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## The Poetic Genius of Early Romanticism

### Manifestations of the Imagination in William Blake, Friedrich Schiller, and Friedrich Schlegel

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#### ABSTRACT

Romanticism, more than being a cultural movement that spread mainly through Europe, represented the freedom of the creative spirit or *Genius*. Contrary to the deterministic nature of Neoclassicism and French Enlightenment that threatened to overshadow human imagination, Romanticism ideal sought a way to transcend the limitations of reason through individual improvement. This essay aims to analyze the concept of Genius (as found in Herder, Novalis, and especially in William Blake, Friedrich Schiller, and Friedrich Schlegel) as the highest manifestation of the imagination, which, tending toward its own concepts of infinity, seeks to place itself beyond the need of achieve an aesthetic-historical synthesis of knowledge.

*Keywords:* Romanticism, poetic genius, Friedrich Schlegel, William Blake, progressive universal

#### ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Die Romantik war nicht nur eine kulturelle Bewegung, die sich hauptsächlich in Europa ausbreitete, sondern repräsentierte die Freiheit des kreativen Geistes oder *Genies*. Im Gegensatz zur deterministischen Natur des Neoklassizismus und der französischen Aufklärung, die die menschliche Vorstellungskraft zu überschatten drohten, suchte das Ideal der Romantik nach einem Weg, die Grenzen der Vernunft durch individuelle Verbesserung zu überwinden. Dieser Essay zielt darauf ab, den Begriff des poetischen Genies (wie er bei Herder, Novalis und insbesondere bei William Blake, Friedrich Schiller und Friedrich Schlegel zu finden ist) als höchste kreative Manifestation zu analysieren, die sich, zu ihrem eigenen Begriff der Unendlichkeit tendierend, jenseits der Notwendigkeit, eine historisch-künstlerische Synthese des Wissens zu erreichen, zu verorten sucht.

*Stichwörter:* Romantik, poetisches Genie, Friedrich Schlegel, William Blake, progressive Universalpoesie

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## 1. Introduction

In the maxim that closes one of his early works, *There is No Natural Religion* (1788), William Blake stated: “He who sees the Infinite in all things, sees God.”<sup>1</sup> Within every human being resides infinite worlds, emanating from the inner God from whom all creative manifestations come. The Poetic Genius represents this faculty of Imagination to create. Such is the revelation that the English poet brought: “As all men are alike (tho’ infinitely various), So all Religions, &, as all similar, have one source. The true Man is the source, he being the Poetic Genius.”<sup>2</sup>

For Friedrich Schlegel, artwork –specifically poetry–<sup>3</sup> is characterized by a moral and philosophical unity where human beings embody God through art. Blake, for his part, was a profoundly spiritual man, although not according to Christian religious orthodoxy. He believed that Genius manifests itself through poetic illumination, another face of what he calls ‘Divine Humanity.’ During the early Romantic period –between the last decade of the 18th century and the first years of the following one– the idea of unity predominated as a constant quest, which unavoidably resulted in incompleteness. Schlegel’s notions of ‘progressive universal poetry’ illustrate this endeavor. For him, self-construction is a perpetual need for a constant going out of oneself and return that drives us to transcend the world of presumed opposites.

To understand why authors from different parts of Europe shared similar concerns, it is crucial to consider the political and cultural events that occurred throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. The French Revolution, the radical rationalization of human thought, and new looks at ancient cultures influenced how ‘Western society’ understood the world. Although the Romantic Movement arose mainly from England and Germany and later spread through Spain, France, and other countries, the expansion of these new ideas was progressive, and there is no precise delimitation of the exact

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<sup>1</sup> William Blake, “There is no natural religion,” in *Poems and Prophecies* (London: Everyman’s Library, 1991), 6. I want to express my gratitude to Dr. Lorenzo Boccafogli, who studied at the Peter-Szondi-Institut für Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft. Thanks to his insights, I’ve had the opportunity to contribute to the historicization of the poetic genre.

<sup>2</sup> Blake, “All religions are one” (1788), Principle 7, in *Poems and Prophecies*, 8.

<sup>3</sup> In this regard, Szondi says that Schlegel “outlines the program of a *romantic*, i.e. through a type of poetry that only emerged in modern times, the novel, as a *progressive universal poetry*.” Peter Szondi, “Das Naive ist das Sentimentalische. Zur Begriffsdiagnostik in Schillers Abhandlung,” in *Schriften. Band II* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2011), 65. Original: “[Schlegel] entwirft das Programm einer *romantischen*, d. h. durch eine erst in der Moderne entstandene Dichtart, den Roman, hervorgebrachten Poesie als einer *progressiven Universalpoesie*.” All translations from the German are my own.

period of its flowering. On the other hand, even though Blake –one of the authors we will focus on– did not speak German, or the German thinkers did not delve deeply into the English works of the time, both parties were already reading works of modern intellectuals.

Such resemblances become a little less surprising when we recognize that Blake was actually quite well read in the philosophical and literary works that interested his contemporaries. He was especially attracted–like Tieck, Schelling, Novalis and others of the Jena circle–to the writings of Jacob Boehme.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the above, we can mention the influence that Blake could have received, both in his written and pictorial work, from his friends Henry Fuseli<sup>5</sup> and Johann Kaspar Lavater, who grew up in Zurich and translated many texts from German (Lavater even traveled with Goethe down the Rhine).<sup>6</sup> Likewise, Coleridge’s translations of the work of Friedrich Schiller contributed to English Romanticism. In England, fiction writers and poets also arose in opposition to Empiricism. They promoted an exaltation of the capacity of the power of imagination and beauty in the formation of human experience. That gave rise to a particular artistic and cultural penchant for the grotesque, the imaginative, and fanciful freedom of the imagination, as well as for an exaggerated and anachronistic recovery of the Gothic, and later for darkness and horror. On the German side, it is relevant to note the influence of some of Shakespeare’s characters, such as Macbeth, and the repercussions that Wieland’s translation of the English playwright’s works had for the pre-Romantics, so the intellectual influence was definitely reciprocal. Therefore, to address these connections, we will endeavour to establish the philosophical parallels concerning the imagination found in the ideas of Blake and those of the early German Romantics, particularly Schlegel, based on a concept that can be found in both: that of Genius.

In this essay, I consider *Poetic Genius* as the concept that best embodies the romantic ideal, representing the highest imaginative manifestation that does not aspire to a synthesis of historical and artistic knowledge but rather goes beyond the need to achieve any synthesis. My remarks begin, in the first place, by discussing the concept of Genius found in the early works of William Blake and its possible similarity to Friedrich Schlegel’s idea of ‘Universal Progressive Poetry’ and other notions of Genius of pre-

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<sup>4</sup> Leonard M. Trawick, “William Blake’s German Connection,” *Colby Library Quarterly*, 13 (4) (1977): 230.

