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PEDAGOGICAL THOUGHT AND THE IMAGE OF THE CHILD IN THE AGE OF GERMAN
ROMANTICISM

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INTRODUCTION: THE THEME OF THE DISSERTATION

Any great movement that strives for universality, claiming to influence and transform society, economy, philosophy and art, makes its presence noticeable in all areas. Romanticism was such an overarching movement. It was in the cultural context of German Romanticism where the so-called "reform-pedagogical thinking about the origin" could emerge, in which the child no longer becomes an adult through the systematic construction of a clear thought process, as the pedagogical thinkers belonging to the traditional line of the Enlightenment would suggest. For most of the "reform pedagogues" of the time who held Romantic views, the child was already a personality, an original, creative form of the human being whose richness must be preserved in teaching and education and used in the art of living. We witness the transmission of this pedagogical culture when we explore the precursors of the values appearing in the life reform movements at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. Pedagogical thinking imbued with the Romantic ideal that emerged from German humanism made it possible to create a powerfield of communication that had the potential to restore the primordial communication between people. This Romantic mindset and the resulting Romantic image of the child had a significant influence on the values shaping and organising life, the life reform movements and, inextricably linked to them, historical reform pedagogy and the philosophy of "life" present at the turn of the century. Its potential for forming the future is indisputable. In my dissertation, I attempt to create a complex picture of pedagogical thinking and the image of the child in German Romanticism.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

It was Alfred Franz (1937) who conducted the first study on the pedagogical content of German Romanticism. Franz (1937) explains that it is no coincidence that prior to his research no one had yet studied the pedagogy of the period, since Romanticism, which is primarily understood as a literary phenomenon, produced no works devoted specifically to pedagogy. For this reason, he warns against the temptation to classify contemporary pedagogues as Romantic just because they lived at the time. The corpus of his analyses consists exclusively of literary works, produced during this period. Examining the German educational horizon of the last quarter of the 20th century, we find that Ballauff and Schaller (1973) avoid using the term "pedagogy of

German Romanticism" because of the problematic definition of the concept of Romanticism. In his history of pedagogy, Blankertz (1982) devotes no attention whatsoever to this movement. For Bollnow (1977), on the other hand, the pedagogy of Romanticism, with its idea of connecting to the origin, attained an unprecedented metaphysical depth thus becoming a benchmark for all subsequent pedagogies. As suggested by the above, using the term "pedagogy of German Romanticism" is not evident in itself.

Recent research on the pedagogical aspects of German Romanticism focuses on the creative child or the child of the divine. The study of the Romantic ideal of the child from ideological, pedagogical, historical and historical-anthropological perspectives has become a popular field of research since the 1990s. Among the researchers publishing in German, it is Yvonne-Patricia Alefeld (1996), Hans-Heino Ewers (1989), Heiner Ullrich (1999) and Meike Sophia Baader (1996a, 1996b, 2001, 2002, 2004) who dedicate special attention to the topic. In Hungary, it is Németh (2002) and Pukánszky (2000, 2001, 2005, 2011, 2015, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c) who enrich the literature on the pedagogy and ideology of children in German Romanticism. In his extensive study *Kindheit als poetische Daseinsform*, Ewers (1989) explains that a fundamental change, a kind of structural shift, could be observed concerning the German Romantic image of the child in the 70s and 80s of the 18th century. This new view, which emphasises the characteristics and self-worth of the child, does not consider the child's consciousness as a tabula rasa any more. Contrary to the view found in related research, namely that this structural shift can be traced back to Rousseau and the anti-Enlightenment views in Romanticism, Ewers (1989) argues that this change can be detected simultaneously in the thinking of both Rousseau and Herder. He also points out that while Rousseau remains on the grounds of the Enlightenment, Herder is already developing a Pre-Romantic character. Another important thesis of Ewers' (1989) is that romantic conceptions of childhood are not uniform. These differences can be demonstrated in particular by comparing the childhood concepts of Herder, Jean Paul, Novalis and Tieck.

