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# PHILIPP OTTO RUNGE AND THE SEMIOTIC LANGUAGE OF NATURE AND PATRIOTISM

Sharon Worley

Philipp Otto Runge (1777–1810) was a leading German Romantic artist whose iconography represents a transition from the Neoclassical iconography of classical mythology and allegory to an abstract semiotic system of signs and allegory based on a Romantic mystical interpretation of nature. His series *The Times of Day* represents the times of day in drawings and paintings as the artist's perception of the genesis and creation of the cosmos as an act of divine conception encoded in the signs of nature, and symbolized by birth and renewal in the metaphors of flowers and children. Runge's iconography can be analyzed in the context of organic theories of linguistics, semiotics and nature, aesthetics and morality, and nationalism during the Napoleonic invasions of German and Wars of Liberation (1806–1813). An admirer of Herder's theory of language, Runge's iconography was representative of a trend among Romantic artists to promote nationalism and cultural values through the implementation of formal epistemological systems in the medium of art. Runge's individual iconography reveals a synthesis of rational and mystical systems of knowledge that emphasize Herder's concept of the German *Volk*

as a unique cultural identity, and presents an analogy between the creation of the cosmos, the organic origins of language and the conception of the German *Volk*.

In his series of paintings called *The Times of Day* (1808), Runge was deeply influenced by contemporary mystical Romanticism. His *Times of Day* illustrates the Romantic concept of the "hieroglyph of nature" as the basic element of language and culture. Read literally, the hieroglyph of the child and ideal woman surrounded by buds in the border and blossoms above suggests the origin of language as an organic process within early societies as an analogy with the birth and development of a child. Studies for the *Times of Day* suggest literal analogies between the growth and formation of flowers, and that of humans. In the lily, for example, the structure of the petals is repeated in the compositional arrangement of the infants, and the stem and blossom of the amaryllis is comparable to the form of the woman. Runge's life spanned the most important period of the Romantic movement that coincided with the Napoleonic Wars in Germany. His iconography expresses the nationalist sentiments and linguistic theory of Herder that formed the basis of German propaganda movements during the Wars of Liberation. The goal of such programs was to communicate with the *Volk* through the element of nature, and to awaken their sense of cultural unity and identity through art and literature. The physical scientific support was provided by investigations into color, language and plants, like those of Runge, Herder, and Goethe, in which all life was revealed as sharing a divine organic basis.

Runge's ink drawing *Fall of the Fatherland* demonstrates a complex nationalist syntax that reveals the synthesis of semiotics and patriotic goals. The mother, supporting the child, plows the earth that buries the husband and father, who died in the Wars of Liberation, becoming a literal fatherland, as an angel helps her drag the plow forward. Military helmets and lances form a decorative border supporting a double Janus of the father's face at the top of the composition. The knights' lances and helmets which frame the scene appealed to both the German noble class, from whom the officers were drawn, as well as recently liberated serfs and peasantry.<sup>1</sup> The design was originally commissioned by a patriotic journal *Das vaterländischen Museum* edited by Friedrich Perthes, and the design, though rejected, expresses the artist's ardent anti-French feelings and commitment

<sup>1</sup> Albert Boime, *Art in An Age of Bonapartism 1800-1815* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 499-505.

to the Wars of Liberation efforts.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, it demonstrates an emerging semiotics used to instill in the German-speaking people a new patriotic ideology. The compositional design is based directly on Runge's painting *Kleine Morgen* from the *Times of Day* from the preceding year, and a later version from 1809. It suggests the renewal of fatherland following the French defeats through an organic cultural process in which linguistics and ethnicity create cultural and national cohesion through Herder's concept of race and territory. Superimposing the composition of one over the other reveals the infant emerging directly from the father's body beneath as his literal seed coming to fruition from the plowed earth, serving as a reminder to German soldiers fighting in the Napoleonic Wars that their sacrifice would benefit Germany in the renewal of the Fatherland through their offspring. The iconography reinforces the message of propaganda to support the Fatherland by volunteering to fight in the Wars of Liberation, but its semiotic origins lay in the practice of using classical iconography to instill new patriotic values through allegory, a practice implemented in political ideology during the French Revolution and Early Republic. The German Romantic language of hieroglyphs, however, went a step further in seeking to communicate the essence of language through the synthesis of myth, science and nationalism.<sup>3</sup>

Herder's *History of Mankind* describes the formation of the Teutonic tribes as a cultural entity based on shared values, ethnicity, land and language.<sup>4</sup> Herder's writings profoundly affected the development of the Romantic movement and German nationalism. By the end of the first decade, Napoleon had transformed the German states into a fragmented entity of disparate states led by nobles and princes wavering in their loyalty to German interests. In 1806 the Napoleonic invasions of Austria precipitated the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire and abdication of the last Habsburg ruler, Francis II. A relic of medieval Christendom since it was created by Charlemagne in 800 CE, the historic institution continued to define German cultural identity and nationalism during the Napoleonic Wars. In the same

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Runge, *Hinterlassene Schriften von Philipp Otto Runge*, 2 volumes (Hamburg, 1840), 1:355–61.

