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The Philosopher as Magus

Novalis and the Esoteric Tradition

Cecilia Rose Inkol[*]

ABSTRACT

This article presents an account of Novalis's engagement in the sphere of magic and esoteric philosophy: his theory of magic; his philosophy of Magical Idealism; his engagement with the esoteric tradition in his philosophizing and poetry; and his esoteric studies. Drawing on the esoteric tradition, Novalis develops an original theory of magic as a practice of the will and of faith, connected with love, language, artistic creation, the senses, and politics. Inspired by esoteric efforts and concepts, he develops an analogical theory of the sciences in which all disciplines are intertwined. He envisages philosophy as a divinatory, Freemasonic and alchemical endeavor. I examine the alchemical nuances underpinning Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* and Novalis's references to the Presocratic proto-alchemist Empedocles. Drawing on extensive evidence, I claim that Novalis presents a philosophy which is esoteric in character and that to fully understand Novalis, it is imperative to include the esoteric tradition in one's analysis. I argue that Novalis was not just a philosopher, but a magus.

Keywords: Novalis, magic, esotericism, Empedocles, alchemy

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article rend compte de la façon dont Novalis a investi le domaine de la magie et de la philosophie ésotérique à travers une analyse de sa théorie de la magie ; de sa philosophie dite de l'« idéalisme magique » ; de sa confrontation avec la tradition ésotérique dans sa philosophie et dans sa poésie ; et, enfin, de ses études ésotériques. Novalis développe une théorie de la magie comme pratique de la volonté et de la foi liée à l'amour, au langage, à la création artistique, à la sensibilité et à la politique. Il développe une théorie analogique des sciences dans laquelle toutes les disciplines sont entrelacées. Il envisage la philosophie comme une entreprise divinatoire, franc-maçonnique et alchimique. Les références de Novalis à l'alchimie et à Empédocle dans l'*Heinrich von Ofterdingen* sont ici examinées. À l'appui de nombreuses preuves textuelles, ma thèse est donc que Novalis élabore une philosophie à caractère ésotérique et qu'il est nécessaire de tenir compte de cette tradition pour comprendre pleinement Novalis. Je soutiens que Novalis n'était pas seulement un philosophe, mais un mage.

Mots-clés : Novalis, magie, ésotérisme, Empédocle, alchimie

[*] MA, PhD candidate, York University, Toronto, 4700 Keele St, North York, ON, M3J 1P3, Canada – ceciliainkol@gmail.com

1. Introduction

This article presents an account of Novalis's engagement in the sphere of magic and esoteric philosophy: his theory of magic; his philosophy of Magical Idealism; his engagement with the esoteric tradition in his philosophizing and poetry; and his esoteric studies. Drawing on this heritage, Novalis develops an original theory of magic as a practice of the will and of faith, connected with love, language, and artistic creation, and pertaining to the senses. Novalis also understands magic as political in nature, as at work in the social sphere. Predicated on the magical notion of analogy, and inspired by esoteric encyclopedic efforts, he develops an analogical theory of the sciences in which all disciplines are intertwined with one another, a notion which he puts to practical effect in his philosophizing and poetry which draw upon an array of fields and subjects, incorporating chemistry, physics, geology, and medicine with esoteric concepts. He develops a conception of philosophy as a form of divination, as true free-masonry, and as an alchemical endeavor. His poetic works are rife with alchemical symbolism and motifs; this article will particularly examine the alchemical nuances underpinning Novalis's poetry-and-prose unfinished masterwork *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*. Novalis's references to and connection with the Presocratic magician-poet-philosopher and proto-alchemist Empedocles will be investigated. Novalis's esoteric studies are examined, and I situate his ideas in the esoteric tradition of the creative imagination. I also render an account of how Novalis's esotericism has been interpreted (or misinterpreted) in scholarship.

Esotericism is a multifarious tradition of philosophy of the unseen, of the invisible. This tradition posits the existence of mysterious forces which supersede the materialist model of reality, imparting to existence a dimension of meaning that exists beyond the material frame. Often it is concerned with the elicitation of practical effects through application of metaphysical understanding. The esoteric tradition is related to hidden meanings, clandestine dimensions, secrets, and mystery, landscapes which particularly intersect for Novalis with the poetic arts and artistic sensibility.

Understanding the role of the esoteric tradition in Novalis's thought offers a point of entry and key to his whole philosophy. It is also a neglected yet crucial facet of his thought, hence that is why this topic is being treated here. Drawing on extensive evidence, I claim that Novalis presents a philosophy which is esoteric in character and that to fully understand Novalis, it is imperative to include the esoteric tradition in one's analysis.

Striving to make philosophy more universal and holistic, seeking to tune into the hidden, unseen dimension of life and to elicit practical effects in his philosophizing, Novalis incorporates esotericism in his thinking. I claim that Novalis was not just a philosopher, but a magus. I will demonstrate this by examining Novalis's philosophy particularly as it relates to his overlooked views on magic. The latter is a multifaceted concept in his work. To better grasp the role and power of magic in his thought involves investigating its connections with countless other fields, including among others music, poetry, the imagination, freemasonry, and alchemy.

In what follows, therefore, I will marshal together a great deal of textual material – much of which is still neglected or underappreciated in the research – to justify and support this reading of Novalis as a philosophical magus.

2. The Philosopher as Poet, Magician

For Novalis, philosophy is the "theory of poetry," the true philosopher a poet. Poetry for Novalis is a magical practice, "the magician is a poet,"[1] he recounts, magic a theory of language.[2]

What is magic for Novalis? Endeavoring to restore magic to a place of honor, Novalis explains magic in several interrelated ways: magic is defined in terms of love, madness, faith, and language. It is also connected with nature and pertains to how one employs the senses.

Novalis understands love as the basis of magic, writing that love "works magically."[3] Novalis gives the examples of the first touch of the hand of one's beloved as an instance of love as magic, the first kiss and so on, saying that the spell and magic of love in such moments is wondrous, eternal, and indissoluble.[4] Novalis understands love as endued with a supramundane, spiritual aspect. He espouses the biblical notion of God as love,[5] writing: "God is love. Love is the highest reality—the primary cause."[6] In *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, he writes that love is the "eternal secret" which rests with Sophia.[7] Love is the beginning and the end, the highest reality and purpose

1 Novalis, "Logological Fragments II" in: *Philosophical Writings*, ed. and trans. Margaret Stoljar (Albany, N.Y.: University of New York Press, 1997), 79.
2 Novalis, "General Draft", *Philosophical Writings*, 125.
3 Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia: Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, ed. and trans. David W. Wood (Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press, 2007), 13.
4 Novalis, "Logological Fragments II", *Philosophical Writings*, 68.
5 John 4:7-21 (New International Version).
6 Novalis, "General Draft", *Philosophical Writings*, 123.
7 Novalis, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* in: *Novalis: His Life, Thought, and Works*, ed. and trans. M.J. Hope (Chicago: A.C. McClurg and Co., 1891), 149.

of world history.[8] Attraction too is a form of magic. Novalis contends that the allure of the object of one's desire is a veritable form of enchantment, relating enchantment to madness:

> All enchantment is an artificially aroused madness. All passion is enchantment—a charming girl is a more real enchantress than we think.[9] … madness and enchantment are very similar.[10]

Schiller has been cited as a source of inspiration for Novalis's understanding of love and attraction as magic. For in Schiller's "Theosophy of Julius," inspired by esotericism and Kabbalism, love is described as an almighty magnet.[11] Novalis's understanding of love, enchantment and magic as madness are Platonic references. According to a letter written by Schlegel upon first meeting Novalis, Schlegel reports Novalis's favorite authors to be Plato and Hemsterhuis.[12] Plato's *Phaedrus* extols the virtues of madness, saying that "the greatest blessings come by way of madness" citing the prophetic achievements of the Delphic prophetesses, priestesses of Dodona and the Sibyl. The *Phaedrus* goes on to recount that in bygone days, madness was held to be a divine gift, and that great poetry is touched by madness, for skill alone does not make a good poet. Plato defines love as divine madness, saying that the highest form of divine madness is when one who attains the full vision of the mysteries, becomes a 'lover' of the eternal.[13]

Novalis defines magic as a way of using the senses, writing:

> Magic is the art of using the world of the senses at will.[14] … The active use of our organs is nothing more than *magical, wonder-working thinking,* or arbitrary use of the physical world—for willing is nothing more than the magical, *powerful* faculty of thought.[15]

Through employing the sense organs willfully, one creates one's experience of the world, one can transform the corporeal world and one fashions one's

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8 Novalis, "General Draft", *Philosophical Writings,* 121; Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 8.

