

Introduction



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The Unknown Novalis

Friedrich von Hardenberg, or Novalis as he later chose to call himself in print, still remains a rather obscure figure in the English-speaking world. If known at all, it is mostly as the German Romantic poet of the blue flower, whose fiancée, Sophie, died young—and like Petrarch for Laura and Dante for Beatrice before him, penned sublime lyrical words to immortalize his beloved.¹ Or perhaps one has read a philosophical fragment or two. Indeed, from Edgar Allan Poe to Karl Popper, John Stuart Mill to Martin Heidegger, it is still the height of philosophical fashion to adorn one's book with a Novalis fragment as a motto.² But who exactly was this enigmatic young philosopher-poet?

Born May 2, 1772, in Oberwiederstedt, Germany, toward the twilight of the Enlightenment, his schooling coincided with the tumultuous Storm and Stress period of German literature. Here he steeped himself in the works of Friedrich von Schiller, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and finally forged his intellectual maturity in the furnace of the Kantian or Critical philosophy. Above all, Novalis belonged to that extraordinarily talented younger generation of writers and thinkers who have become known in history as the "Romantic Circle." This enormously influential group also included the brothers August Wilhelm and Friedrich Schlegel, Dorothea Veit, Ludwig Tieck, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Caroline Schlegel, and the young Friedrich von Schelling. Gathered at the end of the eighteenth century, their innovative literary talents generated an avalanche of essays, fragments, dialogues, speeches, and notebooks, whose revolutionary shock waves still continue to reverberate today throughout the literary, cultural, and artistic worlds.

Yet with regard to Early German Romanticism in our time, perhaps the most significant revolution is occurring in Anglophone and German philosophical circles. Long considered as solely a literary movement, current research is shedding unexpected light on Early Romanticism's serious philosophical credentials.³ Unknown and unappreciated texts are finally gaining the attention they deserve. This is especially true of the theoretical writings of Novalis, due in no small part to the thoroughly revised critical edition of his collected works in German, and recent translations of these writings into both English and French.⁴ Now with the appearance of each new volume, a genuinely *philosophical* Novalis has started to emerge.

Perhaps the most striking instance of this former neglect is the present work: Novalis's *Romantic Encyclopaedia*. Incredibly, his extraordinary project to reunite all the separate sciences into a universal science lay obscure for nearly a century and a half. The text has finally been restored in accordance with his original plan, and though uncompleted, it clearly demonstrates that he was not simply a haphazard thinker, or a mere writer of fragments.

Novalis was also a natural scientist, thoroughly schooled in the sciences of mineralogy and geology. This too is a lesser-known aspect of his life. Not only was he an outstanding lyrical poet, and fully conversant with the latest philosophical developments of the time, but he worked in an altogether *practical* capacity, as a mining engineer, valued and respected by his employers and scientific peers alike. He strove to harmonize his interests in the fields of poetry and philosophy with the concrete demands of working life. And this factor is also telling for his personality. He was being deadly serious when he remarked to close friends in December 1798: "Writing is a secondary consideration—Please judge me according to the main thing—*practical life*. . . . I treat my writing activity as an educational tool."⁵ Thus the time has come to finally overhaul our outmoded perception of him as an impractical and irrational Romantic poet.⁶

With his universality, it is tempting to compare Novalis to other thinkers. Shortly after Novalis's death, Thomas Carlyle was already calling him a "Germanic Pascal," since he saw in his fragments a religious, mathematical, and artistic profundity similar to that found in the *Pensées*.⁷ Again, with their scientific diversity, for many his jottings recall the notebooks of a young Leonardo Da Vinci; or with their imaginative fluidity and artistic form, scholars now draw comparisons with the philosophical style of Friedrich Nietzsche and even Jacques Derrida.⁸ Yet for all these comparisons, there is still something incomparable and intangible about his writings, an intriguing elusiveness about his fragments. "Modernity" may be one of the most overused expressions today, but with this restless and penetrating thinker it must surely be one of the most appropriate. And thus Novalis remains forever Novalis, a truly unique and original spirit.

Although numerous misunderstandings persist concerning German Romanticism and Romantic philosophy, there now exists a growing band of people who believe that their philosophical texts merit a fresh reappraisal. I consider this to be particularly true of Novalis's *Romantic Encyclopaedia*. It is for this reason

that this first translation into English has been carried out—to finally make accessible to an English-speaking audience one of the most remarkable undertakings of the Golden Age of German philosophy.

The Genesis of the *Romantic Encyclopaedia*

At the beginning of September 1798, Novalis wrote the following words to the other members of the Romantic Circle in Jena:

I have been on my journey of discovery, or on my pursuit, since I saw you last, and have chanced upon extremely promising coastlines—which perhaps circumscribe a *new scientific continent*.—This ocean is teeming with fledgling *islands*. (HKA IV, p. 260)

Although adopting the tone of a round-the-world voyager, at the time Novalis was actually a twenty-six-year-old student at the Freiberg Mining Academy in northeastern Germany. Here he was immersed in a study of the sciences, including higher mathematics, physics, biology, and the earth sciences. The town's mining academy was the first institution dedicated to the study of mineralogy and geology in Europe, and renowned throughout the scientific world for its distinguished teachers. These included, among others, the chemist Wilhelm August Lampadius (representative of an antiphlogistic or Lavoisierian chemistry) and the mathematicians Johann Friedrich Lempe and Johann Friedrich Wilhelm von Charpentier (the father of Novalis's second fiancée, Julie). Yet chief among these was the famous figure of Abraham Gottlob Werner—the founder of systematic geology and mineralogy. Prior to this Novalis had studied law, history, and philosophy at the universities of Jena, Leipzig, and Wittenberg, in the years 1790 to 1794. During these earlier academic years he had made contact and become friends with some of the leading German writers and philosophers of the time, such as Friedrich Schiller, Karl Leonhard Reinhold, and Friedrich Schlegel, all of whom immediately recognized the brilliance of his mind.⁹

Novalis arrived in Freiberg at the beginning of December 1797. His course of study was both practical in nature—including excursions into the mines and tunnels beneath the town and its surrounding districts—and highly theoretical, insofar as he was able to hear the latest scientific ideas within the walls of the academy itself. Scientific work was congenial to Novalis's disposition, and he often praised the rejuvenating effects of the sciences on one's health. In fact, his decision to change the course of his studies and delve into rigorous scientific pursuits was partly taken in an effort to overcome his grief at the death of his first fiancée, Sophie von Kühn, in March 1797.¹⁰

It was not long before these diverse academic studies in Freiberg bore creative fruit. On the one hand, Novalis decided to chronicle his reflections on his

regular scientific studies in a large assortment of notebooks—printed in his collected works as the *Freiberg Natural Scientific Studies* (see the Appendix for detailed extracts).¹¹ On the other hand, as he excitedly related in the letter to Caroline Schlegel (see the extract at the beginning of the current section), he had hit upon an extremely promising idea. Novalis faithfully recorded the exploration of this idea or “new scientific continent” in a separate so-called *Brouillon* (rough draft or notebook), which was diligently continued over the next seven months. Although written directly parallel to them, the *Brouillon* is radically different from the other Freiberg notebooks. For its purpose was at once breathtakingly universal and ambitiously idealistic: to discover the common principles underlying all the different arts and sciences. He soon gave a name to this search for a unified or a universal science: “encyclopedistics.” Novalis outlined his intended course of action in the notebook itself (see entry 229):

I will now specifically work my way through all the sciences—and collect material toward encyclopedistics.

