

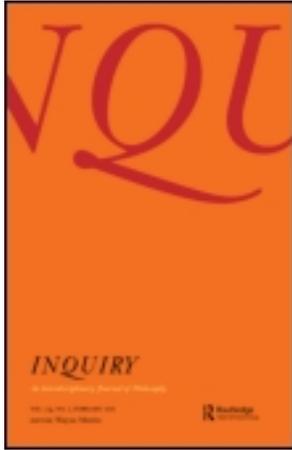
This article was downloaded by: [Lancaster University Library]

On: 07 June 2012, At: 07:09

Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954

Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



## Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/sinq20>

### Friedrich Schlegel, Romanticism, and the Re-enchantment of Nature

Alison Stone <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Lancaster University, UK

<sup>b</sup> Institute for Environment, Philosophy & Public Policy, Lancaster University, Lancaster LA1 4YG, UK  
E-mail:

Available online: 21 Aug 2006

To cite this article: Alison Stone (2005): Friedrich Schlegel, Romanticism, and the Re-enchantment of Nature, *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*, 48:1, 3-25

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00201740510015338>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.tandfonline.com/page/terms-and-conditions>

This article may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, redistribution, reselling, loan, sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae, and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not

be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand, or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

# Friedrich Schlegel, Romanticism, and the Re-enchantment of Nature

ALISON STONE

Lancaster University, UK

(Received 9 August 2004)

**ABSTRACT** *In this paper I reconstruct Schlegel's idea that romantic poetry can re-enchant nature in a way that is uniquely compatible with modernity's epistemic and political values of criticism, self-criticism, and freedom. I trace several stages in Schlegel's early thinking concerning nature. First, he criticises modern culture for its analytic, reflective form of rationality which encourages a disenchanting view of nature. Second, he re-evaluates this modern form of rationality as making possible an ironic, romantic, poetry, which portrays natural phenomena as mysterious indications of an underlying reality that transcends knowledge. Yet Schlegel relies here on a contrast between human freedom and natural necessity that reinstates a disenchanting view of nature as fully intelligible and predictable. Third, therefore, he reconceives nature as inherently creative and poetic, rethinking human creativity as consisting in participation in natural creative processes. He replaces his earlier "idealist" view that reality is in itself unknowable with the "idealist realist" view that reality is knowable as creative nature, yet, in its spontaneous creativity, still eludes full comprehension. I argue that Schlegel's third approach to the re-enchantment of nature is his most consistent and satisfactory, and is important for contemporary environmental philosophy in showing how re-enchantment is compatible with modernity.*

## Introduction

Early German Romanticism, long regarded as a primarily literary and cultural movement, is increasingly recognised as the source of important and original philosophical positions and arguments not only in post-Kantian aesthetics but also metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics.<sup>1</sup> Yet relatively little scholarly attention has been devoted to early German Romantic conceptions of nature and the relationship between humanity and

---

*Correspondence Address:* Alison Stone, Institute for Environment, Philosophy & Public Policy, Lancaster University, Lancaster LA1 4YG, UK. Email: a.stone@lancaster.ac.uk

nature.<sup>2</sup> The early German Romantics, Frederick Beiser notes, “hoped to restore the beauty, magic and mystery of nature in the aftermath of the ravages of science and technology”.<sup>3</sup> They perceived modernity to have estranged humanity from nature and “disenchanted” nature by applying to it a narrowly analytic and reflective form of rationality. The Romantics thus essentially conceived their programme for cultural and aesthetic transformation with the aim of re-enchanting nature and reconciling humanity with nature. This neglected aspect of early German Romantic thought deserves examination and reconstruction, especially because the Romantic ambition to restore a sense of nature’s mystery and magic anticipates the concern of some contemporary environmental philosophers to develop a conception of natural things as animated and so worthy of respect and care.

Scholars have noted that “ecological critique... has its roots in Romantic philosophy”.<sup>4</sup> However, they often interpret this association negatively, based on a view of Romanticism as a reactive retreat from modernity into medievalism.<sup>5</sup> This view is mistaken with respect to early German Romanticism, which endorses Enlightenment values of “secularization, humanism, the libertarian and egalitarian values of republicanism, [and] the primacy of reason”.<sup>6</sup> As Simon Critchley remarks, though, the Romantics aimed to transform these values so as to overcome “the disenchantment of the world that those values... [typically] bring about”.<sup>7</sup> The Romantics, then, sought to create a culture that would reconceive nature as enchanted, but in a distinctively modern way. This makes early German Romanticism important for any current philosophy which hopes to reconceive nature as animated without jettisoning the epistemic and political values of modernity.

The notion that nature has undergone “disenchantment” and could be “re-enchanting” may seem unhelpfully vague – as may, too, the undefined notion of “modernity” that I have relied on so far. But we can derive a relatively precise understanding of these concepts from the work of Friedrich Schlegel, the pre-eminent and most influential theoretician of the early Romantic movement, on whose thought this essay focuses. For Schlegel, as I will show in more detail later on, humans “disenchant” (*entzaubern*) nature if they perceive it as not at all mysterious but completely intelligible by reason. Conversely, humans would “enchant” (*bezaubern*) nature by perceiving it as partly mysterious, not fully rationally comprehensible.<sup>8</sup> For Schlegel, to perceive nature as partly mysterious is equally (given the German word for magic, *Zauber*) to see its behaviour as partly magical, deriving from sources that are occult to us. An “enchanting” view of nature, on which the character and behaviour of natural phenomena can never be entirely grasped or predicted, also implies (as we will see) the appropriateness of care for these phenomena. Throughout, I will use “disenchantment” and “re-enchantment” in Schlegel’s senses, saying that someone disenchants or enchants – or holds disenchanting or enchanting

views of – nature when they see it as (respectively) wholly rationally intelligible (“disenchanted”) or partly mysterious (“enchanted”). Also, I shall rely on Schlegel’s understanding of modernity as a post-medieval culture which endorses a cluster of values (freedom, criticism, egalitarianism) stemming from the specific form of rationality that becomes dominant in this culture – an analytic, reflective, form. This form of rationality, Schlegel thinks, encourages the belief that nature is wholly intelligible to reason; modern culture can be said to “disenchant” nature by educating its members to practise rationality in this form.

I have been writing as if early German Romanticism were a singular entity, but it comprises a loose assemblage of thinkers, and this paper cannot offer a comprehensive account of their divergent conceptions of how nature has been disenchanted and might be re-enchanted. Instead, I shall focus on Schlegel’s conception of this as articulated in a series of texts: *On the Study of Greek Poetry* (written in 1795 and published in 1797), the *Critical and Athenaeum Fragments* (1797, 1798), the novel *Lucinde* (1799), and the *Dialogue on Poetry* (1799). Given Schlegel’s influence on early Romanticism, a study of his early thinking regarding nature provides the best way into broader Romantic approaches to nature. Admittedly, Schlegel’s own writings are far from unified: he underwent considerable intellectual development from 1795 to 1800, and rarely argues systematically for the theories he endorses at each stage. But despite his fragmentary and highly allusive style (which, anyway, he adopts for complex theoretical reasons),<sup>9</sup> Schlegel’s thinking concerning nature can be identified as falling into successive phases, each resolving philosophical difficulties within its predecessor. Schlegel, then, has no single understanding of nature’s disenchantment and re-enchantment, but a series of progressively improving understandings. I will reconstruct these in chronological order, exhibiting the problems within each and concluding with his most satisfactory account (from his *Dialogue on Poetry*).

