


# JOURNEY AS A PHILOSOPHICAL TOPOS IN EARLY ROMANTIC LITERARY NARRATIVES

JEAN-JACQUES ROUSSEAU AND THE JENAERS

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## *Abstract*

The motif of the journey is one of the most widespread and enduring themes in Western literature. It is also a universal and timeless philosophical topos that thinkers from various traditions and backgrounds have used since antiquity. This figure plays a special role in the works of the French and German Romantic pioneers Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Jenaers (Novalis, Friedrich Schlegel, and Friedrich Hölderlin) who imbue literary narratives about journey with philosophical meaning. My aim

is to reveal the shared conceptual foundation of these narratives and demonstrate significant connections between various manifestations of early Romantic thought in the French and German traditions. In the sections of the article, I explore the early Romantic literary figure of journey as the narrative basis for: the philosophical concept of education, the category of cognition/self-cognition in an anthropological context, and the first attempts to develop a modern model of historiosophy.

*Keywords:* journey, Romanticism, literature, education, anthropology, historiosophy.

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### **Potovanje kot filozofski topos v zgodnjeromantičnih literarnih pripovedih. Jean-Jacques Rousseau in jenska šola**

#### *Povzetek*

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Motiv potovanje je ena izmed najbolj razširjenih in trajnih tem znotraj zahodne književnosti. Je tudi univerzalni in brezčasni filozofski topos, ki so se ga misleci različnih tradicij in provenienc posluževali vse od antike naprej. Posebno vlogo igra v delih francoskih in nemških romantičnih pionirjev Jeana-Jacquesa Rousseauja in pripadnikov jenske šole (Novalisa, Friedricha Schlegla in Friedricha Hölderlina), ki so literarne pripovedi o potovanju prepojili s filozofskim pomenom. Namen prispevka je razgrnitev skupne konceptualne podlage teh pripovedi in prikaz pomembnih povezav med raznolikimi manifestacijami zgodnjeromantične misli znotraj francoske in nemške tradicije. V posameznih delih članka raziskujem zgodnjeromantično literarno figuro potovanja kot narativno osnovo za: filozofski pojem izobraževanja, kategorijo spoznanja/samospoznanja v antropološkem kontekstu in prve poskuse razdelave modernega modela historiozofije.

*Ključne besede:* potovanje, romantika, književnost, izobraževanje, antropologija, historiozofija.

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## Introduction

The idea of journey occupies a special position in the history of Western civilization. This word does not mean only one of the most prevalent activities in our daily lives and a primary means of experiencing the world, but also a metaphorical construct imbued with a multitude of symbolic nuances. In light of this, it is unsurprising that journey is regarded as a fundamental and inextricable form of the imaginative life of men in its various forms (Roppen and Sommer 1964, 108).

The present article explores the concept of journey in two main areas: literary works and philosophical reflection. Since ancient times, this figure has invariably accompanied Western literature as “a metaphor for narrative, duration, extension, and purpose” (Roppen and Sommer 1964, 14–15), while it at the same time also “appears on the pages of philosophical works often enough to be considered as a universal philosophical topos” (Wieczorkiewicz 2008, 104). The multidimensionality of the journey topos enables the author to traverse seamlessly between narrative and storytelling, and the realm of concepts and thought, which was a common practice in the works of early Romantics, including the French thinker Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the representatives of the Jena Romanticism: Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg), Friedrich Schlegel, and Friedrich Hölderlin. These authors all considered expressing philosophical ideas in literary form to be a defining feature of their work. In this sense, the figure of travel can be regarded as a significant and emblematic symbol of Romanticism as a phenomenon situated at the intersection of philosophy and literature. This seems particularly relevant for the study of the various Romantic traditions, mainly because of their enormous diversity, which has led some scholars to conclude that “the ‘Romanticism’ of one country may have little in common with that of another,” and that “any study of the subject should begin with a recognition of a *prima facie* plurality of Romanticisms, of possibly quite distinct thought-complexes” (Lovejoy 1924, 235–236).

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An analysis of the various meanings of journey in the works of the early Romantics, representing different national traditions, allows for the observation of numerous similarities in its seemingly disparate manifestations. This study

will focus on these commonalities, offering insights into the convergences that characterize the Romantic travel narrative.

The primary subject of this analysis is the figure of journey as a philosophical topos in early Romantic literary narratives, including the works of Rousseau, such as *Julie, or The New Heloise* (1761), *Emile, or On Education* (1762), *Reveries of the Solitary Walker* (1782), as well as selected novels by the Jenaers: *Hyperion* (1799), *Lucinde* (1799), *The Novices of Sais* (1798), *Henry von Ofterdingen* (1802). The objective of my study is to examine how the authors of these texts use the literary motif of journey to present, explain, or reinterpret specific philosophical ideas that shape the conceptual landscape of Western culture at the dawn of modernity. The philosophical meanings of the early Romantic concept of travel identified in these works are of interest due to their surprising convergence in seemingly distant narratives, including, for example, the stories of the obedient Emile and the ironic Julius, or the sentimental teacher Saint-Preux and Hyperion as the leader of the Greek independence uprising. It is my intention to reveal the common conceptual horizon of these narratives, which demonstrate significant connections between various expressions of early Romantic thought in French and German traditions. In order to realize the above ideas, in the following sections of this article, I explore the early Romantic literary figure of journey as the narrative basis for: the philosophical concept of education, the category of cognition/self-cognition in an anthropological context, and the first attempts to develop a modern model of historiosophy.

