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NOVALIS' APOCALYPTIC VISIONS: FROM ENLIGHTENMENT TO THE END OF TIME

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ABSTRACT: This article reassesses Novalis' critical position towards the Enlightenment. Traditionally, Novalis has been considered one of the spearheads of the German reaction against the Enlightenment. However, recent scholarship has nuanced the poet's reactionary attitude, pointing out certain agreements, concordances and negotiations between the philosophical movements of the eighteenth century and Novalis's thinking. Most of these recent readings would agree that, according to Novalis' understanding of history, Enlightenment was necessary, even beneficial. This paper draws attention to some texts that are usually ignored in this debate to demonstrate that Novalis' regard of Enlightenment was not so positive as late scholarship asserts. This investigation analyses *Hymnen an die Nacht* and *Europa* side by side. Although these two texts seem completely different in their form and purpose, a same trope is dominant in both writings: the Apocalypse, the end of time(s) and the birth of a new world. This new world is a Golden Age: both the eternity where Novalis meets his Beloved in an afterlife wedding and the peaceful kingdom where all nations reunite. To conclude, the article shows that Novalis understood the Enlightenment as the main obstacle for the coming of that Golden Age. No reconciliation, then, is possible.

KEYWORDS: Novalis, Counter - Enlightenment, Apocalypse, Europa, Mysticism.

LAS VISIONES APOCALÍPTICAS DE NOVALIS: DE LA ILUSTRACIÓN AL FIN DE LOS TIEMPOS

RESUMEN: El presente artículo reevalúa la posición crítica de Novalis respecto a la Ilustración. Tradicionalmente, a Novalis se le considera un abanderado de la reacción alemana contra el pensamiento ilustrado. Sin embargo, la crítica reciente ha suavizado esta confrontación para destacar ciertos acuerdos, afinidades o negociaciones entre Novalis y la Ilustración. La mayoría de estas interpretaciones recientes estarían de acuerdo en que, según la concepción novalisiana de la historia, la Ilustración era necesaria, e incluso beneficiosa. Este artículo, no obstante, revisa algunos textos que normalmente quedan fuera de este debate para demostrar que la actitud de Novalis respecto a la Ilustración no fue tan positiva como la crítica reciente afirma. Para ello, se analizan los *Himnos a la noche* junto con *La Cristiandad o Europa*. Aunque aparentemente estos textos no guarden ninguna relación entre sí, un mismo tropo predomina en ambos escritos: el Apocalipsis, entendido como el fin de los tiempos y el nacimiento de un mundo nuevo. Este nuevo mundo es una edad dorada en la que Novalis se reúne con su amada en una boda ultraterrena (*Himnos a la noche*), y a la vez un reino donde conviven todas las naciones pacíficamente (*Europa*). No obstante, para que suceda este apocalipsis, la Ilustración debe ser superada.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Novalis, pensamiento antiilustrado, Romanticismo, Europa, Misticismo.

1. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, Novalis (1772-1801) has been considered one of the spearheads of the German reaction against the Enlightenment. His *Die Christenheit oder Europa* (1799) was regarded as a Counter-Enlightenment text that denounces the destruction of medieval spirituality by the belligerent Reformation and the Enlightened rationality. Not long after Novalis read *Europa* to the Jena Circle, the Romantic theologian Schleiermacher (1768-1834) perceived a reactionary and nostalgic yearning in Novalis' work: «into what barbarous depths of the unholy past would that return us!» (in Hiebel 1954: 98). Recently, Graeme Garrard similarly situates Novalis in the reaction against the Enlightenment in *Counter-Enlightenments: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present*. Garrard aligns the German poet with figures such as Coleridge and Chateaubriand, since they share the «stress they placed on the importance of beauty in their critique of the eighteenth century» (2006: 56). However, later on the book, Garrard offers a more nuanced reading of Novalis' attitude, distancing himself from Schleiermacher's judgment. The poet is not «reactionary», since his «triadic conception of history [...] ends in prophesying a new, post-Revolutionary world of harmony and faith» (2006: 60). Nonetheless, the idea of Novalis as a fierce critic of the Enlightenment persists in this new interpretation. Novalis' view of history requires the overcoming of Enlightenment. Frederick Hiebel writes, regarding *Die Christenheit oder Europa*: «the Enlightenment appears as a Second Reformation, an apostasy from apostasy» where «knowledge and faith are utterly sundered and at odds», a «void» which has to be «traversed» (1954: 92). Lastly, from an eschatological perspective, Helmut Schanze has argued that Enlightenment is the present to be eradicated so Novalis' timeless utopia takes place on Earth (1976: 154).

