

## Poetry and Philosophy: Four Pillars of Tradition – A Comparative Study of Discourses

### 1. Introduction: Hybrids and Exclusions

It is now a very well known truth that poetry and philosophy are not, and have never been, linked through a stable algorithm<sup>1</sup>. Any discussion of the two must, then, inevitably start with the historical and synchronic diversity of poetic output, on the one hand, and with the diversity of philosophical concepts, languages, and world models, on the other<sup>2</sup>. Other forms of poetry and philosophy have developed outside Europe and the Mediterranean world – in Islamic, Eastern, and Native American cultures – and must be also taken into account, with all their different rules and relations. It is also necessary to remember that poetry shapes its attitude towards philosophy by shaping its own relation to itself, while philosophy does a similar thing: it shapes its attitude towards poetry by shaping a relation to itself. In other words we can say that in poetry philosophy functions most often as a poetical argument, while in philosophy poetry works as a philosophical argument.

Hybrids of different kinds are quite frequent. Sometimes the alliance of a kind of literature and philosophy turns polemically against another kind of literature, and vice versa: one philosophy used literature to stand against another. The former situation can be seen in the novels and dramas of Jean-Paul Sartre (such as *Nausea* or *The Roads to Freedom*), which were an artistic reflection of existentialist philosophy, and at the same time the author was very critical about poetry because it “objectified the word” against the postulates of existentialism. These philosophical novels and dramas of Sartre’s repudiated poetry as anti-philosophical, Parnassian, plague-stricken. An example of the other

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<sup>1</sup> In this article the terms “poetry” and “literature” are at times used interchangeably. This results from the specific historical–philosophical context and from a need for generalization. Literature contains poetry, but the treatment of poetry as a synecdoche of literature can – in the face of current domination of prose and the novel – lead to some misunderstandings. Still, it is important to notice that some Romantics (Novalis, F. Schlegel) classified the novel as part of poetry.

<sup>2</sup> Wilhelm Dilthey, among others, brought to light the various character of philosophical practices especially in *Das Wesen der Philosophie* (*The Essence of Philosophy*, 1907), in which he claimed that philosophers do exist, unlike philosophy, and that from a historical point of view we may notice that philosophy exhibits an unusual variability of new tasks and cultural adaptations (39). Dilthey concludes, however, that the variable and diverse character of philosophy and philosophical content manifests also “a tendency towards universalization, an inclination for stability, a willingness to direct the mind to the whole world that was given to us”. He allows a “positivist requirement of universality of this knowledge” (40). It would be difficult, of course, to trace similar tendencies in poetry.

hybrid is, for instance, the work of Søren Kierkegaard, who wanted to explore Hegel's philosophy and style by putting it to work in fictional discourses, and frequently explained his own philosophical concepts by referring to literature. Nietzsche did a similar thing in relation to metaphysics. Kierkegaard's case, however, is more complicated, because the author juxtaposed poetry and philosophy with the discourse of religion as a supreme instance. The opposition of poetry and philosophy was in a number of ways related to aestheticism and religion.

We may also add that the words "poetry" and "philosophy" are, in principle, just useful simplifications. Poetry as such does not add poetic quality to anything, and philosophy is not born from nothing. Authorial signature is always present in both – poets write, philosophers philosophize. Even the symmetrical comparison we offer here is a stylistic figure. Each of the two disciplines is diverse and composed of numerous elements, movements, variants and opinions. Each enters its own relations with other phenomena, such as science, arts, religion, social ideology, politics, and culture. This coalescing ability seems inextinguishable. Although it is easy to believe that the connection between poetry and philosophy is steady and vital, the issue is not so clear. Such a link can be assumed to exist, can be justified theoretically, or supported by examples, but it is hardly ever possible practically and infallibly to prove that it works always and everywhere in the same manner. The fact that philosophy underlies poems by Norwid, Asnyk, Leśmian, Herbert, Różewicz, and Szymborska is quite evident. But does it also appear in the work of Przyboś and Czechowicz? A lot depends in this case on the way we understand philosophy and poetry. It is, of course, true that some criteria for what is philosophical (philosophy as science) completely exclude any possibility of philosophy's coexistence with poetry. It is however equally true that some concepts of poetry reject an ally with philosophy as unlawful and disgraceful.

It is the habits of particular disciplines that led to the situation in which poetry and philosophy were usually seen as disparate, opposite discourses. Poetry, according to this rule, was associated with imagery, emotional expression, suggestiveness, word play, allusion, ambiguity, concreteness, and sensuousness. Philosophy, in turn, was connected with abstract and conceptual thinking, logical rigor, regularity, and a tendency towards generalisation. Each respective discipline was self-centred, uniform, consistent, and hermetic. This was especially evident because of the different languages they used: literary symbols, metaphors, and poetic devices, on the one hand, and abstract, idiomatic terminology, on the other. But, in historical retrospect one may say that literary and philosophical discourses were very much dispersed. Sometimes they tended towards some particular points of focus in which they highlighted their difference and identity,

and on other occasions they rejected these points, entered dialogic exchange, and blended with each other. Therefore it is very easy to say what is characteristic of literariness, and what of philosophy, but all these essential aspects and “eternal ideas” usually point more to some connection with a particular time and cultural situation than to a potential for independence and self-sufficiency.

