

## Research Article

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# Schelling's *Clara*: Romantic Psychotherapy

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**Abstract:** Schelling's unfinished novella/dialog from the early years of his turn to philosophy of spirit presents arguments for personal immortality, but in a narrative form. Characters that represent nature and mind try to rescue the usually equanimous Clara from psychological crisis occasioned by her husband's death and consequent intellectual perplexities about personal survival. Their arguments illustrate Schelling's reformulated Spinozistic metaphysics: expressivism. On this theory, a *Wesenheit* or creative essence manifests in both physical and psychic dimensions but is itself nothing other than the connection between the two. Clara, doctor, and pastor symbolize these three functions while their personae fashion arguments that psychic and somatic phenomena can never be separated, hence that death must signify a transformation into a more spiritual psychosomatic mode of being. The arguments are problematic at best, but the narrative invokes Romantic tropes such as the limits of conceptual language, the possibility of a natural style of communicating philosophy, and reference to then contemporary 'empirical' phenomena such as clairvoyance and hypnotic sleep. The unfinished character of the piece reinforces the impression of ineluctability of the self, which seems to exist only in diaspora as nostalgia or anticipation.

**Keywords:** affect; connection; nature; psychotherapy; Romanticism; soul

One refers to a beautiful soul when the ethical sense has at last so taken control of all a person's feelings that it can leave affect to guide the will without hesitation and is never in danger of standing in contradiction to its decisions.

Friedrich Schiller, *On Grace and Dignity* (Schiller, 1793/2005, p. 287)

Among the manuscripts that F.W.J. Schelling requested his editor-son to burn after his death was an unfinished novella on the continuity of the natural and spiritual worlds that probably dates from the earlier, more productive years of his 'philosophy of freedom.' It is nominally dated 1810 and was published posthumously with an introduction penned for a different essay. The consensus date is accurate; Schelling's "Zwittergeburt" [Hermaphrodite] (Pascal, 2014, p. 52) or pastiche of novel and

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philosophical dialogue resonates with the major themes of the 1809 *Investigations on the Reality of Human Freedom*, the 1810 *Stuttgart Seminars* and anticipates some of the innovations of the 1811 first draft of *Ages of the World*. While the essays of the later identity-philosophy 1804–1807 present an expressivist revision of identity theory in which the *bond* or *copula* unites nature (*Seyn*) and spirit (*das Seyende*), the dynamic tendency toward self-disclosure, affirmation, or expression they assert are themselves flat assertions, items of third-person discourse (see Vater, 2023a). With Schelling's turn toward philosophy of spirit in the 1809 *Investigations*, philosophy's preferred mode of presentation becomes conversational or narrative, first-person discourse. As Schelling intones at the beginning of the 1811 first draft of *Ages*: “The past becomes known, the present recognized, the future divined. What is known becomes narrated, what is recognized shown, what is divined foretold” (Schelling, 1811/2019, p. 55). Narration is the way a person, whose being is diachronic, expresses herself. Her life is conversational. Schelling has philosophical, not just stylistic, reasons to frame the evolutionary journeys of human agency (*Investigations*), of God emergent from nature (*Ages*), and individual human life (*Clara*) as *histories*. The move is audacious for there is a tacit claim to have witnessed things “*in principio*”—or perhaps just (romantically) *in imagine*.

*Clara* is an exercise of romantic psychotherapy. Therapy because the piece recalls Socratic care or cure of soul in its four chief conversations, and because both doctor and pastor attempt to free Clara from crushing psychological crisis that involves intense fear of catastrophe, longing for her dead husband and anxiety about personal survival after death. Their aim is not to return her to superficial cheerfulness or to ‘adjust’ her to the inevitability of death, but to bring her over-active state of mind to the noncognitive equanimity or ‘purity’ that her name signifies by establishing the metaphysical continuity of body, mind, and soul—a continuity capable of turning the separation of mind and body at death into a transformation (*Verklärung*), a transition from sensuous human life to a spiritual but still embodied life (Pascal, 2014, pp. 61–62). It is more difficult to justify the epithet romantic, not in the least because it is commonplace in the history of aesthetics to encounter references to Schelling as the “prince of the German romantics” (Aurello, 2012, p. 43). Critics have listed resort to nature, imagination, and symbolism to heal rifts between humankind and nature, or conscious and unconscious mind as hallmarks of romanticism.<sup>1</sup> A recent discussion cites a nostalgic yet ironic search for an irretrievable self, fascination with language as a totem of the absent self, and resort to revolution as problem-solving as the marks of romanticism.<sup>2</sup> *Clara* has flashes of ironic self-reference, meditations on how language gives sensuous form to the word/

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<sup>1</sup> René Wellek, cited in Norman & Welchman (2011, p. 47).

