

**Athenaeum Fragment 116**

Romantic poetry is a progressive, universal poetry. Its aim isn't merely to reunite all the separate species of poetry and put poetry in touch with philosophy and rhetoric. It tries to and should mix and fuse poetry and prose, inspiration and criticism, the poetry of art and the poetry of nature; and make poetry lively and sociable, and life and society poetical; poeticize wit and fill and saturate the forms of art with every kind of good, solid matter for instruction, and animate them with the pulsations of humor. It embraces everything that is purely poetic, from the greatest systems of art, containing within themselves still further systems, to the sigh, the kiss that the poetizing child breathes forth in artless song. It can so lose itself in what it describes that one might believe it exists only to characterize poetical individuals of all sorts; and yet there still is no form so fit for expressing the entire spirit of an author: so that many artists who started out to write only a novel ended up by providing us with a portrait of themselves. It alone can become, like the epic, a mirror of the whole circumambient world, an image of the age. And it can also -more than any other form- hover at the midpoint between the portrayed and the portrayer, free of all real and ideal self-interest, on the wings of poetic reflection, and can raise that reflection again and again to a higher power, can multiply it in an endless succession of mirrors. It is capable of the highest and most variegated refinement, not only from within outwards, but also from without inwards; capable in that it organizes -for everything that seeks a wholeness in its effects- the parts along similar lines, so that it opens up a perspective upon an infinitely increasing classicism. Romantic poetry is in the arts what wit is in philosophy, and what society and sociability, friendship and love are in life. Other kinds of poetry are finished and are now capable of being fully analyzed. The romantic kind of poetry is still in the state of becoming; that, in fact, is its real essence: that it should forever be becoming and never be

perfected. It can be exhausted by no theory and only a divinatory criticism would dare try to characterize its ideal. It alone is infinite, just as it alone is free; and it recognizes as its first commandment that the will of the poet can tolerate no law above itself. The romantic kind of poetry is the only one that is more than a kind, that is, as it were, poetry itself: for in a certain sense all poetry is or should be romantic.

In Athenaeum Fragment 116, Friedrich Schlegel outlines the characteristics of romantic poetry, and at the same time captures the essence of the 'early German Romanticism'. He starts by declaring that romantic poetry is progressive and universal, and he instantly shows the reader the possibilities that are available. It has a combination of characteristics that the poet blends and creates a work that has the ability to stand on its own, and at the same time can be a mirror of the surrounding world. Romantic poetry is the common ground for the meeting of art and society, of the production of art, and of the criticism of art.

Moreover, it is a way of living life as 'techne' (the Greek 'τέχνη'). The prose, the inspiration, the wit and the humour meet with philosophy and rhetoric. Criticism enlivens romantic poetry and as the real interrelates with the fictional in the work of the author, it produces an image of its age. It also occupies the midpoint between the portrayed and the portrayer, and this position allows romantic poetry to stay free from both reality and idealism. The poetic reflection allows an endless mirroring, and it is the overcoming of the trivial and of classicism's finitude as well. Therefore, the ideal cannot be progressive. However, the unfinished, that which is without 'telos' (the Greek 'τέλος'), and which is always in the state of becoming, can. The infinitude and the freedom of the romantic poetry establish the authority of the will of the poet who is beyond the law.

There is a direct connection between Schlegel's romantic poetry and poet, and Kant's beautiful art and genius. In section 46, Kant defines genius as the talent that gives the rule to art and he claims that it is an inborn predisposition of the mind.<sup>1</sup> In addition, Kant stresses that genius is 'the particular spirit given to a person at birth', and that the author of a work of beautiful art must have the spirit of genius.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, a certain ontological approach is attributed to the artwork as well. In Schlegel's Fragment 116, the author of the poem is not only inherently equipped with the talent and the spirit of genius, but he is promoted beyond any law. The promotion of the poet also brings the promotion of poetry. I would argue that this is an indirect critique by Schlegel of Kant's third Critique; Schlegel, although remaining Kantian, challenges the Kantian boundaries by declaring art's freedom through the infinitude and freedom of the romantic poetry. Thus, when Schlegel mentions the constant becoming and the endless imperfection of romantic poetry, he reveals the essence of the romantic philosophy of art.

Driven by their ambition to explore individuality and subjective interiority, and not entirely satisfied by the notion of subjectivity in Kant and Fichte, the 'early German Romantics' searched for a more fitting answer to the existentialism of human life. The Romantics used irony and play.<sup>3</sup> Fragment 116 embraces a witty attitude, such as in the kiss of the poetizing child who breathes forth in artless song, or in the image of the artists who began to write a novel and ended up by making a portrait of themselves. Schlegel seems to escape Kantian formalism by reducing this to mere life, though never in an uncultivated way. Romantic

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<sup>1</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment* ed. by Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), §46, p. 186.

<sup>2</sup> Kant, §46-48, pp. 187-189.

