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Twelve Letters from the Romantic Circle (1798-1799)

*Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg),
Caroline Schlegel, August Wilhelm Schlegel*

Translated from the German by David W. Wood*

The following twelve letters were originally written between 20 August 1798 and 20 January 1799. They have never appeared in English before. This selection revolves around the correspondence of Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg), at that time studying at the Mining Academy in Freiberg, with his friend Friedrich Schlegel in Berlin, and with August Wilhelm Schlegel and his wife Caroline Schlegel in Jena. It commences just prior to the famous meeting of the Romantic Circle in Dresden in late August 1798 and their joint visit to the city's Art Gallery, and ends six months later with the news that their romantic journal the *Athenaeum* would continue to be published. Not unexpectedly, these letters mention many personal facts and events – e.g. the illness of Novalis's second fiancée Julie, the divorce of Dorothea Veit, the financial issues of Friedrich Schlegel, and even the possible imminent death of Novalis.

A key intellectual concern of the correspondence is religion – what constitutes a modern religious impulse and the idea to write a new gospel, Bible or universal book. The letters above all provide a vibrant snap-shot of the extremely multifaceted interests of the German romantics. There are numerous references to different literary, cultural, political, poetical, and natural-scientific works, as well as to older and contemporary philosophers, such as Plato, Plotinus, Spinoza, Kant, Fichte and Schelling. Indeed, according to Friedrich Schlegel, it was precisely one of the goals of his written correspondence with Novalis to generate communal philosophical reflection. Or as he puts it in a notebook from the summer of 1798: “Symphilosophy with Hardenberg. In letters. He's a magician, me merely a prophet.”

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1. Friedrich Schlegel in Dresden to Novalis in Freiberg

Dresden, 20th August [1798]

I only received your letter¹ on Saturday², and Schelling³ arrived the same day, so it was much too late to inform you. You'll definitely be able to meet him this Saturday⁴, as he is staying here for quite a while, and he is even going to Freiberg.

[Rahel] Levin⁵ still hasn't arrived; even if she had come to take me straight back to Berlin, I wouldn't have gone. That said, I have now set the 4th September as the final date of my departure, and I don't know if I can change it. However, I find your invitation very tempting. When we are alone I enjoy your company in a completely different manner and more properly than when we are together with others. We have time enough to arrange everything next Saturday. See if you can stay as *long* as possible. Now that Schelling is here, he'll also demand a quota of your time. He read *Faith and Love* with great interest and is looking forward to talking with you about it.⁶ He also asks if you could bring along the *Zoological Fragments*.⁷ Regarding the latter, keep them for our correspondence, for you will also have to be my Socrates in physics, among other things. I have plenty of ideas and notebooks about this, which you'll have to read before we write the Letter.⁸ Apart from the introduction, this Letter should include a report about your inner symphilosophy and my texts to the extent that they touch on physics, so that the latter are critiqued by you.⁹

Could I also ask you to bring along *Ritter's* book¹⁰; as well as whatever you consider to be the best handbook on mineralogy, not to mention

¹ These twelve letters can be found in, among others, Novalis, *Schriften. Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs*, eds. Paul Kluckhohn, Richard Samuel *et al.* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960-2016), vol. 4 (hereafter: HKA). I am grateful to the various German editions for their annotations and endnotes.

² See letter of Novalis to Friedrich Schlegel, 16 August 1798 (HKA 4: 257-258), where the former says he plans to visit Schlegel soon in Dresden.

³ Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775-1854).

⁴ The romantic circle met together at the Dresden Art Gallery on 25 and 26 August, 1798. The participants included Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg), August Wilhelm and Friedrich Schlegel, Caroline Schlegel, the translator Gries, and the philosopher Schelling.

⁵ Rahel Varnhagen, née Levin (1771-1833).

⁶ Novalis's text, *Glauben und Liebe oder Der König und die Königen* (Faith and Love or the King and the Queen), was published in the *Jahrbücher der preußischen Monarchie* in June-July 1798; reprinted in HKA 2 (3rd ed., 1981), 485-498. English translation in: Novalis, *Philosophical Writings*, edited and translated by Margaret Mahony Stoljar (Albany/N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1997), 85-100.

⁷ *Zoological Fragments*, an envisaged collection of fragments.

⁸ Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis had planned to jointly write a *Brief über die Physik* (Letter on Physics).

⁹ Novalis wrote marginal notes to Friedrich Schlegel's *Zur Physik* in the summer 1798.

¹⁰ Johann Wilhelm Ritter (1776-1810), physicist and chemist.

Darwin's *Zoonomia*¹¹, if you think it could be useful and understandable to me.

Your letters have recently been brief, my dear friend. How did you like Teplitz?¹² – You seem to have given up on the plan of coming to see us in Berlin at Easter. We'd form a lovely circle around you!

I still can't tell you much about Schelling at the moment. However, I do think that conversation with him will probably never be particularly interesting to me. Yet I'm glad to have met him.

Try and arrange things so that I'm able to see you as much as possible. Concerning my future visit, we'll first have to talk about it in person.

I warmly embrace you,

Friedrich Schl.[egel]

Please pass on my best wishes to old Carlowitz if you see him.¹³ I'd be very happy to have the chance to meet him again.

Caroline is surprised that you haven't written anything about Wilhelm's symbolic music. Everyone sends you their greetings, Charlotte as well.¹⁴

2. Novalis in Freiberg to Caroline Schlegel in Dresden

Freiberg, *Sunday morning* [9th September 1798¹⁵]

I haven't been able to either *leave*, or *send you anything yet*. However, anyone tasked with building a nature and a world clearly cannot depart. I've been on my journey of discovery, or on my pursuit, since I saw you last, and have chanced upon extremely promising coastlines – which perhaps circumscribe a new scientific continent. – This sea is teeming with fledgling *islands*.

The letter on the antiquities has been recast.¹⁶ You will receive instead a romantic fragment – the visit to the antiquities – in addition to an archaeological supplement.¹⁷ I'm fairly confident of awakening your interest. Well, at the very least, I believe this work will contain many novel things.

¹¹ Erasmus Darwin, *Zoonomia, or the Laws of Organic Life* (London: J. Johnson, 1794), translated into German by J. D. Brandis under the title: *Zoonomie oder Gesetze des organischen Lebens* (Hanover: Gebrüder Hahn, 1795-1799).

¹² Novalis stayed in the spa town of Teplitz in July and August 1798, writing there the "Teplitz Fragments". Translated excerpts in: Novalis, *Philosophical Writings*, 101-110.

¹³ Hans Georg von Carlowitz (1772-1840), an old friend of Novalis from his student years.

¹⁴ Charlotte Ernst, née Schlegel, sister of the brothers August Wilhelm and Friedrich Schlegel.

¹⁵ Date of letter uncertain, but presumably written on 9th September 1798.

¹⁶ Cf. the draft notes in Novalis, "Studien zur Bildenden Kunst" (Studies in the Fine Arts), HKA 2: 648-651.

¹⁷ See entry 52 on archaeology, antiquities and the Sistine Madonna in: Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 8.