Since my reconstruction of Schlegel’s evolving views must be somewhat complicated, an anticipatory summary may help. Initially, I will explore how his early, pre-romantic work criticises modern culture for propagating a form of rationality that leads to a disenchanting view of nature. Subsequently, Schlegel reconceives this modern form of rationality more positively, as making possible a new kind of literature – an ironic, fragmentary, romantic poetry – which can reinvest natural phenomena with the very mystery of which analysis and reflection, in their more usual application, have deprived them. Because romantic poetry aspires to knowledge of reality whilst ironically recognising the finitude of its perspective, it can portray natural phenomena as having a mysterious meaning – as pointing to an underlying reality which transcends knowledge. Romantic poetry thereby “points to what is higher, the infinite, [it offers] a hieroglyph of the... holy fullness of life of creative nature [*bildenden Natur*]”

(DP, 334/106-7).<sup>10</sup> So, consistently with his general idea that Romanticism transforms Enlightenment values, Schlegel believes that the analytic, reflective form of rationality makes available the poetic means through which natural phenomena can be *re-enchanted*. Problematically, though, his account of the historical genesis of this form of rationality relies on a contrast between human freedom and natural necessity which reinstates precisely that disenchanting view of nature which Schlegel seeks to surpass. He overcomes this problem by reconceiving nature itself as poetic and creative, so that human beings create freely only by participating in nature's own, more primordial, poetic processes. This gives rise to the revised view that romantic poetry does know reality, and knows it to be creative nature; yet, by knowing nature as freely creative, poetry still portrays it as eluding full comprehension. This final stage in Schlegel's thinking about the enchantment of nature is, I hope to show, his most coherent and satisfactory.<sup>11</sup>

### I. Modernity and the Disenchantment of Nature

Schlegel's early, pre-romantic essay *On the Study of Greek Poetry* advances a wide-ranging critique of modern culture, affirming the aesthetic superiority of classical Greece. This essay forms the point of departure for Schlegel's thought about nature, since he criticises modern culture partly because it encourages a disenchanting conception of nature. By considering this essay (and others of Schlegel's early, classicist, essays which amplify its claims), we can clarify his implicit understanding of the "disenchantment" of nature and of the "re-enchantment" with which it contrasts. We can also clarify what Schlegel means by modernity: a post-medieval culture regulated by the specific – analytic, reflective – form of rationality which he calls "understanding", *der Verstand*. Having clarified these concepts of Schlegel's, we can see how he takes modern culture to "disenchant" nature, a criticism of modernity which prepares for his subsequent defence of romantic poetry as the solution to modernity's problems.

Schlegel opens the essay by arguing that modern literature has several "characteristic traits" (OSGP, 225/22) that render it inferior to ancient literature (he uses "poetry" – *Poesie* – in the broad sense of artistic literature; I shall follow him in this throughout).<sup>12</sup> Modern works are disunified – their various parts do not cohere together and they generate an unsatisfied longing for unity. This disunity arises because modern works concentrate on depicting particular phenomena, individuals, or events in great detail rather than subordinating the depiction of the particulars to the preservation of the work's symmetry and coherence. Modern works depict these particulars in sufficient detail to exhibit their singularity and complexity, and so they become interesting (228/24). All these features render modern works imperfect: dissatisfying and internally discordant.

Furthermore, many modern works are produced under the influence of theories and concepts, which render them sterile and mannered.

Since Schlegel sees modern poetry as the outgrowth of a coherent cultural formation, his criticisms of modern poetry embody a broader criticism of modern culture. Generally, he understands a “culture” (*Bildung*) to be an all-embracing way of life, embodied in customs, art, science, and political institutions, and in which its members become educated (WSGR, 627). Specifically modern culture (or modernity), for Schlegel, emerges in stages, culminating in the 18th century, from the “barbaric” period that succeeds classical antiquity (OSGP, 356/89). Modern culture has a cluster of characteristic values: republicanism and belief in freedom; secularisation; and cosmopolitan mixing of traditions (AF, 198/nos. 214, 216; 203/nos. 231, 233; OSGP, 225/22). These values derive from the central feature of modernity, its *artificial* (*künstlich*) character. Schlegel sometimes simply calls classical and modern culture “natural” and “artificial” (WSGR, 635). Modernity is artificial in the sense that the principles guiding its development are concepts and theories drawn from the understanding (OSGP, 232/26, 263/41; see also GS, 35). Schlegel counts the understanding as artificial because its operations are not governed by nature but are free – the understanding directs its own operations, acting independently of nature (OSGP, 229–30/24–5). The understanding, he remarks, is a specific *type* of rationality (CF, 159/no. 104), not identifiable with rationality *per se* (*Vernunft*); understanding is the particular form that rationality assumes once it begins to operate independently of nature. His classicist writings imply that the understanding has the following defining features.

First, the understanding divides and *analyses* whatever it studies: “The isolating understanding begins by dividing and dismembering [*vereinzeln*] the whole of nature” (OSGP, 245/32). “The understanding arduously builds up the singular, and loses the whole”; it introduces *Zerstückelung* (dismemberment) (GS, 34, 37). Second, the understanding is dispassionately reflective; consequently, a culture of understanding “splits up” (*zerspaltet*) human beings by educating them to pursue reflection to the neglect of sensibility, passion, and the uninhibited action which, Schlegel assumes, can only issue from passion (AW, 29). Within this culture, sensibility (*Sinnlichkeit*) is “in a state of suppression”.<sup>13</sup> These analytic and reflective powers shape modern literature, leading artists to focus on isolated particulars and to follow aesthetic theories and concepts dispassionately. The defects of modern literature thus reflect its production under the aegis of the understanding: “All... aspects of modern poetry can be explained entirely by this domination of the understanding, by this artificiality of our aesthetic culture” (OSGP, 237/28).

Contained within Schlegel’s criticisms of the aesthetic consequences of modern culture is the further objection that this culture disenchant nature. We can see this by considering some of his claims about intelligibility. He

holds that, in modernity (or *die neue Zeit*), the view becomes widespread that everything is wholly intelligible to reason (*verständlich*). This culture, Schlegel maintains, demands that “the whole world [should] become wholly comprehensible [*verständlich*]”.<sup>14</sup> This picture of modernity anticipates Weber’s famous statement that in modernity “there are no mysterious, incalculable forces that come into play, but... one can in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted”.<sup>15</sup> Weber’s statement implies that something is disenchanted just when its character and behaviour are assumed to admit of exhaustive rational understanding. Although it might appear anachronistic to attribute the same understanding of disenchantment to Schlegel, he does seem to presuppose it, contrasting the modern belief in nature’s complete intelligibility to a contrasting conception of nature. Across several texts, he says that this conception, speaking with a magical or enchanting word (*Zauberwort*) (DP, 312), “regards everything as a mystery [*Geheimnis*] and a wonder” (AF, 33/121). On this conception, “everything is strange, significant [*bedeutend*]... and enveloped by mysterious enchantment [*geheimem Zauber*]” – all phenomena, including natural phenomena, are seen as (partly) magical and mysterious.<sup>16</sup> This conception “enchants” nature by denying that it is fully comprehensible by reason.

Schlegel’s early writings presuppose that the specific form of rationality which he calls the understanding encourages a disenchanting view of nature. Because the understanding analyses natural phenomena into their component parts, it makes the operations and interactions of those parts transparently intelligible, depriving those phenomena of the mystery and inexplicable agency they previously appeared to possess.<sup>17</sup> The rise of the understanding, Schlegel writes, ends the pre-modern experience of nature as infinitely rich, creative, inexhaustible – and, by implication, enchanted, incapable of being exhausted by analysis (GS, 34, 38). Moreover, rational analysis requires that one hold back from an immediate emotional response to natural phenomena, adopting an attitude of dispassionate comprehension. Hence, Schlegel writes, “human understanding has a gap beyond the limits of knowledge” – it suppresses the immediate emotional responses to nature which prevailed in ancient Greece (40). Overall, he thinks that the reflective, analytical form of rationality which prevails in modern culture dissolves the mystery, and the attendant emotive force, which humanity formerly found in natural phenomena.

