

**The Return of Nature as Art: An
Ecocritical Perspective on Romantic
Aesthetics**

Kate Rigby

**Centre for Comparative Literature
and Cultural Studies
Monash University**

Wednesday 16 October 2002

N.B. This paper constitutes a chapter of my forthcoming monograph, Topographies of the Sacred: The Poetics of Place in European Romanticism (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2004). It is not for copying or citation in this form.

What are poets for? This was the question to which Heidegger returned in one of the first essays that he wrote as he began to emerge from 'inner exile' following the collapse of Nazi Germany in 1945.¹ This question in turn provides the frame for Jonathan Bate's ecocritical reconsideration of Heidegger's poetics of being and dwelling in the concluding chapter of The Song of the Earth. Heidegger himself had taken his cue from the German writer Hölderlin, who, in "Bread and Wine" ("Brod und Wein," 1800/01), exclaims, "who wants poets at all in lean years."² Stated thus, with reference, that is, to a contemporary reality constructed as in some sense deficient, this is a paradigmatically Romantic question. Both the question itself and the various ways in which it was addressed by different Romantic writers and philosophers are vitally concerned, moreover, with the relationship of art, and particularly poetry, to nature and the divine.

Ghosting the Romantic engagement with this key question is an understanding of mimesis, which, as Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe reminds us in his essay, "Hölderlin and the Greeks," derives its authority from Aristotle.³ "Generally speaking," opines Aristotle in The Physics, "on the one hand techne accomplishes what phusis is incapable of effecting; on the other hand, techne imitates phusis."⁴ Whereas Plato had maintained that all the artist could ever create was a mere imitation of an imitation, Aristotle's concept of techne suggests the possibility of an imitation that actually surpasses the original in nature. When applied to art, this double construction of mimetic techne acquires a new edge for the Romantics in view of their reconceptualization of both nature and the divine. In this chapter, I will trace a number of divergent paths in Romantic thinking on the relationship of art and nature, before returning to the question of the role of literature specifically in the ecopoetics of dwelling, ecstatically, in the Fourfold.

i. Art in search of nature: The sentimental turn

"Poets everywhere," declares Schiller in his essay "On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry" ("Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung," 1796/7), are, "by their very definition, the guardians of nature. Where they can no longer quite be so and have already felt within themselves the destructive influence of arbitrary and artificial forms or have had to struggle with them, then they will appear as the witnesses and avengers of nature. They will either be nature, or they will seek lost nature." (W, 20, 427)⁵ At first glance it is difficult to believe that this affirmation of nature as the source and end of art was penned by the same author who, in the essay on "The Sublime," had argued for an aesthetic oriented quite emphatically toward the transcendence of nature, both inner and outer. In fact, "Naïve and Sentimental Poetry" was written in part as a conciliatory gesture towards Goethe, who had been offended by the unsympathetic manner in which Schiller speaks of nature in earlier essays. "He preached the gospel of freedom," recalled Goethe, "while I defended the rights of nature." (SS, 29) Here, then, egged on by his biophilic friend, Schiller endeavors to theorize nothing less than the reconciliation of nature and freedom within the realm of the aesthetic. In the process, and despite his subsequent dissociation from the young radicals in Jena, Schiller produces something approximating the first articulation of the Romantic project of a return to nature, to be effected, paradoxically enough, within the space of art. The question is, what kind of art would this be and to which 'nature' would it return us?

'Nature' is, of course, a notoriously polyvalent term.⁶ We have already noted the profound difference between the 'nature' of the Enlightenment mechanists and that of the Romantic organicists, and, with regard to the latter, the important distinction between natura naturata and natura naturans. The idea that underlying the appearance of discrete entities in nature there lies a hidden generative principle, that of nature naturing, in turn goes back to the pre-Socratic concept of *physis*, to which Heidegger would later turn in order to differentiate primordial or self-disclosing/self-concealing nature from both the objectified nature of the natural sciences, and the externally created nature of Plato and Augustine: a move which, in my reading, was already prefigured to some extent within Romantic Naturphilosophie. Around 1800, the German word Natur, like 'nature' in English, was also used to refer specifically to 'human nature', and, following Rousseau, was often called upon in the context of arguing for a greater 'naturalness' in human life than was possible under the constraint of 'artificial' social relations and cultural norms. This quest for an enhanced naturalness was itself connected with the new interest in that outer 'nature', which was sought, by preference, in the countryside: in the landscape of 'free', if not necessarily 'wild' nature.

In the German region, ever since the influential dramatist and critic Gotthold Ephraim Lessing had called upon German writers to look to Shakespeare, rather than to French classicism, for their inspiration (thereby initiating a German rerun of the seventeenth-century French querelle des anciennes et des modernes), Natur had also been much invoked in literary discussions, again with a view to countering prevailing conventions. Schiller, no less than Goethe, contributed significantly to the emancipation of German literature from the strictures of French classicism in his youthful work of Storm and Stress, such as his dramas of social and aesthetic rebellion, The Robbers (Die Räuber, 1781) and Intrigue and Love (Kabale und Liebe, 1784).

By the 1790s, however, Schiller and Goethe had joined forces in reaffirming stylistic restraint and recovering classical forms. This is the project known to Germanists as Weimarer Klassik. On the level of representation, moreover, Schiller had never shown much interest in (other-than-human) nature. Certainly, he was no great fan of that eighteenth-century craze for landscape art, which was itself in part inspired by the Rousseauian quest for naturalness. He was nonetheless intrigued by it as a sign of the times. A historian by training and a Kantian by conviction, he would take little interest in the new natural philosophy, and, despite Goethe's best efforts to convert him, he found empirical science distasteful. Although he was prepared to admit (with Kant) that the human mind was able to detect in the phenomena of nature, for all their diversity and apparent arbitrariness, a "considerable unity and regularity," nature as landscape lacked the "strict necessity," which alone could make it a fit subject for "beautiful art."⁷ This, at any rate, was what he maintained in 1794 in what is otherwise a surprisingly favorable review of a collection of nature poetry by the rather mediocre writer Friedrich Matthison. Schiller, who in this respect would clearly have had more time for Dyer than Clare, praises in particular the generic quality of Matthison's poetic landscapes, and the way that he has succeeded in infusing human feelings and ideas into the "soulless" world of nature. He nonetheless concludes by expressing the hope that Matthison would in future turn his talents to greater things, by making his landscapes the locus of specifically human actions (W, 22, 271-83).

In the following year, Schiller provided his own model for how this might be done in a lengthy poem, entitled “Elegie”. Subsequently republished in a revised version under the less formalistic title of “The Walk” (“Der Spaziergang”), this is Schiller’s sole venture into the genre of landscape poetry.⁸ Its primary intertext, as suggested in the revised title, is Rousseau’s final work, Reveries of a Solitary Walker (Reveries d’un Promeneur solitaire, 1780), which, as Bate observes, provides a prototype for that “most characteristic, most intense route back to nature,” favored by the Romantics.⁹ In accordance with the Rousseauian exemplar, Schiller’s poem opens with an ecstatic salutation of the countryside with its sunlit mountain peaks, blue sky, bright fields, green woods and joyful birdsong, as a space of liberation from the prison house of closed rooms and narrow conversation (1-20). This move out of doors exemplifies what Schiller, echoing the title of the English best-seller of the ‘Age of Sensibility’, Laurence Sterne’s satirical novel, A Sentimental Journey (1767), would identify as a ‘sentimental’ turning to nature in the context of an alienating civilization.

Ancient poets, such as Homer, Schiller would later argue in “Naïve and Sentimental Poetry,” paid little regard to the beauties of the non-human natural world, because their culture was still largely integrated into it. Nature, in other words, becomes thematic in literature only when it becomes problematic in reality. Schiller detects an element of this in Euripides and, more so, in Horace. However, he maintains that it was above all in the modern world, when nature (presumably in the sense of ‘naturalness’) had “disappeared from humanity” (W, 20, 430), that poets turned sentimental, seeking in the “lifeless” world of stones, plants, and wild landscapes, and in the artless ways of animals, country folk, primitive peoples, young children and uncorrupted (!) women, that which had been lost to the self-conscious man of reason: an apparently “spontaneous way of being, the subsistence of things on their own, their existence according to their own immutable laws” (W, 20, 413). Within modern civilization, nature still broke through occasionally in the works of writers of genius, such as the inimitable Shakespeare or, more recently, Goethe.

There is an echo here of Kant’s suggestion in the Critique of Judgement, that “genius” that might be termed the “innate mental aptitude (ingenium) through which nature gives the rule to art” (CJ, 168). The modern genius, however, was something of an anachronism. To the extent that he was gifted with genius, the poet could not but give voice to a natural power of inspiration. But to the extent that he was nonetheless a modern, he would tend to direct the genius of his inner nature, as Goethe had paradigmatically in his best-selling novel of Storm and Stress, The Sorrows of Young Werther (Die Leiden des jungen Werthers, 1774) towards the representation of the sentimental quest to reconnect with that outer nature, from which his society had estranged him. Sentimental poetry, Schiller goes on to argue, characteristically favored genres such as the satire or the elegy, which foreground the gulf between nature and society, or the idyll, which figures their reconciliation, either nostalgically, as a putative lost past, or (more productively in Schiller’s view) as a utopian projection into the future.

Prefiguring the arguments of the essay, Schiller’s “Elegy” does more than model this sentimental turn: it also provides a quasi-historical account of why such a turn had become inevitable. As the poem proceeds, the path traced by the walker through space leads him to a reflection upon the temporal progression whereby European civilization had departed from nature’s way. This historical narrative appears to be framed in terms of

the Greco-Roman myth of the Four Ages of the world.¹⁰ The first twenty lines of the poem accordingly present a harmonious image of free nature, bathed in golden sunlight, echoing metaphorically the original Golden Age. This is followed by a passage that traces the walker's ascent through the darkness of the forested hillside to an opening overlooking the valley below (21-20). These lines carry a suggestion, above all in the reference to "silvered grass" (22) of a first departure from the original state of grace. The proceeding description of the agricultural landscape spread out beneath the walker's gaze, accordingly corresponds to the Bronze Age, inaugurated by the development of private property and rural labor, when the people, "not yet awakened to freedom" (57), nonetheless still lived in community with each other and the land. There is, however, a hint here of the "iron world" (44) to come. The entry into this world, to which most of the poem is devoted, is presaged by the "alien spirit" pervading the "more alien fields" of the ruler (62). At this point, the actual landscape recedes from view and we are plunged into a highly Rousseauian account of the progress of civilization, which is nonetheless projected back into the classical world (63-142).¹¹ This, then, is the world of the polis: it is characterized by the rule of law, social hierarchy, nation building, colonial expansion, and a more intensive exploitation of nature, especially in the form of deforestation and mining, in order to increase manufacturing and foreign trade. In this world (one that is beginning to sound considerably more like seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France or Britain than classical Greece or even Rome), the arts and sciences also flourish, and superstition is dispelled by the clear light of reason: "Humanity breaks its chains" (143).

