



UNIVERSITY OF
OXFORD

***Ursprünglichkeit* and Deep Time. Narratives and Concepts of
Originality in German Literature around 1800**

Alexandra Hertlein

**St Catherine's College
University of Oxford**

Submitted for assessment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in
Modern Languages (German)

10 October 2025

Short Abstract

This thesis examines how concepts of *Ursprünglichkeit* – primordality, primevality, originality, and authenticity – were mobilised in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century German literature to confront the epistemic rupture introduced by the discovery of Deep Time, the recognition that the earth's history extends far beyond human time scales.

Chapter One explores how Romantic literature devised narrative structures that rendered the earth's non-human past legible, particularly how Novalis's novels engage with geological temporalities, and translate the absence of human records into speculative forms of history. Chapter Two turns to Orientalist philology and literature. In the wake of the Holy Roman Empire's collapse, German thinkers sought cultural antiquity not in the Greco-Roman canon but in India. Sanskrit's perceived linguistic depth enabled claims of Indo-Germanic kinship, positioning India as a displaced origin that could confer historical prestige. This identification refigured the Orient not as radical Other, but as ancestral mirror. Chapter Three examines the collection of folk songs as an effort to construct a national past anterior to writing culture, in which the absence of textual transmission was reinterpreted as evidence of authenticity, collective memory preserved in oral form.

By tracing how the fields of natural history, Orientalism, and folk song collection intersected within the discourse of *Ursprünglichkeit*, this thesis reveals how concepts and terminologies migrated across disciplinary boundaries. It argues that Romantic literature offered representational means for apprehending temporal depth where scientific inquiry reached its limits, and that *Ursprünglichkeit* functioned as a cultural strategy for restoring coherence in the wake of historical and political fragmentation.

Long Abstract

At the close of the eighteenth century, European thought underwent a profound temporal dislocation. The discovery of what would later be called *Deep Time*, the recognition that the earth's history extended across epochs that dwarfed the span of human memory, shattered inherited frameworks of chronology and causation. Within a few decades, the measured certainties of biblical time gave way to geological speculation that expanded the planet's age beyond comprehension. Time itself ceased to appear as a linear, humanly proportioned narrative and became an abyssal medium, indifferent to human measure. The transformation of temporal imagination reverberated far beyond the sciences that first proposed it, unsettling the conceptual foundations of natural history, theology, and philology alike. In this climate, the question of origin acquired new urgency. How could meaning be constructed in a world whose earliest epochs appeared inhumanly vast and irrecoverable? How could a culture conceive of its beginnings when the very notion of a single, datable point of origin had become untenable?

My thesis examines how literature and thought in the decades around 1800 confronted this epistemic rupture through the concept of *Ursprünglichkeit*. The term, which resists simple translation, connotes at once *primevality* (temporal anteriority), *primordality* (a systematic or ontological first cause), *originality* (in the sense of the unprecedented or new), and *authenticity*. Its semantic elasticity was precisely its

strength. *Ursprünglichkeit* condensed diverse aspirations, such as the epistemological recovery of origins, the validation of cultural purity, the affirmation of aesthetic immediacy, into a single linguistic form – the *ur*-prefix. Rather than solely equating originality with the creative figure of the *Originalgenie*, my thesis understands *Ursprünglichkeit* more broadly as a collective and profoundly mediated form of cultural labour through which Romantic thinkers assembled genealogies and projected their modernity into the deep past. Throughout, I argue that *Ursprünglichkeit* served as a conceptual technology for translating disjunction into continuity. Romantic thinkers mobilised the concept to reimagine coherence in the wake of a twofold loss: epistemologically, the loss of a shared and measurable history of earth and mankind; and politically, the loss of imperial unity after the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806. In that vacuum, the discourse of origins became a surrogate for sovereignty. My project therefore asks two interconnected questions. First, how did Romantic writers integrate the vast, non-human durations of *Deep Time* into narrative frameworks of culture and history? Second, how did the concept of *Ursprünglichkeit* mediate the negotiation of identity in post-imperial Germany?

To address these questions, I combine methods from three complementary traditions. From *Deep Time studies* (Noah Heringman), I draw the insight that shifts in temporal consciousness often precede scientific codification: literature does not merely mirror geology but anticipates its imagination of depth. From the tradition of *Wissenspoetik* (Joseph Vogl), I adopt the premise that literature possesses epistemic agency and that Romantic texts generate, rather than merely reflect, knowledge. And from *discourse analysis* in a broadly Foucauldian sense, I adopt an analytic of formation. I ask not only what *Ursprünglichkeit* meant, but what it did: how it organised relations between knowledge and legitimacy, and how it allowed Romantic thinkers to convert conjecture into evidence. These methods together allow me to treat *Ursprünglichkeit* as a discourse that moves across domains and is responsive to crises of knowledge and power.

My Introduction begins lexicographically with the intention of establishing the conceptual field within which later discourses of origin operated and charting the performative force of linguistic form in securing claims to priority. I trace the semantics of *Ursprünglichkeit* and the prefix *ur*- in major eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century dictionaries, particularly Johann Christoph Adelung's *Grammatisch-kritisches Wörterbuch der Hochdeutschen Mundart* (1801) and Joachim Heinrich Campe's *Wörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache* (1811). The proliferation of *ur*-compounds around 1800 (such as *Urzeit*, *Ursprache*, *Urvolk*) was neither an accident of philological fashion nor restricted to definitions of temporal anteriority. *Ur*-compounds expressed a collective attempt to stabilise meaning and confer epistemic and moral authority at a moment when both the ground of history and the language of beginnings appeared to dissolve. As I show through detailed lemmatic investigation, to call something *ursprünglich* was to endow it with systematic priority and with authenticity often conceived as purity.

The first chapter, 'Deep Time, Originality and Novalis's Geo-Poetics', explores the encounter between Romantic literature and the abyssal temporalities of geology. In the late eighteenth century, the discoveries of figures such as Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon (1707–1788) and Georges Cuvier (1769–1832) exposed an earth millions of years old. This 'abyss of time', to speak in Buffon's words, was found devoid of human

presence, a notion that challenged the established biblical framework of a near simultaneous creation of earth and mankind. Scholars set out to try and merge the ruptured timelines of earth and humanity, searching for human fossils among the strata of the primeval earth, or trying to study the newly discovered temporal depth according to familiar antiquarian frames. The question that troubled the Romantic generation was: if cultural history occupied only a fragment of geological duration, how could human meaning still be inscribed in nature? The chapter demonstrates how Novalis's novels, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1802) and *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* (1802), stage this confrontation between human temporality and geological vastness. Where geology revealed discontinuity, Novalis's poetic imagination reconstituted continuity by symbolic means. Drawing on both the theological framework of Thomas Burnet's *Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1684) and the geognostic empiricism of his teacher Abraham Gottlob Werner (1749–1817) Novalis transformed the material strata of the earth into a legible script: stratigraphy became scripture; the fossil record, a form of memory. My analysis shows how Romantic narrative techniques, such as mythic framing, allegorical compression, and cyclical temporality, translate ungraspable natural duration into forms of reflection. Through this geo-poetic method in particular, Novalis reconceived the abyss of *Deep Time* as a site of potential, where the *Urwelt* (primeval world) becomes a primordial, timeless ideal and germ of future reconciliation between humanity and nature. In his work, Romanticism's encounter with geology appears as a means of thinking temporal scale through literary form.

The second chapter, 'Deep Time and Orientalism', turns from the depths beneath Europe to the imagined antiquity beyond it. After 1806 and the political dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire, questions of origin were relitigated. Without the legitimising structure of empire, German thinkers sought continuity in the deeper temporalities of language and myth. In this context, Orientalist philology provided a new foundation of legitimacy. Friedrich Schlegel's influential *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* (1808) advanced the claim that Sanskrit preserved a linguistic and spiritual antiquity surpassing that of Greek and Latin, and that affinities between Sanskrit and the Germanic languages disclosed a common Indo-Germanic lineage. Antiquity, once the prerogative of the classical Mediterranean, was thus displaced eastwards, and Germanness, long culturally peripheral, could now claim descent from the world's most ancient civilisation. I argue that this reorientation was governed by the logic of *Ursprünglichkeit*. The idea of an *Ursprache* conferred metaphysical weight upon comparative philology. To reconstruct it was to recover the moment when word and world were still commensurate, before modern differentiation and rationality fractured meaning. Schlegel's synthesis of speculative imagination and conjectural philology in the service of *Ursprünglichkeit* exemplifies what I term *identi-fiction*: the fusion of philological reconstruction and poetic invention that transforms scholarship into self-fashioning. '*Identi-fictional*' techniques extended into literature, as I show in the case of Otto Heinrich von Loeben's *Guido* (1808). Here, the Orient appears not as foreign territory but as ancestral mirror, a site where Romantic longing for unity could be projected and reclaimed. Through such texts, Orientalism works as a poetics of displaced self-recognition, an imaginative operation through which the German spirit defines itself by appropriating the antiquity of others. The chapter situates these works within the broader Romantic effort, represented by among others Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829), Joseph

Görres (1776–1848) and Othmar Frank (1770–1840), to reinscribe identity into a world where history itself had lost its moorings.

The third chapter, ‘Originality beyond *Originalgenie: Ursprünglichkeit*, Authenticity, and the German Folk Song Movement’, turns from imagined antiquity abroad to fabricated antiquity at home. The chapter examines the collection and paratextual arrangement of folk songs as an attempt to ground Germanness in vernacular tradition. Whereas geology dealt with epochs without record and philology with languages without a dateable and singular point of origin, folklore addressed national sentiments without a state to contain them. Herder’s concept of a poetic childhood of mankind, as developed in *Von Deutscher Art und Kunst* (1773), had already posited song as humanity’s primordial utterance: poetry before artifice, expression before reflection. Romantic collectors adopted this paradigm at a time where reason and reflection were associated with French modernity, transforming the staged absence of written transmission in their own traditions into a guarantee of authenticity. What lacked a text was deemed pure because it seemed unmediated. My readings of Friedrich Nicolai’s parody of the craze for original folk songs in *Kleyner Feyner Almanach* (1776–77), Anselm Elwert’s collection of allegedly ancient songs, *Ungedruckte Reste alten Gesangs* (1784), and the magazine *Wünschelrute* (1808), whose stated allegiance was to an ancient ‘Vaterland’, show how *Ursprünglichkeit* was enacted through editorial practice. In paratexts, editors constructed antiquity through acts of selection and normalisation, concealing their own interventions to produce an aesthetic of immediacy. The culmination of this process is *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (1806–08), where Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano assembled fragments of allegedly oral song into the semblance of a unified national voice. The songs appear to emanate from the timeless depths of the people, yet their coherence is the product of Romantic artifice. *Ursprünglichkeit*, in this context, emerges as an editorial technique, a means of converting the scattered into the whole, the local into the national, the mediated into the natural.

The originality of this study lies in three interlocking contributions. Firstly, my thesis demonstrates that literature did not passively echo scientific or philological discovery but was an active site of conceptual innovation. Novalis’s narratives, for example, develop speculative models of temporal continuity with the deep past and condense the dizzying immensity of geological time, its *primeval* remoteness, into notions of *primordial* time, where the ideal of *Urzeit* could be imagined to return as a future Golden Age. Secondly, the thesis reconceives *Ursprünglichkeit* as a performative strategy across disciplines and domains, rather than functioning as a merely descriptive label: in geology, it transforms the abyss of nature into a legible narrative; in philology, it converts distant origins into ancestral legitimacy; in folklore, it turns the absence of textuality into proof of authenticity. *Ursprünglichkeit*’s efficacy was thus derived from its elasticity. The same term could designate temporal remoteness, structural priority, or morally charged authenticity. By tracing how *ur*-compounds migrate across scientific, philological, and literary registers, I reconstruct the discursive economy that allowed origin to acquire the aura of evidence.

Thirdly, by situating these discourses within post-1806 contexts, the study positions *Ursprünglichkeit* as both a political and intellectual construct. The collapse of the Holy Roman Empire and the Napoleonic occupation shattered older frameworks of authority. In that perceived vacuum, the search for origins became a surrogate for sovereignty: Orientalist philology appropriated India’s antiquity, while folklore reconstructed a

national prehistory. Romanticism's turn to origin thus appears not as escapism, but as an act of cultural self-assertion, a way of imagining continuity when both history and polity seemed broken. Finally, the thesis draws on extensive archival work, including the examination of unpublished or rarely studied materials, such as Otto von Loeben's manuscripts or Othmar Frank's philological works, which illuminate the varied networks of influence and collaboration underpinning Romantic constructions of originality. By bringing non-canonical figures and neglected sources into dialogue with major writers, the thesis expands the contours of the Romantic corpus and reconstructs a more complex intellectual field than has been assumed.

While my study remains historical in focus, its implications resonate beyond Romanticism. The problem that animated early nineteenth-century thought, namely the effort to locate human meaning within vast, non-human temporalities, has returned with renewed force in contemporary debates on the Anthropocene. Romantic strategies of *Ursprünglichkeit* reveal both the seduction and the peril of seeking orientation in beginnings. They remind us that every appeal to the origin is also an act of invention, that the past we invoke to ground ourselves is always already a construction of the present. Recovering *Ursprünglichkeit* as a discursive formation thus illuminates not merely a historical episode but a persistent human tendency: to make coherence imaginable by returning to what lies before.

Acknowledgements

I gratefully acknowledge the Katritzky Foundation–Heath Harrison Fund for the award of a doctoral stipend, which generously supported me throughout this project. I am also grateful for the Marbach Scholarship, which enabled an archival stay at the Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach.

Above all, I would like to thank my supervisor, Prof. Barry Murnane, for his unwavering support at every stage of the project and beyond; for his expertise, advice, and encouragement; and, not least, for his patience with me. I am also deeply grateful to my examiners: Prof. Katrin Kohl, for my Confirmation of Status, and Prof. Charlie Louth and Prof. Angus Nicholls, for the viva. Their advice and feedback have been invaluable. I would also like to thank Henrike Lähnemann, who has accompanied my learning since I first set foot in Oxford. I am grateful, too, to Prof. Achim Aurnhammer and Prof. Bernhard Zimmermann, who saw this project in its fledgling state and offered much-appreciated guidance at this early stage.

I would like to thank the staff of the Bodleian Libraries, the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, and the Deutsches Literaturarchiv Marbach. I am especially grateful to the staff of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek for their help with deciphering manuscripts from the Loeben-Nachlass, and to the staff at Marbach for giving me the opportunity to work with archival materials and to contribute to an exhibition on literature and song. Part of the third chapter of this thesis is based on an article published in a volume on *Unoriginelle Literatur um 1800*, and I would like to thank the editors, Prof. Erika Thomalla and Prof. Annika Hildebrandt, for their invaluable feedback on my contribution.

I owe more than I can say to my parents, Hansveit and Angela, without whose support I would not have reached the end of this degree. In our many conversations, my father taught me much about the history of geology, and I hope he would have been glad to see that some of it has found its way into this thesis, even if he did not live to see its completion. My mother, whose bookshelves first nurtured my passion for literature, has shown remarkable empathy and generosity in supporting me in a sphere of work that must, from the outside, often seem rather alien.

My friends have shown me the human side of academia and kept me going. Thank you to Anhad, Conor, Sophia, Sarah, Konradin and Luise for your support and conversation; for patiently hearing out my ideas; and for proofreading this thesis. Anhad has seen me through all of it, giving me both the inspiration and the resilience I needed to cross the line: actively, through proofreading and discussing ideas, and passively, by standing as a role model and showing me what philology might mean.

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Notes to the Reader

Abbreviations

DKW: Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano, *Des Knaben Wunderhorn. Alte deutsche Lieder, gesammelt von Achim von Arnim und Clemens Brentano. Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. by Heinz Rölleke, 3 vols (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1987)

HS: Heinrich Heine, *Säkularausgabe: Werke, Briefwechsel, Lebenszeugnisse*, ed. by Klassik Stiftung Weimar und Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 30 vols (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1970–)

HW: Johann Gottfried Herder, *Werke in zehn Bänden*, ed. by Ulrich Gaier and others, 10 vols (Frankfurt a.M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985–2000)

NS: Novalis, *Schriften, Historisch-kritische Ausgabe in vier Bänden, einem Materialband und einem Ergänzungsband mit dem dichterischen Jugendnachlaß und weiteren neu aufgetauchten Handschriften*, ed. by Richard Samuel, Hans-Joachim Mähl and Gerhard Schulz (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer: 1960–1988).

KFSA: Schlegel, Friedrich, *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*, ed. by Ernst Behler and others (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1958–)

FA: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Sämtliche Werke, Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche in 40 Bänden*, ed. by Friedmar Apel and others, 40 vols (Frankfurt a.M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985–1999)

*Parts of Chapter Three of this thesis have appeared in German in an edited volume: 'Unoriginelle Originale. Nachahmung und die Ästhetik des Unverfälschten in Volksliededitionen des späten 18. Jahrhunderts', in *Unoriginelle Literatur um 1800. Nachahmung nach der Nachahmungspoetik* (Zeitschrift für Germanistik), ed. by A. Hildebrandt and E. Thomalla (Bern: Lang, 2024), pp. 121–150.

Introduction

Vorzüglich ist ur anwendbar in der Bedeutung: eher [...], oder eherst=erst. Adam ist nach der Bibel der Urvater, Ewa di Urmutter [...]. Si waren di Ur- oder Erstbewohner der Urerde, in der Ur- oder Erstzeit, darin di Ursprache iren Urbeginn hatte; ihr Urstand oder Urzustand ist uns nicht durch Urkunden umständlich bekant geworden, den di Urschrift oder Urschreibekunst wurde erst nach Tausendjaren erfunden. Di Urkenntnis oder Urwissenschaft der Urältern war gewis nicht grosumfangig. Di Urwelt, das Ural war inen gants fremd [...]. Wüste und Urgewirre (chaos) war noch mancher Flekken auf der Erde. Wer mögte nicht gern di urlichen oder ursprunglichen, ur- oder erstzeitigen Dinge und Begebenheiten wissen? zB. ob der Urort der Urmenschen im Wasser oder auf dem festen Lande war, usw. Aber der Urheber des Weltalles hat di Urgeschichte der Menschen in den Ersttausendjaren uns nicht mitgeteilt.¹

The sheer proliferation of compounds in this excerpt may perplex modern readers: is it a parody, a satirical nod to late eighteenth-century academic jargon? Or perhaps a product of the encyclopaedic flights of associative thought that Michel Foucault famously linked to the early-modern episteme?² Peculiar spelling notwithstanding, what truly commands attention is the almost obsessive recurrence of the prefix *ur-*, which appears in nearly one-fifth of the words. And yet, for all its linguistic oddity, the passage was not penned in jest.³ Its author, Christian Heinrich Wolke (1741–1825), an eighteenth-century polymath and sometime assistant to Johann Bernhard Basedow (1724–1790), composed it as part of a historical reflection on the German language. The prevalence of *ur-* compounds is more than just a stylistic eccentricity: Wolke's depiction of an *Urwelt* (primeval world), where the *Urzustand* (primordial condition) of *Urmenschen* (primitive, or original people) and their *Ursprache* (original language) unfolded, exemplifies a broader intellectual trend

¹ Christian Heinrich Wolke, *Anleit zur deutschen Gesamtsprache oder zur Erkennung und Berichtigung einiger (zu wenigst 20) tausend Sprachfehler in der hochdeutschen Mundart [...]* (Dresden, Leipzig: Reclam, 1812), p. 148.

² Cf. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Pantheon, 1970).

³ For a humoristic comment on the German obsession with the prefix *ur-*, cf. August von Platen's *Der Gläserne Pantoffel* (1823), where he puns on the name 'Ursula', and the words 'Uranfang' and 'Urangutang', August von Platen, *Gesammelte Werke in fünf Bänden*, III (Stuttgart, Tübingen: Cotta, 1843), p. 65.

around 1800: the drive to reconstruct – or, at times, construct – origins as sites of intellectual and cultural authority.⁴

For Wolke and his contemporaries, the prefix *ur-* functioned as a conceptual shorthand for *Ursprünglichkeit*, attributing to each compound a dual sense of systematic ‘firstness’ and temporal remoteness.⁵ These terms evoke not simply antiquity, but a primordial state whose authority underwrites all subsequent developments. The distinction between what is merely old and what is *ursprünglich* becomes decisive when we consider the term *Urbeginn*. While *Beginn* marks a chronological starting point, *Urbeginn* refers to a foundational inception, one that shapes and sustains the very meaning of what follows. Johann Christoph Adelung captures this with the tautological phrase ‘der erste Anfang’, explicitly calling *Urbeginn* an ‘*ursprünglichen Beginn*’, and explains that the term refers to ‘das erste seiner Art’,⁶ from which a type subsequently evolves. In this way, the prefix *ur-* does more than signal temporal priority. It invests that priority with explanatory authority and transforms mere precedence into a generative principle.

The prefix’s conceptual charge becomes especially clear when we widen our lens from etymology to intellectual history. Wolke’s use of *ur-* compounds opens a window onto the intellectual climate around 1800, where questions of origin and authenticity preoccupied thinkers across a range of disciplines, each of which employed their rhetoric of originality

⁴ Raymond Schwab speaks of ‘[t]he great preoccupation with human origins which had grown to fever pitch in the eighteenth century’, cf. Raymond Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance: Europe’s Rediscovery of India and the East, 1680–1880* (New York: Columbia UP, 1984), p. 210.

⁵ Cf. *Urworte: Zur Geschichte und Funktion erstbegründender Begriffe*, ed. by Michael Ott and Tobias Döring (Munich: Fink, 2012), p. 13.

⁶ Johann Christoph Adelung, *Grammatisch-kritisches Wörterbuch der Hochdeutschen Mundart, mit beständiger Vergleichung der übrigen Mundarten besonders aber der Oberdeutschen*, 2nd edn (Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1801), iv, *Seb–Z*, c. 959.

to different ends. Most prominently, Wolke's references to Adam as *Urvater* and Eve as *Urmutter* invoke a biblical framework, where *Ursprünglichkeit* designates the origins of Christian humanity and provides an origin story framed by divine providence.⁷ Yet Wolke's scope is not confined to biblical exegesis. He gestures towards other domains of knowledge which intersect with theological concerns. For instance, *Ursprache* and *Urschrift* evoke one of the era's most fervent scholarly pursuits: the search for the origins of language, and, concomitantly, the attempt to uncover the linguistic roots of human civilisation. The late eighteenth century saw a proliferation of such inquiries, not least Johann Gottfried Herder's prize-winning essay on the subject.⁸ This quest for linguistic origins, in turn, overlapped with anthropological inquiries. Herder located his *Ursprache* within early human communities, aligning it, in part, with Rousseau's ideal of the 'natural man'.⁹ The entanglement of *Ursprache* and *Urbewohner* in Wolke's text reflects this intellectual trend, in which the fields of anthropology and linguistics emerge as cognate in their shared attempts to uncover humanity's beginnings.

Wolke's reference to *Urgeschichte* opens yet another avenue of inquiry.¹⁰ The term itself suggests that the *Urzeit* (the 'dawn of time') could be treated as history even in the

⁷ As early as 1655, Isaac de La Peyrère suggested that the Bible merely told the story of the first Christians, and that there existed men before Adam, cf. Isaac de la Peyrère, *Præ-Adamitæ. Sive Exercitatio super versibus duodecimo, decimotertio, & decimoquarto, capitis quinti Epistolæ D. Pauli ad Romanos. Quibus inducuntur primi homines ante Adamum conditi* (Leiden: n. pub., 1655).

⁸ For an overview, cf. Avi Lifschitz, *Language and Enlightenment: The Berlin Debates of the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford: OUP, 2012). Cf. also Nigel DeSouza, 'Language, Reason, and Sociability: Herder's Critique of Rousseau', *Intellectual History Review*, 22 (2012), pp. 221–240.

⁹ For example, Rousseau's notion that 'the first languages were singable and passionate before they became simple and methodical', emerges across all of Herder's early oeuvre; cf. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, 'Essay on the Origin of Languages', in *On the Origin of Language. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Essay on the Origin of Languages; Johann Gottfried Herder, Essay on the Origin of Language*, ed. by John Moran and Alexandra Gode (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 12. For a discussion of a set of positions and theories shared by both Rousseau and Herder, cf. Frederick M. Barnard, *Herder on Nationality, Humanity, and History* (Montreal, Ithaca: McGill-Queen's UP, 2003), pp. 39–41, and Eva Piirimäe, 'Philosophy, Sociability and Modern Patriotism: Young Herder between Rousseau and Abbt', *History of European Ideas*, 41 (2015), pp. 640–61.

¹⁰ Wolke, *Anleit zur deutschen Gesamtsprache*, p. 139.

absence of written records – a notion that was not universally accepted in Wolke’s time. August Ludwig Schlözer (1735–1809), a Göttingen historian and contemporary of Wolke, initially relegated *Urzeit* to the realm of philosophy, arguing in his 1772 *Universalhistorie* that historical inquiry required textual documentation and thus began only with the advent of writing.¹¹ By the end of the century, however, Schlözer had revised his stance. In his *Weltgeschichte* (1792), he emphasises the significance of the earth’s *Urzeit* for understanding universal processes of transformation that also govern human history. In a striking passage, Schlözer imagines a ‘Naturforscher’ surveying the Alpine peaks, marvelling at the earth’s rugged surface – its fractured rock faces offering physical evidence of revolutions beyond human influence – and digging into the earth’s layered crust to uncover the primeval forces of nature. Only after this empirical groundwork does the scientist turn to early written records, such as the biblical account of Moses, to corroborate his findings.¹² This interplay between empirical and textual evidence reflects a broader shift in late eighteenth-century historiography towards incorporating earth history into universal history.¹³

In a similar vein, Wolke’s brief mention of water or dry land as the original habitat of *Urbewohner* alludes to contemporary geognostic debates that had started to incorporate empirical evidence into natural history, particularly in the context of the rivalry between

¹¹ August Ludwig von Schlözer, *August Ludwig Schlözers Vorstellung seiner Universal-Historie* (Germany: Dieterich, 1772).

¹² Schlözer, *Universal-Historie*, p. 20.

¹³ For a discussion of what Alexander Kling and Jana Schuster call the ‘material turn’ – the empiricist use of physical evidence such as fossils or rock strata to explain earth history, see Alexander Kling and Jana Schuster, ‘Zeiten der Materie. Zur wissenschaftlichen Einführung’, in *Zeiten der Materie: Verflechtungen temporaler Existenzformen in Wissenschaft und Literatur* (1770–1900), ed. by Alexander Kling and Jana Schuster (Hannover: Wehrhahn, 2021), pp. 7–48. Cf. also Wolf Lepenies, *Das Ende der Naturgeschichte: Wandel kultureller Selbstverständlichkeiten in den Wissenschaften des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: Hanser, 1976).

Neptunism and Plutonism.¹⁴ The former, which subsequently came to be associated with the Freiberg geognost Abraham Gottlob Werner (1749–1817),¹⁵ attributed the formation of the earth’s crust to sedimentary processes driven by water, while the latter, advanced by figures such as James Hutton (1726–1797),¹⁶ saw fire and subterranean heat as the key geological forces. Wolke’s invocation of elemental origins aligns his *Urgeschichte* not only with theological and anthropological frameworks, but also points towards contemporary scientific attempts to explain the deep past in empirical terms.¹⁷

Wolke’s seamless integration of diverse *ur*-compounds thus emphasises the complexity of the intellectual landscape from which they emerged. At the close of the eighteenth century, no single discipline held a monopoly over the investigation of the conjoined history of the earth and mankind. Biblical exegesis, natural history, philosophy, comparative philology, and the nascent science of geognosy all contributed to the discourse surrounding *ur*-phenomena.¹⁸ Wolke’s prolific use of *ur*-, then, not only reflects the broader intellectual fascination with *Ursprünglichkeit*, but also suggests a unifying vision: *Urwelt*, *Urbewohner*, and *Ursprache* partake in the same idea of originality – one

¹⁴ Cf. also August Ludwig von Schlözer, *Weltgeschichte nach ihren HauptTheilen im Auszug und Zusammenhange. Erster Theil: Einleitung, I. Ur-Welt, II. Dunkle Welt, III. Vor-Welt*, 2nd edn (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1792), p. 23. For an overview of Neptunist and Plutonist ideas, and their influence on theories assuming a slow and gradual or catastrophic change of the earth, cf. Charles Coulston Gillispie, *Genesis and Geology: A Study in the Relations of Scientific Thought, Natural Theology, and Social Opinion in Great Britain, 1790–1850* (Cambridge, MA: CUP, 1996).

¹⁵ Cf. Robert Jameson, *The Wernerian Theory of the Neptunian Origin of Rocks* [A facsimile reprint of *Elements of Geognosy*, 1808] (New York: Hafner Press, 1976); Martin Guntau, *Abraham Gottlob Werner* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1984).

¹⁶ Cf. Gillispie, *Genesis and Geology*, p. 44.

¹⁷ On the association of depth with antiquity, cf. David Schulz, *Die Natur der Geschichte: Die Entdeckung der geologischen Tiefenzeit und die Geschichtskonzeptionen zwischen Aufklärung und Moderne* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), especially the section ‘Schlözers transhumane Geschichtsschreibung’, pp. 213–15. On the relationship of empirical evidence and theoretical speculation within late-eighteenth-century natural history, cf. Martin Rudwick, *Bursting the Limits of Time: The Reconstruction of Geohistory in the Age of Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 179–80.

¹⁸ For a general overview of the organisation and institutionalisation of different disciplines engaged with the discourse of originality, cf. *Romanticism and the Sciences*, ed. by Andrew Cunningham and Nicholas Jardine (Cambridge: CUP, 1990).

that would prove remarkably adaptable to the epistemological and ideological demands of the age.

This thesis examines these related ideas of originality around 1800 as a structured discourse grounded in a shared episteme that privileged ‘first things’ as sources of authority. This discourse of originality, I argue, operated through a self-reinforcing logic: it generated meaning by affirming the very origins it purported to uncover. Wolke’s linguistic practice offers a case in point. In his passage, *ur*-compounds draw on a wide range of cultural and historical reference points, yet they operate within a tightly interwoven semantic field. The force of each term emerges from its position in this field, where the unexamined assumption of *Ursprünglichkeit* passes from one expression to another, consolidating their collective authority. The result is a closed circuit in which originality legitimates itself without recourse to independent verification. This internal coherence, however, masks a critical vulnerability: claims to primacy are detached from temporal specificity and from criteria that could be empirically tested. It is precisely this detachment from measurable history – its dates and chronologies – that allows originality to serve as a versatile organising principle across disparate cultural domains.

Central to my investigation into how discourses of originality mobilised notions of temporal depth, structural primacy, and authenticity, is the conceptual weight carried by the term *ursprünglich* itself. As alluded to earlier, translating the term into English reveals a constellation of meanings: primordial (a systematic or ontological first cause), primeval (temporal anteriority), original (in the sense of the unprecedented, or new), and authentic. Translation, here, offers an analytic lens that brings into focus what the German term smooths over. Terms such as primordial, primeval, and primitive foreground the latent nuances within *Ursprünglichkeit*, revealing how the discourse of

originality operated across layered, sometimes even conflicting registers. Accordingly, I approach *Ursprünglichkeit* as a cultural project – that is, the attempt to reconcile competing claims to intellectual tradition and cultural heritage. The task of translating and thus refashioning the term into a usable foundation for epistemological enquiry prompts us to ask not only how *Ursprünglichkeit* functions within specific contexts, but also why German thought was so heavily invested in origins as a site of meaning around 1800. What is needed, then, is a method that treats *Ursprünglichkeit* as a contested terrain – at once a site of intellectual negotiation and cultural aspiration – and that is attentive to the aesthetic and discursive mechanisms through which *ur*-compounds perform their conceptual labour.

My corpus intentionally sidesteps canonical hierarchies, placing neglected works, such as Otto von Loeben's *Guido* (1808) or Othmar Frank's *Das Licht vom Orient* (1808), alongside more familiar texts by Novalis or Friedrich Schlegel. I group them to highlight their common investment in the rhetorical and figural strategies through which *Ursprünglichkeit* was imagined, contested, and made culturally legible. By bringing together texts typically assigned to different strands of Romanticism – Novalis's novels (Chapter One), Orientalist philology (Chapter Two), and the folk song revival (Chapter Three) – I argue that what is often cast as a stylistic and thematic fragmentation of the Romantic period is in fact structured by a shared imaginary of origins. In this context, I adopt a Foucauldian model of discourse, viewing it not as a mere collection of statements, but as a generative system that produces knowledge, organises perception, and distributes authority.¹⁹ Discourse, in this sense, is not reducible to ideology or

¹⁹ Foucault uses the metaphor of a 'grid' to describe the system underlying all scientific production (p. xxi), and asks for the 'conditions' that scientists 'have to fulfil [...] to give it [...] value and practical application as scientific discourse', in Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. xiv. 'Order', in turn, is defined on p. xx as 'that

content; it is a system of rules, procedures, and conventions that shape what can be said, thought, or known.²⁰

To trace the discourse of *Ursprünglichkeit* around 1800 is thus to attend not only to content but also to form and mode of circulation. This approach draws on scholarship in *Wissenspoetik*,²¹ which understands literature less as a mirror of external disciplines than as a site where knowledge is generated, tested and transformed.²² Romantic texts routinely blur the boundaries between scientific speculation, historical reconstruction, and poetic invention.²³ Their claim to knowledge lies in probing the limits of objectivity – limits made visible, and sometimes dramatised, through aesthetic form. My reading foregrounds this reflexivity. Literature becomes a medium through which questions of the origin of language, the structure of history, or the age of the earth are both narrativised and imaginatively reconfigured. Here, form is not merely ancillary to thought but emerges as a mode of inquiry in its own right, for instance, through recurring narrative patterns, play with generic conventions, and intertextual echoes. In this light, literature appears

which is given in things as their inner law, the hidden network that determines the way they confront one another, and also that which has no existence except in the grid created by a glance, an examination, a language’.

²⁰ In *Order of Things*, Foucault calls his approach ‘archeological’, because it targets ‘a *positive unconscious* of knowledge’, assuming that ‘unknown to themselves, the naturalists, economists, and grammarians employed the same rules to define the objects proper to their own study, to form their concepts, to build their theories’, Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. xi.

²¹ For a definition of the field, cf. Joseph Vogl, ‘Poetologie des Wissens’, in *Poetik: Historische Narrative und aktuelle Positionen*, ed. by Armen Avanessian and Jan Niklas Howe (Berlin: Kadmos, 2014), pp. 145–64, p. 146.

²² Central to the study of *Wissenspoetik* is a focus on literature’s reflexivity, the meaning of literary form, the interdisciplinary background of literary texts, and their grounding in historical and cultural contexts. Cf. for instance the concept of a *Wissenspoetik* in Joseph Vogl, *Poetologien des Wissens um 1800* (Munich: Fink, 1999); Petra Renneke, *Poesie und Wissen: Poetologie des Wissens der Moderne* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2008).

²³ Cf. Nina Amstutz and Gregor Wedekind, ‘Einleitung’ in *Das Bild der Natur in der Romantik: Kunst als Philosophie und Wissenschaft*, ed. by Nina Amstutz and others (Paderborn: Fink, 2021). Remigius Bunia analyses Novalis’s merging of scientific discourse with poetry as deliberate epistemological stance; cf. Remigius Bunia, *Romantischer Rationalismus: Zu Wissenschaft, Politik und Religion bei Novalis* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2013), pp. 73–4.

not as a passive recipient of scientific and historical paradigms, but as an active agent in their production,²⁴ capable of anticipating or unsettling disciplinary frameworks before they were formally codified.

This reflexive dimension becomes especially important when Romantic texts confront vast temporal scales. In this context, I draw on the theoretical model of ‘Deep Time’,²⁵ developed most influentially by Noah Heringman. By the final decades of the eighteenth century, the earth had begun to age at a disorienting rate. Where once a biblical chronology estimated the planet’s age at roughly 6,500 years, thinkers such as George-Louis Leclerc de Buffon, began to speculate – tentatively in public, more radically in private – about an earth millions of years old.²⁶ These temporal recalibrations reframed the earth as an object with its own deep, pre-human history, a ‘plot without man’,²⁷ shaped less by divine fiat than by slow natural processes stretching beyond the limits of human memory. The term Deep Time,²⁸ first coined by John McPhee and popularised by Stephen Jay Gould, encapsulates this radical disjunction between human and geological timescales. In *Time’s Arrow, Time’s Cycle* (1987), Gould identifies two competing metaphors shaping earth history: the irreversible linearity of ‘time’s arrow’ and the

²⁴ Cf. for instance Angela Oster, ‘Schreiben auf der surface du globe: Naturgeschichte um 1800 zwischen Biologie und Ästhetik bei Georges Cuvier,’ in *Zwischen Literatur und Naturwissenschaft: Debatten – Probleme – Visionen 1680–1820*, ed. by Rudolf Freiburg, Christine Lubkoll, and Harald Neumeyer (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2017), pp. 189–220. Oster examines the relationship of literary or poetic modes of writing and scientific inquiry in Georges Cuvier’s works.

²⁵ Cf. Noah Heringman, *Deep Time: A Literary History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023). In recent decades, Deep Time has gained theoretical significance, particularly in Ecocriticism and Anthropocene studies, cf. Dipesh Chakrabarty, ‘The Climate of History: Four Theses’, *Critical Inquiry* 35:2 (2009), pp. 197–222; *Architecture in the Anthropocene: Encounters among Design, Deep Time, Science and Philosophy*, ed. by Étienne Turpin (Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, 2013).

²⁶ Cf. Martin J. S. Rudwick, *Earth’s Deep History: How It Was Discovered and Why It Matters* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), p. 66.

²⁷ Gillian Beer, *Darwin’s Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 2nd edn (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), p. 17.

²⁸ John McPhee, *Basin and Range* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1981). Noah Heringman, however, points out that the concept of ‘Deep Time’ was first expressed in Science Fiction literature, cf. Heringman, *Deep Time*, p. 2.

cyclical, regenerative logic of ‘time’s cycle’.²⁹ These cyclical concepts of time are central to understanding Novalis’s geo-poetic model of history and mythical recurrence, as I aim to show in Chapter One. In *Deep Time: A Literary History* (2023), Heringman focuses specifically on the literary and philosophical responses that sought to reckon with that disorientation. These responses took shape as symbolic and narrative forms capable of grasping the immensity – and instability – of origins. Romantic literature was, I argue, deeply implicated in this project. It did not passively absorb the chronologies of geology or scripture, but actively reshaped them, experimenting with speculative orders of time.

In seeking to make Romantic literature – despite its polycentric character and stylistic diversity – intelligible as a period invested in *Ursprünglichkeit*, my aim is not to quantify the respective contributions of the natural sciences, philology, and literature to this discourse. Rather, I challenge the assumption of a one-way flow of knowledge from science to cultural production. The claim is not that literary discourse shaped the empirical or theoretical specifics of emerging sciences. Instead, I argue that around 1800, literature and science were jointly implicated in a reconfiguration of temporal consciousness: scientific inquiry extended the scale of natural history, while literary and philological practices rendered that extension culturally and historically legible. In this respect, literature and philology functioned as co-ordinate sites of epistemic negotiation; they participated in determining what counts as an epistemological problem, and elaborated the conceptual forms through which the resulting instability could be addressed. In the anglophone context, Heringman’s research has already proposed a revisionist model that foregrounds literature as a site of epistemic innovation. My own

²⁹ Stephen Jay Gould, *Time’s Arrow, Time’s Cycle: Myth and Metaphor in der Discovery of Geological Time* (Cambridge, MA: HUP, 1987).

approach extends this intervention to the German tradition where questions of originality and Deep Time unfolded within a markedly different intellectual and political landscape. As scholars such as Todd Kontje have shown, the Romantic fascination with temporal depth served to construct a deep national past, an effort born of Germany's perceived marginality within Europe's imperial order.³⁰ The construction of a *Kulturnation*, a nation defined not by territorial dominance but by imagined cultural depth, found narrative expression in accounts of origin that reached beyond the limits of Europe's recorded history.

What initially appears as a thematic coincidence between the discovery of geological Deep Time and the rise of cultural myths of origin reveals itself, upon closer examination, as a structural entanglement. As biblical chronology was gradually decoupled from natural history in the late eighteenth century,³¹ a conceptual vacuum opened up: a space no longer governed by divine providence, but not yet fully claimed by empirical science. Romantic thinkers moved to fill this vacuum with a secularised myth of human antiquity. Excluded from the early epochs of earth's formation, humanity was reimagined – beginning with Herder – as primeval figures dwelling in harmony with nature, uncorrupted by modernity, in a vaguely remote *Urzeit*.³² At the beginning of the nineteenth century, this

³⁰ Todd Kontje, *Imperial Fictions: German Literature Before and Beyond the Nation-State* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018), p. 99; Susanne Zantop, *Colonial Fantasies: Conquest, Family, and Nation in Precolonial Germany, 1770–1870* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997).

³¹ An intermediate step was the introduction of historiographical methodology to biblical exegesis in the eighteenth century to defend the concept of *historia sacra*, cf. Walter Sparr, 'Auf dem Weg zur theologischen Aufklärung in Halle: Von Johann Franz Budde zu Siegmund Jakob Baumgarten', in *Zentren der Aufklärung I. Halle. Aufklärung und Pietismus*, ed. by Norbert Hinske (Heidelberg: Schneider, 1989), pp. 71–89, and Walter Sparr, 'Vernünftiges Christentum: Über die geschichtliche Aufgabe der theologischen Aufklärung im 18. Jahrhundert in Deutschland', in *Wissenschaften im Zeitalter der Aufklärung*, ed. by Rudolf Vierhaus (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 1985), pp. 18–57.

³² For a description of an early state of poetic expression, and man living in unison with nature, cf. HW, IV, ed. by Jürgen Brummack and Martin Bollacher, 'Über die Wirkung der Dichtkunst auf die Sitten der Völker in alten und neuen Zeiten', pp. 155–56.

imagined deep past gained a distinctly nationalist inflection. In the German context, the deep past became the site of a cultural myth in which the ancient German people were stylised as pure, self-sufficient, and spiritually whole.³³ This narrative gained particular urgency during the Napoleonic occupation, which sharpened the ideological contrast between a modern, rationalised, imperial France and a deeper, supposedly untainted German past.³⁴

Within this oppositional frame, the so-called Orient entered the Romantic imagination. As paradigms of empire and civilisation came to be emblematised by France, German thinkers – keenly aware of their perceived cultural belatedness – sought alternative lineages. In place of the dominant, Roman-imperial inheritance imputed to the French, German intellectuals sought kinship elsewhere, reimagining their cultural origins in relation to a more ancient antiquity that could resonate with their own fragmented political situation. One strand of antiquity was the more familiar Greek, manifesting in the cultural constant of German Graecophilia or Philhellenism, which as Suzanne Marchand has noted had become an institutional part of the ‘national patrimony’ by 1871.³⁵ Another involved the Orient, which offered yet another influential symbolic resource: a set of images, ideas, and historical narratives that could be appropriated for domestic cultural purposes.

³³ For a genealogy of these tropes in the context of the German reception of Tacitus, cf. Christopher B. Krebs, *A Most Dangerous Book: Tacitus's Germania from the Roman Empire to the Third Reich* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 2011), and Id., ‘A Dangerous Book, The Reception of the Germania’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Tacitus*, ed. by A. J. Woodman (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), pp. 280–299.

³⁴ Cf. Karen Hagemann, ‘Francophobia and Patriotism: Anti-French Images and Sentiments in Prussia and Northern Germany during the Anti-Napoleonic Wars’, *French History* 18.4 (2004), pp. 404–25. Roger Brubaker discusses the idea of Germany as a linguistic and cultural community as opposed to political national identity of the French. Cf. Roger Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge, MA: HUP, 1992), p. 1.

³⁵ Suzanne Marchand, *Down from Olympus: Archaeology and Philhellenism in Germany, 1750–1790* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. xix.

Marchand has highlighted the often ambivalent relationship of these various antiquities to each other and their susceptibility to manipulation by a German party. Both Classical and Orientalist models seemed to work dialectically. While the professional discipline of *Orientalistik* could claim to challenge the rigours of *Altertumswissenschaft* as the nineteenth century wore on, Marchand argues that it was possible in a proto-institutional sense to have ‘fascinations with both the Orient and with Classical Antiquity’ around 1800.³⁶ A number of thinkers featured below, among them Friedrich Schlegel, made ‘contributions to classical and Orientalist scholarship’, sometimes by playing the findings or speculation of the latter against the former: their interest in Orientalism was either set against the humanist backdrop of Classical philological learning, or motivated by the pursuit of Western antiquities.³⁷

The metaphor Marchand uses is Goethean: ‘two hearts to beat in one breast’, and Goethe himself could at once cultivate the Greek and produce the *West-östlicher Divan* (publ. 1819).³⁸ Schlegel’s career was no less double. In *Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* (1808) explored below, however, he shows himself in an Orientalist camp, advocating spiritual kinship with the East in order to construct a sense of Deep Time for his own national culture, and thereby positioning Germany as the heir to an older, non-imperial legacy. At least in this treatise, not only did such a rhetorical strategy polemically downplay the received emphasis on Classical primacy, which had reigned in his earlier

³⁶ Suzanne Marchand, *Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race, and Scholarship* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), p. 54, though she offers the caveat on p. 56: ‘We should not, however, overemphasise the parity of classical and oriental passion in this era [...] There was too much residual hatred for the Turks, resentment towards the Jews and indifference toward all the other cultures of the East to ground an orientophilia that would have resembled Winckelmannian philhellenism’.

³⁷ Marchand, *Orientalism in the Age of Empire*, p. 54; both the split in scholarly tradition and the overlap in Philhellenic and Orientalist fascination is evidenced as early as the 1810s with the famous spat involving the ‘iconoclastic classicist’ Friedrich Creuzer, one of the earliest practitioners of *Mythengeschichte* or *Mythenforschung*, cf. *Orientalism in the Age of Empire*, pp. 66–71.

³⁸ Marchand, *Orientalism in the Age of Empire*, p. 53.

1790s work, in favour of an easily appropriable ‘German’ origin history. More broadly, the turn towards the Orient allowed such writers to criticise the cultural authority of contemporary Western empires by invoking the particularities of researched antiquity for an historical, intellectual, and above all, political equivalence. By presenting Germany as the ‘Orient of Europe’, as his brother August Wilhelm put it in his ‘Vorlesungen über die romantische Poesie’ in 1804,³⁹ such thinkers cast Germany as distinct from, and morally superior to, the contemporary colonial powers they opposed.⁴⁰

At the same time, German philology took on a quasi-anthropological mission: not merely to analyse language, but to recover a supposed native antiquity preserved in folk traditions. Where the East had been imagined as a land of unbroken tradition and spiritual depth, similar qualities were now sought in Germany’s own dialects, myths, and songs, each recast as a vessel of an authentic and ancient cultural essence. In this context, the folk song emerged as a privileged emblem of Germany’s cultural Deep Time, a surviving specimen of an elusive period belonging to the realm of *ur-*. The folk song’s oral transmission, resistance to textual fixity, and temporal indeterminacy made it uniquely receptive to projections of Deep Time. Because it appeared to bypass written history altogether, the folk song could be imagined as both ancient and timeless: a spontaneous, pre-civilisational utterance resonant with Herder’s vision of humanity’s ‘childhood’ as a period of sensuousness and song. In this form, the folk song appeared to condense the very synthesis Romantic thinkers admired in the East, namely a culturally pure,

³⁹ Cf. August Wilhelm Schlegel, ‘Vorlesungen über die romantische Poesie [1803–1804]’, in *August Wilhelm Schlegel: Kritische Ausgabe der Vorlesungen (KAV)*, ed. by Ernst Behler and Georg Braungart (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1989–), II.1: *Vorlesungen über Ästhetik 1803–1827*, ed. by G. Braungart (2007), pp. 1–194, p. 25.

⁴⁰ Todd Kontje, *German Orientalisms* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), p. 8. According to Kontje, the absence of any territorial stakes allowed German Orientalists around 1800 to ‘adopt a high moral ground in condemning the violent conquests of other colonizing nations, while quietly absorbing selected portions of the Middle East and central Asia into a pan-German Kultur’.

unmediated expression of the national soul, free from the contaminations of modernity and empire. What philologists and poets found in the *Volkslied* was more than a literary or musical form, it was taken to embody the essence of a lost cultural totality, a tangible fragment imagined to reflect the spirit of a primeval German past. In tracing these intersecting quests for origins, from philology's search for linguistic ancestry to the Romantic idealisation of the folk song, it becomes clear that notions of cultural authenticity and temporal depth were deeply entwined. My three chapters examine how this entanglement shaped Romantic thought across different domains of knowledge.

In the first chapter, 'Deep Time, Originality, and Novalis's Geo-Poetics', I explore how Novalis reimagines geological Deep Time through a literary mode, which I call his geo-poetics. Rather than merely illustrating contemporary science, Novalis transforms geognostic debates – from Burnet's *Sacred Theory* to Werner's Neptunism – into narrative and symbolic structures that probe humanity's relation to vast, pre-human temporalities. In *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* and *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*, Deep Time is not an abstract abyss but a lived horizon: mountains, strata, and fossils become figures through which human development is aligned with the earth's cycles. Novalis's texts juxtapose mythic pasts, geological upheavals, and utopian futures, refusing the linearity of Enlightenment historiography in favour of temporal models where origin recurs as promise. Catastrophe is recast as generative; the archaic returns as anticipation of renewal. Literature here functions not as secondary to science but as an epistemic practice in its own right. It devises speculative orders of time that science was only beginning to articulate. Through this geo-poetic method, Novalis makes *Ursprünglichkeit* a principle of mediation between natural and human history, proposing that origins, far from irretrievable, can be imaginatively configured to reconcile epistemological fracture with cultural possibility.

The second chapter, 'Deep Time and Orientalism', examines how German Orientalism mobilised *Ursprünglichkeit* by locating cultural origins in India. Herder had already linked natural and human timescales through his reflections on Asia, but with the collapse of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806 the stakes shifted. Origin became a means of compensating for political fragmentation. Friedrich Schlegel's *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* advanced the claim that Sanskrit revealed a deep linguistic kinship between India and Germany. This alleged affinity displaced the biblical framework of Hebrew primacy and enabled German thinkers to claim an alternative antiquity, one not mediated by Rome or France. The authority of philology lent this act of cultural appropriation a scientific veneer, turning linguistic comparison into a genealogy of peoples. Schlegel and his contemporaries did not simply describe the Orient as other, but recast it as ancestral, a source whose temporal depth could be transferred to Germany. My analysis of Othmar Frank's philological project and Loeben's *Guido* illustrate how this imagined kinship was elaborated in both scholarship and literature, fashioning an 'Oriental' antiquity as part of Germany's own cultural prehistory. Rather than being viewed as exotic and merely 'fremd', the Orient was appropriated and made 'eigen', a part of German culture.⁴¹ Loeben's literary Orient appears as a local product tailored to fit the idea of 'Germanness'.

The final chapter, 'Originality Beyond *Originalgenie*', investigates how the collection and paratextual presentation of folk songs helped shape the discourse of originality around 1800 from Herder through Friedrich Nicolai (1733–1811), Anselm Elwert (1761–1825), to the editors of the *Wünschelruthe* magazine. Early collectors such as Herder

⁴¹ Andrea Polaschegg, *Der andere Orientalismus: Regeln deutsch-morgenländischer Imagination im 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005), pp. 41–9.

viewed folk songs as expressions of *Naturpoesie* – simple, authentic creations unspoiled by artifice – and drew inspiration from Thomas Percy’s *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) and James Macpherson’s *Works of Ossian* (1765),⁴² works that shaped the German understanding of folk songs as relics of a primeval cultural state. Nicolai’s satirical *Eyn Kleyner Feyner Almanach* (1776/77) comments on the obsession with authenticity and unpolished form at the end of the eighteenth century; Elwert’s *Ungedruckte Reste alten Gesangs* (1784) emphasises the link between antiquity and originality; and the magazine *Wünschelruth* (1818) marks a shift towards celebrating the regional roots of folk songs. Such projects reposition originality as continuity rather than invention, shifting emphasis from the singular to the collective, from the *Originalgenie* to the *Volkslied* as a bearer of authentic cultural memory. At stake was less the preservation of existing songs than the imaginative construction of a national antiquity through fragments that were curated to embody a lost totality. Through the folk song, I argue, Romantic *Ursprünglichkeit* was reframed as collective inheritance, providing a form of cultural authenticity that compensated for the absence of political unity.

The subjects of my chapters – the geological imagination of Deep Time, the turn to the Orient, and the philological recovery of German folk tradition – converge in a shared discourse of *Ursprünglichkeit*. And each, in its own way, projects origins onto a temporally remote and culturally untainted past, which was subsequently mobilised in an effort to define an authentic German identity. The following introduction proceeds by moving from a lexicographical overview of how *Ursprünglichkeit* was understood around

⁴² Thomas Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry, consisting of old heroic ballads, songs, and other pieces of our earlier poets, (chiefly of the lyric kind.) Together with some few of later date*, 3 vols (London: Dodsley, 1765); James Macpherson, *The Works of Ossian, the Son of Fingal*, 2 vols, 3 edn (London: Becket, De Hondt, 1765)

1800, to a more detailed outline of my central arguments structured around each chapter.

Ur-compounds in Dictionaries and Lexica around 1800

Before turning to the aesthetic, epistemological, and institutional stakes of *Ursprünglichkeit*, it is worth considering how the prefix *ur-* was understood at the turn of the nineteenth century. Contemporary lexica provide a valuable starting point for three reasons. First, their circular definitions of *ur*-compounds confirm the existence of a broader discourse of originality tied to the prefix. Second, their examples highlight the disciplinary fields, such as natural history and Orientalism, where narratives of origin crystallised. Finally, their citations of contemporary authors reveal the canon and reading culture that framed *Ursprünglichkeit*. Among these, Johann Christoph Adelung's *Grammatisch-kritisches Wörterbuch der Hochdeutschen Mundart* (1801)⁴³ and Joachim Heinrich Campe's *Wörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache* (1811)⁴⁴ stand out, not least for their frequent references to Herder, whose thought threads through all three chapters of this thesis.

The proliferation of *ur*-compounds documented by Adelung, Campe, and later the Grimm brothers, reveals a cultural imperative to anchor modern German identity in an imagined, quintessentially German past. Early nineteenth-century philologists framed this as a task of 'purifying' the language,⁴⁵ replacing loanwords with compounds that resonated with ideas of antiquity and originality. Campe's *Wörterbuch zur Erklärung und Verdeutschung der unserer Sprache aufgedrungenen fremden Ausdrücke* (1801), for

⁴³ Adelung, *Grammatisch-kritisches Wörterbuch*.

⁴⁴ Joachim Heinrich Campe, *Wörterbuch der Deutschen Sprache*, v, *U–bis–Z*, (Braunschweig: Schulbuchhandlung, 1811).

⁴⁵ For a more pronounced and ideologically charged version of this ambition, cf. Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, *Deutsches Volkstum* (1810), in *Friedrich Ludwig Jahns Werke*, 2 vols, ed. by Carl Euler (Hof: Lion, 1884–87), I, pp.143–380, p. 334: 'Worttäuscher', 'hochverrätherisch'; cf. also the 'Berlinische Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache' founded by Karl Christian Friedrich Krause and Christian Heinrich Wolke, cf. Hartmut Schmidt, 'Die Berlinische Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache an der Schwelle der germanistischen Sprachwissenschaft', *Zeitschrift für Germanistik*, 4 (1983), pp. 278–89.

instance, translates Element as *Urstoff*;⁴⁶ Jonathan Friedrich Heynatz follows suit with coinages such as *Urbild* for ‘Original’, *Urgemisch* for ‘Chaos’ and *Urschreiben* for an authentic piece of writing.⁴⁷ Such efforts sought not only lexical enrichment but also a pedigree for the German language, imagined as ancient and self-sufficient.⁴⁸ Grimm’s later dictionary quantified this drive. While Middle High German had some 136 *ur*-compounds, Campe listed nearly 250, a number that, the Grimm dictionary notes, had since tripled.⁴⁹ Grimm attributes the linguistic productivity of *ur*- not only to efforts to ‘germanise’ the language,⁵⁰ but also to broader philosophical currents, such as Romantic *Naturphilosophie* (explored in my first chapter), as well as the influence of regional dialects (the focus of my final chapter).⁵¹

The prefix *ur*- had been part of the German linguistic repertoire long before the eighteenth century, though its meaning shifted over time. For example, the noun *Ur*, originally referring to the aurochs (an extinct species), had all but vanished from standard German by the early nineteenth century, as noted by Adelung and Campe.⁵² Isolated

⁴⁶ Joachim Heinrich Campe, *Wörterbuch zur Erklärung und Verdeutschung der unserer Sprache aufgedrungenen fremden Ausdrücke, I, A — E* (Braunschweig: Schulbuchhandlung, 1801), pp. 324–25.

⁴⁷ Johann Friedrich Heynatz, *Versuch eines Deutschen Antibarbarus oder Verzeichniß solcher Wörter, deren man sich in der reinen deutschen Schreibart entweder überhaupt oder doch in gewissen Bedeutungen enthalten muß*, 2 vols, II (Berlin: Königl.-preuß.-akadem. Kunst- und Buchhandlung, 1797), pp. 543–44.

⁴⁸ On language purism and linguistic nationalism, cf. Anja Stukenbrock, *Sprachnationalismus* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2005); for a discussion of Campe’s position in these debates, cf. v, pp. 179–82 and 209–10.

⁴⁹ *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm*, digitalisierte Fassung im Wörterbuchnetz des Trier Center for Digital Humanities, Version 01/23, <<https://www.woerterbuchnetz.de/DWB>>, xxiv, cols 2355–2361 [Accessed 9 October 2025].

⁵⁰ For Jacob Grimm’s critique of linguistic purism, cf. Jacob Grimm, ‘Ueber das Pedantische in der deutschen Sprache’, in *Jacob Grimm. Kleinere Schriften*, 8 vols, ed. by Karl Müllenhoff (Berlin: Dümmler, 1864–90), I (1864), pp. 327–73, p. 347, where he targets the ‘schwarm von puristen’.

⁵¹ Cf. *Grimm Wörterbuch*, xxiv, cols 2356–58.

⁵² Cf. Adelung, *Grammatisch-kritisches Wörterbuch*, IV, c. 958, and Campe, *Wörterbuch*, v, p. 243. Cf. also Diederich von Stade, *Erläuterung und Erklärung der vornehmsten Deutschen Wörter, deren sich Martin. Luther, in Übersetzung der Bibel in die Deutsche Sprache, gebraucht* (Bremen: Grimm, 1724), pp. 815–49, p. 816: ‘...dasselbe Wort [ist] mit der Zeit den Deutschen so dunckel und unbekant geworden’. Moreover, he states that the proper noun ‘Ur’ is not in use anymore, p. 818: ‘[D]as Wörtlein Ur ist eine primitiva particular, und kan / seiner Eigenschafft nach / nicht als im Zusammensatz mit andern Wörtern gebraucht werden [...]’.

examples of *Ur* from around 1800, such as in Heinrich von Kleist's play *Hermannsschlacht* (1808),⁵³ reflect a conscious effort to revive a linguistic register associated with a distant Germanic past.⁵⁴ Yet, while the noun itself faded, its connotations lived on in the prefix. By the turn of the century, dictionaries identified three primary uses of *ur-* in compound words: as an intensifier, a spatial marker, and a temporal marker.

Earlier lexicographers such as Justus Georg Schottelius (1612–1676) and Diederich von Stade (1637–1718) offer crucial insights into the evolving understanding of *ur-* and its significance in shaping ideas of *Ursprünglichkeit*. In Schottelius's *Teutsche Sprachkunst* (1641), the prefix *ur-* functions almost exclusively as an intensifier, with examples such as *Urplötzlich* and *Urahn* used to convey a sense of extremity rather than temporal priority.⁵⁵ Similarly, Stade does not frame *Urkind* in a genealogical (i.e. temporal) fashion, but to illustrate the prefix's intensifying meaning.⁵⁶ Stade begins to observe broader uses of *ur-*, noting its function as a spatial or prepositional prefix – for instance, in *Ursprachi* which he defines as 'Sprachloß/und dem Tode so nahe/daß die Sprache weg ist'.⁵⁷ By the late eighteenth century, *Ursprache* no longer meant a state 'without language'. It had evolved into a significant term in philological and philosophical debates, denoting an 'original language' considered ancient, or even universal.⁵⁸

⁵³ Heinrich von Kleist, *Gesammelte Schriften, Zweiter Theil*, ed. by Ludwig Tieck (Berlin: Reimer, 1826), pp. 310, 312, 313, 315, 329, 345, 391, 403, 410.

⁵⁴ Grimm, *Wörterbuch*, xxiv, col. 2354: '[U]r schwindet im 17. jh. aus der literatursprache und wird erst von Klopstock als kennzeichen altgermanischen jagdlebens und wilder kraft erneuert'.

⁵⁵ Justus Georg Schottel, *Teutsche Sprachkunst* (Braunschweig, Gruber, 1641), pp. 242–43.

⁵⁶ Stade, *Erläuterung und Erklärung der vornehmsten Deutschen Wörter*, pp. 832–33.

⁵⁷ Stade, for example, includes the meaning 'without', in his overview, Stade, *Erläuterung und Erklärung der vornehmsten Deutschen Wörter*, p. 835.

⁵⁸ The period even saw projects, especially in the anglophone sphere, which aimed to create a universal language, cf. Paolo Rossi, *Logic and the Art of Memory: The Quest for a Universal Language*, trans. by Stephen Clucas (London: Continuum, 2006), especially the chapter 'The Construction of a Universal Language', pp. 146–75. These projects were soon rendered obsolete by the growing popularity of the

Stade's discussion of the causal dimension of *ur-* aligns more closely with the understanding of *Ursprünglichkeit* around 1800. He describes *ur-* as marking the inception of a process governed by specific laws or as indicating a causal principle – *causa* or *rei ratio*, as he terms it.⁵⁹ This notion would later be expanded by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in his concept of the *Urphänomen*,⁶⁰ most famously embodied by the *Urpflanze*, an idealised archetype expressing universal principles of transformation.⁶¹ Though Goethe's *Urpflanze* has since become the most iconic *ur-*compound with its focus on the archetypal and universal,⁶² it does not fully represent the broader discourse of *Ursprünglichkeit* at the turn of the nineteenth century. Notably, Campe's dictionary cites Herder, and not Goethe, to define the term: 'eine erste, ursprüngliche Pflanze. "Wer bildete nun die Urpflanzen, in denen (welchen) Keime fürs ganze Geschlecht lagen?" (Herder)'.⁶³

Epicurean account, according to which language starts with an animalistic stage of primitive sounds which are subsequently modified according to circumstances and environment, cf. Avi Lifschitz, 'The Enlightenment Revival of the Epicurean History of Language and Civilisation', in *Epicurus in the Enlightenment*, ed. by Neven Leddy and Avi Lifschitz (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2009), pp. 207–26.

⁵⁹ Stade, *Erläuterung und Erklärung der vornehmsten Deutschen Wörter*, p. 828 [sic, i.e. 838].

⁶⁰ On the relationship of Goethe's *Urphänomen* with Kantian and Idealist philosophy and notions of the archetypal, cf. Malte C. Ebach, 'Anschauung and the Archetype: The Role of Goethe's Delicate Empiricism in Comparative Biology', *Janus Head* 8.1 (2005), pp. 254–70; Ludovico Zizzo, 'Discovering Archetypes: Goethe and the Poetry of Natural History', *Studii de istorie a filosofiei universale*, 32 (2025), pp. 81–93; Elisabeth Rotten, *Goethes Urphänomen und die platonische Idee* (Gießen: Töpelmann, 1913; repr. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020).

⁶¹ Cf. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Schriften zur Kunst, Schriften zur Literatur, Anmerkungen, Maximen und Reflexionen*, in *Goethes Werke*, ed. by Erich Trunz, 14 vols (Hamburg: Wegner, 1948–1964; repr. Munich: Beck, 1994–2002), xii, ed. by Hans Joachim Schrimpf (1998), p. 744, and John Erpenbeck, 'Urphänomen', in *Goethe-Handbuch*, 4 vols, ed. by Bernd Witte and others (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1996–1999), 4.2: *Personen, Sachen, Begriffe*, ed. by Hans-Dietrich Dahnke and Regine Otto (1998), pp. 1080–82.

⁶² When Goethe developed his theory of the 'Urpflanze' in *Versuch, die Metamorphose der Pflanzen zu erklären* (1790), he was concerned with determining an archetype for all botanical species. In 1816, he revised his ambition, defining the 'Urpflanze' as a hermeneutical construct to *conceive* of an ideal state. In his letter to Nees von Esenbeck from August 1816, Goethe stresses the importance of the *idea* of an origin as an end in itself: 'Ich suchte damals die Urpflanze, bewußtlos, daß ich die Idee, den Begriff suchte wonach wir sie uns ausbilden könnten'. Cf. FA, II.VIII, ed. by Dorothea Schäfer-Weiss, '28. Goethe an Nees von Esenbeck [Mitte August 1816]', pp. 36–7, p. 37.

⁶³ Stade, *Erläuterung und Erklärung der vornehmsten Deutschen Wörter*, p. 249.

Where Goethe's idealism elevates the *Urpflanze* to a 'pure ideal',⁶⁴ the broader intellectual milieu around 1800 was increasingly concerned with tangible responses to new scientific challenges, deliberately moving away from metaphysical abstraction. One of the most significant of these challenges was the recognition of vast geological timescales, prompted, among other factors, by advances in geognosy. As noted above, biblical chronology had bounded history within a finite span of approximately 6,500 years for centuries,⁶⁵ but geognostic observation revealed timescales that extended far beyond this framework, effectively imploding the prior temporal schema and demanding new ways of understanding the past. This epistemological shift found linguistic expression in new *ur*-compounds such as *Urzeit* and *Urgranit*.⁶⁶ Neither Schottelius nor Stade include these terms in their dictionaries – unsurprising given that they emerged amidst late eighteenth-century geognostic debates.⁶⁷ The prefix *ur*-, already well-established in the German lexicon, now served as a means of articulating temporal scales that resisted existing categories. For example, while *Vorzeit* conventionally referred to human prehistory,⁶⁸ the discovery of fossil remains in strata devoid of human traces compelled scholars to conceive of a time that preceded even prehistory itself – a primordial epoch

⁶⁴ Cf. Eva Geulen, 'Urpflanze (und Goethes "Hefte zur Morphologie")', in *Urworte: Zur Geschichte und Funktion erstbegründender Begriffe*, ed. by Tobias Döring and Michael Ott (Munich: Fink, 2012), pp. 155–71.

⁶⁵ Rudwick, *Bursting the Limits of Time*, p. 116.

⁶⁶ Campe, *Wörterbuch*, v, p. 246.

⁶⁷ One of these debates is the so-called *Basaltstreit* between plutonists and neptunists, one tracing the development of the earth to volcanic principles, the other to processes of sedimentation. Cf. David Roger Oldroyd, *Thinking about the Earth: A History of Ideas in Geology* (Cambridge, MA: HUP, 1996), especially the chapter 'Heat, Fire and Water', pp. 86–107; Anthony Hallam, *Great Geological Controversies* (Oxford: OUP, 1989), especially pp. 1–28.

⁶⁸ For a critical discussion of the term and concept of prehistory, cf. Penelope J. Corfield, 'Primevalism: Saluting a Renamed Prehistory', in *Time and History in Pre-History*, ed. by Adnan Baysal, Emma L. Baysal, and Stella Souvatzi (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), pp. 265–82.

requiring a new linguistic and conceptual register and a semantic scope only *ur-* compounds could supply.

Accordingly, *ur-*compounds around 1800 increasingly came to signify a form of temporal depth distinct from measurable or historical time. Among these, *Urzeit* stands out as a particularly resonant term. Adelung notes the term's recent coinage, describing it as both 'der erste Anfang der Zeit' and 'eine sehr alte, lange verflossene Zeit'.⁶⁹ He also acknowledges the novelty of the term *Urbeginn*, calling it an 'im Hochdeutschen ungewöhnliches [...] Wort' used to signify an 'ersten, ursprünglichen Beginn'.⁷⁰ In his entry on *Urzeit*, Adelung quotes Herder, 'Wer kann sich in diese Urzeit der Schöpfungsreligion hinfühlen? Herd.',⁷¹ thus invoking him as an authority on the term's speculative reach. Campe likewise appeals to Herder, citing *Älteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts* (1774–76), which explicitly associates *Urzeit* with temporal descent: 'Nun tiefer hinab – in die Urzeit der Welt hin'.⁷²

Other compounds such as *Urgeschichte*, 'die erste, früheste Geschichte, die Geschichte der Urzeit',⁷³ and *Urwelt*, 'die Welt aus der Urzeit, zur Zeit der Schöpfung',⁷⁴ further strengthen the association between *ur-* and a deep, primeval antiquity. Among eighteenth-century terms for early human history, *Urgeschichte* occupies a distinctly different register from *Vorgeschichte*. In the Enlightenment, *Vorgeschichte* had entered systematic use within emerging archaeological and anthropological frameworks,⁷⁵ and

⁶⁹ Adelung, *Grammatisch-kritisches Wörterbuch*, IV, c. 972.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, c. 959.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Campe, *Wörterbuch*, v, p. 253. Campe shortens the full quote, cf. HW, v, ed. by Rudolf Smend, 'Älteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts', p. 349: 'Nun tiefer hinab; in ein neubewohntes Land, in die Urzeit der Welt hin, und Menschen und Tiere sind Brüder!'

⁷³ Campe, *Wörterbuch*, v, p. 246.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

⁷⁵ Philological, anthropological and archaeological investigations of non-Western cultures provided further evidence for the expanded timescale that geological discoveries had already suggested, pushing human

today still designates the period between the appearance of *Homo sapiens* and the advent of written records.⁷⁶ It fits neatly into developmental narratives oriented towards historical consciousness.⁷⁷ *Urgeschichte*, by contrast, resists such chronological containment. It marks a temporality anterior to historicity itself, bridging the vast, non-human scales of geological Deep Time with speculative and poetic visions of humanity's origins. As such, it designates an origin that escapes empirical measurement and remains suspended outside the frameworks of modern knowledge.

Yet *ur*-compounds do not signify ungraspable antiquity alone. In every instance, *ur*-bestows its compounds with a sense of age that is not merely earlier in sequence, but fundamentally primordial.⁷⁸ Both Adelung and Campe draw this connection, linking *ur*- to the notion of foundational principles or primal substances. Adelung, for instance, defines *Urkraft* as 'die erste ursprüngliche Kraft eines Dinges [...], so fern sie der Ursprung und der Grund aller übrigen Kräfte ist. Die Urkräfte der Welt, die ersten, der Welt gleich bey ihrer Entstehung mitgetheilten Kräfte'.⁷⁹ Likewise, *Urstoff* is identified as a term to denote 'den ersten ursprünglichen Stoff, die ersten Bestandtheile eines Dinges [...]; der Grundstoff', the elemental substrate from which all else derives.⁸⁰

history far beyond biblical chronology, cf. Johannes Rohbeck, 'Geschichte/Geschichtsphilosophie', in *Handbuch Europäische Aufklärung: Begriffe, Konzepte, Wirkung*, ed. by Heinz Thoma (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2015), pp. 242–51, p. 243.

⁷⁶ Cf. Corfield, 'Primevalism: Saluting a Renamed Prehistory'. Corfield, however, calls into question the category of literacy as a stable chronological marker, p. 268.

⁷⁷ On prehistory being tethered to evolutionary and developmental paradigms, cf. Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps: Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

⁷⁸ Timothy Attanucci summarises these connotations succinctly in the context of notions of Deep Time, cf. Timothy Attanucci, "'Der sterbende Leichnam der Natur": Geologische Provokationen bei Goethe, Novalis und Tieck', in *Romantische Ökologien: Vielfältige Naturen um 1800*, ed. by Roland Borgards, Friederike Middelhoff, and Barbara Thums (Berlin; Heidelberg: J.B. Metzler, 2023), pp. 185–206, p. 188: 'Die Tiefen der Zeit und des Raumes muten uns dagegen wie aus einer weiten, unvorstellbaren Ferne an, zumal die "Urzeit" oder "Urwelt", wie der deutsche Sprachgebrauch um 1800 die Tiefenzeit nennt, auch einen Bereich der Ursächlichkeit darstellt, der Wirkungen in der Gegenwart zeitigt'.

⁷⁹ Adelung, *Grammatisch-kritisches Wörterbuch*, IV, col. 963.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, col. 968.

Campe, too, aligns *ur*-compounds with the idea of originary substance, as seen in his entries for *Urfelsen* and *Urgranit*, both terms that denote ancient granite formations believed to be among the earth's most stable and earliest geological strata.⁸¹ As new understandings of sedimentation, fossil layering, and comparative mineralogy extended the earth's age from thousands to millions of years, the linguistic resources for articulating such temporal vastness were still crystallising. *Ur*-compounds such as *Urfelsen* and *Urgranit* emerged in response to this discursive pressure.⁸² They gestured towards the very idea of primordial matter – substances imagined to precede not just humanity but organic life itself.⁸³ Although Adelung's 1801 dictionary does not yet include these particular compounds, their presence in Campe's 1811 edition signals the rising public and academic fascination with geology.⁸⁴

Concrete evidence of the discursive relationship between geology and language with regards to concepts of originality appears in Campe's entry on *Urgang*, which he defines as a variant of 'Eingang', and illustrates, once more, with a quotation from Herder: 'Wenn sich eben hieraus ein ganzes Alterthum schichten, durch die verworrensten Urgänge der Völker ein Lichtfaden ziehen lässt'.⁸⁵ Herder's metaphor of layers evokes geological stratification, which, in turn, gives the term *Urgang* a dual significance. It not only refers to an entrance but also hints at subterranean depths with its allusion to the mining term *Gang* (shaft). Campe does not explicitly unpack this metaphor, but the citation reveals

⁸¹ Campe, *Wörterbuch*, v, p. 246.

