

Novalis (pseudo. for Friedrich von Hardenberg; 1772-1801)

Poet, aphorist, novelist, mystic, literary and political theoretician, student of philosophy and the natural sciences, Friedrich von Hardenberg--best known by his pen name, Novalis--was one of the most striking figures of German Romanticism. Hardenberg's theoretical writings helped establish the program of Early or Jena Romanticism, and his literary compositions rank among the most radical examples of Romantic experimentation in form. His best-known works remain the fragment collection "Blüthenstaub" (1798; selections translated as "Pollen," 1982), the rhapsodic essay "Die Christenheit oder Europa" (1799; translated as "Christianity or Europe," 1960), the poetic cycle "Hymnen an die Nacht" (1800; translated as "Hymns to the Night," 1960), and the unfinished novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1802; translated as *Henry von Ofterdingen*, 1964). The last two writings especially have secured Hardenberg's place in the history of letters, although his voluminous notebooks, which comprise the greatest part of his literary remains, have attracted much recent critical attention for their imaginative and often strikingly advanced treatment of literary, scientific, and philosophical issues. Both practical and enthusiastic, Hardenberg regarded his work in letters as a mere avocation beside his career in the Saxon civil service, and he published scarcely eighty pages of writings before his death at the age of twenty-eight. Celebrated or condemned in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries primarily as the sweet poet of "the blue flower" (a striking image from *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* that came to symbolize the Romantic movement), Hardenberg has come to be recognized not only as an expressive and innovative poet of the German language, but as a daring, resourceful, and rigorous thinker at the threshold of modernity.

A direct descendant of twelfth-century Saxon nobility, the Freiherr (Baron) Georg Friedrich Philipp von Hardenberg was the second oldest of eleven children born into the quiet Pietistic

household of Auguste Bernhardine (née von Bölzig) and Heinrich Ulrich Erasmus Freiherr von Hardenberg. Raised on the family estate of Oberwiederstedt, about eighty kilometers north of the cultural and academic centers of Leipzig and Jena, Hardenberg was a weak and slow child, who suddenly emerged as a sensitive and imaginative boy upon recovery from a prolonged case of dysentery in his ninth year. A brief visit for instruction with the religious Herrnhuter community in Neudietendorf appears to have ended unsuccessfully, and he was sent to live for a year with his uncle, a prestigious aristocrat of the ancient régime and Commander of the Teutonic Order at the opulent Lucklum castle. After having acquainted himself with the good library and more worldly society of his uncle, in 1785 Hardenberg rejoined his family at their new home in Weißenfels. At about this time he began to write poetry in the style of Friedrich Klopstock, Christoph Martin Wieland, and Gottfried August Bürger. In May 1789 a meeting with Bürger followed a correspondence in which the young admirer had exulted that a letter was written to him by the same hand that once wrote "Lenore" and wrestled with Homer.

In 1790, after studying at the Eisleben gymnasium under the distinguished classicist C. D. Jani, Hardenberg moved to Jena to begin university studies in jurisprudence. He quickly attached himself to the professor of Kantian philosophy, Karl Leonhard Reinhold, and to his history professor, the thirty-one-year-old Friedrich Schiller. Schiller, a lifelong acquaintance and influence, encouraged Hardenberg's interest in history, philosophy, poetry, and--at the request of the boy's father--his foundering study of jurisprudence. Hardenberg idolized his teacher, helped nurse him through severe illness in the winter of 1792, and followed his advice to transfer to the university at Leipzig in the fall. His feelings of inferiority before Schiller led directly to Hardenberg's first publication, the poem "Klagen eines Jünglings" (A Youth's Lament). A sentimental prayer for more manly "Sorgen, Elend und Beschwerden" (cares, misery and hardships),

the poem was printed under the signature v. H***g. in Wieland's *Der Neue Teutsche Merkur* of April 1791.

