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# "God's First Hieroglyph"

## Novalis's *Lehrlinge zu Sais* and Tieck's *Runenberg* as Commentaries on Kant's Isis-Inscription

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the intricate relationships between Kant's philosophical ideas and the early Romantic works of Novalis and Tieck, particularly focusing on their respective texts *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* and *Der Runenberg*. Kant's exploration of the aesthetic appreciation of nature provides a foundation for discussions of irony and *Bildung* in these narratives. Through a comparative analysis, this article highlights the transformative and often perilous journey toward self-discovery and knowledge depicted in these works, emphasizing the inherent tension between human understanding and the natural world. The study further explores how irony is employed in these narratives to reflect the complexities of *Bildung* and the challenges involved in attaining a comprehensive understanding of nature.

*Keywords:* aesthetics, Sais, comparative literature, irony, hieroglyphs

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieser Artikel untersucht die komplexen Beziehungen zwischen Kants philosophischen Ideen und den frühromantischen Werken von Novalis und Tieck, insbesondere ihre Texte *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* und *Der Runenberg*. Kants Erforschung der ästhetischen Wertschätzung der Natur bildet die Grundlage für Diskussionen über Ironie und Bildung in diesen Erzählungen. Durch eine vergleichende Analyse werden die transformierenden und oft gefährlichen Reisen zur Selbstentdeckung und zum Wissen hervorgehoben, die in diesen Werken dargestellt werden, und die inhärente Spannung zwischen menschlichem Verständnis und der natürlichen Welt betont. Die Studie untersucht weiter, wie Ironie in diesen Erzählungen verwendet wird, um die Komplexität der Bildung und die Heraus-forderungen, ein umfassendes Verständnis der Natur zu erlangen, widerzuspiegeln.

*Stichwörter:* Ästhetik, Sais, vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft, Ironie, Hieroglyphen

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## 1. "God's First Hieroglyph"

Kant's footnote from his 1790 *Kritik der Urteilskraft* preceded the Romantics' interest in and problematization of the cult of Isis:

> Vielleicht ist nie etwas Erhabeneres gesagt oder ein Gedanke erhabener ausgedrückt worden, als in jener Aufschrift über dem Tempel der *Isis* (der Mutter Natur): 'Ich bin alles, was da ist, was da war, und was da sein wird, und meinen Schleier hat kein Sterblicher aufgedeckt.'[1]
>
> Perhaps nothing more sublime has ever been said, or a thought ever been expressed more sublimely, than in that inscription above the temple of *Isis* (*Mother Nature*): 'I am all that is, that was, and that will be, and no mortal has lifted my veil.'[2]

This footnote is taken from a scientific textbook by Segner, the 18th-century Hungarian-Prussian scientist, which invites his readers—quite paradoxically—to delve into the secrets of nature using scientific study. Additionally, the footnote is followed by a paragraph that suggests the Herderian idea about the problem of signification: no absolute, adequate expression could be found for a 'concept,' nor could a concept totally grasp nature.[3] Thus, Kant proposes two levels of difference: between nature and its concept and between the concept and the words given to it. Kant calls these capacities Imagination (*Vorstellung*) and Understanding (*Verstand*). This problem does not go unanswered in the *Kritik*. It is the Genius who possesses them both.[4] In another much more famous passage, Kant defines the Genius as one who "gives the rule to art," precisely based on his unconditional relationship with nature.[5] Still, Kant's remark contains another element that opens a path toward the early Romantics' appreciation of the myth: no mortal has unveiled Isis. This notion invites other interpretations of the myth or the possibility of an unconditional appreciation of nature in general, namely, of stories that account for non-geniuses, simple, or universal figures that approach nature, either through learning or through traveling.

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1 Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Leipzig, 1922), 171.
2 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, including the First Introduction, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 185.
3 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, Including the First Introduction, trans. Werner S. Pluhar, with an introduction by Mary J. Gregor (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 317.
4 *Ibid.*
5 *Ibid*., 175

In this article, I want to interpret texts that describe the initiatory process Kant suggests, combining it with the mystical, dangerous, and alongside what he sees as its inherent moral dangers. I will read Novalis's *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* and Ludwig Tieck's *Runenberg* as ironic commentaries on the formative (*Bildung*) aspect of Kant's treatment of the myth. Specifically, I aim to show how Kant's suggestive notes about the transformative power of the experience of nature, with its inherent dangers, were interpreted ironically by these two early Romantic writers: in Novalis, as acknowledging the impossibility of knowing nature, and in Tieck, as a cautionary tale of the dangers that acquaintance with nature entails. Indeed, Novalis and Tieck might have been acquainted with the Isis inscription through other sources, as the following discussion suggests. Yet Kant's related thoughts of aesthetics, morality, and mortality play a vital philosophical role in the formative aspect of these writings. Before proceeding to close readings of the texts, a short history and elaboration of the Isis inscription interpretative tradition and the concepts of *Bildung* and irony are needed.

The earliest account of the veil of Isis is found in Plutarch's *Histories*, in his account of the Persian conquest of Egypt. According to Plutarch, this temple contains the inscription: "I am all that has been, is now, and will be; no mortal has ever lifted my veil."[6] The fashionable interest of the 18th and 19th centuries in the character of Isis as an emblem of nature can be attributed to Athanasius Kircher in his *Oedipus Aegyptiacus*, a bestseller in the mid-17th century. French encyclopedias and dictionaries from the latter half of the 18th century describe Isis as interchangeable with nature, depicted as a multi-breasted, beautiful woman covered by a veil.[7] Her beauty corresponds to nature's beauty, her breasts to nature's nourishing quality, and the veil to man's "ignorance" about her mechanisms. The myth of Isis is related to the problem of Egyptian hieroglyphs, which were only deciphered in 1822. In his 1751 *Lettre sur les sourds et muets*, Diderot wrote of language: "Poetic expression is a web of hieroglyphs which depict thought. In this sense, one might say that all poetry is emblematic."[8] The mainly German fascination with hieroglyphs can be ascribed to the influence of Swedenborg, who described the relationship between the representant and the represented as a hieroglyph. The earliest prominent connection between the mystical

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6 Quoted in A. Leslie Willson, "Hesse's Veil of Isis," *Monatshefte* 55, no. 6 (November 1963), 313.

7 Pierre Hadot, *The Veil of Isis: An Essay on the History of the Idea of Nature* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 238.