TRANSLATION

My symphysics with Friedrich especially concerns my latest batch of philosophical-physiological experiments. In the present circumstances, I still can't picture the *form*. Please write to him about this. He will receive his papers – as soon as mine are improved, enlarged and rearranged? – I can't be any more precise. The delay is not due to a lack of hard work – rather, it is more on account of the uncultured nature of the subject – and its immense diversity. – For that reason, it is surely extremely simple – but still so difficult to grasp, seize and shape as it is. The deeper I penetrate into the immaturity of Schelling's *On the World Soul*¹⁸ – the more interesting his mind becomes to me. – He is able to divine the highest, but simply lacks pure *reproductive talent* – which makes Goethe into the most remarkable physicist of our age.¹⁹ Schelling *comprehends* well – but *retains* things to a much lesser extent – and understands *how to reproduce*, least of all.

Please write and tell me how long you still intend to stay in Dresden – so that I can organise my trip accordingly. I'm also not sure when I'll be able to send you something. Please give my regards to Funk²⁰, whom you'll no doubt see.

Your husband [August Wilhelm Schlegel] would be doing me a favour if he could pay the enclosed bill and get a receipt. I'll thank him in person and give him the outstanding amount.

Please pass on my warmest regards to the Ernsts²¹ and to Wilhelm. Above all – tell me how everyone is, and what you are all doing. May the Madonna safeguard your health and protect our friendship.²²

Hardenberg.

[P.S.]

Perhaps your husband might be able to do me an even *bigger favour*. I'm in desperate need of the works of Helmont²³ and *Fludd*.²⁴ Could Wilhelm borrow them from Dasdorf for 14 days, and if so, immediately send them on

¹⁸ F.W.J. Schelling, *Über die Weltseele*. Novalis's notes on this reading can be found in HKA 3: 102-114; translated excerpt in: Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 204.

¹⁹ J.W. von Goethe (1749-1832), had already published his *Essay on the Metamorphosis of Plants* in 1790. Novalis's reflections on Goethe can be found in HKA 2: 640-647; translated excerpts in: Novalis, *Philosophical Writings*, 111-119.

²⁰ Karl Wilhelm Ferdinand von Funk (1761-1828), historian. Funk collaborated on the literary, history and philosophy journal *The Hours (Die Horen)*, edited by Friedrich Schiller between 1795 and 1797.

²¹ Charlotte Ernst, and Ludwig Emanuel Ernst (1756-1826).

²² This reference to the Madonna is also an allusion to the recent visit to the Dresden Gallery, and the viewing of Raphael's painting the *Sistine Madonna*.

²³ Jean-Baptiste Van Helmont (1577-1644), Belgian physician and philosopher, disciple of Paracelsus. A German edition of Helmont's collected works appeared in Sulzbach in 1683.

²⁴ Robert Fludd (1574-1637), English physician and philosopher, working in the Hermetic-Kabbalistic tradition of the Renaissance. Author of the text: *Historia macro- et microcosmi metaphysica, physica et technical* (Oppenheim, 1617).

to me. Bear in mind that the accompanying cosmogony is fascinating – and shouldn't be taken lightly. Schelling will be amazed and delighted by my discoveries. I'm bound to have Friedrich's approval – and sympraxis. Friedrich's sparkling spirit has wrought wondrous mixtures and admixtures in this physical chaos. His papers are really *inspired* – replete with inspired hits and misses. Write to him that my letter has turned into something completely *new* – just a little from out of the old papers. I hope our correspondence will truly encompass *fermenta cognitionis* in abundance and ignite more than a Lavoisierian revolution. I currently feel as if I'm sitting in the *Comité du Salut public universel*.

3. Friedrich Schlegel in Berlin to Novalis in Weissenfels

Berlin, 20th October 1798

I'd long waited and hoped to have a letter from you, and now I hear that you are in Weissenfels! – Surely I'll receive something *from* you soon. Yet I would prefer to have *you* yourself here. Indeed, that is virtually the only, and yet the most important thing that I wanted to tell you – that I want to see and speak with you more than anything else. – I'm actually just beginning to understand you. I've recently had a few revelations, and now feel that I understand you better, the more I understand religion.

If it is at all possible, and if you think it's not in fact a bad idea, visit me here in Berlin.

I'm especially curious to receive *from you*, apart from the Letter on Physics, the *romantic fragments* and the *Christian monarchy*. On my side, the goal of my literary projects is to write a new Bible and follow in the footsteps of Mohamed and Luther.

This winter I think I will be able to frivolously finish the frivolous novel *Lucinde*.²⁵

I'm not going to say any more, since I know you have a different view, and because I hope and believe that you will certainly come to Berlin if it is at all possible.

Apart from that, I think I'll have to more or less cut some ties here, and then depart sooner or later. For worries could threaten me and my family if we are unable to manage the current situation. You are incredibly precious to me, and indelibly rooted in my soul.

Take care, your

Friedrich Schl.

²⁵ Friedrich Schlegel, *Lucinde. Ein Roman* (Berlin: Heinrich Frölich, 1799). English translation in: *Friedrich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments*, translated and with an introduction by Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971).

You are definitely a member of the *Comité de salut public universel*, and as a citizen of the new century in my sense, are fully deserving of a civil wreath. I have recently thought of you incredibly often, or rather, I have always been thinking of you, accompanied by the most delicate friendship.

4. Novalis in Freiberg to Friedrich Schlegel in Berlin

Freiberg, the 7th November 1798

You'll receive this reply via Jena, for I'll refer to the letter I sent to your sister-in-law [Caroline Schlegel], which I asked to be passed on to you. Now, I don't want you to receive the quotation without the quoted, so I'll also send this letter to Jena to provide you with the relevant details. Your letter has strengthened my resolve regarding the necessity of us being together. When you continue to discover more things in me, so from my side I also continue to understand you much more. A striking example of our inner sym-organisation and sym-evolution is contained in your letter. You write about your Bible project, while I'm engaged in my study of science as a whole – and its body – the book – and have likewise hit upon the *idea of the Bible* – of the Bible as the *ideal of each and every* book. The theory of the Bible and its development furnishes the theory of writing or literary sculpting in general – that simultaneously yields the symbolic, indirect theory of the construction of the creative spirit. You can see from the letter to your sister-in-law that I'm occupied with an exceedingly comprehensive work – which will absorb my entire activity for this winter.

It ought to be none other than a critique of the Bible project – an attempt at a universal method of biblicizing – an introduction to genuine encyclopedistics.²⁶

Here I intend to generate truths and ideas *writ large* – of generating inspired thoughts – of producing a living, scientific *organon* – and by means of this syncritical politics of the intelligence, to clear a path to genuine praxis – to a veritable process of reunion.

I've taken the trouble of outlining this project using several expressions that will allow you to gain a more complete answer regarding this Bible idea.

The more time we spend together and reflect on each other, the more we'll share ever move intimately in the mystery of our *duality*.

I understood and enjoyed your fragments, as well as the piece on *Wilhelm Meister*.²⁷

²⁶ Encyclopedistics was the core subject of Novalis's *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*. See David W. Wood, "Introduction" to Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, pp. xxv-xxx.

²⁷ Review of Goethe's novel *Wilhelm Meister*, which appeared mid-July 1798 in the journal *Athenaeum*.

However, there is *one* person who I would still like to be in our company – a person who can be compared to you alone – *Baader*²⁸

His magic unites once again

What the sword of folly has divided.