First the mathematical sciences—then the others—philosophy, morality etc. last of all.

This “collecting of materials” from every kind of sphere resulted in the present mass of notes that constitute the basis for nothing less than a veritable *Romantic Encyclopaedia*. The title of the work in the German edition of his collected works—*Das Allgemeine Brouillon* (The General or Universal Brouillon)—also stems from one of these notebook entries. However, it was at most only a provisional title for a work in progress, and was not chosen by Novalis himself to head the book.¹² This is not entirely unexpected, since the work was neither completed nor published in his lifetime. Referring to both the origin of his new project and his general academic studies, he wrote in late September 1798 (entry 231):

I will first of all work through the theory of gravitation—and the *arithmetica universalis*. I will devote one hour to the former, and 2 hours to the latter. Whatever else occurs to me will also be written down in the *universal brouillon*. The remaining time will be partly devoted to the novel, partly to miscellaneous readings—and to chemistry and encyclopedistics in general.¹³

In early November 1798, roughly two months after commencing the undertaking, Novalis reported on the progress of his *Romantic Encyclopaedia* in a letter to Friedrich Schlegel, and again hinted at its radical *scientific* nature:

I am occupied with an exceedingly comprehensive work—which will absorb my entire activity for this winter. . . . Here I imagine generating truths and ideas writ large—of generating inspired thoughts—of producing a living *scientific organon*.¹⁴

At about the same time as he wrote these words, Novalis set about revising and rearranging the swelling mass of material, including classifying the majority of the notes with striking and unusual headings: "Classification of all my thoughts, and an index of these titles. *Revision of the thoughts*" (entry 597).¹⁵ This process of revision was carried out fairly rapidly and completed in a matter of days. With well over 150 different types or disciplines of classification (see the index), the *encyclopaedic* nature of the project began to take concrete shape, and quite significantly, Novalis now started calling the text a "book" (see entries 552–557).

However, by January 1799 the project had run into difficulties: he had not "had one decent thought for the last two months," causing "everything to come to a standstill." This was mainly on account of outer circumstances, specifically: "anxiety, distractions, work and travel, then joy and love, not to mention bouts of illness."¹⁶ For December 1798 and January 1799 had proved to be busy months for Novalis. He celebrated Christmas in the small village of Sieben-eichen, became engaged to Julie von Charpentier a week later, and then spent a few days at the end of January in Dresden with his brother Anton.

Notwithstanding all these external events, the work on his book still appeared to have advanced far enough for Novalis to harbor the hope of finishing it in the coming summer, as he now related in letters to both Caroline and Friedrich Schlegel:

In the last few months I've been swamped by all kinds of studies. I'm collecting a lot—perhaps I'll be able to complete something in the summer. . . . With regard to my future plans, I'm only collecting at present, and imagine that in the summer I might be able to complete a number of things that I have begun or sketched out.¹⁷

Unfortunately, although he toiled hard for a few more months on the text, his *Encyclopaedia* remained unfinished, with the last notebook entry dated March 1799. In addition to the pressing and time-consuming nature of his work as a mining engineer, other literary projects soon claimed his attention. The latter include some of his most famous works: the novel of the blue flower, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*; the lyrical works *Hymns to the Night* and *Spiritual Songs*; and the natural-philosophic novel *The Novices at Sais*. Despite filling further notebooks with fascinating philosophical and scientific fragments in the following two years, Novalis never returned to the *Romantic Encyclopaedia*.¹⁸ In late 1800, just as Werner promoted him to the mining administration in the Weissenfels district, the signs of a terminal illness started to appear in Novalis, confining him to his bed. Early on the morning of March 25, 1801, Novalis asked his brother Karl to play a piece of classical music on the piano. Just after midday, to the strains of the music and in the presence of his oldest friend Friedrich Schlegel, the young poet-philosopher finally succumbed to the effects of tuberculosis, dying two months short of his twenty-ninth birthday.

Science and Romanticizing

Virtually all of Novalis's philosophical and theoretical writings were published posthumously. Regrettably, many aspects of their editorial history form a rather sorry and somber chapter in Novalis scholarship. This is because for over a century after his death successive editors tore apart and arbitrarily rearranged these texts in order to make them into collections of fragments similar to *Pollen*.¹⁹ This was a fate that acutely befell the *Brouillon* notebook. The true nature of Novalis's astonishing plan to write a Romantic encyclopaedia lay concealed for close to 130 years. The notebook was only published for the first time in its entirety in 1929; that is to say, including all his revisions as well as the essential classificatory headings. And it was not until 1968 that the correct chronological order of the text was finally unraveled by Hans-Joachim Mähl. It is only with these all-important classifications that one can perceive the obvious progression from a miscellaneous notebook to the plan for an encyclopaedia. Indeed, a modest perusal of Novalis's writings from 1798 to 1799 should suffice for one to quickly see that the *Brouillon* notebook is completely unlike any of the other theoretical writings from the same period, such as *Pollen*, *Faith and Love*, or the *Teplitz Fragments*. Hence, as Mähl has rightly pointed out, this work should not be considered as a collection of isolated and unrelated fragments, but as the preparatory materials for a genuine *Romantic Encyclopaedia*.²⁰