8 See Liselotte Dieckmann, "The Metaphor of Hieroglyphics in German Romanticism," *Comparative Literature* 7, no. 4 (Autumn 1955): 306-312.

theory of hieroglyphs and the myth of Isis can be traced to Herder, who, in his 1774 *Älteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts*, saw nature as "God's first hieroglyph."[9]

In another part of his *Kritik*, Kant speaks of the correct way to aesthetically appreciate the pyramids—a physical human genius creation that he has never seen. In a passage from the *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, Kant almost initiates the beholder of such monuments: "In order to get the full emotional effect," he writes, one must not look at them from "too far" nor from "too close." Too far would not let one appreciate their magnitude, and too close would make the lower parts "vanish from his imagination" when he reaches the higher parts.[10] There, one might see the operation of his theory of the sublime or the aesthetic experience that exceeds the imagination. Nevertheless, both here and in his treatment of the Isis inscription, the language (as Assmann remarks[11]) remains initiatory, even pedagogical, rather than mystical. Hamann, a fervent reader of Kant, resisted his "violent divorce"[12] between Nature and God. Nature was not the hieroglyphical creation of God, as it was for Kant and later for Schlegel. Nature was rather where God immanently manifested. This Spinozistic view was later shared by Goethe, as he confesses in his *Dichtung und Wahrheit*.[13] Yet for Kant, as Monica Birthe Hoesch brilliantly observes, the usage of the Isis inscription and the references to Egyptian thoughts in general could not have expressed an inclination to pantheism, given his aversion to such theories.[14] But the readers of these two currents of thought might have sought an initiatory path within the secret language of nature.

The notion of irony, popularized by Friedrich Schlegel, was highly influential among his contemporaries. Its diversity, spanning from definitions such as "irony is the form of paradoxes"[15] to a succession of infinitely

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9 Herder, *Älteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts* (Riga: Hartknoch, 1774), 110.

10 Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, 108

11 Jan Assmann, *Das verschleierte Bild zu Sais – griechische Neugier und ägyptische Andacht* (1999), 62.

12 Johann Georg Hamann, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Josef Nadler, 6 vols. (Vienna: Verlag Herder, 1949–1957), vol. 3 (reprinted Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 1999), 3.

13 See Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Goethes Werke*. Hamburger Ausgabe in 14 Bänden, Band 10 (Hamburg: 1948 ff.), 75-93

14 Monica Birth Hoesch, "I Am All That Is, That Was, and That Shall Be, and No Mortal Has Lifted My Veil: Kant, Novalis, Goethe, and the Veiled Goddess Isis" (PhD diss., Johns Hopkins University, 2005), 93.

15 *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*. Erste Abteilung: Kritische Neuausgabe, Band 2 (München, Paderborn, Wien, Zürich, 1967), 147-164. First published in *Lyceum der schönen Künste*, vol. 1, pt. 2 (Berlin, 1797), 152.

progressive dialectical discourse,[16] opens a possibility, I will argue, for a description of an educational process that enriches Kant's view while examining its actual, human dimensions. By actual and human, I mean not only the prosaic enumeration of what Kant suggests potentially and theoretically for either a Genius or (in his citation of the Isis inscription) a dead person but also a widening and deepening of his thought to simpler, identifiable (non-genius) protagonists. Schiller, a close reader of Kant, took the first step in this direction. In his ballad *Das verschleierte Bild zu Sais (The Veiled image at Sais)*,[17] the apprentice asks the sage, "What would one have if one doesn't have everything?" – referring to complete knowledge about creation. The Egyptian sage confirms, giving the example of harmony in which one note fails and thus ceases to be harmonious. But the fervent apprentice seeks to penetrate the truthful knowledge of nature. He enters the temple and violently removes the cover (*Schleier*) from Isis. Then, he decays slowly in grief and dies. His last words are: "Weh dem, der zu der Wahrheit geht durch Schuld, Sie wird ihm nimmermehr erfreulich sein." (*Woe — woe to him who treads through Guilt to Truth!*)[18] In a related manner, Thomas Mann, in his reflection on the formative journey (*Bildungsweg*) of his *Zauberberg* protagonist, said: "There are two paths to life: one is the regular one, direct, honest. The other is bad, it leads through death – that is the way of genius."[19] This small passage relates many elements present in Kant's 'hieroglyphical' discussion, specifically his thoughts on man's ability to decipher and experience nature.

## 2. *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*

Friedrich von Hardenberg, known as Novalis, was an enthusiastic commentator on the most significant philosophical writings of the time and was a devoted reader of Kant. David W. Wood, in his introduction to the translation of Novalis's *Kant Studien* (*Kant Studies*), quotes from his 1791

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16 What Paul de Man called "endless parabasis", see: "On the Concept of Irony", from: Paul De Man, *Aesthetic Ideology*, edited and with an introduction by Andrzej Warminski (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 178.

17 Friedrich Schiller, *Sämtliche Werke*. Bd. 1. (München, 1962), 224–226. English translation: Friedrich Schiller, *The Poems and Ballads of Schiller*, trans. Edward Bulwer Lytton (New York: T.Y. Crowell, [Date Unknown]), 88-89.

18 It could thus be said that Schiller's treatment of the truth is not yet irony (as in Novalis) but the pathos of the sublime. *Ibid*., 89.

19 Cited in Hermann J. Weigand, *The Magic Mountain: A Study of Thomas Mann's Novel Der Zauberberg* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), 6.

notebook entry "Philosophy: Schiller, Herder, Lessing, I myself, Kant."[20] Wood further mentions the comment made by Schlegel that Novalis was intensely preoccupied with Kant's ethics.[21] Already in his *Kant Studien*, Novalis relates the study of the natural world to questions of development, illusion vs. truth, and knowledge of nature. See, for example, his surprising commentary on the relationship between the absolute and the singular:

> The difference between illusion and truth consists in their varied connection – Truth is connected with the absolute, positive universe – Illusion only relates to specifically selected paradoxical parts of the universe, which it then elevates to an absolute totality – Hence, illusion is illness.[22]

These thoughts appear in a slightly different manner in his *Blüthenstaub* (*Pollen*). The notion of illness, later to appear also as the emblem of the *Romantic-Classical* opposition in Goethe, further emphasizes what I will later show as the manifestation of the negative, or ironic, appreciation of the acquaintance with nature. Moreover, as Azade Seyhan observes, Kant's "second Copernican revolution" was crucial for Novalis because it placed what has to be represented – ethical and aesthetic notions alike – in the human: "Kant places the firm, resting, legislative power a priori in us —the older philosophers placed it outside ourselves. In this way, he validated the counter position in philosophy—as in astronomy."[23]

In her analysis of the *Fichte Studien*, Jane Kneller argues that Novalis turned to Kant precisely because of his "explicit criticism of Fichtean 'seeking the unconditioned,' it is at least not surprising that Novalis returned, if only briefly, to the study of Kant immediately after his 'Auseinandersetzung' with Fichtean philosophy."[24] Specifically, as Theodore Ziolkovski comments, Novalis was interested in the image of Isis: "In 1798 Novalis (…) had encountered the image in Rosicrucian writings as well as in the works of Kant and Schiller, but he adapted it for his own purposes. In a distich among the paralipomena to his fragmentary novel *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* Novalis wrote:

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[20] Quoted in: David W. Wood, "Novalis: Kant Studies (1797)", *The Philosophical Forum* 32, no. 4 (2001): 324.