At this point it becomes apparent that Schiller has recast the cyclical story of decline and new beginning as a kind of 'dialectic of enlightenment', informed by an identifiably modern historical consciousness. For Schiller's Iron Age represents less a nadir than an apogee of human endeavor. This is, however, also a moment of great danger. For, in emancipating themselves from the limits imposed on human existence by "holy nature," the beneficiaries of modern civilization had won freedom, not only for the exercise of reason, but also for their wild desires (153). Ruthlessly pursuing their own individual ends regardless of others, modern humans fall prey to falsehood, further alienating themselves from nature, from one another and from their own true feelings. But nature, the poet warns us, cannot be denied forever. Assuming a prophetic voice, Schiller's walker prefigures the apocalyptic return of the repressed in the sublime image of a female tiger breaking through the bars of her cage (179), as the miserable of the earth rise up in fury to "seek lost nature in the ashes of the city" (182).

The specter of political violence, of revolution turned tyrannical, a legacy of the trauma of the Terror in France, stands behind much Romantic reflection on the role of art. And it is this that separates Schiller from Rousseau. By the mid 1790s, Rousseau's concept of the "social contract," as explicated in his book of that name (Le contrat social, 1762), according to which the rights of the individual were to be surrendered to the will of the whole society embodied in the state, had come to carry the odor of the guillotine. Schiller clearly shared Rousseau's critique of civilization. But he also feared that Rousseau's insufficiently dialectical call for a return to nature was an invitation to anarchy and atavism. Disillusioned with the fruits of the French Revolution, Schiller's solution is to turn from direct political engagement (for which there was in any case still virtually no opportunity for the middle class in Germany) to that form of 'communicative action' embodied in the work of art.

This elevation of the aesthetic to the status of a paradoxically non-political politics, one that was to prepare the way for, or perhaps even effect, a general transformation of society, became a key ingredient in virtually all forms of Romanticism, as well as a good many later modernisms, whether of the 'left' or the 'right'. Schiller's version of this project is spelled out in most detail in his letters On the Aesthetic Education of Man (Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen, 1794; revised 1801). The problem, as he articulates it here, is that the progress of civilization, which promised to enhance the realm of human freedom, had in fact produced fragmentation and division: between those engaged in different and increasingly specialized forms of labor in society; between those positioned differently within a highly hierarchical state; and between different aspects of the self within individuals, whose faculties were ever more unevenly developed and deployed. Underlying and embracing all these other divisions, was the ever-widening breach between nature and society within a civilization, the undoubted achievements of which had been won at the price of a crippling artificiality.¹²

It was no coincidence, Schiller observes in "Naïve and Sentimental Poetry" (in an anti-French-classicist gesture conned from Lessing and Herder), that the nation that had gone furthest in this direction was the one that had first coined the term 'naïve' (W, 20, 432). For naïveté was something that the man of sentiment typically projected onto those who seemed to embody that naturalness which he had lost. Thus, from the sentimental perspective, "[t]hey are what we were; they are what we should once again become. We were nature, just as they, and our culture, by means of reason and freedom, should lead us back to nature" (W, 20, 414). By means of reason and freedom: this, for Schiller, was the key. For Schiller, as for all modernists, history was a one-way street. The process of civilization could not be undone without jeopardizing that pursuit of freedom, which he posited as the exclusive right of rational humanity. Fragmentation and alienation, he nonetheless hoped, could be overcome. What Schiller here terms "culture" is, potentially, the name of that overcoming. Under this name, Schiller proposes something like a generalized version of 'reinhabitation': the reacclimatization, to use Herder's terminology, of human society to nature, but in a new manner, one which represented an advance over both 'pre-modern' culture and 'modern' civilization. And the means of achieving this cultural revolution, a revolution, which was at once a reclamation and a surpassing of the prior state of unity with nature, was, of course, art.

Art therefore acquires a crucial new function in the modern era. According to the Aesthetic Education, the aesthetic experience afforded by truly beautiful art was unique in stimulating and harmonizing all our faculties (the senses and the intellect, reason and imagination, abstract reflection and practical understanding) in a way that had become impossible in everyday life. Within the realm of aesthetic play and semblance, we received training in a kind of freedom and wholeness, on the basis of which we would in time be fitted to create a truly liberated and integrated society. In practice, however, no one form or work of art realized this aesthetic ideal perfectly, and, as Schiller suggests in "Naïve and Sentimental Poetry," both the ancients and the moderns tended to err on one side or the other of the series of interlocking binaries that art, ideally, should reconcile. Thus, whilst the former tended towards objectivity, finitude, necessity and sensuous immediacy, the latter tended towards subjectivity, infinitude, freedom and reflective distance. Whereas the naïve aesthetic was in danger of descending into mere realism, the sentimental was at risk of dissolving into pure fancy or abstraction. Schiller's essay thus

concludes with a call for a new (one is tempted to say, 'post-modern') form of poetry, which would reconcile, or to use the term that Hegel would make famous, but which Schiller already prefigures here, sublate the naïve and the sentimental. By this dialectical sleight of hand, as Lacoue-Labarthe observes, Schiller succeeds in "making the Moderns, subject to those inaccessible masters, the Greeks, master of the masters."¹³ In the same deft move, moreover, he transforms the search for nature into a surpassing of nature. Historicizing Aristotle's definition of *techne*, Schiller attributes to ancient poetry the mere imitation of the 'actual', while reserving for (post)modern poets the honor of accomplishing, or at least aspiring to, "what *physis* is incapable of effecting": the realization of the 'ideal'.

This move too is exemplified in "Elegy." Awakening from his apocalyptic vision of the revenge of nature, Schiller's walker discovers that he had himself strayed into a veritable wilderness, far from cultivated nature and human sociality: "It is wild here and horribly barren" (197). The path that he has pursued on his walk, as well as that which he has traced in his mind, seems to have brought him to an impasse: "Precipitous depths/Hinder my step with a yawning chasm in front and behind" (189-90). How he manages to descend from the mountain we are not told. However, he does find a way forward in his thoughts by means of an idealization that extracts him, at least in his imagination, from his physical predicament. In the closing lines of the poem, the lineaments of the wild landscape fade once more and we are offered instead a consoling idea: "But always youthful, in ever unchanging beauty/You, pious nature, honor chastely the old law" (209-10). This ever-youthful, ever-beautiful, in short, eternally virginal nature, is no longer the alluring, yet also potentially threatening physical nature of rock and tree and bird and sky, but an ideal Nature, and the sun that shines here is emphatically not Newton's, but Homer's: "And behold! the sun of Homer smiles also on us" (216).

The 'nature' to which the new poetry is to restore us, beyond the opposition of the naïve and the sentimental, is thus not that which we have left behind: according to the essay, this 'nature' is not "raw" but "pure" (W, 20, 436), not "real" but "true" (W, 20, 476), not "bad" but "beautiful" (W, 20, 477). In a passage that is highly suggestive of the extent to which the fear of atavism might be bound up with the anxious defense of a certain model of masculine identity, Schiller proposes that, "we see in non-rational nature a happier sister, who remained in the maternal home from which we, in the high-spirits of our freedom, rushed forth into foreign lands. With painful longing we yearn to return there as soon as we experience the oppression of culture and, in the far foreign land of art, we hear yet the moving voice of our mother" (W, 20, 427). But the call of the mother, Schiller insists, must at all costs be resisted, lest we fall into a "bottomless abyss." For, "that nature which you envy in the non-rational is worthy of no respect, no longing. It lies behind you, and must eternally lie behind you" (W, 20, 428). It is thus not in nature, but in that other place, the "foreign land of art," that we must seek, not so much to return to, but to reclaim nature in a new guise. Prefiguring Freud, Schiller's solution to what he perceives as the destructive cycle of repression and revolt sounds suspiciously like sublimation: "Let it no longer occur to you to want to exchange with her," continues Schiller with reference to the metaphorical stay-at-home sister, "but take her up within yourself and strive to wed her infinite advantage to your infinite prerogative, and from both produce the divine" (W, 20, 429).

The mythical prototype for the dialectical reasoning informing this essay is in the end not the Greco-Roman cycle of the Four Ages that Schiller reworks in the poem, but the teleological Christian narrative of Paradise lost and regained. Kleist makes this clear in his parodic reprise to Rousseau and Schiller alike in his characteristically quirky dialogue “On the Marionette Theatre” (“Über das Marionettentheater,” 1810). Here, one of Kleist’s interlocutors reasons that since there was no way back into Eden by retracing our steps, we would have to continue on in the other direction, in the hope that having circumnavigated the globe, we might find another way in at the back.¹⁴ As Myer Abrams rightly observed, the secularization of this religious narrative represents a unifying thread running throughout Romantic literature and philosophy. From a contemporary ecophilosophical perspective, however, the legacy of this ‘recovery narrative’ has not been altogether favorable to the fate of the Earth.¹⁵ Schiller’s reworking of this paradigm, for example, clearly manifests that modern tendency pioneered by Francis Bacon to conceive the recovery of paradise, not as a manifestation of divine grace, but as an achievement of human *techne*, albeit, in this case, poetic rather than scientific. Schiller does his best here to avoid the discourse of mastery which had so offended Goethe in some of his earlier writings, whereby, as he put it in Letter 9 of the Aesthetic Education, Art was to “triumph over Nature.”¹⁶ Schiller’s aesthetics of sublimation nonetheless retains a colonizing agenda. Having defined nature in terms of lack (i.e. of reason), the only way that he can conceive of its reconciliation with freedom is through its incorporation into the sphere of human subjectivity.¹⁷

Schiller was without doubt more of a rationalist than most of the Romantics, and correspondingly more fearful of atavism. He also retains an essentially pre-Romantic concept of the physical world of nature as blind mechanism. As we shall see, however, the tendency to posit the return of nature as art in terms of the surpassing of nature by art was, if anything, radicalized in the thinking of many younger Romantic writers, above all, but not only, in Germany.

ii. Art transforming nature: Romantic avant-gardism

The challenge with which Schiller’s essay concludes, of sublating the ancient and the modern within a new culture that would also reconcile nature with human freedom, was eagerly taken up in Germany by the younger generation of writers and philosophers who converged in Jena towards the end of the 1790s, of whom the principal players were the classical philologists August Wilhelm and Friedrich Schlegel, the former’s wife Caroline and the latter’s lover Dorothea, Novalis, Tieck, Schelling and Schleiermacher.¹⁸ From 1798 to 1800, the Schlegels, together with Novalis, published a journal, the Athenaeum, which was the primary organ for advancing the program of what became known in Germany as ‘Jena Romanticism’ or ‘Early Romanticism’ (Frühromantik). The significance of this journal, not only to Romanticism but also to the whole project of literary modernity, cannot be overestimated. The somewhat frenetic and often unconventional activities of the Jena circle amounted to far more than a collaborative publishing venture. This was rather, as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy put it, “a sort of ‘cell,’ marginal (if not altogether clandestine) [...] In fact, and without any exaggeration, it is the first ‘avant-garde’ group in history.” Positioning themselves in the wake of this avant-garde, Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe conclude: “The Athenaeum is our birthplace.”¹⁹

The importance of Jena avant-gardism has so far escaped the attention of ecocritics of Romanticism. It is important to redress this omission, not only because it is indeed still with us, but also because its construction of the relationship of art to nature, or more generally, of *techne* to *phusis*, has some troubling implications from an ecophilosophical perspective. This is not to say that Jena produced an entirely homogeneous aesthetics. As we shall see, Schelling's philosophy of art goes some way towards redressing the problematic tendencies that I will be tracing here, primarily in the work of Friedrich Schlegel, the principal theorist of Jena Romanticism, and Novalis, the main poet of the inner circle.