I've just read his earlier treatise from 1786 on substance and heat²⁹, what a mind! I'm thinking about writing to him. – Couldn't he perhaps be invited to collaborate on the *Athenaeum*? My friend, join together with Baader – and you'll accomplish incredible things.

Schelling is now delving into mathematics. – If he also writes here too quickly, he'll end up paying the price. It is a strange, modern phenomenon (which isn't to Schelling's disadvantage), that his book *Ideas* has already *wilted* and become rather *sterile*.³⁰ – Only recently have such *short-lived* books been published. Your *Greeks and Romans* too is in part a rather significant sign of the increasing velocity and progression of the human spirit.³¹

Standards, education and spirituality are all increasing within the brevity of a life-span. Books now resemble flashes of inspiration. – At once fleeting – yet creative sparks!

If only I was permitted to seize a single spark – as the activity of life.

I discussed the *Propyläen* in the letter to your sister-in-law.³² I still haven't received the *Almanach*.³³

Your *Lucinde* is enchanting me in advance like the Callipygian Venus – of which it will surely be a sister.

Kant's *Conflict of the Faculties*³⁴ is a lovely legal specimen – a carefully crafted web of chicanes. Kant has become *juristic* – something you accused Leibniz of – and he has been like this from the very beginning. The philosophical faculty (like the most blatant sinner), is the easiest to defend. The philosophical presentation of this conflict could have been an incredibly beautiful defence of the philosophical faculty. But in relation to the Bible, Kant is not *à la hauteur*. To me, Schleiermacher seems to have treated

²⁸ Franz Xaver von Baader (1765-1841), philosopher, theologian, physician and mining specialist; Baader studied in Freiberg from 1788 to 1792.

²⁹ Franz Xaver von Baader, *Vom Wärmestoff, seiner Vertheilung, Bindung und Entbindung, vorzüglich beim Brennen der Körper: Eine Probeschrift* (Vienna/Leipzig: Paul Kraussische Buchhandlung, 1786).

³⁰ F.W.J. Schelling, *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur*, first published in Leipzig in 1797 and revised in 1803. English translation: Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, translated by Errol E. Harris and Peter Heath, with an Introduction by Robert Stern (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

³¹ Friedrich Schlegel, *Die Griechen und Römer* (Neustrelitz: Michaelis, 1797).

³² *Propyläen*, a journal edited by Goethe.

³³ Friedrich Schiller's *Almanach*.

³⁴ I. Kant, *Der Streit der Fakultäten* (Königsberg: Friedrich Nicolovius, 1798).

Leibniz rather unfairly – the section on combinatorial analysis is worthy of all the praise that has been showered on it.

Take care – dear Schlegel, and remain devoted –

Your friend Hardenberg.

5. Caroline Schlegel in Jena to Novalis in Freiberg

Jena, 15 November 1798

Yesterday I received your two letters of the 7th and 11th November at the same time. You should try and find out what happened. You also received my letters fairly late. You can imagine how keen I was to try and carry out your request, which was communicated to me in a somewhat indefinite manner. I immediately guessed the illness of your dear friend, but I wish I'd known what kind of medicine to give her. I didn't want to be vague, because I know how dreadful it can become. So I decided to write to *Stark*, since you yourself favour him over Hufeland, and because I'm also not in close contact with the latter, as you are with the former.³⁵ However, because you yourself had not directly asked Stark for help, I thought I should be cautious, and told him that you had written to me about an acquaintance we have in common in the region x, and that you had asked me for advice. – Here is his answer. I sincerely hope it will lead to some relief. I immediately recognised it as a *facial affliction*, because Böhmer had to have it treated a number of times in the Harz, and it was really difficult for him to find a remedy.³⁶ I remember a woman who had such severe cramps that it degenerated into a seizure of the mouth and hydrophobia. She was cured by belladonna. Try the suggested remedy. The young doctor will certainly agree, and recommend those books to him in your own name, as an autonomous physician. I cannot rest until I post this letter and know that it will help. Your patient is surely no-one else's harmonica but her own.³⁷

I have received from you a long and precious letter, and it is also a genuine harmonica. But I won't be able to answer it today. I'm in a hurry and just recall your letter, because Friedrich then immediately took it. So I can only rely on my memory for the main general points.

³⁵ Johann Christian Stark (1753-1811), family doctor of Schiller, also treated Novalis and his first fiancée Sophie von Kühn; and Christoph Wilhelm Hufeland (1762-1836), personal doctor of Goethe, Herder and Wieland.

³⁶ Johann Friedrich Wilhelm Böhmer (died 1788) was the former husband of Caroline Schlegel, née Michaelis.

³⁷ Allusion to the harmonica theory. See Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, entry 245, p. 36.

We haven't seen the *Propyläen* yet. Why do we need this forecourt when we ourselves already possess the holiest of holies.³⁸ He [Goethe] now dwells here among us. Yesterday I had dinner with him, today I will have dinner with him, and soon I myself will host a feast. You should also come. – I'm looking forward to the *Propyläen*, for it is a pleasure too. He didn't bring any copies with him; and we don't want to ask for the ones already here. He will have a copy sent from Weimar. The preface seems to be full of the most paternal mildness. It should recall another preface or announcement. If you have read the *Allgemeine Zeitung*, then you would also have seen the true report of *Wallenstein's Camp* (*Wallensteins Lager*).³⁹ The letter it contains is no doubt from the hand of the master. He is doing it for his friend, who in the prelude and prologue reveals himself to be his disciple – and more Goethean than ever. What is otherwise in S.[chiller's] *Almanach* shows that he has exhausted himself in this direction. You could get the *Almanach* from Charlotte and a few words of mine about the prelude to *Wallenstein* if you request her, but she won't send them to you on her own account because I haven't asked her.

The *Athenäum* is on hold at the moment, dear friend. Vieweg is undecided as to whether he will continue it, and is behaving like a petty little businessman. He printed far too many copies – 1,500 – and he used too expensive paper. He is now doing the calculations for possible future issues. He doesn't have a clue that with this journal he has something long-term; for him, all the costs have to be immediately met and he has to turn a profit. They're in the middle of negotiating, so I won't go into further details. Our lovely essay *The Paintings* has not been published yet.⁴⁰ I'd like it to be published in the *Propyläen*. My view is that they, i.e. the brothers, shouldn't have burdened themselves with a journal and Wilhelm shouldn't have become a professor. He is so busy here with the university that the situation with the *Athenäum* barely made an impression on him. It hit Friedrich much harder, especially the economic aspects.

The stubborn Schelling was just here. He promised Prévost's work for you.⁴¹ He cannot get Le Sage's book.⁴² I have tried to write very clearly – you should just get used to my bad handwriting.

Please tell me how the patient is doing, so I can also inform Stark.

Take care, we are deeply fond of you.

³⁸ A play on the meaning of the name *Propyläen* – which is the sacred inner courtyard, forecourt, or sanctuary of a temple.

³⁹ One of Schiller's plays, first performed in Weimar on 12 October 1798, the prologue to a trilogy of dramas, along with *Die Piccolomini* (The Piccolomini) and *Wallensteins Tod* (Wallenstein's Death). Schiller finished his Wallenstein trilogy the following year in 1799.

