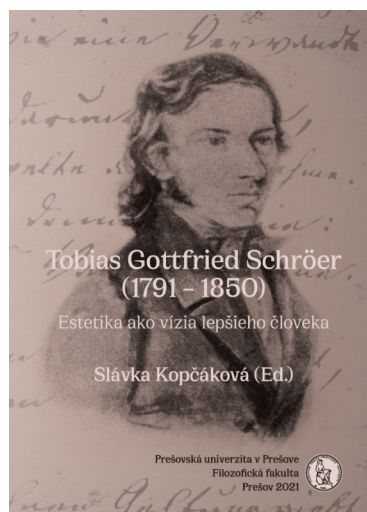


# The functions and place of Aesthetics compendia in the development of aesthetics thinking in Slovakia

Zuzana Slušná

KOPČÁKOVÁ, Slávka, (Ed.) – ORIŇÁKOVÁ, Slávka – ZUBAL, Pavol (2021) *Tobias Gottfried Schröer (1791-1850). Estetika ako vízia lepšieho človeka*. [Tobias Gottfried Schroer (1791-1850). Aesthetics as a vision of a better person.] Prešov: University of Prešov, Faculty of Arts. 321 p. ISBN 978-80-555-2767-3.



In recent times, several publications have emerged that critically reevaluate the development of theoretical perspectives. One notable contribution is the monograph titled *Tobias Gottfried Schroer (1791-1850) Aesthetics as a vision of a better person*, supervised by Slávka Kopčáková and co-authored by Slávka Oriňáková and Pavol Zupal. This monograph sheds light on T.G. Schröer as a polymath, esthetician, man of letters, playwright, and music enthusiast. His activities and writings were influenced by the cultural, political, and linguistic climate of 19th-century Prešpork. They went beyond the implicit standards that usually govern the inclusion criteria within academic disciplines. These criteria encompass not only innovative originality but also the research writing style and emphasis on the “national” context.

The authors, Slávka Kopčáková, Slávka Oriňáková, and Pavol Zubal, critically highlight the limitations of applied models used to conceptualize the history of research thought. Considering the prevailing context and the need to describe national traditions as self-sufficient, unique, and comparatively equal to other established traditions, certain concepts and approaches did not fall under the purview of “big science” for various reasons. Schröer, despite being a profound thinker and an original contributor to aesthetics theory and teaching, received sporadic attention in the history of philosophy and aesthetics. However, he enjoyed national and international recognition, and was renowned as an educator who influenced several members of the Štúr generation. His reputation even extended beyond the borders of Prešpork during that time.

Based on a critical analysis of a section of Schröer’s work, the editor suggests expanding the institutionalization model of Central European aesthetics thinking through the concept of “school aesthetics”. Drawing an analogy to the term “school philosophy” (Meszároš, 2008), the authors perceive school aesthetics as a distinct field within aesthetics theory, whose outputs are preserved in the form of texts such as compendia, manuals, or recorded lectures, but whose primary function was to serve as a system of knowledge that was easily memorable, adoptable, applicable for further learning and practical use.

School aesthetics encompasses a portion of aesthetics theory that was functionally applied as the foundation of the teaching process in higher education institutions. It was in these institutions that future authors involved in shaping and strengthening national cultural identity acquired their knowledge. Within such systems, the compilation nature of propositions, eclecticism, and the absence of originality are not reasons for marginalizing or excluding authors from the discipline’s history.

The authors establish a connection between the distinctiveness of school aesthetics, exemplified by Schröer’s writings, and the educational system in Hungary. They elucidate the textual strategies employed in the preparation of textbooks and compendia. Schröer, in his work, synthesized into a textbook the contemporary knowledge system of various disciplines he covered, including Latin and its grammar, classical philology, German literature and grammar, aesthetics, art history, politics, pedagogy, and aesthetics education as the education of taste or practical aesthetics. Within the framework of Central European aesthetics, the authors highlight the multi-ethnic and multilingual nature of Prešpork, which enabled T.G. Schröer to transcend regional boundaries and become part of the broader Central European context. The strength of the monograph lies in the authors’ deep understanding of aesthetic theory concepts and approaches. They contextualize their study within similar research conducted in Slovakia and offer an innovative assessment of philosophical and aesthetic writings. They perceive aesthetics theory as a multi-layered field that extends beyond its core, encompassing a specific periphery. Placing “school aesthetics” on this (stereotypically conceptualized as uncreative) periphery, following established national concepts, is not seen as a limitation or deficiency.

Slávka Kopčáková and her colleagues clarify the functions of “school aesthetics”, which encompass the rich tradition of aesthetics, literary studies, and philosophy-based outputs from professors at evangelical colleges and similar educational institutions.