A change is required in the way we perceive the mutual relations of poetry and philosophy. Above all, one strategy seems particularly harmful – a strategy which highlights the literary in literature (as in formalist and structuralist studies) and the philosophical in philosophy (the real, flesh-and-blood philosophy which openly rejects all additives). This strategy focuses on the detection of identical elements in both disciplines, that is, of functions and rules that make poetry poetical and philosophy philosophical. But its effects limit our point of view by discriminating all ambiguous, hybrid, and marginal phenomena, and excluding it from the general view of things as “not fully poetical” or “not fully philosophical”, dependent, derivative, artificial admixtures.

An alternative to the strategy can be found in a specific tolerance of departures – from a previously described identity, from tradition and routine. This other attitude reacts positively to difference, opens up to new intellectual and artistic movements, explores new thematic problems, accepts cultural metamorphoses, as well as seeking a connection to other aspects of culture. If these rules are followed, philosophies could be seen in phenomena closer to poetry than to philosophical practice, and vice versa: kinds of poetry could be discovered that would manifest a greater affinity with philosophy than with other poetic works.

The abovementioned examples clearly show that relations between literature and philosophy are not, as it was claimed by Russian Formalists, American New Critics, and by phenomenologists, arranged according to a logical recognition of the identity of each discipline. Neither are they connected in an exclusive manner (“either this or that”). They function much more in discontinuous series, in which the identities of literature and philosophy become vague and unstable. This is the case with the works of Rousseau, Voltaire, Novalis, Kierkegaard, Norwid, Nietzsche, Leśmian, Sartre, and Szymborska. These two identities acquire, then, a hermaphroditic character; they are polycentric, polyvalent, and interchangeable. They can be read in two ways – as artistic creations of words and rhetorical artistry, as well as philosophical reflections on man and the world. Such mixtures indicate that, for example, the style and philosophy of Martin Heidegger have more in common with the German Romantic poetry of Novalis and Hölderlin than with the positivist philosophy of science of Rudolf Carnap or the *Wiener Kreis* (although all these are normally treated as valid philosophies). Some

poems of Norwid, Krasiński, or Słowacki, in turn, have more in common with philosophical movements of the first half of the nineteenth century than with the confessional lyric of the time.

Thus it seems that constantly repeated opinions about the opposite character of literature and philosophy, as well as equally frequent discussions of their affinities, have little to say about the rapidly changing reality of *écriture*, which resists both unifying and separating tendencies. Restrictive opinions reflect university administrative divisions rather than the historically valid state of affairs and the cultural positions of both kinds of writing. They miss the actual order of discourses, as Michel Foucault would put it. As a matter of fact, literature and philosophy renounce mutual exchanges of language, point of view, and themes only in some very isolating and extremely normative circumstances.

In this context, it is worth having a closer look at historical interpretations of the link. Views from before the twentieth century very often become either overt or covert points of departure, sources of patterns, as well as of new applications for old models. They can be also treated as mirrors in which postmodernity with some surprise discovers that so many scenes from the past are replayed, repeated, reused.

## **2. Plato's Banishment of Poets**

The history of the diverse connections of poetry and philosophy, or, to put it more precisely, the history of the theoretical interpretation of these, is long and interesting. Some basic observations of Plato and Aristotle still remain influential. Bearing in mind the fragmentariness of the Mediterranean-European context in which the analysis is conducted, we may assume these two figures started the discussion we are here concerned with. Since my aim here is not to offer a detailed historical survey, I will only sketch out the considerations of the two Greek philosophers.

There is no doubt that Plato's views drew attention to the relation of poetry and philosophy and to the creation of an antagonistic model of this relation. In his analysis of ancient aesthetics, Władysław Tatarkiewicz clearly proved that Plato did not want to – or was unable to – accept the autonomy and difference of Greek art, including the autonomy and power of poetry. Plato had an arbitrary opinion on Greek lyrics, because he based it on his own philosophy, with which poetry was clearly at odds (Tatarkiewicz 128). The utmost certainty about his opinions led him to a radical rejection of poetry in general.

This meant for Plato that no philosophical content can be created within poetry. This applied to poetic creativity and independence in contact with the other discipline.

Ideas and meanings were the domain of philosophers; poets were denied the right to aspire to any philosophical values. Plato, then, demanded poetry be subordinate to philosophy, which in his opinion was superior to all other forms of creation and intellectual activity. It was only philosophy, he claimed, that reached the ultimate, godly truths. Only philosophy offered perfect, valid knowledge. By offering to philosophy a monopoly of knowledge and cognition, he provided it with total authority and control over everything that was connected with the two. This applied also to practical activity. In this way Plato demanded that poetry be subordinate to philosophical knowledge and to a tribunal of philosophers. He limited the tasks of poetry to a kind of propaganda. The world outside philosophy was, then, stigmatized and considered mad, fallen.

This was true for poetry as well. Although it partially eluded the restrictive rigor, it was also seen as mad and mindless. Therefore Plato focused on the ecstasy, exaltation, and prodigality of mind and senses that poetry, as he claims in *Ion*, so often generated. According to his view, poets were influenced by demons, not by human skill and artistic talent (Plato 533E). As a result, Plato saw poets as “interpreters of the Gods by whom they are severally possessed” (534C). He used here a formula which was to remain functional for years. Even in the twentieth century Wilhelm Dilthey and Martin Heidegger did their best to use it anew. Dilthey paraphrased this formula in a modernist way, by claiming that “the poet is a clairvoyant, who has seen through the sense of life” (Dilthey 81).

The concept of the poet as an interpreter of the gods offered an image of inspired, visionary, seer poetry, which was an effect of a mania (madness) rather than skill and techniques applied properly (Tatarkiewicz 123). It is important to add, however, that the existence of this very kind of poetry – not only in ancient Greece; we find it in Romantic, Symbolist, and Catastrophist works – does not prove that such a kind of poetry is the only one that deserves the name of poetry. Moreover, it does not mean that poetry of this sort is *par excellence* mindless and thoughtless.