⁴⁰ The dialogue *Die Gemälde*, written jointly by Caroline and August Wilhelm Schlegel, eventually appeared in 1799 in the *Athenaeum*.

⁴¹ Pierre Prévost (1751-1839), French physicist.

⁴² George Louis Le Sage (1724-1803), French physicist.

6. Friedrich Schlegel in Berlin to Novalis in Freiberg

Berlin. The 16th November [17]98

I hope you got my last letter. If I had to write it again, it wouldn't say anything else except my most pressing desire to know how you are and what you have been doing. Because I can't focus on anything until I know. I fully recall your condition and your last conversations with me. Let me also soon see your handwriting. Then one more thing.

First, some news. Vieweg is probably not going to continue the *Athenaeum*. It is clearly a huge financial mistake, and he doesn't want to wait any longer or continue it. How do you talk any sense into people like that? He's a shopkeeper, not a businessman, and seems perfectly happy to stay just the way he is.

Now to the main point. I am writing to you today about my current situation and hopefully you will be able to do me a big favour.

About 14 months ago I wrote to you about a friend of mine.⁴³ Since then, she has ended up, step by step, becoming my wife⁴⁴, and will remain so eternally. Civilly speaking, however, she is still the wife of another man, though in terms of their marriage they split up a number of years ago. I will never separate from her, and only wish to be fully united with her, it does not matter to me in which form. I would have preferred to put up with the circumstances and to have waited a bit, but things have now picked up pace, and we are currently disputing and negotiating with the husband, to whom she was sacrificed by her parents and her lack of experience. I still have no idea how and when it will all end. It is just a hugely chaotic and annoying state of affairs. But one thing I know, is that whatever happens, I'll need money, more than I presently have: but I'm not afraid of the future. Perhaps our freedom depends on the possession of this sum. Giving back her small assets, which are enough to initially get settled, would cause the least amount of difficulty. However, this would only be the case if we could part *amicably* with our opponent, and we still don't know if it is possible to have an amicable separation. Apart from that, I've immediately fallen into hardship, because my situation here has been greatly hampered and made worse by the terrible circumstances.

I'm presuming that it would not be difficult for you to procure that sum of money for me; however, I don't want to compromise you or your brother: that's why I am asking and requesting it from you. As you can see, I don't

⁴³ Friedrich Schlegel met Dorothea Friederike Veit, née Brendel Mendelssohn (1764-1839) in 1797. She had married Simon Veit in 1783, and divorced him in January 1799.

⁴⁴ *Frau*.– Friedrich Schlegel used this term in 1798 the sense of life partner. Dorothea and Friedrich were eventually married in 1804.

need much. – 200 thalers would already greatly help me out, and could even be enough.

7. Friedrich Schlegel in Berlin to Novalis in Freiberg

Berlin, the 2nd December [1798]

Indeed, the unintentional coincidence of our bible projects is one of the most striking signs and wonders of our agreement and disagreement.

I fully agree with your point that the bible is the central literary form and therefore the ideal of every book. But with several altogether specific conditions and differences. Even a journal, novel, compendium, letter, drama etc., should, *in a certain sense*, be a bible, and yet they remain both what is designated and included under this name and in the spirit of the former. However, I have in mind a bible which is not a bible in a rough sense, not approximately a bible, but which would be entirely literally and in every spirit and sense a bible, the first art work of this kind, because the ones so far have only been products of nature. In order to carry out a project of this kind, the ones that deserve to be called a bible would have to be posited as classical archetypes, just as the Greek poems are posited in practice by Goethe, and theoretically by me, as archetypes for the art of poetry.

As far as I can tell, your work has more of an analogy with an ideal book of mine about the *principles of writing*, which tries to highlight the missing centres of reading and centres of the universities. Consider my fragments and characteristics as the lateral-wings or poles of such a work, and through which these principles would attain their full light. These are the classical materials and classical studies or experiments of a writer, which drives or attempts to stimulate writing as an *art* and *science*: for up to now authors have hardly attained or done this, so that I am perhaps the first person who wants to seriously carry this out. My encyclopaedia will not be anything else than the application of these principles to the university, the counterpart to a genuine journal.

My bible project, however, is not a literary one, but – a biblical project, a thoroughly religious project. I intend to found a new religion, or more exactly, to help proclaim one: for it will come about and be victorious without me. My religion is not of the type that wants to swallow up philosophy and poetry. Rather, I permit the independence and friendship, the egoism and harmony of these two primordial arts and sciences to continue, though I believe that *it is now time* for them to change many of their characteristics. But when viewed without any kind of inspiration, I find that there are objects left over that cannot be treated by either philosophy or poetry. *God* appears to me to be an object of this kind, of which I have a completely new view. The best philosophy speaks of God in the most unspiritual and abstract manner, or carefully pushes him out beyond its borders. That seems to me

to be the main merit of Kant⁴⁵ and Fichte⁴⁶, that they guide philosophy to the threshold of religion, as it were, and then break off. While Goethe's education joyfully wanders in from the other side in the *Propyläen* of the temple. You can easily picture the intermediate links, and obtain an overview of the things, thoughts and poems that can only be unveiled to this epoch by means of gospels, letters, apocalypses, and so on. Or to take another perspective. One has spoken of and discussed for at least one hundred years now the *omnipotence* of the Word in holy scripture and who knows what else. Compared with what is really there and with what has happened, that just seems like a bad joke. But I'm willing to turn this into something serious, and to talk to people literally about their omnipotence. That this is supposed to take place by means of a book, might not seem that strange, since the greatest *authors* of religion – Moses, Christ, Mohammed, Luther – gradually became less and less politicians, and more and more teachers and writers. In addition, you also know that I ennoble and include smaller ideas, and for the latter, which are the heart and soul of my temporal and earthly life, I feel enough courage and strength, not merely to preach and be zealous like Luther, but like Mohammed, to also conquer the kingdom of spirits with the fiery sword of the word, or like Christ, to offer up myself and my life. – However, perhaps *you* have more talent to be a new Christ, and I would be your valiant Saint Paul. In any event, there is a similarity there, in that a certain energy and passion for the truth can only arise when it is preceded by an honest unbelief that stems from lethargy and not inability.

If Lessing were still alive, I wouldn't have to commence this task. The beginning would have already been completed. No one divined as much of the true new religion as Lessing did.⁴⁷ Not only is Kant far behind here, but even Fichte and Jacobi⁴⁸ and Lavater.⁴⁹ A few million of the latter poured into a melting pot would still not produce as much solid matter and pure ether of religion as Lessing possessed.

⁴⁵ See, among others, I. Kant, *Die Religion innerhalb der Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft* (Königsberg: Friedrich Nicolovius, 1793); English Translation: Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, edited by Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁴⁶ Cf. J.G. Fichte's 1798 article, "Ueber den Grund unsers Glaubens an eine göttliche Weltregierung" (On the Basis of our Belief in a Divine Governance of the World). English translation in: J.G. Fichte, *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings (1797–1800)*, ed. and trans. Daniel Breazeale (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), 142-155; and in: *J.G. Fichte and the Atheism Dispute (1798–1800)*, edited by Yolanda Estes and Curtis Bowman (Burlington: Ashgate, 2010), 17-30.