<sup>3</sup> Marianne Thalman, *The Literary Sign Language of German Romanticism*, trans. Harold A. Brasilius (Detroit, 1972); Liselotte Dieckmann, "The Metaphor of Hieroglyphics in German Romanticism," *Comparative Literature* 7 (1955): 306–12; Frances Connelly, "Poetic Monsters and Nature Hieroglyphics," *Art Journal* 52 (2) (Summer, 1993): 31–46.

<sup>4</sup> Johann Gottfried Herder, *Reflections on the Philosophy of the History of Man*, ed. E. Frank Manuel (Chicago, 1968).



year, Napoleon created the Confederation of the Rhine, acquiring German noble estates and ecclesiastical territories along the Rhine River. In 1807 the Peace of Tilsit between France and Prussia created the Kingdom of Westphalia and the Grand Duchy of Warsaw. In 1809, Austria declared war on France, and Napoleon occupied Vienna. Napoleon offered German nobles their land in exchange for transferring their loyalty and political allegiance to France, which challenged the German concept of nationalism and cultural identity among the fragmented relic of the former feudal fiefs.<sup>5</sup> Faced with a lack of political unity not resolved until unification of Germany under Bismarck in the late nineteenth century, cultural unity emphasizing common linguistic and historic origins was substituted for German political unity. German propaganda located in the military strategic centers of Vienna and Berlin stressed loyalty to the Fatherland and cultural nationalism based on language, while German Romantic artists and authors responded by creating works that reflected German cultural heritage and nationalism.

Rousseau and Herder both wrote essays on the origins of language taking into consideration the role of communal societies in forming identity through their relation with the external world. Rousseau, who traced the historic origins of models of constitutional government in the *Social Contract*, which later influenced the French Revolution, wrote that art and music, like language, communicated signs with a moral meaning, rather than mere aesthetic sensations.<sup>6</sup> Like Herder, Rousseau perceives a close correlation between music and poetry, believing them to form a common origin preceding languages. Music and "melody do not affect us merely as sounds, but as signs of our affections, of our feelings," according to Rousseau. Herder's theory of language was based on his broader theory of humanity, and the development of civilization. Language was the basis of civilization according to Herder:

Nature hid sounds in these chords which, when called forth and encouraged, can arouse other beings of equally delicate build, can communicate as though along an invisible chain, to a distant heart a spark that makes it feel for this unseen being. . . language is a feeling which is. . . a law of nature.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Friedrich Meinecke, *The Age of German Liberation, 1795-1815*, ed. Peter Paret (Berkeley, 1977).

<sup>6</sup> Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Essai sur l'origine des langues*, ed. Charles Porset (Bordeaux, 1970), 147.

<sup>7</sup> Johann Gottfried Herder, *Essay on the Origin of Language*, ed. and trans. Alexander Gode (Chicago, 1966), 88.

Not only was language the expression of emotion to which humans attached signs, but the earliest words were those that described sensory perceptions and actions. Language was developed, according to Herder, as the result of sensory perceptions in the human soul. The most important of the senses was hearing. Language became more complex as civilization developed, forming an analogy with the development of a child, for whom the sensory perceptions of the world were impressed on the soul. Runge used the symbol of the child and flower as the sign as a universal basis of language and culture. Melodies, according to Runge, belonged to folk culture, analogous to the plant or flower in their colorful harmonies; they were able to communicate to the listener a language that, like a dialect, suggested a striving toward everything great and powerful in art.<sup>8</sup>