Further evidence of Schlegel’s picture of how modernity disenchant nature comes from his contrasting conception of ancient Greek culture, which he identifies as natural rather than artificial (OSGP, 276/48). This sounds odd, for Greece was still a *culture* and as such emerged through humanity’s struggle to free itself from natural givenness and define its mode of life autonomously (WSGR, 627). However, in Greece, “the *entire* composite human drive is... the guiding principle of culture... the culture is

natural and not artificial” (OSGP, 287/55). The Greeks produced culture not only from their “drive” (*Trieb*) to act freely but also from their natural impulses and powers. The Greeks reconciled these dual components of the “drive” by producing cultural artefacts which portrayed freedom as embodied within given natural phenomena and places and within natural human impulses, thereby sanctioning reliance on those impulses as something compatible with freedom.

Schlegel’s account of the Greeks suggests that they depicted the natural world as enchanted. Greek poetry portrays natural phenomena as embodying freedom by seeing them as the incarnations of divine or quasi-divine beings: there is an “inner connection between this [Greek]... poetic fullness of life and the... ancient pagan faith in nature” (AW, 19). Particular places are seen as inhabited by gods and mythical beings, and natural forces and entities are seen as forms assumed by gods – for example, Poseidon inhabits and governs the sea, while Zeus can assume the form of a swan or a bull. Greek poetry is simultaneously mythology, seeing divinity as contained in all nature (OSGP, 302–3/64). Crucially, Greek poetry sees natural phenomena as embodying or containing deities whose actions are spontaneous and unpredictable, therefore presuming that the behaviour of natural phenomena cannot be exhaustively understood through rational analysis of their parts. From the classical perspective, this behaviour must always remain partly mysterious. Even though Greek culture, *qua* mythological, offers a comprehensive scheme for rendering nature intelligible via traditional legends concerning the gods (277/49), this scheme itself presupposes the presence in nature of a dimension of (divine) spontaneity and unpredictability that will never fully yield to rational analysis.

Schlegel’s key critical claim in *On the Study of Greek Poetry* is that modern culture is based exclusively on the understanding and not also on natural impulses. Having contrasted modernity with classical culture and traced the defects of modern poetry to those of modern culture as a whole, Schlegel claims that modern poetry can only surmount those defects by setting modern standards aside and emulating the harmony and symmetry of classical works. His early “classicism” is a proposal not for narrowly literary change but for a poetry which would portray nature as free and enchanted, justifying renewed acceptance of our natural impulses and inaugurating a less artificial culture as a whole. Since this aesthetic transformation would constitute a break with modernity, though, it cannot occur organically from within the modern world. Schlegel therefore claims that it must be induced by theoretical understanding of Greek poetry (347/84). However, this risks making his proposed new culture still typically modern, reliant on artificial concepts and rules. He therefore suggests that the theoretical understanding in question must itself be not analytic but holistic, in the sense that it regards all aspects of Greek culture as connected

together to compose an indivisible whole. The problem, though, is that it is unclear how modern individuals, entrenched in analytic forms of reasoning, can produce this holistic theory – as he admits, classicists study isolated aspects of the ancient world and generally cannot suppress their penchant for individual details (WSGR, 622, 625).<sup>18</sup> Schlegel’s proposal for a resurrection of classical culture is therefore unfeasible. He needs, instead, to reconceive modernity as containing opposing tendencies – not only inducing a disenchanting view of nature, but also unleashing forces which resist this disenchanting view. He achieves this with the theory of romantic poetry sketched in his next writings.

## II. Romantic Poetry and the Re-enchantment of Nature

In the *Critical* and *Athenaeum Fragments*, Schlegel re-evaluates modern poetry, suggesting that it can re-enchant nature in a distinctively modern way, corresponding to its distinctively fragmentary and reflective character, which he rethinks as its *romanticism*. In Schlegel’s revised view, romantic literature depicts natural phenomena as partly mysterious by portraying them not as the embodiment of the gods but as indications of an unknowable, underlying reality. Moreover, romantic poetry suggests that this underlying reality *is* nature as a whole, a mysterious, incomprehensibly creative force. Let us review the central features of Schlegel’s theory of romantic poetry, especially his central theory of romantic irony, before considering how this poetry infuses natural phenomena with mystery.

In 1796–97, Schlegel re-evaluates the very traits of modern poetry he had formerly condemned; crystallising this re-evaluation, he reconceives modern literature as “romantic”. He famously defines romantic literature as “universal”, in that it combines many genres and various subject matters, which it attempts to unify in single works (AF, 182–3/no. 116). These elements are so diverse that they necessarily resist unification, so that romantic works only ever strive for unity without attaining it. The romantic work remains in a fragmentary state, yet insofar as it strives for unity it is “progressive”, in “becoming”. Through this conception of romantic literature, Schlegel re-describes the fragmentation, unsatisfied yearning, and reflective orientation of modern literature in positive terms. He does not consider romantic poetry to oppose modernity, then, but rather to be quintessentially modern. (However, he denies that all works produced in the modern era are romantic: although the essential tendency of poetry *qua* modern is to be romantic, many second-rate works fail to realise this essential tendency.)

Romantic poetry’s central feature, for Schlegel, is irony. Irony “contains and arouses a feeling of indissoluble antagonism between the unconditioned and the conditioned, between the impossibility and the necessity of complete communication... [it leads us to] fluctuate endlessly between belief and

disbelief” (CF, 160/no. 108). Any attempt to know and communicate about what Schlegel calls “the absolute” or “the infinite” can only be partial, offering a limited perspective upon it (what he means by “the infinite” will be examined shortly). Irony arises insofar as the text reflects upon and makes explicit its partiality, not only incessantly attempting to describe the infinite but also reflecting continuously upon its merely perspectival status, so that it “hovers at the midpoint between the presented and the presenter” (AF, 182/no. 116). Literary texts, for Schlegel, exemplify this ironic stance because – in Claire Colebrook’s words – “the literary work presents itself in the particularity and specificity of its point of view”, drawing attention to the subjective character of all its representations.<sup>19</sup>

Initially, romantic irony appears ill-equipped to re-enchant nature. On traditional readings of Schlegelian irony, such as those of Hegel and Kierkegaard, it is premised on a Fichtean metaphysics according to which only the (absolute) ego or “I” is ultimately real and everything else depends for its existence upon the I.<sup>20</sup> Just as, for Fichte, the absolute I necessarily posits the objective world or non-I which it then strives to recognise as its own product, so, in romantic irony (on this reading), the self strives to “annihilate” external existents – to expose their ultimate unreality – by displaying all its descriptions of reality as mere perspectives which it can “set up and dissolve... out of its own caprice”.<sup>21</sup> Hence, Hegel and Kierkegaard conclude, the ironist denies intrinsic reality and value to anything outside the self, including nature – a position which seemingly intensifies the denial of any mystery and inaccessibility in nature. This traditional reading has been widely criticised, however, since Schlegel believes that literature attempts to know an “infinite” reality which, he assumes, *does* exist. Yet perhaps this infinite reality is really only that of the absolute I – not the finite self, which is distinguished from the objects of which it is conscious, but the unlimited I which, on Fichte’s metaphysics, logically precedes the self/object opposition that it institutes.<sup>22</sup>