⁴⁷ See Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts* (Berlin: Christian Friedrich Voß und Sohn, 1780); English translation in: Lessing, *Theological Writings*, selected and translated by Henry Chadwick (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1956), 82-98.

⁴⁸ Cf. F.H. Jacobi, *Über die Lehre des Spinoza in Briefen an den Herrn Moses Mendelssohn* (Breslau: Löwe, 1785).

⁴⁹ Johann Caspar Lavater (1741-1801), Swiss theologian, also known for his writings on physiognomy.

Nevertheless, don't let that be the criterion for you to agree with me. The actual point is to see if you can agree with positing Christianity in an absolutely negative manner, at least in a certain sense.

I could certainly approve when you posited it in a positive manner, because I not only understood but even anticipated your doctrine of the free power of choice⁵⁰ and its application to Christianity. However, what was practical to you, was simply pure history to me. Hence, the dualism of our symphilosophy even on this point. A semi-understanding and a semi-agreement is possible here, because practice and history remain an undissolved fermentation in your religion. If I succeed in reciprocally saturating the two and blending them together into a perfect harmony, then obviously you can only fully agree or fully disagree. Perhaps the choice is still yours to make, my friend, of either being the last Christian, the Brutus of the old religion, or the Christ of the new gospel.

I sense that this new gospel is already starting to appear.⁵¹ Apart from the indications of philosophy and practice in general, this religion is also starting to stir among individuals, who are above all especially our contemporaries and who belong to the few fellow citizens of the period that is now dawning. A few examples. Schleiermacher, who is certainly no apostle, but a born critic of all biblical expressions (and if he were only given a word of God would powerfully preach it) is now working on a book about religion.⁵² Tieck is whole-heartedly studying Jacob Böhme.⁵³ He is surely on the right path there. Or another observation: does the synthesis of Goethe and Fichte result in anything other than religion? Soon this synthesis shouldn't just be the order of the day, but something universal, since there is a discord of the two of them with the age. This irrevocably arises from their personal point of view, and is already so incredibly striking. The seeds for the means and instruments of this synthesis were already in Lessing, and now others are active in Wolf⁵⁴, not to mention Schelling and Hülsen⁵⁵, who are like the snails of an isolated philosophy, extending their antennae toward the light and warmth of a new day.

⁵⁰ *Willkür*.

⁵¹ The need for a new gospel is expressed in Lessing's *The Education of the Human Race*, and then forms the conclusion to Novalis's essay, *Die Christenheit oder Europa* (Christendom or Europe) from 1799 (HKA 3: 507-524). English translation in: Novalis, *Philosophical Writings*, pp. 137-152.

⁵² Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768-1834). See Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion. Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* (Berlin: Unger Verlag, 1st ed. 1799). English translation: Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers*, trans. R. Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁵³ Jacob Böhme (1575-1624), German shoemaker, philosopher, and Christian mystic.

⁵⁴ Presumably Christian Gottlob Wolf (1757-1838); from 1787 to 1792, he was private tutor in the house of Novalis's neighbours in Weissenfels.

⁵⁵ August Ludwig Hülsen (1765-1810), student of Fichte in Jena from 1794 to 1810; collaborated on the journal *Athenaeum*.

TRANSLATION

Isn't it possible for you to somehow continue our last conversation? The *Athenaeum* will be published again with a new name and publisher. Hence, send us as soon as you can whatever you have and wish to contribute. – How are your Christian fragments coming along? I'm really looking forward to reading them.

If you don't think we can carry out our romantic-philosophical letter on nature and physics, then at least please let me address my *Ideas* to you in an epistolary monologue⁵⁶, which seems rather appropriate to me; they only fail to adhere to the form of a letter, which is surely pretty appropriate to you. You could even mix in some fragments, poems, or small novels, whatever fits.

At the moment, I can't tell you anything definite about my situation. Only that it is more likely that I'll be leaving at Easter than staying here. By the way, nothing has changed, and so I'm obliged to repeat the request that I made in my last letter, and hope that you actually received it (it was addressed to you directly in Freiberg). I hope to soon hear about you and your projects.

I've written to you, insofar as I could write it down. It would be so much better if we could just speak in person about our new projects. Might that at all be possible?

Schleiermacher recently told me that there is also a Freiberg in Silesia and therefore it is highly doubtful if my last letter even reached you. It merely contained a *species facti* of my domestic situation and a question and request that can be summarized in a few words. It is highly probable that my friend, the woman I wrote to you about at the start of my arrival here 15 months ago, a woman who has gradually become my wife, will publicly divorce her husband around Easter time. She has been privately separated from him for a number of years now. Giving back her few assets, if we separate amicably, will cause the least amount of difficulty. But even that is highly doubtful, and then her freedom and my tranquillity could depend on the possession of a cash sum. This annoying domestic and literary state of affairs has not only made me poor with regard to money, but also with regard to credit. Hence, I asked, and I'm asking you again, without putting you or your brother in a compromising situation, whether you might be able to procure for me a sum of about 200 thalers?

⁵⁶ Friedrich Schlegel ended up publishing his text entitled *Ideen* in 1800 as a collection of fragments in the first issue of volume 3 of the *Athenaeum*. English translation in: *Friedrich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments*, 241-256.

Could you also, the next time you are in Dresden, get Gareis⁵⁷ to paint your picture for me?

One more thing: Christianity contains the fullest seeds of the new religion; but they are in a rather neglected state.

The letter⁵⁸ is the true magic wand.

All the wishes of the beloved and all the images of the poets are literally true: namely, of the classical poets, of the true beloved.

Just a question about Baader, whom I know next to nothing about. Is he linking up with Fichte, just as Schelling and Hülsen do, and is he say a chaotic center for these two? Or is he a son of the new epoch, and did he, say, originally begin in the middle of physics, just as I did in the depths of the critique? – Then I could understand the polarity of our spirits to yours, and then it wouldn't merely be subjective. But then it wouldn't be necessary for me to join forces with him. I've already joined with you, and what is to take place through this union must solely take place through you.

The new religion should be entirely *magic*. Christianity is too political and its politics is far too material. On the other hand, symbolic-mystical politics is permitted and essential.

8. Novalis in Freiberg to Friedrich Schlegel in Berlin

Freiberg, December 10, 1798

I just received your long and detailed letter – which once again graphically transported me into your current dire situation. – I might be able to help you, but only after I've departed from here. – You know my situation – I live an uncertain life – for 2 years now I haven't thought about the future – I've neglected many things that I thought I wouldn't need any longer – and tried to make myself as free as possible. Fortune has protected me up to now – I wished to depart with the greatest composure and calmness. However, many things now appear to conspire against my plan. – So instead of seeing myself as dispensable – and becoming dispensable – I now find myself duty bound to old and new acquaintances. – I perceive how I might still be useful to many people; my friendship now compels me not to forsake those dearest to me at this chaotic time, and to share in life's every need with them. If you were all happy, then I could depart consoled. – However, such a fortunate destiny

⁵⁷ Franz Gareis (1775-1803), German painter, who inspired Ludwig Tieck for the character of the painter Franz Sternbald in the 1798 novel *Franz Sternbald's Peregrinations*. Gareis painted the only extent oil portrait of Novalis, now preserved and exhibited at the Novalis Museum in Weissenfels.