9 Novalis, "Teplitz Fragments", *Philosophical Writings*, 106.

10 Novalis, "Last Fragments", *Philosophical Writings*, 158.

11 See Laure Cahen-Maurel, "Novalis's Magical Idealism: A Threefold Philosophy of the Imagination, Love and Medicine," *Symphilosophie: International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism* 1 (2019): 160-1.

12 O'Brien, Wm. Arctander. *Novalis: Signs of Revolution* (London: Duke University Press, 1995), 276.

13 Plato, "Phaedrus," in *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2009), 244a-253c.

14 Novalis, "Logological Fragments I", *Philosophical Writings*, 60.

15 Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 181.

own subjectivity. The will is the capacity to create magic through directing thought and the senses. More will be said on this in a later section.

Magic is an act of faith, and magic requires faith. Magic's effectiveness is reliant upon personal faith; it is only through faith that magic can achieve its effects in one's subjectivity and in the world. Novalis writes that the conviction of God as present among us enables God to be active among us,[16] and says that faith engendered the world.[17] Given that faith "is the effect of the will on the intelligence," then the "power of faith is the will."[18] Faith is the psychical manifestation of the will.

According to Novalis, Nature is connected with magic and poetry: "Nature is a magic city turned to stone," in which the plants, stones, elements, animals possess infinite individuality and are past historical beings.[19] Here:

> the physical Magician [Magus] knows how to enliven Nature, and as with his *body*, to use it at will.[20]

That is to say, in Novalis's Magical Idealism the philosopher is a magus and "true philosophy" is envisaged as "realistic idealism."[21] The poetic act is idealizing, and poetry is understood as "true idealism," the "self-consciousness of the universe."[22] Thus, to romanticize something is to render it ideal. Whilst the empiricist is bound to passive thinking, the result of conceiving of the external world as given, the magical idealist employs the extra-mechanical power of the imagination[23] to create magic and render something to ideality.[24] Magical idealism employs a "pure" thought, image, or sensation arising from beyond mechanistic laws to create transformations of oneself and the world.[25] In this way, one can "infuse poetry into existence,"[26] enliven and poetize nature.

Magic is furthermore entwined with language, language as the medium of magic. The words of the poet are "magic words,"[27] and the true letter is

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16 Novalis, "Miscellaneous Observations", *Philosophical Writings*, 29.
17 Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 91.
18 *Ibid*., 92.
19 Novalis, "Last Fragments", *Philosophical Writings* 155.
20 Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 47.
21 Novalis, "Thoughts on Philosophy and Physics", *Novalis: His Life, Thought, and Works*, 220.
22 Novalis, "Last Fragments", *Philosophical Writings*, 158.
23 Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 152.
24 Novalis, "On Goethe", *Philosophical Writings*, 107.
25 Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 152.
26 Novalis, "Fugitive Thoughts", *Novalis: His Life, Thought, and Works*, 178.
27 Novalis, "Logological Fragments I", *Philosophical Writings*, 54.

poetic.[28] A single word can be sanctified, poetized[29] and is endued with conjuring power, every word an incantation.[30] Even grammar is philological and philosophical.[31] The act of defining a word is a practice of magic. Novalis refers to a definition as a "generating name," saying that the "real definition is a magic word."[32] Explicitly citing Kabbalistic ideas, Novalis espouses that the sign exists in sympathy with what it signifies.[33] Each person possesses her own particular individual language, her individual language as an expression of her spirit. One's individual language is the key to one's genius,[34] genius as poetic activity;[35] genius is defined as the ability to treat the objects of one's imagination as though they were reality.[36]

The spirit is poetic.[37] Poetry is a mode of apprehension. Poetry offers a more profound understanding of life than propositional knowledge and rational scientific investigations are capable of gleaning. Propositions cannot capture an idea, for the idea supersedes all propositions which can be formulated about it.[38] And the poet is better able to understand nature than the mind of the scientist.[39] In short:

> Poetry is absolute truth. That is the gist of my philosophy. The more poetic, the more truthful.[40]

Novalis describes poetry as the "hero of philosophy," the key to its purpose, and meaning. Philosophy elevates poetry to the status of a principle.[41] Poetry sanctifies the most common activity with the highest sympathy, unifying finite and infinite registers.[42] If the philosopher only creates order, the poet loosens all bonds.[43] Inspired by the esoteric *Ars Combinatoria* tradition which

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28 Novalis, "Miscellaneous Observations", *Philosophical Writings*, 32.
29 Novalis, "Logological Fragments I", *Philosophical Writings*, 54.
30 *Ibid*., 48.
31 Novalis, "Teplitz Fragments", *Philosophical Writings*, 105.
32 Novalis, "Logological Fragments II", *Philosophical Writings*, 80.
33 Novalis, "General Draft", *Philosophical Writings*, 125.
34 Novalis, "Logological Fragments I", *Philosophical Writings*, 65.
35 *Ibid*., 57.
36 Novalis, "Miscellaneous Observations", *Philosophical Writings*, 26.
37 *Ibid*., 45.
38 Novalis, "Logological Fragments II", *Philosophical Writings*, 70.
39 Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 182.
40 Novalis, "Fugitive Thoughts", *Novalis: His Life, Thoughts, and Works*, 178.
41 Novalis, "Logological Fragments I"; Novalis, "Logological Fragments II", *Philosophical Writings*, 54, 79.
42 Novalis, "Logological Fragments I", *Philosophical Writings*, 54.
43 *Ibid*.

includes Leibniz and Ramon Llull,[44] Novalis envisages poetry and philosophy as combinatory operations. Poetry elevates something by means of its generation of a novel combination with the whole.[45] As a poetic endeavor, philosophy is the free, imaginary art of creating wholeness from multiplicity; the highest philosophy is constructed from all philosophies.[46]

Novalis develops a mythology of the poet's role in human culture. In the beginning, the poet and priest were not separate vocations, he writes. Later ages would separate their vocations, but the true poet has always been a priest and vice versa.[47] The first art was hieroglyphic. In this art, language or communication was unified with representation or poetry. Its unity was sundered through naming, leading to language in its "true sense," then to its multifarious forms as fine art, philosophy and poetry.[48] This notion will be further elaborated in a later section.

To summarize this section: Novalis equates poetry, magic, and philosophy. Understanding philosophy and poetry as magical arts endues philosophy and poetry with ontological power to create practical effects in the world and in oneself. Novalis seeks to make the mundane extraordinary; through magic, he bequeaths love with a higher, more mysterious aspect, and by defining magic as a practice of the senses, magic becomes a mode of perception. The magus's quest to enliven nature, to render it to ideality, to its highest poetic truth, enables her to overcome mechanistic laws and all perceived limitations. For Novalis, poetry is the original, primordial, and combinatory art.

3. Language and Poetry as Music and Mathematics

Novalis relates that language was originally much more musical, but has since become prosaic, unmusical, more like noise. "It must become *song* once *again*," he declares.[49] It is the task of the poet to reawaken language in new melodic variations; the poet's magic words are tones and intonations, her poetry musical. "Language is a musical instrument of ideas,"[50] Novalis

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44 Martin Dyck, *Novalis and Mathematics: A Study of Friedrich Hardenberg's Fragments on Mathematics and its Relation to Magic, Music, Religion, Philosophy, Language, and Literature* (Vol 27. University of North Carolina Press, 1960), 28; Novalis had in his library Hindenburg's tomes on combinatorial analysis, part of the tradition of Leibnitz's *Ars Combinatoria* and Ramon Llull's *Ars Magna*.

45 Novalis, "Logological Fragments I", *Philosophical Writings*, 54.

46 Novalis, "Logological Fragments II", *Philosophical Writings*, 77.

47 Novalis, "Miscellaneous Observations", *Philosophical Writings*, 36.

48 Novalis, "Logological Fragments II", *Philosophical Writings*, 70.

49 Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 37.

