshowable, on such presentation as being the task of contemporary poetry. Here the dialogue is carried out by six fictional speakers, four of whom have long speeches. The theme of the third speech is the novel as the main contemporary poetic genre, whereas the theme of the fourth speech is the style of Goethe's works. Yet it is the second speech, that of Ludoviko, that stands out among them. Its theme is poetry now, or the task of poetry, and it is introduced by the first speech through the thematization of poetic epochs, which, until now, followed one another sensibly.

Ludoviko's speech bears the title "Speech on Mythology" because it is the task of poetry now, in this epoch, to form mythology, *the presentation of the unshowable in a new mythology*. At the beginning, Ludoviko says:

> I claim that our poetry lacks a center such as mythology was for the old, and all the essential elements in which poetry falls behind that of antiquity can be summed up in the words: We have no mythology. Yet, I add, we are very close to getting it, or it is time to begin seriously endeavoring jointly to get it… (Schlegel, "Gespräch" 301)

In Ludoviko's words, the new mythology will come along "a completely opposite path" to that of the old mythology, which was "the first blossom of a youthful fantasy" (158). It cannot come along the natural path anymore, because "the mythology of newcomers [*der Neueren*] has lost the immediateness of the sensible," as the need for the new mythology is meaningfully (with a hint at Schlegel's word about "the loss of finite reality" in his "Study") substantiated by Heinz Gockel (Gockel 132).

This short allusive formulation of the novelty of the poetic and of the human condition in general brings before our eyes the context of contemporary philosophy. In Schlegel's eyes, *the loss of immediateness of the sensible* was clearly demonstrated by Kant's critical philosophy, a discussion of man's reason, the task of which was to discern the abilities of reason, the boundaries of these abilities, and the realms of their validity. Namely, in his pre-critical period, Kant already renounced the Platonic "seeing reason" (*anschauende Vernunft*) and took sensible seeing (*sinnliche Anschauung*) as the foundation of every knowing, *yet to the point of excluding the possibility that, in this seeing, a thing would be given as it is, in its immediate in-itselfness.* As he states in his first critique, we can know about a thing only that which we ourselves have put into it, which means that, as an object of our knowledge, the thing is our own preparation and that this object is, precisely in its knowability, each time built up in a human cognitive apparatus. And since our cognitive apparatus creates things as knowable objects in our representation, the objectivity of the object is always mediated by the subjectivity of the subject.

Against the background of a lost immediacy of the sensible, however, we must also understand Ludoviko's words that follow as an answer to the question where the new mythology will come from. In contrast to the

old mythology, which came from nature, the new mythology, as Ludoviko states, has to "develop from the most profound depths of the mind; it has to be the most artistic work of art [*das künstlichste aller Kunstwerke*], for it has to contain all the others" (Schlegel, "Gespräch" 301). The new mythology thus has to develop and be *the most artistic and/or the most artificial* – and, consequently, the most unnatural, the most spiritual work of art, that which is most poetic, the succus of the poetic in the poetic work itself. However, it can develop only with the help of the new philosophy, inasmuch as this gives a hint for its development from the mind. "Idealism," Ludoviko assures, is a "firm point," out of which "a big revolution" will come (302), and, speaking of this point, probably aims at Fichte's philosophy, because it was precisely Fichte that, as Schlegel says already in his "Study," discovered "the foundation of critical philosophy" (Schlegel, "Über das Studium" 186) – that is, the foundation of Kantian philosophy on which German idealism later began to build. Fichte was the first to broach the fundamental question of German idealism, the question of what comes before the existence of realms in which the functioning of reason is being applied in Kant. That is, the question of how they come into being; namely, the self-consciousness of man that alone makes possible the planned application of reason for the purpose of knowledge, and, on the other hand, a world that makes possible the functioning of reason to be applied to anything at all.

The foundation of Kantian critical philosophy is Fichte's thesis, according to which the absolute I posits the non-I, the world, by his *Tathandlung* – a fact-act, an act in the emphatic sense of the word that is, for every single, relative I that emerges through it, already a fact. The positing of the non-I is a necessary act of the I by which the I acquires self-consciousness. For the I can grasp and comprehend itself by means of concepts only if it posits the non-I in front of itself; it will then acquire self-assurance only if it limits itself with the non-I – although when self-consciousness awakens it loses absoluteness.

In Schlegel's eyes, the positing of the world by I, a thetic act of the I-subject having the status of a fundamental thesis in Fichte's doctrine of science, is likely to be *a poetic one* in the broad sense of the word: *only then can that which shows itself be presented to the I as different from it*, as its mirror counterpart and, as such, as a guaranteeing instance of its identity. However, for Schlegel poetry in the narrower sense is a presentation of the showable and the unshowable, of one without the other or of one along with the other. Yet in the historically relevant sense, in the sense of high Romantic poetry, it is by all means a presentation of the unshowable, the unshowable in the showable – and through the new mythology at that.