A deepened reverence for the natural world is one of the features of Early German Romanticism. Keenly sensing modern humanity's continued estrangement and alienation from Nature, the Romantics favored a staunchly antimaterialistic conception of the world. They put forward an organic model that viewed matter as a living force, and were particularly inspired by the physiological theories of the Scottish physician Dr. John Brown (see entries 439–454). As he makes plain in the *Encyclopaedia*, Novalis too defended the thesis of a nondeterministic life force, and attempted to unravel its secrets. For him, "life is absolutely only to be explained from life itself" (entries 593 and 786), it is a "moral principle" (entry 255) that has its origin in itself, and even went so far as to devise his own fundamental propositions of natural science (entry 649). In this regard, the *Freiberg Natural Scientific Studies* from 1798 to 1799 are essential for understanding the extent of Novalis's contemporary scientific knowledge (see the Appendix).²¹ Novalis was not alone among the German Romantics in expressing his enthusiasm for scientific theorizing. Toward the close of the eighteenth century, we also find Friedrich Schlegel writing "scientific" fragments, the early Schelling proposing a hypothesis for a higher type of physics in his *On the World Soul* (1798), and Franz Xaver von Baadar writing mathematical-natural philosophic works. However, like Henrik Steffens and Johann Wilhelm Ritter before him, Novalis differed from the other Romantics insofar as he was academically quali-

fied and professionally trained in the sciences. Although he criticized certain scientific results and approaches to science, he only did so from within, so to speak, as a working scientist familiar with its methods. Moreover, he tried to combine the spheres of poetry and science—a fact rendered explicit in his unfinished novel on Nature, *The Novices at Sais* (see Select Bibliography). In this respect he shares a strong affinity with his celebrated contemporary, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe—Germany’s greatest poet, who was also a formidable natural scientist. In fact, Novalis seems to have been one of the first thinkers to appreciate the true significance of Goethe’s studies in the natural sciences, and the latter may have unwittingly played a role in the genesis of the *Romantic Encyclopaedia*: “Goethean treatment of the sciences—my project” (entry 967).²²

A basic methodological aim of the *Encyclopaedia* was the “classification of all scientific operations” (entry 552), yet in a fresh and innovative sense. It was to be a kind of Romantic version of René Descartes’s *Discourse on Method*, as Olivier Schefer has fittingly remarked.²³ What were these “scientific operations” according to Novalis? Just below this entry, Novalis expanded on this thought, saying, “Logical, grammatical, and mathematical investigations—in addition to varied and specific philosophical readings and reflections—must show me the way” (entry 558). In entry 228 he is even more specific, listing sixteen different mathematical operations, including differentiating, integrating, logarithmicizing, and exponentializing. One of the most characteristic features of Novalis’s theoretical works is his appropriation of ideas, concepts, and tools from one discipline for use in another completely different domain. In this regard the operations of mathematics appear to enjoy a special status. Gabriele Rommel has recently argued for this special priority of mathematics within Novalis’s theoretical conceptions, and shown that an essential aspect of German Romanticism involves the application of scientific and mathematical methods to the spheres of literature and poetry (cf. the selections from Novalis’s *Mathematics Notebooks* in sections 2, 7, 8, and 12 of the Appendix).²⁴

Novalis’s use of the mathematical concept of *potentization* is a special case in point. The Romantics believed that the world had lost much of its original significance. Thus in order to regain it, one must rethink or “re-present” its content and form in altogether new and unusual ways. In this regard Novalis (and the philosopher Schelling to a certain degree) especially appropriated the mathematical process of potentization, and insisted that it could be extended beyond its narrow *quantitative* domain. Thus, not only mathematical entities, but everything in the world may be raised to a higher power (or to a lower power—the process of *logarimization*). Potentization broadened and rendered *qualitative* becomes in Novalis’s terminology “romanticizing.” This point is explicated by Novalis in his now famous definition from 1798, where poetic philosophy becomes intertwined with mathematics:

The world must be romanticized. This yields again its original meaning. Romanticizing is nothing else than a qualitative potentization. In this operation the lower self becomes identified with a better self. Just as we ourselves are a potential series of this kind. This operation is still entirely unknown. By giving the common a higher meaning, the everyday, a mysterious semblance, the known, the dignity of the unknown, the finite, the appearance of the infinite, I *romanticize* it—For what is higher, unknown, mystical, infinite, one uses the inverse operation—in this manner it becomes logarithmicized—It receives a common expression. Romantic philosophy. *Lingua romana*. Reciprocal raising and lowering. (HKA II, p. 545)

The true Romantic, therefore, has the whole of Nature as his domain, and almost anything may be “romanticized,” as long as its finite aspect approaches the infinite and the everyday is made mysterious. The results of this activity are not dry mathematical combinations, but artistic and philosophic *elevations* (entry 894). For Novalis, this is especially the case with art, philosophy, and poetry, in which the human spirit becomes the dynamic “principle,” so that *literature*, or “the world of writing is Nature that has been raised to a higher power” (entry 243).

The scientific and encyclopaedic structure of the *Romantic Encyclopaedia* is particularly apparent in its most distinctive feature: its *system of classifications*. As noted earlier, in late 1798 Novalis decided to revise the entire text. He gave each entry a classificatory heading, whereas anything deemed to be extraneous (including booklists and both personal and private notes etc.) was crossed out. The extraordinarily diverse titles of the entries range from the conventional: such as physics, chemistry, physiology, philosophy, medicine; to the more unusual: theosophy, cosmology, anthropomorphic physics, organology; to the highly original: musical mathematics, pathological philosophy, poetical physiology, logical dynamics, theory of the future life. The most frequent classification by far (it occurs seventy times!) is a neologism coined by Novalis himself: “encyclopedistics.” These classifications play the vital role of interrelating the entries, and were a first attempt at trying to unify the text as a whole.

The Bible Project

Composed of over eleven hundred different notebook entries, the *Romantic Encyclopaedia* is easily Novalis’s largest theoretical work. And though it only remained at the semirevised notebook stage, Novalis nonetheless believed that the text was on its way to becoming *an actual book*. One of the most widespread misconceptions about Novalis’s theoretical writings is that he was only a writer of fragments and disconnected thoughts, that he never developed the skills or vision to work on a large and comprehensive project.

Now it is of course true, the Romantics did harbor a predilection for writing fragments, for presenting their ideas in brilliant short bursts of prose. Here nontechnical styles of writing were often combined with unconventional tendencies. Indeed, the fragment style of presentation is generally considered to be one of the hallmarks of philosophical Romanticism. Friedrich Schlegel insisted that a fragment had to be self-contained, “like a hedgehog.”²⁵ For his part, Novalis defined his own fragments as “beginnings of interesting sequences of thoughts—texts for thinking”; and while acknowledging that “many are play pieces and only possess a transitory worth,” he qualified this statement by adding, “on the other hand, I’ve attempted to impress my deepest moral convictions upon some of the others.”²⁶ Although employed to great effect by G. C. Lichtenberg and Ernst Platner earlier in the century, literary-philosophic fragments of this kind first came to general prominence in the journal *Athenaeum*—the main organ for Early German Romanticism edited by the Schlegel brothers from 1798 to 1800. Hardenberg’s initial contribution to this journal was *Pollen*, his most famous collection of fragments, and it marks the first time that the name “Novalis” appeared in print.²⁷

With regard to the *Encyclopaedia*, Novalis stated that the work was developing into a “book” four different times in the text (entries 552, 555, 557, and 945). The majority of these passages occur right in the middle of the notebook. Here Novalis was engaged in an examination of what he considered to be the true nature and aim of any book. In fact, he thought he may have already finished a significant portion of the work: “If I have now really completed a genuine part (element) of my book, then the highest peak has been scaled” (entry 555). In September 1798 he contemplated writing a letter to Friedrich Schlegel, and incorporating an excerpt from his new text, one composed “as romantically as possible” (entry 218). However, he was still completely at a loss as to the exact *form* of his fledgling book. All styles and structures seemed a possibility—*not only* a collection of fragments!

