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NOVALIS  
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DIE LEHRLINGE ZU SAIS  
BLÜTENSTAUB  
DIE CHRISTENHEIT  
ODER EUROPA



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## PREFACE

Friedrich von Hardenberg—the pseudonym Novalis was an ancient family name—is the most poetic of the philosophers and the most philosophical of the poets of German Romanticism. The figure of the poet who “should also be prophet and priest, legislator and physician”, of which the merchants speak in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, the combination of poet and priest discussed in *Blütenstaub* (71): these are closely realized in the life and work of Novalis himself.

At the universities of Jena, Leipzig and Wittenberg, he interested himself in history, philosophy, mathematics and the sciences, as well as completing his official studies in the law. In 1794, he began a practical career in mining administration, and in 1797 resumed his studies, this time at the Mining Academy in Freiberg, remaining for over a year. But the most important biographical event is his relationship with Sophie von Kühn, a young girl whom he met in November 1794 and to whom he was soon engaged. Her death in March 1797, after a long illness, determined the character of his later writing and released the poetic spring within him. Nothing which he wrote before 1797 is significant in any but a documentary sense; all his later works have the cast of greatness, and in each he seeks to erase the frontier between life and death and to achieve reunion with Sophie in the world beyond. His three best-known works, *Hymnen an die Nacht*, *Geistliche Lieder* (both 1799), and *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1798–1801, incomplete), all show this; the texts reprinted here should supplement, not replace, a reading of them, and also give an insight into other aspects of this myriad-minded writer.

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Novalis began to keep notebooks of his ideas in 1795, and two selections from them were published during his lifetime. The earlier of these, *Blütenstaub*, edited by Friedrich Schlegel and with the addition of four fragments by him (15, 20, 26, 31), appeared in the inaugural number of the periodical *Athenäum* (1798). The fragment was a literary genre particularly congenial to the Romantics: its form was unrestricted, and its shortness was an added attraction. The title, epigraph and final fragment of *Blütenstaub* indicate a further advantage: the power to move rapidly from one subject to another, to be more fertile and evocative than in the longer-winded essay. The fragments of Novalis are less epigrammatic than those of the Schlegels; he is more concerned to explore an idea or connect two apparently unrelated spheres. In the notebooks as a whole, he also includes science and mathematics; here, he confines himself to the humanities—religion, law, ethics, psychology, history, linguistics and poetics, with the main emphasis on philosophy and metaphysics. Among the more revealing fragments we may note 14, with its echoes of the loss of Sophie; 91, with its related expression of the significance of love; and 16, which deals with the mystical education of the individual in his own nature.

These and related ideas reappear in *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*, the earliest of Hardenberg's mature creative works. Only two sections, written in 1798, survive of the novel, which was set aside when he began *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* and never completed. In part, the work grew out of his studies in Freiberg (cf. Paralipomenon 1). It deals with the understanding of nature, which is presented both as an independent entity and as a symbol or cypher of the divine. But a further source is the longing for Sophie. The concept of self-knowledge (*Blütenstaub*, 16) reappears in the distich of Paralipo-

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menon 2; but, significantly, it is replaced in the *Märchen von Hyazinth und Rosenblütchen* (pp. 19–23 and Paralipomenon 3), one of the most perfect Romantic expressions of the quest for the significance of life, by the discovery, at the heart of experience, of the loved one: knowledge and love are aspects of the same quest. Again, it is emphasized that the poet and the scientist are engaged upon an identical quest, if by different paths, and that, in the long-lost Golden Age, the two pursuits were combined in a single figure. It seems likely that the journey of Hyazinth, in the interpolated Märchen, was to foreshadow a journey of apprenticeship by the hero himself (outlined in Paralipomenon 4)—a technique which recurs in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*.

The idea of synthesis also dominates *Die Christenheit oder Europa*, an essay in cultural history in the tradition established by Herder, written in September and October 1799. Novalis sees Christian medieval Europe as a (somewhat idealized) spiritual and political unity. This unity was disrupted by the Lutheran Reformation and the Renaissance—scholar and priest, he observes, must quarrel where they are not combined in a single person—and, despite the efforts of the Jesuits to regain it, was destroyed by the Enlightenment, which by its emphasis on human reason denied the supernatural and the divine, and impoverished experience. But there are signs, in Germany especially, of a spiritualization of intellectual curiosity which may lead to restoration of the lost harmony on both spiritual and political levels.

Like *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*, *Die Christenheit oder Europa* did not appear in print until after Novalis's death on 25 March 1801, at the age of 28.

BRIAN A. ROWLEY

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## BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

The text is taken from the standard critical edition of Novalis: *Schriften*, ed. Paul Kluckhohn & Richard Samuel (Leipzig, Bibliographisches Institut, 4 vols, 1929); the critical apparatus to this edition is still the best introduction to Novalis. A new general study is: F. Hiebel, *Novalis, Der Dichter der blauen Blume* (Bern, A. Francke, 1951).

B. A. R.

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