However, recent criticism has questioned Novalis' ascription to the Counter-Enlightenment movement. Frederik Beiser defends that Novalis despised not the Enlightenment, but rather understood it as a necessary process that his new religion had to build upon: «Novalis did not condemn reason and philosophy [...] but saw them as essential to his new religion [...] he also insisted that its [Enlightenment's] destructive work is necessary» (1992: 267). In contrast with afore mentioned criticism, Beiser's interpretation reconciles Novalis with Enlightenment by ascribing to the poet a positive regard towards the benefits of eighteenth-century philosophy. Martín Navarro attempts the same reconciliation. He reads Novalis' work as a continuation of the Enlightenment. Jena Romanticism would be the way Enlightenment confronts its own contradictions and the effort of Enlightened thinking to solve them (2010: 155). To end with these exempla, Arctander criticises other interpretations that «regard *Europa* as a text of simple reaction» (1995: 231) against the Enlightenment tradition. According to Arctander, nowadays most of the scholars would agree with this second interpretation of Novalis' thinking. The critic recognizes a more complex position of Novalis towards the Enlightenment focusing on their concordances and reconciliations (1995: 231).

My intention is not to delve into the position of each of the aforementioned scholars, although we will go deeper in some cases below. Not even I will write an attempt of classification of the different postures that critics express on the issue. Of course, this classification would result far more complex than a simple dichotomy between those who think Novalis was pro Enlightenment and those who argue that the German poet belongs to the Counter-Enlightenment reaction. Rather, my essay wants to draw attention to some aspects that are normally disregarded in this debate.

Most of these critics assesses Novalis' position towards Enlightenment by reading and studying *Europa*. However, this political essay was written side-by-side —after the death of Novalis' fiancée Sophie von Kühn in 1797— with another text that apparently has little to do with the Enlightenment: his *Hymnen an die Nacht*. In spite of the differences between a political essay and a book of poems, if we read *Die Christenheit oder Europa* in the light of *Hymnen an die Nacht*, we can understand better Novalis' attitude towards the Enlightenment. The comparison of these writings is possible since the same trope dominates them. In fact, the trope permeates other works of Novalis, such as *Geistliche Lieder* and some other philosophical writings. This trope is the Apocalypse, which is, the vision of the end of times and Earth and the coming of a new Golden Age. Furthermore, this trope is particularly relevant not only because of its pervasiveness, but also because it unfolds a whole vision of history where Enlightenment is regarded in the temporal context in which it takes its place. Therefore, I will compare *Hymnen an die Nacht* to *Europa* analyzing their apocalyptic concerns in order to uncover Novalis' assessment of Enlightenment. Hopefully, this comparison will contribute to the debate that opened this essay.

2. APOCALYPSE AS «BRAUTNACHT»

2.1. *Mystical Weddings*

The Jena Circle received the influence of several spiritual movements that spread through Germany at the dawn of the eighteenth century. Among those movements, millenarianism announced the coming of a second kingdom of God on Earth. In many writings, this kingdom takes the form of a political unity. There is no need to stress how perfectly this eschatology accommodated to the events of the late eighteenth century, especially to French Revolution. Naturally, Novalis felt an attraction to this idea. Indeed,

in *Europa* it is truly present, as is well known. The fifth poem of the book might be at least close to millenarianism. The hymn interprets mankind's history as departing from the divine, with whom humanity inhabited in a pristine world, but abandoned it long ago. In the hymn, the spiritual and the historical are intermingled. Since in the hymn the history of human spirituality has a geography—which includes Greece, Bethelhem or the Hindustan—one would expect an earthly kingdom of God in the same way as we find an early earthly golden age. However, the apocalypse in *Hymnen and die Nacht* does not take the form of the «kingdom of a thousand years». The *eschathon* is not a geopolitical order, but a marriage.