<sup>3</sup> Terry Pinkard, 'The 1790s after Fichte: The Romantic Appropriation of Kant (I): Hölderlin, Novalis, Schleiermacher, Schlegel' in *German Philosophy 1760-1860: The Legacy of Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 136.

poetry, art and philosophy coexist in the same sentence with society, sociability, friendship, love and life. His fragment is not a synonym of naiveté, but a synonym of a philological and philosophical statement that shows the full potential of the early German romantic thought. It is this thought that challenged Idealism by considering philosophy as an endless journey and not a complete system.<sup>4</sup> Thus, when Schlegel stresses that the real essence of the romantic kind of poetry is still in the state of becoming, and that it should forever remain in this state, he mainly argues about the greatness of poetry and art that remain undisclosed, with endless possibilities. Consequently, I would argue that his statement is still valid and resonant.

### **Athenaeum Fragment 322**

The continual repetition of a theme in philosophy is a result of two distinct causes. Either the author has discovered something, but he doesn't yet know himself quite what; and in this sense Kant's writings are rather musical. Or else the author has heard something new, but hasn't understood it properly; and in this sense the Kantians are the greatest musicians of literature.

I will continue my reflection on the relationship between 'early German Romanticism' and Kant, as Athenaeum Fragment 322 uses the topic of continual repetition of a philosophical theme to describe Kant's writings and his followers. Friedrich Schlegel distinguishes between two causes. In the first cause, the author has discovered something that he does

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<sup>4</sup> Andrew Bowie, 'Critiques of Idealism I: The Early Romantics to Feuerbach' in *Introduction to German Philosophy: From Kant to Habermas* (Cambridge; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2003), p. 96.

not fully comprehend. In the second cause, although the author heard something new, he has not understood it correctly. Schlegel interestingly characterises Kant's writings as musical, and Kantians as the greatest musicians of literature. I would claim that this is an implication that Kant and his philosophy are on the correct path, but have not yet reached the end of the road. For Schlegel and the other Jena Romantics, Kant's philosophy opened up possibilities for the use of art as the essence of human life. Kant, however, was not interested in the role of art, or in aesthetic enjoyment. What he attempted was to explain how knowledge, reflective judgment and morality function under certain a priori conditions. Moreover, Kant's emphasis on the Subject overshadowed his concern for the beautiful and the sublime.<sup>5</sup> This is where the Romantics differentiate themselves from the Kantian doctrine. They use Kant's philosophy as a starting point for art's infinite journey. Subsequently, when Schlegel mentions the author who does not yet know what he has discovered, he points at Kant and at an ontology of a non-teleological creativity where poetry and art will not be limited by the boundaries of completeness. There will always be a state of infinite reflection and more things to be said and written.<sup>6</sup> This infinite reflection is vital in the comprehension of the romantic thought, as the shift from judgment to reflection is the removal of the Kantian limits. Moreover, as Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy have shown, the creation of an infinite web of reflections contains the essence of a 'literary absolute'; the goal of this process is the production of a totality of 'eidaesthetics'

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<sup>5</sup> Andreas Michel, Assenka Oksiloff, 'Romantic Crossovers: Philosophy as Art and Art as Philosophy' in *Theory as Practice: A Critical Anthology of Early German Romantic Writings* ed. by Jochen Schulte-Sasse (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 161.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Bowie, 'German Idealism and Early German Romanticism' in *Aesthetics and Subjectivity: From Kant to Nietzsche* 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), pp. 63-67.

that has a regulative force.<sup>7</sup> Schlegel and the other Jena Romantics use the infinite reflection, and through fragmentation, are able to produce their own system which distances itself from the Kantian narrative, and proposes that art will be central in human existence, and will give the truth about human life. Schlegel, through his fragments, is directly or indirectly implying that a holistic approach is incompleteness. Hence, the romantic thought is far from being systematic.<sup>8</sup>

In Fragment 322, Schlegel links Kant's writing with music, as he puts art in the centre of his fragment. Kant and Schlegel, both consider the aesthetic terrain as distinct and autonomous. Their approach is differentiated only in the possibilities they leave open inside the aesthetic territory. Kant claims for art its pure autonomy, whilst Schlegel, through art, sees the opportunity for seeking the truth to the existentialism of human life. Therefore, in an attempt to interpret Schlegel's fragment and reach its essence, one could propose that Schlegel indirectly says that Kant is right, but Kant still cannot see it. Moreover, by characterising Kant's writing as musical and the Kantians as the greatest musicians of literature, Schlegel is in accordance with the promotion of the role of music inside the romantic thought. The Romantics re-evaluated music as the most subjective and deepest of all the arts, as music can express in the best way the inwardness and the human condition.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Haynes Horne, 'The Early Romantic Fragment and Incompleteness' in *Theory as Practice: A Critical Anthology of Early German Romantic Writings* ed. by Jochen Schulte-Sasse (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 304-308. Horne refers to Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy's book *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988).

<sup>8</sup> Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Jean-Luc Nancy, 'The Fragment: The Fragmentary Exigency' in *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), p. 46.

<sup>9</sup> Terry Pinkard, 'The 1790s after Fichte: The Romantic Appropriation of Kant (I): Hölderlin, Novalis, Schleiermacher, Schlegel' in *German Philosophy 1760-1860: The Legacy of Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 162-163.

Overall, Fragment 322 shows the Romantics' aim to continue, from the point where Kant stops.

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