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Leopardi and the Logic of the Romantic Fragment

I want to consider two ways of thinking about Romantic fragments. In one mode, the fragment is suggestively incomplete; the hidden entirety to which it belongs makes it portentous and alluring; our use of it as a passport to the unattainable can be intoxicating. It possesses the conventional Romanticism of a ruin, which sanctions the indulgence of the folly or the superstition surrounding the relic: a thing to be dwelt on with pleasurable longing, fantasized enjoyment or unsubstantiated wishful thinking. Our interest is increased by its failure to disclose; its incompleteness is its point, the means by which it creates desire. It repels completion like, as Friedrich Schlegel said, an *Igel* or hedgehog. Its substitution for the real thing is almost fetishistic. It deals in shorthand, it is a quick fix, and its immediate pleasures jump the normal rules of comprehension with inspired confidence. And because it ignores logic and so conjures possessions we maybe are not entitled to and which exceed all our economies of understanding and reception, its idiom can appear drunken, like the poet of Coleridge's fragment, 'Kubla Khan', who has 'drunk the milk of paradise', or the sensuously inundated, guideless vehicle of Rimbaud's 'Le bateau ivre'. In the 'The Triumph of Life', Shelley's narrator, Rousseau, drinks nepenthe in order to 'know the presence' which the poem's narrator only sees, so that the impossibly simultaneous display of an entire Western culture chained to the triumphant chariot of life can be staged for him. But how could such a poem finish? It is obliged to participate in the comprehensive outmanoeuvring of apprehension which it proclaims, suffering what it writes, and like the fragmentary lives which it depicts, it dances orgiastically towards no conclusion. In this most pessimistic scenario, the failure of a poem to reach its conclusion, or to map and know its object, becomes the transport meant to carry us over its deficiencies. The authority of knowledge is displaced by the power producing knowledge, life, a higher authority whose anteriority must render knowledge fragmentary. The poem is left the task of mediating our experience of this fact and in this first fragmentary option I am describing its choice is, if you like, to reach for the bottle or claim an aesthetic high.

It's the quality of the 'feeling' in such moments of fragmentation about which Kant was so reticent in his account of the sublime and the beautiful. Aesthetic feeling in the *Third Critique* seems to be an *exemplary* feeling, a logical picture of what we understand a feeling to be, rather than any particular feeling. But epistemological erotics or the implication of what we love in what we strive to know, goes back to Plato's *Symposium*. To gain a view of the structures of knowledge we are trapped inside, to render them fragmentary, needs a discourse different from the philosophical one so judgemental of poetry. So Plato gives us the myth of the cave, an illustration which is both inside the story and is its author. Poetry is some shadowy, incomplete version of an enlightenment it would blind us to look at. It is also, though, our way of knowing this disadvantage and our expression of the desire to overcome it. As described by Plato, though, this poetry is fraught with inspiration and threatens the sobriety of the philosophical project to which it is asked to contribute. Similarly, the epistemological erotics of the *Symposium* can get sidetracked into passions which have lost their higher vocation and have degenerated into merely sensual satisfaction. But when the passion retains its connection with knowledge, it is legitimated by the incompleteness it has shown to be the condition of knowledge, and the consequent state of desire to which frustrated epistemological ambition is necessarily consigned. In *The Symposium*, the desire is managed, disciplined, and becomes an art of turning the quest for immortality into an immediate experience through reproduction. With Diotima's connection of the desire embodied in knowledge with reproducibility we are getting away from the notion of a fragment

clenched in enjoyment of its own ecstasy and approaching something more prosaic. For Diotima, we pursue the infinite through the desire for reproducibility embodied in our attraction to beauty, an attraction which begins in sensual sexual chemistry but which, in the *Symposium*, must try to ascend to more permanent and less sensuously enthralling forms. The good is the most universal of all forms of knowledge, the form of forms, and so to desire the good is in keeping with the motive of defeating transience through reproduction. 'Reproduction goes on forever. It is what mortals have in place of immortality'.¹ Reproduction, therefore, is, as it were the epistemological motive lodged in eroticism, which advances on a philosophical path away from ordinary passion into what Milton, certainly a Platonist in his early poetry, has his infatuated magician, Comus, call 'the sober certainty of waking bliss'.