50 Novalis, "General Draft", *Philosophical Writings*, 129.

writes, language endued with a "musical spirit."[51] History as movement and development is musical, and philosophy is "musical history." When "the philosopher appears as Orpheus" the Whole will "arrange itself together into true sciences."[52] Melody, rhythm, meter, and beat are at work in every art and craft. Life itself and destiny as rhythmical. There is rhythm in all skill, skill as the development of rhythm.[53] The soul itself is acoustic.[54] Music exists in natural elements, in plants, animals, stones, and in how they relate to each other. "Musical relations seem to me to be actually the basic relations of nature," he writes.[55]

In *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, poetry is equated with music and magic in two stories recounted by merchants that in addition to taking inspiration from Herodotus's *Histories*,[56] reference the Pythagorean, Orphic and Empedoclean traditions. Pythagoras and Orpheus were both reputed to be able to tame wild beasts[57] and Pythagoras was known to cure through music, able to direct the virtue of the soul of those who heard his music.[58] The Pythagorean tradition is underpinned by the notion of number as musical, living and spiritual,[59] and Iamblichus relates that the Pythagoreans derived the notion of number as imbued with the essence of Gods from Orphic writers.[60] Pythagoras was reputed to be able to perceive the past and future, and Iamblichus relates that Pythagoras bequeathed to the Greeks the disciplines and researches which would enable them to "perceive the true principles and causes of the universe."[61] And the poet-philosopher and prophet Empedocles claimed to be able to control the weather at will, among other feats.[62]

One of the stories told by merchants in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* follows from the prelude of the legendary bards in a narration of a particular poet's

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51 Novalis, "Monologue", *Philosophical Writings*, 83.
52 Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 77.
53 Novalis, "Teplitz Fragments", *Philosophical Writings*, 109.
54 Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 57.
55 Novalis, "Last Fragments", *Philosophical Writings*, 154.
56 Herodotus, *Histories* (New York: Penguin, 1996) I 23f.
57 Iamblichus, "The Life of Pythagoras" in *The Pythagorean Sourcebook*, ed. David Fideler, trans. Kenneth Guthrie (Michigan: Phanes Press, 1987), 70.
58 Iamblichus, "On the Pythagorean Life" in *The Golden Chain: An Anthology of Pythagorean and Platonic Philosophy*, ed. Algis Uzdavinys, (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2004), 20-22.
59 David Fideler, "Introduction" in *The Pythagorean Sourcebook*, 48.
60 Iamblichus, "The Life of Pythagoras" 94.
61 *Ibid*., 64.
62 Peter Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 224.

adventures who is ejected from a ship at sea, miraculously saved by a dolphin that ferries him to the shore.

> In olden times, all nature was more animated than now. […] We have heard that in past ages there were poets among the Greeks who could charm into life the spirits of the woods, call up gardens in the desert, tame wild beasts, calm the wildest tribes and accustom them to law and order and the enjoyment of the arts of peace, change roaring torrents into placid streams, and excite even the stones to the rhythmic measures of the dance. They were prophets and priests, law-givers and physicians; taught the deepest lore, and could discern the secrets of the future—the secret nature of all things; the virtues and healing power in numbers, herbs, and all creatures. They reduced nature to fixed laws.[63]

The merchants recount the tale of one such poet, rich in jewels, who sought to travel to distant lands. He solicits sailors to ferry him, but their covetousness is aroused by his treasures, though he warns them against taking his treasures. But his warning is not heeded. They plot to throw him overboard and steal his treasures. The poet makes a request to sing a swan song prior to being thrown overboard; the sailors agree to it, stopping their ears so that they would not succumb to his song. But nature would respond to the poet's song. The waves chimed his song, the sun and stars arose in the sky, thousands of fishes leaping in the green waters surrounding the ship. With his wonder-working flute in hand, the poet leaps into the waters, saved by a graceful dolphin who ferries him to shore, and later returns his treasures, whilst the sailors meet their demise.[64]

Another story recounted by the merchants tells of a king's daughter, herself an embodiment of poetry, who falls in love with a commoner, the son of a naturalist. Her beloved teaches her the secrets of nature and "how the world had been created by a wondrous action of sympathy, and how the stars joined together in harmonious motion."[65] Given that the king would not approve of their union, they hide in a subterranean dwelling as she gives birth to a child. They return to the King's palace one year later as the poet-magician enacts a poetic ritual to gain the approval of the king and the public. With lute in hand, he sings the "creation of the world, the beginning of the stars, plants, animals, and men, of the long-forgotten days when love and poetry were lords of all." Then he describes

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63 Novalis, "Heinrich von Ofterdingen," 67.
64 *Ibid*., 67-68.
65 *Ibid*., 76.

> the advent of hate and cruelty, their ceaseless strife with love; ending in the triumph of love over all, the end of sorrow, the return of the Golden Age, and the restoration of nature to the never-ending youth and beauty.[66]

The King's eagle carries the king's diadem to the poet-singer; the poet gives it to his child. The assembly cheers in approval, and the king embraces the couple, holding his grandchild aloft in the air. Then we are told that this "happy land" has evanesced, old legends only recounting that Atlantis has been "swallowed by the sea."[67]

Herodotus's *Histories* recounts anecdotes of runaway princesses (featured in the second tale told by the merchants), preceding a narrative of the life of Solon, which includes his visit to Egypt. Herodotus's *Histories* also recounts the narrative of the bard Arion, inventor of the dithyramb, who is threatened by sailors who want to steal his money, but he is saved by a dolphin after singing a famous Apollonian hymn. Interpreting Arion as an Orpheus-like figure, Novalis attributes Arion's dolphin rescue as result of his dominion over nature through his music. Herodotus's sailors who force the poet overboard face justice when they return to the port safely, but in Novalis's rendition they are shipwrecked. Both versions recount the bard's fortuitous escape on the back of a dolphin.[68] Iamblichus recounts a similar story about Pythagoras; after learning from the Phoenicians, Pythagoras reputedly went to Egypt on a boat of sailors who originally wanted to sell him into slavery, but they were charmed by him instead.[69]

In another reference to the Pythagorean tradition which understood mathematics as creative, musical, living, and a magical expression of the divine, Novalis connects magic and music with mathematics. He writes:

> All enjoyment is music conjoined with mathematics. Mathematics is the highest form of life.[70]

Mundane mathematics refers only to law. "Genuine mathematics is the true element of the magician."[71] Novalis differentiates between arithmetician and the mathematician, saying that an arithmetician does not necessarily understand mathematics and vice versa. Mathematics is the "life of the

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66 *Ibid*., 79.
67 *Ibid*., 81-83.
68 Frederick Hiebel, *Novalis: German Poet—European Thinker—Christian Mystic* (University of North Carolina Press, 1954), 103.
69 Iamblichus, "On the Pythagorean Life," 17-18.
70 Novalis, "Thoughts on Philosophy and Physics," 229.
71 *Ibid*.

gods," religion is "pure mathematics," and all spiritual messengers are mathematicians.[72]

To conclude this section, music and mathematics are crucial for Novalis's philosophy because he identifies poetry, language, history, and philosophy as musical in constitution. By relating that true science will only be arrived at once the philosopher appears as Orpheus, Novalis is iterating a musical theory of knowledge, understanding knowledge as fundamentally musical. The Pythagorean and Orphic traditions relay accounts wherein Pythagoras and Orpheus are able to perform magic through music, and this is an understanding Novalis harnesses—music as a form of magic. Music is also related to mathematics in the Pythagorean tradition, understanding mathematics as a spiritual endeavor, an understanding Novalis likewise puts to effect in his philosophizing.

4. Poetry as Artistic Creation, Magician as Artist

> Poetry is creation. All poems must have a living individuality.[73]
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> A magician is an artist of madness.[74]
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> The spirit is the artist.[75]
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> To become a human being is an art.[76]

Poetry and magic are practices of artistic creation connected with the generative power underlying one's subjectivity. The artist's capacity to create music or painting is a form of magic. The artist doesn't really need the chisel to paint; she can use anything as a magic wand. Art and music are just mediums in the broader category of magic; they are ways of practicing magic.[77] Knowledge makes requisite expression, materialization, externalization.[78] I evince my understanding through creation and transmutation of my thoughts into things, or vice versa. Novalis writes: "if you cannot make your thoughts into external things, then make external things into thoughts."[79]

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72 *Ibid*.
73 Novalis, "Fugitive Thoughts," 178.
74 Novalis, "Last Fragments", *Philosophical Writings*, 158.
75 Novalis, "General Draft", *Philosophical Writings*, 121.
76 Novalis, "Logological Fragments I", *Philosophical Writings*, 65.
77 *Ibid*., 63.
78 *Ibid*., 79.
79 Novalis, "General Draft", *Philosophical Writings*, 126.

