

WORD and IMAGE: On the Poetics of Seeing and the Aesthetics of poetical Speaking

THE IMAGE AS WORD

The Natural Language of the Real

Meditation on the Deep Poetics of the Painting „Der Sieger“ (The Victor)

by JOSEF DÖBBER



ILKA SCHULTHEIS, Der Sieger (The Victor), Aquarell, 1994
(Original 30 x 40 cm, privately owned by the author)

The painter should not only paint what he sees in front of him,
but also what he sees inside himself.
Caspar David Friedrich

The youth who has been standing on our graves with visions deep within him (...)
of higher humankind, a joyful new beginning.
Novalis, 5th Hymn to the Night

This painting has the title „The Victor“, given to it by the painter – and yet, initially it seems to say and to mean something very different. There is a lonely, deeply thoughtful human figure, apparently forlorn before the gaping infinity of the real world. The firm ground, on which this figure is placed, speaks softly of death, decay and things past, which may only be revived in memories and thoughts. The massive ground shows unmistakable anthropomorphous traits of things long dead and gone. *Who* is this then, standing there, and *where* does he direct his vision and thought?

But first of all: What sort of 'standing' is this? In which sense can we say that this human figure, who has been labelled a 'victor', is 'standing' on ground which reminds us of the frailty and transitoriness of all earthly and human life, by its marked darkness, the virtual ossification of its morphologic forms? Does this human figure not rather seem to be *woven* and *fused* into its background (of life), even into the dark background tint, as if woven and knitted into the very fabric of perishability? Indeed, it may be said that this peculiar victor can only be one who rises boldly like a peak above the basic mountain chains of epochal ascents and descents, thereby raising and, in a sense even 'redeeming' it. Being human can obviously only find a successful and worldly completion when painful ascents through death and destruction are accepted and added to the growing mountains of original suffering and the seemingly lost meaning of the past is handed over in silence to the highest and lightest. Such memories of the past and previews of the future take the form of simply giving *thanks*: all-encompassing and all-including thanks which complete themselves in the *original gesture of receiving* openness itself, thereby undergoing a deep transformation giving possession to itself.

However, the viewer who is willing to look closely and spend some time, will soon notice that the inner landscape of this painting is composed of three distinct areas or layers of meaning: the abrupt darkness and blackness of the foreground, the paler light and bluish illumination of the middle, and a further narrow threateningly dark zone, only hinted at, in the upper area of the painting. The victor, however, *towers* in sharp contours against the playful brightness of shadow and light - insistent existence. Saying that he 'towers' really means something very different from saying that he 'stands'. The term feeds into the concrete typical forms of being 'beyond oneself'. The posture of the human figure certainly points to thoughtfulness and review, stopping to think, reflection and memories, so much so, that one might even be tempted to call the painting "The Thinker". But the inner form dynamics and the infinitely rich deep meaning of this painting gravitate less towards this central tangible figure. They rather radiate from it and beyond it into the *pure Between Top and Bottom*, which, according to the hermetic principle of "Like top, like bottom" opens up

a *self-originating area of light*, emerging from the tense dynamics between top and bottom. The 'Victorious' must therefore be seen in the *self-genesis of the cosmic world light*, the *primeval* conditions of which also include night and darkness (bottom and top ground), not only as a shaping outer background, but as an inner moment and incitement of its own pure dawn: *Lux ex tenebris*. The light giving birth to itself as the open radiating element actually owes itself to the shadow of its own not-being and therefore *appreciates* it. This *all-encompassing* appreciation is the *most original ability of Man*, even of all earthbound and cosmic elements, as the universal and victorious *energy of the real* itself. Without a plight overcome and a death suffered, without the provocative basic experience of distress and fear, without destruction and passage through the midnight hour of the spirit, no breakthrough to the *cosmic glow* is possible which has been *covered in the dark* for so long and which, in reality, is nothing but a different form of shape and experience of this darkness, its *very own and secret 'ray'*. The 'Victor' is discovering here and giving himself over to the *all-penetrating light* which is only able to *break through* to itself by means of a cosmic shadowing and historic darkening. He is thinking of what he is owing himself to, as a gift to himself. As he represents a *creative and lonely individual*, probably an artistic and aesthetic person, he marks, at the same time, the precarious 'prototypical' place of an epochal and aeonal transition of the whole: the *abrupt jump round and breakthrough* from a personal and historical night world to a *new world morning*, which is experienced as a concrete identical *rescuing 'after-thought'* of a past era and creation gone. A *new world cycle* begins. It is born in the *pure 'between'* consisting of unimaginable cascades of streaming light, and this seeing, thinking, thanking vision from the heart, still *hidden deep in the night*.