[21] *Ibid*., 325

[22] *Ibid*., 336

[23] Azade Seyhan, *Representation and Its Discontents: The Critical Legacy of German Romanticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 24.

[24] Novalis, *Fichte Studies*, ed. Jane Kneller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), xvi.

(One person succeeded – he lifted the veil of the goddess at Sais – But what did he see – He saw the wonder of wonders – Himself.)"[25]

My reading of Novalis will thus focus on the positive human process of "nearing" the absolute, approaching *Bildung* as self-knowledge through the otherness of nature while seeking an essentially ethical harmony between humans and between man and nature. Interestingly, as Frederick C. Beiser comments in his *Romantic Imperative: The Concept of Early German Romanticism*, Schlegel called this *Bildungsideal*, in an ironic reference to Kant, "the Genius Imperative."[26] This formative ideal, or *Bildungsideal*, is described by Novalis in the first pages of his story *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*:

> Auch ich will also meine Figur beschreiben, und wenn kein Sterblicher, nach jener Inschrift dort, den Schleier hebt, so müssen wir unsterblich zu werden suchen; wer ihn nicht heben will, ist kein echter Lehrling zu Sais.[27]
>
> I, too, then will inscribe my figure, and if according to the inscription, no mortal can lift the veil, we must seek to become immortal; he who does not seek to lift it, is no true novice of Sais.[28]

Thus, the unfinished novel details the process of seeking to lift the veil and become immortal under its manifold poetical forms. First, I will explore the idea of *Verwandtschaft*, the familial relation between man and nature that suggests a certain kind of self-formation through the study of nature. The inherent irony of this thought will be interpreted according to the Schlegelean enumeration of the process of approaching understanding through the gradual development of the incomprehensible (*Unverständliches)*. Second, I will read the novel's treatment of the concept of Harmony, which is central to *Bildung* theory, as can be seen in Morgenstern's introduction of the term *Bildungsroman*.[29] Third, I will interpret the delicate treatment of the idea of the image, the *Bild*, as it manifests in the novice's reflections on and in nature.

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[25] Theodore Ziolkowski, "The Veil as Metaphor and as Myth," *Religion & Literature* 40, no. 2 (Summer 2008): 72.

[26] Frederick C. Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative: The Concept of Early German Romanticism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 19.

[27] Novalis, HKA 1, 79.

[28] Novalis, *The Novices of Sais*, trans. Ralph Manheim, illustrated by Paul Klee (Brooklyn, NY: Archipelago Books, 2005), 17.

[29] In his fundamental essay about the *Bildungsroman*, Karl Morgenstern wrote that the individual comes "toward true nature by means of a collaboration of inner dispositions with outer circumstances, (...) a perfect equilibrium, combining harmony with freedom." Karl Morgenstern, "On the Nature of the 'Bildungsroman," trans. Tobias Boes, *PMLA* 124, no. 2 (March 2009), 656.

My arguments will all depart from the above-mentioned negative understanding of the absolute, which calls for a process-oriented – or, in short, narrative – interpretation of the Isis inscription. The justification for such a reading arises from Novalis's claim, introduced by Kneller in her chapter from *Kant and the Power of Imagination* on Novalis: "Philosophizing is just scientizing [*wissenschaften*], thinking through thought, knowing knowledge – treating the sciences scientifically and poetically."[30] Thus, the way to investigate the inner self and how it "reaches others,"[31] is the way that Novalis develops and *poeticizes* the Kantian system.

Before my close reading of the *Lehrlinge zu Sais* (*The Novices of Sais*) and the main argument, I would like to briefly introduce Novalis's philosophy of the continuum between man and nature and the tension between the singular human being, society, and the universal unity. He writes in his *Blüthenstaub*:

> Vor der Abstrakzion ist alles eins, aber eins wie Chaos; nach der Abstrakzion ist wieder alles vereinigt, aber diese Vereinigung ist eine freye Verbindung selbständiger, selbstbestimmter Wesen. Aus einem Haufen ist eine Gesellschaft geworden, das Chaos ist in eine mannichfaltige Welt verwandelt.[32]
>
> Before abstraction, everything is unified but in a chaotic way. After abstraction, there is unity again, but now it's a harmony of independent, self-determining beings. What was once a mere aggregate has become a society, with chaos transformed into an ordered, diverse world.[33]

As a geologist and engineer who worked in mines, he developed a unique view on the partiality of the study of nature, which was related to but different from that of Goethe. Novalis recognized humanity's incapacity to grasp the entirety of nature through self-observation, whereas Goethe insisted on the universal truth of the subjective-physiological study of nature. For him, the color blue should be defined according to the human experience of the sky. In contrast, Novalis recognized the profound cleavage between the natural and the artificial (*Das Künstliche*), wherein humanity is damned to its artificiality: "Man versteht das Künstliche gewöhnlich besser, als das Natürliche." ("One usually understands the artificial better than the natural.")[34] Never-

[30] Jane Kneller, *Kant and the Power of Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 145.
[31] *Ibid*.
[32] Novalis, *Schriften*. *Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs*. Band 2 (Stuttgart: 1960 / 1977), 453.
[33] Novalis, *Pollen*, no. 95; cf. Frederick C. Beiser, ed., *The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 28.
[34] Novalis, *Pollen*, *ibid*., 26.

theless, Novalis held a strong opinion about the existence of a continuum between man and nature. I will inspect the nature of this metaphysical stance before presenting a dialectical solution based on ironic formation in his *Lehrlinge*. In his article "Human History as Natural History in *The Novices of Sais* and *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*,"[35] Denis F. Mahoney shows how Novalis poetized his lessons from his natural sciences studies into his two novels, demonstrating the parallels he tried to draw between natural history and the history of the human spirit. Both, Novalis argued, are made of layers. In earlier times, human society had its "golden age," like gold lying deep in the ground. For him, "romanticizing" meant finding those earlier layers and, as his only theological essay shows, striving back toward them as a society.[36] The notion of gradual revelation as gradual excavation, I will argue later, could be seen as a challenge to Kant's theory of the cleavage between man and the "language of nature". Learning to decipher the hieroglyphs in Novalis's novella corresponds to a transformative, immersive, and reflective experience. In a 1792 letter written to his brother Wilhelm, Friedrich Schlegel describes his first meeting with Novalis with an anecdote about the young man's moral philosophy: that there is no evil in the world because all things strive back to a common "golden age."[37]

Novalis's *Lehrlinge* expands this notion and ironically problematizes it through different discourses about the connection between man and nature. The novel's first paragraph reveals a deepening of the Egyptian hieroglyph metaphor.