The use of symbol and allegory had its origin in Neoclassicism and the revival of classical antiquity that occurred during the years surrounding the French Revolution and Early French Republic. At this time, art and aesthetics were viewed as an alternative language of political propaganda that could be used to instill moral values in society. Runge was trained by the director of the Dresden Art Academy, Giovanni Casanova, who had studied in Rome under Neoclassical artist Anton Raphael Mengs. Runge was given access to a collection of Mengs's casts in the Dresden Academy. These forms reappear as ideal classical female figures in Runge's *Small Morning*, and have their origin in widely used artist handbooks on allegory and symbol such as Cesare Ripa's *Iconologia*, or Johann Joachim Winckelmann's *Versuch Einer Allegorie* (1766, 1799), which also includes a discussion of Mengs's figures of the nine muses in his *Parnassus* (1761) fresco for Cardinal Alessandro Albani's villa in Rome, a commission that was completed while Winckelmann served as the cardinal's secretary and curator. *Parnassus* was a theme that influenced Runge in its classical conception of divine order expressed through Apollo, the god of the sun, who presides over the nine muses, each governing one of the different arts.<sup>9</sup> Color and image as the divine origin of language in a hieroglyph of order, life and culture, is articulated in Runge's poem entitled *The Times of Day*, in which it corresponds to Genesis, and the creation of the world. It was the first word spoken. The word of God first spoken in Genesis reverberated throughout God's creation of nature in the form of light and color: "Die Farbe sind's die

<sup>8</sup> Letter from Runge to Johann Georg Zimer, January 24, 1806. Philipp Otto Runge, *Briefe und Schriften*, ed. Peter Bethausen (Munich, 1982), 177.

<sup>9</sup> Steffi Rottgen, "Mengs, Alessandro Albani und Winckelmann—Idee und Gestalt des Parnass in der Villa Albani," *Storia dell'arte* 30 (1977): 87–156.



Figure 1: Philipp Otto Runge (1777–1810).  
*The Small Morning*. 1808. Oil on canvas. 109 × 85 cm. Hamburger Kunsthalle.  
Photo Credit: Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, NY.



Figure 2: Philipp Otto Runge (1777–1810).

*Fall of the Fatherland*. 1809. Ink drawing. 193 × 134cm. Hamburger Kunsthalle.  
Photo Credit: Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, NY.



Figure 3: Anton Raphael Mengs (1728–1779).  
*Parnassus*. 1761. Ceiling fresco. Museo di Villa Albani, Rome, Italy.  
Photo Credit: Alinari/Art Resource, NY.



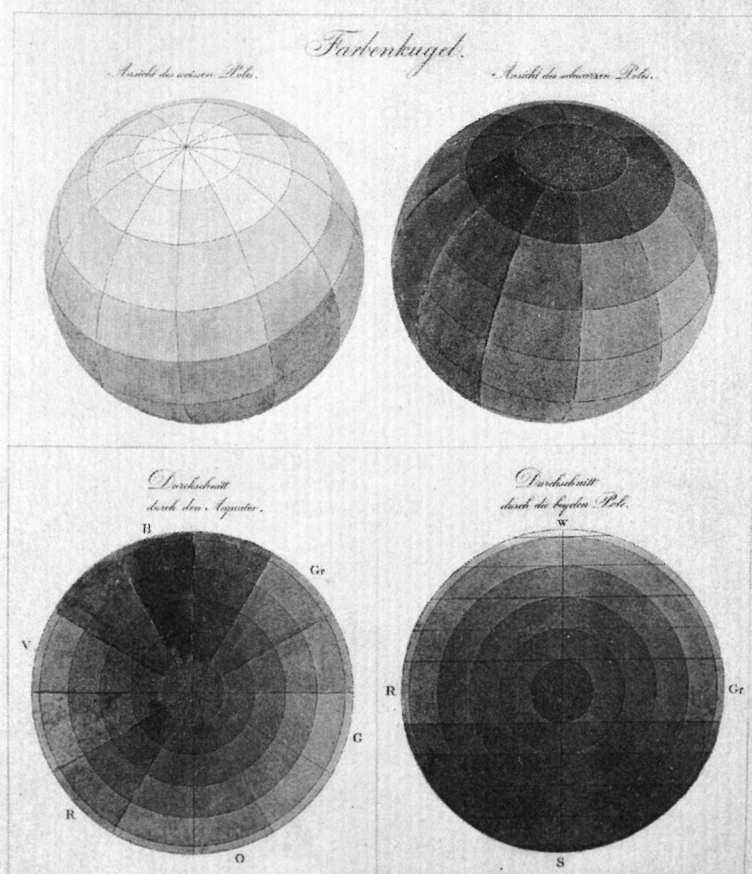


Figure 4: Philipp Otto Runge (1777–1810).  
*Color Sphere*. 1810. Engraving, aquatint and watercolor. 22.5 × 18.9 cm.  
 Photo Credit: Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, NY.