It is widely recognized that the philosophical point of departure for Jena Romanticism was Fichte's theory of the self-constitution of the sovereign self by means of the projection onto the world of its own negative image, which, as we have seen in the first chapter, he termed the Not-I. In one of the more notorious of the "Fragments," a collection of aphorisms, largely penned by Friedrich Schlegel, but with contributions by August and Novalis, which were published anonymously in the Athenaeum in 1798, Fichte's Concept of the Science of Knowledge (Begriff der Wissenschaftslehre, 1794) and Goethe's novel Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship (Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre, 1795) are aligned, provocatively, with the French Revolution as the three "greatest tendencies of the age."²⁰ As is also well known, Fichte's theory was modified by the Romantics (who in this too were following Schiller's lead) in order to give pride-of-place to the imagination in the process of the simultaneous constitution of the self and his world. What also needs to be stressed here, though, is a further departure from Fichte, which emerges from a considerably less well-known remark of Friedrich Schlegel's from The Development of Philosophie (Die Entwicklung der Philosophie, 1804/5): "Nature is thus not a 'Not-I' outside the I; not just a dead, dull, empty, meaningless reflection of the I, which the I in some incomprehensible way delimits, but ... a living, forceful [kräftiges] counter-I, a Thou [Du]." (KA, 12, 337)

Schlegel's concern to reinstate nature as an independent and animate other, a concern that marks his departure from Schiller as well as Fichte, brings him into company with Schelling (and of course Goethe). Schelling is given a voice in Schlegel's "Conversation on Poetry" ("Gespräch über die Poesie," 1800) published in the final issue of the Athenaeum, in the figure of Ludoviko, whose major contribution to the discussion is a disquisition on the immanent emergence of a 'new mythology' (a matter that will concern us more in the next section). An echo of Schelling can nonetheless also be discerned in the introduction to the "Conversation," namely at the point where human poesis is posited as continuous with, and indebted to, the prior autopoiesis of the earth. This "unconscious" poesy, Schlegel insists, is "the first, the original, without which there would certainly be no poesy of words." Organic nature is thus to be delighted in as the "one poem of the deity, of which we are a part and a bloom – the earth." We are however, not only a bloom, a product of nature, Schlegel insists (again, in company with Schelling), but also uniquely endowed by nature with the creative capacity to bring a whole new order of entities into being, in the guise of works of art (KA, 2, 283-7).²¹

The tension between the imitation and surpassing of nature, which Schiller had historicized, is here relocated within all artistic endeavor; but at the same time, both moments are radically reconceived. 'Imitation', now understood as emulation of, or even participation in, the creativity of nature, has been displaced from the level of the work to

the process of its production. Within human poiesis, however, the creativity of nature is, as Schelling would say, raised to a higher potency: in us, it becomes self-conscious. The outcome of this process of human poiesis, moreover, the work of art itself, is to be liberated entirely from the law of imitation. This is where Fichte comes back in (and where we might perceive a point of contact between the Science of Knowledge and the rhetoric of revolution). For, if poiesis is to effect the self-constitution of the subject and his or her world through an act of the creative imagination, this act must itself be absolutely free. Thus, in place of the old order of verisimilitude, conjoined with fidelity to the classical rules of poetics dictating how a work in any one genre was to be written, the Jena Romantics announce a declaration of independence for the author, who will henceforth be subject only to the requirement of ‘originality’. As Schlegel asserts in the most famous Athenaeum Fragment on “Romantic poetry” as “progressive universal poetry,” “the arbitrary rule [Willkür] of the poet tolerates no law above it” (KA, 182-3).²² This is not to say that the Romantic writer as modern author — the author, that is, who is such in that he has become conscious of his own authority — might not avail himself from time to time of traditional forms, tropes or topoi (as indeed Schlegel himself did in composing a sonnet on the Athenaeum for the final issue of the journal). Since, however, the writer is no longer bound to adhere to tradition, the very choice of doing so in a particular case must appear arbitrary, or, to use a key term of Jena Romanticism, ironic, and as such instantiates his freedom.

The most characteristically ‘Romantic’ form of modern literature, in Schlegel’s view, was the novel (in German, Roman, from the French romance) precisely because it is defined by its very lack of definition: by its ability, that is, to incorporate any and all other genres and to assume ever new and varied guises. This, at any rate, was the case with the true “Romantic book” (whose model, as Schlegel came to realize, was nothing less than the Book of Books), as distinct from all those popular romances now flooding the market, which the figure of Antonio (a mask for Friedrich himself) derides in his “Letter on the Novel” in the “Conversation.”²³ This distinction is a significant one historically, for it marks the divergence of ‘high’ literature from what the Germans term Trivalliteratur, popular writing providing mere entertainment for the masses. This distinction in fact brings ‘literature’ in its modern sense into being, namely as a kind of writing defined as ‘free’ and ‘creative’, in contradistinction to writing that was either directed towards an extra-aesthetic purpose or driven by a predetermined formula.

This understanding of literature implied also, or rather, as Schlegel subsequently suggested, presupposed, the modern understanding of criticism.²⁴ For the literary work, understood as creative process, rather than as finished artifact, can only be ‘completed’ through its reception. The reader-critic thus becomes an author in his own right, or indeed, as Schlegel puts it in one of his posthumous philosophical fragments, an “author to the second power” (KA, 18, 106). Since, however, the work will always retain a degree of incomprehensibility — this being a criterion of the ‘classic’ text (KA, 2, 149) — no one reading can exhaust its potential meaning, and the process of interpretation can never be brought to conclusion (not, as least, without killing off the work). Here, then, the ‘infinite’, which Schiller too had claimed as the telos of modern poetry, while nonetheless seeking (vainly perhaps) to resist the ‘arbitrary’, is redefined as boundlessness, implying not only the freedom of the author, but also that of the reader-critic.

Ultimately, it is this infinite creative process that is the true subject of Romantic literature as “progressive universal poesy,” which, as Schlegel concludes, is not after all a particular type of literature, but “poetry itself.” For just as criticism is now seen as inherently creative, the genuinely literary text is expected to combine philosophy and poetry, “inspiration and criticism,” including within itself an endless self-reflection upon its own processes of representation. (Hence the significance, to return to Schlegel’s trio of revolutionary tendencies, that the Jena Romantics attributed to Goethe’s Wilhelm Meister, a highly self-referential novel that is vitally concerned with the nature and role of aesthetic ‘education’ or ‘formation’: Bildung.) The truly Romantic work, Schlegel writes, “can hover at the midpoint, between the portrayed and the portrayer [dem Dargestellten und dem Darstellenden], free of all real and ideal self-interest, on the wings of poetic reflection, and can raise that reflection again and again to a higher power, can multiply it in an endless succession of mirrors.” (KA, 182-3)²⁵

Within this mise-en-abyme of literary self-reflexivity, the relationship of art to nature has, if anything, become even more vexed than in Schiller. Far from promising any kind of ecopoetics of place, Schlegel’s aestheticism threatens to confine both literature and criticism to the space of the poetic; a confinement eagerly embraced by textualist critics of the late twentieth century! And yet it is important not to confuse Jena in the 1790s with Yale in the 1970s. The Jena Romantics were not preoccupied with the phenomenon of literary autoconstruction and deconstruction for its own sake, for they retained the utopian aspiration (one which would be shared by many an avant-garde down to the present day) that the new self-reflexive literature would, as Schlegel puts it, ‘poeticize’ life and society, and thus, in Novalis’ favored phase, ‘romanticize the world’.²⁶ However, this in itself implies that the experience of literature is to be given priority over the experience of the world beyond the page. Art, as Oscar Wilde would say, precedes life: its role is not to imitate, but to transform reality, providing the lens through which we perceive, but potentially also the utopian projections according to which we might seek to alter, the world around us.

Schlegel’s program of a literature that takes itself as its object was to some extent already modelled in Wackenroder’s Outpourings of an Art-Loving Friar (Herzensergiessungen eines kunstliebenden Klosterbruders) published by Tieck in 1797. Composed as a series of rhapsodic reflections by a pious cleric on the life and work of various artists from the Middle Ages and Renaissance, this text exemplifies the privileged role that the Romantics accorded to the aesthetic in the recovery of religious experience. This text is also indicative of a second element of Jena avant-gardism, which appears problematic from an ecocritical perspective. This emerges most clearly in the chapter entitled “Raphael’s Vision”: “Since one encounters so few beautiful female figures,” Raphael is said to have written contemptuously of actual women, “I cling to a certain image, which dwells within me.”²⁷ This image is a vision of the Virgin, whom he had seen one night gazing back at him from one of his own unfinished works. It is the memory of this image that enabled him to go on to paint Madonnas of such extraordinary beauty. What needs to be noted here is not only the idea that art is a vector of the divine (and the artist, therefore, a kind of priest or even saint) but also that it involves the mimesis, not of phenomenal reality, but of an inner vision of the truth.

This inward turn is epitomized in one of the “Paralipomena” to Novalis’ Apprentices of Sais (Die Lehrlinge zu Sais, 1798/9), which was conceived as a kind of

mystical rejoinder to Wilhelm Meister; a text that was ultimately flawed, in Novalis' assessment, by its hero's restoration to an all-too mundane middle-class reality at the end of the book.²⁸ Reconceptualising the artist's apprenticeship in terms of a rite of initiation that is at once spiritual and erotic, Novalis writes: "Someone arrived there — who lifted the veil of the goddess, at Sais. — But what did he see? He saw — wonder of wonders — himself" (S, 1, 110). The idea that the path to ultimate truth lies within (a conviction that is as at least as old as Augustine in the western tradition and that has in our own time become the mantra of eastern-inspired New Age spirituality) favored the emergence of a form of literature focused on the mysteries of the human psyche, in which, as in Novalis' own fantastic (and unfinished) Bildungsroman, Heinrich von Ofterdingen (1802), dreamscape takes priority over landscape.

The genre of fantasy, it should be stressed, can itself be a very effective vehicle for engaging with the question of our right relationship to the natural world, as is it is, for example, in Tolkien (a true inheritor of the Romantic project of recreating myth through literature). This question also lies at the heart of the related genre that was pioneered during the Romantic period by Mary Shelley in Frankenstein (1818), namely science fiction. Novalis, to a greater extent than either of the Schlegels, was vitally concerned with this question as well. He was very well informed in many areas of contemporary scientific research, above all geology and mineralogy, which he studied at the famous Mining Academy in Freiberg. As we noted in the first chapter, science and art represented for Novalis complimentary modes of engagement with nature: what the former necessarily "murder[ed] to dissect," as Wordsworth puts it, the latter restored to life and wholeness.²⁹ It did so, however, in the figure of the human, whose inner world is the privileged locus of Novalis' poetic. Although he too sought to provide a corrective to Fichte's subjectivism by reconceptualising the other as Thou, rather than Not-I, he was unable to see his way past the pronounced human-centeredness of Romantic holism, according to which the entire macrocosm of nature was embodied, microcosmically, in the human, as the most perfect of nature's beings.³⁰ Thus, as we read in one the "Pollen" (Blüthenstaub) fragments, to venture into the depths of the human psyche could be configured as an exploration into the hidden truth of nature per se: "We dream of journeys through the cosmos — Is the cosmos not then in us? We do not know the depths of our own mind/spirit [Geist]. — The mysterious path leads within. In us, or nowhere, is eternity with its worlds — the past and the future" (S, 2, 417-8).