How does the fragment relate to the larger item to which it belongs? Is it a metonym, or a metaphorical likeness? Is it a word in a language, or a piece in a puzzle? Is it a love-letter to its other half, or a philosophy of irony, a knowledge of ignorance? Is it a microcosm or a monad, in which case not exactly a fragment? Is it, as Paola Cori has suggested at this conference, a line of flight or a rhizomatic moment? One intriguing alternative has been to think of the fragment as poetry and its larger linguistic environment as its prose. The interesting aspect of the Romantic version of this is its implication that for such belonging to work prose must continue in some sense to be poetry. The rather banal point that both poetry and prose are constructed out of language doesn't explain their relationship. For that to exist, for the belonging to be there, there must be something more in common than simply being made out of the same materials. In the same way, family members must belong to a unity over and above the qualities they possess as human beings. Family relationships are wonderfully flexible categories, as Wittgenstein showed, but they help here in suggesting an interpretation of the Romantic version of the monad, here become the entry into a genealogical tree whose prose stretches backwards and forwards across a poetic present, in principle up to infinity, from the remotest ancestry to the ultimate progeny. Schlegel's historian, the prophet looking backwards, condenses this difficult idea within the simpler one of a history that continually reshapes itself in response to what it discovers. In the case of poetry, that re-shaping must be the prose criticism that ensures a growth of meaning beyond the author's original poem and so, in a properly retrospectively fashion, the discovery of the work's unconscious. However, again I want to focus more on the prosaic, sober quality which this afterlife must possess in contrast to an ebullient poetic or un-interpreted, unconscious origin.

In the collection of notes now codified by his editors as *Logolologie*, Novalis undertook a complete re-evaluation of the relation between poetry and prose based on a dialectical theory of the fragment. Instead of a straightforward opposition between poetry and prose, Novalis posited a mutual differentiation which had become more complex and interactive. 'Just as the novel was kept for prose, so the lyrical poem was kept for poetry (*Poesie*) – both, as it turns out, incorrectly; the lightest, most authentic (*eigenlichste*) prose is the lyrical poem'.² Prose has apparently lost its usual meaning (*sogennante Prosa*) and exists unified with and in alternation (*Wechsel*) to poetry. But this mutuality comes from the extraordinary ambitions Novalis retains for poetry. Because ultimately, for Novalis, the completed form of knowledge is to be poetic³, poetry must originate the prose in which its project can be carried out. Novalis's bald assertion - *Dichtenistzeugen*- means that poetry generates what leaves it behind, giving birth or witnessing to a life that furthers its purposes through new prosaic growth whose own core, therefore, remains visibly poetic in origin.⁴ Leopardi in his *Zibaldone* is sometimes fascinated by life's purposeful surpassing of the individual, although he thinks this larger, potentially horrific purpose tends to erase the individual entirely. But in literary terms he does replicate Novalis idea of a modern prose or philosophy only explicable as poetry by other means as