Ewers' (1989) ideas are further developed by Baader (1996b) in his essay on the history of ideas, *Die romantische Idee des Kindes und der Kindheit*. The development of the Romantic ideal of the child can be found in literature, philosophy, art and pedagogy. Childhood becomes an independent stage of life for the first time alongside the formation of the middle-class family. Baader (1996b) draws on Schiller's theory of the aesthetic education of man, Hölderlin's novels, Schlegel's and Novalis' interpretations and describes the early Romantic constellation which intertwines the philosophy of history, aesthetics, poetry and pedagogy and centres on the idea

of the child. The Christ-like/Dionysian figure of the divine child is a kind of guarantee for the return of the golden age in the cyclical conception of history in early Romanticism. In this context, the work of the Romantic painter Philipp Otto Runge may be referred to as an example for how the child's way of existence could become an ideal in the theory of fine art. An obvious similarity can be discovered and proved between the childhood myth in literature and in the visual arts.

The structural change in the discourse on the child manifested in the 70s and 80s of the 18th century. Until that time, the child was considered a *tabula rasa*, and childhood was seen as a state with the aim to reach adulthood. At the end of the 18th century, childhood attained self-worth, becoming an ideal in its own right, an embodiment of childlike perfection (Baader, 1996a, 2002, 2004). Herder's role is just as decisive as Rousseau's in the development of the Romantic idea of childhood, since Rousseau positions the child between human and animal, whereas Herder sees the child from the beginning as a whole person, who already has the seed of everything that needs to develop. The key moments in the development of the Romantic image of the child are the following:

1. A crucial prerequisite for the development of the Romantic image of the child is that the Christian doctrine on original sin should be questioned.
2. The image of the child is defined by the organic idea that the child has the seed of all abilities, which need to develop in the process of growth.
3. The Romantic image of the child is critically distinct from the image of the child in the Enlightenment, when the prevailing scheme of thought is that childhood is just a temporary state that leads to adulthood and is characterised by imperfection. For the Romantics, childhood is an independent stage of life that has meaning in itself. The child must be respected, and its self-will must not be broken, unlike in other educational traditions where it is allowed and even expected (Baader, 2004).

According to Ullrich (1999), the image of the child of our time has antecedents in earlier times, in which an empathetic attitude towards the child and towards childhood can be discovered. The central motif of this image of the child is the child's recognition as an autonomous, creative personality. The concept that all the possibilities are already there in the child is intrinsically linked to the idea of the genius. Because of its potential, the child is

identified with the genius artist. The child becomes a role model for the adult, and in this way, generational relations are reversed.

The Romantic image of the child, which was, in essence, established by Rousseau and Herder, was elaborated on by the poets and philosophers of Romanticism and served as a basis for Fröbel's new educational practice in early childhood. At the turn of "the century of the child", the Romantic ideal of the child influenced the classics of child psychology (Stanley Hall, Edouard Claparède and Jean Piaget) and reform pedagogy. In the 20th century, the idea of the child's originality and creative imagination becomes part of the "other" lifestyle (as cultural capital) and determines the culture of upbringing in the child-centred family across a broad spectrum of the social middle class. Since Rousseau, the topos of the child's primordial creative power can be found in the works of all educators who regard the child as the centre. (Baader, 2002; Németh, 2002; Pukánszky, 2018).

RATIONALE AND OBJECTIVES

One of the objectives of the present research was to review, analyse, synthesise and evaluate the theoretical constructs found in the German and Hungarian language literature on German Romanticism in pedagogical thought. The second aim was to interpret works on pedagogical themes related to the culture of German Romanticism using the methodological procedures of hermeneutics.

If we observe the ideas and concepts of Romanticism, we find that the same problems were at the forefront as today: the ambiguity of technological progress, the destruction of the environment, alienation from nature and our own body, the dissociation of the individual in a materialised world (Held, 2003). Exploitation, alienation and reification lead to a loss of balance. Both Romanticism and our era are characterised by a search for the lost equilibrium.

The importance of the topic in our time is also underlined by the fact that in our age, which demands constant movement, change and innovative actions, it has become relevant again that the adult, alienated from the self and willingly or unwillingly adapting to socially accepted, rigid patterns, should learn from the child, as the ideal bearer of the idea of equilibrium, who is able to relate harmoniously to its inner world and thus to the whole.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In accordance with the objectives outlined above, I formulated my research questions by identifying two broad themes:

1. On the pedagogical thought of the German Romantic period:

What do we mean by "the pedagogical thinking of German Romanticism"? What were the processes that had led to the emergence of the German Romantic pedagogy? What are the ideas that link the pedagogical themes of German Romanticism to Romanticism? What ideas are expressed in German Romanticists' works of on pedagogy concerning the purpose of education and development? How do works on pedagogical themes imbued with the Romantic ideals of German humanism address the questions of exploitation, alienation and imbalance that lead to the loss of equilibrium?