Every literary work comprises a living individual, a novel individual combination. The artist creates life: "the artist has vivified the germ of self-formative life in his sense organs."[80] In addition to creating living artistic works, the artist fashions her own subjectivity. The self is constructed, an artistic construction:

> The philosopher approaches this construction by creating artificial elements […] Self is not a product of nature […] but an artistic one—an art—a work of art.[81]

The veritable artist can create herself however she pleases, a self-creation. She fashions her own subjectivity. "The true artist can make himself anything that he likes."[82] "The artist turns himself into everything he sees and wants to be."[83] The greatest magician would be able to enchant herself such that her enchantments would seem to her as autonomous phenomena engendered by others. Perhaps such is at work with us, Novalis muses.[84]

The power of the artist to create is predicated on the creative power of her subjectivity, a notion he derives from Fichte. Novalis conceived he had found in Fichte's conception of the imagination the key unlocking a forgotten under-standing he found traces of in Boehme and Paracelsus, though the Kantian signature was too deeply inscribed in Fichte for Novalis to conceive of him as a veritable continuator of Boehme.[85] Fichte made the "transcendental" poesy possible in the way he revealed the ground of all activity in the systematic way that the "Ich" ('I') projects itself. Novalis envisions his "logology" as the new science that expands Fichte's philosophy.[86]

Whereas the scholar and craftsman are mechanical in their combination of disparate forces, the philosopher and artist organically "combine freely by means of a pure idea and separate according to a free idea."[87] The artist as "completely transcendental," she "stands on the human being as a statue does on a pedestal."[88] Only the artist is privy to the meaning of life; she perceives hidden meanings and is able to discern what is important among a multiplicity of appearances:

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80 Novalis, "Logological Fragments II", *Philosophical Writings*, 72.
81 *Ibid*., 123.
82 Novalis, "Fugitive Thoughts," 178.
83 Novalis, "Logological Fragments I", *Philosophical Writings*, 56.
84 Novalis, "Teplitz Fragments", *Philosophical Writings*, 109.
85 Antoine Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition* (Albany: University of New York Press, 2000), 117.
86 O'Brien, *Signs of Revolution*, 138.
87 Novalis, "Logological Fragments II", *Philosophical Writings*, 78.
88 Novalis, "Logological Fragments I", *Philosophical Writings*, 55.

> Only an artist can divine the meaning of life.[89]

> The real observer is an artist; he guesses at hidden meanings, and perceives among many appearances which are the truly important.[90]

5. Magic as Political

> One word of command moves armies—the word liberty—nations.[91]

Novalis envisions that his new poesy and logology will revolutionize society and transform knowledge. Art offers an oblique presentation of the Absolute and propels the will of the individual upon reality as an effect. Though it needs to work "in accordance with an ideal," art has the capacity to exercise practical power.[92] Crystalized in February 1800, Novalis envisioned *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* as a political allegory. Hardenberg refers to it as "his political novel" meant to evince "the transition from the finite to the infinite."[93]

Heinrich von Ofterdingen expands his earlier thinking to show how a post-Fichtean poetics imparts a politics with a "magical" or "transcendent" character self-consciously employing poetic ritual to create harmonious political institutions and extol poesy as an ideal. In *Heinrich*'s Atlantis story about the commoner who obtains the approval of the King and the assembly through his musical, poetic performance, the evidence for magic exists in its shared effects—the poet does not just imagine but obtains public approval through a poetic ritual that fashions a new reality.[94] There is a message in it concerning the poet's rightful position in society, poetry as legitimate source of political power. Atlantis is described as a poetical kingdom; we are told that poetry was a great preoccupation of the king, his daughter the embodiment of the spirit of poetry itself, her beloved a poet of philosophical learning, the offspring of the princess and her beloved bequeathed the king's crown. In *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, Novalis writes that what makes the king in this poetical kingdom is not his crown or sceptre but

> the feeling of complete satisfaction, the plenitude of earthly joy, the sensation of superabundant possessions.[95]

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89 *Ibid*., 66.
90 Novalis, "Thoughts on Philosophy and Physics," 235.
91 *Ibid*., 23.
92 O'Brien, *Signs of Revolution*, 116.
93 *Ibid*., 274.
94 *Ibid*., 303.
95 Novalis, "Heinrich von Ofterdingen," 78.

6. Poetry and Philosophy as Connected with All Other Sciences Through Analogy

> Every science will be poesy—after it has become philosophy.[96]

> All analogy is symbolical.[97]

August Coelestin Just, the friend and supervisor of Novalis, writes in his biography of the latter:

> His keenest wish was to bring back all art and science to first principles, and raise them to the dignity of true science, uniting them all in one complete whole. According to his conviction, there was a perfect harmony and union between them. With this object, he excluded no subject from his study.[98]

Connected on the one hand with Novalis's notion of the first art as hieroglyphic, a single art which sundered into disparate arts and disciplines, and inspired on the other by the encyclopedic endeavors of Leibniz's *scientia generalis* and Descartes's *mathesis universalis* which sought to encompasses all knowledge,[99] Novalis espouses that all sciences exist as mutually interwoven with another.[100] All cognition and knowledge can be reduced to comparisons and resemblances.[101] Every separate art and science is predicated on only partial harmonies.[102] The mutual interweaving of all sciences stipulates that philosophy can never be completed. Philosophy will only be truly understood once all other sciences achieve perfection.[103]

All sciences are connected through the magical art of analogy, how all ideas are interwoven with one another: "All ideas are related: analogy means *air de famille*." Given that the human exists in analogical relationship with the universe, all knowledge is predicated on the self, on self-knowledge:

> The most wonderful and eternal phenomenon is oneself. Man is the greatest of mysteries. […] Philosophy, science, and literature all seek to solve the riddle.[104]

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96 Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 125.
97 Novalis, "Thoughts on Philosophy and Physics," 226.
98 August Just, "Life of Novalis," 29.
99 Dyck, *Novalis and Mathematics*, 22.
100 Novalis, "Thoughts on Philosophy and Physics," 221.
101 Novalis, "Logological Fragments I", *Philosophical Writings*, 60.
102 *Ibid*., 61.
103 Novalis, "Thoughts on Philosophy and Physics," 221.
104 Novalis, "Fugitive Thoughts," 187.

Analogy is connected with the faculty of wit. Novalis defines wit as the "principle of affinities" and the "menstruum universal."[105] Wit resides at the juncture between imagination and judgment. In its spiritual aspect, Novalis says that there is a form of wit which "is only a magical play of colors in higher spheres."[106]

For Novalis, the original unity of all disciplines coincides with a lost primordial meaning. The Romantic agent gleans the original meaning by making it new through poetization. "The world must be made Romantic," for one to

> find the original meaning again. To make Romantic is nothing but a qualitative raising to a higher power. […] By endowing the commonplace with higher meaning, the ordinary with mysterious respect, the known with the dignity of the unknown, the finite with the appearance of the infinite, I am making it Romantic.[107]

There is an original ancient truth; truth is unchanging, but novelty exists in terms of how the ancient truth is expressed anew, and this is the task of the poet.

> All truth is ancient. The stimulus of novelty lies only in variety of expression. The more contrast in its forms, the greater the pleasure of recognition.[108]

The consequences we can draw from this for Novalis's philosophy are: i) Novalis extols poetry as universal science that combines all disciplines, including magic. This is Novalis's theory of everything. ii) Novalis extols knowledge as fundamentally creative yet eternally unchanging. He articulates the existence of a primordial truth which is eternal, but knowledge is the creative, poetic reconstruction of the eternal. This understanding he predicates upon a magical or poetical history of an original unity which was sundered.

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105 Novalis, "Miscellaneous Observations", *Philosophical Writings*, 32.
106 *Ibid*., 28.
107 Novalis, "Logological Fragments I", *Philosophical Writings*, 60.
108 Novalis, "Monologue", *Philosophical Writings*, 85.

7. Philosophy as Divination, Connected with Prophecy and Memory

> Nothing is more poetic than memory and premonition, or the conception of the future.[109]
>
> The antiquities are at once products of the future and of times past.[110]
>
> Philosophy is antihistorical from the ground up. It moves from the world of the future and the necessary to the real. It is the study of the general sense of divination. It explains the past from the future, whereas in history the contrary is the case.[111]

The veritable poet is all-knowing.[112] She is a prophet of the future, who unites past and future within herself. Novalis cites memory and premonition of the future as what is most poetic. In the mundane everyday, they are joined in limited form. But a spiritual present binds them together, their mixture the poet's element.[113] The worlds of eternity, the past and future, exist within oneself.[114] Philosophy as ahistorical, moving from future world to the necessary and real, comprises a study of divination, explaining the past from the standpoint of the future.[115] Novalis identifies analysis in a general sense with divination, divination as the "art of discovery reduced to rules."[116] Imagination perceives the future world "in a relation of metempsychosis to ourselves."[117] Originating in the ancient world, divination lies in the magical realm.