> Mannigfache Wege gehen die Menschen. Wer sie verfolgt und vergleicht, wird wunderliche Figuren entstehen sehn; Figuren, die zu jener großen Chiffernschrift zu gehören scheinen, die man überall, auf Flügeln, Eierschalen, in Wolken, im Schnee, in Kristallen und in Steinbildungen, auf gefrierenden Wassern, im Innern und Äußern der Gebirge, der Pflanzen, der Tiere, der Menschen, in den Lichtern des Himmels, auf berührten und gestrichenen Scheiben von Pech und Glas, in den Feilspänen um den Magnet her, und sonderbaren Konjunkturen des Zufalls, erblickt.[38]

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35 Dennis F. Mahoney, "Human History as Natural History in 'The Novices of Sais' and 'Heinrich von Ofterdingen,'" *Historical Reflections / Réflexions historiques* 18, no. 1 (1992): 111-124.

36 "Die Christenheit, oder Europa", in Novalis, *Schriften*, Band 3, Stuttgart 1960–1977, 507-525. Entstanden 1799. Erstdruck in: Schriften, 4. Auflage, Berlin (Reimer) 1826.

37 See Max Preitz, *Friedrich Schlegel und Novalis: Biographie einer Romantikerfreundschaft in ihren Briefen: auf Grund neuer Briefe Schlegels* (Stuttgart: H. Gentner, 1957), 9.

38 Novalis, HKA 1, 78.

> Various are the roads of man. He who follows and compares them will see strange figures emerge, figures which seem to belong to that great cipher which we discern written everywhere, in wings, eggshells, clouds and snow, in crystals and in stone formations, on ice-covered waters, on the inside and outside of mountains, of plants, beasts and men, in the lights of heaven, on scored disks of pitch or glass or in iron filings round a magnet, and in strange conjunctures of chance.[39]

This passage presents man as wholly belonging to nature, inscribed alongside other natural objects in the same *Chiffernschrift*—i.e., hieroglyphic script. The language of the human is one with that of all orders of nature: the organic and the inorganic, animals, plants, and rocks. Nevertheless, as with Kant, the language within which the human *is* written and the language which he speaks are not necessarily the same. These two levels of language, one scriptural and one common, correspond to Kant's original differentiation between imagination (*Vorstellung*) and expression (*Ausdruck*). However, belonging to the same order to be deciphered by expression creates a dialectical, reflective motion—a knowledge of the self and of the Other, which could be defined as an ironic formation. A clear-cut definition of this formational challenge from *Die Lehrlinge* can be found in a passage that clearly echoes Schlegel's text:

> Von weitem hört ich sagen: die Unverständlichkeit sei Folge nur des Unverstandes; dieser suche, was er habe, und also niemals weiter finden könne. Man verstehe die Sprache nicht, weil sich die Sprache selber nicht verstehe….[40]

> I heard a voice say from afar that the incomprehensible is solely the result of incomprehension, which seeks what it has and therefore can never make further discoveries. We do not understand speech, because speech does not understand itself, nor wish to…[41]

The connection here is thus threefold (man – language – nature) and precedes, in known ways, 20th-century discourse about language. This challenge, again, is not unsolvable. After the passage cited above, Novalis claims that the only way language understands itself is by speaking. Imagination and expression—which, for the analytical Kant, were thoroughly separated—are conjoined through poetic expression. Yet this poetic expression revolves around the subject that speaks it, creating a dialectical motion of reflection. One might derive from this reasoning that the disciple's

[39] Novalis, *The Novices of Sais*, 3.
[40] Novalis, HKA 1, 78.
[41] Novalis, *The Novices of Sais*, 5.

mistake in Schiller's poem was in differentiating between himself and "the truth," seeking it outside and reinforcing the barrier while mistakenly thinking he would remove it.

The unfinished novel is framed (ironically, one might say) through its title as a story about formation or development. Nevertheless, it is written in the plural first person. Moreover, it can be argued that the subject of *Bildung*, the Novices, also includes the reader. Yet, pupils and teachers are separated. The "we" of the formational subjects is posed before an Other, more—or infinitely more—knowledgeable. The teacher, Novalis writes, learned to treat all as one: to see "people in clouds" and "stones in people." The objects, for him, are not compared to one another but, as Novalis emphasizes throughout the text, are already perceived as one and the same. The immediate, sensorial experience of all components of nature constitutes the explicit *Bildung* project of the pupils of Sais. As one of the instructors of Sais says: "Das Denken ist nur ein Traum des Fühlens, ein erstorbenes Fühlen, ein blaßgraues, schwaches Leben." ("Thought is only a dream of feeling, a dead feeling, a pale-gray feeble life.")[42]

Many commentators see in this view an incarnation of the Fichtean *Philosophie* that seeks to see the objective world as an all-comprising *Ich*.[43] The source of the Romantic concept of harmony between divergent parts, as Peter Hanly points out in his *Between Heidegger and Novalis*,[44] is the ancient Greek notion of *harmonia*, found in Plato's *Symposium*. There, Heraclitus's concept of harmony is presented according to the musical metaphor: "In variance from itself it agrees with itself, like the harmony of bow and lyre."[45] This train of thought draws a fine line between irony and *Bildung* in Novalis according to the Schlegelean thought of irony and Morgenstern's definition of *Bildung* as harmony between the self and the non-self, enlarging the self to include the societal contradictions within it. It also incorporates the Fichtean formula of the all-comprising *Ich*, when Novalis, in his notebooks that came to be known as the *Fichte Studies,* writes: "I = not I. Highest principle of all science and art."[46] The *Ich* is not differentiated from nature, and its only way to grasp nature is by being it—wild as the wind, high as the skies, loving as a band of flowers. However, Novalis's text also insinuates that mere experience is not enough; it should be accorded quiet observation (*Stille Beobachtung*).

42 Novalis, *The Novices of Sais,* 73.

43 Dennis F. Mahoney, "Human History as Natural History in 'The Novices of Sais' and 'Heinrich von Ofterdingen,'", 114

44 Peter Hanly, *Between Heidegger and Novalis. Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2021), 13.

45 *Ibid*.