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ The distinction between the organic and the inorganic became formalised in the late eighteenth century, as Wolfgang Hottner has shown. Cf. Wolfgang Hottner, *Kristallisationen; Ästhetik und Poetik des Anorganischen im späten 18. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2020).

⁸⁴ I use the term geology, although only fully established in its modern meaning over the course of the nineteenth century, as an umbrella term, subsuming various contemporary 'earth sciences' such as mineralogy, chemistry, physics, oryctognosy, and geognosy.

⁸⁵ Campe, *Wörterbuch*, v, p. 246; HW, v, ed. by Rudolf Smend, 'Älteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts', p. 314.

how *ur*-compounds could carry an implicit geological epistemology *avant la lettre*. The prefix *ur*- thus becomes a hinge between natural and cultural history, encoding shared investments in depth, descent, and origin. It constructs a conceptual topography of time, where the past is not behind us but buried beneath. Crucially, this logic reflects the very structure of late eighteenth-century geognosy, which rendered time legible as vertical depth, with *Urgestein* marking the earth's most ancient layer.⁸⁶

Language had long encoded this layered temporality. Stade, for instance, noted the vertical valence of *ur*- in compounds such as *Urstand*, a term for Christ's resurrection implying both return and ascent.⁸⁷ Similarly, Adelung defines *urheben* as 'eine Bewegung in die Höhe'.⁸⁸ In both Stade's compound and Adelung's definition, an upward movement from an origin presupposes depth: time imagined not as a mere sequence, but as a layered descent into – or emergence from – beginnings. On a broader level, meanwhile, the structure of geological strata mirrors a central tenet of Enlightenment historiography: a rise from darkness into light, from primal depths into rational clarity.⁸⁹ The term *Urgrund* makes this spatial logic unmistakable. Attested since the Middle Ages,⁹⁰ *Urgrund* fuses *Grund* (ground, foundation) with *ur*- to name the deepest, most hidden stratum, at once physical and conceptual.⁹¹ Its resonance lies in the dual meaning of *Grund* as both

⁸⁶ Cf. Peter Schnyder, 'übereinander / nacheinander: Zur Metaphorologie der Schicht', in *Metaphorologien der Exploration und Dynamik 1800/1900. Historische Wissenschaftsmetaphern und die Möglichkeiten ihrer Historiographie*, ed. by Gunhild Berg, Martina King and Reto Rössler (Hamburg: Meiner, 2018), pp. 84–99; Id.: 'Einleitung', in *Erdgeschichten: Literatur und Geologie im langen 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Peter Schnyder (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann 2020), pp. 7–25.

⁸⁷ Stade, *Erläuterung und Erklärung der vornehmsten Deutschen Wörter*, p. 821.

⁸⁸ Adelung, *Grammatisch-kritisches Wörterbuch*, iv, col. 956. Cf. also Campe, *Wörterbuch*, v, p. 244.

⁸⁹ Cf. Reinhart Koselleck, *Begriffsgeschichten* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 2006), p. 162. For a discussion of how the idea of progress plays out in the debate on original languages, cf. Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization. Vol I: The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785–1985* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2020), pp. 250–52.

⁹⁰ Used since the Middle Ages to denote unfathomable depth, cf. *Grimm Wörterbuch*, xxiv, col. 2429.

⁹¹ An understanding that still resonates in modern idioms such as 'getting to the bottom of things', where spatial descent becomes epistemological pursuit. For a broader investigation of the role of subterranean

ground and cause: Urgrund becomes the site of both origination and explanation.⁹² Long before geology formalised the principle of stratification, such compounds reveal that language already linked originality with depth and causality. The spatial logic embedded in *ur*-compounds thus anticipated, and perhaps even facilitated, geological models of time as stratified and vertical.⁹³ In this context, *ur*- appears as a structuring dispositif of originality – and one that made Deep Time thinkable before it became measurable.

If the spatial logic of *ur*-compounds lent conceptual depth to temporal origins, their cultural significance comes fully into view in the early nineteenth century. In Adelung's lemma for *ursprünglich*, the prefix is defined as denoting both 'original' and 'primordial', and is compared to the Greek ἀρχή (*archē*).⁹⁴ This analogy serves not to invoke Classical authority, but to clarify a shared semantic structure: like *ur*-, *archē* names both a temporal beginning,⁹⁵ and a constitutive principle,⁹⁶ making it both chronologically antecedent and systematically primordial.⁹⁷ While Adelung stops short of exploring *archē*'s third connotation – 'sovereignty' or 'authority' – that meaning would have been accessible to a readership educated in Classical philology. What remains implicit in Adelung becomes increasingly central in early nineteenth-century discourse, as *Ursprünglichkeit* emerges as a concept for articulating cultural identity and value.

spheres for understandings of the past, cf. Johannes Matthes, *Reisen ins Unterirdische: Eine Kulturgeschichte der Höhlenforschung in Österreich bis in die Zwischenkriegszeit* (Wien: Böhlau, 2015).

⁹² Cf. for instance Campe's entry, which cites Herder to invoke the causal meaning of *ur*-: "Wasser war der Urgrund des Weltalls," Herder'. Cf. Campe, *Wörterbuch*, v, p. 247.

⁹³ Nicholas A. Rupke speculates that linguistic engagement with originality precedes geological investigations; cf. Nicholas A. Rupke, 'Caves, fossils and the history of the earth', in *Romanticism and the Sciences*, ed. by Andrew Cunningham and Nicholas Jardine (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), pp. 241–59, p. 241.

⁹⁴ Jakob Ziguas comments on the parallels of the Aristotelian understanding of ἀρχή with Goethean ideas of originality – Urphänomen – as an archetypal, primordial phenomenon. I argue that Goethe is but one example of a broader discourse concerned with *Ursprünglichkeit*, cf. Jakob Ziguas, 'Archē as Urphänomen: A Goethean Interpretation of Aristotle's Theory of Scientific Knowledge', *Epoché*, 1 (2013), pp. 79–105.

⁹⁵ Cf. Hdt. 1.9, 2.28, 8.132.

⁹⁶ Used e.g. by Anaximander in the tradition of Simp. Ph. 150.23; Arist. *Metaph.* 983b11.

⁹⁷ Cf. Döring and Ott, *Urworte*, p. 15: 'Ur-Worten [ist] [...] eine semantische Überlagerung von temporaler und begründender Bedeutung eigen'.

The ideological charge of origins – the fusion of temporal depth with claims to authenticity and legitimacy – finds explicit expression in Campe’s lexicon, where *ur-* compounds take on a distinctly cultural and normative charge, arising not only from temporal priority but from essential purity. Campe describes *ursprünglich* as that which ‘in seinem Ursprung am meisten das ist, was es sein soll, unverändert und unvermischt von und mit Anderem’.⁹⁸ This logic of unaltered essence finds further expression in his entry for *Urvolk*, which Campe defines as ‘ein ursprüngliches Volk, welches schon in den frühesten Zeiten als für sich bestehendes Volk da ist’,⁹⁹ citing Friedrich Gräter’s magazine *Bragur*,¹⁰⁰ which speaks of ‘[e]in deutsches Urvolk’.¹⁰¹ The emphasis on being ‘für sich bestehend’ underscores the ideal of cultural self-sufficiency, mirroring the post-imperial aspiration to frame Germany as a *Kulturnation* – a community defined by shared, immaterial heritage rather than (recent) political borders. What Campe describes lexically, cultural criticism mobilised ideologically. Whether in philological debates about the *Ursprache*, literary searches for *Volksgeist*, or early ethnographic accounts of *Urvölker*,¹⁰² the authentic origin became the normative axis around which cultural value was organised. The cultural resonance of *ur-* in Campe’s entries thus extends beyond etymology. It participates in what Michael Ott and Tobias Döring describe as a ‘spezifische[s] Sprachmuster [...], das für [...] Beglaubigungsakte von Anfänglichkeit besonders dienlich ist’.¹⁰³ The semantic elasticity of *ur-* allows it to confer legitimacy on

⁹⁸ Campe, *Wörterbuch*, v, p. 251.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Alexander Nebrig, ‘Das Lied und die Schrift: Überlieferung bei Johann Gottfried Herder und Friedrich David Gräter’, *Jahrbuch des Österreichischen Volksliedwerkes*, 69 (2020), pp. 17–31.

¹⁰¹ Campe, *Wörterbuch*, v, p. 253.

¹⁰² Cf. Noah Heringman, ‘Deep Time in the South Pacific: Scientific Voyaging and the Ancient/Primitive Analogy’, in *Marking Time: Romanticism and Evolution*, ed. by Joel Faflak (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017), pp. 95–121.

¹⁰³ Döring and Ott, *Urworte*, p. 11.

selected beginnings, and to embed values into etymologies. My analysis builds on this idea, examining how such authorising gestures shaped cultural self-understanding at a moment when inherited forms of legitimacy – monarchical, theological, historical – were undergoing profound re-evaluation.

Dictionaries such as those of Adelung and Campe, particularly in their prescriptive ambitions, did not simply reflect usage, but helped shape it. Their treatment of *ur-* compounds was part of a wider philological project to establish a distinctly self-originating German intellectual lineage unreliant on Classical imitation or Enlightenment cosmopolitanism. The semantic charge of *ur-* was uniquely suited to this task. It could suggest what was earliest, deepest, purest, or most native, often simultaneously. Spun out from its prefix, *Ursprünglichkeit*, then, was never a mere chronological marker. Instead, the discourse of originality around 1800 rested on a triad of temporal priority, structural primacy, and cultural authenticity.

Ursprünglichkeit as a Literary Response to Epistemological Challenges

While the exploration of Deep Time is typically narrated from the perspective of science,¹⁰⁴ my thesis foregrounds the role of literature in articulating, translating, and at times resisting new temporal frameworks. Literary engagements with Deep Time often unfold along lines quite different from the prevailing scientific models of epistemological change that have dominated scholarly debate. Thomas Kuhn's model of paradigm shifts, for instance, hinges on moments of rupture: scientific frameworks collapsing under the weight of their own anomalies.¹⁰⁵ David Schulz gives an example for such a paradigm shift in the context of earth history, arguing that the genre of *historia sacra*¹⁰⁶ had been rendered scientifically obsolete by the separation of natural from human history.¹⁰⁷ Writers such as Novalis, however, do not discard early modern epistemology, as I will show in my first chapter. In *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, he draws on allegedly outdated models of earth history, such as *historia sacra*, and reanimates them as narrative devices capable of sustaining temporal fluidity. The result is a historical continuum in which geological epochs, mythic ages, and future utopias coexist. Both *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* and *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* envision a coming Golden Age grounded in the poetic memory of a primordial unity,¹⁰⁸ and echo the cyclical structure of history found, for instance, in Thomas Burnet's *Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1684).¹⁰⁹ In so doing, Novalis

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Rudwick, *Earth's Deep History*; Id., *Bursting the Limits of Time*; Gould, *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle*.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 2012), pp. 72–73.

¹⁰⁶ On the genre of the 'Sacred Theory', cf. Rudwick, *Earth's Deep History*, pp. 58–62.

¹⁰⁷ Schulz, *Die Natur der Geschichte*, especially Chapter Two 'Die Delegitimierung der *historia sacra* durch die geologische Tiefenzeit', pp. 52–92.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Hans-Joachim Mähl, *Die Idee des goldenen Zeitalters im Werk des Novalis: Studien zur Wesensbestimmung der frühromantischen Utopie und zu ihren ideengeschichtlichen Voraussetzungen* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1965, repr. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2012).

¹⁰⁹ Thomas Burnet, *The Theory of the Earth. The Two First Books Concerning the Deluge, and Concerning Paradise* (London: Norton, 1684). The volume was first published in Latin under the title *Telluris theoria sacra* (London: Norton, 1681).

refuses the Enlightenment's linear historicism, reclaiming early modern models as tools for thinking time beyond rupture and progress. This imaginative synthesis lies at the heart of what I term Novalis's *geo-poetic* method, which is meant to highlight the collaborative role Romantic literature played in depicting the unfathomably large timescales suggested by geognosy set out above.

My approach thus complicates the prevailing assumption that geology functioned chiefly as a *Leitdisziplin*, a master discourse, that exerted influence on literature. While there is ample work documenting geology's thematic presence in Romantic writing,¹¹⁰ much of it treats literature as a site of reception rather than of production. Michaela Haberkorn's *Naturhistoriker und Zeitenseher* identifies the literary strategies with which authors attempted to represent inconceivable time spans, particularly through spatial metaphors and narratives of transformation.¹¹¹ But her focus is largely institutional, concentrating on the Freiberg Mining Academy and its prominent figures, such as Abraham Gottlob Werner. What remains underexplored is why someone like Novalis, trained in precisely these geognostic traditions, would choose fiction over scientific treatise as the medium of his most innovative engagements with Deep Time. Literature, I

¹¹⁰ For a discussion of the material entanglements – and materialist backgrounds – of Romanticism's engagement with the 'lithic' sphere, cf. Jason Groves, *The Geological Unconscious: German Literature and the Mineral Imaginary* (New York: Fordham UP, 2020), especially the chapter 'Of Other Petrofictions, Reimagining the Mine in German Romanticism', pp. 17–35. For a discussion of the mine as a motif, and a psychoanalytical reading of a descent into subterranean depths, cf. Theodore Ziolkowski, *German Romanticism and its Institutions* (Princeton: PUP, 1990), especially 'Chapter Two: The Mine. Image of the Soul', pp. 18–63; cf. also Josef Dürler, *Die Bedeutung des Bergbaus bei Goethe und in der deutschen Romantik* (Frauenfeld, Leipzig: Huber & Co. Aktiengesellschaft, 1936). For an overview of literary representations of mountaineering cf. *Heights of Reflection: Mountains in the German Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Twenty-First Century*, ed. by Sean Ireton and Caroline Schaumann (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2012). For an analysis of lithic metaphors since the Romantic period, cf. Erika Schellenberger-Diederich, *Geopoetik; Studien zur Metaphorik des Gesteins in der Lyrik von Hölderlin bis Celan* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2006); For an overview of the relationship of geology and literature in the context of current concerns of the environmental humanities, cf. Tobias Menely, *Climate and the Making of Worlds: Towards a Geohistorical Poetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021).

¹¹¹ Michaela Haberkorn, *Geologie und Poesie um 1800: Der Kreis um Abraham Gottlob Werner (Goethe, A.v. Humboldt, Novalis, Steffens, G.H. Schubert)* (Frankfurt a.M: Lang, 2004).

argue, offered writers not just greater rhetorical freedom, but a distinct epistemological framework. Thus fiction enabled Novalis, for example, to merge both outdated and emerging scientific models in order to stage competing chronologies, imagine non-linear histories, and reconcile the mythical and the empirical within a single vision of time. Novalis's claim is that nature can only be revived through the unifying power of poetry, one that elevates literature from a passive medium of reflection to an active tool.¹¹²

Katrin Schär's *Erdgeschichte(n) und Entwicklungsromane* provides a precedent for the geognostic ennoblement of poetry.¹¹³ Schär shows how geological models of development – teleological, cyclical, or catastrophic – shape literary structures, particularly in works such as Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre*. Schär stresses that geological texts themselves rely on narrative strategies, and treats works by Buffon, Lyell, and Cuvier not only as scientific contributions to a nascent genre of geology, but as texts with a specific rhetorical and narrative structure. However, her analysis largely reads scientific concepts as being imported into literature. She takes the key analytic category of her study, *Entwicklung*, to be a scientific concept derived from the biological concepts of preformation and epigenetics,¹¹⁴ even though her own corpus, including her discussion of Herder's concept of development,¹¹⁵ suggests a more complex case, where methods and metaphors are not simply imported from one field to another, but established reciprocally.

¹¹² Christian Becker and Reiner Manstetten, 'Nature as You: Novalis' Philosophical Thought and the Modern Ecological Crisis', *Environmental Values*, 13.1 (2004), pp. 101–18.

¹¹³ Kathrin Schär, *Erdgeschichte(n) und Entwicklungsromane: Geologisches Wissen und Subjektkonstitution in der Poetologie der frühen Moderne. Goethes Wanderjahre und Stifters Nachsommer* (Bielefeld, transcript Verlag, 2021).

¹¹⁴ Schär, *Erdgeschichten*, p. 70.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

My reading in this thesis inverts her orientation. In the first chapter, I will explore how *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* contributes to a geological imaginary by offering formal solutions to problems science was only beginning to theorise: how to narrate catastrophe, how to render immensity, and how to preserve order within contingency. Noah Heringman has stressed the importance of considering the ‘disciplinary ecology that had no fixed rubric for archaeology or prehistory’, arguing that ‘many writers from the mid-eighteenth century onward arrived at a concept of Deep Time by asking, in their own terms, what developments in the history of the earth must have been required for the human species to become viable’.¹¹⁶ Paolo Rossi’s *The Dark Abyss of Time* similarly foregrounds the interdisciplinary nature of early speculations of temporal depth, tracing how theology, archaeology, linguistics, and mythology all contributed to the period’s rethinking of origins.¹¹⁷ Building on their work, this thesis argues that even before geology was fully institutionalised, literary and philosophical texts were already modelling the imaginative scope required to contemplate an irretrievable past.¹¹⁸

Oliver Völker acknowledges such inter- and multidisciplinary activity in *Langsame Katastrophen*, arguing that early geology cannot be neatly separated from aesthetic discourse, while treating literature as a vessel for transmitting scientific motifs, rather than a site of epistemic innovation.¹¹⁹ My thesis builds on Völker’s premise but pushes it further, investigating the possibility ‘that deep time as a figural register predates

¹¹⁶ Heringman, *Deep Time*, p. 9.

¹¹⁷ Rossi, *The Dark Abyss of Time*.

¹¹⁸ Analysing literature’s role in this context is not a retrospective projection but a necessity derived from the evidence itself. Charles Lyell, for instance, presents the problem of addressing vast geological time scales as a fundamental challenge to the imagination: ‘The imagination was first fatigued and overpowered by endeavouring to conceive the immensity of time required for the annihilation of whole continents by so insensible a process...’, cf. Charles Lyell, *Principles of Geology*, ed. by James A. Secord (London: Penguin, 1997), p. 25.

¹¹⁹ Accordingly, Völker aims to examine the relationship between ‘literary poesis’ and ‘scientific exposition’ Oliver Völker, *Langsame Katastrophen: Eine Poetik der Erdgeschichte* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2021), p. 48.

geology'.¹²⁰ This move opens onto a wider scholarly conversation about the generative interplay between literature and science, exemplified by Georg Braungart's account of how the earth sciences relied on imaginative speculation alongside empirical observation.¹²¹ Literature and science, Braungart suggests, share a 'code' for generating knowledge, positioning literary texts as sources of insight in their own right rather than as mere reflections of scientific thought.¹²² The shared code Braungart invokes is evident in the discourse of *Ursprünglichkeit*. Terms such as *Urzeit*, *Urvolk*, and *Ursprache* signal a mode of thought in which natural and cultural beginnings are structurally analogous. Herder's *Ideen*, for example, present the reader with ancient, 'original' people inhabiting equally original mountains, suggesting a topos of originality where natural and cultural antiquity intersect.¹²³

The intertwining of humanity and nature in Romantic thought provides a useful foundation for distinguishing the concept of Deep Time from more recent geological narratives, such as the Anthropocene, which emphasise humanity's material impact on the earth as a transformative geological force.¹²⁴ While both concepts measure humanity against the scale and force of geological change, they operate through different imaginative logics. Where the Anthropocene names a rupture, namely a moment of

¹²⁰ Heringman, *Deep Time*, p. 6.

¹²¹ Georg Braungart, 'The Poetics of Nature: Literature and Constructive Imagination in the History of Geology', in *Inventions of the Imagination: Romanticism and Beyond*, ed. by Richard T. Gray and others (Seattle, London: University of Washington Press, 2011), pp. 26–35.

¹²² Ibid. Braungart gives the example of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, which contains what may be the first literary hypothesis of an Ice Age – years before the idea gained scientific traction. My thesis expands this point: Romantic literature, and particularly the discourse of *Ursprünglichkeit*, was not just imaginative elaboration but speculative epistemology.

¹²³ Cf. HW, vi, ed. by Martin Bollacher, 'Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit', pp. 42, 386, and 423. Cf. Hans Adler, 'Johann Gottfried Herder's Concept of Humanity', *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture*, 23 (1994), pp. 55–74, p. 63: 'Nature, the anthropological, and the history of humanity belong together for Herder'. Cf. also H.B. Nisbet, *Herder and the Philosophy and History of Science* (Cambridge: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1970).

¹²⁴ Cf. *The Anthropocene: Key Issues for the Humanities*, ed. by Eva Horn and Hannes Bergthaller (London: Routledge, 2019), especially the 'Introduction', pp. 18–36, and 'The *Anthropos*', pp. 91–110.

human-induced planetary transformation legible in the geological record, Deep Time explores the *longue durée* of natural phenomena through figures of continuity and recurrence, imagining humanity's place within such temporal depth. Moreover, the Anthropocene is a diagnostic concept. It tracks the measurable impact of industrial society on climate, biodiversity, and the earth's stratigraphy. Its rhetoric is crisis-oriented, rooted in scientific accountability and the urgency of intervention. Deep Time, by contrast, operates as a speculative concept that opens onto spans of time exceeding empirical history and inviting metaphorical, poetic, and philosophical engagement.

This distinction is central to my thesis. The Romantic writers I examine were neither responding to anthropogenic ecological collapse nor attempting to quantify humanity's impact on the biosphere. Instead, they grappled with the unsettling realisation that humanity might be incidental in a world far older, stranger, and more autonomous than previously imagined. Their challenge was to conceptualise humanity's place within a nature perceived as independent from human agency, consequently approaching humanity not as nature's master but as part of a larger, interconnected whole aspiring to harmonious coexistence. Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* exemplifies this approach, staging Deep Time not as a threat, but as a medium for *Bildung*: the individual's development mirrors the earth's cycles, and the ancient past emerges as a site of spiritual and poetic return. Earthquakes become 'Geburten',¹²⁵ and geological upheaval is cast as the template for imaginative renewal.¹²⁶ Novalis's stance is distinct from Anthropocene thinking. Where the Anthropocene compresses time into a narrative of

¹²⁵ Cf. NS, I, p. 253.

¹²⁶ The hermit, upon contemplating the early stages of earth history, feels like 'ein Kind der Zukunft', cf. *Ibid.*, p. 261. Knowledge of this early history, according to him, gives a glimpse into 'die geheime Verkettung des Ehemaligen and Zukünftigen', *ibid.*, p. 259.

acceleration and tipping points, Romantic Deep Time unfolds in spirals and recurring patterns, refusing the linear temporality of progress and collapse. Crucially, Deep Time does not demand the moral accounting that dominates Anthropocene discourse. Instead, the former asks how origins might be thought outside of trauma,¹²⁷ and how humanity might rediscover its place within nature, rather than over or against it.

Ursprünglichkeit, in my thesis, emerges then as a concept that reconciles human and geological timescales, and thus challenges Dipesh Chakrabarty's argument that only the Anthropocene collapsed the distinction between human and natural history.¹²⁸ While Chakrabarty posits that this entanglement is a modern realisation, born of catastrophe, I aim to show that Romanticism had already imagined such permeability, but under a different sign. In *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, human and geological times are not fused by disaster but mirrored in harmony. Heinrich's journey parallels the earth's own revolutions, culminating in a suspended temporality where the 'Urwelt' becomes 'die goldne Zeit am Ende' (NS, I, p. 368),¹²⁹ an archaic past that returns as future promise. This promise is not naïve utopianism. The novel remains attuned to the limits of human understanding: the 'unerhörte Geburten in den Vesten der Erde' remain enigmatic (NS, I, p. 253). Yet this unknowability does not lead to despair, but invites reverence, humility, and a poetics of relation.

The framework of Deep Time offers a way to confront the inescapable anthropocentrism that haunts Anthropocene discourse. While the Anthropocene names

¹²⁷ Novalis, in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, describes nature not as wilting, but as an inexhaustible resource, cf. *ibid.*, I, p. 262: 'Wozu wäre auch eine Vermehrung jener Schätze nöthig, deren Überfluß auf undenkliche Zeiten ausreicht. Wie klein ist der Raum, den ich durchwandert bin, und welche mächtige Vorräthe habe ich nicht gleich auf den ersten Blick gefunden, deren Benutzung der Nachwelt überlassen bleibt'.

¹²⁸ Chakrabarty, 'The Climate of History', p. 32.

¹²⁹ This quote is taken from Tieck's report on Novalis's sketches for the second part of *Ofterdingen*. It is cited in quotation marks and likely taken from Novalis's notes.

humanity as a geological force, it remains a human-centred paradigm, one that organises time through the lens of human impact and survival. The very act of naming an epoch after ourselves exposes a conceptual tension. How can the brief, fragile presence of *Homo sapiens* warrant its own epoch within the vast, aeonic timescale of earth's history?¹³⁰ This tension is not unique to contemporary thought. Romantic literature, particularly Novalis, stages it with striking self-awareness, not by diminishing humanity's significance, but by treating it as the philosophical and poetic challenge of locating human meaning within overwhelming geological durations. In *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, the protagonist begins to sense the entwined histories of earth and humanity only after following 'eine[r] [...] frische[n] Menschenspur' into a mountain.¹³¹ Even entry into Deep Time is mediated by a human mark. Rather than attempting to erase the human altogether, Novalis reflexively stages anthropocentrism, acknowledging its persistence while inviting critical reflection. Beneath the earth's surface, the protagonist encounters not just mineral strata but fragments of memory and myth, suggesting that nature is a site of layered relation, where myth, matter, and memory converge, and where the limits of human perspective are both exposed and unsettled.

At the same time, Novalis recognises the alienation from nature that defines modernity. In his depiction of the present, nature has been rendered mute, reduced to a passive object of inquiry, and stripped of its voice and agency. This rupture between human and non-human worlds emerges as a crisis of understanding. According to

¹³⁰ This tension has not gone unremarked. Scholars such as Jane Bennett and Donna Haraway have criticised the Anthropocene's reliance on anthropocentric categories even as it seeks to decentre the human. Cf. Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

¹³¹ NS, I, p. 254.

Ludwig Tieck's account of Novalis's unfinished continuation, the second part of the novel would have radically redistributed agency. Here, 'Blumen und Thiere sprechen über den Menschen'.¹³² Nature no longer speaks *to* us but *about* us, reversing the familiar gaze so that humanity becomes the observed and interpreted. Humanity, after having silenced and objectified nature, now becomes its object. The passage calls into question a human-centred worldview, and invites the reader to reflect on the legitimacy – and the limits – of humanity's presumed centrality. Such moments reveal why a purely Anthropocene lens would risk reinscribing the very logic my sources interrogate. Deep Time, by contrast, aligns with Romanticism's impulse to decentre the human without erasing it.¹³³ Where the Anthropocene concerns itself with the trace humanity leaves on the earth, Novalis's engagement with Deep Time revolves around the question of what traces the earth leaves in us.

Timothy Morton's notion of 'weird weirdness' provides a suggestive point of comparison for this Romantic negotiation of human–nonhuman boundaries.¹³⁴ In Morton's account, literary metaphors can destabilise ontological categories by looping back on themselves, producing a cognitive dissonance that unsettles anthropocentric hierarchies.¹³⁵ Something of this quality appears in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, where Novalis crafts a world in which plants once spoke and rocks held meaning, but their language has been lost – or forgotten. The silence casts the human not as master interpreter of the natural world, but as estranged listener, no longer worthy of response. Yet Novalis, by ascribing human traits to nonhuman entities, and by treating rocks, roots,

¹³² Ibid., p. 368.

¹³³ Becker and Manstetten, 'Nature as *You*', pp. 101–18.

¹³⁴ Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), pp. 6–7.

¹³⁵ Ibid., pp. 5–8.

and fossils as communicative beings, *ironises* the boundary between the human and the natural. Anthropomorphising plants and stones may seem to affirm kinship, yet in likening their existence to human speech, he subtly undermines the very distinction he invokes. Does humanity's inability to converse with nature make it somehow less human? In the eighteenth century, after all, speech was taken as the defining mark of the human.¹³⁶ Does this gesture of personification invite us into a shared world, or expose the projections through which we imagine it? Is the absence of dialogue an ontological fact or a moral failure?

These questions yield no easy answers, since the Romantic ecological imagination thrives on sustaining the ambiguity between distinctions. One might detect here an affinity with the wariness of resolution found in Morton's 'dark ecology', with its emphasis on uncanny interdependence of beings over the dream of restoring an original harmony. Though one also notices how Novalis's ecological imagination remains attuned to his individual project of *Bildung*. This was an inward re-alignment with a world no longer transparent to reason, and the cultivation of a self capable of renewing dialogue with nature. The rupture he diagnoses is perceptual, not metaphysical, and can be read more broadly as a symptomatic literary response to the epistemological challenge of Deep Time. Nature has not withdrawn; it has been misread. Novalis is one of many who argue that nature speaks to us, if only we know how to listen. I will therefore analyse *Ursprünglichkeit* as literature's way of thinking with and against the epistemological shocks of modernity. Literary contributions to the discourse of originality, such as those

¹³⁶ For Herder, human reason is defined by the ability to structure thought linguistically, cf. HW, VI, ed. by Martin Bollacher, 'Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit', p. 375. Cf. also Anik Waldow, 'Between History and Nature: Herder's Human Being and the Naturalization of Reason,' in *Herder: Philosophy and Anthropology*, ed. by Anik Waldow and Nigel DeSouza (Oxford: OUP, 2017), pp. 147–65. Cf. also Schlözer, *Weltgeschichte*, pp. 139–140.

of Novalis, mark a point of convergence where poetic imagination and natural history intersect to respond to the challenge of Deep Time.

Ursprünglichkeit as a Tool of Cultural Criticism

The second strand of this thesis investigates *Ursprünglichkeit* as a tool of cultural criticism around 1800. As confidence in a strictly biblical chronology began to erode in Europe,¹³⁷ scholars rethought not only the timeline of the earth, but also the question of the position of human origins within a broader historical and non-European framework.¹³⁸ In this climate of expanding temporal and geographical scope, the study of language was undergoing its own transformation. Throughout much of the eighteenth century, debates over linguistic origins were shaped by universalist theories, such as Herder's *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* (1772), which treated the capacity for language as an innate, species-wide faculty. But the terrain of inquiry shifted decisively in 1786, when Sir William Jones, at the time serving as a judge in Calcutta, delivered a lecture to the Asiatic Society noting 'a stronger affinity' between Sanskrit, Latin, and Greek than could be explained by chance.¹³⁹ This was more than an antiquarian observation. Jones's claim suggested that these languages had sprung from a common source, opening the way for a historical and comparative philology that could trace their divergence over time.

In the wake of Jones's intervention, scholarly attention turned away from speculative accounts of a single, ahistorical origin towards the reconstruction of a historically situated original language. Originality, once conceived as a universal human endowment,

¹³⁷ Cf. Helmut Zedelmaier, *Anfang der Geschichte* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2003), and especially 'Teil iv, Das Anfangsproblem im Prozeß historischer Forschung und Erzählung', pp. 133–184.

¹³⁸ HW, vi, ed. by Martin Bollacher, 'Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit', pp. 386, 389, 390, and 423.

¹³⁹ *The Works of Sir William Jones*, ed. by Lord Teignmouth, 13 vols (London: Stockdale, 1807), III, p. 34. Following Jones's hypothesis, Franz Bopp would later formalise the method of comparison and apply it systematically to Sanskrit and German, cf. Franz Bopp, *Über das Conjugationssystem der Sanskritsprache in Vergleichung mit jenem der griechischen, lateinischen, persischen und germanischen Sprache* (Frankfurt: Andreae, 1816). Raymond Schwab calls Bopp's study the 'first work in which William Jones's lucky intuition became a method', Schwab, *Oriental Renaissance*, p. 178.

came to be located in the distinctive forms of particular tongues,¹⁴⁰ each tied to its own cultural ancestry. Such a mode of philological inquiry, linking linguistic structure to the history of peoples, would soon acquire ideological weight, providing both a tool for historical reconstruction and a resource for emerging nationalist agendas. The political stakes of this intellectual transition became increasingly visible as philology matured into a comparative discipline. Friedrich Schlegel, for instance, described inflection as a hallmark of linguistic depth, and identified Indo-European roots, particularly Sanskrit, as the most *ursprünglich* of linguistic forms.¹⁴¹ While earlier engagements with Deep Time often relied on speculative metaphor, comparative philology presented itself as an empirical science that both classified and ranked.

At the same time, philology absorbed and adapted temporal models from adjacent disciplines. Max Müller's 1861 observation that '[t]here is no science from which we, the students of language, may learn more than from Geology'¹⁴² captures this convergence. Geological Deep Time provided a conceptual framework for imagining linguistic ancestry as a slow, layered process of civilisational sedimentation. Philology, in turn, helped to establish a fundamental principle of modern scholarship: that 'things are explained when their origins have been identified'.¹⁴³ Döring and Ott have referred to this mutually

¹⁴⁰ Friedrich Schlegel's *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* (1808), for instance, reads linguistic structure as evidence of cultural ancestry. Schlegel declared Sanskrit the model of a more perfect, more original language, and by extension, a purer stage of civilisation. For characteristics of original languages, cf. Friedrich Schlegel, *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* (Heidelberg: Mohr und Zimmer, 1808), pp. 41–59 and pp. 32–4, where he lists concrete grammatical features shared by German and Sanskrit. Cf. also Bernal, *Black Athena*, I, p. 250.

¹⁴¹ Schlegel, *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*, pp. 41–59 and pp. 32–4.

¹⁴² Max Müller, 'Lecture I. Introductory Lecture. New Materials for the Science of Language, and New Theories', in *Lectures on the Science of Language*, II (London: Longman, Roberts&Green: 1864, repr. Cambridge: CUP, 2013), pp. 1–43, p. 14; for more on Müller's method, and his academic activities in England between c. 1856 and 1871, see Angus Nicholls, 'Max Müller and the Comparative Method', *Comparative Critical Studies*, 12.2 (2015), pp. 213–34.

¹⁴³ Geoffrey Galt Harpham, 'Roots, Races, and the Return to Philology', *Representations*, 106.1 (2009), pp. 34–62, p. 54.

reinforcing relationship as the ‘erstbegründende [...]’ function of narratives of origin – their power to ground knowledge claims by invoking foundational beginnings.¹⁴⁴

Yet philological authority was never neutral, and what appeared to be an epistemological advance also served political ends. As Maurice Olender and Martin Bernal have shown, the new genealogical models of language were fuelled by nationalist and racial ideologies.¹⁴⁵ The apparent objectivity of linguistic comparison masked profound biases: Indo-European languages were cast as complex, flexible, and expressive, while Semitic languages were framed as rigid and spiritually diminished.¹⁴⁶ In this way, philology not only challenged biblical chronology. It displaced the Hebrew ‘Orient’ as the origin of civilisation and installed Sanskrit in its place, which would soon come to serve as a basis for concepts of Germany’s own Deep Time.¹⁴⁷

The ideological stakes were raised further after 1806, when the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire left German-speaking lands politically fragmented and subordinate to Napoleonic France. In this moment of crisis, *Ursprünglichkeit* became a tool of cultural self-assertion. As Todd Kontje has argued, the French, on a mission ‘to spread the gospel of revolutionary reform’ ‘proceeded in a way that was perceived as naked aggression by

¹⁴⁴ Döring and Ott, *Urworte*, p. 15.

¹⁴⁵ Cf. Bernal, *Black Athena*, I, and Maurice Olender, *The Languages of Paradise: Race, Religion, and Philology in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: HUP, 1992).

¹⁴⁶ Herder and Schlözer first used the label ‘Semitic’ systematically, cf. August Ludwig von Schlözer, ‘Von den Chaldäern’, *Repertorium für biblische und morgenländische Literatur*, 8 (1781), pp. 113–176, p. 161; HW, v, ed. by Rudolf Smend, ‘Vom Geist der Ebräischen Poesie’ p. 903. In the ‘1. Gespräch’ of ‘Vom Geist der Ebräischen Poesie’, it is Alciphron who cites Anti-Semitic tropes that would later be revived in works such as Schlegel’s *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*, cf. *ibid.*, p. 674: ‘Wie unvollkommen ist sie! wie arm an eigentlichen Namen und bestimmten Beziehungen der Dinge auf einander! [...] Adjektive, die doch so sehr malen, hat die beinah gar nicht, und muß sich mit Zusammensetzungen einiger Bettelein behelfen. Wie ungewiß und weit hergeholt ist die Bedeutung ihrer Wurzelwörter, und wie gezwungen die Ableitung von denselben!’ He clearly rejects any comparison to the paradigms of originality, Ossian and Homer; *ibid.*, p. 675.

¹⁴⁷ Cf. Ronald B. Inden, *Imagining India* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990) and Nicholas Germana, *The Orient of Europe: The Mythical Image of India and Competing Images of German National Identity* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009).

those on the receiving end'.¹⁴⁸ In response, the discourse of origin was repurposed. No longer concerned with universal human beginnings, the discourse now sought specifically German origins. This Germanocentric transformation is most clearly exemplified in Friedrich Schlegel's work, which charts the shift of the discourse of *Ursprünglichkeit* from a universalist frame to a nationally focused one. Schlegel's proposed kinship between Indian and Nordic languages and peoples had far-reaching implications. As Geoffrey Galt Harpham notes, his image of a linguistic family tree suggested a unifying 'fountainhead', an 'Adam of languages' from which all development stemmed.¹⁴⁹ And since '[a] language requires speakers', 'the idea of an original race came into focus as an entailment of the philological inquiry into linguistic development'.¹⁵⁰ Consequently, the notion of an original people (*Urvolk*) inevitably accompanied the theory of an original language (*Ursprache*).¹⁵¹

Schlegel's turn to India as a privileged site of originality was marked by ideological investment. Though his formal study of Sanskrit began only in 1802–03 under Alexander Hamilton in Paris,¹⁵² Schlegel quickly positioned Indian antiquity as more culturally proximate to Germany than the (arguably more familiar) Semitic traditions of Hebrew or Arabic. The key was Indo-European linguistic filiation. Sanskrit's elaborate grammatical system was interpreted as evidence of India's ancient wisdom and philosophical sophistication. But by asserting linguistic kinship, Schlegel could appropriate that

¹⁴⁸ Kontje, *Imperial Fictions*, p. 4.

¹⁴⁹ Harpham, 'Roots, Races, and the Return to Philology', p. 43.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ For a discussion of how Schlegel linked language to race through his polygenetic concepts of the origins of language and of man, see Sebastiano Timpanaro, 'Friedrich Schlegel and the Beginnings of Indo-European Linguistics in Germany', trans. by J. Peter Mahler, in *Über Die Sprache Und Weisheit Der Indier. Ein Beitrag Zur Begründung Der Altertumskunde (Heidelberg, 1808). New Edition*, ed. by E.F.K. Koerner (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1977), pp. XI–LVII, pp. XX–XXI.

¹⁵² Schlegel, *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*, p. IV.

prestige of Sanskrit in the service of an evolving German culture. Such a linguistic continuity underwrote a deeper claim, namely that German culture could locate its origins not in the Mediterranean South or biblical East, but in an imagined 'Aryan'¹⁵³ past that linked Northern Europe with the Indian subcontinent, bypassing Latin Europe and especially revolutionary France. This selective identification became central to the ideological function of *Ursprünglichkeit* in post-1806 Germany. Beyond its appeal in scholarship, India served as a conceptual reservoir from which German thinkers could extract legitimacy, antiquity, and civilisational prestige. What Schlegel offered, then, was not merely a theory of origin, but a cultural genealogy responsive to the political vulnerabilities of a fragmented and defeated German-speaking world.¹⁵⁴

Rather than merely casting the Orient as an exotic Other, figures like Schlegel construed it as a site of ancestral affinity, a mirror in which German intellectuals could recognise displaced elements of themselves.¹⁵⁵ In this way, *Ursprünglichkeit* operated through both projection and appropriation, locating authenticity in a reimagined East in order to consolidate a coherent national tradition at home. The ideology of

¹⁵³ Dorothy M. Figueira discusses the complex relationship between Schlegel's coinage and subsequent racist use of the term 'Aryan', following Said's diagnosis of Schlegel's work as a 'proto-racist theory of origins', Dorothy M. Figueira, *Aryans, Jews, Brahmins. Theorizing Authority through Myths of Identity* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), and Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 99.

¹⁵⁴ The kinship Schlegel asserts serves a purpose in the context of the emerging German *Kultur*. Instead of territorial occupation, Germans could reclaim their spiritual ancestry through academic study. He claims, 'Es ist ein angebohrner Trieb des Deutschen, daß er das Fremde liebt', and therefore 'auch den Orient wieder zu besitzen [wünscht]', but explicitly admits that, in times of political weakness, cultural and academic endeavours compensate for Germany's lack of territorial stakes in the Orient: 'Gegenwärtig, da die politische Existenz der deutschen Nation zum Theil gar anders modificirt worden ist, zum Theil ganz und gar aufgehört hat, kann sich jene vielumfassende Neigung nur noch im Gebiete der Wissenschaft und der Kunst zeigen; einem Gebiete, wo keine Fesseln die natürliche Erweiterungs- und Eroberungssucht des menschlichen Geistes hemmen', Friedrich Schlegel, 'Beiträge zur Geschichte der modernen Poesie und Nachricht von provenzalischen Manuskripten', *Europa*, 1 (1803), pp. 49–71, p. 50.

¹⁵⁵ Cf. Sybille Bauriedl, *Konstruktionen des Orients in Deutschland* (Berlin: Verlag Arabisches Buch, 1996), and Douglas T. McGetchin, *Indology, Indomania, and Orientalism* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009), p. 62: 'The fascination was arguably more about a self-absorbed projection than a genuine engagement with a viable "Other"'.

Ursprünglichkeit relied on a double movement. It at once projected origin outwards while retrieving it inwards. No figure illustrates this more clearly than Schlegel. His philological work claims proximity to the East in order to secure a usable past for the fragmented German present. As I will show in Chapter Two, Schlegel's engagement with the Orient operates metonymically: on the one hand, individual cultural artefacts drawn from India were extrapolated *partes pro toto* and made to stand in for an undifferentiated 'Oriental' whole.¹⁵⁶ On the other hand, he and his contemporaries reversed this logic in a *totum pro parte* gesture. The imagined spiritual wholeness of the Orient was invoked to confer pedigree on Germany. By claiming kinship with the *Morgenländer*,¹⁵⁷ German culture could insert itself into a lineage of ancient spiritual depth, thereby drawing a sense of legitimacy. This dual appropriation allowed German thinkers to identify with the East as much as define themselves against it.

Methodologically, this allows us to identify the ways in which early nineteenth-century German Orientalism does not fully conform to the model of imperial domination outlined by Edward Said.¹⁵⁸ German Orientalism, as distinguished by scholars such as Susanne Zantop, Todd Kontje, and Sheldon Pollock, exhibited unique characteristics emerging from political crisis.¹⁵⁹ With the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806, German

¹⁵⁶ Polaschegg, *Der andere Orientalismus*, pp. 102 and 205.

¹⁵⁷ 'Morgenland' and 'Morgenländer' are the terms Herder prefers to use in his oeuvre, cf. Chapter Two, pp. 132–33.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Said, *Orientalism*.

¹⁵⁹ Zantop argues that German thinkers, largely detached from direct colonial engagement, employed 'armchair theorising' to construct narratives that contained the potentially destabilising 'Other' while shaping a distinctly German identity, cf. Susanne Zantop, *Colonial Fantasies*, pp. 17–42. Building on Zantop's insights, Pollock's concept of 'Deep Orientalism' critiques how German thinkers appropriated 'Oriental' heritage to construct a national self-image, all through a form of colonialism 'directed inward – toward the colonization and domination of Europe itself', Sheldon Pollock, 'Deep Orientalism? Notes on Sanskrit and Power Beyond the Raj', in *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament: Perspectives on South Asia*, ed. by Carol A. Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), pp. 76–133, p. 77. Tzoref-Ashkenazi outlines how Schlegel instrumentalised India for 'the construction of national identity and national visions', Chen Tzoref-Ashkenazi, 'India and the Identity of Europe: The Case of Friedrich Schlegel', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 67.4 (2006), pp. 713–34, p. 718.

intellectuals sought a lineage that could rival classical antiquity and counteract the fragmentation of modernity. As Nicholas Germana argues, Napoleonic occupation provoked a desire to ground 'Germanness' in a tradition more ancient and spiritually elevated than that associated with French Neo-Classicism.¹⁶⁰ Imagined kinship with India served that purpose, linking Germany to linguistic and spiritual depth, an *Ursprung* untainted by modern decadence. This political longing for rootedness found parallel expression in domestic cultural efforts. Just as the East became a symbolic reservoir of civilisational prestige, so too did German folk traditions come to be seen as repositories of primeval authenticity. Following Nicholas Germana, I argue that the simultaneous interest in German folk traditions and Orientalism reflects the desire to turn territorial fragmentation into spiritual wholeness.¹⁶¹

This 'Orientalising' staging of German *Ursprünglichkeit* unfolded within broader patterns of European nation-building. Across the continent, the past was summoned to legitimise emergent national identities, often through what Eric Hobsbawm famously termed 'invented traditions'.¹⁶² These rituals and narratives retroactively constructed historical depth for modern political communities. In the German case, where statehood remained elusive, literature and scholarship played a compensatory role, anchoring 'Germanness' in an imagined antiquity rather than a present territorial reality. As Benedict Anderson observes, nations emerge as 'imagined communities', and the kinship Schlegel extrapolated from the connections between German and Sanskrit, Germany and the

¹⁶⁰ Nicholas Germana, 'Self-Othering in German Orientalism: The Case of Friedrich Schlegel', *The Comparatist*, 34.1 (2010), pp. 80–94, p. 90.

¹⁶¹ Germana, 'Self-Othering', p. 90.

¹⁶² Cf. *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: CUP, 2012), pp. 1–14.

Orient, was precisely such an imaginative act, in this case a cultural fiction serving political needs.¹⁶³

Anthony D. Smith's theory of 'ethno-symbolism' clarifies how this fiction was made persuasive. According to Smith, nationalist ideologues weave the present into a mythologised 'ethnic past',¹⁶⁴ relying on shared origin myths, symbolic continuity, and collective memory. Romantic deployments of *Ursprünglichkeit* mirror this process almost exactly. Claims of descent from ancient Germanic tribes created an illusion of 'recurrence'.¹⁶⁵ Continuity was constructed through curated traditions, many of which were recent inventions rather than uninterrupted inheritances. Reappropriation, Smith's third pillar,¹⁶⁶ enabled German thinkers to fuse local and foreign material into a composite vision of authenticity: one that could stretch from the forests of Thuringia to the banks of the Ganges.

As Celia Applegate argues in *A Nation of Provincials*, the fragmented political geography of the German-speaking world did not impede national identity, but shaped it.¹⁶⁷ Rather than erasing regional difference, Romantic nationalism cast provincial life as national essence. The 'Oriental spirit', in turn, was imagined as a mirror of the German *Geist* spread across local identities yet held together by shared origin. As I show in Chapter Three, such a symbolic logic also shaped the Romantic folk-song movement. Collectors sought not just rural curiosities but fragments of an imagined whole, remnants

¹⁶³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2016), especially pp. 1–36.

¹⁶⁴ Anthony Smith, 'Ethno-Symbolism and the Study of Nationalism', in *Nations and Nationalism: A Reader*, ed. by Philip Spencer and Howard Wollman (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), pp. 21–31, p. 25.

¹⁶⁵ Smith, 'Ethno-Symbolism and the Study of Nationalism', p. 24.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁶⁷ Cf. Celia Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials: The German Idea of Heimat* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

of a vernacular past that could lend cultural depth to an absent political nation. Yet the authenticity on display was often manufactured. Elites, far removed from the communities they admired, curated these traditions to embody abstract ideals. Anselm Elwert's *Ungedruckte Reste alten Gesangs*, for instance, claimed oral provenance but drew heavily from published sources, while the Romantic collection *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, adapted and Germanised songs of French origin. This editorial practice exemplifies what Anthony Smith calls a 'political archaeologist':¹⁶⁸ the nationalist intellectual who assembles the past not for preservation but for use. Their task was a form of affective persuasion, to make the nation feel ancient and rooted. *Ursprünglichkeit*, in this context, was an act of ideologically inflected authorship.

¹⁶⁸ Smith, 'Ethno-Symbolism and the Study of Nationalism', p. 25.

Ursprünglichkeit Beyond the Originalgenie

The final strand of this thesis concerns literary periodisation, proposing two refinements to debates in German literary history. First, I revisit the increasingly problematised partition between Enlightenment and Romanticism.¹⁶⁹ While handbooks and companions continue to register German Romanticism's pronounced critique of Enlightenment rationality,¹⁷⁰ the *Cambridge Companion to German Romanticism* and related reference works stress the movement's intellectual continuities with late-Enlightenment discourse in aesthetics, language theory, and philosophical anthropology, cautioning against a simple model of rupture.¹⁷¹ Charles Taylor concedes that Romantic expressivism is inconceivable without Enlightenment humanisms, particularly the belief that nature and human development follow an internal, purposive logic.¹⁷² Recent scholarship in Romantic historicism has likewise shown that Romantic thinkers did not abandon Enlightenment categories but reworked them: temporal depth replaced universal principles; organicism displaced mechanism;¹⁷³ and speculative

¹⁶⁹ Notable examples include Paul de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984); Azade Seyhan, *Representation and its Discontents: The Critical Legacy of German Romanticism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Frederick Beiser persuasively argues that early German Romanticism did not constitute a clean rupture but maintained vibrant philosophical continuities with the Enlightenment. Cf. Frederick C. Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative: The Concept of Early German Romanticism* (Cambridge, MA, London: HUP, 2003), especially Chapters Three to Five.

¹⁷⁰ Cf. *Brill's Companion to German Romantic Philosophy*, ed. by Elizabeth Millán Brusslan (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2019). See esp. chs. 'Romantic Views of Language' (Pollack-Milgate), 'The Philosophical Relevance of Romantic Irony', and 'Literary Criticism in the Age of Critical Philosophy', which present Romanticism's anti-systematic impulses and critiques of rationalist closure.

¹⁷¹ *The Cambridge Companion to German Romanticism*, ed. by Nicholas Saul (Cambridge: CUP, 2009).

¹⁷² Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), p. 152.

¹⁷³ Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative*, p. 141: 'The great promise of the organic paradigm is that, after the collapse of mechanism, it guaranteed the principle of the unity of nature, a single form of explanation for both life and matter'. For an overview of Cartesian mechanism, cf. Gordon Baker and Katherine J. Morris, *Descartes' Dualism* (London: Routledge, 1996), especially pp. 69–99. Kant retained traces of mechanism in his thinking. While humans may lack the capacity to understand complex organisms in purely mechanical terms, he did not definitively rule out mechanism itself: 'Wir können die Unmöglichkeit der Erzeugung der organisierten Naturprodukte durch den bloßen Mechanismus der Natur keineswegs beweisen...'; cf. '§71: Vorbereitung zur Auflösung obiger Antinomie', in *Immanuel Kant: Kritik der Urteilskraft*, ed. by Wilhelm Weischedel (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1995), pp. 338–39, p. 338.

philology succeeded systematic grammar.¹⁷⁴ Romanticism, in this sense, is best understood as a transformation of epistemic orientation rather than a wholesale rejection of rationality.

The Romanticism at stake here is a constellation of debates, texts and intellectual formations that emerged in the German-speaking lands in the decades around 1800. Rather than resolving the period's internal heterogeneity by subdividing it into 'early' and 'late', or 'Jena' and 'Heidelberg' Romanticisms,¹⁷⁵ my thesis proposes that evolving concepts of originality provide a more productive axis for tracing development within Romanticism. Such an approach preserves the category of Romanticism as analytically meaningful while also accounting for its internal tensions. As Paul Hamilton has argued,¹⁷⁶ Romanticism rarely achieves a unified aesthetic programme. Instead, it thrives in the creative friction between the dynamics of historicism and myth, imagination and tradition, inwardness and collectivity. My approach builds on this productive tension. I argue that originality can serve as a lens through which we can observe German Romantic thinkers negotiating these contradictions across philosophical, philological and poetic domains.

Accordingly, such a rethinking of the epistemological and aesthetic claims to periodicity also questions the equation of *Ursprünglichkeit* with the *Sturm und Drang* figure of the *Originalgenie*, which marks the solitary, expressive genius whose creative force mirrors that of nature. This paradigm identifies origin with immediacy: the authentic

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Henry M. Hoenigswald, 'On the History of the Comparative Method', *Anthropological Linguistics*, 35.1 (1993), pp. 54–65.

¹⁷⁵ Cf. Paul Kluckhohn, *Das Ideengut der deutschen Romantik*, 3rd edn (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1953), pp. 8–9; Ernst Behler, *Frühromantik* (Berlin: DeGruyter, 1992); Harro Segeberg, 'Phasen der Romantik', in *Romantik-Handbuch*, ed. by Helmut Schanze (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1994), pp. 31–78.

¹⁷⁶ Paul Hamilton, *Metaromanticism: Aesthetics, Literature, Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. xv.

work issues from the depths of inwardness, unmediated by tradition. Charles Taylor provides one of the most influential modern accounts of this logic. In his account, originality becomes the moral imperative to remain faithful to one's inner voice, a secularisation of the Protestant notion of the soul's direct relation to God, with originality referring back to a distinctly modern form of inwardness.¹⁷⁷ Yet Taylor himself acknowledges this individualist paradigm has always had a counterpoint, namely in Herder's conception of originality as a feature of collective cultural life.¹⁷⁸

Jochen Schmidt's extensive two-volume study on the subject, *Die Geschichte des Genie-Gedankens in der deutschen Literatur, Philosophie und Politik 1750–1945*,¹⁷⁹ and particularly his chapter on Herder, likewise demonstrates that originality around 1800 cannot be confined to the rhetoric of expressive subjectivity. In his study, Schmidt crucially speaks not of a 'Begriff' but a 'Gedanke' of genius – a terminological choice that is methodologically instructive. Rather than treating genius as a fixed concept, Schmidt reconstructs a constellation of discursive formations, philosophical, literary and political, within which genius assumes different meanings and emerges as a site of programmatic negotiation. In this respect, Schmidt's approach aligns with my own interest in *Ursprünglichkeit* not as a merely lexical phenomenon but as a discursive function that organises cultural self-understanding and authority.

A further point of convergence lies in Schmidt's treatment of the transition from individualist to collective articulations of creative force around 1800. His discussion of

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Charles Taylor, *The Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge: HUP, 1991). Cf. also Bart van Leeuwen, 'Charles Taylor on Secularization', *Ethical Perspectives*, 10.1 (2003), pp. 78–86.

¹⁷⁸ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, pp. 151–52.

¹⁷⁹ Jochen Schmidt, *Die Geschichte des Genie-Gedankens in der deutschen Literatur, Philosophie und Politik 1750–1945*, 2 vols (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1985).

Herder foregrounds the emergence of *Volksgeist* as a collective figuration of genius,¹⁸⁰ thereby complicating the paradigm of the individual *Kraftmensch* associated, for instance, with the *Sturm und Drang*. For Herder, each *Volk* possesses a unique spirit shaped by language, climate, and custom;¹⁸¹ an internal principle of development that binds individual expression to cultural context.¹⁸² In Schmidt's reconstruction, Herder's genius becomes not only a category of individual distinction but also a vehicle for national-cultural legitimation in the form of a 'genetische Kraft' that is unique to each people and period of history.¹⁸³ This shift, central to my second and third chapters, demonstrates that the discourse of originality cannot be confined to the rhetoric of expressive subjectivity; it equally participates in the formation of collective identity and historical consciousness.

At the same time, Schmidt's study is deliberately oriented towards those figures whose interventions left the most visible and enduring traces in the canonical discourse of genius: Klopstock, Herder, Goethe, Kant and Fichte, to name only a few of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth-century figures Schmidt discusses. His project reconstructs the major theoretical articulations of the *Genie-Gedanken* within systematic philosophy and literary aesthetics, including in the period of Romanticism. Thinkers whose reflections on originality are embedded less in explicit aesthetic theory than in philological practice and editorial mediation inevitably occupy a more peripheral

¹⁸⁰ Schmidt, *Die Geschichte des Genie-Gedankens*, I, p. 137.

¹⁸¹ HW, VI, ed. by Martin Bollacher, 'Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit', p. 259: '[A]uch auf der fernsten Küste trägt jeder den Charakter seines Erdstrichs und seiner Lebensweisem mit sich [...]. Wohin seit Jahrtausenden seine [i.e. Adam's] Söhne zogen und sich einwohnten: da wurzelten sie als Bäume und gaben, dem Klima gemäß, Blätter und Früchte'.

¹⁸² Peter Hallberg, 'The Nature of Collective Individuals: J.G. Herder's Concept of Community', *History of European Ideas*, 25.6 (1999), pp. 291–304.

¹⁸³ Schmidt, *Die Geschichte des Genie-Gedankens*, I, pp. 136, 139–141.

position.¹⁸⁴ This selectivity is not a limitation but a consequence of Schmidt's methodological focus on the dominant trajectories of genius discourse. It is here that my thesis seeks to extend the discussion. Certain figures central to my argument, most notably Anselm Elwert, do not appear in Schmidt's account for precisely those reasons. Elwert does not formulate a systematic theory of genius and therefore does not enter the canon of explicit genius discourse. Yet his work crystallises what Schmidt terms *Genie-Gedanken* within a broader paradigm of *Ursprünglichkeit*, in which innovation and cultural antiquity are not mutually exclusive, but structurally interdependent. Influenced by Herder and subsequently read, adapted, and in part appropriated by Brentano and Arnim, Elwert occupies a hinge position between intellectual generations. For a study concerned with originality as a structural logic operating across philosophical, poetic, and antiquarian domains in the decades around 1800, his position is not ancillary but indispensable.

Deborah Holmes's recent work on the genealogy of concepts of genius further emphasises the necessity of approaching genius as a plural and internally differentiated discourse.¹⁸⁵ In her article, Holmes highlights the semantic elasticity and paradoxical functions of 'Genie' within German-language culture. As Holmes shows, genius serves simultaneously as a trope of individual self-assertion and as a vehicle for collective cultural legitimation, particularly in relation to Herder's conception of *Volksgeist*.¹⁸⁶ This insistence on discursive multiplicity provides a crucial point of departure for my own

¹⁸⁴ Cf. Schmidt's methodological reflection in the preface, Schmidt, *Die Geschichte des Genie-Gedankens*, I, pp. XII–XIII.

¹⁸⁵ Deborah Holmes, 'Introduction: Pre-Romantic and Post-Romantic Genius', *German Life and Letters*, 75.3 (2022), pp. 327–40.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 330: '[...] it also served as a trope of individualist self-assertion while simultaneously informing the emergence of German cultural nationalism as a collective phenomenon', and for a discussion of Herder's idea of 'Volksgeist', cf. p. 333.

argument. If genius discourse around 1800 is structurally heterogenous, then Romantic *Ursprünglichkeit*, too, must be analysed in terms of the shifting relations between individuality, inheritance and mediation that organise the period's thinking about origins.

Romantic philology and folklore collecting operationalise the idea of Herder's *Volksgeist*, according to which language, song, and custom sediment a people's creativity.¹⁸⁷ The idea that thus emerges is the 'original collective'. Friedrich August Wolf's *Prolegomena ad Homerum*, for instance, argued that Homer's epics arose from an oral tradition, reframing 'Homer' as an anonymous collective, an early model of traditioned originality that captivated German Romantic theorists. The image of Homer as *Märchenerzähler* complicates the figure of the autonomous genius: even as he was canonised as an original genius, his works were framed as expressions of a shared, mythopoetic culture.¹⁸⁸ A parallel dynamic emerges in James Macpherson's Ossianic poems and their German reception, as will be discussed in Chapter Three. Although the Ossianic corpus was eventually debunked as a fiction, its framing as the recovered voice of a lost bard endowed it with a kind of mediated originality. Authenticity was relocated from the author's personal invention to the act of transmitting an imagined cultural tradition. In both cases, originality shifts from isolated genius on the one hand to the dynamics of transmission and collective memory on the other. Within German Romanticism proper, Arnim and Brentano's *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (1805–08) makes

¹⁸⁷ Cf. Michael Forster, 'Johann Gottfried von Herder', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2023 Edition), ed. by Edward N. Zalta and Uri Nodelman, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2023/entries/herder/> [Accessed 14 August 2025].

¹⁸⁸ This image of Homer as a representative of collective tradition, a corpus of folk song and fairytales, foreshadows the late nineteenth- and twentieth-century Homeric scholarship of figures such as Milman Parry. Cf. Heinrich Wilhelm Abraham de Marées, *Versuch über die Cultur der Griechen zur Zeit des Homer. Nebst einigen geographischen Anmerkungen zu Robert Woods Versuch über das Originalgenie des Homer* (Berlin: Königl. preuss. akad. Kunst- und Buchhandlung, 1797), pp. 205–06.

the programme explicit: to gather and refashion folk songs so that a modern literature can speak with an ancestral voice. The *Originalgenie* was joined, if not replaced, by the figure of the custodian of a collective past.

By tracing this alternative tradition of originality and *Ursprünglichkeit*, this thesis contributes to the broader reassessment of German Romanticism as an interdisciplinary formation, one whose literary texts were entangled with scientific paradigms, historical anxieties, and nationalist imaginaries specific to the German-speaking context around 1800. In foregrounding *Ursprünglichkeit* as a conceptual hinge across these domains, I propose not only to recover neglected intellectual continuities but also to reanimate the term Romanticism itself: as a complex but coherent response to the question of how to locate meaning in the idea of an origin. My aim is a comprehensive understanding of Romantic originality, not as a rejection of tradition but as a reinterpretation of its intellectual and cultural heritage. Romantic *Ursprünglichkeit*, I argue, was not an anti-modern fantasy but a coping mechanism and tool of mediation: a way to fuse science, poetics, and politics into a grammar of belonging.

I) Deep Time, Originality, and Novalis's Geo-Poetics

In the late eighteenth century, geological inquiry began to reveal what is now referred to as Deep Time: a timeline that dwarfed human history and unsettled the biblical framework of earth's origins.¹⁸⁹ As Martin Rudwick observes, a 'widespread qualitative sense of the likely immensity of time' had begun to permeate both scientific and philosophical discourse.¹⁹⁰ For centuries, natural and human history alike had been compressed into a few thousand years. In the writings of Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon (1707–1788) and James Hutton (1726–1797),¹⁹¹ by contrast, the earth appeared immeasurably older. Abraham Gottlob Werner's Neptunist theory, with its vision of rocks precipitating from a primeval ocean, offered a competing account, but it too implied a chronology far exceeding sacred history.¹⁹² However divergent these models were, they shared one implication. Humanity was displaced from the centre of the story, recast as a minor actor within a planetary drama indifferent to human presence.¹⁹³

With stratigraphy emerging as a formal discipline, depth itself became a cipher for antiquity, its layers preserving the sedimented record of vanished worlds.¹⁹⁴ Writers

¹⁸⁹ Stephen Toulmin and June Goodfield, *The Discovery of Time* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 64, and Richard D.G. Irvine, *An Anthropology of Deep Time: Geological Temporality and Social Life* (Cambridge: CUP, 2020), p. 27; Noah Heringman submits that the term was used even before McPhee allegedly coined it, by science-fiction author J.G. Ballard in his novel *The Drowned World* (1962), Heringman, *Deep Time*, p. 2.

¹⁹⁰ Rudwick, *Bursting the Limits of Time*, p. 127.

¹⁹¹ Cf. *Georges-Louis Leclerc, le Comte de Buffon, The Epochs of Nature*, trans. and ed. by Anne-Sophie Milon, Jan Zalasiewicz and Mateusz Zalasiewicz (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 2018); James Hutton, *Theory of the Earth*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: Cadell, 1795), I; On Hutton's theory, see also Gillispie, *Genesis and Geology*, p. 44.

¹⁹² Cf. Werner's estimates in his handwritten papers that are held at the Georgius Agricola Library at the Technische Universität Bergakademie Freiberg, II, p. 256, quoted after Martin Guntau, 'The Rise of Geology as a Science in Germany around 1800', in *The Making of the Geological Society of London*, ed. by C.L.E. Lewis and S.J. Knell (London: The Geological Society, 2009), pp. 163–78, p. 170.

¹⁹³ The recognition that earth's history vastly predates humanity has been called the 'fourth insult' to humanity, extending Sigmund Freud's account of scientific revolutions that dismantled human self-perception. cf. Rudwick, *Earth's Deep History*, p. 1.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. Schnyder, 'übereinander/nacheinander'.

groped for metaphors to register this vertiginous dislocation, repeatedly returning to the image of the abyss,¹⁹⁵ at once a figure of depth and of the ‘dizziness’ it provoked.¹⁹⁶ It was into this shifting terrain that Friedrich von Hardenberg, better known as Novalis, entered when he enrolled at the Freiberg Mining Academy in the mid-1790s. Under Werner’s instruction in mineralogy and geognosy, he acquired the expertise expected of a future mining inspector: classifying minerals, charting strata, overseeing extraction sites.¹⁹⁷ Yet his training led him well beyond administrative utility. Novalis’s literary imagination seized upon rock and mineral as figures for reflection. Where geological inquiry, even in its nascent forms, had disclosed temporal expanses that defied ordinary comprehension, Novalis did not merely register temporal vertigo, but transmuted it into a space for conceptual invention. For him, the earth’s deepest strata were sources of renewal, sites where beginnings could perpetually resurface. In this context, the notion of *Ursprünglichkeit* becomes pivotal. As outlined in the Introduction, the term carries a double meaning: antiquity as temporal remoteness, imagined through depth, and primordially as timeless universality. This second sense ensures that the original is not confined to the past but remains generative, carrying within itself the potential for future unfolding, as we shall see in the analysis of Novalis’s literary works.

Geology could measure and classify temporal depth, but it could not render such immensities meaningful for human life. That was the task of poetry. ‘Nur die Dichter haben es gefühlt, was die Natur den Menschen sein kann’ (NS, I, p. 99), declares one apprentice in Novalis’s novel *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*. Here, poetic speculation emerges as

¹⁹⁵ For an overview of the image of an ‘abyss’ of time, cf. Rossi, *The Dark Abyss of Time*.

¹⁹⁶ NS, I, ‘Die Lehrlinge zu Sais’, p. 88; Goethe, FA I.x, ed. by Gerhard Neumann and Hans-Georg Dewitz, p. 289.).

¹⁹⁷ *Bergbau und Dichtung: Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis) zum 200. Todestag*, ed. by Eleonore Sent (Weimar, Jena: Hain, 2003).

a mode of attunement to nature, which itself is portrayed as possessing an ‘unerschöpfliche[n] Reichtum [an] Fantasie’ (NS, I, p. 99).¹⁹⁸ But it is not only nature’s creative potential that inspires humans. The relationship is reciprocal. Nature listens to the voice of poetry, so that ‘Steine und Wälder der Musik gehorchen, und, von ihr gezähmt, sich jedem Willen wie Haustiere fügen’ (NS, I, p. 100). For Novalis, poetry makes dialogue possible, turning nature into a ‘You’, an interlocutor with its own selfhood: ‘Wird nicht der Fels ein eigenthümliches Du, eben wenn ich ihn anrede?’ (NS, I, p. 100).

Novalis’s natural-human reciprocal model comes into sharp relief when set against the philosophical horizon of Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*, which he studied intensely.¹⁹⁹ For Fichte, the *Ich* (I) posits itself and confronts the *Nicht-Ich* (non-I), which appears both as a limit and as material to be mastered.²⁰⁰ Nature in this framework functions as the necessary counter-term of selfhood, and possesses no autonomy.²⁰¹ Novalis counters this reduction.²⁰² Against the Fichtean model of inert matter, in his novels Novalis portrays a former Golden Age in which nature was active and responsive.²⁰³ One of Novalis’s central concerns is to find again, through poetry, humanity’s place within a

¹⁹⁸ Similarly, nature expresses itself in song, cf. NS, I, p. 96: ‘Naturgesang’.

¹⁹⁹ On Novalis’s reading of Fichte, cf. Roland Borgards, ‘Natur. Spielarten romantischer Ökologien bei Friedrich von Hardenberg, Friedrich Schlegel und Karoline von Günderrode’, in *Sich kreuzende Stimmen: Friedrich von Hardenberg, Friedrich Schlegel und die Romantik*, ed. by Roland Borgards and Konrad Heumann (Berlin, Heidelberg: Metzler, 2025), pp. 121–43; Alexander J. B. Hampton, ‘Novalis’s Poetic Understanding of Nature in the Age of Romanticism’ in *Matter and Life in Coleridge, Schelling, and Other Dynamical Idealists*, ed. by Peter Cheyne (Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, 2025), pp. 89–101.

²⁰⁰ Johann Gottlieb Fichte, ‘Von der Sprachfähigkeit und dem Ursprung der Sprache’, *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten*, 1.3 (1795), pp. 255–73, p. 260.

²⁰¹ Hampton, ‘Novalis’s Poetic Understanding of Nature in the Age of Romanticism’, pp. 91–2.

²⁰² Becker and Manstetten, ‘Nature as *You*’, pp. 104–05. Schelling writes from a similar perspective about contemporary European philosophy (arguably with Fichte in mind): ‘Die ganze neu-europäische Philosophie [...] hat diesen gemeinschaftlichen Mangel, daß die Natur für sie nicht vorhanden ist’, in Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, ‘Philosophische Untersuchungen über das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit’, in *Sämmtliche Werke*, I.VII (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1860), p. 356.

²⁰³ On the image of a responsive nature, see Becker and Manstetten, ‘Nature as *You*’, pp. 105–06.

nature that has come to appear estranged,²⁰⁴ and towards which modernity knows only the stance of mastery. To acknowledge nature's potential responsiveness is already to displace the logic of mastery that governs both philosophical idealism and the applied sciences in which Novalis was trained.

Throughout his writings, Novalis thus contests the anthropocentric inheritance of his age and offers a startling prefiguration of our own age of ecological crisis. The ecocritical recognition that human activity now operates on geological scales has sharpened interest in how earlier writers, particularly the Romantics, confronted the ethical relation between human and earth history, and between modes of perception and imagination.²⁰⁵ The literary capacity for temporal synthesis gains particular significance within Anthropocene Studies which emphasise a double temporality: the compressed timeline of human history coexisting with the vast durations of earth systems.²⁰⁶ Novalis's writings occupy a distinctive place within this field.²⁰⁷ His poetics unsettles the conventional boundary between subject and object,²⁰⁸ and in so doing, he anticipates later

²⁰⁴ NS, I, 'Die Lehrlinge zu Sais', p. 83: 'den alten einfachen Naturstand herzustellen'.

²⁰⁵ The effect was not simply humbling; it severed the perceived intimacy between nature and human destiny. Cf. Franklin Ginn, Michelle Bastian, David Farrier, and Jeremy Kidwell, 'Introduction: Unexpected Encounters with Deep Time', *Environmental Humanities*, 10.1 (2018), pp. 213–25, p. 214; in this context, literature is often discussed as a means to cultivate awareness of temporal scales that exceed human lifespans and thereby reshape ethical responsibility. Cf. David Farrier, *Anthropocene Poetics: Deep Time, Sacrifice Zones, and Extinction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019); Lynn Keller, *Recomposing Ecopoetics: North American Poetry of the Self-Conscious Anthropocene* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2017). On the role of literature and the arts in making geological temporality cognitively and ethically legible, cf. *Digressions in Deep Time: Ecocritical Approaches to Literature and the Arts*, ed. by Declan Lloyd and Warren Mortimer (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2024).

²⁰⁶ Cf., for instance, Dipesh Chakrabarty's interventions on planetary history, Chakrabarty, 'The Climate of History'.

²⁰⁷ Several contributions link Novalis's training in geognosy, his experiences at the Freiberg mining academy, and his poetic practice to a proto-ecocritical sensibility. Cf. Karin Littau, "'Just ask the stones': Eco-Translation, natural history and geomediality', in *History as a Translation of the Past: Case Studies from the West*, ed. by Luigi Alonzi (London: Bloomsbury, 2023), pp. 167–89; Naveeda Khan, 'At Play with the Giants: Between the Patchy Anthropocene and Romantic Geology', *Current Anthropology*, 60.20 (2019), pp. 333–41; Heather I. Sullivan, 'Collecting the Rocks of Time: Goethe, the Romantics and Early Geology', *European Romantic Review*, 10.1–4 (1999), pp. 341–70.

²⁰⁸ In this respect, Novalis anticipates Timothy Morton's concept of 'hyperobjects' – entities so vast in time and space that they exceed human comprehension. cf. Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and*

philosophical attempts to describe agency and temporality beyond the human. Central to this effort is his use of *Ursprünglichkeit* to negotiate between geological time and cultural history, forging a literary practice that I describe as a Romantic geo-poetics. This is the capacity of form, metaphor, and myth to attend to geological time, material agency, and the ethical implications of inhabiting an ancient earth, rendering geological processes perceptible and meaningful within human experience and lived temporality.²⁰⁹

The works in which Novalis pursues his geo-poetics most directly are his two unfinished novels, *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* and *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*. Each illustrates in a different way his effort to bring natural philosophy into dialogue with poetic imagination. *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* is set in a school of apprentices who attempt to fathom the mystery of nature, with their conversations branching into fable, allegory, and myth. The novel's form enacts its central concern. Knowledge of nature cannot be reduced to a single approach, whether empirical, symbolic, or mystical. Instead, the text stages knowledge as a plurality of methods, none of which exhausts its object. *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, meanwhile, follows his eponymous protagonist on a journey towards his poetic awakening. The narrative is interlaced with poems and embedded tales that refract stages of Heinrich's own development in poetic form. His journey, too, is punctuated by encounters with emblematic figures linked to Deep Time,²¹⁰ and by literal descents into subterranean depths. For Novalis, depth is the province of a poetic

Ecology after the End of the World (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013); Cheryl Lousley, 'Ecocriticism', *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature* 27 Oct. 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.974> [Accessed 9 August 2025].