Schlegel, though, always had intellectual sympathies which oppose this Fichtean view: in 1793, he equates “the truth” not with the absolute I but with “eternal nature” (which he also calls “the great hiddenness”).<sup>23</sup> Despite his (subsequent) attraction to Fichte, from mid-1796 he increasingly rejected Fichte’s metaphysics, above all due to his professed “loyalty to the universe”.<sup>24</sup> Schlegel, with other Romantic thinkers, had reached the view that, since the absolute precedes the subject/object contrast, it cannot be identified with subjectivity, but must be some deeper, unitary reality that underwrites both subject and object, the character of which remains necessarily unknowable by us *as* subjects.<sup>25</sup> Poetry, then, arises in our endeavour to know this infinite reality; and poetry becomes ironic in exposing that we can only ever access this reality partially, perspectively. Nonetheless, in exposing that reality lies beyond our cognitive reach, irony generates a “sense of the infinite [*Sinn fürs Unendliche*]” (AF, 243/

no. 412) – it points towards infinite reality, albeit as precisely unknowable. This instils a renewed longing to know the infinite, impelling further – unsuccessful – poetic efforts to do so. This striving to know the infinite, then, need not entail the Fichtean metaphysics on which the I strives to unmask the non-I’s ultimate unreality; for Schlegel, by contrast, the self strives, unsuccessfully, to *transcend* its limitations and cognitively access reality itself.

How does romantic poetry’s generation of a “sense of the infinite” re-enchant nature? Schlegel’s writings indicate two ways in which this occurs. First, insofar as romantic texts describe natural phenomena, they portray those phenomena as pointing to an inaccessible underlying reality. This renders those phenomena partly mysterious, for they come to signify (*bedeuten*) something beyond them that remains obscure. Schlegel claims that a romantic work should be “true to fact and truthful in the realm of the visible and full of secret meaning and relation to the invisible” (DP, 270/90). Writers try to know the absolute, but can only access and describe visible, finite, natural things; yet, in describing these finite things, writers convey a sense that the infinite is located beyond them. In this way, the romantic text “tries... to enchant (*bezaubern*) the mind” (AF, 250/no. 429) – to fill the mind with a sense of the mystery of natural phenomena. Notably, Schlegel also suggests that, in romantic poetry, finite things indicate (*hindeuten*) the “fullness of life of creative nature” (DP, 334/107): that is, romantic poetry engenders a sense that infinite reality is creative nature. This seems to contradict his view that the infinite is unknowable. However, he believes that, because the infinite is irreducible to any or all of the finite natural phenomena which we can know (perspectivally), we gain a sense that the infinite has an inexhaustible richness (*Lebensfülle*) in virtue of which it stands to the finite realm as *natura naturans* (creative nature) does to *natura naturata* (created nature). Although infinite reality is unknowable, when we sense its unknowability we confer upon it the connotation of nature as an incomprehensibly rich and dynamic power. Hence: “Every fact must have a strict individuality, [but also] be both a mystery and an experiment... of creative nature” (AF, 249/no. 427). As a whole, romantic poetry, first, depicts particular natural things as having mysterious meaning, and, second, engenders a sense that reality – in its transcendence of finite, knowable, things – is an incomprehensibly creative nature bursting with “holy fullness”.

Schlegel does not elaborate the ethical implications of this reconception of nature as enchanted, but they can be inferred, as they were by his fellow Romantic, the writer and critic Tieck. Tieck concludes from Schlegel’s epistemological reflections that we should acknowledge our cognitive limits, adopting a stance of epistemic modesty.<sup>26</sup> For Tieck, to acknowledge our limits is, simultaneously, to “forebear” from “illuminating too harshly [nature’s] gentle twilight” – to refuse to make the mistake of treating natural

phenomena as fully intelligible.<sup>27</sup> Tieck supposes that such forbearance also requires “care” for natural phenomena, in a double sense: respect for their mysteriously significant dimension, and circumspection about acting upon them insofar as their behaviour can never entirely be predicted.

Importantly, the romantic view of enchanted nature which Schlegel proposes remains fundamentally modern. He no longer proposes returning to the classical poetic paradigm in which natural phenomena embody gods whose activities, although unpredictably spontaneous, are recognisable after the fact in terms of familiar mythic schemes. Romantic poetry instead portrays natural phenomena as not merely everyday objects but also “hieroglyphs” of an unknowable reality. Anticipating this contrast between ancient and modern ways of seeing natural phenomena as enchanted, *On the Study of Greek Poetry* had stated that ancient poetry depicts “the visible divinity of man” rather than the “divinity of a nature that lies beyond the eternal veil no mortal can peer through” (OSGP, 329/77). The contrast is between a divinity incarnated in human – and non-human – nature and made familiar through traditional legends, and an infinite reality which exceeds comprehension and which is not incarnated in particular natural phenomena, but only indicated by them as something that lies beyond them.

Although Schlegel does not make this explicit, he believes that romantic poetry enchants natural phenomena in this distinctively modern way because this poetry results from the analytic and reflective form of rationality that prevails in modernity. First, reflection is the necessary precondition of irony: it enables the poet to temper his enthusiasm for knowing about reality with dispassionate reflection on the partiality of his efforts. Second, analysis is at work when romantic texts describe phenomena in exhaustive individual detail – yet, as a result, they give so much detail as to preclude any overall understanding, which again exposes the limitations of our cognitive powers and instils a sense that infinite reality remains unknowable. Thus, the very features of modern rationality – reflectiveness and analysis – which Schlegel had in his classicist writings blamed for disenchanting natural phenomena, he now takes to enable and generate an essentially modern form of poetry which *re-invests* those phenomena with mystery in a correspondingly modern way. Schlegel’s call to overcome modernity’s disenchantment of nature is not a retreat from modernity, but rests on the idea that the modern form of rationality contains opposing tendencies: its reflective and analytic elements encourage the view that nature is wholly intelligible, but they also enable a kind of poetry which opposes this very view. Schlegel urges artists to produce a body of literature of this kind which, he hopes, would transform our experience of the natural world surrounding us (a transformation which, nonetheless, would remain compatible with modern values of freedom and critical thought). This romantic programme for overcoming the disenchantment of nature is

preferable to Schlegel's classicist account, since it is clear how the programme is realisable from within modernity. Yet Schlegel's theory of romantic re-enchantment still has significant problems, as we should explore.

