

ILLUSION OR FUSION?

POETRY AND REALITY IN PLATO, PROCLUS, AND ERICH NEUMANN

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Abstract

Plato's Socrates, even when banishing poets from the *polis*, declares that he would willingly let them come back, if they or anybody else could make a case for it (*Rep.* 607c6-d1). In so doing, Plato allowed the possibility of a philosophical justification of poetry, vaguely suggesting that its charms could offer something else than a distorted picture of reality. According to the Neoplatonist Proclus, there are three types of poetry (the inspired, the didactic, the imaginative): only the last type, the

imaginative, is mimetic. What characterizes the effects of the first two types is *fusion* and non-mimetic means: absolute fusion of subject and object in the inspired poetry, and fusion of knower and known in the epistemic. For Jungian-oriented psychologist Erich Neumann the true reality is undivided and can be only experienced through experience of one's own self. Such an experience is defined as a kind of *fusion* of subject and object. It is by no means limited to poetry, but some of the most refined examples Neumann offers are taken from lyric poetry.

Keywords: Plato, Proclus, Erich Neumann, poetry, reality, *mimesis*, fusion of subject and object.

Iluzija ali zlitje? Pesništvo in resničnost pri Platonu, Proklu in Erichu Neumannu

Povzetek

224 Platonov Sokrat celo tedaj, ko izganja pesnike iz *polis*, pravi, da bi jih z veseljem spet sprejel, če bi le mogel kdorkoli navesti dober razlog za to (*Država* 607c6-d1). Na ta način je Platon vsaj dopustil možnost etičnega (filozofskega) osmišljenja poezije in nedoločno namignil, da njeni čari morda razkrivajo kaj drugega kot izkrivljeno podobo resničnosti. Novoplatonik Proklos je učil, da obstajajo tri vrste poezije (navdihnjena, didaktična, domišljajska), samo zadnja od njih je mimetična. Za učinke prvih dveh so značilni *zlitje* in nemimetična sredstva: popolno zlitje subjekta in objekta v navdihnjeni poeziji in zlitje spoznavajočega in spoznanega v epistemični poeziji. Za psihologa jungovske usmeritve Ericha Neumanna je prava resničnost nerazdeljena in jo je mogoče izkusiti samo v doživetju lastnega sebstva. To izkušnjo opredeljuje kot neke vrste *zlitje* subjekta in objekta: četudi je nikakor ne zamejuje s področjem poezije, zajema nekatere najbolj prefinjene primere prav iz lirične poezije.

Ključne besede: Platon, Proklos, Erich Neumann, pesništvo, resničnost, *mimesis*, zlitje subjekta in objekta.

Exposition

Plato, Proclus, and Erich Neumann are authors so different from each other that in many ways they are difficult to compare. They lived in different periods of time: nearly eight centuries passed between the lives of Plato (427–347 BC) and Proclus (412–485), and nearly fifteen centuries between the lives of Proclus and Erich Neumann (1905–1960). The profound differences in the social and cultural context of their lives decisively marked all of their work. Neither does their (explicit) interaction provide solid ground for comparison: Proclus was the head of the Academy and studied Plato systematically, whilst Erich Neumann mentions Plato only occasionally¹—within the broader framework of exploring the consciousness of the European man—and Proclus not at all. All three of them wrote about poetry, and although it was not their main topic, they thought about poetry very profoundly. They were not interested only in its psychological effects and social as well as cultural functions, but also in the relationship established by man with himself and with the entire reality through poetry.