At Leipzig Hardenberg met Friedrich Schlegel, who, though only two months older, assumed the role of mentor for his provincial friend. The two neglected their formal studies and abandoned themselves to a raucous student life, while Schlegel led Hardenberg deeper into the study of Kant, introduced him to more contemporary literature and criticism, and awakened his delight in the wit and paradox that would henceforth enliven his writing. In 1792 Hardenberg transferred to the University of Wittenberg. There he finally applied himself to his studies, and in the summer of 1794 he passed the state examinations in jurisprudence with the highest grade.

Having made little headway in securing a government post through a distant relative, the Prussian minister Karl August von Hardenberg, in October Hardenberg accepted a position as administrative assistant for the district director Coelestin August Just in Tennstedt. By November Hardenberg had embarked upon the experience that would prove decisive in his life: on a business trip to nearby Grüningen, he met and fell deeply in love with the twelve-year-old Sophie von Kühn. Everyone who met her, including Goethe, Schlegel, and Ludwig Tieck, would later agree that Sophie was a remarkable girl, and in his most detailed description of her, a sketch entitled "Klarisse," Hardenberg notes that she was devoted to her family, rather formal, fond of tobacco, not overly fond of poetry, and, perhaps most important: "*Sie will nichts seyn--Sie ist etwas*" (She *wants to become nothing--She is something*). The two became secretly engaged in March, but in November Sophie fell ill with a tuberculosis related liver tumor. A series of painful operations ensued, and after much suffering she died on 19 March 1797, followed a month later by Hardenberg's favorite brother, Erasmus. The deaths plunged Hardenberg into a prolonged

period of mourning and a meditation on death that would decisively alter the nature of his work.

The two years with Sophie had been intellectually fruitful. Hardenberg had immersed himself in the philosophy of Johann Gottlieb Fichte and produced the long "Fichte-Studien" (Fichte Studies) notebooks of 1795 and 1796. Here Hardenberg grapples with problems of the self, perception, religion, ontology, and semiotics, and makes the statement central to all his work: "Spinoza stieg bis zur Natur--Fichte bis zum Ich, oder der Person. Ich bis zur These Gott" (Spinoza ascended to Nature, Fichte to the Ego or Person; I to the thesis, God). In the summer of 1795 he met Fichte along with the poet Friedrich Hölderlin at a gathering where, his host noted, much was spoken about how many questions still remained open for philosophy in regard to religion. After Sophie von Kühn's death, by which time he had returned to Weißenfels to assist his father's directorate of the Saxon salt mines, he studied Spinoza, Kant, Schelling, Goethe, the pietistic writer Nikolaus Ludwig Zinzendorf, the mystical philosophers Johann Kasper Lavater and Tiberius Hemsterhuis, the Scottish physician John Brown, and other philosophical, mystical, and alchemical writers.

In December 1797, after stopping on the way to meet Schelling, Hardenberg arrived at the Mining Academy in Freiberg for a year and a half of studies. Under the direction of Abraham Gottlob Werner and W. H. Lampadius, two of the foremost scientists of the day, he studied geology, mineralogy, chemistry, surveying, mining, and mining law, and worked in the mines three or four times a week. Hardenberg, who during his stay at the academy often slept only five hours a night and planned his time to the quarter hour, managed to continue his other readings and his notebooks, as well as to socialize with Fichte, Schiller, Goethe, Friedrich Schlegel and his brother August Wilhelm, and his friends in the Saxon Diet, Hans Georg von Carlowitz and Dietrich von Miltitz. In the summer of 1798 he produced his first major publications, the

fragment collections "Blüthenstaub" and "Glauben und Liebe, oder der König und die Königin" (Faith and Love, or the King and Queen). In both, Hardenberg took up the pseudonym Novalis, a name derived from the phrase *de novali* and used by his early forebears from the estate Von der Rode.