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### **Early Romantics and the concept of educational journey**

During the Age of Enlightenment, it became widely accepted that travel was an essential aspect of human education, originating directly from the ancient sources of our culture: “If travelling was in such high esteem among the ancients, no wonder that the moderns should be fond of imitating their example, and that this excellent custom should so generally obtain in this learned age.” (Nugent 2005, 16.) The concepts of travel and education are becoming increasingly intertwined over time. In Chevalier de Jaucourt’s article published in the *Encyclopédie* (1756), the term *voyage* is defined in relation to three main contexts, one of which is education as the transfer of knowledge and skills (Van

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Den Abbeele 1992, XV–XVI). At the same time, the Enlightenment educational process became increasingly difficult to imagine without traveling: “The last part usually in education is travel, which is commonly thought to finish the work and complete the gentleman.” (Locke 1996, 158.) As Georges Van Den Abbeele observes, the basis for this correlation between the categories of travel and education is Locke’s epistemology of sensory perception and the related pedagogical concept of personality formation through direct interaction with the external world. In his view, it is expressed both in the practice of the Grand Tour and in certain aspects of the development of the modern novel, including the *Bildungsroman* genre and autobiographical writing (1992, 85).

The term “Grand Tour” was first employed by Richard Lassels in his guidebook, *An Italian Voyage* (1670), which included a description of routes and destinations recommended to young gentlemen embarking on their final stage of education (Lassels 1697, 18). The young man began the two-year Grand Tour between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one, usually under the guidance of a tutor (Locke 1996, 158–159). His destination was initially mainly Italy (Rome, Venice, Florence), but in time also France (Paris, Lyon, Versailles) and German cultural centers or health resorts (Berlin, Dresden, Baden-Baden, Karlsbad). In the eighteenth century, there is also a growing conviction that “to study human nature to purpose, a traveler must enlarge his circuit beyond the bounds of Europe,” visiting North America, China and Japan, Africa and Arab countries (Hurd 2005, 18). Of the analyzed examples of early Romantic prose, the journey of Emil from Rousseau’s novel is the most analogous to the conventional Grand Tour. The young man begins it at the age of twenty, as the final stage of his education, and over the course of two years, he visits first Paris and then “a few of the great countries and many of the smaller countries of Europe” (Rousseau 2015, 414). The course of this travel is meticulously planned and controlled so that “the voyage will only have those effects intended by Emile’s tutor” (Van Den Abbeele 1992, 86). We can also find some elements of the traditional Grand Tour model in other novels of the early Romantics. At the age of twenty, Henry von Ofterdingen leaves his hometown of Eisenach in Thuringia. Rather than travelling throughout Europe, he sets off to visit his grandfather Schwaning in Augsburg. As with Emil, however, this journey is undertaken for the purpose of completing his education, thereby initiating his

adult life (Novalis 1964, 24–25). In comparison, Hyperion traverses both the territory of his native Greece and the traditional Grand Tour route through Italy, Germany, and France, which he ultimately decides to embark upon at the end of the novel's second volume (Hölderlin 2019, 76). In contrast, in *The New Heloise* Rousseau introduces the theme of travel to countries outside of Europe. In addition to the conventional Grand Tour itineraries to Italy or Paris, Saint-Preux embarks on a maritime journey around the globe, visiting Brazil, Mexico, Peru, China, and Africa (1997, 339–340).

266 In the eighteenth century, the educational value of the Grand Tour was most often equated with the extensive knowledge gained by young men about the history, geography, economy, legal system, and social customs of other nations: "The rational design of travelling is to become acquainted with the languages, customs, manners, laws and interests of foreign nations; the trade, manufactures and produce of countries; the situation and strength of towns and cities." (The Gentleman's Magazine 2005, 14). In an analogous way, Emil acquires proficiency in "two or three of the chief languages" during his travels in Europe. Additionally, he gains knowledge of the "natural history, government, arts, or men" of various countries and nations (Rousseau 2015, 414). Before Hyperion travels to Smyrna, his father gives him the following advice: "[...] learn there the arts of seamanship and war, learn the speech of polished peoples, learn about their constitutions and opinions and manners and customs, prove all things and hold fast the best" (Hölderlin 2019, 17). Less pragmatic, but equally encyclopedic in scope, is the knowledge of the world that Henry of Ofterdingen acquires during his journey. Its different aspects are embodied by successive characters: merchants telling of the mythical Atlantis, Crusaders recalling the Holy Land, a captive Arab girl named Zulima, a miner exploring the secrets of nature, and a hermit (count Friedrich von Hohenzollern) studying history. Novalis equips his hero with an encyclopedic knowledge, but he also reinterprets the traditional task of the Grand Tour in the Romantic spirit, because in his novel "warfare, the Orient, nature and history, poetry, love and death are drawn together through the movement of poetic imagination and the interplay of reality, interpolated narratives and dreams" (Phelan 2009, 48).