²⁰⁹ Cf. Littau, 'Just ask the stones'; Joanna Raisbeck, "'Ich Petrefakt": Geopoetics in Nineteenth-Century Poetry', *Oxford German Studies*, 54.1 (2025), pp. 58–71.

²¹⁰ For instance, Count Friedrich von Hohenzollern, whom he encounters in a cave in Chapter Five, or the Arab girl Zulima, who inspires reflection on the Deep Time of culture that Novalis's contemporaries sought in the 'Orient', cf. Chapter Two of this thesis, pp. 121–80.

Tiefsinn, namely the reflective probing of origins, and attunement to the hidden web of correspondences that lies beneath nature's surface.²¹¹ *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* thus realises what *Die Lehrlinge* had posited as a theoretical aspiration: that natural history should be approached as poetry.²¹² It 'romanticises' Novalis's philosophical speculations about natural history, giving 'the ordinary' of his geognostic studies 'a mysterious appearance' and lending 'the finite an infinite semblance'.²¹³ While the latter text remains more explicitly engaged with scientific and philosophical inquiry, the former reshapes these ideas within a narrative framework. Read together, they invite a comparative approach, revealing Novalis's evolving concept of *Ursprünglichkeit* as a fusion of geognostic, philosophical, and poetic modes of thought.

The convergence of geological and philosophical registers of *Ursprünglichkeit* comes into focus in *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*. In one passage, an apprentice observes: 'Nicht unwahr haben alte Weisen im Wasser den Ursprung der Dinge gesucht' (NS, I, p. 104). The remark about water as an original substance readily recalls Neptunist accounts of formation, yet the text refuses to pin down this 'original water' to an empirical primeval ocean. Instead, it distinguishes ordinary water from a speculative element: the ancients, the apprentice insists, spoke 'von einem höhern Wasser, als nur dem Meer- und Quellwasser', and that only 'in jenem [...] offenbaret sich das Urflüssige' (LzW, 104). *Ursprünglichkeit* therefore does not remain a matter of sedimentary prehistory; it is shifted into a register in which origin is not simply what lies furthest back in time, but what discloses itself as a first

²¹¹ For references to *Tiefsinn*, see NS, I, pp. 93, 204, 206, 237, 245, 255, 257, 292, cf. also pp. 216 [*tiefes Gemüth*] and 243 [*tiefe Einsichten*].

²¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 99 and 259.

²¹³ Cf. Novalis's definition of 'romantisiren': 'Indem ich dem Gemeinen einen hohen Sinn, dem Gewöhnlichen ein geheimnisvolles Ansehen, dem Bekannten die Würde des Unbekannten, dem Endlichen einen unendlichen Schein gebe, so romantisiere ich es', NS, II, 'Logologische Fragmente II', p. 545.

principle within and through material media. From here, the passage turns to the human scale: Thirst, the apprentice explains, is the stirring of ancient waters within us; sleep, a flood; waking, an ebb; and the Golden Age itself, a wave of the primal fluid (NS, I, p. 104). These analogies map the vocabulary of geological origins directly onto human existence. Sedimentary processes reappear as physiological rhythms, and mythical history is figured as a recurrence of the same primordial element. Water thus operates simultaneously as physical substance, physiological necessity, and symbolic medium. What seems temporally remote is translated into immediate experience: originality is both materially recorded and existentially enacted, and Deep Time transforms from a remote period of earth history into a lived rhythm.

Novalis's evocations of Deep Time register not only the immensities uncovered by geology but also a distinctly Romantic temporal pattern:²¹⁴ an original Golden Age of harmony with nature, a present marked by fragmentation and rational abstraction, and a future reconciliation.²¹⁵ Many late-eighteenth-century thinkers imagined history in this triadic form,²¹⁶ but Novalis gives it a distinctive inflection by grafting geological temporality onto it. He associates, for instance, the Neptunist primeval ocean with both the 'Urflüssiges' and a mythical Golden Age, which humanity once inhabited 'wie [...]

²¹⁴ Ricarda Schmidt identifies the belief in a triadic model of history as one of the few shared concerns of the otherwise heterogeneous literary period of Romanticism, cf. Ricarda Schmidt, 'From early to late Romanticism', in *The Cambridge Companion to German Romanticism*, ed. by Nicholas Saul (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), pp. 21–40, p. 25.

²¹⁵ Fabian Lampart, 'The Turn to History and the Volk: Brentano, Arnim, and the Grimm Brothers', in *The Literature of German Romanticism*, ed. by Dennis F. Mahoney (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2004), pp. 171–90, p. 175.

²¹⁶ Cf., for example, Friedrich Schiller, 'Ueber naive und sentimentalische Dichtung', in *Schillers Werke [Nationalausgabe]*, xx: *Philosophische Schriften. Erster Teil*, ed. by Helmut Koopmann and Benno von Wiese (Weimar: Böhlau, 1962), pp. 413–503, p. 414; HW, IV, 'Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit', p. 20, and in satiric form: Heinrich von Kleist, 'Über das Marionettentheater', in *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe [Münchener Ausgabe]*, II: *Erzählungen. Kleine Prosa. Gedichte. Briefe*, ed. by Roland Reuß and Peter Staengle (Munich: Hanser, 2010), pp. 425–33, pp. 429, 433.

Wellen' (NS, I, p. 104). In this way, geological time, often treated as a separate domain of natural history, becomes for him a conceptual catalyst for reflecting on human Deep Time. His notes for the unfinished second part of *Ofterdingen* confirm this vision: 'Es wird stiller einfacher und menschlicher nach dem Ende zu',²¹⁷ he writes, but the narrative does not leave Deep Time behind. Rather, it culminates in its full recovery: '[e]s ist die Urwelt, die goldne Zeit am Ende'.²¹⁸ This former Golden Age, then, is not merely remembered but reactivated, wrought from the past and reinstated in the present.

The literary form of Novalis's writings is essential to this project. Time does not appear as a rigid, systematic structure, but as something refracted through embedded tales and the voices and perspectives of his characters, allowing multiple temporalities to intermingle rather than stand in strict opposition. In so doing, his literary approach overcomes what the theoretical model of triadic history identified as a fundamental shortcoming of the present: an overly rational and one-sided perspective on nature.²¹⁹ By contrast, Novalis champions a poetic mode of inquiry that resists the constraints of systematic thought. Novalis's contemporaries, most notably Herder, had already identified poetry as an expression of human Deep Time, linking it to the primeval origins of language and culture.²²⁰ Novalis takes this further. Poetry is not only a record of primeval humanity but the very means of restoring unity with nature, the instrument through which *Ursprünglichkeit* can be perceived and renewed. In this context, Novalis's *Urzeit* unites two functions. It names a remote epoch and designates an archetype whose

²¹⁷ NS, I, p. 345.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Cf. Borgards, 'Natur. Spielarten romantischer Ökologien bei Friedrich von Hardenberg, Friedrich Schlegel und Karoline von Günderode'.

²²⁰ For a characterisation of the wild poetry of early peoples, see HW, II, ed. by Gunter Grimm, 'Auszug aus einem Briefwechsel über Ossian und die Lieder alter Völker', p. 452.

form remains latent in the present. Because *Urzeit* persists as pattern, it can orient the future, re-emerging through poetic imagination.

In order to reconstruct this functionality of *Urzeit* for Novalis – and, by extension, Romanticism more broadly – this chapter is divided into the following sections. Firstly, I outline the intellectual context of late-eighteenth-century earth sciences and their competing chronologies. Secondly, I analyse Novalis’s models of linear, cyclical and Deep Time in his two fragmentary novels. A key focus here is the interaction between the temporal structures of Deep Time and the intrinsic time of the narrative. I explore how Novalis structures and disrupts the plot to reflect the ways in which his characters experience and theorise Deep Time. I aim to show that at the heart of his triadic vision of history – the return of the original Golden Age in the future – is a fusion of linear and cyclical temporal models. Thirdly, I analyse Novalis’s deployment of myth and metaphor as means of access to Deep Time. These embedded forms and poetic devices function as exercises in perception, training the reader to look ‘hinter den Vorhang’, beyond the veil of the everyday, towards a lost Golden Age, the *Ursprung*.²²¹

²²¹ For the image of a ‘veil’ (‘Schleier’) or ‘curtain’ (‘Vorhang’) that separates an original from the mundane world, see NS, I, pp. 198, 217, 252, 310, 312.

Studying Earth History around 1800: Scientific Fragmentation, and Poetic Unification.

Novalis remarks in the first of his *Blüthenstaub* fragments: ‘Wir suchen überall das Unbedingte und finden immer nur Dinge’.²²² The aphorism reflects the idea that knowledge is based on subject-object distinctions – processes of separation – and can never fully grasp the infinite nature of the universe. Nature in its original state formed a unified whole, which human reason subsequently divided into intelligible units. As Novalis learned from his readings of Fichte,²²³ ‘things’ (‘Dinge’) acquire ontological status only through their distinction from other things. The ‘Unbedingte’, by contrast, is original in the sense of being an axiomatic, irreducible truth. Discussing Fichte’s influence on Novalis in the 1790s, Frederick C. Beiser argues that for Novalis, ‘the only absolute given to the transcendental philosopher is the *striving* or *search* for first principles’.²²⁴ The pursuit of the *Unbedingte* is thus a quest for origins, with the ‘unconditioned’ functioning as a systematic first cause. In this section, Novalis’s concept of *Urzeit* is examined as an instance of such an original phenomenon. *Urzeit* temporalises the idea of an *Unbedingtes*, embodying a primordial time before the modern fragmentation of the world into discrete entities.

Novalis’s critique of knowledge reflects both his engagement with Fichtean philosophy and his own academic practice. The *Blüthenstaub* fragments, published in 1798 during his studies at the Freiberg mining academy, attest to his immersion into the study of

²²² NS, II, ‘Blüthenstaub’, p. 413.

²²³ On Novalis’s Fichte-studies, cf. Frederick C. Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivism, 1781–1801* (Cambridge, MA, London: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 410–34. Manfred Frank puts details of Novalis’s engagement with Fichte in a historical context, stressing the influence of other philosophers such as Karl Leonhard Reinhold. Cf. Manfred Frank, ‘On the Historical Origins of Novalis’ Critique of Fichte’, in Frank, *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004), pp. 39–54.

²²⁴ Beiser, *German Idealism*, p. 414.

nature, particularly in disciplines later subsumed under the umbrella of ‘geology’, such as mineralogy, chemistry, physics, oryctognosy and geognosy.²²⁵ At the time, the study of nature relied on classifying the material world into discrete, finite entities – or ‘Dinge’. Just as Carl Linnaeus’s system of botanical nomenclature categorised plants through systems of likeness and difference, Novalis’s teacher, Abraham Gottlob Werner, applied a similarly taxonomic approach to rocks, fragmenting the primordial whole of *Urgestein* into isolated components.²²⁶ Novalis encountered these classificatory methods not only through theoretical lessons on chemistry, mineralogy, and geognosy but also in fieldwork, where he learned to apply Werner’s empiricist techniques of rock classification first-hand.²²⁷

Yet even as Novalis pursued geognostic studies, his writings reveal a persistent impulse to resist the increasing specialisation of disciplines. In a fragment from the *Werner-Studien*, he envisions an integrative approach to nature, one that not only acknowledges the earth’s material composition but also recognises the entanglement of mineral and human history. This vision culminates in his conception of an imagined discipline – ‘Lithologie’ – which unites scientific and artistic engagements with the lithic sphere: ‘Der Bergbau, das Mauerhandwerck, der Bildhauer, Steinschneider – der Architekt etc. Der Steinmahler, der Steinbeschreiber – der Steinsammler und Ordner –

²²⁵ For an overview of the curriculum, cf. [Anon.], *Die Bergakademie zu Freiberg. Zur Erinnerung an die Feier des hundertjährigen Geburtstages Werner’s am 25. September 1850* (Freiberg: Engelhardt, 1850), pp. 23–35. Cf. also Marit Bergner, ‘Ein montanistisches Institut für die Universität Halle. Steffens’ Entwurf einer Bergakademie’, in *Henrik Steffens und Halle um 1800*, ed. by Marit Bergner and others (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2024), pp. 175–203, especially pp. 178–80.

²²⁶ Novalis comments on Werner’s own comparison of his method with botanical nomenclature, cf. NS, III, ‘Werner-Studien’, p. 140.

²²⁷ *Im Steinbruch der Zeit: Erdgeschichten und die Anfänge der Geologie*, ed. by Tom Gärtig and Claus Veltmann (Halle: Verlag der Frankeschen Stiftungen, 2020), p. 151: ‘Anhand von Farbe, Geruch, Geschmack, Klang, Schwere und Kälte sollten die Mineralien mit allen Sinnen möglichst vollständig erfasst werden, um sie anschließend benennen und klassifizieren zu können’.

der Steinverfertiger – alle gehören in die Lithologie'.²²⁸ By juxtaposing these fields, Novalis collapses the distinction between practical craftsmanship and speculative inquiry, proposing instead a holistic field in which artisanal, aesthetic, and scientific practices coalesce. In a similar vein, he observes that what appear to be heterogeneous sciences are, in fact, held together by an artistic centre: 'Es sind Künste, keine Wissenschaften, [denn] [f]ast jede Kunst setzt verschiedene, wissenschaftliche Organe zugleich in Bewegung'.²²⁹ For Novalis, art is not an ornamental supplement to knowledge but its very precondition, an activity that simultaneously engages multiple intellectual faculties and resists the reductive logic of specialisation.

The idea that *Kunst* could integrate disparate modes of inquiry permeates *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*. The miner that Heinrich and his companions encounter in Chapter Five describes his profession as a 'seltne, geheimnisvolle Kunst' (NS, I, p. 241).²³⁰ The phrasing is telling. *Kunst* here is not mere technique but an epistemic mode, a way of knowing that eludes the rigid methodologies of modern science. Though *Bergwerkskunst* is presented as a practical craft, Novalis's phrasing echoes the ubiquitous philosophical aesthetics of Kant and Schiller, for whom art emerges as a medium of moral education:²³¹ '...es giebt keine Kunst, die ihre Theilhaber [...] edler machte, die mehr den Glauben an eine himmlische Weisheit und Fügung erweckte, und die Unschuld und Kindlichkeit des Herzens reiner erhielt, als der Bergbau' (NS, I, p. 244). Mining, in this philosophical vision

²²⁸ NS, III, 'Werner-Studien', pp. 152–3. Cf. also the entry '90. ENC[CYCLOPAEDISTIK]' of 'Das Allgemeine Brouillon' in NS, III, pp. 256–57.

²²⁹ Ibid., p. 258.

²³⁰ For mining as an 'art', cf. *ibid.*, pp. 242, 244, 246, 260.

²³¹ Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, pp. 298–99: '[W]ir benennen schöne Gegenstände der Natur oder der Kunst oft mit Namen, die eine sittliche Beurtheilung zum Grunde zu legen scheinen.[...] Der Geschmack macht gleichsam den Übergang vom Sinnenreiz zum habituellen moralischen Interesse ohne einen zu gewaltsamen Sprung, möglich, indem er die Einbildungskraft auch in ihrer Freiheit als zweckmäßig für den Verstand bestimmbar vorstellt und sogar an Gegenständen der Sinne auch ohne Sinnenreiz ein freies Wohlgefallen finden lehrt'.

cultivates virtue, awakens a sense of divine order, and preserves a primordial innocence of the heart.

In relating his *Kunst*, the miner also speaks of the songs that accompany his work and even offers a sample (NS, I, pp. 247–50), aligning him with Zulima and Klingsohr as one of the novel's privileged voices through which poetry is woven into *Otherdingen's* structure. Novalis here uses literary form to affirm his conviction that poetry is not an autonomous sphere of aesthetic contemplation but an epistemic instrument, one that renders the material world intelligible in ways science alone cannot. *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* offers one of his clearest reflections on what is gained and lost when knowledge advances by analysis:

Durch Uebung werden Entwicklungen befördert, und in allen Entwicklungen gehen Theilungen, Zergliederungen vor, die man bequem mit den Brechungen des Lichtstrahls vergleichen kann. So hat sich auch nur allmählich unser Innres in so mannichfaltige Kräfte zerspaltet, und mit fort dauernder Übung wird auch diese Zerspaltung zunehmen. Vielleicht ist es nur krankhafte Anlage des späteren Menschen, wenn sie das Vermögen verlieren, diese zerstreuten Farben des Geistes wieder zu mischen und nach Belieben den alten einfachen Naturzustand herzustellen, oder neue, mannichfaltige Verbindungen unter ihnen zu bewirken. (NS, I, p. 82–3)

The passage does not single out any one discipline; rather, it treats 'Entwicklungen' as a general dynamic of cognition, in which 'Theilungen' and 'Zergliederungen' take place, compared to the refraction of a single ray dispersed into colours. What is diagnosed as the 'krankhafte Anlage des späteren Menschen' is therefore not empirical inquiry as such, but the possibility that, with increasing fragmentation, we lose the capacity to blend the mind's dispersed colours again and recover an earlier, unified view of nature. Read alongside Novalis's own formation in Freiberg, this general epistemological concern also bears on the extractive sciences in which he was trained. Geognosy, with its classificatory procedures, can be understood as one historically specific instance of the movement the passage sketches: a practice of *Zergliederung* that disarticulates the earth into measured

profiles, sequences of strata, rock-types and specimen collected in a cabinet. Yet this analytical labour can also leave these determinations as dispersed data, in need of a further synthetic act to reconnect them. Novalis's point is not that such division is illegitimate, but that it calls for a complementary capacity, synthetic and poetic, to restore relation and meaning to what analysis has separated.

Torn between his administrative duties and his literary calling in the late 1790s, he wrote as both the mining specialist Friedrich von Hardenberg and the poet Novalis. The above-quoted synthesis between empirical observation and poetic vision was thus no mere abstraction for Novalis. His professional and poetic pursuits unfolded in parallel, as evidenced by a manuscript in which he listed 'Mein Roman' alongside technical reports on geognosy, salt mining, and coal extraction.²³² A note from his early encyclopaedia, *Allgemeines Brouillon* (1798/99), makes the rhythm of this dual life explicit. His days began with two hours of scientific study, followed by literary work and extensive reading, the latter forming the basis of his 'Nebengedanken'.²³³ Despite these parallel pursuits, Novalis carefully distinguished his scientific persona from his literary one. When he sent his *Blüthenstaub* fragments to August Wilhelm Schlegel, he assured his friend that his 'alte Neigung zum Absoluten' had rescued him from the 'Strudel der Empirie'.²³⁴ Schlegel, who had feared that Hardenberg's mathematical training in Freiberg might turn him into 'louter a+b', was reassured that the poet had not been swallowed by scientific abstraction.²³⁵ Novalis confirmed as much only a few lines later: '[k]ünftig treib

²³² NS, v, 'Verzeichnis der Salinenschriften', pp. 58–9: here, he references 'Geognostischer Bericht', 'Salinensachen', 'Kohlenwerckssachen'.

²³³ NS, iii, 'Das Allgemeine Brouillon', pp. 279–80.

²³⁴ NS, iv, 'Briefe, Novalis an August Wilhelm Schlegel, 24 February 1798', pp. 251–2.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 251.

ich nichts, als Poesie – die Wissenschaften müssen alle poëtisiert werden'.²³⁶ Novalis's insistence on publishing under a pseudonym, however, emphasises the divide between the mining official and the speculative thinker.²³⁷ As he explained to Schlegel, the name Novalis granted him the freedom to explore ideas without the constraints of academic integrity.²³⁸ It allowed him to move beyond the empirical 'Dinge' towards the unconditioned, almost Fichteian 'Unbedingte' quoted above.

For all his self-reflection, Novalis never dismissed classification as such. Rather, he viewed it as a necessary stage in intellectual history. In the *Allgemeines Brouillon*, he outlines a tripartite model of human development. The first phase, a poetic Golden Age, is marked by an uncritical unity between humanity and nature. The second stage, the age of reason, fractures this unity, creating a world of distinct 'things' through what Novalis calls 'polare Thätigkeit', an early scientific impulse that dissects the world into discrete, finite objects.²³⁹ This division prepares for the third stage, inaugurated by 'synthetische Tätigkeit', in which those divisions are reintegrated into a higher synthesis.²⁴⁰ In *Blüthenstaub*, he crystallises this vision:

Vor der Abstraktion ist alles eins, aber eins wie Chaos; nach der Abstraktion ist wieder alles vereinigt, aber diese Vereinigung ist eine freye Verbindung selbständiger, selbstbestimmender Wesen. Aus einem Haufen ist eine Gesellschaft geworden, das Chaos ist in eine mannichfaltige Welt verwandelt.²⁴¹

The interplay between empirical study and poetic reflection finds one of its richest expressions in his vision of the earth's 'original period' (*Urzeit, Urwelt*), which he aligns

²³⁶ Ibid., p. 253.

²³⁷ Ibid., p. 251: 'Hätten Sie Lust öffentlichen Gebrauch davon zu machen, so würde ich um die Unterschrift Novalis bitten'.

²³⁸ Ibid., p. 252: 'Hier ist kein pflichtmäßiges Votum abzulegen, wo jeder ehrliche Mann sich nennt'.

²³⁹ NS, III, 'Das Allgemeine Brouillon', p. 277.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

²⁴¹ NS, II, 'Vermischte Bemerkungen und Blüthenstaub', pp. 455–56.

with both the geological theories of his time and the literary tradition of the Golden Age.²⁴² In this sense, his *Urwelt* becomes a kind of ‘scientific fiction’: a reconstruction of the earth’s deep past that is informed by natural history yet animated by the speculative freedom of literature.²⁴³ This dynamic also informs *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*, where poets and natural historians are said to have, ‘durch Eine Sprache sich immer wie Ein Volk gezeigt’ (NS, I, p. 84). Poetry, described as the ‘liebste Werkzeug’ of those who truly love nature, allows the *Naturgeist* to shine forth in a way that complements, rather than competes with, the ordering work of science.²⁴⁴ While natural historians collect and organise knowledge ‘in großen, geordneten Massen’, poets transform such understanding ‘für menschliche Herzen zur täglichen Nahrung’ (NS, I, p. 84). Poetry breaks down the ‘unermeßliche Natur’ into intimate, graspable forms.

The distinction sharpens in Novalis’s image of ‘Messerschnitte’, with which natural historians seek to ‘erforschen’ nature’s ‘innern Bau und die Verhältnisse der Glieder’ (ibid.). The phrase carries a wider methodological charge: it figures contemporary natural inquiry as an invasive access to an inner structure, and hints at the cost of such access

²⁴² Hans-Joachim Mähl traces Novalis’s use of this motif in detail but does not fully link it to his geognostic concerns. Cf. Mähl, *Die Idee des goldenen Zeitalters*, especially pp. 11–252 for an overview of the history of the concept since antiquity, pp. 354–362 for a discussion of the motif in *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*, and pp. 397–423. Conversely, studies of eighteenth-century geology often neglect how poetic traditions shaped emerging notions of Deep Time. While David Schulz’s *Die Natur der Geschichte* takes a cultural-hermeneutic approach, analysing eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century historiographical and geological texts and demonstrating how the idea of earth’s vast temporal depth influenced key intellectual shifts, he does not consider the role of literary concepts of ‘Deep Time’ for scientific theory-building. Katrin Schär examines the extent to which works such as Buffon’s *Epochs of Nature* can be seen as narratives of development with literary qualities, but she does not consider explicitly literary contributions to concepts of Deep Time. Noah Heringman’s *Deep Time: A Literary History* is the first to address this gap, demonstrating how cultural and literary imaginaries not only accompanied but actively shaped and even preceded the geological discovery of Deep Time. Cf. Heringman, *Deep Time*, p. 6.

²⁴³ The convergence of scientific and poetic inquiry was characteristic of the intellectual climate at the Freiberg Mining Academy. Henrich Steffens, Novalis’s fellow student, exemplifies this synthesis. On the role of poetry and literature in Steffens’s scientific works, cf. Stefan Höppner, *Natur / Poesie: Romantische Grenzgänger zwischen Literatur und Naturwissenschaft: Johann Wilhelm Ritter, Gotthilf Heinrich Schubert, Henrik Steffens, Lorenz Oken* (Würzburg: Königshausen&Neumann, 2017), pp. 579–98.

²⁴⁴ NS, I, p. 84.

when the living object is reduced to what remains after analysis. Novalis makes this explicit in a description that recalls the practice of vivisection, which destroys the very vitality it claims to disclose: ‘Unter ihren Händen starb die freundliche Natur, und ließ nur todte, zuckende Reste zurück’ (NS, I, p. 84). Read against Novalis’s own training in Freiberg, the image also acquires a concrete resonance, since the mining sciences, too, make the earth legible by breaking through its surface and extracting. The division of labour the passage sketches is therefore not simply antagonistic. Science may expose internal structures, but poetry, as the ‘Werkzeug der eigentlichen Naturfreunde’ (NS, I, p. 84) breathes life back into the dissected object, it reassembles and animates.

The Freiberg horizon matters for the specific way Novalis imagines *Urzeit*. At the academy, he encountered competing geological theories that would fundamentally shape his literary depictions of primordial time. Werner’s dominant Neptunism claimed that the earth’s surface formed through sedimentation in water, while Vulcanists²⁴⁵ attributed rock and mountain formation to internal heat.²⁴⁶ Both Novalis and Henrich Steffens (1773–1845), one of Novalis’s fellow students at Freiberg,²⁴⁷ harboured scepticism towards Werner’s theory,²⁴⁸ and Novalis’s *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* reflects this dual engagement, referencing both the ‘ungeheure Fluten’ (NS, I, p. 261) and ‘innere

²⁴⁵ Novalis’s fellow student at Freiberg, Henrich Steffens, mentions James Hutton and Leopold von Buch as representatives. He also recalls that back then, ‘[v]on Huttons Erhebungstheorie war kaum die Rede’, cf. Henrich Steffens, *Was ich erlebte*, 10 vols (Breslau: n. pub., 1840–1844), IV, p. 204.

²⁴⁶ On the competing theories of Neptunism and Vulcanism from 1780–1820, and their relationship with succeeding concepts of catastrophism and actualism, cf. Schär, *Erdgeschichte(n) und Entwicklungsromane*, pp. 44–50.

²⁴⁷ Like Novalis, Steffens combined scientific inquiry with poetic sensibilities. His first scientific treatise, although largely devoted to geognostic observation and chemical analysis, begins with an unmistakably Romantic gesture: he wonders ‘...ob es mir gelang einzelne Töne aus der Natur herauszuheben, die mit seinen ewigen Harmonien zusammenstimmen?’, before declaring his intention to lay ‘[s]eine Schrift’ in the ‘delphischen Tempel der höhern Poesie’. Cf. Henrich Steffens, *Beyträge zur innern Naturgeschichte der Erde. Erster Theil* (Freiberg: Crazische Buchhandlung, 1801), preface [n.p.].

²⁴⁸ Cf. NS, IV, p. 399, where he claims to plan a ‘Revision des Wernerschen Systems’.

Feuer' (NS, I, p. 253) that shaped the earth. More significantly for Novalis's conception of *Urzeit*, both writers characterised primordial time as fundamentally violent. Steffens described it as a 'gewaltsam[e] Epoche',²⁴⁹ while Novalis spoke of the 'gewaltsamen, riesenmäßigen Zeiten' of the past, contrasting them with 'ruhig[e] und friedfertig[e] heutige Natur' (NS, I, p. 261). This depiction of a violent *Urzeit* finds expression in Novalis's poetic imagery of nature's gradual 'pacification' throughout natural history,²⁵⁰ a dynamic understanding that contrasts with the static classifications of scholars such as Linnaeus, whose systematic approach to botanical taxonomy continued to dominate scientific study at the turn of the century.²⁵¹

The revolutionary ideas of Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon and Georges Cuvier paved the way for such a dynamic understanding of nature, fundamentally challenging traditional concepts of time and nature's immutability, as seen in Linnaeus. Although Steffens acknowledges that Buffon was eventually 'discredited',²⁵² he emphasises his lasting influence on intellectual history.²⁵³ Buffon's popularisation of earth's immense antiquity shattered the biblical framework of roughly 6,500 years,²⁵⁴ rendering even millennia of human history, in Steffens's words, 'eine kurze Gegenwart' against the vast expanse of geological time.²⁵⁵ Buffon's suggestion that the earth had also hosted entire

²⁴⁹ Steffens, *Beyträge zur innern Naturgeschichte der Erde*, p. 17.

²⁵⁰ NS, I, p. 261: 'Es ist erfreulich, sagte der Alte, jene allmähliche Beruhigung der Natur zu bemerken'. Cf. also the term 'Entwilderung' in *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*, *ibid.*, p. 87.

²⁵¹ Steffens acknowledges this implicitly in his appraisal of Werner's authority in the field of oryctognosy: 'Keiner konnte sich damals mit ihm als Oryktognosten messen, selbst Linné besaß nie eine allgemeinere Autorität in der Botanik, als Werner in der Oryktognosie'. Cf. Steffens, *Was ich erlebte*, IV, p. 204.

²⁵² Steffens, *Beyträge zur innern Naturgeschichte der Erde*, p. 89.

²⁵³ Buffon is still quoted as an authority in the early nineteenth century, for instance by Jean-André Deluc, cf. Jean André de Luc, *Geologische Beantwortung der Vorrede des zweiten Theils von dem Versuche einer Lithurgik oder ökonomischen Mineralogie des Herrn Dr. Carl Schmieder (Leipzig 1804). Aus dem Französischen übersetzt* (Braunschweig: Fürstl. Waisenhaus-Buchdruckerei, 1805), p. 61.

²⁵⁴ Buffon proposes the earth's age to be 75000 years. In his notes and sketches, however, his numbers and calculations reached into the millions. Cf. Rudwick, *Earth's Deep History*, p. 66.

²⁵⁵ Steffens, *Was ich erlebte*, I, p. 233: 'Durch Buffons leichte und gefällige Darstellung, [...] erfuhr ich zuerst, daß diese Gebirge, deren Massen meiner Phantasie vorschwebten, ein geheimes Geschick verbargen, daß

generations of now-extinct species contradicted earlier notions of a static nature.²⁵⁶ It was Cuvier, however, who definitively demonstrated that nature was far from immutable. Comparing elephant bones with what he proved to be mammoth remains, Cuvier revealed that the earth had undergone profound transformations and that species could completely disappear.²⁵⁷ This insight introduced the radical concept of historical change within nature, pointing towards contingent, irreversible events shaping life on earth.

Novalis grapples directly with these scientific implications of a formative primeval *Urzeit* in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*. In a scene from Chapter Five, a miner dismisses peasants' belief in human fossils as superstition, pointing to petrified bones and asking rhetorically 'ob sie jene Knochen für Knochen bekannter Tiere oder Menschen halten?' (NS, I, p. 253). Without waiting for an answer, he implies these fossils represent long-extinct species (ibid.). Here, Novalis captures a paradigm shift: beliefs in a fixed and immutable nature, once held by many, are now seen as mere superstition. The new understanding of geological time and earth's deep past, driven by figures such as Buffon and Cuvier, had introduced a radically different temporal framework which needed to be grasped conceptually.

Erdbeben, vulkanische Ausbrüche und Überschwemmungen, wie sie jetzt noch stattfinden, nur die gebändigten Reste einer furchtbaren Bewegung genannt werden konnten, die gewaltsam, wild und mit Zerstörungen wechselnd, die Oberfläche der Erde im großen verändert hatte, daß die Jahrtausende der Geschichte, verglichen mit jener Vergangenheit der Erdbildung, nur als eine kurze Gegenwart betrachtet werden konnten'.

²⁵⁶ Steffens, *Was ich erlebte*, I, pp. 235–36: '...daß die Erde ganze zerstörte Geschlechter der Tiere und Pflanzen in sich verbarg'. Yet, Steffens also points out that many of Buffon's contemporaries still believed that fossils represented species that were alive, cf. ibid., p. 236: '...daß die Versteinerungen von Tieren und Pflanzen herrührten, wie diejenigen, die jetzt leben'.

²⁵⁷ He first publicly proposed the theory in his inaugural lecture at the *École Centrale du Panthéon* in 1796, which was published in 1798 under the title *Mémoires sur les espèces d'éléphants vivants et fossiles*. Cf. Georges Cuvier, *Mémoires sur les espèces d'éléphants vivants et fossiles* (Paris: Baudouin, 1798).

Like Steffens, who argued that the key to nature's deepest secrets lay 'in den innersten Tiefen unseres eigenen Geistes',²⁵⁸ Novalis approaches the problem of Deep Time by turning inwards. For him, the implications of geological temporality extend beyond natural history to questions of human knowledge and significance. In *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*, for example, self-reflection becomes a method of natural inquiry, suggesting a fundamental analogy between human development and nature's transformations. Understanding the 'Urscheinung' of nature thus depends on an 'inneres Selbstempfangnis' that unlocks the 'Erzeugungsgeschichte der Natur' (NS, I, p. 101). The apprentice notes that 'die Zufälligkeit der Natur' appears, 'sich wie von selbst an die Idee menschlicher Persönlichkeit anzuschließen', so that nature itself emerges 'als menschliches Wesen' (NS, I, p. 84). In Novalis's poetic philosophy, then, natural inquiry is not detached observation but a quest in which self-knowledge becomes the key to universal understanding.²⁵⁹

Ultimately, this inward turn enables Novalis to respond imaginatively to the temporal displacements revealed by geology. He reconstructs a primordial harmony in which humanity was once intimately entwined with nature, a Golden Age when nature acted as 'Freundin, Trösterin, Priesterin und Wunderthäterin' among humans (NS, I, p. 86).²⁶⁰ This poetic vision of a harmonious *Urzeit* confronts the epistemological challenge posed by geological time, which threatened to displace humans from anthropocentric narratives

²⁵⁸ Steffens, *Beyträge zur innern Naturgeschichte der Erde*, p. 90.

²⁵⁹ On Novalis's 'poetics of interiority' in the context of Romanticism, cf. Eugene Stelzig, "'Our home is with infinitude, and only there": The Romantic Rhetoric of Infinite Aspiration in a Finite World', *Romanticism*, 31.2 (2025), pp. 152–60, especially pp. 156–57.

²⁶⁰ Steffens's memoirs reveal the idea of a connection between natural and human history as another potential legacy of Buffon. Steffens recalls 'Vor allem begründete Buffon frühzeitig eine Ansicht, durch welche ich in allen menschlichen Verhältnissen die verborgene Macht der Natur erkannte und festhielt', cf. Steffens, *Was ich erlebte*, I, p. 247.

of creation and purpose. Such a vision does not deny the vast timescales uncovered by science but reinterprets them, integrating natural history into a symbolic narrative of estrangement and possible reunion. The ‘Messerschnitte’ of geological analysis and the synthetic power of poetry thus work in tandem to make nature’s deep history meaningful, returning scientific insight to the realm of lived experience. Novalis’s works, as the following analysis will show, systematically transform the threat of temporal displacement into an opportunity for poetic re-enchantment.

Plotting Deep Time with Novalis

Writers from Herder to Goethe turned to the earth’s depths as a way of reimagining human time, experimenting with narrative strategies equal to the immensity of geological scales.²⁶¹ Nowhere, however, is this drive more fully staged than in Novalis, whose novels transform temporal depth into a tool by which rupture and continuity in history might be reconfigured. In both *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* and *Lehrlinge zu Sais*, Deep Time is actively staged through literary form. *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* interweaves poetry and fairytales to demonstrate how poetry itself serves as a repository of knowledge beyond the reach of systematic inquiry. By contrast, *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* unfolds through dialogue, embracing a polyphonic structure that reflects the text’s exploratory nature. Here, too, literary form is integral to the novel’s epistemological project. The search for truth, embodied in the aspired unveiling of Isis at Sais, is structured as an ongoing conversation, in which competing theories of natural history and humanity’s place within

²⁶¹ Cf. Schär, *Erdgeschichten*, especially pp. 71–5 and pp. 165–203.

it are tested and reshaped.²⁶² While both novels engage with motifs central to the Romantic discourse of originality, such as the Golden Age and the metaphor of depth, each explores different dimensions of literature's capacity to represent time. When I speak of *plotting* Deep Time in this context, I refer to the deliberate structuring of time within the literary text, whether through the fragmentation of linear narratives by embedded stories or the rhythmic recurrence of motifs that evoke cycles of loss and return.²⁶³

Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* follows the young poet Heinrich on a journey of artistic and spiritual self-discovery. The novel begins with Heinrich, still inexperienced and tied to the mercantile world of his parents, having a prophetic dream of a mysterious blue flower, a symbol of poetic longing. Urged by his mother's stories of her homeland, he embarks on a journey to Augsburg, encountering merchants, miners, and the Arab girl Zulima, whose tales of lost wisdom and enchanted realms deepen his belief in poetry as a gateway to hidden truths. In Augsburg, he meets the wise poet Klingsohr, whose fairytale, an allegory of poetic transformation, parallels and foreshadows Heinrich's own maturation as a poet. There, he also finds his destined love, Mathilde, who embodies the fusion of earthly and spiritual inspiration. The novel's unfinished second part was meant to depict Heinrich's full realisation as a poet. But the novel's ultimate horizon was a return to a lost Golden Age, an era both temporally distant and archetypally present. Had the novel been completed, its second part would have enacted the vision of both restoring a vanished past and altogether dissolving historical rupture, the 'abyss' of Deep Time

²⁶² Cf. Ingrid Kreuzer, 'Novalis. Die Lehrlinge zu Sais: Fragen zur Struktur, Gattung und immanenten Ästhetik', *Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft*, 23 (1979), pp. 276–308, especially p. 288, where Kreuzer explains how this polyphony breaks with the linear narrative techniques of conventional novels.

²⁶³ On embedded tales as part of Novalis's mythological method, cf. Owen Ware, 'Searching for the Blue Flower', in Ware, *Return of the Gods* (New York, NY: OUP, 2025), pp. 125–63, and especially pp. 154–58.

emerging in contemporary thought, in an eschatological resolution where time itself is transcended.²⁶⁴

While Novalis's vision of Deep Time and mythical recurrence informs the broader structure of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, the novel does not begin in an *Urzeit*-setting. Heinrich is first encountered in his family home in Eisenach, where he is surrounded by an abundance of stifling sensory impressions, most notably the rhythmic beating of a wall clock: 'Die Eltern lagen schon, und schliefen, die Wanduhr schlug ihren einförmigen Takt, vor den klappernden Fenstern sauste der Wind; abwechselnd wurde die Stube hell von dem Schimmer des Mondes' (NS, I, p. 195). The steady, almost hypnotic ticking, its mechanical rhythm that parcels time into labour and leisure, suggests enclosure and routine. The clock's presence speaks not only to the household's petit-bourgeois sensibilities but also to a concept of time as measurable, regimented, and relentless in its forward march.²⁶⁵ Adding to this impression are the rattling shutters of the parlour windows,²⁶⁶ which, swaying in the wind, mimic in miniature earth's own rotation, performing a kind of time-lapse version of the natural cycle of day and night: 'abwechselnd wurde die Stube hell von dem Schimmer des Mondes' (NS, I, p. 195). These two rhythms, the pendulum's swing and the shutters' creak, seem to merge, forming a binary pulse of perpetual repetition, in which time appears as a chain of discrete, equidistant moments.

²⁶⁴ NS, I, pp. 322, 347.

²⁶⁵ Peter Utz, 'Das Ticken des Textes: Zur literarischen Wahrnehmung der Zeit', *Schweizer Monatshefte für Politik, Wirtschaft, Kultur*, 70 (1990), pp. 603–22.

²⁶⁶ In Medieval Germany, most moderately sized, rural buildings would have been fitted with colourful exterior window shutters. The most common pattern is formed by chevrons painted directly on the wood in white and red. At the end of the eighteenth century, decorated window shutters came back into fashion, often imitating the medieval models. Cf. Urs Meier, *Der Fensterladen: Kleines Handbuch zu einem unterschätzten Bauteil* (Master Thesis, Berner Fachhochschule Architektur, Holz und Bau, 2018) <https://www.bfh.ch/dam/jcr:738ca24b-1ed8-40b7-934a-f55e07a864ca/masterarbeit-urs-meier.pdf>. [Accessed 8 October 2025].

For Heinrich, however, this rhythmic regularity does not provide comfort.²⁶⁷ Lying restless in the dark, he feels the weight of the confined space pressing in, his thoughts straying to the stories of a stranger whose tales had, if only briefly, disrupted the clockwork predictability of his life in Eisenach. Relief comes at last through a dream, which carries Heinrich out of this measured temporality and into something altogether different. He describes himself as ‘having slumbered from one world into another’ (‘in eine andere Welt hinübergeschlummert’, NS, I, p. 195), entering a threshold state that allows him to escape the habitual and the finite. There, he undergoes the uncanny sensation of dying and returning to life (‘starb und kam wieder’, NS, I, p. 196), as if stepping outside the linearity of human time. The dream becomes, in his words, ‘eine Schutzwehr gegen die Regelmäßigkeit und Gewöhnlichkeit des Lebens’ (NS, I, p. 199), suspending the confinements that hinder his poetic awakening. Yet the old order, previously embodied by the monotonous ticking of the wall clock, reasserts itself as soon as he wakes. His father’s complaint that he ‘nicht [habe] hämmern dürfen’ while Heinrich was sleeping, stands as an acoustic reminder of the regularity that had been briefly silenced (NS, I, p. 197). At this stage, the freedom from temporal constraint remains reserved for dreams alone.

It is within this first dream that Heinrich encounters the much-fabled blue flower.²⁶⁸ The flower blooms in a timeless, paradisiacal landscape, belonging to a realm untouched by measured, mechanical time. Here, distinctions between past, present, and future dissolve. Heinrich senses that nature might, at any moment, resume its speech: ‘Mir ist gerade so, als wollten sie [die Thiere und Bäume und Felsen] allaugenblicklich anfangen

²⁶⁷ Cf. NS, I, p. 195: ‘Der Jüngling lag unruhig auf seinem Lager [...]’.

²⁶⁸ Bernard Franco, ‘La fleur bleue: naissance d’un cliché romantique’, *Revue de littérature comparée* 388.4 (2023), pp. 417–26.

[zu sprechen]' (NS, I, p. 195) – as in the Golden Age.²⁶⁹ The dream does not simply transport him elsewhere. It awakens in him the intuition of another temporality, one in which nature is animate and history is not a straight line but a living presence whose previous states might return.

This impression is deepened by the curious structure of the narrative itself. Heinrich seems to long for the flower before he has even dreamed of it for the first time.²⁷⁰ Memory and premonition collapse into one another, as though the dream had already been waiting for him, inscribed somewhere in his past. This subtle *hysteron-proteron* signals one of Novalis's most characteristic meditations on Deep Time, the profound interconnectedness of past and future, where beginnings and endings are already entwined. This impression is confirmed when Heinrich's father recounts a dream of his own, one in which the blue flower had also appeared. Heinrich's father recalls 'unendliche Zeiten' passing before him, shimmering and shifting in their endless transformations,²⁷¹ as he is charged with the task of seeking a blue flower. His dream-journey unfolds across the vast expanse of Deep Time during which he himself is changed: 'Wie gelöst war meine Zunge, und was ich sprach, klang wie Musik' (NS, I, p. 202). The blue flower is no longer just a symbol of Heinrich's individual *Sehnsucht*. It reveals itself as something resonating across generations, potentially even pointing to a genuinely human longing for a unification with nature in these 'unendliche Zeiten' that manifest in both dreams.

²⁶⁹ NS, I, p. 195. For tropes of a speaking nature, associated with an original Golden Age, cf. also pp. 210, 211, 224, 237, 268, 278, 305, 312.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 195: 'aber die blaue Blume sehn' ich mich zu erblicken. Sie liegt mir unaufhörlich im Sinn...'. Only afterwards, on p. 196, he falls asleep and dreams of the flower: 'Der Jüngling verlor sich allmählich in süßen Fantasien und entschlummerte'.

²⁷¹ Ibid., p. 202: 'unendliche[n] Zeiten', die an ihm vorüber „gaukelten mit mannichfaltigen Veränderungen'.

Both dreams do more than interrupt the monotony of daily life. They seem to suspend time itself. Heinrich's father reflects '[o]hne die Träume würden wir gewiß früher alt' (NS, I, p. 199), suggesting that dreams act as temporal anomalies, delaying the aging process. In his dream, he experiences further temporal disorientation. Although he dreams of the flower on the same night after meeting his host, he feels as though that encounter had taken place long ago, 'als sey das vor geraumer Zeit geschehn, daß ich bey ihm gewesen sey' (NS, I, p. 201). Time, in other words, is no longer linear or bound to ordinary perception, but gains depth beyond the measure of clocks and the constraints of everyday experience. This temporal suspension is especially significant, since these dream sequences transport both Heinrich and his father into a landscape that evokes the primordial Golden Age. Time, here, expands, becoming a defining feature of an original era where nature speaks and poetry reverberates through the world.

Novalis's Early Modern Thinking

Whereas *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* employs a wall clock as a metaphor for the linear and uniform passage of time, and creaking window shutters that mimic the cyclical rhythms of the earth, *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* situates its inquiry within eighteenth-century debates on nature's history. In the novel's second section, *Die Natur*, the apprentices articulate distinct perspectives on how nature should be studied.²⁷² The focalised apprentice comments on this polyphony, noting 'mit Bangigkeit die sich kreuzenden Stimmen' around him (NS, I, p. 91).²⁷³ Yet these voices extend beyond the dialogue of the

²⁷² Among those can be found Cartesian, physico-theological, Kantian, and Fichtean positions, cf. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

²⁷³ Cf. Kreuzer, 'Novalis. Die Lehrlinge zu Sais', p. 288.

apprentices themselves. They embody the competing theories of nature and history embedded within the novel's fictional framework. The first *Paralipomenon* to *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*, written in early 1798, identifies the earth's 'debut, in other words its origins, as well as the contentious debate over its formation, whether through volcanic or aquatic processes, as a central concern: 'Der geognostische Streit der Volkanisten und Neptunisten ist eigentlich der Streit: Ob die Erde sthentlich oder asthenisch debütiert habe'.²⁷⁴

Die Lehrlinge zu Sais not only absorbs late-eighteenth-century geognostic debate; it also reactivates a broader archive of early modern earth history, one that offers one plausible if conjectural inroad into Novalis's possible thinking. A mechanistic lexicon, where nature figures as a system governed by stable relations, brings one strand of the text into the orbit of the mechanical philosophy for which René Descartes (1596–1650) had become paradigmatic.²⁷⁵ At other moments, natural history is spoken of in a sacral register that recalls the ambition of early modern 'sacred theories of the earth'²⁷⁶ and physico-theology,²⁷⁷ where earth history becomes accessible only against a horizon of revelation and providence. While Novalis does not cite Burnet directly, his notion of

²⁷⁴ NS, I, p. 110.

²⁷⁵ In his *Principia Philosophiae* (1644), Descartes employs a mechanistic framework to explain the earth's formation through universal principles and the interaction of three elemental substances. René Descartes, *Principia Philosophiae* (Amsterdam: Elzevir, 1644), pp. 94–5: 'Iam itaque duo habemus genera materiae valde diversa, quae duo prima elementa huius mundi aspectabilis dici possunt. Primum est illius, quae tantam vim habet agitationis [...]. Alterum est eius, quae divisa est in particular sphaericas, valde quidem minutas, si cum iis corporibus, quae oculis cernere possumus, comparentur [...]. Tertiumque paulo post inveniemus, contans partibus vel magis crassis, vel figuras minus ad motum aptas habentibus. Ex his tribus omnia huius mundi aspectabilis corpora componi ostendemus'.

²⁷⁶ For a discussion of 'geo-theories' as a genre of earth history, cf. Rudwick, *Earth's Deep History*, pp. 55–77.

²⁷⁷ Cf. Anne-Charlott Trepp, 'Sinn und Sinnlichkeit des Materiellen: Die Physikotheologie als Glaubens- und Wissenspraxis vom 17. bis zum frühen 19. Jahrhundert', in *Von der Physikotheologie zum Vitalismus? Transformationen des Verhältnisses von Naturforschung und Religion im späten 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Thomas Ruhland and Friedemann Stengel (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 2024), pp. 49–84.

Ursprünglichkeit takes shape where those idioms meet: between the impulse to reduce nature to universal principles and the counter-impulse to treat origins as a mysterious and partially veiled domain that resists purely analytical approaches.

One apprentice gives the mechanistic posture its most compressed formulation when he describes nature as a ‘große[s] Uhrwerk [...]’ (NS, I, p. 90). The metaphor in itself does not prove doctrinal allegiance to any single thinker; it is a widely circulating metaphor of mechanical philosophy that emphasises nature’s law-governed regularity: if nature is an organised mechanism, then its workings should, in principle, be predictable. The same voice accordingly insists that in nature ‘nichts kommt uns unerwartet’ (NS, I, p. 90), since immutable, timeless principles allow them to anticipate its developments with precision.²⁷⁸ Another apprentice presses the same idea further: only by observing an ‘Urscheinung’ could one grasp the ‘Erzeugungsgeschichte der Natur’ (NS, I, p. 101), a genesis that could ultimately be reduced to a ‘Formel des Universums’ (Ibid.) – a universal principle, in other words. Yet the novel does not allow this mechanistic vision to stand unchallenged. Another apprentice expresses scepticism towards such universal systems announcing that even ‘die gut ausgeführten Systeme [...], aus denen der künftige Geograph der Natur die Data zu seiner großen Naturkarte nimmt’ remain ‘himmelweit von ihrer Auslegung verschieden’ (NS, I, pp. 98–9). What the text exposes here is not simply a dispute between ‘science’ and ‘poetry’, but an internal tension within natural inquiry itself: between the production of ordered inventories and the question of their interpretation: how, if at all, the investigation of nature can yield true knowledge and not just a self-contained system of data.

²⁷⁸ NS, I, p. 190. The term ‘development’, however, is misleading: Descartes’s ‘geo-theory’ does not propose a history of nature in the modern sense but rather a vision of its processes as eternal and unchanging. Rudwick, *Earth’s Deep History*, p. 61.

What is needed, the sceptical voice insists, is not merely an abstract formula but historical depth, an insight into nature's past that simultaneously deciphers the future, while acknowledging that '[n]och ist dieses Gebiet ein unbekanntes, ein heiliges Feld' (NS, I, p. 99). The phrase of a 'holy field' does not read like a casual metaphor. It shifts the register from calculability to reverence and signals that nature's history is not exhausted by the epistemic virtues of measurement and classification. In this diction, *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* touches a longer tradition in which earth history has been framed as a domain where theology and natural inquiry were not cleanly separable: sacred theories of the earth, such as Burnet's *Telluris Theoria Sacra* (1681/84) or physico-theological projects of natural interpretation, such as Johann Jakob Scheuchzer's *Physica Sacra* (1731–35),²⁷⁹ both sought to align divine revelation with earth history. Pausing over that legacy helps to clarify what kind of temporal imagination would have been available to Novalis and how this might have shaped his depiction of Deep Time.

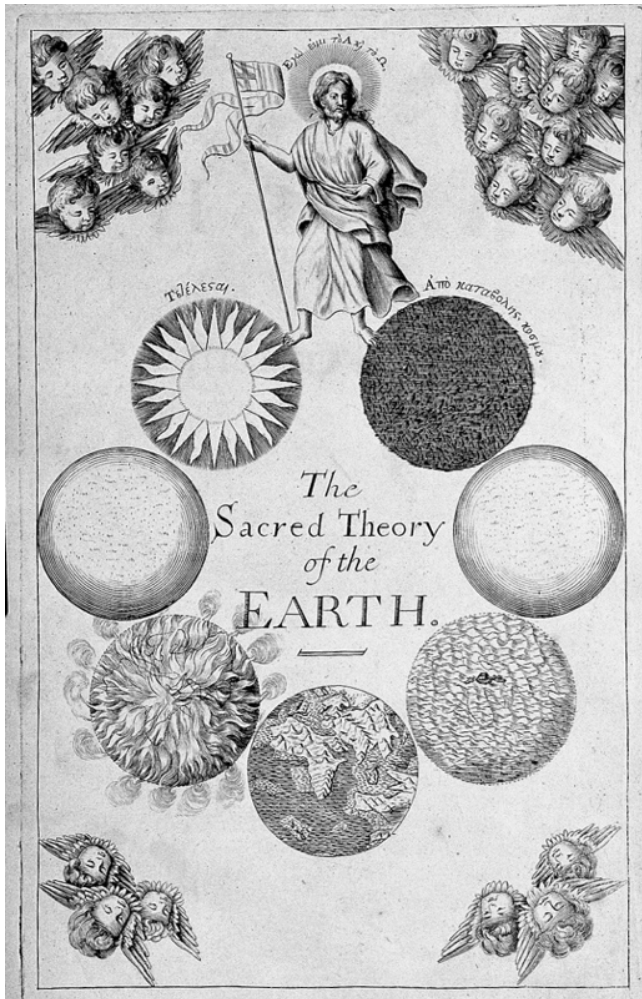
For all their scientific obsolescence, these works offered precisely the imaginative latitude that the measuring and quantifying procedures of contemporary science could not provide, allowing history, theology, and cosmology to converge within a single, symbolically charged vision of the earth. Burnet's *Sacred Theory of the Earth* stages the history of the planet as both a linear progression, from creation through catastrophe to final consummation, and a cyclical recurrence, in which beginning and end reflect one another. Burnet is among the first to bring these models into explicit dialogue, and his text remained a conspicuous reference-point in later debates over how earth history should be approached, not least because early nineteenth-century geology defined itself

²⁷⁹ Burnet, *Telluris theoria sacra*, Burnet, *The Theory of the Earth*. Johann Jakob Scheuchzer, *Physica Sacra*, 4 vols (Ulm, Augsburg: Christian Ulrich Wagner, 1731–1735).

repudiating precisely the kind of mythic-historical synthesis Burnet exemplified.²⁸⁰ Although Charles Lyell and James Hutton dismissed Burnet's work as 'poetic fiction',²⁸¹ their need to distance themselves from it is itself a measure of its continuing presence. What disqualified Burnet within a strictly disciplinary geology, namely his refusal to separate natural history from mythic imagination, may well have been what appealed to Novalis. For a poet-philosopher intent on holding scientific inquiry and myth in the same frame, Burnet's synthesis offered a model for binding nature and history into a single, symbolically charged whole. Even if Novalis never cited the *Sacred Theory* directly, the cultural afterlife of Burnet's work as a type of earth-historical narration would have made such a resonance possible.²⁸² Read from this angle, the appeal of the *Sacred Theory* lies not in the viability of its geology by late-eighteenth-century standards, but in its narrative architecture for thinking temporal depth.

²⁸⁰ Cf. Charles Lyell's (1797–1875) critique, in Charles Lyell, *Principles of Geology*, I (London: John Murray, 1830), p. 37: 'Even Milton had scarcely ventured in his poem to indulge his imagination so freely in painting scenes of the Creation and Deluge, Paradise and Chaos, as this writer [i.e. Burnet], who set forth pretensions to profound philosophy'. On Lyell as the 'father of geology', Rudwick, *Earth's Deep History*, p. 163.

²⁸¹ Hutton, *Theory of the Earth*, I, cf. chapter 3, p. 271: 'We have, first, Burnet's Theory of the Earth. This surely cannot be considered in any other light than as a dream, formed upon the poetic fiction of a golden age [...]'. In the next sentence, Hutton mentions LeBenoit's *Telliamed*, a crucial work for Novalis's concept of originality, as we shall see. Cf. *ibid.*, 'In Telliamed again, we have a very ingenious theory [...], which has something in it like a regular system, such as we might expect to find in nature; but it is only a physical romance [...]'.
²⁸² Rudwick suggests that Burnet's work inspired a whole new genre of natural history: 'theories of the earth'. According to Rudwick, 'Burnet's work prompted such a profusion of books and pamphlets [...] that one critic referred scornfully to the whole project as absurdly speculative "world-making". Nevertheless, it continued to be popular among savants throughout the 18th century'. Cf. Rudwick, *Earth's Deep History*, p. 61.



The frontispiece of *Sacred Theory* encapsulates Burnet’s vision of history as a sequence of seven stages – from primordial chaos to the final consummation, *katasterismos*, of the earth –, while also encouraging the perception of large-scale correspondences across that sequence. Arranged in a circle, these seven globes depict divine providence, in which even cataclysmic events such as deluge and fire remain within an ordered cosmic plan. Burnet’s

Christian framework, in which paradise finds its counterpart in a chiliastic vision of a future messianic kingdom, earned him a reputation as ‘the archetype of [...] biblical idolatry’.²⁸³ Yet, it is precisely this ‘poetic fiction of a golden age’ that aligns his model of earth history with Novalis’s own vision of a messianic return to the kingdom of poetry.²⁸⁴

Stephen Jay Gould draws on Burnet’s frontispiece to explain linear and cyclical models of time, captured in his terminological pair of ‘Time’s Arrow’ and ‘Time’s Cycle’. Linear Time, he argues, is ‘an irreversible sequence of unrepeatable events’, while the model of cyclical time posits history as a pattern of recurrence, in which ‘motions are

²⁸³ Gould, *Time’s Arrow, Time’s Cycle*, p. 23.

²⁸⁴ Hutton, *Theory of the Earth*, I, p. 271.

parts of repeating cycles, and differences of the past will be realities of the future'.²⁸⁵ Gould highlights how Burnet's image incorporates both. While following the Christian teleology of development from chaos to eschaton, its circular arrangement suggests eternal recurrence. At the image's apex, Christ stands with one foot on the first and last globes, the chaotic beginning and the world's end, reinforcing the idea of temporal completeness. His presence bridges the gap that would open up if this sequence of states were interpreted along the lines of the traditional, directional account of Christian history. The inscription above him from the Book of Revelation, 'Ἐγὼ εἶμι τὸ Ἄ καὶ τὸ Ὠ' ('I am the Alpha and the Omega'), further emphasises this synthesis of linearity and cyclicity. Christ himself embodies both principles: he is the beginning, the end, and the force that connects them.

Novalis's *Allgemeines Brouillon* reveals striking parallels with Burnet's vision of earth history. In an entry titled *Historik*, Novalis outlines a trajectory from paradise to the eternal kingdom ('ewige[s] Reich[...]',²⁸⁶ mirroring Burnet's second through sixth globes: the span of human history. Another entry situates this timeline within a broader cosmological framework, introducing a cyclical perspective. Novalis juxtaposes the pre- and post-human epochs as mirror images: 'Der Naturstand der Natur – die Zeit vor der Welt (Staat). Diese Zeit vor der Welt liefert gleichsam die zerstreuten Züge der Zeit nach der Welt – wie der Naturstand ein sonderbares Bild des ewigen Reichs ist'.²⁸⁷ Here, time does not simply begin with creation but arcs beyond the temporal bounds of the world itself, in parallel with Burnet's first and seventh globes.

²⁸⁵ Gould, *Time's Arrow, Time's Cycle*, p. 11: '...events have no meaning as distinct episodes with causal impact upon a contingent history'.

²⁸⁶ NS III, p. 321.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 280–81.

Further, in the *Allgemeines Brouillon*, Novalis explicitly links the tension between chaos and cosmos to a specific literary form: the fairytale. He writes: ‘Die Welt des Märchens ist die durchausentgegengesetzte Welt der Welt der Wahrheit (Geschichte) – und eben darum ihr so durchaus ähnlich – wie das Chaos der vollendeten Schöpfung’.²⁸⁸ For Novalis, Poesy (in the form of the *Märchen*) is not an ornament added to historical truth but the creative chaos from which a meaningful cosmos of history can emerge. What Burnet narrates in the successive stages of earth history, Novalis reimagines in poetic form: paradise becomes an idealised Golden Age, while the Christian *Regnum Aeternum* is transformed into a chiliastic poetic empire,²⁸⁹ figured most vividly in Klingsohr’s tale at the close of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*.²⁹⁰ His allusion to ‘vollendete[...] Schöpfung’ in the *Allgemeines Brouillon* resonates with the τετέλεσται (‘it is accomplished’, from τελέω – to accomplish, complete) that crowns Burnet’s final globe. Just as Burnet’s Christ gathers the chaotic beginning and the eschatological end into a single providential design, so poetry for Novalis mediates between origin and consummation. It offers a mythic vantage point from which the whole arc of history can be intuited as one: past and future perceived together as a completed whole.

²⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 281. Several articles have explored Novalis’s connection with theories on the origin of the earth, reading especially his use of the idea of ‘Chaos’ against the backdrop of modern theories. Cf. Joyce S. Walker, ‘Romantic Chaos: The Dynamic Paradigm in Novalis’s “Heinrich von Ofterdingen” and Contemporary Science’, *The German Quarterly*, 66 (1993), pp. 43–59, and Dennis F. Mahoney, ‘Hardenbergs Naturbegriff und -Darstellung im Lichte moderner Chaostheorien’, in *Novalis und die Wissenschaften*, ed. by Herbert Uerlings (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1997), pp. 107–20.

²⁸⁹ Charles Taylor comments on these analogies in passing: ‘Novalis is in many ways an orthodox Christian. He speaks of our original unspoiled condition as a golden age, and of our eschaton as a return to a renewed golden age. This is not a biblical term, but our departure from the original can be understood in biblical terms, as the result of sin, and our return is placed ultimately in a Christian framework’, in: Charles Taylor, *Cosmic Connections: Poetry in the Age of Disenchantment* (Cambridge, MA and London, UK: HUP, 2024), p. 118.

²⁹⁰ Cf. Klingsohr’s tale, NS, I, pp. 290–315.

This insight also clarifies the role of the fairytales embedded within Novalis's novels. Far from being ornamental digressions, these *Binnenerzählungen* function as temporal apertures that suspend ordinary chronology. They transport the reader into primeval scenes in which humanity and nature exist in an undivided state, a condition not yet fragmented into the 'Welt der Wahrheit (Geschichte)'.²⁹¹ What they disclose is a *vorzeitlich* (pre-temporal) state: not measurable by historical time, because it precedes the rational partitioning of the world into distinct *Dinge* and the chronicling of their successive states. Yet once this primordial chaos enters the course of history, it undergoes a phase of polarity and 'Selbstabsonderung'.²⁹² That separation becomes the very precondition for reconciliation. As Novalis observes, 'je vollkommner auf der einen Seite isolirt, desto vollk[ommner] auf der Andern verbunden'.²⁹³ On the far side of division lies, paradoxically, *Urzeit* itself, the period in which the harmonious original state is fully realised: 'Die künftige Welt ist das vernünftige Chaos – das Chaos, das sich selbst durchdrang'.²⁹⁴ In that future world, humans no longer live in harmony with their surroundings by instinct alone, as in primeval times, but by deliberate choice. Novalis's ideas of *Ursprünglichkeit* and *Urzeit* emerging here articulate a vision more ambitious than Wolke's morphemic appeal to a vague depth of the past quoted in the Introduction. Deep Time is not just figured as a deep past, but as a temporal register that also stretches into the future.

The unsettling of linear time seen in early modern sources clarifies why the legacy of sacred theories of the earth, such as Thomas Burnet's, continued to hold significance for

²⁹¹ NS III, p. 281.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 301.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 293.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 281.

Novalis. Given the influence of such theories, the impact of biblical traditions on eighteenth-century earth historiography calls for closer consideration.²⁹⁵ Around 1800, figures such as the geologist Jean-André de Luc still emphasised the cultural and historical weight of Genesis, not merely as theological authority but as a narrative of origins.²⁹⁶ For Novalis, too, the Bible could be read at once as literature and as natural history. In the *Allgemeines Brouillon* he calls it ‘reales und ideales Muster und Keim aller Bücher’,²⁹⁷ and imagines a project that would bring biblical revelation into dialogue with scientific investigation: ‘Beschreibung der Bibel ist eigentlich mein Unternehmen – besser Bibellehre – Bibelkunst und Naturlehre’.²⁹⁸ Rather than choosing between scripture and science, Novalis seeks their convergence, proposing a historiography in which the natural world and the biblical world are two halves of a single legible whole.

Novalis’s idea that nature could be read like a text was central to eighteenth-century physico-theology, which insisted that God’s two revelations, scripture and creation, spoke with a single voice. Scholars such as Johann Jakob Scheuchzer exemplified this approach, combining empirical observation with theological reflection. In his *Jobi Physica Sacra* (1721) and the monumental *Physica Sacra* (1731–35), Scheuchzer presented fossils, minerals, and animals as annotations to the Bible, treating them as glosses that confirmed divine design. His project sought to vindicate scripture by showing its agreement with natural evidence, but it also encouraged the careful collection and

²⁹⁵ Cf. Liisa Steinby, ‘The Early Romantic Idea of a New Mythology: Poeticising the World in Novalis’s Heinrich von Ofterdingen: From Herder to the Early Romantics’, in Steinby, *Myth in the Modern Novel: Imagining the Absolute* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2023), pp. 80–115, pp. 81 and 87.

²⁹⁶ Cf. Jean-André de Luc, *Geologische Beantwortung*, p. 10. In a critique of Karl Christoph Schmieder, a younger geognost and chemist, he warned that abandoning *Genesis* would sever humanity from its origins. Schmieder, he states, ‘[sei zu jung] die Welt hinlänglich zu studiren, um zu fühlen, was aus den Menschen werden würde, wenn sie, durch Verlassung der Genesis, allen Spuren von ihrem Ursprunge entsagt hätten, und sich so ihren eigenen Ideen über den Ursprung, selbst des Universums, überlassen haben’.

²⁹⁷ NS III, p. 363.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 365.

classification of specimens. In effect, Scheuchzer turned natural history into a mode of exegesis, and the naturalist into a kind of biblical scholar who read the strata as though they were sacred verses.

Such a method had particular significance in a Protestant intellectual climate shaped by *sola scriptura*. The Reformation had elevated the literal sense of the text, subordinating allegorical readings that might have treated the days of creation as symbolic epochs.²⁹⁹ Philological analysis became the principal means of resolving textual disputes.³⁰⁰ Novalis, however, saw this development as spiritually impoverished and, in *Christenheit oder Europa*, called the rise of literalism a baleful ('verderblich') development.³⁰¹ He also lamented that a foreign discipline, namely philology, had intruded into religion and exerted its 'auszehrende[n] Einfluß'.³⁰² For him, the authority of scripture could not be sustained by philological apparatus alone. Scheuchzer's example therefore offered an alternative way to integrate empirical discovery with a symbolic reading of nature,³⁰³ blending observation with reverence, and marking a departure from

²⁹⁹ Cf. Schlözer, *Welt-Geschichte*, p. 29: 'Periode: ob 24 Stunden lang (dieses kleinstädtische TageMaas war damals noch nicht)? oder 24 Jahrhunderte lang? entscheidet die Urkunde nicht'. This idea was first voiced by Saint Augustine who cast doubt on a literal interpretation of Genesis in the fifth century – pointing out that 'days' had not even existed before the creation of the sun on the fourth 'day'. Andrew J. Brown mentions eighteenth-century scholars such as J.D. Michaelis, J.C. Döderlein and G. Hensler who supported the idea that the days of Creation should be understood as extended time periods, cf. Andrew J. Brown, *Days of Creation: A History of Christian Interpretation of Genesis* (Blandford Forum: Deo Publishing, 2014), p. 214.

³⁰⁰ Cf. Michael Kempe, *Wissenschaft, Theologie, Aufklärung. Johann Jakob Scheuchzer (1672–1733) und die Sintfluttheorie* (Epfendorf: Bibliotheca-Academica-Verlag, 2003), p. 157.

³⁰¹ NS III, p. 512.

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Scheuchzer's physico-theological approach was by no means universally accepted. It received sharp criticism from Buffon among others. In Friedrich Heinrich Wilhelm Martini's translation of *Histoire Naturelle*, readers are instructed that it is a fundamental mistake to merge narratives of revelation with science: 'Den Fehler, die Naturkunde beständig mit der Gottesgelahrtheit zu vermischen, begieng dieser Schriftsteller [i.e. Scheuchzer] häufiger, als je ein anderer getan hat'. Cf. Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon, *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte*, trans. by Friedrich Heinrich Wilhelm Martini, 7 vols (Berlin: Pauli, 1771–1774), I (1771), p. 266.

philological dominance.³⁰⁴ In so doing, Scheuchzer also laid the groundwork for an empiricism that would mature in the late eighteenth century, when institutions such as the Freiberg mining academy trained their students to reconstruct earth history from the evidence of its rocks.³⁰⁵

This weighty pedigree seems to come to a head in *Lehrlinge zu Sais*, which opens with the image of nature as a 'große Schrift' (NS, I, p. 90). This image draws on a long physico-theological tradition that treated the natural world as a second revelation, a book written by the Creator to be deciphered by humankind. Novalis describes 'Figuren, die zu jener großen Chifferschrift zu gehören scheinen, die man überall ... erblickt' (NS, I, p. 79). The image suggests that meaning is not given in a single linear text but distributed across phenomena, awaiting a reader whose task is to trace hidden correspondences and bring them into relation. When the teacher in *Die Lehrlinge* later speaks of the 'Buchstaben der Natur' and declares that 'keiner Erklärung bedarf die heilige Schrift' (NS, I, p. 79), he refers to the Bible and to nature as sacred writings, in both cases insisting that their meaning is immediate and self-revealing. Interpretation, in this view, is less a matter of explanatory notes by a philological mediator than of becoming receptive to what is already being said.

This insistence on listening to a 'Chifferschrift', rather than merely reading, prepares the ground for the pedagogical programme of *Die Lehrlinge*. Their teacher embodies precisely this art of attunement. From an early age, the reader is told, 'er hörte, sah, tastete und dachte zugleich' (NS, I, p. 80): sensory perception and thought are fused into

³⁰⁴ For the importance of philology and the written record for the study of nature in the early eighteenth century, cf. works such as William Whiston, *Nova Telluris Theoria, das ist: Neue Betrachtung der Erde, Nach ihrem Ursprung und Fortgang bis zur Hervorbringung aller Dinge*, trans. by Michael Swen (Frankfurt a.M.: Ludwig, 1713), p. 116.

³⁰⁵ For an overview of the instruction Novalis received in Freiberg, cf. Marianne Beese, *Novalis: Leben und Werk* (Rostock: Neuer Hochschulschriftenverlag, 2000), pp. 98–101.

a single act of knowing. He embodies a methodological ideal that mirrors the empirical practice Novalis encountered under Abraham Gottlob Werner at the Freiberg mining academy.³⁰⁶ Werner instructed his students to classify stones not by abstract theory but by the trained use of the senses. Colour must be observed, texture felt, hardness tested, weight gauged, sometimes even taste and smell consulted.³⁰⁷ Such training transformed the body itself into an instrument of inquiry.

In *Die Lehrlinge*, for instance, the decoding of nature's cipher is figured as a synaesthetic experience in which sight, hearing, and touch cooperate. Right at the start of the novel, we find a reference to one of the experiments that Novalis might have conducted himself in the Freiberg programme.³⁰⁸ The 'Figuren, [...] die man auf berührten und gestrichenen Scheiben von Pech und Glas, in den Feilspänen um den Magnet her [...] erblickt' (NS, I, p. 79), recall Ernst Chladni's demonstration of sound figures.³⁰⁹ In Chladni's experiment, a violin bow is drawn across a glass or metal plate, and grains of sand leap into intricate geometric patterns as visible evidence of invisible vibration. For Novalis, such images are emblematic. For they reveal that nature's script is dynamic, coming into legibility only under certain conditions, when the right note is struck.³¹⁰ The observer must therefore become a participant, setting the world into resonance.

³⁰⁶ Werner arguably was Novalis's most prominent teacher, but not the only one championing an empirical practice. Also the young Wilhelm August Lampadius impressed Novalis with his combination of theoretical and practical approaches. Cf. Hans-Henning Walter, 'Das sächsische Hütten- und Salinenwesen im 18. Jahrhundert und die Bergakademie Freiberg', in *Bergbau und Dichtung: Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis) zum 200. Todestag*, ed. by Eleonore Sent (Weimar; Jena: Hain, 2003), pp. 57–91, pp. 60–1.

³⁰⁷ Gärtig and Veltmann, *Im Steinbruch der Zeit*, p. 151: 'Anhand von Farbe, Geruch, Geschmack, Klang, Schwere und Kälte sollten die Mineralien mit allen Sinnen möglichst vollständig erfasst werden, um sie anschließend benennen und klassifizieren zu können'.

³⁰⁸ Alexis B. Smith, 'Resounding in the Human Body as the "True Sanskrit" of Nature', *Somaesthetics and Sound*, 5.2 (2019), pp. 102–20, p. 108.

³⁰⁹ Jürgen Daiber, *Experimentalphysik des Geistes: Novalis und das romantische Experiment* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 2001), p. 185.

³¹⁰ Cf. NS, I, p. 95: "'O! daß der Mensch", sagten sie, "die innre Musik der Natur verstände, und einen Sinn für äußere Harmonie hätte[...]'".

This notion of participation is particularly important. Novalis does not imagine the Golden Age as a static state preserved somewhere in the distant past, but as a possibility that can be reawakened through the right mode of perception. ‘Lernt er nur einmal fühlen?’ the narrator asks, for ‘[d]urch das Gefühl würde die alte, ersehnte Zeit zurückkommen’ (NS, I, pp. 95–6). Feeling becomes the key that unlocks Deep Time. The return of the ‘alte Zeit’ is not an antiquarian fantasy but a transformation of the present, made possible by a heightened sensibility. In this sense, Novalis’s reworking of the ‘book of nature’ metaphor performs a double task. It dignifies empirical observation by rooting it in a venerable theological tradition, and at the same time exceeds empirical science by turning perception into a mode of temporal recovery.