"Blüthenstaub" filled thirty-seven pages of the first issue of the Schlegel brothers' epochmaking journal, the *Athenaeum*, with 114 prose fragments--a genre raised to new heights by the Romantics. Ranging in length from two lines to two pages, the fragments address issues in philosophy, literature, religion, and politics. This diversity is explained by the collection's motto: "Freunde, der Boden ist arm, wir müßen reichlichen Samen/Ausstreuen, daß uns doch nur mäßige Erndten gedeihn" (Friends, the soil is poor, we must richly scatter seeds to produce even a modest harvest). Enthusiastic over the French Revolution and the rapid literary development of Germany, the contributors to the *Athenaeum* had great ambitions, as Hardenberg programmatically states in "Blüthenstaub": "Wir sind auf einer Mission: zur Bildung der Erde sind wir berufen" (We are on a mission: we are called to the education of the world). Such a project, which would now inform all of Hardenberg's work, clearly shows a debt to the enlightened pedagogy of Schiller and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, but also the change it has undergone in its "Romanticization." No longer elaborated in a discursive treatise but in a fragmentary and disparate text, the Romantic project of "universal education" rejects an enlightened, totalizing concept of history, and instead envisions a pervasive reevaluation of values and institutions for which the goal--playfully called by Hardenberg "the Golden Age"--remains infinitely deferred. The "end of history" is no longer a historical goal for Hardenberg but a question of personal salvation. As he states in one of the most famous and "Fichtecizing" fragments of "Blüthenstaub": "Nach Innen geht der geheimnißvolle Weg. In uns, oder nirgends ist die Ewigkeit mit ihren Welten, die Vergangenheit

und Zukunft" (Inward goes the mysterious path. In us or nowhere is eternity with its worlds, the past and future).

The political and personal, practical and mystical, revolutionary and reactionary task set forth by the Early Romantics at first provoked general incomprehension, a response that greeted Hardenberg's "Glauben und Liebe, oder der König und die Königin" even from the Prussian throne. Forty-three political aphorisms preceded by two pages of poetic "Blumen" (Flowers), "Glauben und Liebe" was printed in the 1798 *Jahrbücher der Preußischen Monarchie unter der Regierung von Friedrich Wilhelm III.* (Journal of the Prussian Monarchy under Friedrich Wilhelm III), a monthly magazine devoted to the young Prussian monarch and Queen Louise, both of whom had been greeted as paragons of political and domestic virtue upon succession to the throne in 1797. "Glauben und Liebe" puts forth a complex and highly metaphorical theory of political institutions. Praising the Prussian king and queen in their own right, it also presents them as educating their subjects for the eventual replacement of monarchy with new, republican institutions--which Hardenberg still describes with metaphors of monarchical rule. Thus, while Hardenberg heaps exorbitant praise on the actual king and queen, he simultaneously uses them as figures for political conceptualization, as in the claim: "Der König ist das gediegene Lebensprinzip des Staats; ganz dasselbe, was die Sonne im Planetensystem ist" (The king is truly the principle of life in the state; quite the same as the sun in the planetary system). Paradoxes abound in formulations such as: "kein König" (No king without a republic, and no republic without a king) and: "Alle Menschen sollen thronfähig werden" (All men should become fit for the throne). Notwithstanding Hardenberg's disclaimer that he was writing in a "Tropen und Räthselsprache" (a language of tropes and riddles), the court made its disapproval known, the censor stopped publication of the final installment entitled "Politische Aphorismen" (Political Aphorisms), and even Friedrich Schlegel

voiced his disapproval, advising his friend either to find a new pseudonym or to abandon hopes for publishing ever again.

While in Freiberg, Hardenberg greatly expanded his reflections on the underlying linguistic and cognitive structures that permitted something like "a language of tropes and riddles" or even scientific language. In groups of fragments with titles such as "Logologische Fragmente" (translated as "Logological Fragments," 1982) and "Poëticismen" (Poeticisms), he develops a theory of "Magic Idealism." Extending the thought of Kant and Fichte, Hardenberg claims, "Die Welt ... ist überhaupt a priori von mir belebt" (The world ... is animated by me a priori), and he seeks to control this animation through the magic of language: "Magie ist = Kunst, die Sinnenwelt willkürlich zu gebrauchen" (Magic is = the art of using the world of the senses arbitrarily). To systematize these observations further, he embarked on a large encyclopedic project, the "Allgemeine Brouillon" (General Notebooks) of 1798-1799. Differing from the encyclopedias of the eighteenth century, which present individual fields of knowledge under separate headings, the "Allgemeine Brouillon" tries to show the underlying unity of all knowledge through analogical discussions of "chemische Musik" (chemical music), "poetische Physiologie" (poetic physiology), "mathematische Philosophie" (mathematical philosophy), and "physicalische Geschichte" (physical history), among many other similarly combinative topics.