M.H. Abrams described in *Natural Supernaturalism* two features of Romantic Apocalypse: «a vision in which the old earth is replaced by a new and better world» (Abrams, 41) and the marriage, «as a form of covenant» (1971: 42). With some nuances, this paradigm is useful to think on *Hymnen and die Nacht*. These poems express the apocalyptic renewal of the Earth that happens when the two lovers—Novalis and his recently dead fiancée—meet in eternity. Since Sophie cannot come back to the perishable world, only through his death the lovers can encounter again: «zur Hochzeit ruft der Tod» (1984: 171), announces the fifth hymn. Under this frame, death is re-signified as birth to a new and joyful eternal life. Novalis writes in a different text: «Was wir hier Tod nennen ist eine Folge des Absolut Lebens, des Himmels – daher die unaufhörliche Zerstörung alles unvollkommenen Lebens» (1965: 416). For this reason, the last hymn praises death: «Gelobt sei uns die ewge Nacht / Gelobt der ewge Schlummer» (1984: 175), and not by chance this is the only hymn with a title: «Sehnsucht nach dem Tode». Evidently, Novalis longs for death because he believes in an afterlife of eternity, which is guaranteed by a God who is a Father: «Die Lust der Fremde ging uns aus / zum Vater wollen wir nach Haus» (1984: 175). The divine plays in the *Hymnen* the same mediator role that Klingsohr performs in the novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*. In the novel, the meeting of Henry and his beloved Matilda is always mediated by the presence of Klingsohr, the father of Matilda. Due to the strong symbolism Novalis uses in the novel, it is not strange to interpret Klingsohr as a figure of the Father who permits the marriage of poet and beloved.

This co-presence of the Father and Sophie has led many distinguished scholars to read *Hymnen an die Nacht* as mystical songs of marital union with both Sophie and Christ. Certainly, *Hymnen an die Nacht* can be better understood in the tradition of the Bible, which is, that of the *Song of Songs*, where the union of the soul with God is metaphorically represented by the nuptial union of lover and beloved. In this sense, Arctander has interpreted this ambiguity as a subversive strategy by which Novalis wants to implement his «new Romantic religion»:

It [he is referring to *Geistliche Lieder*, but latter he applies the same reading to *Hymnen an die Nacht*] uses Christian tropes to figure Sophie as Hardenberg's divine mediatrix [...]. Christ and Sophie [...] function as mediators, as incarnations of the Absolute, of the One God of entheism, but they are also freely chosen mediators, the arbitrarily chosen gods of pantheism as well (1995: 249).

Nonetheless, Arctander over-stresses the revolutionary nature of Novalis' texts to the point of obscuring the traditional biblical genre upon which the *Hymnen an die Nacht* are constructed.

In any case, going back to the fifth hymn, we read that this marriage in eternity affects the Earth:

Der herbeste Kummer fleucht
 Vor deiner goldnen Schale,
 Wenn Erd und Leben weicht,
 Im letzten Abendmahle (1984: 171).

Earth and perishable life retreat and a new world is born: «[Christ] Erwacht in neuer Götterherrlichkeit, erstieg er die Höhe der neugebornen Welt – begrub mit eigener Hand der Alten Leichmann in die verlaßne Höhe» (1984: 170). The old world —Earth—, dies; the new one —Heaven— rises. Heaven is the realm of eternity where death no more distances lover from beloved, since death does not exist anymore. It is the end of time(s).

While in the first and second hymn the end of this «Brautnacht» frightens the poet, in hymns three and four we can read the confidence of the lover in the upcoming eternity of this night. The third hymn starts with a depiction of the poet's desperate situation. The first person laments his sorrowful loneliness: «einsam, wie noch kein Einsamer war» (1984: 153). Novalis might be remembering the dark night of his soul when Sophie died. But another night comes and this Night will redeem the poet from his woe. The Night brings, as it did in the first hymn, «die verklärten Züge der Geliebten» (1984: 155). As in the Incarnation, eternity enters Earth in the moment of the vision of the beloved. Eternity incarnates in this phantom of Sophie. It is glimpsed in the eyes of the beloved girl: «In Ihren Augen ruhte Ewigkeit». «Jahrtausende zogen abwärts in die Ferne, wie Ungewitter» (1984: 155) continues the poet. Time disappears in the horizon: the poetic persona has seen eternity, the eternity of Sophie as a living creature beyond the earthly realm. Although at the end this vision does not last, he has a certain trust in its upcoming, an «ewigen, unwandelbaren Glauben an den Himmel der Nacht und sein Licht, die Geliebte» (1984: 155). The following hymns will confirm his expectations. «[...] Dann ewig die Brautnacht währt» (1984: 151), we read in the last line of the first hymn.

As true apocalypse, then, the apparition of the beloved completely renews the face of the earth. In the Biblical imagination, as Abrams explains, the apocalypse destroys the old earth in *ekpyrosis*. From the ashes of this final conflagration, a new earth rises. We have read it in the fifth hymn: the old Earth dies, the new one is born. In the third hymn too, the coming of the beloved brings «eine neue, unergründliche Welt» (1984: 155). The presence of the beloved not only renews the earth, but also transforms the soul of the lover: «über der Gegend schwebte mein entbundner, neugeborner Geist» (1984: 155). This apocalypse enraptures the lonely poet and elevates his mourning soul to an exultant mood, where he believes in the forthcoming eternal marriage. The following hymns, specially their lyrical parts, prefigure this same apocalyptic vision. A detailed commentary of each of them escapes the purpose of this essay. Conversely, I should turn now to the question I raised in the introduction, which is Novalis' attitude towards the Enlightenment. To what extent are the *Hymnen an die Nacht* related to the Enlightenment?