### III. Problems with Schlegel's Conception of Re-enchantment

Schlegel's first problem concerns his idea that romantic literature is a product of the artist's freedom. Unlike classical literature, which he continues to see as partly a natural expression of the artist's instincts (AF, 172–3/no. 51), modern poetry issues from that complete freedom from nature that manifests itself in modern authors' abilities to analyse and reflectively withdraw from their conceptions. Schlegel regards these abilities as functions of the exercise of human freedom, as he makes explicit in his *Ideas* (1800), stating bluntly that "reason is free".<sup>28</sup> Accordingly, he writes, the romantic poet must understand his endeavours in terms of the "creative philosophy which starts from... belief in freedom, and then shows how the human spirit impresses its law on all things and how the world is its work of art" (AF, 192/no. 168). Evidently, Schlegel presumes that modern individuals really have become separated from nature, a separation which arises, historically, through the breakdown of the classical synthesis between freedom and natural drives. Schlegel's account of this breakdown is that ancient culture reached a stage when human freedom broke from nature's "guardianship" and became independent (WSGR, 633). This historical account presupposes that there is an original duality between humanity's "drive" to freedom and its natural drives. This positions freedom in opposition to a nature that is implicitly defined, by contrast, as unfree – presumably in the sense of comprising an endless sequence of causal interactions. These assumptions are displayed when Schlegel says of romantic poetry, "it alone is free; and it recognises as its first law that the will of the poet can tolerate no law above itself" (AF, 183/no. 116). Poetry is the only art that genuinely expresses freedom because it relies on the humanly produced media of "fantasy" and "arbitrary sign-language", and so has no admixture of nature (OSGM, 265/42, 294/59).<sup>29</sup> By implication, nature is a locus of unfreedom, of "external [causal] influence" (265/42). This view that nature is unfree reintroduces the very idea of nature as a realm of fully intelligible, predictable, interactions that Schlegel seeks to overcome. To distance himself from this disenchanting view of nature, he must argue that nature itself, in some way, already evinces spontaneous creative agency – he needs, as he notes: "To observe nature as a whole which, in itself, is infinitely purposive" (PL, 149/no. 308). From this perspective, human freedom would have to be rethought not as opposed to nature but as a manifestation, or derivative form, of a more generalised

creativity located within the natural world. Schlegel's subsequent writings will pursue this rethinking.

Before considering this, though, we should turn to a second problem: does Schlegel naïvely overestimate the power of poetry to transform our everyday life and experience of nature? If romantic poetry depends on a form of rationality the non-poetic exercise of which leads to a disenchanting view of nature, then this poetry can arise only in a social context in which the disenchanting view is widely held. Consequently, although poetry may change how we experience nature, this experience seems liable to be overwhelmed by the prevalent disenchanting view. Schlegel's writings outline an interesting solution to this problem. He suggests that other intellectual disciplines and forms of knowledge are developing, internally, to become increasingly poetic – “The boundaries of science and art... are so confused that even the conviction that these eternal boundaries are unchangeable has generally begun to falter” (OSGP, 219/18) – a development that romantic poetry can hasten by opening itself to simultaneous fusion with those other fields. Schlegel argues this, most importantly, apropos of natural science, often identified as a principal source of nature's disenchantment.<sup>30</sup>

Natural science is a recurring theme in the *Athenaeum Fragments*. One fragment states that many scientific explanations either explain nothing or “obscure” everything (AF, 177/no. 82), implying that science often reflects the modern predisposition towards meticulous analyses that obscure the mystery of natural phenomena. Sometimes, though, scientific explanations give a “hint” of reality – a growing tendency which, for Schlegel, makes science increasingly poetic. He compares recent discoveries in chemistry to *bon mots* – inspired, witty, insights into hidden connections (200/no. 220) – whose scientific discoverers are, actually, artists (236/no. 381). To appreciate Schlegel's point, his comments must be situated in their contemporary scientific context. Numerous phenomena had been discovered (oxygen in 1774 and electricity in 1789, while Lavoisier had experimented with broader processes of chemical mixing and separation), but so recent were these discoveries that, as yet, no generally accepted and fully satisfactory theoretical frameworks existed to understand them. Consequently, Schlegel can maintain that contemporary chemists are discovering patterns of chemical attraction which surpass analytic understanding, because they inherently point to underlying connections and affinities which, themselves, transcend comprehension. Scientific research generates only an obscure sense of these connections, just as romantic poetry gives only a sense of the infinite. By hinting at the reality underlying natural processes and phenomena, science (so Schlegel believes) is superseding the disenchanting form it had acquired with the rise of the Newtonian paradigm and the elimination of poetic and mythic elements from scientific writing from the 17th century onwards.<sup>31</sup> Now, in contrast, “the ultimate goal of physics

must be mythology. – The highest presentation of physics necessarily becomes a novel” (PL, 155/nos. 378–9). Schlegel urges scientists to advance this poetic tendency by drawing openly on literary inspiration. (Similarly, many contemporary German biologists, influenced by Romanticism, believed “the aesthetic comprehension [in, say, an artist’s sketch] of the entire organism or of the whole interacting environment [to] be a necessary preliminary stage in... scientific analysis”).<sup>32</sup> Schlegel does not believe, then, that poetry must struggle to change our experience of nature in the face of scientific currents that depict it as disenchanting; rather, contemporary science internally tends to see nature as partly mysterious, a tendency which poetry has only to strengthen.

Romantic poetry, according to Schlegel, should do this by synthesising itself with science, through acknowledging and accentuating its own intrinsically *chemical* form.<sup>33</sup> To understand this peculiar claim, we should recognise Schlegel’s assumption that, in chemical processes, substances strive to realise their hidden affinities and to dissolve their separation, but, even when they unite, only produce new, discrete, items to be drawn into fresh chemical cycles. He takes this chemical interplay between mixing and separation to have the same structure as romantic poetry, which positions the infinite as “the result of eternally separating and uniting powers” and so “thinks of [its] ideals... as being chemical” (AF, 243/no. 412). In chemical processes, bodies try to overcome their separation (likewise, the poetic self tries to overcome its limitations and know about the infinite), but bodies only end up forming another finite body (likewise, the self realises that its attempted knowledge was merely perspectival). Since poetry produces the sense of the infinite through this oscillation, Schlegel claims that this sense is produced “chemically” and, by extension, that poetry portrays the infinite *as* chemical – as the same hidden connection at which chemical processes hint.

Schlegel’s account of the growing similarity between poetry and science exemplifies his broader view that, across the whole range of intellectual fields, attempted applications of analysis and reflection are re-creating a view of nature as partly mysterious – the entire modern age, after all, is chemical (AF, 248/no. 426). Poetic experience of nature, then, will not necessarily be overridden by a disenchanting view, since other intellectual fields do not unequivocally propagate that view anyway. Yet this raises a new problem: perhaps Schlegel’s assessment of modern intellectual trends is too optimistic – especially given the extensive repudiation of romantic science by later 19th-century scientists and their elaboration of a unified mathematical framework for explaining chemistry and electricity. Schlegel would presumably reply that later scientists have exposed new mysteries in turn, so that, even if they treat those mysteries as further matters for reflective analysis, science nonetheless remains ambiguous, and poetry can strengthen its mystifying aspect. Generally, then, Schlegel’s view is that

poetically induced experience of nature is not simply doomed to be overridden by other intellectual currents, for these also bring about re-enchantment to varying degrees.

Furthermore, Schlegel's idea that romantic texts have the form of series of chemical processes opens up a route for thinking of natural processes as creative and so for avoiding his problematic opposition of human freedom to natural necessity. Since the poetic process of striving to know the infinite has a chemical structure, this implies that the identically structured chemical processes which suffuse all of nature – since, for Schlegel, the “whole of nature divides itself into *products, processes, and elements*” (PL, 148/ no. 304) – have a *poetic* structure. These processes are poetic because, through their interactions they hint at a hidden, underlying reality: “The true phenomenon is a representative of the infinite, therefore an allegory, a hieroglyph – therefore also a fact” (155/no. 380). By developing this idea that natural processes are poetic in themselves, Schlegel could attribute to them an inherent creativity in virtue of which they already approximate to and prefigure human freedom. He pursues this idea in ensuing writings, especially *Lucinde* and the *Dialogue on Poetry*.

#### IV. The Poetry of Nature

By developing the idea that natural processes are poetic, Schlegel succeeds in rethinking the natural world as creative and reconceiving human freedom to consist in participation in nature's underlying creativity. However, the idea that natural processes are poetic proves not straightforwardly compatible with his previous philosophical framework. As I will explain, this new idea implies that infinite nature can be *known* in its real creativity, which obliges Schlegel to revise his whole understanding of how romantic poetry re-enchants nature. Ultimately, this revision produces his most satisfactory conception of re-enchantment, as I hope to show.