Figure 5: Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio) (1483–1520).

*The Sistine Madonna*. Ca. 1512–13. Oil on canvas.

Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen, Dresden, Germany.

Photo Credit: Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz / Art Resource, NY.

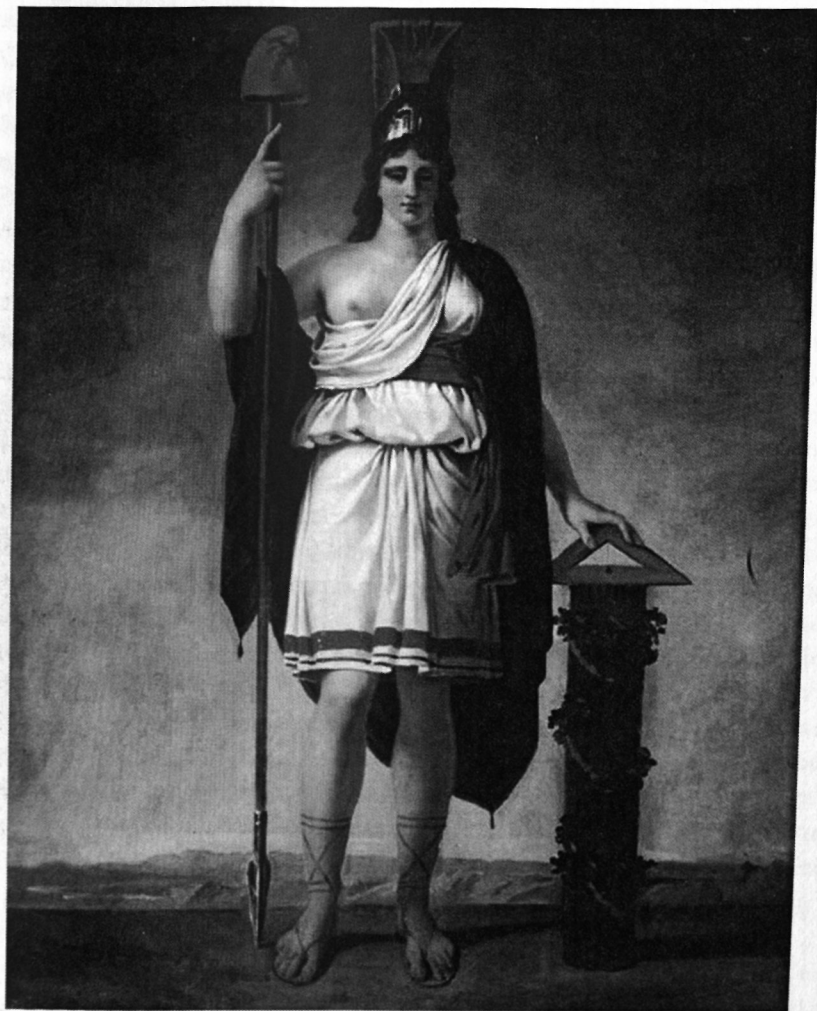


Figure 6: Antoine Jean Gros (1771–1835).

*The Republic*. 1794. Oil on canvas. 71 × 63 cm. Château de Versailles et de Trianon, Versailles, France. Photo Credit: Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, NY.



erst das Wort gesprochen."<sup>10</sup> Color also had specific theological iconographic significance, symbolizing the Trinity represented by the "highest light" and three primary colors. These colors in turn could break down into a thousand colors in the world. Thus, our experience of God would be absorbed through our experience of the world. Here, color and the flower become the organ of God in the symbol of the white lily. The primary colors are further revealed through the form of the rose (red), sun (yellow), and sky (blue).<sup>11</sup> The female figure who symbolizes the origin of life can also be associated with the classical goddess Diana, while the female figure representing morning represents Aurora, the dawn. Runge's color theory, like that of Goethe, defined white as light equated with goodness, while darkness symbolized evil. Blue instilled reverence like a father, while red was a mediator between heaven and earth. When the two combined in the night, it would create a fire and a yellow that served as a comforter.<sup>12</sup> The semiotic syntax of the metaphysical world is described in basic abstract form in Runge's theory and illustrated in the form of the woman, child, and flower.