While it is undoubtedly true that the depths of our own psyche remain mysterious to us (and, in Schelling's view, would always remain so), the problem with this exhortation to explore the cosmos by means of introspection is that it risks obliterating the difference between self and other, and between 'human nature' (whatever that might be) and the great diversity of other others (whoever and whatever they might be) that comprise the more-than-human natural world. Interestingly, in the embedded narrative of Hyazinth and Rosenblütchen in The Apprentices of Sais, the veil of the goddess is lifted to reveal the beloved: that the figure behind the veil in the Paralipomena cited earlier should be the questing subject himself suggests, perhaps, that the beloved had always been a self-projection. To some extent, this assimilation of the other to the self had already been critiqued by Goethe in the figure of Werther, whose dreams of union, both with the land and with Lotte, can well be read as narcissistic fantasies. This, however, does not appear to be the way that Werther was interpreted in Jena. Werther, of course,

ended up committing suicide. Novalis, by contrast, had the misfortune to die of tuberculosis at an early age, but not before he had penned his own orphic “Hymns to the Night” (Hymnen an die Nacht, 1800), eroticising death as the ultimate annulment of the distinction between self and other and, hence, the vehicle of true union with the beloved in a spiritual beyond.³¹

It should nonetheless be noted that for Novalis, who continued his scientific research and reflection, along with his professional work in the mining industry, right up until his own premature death, the journey within was not intended as a substitute for, but rather as a preliminary to, an active engagement with the world without.³² Yet the mode of interaction with the earth that was to follow from these internal explorations was in itself oriented towards the elimination of its recalcitrant alterity. We will consider this further in relation to Heinrich von Ofterdingen in the following chapter. For now, let me return briefly to The Apprentices to illuminate this point. The project, into which Novalis’ apprentices are being initiated in Sais is explicitly opposed to the “war of destruction” upon nature proposed by those who see it (in Hobbesian terms) as an all-consuming “realm of greed” (S, 1, 89, 88). This is rather an eminently ecological project, to the extent that it posits nature as an evolving community of life, which can only be understood adequately by means of creative observation, conjoining empirical examination with imagination. This is a community, moreover, with which we are corporeally connected: the natural world discloses itself to us through the correspondences that we can discover between “unknown and mysterious relationships within our body” and “unknown and mysterious conditions in nature” (S, 1, 97). Ultimately, however, the knowledge thus gleaned is to be directed towards the total humanization of the earth: the pacification, or “un-wilding” (Entwilderung) of nature (S, 1, 87). “We are on a mission,” Novalis writes in similar terms in his notes towards his planned encyclopedia (Allgemeines Brouillon): “We are called to educate [or form: bilden] the earth” (S, 2, 426).

Thus, in Novalis’ version of the recovery project, nature is to cease to be nature and become art, while art is to become “second nature” (S, 2, 646). Here, the surpassing of nature by art is reconfigured as the transformation of the given into the made: the artefactualization of nature undertaken in the name of its ‘actualization’. This principle also guided Novalis’ concept of “transcendental health” (S, 2, 535), whereby our very corporeality was to be taken into our own hands, such that humans would by and by become in some sense independent from nature.³³ This is, perhaps, an appealing idea when your fiancé and younger brother have recently been killed by the tuberculosis bacterium; but it is clearly at odds with an ecological ethos of accommodation to the limits of earthly existence.

As Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy observe, Jena Romanticism “effectuates the Subject’s break with all ‘naturalty’; even if the production of the work is always thought according to the archetype of natural organic engendering, what now begins to specify subjectivity [sic.] is production as such, the pro-ducere, outside of any natural given, of that (the one) which produces itself by itself.”³⁴ The literary prototype for the this new model of the subject was, once again, bequeathed to the younger Romantics by Goethe: this is the figure of Prometheus, who, in the rebellious young bard’s most famous ode of Storm and Stress, embodies the modernist ethos of human self-assertion, explicitly against the gods, but implicitly also against the natural environment. Goethe’s Prometheus is the

archetype of homo faber, man the maker, who accepts nothing as given (because it is given), valuing only what he has himself accomplished. Readily recognizable in the context in which the poem was written as a figure for artistic genius, Prometheus, having usurped the divine prerogative of creation, symbolized by his theft of the element of transformation, fire, now declares his intention to deploy his creative powers in fashioning a new breed of men in his own image, who, like him, will owe nothing to the gods (W, 1, 44-6).

It was quite possibly with Goethe's poem in mind that Mary Shelley subtitled her novel Frankenstein "the new Prometheus." This text stands as a remarkable double critique of the Promethean impulse, for, to the hubris of Frankenstein's endeavor to create life artificially Shelley adds the heartlessness of his rejection of the creature that turned out to be not quite in his own image after all. Mary's husband Percy, on the other hand, embraced the Promethean in the name of human liberty. Of all the English Romantics, Shelley is in many respects closest to the avant-gardism of Jena, not only in his hostility to oppressive social relations and conventions, his anticlericalism and republicanism, but also to some extent in his aesthetics.

In Shelley's view, poets were both prophets and, as he memorably puts it in his "Defence of Poetry" (1821), "the unacknowledged legislators of the world."³⁵ Not unlike the Jena Romantics, he understood literature (especially poetry) as a specific and particularly valuable form of a wider practice of poiesis, which was to be found in the arts generally, as well as in the practice of statecraft, education and invention. As Tim Morton has argued, Shelley was also an ecological thinker of sorts, with a very good appreciation of contemporary developments in the sciences. A champion of the rights of all the oppressed, including animals, and for some time a vegetarian, Shelley recognized the importance to the survival of all of suitable environmental 'niches' for each species.³⁶ Additionally, as Mark Lussier has demonstrated, the "rhythmic universe" disclosed in his verse affirms the continuity of mind and matter and can be seen to anticipate contemporary understandings of the dialectic of order and chaos in complex non-linear systems.³⁷

As a cultural theorist, moreover, Shelley's critique of capitalist industrialization is remarkable in its prefiguration of Adorno's and Horkheimer's diagnosis of the 'dialectic of enlightenment': "The cultivation of those sciences which have enlarged the limits of the empire of man over the external world, has, for want of the poetical faculty, proportionately circumscribed those of the internal world; and man, having enslaved the elements, remains himself a slave." (CW, 7, 134) In this context, Shelley looks to the "poetical faculty," that is, to the power of imagination, to transform and reharmonize both society and the natural environment. The 'Promethean work' proclaimed by the Chorus of Spirits "come from the mind of humankind," in the final Act of Prometheus Unbound (1820; CW, 2, 246), represents a further version of the recovery project, this time with a technotopian edge. Its telos is the creation of a "habitable earth" (52) such as that which Shelley had envisaged earlier in Queen Mab (1813).³⁸ This is an unusually ecocentric utopia, for here "man has lost/His terrible prerogative, and stands an equal amidst equals" (225-7); but it is one from which (à la Novalis) all wildness has been eradicated: the polar ice caps have melted and the sound of waves now echoes in "heaven-breathing groves" (68); the sandy deserts have turned to "daisy-spangled lawn" (82); the expanse of the ocean is bejeweled with "bright garden-isles" (101); and (of course) the lion sports beside

“the dreadless kid” (126). This tempered (and notably temperate), emphatically beautiful (if no longer sublime) Earth is conceived as the outcome of a marriage of mind and nature, in which the latter nonetheless retains its “omnipotence.”³⁹

Given his penchant for the Promethean, it is not surprising to discover that Shelley tried his hand at translating some scenes from Goethe’s Faust. Part One. For it is in his reworking of the legendary figure of Faust that Goethe produced his most important and complex engagement with the Promethean subject of modernity, whose genesis, as we have seen, is eminently Romantic. As will be discussed in further detail in chapter five, however, Goethe’s Faust assumes his most modern guise only at the end of Faust. Part Two, penned right at the end of Goethe’s own life and only published posthumously. Here, Faust metamorphoses into a development engineer, who takes on the very sea itself in his restless urge to transform the given into an artifact of his own making – and he too dreams at the end of a liberated society living in a habitable world, wrested from the wildness of nature.

Sadly, Shelley, who was himself an enthusiast of such water-controlling schemes as the construction of the Tremadoc Embankment on the Thames, did not live to read the conclusion of Goethe’s great work, having met a watery death in the Sea of Liguria in July 1822. Yet it is quite likely that he would not have identified entirely with Faust the developer. For Shelley’s Prometheanism, flawed though it might appear from a contemporary ecophilosophical perspective, is fuelled less by a will to dominate, such as assails Faust in view of the intractability of the ocean, than by a desire for liberation and reconnection. For him, as for Novalis, the primary motivation was not power, but love (but then again, as many a feminist reminds us, love too can be domineering). Shelley, who writes of “ambiguous man,” the “burthen or glory of the earth” (CW, 1, 124), himself exemplifies to a high degree the ambiguity inherent in Romantic aesthetics. For while, on the one hand, he dreams of the technotopian transformation of the earth, he also insists on the other, that the task of the poet is merely to disclose the given, by enabling us to perceive, behind the “veil of familiarity,” the truth and beauty that was always already there. In so doing, as he continues in the “Defence,” poetry “redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man.” (CW, 7, 137) In this understanding of poiesis as in some sense redemptive, as a making anew that is also a bringing back, Shelley retains a link with the older English Romantics Wordsworth and Coleridge, and, as we shall see in the next section, thereby also draws closer to Schelling and Goethe than to Schlegel and Novalis.

iii. Art redeeming nature: Aesthetic re-ligio

Schelling, as already noted in the previous section, reconceived artistic mimesis as a continuation, on the level of consciousness, of the unconscious creativity of natura naturans. Outlining the philosophy of art that he would later develop in more detail in his lectures in Jena (1802-3) and Wurzburg (1804-5), Schelling writes in the final chapter of his System of Transcendental Idealism (System des transzendentalen Idealismus, 1800), that the work of art is nonetheless not a purely conscious creation. On the contrary, it arises out of the interplay of conscious and unconscious activity. Against Schlegel’s emphasis on the self-reflection of the sovereign subject, it is this unconscious element of artistic creation that Schelling honors with the name of ‘poesy’, which, he insists, is by

definition not something that can be learnt, but is rather a gift of nature.⁴⁰ It is also this unconscious ‘genius’ which guarantees that the work of art always transcends the intentionality of the artist, on the level of production as well as reception, bringing forth things that he did not mean to say and that he himself cannot even fully comprehend (ST, 616).

It is no coincidence if this sounds like Freud, as the latter learnt at least as much from the Romantics as he did from his patients.⁴¹ However, it should be recalled that for Schelling, the unconscious is not confined to the narrow bounds of the human psyche, but encompasses also that wider nature, which on the level of its immanent productivity, if not of its individual products, is, for him, coterminous with the divine. Conjoining conscious crafting and unconscious poiesis, the work of art gives material form to the longed for identity of freedom and nature, which the philosopher can merely posit in the abstract (and which Schiller had relegated to a future ‘post-modern’ poetry): art thus becomes for Schelling at once a privileged mode of divine revelation and the true “organon and document” of philosophy (ST, 627). Whereas Hegel would later argue that philosophy was set to take over from religion, just as religion had formerly sublated art as the highest expression of the Spirit, Schelling here maintains the reverse: the future of philosophy was to pass over into poesy in the guise of a “new mythology” (ST, 629).