2. On the Romantic image of the child:

How did processes in history and the history of mentalities form the development of the Romantic image of the child? What patterns of thinking about childhood can be found in works on pedagogy in German Romanticism? What similarities in thinking about childhood can be found in a close-textual analysis of the pedagogical works of Hölderlin, Arndt, Fröbel and Jean Paul? How does the image of the child, having emerged in the pedagogical culture of German Romanticism, reappear in historical reform pedagogy?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

When answering my research questions, I relied on the available Hungarian and mostly German language literature and a close-textual analysis of relevant primary sources. Having a background in literary studies, I examined which trends in literary studies may be suitable for supporting my research in the history of ideas in an auxiliary function. The traditional methodology applied in intellectual history and, within it the history of ideas, is hermeneutics. In the first stage of my research, I found it self-evident that I had to choose a method that would not suppress the essence of critical thinking when investigating phenomena that are intrinsically connected but go beyond themselves in an intellectual sense. Nevertheless, I considered it

important to interpret the phenomena, studied in their “open state of meaning”, also as historical facts, which is the domain of philology. Thus, philology, being complementary to all the humanities, could not be ignored, and, it also became important when paving the way for hermeneutical analysis.

Since the term "pedagogy of German Romanticism" cannot be regarded as self-evident, in addition to exploring the references in the literature, I found it vital to interpret the complexity of the Goethe era, from which German Romanticism could emerge, by examining the literature of the time on social history, the history of mentality and the history of pedagogy and studying other related sources. When discussing issues embedded in the history of ideas, I wished to prove the findings of the literature on the ideas of German Romanticism in the primary sources I analysed, and also to include the idea of equilibrium as a new domain of interpretation. By applying close-text hermeneutic analyses, I explored how works on pedagogy imbued with the Romantic ideal of German humanism provide answers to problems of exploitation, alienation and reification, leading to the loss of equilibrium, which has not yet been addressed by previous research.

In my dissertation, I deal with the abstract, idealized figure of the child, the "principle" of the child. In analysing the representative works of German Romantic pedagogy with respect to the image of the child, I draw on my own interpretations as well as on some relevant literature (Bollnow, 1977; Ewers, 1989; Ullrich, 1999; Baader, 1996a, 1996b, 2001, 2002, 2004), which makes it apparent how differently the pedagogical authors I examine are perceived in different time periods. The corpus of my analyses consists of original, German language texts: I analyse Hölderlin's *Hyperion*, Ernst Moritz Arndt's *Fragmente über die Menschenbildung*, Jean Paul's *Levana* and Friedrich Fröbel's *Die Menschenerziehung*.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

1. On the pedagogical thinking of German Romanticism

The development of pedagogical thinking in German Romanticism is inextricably linked to those processes in social history and the history of consciousness which resulted in the birth, blooming and decline of German Romanticism (Németh, 1978). The rise of the Enlightenment thought triggered a remarkable intellectual development in contemporary Germany: first

rationalism, then the Sturm und Drang movement, next the transcendence of both by the humanity ideal of German classicism, and, finally, Romanticism as the religious–aesthetic counter-reaction to the Enlightenment (Gössmann, 2006).

The Enlightenment was a (reform)conscious, reflective, programmatic movement, one of the main ideas of which was that it is reason and virtue that should rule the world so that happy and free people could live in it (Schneiders, 1995). The Enlightenment demands for equality of opportunity in law and education and for the free development of the individual, and the related reform movements in the German-speaking world could be found within the framework of the Enlightenment absolutism (Dülmen, 2002).