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The poetry explored by Neumann was very different from the poetry explored by Plato or Proclus, as were the cultural and social functions of poetry in the respective periods. The horizon of poetry interpretation was different as well. Each of them explained poetry within a different ontological framework and found a different value in it. Of course, Neumann was radically different, and we should not forget that he was neither a philosopher nor a systematic ontologist. What is common to them, is the belief that, in poetry, man establishes a special relationship with reality, and this relationship is connected with how the poetic means operate.² How this relationship diverges from the one that is typical of everyday life or a philosophical insight, and what the relationship between them is (put simply, how to include poetry in

1 In the book *Der schöpferische Mensch*, which was first published in Zürich in 1959, and is the most important in terms of Neumann's thoughts on poetry, Plato is explicitly referred to only on page 37, in a reference to Aldous Huxley (cf. Neumann 1995).

2 It has to be stressed that none of the three authors was a poet himself. They discuss the effects of the *reception* of poetry, which is what I will limit myself to, even though such questions are exceptionally important for interpreting how a poem was created as well.

everyday life and how to judge poetry “within the horizon of philosophy”) are complex and broad questions which cannot be addressed with in detail in this paper. It is important to examine whether poetry enables us to establish a relationship with “broader” or “narrower” reality, and whether poetic reality is more or less “real” than everyday or philosophical reality. The three authors provide a range of answers to these questions.

Socrates’ question

226 Plato’s understanding of poetry is an ancient and broad field that is hard to tackle, with a myriad of old and new unsolved questions. The value judgments of poetry found in his dialogues occasionally contradict each other, and interpreters throughout history have not agreed on the extent to which such judgments ought to be taken at face value or as a sign of irony. Most of all, due to the dialogical form of his texts, it is difficult if not impossible even to say what a clearly expressed teaching of Plato’s is.³ If *Phaedrus* was deemed an ode to inspired poetry⁴ and *Ion* the rudiment of literary theory and aesthetics,⁵ if the Athenian Stranger in the *Laws* does not enthrall (most) modern readers by recommending that “only those songs shall be sung, even though they be not musical, which are composed by men who are personally good and honoured in the State as performers of noble deeds” (829d), then Socrates in the *Republic* notably provoked many interpreters by banning Homer and tragic poets from the city. As pointed out by Malcolm Heath, certain modern interpreters see irony in Plato’s or Socrates’ positive judgments on poetry and believe that he was actually never favorably disposed towards poetry, or was at least indecisive about its value (Heath 2013, 141).⁶ I would like to point out that Socrates might have been indecisive about poetry on another occasion: when the (tragic) poets were banished by him from the *polis*. The reasons for this banishment are known

3 Cf. Heath 2013, 10–12. The topic is discussed in detail in Kosman 1992, 73–92; Kahn 1997, 55–63; McCabe 2008, 88–113, and 2006, 13–24; Gill 2009.

4 Already for Proclus, cf. *In Remp.* 180.12–182.23.

5 Cf. Schaper 1968; Ranta 1967; Saadi Liebert 2010. For sharp criticism of Schaper cf. Stern-Gillet 2004.

6 Cf. Stern-Gillet 2004.

well enough and need not be presented here in detail: “Poetry imitates, it is the third place from the truth [...] it affects the lower parts of the soul and misleads even the good people.” (605c-d)⁷ This kind of judgment is possible on Plato’s ontological horizon, where the world is divided into the really existing (ideas) and merely virtually existing (individual things): poetry merely imitates how things appear, which is unstable even in comparison with the relatively stable things (which are, however, absolutely unstable in comparison with the absolute stability of ideas).⁸ Especially tragic poetry (and music), with its particular spells, creates a cognitive illusion which misguides the listener and leads them astray from the right ethical pathway.⁹ Nevertheless, at the end of his pondering about poetry (607c-d), Socrates says the following:

“But nevertheless let it be declared that, if the mimetic and dulcet poetry can show any reason for her existence in a well-governed state, we would gladly admit her, since *we ourselves are very conscious of her spell*. But all the same it would be impious to betray what we believe to be the truth. Is not that so, friend? Do not *you yourself feel her magic* and especially when Homer is her interpreter?” “Greatly.” “Then may she not justly return from this exile after she has pleaded her defence, whether in lyric or other measure?” “By all means.” “And we would allow her advocates who are not poets but lovers of poetry to plead her cause in prose without metre, and show that she is not only delightful but beneficial to orderly government and all the life of man. And we shall

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7 Cf. Belfiore 1983.