Schlegel's novel *Lucinde* appears, initially, to apply his pre-existing theory of romantic poetry and its re-enchantment of nature. At one point, for example, *Lucinde*'s central character Julius sinks into a dreamlike state: his imagination takes over, he finds the external world “transfigured and purer: above [him] the blue canopy of the sky, below... the green carpet of the rich earth, soon teeming with happy shapes” (L, 19/57). All natural things are construed as allegories of a “spiritual breath” hovering over them (59/104). Although these comments seem to concur with Schlegel's earlier work that poetry portrays natural phenomena as pointing to an unknowable reality, in fact the comments are embedded within a theoretical framework which significantly develops and modifies that of the *Athenaeum Fragments*. It does so, first, in stressing the artist's passivity, and second, in understanding nature and poetry on the model of the plant, not that of chemical processes.

Just as Julius imagines by sinking into a passive, dreamlike state, so *Lucinde*'s "Idyll of Idleness" suggests that creativity arises from passive submission to non-conscious workings of one's nature (25–6/64). Genuine artists allow works to gestate within themselves, without intervention. They also allow the formation of works to be influenced by chance events. Whereas the *Athenaeum Fragments* emphasise the modern poet's freedom and rationality, *Lucinde* urges him to submit to non-rational elements, a submission that should ideally be unimpeded by reflection. The "Idyll" unfavourably contrasts Prometheus, who creates "mechanically" by following artificially imposed rules, with Hercules, who creates by allowing his natural impulses to prevail and develop organically (28–9/66–8). *Lucinde* therefore stresses the artist's need to reject conventional, artificial values, which cramp his nature.<sup>34</sup>

The claim that creativity consists in passivity sounds odd – surely creation involves activity. Schlegel's point, though, is that the artist best creates if he desists from deliberate action and – passively – allows his non-rational nature to exercise *its* creativity (which, as creativity, is active). This natural process of creating is also a *vegetal* process, for Schlegel: the poet should let the work grow and take shape through a plant-form process of natural growth and self-formation. As the *Dialogue on Poetry* says, "poetry blooms forth [*hervorblüht*] from itself out of the invisible original force of humanity" (DP, 285). Schlegel's assumption is that plants grow non-consciously, from instinct, in a gradual and incremental fashion that incorporates chance influences. On this basis, he rethinks romantic poetry as having the form of a plant – resulting from gradual, contingent growth. Schlegel's earlier idea that the romantic work unsuccessfully strives for unity becomes recast as the idea that the work continually grows and proliferates parts that never achieve the stable interrelatedness and functionality by which the organs of an animal body secure its coherent unity.<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, for Schlegel, the poetic work is not merely like a plant but actually results from vegetal growth within the artist. This vegetal creativity of the artist is an offshoot of a generalised vegetal creativity that Schlegel finds throughout nature, noting: "The *world* as a whole, and originally, is a plant" (PL, 151/no. 332). This strange idea that the world is a plant occurs within a loose series of unpublished fragments which hint that the natural world is free, developing, purposive, and composed of linked processes (148–51/nos. 304–80). Read in this context, and in relation to *Lucinde*, the idea that the world is a plant suggests that all natural processes are vegetal, in the sense that natural things continuously strive to interweave into coherent bodies and groupings, but never achieve stable, unified organisation. Instead, they only move towards such unity, and so display the same form of creativity that is manifest in romantic poetry. Hence, the "artificial works or natural productions that bear the form and name of poems... what are they in comparison with the formless and unconscious poetry which

reigns in the plant, radiates in the light... ? – Yet this is first, original, without it there could certainly be no poetry of words” (DP, 285). “All the holy plays of art are only distant imitations of the infinite play of the world, the eternally self-forming [*bildende*] art-work” (324). Human beings are creative insofar as they participate in these more “original” processes within nature. Schlegel’s idea that natural processes are creative and poetic thereby recasts the human freedom to create art (and to create and redefine the self culturally) as a manifestation of nature’s over-arching creativity.

Although Schlegel’s idea that natural processes are creative overcomes his earlier dualism of freedom and nature, this idea is not straightforwardly compatible with his pre-existing philosophical framework. Certainly, he had already affirmed that romantic poetry engenders a sense that infinite reality is nature which is creative and inexhaustibly full, *natura naturans*. But within this preceding framework, one does not know reality to be creative nature, but only senses it to be creative nature insofar as one senses that it surpasses understanding, inexhaustibly transcending all finite, knowable things and processes. Now, Schlegel also attributes creativity to finite human individuals *qua* natural and to the other finite, particular processes of nature. According to his earlier epistemology, the infinite would transcend finite creative processes, the creativity of the latter giving no knowledge of that of the former. Yet now, Schlegel assumes that our knowledge of finite creative processes *does* give us the knowledge that (as he puts it) the world as a whole (that is, as infinite) is a plant and an infinitely, eternally, developing art-work. Particular things, he also states in the *Dialogue on Poetry*, provide “means to the intuition [*Anschauung*] of the whole” (DP, 323). Why has he moved away from his earlier conviction that the infinite cannot be known? He now sees natural things and processes as directly creative, their creativity being immediately visible in their self-forming behaviour. These things, therefore, no longer merely signify (*hindeuten*) a creativity that lies beyond them. These things and processes manifest a creativity which, existing in identical form within all of them, is not a finite particular but a universal, and which is immediately visible in the behaviour of these particulars, present to our inspection (*Anschauung*). Just as finite creative processes can be known, so can the universal creativity of nature be known insofar as it is embodied and manifested within them. On Schlegel’s new view, then, one does not merely form a sense that unknowable reality is creative: one can *know* that infinite reality is a nature which is creative; and know, specifically, that nature as a whole creates poetic significance through incremental and gradual processes of vegetal growth. This character of creative nature can be known because it is manifest within particular vegetal processes. Hence, Schlegel says, these processes trace the “history” of nature’s “free becoming” – making nature’s creativity knowable (PL, 155–156/no. 386, 390).

Schlegel's shift away from the belief that the absolute is unknowable is also evidenced in his *Dialogue on Poetry* when he argues that the "idealism" of his earlier romanticism must be synthesised with an "equally unlimited realism" (DP, 315/98). He clarifies what he means by his "idealism" by reprising his earlier romantic theory: modern culture lacks the mythology that prevailed in classical times, a mythology which arose through the ancients' direct perception of spiritual forms within the "sensible world" (312/96). Modern poets must create a new mythology artificially, by applying the irony and analysis which generate a recognition that reality lies unknowably beyond finite things. In the *Dialogue on Poetry*, then, Schlegel defines his romantic theory as "idealistic" because it holds that we can only cognitively approach the infinite through perspectival conceptions of finite things, but cannot know the infinite as it really is, independently of our perspectives upon it. To clarify how this idealism must fuse with realism, Schlegel reconsiders the poetry/science relationship, reiterating that physics increasingly formulates "dynamic paradoxes" and opens up "sacred revelations of nature", while poetry, equally, must become scientific (322/101). Since he aligns this physics/poetry confluence with that of realism and idealism, he apparently assumes that physics adopts a "realist" standpoint, which purports to describe nature as it really is – a standpoint which, for Schlegel, poetry must come to share. How is romantic poetry to describe nature as it really is?