Be that as it may, Plato prepared a solid basis for the conceptual opposition of philosophy and poetry, in which objective *logos* stands against visionary madness, perfect order against anarchic poetic speech. In centuries to come this juxtaposition received different treatment and gained new forms, confronting mind and emotion, intellect and faith, imitation and vision, etc. The rule of opposition, however, continued to be valid.

Plato banished poets from the logical republic of philosophers. He condemned them as creators of apparitions and antagonists to philosophical truth that was to become a universal, state truth applicable to all. As a result, poetry was held up for further criticism. It was accused of implanting evil, propagating obscure messages, unable

to distinguish between things of minor and major importance (*Republic* 605a). Lewd poetry was seen as a danger to state order.

Plato's view evolved. Polar values of *logos* and madness were reversed and changed. Although madness was frequently honoured, and *logos* despised, Plato's dualism of philosophy and poetry never completely lost its validity. The essence of Plato's view was expressed in his radical solution, which not only clearly elevated philosophy and its needs above poetry, but also located them in opposite positions. Plato treated these two phenomena as separate monoliths, separated for good, unwilling to coalesce, always to remain on hostile terms. The elevation of one he supported with the condemnation of the other in an irreducible dualism.

Plato's conception reveals numerous methodological advantages, some of which might have been unintended. For example, it perfectly well exemplifies the weak points of any uniform, symmetrical opposition of poetry and philosophy. It indicates potential consequences of simplification favouring one side of the relation (philosophy, in Plato's case). Still, however, the conception encourages critical views on the relations between poetry and philosophy, which so often are rashly considered separate and irreconcilable.

It also leads one to abandon a cognitive viewpoint expressed in the claim of, as Plato puts it, "the old quarrel between philosophy and poetry" (*Republic* 607b). It is impossible to agree with a radical view that poetry and philosophy, in the different ways we understand them, are always the same. Therefore, if such an assumption is made, their relations cannot be always antagonistic. Even the fact that poetry and philosophy can be compared (and thus put into a relation), as Plato himself proved, assumes a kind of mutual influence and interpenetration. Moreover, the lessons of history should not be neglected either. Postplatonian considerations on the subject did not always bring to light differences between the two phenomena. It is impossible to transfer through time Plato's local, culturally specific, and subjective feelings and views to all people of all times. It happened at times that poetry and philosophy changed roles and substituted for each other. The differences in their identity and the oppositions, so clearly seen otherwise, frequently turned out to be relative. Only in some most stagnant circumstances did poetical or philosophical qualities seem to be stable and petrified.

We need to do justice to Plato as well. A master of style, author of dialogues, he himself repudiated his own metaphysical, doctrinaire character. The sly "demon of poetry" was hidden in the stylus of the "prince of philosophers", to deride the speculative metaphysics and the conceptual opposition of poetry and philosophy. And this was indeed the paradox of the relationship this article deals with – the fact that a philosopher engaged himself in thoroughly poetical work, based on a careful selection of words, phrases,

rhetorical figures that could better illustrate his thoughts. In this the philosopher was turned into a creator not very dissimilar to a poet. Writing tempted one with irony, metaphors, similes, epithets, antitheses, etc. But a parallel situation applied to poets as well. When speaking to an auditorium, addressing the general public, poets naturally had to win their attention, establish contact, gain an understanding and acceptance. As a result, then, they did not, as Plato wants, offer savage, mad emotions of an irrational character. Remnants of ancient poetic work indicate that we should be talking about quite a different state of affairs. Poets consciously used a poetic discourse which openly made use of ideas and meanings, not only emotions. It was not without reason, then, that Aristotle corrected Plato's view in his *Poetics*, where he claims that poetry is perhaps more philosophical than history, because it presents, as philosophy has always done, possible worlds, not only those which actually exist.

### **3. Giambattista Vico: The Elevation of Poetry**

The mutual relations of poetry and philosophy were one of the central subjects of interest for the Italian thinker and scholar Giambattista Vico (1668–1744), who discussed them in detail in his most impressive work *La scienza nuova* (*The New Science*), three consequent editions of which were published in 1725, 1730, and 1744. In it, Vico interpreted the abovementioned relations in three ways: anthropological, historical (generic), and sociological. We can assume that the relation between poetry and philosophy, discussed also with reference to aesthetics and historiosophy, was the core concept of Vico's thinking, in which both disciplines were related to *homo historicus*, the creator of civilisation. Vico juxtaposed the concepts of poetry and philosophy with human innate (animalistic, bodily) qualities as well as with intellectual and civilisational development.

According to Vico's view, then, poetry has accompanied man from the very beginning of the species. It was one of the main factors in human historical and civilisational development. It originated in the activity of the senses and in imagination dependent on memory, which shaped our experience. Poets expressed the experience in accordance with human mind and nature rather than with some objective character of things. Philosophy, unlike poetry, originated in reflection and the workings of intellect. It was a product of secondary activity, a derivative of poetry<sup>3</sup>. Vico claimed that poetical, that is, intuitive and sensuous experience of the world, preceded (temporally

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<sup>3</sup> This clearly expresses a view polemical with Descartes and rationalism. The opposition of poetry and philosophy was parallel to the opposition of metaphysics and poetry: "By the very nature of poetry it is impossible for anyone to be at the same time a sublime poet and a sublime metaphysician, for metaphysics abstracts the mind from the senses, and the poetic faculty must submerge the whole mind in the senses; metaphysics soars up to universals, and the poetic faculty must plunge deep into particulars" (Vico, Para. 821).

and logically) philosophical reflection of any kind. "Only so much as the poets had first sensed of vulgar wisdom did the philosophers later understand of esoteric wisdom; so that the former may be said to have been the sense and the latter the intellect of the human race" (Vico, Para. 363)<sup>4</sup>.