The emergence of a new mythology, one which would render the people ‘rational’ and the intellectuals ‘sensuous’, reconciling reason with religion, freedom with faith, had already been announced as immanent in The Oldest Systemprogramme of German Idealism of 1797. Whoever actually wrote this mysterious document, whether Hegel, Schelling, Hölderlin or some combination of the three, the ‘programme’ that it sketched was one that continued to preoccupy Schelling in particular. In his lectures on the philosophy of art, Schelling attributes to the new mythology the task of overcoming that bifurcation of “the realistic and idealistic impulses” inaugurated by Christianity. For while the figure of Jesus as God incarnate embodies the identity of the real and the ideal, the finite and the infinite, in Christ’s death and resurrection the finite, Schelling argues, is ultimately sacrificed to the infinite.⁴² Thus, whereas for the Greeks, “nature was immediately and of itself divine [...] For the newer world [...] nature was closed, since that world comprehended it not in and for itself, but rather only as an allegory of the invisible and spiritual world.” (PA, 66) It is, therefore, if not to Judea in the time of Christ, then to Rome in the time of Augustine, that Schelling traces the birth of modernity. For “the modern world begins when man wrests himself loose from nature. Since he does not yet have a home, however, he feels abandoned” (PA, 59). This sense of abandonment results in the bifurcation mentioned previously, whereby religious experience is progressively spiritualized, while nature is reduced to the status, first of allegory, then of mere materiality and, as Heidegger would put it, standing reserve.

A similar analysis of Christian culture to Schelling’s also informs Hegel’s theory of what he calls ‘Romantic art’ (that is, art of the Christian era, from the Middle Ages to the present). According to the tripartite history of art that he presented in his lectures on fine art, the aesthetic ideal is fully realized only in classical Greek art. For in archaic art the material means, as it were, outweigh the spiritual content, while in Romantic art, the spiritual content outstrips the material means. In locating its highest truth in a heavenly beyond, Christianity instigates a crisis in aesthetics, generating an art that is forever pointing beyond itself to something that can, by its very nature, never be adequately

represented in material form.⁴³ Hegel's solution to this crisis is, as already mentioned, the sublation of both art and religion by philosophy as the only adequate expression of the Spirit, which was now entering a new historical period: that, namely, of its self-reflection in the concept.⁴⁴

Schelling's solution to the modern crisis of art (which, in his analysis, is simultaneously a crisis of nature) favors a movement in the opposite direction from that proposed by Hegel: not towards a further dematerialisation in the form of philosophical abstraction, but towards a rematerialisation in the guise of the promised new mythology, which, as we read in the Philosophy of Art, would sublimate the opposition of paganism and Christianity by returning the divine to nature. If, as Schelling observes, polytheism had survived within Christian culture only in the form of the "gods of history" – history, that is, understood as the temporal unfolding of the promise of redemption –, then the new mythology would also naturalize history (and historicize nature). That this should be recognized as "the final destiny of all modern poesy" (PA, 76) had been made possible by the overcoming of mechanistic science within the 'new physics', within which, as we saw in the first chapter, the natural world was understood, as a living whole, ensouled and evolving.

Although he had high praise for Faust. Part One as "the greatest poem of the Germans" (PA, 276), Schelling was clearly unconvinced by contemporary literary endeavors to generate this new mythology, as he now refers to its advent (rather more soberly than in the Oldest System Programme) as "indiscernibly distant" (PA, 77). We can only speculate as to what he would have made of Blake, who probably goes further towards the invention of an emphatically post-mechanistic mythology of earthly redemption than any other Romantic writer. Moreover, although Blake did not have the benefit of Schelling's 'higher physics' to ground his philosophy of nature, his cosmological metaphors are frequently drawn upon by contemporary physicists endeavoring to explain the strange world of unified field theory and quantum dynamics.⁴⁵

It is nonetheless evident that despite the best efforts of Blake, Novalis, and any number of later mythographers from Wagner to Tolkien and beyond, no one new mythology has yet emerged that could effect that unification of culture called for by Schelling. Barring a repetition of the fascist endeavor to create cultural uniformity by totalitarian means, it seems that we will continue to rejoice in a plurality of vying myths of nature and the divine, some new, some old, of varying degrees of dominance or marginality. This is in large part a facet of the cultural, religious and ideological diversity of modern liberal democratic societies (the endurance of which is nonetheless by no means guaranteed). However, it is also a consequence of the concomitant autonomization of art, which was celebrated by the Jena Romantics. For what this meant — and this is perhaps also what Hegel was predicting with his thesis of the 'end of art' — is that art, far from founding a new religion, would cease to be anything more than art, as distinct, that is, from 'life' generally, as well as from politics, philosophy, morality and religion (although some modern aesthetes, following once more in the footsteps of Jena Romanticism, would be tempted to turn art itself into a religion).⁴⁶

And yet, within the limits of art, many literary works were produced during the Romantic period, which, if not founding a new religion of nature, did nonetheless foster a sensibility that was favorable to the resacralisation of the earth. These are works which seek to achieve what Schelling, in an important public lecture from 1807, identifies as the

highest relation of art to nature: that of “making the latter a means of rendering visible the soul within it.”⁴⁷ Eichendorff’s metaphor for this poetics of revelation is the Wünschelrute, or “divining rod,” which awakens nature into song:

Slumb’ring deep in everything
Dreams a song as yet unheard,
And the world begins to sing,
If you find the magic word.⁴⁸

This, I would suggest, is indeed an ecopoetics of sorts. It is oriented towards neither Schillerian idealization, which, as Schelling rightly observes, actually seeks the elimination of real nature, nor utopian transformation, which ends in the artefactualization of the given, but rather towards the reclamation of the earth as a locus of the holy. This might be described as a poetics of aesthetic re-ligio: not a religion of art, but a deployment of art to restore a connection with the divine as manifest (if incompletely, perhaps only as a trace) in Creation. Needless to say, this reconnection is in turn understood as opening the way for the delivery of humanity from the modern condition of alienation from nature in a world perceived to be bereft of divine presence: this then, to return to Hölderlin, is what poets are for “in lean years.” Recalling Schelling’s diagnosis of alienation as homelessness, we might also say that the aesthetic re-ligio promises to admit us into dwelling by reestablishing the earth as our home (albeit one where we dwell, ecstatically, amidst the elemental, uninhabitable and incomprehensible).

It is important not to overdraw the distinction that I have been laboring to construct between the avant-garde and the redemptive strands of Romantic aesthetics. In practice, they are entangled with one another, sometimes within the one writer, as in the case of Shelley and, as we will see, Novalis, but also inherently, by virtue of certain common elements. One of these is the humanist assumption that “man is the culmination of nature,” as Goethe puts it in his essay on Winckelmann (W, 12, 98), and that his mind, pace Wordsworth in the concluding lines of The Prelude, is capable of becoming “A thousand times more beautiful than the earth/On which he dwells” (13, 446-7). Another common element is the high value placed on originality, and the associated conviction that in generating innovative works of art, human techne, as Aristotle had averred, accomplishes what phusis alone was incapable of effecting: for in human creativity, Schelling too insists at the end of the System of transcendental Idealism, “a new series begins,” which, while emerging from nature, nonetheless “leaves nature behind” (ST, 633).

Within the poetics of redemption, however, this elevation of the human mind and its powers of creation tends to be moderated by a respect for the given and a sense of responsibility towards the other. Adopting an almost untranslatable term that Goethe coins in Wilhelm Meister’s Journeyman Years (Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre, 1821), one might say that this strand of Romantic aesthetics is characterized by a certain Weltfrömmigkeit (W, 8, 243), meaning piety, respect, and obligation towards the world (and, I would add, towards the earth).⁴⁹ This is not a purely self-reflexive or introspective aesthetic, but one that reaches out towards that which exceeds the bounds of art and the confines of the self, even though in its more Kantian moments, it incorporates a

recognition that this can only ever be perceived in accordance with the configuration of our senses and the categories of our mind, and as illuminated by the much celebrated poetic imagination.

True imagination, however, as Coleridge famously argued in his Biographia Litteraria (1817), does not imply a free-play of ‘fancy’, unanchored to any external reality, but rather the capacity to disclose, within the phenomenal, what would otherwise remain hidden from view (CW, 7.1, 82-8). This, to take a German example, might be likened to the difference between Novalis’ purely fanciful blue flower with a human face in Heinrich von Ofterdingen, and Goethe’s imaginative representation in his poem “The Metamorphosis of Plants” of the growth of a perfectly ordinary (but for that reason, no less marvelous) flowering plant. Here, imagination and reflection are conjoined with a respectful attention to the self-disclosure of the other: to what Coleridge, for all his Kantianism, and with reference to Wordsworth and the project of the Lyrical Ballads, terms “the truth of nature” (CW, 7.2, 5). In Schelling’s view (one with which Wordsworth and Coleridge would doubtless have concurred), this hidden truth could not be revealed through an “arrogant overriding (or repudiation: Wegfahren über) of outward things,” but only by approaching them with love, in recognition of the “continuity of ones own mind with the life of nature” (SW, 1:7, 61-2).⁵⁰

Within the poetics of redemption, mimesis is then conceived, not as the imitation of nature in its outward materiality, but as an intimation of its phenomenal givenness. The truth of the other that was thereby made manifest, moreover, ultimately eluded positive or final knowledge.

This recognition of the limits of knowledge represents a further dimension of the Weltfrömmigkeit of the aesthetic re-ligio, and goes some way towards countering the more hubristic tendencies of Romantic humanism. Interestingly, one of the most suggestive statements of epistemological limitation comes from Novalis, who, in a further example of the complex interweaving of the avant-garde and redemptive moments of Romanticism, writes in one of his Fragments: “Nature is incomprehensible [or ungraspable: unbegreiflich] per se. Stillness and formed incomprehensibility [Unbegreiflichkeit]. Philosophy is prose. Her consonants. Distant philosophy sounds like poesy – because every call into the distance [in die Ferne] becomes a vowel. So everything at a distance [in der Entfernung] becomes poesy – poem.” (S, 2, 302) By contrast with his insistence elsewhere that nature was to be humanized by art, Novalis here seems to be implying that this other “poesy of the night and twilight” (320) comprises a way of speaking about nature, which allows it to remain distant and hence “ungraspable.”