Runge's color theory *Die Farbenkugel* was first published in 1810; however, he carried on a lengthy correspondence with Goethe as early as 1806 in which the two discussed their color theory. In his correspondence with Goethe, Runge also discussed his artistic development that included copying casts by Mengs and studying under his pupil Casanova. Goethe, who advocated the study of classical antiquity in Rome, arrived at a similar color theory to that of the artist, in that the science of optics merged with Neoplatonic color symbolism and Romantic nature worship in landscapes.<sup>13</sup> Runge created color charts, arranging the primary colors on the three points of a triangle with blue at the apex, red on the lower left, and yellow on the lower right. He then added the secondary colors created by mixing the primary colors along the arms of the triangle. Then, he arranged the varying shades of these colors around a sphere with white at the top, and black at the bottom.<sup>14</sup> Runge was

<sup>10</sup> Runge, *Hinterlassene Schriften*, 1:52.

<sup>11</sup> Runge, *Hinterlassene Schriften*, 1:52, 2:210.

<sup>12</sup> John Gage, *Color and Meaning. Art, Science and Symbolism* (Berkeley, 1999), 169–76; Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Theory of Colours*, trans. Charles Lock Eastlake (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1970), 161, 212.

<sup>13</sup> Alexander Rueger, "The Cultural Use of Natural Knowledge: Goethe's Theory of Color in Weimar Classicism," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 29 (1992–93): 211–32; Rupprecht Matthaei, ed., *Goethe's Color Theory* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1970).

<sup>14</sup> Philipp Otto Runge, *Die Farbenkugel und andere Schriften zur Farbenlehre* (Stuttgart, 1959); Hellmuth Freiherrn von Maltzahn, *Philipp Otto Runge's Briefwechsel mit Goethe*

also influenced by the color theory of German Neoclassical painter Mengs, whom he referred to as the first among painters of his time to achieve a pure art, while his pupil, Runge's teacher Casanova, was the second.<sup>15</sup> Mengs, like Runge, also had a Neoplatonic perception of art perceiving a correlation between beauty and divinity, the belief that a perception of divinity was a function of color and light, an idea expressed in the aesthetic theory of Immanuel Kant. "Art has one thing," writes Mengs, "in which it surpasses Nature, which is in Beauty." Perfection and a representation of beauty could thus only occur in art. In his discussion of the ancient Greeks, Mengs believed they achieved the highest level of beauty and divinity in art, finding a "medium between Deity and humanity" in the form of their heroes and producing a sublime union between the human and divine.<sup>16</sup>

At the same time, Christian and classical imagery combine to create a unified semiotic system based on existing lexicons of meaning. The organic development of the seed into a blossom, for example, according to one scholar, can correspond to traditional Christian theology and represent the progress of the human soul from the dark earthly globe at the bottom of the frame to the eternal morning star of Venus and the Star of Bethlehem.<sup>17</sup> Runge writes of the beauty of Raphael's *Dresden Madonna* and Guido Reni's *Aurora*, both of which express the loftiest sentiments and a connection with the universe. The purpose of art, he writes, is to record nature with an image that in turn evokes a thought. In representing nature, one not only recorded the image but also the feeling evoked by it. The figure of the woman in Runge's *Times of Day* also appears as the Virgin Mary in the clouds in Christian iconography and allegorical women in Greek mythology evoked the most beautiful thoughts in the soul. Greek art, too, he acknowledges, evoked a concept of ideal beauty through its portrayal of divinity in the form of the Greek gods.<sup>18</sup> The artist's iconography formed part of an evolving Romantic iconography based on nature symbolism. His use of the child and flower, for example, are a hieroglyph also found in the writings of Novalis, and represent an organic unity. Novalis, like Runge, envisioned a poetic synthesis in that nature was a

(Weimar, 1940), 39–47.

<sup>15</sup> Philipp Otto Runge to Daniel Runge, October 6, 1801. Runge, *Briefe und Schriften*, 62–63.

<sup>16</sup> Anton Raphael Mengs, "Reflections on Beauty and Taste in Painting," *The Works of Anthony Raphael Mengs* (London, 1796), 1–82.

<sup>17</sup> Hanna Hold, "Philipp Otto Runge: Four Times of Day," *Philipp Otto Runge and Caspar David Friedrich: The Passage of Time*, ed. Andreas Blühm (Zwolle, 1996).