46 *Ibid*., 34

The hierarchy of observation and experience sets the difference between the different voices of the educators in the text. While one educator claims that "being" nature is nothing but projecting inner drives, making nature a "terrible beast" (*entsetzliches Tier*), the other says that experiencing "natural" feelings suffices and surpasses every reflection. This course of thought in the text destabilizes the *Bildung*-science-poetry-irony equivalent and invites a crack in the *harmonia*.

Novalis's text is undoubtedly polyphonic, and many different voices of educators speak within it. The multiplicity of voices corresponds to the capricious form of the text, turning into a hazardous outgrowth of a plant. The text often mentions randomness as the operating principle of growth. Towards the end of the text, unending lust towards nature is presented as a necessary and sufficient condition to achieve the wanted *Verwandtschaft* (familial relation) with it. Still, the text is unfinished and, as Alicia Kuzniar claims, is unfinishable, as it is an endless envy towards a whole (*Das Ganze*) and an endless absolute *Bildung*.[47] The succession of discourses demonstrates an almost natural chain of predators that grow while annihilating each other, unable to ever reach the "final Irony" for which Schlegel desperately calls in his *Über die Unverständlichkeit*.[48] The romantic tendency to seek a universal principle (of which Charles, for example, talks in his *Modernism between Benjamin and Goethe*[49]) leads to the paradoxical longing for a principle of all principles.[50] Interestingly, early Romantics such as Novalis and Schlegel seemingly rebelled against Kant's too-harmonious, too-analytical system.[51]

Yet, this wish for a system—infused with angst—calls Kant back into mind. Specifically, when speaking of the aesthetic appreciation of nature,

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47 See Alice A. Kuzniar, *Delayed Endings: Nonclosure in Novalis and Hölderlin* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2008). See, for example, the chapter entitled "Temporalization vs. Temporality", 40-50.

48 "What gods will rescue us from all these ironies? The only solution is to find an irony that might be able to swallow up all these big and little ironies and leave no trace of them at all." In Schlegel, *On Incomprehensibility*, 267.

49 Matthew Charles, *Modernism Between Benjamin and Goethe* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021), 44.

50 Schlegel, "Über die Unverständlichkeit," in: Friedrich Schlegel, *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*. Erste Abteilung: Kritische Neuausgabe, vol. 2 (München, Paderborn, Wien, Zürich: 1967), 368.

51 See the comment from Novalis's *Miscellaneous Observations*, from the notebooks he wrote before Friedrich Schlegel edited them into the wider known *Pollen* that appeared in 1798: "The more narrow-minded a system is the more it will please worldly-wise people. Thus, the system of the materialists, the doctrine of Helvetius, and also Locke has received the most acclaim amongst this class. Kant even now will find more followers than Fichte." In: Novalis, *Philosophical Writings*, trans. and ed. Margaret Mahony Stoljar (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 42.

Kant makes repeated reference to a calm (*beruhigendes*) feeling. This point, which did not gain sufficient critical attention, appears exactly in the paragraph preceding the Isis reference:

> So sagt z. B. ein gewisser Dichter in der Beschreibung eines schönen Morgens: »Die Sonne quoll hervor, wie Ruh aus Tugend quillt.« Das Bewußtsein der Tugend, wenn man sich auch nur in Gedanken in die Stelle eines Tugendhaften versetzt, verbreitet im Gemüthe eine Menge erhabener und beruhigender Gefühle und eine gränzenlose Aussicht in eine frohe Zukunft, die kein Ausdruck, welcher einem bestimmten Begriffe angemessen ist, völlig erreicht.[52]

> Thus, for example, a certain poet, in describing a beautiful morning, says: 'The sun flowed forth, as serenity flows from virtue.' So the consciousness of virtue, even if we only think of ourselves as in the position of a virtuous person, spreads in the mind a multitude of sublime and calming feelings and a boundless outlook toward a joyful future, such as no expression commensurate with a determinate concept completely attains.[53]

It might, therefore, be argued that the limitedness of vision (Kant speaks in terms of *Augenverbot*), man's incapacity to represent to himself the coherent system of nature, invites a thought about morality, virtually absent from the text. The problem of comprehending (*begreifen*) that seeks an accurate expression (*Ausdruck*) remains unanswered in Kant, but this non-answer is not ignored by the poet (*Dichter*). Rather, the consciousness of virtue—a human rather than a natural quality—brings him calm. This notion operates negatively, I suggest, in Novalis's text. The intensive and absolute identification of nature, alongside the striving towards a unification of being, imagination, and expression, brings about an immoral, death-inciting natural existence that arouses angst in the narrator(s). For example, Novalis describes the disciples as seeking a "nature of natures":

> Es frägt sich, ob wir die Natur der Naturen durch diese spezielle Natur wahrhaft begreifen lernen können, und inwiefern unsre Gedanken und die Intensität unsrer Aufmerksamkeit durch dieselbe bestimmt werden, oder sie bestimmen, und dadurch von der Natur losreißen und vielleicht ihre zarte Nachgiebigkeit verderben.[54]

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52 Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, 316.
53 Kant, *Critique of Judgement,* 184-5.
54 Novalis, HKA 1, 97.

> The question arises, whether we can learn to understand the nature of natures through this specific nature, and to what degree our ideas and the intensity of our attention are determined by it, or else determine it, thus snatching it away from nature and perhaps destroying its delicate flexibility.[55]

This brings forward perhaps the most powerful crisis in the text: the hidden danger (or wish) towards death. One of the educators in the text emphasizes that, calling nature "a terrible mill of death," circling viciously and eternally. The ideal triad of being-imagining-expressing nature would, therefore, not come without a deterioration of the mind, which would mean, again paradoxically, not existing. This irony resembles that of Schiller's text—namely, that the knowledge of nature leads the disciple to silence, illness, and early death. In his view, these are an objectification of the mind and the body—the mind turning into a natural force, a slave to the drives (*Triebe*), and the body to inorganic matter. Therefore, I suggest that contrary to the conception of Novalis's text as a poetical incarnation of Fichte's system, it adheres to Kant's idea of the inherent, insurmountable *difference* between man and nature. In other words, *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* demonstrates the Kantian citation that insinuates the deadly danger that awaits in revealing nature's veil.

