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Veli-Matti Saarinen

The Daybreak and Nightfall of Literature

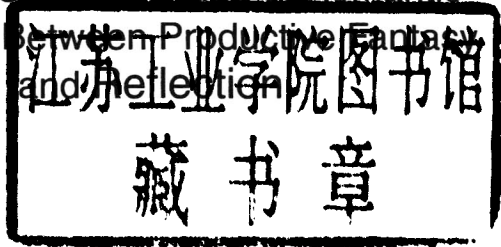


PETER LANG

Veli-Matti Saarinen

The Daybreak and Nightfall of Literature

Friedrich Schlegel's Idea of Romantic
Literature: Between Productive Fantasy
and Reflection



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Das Schlafen und Träumen ist ein Zurücksinken in den Schooß der Erde. Das Denken ist ein Erzeugniß des Lichts, der Luft, des Mittags. Alle Poesie also Morgenröthe und Abendröthe. (Friedrich Schlegel in KFSa 18, p. 179, number 635.)

Die eigentliche Form unsers Denken ist Reflexion; das Entgegengesetzte ist das objektive Denken – produktive Fantasie. Also ist die Kunst nicht menschlich sondern göttlich.” (Friedrich Schlegel in KFSa 18, p. 179, number 643.)

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Foreword

This study is an attempt to understand the nature of Friedrich Schlegel's conception of Romantic literature during the last years of the 1790s, at the time when he was writing the novel *Lucinde* (1799). My purpose is to give a picture of Schlegel's ideas about the new kind of Romantic literature that he is trying to create during these years, based on his published reflections on literature and on his notebooks as well as on *Lucinde*. The question I ask is, whether it is possible to understand Schlegel's idea of Romantic literature not in terms of a binary opposition – as either reflection or its opposite, productive fantasy; as either discursive, conceptual writing or as literature as the opposite of such writing – but as something which integrates these two opposites. I suggest that Schlegelian Romantic literature can be perceived as situated between the philosophical and the literary in the pre-Romantic sense.

The question will be the following: Is it possible to think of Schlegelian Romantic literature beyond the opposition between philosophy and literature? The Schlegelian idea of literature as daybreak and nightfall may be seen as one of the attempts to think of literature in this way. Literature may be thought of as a moment between the daylight of thinking (and knowing) and the mysterious, unknown darkness of the night. Daybreak may also be thought of as something that resembles both the daylight of thinking and the darkness of the mysteries of creation. But daybreak also connects these realms, which are usually kept separate. And daybreak is also the point at which something new (a new day) is born. It is the point at which our concentration is focused on waiting for something new to emerge in the world of thinking. At the same time there is another side to Romantic literature. The something new to come, something new to be born, is never finally realized. From the point of view of the Romantic work of art the moment of birth is always at the same time nightfall, and the beginning of waiting for a new day. The Romantic literary work never finally reaches daylight.

Friedrich Schlegel's explicit intention is to keep the discussion concerning the idea of Romantic literature going on forever. Schlegel himself does not provide definitive, final answers to the questions that he raises. The intentions of this study are in this respect Romantic: I will consider further and try to understand the nature of Romantic literature on the basis of Schlegel's paradoxical and often ironic statements on the matter. I believe that Schlegel has made it impossible to close the question. All our efforts are merely provisional, tentative statements in an endless dialogue.