Shall it be a *recherche* (or *essai*), a collection of fragments, a commentary in the style of Lichtenberg, a report, an exposition, a story, a treatise, a review, a speech, a monologue or a fragment of a dialogue etc.? (entry 218)

Notwithstanding the Romantics penchant for universality, it is still remarkable to behold just how varied he pictured the potential form of his book. This point is again highlighted toward the very end of the text (entry 945), where Novalis comments on the book’s possible finished format, intimating that his undertaking might even include *poetical* works:

Every part of my book, which may be written in completely different styles—In fragments—letters—poems, rigorous scientific essays etc. Dedicated to one or several of my friends.

Of the many misunderstandings associated with this largely forgotten project of Novalis, his definition of it in entry 557 has perhaps provoked the most speculation:

My book shall be a scientific Bible—a real, and ideal model—and the seed of every book.

Not surprisingly, it is sometimes assumed that here Novalis wished to write something like a “new romantic gospel,” or even institute a “Romantic Religion.”²⁸ This idea of writing a new, modern gospel was derived from the conclusion of Lessing’s work from 1777, *The Education of the Human Race*, in which he remarked: “It will certainly come, this age of a new, eternal gospel, which is itself promised in the elementary books of the new covenant” (aphorism 86). This challenge was seized upon by the Jena Romantic Circle, with the idea suggested of writing a so-called second part to Lessing’s book (yet was never executed in the end). However, the *Romantic Encyclopaedia* was not Novalis’s attempt at writing this new gospel mentioned by Lessing. The confusion has arisen because with Novalis we are dealing with *two distinct projects*, which are often conflated.

One project, which may be termed the “gospel project,” was indeed directly linked to Lessing’s idea. In fact, in 1799/1800 Novalis actually remarked that he was thinking of joining forces with Schleiermacher, Tieck, and Friedrich Schlegel in order to carry out this task of writing, as he now termed it, “a gospel of the future” (HKA III, p. 557). Further accompanying notes reveal that this gospel project was thoroughly religious in both content and form. This “gathering of data for a second part to *Lessing’s Education of the Human Race*” had its immediate starting point in the New Testament, since according to Novalis, there are present in the four gospels the “fundamental features of future and higher gospels” (HKA III, p. 669). These thoughts of a new Christian gospel were to later find lyrical expression in his *Hymns to the Night* and *Spiritual Songs*, and reach their climax in the controversial essay, *Christendom or Europe*, where Novalis enjoins us “to proclaim the *divine gospel* in word and deed, and to cleave to this true, eternal faith right up until death” (HKA III, p. 524).

The other project, the *Romantic Encyclopaedia*, although containing strikingly original religious thoughts, was not at all concerned with Lessing’s idea and a new Christian gospel as such. Rather, its aim was much more universal, with its basis rooted in the empirical and philosophical sciences.

The question therefore is, What did Novalis mean here by “Bible”? When he used the term “Bible” in this context, Novalis understood it in an utterly general sense. For as he jotted in marginalia to Friedrich Schlegel’s 1799 work *Ideen* (Ideas): To him the idea of a Bible was a “Gattungsbegriff” or a generic concept.²⁹ In this sense, a Bible is simply the highest form of a book in a specific genre or discipline. As he had earlier written in the *Encyclopaedia*: “A Bible is the supreme task of writing” (entry 433).³⁰ Each field of human knowledge could

have its own Bible, it all depended on the method employed or the “spirit,” something already noted in *Pollen*: “When the spirit renders it sacred, then every genuine book is a Bible.”³¹

Despite its scientific orientation, the *Romantic Encyclopaedia* was still comprehensive enough to accommodate Novalis’s ideas on theology.³² Indeed, in terms of fundamental definitions, he was perhaps contemplating making God into one of the central principles of the work:

Definition and classification of the sciences . . . Should God be the *ideal* of the degree, and the *definition of God*—the seed of all definitions? (entry 554)

Matters are further complicated by the fact that precisely at the same time as Novalis was casting his *Encyclopaedia* as a “scientific Bible,” Friedrich Schlegel was likewise conceiving a Bible project. It is surely a curious kind of conjunction that both Novalis and Schlegel conceived their Bible projects at virtually the same time. Novalis attributed this amazing coincidence to their inner harmony of thought, an intellectual symbiosis that they called “sym-philosophizing.”³³ Nevertheless, their ideas for a Bible were vastly different. How did Novalis describe *his* book? In a letter to Friedrich Schlegel about his Bible project (Letter, November 7, 1798), Novalis wrote:

A striking example of our inner sym-organisation and sym-evolution is contained in your letter. You write about your Bible project, while I’m engaged in my study of science as a whole—and its body—the book—and have likewise hit upon the idea of a Bible—the *idea of the Bible*—as the *ideal of each and every book*. (HKA IV, p. 263)

In contrast to Novalis’s endeavor to supply an ideal book or “body” for the sciences, the aim of Friedrich Schlegel’s Bible project was indeed to “establish a new religion” and follow in the footsteps of “Mohammed and Luther.” Here the two parted intellectual company, for Novalis was not particularly impressed with his friend’s grandiose religious plan, saying it was altogether “illusory and obscure” to him.³⁴

Thus, with the *Romantic Encyclopaedia* Novalis’s primary concern was not writing a religious text as such, but a supreme book of the sciences. Taking his start from the single methodological principle “Proposition—*All science is one*” (entry 526), we can see how all these conceptions started merging into the grand idea of a single unified book of the sciences, i.e. into that of a “scientific Bible”:

All the sciences *amount to one book*. . . My undertaking is really a *description of the Bible*—or better, the *theory of the Bible*—art of a Bible and theory of Nature. (Elevation of a book to a Bible). (entry 571)

Romantic Philosophy

From 1790 to 1791 Novalis received a thorough philosophical education in Jena, studying philosophy under Karl Leonhard Reinhold, the populizer and interpreter of Immanuel Kant, and the playwright and avowed Kantian, Friedrich Schiller. Moreover, Reinhold was the originator of his own system, “Elementary Philosophy,” which radicalized post-Kantian philosophy with its insistence on philosophy as a rigorously systematic and unified enterprise.³⁵ Novalis undoubtedly first learned about the Kantian philosophy in detail from the lectures of Reinhold and Schiller, with both of whom he later became friends and corresponded. It is difficult to gauge the true impact of Reinhold’s doctrines on Novalis, since there is only the very occasional reference to him in his many notebooks. Notwithstanding, Novalis seems to have accorded him a central place in the history of German Idealism: “Kant established the possibility, Reinhold the reality, and Fichte the necessity of philosophy.”³⁶ With Schiller, Novalis valued above all his engaging and magnetic personality, his graceful style and expositions on aesthetics.³⁷ As he playfully noted in the *Encyclopaedia*, “Schiller makes exceedingly philosophical music” (entry 419).

