

“WIR HABEN KEINE MYTHOLOGIE”:
DANTE’S *COMMEDIA* AND THE POETICS OF EARLY GERMAN ROMANTICISM

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ABSTRACT

“WIR HABEN KEINE MYTHOLOGIE”:
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This dissertation reinterprets the German Romantics’ project of writing a new mythology by arguing that the project’s theoretical and poetic contours, as they emerge around 1800, owe to the Romantic engagement with Dante and his *Commedia*. Positioning the *neue Mythologie* vis-à-vis mythographical discourses of the Enlightenment, I begin by showing how A.W. Schlegel’s scholarship on Dante in the early to mid 1790s endorses the *Commedia* as the preeminent symbolic work of Romantic poetry, which in turn grounds Friedrich Schlegel’s theorization of the *Commedia* as a work of universal symbolic value in the mid to late 1790s. Friedrich Schlegel’s activity culminates in the *Rede über die Mythologie*, in which he, having defined the new mythology as a symbolic instantiation of absolute idealism, asserts that any new mythology would necessarily assume the form of the *Commedia*. In subsequent chapters on Novalis, Schelling, and Goethe, I show how these figures take up the challenges of the Schlegel brothers’ literary historiography by adopting both poetic strategies as well as specific scenes from the *Commedia* in order to render the tenets of absolute idealism in a system of Dantean myth.

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Abbreviations

AWSW = *August Wilhelm von Schlegel's Sämtliche Werke*. Edited by Eduard Böcking. Leipzig: Weidmann, 1846-1847. 12 volumes.

FA = *Johann Wolfgang Goethe. Sämtliche Werke. Briefe, Tagebücher und Gespräche*. Edited by Dieter Borchmeyer et. al. Frankfurt: Deutscher Klassiker, 1985—.

HKA = *Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling Historisch-kritische Ausgabe*. Edited by Hans Michael Baumgartner et. al. Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1976—.

Inferno/Purgatorio/Paradiso = Dante. *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*. Edited and translated by Robert M. Durling and Ronald L. Martinez. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996-2013. 3 volumes.¹

KAV = *August Wilhelm Schlegel: Kritische Ausgabe der Vorlesungen*. Edited by Ernst Behler and Frank Jolles. Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1989—.

KFSA = *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*. Edited by Ernst Behler, Jean Jacques Anstett, Hans Eichner (München: F. Schöningh, 1958—.

MA = *Johann Wolfgang Goethe: Sämtliche Werke nach Epochen seines Schaffens*. Edited by Karl Richter, Herbert Göpfert, Norbert Miller, Gerhard Sauder. München: Hanser, 1985—.

SBD = *F.W.J. Schelling, Briefe und Dokumente*, ed. Horst Fuhrmans. Bonn: Bouvier, 1962-1965. 3 volumes.

Schriften = *Novalis Schriften: Die Werke Friedrich von Hardenbergs*. Edited by Paul Kluckhohn and Richard Samuel (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1960 —.

SW = *Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schellings Sämtliche Werke*. Edited by Karl Friedrich August Schelling. Stuttgart, Augsburg: Cotta, 1856-1861. 14 volumes.

WA = *Goethes Werke*. Weimar: Böhlau, 1887-1919. 133 volumes.

¹ I draw on the Italian text of these editions, but translations, unless noted otherwise, are my own.

Introduction

In winter 1799, in the German university town of Jena, there convened at Leutragasse 5 a small community of friends, rivals, lovers, and intellectuals who together wended their way through Dante's *Commedia*. By New Year's, 1800, they had covered some fifty percent of the poem, which is to say they had already coursed through Hell and climbed to the third of Mount Purgatory's seven terraces, where the wrathful like Marco Lombardo dwelt. With the discipline of monks, these German *dantisti* gathered in the evening, plied their Italian on the *Commedia*, and retreated to their cells, only to resume their labors on the next evening. Among these readers were the trailblazing figures in two overlapping sectors of modern German intellectual history: the artistic movement known as Romanticism and the philosophical school known as German idealism.

A.W. Schlegel and his brother Friedrich Schlegel, who would publish the most influential organ of Romantic art theory, the *Athenäum* (1798-1800), were regarded in this community as *cognoscenti* in all matters related to Dante. Among their students were a revolutionary and a novelist, Caroline Schlegel and Dorothea Veit respectively, both of whose connections to German intellectual life ran far and wide. The protean philosopher Friedrich Schelling, who arrived in Jena in 1798 and would articulate the Romantic *Naturphilosophie*, rounded out the class. This Who's Who of Romantic Dante readers, however, does not account for figures on the periphery of the circle who visited and corresponded with the Schlegel household during the winter of 1799. Indeed, that list would include no one less than Johann Wolfgang Goethe, Johann Gottlieb Fichte,

Friedrich Schleiermacher, Ludwig and Amalie Tieck, and the poet Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis).

To be sure, compiling a list of prominent readers of a poet as widely read as Dante is no difficult task. But a series of factors marks this group as worthy of special attention. First of all, at the end of the eighteenth century, when the early German Romantics commenced their study of Dante, there had existed a full German translation of the *Commedia* for a mere three decades; indeed, A.W. Schlegel himself counts as one of the first and certainly most significant translators of the poem. Dante's status as an incontestably canonical poet, in other words, ought not be judged a presupposition of eighteenth-century literary sensibility, for the foundation of his European canonicity owes in no small measure to the efforts of the German Romantics in the first place. A quite different but equally important reason why the Romantic engagement with Dante merits our attention is, as I have suggested above, its communal nature. In an uncommonly fulsome way, we can speak of a *Romantic* reception of Dante, as opposed to a merely Schlegelian or a Schellingian reception, precisely because the *Commedia* impelled a communal intellectual enterprise, indeed a preeminent instance of Romantic *Symphilosophie* that was sustained intensively for several months and sporadically for a few years. Finally, one of the most compelling reasons for a discerning account of the Romantic Dante phenomenon boils down to historical contingency: contrary to what many readers might well suppose — namely, that the Romantic reception of Dante ought to be understood in conjunction with their many conversions to Catholicism and political

conservatism — this reading of Dante occurred precisely at the corona of Romantic theory and poetry.

In fact, in the winter that Dante was read, Friedrich Schlegel had just published *Lucinde* and was at work on the summative statement of Romantic poetics, *Das Gespräch über die Poesie*, while Schelling, in addition to projecting poetic work with Goethe, was putting the finishing touches on his seminal philosophical tract, *Das System des transzendentalen Idealismus*. At the same time, moreover, the so-called *Atheismusstreit* over Fichte's heterodoxy embroiled Jena, Schleiermacher's hugely influential speeches on religion appeared, and the weight of Spinoza's philosophy hit the Romantic circle in full force. It is the cardinal goal of this dissertation to show that the communal reception of Dante, hardly just a *divertimento di notte*, came to shape the Romantics' attempts to receive and process the confluence of literary and philosophical discourses at the end of the eighteenth century.

But don't we already know that Dante was a crucial figure to the Romantics? After all, the seminal histories of the period — those written in the decades around the turn of the twentieth century — all allude to the Romantics' interest in Dante at least in passing.² And the very epithet *Romantik* would seem to presuppose the Romantics' reception of canonical western European writers. I would contend, however, that presuppositions of this sort have forestalled efforts to arrive at a sufficiently differentiated understanding of a phenomenon like the Romantic reception of Dante. Indeed, nothing

² Rudolf Haym, *Die romantische Schule* (Berlin: Gaertner, 1870), Ricarda Huch, *Blütezeit der Romantik* (Leipzig: Haessel, 1899), Oskar Walzel, *Deutsche Romantik* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1908).

would seem to validate this contention more forcefully than the recent statement of a group of scholars who, when organizing a conference on Dante's reception in the twentieth century, asserted the historical priority of their topic by disparaging Romantic treatments of Dante as "a-critical [...] Kitsch tribute."³ Extreme though this formulation might be, its assumption of an undifferentiated Romantic veneration of Dante is hardly uncommon. One of the foremost contemporary scholars of the *Commedia*, Robert Hollander, has dismissed European Romantic adaptations of the poem as reducible to a bit of Goethean *Sturm und Drang*, while one of the twentieth century's most erudite scholars of German Romanticism, Ernst Behler could muster no more than platitudes when summing up the Romantics' interaction with Dante.⁴

In fairness, the Romantics *did* write "romantically" about Dante. In F. Schlegel's words, Dante was the "heilige[r] Stifter und Vater der modernen Poesie."⁵ According to A.W. Schlegel, he was one of the "riesenhaften Schatten der Vorwelt, für die es jetzt an der Zeit ist, wieder aufzuerstehen."⁶ Schelling wrote that where religion and poetry intersect, Dante stands as "Hohepriester und weiht die ganze moderne Kunst für ihre

³ This quote is drawn from the call for papers for a 2009 conference, "Metamorphosing Dante," in which the organizers sought submissions that would treat twentieth and twenty-first-century manipulations of Dante. They defined the parameters of their conference in the CFP by drawing a distinction between the substantive and oblique adaptations of the twentieth century and the "kitsch tribute" of the Romantics. Results of the conference have been published in *Metamorphosing Dante: Appropriations, Manipulations, and Rewritings in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries*, ed. Manuele Gagnolati, Fabio Camilletti, and Fabian Lampart (Wien: Turia + Kant, 2011).

⁴ Hollander, "Dante and his Commentators" in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 232. Behler writes quite blandly that "Dante became a guiding figure for early German Romanticism and the attempt to develop a self-conscious modern style of literature." *Dante Encyclopedia*, ed. Richard Lansing (New York: Routledge, 2010), 266.

⁵ KFSa II, 297.

⁶ KAV II/1, 148.

Bestimmung ein.”⁷ The *Commedia*, F. Schlegel thought, was “das einzige System der transzendentalen Poesie, immer noch das höchste seiner Art,” for “in Einem ungeheuren Gedicht,” the poet had encompassed “seine Nation und sein Zeitalter.”⁸ A.W. Schlegel deemed it nothing less than a “Darstellung des Universums.”⁹ And Schelling, with perhaps the most superlative of remarks, wrote that Dante’s poem stood so sealed off unto itself that it represented “nicht ein einzelnes Gedicht, sondern die ganze Gattung der neueren Poesie”; indeed, as an “eigene Welt” it demanded also its “eigne Theorie.”¹⁰ To the contemporary ear, statements like these of course have a ring of the ridiculous; but to dismiss them as acritical kitsch is to dismiss the substance of Romantic criticism for being Romantic.

Fortunately, the scholarly landscape is not entirely bleak — far from it, in fact. The inquisitive reader (provided she reads Italian or German) can quite readily leaf through any number of by now influential studies on the German reception of Dante. These include Giovanni Scartazzini’s *Dante in Germania* (1881-1883), Emil Sulger-Gebing’s *Dante in der deutschen Literatur bis zum Erscheinen der ersten vollständigen Übersetzung der Divina Commedia 1767/69* (1895), Arturo Farinelli’s *Dante. Spagna — Francia — Inghilterra — Germania* (1922), Werner Friedrich’s *Dante’s Fame Abroad* (1950), and most recently, Eva Hölder’s “*Der Dichter der Hölle und des Exils.*”

⁷ SW V, 152.

⁸ KFSA II, 206, 297.

⁹ KAV II/1, 148.

¹⁰ SW V, 152-53.

Historische und systematische Profile der deutschsprachigen Dante-Rezeption (2002).¹¹

From among the impressively comprehensive scholarship, the character of which is largely indexical and notational rather than interpretive and synthesizing,¹² there emerge however only three genuine accounts of the Romantic reception of Dante: Erich Auerbach's "Entdeckung Dantes in der Romantik" (1929), Clara-Charlotte Fuchs's "Dante in der deutschen Romantik" (1933), and Christian Senkel's "Absolutes in poetischer Entfaltung" (2005). Each of these essentially article-length studies has considerable merits, in particular that of Fuchs,¹³ yet two of them were written nearly one century ago. In any field, so long a silence would warrant new investigation, but this is especially true of German Romanticism. For in the last several decades, the publication of new critical editions (containing the writings of F. Schlegel, Novalis, Schelling) as well as the sweeping historical-philosophical reinterpretations of Romanticism undertaken by Manfred Frank and Frederick Beiser have dramatically altered our understanding of Romantic thought. Indeed, any account of the Romantics as readers of the *Commedia* remains incomplete without registering such substantive revisions in the scholarship on German Romanticism.¹⁴

¹¹ For more detailed accounts of these sources, it is worth consulting Hölter, *Der Dichter der Hölle und des Exils* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2002), 11-16.

¹² There are of course exceptions to the annals of reception history, most of which analyze the relationship of a particular Romantic poet to Dante in an article-length study. One important example is Irmgard Osols-Wehden, *Pilgerfahrt und Narrenreise: der Einfluss der Dichtungen Dantes und Ariosts auf den frühromantischen Roman in Deutschland* (Hildesheim: Weidmann, 1998). Osols-Wehden is almost unique in that she devotes a monograph, and not just an article, to the phenomenon. I single out her book especially because, in its attention to Tieck, it attends to a Romantic poet whom this dissertation omits.

¹³ At 70 pages, Fuchs's study is more than three times as long as those of Auerbach and Senkel, yet still leaves much room for interpretation.

¹⁴ Senkel's account centers on the Schlegel brothers and Schelling from a religious-theological perspective.

My aim in this dissertation lies in showing how the Dante reception around 1800 constitutes a vital thread in the narrative of the *Frühromantik*, with effects that still resonate in Goethe's *Faust II* some three decades later. Specifically, I argue that Dante's *Commedia*, as it was read, interpreted, and adapted around 1800, came to function as a complex and fecund model for the Romantics' ambitious project of creating a new mythology. For all its Romantic trappings, this loosely defined project promulgated the promise of cultural transformation on the basis of artistic education and, in this way, largely recapitulated the doctrine of autonomous art as formulated by Schiller and Goethe in Weimar.¹⁵ To the extent, however, that the new mythology proposed the creation of a single, unified aesthetic culture on the basis of the convergence of realist and idealist philosophy, it adopted a more prescriptive approach to art that necessarily demanded its own design. In its encyclopedic scope, its synthesis of art and science, as well as its harmony of allegory and history, the *Commedia* represented to the Romantic theorists of the new mythology a uniquely apt poetic exemplar for the eidolon they had envisioned.¹⁶ Subsequent chapters in this dissertation will examine how the foundations for Romantic mythological discourse were laid via the Dante studies of A.W. Schlegel; how the theoretical focus of the project was sharpened and delineated by Friedrich Schlegel; how

¹⁵ On the emergence of the Romantic new mythology from the Enlightenment, see Stefan Matuschek, "Was heißt 'Mythologisieren'? Oder: Warum und wie sich die romantische Neue Mythologie der Aufklärung verdankt," in *Romantik und Revolution. Zum Reformpotential einer unpolitischen Bewegung*, ed. Klaus Ries (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag, 2012), 71-82.

¹⁶ In making this point, I concur with Senkel, who writes that the *Commedia* never became an "Operator für Schlegels Textreligion" in the same way it did for example for Stefan George or Rudolf Borchardt; which is to say, the *Commedia* would not itself serve as the new mythology. Inasmuch as I regard the *Commedia* as a paradigmatic model for the project for a new mythology, however, I must disagree with his judgment that "Dante nicht als Urbild einer neuen Dichtung, sondern eher als früher Rivale gesehen wird [...]." See Senkel, "Absolutes in poetischer Entfaltung. Dantes *Commedia* und die frühromantische Religionspoetik," in *Romantische Religiosität*, ed. Alfred von Bormann (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2005), 53ff.

Novalis availed himself of the *Commedia* in order to unite subject and object in a mythic novel; and how, on the periphery of the Romantic poetic school, Schelling and Goethe both appealed to the *Commedia* in their elaborate efforts to produce a mythology of nature.

In the first chapter, however, we will bid Dante adieu until we have mapped the infrastructure of the scene in which his arrival proved so transformative. To show precisely how Dante opened new avenues for the Romantic project of writing a new mythology, it will be important to chart the project's philosophical and historical catalysts. To that end, I will offer first an account of Romantic myth as an innovative aesthetic response to the dilemmas in late 18th-century philosophy. Second, I will account for the utopian-political impulse that impelled the Romantic quest for the formulation of a new mythology. An exploration of both aspects will lead us back once again to Dante.

1

The Romantic Project of a New Mythology

The Realism of Romantic Mythology

After a century in which German intellectuals, exemplified by Leipzig's literary dictator, Johann Christoph Gottsched (1700-1766), had measured themselves and the German *Volk* against the culture of French absolutism, there emerged in the final decades of the eighteenth century a vastly different panorama of European and German modernity: the French monarchy had crumbled nearly overnight; the Rationalist metaphysical system of Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716) and Christian Wolff (1679-1754), absolutist in its theory of the divinely ordained perfection of the world, had been dethroned by the rigorous new epistemology of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), which was in turn radicalized by Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762-1814); and meanwhile, the aesthetic principles of French classicism that had long dictated the ideals of German taste were discarded and surpassed by the theories of Johann Joachim Winckelmann (1717-1768), Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781), Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), and above all, Johann Wolfgang Goethe (1749-1832). German Romantics of course welcomed much in the way of these changes: Friedrich Schlegel's (1772-1829) famous dictum that the French Revolution, Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*, and Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* constituted the three great tendencies of the age, suggests as much.¹⁷ But as the century drew to a close, it became

¹⁷ KFSA II, 198.

increasingly evident to the Romantics in the Jena circle that recent ripples had wrought troubling consequences. Indeed, the Romantics' various publications and lectures began to articulate the clear conviction that the politics, philosophy, and poetics of the modern European West had been deeply riven by processes of historical and cultural fragmentation.¹⁸ After the Reformation had severed the unity of Christendom, the Enlightenment had nearly eradicated religion from European soil. The initial promise of the Revolution had devolved into chaos, bringing dissolution rather than democracy, and the philosophy of Kant and Fichte, despite its initial promises of intellectual revolution, had also divested nature of its glory (and reality) by subordinating it to the power of the ego.¹⁹ Only the Romantics' esteem for Goethe, their perpetual critic, seemed not to waver.

With the project of creating a new mythology, the Romantics envisioned a veritable panacea to these pressing challenges, theorizing it on the one hand as a remedy to what we might classify as crises of a social-political variety, and on the other to what we might deem crises of an aesthetic-philosophical sort. If we turn our attention to the latter, we find that what had begun troubling the Romantics in both philosophic and poetic discourses was a general lack of realism (*Realismus*). Here the term does not refer to the mimetic exactitude of a naturalist aesthetic, but rather to the metaphysical view that accords nature and history no less privileged a status than spirit and ideality. The

¹⁸ Perhaps the most famous example is Novalis's epigonal essay, *Die Christenheit, oder Europa*. But similar sentiments can be readily found in the work of both Schlegel brothers, and Schelling too.

¹⁹ Seminal statements of Romantic cultural critique include, among others, Novalis's *Die Christenheit, oder Europa* (1799), Schelling's lectures on the *Philosophie der Kunst* (1802-1803), and A.W. Schlegel's *Vorlesungen über schöne Literatur und Kunst* (1801-1802). See especially KAV I, 458ff.

conceptual force behind this notion of realism, defined against the subjective idealism formulated by Kant and refined by Fichte, emerged from a generation that had simultaneously been disillusioned by the promises of Kantian philosophy and charmed by the beauty of art and poetry in the work of Goethe and Schiller.²⁰ This is not to say, of course, that the Romantics merely dismissed the philosophy of Kant and Fichte as nonsense and devoted themselves to a life of *l'art pour l'art*: after all, Kant's turn to epistemology was crucial in dismantling the onerous metaphysical systems of Rationalism that had gained traction in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But Kant's self-proclaimed "Copernican revolution" in philosophy subjected reason to so thoroughgoing a critique that reason's sphere of knowledge dwindled to the knowing subject itself. Fichte, in turn, radicalized Kant's philosophy such that what resided outside the subject — nature, the objective, the universe — came to be seen as a merely regulative ideal, a chimera whose sole purpose lay in its promotion of the ego's development. Nature's reality, in effect, could not even be deduced by logic but had to be inferred from the fact that the ego required external obstacles for its moral growth.²¹ To the Romantics, it appeared that critical philosophy had privileged the ideal to the detriment of the real.

²⁰ The philosophical and the political are not, however, unrelated. Manfred Frank devotes special attention to the political dimension of the new mythology, but likewise acknowledges that the Romantics promote a new mythology "auf der Grundlage einer Kritik an der analytischen Konzeption von Vernunft." See in particular the sixth and seventh lectures in *Der kommende Gott: Vorlesungen über die Neue Mythologie*, 1. Teil (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1982). Here: 188.

²¹ On this score, see Frederick Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle Against Subjectivism 1781-1801* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2002), 392. In general, Beiser gives a tremendously thorough and readable account of the Romantics' response to the philosophy of Kant and Fichte, much of which informs this very chapter.

Transcendental idealism's apparent devaluation of nature vexed the practical sensibility of the Romantics. While Leibniz's philosophy of the best of all possible worlds, with its theory of a pre-established harmony, flew in the face of empirical experience, so too did the conclusions reached by his critics, who had first proposed nature as an unknowable matter of faith before ultimately dismissing it as an ideal of instrumental value for the subject's growth. Kant and Fichte's assignation of rational primacy to the subject, which resulted in this thoroughly provisional conception of nature, would have far-reaching consequences: one philosopher of idealism imagined the need for a new physics that, instead of proceeding by principles of empiricism, would ask "Wie muß eine Welt für ein moralisches Wesen beschaffen sein?"²² To those for whom a provisional concept of nature simply would not suffice, the transcendental idealism of Kant and Fichte appeared as impractical as the bulky metaphysical systems of the Rationalists. Surely there were ways of knowing the reality of nature, even if synthetic a priori concepts, to use Kant's language, could not correspond to the intuitions of a posteriori sense experience.

Friedrich Hölderlin was among the very first both to criticize the subjectivity of Fichte's philosophy and to formulate the principles of an Absolute Idealism according to which the absolute might be accessed, if not via the concepts of discursive reason, then certainly via the power of intuition.²³ In his fragmentary essay "Über Religion," he writes

²² *Das Älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus*, in Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke*, Kleine Stuttgarter Ausgabe, ed. Friedrich Beissner (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1965), IV, 309.

²³ Hölderlin's critique of subjective idealism is found in the now famous fragment, "Urteil und Seyn" in *Sämtliche Werke*, IV, 226-227.

of the “Bedürfnis der Menschen [...] ihre verschiedenen Vorstellungsarten von Göttlichem [...] sich einander zuzugesellen [...]”²⁴ While one’s rational faculty may approach such intuitions, it hardly begins to exhaust them; and for this reason, he suggests, there must be formulated a new means of *Vorstellung*: it will be neither purely intellectual nor purely historical, “sondern intellektuell historisch, d.h. Mythisch [...]”²⁵ The traces of Hölderlin’s quest to realize such a mythology can be found in texts like his novel *Hyperion*, which employs a poetic narrative to communicate the possibility of the subject’s union with the object of nature. In a letter to a friend, for example, the novel’s eponymous hero writes quite tellingly, “Die Wissenschaft [...] hat mir alles verdorben. Ich bin bei euch so recht vernünftig geworden, habe gründlich mich unterscheiden gelernt von dem, was mich umgibt, bin nun vereinzelt in der schönen Welt, bin so ausgeworfen aus dem Garten der Natur, wo ich wuchs und blühte, und vertrockne an der Mittagssonne.”²⁶ As Beiser says of Hölderlin’s turn to an aesthetics of myth, “it avoids the abstract and analytical language of reason yet it puts our intuitions and feelings into some more concrete form. Mythical language is a synthesis of the intellectual and the historical: it has all the determinacy of the intellectual but also all the immediacy, unity, and wholeness of the historical.”²⁷ Myth, Hölderlin surmised, could grant access to a realm that exists beyond the bounds of mere reason by balancing the ideal and the real.

²⁴ Hölderlin, *Über die Religion, Sämtliche Werke*, IV, 291.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 292.

²⁶ Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke*, III, 9.

²⁷ Beiser, *German Idealism*, 397.

The first, true “call” for a new mythology, invoked in the enigmatic text known as the *Ältestes Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus* (1795/96), envisioned that a contemporary mythology would fulfill a purpose similar to that which Hölderlin had described: namely, to communicate knowledge that otherwise posed a challenge for the narrow scope of philosophical inquiry. Thus the anonymous author of the two-page manuscript, alternately identified by historians as Hegel, Hölderlin, or Schelling, judges beauty rather than truth to be the apex of reason, stating quite clearly that “der höchste Akt der Vernunft [...] ein ästhetischer Akt ist und daß *Wahrheit und Güte nur in der Schönheit* verschwistert sind.”²⁸ This view of course entails a judgment concerning the relation of philosophy and art, the core of which is that poetry possesses “eine höhere Würde” and can be deemed the true “Lehrerin der Menschheit.”²⁹ Consequently, the author asserts, “wir müssen eine neue Mythologie haben, diese Mythologie aber muß im Dienste der Ideen stehen, sie muß eine Mythologie der *Vernunft* werden.”³⁰ Mythology, as the author of the *Systemprogramm* formulates it, would function as an aesthetic religion that works in concert with philosophy and rationality. Hardly a reactionary response to the critical philosophy of the Enlightenment, the *Systemprogramm*’s call for a new mythology emanates from the standpoint of Kant’s idealism while simultaneously attempting to transcend its self-imposed limits.

In much the same spirit, Friedrich Schlegel’s groundbreaking *Rede über die Mythologie* locates in myth the possibility of the subject’s union with the reality of nature

²⁸ Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke*, IV, 310.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 310.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 311.

via an aesthetic intuition. What Schlegel refers to as the new mythology would not be a poetic corpus of stale didactic fables, i.e. an allegorical recapitulation of contemporary philosophical doctrine. Rather, it would need to be a poetic work that transcended the limits of philosophy altogether. As he writes in the *Ideen*, “wo die Philosophie aufhört, muß die Poesie anfangen.”³¹ The new mythology would accordingly be an aesthetic phenomenon in which could be intuited that which the language of philosophy failed to articulate: in short, the absolute — or nature, the universe, the infinite, or God, depending on one’s lexicon. Like Hölderlin, who had intimated the communicative potential of myth in comparison to the deficiencies of discursive logic, Schlegel presents the new mythology as an aesthetic-religious lens via which the *Anschauung* of nature occurs. “Was sonst das Bewußtsein ewig flieht,” he writes, “ist hier [in Mythologie] dennoch sinnlich geistig zu schauen, und festgehalten [...]”³² In Schlegel’s later emendations for his *Sämtliche Werke* (1823), for example, we see that he glosses *Mythologie* repeatedly as “symbolische Anschauung,” “symbolische Naturansicht,” “fest bestehende Symbolik der Natur und der Kunst.”³³

These are no doubt important terms in their own right, indicating the supra-rational dimension of the new mythology, but they also merit attention in that we glimpse in them the intellectual lineage of Schlegel’s project and the trajectory he charts for it. His speech on mythology appeared in the third issue of the *Athenäum*, 1800, just months after he had read what proved to be a formative text in his intellectual development:

³¹ KFSA II, 261.

³² KFSA II, 318.

³³ Ibid., 311 ff.

namely, Friedrich Schleiermacher's *Über Religion*, a collection of four speeches purporting to salvage religion in the wake of Kant's triumph over metaphysics. Crucially, Schleiermacher claims there that religion consists neither in a system of speculative metaphysics like that of Leibniz, nor in a system of practical morality like that of Kant; rather, Schleiermacher says, the core of religion is the *Anschauung des Universums*: "Ihr Wesen ist weder Denken noch Handeln, sondern Anschauung und Gefühl. Anschauen will sie das Universum [...]." ³⁴ Kant's critique of religion and faith failed to resound, Schleiermacher suggests, for he had been knocking at an open door. In point of fact, religion pursues a wholly different course — namely, that which had been proposed by Spinoza:

Opfert mit mir ehrerbietig eine Locke den Manen des heiligen verstoßenen Spinoza! Ihn durchdrang der hohe Weltgeist, das Unendliche war sein Anfang und Ende, das Universum seine einzige und ewige Liebe, in heiliger Unschuld und tiefer Demut spiegelte er sich in der ewigen Welt, und sah zu wie auch Er ihr liebenswürdigster Spiegel war; voller Religion war Er und voll heiligen Geistes; und darum steht Er auch da, allein und unerreicht, Meister in seiner Kunst, aber erhaben über die profane Zunft, ohne Jünger und ohne Bürgerrecht. Anschauen des Universums, ich bitte befreundet Euch mit diesem Begriff, er ist der Angel meiner ganzen Rede, er ist die allgemeinste und höchste Formel der Religion, woraus Ihr jeden Ort in derselben finden könnt, woraus sich ihr Wesen und ihre Grenzen aufs genaueste bestimmen lassen. ³⁵

Schleiermacher's religious enthusiasm for a philosopher so traditionally associated with atheism would no doubt ring paradoxical to the ears of Jacobi, but Spinoza had in fact theorized a quasi-mystical form of knowledge that approximated Hölderlin's and Schlegel's quest to transcend the cold logic of discursive reason. In his *Ethics*, Spinoza had posited reason and experience as distinct means of knowledge, but he

³⁴ Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion: Reden an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2004), 28-29.