Novalis’s philosophy of perception turns history into a creative act of composition, in which imagination and intuition play as great a role as observation. In *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, the hermit urges young Heinrich not to receive tradition ‘buchstäblich’ (NS, I, p. 257), as a mechanical transmission of words, but to practise a form of ‘zusammensetzen’ (NS, I, p. 258). The claim that a historian ‘müsste nothwendig auch ein Dichter seyn’ elevates poetry to a privileged epistemic position (NS, I, p. 259). Only the poet possesses the faculty to restore relations fractured by the accumulation of data and the classificatory impulse of Enlightenment science. Novalis thus envisioned the poet’s mission as the active recreation of a paradisiacal Golden Age,³¹¹ where human and

³¹¹ Novalis arguably encountered the motif first in his translations of Virgil’s eclogues. On the parallels of Virgil’s and Novalis’s Golden Age, cf. Mähl, *Die Idee des goldenen Zeitalters*, pp. 70–1, and p. 257.

natural speech merge harmoniously,³¹² a recurring trope in his oeuvre.³¹³ In *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, the protagonist remembers stories of an age when nature spoke directly to humankind: ‘Ich hörte einst von den alten Zeiten reden; wie da die Tiere und Bäume und Felsen mit den Menschen gesprochen hätten’ (NS, I, p. 195). In *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*, Hyacinth encounters ‘eine[...] Menge Blumen’ that speak to him: ‘Sie grüßten ihn freundlich mit bekannten Worten’ (NS, I, p. 94)’. This inserted tale inspires the apprentices to wish for a return of this ‘goldne[...] Zeit’, called a ‘Leben im Schooße der Natur’, where humans were still capable of understanding ‘die innre Musik der Natur’ (NS, I, p. 95). Such reminiscences are not fanciful, but signal a diminished human capacity to hear what once seemed obvious. Poetry, in this sense, is the practice of reawakening suppressed senses and recovering a lost intimacy between nature and humanity characteristic of *Urzeit*. It performs the task of ‘zusammensetzen’, restoring *Ursprünglichkeit* to a desensitised modernity.

More explicitly than in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* interweaves its vision of primordial harmony with representations of primeval earth and biblical motifs. For instance, the text explicitly invokes the biblical Deluge: ‘[I]n jener großen Begebenheit, welche heilige Sagen die Sündflut nennen, ging diese blühende Welt unter:

³¹² This motif runs through all of Novalis’ works. Another example, where a past Golden Age is associated with a paradisiacal state is *Hymnen an die Nacht*, cf. NS, I, p. 145: ‘Des jungen Geschlechts Lustgarten verwelkte [...]. Einsam und leblos stand die Natur’. In the messianic context of the *Hymnen*, Novalis also speaks of a ‘goldene Zukunft’ (p. 149). Cf. also Nicole Fischer, ‘Von der Komparsin zur Hauptdarstellerin: Naturdarstellungen in Novalis’ Jugendnachlass und ihre Bedeutung für sein späteres Werk’, in *Vor ‘Novalis’ – Friedrich von Hardenbergs Jugendnachlass: Korpus, Kontexte, Konsequenzen. Mit einer Edition neu zugeschriebener Gedichte*, ed. by Benjamin Specht (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2024), pp. 301–22, p. 314: ‘Später entwickelte er, hieran angelehnt, dann in seiner eigenen Naturphilosophie das ‘goldene Zeitalter’ zu einer Utopie weiter, in der die Welt in neugewonnenem Einklang – also Natur und Mensch – zusammenkommt. Dieser zukünftige Zustand ist damit noch eine Potenzierung gegenüber dem verlorenen. Im so erweiterten Motiv des ‘goldenen Zeitalters’ ist Natur jetzt integraler Bestandteil der anzustrebenden harmonischen Einheit mit dem Menschen[...]’.

³¹³ In *Brouillon*, ‘Historie’ is concerned with ‘die Zeit, wo Vögel, Thiere und Bäume gesprochen haben’, Novalis, NS III, p. 276.

[...] einige Menschen blieben geschwemmt auf die Klippen der neuen Gebirge in der fremden Welt zurück' (NS, I, p. 105). Here, as in Burnet's *Sacred Theory*, the Flood, a radical rupture, divides earth history into pre- and post-diluvian epochs. The mountains formed by the event are described as 'neue[...] Gebirge', a phrase that suggests not only the physical transformation of the landscape but the inauguration of an entirely distinct geological age. The previous era appears ancient, even original, by contrast.

This sequence of discrete phases is complicated by the text's emphasis on interconnectedness. While Novalis, in Neptunist language, identifies water as the 'Ursprung der Dinge', he also draws analogies between the *Urgewässer* and the human body (NS, I, p. 104), according to which all life emerges from and remains linked to the primeval waters. Within this analogy, the text introduces a distinctly Romantic longing – 'Sehnsucht' – for the *Urflüssige*,³¹⁴ a yearning for dissolution and reintegration into nature itself. In water, we can thus observe the 'geheime Verkettung des Ehemaligen und Künftigen'³¹⁵ that *Ofterdingen's* hermit ascribes to natural history more generally, for water, in the form of *Urflüssiges* bears sympathetic connections both to nature's past and the human present.³¹⁶ In this image of the *Urflüssige* as a medium binding past and future, Novalis crystallises the chapter's central claim. *Ur*-phenomena are not vestiges of a vanished world but structures through which Deep Time itself becomes thinkable. By staging origins as both irretrievably lost and imaginatively recoverable, he transforms the

³¹⁴ NS, I, p. 104: 'Im Durste offenbaret sich diese Weltseele, diese gewaltige Sehnsucht nach dem Zerfließen [...] und am Ende sind alle angenehme Empfindungen in uns mannichfache Zerfließungen, Regungen jener Urgewässer in uns. [...] Wie diese Wellen, lebten wir in der goldnen Zeit...'. Cf. Ritchie Robertson, 'Jenseitsvorstellungen in der Spätaufklärung: Hardenberg und einige Zeitgenossen (Zinzendorf, Lavater, Swedenborg)', in *Vor 'Novalis'– Friedrich von Hardenbergs Jugendnachlass: Korpus, Kontexte, Konsequenzen. Mit einer Edition neu zugeschriebener Gedichte*, ed. by Benjamin Specht (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2024), pp. 187–203, pp. 196–97.

³¹⁵ NS, I, pp. 257–58.

³¹⁶ For the idea of sympathy in natural history, cf. the hermit's philosophy of nature in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, NS, I, p. 257.

challenge of temporal rupture into the very condition for poetry's power to mediate between the abyss of Deep Time and the promise of renewal.

Sympathetic Suspension of Time: Hemsterhuis and Novalis

Die Lehrlinge is not organised as linear narrative but rather as a web of motifs and analogies. Its cross-references and repetitions mirror the epistemic posture of 'resemblance' characteristic of early modern thought.³¹⁷ Novalis deliberately revives such modes of thought with his analogies, countering the classificatory logic of the Enlightenment, and what Foucault terms the Classical age – above all, its reliance on 'representation'.³¹⁸ The semiotic concept underlying *Die Lehrlinge* clearly departs from the representational logic, as seen in a reflection on language. There, one apprentice declares: 'Man verstehe die Sprache nicht, weil sich die Sprache selber nicht verstehe', and further suggests that, 'die ächte Sanscrit spräche, um zu sprechen, weil Sprechen ihre Lust und ihr Wesen sey' (NS, I, p. 79.). Sanskrit, posited as the primordial language, does not function as an arbitrary system of signs pointing to external meanings. Rather, its speech is an expression of its own inherent being. What Novalis offers here is a *wissenspoetologisch* vision of origins as self-generating and inseparable from the literary medium that brings them to light.

A similar suspension of representational logic shapes Novalis's engagement with natural history. As Foucault observes, in early-modern thought 'signs were then part of things themselves, whereas in the seventeenth century they became modes of

³¹⁷ Cf. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Pantheon, 1970); Foucault distinguishes between *convenientia*, *aemulatio*, analogy, and sympathy, pp. 18–25.

³¹⁸ For a short summary of Foucault's concept of representation as a 'Classical episteme', cf. Christopher Falzon, Timothy O'Leary, and Jana Sawicki, *A Companion to Foucault* (Malden, Mass: Wiley, 2013), p. 106 and pp. 107–11.

representation'.³¹⁹ This shift marks the difference between a world in which knowledge grew from intrinsic sympathies and one in which it was mediated by detached systems of representation. For Novalis, the earlier model made possible the search for correspondences between humanity and nature. Natural history was not a mere archive of signs awaiting interpretation but a self-inscribing process.³²⁰ To grasp its essence requires more than theoretical cognition or the patient labelling of the visible world that Foucault associates with Classical epistemology.³²¹ It demands an intuitive attunement to hidden relations.

For Novalis, such an intuition is located spatio-temporally in a primordial condition. In the *Urzeit*, which Novalis calls 'de[n] alten einfachen Naturstand' (NS, I, p. 83), there is no divide between interior and exterior worlds; human 'Vorstellungen', or mental images, correspond seamlessly with the surrounding environment.³²² The radical separation of signifier and signified, the gulf of representation so characteristic of Foucault's Classical order, has not yet appeared. The utterances of those who inhabit this 'einfachen Naturstand' are organic extensions of the world to which they belong. As Novalis puts it, they are 'eine Selbstabbildung des damaligen Zustandes der irdischen Natur' (NS, I, p. 83). This primordial unity between nature and humankind, he suggests, was most clearly

³¹⁹ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 129.

³²⁰ Cf. NS, I, 'Die Lehrlinge zu Sais', pp. 106–07: 'Vorzüglich hatte sie jene heilige Sprache gelockt, die das glänzende Band jener königlichen Menschen mit überirdischen Gegenden und Bewohnern gewesen war, und von der einige Worte, nach dem Verlaut mannichfaltiger Sagen, noch im Besitz einiger glücklichen Weisen unter unsern Vorfahren gewesen seyn mögen. Ihre Aussprache war ein wunderbarer Gesang, dessen unwiderstehliche Töne tief in das Innere jeder Natur eindringen und sie zerlegten. Jeder ihrer Namen schien das Loosungswort für die Seele jedes Naturkörpers. Mit schöpferischer Gewalt erregten diese Schwingungen alle Bilder der Welterscheinungen, und von ihnen konnte man mit Recht sagen, daß das Leben des Universums ein ewiges tausendstimmiges Gespräch sey; denn in ihrem Sprechen schienen alle Kräfte, alle Arten der Thätigkeit auf das Unbegreiflichste vereinigt zu seyn'.

³²¹ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, pp. 129–132.

³²² Specifically, he claims that 'die Vorstellungen [der Menschen] mit der sie umgebenden Welt übereinstimmen'. Cf. NS, I, p. 83.

preserved in ‘Mährchen und Gedichte voll merkwürdiger bildlicher Züge’ (NS, I, p. 83), and in this form it remains obliquely visible and (perhaps) attainable. This is one of the reasons why poetry becomes the medium through which humanity’s fractured relationship with nature may once be restored for Novalis. As a witness of former unity, it links past and present, nature and humanity.

Novalis’s concept of early human expression was likely shaped by his reading of Frans Hemsterhuis,³²³ particularly his *Alexis, ou sur l’âge d’or* (1787), which Johann Friedrich Jacobi translated into German the same year it was first published.³²⁴ *Alexis* is a Socratic dialogue exploring the Golden Age as the first stage of both the earth and humanity, and its intrinsic connection to poetry. Novalis’s above-quoted idea of mental images and the external world existing in unbroken correspondence,³²⁵ finds a parallel in a passage of *Alexis*, where the eponymous protagonist laments the lost harmony between inward perception and outward expression.³²⁶ He recalls an era when knowledge was conveyed through signs that corresponded perfectly to the objects they represented: ‘wie einleuchtend die Wissenschaften, welche durch Zeichen vorgetragen wurden, die mit den Gegenständen dieser Wissenschaften vollkommen übereinstimmten’.³²⁷ This reflection unfolds into a meditation on humanity’s diminished capacity to attune to the natural world – a loss Hemsterhuis attributes to weakened sensory faculties, which are

³²³ Cf. Herbert Uerlings, ‘Hemsterhuis-Studien’ in Uerlings, *Friedrich von Hardenberg, genannt Novalis* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1991), pp. 120–23.

³²⁴ Frans Hemsterhuis, *Alexis oder Von dem goldenen Weltalter*, trans. by Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi (Riga: Hartknoch, 1787).

³²⁵ Cf. NS, I, ‘Die Lehrlinge zu Sais’, p. 83.

³²⁶ On Hemsterhuis as a model for Novalis’s concept of intuition and sensory perception, cf. Oliver Bach, ‘Novalis’ Heinrich von Ofterdingen (1800/02): Pragmatische Geschichte und Universalpoesie’, in Bach, *Pragmatische Geschichte: Utopisches Denken, politische Reform und erzählerische Innovation 1720–1820* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2024), pp. 371–410, pp. 379–81.

³²⁷ Hemsterhuis, *Alexis*, p. 64.

no longer easily moved.³²⁸ Novalis would likely have affirmed the question Diokles poses to Alexis in this context:

[I]st es denn wohl möglich, mein lieber Alexis, die große Wahrscheinlichkeit zu läugnen, daß wir einige Sinne, oder vielmehr einige ihnen analoge Leitzeuge der Thätigkeit verlohren haben, durch deren Vermittlung gewisse Zwischenideen und Zwischenempfindungen vormals aus unserm eingeschränkten Wissen ein vollständiges Ganzes machten, wovon keine Spuren mehr übrig sind, als in den mehr oder weniger veränderten Traditionen von unserm ehemaligen Zustande?³²⁹

The idea that human knowledge was once more complete, mediated by lost faculties of perception, reemerges in Novalis's reflections on the fragmentation of scientific inquiry.

Both Hemsterhuis and Novalis criticise the contemporary study of nature for its atomised, classificatory approach, which fractures knowledge rather than revealing its underlying unity.³³⁰ Hemsterhuis specifically critiques taxonomic systems, which he sees as imposing artificial divisions, introducing 'Zwischenräume, Lücken und Leeres', whereas sensory perception testifies to the interconnectedness of truths: '[U]nsere Sinne [...] beweisen [uns], daß wir fähig sind, die Kettenreihe den Zusammenhang der ergänzenden Wahrheiten, die einen Theil der großen Wahrheit ausmachen, zu erkennen und zu fühlen'.³³¹ This notion of 'Verkettung' is present in *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*, both in allusions and direct references. The image of the chain appears, for instance, in a passage expressing the overwhelming awe inspired by the contemplation of nature:

Wenige bleiben bei dieser herrlichen Umgebung ruhig stehen, und suchen sie nur selbst in ihrer Fülle und ihrer Verkettung zu erfassen, vergessen über der Vereinzelung den blitzenden Faden nicht, der reihenweise die Glieder knüpft und den heiligen Kronleuchter bildet, und finden sich beseligt in der Beschauung dieses lebendigen, über nächtlichen Tiefen schwebenden Schmucks. (NS, I, p. 85)

³²⁸ Ibid. Cf. also p. 101.

³²⁹ Ibid., p. 75.

³³⁰ On Novalis's critique of contemporary science in which 'Zahlen und Figuren / Sind Schlüssel aller Kreaturen', cf. Borgards, 'Natur. Spielarten romantischer Ökologien bei Friedrich von Hardenberg, Friedrich Schlegel und Karoline von Günderode', especially pp. 124–32.

³³¹ Hemsterhuis, *Alexis*, p. 74.

Here, nature is imagined as a vast, interwoven structure, where seemingly disparate elements reveal themselves as intimately connected. This principle is further reinforced through the teacher's pedagogical method: arranging 'Steine, Blumen, Käfer aller Art [...] auf mannichfache Weise [...] in Reihen' (NS, I, p. 80). The ordering of objects, though not based on biological classification, suggests an underlying logic of proximity, an intuitive relationality rather than a rigid taxonomy.³³² The idea of proximity, what Foucault terms *convenientia*,³³³ recurs in a passage depicting the reflection of the sky in water, which, too, is captured with the vocabulary of kinship. Reflection is a mere surface effect pointing towards correspondences underlying the natural world on a deeper level:

Es ist nicht blos Widerschein, daß der Himmel im Wasser liegt, es ist eine zarte Befreundung, ein Zeichen der Nachbarschaft, und wenn der unerfüllte Trieb in die unermeßliche Höhe will, so versinkt die glückliche Liebe gern in die endlose Tiefe. (NS, I, p. 105)

The emotive language anticipates the text's concern with knowledge as a form of longing. The striving for nature's secrets is here transformed into an affective connection,³³⁴ and accordingly, other passages emphasise this sympathy-driven cognition: 'die Erzeugungsgeschichte der Natur [...] wird ihm eine neue Offenbarung des Genius der Liebe' (NS, I, p. 101). Sympathy, a central motif in *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*, appears as an epistemic principle.³³⁵

³³² Quoted after Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 19: 'As with respect to its vegetation the plant stands convenient to the brute beast, so through feeling does the brutish animal to man, who is comfortable to the rest of the starts by his intelligence; these links proceed so strictly they they appear as a rope stretched from the first cause as far as the lowest and smallest of things, by a reciprocal and continuous connection'.

³³³ Ibid., pp. 18–20.

³³⁴ NS, I, p. 85: 'Es ist schon viel gewonnen, wenn das Streben, die Natur vollständig zu begreifen, zur Sehnsucht sich veredelt'.

³³⁵ Ibid.: 'Liegt nun die wundersame sinnliche und unsinnliche Natur rund um uns her, so glauben wir es sey jener Zug ein Anzieh'n der Natur, eine Äußerung unsrer Sympathie mit ihr[...]'; cf. also pp. 97, 100 and 109 for a direct reference to the concept of 'Sympathie', and pp. 101 and 105 for references to related concepts, such as the harmony and analogy between macrocosm and microcosm, and mankind's 'intrinsic relationship' [*innere Verwandtschaft*] with nature. This analogy of micro- and macrocosm as a

Where late-eighteenth-century historiographical models sought either to organise natural history along a developmental axis,³³⁶ or to account for it through spontaneous, contingent change,³³⁷ Novalis's notion of sympathy aligns with neither fully:

...wenn auch im Einzelnen ein bewußtloser, nichtsbedeutender Mechanismus allein zu herrschen scheint, so sieht doch das tiefer sehende Auge eine wunderbare Sympathie mit dem menschlichen Herzen im Zusammentreffen und in der Folge der einzelnen Zufälligkeiten. (NS, I, p. 100)

Contingency, understood as the potential for events to unfold unpredictably, is a defining condition of modern historical consciousness.³³⁸ Around 1800, it allowed natural history to be conceived analogously to human history, and thus to be understood as 'history proper'.³³⁹ In *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*, however, sympathy neutralises contingency rather than accommodating it. Instead of allowing history to be shaped by randomness, sympathy imparts an underlying coherence, as if every occurrence were part of a preordained harmony. The challenge to linear models of history is spelled out even more explicitly:

principle of inquiry features prominently in Scheuchzer's works, cf. Kempe, *Wissenschaft, Theologie, Aufklärung*, p. 202.

³³⁶ Cf. HW, vi, ed. by Martin Bollacher, 'Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit', pp. 45, 568.

³³⁷ Cf. James Hutton's geological vision rejects teleological or staged history. In *Theory of the Earth*, he contends that 'we find [...] no vestige of a beginning, – no prospect of an end'. Nature is thus not confined by developmental endpoints but circulates through an open-ended continuum of decay and renewal. Cf. James Hutton, *Theory of the Earth* [Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh] (Edinburgh: Royal Society of Edinburgh, 1788), p. 96; Buffon's account underscores the unpredictable oscillations and accidental shifts shaping the living world, cf. Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon, *Natural History*, trans. by James Smith Barr, 10 vols (London: Symonds, 1807), vi, p. 89: 'These æras, these great events [...] are yet only slight vicissitudes in the ordinary course of animated nature'.

³³⁸ Cf. Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1989), pp. 158–75. In the context of Romantic concepts of history, Schelling explicitly reflects on contingency as an aspect of history, cf. Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling, 'System des transcendentalen Idealismus', in Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke*, I.III (Stuttgart, Augsburg, Cotta: 1858), p. 589: 'Der Mensch hat nur deswegen Geschichte, weil, was er thun wird, sich nach keiner Theorie zum voraus berechnen lässt'.

³³⁹ For example in the context of 'catastrophism', cf. Johann Heinrich Gottlob Justi, *Geschichte des Erd-Cörpers aus seinen äusserlichen und unterirdischen Beschaffenheiten hergeleitet und erwiesen* (Berlin: Himgurg, 1771), p. 322. Cf. also Rudwick, *Earth's Deep History*, p. 76.

Ja, sagte der Zweite, nichts ist so bemerkenswerth, als das große Zugleich in der Natur. Ueberall scheint die Natur ganz gegenwärtig. In der Flamme eines Lichts sind alle Naturkräfte thätig, und so repräsentirt und verwandelt sie sich überall und unaufhörlich, treibt Blätter, Blüten und Früchte zusammen, und ist mitten in der Zeit gegenwärtig, vergangen und zukünftig zugleich...(NS, I, p. 102)

In Novalis's account, nature does not unfold as a sequence of discrete stages, but subsists within time, encompassing past, present, and future in a single simultaneity. This suspension of linear chronology is central to his vision of *Ursprünglichkeit*. Geological inquiry had offered a vocabulary of depth with which to associate the ancient, and analogy enabled him to situate both humankind and nature within a vast prehistory. Yet geology, by its very nature, implies succession and irreversibility: strata follow one another, and moments once elapsed cannot return. In such a model, any recovery of the primeval would be impossible and the Golden Age would remain forever behind us. The idea of sympathy, however, dissolves this rigidity. It binds disparate moments into resonance, suspending sequence and transforming nostalgia for the *Urzeit* into a forward-driving imperative to recover nature's original unity.

Nowhere is the idea of natural correspondences expressed more clearly than in *Die Lehrlinge*, where Novalis presents nature and the human body as structurally interwoven:

Unbekannte und geheimnißvolle Beziehungen unsers Körpers lassen unbekannt und geheimnißvolle Verhältnisse der Natur vermuthen, und so ist die Natur jene wunderbare Gemeinschaft, in die unser Körper uns einführt, und die wir nach dem Maaße seiner Einrichtungen und Fähigkeiten kennen lernen. (NS, I, p. 97)

Knowledge does not arise incrementally, but through intuitive recognition of hidden analogies. This analogical reasoning situates humanity and nature in a shared order of resonance, opening the possibility of recovering their lost unity. A similar idea had been proposed in Hemsterhuis's *Alexis*,³⁴⁰ where the characters suggest that poetic

³⁴⁰ Hemsterhuis, *Alexis*, p. 89.

enthusiasm can restore a correspondence between ideas and things once perceptible in the Golden Age.³⁴¹ For Novalis, too, poetry takes on this restorative role.

Novalis thus situates his Golden Age in a distant past while anticipating its return. Its defining characteristics – unity with nature and a poetic mode of perception – are presented as enduring, unaffected by historical contingency. This raises a fundamental tension in his concept of *Ursprünglichkeit*: is originality an eternal, archetypal state beyond time,³⁴² or is it embedded within the deep past, recoverable only through historical inquiry? On the one hand, the Golden Age appears as *ursprünglich* in a timeless, universal way, as an ever-present reality, which is accessible to those attuned to nature's language.³⁴³ In this mode, originality is not something irretrievably lost but something latent, an underlying harmony between humanity and nature that can be reawakened through poetic and philosophical insight. *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* exemplifies this approach. The apprentice's reflections suggest that primordial wisdom does not belong to a sealed-off past but remains available to those who learn to read nature's signs. On the other hand, *Ursprünglichkeit* represents a material condition rooted in the deep past. This perspective is most clearly articulated in Chapter Five of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, which introduces as sweeping panorama of earth history. Both the Neptunist vision of a primeval ocean and the Vulcanist emphasis on fire as a shaping force are woven into his depiction of prehistory.³⁴⁴

³⁴¹ Ibid., p. 102: Alexis references here 'dieser Enthusiasmus, diese sonderbare Annäherung von Ideen, diese fruchtbare Quelle der wahren Poesie'.

³⁴² Cf. Hemsterhuis's depiction of the Golden Age as a 'state of being', 'Das goldne Weltalter ist ein figürlicher Ausdruck, worunter Du ohne Zweifel mit mir den Zustand eines jeden Wesens verstehen wirst, welches die ganze Glückseligkeit genießt, wozu seine Natur und seine wirkliche Art zu seyn es fähig machen?', cf. Ibid., pp. 51, 104, and also the brief overview since the origin of the world on pp. 114–16.

³⁴³ On the convergence of antiquity and universality, cf. also Novalis' entry 'Geschichtslehre' in the *Allgemeines Brouillon*, NS III, p. 273: 'Wo ewige, unabänderliche Gesetze walten – da ist Alterthum, Vergangenheit'.

³⁴⁴ Cf. NS, I, pp. 253 and 261.

Yet even in this scene in Chapter Five of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, Novalis's plotting of Deep Time evokes both registers of *Ursprünglichkeit* simultaneously. Surrounded by petrified bones and stratified rock formations in a primeval landscape of *Urzeit*, Heinrich and his companions encounter not merely ancient matter, but an active principle of timeless originality, an *Ursprünglichkeit* that operates through analogical correspondence. The hermit articulates a vision of natural history as 'geheime Verkettung des Ehemaligen und Künftigen' (NS, I, pp. 257–58), explaining that '[d]ie nächsten Ereignisse [...] sympathisieren [...] mit entfernteren' (NS, I, p. 257). This sympathetic resonance dissolves chronological sequence into a synchronic web where temporal distance becomes irrelevant.

The hermit's conception of historical understanding depends on this collapse of temporal boundaries. True insight belongs only to one 'welchem die ganze Vorzeit gegenwärtig ist' (NS, I, p. 258). Novalis's wordplay on *Vorzeit* and *Gegenwart* is programmatic. True historical consciousness recognises that prehistory inhabits the present moment. Poetry emerges as the privileged medium for this recognition because only it can trace the hidden correspondences between nature and human experience, past and present. As the hermit declares, '[e]in Geschichtsschreiber [müsse] nothwendig auch ein Dichter seyn [...], denn nur die Dichter mögen sich auf jene Kunst, Begebenheiten schicklich zu verknüpfen, verstehen' (NS, I, p. 259). What comes into view here once more is the *wissenspoetologisch* dimension of Novalis's project. His text does not stage poetry as a secondary representation of scientific or historiographical inquiry, but as a medium in which knowledge of the world generates and articulates itself. What Novalis models, then, is the demonstration that literature itself is a genre of knowledge,

capable of recording, mediating, and transmitting the originary principles on which both nature and history rest.

Novalis's text also enacts what I have earlier described as the reflexivity of Romantic literature. Knowledge is probed and tested at the threshold of objectivity, with literature itself serving as the laboratory of thought. The poetic historiography in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* gains reflexive dimension through Heinrich's own position as emergent poet. His education in correspondent thinking becomes the reader's education. We, too, are drawn into the novel's web of recurring motifs and metaphorical networks, particularly the sustained imagery of depth that structures the narrative's symbolic geography. The hermit's model of understanding, predicated on recognising hidden affinities across temporal distance, becomes the very mode through which we encounter the text. Novalis intended this interplay of poetic insight and historical knowledge to culminate in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen's* second part, where temporal synthesis would achieve complete realisation:

Das ganze Menschengeschlecht wird am Ende poëtisch. Neue goldne Zeit. Poëtisirter Idealism. Menschen, Thiere, Pflanzen, Steine und Gestirne, Flammen, Töne, Farben müssen hinten zusammen, wie Eine Familie <handeln> oder Gesellsch[aft] wie Ein Geschlecht handeln und sprechen.³⁴⁵

This projected Golden Age would restore the severed correspondences between natural and human worlds, enabling universal communication through recovered sympathetic bonds. Poetry's function throughout the novel's first part, uncovering latent affinities, would expand to suspend temporal differentiation altogether: 'Zukunft und Vergangenheit hatten sich in [Heinrich] berührt und einen innigen Verein geschlossen'.³⁴⁶

The surviving fragments indicate that Novalis planned to reintroduce first-part characters

³⁴⁵ NS, I, p. 347.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 322.

in deliberate interconnection, inscribing temporal correspondence directly into narrative structure: a literary enactment of cyclical historical time that transcends linear progression.³⁴⁷

This analysis has revealed three insights into Novalis's plotting of Deep Time. Firstly, his merging of linear and cyclical models of time harks back to early modern natural history, offering a counterpoint to contemporary, linear narratives of progress. Secondly, this temporal restructuring enables a reconceptualisation of origins and originality. *Ursprünglichkeit* manifests not only as a characteristic of the past, but as an eternal principle accessible through analogical recognition in any present moment. Finally, Novalis's narrative architecture and association of motifs represents a deliberate poetic strategy for embodying the correspondent thinking that his characters theorise.

³⁴⁷ Cf. the Paralipomena to *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, *ibid.*, pp. 335–48, especially Klingsohr, figures from his tale – Sophie, Fabel, Arctur e.a. –, but also the Count of Hohenzollern, Heinrich's family, and the miner make several appearances.

Narrating Depth: Novalis's Metaphors and Myths of *Ursprünglichkeit*

In *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, metaphors of depth operate simultaneously as spatial and temporal coordinates, mapping both the subterranean realm and a mythical past where literal descent becomes figurative revelation. When characters descend into mineshafts, caves, or sedimentary strata, their vertical movement through geological time opens up access to deeper reality itself. Depth thus functions epistemologically. Its excavation yields meaning, origins, lost knowledge. Against this backdrop, Novalis's notion of *Tiefsinn*³⁴⁸ – profound reflection – emerges not merely as contemplative faculty but as poetic instrument, a means of recovering the Golden Age from Deep Time's abyss.

The apprentices in *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* first encounter Deep Time as 'Schwindel an der entsetzlichen Tiefe' (NS, I, p. 88) when attempting to grasp natural history in its entirety. Probing 'dieses riesenmäßige Triebwerk' proves perilous, stimulating 'ein Zug in die Tiefe, ein beginnender Schwindel' (NS, I, p. 88). These descriptions suggest that depth is not only daunting but also existentially destabilising.³⁴⁹ The vertigo reflects humanity's disorientation before the temporal gulf of Deep Time, a phenomenon already prefigured in Johann Jakob Scheuchzer's 'immense abyss of nothing' from which God created the world.³⁵⁰ But the idea of Deep Time as vertigo had contemporary cachet. Buffon secularised this image, transposing it from divine prehistory to geological temporality,

³⁴⁸ Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 93, 204, 206, 237, 245, 255, 257, 292, cf. also pp. 216 [*tiefes Gemüth*] and 243 [*tiefe Einsichten*].

³⁴⁹ Cf. in this sense also Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, I.ii, ll. 49-50: 'What seest thou else / In the dark backward and abysm of time?'; *The Norton Shakespeare; Based on the Oxford Edition*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt and others (New York; London: Norton&Company 1997), pp. 1761–1821. All subsequent references are to this edition.

³⁵⁰ Johann Jakob Scheuchzer speaks at the beginning of his *Physica Sacra* of the 'abyss of nothing', from which God has created the world: 'in Temporis principio Mundum ex immensis Nihili Abyssis produxit'. Cf. Scheuchzer, *Physica Sacra*, I (1731), p. 1.

and earth's newly discovered antiquity.³⁵¹ This shift from theological to geological temporality reconfigured the human relationships to origins, and replaced a providentially ordered past with an unfathomable expanse of lost epochs.

Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre* offers another literary reflection of abyssal disquiet, and articulates what in Novalis's *Lehrlinge* remains only implicit. Jarno (Montan) interprets the vertigo induced by mountain precipices as an existential recognition of humanity's marginalisation: "Es ist nichts natürlicher", sagte er, "als daß uns vor einem großen Anblick schwindelt, vor dem wir uns unerwartet befinden, um zugleich unsere Kleinheit und unsere Größe zu fühlen [...]".³⁵² In describing such sensations, Paolo Rossi argues that the vertigo of Deep Time arises not only from humanity's sudden displacement from the centre of the universe, but also from a transformed relationship to origins.³⁵³ For Novalis, confrontation with Deep Time also transcends mere anxiety. The encounter reconfigures notions of originality. Origins become not singular, recoverable points but infinite realms defined chiefly by a sense of remoteness, accessible only through poetic intuition. One apprentice counters time's dizzying vastness by proposing to build 'ein neues Dschinnistan',³⁵⁴ a poetic realm beyond temporal constraints. Novalis enacts this proposal at the end of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* in the form of Klingsohr's tale, which appears to respond intertextually to the Deep Time dizziness voiced in *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*.

³⁵¹ Cf. Buffon, *The Epochs of Nature*, p. 16. The same metaphor is used by John Playfair, cf. John Playfair, 'Biographical Account of the late Dr James Hutton. F.R.S. Edin. [Read by John Playfair 10th January 1803]', *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh*, 5.3 (1805), pp. 39–99, pp. 72–3.

³⁵² FA, I.x, 'Wilhelm Meisters Wanderjahre oder die Entsagenden', ed. by Gerhard Neumann and Hans-Georg Dewitz, p. 289.

³⁵³ Rossi, *The Dark Abyss of Time*, p. ix.

³⁵⁴ NS, I, p. 89; this can be read as a reference to Wieland's *Dschinnistan*. Cf. Christoph Martin Wieland, *Dschinnistan oder auserlesene Feen- und Geister-Mährchen* (Winterthur: Steiner, 1786–1789).

Novalis's characters counter Deep Time with a complementary faculty: *Tiefsinn*, the ability to perceive what lies beneath the surface of the present, visible world. In *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*, this 'tiefer Geist' manifests as 'ein seltsames Verständnis der Steinwelt' (NS, I, p. 101) when beholding ancient stone artefacts – a phrase that points, beyond the contemplation of ancient statues, to an awareness of the natural antiquities contained within the mineral kingdom. Here we glimpse Novalis's vision of natural reunification. Contemplators undergo transformation rather than observing lithic otherness: '[es] überzieht den sinnvollen Betrachter mit einer Steinrinde, die nach innen zu wachsen scheint' (NS, I, p. 101). To become one with nature, this passage implies, requires a *tiefsinnig* faculty, one that enables not only a reunion with the ancient culture that expressed itself in the statues, but also with the primordial matter that constitutes the ancient objects. Cultural and natural originality thus merge into a single image.

The fairytale of Hyacinth and Rosenblüthe illustrates explicitly the convergence of spatial and metaphorical meanings of *Tiefsinn*. In the tale, Hyacinth encounters a mysterious stranger who introduces him not only to foreign cultures but leads him 'in tiefe Schichten hinunter[...]' (NS, I, p. 93). The descent into the literal depths of the earth's crust, nature's original sphere, renders him 'tiefsinnig' and ultimately inspires his search for 'den geheiligten Wohnsitz der Isis' (NS, I, p. 94), arguably positioned as the origin of culture. Here, *Tiefsinn* emerges as the defining attribute of one who seeks *Ursprünglichkeit*. In the case of Isis, this pursuit is framed as a return to the *Ureigene*, a journey homewards.³⁵⁵

³⁵⁵ Hyacinth, upon arriving at the sanctuary of Isis, eventually finds Rosenblüthe there, whom he had left behind when leaving home. Accordingly, he 'schloß alles Fremde von diesem entzückenden Orte aus', cf. NS, I, p. 95.

Heinrich von Ofterdingen similarly links homecoming to Orientalist paradigms of cultural originality.³⁵⁶ In the fourth chapter, Heinrich encounters Zulima, a girl described as coming from the 'Arabischen Gegenden' (NS, I, p. 236). He is first drawn to her by song, which emerges from what is characterised as a 'nahe [...] Tiefe' (NS, I, p. 234). At first glance, the phrase 'near depth' appears oxymoronic. Depth typically implies remoteness. Yet here, depth seems to signal a form of cultural Deep Time, staged as an 'alte Heymath' (NS, I, p. 237). Much like 'near depth', this ancient *Heymath* encapsulates a productive tension between notions of proximity – *Heymath* – and (temporal) distance.³⁵⁷ In the notion of proximity lies an argument for potential recovery, for the same dynamic also characterises Novalis's concept of the original Golden Age: a glorious past, on the one hand, and a universal ideal that can be experienced in the present and future on the other.³⁵⁸ Zulima hails from a region reminiscent of the novel's depictions of the Golden Age, described as 'Kolonien des Paradieses' (NS, I, p. 236). She thus enters Heinrich's present as if arriving directly from a realm of cultural Deep Time,³⁵⁹ collapsing spatial-temporal distance consistent with the novel's meditation on origins as recoverable past phenomena.

³⁵⁶ Cf. Inden, *Imagining India*; Germana, *The Orient of Europe*; Schwab, *The Oriental Renaissance*. Cf. also Chapter Two of this thesis.

³⁵⁷ For a discussion of notions of proximity and distance, and their relationship with concepts of originality, cf. Chapter Two of this thesis. Kenneth Calhoun has read this passage in light of a Saidian concept of Orientalism and concludes: '[A]s it stands, the only Oriental encounter presented by the unfinished *Ofterdingen* occurs on German soil, and the concreteness ascribed to this experience seems to mark the Orient as the product of a colonizing imagination'. Cf. Kenneth S. Calhoun, *Fatherland: Novalis, Freud, and the Discipline of Romance* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), p. 154.

³⁵⁸ Nina Berman cites this passage to describe the twofold function of the Orient more generally, cf. Nina Berman, *German Literature on the Middle East* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), p. 172: the Orient is employed as 'a vehicle to express a longing for an order that is utopian in its desire for individual development yet also reactionary in its nostalgia'.

³⁵⁹ As such, she is presented in an almost timeless fashion – a feature that Todd Kontje links with the role of gender in Orientalism more generally: 'the feminized Orient simply is; Western men are in the process of becoming'. Cf. Kontje, *Orientalisms*, p. 95. Cf. also Kamakshi P. Murti's entry on the 'Exotin' in *The Feminist Encyclopedia of German Literature*, ed. Friederike Ursula Eigler and Susanne Kord (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1997), pp. 133–35.

Heinrich's familiarity with Zulima implicitly suggests his receptiveness to Deep Time. Through Zulima's song, he discovers her homeland's 'romantische Schönheiten', rich in 'Überbleibsel ehemaliger, denkwürdiger Zeiten' (NS, I, p. 236). Depth unfolds horizontally. Those who embody the original state of unity with nature still exist in the present, yet they dwell far away.³⁶⁰ Readers might recall at this point the dedicatory poem of the novel, which alludes to depth and remoteness in a similar way and claims '[t]ief ins Gemüth der weiten Welt zu schauen' (NS, I, p. 193). The spatial remoteness alluded to in the Zulima passage is complicated by a remark that anticipates the cultural-political argument of an alleged 'German-Oriental kinship' that I will analyse in Chapter Two: even the Crusaders, who displaced Zulima from her idyllic homeland, were in fact seeking 'nach der alten Heymath ihres Geschlechts' (NS, I, p. 237). The passage thus frames 'old' and 'new' lands within a territorial paradigm rooted in a Crusader narrative that positions the 'Orient' as the supposed *Urheimat* of Europeans.³⁶¹ Yet structurally, it gestures towards a broader dynamic and interplay of past and future states of humanity, namely the potential return of the Golden Age, envisioned as a cyclical homecoming after 'eine gewisse Zeit des Erwachens' (NS, I, p. 237).

The homeland Zulima evokes, a place where nature and humanity coexist in perfect harmony, recalls the Deep Time trope of a lost Golden Age. The 'seltsame[...] Züge und Bilder auf den Steinplatten' reinforce the interplay of remoteness and familiarity that characterises the entire scene. They belong to an era already considered ancient from

³⁶⁰ On the spatialisation of time in myths of the 'noble savage' that played a structurally similar role for German constructs of *Heimat*, cf. Johann J. K. Reusch, 'Germans as Noble Savages and Castaways: Alter Egos and Alterity in German Collective Consciousness during the Long Eighteenth Century', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 42.1 (2008), pp. 91–129, p. 105.

³⁶¹ Cf. on this Debra N. Prager, 'Discovering the 'Great Orient within Us': Novalis's Heinrich von Ofterdingen' in Prager, *Orienting the Self: The German Literary Encounter with the Eastern Other* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2014), pp. 119–88.

Zulima's perspective, yet 'scheinen [sie] so bekannt' (NS, I, p. 236). It is here that *Tiefsinn* re-emerges as the interpretive key to this original period. Reflection allows one to perceive 'den tiefsinnigen Zusammenhang dieser uralten Schrift' (NS, I, p. 237). Even without deciphering the inscriptions, one gains insights. Zulima remarks that '[s]o hat man doch tausend merkwürdige Entdeckungen in sich selbst gemacht' (NS, I, p. 237), articulating a core principle of Novalis's idea of originality: the Golden Age represents a state in which humanity and nature form a seamless unity, a mutual sympathy that allows self-knowledge through the contemplation of the natural world. A culture long rooted in its environment merges so completely with its surroundings that '[d]ie Natur scheint dort menschlicher und verständlicher geworden' (NS, I, p. 237). This condition, thought to have vanished with the decline of the Golden Age, is here rendered palpable once more.

The motif of resonance between past and present is explicitly emphasised by the language of depth. Zulima describes the world as doubled, with a hidden realm lying 'wie eine dunkle Erinnerung unter der durchsichtigen Gegenwart' (NS, I, p. 237). Elsewhere, Novalis uses the image of a 'Vorhang' or 'Schleier', a veil that conceals a deeper reality.³⁶² This motif recurs, for instance, in the merchants' fairytale in the third chapter, where a princess falls in love with a singer who has spent his life in solitary communion with nature. Time with him seems to unfurl 'ein magischer Schleier [...] in weiten Falten um ihr klares Bewußtseyn', so that she imagines she would find herself 'in einer überirdischen Welt', where the veil is fully lifted (NS, I, p. 217). Poetry, once her greatest joy, now becomes distant, 'ein[...] ferne[r] Gesang[...]',³⁶³ yet precisely in its distance it connects

³⁶² For the image of a 'veil' ('Schleier') or 'curtain' ('Vorhang') that separates an original from the mundane world, cf. NS, I, pp. 198, 217, 252, 310, 312.

³⁶³ Ibid., p. 218. This is echoed in Chapter Four, when Zulima's song emerges from a 'nahe Ferne', and is described as 'dunkle Erinnerung'.

her to 'ehemalige[...] Zeiten' (NS, I, p. 218). Novalis thus evokes the deep structures of cultural memory through a past that remains beneath the surface of the present, waiting to be reawakened.

While fairytales and poetry constitute one way of peering behind the veil that conceals the hidden world, dreams provide another, as the novel's opening chapter makes clear. Heinrich's dream of the blue flower is described as 'ein bedeutsamer Riß in den geheimnißvollen Vorhang [...], der mit tausend Falten in unser Inneres hineinfällt' (NS, I, p. 198). The image of the tear in the curtain is crucial: the dream is not merely a pleasant vision but a disruption of ordinary perception, an aperture through which Heinrich glimpses a deeper reality. This experience initiates him into a mode of seeing that will be developed throughout the novel, a way of reading the world as symbolic, alive with meaning. At first, the dream-world offers only a distant and fragmentary intimation of the Golden Age. Its significance lies less in what Heinrich actually beholds than in the fact that he momentarily crosses the threshold separating everyday perception from the ordinary realm. The hermit's discourse in Chapter Five deepens this experience by giving it historical and philosophical resonance. After hearing the hermit's account of the earliest ages, Heinrich senses that 'die in unzählige Grenzen getheilte Natur in jene fabelhafte Urzeit zurück[führte]' (NS, I, p. 252). The veil metaphor reappears, now internalised: '[d]ie Worte des Alten hatten eine versteckte Tapetenthür in ihm geöffnet', through which 'die ernste Vorwelt emporstieg' (NS, I, p. 252). This opening signifies a transformation of perception. It is as though a hidden chamber of the self has been unlocked, allowing Heinrich to experience a sympathetic connection between inner and outer worlds.

What follows is decisive. Nature itself becomes articulate, as though responding to Heinrich's newly awakened receptivity. He encounters creatures, 'von denen jede ihre innere Natur in einer einfachen Bitte und in einer eigenthümlichen Mundart vernehmlich aussprach' (NS, I, p. 252). Heinrich's inner transformation, the opening of the 'versteckte Tapetenthür', allows him to hear nature's voice, and in turn, nature reveals its own essence. Novalis here appears to link self-knowledge and natural knowledge as mutually constitutive. To understand the world is to understand oneself, and vice versa. The dream, the hermit's teaching, and the speaking creatures thus form a coherent progression: first the glimpse through the veil, then the philosophical framing of that experience, and finally its realisation as a dialogue between the human and non-human realms.

Throughout the novel, Novalis presents multiple modes of access to the hidden world beneath ordinary experience: fairytales, poetry, and dreams each serve as partial revelations, preparing the way for a fuller disclosure. Each deepens Heinrich's capacity to read the world symbolically – in other words, to experience it as alive, resonant, and continuous with his own inner life. This process reaches its culmination in Klingsohr's tale, where the return of Sophie and Arctur's rule is brought about by Fabel herself, now personified. By triumphing over the Fates and the Chronicler – figures who represent a fixed, linear conception of time –³⁶⁴ Fabel opens the way to a different temporal order, one that unites past, present, and future: 'Der Vorhang wird sich bald heben', she declares, 'dann spinne ich die Tage der Ewigkeit' (NS, I, p. 310). The earth is then described as

³⁶⁴ Cf. NS, I, p. 303, where the chronicler appears with an hourglass and a sickle, iconographic symbols of transience.

‘beb[end] in ihren Tiefen’ and drawing nearer ‘unter dem Schleier’ (NS, I, p. 312), explicitly invoking the veil motif that has accompanied Heinrich’s *Bildung* from the beginning.

At this moment, the breach Heinrich first experienced in a dream becomes cosmic: the curtain is not merely torn but fully lifted.³⁶⁵ Two lovers who witness the kingdom’s restoration feel as though they are dreaming,³⁶⁶ as Heinrich once did, until nature itself begins to speak again: ‘Alles schien beseelt. Alles sprach und sang’ (NS, I, p. 312). Here, the novel’s central trajectory is fulfilled. The distinction between dream and waking reality collapses, and the sympathetic dialogue between self and nature now expands to include the entire cosmos. The result is not only the inauguration of a new Golden Age but also the completion of Heinrich’s inner journey, in which the hidden depths of the world and of the self are simultaneously unveiled. In this sense, Klingsohr’s tale functions as the novel’s synthesis. The tale gathers the scattered glimpses of Deep Time offered through dreams, fairytales, and the hermit’s philosophy, and resolves them into a single vision where past and future, nature and self, interiority and exteriority are harmonised.

This final unveiling, which concludes the first part of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, invites a comparison with *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*, particularly in their shared treatment of the return to the Golden Age. In *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, this return is prepared cumulatively. Each breach in the veil offers a further glimpse, culminating in Klingsohr’s tale, which enacts the restoration of the eternal kingdom. A parallel passage in *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* appears within a discussion of the manifold ways of contemplating nature (‘mannichfache Naturbetrachtungen’, NS, I, p. 85). Some interlocutors speak of a ‘Heimath’ concealed behind a veil, others envision ‘eine lebensvolle Zukunft’ (NS, I, p.

³⁶⁵ Cf. the reference to a ‘Riß in de[m] geheimnisvollen Vorhang’ in HvO, NS, I, p. 198.

³⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 312: ‘...ein glückliches eben erwachtes Paar [...] hielt die neue Welt für einen Traum’.

85). Yet another perspective imagines nature gradually reviving, heralding the Golden

Age's return:

Allmählich fing ihr [i.e. nature's] Herz wieder an menschlich sich zu regen, [...] und so scheint allmählich die alte goldne Zeit zurückzukommen, [...] als sie unter ihnen wohnte und ein himmlischer Umgang die Menschen zu Unsterblichen machte. Dann werden die Gestirne die Erde wieder besuchen, [...] dann legt die Sonne ihren strengen Zepter nieder, [...] und alle Geschlechter der Welt kommen dann nach langer Trennung wieder zusammen [...], dann kommen die ehemaligen Bewohner der Erde zu ihr zurück, in jedem Hügel regt sich neu erglommene Asche, überall lodern Flammen des Lebens empor, alte Wohnstätten werden neu erbaut, alte Zeiten erneuert, und die Geschichte wird zum Traum einer unendlichen, unabsehbaren Gegenwart. (NS, I, p. 86–7)

Heinrich von Ofterdingen takes up this vision but renders it dramatically concrete. The 'himmlische[...] Umgang' of *Die Lehrlinge* becomes a theophany in Klingsohr's tale, with natural forces returning to earth as divine presences.³⁶⁷ The moon court is restored to its former splendour,³⁶⁸ while the sun does not merely set aside its sceptre, as in *Die Lehrlinge*, but burns itself out entirely: 'endlich war nichts von der Sonne mehr übrig, als eine schwarze ausgebrannte Schlacke, die herunter ins Meer fiel' (NS, I, p. 307). Both works similarly culminate in a vision of renewal. Just as *Die Lehrlinge* foresees that 'alte Zeiten [werden] erneuert',³⁶⁹ *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* affirms in the present tense: 'Die alten Zeiten kehren zurück' (NS, I, p. 310). Linear time is also suspended. *Die Lehrlinge* describes history transformed into the 'Traum einer unendlichen, unabsehbaren Gegenwart', while *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* enacts this transformation poetically, as Fabel sings: 'Gegründet ist das Reich der Ewigkeit' (NS, I, p. 87). Past, present, and future converge into a single temporal continuum.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 298.

³⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 314.

³⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 87: '...alte Wohnstätten werden neu erbaut, alte Zeiten erneuert, und die Geschichte wird zum Traum einer unendlichen, unabsehbaren Gegenwart'.

The extinction of the sun is crucial to this dissolution of linear time. Once the sun's cycles no longer measure the days, existence unfolds in an eternal present. This final image also closes the novel's narrative loop: Heinrich's story begins with frustration at the mechanical regularity of daily life – the ticking clock, the shutters simulating day and night in miniature – and ends with the abolition of this entire structure. Time no longer constrains the characters but opens into fluidity and infinity. In this condensed and metaphorical vision, we encounter once more Novalis's rejection of linear history. The Golden Age is not imagined as an unreachable past but as a return to an originary state, at once reminiscent of Burnet's cyclical providentialism and resonant with the universalism of the Cartesian model.

Yet unlike Descartes' mechanistic cosmos, clockwork set in motion, Novalis's world is animated by myth and poetry: forces that bind past and present, and that render the eternal recurrence of origins perceptible. When *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* summons the Kyffhäuser legend or invokes the figure of Orpheus, these function as instruments through which literature interrogates its own relationship to Deep Time. Myth, beside metaphor, emerges as a medium through which Romantic poetry negotiates the vertiginous encounter with geological vastness. As a genre that has always already existed in cultural Deep Time,³⁷⁰ myth provides poetry with a model for accessing originality that remains perpetually present rather than irretrievably lost.

³⁷⁰ According to Schelling, myth represents a 'pre-historical' form of thought, situated at the threshold of consciousness itself; in this sense, myth operates as a genre whose temporality coincides with what we might call cultural Deep Time. Cf. Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, 'Ueber Mythen, historische Sagen und Philosopheme der ältesten Welt', in Schelling, *Sämmtliche Werke*, 1.1 (Stuttgart, Augsburg: Cotta, 1856), pp. 41–83, pp. 43–4.

Novalis's mythological method reflects early Romantic theories of poetry's primordial function.³⁷¹ Schelling's vision of sciences flowing back 'als ebenso viel einzelne Ströme in den allgemeinen Ozean der Poesie'³⁷² parallels Novalis's concept of the *Urflüssige*,³⁷³ and stages poetic creation as a Deep Time phenomenon.³⁷⁴ Schlegel's call for a 'Neue Mythologie'³⁷⁵ emerging 'aus der tiefsten Tiefe des Geistes'³⁷⁶ similarly positions mythic thinking as poetry's means of accessing temporal depths that historical consciousness cannot reach. Both philosophers recognise myth as a sophisticated temporal technology. They were not merely interested in reviving ancient myths, but sought to uncover mythic structures as universal expressions of the original poetic unity characteristic of the Golden Age.³⁷⁷ This idea finds its counterpart in Novalis's reimagining of Orpheus as an archetypal figure in the second chapter of *Offerdingen*,³⁷⁸ as an *Urdichter* whose poetic power bridges the divide between humanity and nature. Poetry, in this context, is described as a force that animated nature in 'uralten Zeiten':

³⁷¹ KFSa, II, 'Gespräch über die Poesie', ed. by Hans Eichner, pp. 311–313.

³⁷² Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, 'System der transcendentalen Idealismus', in *Sämmtliche Werke*, I.III (Stuttgart, Augsburg, Cotta: 1858), p. 629.

³⁷³ NS, I, p. 104.

³⁷⁴ Cf. also Herder's idea of a cultural Deep Time and poetry's role in it; Herder speaks of the 'Simplizität der Fabel' that is characteristic of the 'Kindheit der damaligen Zeit', cf. HW, II, ed. by Gunter Grimm, 'Von Deutscher Art und Kunst: Shakespear', p. 500.

³⁷⁵ In his *Rede über die Mythologie*, Schlegel called for a *sympoiesis* modelled after Greek mythology, cf. Manfred Frank, *Der kommende Gott: Vorlesungen über die Neue Mythologie* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1982), p. 209.

³⁷⁶ KFSa, II, 'Gespräch über die Poesie', ed. by Hans Eichner, p. 312.

³⁷⁷ Schelling explicitly states that, for mythology, history begins with the loss of the Golden Age, cf. Schelling, in 'System der transcendentalen Idealismus', *Sämmtliche Werke*, I.III, p. 589. He also claims that mythology enables a return from the hegemony of science and reason to poetry, pp. 628–629.

³⁷⁸ This is not the Orpheus of Apollonius of Rhodes or Virgil, but a hybrid figure who in different parts of Novalis's works appears with different characteristics, cf. Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica*, I, 23–34; Virgilius Maro, *Georgica*, IV, 453–566. For an overview of the mythological figure, cf. *Mythos Orpheus: Texte von Vergil bis Ingeborg Bachmann*, ed. by Wolfgang Storch (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1997).

[D]urch den seltsamen Klang wunderbarer Werkzeuge [haben Dichter] das geheime Leben der Wälder, die in den Stämmen verborgenen Geister aufgeweckt, in wüsten, verödeten Gegenden den todtten Pflanzensaamen erregt, und blühende Gärten hervorgerufen, grausame Thiere gezähmt und verwilderte Menschen zu Ordnung und Sitte gewöhnt, sanfte Neigungen und Künste des Friedens in ihnen rege gemacht, reißende Flüsse in milde Gewässer verwandelt, und selbst die todtesten Steine in regelmäßige tanzende Bewegungen hingerissen [...]. (NS, I, p. 211)

The Orphic figure is not just an example of poetic power but a model through which Novalis thinks about what poetry *is* and *does*. In other words, Orpheus is a figure of poetic self-reflexivity: poetry reflecting on its own ability to bridge temporal gulfs between mythic past and present, between human life and geological Deep Time. Novalis thus stages poetry as a mode of knowledge in its own right, one that generates insight by dramatising nature's hidden forces and making them available to thought. In a *wissenspoetologisch* sense, myth emerges not simply as a cultural residue but a poetic experiment in how knowledge circulates across time.

The Orphic poet's ability to awaken hidden forces and bridge past and present is mirrored in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen's* narrative form. Just as poetry accesses temporal depths, the novel arranges events so that past and future reflect one another, inviting the reader to experience time as a layered, recursive continuum, an interplay of memory and prophecy, rather than a linear sequence.³⁷⁹ This technique is most transparent in Chapter Five's cave scene, where Heinrich discovers a mysterious book containing his own story, both past events and future occurrences.³⁸⁰ This bookish encounter creates a textual

³⁷⁹ This interplay of future and past recalls Koselleck's categories of 'Erfahrung' and 'Erwartung', which he characterises as the conceptual alembic of time systems: 'Erfahrung und Erwartung sind zwei Kategorien, die geeignet sind, indem sie Vergangenheit und Zukunft verschränken, geschichtliche Zeit zu thematisieren', cf. Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft*, p. 353. Koselleck explicitly cites Novalis as an example on p. 352, claiming he alludes to the 'discovery' of history in the eighteenth century in the sentence 'Der eigentliche Sinn für die Geschichten der Menschen entwickelte sich erst spät', and when stating that only once the 'geheime Verkettung des Ehemaligen und Künftigen' is discovered, 'lernt [man] die Geschichte aus Hoffnung und Erinnerung zusammensetzen', *ibid.*, pp. 352–53.

³⁸⁰ NS, I, pp. 264–65.

mise-en-abyme. Heinrich reading about himself mirrors the reader's experience of encountering correspondences across the novel's temporal layers.

The recursive structuring of the narrative demonstrates the capacity of myth and poetry to render temporal depth in ways that resist confinement to a linear timeline.³⁸¹ In Klingsohr's tale, the tension between linear and poetic modes of time unfolds as a conflict between mythic and historical temporality. The personified Fabel, claiming to come 'aus alten Zeiten' (NS, I, p. 301) proves more successful than the court historian, a mere chronicler, in capturing the essence of history.³⁸² Ultimately, she succeeds in restoring Arctur's kingdom, a process described as '[d]as Innere [zu] offenbar[en]' and lifting the 'curtain' that had veiled the original Golden Age.³⁸³ Fabel's nurse Ginnistan, whose name likely alludes to Christoph Martin Wieland's Orientalist collection *Dschinnistan*, also plays a crucial role in this restoration. She is the lover of Fabel's father and is ultimately elevated to the position of 'Statthalter[i]n' on earth.³⁸⁴ Alongside Fabel, Ginnistan is associated with the paradigm of oral poetry, and thus of human Deep Time, which functions as a medium of cultural memory,³⁸⁵ a notion that gained prominence in ideas of originality around 1800 (as will be discussed in more length in Chapter Three of this thesis). Ginnistan's superior memory, upon which the frustrated historian must rely, demonstrates the inadequacy of written historical methods when confronted with temporal depths that exceed documentary record: 'Der Schreiber rührte die Feder, und

³⁸¹ Cf. the image of the veil, or curtain concealing an original world (NS, I, pp. 198, 217, 252, 310, 312), or on p. 210, the image of 'deep caves' ('tiefe[...] Höhlen'), from which both bygone ages and a glorious future emerge – an image that is enacted in Chapter Five on the plot level, as Heinrich himself descends into a cave and comes closer to his spiritual destination of becoming a poet.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 295–96.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 310.

³⁸⁴ NS, I, p. 314.

³⁸⁵ Cf. for example Peter Mondelli, 'Singing Print, Reading Song: Navigating Voice and Writing in Herder's "Volkslieder"', *The German Quarterly*, 91.4 (2018), pp. 377–88; Ruth Michaelis-Jena, 'Oral Tradition and the Brothers Grimm', *Folklore*, 82.4 (1971), pp. 265–75.

machte immer eine Fratze, wenn er genöthigt war, Ginnistan um etwas zu fragen, die ein sehr gutes Gedächtnis hatte, und alles behielt, was sich zutrug'.³⁸⁶ The relationship between Fabel, Ginnistan and the Schreiber thus cements poetry's claim to a privileged access to origins.

While Klingsohr's tale at the end of Part One of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* is arguably the most synthesised expression of poetry's role in history, Novalis also reworks existing legends to serve as allegories of poetic renewal. Nowhere is this more apparent than in his treatment of the Kyffhäuser material,³⁸⁷ a myth that promises the return of a dormant emperor and, with him, the restoration of a lost order. The motif itself can be traced back to earlier folk and literary traditions. But one tradition appears to be especially significant for Novalis. Frederick Hiebel identifies Otmar's *Volcks-Sagen* as the earliest printed source associating a magical flower with the Kyffhäuser region.³⁸⁸ Published in 1800, the very year Novalis was most intensely working on *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, Otmar's collection of 24 tales from Germany's Hartz region presents a plausible source of inspiration.³⁸⁹ Arnim and Brentano had already suspected that the similarities between Otmar's legends and Novalis's *Ofterdingen* could hardly be coincidental. In a letter to his

³⁸⁶ NS, I, p. 296.

³⁸⁷ The Kyffhäuser massif is more than just a literary reference. It is also where Novalis first encountered material that would inspire *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*. Although the Kyffhäuser is not explicitly named in the published text, it features prominently in his sketches for the novel's second part, 'Erfüllung'. As Kluckhohn and Samuel note in their editor's preface, Novalis studied old chronicles in this region, including those referencing the medieval bard Heynrich von Aftirdingen. Cf. NS, I, pp. 183–84.

³⁸⁸ Frederik Hiebel, 'Zur Interpretation der 'Blauen Blume' des Novalis', *Monatshefte*, 3.7 (1951), pp. 327–34, p. 327.

³⁸⁹ Carl Busse disagrees but must have had an incorrect publication date in mind, as he claims that Otmar's *Sagen* were published only after the release of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*. Cf. Carl Busse, *Novalis' Lyrik* (Oppeln: Maske, 1898), p. 108.

friend, Arnim remarks dryly: 'Tieck und Novalis haben ihn [i.e. Otmar] schön bestohlen und nie genannt'.³⁹⁰

A closer look at the arrangement of Otmar's tales corroborates this hypothesis: stories 7, 8 and 9 share motifs that reappear in *Ofterdingen*, including a magic flower (7), *Bergentrückung* (7, 8, 9), and a sleeping emperor (9). The final story, 'Der verzauberte Kaiser', is especially suggestive. The story features plot elements such as an enigmatic book from which a monk reads and the figure of a miner (*Bergmann*), both unmistakably echoed in Novalis's novel. Otmar's *Volcks-Sagen* thus appear to have served as a kind of quarry from which Novalis extracted disparate narrative fragments, recombining them into a new legend woven from preexisting strands. From the perspective of a *Neue Mythologie*, however, this practice is fully justified, oriented towards detecting and recombining the original and universal patterns latent in existing myths.

Rather than merely appropriating folk tradition, then, Novalis transforms the sleeping-emperor motif into a structural principle that both mirrors and reflects upon the novel's temporal design. The legend's promise of cyclical return, where death becomes suspended animation and the past lies in wait for reawakening, provides a mythic model for the kind of temporal synthesis that poetry itself performs. The motif recurs at key junctures: in Heinrich's father's dream, in Count Friedrich von Hohenzollern's cave hermitage, in Klingsohr's tale, and again in Novalis's plans for the novel's continuation. In the *Berliner Papiere*, for instance, 'Kyffhäuser' serves as the title of an independent section placed just before the reappearance of the blue flower and Heinrich's apotheosis.³⁹¹ Novalis's notes repeatedly interlace '*Bergentrückung*' and '*Kaisersage*'

³⁹⁰ *Achim von Arnim und die ihm nahestanden*, ed. by Reinhold Steig and Herman Grimm, 3 vols (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1894), I, p. 128.

³⁹¹ NS, I, p. 341.

motifs, ultimately revealing Klingsohr as a reincarnation of the sleeping emperor,³⁹² and Arctur from *Klingsohr's Märchen* as an alter ego of emperor Friedrich.³⁹³ Both figures represent variations of the Kyffhäuser legend: instead of waiting to restore the Holy Roman Empire, as Barbarossa does in folk tradition, they anticipate poetic salvation and the dawn of a new Golden Age.³⁹⁴

In Heinrich's father's dream, the Kyffhäuser reference appears in its most conventional form: an old man whose 'Bart war durch den eisernen Tisch gewachsen'.³⁹⁵ This image aligns closely with the folk tradition of the sleeping emperor, whose ever-growing beard signals his prolonged dormancy as he awaits the right moment to awaken and restore the empire. In its traditional form, the Kyffhäuser legend subverts the linearity of history. Death, which marks the definitive end of an individual's life, is denied, replaced by a mythic period of sleep. The emperor's return is perpetually deferred but always anticipated, making the past not something lost but something awaiting reactivation.

At the novel's midpoint, Novalis introduces another Kyffhäuser figuration: Count Friedrich von Hohenzollern, who has withdrawn from the world to live as a hermit in a cave. Unlike the mythic emperor, Friedrich is not asleep, yet he remains suspended in time and represents a crucial intermediary stage where mythic and geological temporalities intersect. Despite prolonged isolation, Friedrich shows no aging: 'Er sah weder alt noch jung aus, keine Spuren der Zeit bemerkte man an ihm' (NS, I, p. 255). Friedrich embodies adaptation to geological rather than historical time, where human duration becomes insignificant against earth's vast chronology. His experience that years

³⁹² Ibid., p. 348.

³⁹³ Ibid., p. 342.

³⁹⁴ For a discussion of the discourse of originality in relationship to the fate of the Holy Roman Empire, cf. Chapter Three of this thesis.

³⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 201.

pass, 'wie ein Augenblick' demonstrates how consciousness might adjust to Deep Time's overwhelming scales (NS, I, p. 257). The tombstone marking his eventual return to the 'Vaterland' materialises this merger of human mortality with lithic permanence (NS, I, p. 257).

Klingsohr's fairytale completes the legend's transformation from political to purely poetic restoration. Here, the Kyffhäuser tradition becomes fully abstracted. Arctur and Sophie's kingdom represents not imperial return but imaginative synthesis. The sleeping emperor's political promise transforms into poetry's capacity to suspend linear temporality altogether, creating what the tale calls 'das Reich der Ewigkeit'. Looking at the intended macrostructure of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, one could argue that Klingsohr's tale serves as a utopian ideal for the narrated present in the novel's first part, *Erwartung*, but forms a legendary past to the narrative Novalis sketches in his design for the second part, *Erfüllung*.

Understood more broadly, Novalis's mythological practice offers a crucial insight into Romanticism's engagement with the epistemological shock of Deep Time. Rather than retreating from the disorienting vastness revealed by geology, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* turns to poetry and myth as tools for thinking through time itself. The novel's recursive narrative structure – Heinrich reading his own story, the Kyffhäuser legend's transformations across successive temporal layers, and the Orphic vision of poetry animating even 'die todtesten Steine' – all point to the same strategy. Myth allows Romantic literature to reconceive origins not as irretrievably lost but as continually accessible. Myth becomes less an archive of ancient content than a temporal technology, mediating between human consciousness and abyssal time, converting temporal vertigo into creative possibility. Novalis, here, enacts the very *Tiefsinn* he

attributes to his protagonist. The search for *Ursprünglichkeit*, for a lost poetic and historical unity, leads not to a distant past but, paradoxically, ‘immer nach Hause’.³⁹⁶ The Romantic quest for origins, as *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* reveals, is a rediscovery of what was always already present.³⁹⁷ While both Novalis’s novels are programmatic in their depiction of poetry’s role in restoring a Golden Age, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* implements the poetic programme in a performative manner. In *Lehrlinge zu Sais*, the Golden Age is largely a theoretical construct, discussed and imagined by various characters; in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, it unfolds as a poetic revelation in Klingsohr’s tale, where poetic creation and historical renewal become one and the same.

Conclusion

Novalis’s literary engagement with Deep Time – both geology’s proverbial ‘abyss of time’,³⁹⁸ and in its existential challenge to humanity’s place within history – demonstrates how Romantic writing could absorb and ultimately reframe the epistemological shocks of the late eighteenth century. Rather than appropriating geology as a ready-made discourse, his novels treat the abyss of time as a provocation to poetic invention. In *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* and *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*, the vertiginous expanses of *Urzeit* are not figured as alien or hostile, but as horizons of poetic renewal. His protagonists learn to read strata and legends alike as palimpsests of origin, where the deepest past anticipates a future Golden Age. By entwining natural and human history in a common

³⁹⁶ NS, I, p. 325.

³⁹⁷ Cf. Mähl, *Die Idee des goldenen Zeitalters*, p. 309.

³⁹⁸ The scientist and biographer John Playfair famously uses this phrase when describing James Hutton’s examination of Scottish rock formations: ‘Revolutions still more remote appeared in the distance of this extraordinary perspective. The mind seemed to grow giddy by looking so far into the abyss of time’. Cf. Playfair, ‘Biographical Account of the late Dr James Hutton’, pp. 72–3.

cycle, Novalis transforms the very loss implied by Deep Time into a possibility of imaginative recovery.

At the heart of this project lies what I have described as a *wissenspoetologische* practice. Poetry here does not passively reflect scientific insight. It generates its own models of knowledge, staging encounters between geology, myth, and philosophy that neither science nor historiography could sustain alone. Novalis's novels dramatise this power of literature to make origins thinkable: to convert immensity into narrative, to translate mute stone into communicative form, and to bind humanity once more to a world that modernity had estranged. Mythological figures such as Orpheus or the Kyffhäuser emperor serve as emblems of poetry's ability to traverse temporal gulfs and awaken dormant continuities. In this way, Novalis develops a Romantic epistemology in which literature is both the medium of origins and the means of their reactivation across time.

Yet Novalis is only one node in a wider nexus. His geo-poetic vision resonates with broader Romantic efforts to negotiate the challenge of originality in an age of temporal dislocation. The philologists who reconstructed an *Ursprache*, the collectors who framed folk songs as vessels of antiquity, and the Orientalists who traced cultural kinship to India all participated in the same imaginary of origins. Each field projected beginnings onto a temporally remote past in order to secure cultural identity in the present. Seen in this light, Novalis's geo-poetics is exemplary not because it is unique, but because it crystallises a Romantic strategy that recurs across genres and disciplines: to turn the deep past into a generative principle, and to imagine origins as promises of renewal. The following chapters pursue this comparative perspective, showing how the discourse of

Ursprünglichkeit shaped Romantic attempts to reconcile disenchanting modernity with the allure – and authority – of beginnings.

II) Deep Time and Orientalism

Within the emerging field of German Orientalism, the concept of originality was drawn back from the abstractions of timelessness and historicised. In the figure of the Orient, ideas of cultural originality were reinscribed into the vast framework of Deep Time.³⁹⁹ German explorations of an allegedly original Orient were not merely quests to recover the earliest languages or reconstruct the fabled ‘childhood of mankind’.⁴⁰⁰ More was at stake. These scholarly and poetic ventures subtly reconfigured national identity. German Orientalism served as a temporal prosthesis for the emerging *Kulturnation*. The concept and discipline provided ways to locate German cultural identity within a history so ancient, so mythically remote, that it eluded more recent European rivals – above all, France. When the Holy Roman Empire eventually collapsed in 1806, the Orient became a central site for Germany’s cultural self-invention. This chapter examines how German Orientalism mobilised the idea of *Ursprünglichkeit* across three case studies: in Herder, where the Orient’s *Ursprünglichkeit* emerges as a universal paradigm of origins that links natural and cultural beginnings; in Frank and Schlegel, as a philological and mythological resource for constructing a German prehistory in the Orient; and in Otto Heinrich von

³⁹⁹ Since Said has exposed the Orient as a Western fiction and analysed Orientalism as both a precursor and a tool of colonial exploitation, scholarly attention has shifted to exploring the specific ways in which this Orient was constructed. Scholars now approach it as a fantasy (al-Azmeh; Koppelkamm), a fabricated construct (Bauriedl; Berman), or a distorted picture and travesty of the West (Kabbani); cf. Said, *Orientalism*; Aziz al-Azmeh, ‘Islamic studies and the European Imagination’, *Islamic Culture*, 61.1 (1987), pp. 1–27; Stefan Koppelkamm, *Der imaginäre Orient: Exotische Bauten des achtzehnten und neunzehnten Jahrhunderts in Europa* (Berlin: Ernst&Sohn, 1987); Bauriedl, *Konstruktionen des Orients in Deutschland*; Nina Berman, *Orientalismus, Kolonialismus und Moderne: Zum Bild des Orients in der deutschsprachigen Kultur um 1900* (Stuttgart: M&P, 1996), p. 14; Rana Kabbani, *Mythos Morgenland: Wie Vorurteile und Klischees unser Bild vom Orient bis heute prägen* (Munich: Knaur, 1993).

⁴⁰⁰ For an overview of concepts of a childhood of mankind, including Rousseauian and Herderian tropes, cf. Stefanos Geroulanos, *The Invention of Prehistory: Empire, Violence, and our Obsession with Human Origins* (New York: Liveright, 2024), especially Chapter 1, ‘The Infancy of Humanity’. For an overview of the trope of the Orient as the ‘cradle of humanity’, cf. Ludwig Ammann, *Östliche Spiegel: Ansichten vom Orient im Zeitalter seiner Entdeckung durch den deutschen Leser 1800–1850* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1989), pp. 31–7.

Loeben (1786–1825), where the Orient is reimagined as Germany’s original ancestral territory in literature. Taken together, these case studies reveal how *Ursprünglichkeit* became a central idiom for embedding Germany into a Deep Time that exceeded classical antiquity and rivalled France’s claims to cultural authority.

In *Orientalism*, Edward Said famously calls out the complicit relationship between knowledge and power in constructing the Orient. Said views Orientalism as a ‘corporate institution’ that exerts dominance by ‘authorizing views of [the Orient], describing it, by teaching it, settling it’.⁴⁰¹ While Said’s analysis primarily targets French and British imperial practices, Germany, a latecomer to colonialism in the material sense, proves no less instructive. From a Saidian perspective, German Orientalists operated on colonial terms, but their conquests were hermeneutic, not territorial. They made, in Said’s words, ‘the Orient deliver up its secrets under the learned authority of a philologist whose power derives from the ability to unlock secret esoteric languages’.⁴⁰² *German Orientalism*, I argue, deserves its own label not because it discovered something new about its object, but because it made the Orient *do* something very specific for Germany. The concept anchored a narrative of cultural self-origination at a moment of political fragmentation. In the absence of a nation-state, the Orient became Germany’s surrogate antiquity – older than Rome, nobler than France, and, usefully, just vague enough to be moulded to the ‘imagined community’ that Germany was at the beginning of the nineteenth century.⁴⁰³ While relying on colonial infrastructures built by others, German philologists claimed superior, disinterested insight into the East, and cultivated a peculiar sense of

⁴⁰¹ Said, *Orientalism*, p. 3.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 138.

