

The submitted doctoral thesis examines the function and performance of the motive of a snake in four selected texts about artists of the German romantic period and perceives the snake as an attribute reflecting the problems of the artistic existence and a way to the artistic work, possibly of the artistic work at all. When interpreting the single motives of the snake, three-phase procedure as applied by Erwin Panofsky in description of the motives in the pictures has been chosen by analogy for literary texts. The interpretation is based on the structural position of the motive of the snake in the text and its performance in the text. Subsequently, the principal role is revelation of contexts which updates the given motive of the snake – in particular they are biblical snakes, mythical snakes and a serpentine line as a line of beauty which was the subject of the period aesthetic discourse. The meaning of the motive of the snake in the texts is given primarily by the mutual interaction of theme contexts which is in the single texts realized by various ways. The motive of the snake as formed in the single interpreted texts is a highly complex motive in all the cases. Thanks to the possibility of connotation with the snakes from the sphere of the Bible and mythology the literary motive of the snake becomes a polyvalent feature that characterizes also the artistic existence as polyvalent, possibly ambivalent. It means that on one hand the artistic existence is preferred, possibly that it is presented as fascinating. On the other hand it is, according to the given text, more or less destructive and dangerous. Since the selected texts represent the main stages of German romantic period, it was possible to determine also the development diagnosis – positive features of snakes from the oldest to the newest of the texts obviously decrease. Thus the motive of the snake reflects the usual characteristics of the German romantic period that states that the German romantic period develops from the initial unreserved celebration of unbounded fantasy to the definitive finishing with such fantasy and departure from it. At the same time, however, the motive of the snake is the evidence for the continuity of the romantic period because it documents that also the texts of the later stages of the romantic period show the complex auto-reflexivity which is usually attributed to the early romantic period. The motive of the snake also shows that even the early romantic period connects the artistic existence with destructivity to a certain extent and thus it is not a mere encomium of the idealized artistic existence. Thus the motive of the snake as means of the reflection of the art serves to show the continuity and complexity of the entire period under examination.

Key words: snake, German romantic period, art, artist, poet, texts about artists, reflection, context, Bible, mythology, serpentine line, motive