<sup>2</sup> Drawn from texts of Friedrich Schlegel, Heine, and Shelly (Norman & Welchman, 2011, pp. 49–52).

the Word, and is consumed with the problem of spiritual life as always-already-in-diaspora. It is the most literary of Schelling's works, both "romanesque" or novel-like and "romantic." (Pascal, 2014, p. 55). It asks of the reader both minute attention to characters, their viewpoints and statements as well as familiarity with Schelling's current version of metaphysics, one that paradoxically mixes monism and dualism.<sup>3</sup> I will discuss its literary and metaphysical dimensions separately. Some recent literature pays scant attention to the arguments in the third and fifth sections, taking Clara's nonintellectual mindset as lack of philosophical aptitude or inattention.<sup>4</sup>

## 1 Nature as Interlocutor—*Clara's* Literary Dimension

Were it just a novella or a philosophical dialogue, the setting of the discussion would be secondary to the speakers, their beliefs, and motives. But the setting is both *Clara's* subject and a presentation in its own voice of *nature* as permeated by soul and so inseparable from mind. The continuity thesis and its opposite, the ruin of nature, are displayed as well as voiced, doubted, or believed by the discussants. There are indications in *Clara* that Schelling has Plato's *Phaedo* in mind, but nothing closer than this shared dramatic or 'show and tell' approach to discussing mortality and immortality. Nature's continuity across seasonal change and geologic variation frames the five conversations, each of which is inconclusive or merely suggestive about Clara's ardent desire to reunite with her dead husband—her demand for immortality of the whole human person (Schelling, 1865/2002, p. 33). But nature's voice is not monolithic or invariantly reassuring. Human will warped nature's evolution toward the spiritual, producing evil, sin, and death "Earth is one great ruin" (Schelling, 1865/2002, pp. 24–25). The lilies of the field (*die Zeitlose*) are poisonous and suggest something sinister in turning to memory or relying on nature (Schelling, 1865/2002, p. 32). That Clara's memories may be poisonous and her hopes

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<sup>3</sup> Philippe Grosos and Miklos Vető echo earlier verdicts by Fuhrmans and Marquet on the mixed metaphysics of the middle philosophy where Schelling tries to graft a dualism based on the principle of sufficient reason onto the monism of identity philosophy (Grosos, 2014, pp. 43–44; Vető, 2014, p. 27). See (Vater, 2023b).

<sup>4</sup> Ryan Scheerlinck suggests the dialog was written in 1807 in response of Schleiermacher's *Christmas Eve* dialogue on the incarnation. He sees no symbolic or metaphysical significance to the three characters; the pastor and doctor are mere friends trying to talk the moody Clara back to everyday cheerfulness or the usual fantasy of a happy death by offering "stories" rather than arguments (Scheerlinck, 2020, pp. 150–153). Whistler concludes "in Clara the dialectic is only invoked under a veil of melancholy as an inferior surrogate for those neither inspired by mystic vision nor brave enough to die" (Whistler, 2013, p. 182).

illusory, that the crisis of hope and fear that now grips her might take her life, are the reason for the doctor's and the pastor's interventions.