There were various motifs in pedagogical reform efforts in the last third of the 18th century which would have been unimaginable without the influence of Rousseau. They went back to a critique of the prevalent school system, socio-cultural changes and the new concept of the human being. All this is reflected in the educational and developmental principles of the philanthropists, which were introduced in some model schools in the 1770s and 1780s. The philanthropist movement faded away around 1800 and was replaced by the educational philosophy of neo-humanism and Herbartianism. To Rousseau's question of whether to educate a citizen or a human being, the philanthropists answered that one should educate for civic utility. In contrast, neo-humanism was about the development, cultivation and creation of the human being: the goal was to develop the individual, human perfection and versatility.

German humanism, called neo-humanism, was characterised, above all, by the rejection and transcendence of the Enlightenment, at least its form that manifested there and then. In contrast to the intellectualism of the Enlightenment, there was a certain desire for an all-encompassing life. The pursuit of utility was contrasted with the recognition of the self-worth of the action; the practical, moral life with an artistic–universal view of life; the resignation to an emerging gap between the human being and the world with the desire for union with the universe (Eucken, 1905).

The emerging intellectual network of German thinkers (Herder, Humboldt, Wolf, Schiller, Goethe, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Schleiermacher and Herbart), linked to neo-humanism in any form, responding to Kantian challenges and reflecting on important pedagogical problems in the process, mark that very space of knowledge transfer where the spirit of the Goethe–era could unfold. Despite the differences and possible oppositions between them, the above-mentioned authors were connected on an intellectual level, forming a certain

constellation between them, which demonstrates how difficult it is to draw a sharp line between some movements, and thus it is not at all obvious what the pedagogy of Romanticism may mean. The ideas of Romanticism could take root in the pedagogical culture of Goethe's time only slowly, but for a longer period of time. With the exception of Ernst Moritz Arndt's and Friedrich Fröbel's educational concepts, Jean Paul's educational novels, Friedrich Hölderlin's literary or epistolary reflections on education and the image of the child and Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher's early writings, the discourse on education and upbringing in the early 19th century was mostly influenced by German Romanticism only indirectly. The most important Romantic concept of development and education is associated with Fröbel. He can be considered a pedagogue of Romanticism, because his pedagogy clearly reflects the Romantic image of the child, nature and art. At the same time, Fröbel was also part of the neo-humanist constellation that Romanticism emerged from.

As Németh (1978) so aptly put it, German Romanticism is the era of the search for lost equilibrium, dated to the period between the two revolutions (1790–1840), and which many consider to be a counter-trend of classicism. All scholars seem to agree that Romanticism was a period of critical confrontation with the Enlightenment and its consequences, a reaction to the demythologisation of the world that the Enlightenment had initiated. The consequences include the ambiguity of technological progress, the destruction of the environment, our alienation from nature and our own body, the dissociation of the individual in a materialised world (Held, 2003), and thus exploitation, alienation and reification.

The emergence and emancipation of the German middle class provided the context for the revaluation of aesthetics and art within the framework of human education. As a result of the encounter and intense engagement with the ideas of the French Revolution, the process of individualisation did not only emerge among the middle class, but also among the nobility. At the end of the 18th century, in the fashionable salons organised mainly by women, members of both the middle class and the nobility could freely and informally express their opinions on literature, art and, to some extent, politics (Dülmen, 2001, 2002). This is a good example for a kind of anti-establishment habitus in German Romanticism, as well as a defiance of the prevailing norms and rules, which is reflected in the development of new ways of life and in the discussion of new political and social concepts (Dülmen, 2001). It is clear that human subjectivity and individuality were brought to the fore. Human relationships – love, friendship and community – became important. Not only were these ideas significant at the personal level, but they also had political relevance, as they were aimed at creating a better society. All of this

was a living experience in exclusive Romantic circles. It was above all a small group of young artists, the Jena Romantics, who – through the conscious recognition of their own individuality and enjoying life free from constraints and traditions – demonstrated the triumph of individuality through their works and their way of life (Dülmen, 2001).