<sup>5</sup> Johann Heinrich Füssli (1741 – 1825), a Swiss painter.

<sup>6</sup> Trawick, “William Blake’s German Connection.”

Romanticism and early German Romanticism. Secondly, we will analyze how the tension between the ancient and the modern conception of art is carried out in the literature, as in the case of Schiller's work, which could have influenced him to aspire to a synthesis of knowledge. Finally, we will consider how *Poetic Genius* represents an impulse that does not tend to a final synthesis of artistic forms or an absolute but tends toward its own concept of infinity. Thus, these authors warn that excessive analysis does not create art but mere rhetoric. Instead, Schlegel tells us in fragment no. 117 of the *Critical Fragments*:

Poetry can only be criticized by way of poetry. A critical judgment of an artistic production has no civil rights in the realm of art if it isn't itself a work of art, either in its substance, as a representation of a necessary impression in the state of becoming, or in the beauty of its form [...].<sup>7</sup>

Not in vain, Antoine Berman claimed that “[t]he romantic program consists in transforming what is historically only a tendency into a self-conscious intention [...]”.<sup>8</sup> That is the reason why Poetry represents the ideal of placing oneself beyond the attempts to explain everything within the limits of the philosophical tradition, greatly influenced in its time by Kantian epistemology. Differences between Blake and the pre-Romantic thinkers begin to emerge at this point. While the latter start from Kant to address a counterproposal, Kant does not serve as the foundation for the English poet's vision at all. Additionally, Blake's rejection of empiricism is more radical, distancing him from the so-called natural religion or natural philosophy, which he compared to the means of Satan.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, the pre-Romantic thinkers had embraced the ideal of achieving a synthesis between art and science. However, from an aesthetic point of view, similarities can be found. Let's remember that for Kant, a theoretical systematization of aesthetics is not possible since it is related to taste, so it is an individual experience.<sup>10</sup> For the German Romantics, the latter was insufficient to account for aesthetic experience, and even for understanding the truth. For this reason, its main

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<sup>7</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 157.

<sup>8</sup> Antoine Berman, *The Experience of the Foreign* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1992), 74.

<sup>9</sup> “Jerusalem: To the Deists.” William Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), 201.

<sup>10</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Thinkers such as Novalis, Schiller, Fichte, Schelling, or the Schlegel brothers would analyze art by emancipating it from Kantian logic and epistemology, relating it to action rather than judgment. Thus, for Kant, the aesthetic judgment is immediate and free, whereas, for the romantics, the aesthetic experience implies reflection, it is not immediate.

object of reflection is found in itself, encompassing all literary genres. “Romantic poetry is a progressive, universal poetry,”<sup>11</sup> exclaims the *Athenaeum* fragment no. 116, and “knowledge is not a deduction”<sup>12</sup> but an experience.

## 2. The Poetic Genius and the Progressive Universal

Early German Romanticism (*Frühromantik*) aimed to found an artistic and intellectual movement that fostered the search for inner truth outside any doctrine established by excessive reasoning. In this way, the issues about the confrontation with ‘the other’ became a topic of interest. In other words, the tension between one’s own –and national– identity and the foreign one, a process that places great merits on the formation or education of oneself (*Bildung*), which we could well understand as a life dedicated to trial and error through artistic production. The creative manifestation, and as William Blake would say, the imaginative one, is the only possible way to bring us closer to the divine beyond the limits established by language and reason. For the English author, art that imitates nature is inferior to art that comes from pure imagination, where the material conditions of space and time do not exist. How should we understand the concept of Divinity in this sense?

Karl Wilhelm Friedrich von Schlegel, in fragment no. 44 of the *Ideas*, states: “We cannot see God but we can see godlikeness everywhere —first and foremost in the heart of a thoughtful man, in the depths of a living human creation.”<sup>13</sup> Though Schlegel and Blake were separated by language and sea, in addition to the fact that it would be an error to affirm that Blake had an affinity with most of the ideas of German Romanticism, their thoughts nevertheless pointed to similar goals regarding creativity. As seen in the previous Schlegel fragment, Blake says that “the Poetic Genius is the true Man, and that the body or outward form of Man is derived from the Poetic Genius. Likewise that the forms of all things are derived from their Genius [...]”<sup>14</sup> Our task in this article will be to understand how this *Genius*

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<sup>11</sup> Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 175. We must remember that the fragments of the *Athenaeum* were written by various thinkers, such as Novalis, Schleiermacher, Friedrich & August Wilhelm Schlegel, as part of the *Symphilosophie* experiment of collective writing.

<sup>12</sup> Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 664.

<sup>13</sup> Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 245.

<sup>14</sup> Blake, “All Religions are One,” Principle I<sup>st</sup>, in *Poems and Prophecies*, 7. Blake will use ‘Imagination’ instead of *Genius* in his following works, referring to ‘true man,’ an active creative faculty of the spirit. Friedrich Schlegel used ‘enthusiasm’ or ‘inspiration,’ as we will see, with a similar connotation.

manifests itself and to what extent Blake's conception of Genius is similar to that of the German Romantics.

The literary scholar Peter Szondi, in his study of poetry in Schiller,<sup>15</sup> argues that the representatives of the *Sturm und Drang* literary movement,<sup>16</sup> which can either be considered as the transition between Weimar Classicism and Romanticism, or as pre-Romanticism, "took the concept of genius from English art theory of the 18th Century and from Diderot concerning the moment of originality."<sup>17</sup> However, the concept of genius that can derive from the empiricist tradition is still related to the idea of individual artistic genius and creative production. On the other hand, the Romantic project places genius as the ability to expose the limits of reason.

William Blake has been considered both as pre-Romantic and as an influence of English Romanticism. He referred to the *Poetic Genius* in his early works (1788-1795). For the literary theorist Northrop Frye, Blake seems to have coined the term Poetic Genius from his reading of the English pre-Romantic poet Thomas Gray, who related it to liberty,<sup>18</sup> and Blake, in turn, related it to the imagination. In his mature works, especially in his 'prophetic books,' Blake most frequently employs the terms 'Imagination' or 'Spirit of prophecy' with a similar meaning, as the latter is more closely related to his integral and mature vision of what he considered the 'real world,' where art and religion are two ways to express the divine. With this in mind, our English author chose the "infernal method"<sup>19</sup> to capture his visions, which allowed him to make relief engravings that brought together the poems and color images, later known as 'illuminated printing.'

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<sup>15</sup> Peter Szondi, "Das Naive ist das Sentimentalische. Zur Begriffsdialektik in Schillers Abhandlung," For a philosophy of history through artistic production, Szondi emphasizes *Frühromantik's* concept of discontinuity instead of the idea of continuity of the national (German) tradition, promoted mainly by authors such as Heidegger and Gadamer.