8. Philosophy as Alchemy, True Freemasonry

Connected with the notion of philosophy as divinatory practice, Novalis writes that the philosopher's stone is the "fullness of the future" "which is everywhere and nowhere, everything and nothing."[118] He relates the task of philosophy to the endeavor of attaining the philosopher's stone; it is concerned with ideal rather than material attainment.

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[109] Novalis, "Miscellaneous Observations", *Philosophical Writings*, 45.
[110] Novalis, "General Draft", *Philosophical Writings*, 121.
[111] *Ibid*., 136.
[112] Novalis, "Logological Fragments II", *Philosophical Writings*, 80.
[113] Novalis, "Miscellaneous Observations", *Philosophical Writings*, 45.
[114] *Ibid*., 25.
[115] Novalis, "General Draft", *Philosophical Writings*, 136.
[116] Novalis, "Thoughts on Philosophy and Physics," 218.
[117] Novalis, "Miscellaneous Observations", *Philosophical Writings*, 25.
[118] Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 177.

> There is no philosophy *in concreto*. Philosophy, like the philosopher's stone—the squaring of the circle etc. – is simply a necessary task of the scientist—the *ideal of science* in general.[119]

But philosophy can offer one "God, freedom and immortality."[120] Following the esoteric and Neoplatonic[121] maxim that the human can attain to divinity, Novalis espouses that every person who "lives from God and through God, will himself become God."[122] He writes that God can only be known by a God,[123] and that God exists in all things. Novalis writes: "He who seeks God will find Him everywhere."[124]

Novalis envisions a 'true freemasonry' binding all veritable thinkers in a spiritual hierarchy:

> The basis of all eternal attachment is an absolute tendency in all directions. On this rests the power of the hierarchy, of true freemasonry, and the invisible bond of true thinkers—herein lies the possibility of a universal republic.[125]

In his mundane life, Novalis was a mining engineer, a connection which enlivened his imagination for its alchemical resonances, resonances which would find poetic expression in his creative life through *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*. He relates the craft of mining to the alchemical endeavor, saying that "there is no craft which makes men nobler and happier, which awakens greater faith in heavenly wisdom and forethought."[126] The miner is not selfish in her endeavors to glean the metallic powers: "It is enough for him that he knows the hiding-places of the metallic powers, and can bring them forth to light; but their brilliancy does not raise thoughts of covetousness in his pure heart."[127] The miner does not seek attainment of precious metals, she only desires knowledge, alongside loving union and peace: "How patiently does the miner work on in the deep abyss, away from the tumult of the world, desiring only knowledge, and loving union and peace."[128] The miner "breaks

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[119] *Ibid*., 116.
[120] *Ibid*., 62.
[121] Algis Uzdavinys, "Neoplatonic Hermeneutics and the Way to God," in *The Golden Chain: An Anthology of Pythagorean and Platonic Philosophy*, ed. Algis Uzdavinys (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2004), 112.
[122] Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 47.
[123] *Ibid*., 174.
[124] Novalis, "Fugitive Thoughts," 197.
[125] Novalis, "Miscellaneous Observations", *Philosophical Writings*, 36.
[126] Novalis, "Heinrich von Ofterdingen," 95.
[127] *Ibid*., 95.
[128] *Ibid*., 96.

down the intervening obstacles till he reaches the true golden strata. Thus the miner is exposed to all the caprices of fortune, though he retains the belief that only through diligence and perseverance can he overcome them, and obtain the bravely guarded treasure."[129] Referencing the Pythagorean connection between magic and music, the miner has a special musical sensibility: "song and the zither are part of a miner's life. No class of men are more susceptible to melody."[130]

Heinrich von Ofterdingen opens with the titular character dreaming of Novalis's famous image of the blue flower, its petals opening to reveal "a lovely tender face."[131] Novalis's famous emblem of the blue flower has an alchemical origin. A 1582 Alchemical Illustration from Basle credited to H. Reussner depicts three flowers growing out of the "Mercurial tail-eater" Ouroboros. The blue center rose of the depicted is referred to as the "flower of wisdom."[132]

9. The Alchemical Process in Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*

Klingsohr in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* recounts an alchemical fairy tale of the marriage of Fable and Eros. The plot concerns the attempted usurpation of Eros by the Scribe and the renewal of the kingdom, finally brought to fruition by princess Freya's marriage to Eros. Eros departs from the family to undertake a series of adventures and the scribe schemes the mother's death inside a cave where the three Fates dwell. The villainous Scribe and cohorts were in midst of immolating the primal mother on a great pyre, its flames devouring the sun. The Sun falls into sea as black dross, startling the scribe and cohorts.

I interpret this as a reference to the first alchemical stage of purification, the nigredo or black sun. I will now outline in more detail various alchemical stages to be found in this fairy tale.

The first stage of the black sun comprises "a dark material fire" that distinguishes spirit and soul from what has been putrefied.[133] The sisterly trio of the Fates force Fable to spin dresses from tarantula webs. Fable is instructed to soak thread in spider juice so it won't break and interweave flowers which have grown in fire; otherwise, the sisters will ensure Fable's death. Fable's singing ensures the spiders spin the dresses.[134] Then Fable

[129] *Ibid*., 97.
[130] *Ibid*., 97.
[131] *Ibid*., 55.
[132] Alexander Roob. *Alchemy and Mysticism* (Köln: Taschen, 2020), 342.
[133] *Ibid*., 199.
[134] Novalis, "Heinrich von Ofterdingen," 148.

goes to Arcturus and asks the king for fire flowers. The king calls the gardener named Zinc and requests from him flowers. The gardener brings a vessel full of fire and sows shining seeds therein. Flowers spring up, which Fable brings to the spiders, who fasten the flowers to the dresses.[135] The sisters approve of the dresses and deceitfully promise Fable long life and rewards in return.

The second alchemical stage proceeding from the nigredo is the albedo, a white stage of further purification. Zinc is a metal with special alchemical significance; it is reputed that alchemists would burn zinc to produce a wooly precipitate referred to as 'philosopher's wool.' I interpret Fable's spinning of the dresses in this light. With the ends of the threads still in the dresses, the spiders eat the sisterly trio of the Fates. Fable looks from a cleft in a rock and sees Perseus with a great shield of iron. The shears fly to the iron shield and Fable asks him to use them to trim the wings of Eros, and then to immortalize the sisters upon his shield and finish the great work. Fable says:

> The flax is spun. The dead have lost their power. The living will rule and use all things. The hidden will be manifested, and the seen hidden. The curtain is about to rise on a new scene. Yet once more I crave a boon, then I will sit and spin to all eternity.[136]

Fable goes with Turmaline, the gardener, and Gold to gather the ashes of her mother. They traverse until they come to an immobile old giant. Gold places a coin in his mouth. Fable touches his eyes and pours out a vessel upon his forehead. As the water trickles down his face, his face becomes animated. Fable tells the old giant: "The earth is again light," the "old days are returning," the garden of the Hesperides "will soon bloom again, and perfume the air with its golden fruit."[137]

Fable hands the urn containing the ashes to Sophia, who embraces her tenderly. Sophia tells Fable:

> Dearest child, your zeal and faith have won you a place amid the eternal stars. You have chosen the undying potion, the Phoenix is yours. You will be the soul of our life. Now wake up the bridegroom.[138]

Fable rejoices and calls her companions Gold and Zinc. Gold melts a coin, impelling a glittering stream. Zinc winds a chain around Ginnistan's neck. The chain touches the flood, her bridegroom awakens, who draws his bride to his bosom. The metal turns into a clear and liquid mirror, a mirror which

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135 *Ibid.*, 150.
136 *Ibid.*, 151.
137 *Ibid*., 152.
138 *Ibid*., 153.

reflects things truly, destroying all hurtful illusions. She takes the urn, shakes the ashes into a bowl upon the altar. Sophia hands the bowl to Eros, and all imbibed from it, the mother's presence felt among them. Sophia declares:

> The great secret is now revealed, but remains unfathomable. The new world rises from pain, and eternity is revealed to tears. The heavenly mother lives in each of her children. Do you not feel the new life within you?[139]

Gold is the end of the alchemical endeavor, an emblem of the alchemist's refined soul. The primal mother is revivified in spirit through the alchemical process, the earth renewed, its hero Fable, with her companions Gold and Zinc, impar-ting that Fable's poetic imagination is the key to alchemical transmutation and renewal.