Vico supported this thesis with the example of Homeric epic, which he saw as completely deprived of refined philosophy or reflection. He wanted to show that Homer was not a philosopher (Para. 806). The lack of a developed philosophy pointed not only to the primitive character of Homer's work, but also to the sensuous truth and suggestiveness of it. Fiction and confabulation were in Vico's opinion only some secondary products of intellect rather than primary effects of poetic sensuousness.

In fact, Vico showed the relationship of poetry and philosophy as very static. Both disciplines seemed to him two typologically and chronologically different stages of human development. There are, however, elements in his argument that exceed the limitations of the logical-axiomatic structure and style of his deliberations, conducted in a seventeenth-century "geometrical method". These originate in the assumption that primary (poetic) forms condition and partially permeate secondary (philosophical) forms. The latter are traces or stigmata of the former, from which they originate<sup>5</sup>.

Following this rule, Vico saw Homer as a collective poet. In his opinion Homer was "the source of all Greek philosophies". But, he continued, "it was poetic wisdom itself whose fables provided occasions for the philosophers to meditate their lofty truths, and supplied them also with means for expounding them" (Para. 901).

Although he occasionally refers to it, Vico rejects Plato's paradigm's insistence on philosophy's superiority. Unlike Plato, he offers historical precedence to poetry<sup>6</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> Vico also refers to Aristotle: "What Aristotle said of the individual man is therefore true of the race in general: *Nihil est in intellectu quin prius fuerit insensu*" (Para. 363). See also Paragraph 374, where Vico claims that "human nature, so far as it is like that of animals, carries with it this property, that the senses are its sole way of knowing things". This is the anthropological paradox of Vico's concepts: the change from the senses (which people and animals have in common) through imagination to great poetry. See also Para. 779, Para. 820.

<sup>5</sup> "Inasmuch as the poets came certainly before the vulgar historians, the first history must have been poetical" (Para. 813)

<sup>6</sup> See Paragraph 384: "All that has been so far said here upsets all the theories of the origin of poetry from Plato and Aristotle down to Patrizzi, Scaliger and Castelvetro. For it has been shown that it was deficiency of human reasoning power that gave rise to poetry so sublime that the philosophies which came afterwards, the arts of poetry and of criticism, have produced none equal or better, and have even prevented its production. Hence it is Homer's privilege to be, of all the sublime, that is, the heroic poets, the first in the order of merit as well as in that of age. This discovery of the origins of poetry does away with the opinion of the matchless wisdom of the ancients, so ardently sought after from Plato to Bacon's *De sapientia veterum*". In this way Vico tried to solve the ancient conflict of poetry and rational, speculative philosophy in favour of the former, and the equally problematic dispute about ancient poetry and new neo-classicist formal poetry, in favor of the old, natural work of Homer. Classicism saw poetry as a product of reflection, an imitation of nature, and a pleasure. Vico, on the contrary, wanted to see poetry as a basic, natural function of imagination and the senses that precedes reflection and allows, together with religious beliefs, for civilization to develop and for the social order to be stable. In Vico's historical dispute with Descartes, poetry was an argument against *The Discourse on Method* and the rationalism of contemporary philosophers.



To him, the first people were “poets” thanks to their natural features; they were “philosophers” only if their poetry contained sparks of philosophical thought. In his opinion, poetry formed civilisation<sup>7</sup>; it is a meeting point of nature and culture – the beginning of poetry marks the passage from the former to the latter.

The Italian thinker links poetry to some features that are natural to man. He associates it with “robust sense and vigorous imagination” that originate in “a faculty born with them” (Para. 375). Poetry in his view originated from the attitude of man to the mysterious world. The world generated surprise and anxiety; poetry was born of a need to counter an ignorance about this world. It was a form of articulation of *l'impossibile credibile*. This ignorance was manifested in a number of ways – anthropomorphic and godly images of nature in primitive poetry, that is, presenting natural phenomena as results of the actions of gods, are good examples in point.

Both manifestations were, however, governed by human predispositions, by the nature of the human mind rather than by nature itself or by objective explication and imitation. This is exemplified by an ability to exaggerate, to create an addition to imitated reality (Para. 816–817, 819). Poetry, then, originated generically (or logically) in the rules of imagination (Para. 376). The poet was, unlike the philosopher, a creator with, as ancient Greek poetry shows, the following tasks: “to invent sublime fables suited to the popular understanding, to perturb to excess, with a view to the end proposed, to teach the vulgar to act virtuously” (Para. 376). In this sense poetry was always a phenomenon with educational and socially binding effects. It supported the basis of social life and rules of social order.