<sup>16</sup> Before Novalis or Hölderlin, who would search for a sense of collective consciousness, the pre-Romantics had declared their opposition to the extreme reasoning of the Enlightenment by exalting individual freedom and sentiment. Among the pre-Romantics were Johann Gottfried von Herder and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who would influence the thought of Jena Romanticism or early German Romanticism (*Frühromantik*). This early Romanticism can be separated thematically from the German romantics who would arrive soon, whose concerns were more literary than philosophical, coming closer to the English romantics. Among these may be mentioned E. T. A. Hoffmann and Ludwig Tieck.

<sup>17</sup> "[Ü]bernahmen aus der englischen Kunsttheorie des 18. Jahrhunderts und von Diderot für das Moment der Originalität den Begriff des Genies." Szondi, "Das Naive ist das Sentimentalische. Zur Begriffsdialektik in Schillers Abhandlung," 78.

<sup>18</sup> Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A study of William Blake* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1969).

<sup>19</sup> Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, "A memorable fancy," in *Poems and Prophecies*, 52.

One of the crucial ideas to understand the thought of the English author is that there is no *real* division between body and soul except what he calls Reason and Energy, which are the two elements that make up the human being. “Man has no Body distinct from his soul; for that call’d Body is a portion of Soul discern’d by the five Senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age.”<sup>20</sup> Following this thought, what is normally understood as Good is a passive element that obeys Reason (identified with *Heaven*), and Evil is the active element that arises from Energy (identified with *Hell*). Therefore, the English poet, as if he were a prophet of ancient times, will exalt the reconciliation between these that happens within the human being, especially in: *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, which was how he named his book of revelations, biblical interpretations, aphorisms and even ironic parodies, which was written between 1790 and 1793. These visions should not be taken solely as a manifestation of imagination as something unreal, as Andrew Bowie mentions with regard to the concerns of early Romanticism:

In the Romantic conception art can be regarded as reconciling in the realm of appearance what is unreconciled in reality, and thus as a form of ideology. Art does so, though, because it grants freedom to the imagination, allowing it to move beyond the world of what there is to a world of as yet unrealised possibility.<sup>21</sup>

Schlegel stated that “[e]very thinking part of an organization should not feel its limits without at the same time feeling its unity in relation to the whole.”<sup>22</sup> How to overcome those limits? “Where philosophy stops, poetry has to begin.”<sup>23</sup> Thinkers like Schleiermacher, Novalis, or Schlegel had warned that mere philosophical knowledge is incapable of accounting for the absolute, but poetry can get close to it. “Philosophy too is the result of two conflicting forces—of poetry and practice. Where these interpenetrate completely and fuse into one, there philosophy comes into being; and when philosophy disintegrates, it becomes mythology or else returns to life.”<sup>24</sup> However, although these authors approached mythology from the critique of poetry – an issue that we will address in the next section, they did not set out to create a mythology. Blake did. Mythology speaks the language of the absolute, distant, and fragmentary at the same time. Mythology is, in this way, poetry.

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<sup>20</sup> Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, “The voice of the Devil,” in *Poems and Prophecies*, 46.

<sup>21</sup> Andrew Bowie, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 14.

<sup>22</sup> Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 245. *Ideas* fragment 48.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Athenaeum* fragment 304. Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 245.

*Urizen*<sup>25</sup> represents what is done rationally in Blake's mythology, perhaps commonly understood by the optimistic idea that reason tends towards good and law and tries to separate itself from mere impulses. These last, however, are the source of creativity (identified by *Los*). In 'A Memorable Fancy' (a section of the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*), Blake says: "As I was walking among the fires of hell. Delighted with the enjoyments of Genius, which to Angels look like torment and insanity, I collected some of their Proverbs [...]."<sup>26</sup> From the abyss of the senses, the *Hell* where convulsive productive energies converge (which we could identify with the 'enthusiasm' that Schlegel speaks of throughout his works), Reason establishes a radius, that is, a proportion, to mark the scope of what is understood, an attempt at assimilation and ordering. There is an attempt at unity that does not finish joining, an expectation of overcoming not reached and that will never be reached. The radius of knowledge is gradually expanding, a conception we can recognize as the 'progressive universal' of the early German romantics. The problem is that *Urizen*, in a certain way, a parody of a God understood by reason through the establishment of time and space, separates nature (reality) from consciousness. Science from art. But the Genius is beyond this separation.

Johann Gottfried Herder, one of the leading pre-Romantic thinkers, inspired by the works of Shakespeare and Rousseau, helped develop the concept of genius by detaching it from the English and French empiricist tradition and making it a topic of discussion in the *Sturm und Drang* movement. In his essay *Shakespeare*, referring with a certain melancholy to ancient Greece (which we will arrive at a little later), he says:

And if now in this changed time, changed for good or ill, there arose an age, a genius who created dramatic works from this raw material as naturally, sublimely, and originally as the Greeks did from theirs; and if these works reached the same goal by very different paths; and if they were essentially a far more multiformly simple and uniformly complex

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<sup>25</sup> According to Blake's cosmivision, *Urizen* is one of the four main forces (*Zoas*) that make up the universe and represents an ordering principle identified with reason. It is opposed to *Los*, the abstraction of the imagination and time. "Four Mighty Ones are in every Man; a Perfect Unity," said Blake in *Vala (The Four Zoas)*. Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 300.

<sup>26</sup> Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, "A memorable fancy," in *Poems and Prophecies*, 47. In this passage, Blake parodies Dante's journey.



entity, and thus (according to all metaphysical definitions) a perfect whole [...].<sup>27</sup>

Antoine Berman mentions that genius, along with reflection, is the category that “best represents the romantic perception of the subject,”<sup>28</sup> and the *Sturm und Drang* movement “had developed the notion of artistic genius as a tempestuous, unconscious, and natural force, engendering works as one engenders children in the ecstasy of desire.”<sup>29</sup> These conceptions of genius present similarities based on similar pursuits, for instance, advocating for a religious character of literature. Novalis, for his part, used the concept of genius to designate someone capable of being many people at the same time, coinciding with Blake in the idea of totality. “Genius is nothing but spirit in this active use of the organs. Up to now we have *had* only single *genius*—but the spirit is to become total *genius*.”<sup>30</sup>

The *Poetic Genius* implies constant self-improvement, a process where Reason descends to *Hell*, again and again, to take what it can from the impulses and return to build something new: a creation. “Without Contraries is no progression,”<sup>31</sup> the English poet affirms, “and Negations,” the scholar Michael Kirwan adds, because “[c]ontraries are opposites whose interplay generates understanding and energy; these can exist even in eternity; negation refers to separation and ultimate alienation from God.”<sup>32</sup> This constant encounter and reunion that we can identify with the romantic ‘progressive universal’ manifests itself in ultimate poetry, an end in itself beyond any categorization. The foundational *Athenaeum* fragment no. 116 says of this:

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

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<sup>27</sup> Johann Gottfried Herder, *Selected Writings on Aesthetics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 297.