⁴⁰³ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, cf. p. 45, n. 160.

proximity to the Orient, a spiritual ‘kinship’ in service of their own quest for cultural originality.⁴⁰⁴

This imaginary and its German specification begins with Herder, whose works provided the blueprint for a nascent cultural genealogy fuelled by concepts of originality.⁴⁰⁵ In his *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache* (1772), Herder aligns *morgenländisch* with *ursprünglich*, treating certain ‘Oriental’ linguistic structures as analogues of humanity’s earliest stage of expression.⁴⁰⁶ The Orient is not merely elsewhere. It is *before*, functioning as the cradle of humanity, the site of first articulation, and the necessary point of departure from which cultural development, including that of the Germans, must be traced.⁴⁰⁷ What appears to be a universalist anthropology thus lays the groundwork for a more particular claim, namely the genealogical linking of German identity to an ‘Oriental’ past.

Herder’s ideas did not emerge in a vacuum. His studies of Sanskrit literature relied heavily on English translations, particularly William Jones’s works. Jones, one of the first scholars to conduct extensive research on India as part of his work for the East India Company, explicitly articulates the nexus between research and colonial interests.⁴⁰⁸ If

⁴⁰⁴ Cf. HW, I, ed. by Ulrich Gaier, ‘Von den Deutsch-Orientalischen Dichtern’, p. 277.

⁴⁰⁵ Joseph Görres points out Herder’s foundational role for the discourse around 1800 in a review of Othmar Frank’s *Das Licht vom Orient*, cf. Anon. [Joseph Görres], ‘Das Licht vom Orient, dargestellt durch Othmar Frank’, *Heidelberger Jahrbücher der Literatur. Theologie, Philosophie und Pädagogik*, 2.1, 12 (1809), pp. 269–83, p. 271.

⁴⁰⁶ HW, I, ed. by Ulrich Gaier, ‘Über den Ursprung der Sprache’, p. 765. For the association of originality with the Orient, cf. also *ibid.* p. 755.

⁴⁰⁷ For an overview of eighteenth-century theories on the monogenesis and polygenesis of humanity, cf. Robert Cowan, ‘As Flood Waters Receded: The Enlightenment on the Indian Origins of Language and Art’, in Cowan, *The Indo-German Identification: Reconciling South Asian Origins and European Destinies, 1765–1885, Studies in German Literature Linguistics and Culture* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2010), pp. 33–48.

⁴⁰⁸ A. T. Hartmann, in a discussion of William Jones’s Persian grammar, quotes Jones’s statement ‘dass die englischen Besitzungen am Ganges die Kultivierung dieses Zweigs der Wissenschaften nothwendig mache’, Anton Theodor Hartmann, *Über die Ideale weiblicher Schönheit bei den Morgenländern* (Düsseldorf: J.H. Schreiner, 1798), p. 279.

the British are not willing to devote more resources to the study of Sanskrit, Persian and Arabic in the future, he asserts that ‘the limits of our knowledge will be no less extended than the bounds of our empire’. The objective is to comprehend ‘the manners and sentiments of the Eastern nations’ to govern them more effectively.⁴⁰⁹ Herder is both aware of and distances himself from this imperialist rationale. In his preface to Georg Forster’s *Sakontala*, translated from Jones’s English version, he launches a dual assault: first against the inadequacy of English versification to capture Sanskrit beauty, and second against British colonialism itself. Borrowing an image from *Sakontala*, Herder writes that English rhyme strikes Indian poetry ‘wie zehrend-brennendes Wasser [...] die zarte Mallika-blume, die es (wie die Engländer die *Hindu*’s selbst) sengt und zerstöret’.⁴¹⁰ Here, philological fastidiousness masks a larger moral claim of the German handling of the Orient as purer and untainted by the violence of empire. As Todd Kontje and Susanne Zantop have shown, Germany’s lack of colonies allowed it to occupy a rhetorical high ground, condemning the violence of imperial conquest ‘while quietly absorbing selected portions of the Middle East and Central Asia into a pan-German cultural project’.⁴¹¹

Such investments in cultural prestige shaped the contours of German representations of the Orient. The desire to articulate a distinctly German vision often overrode concerns for geographical or ethnographic precision. Despite occasional gestures towards specificity,⁴¹² early nineteenth-century German texts freely conflate India, the Holy Land,

⁴⁰⁹ William Jones, *A Grammar of the Persian Language* (London: Richardson, 1771), pp. x–xi. Cf. also Eric John Sharpe, *The Universal Gita: Western Images of the Bhagavad Gita* (London: Duckworth, 1985), and John James Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment: The Encounter between Asian and Western Thought* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 26.

⁴¹⁰ HW, VIII, ed. by Hans Dietrich Irmischer, ‘Über ein morgenländisches Drama’, p. 989.

⁴¹¹ Cf. Kontje, *Orientalisms*, p. 8; Zantop, *Colonial Fantasies*, pp. 17–42.

⁴¹² In *Fundgruben des Orients*, Joseph von Hammer, for instance, names the specific regions that form his Orient: ‘Constantinopel, Levante, Persien, Syrien, Aegypten, [zukünftig: Barbarey und Tartarey], Arabien, Marokko, China, Indien’, cf. Joseph von Hammer, ‘Vorrede’, in *Fundgruben des Orients*, ed. by Hammer (Wien: Schmid, 1809), I, pp. I–VI, p. III. Cf. also Hartmann, *Über die Ideale weiblicher Schönheit bei den*

and the *Morgenland*. Homogenisation could not always be excused as a failure of knowledge. More often than not, the aggregation of the Orient's spaces was a deliberate rhetorical strategy. A handful of evocative tropes summoned the image of a holistic Orient *pars pro toto*, which were then bolstered by the paratexts of Orientalist publications. In his *Denkwürdigkeiten von Asien*, for example, Heinrich Friedrich von Diez reassures his readers that Turks could safely be classified with Arabs and Persians as Orientals.⁴¹³ Such gestures prioritised rhetorical coherence over ethnographic fidelity, preserving the Orient as a self-contained, undifferentiated antiquity available for appropriation.

This conjured Orient served a larger purpose.⁴¹⁴ Desirable attributes, such as originality, self-sufficiency, spiritual depth, were projected onto the Orient and then re-imported into German cultural self-understanding. Anton Theodor Hartmann, for instance, comments on the self-sufficiency of Indian culture in his 1806 compendium *Aufklärungen über Asien*, stating that

Die genügsamen Bewohner dieses Himmelsstrichs [India] konnten die Produkte fremder Völker entbehren und es ist gar keine Veranlassung da, die uns auf den Gedanken führen könnte, daß sie entfernte Gegenden aufgesucht haben sollten. Als Phönizier und Karthaginenser schon in beträchtlichem Verkehr mit Aegypten standen, befanden sich die Indier auf einer so hohen Stufe der Cultur daß sie wohl anderen mittheilen, nichts aber für sich zu holen brauchten.⁴¹⁵

Morgenländern, p. 5: 'Unter dem Namen Morgenländer begreife ich hier alle die Nationen, die der Mahomedanischen Religion zugethan sind, mit Einschluss der Indier'.

⁴¹³ Heinrich Friedrich von Diez, *Denkwürdigkeiten von Asien in Künsten und Wissenschaften, Sitten, Gebräuchen und Alterthümern, Religion und Regierungsverfassung aus Handschriften und eigenen Erfahrungen gesammelt*, 2 vols (Berlin: Nicolai, 1811–1815), I, p. xxiii.

⁴¹⁴ Cf. al-Azmeh, 'Islamic studies and the European imagination'; Koppelkamm, *Der imaginäre Orient*; Bauriedl, *Konstruktionen des Orients in Deutschland*; Berman, *Orientalismus, Kolonialismus und Moderne. Zum Bild des Orients in der deutschsprachigen Kultur um 1900* (Stuttgart: M&P, 1996), p. 14.

⁴¹⁵ Anton Theodor Hartmann, *Aufklärungen über Asien für Bibelforscher, Freunde der Culturgeschichte und Verehrer der morgenländischen Literatur*, 2 vols, (Oldenburg: Schulze, 1806–1807), I, p. ix. Cf. Also Anon., review of 'Benjamin Bergmann, Nomadische Streifereien durch die Kalmükei. Dritter und Vierter Theil', *Neue Leipziger Literaturzeitung*, 2 (1805), pp. 2054–61, p. 2054.

Contemporary publications on Germany's political status, written amidst French occupation, similarly assert the nation's cultural and political self-sufficiency: 'Gelegen in der Mitte von Europa, unzähligen Einflüssen von allen Seiten ausgesetzt, hat dieses Volk in dem Laufe der Jahrhunderte doch nie seine Eigenthümlichkeit verläugnet'.⁴¹⁶

The logic worked both ways. The metonymic Orient, homogenised by Orientalist writing that took individual observations about India or Muslim cultures *partes pro toto* as instances of 'the Orient', also worked *totum pro parte*. As thinkers such as Herder proclaimed German 'kinship' with 'Morgenländer',⁴¹⁷ the Orient bestowed Germany, partaking in its ancient venerability, with value and pedigree. Praising the Orient for its cultural independence and originality implied an accolade of German culture as part of this 'Oriental' spirit. Learning about the 'Orient' promised insights into cultural antiquity. This was knowledge rendered particularly important in the German-speaking lands, which were struggling for cultural cohesion at the beginning of the nineteenth century in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars. Sponsors of the German national idea thus looked towards the Orient for lessons in self-sufficiency.⁴¹⁸ Across the sprawling landscape of German Orientalist discourse, one purpose crystallises, namely the pursuit of originality, through a spiritual, ancestral, or linguistic connection with the Orient. By rooting German culture in the Deep Time of humanity's dawn, Orientalist narratives offered both an escape from foreign domination and a blueprint for national rebirth.

Where natural historians of the late eighteenth century had imagined an abyssal past of the earth, early nineteenth-century German Orientalists effectively repopulated Deep Time with notions of *Urvolk* and *Ursprache*. The idea of temporal depth first developed in

⁴¹⁶ Karl Heinrich Ludwig Pölit, *Der Rheinbund, historisch und statistisch* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1811), p. 1.

⁴¹⁷ Cf. HW, I, ed. by Ulrich Gaier, 'Von den Deutsch-Orientalischen Dichtern', p. 277.

⁴¹⁸ Cf. Kontje, *Orientalisms*, p. 68.

the context of natural history is thus translated into the cultural sphere. Accordingly, Friedrich Schlegel, in *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* (1808), proposes that human cultural development should be read stratigraphically. Just as a geologist infers the earth's past from sediment and fossil – 'wie der Naturforscher die Lagen der verschiedenen Erdarten in den Gebirgen'–, so must a historian decipher ancient languages and myths as cultural deposits.⁴¹⁹ The metaphor of 'Völkerschichten' anchors human history in a quasi-geological framework, where cultural memory is embedded like quartz in limestone.⁴²⁰ Joseph Görres, in his *Mythengeschichte der asiatischen Welt* (1810), extends the metaphor. In the preface, his narrator descends into a limestone cave seeking echoes of primeval humanity among natural antiquities and *lusus naturae*.⁴²¹ In this context, Görres employs an image that suggests early humanity is an articulation of the primeval earth itself: 'Der frühe Mensch ist das artikulierte Wort, das die Erde ausgesprochen'.⁴²² He locates the most faithful remnants of this primeval utterance not in Western literature, but in the Indian Vedas, praised for their 'Alterthümlichkeit' and 'Treue des Natursinns'.⁴²³

What unites Schlegel and Görres is their shared investment in *depth*, a concept that in German Orientalism functions doubly. Depth, firstly, signifies an epistemological challenge. The Orient appears tantalisingly obscure, its earliest languages nearly inaccessible, at least in the case of Sanskrit.⁴²⁴ Helmina von Chézy, for instance, laments

⁴¹⁹ Schlegel, *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*, p. 166.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

⁴²¹ Joseph Görres, *Mythengeschichte der Asiatischen Welt*, 2 vols (Heidelberg: Mohr und Zimmer, 1810), I, p. 6.

⁴²² *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁴²⁴ Othmar Frank, *Das Licht vom Orient* (Nürnberg: Lechner; Leipzig: Besson, 1808), p. 31. Frank speaks of the Orient as 'in seiner Tiefe meist noch verschlossen [...]']

that ‘nicht eine Hülfquelle zur Erlangung der tiefsten aller Sprachwissenschaften war auf dem festen Lande Europas zu finden’.⁴²⁵ The original Orient needed to be unearthed from the depths of cultural memory, ‘dug up’⁴²⁶ from under the epistemological layers of later centuries.⁴²⁷ The second aspect evoking the metaphoric field of depth within Orientalist discourse is the perception of the Orient as the ‘cradle of humanity’, the origin of all cultural development.⁴²⁸ Herder, in his *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit*, associates the Orient (‘Morgenland’) with the ‘Menschengeschlecht in seiner Kindheit’,⁴²⁹ a foundational period whose ‘Grundsteine’ were ‘tief’ ‘gelegt’.⁴³⁰ Depth here takes the shape of both spatial and temporal remoteness, akin to the deep, geological timescales and strata that had shaped ideas of originality at the end of the eighteenth century. This coupling of epistemic opacity and temporal profundity endowed the Orient with singular prestige.⁴³¹

⁴²⁵ Helmina von Chézy, *Unvergessenes. Denkwürdigkeiten aus dem Leben von Helmina von Chézy*, 2 vols (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1858), I, p. 321.

⁴²⁶ The metaphor of buried sources that need to be ‘dug up’, is found in Hammer’s *Fundgruben des Orients*, I, p. III.

⁴²⁷ Cf. Diez, *Denkwürdigkeiten von Asien*, I, p. xviii; Johann Gottfried Eichhorn, *Repertorium für Biblische und Morgenländische Litteratur*, 4 vols (Leipzig: Weidmann, 1777–1779), I (1777), p. I; and Joseph von Hammer, *Rosenöl. Erstes Fläschchen, oder Sagen und Kunden des Morgenlandes aus arabischen, persischen und türkischen Quellen gesammelt. Erstes Bändchen*. (Tübingen, Stuttgart: Cotta, 1813), p. III.

⁴²⁸ Diez, *Denkwürdigkeiten von Asien*, p. IV.

⁴²⁹ HW, IV, ed. by Jürgen Brummack and Martin Bollacher, ‘Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit’, p. 16.

⁴³⁰ Ibid.

⁴³¹ Cf. Frank, *Das Licht vom Orient*, 27, Schlegel, *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*, p. 69; Schwab, *Oriental Renaissance*, pp. 7, 23, 221, and 484.

Herder's Morgenland as a Paradigm of Originality

Herder occupies a central place in the Romantic discourse on originality. As Nicholas Germana notes, '[t]here are few, if any, issues that engaged the Early Romantics that were not first dealt with by Herder. Their fascination with language, with fables and folktales, with mythology, and with nationalism, can all be traced back to Herder's influence'.⁴³² He also forged a conceptual link between Orientalism and originality that would inspire later thinkers, for example Friedrich Schlegel, to claim German 'kinship' with the Orient. Herder's first forays into Orientalist thought owe less to India, which would dominate German imaginations in the early nineteenth century,⁴³³ than to the Orient of biblical criticism.⁴³⁴ But it is in the context of the biblical Orient that key connotations of originality were first shaped. Herder's focus on the Hebrew language and scripture, for example, was driven by a concern with originality understood not as innovation, such as the notion of the 'original genius' in a *Sturm und Drang* context, but as antiquity. According to Herder's *Vom Geist der Ebräischen Poesie* (1782), the Bible should be treated as an ancient cultural artefact giving testament to early poetic expression.⁴³⁵ While Herder, as Maurice Olender has remarked, did not consider Hebrew 'the "mother of all languages"', he nevertheless viewed it as "one of the eldest daughters" of the *Ursprache*, or primal

⁴³² Germana, *The Orient of Europe*, p. 57.

⁴³³ Cowan, *The Indo-German Identification*, cf. especially chapter 2, 'Seeds of Romantic Indology: From Language to Nation' for a discussion of Herder's influence on later Romantic engagement with India, pp. 49–71.

⁴³⁴ Cf. Olender, *The Languages of Paradise*, especially pp. 31–2.

⁴³⁵ Christoph Bultmann, *Die biblische Urgeschichte in der Aufklärung: Johann Gottfried Herders Interpretation der Genesis als Antwort auf die Religionskritik David Humes* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), p. 6.

language’,⁴³⁶ and presents Hebrew poetry as the spontaneous utterances of a people still close to nature.⁴³⁷

Yet as more Persian and Sanskrit texts began to filter into Europe in the 1770s and 1780s, Herder’s focus shifted.⁴³⁸ In his *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, India emerges as the birthplace of early mankind, a stage upon which natural and human history intertwine. Here, Herder’s thought makes a decisive move. He yokes the formation of the earth itself to the origins of culture, arguing that just as climates and mountains shaped the world’s vegetation, so too did they shape the nascent human race.⁴³⁹ In the third volume of his *Ideen*, Herder tightens the analogy of natural and human development. Nature, he argues, evolved through gradual transformations, and human societies followed the same course:

So hat also die Natur mit den Bergreihen, die sie zog, wie mit den Strömen, die sie herunter rinnen ließ, gleichsam den rohen aber vesten Grundriß aller Menschengeschichte und ihrer Revolutionen entworfen. [...] Das Alles gehört so sehr zur natürlich-fortschreitenden Geschichte des Menschengeschlechts, als zur Naturgeschichte der Erde.⁴⁴⁰

For both spheres, Herder invokes the concept of *Urgestalten*, primordial forms, that underlie all later variations:

Was indes jeder Stein-und Erdart verliehen ist: ist gewiß ein allgemeines Gesetz aller Geschöpfe unsrer Erde [...] und hätten wir einen Sinn, die Urgestalten und ersten Keime der Dinge zu sehen, so würden wir vielleicht im kleinsten Punkt die Progression der ganzen Schöpfung gewahr werden’.⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁶ Cf. Olender, *Languages of Paradise*, p. 32, and HW, v, ed. by Rudolf Smend, ‘Vom Geist der Ebräischen Poesie: 10. Gespräch’, p. 920.

⁴³⁷ Herder follows the English Bishop Robert Lowth (1710–1787) in this revaluation. Lowth describes Hebrew poetry as simple, powerful, and noble, a stark contrast to the Enlightenment philosophers who dismiss Hebrew poetry as an ‘unclear’ and ‘impure’ product of hot climates. Cf. Ofri Ilany, ‘“Is Judah indeed the Teutonic Fatherland?” The Debate over the Hebrew Legacy at the Turn of the 18th Century’, *Naharaim*, 8.1 (2014), pp. 31–47, p. 39. Cf. Schwab, *Oriental Renaissance*, p. 210.

⁴³⁸ Germana, *The Orient of Europe*, p. 19.

⁴³⁹ On Herder’s climate theory, and his indebtedness to Vico and Montesquieu cf. Isaiah Berlin, *Three critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder* (London: Vintage Digital, 2012), especially pp. 212, 234, 238, 291, and 345, and Isaiah Berlin, *Vico and Herder: Two Studies in the History of Ideas* (London: Hogarth, 1976), pp. 147–48.

⁴⁴⁰ HW, vi, ed. by Martin Bollacher, ‘Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit’, pp. 44–5.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 55–6.

Even though natural history and geology do not occupy the same central place in Herder's biography as they do in the life and works of Novalis (as discussed in the preceding chapter), Herder nonetheless took an active interest in these fields. His son studied under Abraham Gottlob Werner. Herder himself met Werner, and was acquainted with his theories on the origins and transformations of the earth.⁴⁴² Significantly, Herder was also familiar with the work of Werner's intellectual rival, the French naturalist Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon, as evidenced in his *Älteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts*.⁴⁴³ Accordingly, we can see the formative role of geological concepts of *Ursprünglichkeit* nestled between the lines quoted above. Herder takes for granted that universal *Urgestalten* are established for all 'Stein- und Erdart[en]'. The geological sphere, even if evoked only obliquely, serves as a conceptual point of departure for his search for analogous patterns in human history and cultural development.

Herder's model of history, blending Buffon's vision of nature's dynamic evolution with his own anthropological speculations,⁴⁴⁴ allows him to imagine a universal law of development, namely the principle by which nature and culture could unfold in tandem, each mirroring the other's processes of growth, decay, and renewal. This is not to suggest a simultaneous emergence of geological and human histories. Herder is clear that primeval revolutions of the earth occurred without human witnesses.⁴⁴⁵ Rather, his

⁴⁴² Caroline von Herder, *Erinnerungen aus dem Leben Johann Gottfrieds von Herder*, 3 vols (Stuttgart, Tübingen: Cotta, 1830), III, p. 109.

⁴⁴³ Cf. HW, v, ed. by Rudolf Smend, 'Älteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts', p.195.

⁴⁴⁴ Schulz, *Die Natur der Geschichte*, p. 142. On the similarities and differences of Buffon's and Herder's concepts of history, cf. Werner Conze, 'Evolution und Geschichte die doppelte Verzeitlichung des Menschen', *Historische Zeitschrift*, 242.1 (1986), pp. 1–30, p. 14.

⁴⁴⁵ HW, VI, ed. by Martin Bollacher, 'Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit', pp. 381–82.

framework rests on analogy. Natural and human developments are not synchronous, but structurally homologous.

Searching for the ‘Bildungsstätte und der älteste Wohnsitz der Menschen’, he looks not to Europe but to the ‘die Höhen der ewigen Urgebürge’ in Asia.⁴⁴⁶ According to Herder, while Europe still lay submerged beneath the waters of a primeval ocean,⁴⁴⁷ Asia had already become hospitable to human life, offering fertile soils and a favourable climate. Drawing on a synthesis of climate theory, natural history, and anthropology, he situates Asia as the ‘cradle of humanity’.⁴⁴⁸ It is in the valleys and mountains of the Orient, he contends, that the ‘geistreichsten und erhabensten Menschen’ first arose.⁴⁴⁹ This account does not isolate Asia from Europe, but binds them in a narrative of genealogical and cultural transmission. Herder asserts that Europe was populated by both people and animals that migrated from Asia, suggesting not only that human history begins in Asia, but that European culture partakes in its primeval vitality: ‘Daß Europa sowohl an Menschen als Thieren meisten aus Asien besetzt sey [...] ist sogar aus der Geschichte erweislich’.⁴⁵⁰

Herder captures this process in the terminology of familial relations, suggesting both a spiritual and biological kinship between Asia and Europe: ‘so scheint es doch, daß Afrika und Europa nur wie Kinder sind, an den Schooß der Mutter, Asien, gelehnet’.⁴⁵¹ The metaphor of familial intimacy is further developed in a subsequent passage, where Herder articulates a genealogical vision of humanity’s emergence:

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 383.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 386.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 386–87.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid. p. 387.

⁴⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁵¹ Ibid. p. 388.

Das Menschengeschlecht, das zur Humanität bestimmt war, sollte von seinem Ursprunge an ein Brudergeschlecht aus Einem Blut, am Leitbände Einer bildenden Tradition werden, und so entstand das Ganze, wie noch jetzt jede Familie entspringt, Zweige von Einem Stamm, Sprossen aus Einem ursprünglichen Garten.⁴⁵²

The passage reveals Herder's pivotal role in embedding metaphors of kinship into the discourse of *Ursprünglichkeit*. Even as he focuses on Asia's role as *Europe's* ancestral homeland, the familial trope sets the stage for a lineage-based model of cultural inheritance, one that would later be reframed in terms of a narrower 'German-Oriental kinship'.

This sense of kinship is inflected differently across Herder's works, depending on his aims and contexts. In *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, for example, we find Herder consistently using the term *Asien* rather *Orient* or *Morgenland* to name the paradigm of origin. This lexical choice may reflect a more literal geographical ambition in *Ideen*, namely the desire to locate primordial humanity and nature in a specific, mappable region. In other texts, especially those that engage more directly with the culture and literature of the East, Herder's language becomes less geographical and more evocative, revealing the metonymic tendencies that would come to characterise German Orientalism around 1800. In his *Älteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts* (1774), for instance, Herder quotes fragments from vastly different sources – the Zend Avesta, the Kabbalah, the Qur'an – to evoke the spirit of a unified Orient without regard for geographical or historical precision.⁴⁵³ In his *Spruch und Bild, insonderheit bei den Morgenländern*, however, Herder acknowledges the diversity of his sources: '[u]nter dem Namen der morgenländischen Dichtung begreift man gewöhnlich die Poesie so

⁴⁵² Ibid. p. 389.

⁴⁵³ Cf. Suzanne Marchand, *German Orientalism in the Age of Empire: Religion, Race and Scholarship* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), p. 45.

verschiedner Völker und Zeiten Asiens, als man in Europa schwerlich unter Einem dergleichen Hauptnamen begreifen möchte'.⁴⁵⁴ Yet he still lumps them together:

Ob also gleich über die Poesie der Morgenländer mit mancher Unterscheidung gesprochen werden muß: so hat und behält sie doch allerdings ihren allgemeinen Hauptcharakter, der aus der Sprache dieser Völker, aus ihrer gemeinschaftlichen oder verwandten Religion, Regierungsform, Lebensweise, zum Theil auch aus ihrer Geschichte und Abkunft sehr wohl zu erklären ist.⁴⁵⁵

Independent of their individual historical contexts, all 'Oriental' sources 'atmen den Geist Einer und derselben Weltgegend',⁴⁵⁶ while their 'general character' crystallises around three key traits: sensuality, simplicity, and proximity to nature.

In his claim that the vivid imagery, emotional immediacy, and unrefined expression of 'Oriental' poetry breathes the spirit of humanity's infancy,⁴⁵⁷ Herder follows such thinkers as Johann Georg Hamann, for whom poetry was the mother-tongue of mankind. Indeed, he quotes Hamann directly. As gardening precedes agriculture, or painting precedes writing, so poetry, in Hamann's words, precedes prose as the earliest and most natural form of human expression.⁴⁵⁸ The paradox is that to make 'Oriental' poetry accessible to European readers, Herder cannot resist reshaping it. He freely adapts, rewrites, and embellishes his sources, smoothing out obscurities and amplifying resonances he

⁴⁵⁴ HW, VIII, ed. by Hans Dietrich Irscher, 'Schriften zur Literatur: Spruch und Bild, insonderheit bei den Morgenländern', p. 31.

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., pp. 37–8.

⁴⁵⁶ HW, III, ed. by Ulrich Gaier, 'Blätter der Vorzeit', p. 726.

⁴⁵⁷ The perceived simplicity and purity of 'Oriental' poetry was said to evoke a notion of 'Fremdheit' that European readers experience due to their more advanced levels of civilisation and sophistication, cf. *ibid.*, p. 725. For the full quote from second preface to the third collection of *Zerstreute Blätter* (1787), cf. Johann Gottfried Herder, *Blumenlese aus morgenländischen Dichtern*, ed. by Johann von Müller (Tübingen: Cotta, 1807), p. VII. Cf. also HW, VIII, ed. by Hans Dietrich Irscher, 'Spruch und Bild, insonderheiten bei den Morgenländern', p. 32.

⁴⁵⁸ Herder quotes from Hamann's *Kreuzzüge des Philologen* in this context, cf. HW, VIII, ed. by Hans Dietrich Irscher, p. 38.

deems essential.⁴⁵⁹ The very act of preserving ‘Oriental’ originality becomes, inevitably, an act of interpretation and appropriation.

Nowhere is this act of appropriation more apparent than in the opening tale of *Blätter der Vorzeit*. In the tale, the narrator approaches the gates of paradise, longing to glimpse ‘[d]ie älteste Wohnung meines Geschlechts’.⁴⁶⁰ A cherub answers that this original abode has waned, but that the tree of life and knowledge now grows everywhere, accessible to all. The narrator is then handed a branch whose leaves – pages and foliage –, consist of ‘die unverwelklichen Blätter der ältesten Sage’.⁴⁶¹ Interpreting this as a calling, he vows to disseminate this ancient wisdom: ‘Ich folge dem Befehl des Engels [...] Auf meiner Lippe sey die Sprache der alten Zeit; meine kindliche Sage atme den Hauch vom Zweige des Paradieses’.⁴⁶² What follows is Herder’s curated collection of ‘Oriental’ legends and poetry, offered to the reader as the very ‘Blätter der ältesten Sage’.

In the text, Herder’s stated purpose is a response to what he perceives as a cultural amnesia in Europe, especially in Germany,⁴⁶³ regarding its own original poetry. The lack of originality among modern writers is explicitly cited as a motivating concern: ‘Wie selten sind nun, (nochmals gesagt,) diese eigenthümlichen, ursprünglichen Denker unter den Menschen!’.⁴⁶⁴ The Orient, in his view, is a source of inspiration capable of countering the growing sterility of contemporary literary production. What renders the sources original

⁴⁵⁹ HW, III, ed. by Ulrich Gaier, ‘Blätter der Vorzeit: Dichtungen aus der morgenländischen Sage: Aus der Vorrede zu “Zerstreute Blätter”’, p. 725. Herder’s intent was to make passages more readable for the Western audience, acknowledging the modifications he made to accommodate the sensibilities of his readers, cf. HW, VIII, ‘Spruch und Bild, insonderheiten bei den Morgenländern’, ed. by Hans Dietrich Irmischer, p. 40.

⁴⁶⁰ HW, III, ed. by Ulrich Gaier, ‘Blätter der Vorzeit’, p. 726.

⁴⁶¹ Ibid., p. 727.

⁴⁶² Ibid.

⁴⁶³ Cf. The image of ‘Lethe’, ‘de[r] königliche[...] Hauptstrom unseres Vaterlandes’; HW, VIII, ed. by Hans Dietrich Irmischer, ‘Spruch und Bild, insonderheiten bei den Morgenländern’, p. 47.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 30.

to him is their rootedness in the childlike stages of humanity, on the one hand, and their ability to express these experiences in a universal form on the other. It is precisely this combination – antiquity, or primevality, and universality, or primordiality – that according to Herder confirms the originality of these ‘Oriental’ traditions.⁴⁶⁵

Herder’s enthusiasm for Sanskrit literature and its foundational status as an original expression of early humanity, comes to the fore once more in his above-quoted preface to Georg Forster’s translation of *Sakontala* (1803). For Herder, *Sakontala* is a testament to an original unity with nature, a living echo of paradisiacal infancy.⁴⁶⁶ Herder’s praise for Forster thus extends to preserving the delicate interplay between poetry and nature, and to enriching the translation with insights drawn from Indian natural history.⁴⁶⁷ *Sakontala*, he argues, cannot be understood without an intuitive grasp of the land’s flora, fauna, and climate. Its sensibility is one in which ‘everything is alive’, where everything participates in a shared vitalism:

Alles ist in der indischen Natur belebt; hier sprechen und fühlen Pflanzen, Bäume, die ganze Schöpfung... [...] In dieser Vorstellungsart, in der alles sich so leise und zart berührt, kann mit Beibehaltung ewiger Urformen alles aus allem werden.⁴⁶⁸

Where Novalis’s *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* fantasises about the rebirth of a Golden Age through poetry, Herder envisions a rejuvenation of culture and a return to unity with nature through the reception of ‘Oriental’ texts.⁴⁶⁹

The titular figure, Sakontala, embodies a fluid boundary between human and nature herself. She is described in the text as a flower, with the forest around her characterised

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 31.

⁴⁶⁶ Cf. Schwab, *Oriental Renaissance*, p. 211.

⁴⁶⁷ HW, VIII, ed. by Hans Dietrich Irmischer, ‘Über ein Morgenländisches Drama: Vorrede zur zweiten Ausgabe von G. Forsters “Sakontala”’, p. 986.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 988.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 987. For a description of an early state of poetic expression, and man living in unison with nature, cf. HW, IV, ed. by Jürgen Brummack and Martin Bollacher, ‘Über die Wirkung der Dichtkunst auf die Sitten der Völker’, pp. 155–56.

as an ‘umzäuntes Paradies’.⁴⁷⁰ The text, *Sakontala*, is likewise compared to ‘ein schönes Gewächs, natürlich’,⁴⁷¹ and, as such, ‘ein Spiel für die Sinne’.⁴⁷² With *Sakontala*, Herder has found a literary example for his idea of the original stage of cultural development, which is characterised by proximity to nature, sensual expression and poetry, as Dorothy Figueira has argued.⁴⁷³ In framing Indian literature through the biblical metaphor of the Garden of Eden, Herder collapses distinctions between different Orientalist traditions and draws them into a single figure of original harmony, rendering them legible within a comparative anthropology of early humanity. When he remarks that ‘ein Europäer war dieser Dichter Kalidas nicht’,⁴⁷⁴ he emphasises the historical and cultural specificity of Kālidāsa’s poetic world. At the same time, however, the drama’s vitality is not sealed off from later readers. *Sakontala*, in particular, is staged as a mediator in this regard: ‘Die jüngere Generation lerne auch hier von dem Indier, immer vertrauter mit dem Geiste der Natur werden’.⁴⁷⁵ A German reader, properly attuned to nature’s voice, might yet hear the echoes of that lost world. To read *Sakontala*, then, is not merely an act of literary appreciation but an attempt of cultural and spiritual regeneration. While Herder never issues a claim as programmatic as Goethe’s appeal from the *Noten und Abhandlungen* that ‘wir [müssen] uns orientalisieren’ to partake in the Orient’s productivity, he nonetheless urges his readers towards a transformation of perspective.⁴⁷⁶ The task, as he

⁴⁷⁰ HW, VIII, ed. by Hans Dietrich Irsmscher, ‘Über ein Morgenländisches Drama: Vorrede zur zweiten Ausgabe von G. Forsters “Sakontala”’, p. 988.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., p. 987.

⁴⁷² Ibid., p. 988.

⁴⁷³ Dorothy M. Figueira, ‘Karoline Von Günderrode’s Sanskrit Epitaph’, *Comparative Literature Studies*, 26.4 (1989), pp. 291–303, p. 293.

⁴⁷⁴ HW, VIII, ed. by Hans Dietrich Irsmscher, ‘Über ein Morgenländisches Drama’, p. 53.

⁴⁷⁵ HW, VIII, ed. by Hans Dietrich Irsmscher, ‘Über ein Morgenländisches Drama: Vorrede zur zweiten Ausgabe von G. Forsters “Sakontala”’, p. 987.

⁴⁷⁶ FA, III.I, ‘West-östlicher Divan’, p. 201. Goethe acknowledged his indebtedness to Herder’s Orientalist thought in one of the introductory essays of the *Noten und Abhandlungen*, titled ‘Hebräer’, FA, III.I, p.140.

formulates it, is to approach Kālidāsa's text not through the habitual filters of European taste, but to read it 'Indisch, mit feinaufmerkender Überlegung, Ruhe und Sorgfalt'.⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷⁷ HW, VIII, ed. by Hans Dietrich Irmischer, 'Über ein Morgenländisches Drama', p. 52.

The 'Identi-fiction' of the German Orient: Othmar Frank and Friedrich Schlegel

The dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806 shook centuries-old structures of governance and identity. Whether read as the manipulations of an international aristocracy or the outcome of Napoleonic design, the Empire's collapse turned Germany into an object of foreign arrangement. Amidst territorial fragmentation and French encroachment, German intellectuals launched a cultural counter-offensive. The rise of Orientalist scholarship was part of the effort to reimagine Germanness at a moment when its political foundations had nearly vanished. As I will show, Othmar Frank's *Das Licht vom Orient* (1808) and Friedrich Schlegel's *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* (1808) represent this turn.⁴⁷⁸ Despite their differences in tone and method, both works share a common project: to reconstruct German identity by projecting it into a cultural prehistory deep enough to bypass France altogether.⁴⁷⁹ French cultural production, with its Enlightenment cosmopolitanism and neoclassical aesthetics, had come to symbolise a form of cultural dominance that Romantic-era Germans increasingly viewed as derivative, artificial, and politically coercive. Orientalism offered a double alternative as a body of knowledge and a symbolic genealogy, a mythic origin story in which Germany, too, could claim a venerable antiquity. It is within this context that the conjunction of Romantic nationalism and Orientalist speculation must be understood.

As Andrea Polaschegg has observed, a key operation in German Orientalist works of the early nineteenth century is the dynamic of proximity and distance, mediating the binaries of 'self' and 'other', 'familiar' and 'foreign'.⁴⁸⁰ The Orient is both idealised and

⁴⁷⁸ Frank, *Das Licht vom Orient*; Schlegel, *Ueber die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*.

⁴⁷⁹ Germana, 'Self-Othering', p. 90.

⁴⁸⁰ Polaschegg, *Der andere Orientalismus*, pp. 41–9.

domesticated, at once fetishised as a primeval relic and reconfigured as spiritually kin to contemporary Germany. These attempts to Germanise the Orient, and ‘orientalise’ Germany result in what could be termed an *identi-fiction*, a hybrid form in which philological inquiry, poetic invention, and speculative anthropology converge to produce narratives of ancestral affinity. In Frank’s and Schlegel’s works, scientific authority and poetic license merge to construct the East as an ancestral mirror in which Germany recognises itself as ancient and spiritually profound.⁴⁸¹ These projects do not merely interpret Oriental texts, but perform a kind of national autofiction under the guise of scholarship. It is precisely their fictional quality that makes them so effective, for, as Benedict Anderson argues, fictions often ground collective imaginaries.⁴⁸² *Identi-fiction* thus names the speculative labour by which Romantic Orientalism around 1800 fabricated a German prehistory in the East, and even staged Germany as the ‘Orient of Europe’.⁴⁸³

Joseph Görres’s *Mythengeschichte der asiatischen Welt* (1810), published two years after his *Teutsche Volksbücher*, exemplifies this strategy with particular clarity. The preface of the volume opens with an image that evokes metaphors of kinship amongst indigenous tribes. ‘[W]er kann Zeugniß geben von der langen Zeit, die schon gewesen ist?’ he asks the reader rhetorically, before continuing:

Fragt die Geschlechter, die mit euch gelebt, sie deuten verstummend auf die Väter, noch weiter winken euch die zurück, hoch und höher müßt ihr am Fluß der Zeiten steigen, bis ihr zuletzt am Berge die ehrwürdige silbergraue Gestalt gefunden, die an der Quelle von jedes Volks Geschichte sinnend ruht, und mit Lotos das sonnenbeglänzte Haupt umwunden, die goldne Urne hält, aus der sich der Völkerstrom ergießt.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸¹ Cf. Schwab, *Oriental Renaissance*, p. 484.

⁴⁸² Cf. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 9–36.

⁴⁸³ Cf. Schlegel, ‘Vorlesungen über die romantische Poesie’, p. 25.

⁴⁸⁴ Görres, *Mythengeschichte der asiatischen Welt*, I, pp. IV–V.

The lotus marks the scene as unmistakably Orientalist in conception, and Görres soon identifies the Indian Vedas as the oldest surviving traces of cultural memory.⁴⁸⁵ His use of the word *Völker* in the plural further signals that early humanity is envisioned as a community of distinct tribes bound by a shared origin. The suggestion is not only that the Orient preserves the remnants of human beginnings, but that it embodies the original conditions of tribal, and thus authentic, cultural life.⁴⁸⁶ The trope of tribal belonging, invoking Tacitus's *Germania* and the decentralised organisation of the pre-unification German states,⁴⁸⁷ offers a culturally resonant model for reconceiving Germany itself: fragmented politically, but united spiritually in an ancient, quasi-Oriental mode of being.

What Görres here merely gestures towards in mythic imagery, scholars such as Friedrich Schlegel and Othmar Frank pursued with philological seriousness. Both traced Germany's cultural ancestry to an imagined Oriental origin, inadvertently seeking to compensate for the disunity of the early nineteenth-century political landscape. As Todd Kontje notes, Schlegel even viewed the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire as an opportunity for the re-emergence of the Germanic peoples (*Völker*) that would form the substance of a future *Volk*. For Schlegel, then, Orientalist scholarship became the stage upon which a national spirit was rediscovered and recast: 'der christlich-konservative Nationalist Schlegel versucht, den Orient als organischen Bestandteil des germanischen Volkes anzueignen, [...], der Patriot Schlegel verfasst die Geschichte des deutschen Geistes'.⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁵ Ibid., p. xi.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. x, xi.

⁴⁸⁷ Görres occasionally used 'Germania' as an imprint, cf. his publication *Beantwortung der in den jetzigen Zeiten für jeden Teutschen besonders wichtigen Frage: Was haben wir zu erwarten?* (Germanien: n. pub., 1814)

⁴⁸⁸ Todd Kontje, 'Aneignung oder Abgrenzung? Über den Umgang mit dem Fremden in Friedrich Schlegel "Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier" und Goethe "West-östlicher Divan"', in *Persien im Spiegel*

If Schlegel constructed the Orient as a repository of linguistic and mythic depth through which German history could be retroactively sanctified, Othmar Frank pushed this identitarian logic to a more literal conclusion. More fervently than any of his peers, Frank insisted on a direct, unbroken lineage of cultural descent. Not only did he argue that ‘altteutsche Nation, Mythologie und Sitte kamen unmittelbar aus Persien’,⁴⁸⁹ but went so far as to claim, grounded in speculative etymologies and a loosely comparative philological method, that Germans once spoke Persian.⁴⁹⁰ Frank’s bold endeavour did not go unnoticed among his fellow Orientalists. In a substantial review,⁴⁹¹ Joseph Görres praised Frank’s effort to capture a ‘spirit of totality’ (*Geist der Ganzheit*) and to dissolve what he saw as ‘künstliche[...] Grenzen zwischen den Welttheilen’,⁴⁹² namely, between Europe and Asia. He commended Frank’s ambition to trace knowledge back to its origin, to seek ‘Weisheit [...] an der ersten Quelle’.⁴⁹³ But Görres’s praise stops there. His principal critique hinges on a fundamental disagreement about the nature of origins, which is an issue worth delineating, particularly because Frank’s prolix prose often yields a clearer understanding of his views when approached obliquely or through contrast. Görres took issue with Frank’s compulsion to historicise origins, to anchor the genesis of cultural development in a singular, concrete civilisation. For Görres, Frank’s beloved Persians were but one in a sequence of historical phenomena. As such, they may be ancient, but did not deserve the *ur*-prefix.

Deutschlands: Konstruktionsvarianten von Persien-Bildern in der deutschsprachigen Literatur vom 18. bis in das 20. Jahrhundert, ed. by Christine Maillard and Hamid Tafazoli (Straßburg: Presses universitaires de Straßburg, 2018), pp. 189–202, p. 190.

⁴⁸⁹ Frank, *Das Licht vom Orient*, p. 141.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

⁴⁹¹ Görres, rev. ‘Das Licht vom Orient’, pp. 268–83.

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 270.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*

Invoking the collective ‘we’, likely to include his fellow *Naturphilosophen*, Görres proposed a very different understanding of origin. ‘[W]ir nehmen keine historische, bleibend gewordene und fixirte Form als urerstes an’,⁴⁹⁴ he wrote, rejecting both the idea that something truly original would manifest at a single point in history, and that of linear progression more generally. Instead, he offered a cyclical conception of history, one familiar from Novalis’s works and, as we shall see, echoed later in the writings of Romantic poet Otto von Loeben: ‘Allerdings gibts ein solches Erstes, das aber zugleich auch Letztes ist, was nimmer für sich selbst im Einzelnen erschöpfend dargestellt werden mag, sondern unerschöpflich immer in jedem Kommenden scheinbar verjüngt wiederkehrt’.⁴⁹⁵ While human life may be marked by transience – and thus, by linearity – Görres insisted that scholarship should be exempt from such constraints.⁴⁹⁶ In a move reminiscent of Platonic thought, he posited that all material forms refer back to an ideal archetype, an original form, and that all organisms are ‘unbewußt in die Natureinheit zusammengeknüpft’.⁴⁹⁷ And it is precisely here that Görres’s discomfort with Frank’s vision of an original Orient comes into focus. It lacks any sense of timeless universality: ‘Ist das erste Geschlecht etwa unsterblich nicht auch hinweggezogen [...]?’ he asks, and does not pause before answering: ‘Es hat allerdings den Keim der ganzen Zukunft in sich beschlossen’.⁴⁹⁸ In Görres’s view, Frank’s search is not for true *ur*-phenomena, but merely for the oldest traceable instance. This was a significant distinction:

Nicht also darf auch selbst die erste Form mit dem, was über alle Form geht, verwechselt werden, [...] und jede folgende, ob sie gleich organisch mit ihr verknüpft erscheint, hat doch mitten in ihre Hinfälligkeit ein gleiches Maß von Selbstständigkeit gegründet.⁴⁹⁹

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 272.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 273.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁹ Ibid.

One discerns in these lines a subtle allusion to the idea of German self-sufficiency, which was an attribute that Germany, in Görres's view, ostensibly shares with the Orient.

Görres may well be right in identifying Frank's scholarly superficiality, his 'hohle[s] Wortgesause',⁵⁰⁰ but Frank's ambitions, however overwrought, are deeply attuned to the intellectual pulse of his time. Like many of his contemporaries, Frank held an ambivalent position towards the French Revolution.⁵⁰¹ On the one hand, he admired its transformative energy; on the other, he regarded the cultural and political dominance of Napoleonic France as a threat to German identity. This tension reflects a deeper paradox within Romanticism itself. As Todd Kontje has argued, the French Revolution was often interpreted in Romantic *Naturphilosophie* not merely as a political rupture but as a cosmic or natural principle – one that could, paradoxically, coexist with rising anti-French sentiment among German intellectuals: 'Die Französische Revolution wurde naturphilosophisch als Prinzip gesehen', Kontje writes, 'deshalb war sie durchaus kompatibel mit dem späteren Frankreich-Hass der Romantiker-Orientalisten'.⁵⁰² Frank's work, with its fusion of revolutionary tropes and nationalist longing, exemplifies this uneasy synthesis.

Frank saw in Napoleon not just the force reshaping Europe, but also the herald of a new cultural epoch, not least because of his sponsorship and institutionalisation of academic Orientalism. At once captivated by the symbolic energy of the Revolution and

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., 277.

⁵⁰¹ For an overview of the reception of the French revolution in German literature, cf. Karol Sauerland, 'Goethes, Schillers, Fr. Schlegels und Novalis' Reaktionen auf die neuen politischen, konstitutionellen und sozialphilosophischen Fragen, die die Französische Revolution aufwarf', in *Daß eine Nation die ander verstehen möge*, ed. by Norbert Honsza and Hans-Gert Roloff (Leiden: Brill, 1988); Helmut Koopmann, *Freiheitssonne und Revolutionsgewitter: Reflexe der Französischen Revolution im literarischen Deutschland zwischen 1789 und 1840* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1989).

⁵⁰² Kontje, 'Aneignung oder Abgrenzung', p. 190.

invested in a distinctly German-Oriental genealogy, Frank seizes on Napoleon as a figure through whom Germany might recover its lost unity and rediscover its ancient origins. In this vision, Napoleon becomes a kind of catalytic avatar, a foreign agent capable of reigniting the dormant spirit of the Germanic tribes. This vision culminates in the dedicatory preface to *Das Licht vom Orient*, which Frank addresses to Napoleon in a single, sprawling sentence that stretches across four pages:

Dem mächtigsten Avatar der Zeit (im Sinne der Brahmanen); der siegenden und gestaltenden Lichtenergie der Nationen; der alten, endlich wieder sichtbar werdenden Selbstbeleuchtung der Völkervereine [...]; dem Erhabenen, der als gewaltiges, heiliges Staatsfeuer den chaotischen Streit der Finsternis auch in Teutschland durchbrochen hat, und noch die Nacht ganz vernichten wird, die sich zwischen Teutsche graulich lagerte, ihre Heiligthümer mit Tod und Verderben erfüllte; der dem staunenden Europa den uralten Götterspruch vom Neuen erprobt, dass, so wie der Staat, in dem das Centrum erlischt, durch den ganzen Körper sich verfinsternd, in Schmach versinke, die Lichtkraft des Mittelpunkts ein ganzes Volk über sich selbst erhöhen könne; der in Teutschland einen Sonnentempel gründen wird, in dem der Germanen alte Einheit sich zum Leben vom Neuen entzünden, und mit Galliens Band ungetheilt glühen soll; der im geheimen Lichtzuge uns den Orient und das freye Verkehr mit der Wiege des Menschengeschlechts und dem Paradiese unserer Urväter wieder öffnen wird, – weihet sein Werk allerunterthänigst der Verfasser.⁵⁰³

Frank's reading of Napoleon is striking. The man who dissolved the Holy Roman Empire appears not as a conqueror but as the figure who ends Germany's internal strife and reawakens its spiritual potential. In his dedication, Napoleon becomes the hero whose majesty was first ignited in Egypt: 'Der Held unserer Zeit hat seinen grossen Glanz erst in Aegypten zur Majestät entzündet'.⁵⁰⁴ Frank credits him with breaking the 'chaotic strife of darkness' in Germany itself, as if foreign domination were the precondition for a new

⁵⁰³ Frank, *Das Licht vom Orient*, Widmungsvorrede (n. p.).

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., p. 20. On the association of Napoleon with 'eclat', Cf. Francois-René de Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d'outre-tombe* (Paris: Gallimard, 2013), p. 694: 'Bonaparte se tourna vers l'Orient, doublement congénial à sa nature par le despotisme et l'éclat'. On the heroic features of 'Eclat', cf. Andreas Gelz, *Der Glanz des Helden: Über das Heroische in der Französischen Literatur des 17. bis 19. Jahrhunderts* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2016). Cf. also the iconographic tradition following Laurent Dabos' Head of Napoleon, girdled with a crown of sunlight, Laurent Dabos, *Kaiser Napoleon im Strahlenkranz*, 1806, oil on canvas, Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen. On contemporary depictions of Napoleon in the fine arts, cf. Werner Telesko, *Napoleon Bonaparte: Der 'moderne Held' und die bildende Kunst (1799–1815)* (Wien: Böhlau, 1998).

unity. Frank drew, implicitly or explicitly, on Tacitus's *Germania*, imagining the German lands as dispersed but spiritually coherent, awaiting the galvanising force of an external enemy.⁵⁰⁵ Frank's invocation of 'Gallien' reinforces this analogy, casting France as the historical successor to Rome's imperial encroachment.

Frank's vision of unity does not stop at Germania's tribal past. 'Galliens Band', newly strengthened by the end of German internal rivalries, is woven into a much older narrative of the Orient as the 'Wiege des Menschengeschlechts', which, he insists, is connected to the 'teutsche Nation [...] auf die unzweydeutigste Art'.⁵⁰⁶ According to Frank, the spiritual effect of light and climatic factors bestow the Orient with originality and make it the 'Geburtstätte der Menschengattung'.⁵⁰⁷ This light follows a distinct path: 'Von Iran strahlte es nach Indien, Sina, Aegypten, Griechenland, Teutschland und ganz Europa'.⁵⁰⁸ To restore and renew the historical bond between Germany and the Orient, Frank argues, a mystical light must be rekindled, and Napoleon is the one to strike the spark. The illumination Napoleon brings is not the cold clarity of Enlightenment rationalism but a quasi-sacred force. Political rupture is thus transfigured into cultural redemption. The East, refracted through the figure of Napoleon, ceases to be a distant other and is instead cast as a forgotten origin, reanimated by an external, though sympathetic, force.

Frank insists that this cultural reawakening would not fall on barren soil. Contemporary German thought, he argues, is already engaged in the same work of rediscovering unity beneath the fractured surface of modernity: 'Auch dies hat die neueste Philosophie mit der orientalischen Urweisheit gemein, dass sie mit der reinen

⁵⁰⁵ For an overview of the reception of Tacitus, cf. Krebs, *A Most Dangerous Book*, and Id., 'A Dangerous Book: The Reception of the *Germania*'.

⁵⁰⁶ Frank, *Das Licht vom Orient*, p. 38.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 3–4.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

Natur verklärt, in einer Einheit lebt, und, wie die jetzt herrschenden Vorstellungsarten, auf keine Weise gefasst seyn will'.⁵⁰⁹ Yet if contemporary German thought shows signs of renewal, the dominant aesthetic ideals of Western Europe remain, in Frank's view, a significant obstacle. Frank's vision of cultural renewal culminates in a sweeping critique, not only of classical education,⁵¹⁰ but of the entire cultural hierarchy that places Greco-Roman antiquity at the centre of European intellectual life.⁵¹¹ For Germans in particular, he argues, such a classicist orientation leads to a form of cultural estrangement, as it neglects their essential, and in his view more authentic, affinity with Persia.⁵¹² The result is an education and cultural life marked, as he puts it, by 'fremder Anstrich', and a lack of true vitality.⁵¹³ By contrast, Persian remains a living language, a bridge that links present to antiquity and preserves what Frank calls 'fortlebendes Alterthum',⁵¹⁴ a continuity of tradition carried not in books but in living speech, ritual, and thought,⁵¹⁵ still bearing 'lebendige Spuren des grauesten Alterthums'.⁵¹⁶

On this basis, Frank calls for a radical reorientation of German scholarship: away from the exhausted classics and towards a comparative study of Persian, Sanskrit, and Old German as coeval strands of linguistic antiquity. The shift he envisions is nothing short of institutional. In a section titled *Vorläufige Ideen zur Uebersicht der Vorkenntnisse des ältesten Alterthums*,⁵¹⁷ Frank proposes the creation of a *Philosophisch-persische*

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 6.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., p. 27.

⁵¹¹ Cf. Ibid., pp. 17–8, 23–4, 27, and 93; he criticises Adelung for his belief in Greek sources as the oldest available cultural texts, and for criticism of 'fremde Richtung', which '[d]ie Schriften der Griechen und Römer [...] der deutschen Kultur [...] gegeben', cf. p. 16. On the inaccuracy of Greek texts as sources, cf. p. 98.

⁵¹² Ibid., p. 11.

⁵¹³ Ibid., cf. also p. 16.

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., p. 13.

⁵¹⁵ Ibid.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., p. 14.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 31–118.

Academie on German soil, a learned society devoted to the study of the ‘älteste[...] Weisheit des Orients und der deutschen Nation’ that would anchor Germany’s cultural future in a scholarly recovery of its ‘Oriental’ past.⁵¹⁸ The implications are twofold. First, Persian culture forms the very foundation of German antiquity, ‘die *Grundlage* des deutschen Alterthums’.⁵¹⁹ Second, this recovery must occur within German institutions. At stake is the right to speak for the Orient and to claim its legacy as a German inheritance.

Frank is explicit about this moral and scholarly distinction. He derides the instrumentalisation of the Orient by theologians, merchants, and colonial companies who sought, in his words, to achieve ‘allerley kleinliche, zweydeutige Zwecke’.⁵²⁰ His language is openly dismissive, positioning German Orientalism as a higher calling unsullied by commercial or political interests. And yet, this disavowal is unstable. His own scholarship depends on colonial archives, missionary reports, and travel accounts.⁵²¹ He even acknowledges that Europe has attempted ‘wissenschaftliche[...] Kenntnisse [...] zu seinem Eigentum umzustempeln’,⁵²² turning the Orient into Western intellectual capital, a critique he buries in a footnote, as if conceding the paradox at the heart of his project. To resolve this tension, Frank appeals to a ‘höheres, vom Orient selbst gezeugtes Streben’,⁵²³ a striving supposedly born from the inner spirit of the Orient but uniquely comprehended by the Germans. This move transforms alleged cultural

⁵¹⁸ Ibid., p. 31.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid.

⁵²⁰ Ibid.

⁵²¹ On his sources, cf. *ibid.*, p. 33.

⁵²² Ibid., p. 36. He is quoting Arnold Hermann Ludwig Heeren, *Ideen über die Politik, den Verkehr und den Handel der vornehmsten Völker der alten Welt*, 3rd edn (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1815), I, p. 56.

⁵²³ Frank, *Das Licht vom Orient*, p. 38.

kinship into cultural exceptionalism. Germany, he insists, alone possesses the historical and linguistic disposition to recover humanity's origin: 'Dieses [i.e. das höhere Streben] hat offenbar die teutsche Nation eigen', he writes, as 'ihre Nationalgeschichte unter andern auch durch ihre Sprache auf die unzweydeutigste Art mit der Geschichte der ältesten Nation, mit der Wiege des Menschengeschlechts und der Welt unmittelbar historisch zusammenhängt'.⁵²⁴

Language becomes not just evidence of contact but the very medium of identity, the living proof that Germans are 'der Perser unmittelbare Brüder'.⁵²⁵ The Germans, Frank insists, did not merely resemble Persians in spirit or structure. They were, in essence, the same people. 'Die alten Teutschen', he writes, 'hatten nicht bloss persische Tugend, Sitte und Cultus, sondern redeten auch persische Sprache'.⁵²⁶ The linguistic correspondences he cites function as historical proof.⁵²⁷ But he also gestures beyond, arguing that the binding glue of the two cultures is a set of shared qualities that mark them as truly *original*: 'ursprüngliches Alterthum', 'originelles Leben', 'weite Ausbreitung', 'grosse Bildsamkeit', and 'Reinheit'.⁵²⁸

Like Othmar Frank with his notion of ancient Persian, Friedrich Schlegel sought to identify an original language. In *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*, he compared linguistic roots to argue that Sanskrit was the common ancestor of all European languages, including Persian. This philological inquiry was never a merely technical exercise. It was part of Schlegel's larger vision of cultural renewal. As early as 1800, he declared '[i]m Orient müssen wir das höchste Romantische suchen', imagining that

⁵²⁴ Ibid., p. 38.

⁵²⁵ Ibid., pp. 15–6.

⁵²⁶ Ibid., p. 38.

⁵²⁷ Ibid., p. 40.

⁵²⁸ Ibid., p. 39.

Sanskrit poetry could provide the raw material for a *Neue Mythologie* that would restore to Europe the unity of poetry, religion, and philosophy.⁵²⁹ Schlegel's philology thus worked on two registers at once: as linguistic scholarship tracing kinship among Roman, Greek, Germanic, and Persian languages, and as a mythopoetic project aimed at reanimating Europe's spiritual past. He even speculated that Indian and Persian tribes migrated as far north as Scandinavia, a claim that located Germanic culture in a single, continuous lineage with Asia.⁵³⁰ Kinship here is genealogical, proposing a shared history binding Asia and Europe as members of one extended family.

Schlegel's turn to Sanskrit was also coterminous with the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806 and the subsequent Napoleonic reorganisation of Central Europe left German lands overshadowed by France. In this context, the Romantic project of forging a *Kulturnation* – a nation defined not by statehood but by shared culture – took on an urgent political charge.⁵³¹ Ironically, Schlegel encountered Sanskrit not in Germany but in Paris, yet this only sharpened his critique of French modernity and intensified his search for a distinctly German cultural identity. In *Europa* (1803), Schlegel's reflections on his journey to Paris double up as a meditation on Germanness, and on what he saw as the spiritual poverty of French civilisation. The remedy he imagined was to be achieved through an engagement with the Orient.⁵³² Schlegel's descriptions of the landscapes he

⁵²⁹ *Athenaeum*, III, ed. by August Wilhelm von Schlegel and Friedrich von Schlegel (Berlin: Froelich, 1800), p. 103: 'Aber auch die andern Mythologien müssen wieder erweckt werden nach dem Maaß ihres Tiefsinns, ihrer Schönheit und ihrer Bildung, um die Entstehung der neuen Mythologie zu beschleunigen. Wären uns nur die Schätze des Orients so zugänglich wie die des Alterthums! Welche neue Quelle von Poesie könnte uns aus Indien fließen, wenn einige deutsche Künstler mit Universalität und Tiefe des Sinns [...] die Gelegenheit besäßen, welche eine Nation, die immer stumpfer und brutaler wird, wenig zu brauchen versteht. Im Orient müssen wir das höchste Romantische suchen'. Cf. also *Friedrich Schlegel-Handbuch*, ed. by Johannes Endres (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2017), p. 126.

⁵³⁰ Schlegel, *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*, p. 193.

⁵³¹ Kontje, *Imperial Fictions*, p. 99.

⁵³² Kontje, 'Aneignung oder Abgrenzung', p. 190.

passes on his journey are laced with cultural criticism. Germany's patchwork of customs and dialects signals historical depth and vitality, whereas France's cultivated uniformity appears spiritually sterile. Germany's unity, Schlegel suggests, lies not in political centralisation but in a shared inner life sustained by tradition: 'unglaublich viele kleine Bruchstücke aus der Lebensweise, den Sitten und der Denkart der vorigen bessern deutschen Zeit'.⁵³³ This notion of a fragmented whole, loosely united by 'customs' and 'ways of thought', mirrors concepts of the Orient, where disparate regions and customs were subsumed into a singular spiritual essence *partes pro toto*. France's homogeneity, on the other hand, is described as engineered from above as an elitist political project that paralyses independent, local cultures.⁵³⁴ This contrast anticipates a broader cultural distinction that figures prominently in post-revolutionary German thought. As Todd Kontje notes, *Zivilisation* – often aligned with the French model – was seen as a universal, exportable commodity tied to state power and imperial ambition.⁵³⁵ *Kultur*, on the other hand, was imagined as inward-looking and rooted in local traditions, marked by spiritual depth and organic development.⁵³⁶

Schlegel's German landscape seems to bear witness to the former vitality and connect the present to an older, more authentic life. Crossing into Lorraine, however, Schlegel perceives a sudden shift. The forest thins, the language turns harsh, the air loses its freshness:

⁵³³ Friedrich Schlegel, 'Reise nach Frankreich', *Europa*, 1 (1803), pp. 5–40, p. 29.

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁵³⁵ Kontje, *Imperial Fictions*, p. 99.

⁵³⁶ Kontje relies on Norbert Elias's distinction between the 'universal' concept of civilisation and the idea of 'cultures' that are locally specific. Cf. Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: The Development of Manners. Changes in the Code of Conduct and Feeling in Early Modern Times*, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (New York: Urizen, 1978), pp. 3–28.

Es geht durch die herrlichsten Waldungen, die das Gefühl romantischer Freiheit erregen, und die Erinnerung an das alte deutsche Leben, das nun untergegangen ist. Einen anderen Charakter nimmt die Erde an, so wie man eintritt in die Lorraine, und die fremden Töne der hier sehr widrig auffallenden französischen Landessprache vernimmt. Man sieht nicht mehr diese ungeheuern Bäume und Felsen, und sehnt sich umsonst nach dem frischen Waldgeruch des vaterländischen Bodens.⁵³⁷

Here, the natural environment itself becomes emblematic of national character. The German woods and mountains evoke not only a sense of 'romantische Freiheit' but also a metaphysical connection to the soil, with *Boden* functioning as both a literal and symbolic foundation.⁵³⁸ France, by contrast, is rendered linguistically and environmentally alien. Its language is 'widrig', its landscape flattened and denatured. The encounter with the French countryside confirms Germany's perceived difference through sensory estrangement.

Germany, Schlegel is at pains to say, should not look to France, or, in fact, to any European country, for models of political organisation in their homelands. Instead, Schlegel posits Asia as a more apt model because it allegedly showed the same freedom and co-existence of seemingly heterogenous parts that were still united by a shared 'Oriental' enthusiasm. The spiritual root for this enthusiasm is nature itself:

Sollte es demnach mehr als ein misglückter Einfall, sollte es wirklich Ernst seyn mit einer Revolution, so müßte sie uns wohl vielmehr aus Asien kommen [...]. Eine wahre Revolution kann nur aus dem Mittelpunkte der vereinigten Kräfte hervorgehen, sonach ist das Organ für dieselbe in Europa bei der Menge gar nicht vorhanden; im Orient aber sind wir der Meinung, daß die Möglichkeit des Enthusiasmus nie so bis auf die letzte Spur vertilgt werden könne, weil die Natur selbst eine ursprüngliche und nie ganz zu versiegende Quelle desselben dorthin gelegt hat.⁵³⁹

The Orient, here, is staged as the paradigm of originality, both primeval (*ursprünglich*) and timeless (*nie ganz [...] versiegend [...]*), a point Schlegel drives home by reminding his

⁵³⁷ Schlegel, 'Reise nach Frankreich', p. 17.

⁵³⁸ Ibid., p. 29.

⁵³⁹ Ibid., p. 36.

readers that all religion and mythology trace their origins to Asia.⁵⁴⁰ The revolution the East might inspire is limited to the spiritual, aimed squarely at culture. So enduring is the Orient's spiritual foundation, Schlegel argues, that even the military and political revolutions of history have failed to dislodge it: just as the Arab invasions left no lasting mark on Europe, so neither Greek nor Roman conquest could impose its will on Asia.⁵⁴¹ Despite their lack of contemporary military might, Schlegel aligns both Asia and Germany with the 'welterobernde [...] Nationen der Vergangenheit'.⁵⁴² In this elevation, he returns to a familiar theme: the cultural independence of the German spirit. What distinguishes the Germans from the Romans, he insists, is their innate love of freedom and their instinctive connection to local soil:

Unter den welterobernden Nationen der Vergangenheit, nehmen die Deutschen eine der ersten Stellen ein [...]. Was sie von den Römern besonders unterscheidet, ist die größere Liebe zur Freiheit; es war bei ihnen nicht bloß ein Wort und eine Regel, sondern angebornes Gefühl. Zu groß gesinnt, ihre Sitten und ihren Charakter allen Nationen aufprägen zu wollen, schlug derselbe doch überall Wurzel, wo der Boden nicht ganz ungünstig war, und der Geist der Ehre und Liebe, der Tapferkeit und Treue wuchs dann mit mächtigem Gedeihen empor. Wegen dieser ursprünglichen Freiheit des deutschen Lebens, die ein unvergänglicher Charakter der Nation ist, erscheint sie auch in ihren guten Zeiten ursprünglicher und dauerhafter romantisch, als selbst die orientalische Märchenwelt.⁵⁴³

Schlegel's praise culminates in a startling claim. The German nation, by virtue of its 'original freedom', appears in its best moments *ursprünglicher* than the Orient itself, surpassing even the 'orientalische Märchenwelt', long celebrated as an archetype of originality. This is not a rejection of the Orient but a reframing. The East becomes the necessary prelude to a higher synthesis that finds its true fulfilment in German cultural destiny.⁵⁴⁴

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., p. 37.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., p. 36–7.

⁵⁴² Ibid., p. 12.

⁵⁴³ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁴ Cf. Schwab, *Oriental Renaissance*, pp. 216–17.

Such an inversion reflects a Romantic philosophy of history akin to Novalis's triadic model outlined in Chapter One. Within this arc, the Orient embodies the primal, fecund first stage, while Germany does not merely follow but returns to this origin on a higher, more self-conscious plane. German *Kultur* thus becomes the telos of a history that begins in the East and finds completion in the Romantic West. Though Schlegel never explicitly cites Novalis, his portrayal of the Orient as a cultural prologue to Germany's poetic mission reveals a similar logic. The East's imaginative plenitude is not discarded but reappears, transfigured, in the reflective interiority of German Romanticism. For Schlegel, this return is not the achievement of philosophy alone, but is realised through an affective and aesthetic bond, through the experience of *Heimat* and the idea of *Vaterland*.⁵⁴⁵ The concept of *Vaterland* plays a central role in the *Europa* article, where Schlegel treats originality not as a fixed national essence, but as a poetic, indeed Romantic, condition. *Vaterland* appears in two parallel registers: once in relation to Germany, and once to India.⁵⁴⁶ In both cases, it functions as a symbolic, rather than political, homeland, a site of lost poetic unity. Thus, when Schlegel gazes upon the landscape around Eisenach, he recalls 'die Zeiten, da die Poesie hier in voller Blüte stand, und durch ganz Deutschland das allgemeine Element des Lebens, der Liebe und der Freude war'.⁵⁴⁷ This evocation of a shared poetic past immediately yields a second reflection. Such flourishing belonged to an age 'da der Mann noch ein Vaterland hatte'.⁵⁴⁸

Schlegel stages the fixation on *Vaterland*. He embeds within the prose a poem that conjures a medieval Germany of castles, knights, forests, and Charlemagne. Into the

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 8 and 32.

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 8.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid.

nostalgic landscape of German *Heimath*, Schlegel inserts the unexpected figure of the Orient, which appears as an integral part of Germany's poetic memory:

Langsam dann im Thal gezogen
Auf allen Straßen und Wegen
Orientes Reichthum in vollem Triumphe,
Wagen und Männer,
Elephanten und Mohren,
Blühende Stein' und farbige Früchte,
Indiens goldenster Segen.⁵⁴⁹

Yet for Schlegel this poetic *Vaterland* is a thing of the past. Its loss is not blamed on foreign conquest or political catastrophe but on an inner rift: the modern separation of poetry from philosophy, of science from art.⁵⁵⁰ What was once an organic whole has fractured, draining Europe of its cultural lifeblood. In another twist, however, Schlegel locates this original synthesis in the Orient. In India specifically, he argues, the aesthetic, spiritual, and intellectual dimensions of life remain intimately bound together, either 'zur höchsten Schönheit vereint' or coexisting 'in kräftigster Eigenthümlichkeit ohne gegenseitige Ausschließung dicht neben einander'.⁵⁵¹ This enduring integration of realms, for Schlegel, is what qualifies India as a 'gemeinschaftliche[s] Vaterland[...]' and 'Urbild' for all European cultures, including Classical Greece and Christianity.⁵⁵² The task of the modern poet-philosopher is to recover this spirit. Just as artists once travelled to Italy to find there the ideals of a Greco-Roman antiquity, so must the Romantic seeker now journey to India.⁵⁵³ India's significance for Schlegel is double. It is both temporally and spiritually profound, preserving the primal unity of art, religion, and knowledge at the origins of humankind. This convergence of temporal remoteness and metaphysical plenitude

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 9.

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 32.

⁵⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵⁵² Ibid.

⁵⁵³ Ibid., p. 33.

makes the Orient, in Romantic thought, the very paradigm of *Tiefe* and the essential point of departure for Germany's own cultural renewal.

Schlegel expands on this vision in *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier* where he consolidates the notion of India as both a linguistic and religious point of origin.⁵⁵⁴ Though indebted to Herder's anthropological speculations, especially the notion of an early, unsophisticated mode of poetic expression,⁵⁵⁵ Schlegel rejects Herder's universalism. And although he praises Herder's sensitivity to 'Fülle des orientalischen Geistes',⁵⁵⁶ originality, for him, is not a diffuse condition shared by many early peoples. Instead, Schlegel presents originality as a concentrated inheritance traceable to India. Schlegel is also sympathetic to Herder's ideas of cultural progress and decline,⁵⁵⁷ but frames them in a theological rather than anthropological narrative. Accordingly, he presents Christianity as the culmination of a sacred tradition whose origins lie in the East.⁵⁵⁸

Schlegel's interest in early Indian poetry is not purely philological. He seeks both the relics of natural expression and the enduring traces of a divine illumination, a 'göttliche[s] Licht' that has survived the *longue durée* of cultural decline.⁵⁵⁹ This religious inflection marks Schlegel's divergence from Herder. Poetry's origins are not grounded in nature

⁵⁵⁴ Chen Tzoref-Ashkenazi, *Der romantische Mythos vom Ursprung der Deutschen: Friedrich Schlegels Suche nach der indogermanischen Verbindung* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2009), p. 145.

⁵⁵⁵ For Herder's idea that primordially of a language corresponds with sensuality and power of expression, cf. his *Abhandlung über den Ursprung der Sprache*, in HW, I, ed. by Ulrich Gaier, pp. 751–52, 758, and 761–62.

⁵⁵⁶ Schlegel, *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*, p. 200.

⁵⁵⁷ On Schlegel's idea of cultural decline, cf. Robert Cowan, 'Fear of Infinity: Friedrich Schlegel's Indictment of Indian Philosophy in *Über die Sprache und die Weisheit der Indier*', *The German Quarterly*, 81.3 (2008), pp. 322–38, p. 329.

⁵⁵⁸ For the euro-, even germanocentric tendencies of Schlegel's philosophy of history, cf. Tzoref-Ashkenazi, *Der romantische Mythos vom Ursprung der Deutschen*, p. 148. Especially in the years before his Baptism in 1808, Schlegel would look for a 'primitive holy unity' in the East, cf. Schwab, *Oriental Renaissance*, pp. 218–19.

⁵⁵⁹ Schlegel, *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*, p. 137.

alone, but arise from nature venerated, from pantheistic worship nourished by the idea of the infinite, as he writes in *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*:

Zwar hat dieselbe [Poesie] einen zwiefachen Ursprung; der eine ist durchaus natürlich, indem das Gefühl bei wilden, wie noch bei gebildeten Menschen, sich überall in Gesang aushaucht. Aber es giebt noch einen andern mythischen Bestandtheil der alten Poesie [...] Aus dem immer noch durch den Gedanken des Unendlichen und Göttlichen befruchteten Naturdienst und Aberglauben, ging zuerst die Fülle der ursprünglich wilden und riesenhaften Dichtung hervor.⁵⁶⁰

In this context, poetic expression is depicted not solely as a marker of originality or symptom of the childhood-phase of mankind. Rather, Schlegel attributes a transformative force to original tales and poems, rendering them active factors *within*, not only indicators of cultural development.⁵⁶¹ This is evident in Schlegel's bold claim that poetry and religion were catalysts for the migrations of Indian tribes – tribes that, upon settling in the North, became 'Germanic'.⁵⁶² Crucially, the term 'Germanic' for Schlegel does not denote a fixed ethnonational category but a stage within in a single cultural lineage whose point of departure lies in Asia.⁵⁶³

To highlight the formative power of legend in this process, Schlegel references the Indian myth of Mount Meru, where the god of wealth, Kuyero, embodies the riches of the northern mountains. Enticed by this promise, tribes are compelled to migrate northwards.⁵⁶⁴ For Schlegel, such myths are engines of history:

Es wäre nicht das erste und nicht das einzige Mal, daß dichterische Sagen und alte Gesänge, tief im innigsten Gefühl und Glauben mit Religion verwebt, auf die Züge und Abentheuer der Helden mehr Einfluß gehabt haben, als diejenigen glauben möchten, die von der Geschichte nur die Politik kennen.⁵⁶⁵

⁵⁶⁰ Ibid., pp. 161–62.