While Hardenberg's theoretical studies reached their most abstract point in Freiberg, he soon established relationships with two people who would rivet his attention more closely than ever to his professional career and to literature. In January 1798 Hardenberg met Julie von Charpentier, the daughter of the Freiberg official and former mineralogy instructor Johann Friedrich Wilhelm von Charpentier. A year later they were engaged, a step Hardenberg seems to have undertaken not entirely without calculation and with a pronounced ambivalence (he wrote to

Friedrich Schlegel that a very interesting life appeared to await him--still, he would rather be dead). In any case, he energetically returned to work in Weißenfels in May 1799, filled with hopes for financial independence and marriage. The following month on a visit to Jena he met the young Ludwig Tieck, already a popular writer. The two instantly struck up a close friendship, read the mystical writings of Jakob Böhme together, and even planned joint literary projects. Hardenberg entered upon his most intense period of professional and literary activity, producing by the following fall the essay "Die Christenheit oder Europa," the novelistic fragment *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* (translated as *The Novices of Sais*, 1949), and the first of the poems known as "Geistliche Lieder" (Spiritual Songs, translated as *Sacred Songs of Novalis*, 1956).

Die Lehrlinge zu Sais is an essay-length prose text composed of first- and third-person meditations on nature that are loosely bound together by the general narrative setting of novices arriving in the ancient Egyptian city of Sais in search of the *Ursprache*, or primeval language. In the brief first part, "Der Lehrling" (The Novice), a first-person narrator muses on nature as a "große Chifferschrift" (a great script of ciphers) written in a language no one understands, "weil sich die Sprache selber nicht verstehe, nicht verstehen wolle" (because the language does not understand itself, nor want to understand). He compares it to "die ächte Sanscrit" (genuine Sanskrit), which only speaks "um zu sprechen, weil Sprechen ihre Lust und ihr Wesen sey" (in order to speak, because speaking is its pleasure and its essence). This simultaneously skeptical and mystical conception of language--which Hardenberg also expounds in his brief poetical manifesto "Monolog" (translated as "Monologue," 1982)--receives amplification in the longer second part of *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*, "Die Natur" (Nature). Here a marginal narrator introduces soliloquies on nature and language that echo the views of Hardenberg's own teachers. One of the voices makes the extreme claim--especially remarkable given the Romantics' supposed cult of nature: "Man kann nicht sagen,

daß es eine Natur gebe, ohne etwas überschwengliches zu sagen, und alles Bestreben nach Wahrheit in den Reden und Gesprächen von der Natur entfernt nur immer mehr von der Natürlichkeit" (One cannot say that nature exists, without saying something excessive; and all striving after truth in speeches and conversations about nature only progressively distances one from naturalness). Yet if in *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* one voice denies the ability of language truthfully to represent nature, the teacher's voice claims at its conclusion that nature still serves as an instrument of higher understanding if it provokes an overwhelming feeling of *Sehnsucht*, of longing for a transcendent unity that never appears as such, but only in diversity, difference, and change. This desire for a lost unity is succinctly dramatized within the second part of *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* by the story "Hyacinth und Rosenblüthe" (translated as "The Story of Hyacinth and Roseblossom," 1913), an allegorical fairy tale in which Hyacinth abandons his childhood home and his beloved to search for knowledge, only to recover Roseblossom far from home, in a dream within the temple of Isis.