<sup>28</sup> Antoine Berman, *The Experience of the Foreign*, 78.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Novalis, no. 28 of the “Logological Fragments II,” in *Philosophical Writings* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), 76. Italics in the original.

<sup>31</sup> Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, “The Argument,” in *Poems and Prophecies*, 46.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Kirwan, “‘A Candle in Sunshine’: Desire and Apocalypse in Blake and Hölderlin,” *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis, and Culture* 19 (2012): 192. Negation in Blake implies an exposition of all the parts of the same nature to their extremes to overcome both towards a prior unity.

as it alone is free; and it recognizes as its first commandment that the will of the poet can tolerate no law above itself.<sup>33</sup>

Genius contains the Divine Humanity, the supreme inner state that includes all other imaginative states and processes;<sup>34</sup> and Imagination is the faculty of the spirit to experience it and transcend the finitude, that is, in fact, the conscience for Blake.<sup>35</sup> Hence, we can understand Poetic Genius as a divine imaginative faculty, the mediator between both worlds, Heaven (reason) and the abyss (impulses). Descending and returning makes the artist transcend and expand to a greater extent the radius that reason tries to impose on him/her in the material dimension. The inner genius attempts to transcend by building a self that will manifest on the outside, mobilizing from the implicit to the explicit, a getting out of oneself that never reaches a particular being. In this way, we can identify one of Schlegel's main ideas, since: "Every good human being is always progressively becoming God. To become God, to be human, to cultivate oneself are all expressions that mean the same thing" (*Athenaeum* fragment no. 262).<sup>36</sup> Related to this, it is worth mentioning what Gadamer underscores about the concept of *Bildung*: "it evokes the ancient mystical tradition according to which man carries in his soul the image of God, after whom he is fashioned, and which man must cultivate in himself."<sup>37</sup> Finally, for Blake, Imagination is a divine faculty of the human being; it is the image of God.

Later we will return to the religious character of the poetic manifestation. Before we must ask: if art through Imagination tries to overcome the opposites without succeeding, but Genius refers to the attempt, where does the desire to achieve a progressive universal poetry come from? To answer this question, we need to focus on classical antiquity and how the new philological studies around this contributed to the birth of literary criticism, the skepticism about the scope of philosophy in terms of how to reach knowledge, and of course, self-reflection.

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<sup>33</sup> Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 175.

<sup>34</sup> Kathleen Raine, *Golgonooza. City of Imagination: Last Studies in William Blake* (Hudson, N.Y.: Lindisfarne Press, 1991).

<sup>35</sup> As he recorded in the letters addressed to Rev. Dr. Trusler in 1799: "I find more and more that my style of designing is a species by itself, and in this which I send you have been compelled by my Genius or Angel to follow where he led." William Blake, *The Letters of William Blake* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), 57.

<sup>36</sup> Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 200.

<sup>37</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 10.

### 3. A Look at the Ancients

For the romantic thinkers, there was an opposition between modern thought and their simplified image of the Classical World. Although they presented both views as opposites, they aimed to overcome this confrontation by creating artworks that resulted in a new path. If we go back to Archaic Greek antiquity, where the responsibility for the education of the youngest was in the hands of the poets, and the written word did not yet exist in the practical sense that we give it today, the great epics were memorized, recited and transmitted orally for generations. According to some authors such as Schiller, whose influence is notable in early Romanticism, we could speak about “natural poetics,” where the words ‘myth’ and ‘history’ did not exist with the differentiated connotations that characterize them in modern times.

William Blake showed great interest in the Greek world, both for its sculpture and its worldview, to the point of stating that his purpose of being alive was “to renew the lost art of the Greeks,”<sup>38</sup> although he retracted this stance later in his life. One of the first books to bring Blake into this culture was Füssli’s translation of Winkelmann’s *Reflections on the Painting and Sculpture of the Greeks*. However, a spirit of peaceful rebellion like Blake would be disappointed to admit that the Greeks were people who glorified war. He even goes so far as to affirm that “a warlike State never can produce Art.”<sup>39</sup>

Blake later disparaged Greek art as “mathematic” rather than truly imaginative, but in the 1790’s he was an enthusiastic Hellenist (in an 1800 letter to George Cumberland, for example, he welcomes “the immense flood of Grecian light & glory which is coming on Europe”). Winkelmann’s book, which did much to revive an appreciation of classical art both in England and in Germany, must have affected the young engraver’s tastes.<sup>40</sup>

The ancient world, particularly the Greeks, was an idealized reference, mainly due to the exhaustive philological work done by different thinkers from both Classicism and Romanticism. The modern human being exists between a past that will not return—which we can only incompletely

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<sup>38</sup> Letter addressed to Dr. John Trusler, August 16, 1799. Blake, *The Letters of William Blake*, 57.

<sup>39</sup> Blake, ‘On Virgil’ (1818), in *Poems and prophecies*, 333. To complement, let’s take a look at the fragment of one of the poems belonging to the so-called *MS. Book* (1800-1803):

*’Twas the Greeks’ love of war  
Turn’d Love into a Boy  
And Woman into a Statue of Stone,  
And away fled every joy.*

<sup>40</sup> Trawick, “William Blake’s German Connection,” 233.

reconstruct, and an uncertain future. For these authors, the Greek world represents a society that lived in a certain balance and acceptance with nature. In this way, its artistic manifestations were the exaltation of this balance, carried out within a context that, from the point of view of a radical modern historicity of artistical forms, it would be 'unconscious of itself.' The modern human being, on the contrary, is not much more than an accumulation of fragments oriented towards extreme rationality that suffocates the creativity intrinsic to his / her spirit. "Many of the works of the ancients have become fragments. Many modern works are fragments as soon as they are written"<sup>41</sup> (*Athenaeum* fragment no. 24). Despite this, it can also be inferred that genius harbors a "fragmentary genius," as Schlegel said in no. 9 of the *Critical Fragments*.<sup>42</sup>

What we now know as mythology could be understood as a manifestation of the creative spirit of the ancient human being, a world that, despite coming to a certain extent from the imagination, should not, therefore, fall into the error of burying it within the unreal, since this becomes poetry, and in this way becomes cultural identification, identity. A deified world with an origin that is at the same time the ideal of the ancients: the so distant Age of Gold. In fragment no. 85 of the *Ideas*, Schlegel says of this conception: "The kernel, the center of poetry, is to be found in mythology and the mysteries of antiquity. Sate the feeling of life with the idea of infinity, and you will understand both the ancients and poetry."<sup>43</sup> According to Kirwan, in contrast to German romantic poets such as Friedrich Hölderlin, "Blake preferred to construct his own smoky mythological system rather than resort to classical or syncretistic paradigms."<sup>44</sup>

Michael Kirwan mentions several similarities between the ideals of Blake and Hölderlin, for instance, a religious unification from which, however, the Christian elements stand out in the end. The scholar quotes René Girard when referring to the project that Hölderlin, Hegel, and Schelling had: "This was the construction of the 'new mythology' that was required by philosophy but would have to be realised by poets: a mythology that would combine 'monotheism of reason and the heart, polytheism of imagination and art.'"<sup>45</sup> Kirwan also highlights that Hölderlin's poetry is full of gods; it tends to deify everything. However, the German poet realized the imminent failure of this goal, due to the difference between the archaic spirit

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<sup>41</sup> Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 164.