In the next few years the study of philosophy began to assume priority in both Novalis’s thinking and his personal life: “My favourite study basically bears the same name as my fiancée: Philo-Sophie—it is the soul of my life and the key to my inner self.”³⁸ Yet he could still teasingly mock both the “prejudices” of professional philosophers toward poetry (entries 468 and 749), and the practical and social value of philosophy itself: “Philosophy cannot bake bread—however, it can provide us with God, freedom and immortality—now which is more practical—philosophy or economics?” (entry 401).

A dramatic turn occurred in 1795—he fell under the spell of Johann Gottlieb Fichte, the successor to Reinhold in Jena. “Fichte is the most dangerous thinker I know. He powerfully enchants one into his circle” (HKA IV, p. 230). From autumn 1795 to autumn 1796 he plunged into an intensive study of the Fichtean philosophy. The results of these detailed meditations have come down to us as the so-called *Fichte Studies* notebooks.³⁹ He appears to have been spurred to write these notes after finally meeting Fichte in person in May 1795, at the home of philosopher, and editor of the *Philosophisches Journal*, Friedrich Niethammer. That same night also appears to be the first and only time Novalis came into contact with another talented young philosopher-poet in Jena: Friedrich Hölderlin.⁴⁰

Of all of Novalis’s philosophical writings, the *Fichte Studies* has been subject to the most academic scrutiny, due in large measure to the groundbreaking studies of Hans-Joachim Mähl and Manfred Frank.⁴¹ In his reactions to the Critical philosophy, they show Novalis searching for his own philosophical voice and identity. Breaking with the Fichtean model, he tried to elaborate his own philo-

sophical theory on the nature of self-consciousness. Moreover, there is a clear antifoundationalism expressed in the *Fichte Studies*, an opposition to the Fichtean and Reinholdian belief that the whole of philosophy could be derived from a single first principle. Instead of a logical deduction from a first principle, Novalis and the Romantics sought a more fruitful conception, invoking the now famous idea of an “infinite approximation.”⁴² Here the notion of a first principle becomes inverted, as it were, into a Kantian regulative idea, which the elements of the system “infinitely approach” yet never actually reach. This conception is intimately related to the Romantics’ view of human nature as being *finite* in a physical sense and *infinite* in a spiritual sense. A tension or “longing for the infinite” famously uttered by Novalis in his very first *Pollen* fragment, with its untranslatable wordplay: “We *search* everywhere for the Unconditioned (Unbedingte), but only ever *find* things (Dinge).”⁴³

Hints of this opposition to a first principle in philosophy are even present in the *Romantic Encyclopaedia*: “Why do we need a *beginning* at all? This unphilosophical—or semiphilosophical goal is the source of all error” (entry 634). Here Novalis extends the theory of infinite approximation to the distant ideals or “Gods” of every science and discipline: “Every science has its God, that is also its goal.” In philosophy, it is the search for a first principle; in chemistry, a universal solvent; in politics, perpetual peace; and in medicine, an elixir of life (entry 314). Yet these “forever frustrated expectations” are an infinite and endless quest, like the search for the philosopher’s stone, or the attempt to square the circle (entry 640). These reflections highlight some of the key tenets of the Romantic Circle: that there are limits to philosophy, a distrust of closed, all-embracing systems, and that philosophizing itself is an infinite activity. In Isaiah Berlin’s succinct definition, Romanticism is a current in “perpetual movement.”⁴⁴

However, for all his opposition to a Fichtean first principle, Novalis did not completely abandon Fichte’s philosophy. In fact, it continued to exert the greatest influence on him. Along with the majority of the Romantics, he wholly shared Friedrich Schlegel’s conviction (articulated in an oft-quoted *Athenaeum* fragment from 1798), that besides the French Revolution and Goethe’s educational novel of development, *Wilhelm Meister*, Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre* (Doctrine of Science) was one of the three greatest tendencies of the age.⁴⁵ If Novalis had initially termed Kant the “Copernicus” of philosophy, he now considered Fichte greater, calling him a “2nd Kant” (entry 463) and a modern “Newton,” since he was “the discoverer of the laws of the internal system of the world—the 2nd Copernicus” (entry 460).

What did Novalis especially prize about Fichte’s philosophy? What particularly appealed to him was the method and *type of thinking* employed by Fichte in the *Wissenschaftslehre*, or what he and the other Romantics started calling the “art of Fichticizing.”⁴⁶ By subjecting the laws of thought to a critical examination, they believed Fichte had discovered the very “rhythm of philosophy” (entry 382).

It was a radical new manner of philosophizing, a “*process for generating thought*” (entry 1147), that allowed one to further develop “flashes of inspiration,” and to systematically organize one’s own faculty of genius (entry 921). “Fichticizing” became identical for Novalis with “metaphilosophy,” with a deepened analysis of the activity of philosophizing itself:

It may well be possible that Fichte is the inventor of an altogether new way of thinking—for which our language doesn’t even have a name yet. The inventor is not perhaps the most skillful and ingenious artist on his instrument—although I’m not saying that this is so. However, it is most likely that there are and will be people—who Fichticize far better than Fichte himself. *Fabulous works of art* could come into being here—as soon as one begins to Fichticize artistically.⁴⁷

Fichte’s philosophy catered to that eternal Romantic concern—the nature of *genius*. However, for the Romantics, “genius” wasn’t a gushing God-given faculty for the destined few, rather a potential creative power possessed by everyone: “every person is the seed of an *infinite genius*” (entry 63). On the one hand, they considered the power of genius as necessary for a deeper understanding of the world of Nature: “*Natural genius* belongs to experimenting, that is to say, that wondrous ability to capture the sense of Nature—and to act in her *spirit*.”⁴⁸ On the other hand, they saw it as one of the results of genuine *Bildung*—that is, of the cultural development or higher education of the individual and society.⁴⁹ Despite being ennobled and from the upper social stratum, Novalis’s view of humanity was extremely open-ended and egalitarian: “I believe that in order to reach a completed development one has to pass through various stages. One should be a tutor, professor, and artisan for a period of time, as well as a writer. Even a position of servitude wouldn’t do any harm” (HKA IV, p. 266). His educational theory is addressed to our inner plurality, in which humanity is capable of an infinite and ongoing development. It is romanticizing applied back to ourselves: “every person, who consists of *people*, is a person raised to the 2nd *power*—or a *genius*” (HKA II, p. 645). The harmonious interaction of all our abilities ultimately results in the “completely developed human being,” or the “true scholar,” a modern-day Midas, “who bestows on whatever he touches and does, a scientific, idealistic and syncritic form” (entry 470).