8 A concise discussion of the issues in: Moss 2007; Halliwell 2002 and 2011; and Belfiore 1984.

9 Cf. Burneyat 1999, 226. There is a number of interesting questions regarding Plato’s viz. Socrates’ criticism of tragedy that cannot be discussed here, such as: what kind of tragedy provoked his criticism? Did he notice any differences between the Homeric gods and those portrayed in the Aeschylean tragedy? (On which cf. Sommerstein 2010, 254–280.) Why didn’t he attach any importance to the so-called moral lessons of tragedy? Did the tragedies he saw in the theatre convey any lessons on the gods’ supremacy? Was he that much preoccupied with the (uneducated) audience’s expectations (taste) because he believed that the only goal of tragedians was to achieve audience approval?

listen benevolently, for it will be clear gain for us if it can be shown that she bestows not only pleasure but benefit.”¹⁰

Are these words merely a polite, but ironic way of saying that poetry is simply not useful for the *polis*? Does he wish to assign to his conclusion an even greater depth and importance by saying that, although the spells and pleasures of poetry are not foreign to him, he simply cannot find a good reason to keep poets in the *polis*? Or does he actually allow for the fact that what poetry manages to achieve with its spells (601b),¹¹ might somehow benefit the *polis*? That in the experience brought by poetry there might be something that eludes his explanations? Does he, after all, leave a crack open for interpreters?¹²

Although it is hard to find a reliable answer to these question, it is not without value: it *draws* attention to a particular effect of poetry, connected with its specific means (harmony, rhythm, meter), which are difficult to define explicitly or with purely analytic reasoning.

Allegoric answers

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For a number of reasons, the philosophers in the following centuries accepted this invitation and attempted to find reasons to invite poets back into the city. The most common means was the one rejected by Socrates in the *Republic* (378d): the allegorical interpretation of poetry. Nevertheless, it has to be pointed out that philosophical criticism of poetry and allegorical interpretation are much older. Perhaps the oldest example of the former can be

10 All the translations of *Republic* are from: Plato 1969.

11 “And similarly, I suppose, we shall say that the poet himself, knowing nothing but how to imitate, lays on with words and phrases the colours of the several arts in such fashion that others equally ignorant, who see things only through words, will deem his words most excellent, whether he speak in rhythm, meter and harmony about cobbling or generalship or anything whatever. So mighty is *the spell* that these adornments naturally exercise; though when they are *stripped bare of their musical colouring* and taken by themselves, I think you know what sort of a showing these sayings of the poets make. For you, I believe, have observed them.’ ‘I have,’ he said. ‘Do they not,’ said I, ‘*resemble the faces of adolescents, young but not really beautiful, when the bloom of youth abandons them?*’ ‘By all means,’ he said.”

12 For a penetrating discussion of the passage cf. Halliwell 2011, 196–207.

found in Xenophanes' well-known fragment, and the latter was, according to Porphyrius, practiced already by Theagenes of Rhegium, a literary critic from the 6th century BC.¹³ After all, the ancient dispute between philosophy and poetry is already referred to by Socrates, in the 10th book of the *Republic* (607b-c). The background of this dispute may be summarized as follows: according to an ancient and widely held belief, poetry was of divine origin. Real poetry cannot be created without divine intervention, for it is born when the Muses or some other deity speaks through the poet's mouth, uttering what cannot be grasped with man's own powers. Yet, these divine messages are not always reliable: the Muses do not always speak the truth and may misguide humans.¹⁴