Novalis offers some insight into why tourmaline would be involved in an alchemical process from his scientific studies in Freiburg; he writes: "Tourmaline is at once constantly magnetic and constantly electric—it possesses the *greatest irritability* against both forces."[140] Tourmaline is a pyroelectric semi-precious mineral, referred to as the "electric" crystal. The term *pyro* derives from the Greek word which means 'fire' for the effect which is elicited when tourmaline is heated. Tourmaline generates electric charges when heated.[141] The notion of the world as again light can be viewed as an alchemical transmutation in a philosophical fragment in which Novalis writes that metaphysics and astronomy comprise a single science: "The sun is to astronomy what God is to metaphysics. Freedom and immortality are like light and heat."[142] The sun as an emblem of God is a Platonic[143] and alchemical notion, as seen in the works of Neoplatonic esotericist Robert Fludd[144] and in alchemist Georg von Welling's *Opus-Mago-Cabbalisticum*.[145]

The mother who the scribe views as his enemy is chaos; in early Greek myth, chaos is the mother of eros. Chaos must be transmuted through flame. In his philosophical writings, Novalis articulates the flame as a symbol of the

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[139] *Ibid*., 154.

[140] Novalis, "Freiberg Natural Scientific Studies (1798/99)" in *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 199.

[141] Yuriy M. Poplavko. *Electronic Materials: Principles and Applied Science* (Amsterdam: Elsevier Science, 2018), 545.

[142] Novalis, "General Draft," 127.

[143] Algis Uzdavinys, "Plato's Dialogues and Letters," in *The Golden Chain: An Anthology of Pythagorean and Platonic Philosophy*, ed. Algis Uzdavinys, (Bloomington: World Wisdom, 2004), 68.

[144] William Huffman, *Robert Fludd and the End of the Renaissance* (London: Routledge, 1988), 108.

[145] Gray, *Goethe the Alchemist*, 19.

genesis of life and self-transcension, and in this way a symbol of philosophy philosophisizing itself, in which it is consumed and renewed.[146] In another instance Novalis articulates fire as a symbol of one's being and of religious feeling.[147] Hiebel evinces Novalis's symbolism of the flame as a symbol of Christ. Understanding the flame as symbol of Christ, imbibing from a chalice containing the mother's ashes becomes a communion ceremony.[148] Sophia makes the proclamation that tears shall be ashes, new world birthed. Connected with the image of the flame is the Phoenix which rises from the ashes. The Phoenix is an ancient alchemical emblem symbolizing the resurrection of Christ. In the alchemical milieu, the Phoenix was equated with the Lapis or philosopher's stone, characterizing the renewal of life. Hence why Sophia tells Fable: "Yours is the Phoenix." Hiebel writes:

> And Fable perches on the wings of the Phoenix, hovering above the throne that has finally become transformed into a marriage bed. The meaning of this transformation is what the alchemists termed the 'chymical marriage.' Fable under the influence of the Scribe is but the didactic prosody of rationalism. But Fable on the pinions of the Phoenix becomes the priestess of Christ.[149]

10. The Philosopher's Stone

Another alchemical image meriting mention in Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* is the princess's red stone in the Atlantean fairy tale told by the merchants. In it, Novalis describes a mysterious red carbuncle that can be interpreted as a poetic emblem of the alchemists' philosopher's stone. After meeting the princess for the first time, the son of the naturalist finds a large, dark red "carbuncle" in the forest, one side brilliant and sparkling, the other inscribed with mysterious ciphers. It was the costly carbuncle of the princess, gifted to her by her mother, a talisman of protection which ensured she could not fall into another's power against her will.[150] Hiebel calls the princess's stone "a symbol of the heart."[151] In my interpretation, Novalis's description of it suggests that the talisman can be interpreted as an image of the philosopher's stone.

The philosopher's stone is most frequently envisioned in the alchemical imagination as red or white, although it has been described as black powder;

[146] Novalis, "General Draft," 64.
[147] Novalis, "Teplitz Fragments," 108.
[148] Hiebel, *Novalis*, 65.
[149] *Ibid*., 66.
[150] Novalis, "Heinrich von Ofterdingen," 74-75.
[151] Hiebel, *Novalis*, 104.

sometimes it is even yellow, blue, or green. Matching up with Novalis's description, Raymond Llull refers to the philosopher's stone as "carbunculus," and Paracelsus characterizes it as red, comprised of a solid body akin to a ruby, yet flexible and transparent. Beregard describes it as the color of wild poppy, its smell akin to heated sea salt.[152] The 17th century alchemist Starkey envisions the philosopher's stone as "sparkling red."[153] Emma Jung writes that according to tradition, the philosopher's stone is both priceless and exceedingly common, discarded by others, its cheapness can be interpreted to mean that the philosopher's stone indwells all as a seed and a potential.[154] Other names for the philosopher's stone include: the Essence, Stone of the Wise, Magnum Opus, Quintessence, Universal Essence. 13th century writer Wolfram von Eschenbach equates the philosopher's stone with the holy grail, saying that its power enables the phoenix to withstand fire and rise again rejuvenated from ashes.[155] The holy grail and the philosopher's stone are also connected with mysterious writings and with Christ. Emma Jung writes that the holy grail is reputed to articulate the will of God through writing which appears upon it.[156] For the Christian alchemist, the philosopher's stone is equated with Christ, as seen in the works of Fludd and Khunrath.[157] Gottfried Arnold describes Christ as "the heavenly lovingness of the ruby or carbuncle-stone."[158] Carl Jung has evinced the philosopher's stone as a symbol of the inner spiritual human, a symbol of God encrypted in nature, analogous to Christ as the divine having assumed a human form and endured suffering.[159] The philosopher's stone as the stone of the heart fits well with Novalis's understanding: "The heart is the key to the world and to life," he writes, equating Christ with the heart.[160]

The philosopher's stone true name, writes alchemist Basil Valentine, is All in All. In this way, the Stone was conceived as God immanent in creation, whilst simultaneously transcending it; this was a way for the Christian alchemist to refer to Christ.[161] In *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, Novalis can be

[152] C. J. S. Thompson, *Lure and Romance of Alchemy* (London: George G. Harrap, 1932), 71.
[153] Ronald Gray, *Goethe the Alchemist*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2010), 17.
[154] Emma Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz, *The Grail Legend*, trans. Andrea Dykes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 157.
[155] Jung and von Franz, *The Grail Legend*, 152.
[156] *Ibid*., 155.
[157] Gray, *Goethe the Alchemist*, 19.
[158] *Ibid*., 20.
[159] *Ibid*., 157.
[160] Novalis, "Teplitz Fragments," 107.
[161] Gray, *Goethe the Alchemist*, 20.

interpreted as referencing the philosopher's stone as all that lives in all and the heart in a single verse:

> Ein jeder lebt in Allen,
> Und All' in jedem auch.
> Ein Herz wird in euch wallen,
> Von einem Lebenshauch.[162]
>
> Each will in all be dwelling,
> And all in each one too;
> One heart in you be swelling,
> One breath the whole imbue.[163]

Fitting with *Heinrich von Ofterdingen's* depiction of the gardener accompanying Turmaline and Gold on an alchemical quest to make the world again light, the philosopher's stone was also conceived by the alchemists as a seed. The alchemists conceived the philosopher's stone to exist in embryonic form within all things as a central point, spark or seed that could be made to grow until it fully encompassed the subject. All natural objects, not just humans and living beings, were conceived to possess this central point or seed, which if nurtured, could engender the highest manifestation of the object or subject. To develop the seed of gold that resides within oneself, it is requisite that the alchemist purify her base desires, transmute them to achieve harmony.[164] Paracelsus referred to this seed as "a small spark of the eternal invisible fire."[165] The seed as the central node is articulated by Gottfried Arnold: "in general, the Center is the innermost ground of every thing, for which reason there are various Centra. In man, the Center is God Himself, or the faded image of God…" Georg von Welling likewise writes that eternal joy can be found in "the center of peace, that is, in God" and refers to "the tincture which is Christ Jesus himself, the beginning and the end, the center of the revealed divine eternity." Louvigni refers to Christ as the "centre of peace."[166] Novalis invokes the alchemical notion of the central point in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*'s famous poetic interlude Astralis:

> Wollust ist meines Daseins Zeugungskraft,
> Ich bin der Mittelpunkt, der heilge Quell,
> Aus welchem jede Sehnsucht stürmisch fließt,

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[162] Novalis, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen: Ein Roman* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1987), 136.
[163] Novalis, *Henry von Ofterdingen*, translated by Palmer Hilty (New York: Frederick Unger Publishing Co., 1964), 134.
[164] Gray, *Goethe the Alchemist*, 25.
[165] Quoted in *Goethe the Alchemist*, 26.
[166] Quoted in *Goethe the Alchemist*, 26.