This is a fascinating choice of terms, because it implies that nature is not only incomprehensible (unverständlich), but also that it is not, as Heidegger would say, simply ‘present-at-hand’ (vorhanden). What the poet, then, discloses is precisely the latent givenness of nature: the nature that, in giving itself to experience, nonetheless withdraws from our grasp and thus keeps its distance; the nature that, not being fully ‘present-at-hand’, is also not ‘ready-to-hand’ (zuhanden) and therefore resists being used merely as ‘equipment’. This ‘primordial’ nature is what Heidegger, from the mid-1930s, would come to call ‘Earth’. As he explains in “...poetically man dwells...,” the poet, in calling things forth in all their latency, their persistent strangeness, “makes them shine and ring”.⁵¹ Coleridge says something similar of Wordsworth, who, he claims, had “the

original gift of spreading the tone, the atmosphere, and with it the depth and height of the ideal world around forms, incidents and situations, of which for the common view, custom had bedimmed all the luster, had dried up the sparkle and the dew drops.” (CW, 7.1, 80)

Within the poetics of redemption, unveiling thus implies defamiliarization or estrangement: in Coleridge’s formulation, “awakening the mind’s attention from the lethargy of custom” (CW, 7.2, 7). This is why, to return to the question raised at the end of the last chapter, poetry might be understood to play so important a role in admitting us into dwelling ‘ecstatically’: namely, as an unveiling, which, in restoring to things the radiance of their enduring strangeness, restores us, as Coleridge puts it, to a “child’s sense of wonder” (CW, 7.1, 81). Restored to wonder, we are, as Haar puts it, drawn forth into “the opaque remoteness of an Earth” and “the luminous distance of a world.”⁵² This, to adopt a key phrase from Keats, might be called the “negative capability” of the poetics of redemption.⁵³

It seems then that Schiller was right after all (if, perhaps, for the wrong reasons): the way home to nature, which returns us to a world that is ultimately beyond our grasp, passes necessarily through the ‘foreign land’ of art. Contrary to Schiller’s primitivist assumptions about those ‘wild’ folk (*Wilde*), whose relationship to nature he took to be ‘naïve’, it is clear, moreover, that the passage through art in the form of story, song and dance, is also integral to tribal dwelling. They, it turns out, were never naïve, just as we, who continue to be dependent upon and involved with a more-than-human natural world, have “never been modern,” as Bruno Latour puts it: industrial humans, no less than hunter-gatherers, herders, or farmers, still live in culture-nature.⁵⁴ The problem is not so much that nature has disappeared from the modern world, as Schiller put it, but rather that the industrial economy which was beginning to come into being during the Romantic period manifests an unprecedented capacity to destroy the natural environment upon which it remains dependent, having suppressed the art of dwelling in a way which cares for the earth by allowing it its own flourishing. Australian Aborigines, who know full well that caring for country has to be learnt (which is why the destruction of traditional narratives and knowledges has been so catastrophic), call the art that admits us into dwelling ‘singing up’ the land. Singing up might be understood as a mode of estrangement that draws forth what cannot be known through the senses alone: the land of the Dreaming, shaped by the tracks of the ancestors, and peopled by a plethora of diverse beings, human and otherwise.

Might not the redemptive poetics of being and dwelling, which discloses the hidden trace of the holy in nature and calls us into a respectful relationship with an ultimately ungraspable earth, be thought of also as a mode of singing up the land? This is a tempting idea, but one which should probably be resisted. For there is a world of difference between a sharing of story, song and dance in a communal situation in the midst of the more-than-human dwelling-place and the solitary experience of composing a written text that is destined to be read by generally solitary readers in any number of places other than that in which it was penned, or to which it refers. It is here, moreover, in coming up against the existence of the poem as a written text, that we encounter a previously unforeseen problem: one which goes to the heart of the Romantic poetics of place.

Earlier, I argued that the Weltfrömmigkeit of the poetics of redemption incorporated a reaching out to a world (let us now also say, an earth) beyond the bounds of art. In this strand of Romantic aesthetics, art, as Coleridge puts it, is “subordinated” to nature (CW, 7.2, 17). Wordsworth, certainly, was clear on this, insisting in “Prospectus,” that natural beauty, the “living Presence of the earth,” surpassed “the most fair ideal Forms/Which craft of delicate Spirits hath composed/From earth’s materials” (42-5).⁵⁵ Within German Romanticism, the strongest statement of the priority of nature over art is to be found in Hölderlin’s ode “Nature and Art or Saturn und Jupiter” (“Natur und Kunst oder Saturn und Jupiter”), which suggests that the power of poesy (embodied in the figure of the Olympian god) is usurped from physis (his deposed father), and remains forever indebted to it.⁵⁶ Similarly, in Modern Painters, Ruskin insists that art should never seek to compete with or outdo, but simply to interpret nature: it might function as an icon, pointing beyond itself to the intimation of the divine in nature, but it must never become an idol. “The picture which is looked to as an interpretation of nature is invaluable, but the picture which is taken as a substitute for nature, had better be burned.” (W, 3, 12) Thus, he insists on “the necessity, as well as the dignity, of an earnest, faithful, loving study of nature as she is, rejecting with abhorrence all that man has done to alter and modify her.” (W, 3, 44)⁵⁷

And yet, how could the work of art that interprets nature not in some way itself “alter and modify her,” at least within its own imaging of it? Moreover, to the extent that the work of art is not bound to the place that it represents, but destined rather to be received in any number of other places, most of them pretty well insulated against “nature as she is” (such as art galleries, domestic interiors, school classrooms), the work of landscape art is always at risk of functioning precisely as a substitute for embodied experience of the land itself. A substitution of this kind is indeed recommended by Alexander von Humboldt, who concludes his essay on “The Physiognomy of Plants” with a celebration, not of the natural world as such, but rather of the power of the writer and artist to convey the experience of exotic places in their work. For those who are unable to travel to such places themselves, art, he says, can provide a substitute.⁵⁸ This might have seemed relatively innocuous in the early nineteenth century, and indeed, could have been intended to in some measure protect the wild places that Humboldt had visited from being overrun by tourists and settlers. However, at a time when the beauty, wonder and strangeness of first nature is at risk of being utterly eclipsed by a tamed and simulacralized second nature, in which images of wild places somewhere else are proffered to reconcile us to the disappearance of the wild from the places where we ourselves reside (I will not say dwell), we need a hermeneutics that resists Humboldt’s logic of substitution. Such a hermeneutics would need to be able to demonstrate how the work of art always, inevitably, fails to convey the experience of which it is a trace. This, as I suggest below, might be termed a Romantic ‘ecopoetics of negativity’.

iv. Art falling short of nature: Negative ecopoetics

In literature, that unveiling which admits us into dwelling by restoring to the familiar the aura of the unexpected and the incomprehensible takes place in the medium of language. In order to move towards a negative ecopoetics, which in some measure protects the otherness of the earth from disappearing into a humanly constructed world of words, we

will therefore need to reconsider the relationship between the logos and the oikos, between human language and the natural world, the more-than-human ‘home’, in which we must learn anew to dwell.

Let us begin, once again, by turning to Schelling, for whom, as we have already glimpsed in discussing the Introduction to Schlegel’s “Conversation,” the connection between language and nature is both intimate and reciprocal. According to the Philosophy of Art, just as “nature is [...] the first poem of the divine imagination,” such that nature “contains the true archetype for poesy,” human poesy, and language more generally, is simply a continuation, in a new potency, of this primal poesy of nature (PA 202,99). Moreover, language, Schelling argues, is itself structured like the natural world from which it had emerged in two key respects. On the level of the word, language, like nature, is constituted through the informing of the infinite, or ideal, into the finite, or real, namely (as Saussure would subsequently rediscover!) in the coming together of an immaterial signified, the idea, with a material signifier, to which Schelling refers in the case of spoken language as its “sonority” (PA 204). Additionally, on the level of the sign system as a whole, language is structured like the natural world (which is to say, like the unconscious, and, as Lacan would subsequently rediscover, vice versa!), within which the meaning of each individual element is determined by the whole (PA 101).

As Andrew Bowie stresses, this is not “a theory of language as correspondence or representation.”⁵⁹ However, in the hands of a less rigorous philosopher, the idea that human language emerges from nature, which has itself emerged from the divine logos, could lead to the assumption of a mystical correspondence between language and reality. This is in fact the conclusion reached by Novalis. In a remarkable short text simply called “Monolog” (“Monologue,” 1798/9) he likens language in general to mathematical formulae, which “express nothing but their own marvelous nature.” This is why, he goes on to say, “they are so expressive, why they are the mirror to the strange play of relationships among things. Only their freedom makes them members of nature, only in their free movements does the world-soul express itself and make of them a delicate measure and a ground-plan of things.” For this reason, Novalis adds, the poet should not set out with an intention to represent anything in particular in the outside world, but should allow himself to be carried along by the free-play of language, which, he avers, is “concerned only with itself.”⁶⁰

A not dissimilar, although far more rigorously (if not necessarily convincingly) argued faith in language also informs Heidegger’s poetics. For Heidegger, as for Novalis, language decentres the subject. It is not we who are masters of language, he insists in “... poetically man dwells...,” but language that masters us: “For, strictly, it is language that speaks.”⁶¹ In the late twentieth century, this was to become the mantra of structuralism and poststructuralism, although stripped now of any lingering belief in a mystical correspondence between the endless self-reference of words and the hidden truth of things. For Heidegger, however, it is only within language that the otherwise undisclosed being of things is revealed. For it is not only that language constructs the horizon of understanding, or world, within which we experience the being of beings. It is also, more profoundly, through language that we answer to the call of Being by drawing things forth into the ‘clearing’ (Lichtung) of an articulated world. Language is thus, as he avers in “What are poets for?” the “house of Being”; for, as he states even more

emphatically in Unterwegs zur Sprache (“Underway to Language”), “only the word grants being to a thing.”⁶²

Now, this is not for one moment to deny the existence of a material reality that precedes and in some respects exceeds anything that humans might say or make of it (and, for Heidegger, all saying is in itself a making). Nor is it to deny to the non-human a capacity for self-disclosure. Thus, for example, in a talk from 1956 on the dialect poet and storyteller Hebel (whom we will encounter again in the next chapter), Heidegger speaks of the way that the “naturalness of nature,” in the rising and setting of the sun, moon and stars, “addresses” us (uns anspricht), “granting” us (uns zuspricht) an experience of the “mysteriousness of the world.”⁶³ It was precisely this Zuspruch, the self-disclosure or givenness of natural entities, which, as Heidegger warns in an earlier talk entitled “The Country Path” (“Der Feldweg,” first delivered to the people of his hometown of Messkirch in 1949), was now in danger of being drowned out by the drone of machines, those false gods of modernity.⁶⁴ And it was of course to the givenness of nature that the poet of being and dwelling bids us once more attend.