2.2 *Night versus light*

Although the relationship is neither evident nor straightforward, Novalis' Counter-Enlightened thinking lies at the bottom of *Hymnen an die Nacht*. References to the Enlightenment's mindset are scarce, dubious and elusive. However, the image of light is frequent, especially in the first hymns. In Novalis' context, the connection of light with *Aufklärung*, if not necessary, at least seems very plausible, and would have been a possible and not particularly stilted reading in this period. Charles Passage notices

also this connection in his introduction to *Hymnen an die Nacht* (1960: x). Furthermore, the relationship of the Night with Romanticism may be a more straightforward one. Arctander, for example, identifies the night with the «Romantic Absolute» (1995: 263). But, more importantly, the attitude of Novalis towards Enlightenment proves to be relevant to understand the worldview that governs *Hymnen an die Nacht*, since the poet's ideas on transcendence, knowledge and love are defined in relation (and contraposition) to the philosophies that precedes him or were to him contemporary.

Throughout the hymns, the relationship between Light and Night is one of opposition. The most common characterisation of Light and Night is that of two different and separate realms. The poet urges for movement from Light to Night, as in the hymn 4: «wer oben stand auf den Grenzgebürge der Welt, und hinübersah in das neue Land, in der Nacht Wohnsitz – wahrlich der kehrt nicht in das Treiben der Welt zurück, in das Land, wo das Licht in ewiger Unruh hauset» (1984: 155). Here the division is clear: Light and Night form two completely different lands. The man who has seen both «baut er sich Hütten» (1984: 155) in the realm of the Night. It is common to interpret this expression as a reference to the Gospels. In mount Tabor, Christ manifests his divinity to the apostles, who, enraptured by this sudden grace, wish to build tabernacles for Christ and the two prophets that accompany him in an attempt to enjoy longer the epiphany. The Night is then the mount Tabor: the place where we want to settle our tents and stay to witness the manifestation of the divine. The Night is «der Offenbarungen mächtiger Schooß» (1984: 165), as Novalis characterises it in the fifth hymn. In the first and third hymns, Night brings to the lover the presence of the beloved: it is the Tabor both of Christ and Sophie. So the Tabor is transfigured in the nuptial altar of the wedding of Christ and Sophie with the poet's soul. The Night is then truly apocalyptic, since «apocalypse» is the Greek word for «revelation».

The Greek points to the end of time. In spite of the poet's intuition of the Night as the end of times, on some occasions he fears the return of the morning, as we have noticed in the previous section. Precisely in this way does the second hymn starts. After the poet has enjoyed the «Brautnacht» of the first hymn, he muses: «Muß immer der Morgen wiederkommen? Endet nie des Irdischen Gewalt? unselige Geschäftigkeit verzehrt den himmlischen Anflug der Nacht. Wird nie de Liebe geheimes Opfer ewig brennen?» (1984: 153). Because Night has been represented in such a redeeming and blissful way, Light can only have negative connotations. Light is the realm from which we want to leave, and the moment we fear it might come, interrupting then the benedictions of the bridal Night. Indeed, the opening line of the second hymn remembers the tradition of medieval «Tagelieds», which were compositions sung on the departure of the lover at dawn.

In opposition to the Night, Light is associated with the «irdische», «unselige», non-transcendent and quotidian things:

Noch weckst du, muntres Licht den Müden zur Arbeit [...] Gern will ich die fleißigen Hände rühren [...] unverdroßen verfolgen deines künstlichen Werks schönen Zusammenhang – gern betrachten deiner gewaltigen, leuchtenden Uhr sinnvollen Gang – ergründen der Kräfte Ebenmaß in die Regeln des Wunderspiels unzähliger Räume und ihre Zeiten (1984: 157).