We must briefly discuss plot or action before we can assess the discussants' character; the piece demands the reader carefully track both. The Protestant pastor, Schelling's persona, narrates all the discussions.<sup>5</sup> In the *first conversation*, the doctor and pastor witness Catholic All Soul's Day rituals from outside the cemetery chapel, remarking the close feeling that binds the living and the dead. They rejoin Clara at a secluded Benedictine monastery where Clara seeks to resolve financial and social injuries that her family and lands have suffered since the Thirty Years War. Her family is Catholic, her deceased husband Protestant, both 'friends of nature' along with the doctor. Clara expresses grief for her lost husband but a "young and well-educated" cleric, more *Aufklärer* than antiquarian, assures her there is no contact between this world and the next and that religion's sole counsel is to fulfil one's moral duties to those present in this life. Clara argues that love sustains bonds of friendship even in separation, as in the bond of maternal feeling. The Kantian monk chides her for the selfishness of her sentiments, saying sin has separated the worlds and that affective judgments that make the rascal equal to the saint only tempt unbalanced minds (Schelling, 1865/2002, pp. 12–15). The doctor disagrees, saying only the cheerful and balanced should inquire about higher things, but avers that 'bottoms up' not 'top down' is his maxim for inquiry. The discussants leave the monastery but continue to extol its setting where equanimity, a purposeful life not pinched by need, and lack of possessions provide positive conditions. The pastor and his daughter discuss how such settings could again become centers of learning and spiritual guidance, rural Platonic academics freed from the narrow politics of cities and their princes. "The sciences have the same end as religion; their best times were and are those in which they are in accord with it" (Schelling, 1865/2002, p. 17). The doctor closes the discussion with praise for a Catholic order, the Carthusian, where silence, penance, and unwavering contemplation of the "mortal person's sad fate" has rescued lost souls, developed deep insight into human psychology and unlocked knowledge of plants useful to human health (Schelling, 1865/2002, p. 18). Although higher human capacities that ought to have discerned and preserved the continuity of life have made a mess of history with sectarianism, factions and wars, the 'higher' men—pastor, cleric, doctor—face the challenge of Clara's demand for the *continuous existence of the whole human being*, a demand made from the heart, to be sure, but adulterated with the poisons of affective being (*Gemüth*)—the pain of nostalgia, the

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<sup>5</sup> Steinkamp translates *Pfarrer* as priest, the Benedictine *Geistige* as clergyman, blurring denominational lines that the discussion aims to relativize but keep distinct. I use 'pastor' and 'cleric'.

insistence of pleasure-desire, and the blindness of feeling.<sup>6</sup> Clara's mind is the unbalanced specimen the cleric hesitated to educate, precisely in need of what guidance natural and spiritual learning can supply.

The *second conversation* take place in the last days of Autumn, outdoors, some months before Clara's death. It depicts *Clara's* crisis or dejection over nature's uncanny aspects and its dispersion through insight into how human freedom causes the rifts between nature and spirit. Clara's and the doctor's exchanges in fact reprise the 1809 *Investigations of Human Freedom* (Schelling, 1865/2002, pp. 22–25). Clara leads the friends on a hike to a narrow valley between hills, each with a single path—a place of disjunction, discontinuity, opposite paths. She confesses she is beset by fears occasioned by sight of past upheavals in nature. The pastor suggests knowledge may serve as a poison, agreeing with St. Paul that nature has been degraded or enslaved, while the doctor sees that remedies reside in Clara's peaceful nature. On a more intellectual level, he rejects the pastor's view that nature is the cause of human suffering; he and Clara agree that God and nature are essentially creative forces, without destructive admixture. Though nature sometimes seems to exhibit hostility to human development and sometimes assistance, the difference seems to be between internal and external views of nature. Commonsense dualism veers into general optimism about nature but hostility to knowledge of its detailed workings. Anything divine can appear only conditionally in nature, but the doctor contends "only he who has already known his opposite through and through can look the spiritual right in the eye, just as only he is to be called 'free' who knows what is necessary" (Schelling, 1865/2002, p. 28). Clara and the doctor agree that arbitrary will is but the arrangement of external conditions, that no basis can be found for the free act. "Necessity is the inner being of freedom ... [F]reedom is as it is because it is so; it just is, it is absolutely and thereby necessarily" (Schelling, 1865/2002, p. 28). Clara ends this discussion, declaring she is now much closer to the spirit-world than to nature.