An important feature of the German Romantic cultural act was its close connection with nature and the search for new transcendental truths, which, alongside the metaphysical, pantheistic and divine principles already present on the horizon of the era, were found in forms that could perhaps be interpreted as surrogates, such as romantic love, nature and art. It was aesthetics that could serve as a medium in which romanticisation and poeticisation of the world could take place (Held, 2001). The essence of the Romantic conception of art is that the world does not end with earthly existence, but an infinite world reveals itself within the human being, and it is the task of art to reveal it. There is a turning point in the search for values: in the search for inner values, the dynamics of the tacit, inner self receives a prominent role, which is still alive in the child through its attachment to primordial existence, to the divine. Romanticism is a culture that feeds on the living, connecting to the primordial, to the divine. And respect for all beginnings includes respect for the child. With the discovery of the child, values that had almost died out could be idealised: for example, openness to the supernatural world, to the mysteries of the soul, to the other person and to all living beings, that is, to nature. In Romanticism, nature appears not only as an object, but also as a subject, almost as a living person. It is the poet and the artist who can truly get to know nature, who has access to its essence, its primordial basis, and can share in its truth. Romantic individuality went hand in hand with the desire to exist in the great, total unity, and with the need for the individual to be dissolved in nature, in the Absolute. Having the privilege of being able to create coherence, the Romantic artist, as a genius (and as a construct), was capable of representing the Absolute, the unity of art and life (Held, 2003). In the course of my research, I found that Romanticism's response to exploitation is an organic, selfless connection to nature, its response to alienation is an empathic love relationship, and its antidote to exploitation is the need to connect to the Absolute, which implies a need for moral development.

I address the question of how pedagogical works imbued with the Romantic ideal of German humanism respond to exploitation, alienation and reification leading to the loss of equilibrium – in the light of the characteristics of German Romanticism described above – through presenting my findings from the analysis of the works of Hölderlin, Jean Paul, Arndt and Fröbel.

In Hölderlin's *Hyperion*, it is the creation of an originally perfect, creative, poetic and religious existence that appears as the main pedagogical value goal. Hölderlin's path is to turn away from meaningless and corrupted social existence and to return to nature as a way of reuniting with the origin, with being, and to seek the equilibrium experienced in it. In his letter of 2nd September, 1795 to Johann Gottfried Ebel, a physician and naturalist in Frankfurt, Hölderlin discusses his educational principles in detail, emphasising the importance of empathy, fairness, love, a challenging but safe learning environment and the significance of encouraging moral, cultural and intellectual awakening.

Some paragraphs that are considered fundamental in Jean Paul's *Levana* (Jean Paul, 1845, §32–40) capture education as an act of going beyond the spirit of the times. According to Jean Paul, a child should not be educated for the present, but rather against the present age by strengthening its willpower, love and religion. For Jean Paul, the human soul is the abode of spiritual individuality, which is immortal, reflecting the infinite ideal, the divine. In contrast to the higher spiritual unity that expresses the divine, the other elements of the human organism represent the finite and impermanent. The divine appears in each human being as an indestructible instinct. Together with the divine world of light, the human being receives the ability to want good. For Jean Paul, the main objective of education is to help the innate seed of the inner being in the child to develop.

Arndt's *Fragmente über Menschenbildung* clearly articulates the rebellion against the pressure of external social conventions, the critique of machine-life (Maschinenleben) and machine-belief (Maschinenglauben), the denial of the illusory life of thought (Scheinleben des Gedankens) and the tension between life (Leben) and thought (Denken). All this is in contrast with the Enlightenment, which assumed that human beings could rule the world through reason and become divine through reason, that is, through what human beings created of themselves. Arndt rejects everything that is artificial, that is, all things by which human beings arbitrarily interfere with the order of nature, which clearly links him to the approach of Rousseau and German Romanticism. The essence of what is human in a human being is not reason, but rather the unity of body, spirit and soul. For Arndt, the basis of education is natural goodness. By demonstrating the polarities in the world and by experiencing action-oriented love, he is working on the elaboration of the physical–spiritual personality, and in this way he is describing the conditions of equilibrium in the world. Arndt's creed of love is not the communication of a kind of sentimental tide of feelings, but rather the expression of the force that can keep the

world in balance and that can drive goodwill in the human being, thus becoming the key to moral progress.

Fröbel identifies the innate divine in all things as their essence and believes that the purpose of everything is to develop and present the divine through the visible and the impermanent. In Fröbel's interpretation, the task of education is also related to this: to teach self-awareness and self-determination, and to lead the human being, as a consciously developing, thinking and learning being, to a pure and intact representation of the divine. Fröbel's worldview is harmonious, his pedagogy is permeated by the consistent unity of life, the meaningfulness of existence and the protection of all creatures in the divine whole. The task of education is to lift the human being to a level where the innate divine can manifest freely.