Hardenberg's skepticism regarding language as a medium of truthful representation and his by no means contradictory belief in its practical power coalesced in his attempts to generate new cultural mythologies in "Die Christenheit oder Europa" and the "Geistliche Lieder." Opening with the words, "Es waren schöne, glänzende Zeiten" (They were beautiful, sparkling brilliant times), "Die Christenheit oder Europa" is cleverly posed between historical account and fairy tale. In presenting a mythical history of Europe from the Middle Ages to the present, Hardenberg strives to incite readers both to a reevaluation of modern European history and to personal transformation. Employing the triadic structure of unity, fall, and redemption, the essay rhapsodically recalls the Catholic Middle Ages as a time of cultural and spiritual integration, laments Europe's spiritual disintegration through the Reformation and Enlightenment, and announces the imminent return of "die Regierung Gottes auf Erden" (God's

reign upon earth), which it sees foreshadowed in the political turmoil of the French Revolution and in the cultural growth of Germany. "Die Christenheit oder Europa" ends with the insistence that this political and cultural renewal can take place only through religion: "Nur die Religion kann Europa wieder aufwecken" (Only religion can reawaken Europe). The text produced great embarrassment among Hardenberg's friends. In presenting the Middle Ages not as the Dark Ages but as a period of high culture to inspire Germany, Hardenberg was building upon the groundwork of a new, Romantic appreciation of the past that Tieck and Heinrich Wackenroder had already laid in place; but in his effusive celebration of Catholicism and the Counter-Reformation, his hyperbolic criticism of the Reformation, Protestantism, and the Enlightenment, and his explicit fusion of republican politics with mystical religion, Hardenberg went beyond the pale of even the most liberal Romantic propriety. Acting on the advice of Goethe and the Berlin theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher, the Schlegels refused to publish the manuscript in the *Athenaeum*--and it was first printed twenty-five years later, probably through an error.

The twelve poetical songs now grouped together as the "Geistliche Lieder" were undertaken as a more modest project and met with more immediate success. Having found the church songs of the eighteenth century to be overly intellectual, dogmatic, and obscure, Hardenberg set about the composition of more accessible and evocative ones. He succeeded in producing poems that express tender religious sentiments in an imaginative, mystical, and at times erotic language, poems that preserve their popular appeal with a deceptively simple style and vocabulary. Although their orthodoxy remains a matter of debate, several of the songs quickly found their way into church songbooks, where they can still be found today.

The fall of 1799 marked the high point of Early Romanticism, as Hardenberg, Tieck,

Schleiermacher, the scientist J.W. Ritter, and Friedrich and Dorothea Schlegel met regularly at the home of August and Caroline Schlegel in Jena. Hardenberg, a brilliant speaker and, according to Tieck, a virtuoso in the social arts, read his new works aloud to this group, who spurred him on to his most productive year. Although professional duties in Tennstedt occupied most of his attention, and his health continued to deteriorate from the tuberculosis that had begun to afflict him the previous year, Hardenberg began work on his two most ambitious literary projects: the poetic cycle "Hymnen an die Nacht" and the quintessentially Romantic novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*.

"Hymnen an die Nacht," published in the final issue of the *Athenaeum* in August 1800, immediately became Hardenberg's most successful work in his lifetime, and continues to be his most-read work to the present day. The first four hymns, written almost entirely in rhythmic prose, elaborate the basic argument of the text. In the first hymn, after initially praising the light as a "König der irdischen Natur" (king of earthly nature), the poet announces a turn "Abwärts ... zu der heiligen, unaussprechlichen, geheimnißvollen Nacht" (downward ... to the holy, ineffable, mysterious night). The poet's nostalgia for the daylight is overcome by the appearance of a mediatrix, his "zarte Geliebte" (tender beloved) with whom he experiences a sexual-mystical union, which proves at first to be only transitory. In the second hymn, the poet returns to day and laments the transitoriness of the night. The brief third hymn, perhaps Hardenberg's most famous piece of writing, recounts the central experience of the "Hymnen an die Nacht," a vision with striking--and artfully reworked--similarities to his 1796 diary account of an experience at Sophie von Kühn's grave. The poet tells how he once stood, overcome with grief, at the burial mound of the "Gestalt meines Lebens" (shape of my life). Suddenly he feels a "Dämmerungsschauer" (twilight shudder). A heavenly sleep overcomes him, the mound seems to rise up, time to blow away, and the beloved almost to resurrect before