In subsequent sections the pastor tries to educate Clara about the connection of the worlds and the best way philosophy can express it. Clara is uninterested in argument, either not needing it to bolster her 'clear seeing' or impatiently demanding it be put in plain speech, not academic jargon, and offer what is desired from the learned—the salt of the people, a new baptism of fire (Schelling, 1865/2002, p. 65). Commentators interpret this dramatic turn variously, some seeing in the doctor, the pastor, and Clara obvious symbols of the tripartite image of the person—body, mind, and soul—that the *third conversation* advances in argument, others viewing Clara's mindset as an inability to rise to the challenge of conceptual

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<sup>6</sup> See Schelling's *Stuttgart Seminars* SW VII, 466/*Georgi Nachschrift* AA I, 8, 157. As Vetö argues, the 1810 system is crucial for interpreting *Clara*; without it, it is difficult to see Clara's mind as originally pure, untroubled by conceptual distinctions, rather than blank (Vetö, 2014, p. 30).

philosophy, hence voicing a need of for a popular style of communication addressed to human sympathy rather than intellect. Nothing prevents a literary work from supporting various readings but I think the first that portrays Clara operating in an intuitive, supra-conceptual sphere harmonizes better with the anthropology of the middle philosophy than the second which suggests an interest in communitarian politics based on a psychology of sympathy.<sup>7</sup> I will address the arguments separately. For now, we note that the third conversation takes place in the depths of Clara's house on Christmas Eve, and though the family celebration of Christmas with its exchange of gifts and story is identical with that of Schleiermacher's *Die Weihnachtsfeier*, the mood and the discourse is darker than that preacher's sunny tale of the Incarnation. What the feast celebrates is Christ's reuniting the broken bond of nature and spirit in undergoing death, exploding our delusion of separation from that inner sanctuary to which we too gain entrance only through death. Birth and death are inseparable. "Earth's spiritual age begins from this day, for even Earth must go through it all" (Schelling, 1865/2002, p. 61).

The *fourth conversation* breaks the frame and draws attention to the oddity of the kind of discourse this novel/dialogue is and the kind of conceptually overwrought productions that systematic philosophy has on offer. It matters not that the unintelligible volume Clara finds on the pastor's reading table is Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* or one of Fichte's or even Schelling's earlier works. Obscurity, neologisms, and the torture of language seem the philosophic coin, but Clara would rather "see a philosopher with a social garland in his hair than with a scientific crown of thorns through which he presents himself as the truly tormented *ecce homo* of the people" (87/63).<sup>8</sup> Clara proposes that the sort of discussion she used to have with Albert would be the best way to present philosophy, but the pastor raises playful objections about what sort of personae and settings, historical or contemporary could fill the bill, or what sort of discourse could capture the Clara [clear-seeing] we have before our eyes. The pastor muses, mixing reference to this dialogue and Schlegel's *Lucinde*,

I can already hear what they will say: see what a cross-breed [Zwittergeburt] between novel and philosophical discussion this is, although I already know some novels that are held in high regard but that, had they been titled something like morality discussions, would have been shamed not by their content but by their title (Schelling, 1865/2002, p. 65).

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<sup>7</sup> Vetö endorses the first interpretation (Vetö, 2014, p. 25) though he notes that Schelling uses teachings on soul to address themes of continuity in succession, communication, and sympathy in a popular register (Vetö, 2014, p. 29). Daniel Whistler endorses the second (see Whistler, 2017).

<sup>8</sup> See the final paragraph of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, where the concept culminates as the intersection of [philosophic] science in its accumulated shape and the history of its display in appearances, the "*Schädelstätte des absoluten Geistes*."

Schelling calls attention to his hermaphrodite invention by having the pastor object that a philosophic discussion should have unity of time and place, “for here everything proceeds so completely internally and everything has to be decided on the spot, as it were, without moving away from the original location because of the narrow context of thought” (Schelling, 1865/2002, p. 65). But *Clara's* thought-world ranges over heaven and earth, its arguments do not decide the subject, and the text ends without ending—“a fabrication of an untotalizable totality” (Grosos, 2014, pp. 46–47).

## 2 Arguments for Soul's Pervasion of Nature and the Spirit-World

The body of the *third conversation* and the beginning of the *fifth* introduce philosophical, but still dramatically framed, ideas intended to solidify Clara's confidence that death will be an enhancement of spiritual (mental) life in a transformed body. At the beginning of the Christmas Eve conversation, Clara is enveloped in blissful contemplation wherein everything is present without distinction, need, or pain. The pastor perceives this as mental lethargy and prescribes activity or scientific cognition, the translation of mental states held in memory (part of *Gemüth*) into clear concepts. Upon examination Clara's demand that the whole person be immortal is seen to involve the soul's union of body and mind, soul being the immortal element or the 'whole' person. This view is elaborated into the *rotary* or *circular hypothesis*: the components are linked as interdependent conditions.