Magical Idealism

The artistic form and *style* of philosophical writing was a particularly burning question for the Romantics.⁵⁰ In this regard we encounter some of the most damning criticisms of the Critical philosophy. According to Novalis, for all their philosophical ingenuity and innovation, the form of the presentations of Kant

and Fichte were at best “one-sided and scholastic” and at worst “frightful convolutions of abstractions.”⁵¹ Up to now, these expositions were not yet “complete or presented precisely enough—absolutely *unpoetic*—Everything is still so awkward, so tentative” (entry 924).

This critique of “unpoetic” and abstract philosophical works led the Romantics in turn to consider the roles of art and language within philosophy. As both Andrew Bowie and Charles Larmore have recently argued, it was a central conviction of German Romanticism that art was in fact a better path for understanding such mysteries as the Infinite and the Absolute than philosophy; that essential intellectual insights cannot always be realized in a philosophical text, but sometimes have to be communicated in a work of art.⁵² Hence, there are inherent limits to philosophical discourse that can only be approached using the deeper linguistic potential of poetry. As Manfred Frank has eloquently stated, “[P]oetics must jump into the breach where the air becomes too thin for philosophy to breathe.” However, he forcefully adds that this reasoning of the Romantics is not a piece of poetic production, but rather a “work of genuine and rigorous philosophical speculation.”⁵³ Thus, although the Early German Romantics sought to transform philosophy to include poetics, they still endeavored to remain within the margins of philosophy.

Indeed for Novalis, poetry and philosophy had always been indivisible and inseparable, merely two sides of the same coin. In earlier times, the poet and philosopher were united and one, but in our time “the separation into poet and thinker is . . . to the *disadvantage* of both—It is a sign of sickness” (entry 717). It is only by becoming more varied and universal that the philosopher is able to raise himself up to ever higher levels, and ultimately, up to that of the poet. If the “diversity of the methods increases—the thinker eventually knows how to make everything, out of *each thing*—the philosopher becomes a poet. The *poet* is but the highest degree of the thinker” (entry 717).

Toward the end of 1798 Novalis finally drew together all these diverse strands of his earlier contemplations. Philosophy, art, and science were richly blended together to result in his most mature and original theoretical work: the *Romantic Encyclopaedia*. It is the audacious attempt to reconcile and reunify all the disjointed sciences, by means of incessant poeticizing or philosophical romanticizing. As Novalis boldly proclaimed to August Schlegel, “In the future I’ll carry out nothing but poesy—all the sciences must all be *poeticised*.”⁵⁴

Here we arrive at perhaps the most well-known and controversial aspect of Novalis’s philosophy—his theory of “Magical Idealism.” This doctrine features prominently in the *Romantic Encyclopaedia*, and in spite of ongoing disputes about its precise nature, there are good grounds for considering it as Novalis’s own personal philosophy.⁵⁵ But what exactly is Magical Idealism? As the name suggests, it was a combination of the idea of romanticizing and an extension of transcendental idealism. The term “magical” referred to Novalis’s belief in the

“art of using the sense world at will,” that is, that the rest of nature could someday conform or be subjugated to our will.⁵⁶ And though he once remarked in a celebrated poetic fragment that “Nature is a magical petrified city” (HKA II, p. 761), he believed that it could be “enlivened” again. “The Magician of the sense world knows how to enliven Nature, and as with his body, to use it at will” (HKA II, p. 546). Here there is an indivisible nexus between willing and thinking, for the will is nothing else but “the magical, *powerful* faculty of thought” (entry 1075). This theory posits that ultimately we will have control over the external senses, just as we now have control over our internal organs of speech and thought, to become veritable “artists of immortality” (entry 399; also see entry 137). His “Idealism” of course had its origin in the doctrines of Fichte and Kant, in the theory that what we perceive depends on our own creative activity. He extended this by suggesting that certain pure thoughts and images are subject to “an extramechanical force” (entry 826), that at base all thinking itself is a true “action at a distance” (entry 1120). In an extraordinary passage, this “brand-new” theory of metacriticism “lets us divine Nature, or the *external world*, as a human being”—wherein Fichte’s *Nicht-Ich* or non-ego becomes transfigured into a “you” (entry 820). However, as Frederick Beiser has recently shown in great detail, Magical Idealism neither rejects reason and the rational element, nor is a form of irrationalism. It is *syn-criticism*, or the attempt at creating a synthesis of realism and idealism by adding an aesthetic dimension to Kant and Fichte.⁵⁷ In the history of philosophy Novalis viewed his own theory as follows: “Voltaire is a pure empiricist, as are most of the French philosophers . . . from transcendental empiricism we come to the dogmatists—from there to the enthusiasts or the transcendental dogmatists—then to Kant—from there to Fichte—and finally to Magical Idealism.”⁵⁸ The Magical Idealist “wonderfully refracts the higher light” (entry 638), by changing “thoughts into things, and things into thoughts” (entry 338). It affirms the necessity of transforming Nature into a work of art, so that it regains its inherent magic and beauty (cf. the most poetic passage of the *Romantic Encyclopaedia*—entry 737). As such, it is none other than genuine romanticizing, the potentization of the world as defined by Novalis above.