<sup>18</sup> Philipp Otto Runge, *Briefe und Schriften*, ed. Peter Berthausen (Munich, 1982), 238.

body like a tree and the humanity formed the buds.<sup>19</sup> The flower represented the image of humanity within the cosmological principle. Like the flower, morning too was the representation of the beginning of the world and symbolized the origin of meaning itself: the original symbol or sign. But Novalis also described Christianity in similar terms as an organic entity that would encompass all aspects of life:

Christianity must again pour the old cornucopia of blessings over the nations. It will rise again from the bosom of a venerable European council, and the business of religious awakening will be pursued according to a comprehensible divine plan.<sup>20</sup>

Both French and German philosophers who advanced theories of semiotics applied to political propaganda suggested that cognition preceded conscious thought in the perception of the image. Nationalist theories, like that of Herder, went a step further in suggesting that cognition and language were dependent upon common racial, ethnic and linguistic origins. German propaganda thus sought to appeal to common linguistic origins to encourage loyalty, but also to exert influence through a subliminal appeal to morality and divinity in the aesthetic response. Germans had only to appreciate the beauty of the landscape and nature of the Fatherland to understand their duty to protect it.

Fichte's theory closely follows that of Herder in tracing the earliest origins of the German nation from its anthropological and linguistic roots. Delivered as a series of lectures entitled *Reden an die Deutschen Nation* (1806) during the first occupation by the French, his theory reinforced the scientific basis of nationalism first introduced by Herder. Fichte's work was enormously successful, and his Berlin audience, comprised of many Romantics including salon hostess Rahel Levin, were enthusiastic over the nationalist sentiments he stirred. Levin, for example, not only participated in the war effort by showing support for German nationalism but participated directly when the front reached Berlin by working as a nurse in a hospital for wounded soldiers and encouraging the Jewish community to donate aid to the relief effort.<sup>21</sup> All

<sup>19</sup> Curt Grützmacher, *Novalis und Philipp Otto Runge: Drei Zentralmotive und ihre Bedeutungssphäre: Die Blume – Das Kind – Das Licht* (Munich, 1964).

<sup>20</sup> Novalis, "Christianity or Europe," *The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics*, ed. & trans. Frederick C. Beiser (New York, 1996), 79.

<sup>21</sup> Jennings, *Rahel: Her Life and Letters*, 126–27.

successive German military propaganda writers including Friedrich Schlegel, Ernst Moritz Arndt, and Adam Müller relied on Fichte's basic argument to support the efficacy of their own nationalist claims.

The difference between Germans and other peoples began with the "rootedness" of Germans in both their "original dwelling place" and their original language. While other branches of the same Teutonic stock migrated to other regions and adopted foreign languages, the Germans retained their original lands and language. Speech, according to Fichte, is the cohesive essence which holds a people together and stores their communal knowledge. Language first arises when people evolve from a sensuous state in nature to grasp supra-sensuous natural objects and designate them for the convenience of communication. The Germans maintained the use of their primitive language, which had an effect on their development as a people. Because of the direct relationship between thought and language, a living language is viewed as an organic essence which continues to shape culture. Literature thus becomes a supreme expression of the German spiritual culture and collective will, and it assumes a preeminent position in its capacity to reanimate the people of their spiritual culture. As an extension of its organic animate basis, the social machinery that governs society will be a reflection of its spirit as opposed to the implementation of an abstract finite political model. This organic infusion of spirit into the mechanical state craft is effected by educating the young in their native language. Fichte traces the roots of culture and attributes varying rates of success in intellectual and spiritual development to the maintenance of specific hereditary nationalist stocks. Runge's *Fall of the Fatherland* and *Times of Day* literally illustrate the concept of language as the origin of cultural identity and first hieroglyph of the *Volk* defined by common ethnicity and linguistic ties.<sup>22</sup>

Fichte's *Addresses* is based on Herder's theory of literature in which nationalist identity and morality are established by folklore. For Fichte, literature was the single most important defining feature of national character. A people's literature defined not only its identity and sense of communal existence but its laws and ethics. Political applications of Herder and Fichte's philosophy appeared in the propaganda of the Wars of Liberation in which Arndt and Müller appealed to the nationalist tenor introduced by these earlier philosophers. National unity here was based not on a commitment to representational legislative government, but a cultural and ethnic

<sup>22</sup> Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Addresses to the German Nation*, ed. George Armstrong Kelly (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 45-91.

identity that defined Germans as sharing a common language and culture and fighting a common enemy. Hegel also maintained that religion was the "spirit of a nation" and the most important feature of society. Folk religion, according to Hegel, was a product of culture that had the power to influence the individual through imagination and enthusiasm. The great "pure images" of folk religion could inspire the individual to feelings of benevolence. Thus is possessed the power to mold the character and virtues of a people and a nation.<sup>23</sup>