According to Ludoviko, the source of this mythology, then, will be Idealism, "a firm point" in "the most profound depths of the mind," a starting-point for the revolution of the spirit in which the main role will be played by poetry. So the new mythology will not be for modern poetry what the old mythology was for Greek poetry – a gift, or a work, of nature. It will not, in natural succession, simply replace the old one, because Idealism, as its source instead of nature, will indeed be *a source of the nov-*

*elty of mythology itself*. It therefore has to spring up – not as a reproduction of the showable, but *as a (re)production of the unshowable* – "from the creative power of subjectivity," says Manfred Frank, one of the great connoisseurs of philosophy and literature in the Romantic period (Frank, *Der kommende Gott* 206). Because no new mythology can be expected from nature, poets must now begin drawing from their own subjectivity and create the mythology themselves – a mythology that, in view of the wideness of encompassed stuff, will be a sort of universal mythology, an anthology of mythologies until now, not only of Classical, but also Oriental; for example, India's mythology.

However, the main role in the genesis of the new mythology will be played by the *imagination*. For, as Ludoviko announces, the new mythology will be a creation of the imagination along with a simultaneous *Aufhebung*, a cancellation or temporary "suspension of reason" (Bowie 54):

> For this is the beginning of all poetry that it cancels the course and the laws of reasonably thinking reason [*den Gang und die Gesetze der vernünftig denkenden Vernunft aufzuheben*] and transfers us to the beautiful mess of fantasy, to the original chaos of human nature, for which I have not yet found a more beautiful symbol than a varied swarming of old gods. (Schlegel, "Gespräch" 305)

The new mythology will be a connective making of images out of various mythologies, generating from the mind with the active help of the imagination and the inactiveness of reason, and, as a great simile made up of a story and an image, it will let us see "what otherwise always runs away before the consciousness" (305) – the preconscious that, together with consciousness, is one of the characteristic oppositions alongside the general and the individual, the ideal and the real, or the infinite and finite, through which idealistic thought moves.

The stress in the "Dialogue," then, is on the *imaginative* presentation of the unshowable, where every rational, discursive moment is turned off, yet in such a way that *also watching or seeing is sprung over* while being enabled by the seen itself, and *the making of images takes precedence over it*. As *Einbildungskraft*, as a "power" or "ability" (*Kraft*) of "making images" (*Ein-bilden*), the imagination thus becomes a unique, subjective power that, by being able to shape a new mythology and present the unpresented, will enact the revolution of the spirit prepared by the new idealistic philosophy. It is precisely in this high evaluation of the imagination that Schlegel's Romantic subjectivism so alien to Plato culminates, in spite of his Platonistic interest in the unshowable.

Let me return to the text. Ludoviko's speech is followed by a talk in which Ludoviko himself speaks again, saying that poetry is, given the manner in which it refers to the infinite or the unshowable, *an allegory*: "… all beauty is an allegory. And precisely because the supreme is unsayable, it can only be said allegorically" (308). The allegory is obviously a presentation that is beautiful in itself, but different from the beautiful presentation of Greek poetry spoken of by Schlegel in his "Study" in that it unites the

unsayable with the sayable, the unshowable with the showable. Or in the words of Manfred Frank, which concisely draw on the conceptuality of German idealism: "The allegory – to put it briefly – is a tendency towards the Absolute in the finite itself" (Frank, *Einführung* 291).[7]

Inasmuch as the Greek verb *allegoréo* means 'I speak, utter, in a different way', for Schlegel to speak allegorically means to say, to mean, to meaningfully hint at something else, to point to the infinite, to the Absolute, in the finite. The act of allegorical meaning is not identical to what it aims at, and its negativity "exists in a release effacing itself to itself as a *positivum*: that is, in a release of the view [*Freigabe des Blicks*] of that which is meant absolutely" (Frank 294). Because this act, then, effaces itself in a view, which the act itself has opened, there remains an image that is nothing but an image of the infinite in the finitude of language.

In this respect, the poetic allegory goes further than the philosophical concept. Schlegel explains this elsewhere by saying: "It goes to the gates of the supreme and satisfies itself by only indeterminately indicating the infinite, the divine, which cannot be designated or explained philosophically" (KFSA 12, 210). The poetic allegory comes closer to the supreme than the philosophical concept does, because the latter cannot grasp and determine it in any intervention. It comes close by coming "to the gates" leading into it, without stepping through the gates – *in indeterminate indication* that, although it is rationally undecipherable, nevertheless gives a rich image as far as graphicality is concerned, inasmuch as the indeterminate is in no way necessarily anything poor. In this way the allegory is the highest form of saying: "Every allegory means God, and of God we cannot speak otherwise than allegorically" (KFSA 18, 347).