<sup>42</sup> Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 144.

<sup>43</sup> Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 248.

<sup>44</sup> Kirwan, "A Candle in Sunshine," 195.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

and that of the modern (Christian),<sup>46</sup> a conclusion that may have been inspired by his admiration of Schiller, a thinker we will delve into later.

How could these modern and fragmentary individuals understand the ancient world whose reality is determined by the Garden of the Hesperides, the nymphs, and the gods? Perhaps the answer can be found in the work of art. If we follow Blake, we could suppose that art and poetry could once again unite nature and the sciences through imaginative and productive experience, as will happen in his renewed world, where “[t]he dark Religions are departed & sweet Science reigns.”<sup>47</sup> We know that Blake despised empiricism and mechanistic materialism, so what did he mean by a ‘sweet science’? Perhaps we will find the answer by contemplating the creative impulse of the ancients, and once again we come closer to the German thinkers of his time. The goal of the Greek work of art rested on the representation of a collective ideal, a part of a common ritual, as Walter Benjamin recalls:

Originally the contextual integration of art in tradition found its expression in the cult. We know that the earliest art works originated in the service of a ritual—first the magical, then the religious kind. It is significant that the existence of the work of art with reference to its aura is never entirely separated from its ritual function. In other words, the unique value of the “authentic” work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value. This ritualistic basis, however remote, is still recognizable as secularized ritual even in the most profane forms of the cult of beauty.<sup>48</sup>

How to reduce the distance between a work erected as part of a collective ritual, of which little can be understood about its original function, and the current use of art? Here arises the modern work thought of as a reproduction, where the technique has been imposed on the creative intellect. But just as Benjamin predicted a dark future for art as reproduction,<sup>49</sup> which in an attempt to ‘update’ the work would contribute to the destruction of its

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> “Vala (The Four Zoas).” In Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 407. Amanda Jo Goldstein highlights the fact that in Blake’s post-apocalyptic morning narrated in *Vala*, the word for what presides over the new world, is ‘science,’ and not ‘poetic genius’ or ‘imagination.’ Amanda Jo Goldstein, *Sweet Science: Romantic Materialism and the New Logics of Life* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017).

<sup>48</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Technical Reproduction,” in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 223-224.

<sup>49</sup> It should be noted that Szondi considered Benjamin and Lukács heirs to the historicization of the poetry genre inaugurated by Schiller and passing through Schlegel, Hölderlin, and Hegel. Szondi, “Das Naive ist das Sentimentalische. Zur Begriffsdiagnostik in Schillers Abhandlung.”

millennial significance, the early romantics similarly became aware of this. Blake despised art that tried to imitate nature, considering it inferior to one that springs from the Imagination since the former was enclosed within finite things, not eternal.<sup>50</sup> Novalis said: “As civilization advances his attempts begin to lose the quality of genius—but they gain in utility—whereby he is led into the error—of generalizing entirely from the premises [...]”<sup>51</sup> And he also tells us: “The former are infinite, but uniform—the latter limited—but diverse. The former have genius the latter talent—the former ideas—the latter skills. The former are heads, without hands, the latter hands, without heads.”<sup>52</sup>

Blake was sure that the ancient Poets “studied the genius of each city & country, placing it under its mental deity,”<sup>53</sup> but then a system was formed, and the unity was lost. In this sense, looking at the past to understand how we are in the present also leads to the conclusion that the past should not (and cannot) be reproduced, “And hardly allowed to wake the dead;”<sup>54</sup> hence the aporia that affects the fragmentary perception of the modern. How to create something new if what is presumably known is all the old? How to replicate the ancient vision if we can only create in the present age and based on interpretations? Due to unknowns such as these, different authors dedicated themselves to the task of studying and analyzing the types of artistic creation since ancient times, carrying out classifications, for example, of literature, and opening new doors to the philological occupation.

Friedrich Schiller, in his essay *Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung* (*Naive and Sentimental Poetry*, 1795), analyzes how Genius manifested itself in antiquity compared to modernity, but from a different perspective from that of the study of literary genres of normative intention that had been developing with Classicism. “With this, Schiller bids farewell to the traditional poetics of the genre, which does not know the historicity of literary forms, and introduces the historicization of the poetics of the genre [...]”<sup>55</sup> approaching poetics from a philosophy of history that would influence Schlegel’s and Hölderlin’s theories and even impact Hegel. For Schiller, the ancient poet is naive, like a child; he tries to imitate nature. The sentimental poet seeks an ideal; he / she is nostalgic and speculative; the reflection comes

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<sup>50</sup> Blake, *The Letters of William Blake*.

<sup>51</sup> Fragment no. 18 of the “Logological Fragments I.” Novalis, *Philosophical Writings*, 52.

<sup>52</sup> Fragment no. 13 of the “Logological Fragments I.” Novalis, *Philosophical Writings*, 50.

<sup>53</sup> Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, “A memorable fancy,” 50.

<sup>54</sup> “Und kaum erlaubt, Gestorbene zu wecken.” Hölderlin, from the poem *Germanien*.