At the same time Vico notices a difference in quality between sensuously and imaginatively motivated poetry and extra-sensuous and abstract philosophy. The primitive poet transmitted – as his contemporaries thought – the mysterious, dark speech of the gods. These were the oldest sources of the authority (power) of poetry, so well praised by Vico’s twentieth-century follower, Martin Heidegger. Poetry was then linked with the domain of the senses, imagination, and creative will, rather than with that of alienated philosophical intellect grown on abstraction. Keeping Plato’s dualism, Vico noticed an opposition between poetry and philosophy in the opposition of two human functions and potentials: imagination connected to the senses, and abstraction which steered clear

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<sup>7</sup> “The world of civil society has certainly been made by men, and that its principles are therefore to be found within the modifications of our own human mind. [...] The human mind [...], immersed and buried in the body, it naturally inclines to take notice of bodily things, and finds the effort to attend to itself too laborious; just as the bodily eye sees all objects outside itself but needs a mirror to see itself” (Para. 331). This argument (in which Vico is not fully correct) contains a key concept of contemporary social anthropology – the idea of the change and the auto-creation of the human mind in a social and historical perspective. A number of scholars have pointed out this dual, innovative-conservative character of *The New Science*.

of sensuous experience. A fairytale vision of the world was the fruit of the former (here Vico was influenced by rationalism), and science, concepts, and rational argumentation were the products of the latter.

One reason for a difference of this sort was the language of poetry, which for Vico was similar to primitive forms of speech and valuable more than the language of prose (Para. 409). "It was a fantastic speech making use of physical substances endowed with life and most of them imagined to be divine", he wrote in a chapter devoted to poetic logic (Para. 401).

Narrative creations of the language are the following: tale, fable, myth<sup>8</sup>. At the same time the language was figurative, and supported the world (the poetic subject) with the power of the poet's vision and imagination. It made things similar to the poet. The core of the language, in Vico's view, remained in metaphor and in metonymy, which both demonstrated the creative potential available to man<sup>9</sup>. Thanks to these figures, Vico claims.

"He has made of himself an entire world. So that, as rational metaphysics teaches that man becomes all things by understanding them (*homo intelligendo fit omnia*), this imaginative metaphysics shows that man becomes all things by not understanding them (*homo non intelligendo fit omnia*); and perhaps the latter proposition is truer than the former, for when man understands he extends his mind and takes in the things, but when he does not understand he makes the things out of himself and becomes them by transforming himself into them" (Para. 405).

#### 4. Romanticism: Sympoetry and Symphilosophy

The modern view of the relationship of poetry and philosophy originates in the times of European Romanticism. In its early phase the view owed much to the ideas of German Romantics – Novalis (1772–1801) and Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829) especially. Later it was shaped through adaptation and development of their ideas<sup>10</sup>. Some of its assumptions are still valid and continue to be a source of numerous references.

In his work on Romantic transcendental poetry, Novalis openly called it a "connection of poetry and philosophy" (*Pisma* 110). He put forward a concept of symphilosophy and sympoetry, that is philosophy and poetry that is "carried out" in contact with people and other creatures and uses their active spiritual participation. Friedrich Schlegel, who clearly agreed with these concepts, presented the issue we deal with here in terms

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<sup>8</sup> On the one hand these categories had an epistemological character – they defined the fantastic (unreal) character of the images of phenomena. On the other, however, Vico treated them as expressions of "ideal truths" superior to "physical truths" (Para. 205).

<sup>9</sup> Vico's *The New Science* must have influenced Roman Jakobson's study of metonymy and metaphor. See Paragraphs 404–407.

<sup>10</sup> Quotes from Schlegel come from two volumes of *Fragmente zur Poesie und Literatur*. In what follows I use an abbreviated form KA and a volume number to refer to particular passages in the text.

of mutual interactions, rather than oppositions and hierarchical precedence. He believed that philosophy – which he called “a logical chemistry, a science about all mixed and mixing sciences” (*Pisma* 210) – and poetry permeate and complete each other.

However, Schlegel did not mean a mechanical change of philosophy into poetry, or vice versa. He claimed that links between one and the other were dramatic and archetypal. They were present even in the most archaic and forgotten of literary creations. When talking about historical periods of unity and periods of separation of the two phenomena, Schlegel, like Vico, tried to discuss the relationship of poetry and philosophy in terms of history and genetic origin.

Schlegel stated that the main role in this close, prehistoric link of poetry and philosophy was played by gnomic and aphoristic poetry. “In every context and in every tribe gnomic poetry originates in the most distant past. Adages in *Edda*. This is the root and depth of poetry. A beginning, a point in which poetry is not yet separate from philosophy and remains with it in the same seed” (KA, 17, XXII, 131).

Adages, gnomes, aphorisms – these are Schlegel’s literary core of philosophy and poetry. Being a source of reflective poetry (*Gedankenpoesie*) and a kind of spiritual poetry (*Geistespoesie*), ancient adages received a fuller meaning and a genuine poetic character (KA, 17, XXII, 227)<sup>11</sup>. They shaped the old borderland of poetry and philosophy.

Gnomic utterances and adages expressed not only emotions, but also presented a concise reflection (*Gesinnung*), in which gnomic and aphoristic poetry established its contact with philosophy. These concise forms (gnomic utterances) for Schlegel functioned as primeval, minimal poetic forms, which developed later into didactic and philosophical poetry.

In these vivid, concrete similes, a religious and poetic mythology of the word (*verbum, das Wort*) was expressed. Epic poetry, in turn, was for Schlegel much closer to history, while drama manifested affinities with rhetoric, dialectics, and dialogics. It is interesting, however, that Schlegel wanted to trace some affinities between lyric and philosophy in a modern way: “In lyrical poetry there is a specific order of thought (the soul) and a logic of feeling [*Logik des Gefühls*]” (KA, 17, XXII, 134). Elements of philosophy can be clearly noticed in this very assumption.

Schlegel believed that – as it had been before<sup>12</sup> – a new Romantic vision was to create a philosophical unity, which could be shaped through the presence of an ideal element

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<sup>11</sup> Aphorisms and gnomic poetry were, in Schlegel’s opinion, a branch of the lyric or the *Geistespoesie*, that is, a kind of reflexive poetry (*Gedankenpoesie*) – KA, 17, XXII, 228.

