

reality” (not as the thing-in-itself in an absolute sense, but rather only relative to the world of phenomena, 254) and that there is indeed some kind of differentiation and individuation at the level of the will itself (257 seqq.). This offers a promising alternative perspective on Schopenhauer’s theory of the will and the “World as Will,” avoiding a one-sided reading of Schopenhauer’s position as radical monism.

The reviewed volume offers many different and important perspectives concerning one of the central notions in classical German philosophy, especially with regard to ethical issues. At the same time, it hints at interesting questions that are left open by this book and still have to be debated, e.g. the relation between Schelling’s and Schopenhauer’s conceptions of the will and their philosophies of nature, or a possible Spinozistic background — the conatus — in theories of the will in classical and post-classical philosophy, at least from Schelling and Schopenhauer to Nietzsche.

*Daniel Elon*

**Novalis, *À la fin tout devient poésie*, edited, translated, and introduced by Olivier Schefer, Paris: Editions Allia, 2020, 272 pp. ISBN 979-10-304-2252-8.**

This volume contains a new French translation of the unpublished notes and reflections of the young poet-philosopher Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis) from the years 1799-1800. Originally collected together and published in German under the title “Fragmente und Studien” (Fragments and Studies), this volume presents, in over 700 fragments, the final philosophical and poetic thoughts of Novalis, since he died not long after on 25 March 1801, just short of his 29<sup>th</sup> birthday. It is wonderful to finally have this complete French translation by Olivier Schefer, presented in a beautiful edition and format by the Paris publisher Allia. The edition contains a wide-ranging introductory essay by Schefer entitled “Science, art et religion” (7-19), dozens of pages of highly informative endnotes (213-249), a subject and name index (251-258), and a brief bibliography (259-261). The book is a fitting third companion to the two other volumes of Novalis’s philosophical writings translated by Schefer for Allia: *Le Brouillon général* (2000, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2015), and *Semences* (2004). If they are grouped together with the 2012 French translation of Novalis’s *Fichte Studies* by Augustin Dumont, *Les Années d’apprentissage philosophique: Études fichtéennes, 1795-96* (Presses universitaires du Septentrion), the result is that virtually Novalis’s entire

philosophical œuvre is now available in French translation, with these volumes perfectly complementing the recent Italian edition of Novalis's philosophical texts, *Scritti filosofici*, translated and edited by Fabrizio Desideri and Giampiero Moretti (Morcelliana, 2019).<sup>1</sup>

But how are we to fruitfully read and understand these last thoughts and fragments? For the volume not only contains Novalis's most mature philosophical musings, but interspersed among them are highly personal jottings and diary entries: the latter include diverse notes about future literary plans (60, 157), with fragment number 534 projecting an entire collection of romances by "Novalis" (146), i.e. Hardenberg is clearly envisaging writing them under his adopted pseudonym; other short sketches for novels (141, 157); the draft of a wedding speech (68); miscellaneous lists of topics, books and vocabulary (60-66, 105); a brainstorming session for how to earn money (59); and multiple references to Hardenberg's domestic life with his second fiancée Julie von Charpentier (25, 54, 56, 140), including experiments with her on the possible medicinal benefits of magnetism and galvanism (89, 104-105).

In addition to these more personal diary entries, and in a clear extension of his 1798/99 encyclopaedia project, we also find in this volume a series of more technical scientific notebooks, replete with detailed observations on subjects like mathematics (76-78), physics (79-101), and medicine (102-142). Noteworthy too is the concluding longer meditation on "Le royaume du poète" (The kingdom of the poet), which compares the real and symbolic missions of the philosopher and the poet (211-212). And some of Novalis's most celebrated poetic-philosophical fragments are indeed to be found in this volume. For instance, fragment no. 65 (37): "La nature est une ville magique pétrifiée" (Nature is a magical petrified city); or fragment no. 130 (49): "L'homme est un soleil – ses sens sont ses planètes" (Man is a sun, and his senses are his planets), as well as fragment no. 182 (56), Novalis's plaidoyer extolling the benefits of exact scientific thinking over nebulous fantasy: "Je suis convaincu que l'on peut parvenir à de véritables révélations par un entendement technique et froid, un sens moral paisible, plutôt que par l'imagination [*Fantasie*] ..." (I am convinced that we can better attain *true revelations* by means of a sober, technical intellect, a tranquil moral sense, than through fantasy ...).