Therefore, poetry can also be a source of delusions and misconceptions for man. Seeking the truth, man may be completely dependent on divine forces. The Pre-Socratic philosophical critique was motivated by immoral mythological ideas about gods, which were viewed as poetic fables,¹⁵ as well as by the cultural stronghold and influence of (especially epic) poetry. Individual critics of poetry were not unanimous in their criticism: on the contrary, they were sharply polemical towards each other. Although their criticism did not necessarily exclude poetic means or divine intervention, it did include different conceptions of the gods.¹⁶ This philosophical and theological critique, which undoubtedly reached its peak with Plato, presented a greater challenge to the defenders of poetry. The popularity of epic poetry, especially Homer's, and its exceptionally important role in culture and education roused both critics and apologists of poetry alike.¹⁷ The idea of the allegorical nature of poetry, whose truth is not revealed in its superficial meaning, was often interestingly connected

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13 A2 = Porphyrius on Il. 20.67–75. Theagenes' text is lost. One of the oldest examples of allegorical interpretations was found in the *Derveni Papyrus* from around 340 BC, found in 1962. Parts of the unburned books present fragments of allegorical interpretation of the Orpheus' mythological poem.

14 Cf. Hesiod, *Theogony* 26–28. Cf. also Heath 2013, 5: "Archaic poetry takes it for granted that gods are deceptive."

15 Xenophanes B11-12: "Homer and Hesiod have ascribed unto the Gods all that is reproach and blame in the world of men, stealing and adultery and deceit."

16 Xenophanes and Parmenides wrote verses; Xenophanes B23 taught that there is one god (greatest among gods and men); Parmenides confessed his dependence on the goddess.

17 Cf. Xenophanes B11: "Since all have learnt in Homer in the beginning."

with the deep-rooted and widely held belief that ancient people were better than the modern-ones. As these ancient peoples met their downfall in different catastrophes (which are reflected in the myths about Phaeton, Deucalion and Pyrrha), their wisdom was only preserved in fragments. The poets then took these fragments, remodeled and distorted them. Only etymology helps us to discern their original representation.¹⁸

230 The Stoics took a similar approach: due to the bad influences of modern society, man's pre-conceptions, natural notions, and *physikai énnōiai* cannot correctly express themselves in language. With the ancient, non-corrupted people, however, they could do so: their wisdom was mirrored in their words which were able to convey the true nature of things (Heath 2013, 123). Although these words have changed in the course of time, an etymological operation can reveal their true form and meaning, and consequently the truth (the core interest always being directed at the names and nicknames of the gods). Therefore, the Stoics were looking for the primordial meaning in the made-up poetic myths—which they separated from the language of symbolism that expressed the wisdom of the ancients—, and rejected them.¹⁹ The true allegorists believed that the ancient poets purposely expressed their wisdom in an enigmatic manner and saw their role in decoding this wisdom by using etymology and other interpretation procedures. A relatively early example of this is the *Derveni Papyrus*—an anonymous author claims that Orpheus intentionally used an allegorical narrative for the cosmological content.²⁰ What prompted poets to use allegory? M. Heath mentions two motives: to protect the secret teachings from the “profane” (who were unable to gain insight), and in some cases for self-protection, because the new (physical) explanations of the world could have severe consequences for the authors.²¹ During the process of allegorization and spiritual interpretation, Homer became a philosopher and

18 Cf. Heath 2013, 118–121, for echoes of this kind of thinking in Plato and Aristotle.

19 On the basis of such arguments, Cornutus, a Stoic philosopher of the first century AD, rejects even Homer, cf. Heath 2013, 124.