The painting may be showing us a genial premonition and anticipation of the „last man“ (Nietzsche) who is at the same time the first „superman“, or the „new man under a new sky on a new earth“ (Revelation of St. John) of a *posthistoric world era*. The painting as a whole is something like an *artistic revelation* and a *deep poetic vision of and preview* into the near and imminent future of the present 'mankind in cataract': a living form and a speaking, even sounding *prototype of the coming future*. It remains true to the earth and man's mortality, and still extends itself into the open infinity of the sky. But what happens to this basic figure of humanity? It is internally dissolving back into the open and light, back into a hidden sparkling transparency, while this secret *radiation of humanity* into its innermost and highest meaning and destiny of being *enlightens* the strict and tender thinker as a renewed *concrete incarnation of the Godlike in humanity*. The poetic thinker and the thinking poet (as such we would now like to regard the sensitive figure of pure reflection and seeing memories) thus reveals in himself an inner confluence, transparency and evidence of typical image form. This *breakthrough into the future fullness of completion* can and need not be surpassed, but may even now suddenly become full and unreserved reality, if only Man would *take heart*. Historical times – as our victor is comprehending – have *already and always* reached their 'end'. The pulsating 'centre of time' as the revitalising 'source of eternity' is, however, not easy to reach. The creative and poetic individual is already living it, breathing the air and aroma of the openness itself which feeds, raises and transfigures him. The basic statement or the inner form meaning of the image is therefore a single comparative: *the universal human at the moment of its reunification movement with the incarnating godhead as the true, the cosmic liturgy of the worlds* – Christus universalis in the after-thought of the past and preview of the imminent new creation. The image now appears as the masterful personification of Hölderlin's "coming God", which is the basic form and figure of meaning of the Godhead, nothing but the *self-generating 'movement of*

arrival' and the all-transforming deep experience of an 'overcoming' by the *overwhelming force of the living union itself*. This kind of victory, of course, in its highest sense also means *deliverance* and *resurrection*, deliverance and revitalising transformation of the whole natural and human past history in a universal sense which no longer excludes anything. That is why the viewer, who dares wander through and read the image or even enter into its concrete *synergetic form dynamics* of colour and shape, will not only experience a surprisingly new and all-transforming view of himself and the world. The viewer of the present may also know that he will find *unending meaning, shelter, support, even comfort and strength* in the secretly open (albeit forever 'nameless') message of this painting. Give us paintings and images to praise the present and the future – here we have one of those!

Note: Some paintings have not only been painted, they exist as a *real poem of forms, colours and shapes*. In this sense we attempted to explore this painting, which is so rich in metaphores of natural language translated into the medium of paint, as a *modern icon of cosmic rebirth*. We attempted to interpret it in the thematic context of an anthropopoetic image-phenomenology. The reader and viewer, thanks to his own vision, may enter even deeper into the unshadowed centre of being of the numinous image reality, and thereby receive the message of the sole 'self-less self' as a *ray of self-illumination*, where the inner truth of the image and the original truth of the word fuse into a *real-present Parusia solis invicti*. - God is not simply 'dead', he may well be dwelling today as a 'God of Images' and Poetry in the unobtrusive nothing of their hidden spirit. What turns such a painting into a veritable *poem* is nothing other than its 'innermost very own God' who can only exist as the *concrete rising movement of the totum of its form dynamics* (as 'spirit') in real-poetic terms.

Thus the arts remain poetically linked, like *mirror-images of their own cultural worlds*, right down to the deepest innermost point of their full identity and unity: painting, poetry, music – these three. But the greatest among them is the fiery *light-birth* of their unity and joint vitality as the *self-delivery of the real reality (of the all-creative element)* within Man. The *concert of the worlds*, which is beginning to sound with the dawn of this new aeon, rings as a *religious and cosmic integrated work of art*. Its only subject is the infinitely renewed, transforming *resurrection and embodiment of the transcending unity of the godly-human quality*, leading to an eventual emergence of the *pure superiority of the absolute concrete spirit* as the only real power or, as the *real omnipotence of the primeval creative living and only Being*. He who experiences this and who is able to make such a pure experience happen co-actively and co-creatively, has always been called an 'artist'. The genius of the word, however, and the art of seeing and painting compose a *single light-event*, an interconnected poem, the *original image of self-poetry of everything real* in epochal intensification of reaching out into the cosmos. Where this exists, everything appears – *saved* – participating in the closed circle of the aeons as in an eternal cosmic dance of the worlds. What a powerful 'victory' in our painting of shadow and light, consisting not only of a 'world image', but also of a modern *hermetic basic image of worlds and world creation!* And what a death-intoxicated, world-destroying *and* world-creating 'victor'!

Whoever is able to *recognise himself* in this painting, bears witness of the re-birth and all-encompassing presence of Adam Kadmon's *cosmic primeval Man*, who exists in everyone secretly waiting to be allowed to break through *from his shell* and as *himself* into his radiating victorious appearance. The 'New Earth' and the 'New Sky' of the coming future will rise poetically and creatively in colours and shapes,

visions and sounds, shades and music. Or nothing will rise any more which would deserve completing its cycle of being. In conclusion, the painting „The Victor“ reveals itself to us as a *poetic deep vision which makes us shiver*, into the shadowy-light abyss, from which all original life is born, and which nourishes and in time reabsorbs every living thing. The painting is a *painted poem of self-revelation and self-formation of the unformed underground itself*, the universal and only ‘original poet’. Its eternal self-poetry is the basis of all poetic form as its ‘self-awakening’. Poeta omnium mundorum sophia relevata - imago autem emanatio ipsius realitatis sanctae.

1995

Translation from German: Sibylle Ferner (New Zealand)