Schlegel's answer can be reconstructed from his literary practice in *Lucinde*, specifically from the changed function that it gives to irony. The novel still uses irony to expose the partiality of the writer's perspective, spurring further attempts to know the infinite. But this results in a *process* by which the work emerges incrementally and vegetally, and this process does confer knowledge of the vegetal creativity of nature as a whole. By experiencing the developmental relations between the parts of the work, one comes to know the creativity of nature, which is exemplified in (that of) the work. Irony, then, serves to stimulate the poetic text's growth. This reflects an emergent Schlegelian view that the role of reflective, analytic rationality in poetic creation is to (repeatedly) cancel itself out. "The highest, most complete life would be nothing other than *pure vegetating* [*Vegetieren*]" (L, 27/66) – the ideal poet allows non-rational nature to be creative – so reflection and analysis can only function positively within art if they are used, in some way, to cancel themselves out. This happens in irony, which uses reflection to check the operation of the understanding and create space for a process of poetic growth which proceeds, vegetally, from the artist's nature. Hence, Schlegel writes, the poet achieves "an intentional, arbitrary, and one-sided [ironically induced] passivity, but still passivity".

Granting that romantic poetry, physics, and other disciplines, in their respective ways, provide knowledge of creative nature, how does Schlegel's revised framework incorporate idealism – which, to recall, he has defined in

*Dialogue on Poetry* as the belief that infinite reality *surpasses* knowledge? The answer can be gleaned from a 1799 note which adopts the apparently different definition that idealist views of nature know it to be free (PL, 156/ no. 390). By this definition, his own view of nature, which knows it to be creative and spontaneous, is idealist. But this is actually consistent with his definition of idealism in the *Dialogue*. He counts his view of nature as “idealist” because it knows that nature has a creative, spontaneous, character such that its dynamic processes cannot be wholly understood, nor their course entirely predicted – and so it knows (paradoxically) that nature resists full comprehension. Thus, Schlegel’s view of nature is both realist – holding that we can have knowledge of nature as a creative, vegetal force, manifesting itself in myriad particular processes – and idealist – for this knowledge includes the knowledge that nature necessarily remains, to a significant extent, mysterious to us, precisely in respect of its creativity and spontaneity. He therefore calls his view of nature “idealist realism” (DP, 315/98). Within this framework, he preserves the idea that romantic poetry, and other fields of knowledge inasmuch as they increasingly resemble romantic poetry, describe nature as partly mysterious and thereby “enchant” it.

Schlegel’s “idealist realist” account of re-enchantment can advance the environmentalist project of reconceiving natural things as animated and therefore meriting respect. Several environmental philosophers have argued that the mechanistic worldview that became dominant in the 16th and 17th centuries, on which nature is inherently inert material stuff, licensed unrestrained manipulation or exploitation of this bare stuff.<sup>36</sup> These philosophers conclude that, to resolve environmental problems, we above all need an alternative worldview on which natural entities have their own agency and freedom.<sup>37</sup> This conception of nature would be re-enchanting, portraying natural phenomena as partly mysterious in virtue of their independent spontaneity, and, therefore, as deserving respectful and circumspect treatment. The problem is that this conception risks returning us to pre-modern worldviews in which natural things act from purposes installed by God, or express obscure series of correspondences in meaning. Because these worldviews have religious, hierarchical, and esoteric overtones, they are not readily compatible with modern values of secularism, individual freedom, criticism, and self-criticism. In contrast, on Schlegel’s “idealist realist” account of re-enchantment, modernity’s distinctive form of rationality is necessary to romantic poetry and its re-enchanting view of nature. Romantic poetry does not oppose modernity, but uses reflection and analysis to liberate a process of natural growth through which nature can be known as creative and so, too, as significantly mysterious (hence, enchanted). Schlegel thus retains the idea that romantic literature has a specially modern way of infusing nature with mystery – it does not depict natural phenomena as embodying the agency of the gods (as classical works

do), but embodies and reveals the creativity of nature itself, as an infinitely self-forming, spontaneous power. This form of re-enchantment is distinctively modern because it depends upon the exercise of rationality in its modern form, and hence can only exist together with the attendant manifestations of this form of rationality in values of criticism, secularisation, and individual freedom. Schlegel's final conception of re-enchantment is therefore his most satisfactory, preserving the strengths of his idealist account – above all its explanation of how nature's re-enchantment is possible within modernity – while abandoning his previous, problematic assumption that nature is unfree and predictable. Moreover, this conception contributes significantly to contemporary environmental philosophy, outlining a way to preserve the central values of modernity while reconceiving nature as spontaneously creative, partially mysterious, and therefore worthy of respect and care.<sup>38</sup>

## Notes

1. See, on Romantic aesthetics and literary theory, Andrew Bowie, *From Romanticism to Critical Theory* (London: Routledge, 1997) and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988); on epistemology and metaphysics, Frederick Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism 1781–1801* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 349–461, Manfred Frank, *Unendliche Annäherung: Die Anfänge der philosophischen Frühromantik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1997), and Terry Pinkard, *German Philosophy 1760–1860: The Legacy of Idealism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 131–71; on ethics, Richard Eldridge, *The Persistence of Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) and Charles Larmore, *The Romantic Legacy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).
2. However, see: Christian Becker and Reiner Manstetten, “Nature as a *you*. Novalis' philosophical thought and the modern ecological crisis”, *Environmental Values* 13 (2004), pp. 101–18; Andrew Bowie, “Romanticism and technology”, *Radical Philosophy* 72 (1995), pp. 5–16. (Bowie argues that the Romantics sought to overcome the subject's domination of nature by highlighting its lack of transparency to itself, as exemplified in the inexhaustibility of our self-understandings as embodied in art; in contrast, I will stress the Romantic idea that *nature* is inexhaustibly mysterious and creative.) On the related area of Romanticism and natural science, see Andrew Cunningham and Nicholas Jardine (eds.), *Romanticism and the Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Robert J. Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); and, on Schlegel specifically, Michel Chaouli, *The Laboratory of Poetry: Chemistry and Poetics in the Work of Friedrich Schlegel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002).
3. Frederick Beiser, “German Romanticism”, in Edward Craig (ed.) *The Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998). Beiser's reference to “technology” might sound anachronistic, but the Romantics were sensitive to current technological developments like mining – Novalis, after all, studied mining technology and worked as a director of salt mines.
4. Andrew Bowie, “Confessions of a ‘new aesthete’”, in *The Philistine Controversy*, eds. Dave Beech and John Roberts (London: Verso, 2002), p. 95.