⁵⁶¹ Herder touched upon the topic of poetry affecting a people's customs in his *Über die Wirkung der Dichtkunst auf die Sitten der Völker in alten und neuen Zeiten*, Cf. HW, IV, ed. by Jürgen Brummack and Martin Bollacher, 'Über die Wirkung der Dichtkunst auf die Sitten der Völker', pp. 149–214, 159, and 165.

⁵⁶² Schlegel, *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*, p. 165.

⁵⁶³ On the racist afterlife of Schlegel's concepts of Indo-German kinship, cf. Bernal, *Black Athena*, p. 230.

⁵⁶⁴ Schlegel, *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*, pp. 193–94.

⁵⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 194.

Peoples (*Völker*) are born not of decree but of mythopoetic agency. This legitimises his own method, which privileged poetry and religion as key to understanding early humanity, and redefined legend as historically efficacious rather than merely reflective. In this context, the dynamic of what I termed 'identi-fiction' becomes palpable: philology and poetry entwine to compose imaginative myths of origin. In Schlegel's hands, the study of myth and language becomes an instrument of self-creation, and the Orient a reflective surface in which Germany beholds the image of its own remotest beginnings.

From Schlegel's vantage point, the genealogy of German unity runs back beyond Rome or Charlemagne to an Indian motherland. The Holy Roman Empire is but a later chapter in a story stretching to the dawn of culture. German unity, accordingly, is not an artificial construct imposed from above but the rediscovery of an ancient inheritance, buried in myth and language. Here, the political edge of Schlegel's vision comes into view. Against France, whose revolution sought to manufacture unity through law and conquest, Germany must ground its regeneration in its mythic origins. The German nation, as Schlegel tells it, is heir not to a political but to a spiritual revolution. By recovering these roots, Germany answers its political fragmentation with the inward confidence of a people certain of their ancient pedigree. Thus Schlegel's progression, from a philological defence of Sanskrit as original language to a nationalist programme predicated on Indo-Germanic kinship, reclaims the Orient as Germany's ancestral fountainhead and positions France, with its borrowed classicism and administrative uniformity, as an incomplete and alien model. Through this elaborated mytho-historical narrative, Schlegel does not merely argue for cultural difference; he stakes the claim that Germany's originality and unity rest on a deeply rooted connection to the East – and one that political revolutions alone could never replicate. Schlegel's reimagining of the Orient

as Germany's ancestral home did not remain confined to philology. It soon entered the literary imagination, where the myth of Oriental originality became a medium for poetic experimentation and cultural self-examination, as we shall see in the next section on Otto Heinrich von Loeben's work.

Otto Heinrich von Loeben: An Orient after Novalis

In a fragmentary note from his literary remains, likely drafted as a letter to his friend Helmina von Chézy (1783–1856),⁵⁶⁶ the Romantic poet Otto von Loeben (1786–1825) reflected on the literary traditions that shape ideas of originality.⁵⁶⁷ He cites German folk genres ('unsere[...] Volksromanzen') and old Nordic paganism, 'alte[s] nordische[s] Heidenthum', and contrasts 'Southern' and 'Oriental' forms with '[das] Eiserne[...] und Geheime[...], Felsigte[...] und Strömende[...] der gigantischen Zeit' as part of a dialectical structure. The austere force of the North is animated by contact with the splendour of the South and East. This conceptual entanglement echoes Friedrich Schlegel's *Gespräch über die Poesie* (1799), where he describes the emergence of European poetry as a synthesis between Gothic vigour and Oriental fantasy:

Mit den Germaniern strömte ein unverdorbenener Felsenquell von neuem Heldengesang über Europa, und als die wilde Kraft der gotischen Dichtung durch Einwirkung der Araber mit einem Nachhall von den reizenden Wundermärchen des Orients zusammentraf, blühte an der südlichen Küste gegen das Mittelmeer ein fröhliches Gewerbe von Erfindern lieblicher Gesänge und seltsamer Geschichten.⁵⁶⁸

For Schlegel, this encounter signals expansion, not dilution. Loeben, in turn, makes this fusion the programmatic centre of his 1808 novel *Guido*.⁵⁶⁹ Like Schlegel, he does not imagine the Orient as a distant or alien Other, but as a poetic resource through which Germany might return to its cultural roots.

⁵⁶⁶ Helmina von Chézy, the potential addressee of this piece, was a key figure within Orientalist scholarship herself, consorting with Joseph Hammer, Antoine-Léonard de Chézy and Alexander Hamilton, and teaching the aspiring linguist Franz Bopp his first lessons in Persian. In her memoirs, she recounts how Chézy shared the fruits of his research with her, cf. Chézy, *Unvergessenes*, I, pp. 322 and 357. On her acquaintance with Hamilton, I, p. 270. On her role as a teacher of Persian, II, p. 64.

⁵⁶⁷ The manuscript, preserved in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, seems to contain the draft of a letter. Cf. *Loeben Nachlass*, Cod. Germ. 636, fol. 23. The back of the leaf is addressed to Helmina von Chézy, with whom Loeben planned the edition of an *Almanach* at the time.

⁵⁶⁸ KFSA, II, 'Gespräch über die Poesie', ed. by Hans Eichner, pp. 284–351, p. 296.

⁵⁶⁹ Isidorus Orientalis [Otto Heinrich Graf von Loeben], *Guido* (Mannheim: Schwan und Götz, 1808). In the following, I will quote passages directly in the main body indicating the page number.

The critical neglect that Loeben's *Guido* has received in scholarship can be traced, in part, to a persistent view of the author as a derivative figure, a mere epigone of Novalis. Contemporary critics were uncharitable. Joseph von Eichendorff dismissed *Guido* as a work of 'mystical exuberance', suggesting that Loeben merely imitated Novalis without capturing his poetic depth.⁵⁷⁰ Eichendorff's assessment has shaped Loeben's critical afterlife. Alain Montandon characterises the novel as a 'potpourri' of Romantic clichés – 'luth, guitare, cor de chasse, Moyen Âge, Italie, Orient et vieille Allemagne' – assembled into what he calls an 'imitation artificielle' of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*.⁵⁷¹ Similarly, while Gerhard Schulz acknowledges *Guido*'s transformation of the Romantic symbol of the carbuncle into an allegory of the lost imperial crown – and, by extension, of German unity – he relegates the novel's references to India to the level of ephemeral literary fashion.⁵⁷²

Such readings, however, fail to register the conceptual coherence of Loeben's project. While *Guido* undoubtedly borrows from the Romantic lexicon, its engagement with Orientalist motifs is neither incidental nor merely decorative. Rather, Loeben constructs a framework in which the East functions as a symbolic reservoir of origin – one that fuses theology, philology, botany, and myth into a poetic vision of cultural rebirth. The Orient is not only evoked to flatter contemporary taste, but to enact a more serious ambition, namely to inscribe Germany into a shared mythic past, in which it does not appear as a latecomer to civilisation, but as the rightful heir to a timeless spiritual legacy.

⁵⁷⁰ Joseph von Eichendorff, *Sämtliche Werke des Freiherrn Joseph von Eichendorff. Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. by Wilhelm Kosch and others, 22 vols (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1986–), v.IV, pp. 161–62.

⁵⁷¹ Alain Montandon, review of Isidorus Orientalis (Otto Heinrich Graf von Loeben), *Guido, Romantisme*, 25–26 (1979), p. 252.

⁵⁷² Gerhard Schulz, 'Loeben, Otto Heinrich von', *Verfasser-Datenbank* (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2012). <https://www.degruyterbrill.com/database/VDBO/entry/vdbo.killy.3937/html> [Accessed 14 May 2025].

Guido's narrative traces the journey of its eponymous protagonist, the son of a German count and a woman from the 'Morgenland', on a journey to recover a lost poetic world, which unfolds as a series of encounters. Departing from Thuringia, where he takes leave of the hermit Ambrosius and his children, Guido meets a 'Morgenländerin' named Flora, and enters landscapes populated with allegorical figures. His path ultimately leads to a vision of restored harmony between nature and mankind, an Orientalist trope that is found across the entire novel, and culminates in the coronation of Guido and his companion Sophie as king and queen of a timeless realm, where poetry and love reign once more. At several stages of the plot, Loeben adopts Novalis's idea of a Golden Age, a bygone period in the remote past that might be restored through poetry and love. But, more concretely than Novalis, Loeben associates this Golden Age with the Orient. Loeben's poetic pseudonym, 'Isidorus Orientalis', signals this allegiance. For him, the Orient was not a realm of otherness, but the site of an ancient unity that German poetry could reclaim. As I will show, this is no longer Herder's universal 'Morgenland', but a Romantic reimagining of a 'German Orient' that has absorbed the idea of a spiritual kinship that Schlegel had called for in the same year. In this sense, *Guido* participates in a wider Romantic discourse that sought to relocate Germany within a cultural history of antiquity and myth that would later inform Schlegel's formulation of Germany as 'the Orient of Europe'.⁵⁷³ This was a space within Europe imagined, like the Orient, as the repository of spiritual depth, poetic authenticity, and primordial wisdom.

Loeben did not create *ex nihilo*. One likely source for Loeben's literary vision of the Orient came with Gerhard Anton von Halem's *Blüthen aus Trümmern*.⁵⁷⁴ Halem's tale 'Die

⁵⁷³ Cf. Schlegel, 'Vorlesungen über die romantische Poesie', p. 25.

⁵⁷⁴ Gerhard Anton von Halem, *Blüthen aus Trümmern* (Bremen: Wilmans, 1798).

Blume Oschaddi' offers a blend of Orientalist motifs, featuring, among other elements, a reference to the ritual of Sati that Loeben reuses.⁵⁷⁵ As Halem's mixes vegetal and mythological symbolism, so in *Guido*, Flora, the 'Morgenländerin', recounts a tale of a lost Golden Age, the 'Reich des Mondes' (80–89), in which the divine children of King Uranus are nurtured by a sentient flower named Oschaddi. The children emerge one by one from her calyx, descending to earth to bestow gifts on humanity – all except for little Buddha, who remains behind, separated from his sister Edda, a figure from Northern mythology. Beyond Halem, however, it is Novalis who provides the chief poetic and philosophical template. Among German writers, Loeben regarded Novalis as the first to successfully integrate German and 'Oriental' traditions. In a marginal but telling note from his unpublished manuscripts, Loeben glossed 'Novalis' with 'Mährchen, überhaupt die [*later addition in Loeben's own hand*: philosophischen] Mährchen dieser Zeit, sind erste Erscheinungen des orientalisch-südlichen, lieblichen Zaubereinhalts in deutscher Poesie'.⁵⁷⁶ What appeared to captivate him was not only Novalis's central position within German Romanticism, but his ability to soften Northern austerity through symbolic motifs drawn from the South and East. Such was Loeben's esteem for Novalis that one of his earliest literary ambitions was to complete *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, using fragments from Novalis's unpublished sketches.⁵⁷⁷ *Guido* might thus be read as a response, a form

⁵⁷⁵ Loeben cites the ritual but removes its gendered nature, where a widow burns herself on a pyre. Instead, he features the burning as a more general sacrifice for love, cf. Loeben, *Guido*, p. 308: '...Wer will lösen, was der Tod verband?! Tritt muthig in die Flammen!/ Wir bleiben fest zusammen,/ Und gehn durch diese Flammen/ Daheim in's Jugend-Land'. Cf. also Loeben, *Guido*, p. 114.

⁵⁷⁶ Cf. the manuscript of the draft letter is preserved in the Bayrische Staatsbibliothek, Cod Germ. 636, no 23, s.p.

⁵⁷⁷ He had received Novalis's literary remains from Ludwig Tieck for this purpose. Cf. Stefanie Janke, *Isidorus Orientalis: Ein Beitrag zur Wesensbestimmung der deutschen Spätromantik* (doctoral thesis, University of Cologne, 1962), p. 23.

of continuation that seeks to recast Novalis's vision of a Golden Age within a new symbolic framework centred on cultural renewal in the Orient.

Novalis's influence, however, extends beyond thematic parallels and imagery. Loeben, firstly, shared Novalis's investment in a poetics of origin that reconfigured historical time as materially inscribed. Geognostic thought, of the kind I explored in Chapter One, enters *Guido* explicitly. In one passage, the narrator describes the early earth as a compact, animate body, its residues now visible in stone and soil: 'Die damalige Erde erscheint uns bei genauerer Ansicht als ein einziger dichter Körper, dessen Knochenrest als Gebirge, dessen Aschenstaub in bunten Erden uns geblieben ist' (51–52). Fossils and minerals are treated as a 'Kapitel aus der großen Weltgeschichte' encoded in matter that bears witness to a primeval state of harmony between nature and mankind (9). Elsewhere, Guido senses a 'wunderbare Spur' of stars in 'aderreichen Steinen' (25). The passage echoes Novalis's notion of natural historians as 'verkehrte Astrologen' (NS, I, p. 260), who read the past instead of the future. The presence of geognostic images may be read, first, as a sign that Loeben's literary search for Germany's cultural origins is not untouched by the impression of temporal depth left by the geological imagination of the late eighteenth century, and second, that this idea of natural antiquity is developed alongside notions of cultural antiquity figured in the Orient. Together, they inform Loeben's concept of *Ursprünglichkeit*.

In addition to geological strata recording a buried past, *Guido*'s narrative architecture secondly reflects Novalis's principle of layered time. Like *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, Loeben's novel unfolds the *mise-en-abyme* technique of embedded narratives and poetry. One scene, for instance, involves a mysterious book, a large, square tome filled with strange images and cryptic verses, with illustrations apparently so vivid that they

seem poised to speak (173–74). The book's contents echo the events of the novel itself: the unity of nature and humanity, the redemptive power of love, the journey towards poetic *Verklärung*. At the novel's conclusion, it is revealed that the book is the story of Guido's life (339). Mirroring Novalis's depiction of the Provençal codex in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, which stores images both unfamiliar and strangely known, Loeben uses the motif of the recursive written record to break open linear time. *Guido's* book gathers figures and objects from all ages and social worlds: 'Auf den Bildern sahe man Gestalten und Sachen aus allen Ständen und Zeitaltern beisammen' (173). It functions both as a metafictional device and an object that embodies temporal simultaneity, dissolving the distinction between past and future, myth and memory. Much like Novalis's 'Tapetentür' (NS, I, p. 252), behind which another temporal and universal dimension opens, Loeben's book reveals an original world that lies just beneath the surface of historical consciousness. The sense of temporal layering also extends to the structural treatment of the novel's characters, many of whom migrate between fictional and historical realms, across epochs, and into symbolic registers. Loeben adapts and repurposes figures from *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, transposing them into *Guido's* allegorical world. Heinrich himself appears at the end of the novel as a singer participating in a poetic contest, but also the figure of Heinrich Frauenlob – a historical *Meistersinger* – is reimagined in a way that resembles Novalis's protagonist. Frauenlob travels with merchants, passes through Augsburg, and is presented as a future poet of renown (184–85). His journey, both geographic and spiritual, mirrors that of Novalis's Heinrich and signals Loeben's interest in constructing a continuous poetic lineage.

Thirdly, as with Novalis, it is poetry that emerges in *Guido* as the privileged medium through which both natural and cultural Deep Time become accessible. Loeben's readers

would have been familiar with Herderian ideas of poetry as an expression of early mankind marked by emotional immediacy.⁵⁷⁸ Yet Loeben extends this framework to represent poetry not merely as a vestige of natural origin but also a repository of cultural memory and an instrument of historical recovery. While Novalis alludes to the power of ‘fable’ to awaken poetic consciousness, Loeben explicitly anchors legends and fairytales in the original *Urwelt*:

Alles, was wir über den Ursprung der Welt uns vorstellen, wird augenblicklich zur Sage; nicht blos aus den Trümmern der Vergangenheit umher, aus diesen einzelnen mährchenhaften Kindersagen unsers eigenen beschauenden Gemüths sollten wir jene Urwelt zusammensezen. (50–1)

For Loeben, every concept of originality eventually turns into myth or legend. All accounts of beginnings become fable, not because they are fictional, but because they alone are able to capture the former unity of nature and mankind, the ‘engste Vereinigung auf dem Erdboden’ (51). Within this framework, poets are assigned a sacred role. They are not mere chroniclers, but what the narrator calls the ‘eigentliche Priester der Geschichte’ (119), entrusted with the task of transforming ‘Vergangenes in Zukünftiges’ (119). Their vocation is to gather the scattered remnants of a lost world and reassemble them into a new symbolic whole. Through poetic language, what is distant in time or space is drawn close and is charged with emotional immediacy. As Loeben writes, these become tales of an ‘ewig nahe [...] Ferne’ (120). It is precisely this paradox of proximity and distance, of an origin that is both irretrievable and ever-present, that defines his Romantic poetics of originality.⁵⁷⁹

⁵⁷⁸ Cf. HW, v, ed. by Rudolf Smend, ‘Über die ersten Urkunden des Menschlichen Geschlechts’, pp. 14, 18.

⁵⁷⁹ On the Romantic gesture of dissolving the binary between proximity and distance, cf. Schwab, *Oriental Renaissance*, pp. 484–85.

There are, however, other noteworthy narrative aspects of *Guido* that deserve comment. The novel's narrative is structured around inserted poems and legends that enact on a symbolic scale one of the central features of Romantic originality: the restoration of harmony between nature and humanity. One of these legends, told by Ambrosius in the second chapter, takes the form of a fairytale about the Golden Age, and centres on a violet gemstone (*Karfunkel*), which functions as a magical device capable of reuniting a fractured world and ushering in an eternal kingdom. Once the ruler of a paradisiacal realm, Uranus now wanders the earth in exile, living among humankind as a poet. His only companion is his eldest daughter, rendered mute since the fall of the Golden Age. Yet even amidst the brokenness of the world, Uranus discerns faint traces of his lost kingdom in the lives of ordinary people (*Volk*): small fragments of the ancient simplicity that once defined a unified existence. Their journey eventually brings them to a young hermit, whose destiny appears mysteriously intertwined with their own. Haunted by visions of a radiant kingdom (17–18), the hermit has set out to restore it with the aid of a gemstone – soon revealed to be the long-lost centrepiece of Uranus's royal crown. These dreamlike recollections, Uranus confirms, are in fact true memories of the Golden Age (21).

Uranus's recollection of the old kingdom centres on its gardens, a space where nature was not only alive but articulate. In this earlier world, the boundary between the human and the non-human was fluid, and the elements of nature displayed an agency. His daughter, once a part of this world, now appears as a spectral figure in the present. Silent and fading like a wilting flower, she succumbs to a death-like sleep by the end of the chapter. Loeben subtly echoes Novalis's idea of a speaking nature in this context, framing the daughter's silence as emblematic of a larger civilisational rupture. In the present day, humans and nature no longer share a common language; the book of nature, once

legible, has become mute.⁵⁸⁰ Within the lost kingdom, by contrast, personified plants act with intention and sensitivity. They interact like humans and communicate through forms of natural song. One description captures this lyrical ecology with a characteristic Romantic flourish: ‘jedes grüne Blatt war eine Aeolsharfe und der Springquell unter ihr die Ballade dazu’ (25). Here, Loeben collapses the division between nature and poetic form, and suggests that ballads, conceived as one of the earliest forms of poetry,⁵⁸¹ are inherent to the natural world itself. In the Golden Age, poetry is not an invention but a condition of existence: the medium through which nature and humanity remain in harmony. The paradise Uranus evokes is marked by a double temporality: it is both an ancient, vanished order and oriented towards the future. The Golden Age, he insists, could ‘wieder aufblühen und ewig seyn’ and remain ‘auf immer unter uns’ (18). Like Novalis’s idea of the eternal kingdom in Klingsohr’s tale, Uranus’s realm is suspended between past and future, belonging to a time outside of history that could be termed Deep Time. This temporality underwrites Loeben’s theory of originality. The Golden Age is not the beginning of history, but the deep stratum beneath it, the always-already origin to which culture must return.

It should be clear that Loeben’s staging of originality rests on the premise that nature and mankind share a common temporality. But where earlier scenes anthropomorphise nature – leaves transformed into Aeolian harps, springs reciting ballads – now it is the human world that becomes legible within the temporal grammar of nature. Deep Time

⁵⁸⁰ Cf. also Loeben, *Guido*, pp. 53–4: ‘Während wir glauben, die Natur schweige, sind wir es allein, die der Natur schweigen und nicht erlernen wollen die allgemeine Sprache’.

⁵⁸¹ *Aufklärung, Sturm und Drang, Frühe Klassik*, ed. by Sven Aage Jørgensen, Klaus Bohnen, and Per øhrgaard (Munich: Beck, 1990), p. 168 on the ballad: ‘Es handelt sich also um eine neu entdeckte, singbare bzw. liedhafte, volkstümliche, oft sehr emotional geladene episch-lyrische Gattung von teilweise naiv-archaisierendem Charakter’. Goethe termed the ballad ‘das “Urei” aller Dichtung’.

ceases to be the exclusive domain of geology and flora. It expands to include cultural memory and human artefacts: 'Mir wenigstens ist es oft so vorgekommen, wenn ich die uralten Reliquien, Burgen und Geräthschaften der Erde betrachtet habe, als würd' ich durch diese Beschauung eins mit ihnen' (51). Human existence is reinscribed into natural, *uralt* timescales, not as an intrusion, but as part of a temporal depth it shares with the earth. This reversal becomes especially clear in the reflections of Felix, who offers a botanical perspective on the interwovenness of natural and human time. He describes ancient plant life and earth's geological layers not as inert matter, but as material witnesses to a once-shared condition of life: '[Sie] erinnern [...] uns an eine Zeit, wo die engste Vereinigung auf dem Erdboden waltete' (51–2). In the present, humans stand apart 'wie ein einzelnes Pflanzengeschlecht', perched atop the accumulated remains of earlier life: 'auf mächtiger Asch' und gebirgähnlichen Knochen' (51). Meanwhile, plants, Felix tells us, are 'Barometer unendlicher Zeiten unsers Lebens' (244), as though participating in the record of world history that charts the interdependence of human and natural time. The developmental arc of a single plant mirrors that of the species; and in turn, Loeben implies, the unfolding of an individual life reflects human history: 'Wie sich aus dem Entwicklungsgange des einzelnen Menschen der Gang der Menschheit abnehmen läßt', Felix notes, 'eben so gut bild' ich ihn aus dem Gewächsreich fort bis zum jüngsten Tage der Welt' (244).

The theme of unity with nature finds secondary expression in the novel's framing narrative. Its characters partake in a state of *Verklärung*, a mode of being in which the boundary between self and world dissolves. One such character is Cyane, who gives her instrument to Guido with the observation: 'Jeder Baum ist eine Saite für uns, und wir selbst sind die Lieder dazu' (41). The metaphor collapses the distinction between natural

object and musical form, suggesting that trees themselves become instruments, and human beings the songs they emit. Humans, quite literally, resonate with nature. Guido himself articulates a similar attunement when he declares: ‘Nun weiß ich auch, daß ich ein Gewächs bin’ (129).⁵⁸² Here, Loeben renders his protagonist not as one who observes nature from without, but as one who inhabits its rhythms from within. Love and cognition serve as dual conduits for this transfiguration. On the one hand, Guido likens himself to a ‘Staupe’, ‘seit die Geliebte meine Heimath worden ist’ (143). His beloved becomes the ground from which he grows, staging love as the medium of natural rootedness. On the other, he suggests that the tools of *Verklärung* are distributed across nature: ‘Das Verklärungs-Organ finden wir eben so gut im Stein, als im Saft der Pflanze, im Thier’ und in der menschlichen Gebärde’ (244). Unity with nature, then, is both an emotional state and a form of embodied knowledge, something one can experience through poetry and through the study of living and non-living matter.

Much of the foregoing seems to relegate Orientalism to a secondary concern, a mere staffage to Loeben’s original thinking. But while Loeben does not always name the Orient in passages of poetic and botanical synthesis, contemporary readers would have found Orientalist discursive echoes of Herder’s vision of an ‘Oriental’ ‘childhood of mankind’⁵⁸³ in Loeben’s depictions of the paradisiacal Golden Age inhabited by people living in unison with nature and poetry. Elsewhere, however, Loeben does signal the Orient through its symbols. The ‘Morgenländerin’, Flora occupies an important mediating position here. She introduces Guido to Sanskrit, ‘[die] Samscretsprache [...] [und] die Anfangsgründe des Indischen’ (62), and the sacred lore of her homeland, through an inductive practice that

⁵⁸² Cf. also Loeben, *Guido*, pp. 51–2.

⁵⁸³ Cf. HW, v, ed. by Rudolf Smend, ‘Über die ersten Urkunden des Menschlichen Geschlechts’, pp. 11, 27.

restores his sensitivity to nature: ‘Die Lehrstunden bestanden in Gespräch, Lesen und Gesang. Guido verlor sich tagtäglich mehr in die indische Botanik’ (77). Guido’s study of Indian botany marks a return to a world in which nature and mankind speak the same language. Accordingly, it familiarises him with the ‘zartesten Dichtungen und Sagen’ from the Orient (77).

The name, ‘Flora’, is not incidental. It gestures towards one key topos of Orientalist reference, Romantic *Blumensprache*, while her dual role as teacher of Sanskrit and botany marks her as a mediator of linguistic and natural knowledge.⁵⁸⁴ In this capacity, she evokes the figure of Sakontala, not through direct reference, but through a shared symbolic constellation in which poetic insight and intimacy with nature converge. Yet Flora departs from Sakontala’s model in one crucial respect. She is not merely intuitive, but intellectually articulate. Loeben fashions her into a pedagogical figure, one who translates an imagined Eastern inheritance into terms that Guido – and the novel – can absorb. As a figure who brings the Orient into intimate familiarity through instruction, Flora anticipates one of the novel’s central dynamics: the continual play between distance and proximity.

What at first appears as geographical or temporal remoteness is thus gradually drawn nearer, until it becomes not just familiar, but familial. The mechanism by which *Guido* enacts this movement from distance to intimacy, relies, like many Orientalist texts of the period, on a *pars pro toto* logic: discrete places, images, and customs stand as synecdoches for the whole Orient. References to India, Jerusalem, or the Holy Land rarely

⁵⁸⁴ Readers familiar with German translations of *Sakontala*, such as Forster’s, would have recognised the resonances. Georg Forster, trans., *Sakontala oder der entscheidende Ring. Ein indisches Schauspiel von Kalidas. Aus den Ursprachen Sanskrit und Prakrit ins Englische übersezt*, trans. by Georg Forster (Mainz, Leipzig: Fischer, 1791). Cf. Nandani Lynton, *The Cross-Kulturation: Early Romanticism and Indo-Germanic Ideology in Anthropological Perspective* (doctoral thesis, Cornell University, 1988), pp. 139–42.

denote geographic reality;⁵⁸⁵ they function as symbolic co-ordinates, nodes in a network of associations that point towards a larger, timeless East. Each part, however, contributes its own features to the broader construct of Oriental originality. Loeben's references to the Holy Land, for instance, evoke the exploration of the biblical Orient pursued by scholars such as Johann David Michaelis,⁵⁸⁶ though not to propose a theological argument, but to make a symbolic gesture. Christianity becomes part of the cultural inheritance that ties Germany to the East. India, in turn, had assumed an elevated status in the German imagination as a site of spiritual wealth, linguistic purity, and philosophical profundity.⁵⁸⁷ This rhetorical *partes pro toto* compression allows German identity to be drawn into the space of the Orient, either by analogy, through shared traits such as spiritual depth and cultural inwardness, or by imagined kinship which recasts Germany as heir to a primeval Oriental legacy.

To mirror the dynamic between proximity and distance, Loeben's *Guido* sustains a productive tension between *Ferne* and *Heimat*, recasting a central motif of Romantic poetics as encapsulated by the guiding phrase of Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, '[i]mmer nach Hause'.⁵⁸⁸ In *Guido*, the refrain becomes 'fort, immer fort' (132, 147), signalling a restless movement towards the Orient as the imagined cradle of poetic truth. Yet this journey is not linear. As Guido travels eastwards, the Orient itself seems to

⁵⁸⁵ For references of India, cf. Loeben, *Guido*, pp. 63, 223, 269, 287; for 'das gelobte Land', cf. pp. 223, 253, 254; for Jerusalem, cf. pp. 121, 216, 301.

⁵⁸⁶ The most prominent example is Michaelis's Danish Arabia expedition (1761–1767), a project intended to chart the spaces of the Bible. For an account of the expedition, cf. Han F. Vermeulen, *Before Boas: The Genesis of Ethnography and Ethnology in the German Enlightenment* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2015); Rudolf Smend, 'Johann David Michaelis', in *From Astruc to Zimmerli: Old Testament Scholarship in three Centuries*, trans. by Margaret Kohl (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), pp. 30–42; Lifschitz, *Language and Enlightenment*, pp. 104–09.

⁵⁸⁷ Cf. McGetchin, *Indology, Indomania, and Orientalism*; Cowan, *The Indo-German Identification*.

⁵⁸⁸ Novalis, NS, I, p. 325.

approach him, closing the gap between *Ferne and Nähe*. This dissolution of boundaries is articulated in Guido's dialogue with the young Heinrich Frauenlob:

'...du hast mir gestern selbst gesagt, daß die romantische Dichtung deine eigentliche Seele sei, daß dir in einer minniglichen Gegend das Herz aufgehe – was ist sie aber anders, als eine ewige Ferne und Nähe?' (200),
'...verliere dich in die Ferne, komme dir dann als Gegend und Wald wieder nah' (201).

Losing oneself in the distance to discover a renewed sense of home is a central feature of Loeben's Romantic Orientalism. The Orient functions simultaneously as a distant horizon of yearning and as a rediscovered ancestral home. In integrating the Orient into a German poetics of longing, Loeben suggests that originality must be sought both *beyond* and *within*.

Guido's reunion with his father, Count Ilseburg, enacts the dialectic between the *beyond* and the *within*. Initially a stranger, Ilseburg gradually emerges from a temporally and spatially remote past: a youth spent in the 'Holy Land' (116), where he married an Oriental princess. Their reunion makes the distant Orient palpably present within Guido's immediate world. The castle of Count Ilseburg also features a 'colourful' mix of German domesticity and Oriental splendour: 'bunte Teppiche, Stikereien, kostbare Gemälde waren in die schlichte teutsche Haussitte verwebt' (117–18). Guido further recalls overhearing a comparison between German's place among European languages and Sanskrit's among Asian ones: 'Indien wäre die Sonne der morgenländischen Sprachen, wie es mit der teutschen im Abendlande der Fall seyn möchte...Beide, sagt' er, werden sich vielleicht nur schließen, wenn sie sich umarmen' (63). Here, 'Sonne' evokes both the dawn of the Orient and the dusk of the Occident in a circular metaphor whose 'closing' promises wholeness. The intimacy of this metaphor of philological and spiritual reunion, mediated by poetic originality, is deepened when Guido frames the quest for linguistic

origins as a 'search for the mother': 'Sie sind mir immer vorgekommen wie verirrte heilige Kinder, die in der ganzen Welt umherlaufen und ihre Mutter suchen' (62). Languages are portrayed as wandering orphans, which is in keeping with Romantic philology's attempt to reconstruct a common lineage and, by extension, a shared cultural past.⁵⁸⁹

Loeben's genealogical metaphors serve a broader political purpose. The fall of Uranus's Golden Age and his exile allegorise the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire. *Guido* becomes a meditation on political fragmentation and a call for renewed order. This allegory is crystallised in the image of the Karfunkel, the missing centrepiece of Uranus's crown, whose absence has thrown the cosmos into disarray. To redeem the gem is to reconstitute sovereignty (349). Guido's act of recovering it thus symbolically restores the kingdom and anticipates a Romantic vision in which poetry and myth are blueprints for national renewal. A further political dimension unfolds in Loeben's portrayal of historical figures, most notably Frederick II, poet-emperor and *stupor mundi*. In the climactic poetic contest at the close of *Guido* he serves as arbiter, yet joins the competition himself, as if to suggest that empire must be renewed through poetry and that sovereignty and song share a common ground. Frederick embodies the Romantic longing for the Orient in the flesh and even contemplates relocating his imperial court to the East: '...es wäre ihm recht lieb daß ihr jezt voraus in das schöne wunderbare Lande zöget, und er würde nachkommen, dort einen ganz neuen Kaiserhof errichten, wo es hoch und in Freuden hergehn sollte ewiglich' (240). The East is figured as a place where empire might recover its vitality, where political and poetic life could coincide once more, using a number of stock-in-trade Orientalist tropes: sensuality ('beständig Hören und Sehen'),

⁵⁸⁹ On the search for a shared proto-tongue and the parallel establishment of methods of textual criticism, Sebastiano Timpanaro, *The Genesis of Lachmann's Method* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 86–88 and 119–120.

flowers as essential tools of relating to the world akin to Romantic *Blumensprache*,⁵⁹⁰ and the depiction of a paradisiacal sphere that recalls Herder's concept of a childhood of mankind,⁵⁹¹ where poetry is the earliest expression of humanity.

...Doch meine Sinnen/
Gehn zu der Stund' von hinnen,
Nach einem andern, minniglichen Land,
Deß ich des Preises nicht sattsam fand.
Da müssen im Duft von Lilien und Viole
Die Menschenkinder Athem holen,
Ist ein beständig Hören und Sehen,
Und als ein überirdisch Ergehen
[...]
In den warmen leichten Tagen
Hat die Minn' ihr Freundreich aufgeschlagen,
Ist ein Liebhaben und Küssen und Hälsen,
Das Herz will in der goldnen Quelle schmelzen,
Das ganze Land ist ein großer heiliger Wald,
Uns Dichtern ist ein sichrer Aufenthalt.
Drin wollen wir uns all' aufhalten
Und uns wie die Kinder bei den Händen halten,
Lustwandeln im lieb'selgen Hain
Und bunte Singer am Himmer seyn. (268–69)

Frederick's Orient appears as the projection of a realm where humanity returns to its earliest and most harmonious state. By situating this childhood in the East, Loeben transforms India into the site of a possible rebirth:⁵⁹² the place from which a revitalised order might radiate back towards Europe. Frederick's dream of moving the imperial court 'to the wondrous lands' is therefore a deliberate regression in order to inaugurate a future Golden Age. Yet Loeben resists letting this vision stand unopposed. Frederick's opponent in the contest, Der Herr von Scharffenberg, answers with verses in praise of Meißen, recalling the particular landscape from which Guido springs (269–270). His response

⁵⁹⁰ Cf. Lynton, *The Cross-Kulturation*, pp. 138–39; Holly Watkins, 'The Floral Poetics of Schumann's Blumenstück, Op. 19', *19th Century Music*, 36.1 (2012), pp. 24–45, p. 36.

⁵⁹¹ Cf. HW, v, ed. by Rudolf Smend, 'Über die ersten Urkunden des Menschlichen Geschlechts', pp. 11 and 27, and HW, iv, ed. by Jürgen Brummack and Martin Bollacher, 'Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit', pp. 15–6.

⁵⁹² In the song of Frederick's opponent, the East is disambiguated into 'India', cf. Loeben, *Guido*, p. 269.

reinscribes the local and historical, suggesting that *Sehnsucht* for the distant must ultimately return to the familiar if it is to bear fruit. Loeben thus stages a tension rather than a resolution: the Orient inspires, but *Heimat* anchors.

Loeben makes Guido himself the figure in whom the tension between Orient and *Heimat* is not merely represented but resolved. His dual lineage – the product of Count Ilseburg's Eastern marriage and his own upbringing in Meißen – allows him to embody the fusion that others merely long for. When his father recognises traces of the Orient in Guido's face (121), the distance between faraway lands and immediate kinship is collapsed. The Orient is no longer a remote object of yearning but is literally inscribed on the body of the protagonist. This move is conceptually significant. The Orient ceases to function as a purely exotic elsewhere and becomes genealogically intimate. *Heimat* is not left behind on the journey East. It is redefined by incorporating the Orient within its borders. Guido becomes a living axis of proximity and distance, *Heimat* and *Fremde*, and thereby embodies the Romantic conviction that renewal depends on reconciliation, that a new political and poetic order must integrate what seems distant into the very core of the self, with the Orient constituting the deepest layer of Germanness.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Loeben's narrative thus intertwines Orientalist and German folk motifs, such as the figure of Goldblüthe, whose sisters marry the 'König von Thule' and the ruler of 'Hindostan', respectively. Yet Loeben treats both Western and 'Oriental' mythology with considerable freedom. The figure of Govinda is one example. In Hindu philosophy, Govinda is an epithet of Vishnu and used for his avatars, for instance, Krishna. He is often depicted as a young shepherd, labelled the 'master of the senses',

and as the origin of all living beings.⁵⁹³ In *Guido*, Govinda also appears as a young shepherd boy, and is called a ‘Priester der Liebe’. At the same time, however, he sings about ‘Reich der Minne’ (275), and presents the reader with a curious merger of Indian and German medieval allusions. The fusion of ‘Oriental’ and ‘German’ originality is complete, when Govinda is revealed to be the child of Guido and Sophie (281–82).

For all its use of Indian motifs, *Guido* is structured within a Christian worldview. The framing narrative unfolds against the backdrop of the Crusades, which are portrayed in a wholly positive light. This perspective aligns with the sensibilities of contemporary Orientalism, which idealised India while casting the Muslim world as oppressive.⁵⁹⁴ The reason for this differentiation, however, is not an appreciation of cultural diversity. Rather, German Orientalism was establishing a moral vantage point from which to trace, or invent, its own cultural lineage. In *Guido*, the Crusades are staged as a rescue operation to free Jerusalem from Muslims, portrayed as the ‘wrong’ representatives of the Orient.⁵⁹⁵ A clear confrontation between different paradigms of the Orient emerges when Guido’s father involves Flora, the Indian woman, in the crusading efforts, remarking: ‘Ich erlebe noch, daß ich euch den Ungläubigen gegenüber sehe, sprach lächelnd der Graf’ (70). The mission is not only dedicated to spreading Christianity, but also to freeing the Orient,

⁵⁹³ Cf. Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, *On the Bhagavad-Gīta, a New Translation and Commentary, Chapters 1–6* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 57, l. 32, and the fifth chapter of *Brahma Samhita* that describes Krishna under the name of ‘govindah’ as ‘the original source of all incarnations’, ‘source of everything’ (anādir ādir; anādiḥ – without a beginning; ādiḥ – the original form of all else; sarva kāraṇa kāraṇam – the cause of all causes, or the original form), cf. Bhaktivedānta Nārāyaṇa, Jiva Gosvāmī, ed., *Śrī Brahma-saṁhitā, Fifth Chapter* (Uttar Pradesh, India: Gauḍīya Vedānta Publications, 2003), p. 1.

⁵⁹⁴ Cf. for example p. 61, where Flora’s story is told, who is ‘mit einer Karavane durch Persien und das Arabische gezogen, und unter die Seldschuken gerathen, aus deren Bothmäßigkeit sie von einem christlichen Ritter befreit wurde’. This passage records both the differentiation of different corners of the Orient and privileging of India, and the early modern trope of the Christian saviour, cf. Kontje, *German Orientalisms*, pp. 32–9 and pp. 39–59.

⁵⁹⁵ This view finds explicit expression in Friedrich Schlegel’s *Vorlesungen*, where he cautions ‘Alle Werke der Mahomedaner über indische Gegenstände sind mit großer Vorsicht zu gebrauchen [...] wegen ihrer Unfähigkeit, eine der ihrigen so fremde und tiefe Denkart, wie die indische, zu fühlen und zu fassen’. Cf. KFSÄ, vi, ed. by Hans Eichner (1961), p. 131.

specifically India, from its ‘Oriental’ oppressors, who have ‘...Unglück / Ueber die halbe Welt gebracht, bis zum göttlichen Ganges’ (297).⁵⁹⁶ The passage once again represents what Kontje has identified as the ‘moral high ground’ that Germans claimed for themselves in their self-victimisation under French occupation, drawing parallels between their situation and the oppression and colonisation of India. It also illustrates the process of Othering, but this time within Orientalism. The Orient as a whole does not pose otherness, but is instead dissected into ‘eigen’ (India) and ‘fremd’ (Muslim world), the latter representing an undesirable distortion of the ideal. This internal partitioning allows Loeben to align India with German cultural aspirations.

Indeed, such is the extent of the internal differentiation between Orientalist spaces that Flora represents the association of Indian mythology and Christianity, mirroring Schlegel’s postulate in *Über die Sprache und Weisheit der Indier*.⁵⁹⁷ Flora is introduced as a devout Christian who finds solace in her faith, which alone is able to quench the longing for her ‘Vaterland’. Her song (66–68) includes a vision of Virgin Mary, who consoles her and is portrayed as coming from the Orient herself: ‘Aus meinem Vaterland gewallt / Kamst du, holdselige Gestalt!’ (67). Flora laments that Christianity now resides ‘im kalten Norden’ (67), implicitly calling for missionary work: ‘Dreh’ dich nach deinem alten Reich, / Gleich sprühendem Karfunkelsteine / Mit neuen Stralen uns bescheine’ (68). When Loeben’s German crusaders set out for the Orient, they hope to find an audience similarly

⁵⁹⁶ Loeben falls back behind Novalis’s more pluralistic depiction of the Muslim ‘occupation’ of Jerusalem (NS I, p. 231), recounted in the song of the Crusaders as only one of several perspectives, which is then countered and put in perspective by his own account. On Zulima as a ‘reflective and philosophically informed’ character, cf. James Hodkinson, ‘Moving beyond the Binary? Christian-Islamic Encounters and Gender in the Thought and Literature of German Romanticism’, in *Encounters with Islam in German Literature and Culture*, ed. by James Hodkinson and Jeffrey Morrison (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2009), pp. 108–27, p. 117.

⁵⁹⁷ Cf. also the fifth of Novalis’s *Hymnen and die Nacht*, NS, I, pp. 141–53.

receptive to their cause: 'Zieh nur in's Morgenland geschwind', as an inserted song appeals, there you will find 'die Mutter mit ihrem Kind' (219). Jerusalem, paradoxically, seems to be closer to India than to the territories of the Near East and Muslim world.

The sense of synthesis appears in the minutest of details. When Flora enters a dinner party dressed in *altdeutsche Tracht* (181), she becomes for Guido the very embodiment of this Oriental-German fusion: 'Guido konnte sich nicht satt sehn an ihr, wenn die teutsche volle Tracht die reizenden Glieder umzwängte' (77). Flora's appearance goes along with her declaration that she wishes to learn German poetry, a wish articulated in a distinctively Romantic idiom that circles around the dialectic of proximity and distance: 'die Hörner klingen so fern und nah', so wohl und so weh' (64). The scene stages a shared gaze: Guido and Flora together look out of the window onto the surrounding 'Wälder', 'Schluchten', 'Mühlen', 'Berge' (65). The imagery recalls Schlegel's *Reise nach Frankreich*, where the Wartburg and its wooded encirclement function as an emblem of a formerly flourishing national poetics: 'diese Burg auf einem einzelnen, ehemals ganz waldumkränzten Berge, rundum von Felsen und Thälern und Hügeln umschlossen' is a testament to the times of German history 'da die Poesie hier in voller Blüthe stand'.⁵⁹⁸

Flora's ensuing reaction mirrors and deepens this association of medieval landscape and poetry. As she gazes upon the forests, valleys, and hills, she exclaims: 'So kömmt mir eure Dichtung vor' (65). What she perceives is not merely a provincial topography but a 'Heimath' charged with emotional resonance, a category she recognises through her own longing for a distant 'Vaterland'. Her 'Sehnsucht' crystallises in song, where images of India mingle with Christian motifs (66–68). Here, Hindostan appears not simply as her

⁵⁹⁸ Schlegel, 'Reise nach Frankreich', pp. 7–8.

fatherland, but as *'unser Vaterland'* (68, emphasis mine). The phrasing admits of two readings: either an allusion to Guido's own 'Oriental' belonging, or, more suggestively, a gesture of shared *Heimat*, in which the 'Oriental' and the German are enfolded into a single Romantic horizon of origin and return.

This latter interpretation is borne out by Guido's own words near the novel's close. Now appearing as a pilgrim, he recounts his wanderings in 'foreign lands' (*Fremde*) only to conclude that 'Heimath' is nothing other than 'der Ort, worauf wir stehn' (271). Strikingly, he utters this affirmation not in Germany, but in India. Guido's journey thus resists a simple logic of contrast. The Orient is not merely the Other against which home defines itself. It is also a gravitational centre that discloses the deeper structure of belonging. For Guido, as a Romantic poet, the Orient is folded back into *Heimat*: 'Hier ist die Perspektive, die von jeher vor mir gelegen hat, wohin ich immer gewendet war, als ein Wandersmann nach Hause zu' (282–83).

The theme of belonging culminates in a more explicitly philosophical meditation on place and identity. In conversation with the young Heinrich Frauenlob, Guido declares it the task of the Romantic poet to overcome the tension between proximity and distance:

Nähe und Ferne streiten um die Oberherrschaft, bis er [i.e. der Dichter] in sich selbst das Gleichgewicht für beide findet und zum völlig romantischen Dichter wird; und so könnte man seine Lebensgeschichte überall mit den unendlichen Zeiten der Weltbegebenheit vergleichen (121).

The poet's inner equilibrium is here cast as a microcosm of world history, suggesting that reconciling the tension between *nah* and *fern* is not merely a personal exercise but a philosophical and historical act. To resolve this opposition is to access universality itself, to recover an ideal state preserved in Deep Time. This gesture towards universality clarifies how Loeben positions the Orient in *Guido*. Although nominally situated on the Indian subcontinent, the Orient becomes symbolically domesticated as part of

Germany's own cultural landscape. Its 'exotic'⁵⁹⁹ allure is never denied, but is carefully assimilated into a narrative of belonging that serves a nation eager to distinguish itself from classical and French models. Loeben's Orient thus represents a digestible *Fremdheit* because it is the local product of German Romanticism.

In sum, *Guido* demonstrates with particular clarity how Romantic originality depended on the temporal and symbolic resources of the Orient. By staging Guido as the child of a German count and a woman from the *Morgenland*, Loeben literalises the fantasy of genealogical kinship that Schlegel had formulated on philological grounds. The recovery of the *Karfunkel* crown, with its promise of restored unity, translates this kinship into an allegory of sovereignty, in which Germany's political fracture becomes the very condition for returning to primordial wholeness. Geological motifs reinforce this vision. Descriptions of fossils, strata, and the animate early earth provide a vocabulary through which cultural time can be imagined as layered, recoverable, and continuous with natural history. The Orient, in this framework, is not external but ancestral. It is the deep stratum that secures Germany's place within the earliest formations of human culture. What Novalis had only intimated as a poetic simultaneity, Loeben turns into a narrative of descent and recovery. Originality here lies not in innovation but in the capacity to connect the German present to a temporality that exceeds history. Critics have dismissed *Guido* as derivative, yet this derivative quality is itself symptomatic of Romantic *Ursprünglichkeit*, which consistently defined itself through repetition, translation, and re-inscription of older forms. In this sense, Loeben's novel is a revealing document of how Orientalism and Deep Time converged in the Romantic imagination of originality.

⁵⁹⁹ For the concept of the 'exotic', cf. Dorothy M. Figueira, *The Exotic: A Decadent Quest* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

Conclusion

The three case studies in this chapter chart a movement from universal speculation to national appropriation. In Herder, the Orient works as the scene of first articulation, where nature and culture are still entwined; in Schlegel and Frank, it becomes the philological paradigm through which Germany can claim a venerable antiquity; in Loeben, it is reimagined as ancestral territory, the ground of poetic and political renewal. Together, they show that the Orient served as a temporal medium. It allowed German thinkers and poets to embed their present within a chronology that stretched beyond Greece and Rome, and thereby to rival France's cultural authority. Originality, in this constellation, was not conceived as invention but as temporal depth, a claim to participation in the earliest stages of cultural history.

What follows is that originality around 1800 must be understood as a practice of temporal re-situation. By repopulating Deep Time with original languages, peoples and myths, German Orientalism offered a surrogate antiquity in which national identity could be anchored. This temporal operation functioned as a form of compensatory reorientation. It furnished Germany with a prehistory older than classical civilisation, 'purer' than Enlightenment cosmopolitanism, and free from the taint of French domination. To invoke the Orient was thus to invoke an origin that could not be displaced by more recent histories. In this light, Romantic *Ursprünglichkeit* appears not only as an aesthetic category but as a cultural response to historical dislocation: a way of binding the fragility of the present to the authority of an immemorial past. Yet the quest for origins did not end with the projection of Germany's beginnings onto a distant East. In the early nineteenth century, the same desire for depth and unity turned inwards, seeking the nation's voice in its own vernacular traditions. The rediscovery of the *Volkslied*

transformed the search for antiquity into a search for authenticity, reconfiguring *Ursprünglichkeit* as a living inheritance rather than a lost epoch. Returning to Herder as a point of departure, the next chapter explores how this inward turn reframed originality as the expression of collective spirit.

III) Originality beyond *Originalgenie*: *Ursprünglichkeit*, Authenticity and the German Folk Song Movement

Late-eighteenth-century German literature grappled with a sense of belatedness. Poets lamented the absence of distinctly ‘original’ native models,⁶⁰⁰ a concern that only deepened as the spectre of French cultural dominance, in the wake of Napoleonic expansion, cast the fractured identity of the German lands into sharper relief.⁶⁰¹ While the English could claim Shakespeare and the Scots celebrated their Ossian,⁶⁰² German writers found themselves suspended between imitation and aspiration, yearning for a poetic idiom that could both reflect and elevate their own cultural heritage.⁶⁰³ This chapter examines how the idea of originality evolved in response to this perceived crisis, moving beyond the familiar figure of the *Originalgenie* as an isolated creative force towards more collective and temporally inflected models. Rather than anchoring originality solely in innovation or authorship, I explore how editors and poets reconceived it through the interrelated lenses of antiquity, authenticity, and orality. In so doing, I argue for a broader, more nuanced genealogy of originality, one that recognises the cultural work performed by folk song collections as acts of mediated continuity that countered the model of spontaneous invention embodied by the *Originalgenie*.

I trace this transformation through four key case studies. The first is the reception of Ossian at the close of the eighteenth century, when ideas of ‘natural poetry’ offered a

⁶⁰⁰ The preface to the second part of Herder’s *Volkslieder* accounts for this sentiment. He comments on the fact that the genius of Homer, Hesiodus and Orpheus can’t be translated into German, cf. HW, III, ed. by Ulrich Gaier, ‘Vorrede: Volkslieder Nebst untermischten andern Stücken; Zweiter Teil’, p. 233; on the comparison of German original songs with other European literatures, pp. 234 and 242.

⁶⁰¹ Cf. Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1800–1866: Bürgerwelt und starker Staat* (Munich: Beck, 1983), p. 11; Applegate, *A Nation of Provincials*, pp. 7 and 26.

⁶⁰² Cf. Anon., ‘Wien’ [review of the first volume of Denis’s Ossian translation], *Erfurtische gelehrte Zeitungen für das Jahr 1769*, pp. 27–9, p. 28.

⁶⁰³ Cf. Hermann Strobach, *Deutsches Volkslied in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1980), p. 10.

model for poetic originality still operating within the orbit of the *Originalgenie*. Here, I examine how German writers negotiated the uneasy balance between imitation and innovation, reverence and self-assertion. The second section turns to one of the fiercest critics of that model: Friedrich Nicolai. His satirical *Kleyner Feyner Almanach* (1776/77) was intended as a polemic against the cult of genius and the growing fascination with folk song. Yet, paradoxically, Nicolai's critique helped consolidate a new aesthetics of originality grounded in antiquity, authenticity, and the collective voice, which in turn prompted a renegotiation of the term *Volk* that would shape future collections. One such collection is Anselm Elwert's *Ungedruckte Reste alten Gesangs* (1784), the focus of my third section. Elwert's anthology occupies a transitional moment. It was indebted to earlier models like Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) and Ossianic verse, but already deployed recognisably Romantic strategies, such as foregrounding orality, cultivating anonymity, and staging editorial modesty as a mark of authenticity. My final case study, the short-lived magazine *Wünschelruthe* (1818), marks a decisive shift. By the early nineteenth century, originality is no longer imagined solely in temporal terms but increasingly spatialised, both anchored in regional rootedness, and signalled by dialect and oral provenance. This move, I argue, responds to a perceived threat of cultural homogenisation under Napoleonic rule and the bureaucratic abstractions of the German Confederation.

Homer, Ossian, and Herder: Exploring the Possibility of an Original Voice in German Poetry

As writers negotiated their place within an emerging national tradition, they adopted a language of poetic lineage that was at once aspirational and deferential. A telling instance of this national self-consciousness comes with the period's penchant for *antonomasia*. Poets began referring to one another as the 'German Homer', 'German Horace', 'German Sappho', or 'German Ossian'.⁶⁰⁴ These epithets perform a double manoeuvre. They signal reverence for established foreign models, while simultaneously attempting to naturalise them within a distinctively German tradition.⁶⁰⁵ While the baroque exuberance of *Schwulst* may have faded by the late eighteenth century, the underlying practice of poetic emulation had not only persisted, but had evolved into something more overtly national in scope.

This phenomenon reveals a fundamental paradox at the heart of German literary self-conception. The quest for originality remained deeply dependent on acts of imitation and translation. Yet rather than viewing this as mere cultural belatedness, we might understand these designations as attempts to establish what could be called 'borrowed authenticity', a mode of cultural legitimacy that acknowledged foreign influence while asserting the possibility of genuine German expression. As poets sought to resolve this tension through increasingly self-conscious appropriation, a more radical solution began

⁶⁰⁴ The *antonomasies* 'German Homer', and 'German Ossian' will be discussed in this chapter. On Anna Louisa Karsch as 'German Sappho', cf. Claire Baldwin, 'Anna Louisa Karsch as Sappho', *Women in German Yearbook*, 20 (2004), pp. 62–97. The address 'German Horatius' was used for Karl Wilhelm Ramler by Johann Wilhelm Ludwig Gleim, who himself was going by the name of 'German Anacreon'. Cf. *'Mein lieber deutscher Horaz'. Der Briefwechsel zwischen Johann Wilhelm Ludwig Gleim und Karl Wilhelm Ramler*, ed. by David E. Lee and John C. Osborne (Heidelberg: Winter, 2021).

⁶⁰⁵ Cf. also HW, I, ed. by Ulrich Gaier, 'Über die neuere deutsche Literatur II: Klopstock mit Homer verglichen', p. 312. Here, he compares Anacreon and Tyrtaios with Gleim, Theocritus with Geßner, Alciphron with Gerstenberg, Sappho with Anna Louisa Karsch.

to emerge. Instead of translating foreign models into German equivalents, a new generation of writers proposed to bypass the problem of literary inheritance altogether. At the heart of this alternative lay the revolutionary ideal of a poetic voice drawn not from inherited forms, but from the immediacy of nature itself. This became a central tenet of *Sturm und Drang* aesthetics, which positioned itself against the Enlightenment's allegiance to reason and formal restraint. Young writers, eager to proclaim their independence from neoclassical decorum, elevated the *Originalgenie* as their emblem. This was a poet whose creative power flowed not from tradition, but from within. Goethe's emphatic claim, 'Ich, der ich mir alles bin, da ich alles nur durch mich kenne',⁶⁰⁶ became the watchword for an epoch conventionally labelled *Geniezeit*.⁶⁰⁷ Crucially, however, this discourse of originality was never purely inward. Its ideal of spontaneous invention was repeatedly anchored in an imagined bond between a poet and their surrounding culture and climate.⁶⁰⁸ The genius in question was not only self-generating, but also the voice of a place, an autochthon whose originality was guaranteed by natural rootedness as much as by inner authenticity.

Ironically, the rebellion against imitation produced its own canon. Even as the cult of the *Originalgenie* took hold, a new triumvirate of poetic forebears emerged: Homer,

⁶⁰⁶ Cf. Goethe, FA, I.XVIII, ed. by Friedmar Apel (1998), 'Zum Shakespeares-Tag', pp. 9–12, p. 9.

⁶⁰⁷ *Sturm und Drang: Dichtungen aus der Geniezeit in vier Teilen, mit 6 Beilagen in Kunstdruck und zahlreichen Vignetten*, ed. by Karl Freye (Berlin: Bong, 1911); Ferdinand Josef Schneider, *Die deutsche Dichtung der Geniezeit* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1952); Schmidt, *Die Geschichte des Genie-Gedankens in der deutschen Literatur*, I.

⁶⁰⁸ Cf. Young's widely-read essay on the matter suggested geniuses would likely appear in enlightened and affluent societies, cf. Edward Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition [1759]*, ed. by Edith J. Morley (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1918). By contrast, William Duff situates geniuses in 'early and uncultivated Periods of Society', cf. William Duff, *An Essay on Original Genius and its Various Modes of Exertion in Philosophy and the Fine Arts, particularly in Poetry* (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1767), p. 260. For a discussion of Herder's 'genetic method', and his idea that artefacts can never be fully understood in isolation from their respective cultural surroundings, cf. Hans Adler, 'Was ist 'Vergleichen' bei Herder?', in *J. G. Herder: From Cognition to Cultural Science / Von der Erkenntnis zur Kulturwissenschaft*, ed. by Beate Allert (Heidelberg: Synchron, 2016), pp. 23–37, especially p. 27.

Shakespeare, and Ossian.⁶⁰⁹ These figures were held up as exemplars of true originality, as voices that seemed to spring fully formed from their respective cultural (and national) soils. Contemporary satire was quick to seize on the ensuing contradiction between an alternative canon that replaced one set of models with another and the desire to be rid of a burden of influence. In his mock-poem *Das Kraftgenie* (1782), Gotthold Friedrich Stäudlin lampooned the rhetoric of the genius cult by portraying its poetic output as an example of batch-production: 'Ich stelle nur Kolossen auf / Und drücke Shakespear's Stempel drauf'.⁶¹⁰ The poet of genius, in this caricature, becomes a forger.

And yet the tension between imitation and originality was not lost on those who championed the idea of the original genius. In a 1769 review of James Macpherson's *Ossian*, an anonymous critic attempts to disentangle the terms *Original* and *Genie* with a quote taken from Michael Denis's translation:

Muß denn immer, wenn große Geister über einen Gegenstand gleich denken, einer dem andern abgeborgt haben? Und heißt nicht zuweilen ein Schriftsteller Original, ein anderer aber nur ein großes erhabenes Genie, bloß derowegen, weil jener vor diesem geschrieben hat? Hätten wir einen Klopstock, einen Gleim, wenn kein Milton, kein Anakreon gewesen wäre? Bis auf einige Zufälligkeiten glaube ich immer Ja.⁶¹¹

Here, the reviewer defends the poetic legitimacy of Klopstock and Gleim against charges of derivative writing. To rehabilitate their originality, he questions whether they have actually imitated their predecessors at all, although comparative readings might suggest otherwise. The similarities with Milton or Anacreon, he argues, are coincidental. True originality, he suggests, lies in the fidelity with which a poet imitates nature. It is this return

⁶⁰⁹ Christian Heinrich Schmid, *Zusätze zur Theorie der Poesie und Nachrichten von den besten Dichtern. Dritte Sammlung* (Leipzig: Crusius, 1769), p. 218.

⁶¹⁰ Gotthold Friedrich Stäudlin, *Vermischte Poetische Stücke* (Tübingen: Cotta, 1782), pp. 51–4, p. 52.

⁶¹¹ Anon., 'Wien' [review of the second volume of Denis's *Ossian* translation], *Erfurtische gelehrte Zeitungen für das Jahr 1769*, pp. 417–19, p. 418. The quote is taken from Denis's volume, cf. James Macpherson, *Die Gedichte Ossians eines alten celtischen Dichters*, trans. by Michael Denis, 3 vols (Wien: Trattner, 1768–69), II (1768), p. 142.

to nature, not the denial of influence, that signals genuine creative power. Embedded in this somewhat strained attempt to redeem Klopstock and Gleim from the charges of epigonism are two assumptions that would shape late eighteenth-century thinking on originality. First, originality is implicitly linked to precedence. The *Original* is often the earlier work, the one from which others are thought to derive. In a literary culture accustomed to imitation and emulation as aesthetic strategies, antiquity thus becomes a proxy for an originality understood as authenticity. Second, the review implies a shared essence among so-called geniuses. All *Genies*, regardless of period or place, are connected by a common creative impulse. This premise of comparability allows figures as historically and culturally disparate as Homer, Shakespeare, and Ossian to be grouped together as representatives of an atemporal sphere of originality.⁶¹² Their works are not treated as historical artefacts but as manifestations of a timeless, universal capacity to imitate nature directly, unmediated by tradition, untainted by artifice. The review, then, offers a revealing glimpse into originality's constitutive ambiguity, which holds in productive tension the authority of historical precedent and the allure of universal, primordial creativity.

Such multiplicity challenges the prevailing scholarly emphasis on *Originalgenie*,⁶¹³ showing that the rhetoric of inventive creativity formed only one strand within a broader, and more fluid semantic field around originality.⁶¹⁴ The conceptual bridge that sustains

⁶¹² In contemporary debates, Homer, Shakespeare, and Ossian are often mentioned in the same breath, cf. Schmid, *Theorie der Poesie*, p. 218.

⁶¹³ Cf. Schmid, *Die Geschichte des Genie-Gedankens in der deutschen Literatur*; Joyce E. Chaplin and Darrin M. McMahon, 'Introduction', in *Genealogies of Genius*, ed. by Chaplin and McMahon (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 1–10, p. 3. Jan Niklas Howe speaks of '[d]ie Privilegierung des Genies als seiner einmaligen Ausnahmeerscheinung, die für die Genieästhetik als konstitutiv gilt'. Cf. Jan Niklas Howe, 'Die Anfänge des schöpferischen Menschen', in *Kritische Kreativität: Perspektiven auf Arbeit, Bildung, Lifestyle und Kunst*, ed. by Kim Kannler and others (Bielefeld: transcript, 2019), pp. 21–42, p. 23.

⁶¹⁴ For an overview and critical discussion of the 'Genie' rhetoric from *Sturm und Drang* into later debates, cf. Holmes, 'Introduction: Pre-Romantic and Post-Romantic Genius', pp. 327–40.

this ambiguity, linking temporal precedence with timeless universality, as seen in the Ossian review, rests on an unspoken assumption about nature's stability.⁶¹⁵ Nature is imagined as constant, immune to the shifts of taste or the sedimentations of culture, a pure origin from which all true poetry must spring. This view secures the comparability of poets divided by centuries and continents, and in doing so, complicates any singular narrative of originality grounded solely in individual genius.

The notion that Homer and Ossian both speak from within this primordial continuity became a familiar cliché of Ossian reception, popularised above all by Hugh Blair's *Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian* (1763).⁶¹⁶ Though the *Dissertation* was not officially translated into German until 1766,⁶¹⁷ it had circulated for several years, and was read by German scholars as early as 1763.⁶¹⁸ Blair's central claim was deceptively simple: Homer and Ossian's similarities arose not from imitation but from comparable social conditions.⁶¹⁹ Both poets, he argued, emerged from pre-civilised societies where poetry served as an expression of collective values and emotions. As he put it, 'the most natural pictures of ancient manners are exhibited in the ancient poems of nations'.⁶²⁰

⁶¹⁵ Only with the emergence of concepts of thermodynamics was the idea of an unchanging and stable nature – with Newton as its most prominent spokesperson – eventually replaced, cf. Stefan Heiland, *Naturverständnis: Dimensionen des menschlichen Naturbezugs* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1992), pp. 62–8; and Karen Gloy, *Das Verständnis der Natur*, 2 vols (Munich: Beck, 1995–96), vol II (1996), p. 198; Wolf von Engelhardt, 'Wandlungen des Naturbildes der Geologie von der Goethezeit bis zur Gegenwart', in *Das Naturbild des Menschen*, ed. by Jörg Zimmermann (Munich: Fink, 1982), pp. 45–73, pp. 65–5.

⁶¹⁶ Hugh Blair, *A Critical Dissertation on the Poems of Ossian, the Son of Fingal* (London: Becket and De Hondt, 1763). On the cliché of Ossian as a 'Homer of the North', cf. Gauti Kristmannsson, 'Ossian in the North', *Translation and Literature*, 22.3 (2013), pp. 361–82.

⁶¹⁷ Cf. Anon. [Christian Felix Weiße], review of 'The Works of Ossian the Son of Fingal, in Two Vols', *Neue Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und der freyen Künste*, 2.2 (1766), pp. 245–61, p. 246. Also reproduced in Macpherson, *Die Gedichte Ossians eines alten celtischen Dichters*.

⁶¹⁸ An anonymous review from 1763 reproduces both terminology and aesthetic categories from Blair's dissertation. He even explicitly mentions the dissertation, wrongly attributing it, however, to Macpherson himself. Cf. Anon., 'England' [review of the 1763 edition of *Temora*], *Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und der freyen Künste*, 9.2 (1763), pp. 315–6.

⁶¹⁹ Blair, *A Critical Dissertation*, p. 2.

⁶²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 1 and 316.

What linked the Greek and Celtic bards was not literary genealogy but shared access to what Blair termed 'barbarous' authenticity: a primitive social environment that lent their verse emotional power and stylistic directness unavailable to more sophisticated ages.⁶²¹

This Rousseauian developmental framework of Blair's *Dissertation* spread rapidly through German literary culture.⁶²² First appended to Macpherson's editions after 1765,⁶²³ it became the foundational text for aligning Ossian with Homer. Published independently in newspapers and later included in Michael Denis's widely read hexameter translation,⁶²⁴ Blair's comparative framework had become a standard reference point in discussions of poetic antiquity by the mid-1760s. German reviewers eagerly adopted his approach, repeatedly framing both Homeric and Ossianic poetry as expressions of cultures untouched by artifice. The appeal lay in the promise of poetic immediacy, which was wild and vital verse. Originality, in this context, emerged as a characteristic pointing to both an early stage of civilisation and the authenticity that such a period guaranteed.

Herder seized upon precisely this aspect when he expanded Blair's framework within his broader anthropological scheme. In *Von deutscher Art und Kunst* (1773), for instance, he radicalised the connection between cultural primitivism and poetic potential:

⁶²¹ Blair, *A Critical Dissertation*, p. 2.

⁶²² Rousseau describes in his *Discours sur l'inégalité* the early stage of mankind as a 'l'état animal' consisting of 'des Peuples Sauvages', cf. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Diskurs über die Ungleichheit/ Discours sur l'inégalité* [1755], ed. by Heinrich Meier (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1984), p. 96. On Rousseau's foundational influence on positions of cultural pessimism, cf. Peter Burke, *Helden, Schurken, Narren: Europäische Volkskultur in der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. by Rudolf Schenda, trans. by Susanne Schenda (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1985), p. 24.

⁶²³ James Macpherson, *The Works of Ossian, the Son of Fingal*, 2 Vols, 3 edn (London: Becket, De Hondt, 1765).

⁶²⁴ Cf. Anon., review of 'The Works of Ossian the Son of Fingal, in Two Vols', p. 246; 'Abhandlung von dem Alter der Gedichte Ossians, des Sohns Fingals', in Macpherson, *Die Gedichte Ossians eines alten celtischen Dichters*, n. p.

Wissen Sie also, daß je wilder, d. i. je lebendiger, je freywirkender ein Volk ist, [...] desto wilder, d. i. desto lebendiger, freyer, sinnlicher, lyrisch handelnder müssen auch [...] seine Lieder seyn!⁶²⁵

For Herder, poetic vitality increased in inverse proportion to a people's distance from artificial systems of knowledge and academic polish. True poetry emerged not 'fürs Papier', but as living speech.⁶²⁶ Within this framework, what mattered was not the empirical authenticity of the text – whether Ossian was 'real' – but its cultural authenticity, its perceived rootedness in the life of a people. In this sense, Herder could treat Ossian as analogous to Homer, a poet whose authority derived less from verifiable authorship than from the oral traditions that were thought to sustain him. Herder drew on Robert Wood's *Essay on the Original Genius of Homer* (1767/69/75),⁶²⁷ which had characterised Homer as a folk poet whose works, though eventually fixed in writing, originated in oral performance.⁶²⁸ By this measure, Ossian deserved similar treatment. Both figures were positioned as embodiments of a pre-literary world, their originality conceived not as individual, autonomous creativity, but as a function of collective tradition and oral transmission.⁶²⁹

The wider implications of this framework come into focus when one considers how readily eighteenth-century readers accepted the comparison between Ossian and Homer. Far from arousing suspicion, the parallel was seen as a mark of legitimacy. Their

⁶²⁵ HW, II, ed. by Gunter Grimm, 'Von Deutscher Art und Kunst: Briefwechsel über Ossian, 1773', pp. 452–53.

⁶²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 452.

⁶²⁷ Robert Wood, *A Comparative View of the Antient and Present state of the Troade. To which is Prefixed an Essay on the Original Genius of Homer* (London: n. pub., 1767); Robert Wood, *An Essay on the Original Genius of Homer* (London: n. pub., 1769); Robert Wood, *An Essay on the Original Genius of Homer, with a Comparative View of the Ancient and Present State of the Troade* (London: Hughs, 1775).

⁶²⁸ Cf. HW, III, ed. by Ulrich Gaier, 'Vorrede: Volkslieder Nebst untermischten andern Stücken; Zweiter Teil', p. 231: 'Der größte Sänger der Griechen, *Homerus*, ist zugleich der größte *Volksdichter*'.

⁶²⁹ For a discussion of Herder's 'genetic method', and his idea that artefacts can never be fully understood in isolation from their respective cultural surroundings, cf. Adler, 'Was ist 'Vergleichen' bei Herder?', p. 27.

resemblance did not suggest imitation, but rather confirmed a shared participation in a primal, universally intelligible poetic mode. Albrecht von Haller, for example, noted:

Wir finden in diesen Gedichten eine Schreibart, die aus den biblischen Schriften, aus dem Homer, und aus den Reden der Irokesen zusammengesetzt ist, und dennoch ihr eigenes hat.⁶³⁰

To modern ears, Haller's failure to question whether Macpherson, in his Ossianic verse, might have borrowed from Homer may seem naïve, but in the intellectual climate of the 1760s, such resonances were unproblematic. The explanation, once more, lay in cultural comparability. As Blair had argued before, what mattered was not chronology, but social structure. A German magazine paraphrased Blair's reasoning succinctly:

Da Homer unter den größten Dichtern der einzige ist, dessen Sitten und Zeiten Ossians seinen am nächsten kommen, so stellt D. Blair eine Vergleichung zwischen beyden an. Denn ob jener gleich mehr als tausend Jahr vor diesen celtischen Barden gelebt, so ist es doch nicht so wohl von den Jahren der Welt, als vielmehr von dem Zustande der Gesellschaft, daß man von ihrer Aehnlichkeit urtheilen muß.⁶³¹

Originality, here, is redefined as the emergence of poetry from an oral and culturally unselfconscious stage of human life, which is deemed to be 'early' or primeval, and hence 'natural' or 'authentic'.⁶³² This logic became methodologically foundational. By the late eighteenth century, the comparability of early cultures had developed into a principle embedded in emerging philological and anthropological discourses. Homer, once more, was the key figure in these debates. Wood noted that 'it [was] principally from him that we have formed our ideas of the sameness in the pursuits and occupations of mankind

⁶³⁰ Anon. [Albrecht von Haller], 'London' [Review of Macpherson's *Fingal*], *Göttingische Anzeigen von gelehrten Sachen* 17 (1765), pp. 129–31, p. 130.

⁶³¹ Anon. [Christian Felix Weiße], review of 'The Works of Ossian the Son of Fingal, in Two Vols', p. 259.

⁶³² Herder labels the Greeks as 'Halbwilde', cf. HW, III, ed. by Ulrich Gaier, 'Alte Volkslieder: Ausweg zu Liedern fremder Völker', p. 63. A perspective that combines aspects of individual genius with cultural determinism is the idea the original genius as a 'grande homme', who is born into the right time, cf. Anon. [Christian Felix Weiße], review of 'The Works of Ossian the Son of Fingal, in Two Vols', p. 255.

in the Heroic ages, which is the genuine character of an early stage of Society'.⁶³³ Blair, and with him his German translator Weiße, also speak of the similarity of customs, objects, and passions across the 'Alterthümer' of all peoples, the basis of their poetic kinship across time and geography.

Daher werden wir sicher unter den Alterthümern aller Völker Gedichte finden, und es ist sehr wahrscheinlich, daß sie wegen der Gleichheit der Sitten, Gegenstände und Leidenschaften alle unter einander eine gewisse Aehnlichkeit haben. Was wir also bisher gewohnt gewesen bloß als den Charakter der orientalischen Poesie anzusehen, weil einige der frühesten Gedichte davon auf uns gekommen, ist wahrscheinlicher Weise eben so gut der occidentalische, und mehr eines Zeitalters, als eines Landes. Die Werke des Ossian sind ein merkwürdiger Beweis davon.⁶³⁴

The idea of an early stage of mankind, however compelling, faced immediate practical challenges when applied to Ossian. Unlike Homer, whose antiquity was rarely questioned, Ossian's claim to ancient origins prompted fierce scrutiny from the moment Macpherson's poems began circulating in the 1760s.⁶³⁵ The controversy was never purely philological. That a sophisticated body of Gaelic poetry might be rooted in a distinctively Scottish tradition was enough to rouse English and Irish indignation. One English commentator dismissed the publication as 'another proof of Scotch conspiracy in national falsehood',⁶³⁶ while others accused Macpherson of appropriating Irish sources and rebranding them as Scottish legend.⁶³⁷ Macpherson responded by marshalling an

⁶³³ Wood, *An Essay on the Original Genius of Homer, with a Comparative View of the Ancient and Present State of the*, p. 247.

⁶³⁴ Anon. [Christian Felix Weiße], review of 'The Works of Ossian the Son of Fingal, in Two Vols', p. 249.