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In addition to the acquisition of a specific type of knowledge, the aim of the Grand Tour was also to bring the young man to a stage of personal and social maturity. Lassels suggests that achieving independence from parental influence, developing freedom and responsibility, and broadening intellectual horizons are key factors in accomplishing this task (1697, 14–16). The early Romantics especially expose this aspect of the educational journey. As Rousseau observes, travel is an integral part of the formation of a mature personality, reinforcing the innate characteristics and predispositions of individuals and ultimately defining their moral character, because “when a man returns from traveling about the world, he is what he will be all his life” (2015, 398). According to Schlegel, the Grand Tour gives a young person “more freedom and inner versatility and thereby greater independence and self-sufficiency” (1971a, 204). In early Romantic novels, a female character represents the male protagonist’s personal and social maturity. The journeys of Saint-Preux correspond to the successive stages of his moral development, which is expressed in the evolution of his love for Julie. His initial naïve affection, reflective of the natural beauty of the Swiss Alps, is replaced by mature devotion and respect, forged in the crucible of global travel: “I felt obliged to have a new sort of respect for her; her familiarity was almost a burden; as beautiful as she seemed to me I would have kissed the hem of her dress more willingly than her cheek.” (Rousseau 1997, 348.) When Emil first meets Sophy on his journey, he is not mature enough to start a family and, as a result, he has to “leave her in order to return worthy of her” (Rousseau 2015, 392). Similarly, in German literature “inspiration through love is a key factor in Romantic protagonists’ development to maturity” (Schmidt 2009, 27). Johann Wolfgang Goethe was the first to give full expression to this idea in his *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* (1795/96). Because of the connection between the idea of education and the category of travel, this novel has repeatedly been referred to as an “odyssey of education” (Janion and Żmigrodzka 1998, 66).<sup>1</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup> Meister’s story begins with a merchant voyage that he interrupts to join a troupe of traveling actors. With them, he arrives at Lothario castle, where he meets members of the elite Tower Society, who gradually dissuade him from his theatrical aspirations in favor of a vocation for the conscious life at the bosom of family and society: “Goethe’s hero journeys through various romantic attachments, but also through a practical and aesthetic education in theatre, towards the recognition of personal responsibility and

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each of the early German Romantic novels, the figure of the female protagonist is central, but the Goethean idea that the path to maturity passes through the world of women, who “educate” man, is most overtly expressed in the plot of *Lucinde*. In the section “Apprenticeship for Manhood,” Schlegel ironically travesties the title of Goethe’s novel, thereby rendering his protagonist’s journey already purely metaphorical. This is evidenced by the various stages of Julius’s “odyssey of education” as they manifest in his many love adventures. In contrast with the protagonists of Rousseau or Goethe, Julius’s journey is not oriented towards social integration. Instead, his goal is the Romantic ideal of the fullness of humanity that can only be achieved through the power of love: “[...] it is love that first makes us true and complete human beings and is the essence of life [...]” (Schlegel 1971c, 110).

268 Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the two principal tenets of the Grand Tour pedagogical tradition—the pursuit of knowledge and the holistic development of the individual—found their expression in the German term *Bildung*: “This word signifies two processes—learning and personal growth—but they are not understood apart from one another, as if education were only a means to growth.” (Beiser 2003, 91.) The term *Bildung* has its roots in theology, where it denotes the process of forming a human being into an image of God (*imago Dei*), but over time it has become synonymous with upbringing (*Erziehung*) or development (*Entwicklung*) as self-education (*Selbstbildung*). In the eighteenth century, the terms *Entwicklung*, *Erziehung*, and *Bildung* acquired distinct meanings as a result of the integration of natural science terminology into humanistic discourse. Since then, the first denotes the spontaneous development of the human being as an organic whole; the second signifies the education of the individual according to preconceived pedagogical principles and norms; the third represents the process of forming the human personality without the planned influence of other people (Selbmann 1994, 1–2). In contemporary discourse, the distinction between the meanings of these three terms has given rise to the concept of the literary genre *Entwicklungsroman*

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social integration.” (Phelan 2009, 41.) However, this would not have been possible without the different kinds of love, as the course of Wilhelm’s education is influenced far more by the women who love him than by the Tower Society (Janion and Żmigrodzka 1998, 111).

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(novel of development) and its two variants: *Erziehungsroman* (novel of education) and *Bildungsroman* (coming-of-age novel). An example of the first type is Rousseau's *Emile*, whereas the second is represented by Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship*, to which the Jenaers' novels are related (Engel 2008, 265).<sup>2</sup> It should also be noted that the defining characteristics of the *Bildungsroman* genre can be found not only in the works of Hölderlin, Novalis, and Schlegel, but also in Rousseau's *The New Heloise*. This latter text narrates the story of an individual's moral development in the face of unforeseen circumstances and a variety of social interactions, in contrast to Emil's education, which is determined by meticulously planned curriculum. One of the basic common features of works within the *Bildungsroman* genre is precisely the motif of journey, which serves as an excellent metaphor for the educational process,<sup>3</sup> wherein the acquisition of knowledge is interwoven with various aspects of individual growth and development. At the same time, just as the concept of *Bildung* cannot be simply reduced to the phenomenon of education in its most common sense, so, too, the metaphor of travel in early Romantic literature cannot be reduced to a mere element of the plot of a coming-of-age novel.

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### From an educational journey to a modern philosophy of man

The educational significance of the journey does not exhaust the richness of the meanings attributed to it by the early Romantics, because they do not

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2 It is important to note that neither Goethe nor the Jenaers used the word *Bildungsroman* to describe their novels. This term was first used by Karl von Morgenstern in 1810 and later popularized by Wilhelm Dilthey. Both scholars identified the first example of this genre in Christoph Martin Wieland's *Geschichte des Agathon* (1766/67), and agreed that *Wilhelm Meister* was the exemplar for this genre (Engel 2008, 263). *Wilhelm Meister* "has been imitated in a whole series of 'Bildungsromane' and made this the German species of the novel" (Bruford 2009, 29), but it also "played a very serious role in the formation and dissemination of the specifically German 'educational idea,' or notion of *Bildung*" (Janion and Żmigrodzka, 51).

3 The enduring connection between the category of travel and the concept of *Bildung* is also evidenced by the presence in modern German of the terms *Bildungsreise*, *Ausbildungsreise*, or *Fortbildungsreise*, which refer to different types of educational journey (Żołądź 1994, 8).