Based on my research, I can conclude that in the works of the authors closely connected to the Romantic culture we can discover the layers of meaning that are the constituent elements of German Romantic discourse: the organic, selfless connection to nature, the empathic love relationship and the need to connect to the Absolute, which also implies a need for a kind of moral development. Pedagogical thought imbued with the Romantic idealism that emerged from German neo-humanism made it possible for a powerfield of communication to appear that holds the possibility of primordial communication between people (from soul to soul). It is a pedagogy whose *a priori* is not only the transmission of culture, but also the development of creativity. The “heart” of German Romantic pedagogy is the holy child of creative origin.

2. On the Romantic image of the child

In the following, I present my findings on the abstract representations of “childness” in German Romanticism. The literature on the image of the child in German Romanticism is extremely rich, so the rationale for my research in this direction was to synthesize the results of German and Hungarian literature and contribute to the discourse on the topic with my interpretations based on my close-text analysis conducted on the original German-language corpus. My research followed two major issues: first, I was interested in the processes in social and mental history that led to the Romantic image of the child, and second, I examined what patterns of thinking emerged about childness in the pedagogical works of German Romanticism.

When presenting the prehistory of the Romantic image of the child, I examined the idea of the child in antiquity, touched on the emergence of the Romantic image of the child in early Christianity, pointed out the ambivalent nature of the image of the child in the Western Christian tradition, and then looked at the genesis of the Romantic ideology of the child after the

Enlightenment. Concerning the latter, I observed Rousseau and Herder in detail, and then showed how Goethe developed Rousseau's and Herder's image of the child.

Inspired by Rousseau, German Classicism and German Romanticism gave birth to a so-called myth of the child, which defined modern educational thinking for a long period of time. The myth of the child is composed of concepts and ideas about children and childhood which emerged in the late 18th and early 19th centuries and appeared in different variations in Herder, Goethe, Schiller, Hölderlin, the Schlegel brothers, Tieck, Runge, Schleiermacher and Fröbel (Baader, 1996a).

The myth of the child is a view according to which the child is seen as a divine, holy being, with the seed of every further development innately present, which the child can later realise. This carries the educational implication that the child needs to be respected and provided with a protective space where it can develop its strengths without constraints and independently as much as possible (Baader, 2002).

With my hermeneutic textual analyses, I intended to enter into a dialogue with the works of four authors in German Romanticism (Friedrich Hölderlin, Ernst Moritz Arndt, Jean Paul and Friedrich Fröbel), who discuss pedagogical issues, in order to examine the patterns that emerge in the texts in relation to the image of the child.

Hölderlin, a prominent poet of the "world of values" that emerged between German classicism and Romanticism, created the outlines of the Romantic ideal of the child. For him, the child is not only the not yet alienated, original human being, in unity within itself – as seen by Rousseau and Herder – but also a divine being, who still lives unconsciously in the primordial depths of existence, in equilibrium, in unity with the Absolute. The deification of the child is a logical consequence of Hölderlin's pedagogical thinking. The Romantic image of the child, with its central element of an originally perfect, creative, poetic and religious being, could emerge from this. Hölderlin's childlike way of existence is the opposite of the shatteredness of a human being who has disconnected from nature and transcendence and is alienated from his or her true faith. The child has not yet divided against itself and does not know the tragedy of individualisation. According to Hölderlin, when human beings step out of the universal context of divine life, they experience a tragic state of metaphysical orphanhood, which is a fundamental idea in German Romanticism. The rediscovery of religious experience, which unfolds in the presence of the beautiful and the true and in the loving encounter with the child, leads human beings, broken within, back to the path of unity with the universe, in which

they lived as children. The search for reunification with the origin, with existence and the equilibrium that can be experienced in it is Hölderlin's path. This path leading into the inner world is also reflected in the philosophy of Romanticism. In Hölderlin, the recollection of childhood as a sinless, free existence shows the human being's desire to return to Paradise. The child is a "beautiful human being" who, in the infinity of the moment, feels immortal, similar to God. There is a glimmer of hope that through the human being's return to nature and rebirth in love, humanity will enter a second childhood, while rejuvenating into its original divinity.