⁶³⁵ For a discussion of Bardic poetry as an 'origin of cultural nationalism' in Britain, as well as concepts of oral transmission and how the true antiquity of peoples became a contested field around 1800, cf. Katie Trumpener, *Bardic Nationalism: The Romantic Novel and the British Empire* (Princeton: PUP, 1997), p. xi.

⁶³⁶ Cf. James Boswell, *The Life of Samuel Johnson, LL.D., comprehending an Account of his Studies and Numerous Works*, Vol I, (London: Baldwin, 1791), p. 448.

⁶³⁷ Cf. John O'Brien [pseud. M. de C.], 'Mémoire de M. de C. à Messieurs les Auteurs du *Journal des Sçavans*, au Sujet des Poèmes de M. Macpherson' *Le Journal des Sçavans, pour l'année M. DCC. LXIV* (1764), May, pp. 277–92; June, pp. 353–62 and 408–17; August, pp. 537–55; September, pp. 604–17; December, pp. 845–54 [plus pp. 854–57: 'Récapitulation du Mémoire précédent par les Auteurs du *Journal des Sçavans*']; also as 'Mémoire de M. de C. à Messieurs les Auteurs du *Journal des Sçavans* au sujet des Poèmes de M. Macpherson' *Journal des Sçavans, avec des Extraits des meilleurs Journaux de France & d'Angleterre. Suite des CLXX Volumes du Journal des Sçavans, & des LXXIX Volumes du même Journal combiné avec les*

impressive array of supposed sources: eyewitness accounts of ancient manuscripts, references to an oral tradition very much alive, and testimonies from Gaelic-speaking communities. In Germany, this strategy proved largely successful. The perceived continuity of oral tradition became a guarantor of both authenticity and originality, as one 1767 reviewer confidently declared: ‘Das Zeugniß vieler lebenden Zeugen [gibt] die unwidersprechliche Ueberlieferung dieser Gedichte deutlich zu erkennen’.⁶³⁸ Crucially, the idea of an untainted lineage preserved within an ethnically homogeneous population, reinforced this authentication:

Und von dieser Ueberlieferung kommt es, daß in einem Lande, unter dessen Einwohnern keine Ausländer vermenget sind, und bei einem Volke, das so sehr auf das Andenken seiner Vorfahren gesetzt ist, viele dieser Gedichte größten Theils unverfälschet auf unsere Zeiten gekommen sind.⁶³⁹

For this anonymous reviewer, originality becomes a function of purity: of cultural isolation, of memory uninterrupted, of a people defined by their fidelity to ancestral forms. What emerged was a constellation of mutually reinforcing ideas: firstly, authenticity depends on historical continuity; secondly, such continuity is secured through cultural homogeneity; and thirdly, originality, far from denoting the imaginative invention of a *Genie*, emerges as the unbroken survival of something ancient. In this

Mémoires de Trévoux (Amsterdam, 1764–65), 4.7 (1764), pp. 42–74; 4.8 (1764), pp. 353–73; 5.9 (1764), pp. 48–68; 6.11, (1764), pp. 49–89; 6.11, (1764), pp. 344–74; and 1.2 (1765), pp. 313–32. Quoted after Schmidt, ‘Homer des Nordens’ und ‘Mutter der Romantik’, I, p. 212. In Germany, this debate was picked up by Christian Felix Weiße, cf. Anon. [Christian Felix Weiße], review of ‘The Works of Ossian the Son of Fingal, in Two Vols’, p. 246. Albrecht von Haller comments on the issue in the same year, also defending the authenticity of a Scottish Ossian, cf. Anon. [Albrecht von Haller], ‘London’ [Review of Macpherson’s Fingal], p. 129.

⁶³⁸ Anon. [Christian Felix Weiße], review of ‘The Works of Ossian the Son of Fingal, in Two Vols’, p. 257.

⁶³⁹ Cf. Anon., ‘Fragmente der Alten Dichtkunst in den Hochländern von Schottland, gesammelt und aus dem Englischen übersetzt’, *Neues Bremisches Magazin*, 1.1 (1766), pp. 1–54, p. 6. The importance of the articles in *Neues Bremisches Magazin* for the German reception of Ossian is attested in passages such as Friedrich Traugott Hase’s *Auszug aus Eduard Blondheims geheimen Tagebuche. Ein Beytrag zur Geschichte vom Genie und Charakter* (Leipzig: Dyk, 1777), p. 50. Cf. also Schmid, *Theorie der Poesie*, p. 499; and Johann Wilhelm Petersen, ‘Vorbericht des teutschen Übersetzers’, in *Die Gedichte Ossians neuverteutschet* (Tübingen: Heebrandt, 1782), p. IX.

configuration, three concepts – authenticity, cultural belonging, and originality – operate interdependently.

This ideal of originality as ancestral continuity, however, proved conceptually unstable. It coexisted with a parallel understanding of originality as innovation. This double connotation gave rise to a productive tension in contemporary aesthetic discourse. A 1766 review of Ossian published in the *Neue Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften*, for instance, references the ‘originelle Alterthum’ of the Ossianic poems.⁶⁴⁰ The expression conceptually intertwines the two chief connotations of originality: *original* in the sense of ancient or authentic, and *originell* in the sense of inventive or novel. Christian Heinrich Schmid was another commentator who described Ossian’s tone as *originell*, highlighting its stylistic peculiarity and emotional intensity, qualities that challenged conventional expectations and demanded a recalibration on the part of the reader.⁶⁴¹ But in the *Neue Bibliothek* review, *originell* points in a different direction. Here, it is associated not with stylistic innovation but with antiquity and tradition, ‘die Ehre eines sehr alten Herkommens’.⁶⁴²

This dual usage, of originality as ancestry and originality as innovation, showcases a tension between originality defined by novelty and originality as antiquity. What might appear to be mutually exclusive qualities – being *originell* in the sense of stylistic innovation, and *original* in the sense of ancient provenance – were, in Ossian, mutually reinforcing. His poetry felt new precisely because it appeared old. Its strangeness stemmed from a distance so vast that it read, to eighteenth-century eyes, as both

⁶⁴⁰ Anon., ‘Briefe über die Merkwürdigkeiten der Litteratur, 1 und 2te Sammlung’, *Neue Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften*, 3.2 (1767), pp. 303–17, p. 308.

⁶⁴¹ Cf. Schmid, *Theorie der Poesie*, pp. 218–30; on Ossian, p. 219.

⁶⁴² Anon., ‘Briefe über die Merkwürdigkeiten der Litteratur’, p. 308.

radically unfamiliar and deeply rooted. The absence of Classical polish, the stark emotional register, the fragmentary structure all suggested a form untouched by modern conventions and thus 'pure'. That purity was read as authenticity; and that authenticity, paradoxically, was felt as originality. In this way, Ossian came to embody an ideal fusion: he was both the voice of a lost world and a poetic presence that felt startlingly fresh.

This paradox of a newness arising from antiquity was embedded in the very form of the poems. The fragmentary structure of Ossian, both in terms of its publication history and its internal composition, cultivated what might be called an aesthetic of Deep Time.⁶⁴³ Tellingly, Herder titled one of his Ossian adaptations in *Volkslieder* 'Erinnerung des Gesanges der Vorzeit'.⁶⁴⁴ More broadly, Noah Heringman argues that Herder's 'theoretical ambition [...] elevated the survivals embedded in oral tradition into evidence for a fully developed paradigm of deep human time'.⁶⁴⁵ The poetry's disjointed style, its abrupt transitions, impressionistic imagery, and episodic construction,⁶⁴⁶ invited readers to imagine a lost epic tradition cast in fragments. German critics, sensitive to this poetics of incompleteness, where fragmentariness implied the existence of a former whole,⁶⁴⁷ thus often interpreted irregularity as evidence of antiquity. The poems' refusal to fit neatly into Enlightenment-era literary expectations became a virtue. If the texts lacked polish, it was because they bore the weight of centuries; if they defied chronology, it was because they belonged to a time before history was written. Reviews consistently evoked an aura of

⁶⁴³ Heringman, *Deep Time*, p. 175.

⁶⁴⁴ HW, III, ed. by Ulrich Gaier, 'Volkslieder II: Zweites Buch', p. 324.

⁶⁴⁵ Heringman, *Deep Time*, p. 150.

⁶⁴⁶ Heringman cites examples from both Herder and British publications, all of which agree on the 'daring' and 'figurative' character of this early poetic language, its 'native energy', and a register that is full of vitality even if it verges on the 'rude', cf. *ibid.*, p. 151.

⁶⁴⁷ Anon., 'Fragmente der Alten Dichtkunst in den Hochländern von Schotland', p. 5.

Ossian's 'great age' rather than providing exact timelines,⁶⁴⁸ and the concept of *Vorwelt* emerged as a way of naming a time before time,⁶⁴⁹ one that could not be verified through empirical evidence but could be felt through form and tone.

In *Ossian*, then, German readers found not only the trace of a lost world, but the aesthetic conditions through which that world could still be experienced. At the same time, Ossian's status as a wild, untamed bard proved difficult to maintain once he was given a new voice in German. Michael Denis's translation of *Ossian* into Classical hexameters, published in the 1760s, sought to confer dignity and poetic elevation on the text by aligning it formally with Homer. But this act of formal homage came at a cost. Rather than confirming Ossian's stature, it risked domesticating him: transforming the unruly Celtic bard into a tame inhabitant of the Classical canon.

The German reception of Ossian was thus split in two. Some praised Denis's achievement, even going so far as to claim that his rendering of Ossian should serve as a model for future translations of Homer.⁶⁵⁰ Others saw precisely the opposite: that the translation had sacrificed Ossian's power, whose beauty lies just in the 'irregularities' and 'unpolished' character of his style,⁶⁵¹ by imposing Classical restraint. Where the original leapt and murmured, Denis's version marched in stately cadence. Ossian, once elemental and strange, now sounded suspiciously cultivated. This anxiety was not unfounded. As early as 1769, Robert Macfarlan had attempted a Latin hexameter

⁶⁴⁸ Anon. [Christian Felix Weiße], review of 'The Works of Ossian the Son of Fingal, in Two Vols', pp. 246–47.

⁶⁴⁹ Cf. HW, II, ed. by Gunter Grimm, 'Rezensionen: Denis' "Die Gedichte Ossians"', p. 736. Anon., 'Wien' [rev. of the second volume of Denis's Ossian translation], p. 418.

⁶⁵⁰ Anon., review of 'Die Gedichte Ossians, übersetzt von Denis, Zweiter und dritter Band', *Almanach der deutschen Musen auf das Jahr 1770*, ed. by Friedrich Traugott Hase (Leipzig: Weygand, 1770), pp. 113–14, p. 113.

⁶⁵¹ Cf. Blair, *A Critical Dissertation*, p. 2.

translation of *Temora* –⁶⁵² a move that alarmed those invested in Ossian’s primitive appeal. To dress Ossian in Virgilian hexameter was, in their view, to rob him of his vitality and violate the very essence of his originality.⁶⁵³ Language, after all, was not neutral: Latin was a ‘dead tongue’, and Ossian was meant to be alive.⁶⁵⁴ For Herder, the clash between lifeless formalism and Ossian’s raw potential was intolerable. In a sharply worded 1769 review, he asks: ‘Thut Oßian in seinem homerischen Gewande eben die Wirkung, als Oßian der Nordische Barde?’⁶⁵⁵ The answer, of course, was ‘no’. Ossian in hexameter, to Herder, was not Ossian at all. For Herder, Denis’s translation was not merely a stylistic misstep; it symbolised a deeper failure of imagination. Denis, in Herder’s view, had muffled Ossian, substituting metre for mood, rhythm for resonance.

Herder’s target was not Denis alone. He railed more broadly against the Homerising tendencies of the time: against Klopstock, whose hexametric epics had inspired a school of imitation; against the wave of German poets who sought poetic legitimacy by dressing as ancient Greeks.⁶⁵⁶ For Herder, this was no more than belated Classicism, poetry in borrowed robes. And yet, with a rhetorical twist, Herder could not quite resist the Homeric idiom himself. In contrasting Denis’s stylistic choices, he borrows Homeric tags to make his point – juxtaposing ἔπεα νιφάδεσσιν ἑοικότα χειμερίησιν (words like

⁶⁵² Robert Macfarlan, *Temorae Liber Primus versibus latinis expressus* (London: Becket, De Hondt, 1769). Parts of his work were first published in Germany in Anon., ‘Nachricht von einer lateinischen poetischen Uebersetzung der Ossianischen Werke’, *Unterhaltungen*, 8.1 (1769), p. 76, and Anon., ‘Probe der lateinischen Uebersetzung des Ossian’, *Unterhaltungen*, 8.6 (1769), pp. 541–42.

⁶⁵³ Anon., ‘Wien’ [review of the first volume of Denis’s Ossian translation], p. 28, and Anon., ‘Wien’ [review of the second volume of Denis’s Ossian translation], p. 716.

⁶⁵⁴ Anon., review of ‘Robert Macfarlan’s *Temorae Liber Primus versibus latinis expressus*’, *Neue Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften*, 9.2 (1770), pp. 344–49.

⁶⁵⁵ Johann Gottfried Herder, review of ‘Die Gedichte Oßians, eines alten celtischen Dichters, aus dem Englischen übersezt von M. Dennis, Erster Band’, *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek*, 10.1 (1769), pp. 63–9, p. 64.

⁶⁵⁶ Herder writes laconically about ‘Bardengeschrei der deutschen Nation’ in 1772, in HW, II, ed. by Gunter Grimm, ‘Rezensionen: Denis’ “Die Gedichte Ossians”’, p. 742.

snowflakes) with παῦρα μὲν ἀλλὰ μάλα λιγέως (few, but clear words) – only to declare the latter closer in spirit to the Ossianic original.⁶⁵⁷ The irony is not lost: even Herder, in arguing against the Classical frame, must momentarily inhabit it to persuade his audience.⁶⁵⁸

Herder's rejection of Classical imitation was not merely aesthetic. There was perhaps a genealogical motive. He envisioned Ossian as a kindred spirit, someone who might even be partially reclaimed as German. In one of his more startling assertions, he suggests that Ossian should be translated 'als ob er, ein Deutscher gewesen wäre: das er doch, der Hälfte nach, gewesen ist'.⁶⁵⁹ Ossian, half-German? Herder was not seeking ethnographic precision but poetic lineage. He imagined a German tongue still capable of recovering its ancient tonal power, despite centuries of stylistic constraint.⁶⁶⁰ The imitation of Homer, he implies, leads only to ossification. Ossian, by contrast, offers a living model resistant to Classicism, and resonant with a buried, national potential.

By the early 1770s, Ossian had become a vehicle for a wide range of poetic and philosophical aspirations. To some, he was the 'Homer of the North'; to others, a misunderstood Celt, a disguised German, a literary fraud, or the voice of primeval humanity. This very polyvalence was not a liability but central to his cultural power. It allowed Ossian to move fluidly across discourses – on poetic form, historical

⁶⁵⁷ Herder, review of 'Die Gedichte Oßians', p. 67: 'Es ist, wie mit jenen beyden Rednern Homer: der eine spricht -- επεα νιφάδεσσιν εοικότα χειμεριοισιν [sic, i.e. ἔπεα νιφάδεσσιν εοικότα χειμερίησιν] – Der andere παυρα μεν αλλα μαλα λιγεως [i.e. παῦρα μὲν ἀλλὰ μάλα λιγέως] – Der letzte dünkt mich dem Tone des Originals treuer'. For the Homeric passages, cf. Iliad, Γ, 222.: 'ἔπεα νιφάδεσσιν εοικότα χειμερίησιν', meaning 'words that are like wintry storms' or 'words that resemble stormy snowflakes'; Cf. Iliad, Γ, 214: 'παῦρα μὲν ἀλλὰ μάλα λιγέως', meaning 'with few words, but very clearly'.

⁶⁵⁸ Elsewhere, he refers to Temora as Ossian's Odyssey and Fingal as the 'Iliade Oßians' – a concession to the tastes of a readership attuned to Classical analogies, cf. Johann Gottfried Herder, review of 'Die Gedichte Ossians, eines alten Celtischen Dichters aus dem Englischen übersetzt von M. Denis. Zweyter Band', *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek*, 17.2 (1772), pp. 437–47, pp. 446–47.

⁶⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 446.

⁶⁶⁰ Herder, review of 'Die Gedichte Oßians, eines alten celtischen Dichters', I, p. 65.

transmission, cultural identity, and, above all, originality – energising each in turn. In this context, originality came to be understood in layered and at times contradictory ways. Firstly, Ossian was perceived as original in the historical sense: a voice from the dawn of human expression, shaped by nature rather than artifice. His supposed antiquity gave him authority, and his fragmentary, oral style seemed to prove it. Secondly, he was admired as an aesthetic original – a genius whose work, such as that of Homer or Shakespeare, sprang from an inner creative vision. But most crucially, Ossian became the point where these strands converged. He was at once archaic and novel, collective and singular, rooted in tradition yet capable of initiating new poetic forms. At the heart of these debates lay a persistent question: was originality singular or universal? Was Ossian valuable because he was inimitable, a one-off anomaly? Or because he embodied a common human capacity to create natural poetry under so-called ‘barbaric’ conditions? Ossian’s reception in Germany thus did more than spark aesthetic admiration; it helped reshape the very concept of originality.⁶⁶¹ For the first time, authenticity, antiquity, and innovation were drawn into the same orbit. This ambiguity allowed German thinkers to claim Ossian both as an object of reverence and a source of renewal. He was the outsider who could recover what was most authentic within.

⁶⁶¹ Numerous reviews of the Ossianic corpus across the landscape of German magazines and newspapers attest to the fact that the reception of Ossian became the inspiration behind a new way of thinking about originality, cf. Schmidt, *‘Homer des Nordens’ und ‘Mutter der Romantik’*, especially the chapter ‘Die Frühphase. Ossianrezeption im Umkreis der Aufklärung’, I, pp. 485–587, and the chapter on Herder’s reception ‘Die Hauptphase. Ossianrezeption im Umkreis des Sturm und Drang’, I, pp. 589–722; and Paul Barnaby, ‘Timeline of Ossian’s European Reception’, in *The Reception of Ossian in Europe*, ed. by Howard Gaskill (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. XXI–LXVIII.

Mocking an Original Mode: Friedrich Nicolai's *Kleyner Feyner Almanach* (1776/77)

Friedrich Nicolai's *Kleyner Feyner Almanach*,⁶⁶² disguised as a collection of folk songs, responds to two literary trends: the veneration of the *Originalgenie*, associated with the German reception of Shakespeare and Ossian, and the growing obsession with folk poetry as a site of authenticity. That the first standalone collection of German folk songs in the eighteenth century should take the form of a satire is, if nothing else, a gesture of literary sabotage.⁶⁶³ Nicolai, a staunch advocate of Enlightenment rationalism and erudition, viewed the poetic climate of the late 1760s and early 1770s with growing unease. A wave of publications in newspapers, journals, and literary miscellanies promoted the idea of simple, 'natural' poetry as the highest form of expression. While writers such as Bürger and Herder championed folk poetry as the embodiment of national spirit and emotional immediacy,⁶⁶⁴ a literary trend called 'Bardenpoesie' experimented with unpolished forms in practice.⁶⁶⁵ These developments, further supported by polemics against neoclassical aesthetics, framed poetic refinement not as an ideal but as a constraint.⁶⁶⁶ To Nicolai, such innovations amounted to a rejection of

⁶⁶² Friedrich Nicolai, *Eyn feyner kleyner Almanach vol schönerr echterr liblicherr Volckslieder, lustigerr Reyen unndt kleglicher Mordgeschichte, gesungen von Gabriel Wunderlich weyl. Benkelsengernn zu Dessaw, herausgegeben von Daniel Seuberlich, Schusternn tzu Ritzmück ann der Elbe. Erster Jahrgang. Berlynn unndt Stettynn 1777* (Berlin, Stettin: Nicolai, 1776).

⁶⁶³ The first request to collect folk songs, however, dates from the beginning of the eighteenth century, cf. Herder's translation of Joseph Addison's article in *Spectator*, 70 (1711), in HW, III, ed. by Ulrich Gaier, 'Zeugnisse über Volkslieder', p. 71.

⁶⁶⁴ Herder was a ready a target after his falling out with Nicolai in 1774, but Bürger arguably is the main target of the *Almanach*, not least because of his article in *Deutsches Museum*, cf. Gottfried August Bürger, 'Aus Daniel Wunderlichs Buch', *Deutsches Museum* 1 (1776), pp. 440–50; Cf. Gunter E. Grimm, "'Lieber ein unerträgliches Original als ein glücklicher Nachahmer.'" Bürgers Volkspoesie-Konzept und seine Vorbilder', in *In dem milden und glücklichen Schwaben und in der Neuen Welt. Beiträge zur Goethezeit. Festschrift für Hartmut Fröschle*, ed. by Reinhard Breymayer (Stuttgart: Akademischer Verlag, 2004), pp. 55–74.

⁶⁶⁵ Nicolai comments on his reading of 'Bardenpoesie' in a letter to Herder from 6 September 1773, Cf. *Herder's Briefwechsel mit Nicolai*, ed. by Otto Hoffmann (Berlin: Nicolai, 1887), p. 103.

⁶⁶⁶ HW, II, ed. by Gunter Grimm, 'Von Deutscher Art und Kunst: Briefwechsel über Ossian, 1773', pp. 452–53. Cf. also Gunter E. Grimm, *Letternkultur: Wissenschaftskritik und antigelehrtes Dichten in Deutschland von der Renaissance bis zum Sturm und Drang* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1998).

literary discipline in favour of what he saw as sentimental posturing and vague emotional immediacy. The poetic model of the inspired, nature-bound genius, in Nicolai's view, was little more than a license for mediocrity in disguise. Yet rather than mount another Enlightenment rebuttal in essay form, Nicolai opted for mimicry. He compiled a selection of folk songs that he believed would collapse under the weight of its pretensions. The idea is simple and devastating: let the bad poetry speak for itself.⁶⁶⁷ In adopting the voice of what he saw as misguided enthusiasm, Nicolai stages a parody that not only ridicules its target but also reveals just how widespread and culturally potent the ideals of originality and authenticity had become.

Nicolai's scepticism towards *Bardenpoesie* had been simmering since the early 1770s. In 1771, he had considered compiling a comprehensive review of bardic poetry for the *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek*.⁶⁶⁸ His interest, he claimed, lay chiefly in Herder's thoughts on 'Bardengeschmack'.⁶⁶⁹ But his own opinion had already hardened: the sentimental imitation of Ossian, he wrote, was mere 'poetische Ueppigkeit' – all misty grandeur, no substance.⁶⁷⁰ His central objection, which would come to shape the *Almanach*, was both aesthetic and cultural: Ossian, and the poetic style attributed to him, simply did not suit modern German life. The rawness of ancient Celtic verse so prized by its admirers jarred with domestic comforts and sensibilities,⁶⁷¹ where that very admiration had become most fashionable. For Nicolai, the disjunction was comical.

⁶⁶⁷ He did not publicly declare his sources, but only reveals in a letter to Lessing that they come from Anon., *Bergkreyen* (Nürnberg: n. pub. 1547). Cf. Letter to Lessing from 5 June 1777, in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Gotthold Ephraim Lessings Briefwechsel mit Karl Wilhelm Ramler, Johann Joachim Eschenburg und Friedrich Nicolai; Nebst einigen Anmerkungen über Lessings Briefwechsel mit Moses Mendelssohn* (Berlin, Stettin: Nicolai, 1794), p. 388.

⁶⁶⁸ Cf. Letter to Herder, 7 September 1771, *Herder's Briefwechsel mit Nicolai*, p. 63.

⁶⁶⁹ Cf. Letter to Herder, 15 June 1771, *Herder's Briefwechsel mit Nicolai*, p. 59.

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷¹ *Ibid.*

Nothing, he implied, could be more artificial than the sentimental longing for unpolished poetry among the elegantly upholstered classes.⁶⁷² As such, he rejects Ossian as both stylistic model and cultural transplant. The supposed ‘national feeling’ embedded in the Ossianic corpus, Nicolai confesses, leaves him unmoved: ‘Die Nationalempfindung, die in der nordischen Mythologie liegen soll, kann ich noch nicht nachempfindungen (sic)’.⁶⁷³ For him, Ossian’s ‘barbaric’ world belongs to a bygone era, and more crucially, to a different civilisation. Germans, he insists, should look to Athens and Sparta, if they wish to refine their national poetics.⁶⁷⁴

For Nicolai, the growing enthusiasm for ‘natural poetry’ rooted in what he labels barbaric cultures was both intellectually dubious and aesthetically offensive.⁶⁷⁵ Nicolai saw little more than an indulgent fantasy, poetry praised not for its form or craftsmanship, but for its mood, its mythology, and its distance from civilisation. The mere presence of myth – whether Greek or Nordic – was no guarantee of poetic worth: ‘Ich halte nichts von den Schönheiten, die sich bloß auf die Mythologie gründen, es sey die nordische oder griechische’,⁶⁷⁶ he wrote. This was not, it must be said, a rejection of mythological poems as such. Homer’s hexameters, with their formal brilliance, remained an ideal. What Nicolai opposed was the growing tendency to praise poems for their atmosphere and mythic colouring while overlooking their lack of structure or craft. He mocked the intoxicated fervour of younger readers: ‘Um die Bardenlieder zu schmecken, muß man

⁶⁷² Ibid.

⁶⁷³ Nicolai to Herder, 19 November 1771, Cf. *Herder’s Briefwechsel mit Nicolai*, p. 65.

⁶⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁵ Nicolai uses the term ‘barbaric’ in a derogatory way. The term obtained its pejorative meaning, ‘Non-Greek’, therefore ‘uncultured’, in the course of the Persian Wars of the 5th century BCE. Cf. Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian: Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989).

⁶⁷⁶ Nicolai to Herder, 19 November 1771, Cf. *Herder’s Briefwechsel mit Nicolai*, p. 65.

vielleicht von einem besondern poetischen Taumelkelch getrunken haben'.⁶⁷⁷ For him, the real danger was that enthusiasm for supposed originality was eroding shared standards of judgement. As he put it:

Ob nicht unsere großen Genies, den Geschmack und die Poesie verderben, dadurch, daß sie alle allzusehr original seyn wollen. Jeder geht seinen eignen Weg, und keiner von diesen Wegen stößt zusammen.⁶⁷⁸

The Classics offered models that had stood the test of time. The new originals, by contrast, seemed self-indulgent and resistant to critique.⁶⁷⁹ Their claim to imitate nothing but nature placed them outside the very norms by which literary merit had long been judged.

It is worth pausing here to consider what Nicolai's objections imply for the concept of originality. For him, originality signified not the cultivation of style but a compulsive pursuit of novelty, an imperative to innovate at the expense of coherence and form.⁶⁸⁰ Gottfried August Bürger (1747–1794) seems to be aware of this criticism, when he addresses the trend of writing innovative and original literature in his article *Aus Daniel Wunderlichs Buch in Deutsches Museum*. There, Bürger deflects the charge that he and his peers were writing under the spell of 'Originalkizel', a craving for originality for its own sake.⁶⁸¹ It was the second part of this article, 'Herzensausguß über Volks Poesie',⁶⁸² that tipped the scales for Nicolai and turned his long-standing reservation into an open attack.⁶⁸³ In *Herzensausguß*, Bürger had directly attacked the dominance of erudition in German poetry, blaming it for the genre's lifelessness and lack of emotional power. His

⁶⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 65–66.

⁶⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 66.

⁶⁸⁰ Nicolai to Herder, 24 August 1772, *ibid.*, p. 81.

⁶⁸¹ Bürger, 'Aus Daniel Wunderlichs Buch', p. 441.

⁶⁸² Cf. the section 'Herzensausguß über Volks Poesie', pp. 443–450, in Bürger, 'Aus Daniel Wunderlichs Buch'.

⁶⁸³ Nicolai to Lessing, 5 of June 1777, cf. Lessing, *Gotthold Ephraim Lessings Briefwechsel*, p. 586.

solution was deceptively simple: abandon learned artifice and return to nature.⁶⁸⁴ The German Muse, he wrote, ‘sollte billig nicht auf gelehrte Reisen gehen, sondern ihren Naturkatechismus zu Haus auswendig lernen’.⁶⁸⁵ No need for foreign models; truth was to be found in native soil, ideally among miners, peasants, and craftsmen.⁶⁸⁶ Unlike Herder, who hoped to reawaken German bards through reading Ossian, Bürger concludes his article expressing the hope that one day, a ‘German Percy’ will rise and collect relics of *German* (rather than Scottish or English) folk song,⁶⁸⁷ restoring the genre to its former glory under a national agenda. The true poetry of the people, Bürger insisted, had not died out. It simply needed to be rediscovered.

For Nicolai, this was the final straw. Bürger’s call for a ‘German Percy’,⁶⁸⁸ a figure who would recover native folk poetry just as Thomas Percy had done for Britain, struck him as nostalgic cultural regression. The idea that one could locate poetic truth by mingling with the lower classes and mimicking their voice appeared, to Nicolai, both naïve and dangerous. Worse still, it elevated originality not only above form but above social and intellectual credibility. In Bürger’s formulation, originality had verged on populist fantasy,⁶⁸⁹ a means of bypassing both Classical education and critical scrutiny in the

⁶⁸⁴ Cf. Roy Pascal, *The German Sturm und Drang* (Manchester: MUP, 1953), p. 83.

⁶⁸⁵ Bürger, ‘Herzensausguß über Volks Poesie’, p. 444.

⁶⁸⁶ The full spectrum of professions that Bürger associates with the ‘lower classes’ reads: ‘Bauren, Hirten, Jägern, Bergleuten, Handwerksburschen, Kesselführern, Hechelträgern, Bootsknechten, Fuhrleuten, Trutscheln, Tyrolern und Tyrolerinnen...’ Cf. Bürger, ‘Aus Daniel Wunderlichs Buch’, p. 450.

⁶⁸⁷ Cf. Thomas Percy, *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry, consisting of old heroic ballads, songs, and other pieces of our earlier poets, (chiefly of the lyric kind.) Together with some few of later date*, 3 vols, (London: Dodsley, 1765).

⁶⁸⁸ On the early Percy-reception in Germany, and specifically Herder’s and Bürger’s engagement, and Nicolai’s criticism, cf. Haucke Friedrich Wagener, *Das Eindringen von Percys Reliques in Deutschland* (Heidelberg: Pfeffer, 1897), and Heinrich Lohre, *Von Percy zum Wunderhorn: Beiträge zur Geschichte der Volksliedforschung in Deutschland* (Berlin: Mayer&Müller, 1902). On Percy’s sources and compilation of his anthology, cf. Martin Hagedorn, *Das Percy-Folio-Manuskript: Die Stellung der Volksballaden des Percy-Folio-Manuskripts in der englisch-schottischen Volksballaden-Tradition* (Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter, 2019), pp. 61–3.

⁶⁸⁹ For a discussion of the concept and development of ‘Popularität’, cf. Niels Penke, *Formationen des Populären: Semantik und Poetik des ‘Volkes’ um 1800* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2024).

name of affective immediacy. Nicolai was certainly not whom Bürger had in mind with his German Percy, but he beat the Göttingen-based writer to the task of representing the lower classes, if only satirically.

Nicolai's *Almanach* provides a literary fiction of a cobbler interested in folk poetry, albeit one who seems surprisingly well-versed in the vocabulary of literary fashions. This was a literary construction, carefully crafted to parody the very notion of authenticity that Bürger and Herder had romanticised. The preface to the *Kleyner Feyner Almanach*, written in pseudo-early modern orthography and with idiomatic speech,⁶⁹⁰ makes an equivalence between the cobbler's and poet's arts, a facetious variation of the medieval trope of *poeta faber*.⁶⁹¹ At the same time, it offers a caricature of the rhetoric around originality, disguised as working-class wisdom. Lamenting the state of contemporary poetry as cluttered with artifice, the cobbler praises the old times where poetic expression allegedly overcame cobbling poets like an emotional outpouring ('Hertzens-Ausguss'), driven by a natural urge and inspiration ('aus innerm Drang hervorschwellen') and just as heartfelt as a well-cut sole.⁶⁹² In barely disguised satirical ventriloquism, both phrases echo Bürger's terminology from *Herzensausguß über Volks Poesie*.

Nicolai's mockery hinges precisely on the slipperiness of claims to originality. What Bürger presents as spontaneous natural expression is revealed, under the cobbler's voice, as a pose, an affectation as formulaic as the Classicism it claims to overthrow. Similarly, in their naïve sentimentality, the champions of original poetry could not

⁶⁹⁰ Cf. Udo Stein, 'Anselm Elwert: Sammler, Dichter Publizist und Amtmann zwischen Aufklärung und Romantik', *Archiv für Hessische Geschichte*, 68 (2010), pp. 49–120, pp. 90–1.

⁶⁹¹ On the medieval trope of *poeta faber*, cf. Patricia Harant, *Poeta Faber; Der Handwerks-Dichter bei Frauenlob; Texte, Übersetzungen, Textkritik, Kommentar und Metapherninterpretationen* (Erlangen, Jena: Palm&Enke, 1997), and *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturwissenschaft*, ed. by Klaus Weimar and others, 3rd edn (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 1997–), I: A–G, p. 359.

⁶⁹² Nicolai, *Almanach*, p. 10.

distinguish true natural expression and ungainly gaucherie: ‘meynens seyn naturlich, wenns ungehobelt unndt plump ist’.⁶⁹³ Naïve obsession with unpolished form receives a sneer in the cobbler’s comparison of ‘cutting a sole’ and ‘cutting a verse’.⁶⁹⁴ The satire deepens when the cobbler dismisses the new self-styled geniuses as little more than derivative *Versemacher*, masquerading as visionaries: ‘Zwaren spuret man hin unndt her, newe Gesellen, nennen sich Genyes [...] stelen drob, aus Volcksliedern, hir’n Wort, da’n Wort, flicken’s in ire Verse’.⁶⁹⁵ Like previous allusions, this statement seems to target Bürger directly, who had claimed in 1776: ‘Mit den Angelegenheiten der Versmacherkunst hab’ ich hier nichts zu schaffen’.⁶⁹⁶ Nicolai is not convinced. In the seemingly simplehearted criticism of his cobbler, the implications are clear. These poets, for all their claims to originality, are merely *pasticheurs* who borrow fragments of folk speech and stitch them into poems to simulate authenticity. Nicolai turns the tables: the ‘originals’, it seems, are anything but.

In addition to mocking poetic expression, Nicolai’s cobbler dismantles the fantasy that undergirds it, namely the idea that one might become, even momentarily, one with ‘the people’.⁶⁹⁷ The cobbler warns:

Wollt’ eyner hoch fligen, sam eyn Vogeley in der Luft, must er auch können, Wurmer unndt Spinnen essen [...] ist im aber feystes Rynderfleysch tzur Narung not, so bleyb’ er uff Gottes Erdboden.⁶⁹⁸

The image is drawn directly from the folk song *Wenn ich ein Vöglein wär*,⁶⁹⁹ but is taken literally to absurd effect. If you wish to fly like a bird, Nicolai suggests, you must also live

⁶⁹³ Ibid., p. 11.

⁶⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 6.

⁶⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 11.

⁶⁹⁶ Bürger, ‘Herzensausguß über Volks Poesie’, p. 447.

⁶⁹⁷ Nicolai, *Almanach*, p. 17.

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 17–8.

⁶⁹⁹ The hypothetical subjunctive (‘Wenn ich...wär’) can be found in the opening lines of all the existing versions, and is just as distinctive for the song as the motif of the bird. The initial lines are quoted in

like one: eat worms, shelter in narrow cracks, renounce beef, or else, stay grounded. And so: bourgeois poets who wish to write folk poetry must accept the full social and material implications of that identification. They would have to enter the sphere of the lower classes to make their poetry authentic. Nicolai employs a narrow understanding of folk song here. Folk song, to him, is not ‘song for the people’, but ‘by the people’.⁷⁰⁰ His cobbler, however, dismisses the folkloristically enthused ‘Versemacher’ as hypocrites, and their poetry, which was an unsuccessful result of appropriation, as inauthentic. At stake here is his conviction that originality requires congruence between speaker and style, form and social reality. Poets such as Bürger, in his view, fail on both counts.

And yet, for all its mockery, Nicolai’s *Almanach* does more than dismantle. Satire, after all, depends on recognisable forms and Nicolai’s vocabulary helps establish the tropes of the genre he mocks. He comments knowingly on the tradition of passing songs down by word of mouth,⁷⁰¹ hints at their ties to local customs, and gestures towards the nationalist implications of preserving such expressions as part of a cultural heritage.⁷⁰² Thus, Nicolai unintentionally anticipates strategies that would come to define the genre in the decades that followed.⁷⁰³ If his goal was to expose the sentimental cult of originality

Goethe’s free adaptation of Aristophanes’ birds from 1780. Cf. Goethe, FA, I.v, ed. by Peter Huber and Dieter Borchmeyer (1988), p. 246. Cf. also Anon., *Liebe und Treue. Ein Liederspiel in einem Aufzuge. Nach Melodien von Johann Friedrich Reichard* (Berlin: Unger, 1800), p. 28. Several other versions of the song, dating before 1800, hand down the same initial lines. Cf. a pamphlet that is kept by the University library of Bern, Cf. Anon., *Vier weltliche Schöne neue Lieder* (n. p.: n. pub., 1760?), Nehlsen Q-9806; a hand-written collection from 1808, a copy of which is kept in ‘Schweizerisches Volksliedarchiv’ in Basel, Sign. DVA: A 205176.

⁷⁰⁰ The German genitive composite ‘Volkslied’ allows for both readings, *gen. subiectivus* and *gen. obiectivus*. The definition was later disambiguated by Jacob Grimm: ‘volkslied, beßer schwed. Folkvisa, den der begriff ist weniger ein lied des volks, als ein unter dem volke umgehendes’. Cf. Jacob Grimm, *Deutsche Grammatik*, 4 vols (Göttingen: Dieterich, 1822–1837), II (1826), p. 615. On folk culture as ‘the culture actually made by the people for themselves’, cf. Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford: OUP, 2015), p. 180.

⁷⁰¹ Nicolai, *Almanach*, p. 10: ‘pflanzens von Mund zu Mund ungeendert fort’.

⁷⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁷⁰³ Cf. August Friedrich Christian Vilmar, *Geschichte der deutschen National-Literatur*, 10th edn, (Marburg, Leipzig: Elwert, 1864), p. 264. Cf. also Frieder von Ammon, ‘Kampfplätze der Literatur: Friedrich Nicolai und

as untenable, he also had to inhabit its logic – and, in so doing, he reveals just how powerfully that logic was beginning to shape poetic thought. Most consequential for the following decades of folk song collections, however, is Nicolai’s sweeping statement that folk poetry is not merely rough or unrefined, but aesthetically bad. For him, it is not a minor form, but a *low* one: an artless product of a social class whose literary efforts should remain confined to their own sphere. The poetic voice of the *Volk* is, in Nicolai’s understanding, neither a collective inheritance nor a lost reservoir of national feeling. It is, bluntly, the voice of the ‘Pöbel’.⁷⁰⁴ If a poet wants to write folk poetry for the ‘Volk’, Nicolai contends, they should become a member of the ‘Volk’ first.⁷⁰⁵ While this aspect of Nicolai’s argument went down well with some of his audience, Lessing in particular,⁷⁰⁶ for poets and theorists who had wed their literary integrity to the *Volkslied* – Herder, Bürger, Elwert –, Nicolai’s satire posed a more immediate threat. He had not only mocked their ideals; he had exposed how fragile their definitions of *Volk* and *originality* truly were.

Indeed, in the years that followed, each would attempt to clarify – or, more precisely, sanitise – their terminology. Herder, writing in 1778, insisted that *Volk* should not be confused with *Pöbel*:

Zum Volkssänger gehört nicht, daß er aus dem Pöbel seyn muss, oder für den Pöbel singt; so wenig ist die edelste Dichtkunst beschimpft, daß sie im Munde des Volkes tönet. Volk heißt nicht, der Pöbel auf den Gassen, der singt und dichtet niemals, sondern schreyt und verstümmelt.⁷⁰⁷

die Streitkultur des 18. Jahrhunderts’, in *Friedrich Nicolai im Kontext der kritischen Kultur der Aufklärung*, ed. by Stefanie Stockhorst (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2013), pp. 23–49, p. 44.

⁷⁰⁴ Cf. Lessing to Nicolai, 20 September 1777, Cf. Lessing, *Gotthold Ephraim Lessings Briefwechsel* (1794), p. 393.

⁷⁰⁵ Nicolai, *Almanach*, p. 20.

⁷⁰⁶ Lessing to Nicolai, 20 September 1777, Cf. Lessing, *Gotthold Ephraim Lessings Briefwechsel*, p. 393; Roy Pascal adds Schlözer and Ramler to the list of Nicolai’s advocates, Cf. Pascal, *The German Sturm und Drang*, p. 80.

⁷⁰⁷ HW, III, ed. by Ulrich Gaier, ‘Vorrede: Volkslieder Nebst untermischten andern Stücken’, p. 239.

Bürger also distanced his poetic *Volk* from any specific social class. Roy Pascal concludes that after Nicolai's critique, 'the concept "Volk" [for Bürger] sums up only those characteristics in which more or less all, or at least the most estimable classes, agree'.⁷⁰⁸ Nevertheless, Nicolai's *Almanach* left a deeper mark than its author perhaps intended. His exaggerated portrayal of folk poetry as aesthetically coarse and socially misplaced resonated so strongly that it successfully undermined the field. For nearly three decades after its publication, few dared to issue serious folk song collections. As Anselm Elwert would later observe, 'Volkslieder [sind] durch den kleinen feinen Almanach fast zum Ridikül geworden'.⁷⁰⁹ Elwert's own 1784 anthology, *Ungedruckte Reste alten Gesangs Nebst Stücken Neuerer Dichtkunst*, tried to thread the needle: embracing the form while raising its status, despite his admission that Nicolai had made the genre almost untenable. The idea of the *Volk* was gradually disentangled from the lower classes and reimagined as a spiritual-cultural category,⁷¹⁰ a move that would be pursued in earnest during the early nineteenth century.⁷¹¹

By the time Arnim and Brentano published *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* in 1806, the landscape had changed. Nicolai's sting had dulled, even as his influence lingered.⁷¹² In one final ironic twist, many of the very poems he had compiled to expose the mediocrity

⁷⁰⁸ Pascal, *The German Sturm und Drang*, p. 84.

⁷⁰⁹ Anselm Elwert, *Ungedruckte Reste alten Gesangs nebst Stücken neuerer Dichtkunst* (Gießen, Marburg: Krieger, 1784), p. 140.

⁷¹⁰ Holger Dainat views the increased use of composite nouns such as 'Volkskultur', 'Volkslied' or 'Volksstück' as a symptom of this revaluation. Cf. Holger Dainat, "'Meine Göttin Popularität'": Programme printmedialer Inklusion in Deutschland', in *Popularisierung und Popularität*, ed. by Gereon Blaseio, Hedwig Pompe, and Jens Ruchatz (Köln: DuMont, 2005), pp. 43–62, p. 48. Cf. also Penke, *Formationen des Populären*, pp. 47–183.

⁷¹¹ Cf. Hermann Bausinger, 'Die Mühen der Einfachheit: Zur Modellierung des Populären in der Literatur um 1800', *Deutsche Akademie für Sprache und Dichtung* (1985), pp. 13–36, pp. 21–3.

⁷¹² Cf. Vilmar, *Geschichte der deutschen National-Literatur*, p. 264.

of folk verse were reprinted as part of a canon.⁷¹³ What had once been intended as evidence against the aesthetic value of folk song was now treated as testimony to its enduring charm. In this transformation, we glimpse the paradox at the heart of Nicolai's intervention: by mocking the sentimental pursuit of originality, he helped sharpen its terms. He forced figures such as Bürger and Herder to distinguish between poetry that was aesthetically poor and poetry that was simply unpolished. At the same time, he gave Herder more reason to elevate his model of unsophisticated art, strengthening it by framing it within a broader cultural-historical context that idealised a state of innocent childhood. His satire clarified what originality was not, and in doing so, forced its defenders to articulate what they believed it could be. That he never accepted the premise of *Volkslied* as true poetry does not diminish the fact that he shaped its reception profoundly. For better or worse, originality – so often assumed to be spontaneous – here proved to be the product of conflict and cultural negotiation.

⁷¹³ Cf. Ferdinand Rieser, *Des Knaben Wunderhorn und seine Quellen: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des deutschen Volksliedes und der Romantik* (Dortmund: Ruhfus, 1908).

Age as a Marker of Originality: Anselm Elwert's *Ungedruckte Reste alten Gesangs* (1784)

If Nicolai's *Kleyner Feyner Almanach* mocked the notion of poetic originality by parodying folk song, Anselm Elwert responds more earnestly with his 1784 anthology *Ungedruckte Reste alten Gesangs*. The volume soon attracted the attention of the bibliophile and philologist Karl Hartwig Gregor von Meusebach (1781–1847), who not only read but annotated it.⁷¹⁴ His engagement suggests that Elwert's collection was regarded as a significant contribution to the study of folk song, and that its impact was amplified through Meusebach's circle of friends, including the Brothers Grimm, Joseph Görres, Achim von Arnim, Hoffmann von Fallersleben, and Karl Lachmann.⁷¹⁵ Writing to Goethe in 1814, Elwert proudly described himself as the person, 'welcher zuerst, unter dem Titel: Reste altdeutschen Gesangs, Volkslieder sammelte'.⁷¹⁶ He knew, even decades later, that this anthology would remain his principal legacy.

Elwert's work, however, has had a mixed academic reception. Robert Seidel has dismissed *Ungedruckte Reste* as little more than a mixture of obsessive collecting and

⁷¹⁴ Cf. the copy kept at the *Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin*, shelfmark Xa 3610, and the auction catalogue of Meusebach's library from 1855, Anon., *Verzeichniss von Büchern vorzüglich aus der Freiherrn von Meusebach'schen Bibliothek. Erste Abtheilung, welche am 5. März d.J. und folgenden Tagen durch den Königl. Auctionscommissarius für Bücher und Kunstsachen Th. Müller in der Georgenstrasse No. 29 gegen baare Zahlung öffentlich versteigert werden soll* (Berlin: Schade, 1855). On Meusebach's role for folk song collections and the discipline of Germanistik in general, cf. Andreas Bässler, 'Im Wettlauf um die Entschlüsselung: Karl Hartwig Gregor Freiherr von Meusebach auf den Spuren und in den Fußstapfen Grimmelshausens', *Simpliciana*, 32 (2010), pp. 435–56; Jürgen Schulz-Grobert, 'Meusebach, Karl Hartwig Gregor Freiherr von', *Internationales Germanistenlexikon 1800–1950*, ed. by Christoph König and others, 3 vols (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2003), II, p. 1208. Cf. also the introduction of I, p. xv. A. Elwert's son, Ernst Elwert, mentions Meusebach as the expert on folk song around 1800 in the foreword to the reprint of the anthology, cf. Anselm Elwert, *Ungedruckte Reste alten Gesangs*, ed. by Ernst Elwert (Marburg: Elwert, 1848), p. v.

⁷¹⁵ Cf. Dietrich Lückoff, *Aus dem Leben und Kleben des Freiherrn Karl Hartwig Gregor von Meusebach* (Stuttgart: Hirzel, 2020); and 'Fabian-Handbuch', s. v. *Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz* (SBB-PK): http://fabian.sub.uni-goettingen.de/fabian?SBB-PK_3 [Accessed 10 October 2025].

⁷¹⁶ Letter from A. Elwert to Goethe, 11 August 1814, *Goethe und Schiller-Archiv*, 28/65, Bl. 608.611.

an Ossian-inspired attempt to revive a supposed German spirit.⁷¹⁷ He accused Elwert of poor taste and inadequate poetological knowledge.⁷¹⁸ Dieter Martin, by contrast, emphasises the collection's importance for the Romantic rediscovery of Baroque poets such as Philip von Zesen. He argues Elwert not only cited Zesen but also supplied his own version of the text, one that would be creatively reworked in *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (hereafter *DKW*).⁷¹⁹ This case exemplifies the extent to which 'High Romantic' anthologies relied on the groundwork of earlier collectors. Martin's recognition of Elwert's significance is borne out both by the analyses that follow and by Elwert's role in shaping the Romantic staging of originality through appeals to antiquity and the context of oral transmission.

In many respects, Elwert's anthology stands at a crossroads. Published after Nicolai's polemics and Herder's *Volkslieder*, it precedes *DKW*, the first collection after Elwert showing the same level of conceptual coherence, by more than twenty years.⁷²⁰ Although Elwert draws on both the song material and the theoretical framework of Herder's early engagement with the genre,⁷²¹ he is no longer absorbed by the paradigm of the original genius developed by the *Sturm und Drang* generation in the 1760s and 1770s, which Nicolai had satirised in his *Almanach*. Elwert emphasises the antiquity of his original

⁷¹⁷ Robert Seidel, *Literarische Kommunikation im Territorialstaat: Funktionszusammenhänge des Literaturbetriebs in Hessen-Darmstadt zur Zeit der Spätaufklärung* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2003), p. 363.

⁷¹⁸ Seidel, *Literarische Kommunikation im Territorialstaat*, p. 320.

⁷¹⁹ Martin convincingly proves that Arnim and Brentano used Elwert's versions for their edition. Cf. Dieter Martin, *Barock um 1800: Der Erarbeitung und Aneignung deutscher Literatur des 17. Jahrhunderts von 1770–1830* (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 2000), p. 476; Achim von Arnim and Clemens Brentano, *Des Knaben Wunderhorn. Alte deutsche Lieder*, 3 vols (Heidelberg: Mohr und Zimmer, 1806–8), I (1806), II (1808), III (1808), and *Des Knaben Wunderhorn. Alte deutsche Lieder, gesammelt von Achim von Arnim und Clemens Brentano. Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. by Heinz Rölleke, 3 vols (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1987). Subsequent references in the main body are to this edition.

⁷²⁰ Stein, 'Anselm Elwert', p. 96.

⁷²¹ Cf. Waltraud Linder-Beroud, *Von der Mündlichkeit zur Schriftlichkeit? Untersuchungen zur Interdependenz von Individualdichtung und Kollektivlied* (Frankfurt a.M.: Lang 1989), p. 21.

songs, but, paradoxically, adds a collection of ‘new originals’ to his anthology.⁷²² His tentative attempt to update the genre of folk songs in modern adaptations, even if it was ultimately unsuccessful,⁷²³ subsequently becomes a common practice in editions such as *DKW*, which also placed editorial emphasis on the staging of oral transmission, the cultivation of anonymity and simplicity.⁷²⁴ Elwert’s reception of Herder and Nicolai is well represented in the archives – so, too, his influence on Clemens Brentano and Achim von Arnim, which I will underpin with close-readings of several folk songs that Brentano and Arnim had likely taken from Elwert. This section will therefore reveal Elwert’s axial position concerning models of originality and authenticity between successive generations of writers interested in folk songs, linking late-Enlightenment discourses of originality, and *Sturm und Drang*’s inspired genius with a Romantic aesthetic grounded in the illusion of folk authenticity.

The chief appeal of *Ungedruckte Reste alten Gesangs* lies in its redefinition of originality – not as invention or genius, but as antiquity.⁷²⁵ Each of the four titular words gestures towards temporal depth: *ungedruckt* suggests oral transmission, a mode of circulation closely associated at the time with the Homeric corpus,⁷²⁶ particularly amidst

⁷²² Cf. Elwert, *Ungedruckte Reste* (1784), pp. 75–136. The poems in this section were written by Elwert himself. Nevertheless, he publishes them anonymously to homogenise the appearance of the collection. Poem number 19, ‘Nachahmung der Natur’, satirises the idea of original poetry based on the imitation of nature alone. Cf. Elwert, *Ungedruckte Reste* (1784), p. 118 and pp. 185–200.

⁷²³ The second edition of his collection only features the old songs, cutting the ‘Stücke neuerer Dichtkunst’, cf. Elwert, *Ungedruckte Reste alten Gesangs* (1848).

⁷²⁴ Cf. Dieter Martin, ‘Fliegende Blätter’: Eine *Wunderhorn*-Quellengruppe zwischen Literalität und simulierter Oralität’, in *Das ‘Wunderhorn’ und die Heidelberger Romantik: Mündlichkeit, Schriftlichkeit, Performanz*, ed. by Walter Pape (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2005), pp. 35–48.

⁷²⁵ Stein, ‘Anselm Elwert’, p. 95.

⁷²⁶ On the oral transmission of the Homeric corpus, see Thomas Parnell, ‘Essay on the Life, Writings and Learning of Homer’, in *The Iliad of Homer*, trans. by Mr. Pope, 6 vols (London: Bowyer, 1715), I, pp. 29–100. One of the most influential examples of this strand of scholarship is Wood, *An Essay on the Original Genius and Writings of Homer*. Herder popularised the image of Homer as an improvising bard, relying on Wood’s research. In this light, Friedrich August Wolf’s *Prolegomena ad Homerum* (1795) is an erudite and precise summary of a debate that lived through the best part of the eighteenth century. Cf. Friedrich August Wolf,

the flourishing of Homeric philology.⁷²⁷ The term ‘Reste’ implies that what survives is only partial, a trace of something formerly whole, now worn down by time. ‘Gesang’ evokes the role of the bard, suggesting a performative origin prior to the advent of print culture. ‘Alt’ requires no gloss. Together, these terms stake a claim on originality not through novelty, but through ancient venerability. Their fragmentariness becomes a credential. The less complete the text, the more plausibly it can be imagined as ancient. Elwert’s editorial stance mirrors this logic. Unlike Herder, who often introduced songs with reflective prefaces or interpretive commentary, Elwert presents his selections with sparse framing, allowing the ‘rests’ to speak for themselves.

If the title thus elevates antiquity as a unique selling point for German song at the close of the eighteenth century, the subtitle, *nebst Stücken neuerer Dichtkunst*, introduces a modern counterpoint. As Udo Stein has shown, the phrasing of Elwert’s title performs a double citation.⁷²⁸ It echoes the subtitle of the second volume of Herder’s *Volkslieder, Nebst untermischten anderen Stücken*, where Herder quietly folded contemporary texts into his collection. At the same time, it gestures towards Thomas Percy’s *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, a foundational model for presenting old ballads alongside editorial and poetic supplements. Elwert borrows both their wording and strategy, juxtaposing the ancient and the recent without marking clear boundaries. This

Prolegomena ad Homerum; Sive de Operum Homericorum Prisca et Genuina Forma Variisque Mutationibus et Probabili Ratione Emendandi (Halle: Druckerei der Franckeschen Stiftungen, 1795).

⁷²⁷ The first scholar to claim that Homer’s works are in fact a heterogenous conglomerate of individual, and potentially orally transmitted, pieces was François Hédelin, cf. François Hédelin abbé d’Aubignac, *Conjectures académiques, ou Dissertation sur l’Iliade, ouvrage posthume, trouvé dans les recherches d’un savant* (Paris: Fournier, 1715). Roughly at the same time, and independently from Hédelin, Richard Bentley came to a similar conclusion. Cf. Phileleutherus Lipsiensis [Richard Bentley], *Remarks on a late Discourse of Freethinking* (London: Morphew, Curl, 1713). Closest to the eighteenth century understanding of folk poetry is Vico’s influential claim that Homer’s works are not penned by a single individual, but formed by the entire Greek population. Cf. Giambattista Vico, *Opere*, ed. by Andrea Battistini, 2 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1990), I, §875.

⁷²⁸ Stein, ‘Anselm Elwert’, pp. 94–5.

equivalence is reinforced visually. *Alten Gesangs* and *neurer Dichtkunst* appears in enlarged type on the frontispiece. Yet nowhere does Elwert identify the newer pieces as his own. Instead, he lets both sections stand anonymously, allowing the present to pass as a continuation of the past. By withholding attribution, he encourages readers to receive all the material as equally original.

The anthology's epilogue circles back to the collection's central premise: that his old songs, now printed for the first time, acquire value through survival. Publication is not an act of authorship, but of retrieval, a belated recognition of what has endured outside the realm of print. Yet Elwert goes further. Drawing on Herder's early writings and Rousseauian anthropology, he outlines a vision of the folk poet as shaped by instinct:

Der natürliche Mensch, nachdem er seine erste Bedürfnisse befriedigt hat und sich wol fühlt, hat den Drang in sich, [...] die Schönheiten, die er fühlt und genießt, zu besingen, er geußt, wie Ossian, seine Lieder aus.⁷²⁹

Elwert's comments form a capsule theory of spontaneous expression. Song emerges as naturally as breath. Elwert, as his borrowing record at the University of Göttingen suggests, immersed himself in both Herder's early writings and Rousseau during his student years.⁷³⁰ It was there, too, that his interest in folk song, as transmitted by Herder and Ossian, took shape.⁷³¹ In his essay on old English song, he develops a Herderian critique of poetic artifice and decline that would inform also his *Reste*:

⁷²⁹ Elwert, *Ungedruckte Reste* (1784), pp. 137–38.

⁷³⁰ Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen. Cod. Ms. Bibliotheksarchiv *Ausleihregister Ostern 1781 – Michaelis 1781*; fols 8^r, 19^v, 42^v, 45^r, 48^v, 50^v, 62^r; and Cod. Ms. Bibliotheksarchiv *Ausleihregister Michaelis 1781–Ostern 1782*; fols 5^r, 11^v, 54^r, 58^r, 60^r, 68^v. The library of Göttingen contained 160000 volumes at the time, forming one of the largest collections in Europe, thanks to the curation of Christian Gottlob Heyne. In comparison, Halle counted 12000, and Cambridge around 30000 volumes. Quoted after Stein, 'Anselm Elwert', p. 62.

⁷³¹ Stein, 'Anselm Elwert', pp. 61–2.

Man erschöpft sich, die Regeln drücken zu hart, die besten Dichter schreiben einander ab, man will neu seyn, und fällt auf Abenteuer, man will sich kuriren, und stirbt sanft und selig an einer Auszehrung. Der Skalde las nicht, bevor er sang, die Sammlung poetischer Schriftsteller seiner Nation, [...] er fand in sich eine unversiegbare Quelle, und siehe da, es war alles sehr gut.⁷³²

The figure of the bard is prelapsarian: unschooled, unburdened by rules, untouched by imitation, and guided only by a natural sense of form. Elwert's epilogue to *Ungedruckte Reste*, with its invocation of Ossian and anthropological tropes, such as 'Kindheit der Menschheit', also reveals his deeper debt to Herder, specifically the *Ossianschrift*.⁷³³ There, Herder had proposed a first stage of culture common to all peoples, in which early poetic forms shared essential traits.⁷³⁴ Elwert adopts this framework to justify the inclusion of non-German songs in his collection. For him, folk song is anchored in the poetic condition. It arises from shared memory, oral transmission, and minimal interference from literary tradition.⁷³⁵

Elwert's transnational understanding of *Volkslied*, another inheritance from Herder, sets his anthology apart from later Romantic collections.⁷³⁶ In publications such as *DKW*, folk song becomes one strand in the broader effort to articulate a distinctively German cultural tradition. Ethel Matala de Mazza describes Arnim's and Brentano's purpose as 'Rehabilitierung jener als "Pöbel" in den kulturellen Mißkredit geratenen Schicht der

⁷³² Anselm Elwert, 'Ein Stück der ältesten englischen Geschichte. Nach einem Angelsächsischen Todes- und Siegesliede. In einem Schreiben an den Herausgeber dieses Magazins', in *Posselts wissenschaftliches Magazin für Aufklärung*, 2.1 (1786), pp. 64–76, p. 73.

⁷³³ Elwert, *Ungedruckte Reste* (1784), pp. 137–38.

⁷³⁴ Herder, however, combines this universal idea, even at an early stage, with concepts of national belonging, cf. the prefaces of his unpublished *Alte Volkslieder* (1773/74), where he dubs his songs as expressions of 'Vaterlandsgeist' and 'Denkart der Nation', cf. HW, III, ed. by Ulrich Gaier, 'Alte Volkslieder', pp. 17, 20, and 23.

⁷³⁵ For Elwert's models, cf. HW, II, ed. by Gunter Grimm, 'Von Deutscher Art und Kunst: Briefwechsel über Ossian, 1773', pp. 452–53, and Anon. [Christian Felix Weiße], review of 'The Works of Ossian the Son of Fingal, in Two Vols', p. 259.

⁷³⁶ Stein, 'Anselm Elwert', p. 86; Cf. also Armin Schulz, 'Volkslied', in *Reallexikon der Deutschen Literaturwissenschaft. Neubearbeitung des Reallexikons der deutschen Literaturgeschichte*, 3 vols, ed. by Harald Fricke and others (Berlin, New York: De Gruyter, 2007), III, pp. 794–97, p. 795.

Geringeren',⁷³⁷ with the effect that the 'Nation wird zur Gefühlssache – und ihr Körper zum Resonanz-Körper einer sich im Singen und Sprechen selbst vernehmenden Natur'.⁷³⁸ Elwert's criteria, by contrast, are less bound to national provenance. What unites the songs conceptually for him is their antiquity and simplicity, both of which signal their emergence from a pre-civilised stage of cultural development, as shown by a passage in the epilogue:

Einfalt, Leben und Wahrheit sind die Bestandteile des alten Lieds. Sein Fluß ist rein, dass böse Buben ihn trübten ist nicht der Quelle Schuld. Alle Blumen in Euern Gärten sind Kinder des Felds und des Walds. Sie hatten sanfte Farben von der Natur, aber sie luxurierten zuletzt und wurden oft grell durch überflüssigen Saft.⁷³⁹

The natural metaphor is pointed: the stream is clear until corrupted; the garden flowers, though descended from wild stock, have become gaudy from excessive cultivation. Elwert sets up a contrast between art and nature,⁷⁴⁰ between song as spontaneous outpouring and song as overworked artifice.

The metaphors of garden and stream encode a poetics. The deliberately ambiguous vocabulary of sources/springs (*Quellen*) and flowers links Elwert's natural imagery with the scholarly medium of the anthology. His work is a florilegium in the literal sense: a gathering of poetic flowers. Not all blooms belong, however. The artificial or overcultivated flower – that is, the contemporary poem shaped to suit fashionable taste⁷⁴¹ – disrupts the harmony of the natural bouquet. Elwert's horticultural imagery

⁷³⁷ Ethel Matala de Mazza, *Der verfaßte Körper: Zum Projekt einer organischen Gemeinschaft in der Politischen Romantik* (Freiburg: Rombach, 1999), p. 353.

⁷³⁸ de Mazza, *Der verfaßte Körper*, p. 360.

⁷³⁹ Elwert, *Ungedruckte Reste* (1784), p. 137.

⁷⁴⁰ Also in this case, he seems to have been inspired by his reading of Rousseau, cf. Chapter One, n. 625. On the dichotomy of nature and culture in political philosophy, cf. Bruno Latour, *Wir sind nie modern gewesen*, trans. by Gustav Roßler (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1995); for Christian criticism of the corruptive powers of culture as opposed to the unspoiled creation, cf. Gernot Böhme, *Natürlich Natur: Über Natur im Zeitalter ihrer technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1992), pp. 12–28.

⁷⁴¹ Elwert, *Ungedruckte Reste* (1784), p. 137: 'sie luxurierten zuletzt und wurden oft grell durch überflüssigen Saft'. In the epilogue, he stresses the importance of the section containing the old songs, cf. 142.

echoes Herder's own unease about transplanting folk poetry into the cultivated beds of print culture. In the *Ossianschrift*, Herder famously lamented how 'die gute Feldblume' suffers once it stands 'im Gartenbeet des weißen Papiers', subject to the dissecting gaze of the 'honette Publikum'.⁷⁴² Elwert shares this anxiety, even as he distances himself from Herder elsewhere, insisting, for instance, that German poetry needs no Ossian of its own.⁷⁴³ What both affirm, in different registers, is the same underlying tension: the song's origin in lived tradition and its uneasy migration into text. A passage from Elwert's own epilogue makes their shared anxiety unmistakable:

'Ich habe von jeher viele solcher Lieder gesammelt, und es dünkte mich Sünde, sie auf weißes Papier aus dem Garten der Natur zu verpflanzen, drum bewahrte ich sie nur im Gedächtnisse auf'.⁷⁴⁴

The phrasing closely mirrors Herder's. Like Herder, he casts the act of transcription as a kind of trespassing. To anthologise is to preserve, but also to dislodge. Once transcribed, a song becomes static, cut off from the process of variation and adaptation that defines oral transmission. Elwert further emphasises this point, highlighting the song's survival across time without the aid of print: 'Sie [die Lieder] lebten im Gesang und gingen von Mund zu Mund. Sie erhielten sich unendlich lang ohne Druk und Papier'.⁷⁴⁵ This line makes two claims: first, that the longevity of folk song stems from its oral vitality;⁷⁴⁶ and second, that print, while a means of preservation, is a late intervention. The song, once printed, becomes entirely textual. It ceases to evolve and loses the situatedness of

⁷⁴² HW, III, ed. by Ulrich Gaier, 'Vorrede: Volkslieder Nebst untermischten andern Stücken', p. 244.

⁷⁴³ Elwert, *Ungedruckte Reste* (1784), p. 138.

⁷⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 140–41.

⁷⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

⁷⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 53–4.

performance,⁷⁴⁷ the community of repetition.⁷⁴⁸ And it becomes vulnerable to the kind of scholarly dissection that Elwert himself cites as a threat in his epilogue.⁷⁴⁹

The loss of variability, of performative immediacy, of communal context, and the threat of reductive scholarly appropriation inform how Elwert presents the songs. In footnotes, he signals oral provenance with deliberate care, drawing attention to voice preceding script.⁷⁵⁰ Elsewhere, Elwert insists that his songs are not simply to be read, but sung,⁷⁵¹ reflecting a contemporary understanding of *Lied* as a form completed only in melody.⁷⁵² Elwert recognises that transcription, while preserving the text, may sever it from the conditions that once gave it life: repetition, performance, and the presence of a listener. Why, then, commit these songs to paper at all? Unlike Herder, who framed collection as a cultural imperative, a defence against decay and ephemerality,⁷⁵³ Elwert offers a more intimate reason: the fading of his own memory. Yet even this rationale is subtly dramatised. Forgetfulness is not cast as a passive erosion, but as something encroaching and invasive. It is, he suggests, the consequence of scholarly overgrowth, ‘akademisches

⁷⁴⁷ In his emphasis on performance, Elwert also prefigures ideals that are later stressed by the *Wunderhorn* editors, cf. de Mazza, *Der verfaßte Körper*, p. 357.

⁷⁴⁸ Elwert, *Ungedruckte Reste* (1784), pp. 53–4.

⁷⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

⁷⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 53–4.

⁷⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵² Cf. Johann Heinrich Voss in a letter to Johann Abraham Peter Schulz on the 29th March 1784, in *Briefwechsel zwischen J.A.P. Schulz und J.H.Voss*, ed. by Heinz Gottwaldt and Gerhard Hahne (Kassel, Basel: Bärenreiter, 1960); Johann Joachim Eschenburg, *Entwurf einer Theorie und Literatur der schönen Wissenschaften* (Berlin; Stettin: Nicolai, 1789), p. 156; and a letter from Goethe to Zelter in 1809, in *Briefwechsel zwischen Goethe und Zelter in den Jahren 1799–1832*, ed. by Ludwig Geiger, 3 vols (Leipzig: Reclam 1902), I, p. 260. Cf. also Heinrich W. Schwab, *Sangbarkeit, Popularität und Kunstlied: Studien zu Lied und Liedästhetik der mittleren Goethezeit, 1770–1814* (Regensburg: Bosse 1965), p. 22.

⁷⁵³ HW, II, ed. by Gunter Grimm, ‘Von Deutscher Art und Kunst: Briefwechsel über Ossian, 1773’, p. 481.

Unkraut’,⁷⁵⁴ crowding out the simple songs he once knew by heart.⁷⁵⁵ This rhetorical move from personal lapse to editorial act recasts personal memory as a microcosm of cultural transmission. The gaps and distortions in his own recollection echo the broader selective pressures of oral tradition. In both cases, what survives is marked by imperfection. Crucially, however, that imperfection is a token of authenticity. Elwert’s editorial logic thus departs from later philological ideals: he does not seek to reconstruct an *Urtext*,⁷⁵⁶ but to preserve the lived traces of a tradition that resists textual finality. The originality of Elwert’s songs, then, is defined by the duration over which they have survived the selective processes of oral transmission, described in the epilogue as the ‘ravages of time’ (‘Zahn der Zeit’).⁷⁵⁷

Elwert gives form to this endurance. While he avoids pinning antiquity to concrete dates, he expresses it aesthetically through an epigraph at the threshold of the anthology:

Hier hast du alten Sanges Kraft,
 Der tode Ding ins Leben schafft;
 Doch willst du haben nett und fein,
 So wird’s für dich nicht Nahrung seyn.⁷⁵⁸

No appeal is made to taste or refinement. Instead, the reader is warned that what follows may be rough, even inelegant, but it has a vitality capable of reviving the lifeless. Antiquity, in this framing, offers substance, and only to those prepared to stomach its unvarnished strength. The quatrain sets up a polemic against the formalism and aesthetic propriety

⁷⁵⁴ This is in stark contrast to later positions such as those of Johann Christoph Greiling, cf. Johann Christoph Greiling, *Theorie der Popularität* (Magdeburg: Keil, 1805), p. ix. Cf. also Hans Adler, ‘Die Aufhebung des ‘Vernunftsolos’ durch Versinnlichung. Johann Christoph Greilings ‘Theorie der Popularität’’, in *Aufklärung der Öffentlichkeit – Medien der Aufklärung*, ed. by Rudolf Stöber and others (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2015), pp. 217–30.

⁷⁵⁵ Elwert, *Ungedruckte Reste* (1784), p. 141.

⁷⁵⁶ On methods of textual criticism around 1800 to establish archetypes and first versions, cf. Sebastiano Timpanaro, *The genesis of Lachmann’s method*, ed. and trans. by Glenn W. Most (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), particularly chapter 7, ‘What Really Belongs to Lachmann’, pp. 115–118.

⁷⁵⁷ Elwert, *Ungedruckte Reste* (1784), p. 138.

⁷⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, n. p.

associated with Classicist poetics – targeting, however obliquely, Nicolai’s ideal of metrical discipline, which had already been the object of Herder’s critique.⁷⁵⁹

Elwert’s emphasis on rawness finds a fitting continuation in the motto that follows. The passage, an adapted quotation from Shakespeare, invokes an ‘old and antik song’ that ‘relieve[s] [...] passion’ and restores ‘the innocence of Love | Like the old Age’.⁷⁶⁰ Elwert seamlessly merges two passages from *Twelfth Night*, omitting only the lines that tether the song to its dramatic context. In the play, Duke Orsino calls upon Cesario to sing an ‘old and plain’ tune, once sung by ‘the spinsters and the knitters... and the free maids’.⁷⁶¹ This ‘old and antic song’⁷⁶² stands in deliberate contrast to the fashionable trifles of the present, speaking more directly to the heart than ‘light airs and recollected terms / Of these most brisk and giddy-paced times’.⁷⁶³ Elwert’s choice to open with Shakespeare can be read, in part, as a tribute to the poet’s revered status during the *Geniezeit*. More significantly, however, it gestures towards Herder, who had cited the very same passage in his *Ossianschrift* as evidence of English poetry’s rhythmic vitality and emotional authenticity, qualities he saw as hallmarks of true poetic originality.⁷⁶⁴ The likelihood of Herder as Elwert’s source is underscored by a curious textual echo: both Herder and

⁷⁵⁹ HW, II, ed. by Gunter Grimm, ‘Von Deutscher Art und Kunst: Briefwechsel über Ossian, 1773’, pp. 473–74; often, schemes of metrical units preceded the classicist poetry, cf. Klopstock’s Ode ‘Die frühen Gräber’ (1764), which is introduced with a scheme of metric quantities, consisting of several established feet (Dactyl, Chorus, Choriamb, Iamb, Anapaest, Creticus). Klopstock, however, wanted his poetry to be regarded as a ‘metrische Composition’, ‘nichts anders, als den genauen Ausdruck des Sylbenmaaßes in der Musik’. Cf. the Letter from the 22 November 1766 to Denis Lappenberg, in Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock, *Werke und Briefe* [HKA], 9, 2, ed. by Horst Gronemeyer and others (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter 2021), p. 684; and ‘Von der Nachahmung des griechischen Silbenmaßes im Deutschen’, in *Werke und Briefe* [HKA], 9, 2, ed. by Horst Gronemeyer and others (Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter 2021), pp. 551–562. Cf. also Schwab, *Sangbarkeit*, p. 37, who reproduces the ode.

⁷⁶⁰ Elwert, *Ungedruckte Reste* (1784), p. 3.

⁷⁶¹ Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, II.IV, ll. 43–44, p. 1787.

⁷⁶² *Ibid.*, II.IV, l. 3, p. 1786.

⁷⁶³ *Ibid.*, ll. 5–6.

⁷⁶⁴ HW, II, ed. by Gunter Grimm, ‘Von Deutscher Art und Kunst: Briefwechsel über Ossian, 1773’, p. 449.

Elwert reproduce the same typographical error, rendering Shakespeare's 'silly' as 'sitty'⁷⁶⁵: a small but telling slip that hints at a shared lineage of reading and reception.⁷⁶⁶

Elwert's dialogue with Shakespeare, mediated through Herder, both situates him within a particular aesthetic tradition and points to his broader method. For Elwert, antiquity was not defined by chronology alone but by the qualities that made a song feel old: its simplicity and emotional directness. This principle becomes apparent in the first part of *Ungedruckte Reste*, where the very architecture of the collection reinforces the theme of antiquity. Of the 25 songs comprising this opening section, ten explicitly invoke the idea of great age, either through the adjective 'alt' or through references to their provenance. The remaining fifteen, while lacking such direct markers, work by association. They fall into four broad categories: (a) translations, (b) adaptations from Ossian, (c) pieces labelled as 'Volkslied' or drawn from Herder's *Volkslieder*, and (d) conventional types such as drinking songs, love songs, or soldiers' songs. Though these songs are not overtly identified as old, their placement alongside explicitly ancient material, and their separation from the second half, *Stücke neuerer Dichtkunst*, casts them in the same antique light. Here, proximity itself becomes a curatorial strategy.