Giants in cultural history are deftly characterized, with Novalis famously designating Spinoza as "un homme ivre de Dieu" (a god-

---

<sup>1</sup> See Giovanni Panno's review essay of this Italian edition in the present second issue of *Symphilosophie*.

intoxicated man) (153); Shakespeare impresses as a powerful soul with a meditative mind (43) and his poems and verse are favourably compared with Boccaccio and Cervantes (181). We can peer over Novalis's shoulder as he contemplates the possibility of having Jacob Böhme reappear at the end of his novel of the blue flower, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (184), and glimpse his plan to incorporate into the novel both true events from German history (188-190), and a reworked version of the legend of Orpheus and Eurydice as an inverted fairy tale (188). Novalis admits that this multi-layered and polysemic novel is deeply autobiographical: it recounts the story of a poet who loses his fiancée, just as Hardenberg had lost Sophie von Kühn (187). Thus, while simultaneously writing many of these fragments, notes, and studies, Novalis was hard at work on his two longer poetic stories and novels, *The Disciples at Sais* and *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*. Multiple preliminary sketches for these works are found in the section called "Les papiers de Berlin" (183-209). In his introductory essay, Olivier Schefer eloquently summarizes Novalis's late writing mood and manner of working:

Il est assez fascinant de voir à quel point chez Novalis tout se concentre, se ramasse, s'intensifie avec le temps. La douleur, comme la joie, le savoir comme la poésie. Ces derniers manuscrits en sont pour ainsi dire la plus parfaite expression. En les écrivant, il rêve, plume à la main, à son *Henri d'Ofterdingen*, roman romantique par excellence, empreint d'esprit médiéval et de sa lecture des textes ésotériques de Jacob Böhme. [...] dans le roman de la fleur bleue [...] Novalis entrecroise le christianisme médiéval (la joute des ménestrels et la quête du Saint Graal) aux légendes orphiques et hindoues, le monde devant s'achever en une transfiguration poétique du monde. (10, 18)<sup>2</sup>

Here one has to agree with Schefer's further suggestion (18-19) that these late fragments should be read in direct conjunction with the other parallel texts of the time; i.e. not just the poetic novels, but also the 1799 essay *Christianity or Europe*, and the 1800 text, *Hymns to the Night* – a lyrical cycle published in the romantic journal, the *Athenaeum*.

The fact that Novalis's writings are an *original* intellectual engagement with and direct response to the work of many of his contemporaries, some of

---

<sup>2</sup> "It is rather fascinating to see how with Novalis everything becomes concentrated, collected and intensified over time. Suffering as well as joy, knowledge as well as poesy. These final manuscripts are, as it were, the most perfect expression of this. While writing them, quill in hand, he's dreaming of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, the romantic novel par excellence, imbued with a medieval spirit and his reading of Jacob Böhme's esoteric texts. [...] In the novel of the blue flower [...] Novalis interweaves medieval Christianity (the jousting of the minstrels and the quest for the Holy Grail), with Orphic and Hindu legends, and the world ends through a poetic transfiguration of the world."

whom he personally knew, is repeatedly confirmed in these late fragments. However, it is still breath-taking to see *just how close a reader* he was of their works. That too is another fruitful method for understanding Novalis – to closely study and compare those works that he himself read and referenced. In this regard, we find that in the years 1799-1800 the philosopher J.G. Fichte still remains a focal point for the romantic thinker. Novalis highlights the crucial role of logic in the 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre* (29), and rightly surmises the deeper religious undercurrent of the *Wissenschaftslehre* as a practical application of Christianity (46). Jacobi in turn is criticized for lacking an artistic sense and therefore failing to understand Fichte (48), underscoring the vital aesthetic component of the Fichtean system. Both the aesthetic and religious dimensions of the 1794 *Wissenschaftslehre* are aspects only beginning to be acknowledged in modern Fichte research. In addition, we see Novalis inspired by the conclusion of Lessing’s *Education of the Human Race* about the possibility of writing a new gospel of the future (179), making plans to join forces with Tieck, Friedrich Schlegel and Schleiermacher to this end (26), while noting the latter’s idea of a *Kunstreligion* (33). On Novalis’s side at least, this daring poetic plan seems to have become partly fulfilled in the 1800 *Hymns to the Night*. Fragment no. 605 of this volume also contains an extended discussion of the history of philosophy as a “mysterious tradition”, in which Novalis remarks how Schelling’s *Naturphilosophie* presupposes a limited concept of nature and philosophy, and poses the question about the true essence of Schelling’s system (174). Lastly, Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister* is put under the microscope (42-43, 136, 146-147, 150); it is pictured as a sort of Voltairian *Candide* against poetry (147), with Novalis expressing the intention to write a polemic against Goethe (49).