we shall see. Novalis's big idea that inspires his own polymathy is the idea that what is typically poetic is just the creativity by which a living individual perpetuates itself in new forms. Hence poetry is for him the basis of society – meaning, I think, that poetry relates to prose as an individual relates to social life, not simply as an atomic constituent but as an active participant whose life is extended by its social belonging. Novalis is constantly looking for comparable expressions of poetry's productive self-substitution. The start of *Das Allgemeine Brouillon* is the area from which come most of the young Walter Benjamin's endorsements in his doctoral thesis on the Romantic idea of art-criticism; in effect, it is a treatise on the Romantic idea of the productive relation of poetry to prose. Its major sources are in moments like the one in which Novalis likens romanticizing to algebra, or the substitution of another terminology to facilitate the solution of problems in the original terminology. This kind of prosthetic logic at the heart of allegorical or mythic extension preoccupies Benjamin; but, more than this, what especially grips him is the way that an original *Sprachmagie*, the magical adequacy of a poem to its idea, works by the extension of its dynamic individuality into the prosaic sobriety of other discourses, an extension Benjamin will eventually call its reproducibility (*Reproduzierbarkeit*). This, after all, was the rationale of the *Roman*, the *Mischgedicht* or Romantic work of art par excellence, whose re-articulation of poetry actually places poetry (as does, say, John Keats's 'Ode on Indolence') as one of its own contents or spectacles. Yet this self-relegation remains poetry's greatest achievement, not the recuperation for which Paul de Man perpetually attacked it, but something for Benjamin eventually much more like the surrender of class-interest and cultural privilege demanded of the bourgeoisie by the revolution. For Benjamin, reproducibility is a democratizing of access to the work of art which, at one stroke, destroys its 'aura' by rendering the work's uniqueness fragmentary, only one part of the unfolding history of its continuing significance in different forms.

Diotima suggests that poetry itself is a fragment of a larger creativity, because the word poetry (poesis) stands for the products of a much wider artisanship. Poetry in 'a restricted sense', as Percy Shelley would put it, has to dissociate itself from a general field of creativity to be poetry proper.⁵ But of course this surrounding prosaic environment is needed for poetry to have that distinctive concentration we recognise in poems. 'A poem of any length', wrote Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria*, 'neither can be or ought to be, all poetry'.⁶ What might have appeared to be a matter of orchestration, of balancing a lyric intensity traditionally held to be typical of Romanticism with unavoidable descents within the same poem into other registers, expository or narrative, when read in context looks less settled. The ostensibly subjective turn Coleridge takes immediately after this passage – 'What is poetry? Is so nearly the same question with, what is a poet?' – actually insists on the range of a poetic profession which 'brings the whole soul of man into activity'. Now this could simply be contained within a Schillerian aesthetic where, enclosed by carefully aestheticised boundaries, we experience a sense of being undetermined denied to us in real life. But it is not obvious that Coleridge's words can keep at bay the expansion of poetry into the prose of which it is a piece, the relation that his contemporaries were exploring. Fragments, for Friedrich Schlegel were 'the real form of universal philosophy', and clearly poetry was no exception to the rule.⁷ Poetry, philosophically understood, was a fragment of prose. Coleridge runs this implication alongside his more conspicuous Romantic rehabilitation of 'imitation', 'symbol' and a defining 'pleasure'. Schlegel, more wholeheartedly, attacked these traditional differences and their Romantic updating, proclaiming instead the arrival of the time to bring poetry together with all the things in distinction to which it had hitherto defined itself. Poetry observed the fragmentary organization structuring all forms of thought. In its case, though, it seemed particularly difficult to see the part / whole relation because the poem's rationale so unarguably had resided in its difference from prose, not in its

continuity with prose. But it was precisely this continuity that major Romantics set about explaining, and Leopardi was one of them.

Diotima's idea was that we should rise through the ranks of discourse on the wings of restricted poetry, just as love proper should let us advance in human terms beyond the lower sensuous entanglements into which love leads, guided instead by love's desire for immortality through reproduction into the realm of other qualifiers for eternity, principally the true and the good. Notoriously, in Plato's world of forms, successful candidates lose their differences and partake in a common refinement. The poet and the lover are indeed 'of imagination all compact', an imagination legitimated by the quest for beauty's arrival at the point where truth and the good coincide. But this salvation of poetry, and *The Symposium* does indeed seem to save poetry from the charges of mimetic incompetence with which it was labelled in *The Republic*, is achieved by severing its connection with different forms of creativity which might otherwise shed light on or even add to its original substance. Or, one might say, as elsewhere in Plato (*Ion*, *Timaeus*), that poetry's origin in the original forms of creativity from which it distils its purity is empowering in its own way. It risks, especially in the *Ion*, identification with the 'madman', the third member of Shakespeare's imaginative trio whom I strategically omitted. But Plato allows for the sober reproduction of poetry too. Then poetry's fragmentariness in a world of creativity gives it an afterlife in the ways in which its peculiar formative power is reproduced in other disciplines and activities for which it can still provide inspiration without dissociating itself from what they are doing.