<sup>12</sup> “New poetry made a union with philosophy; the fourth generation of the new writing should do so as well”; “New poetry should at the same time be national and universal; it should make a union with philosophy through art and through nature” (KA, 17, XX, 225–226). New, in this context, means the same as Romantic.

in both. By this he did not mean an identity of tasks. Poetry, he claimed, “should rise to the sky”, while philosophy, “from the sky should come to earth” (KA, 17, XXI, 45, 47). At the time, as Schlegel himself noticed, philosophy influenced, above all, the spiritual, dialogic part of poetry. This resulted in the production and reception of poetry as meditation and “internal dialog”.

Thus poetry and philosophy seemed to have a lot in common. They were both universal. The universalism of poetry was, for instance, linguistic – poetry defended language against deterioration and strengthened its universal character. The universal character of language determined the affinities of poetry with philosophy. In philosophy the universal character of language was established differently – it followed a rule that “terminology is speech within a speech” (KA, 17, XV, 89). This is why Schlegel concluded that “both poetry and philosophy are instances of supreme speech” (KA, 17, XV, 95)<sup>15</sup>. An effect of this supreme quality was the use of hieroglyphs in both disciplines.

Separate as it was from philosophy, poetry was losing its inherent elements of thought and universalism. It was becoming, Schlegel claimed, an empty, intellectually barren sensuousness. Philosophy, in turn, deprived of poetic element, was sinking into abstraction, speculation, and vagueness. It no longer influenced imagination and emotions. On the contrary, it had become hermetic and incomprehensible. In Schlegel’s view the relationship of the two was necessary. It defined not only the essence of poetry (the openness to difference) but also the similar essence of philosophy. Isolation distorted the true, open and dynamic nature of each creative form. It led to stagnation and inertia. Only mutual communication and exchange could guarantee development of both disciplines. Only a turn towards universalism could offer life to them.

In the later, “Catholic” period of his argumentative activity Schlegel highlighted the kinship of poetry and philosophy also on other levels. He noticed signs of it in their connection to other forms of culture – religion and mythology especially. From 1810 to 1812 he continued to claim that both disciplines contain a godly element and refer to the inner life of man. Both were carriers of the word rooted in Christianity. Both aimed at “the exploration and presentation of the word of God” (KA, 17, XXI, 110). Schlegel claimed that “poetry is the soul of the word and the word of the soul; philosophy is the spirit of the word and the word of spirit” (KA, 17, XXII, 166). Poetry and philosophy supported not only the psychological and spiritual development of man, but also shaped his inner life and helped to establish a link to universe and to a deity. Unlike poetry

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<sup>15</sup> Compare the following passage: “In its relation to the word, poetry is closely related to philosophy” (XIX, 166). This closeness was evident in the relation towards the word of God, which philosophy explains, while poetry makes human words closer to God’s, since it uses hieroglyphs and holy signs.

(focused on “the word of the soul”), philosophy announced the existence of creation, nature, world, and God.

For late Romantics, poetry, paradoxically, was by definition a transfer of philosophy (very often religious); philosophy, in turn, a superior kind of intellectual poetry. Both disciplines were a counterbalance to mediocrity. One inevitably contained elements of the other. Poetry gained its essence exclusively in contact with philosophy, and vice versa. Neither existed without the other. Poetry annihilated itself as sterile and spectral “pure poetry”; philosophy condemned itself as “pure philosophy”. A transgressive element, an amorous conjunction, seemed inevitable if either of the disciplines was to exist.

Thus, European Romanticism treated poetry as the “inspiration” and, at the same time, the “realization” of philosophy; philosophy, in turn, was for it a development and continuation of the universalism of poetry, that is, an expression of poetry’s sense-creating potential. These conceptions, of course, contained postulative, evaluative, and utopian elements. Things were seen according to desires rather than to their real standards. But this was not very important.

The most important thing was the idea of a common discourse, previously oppressed by feudal difference and hierarchy. Attempts to put poetry in the same line with philosophy because of a common standard of sense that the two disciplines shared, were of vital importance (even though the standards were met by different means and in different forms). For philosophy the moment when links with speculative metaphysics, adoration of cosmos, logos, mind, and knowledge became less strict, was equally important, because in this way philosophy moved towards life, existence, act, expression, and art. Romanticism opposed the idea of poetry and philosophy as separate entities with an idea of mutual inclusion, that is, reciprocal dialogic complementation.

One could conclude, then, that Romanticism undermined the traditionally established rule of the dualism of poetry and philosophy. It repositioned values. In the Romantic view the relationship of the two was no longer limited to exclusion. Respective zones of influence of each discipline appeared to converge. Differences were evident only in concentration, dispersion, distribution, and saturation of mutual influences. Instead of an abyss between the two, one could speak of a merger of disciplines. Romanticism, despite its aberrations and utopias, was in this field a prologue to modernity.

The twentieth century did not completely reject the Romantic heritage. Some movements continued the legacy, while other opposed or ignored it. The end of the century, however, and the popular idea of blended discourses point to a new validity of the concept of the unity and universality of ideas, creation, and art. This applies also to theoretical reflection on philosophical poetry and poetic philosophy. A question we now ask

is not about the whereabouts of a merging point of the disciplines, but about different dispersals of these, different *loci* of interrelations, different aspects of a contemporary discursive domino.