20 For a wider discussion of the *Derveni Papyrus* cf. Laks and Most 1997; Rangos 2007.

21 Heath 2013, 118, refers to Plato's Protagoras, who maintained the archaic poets were sophists at heart: Homer, Hesiod, and Simonides masked their teachings into poetry, whilst Orpheus and Musaeus transformed them into religious rituals and prophecies (*Prot.* 316d-e).

the deepest of theologians, even though the true content of his poetry was masked twice: firstly, you had to recognize its theological nature, and, secondly, you had to decode its riddles.²²

In order to understand Neoplatonic interpretations of Homer, two points need to be taken into consideration. Rather than self-contradictory or in progress, Plato's works were perceived by the Neoplatonics as a unified and wholly consistent teaching. According to them, his dialogues do not present different views, but a unified Platonic doctrine, which is revealed by the leading characters in the individual dialogues (most often Socrates). The second point is that, according to Neoplatonics, there was no real discord between Homer and Plato. The inconsistencies in the works of both authors are merely superficial. With both of them, we need to look for the meaning below the surface: if Plato sometimes praises and at other times criticizes poetry, reading "beneath the surface" shows that, in reality, Plato always praises poetry, and the true meaning of negative criticism is different from the superficial one. Moreover, Homer's problematic depiction of gods (e.g., that they fight each other) contradicts the representations of their life as eternal and blessed only on the surface, for an appropriate interpretation reveals that the deep or true meaning differs from the superficial one, and that Homer, in reality, believes in the true representation of gods (eternal and blessed) throughout. Both use imagery (Homer throughout, Plato often in the 6th and 7th books of the *Republic*—the imagery of the sun, lines, and the cave) and both require an allegorical interpretation, which in both cases reveals that they are philosophically compatible with each other and with themselves.

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Proclus' symbolic response—answering the question or laying it aside?

Against this background, we can finally understand Proclus' defense of Homer, as developed in the "Fifth" and "Sixth Essay" of his *Commentary on the Republic of Plato*.²³ From the Neoplatonic perspective, it is perhaps more

22 Cf. Lamberton 1992.

23 Proclus the Successor (*Próklos diádochos*). For the latest biography cf. Wildberg 2019.

appropriate to talk about the symbolic marriage of Plato with Homer than about defense and reconciliation, because there never was any contradiction in the first place, as Malcolm Heath remarks.²⁴ Of all (preserved) Neoplatonic interpretations of Homer, Proclus' apologetic interpretation is the most complex and the most sophisticated one. Since it cannot be represented here, I will limit the presentation to what is essential for the purpose of this paper.

For Proclus, Plato is, so to speak, Homer's pupil, because he follows the latter in philosophical matters (*In Remp.* K154.16–155.1; K164.8–172.30; K196.9–13) as well as uses the mimetic style (K163.19–27).²⁵ Proclus interprets Plato's critique of poetry within the framework of his own division of poetry, which is considered an especially suggestive and important theoretical innovation.²⁶ In view of this division, there is a contradiction between the "Fifth" (all poetry is mimetic, but only philosophy is inspired "poetry")²⁷ and the much longer and more original "Sixth Essay,"²⁸ where poetry is generally divided into three (two of which are not mimetic and only one, the lowest, is mimetic) or sometimes even into four types according to its cognitive values, which represent the real merit of an artwork for Proclus:

1) *inspired poetry* (*he éntheos / entheastikè poietiké*): better than knowledge (*tò mèn hos kreíton epistémes*);

24 Proclus didn't use the term "allegory"; he "preferred other terms, among which 'symbol' is the most frequent and for this reason it is natural to talk of symbolic interpretation instead of allegorical interpretation." (Kuisma 1996, 62)

25 The exceptionally interesting question whether Plato was himself a poet is, evidently, very old. In his own way, Proclus provides an affirmative answer.

26 Sheppard 1980, 39–103, attributes to his teacher Syrian the division of poetry into inspired and non-inspired, upon which Proclus then developed his triple model.

27 Essay 5 is entitled "Plato's Position on the Art of Poetry and Its Various Genres and the Best Mode and Meter" (*Perì poietikês kai tôn hyp' autèn eidòn kai tês aristes harmonías kai rhythmoû tà Plátوني dokoúnta*). All translations of Proclus' text are from Lamberton 2012, 256–259. On the contradictory definitions of poetry in the two essays cf. Lamberton 2012, xvii; 37. Proclus K57.9, referring to Plato *Phd.* 61a3–4, calls philosophy the greatest music (not poetry), but the phrase is ambiguous. Anyway, "in Essay 5 an inspired *poietiké* seems beyond the realm of possibility" (Lamberton).