³⁵ Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion*, 31.

subordinated them both to what he deemed a third and higher form: *scientia intuitiva*.³⁶ Whereas reason climbs upward from effects to causes to essences, intuitive knowledge proceeds downward from essences to causes to their effects, thus inverting the process of analytic reason and proceeding from the whole to its parts, rather than from the parts to their whole. Distinct from the anti-rational, Protestant Christian mysticism of a Jakob Böhme or Johann Georg Hamann, Spinoza's doctrine of *scientia intuitiva* resembled the hyper- or supra-rationalism of Friedrich Schlegel's single most profound intellectual influence, Plato himself, as Frederick Beiser writes.³⁷ Spinoza had written furthermore that intuitive knowledge would inspire a desire for itself in human beings and thereby produce the greatest of all possible intellectual satisfaction — joy.³⁸ He writes that this joy ultimately yields the condition of blessedness itself, an *amor dei intellectualis*.³⁹ In Spinoza's view, this intellectual love of God constitutes the equivalent of salvation.⁴⁰

Clearly, Spinoza's God is not the personal God of Abrahamic theism, but rather the totality of the monistic universe's one substance. After all, Spinoza was not primarily interested in epistemology, but rather (meta)physics: for prior to having circumvented the limits placed on reason by means of his *scientia intuitiva*, Spinoza had posited a monist ontology that did away with a mess of dualist binaries like subject/object, ideal/real, etc.,

³⁶ Benedict de Spinoza, *Ethics*, ed. and trans. Edwin Curley (New York: Penguin, 1996), 2p40s2. See also 5p25 (cited by part, proposition, and scholion).

³⁷ On the distinction between these stances vis-à-vis rationality, see "Frühromantik and the Platonic Tradition" in Frederick Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative: The Concept of Early German Romanticism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 56-72.

³⁸ *Ethics*, 5p26-27.

³⁹ *Ethics*, 5p32. According to the Definition of Affects, VI, "Love is a joy, accompanied by the idea of an external cause." Thus, the joy produced by intuitive knowledge — accompanied by the knowledge of God as its cause — amounts to an intellectual love of God.

⁴⁰ *Ethics*, 5p36. Also 5p42.

by resolving them as the mere attributes of one universal substance. He had essentially turned Kant's self-proclaimed Copernican revolution inside-out: if knowledge consists in the coincidence of subject and object, and if there is only one universal substance, then wouldn't the transcendental philosopher's first principle of "I exist" amount to the Absolute Idealist's proposition "There are things outside of me" anyway?⁴¹ In the subsequent *Naturphilosophie* of Schelling, it became clear that philosophy would not proceed from the subject before ultimately acknowledging a flimsy ideal of nature; on the contrary, philosophy would presuppose a robust, vibrant nature and admit the subject as a portion or attribute of it. For theists like Jacobi and Mendelssohn, this was tantamount to atheism; but for an Absolute Idealist like Novalis, Spinoza was a "Gottbetrunkenener Mensch" and a visionary: for with intellectual tools he had bridged the gap between science and religion that Jacobi could only envision being leapt by a *salto mortale*. If the new mythology were to be a sensual religion, as the author of the *Systemprogramm* had written, its creed would be that of Spinozism.⁴²

In point of fact, Schlegel was hardly shy in appropriating this bogeyman of Christians and idealists alike. Throughout the *Rede über die Mythologie*, he trumpets Spinoza's name while giving short shrift to any other figure in the history of philosophy. Ludoviko, the character in Schlegel's dialogue who delivers the speech, supplies an important reason for the exaltation of Spinoza: it is not that he considers Spinoza to be

⁴¹ See Schelling, *System des transzendenten Idealismus*, introduction, corollary 2.

⁴² The Romantics make important emendations to Spinoza's doctrine of monism, most notably in that they conceive of the universe as a teleologically unfolding substance, rather than a static substance. On this note, see especially Frank, *Der kommende Gott. Vorlesungen über die neue Mythologie* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1982), 155ff.

the “Meister einer neuen Alleinherrschaft.” Rather, he regards Spinoza as an exemplary theoretician of the relationship of *Mystik* and *Poesie*.⁴³ This of course sounds puzzling, given the absence of a philosophy of art in Spinoza’s oeuvre. But Schlegel conceived of the new mythology as a supra-rational poetic instrument designed for the intuition of nature. Inasmuch as the new mythology thus constitutes a commitment to the reality of nature, a position referred to in the speech as realism, it diverges from the abstractions of subjective idealism and displays its affinity to the objectivity of Spinoza’s naturalism. It is by this association of the mythological and the poetic with the natural and the real that Ludoviko can assert what otherwise sounds terribly perplexing: “Ich begreife kaum, wie man ein Dichter sein kann, ohne den Spinoza zu verehren, zu lieben und ganz der seinige zu werden.”⁴⁴

The significance of “realism” to the project of the new mythology can hardly be overstated, for in addition to bearing the philosophical force outlined above, it carried with it a poetic connotation that rendered the Romantics’ doctrine of myth drastically different from the reigning view of Enlightenment theorists. The contrast stems above all from the fact that Enlightenment *philosophes* had long regarded myth as a form of poetic aetiology that amounted to little more than an allegorical shell. In point of fact, one might claim with accuracy that Enlightenment theorists did not know myth as anything but a highly didactic form of allegory. Following the example of Latin writers, who had translated the Greek *mythos* as *fabula*, French, English, and German writers all reduced

⁴³ KFSa II, 321.

⁴⁴ KFSa II, 317.

the same term to *fable* or *Fabel* and in doing so sharply delimited its conceptual range. Gottsched, for example, devoted a lengthy section of his *Critische Dichtkunst* (1730) to what Aristotle referred to as *mythos*, linking it very specifically to the Rationalist poetic category of the *Fabel*. He defines it as a “moralischen Lehrsatz” cloaked by a fictional “Begebenheit.”⁴⁵ To be sure, the allegory of the fable bore no conceptual relationship to the idealism of Kant or Fichte; yet its distinctly un-mimetic character as a didactic genre entailed all the same an irreality that implied remoteness from the objectivity of nature and history. Indeed, *fabulae* were illusive narratives that laid no claims to historical or natural veracity. To the Romantics, such an interpretation of *mythos* amounted to no less than a dilution of poetry itself, for which reason Novalis would later describe the Enlightenment’s effect on poetry as that of cold water on hot fire.⁴⁶

Bernard Fontenelle’s (1657-1757) pithy essay *De l’origine des fables* (1724) formulated the myth-as-allegory thesis so succinctly and cogently that it set the tone for most subsequent treatments in French, English, and German.⁴⁷ He wrote of myth as a primeval mode of narrative that accounted for inexplicable events: “Ces pauvres sauvages, qui ont les premiers habité le monde, ou ne connaissaient point ces choses-là, ou n’y avaient fait aucune attention. Ils n’expliquaient donc les effets de la nature que par

⁴⁵ Johann Christoph Gottsched, *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Joachim Birke (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1968-1987), VI/1, 203.

⁴⁶ Schriften III, 516.

⁴⁷ Another noteworthy approach to myth among French scholars is to be found in Pierre Bayle’s famous encyclopedia, where his entry on Jupiter commences with an extensive litany of the god’s sundry offenses: rape, incest, sodomy, theft, murder, etc. Bayle attempts, fairly transparently, to lay bare the stupidity of those who would worship such gods. And, through an attack on pagan myths, the principles of his argument could be applied easily enough to the Judaeo-Christian tradition. See Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, 5th ed. (Amsterdam, 1740), v. 2, 901-02. On the Enlightenment criticism of Christianity via pagan myth, see Hans Blumenberg, *Work on Myth* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985).

des choses plus grossières et plus palpables, qu'ils connaissaient."⁴⁸ Myths arose as aetiological narratives, from which in turn were born myth's gods and goddesses, indeed pantheons full of anthropomorphic deities whose divine activity accounted for a range of otherwise inscrutable natural phenomena. Fontenelle goes on to assert, with no faint hint of obloquy, that the fictitious nature of such narratives becomes compounded once myth has attained broader popularity, for then "on ne raconta plus les faits un peu remarquables sans les revêtir des ornements que l'on avait reconnu qui étaient propres à plaire. Ces ornements étaient faux [...] et cependant les histories ne passaient pas pour être fabuleuses."⁴⁹ This process stubbornly perpetuates itself, according to Fontenelle, for two reasons. What has already proven pleasing legitimates its own existence and propagation, while people's respect for the tradition of their progenitors "étend une sottise à l'infini."⁵⁰

David Hume (1711-1776), whose work enjoyed an intensive German reception, among the Romantics no less,⁵¹ adopted Fontenelle's method of collective psychologizing in his *Natural History of Religion* (1757) and approached myth as a matter characteristic of an early and unenlightened humankind. Already known for his unique philosophy of causation, Hume writes that "we are placed in this world, as in a great theatre, where the true springs and causes of every event are entirely concealed

⁴⁸ Fontenelle, *De l'origine des fables*, ed. J.-R. Carré (Paris : Librairie Félix Alcan, 1932), 16-17.

⁴⁹ Fontenelle, 22.

⁵⁰ Fontenelle, 28. Precisely this notion would be addressed in Lessing's *Nathan der Weise*, when Nathan responds to a challenge to his Judaism by responding that he cannot simply judge his forebears to have been liars (III: 7).

⁵¹ Günter Gawlick and Lothar Kreimendahl, *Hume in der deutschen Aufklärung: Umrisse einer Rezeptionsgeschichte* (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1987).

from us [...].”⁵² Though it would be wisest of human beings to discern such causes in the machinery of the universe, so sage a manner of perception proves beyond their power of comprehension, Hume writes; instead, the imagination is employed to sort out the confusion over questions of causation. The imagination in turn furnishes all manner of queer explanations, among which are those that would ascribe personal agency to impersonal phenomena. Since “there is an universal tendency among mankind to conceive all beings like themselves, and to transfer to every object, those qualities, with which they are familiarly acquainted,”⁵³ there comes about a belief in invisible powers — both salutary and destructive — upon which are conferred a range of human qualities. Like Fontenelle, Hume underscores the fictive component of myth by devoting an entire chapter of the *Natural History of Religion* to discussing the allegorical quality of fables. Fontenelle’s and Hume’s explanation of myth as an aetiological discourse shaped the contours of subsequent theorization to the extent that much of what German intellectuals later wrote must be weighed against these earlier statements. Christian Gottlob Heyne, for example, who was perhaps the foremost German classicist of the eighteenth century (Winckelmann included), only echoed the assertions of Fontenelle and Hume when he wrote that “the origin of all mythology is ignorance concerning what causes appearances.”⁵⁴

⁵² David Hume, *Principal Writings on Religion*, ed. J.C.A. Gaskin (New York: Oxford UP, 1993), 140.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁵⁴ C.G. Heyne, “Inquiry into the Causes of Fables,” in *The Rise of Modern Mythology 1680-1860*, ed. and trans. Burton Feldman and Robert D. Richardson (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1972), 219. For original, see Heyne, “De caussis fabularum seu mythorum” (1764), in *Opuscula Academica Collecta*, v. 1 (Göttingen, 1785), 194-206.

In scholarship on the rise of eighteenth-century mythography, Heyne has won approbation as a philologist for his introduction of language as a lens through which to study myth.⁵⁵ And, in important respects, Heyne's contributions to the field did in fact undermine the longstanding equation of myth with the poetic fable: he argued, for example, that the linguistic capabilities of the cultures producing myth were simply too raw to have furnished the sorts of fables described by Fontenelle and others. Not having yet attained linguistic maturity, "man needed gestures, expressive voice, movements of limbs and eyes" to account rationally for sense perceptions.⁵⁶ The body became an instrument of articulation, with the result that thoughts, perceptions, and memories found expression as events. As Heyne writes, "what was awakened in the mind by reflection becomes reproduced once more as a deed."⁵⁷ Classifying poetry an heir of myth, Heyne did indeed sunder the longstanding union of myth and poetry. But for as apparently radical as his argument was — with its historicist and linguistic sensitivity — it ultimately recapitulated the central thesis Fontenelle and Hume. Heyne's historicism enabled him to dispute the notion that myth materialized only in poetry, showing instead that poetry later received and shaped the raw matter of myth; but even with a more nuanced methodology, he only seemed to confirm that myth had served as a primitive aetiology, the utility of which had been rendered obsolete by cultural maturation. This course of thought would meet rigid opposition from Romantics who regarded it as having

⁵⁵ See e.g. Lucas Marco Gisi, *Einbildungskraft und Mythologie: die Verschränkung von Anthropologie und Geschichte im 18. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2007).

⁵⁶ C.G. Heyne, "Inquiry into the Causes of Fables," in *The Rise of Modern Mythology 1680-1860*, ed. and trans. Burton Feldman and Robert D. Richardson (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1972), 219.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

subordinated the autonomous value of art to narrowly utilitarian ends. Schelling rebuked Heyne, for example, for having interpreted Homer's epics in this fashion, writing that "Die innere Geistlosigkeit einer solchen Vorstellung überhebt uns aller Widerlegung derselben. Es ist, möchte man sagen, die gröbste Art, das Poetische des Homeros zu zerstören. Das Gepräge einer solchen gemeinen Absichtlichkeit wird man an keiner Spur seiner Werke erkennen."⁵⁸

Indeed, Romantics like Schelling and A.W. Schlegel, a dotting student of Heyne in Göttingen,⁵⁹ much more doggedly pursued the simple but innovative vision of mythology proposed by the novelist-philosopher-psychoanalyst, Karl Philipp Moritz (1756-1793). In his *Götterlehre: oder mythologische Dichtungen der Alten* (1791), Moritz had written that to reduce the myths of the ancients to mere didactic allegories "ist ein eben so thörichtes Unternehmen, als wenn man diese Dichtungen durch allerlei gezwungene Erklärungen in lauter wahre Geschichte zu verwandeln sucht."⁶⁰ He observes, in point of fact, that the myths of the Greeks avoid conceptions of eternity and infinity in favor of a cosmogony of limitation, definition, and generation. The gods of the Greeks avoid eternity and omnipresence and link themselves instead to history, albeit the "dunkle

⁵⁸ SW V, 409. The work of Heyne in question is his "De origine et causis fabularum Homeriarum," in *Commentationis Societatis Regiae scientiarum Göttingensis*. Neue Folge, v. 8 (1777). A.W. Schlegel weighs in on the same issue, likewise against Heyne. See KAV I, 448. Incidentally, it is precisely the same impulse toward the preservation of the poetic dimension of the text that has driven *dantisti* in their quest to do away with the so-called diluting tendency of the allegory of the poets, which seems to subordinate the *Commedia* to a work of purely theological significance.

⁵⁹ A.W. Schlegel wrote a 1787 *Preisschrift* under Heyne's direction on the topic of Homeric geography, in addition to compiling the index to Heyne's edition of Virgil. On Schlegel's relation to Heyne, see Achim Höller, "Schlegels Göttinger Mentoren," 16-17.

⁶⁰ Moritz, *Götterlehre: oder mythologische Dichtungen der Alten* (Berlin: Unger, 1791), 3.

Geschichte der Vorwelt.”⁶¹ Hovering thus on the edges of primeval time, they avail themselves of the reality of history and cannot be deemed a “leeres Traumbild,” a “bloßes Spiel des Witzes,” or “bloße Allegorie.”⁶² Nor, however, do they purport to be historical tales. Instead, Moritz writes, they are to be read “grade so [...] wie sie sind, und soviel wie möglich mit einem Ueberblick das Ganze zu betrachten.”⁶³ They are a “Sprache der Phantasie,” or, as we might gloss this: art. Echoing the principles of his classicist aesthetic ideal of autonomous art,⁶⁴ Moritz writes of myth as a hermetic world fashioned according to the dictates of the beautiful:

Ein wahres Kunstwerk, eine schöne Dichtung ist etwas in sich Fertiges und Vollendetes, das um sein selbst willen da ist, und dessen Werth in ihm selber, und in dem wohlgeordneten Verhältniß seiner Theile liegt [...]. Alles, was eine schöne Dichtung bedeutet, liegt ja in ihr selber; sie spiegelt in ihrem grossen oder kleinen Umfange, die Verhältnisse der Dinge, das Leben und die Schicksale der Menschen ab; sie lehrt auch Lebensweisheit [...]. Aber alles dieses ist den dichterischen Schönheiten untergeordnet, und nicht der Hauptendzweck der Poesie; denn eben darum lehrt sie besser, weil Lehren nicht ihr Zweck ist; weil die Lehre selbst sich dem Schönen unterordnet, und dadurch Anmuth und Reiz gewinnt.⁶⁵

Whereas Enlightened intellectuals like Fontenelle, Hume, and Gottsched had conceived of myth as what appeared to the Romantics to be an attenuated poetry, devoid of realism, Moritz viewed myth as a lavishly, fantastical aesthetic world: its whole *raison d'être* lay in the realm of the aesthetic, and notions of aetiology quickly lost their currency. Indeed, Moritz regarded beauty as its own sufficient reason.

⁶¹ Ibid., 2.

⁶² Ibid., 3.

⁶³ Ibid., 4.

⁶⁴ Moritz's classic essay on beauty is *Über die bildende Nachahmung des Schönen*.

⁶⁵ Moritz, *Götterlehre*, 5-6.

This conception exerted a profound influence on the myth theory of the Romantics, above all on that of Schelling. We see this most clearly in his lectures on the *Philosophie der Kunst*, which, despite never being published by Schelling, still constitute his most extensive treatment of myth from the time of his collaboration with the Romantics in Jena. Schelling's philosophy of art during this period emanates from his so-called *Identitätsphilosophie*, a philosophical approach that attempted at once to balance the objective realism of Spinoza's monism and the subjective idealism of Fichte's first principle of self-consciousness or reflection. Via Schelling's monist ontology of the Absolute, this philosophy found expression in a new first principle of identity: the reality of nature, namely, is identical to the ideality of spirit; each just happens to represent a different perspective of the Absolute. Art fulfills a crucial epistemological role in this philosophical system that reflects the role it had been assigned in the work, for example, of Hölderlin and F. Schlegel; that is, it provides an intuition of the absolute the likes of which lies beyond the means of philosophical reason. Philosophy, according to Schelling, aims to demonstrate the identity of the real and the ideal, but can do so only through means of an internal, subjective, intellectual intuition; art, on the other hand, renders comprehensible in objective form the identity of nature's reality and the spirit's ideality. Thus, as Douglas Stott writes of Schelling's aesthetics, "in art the philosopher finds revealed objectively that which grounds his entire system, namely, the absolute itself, or absolute identity, and art is granted an expressly revelatory function."⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Schelling, *The Philosophy of Art*, ed., trans., and intro. by Douglas W. Stott (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), xxxiv.

Within Schelling's aesthetics, myth occupies a special place, the significance of which is evident when approached from the triadic structure upon which his *Identitätsphilosophie* rests. Schelling's system of identity rests not just on the apparent dualism of the reality of nature and the ideality of spirit; that apparent dualism is subsumed by the indifference of their union in the absolute. As Schelling lays out his system, this triadic structure unfolds in further series of potencies: nature in its reality consists of matter (real), light (ideal), and their indifferent union in the organism; spirit in its ideality consists of knowledge (real), action (ideal), and their indifferent union in art; the absolute consists of truth (real), goodness (ideal), and their indifferent union in beauty. Schelling applies the triadic structure to art, as well, insofar as he conceives of art as the composite of three modes of representation: the schematic (real), the allegorical (ideal), and their indifferent union in the symbolic. According to Schelling's definitions, schematism refers to the mode of representation in which the particular is intuited in the universal; allegory refers to the mode of representation in which the universal is intuited in the particular; and symbolism refers to the mode of representation in which the two have been synthesized as one.

Schelling believed that Moritz's system of mythology accounted for precisely this synthesis of the schematic and the allegorical — the unity, that is, of the universal in the particular, and the particular in the universal. Moritz, after all, had underscored the character of the Greek gods as defined by limitation and historicity, all the while arguing that the mythological sphere constituted a world unto itself, an absolutized realm of fantasy in which the gods acted. Schelling adopted this conception of mythology, but

argued for it not from the perspective of the myths themselves, but rather by deducing the myths as the inevitable necessity of art's function within the absolute. He arrives at this conclusion by means of a philosophical analogy from the perspective of the ideality of spirit: "Die besonderen Dinge, sofern sie in ihrer Besonderheit absolut, sofern sie also als Besondere zugleich Universa sind, heißen Ideen."⁶⁷ Given Schelling's principle of identity, the same proposition can likewise be viewed from the perspective of the real; but in that case, where in nature would we locate the particular things that are absolute in their particularity? Here Schelling alights on the gods: "Dieselben Ineinsbildungen des Allgemeinen und Besonderen [...] sind real betrachtet Götter. Denn das Wesen, das An-Sich von ihnen = Gott. Ideen sind sie nur, inwiefern sie Gott in besonderer Form. Jede Idee ist also = Gott, aber ein besonderer Gott."⁶⁸ The collective totality of the gods, i.e. the entirety of the mythology, thus represents in objective form the absolute. As Schelling writes, "Die Götter bilden nothwendig unter sich wieder eine Totalität, eine Welt [...]. Demnach bilden sie nothwendig unter sich wieder eine Welt, worin alles durcheinander wechselseitig bestimmt ist, ein organisches Ganzes, eine Totalität, eine Welt."⁶⁹ In stark contrast to the theories of mythology propagated by the likes of Fontenelle, Hume, Heyne, or other Enlightenment *philosophes*, Schelling thus proposes a thesis that would derive mythology as a necessary aesthetic category from the perspective of his *Identitätsphilosophie*. Hardly a pedagogical tool characteristic of primitive peoples, myth

⁶⁷ SW V, 390.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 399.

gains credence as a supremely privileged dimension of art itself, since only via its synthesis of schematism and allegory does the absolute reveal itself.

Schelling was not alone in rejecting the notion of myth as fable and constructing a framework within which its essence was seen as constitutive of nature itself. A.W. Schlegel, who by no means was a philosopher of Schelling's caliber, arrived at a similar conclusion in his own discipline of philology. In response to Hume's writing on religion and myth, for example, Schlegel remarked with some cheek, "Hume hat eine natürliche Geschichte der Religionen geschrieben: ich wollte, es schriebe einmal einer eine religiöse Geschichte davon."⁷⁰ A.W. Schlegel's own theory of myth first emerged in his *Vorlesungen über Philosophische Kunstlehre* (1798-1799) in Jena, which in point of fact show the traces of Heyne, his teacher in Göttingen. Schlegel even explains the origins of myth on the basis of early human beings' limited cognitive ability, just as Heyne had.⁷¹ But by the time he delivered a similar course of lectures in Berlin, just a few years later, Schlegel began to echo Moritz by depicting myth as an intermediate act of the organ of *Fantasie*. First, he writes, the human subject performs a real, undeliberate (*unabsichtlich*) act of *Fantasie* when it posits its own existence as well as that of an external nature. Last, the human subject performs an ideal, deliberate (*absichtlich*) act of *Fantasie* when it creates art. Myth falls precisely between these two acts of *Fantasie*: like the initial act, it proceeds undeliberately in its assignation of agency to nature and thus may be deemed

⁷⁰ KAV I, 442.

⁷¹ Ibid., 50: "Die erste Quelle der mythischen Götterlehre ist die Unmöglichkeit für die rohen Menschen, sich den Grund wahrgenommener Veränderungen anders, als unter dem Bilde ihrer eignen Wirkungsart vorzustellen; notwendige Vermenschlichung der Naturkräfte."

“real”; yet in as much as it personifies nature, myth engages in the process of artistic creation and thus resembles art’s “idealism.”⁷² We thus see that Schlegel foreshadows Schelling’s own concept of mythology, according to which the union of the real and ideal is revealed objectively in art, while likewise reiterating the statements of his brother’s *Rede über die Mythologie*, in which the new mythology was likewise theorized as a union of the real and ideal.

Recent studies of Romantic and idealist philosophy have furnished exquisitely nuanced interpretations of this drive toward harmonizing the real and the ideal in the work of figures like Hölderlin, Schelling, Novalis, and F. Schlegel. Indeed, the central thrust of Beiser’s tome on German Idealism aims to correct the longstanding scholarly misperception that there may be assumed from an initial enthusiasm for Fichte a general infatuation with the subjectivity of idealism.⁷³ Along these lines, we have now begun to glimpse that the impulse toward establishing a counterweight to the predominance of idealist philosophy led the Romantics first of all to privilege the revelatory power of mythic art over the discursive power of philosophy and, second, to refute what appeared to be the Enlightenment’s tendency toward divesting art of its reality. The latter of these tenets, in particular, would influence the style of artistic criticism that would eventually locate in the *Commedia* the ideal model of Romantic myth. A.W. Schlegel, for example, who states quite expressly that “nicht alles fabelhafte [gehört] zur Mythologie,” since

⁷² Ibid., 441.

⁷³ Beiser, *German Idealism*, 3.

myths “sind Dichtungen, die ihrer Natur nach auf Realität Anspruch machten,”⁷⁴ would repeatedly denigrate the mythic epics of poets like Milton and Klopstock on precisely these grounds. The realization of a mythology would inevitably fail, Schlegel writes, “wenn bloß allegorische Personen, denen es ganz an individueller Wahrheit fehlt, als mythische Wesen handelnd eingeführt werden.”⁷⁵

The Utopianism of Romanticism

A caveat is in order: the present focus on the Romantics’ realism ought not discount their simultaneous allegiance to the legacy of idealism. Their cultivation of realism, after all, was an attempt to harmonize the philosophies of subjectivity and objectivity in the new mythology. It just happens that, as Beiser has demonstrated so well, scholarship has ceded disproportionate attention to the influence of Fichte and the philosophy of subjectivism since Rudolf Haym’s landmark study, *Die romantische Schule* (1870). But there is another sense, too, of course, in which we might speak of the idealism of the Romantic project of the new mythology; indeed, from this bird’s eye view it is crucial to observe that the ideals of a social utopianism impelled the project of a new mythology just as strongly as the heady philosophical discourses in Jena’s lecture halls. For the new mythology was conceived as a salve for what the Romantics perceived to be the increasing fragmentation of European *social* life. Granting the new mythology’s ability to transcend the limits of philosophical reason, we want to ask now what practical

⁷⁴ KAV I, 440.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 58-59.

implications it carried. What were the social and political dimensions of the new mythology?

One of the primary goals the Romantics hoped to achieve with the creation of the new mythology involved a reversal of what they regarded as the Enlightenment's deleterious effects on European religious sensibility. To be sure, no matter how many contemporary scholars and critics misguidedly scold Novalis for his *Christenheit* essay, the Romantics in Jena by no means sought to revive a medieval Christianity. In general, they were less interested in the particulars of a doctrinal system than they were in reconstituting the intellectual parameters that would sanction the legitimacy of any religion at all. This kind of game-changing intellectual maneuver is precisely what F. Schlegel believed to have found in Schleiermacher's speeches on religion, which, by redefining the essence of religion as *Anschauung des Universums*, had preempted the Kantian strictures imposed on reason. The new mythology bore on this rehabilitation of religion inasmuch as it provided for a symbolic intuition of the universe in the form of art. Indeed, if mythology could provide for a religious praxis centered on the intuition of nature, it would mitigate the deepest and most longstanding division that plagued humankind: namely, the division between the objective realm of nature and the subjective sphere of human existence.

In his novel *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* (1798), Novalis depicted this disunity in a splendidly simple fairy-tale: there once lived a youth named Hyacinth who conversed with the trees, the flowers, and the animals of his home. Shortly after he fell in love with Rosenblütchen, who requited his love, Hyacinth received a visit from a longbearded

foreigner who gave him a mysterious book. From then on, Hyacinth lost interest in Rosenblütchen and left home in a form of self-inflicted exile. His wandering continued until he met a woman who burned his book and enjoined him to find the goddess Isis. When Hyacinth eventually located Isis and pulled back the veil that covered her, Rosenblütchen fell into his lap, their love was rekindled, and Hyacinth enjoyed a reunion with nature. The tale illustrates what the characters in the frame narrative of the philosophical novel reason about discursively: that there was once a unity between humankind and nature, but through the introduction of scientific knowledge, this unity was shattered. One of the novel's characters illuminates the gist of the scientific fallacy when he explains that it has reduced nature to an "einförmigen Maschine, ohne Vorzeit und Zukunft [...]"; proceeding as if nature were external to history, they treat it as if "sie keinen Geist hätte [...]".⁷⁶ In the context of the rapid growth of vitalism and *Naturphilosophie*, these remarks clearly take aim at the Enlightenment's mechanistic conceptions of nature and hold them at least partially responsible for thwarting the eventual reconciliation of nature and humankind. Indeed, the same scientists are later described as "Scheidekünstler" and "tote Menschen" whose interest in nature extends only so far as they can exercise power over it.⁷⁷

Like Hyacinth, who rediscovered an edenic union with nature, humanity too will one day overcome its alienation from nature, Novalis suggests. But whereas Hyacinth's quest took the path of theistic religion — in finding the goddess, the exiled man found his

⁷⁶ Schriften I, 99.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 106.

way back to the peace of the primordial idyll — Novalis knew well that the Enlightenment had all but precluded the possibility of reenchantment via traditional religion: any hope for a restoration of paradise would have to be accomplished by poetry. The proposition that humanity would be saved by a “großen gemeinschaftlichen Entschluß,”⁷⁸ asserted early in the novel, is refined by its end, when a sage explains that such salvation must occur in the sphere of poetry. Poets alone “haben es gefühlt, was die Natur den Menschen sein kann [...]. Alles finden sie in der Natur. Ihnen allein bleibt die Seele derselben nicht fremd, und sie suchen in ihrem Umgang alle Seligkeiten der goldnen Zeit nicht umsonst.”⁷⁹ Along these lines, when in the novel there is talk of “Verkündiger der Natur” and the gospels that they would generate,⁸⁰ Novalis no doubt has in mind Lessing’s prediction of the coming of a new gospel, as well as his and F. Schlegel’s plans to write a new Bible — plans that fall under the conceptual umbrella of the new mythology.⁸¹

The Romantic conviction in the socially transformative power of poetic myth thus hinges in no small measure on the myth that humankind once enjoyed a unity with nature that processes of Enlightenment have long since sundered. The myth of a so-called golden age, ubiquitous in the poetic and theoretical work of Novalis,⁸² constitutes one of the core narratives of myth itself, according to Mircea Eliade, who writes that myth is

⁷⁸ Ibid., 88.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 99.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 106.

⁸¹ On this, see chapter three below.