<sup>55</sup> “Damit verabschiedet Schiller die überlieferte Gattungspoetik, welche Geschichtlichkeit der literarischen Formen nicht kennt, und leitet jene Historisierung der Gattungspoetik mit ein [...]” Szondi, “Das Naive ist das Sentimentalische. Zur Begriffsdiagnostik in Schillers Abhandlung,” 80.

from him / herself, not from the outside. To better understand this tension-relation between ancient (naive) and modern (sentimental) poetry and how these would give rise to romantic poetry in an attempt to reach absolute poetry, it is worth dwelling on what Schiller tells us regarding the ancients:

What determines their character is precisely what is lacking for the perfection of our own; what distinguishes us from them, is precisely what they themselves lack for divinity. We are free, they are necessary; we change, they remain a unity. But only if both are joined one with the other—if the will freely obeys the law of necessity, and reason asserts its rule through all the flux of imagination, does the ideal or the divine come to the fore. *In them*, then, we see eternally that which escapes us, but for which we are challenged to strive, and which, even if we never attain to it, we may still hope to approach in endless progress.<sup>56</sup>

It is not in vain that Blake accentuates this contrast, particularly in his *Songs of Innocence and of Experience. Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul* (1794), two collections of poems that thematically complement each other. True humanity –Divine Humanity– would reside in the unification of the naive and the sentimental. Romantic poetry lies in the attempt to achieve this synthesis but emphasizes the attempt, not the synthesis as such, because it is unattainable for us. The sentimental poet seeks to return to the naive through reflection, until becoming something else (a third category) when art has returned to nature, in Schiller’s thought. Therefore, Poetic Genius arises when the observing and the speculative genius meet constantly but do not merge, so the role of the mediator is still to be clarified.

But now the poet is assigned the task of equating an individual state to the human whole, consequently to base that state absolutely and necessarily upon himself. Hence, every trace of temporal dependence must be removed from the moment of inspiration, and the subject itself, however limited it may be, may not limit the poet.<sup>57</sup>

However, Schiller still does not abandon the influence of Kantian categories,<sup>58</sup> which affects his concept of genius. Let us remember that, for Kant, nature gives the rules to art, while the genius (in this sense, the artist)

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<sup>56</sup> Friedrich von Schiller, *Naive and Sentimental Poetry and On the Sublime* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1966), 85.

<sup>57</sup> Schiller, *Naive and Sentimental Poetry and On the Sublime*, 157.

<sup>58</sup> For Kant, as he wrote in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, there will always be three categories for each class to avoid dichotomy. The third category would be the result of combining the two previous ones.

is convinced that it creates freely.<sup>59</sup> “Genius, as Kant understands it, is a ruse of nature. No different is the goal that Schiller imposes on the spirit that has passed through culture.”<sup>60</sup> Schiller does not notice a contradiction in his explanation of the naive and the sentimental. Throughout his work, he shows naive and sentimental poetry in an antagonistic way but on other occasions suggests that what is opposed to the naive one is *reflection*, being the sentimental a third category: the *ideal*. This is problematic because, by suggesting a third category, the sense that the ideal is unattainable is lost. However, the next generation, as part of the early romantic movement, would return to this concern.

As mentioned, this conception hindered the optimal development of the exposition on the naive and the sentimental, presenting both on many occasions as opposites and, in other cases, as complementary. Nevertheless, what Schiller seemed to want to point out is the Sentimental as a recovery of the ancient through reflection, being the result, no longer *the sentimental*, but *the ideal* (only poetic). Although he does not clarify this thought (dialectical, in a Hegelian sense), he would surely inspire Schlegel’s literary theory. Indeed, it is worth paying attention to Schiller’s birthday letter to his friend Goethe in August 1794: “*just as you passed from intuition to abstraction, you also had to turn concepts back into intuitions and transform thoughts into feelings, since only through these can genius produce.*”<sup>61</sup>

From the contributions of Schiller, Schlegel will classify the poetry of nature as natural or artificial.<sup>62</sup> “Naive is what is or seems to be natural, individual, or classical to the point of irony, or else to the point of continuously fluctuating between self-creation and self-destruction.”<sup>63</sup> But for this work to be beautiful, poetic, and ideal –he tells us later– “The beautiful, poetical, ideal naive must combine intention and instinct. The essence of intention in this sense is freedom, though intention isn’t consciousness by a long shot.”<sup>64</sup> Peter Szondi, in his reading of German Romantic genre theory, points out that natural poetry is subjective or objective according to how Schlegel posits it. Nevertheless, the mixture of

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<sup>59</sup> Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*.

<sup>60</sup> “Das Genie, wie Kant es versteht, ist List der Natur. Nicht anders ist das Ziel beschaffen, das Schiller dem durch die Kultur hindurchgegangen Geist setzt.” Szondi, “Das Naive ist das Sentimentalische. Zur Begriffsdiagnostik in Schillers Abhandlung,” 78.

<sup>61</sup> “[S]o wie Sie von der Anschauung zur Abstraktion übergangen, so mußten Sie nun rückwärts Begriffe wieder in Intuitionen umsetzen, und Gedanken in Gefühle verwandeln, weil nur durch diese das Genie hervorbringen kann.” Quoted by Szondi, “Das Naive ist das Sentimentalische. Zur Begriffsdiagnostik in Schillers Abhandlung,” 90. Italics in the original.

<sup>62</sup> As has been stated in the *Athenaeum* fragment no. 4.

<sup>63</sup> *Athenaeum* fragment no. 51. Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 167.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*



the subjective-objective is not possible in the natural formation among the Greeks.<sup>65</sup> Would this union be the highest achievement of Romantic literature, which would find its zenith in the novel (understood as an object of poetry) and in the philology of philosophy, in Schlegel's terms?<sup>66</sup> The Poetic Genius, the one who would bring the instinctual closer to the intentional, or as we saw at the beginning, reconciles Heaven and abyss, transcends the confrontation between two aspects of the same world, elevating it towards a new conception of infinity.

#### 4. The Door to Infinity

How do the romantic ideal and Genius, as the imaginative manifestation of an almost religious character, complement each other? Religion is another notable element for these authors, although not in an institutional or political sense, but as a way of approaching what Blake called 'Divine Humanity.' As we have seen, for the English poet, inspired by the mystical thought of Jakob Böhme and the immaterialism advocated by Berkeley, all religions have the same source, the *Poetic Genius*, the *True Man*. In other words, in a manner reminiscent of Novalis, this notion pertains to a shared faculty attainable by any individual who has cultivated discernment to remove the veil that establishes the limits of reason.

According to Blake, when the genius that the ancient poets possessed was overshadowed, and the divine was separated from the sensible things, "thus began Priesthood, Choosing forms of worship from poetic tales."<sup>67</sup> This provides us with an important fact: we must consider that Blake grew up in an environment of religious dissent. Let us not forget the influence that Swedenborg exerted in his early life, and our English poet leaned towards radical religious ideas (in the sense of a spiritual and prophetic preponderance) that were not under the institutionalized doctrines of the Church. Similarly, Trawick reminds us: "In Germany the corresponding wing of religion, Pietism, which itself had many interconnections with English dissenting sects, was influential both on the *Frühromantiker* and on their *Sturm und Drang* predecessors."<sup>68</sup>

One of the ideas of the Enlightenment, influenced by Locke,<sup>69</sup> is that human beings are miniature gods: we create things, and by having this

<sup>65</sup> Szondi, *Poetik und Geschichtsphilosophie II. Studienausgabe der Vorlesungen, Band 3*.