Soul is connected to the spirit only insofar as a body exist at the same time, and it is connected to the body only insofar as spirit exists at the same time, for if either of them were missing it could not possibly be present as a unity, i.e. as a soul. The whole person thus represents a kind of living circuit: wherever one thing reaches into the other, neither of the others can leave, each requires the other (Schelling, 1865/2002, p. 35, translation altered).

The view incorporates the paradox that dominates Schelling's metaphysics since the first day of Identity Philosophy: items viewed ontically or in appearance as opposites are ontologically grounded in a third that (appears to depend on the other two but) is really their substance. What in appearance seems to be a contingent, hence dissoluble, union of mind and body is ontologically an independent creative essence [*Wesenheit*] that manifests equally in psychic and somatic dimensions and which therefore could not manifest if it lacked either bodily or mental expression.

Clara objects that separation of soul and body at death would break the chain of interdependence. The pastor proposes a closer examination of death or so-called separation. If what we call separation were a re-embodiment in a spiritual sort of body, there would be no problem. Death would be transition from a corporeally inflected existence to a more spiritual one. “[W]e shouldn't say that the body becomes

spiritual in that higher life, as if it weren't spiritual from the beginning, but that the spiritual side of the body that here was hidden ... becomes one that there is manifest and dominant" (Schelling, 1865/2002, p. 39). This view is refined into a second or **germ hypothesis**, that the *seed of a higher phase is present in the lower*, whereby bodies, electrical forces, and chemical transformations might manifest differently in a spiritual context. Inconclusive ideas about whether inorganic beings "live" in a planetary (geologic, ecological) context furnish a hint, pursued in the fifth conversation, that one way to flesh out talk of 'bodily mind' and spiritual or 'mental bodies' would be exploring the difference between inorganic and organic nature (Schelling, 1865/2002, p. 40)—hardly a promising route, since from Schelling's time to ours biology has advanced only by finding mechanical, electrical, or chemical aspects of cellular life.

When the doctor enters the conversation, he and the pastor downplay the germ hypothesis since there is no evidence of body possessing its own intelligence or mental being its own sort of body. Clara becomes inattentive as the pastor argues that pure freedom requires separation of soul and body but returns to the discussion only to (ironically) ask how the life-to-death transition is any different from that from sleep to the awakened state. Since inner life awakens only when external light fails, perhaps the best state, that of the blessed, might be an awake sleep like **hypnotic sleep or clairvoyance**. This *third hypothesis* depends on the discussants' belief that magnetic sleep—peaceful, painless, with body transfigured, senses alert but diminished, mentally in a trance, and temporal distinctions in abeyance—is factual (Schelling, 1865/2002, pp. 47–48).<sup>9</sup> The pastor speculates that personal consciousness ceases at death, but Clara inquires how the soul that 'survives' in hypnotic bliss remains distinct from God. Two theories are advanced, either that the soul freed of the false agency (*das falsche Seyende*) of this life attains true agency and freedom, or pantheistic absorption. Clara and the pastor agree that personality persists even in the hypnotic vision of bliss since the bodily aspect of the human being belongs to that in God which is not God, nature, or the ground of being (see Vetö, 2014, pp. 32–33).

The *fifth conversation* returns to the hypotheses of the third—the circular relation of nature and the spirit-world, with the germ of the latter in the former, or hypnotic (beatific) vision emergent from waking consciousness—but Schelling's concern here is to soften the contrast between opposite realms of experience into a display of graduated differences, a continuum of items linked in **sympathy**. Three symbolic or narrative episodes embellish the argument. In the first, as the friends climb to the chapel of St. Walderich, Clara takes the flooded lake nearby as the image

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<sup>9</sup> Schelling cites Johann Kaspar Lavater's descriptions. While hypnotic sleep involves awareness, it excludes agency, and perhaps involve bodily paralysis, as in anesthesia and at least some REM states. Typically, Schelling defines mental (*geistige*) life as consciousness *and* conscientiousness or moral capacity.