28 "Proclus the Successor on the Things Said by Plato in the Republic Regarding Homer and Poetics" (*Próklou diadóchou peri tôn en Politeía pròs Hóméron kai poietikèn Plátوني rhethénton*).

2) *epistemic poetry* (*he epistémon poietiké*): knowledge (*tò dè <hos> epistemikón*);

3) *eicastic poetry* (*tò eikastikón*): correct opinion (*tò dè hos orthodoxastikón*);

4) *fantastic poetry* (*tò phantasikón*): worse than correct opinion (*tò dè hos kai tês orthês dóxes apoleipómenon*).²⁹

However, more important than this division is the division which corresponds to the three types of human life, i.e., the three conditions of the soul (*treîs héxeis tòn psychôn*, *In Remp.* K 177. 5–179. 32). They are described as follows:

1) *inspired poetry*:

[...] the best and perfect life, in which the soul is contiguous with the gods and lives the life that is most closely related to them and made one by its extreme resemblance to them. The soul belongs not to itself but to them, surpassing its own intellect and awakening in itself the secret symbol of the unified substance of the gods, and attaching like to like, the soul's own light to the transcendent light and the most unified element of its own being and life to the One beyond all being and life. (*In Remp.* K177.16–23)

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2) *epistemic poetry*:

The life that comes after this one in rank and power, situated as a mean in the middle of the soul, in which the soul returns within itself, coming down from the divine life and setting intellect and wisdom as the first principle of its activity, elaborates the multiplicity of *logoi* and contemplates the varied transformations of the forms, draws together the knower and the known into the same entity, and reproduces the image of the intellectual substance, drawing together into one the nature of the noetic objects. (*In Remp.* K177.24–178.2)

²⁹ *In Remp.* K191.27–29. The scheme and translations are taken from Kuisma 1996, 135. Cf. also Trimpi 1983, 210–211.

3) *mimetic poetry*:

[...] another, third life after these, drawn along with these lower powers [in our immediate environment] and acting with them. It makes use of imaginings and irrational sense-perceptions and is entirely infested with lower things. (*In Remp.* K178.2–6)³⁰

234 All poetry in its entirety, including the forms of life and poetic means,³¹ comes from above (*tês poietikês [...] ánothen symproioúses*, K178.9); and is only then divided into the first, intermediate, and last kinds of action. Only the last one stoops to connect with the lower powers and becomes mimetic: an imitation of the sensual and perceptive similarity, it is full of opinions and imaginings. Moreover, it changes the various dispositions of the soul through words and expressions, through changes of mode and variation of meter (K19.23–24). The higher forms do not do that; they express symmetry with the unified meter (although this is not stated explicitly, it is certainly hexameter) and use symbols. Essential for Proclus' interpretation of poetry is his conviction that "the function of symbolic words is not restricted to semantic purposes, since they can be used for *doing* something." (Kuisma 1996, 142) The conception of cosmic sympathy is the basis for his belief that symbols can even arouse divine benevolence.³² This is how the two higher types of poetry can lead the soul to mystic *hénosis* with gods and draw together the knower and the known or reproduce the image of the intellective

30 Eicastic and fantastic poetry are now defined as subcategories of mimetic poetry (179.30–33).

31 *In Remp.* K178.28–29: *diò dè kai tàs eschátas autês energeías métrois te kai rhythmoís katekósmesen*. Proclus mentions two poetic devices: *harmonía* (scale, tuning, mode) and *rhythmós* (rhythm, metrical foot).