<sup>66</sup> Bowie, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory*.

<sup>67</sup> Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, in *Poems and Prophecies*, 50.

<sup>68</sup> Trawick, "William Blake's German Connection," 230.

<sup>69</sup> John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

creative capacity, we also have the authority of knowledge to produce them. In Romantic thought, this conception of the human being as an image of God prevails to a certain extent due to our ability to create (Divine Humanity as a source of creation). But unlike the Enlightenment, it does not focus on the material work produced but on the ability itself, coming from the imagination. We are an image of God, not because we create things, but because we *create*. Following Blake, who, by the way, despised Locke, the Creation in its entirety is the Imagination of God. Our author seems to focus on the creative capacity rather than on what is created, and this makes more sense when we return to the German romantic ideal of forging oneself (*Bildung*).

This religious thinking influenced the desire of many romantic authors to imagine their identity, their collectivity, and their nation as a cultural community. To illustrate this, in the poetry of Friedrich Hölderlin, all the elements that we have been analyzing converge: identity as a cluster of fragments, nostalgia for a past that does not belong to us, the unification that never occurs, the creative impulse in constant reformulation and uncertainty about our place in a growing global community. This confrontation can be perceived, for instance, in the poem *Patmos*:

*Mir Asia auf, und geblendet sucht'  
Ich eines, das ich kennete, denn ungewohnt  
War ich der breiten Gassen, wo herab  
Vom Tmolus fährt  
Der goldgeschmückte Pactol  
Und Taurus stehet und Messogis,  
Und voll von Blumen der Garten,  
Ein stilles Feuer; aber im Lichte  
Blüht hoch der silberne Schnee;  
Und Zeug unsterblichen Lebens  
An unzugangbaren Wänden  
Uralt der Epheu wächst und getragen sind  
Von lebenden Säulen, Cedern und Lorbeern  
Im Zwielight, Menschen ähnlich, da ich gieng  
Der schattige Wald  
Und die sehnsüchtigen Bäche  
Der Heimath; nimmer kannt' ich die Länder.<sup>70</sup>*

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<sup>70</sup> Friedrich Hölderlin, "Patmos," in *Fünf Gedichte* (Pisa: JsQ, 2008), 60-61. "Asia on me, and blinded searches / I one that I knew, because unknown / Was I from the wide alleys, where I descended? / Drives from Tmolus / The gold-adorned Pactol / And Taurus stands, and Messogis, / And the garden is full of flowers / A silent fire; but in the light / Silver snow blooms above; / And stuff of immortal life / On inaccessible walls / Ancient the ivy grows

Thinking about the juxtaposition of places, the confrontation of times, in that unification attempt that is still fragmentary, gives rise to what Antoine Berman (in his study on *The Experience of the Foreign* about the work of romantic translation) calls an ‘infinite versatility’ and, indeed, the capacity of the Genius. Infinite versatility “is also the ability to be everywhere and to be many [...]. As such, it formulates an entire new view of *Bildung* [...];”<sup>71</sup> a thought that could have influenced Hegel in his concept of freedom as the ability to be oneself in the other.

How is this religious thinking conceived concerning knowledge found in other intellectual fields of the time, such as physics? As Bowie says: “A central aim of early German Romantic thought was to bring together in a new synthesis the increasingly specialised knowledges that were developing in both the natural and the human sciences at the end of the eighteenth century.”<sup>72</sup> This is where German thinkers distance themselves from Blake’s thought, for whom there is nothing more than an explicit clash between science and art. That was one of Blake’s statements to the point that Kathleen Raine claims that he “is the only English poet whose central theme is the confrontation of science and imagination.”<sup>73</sup> The separation between mind and nature leads to the preponderance of material science over spirituality. Blake maintained that we should return to the original unity, that is, the internal and external worlds unified by the first principle of creation, Imagination or *Genius*, the creative divine faculty of the human being, leading to a “sweet science,” a thought also found in the English romantic poet, Coleridge.<sup>74</sup> For this reason, the “work of art, understood as the manifestation of a unification of necessity and freedom not possible in any other realm of human activity, played a vital role in Romantic approaches to such a synthesis.”<sup>75</sup>

However, when the philosophical analysis tries to isolate each object and study it in a particular way, it usually leads to the error of classifications.

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and wears away / Of living pillars, cedars and laurels / In the twilight, human like as I walked / The shady forest / And the longing streams / of home; I never knew the countries.”

<sup>71</sup> Berman, *The Experience of the Foreign*, 78.

<sup>72</sup> Bowie, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory*, 13.

<sup>73</sup> Raine, *Golgonooza. City of Imagination*, 9.

<sup>74</sup> As Coleridge said in 1817: “There are evidently two powers at work, which relatively to each other are active and passive; and this is not possible without an intermediate faculty, which is at once both active and passive. (In philosophical language, we must denominate this intermediate faculty in all its degrees and determinations, the IMAGINATION [...]). Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 88-89.

<sup>75</sup> Bowie, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory*, 13.

Speculation often involves a false dichotomy, whose extremes look even more distant for anyone who gets carried away by excessive reasoning, hence the criticism of philosophy in the claim that it can account for true facts. For example, the concepts of finite and infinite are apparently contradictory to each other, but if we see them from Schlegel's perspective, the infinite is nothing more than the finite in constant change. In the romantic poetic work, which is nevertheless also philosophical (to live poetically implies, therefore, to live philosophically), to achieve or to consummate are not qualities of the infinite. "Not art and works of art make the artist, but feeling and inspiration and impulse"<sup>76</sup> (no. 63 of *Critical Fragments*).

We have hinted at some aspects of early Romanticism concerning the search for an ideal from the confrontation between historical moments in art. If we consider the early Romantic conception of totality or the universal, the artistic process implies creation, distancing from the self, and finally, 'self-annihilation' and the impulse starts all over again. The artwork would host all these stages, but distancing does not imply the negation of creation, just as self-destruction is not the negation of distancing. The universal is a constant approach to the absolute. It is the attempt to unify all the supposedly contrary moments, but not their absolute synthesis. Art distances itself from the artist, and the latter, immersed in the artistic process, forgets her/himself. But art is not the mediator between the world of the senses and that of reason, but the artist—who possesses the poetic faculty. However, art is the testimony of what remains of the impulse, as stated in fragment no. 44 of the *Ideas*:

A mediator is one who perceives the divinity within himself and who self-destructively sacrifices himself in order to reveal, communicate, and represent to all mankind this divinity in his conduct and actions, in his words and works. If this impulse is not present, then what was perceived was not divine or not really his own. To mediate and to be mediated are the whole higher life of man and every artist is a mediator for all other men.<sup>77</sup>

For Schlegel, the mediator between unity and multiplicity in poetry takes the form of allegory, "which 'results from the impossibility of reaching the Highest by reflection'."<sup>78</sup> Let us remember that Genius manifests itself in

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<sup>76</sup> Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 150.