> Wohin sich jede Sehnsucht, mannigfach
> Gebrochen, wieder still zusammen zieht.[167]
>
> Sweet lust is of my life the fountainhead,
> I am the midpoint and the holy spring,
> Whence every stormy longing dashes forth,
> And whither every longing, being broken,
> Returns again to restful quietude.[168]

In addition to elucidating alchemical valences in Novalis's work, this section has explicated that Novalis interprets the task of philosophy as the attainment of the philosopher's stone, thereby equating philosophy with the endeavor of alchemy. He understands the philosopher's stone as the heart and as Christ.

11. The Magic of Empedocles

The final sections of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* authored just prior to Novalis's death can be interpreted as referencing Empedocles. In an analogy to Novalis's own life, Heinrich's love Mathilda has died, but his journey continuing onward, he meets a pilgrim, a girl named Cyane. Cyane leads him to the physician Sylvester, who relates to Heinrich that he was raised near Mount Etna, where his father, an astrologer and healer, attracted many visitors from far off lands.[169] I interpret these as a litany of references to Empedocles. From study of his work, one gleans that Novalis's poetic references are not frivolous, but are endued with hidden meaning.

Cyane's name is redolent of the mystical blue flower in which he perceived Mathilda's face, its meaning dark blue. Her name has another, more mytho-logical connotation: in Greek myth, Kyane is a naiad who witnesses Hades's abduction of Persephone to the underworld, and the spring wherein Persephone was said to be abducted.[170] Kyane is also connected with the cultic mysteries of Empedocles, a doublet of Persephone as her own story mirrors that of Persephone.[171] Persephone, under the moniker Nestis, is one of Empedocles' four elements conceived as divinities; her element is water. The name Sylvester too has a meaning which can be interpreted to hint at Empedocles; the name Sylvester means 'wooded' or 'wild.' Empedocles referred to the four elements as roots,[172] and his

[167] Novalis, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen: Ein Roman*, 155.
[168] Novalis, *Henry von Ofterdingen*, translated by Palmer Hilty, 151.
[169] Novalis, "Heinrich von Ofterdingen," 169.
[170] Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy*, 97.
[171] *Ibid*., 353.
[172] *Ibid*., 6.

philosophy is riddled with metaphors related to trees and wood. The ideas of the Presocratic philosopher Empedocles were appropriated by alchemists; in a sense he can be viewed as the father or forerunner of alchemy.[173] Empedocles was a poet, prophet, magician, healer, and philosopher who claimed to possess supernatural powers. He maintained that he was able to retrieve dead souls from Hades and professed to possess knowledge of 'pharmaka,' meaning spells or remedies, which will endow immortality.[174] Legend has it that Empedocles sought to prove his immortality in the fiery lava of Mount Etna, its landscape inextricably bound up with him.

As a poet-philosopher and magical practitioner with an interest in medicine, Novalis surely would have felt great kinship with Empedocles, whilst Empedocles's claim to be able to retrieve souls from Hades, the realm of the dead, would have appealed to Novalis on a personal level. Novalis's personal mythology is strongly reflected in his creative work as a way of processing and granting a higher meaning to his personal tragedies, poetry as a modality of healing. Further resonances with Empedocles can be gleaned in his philosophical writings. Empedocles refers to a Golden Age prior to human incarnation ruled by the force of Love;[175] he also conceives that the force of Love will reign again in the future, notions which coalesce with Novalis's notion of an original paradisiacal unity which sundered, but which will be achieved again in futurity.

12. Novalis's Alchemical and Esoteric Studies

Novalis's father insisted that that poet-lawyer Novalis attend Freiberg's famous mining academy, where he studied under Johann Wilhelm Ritter's (1776-1810) tutelage. Ritter would teach him electrical physiology and alchemy.[176]

The works of alchemist-philosopher Jakob Boehme were popular among the German Romantics, first referenced by members of the Jena circle in 1798 in a letter from Schlegel to Novalis, Schlegel mentioning that Ludwig Tieck has undertaken a study of Boehme. Tieck introduced Novalis to Boehme, Novalis commemorating the introduction with a poem where he refers to Tieck as "herald of the morning Glow." August Just writes in his biography of Novalis that following his fiancée Sophie's death, he "became

[173] *Ibid*., 326.
[174] *Ibid*., 222.
[175] Robin Waterfield, ed., "Empedocles of Arcragas, in *The First Philosophers: The Presocratics and the Sophists*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 153.
[176] Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life*, 34-5.

devoted to the writings of Lavater and Zinzendorf, various book of Roman Catholic devotion, and even Jacob Boehme's works." He also writes that Novalis found in Boehme's works "the highest poetry." It is known that Novalis borrowed Boehme's works from the Weimar library in August 1799. Novalis was immersed in a study of Boehme in the winter of 1799-1800. However, in his Pietist upbringing,[177] he would have already encountered Boehme's Christocentric vision and Sophianic mysticism; the Pietist branch founded by Zinzendorf has been cited as especially occult-minded.[178] Novalis extols Boehme as a Romantic poet-prophet and in mythical form through his poetic imagination; Boehme appears as a character in his poem *An Tieck*. Novalis saw Boehme as a prototype and precursor of his own Romantic endeavor as a poet-philosopher.[179]

Hans-Joachim Mähl's 1963 article "Novalis und Plotin" demonstrates the influence of Neoplatonism on Novalis. In addition to his Pietist upbringing, Novalis's familiarity with ancient and early Neoplatonism laid the groundwork for his later reception of Boehme. Mähl writes that Novalis became familiarized with Neoplatonism as early as mid 1798.[180] Novalis read Sprengel in the fall of 1798, through which he acquired knowledge of emanation theories deriving from ancient Persia, the Kabbalah, and Paracelsus. His notes from this study evince that he particularly retained the notions of a divine origin of language, divine emanation and of all things as joined through mysterious sympathies as an outcome of divine emanation. Novalis extracted lengthy excerpts from this study pertaining to Paracelsus concerning Paracelsus's relation to ancient emanation theories, his theory of signatures, and his conception of cosmic sympathies and harmony. Also during that time, Novalis studied Tiedemann; in his studies of Tiedemann, Novalis retained passaged pertaining to Paracelsus (especially related to the notion that one only perceives God in the way He manifests through His creatures), the Boehme commentator Pordage, and Giordano Bruno. By December, Novalis was occupied with Tiedemann's extensive Plotinus exposition. Mähl extracts these main themes from Novalis's Tiedemann studies: emanation theory and the concept of the world soul (neither were new to Novalis), ecstasis as a path to intuition of the divine and as inner light, Plotinus' theory of the One and hypostases as sharing a kinship with Fichte's logic of the ego principle's self-unfolding, and Plotinus's figurative language,

[177] O'Brien, *Signs of Revolution*, 242.
[178] Gray, *Goethe the Alchemist*, 48.
[179] Paola Mayer, *Jena Romanticism and its Appropriation of Jakob Böhme: Theosophy, Hagiography, Literature* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), 81-83.
[180] *Ibid*., 78-80.

the notion that poetic creativity can infiltrate the creative workings of nature through imitation of it.[181]

13. The Imagination: Novalis and the Esoteric Tradition

The noted scholar of esotericism Antoine Faivre cites imagination as a hallmark of esoteric thought.[182] Indeed, for Novalis, imagination underpins life. Novalis in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* extols imagination as source of reality. The imagination for Novalis is the source of magic, the poetic organ, and the principle of reality that enables one to overcome the determinism of fate, as poetically evinced in Fable's overcoming of the Three Fates. Imagination bequeaths one with freedom, and as the power of conscience, it enables one to access the highest realities.