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limit the idea of education to the sphere of pedagogical influence, but also see it as an important anthropological category. Using the metaphor of the journey, early Romantic literature tries to establish its philosophy of man either through cognition or self-cognition. We can analyze the first of these paths with the example of Rousseau's novels. In *Emile*, the French author assumes that an educational journey has a philosophical function when its goal is the knowledge of different nations:

To travel to see foreign lands or to see foreign nations are two very different things. The former is the usual aim of the curious, the latter is merely subordinate to it. If you wish to travel as a philosopher you should reverse this order. (2015, 398.)

270 Saint-Preux, returning from a journey around the world, shares with Clara his knowledge of exotic nations enslaved by the yoke of European colonialism, but at the same time he also writes about the English nation: "Finally I have seen in my travelling companions an intrepid and proud people whose example and freedom restores in my eyes the honor of my species [...]" (Rousseau 1997, 340). As Rousseau argues in *Emile*, cognition of other nations means "full knowledge of questions of government, public morality, and political philosophy of every kind" (2015, 401). Thus, during the journey, the protagonist is not interested in the history or art of different countries, since "Emile is not an archeologist. His attention is directed especially to questions of government, to customs and laws. He will study politics and comparative legislation on the spot." (Compayré 1971, 78.) A comparative analysis of the political and legal systems of different countries leads to an understanding of the human species as a whole, providing the basis for Rousseau's anthropology: "He who has compared a dozen nations knows men, just as he who has compared a dozen Frenchmen knows the French." (Rousseau 2015, 395.) Emil's Grand Tour is therefore not limited to education as a process of acquiring knowledge or skills, but in Rousseau's novel, "the pedagogical function of travel has to do, it would seem, with overcoming ethnocentrism, and with the corresponding establishment of a general anthropology" (Van Den Abbeele 1992, 89). This turn from education to the philosophy of man explains why, in *Emile*, the account of the Grand Tour is limited to the most basic information and is followed by reflections on the importance of the institution of travel and

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detailed considerations of political philosophy, which take the form of regular lessons the educator gives the young man, “as if Emile were not on a journey but in a lecture on constitutional law” (Oelkers 2008, 127). Consequently, the literal meaning of the hero’s journey becomes secondary, and the metaphorical sense comes to the forefront. For Rousseau, it is not so much a journey through time and space, but rather the intellectual journey, during which he seeks an answer to the most fundamental questions about human nature by studying the various manifestations and forms of social life, and the political and legal systems.

The establishment of an early Romantic anthropology also constitutes a significant objective in the novels of German authors. Nevertheless, in contrast to Emil, the protagonists of these literary narratives choose the path of self-discovery, perceiving it as the optimal strategy for comprehending human nature:

We dream of journeys through the cosmos: isn’t the cosmos then in ourselves? The depths of our spirits we know not.—Toward the Interior goes the arcane way. In us, or nowhere, is the Eternal with its worlds, the past and future. The outer world is a shadow world, which casts its’ shadow into the realm of light. (Novalis 1989, 26.)

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The journey of self-discovery should lead to reaching a specific point on the map of human consciousness. According to Schlegel, “true human being is one who has penetrated to the center of humanity” (1971b, 249), whereby this applies not only to the individual, but also to the human species as a whole: “[...] mankind struggles with all its power to find its own center” (1968, 83). In Schlegel’s novel, each of Julius’s love experiences brings him closer to this objective and the culmination of this journey is his relationship with Lucinde who embodies the moment of self-knowledge: “A light entered his soul: he saw and surveyed all the parts of his life and the structure of the whole clearly and truly because he stood at its center.” (1971c, 102.) The moment of supreme self-awareness, which provides Julius with access to the center of his humanity, is tantamount to achieving the unity of the dispersed elements of the personality, which is the objective of the educational process understood in the Romantic way. The story of Julius’s love adventures allows us to see in him:

[...] a hero whose journey is an education in experience through stages of awareness which culminate on the level of intellectual maturity—a stage of integrity, power, and freedom in which the protagonist finally learns who he is, what he was born for, and the implicit purpose of all that he has endured on the way. (Abrams 1971, 193–94.)

272 The deepest meaning of Hyperion's wanderings—first with his mentor and teacher Adamas, and then with his friend and companion Alabanda and his beloved Diotima—can be understood in a similar way. The figure of Diotima, like Schlegel's Lucinde, represents the moment of supreme unity that the protagonist experiences when reaching the center of his humanity in the process of self-discovery: "For some time now, under Diotima's influence, more stability had come into my soul; [...] I felt it with threefold purity, and the scattered swarming energies were all gathered in one single golden mean." (Hölderlin 2019, 66.) According to Meyer Abrams, Hölderlin's literary narrative of his protagonist's journey represents "the course of life as an approximation to its center in the primordial unity of being" (1971, 238), since "from childhood to manhood Hyperion passes through stages of experience in which he periodically appears to approach a lost harmony with himself and with the outside world" (1971, 239). As a result of the interactions with the various characters he encounters, Hyperion's educational journey evolves into a process of self-discovery, as „his spiritual growth consists not in the steady enlargement of personality, but rather in the deepening of consciousness through a recurrent experience" (Salzberger 1952, 26). In German Romantic anthropology, self-cognition, understood as an inner movement that stimulates the individual's development towards personality integration, does not end, when unity is achieved. In other words, there is no single center of humanity where an individual, upon reaching it, remains permanently in a state of harmony with the world and with himself. That is why, in Hölderlin's novel, Adamas leaves Hyperion, his friendship with Alabanda ends, and Diotima dies, obliging the protagonist to continue the effort of self-discovery, which means that "the equilibrium proves unstable and immediately splits into opposites, which in turn strive for a new integration" (Abrams 1971, 239). Likewise, Schlegel's novel does not end, when Julius first stands at the center of his humanity (that is, when he meets Lucinde), but the story continues "by

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opening the journey of self-discovery to a sense that identity is available only in a fragmented or fragmentary way” (Phelan 2009, 49).