⁸² When Friedrich Schlegel reports to A.W. Schlegel of his very first encounter with Friedrich von Hardenberg in Leipzig, he mentions Hardenberg’s obsession with the notion of a golden age. See *KFSA*, XXIII, 40. The definitive scholarly work on the topic is Hans-Joachim Mähl, *Die Idee des goldenen Zeitalters im Werk des Novalis* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1994 (1965)).

predicated upon the narration of sacred history that occurred in *illud tempus*, the primordial age when human beings communicated directly with the natural and celestial spheres.⁸³ To the extent that myth seeks to recall and reconstitute this form of primordial unity, according to Eliade, it operates as a curative endeavor on par in the twentieth century with psychoanalysis, which in its attempt to “rebirth” the patient from the moment of childhood strives for an essentially analogous result.⁸⁴

It would be a mistake to judge the Romantics so sanguine (and naïve) as to expect the imminent advent of a new golden age. As Hans-Joachim Mähl has shown, the anticipatory expressions of a Novalis, which could so easily be confused for a form of messianism, are in point of fact only a rhetorical strategy predicated upon the view that progress toward a utopian ideal demands the fervor of apodictic language.⁸⁵ In much the same way, the work on a mythic poetry among figures like Novalis and F. Schlegel was undertaken not with the real expectation that it would usher in a new golden age, but with the hope that it would hasten the real changes required of moving toward such a goal. Specifically, they believed that such a poetics would assuage the cultural atomization wrought by enlightened absolutism and democratic revolution, the two opposing poles of eighteenth-century political life that had laid waste to social harmony. While the French Revolution had once roused the excitement of the Romantics, by the end of the eighteenth century, its aftermath had prompted Novalis to compare the dissolution of

⁸³ Eliade, *Cosmos and History: The Myth of the Eternal Return* (New York: Harper, 1954), 112.

⁸⁴ Eliade, 71-72.

⁸⁵ See Mähl, 339-340.

monarchies to the rubble left behind by a collapsing mountain.⁸⁶ The status quo of the *ancien régime*, however, was no cheery alternative. More than any other state, Novalis wrote, Prussia was governed like a mechanized factory (Fabrik), the human cogs of which had been stuck together by the old paste of mutual self-interest.⁸⁷⁸⁸ Like his intellectual idol, Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805), who in the *Briefe über die ästhetische Erziehung* (1795) had prescribed art as a remedy for the barbarism of the Revolution, Novalis understood his and other poets' roles as pedagogical in nature, poetic in form. "Wir sind auf einer Mißion," he wrote, "zur Bildung der Erde sind wir berufen."⁸⁹ Implicit in the mission of *Bildung* was the forging of genuine human bonds through poetry, as Novalis would write in *Blüthenstaub*: "Die Menschenwelt ist das gemeinschaftliche Organ der Götter. Poesie vereinigt sie, wie uns."⁹⁰

Neither in the critique of a mechanistic state nor in the conviction that poetry might save it was Novalis alone. The anonymously written *Ältestes Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus*, drafted in the years just before the school in Jena coalesced, heralded a new mythology precisely as a means of transforming what seemed to be a de facto machine-state. In contrast to Novalis, however, who yearned for a constitutional monarchy governed by love, the author of the *Systemprogramm* had envisioned a radically different scenario: the abolition of the state itself. Since the state belongs not to the realm of nature or ideas, he wrote, but is generated instead by *Menschenwerk*, it

⁸⁶ Schriften II, 487.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 494.

⁸⁸ Love as a principle of political force gains significant traction in Novalis's *Politische Aphorismen*.

⁸⁹ Schriften II, 426.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 461.

necessarily treats human beings as cogs in a system. “Denn jeder Staat muß freie Menschen als mechanisches Räderwerk behandeln; und das soll er nicht; also soll er *aufhören*.” Whereas the mechanism of the state cannot sustain, let alone generate, genuine human community, the author asserts that beauty can and consequently designates poetry rather than philosophy the “Lehrerin der Menschheit.” This view leads to what the author confesses is a rather bold proposition:

wir müssen eine neue Mythologie haben, diese Mythologie aber muß im Dienste der Ideen stehen, sie muß eine Mythologie der *Vernunft* werden. Ehe wir die Ideen ästhetisch, d. h. mythologisch machen, haben sie für das *Volk* kein Interesse; und umgekehrt, ehe die Mythologie vernünftig ist, muß sich der Philosoph ihrer schämen. So müssen endlich Aufgeklärte und Unaufgeklärte sich die Hand reichen, die Mythologie muß philosophisch werden und das Volk vernünftig, und die Philosophie muß mythologisch werden, um die Philosophen sinnlich zu machen. Dann herrscht ewige Einheit unter uns. Nimmer der verachtende Blick, nimmer das blinde Zittern des Volks vor seinen Weisen und Priestern. Dann erst erwartet uns *gleiche* Ausbildung *aller* Kräfte, des Einzelnen sowohl als aller Individuen. Keine Kraft wird mehr unterdrückt werden. Dann herrscht allgemeine Freiheit und Gleichheit der Geister! – Ein höherer Geist, vom Himmel gesandt, muß diese neue Religion unter uns stiften, sie wird das letzte, größte Werk der Menschheit sein.⁹¹

Mythology, in other words, is a more effective instrument for achieving the education of the *Volk* than Enlightenment philosophy itself.

But if an intervention into the sphere of aesthetic practice like the one proposed by the *Systemprogramm* were to provide for the conditions of a unified and democratic equality, artists would require a common mythology in the first place. This posed no small problem, the Romantics thought, because the spiritual-intellectual heritage of modern German poetry was every bit as splintered as the hundreds of German principalities that littered central Europe. F. Schlegel diagnosed the affair in his *Rede*

⁹¹ Hölderlin, *Werke*, IV, 311.

über die Mythologie, in which Ludoviko articulates the lacuna common to modern poetic production:

Ihr müßt es oft im Dichten gefühlt haben, daß es Euch an einem festen Halt für Euer Wirken gebrach, an einem mütterlichen Boden, einem Himmel, einer lebendigen Luft. Aus dem Innern herausarbeiten das alles muß der moderne Dichter, und viele haben es herrlich getan, aber bis jetzt nur jeder allein, jedes Werk wie eine neue Schöpfung von vorn an aus Nichts. Ich gehe gleich zum Ziel. Es fehlt, behaupte ich, unsrer Poesie an einem Mittelpunkt, wie es die Mythologie für die der Alten war, und alles Wesentliche, worin die moderne Dichtkunst der antiken nachsteht, läßt sich in die Worte zusammenfassen: Wir haben keine Mythologie. Aber setze ich hinzu, wir sind nahe daran eine zu erhalten, oder vielmehr es wird Zeit, daß wir ernsthaft dazu mitwirken sollen, eine hervorzubringen.⁹²

The lack of a *Mittelpunkt*, a common “motherly ground,” entailed consequences for the composition of modern poetry, Schlegel believed. In the vision of modernity sketched by Ludoviko, each and every poet’s endeavors arose not from a common intellectual, spiritual, or mental heritage, but rather from the ego itself, such that what he refers to as “unsrer Poesie” is linked not so much to an *uns* as to an aggregate of discrete *ichs*.

Even before his transformation from classicist to Romantic, Schlegel had lamented this fractured ground of modern poetry. His essay *Über das Studium der griechischen Poesie* (1795-97) had delineated the riven character of modern poetry as it compared to what he saw as the cohesion of classical Greek poetry. Indeed, in the *Studiumaufsatz* he had written that modern poetry hardly reveals “etwas Gemeinsames,” let alone a “befriedigende Einheit.”⁹³ There prevails, instead, what Schlegel characterizes as a “rastlose unersättliche Streben nach dem Neuen, Piquanten und Frappanten, bei dem dennoch die Sehnsucht unbefriedigt bleibt.”⁹⁴ Despite the positive shifts in Schlegel’s

⁹² KFSA II, 312.

⁹³ KFSA I, 221.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 228.

estimation of modern, Romantic poetry between the time of this essay and the *Gespräch über die Poesie*, he persisted in his view that poets' quest for union with the absolute and with each other would benefit should it spring from a common fount rather than a scattered mess of disparate intellects. As Schlegel writes in the introduction to the *Gespräch über die Poesie*, the poet will first make progress on his quest for union with the absolute "wenn er den Mittelpunkt gefunden hat, durch Mitteilung mit denen die ihn gleichfalls von einer andern Seite auf eine andre Weise gefunden haben. Die Liebe bedarf der Gegenliebe. Ja für den wahren Dichter kann selbst das Verkehr mit denen, die nur auf der bunten Oberfläche spielen, heilsam und lehrreich sein. Er ist ein geselliges Wesen."⁹⁵ In addition to the philosophical harmony of the real and the ideal, there lay at the heart of Schlegel's vision for the new mythology, in other words, the vision of a social-aesthetic harmony.

It is perhaps now more than ever a mystery that Dante's *Commedia* should have been an integral piece in what we have just outlined as the Romantic project of a new mythology. What did a profoundly Catholic and quintessentially medieval poem have to do with the new gospel evangelized by Spinoza's devotees? Why would a group of Romantics, who railed against the absolutism of the *ancien régime*, embrace a poem whose author gleefully prophesied the advent of a new world order based in Rome? To be sure, these aspects of the *Commedia* were not lost on its Romantic readers; they hardly could be, given that they formed the basis of the poem's tepid reception in the French and German Enlightenment. But with the turn toward a radical aestheticism, as well as a new

⁹⁵ Ibid., 286.

historicism that relativized the peculiarities of Dante, the Romantics discovered in the poem a work amenable to the new, revelatory character they had begun to ascribe to poetry. In the remainder of this dissertation, I will argue that the Romantics believed that in Dante's *Commedia* they had located an exemplary model for the means by which they might transform the tenets of Fichte's idealism and Spinoza's realism into an objective artwork, a new mythology, that would simultaneously outstrip the limitations of philosophical reason and provide for a new source of cultural-poetic currency.

2

**Discovering Dante and Theorizing Myth:
The Schlegel Brothers and the Origins of the New Mythology**

Une Divinité Cachée

Vous voulez connaître le Dante. Les Italiens l'appellent *divin*; mais c'est une divinité cachée: peu de gens entendent ses oracles; il a des commentateurs, c'est peut-être encore une raison de plus pour n'être pas compris. Sa réputation s'affermira toujours, parce qu'on ne le lit guère. Il y a de lui une vingtaine de traits qu'on sait par coeur: cela suffit pour s'épargner la peine d'examiner le reste.⁹⁶

Voltaire's assessment of Dante, which in the same sentence both registers his towering reputation and undermines its foundation, bespeaks the generally contested position of the Italian poet and his *Commedia* in Neo-Classical literary culture of the eighteenth century. To be sure, even if the remark was intended pejoratively (it was),⁹⁷ Voltaire did not err in labeling Dante *une divinité cachée* — particularly from the vantage point of German-speaking Europe.⁹⁸ Translated into German for the first time in 1559, Dante attained early notoriety in German lands as a forerunner of Luther by virtue of his Latin treatise on universal monarchy, *De Monarchia*, which vociferously denounced the legitimacy of the papacy's interventions in the operation of temporal government.⁹⁹ The

⁹⁶ Voltaire, *Œuvres Complètes de Voltaire*. Nouvelle Édition. (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1878), 312.

⁹⁷ One might note, for example, that *oracles* was a loaded term in the wake of the French Enlightenment, during which Bernard Fontenelle (1657-1757) had written and published the *Histoires des Oracles* (1687), which, by demythologizing the oracles of pagan antiquity as frauds, indirectly sought to demythologize the religious rites of Christian Europe. Voltaire's use of the term with respect to Dante, therefore, suggests a measure of authorial fraudulence. On the controversy surrounding the oracles, see Jonathan Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 359-374.

⁹⁸ Voltaire never mentions Dante, for example, in his *Essay on Epic Poetry*, written and published in English in 1727.

⁹⁹ See Francis Cheneval, *Die Rezeption der Monarchia Dantes bis zur Editio Princeps im Jahre 1559: Metamorphosen eines philosophischen Werkes* (München: W. Fink, 1995). See also Daniel DiMassa, "The

Commedia, on the other hand, garnered attention only slowly over the course of the German eighteenth century.¹⁰⁰ For the better part of the century, in fact, it was deemed a Gothic monstrosity due to its violation of the standards of French taste as propagated by the likes of Boileau, Voltaire, and the literary dictator of Leipzig, Johann Christoph Gottsched.¹⁰¹

Against Dante's various detractors, the Swiss critic Johann Jakob Bodmer — who had already polemicized on behalf of Milton's *Paradise Lost* — launched a defense of the *Commedia* in essays and remarks scattered between 1749 and 1763.¹⁰² To those who

Politics of Translation and the German Reception of Dante: Johannes Herold's *Monarchy*," in *Translation and the Book Trade in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Jose Maria Perez Fernandez and Edward Wilson Lee (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

¹⁰⁰ Nicolo Ciangulo published the first full translation of the *Inferno* into German in 1755. Leberecht Bachenschwanz translated the *Commedia* in its entirety for the first time into German prose between 1767 and 1769. Critics like Johann Nicolaus Meinhard and Johann Jakob Bodmer had translated portions of the poem in critical essays in the mid-to-late eighteenth century. On the early German translations and editions, see Ernst Behler's entry in the *Dante Encyclopedia*, ed. Richard Lansing (New York: Routledge, 2010), 266.

¹⁰¹ The Gottschedian poet and critic Daniel Wilhelm Triller, for example, dismissed Dante — together with Milton and Ariosto — as a poet of "fieberhaften Träumen" in the fifth part of his *Poetische Betrachtungen* (Hamburg: 1751). In the introduction to part one of this work, Triller included a long dedicatory poem to Heinrich Brockes in which he even wrote a strophe mocking Dante's apparent simplemindedness: "Zwar Dantes stellet uns des Ditis Hofstadt dar, / Und schreibt ein langes Werk von der Verdammten Plagen: / Alleine, wird man nur der Einfalt recht gewahr, / So müssen wir dabey mehr lachen, als verzagen." I quote here from Emil Sulger-Gebing, "Dante in der deutschen Litteratur des XVIII. Jahrhunderts," *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Litteraturgeschichte* 9:6 (1896), 470. Sulger-Gebing summarizes Dante's meaning for Gottsched himself: "Gottscheds ganzer Richtung auf das Nüchterne und Verstandesgemässe war Dantes Dichtung diametral entgegengesetzt, und so können wir uns nicht wundern, dass er dem grossen Florentiner keine Sympathie und nur widerwillig die dürftigste Anerkennung, in erster Linie für seine Verdienste um die Sprache [...] entgegenbrachte [...]," 470. Another critic, Johann Nicolaus Meinhard, marvels over the heights of Dante's genius, yet criticizes him for the "größten Ungereimtheiten" and the "frostigsten und niedrigsten Einfällen" to which he at times sinks. Meinard's explanation for this discrepancy relies on a Gottschedian argument: Dante's imagination, he writes, "bleibt nicht immer gleich gespannt, sie sinkt bisweilen desto tiefer, je höher sie vorher gestiegen war, wenn sie nicht durch die Kunst und durch Regeln unterstützt wird. Außerdem kann sie (Dante's imagination) sich sehr wohl mit einem Verstand gatten, der von den Vorurtheilen und dem falschen Geschmacke eines barbarischen Jahrhunderts angesteckt ist; und dieses war der Fall, in welchem sich Dante befand." Meinhard, *Versuche über den Charakter und die Werke der besten Italiänischen Dichter* (Braunschweig: 1774), 23.

¹⁰² Bodmer makes two major statements on Dante. The first comes in letter twenty-nine of the *Neue kritische Briefe über ganz verschiedenen Sachen* (Zürich: Orell, 1749). The second is his essay "Über das

would disparage the poem for not having been written “in unsere[r] Denkart,” Bodmer prescribed a dose of historicism: after all, the critics who dismiss the *Commedia* on such grounds are the same ones who presuppose their times to be “die aufgeklärtesten und gründlichsten [...]”¹⁰³ Indeed, Bodmer argues, a condescending assurance of their own intellectual superiority leads critics to apply contemporary standards of taste and morals to vastly different peoples and ages, as if the principles of French Neo-Classicism obtained universally. Precisely this myopic outlook, according to Bodmer, resulted in the judgment that “übler Geschmack” and “gotische Kühnheit” reigned supreme in the *Commedia*.¹⁰⁴ Oddly enough, he writes, critics deemed Dante a sort of naïve genius, but since his poem did not display the principles of a classical arrangement, “es beleidigte alle Regeln die zum mechanischen Baue eines Gedichtes gegeben worden.”¹⁰⁵

This dynamic is evident even in the fervent but episodic *Sturm und Drang* reception of Dante. Johann Heinrich Füssli (1741-1825) illustrated scenes from the poem, while the dramatist Heinrich Wilhelm von Gerstenberg (1737-1823) adapted Dante’s grisly Ugolino material into a tragedy of the same name (1768). Bodmer, too, though no proponent of the *Sturm und Drang*, incorporated the tale of Ugolino into his drama *Der Hungerthurm zu Pisa* (1769), a heroic drama written to counter what seemed to him a glut of sentimental literature. And later, Josef Alois Gleich (1772-1841), an Austrian dramatist, and Casimir Boehlendorff (1775-1825), a friend of Friedrich Hölderlin, would

dreyfache Gedicht des Dante,” published most recently in *Schriften zur Literatur*, ed. Volker Meid (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1980), 283-293. This was originally published in “Freymüthige Nachrichten von Neuen Büchern, und andern zur Gelehrtheit gehörigen Sachen,” 20. Jahrgang 1763, pp. 268-270, 276-278.

¹⁰³ Bodmer, “Über das dreyfache Gedicht des Dante,” *Schriften zur Literatur*, 283.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 284.

write dramas based on the very same Ugolino material. Above all, however, these episodic approaches to the *Commedia* — which limited themselves almost exclusively to adaptations of *Inferno* 5 and *Inferno* 33 — seemed to reinforce the already prevalent assumption that Dante's genius, stifled by the weight of his Gothic edifice, sparkled only intermittently in moments of the most intense pathos.

Bodmer's earlier defense of the *Commedia*, however, indicates what would be a decisive juncture in eighteenth-century aesthetics, indeed one so fundamental that it would transform the opprobrium apportioned to the *Commedia* as well as to many other foreign works into enthusiastic approbation. The juncture to which I refer is the emergence in the 1760s and 1770s of a radical historicism, the effect of which relativized what once seemed to be the infallible and universally valid aesthetic judgments authorized by the Rationalism of Gottsched and his school. It was precisely this historicism that enabled Herder, in his essay *Über Shakespeare* (1773), for example, to rely on cultural and anthropological arguments in order to legitimate the excellence of the Bard's decidedly un-Aristotelian dramas.¹⁰⁶ Published together with Herder's Shakespeare essay was another famous salvo, Goethe's *Von deutscher Baukunst*, which is unusually illuminating in highlighting the stakes of the *Commedia*'s entry into German arts and letters in the final quarter of the eighteenth century. Goethe describes there the initial experience of encountering the Strasbourg Cathedral, a Gothic monument whose connotations in 1773 will have borne striking similarities to those associated with Dante's

¹⁰⁶ On the rise of German historicism, and in particular of Herder's involvement with the development of anthropology, see Frederick Beiser, *The German Historicist Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

famously architectonic poem. I would like to emphasize what he identifies as the prejudices of his taste upon visiting the church:

Als ich das erstemal nach dem Münster ging, hatt ich den Kopf voll allgemeiner Erkenntnis guten Geschmacks. Auf Hörensagen ehrt ich die Harmonie der Massen, die Reinheit der Formen, war ein abgesagter Feind der verworrenen Willkürlichkeiten gotischer Verzierungen. Unter die Rubrik *gotisch*, gleich dem Artikel eines Wörterbuchs, häufte ich alle synonymische Mißverständnisse, die mir von Unbestimmtem, Ungeordnetem, Unnatürlichem, Zusammengestoppeltem, Aufgeflicktem, Überladnem jemals durch den Kopf gezogen waren. Nicht gescheiter als ein Volk, das die ganze fremde Welt barbarisch nennt, hieß alles *gotisch*, was nicht in mein System paßte, von dem gedrechselten, bunten Puppen- und Bilderwerk an, womit unsre bürgerliche Edelleute ihre Häuser schmücken, bis zu den ernsten Resten der älteren deutschen Baukunst, über die ich, auf Anlaß einiger abenteuerlichen Schnörkel, in den allgemeinen Gesang stimmte: »Ganz von Zierat erdrückt!« und so graute mir's im Gehen vorm Anblick eines mißgeformten krausborstigen Ungeheuers.

This account, in which Goethe admits he understood the Gothic not so much as an historically informed heuristic but as a generic placeholder for everything that “nicht in mein System paßte,” indicates the manner in which generally a-historical prejudices underwrote the Rationalist criticisms leveled at works like the *Commedia*. Telling, too, is Goethe’s confession that the aversion to anything so foreign as the Gothic necessarily rendered it *barbarisch*. This term, as we have already seen from Meinhard’s remarks,¹⁰⁷ was among the most common pejoratives used to criticize Dante’s poem.¹⁰⁸ In an early statement, even Friedrich Schlegel described the medieval period at large as “das große barbarische Intermezzo, welches den Zwischenraum zwischen der antiken und der modernen Bildung anfüllt.”¹⁰⁹ If the *Commedia* were to find a thoughtful reception among German readers of the eighteenth century, therefore, its stewards would have to

¹⁰⁷ See note 101 above.

¹⁰⁸ Before having been convinced of its beauty, even Friedrich Schlegel described the *Commedia* as beholden to the “gotischen Begriffen des Barbaren.” See below, p. 70.

¹⁰⁹ KFSA I, 235.

span the seemingly unbridgeable gap into the “barbarism” of the middle ages and make Dante compelling for readers and critics in eighteenth-century Europe.¹¹⁰

Making Dante Modern

As a student in Göttingen (1786-1791), A.W. Schlegel undertook the most sympathetic assessment of Dante in German since Bodmer.¹¹¹ There he met the historian of Romantic literature, Friedrich Bouterwek (1766-1828), studied under the tutelage of Gottfried August Bürger (1747-1794), a *Sturm und Drang* poet and revolutionary, and cultivated careful scholarly habits under the mentorship of Christian Gottlob Heyne (1729-1812), the classicist whose historicism paved the way from the Enlightenment’s interest in fable to the nineteenth century’s study of myth.¹¹² Exploiting his teachers’ turn to historicism,

¹¹⁰ Edith Höltenschmidt makes the important observation that, even if F. Schlegel once regarded the middle ages as a “barbarisches Intermezzo” between ancient and modern literature, he did not identify Dante with either of the two streams of poetry he described as local to the middle ages, namely the heroic poetry of the north or the fantastical poetry of the south: “Von den beiden mittelalterlichen Literaturbereichen nordischer und südlicher bzw. romanischer Prägung wird indirekt Dante ausgeschlossen [...]. Mit der Dominanz des Verstandes über die ursprüngliche Phantasie komme in Dante das im Christentum angelegte, bewußt lenkende Kunstprinzip der Moderne vollends zum Durchbruch, welches in der vorangegangenen, überwiegend naturpoetischen Literatur des Mittelalters erst spurenweise vorhanden gewesen sei.” See Höltenschmidt, *Die Mittelalter-Rezeption der Brüder Schlegel* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2000), 281.

¹¹¹ In fairness, Johann Nikolaus Meinhard had written *Versuche über den Charakter und die Werke der besten italiänischen Dichter* (1763). But, it reiterated many of the same criticisms that had come from the *Commedia*’s Enlightened critics. Schlegel in fact dismisses Meinhard’s work, writing of it to Schiller in Dante’s own words: “Non ragioniam di lor, ma guarda e passa!” (Let’s not speak of them, but look and pass by)! See his letter to Schiller in Schiller, *Nationalausgabe*, ed. Günter Schulz (Weimar: Hermann Böhlaus Nachfolger, 1943-1998), Bd. 35, 215 (June 4, 1795). Friedrich Schlegel, in his 1792 review of Bürger’s *Akademie der schönen Redekünste*, would criticize his brother’s dismissive attitude toward Meinhard’s work.

¹¹² A helpful account of Schlegel’s years in Göttingen can be found in Stefanie Roth, “Der Einfluß des Göttinger Neuhumanismus und der Universität auf die frühromantische Bewegung,” in *Romantik in Niedersachsen: Der Beitrag des protestantischen Nordens zur Entstehung der literarischen Romantik in Deutschland*, ed. Silvio Vietta (Hildesheim, Zürich, New York: Georg Olms, 1986): 148-151. See likewise the excellent account of Achim Hölder, “August Wilhelm Schlegels Göttinger Mentoren,” in *Der Europäer August Wilhelm Schlegel: Romantischer Kulturtransfer — romantische Wissenschaften*, ed. York-Gothart Mix and Jochen Strobel (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), 13-29. Hölder explains that Bouterwek, despite his

it was Schlegel who bridged the gap between the fourteenth and the eighteenth centuries and managed once and for all to popularize Dante.¹¹³ Instead of perpetuating the image of a poet hindered by the circumstances of his barbaric age, Schlegel freely acknowledged the barbarism of the fourteenth century while analogizing it to the barbarism of the eighteenth century. After all, Europe ca. 1790 no longer looked like *le meilleur des mondes possibles*, as the Rationalist credo would have it; in fact, it looked conspicuously similar to a world mired in Guelph-Ghibelline factionalism. Rather than represent Dante as the victim of an age so foreign as to be barbaric, therefore, Schlegel depicted Dante's century as so similar to his own that Dante could not but be regarded as an exemplary model for contemporary poets. It was not the affective intensity of the *Sturm und Drang*, therefore, that effected the comprehensive appraisal of the *Commedia* in the German nineteenth century, but rather this historical contextualization by means of which A.W. Schlegel both familiarized his readers with the poem and asserted its contemporaneity. Ernst Behler's assessment that A.W. Schlegel's study of the *Commedia* shifted interest "from the political, theological, and historical aspects of the work to its poetry and poetic structure"¹¹⁴ is true, in other words, but only because Schlegel himself had enabled an aesthetic reception by arguing in the first place on behalf of the contemporaneity of the "political, theological, and historical aspects of the work."

similarities to Schlegel, exerted very little impact on the writings of A.W. Schlegel, whose later lecture cycles made him a competitor of Bouterwek (20).

¹¹³ For another discussion of Schlegel's historicism, particularly vis-à-vis the Dante reception and his studies with Heyne, see Höltschmidt, 15ff. She writes that the historicist approach to literary texts in Schlegel culminates, however, "in die Zirkularität gegenseitiger, unreflektierter Ableitung von Literatur und Historie [...], welche in einem idealisierten Geschichtsverständnis wurzelt [...]."

¹¹⁴ Behler, "Dante in Germany," *Dante Encyclopedia*, 266.

Schlegel's major early contribution to Dante studies was an essay that appeared in the third volume of Gottfried Bürger's *Akademie der schönen Redekünste* (1791). Here he aims to popularize a poet who, having been burned on a pyre of moral and aesthetic rules, had been the victim of an *auto-da-fé*.¹¹⁵ The metaphor of the *auto-da-fé* bears mentioning in that it marks Dante first of all as an aesthetic heretic, a figure whose poetry, like Shakespeare's dramas, contravened the rules of the French. It likewise confers upon Dante and his poetry an air of the sacred. He is a holy figure, Schlegel implies, whose genius earned for him only the condemnation of the Pharisees of eighteenth-century Rationalism. In an attempt to preempt their criticisms, Schlegel himself acknowledges the poet's foreignness by adopting the very pejoratives they had employed: "In unserm Zeitalter ist Dante selbst seinen Landsleuten [...] wenig bekannt. Seine Dunkelheit wird ihnen immer undurchdringlicher, seine Sprache fremder, der männliche Klang seiner Verse rauher und barbarischer."¹¹⁶ To compensate for this distance, indeed to render the barbarian ring of his verses more intelligible, Schlegel explains that readers must "einen Zug seiner Grösse in sich [übertragen]."¹¹⁷ The critical apparatus required of such a translation would be provided by Schlegel himself, who drawing on the principles of Heyne's and Herder's historicism, would illuminate the "Dunkelheit" of Dante. The ensuing essay, therefore, in addition to providing an informative overview of medieval Italian politics and culture, employs this historical

¹¹⁵ AWSW III, 200.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 200.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 199.

frame to suggest the relevance of Dante to contemporary intersections of art and politics.¹¹⁸

Schlegel's historical sketch operates on two valences, for the apparently straightforward account of medieval Italy demands to be read reflexively as a commentary on the radical troubles facing Europe at the close of the eighteenth century. In this respect, Schlegel's historical sensitivity does more than contextualize a foreign poem: it functions as a mode of cultural translation, spanning a gap of some five centuries and enabling Schlegel to portray Dante as a poet with something urgent to convey to Revolutionary Europe. What clues us in to the double valence of Schlegel's historiography is the bold comparison he draws between medieval and modern Europe.¹¹⁹ "So voller Barbarei, Ausschweifungen, und Greuel das Jahrhundert war, worin er [Dante] lebte, so steh ich doch nicht an, es dem jetzigen weit vorzuziehen."¹²⁰ Writing in 1790-1791, one can imagine that the medieval *Barbarei*, *Ausschweifungen*, and *Greuel* of which Schlegel writes represent favorable alternatives to the more violent affairs of revolutionary France. If, as Goethe had written, Gothic barbarism were reducible to all that which "nicht in mein System paßte," the *Barbarey* of the Revolution denoted

¹¹⁸ Ulrike Schenk-Lenzen has written of Schlegel's historicist approach to Dante as an effort to fulfill the conviction that there need be a critical maneuver undertaken in order to render Dante intelligible to his readers. Schenk-Lenzen regards this historicism as enabling a "Metamorphose des Geistes" that transports readers to Dante's own century. While I share Schenk-Lenzen's basic point, I would suggest that the historicism works in the opposite direction: namely, Schlegel's introduction to the *Commedia* renders its poet modern, rather than its reader medieval. The historiographical parallelisms that Schlegel constructs between 14th-century Florence and contemporary Europe seem to bear this out. See Schenk-Lenzen, *Das ungleiche Verhältnis von Kunst und Kritik: Zur Literaturkritik August Wilhelm Schlegels* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1991), 251ff.