The visibility of this fragmentary structure in which poetry engages in a self-surpassing to achieve the 'unrestricted sense' Shelley thought it possessed was a major starting-point for Walter Benjamin's doctoral thesis on Schlegel. Benjamin claimed to be using new material from the recently discovered Windischmann texts to turn Schlegel from the Jena ironist into a philosopher prescient of the crisis of art in modernity. The fragment, far from teasing and intoxicating us with its excessively concentrated suggestiveness, encouraged sobriety (*Nüchternheit*). Out of the convolutions of Fichte's theory of reflection, Benjamin conjures a Schlegelian critique which shows that Fichte's post-Kantian insistence on a world merely reflecting back to us our powers of understanding it, and so existing only as far as our reflections were not what they reflected (the 'not-I') entailed an infinite regress. In other words, if the world is not describable other than in my terms of apprehending it, and as a reflection of those capabilities, then the world must also reflect back to me my consciousness that it is nothing but such a susceptibility to reflection. It must reflect back to me that sense of knowing itself in the act of reflection, a still more complete mirroring in which it appears to know me as much as I know myself in it – what Benjamin calls 'the being-known of the knowing being by the being it knows'.⁸ This formula sounds like animism: consciousness or sentience is attributed to the object or artefact because it must reflect back to me my own experience of being conscious of it. In fact, the claim is part of Benjamin's disenchantment of art, leading to his demolition of the 'aura' of art, which he thinks is indeed 'animism', in his later work. His claim that the artwork knows its reader can lead in two easily grasped and importantly related directions. On the one hand it would explain to Benjamin how an object I represent to myself could make me know myself in hitherto unforeseen ways. It can activate my unconscious. It can resource Proust's *mémoire involontaire*, out of which can be spun a whole new world, one which always belonged to me, but unconsciously. Its fragmentary quality here promotes Benjamin's understanding of major modernist texts like *À la recherche du temps perdu*. But secondly, in the case of art, this reflective productivity explains the activity of criticism. It takes criticism of the artwork to awaken its own reflection of the domain of which it is a fragment. Art incapable of this reflection, bad art, remains in the realm of irony which, Benjamin claims, once consumed Schlegel but which in his later lectures he moved beyond. The reflective artwork is assured an afterlife of

changing interpretation and reproducibility by criticism which itself is only the midwife of truth or the activity ‘through which the artwork is brought to knowledge of itself’. ‘Criticism’, writes Benjamin, ‘in its central intention is not judgement but, on the one hand, the completion, consummation and systematization of the work, and, on the other hand, its resolution in the absolute’.⁹ The ‘absolute’ comes in because there is no reason to think that the critical process won’t continue. It is resolved because, as art like Proust’s shows, what it gives the critic is an experience, a new experience of his or her perpetual renewal in the work of art, along with the recognition of that experience’s historicity and individuality. An infinite regression terminates in an *experience* of its possibility, hence the resolution of the otherwise irresolvable ‘absolute’. This leads to his later messianic terminology of a *Jetztzeit*, the *nuncstans* of his ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’, where, again, we *experience*, however fleetingly, the fragment’s exemplary rescue from ideological continuations of itself and its restoration to an authentic future desired by Benjamin’s Marxism.