⁵⁸ *Buchstabe* – letter of the alphabet.

hasn't been allotted to me. If this state of affairs continues I'll soon have to begin a new life – and perhaps – a *higher* one. An early death is presently my greatest lot – continued life my second gain. The time of my departure from here is crucial. If I depart, then it is in my power to render a small service to you; if I remain – then I'll use my increasing energy for work to endeavour to be of some assistance to you soon.

Your request has strengthened my resolve, that if I live on – to become a rich man, hopefully in accordance with a grand plan. – It annoys me that I've made so few *useful* acquaintances. –

If you were in Jena, I'd still have some hope of helping you – well at least *per tertium*.

If only you were aware of my entire situation – you would quickly see that it is impossible for me to help you at the present time.

The uncertainty of the future now requires that I work in detail, delaying my literary projects – particularly since illness and other unpleasant factors have distracted and disrupted me, and continue to do so.

I haven't had a decent thought in the last three weeks. Up until then I'd been exceptionally fortunate. – That time will come again. – The sooner you write to me, the better, regarding how you yourself, or some fortunate turn of events – has helped you out – and who is looking after your legal situation – in short, all about your domestic circumstances.

You've told me some great news – that the *Athenaeum* is going to continue – that's why I told your sister-in-law that its cessation had greatly upset me. – My *new plan is extremely comprehensive* – I'll tell Wilhelm all about it *in extenso* at Easter. If I remain among you, then this plan will comprise a principal occupation of my life. –

It concerns:

The establishment of a literary republican order – that is thoroughly *mercantile* and political – a genuine cosmopolitan lodge.

A *printing place* – a *book shop*, must be the first seedling. Jena – Hamburg, or *Switzerland*, if there is peace – has to be the headquarters of the bureau. If everyone finds some suitable candidates – then joint hard-work, like-minded souls and communal credit may quickly fan the first tiny sparks. In both a literary and political sense, all of you should no longer be dependent on the book trade.

Who knows if your project will merge into mine – and therefore set heaven into motion, as mine does the terrestrial sphere.

One has *talked about* such projects for long enough. Why shouldn't we attempt to realize something in this vein? We have to be in the world, what we are on paper – creators of ideas.

I can't go into your thoughts on religion and the Bible at the moment – I can't actually do so, because most of them are so illusory and obscure to me – apart from a few excellent inspirations – particularly concerning the cornucopia.

More about this in person – or *in* writing, when *some fragments worth reading* are finished and published.

I can't recall if I've already told you about my dear Plotinus.⁵⁹ He is a philosopher born for me, and I first learned about him from Tiedemann⁶⁰ – and was struck by his similarity to Fichte and Kant – and his idealistic similarity to them. He is dearer to my heart than those two. Somebody told me that my discovery isn't new and that this enchanting conjunction has already been mentioned in Maimon's *Life*.⁶¹ Yet why didn't it cause a stir? There is so much that has not been ploughed in Plotinus – and a fresh proclamation would be certainly worthwhile.

Regarding the *Athenaeum's* new style, and if it really continues, I'll probably contribute some literary epistolary news in a fleeting and light style – Perhaps I'll start off by saying something about Plotinus etc.

It's a pity that I've still got so much to do – I have masses of stuff for interesting letters. I'll have to put the romantic projects on hold for a while.–

The *merchant* is now the order of the day. Chemistry – and mechanics or technology, in the most general sense, are currently my most pressing concerns. The other things will just have to wait.

Take care – your *dear friend*,
Hardenberg.

9. Friedrich Schlegel in Berlin to Novalis in Freiberg

Berlin. 17th December 1798

Your dear wonderful letter was a true balm for *us*: then apart from any dullness that we ourselves create, everything around us here is suffocatingly dull. We can now delight in your friendship in a tranquil and undisturbed manner, since we do not need your assistance, for the moment at least. –

⁵⁹ Plotinus (c. 205-270), Greek philosopher, founder of Neoplatonism.

⁶⁰ Dieterich Tiedemann (1748-1803), historian of philosophy, author of a 6-volume compendium entitled *Geist der spekulativen Philosophie* (Marburg: 1791-1797). It is through this compendium that Novalis discovered the philosophy of Plotinus.

⁶¹ Salomon Maimon (1754-1800), Jewish philosopher. His autobiography, *Lebensgeschichte*, was published in Berlin in 1792-1793 by Karl Philipp Moritz. English translation: *The Autobiography of Solomon Maimon*, edited by Yitzhak Y. Melamed and Abraham P. Socher; translated by Paul Reitter; with an afterword by Gideon Freudenthal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019). Salomon Maimon's autobiography does not contain a reference to Plotinus.

TRANSLATION

When I first wrote to you everything was in turmoil and uncertain; and I was without money and means, and there were a thousand chance things which could have depended on this money and means. – But now the world is much clearer; today I can see my friend in her own house for the first time, and shortly she will be divorced. Everything has been amicably negotiated, and even the issue of the property has been decided fairly. I'll tell you more about this later.

We are going to stay here this winter. We will not shy away from the attention, and it is always best to deal with it immediately. I won't actually marry her: for that is the sole condition under which she can and is allowed to keep her youngest son. I also personally prefer it if a ceremony isn't necessary. I don't think I've told you yet, but in this respect I'm in proximity to Leibniz's philosophy. Through a significant stroke of fate my friend is actually the daughter of old Mendelssohn.⁶² The ceremony is precisely the stumbling block. For the family would be more than reasonably affronted by a baptism.

We won't stay here for the summer, but I imagine we'll be in Dresden. We sincerely hope to see you! – Shall we even pass through Freiberg to see you before heading on to Dresden, or should we just meet in Dresden? – I'm sure you will really like her, a woman who has remained upright and dignified while in a wretched state without any support except for the energy of exasperation, and who has then emerged with a tranquil force. She is far behind my sister-in-law in external education and refinement. She is just a sketch, yet in a thoroughly grand style. Her entire being is religion, although she isn't aware of this. If she were to lose me, then in accordance with the Indian tradition she would follow me out of true religion, and without realizing that it would be something extraordinary or the right thing. I am relating this to you this because I have to confess that I told her about your mysteries. All these thoughts and views are so close to her heart that it seemed unnatural to me not to initiate her into them. The religiosity of her feeling is all the more decisive, since her intellect is still so numbed by misfortune as it were and she doesn't have the concepts. Let us soon know how and when we can see and meet each other again, and also write to me soon with an answer regarding my letter on the Bible.

Just a few more details about the finances. From your letter, it appears as though you actually cannot do anything *at the moment*, perhaps it might be easier towards Easter then.