32 The key term in adapting the concept of cosmic sympathy to interpretation of poetry is "seira" (*seirá*): "it means 'chain', series, horizontal or vertical, dependent on his first member. In mythic stories, divine beings form continuous *homonymous* chains, so that lower members may represent higher members of the same chain. Hence, the name 'Apollo' does not necessarily refer to Apollo the god but perhaps to a daemon of the same chain. For this reason interpretation of particular tales of Apollo should be interpreted according to a defined level of the chain." (Kuisma 1996, 61) Cf. also Rangos 1999.

substance. It is especially typical of the highest form “that it can express in the medium of language and images the transcendent potentiality of the models (*paradigmáton*) by those things most opposite to them and furthest removed from them.” (*In Remp.* K77.21–24) Rightly, Oiva Kuisma connects this with negative theology (1996, 131). With Proclus, especially the higher form of poetry, like philosophy, is closely related to mystical religion. As a matter of fact, it is a form of mystagogy: it leads to experiencing the highest reality, which is beyond the grasp of rational thought. Consequently, one is allowed to describe it with negative terms and even logical contradictions.³³

For Proclus, Homer’s poetry is thus useful—if not for the *polis*, then for the individuals initiated into Neoplatonic knowledge who know how to read it properly. Poetry does not keep the individual soul in the world of images; it leads it beyond them, to the realm of the real being, which lies beyond the reach of rational thinking. In Proclus’ account, Homer is no longer a poet banished by Plato from the *polis*; he rather becomes a philosopher reminiscent of Plato himself. However, the question which arose from Socrates’ aforementioned words in the *Republic* has actually not been answered. Namely, Socrates ponders (seriously or ironically) whether a reason could be found to return to the *polis exactly that kind of poetry which has to be banished*. Is the reality we are in touch with while we are under the spell of poetry of this kind truly nothing more than the realm of appearances? What else could it be?

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Neumann’s answer: unified reality

In the 20th century, one possible answer to this question was provided by Erich Neumann. While speculative like Proclus, he was often a contradictory and less systematic thinker. Like Proclus, he strongly emphasized the role of psychology and personal experience. Since he was profoundly connected with phenomenology and used religious categories (although he was not a religious thinker in the traditional sense of the word), he might seem problematic for the more rationally-oriented scholars. Nevertheless, his interpretation of the effects of poetry seems worthy of consideration, not only due to his partial

33 Cf. Kuisma 1996, 140.

analogy with Proclus' interpretation, but also because the exclusively rational and objectivist interpretations of poetry could hardly contain the specific poetic moment, as even Socrates might have implied. If nothing else, Neumann described poetry very profoundly and with great sensitivity.

236 In order to understand Neumann's explanation, it is essential to bear in mind two basic elements of his theory. Firstly, for him reality is not divided into two, and the fundamental, really existing things are not merely ideas, but a unified reality. This comprises the external, material and internal world, intellectual and sensory reality. Rather than deny them, it represents their unification. Secondly, like Jung, Neumann distinguishes between two fundamental levels of the soul: the *Self (Selbst)*, the totality of the psyche, including all of the elements; and *I (Ich)*, which is its conscious part. Unified reality can only be experienced through encountering one's Self (*Selbst*), which is actually part of the unified reality, but is not accessible to rational thinking: the latter is tied and limited to the *I (Ich)* and the functions of its consciousness. In everyday life and science, man has to act consciously, as an *I*, and move within a narrower compass, within the bounds of consciousness, where the world is polarized into internal (*psycheartig*) and external, wordly (*welthaft*) reality. Experiencing unified reality means transcending these boundaries—despite man's primary need of this reality, he cannot consciously/rationally force it but always receives it as a gift (*gnadenhaft*) (Neumann 1995, 87),³⁴ in modern society often as an unwanted interference. Neumann calls this the big experience (*die große Erfahrung*). Experiencing poetry is only one of the forms of this experience, but arguably one of the noblest ones. Although Neumann did not interpret Homer (nor epic poetry), but German poetry instead (Goethe, Rilke, Trakl), at least some of his findings are, *mutatis mutandis*, applicable to interpreting all kinds of poetry. Understandably, he paid special attention to the psychological and mythic moments of poetic creation and reception. Here, he was exceptionally attentive to the use of specific poetic means: from the sound representation and hidden association of individual words