Benjamin thought that Schlegel ‘grasped the prosaic element [of poetry] less purely than Novalis’. Novalis’s concentrated fragments repeatedly seek a term for the cross-overs and kennings they explore – sometimes a universal *Rhythmus*, or *Figuristik*, sometimes a musical *Physik* or a curative philosophy, sometimes a medicinal *Musik*, or anything, one feels, which will keep in motion the encyclopaedism (*Enzyklopaedistik*) for which his notebook is assembling its materials. Most striking of all for a later enthusiast like Benjamin is Novalis’s search for his own language in material nature. The opening of *Die Lehrlinge zu Saïs* is famously motivated by the logic of the palimpsest. But in the *Brouillon*, the material of language, its very acoustical substance, is heard directly in ‘consonantal’ nature which his ideal art-work, the *Roman*, retards sufficiently to make audible. Benjamin quotes in his notes Novalis’ obscure but fascinating remark that ‘If the novel is of a retarding nature then in truth it is poetically prosaic, a consonant (Wenn der Roman retardirender Naturist, so ist er wahrhaft *poëtisch*, prosaisch, ein *Consonant*.)’¹⁰ Benjamin glosses the crucial notion of a ‘retarding’ principle as ‘an expression of mindfulness (*als retardierendes Prinzip verstanden: Ausdruck der Besinnung*)’.¹¹ Much later, discussing Brecht’s devices for destroying the audience’s fanciful empathy with drama and getting it to use its brains, to be soberly mindful, Benjamin will also talk of a ‘retarding’ function.

One generation after these Jena speculations, Leopardi is working out his own notions of poetic sobriety and mindfulness. In 1820 he embarked on some entries in the *Zibaldone* which are of an unusual range of reference. These meditations assimilate personal, literary, philosophical and historical remarks in a mutually illustrative way. His insistence on the viability of these comparisons implies the unity of Leopardi’s views in a context which, like Novalis’s, *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, otherwise seems pretty miscellaneous. Leopardi equates his personal career with that of humanity. My suggestion is that the underlying structure governing his way of thinking about the history of culture is the one we have been looking at. To put it more boldly, he sees his and Europe’s modernity emerging as the transition between a fragmentary apprehension of the world full of pleasure and fancy to one which is sober and philosophical. Though still poetically empowering, the new mind-set is increasingly experienced as poetic privation. A departure from poetry seems to be a condition of his mature approach to ‘reason and truth’.

Another way he describes this is to say that he becomes ‘sentimental’ (*sentimentale*). And sentimental appears to mean largely what it means in Schiller’s famous treatise on naïve and sentimental poetry. There Schiller tries to show the interdependence of naïve and sentimental through the argument that the sentimental always tries to reconstruct the naïve out of its reflective awareness of the loss of that valuable condition. Leopardi, though, in 1820, says in effect that human nature has changed, that we

cannot be naïve again in any sense. Once poets, we are now philosophers. This change happened not only in human history but also personally: in this case, ontogenesis is phylogenesis. Leopardi's own personal circumstances, however unfortunate, are presented as typical. The illnesses, the trouble with his eyes, the family difficulties, the failed relationships – all these in his analysis follow a general pattern. Our nature, he wants to say, has become unnatural.

This unnatural nature, which is the modern dispensation, develops 'feeling and melancholy... from the advancement of philosophy and from the knowledge of man, the world, the vanity of things, and human unhappiness'.¹² This condition differs strikingly from the 'sensibility in the ancients' which, though linguistically only round the corner for Leopardi, was 'potential, not actual as with us'. So philosophy actualises, realises poetry in the moment of leaving it behind. This is the argument finally coming out of Leopardi's *Discorso...* on Romantic poetry written a few years before. Poetry, we might say in this context, is retarded, made backward, but appreciated all the more by a new mindfulness in that retrospect. When Leopardi first begins formulating this idea, he is still caught up in his controversy with the 'new' Romantic poetry championed by Lodovico di Breme in the example of Byron's *The Corsair*. But a philosophy of a modern-leaning Romanticism is emerging from Leopardi's disagreement with di Breme:

By describing with only a few strokes and showing only part of the object, the ancients allowed their imagination to wander in vague and indeterminate childlike notions which arise from an ignorance of the whole. In a rustic scene, for example, depicted by an ancient poet with a few lines, and without a horizon (so to speak) stirred in the imagination that divine undulation of indistinct ideas, bright with an indefinable romance and that extremely dear, sweet strangeness and wonder that made us ecstatic in our childhood. Whereas the moderns, defining and describing every object in detail, lack this infinite emotion almost entirely, and bring out instead only a finite and circumscribed emotion. This springs from a knowledge of the whole object and which has nothing extravagant, but belongs to a maturity devoid of these inexpressible delights of a roving imagination experienced in childhood. (8 January, 1820).¹³