In their search for the truth about man and his world, the early Romantics also point to the different methods of cognition and self-cognition. The first is observation, which Rousseau’s protagonists often use during their travels. As Saint-Preux reports from the Valais, “I have spent scarcely a week travelling through a countryside that would require years of observation [...]” (Rousseau 1997, 62), while during his stay in Paris he writes to Julie: “It also seems to me that it is folly to try to study the world as a mere spectator. He who pretends simply to observe observes nothing [...]” (1997, 202). Observation, which in Rousseau’s philosophy comes directly from the intellectual traditions of the Enlightenment,<sup>4</sup> does not consist in simply looking at various objects or events. Rather, it means the rational and scientific “method of conscious and direct observation of things” (Compayré 1971, 67). Accordingly, in *Emile*, the French author provides precise guidelines for his method of observing nations:

Before beginning our observations we must lay down rules of procedure; we must find a scale with which to compare our measurements. Our principles of political law are our scale. Our actual measurements are the civil law of each country. (Rousseau 2015, 402.)

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The notions of scale and measurement allow us to consider this procedure as a typical tool of the Enlightenment philosophy, which, as Baczko notes, was based on facts gathered by the methods of experiment and observation commonly used in the natural sciences (1965, 56–57). In Rousseau’s novels, travel plays an important role in cognitive processes, because it facilitates direct and systematic observation, thereby enabling the discovery and accumulation of new facts in alignment with the doctrine of sensualism. At the same time, this typical method of the Enlightenment is also often replaced by an alternative mode of cognition, which Rousseau calls meditation, reverie, or

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<sup>4</sup> In the eighteenth century, mainly due to the philosophy of Locke and Condillac, sensualism became the leading epistemological doctrine. As Bronisław Baczko points out, it “constituted the theoretical justification of the entire theoretical-cognitive concept of the Enlightenment, and at the same time was most closely connected with the ethical-social doctrine” (1965, 57).

contemplation: "It is certain that this state of contemplation constitutes one of the great charms of sensible men." (1997, 456.) Contemplation can be directed towards the outside world, especially nature, but it also means "the habit of turning within" that Rousseau practiced in his last years and documented in *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*:

By my own experience, I thus learned that the source of true happiness is within us and that it is not within the power of men to make anyone who can will to be happy truly miserable. For four or five years, I habitually tasted those internal delights that loving and sweet souls find in contemplation. (1992, 13.)

274 As a solitary walker, the French author appears to be merely wandering around Paris, but in fact he is undertaking a journey into himself, embarking on a path of inner contemplation. It becomes a method of philosophical cognition of the nature of man, because, in the case of Rousseau's thought, "inward exploration yields knowledge of the same reality, it reveals the same absolute norms, as does exploration of the most remote past" (Starobinski 1988, 19).

The two methods of cognition postulated by Rousseau also manifest themselves in the works of the representatives of the German early Romantic tradition. However, these authors reinterpret them in the context of transcendental philosophy that emerged at the end of the eighteenth century. In this context, Novalis again refers to the figure of the journey and distinguishes between "the way of experience" and "the way of intuition":

He who takes the first road has to figure out one thing from another by laborious calculation, while he who takes the second immediately penetrates to the essence of every event and object and is able to contemplate these essences in their vital complex interrelationship and easily compare them with everything else like numbers on a slate. (1964, 29–30.)

Novalis's interest in the opposition between immediate and mediate cognition in this form derives from the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, who "still explicitly and emphatically affirmed both the possibility of thinking an intellectual intuition and its impossibility in the realm of experience" (Benjamin

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1996, 121). Johann Gottlieb Fichte then presents a new formulation of this question, elucidating the reflexive nature of thinking. This is demonstrated by the essential connection between two forms of consciousness (the self):

We have a self in a dual aspect: partly, insofar as it is reflective, and to that extent the direction of its activity is centripetal; partly, insofar as it is that upon which reflection takes place, and to that extent the direction of its activity is centrifugal out to infinity at that. (Fichte 1970, 241.)

The ways of experience and contemplation that Novalis distinguishes correspond to the dual structure of the transcendental self, which in infinite movement turns to the external object of cognition and then returns to itself. In other words, as Walter Benjamin notes, “the forms of consciousness in their transition into one another are the sole object of immediate cognition, and this transition is the sole method capable of grounding that immediacy and making it intelligible” (1996, 122–123). The figure of the journey perfectly illustrates this infinite movement of reflection from the world to itself, for the reason that “the journey belongs to the essence of thinking, since thinking in its essence is doubled between ‘here’ and ‘there,’ between the finite and the infinite [...]” (Gadacz 2007). While Fichte considers the question of the two-way activity of the self in the context of the epistemology of the Science of Knowledge, the Romantics transfer it to the sphere of the philosophy of man, distinguishing two anthropological types. According to Novalis, the way of experience is travelled by those who are inclined to action and who are set on exploring the world around them: “Their soul may not indulge in introspective reverie; it must be steadily directed outward and be an industrious, swiftly-deciding servant of their mind.” (1964, 93.) The second way is chosen by people who belong to another type of wanderers, “whose world is their soul, whose activity is contemplation, whose life is a gradual development of their inner powers” (ibid.). The German Romantics usually juxtapose the two anthropological types, emphasizing the contrasts between them. In *The Novices of Sais*, the typical man of action is a teacher:

When he grew older, he roamed the earth, saw distant lands and seas, new skies, strange stars, unknown plants, beasts, men, went down

into caverns, saw how the earth was built in shelves and multicolored layers, and pressed clay into strange rock forms. (Novalis 2005, 7.)