him. The poet claims that this vision was "der erste, einzige Traum" (the first and only dream), after which he feels only an "ewigen, unwandelbaren Glauben an den Himmel der Nacht und sein Licht, die Geliebte" (an eternal, immutable faith in the heavenly Night and in its light, the beloved). The fourth hymn, after affirming the poet's now cheerful return to the day and his inner fidelity to the night, concludes by breaking forth with jubilant song in praise of the night and "des Todes / Verjüngende Flut" (death's rejuvenating flood). The fifth hymn sharply changes the direction of the "Hymnen an die Nacht" by translating this history of personal salvation into a mythical history of Western religion from ancient Greece to Christianity. After alternating between prose and verse, it ends with a song in praise of the Resurrection as mankind's victory over death, and of the Virgin Mary as the eternal mother who awakens the human longing for immortality. The sixth and final hymn, the tenstanza poem "Sehnsucht nach dem Tode" (Longing for Death) recapitulates the major themes of the "Hymnen an die Nacht" and ends with the poet's yearning for his celestial home, where "Ein Traum bricht unsre Banden los / Und senkt uns in des Vaters Schoß" (A dream at last our bonds does snap / And lays us in our Father's lap).

Heinrich von Ofterdingen, a Bildungsroman based freely on accounts of the medieval poet Heinrich von Ofterdingen, was Hardenberg's final and most extensive literary production. It traces the growth of its protagonist through adolescence on his way to becoming a poet--a goal never attained in the incomplete novel. Formally daring, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* mixes a realistic and morally elevated narration with dreams, fairy tales, operatic songs, mystical dialogues, discourses on poetry, and fantastic adventures. The first part, "Die Erwartung" (Anticipation), begins with Heinrich's dream within a dream of the blue flower--a vision that fills him with a longing he cannot understand. The second through fifth chapters trace Heinrich's journey to Augsburg with his mother and their encounters with

businessmen, former crusaders, an Arabian woman, and a wise miner, all of whom share their stories with the boy. In the sixth chapter the pair arrives at his grandfather's house in Augsburg, where Heinrich falls in love with Mathilde, the daughter of his grandfather's friend and adviser, the poet Klingsohr. Heinrich and Klingsohr discuss poetry, history, and politics into the eighth chapter, in which Heinrich and Mathilde promise eternal love in a series of avowals that would later become the clichés of Romantic love, but are here spoken with a fairy-tale simplicity. The first part of the novel ends with "Klingsohrs Märchen" (Klingsohr's Fairy Tale), an obscure allegory of universal renewal filled with scientific, alchemical, mystical, philosophical, and literary allusions. When the novel's second, unfinished part, "Die Erfüllung" (Fulfillment), begins, Mathilde has died, and Heinrich is roaming the world as a pilgrim. The novel abruptly breaks off as Heinrich speaks with Sylvester, his father's former teacher, about nature, education, and religion.

Although Hardenberg had detailed plans for the continuation of the novel and wrote some of his finest poetry to include within it, his rapidly deteriorating health prevented him from finishing it. While writing the first part, Hardenberg had continued to make literary and professional plans, and even obtained a promotion as district director for the area around Weißenfels. Yet while he remained free from pain, he grew progressively weaker. In October 1800, when he received word that a younger brother had drowned, Hardenberg suffered a severe hemorrhage and was forced to cease virtually all professional and literary activity. Over the winter of 1800-1801, even speaking became tiring for him, and in the spring he sent for his friends. On 25 March 1801, as Friedrich Schlegel sat beside him in Weißenfels, Hardenberg fell asleep listening to his brother Karl play piano and died peacefully at noon. Less than a year and a half later Tieck and Schlegel issued the first two-volume collection of his works, including *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*, "Geistliche Lieder," and some

unpublished fragments. By 1837 the collection had gone through five editions and had assured Novalis's place in the world of letters.

Papers: The Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Frankfurt am Main, holds the largest collection of Novalis's extant manuscripts. The Biblioteka Jagiellońska of Kraków University has collections of his poetic juvenalia and professional writing. The Museum Weißenfels has a collection of Hardenberg family correspondence, several of Novalis's personal possessions, and the oil portrait of Novalis by Franz Gareis.

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