This could be demonstrated by Novalis's diverse use of the German root *Bild* in the text. The concept of *Abbild* (copy, image) with its religious connotations (man being made in the image of God in Genesis) is frequently mentioned concerning the question of the epistemological hierarchy of the knowledge of nature: the teachers are in disagreement about whether nature is an *Abbild* of man or the opposite. If the first is the case, a teacher says, then it is just because of man's imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) that he mistakenly sees nature in his own (horrifying) image.[56] The teacher supporting the position of the *Vernunft* uses the verb *bilden* (forming, educating), saying that self-work on human moral behavior will make nature open "by itself" in front of him.[57] Then, inclining to a meta-poetic discussion, nature is called the "reflection of humanity" (*Gegenbild der Menschheit*). Therefore, only the artist can create the natural world as an image that follows his ways (*auf seine Art nachbilden*[58]); for lovers, it is said afterward, nature is only an *Abbild* of the loved one.[59] Then, speaking of the diversity of the world, a teacher says all objects in nature are images (*Bilder*) signifying the different sounds of a

[55] Novalis, *The Novices of Sais,* 78-9.
[56] Novalis, *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais,* p. 14
[57] *Ibid*., p. 15
[58] *Ibid*., p. 27
[59] *Ibid*., p. 28

language, thus returning to the initial definition of the mystical study of nature as a hieroglyphical science[60]—the only definition given from the speaking "we" of the text, simultaneously with more and less authority, given not by a teacher but by its multi-headed (or infinite) disciples (*Lehrlinge*). The universe is thus a *Gespräch*, a conversation, with the German word resonating with the very act of speaking (*Sprechen*). This symphony of the German language, providing multiple definitions, contradicting itself but developing little by little a harmony, finally coming back to its initial tone constitutes exactly an ironical (constantly changing with internal contradictions while striving towards itself) *Bildung*, with the text striving towards education, explicitly in its title and implicitly with its treatment of the *Bild* leitmotif that overtones *Bildung*.

### 3. *Der Runenberg*

In his early works while a student, Tieck's works were "parodies of the cult of the Genius."[61] Roger Paulin comments that Tieck's critique of Enlightenment during the years 1797-1800, after having known Friedrich Schlegel and Friedrich Nicolai in the Belin Salons of Rahel Varnhagen and Dorothea Veit, concerned not the basic assumptions and aspirations of the movement, but instead its capacity for poetic (i.e., literary) freedom. This, he found in Schlegel's *Universalpoesie* (universal poetry) and its "steten Wechsel von Selbstschöpfung und Selbstvernichtung",[62] (constant alternation between self-creation and self-annihilation). Although around 1800, Tieck announces he "never studied the transcendental philosophy thoroughly," Jürgen Brummack comments that the idea of the sublime – specifically in its interplay between the *Schrecklichen* (terrifying) and the *Schönen* (beautiful) – played an essential role in the metaphysical motivations of his writings in the early 19th century. Specifically, Brummack comments that § 49 of Kant's *Kritik der Urteilkraft* particularly influenced Tieck when he composed his own thoughts about the sublime.[63] This small section, consisting of six pages, is also where the note about the Isis inscription appears.

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60 Tieck, on the other hand, treats art as an *understandable* hieroglyphic writing: "Sie redet durch Bilder der Menschen und bedienet sich also einer Hieroglyphenschrift, deren Zeichen wir dem Äußern nach kennen und verstehen." In Tieck and Wilhelm Wackenroder: *Werke und Briefe*. Berlin und München 1984, 191.

61 Roger Paulin, "Tieck in Berlin", in: Claudia Stockinger and Stefan Scherer, ed., *Ludwig Tieck: Leben, Werk, Wirkung* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 27.

62 *Ibid*., 28

63 Jürgen Brummack, "Poetologische und kritische Schriften von 1792 bis 1803", in *Ibid*., 328.

To further deepen the discussion of irony in the Romantic *Bildung* of nature through Tieck's 1804 novella *Der Runenberg*, it is essential to examine its plot and key themes. The tale begins with a "young man" named Christian who has left human society to find loneliness (*Einsamkeit*). His departure is explained by his view of society as a Platonic cave, where people live in a "state of unknowing"[64] and even nature is confined to a "little garden." On his first journey, Christian reaches the Runenberg, where he meets a beautiful woman who enchants him. Overcome by a sense of awe and fear, Christian finds a sparkling gem, which he takes with him. Upon returning home, Christian's life takes a dark turn. Preoccupied with his experience from the Runenberg, his relationships quickly deteriorate, particularly with his fiancée and his father. The once bright and cheerful Christian becomes increasingly obsessed with the gem and the memories of his supernatural experiences. His descent into madness peaks when he abandons his family and home, driven by an irresistible urge to return to the Runenberg. The story ends ambiguously, with Christian disappearing into the mountains, leaving his fate uncertain.

Like in Novalis's text, the notion of *Bildung* is crucial. As Klaus F. Gille argues in his "Der Berg und die Seele: Überlegungen zu Tiecks' *Runenberg*,"[65] the tale invites a reading as a parody of a *Bildungsroman*, notably of *Wilhelm Meister*, which was published shortly before. Gille focuses on the tension between morality and sensuality, saying that if for Meister education consisted of reconciling the two, here they were 'torn apart'.[66] A full interpretation of this text is beyond the scope of this discussion, but I will focus on two decisive moments in the tale: with a beautiful, veiled woman

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[64] "Die Ebene, das Schloß, der kleine beschränkte Garten meines Vaters mit den geordneten Blumenbeeten, die enge Wohnung, der weite Himmel, der sich ringsum so traurig ausdehnte, und keine Höhe, keinen erhabenen Berg umarmte, alles ward mir noch betrübter und verhaßter. Es schien mir, als wenn alle Menschen um mich her in der bejammernswürdigsten Unwissenheit lebten." In Ludwig Tieck: *Werke in vier Bänden*, vol. 2 (München, 1963), 61. ("The plain, our patron's castle, and my father's little hampered garden, with its trimmed flower-beds; our narrow dwelling; the wide sky which stretched above us in its dreary vastness, embracing no hill, no lofty mountain, all became more dull and odious to me. It seemed as if the people about me were living in most lamentable ignorance." in Tieck, 203).

[65] Klaus F. Gille, „Der Berg und die Seele: Überlegungen zu Tiecks ‚Runenberg'," *Neophilologus* 77, no. 4 (1993): 611.

[66] Sinnlichkeit und Sittlichkeit sind, anders als für die Weimarer Klassik, durch eine unüberbrückbare Kluft getrennt, machen das Individuum Christian zum Bürger zweier Welten, in denen es nur um den Preis ständiger Loyalitätskonflikte bestehen kann. *Ibid*., 617. ("Sensuality and morality, unlike in Weimar Classicism, are separated by an unbridgeable chasm, making the individual Christian a citizen of two worlds in which existence is only possible at the cost of constant conflicts of loyalty.")

and with a mandrake root. These encounters determine Christian's fate and serve as emblems of the inherent danger of knowledge, identification, imagination, and expression of nature. Unlike Gille, who focuses on sensuality as the driving power towards nature, I would like to speak of a passion similar to that of Novalis in his *Lehrlinge zu Sais*. Certainly, the incarnation of nature as a veiled, beautiful woman bears notes of sensuality, yet Tieck's description avoids any sensual or sexual references. Instead, he focuses on the luring beauty and mystical knowledge that she offers with her jewels. Therefore, I will read the encounter scene as a representation of the inherent danger of too deep, too close knowledge of nature—and, imbued with irony, of the self.