In contrast, the type of the contemplative man—the wanderer on the inner path—is represented by his disciple: “With me it has never been as with the teacher. Everything leads me back into myself. I well understood whose words of the second voice.” (Novalis 2005, 13.) In a manner analogous to Fichte, who posits that “this necessary reflection of the self upon itself is the basis of all its going forth outside itself” (1970, 243), the German Romantics recognize the ideal of contemplative life as the most fundamental mode of human existence, which is capable of revealing the deepest mysteries of our condition:

The mind has this peculiarity, that next to itself it loves to think most about something it can think about forever. Hence, the life of the cultivated and meditative man is a continual cultivation and meditation on the lovely riddle of his destiny. (Schlegel 1971c, 119.)

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The German Romantics replace Fichte’s abstract transcendental subject with the anthropology of a living individual, developing in a historically conditioned world of culture (*Bildungsgeschichte*). In this view, the fate of the individual not only merges with the biography of humanity as a whole, but also serves as a kind of prototype for it, determining the fundamental shape of early Romantic philosophy of history. As it turns out, this is another idea that the Jenaers share with Rousseau, and like him, they link it to the literary motif of journey.

### **A circular journey, or a return to the home of nature**

In early Romantic literary narratives, historiosophical concepts usually manifest themselves in the theme of the home “as that point from which the voyage begins and to which it circles back at the end” (Van Den Abbeele 1992, XVIII). Both Rousseau and the Jenaers employ the concept of the circular journey as an allegory for the return to a state of nature, which they perceive as the original homeland of humanity. This process unfolds historically and is reflected in the attempt to reconstruct the ideal of the natural man, living

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in complete harmony with nature and self-unity: “The natural man lives for himself; he is the unit, the whole, dependent only on himself and on his like.” (Rousseau 2015, 7.)<sup>5</sup> The state of nature is often presented by the Romantics as the time of “the old golden age, in which she was man’s friend, consoler, priestess and enchantress, when she lived among men and divine association made men immortal” (Novalis 2005, 35). The early Romantic historiosophical tradition assumes that the history of human culture begins with the end of the golden age. The circular journey as a metaphor for human history, however, does not imply a return to its mythical beginnings. Instead, “it fuses the idea of the circular return with the idea of linear progress, to describe a distinctive figure of Romantic thought and imagination—the ascending circle, or spiral” (Abrams 1971, 184). In *The New Heloise*, the symbol of this kind of return to nature is Julie’s garden, called Elysium (in reference to the mythical land of eternal happiness). It is deceptively reminiscent of a wilderness untouched by man, whereas, as Mrs. de Wolmar points out, “nature did it all, but under my direction, and there is nothing here that I have not designed” (Rousseau 1997, 388). Julie designs Elysium according to the idea of nature as it might have been experienced sensually by primitive man, but it is in fact “a nature reconstructed by rational beings who have passed from sensual existence to moral existence” (Starobinski 1988, 111) in the course of the historical development of our culture. An analogous concept of recapturing nature is presented by an old miner in *Henry von Ofterdingen*: “Nature is approaching human beings; and whereas she was formerly a wildly producing cliff, today she is a tranquil, growing plant, a silent human artist.” (Novalis 1964, 88.) It is noteworthy that, in the German tradition, Rousseau’s historiosophical model of the return to nature was first proposed by Friedrich Schiller who distinguished three periods in the history of culture and related them to the stages of personal development. Significantly, Schiller also uses a language that refers to the figure of the journey:

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5 As Jürgen Oelkers observes, the concept of the natural man (the savage man or, in French, *homme sauvage*)—a key idea in the work of Rousseau—emerged from popular narratives of mid-century expeditions in America. This demonstrates that the “the ‘noble savage’ is not an invention by Rousseau but an often-used topos of contemporary literature” (2008, 46).

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This path taken by the modern poets is, moreover, that along which man in general, the individual as well as the race, must pass. Nature sets him at one with himself, art divides and cleaves him in two, through the ideal he returns to unity. (Schiller 1966, 112.)

The historiosophy of the Jenaers refers—more or less critically—to Schiller’s reinterpretation of Rousseau’s thought in the spirit of idealism:

[...] what was nature is the ideal. And it’s by this ideal, this rejuvenated godhead, that the few shall know each other and they are one, for the oneness is in them, and from them, these few, shall begin the second age of the world. (Hölderlin 2019, 55.)

278 If the idea of a circular journey implies that human history reproduces the destiny of each individual, wandering along the paths of his life from the innocence of childhood to the self-consciousness of adulthood, an important source of historiosophical knowledge can be the biography of each human existence accessible through inner contemplation. One of the most characteristic features of Rousseau’s work, documented in autobiographical writings from 1765 to 1778, is undoubtedly his deep reflection on his own past. In *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, the historiosophical idea of mankind’s return to the house of nature is paralleled by the autobiographical narrative of the individual’s return to the personal experiences of childhood and youth:

I went back over the movements of my soul from the time of my youth, through my mature age, since having been sequestered from the society of men, and during the long seclusion in which I must finish my days. (1992, 14.)