Within poetic language, moreover, nature, as we have already noted, is never fully present. Here, nature as earth, primordial nature, is rather “set forth” (hergestellt), as Heidegger expresses it in The Origin of the Work of Art, precisely as “self-secluding”: it is brought into the Open of a world as “that which hides itself” (das Sichverschliessende). In this way, the poetic use of language, “lets the earth be an earth,” namely the undisclosed ground upon which we construct our world. In the 1956 Addendum to this essay, Heidegger acknowledges that the work of art as a practice of giving form (Gestalt) constitutes an enframing, a Gestell, of sorts. However, he distinguishes artistic forming from technological enframing on the grounds that the former is not a “challenging,” precisely to the extent that it preserves this undisclosed dimension of nature as earth. From this, we would have to conclude that the language of poetry admits us into dwelling by saving the earth, not only, as we have already seen, as ultimately unknowable, but also as properly unspeakable.⁶⁵

Despite this moment of negativity, however, Heidegger insists that through language, humans have a privileged role to play in the disclosure of Being. As Bate boldly restates the Heideggerian case, “things need us so that they can be named.”⁶⁶ Unfortunately, this seems to me to fall right back into the hubris of anthropocentrism, effacing the extent to which the “human process actualises semiotic processes that it did not make and that it did not shape,” as Robert S. Corrington reminds us. “Our cultural codes, no matter how sophisticated and multi-valued, are what they are by riding on the back of this self-recording nature.”⁶⁷ There is, moreover, a dimension of our encounter with “things, other, world and God,” as Jean-Louis Chrétien insists, that will always exceed our capacity to respond, whether verbally or corporeally. Thus, the “joy with which beauty strikes us delivers us to word and song, to thanks and praise, but how could the response to it not fall short of it?”⁶⁸ For Chrétien, as for Heidegger, we are called to respond to the self-disclosure of the other; and yet, in Chrétien’s view, it is only in the inevitable inadequacy of our response that we remain open to that which lies beyond the self and beyond the text. Falling short is thus neither “a contingent deficit nor a regrettable imperfection [...] It is the very event of a wound by which our existence is altered and opened, and becomes itself the site of the manifestation of what it responds to.” It is also the very woundedness of our song that necessitates and affirms a plurality of voices. For if no one speaker can say it all, then we are

all called upon to participate in our own way in the “chorus and polyphony” of responses, each of which “accomplishes its unsubstitutable singularity in giving itself into a community and thus making appeal to other voices.”⁶⁹

To this, the ecophilosopher would want to add that the chorus and polyphony in which we are invited to join contains many more than human voices. Whereas Heidegger’s poetics is at risk of rendering the song of the earth a purely human accomplishment with the poet as ventriloquist extraordinaire, the one that I am proposing here repositions the poet as witness to and participant in the gloriously exuberant singing, dancing, shape-changing, many-hued self-disclosure of a more-than-human world that forever exceeds the human capacity to respond to it in words.⁷⁰

Although many Romantic writers would appear to have shared Heidegger’s faith in the capacity of the poetic word adequately to give voice to the song of the earth, there are occasional foreshadowings of a more modest view. We have already noted in Wordsworth, Ruskin and Hölderlin an insistence on the secondariness of art vis-à-vis nature. Schelling too is at one point in his lecture “Concerning the Relation of the Plastic Arts to Nature” struck by the thought that if nature already embodies infinite beauty, then the work of art that endeavors to surpass nature, must always actually “lag behind” it. He moves swiftly to counter this suspicion, by claiming for art the prerogative of revealing things in their aspect of eternity by lifting them out of the flux of time. That is to say (somewhat lamely, perhaps), art surpasses nature by representing “as non-existent only that which does not exist.”⁷¹ Far from reestablishing the transcendence of art over nature, however, this is tantamount to admitting that in the transformation of nature into art, something, inevitably, is lost: namely, the plenitude of living being.

Schelling’s understanding of art did not change significantly in his later work, although he subsequently perceived the relationship of the real to the ideal as more vexed than it had appeared in the context of his identity philosophy. With regard to literature specifically, however, his reflections on language in the The Ages of the World (System der Weltalter, 1827-8) have some significant implications. For here he argues that whenever we commit ourselves to speech, we exclude other possibilities of the ‘sayable’. “The resultant ‘contraction,’” as Andrew Bowie explains, “involves a lack: the sayable is reduced by the said to finite determinations which cannot exhaust the sayable.”⁷²

According to Hegel in the Jena System Programme, moreover, the use of language has even more dire implications. Here, he maintains that the imposition of names, by means of which the first man asserted his God-given dominion over the animals, “annihilated” their referents by substituting for the particularity of their embodied being something ideational that could henceforth exist in the absence of the thing so named (GW, 6, 20). This insight did not impede Hegel’s philosophical use of language, since its aim was precisely to sublimate the manifold particularity of actual things into the universality of the concept. Hegel’s insight into the ‘violence’ of the name does nonetheless pose a problem for any poetics that seeks respectfully to give voice to the given. This is especially so if one considers that the things thus named are thereby incorporated into a system of signs, which might, as Schelling suggests, be analogous to a natural system, but which cannot be assumed to replicate the pattern of differences and connections prevailing among things-in-themselves. Heidegger, as we have seen, is very keen to protect language from the bane of enframing. But in naming things in accordance

with a logic that is not necessarily their own, language inevitably also enframes, and although it does not thereby exploit, it may well open the way to exploitation.

This potential association between naming, enframing and exploitation is made explicit by Heidegger's own favored poet of being and dwelling, Hölderlin, in the very poem, in which he delineates the 'calling of the poet' ("Dichterberuf," 1800/01):

Too long now things divine have been cheaply used
And all the powers of heaven, the kindly, spent
In trifling waste by cold and cunning
Men without thanks, who when he, the Highest,

In person tills their field for them, think they know
The daylight and the Thunderer, and indeed
Their telescope may find them all, may
Count and may name every star of heaven. (SP, 81)

The naming that Hölderlin rejects here, it should be noted, is a specific kind of naming: that of the technologically enhanced (and phenomenologically impoverished) scientific gaze, incorporating a claim to knowledge, which, although in part delusory, nonetheless facilitates the instrumentalization and exploitation of the natural world. The poet's calling is thus to counter the naming practices of the "cunning men" with a way of speaking that disclaims the positivity of the scientific-technological bid for knowledge and power.

Might not this poetic way of speaking be one which acknowledges that whatever is drawn forth into the light of the word and, thereby, the Open of a world, will always fall short of that which lies beyond all human speaking? This, certainly, is one conclusion that could be drawn from Hölderlin's multiple reworkings of the tragedy of Empedokles, the fallen genius, whose claim to be the true voice of nature as her self-proclaimed priest is ultimately revealed as self-aggrandizing and hubristic. Empedokles' response to this realization is to plunge into the fiery depths of Aetna, allowing his voice to be consumed, literally, by the earth. Hölderlin, on the other hand, survived, and his own speaking of nature became if anything less stylized, more attentive to detail, as a result of confronting the crisis of Empedokles.⁷³

It might not be the case that "things need us so that they can be named," for, as we read in the first version of *Empedokles*, "divinely-present nature has no need of speech" (1628-9).⁷⁴ That does not necessarily mean that we should renounce speech. But it is preeminently for our own sake that we need to take the risk of using language, in order to share understandings about what we perceive, believe and value; what we desire, fear and hope; and about how we should live and how we should die. Especially at a time of forgetfulness and endangerment of the more-than-human natural world, moreover, we need poets to remind us of our indebtedness to, and embeddedness in, that which precedes, enables and exceeds all human art.

The ecopoetics of negativity that I am sketching is in fact 'romantic' in a thoroughly Hegelian sense, with the crucial difference, however, that what art is here understood to fall short of adequately responding to, let alone mediating, is not so much an immaterial beyond, as the embodied experience of earthly presence itself. This is not to say that all Romantic writers would have conceived of their project in these terms.

Explicit disavowals of sayability are nonetheless sometimes encountered in Romantic texts, such as Wordsworth's "(but I cannot name it)" with reference to his own dwelling place in "Home at Grasmere." There are other less obvious ways, however, in which we might be reminded of the absence of that earthly presence to which Romantic writers frequently bid us to attend. Among these is that very thematization of mediation, which we have already encountered among the Romantic avant-garde in Jena, under the name of Romantic irony. For while this kind of self-reflexivity might have led historically to the formation of a self-consciously autonomous art that seemed to have cut itself loose from all earthly moorings, it can also be seen as a strategy for protecting as inassimilable to the order of the text that to which it nonetheless continues to allude. Romantic irony, in other words, can perhaps be recuperated from an avant-garde to a redemptive poetics, if it is understood as a way of reminding us (as, for example, Magritte does in entitling his painting of a pipe, "Ceci n'est pas une pipe") that what we have before us is nothing more nor less than a work of art, and that if we want an experience of earthly presence, then, as Bonnefoy puts it, we had best "lift our eyes from the page" and go seek such experience within our own places of being and dwelling.⁷⁵

If self-reference, including express affirmations of inexpressibility, interrupt our reading to remind us that that is what we are doing, then so too might those formal qualities of all texts, which draw our attention to the fact that they are, in fact, carefully crafted artifacts. In the case of poetic language, this includes the use of phonetic and metrical patterning, which foregrounds the sonority of the linguistic medium itself. Here, however, we must note a further irony. For, it is precisely the dense sonority of the verbal signifier, which, according to Heidegger's construction of the work of art, constitutes the very earthiness of poetry. From this perspective, it is not least in its sonorous materiality that the verbal work of art can be seen as continuous with the multitudinous sounds and rhythms of the earth around us, even while its semantics inevitably fail to restore us to the presence of the earth.

Although unable to reestablish presence, Bonnefoy argues (romantically, we might add), the poet can nonetheless "recall that presence is a possible experience, and he can stir up the need for it, keep open the path that leads toward it — after which one will read him and restore to his poem the benefit of that experience it had been unable to completely achieve."⁷⁶ Here, we should consider also that just as the poem inevitably falls short of the experience to which it responds, so too any one reading of the poem, which gives itself to us as a phenomenon in its own right, will necessarily fall short of saying all that it might convey.

How we respond to the poetic response to that other place beyond the text to which it might allude will depend on our own experiences of place. In this connection, Bonnefoy exclaims with reference to a sonnet by Mallarmé, "[h]ow can we read about 'forgotten woods' over which 'somber winter' passes without going into woods that are our own, where we can either find or lose ourselves?"⁷⁷ But what if, as in the case of Clare, 'our' woods have been taken from us? Or what if, as in the case of Heinrich Heine, the German Jewish socialist, any connection we might have felt with the woods of our homeland was in question, even before we went abroad into exile? For his part, Chrétien considers "praise, and thus the thank you and the yes, as the highest possibility of speech."⁷⁸ Much Romantic poetry of place participates in this work of praise. As the very different examples of Clare and Heine suggest, however, there is a sometimes a place,

and perhaps a need, for the poet to adopt a more critical role. To some extent, this too is admitted by Heidegger in “What are Poets For?” Before he goes on to attribute to the poet the positive role of rescuing the Being from the grips of enframing, he suggests that in a world in which all trace of the holy is in danger of being obliterated, it is up to the poet to disclose “the unhealable, the unholy as such” (das Heillose als das Heillose).⁷⁹

Whether or not its voice is primarily celebratory or hortatory; whether it calls us to take pleasure in those topographies of the sacred that remain to us, or whether it bids us mourn for those that have been lost or to yearn for their recovery, Romantic ecopoetics can only play its part in restoring us to the earth to the extent that it succeeds in causing us to lift our eyes from the page; not only to seek the trace of the divine in the givenness of our own earthly environment, but also to recognize how and where it is being obliterated.⁸⁰ For unless such literature is to perform a merely compensatory function, we must bring to our reading an understanding that the reconciliation of human emancipation with that “holy nature,” which as Diotima avers in Hyperion, “cannot be written in any book” (SW, 3, 116), should not be left to art alone: it must rather be worked towards in our daily lives in those (increasingly urbanized) places where we actually reside, and where we might yet learn, ecstatically, to dwell.

¹ Heidegger, “What are Poets For?” in Poetry Language Thought, 89-142.

² The German is considerably pithier: “wozu Dichter in dürftiger Zeit?” Hölderlin, Selected Poems and Fragments, 156, 157. Unless otherwise indicated, all further quotes from Hölderlin poems in English translation will be taken from this edition, which also includes the German in parallel text. Hereafter: SP.

³ Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Typography, 238. On the history of “mimesis” within Western literature, see Auerbach, Mimesis.

⁴ Aristotle, The Physics, vol. 1, 173.

⁵ In my discussion of this text, some of the quotes in English translation are taken from Schiller, “Naïve and Sentimental Poetry,” in Simpson, Origins of Modern Critical Thought, 148-73. However, as this only comprises a partial translation of the essay, I will refer to the German original, providing my own translations when necessary.

⁶ See Soper, What is Nature? The weighty German historical dictionary of philosophy has nearly one hundred pages on different meanings of ‘nature’ in Western thought. Ritter and Gründer, Philosophisches Wörterbuch, 421-517.

⁷ Schiller, “Über Matthisons Gedichte,” Werke, vol. 22, 270-1. Hereafter: W.

⁸ The line references given in my discussion of this poem refer to the original version that Schiller published in his journal Die Horen in 1795: W, 1, 260-66, rather than to the revised version of 1800.

⁹ Bate, Song of the Earth, 41.

¹⁰ The earliest source for this myth is Hesiod’s Theogony, but it is perhaps best known in the version composed by Ovid in the opening section of his Metamorphoses. See Bate’s ecocritical discussion of this myth in Bate, Song of the Earth, 26-9.

¹¹ The key texts here are Rousseau’s Discourse on the Arts and Sciences (1750) and, even more obviously, his Discourse on the Origin of Inequality (1754).

¹² A translation of excerpts from the 1801 version of the Aesthetic Education is to be found in Simpson, Origins of Modern Critical Thought, 129-47.

¹³ P. Lacoue-Labarthe, Typography, 237.

¹⁴ Kleist, Sämtliche Werke, vol. 2, 345.

¹⁵ See e.g. Merchant, “Eve: Nature and Narrative.”

¹⁶ Schiller in Simpson, Origins of Modern Critical Thought, 137.

¹⁷ See Val Plumwood’s excellent ecofeminist analysis of the “logic of colonisation” in Feminism and the Mastery of Nature, 41-68.

¹⁸ Several others were also more loosely associated with this group at various times, including Tieck’s close friend Wackenroder shortly before the latter’s premature death at twenty-five in 1798; the linguist Bernhardt (Tieck’s brother-in-law); the poetess Sophie Mereau, who later introduced her husband, Brentano; his sister Bettina and, subsequently, her husband Achim von Arnim; and Jean Paul, who, in 1804, wrote the first history of the group (which had already broken up several years earlier). In addition, various members of the group exchanged letters with Fichte, Ritter, and another important Naturphilosoph, Franz von Baader. Robert Richards provides a very helpful, and in parts pretty racy, depiction of Jena Romanticism in The Romantic Conception of Life, 17-203.

¹⁹ Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, Literary Absolute, 8.

²⁰ F. Schlegel, Kritische-Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe, vol. 2, 198. Hereafter: KA. This is one of a number of Schlegel's Fragments published in English translation in Simpson, Origins of Modern Critical Thought, 188-99; here, 194.

²¹ Similarly, Novalis observes in one of his "logological" fragments: "The genuine beginning is NaturePoesy. The end is the 2nd beginning – and is ArtPoesy." S, 2, 536.

²² Schlegel in Simpson, Origins of Modern Critical Thought, 192-3.

²³ Ibid., 204-6.

²⁴ "(for the Moderns, or at least for us, Germans) criticism and literature are born at the same time; and the first, in fact, almost a little earlier." Lessing, Gedanken und Meinungen (The Spirit of Lessing and his Writing, 1804) (KA, 3, 81).

²⁵ Schlegel in Simpson, Origins of Modern Critical Thought, 192-3.

²⁶ "The world must be romanticized," declares Novalis in one his most famous fragments. S, 2, 545.

²⁷ Wackenroder and Tieck, Outpourings, 7.

²⁸ Novalis initially shared the general enthusiasm for Goethe's novel, but subsequently condemned it for endorsing the triumph of economic rationality over poetic imagination. See his letter to Tieck, January 23, 1800 (S, 4, 323).

²⁹ Wordsworth, "The Tables Turned" (1798), in Lyrical Ballads, 107.

³⁰ With regard to Fichte's subjectivism, Novalis writes in an the notes for his planned encyclopedia, the Allgemeines Brouillon, "Instead of N[ot] I – Thou" (S, 3, 430).

³¹ Apparently inspired by an experience at the grave of his own child fiancé, Sophie, this text also bears witness to Novalis' return to Christianity, which he justified in his treatise "Christianity or Europe" (Die Christenheit oder Europa), which appeared, against the will of Schelling (and the advice of Goethe, who was also consulted on this matter by the Schlegels) in the Athenaeum in 1799.

³² In another of the Pollen-Fragments Novalis writes: "The first step is to look within, the discriminating contemplation of the self. He who remains at this point only half develops. The second step must be a telling look without, independent, sustained contemplation of the external world" (S, 2, 423).

³³ This, at any rate, is how Schipperges reads Novalis in "Krankwerden," 239. For a more extended, and somewhat differently oriented interpretation of Novalis' thinking on illness, see Krell, Contagion, 46-69.

³⁴ Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, Literary Absolute, 104.

³⁵ Shelley, Complete Works, vol. 7, 140. Hereafter: CW.

³⁶ Morton, Shelley and the Revolution in Taste, 218.

³⁷ Lussier, Romantic Dynamics, 26 and 136-60.

³⁸ CW, 1, 122. The numerals in brackets here and in the following quotations from this edition refer to line numbers in the text.

³⁹ "Whilst every shape and mode of matter lends/Its force to the omnipotence of mind,/Which from its dark mine drags the gem of truth/To decorate its paradise of peace." (235-8)

⁴⁰ Schelling, System, 618. Hereafter: ST. See also his lecture, "Concerning the Relation of the Plastic Arts to Nature," 353, where art is referred to as a "pure gift of nature, which here brings itself to a second conclusion, realizing itself completely by vesting its creative power in the creature".

⁴¹ For an excellent analysis of the close relationship between German idealist aesthetics and Freudian psychoanalysis, see Maquard, Transzendentaler Idealismus.

⁴² Schelling, Philosophy of Art, 64. Hereafter: PA. These lectures only appeared in print posthumously in the first edition of Schelling's works published by his son in 1859.

⁴³ Hegel, Aesthetics, 427-38.

⁴⁴ As he puts it in the Aesthetics, 10: "The peculiar nature of artistic production and of works of art no longer fills our highest need [...] Thought and reflection have spread their wings above fine art."

⁴⁵ Lussier, Romantic Dynamics, 38-41.

⁴⁶ On Schlegel's 'aesthetic religion', see Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, Literary Absolute, 59-78.

⁴⁷ Schelling, "Concerning the Relation of the Plastic Arts to Nature," 347.

⁴⁸ Eichendorff, "Divining Rod." Trans. Alison Turner. In Browning, German Poetry, 144.

⁴⁹ Angus Nicholls interprets this notion to imply that "the individual's subjective wishes, longings and theories" should be placed "within the context of a wider social, natural and cosmic order. When the subject perceives itself as a finite being situated within the expanse of the entire world — of what Goethe might, in a pantheistic context, see as the cosmos — its subjective desires, longings, projects and theories must adopt a sense of humility and self-limitation which is appropriate to its place within this wider order." Nicholls, The Mantic Art, 275. On Goethean Weltfrömmigkeit, see also, Gadamer, "Goethe and die Philosophy."

⁵⁰ On the striking resonance between Wordsworth's poetry and Schelling's philosophy of mind and nature, see the still very interesting study by Hirsch, Wordsworth and Schelling. On Coleridge and Schelling, see Mondiano, Coleridge and the Concept of Nature.

⁵¹ Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought, 225.

⁵² Haar, Song of the Earth, 139.

⁵³ Letter to George and Thomas Keats, 21, 27? Dec. 1817, in John Keats, 370. Hereafter: JK.

⁵⁴ Latour, We Have Never Been Modern.

⁵⁵ Wordsworth, Poetical Works, vol. 5, 4.

⁵⁶ Addressing Jupiter, the poet exclaims, "So down with you! Or cease to withhold your thanks!/And if you'll stay, defer to the older god/And grant him that above all others,/Gods and great mortals, the singer name him!/ For as from clouds your lightning, from him has come/What you call yours." SP, 75.

⁵⁷ See also the footnote, in which Ruskin likens the artistic representation of nature to a commentary, similar to that of "divines" on the Bible, concluding that "he who takes Art for his authority may entirely lose sight of all that it interprets, and sink at once into the sin of an idolater, and the degradation of a slave." (W, 3, 45)

⁵⁸ Humboldt, Ansichten, 260. Hans Blumenberg notes that Humboldt was especially excited about the prospects for a dioramic mode of pictorial representation, such as that which he had experienced in the museum of the American Philosophical Society, designed by Charles Willson Peele, which he visited in 1804. Blumenberg, Lesbarkeit der Welt, 297. One wonders what he would have thought of the multimedia displays of today's high-tech exhibitions, where even the dinosaurs, seemingly, walk again.

-
- ⁵⁹ Bowie, Schelling, 118.
- ⁶⁰ Novalis in Simpson, Origins of Modern Critical Thought, 273-4.
- ⁶¹ Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought, 216.
- ⁶² Ibid., 132; Unterwegs zur Sprache, 164. This work actually takes its point of departure explicitly from Novalis' "Monologue." The relation between the two is discussed in Pott, "Der zarte Maaßstab'."
- ⁶³ Heidegger, Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens, 145.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid., 89.
- ⁶⁵ Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought, 47; 46; 82-7.
- ⁶⁶ Bate, Song of the Earth, 265.
- ⁶⁷ Corrington, Ecstatic Naturalism, ix.
- ⁶⁸ Chrétien, Unforgettable and the Unhoped For, 122. See Chrétien, l'Efroi de beau. Chrétien's critique of Heidegger's philosophy of language is developed in l'Appel et la reponse.
- ⁶⁹ Chrétien, Unforgettable and Unhoped For, 122.
- ⁷⁰ In his essay on Arne Naess's "concrete contents," David Rothenberg, whose own musical work is conceived along these line, finds a model for such a participatory aesthetic in the practice of the Kaluli people of Papua New Guinea, which they term "dulugu ganalan." Translated here as "lift-up-oversounding," this involves the use of human voices and instruments to 'sing along' with the circumambient sounds of the forest. "No World but in Things," 163.
- ⁷¹ Schelling, "Concerning the Relation of the Plastic Arts to Nature," 332, 333.
- ⁷² Bowie, Schelling, 120.
- ⁷³ Söring, "Die göttlich gegenwärtige Natur bedarf der Rede nicht'," 81.
- ⁷⁴ Hölderlin, Sämtliche Werke, vol. 4.1, 69. Hereafter: SW.
- ⁷⁵ Bonnefoy, "Lifting Our Eyes from the Page."
- ⁷⁶ Ibid., 801
- ⁷⁷ Ibid., 806.
- ⁷⁸ Chrétien, Unforgettable and the Unhoped For, 128.
- ⁷⁹ Heidegger, Poetry, Language, Thought, 117.
- ⁸⁰ The distinction between 'celebratory' and 'hortatory' nature writing is developed by Scott Slovic in his article, "Epistemology and Politics."