Novalis characterises the realm of Light in this passage of the fourth hymn as industrial, mechanical, scientific; adjectives that could easily be ascribed to the Enlightenment. However, other adjectives and adverbs used in this fragment can be misleading: «gladly»,

«admirable», «mighty», «wondrous»... seem to manifest a positive assessment. How is this contradiction resolved? The hymns depict a process of discovery. The poet understands only at the end of the poems that death is life, that the night is bridal. So it happens in the first hymn. It starts with a paean to light, but it ends: «du hast die Nacht mit zum Leben verkündet» (1984: 151). Novalis' conversion to the Night is progressive. By the middle of the fourth hymn the continuation of the passage aforementioned allows no doubt:

Aber getreu der Nacht bleibt mein geheimes Herz, und der schaffenden Liebe,
ihrer Tochter. Kannst du mir seigen ein ewig treues Herz? Hat deine Sonne freund-
liche Augen, die mich erkennen? Hat deine Sterne meine verlangende Hand? [...]
oder war sie [die Nacht] es, die deinem Schmuck höhere, liebere Bedeutung gab?
[...] Trägt nicht alles, was uns begeistert, die Farbe der Nacht? (1984: 157).

The answer to these questions leads the poet to condemn the Light: «Du verflögst in dir selbst – in endlosen Raum zergingst du [...] Einst zeigt deine Uhr das Ende der Zeit, wenn du wirst wie unser einer, und voll Sehnsucht und Inbrunst auslöschest und stirbst» (1984: 157 and 159). This is a violent menace, a death threat against Enlightenment. Indeed, the poet will rejoice on its extinction: «In mir fühl ich deiner Geschäftigkeit Ende – himmlische Freiheit, selige Rückkehr» (1984: 159). This condemnation is not exclusive to the fourth hymn. In the first hymn, for example, after an initial and apparent praise of the Light, Novalis despises its realm: «Wie arm und kindisch dünkt mir das Licht nun – wie erfreulich und gesegnet des Tages Abschied». He follows on explaining his initial confusion of having praised the Light: «Also nur darum, weil die Nacht dir abwendig macht die Dienenden, sätest in des Raumer Weiten die leuchtenden Kugeln, zu verkünden deine Allmacht – deine Wiederkehr – in den Zeiten deine Entföhnung» (1984: 151). And to conclude with the hymn with which we began our discussion, in the third hymn, Novalis wrote: «von der Höhen meiner alter Seligkeit ein Dämmerungsschauer – und mir einenmale Riß das Band der Geburt – des Lichtes Fessel» (1984: 153 and 155). This image can be read as a witty subversion of Kant's similar metaphor. In *Was ist Aufklärung?*, the philosopher claims that the main goal of the Enlightenment is to liberate humankind from the «Gängelwagen» of «die Obergewalt», allowing people, then, «allein zu gehen» (1985: 55). Here, Novalis, strongly educated in philosophy, inverts the terms of the Kantian image: Enlightenment is the fetter from which Romanticism must release us.

Before reaching the end of this part, one question may arise. Why did not Novalis mention the term Enlightenment explicitly? The answer is that, precisely by not naming it, Novalis performs a Counter-Enlightened action. The *Hymnen* are written in the same language we find in Novalis' literature, such as *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*: that of the symbol, the fantasy. To explain this, we could refer to several fragments of the *Schriften* where Novalis expresses that poetry leads to the highest understanding. But I prefer to tell a story, which is found by the end of the first part of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, where Klingsohr narrates a story. At some point of Klingsohr's tale, the father of Matilda depicts a room where the main characters are reunited. The Scrivener, who represents reason and soon will become a fearsome tyrant, is writing what Sense dictates him. His writing is proofed by another character who submerges the Scrivener's paper on water. Only the pages that survive this proof are piled up. In a moment of distraction, a little girl (Fable) takes the position of the Scrivener and writes. Every page of Fable survives the proof of the submersion. In a novel whose main topic could be the nature of poetry, Novalis portrays in this story the victory of poetry over the tyranny of reason. This passage

predicts reason's defeat. To pass the proof of submersion, Novalis uses also in the *Hymnen* the language of Fable, which is poetry. Poetry, in the same way as the Night, allows us to see the transcendent: it proclaims a faith in the invisible and in the spiritual, the only realms where the two lovers can meet each other again.

On the contrary, Enlightenment imprisons the soul in the realm of light. As long as daily light endures, the enjoyment of the lover must wait until the truly apocalyptic Night enters. The apocalypse will deliver the poet from Enlightened fetters in the same movement with which it delivers human soul from earthly prison. In transcendence, Novalis' ciphers the possibility of the «Brautnacht» where lover and beloved reunite in eternity. Contrarily, Enlightenment's inclinations towards empiricism and immanence, and, especially, its crusade against religion (as we will see in the following chapter) closed the door to the mystical transcendental reunion. As Siegmar Hellerich expresses,

The feeling of Sophie's real presence clinched the mourner's faith in Plato's doctrine of the immortality of the soul [...] Sophie's perceptible proximity made Novalis believe that eternity is invisibly present in the temporal and can be experienced by the «inner sense» (1995: 58).