It is worth recalling how this negative critique of *Wilhelm Meister* has led many scholars to primarily underscore the opposition between Novalis and Goethe, and therefore between romanticism and classicism, and to overlook the aesthetic harmony that is sometimes found between these two figures and currents. A striking example of one such harmony is Novalis’s idea of inverted fairy tale (188) mentioned above. This idea should be directly placed in the Goethean tradition, and highlights again what an incredibly close reader he was of Goethe. Novalis’s poem “Wenn Zahlen und Figuren” (German: 246; French: 187) – is referred to by Oliver Schefer as one of Novalis’s most famous poems, and he rightly recalls that it is now considered a classic of romantic poetry (245). This poem explicitly states that it is possible to see “true world histories” (*wahre Weltgeschichten*) in fairy tales and

poems (187, 246).<sup>3</sup> Where does Novalis find an example of this among his contemporaries? – In Goethe’s 1795 *Märchen* (Fairy Tale).<sup>4</sup> In 1798 Novalis had already classified this *Märchen* as a “erzählte Oper” (opéra raconté/narrated opera).<sup>5</sup> How is Goethe’s *Märchen* like an opera? Novalis does not elaborate, but many scholars now agree that it is a reference to *The Magic Flute* – Mozart’s opera of initiation into the Egyptian mysteries of Isis and Osiris. Besides other mystery religions, highly visible Egyptian elements are indeed present in Goethe’s *Märchen*, such as the circular image of the snake biting its own tail, the Egyptian symbol of eternity, and the concluding image of the hawk reflecting the rays of the sun, both of which are symbols of Osiris.<sup>6</sup>

Novalis’s also artistically refers to Goethe’s *Märchen* in the prefatory aphorisms to his 1799 published text *Glauben und Liebe* (Faith and Love), under the leitmotiv of the *Märchen* and the words of the Apocalypse: “The Time is at Hand” (Revelation 22:10).<sup>7</sup> This emphasises once more the extent to which Novalis’s last fragments need to be read in conjunction with his other writings from the same period, especially his published works. Here in this 1799 text Novalis gives a second inspired indication about Goethe’s *Märchen*. He writes that it is possible to detect “ancient dynasties” in it, and that we should seek to recognise the identity of the navigator or Ferryman, a figure in the tale.<sup>8</sup> Again, he does not elaborate further. However, the term “dynasty” could also refer to Egypt and the ancient dynasties of the royal pharaohs. Is Goethe’s 1795 text therefore an example of how a *Märchen* can contain “*wahre Weltgeschichte*”? I would argue that it is, and in line with these two indications of Novalis, I put forward the following interpretation relating it to the ancient dynasties of Egyptian history. On a purely artistic level, Goethe’s *Märchen* commences with an old Ferryman in his boat with two Will-o’-the-wisps, who are causing havoc on the high water. Later we learn

---

<sup>3</sup> I am reading this in the literal sense of “*wahre Weltgeschichten*”. In his rendering of this poem (187), Schefer translates it into French as “les vraies cosmogonies” (true cosmogonies). This of course is a perfectly acceptable poetic translation, and he explains this choice in the endnotes insofar as the task of romantic poetry and fairy tales can also be rightly understood as revealing and recounting the origins of the world (245).

<sup>4</sup> J.W. von Goethe, “Märchen”, first published in 1795 in the journal *Die Horen*, Band 4, 10. Stück, 108-151.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Novalis, fragment 45 of “Poésie”, in: Novalis, *Semences*, translated by Olivier Schefer (Paris: Allia, 2004), p. 133.

<sup>6</sup> These interpretations can be found in two works by Goethe’s friend from Rome, Karl Philipp Moritz, *Die symbolische Weisheit der Aegypter* (Berlin: Karl Massdorff, 1793) p. 7; *Mythologisches Wörterbuch* (Berlin: Christian Gottfried Schöne, 1794), p. 367.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Novalis, “Fleurs”, *ibid.*, p. 95.

<sup>8</sup> Novalis, “Fleurs”, in: *Semences*, p. 95.

the Will-o'-the-wisps are gold plundering robbers. They attempt to escape payment to the old Ferryman, but he holds them fast, and subsequently they become helpers and protectors of the royal kingdom. Where do we find a specific example of this in the world historical dynasties of ancient Egypt? – In the battle of Ramesses II (Ramesses the Great, the Great Ancestor) with the Sherden sea pirates. Ramesses II was a Pharaoh of the 19<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, and the sea-pirates he defeated and captured ultimately became part of his personal guard. In fact, Goethe had elsewhere already telescoped this same Egyptian history, but in an *inverted manner*, in the content, composition and title of his 1791/92 play *Der Groß-Coptha* (The Great Coptha).

To conclude, the multifaceted combination of poetry, Egyptian mythology and true history in Goethe's *Märchen* therefore forms a key artistic model for Novalis's idea of an inverted Orphic *Märchen* in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*. A *Märchen* can do this because for both Goethe and Novalis: "Le monde réel lui-même ressemble à un conte." (The real world itself resembles a fairy tale) (186). As the title of this new French edition evocatively declares: *À la fin tout devient poésie*, everything becomes poesy in the end – even world history.

*David W. Wood*