Another significant strand of Magical Idealism is its connection with Platonism and neo-Platonism.⁵⁹ Plato had been one of Novalis’s favorite authors since his student days in Leipzig, and both he and Plotinus take pride of place in the pantheon of philosophers enumerated in entry 1096. However, Novalis only discovered the philosophy of Plotinus in December 1798, while reading Dieterich Tiedemann’s *The Spirit of Speculative Philosophy* (see section 9 of the Appendix).⁶⁰ Tiedemann’s work was decisive for the *Encyclopaedia*, since Novalis not only drew his knowledge of Plotinus from it, but much of his information concerning magic, the Cabbala, theosophy, and mysticism. Novalis now noted Plotinus’s similarity to Fichte (entry 908), and gave many of his former Fichtean concepts a neo-Platonic interpretation.⁶¹ Here Fichte’s notion of intellectual intuition is compared with

the ecstasy of Spinoza, and the ego is proclaimed as the precursor of the divine logos (entries 896 and 897).⁶² And following the example of the neo-Platonist Frans Hemsterhuis, he formulated both the existence of a “moral organ” in man (entries 197 and 782) and the necessity of a mediator for humanity (entry 398), which would reconcile Platonism with the deeper aspects of Christian spirituality.⁶³ Other neo-Platonic notions such as a new Golden Age (entries 894 and 634), a higher paradise of Ideas (entry 929), and the theory of “emanations” (entry 137) all feature heavily in the text. Excavating these more esoteric strata that he found missing in Fichte, Novalis discovered “the idea of infinite love” in Spinoza, the famously “God-intoxicated man.”⁶⁴ Love is another essential element in Novalis’s philosophy of Magical Idealism. In the *Encyclopaedia*, love forms “the highest science” and is the “basis for the possibility of magic,” because only “love works magically” (entry 79). Hence, love now becomes “the ideal of every endeavor” (entry 835), and one of the fundamental axioms of Novalis’s encyclopaedic project: “Love is the final goal of *world history*—the One of the universe” (entry 50).

The *Romantic Encyclopaedia* remained unfinished, and was destined never to possess a polished philosophical form, such as that acquired by G. W. F. Hegel’s *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* just seventeen years later. However, it is precisely on account of its fragmentary state that we can peer into the workshop of the author, and are granted a fascinating glimpse into the inner workings of Novalis’s mind. As Olivier Schefer has remarked, Novalis had a philosophical spirit that wished to be at home in every sphere, from the most mundane to the highest realms of abstract science and thought.⁶⁵ More than anyone else, Novalis embodies Early German Romanticism’s ever-restless and incessant philosophical longing:

Philosophy is really homesickness—the desire to be everywhere at home.
(entry 857)

What is Encyclopedistics?

With regard to its encyclopaedic form, it is obvious that Novalis’s *Romantic Encyclopaedia* was drawing on a long tradition whose general aim was the systematic compilation of human knowledge. A principal inspiration was the famous *Encyclopédie* of the French philosophers Denis Diderot and Jean-Baptiste D’Alembert, published between 1751 and 1780. In fact, entries 327–335 of Novalis’s project are based on a close reading of this text, with entry 336 a direct quote (in French) from D’Alembert’s long preliminary discourse. The goal of the French *Encyclopédie* was to describe the “order and sequences of human knowledge,” and in so doing furnish a so-called “rational dictionary of the sciences, arts and crafts.”⁶⁶ Novalis’s citation and reflections on this work are important, since they show just how different his

own project was to the alphabetical enterprise of the *Encyclopédie*. If the French *philosophes* stressed individual definitions and the strict division of our mental faculties, Novalis in contrast emphasized the deeply unified nature of science (entry 333) and the future harmonious interactions of our mind (entry 327). With his “new view of idealism and realism” (entry 331). Novalis wanted to uncover nothing less than an “absolute universal science” (entry 333). And it is striking that these contemplations lead directly over into his theory of Magical Idealism (entry 338).

Novalis sought to discover a deeper foundation for his encyclopaedic undertaking by subjecting the notebook to a revision or a “critique,” an approach deeply embedded in the propaedeutic tradition of German idealistic philosophy.⁶⁷ His project wasn’t simply to be a collection of unrelated fragments, but a true “science of the sciences” (entry 56), which is exactly the same lofty intention as Fichte had envisaged for his *Wissenschaftslehre*.⁶⁸ According to Novalis, Fichte’s attempt was highly promising in the sphere of philosophy, but far too narrow when contrasted with his own interdisciplinary endeavor. “Fichte has *only* begun to realise a single idea in this manner—the idea of a system of thought.”⁶⁹ And hence the universalizing tendency that Fichte has wrought within philosophy, “should be undertaken in all the other sciences” (entry 155), since, in Novalis’s opinion, “there exists a philosophical, a critical, a mathematical, a poetical, a chemical, a historical *Wissenschaftslehre*” (entry 429).⁷⁰

Unfortunately, Novalis’s notes on this topic remain highly sketchy and speculative, and are undeveloped in most of their details. Nevertheless, it appears that Novalis took Fichte’s specific philosophical *Wissenschaftslehre* to be a template for a much more universal *Wissenschaftslehre*. And if we regard the remarkable sketch in entry 820, then it is possible that the *Romantic Encyclopaedia* was to be the vehicle for a “higher science” of the combined histories of the human self and Nature (entry 76); or what he called in early 1798 “a higher *Wissenschaftslehre*.” Taking its start from the Fichtean intuition of the ego, and again employing the operation of potentization in a *qualitative* sense (since it is directed back upon the activity of consciousness), the end result would be a wholly new or “higher I.” And just like in Fichte’s theory of the self, this fact is not logically demonstrable, but must be experienced by everyone themselves. Novalis writes:

There are certain poetical activities in us that appear to be of an entirely different character to all others, because they are accompanied by the feeling of necessity, and yet there doesn’t seem to be any external stimulus present. It appears to man as if he were engaged in a conversation, in which some kind of unknown, spiritual being wondrously incites him to develop the most evident thoughts. This being must be a higher being because it is placed in such a relation with himself that it cannot be a being of the world of appearances. This higher kind of ego or “I” is related to the human being as the human being is related to Nature, or as the wise man is related to the child. . . . This fact can-

not be presented. It is a higher kind of fact, which is only the concern of the higher human being. However, man should strive to engender it in himself.

The science that comes into existence here is the higher *Wissenschaftslehre*.⁷¹

In his commentary on the German edition of the *Romantic Encyclopaedia*, Hans-Joachim Mähl has also drawn attention to the close parallels between Novalis's plan and the little-known works of other contemporary German thinkers from the end of the eighteenth century.⁷² The encyclopaedic and scientific writings of Karl Eschenmayer (1768–1852), W. T. Krug (1770–1842), J. H. Lambert (1728–1777), and Kurt Sprengel (1766–1833) have left their indelible imprint on Novalis's text.⁷³ With its emphasis on the “reciprocal relations between the sciences,” Krug's idea for a general systematic encyclopaedia, outlined in his *Attempt at a Systematic Encyclopaedia of the Sciences*, is particularly aligned with Novalis's project:

A *specialized* encyclopaedia, be it universal or partial, is a mere aggregate of the sciences, which can be more or less orderly arranged. The main purpose of a *general* encyclopaedia, on the other hand, is not the presentation of the sciences themselves, but rather the depiction of the reciprocal relations, sketched in accordance with the principles of a perfected system, and therefore must also be a science, or be at least *analogous* to a science, to a *systematic conception of science*. (pt. 1, p. 11, § 15).