The veil of Enlightenment covers our eyes, so we cannot perceive the invisible presence of the eternal. It must be torn.

3. APOCALYPSE AS THE KINGDOM OF GOD

3.1. *The ekpyrosis of Enlightenment*

Es waren schöne glänzende Zeiten, wo Europa ein christliches Land war, wo *Eine* Christenheit diesen menschlich gestalteten Welttheil bewohnte; *Eine* großes gemeinschaftliches Interesse verband die entlegensten Provinzen dieses wieten geistlichen Reichs (1984: 526).

So *Die Christenheit oder Europa* begins: an imaginative remembrance of the Middle Ages. The gaze of the poet seems, at the same time, nostalgic and visionary. The tone is certainly elegiac: it can be appreciated in the adjectives Novalis uses to describe this faded Europe.

It is difficult to deny that Novalis regarded the Middle Ages as one of the happier ages of mankind – if not the happiest. Humankind ascended to the highest summits: «aller andern menschlichen Kräfte, die harmonische Entwicklung aller Anlagen; die ungeheure Höhe, die einzelne Menschen in allen Fächern der Wissenschaften des Lebens und der Künste erreichten [...]» (1984: 528); all that was achieved in this period. The reason for this high regard is that the Middle Ages were for Novalis the Christian Ages. Or, better said, the Catholic Ages. Why would a Pietist such as Novalis have this esteem for Catholicism? Beiser adduces: «Novalis' flirtation with Catholicism is based on his political ideals rather than his religious beliefs. What pushed him toward Catholicism was his ideal of community, his demand for an aesthetic state» (1992: 178).

Although Beiser's diagnosis here seems to be correct; his distinction between religion and politics is problematic. Novalis remarks in the beginning of his essay the unity achieved by Catholicism in Europe. The word «Eine» appears twice marked in italics. Novalis translates the brotherhood in faith into political peace: «das Himmelreich zum einzigen Reiche auf dieser Welt zu machen» (1984: 527). This longing for serene

community buries its roots in Novalis' immediate political context. Europe was on the verge of conflagration: the Great Alliance was preparing itself to fight the Napoleonic forces. The feeling of impending war made Novalis wish for peaceful coexistence. Only religion could save the situation (Novalis 1984: 535-537). But religion was severely weakened by the attacks of the *Aufklärung*. Thus, as religion retires from politics, its communitarian effect mitigates.

Novalis devotes several critical passages against the Enlightenment in *Die Christenheit oder Europa* and they are mainly based on Enlightenment's crusade against religion. The poet accuses the eighteenth century of having disenchanted the world. Indeed, he was one of the first thinkers that would cultivate this critical Romantic trope: «[...] der modern Denkungsart [...] setzen den Menschen in der Reihe der Naturwesen mit Noth oben an, und machte die unendliche schöpferische Musik des Weltalls zum einförmigen Klappern einer ungeheuren Mühle» (1984: 535).

«Klappern» is a sound that could also describe the chaotic noise of war. Although it is not explicit in the text, in Novalis' imagination the development of mechanical sciences achieved by the Enlightenment supported a progressive industrialisation, which at the end devotes its efforts and production to an impending war. War deafens the peaceful and neo-platonic «Musik des Weltalls», though only in this music abides the power to overcome the «Klappern»:

Es wird so lange Blut über Europa strömen bis die Nationen ihren fürchterlichen Wahnsinn gewahr werden, der sie im Kreise herumtreibt und von heiliger Musik getroffen und besänftigt zu ehemaligen Altären in bunter Vermischung treten, Werke des Friedens vornehmen, und ein Großes Liebesmahl, als Friedensfest, vornehmen [...] (Novalis 1984: 543).

The adjective «heiliger» identifies the celestial music with religion, which in plays Novalis a harmonising role. «Nur Religion kann Europa wieder aufwecken» (1984: 543); only religion can recuperate the lost unity that reigned in Europe and rebuild again a Catholic Europe, an «universal» one. So religion cannot be separated from politics: this was, as it is well known, against the main tenets of Enlightenment.