The felicity of the poetry of the ancients is generated by the partial, fragmentary understanding by which it produces an 'indefinable romance'. But the superior knowledge of the moderns itself cannot be described other than as fragmentary in relation to the ancient, infinite suggestiveness it supposedly renders obsolete? Already surrounding Leopardi's deprecation of modern sobriety compared to ancient romance are explorations which undo this hierarchy rather in the manner we saw the other Romantics re-think the one between poetry and prose. Insofar as the philosophy of *Zibaldone* can be said to be driven by any one thing, then perhaps it is driven by Leopardi's re-thinking of his initial partisanship to a classical fragmentariness whose ignorance of the whole is full of Romantic compensations. In accepting his modernity, he has to revalue his classicism by seeing it produced by those changes in his nature which now separate it from a classical sensibility. And in so doing, he finds an argument for the continuity of his poetry with the huge creative effort in prose of all kinds represented by the *Zibaldone*. Classicism, in other words, becomes an illusion, but an illusion necessary to the poet, since his modern knowledge has not replaced illusion but rather knows its ubiquity and inescapableness. Everything can be referred back to a fragmentary core which we try to complete in different ways at different times. Relativism, he writes, 'should be the basis for all metaphysics'.¹⁴

Early on in *Zibaldone*, Leopardi goes back to Plato in order to express the break with the ancients of his modern relativism. Plato coins the eternal ideas, but they can only appear in a contemporary

currency, in historical forms so specific that we cannot be sure that other historical versions of ideas contrary to our own may not in fact bear a closer resemblance to the originals than ours. Leopardi then tells us he is thinking of Montesquieu, but he is also forging the notion that an original nature is one able to change its nature, and so to become extended in new forms in the course of its historical career. In fact Leopardi rejects 'Plato's dream'.¹⁵ However 'universal' the rules governing 'the principal substance' of original literature, thinks Leopardi, 'in their particulars... they must change infinitely'. That original literary 'substance' is simply displaced or over-ruled by the 'different natures' writing assumes.

But Leopardi is also clear that the propulsion to the change of nature comes from the poetic end of things and explains a persistently poetic character of the prosaic. The imagination, which produces poetry, 'is of materially infinite extent'. It extends itself endlessly by joining forces with our desire for pleasure, a pleasure which may appear to be defined by its object but which is actually never exhausted by possessing its object. Each particular enjoyment turns out to have disguised a longing for 'pleasure as such'.¹⁶ We can only get hold of what that consequently indefinite pleasure is like through the inventions of imagination, through illusion and its pleasures. Ultimately, though, this realization has left even illusions behind. Leopardi reflects with increasingly frequency that the nullity of things, their illusionariness, itself becomes the reality recognized by reason. In a poem like *L'infinito*, poetry must contrive its own shipwreck, sweet illusion, to achieve its purpose of showing the indefinite and so illusory nature of everything including itself. But the sober recognition of what it has achieved belongs to the philosophy of the *Zibaldone*, the unending notebook record of Leopardi's changing natures. He continually asserts that an aspiration – pleasurable, desiring, epistemological – is not 'infinite in itself, but only materially': that is, it has to do with our natures as they observe particular shapes at particular times, exemplifying another relativizing of a potentially 'absolute' category. Leopardi moves beyond the original opposition of his *Discorso*, but only to see the prosaic reproduction of poetry continually recurring. This is at once the end of poetry, and its reworking in another form.