With regard to his natural scientific studies at the Mining Academy, another possible influence on Novalis's project was a series of lectures delivered by Abraham Gottlob Werner entitled: “The Encyclopaedia of Mining Sciences.”⁷⁴ Although nothing is known about these Freiberg lectures except their title, the long reflection on Werner's methodology of an encyclopaedia may have been written down after attending this series of talks (cf. entry 670). In the *Encyclopaedia*, Novalis frequently criticizes Werner's method of classification, specifically its pretension to objectivity (see entries 532, 534, 609, and 662). Notwithstanding, Novalis thought he could gain much by at least practicing “classifying and defining etc. using Werner's system” (entry 558), albeit in a “much more universal” fashion, (entry 475).

Stimulated by these diverse contemporary projects, Novalis attempted to develop his own system of encyclopaedic classifications. With a mixture of richly poetic-philosophic contents and exotic scientific titles, it is clear it was no ordinary encyclopaedia that Novalis had in mind. “The ordering of *my papers* is dependent on my system of science” (entry 597). A method of scientific classifying he otherwise called “encyclopædistics.” However, what did Novalis mean here by the term, *encyclopædistics*? In entry 233 he gives his clearest definition:

One hour of encyclopædistics in general. This includes scientific algebra—*equations*. Relationships—similarities—equalities—effects of the sciences on each other.

An examination of the text itself shows that the countless entries classified as “encyclopedistics” are indeed concerned with scientific procedure and method, with the interrelations and interactions between different scientific disciplines. In the letter to Friedrich Schlegel from November 7, 1798, mentioned earlier, Novalis spoke of writing an “*introduction* to genuine encyclopedistics,” for the purpose of producing inspired thoughts, truths, and ideas.⁷⁵ It would be a “*science of active empiricism*,” and give rise to nothing less than “the free generation of truth” (entry 924). This introduction is vital, since it was to perhaps supply the “*philosophical text to the plan*,” or the real “encyclopedistics of the book” (entry 599). Inspired by the combinatorial and mathematical theories of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (entry 547) and Karl Friedrich Hindenburg (entry 648), Novalis understood his theory as a kind of “scientific grammar . . . or theory of composition” (entry 616). And like the French thinker Condorcet’s early attempt at a *Sketch for a Historic Tableau of the Progress of the Human Spirit*, his project too stressed the importance of studying the history and philosophy of science (cf. entries 480–490 and 790–807). As Irene Bark has noted in her discussion of Novalis’s method, it is important to bear in mind that although the main principles of encyclopedistics are theoretical, they are gleaned from the empirical sciences, and can moreover be reapplied to them to serve as a confirmation of their validity.⁷⁶

Novalis’s theory consists in an ascending and descending hierarchy of scientific stages. He termed the lower components of science “words,” which correspond to higher elements, the so-called propositions of natural-scientific theories. Each principle of this scientific schema could in turn be elevated to a higher degree. Since “a proposition is a word raised to a higher power. Every word can be raised to a proposition, to a definition” (entry 333). It should be clear that this operation is the by now familiar method of *potentization*. Yet this time the process is applied back to the structure of science itself, since “through pure potentization, every science can be raised to a higher science” (entry 487). In the *Romantic Encyclopaedia* potentization is none other than the fundamental scientific operation of Novalis’s theory of encyclopedistics. This process of potentization may be continued up to an ever-higher level:

Propositions are raised up to sciences—Science is the dignity of the proposition—and thus this elevation may be continued up to an absolute universal science.
(entry 333)

Following Hemsterhuis, Novalis assumed that in ancient antiquity science was once a unity. The original paradisiacal stage of this universal science was called a “total-science” (entry 199). In the course of time the sciences had become splintered, and our task is to unite them again. This dilemma exposes the

eternal tension between our separating intellect and the unifying ability of our reason. This task is too great for the mere “intellect,” it requires the services of a higher faculty—that of *genius*.

It is entirely due to a lack of genius that the sciences are separated.—The relations between the sciences are too intricate and distant for the intellect. We owe the most sublime truths of our day to such interactions between the long-separated elements of this total-science.⁷⁷

It is by means of the “utmost simplification and reduction” that the “*encyclopaedic scholar*” attains this highest degree of perfection, whereby “all the separated sciences are changed into a single science” (HKA II, p. 586). In line with his earlier Jena conviction of philosophy as *an infinite approximation*, Novalis doubted whether this total-science could ever be truly “finished” or “completed” (cf. entry 526); it is simply a “schema for the future” (entry 886).⁷⁸ Hence, there is “no philosophy *in concreto*. Philosophy, like the philosopher’s stone—and the squaring of the circle etc.—is simply a necessary task of the scientist—the *ideal of science in general*.” (entry 640). And because “the *poet* understands Nature better than the scientific mind” (entry 1093), Novalis was absolutely confident as to what form this ideal science would assume—“the perfected form of the sciences must be *poetical*.”⁷⁹

Perhaps it is then not surprising to see that Novalis’s *Encyclopaedia* remained unfinished, precisely because it was *romantic*. Romantic in the sense that it embodied some of the leading motifs and methods of Early German Romanticism: “a longing for the infinite” and the philosophies of infinite approximation and Magical Idealism; meditations on the history and aims of Nature and humanity; the future development of our faculties of reason, imagination, genius, and the senses; and the wedding of poetry and philosophy in order to articulate the different operations of science, art, and religion. Its contents are expressed in short philosophic fragments and notes, united by poetic-scientific headings. Systematically, however, it remained open-ended and capable of metamorphosis. It was not only to enliven the static sum of human knowledge, but its deeper currents and interrelations, based on a unifying philosophical ideal.

If all the different sciences amount to “One book,” then it is clear that Novalis did not wish to furnish the individual chapters of this book. Instead, in the *Romantic Encyclopaedia* he conceived the ambitious plan to reunite all the disjointed and separated sciences, to raise them up to the level of a universal science. This was done by means of romanticization or potentization, the central operation in his theory of encyclopedistics. He sought to elevate every proposition and book of science into a book of books, and it is for this reason that he called his project a “scientific Bible.”

Ultimately, romanticizing is a philosophy of artistic activity, and it is precisely in this original and transformational sense that we must understand the term—it is an attempt to *transform* the world. The *Romantic Encyclopaedia* is Novalis's most mature philosophical work, whose boldness of vision and wealth of sparkling ideas can still inspire us today. This project is simply a continuation of that noble task he had already announced in *Pollen*: "We are on a *mission*: to educate the earth."⁸⁰