¹¹⁹ As a point of comparison, for example, one might consider Novalis's *Die Christenheit, oder Europa*, another Romantic account of medieval Europe, that is almost diametrically opposed to Schlegel's reading in this essay.

¹²⁰ AWSW III, 201.

something entirely less innocuous. Indeed, only four years after Schlegel's Dante essay appeared, his friend and mentor, Schiller, would famously employ the term *Barbarey* to describe the ultra-principled but deplorably inhumane aristocracy of revolutionary France.¹²¹ In Schlegel's case, the barbarism of the eighteenth century likely refers to the violence of the revolutionaries themselves, which Schlegel, as we know from his correspondence with his brother, regarded most disapprovingly.¹²²

Several details emerge in Schlegel's panorama of late-medieval Europe to suggest correspondences with modern Europe, but none more suggestive than the observation that Italy found itself the victim of eternal feuds: "Es war dort nur eine ewige Wuth Aller gegen Alle."¹²³ The "blinde Wuth der Faktionen," he writes, led to bitter strife between several parties, such that nobles and commoners fought against each other, while even the sexes opposed one another.¹²⁴ The specter of the Revolution looms large over these lines,

¹²¹ Schiller, *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen* (1795).

¹²² A.W. Schlegel's position toward the French Revolution must be reconstructed from Friedrich Schlegel's letters to his brother. In a letter of August 26th, 1791, Friedrich acknowledges that A.W. Schlegel would like for him to read *Reflections on the Revolution in France* by Edmund Burke, one of the most stalwart opponents of the Revolution (KFSA XXIII, 23). In a letter from November 24th, 1793, amidst Robespierre's Reign of Terror, Friedrich writes not without a hint of sarcasm to his brother, "Mit Rührung verehere ich Deine edle Menschlichkeit, die <die kleinste> Gewaltthätigkeit verabscheut, sie mag im Namen der Ordnung oder im Namen der Freyheit verübt werden; aber ungern sehe ich daß Dein Haß gegen die Franken Dich unbillig macht, daß alle Theilnahme, die Du einem großen Volke zu schenken hast, einige bittere Spöttereyen sind" (KFSA XXIII, 161). Otto Brandt, accounting for A.W. Schlegel's later comments on the Revolution, summarizes in the following way: "August Wilhelm Schlegel ist unter den Romantikern zuerst und am lautesten als Gegner der französischen Revolution ausgetreten. Ehe noch mit Adam Müller und Arnim der romantische Ansturm gegen die revolutionären Erscheinungen begann, früher als seine nächsten romantischen Freunde hat er erkannt, welch tiefe Kluft sich zwischen der französischen Bewegung und den erwachenden politischen Ideen und Idealen der Romantik auftat." Otto Brandt, *August Wilhelm Schlegel: Der Romantiker und die Politik* (Stuttgart and Berlin: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1919), 36.

¹²³ AWSW III, 201.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 203. Such observations would find famous poetic expression in Goethe's *Unterhaltungen deutscher Ausgewanderten*, published, incidentally, together with Schlegel's translations of and comments on Dante's *Inferno* in *Die Horen* (1795).

with Schlegel writing that despite its myriad problems, life in medieval Europe would have been preferable to life in contemporary Europe. The reason for this, he thinks, depends on one's perspective. For even though mired in feuds, "damals konnte die Nation noch alles werden [...]. Jetzt ist sie gewesen, was sie werden konnte."¹²⁵ When in hindsight Schlegel surveys the landscape of eighteenth-century Europe, he determines that the factionalism of Dante's age simply never abated. On the contrary, it had intensified so aggressively as to prevent Schlegel from regarding his own age as the beginning of a new one, deeming it instead an age in which historical enmity had merely become integral to the status quo.¹²⁶

Schlegel's account of Dante's Italy draws readers' attention to the lack of a single political head, and in so doing, constructs another vital parallel for his German-speaking contemporaries: "Das Ansehen der Kaiser galt nichts mehr, und doch gab es sonst kein Oberhaupt, welches Macht gehabt hätte, die trotzige Städte zu einem Ganzen zusammen zu ordnen und sie ihre Freiheit ertragen zu lehren. Herrenlos war das Land und fast jeder kleine Theil desselben von mannichfaltiger Unterdrückung gequält."¹²⁷ More than just echoing the central thesis of Dante's political worldview, namely that a single imperial

¹²⁵ Ibid., 201. Friedrich Schlegel wrote a review of Bürger's journal in 1792 for the *Jenaische Allgemeine Literaturzeitung* and quoted this line from his brother's essay. He too draws attention to the analogy between medieval Europe and Revolutionary Europe.

¹²⁶ In his Berlin lectures on Romantic poetry, Schlegel gives an overview of medieval life in which he alters and idealizes the notion of the medieval feud. No longer does factionalism mark the middle ages as barbaric, instead, it concentrates itself in the form of the individual feud and finds expression in honorable, hand-to-hand combat: "Da man gegen die verwandten Waffenbrüder durch die Fehde doch eigentlich nur sein Recht suchte, wollte man es auch auf eine rechtmäßige Art thun, die Hinterlist wurde ausgeschlossen, man kämpfte offen, mit gleichen Waffen und Mitteln. So reducirte sich die Fehde allmählich auf den Zweykampf, dieser bekam eine gesetzliche Sanction und wurde unter dem Vorsitz des Lehnsherrn nach gewissen Veranstaltungen gehalten." See KAV, II/1, 76.

¹²⁷ AWSW III, 203.

ruler could achieve unity and peace, Schlegel raises a point that invites readers to think reflexively about medieval Italy. Just months before Mainz would be sacked by the French, and not long before the Holy Roman Empire itself would collapse after a millennium's reign, Schlegel's historical observations did more than diagnose the precariousness of medieval political life; they indirectly referenced the unsettling divisions among Germans in the face of the French Revolution and its aftermath. Conflict between Frederick the Great and Maria Theresa had precluded any grand dreams of pan-Germanic unity and exacerbated strife between Prussia and the Empire. The former's francophilic inclinations, moreover, represented an indignity to German patriots. The monarchs' deaths, in 1786 and 1780 respectively, blew gaps in German governance while the reigns of their successors, Frederick II and Joseph II, despite favorable Enlightenment policies, culminated in little more than disappointment over their inefficacy. In the final analysis, Germans' political reality was largely shaped by a scattered host of minor princes and governors. Thus when Schlegel adds that none of the Italians "wusste, ob er ein Vaterland habe," he bespeaks a sentiment common to eighteenth-century Germans, and one that would find resonance among other Romantics.¹²⁸ After all, in his notorious essay *Die Christenheit, oder Europa* (1799), Novalis would call attention to the very same deficiency in contemporary political governance, though by making precisely the opposite claim about the medieval period.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Ibid., 204.

¹²⁹ Schriften III, 507: "Es waren schöne glänzende Zeiten, wo Europa ein christliches Land war, wo *Eine* Christenheit diesen menschlich gestalteten Welttheil bewohnte; *Ein* großes gemeinschaftliches Interesse verband die entlegensten Provinzen dieses weiten geistlichen Reichs. – Ohne große weltliche Besitzthümer lenkte und vereinigte *Ein* Oberhaupt, die großen politischen Kräfte."

Having sufficiently demonstrated the turmoil linking Dante's age to his own, Schlegel prepares to articulate that which his contemporaries stand to learn from a poet who had otherwise appeared impossibly foreign. He does this by sketching the cultural landscape of the fourteenth century and censuring the abstract, apolitical erudition of medieval scholasticism and contrasting it with contemporaneous art forms that celebrated action. This is nowhere more evident than in the distinction Schlegel draws between medieval men of the book and medieval men of action. The "speculierenden Köpfe" of Dante's age, he writes, busied themselves "in einer aus vorigen Zeiten herabgeerbten Erstarrung zum Theil mit vielem Scharfsinn, zum Theil auch durch bloße platte Pedanterei sich selbst gefangen. Nichts wusste man von allem, was nützlich ist zu wissen, und bekümmerte sich auch nicht darum."¹³⁰ Against the background of internecine feuds, when the "romantische Geist ritterlicher Abenteuer" was emerging, these poindexters of the ivory tower twiddled their thumbs in *Erstarrung* and *Pedanterei*, not wanting to engage in "was nützlich ist zu wissen."¹³¹ Amidst this scholastic culture of Aristotle's admirers, however, there arose a form of poetry "bedewed by the sweat of praiseworthy deeds" — the *Minnesang* of the Provençal troubadours.¹³² Unmistakable in the contrast between scholastic and knightly literature is a judgment that suggests that intellectual production not rooted in the affairs of lived experience is to be dismissed as pedantry.¹³³

Minnesang, of course, did not belong to the sphere of political rhetoric, but its origins in a

¹³⁰ AWSW III, 204-205.

¹³¹ Ibid., 203.

¹³² Ibid., 206.

¹³³ The rise of knightly culture becomes crucial to Schlegel's later historiography of the Middle Ages. In the *Vorlesungen über die romantische Literatur* (1803-04), he enthuses over Germans' knightly heritage and undertakes an astonishing defense of religious warfare. See for example KAV, II/1, 72-73.

vernacular courtly culture that prized action and love were significant inasmuch as those values demarcated it from the otherwise abstruse, Latin learning of medieval literati. The discussion of *Minnesang* and its attendant status as loosely political art foreground Schlegel's estimation of Dante's poetry. This estimation culminates in a portrait of Dante that is best understood in light of his remarks on the tension between the middle ages' tempestuous politics and pedantic erudition. Schlegel writes the following:

Es ist das Siegel menschlicher Vortrefflichkeit, unabhängig zu sein vom Schicksal: Dante war's. Weder Druck, noch Leiden, noch Unruhe und Ungewissheit des äußern Zustandes machten seine Seele irre in ihrem Thun. Gewöhnlich leiden große Menschen viel, und selten läßt sich bestimmen, in wie fern das Schicksal sie zu der Würde erzog, oder nur die in ihnen ruhende Größe entwickelte und ihnen Stoff zum Wirken gab. Dieß ist auch der Fall bey Dante. Wir wissen nicht, welch ein Gedicht, er hervorgebracht haben würde, hätte er in Ruhe und in Wohlstand seines Lebens genossen; das, welches er in der Verbannung geschrieben hat, ist göttlich. Ihm sank der Muth nicht zu einer so umfassenden Unternehmung, die das angestrengteste Nachdenken vieler Jahre forderte, und er führte sie zu Ende mit einer Ueberlegenheit, daß alle Werke seiner Zeitgenossen, nicht nur in Italien, sondern in ganz Europa, wie Mißgeburten oder Zwerggestalten daneben stehen. Drang der Sorgen verjagt alle Ruhmbegierde aus den Herzen kühner, aber nicht ausdauernder Menschen; bei ihm zog sie sich mehr in's Innere zurück und wurzelte tiefer in sein Dasein. Er wandte sich von den Lebenden weg an die Nachwelt. Nicht geachtet zu werden, war für ihn ein Sporn, seinen Werth darzuthun: ihm ahndete, und ihm durfte es ahnden, er werde einst vor denen, die damals in ihrer kleinen Größe prunkten, aus dem Dunkel hervorleuchten. — Und wenn man nun liest, wie er von Mächtigen und Geringen, von Lebenden und Todten so frei, so niederwerfend stark die Wahrheit sagt, und dann bedenkt: der, welcher so redet, war seiner bürgerlichen Existenz beraubt, ohne die im damaligen Italien eben so wenig als im alten Griechenland Wohlstand des Lebens Statt fand; war unstät, abhängig und beinah zum Betteln verdammt; wer muß sich nicht mit Ehrfurcht neigen vor seinem Bilde, nicht weil es eines Denkers oder Dichters, sondern weil es eines Mannes Bild ist?¹³⁴

In this magnificent panegyric, which asserts Dante's having transcended the hardships of his fate by exploiting them to cultivate his innate talent, Schlegel suggests Dante as a model for achieving greatness in the face of almost unimaginable adversity. The *Commedia*, he writes, cannot be conceived independently of Dante's exile and his concomitant longing for esteem. Robbed of his "bürgerlichen Existenz," and damned to

¹³⁴ AWSW III, 221-223.

“begging,” Dante composed it not primarily as a *Denker* or as a *Dichter*, but as a *Mann*. With this observation, Schlegel echoes his earlier remark on the “männlichen Klang” of Dante’s verse and insists on manliness and action as prerequisites of aesthetic success.¹³⁵ Indeed, the insistence on Dante’s manliness enables Schlegel to distinguish the poetry of a man of action from the writing of those who “in ihrer kleinen Größe prunkten.”¹³⁶ In contrast to the pedants whom Schlegel had excoriated for their useless learning — among whom, by way of anachronism, one is tempted to include the Rationalists and Neo-Classicists of the eighteenth century — Dante wrote a poem whose germ consisted of real experience. Whereas at the beginning of the essay Schlegel had acknowledged critics’ confusion over Dante’s “Dunkelheit,” he now points to Dante as a poet who knew he would one day “aus dem Dunkel hervorleuchten.” Dante, while not a poet of the Enlightenment, is nonetheless a luminary. Clearly, Schlegel’s essay neither espouses nor criticizes the particulars of contemporary policy. And yet its political import is unmistakable: in censuring the barbarism of contemporary Europe and suggesting that good art bears the capacity to transcend and perhaps even transform such barbarism, Schlegel anticipates the imminent programs of Weimar Classicism and Jena Romanticism.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 200.

¹³⁶ In his *Vorlesungen über die romantische Poesie*, Schlegel again marvels over the manliness of medieval men, particularly that of German knights. He claims that they and their horses were bigger and stronger than men (and horses) of the eighteenth century (“sie waren ihnen in Wahrheit durch Muth, wackre Gesinnungen, Stärke, ja selbst an edler schöner Gestalt und an Leibesgröße unendlich überlegen”). Here, though, there is no attempt to link the manliness of medieval men with the composition of poetry. See KAV II/1, 74-75.

The venue in which Schlegel published this initial Dante essay, which deems experience a *sine qua non* for the production of good poetry, further attests to the timely political valences of the essay. Gottfried Bürger, Schlegel's professor, friend, and the publisher of the *Akademie der schönen Redekünste*, so vocally criticized absolutism and supported the Revolution that he earned a public scolding.¹³⁷ The *Akademie* itself, established in 1789 and published for the first time in 1790, functioned as an organ of German patriotism.¹³⁸ And in the very same edition of the *Akademie* in which Schlegel published his essay on Dante, Bürger published an anonymous piece on translation that satirized the Germans' inactivity and irrelevance as poets and scholars.¹³⁹ The anonymous author of the essay, which bears the unwieldy title "Panegyrikus oder flüchtige Standrede zu Ehren der wohlöbl. Uebersetzer-genossenschaft im heil. röm. deutschen Reiche," jokes that Germany's excellent translators maintained Germans' humility by not presupposing that they could write any books that would actually surpass the quality of those that they translated. Indeed, herein lies the sharpness of German translators, the author says, for whereas

der Selbstdenker und Erfinder handelt maschinenmäßig [...] der Uebersetzer, der mit jeder Zeile eine Probe seines mannhaften Fleisses giebt, zeigt sich eben dadurch als ein edleres, freieres, selbständigeres Wesen, und giebt den Unerfahrenen eine Weisung, wie

¹³⁷ On Bürger's political radicality, see Walter Grab, "Gottfried August Bürger als literarischer Wegbereiter und politischer Weggefährte des deutschen Jakobinismus," in *Gottfried August Bürger (1747-1794): Beiträge der Tagung zu seinem 200. Todestag*, ed. Wolfgang Beutin and Thomas Bütow (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1994), 9-23. In his *Romantische Schule* (1833), Heine famously wrote of Bürger: "Der Name *Bürger* ist im Deutschen gleichbedeutend mit dem Wort *citoyen*." See Heine, *Historisch-kritische Gesamtausgabe der Werke*, ed. Manfred Windfuhr (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1979), Bd. 8/1, 170.

¹³⁸ Bürger's dedicatory poem prays to the goddess of song that, though it has not happened yet, she be dignified by the German *Volk* in the way that she has been by the Greeks, Romans, British, and French. See *Akademie der Schönen Redekünste* 1:1 (1790), ll. 1-3.

¹³⁹ The essay was attributed to "Xy" on the journal's title page.

man zur Vortrefflichkeit kommen kann auf dem kürzesten, gemächlichsten und sichersten Wege.¹⁴⁰

In this respect, “die deutsche Nation ist unter allen Nationen der Welt die einzige, die sich selbst den untersten Platz zuerkennt, wenn die Rede ist von Rangstreit. Bei ihr allein ist Nationaldemuth zu finden.”¹⁴¹ Lampooning the notion that translation displays “manly industriousness,” the author, like Schlegel, implies that German writing lacks the manliness characteristic of foreign writers for whom patriotism or political action play a role. This, then, is the context in which Schlegel’s first essay on Dante — and the first truly significant German essay on Dante at all — is to be read. In his introduction to the German reading public, and in a pivotal publication for a founding member of the Jena *Frühromantik*, Dante represented the ideal of a man whose trying life blossomed into a celestial poem.

Allegory and Theology in the *Commedia*

Schlegel’s essay on Dante, written at just the point when he moved from Göttingen to Amsterdam, reflects the lasting influence of his university professors while simultaneously signaling a step that would distinguish him as a scholar in his own right. If the spirit of Bürger’s activism infused the text with its political tone, and Heyne’s historical sensitivity lent nuance to its methodology, it was above all Schlegel’s selection of the *Commedia* itself and interpretation of it that distinguished him from his forebears

¹⁴⁰ *Akademie der Schönen Redekünste* 1:3 (1791): 329-331.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 330.

and paved a way for him to move forward with his career.¹⁴² Indeed, the influence of Bürger, in particular, grew especially problematic after Schiller wrote a damning review of his poetry in the *Allgemeine Literaturzeitung* of 1791. His view that Bürger failed to idealize his poetry properly, in effect that he wrote too idiosyncratically,¹⁴³ was echoed later by Schlegel's impressionable brother, Friedrich, who saw in Bürger an impediment to A.W. Schlegel's success. Thus in December of 1793, F. Schlegel explained to A.W. Schlegel, after a lengthy diatribe against Bürger's poetry, that "Seit Du Car.[oline] liebtest, und wie Du nachher den Dante kennen lerntest, stieg Dein Geschmack zu einer Höhe, die B.[ürger] vielleicht nicht zu begreifen fähig ist. [...] Dein Eifer gegen Schiller gründet sich auf die Furcht, er möchte schaden. Sey sicher, er ist noch viel zu gut!"¹⁴⁴ The irony in Friedrich's statement, of course, is that such rancor would fester between himself and Schiller in 1796 that Schiller would disavow the Schlegels entirely; not, however, before A.W. Schlegel could publish a series of translations and commentary on Dante's *Inferno* in Schiller's short-lived but eminent journal, *Die Horen* (1795-1797).

Schlegel's 1791 essay laid the groundwork for the series of four translations and commentaries on the *Inferno* that would be published in Schiller's *Horen* in 1795.¹⁴⁵ An uncharacteristic fit for the otherwise classicist journal,¹⁴⁶ these publications — spurred by Gottfried Körner's effusive praise of Schlegel's Dante essay for Bürger¹⁴⁷ — were

¹⁴² Though never completed, Schlegel had planned throughout the 1790s to write and publish an entire book on Dante. On this, see Oskar Walzel, "Wilhelm Schlegel und Georg Joachim Göschen," in *Prager Deutsche Studien* 9 (1908), 125-147.

¹⁴³ Schiller, *Allgemeine Literaturzeitung* 14 (1791): 105-110.

¹⁴⁴ KFSA XXIII, 166. December 11, 1793.

¹⁴⁵ Schlegel would likewise translate and comment on excerpts from the *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* between 1795 and 1797. These publications included less commentary and appeared in *Beckers Taschenbuch zum geselligen Vergnügen*. They appear in AWSW III.

received with what was perhaps a surprising measure of acclaim.¹⁴⁸ Schiller's publisher, J.F. Cotta, despite certain reservations regarding the translations, deemed the contribution a "Meisterstück."¹⁴⁹ Herder, who had read the *Commedia* twice on his own, still found Schlegel's commentary to be both illuminating and enthralling. He commended Schiller for its publication:

Mit größtem Dank empfangen Euer Wohlgeb. Die Schlegelsche Schrift über Dante anbei zurück. Sie ist der Horen auf alle Weise werth; nicht nur die Verse sind sehr wohl gearbeitet; [...] und der literarische sowohl als kritische Blick auf das Gedicht selbst ist in hohem Grad belehrend. Es thut mir weh, daß das Mscr. zu Ende war, und ich bitte, dem Verfasser auch von mir [...] zu danken, und ihm um die Fortsetzung des Werks zu bitten. Ich habe den Dante im Italienischen 2mal gelesen, und bekenne gern, daß mir einige Illustrationen neu waren.¹⁵⁰

Schiller, too, offered lavish praise for Schlegel's contributions on Dante, noting that Schlegel had given him "ein zu entschiedenes Verdienst um den glücklichen Fortgang dieses Journals, als dass ich Ihnen nicht den verbindlichsten Dank dafür sagen sollte."¹⁵¹

It is possible that Schiller's kind words sprang from the relief of having acquired a publication with which to pad his journal, as F. Schlegel seemed to suggest to his brother.¹⁵² Indeed, Friedrich Schlegel, despite appreciating certain portions of his brother's commentary, found the overall quality marred by Schiller's decision to release

¹⁴⁶ In its first year of publication, *Die Horen* included Schiller's letters on aesthetic education, Goethe's *Literarischer Sansculottismus*, Heinrich Meyer's *Ideen zu einer künftigen Geschichte der Kunst*, and a bevy of other texts that seemed to announce the advent of Weimar Classicism.

¹⁴⁷ Schiller, *Nationalausgabe*, Bd. 35, 108-109 (December 12, 1794). Körner writes of Schlegel's 1791 essay: "Vorzügliche Stellen sind metrisch übersetzt, das übrige im Auszuge, mit einem historisch-philosophischen Commentar, der sich durch Geist und Kunstgefühl auszeichnet. In der Uebersetzung ist besonders der Ton des Ganzen sehr gut gelungen."

¹⁴⁸ Körner, for example, informs Schiller that Schlegel ought to be very pleased with the "günstige Aufnahme" of his work, particularly because its initial appearance in Bürger's journal attracted very little attention. See *ibid.*, 151 (February 16, 1795).

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 175 (March 20, 1795).

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 145-146 (February 4, 1795).

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, Bd. 27, 194.

¹⁵² See F. Schlegel's letter to his brother. KFSa XXIII, 246 (August 17, 1795).

the work in four separate runs.¹⁵³ Friedrich intimated, moreover, that his older brother ought to find new material: “Darf ich fragen ob Du ausser dem Dante schon eine bestimmte Arbeit unter den Händen hast?”¹⁵⁴ Generally, Friedrich supported and encouraged his brother’s translation of the *Commedia*, but the commentary in the *Horen* seems to have disappointed him.¹⁵⁵ Wilhelm von Humboldt found Schlegel’s Dante ultimately pedestrian, though better than the texts with which it was published: “Die Unterhaltungen [deutscher Ausgewanderten] mißfallen durchaus und total [...] Der Dante gefällt nur mittelmäßig, Herder gar nicht.”¹⁵⁶ The attention Schlegel devoted to the Ugolino episode, however, earned special praise from Humboldt.¹⁵⁷ And Klopstock, who by 1795 was an aging poet of yesteryear, boasted in curmudgeonly fashion that he had known Dante “seit langer Zeit, vielleicht vor Schl.[egels] Geburt.”¹⁵⁸

While Schlegel’s new interpretive approaches to the *Commedia* lacked the same political valence of the earlier Dante essay, their critical approach was nonetheless rooted in that essay’s preliminary outline of the poetic principles of the *Commedia*. Indeed, already in the essay for Bürger, Schlegel had outlined a paradigm for reading Dante that

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ KFSa XXIII, 247 (August 17, 1795).

¹⁵⁵ Friedrich likewise admonishes A.W. Schlegel: “Vor einigen Jahren glaube ich schrieb ich Dir nach nach Amsterdam: ‘Concentriere Dich’. Damals hatte das keine Bedeutung. Jetzt ist es ein Wort zu seiner Zeit. Zerstreue Dich nicht in Lektüre, in litterarischen Kleinigkeiten. Thue Dir *Gewalt* an.” Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Humboldt, in Schiller, *Nationalausgabe*, Bd. 35, 250 (July 17, 1795).

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 341 (September 14, 1795).

¹⁵⁸ Klopstock, *Werke und Briefe*, ed. Horst Gronemeyer et al. (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1974—), *Briefe*, Bd. 9.1, 186 (November 18, 1797). While Klopstock displays some knowledge of Dante, joking to Böttiger, for example, that Dante’s Latin resembled Kant’s German, he seems to have been thwarted by Dante’s language, writing to Böttiger that he usually could not understand Dante. This is attested in a much earlier letter Klopstock had sent to Bodmer, in which he wrote “Wie sehr wünschte ich, dass Ihr Freund den Dante übersetzte. Ich habe schon lange ein grosses Verlangen gehabt diesen Poeten zu lesen.” Ibid., *Briefe* I, 51 (June 7, 1749).

would render him uniquely suited to the Romantic project of a new mythology as formulated at the end of the century. Alighting on a word that would be important to F. Schlegel, A.W. Schlegel described the *Commedia* as a “Hieroglyphe,” an artwork constructed in such manifestly reverent fashion that even its tremendous age and interpretive riddles could not entirely obscure its sacred quality.¹⁵⁹ Schlegel writes that the poem bears an allegorical dimension that invites readers “nachdenkend zu verweilen, wie vor einem bedeutenden Bilde, in dessen Zusammensetzung etwas räthselhaftes zu liegen scheint.”¹⁶⁰ Vital to this particular conception of the *Commedia* as both sacred and cryptically multivalent was Schlegel’s exposition of a letter that Dante had written to his patron, Can Grande della Scala, in which the poet explained the means with which the poem was to be interpreted.¹⁶¹ In that letter, Dante writes that the *Commedia* ought to be considered “polysemous, that is, having several senses. For the first sense is that which is contained in the letter, while there is another which is called allegorical, or moral or anagogical [...]. And although these mystical senses are called by various names, they may all be called allegorical, since they are all different from the literal or historical.”¹⁶²

Referencing the *quadruplex sensus* of scripture, Dante interpolates his poem in a tradition

¹⁵⁹ AWSW III, 225. A.W. Schlegel again uses this term as a descriptor for the verbal and visual signs of the *Commedia* in his 1799 essay *Ueber Zeichnungen zu Gedichten und John Flaxmans Umriße*. See AWSW IX, 114.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 225.

¹⁶¹ In his *Vorlesungen über die romantische Poesie* (1803-1804), Schlegel insists on the authenticity of the letter. See KAV II/1, 150. The matter of the letter’s authenticity has engendered heated debate among medievalists and Dantisti. See e.g. Peter Dronke, *Dante and Medieval Latin Traditions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) and Robert Hollander, *Dante’s Epistle to Can Grande* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993). The latter, citing the argument of the former against the authenticity of the epistle, writes cheekily: “Not one to be defeated by the evidence, Dronke twists it to his purpose” (48).

¹⁶² Dante to Can Grande, trans. Robert S. Haller, *Literary Criticism of Dante Alighieri* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973), 99.

of Christian biblical exegesis that dated back at least to Origen in the third century and that flourished in the medieval Latin theological tradition. He presents himself, however, not as an interpreter; instead, his claim suggests that his poem — inasmuch as it may be read according to scripture's four senses — matches the Bible in the depth of its powers of signification. This assertion, taken together with Dante's claims to be a divinely commissioned scribe in the poem itself (*Paradiso* 10.27), undoubtedly contributed to Schlegel's notion that the *Commedia* was like a sacred hieroglyph. In the 1791 essay, however, Schlegel's response to the poem as *Polysensuum* is one of bemused ambivalence. For on the one hand, when it is “unmittelbar geföhlt,” the profound allegory gives readers something over which to marvel. On the other hand, Schlegel blanches at the thought of being tasked with laying bare something so monstrously inscrutable. Thus, after explaining the nature of allegory in the *Commedia*, he reasserts the poem's hieroglyphic nature in arguing that it would be “vergeblich [...] eine so geheimnisvolle Symbolik ergründen zu wollen.”¹⁶³

The inscrutability of the poem's allegory — specifically, the sheer inability to fathom the particular referents of each and every allegorical representation — does not hinder Schlegel from evaluating allegory as one of the figural devices of the poem. In fact, he suggests that the manner in which Dante employs allegory constitutes at least part of what distinguishes him from lesser poets. For in the case of many writers, their use of

¹⁶³ AWSW III, 226. Despite their hesitancy to decode the allegorical referents of the *Commedia*, and indeed their acknowledgment of the literal valence of the poem, Schlegel and his brother would become targets of Hegel's scorn for what he deemed their overly allegorizing reading of poetry in general, and of Dante in particular. See Hegel's comments on F. Schlegel, allegory, and Dante in the *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, in *Werke*, ed. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1969-1971), XIII, 404-405.

allegory unintentionally reduced characters to “marklosen Schatten,” robbing them of their fictive power in a narrative. “Ein nackter Verstandesbegriff hat für die Fantasie weder Leben noch Schönheit,” Schlegel says.¹⁶⁴ In order to maintain both the allegorical and the historical dimensions of a poem, Schlegel explains, the *Verstandesbegriff* must “sich in eine sinnliche Gestalt verlieren, und nur so wie die menschliche Seele im Körper durchschimmern.”¹⁶⁵ Indeed, Schlegel writes, most poets fail so miserably at managing the *Versinnlichung* of the *Verstandesbegriff* that the palpable tension between literal and allegorical levels interrupts readers as a constant irritant. Dante’s ability to avoid precisely this dilemma marks the genius of the *Commedia*’s allegory. His characters, though allegorical, have a solid existence (*Bestandheit*) independent of their symbolic meaning. The historical tactility of the poem thus allows Schlegel to describe the reading experience as one of walking “überall auf festen Boden, umgeben von einer Welt der Wirklichkeit und des individuellen Seins.”¹⁶⁶ As an example, Schlegel cites Virgil as a personification of earthly wisdom who simultaneously functions in a personal capacity as the first-century, Roman poet.