Enlightenment is one of the disenchanting forces that dissolved the Middle Ages. It turns the beautiful and miraculous into the mechanical, since its project consists in «die Natur, den Erdboden, die menschlichen Seelen und die Wissenschaften von der Poesie zu säubern, - jede Spur des Heiligen zu vertilgen [...]» (1984: 535). Nothing is, then, more contrary to Novalis' program than Enlightenment. As Novalis remarks in another text:

Die Welt muß romantisiert werden. So findet man den ursprünglichen Sinn wieder [...] Indem ich dem Gemeinen einen hohen Sinn, dem Gewöhnlichen ein geheimnisvolles Ansehn, dem Bekannten die Würde des Unbekannten, dem Endlichen einen unendlichen Schein gebe so romantisiere ich es (1965: 545).

This Counter-Enlightenment is performed by Romantic imagination: to infuse spirituality into empirical knowledge, in order to be able to read in nature the higher reality, «the double character of all natural phenomena» (Pfefferkorn 1998: 121): as a

¹ A hundred years later, Adorno and Horkheimer will reach to a very similar conclusion in *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*.

«natural object», but also as a sign that points to something greater. Naturally, this quote explains what was said above about the importance of poetry as a way of knowledge, for poetry is the work of imagination, the wand of analogy, as we will see. Enlightenment, then, obscures the power of romanticising imagination. As Nassar notes, «in his essay *Christendom or Europe* [...], Novalis identifies this deficiency of perception with, among other things, the protestant and the mechanistic world views» (2014: 68).

Novalis' accusations against the Enlightenment are, then, severe. The clattering of the mill defies, risks and eventually deafens the cosmic harmony. This cosmic harmony is to be understood in two senses, using, as Novalis would put it, the «Zauberstab der Analogie» (1984: 537). One is political; the other, epistemological. «Alte und neue Welt sind in Kampfen begriffen»: this fight, which correlates to the French Revolution as much as to apocalyptic imaginary, needs to stop «wie in den Wissenschaften eine nähre und mannigfaltigere Connexion und Berührung» (1984: 542). Just as spiritual and empirical knowledge are destined to fuse in one truth through imagination, Novalis wishes all the political states to achieve the same peace, to fuse in one Europe. The Golden Age to come is, like the Middle Ages, a promised period of unity. However, the clattering of the mill resounds like engines of war. Novalis explains in the text how Enlightened hatred to Catholicism progressively spreads to all that is beautiful, moral, artistic or religious. But this hatred and disbelief goes even further, and Novalis blames Enlightenment for all the wars and disasters of the modern age. Enlightenment disempowers religion. But religion has been portrayed as the capacity to hear the harmonic music of the cosmos, to feel the harmony. The pacifying role religion was to play in violent times has been wiped out by the disenchanting project of Enlightenment (1984: 534-536).

So, to reach the peaceful Golden Age, to achieve harmony, Enlightenment must be not only overpassed, but also destroyed. «Längst hätte sich das überirdische Feuer Luft gemacht, und die klugen Aufklärungs-Pläne vereitelt, wenn nicht weltlicher Druck und Einfluß denselben zu Statten gekommen wären» (Novalis: 1984, 536). Literally, this expresses an *ekpyrosis*, an apocalyptic destruction of the old earth in order to let the new one be born: «[...] die Zeit der Auferstehung gekommen ist, [...] die günstigsten Zeichen ihrer Regeneration geworden sind» (Novalis 1984: 537). As Novalis did in *Hymnen an die Nacht*, the text embodies again the romantic apocalyptic paradigm traced by Abrams in *Natural Supernaturalism*. For Novalis, the ashes of Enlightenment would be the nurturing ground for a new Earth.

Some critics allude to Romantic dialectic of history in order to argue that Enlightenment was necessary for Novalis' Golden Age (see, for instance, Beiser 1992: 285). A similar trend can be found in Martín Navarro (2010: 155). According to this criticism, Novalis understood history as progress. Each period consists in a step climbing a little bit closer to the Golden Age. Therefore, Enlightenment was interpreted as any other period of history: a necessary step. This dialectic of history entails the well-known formula thesis + antithesis = synthesis. However, the apocalyptic images we have traced in *Europa* focus only in the destructive part of this historical dialectic. Therefore, Novalis' vision of history agrees only with the antithesis: only the destruction of the Enlightenment movement is really needed, not the existence of the movement in its self. On the other hand, nothing is stated about the necessity of the coming of Enlightenment. In other words, what is necessary for the Golden Age is only its surpassing, its *ekpyrosis*. So the position abovementioned uses the necessity of this destruction to argue the necessity of Enlightenment for the realisation of Novalis' project. A falling, then, is misread as an ascension, just because after the fall humankind will rise again. Or, at least, that was what Novalis believed.