As Novalis studied Paracelsus, Boehme, and alchemy, there are congruences between Novalis's conception of the imagination with those espoused by Paracelsus, Boehme, and in alchemical thought. Like Novalis, Paracelsus bequeaths the imagination with the power to create effects in the world and as linked to faith. Paracelsus envisions the imagination as intermediary between being and thinking, perceiving it as incarnating thought through the image. The human's three great faculties he defines as soul (*Gemüth*), imagination and faith. He defines the *Gemüth* as the "bursting of sidereal power into us, the preeminent connection of our opening to the invisible world, which governs us from inside ourselves." Faith "produces imagination, this produces a star, and this in turn an effect. Faith produces imagination in God."[183] Novalis describes magic as a "starlike force" saying that through magic, the human "will become powerful like the stars," and that the human is "intimately related to the stars."[184] Also related to stars, one recalls how in Klingsohr's tale of Fable and Eros in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, Sophia tells Fable: "Dearest child, your zeal and faith have won you a place amid the eternal stars."[185] Whilst Novalis's espousal of eternal life amongst the stars can be connected to Paracelsus's sidereal concepts, the notion of stellar eternal life originates in the Egyptian mythic and magical tradition that seeps into Platonic and Neo-Platonic discourse.[186] In an

[181] *Ibid*., 81-83.
[182] Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994), 12.
[183] Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition*, 102.
[184] Novalis, "Freiberg Natural Scientific Studies," 208.
[185] Novalis, "Heinrich von Ofterdingen", 153.
[186] Algis Uzdavinys, "Porphyry's On the Cave of the Nymphs and the Spiritual Exegesis of Homer" In *The Heart of Plotinus,* ed. Algis Uzdavinys, 233-4.

additional connection with Paracelsus, Novalis's conception of the human as "messiah of nature," the human as charged with the duty to redeem nature also exists in Paracelsus.[187]

Like Boehme, Novalis envisions an original paradisiacal state of unity that was sundered, and the original human as endued with divine powers. Boehme also employs flame symbolism to denote the sacred. In Boehme's understanding, the original fall occurred through a misuse or perversion of imagination, but one can revert it to its original direction and achieve original unity again. When one's faith is exalted sufficiently, the sacred flame shines forth. For Boehme, God's manifestation is achieved through His imagination, the imagining of a veritable image, imagined in the mirror of Sophia. Boehme associated imagination with magic, writing: "Imaginatio macht Wesenheit," the imagination determines the essence.[188] One recalls in Klingsohr's tale of Eros and Fable in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* that Sophia counsels the other characters to consult the mirror "which reflected everything in its genuine shape, and destroyed all hurtful illusions."[189] The image of the mirror which reflects the true nature of things recurs in the work of esotericist Rudolf Steiner.[190]

The alchemical text the *Rosarium Philosophorum* relates that the great work can only be achieved with true imagination rather than fantastical imagination.[191] "Imagination alone reveals to me what this present world is," Novalis writes.[192] For Novalis, imagination evinces the highest truth, as "the higher organ" and his poetic endeavor seeks to reveal truth. Whilst poetry has a certain basis in illusion, it is illusion which is reflective of a higher truth:

> Poetry heals the wounds given by reason. Its elements are of a totally opposite character, and may be described as elevated truth and agreeable illusion.[193]

14. Scholarly Misconceptions: Novalis and the Esoteric Tradition

Whilst there is positive momentum with respect to the recognition of Novalis's esoteric inspiration in the academic sphere,[194] on the converse side,

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187 Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, 134.
188 Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition*, 106.
189 Novalis, "Heinrich von Ofterdingen", 153.
190 Rudolf Steiner, *Knowledge of Higher Worlds: How Is It Achieved?* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1969), 152.
191 Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition*, 109.
192 Novalis, "Heinrich von Ofterdingen," 167.
193 Novalis, "Fugitive Thoughts," 177.
194 Laure Cahen-Maurel, "Novalis's Magical Idealism," 161.

Novalis's magic has a history of having been terribly misinterpreted and misunderstood. Major interpreter O'Brien writes that Novalis was not a philosopher, seer, priest, nor magician, only a writer of fictions.[195] Kneller notes that Novalis's use of the term magic is "flamboyant," but that all it referred to was the use of metaphor, symbolism and analogy as a way of viewing nature.[196] O'Brien seems to have missed or overlooked Novalis's notion of the philosopher as poet, in which poetry is especially a *theory of magic*. As a famed poet, Novalis puts his theory of magic into practice; that Novalis puts his magical theory to effect renders Novalis a magician, or a practitioner of magic, a magus. Beyond this crucial missed point, O'Brien's interpretation completely dismisses or evinces a complete lack of awareness of the esoteric tradition. Novalis's use of the term magic is not "flamboyant" either; this is an entirely inappropriate descriptor, and it is not just a way of seeing nature poetically. This term has been employed countless times in the long history of the esoteric tradition. And it is not just a way of viewing things, but a way of eliciting practical effects in the world and in oneself. One wonders if such misinterpretations are the result of a lack of awareness of the esoteric tradition, or a reluctance to reference the esoteric tradition's influence upon philosophy given that academia is still recovering from its long-standing prejudice against the inclusion of esotericism within its scope, despite its historical significance in the history of philosophy.[197]

15. Conclusion

Esotericism is concerned with secret meanings, forces, and dimensions. With a poetic and artistic disposition, Novalis is drawn towards the unseen or esoteric dimension, and he seeks secret meanings. Understanding the artist as the one who perceives the invisible, who can glean hidden meanings with imaginative perception, Novalis champions the artist as the agent who can divine the original meaning, renew it. Novalis's artistic disposition toward the unseen and esoteric dimension takes him to the realm of death, granting him insight into it, allowing him to reconcile death to life through his poetry and philosophizing. Through his poetry, he grants a mythic, higher meaning to his personal tragedy of the death of his beloved Sophie, his own personal myth as impetus for poetical cosmic redemption.

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[195] O'Brien, *Signs of Revolution*, 73.

[196] Jane Kneller, "Early German Romanticism: The Challenge of Philosophizing," in *The Routledge Companion to 19th Century Philosophy*, ed. Dean Moyer (Florence: Routledge, 2010), 312.

[197] Wouter Hanegraaff, *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 3.

Novalis's aim with his philosophy and poetry is magical, seeking to effect practical transformation in the world and in oneself; it seeks nothing less than the completion of the alchemical work itself, the alchemical work as comprising the deification of the world. Novalis seeks to overcome death, redeem the past, entwine past and future. He seeks to make the world beautiful, to baptize it in the Sophianic mirror, to raise it to a higher power, make it Romantic, to render the world song once again. He seeks the regeneration of the original primordial paradise. He wants to reconcile all things which appear disparate, including all disciplines and knowledge, and render their apotheosis.

Magic provides Novalis with an ancient and metaphysical framework that enables him to formulate a theory of knowledge that is creative, predicated on creativity; it allows Novalis to formulate an original unity of all disciplines, and he renders a mythic theory of history through the magical lens, intertwining history, magic, and myth. With its understanding of language as ontologically effective, the magical tradition enables Novalis to formulate how the poet can create practical effects through her poetizing; it enables Novalis to assert how poetry transforms the reality of the world.

As predicated on the poetic principles of metaphor, analogy, and symbolism, the esoteric tradition can be viewed as a poetic art, and this is how Novalis interprets it. Novalis provides a novel, original interpretation of the esoteric tradition wrought through a poetic lens. He re-interprets the esoteric tradition, combining it with other philosophical influences, granting it new meaning, a poetical meaning. His magical science of reality presents an esoteric theory of poetry, music, and philosophy. The esoteric tradition gives Novalis creative philosophical material, and he maps his ideas upon it.

Linking poetry and music to the magical tradition bequeaths it with associations, meanings, and powers it would not otherwise have—such a linkage enriches his poetry, offers it a metaphysical foundation, providing his poetry with an added depth, weight, and power. By linking his poetry with the esoteric tradition, he is also encrypting secret meanings in his work, imbuing his work with a dimension of mystery, situating it within an edifice of mystery.

As I have endeavored to evince, for Novalis, magic, alchemy, and philosophy are ultimately synonymous. His philosophical and poetic writings explicitly reference astrology, alchemy, Kabbalism, the esotericist Franz Baader,[198] and Neoplatonism.[199] This article has presented an account of

[198] Novalis, *Notes for a Romantic Encyclopaedia*, 112.
[199] *Ibid*., 162.

Novalis's engagement in the domain of magic, his theories of magic and Magical Idealism, his esoteric studies and practical engagement with esotericism. Magic for Novalis is a praxis of the will and faith, related to love, language, artistic creation, the senses, and politics. Drawing on the magical conception of analogy and inspired by esoteric encyclopedic endeavors, he envisages all sciences as fundamentally intertwined with one another, effectively transposing all disciplines into the esoteric domain. He conceives of philosophy as divination, as veritable Freemasonry, and as alchemy. The alchemical underpinnings of Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, its references to the Presocratic proto-alchemist Empedocles have been elucidated.

Finally, this article has rendered an account of Novalis's esoteric studies and situated him in the esoteric tradition of the creative imagination. It has argued that Novalis was a magus, not just a writer of fictions. It has defended the claim that Novalis's philosophy is esoteric in character, and that to fully understand Novalis's life and thought, it is therefore imperative to include the esoteric tradition in one's analysis.

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