Schlegel’s remarks on the allegory of the *Commedia* are important in two respects. First of all, inasmuch as Schlegel’s reading both accommodates and lends credence to the literal dimension of Dante’s text, it signifies nothing less than a decisive turning point in the history of the exegesis of the *Commedia*. For since the appearance of the earliest *trecento* commentaries, the literal sense of the *Commedia*, as Robert

¹⁶⁴ AWSW III, 226.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

Hollander notes, had been dismissed as a poetic shell, the purpose of which had been to furnish an allegorical understanding of the poem.¹⁶⁷ Hollander, who deems “the misprision of that argument [...] the single most negative force hindering the development of Dante studies,” identifies Erich Auerbach’s devotion to the historical sense of the text the driving force behind the modern reevaluation of the poem’s allegorical depth, particularly in the *dantismo* of the Singletonian school.¹⁶⁸ Yet what Hollander does not note is Auerbach’s indebtedness to the by no means simplistic readings of the Romantic school, beginning with those by A.W. Schlegel.¹⁶⁹ When, in a seminal monograph like *Dante als Dichter der irdischen Welt* (1929), Auerbach asserts his cardinal interpretive gesture to be the observation that Dante has fixed the individual, earthly-historical character of the souls in the *Commedia* for eternity, we would do well to remember that A.W. Schlegel — and Schelling, after him — had repeatedly emphasized the real, historical texture and richness of the poem’s characters.¹⁷⁰ Evidence

¹⁶⁷ Robert Hollander, “Dante and his commentators,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. Rachel Jacoff (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 229.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 234.

¹⁶⁹ One of the factors preventing a legitimate reappraisal of Romantic readings of the *Commedia* is the presupposition that Romantic readings are largely undifferentiated. Hollander, for example, writes the following: “What Dante knew best how to portray, for [Romantic readers of the *Commedia*], was the passion of suffering. It would be foolish to claim that this vision of the *Commedia* is entirely incorrect; rather, one would better claim that the great Romantic reading of the poem seized the foreground and put it against another backdrop, as though Francesca, Pier delle Vigne, Ulysses [...], and Ugolino were characters in a text by Goethe at his stormiest. The ‘professional’ *dantista* may decry the Romantic reading (and I will surely join in the chorus); however, all of us who deal professionally with the poet ought to realize that, in a real sense, we owe our jobs to the Romantic recovery of his work” (232). Hollander’s assessment certainly applies to a great number of Dante’s readers, but as this dissertation has set out to show, there are other narratives to be found within the Romantic reception of the *Commedia*.

¹⁷⁰ Erich Auerbach, *Dante als Dichter der irdischen Welt* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1969 (1929)), 108. In Auerbach’s own words: “Dante hat einen ganz besonderen Schauplatz für seine Darstellung gewählt, der ihm und ihm als erstem, wie wir oben gesagt haben, ganz neue Möglichkeiten des Ausdrucks eröffnete. Gestützt auf die höchsten Autoritäten der Vernunft und des Glaubens, wagte es sein dichterischer Genius zu unternehmen, was noch keiner vor ihm gewagt hatte: die gesamte irdisch-historische Welt, die zu seiner

of Auerbach's own debt to these readings ought to be no secret. After all, it was in his 1929 inaugural lecture in Marburg that he discussed the "Entdeckung Dantes in der Romantik."¹⁷¹

The second reason for the significance of A.W. Schlegel's discussion of Dante's representational technique has more narrowly to do with the Romantic project of a new mythology. Quite simply, the technique of symbolism that Schlegel identified as inherent to Dante's mode of signification became a crucial component in the poetic theory of the Romantics' new mythology.¹⁷² To be clear, this symbolism ought not be understood as pointedly different from allegory;¹⁷³ instead, as Schlegel uses it, symbolism refers to a broad representational practice whereby a range of poetic images is used to articulate a more abstractly conceptual worldview.¹⁷⁴ As we will see, this notion of symbolism would

Kenntnis gelangt war, als schon dem endgültigen Urteil Gottes unterworfen und somit an ihren eigentlichen, ihr nach der göttlichen Ordnung zukommenden Platz gestellt, als schon gerichtet vorzustellen, und zwar so, daß er die einzelnen Gestalten in ihrem eschatologischen Endgeschick nicht etwa ihres irdischen Charakters beraubt oder auch nur ihn abschwächt, sondern indem er die äußerste Steigerung ihres individuellen irdisch-historischen Wesens festhält und sie mit dem Endgeschick identifiziert."

¹⁷¹ Erich Auerbach, "Entdeckung Dantes in der Romantik," in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur romanischen Philologie* (Bern: Francke, 1967), 176-183.

¹⁷² On this, see Höltnschmidt, 358ff. On symbolism and allegory in German Romanticism, see Behler, "Symbol und Allegorie in der frühromantischen Theorie," in *Studien zur Romantik und zur idealistischen Philosophie*, ed. Ernst Behler (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1993), Bd. 2, 249-263.

¹⁷³ On this note, see Gadamer, who writes that "der uns selbstverständlich erscheinende künstlerische Gegensatz zwischen Allegorie und Symbol erst das Resultat der philosophischen Entwicklung der letzten zwei Jahrhunderte ist und an deren Beginn so wenig erwartet werden darf, daß vielmehr die Frage zu stellen ist, wie es überhaupt zum Bedürfnis einer solchen Unterscheidung und Entgegensetzung kam. Es läßt sich nicht übersehen, daß Winckelmann, dessen Einfluß auf die Ästhetik und Geschichtsphilosophie der Zeit bestimmend war, beide Begriffe synonym gebraucht, und das gilt vom Ganzen der ästhetischen Literatur des 18. Jahrhunderts." Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode: Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1965 (1960)), 68.

¹⁷⁴ Behler, cited two notes previously, wrote what is now an authoritative article on symbolism and allegory in German Romanticism. Contrary to Gadamer, he describes a differentiation of symbol and allegory in the theory of the early Romantics; yet much of the evidence Behler cites seems just as likely to support the thesis of Gadamer. My own sense is that the early Romantic distinctions between symbol and allegory were *im Werden*, and that even if we may discern distinctions in their usage, these distinctions are so unsystematic that we are better served by presupposing their interchangeability than we are by

inform both F. Schlegel's concept of myth as well as the poetics of absolute idealism that girds Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*. In addition to these early Romantic applications of a theory of the symbol to the project of a new mythology, the notion of symbolism itself would come to play a crucial role in the subsequent study of myth in later Romantic historiography. Franz Josef Mone, a historian in Heidelberg, for example, would eventually write the *Geschichte des Heidenthums im nordlichen Europa* (1822-23) in which he characterized myth as a symbolic system — encoded in symbols, runes, and hieroglyphs — that relied on a theological substrate. Friedrich Creuzer, Mone's colleague in Heidelberg, described myth in similar terms in his highly contended *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker* (1810-12).¹⁷⁵ The authors of these later mythographical studies, knowingly or not, adopted a discourse rooted in A.W. Schlegel's assessment of the allegory of the *Commedia*.

In addition to these factors, one of the primary reasons that the *Commedia* becomes central to the poetic theory of Romanticism is Schlegel's exegesis of it as a singular synthesis of theology, physics, and metaphysics. What distinguishes Dante's depictions of the afterlife from those of other poets, Schlegel explains, is the necessity by which his system of metaphysics orders them:

Dante's Zweck erlaubte es nicht, die Hölle in ungewissen Umrissen, wie ein Chaos schreckender Dinge oder Undinge hinzuwerfen. Er öffnet sie nicht, wie etwa Tasso, nur um einzelne handelnde Personen daraus hervorgehen zu lassen, und sie dann wieder zu schliessen, sondern seine ganze

presupposing their difference. One of the first post-Goethean definitions is that of Schelling in the *Philosophie der Kunst*, discussed below in chapter four. On Romantic allegory in relation to the *Commedia*, see also Hölter, *Der Dichter der Hölle und des Exils*, 55, 81ff.

¹⁷⁵ For a fulsome overview of these two texts, see Williamson, *The Longing for Myth in Germany: Religion and Aesthetic Culture from Romanticism to Nietzsche* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 102-104, 121-150.

Handlung, die wunderbare Reise, liegt in ihr und den beyden andern Geisterreichen, die er vollständig kennen lehren will. Der fast unendliche Reichthum seiner belebten Gruppen müßte zum Labyrinth werden, ohne einen sichern Leitfaden. Dazu dient ihm die mathematische Begränzung der verschiedenen Geisterwohnungen. Deswegen trennt und ordnet er die Arten der Verdammten, Büßenden und Seeligen, nach seinem System der philosophischen Moral und der Theologie.¹⁷⁶

Dante's delineations of Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise, governed by his didactic mission, arise not from the contingencies of poetic entertainment but rather from the necessity of his "System der philosophischen Moral und der Theologie." The exactitude with which Dante executes these representations, drawing the boundaries of each realm with mathematical precision, bespeaks the methodology of the *Commedia*: art serves science, poetry serves theology. Schlegel reiterates this point when, describing the poem's geography of the earth, he observes that Dante's placement of Jerusalem on the exact center of the earth's surface owes not to scientific error, but rather to "einer gewissen christlichen Mythologie."¹⁷⁷ It is neither historical nor geographical contingency that dictates the poem's mimesis; on the contrary, it is Dante's theological worldview that dissolves such contingencies in the first place and institutes a representational mode underpinned by philosophical necessity. Schlegel describes this interpenetration of science and art in a revelatory poetics at greater length in his essay on John Flaxman's contour illustrations of the *Commedia*, where he writes of Dante:

Er baut den Himmel, in den er sich aufschwingt, nach beschränkteren Begriffen vom Weltsystem, als die unsrigen sind, und eben darum geordneter und schöner. Zwar lag dabei Wissenschaft zum Grunde : nämlich theils die Weltlehre des Aristoteles, die aber rational sein wollte, und folglich die Regelmäßigkeit des Ganzen umfaßte; theils die ältere Astronomie, die schon Mythologie, d. h. poetisches Kostüm der Natur, geworden war.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ AWSW III, 239.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 238.

¹⁷⁸ AWSW IX, 130.

We already know from F. Schlegel's definitional *Athenäumsfragment* that Romantic poetry was tasked with uniting the disparate spheres of poetry and philosophy, and in his interpretation of Dante's *Commedia* as a "poetisches Kostum der Natur," we see that A.W. Schlegel had found a unique model of just such a synthesis. Indeed, in a lecture known much less well than F. Schlegel's 116th *Athenäumsfragment*, A.W. Schlegel describes the nature of the impulse toward synthesis in a way that clarifies its relation to myth.¹⁷⁹ There he writes that philosophy and poetry constitute the "ursprünglichen und ewigen Anlagen [...] des menschlichen Gemüths" and that, historically, "Mythologie war das verbindende Mittelglied zwischen Philosophie und Poesie [...]."¹⁸⁰ To the extent that Dante had seamlessly woven geography, physics, and metaphysics into the poetic fabric of the *Commedia*, his poem represented precisely the mediation between philosophy and poetry presupposed of the new mythology.

Friedrich Schlegel and the New Mythology

For as much significance as we cede to A.W. Schlegel in having discovered Dante, it was ultimately his precocious younger brother, Friedrich, who located in Dante the model for the Romantics' new mythology. This critical maneuver sprang from Friedrich Schlegel's habit of outlining the future of European poetry on the basis of his idiosyncratic interpretation of its past, an almost constant enterprise for the younger Schlegel throughout the 1790s. During this period, the mercurial critic would transition from

¹⁷⁹ KAV II/1, 209-218.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 216-217. Schlegel first lists philosophy and poetry, but subsequently includes religion and morality as "die vier Weltgegenden des menschlichen Geistes."

writing in the essay *Über das Studium der griechischen Poesie* (1795) that Dante's poem owed its structure to the "gotischen Begriffen des Barbaren" to the conviction that this poem of gothic construction could alone signal to modern poets the means by which they might realize a new mythology.¹⁸¹ These reversals in poetic fortune epitomize Schlegel's almost constant reappraisal of European literature, variations of which can be noted even within the years of the most intense Romantic theoretical output, 1798-1800. It will be necessary to survey these shifts in order comprehend the origins and goals of the new mythology as well as to witness how Dante emerges as a vital figure in this project.

When in his Platonic dialogue, *Das Gespräch über die Poesie* (1800), F. Schlegel included a *Rede über die Mythologie*, he posited a new mythology as the solution to a dilemma that was not local to the poetics of Jena Romanticism, but rather to post-classical poetry at large. He had articulated this vision, albeit from a different point of view, in the protracted *Studiumaufsatz* on the history of Greek poetry. It was there that Schlegel, who freely acknowledged his essay to be a "Versuch [...] den langen Streit der einseitigen Freunde der alten und der neuen Dichter zu schlichten," had renewed the old *querelle des Anciens et des Modernes*, yet like many other prominent Germans — including Gottsched, Winckelmann, Goethe, Hölderlin, etc. — wrote what amounted to a theory of how the moderns might approach what the ancients had already accomplished.¹⁸² To do this, Schlegel postulated certain theses that separated the poetry of the Greeks from that of the moderns. These theses included, most fundamentally, the

¹⁸¹ KFSA I, 233.

¹⁸² Ibid., 207.

observation that whereas Greek poets privileged the beautiful, modern poets privileged the interesting. Inasmuch as the Greeks appealed to objective principles of beauty, they enabled the flourishing of a harmonious aesthetic culture, whereas the reliance of the moderns upon subjective aesthetic experience produced “nur einzelne durch äußere Gewalt aneinander gefesselte Stücke, ohne eigentlichen Zusammenhang, ohne ein Ganzes.”¹⁸³ The gap between ancient and modern poetry was expanded, moreover, by the means of its production: whereas Greek poetry sprang organically to life “in der natürlichen Bildung,” modern poetry was forged “in der künstlichen Bildung.”¹⁸⁴ This difference, too, resulted in a modern poetry that could only ever approximate — but never attain — the totality of the ancients. In judging the task of his own essay to be a “wesentliche Bedingung der Vervollkommnung des Deutschen Geschmacks und Kunst,”¹⁸⁵ Schlegel, we see, had already begun to undertake efforts to mitigate the splintered character of modern poetry.

Between 1798 and 1799, Schlegel’s efforts to theorize the regeneration of modern poetry and to overcome its fragmentation assumes new forms, particularly via an inchoate concept of myth that begins to emerge in fragments, annotations, and other assorted jottings in Schlegel’s notebooks. Indeed, in the first of his notes entitled “Zur Poesie. 1799.,” we find a statement that would prove programmatic for the new direction of his thought: “Das Wesen der π[Poesie] besteht allerdings im μυθος. [...] Durch den

¹⁸³ Ibid., 238.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 293.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 206.

μυθος wird die Poesie eben so unendlich. —”¹⁸⁶ Germs like this one would blossom in 1800 in the fullest poetological treatise that Schlegel would ever compose, *Das Gespräch über die Poesie*. There, in the *Rede über die Mythologie*, it was the tantalizing possibility of renewing myth in modernity that would inspire Schlegel to write that Romantic poetry — lacking a “mütterlichen Boden” and a “Mittelpunkt” — could eventually grow from a common spiritual heritage rather than be forged from the interior of each individual poet. This corona of Romantic theory would likewise find expression in Schlegel’s *Ideen*, a collection of fragments likewise published in the final volume of the *Athenäum*.

To be sure, when the term *mythos* begins to appear in Schlegel’s notebooks in the late 1790s, it bears many of the same supramundane accoutrements that accompany the term in popular discourses to this day: gods, goddesses, etc. These figures could range from Greek deities to Christian saints like the Virgin Mary, whose centrality to the visual art theorized by early Romantics had brought Catholic imagery into the purview of intellectuals weaned on an Enlightened Protestantism. Yet Schlegel’s notebooks reveal a theoretical substrate that underpins and indeed precedes these connotations. At its core, this substrate is predicated on the view that myth constitutes a functional — which is to say purposive — aesthetic mode.¹⁸⁷ In certain respects, the notion of myth as purposive will be familiar to us from the Enlightened *philosophes* like Fontenelle, who already in the first half of the eighteenth century had dismissed myth as a form of fictional aetiology. With its attendant connotations of dissemblance (particularly in the case of

¹⁸⁶ KFSA XVI, 255.

¹⁸⁷ KFSA XVI, 260.

Fontenelle), however, the category of fiction approximates Schlegel's apprehension of myth less closely than does a broader and more fluid concept of aesthetic representation. The consequence of this by no means blunt distinction is anything but trivial: for myth, in Schlegel's view, comes to be conceived not as an ideological device designed to hoodwink or console primitive peoples, but rather as an aesthetic system that, to the extent that it crystallizes a particular worldview in imaginative art, provides for the efflorescence of a unified artistic culture.

Certain formulations in Schlegel's notebooks prove helpful in elaborating this vision of myth. When in 1799 he writes, "Poesie ohne Kunst ist Mythologie, und d.[er] Kern aller Mythologie ist die Idee der Natur," he links art and nature in a way that would begin to assume more mystical connotations in subsequent fragments and publications.¹⁸⁸ At another point in the notebooks, for example, he theorizes: "Für d[en] Mystiker kann Poesie nur durch d[as] Medium d[er] Mythol[ogie] deducirt werden — als Stütze d[er] Kosmologie — oder auch *polemisch* als Gegengewicht d[er] Ontologie — aus Rückkehr zum Ganzen."¹⁸⁹ It is important to note in these definitional fragments that Schlegel, by identifying *die Idee der Natur* and *Kosmologie* as fundamental to the task of myth, codes it as a discourse that is grounded in the physics of the cosmos. Along these lines, it is likewise significant that Schlegel describes myth as the *Gegengewicht der Ontologie*, i.e. the counterweight to the branch of philosophy devoted to the *nature of being*. What I want to underscore in singling out these statements is the status of myth, in each case, as

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 266.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 263.

Stütze of nature/cosmos and as *Gegengewicht* to ontology. The latter of these formulations, which conceives of myth as fulfilling a role incapable of being realized by philosophical rationality, importantly posits the revelatory dimension of myth. The former of these formulations, together with the notion that the “Kern aller Mythologie ist die Idee der Natur,” suggests that what this aesthetic mode reveals (or represents) is the object about which ontology philosophizes, i.e. being, nature, cosmos. This much is confirmed elsewhere in the notebooks, for example, when Schlegel opines that “Die Form der natürlich[en] Dinge ist d.[as] eigentl[iche] Wesen d[es] Symbolischen, d[er] höhern Poesie,”¹⁹⁰ when he notes that “Die Factoren d[er] Mythologie sind *Allegorie* und *Kosmogonie*,”¹⁹¹ and when he writes elliptically: “Das große Centrum *Offenbarung der Natur genannt*.”¹⁹²

Schlegel’s understanding of myth as the mode whereby the essence of nature in its totality is revealed in art likewise underpins his *Rede über die Mythologie*. Indeed, he refers there to mythology as both the “hieroglyphische Ausdruck der umgebenden Natur” as well as the “Kunstwerk der Natur.”¹⁹³ When he revised the *Rede* for a new edition in 1823, he even glossed *Mythologie* as “symbolische Anschauung,” “symbolische Naturansicht,” and “Symbolik.”¹⁹⁴ Leaving aside the striking language of symbolism, which as I already mentioned links Schlegel’s concept of a new mythology and his brother’s early theorization of the *Commedia*, I want to underscore the preoccupation

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 307.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid., 279. See also KFSA XVI, 256, where Schlegel describes the “ästhetische Ansicht der Natur.”

¹⁹³ KFSA II, 318.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 311-312.

with nature that permeates the *Rede über die Mythologie*. Unable to envision precisely how the new mythology will materialize, Ludoviko, the figure in Schlegel's dialogue who holds the *Rede*, repeatedly emphasizes that its source ought to be sought in modern physics: "Ich kann nicht schließen," Ludoviko declares, "ohne noch einmal zum Studium der Physik aufzufodern, aus deren dynamischen Paradoxien jetzt die heiligsten Offenbarungen der Natur von allen Seiten ausbrechen."¹⁹⁵ This insistence, as Ernst Behler has written, refers to the school of *Naturphilosophie* as epitomized around the turn of the century by the philosophy of Friedrich Schelling.¹⁹⁶ As Schlegel notes elsewhere in the *Rede*, the development of a philosophy of nature out of the seed of idealist philosophy provides a model for imagining the emergence of a new realism out of the spirit of idealism. This notion is vital to his theory of the new mythology, for as Schlegel writes, it will take the form of a poetry centered upon the harmony of the real and the ideal. It will be a union of the philosophy of nature and the philosophy of spirit in the dimension of art.¹⁹⁷

What should by no means be neglected in this account of the *Rede*, however, is another figure who is no less significant for the appearance of a new realism: Spinoza. Despite his reputation as Europe's most dangerous atheist, Spinoza — by virtue of his pantheism — had been celebrated by the Romantics as "den Gott betrunkenen Menschen," the philosopher whose unique interpretation of the cosmos had saved

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 321-322.

¹⁹⁶ Behler, *German Romantic Literary Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 162-163. In addition to Schelling, we might likewise mention in this respect Franz Baader, whom Schlegel discusses in the *Ideen* as a *Physiker*. See KFSa II, 266.

¹⁹⁷ KFSa II, 314-315.

religion from the Enlightenment, as Frederick Beiser has shown so well.¹⁹⁸ Throughout the *Rede*, Ludoviko lauds Spinoza with the fervor of a new convert, and indeed Schlegel had recently been won over to Spinoza by his reading of Schleiermacher's speeches *Über die Religion* (1799), in which Schleiermacher had dispensed with theories of religion — hawked by both believers and critics — that reduced religion to either a matter of metaphysics or a matter of morals.

Sie [Religion] begehrt nicht das Universum seiner Natur nach zu bestimmen und zu erklären wie die Metaphysik, sie begehrt nicht aus Kraft der Freiheit und der göttlichen Willkür des Menschen es fortzubilden und fertig zu machen wie die Moral. Ihr Wesen ist weder Denken noch Handeln, sondern Anschauung und Gefühl. Anschauen will sie das Universum [...].¹⁹⁹

Schleiermacher owed his assertion that the essence of religion lay in *Anschauen* to Spinoza, who in the *Ethics* had both articulated a theory of intuitive knowledge (*scientia intuitiva*) and suggested that the realization of this highest form of knowledge would lead the human subject to a state of blessedness.²⁰⁰ The Spinozist-Schleiermacherian articulation of religion exerted a profound impact on Friedrich Schlegel, who in a short span embraced Spinoza as the evangelist of his new religious outlook and quickly saw the overlaps between Schleiermacher's reading of religion and his own theorization of myth.

In the *Ideen*, for example, he writes: "In der Welt [...] der Kunst und der Bildung,

¹⁹⁸ Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative*, 141-142.

¹⁹⁹ Schleiermacher, *Über die Religion* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 2004), 28-29.

²⁰⁰ Schleiermacher gives credit where credit is due: "Opfert mit mir ehrerbietig eine Locke den Manen des heiligen verstoßenen Spinoza! Ihn durchdrang der hohe Weltgeist, das Unendliche war sein Anfang und Ende, das Universum seine einzige und ewige Liebe, in heiliger Unschuld und tiefer Demut spiegelte er sich in der ewigen Welt, und sah zu wie auch Er ihr lebenswürdigster Spiegel war; voller Religion war Er und voll heiligen Geistes; und darum steht Er auch da, allein und unerreicht, Meister in seiner Kunst, aber erhaben über die profane Zunft, ohne Jünger und ohne Bürgerrecht. Anschauen des Universums, ich bitte befreundet Euch mit diesem Begriff, er ist der Angel meiner ganzen Rede, er ist die allgemeinste und höchste Formel der Religion, woraus Ihr jeden Ort in derselben finden könnt, woraus sich ihr Wesen und ihre Grenzen aufs genaueste bestimmen lassen" (31).

erscheint die Religion notwendig als Mythologie oder als Bibel.” This statement reiterates the revelatory character of myth while naming that which myth reveals, the essence of the cosmos, “Religion.” At another point in the *Ideen*: “Die Andacht der Philosophen ist Theorie, reine Anschauung des Göttlichen, besonnen, ruhig und heiter in stiller Einsamkeit. Spinoza ist das Ideal dafür. Der religiöse Zustand des Poeten ist leidenschaftlicher und mitteilender. Das Ursprüngliche ist Enthusiasmus, am Ende bleibt Mythologie.” Like Schlegel’s notebook entry on myth that was cited above, this articulation establishes a parallel between the tasks of philosophy and poetry while suggesting that the poet’s mythology is the religious counterpart to the philosopher’s *theoria*. Religion, in other words, has little to do with faith in personal deities; at its core, it is a privileged mode of encountering the cosmos that expresses itself in the aesthetic system of a mythology. Without naming it religious, Frederick Beiser has summarized the import that Romantics like Schlegel had ascribed to aesthetic experience, which nonetheless amounts to Schlegel’s (and earlier, Schleiermacher’s) theory of religion around 1800: “Through aesthetic experience, they [the early German Romantics] believed, we perceive the infinite in the finite, the supersensible in the sensible, the absolute in its appearances. Since art alone has the power to fathom the absolute, it is superior to philosophy, which now becomes the mere handmaiden of art.”²⁰¹ Aquinas had once called philosophy the handmaiden of theology (*ancilla theologiae*); for the Romantics, aesthetic experience now served as religious experience.

²⁰¹ Beiser, *The Romantic Imperative*, 73. As Schlegel himself writes, “Wo die Philosophie aufhört, muß die Poesie anfangen.” See KFSA II, 261.

In both the *Gespräch über die Poesie* and the *Ideen*, Schlegel displays more than a characteristically Romantic longing for the realization of this form of aesthetic-religious experience. He squarely asserts that its time has arrived: “Es ist Zeit den Schleier der Isis zu zerreißen, und das Geheime zu offenbaren,” he writes at the outset of the *Ideen*.²⁰² Diagnosing the lack of a modern mythology in the *Rede*, he (Ludoviko) proclaims: “Wir haben keine Mythologie. Aber setze ich hinzu, wir sind nahe daran eine zu erhalten, oder vielmehr es wird Zeit, daß wir ernsthaft dazu mitwirken sollen, eine hervorzubringen.”²⁰³ As Ernst Behler has written, however, “the new mythology is not a research project to be carried out in the near future, but one of those more fundamental tasks that, upon reflection, manifest both the impossibility and the necessity of their realization.”²⁰⁴ Judging by the apodictic tone of his assertions as well as his own literary plans, Schlegel likely would not have agreed with Behler’s assessment of the project as impossible; yet it is certainly true that he can do no more than provide intimations of how such a monumental feat of cultural transformation might be realized. As Ludoviko says in the *Rede*, idealism provides one hint; but Schlegel himself provides others. In the *Ideen*, for example, he writes of the ancients’ system of mythology and sees its analog in the Bible, which bears on the possible manifestation of a new mythology: “Auf eine ähnliche Weise sollen in der vollkommenen Literatur alle Bücher nur Ein Buch sein, und in einem solchen ewig werdenden Buche wird das Evangelium der Menschheit und der Bildung offenbart

²⁰² KFSA II, 256.

²⁰³ Ibid., 312.

²⁰⁴ Behler, *German Romantic Literary Theory*, 164.

werden.”²⁰⁵ In point of fact, Schlegel and Novalis — inspired by Lessing’s prediction of a gospel of the future in the *Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts* (1780) — had corresponded about the possibility of composing a new Bible, and Novalis had even conceived of his encyclopedia project, *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, as a scientific bible.

At any rate, Schlegel himself seems to have recognized the amorphous vision of the new mythology as he had sketched it in the *Rede* and sought to define its features more clearly in the dialogue following the talk. Indeed, many of the characters in the *Gespräch* voice concerns and make comments that readers of the text likely share, thereby allowing Schlegel to clarify and elaborate the concept of the new mythology at greater length. In general, these questions and comments are twofold in nature: they center (1) functionally on the question of how the poetic form of the new mythology ought to accomplish its goals and (2) historically on the question of who and what might serve as its models. The first of these topics hinges on remarks made by Marcus, Antonio, and Lothario, each of whom has been alleged to represent a member of the Jena circle, and all of whom expand the lexicon with which Ludoviko had described the new mythology.²⁰⁶ These comments, which theorize concepts like the didactic and the romantic, culminate when Ludoviko gathers and summarizes them: “Mit andern Worten: alle Schönheit ist Allegorie. Das Höchste kann man eben weil es unaussprechlich ist, nur allegorisch sagen.”²⁰⁷ This much will be familiar to us from Schlegel’s notebook entries,

²⁰⁵ KFSA II, 265.

²⁰⁶ For a discussion of which characters represent which Romantics, see KFSA II, LXXXVIII.