After leaving the restricted realm of his family, and while wandering in the mountains, Christian encounters a "big womanly figure" who does not seem to "be among the mortals." The representation of nature as a luring woman stems from proto-biblical traditions of Lilith and medieval concepts of Mother Earth. However, the central distinction in this text is between the woman of the mountain and the "young girl" of the village whom he marries. This contrast is tied to two natural elements: flowers and stones, symbolizing two extremes of nature. The old woman exposes precious stones, immortal but lifeless, while the young girl is compared to a flower, foreshadowing her insufficiency for Christian's immortal envy, reminiscent of the "limited flower garden" of his parents' castle. Moreover, in the midst of their marriage, he cruelly admits to her:

> Nein, nicht jenes Bild bist du, welches mich einst im Traum entzückte und das ich niemals ganz vergessen kann, aber doch bin ich glücklich in deiner Nähe und selig in deinen Armen.[67]
>
> No, thou art not that form which once charmed me in a dream, and which I never can entirely forget; but I am happy beside thee, and blessed that thou art mine.[68]

The *Bild* he refers to is of the old woman's unclothing, her removing of her veil (*Schleier*) and her revealing of the "more than earthly beauty" (*überirdische Schönheit)*. Thus, the distinction here is not between the *Sittlich* and the *Sinnlich*, but between the organic and the inorganic, the timely and the immortal. Intertwining with the latter, following Kant's model, this suggests

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[67] Ludwig Tieck: *Werke in vier Bänden*, vol. 2 (München, 1963), 70.

[68] I am using the Carlyle translation to English: *Jean Paul, Johann Karl August Musäus, and Ludwig Tieck*, Translations from the German by Thomas Carlyle (Vol. 3 of 3): *Tales by Musæus, Tieck, Richter* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1827), 209.

an 'immortal', inorganic (and thus also immoral) state. Borrowing from Kant, there is a connection between the living, human, limited, moral being—and the immoral and infinite nature, which is not to be understood by humans unless leaping to a state of death or folly. The *Bild* of the woman changes from the first encounter (*Überirdische Schönheit*) to the second (*ein altes Weib von der äußersten Häßlichkeit*). Nevertheless, the temptation to return to her does not cease but intensifies. Christian is drawn back to the forest for the same reasons that the Schillerian figure unveils Isis: not only out of thirst for knowledge but for becoming one with this inorganic, immobile knowledge.

This could be regarded according to Freud's division of nature into organic and inorganic in his "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (*Jenseits des Lustprinzips)*, instead of the prevalent division of human and natural. In the Freudian sense, the human is enclosed within this circle while aspiring towards a shifting state, again, into the inorganic, the stone.[69] The contrast between flowers and stones appears throughout the novella. For example, in their last meeting before Christian's departure, his father warns him: "Cast this writing from thee, which makes thee cold and cruel, which will turn thy heart to stone."[70] ("Wirf diese Schrift weg, die dich kalt und grausam macht, die dein Herz versteinern muß.") The *Schrift*, or the script, that the father refers to is the tablet of stones given to him by the mountain lady. It might be suggested that the ability to read this would make his heart turn to stone (*Versteinern*). In other words, only turning into stone would permit him to read the hieroglyphical language of stones.

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[69] Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. and ed. James Strachey, introduction by Gregory Zilboorg (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1961), 21, 32, 33, 55.
See also Schelling in *Von der Weltseele:* "Das Princip des Lebens ist nicht von außen in die organische Materie (etwa durch Infusion) gekommen … sondern umgekehrt, dieses Princip hat *sich* die organische Materie *angebildet.*" (Hamburg: Perthes, 1798), 302. The subject of a cycle between the organic and the inorganic was discussed by romantic thinkers such as Gotthilf Heinrich Schubert in his *Ansichten von der Nachtseite der Naturwissenschaft, Siebente Vorlesung*: *Von der sogenannten anorganischen Natur*: "Es bauet sich fröhlich eine neue Zeit aus den Trümmern der versunkenen alten auf, hoffend wenn auch nicht durch die Dauer der körperlichen Masse, doch durch die Kraft des Geistes das Werk ihrer Hände fester in die Tiefe der fernsten Zeit zu gründen, als jene untergegangene Vorzeit." ("A new era joyfully builds itself up from the ruins of the sunken old one, hoping to establish the work of its hands more firmly into the depths of the farthest time, not through the permanence of physical matter, but through the power of the spirit, than that bygone past.") In: Gotthilf Heinrich von Schubert, *Ansichten von der Nachtseite der Naturwissenschaft,* (Dresden, 1808), 215.
Freud's interpretation adds passion to this Romantic-scientific equation, which agrees with Tieck's intensive treatment of beauty and erotic passion in this tale and his other writings.

[70] Tieck, *The Runenberg*, 216.

Again, in Kantian terms, Christian is haunted by an uneasiness (*Unruhe*). By his parents' house and with his spouse in the city, he has no peace of mind. Elisabeth attests to his father that she "cannot understand her man anymore." The calm feeling in Kant, as demonstrated earlier, stems from the human acceptance of distance and from the virtue of the represented object. The tale demonstrates this Kantian system with the transition of the beautiful to the ugly: as a representation or imagination, it represents Christian's perception. Morally, Christian's fascination becomes increasingly problematic as he gradually distances himself from his spouse. The formational aspect of this tale is cautionary. As Tieck writes elsewhere, "we do not know what a tree is."[71] Like Novalis, whose story supports his argument about man's understanding of the *Künstliche* rather than the *Natürliche*, Tieck provides a cautionary narrative following Kantian logic, warning against removing the distance from nature in the imagination-expression (*Vorstellung-Ausdruck*) process discussed earlier.