of eternity, while the doctor thinks a flowing river a better symbol for life (Schelling, 1865/2002, pp. 67, 69). Clara symbolizes utter purity or freedom from concreteness, the *Lauterkeit* of the godhead prior to God that *Ages of the World* will depict (Schelling, 1811/2019, pp. 4, 14–16). Water is water, whatever the container; life is a single continuum of expression. In the second, the friends observe a local Protestant woman stealthily make an offering to the saint for the cure of her son's illness, transgressing boundaries at once artificial and hallowed by spilt ancestral blood, a tendency that nature too displays in letting certain 'power spots' manifest spiritual efficacy (Schelling, 1865/2002, pp. 73–75). The third turn to story occurs after argument has decided that love rules the spirit-world the way the hypnotist-physician rules patients' minds. Love imparts profound harmony and sympathy. The pastor recalls Plato's paradoxical tale of an archetypal language preserved in all extant tongues and joins it to Swedenborg's similarly paradoxical report of a first-person visit to eternity where he viewed sensible items like chairs and tables while learning that the world was created for the word (or the Word), its spread, and preservation (Schelling, 1865/2002, pp. 71–72, 78). *Unity of spirit, sympathy, harmony of reconciled differences*, the invention and preservation of learning in language—if exploring these romantic themes is not Schelling's plain philosophical intent, they serve as evidence for his more abstract teaching on the interconnection of nature and spirit. They provide reasons one may believe in a spiritual world without a mental *salto mortale*, analogous to the confessional leap the grocer's wife made, and come to believe that death is but a transition, not catastrophic loss of life (Schelling, 1865/2002, p. 73).

In discussion, the pastor recounts his intellectual history and his study of nature in particular—a reprise of Socrates' intellectual history in *Phaedo* 96A-105E, where Socrates recalls how disappointment with materialistic accounts of nature led him to the theory of forms. While referencing *Phaedo*'s investigation into soul's immortality, Schelling playfully underscores differences in the picture of nature presented by his *Naturphilosophie* and that promoted by Newtonian mathematical physics. The pastor recounts that as a child he thought up was up and down was down, but after studying physics he saw there was no up, since gravity means we fall towards every body. If he were to wager with a friend who proposed an infinite, unbounded universe, and he a bounded, finite, purposeful one with an up and a down, although he knows the friend would win, he still *prefers* the second account—with perfection as the measure of being, each thing occupying its own place, and God as the force of gravity (Schelling, 1865/2002, pp. 67–70). The nature that we see derives from a separation of chaotic forces; separation has wrenched nature and spirit apart so that it is completely obvious *to us* that gravity and sympathy are different forces (Schelling, 1865/2002, pp. 70–71). "The earth is cast out of its central position," though we may still imagine the living, continuous creation as a rotation in which the corporeal is raised to the spiritual and spirit embedded in the bodily—a

transfiguration that is the real meaning of incarnation (Schelling, 1865/2002, pp. 76–77). The doctor alludes to the hermetic astronomy of *Bruno* and calls variations in mathematical relations among planetary bodies a string of “self-repeating septenaries”<sup>10</sup>—in the epic return of nature and consciousness to soul’s primordial purity.

There is no closure of this final conversation. A fragment entitled ‘Spring’ from 1811 depicts Clara ‘prophetically’ voicing ideas different than earlier discussions, envisioning a serial or temporal path of evolution from nature to spirit like the life of God depicted in *Ages of the World*. She is pulled in different directions, spiritual and earthly, by viewing nature’s return to life but is puzzled by the dichotomous nature of her experience since life is one. Won’t body, spirit, and soul converge in a process of ultimate spiritualization, just as chemical, physical, and electrical forces seen in the inorganic converge in organic life? Shouldn’t the powers we now see side by side not emerge in successive fashion in the whole of being (Schelling, 1865/2002, pp. 79–80)? Isn’t there a unity higher than the mental (*geistige*), an essentiality (*Wesen*) that will satisfy the heart (Schelling, 1865/2002, p. 80)? Schelling is not satisfied with the residual dualism of the rotary hypothesis, nor with the opening it offers for reincarnation as well as for spiritualization. Schelling’s difficulties here are logical, not psychological: a *bond* or *copula* or *essence* that identifies body and mind seems to express something subsequent to and dependent upon those items, not the independent, primitive object of the heart’s desire. *Clara* is philosophically incomplete—or incompletable—since for us at least it can but romantically signify the dispersion of desire or essential homelessness.

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10 A heroic meter of seven syllables, with a diaresis between the first four and latter three.

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