3.2. *Mystical politics*

Both in *Hymnen an die Nacht* and in *Europa*, Enlightenment is an obstacle to the mystical union. «All humanity will melt together like a pair of lovers» (1999: 39), Novalis wrote in *Glaube und Liebe*, equating in a striking metaphor, or analogy, the longings of *Hymnen an die Nacht* and *Die Christenheit oder Europa*. The reunion of the fighting states in Christendom parallels the afterlife marriage of Novalis with Sophie under the mediation of the divine. Enlightenment stands in the way of this meeting.

Sie [Christendom] muß das alte Füllhorn des Seegens wieder über die Völker ausgießen. Aus dem heiligen Schooße eines ehrwürdigen europäischen Consiliums wird die Christenheit aufstehn, und das Geschäft der Religionserweckung, nach einem allumfassenden, göttlichem Plane betrieben werden. Keiner wird dann mehr protestieren gegen christlichen und weltlichen Zwang [...]

Wenn und wenn eher? darnach ist nicht zu fragen. Nur Geduld, sie wird, sie muß kommen die heilige Zeit des ewigen Friedens [...] Genossen meines Glaubens, verkündigt mit Wort und That das göttlichen Evangelium, und bleibt dem wahrhaften, unendlichen Glauben treu bis in den Tod. (Novalis 1984: 544).

This Europe is truly «catholic», which in Greek means «universal». Its universal call leaves no one aside, not even the Enlightened intellectuals: «Also kommt auch, ihr Philantropen und Encyklopädisten, in die friedensstiftende Loge und empfängt den Bruderkuß» (1984: 540). This invitation is not to be understood as a recognition of the Enlightenment, nor as an acceptance. As a kind of rite of passage, the Enlightened must abandon their previous beliefs and convert to the new religion: «steift das graue Netz ab, und schaut mit junger Liebe die Wunderherrlichkeit der Natur, der Geschichte und der Menschheit an» (1984: 540). The veil of Enlightenment blinds humanity so it cannot see anymore the «miraculous magnificence»: the cosmic harmony that produces the «heiliger Musik», which will deafen the war between the states and between the sciences. What the neophyte is about to discover when stripping off the Enlightened veil is the unity of all beings (see Pfeffekorn 1988: 121). In the new millenarian Earth, in the communion of the kingdom of God, Novalis states it clearly: blinding Enlightenment must be abandoned.

4. CONCLUSION

In *Die Christenheit oder Europa*, Novalis imagines a new Christian Europe to be reborn out of the ashes of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. The German poet believed in the glorious and inevitable upcoming of a Golden Age where unity and spirituality shall govern mankind. Novalis longs for a renewal of Catholicism: not understood as a reversal to the Medieval Roman Church, but rather in its etymological meaning, as a universal community. The Golden Age lies not in the past, but in the future. This is why Garrard and Beiser were reluctant to call *Die Christenheit oder Europa* «reactionary».

By not calling him «reactionary», they were pointing to the fact that Novalis did not want to return to the Middle Ages. But Beiser, as well as Actander, goes further and identifies in Novalis an acceptance of the Enlightenment's task as a necessary and

essential part of the historical progress towards the Golden Age. Nonetheless, as we have seen, a different reading of Novalis' *Hymnen* and *Europa* uncovers a very critical attitude towards eighteenth-century philosophy. In this interpretation, Enlightenment is a veil that must be stripped off, since otherwise we will not be able to see the underlying harmony that unites everything.

Hymnen an die Nacht expresses an apparently different vision of the apocalypse as it is represented in *Europa*. The future realm stresses not so much the kingdom of God, but the mystical «Brautnacht». In most of the hymns, universal communion leaves its place to a reunion of soul and Beloved. This encounter demands not peace between states or between disciplines of knowledge, but rather an unshakeable faith in the upcoming of the «Brautnacht», in the immortality of the soul and in transcendence. However, what the *Hymnen an die Nacht* teaches about Enlightenment is particularly relevant for *Europa*. Enlightenment's radical immanence endangers the otherworldly marriage of Novalis and Sophie. Enlightenment is perceived as a counterweight of the soul's flight towards the beloved. Novalis must turn off the light in order to let the mystical Night enter. Since «all humanity will melt together like a pair of lovers», just as Enlightenment impedes the mystical wedding night, it also hampers Christendom —the universal reunion of the states—. We have already explained how deeply connected Enlightenment and war are in Novalis' thinking. In both texts, Novalis situates Enlightenment as the main obstacle for the realisation of the Apocalypse. Therefore, both apocalyptic futures (Christendom and the «Brautnacht») require the *ekpyrosis* of this intellectual movement. The eighteenth-century worldview is the old earth, from whose ashes the new earth shall reborn.

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