Let me conclude. In Schlegel – provided that he proceeds from the modern concept of theory and given the loss of immediacy of the sensible, and provided also that he preserves a Platonic interest in the unshowable and elevates the imagination – a fundamentally different position of poetry is drawn in comparison to Plato.

It is the seeing of the supersensible that matters to Plato; the great consequence of his entire philosophy is nothing but a perfect seeing of the Beautiful beyond things, instead of only a partial mediation of the supersensible in the sensible. The sensible, which shares in the supersensible, can only be a support for the ascent of the soul towards the Beautiful, and the soul, in order to reach towards the Beautiful, has to turn away from the beauty of things and finally leave it behind. On the other hand, inasmuch as poetry (or art in general) always operates within the realm of esthesis, of esthetic, sensible mediation, it cannot be a privileged place for the revelation of the Beautiful. Artistic presentation is a presentation in the sensible, in stone or wood, colors, or in words, and is therefore never on the level of seeing what the image made in a philosophical myth is best suited to. In this seeing the soul ultimately experiences the Beautiful completely outside the sensible, in pure silence.

In Schlegel, on the contrary, poetry becomes a privileged place of presentation of the Absolute, of making its images in language (whereas the po-

etic presentation prevails as beautiful, the Absolute itself remains outside it). Namely, Schlegel – who criticized poetry made after Classical antiquity that, after losing contact with mythology, got along only with poor hints at the Absolute – conceptualizes contemporary poetry by orientating himself after the unmistakenly Platonistic interest in the unshowable, although his own Platonism is, of course, mediated through modern subjectivism.

In Schlegel's conception, poetry is thus not only a reproduction of the world of phenomena that, after Fichte, the I-subject posits with an original thetic act or with a second creation, so to say. Poetry is on the level of its time, and answers to the historical challenge of this time, only as it undertakes the presentation of the unshowable using the new mythology as a creation of the imagination. However, this mythology is neither a successor of the old mythology emerging as a gift of nature in its self-showing, nor a repetition of the thetic act of the I, inasmuch as, in its novelty, it is precisely a simile of the unshowable.

*In modern poetry, the unshowable shows itself only in the presentation* – and in no other way. This is why such a presentation is an extremely unusual monstration, a paradoxical re-presentation or after-presentation, an after-bringing-into-being. For in this case the "re-" does not indicate an afterwardness, no "being-after," inasmuch as the poetic presentation is essentially not a presentation of the phenomenal or of that which is present, yet at the same time indicates it, inasmuch as this presentation is *a presentation of that which is "present" differently or in its difference with the present*, beyond the rationally decipherable and conceptually expressible presence, because this, as the unshowable, would otherwise not be present in the realm of the sensible at all, remaining completely alien to us humans who are always on the way to this realm and wandering within it.

Precisely the fact that poetry somehow mediates what is in itself unmediateable, or cannot be mediated otherwise than in this way, elevates it to the high position given to it in Schlegel's "Dialogue." This dialogue is therefore one of the most relevant expressions of Romantic "artistic religion," of a view that sees art in the position of, or even at a place of, religion. And because Schlegel's "Dialogue" indeed assigns to poetry the distinguished position of mediator of the Absolute, it is simultaneously one of the foundation stones of the future "dialogue between literature and theory" – only that poetry will perhaps become a mediator of the nonsensible instead of the supersensible in the counter-Platonic or counter-metaphysical poetics of the coming modern times.

Translated by Suzana Stančič

## NOTES

[1] Cf. also Behler 97.

[2] For the letter to Novalis, see KFSA 23, 204, and for the letter to August Wilhelm Schlegel, see KFSA 23., 188. I have cited a version of the formulation in the letter to his brother in parentheses. Cf. also Behler 98 and 94.

[3] Cf. Kocijančič, "Država" 1000: "The knowledge of eide that is elsewhere (also in 'The Republic') the matter of an extraordinary demanding dialectical ascent *of the philosopher*, Socrates here [in Book 10 of this dialogue – V. S.] paradoxically ascribes to every *artisan*."

[4] I am quoting the Greek original from the recent Italian bilingual edition of Plato's works (see "Bibliography).

[5] My translation. Cf. Plato 1130.

[6] My translation. Cf. Plato 493: "the great see of beauty."

[7] In the second edition of "Dialogue on Poetry," Schlegel replaced "allegory" with "symbol," taking into account the semantic differentiation of the concepts that asserted itself in the Romantic period. However, after all, it does not matter whether it is an "allegory" or "symbol" that stands here; in both cases it is about the imaginativeness of language, about making images of the unpresentable in language. Cf. Buchholz 207: "The controversial question of whether Schlegel had in mind "allegorical" or, as corrected in the later version, "symbolical forming" is of secondary importance in this connection because the moment *of an image* [*das* bildliche *Moment*] – that is, the tropical form of expression – is at stake in both cases.

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