²⁰⁷ KFSA II, 324. For a comment on the nature of allegory in this statement, see Behler, “Symbol und Allegorie,” 249-250.

which, as we saw, posited the aesthetics of myth as a form capable of manifesting the totality of the cosmos, an understanding of art as revelation. Ludoviko's remark is of particular significance here, however, inasmuch as it leads the dialogue's participants to squabble over whether Böhme, Plato, or others might not have served as better exemplars than Spinoza. The quibbling is finally left behind when Camilla, in the lone question posed by a female participant, asks Ludoviko: "Wäre es nicht möglich, daß Sie, Ludoviko, den Geist des Spinoza in einer schönen Form darstellen könnten; oder besser noch Ihre eigne Ansicht, das was Sie Realismus nennen?"²⁰⁸ In this one direct question, which reduces the hubbub of the discussion to the heart of the matter (what would the new mythology look like?), Camilla elicits from Ludoviko his final word on the topic of the new mythology: "Wer etwa dergleichen im Sinne hätte, würde es nur auf die Art können und sein wollen wie Dante. Er müßte, wie er, nur Ein Gedicht im Geist und im Herzen haben, und würde oft verzweifeln müssen ob sichs überhaupt darstellen läßt. Gelänge es aber, so hätte er genug getan."²⁰⁹

Friedrich Schlegel: New Herald of Dante, Herald of a New Dante

Schlegel's identification of Dante as the model author for the creation of a new mythology clearly displays the influence of his brother, A.W. Schlegel. Ludoviko's assumption that Dante must have experienced despair in writing, for example, calls to mind the elder Schlegel's attention to the personal vigor of Dante, whose poetry

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 327. The significance of this as the lone question of the dialogue posed by a woman is difficult to determine, though if its concern for artistic form is to be read as a gendered linkage of art and femininity, it of course suggests the ideal of the eternal feminine, which stretches from Dante and Petrarch through the *Frühromantik* and up to its most famous expression in Goethe's *Faust II*.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 327.

blossomed so magnificently, he wrote, precisely because of the struggles Dante had endured. Indeed, this sentiment is validated by Andrea, another character in the dialogue, who responds to Ludoviko's statement with a similar assessment: "Sie haben ein würdiges Vorbild aufgestellt! Gewiß ist Dante der einzige, der unter einigen begünstigenden und unsäglich vielen erschwerenden Umständen durch eigne Riesenkraft, er selbst ganz allein, eine Art von Mythologie, wie sie damals möglich war, erfunden und gebildet hat."²¹⁰ The notion of Dante's enormous force powering him through countless trying circumstances likewise relies on A.W. Schlegel's first Dante essay in the *Akademie der schönen Redekünste*.

To be sure, it was through the mediation of his older brother that F. Schlegel first engaged with the *Commedia*: in 1792, he reviewed A.W. Schlegel's 1791 essay on Dante and the *Commedia* for the *Allgemeine Literatur-Zeitung* in Jena;²¹¹ he acted as a liaison between his brother and his German publishers while A.W. Schlegel lived in Amsterdam and continued his translation of Dante; and on several occasions, Friedrich raised

²¹⁰ Ibid., 327. Senkel asserts that the *Commedia* is represented differently, and indeed, incompatibly in the statements of various characters in the *Gespräch über die Poesie*. He regards Andrea, for example, as a private joke made by F. Schlegel, character whose view of Dante does not approximate Schlegel's own view. To the extent, however, that Andrea's statement corresponds both to Ludoviko's remarks as well as Schlegel's own notebooks, this seems untenable. Alternating statements on Dante and the *Commedia* only seem natural, moreover, inasmuch as the *Gespräch* itself alternates between literary history, theory, and poetry itself. See Senkel, 54.

²¹¹ The review is printed in the *ALZ*, numero 107, April 26, 1792. Schlegel's review of his brother's essay on Dante for Bürger's journal furnishes interesting insight into F. Schlegel's early knowledge and estimation of the *Commedia* as well, of course, of his view of his brother's reading of the poem. Acknowledging himself to be "ein warmer Verehrer dieses großen Geistes [Dante]," F. Schlegel expresses doubt that A.W. Schlegel could arouse interest in Dante, given Meinhard's failure to do so three decades earlier. In addition to criticizing elements of his brother's translation, F. Schlegel likewise questions A.W. Schlegel's incisive political commentary and confesses confusion over the notion that Dante's exile in any way does his poem credit. F. Schlegel likewise asserts that the *Commedia* is a work of more universal scope than A.W. Schlegel gives it credit.

interpretive questions, offered practical suggestions, and gave encouragement to his brother in his scholarly work on Dante.²¹² It would be wrong to assume, however, that F. Schlegel's appeal to the *Commedia* and its hallowed author in the *Rede* merely relied on the scholarly work undertaken by A.W. Schlegel a decade earlier. For in the years since the publication of A.W. Schlegel's initial Dante essay in 1791, F. Schlegel himself had taken to wrestling with the *Commedia* in his own right. As works of Romantic literature began to permeate what once seemed like Friedrich Schlegel's devotion to an exclusively classical canon, Dante assumed a pivotal role in Schlegel's historiography of Romantic literature and subsequent theorization of the new mythology. In a review essay in 1796, he writes with gusto of the figure whom A.W. Schlegel had attempted to recover: "In jenen Zeiten, welche wir *barbarische* nennen, vor der sogenannten Erweckung der Alten, gab es einen *Dante*."²¹³ If Dante came to represent for F. Schlegel a paradigmatic figure in the creation of a new mythology, this view relied in no small measure on his interpretation of Dante's singular place in European literary history. "Die moderne Poesie fängt an mit Dante," he jots in a notebook entry in 1797;²¹⁴ "Dante ist der Keim der ganz[en] modern[en] Poesie" he writes in another;²¹⁵ and later, "Dante ist der Anfang des Romantischen aus dem Didaktischen."²¹⁶

The universalizing tendency of Schlegel's statements, typical of his remarks on Dante in these years, emerges not (merely) from the hyperbolic *Schwärmerei* of a

²¹² See for example an assortment of Friedrich's more substantive remarks to A.W. Schlegel in KFSA XXIII, 19, 26, 50, 138, 165, 172, 184, 185, 223, 224, 27, 228, 246.

²¹³ Review of Herder's *Humanitätsbriefe* in KFSA II, 52.

²¹⁴ KFSA XVI, 171.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 131.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 272.

Romantic, but rather from his interpretation of the *Commedia* as a unique pleroma of Romantic poetics. Indeed, in turning again to the notebooks, we find that what distinguishes Dante for Schlegel is his having aligned harmoniously and absolutely the most distant coordinates that map the geography of *romantische Poesie*. The *Commedia* is at once a mimetic novel (*Inferno*), a sentimental novel (*Purgatorio*), and a fantastical novel (*Paradiso*).²¹⁷ In addition to its uniting *Ethos*, *Philosophie*, and *Poesie*,²¹⁸ its manner of doing so via a visionary system — akin to that of the Old Testament, Schlegel writes — is foundational for any attempt at wedding poetry and philosophy.²¹⁹ In this respect, Schlegel suggests that the *Commedia* transcends other works of Romantic poetry: its unification of genres and forms within the logic of a prophetic vision renders it quintessentially Romantic inasmuch as prophecy operates as a device of intensive self-reflection.²²⁰ On this note, we will recall that in the most famous of his *Athenäumsfragmente*, Schlegel characterizes Romantic poetry as radically unitive in its approach to literary forms while profoundly reflexive in its execution (“wie in einer endlosen Reihe von Spiegeln”).²²¹ It is the *Commedia*’s interpenetration of forms within a

²¹⁷ Ibid., 158.

²¹⁸ Ibid., 108.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 112.

²²⁰ Schlegel, like his brother and like Schelling, alternated between designations of the genre of the *Commedia*. At one point, for example, he writes plainly: “Dante’s Komödie ist ein *Roman*” (KFSa XVI, 91). At another point: “In den modernen Kunstepopoën stecken zwei Gedichte, ein prophetisches und ein absolut poetisches. Im Dante noch außerdem ein absolut synthetisches” (KFSa XVI, 116). Elsewhere, it is “absolutes poetisches Drama” (KFSa XVI, 157). A few years later, in 1802, he notes to himself: “Dante ist durchaus didaktisch — vielleicht auch lyrisch” (KFSa XVI, 375). In 1803: “Alte Tendenz des Epos zum Didaktischen und vice versa — in Dante gewissermaßen synthetisiert” (KFSa XVI, 493). These changes do not signal Schlegel’s changing conception of the *Commedia* so much as they exemplify the robust diversity that he continually ascribed to it. As he writes in 1804, Dante’s *Commedia* unites all genres (KFSa XI, 153).

²²¹ KFSa II, 182-183.

system of such (prophetic) reflexivity that prompts Schlegel to deem it the paradigmatic instance of *Transcendentalpoesie*: “Dante tendenzirt zugleich auf absoluten Roman absolutes poetisches Drama und auf absolute Prophetie. Er umfaßt die ganze Transc[endental]π[poesie], insofern auch die ganze Abstr[acte] und die ganze R[omantische]π[poesie].”²²² This assertion, recorded in 1797 and reiterated in another notebook entry in which Schlegel writes “Dante ist nichts als die gesamte Transc[endental]π[poesie],”²²³ would make its way one year later into the *Athenäumsfragmente*, where Schlegel writes that “Dantes prophetisches Gedicht ist das einzige System der transzendentalen Poesie, immer noch das höchste seiner Art.”²²⁴

Dante, of course, was not the only star in Schlegel’s constellation of Romantic literature; in the very same *Athenäumsfragment*, he compares Shakespeare’s universality to the “Mittelpunkt der romantischen Kunst” and refers to Goethe’s poetry as the “vollständigste Poesie der Poesie.” Hyperbolic paeans like these would seem to relativize the place that Dante occupies in what Schlegel refers to as this “Dreiklang der modernen Poesie,” as do other superlative compliments paid to the likes of Camoens, Calderón, and Cervantes.²²⁵ Notwithstanding such bluster, neither Shakespeare, nor Goethe, nor any other writer occupies precisely the same perch in Schlegel’s canon in the final years of the century that Dante does. As Schlegel himself writes, “*Dante ist unter allen*

²²² KFSa XVI, 157. In quoting certain notebook entries, I opt not to adopt the entirety of Schlegel’s idiosyncratic, symbolic annotations (often Greek letters, for example, within what appears to be a mathematical function), but use instead the editors’ glosses.

²²³ Ibid., 143.

²²⁴ KFSa II, 206.

²²⁵ As late as 1803, Schlegel’s notes seem to suggest Dante still reigns supreme in Schlegel’s canon: “Außer dem Dante — doch Calderone und Shakespear die bedeutendsten Dichter — Camoëns und Cervantes auch” (KFSa XVI, 466).

mod.[ernen] Dichtern *allein, encyklopaed[isches]* Bild des Zeitalters. Sh[akespeare] ist das nicht.”²²⁶ For in addition to the *Commedia* having epitomized the emblematic definitions of Romantic poetry, its appearance of having comprehensively mirrored Dante’s age rendered the *Commedia* a perfect model for the creative and productive tasks of the new mythology. As Schlegel outlines the creation of a new mythology in the *Rede*, this project represents not merely the attempt to concretize a modern *Weltanschauung* into an artwork that would be lodged in a museum or library; on the contrary, the aesthetic system constituted by the new mythology would serve as a living, symbolic font from which all new poetry could be created. Schlegel judged the *Commedia* to have produced a summative vision of medieval Christian life and thinking that he saw as not a mere system of images, but rather as a foundation for the subsequent development of all modern (Romantic) literature. This distinguishes Dante’s fate, Schlegel writes, from those of Cervantes and Shakespeare: Dante is “der Stifter und das Haupt einer neuen Poesie.”²²⁷ As he writes in the *Epochen der Dichtkunst*, the historiographical segment of the *Gespräch über die Poesie*:

Die katholische Hierarchie war unterdessen ausgewachsen; die Jurisprudenz und die Theologie zeigte manchen Rückweg zum Altertum. Diesen betrat, Religion und Poesie verbindend, der große Dante, *der heilige Stifter und Vater der modernen Poesie*. Von den Altvordern der Nation lernte er das Eigenste und Sonderbarste, das Heiligste und das Süßeste der neuen gemeinen Mundart zu klassischer Würde und Kraft zusammenzudrängen, und so die provenzalische Kunst der Reime zu veredeln; und da ihm nicht bis zur Quelle zu steigen vergönnt war, konnten ihm auch Römer den allgemeinen Gedanken eines großen Werkes von geordnetem Gliederbau mittelbar anregen. Mächtig faßte er ihn, *in Einen Mittelpunkt drängte sich die Kraft seines erfindsamen Geistes zusammen, in Einem ungeheuren Gedicht umfaßte er mit starken Armen seine Nation und sein Zeitalter, die Kirche und das Kaisertum, die Weisheit und die Offenbarung, die Natur und das Reich Gottes*. Eine Auswahl des Edelsten und des

²²⁶ KFSA XVI, 161.

²²⁷ KFSA II, 347.

Schändlichsten was er gesehn, des Größten und des Seltsamsten, was er ersinnen konnte; die offenerzigste Darstellung seiner selbst und seiner Freunde, die herrlichste Verherrlichung der Geliebten; alles treu und wahrhaftig im Sichtbaren und voll geheimer Bedeutung und Beziehung aufs Unsichtbare.²²⁸

This account of Dante's achievement, which precedes the *Rede* within the frame of the same dialogue, reveals Schlegel's concern for the encyclopedic and representative character of the *Commedia*. Indeed, the very insistence upon the singularity of the poem ("Einen Mittelpunkt," "Einem ungeheuren Gedicht") prefigures the same rhetorical tack that Ludoviko and Andrea use when identifying the *Commedia* as the only model for a new mythology ("Nur Ein Gedicht im Geist und im Herzen haben," "Dante der einzige," etc.).

All of these features of the *Commedia* — its encyclopedic scope, its representative contemporaneity, its singularity — bespeak the reasons why Dante becomes so vital in these years to Schlegel's theorization of a new mythology, particularly as it begins to take shape in his notebooks. Indeed, just as the philosophical fragment ultimately gives way to the Romantics' preoccupation with a philosophical system, represented by the efflorescence of their lecture cycles,²²⁹ so too does the aesthetic of the fragment give way in Schlegel to the aesthetic of the system. His and Novalis's Bible-project derived from a view of the Bible as a system of books; Schlegel understood the diversity of ancient Greek poetry as unified by its one system of mythology; and Dante, it seemed, had achieved a similar unity in the *Commedia*. He alone, and perhaps Jakob Böhme, Schlegel writes, could be credited with treating

²²⁸ Ibid., 297. The italics are my own.

²²⁹ On this topic, see Theodore Ziolkowski, *German Romanticism and Its Institutions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 252ff.

Christianity in a truly catholic (i.e. universal and systematic) fashion. “Dante ist der Mythologe der katholischen Religion,” Schlegel writes; “Er hätte gleich von selbst Papst werden.”²³⁰

Schlegel’s notebook entries from 1797-1800, which I have already drawn on rather heavily in sketching the place of Dante in Schlegel’s conception of European literary history, likewise reveal how deeply Schlegel’s own mythopoeic plans and “romantische Einfälle” owed to the particular interpretation of Dante and the *Commedia* he had begun to formulate. His vision for the development of Romantic poetry, which would be articulated most programmatically in the *Gespräch über die Poesie*, already shows a Dantean proclivity toward those ideas which would take shape in the idea of the new mythology. Take, for example, the following excerpts from the plans from Schlegel’s “Ideen zu Gedichten”:

Ein φμ[philosophisches Poem] in dramat.[ischer] Form aus d.[er] Kunstgeschichte. — Die ganze φσ[Philosophie] und Hist[orie] der π[Poesie] in *Ein* Gedicht von Virgilisch-Dantisch epischer Form. —²³¹

Maria und Christus. Eine Fantasie/ Darstellung d[es] Himmels./ *Satan*. Darstell[un]g der Hölle.²³²

Die Poetisazion der ganzen Natur und die Philosophation der Mythol.[ogie] machen nur *Ein* Ganzes aus.²³³

Die ΔιΘ[Dithyramben] = Kosmogonie + [absolutes Pathos]. Die Welt als χα[Chaos] und χα[Chaos] für die Welt. — Das Universum ist ewig und unveränderlich, aber die *Welt* des κοσμος ist im ewigen Werden. — *Evangelium der Poesie*; also Poesie der Poesie [...] Das Ganze = Mysterien der Natur — und Orgien der Schönheit oder der Liebe. — Alle Bilder sind wahr. — *Licht* ist Leben und Liebe; alle Materie ist menschlich und alle Form göttlich. Die Rückkehr zu den Elementen ist das was eigentl[ich] d[en] Menschen von Thieren und Pflanzen unterscheidet. — *Paradies*. — Ansicht d[er] Malerei? *Adam*

²³⁰ KFSa XVI, 268.

²³¹ Ibid., 193.

²³² Ibid., 194.

²³³ Ibid.

und Eva. — Der Himmel innerlich wie im Böhme. — Fülle d[er] Alleg[orien] und Gesichte. — *Darstell[un]g des Himmels.* Ein *Lichtreich* wie im Dante. — Die Menschheit ein unmittelbarer Ausfluß der Gottheit. — Auch Thiere, Pflanzen und Elemente idealisirt nach d[em] Charakter jener. Unmittelbares Anschauen der Sonne, und auch sonst ursprüngl.[icher] Sinn der jezt verlohren ist.²³⁴

Der Regenbogen als himmlische Allegorie [...] Eine göttliche Ansicht d[er] Natur und d[es] Universums zugleich.²³⁵

Es müßten Terzinen seyn die zu xa <*Chaotischem*> gut passen. — Viell.[eicht] jene *Vision* als Fortsetzung des An die Deutschen [...].²³⁶

In perusing Schlegel's notebooks from these years, we see that the earliest Romantic theorization of a poetics of myth, and thus of the new mythology with it, is deeply enmeshed in Schlegel's engagement with Dante and the unique poetic model of the *Commedia*. He returns time and again to the possibility of uniting philosophy and poetry in a single, magisterial poem like the *Commedia*, a prospect which for him is attractive inasmuch as it concretizes in aesthetic form the monistic metaphysics of the *hen kai pan*.²³⁷ Indeed, Schlegel's concept of poetry, as we see in the fragments above, ascribes increasing significance to the task of rendering the cosmos in aesthetic form, an imperative that we know finds its clearest expression in the *Gespräch über die Poesie* and in the *Rede*. It is Dante, moreover, who provides the clearest example of how to accomplish this goal: most of the poetic images, features, and devices Schlegel identifies for its realization — the combination of philosophy, poetry, and history in the heavenly allegory of a single magisterial poem (in *Terzinen*, no less!) — all point to the *Commedia*

²³⁴ Ibid., 199.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ See *ibid.*, 267.

as the poetic work that Schlegel (via Ludoviko) would later identify as the only possible model for the new mythology.

It can hardly escape the attention of the reader of these notebooks that, down to the very minutiae of its formal components — and in particular its status as vision in *terza rima* — the *Commedia* represented to Schlegel a model form for the new mythology. At different junctures, he writes of depicting “Die alten Götter und Mythol.[ogien] [...] in Terz.[inen] Sonn.[etten] Stanzen”; of using “Terzinen oder Visionen zum Ausdruck d[er] Religion, zur Magie und Mystik”; and of poeticizing Böhme’s cosmogony in *Terzinen*.²³⁸ Inchoate and undeniably provisional, these conjectures and plans nonetheless point toward what shortly thereafter would crystallize in the (comparatively) clear call for a new mythology. If we recall that, in the *Rede* and its variants, Schlegel repeatedly glosses the *neue Mythologie* as a symbolic view of nature, we recognize all the more clearly its roots in those notes of Schlegel inspired by the *Commedia*: “Fantasi[en] und Vision[en] als fortgehend[e] Studien des Romantisch[en]. Vision[en] in Terz[inen]. Der Grund aller Vision und Allegorie dergl[eichen] Anschauung der Natur.”²³⁹ Even before having sounded the call for a new mythology, Schlegel envisions here that the Romantic will unfold in fantasies and visions in *Terzinen* — i.e., in the unique formal dress of the *Commedia*.

²³⁸ Schlegel’s notebooks in these years teem with considerations of the possibility of uniting stanzas and *Terzinen*. In addition to the examples above (KFSA XVI, 255, 264, 280), see for example pp. 270, 286, 290, 302, 332, 356.

²³⁹ Ibid., 281.

Schlegel's practice of literary diagnostics — the manner, that is, in which he identifies the philosophic-aesthetic currents of the age and projects their future manifestations — likewise involves locating their symptoms. The clearest sign to Schlegel that contemporary European poetry was near to blossoming in a Dantean mythology lay, of all places, in the work of a poet who at the time had little to no interest in Dante: namely, Goethe. As early as Schlegel began conceiving the poetics of myth, Goethe's *Faust* project — portions of which he had published in 1790 as *Faust. Ein Fragment* — seemed a natural source for the possible resurrection of mythology in modernity.²⁴⁰ According to Schlegel's theorization of European literary history, this linked Goethe's potential role for modernity with that of Dante for the emergence of medieval, Romantic literature: "Im Faust d[ie] deutsche Mythologie, wie die alte im Dante," Schlegel writes in one note.²⁴¹ Just as Schlegel conceived of Dante as a supremely productive poet inasmuch as his *Commedia* spawned a school of Romantic literature — as opposed to Shakespeare, for example, who had been quickly forgotten — he imagined Goethe, in adopting the role of Dante, might provide a fecund ground for the development of contemporary poetry. He states as much in the *Gespräch über die Poesie* when he concludes its final segment, a *Versuch über den Styl in Goethes früheren und späteren Werken*, with the assertion that Goethe, should contemporary poets follow his lead, will be "der Stifter und das Haupt einer neuen Poesie [...], für uns und die

²⁴⁰ See for example various notes of Schlegel on *Faust* in KFSa XVI, 255, 256, 263, 285-287, 296-298.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 299.

Nachwelt, was Dante auf andre Weise im Mittelalter.”²⁴² Indeed, it is almost uncanny the degree to which there obtains a correspondence between Schlegel’s notes on a new poetry of myth and the form assumed by Goethe’s *Faust II* many years later. We will

return to the relation of the Romantics’ new mythology and Goethe’s endeavors in *Faust* in chapter four.

A.W. Schlegel and the Mythology of Dante

In much the same way that Herder had once tried to resurrect Shakespeare, A.W. Schlegel declared the timeliness of a modern rehabilitation of Dante in his *Vorlesungen über die romantische Literatur*: “Dante ist auch einer von den riesenhaften Schatten der Vorwelt, fuer die es jetzt an der Zeit ist, wieder aufzuerstehen, da die gaenzlich bis auf den Begriff verlohren gegangne Philosophie und Theologie anfaengt, sich wieder zu beleben.”²⁴³ Schlegel’s listeners may have refuted the last of these claims, but thanks to his and his brother Friedrich’s efforts, there was no debating the emerging relevance of Dante for the crystallization of Romantic poetics at the turn of the century. Over the winter of 1799 and into the spring of 1800, with both brothers having taken up residence in Jena, there took place Italian lessons in A.W. Schlegel’s house in which he and Friedrich tutored their guests and boarders in the *Commedia*. The degree to which this manner of study shaped the subsequent Romantic reception of Dante and the formulation of the theory of a new mythology can hardly be underestimated. The Schlegels’ Dante

²⁴² KFSA II, 347.

²⁴³ KAV II/1, 148.

lessons coincided with the pinnacle of Romantic poetic activity, which in the difficult years after the turn of the century gave way to a canon of critical and poetic work shaped by the impact of Dante and the *Commedia*. This canon included Friedrich Schlegel's immensely fecund notebooks as well as his *Gespräch über die Poesie*, which we have already examined; but it likewise included Friedrich Schelling's groundbreaking essay *Ueber Dante in philosophischer Beziehung* (1802) and his lectures on the philosophy of art (1802-03); Novalis's novel-fragment *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1801); and A.W. Schlegel's *Vorlesungen über die romantische Literatur* (1803-04). To the extent that these figures studied Dante together, traded editions of and commentaries on the *Commedia*, and compared notes for the composition of their various lecture cycles, their engagement with Dante and the *Commedia* constitutes one of the preeminent models of Romantic *Symphilosophie*. We will chart this terrain in subsequent chapters, but not before casting one last glance at A.W. Schlegel's lectures on Romantic poetry, in which he sketches a map whose features will prove instructive for the duration of our inquiry.

When in his Berlin lectures A.W. Schlegel once again devotes earnest attention to Dante, more than a decade after his initial publication on Dante in Bürger's journal, he underscores more strongly than ever the theologically didactic dimension of the *Commedia*. In a comparison of Dante and Calderón, he asserts that these two poets are *de facto* theologians whose poetry provides "eine irdische Hülle und körperliche Einkleidung der unsichtbaren Dinge und göttlichen Kräfte, eine Art von Theologie, nur

allgemein verständlicher und lieblicher als die eigentlich so genannte.”²⁴⁴ This judgment, which bespeaks the unmistakably pedagogic function that Schlegel ascribes to the *Commedia*, likewise identifies Dante as having fulfilled the task charged several years earlier by the author of the *Systemprogramm*: namely, a poetic representation of philosophical truths that is comprehensible to the *Volk*. Dante’s poetry, *verständlicher* and *lieblicher* than theology itself, expresses what Schlegel regards as the constitutive task of theology: “Darstellung des Universums.”²⁴⁵ This articulation carries with it the resonances of the Romantic discourse of myth and religion, for it articulates a notion inherent to both Schleiermacher’s theory of religion (*Anschauung des Universums*) as well as to F. Schlegel’s theory of a new mythology (*symbolische Ansicht der Natur*). In drawing on the Romantic lexicon of myth and religion from 1799-1800, A.W. Schlegel aligns his reading of the *Commedia* as a symbolic representation of the cosmos with that already put forward by his brother Friedrich in the *Rede*.

The alignment of his and his brother’s readings of the *Commedia* is expressed nowhere more clearly than when A.W. Schlegel elaborates what he means by describing the *Commedia* as a *Darstellung des Universums*: “Die wesentlichsten Naturkräfte werden dem Dichter Symbole des geistigen Seyns, und so geht aus der Vereinigung seiner Physik mit seiner Theologie eine scientifische Mythologie hervor, so daß, wenn man die Möglichkeit bezweifelt, daß die Poesie Organ des Idealismus werden könne, man sie hier

²⁴⁴ KAV, II/1, 148.

²⁴⁵ KAV, II/1, 148.

schon realisiert findet.”²⁴⁶ A.W. Schlegel’s description of poetry as the *Organ des Idealismus*, we will recall, reiterates his brother’s discussion of the quest to unite the ideal with the real in a new mythology, brought to material form by means of poetry. A new mythology, that form of realism that operates as the counterpart to idealist philosophy, is glossed by A.W. Schlegel in the very same language as that which had been employed by F. Schlegel: it is a system of poetic *Symbole* united in a *Mythologie*.

Dante’s ability to versify a complex, theological architectonic, for all its merits, is not without its dilemmas. Whereas Greek religion, according to Schlegel, had arisen from “Träumen der Phantasie [...], an denen sich künstlerische Willkühr immerhin alles erlauben mochte,” and thus in its essence amounted to poetry, the theological tenets of Christianity did not lend themselves so readily to poetic representation: “Das Wesen der Wesen redend und handelnd einführen, den unendlichen Geist den engen armseligen Formen unserer Psychologie unterwerfen, ist ein Wagstück [...].”²⁴⁷ Of course, Dante was not the only prominent Christian poet to have faced the problem of depicting transcendent beings. In the eighteenth century, with critics like Bodmer, Breitinger, and Gottsched having debated the place of *das Wunderbare* in secular poetry, poems like Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and Klopstock’s *Messias* furnished aesthetic precedents. Indeed, the comparison of the *Commedia* with these poems would lead Schlegel to alter the distinction between Greek religion’s affinity for poetry and Christianity to a confessional distinction between Catholicism and Protestantism. In his essay on John Flaxman’s

²⁴⁶ KAV, II/1, 154.

²⁴⁷ AWSW III, 263.

contour illustrations, Schlegel comments on the particular suitability of the *Commedia* for visual representation. Rather than illustrate scenes from his revered countryman, Milton, Flaxman chose prudently, Schlegel writes, to illustrate the “finstern” Dante. Schlegel underscores the difference between Milton and Dante by referencing their confessional divide in aesthetic terms, describing Milton as someone whose attempt to idealize Christianity classically would relegate him to a position behind “den großen Propheten des Katholicismus.”²⁴⁸ Elsewhere, too, Schlegel would link Dante’s plasticity with his Catholicism while contrasting it with what he deemed a more image-starved Protestantism. Whereas Klopstock, for example, had written the *Messias* in a manner of “heiligen entkörpernten, schwebenden Darstellung,” Dante composed the *Commedia* in such “festen, bestimmten Umriße” that Schlegel deemed him the Michelangelo and Raphael of poetry.²⁴⁹ This contrast between the German Protestant and the Italian Catholic would retain validity for Schlegel, who even in his lectures on aesthetics in Berlin described Klopstock’s *Messias* as the “vergebliches Bestreben eine protestantische Mythologie aus nichts zu machen.”²⁵⁰

Schlegel’s faith in the aesthetic merits of Catholicism guided his appreciation of medieval art while, as one might suspect, it entailed a severely critical view of the aesthetic theory and production of the Enlightenment. In a commemorative essay on Bürger, in which he reflects on the criteria of *Volkspoesie*, he writes that the Bible and the

²⁴⁸ *Ueber Zeichnungen zu Gedichten und John Flaxmans Umriße*, in AWSW IX, 117-118.

²⁴⁹ From review of Benkowiz, AWSW XI, 162. The same comparison is made in the essay on Flaxman, except there Dante is contrasted with Milton. Schlegel writes there that Dante “stellt [...] eine vollständige Galerie aller menschlichen und göttlichen Charaktere auf.” AWSW IX, 118.

²⁵⁰ KAV I, 461.

medieval hymns of Catholicism achieved staggering popularity, whereas “die neuen bild- und schwunglosen, vernünftig gemeinten, und wasserklaren, die man in ihre Stelle gesetzt hat, sind das ganz und gar nicht.”²⁵¹ Neo-Classical artists, he writes at another point, are little more than the “geistlosen Nachahmern einer misverstandnen Classicität.”²⁵² And Klopstock, whom one might otherwise mention in the same breath as Dante, earns a sharp rebuke from the medievalizing Schlegel: “Klopstock. Vergebliches Bestreben eine protestantische Mythologie aus nichts zu machen. Irreligiosität hierin.”²⁵³ The sudden growth of a distinctly Catholic aesthetic around 1800, nourished first by Tieck and Wackenroder, enabled Schlegel to remap the bounds of good taste and idealize the ground from which the *Commedia* blossomed — all while leveling devastating judgments at the religious epics that appeared to compete with it.