The theme of rejection and alienation, to which Rousseau returns obsessively in his memories, plays an extremely important role in his historiosophy. Baczko notes that it reveals—at the heart of Rousseau’s autobiographical reflection—the conflict between the individual and society as an element of moral self-knowledge. This relates his personality and unique history to the universal conflict between historical culture and ahistorical nature (2009, 190). Simultaneously, Rousseau perceives this journey along the trajectory of one’s

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personal history as a means of recapturing nature. This process does not entail the examination of external historical artifacts, but rather the introspective exploration of one's own inner self:

[...] a retired and solitary life, an active taste for reverie and contemplation, the habit of looking within oneself and seeking, in the calm of the passions, those original traits that have disappeared in the multitude, could alone enable him to rediscover them. In short, a man had to portray himself to show us primitive man like this [...]. (Rousseau 1990, 214.)

In a similar manner, as with the question of the conflict between nature and history, so, too, with regard to the issue of the return to nature, one encounters difficulty in separating Rousseau's historiosophical studies from his autobiographical reflections. Indeed, as Jean Starobinski aptly concludes:

Rousseau did not have to travel back somehow to the beginning of time in order to enter the state of nature and become its historian. He had only to describe himself, to know himself intimately, to get close to his own true nature through a process that was at once active and passive: exploring his inner nature and abandoning himself to reverie. (1988, 18–19.)

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Among the German authors, Schlegel makes the most interesting use of the autobiographical theme in the context of the conflict between nature and history. He transforms the story of his love affair with Dorothea Veit—the prototype of the title character *Lucinde*—into a metaphorical narrative about the reconciliation of opposites as the main metaphysical principle of the becoming of the world. Schlegel derives it from the system of the Science of Knowledge, but at the same time he seeks to relativize Fichte's thought, arguing that “there is no self-knowledge except historical self-knowledge” (1971b, 254).<sup>6</sup>

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6 Ernst Behler posits that Schlegel's ambivalence towards Fichte's philosophy is primarily due to his rejection of the ahistoricity of the system of the Science of Knowledge: “Schlegel, in other words, raised the question of Fichte's own historicity, or the historicity of what was going on in his system, and felt that what was proclaimed here as absolute Ego or absolute thought was nothing more than Johann Gottlieb

The vision of the reconciliation of lovers in the sexual act corresponds to the return of the Fichtean self to itself, placed in the context of Julius's individual existence. This reflects on a micro scale the historiosophy of the return to the house of nature. In the section entitled "Reflection," the protagonist's erotic experiences become the backdrop for an ironic game that seeks to equate the sexual act as a symbol of the eternal reproduction of the cycle of nature with mental activity as a constant reflection on one's own existence:

It has often struck me as strange that sensible and respectable people could repeat this petty game and repeat it again in an eternally recurring cycle, performing it with untiring energy and enormous seriousness. And really the game apparently has no function or purpose, even though it may be the oldest of all games. (Schlegel 1971c, 119.)

280 In this ambiguity of reflection, which paradoxically turns out to be both a physical and a mental activity, Peter Firchow sees "the function of generalizing Julius's experiences and his new awareness," as it allows the protagonist to place his own biography in the context of the history of all mankind (1971, 36). If we add that Julius's experiences are in fact a literary adaptation of Schlegel's biography, the historical nature of self-knowledge becomes fully apparent only in relation to the category of autobiography. In the light of Schlegel's conception of reflection as a sexual-mental activity, this new self-awareness, as articulated by Firchow, does not signify an order opposed to nature, but represents its highest form. Although Schlegel's view of nature differs from that of Rousseau, the idea of the return to nature shows common features in the concepts of both authors, since in *Lucinde*—as in Rousseau's autobiographical works—"[...] the discovery of nature in its parts and as a whole is necessarily also a journey of self-discovery, on which self-knowledge and the understanding of nature mutually condition and support each other" (Barkhoff 2009, 211).

As we have seen, an important place in the historiosophy of the return to nature is occupied by the idea of a new golden age, which in the novels of Rousseau and the Jenaers is closely linked to the problems of solitude and community. These two categories relate to the primary structural elements of

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Fichte in Jena, including all his personal idiosyncracies and prejudices." (1993, 190.)

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the journey metaphor, namely the question of human nature and the ethical organization of social life (Roppen and Sommer 1964, 15). The ultimate goal of the journey of Rousseau's protagonists is to live in an authentic community, which the French author contrasts with modern society. The result of Emil's Grand Tour, which "defines him as a full member of society (in his accepting the rights and obligations entailed in living within that society)" (Van Den Abbeele 1992, 94), is the formation of a family unit as the foundation for the development of a larger community. The nuptials of the young couple inaugurate a golden age, which signifies a return to living in harmony with nature:

I see the young couple in the midst of the rustic sports which they have revived, and I hear the shouts of joy and the blessings of those about them. Men say the golden age is a fable; it always will be for those whose feelings and taste are depraved. People do not really regret the golden age, for they do nothing to restore it. (Rousseau 2015, 417.)

In turn, Saint-Preux's travels prepare him to participate in the community of friends formed around the family of Julie and Wolmar. In *The New Heloise*, the symbol of the return of the golden age is the grape harvest festival, which serves to unite all residents of the Wolmar estate in common labor, regardless of the divisions that have resulted from traditional social arrangements: "[...] the gentle equality that prevails here re-establishes nature's order, constitutes a form of instruction for some, a consolation for others, and a bond of friendship for all" (Rousseau 1997, 497). However, both golden age communities exist on the periphery of modern society and are accessible only to a select few. The idea of this hermeticism refers to the solitude of modern man, since in Rousseau's work "the *general* exaltation of the closed community becomes a symbol of universality, though it remains a subjective, psychological experience" (Starobinski 1988, 102). In this way, the fictional world of Rousseau's novels "is as much an affirmation of his own solitude and isolation in the existing world as it is a postulation of another moral world and the constitution of another ideal community" (Baczko 2009, 151). At the end of his life, Rousseau finally abandons the literary fantasies of the ideal community, and replaces them with the reveries of a solitary wanderer who believes that the only way to preserve

the authenticity of his own existence is to be absolutely free of all social ties: “These hours of solitude and meditation are the only ones in the day during which I am fully myself and for myself, without diversion, without obstacle, and during which I can truly claim to be what nature willed.” (Rousseau 1992, 12.) Consequently, for Rousseau, solitary wandering serves as a metaphor for experiencing and interpreting the inner world of man in accordance with his own nature, while the social life is always an obstacle to this process.