One incident stands out in the tale that demonstrates this process: the plucking out of the mandrake root:

> Gedankenlos zog er eine hervorragende Wurzel aus der Erde, und plötzlich hörte er erschreckend ein dumpfes Winseln im Boden, das sich unterirdisch in klagenden Tönen fortzog, und erst in der Ferne wehmütig verscholl. Der Ton durchdrang sein innerstes Herz, er ergriff ihn, als wenn er unvermutet die Wunde berührt habe, an der der sterbende Leichnam der Natur in Schmerzen verscheiden wolle. Er sprang auf und wollte entfliehen, denn er hatte wohl ehemals von der seltsamen Alrunenwurzel gehört, die beim Ausreißen so herzdurch-

[71] Tieck's *Runenberg* can be regarded as a critical reflection on the Romantic assumption of a continuum between non-human worlds and human consciousness. Tieck, I argue, points to and questions this continuum, which presupposes a shared language between humans and non-human nature. See Tieck in his own words (written jointly with Wackenroder) about the capacity of understanding nature, from his discussion on art: "Wir wissen nicht, was ein Baum ist; nicht, was eine Wiese, nicht, was ein Felsen ist; wir können nicht in unsrer Sprache mit ihnen reden; wir verstehen nur uns untereinander. Und dennoch hat der Schöpfer in das Menschenherz eine solche wunderbare Sympathie zu diesen Dingen gelegt, daß sie demselben, auf unbekannten Wegen, Gefühle oder Gesinnungen, oder wie man es nennen mag, zuführen, welche wir nie durch die abgemessensten Worte erlangen." ("We do not know what a tree is; not what a meadow is, not what a rock is; we cannot speak with them in our language; we only understand each other. And yet, the Creator has placed such a wonderful sympathy for these things in the human heart that, through unknown paths, they convey to it feelings or sentiments, or whatever one may call them, which we could never attain through the most measured words.") My translation, in Wilhelm Wackenroder, *Werke und Briefe* (Berlin and Munich, 1984), 191.

> schneidende Klagetöne von sich gebe, daß der Mensch von ihrem Gewinsel wahnsinnig werden müsse.[72]
>
> Unthinkingly, he pulled a straggling root from the earth; and on the instant, heard, with affright, a stifled moan underground, which winded downwards in doleful tones, and died plaintively away in the deep distance. The sound went through his inmost heart; it seized him as if he had unwittingly touched the wound, of which the dying frame of Nature was expiring in its agony. He started up to fly; for he had already heard of the mysterious mandrake-root, which, when torn, yields such heart-rending moans, that the person who has hurt it runs distracted by its wailing.[73]

Laura Isengard interprets the motive of language in Tieck's tale,[74] focusing on the imagery of the mandrake root. She shows how in folklore, from biblical and medieval times, the mandrake was compared to human beings, both in its shape of a two-legged root, through its ascribed psychological-aphrodisiac effects, to Hildegard von Bingen, the medieval monk and mystic, who argued for a common natural origin of man and mandrake.[75] Isengard argues that this moment goes against the (romantic) belief in a continuum between man and nature. Indeed, it is precisely the educational moment of learning about death and the suffering attached to it with the root's scream that teaches him about death in two respects: his ability to cause death and to experience it. Here lies the characteristic intersection of violence, self-annihilation, and language—which is the focal point of ironic *Bildung* in this story with respect to nature. Being himself nature (the mandrake as human) at the same time as violently annihilating a piece of nature—this reflexive moment extracts a scream from the root. A scream being a mode of expression, maybe the most primal, might be suggested as a meta-poetical indication of the origin of language, or its essence, as violence.

Adding another layer to Isengard's discussion of "a shared language between humans and the non-human nature," a scene from the *Divine Comedy* could be one of the cultural sources of the mandrake scene.[76] In the 13th *canzone* of the *Inferno*, the narrator encounters a bush:

> Therefore the Master said: 'If thou break off

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72 Tieck, *Der Runenberg*, 91-2.

73 *Tales by Musæus, Tieck, Richter*, 201.

74 Laura Isengard, "Nature's Say: Negotiating the Human-Nature Continuum in Ludwig Tieck's *Der Runenberg*," in: Adrian Renner and Frederike Middelhoff, eds. *Forces of Nature: Dynamism and Agency in German Romanticism* (De Gruyter, 2022), 205-225.

75 *Ibid*., 209.

76 To my knowledge, this has never been discussed in literature about this tale.

Some little spray from any of these trees,
The thoughts thou hast will wholly be made vain.'
Then stretched I forth my hand a little forward,
And plucked a branchlet off from a great thorn;
And the trunk cried, 'Why dost thou mangle me?'
After it had become embrowned with blood,
It recommenced its cry: 'Why dost thou rend me?
Hast thou no spirit of pity whatsoever?
Men once we were, and now are changed to trees;
Indeed, thy hand should be more pitiful,
Even if the souls of serpents we had been.'[77]

Tieck was one of the most enthusiastic readers of the *Divine Comedy* and studied it thoroughly.[78] The context in the original text is Dante's need to verify "on his own" Virgil's argument that people turned into trees. He does that through the same violent act of plucking a leaflet.[79] The striking similarity between the scenes, which also comment on the same question (could humans turn into plants), has not been studied before.

Some interesting ideas can be extracted from Tieck's remake of this scene from the *Inferno*. Firstly, these natural beings can feel pain and are aware of their human past—the very presence in the inferno indicates that it has been a person who has died. Secondly, and inferably, there is a cry for empathy among organic beings that can experience and cause pain; even the impartial traveler and narrator of the *Comedy* finds himself engaged in such interaction. Thirdly and most importantly, Virgil warns Dante of insanity when he intends to tear the branch: this sheds another light on this moment, suggesting that insanity is inherent to a direct, violent relationship with nature.[80] This idea correlates to the passion that drove Christian, the protagonist of *Der Runenberg*, into nature. If in other texts interpreted in this chapter man is driven into nature seeking solitude or knowledge, here the

77 Dante, *Divine Comedy*, translated by Henry Longfellow (Boston, 1867), 75.

78 See: Eva Hölter, "Dante's Long Road to the German library: Literary Reception from Early Romanticism until the Late Nineteenth Century", in *Dante in the Long Nineteenth Century*, A. Audeh & N. Havely eds. (Oxford University Press, 2012), 225-247.

79 The first section of *Inferno* 13 is important for the intertextual dynamic between the *Aeneid* and the *Commedia*. The fact that a man has become a tree is termed "unbelievable" — "cosa incredibile" (unbelievable thing) — in *Inferno* 13.50. It is therefore something that cannot be accepted on the basis of a prior account, no matter how authoritative, but which, if it is to be believed, must be verified through one's own actions and experience. Hence, because the account in Vergil's Aeneid is deemed literally "in-credible", Virgilio instructs Dante to break the branch in order to verify that the tree is truly a man.

80 According to Isegard, this also echoes Schelling's statement: "Die Natur soll der sichtbare Geist, der Geist die unsichtbare Natur seyn."