## 5. Hegel: The Eyes of Argus

“Art makes every one of its productions into a thousand-eyed Argus, whereby the inner soul and spirit is seen at every point”

G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*

Similarly to Vico, Georg Friedrich Hegel, moved away from Plato’s eternal antagonism of poetry and philosophy. He was much more concerned with the convergence of the two<sup>14</sup>. To discuss these he employed the aesthetic categories of form and content. Content was for him a necessary element of a work of art, since it originated in the fabric of the work itself, in the language and in linguistic signs and meanings. A work of art, Hegel insisted, should not contain anything which does not express and relate to content (*Aesthetics I* 95). In this field, art in general – not only poetry – “stands on one and the same ground with religion (in the stricter sense of the word) and philosophy” (*Aesthetics I* 101).

Each of the disciplines aimed essentially at a transfer of truth (which was the necessary component of content), while formal factors (means of content presentation) defined differences between art, on the one hand, and religion and philosophy, on the other. Each of these established itself within particular boundaries and developed a specific repertoire of forms. Literary forms of artistic communication of meaning were, for example, sonnets, novels, and narrative poetry. Among religious forms, we could list the gospel, catechisms, homilies, encyclicals, breviaries. Lectures, treatises, and discourses are examples of philosophical forms. Content, to put it simply, united discursive practices of art, religion, and philosophy, while form had a much more individualizing, differentiating effect.

The main purpose of form was, for Hegel, to communicate content. It was the “transfer of the content into our consciousness” that mattered. Each discipline, however, assumed a general, specific way of meaning creation (that is, it had its own directive idea of form). Art was typically associated with singular, concrete forms of sensuous inspection that allowed the recipient to engage in the aesthetic pleasure of the work.

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<sup>14</sup> In some respect Hegel agreed with Plato on philosophy’s intellectual superiority over poetry, since free thought – the domain of philosophy – he understood to be the purest form of free knowledge, the highest form of inner life, and that supreme synthesis of religion and art, free of all the limitations of both disciplines, especially of art’s “objective existence”, that is the need for all creativity to function in the form of a work of art.

Religion, devoted to the internal, spiritual afterlife, employed a pious, emotional “thinking consciousness”. Philosophy, in turn, was connected with “free thinking”, which brought to life different forms of conceptual creation and transfer of knowledge about the world (*Aesthetics I* 95–101).

Forms themselves, regardless of their content, did not determine the quality or value of particular works of art, religious acts, or philosophical concepts. A major criterion for the assessment of form was the applicability of form to content. It was important how well form suited content and how adequately it facilitated transfer. Forms for Hegel, then, were neither independent nor decisive as regards the historical existence of the two disciplines we are dealing with here. A growing independence of form and a separation of it from the transfer of content made it more abstract, vague, empty, and lifeless. The initiative was on the side of novel cognitive content, of new discoveries, of broadly understood historical truth that sought expression (*Aesthetics I* 9). In this respect, Hegel radically rejected the formalist Kantian *Critique of Judgement* (1790), which had such an influence on twentieth-century aesthetics and poetics, including phenomenology, formalism, structuralism, and some of poststructuralism.

This did not mean that Hegel in any way depreciated the role and importance of form. On the contrary, he highlighted the significance of form to a work of art. Unlike objective philosophy, in his opinion, art referred to content (meaning, sense, cognitive value) in an essentially subjective, sensuous, and direct way. Thus, the forming of content required creativity, especially because content, changed into an individual artistic sensuous creation (an intersubjectively accessible work of art), became an object of feeling and inspection, that is, an object of aesthetic reception and understanding. In this way, art “sets truth before our minds in the mode of sensuous configuration, a sensuous configuration which in this its appearance has itself a loftier, deeper sense and meaning” (*Aesthetics I* 101).

Hegel, as the passage above indicates, was fully aware of a need for a semantic content (that is, for a semantic motivation) of form, and appreciated its key role in art. These assumptions made him criticize alienated forms, used in a mechanical, automatic, empty, and barely sensuous way. He believed that in art – also in poetry and literature – content (meaning, sense) includes shapes and carriers, not only subjects, concepts and ideas. It is difficult now to assess to what degree he was aware of all the consequences of this novel idea and to what degree he expected a major change in art. His viewpoint meant that form was an idea, and that forms did not move art away from philosophy; quite the opposite, they allow the translation of art into philosophical categories with which art can then communicate.

Individual artistic form in a particular work of art, if correlated to content, inevitably became meaningful. "The union of meaning with its individual configuration", or unity with imagery and sensuous shapes presented in a work of art decided about the essence of beauty and artistic creation in it (*Aesthetics I* 101). All in all, Hegel elevated the sensuous, formal elements in art and poetry and assigned to them independent meanings in comparison to general concepts that are "professional" in philosophy. While the communicative means of philosophy could be seen as derivative and passive, in art, and in poetry as well, form became a central issue, since it carried meanings and functioned as the main active (perhaps also necessary) component of the reception of a particular work of art.

In poetry, unlike in other kinds of art, the material (sensuous) fabric was mainly the spiritual form – imaginations, fantasies, emotions, and expressions. In this discipline the human spirit became an object for itself. Unlike other creatures and creations of nature, humanity was capable of self-assessment and reflection. This, according to Hegel, determines the extensiveness of poetry, that is, poetry's lack of limitations in terms of content or form. In this respect, Hegel agreed with the Romantics, who noticed the unlimited and historical character of poetry. For Hegel limits of poetry were not very strict; throughout time these limits changed repeatedly. As a consequence, the relationship of poetry and philosophy could also never be stable and uniform.