In the context of the German prose, the dialectic of community and solitude is most fully manifested in the story of Hyperion whose beliefs represent “a blend of mystical ideas and the social tenets of Rousseau” (Salzberger 1952, 32). Similar to Emile or Saint-Preux, the primary aim of his journey is the establishment of a new kind of community, in which “humanity and nature will unite into one all-embracing godhead” (Hölderlin 2019, 77). In order to achieve this goal, Hyperion must fight for his country’s independence in a war against the Turkish invaders. But instead of a real Greek society, he attempts to build a closed and ideal community that conforms to the rules of the individual’s inner world:

It’s a better age you’re seeking, a more beautiful world. It was only that world you embraced in your friends, with them you were that world [...] The loss of all the golden centuries, as you felt them, compressed into a single happy moment, the spirit of all the spirits of better times, the energy of all the energies of the heroes, all this was to be made good for you by a single mere man. (Hölderlin 2019, 57–58.)

Nevertheless, under Diotima’s influence, he aspires to abandon his introspective and solitary journey of self-discovery and instead become a leader who will guide his people to victory: „But first I must go forth to learn. I’m an artist, but I lack the craft. I can mould in my mind, but I haven’t yet learned to direct my hand.” (Hölderlin 2019, 76.) Hyperion ultimately fails to achieve his intended goal, because he proves to be utterly helpless in a fundamentally alien external world, where “he is ‘other-directed’ rather than self-directed. His decisions are usually not his own, but those of other, stronger individuals: Adamas, Alabanda, Diotima, even Notara.” (Silz 1969, 39.) Finally, the vision of an ideal society is ultimately untenable, because “Hyperion is not the man

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to set his country in order. He has little knowledge of men.” (Salzberger 1952, 32.) When the struggle for Greek freedom turns to unpunished robbery and murder, Hyperion is left alone on the ruins of his ideals. His destiny is not community, but solitude, as the novel’s subtitle—*The Hermit in Greece*—already informs the reader. From the perspective of community building, Hyperion’s journey is thus revealed as futile and devoid of meaningful results, exposing the profound solitude that individuals face in the modern world.

## Conclusion

My attempt to present journey as a philosophical topos in early Romantic thought certainly does not exhaust the full range of meanings we can attribute to one of our culture’s most universal metaphors in the works of Rousseau and the Jenaers. However, I did not intend to analyze all possible contexts, in which this motif manifests itself in the early Romantic literature selected for this study. The aim of my work was to identify those contexts, in which this topos plays an important role as a link between: (1) the sphere of narrative and the domain of concepts; (2) the two national traditions of early Romanticism; and (3) the most important ideas expressing significant dilemmas in the reflection on man and history, which shaped the paradigm of modern anthropology and historiosophy. In this regard, I attempted to demonstrate that both Rousseau and the early German Romantics intentionally used the motif of journey to illustrate the conceptual unity and close interdependence of the key elements of their philosophical thought: the broad concept of education, major anthropological principles, and early attempts at a modern philosophy of history.

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In consideration of the analysis conducted, it can be posited that the most literal interpretation of literary journey narratives exhibits a close association with the educational process, conceptualized as the creative endeavor of an individual who is oriented towards self-development or the shaping of another individual. Education, in this sense, emerges as an indispensable prerequisite for establishing the paradigm of early Romantic anthropology on the paths of cognition and self-knowledge, which more or less directly invariably refer to the literary figure of the road. Subsequently, early Romantic thought,

emphasizing anthropological ideas of human formation and development, also adapts them to its three-stage historiosophical model, in which the postulate of a return to nature—as a result of the educational aspirations of modern man—is expressed in a literary vision of a circular journey.

In summary, the implementation of the assumptions of such a research approach serves as a crucial complement to the interpretative approaches presented in the extant literature on the subject, to which I refer in the article.

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## *Phainomena 33 | 130-131 | November 2024*

### **Human Existence and Coexistence in the Epoch of Nihilism**

Damir Barbarić | Jon Stewart | Cathrin Nielsen | Ilia Inishev  
| Petar Bojanić | Holger Zaborowski | Dragan D. Prole | Susanna Lindberg | Jeff Malpas | Azelarabe Lahkim Bennani | Josef Estermann | Chung-Chi Yu | Alfredo Rocha de la Torre | Jesús Adrián Escudero | Veronica Neri | Žarko Paić | Werner Stegmaier | Adriano Fabris | Dean Komel



## *Phainomena 33 | 128-129 | June 2024*

### **Marcations | Zaznačbe**

Mindaugas Briedis | Irfan Muhammad | Bence Peter Marosan  
| Sazan Kryeziu | Petar Šegedin | Johannes Vorlauffer | Manca Erzetič | David-Augustin Mândruț | René Dentz | Olena Budnyk | Maxim D. Miroshnichenko | Luka Hrovat | Tonči Valentić | Dean Komel | Bernhard Waldenfels | Damir Barbarić



## *Phainomena 32 | 126-127 | November 2023*

### **Demarcations | Razmejitve**

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