5. Andrew Feenberg, for example, expresses the typical worry that criticising technology makes someone into a “romantic technophobe”, describing Romanticism as a “retreat from the technical sphere into art, religion, or nature”; see his *Questioning Technology* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 153, 152.
6. Simon Critchley, *Very Little...Almost Nothing: Death, Literature, Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 85–86.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 86.
8. I say “partly” mysterious advisedly: none of the “enchancing” views that Schlegel discusses see nature as wholly unintelligible. For the ancient Greeks, natural phenomena embody the gods, whose actions are free and unpredictable, but also recognisable in terms of mythic doctrines (see Section I). For romantic poetry, natural phenomena are mysterious in indicating an unknowable reality beyond them, but are also intelligible everyday objects (Section II). And, on Schlegel’s later view, romantic poetry sees natural phenomena as embodying the creativity of nature as a whole, a creativity that is mysterious in its spontaneity, but also expresses itself in recognisably vegetal, incremental, ways (Section IV).
9. For Schlegel, this style exemplifies both the fragmentation inherent in modern literary works and the simultaneous desirability and impossibility of a comprehensive system of thought (AF 173/no. 53; see note 10 on abbreviations).
10. Repeatedly quoted texts by Schlegel are cited parenthetically. I give page numbers to the text in the relevant volume of the *Kritische Friedrich Schlegel Ausgabe* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 1958–; hereafter KFSa), then, after a slash, fragment numbers when applicable, or when not page numbers to English translations if these exist. I use these translations whenever possible, sometimes amending them without special notice. I use these abbreviations: AW = “Vom ästhetischen Werte der griechischen Komödie” (1794), in KFSa vol. 1, pp. 19–33. GS = “Über die Grenzen des Schönen” (1794), in KFSa vol. 1, pp. 34–44. WSGR = “Vom Wert des Studiums der Griechen und Römer” (1795), in KFSa vol. 1, pp. 621–42. OSGP = *On the Study of Greek Poetry*, trans. Stuart Barnett (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002). German text in KFSa vol. 1, pp. 217–367. CF = “Critical fragments”, in *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991). German text in KFSa vol. 2, pp. 147–63. AF = “Athenaeum fragments”, in *Philosophical Fragments*, trans. Firchow. German text in KFSa vol. 2, pp. 165–255. L = *Lucinde*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press). German text in KFSa vol. 3, pp. 1–82. DP = “Dialogue on poetry” (selections), trans. Ernst Behler and Roman Struc, in *German Romantic Criticism*, ed. A. Leslie Willson (New York: Continuum, 1982). Complete German text in KFSa vol. 2, pp. 284–351. PL = *Philosophische Lehrjahre 1796–1828*, ed. Ernst Behler, KFSa vol. 18.
11. Calling this “final” sounds odd, since Schlegel continues writing until his death in 1829. Yet, after the *Dialogue on Poetry*, his view of nature does not fundamentally change; rather, he increasingly understands nature’s creativity as life, force, and energy. In the 1800–1801 *Lectures on Transcendental Idealism*, he identifies the reality underlying both subject and object with a single, energetic, life force. In the 1827 *Philosophy of Life*, he again describes nature as a “dynamic, living, force” manifest in particular processes and phenomena (KFSa vol. 10, p. 66). So, I call his *Dialogue* framework “final” because it guides all his subsequent thinking concerning nature.
12. Schlegel consistently judges the prose novel the exemplary form of modern poetry: “Progressive poetry is the novel” (AF 182).
13. Other aspects of rationality in its modern form concern Schlegel: for example, the way that – as in Fichte – rationality becomes a technology by which the subject creates the world (which it can therefore know *a priori*). This implies that we must restore our sovereignty over the world by practically subordinating it, as Fichte draws out: see *The Vocation of*

- Man* (1800), trans. Peter Prauss (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987). Examination of this technological aspect of the modern form of rationality is beyond the scope of this paper.
14. KFSa vol. 2, p. 370; "On incomprehensibility" (1800), in J. M. Bernstein (ed) *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 305.
  15. Max Weber, "Science as a vocation" (1919), in *Essays in Sociology*, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Routledge, 1948), p. 139.
  16. KFSa vol. 2, p. 130; "On Goethe's *Meister*" (1798), in *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, p. 272. Schlegel is referring to the conception of the world he discerns in Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* – a novel which, at this time, he finds paradigmatic of the romantic and so, too, of the enchanting.
  17. "In the present epoch, people strive only for laws of nature... they thereby treat nature as a machine" (PL, 149/no. 312).
  18. As Stuart Barnett concludes, *On the Study of Greek Poetry* "does not successfully outline how a synthesis between antiquity and modernity might be achieved... [because] the antinomy between the two seems irreconcilable" ("Critical introduction" to *On the Study of Greek Poetry*, p. 13).
  19. Colebrook, *Irony in the Work of Philosophy* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), p. 131.
  20. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox (2 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), vol. 1, p. 64; Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*, trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 273.
  21. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, vol. 1, pp. 64–5.
  22. For example, Kai Hammermeister claims that, for Schlegel, the self "never arrives at full self-knowledge or self-certainty, but remains elusive [to itself], the object of... longing". See his *The German Aesthetic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 83. Although, on this reading, romantic irony deflates the self's power by allowing only that it can feel – but not know – itself, it still sees only the self as ultimately real.
  23. Letter to August Schlegel, quoted in Ernst Behler's introduction to PL, p. xvi.
  24. *Blütenstaub* no. 26, in KFSa vol. 2, p. 164. Beiser traces this reason for Schlegel's disillusionment with Fichte in *The Struggle Against Subjectivism*, p. 443.
  25. Whether all the German Romantics deny the possibility of knowledge of the absolute is contested. According to Frank (*Unendliche Annäherung*, pp. 831–861), they do, but for Beiser (*The Struggle Against Subjectivism*, p. 660), they deny only the possibility of discursive knowledge but admit mystical, intuitive, or aesthetic knowledge. Schlegel, however, states unequivocally in 1796 that: "Knowing [*Erkennen*] already means a conditioned knowing [*Wissen*]. The unknowability of the absolute is therefore an identical triviality" (PL, 511/no. 64). The absolute can be sensed, or felt, to exist, but for Schlegel this mode of access to the absolute lacks the epistemic status of knowledge. His view here may stem (as Frank suggests in "Philosophical foundations of early Romanticism" in *The Modern Subject*, ed. Karl Ameriks and Dieter Sturma (Albany: SUNY, 1995), p. 67) from Kant's argument that existence is not a predicate, so that bare awareness that something exists is non-propositional, counting not as knowledge but mere "sense". Accordingly, Schlegel's view can be restated to say that we can sense that the absolute exists but not know anything about its character. As Beiser notes, though, Schlegel's epistemological views become more realist by 1800–1801, an increasing realism which, this paper will suggest, arises at least partly from problems in his initial account of how romantic poetry depicts nature as enchanted.
  26. See Ludwig Tieck, *Erinnerungen aus dem Leben des Dichten* (Leipzig, 1855), vol. 2, p. 250. Quoted in Frank, *Einführung in die frühromantische Ästhetik* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1989), p. 298.

27. Tieck, *Schriften* (Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985–), vol. 12, p. 228.
28. KFSÄ vol. 2, p. 269/no. 131.
29. For more on Schlegel's contrast between free poetry and unfree nature, see Bernstein, introduction to *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics*, pp. xxvii–xxix.
30. Schlegel's term *Wissenschaft* refers to any systematic form of knowledge, but context makes clear when he means specifically natural science, which he also sometimes calls *Physik*.
31. On the historical purge of poetry from science, see Londa Schiebinger, *The Mind Has No Sex?* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 150–1.
32. Richards, *Romantic Conception of Life*, p. 12.
33. Chaouli shows how Schlegel “conceiv[es] of verbal artworks as chemical experiments” (*The Laboratory of Poetry*, p. 11), taking chemical processes of unexpected mixing and separation as a model for how words and parts of words unpredictably combine (see, especially, p. 26, 121, 126).
34. Admittedly, Schlegel still affirms the need for “artificially ordered confusion” (DP, 318/100). Firchow takes this to refer to the poet's freedom to select from the products of his imagination (introduction to *Lucinde and the Fragments*, p. 30). More deeply, though, Schlegel thinks that the work must be “artificially ordered” insofar as its growth must be stimulated by irony, but he rethinks irony as reflection cancelling itself out: see below.
35. See Elaine Miller, *The Vegetable Soul* (Albany: SUNY, 2001), on how the Romantics generally took the plant – which they opposed to the animal – as an emblem of subjectivity understood as creative, never fully unified.
36. See, especially, Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution* (London: Wildwood House, 1982). See also Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), pp. 157–8.
37. See, for example, Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture* (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 50–7.
38. I thank the anonymous referees for *Inquiry* for their very helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.