This fluidity and lack of limits (an internal openness) of poetry was also a risk, because it created a tempting opportunity for withdrawing from the sensuous sphere and blending into the spiritual. In this way Hegel warned us against the galloping progress of poetic anarchy, whose symptoms he noticed in the mystic uncontrollable ecstasies of the Romantic poetry of the time. He also suggested that poetry, in order to avoid empty resonance, should above all never plunge too deeply into philosophy. Hegel fought two battles. On the one hand, he opposed a content-less poetry (he embraced philosophy and thought) and, on the other, he supported artistic independence (culminating in sensuous, aesthetic elements). His aesthetic ideal consisted in a unity (or dialectic synthesis) of poetry and philosophy, which he understood as a splicing together of the sensuous and the intellectual.

When postulating a need for a unity of meaning and individual shape, Hegel at the same time demanded that free artistic fantasy be linked to the task of poetic transformation of a work of art into a self-sufficient, internally-focused world. Creating a separate, self-sufficient, sensuous and meaningful entity was an individual task of poetry, not a realization of external instruction of a religious, political, or philosophical character. Hegel, therefore, rejected some important elements in Plato's and Kant's



respective observations. He opposed the separation of the two disciplines, but was also against the image of poetry as incapable of meaning-creation. Similarly, he renounced the Kantian limitation of poetry to the production of “pure forms” and the subjection of it to philosophy.

Hegel’s argument assumes a partnership of poetry and philosophy based on mutual reassurance of advantages and complementation of the other’s weak points. As far as poetry was concerned, its task was not to copy or support the rules governing philosophy (this would mean simple imitation), but to create – with all the means and artistic forms available – its own artistic philosophy of man and the world, and its own philosophy of poetry.

In this individualizing union of form and content in poetry, Hegel, like Vico, saw a major historical role and elevation of poetry. Poetry for him was “older than skilfully elaborated prosaic speech”.

“It is the original presentation of the truth, a knowing which does not yet separate the universal from its living existence in the individual, which does not yet oppose law to appearance, end to means, and then relate them together again by abstract reasoning, but which grasps the one only in and through the other [...] Consequently the universal and the rational are not expressed in poetry in abstract universality and *philosophically* proved interconnection, or with their aspects merely related together as in *scientific* thinking, but instead as animated, manifest, ensouled, determining the whole, and yet at the same time expressed in such a way that the all-comprising unity, the real animating soul, is made to work only in secret from within outwards” (*Aesthetics II* 973).

This statement led Hegel to conclude in a surprisingly modern way that “the aim of poetry is imagery and speech, not the thing talked about or existence in practice. Poetry began when man undertook to express *himself*”. “For poetry”, Hegel continues, “what is spoken is there only to be expressed” (*Aesthetics II* 974), not to express a mimetically real state of affairs independent of expression, or to communicate something specific (information), or lead somebody to do something.

To sum up, poetry for Hegel was not a passive transfer of content prepared by different means (through religion, politics, or academic philosophy). It was an independent generator and inventor of meanings embodied in speech, brought to life only for their own expression, which was to lead to a number of historical consequences. Hegel believed numerous religious figures had been inspired by poetry and art: “In this connection, we may refer once more to the great remark of Herodotus: Homer and Hesiod gave the Greeks their gods” (*Aesthetics II* 1047).

The potential of philosophy appears equally high. In terms of sense-creation, philosophy occupied the most important position in Hegel’s hierarchy. It was the domain

of free, pure, disinterested thinking. Thus it allowed the synthesis of art and religion. Sensuous and concrete forms of art and subjective forms of religion were melted by poetry in pure forms of thought. It would be difficult, however, to deny that an element of form was needed also in philosophy if a particular philosophical idea managed to escape the "soul" of the philosopher and appeared "on the market" as a word of appeal, a lecture, essay, aphorism, or treatise.

Every act which communicated a philosophical idea demanded a linguistic and textual form. Thus we may speak of a hidden link of philosophy and art. If philosophy could offer a lot to poetry in terms of pure thought, poetry could definitely reward philosophy with its repertoire of forms and expressions. These were, in fact, its domain and genuine kingdom. In this way elements of poetry remained at the very centre of philosophical thinking. Hegel himself benefited from it quite frequently. A perfect metaphor of a work of art as the eyes of Argos is an example of this.

Hegel's argument is important because it equates philosophy, religion, and poetry by highlighting the specificity of each and promoting a fuller intermingling of them. This resulted in a stressed possibility of coalescence and complementation. Thinking (the shaping of forms of thought and the thinking about forms) was for Hegel a common motherland of philosophy, religion, and art. Without the poetic element, philosophy, seen as a self-sufficient domain of "free thought", seems just as incapacitated as is poetry without meaningful expression.

The figures of the poet, the philosopher, and the priest meet in Hegel's thinking at the same round table. His *Aesthetics* proves perfectly well that the meeting is fruitful. With all its influence on contemporary and prospective discussions of the subject, *Aesthetics* is yet another step in the study of the relationship between poetry and philosophy. The history of the debate does not end with Hegel, however. The relationship in question is still full of life – it is not limited to Hegel's model. His spirit of union and synthesis did not continue to appeal to prospective students of the subject. The positivist philosophy and poetry of the next decades stressed differences more than similarities. New, interesting proposals and practices appeared with the advent of modernism. But that is another story. Although the global picture of the problem may seem much more diverse, it is important to remember that the four models presented in this article – taken as pillars of tradition – created a canon which continues to affect discussions of the subject within European and Mediterranean cultures.

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Roussanka Alexandrova-Nowakowska, *Space 7*