The irony in such judgments, of course, is that they embodied prejudices no less arbitrary than those against which Schlegel had directed his first article on Dante more than a decade earlier. We would do well to remember, however, that it was not Dante’s Catholicism that first rendered him an object of inquiry for the Schlegel brothers; and even if his filiation with a Catholic aesthetic endears him to the medievalizing A.W. Schlegel, Friedrich Schlegel’s respect for the *Commedia* — as we will see in this dissertation’s epilog — would wane after his own conversion to Catholicism in 1808.

²⁵¹ AWSW, VIII, 78.

²⁵² KAV II/1, 5.

²⁵³ KAV II/1, 5.

3

Dreaming of Dante: Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* and the Poetics of Absolute Idealism

Between 1799 and 1800, when the Schlegel brothers were teaching Dante to house guests in Jena, their friend Friedrich von Hardenberg toiled away on his monumental novel project, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, which after his death in 1801 would come to be regarded as the quintessential poetic accomplishment of the Jena *Frühromantik*. Instrumental in the process of this literary canonization was Ludwig Tieck, another Romantic novelist and visitor in Jena, who when he published the first edition of Novalis's works included a hagiographic statement that would set the tone for Novalis reception until the publication of a critical edition by Paul Kluckhohn and Richard Samuel in the 1960s. A considerable reason for the efficacy of Tieck's statement lay in his reverential praise of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*'s cosmic, ethereal quality, the force of which Tieck was able to enhance by mythologizing the 1797 death of Novalis's fiancée, Sophie von Kühn, and its profound impact on the poet. It was precisely this biographical

detail, in fact, that enabled Tieck to draw the following bold comparison between Novalis and Dante:

So erfand er, von Beispielen unbestochen, einen neuen Weg der Darstellung, und in der Vielseitigkeit der Beziehung, in der Ansicht der Liebe und dem Glauben an sie, die ihm zugleich Lehrerin, Weisheit und Religion ist, darin, daß ein einziger großer Lebens-Moment und Ein tiefer Schmerz und Verlust das Wesen seiner Poesie und Anschauung wurde, gleicht er unter den Neueren allein dem erhabenen Dante, und singt uns wie dieser einen unergründlichen mystischen Gesang, sehr verschieden von jenem mancher Nachahmer, welche die Mystik wie ein Ornament glauben an und ablegen zu können.²⁵⁴

Alluding to the loss of Sophie, and linking it to Dante's longing for Beatrice, who had likewise died young, Tieck establishes the foundation for what he suggests is a more substantive connection between the two writers. Yet what is more noteworthy here than the biographical parallel is the language in which Tieck forms this connection. Observing his string of qualifying adjectives — *ein einziger* großer Lebensmoment, *Ein tiefer* Schmerz, *allein* dem erhabenen Dante, *einen unergründlichen* mystischen Gesang — we hear more than a faint echo of Schlegel's call for a new Dantean mythology. For when in his dialogue Ludoviko is asked how a Spinozistic mythology might assume concrete form, Schlegel writes (through Ludoviko's voice): "Wer etwa dergleichen im Sinne hätte, würde es *nur* auf die Art können und sein wollen wie Dante. Er müßte, wie er, nur *Ein* Gedicht im Geist und im Herzen haben [...]."²⁵⁵ Dante displayed singularity, as Schlegel indicates in his dialogue, in two respects: (1) First, his *Commedia* represents the *only* means of realizing a new mythology and (2) second, he is a poet known not for a plethora of minor works, but rather for one, magisterial *magnum opus*. In one of the documents most notorious for mythologizing Romantic poetry, Tieck appears to have taken a lesson

²⁵⁴ Schriften IV, 559.

²⁵⁵ KFSA II, 326.

from Schlegel's own *Rede über die Mythologie*, suggesting that Novalis's one "unergründliche[r] Gesang" transcended the mystical posturing of common hacks and dilettantes.

In fairness to Tieck, who on account of this biographical sketch has suffered considerable criticism, there were in fact unmistakable parallels to be seen between Dante and Novalis.²⁵⁶ It is true, for example, that the death of Sophie prefigures aspects of the *Hymnen an die Nacht* as well as *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, though scholars have long debated the weight that ought to be accorded the so-called *Sophien-Erlebnis*. Beyond biographical correspondences, moreover, the two shared poetic and intellectual traits. Dante's masterpiece was preceded by the *Vita Nuova*, a prosimetric reflection in which a poet stylizes and codifies his love for a deceased woman, just as before *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* Novalis had used the *Hymnen an die Nacht* to articulate a simultaneously erotic and mystical vision of love. Just as Dante, in the *De Monarchia*, had written wistfully of the past age of (Roman) European political unity, so too had Novalis in *Die Christenheit oder Europa* longed for a lost era of (Christian) European unity. And just as in the *Commedia* Dante had merged the identity of a poet and a pilgrim, so too did Novalis in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* compose a grand romance in which a poet's process of self-actualization assumes the form of a pilgrimage. As striking as these parallels are, they are all the more astonishing when one considers that in his entire oeuvre, there is not a single instance in which Novalis mentions Dante. The closest

²⁵⁶ On the subject of Tieck's hagiography, see Wm. Arctander O'Brien, *Novalis: Signs of Revolution* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1995), part 1.

one comes to finding an indication that he might have read Dante, for example, is in an early letter of Friedrich Schlegel to A.W. Schlegel: “Schiller hat sehr gut von dir geredet; vorzüglich Dein Dante hat ihm sehr gefallen, und nach dem was er von andern vom Dante gehört, glaubt er daß Du deßen Geist vortrefflich gefaßt hättest. Dies hat er Hardenberg gesagt, nicht *mir*...”²⁵⁷

Despite Novalis’s complete silence on the *Commedia*, he continued to inspire comparisons to Dante, particularly by dint of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*. When Heinrich Heine discussed the novel in his retrospective analysis of German Romanticism, for example, he described it as “das Fragment eines großen allegorischen Gedichtes, das, wie die *Göttliche Komödie* des Dante, alle irdischen und himmlischen Dinge feiern sollte.”²⁵⁸ Whereas this sounds like a vague justification for a rather bold comparison, and it may in fact only derive from the narrative already spun years earlier by Tieck, A.W. Schlegel offers a particularly illuminating comparison in his lectures on Romantic poetry. When discussing the *Commedia*, he underscores the uniqueness of its fusion of physics and theology with an ode to Novalis: “Es ist dies eins von den unzähligen Zeugnissen, wodurch man beweisen könnte, dass die Bemühungen mancher mir verbrüderten Zeitgenossen, z.B. Novalis, welche man als so unsinnig verschrien, in noch nicht längst verflossenen Zeiten als die wahre Richtung anerkannt wurden.”²⁵⁹ Schlegel’s exegesis of the *Commedia* as an encyclopedic poeticization of medieval science will in fact ring

²⁵⁷ Schriften IV, 573 (May 17, 1792).

²⁵⁸ Heinrich Heine, *Die Romantische Schule*, in *Heinrich Heine: Werke in fünf Bänden*, Bd. 3, ed. Rolf Toman (Köln: Könnemann, 1995), 99.

²⁵⁹ KAV II/1, 150.

familiar to readers of Novalis, whose encyclopedic project, *Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, had important overlaps with *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*. Indeed, from the time of some of the early criticism of the novel, including Dilthey's treatment of it in *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung* (1906), it has been accepted that *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* can in fact be read as a poeticization of contemporaneous scientific theories like Galvanism and magnetism.²⁶⁰ Furthermore, the link that Tieck had established between Dante's Beatrice and Novalis's Sophie was sufficiently impressive to inspire Karl Immermann, in the dedication to his mythic drama *Merlin* (1832), to draw the very same comparison.²⁶¹

In recent years, the comparisons of Novalis's novel and Dante's poem have emerged in more definite form: Silvio Vietta has succeeded in showing that the romantic female figure in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, Mathilde, is the direct intertextual descendant of Dante's Matelda, the woman who resides atop Mount Purgatory in the earthly paradise.²⁶² Given scholars' now two-hundred year debate over the relation of Novalis's novel to Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* and the tradition of *Bildungsromane/Künstlerromane*, which, incidentally, has led to no particular interpretive consensus, Vietta has discovered new "data." The novelty of this discovery is all the more surprising when we consider,

²⁶⁰ Wilhelm Dilthey, *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung*, 8th ed. (Leipzig/Berlin: Teubner, 1922 (1906)). Dilthey judges Klingsohr's fairy-tale, in particular, as an artistic rendering of Galvanist doctrine.

²⁶¹ Karl Immermann, *Werke in Fünf Bänden*, ed. Benno von Wiese (Wiesbaden: Athenaion, 1977), Bd. 5, 555.

²⁶² Incidentally, one of the more interesting circumstantial components of the Mathilde/Matelda correspondence that Vietta does not mention is the vexed question of Dante's historical source for Matelda. Without rehashing a truly onerous amount of scholarship, it suffices to note that one of the women postulated as an historical antecedent for Matelda was Mechtild von Hackeborn, a mystic from Sachsen-Anhalt, not far at all from Novalis's family estate in Oberwiederstedt, who had left behind a book of revelations. It is at least worth conjecturing the extent to which Novalis might have registered this connection. On Mechtild, see *The Book of Gostlye Grace*, ed. Theresa A. Halligan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1979).

for example, that Dante makes no appearance in a virtually comprehensive work like Hans-Joachim Mähl's *Die Idee des goldenen Zeitalters im Werk des Novalis* or a reception-history like Ira Kasperowski's *Mittelalterrezeption im Werk des Novalis*. Yet with the rise of cultural studies, Vietta's article has been buried under more contemporary approaches to Novalis's novel.²⁶³ Given the many comparisons between Novalis and Dante, from the time of his death onward, it is disappointing that Vietta's claims have not gained more traction — particularly given the way they alter our basic intellectual associations with the novel. My goal in this chapter lies in modulating the parameters of Vietta's two primary maneuvers: whereas he locates Novalis's adaptation of Dante within a narrative of European secularization advanced by art, I would suggest narrowing our focus by reading Novalis's adaptation of Dante as a seminal moment within the narrative of the Romantic project of a new mythology. There are of course implications to be drawn for processes of secularization, but it is difficult to extrapolate them without first framing the novel in its more immediate context. Indeed, this point of historicization raises a matter of hermeneutics: whereas Vietta reads Novalis's Mathilde as a mediatrix in the mold of the feminine figures in Dante's *Commedia*, and convincingly so, the context of the Romantics' new mythology, particularly given the Schlegels' revolutionary scholarship on and theorization of the *Commedia*, suggests that the significance of the

²⁶³ Recent approaches to *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* have gravitated largely toward discussions of the novel's engagement with the Orient. Examples include Elena Pnevmonidou, "Veiled Narratives: Novalis' *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* as a Staging of Orientalist Discourse," *The German Quarterly* 84.1 (2011), 21-40; James Hodkinson, "Der Islam im Dichten und Denken der deutschen Romantik," in *Islam in der deutschen und türkischen Kultur*, ed. Michael Hoffmann (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2012), 61-80; Todd Kontje, "Ein Weltbürger aus der Provinz: Novalis, Europa und der Orientalismus," in *Bergbau und Dichtung: Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis) zum 200. Todestag*, ed. Eleonore Sent (Weimar & Jena: Hain, 2003), 209-227.

Commedia for *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* lay in more than Dante's depiction of female soteriological figures.²⁶⁴ The present chapter thus revisits the Dantean adaptations of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, in some cases accenting different points than those raised by Vietta, and in others highlighting allusions that Vietta neglects. The goal is not to contravene Vietta's wonderful work, but rather to resituate the material he has identified and show that Novalis's interaction with Dante constitutes an advancement of the Schlegelian dictum that the new mythology could be realized only in the way that Dante had written the *Commedia*.

Establishing the Intertext

Just as the *Commedia* begins on the brink of sleep ("tant' era pien di sonno a quel punto," leading some to speculate whether its action was not intended to be read as a dream,²⁶⁵ so too does Novalis's novel open as its protagonist hovers on the borders of consciousness: while contemplating in the middle of the night a distant blue flower, he falls asleep to the vision of an unsettling dream in which he sees wondrous animals, lives with various people in war, is taken prisoner, dies, is reborn, and loves someone passionately but is

²⁶⁴ Vietta's point, however, is well taken, and I would add that it anticipates an even longer trajectory than his article indicates: Dante's mediatrixes of grace would influence Novalis's depiction of Mathilde, as well as the feminine figure in Schelling's Dantean stanzas and the very concept of the *Ewig-Weiblichen* in Goethe's *Faust II*. Traces of these images stretch all the way to Wagner's *Parsifal*. On this, see chapter four.

²⁶⁵ *Inferno* 1.11. The matter has implications for the apparent dichotomy that forces readers of the *Commedia* to regard Dante as either poet or visionary, the poem as either *viaggio* or *visione*. On this, see the excellent discussion in Teodolinda Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992). She reconciles the apparent dichotomy by arguing that "These references to sleep at the beginning [*Inf.* 1.11-12] and end [*Par.* 32.139] of the poem are important; although the poet does not dwell on them, neither can they be conjured out of the text. I take their elusive presence as part of Dante's Pauline strategy, stemming from his need to veil in mystery the ultimate mode of an experience that he himself—like St. Paul—was unable to explain [...]" (144). This dilemma and its bearing on *Heinrich* is discussed more thoroughly below.

ultimately separated from her.²⁶⁶ Toward morning, however, Heinrich is overtaken by a calm that brings with it a more pleasant dream of a singular landscape: “Es kam ihm vor, als ginge er in einem dunkeln Walde allein. Nur selten schimmerte der Tag durch das grüne Netz. Bald kam er vor eine Felsenschlucht, die bergan stieg.”²⁶⁷ Codified by some of the most famous lines of European poetry (“Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita / mi ritrovai per una selva scura”), the image of the solitary pilgrim who traverses a dark wood before reaching the face of a mountain can neither be written nor read without conjuring the specter of the *Commedia*’s initial images.²⁶⁸ Lost in a dark wood, the allegory of a spiritual quagmire, Dante’s pilgrim sees that his way up a mountain and out of the forest is impeded by three beasts. Heinrich’s pilgrimage unfolds in the same landscape, though its connotations, as well as his path, are markedly different: whereas Dante’s pilgrim cannot scale the mountain without first witnessing the terrors below, Novalis’s disinterest in a specifically Christian topography of the afterlife leads him to eschew the space of Hell, relegating it perhaps elliptically to Heinrich’s first unquiet dreams, in favor of a quick ascent up the mountain, where Heinrich discovers a cavern in which he disrobes and bathes in an edenic spring. The space, unmistakably vaginal in its imagery, borders on the incestuous in the manner in which it blends two registers of the feminine: the dream-journey, broken when Heinrich looks longingly at the image of a romantic object

²⁶⁶ Schriften I, 196.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ *Inferno* 1.1-2.

but is awoken by his mother, signals at once a retreat to the womb yet a yearning for romantic fulfillment.²⁶⁹

The bifurcation of femininity along the borders of the maternal and the erotic, inasmuch as Novalis maps it onto a geography of the idyllic, bespeaks the conceptual dynamic according to which he had theorized the idea of a golden age, an idea that teeters between experiences of *Erinnerung* and *Ahnung*. Elaborating the significance of a golden age for Novalis is a task unto itself, and one that has been fulfilled more than adequately in Hans-Joachim Mähl's magisterial work on the topic, but it bears repeating that the concept of a golden age animates the fundamental principles of his philosophical-historical worldview. In abbreviated form, this idea entails a triadic structure that one can locate at play in most of his poetic work: a golden age that has been lost to the present will return in an age of fulfillment. But as Mähl has shown, the coming golden age represents to Novalis not simply a return to the primal *Naturzustand*; instead, it will be a new age that unites the universe in harmony while preserving the individuation of each being.²⁷⁰ Whereas to the original golden age Novalis thus ascribes characteristics like instinct and monotony, he envisions the new golden age as a time marked by art,

²⁶⁹ Schriften I, 197.

²⁷⁰ Novalis's concept of a golden age, which relies in large measure on the Dutch Platonist Franz Hemsterhuis, represents in fact a thoughtful working through of sticking points in Hemsterhuis's work that had raised the suspicion of Herder. The latter, who had translated the former's work on love (*Verlangen*), warned against anyone's longing for an age in which union with God entailed dissolution of the self. After all, Herder had written, "Das höchste Gut, was Gott allen Geschöpfen geben konnte, war und bleibt eignes Dasein, eben in welchem Er ihnen ist und von Stufe zu Stufe mehr sein wird *Alles in Allem*." See Herder, *Liebe und Selbstheit*, in Herder, *Werke*, ed. Günter Arnold et. al. (Frankfurt: Deutscher Klassiker, 1994), IV, 424.

harmony, and rebirth.²⁷¹ In this respect, we witness the considerable overlap in Novalis's conception of the future of humankind, on the one hand, and what documents like *Das älteste Systemprogramm* and *Die Rede über die Mythologie* imagine a new mythology will accomplish for the future of humankind, on the other. Significantly, the authors of these documents, together with Novalis, agree that the approximation of a future utopia will be effected by art alone. They even share the same metaphors of flowing water in its visualization: just as in the *Gespräch über die Poesie* Schlegel writes that "alle Ströme der Poesie fließen zusammen in das allgemeine große Meer," and just as the *System des transcendentalen Idealismus* envisions that the age of myth would usher in a sea of poetry, so too does Novalis write of the coming golden age as a return of the waters of poetry.²⁷²

The novel's first dream functions as a microcosm of this conceptual dynamic, transporting Heinrich to a primal womb in which he is simultaneously enveloped by the warmth of the past yet reborn to the delights of a future that will be realized by means of his development as a poet. Indeed, the subsequent action of the novel reveals the profound extent to which this dream functions as a harbinger of Heinrich's process of actualization and Novalis's attendant poeticization of past and future. In this respect, we might focus our attention on the novel's pivotal fifth and sixth chapters, where — after a series of encounters with merchants, crusaders, and their captive, Zulima — Heinrich first penetrates the surface of the earth and encounters the memory of the original golden

²⁷¹ Mähl, 306-309.

²⁷² KFSA II, 283; HKA IX/1, 329; Mähl, 398.

age before ascending to experience a premonition of its future coming. This sequence begins when in a village tavern Heinrich happens upon an aged Bohemian miner who regales a group of curious listeners with tales of his trade and leads a party, including Heinrich, into nearby caves. Wending their way underground, they pass deposits of bone and teeth in various states of decay and petrification, which while frightening to the neophytes, signify to the adept miner the “Überbleibsel einer uralten Zeit,” “Zeichen eines undenklichen Altertums.”²⁷³ As Theodore Ziolkowski has noted, geological observation in the late eighteenth century afforded a novel mode of historical interpretation, with some writing of *lapides literati*, others finding runes in stones, yet others believing they had discovered Hebrew or Arabic inscriptions in crystals.²⁷⁴ In this case, they point to a primeval antiquity whose conflicting interpretations by the miner and his followers dramatize the very question of how to “read” history.

The same interpretive quandary arises in the miner’s subsequent discussion with Count Friedrich of Hohenzollern, a crusader-turned-hermit whom the miner and his group discover living in the caves. The hermit opines that, from a remote distance, one can interpret series of events and begin to understand the interconnectedness of past, present, and future. In an echo of Friedrich Schlegel’s maxim that “Der Historiker ist ein rückwärts gekehrter Prophet,” he describes miners as “verkehrte Astrologen [...]. Jenen ist der Himmel das Buch der Zukunft, während euch die Erde Denkmale der Urwelt

²⁷³ Schriften I, 253.

²⁷⁴ Theodore Ziolkowski, *German Romanticism and Its Institutions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 33.

zeigt.”²⁷⁵ When they wander into other caverns, it is this discussion that foregrounds one of the novel’s most enigmatic moments: Heinrich leafs through the hermit’s library and discovers a book as remarkable as it is indecipherable, for in it he recognizes images of himself, his family, and his new acquaintances. The puzzling artifact, the meaning of which he cannot solve, conveys to the novel’s readers in a poetic image the theory of historical understanding that the hermit had just explained:

Der eigentliche Sinn für die Geschichten der Menschen entwickelt sich erst spät, und mehr unter den stillen Einflüssen der Erinnerung, als unter den gewaltsameren Eindrücken der Gegenwart. Die nächsten Ereignisse scheinen nur locker verknüpft [...]; und nur dann, wenn man imstande ist, eine lange Reihe zu übersehn und weder alles buchstäblich zu nehmen, noch auch mit mutwilligen Träumen die eigentliche Ordnung zu verwirren, bemerkt man die geheime Verkettung des Ehemaligen und Künftigen, und lernt man die Geschichte aus Hoffnung und Erinnerung zusammensetzen.²⁷⁶

Heinrich cannot interpret the book, Novalis suggests, because he is blinded by his proximity to the story that it tells.

History is rendered more intelligible, the miner and the hermit agree, when it is fused with the spirit of poetry, even assuming the form of a fairy-tale.²⁷⁷ It is this transformation that we find in the very next chapter: whereas the descent through the caves had evoked a golden age of the historic past, Heinrich’s arrival in Augsburg now ushers in the fairy-tale paradise of a future age. Disembarking at the home of Heinrich’s grandfather, Schwaning, the traveling party hears music and observes that a party is afoot, for which reason Heinrich and his mother fret over their weary appearance. Entering the house, but unable to locate anyone, they ascend a spiral staircase, explain

²⁷⁵ KFSa II, 176; Schriften I, 260.

²⁷⁶ Schriften I, 257-258.

²⁷⁷ The relation of history to poetry and fable becomes a topic of interest even in Novalis’s notes of 1799, where he writes, for example, “Die Geschichte Xsti ist eben so gewiß ein *Gedicht*, wie eine Geschichte, und überhaupt ist nur die Geschichte, Geschichte, die auch Fabel seyn kann” (Schriften III, 566).

themselves to the servants, and eventually meet Schwaning in an overlaid scene of anagnorisis that reenacts a fairy-tale told to Heinrich by the merchants with whom he had traveled. The entire sequence, the reader quickly realizes, represents Novalis's mythic transformation of the cave of history into a fairy-tale. The otherworldly topos in which Heinrich finds himself is none other than an earthly paradise: amidst singing, dancing, drinking, and jollity, he is introduced by his grandfather to both a poet, Klingsohr, as well as to Klingsohr's charming daughter, Mathilde, who serves as an allegory of the spirit of poetry itself, the actualization of the blue flower that Heinrich had seen in the novel's first dream. In describing the atmosphere's effect on Heinrich, Novalis embeds the images in a biblical register:

Der Lebensgenuß stand wie ein klingender Baum voll goldener Früchte vor ihm. Das Übel ließ sich nicht sehen, und es dünkte ihm unmöglich, daß je die menschliche Neigung von diesem Baume zu der gefährlichen Frucht des Erkenntnisses, zu dem Baume des Krieges sich gewendet haben sollte. Er verstand nun den Wein und die Speisen. Sie schmeckten ihm überaus köstlich. Ein himmlisches Öl würzte sie ihm, und aus dem Becher funkelte die Herrlichkeit des irdischen Lebens.²⁷⁸

The majesty of earthly life, the tree with its fruit, and Heinrich's disbelief that amidst this splendor one would have turned toward evil all render clear allusions to the garden of Eden as it is depicted in Genesis. While such thoughts occupy Heinrich, his grandfather interrupts with a song that not only thematizes the earthly paradise, but that directly bespeaks Heinrich's disbelief that Adam and Eve could have ever chosen sin:

Sind wir nicht geplagte Wesen?
Ist nicht unser Los betrübt?
Nur zu Zwang und Not erlesen
In Verstellung nur geübt,
Dürfen selbst nicht unsre Klagen
Sich aus unserm Busen wagen.

²⁷⁸ Schriften I, 272.

Allem was die Eltern sprechen,
 Widerspricht das volle Herz.
 Die verbotne Frucht zu brechen
 Fühlen wir der Sehnsucht Schmerz;
 Möchten gern die süßen Knaben
 Fest an unserm Herzen haben.

Wäre dies zu denken Sünde?
 Zollfrei sind Gedanken doch.
 Was bleibt einem armen Kinde
 Außer süßen Träumen noch?
 Will man sie auch gern verbannen,
 Nimmer ziehen sie von dannen.²⁷⁹

There are at least two points to be made here with respect to Novalis's adaptation of the *Commedia*. Leaving aside for now the major intertextual link, namely the connection of Novalis's Mathilde to Dante's Matelda, the first of these points concerns the initial response of Dante's pilgrim upon learning that he has entered the earthly paradise after having scaled Mount Purgatory. There he reproaches the nerve of Eve, who "could not suffer to be under any veil, under which if she had devoutly remained I would have felt those ineffable delights sooner and for longer time."²⁸⁰ It is precisely this reaction, though articulated more humanely in the narration of Novalis's novel, that both preoccupies Heinrich's thoughts and precipitates his grandfather's song, which in opposition to Dante, justifies concupiscence from the perspective of Eve. The second observation to be made with respect to the adaptation of the *Commedia*, related to the first, concerns the very technique by which Novalis has enabled Heinrich's grandfather to intuit Heinrich's thoughts and provide correction: precisely this ability to "read the mind" of the poet-pilgrim and provide instruction recurs throughout the dialogue between Virgil and Dante

²⁷⁹ Schriften I, 272-273.

²⁸⁰ *Purgatorio* 29.27-30.

in the *Commedia*. Just as Dante's Virgil is endowed with the qualities of both mind-reader and prophet, so too is Novalis's Schwaning, whose so apparently quaint drinking song in fact presages Heinrich's fateful dream that evening.

This dream, which is found at the end of the sixth chapter, occurs just as Heinrich's dream in the first chapter had, which is to say it materializes in the hours just before waking. Apropos the dreams' links to the *Commedia*, this attention to the hour of their appearance bears significance inasmuch as the Dante points to the hours before sleep as the time when dreams are prophetic.²⁸¹ In Heinrich's dream, when a blue river emerges from a space of greenery, Mathilde appears paddling a small boat on the river. Bedecked in wreaths, she looks wistfully at Heinrich while singing. Suddenly the boat begins to swirl and take in water. Heinrich tries to bridge the space between them by diving into the river and following her voice, but he is carried away and loses consciousness while Mathilde is drawn under. When he regains consciousness, he believes himself to be ashore; indeed, Mathilde clutches him in a tight embrace, fulfilling the words of yearning in Schwaning's song: "[wir Mädchen] möchten gern die süßen Knaben / fest an unserm Herzen haben." Heinrich asks where the river is, Mathilde points to its blue waves above them and indicates that they have both been submerged, explaining that they are now in the eternal realm of their parents. She kisses him and whispers a secret word that, though it resounds through his entire being, is lost when he is awoken by his grandfather.²⁸² Inasmuch as the dream stages the union of the pilgrim with

²⁸¹ *Inferno* 26.7, *Purgatorio* 9.13-18, *Purgatorio* 27.92-95.

²⁸² *Schriften I*, 278-279.

his romantic object, it constitutes a reimagined transformation of the novel's first dream, in which Heinrich had submerged himself in water before losing consciousness and awaking (within the dream) to the image of Mathilde's face in the blue flower.

It is the paradisiacal landscape of the *Commedia*, its representation of the encounter between the poet-pilgrim and the feminine figure who tends that landscape, and indeed its sequence of action that shapes these vital dreamscapes in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*. Whereas in the first dream Heinrich had begun in the equivalent of Dante's *selva oscura*, reality itself has now assumed the hue of poetry, foregrounding the action of the second dream. Thus it is the actual setting of his grandfather's home, repeatedly coded as a return to the *locus amoenus* of Eden, that introduces the dream whose events now unfold in the equivalent of the *divina foresta* in which Dante locates his earthly paradise. When he enters that forest, Dante's pilgrim hears the melodious singing of a woman (Matelda) whom he observes picking flowers across a stream. He advances toward her and requests that she, too, move nearer that he might understand her singing.²⁸³ A good deal more occurs, too, some of which we will revisit, but it is important to mention now how the encounter between Dante's pilgrim and Matelda grounds Heinrich's dream most fundamentally. In the earthly paradise, Dante's pilgrim witnesses a stunning procession of allegorical figures, each of which represents a book of the Bible; amidst these figures on a chariot rides Beatrice, whose words for the pilgrim are not those of a long-lost, mourning lover: instead of seeing to a happy reunion, she fiercely chides him for turning to wantonness after her death, stirring in him such acute

²⁸³ *Purgatorio* 28.46-48.

compunction that he is purified to the point of attaining access to paradise itself.²⁸⁴ At the moment of repentance, however, he faints, with Matelda drawing him into the earthly paradise's river, Lethe, as she walks on it as lightly as a bark; she embraces him, submerges him, and in so doing, purges him of the memory of sin.²⁸⁵ Afterward, as the pilgrim approaches the shore, he hears the psalm *asperges me* being sung, yet Dante the poet remarks that it was so sweet that he can neither remember nor write it.

As Dante had done with myriad classical sources, Novalis transforms this scene, adapting it to the logic of his protagonist's quest for poetic self-actualization in a golden age marked, above all, by love. The parallels to Heinrich's dream are unmistakable: both Mathilde's singing and her separation by water from Heinrich, who attempts to overcome this gap, represent a clear reworking of *Purgatorio* 29. The loss of consciousness, the submersion, the association of Matelda/Mathilde with a small boat, as well as a final, secret word all point to a poetic reworking in Novalis's novel that, even if it does not signify the same sort of salvific purification it does in the *Commedia*, nonetheless effectively translates *Purgatorio* 31 for the sake of marking Heinrich's transition to full-fledged poet and lover. Yet the parallels are more profound, and indeed, Novalis's reliance on Dante is more striking than this would first indicate. That Mathilde functions (partially) as an allegory for the spirit of poetry seems no mere invention of Novalis, but rather a manipulation of Dante's Matelda, who at nearly every juncture is marked by her delight in song. The significance of Dante's Matelda for Novalis, however, extends

²⁸⁴ *Purgatorio* 31.49-87.