34 This is an obvious analogy to Proclus' (and ancient) beliefs about poetry being a divine gift.

(246–249) to the explicit, picturesque mental imagery (101–103). A poem provides an opportunity for the “big experience” (which does not always happen, because it is always *gnadenhaft*, whether it is a question of creation or of reception), especially with its structure of irreplaceable elements.

As with mysticism, this does not mean knowledge, but an experience which cannot be translated into terms of a rational discourse, because the latter can only partly describe it. However, such experience is not without consequences for the entire field of the cognitive: with each experience of unified reality, the self becomes newly aware of the limitations and insufficiency of consciousness and of the boundaries of its world. At the same time, Neumann presented the difference between mystical and artistic experience (1995, 93–94). In the mystical experience of transcendent reality, the world somehow disappears (as for Proclus, or even for Plato, the world of images disappears once the truly existing, supra-rational—the Forms—is perceived). In the artistic experience, however, reality unifies with the world: the polarizations and the boundaries, which consciousness sees in the world, lose their relevance, the existing, however, does not disappear. Therefore, this experience cannot be deemed fully sensory, psychological, or intellectual, because it simultaneously unites all three and takes us beyond them.

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Perhaps this sounds very arbitrary and subjective. However, this is not a lone assumption; not even among the most rigorous rational thinkers of our (scientific) time. The history of literary theory has shown that certain aspects of poetry are hard to discuss with relevance without starting from an experience that is always individual (personal) and singular (which does not mean that those experiences cannot be compared and, to an extent, communicated). With regard to this, I would like to provide just one example of the means, by which poetry produces its effects: the metaphor. One of the most distinguished analytic philosophers, Donald Davidson, calls the metaphor in his famous work “What Metaphors Mean” (Davidson 1978) *a dream work of language*. Metaphors have to be defined, claims Davidson, by their characteristic “effect” on the hearer (by what they make him “notice” at each reading), rather than as distinct cognitive contents; this also accounts, he says, for our frequent

difficulty in paraphrasing metaphorical meaning into literal talk.³⁵ In one of the most detailed studies ever written on the metaphor, *La métaphore vive*, Paul Ricoeur emphasizes: “La crainte du psychologisme ne doit donc pas empêcher de rechercher, à la manière transcendente de la critique ancienne, le point d’insertion du psychologique dans la sémantique, le point où la langue même, sens et sensible s’articulent.” (1975, 264) The term “see as,” with which the iconic theory explained the metaphor,³⁶ is defined by Ricoeur as the sensory side of the language (*la face sensible du langage poétique*), as a half-thought, half-experience (*mi-pensée, mi-expérience*), as an act-experience (*acte-expérience*) and an intuitive relationship where imagination plays the central role (cf. Ricoeur 1975, 270). Thus, even the most precise among contemporary analytic interpreters do not avoid psychology or using complicated composed terms. They do so precisely because they want to be as precise as possible. And what applies to metaphor applies to poetry as a whole as well. This reminds us of the difficulties we encounter while trying to explain or even describe our deepest experiences with poetry. Perhaps contemporary theory cannot do it much better than ancient philosophers did.

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35 Cf. also Malpas 2019: “[...] it [metaphor] depends on using sentences with their ‘literal’ or standard meanings in ways that give rise to new or unexpected insights—and just as there are no rules by which we can work out what a speaker means when she utters an ungrammatical sentence, makes a pun or otherwise uses language in a way that diverges from the norm, so there are no rules that govern the grasp of metaphor.”

36 In doing so, Ricoeur strongly relies on the definitions of Hester 1967.

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