More than thematic kinship, however, it is a shared stylistic idiom that unites these songs. Even those lacking explicit claims to antiquity adhere to the aesthetic principles of the *Volkslied*, as its advocates defined them: a rough-hewn directness and resistance to ornament. The songs favour parataxis, abrupt transitions, and unadorned diction – all

⁷⁶⁵ Cf. Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, II.IV, l. 45, p. 1787. Cf. Johann Gottfried Herder, *Von Deutscher Art und Kunst* (Hamburg: Bode, 1773), p. 8; Elwert, *Ungedruckte Reste* (1784), p. 3.

⁷⁶⁶ Herder conflates the two English passages in a similar way, with the only difference being that his version also features three lines on the sociological setting of the song that are missing in Elwert. cf. Herder, *Von Deutscher Art und Kunst*, p. 8: 'The Spinsters and the Knitlers in the Sun/ And the free Maids that weave their Thread with Bones/ Do use to chant it'.

features that deliberately eschew the rhetorical elaboration of mannerist verse.⁷⁶⁷ *Gute Lehre* (p. 48), for example, is only 61 words long: eight derive from *Liebe/lieben*, four are first-person pronouns, and three reference the heart. Its stichomythic structure, heavy use of deixis, and clipped lines create a sense of immediacy. The metrical shape of the poems in this section is equally uneven; line lengths fluctuate unpredictably, and the language is laced with dialect and idiom. *Fragment aus einem alten Manuscript* offers a vivid illustration in lines 9–14, where irregular rhythms, lines ranging from eight to ten syllables, and vernacular phrases such as ‘scharwenzen’ (l. 9) or ‘Häckel Gepäckel’ (l. 14) evoke an archaic texture. What may initially seem like a lack of polish is, in fact, a deliberate and aesthetic embrace of coarseness.

This conviction in the value of the raw is reaffirmed in Elwert’s 1786 article, *Ein Stück der ältesten englischen Geschichte*, where he cites Herder’s 1773 translation of the Valkyrie song.⁷⁶⁸ That early translation, with syntactic disjunctions and jagged rhythms, sought to capture the abruptness of the original, an aim Herder would later temper in his smoother 1778 revision. Herder’s tonal shift, prompted in part by Nicolai’s criticism, marks a retreat from his earlier, more radical stance. In the 1778 preface to *Volkslieder*, he distances the *Volk* from the *Pöbel*,⁷⁶⁹ polishes his earlier renderings,⁷⁷⁰ and omits orally sourced material altogether. As Heinrich Lohre argues, this shift represents a capitulation to Nicolai’s polemic.⁷⁷¹ Elwert, by contrast, remains steadfast. As Udo Stein has shown,

⁷⁶⁷ Cf. HW, II, ed. by Gunter Grimm, ‘Von Deutscher Art und Kunst: Briefwechsel über Ossian, 1773’, pp. 476–77.

⁷⁶⁸ Cf. Anselm Elwert, ‘Ein Stück der ältesten englischen Geschichte’, pp. 64–76. On Elwert’s relationship with the early Herder, cf. also Stein, ‘Anselm Elwert’, p. 93.

⁷⁶⁹ HW, III, ed. by Ulrich Gaier, p. 239.

⁷⁷⁰ Cf. the 1773 ‘Der Webegesang der Valykyriur’, HW, II, ed. by Gunter Grimm, ‘Vorrede: Volkslieder Nebst untermischten andern Stücken’, pp. 469–72, and the 1778 ‘Die Todesgöttinnen’, HW, III, ed. by Ulrich Gaier, ‘Volkslieder II: Drittes Buch’, pp. 367–69. The later version shows a smoother metre, fewer repetitions, and reduced imagery.

⁷⁷¹ Lohre, *Von Percy zum Wunderhorn*, p. 14.

Elwert consistently preferred Herder's earlier, rougher translations when given the choice.⁷⁷² For Elwert, poetic unevenness demonstrates not aesthetic inferiority but an authentic lineage that reaches back to the formative moment of oral song.⁷⁷³

Elwert's preference for early Herder is also legible in the internal composition of his anthology. Where Herder's 1774 *Alte Volkslieder* closes with a song called *Voluspa*, taken from the Old Norse poem Edda, Elwert begins his own collection with a different passage of *Voluspa*, taking up the project where Herder left off. The first song in Herder's *Alte Volkslieder*, titled *Das Lied vom jungen Grafen*, appears as the penultimate text of Elwert's first section, under the title *Das Lied vom jungen Knaben*. Moreover, Elwert includes a reference to Herder in the peritext of this song: 'Siehe Herders Volkslieder 1. Th. S. 15 der Verschiedenheit wegen hier eingerückt'.⁷⁷⁴ This is both an homage to Herder and a self-confident gesture of offering an alternative version. The philological manoeuvre – foregrounding divergence while effacing derivation – serves his broader claim to authenticity more effectively than any denial of precedent would have.

Elwert, however, is right in stressing the difference between his and Herder's versions. While Herder's version belongs to the corpus of songs he had received from the Alsatian region,⁷⁷⁵ the first line of Elwert's *Das Lied vom jungen Knaben* contains a reference to 'Koblenz' in the Rhineland-Palatinate. Moreover, the first three stanzas of Elwert's poem are missing altogether in Herder's version. The opening lines provide a contextualising frame to the main narrative, evoking the scene of a garden, embellished with a nutmeg

⁷⁷² Stein, 'Anselm Elwert', pp. 92–3.

⁷⁷³ One passage of his epilogue reads as if he were defending his poems against the accusation of bad style, admitting that not each of his folk songs is of the same quality, cf. Elwert, *Ungedruckte Reste* (1784), p. 140: 'Man fordre nicht mehr von dem Volkslied, als es geben kan, jedes Ding hat sein eignes Maas und Gewicht'.

⁷⁷⁴ Elwert, *Ungedruckte Reste* (1784), p. 51.

⁷⁷⁵ Cf. Heinz Rölleke's commentary, in *Johann Gottfried Herder: 'Stimmen der Völker in Liedern'. Volkslieder*, ed. by Heinz Rölleke (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1975), p. 406.

and a clove tree. The boy, looking onto the garden, plans to use the sweet-smelling nutmeg and clove as an olfactory forget-me-not for his beloved (p. 51). The motif has precedent in earlier folk song traditions, including the song *Von deinet wegen bin ich hie*, first documented in a publication from 1540.⁷⁷⁶ More plausible as a source for Elwert, however, is Friedrich Reichardt's song *Das Mühlrad*, first published in *Musikalisches Kunstmagazin* from 1782, for two reasons, as closer analysis will reveal.⁷⁷⁷ First, Elwert's wording is very similar to Reichardt. Second, Reichardt included these stanzas as part of another song that can also be found in Elwert's volume, here titled *Da droben auf dem Berge*. Reichardt's last two stanzas, in comparison with Elwert and the 1540 source, read:

Anon., 1540

Inn meines bulen garten
do steen zwey Peumelein.
Das ein dz tregt gut Muscat
das ander Negelein.

Die Muscat die sein süsse
Die Negelein die sein reß
Die gib ich meinem bulen
Das er mein nit vergeß.⁷⁷⁸

Reichardt, 1782

Dort in meines Vaters Lustgarten
Da stehn zwey Bäumelein
Das eine träget Muskaten
Das andre braun Nägelein.

Muskaten die sind süße,
Braun Nägelein riechen gar wohl
Die will ich mein'n Schätzgen verehren
Daß es dran riechen soll.⁷⁷⁹

Elwert, 1784

Es fließt in Liebgers Garten
Da wohnt niemand drein,
Als nur zwei Bäumelein,
Das eine trägt Muskaten
Das andre braun Nägelein.

Muskaten die sind süße
Braun Nägelein riechen wol
Die geb ich meinem Feinsliebchen
Das es meiner gedenken soll.⁷⁸⁰

Reichardt is the first person to associate these two stanzas with the tradition of *Da droben auf dem Berge*. Even if the song itself is quite old, and can be traced as far back as 1536,⁷⁸¹ the two stanzas referring to the trees are missing in any of the earlier publications. Elwert's almost literal quotation of them in *Das Lied vom jungen Knaben* – the only

⁷⁷⁶ Anon., *Drey schöne lieder* (n. p.: Gutknecht, 1540).

⁷⁷⁷ Johann Friedrich Reichardt, 'Volkslieder', *Musikalisches Kunstmagazin*, 1.1–4 (1782), pp. 99–100, p. 99.

⁷⁷⁸ Anon., *Drey schöne lieder* (n. p.: Gutknecht, 1540), n.p.

⁷⁷⁹ Reichardt, 'Volkslieder', p. 99.

⁷⁸⁰ Elwert, *Ungedruckte Reste* (1784), p. 51.

⁷⁸¹ Anon., *Etlüche hübsche Bergreihen* (Nürnberg: Hergot, Wachter, 1536), no. 54, strophe 8 of the song 'Jungfräulein soll ich mit euch gan'. Cf. also Hans Ott, *Hundert und fünfftzehen guter neuer Liedlein* (Nürnberg: Andreae 1544).

difference being that the garden is owned by the beloved, not the father – suggests a direct reception of Reichardt’s song. Yet Reichardt is never named. In fact, it was very much in Elwert’s interest to conceal Reichardt as his source. After all, he stages his songs as old and authentic, in this case supposedly picked up directly from oral transmission. Fighting off the suspicion that he had copied from Herder turned out to be difficult enough. To do so, he carefully quotes Herder as an *alternative* source for the song *Das Lied vom jungen Knaben* and claims that he himself had taken it from a Rhenish tradition. Elwert arguably includes the lines found in Reichardt’s version to prove the independence from Herder, but one founded on his reliance on another written source. Therefore, he needed to suppress Reichardt’s name for his claim to originality and antiquity to appear watertight.

After the third stanza, the tense of Elwert’s song briefly changes to a narrative preterite, marking the beginning of a dream. In Herder, on the other hand, the first stanzas are presented as a real scene, the count’s dream that his beloved has taken the veil commencing only afterwards, and independently. The next four stanzas (1–4 in Herder) are almost identical in Herder and Elwert, with the small difference of Herder using present tense in the first two lines. Intradiegetically, this is a strategy to make the scene more present, and create an embodied reading response, while Elwert’s preterite marks a transition from one state of cognition to another within the boy’s mind. The introductory frame would therefore suggest that Elwert and Herder had relied on different sources. The following stanzas, however, tell a different story. The lyrical self, in both poems, stands on a high mountain, from which they overlook a valley that is crossed by a ship. There are three people sitting in the ship – counts (‘Grafen’) in Herder’s version, boys (‘Knaben’) in Elwert’s poem. The youngest of them encourages his beloved to drink a glass of poison:

‘Der gebot seiner Lieben zu trinken / Aus einem venedischen Glas’. Both Herder and Elwert add a footnote here; at least in Elwert’s volume, this is a rare occasion. What is more, the content of the footnote shows the exact same wording in both instances, and even the same odd spelling of the word ‘Tradizion’: ‘Nach der Tradizion ein Glas, das den Trank vergiftete’. Rölleke qualifies Herder’s footnote as ‘sachlich zweifelhaft’,⁷⁸² suggesting that he had probably puzzled it together, freely associating a passage from Georg Wickram’s *Rollenwagenbüchlin*, the only instance that relates ‘venetian’ to poison. It seems highly unlikely that Elwert should have come to the same result by coincidence, especially as other versions of the same song have ‘römisch Glas’ instead of ‘venedischen Glas’.⁷⁸³ Instead, he must have copied major parts from Herder’s printed volume, or from Reichardt’s *Musikalisches Magazin*, which featured the song with footnotes in Herder’s version.

If Elwert wanted to conceal Herder’s influence altogether, he would not have mentioned him explicitly in the peritext. The reference performs a programmatic function in service of the idea of originality: viewed alongside the divergent first stanza, the reference relates to the staging of orality, and thus the antiquity of his own text. In terms of provenance, Elwert claims his texts to be from a Rhenish oral tradition;⁷⁸⁴ the reference to ‘Koblenz’ in the stanza strengthens this notion. Making explicit the region of origin seems to suggest that Elwert had indeed collected it first-hand in its oral form. The mere fact that there is a conflicting version, Herder’s Alsatian song, underlines variation as a principle of orality. Admitting the status of his own text as a variant, Elwert uses the

⁷⁸² Herder, *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern*, p. 406.

⁷⁸³ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁴ Elwert, *Ungedruckte Reste* (1784), p. 53.

philological method of declaring conflicting versions to underline the authenticity of a text that was shaped in an oral culture.

Another paratext makes the suggestion of oral transmission even more explicit, and connects it with an extant practice of singing. As mentioned above, Elwert uses footnotes sparsely. This song is only one of three to have footnotes, the other two (nos. 2 and 4) referencing the antiquity of the printed songs. In the footnotes to *Das Lied vom jungen Knaben*, Elwert gives two accounts of a singing practice that is still alive in the Rhenish area: ‘Statt disser 2 lezten Verse singt man am Rhein...’ (p. 53), and ‘Statt dessen singt man auch’ (p. 54). Both regional provenance and the practice of singing, pointing to a long oral tradition, are merged in this reference. It is striking, then, that Elwert, clearly attentive to the performative dimension of song, makes no mention of Herder’s remark on the melody to *Das Lied vom jungen Grafen*: ‘Die Melodie ist traurig und rührend; an Einfalt beinah ein Kirchengesang’.⁷⁸⁵ After all, Elwert’s footnotes suggest that he heard the song performed. Either the song was sung to a completely different tune in the Rhenish area, or his recollection of the tune did not match up with the music Herder referred to as ‘traurig und rührend’.

There is, however, a more compelling explanation. Herder’s melody first appeared in 1782 in J.F. Reichardt’s *Musikalisches Kunstmagazin*,⁷⁸⁶ and there is every reason to suspect that this so-called ‘folk’ tune was, in fact, composed by Reichardt himself, who was a prolific figure behind several well-known melodies of the period.⁷⁸⁷ Elwert may have found good reason to sidestep Herder’s comment on the grounds of the melody’s

⁷⁸⁵ Herder, *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern*, p. 9.

⁷⁸⁶ Johann Friedrich Reichardt, ‘Volkslieder’, *Musikalisches Kunstmagazin*, 1.1–4 (1782), p. 154–155.

⁷⁸⁷ Cf. the example ‘Wenn ich ein Vöglein wär’. The song can be found in almost any folk song collection of the time; before Reichardt, however, it was printed without the melody.

questionable authenticity and suspiciously recent provenance. Yet by omitting Herder's note, Elwert also avoided drawing attention to Reichardt's publication, an awkward association, especially given that Elwert had likely borrowed from that very collection elsewhere. This editorial choice preserved the illusion of originality, presenting the song as transmitted directly through oral tradition rather than mediated by contemporary art music. Where Herder's version might reflect a stylised or newly composed setting, Elwert foregrounds living singing practices, anchoring the melody in communal memory and distancing it from the realm of composed art music. The appearance of originality, then, depends not on novelty but on the illusion of historical continuity. Invoking Herder or Reichardt would have introduced visible intermediaries, undermining Elwert's claim to first-hand capture. Instead, Elwert gives his audience the impression that they can now read in print for the first time what had been preserved orally, in its original context of transmission, for centuries.

Elwert's tacit curatorial strategy, shaping materials to conform to an ideal of authentic folk song, echoes later Romantic collectors, most notably the editors of *DKW*. Brentano and Arnim also revised and arranged their selections to reflect the aesthetics of simplicity and oral transmission. Their preference, too, was for songs that appeared not merely old but untouched, texts that bore the mark of age without the stain of artifice. Achieving this effect often required subtle fabrication, altering poems to make them seem more 'original' than they were.⁷⁸⁸ *Das Lied vom jungen Knaben* offers an example of this editorial inheritance. When Brentano and Arnim assembled their anthology, they included Elwert's *Das Lied vom jungen Knaben* under the title *Wassersnoth*, subtitled

⁷⁸⁸ On their editorial principles, but also the disagreement between Arnim and Brentano in editorial matters, such as selection and presentation of songs, cf. Rölleke's *Nachwort*, in *DKW*, III, pp. 557–81.

‘Mündlich’.⁷⁸⁹ They reproduced the opening stanzas almost verbatim, but without any mention of Elwert.⁷⁹⁰ Crucially, the six lines they preserved are precisely those absent from Herder’s version: the stanzas Elwert had introduced to reinforce the illusion of regional and oral provenance. Brentano and Arnim thus inherit not just the song itself but Elwert’s editorial fiction, perpetuating a carefully crafted lineage of authenticity.

Beyond the opening lines, Brentano and Arnim’s version diverges from Elwert’s. The garden setting disappears; nutmeg and clove give way to a more abstract separation of lovers. Where Elwert’s song warns against choosing a bride for wealth rather than affection, Brentano and Arnim present a boy chastened by loss, now faithful to the one he once rejected. Their adaptation transforms Elwert’s specific narrative into a generalised folk motif. Yet even in this abstraction, their debt to Elwert remains. Elwert’s moralising conclusion becomes the ethical core of their version: ‘Freit nicht nach Geld und Gut / Freit Euch ein wakres Mädelein, / Die Euch gefallen thut’.⁷⁹¹ Accordingly, the boy’s beloved is introduced as a simple girl, ‘Liebchen’, rather than one of the beautiful ladies on the bridge. The only link between the garden below and the bridge above is the melting snow, seeping down as it floods the garden. This bridge, however, does not bring him to his Liebchen: ‘Ich kann nicht zu ihr hin’. (*DKW*, I, p. 71) It is instead used by the ladies of society to cross dry-shod. Even if they notice him, he remains indifferent, thinking only of his sweetheart. Brentano and Arnim, therefore, present a boy who seems to follow Elwert’s advice. Their boy adores his beloved as if chastened by the

⁷⁸⁹ *DKW*, I, pp. 71–2.

⁷⁹⁰ In other cases, they declared their reliance on Elwert’s collection, cf. Stein, ‘Anselm Elwert’, p. 99.

⁷⁹¹ Elwert, *Ungedruckte Reste* (1784), p. 55.

consequences of the mistake he had made in the Elwert version, rejecting her as merely one among many, ‘Deins Gleichen gibts noch mehr’.⁷⁹²

A more literal reception of Elwert appears in their song *Müllers Abschied*, which Brentano and Arnim had lifted almost verbatim from Elwert’s *Da droben auf jenem Berge*. Their changes were minimal: a shift in pronouns for metrical alignment – ‘jenem’ becomes ‘dem’ in the opening line – and an amplification of repetitions, a stylistic hallmark often associated with the folk song aesthetic.⁷⁹³

Da droben auf jenem Berge, 1784

Das Mühlenrad ist verbrochen
Die Liebe hat ein End⁷⁹⁴

Müllers Abschied, 1805

Das Rad, das ist gebrochen,
Die Liebe, die hat ein End⁷⁹⁵

Brentano and Arnim also added a final stanza to frame the preceding verses. Rather than citing printed models, they offer a poetic attribution of the song and frame it as a miller’s lament: ‘Die Liedlein [...] hat wohl ein Müller erdacht; / Den hat des Ritters Töchterlein / Vom Lieben zum Scheiden gebracht’.⁷⁹⁶ The provenance is vague enough to sustain the illusion of folk origin, yet sufficiently specific to provide a plausible sociological context. In the earlier case of *Wassersnot*, the changes are extensive enough that one might view it as their own creation, making citation of Elwert unnecessary. *Müllers Abschied*, by contrast, reads almost like a literal transcription, rendering the subtitle ‘Mündlich’ a deliberate fiction. Brentano and Arnim sought to conjure the voice of the singing miller, not the pen of the scholarly editor.

⁷⁹² Ibid., p. 53.

⁷⁹³ Cf. Ernst Schade, ‘Volkslied-Editionen zwischen Transkription, Manipulation, Rekonstruktion und Dokumentation’, *Jahrbuch für Volksliedforschung*, 35 (1990), pp. 44–63.

⁷⁹⁴ Elwert, *Ungedruckte Reste* (1784), pp. 34–5.

⁷⁹⁵ *DKW*, I, p. 94.

⁷⁹⁶ Ibid.

The indebtedness of *DKW* to Elwert is further evidenced on the cover. The title itself is borrowed from Elwert's *Ungedruckte Reste alten Gesangs*. Like Elwert, Brentano and Arnim avoid the term 'Volkslied' and instead use 'Alte deutsche Lieder' as a subtitle. The horn motif comes from a medieval French romance that Elwert had published as the fifth song in his collection, along with a German translation. Its first lines read: 'Ein Knabe kam / Lieblich und schön / Auf einem schnellen Roß / In König Arthurs Schloß. / Ein Horn trug seine Hand. / Daran vier goldne Band'.⁷⁹⁷ This imagery appears on the frontispieces of both the 1806 and 1808 editions of *DKW*:



DKW, I (1806), frontispiece



DWK, II (1808), frontispiece

⁷⁹⁷ Elwert, *Ungedruckte Reste* (1784), p. 13.

The absence of any reference to Elwert once more reflects the logic of the subtitle. Brentano and Arnim aimed to present not just original, authentic songs, but songs of unmistakably German provenance.⁷⁹⁸ Had readers consulted Elwert's volume, they would have discovered the song's French origin. To avoid this, Brentano and Arnim quietly altered the setting:⁷⁹⁹ Elwert's 'König Arthurs Schloß' becomes the vaguer 'der Kaisrin Schloß'.⁸⁰⁰ The subtle editorial change signals a broader reorientation in the understanding of folk authenticity. Where Elwert still operated within a Herderian framework that valued cross-cultural echoes and a universal simplicity – an idea of originality rooted in a shared human condition – Brentano and Arnim begin to narrow down that vision. The universalist ideal of ancient song as a common human inheritance gives way to a Romantic project of national definition.

Despite the obfuscation of Elwert's influence, the connections run deeper. Eight songs from his collection appear in the first volume of *DKW*, making him one of the anthology's key (if uncredited) contributors alongside Herder and Nicolai.⁸⁰¹ Correspondence between Brentano and Arnim in 1805 confirms Elwert's importance. Arnim received a copy of *Ungedruckte Reste* in February and praised its rendering of Main-Franconian diction. Two lines especially struck him: 'und wenn zwei Liebercher [sic] scheiden, / so drücken sie einander die Händ'. They reminded him of Brentano's voice shaped by life between the Main and the Rhine.⁸⁰² In 1806, Brentano met Elwert and immediately tested

⁷⁹⁸ In light of this, it seems difficult to maintain Rölleke's view that the titular poem's gradual shift toward a more national tone was not consciously intended, cf. Rölleke's commentary in *DKW*, I, p. 421: 'dass die national verengte Rezeptionsgeschichte von den Herausgebern nicht intendiert war'.

⁷⁹⁹ Cf. Heinz Rölleke's commentary in *DKW*, I, pp. 420–21.

⁸⁰⁰ Elwert, *Ungedruckte Reste* (1784), p. 13; Arnim and Brentano, *DKW*, I, p. 17.

⁸⁰¹ Stein, 'Anselm Elwert', p. 98.

⁸⁰² Achim von Arnim and Bettina Brentano, *Briefwechsel*, ed. by Reinhold Steig (Bern: Lang, 1970), p. 133. In Elwert, the line reads 'Und wenn zwei Lieberger scheiden...'; cf. Elwert, *Ungedruckte Reste* (1784), p. 35.

the reception of *DKW* by showing him selected songs to see whether he would consider them authentic. Elwert, himself a master of staging antiquity, seems to have been taken in: 'Aber stelle dir vor, dieser alte Praktikus selbst erkennt unsere Restauration und Ipsefacten für aecht'.⁸⁰³ Elwert's impact on the Heidelberg Romantics goes beyond intertextual borrowing. Brentano and Arnim adopted from him key strategies for presenting their folk songs as original. First among these was the staging of orality. Like Elwert, they used explicit paratextual cues such as 'Mündlich' to signal oral provenance, often regardless of the song's actual transmission. This supposedly unbroken oral lineage allowed them to frame their texts as unspoiled by both print culture and historical-critical methods.

By the time of *DKW*, the idea of originality had been decisively severed from the notion of creative innovation. Herder had already redefined originality in terms of collective expression and natural poetry. Brentano and Arnim radicalised this shift. For them, originality lay not in authorship but in belonging, in the song's rootedness within a German communal past, its survival across generations, and its persistence in oral form. Notions of long oral tradition and authenticity gradually became the twin pillars of originality in Romantic folk song. And it was Elwert, not the Heidelberg Romantics or Grimms, who first expressed these notions decisively in the sphere of folk song collections. Decades before *DKW* or *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, Elwert had already developed the editorial and paratextual strategies that would come to define the Romantic paradigm of folk authenticity.

⁸⁰³ *Clemens Brentano, Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, ed. by Jürgen Behrens and others (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1975–), xxxi, *Briefe 3, 1803–1807*, ed. by Lieselotte Kinskofer (1991), p. 515.

Locating Antiquity: The Spatial Parameters of Originality in *Wünschelruthe* (1818)

In March 1821, a letter arrived in Göttingen addressed to the ‘Männlein mit der Wünschelruthe’.⁸⁰⁴ The sender was a young Heinrich Heine, having recently discovered Heinrich Straube’s co-edited magazine *Wünschelruthe*. A year later, Heine penned a poetic tribute, *An H. Str.*, which offers a gloss on the magazine’s project. The sonnet speaks of recovered splendours: ‘goldene Bilder’ from his childhood, myths and fairytales reawakened in the pages of the journal, and of a sacred architecture rebuilt in memory: ‘Der frommen Dom, den deutscher Glaube baute, / Ich hör’ der Glocken und der Orgel Laute’ (6–7).⁸⁰⁵ These lines conjure the afterlife of a once-Christian, once-German world. Following Napoleon’s redrawing of the German political map, dismantling ecclesiastical states and imperial structures alike, Heine’s evocation of restored spiritual grandeur strikes a nostalgic yet resilient chord. In the final tercet, Heine offsets devastation with the promise of rebirth:

Doch mag man immerhin die Eich’ entblättern,
Und sie des grünen Schmuckes rings berauben, –
Kommt neuer Lenz, wird sie sich neu belauben.⁸⁰⁶

Even stripped bare, the German oak will bud again come spring. The tree’s capacity for seasonal self-renewal represents a deeper national hope: that the spiritual and cultural roots of Germany lie dormant rather than dead.

⁸⁰⁴ Heinrich Heine to Heinrich Straube in Göttingen. March 1821. Cf. HS, xx, ed. by Fritz H. Eisner. ‘Briefe 1815–1831’, p. 39.

⁸⁰⁵ HS, I, ed. by Hans Böhm (1979), ‘Gedichte 1812–1827’, p. 58.

⁸⁰⁶ Ibid.

Heine's gesture of poetic restoration subtly revises a poem from the *Wünschelrute*.⁸⁰⁷

There, the same image of a leafless branch, and the wind's indifferent rush, speak not of renewal but of finality. The poem offers no promise of resurrection. Instead, it intones the quiet of a hopeless world:

Wenn Zweige sich entlauben
Dann wird das Leben neu,
Gelöst von allem Glauben
Von jeder Hoffnung frey!

Dann gut, dem Sturm zu lauschen!
Er streift kein Blatt mehr ab,
Nur die gefallnen rauschen
Empor aus ihrem Grab.

Was wollt ihr aber steigen
Die ihr verwelket liegt?
Sobald die Winde schweigen,
Sinkt ihr, wie jetzt ihr fliegt!

Drum bleibt in eurem Grabe,
Ihr weckt den Frühling nicht:
Die Zeit hinkt selbst am Stabe,
Wenn Jugend ihr gebricht!⁸⁰⁸

Nature, here, testifies to loss. The wind, once a herald of transformation, rustles only dead leaves, time itself has become infirm, spring is no longer a certainty, and nature does not heal. This closing quatrain casts both nature and history in a state of irreversible decline. Crucially, 'Die Zeit' – not just time in the abstract, but *our time*, the historical present – appears crippled, leaning on a staff, because it lacks the regenerative force of youth. Poetic and political renewal alike are stalled in a present that is unable to imagine its own future. Heine's response, then, is a countermove: a poetic effort to redeem a national symbol from within its own premature elegy.

⁸⁰⁷ Friedrich Gottlob Wetzel's 'An den Bergkönig' in *Wünschelrute. Ein Zeitblatt*, 19 (1818), ed. by Heinrich Straube and Johann Peter von Hornthal, p. 75. Moreover, cf. poem no. 2 in *Wünschelrute. Ein Zeitblatt*, 14 (1818), p. 56.

⁸⁰⁸ Ibid.

Wünschelruthe did not live to see the spring. Despite Heine's vision of renewal, the magazine enjoyed only a brief life, launching in January 1818 and quietly fading after just 52 issues. And yet, in this short span, it assembled a formidable constellation of contributors: among them the Brothers Grimm, Ludwig Uhland, Wilhelm Müller, Clemens Brentano, and Achim von Arnim. The editors, Heinrich Straube (1794–1847) and Johann Peter von Hornthal (1794–1864), envisioned *Wünschelruthe* as a literary forum for establishing and promoting a spiritual and 'public' dialogue with the 'Vaterland'.⁸⁰⁹ In so doing, *Wünschelruthe* echoed the restorative impulses of Romantic nationalism while embedding itself in the philological and antiquarian currents of the age.

Not all shared this vision. Achim von Arnim, while sympathetic in spirit, expressed reservations about the magazine's lack of contemporary engagement. Subtitled *Ein Zeitblatt*, *Wünschelruthe* might have promised a focus on current events.⁸¹⁰ Instead, it trafficked in 'timeless' material – folk songs, legends, and tales – drawn from the national past. Arnim therefore suggested adapting the journal's structure to better reflect the international literary press and thereby broaden its appeal.⁸¹¹ What *Wünschelruthe* supposedly lacked in timeliness, it claimed back in originality. In contrast to the cosmopolitanism Arnim envisioned, the magazine offered a different model: a poetics of return, where old *Volkslieder* were gathered for renewed collective performance. These

⁸⁰⁹ Cf. 'Ankündigung eines neuen Zeitblattes: Wünschelruthe', in *Wünschelruthe. Ein Zeitblatt*, ed. by Heinrich Straube and Johann Peter von Hornthal, 52 vols (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck&Ruprecht, 1818), I, preface (n. p.).

⁸¹⁰ Cf. L.A.v. Arnim to A. von Haxthausen, Berlin, 2 April 1818: '[Die Wünschelruthe hätte] eben so gut früher oder später [...] das Geleistete liefern können'. Quoted after: K. Schulte Kemminghausen, '[D]ie Form eines solchen Blatts verlangt, daß es wirklich mit der Tagesgeschichte der Zeit in einer notwendigen Berührung stehe', in Karl Schulte Kemminghausen, 'Aus dem Briefwechsel zwischen Achim von Arnim und August von Haxthausen', *Jahrbuch für Volksliedforschung*, 4 (1934), pp. 138–44, p. 142.

⁸¹¹ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 141–42.

songs, they believed, had to be sung and heard together once more to regenerate the very (pre-modern) communal spirit from which they had supposedly emerged.

The editors' lens was shaped by the discontinuities of post-Napoleonic Germany. The *Vaterland* they invoked in 1818 was no longer the fragmented but familiar patchwork of the Holy Roman Empire. The German lands had been territorially and politically transformed. Between 1795 and 1814, the *Reichsdeputationshauptschluss* and the Confederation of the Rhine redrew the political map,⁸¹² subordinating and secularising hundreds of principalities in favour of emerging great powers: Prussia, Bavaria, Baden, and Württemberg. The Congress of Vienna in 1815 confirmed this new order, establishing the German Confederation as an abstract federation of thirty-nine states, far removed from the historical continuities these Romantic thinkers hoped to recover. In response, *Wünschelrute* shifted the terms of cultural originality, seeking authenticity not in antiquity alone but in place, real or remembered, as a review essay on Görres's *Altdeutsche Volks- und Meisterlieder* (1817), which celebrates the return of the *Bibliotheca Palatina* to Heidelberg,⁸¹³ makes clear:

Der deutsche Baum der nach Rom verpflanzt und dort weder angehen noch Früchte tragen wollen, nachdem er wieder im deutschen Boden Wurzel gefaßt, gleich gegrünet und geknospet hat. Da ziehen dann die Vögel hin und pflücken die Blätter und tragen sie umher und oculiren sie jedem wilden Schößling, [...] unten aber mit den Wurzeln fester in die Erde, welche ihn mit dem anderen als Vaterland verbindet.⁸¹⁴

⁸¹² Friedrich Meinecke, *Das Zeitalter der deutschen Erhebung 1795–1815* (Bielefeld: Velhagen&Klasing, 1906).

⁸¹³ However, only 847 volumes of the *Bibliotheca Palatina* were returned to Heidelberg in 1816, cf. Friedrich Wilken, *Geschichte der Bildung, Beraubung und Vernichtung der alten Heidelbergschen Büchersammlungen: ein Beytrag zur Literärgeschichte vornehmlich des funfzehnten und sechszehten Jahrhunderts, nebst einem Verzeichniß der im Jahr 1816 von dem Papst Pius VII. der Universität Heidelberg zurückgegebenen Handschriften und einigen Schriftproben* (Heidelberg: [n. pub., 1817], pp. 273–546.

⁸¹⁴ Anon., review of 'Ueber die Altdeutschen Volks- und Meisterlieder aus den Handschriften der Heidelberger Bibliothek, herausgegeben von J. Görres (Frankf. a. M. b. Wilmans 1817)', *Wünschelrute. Ein Zeitblatt*, 42 (1818), pp. 165–66; Cf. also *Wünschelrute. Ein Zeitblatt*, 43 (1818), p. 172; *Wünschelrute. Ein Zeitblatt*, 44 (1818), pp. 175–76; *Wünschelrute. Ein Zeitblatt*, 45 (1818), pp. 179–80.

The image of the German tree that refuses to thrive in Roman soil but flourishes once replanted in native ground encodes a vision of Germanness as rooted, resistant, and autochthonous. It stages a rejection of foreign transplantation, of cultural forms imposed from without, particularly those associated with Classical tradition. By contrast, its renewed flourishing upon return to ‘German soil’ affirms a national essence bound to organic continuity.

Even as the reviewer draws on the metaphor of uniquely ‘German soil’, he simultaneously gestures towards a more comparative vision of a folk song tradition and to the history of eighteenth-century folk song collections and the editorial assumptions that shaped them. Grounded in the idea of continuous oral transmission, folk songs are described as literary chameleons, ‘Thiere [welche] die Farbe des Laubes bekommen worauf sie leben’.⁸¹⁵ This adaptability is framed through a familiar Enlightenment trope: the universal similarity of human nature. The reviewer observes a ‘seltsame Aehnlichkeit zwischen den Volksliedern aller Nationen, dieselben Gedanken, Wendungen, Worte, die aber freilich in jeder menschlichen Brust gut gegründet’.⁸¹⁶ Weiße and Herder had offered similar views decades earlier,⁸¹⁷ linking the common features of ‘natural poetry’ to the shared conditions of early, pre-civilised societies.⁸¹⁸ Yet what the *Wünschelruthe* reviewer adds is a concept of national feeling, a sentiment that, while distinctly expressed within each culture, nevertheless manifests in strikingly similar ways across them. Folk poetry thus inherits the epistemological role once assigned to natural poetry

⁸¹⁵ *Wünschelruthe. Ein Zeitblatt*, 42 (1818), p. 166.

⁸¹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸¹⁷ Even in Herder’s works, however, universalist tendencies are laced with more nationally minded sentiments, cf. Kaspar Renner, ‘Die “eine deutsche Nation” und die “vielen kleinen Völker”’: Zur doppelten Emergenz von nationalpoetischem und kulturalanthropologischem Diskurs in Herders Alten Volksliedern (1773–1775)’, *Études Germaniques*, 303.3 (2022), pp. 301–20.

⁸¹⁸ Cf. Anon. [Christian Felix Weiß], review of ‘The Works of Ossian the Son of Fingal, in Two Vols’.

by Herder's generation, offering a new paradigm of originality grounded in emotional authenticity and anthropological essence. While the tension between universality and cultural specificity shaped much of the eighteenth-century discourse on folk song, *Wünschelrute* reflects a shift in emphasis, away from the timeless and towards the located, from the universal condition to the national landscape.

Running parallel to this shift is a broader historical bifurcation in the status of folk song.⁸¹⁹ On the one hand, folk song represented an elevated art form cultivated by the educated elite; on the other, it continued circulation of simpler songs among the *Volk*,⁸²⁰ which here functions as a socially stratified category, or a shorthand for the so-called 'uneducated' classes.⁸²¹ By the time the latter type is 'discovered', it already shows signs of decline.⁸²² The connoisseur of simplicity destroys what he seeks by the very act of finding it and putting it on a pedestal. The folk poet, once imagined as the mouthpiece for a unified collective, now finds himself split between audiences, and the act of preservation begins to look uncomfortably like appropriation. *Wünschelrute*, in turn, does not aim to elevate *Volkslieder* into *Kunstlieder* for cultivated audiences. Indeed, the editors criticised this practice in reviews.⁸²³ Instead, the magazine reevaluates the *Volk* as cultural agents by dignifying the songs that continue to circulate in intimate and everyday settings. If the collections discussed earlier grounded originality in temporal depth, locating songs in a mythic and ancient past, *Wünschelrute* relies less on temporal

⁸¹⁹ Herder was forced to navigate between these extremes: on one side, the vulgar cacophony of the mob ('Geschrei des Pöbels'); on the other, the overwrought artificiality of bardic pastiche. Cf. HW, III, ed. by Ulrich Gaier, 'Volkslieder I', pp. 226, 239, and HW, II, ed. by Gunter Grimm, 'Rezensionen: Denis' "Die Gedichte Ossians"', p. 742.

⁸²⁰ On the term 'Volk' and its different meaning at the end of the eighteenth century, cf. David Hill, 'Bürger and 'das schwankende Wort Volk'', in *The Challenge of German Culture. Essays presented to Wilfried van der Will*, ed. by Michael Butler and others (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), pp. 25–36.

⁸²¹ Cf. Anon., rev. of 'Ueber die Altdeutschen Volks- und Meisterlieder', p. 166.

⁸²² Ibid.

⁸²³ Ibid.

remoteness than on its transformation into a kind of spatial embeddedness. The magazine conjures a literary geography: a mosaic of regional voices, dialect zones, and remembered territories that transcends political boundaries. Its paratexts invoke not only contemporary political regions (such as Hessen), but older cultural designations (such as Thuringia),⁸²⁴ linguistic zones ('Norddeutsch'), and even national categories ('Schottisch', 'Romanisch') that gesture across borders.

This spatial turn coincides with broader shifts in textual scholarship. By the early nineteenth century, the vague temporal claims that had rested on the rhetoric of timeless antiquity were giving way to the more exacting standards of philology.⁸²⁵ Through Karl Lachmann and his contemporaries, texts acquired histories, variants, and traceable paths of descent. Provenance became the foundation of scholarly authority. Geography was a material dimension of textual life, while the concept of manuscript families established spatial parameters for understanding textual genealogy. Under this new dispensation, authenticity depended not on tone or antiquarian flavour, but on demonstrable material genealogy and geographic continuity.⁸²⁶ For a song to register as authentic, sounding ancient no longer sufficed; it had to be *placed*. Spatial rootedness became a surrogate for historical depth. A song's authority no longer derived from appeals to mythic antiquity, but from its persistence within a particular dialect, region, or community. Endurance in place began to function as a guarantee of antiquity, transposing temporal depth onto the terrain of geography.

⁸²⁴ On the nation as a cultural phenomenon, cf. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

⁸²⁵ Cf. Timpanaro, *The Genesis of Lachmann's Method*.

⁸²⁶ On the late eighteenth century's growing fascination with material culture: archaeology, antiquarianism, and the fetishisation of manuscripts as historical artefacts, cf. Peter N. Miller, *History and its Objects: Antiquarianism and Material Culture since 1500* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018); *Producing the Past: Aspects of Antiquarian Culture and Practice 1700–1850*, ed. by Lucy Peltz and Martin Myrone (Boca Raton, FL: Routledge, 2018).

This was not a wholly new mode of cultural validation; the idea that place could authenticate a text had long existed, especially in relation to authorship. In the late eighteenth century – as I have shown with the reception of Ossian – originality was conceived as shooting up from authorial soil, a specific personality rooted in a specific location. A work’s authenticity thus depended on proximity to the author’s life and landscape. Goethe, for instance, in his *Xenie* 355, ‘Homer’, satirised how ‘Sieben Städte zankten sich drum, ihn geboren zu haben, / Nun, da der Wolf ihn zerriß, nehme sich jede ein Stück’.⁸²⁷ Once Wolf’s philology had dismantled Homer as a unified author, the distich suggests, the text was no longer a monument to singular genius but a mosaic of fragments.⁸²⁸ Yet, the hunger to claim a birthplace persisted even in the absence of a coherent author as originator of a work. Goethe’s joke cuts both ways, at once exposing the futility of grounding authenticity in biography, while also acknowledging the fragmentation that emerges when authorship dissolves. Goethe’s logic surfaces again in Heyne’s review of Wood’s *Essay on the Original Genius of Homer*, where authenticity is said to reside in landscape itself. Heyne privileges observations made by someone who has stood where Homer sang, where Achilles fought, where Odysseus travelled:

Anmerkungen und Betrachtungen über den Homer von einem Mann, welcher auf der Stelle gewesen ist, wo Homer sang, Achill focht und Ulyß reißte, müssen ohnedem Aufmerksamkeit verdienen.⁸²⁹

For Heyne, the place where Homer sang coincides with the place where Homer’s works are set. A similar dynamic animates the Ossian debate: defenders of Ossian’s historical

⁸²⁷ Cf. FA, I.1, ed. by Karl Eibl, ‘Gedichte, 1756–1799’, p. 536.

⁸²⁸ The problem of Homer’s origin, and the different cities that claimed to be his birthplace, is already mentioned in antiquity. Cf. Lukian, ‘Δημοσθένους ἐγκώμιον’, 1–7. Cf. also Lukian ‘True Stories’, 2.20.

⁸²⁹ Christian Gottlob Heyne, review of ‘An Essay on the Original Genius of Homer (1769)’, in Robert Wood, *Versuch über das Originalgenie des Homer*, trans. by Christian Friedrich Michaelis (Frankfurt a.M.: Andreae, 1773), pp. 6–26, p. 7.

authenticity argued that his verses bore the untamed imprint of the Scottish highlands. Even in the context of *Genieästhetik*, then, geography was not just context, but evidence. In the time of *Wünschelrute*, however, folk song becomes a medium of cultural continuity, a site where an original tradition remains allegedly untouched by the forces of modernity.

Against the backdrop of both the Napoleonic reorientation of Germany and the newfound emphasis on spatialisation, the editors of *Wünschelrute* were faced with a paradox: too specific a location risked suggesting cultural narrowness, contradicting the expansive and polyphonic tradition associated with original folk songs;⁸³⁰ too broad a designation failed to anchor the song in the rootedness that guarantees its authenticity. Rather than bow to one or the other, the magazine's spatial references are strategically imprecise – the song 'Ach schönster Schatz, mein Augentrost', is simply attributed, 'Aus dem Paderborn'schen'. Earlier publications tracing it to Frankfurt am Main, the Odenwald, or Erlach are suppressed.⁸³¹ At the same time, the editors privilege settings that evoke oral transmission over those that suggest textual circulation. They curate locations based on their capacity to stage plausible authenticity ('Mündlich aus Ippinghausen in Hessen').⁸³² Such isolated place names serve a theatrical function, conjuring the image of a collector journeying to remote regions to capture songs first-hand, transforming vague claims of oral transmission into graspable, localised evidence. This geographic selectivity serves the magazine's construction of originality in crucial

⁸³⁰ Cf. Natasha Loges, 'How to Make a 'Volkslied': Early Models in the Songs of Johannes Brahms', *Music and Letters*, 93.3 (2012), pp. 316–49.

⁸³¹ Cf. Ludwig Erk, *Deutscher Liederhort* (Berlin: Enslin 1856), p. 241.

⁸³² The provenance, however, does not seem plausible. The poem is a 'Schnadahüpferl', a genre common for Alpine regions. *Deutscher Liederhort* II (no. 1056) most likely adopts the provenance from *Wünschelrute*.

ways. The fact that a song can be *located* unambiguously suggests it is still embedded in an extant practice of singing. Once a song has been published in print, it is potentially everywhere at once. Local and oral traditions, on the other hand, are rooted in one specific place.

The most potent strategy for underlining this rootedness lies in publishing songs in regional dialects.⁸³³ Dialects, after all, belong to distinct and clearly defined territories and cannot be fabricated or transplanted. The book announcement (*Bücheranzeige*) for Josef Georg Meinert's *Fylgie, oder alte deutsche Volkslieder in der Mundart des Kuhländchens* explicitly praises the decision to preserve songs in their local dialect as evidence of autonomous tradition: '[es] zeugt für die Abgeschlossenheit [...] des Volksstammes, daß alle Lieder im Volksdialect sind'.⁸³⁴ The autonomy of these peoples, their alleged imperviousness to outside influence, transforms them into ideal repositories of original song. Their geographic isolation serves as a window into an imagined past that modernity has not yet corrupted.

This preference for vernacular language might surprise given the recent triumph of High German standardisation. By the late eighteenth century, Adelung's *Über den deutschen Styl* (1787) had established High German's prerogative as the literary language, providing a handbook for clamping down on 'provincial expressions' in published works.⁸³⁵ Critics of the vernacular wielded Adelung's authority like a weapon:

⁸³³ Collections such as Josef Georg Meinert's *Fylgie* (1817) are praised for the absence of any editorial beautifications and their faithful transmission of the vernacular, cf. *Wünschelrute. Ein Zeitblatt*, 30 (1818), p. 120.

⁸³⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸³⁵ Johann Christoph Adelung, *Ueber den deutschen Styl*, 2 vols, 2nd edn (Berlin: Voss und Sohn, 1787).

Allein wir wünschen, daß der Hr. Verf. lieber der in Deutschland einmal eingeführten hochdeutschen Schriftsprache eingedenk gewesen wäre, und sich dessen erinnert hätte, was Hr. Adelung hiervon [...] im 11ten Kapitel seines Buchs über den deutschen Styl gesagt hat.⁸³⁶

This linguistic policing echoed earlier criticisms of Ossian translations for their use of provincial idioms.⁸³⁷ The critique of ‘provincial language’ rested on two pillars: first, that idiomatic expressions obscured meaning and hindered comprehension; second, that provincial language emphasised particularity over the larger German unity. Yet *Wünschelrute*’s embrace of dialect represents a deliberate inversion of these values. In folk song collection, dialects carry the precious cargo of local origins, and particularity becomes not a weakness but the very foundation of authenticity. The magazine transforms the stigma of provincial speech into a badge of cultural honour. Where standardisation threatens to homogenise and modernise, dialect preserves the irreducible diversity that signals genuine tradition. Accordingly, several poems in the *Wünschelrute* are printed in dialect.

The first folk song that appears in a dialect deviating from High German is, tellingly, a Tyrolese song. In 1809, Tyrol had crystallised as a symbol of resistance against Napoleonic reordering,⁸³⁸ when Andreas Hofer’s rebellion briefly installed independence

⁸³⁶ Cf. Anon., ‘Wien’, *Gothaische gelehrte Zeitungen*, 9 (1787), pp. 69–72, p. 71.

⁸³⁷ Cf. Schmid, *Theorie der Poesie*, pp. 218–30, 219; and Anon., review of ‘Die Gedichte Ossians, eines alten Celtischen Dichters aus dem Englischen übersetzt von M. Denis. Zweyter Band [...]. Dritter Band’, *Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek*, 17.2 (1772), pp. 437–47, p. 445.

⁸³⁸ In his *Reisebilder*, Heinrich Heine comments on the events laconically: ‘Von der Politik wissen sie (die Tiroler) nichts, als daß sie einen Kaiser haben, der einen weißen Rock und rote Hosen trägt; das hat ihnen der alte Ohm erzählt, der es selbst in Innsbruck gehört von dem schwarzen Sepperl, der in Wien gewesen. Als nun die Patrioten zu ihnen hinaufkletterten und ihnen beredsam vorstellten, daß sie jetzt einen Fürsten bekommen, der einen blauen Rock und weiße Hosen trage, da griffen sie zu ihren Büchsen, und küßten Weib und Kind, und stiegen von den Bergen hinab, und ließen sich totschiessen für den weißen Rock und die lieben alten roten Hosen’. In HS, VI, ed. by Christa Stöcker, ‘Italien. 1828. I. Reise von München nach Genua’, pp. 7–72, p. 30.

against Bavarian and French forces.⁸³⁹ The title's regional designation thus invokes proud particularism, albeit while spelling 'Tyrol' with Philhellenic orthography.⁸⁴⁰ The poem itself performs authenticity through careful linguistic staging. Its diminutive forms and open vowels announce their Austrian provenance, even as inconsistencies in transcription of Schwa sounds (compare 'ander'/'Schmarotzer' vs. 'Schatzal'/'Bandal'), and occasional inaccuracies ('haglich' for Austrian 'hagli') reveal the editorial hand behind the seemingly natural dialect. The editor provides no explanatory notes or framing commentary, arguably to amplify the text's foreignness:

(Tyroler Lied.)
 Und wann'st auf dei Schatzal
 So haglich willst sey,
 Und so nimm a Papierl
 Und wickel der's nei,

 Und nimm a roths Bandal
 Und bind der's fest zua,
 So kummt der ka andrer
 Schmarotzer dazua.⁸⁴¹

That such words as 'haglich' (picky) would have been virtually incomprehensible to a Göttingen audience serves the magazine's purposes perfectly. The poem's power lies in its capacity to sound authentically Other, and thus to suggest both remoteness and a tradition undisturbed by linguistic standardisation and cultural modernisation.

This Tyrolese song serves as a template for examining the magazine's complex relationship with its sources. Previous scholarship has claimed that Achim von Arnim

⁸³⁹ *Triumph der Provinz: Geschichte und Geschichten 1809–2009*, ed. by Johann Holzner, Brigitte Mazohl, and Markus Neuwirth (Innsbruck: Innsbruck University Press, 2012); Wolfgang Pfaundler and Werner Köfler, *Der Tiroler Freiheitskampf 1809 unter Andreas Hofer: Zeitgenössische Bilder, Augenzeugenberichte u. Dokumente* (Munich: Süddeutscher Verlag, 1984).

⁸⁴⁰ On the relationship of Philhellenism and Romantic folk song collections, and their indebtedness to earlier models of natural poetry, cf. Marco Hillemann, 'Die Geburt Griechenlands aus dem Geiste der Musik: Der romantische Volkslied-Diskurs und seine Bedeutung für den deutschen Philhellenismus', *Germanistica Euromediterrae*, 6.1 (2025), pp. 29–46.

⁸⁴¹ *Wünschelrute. Ein Zeitblatt*, 2 (1818), p. 8.

contributed only three poems to *Wünschelrute*, all of them his own creations.⁸⁴² Yet this song, which appeared in the magazine in 1818, clearly derives from Arnim's unpublished collection. A handwritten copy has survived in his estate, later published by Ludwig Erk in 1854, showing only orthographic variations from the magazine version.⁸⁴³ The discovery suggests Arnim played a far more active role in the magazine's folk song publications than previously assumed. His acquaintance with August von Haxthausen, one of *Wünschelrute*'s main contributors, provides a plausible channel for transmission. After having received some of Brentano's and Arnim's original copies of *Wunderhorn*-songs via Joseph Görres, Haxthausen explicitly approached Arnim in 1818 seeking folk songs that he and Brentano had not used for *DKW*.⁸⁴⁴ This practice likely extends to other songs whose origins remain shrouded in editorial discretion. *Wünschelrute*'s citational practices, in turn, reveal a sophisticated strategy for establishing independence from *DKW*'s towering authority. The magazine references Brentano's and Arnim's collection only when deviating from their versions, a practice that paradoxically uses the earlier collection's prestige to authenticate the magazine's own editorial choices. Independence, it seems, must be performed through strategically selective acknowledgment rather than silence.

Another case of the magazine's finessing of source attribution comes with Hans Rudolf Schröter's treatment of 'Romanze', a song in the tradition of 'Da droben auf jenem

⁸⁴² Schulte Kemminghausen, 'Briefwechsel zwischen Arnim und Haxthausen', pp. 139–40: 'Von ihm [i.e. Arnim] erschien in Nr. 5 vom 15. Januar das Gedicht 'Zur Weihnachtszeit' (*Was leuchtet durch die Nacht so helle*), in Nr. 12 vom 9. Februar 'Die heiligen Zeichen. Romance' (*Wunder! schreit's durch alle Gassen*). [...] [140] und schließlich in Nr. 51 (29. Juni) das Sonett 'Oliviers Berchtolsgadner Landschaft' (*Ich schließ die Augen und vor meinen Blicken*). [...] Aus dem Inhalt ist ersichtlich, daß Arnim schon früher einen Brief mit zwei Gedichten an die gleiche Anschrift geschickt hatte. Es wird sich um die beiden oben an erster Stelle genannten Beiträge handeln'.

⁸⁴³ Ludwig Achim v. Arnim, *Sämmtliche Werke. Neue Ausgabe*, ed. by Wilhelm Grimm (Berlin: Veit, 1839–54), xxi, *Des Knaben Wunderhorn. Alte deutsche Lieder, Teil 4: Nachlaß 5*, ed. by Ludwig Erk (1854), p. 129.

⁸⁴⁴ Cf. Schulte Kemminghausen, 'Briefwechsel zwischen Arnim und Haxthausen', pp. 138 and 140.

Berge'.⁸⁴⁵ Schröter claims to deliver a version taken directly from oral tradition ('Mündlich aus Schlesien'), justifying publication through the outstanding beauty of this orally transmitted text compared to Arnim and Brentano's printed version: 'vieler schönen Züge wegen, die dort [i.e. in *DKW*] fehlen, schien die vorliegende Mittheilung zu verdienen'.⁸⁴⁶ Yet textual evidence suggests a more complex genealogy. References to Herder and Elwert, who previously published versions of the same song, are omitted altogether. Whether Schröter simply did not know them, or decided to suppress them, is a moot point, though several striking similarities between *Wünschelrute*, Herder, and Elwert suggest the latter. The forget-me-not, missing in *DKW*, is mentioned in both Elwert and *Wünschelrute*, albeit in the shape of a golden ring in *Wünschelrute*, not the muscat and cloves in Elwert. Both in Herder and Elwert, the decision to take the veil is portrayed as a decision of the beloved herself: 'Ich will jetzt in ein Kloster gehn' (Elwert, p. 53 and HW, III, p. 75), 'Ins Kloster will ich ziehen/Will werden eine Nonn' (*Wünschelrute*, 30, p. 118, ll. 23–24). In *DKW*, on the other hand, it is the father of the girl who determines her fate: 'Mein Vater will mich ins Kloster tun' (*DKW*, I, p. 227). More telling still, and suggesting Schröter's indebtedness to Herder and Elwert, is the almost literal repetition of the line 'Die Lieb' ist reitenswerth' in all three sources, and its absence in *DKW*.⁸⁴⁷ Schröter's footnote in acknowledgement of the *DKW*-variant shows that he accounted for previous publications of the song. The textual evidence, however, suggests that those publications were not necessarily the ones he relied on. What Schröter aimed to do by referencing *DKW*, but transmitting a text that differs in many aspects from Brentano's and Arnim's

⁸⁴⁵ *Wünschelrute. Ein Zeitblatt*, 30 (1818), pp. 118–19.

⁸⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, I, 32; Elwert, *Ungedruckte Reste* (1784), p. 54; HW, III, ed. by Ulrich Gaier, 'Volkslieder', p. 76.

version, was to underline the autonomy of an allegedly oral tradition, and the value of *Wünschelruthe* as an independent source.

Such direct appeals to the reader's participation recur throughout the magazine, both suggesting and coaching an extant oral song tradition. The magazine's first section of 'Volkslieder', for example, opens with a strategic invitation to submit allegedly lost melodies for the songs that are here printed as texts only:

Volkslieder. Uns eine vollständige Anzeige über ein Werk vom deutschen Volksgesang vorbehaltend, welches sich von den übrigen Sammlungen dadurch scheidet, daß es eine Hauptrücksicht auf die Musik der Lieder nimmt, werden wir in diesen Blättern einige Lieder geben, zu denen uns die Melodien fehlen, und wobei wir Jeden, der Freude daran hat, und dem sie vielleicht zu Ohren kommen, bitten, uns sie – die Melodien – mitzutheilen.⁸⁴⁸

The appeal performs multiple functions in the magazine's staging of authenticity. The passage firstly stresses the communal aspect of folk culture. Everyone who takes pleasure in folk songs ('Jeder, der Freude daran hat') has something to contribute, regardless of education or expertise. The magazine thereby presents itself as a space where the population helps construct the popular.⁸⁴⁹ The phrase 'zu Ohren kommen' secondly emphasises word-of-mouth distribution, reinforcing the central role of oral circulation, which is then given a musical correlate in the negative. The magazine does not reproduce the texts' melodies to emphasise that the living practice of folk song performance exists, in its current form, beyond the fixities of textual preservation.

The magazine's invocation 'Deutscher Volksgesang' is beset by a paradox. The editors, elsewhere, deliberately fragment Germany's borders through two complementary strategies: firstly, through paratextual references to regions that exceed the German

⁸⁴⁸ *Wünschelruthe. Ein Zeitblatt*, 2 (1818), p. 8.

⁸⁴⁹ This concept reminds of Arnim's and Brentano's self-fashioning as editors who allegedly disappear behind the collective and return their songs to the people who had produced them. Cf. de Mazza, *Der verfaßte Körper*, p. 361.

Confederation's boundaries, and, secondly, through dialectal markers that linguistically demarcate local origins. A truly German folk song, in *Wünschelrute's* vision, must display rootedness in pre-national regional traditions. Such is the emphasis on the enduringly local that the magazine rides roughshod over contemporary political realities to encompass the territorial legacy of the Holy Roman Empire. Poems, such as 'Friedrich Barbarossa und Konradin' for example, explicitly evoke Barbarossa as a messianic figure destined to restore the Empire to its former glory.⁸⁵⁰ The implication is that until that mythical awakening, the German population must seek the Empire's remains in folk song tradition as fragments of a vanished wholeness preserved in regional particularity.

Wünschelrute's construction of folk song authenticity thus provides a snapshot of originality as a fundamentally political category in the early nineteenth century. The magazine's geographic and linguistic strategies serve not merely to identify ancient sources but to imagine a cultural unity that transcends the fragmented political reality of post-Napoleonic Germany. Crucially, antiquity no longer requires explicit demonstration but becomes implied in what has taken centre stage as the criterion of originality: rootedness in specific spatial parameters. The magazine's inconsistent dating matters less than its consistent invocation of place and dialect as authenticating markers. Through this lens, the magazine's editorial practices, their selective geography, performative orality, and strategic citation, emerge as sophisticated technologies for manufacturing cultural continuity. *Wünschelrute* transforms the stigma of political fragmentation into the virtue of cultural diversity, suggesting that authentic Germanness can only be found in the irreducible particularity of regional traditions. The magazine's

⁸⁵⁰ *Wünschelrute. Ein Zeitblatt*, 9 (1818), p. 36.

ultimate achievement lies in making this constructed authenticity appear natural, inevitable, and – above all – original.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that what began in the 1760s as a cross-cultural pursuit of folk poetry hardened, by the nineteenth century, into a politics of national belonging. At stake was not merely aesthetic taste but the very meaning of originality, transformed from a category of individual genius into one of temporally and, finally, spatially rooted authenticity. Ossian first crystallised this shift. His verses, taken as fragments of a poetic *Urzeit*, seemed to offer an alternative to Enlightenment rationalism. The very absence of sophistication was taken as proof of their authentic oral tradition, and thus, of temporal depth and primeval ‘originality’. Yet their status was fragile: if originality opposed imitation, how could imitation of Ossian itself appear original? Herder resolved the paradox by relocating originality from author to community, from invention to transmission. The proof of authenticity no longer lay in biography but in style – in the ‘barbaric’ clarity and roughness that were read as tokens of oral antiquity. But this aesthetic criterion quickly collapsed into parody, as the *Bardengeschmack* revealed how easily *Ursprünglichkeit* could be manufactured.

Collectors therefore turned to provenance. Transmission – where and how a song survived – replaced style as the decisive marker of depth. By 1800, however, even this temporal logic gave way to a spatial one. In the wake of the Empire’s dissolution and the territorial fractures of the Confederation, German provinciality gained new currency. Editorial gestures emphasising such provincial elements created what might be called a layered temporality, in which the past survived within the textures of the present: in accent, idiom, and localised memory. As regional rootedness, once marginal, emerged

as the vehicle for national continuity that political realities could no longer provide, so songs anchored in local soil became the symbolic surrogates of a dismembered national body. The editorial choices that shaped the collections analysed in this chapter – what dialect to preserve, what region to name, what oral source to cite – are thus not simply acts of classification. These were ultimately acts of cultural imagination: decisions about what kind of past can be claimed, and by whom. Around 1800, then, we do not see the disappearance of originality, but its redirection: Originality is no longer staged through the inspired genius of an author, but through the enduring voice of a region. As both artefact and agent, the *Volkslied* is a trace of what has been lost, and a medium through which cultural identity is reconstructed.

Conclusion

This thesis has traced the discourse of *Ursprünglichkeit* and its entanglement with the emerging consciousness of Deep Time during the decades around 1800, in which the temporal and epistemic frameworks of the early modern world were profoundly reconfigured. In this context, the Romantic preoccupation with beginnings, of peoples, languages, and the earth itself, appears not as a retrospective curiosity but as a defining response to a newly temporalised sense of history. My study has shown how across lexicography, natural history, philology, and literature, the proliferation of *ur*-compounds and the notion of originality expressed by them indexes this shift: the language of origins became the site where human and natural times were jointly negotiated. By attending to the idea of *Ursprünglichkeit* across these fields, I have sought to demonstrate how Romantic engagement transformed the very idea of origin from a theological given into a flexible mode of thought that could generate new forms of cultural legitimacy and knowledge in an age of perceived discontinuity.

As discussed in the Introduction, the *ur*-prefix often served as a temporal marker, a linguistic attempt to discipline the abyssal vastness that studies of natural history had newly disclosed. While the precise chronometry once ventured by Buffon, his 75000 years, had long been abandoned, the term *Urzeit* still sought to circumscribe the incomprehensible – that which lay beyond measurable history – within language. Both notions of the primeval and the primordial informed this understanding of *Urzeit*, and with it, *Ursprünglichkeit*. Yet the two terms were not identical connotations. The primeval denoted temporal anteriority, the first in a chronological series, whereas the primordial suggested systematic priority, the origin as principle or archetype. Around 1800, these

two meanings came to interlock: the temporally remote and the conceptually originary were read together as mutually illuminating. Novalis's archetypal Golden Age, oscillating between a bygone era and a timeless ideal, is one example analysed in Chapter One. For Novalis, and with him the broader circle of thinkers invested in constructing a 'New Mythology', Deep Time was not a mere quantitative expanse but a speculative medium through which the remote *Urzeit* could appear as the germ of a higher synthesis: a past whose recovery promised a future reconciliation. What others perceived as a vertiginous abyss, the Romantics around Novalis construed as latent plenitude.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, this speculative reading of Deep Time began to acquire sharper cultural definition. After the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire in 1806, the vocabulary of origins was drawn into political and philological projects that sought to articulate coherence in the absence of empire. The conjoined logics of primevality and primordality thus solidified into a programme of cultural self-specification. *Ursprünglichkeit* became the conceptual medium through which temporal distance, linguistic genealogy, and national imagination could be rendered commensurate. As the lexicographical overview of the Introduction already indicated, however, the association of *Ursprünglichkeit* with purity did not emerge *ex nihilo* in 1806. Linguistic purism had long upheld cultural untaintedness as an ideal, well before Germany possessed anything like a national movement. Chapter Two demonstrates how this ideal was intertwined with several threads of the discourse of origins: the dream of immemorial antiquity, the preservation of a cultural kernel, the desire for an unbroken lineage. The destabilisation of chronology wrought by geological Deep Time further renewed the urgency of inquiring into human beginnings. Sources dismissed a century

earlier for their discord with Scripture,⁸⁵¹ especially those with an Orientalist inflection, now acquired prestige, as though they too had surfaced from a hidden Deep Time. Amidst the fragile political landscape of early nineteenth-century Germany, poised between empire and nation, and marked by Napoleonic occupation, Orientalist philology and literature sought an ideological anchor in the imagined Orient. Linguistic arguments concerning primordality, the classification of certain languages as systematically ancient and aligned with the trope of humanity's childhood, as in Herder, converged with a temporal scheme of primevality, tracing a descent that could serve as the point of departure for a German lineage. Out of this convergence arose conceptions of an essentially German culture, an 'authentic' Germanness reimagined as a mode of *Ursprünglichkeit*.

Chapter Three turned away from the Orient to examine the search for distinctly German literary and aesthetic registers of *Ursprünglichkeit*, though still governed by the same paradigms of antiquity and universality. Within this context, the paradigm of the original genius and the search for collective originality in the *Volkslied* occupy parallel positions in the Romantic reorganisation of *Ursprünglichkeit*. The *Genie*-discourse conceives originality as inner spontaneity. The genius imitates nature from within, generating form through intuitive accord with natural law. The discourse of the *Volk* grounds originality differently, namely as the temporal proximity to a natural state

⁸⁵¹ Long before the decline of biblical literalism, non-European traditions imagined an earth and a human history far older than Genesis allowed. Schlözer mentions among others Babylonian, Chinese and Brahmin sources, all of which he discredits as either errors of translation; incompatible systems of calculating time; or dreams and forgeries. Cf. Schlözer, *Weltgeschichte*, p. 33.; cf. also [Anon.], *Uebersetzung der Allgemeinen Welthistorie die in Engeland durch eine Gesellschaft von Gelehrten ausgefertigt worden. Nebst den Anmerkungen der holländischen Uebersetzung auch vielen neuen Kupfern und Karten. Genau durchgesehen und mit häufigen Anmerkungen vermeret von Siegmund Jacob Baumgarten* (Halle: Gebauer, 1744), p. 489.

preserved in song and custom. Both share the same horizon of natural immediacy, but the *Volkslied* transposes it from individual interiority to collective memory. While their difference lies in the scale on which authenticity is imagined, the one personal, the other communal, both participate in the same logic of mediation that turns temporal depth into moral authority.

The convergence of these modes marks a crucial shift. As the cult of genius waned and the *Volkslied* ascended, *Ursprünglichkeit* came to name not a property of the inspired individual but a structure of cultural legitimation. The *Volk* provided an imagined community through which the scattered energies of Romantic originality could be gathered, akin to a living archive in which antiquity and authenticity appeared to coincide. The transformation of the linguistic province into the symbolic ground of an authentic Germanness was shown to be the product of interdependent assumptions about language, temporality, and nature. By tracing these interrelations, my account reframes the *Genie*-discourse of the late eighteenth century. The discourse was never simply a celebration of creative autonomy, but a complex negotiation between aesthetic individuality and cultural historicity, each sustained by the same operations of *Ursprünglichkeit*.

Across the chapters of this thesis, *Ursprünglichkeit* has emerged not merely as a theme that literature reflects but as a principle through which literature mediates and organises knowledge. In the context of geological and philological thought, literary form became a means of thinking through problems that the sciences could only gesture towards. The vast, unrepresentable durations uncovered by geology found in Romantic writing a set of figurative and temporal solutions. In Novalis's reflections on earth history, for example, narrative techniques, the use of myth and metaphor supplied structures of

understanding where calculation failed. The immensity of geological time, resistant to empirical chronometry, was rendered imaginable through aesthetic condensation. Metaphor transformed discontinuity into coherence, and myth provided a temporal syntax for the otherwise incommensurable. Literature thus did not merely illustrate scientific discoveries. It absorbed and rearticulated them in narrative terms.

A comparable process took place in Orientalist philology. Herder, Görres, and their contemporaries employed literary and rhetorical devices to represent temporal relationships that exceeded the capacities of linguistic evidence. Schlegel's image of 'Völkerschichten' (strata of peoples) exemplifies how language and geology converged not only conceptually but formally, with both disciplines turning to stratigraphic metaphor. In these speculative histories, the figure of *Ursprünglichkeit* serves as a cognitive instrument, making the remote legible, and converting the abyss of time into an ordered continuity. The knowledge produced here is not factual in the scientific sense. Rather, it suggests a knowledge about relationality, analogy, and the conditions under which the past can be rendered intelligible.

This is where my study intersects with two interests of current scholarship on the long eighteenth century: the expanding field of Deep Time studies and the *Wissenspoetik* approach to literature's epistemic agency. By integrating these perspectives, I have sought to show that *Ursprünglichkeit* functioned as a shared conceptual framework through which both natural and human history were newly imagined. Deep Time studies have emphasised how Enlightenment and Romantic writers responded to the discovery of geological profundity. My contribution extends that inquiry into the German sphere, demonstrating that *Ursprünglichkeit* provided a national and linguistic inflection to that global shift. Within *Wissenspoetik*, my work situates *Ursprünglichkeit* as a mode through

which literature participates in the production, not only the reflection, of knowledge. By staging how beginnings are conceived, mediated, and narrated, literary texts render visible the epistemological assumptions of their age. In Romanticism, this meant transforming the ungraspable immensity of time into a thinkable history and grounding the fluidities of culture within figures of origin.

A recurrent insight of this thesis is that Romantic constructions of *Ursprünglichkeit* are never seamless. The very texts that most ardently assert originary depth simultaneously reveal the fissures through which that depth is fabricated. The prefaces and annotations of the *Volkslied* collectors, for example, betray their dependence on print culture and editorial mediation; the comparative genealogies of philologists are haunted by the absence of any singular *Ursprache*, sustained only by a method that both conceals and exposes its conjectural foundations. By reading these materials side by side, this study has traced the fractures within the discourse itself, the moments where the rhetoric of immediacy collapses under the weight of its own mediations. Exposing these fissures has been central to my method, for it allows the underlying mechanics by which cultural authority is asserted to come into view. To read *Ursprünglichkeit* attentively, then, is to perceive both its power to generate authority and its impulse to expose the mechanisms by which that authority is produced. Herein lies the study's critical force: Romanticism stages, in plain view, the very processes that later scientific paradigms and nationalisms, from nineteenth-century evolutionary sciences to the racist supremacism that Germany would show again in the twentieth century when nation wed empire once more, would labour to conceal beneath the veneer of self-evidence. My mapping of *Ursprünglichkeit* across these early nineteenth-century discourses therefore recovers a prequel to some

of the characteristics haunting modern thinking about origins, namely the transition from Romantic self-reflection to the naturalisation of origin in the human and life sciences.

To recognise *Ursprünglichkeit* as a general ordering force is thus to grasp its durability beyond its immediate historical setting. In moments of epistemic or political flux, the appeal to origins performs a stabilising function, furnishing a symbolic ground when established coordinates collapse. Romanticism's strategies for grounding, its search for a *degré zéro* of culture amidst the expanding scales of Deep Time and political upheaval, reveal the adaptive logic by which cultures negotiate disorientation. Nationalism, in this view, is not the inevitable telos of *Ursprünglichkeit* but one among several modes of re-grounding the human in times of transformation. By reconstructing these strategies, my thesis reframes *Ursprünglichkeit* as a paradigm of cultural self-organisation under conditions of instability, a model that continues to illuminate how ideas of authenticity, purity, and origin are mobilised to arrest flux and render historical change intelligible.

This thesis has argued that *Ursprünglichkeit* should be understood not as a category of content but as a mode of cultural production that transforms disjunction into continuity and renders the fragmentary world of the early nineteenth century momentarily whole. Its significance lies not in what it names, but in what it enables – that is, the work it performs across literary, philological, and scientific domains in order to stabilise meaning in a landscape of uncertainty. Romantic *Ursprünglichkeit* functioned as one such mode of imaginative grounding, a way of reconstituting coherence amidst the perceived dissolution of temporal, political, and epistemic order. The strategies by which origins were staged in the early nineteenth century, editorial framing, genealogical reconstruction, analogical thinking, established models of coherence that national historiography, ethnography, and the natural sciences would later inherit. Yet the

Romantic texts examined here retain a self-consciousness that their successors largely effaced. They do not simply build foundations, but reflect on the act of foundation-building itself. To attend to these reflexive seams is to recover a critical method for reading later invocations of identity, nature, or lineage that present themselves as self-evident. In exposing how authority is assembled from fragments, Romanticism provides an analytic grammar for understanding how origin myths, whether in cultural history, political discourse, or scientific explanation, continue to exert force even after their constructedness has been recognised.

In sum, what these constellations of texts and ideas have revealed is that origins are never found. They are made, and remade with every attempt to locate them. This making of origins remains among the most consequential of cultural acts because it governs how societies position themselves in time. The engagement with *Ursprünglichkeit* around 1800 offers a particularly vivid instance of this process, emerging at a moment when the scales of history and the grounds of legitimacy were being radically redrawn. It would be misleading, however, to pretend that this study stands outside the structures it describes. Every reconstruction of an intellectual genealogy performs its own act of origin-making. The boundaries traced here, between Enlightenment and Romanticism, between natural history and philology, are themselves interpretive placements, contingent and revisable. If this thesis has attempted to map the Romantic fabrication of origins, it has also participated in that practice, layering its own strata of interpretation upon those of its subjects. This self-knowledge only aligns my arguments with the insights that Romanticism itself bequeaths. For every origin remains an imaginative construct, whose productive force can only be fully considered when the conditions under which it was created are self-reflexively probed.

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