Runge's series *Times of Day* coincides with the height of the German Wars of Liberation against Napoleon, and propaganda campaigns such as that of Ernst Moritz Arndt's *Spirit of the Times* (1808), designed to galvanize the support of German volunteers through an appeal to patriotism and religious feeling. Following a series of dramatic German defeats at Jena, Austerlitz and Tilsit (1807), German military authorities responded with propaganda programs that appealed to German nationalist sentiments, often having their origin in German Romanticism and literature. Friedrich Schlegel, who first defined Romanticism in the *Athenaeum* (1798) in linguistic terms as "universal, progressive" modern poetry in a constantly evolving state of becoming, also defined Germany as the "greatest nation in the world in respect to their cultivation of artistic sensibility and scientific spirit," and would ultimately turn his attention to medieval German poetry like the *Nibelungen* and nationalist political propaganda he wrote for the Austrian military campaigns.<sup>24</sup> German Romanticism conflated art, religion and nationalist identity through common linguistic origins as outlined by Herder's *History of Mankind*. To Runge, art was a pure religion that corresponded to the hieroglyph of the flower. The flower in turn was a symbol of the German *Volk* as an organic entity; it also symbolized the origin of nationalism in language and symbol. The artist's *Times of Day* ascribes specific meaning to each of the times of day: "Morning is the boundless illumination of the universe. Day is the boundless image of the creature, and the fulfillment of the universe. Evening is the boundless destruction

<sup>23</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, "Religion Is One of Our Greatest Concerns in Life," *Hegel: Theologian of the Spirit*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 39-57.

<sup>24</sup> Friedrich Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 157, 175; Walter Consuelo, *The Napoleonic Wars and German Nationalism in Austria* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1930), 43, 68; Friedrich Meinecke, *The Age of German Liberation, 1795-1815* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 102-78.

of existence in the origins of the universe. Night is the boundless deep of the recognition of the undestroyed existence in God."<sup>25</sup> In his *History of Mankind*, Herder explains that Genesis was the oldest book written by God himself, and the separation of light from darkness symbolized by the rising sun, or Aurora, represented the hieroglyph of nature. Herder's work, first published in 1774, introduced the German Romantics to the concept of nature as a symbol and hieroglyph of divinity.<sup>26</sup>

The revival of classical allegory at the time of the French Revolution was used exclusively to give ideal physical form to abstract political virtues such as Liberty or the Republic.<sup>27</sup> Implemented at the time of the French Revolution, when the old vestiges of a divinely ordained monarchy were replaced with allegories of ideal republican virtues, semiotics acquired an unprecedented importance for wielding authority. The early government of the French Republic, as Joan Landes has shown, relied on the work of Enlightenment philosophers Condorcet and Condillac, Abbé Gregoire and others, in formulating propaganda programs that used the sign and symbol to influence public opinion and form new standards of moral and patriotic values. Iconography was used to restore legitimacy to the new Republic. Landes quotes Abbé Gregoire, for example, who stated specifically that in order to "republicanize" the government, the legislator must use "the language of signs" to "impress the senses, to awaken republican ideas" and mold national character.<sup>28</sup> The use of visual symbols was so enthusiastically advocated, asserts Landes, that they suggested a fusion of figurative imagery with language based on contemporary theories of the origin of language, such as Condorcet's, which held that the "mind grasped the figurative and the literal sense simultaneously." In Paris, during the Revolutionary transition and radical reorientation of political loyalty, Christian and monarchical symbols were systematically stripped of their former associations with social legitimacy and imbued with new Republican significance. The Virgin Mary, for example, was replaced by the Grecian allegorical figure of Liberty, and extolled as the goal of all human and social development of nations.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Runge, *Hinterlassene Schriften*, 1:82.

<sup>26</sup> Gunnar Berefelt, "On Symbol and Allegory," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 28 (1969): 201-12.

<sup>27</sup> Joan B. Landes, *Visualizing the Nation: Gender, Representation, and Revolution in Eighteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 82-113; Madelyn Gutwirth, *Twilight of the Goddesses* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Landes, *Visualizing the Nation*, 28-29.

<sup>29</sup> Emmett Kennedy, *A Cultural History of the French Revolution* (New Haven, 1989), 204-5, 343.