In addition to providing a unified conceptual framework, the approach also considers the temporal dynamics of the phenomena being described and analyzed. The authors view aesthetics theory as an autonomous field of knowledge, precisely positioned at the intersection of philosophy and the arts. They recognize that aesthetics theory is a dynamic cultural and social phenomenon shaped by social relationships and institutional ties.

One notable aspect is the critical discussion of the functions of knowledge that is generated and created outside of academia and universities. This knowledge played a significant role in shaping the foundations of theoretical disciplines prior to the establishment of national research institutions. The monograph paints a portrait of T.G. Schröer as an educated and well-read individual who was deeply connected to the culture and communities of his contemporary Prešpork, seamlessly integrating himself into the ethnically diverse population of the city. The first chapter of the book, titled 'Tobias Gottfried Schröer (1791-1850). Aesthetics as a Vision of a Better Person', written by Kopčáková, provides a biographical overview that introduces the political, cultural, and social atmosphere of Prešpork and Hungary during that time (pages 11-64).

The core of the book is the second chapter, titled 'Aesthetics and Aesthetics Education in Tobias Gottfried Schröer's Work', authored by Kopčáková and Oriňáková (pages 65-155). Their aim is to position Schröer's approach within the context of Central European aesthetics thinking. The authors employ a complex interdisciplinary research methodology, drawing from aesthetics, literary studies, classical philology, pedagogy, and drama. They delve into greater detail regarding Schröer's key work, *Isagoge in eruditionem aesthetics* (1842). They outline Schröer's aesthetics system, which is both conventional and eclectic, while also adhering to contemporary didactic principles and recommendations.

The success of the authors' approach is evidenced by the fact that Schröer's textbooks were not only known and used within Hungary but also beyond its borders. Schröer respect the contemporary division of aesthetics theory into two areas. General aesthetics encompasses the reflection of the laws of aesthetic perception and experience, as well as aesthetics categories that emphasize beauty. It also provides a summary of central aesthetic concepts from the past, offering a brief overview of their proponents. So-called 'special aesthetics', on the other hand, involves the description of the theory and aesthetics of individual art forms.

Although Schröer's concept does not surpass the established standards of the time, his texts were utilized as educational materials, extending their readership to home education contexts. Aesthetics education, as presented by Schröer, aimed to shape individuals towards humanity, cultivating and accumulating humanity itself. This vision of a better person aligns with the concept of anthropological aesthetics. Drawing inspiration from Schiller's idea of an aesthetic being (*homo aestheticus*), Schröer highlights the formation of morals and religious sentiments as the key function of aesthetics education. It is worth noting that Schröer's inclination towards German culture and his admiration for figures like Schiller, Goethe, and Hegel are dominant in his theses on aesthetics education, even considering his ethnicity.

The monograph titled *Application of Aesthetics Education in Teaching Languages and Literature, Tobias Gottfried Schröder's Art Works*, authored by S. Oriňáková and P. Zubal, brings new insights to an area that has received considerable attention from scholars, particularly those from Hungary and Germany (pages 157-232). The authors shed light on the context of teaching languages (Greek, Latin, German) and literature. Education in the humanities and classical philology was an integral part of Schröder's teaching, both at the boys' lyceum and the girls' high school. Latin remained the language of learning and education for Schröder, and within classical philology, he also studied ancient culture and literature. In the Hungarian school system, Latin held a prominent position in higher education and served as preparation for university studies, with this dominance being firmly established and legislatively supported. While German was Schröder's native language and the language of his professional activities in lyceum education, it gradually began to be replaced by Hungarian in the 1840s. Schröder's works, along with his teaching-related activities and overall body of work, played a significant role in the institutionalization of the teaching of aesthetics as a school subject. Due to the popularity of his writings, the authors consider Schröder as one of the founding figures of Central European school aesthetics, where aesthetics education is defined as the activation of mental faculties leading to the cultivation of taste and a good life.

The layout and organization of the monograph demonstrate the authors' adeptness in language and stylistic skills. A promising aspect for the future is the authors' ambition to prepare annotated editions of the most important works of this previously overlooked figure in the history of aesthetics. The inclusion of rich visual material from Slovak and foreign archives, as well as the trilingual summary (English, German, and Hungarian), reaffirms the importance of the topic in the research on 19th-century aesthetics thinking and the teaching of aesthetics.

Zuzana Slušná  
Institute of Aesthetics and Art Culture  
Faculty of Arts, University of Presov, Slovakia  
[zuzana.slusna@unipo.sk](mailto:zuzana.slusna@unipo.sk)

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.8119783