The central idea in Jean Paul's pedagogy is a Romantic image of the child which is based on the assumption that the child is an inherently holy and perfect being. As expressed in his work entitled *Levana*, the essence of his metaphysics regarding the child is that the pure, infinite spiritual seed of the personality is already present in the child in its fullness. In the creation story of the human being, it is the parents who act as creators, while for Jean Paul, the birth of life is the epiphany of the divine, a "flash of the radiant light" of infinite ideality in the materiality of the finite world. In the "original moment" of each human being, it is the individualization of divine light that takes place first, which precedes the encounter with matter. The divine light enters the corporeal world as a "ray of self", and thus the metaphysical individuality is born, which precedes life and persists beyond death.

The creation story of the child's body happens in earthly existence. In this process, a person creates a constellation of different dispositions, abilities, talents and traits. The individualities meet in the "original moment". The inner, spiritual light of the human being is transcendental in nature, and it abides in the child's soul before the its self is formed. In a metaphysical sense, the sanctity of childhood implies purity and sinlessness. Jean Paul's reflections on childhood were inspired by the essential idea that the divine seed in the human being needs to be saved.

Arndt's *Fragmente über Menschenbildung I-II* is considered to be one of the founding works of Romantic pedagogy, exerting a major influence on Fröbel's pedagogical thinking as well. He developed the Romantic ideal of the child not only from an aesthetic but also from a pedagogical point of view. For Arndt, the process of education means that the human being needs to be formed into an image of something, so it is not a matter of unfolding from within. The perfect human being is not to be created in the image of another human being, but, in Arndt's understanding, the human being needs to be the image of the world. Relating to monistic anthropology, Arndt sees the human being as a microcosm, a large mirror that condenses the contents of many small mirrors. In this way, the world is reflected in human

beings, and as cognitive beings, they perceive the reflections, which they become a mirror of, and a double reflection is created. Human beings recognize the whole world in each individual, and in the world, as a collection of individual beings, they also recognize the myriads of possible reflections, possible appearances and viewpoints that can occur in the Universe. The process of living reflections is life itself.

Arndt sees the essence of human development in plant growth. In early childhood, the flower is an almost completely intact bud, the child already opens a few buds, and the youngster lets the sun shine on the petals with the green sepals gone already. In adulthood, the flower opens, in old age twilight comes, and in the darkness, all the flowers close their petals. This series of metaphors is a graphic representation of organic development, of life in its continuous movement.

In Fröbel's understanding, the child's soul is still connected to the spiritual–divine primordial foundation of the world. The child's "superiority" is expressed in its smile, its confidence, its intuition and the creative power of its play. By playing with and talking to the child, the adult can reconnect with the shaken child within, and at the same time be healthy and whole again, and return to the unity of life, to the experience of the spiritual–divine interconnection of beings and things. The child, therefore, is not the unfinished human being who needs to be educated in order to mature, but the role model for adults because of its originality. Consequently, the education of children has the potential to educate adults.

My analysis has revealed that all four Romantic pedagogical thinkers revived the millennia-old idea of the absolute child: the divine child as the earthly saviour of adults. For the Romantic soul, oriented towards the origin, towards the original, the child is a symbol of naturalness, of vitality, of creation and of cosmic connection to the source of life. It is no coincidence that the romantic image of the child lies at the heart of historical reform pedagogy. Initiated by the child's intuition, a pedagogical path is revealed which can lead us out of the asymmetries of modern society, away from the fragmentation and away from a mindset that makes us immune to issues concerning values. By "re-enchanting" the child into nature and by making the pedagogical situation empathic, education can fulfil its community-building function. By treating the child authentically, the original wholeness and completeness, i.e. life that is not yet alienated, can be experienced again.

In the depiction of the world of German Romanticism, it became clear that duality was a symptom of the age of modernity (and within it, premodernity): God and the human being

that is orphaned in the metaphysical sense; the individual and the community; matter and spirit; the moral ideal and the human being's perception of reality. It was this duality that authors and educators of Romanticism sought to resolve, and this quest for equilibrium is manifested in the Romantic image of the child.

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