Her own wealth will be deposited, and she will only receive the interest. After she has set something aside for the youngest son, she will obtain 400 thalers per year. Apart from that, she admittedly has around 1,100 thalers

⁶² Moses Mendelssohn (1729-1786), Enlightenment thinker, German philosopher of Jewish faith, disciple of Leibniz and Christian Wolff.

freely at her disposal. Out of this amount, she has to keep at least 500 thalers available in the very likely event that she contracts a serious illness, because she has had a few already. On her side, she has a debt of 200 thalers, and together we have 200 thalers debt. The first place we stay also has to be deducted from this capital. Now that I share assets in common with her, and we will henceforth live inseparably, then obviously it is absolutely necessary that I also put my things in order, above all two outstanding old debts, each of them 90 thalers, and which cannot be postponed any longer. However, the worst thing is, that the family would notice if she starts dipping into her finances and immediately starts spending a lot more of her own capital than they know she needs for herself and her own debts. This should not be done for many reasons. Thus, if between now and Easter, or whenever is convenient, you were able to fulfil my request, then I promise to repay it. By the way, you can now be certain that the mercantile spirit will be favourable to me, since I now no longer have to just take care of myself, and my life is no longer a chaos, but has received a center and shape and is being rebuilt on solid ground. Hence, all purchases and commerce, indeed all property, has to start: with the family.

Friedrich

Please do not say anything to Caroline and Charlotte about these financial matters. They know about everything else, or they should know. Are you also fine, or should I have not said anything to her about you? – We have so often thought of you with tears and joy. Yet her heart is aching.

10. August Wilhelm Schlegel in Jena to Novalis in Freiberg

Jena, 12 January 1799

Since I saw you last in Dresden, I have been as silent as a stone. – But because today our dear friend Herder⁶³ visited us, who travelled from near you, and will return back to where you are, I couldn't pass up the chance to greet you with a few lines. This winter I have been occupied with many different things, and that is also the reason for my silence, and my wife would have told you about that. So far my university lectures have not been without interest to me – I wished you could have attended some of the ones on aesthetics to give me your opinion. The public talks on the history of German poetry made me return to read some of our older and even ancient poets, and this caused me to become really excited again about my long-held project to write a poem about chivalry – next summer I am definitely going to start writing up this

⁶³ Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), theologian, critic and philosopher.

project. Otherwise, I am working hard on Shakespeare, and have almost finished the *Merchant of Venice* – hopefully you will like it.⁶⁴

Moreover – and so I don't forget the most important piece of news – the *Athenaeum* has fortunately been recovered from its stingy publisher; another bookseller, Fröhlich⁶⁵, who bought Vieweg's Berlin business, has now included it in his publishing house, and bought up the stockpile of the first issue. In about six weeks you should already receive the third issue. You are also hereby requisitioned to send us further contributions. Hülsen, who is now in Berlin and fraternizing with my brother, has promised him various things. We envisage continuing the sthenic diet, that is, not avoiding peppery critiques. Presumably the collected works of Wieland⁶⁶ will be reviewed in the next four issues, which the bookseller is obliged to do.

I have started writing a large elegy on Goethe and ancient art⁶⁷ – even more than started. I am extremely curious what you will make of it. But you should not see the work before it is finished and published (in the fourth issue of the *Athenaeum*). We would be incredibly delighted if you could then come and personally visit us.

Friedrich is currently detained due to the domestic disruptions that his friend Ms. Veit is caught up in, so please excuse his silence too. She is now divorced from her husband, and Friedrich assures us that a new period in his life's plan has now commenced. If we are to trust his letters, he has really indeed started writing a novel called *Lucinde*, and when it is ready he promises to send us soon a sufficient sample to allow us to form our own judgment of it.

Regarding the latest literary news, let me draw your attention to a text that has just been published: Tieck's *Phantasies on Art*.⁶⁸ It contains Wackenroder's (of the *Klosterbruder*)⁶⁹ literary remains, supplemented with a few essays by T[ieck].

⁶⁴ August Wilhelm Schlegel translated numerous plays of William Shakespeare into German. He completed and published many of these in the years 1797-1801. These translations later appeared together with those of Ludwig Tieck in a celebrated edition.

⁶⁵ Heinrich Fröhlich, took over from Johann Friedrich Vieweg as the publisher of the *Athenaeum* from January 1799 until the definitive cessation of the journal in 1800.

⁶⁶ Christoph Martin Wieland (1733-1813), German poet, writer and translator, editor of the literary journal *Der Teutsche Merkur* from 1773 to 1789.

⁶⁷ See A.W. Schlegel, *Die Kunst der Griechen. An Goethe. Elegie. „Kämpfend verirrt sich die Welt“* (The Art of the Greeks. To Goethe. An Elegy), *Athenaeum* 2, no. 2 (1799): 181-192.

⁶⁸ See Ludwig Tieck, *Phantasien über die Kunst, für Freunde der Kunst* (Hamburg: Friedrich Perthes, 1799).

⁶⁹ Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder (1773-1798), friend of Ludwig Tieck and author of the *Herzensergießungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders* (Outpourings of an Art-Loving Monk), which formed the core text of the *Phantasies on Art*.

You would have heard about Fichte's arguments concerning our dear God from the *Intelligenzblatt der Literaturzeitung*.⁷⁰ The brave Fichte is actually fighting for all of us, and if he loses, then the funeral pyres would have gotten much closer again.

Take care, my dearest friend. Even though Caroline has not added anything here, she sends you her warmest greetings and will write to you soon. Sincerely,

A.W. Schlegel.

11. Novalis in Freiberg to Friedrich Schlegel in Berlin

Freiberg: January 20, 1799

I've put off for long enough answering your very welcome and kind letter.⁷¹ It was packed with material – and I ran out of time. My brother [Anton]⁷² was here with me for 14 days – we went to Dresden, and there I spent a couple of delightful hours with your sister. You, and your new circumstances, were the main topic of our conversation. We still only want one thing – that if possible this relationship also be civilly sanctioned – since you cannot overlook the unpleasant aspects that might arise. The Ernsts told me many fine things about your life's companion, and we all would like to visit you, the sooner the better, in order to meet her. I'll certainly see you after Easter – when you come to Saxony. I doubt that I'll be able to make it to Berlin. The most sensible thing would be for you to come to Jena. The Ernsts would also have to come. We would have a wonderful time. I have so much to tell you – the earth appears to want to hold on to me for some time yet. The relationship I told you about has become more inward and compelling.⁷³ I see myself loved in a way that I've never been loved before. The fate of a delightful young woman depends on my decision – and my friends, parents and siblings now need me more than ever. A very interesting life seems to await me – although I'd much rather be dead.

I'm keenly attentive to the course of events. – If I perceive the possibility of making myself no longer needed, or hit against hindrances – then these are hints to carry-out the first plan – and I hope Karl⁷⁴ or Carlowitz⁷⁵ would take my place. If my health were fine, then I'd now be experiencing happy and

⁷⁰ J.G. Fichte, *Appellation an das Publikum über die durch ein Kurf. Sächs. Confiscationsrescript ihm beigemessenen atheïstischen Äußerungen: Eine Schrift, die man erst zu lesen bittet, ehe man sie confiscirt*, *Allgemeine Literaturzeitung, Intelligenzblatt* no. 1 (9 January 1799).

⁷¹ Letter of 17 December 1798 (letter no. 9 above).

⁷² Georg Anton von Hardenberg (1781-1825).

⁷³ Relationship to Julie Charpentier (1776-1811), daughter of the Professor of mathematics at the Freiberg Mining Academy, Johann Friedrich Wilhelm Charpentier.

⁷⁴ Gottlob Albrecht Karl von Hardenberg (1776-1813), a younger brother of Novalis.