While the ideology of the French Revolution eradicated the feudal vestiges of Christianity and monarchy, German Romanticism and propaganda programs directed at army recruiting for the Wars of Liberation emphasized a revival of Germany's medieval hierarchy. The symbols of the Gothic church and kings, for example, that reinforced a feudal hierarchy, were revered as unique characteristics of German heritage. The ideal figure of a woman in Runge's series *The Times of Day* also represents an allegory of liberty, like the French allegory, but it represents the German concept of liberty during the Napoleonic Wars as freedom from foreign domination and the preservation of German culture, ethnicity, and language.<sup>30</sup> His series also implements contemporary theories of semiotics and patriotism, such as Herder, as well as Schiller, whose *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* was written in response to the French Revolution, and addressed the need for art and theory that influenced human behavior on a subliminal and aesthetic level. Merging art and religion was a distinguishing characteristic of the Romantic movement, and it was supported by contemporary epistemology. Schiller's *Aesthetic Education of Man* would have been available to Runge when it was first published in serial form in 1795 in the periodical *Die Hören*. Schiller's range of intellectual pursuits was as broad as Herder's, with writings on physiology and psychology as well as ethics and aesthetics. According to Schiller, art was a pure ideal and equivalent with truth. It served as a beacon and a moral indicator for society. Aesthetics, he maintained, "exists in every finely attuned soul...like the pure Church and the pure Republic." He defines the role of beauty as one which is intended to create an ideal state. Dividing human nature into "sensual man" and "rational man" he advances a plan for pacifying sensual man through art which represents a higher intellectual and abstract standard of morality and virtue. Sensual man has the capacity to destroy society if his needs are not met, while rational man conforms to the highly evolved intellect which formulates abstract laws of morality and justice. Art serves as the mediator between the two by manipulating the lower functions of sensual man to conform to the laws created by rational man. Art then represents a moral standard and ideal subliminally apprehended on a sensory level by sensual man, and comprehended on the higher rational abstract intellectual level by rational man. Schiller assumes that the moral standards of society are absolute laws that exist independently of human experience. The image of

<sup>30</sup> Hans Kohn, *Prelude to Nation States: The French and German Experience 1789-1815* (Princeton, 1967).



the ideal ordered society is never in question, rather Schiller's purpose is to show how art serves to maintain the social order.<sup>31</sup>

Schiller's series of letters comprising *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* were written with far-reaching goals concerning the philosopher's ability to affect and model society. Written under the patronage of the Danish Duke of Augustenberg, the original letters were written after the execution of Louis XVI in 1793, and during the Jacobin Reign of Terror which followed. Like most German intellectuals, Schiller was affected by the French Revolution, the challenge it posed to the existing social structure of society and the laws on which it rested. His initial admiration of the Enlightenment ideals embodied in the Early Republic's Rights of Man and Citizen was rewarded by honorary French Citizenship. But his reaction soon turned to horror as he learned of the atrocities that followed during the Reign of Terror. He wrote to his patron that he was "sickened by these abominable butchers" who had just executed the king and "plunged" Europe "back into barbarism and slavery." To Goethe, he confided that his *Aesthetic Letters* were intended to profess his "political faith" concerning both the "wretchedness of the actual political situation" and the ideal of freedom which it violated.<sup>32</sup> The key to ordering society, according to Schiller, was ideal beauty represented in art in the classical ideal such as a Neoclassical statue of the Juno/Hera, the goddess who presided over lawful marriages. Art was a method of maintaining the ideal ordered society, and pacifying the wild beast which lurks in human nature. Art is able to appeal to the sensual, bestial nature of man through its sensual beauty which also communicates abstract moral values on a subliminal level through the physical representation in art of allegory and iconography.

The meaning that Runge ascribed to the landscape was both scientific and spiritual. Thus, it represented a hieroglyph of a moral order in society, and specifically, a moral order for Germans based on their common ethnic and linguistic origins. He was interested in color theory for the purpose of producing harmony in color arrangements emanating from the moral and spiritual sphere, and illustrating the origin of Teutonic culture in the hieroglyph of nature. The harmony in color and form was also an expression

<sup>31</sup> Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, ed. and trans. Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982).

<sup>32</sup> Letter from Schiller to Duke Augustenberg, February 8, 1793; letter from Schiller to Goethe, 1794, Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, quoted in Wilkinson and Willoughby, fn.3, xvii-xix.



of God and divinity manifested in the universe; art was a representation of divinity in nature, but also German nationalism, and the social order. It was a coherent cosmological expression of Herder's Romantic conception of language and communal identity. Runge's iconography, however, continued to use classical idealism in the human figure, much like Schiller's aesthetic theory, where it was represented through the classical ideal. Nature became the blueprint or hieroglyph of a divine social order perceived through aesthetic intimation.