When Leopardi comes to reconsider his opinion of Mme de Staël he turns to her novel, *Corinne, ou l'Italie*, which one might have expected him to think even more presumptuous than the essay on translation whose advice to Italian writers inspired the Romanticism controversy. But he bypasses controversy this time by focusing on Staël's emphasis on a fragmentary rendering, as he sees it, of the bits and pieces of Corinne's life. The prose of her experience, the quotidian of Corinne's life, are again described by Leopardi as lending to observation 'an entirely new naturalness and truth', one which must be different but continuous with the sublimity of Corinne's improvisations and exclamatory declamations about her native land for which she has become a celebrated public figure.¹⁷ This integration of the prose with the poetry of Corinne's life must anticipate the modernity with which Leopardi will challenge the reader of, say, his poem *A Sylvia*, to concede the larger significance and pathos of her ordinariness. But the idea that the poetry here is accomplished in sober facts is won through the poetic legitimation of prose, a transference of authority which the poem so poignantly thematises in its use of *Sylvia* to represent and articulate the poet's fate.

In conclusion, if we read Leopardi through the fragment form in this way, we can say the following. His pessimism amounts to this. Nature overrides the interests of its individual members to such a degree that their belonging to nature appears illusory. The nothingness that looms, though, is not only psychologically unbearable, but also something we cannot get on terms with. The only reality is illusion, and the fundamental illusion is that there *are* fragments, that we *can* think in fragments, and that we can find *new* versions of fragmentary knowledge as required: 'we and our small things we

have believed infinite'.¹⁸ The climax of this renovation of the sense of the fragmentary in Leopardi has usually been taken to be the *social catena* upon which we are thrown us back by our condition of being utterly bereft of any natural support. While we can call this solidarity an illusion, what we cannot do is deny that it knows especially well the reality of its own illusoriness, at odds as it is with natural reality and its contrasting indifference. To see through any sense that we *naturally* belong to a larger whole and to make of that poverty the next illusion of a shared human *nature* is a logic which seems inviolable. In its pessimism lies that Leopardian resistance which Marxist critics in particular have tried to enlist and whose retardation allows a mindfulness of our material condition. This most sober and least fanciful of all reflections, basing itself in our power to reproduce ourselves in new forms of association, looks forward to the political role Benjamin saw for the Romantic fragment.

¹ *Symposium*, translated with Introduction and Notes by Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 1984), 206E – 207A.

² Novalis, *Schriften* ed. Paul Kluckhohn and Richard Samuel, 3 vols (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960), 2.536, no. 51.

³ *Ibid.*, 2. 527, no. 17

⁴ *Ibid.*, 2. 534, no. 36

⁵ Percy Bysshe Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers. New York: Norton, 1977 (3rd printing, corrected, 1982), pp., 483, 507.

⁶ *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), II. 15

⁷ *Athenaeums-Fragmente*, 259.

⁸ 'The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism', *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-26*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1997), p. 146

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 151, 159.

¹⁰ Novalis, *Der Allgemeine Brouillon: Materialienzur Enzyklopädistik 1798/99*, with an Introduction by Hans-Joachim Mähl (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1993), p. 70, no. 384.

¹¹ *Selected Writings*, p.197 n. 284, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. R. Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1974) Band I.1, p. 104 n. 277.

¹² Giacomo Leopardi, *Zibaldone di Pensieri*, selected and edited by Anna Maria Moroni, 2 vols (Milano: Monadori, 1983), nos 78-9, pp. 74-5; *Zibaldone: A Selection*, translated with an Introduction by Martha King and Daniela Bini (Bern: Peter Lang,) p. 26

¹³ *Zibaldone*, no. 100, p.p. n90-1; *A Selection*, p. 32.

¹⁴ *Zibaldone*, no. 451, p. 281; *A Selection*, p. 93.

¹⁵ *Zibaldone*, no. 154, p. 126; *A Selection*, p. 41.

¹⁶ *Zibaldone*, nos 165-6, pp. 134-5; *A Selection*, p. 42.

¹⁷ *Zibaldone*, no.83, p. 77; *A Selection*, p. 28.

¹⁸ *Zibaldone*, no 4178, (vol. 2) p. 1097; *A Selection*, p. 174.