<sup>77</sup> Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 245.

<sup>78</sup> Bowie, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory*, 68.

Imagination;<sup>79</sup> it is basically productive and immediate. Reflection comes later, with contemplation; hence the aesthetic judgment is not immediate. The work, therefore, brings together intention, enthusiasm (inspiration), and criticism. That is why the work of art, and especially poetry, is at the same time philosophical. Regarding this, Berman argues referring to Schlegel:

The formal structure of reflection (the movement by which I pass from “thought” to “thought of thought,” then to “thought of thought of thought.” etc.) provides a model of *infinitezation*, to the extent that this passage is conceived as an *elevation*: It is a structure of corridors, stories, staircases, gradations, and the elevation may be considered simultaneously as an ascension, a potentiation (*Potenzierung*), and an amplification (*Erweiterung*). Thus its concrete and positive plenitude is manifested.<sup>80</sup>

If we return to Blake’s statement that *Poetic Genius* is the true source, then the work is the mediator between the artist and the viewer; and in the same way, the artist is that between the artwork and the genius. “Only someone who has his own religion, his own original way of looking at infinity, can be an artist” (*Ideas* fragment no. 13).<sup>81</sup> To put it another way, the artist is the one who opens the doors to infinity, whereas art or poetry only shows them. The artist can access infinity during the creation process, while the viewer can only get an idea of this concept by contemplating the work of art. For Blake, self-examination precedes self-annihilation to transcend the “false body” that encloses Spirit:

To cleanse the Face of my Spirit by Self-examination.  
To bathe in the Waters of Life; to wash off the Not Human  
I come in Self-Annihilation and the grandeur of Inspiration [...]<sup>82</sup>

In a similar sense, Schlegel says that being a mediator implies a certain sacrifice, self-destruction. “Join the extremes and you will find the true middle”<sup>83</sup> (*Ideas* fragment no. 74). A middle that should not be confused with consummation.

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<sup>79</sup> It is worth quoting Blake once again when he tells us: “The Eternal Body of Man is The Imagination.” ‘*⌘* & His Two Sons Satan & Adam,’ in *Poems and Prophecies*, 335.

<sup>80</sup> Berman, *The Experience of the Foreign*, 76.

<sup>81</sup> Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 242.

<sup>82</sup> “Milton”: ‘Book the Second.’ Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, 142. As mentioned in *Jerusalem*: ‘Chapter 4,’ the water of life comes from the four rivers of life (Ibid., 257), referring to the four senses (*Annotations to Berkeley’s Siris*. Ibid., 663).

<sup>83</sup> Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 248.

## 5. Epilogue: Towards an Ideal

In fragment no. 139 of the *Ideas*, Schlegel says: “There is no self-knowledge except historical self-knowledge. No one knows what he is if he doesn’t know what his contemporaries are, particularly the greatest contemporary of the brotherhood, the master of masters, the genius of the age.”<sup>84</sup> But some thinkers would later affirm that the self-conscious spirit would mark the end of history, an issue with which Friedrich Schlegel or the pre-Romantics would surely not agree.

From the perspective of other philosophical traditions, such as Empiricism or Idealism,<sup>85</sup> when a final point is reached, and the fragmentary reflections that presumably did not dare to form a theoretical systematization are collected and become part of a philosophical system, we will probably also see an end of the history. And in the case of Hegel, who read Schlegel, such a view possibly influenced his judgment regarding aesthetics, suggesting the death of art. For the philosopher of mature Idealism, the beauty of art is superior to that of nature because it is a creation of the spirit in its self-conscious character. The beauty of art “is beauty born of the spirit and born again, and the higher the spirit and its productions stand above nature and its phenomena, the higher too is the beauty of art above that of nature.”<sup>86</sup> This overcoming of nature, rather than a return to it, seems to have a pre-Romantic influence. However, Hegel tries to go further: to liberate the spirit of the sensible in favor of the rational; not a fragmentary but an absolute totality.

Nevertheless, the romantics of the early period, well aware of this possible path, decided to embrace the fragmentary inheritance, preventing themselves from falling into the naive thought that human creativity must necessarily reach an end or a systematization. Perhaps this led to their interest in self-reflection and fragmentary and collective writing. Such is the vision of thinkers like Blake, Novalis, and Schlegel, and the ideal of progressive universal poetry. For this reason, Szondi is convinced that Friedrich Schlegel will be given his rightful place as one of the most original thinkers of the turn of the century, but who at the time was overshadowed by the criticism of

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<sup>84</sup> Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 254.

<sup>85</sup> It should be noted that Peter Szondi studied the relationship between German Idealism and pre-Romanticism from the point of view of the philosophy of art. Peter Szondi, *Poetik und Geschichtsphilosophie II. Studienausgabe der Vorlesungen, Band 3* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1987).

<sup>86</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics. Lectures on Fine Art*, Vol. I (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 2.

Goethe, Schiller, and Hegel himself for possibly having turned to a certain conservatism in his mature years.<sup>87</sup>

The long-awaited synthesis is not completely consummated in an absolute; its response lies in the attempt at unity. “EVERY Poem must necessarily be a perfect Unity [...],”<sup>88</sup> William Blake stated in *On Homer’s Poetry* (1818). A unity that, from the vision of the English poet, aims to accept the two sides of the same nature without the interference of divisive human morality. This unity can be understood as the reconciliation of the external and internal worlds through art in an attempt to capture what the artist received from the Imagination. The result is allegory, since “the mystery of a momentary beginning or transformation can only be divined and it can only be divined in allegory,”<sup>89</sup> as Schlegel asserts. It is about aspiring to the ideal, not reaching it. “The sense of the holy is the experience itself. Indeed, the holy exists only in being experienced,”<sup>90</sup> affirmed Raine about Blake’s worldview. The work of art, as well as poetics, remains as the testimony of this constant approach to the absolute, to some extent, a return to the source. The viewer can get a sense of infinity through the artwork as a piece of pure imagination, but the creator experiences the infinity during the act of creating; that is to say, the opposites are blurred, and the artist ascends as a mediator. At that moment, the artist, as creator, becomes the *Poetic Genius*. After all, as Friedrich Schlegel claims: “All philosophy is idealism, and there exists no true realism except that of poetry.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Szondi, *Poetik und Geschichtsphilosophie II*.

<sup>88</sup> Blake, *Poems and Prophecies*, 332.

<sup>89</sup> Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 104.

<sup>90</sup> Raine, *Golgonooza. City of Imagination*, 28.

<sup>91</sup> *Ideas* fragment no. 96 (1800). Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, 250.