⁷⁵ See above note 13.

wonderful days. *Julie* was tormented for an entire half-year with the most terrible pain – we feared the worse. – The affliction then suddenly departed during the most dreadful period, and she has been healthy and cheerful since Christmas Eve. I haven't been able to do much for 2 months. Anxiety, distractions, work and travel, then joy and love, not to mention bouts of illness – have kept me altogether at a distance from writing. In the last few months all kinds of technical studies have been closing in upon me. I'm collecting a lot – *perhaps* I'll be able to complete something in the summer. Your sister-in-law will send you a letter from me, which will reveal to you my principal ideas in physics. Baader has recently published a few sheets – *On the Pythagorean Quadrate in Nature*⁷⁶, it is nothing else but solid, sturdy poetry, yet patently packed in a rough and rocky frame, and difficult enough to polish and hew out. Your fraternal feelings toward Hülsen are an encouraging sign. Such constellations signify fortunate and fruitful times.

I can't wait to see your novel. I don't have any point of comparison to be able to picture it in advance. As for your view of religion, I'd rather discuss it with you in person. Your opinion concerning Christianity's negativity is excellent. Christianity thereby becomes elevated up to the level of a *foundation* – the *projecting force* for a new world-edifice and a new humanity – a genuine *firmament* – a *living, moral space*.

This wonderfully relates to my ideas regarding the hitherto misunderstood nature of *space* and *time*, whose personality and archetypal force have become indescribably illuminating to me. The *activity* of space and time is the force of creation, and their relations – are the very hinges of the world.

The absolute abstraction – annihilation of the present – the *apotheosis* of the *future*, of this veritable better world – all belong to the essence of Christianity's commands – thereby linking it with the religion of the *old sages*, with the divinity of ancient world, with the restoration of antiquity, as its 2nd main wing. – Like the body of an angel, both hold the universe in eternal suspense – in the everlasting *enjoyment* of space and time.

We'll discuss your domestic situation this spring in person. Perhaps you and me can then reach a truly useful agreement – particularly when I have more details about your future life plans.

With warmest greetings to your wife,
and remain as ever, a dear friend of

your friend, Hardenberg.

⁷⁶ F.X. von Baader, *Ueber das pythagoräische Quadrat in der Natur, oder die vier Weltgegenden* (On the Pythagorean Quadrate in Nature, or The Four Regions of the World) (Tübingen: Cotta, 1798).

12. Novalis in Freiberg to Caroline Schlegel in Jena

Freiberg: 20th January, 1799

I've been happy enough since I last wrote to you. Julie is miraculously healthy and happy again since Christmas Eve, when the dreaded affliction suddenly departed. My health is pretty fair, and I've seen the *good Ernsts*. Admittedly, it was only for a short while – nonetheless I envisage seeing them again soon and longer. I infinitely lament that my future home is so far from Dresden – the proximity of the Ernsts would be highly valuable to me. I say infinitely much from my inner being, when I say that she is a woman after my heart. I'm also inwardly joyous about Friedrich's happy union. I too have received a new and splendid sister-in-law. Of course, if it were possible, I would also be very happy about a civil union. *Wilhelm's* recent lovely letter was so very welcome to me. He will surely forgive me if I direct my reply to you – you, who have really become more precious and dear to me on account of all your heartfelt compassion and promptness.

In the last two months everything has come to a standstill with me, which is only natural with a liberal existence. I haven't had three decent ideas in this space of time. I'm now immersed in technical studies, because my apprentice years are coming to an end, and middle-class life with its many demands draws ever closer. With regard to my future projects, I'm only collecting at present, and imagine that in the summer I might be able to complete a number of things that I have begun or sketched out. Poetry with living forces, with human beings, and otherwise, pleases me more and more. One has to create a poetical world around oneself and live in *poetry*. My mercantile plan concerns this field. The art of writing falls in this domain. I praise Wilhelm for his lively professorial activity. Even this belongs to a *lovely*, liberal economy, to the actual element of the cultivated human being.

I can't wait to read *his elegies* – undoubtedly these will be a beautifully fashioned sediment of living matter from the fragrance of a past epoch. If he could only dissolve a dash of the future in them, then the crystallisation would be even more beautiful.

The resurrection of the *Atheneum* is invaluable to me. I won't presume to say anything in advance about Friedrich's novel. – It will surely be something altogether new. I've read Tieck's *Phantasies* – There are so many lovely things in the book, yet there could also be a lot less. The meaning is often spelled out at the expense of the words. I'm more and more beginning to love things that are sober, yet genuinely progressive and stimulating – while his *Phantasies* are always fantastic enough and perhaps they only wish to be

so. Tieck's *Don Quixote* is also underway.⁷⁷ Write to me soon about Ritter⁷⁸ and Schelling. Ritter [Knight] is a knight and we are merely his pages. Even Baader is only his poet.

However, these gentlemen still plainly fail to see the best within nature. Here Fichte will once again put his friends to shame, while *Hemsterhuis* anticipated this *holy* path to physics sufficiently clearly.⁷⁹ Even Spinoza harboured this divine spark of natural understanding. *Plotinus*, perhaps inspired by Plato, first graced the holy sanctuary with genuineness of spirit – and yet no-one after him has again penetrated so far. In numerous ancient writings there beats a mysterious pulse, denoting the place of contact with the invisible world – a coming into life. Goethe will be the *liturgist* of this physics – for he perfectly understands the service in the temple. Leibniz's *Theodicy* has always been a magnificent attempt in this field. Our future physics will achieve *something similar*, yet clearly in a loftier style. If only one had employed another word in so-called physico-theology instead of *admiration!*

However, enough of that – remain but a little devoted to me, and remain in the magical atmosphere which surrounds you, and amid a torrential tempest, amid suffering and fateful people, isolated like a spiritual family, so that no lower needs and cares can attach themselves and oppress you. Pass on this letter to Friedrich, I've only written him a short note, because I'm currently down in the mines a lot, while up on earth I'm plagued by my numerous sober studies. I depart here at Easter and intend to visit you in April. My future life might be highly attractive and fruitful.

Write to me soon – if possible, accompanied by the *Athenaeum*. I've so many things weighing me down at present. After Easter I'll create some deep and fresh air, and emerge again, warming myself early in the year. I can't exist without *love*. Many more really novel and beautiful things in person. Warmest wishes to W[ilhelm] and Auguste.⁸⁰

Your
friend
Hardenberg.

⁷⁷ Ludwig Tieck translated Cervantes's *Don Quijote de la Mancha* (1605-1615) into German. His translation appeared in Berlin (Unger Verlag) in 4 volumes, between 1799 and 1801.

⁷⁸ The physicist and chemist Johann Wilhelm Ritter. See above note 10.

⁷⁹ Frans Hemsterhuis (1721-1790), Dutch philosopher, adherent of Platonism. Novalis knew Hemsterhuis's philosophical dialogues and writings, which were written in French and partly translated into German by Jacobi and Herder, as early as 1792; he studied them more intensively from the summer of 1797 onward. The notes Novalis made on this intensive reading can be found in HKA 2: 360-378.

⁸⁰ Auguste Böhmer (1785-1800), daughter of Caroline Schlegel with her first husband, Johann Friedrich Wilhelm Böhmer.