²⁸⁵ *Purgatorio* 31.91-105.

further yet, for even before the centrality of her song — which, in the context of the *Commedia*, exemplifies her active service to God — stands her role as the new Eve, an embodiment of pure erotic love.²⁸⁶

Such is the nature of Novalis's Mathilde, who is not to be reduced to a mere allegory of poetry, for her inspiration for Heinrich's poetic development is inseparable from her undeniably erotic dimensions. This combination of traits renders her character more clearly intelligible in light of Novalis's concept of a golden age: influenced by the Dutch Platonist Franz Hemsterhuis's theorization of history and its culmination in an eternal golden age, Novalis's own postulation of a future age of unity relied not only on the approximation of that age via the power of poetry, but also, and crucially, via the power of love. Just as Hemsterhuis had written of a *moralisches Organ* that, in contrast to the organs of sense, could provide for a direct intuition of nature and hence the immediacy required of union with other beings, so too did Novalis theorize this possibility, writing of love as the "alleinige, ewige Basis aller wahrhaften, unzertrennlichen Verbindung."²⁸⁷ As the emblem of the earthly paradise, Mathilde, like Matelda, unites celestial song with pure love: "die Liebe," Klingsohr says while observing Mathilde, "ist selbst nichts, als die höchste Naturpoesie."²⁸⁸ The remarkable relationship between Mathilde and Matelda lies not, as Vietta suggests, in a contrast whereby Matelda points to the *Jenseits* and Mathilde points to the *Diesseits*; this is to

²⁸⁶ On this see Hermann Gmelin, *Kommentar: Der Läuterungsberg* (Stuttgart: Klett, 1955), 440; A. Bartlett Giamatti, *The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 110.

²⁸⁷ *Schriften* II, 495. On this topic see likewise Mähl's thorough exegesis of Novalis's reading of Hemsterhuis in Mähl, *Idee des goldenen Zeitalters*, 266-86.

²⁸⁸ *Schriften* I, 287.

simplify a matter of metaphysics that, on the one hand, is in actuality far more complex, and on the other, seems to be beside the point.²⁸⁹ What is at stake in the link between these figures is the transfigurative experience each affords to the pilgrim-poet: in both cases, Matelda/Mathilde subjects the pilgrim-poet to a rite of baptism that necessarily precedes his transformation to poet-prophet. It is true that in the case of Dante the ritual prepares his pilgrim for a symbolically Christian representation of paradise, whereas in the case of Novalis, the baptismal scene paves the way to the transformation of Heinrich's world into a realm of poetry. Yet the notion that Novalis's adaptation amounts to a secularization of Dante's mediatrix relies so heavily on the narrative of secularization that it loses sight of the novel's more immediate context, the Romantic project of a new mythology.

The Function of the Dantean Dream

For all the talk of common imagery, we ought not overlook the fact that the dream itself features as a constitutive device in the narrative of both the *Commedia* and *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*. Just as Novalis begins the first chapter of his novel with an extended dreamscape, Dante too uses structural markers to foreground the centrality of the dream to his poem; indeed, in addition to flanking his poem with references to sleep, he signals

²⁸⁹ In his groundbreaking explication of the metaphysical system that underlies the *Commedia*, Christian Moevs challenges the casual attribution of a generically medieval worldview to Dante by arguing instead that Dante's metaphysics rests on five principles: (1) the world of space and time actually exists in Intellect; (2) matter denotes not material, but rather distance from being; (3) creation is limitation of Intellect and exists only insofar as it participates in Intellect; (4) creation and creator are not two, nor however are they the same; (5) one cannot experience God; one can only "know" God to the extent that one knows oneself as God. While I would not suggest that Novalis, or even Schelling, understood Dante's metaphysics quite as carefully as does Moevs, this metaphysical outline nonetheless complicates Vietta's thesis of Novalis as secularizing Dante's largely medieval worldview inasmuch as it aligns Dante's worldview much more closely with the monism of the Romantics. See Moevs, *The Metaphysics of the Comedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4-5.

the cardinal importance of the dream as technique by bracketing the literal center of the poem (*Purgatorio* 16) with a dream in the preceding and following cantos. Beyond functioning as mere citations of a visionary genre, however, the dreams of the *Commedia* constitute narrational maneuvers that span the spheres of poetry and prophecy. This much is true of *Heinrich*, too, of course, where the dream marks a liminal space defined by its ambiguous relation to both truth and fiction.²⁹⁰ It is to this point that we now turn, for I wish to show that Novalis not only repurposes the imagery of Dante in his dreams, but that his very use of these dreams as a technique of narration fulfills the role accorded the dream in the logic of the *Commedia*. In making this claim, I want to suggest that it is through the dreamscape that Novalis realizes the possibility of harmonizing the ideality of the subject and the objectivity of external reality — i.e., the possibility of a poetics of myth.

The proximity of Novalis's unfinished novel project to the Romantics' new mythology has been probed since Friedrich Schlegel's 1803 review in the journal *Europa*, where he characterized it as an "Übergang vom Roman zur Mythologie."²⁹¹ What it is that constitutes the mythology of the novel, however, has eluded scholarly consensus, in large measure because the novel has proven intractable in yielding reliable signs of the mimetic principles by which it operates. In Klingsohr's fairy-tale, for example, Dilthey saw the "Verkörperung einer die Natur erklärenden Weltansicht,"

²⁹⁰ Ernst Behler writes unequivocally, "The first dream is the motivating force for all subsequent events of the novel [...]." On this note I would agree, but my reading aims to sharpen the assertion that dreams in the novel "do not relate to psychoanalysis and spiritualism, but emphasize the relationship to the supernatural." See Behler, *German Romantic Literary Theory*, 212.

²⁹¹

which led him to call it “Mythologie.”²⁹² Haym regarded the novel as a work of “mythologischer Einkleidung,” but that which lay under the cloak of myth, he wrote, was “die Gemüthsgeschichte, die poetisirte Lebensgeschichte des Dichters selbst.”²⁹³ In her influential reading of the novel’s unfinished second half, “Die Erfüllung,” Elisabeth Stopp located the mythology in the novel’s apparent poeticization of a doctrine of metempsychosis, citing the reiterations of the novel’s female type — Zulima, Mathilde, Cyane — as evidence.²⁹⁴ Dennis Mahoney, on the other hand, has located the novel’s mythic character not in metempsychosis, but rather in what he sees as a motif of death and resurrection.²⁹⁵

The readings of Stopp and Mahoney, in identifying the mythological dimension of the novel in the eschatological events within the narrative, overlook the more essential quality of the new mythology as an aesthetics predicated not on action that resembles myth, but on what Schlegel and Novalis understood to be symbolism (*Symbolismus*). Schlegel, we will recall, would describe the *neue Mythologie* as a “symbolische Ansicht der Natur.” This implies that any reading of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* as an attempt at the realization of a mythology needs necessarily to consider not first and foremost the actions of the novel’s agents, but rather the mimetic system from which that action is generated. As Novalis himself wrote of the task of the novelist, “Es kommt also alles auf

²⁹² Dilthey, 344.

²⁹³ Haym, 387.

²⁹⁴ Stopp, “‘Übergang vom Roman zur Mythologie’: Formal Aspects of the Opening Chapter of Hardenberg’s *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, Part II,” *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Geistesgeschichte und Literaturwissenschaft* 48 (1974), 318-341. Stopp’s thesis, which includes the assertion that “natural phenomena camouflage spiritual meaning” (325), revises Dilthey’s early position.

²⁹⁵ Dennis Mahoney, “The Myth of Death and Resurrection in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*,” *South Atlantic Review* 48:2 (1983), 52-66.

die Weise an, auf die künstlerische Wählungs und Verbindungskunst [Poësie hervorzubringen].”²⁹⁶ In point of fact, it is a disagreement over how this question ought to be answered that begets the tension between the seminal readings proposed by Dilthey, on the one hand, and Haym on the other: whereas the former reads the novel as a poetic articulation of a science of nature, the latter reads the novel as a narrative of the interior, a poetic memoir of Heinrich’s artistic development that, while featuring elements like the transmigration of souls, has as its true backdrop Heinrich’s own soul.²⁹⁷ We are dealing, in other words, with a question of subject-object primacy within the realm of the aesthetic. That is to say, the difference between the readings of Dilthey and Haym hinges on determining whether it is a worldview ordered by idealism or realism that guides the mimetic practice of the novel. Whereas Dilthey’s reading would suggest the primacy of the object, and thus imply that the novel assumes a mimesis of realism, Haym’s reading inclines in the other direction: “Die Metaphysik des Menschenlebens, zusammenfallend mit der Metaphysik des Universums, wird in geschichtlicher Form, in Form einer Erzählung von dem Lebenslauf eines Dichters mit der unbedingten Freiheit metaphysischer, transzendentaler Poesie vorgetragen.”²⁹⁸

In his notes from the composition of the novel, Novalis expresses it in the following way: “Poësie ist wahrhafter Idealismus — Betrachtung der Welt, wie Betrachtung eines *großen Gemüths* — Selbstbewußtseyn des Universums.”²⁹⁹ While he

²⁹⁶ Schriften III, 649.

²⁹⁷ Haym, 386-387.

²⁹⁸ Haym, 383.

²⁹⁹ Schriften III, 640.

seems to offer an easy answer, calling poetry “wahrhafter Idealismus,” his definition of the term reveals that poetry is hardly reducible to Fichte’s idealism of the ego. On the contrary, it is a mode of observation that acknowledges the reality of the universe while comprehending it as mind or spirit. Contrary to the mythic cloak of nature proposed by Dilthey, as well as to the thesis of idealism suggested by Haym, the definition of poetry that Novalis develops corresponds precisely to what Frederick Beiser describes as Novalis’s philosophy of absolute idealism. Novalis believes, namely, that “the absolute has both a subjective and objective aspect, that it unites idealism and realism.” His goal, as Beiser shows, “is to *synthesize* Fichte and Spinoza.”³⁰⁰ On this note, we will recall that in the theoretical manifesto of the new mythology, F. Schlegel’s *Rede über die Mythologie*, there had been heralded a new mythology that would rest upon the “Harmonie des Ideellen und Reellen.”³⁰¹ It is this aesthetic imperative, articulated in Novalis’s notes, that animates the poetics of his novel project and which, I believe, Paul Kluckhohn alluded to when writing that the novel was neither realistic nor allegorical, but “ein symbolischer Roman, der die Immanenz des Transzendenten im diesseitigen Leben, die tiefere Wesenheit, das Göttliche im Irdischen aufzeigen will.”³⁰²

That *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* can be regarded as a project conceived under the rubric of a symbolic new mythology can be deduced, apart from any reading of the novel itself, from the letters exchanged between Novalis and F. Schlegel in the years prior to

³⁰⁰ Beiser, *German Idealism*, 409, 420.

³⁰¹ KFSA II, 314.

³⁰² Schriften I, 56.

the novel's composition. Novalis, for his part, urged Schlegel to write "etwas Ganzes."³⁰³ And Schlegel, on the basis of Novalis's (recently announced) transition to poetry, recruited him for what must have seemed like tantalizing plans: "Du kannst denken," he writes to Novalis,

[...] daß Projekte die Menge gewachsen sind, beynah so viel wie in der Philosophie. Einige versuche ich gewiß mit Ernst, und von Einem hoffe ich schon mit Zuversicht Gelingen. – Alle sind so, daß kein Mensch der Jezigen sie machen kann, auch Goethe nicht, und doch kann ich aus Urschriften und Philosophie beweisen, daß sie kommen *müssen*, es mag sie machen wer will, und wann er will. Die Ideen würden aber auch beym ersten Blick grade Dich plötzlich treffen und Dir ganz gefallen.³⁰⁴

Novalis, whose letters evince a continuing fascination with an aesthetics of totality, teases Schlegel meanwhile with a plan that "nichts minder betrifft, als die mögliche, evidente Realisirung der *kühnsten* Wünsche und Ahndungen jeder Zeit — auf die analogste, begreiflichste Art von der Welt."³⁰⁵ Remarks of this sort in the Novalis-Schlegel correspondence, as we will have noticed from their subsequent resonances in the *Rede über die Mythologie*, foreground the rhetoric in which the project of the new mythology would ultimately be framed.

Yet what underwrites the conspicuous excitement in such statements is not merely the promise of a new Romantic poetry, the *Verschmelzung* of literature and philosophy that Schlegel describes in the *Athenäumsfragmenten*. It is the conviction that their poetic endeavors were very nearly about to transcend the limits of even Fichte's idealism and Schelling's realism. We witness this, for example, in Novalis's letter of July 20, 1798 to Schlegel:

³⁰³ Schriften IV, 226 (May 3, 1797).

³⁰⁴ Schriften IV, 490 (September 26, 1797).

³⁰⁵ Schriften IV, 254 (May 11, 1798).

In meiner Philosophie des täglichen Lebens bin ich auf die Idee einer *moralischen* / im Hemsterhuisischen Sinn / Astronomie gekommen und habe die interessante Entdeckung der Religion des sichtbaren Weltalls gemacht. Ich denke hier, Schelling weit zu überfliegen. Was denkst Du, ob das nicht der rechte Weg ist, die Physik im allgemeinsten Sinn, schlechterdings *Symbolisch* zu behandeln? Auf diesem Wege denk ich tiefer, als je, einzudringen und aller Campanen und Oefen entübrigt zu seyn.³⁰⁶

In language that clearly anticipates Schlegel's own formulae, Novalis articulates a symbolic program that serves the very same absolute idealism described above by Beiser. Art would not merely poeticize the laws of nature in a form already prevalent in the fundamentally didactic fables of an anti-aesthetic Enlightenment; on the contrary, it would stage the convergence of nature and spirit, alternate aspects of the one absolute, in the concrete revelation of a symbolic "Religion des sichtbaren Weltalls." In locating the essence of religion in an intuition of the universe provided for by art, Novalis displays signs of the same Platonism and Spinozism that simultaneously guided Schleiermacher in the composition of his speeches on religion. And by theorizing the relationship of ethics and physics, indeed conceiving of subject and object as alternate valences of one and the same absolute, Novalis does indeed fly past Schelling, who would not formulate the principles of his *Identitätsphilosophie* for some time yet. Enamoured by the idea of a "Galvanismus des Geistes," Schlegel even enjoined Novalis to begin with him a publishable correspondence in which they would unite religion and physics.³⁰⁷

The question facing Novalis was how to forge the representation of that which is marked by its equally subjective and objective dimensions, how to write a "Betrachtung der Welt" that is a "Betrachtung des *großen Gemüths*." If taken in the direction of

³⁰⁶ Schriften IV, 255 (July 20, 1798).

³⁰⁷ Schriften IV, 497-498 (End of July, 1798).

Dilthey, Novalis would seem to have granted the fantastical aspect of the narrative the full weight of reality, while if taken in the direction of Haym, he would have subordinated the fantastical aspect of the narrative to the imaginative power of Heinrich's interior. For interpreters of the novel to choose between the horns of this mimetic dualism, however, is as unnecessary as it was for Novalis to have chosen between Fichte and Spinoza, between idealism and realism. Schlegel's note that the novel represents an "Übergang vom Roman zur Mythologie," referencing Novalis's own note that "der Roman soll allmählich in Märchen übergehn" — indeed that it would be a "glückliche Mischung" of novel and fairy-tale³⁰⁸ — signals not an either/or that either absolutizes the ego or absolutizes nature, but rather a spectrum along which the novel itself moves.

The primary authorial technique whereby Novalis manages to dance across the spectrum of subject and object, present throughout the novel, is his use of the dream. The major dream sequence of the opening chapter, for example, which stages an incrementally deepening penetration into the interior of Heinrich via dreams within dreams and caverns within caverns, turns out to be not merely the solipsistic representation of a poeticized idealism, but rather the subjective dimension of an aesthetic strategy that depicts its objective complement in the subsequent action of the novel: that is to say, the apparently narcissistic quality of the dream vanishes when readers see that it delineates not only the workings of Heinrich's interior, but rather that it prophesies the actual events of his life that are yet to come. The same is true, of course, of the tragic dream in which Heinrich sees Mathilde drown. For inasmuch as it is

³⁰⁸ Schriften IV, 330 (April 5, 1800).

foregrounded by Schwaning's song and fulfilled by the death of Mathilde, it functions as a thread with which Novalis intertwines the interior of his protagonist with the actuality of the world in which he exists.

Far more than a poetic device that serves to foreshadow, the dream is a vehicle that concentrates the force of narrative foreshadowing by transferring it from the epistemological domain of the reader to that of the protagonist; the dream is thus the prophetic space in which the interior of the protagonist intersects with the actuality of his existence. When Heinrich asks his father, for example, "Ist nicht jeder, auch der verworrenste Traum, eine sonderliche Erscheinung, die auch ohne noch an göttliche Schickung dabei zu denken, ein bedeutsamer Riß in den geheimnisvollen Vorhang ist, der mit tausend Falten in unser Inneres hereinfällt?,"³⁰⁹ the image of the torn curtain that grants a glimpse of the interior likewise signifies a passage of mediation between the subject and the stage of the world upon which he lives. It is true, as Schlegel and Novalis noted, that *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* becomes increasingly mythological in character as the narrative transitions from part one to part two, yet this passage from novel to mythology hinges not on the mere introduction of the fantastic, which is present from the beginning, but rather on the increasing interpenetration of subject and object, of spirit and nature. This finds its clearest expression in the pantheistic song of Astralis, Heinrich and Mathilde's child, who in addition to singing of the *hen kai pan* proclaims that "Die Welt wird Traum, der Traum wird Welt."³¹⁰

³⁰⁹ Schriften I, 198.

³¹⁰ Schriften I, 319.

Assuming, as I have demonstrated, that the dreamscapes themselves operate within the narrative as a technique whereby Novalis mediates between the poles of idealism and realism, thus fulfilling the aesthetic imperative of his and Friedrich Schlegel's theorization of a new mythology, there remains the question why Dante's *Commedia* should have seemed apt for this mode of art that would take as its task the union of spirit and nature, ego and world, subject and object. As we know, in his *Rede über die Mythologie*, Schlegel had identified Dante in a fairly general way as the lone figure capable of providing a model for such an endeavor, yet in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* we witness a concrete attempt to manipulate the *Commedia* in the service of the new mythology. What in certain respects is striking about its adaptation of Dante is the silence in which Novalis deploys the *Commedia*: whereas notes and letters indicate a preoccupation with Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, for example, there exists no truly helpful documentation — let alone conspicuous markers within the novel — that would betray Novalis's appeal to the *Commedia*.

Without ascribing too much significance to this curiosity of the novel's composition, it seems reasonable nonetheless to deduce two points from it. First of all, with the exception of his use of the name *Mathilde*, Novalis's appropriation of the *Commedia* is so subtle that it can hardly be read as a form of literary citation, according to which the reader's ability to recognize a familiar scene, for example, would in some way be constitutive of how Novalis imagined the novel ought to be read. A corollary of this observation would seem to be the proposition that Novalis discovered in the *Commedia* something of legitimate use value for the construction of his own novel. On

the basis of the Dantean character of Heinrich's dreams, the present reading argues that Novalis's use of the dream as a means of bridging subject-object dualism finds its source in the *Commedia*.

The challenge to Novalis lay in avoiding the basic dichotomy represented by the readings of Dilthey and Haym: *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, having emerged in the years of Novalis's reconciliation of idealism and realism, could neither give the impression of pure mimesis of nature nor that of pure expression of interiority. In some way, it had to do both. As I have shown, the fusion of subject and object was provided for by Novalis's interpenetration of dreamscape and reality, a fiction so effective that it has prompted readers like those I have noted to debate whether Novalis is actually propagating something like a doctrine of the transmigration of souls or whether such elements of the narrative are not simply reflective of Heinrich's own subjectivity. This feat, when granting the indebtedness of the dreams' depictions to Dante's *Commedia*, is virtually impossible to read apart from one of the fundamental debates that has long governed the interpretation of the *Commedia*: that, namely, over whether the *Commedia* ought to be read as the poet's *viaggio* or his *visione*, his voyage or his vision. Since perhaps the time of Boccaccio's biography of Dante, in which he relates the story of a group of Veronese women who, upon seeing Dante, note "how his beard is crisped and his complexion browned by the heat and smoke that is below," the voyage/vision question has been in play — albeit at a usually more elevated level of inquiry.³¹¹ In essence, however, the crux of the debate is the following: if the *Commedia* is to be read as a voyage, its author must

³¹¹ Boccaccio, *Life of Dante*, trans. G.R. Carpenter (New York: Grolier Club, 1900), 85.

be deemed a poet (and not a space traveler, as the Veronese suggest!); if, on the other hand, the *Commedia* is to be read as a vision, its author is to be deemed a prophet. The history of the interpretation of the *Commedia* includes prominent voices on both sides, with Bruno Nardi, for example, asserting that Dante continued the tradition of the Old Testament prophets and medieval visionaries, while Charles Singleton, on the other hand, famously writes that “the fiction of the *Commedia* is that it is not fiction.”³¹²

In recent years, the *dantista* Teodolinda Barolini has very convincingly exposed this debate as predicated upon a false dichotomy by reassessing the dream qualities of the poem and arguing that Dante’s empiricism (i.e. his poetry of voyage) operates in tandem with his mysticism (i.e. his theology of vision). Barolini’s argument relies, in the first place, on the elliptical remarks at the beginning and end of the *Commedia*, both of which allow readers to infer, though not conclude, that the experience of the *Commedia* is underwritten by sleep.³¹³ According to Barolini, these subtle but essential remarks form “part of Dante’s Pauline strategy, stemming from his need to veil in mystery the ultimate mode of an experience that he himself — like St. Paul — was unable to explain: [...] ‘I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago — whether in the body *I known not* or out of the body *I know not*, God knows — was caught up to the third heaven.’”³¹⁴ In following the example of Paul, therefore, the nature of whose rapture is famously ambiguous, Dante suggests the corporeality of his experience all the while that he veils it

³¹² Nardi, *Dante e la cultura medievale* (Bari: Laterza, 1984 (1949)), 318-326. See likewise Singleton, “The Irreducible Dove,” *Comparative Literature* 9:2 (1957): 129.

³¹³ *Inferno* 1.11-12; *Paradiso* 32.139.

³¹⁴ Barolini, *The Undivine Comedy: Detheologizing Dante* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 144 (2 Cor. 12:2).

in the language of sleep. As Barolini writes of Dante's allusions to Paul, "Dante chooses a precursor who 'went' as well as 'saw' [...] who left his mode of going notoriously unexplained, so that an exegetical tradition grew up devoted to explaining what the apostle says he does not know and, increasingly, to debating whether or not Paul saw God in his essence."³¹⁵

What I want to emphasize in Barolini's argument, and what I believe is crucial for Novalis's own narrative, is that Dante uses sleeping and dreaming as a poetic device not for the sake of undermining the reality of his experience, but in order to blur the lines that would otherwise allow for the distinction between voyage and vision. As Barolini explains, "Transition in the *Commedia* is regularly represented by sleep, a quintessentially liminal condition that participates in both life and death, standing on the thresholds of both worlds and fully committed to neither."³¹⁶ Dreams, for Dante, are never mere fiction, for the sleep that he depicts is the waking sleep of John the Evangelist, who goes "dormendo, con la faccia arguta" ("sleeping, with a vigilant face").³¹⁷ As Barolini argues so cogently, sleeping and dreaming function within the logic of the *Commedia* so as to mediate between the apparently opposed experiences of voyage and vision, participating in the reality of both of them without privileging either. As a narrative technique that in this way sustains both the actuality of experience and the subjectivity of vision, Dante's poetics of waking sleep afforded Novalis the means whereby he could in fact unite the apparent antipodes of idealism and realism, thus

³¹⁵ Barolini, 148.

³¹⁶ Barolini, 160.

³¹⁷ *Purgatorio* 29.144.

preserving and indeed intertwining both the cognition of the subject and the reality of objective experience. The potency is perhaps diminished in Novalis's third-person narration, which lacks the same ability to collapse the space between action, narration, and reading that Dante's first-person poem possesses, but the history of the novel's reception suggests nonetheless that Novalis's convergence of dream and reality has the effect of clouding distinctions between reality and subjectivity just as in the *Commedia*.

That Novalis should have adapted his poetics of the dream from Dante, even incorporating the *Commedia* into the dreams of his novel, may likewise owe to circumstantial factors. Not least of these is the commentary of A.W. Schlegel on the *Purgatorio*, published in 1796 in W.G. Becker's *Taschenbuch zum geselligen Vergnügen*, in which Schlegel discusses dreams in relation to the scenes that Novalis actually adapts, those namely from the earthly paradise. Schlegel focuses in particular on Dante's dream of Rachael and Leah at the end of *Purgatorio* 27. Whereas in the *Commedia* the dream of these sisters prefigures the appearance of Beatrice and Matelda, with the latter representing a forerunner of the former in the biblical story of Jacob, Schlegel focuses on the theological differences between sisters and writes of Rachael as a model of "himmlischer Beschauung" in a manner that would no doubt have intrigued Novalis: "Hieraus ist es nun begreiflich, warum die ursprünglich schöne Seele, der das Ideale natürlich ist, die Seele eines Plato, eines Petrarca oder Hemsterhuys, den stärksten Hang zu himmlischer Beschauung fühlt. Mit hingeebener Liebe verliert sie [Rachael] sich aus ihrem eignen Innern, um sich in der Gottheit wiederzufinden" In point of fact, it is Leah — singing, picking flowers, and winding a garland — who prefigures Dante's Matelda

and, ultimately, Novalis's Mathilde. But in all likelihood, Schlegel's exegesis of the passage would have at the very least roused the curiosity of Novalis, who at the time of writing *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* had been enthralled not only by Hemsterhuys, but by his engagement with Neoplatonism in the philosophy of Plotinus.³¹⁸ This is to say nothing, by the way, of the attention that A.W. Schlegel devotes to Dante's frequent use of early-morning dreams, noting that such dreams are "am wirksamsten," a lesson that Novalis clearly adapts to the depiction of dreams in his novel.

A final component of Novalis's dreamscapes that has not yet been discussed, but which merits more than a modicum of our attention, is the specifically biblical-revelatory character of the dream in his novel. Heinrich's father, an incorrigible philistine, admonishes Heinrich after he has awoken from his first mesmerizing dream:

Träume sind Schäume [...] Die Zeiten sind nicht mehr, wo zu den Träumen göttliche Gesichte sich gesellten, und wir können und werden es nicht begreifen, wie es jenen auserwählten Männern, von denen die Bibel erzählt, zu Muthe gewesen ist. Damals muß es eine andere Beschaffenheit mit den Träumen gehabt haben, so wie mit den menschlichen Dingen.³¹⁹

Importantly, within the medieval setting of the novel, dreams are linked to the dream-visions of biblical authors. This diatribe thus calls to mind those visions of prophets and scribes like Ezekiel, Paul, and John, all of whom inform the religious-visionary character of the *Commedia* in unique ways.³²⁰ Dante's "Pauline strategy," noted above in the discussion of Barolini, culminates in what may well be the most astonishing image of the

³¹⁸ On Novalis's reception of Plotinus, see Mähl, "Novalis und Plotin," *Jahrbuch des freien deutschen Hochstifts* (1963): 139-250.

³¹⁹ *Schriften* I, 198.

³²⁰ It is worth noting, albeit with a degree of caution, that Heinrich's dream as well as that of his father, both described in chapter one, occur in proximity to *Johannistag*. This feast, which in fact celebrates John the Baptist and not the Evangelist, at the very least elicits a tenuous connection between the revelatory dream and St. John.

Commedia, the allegorical pageant that Dante's pilgrim witnesses in the earthly paradise. There, after having met Matelda, he beholds a parade of celestial figures who represent each of the books of the bible. The procession, which ends with the sleepwalking man with the alert face (John, author of Revelation), constitutes of course more than a mesmerizing Johannine vision. It signifies nothing less than Dante's own effort to arrogate the sacred authority of the prophets to himself. When he writes that the beasts of his vision had six wings, rather than four, and thus asserts that "John is with me and departs from him [Ezekiel],"³²¹ he professes not that his vision thereby resembles that of John — amazingly, John's vision resembles his own. And indeed, before the end of *Purgatorio*, Dante will be commissioned by Beatrice to write what he has seen and heard.³²² The hermeneutic import of this entire dynamic has been amplified, of course, by the (perhaps forged) letter of Dante to his patron, Can Grande della Scala, in which Dante purportedly claims that his work ought to be read according to the fourfold method of the medieval exegetical tradition.

The literary-religious legacy of Dante's having inscribed himself in the canon of sacred scripture by means of a poetics of the dream-vision is not to be underestimated. Peter Hawkins, a scholar who has written on this topic as much as anyone, has expressed in a personal reflection the effect of this biblical poetics on his own practice of reading:

Dante seemed to bring the Bible to life for me precisely by appropriating it so boldly for himself. He saw the Exodus of Israel out of Egypt as none other than *his* story, chose Good Friday as the day that he, too, would descend into hell, and appointed Easter dawn

³²¹ *Purgatorio* 29.105.

³²² *Purgatorio* 32.103-105; 33.46-54.

as the time of his emergence on the shores of purgatory. I found myself reading the Bible because of what I found in the *Commedia*.³²³

Indeed, this aspect of the *Commedia* was not without its effect on Romantic readers of Dante. A.W. Schlegel, for example, commented on the prophetic dimension of the poem, noting that “Dante gleicht [...] einem Propheten des alten Bundes [...]”³²⁴ The hermeneutic imperative of the letter to Can Grande, likewise familiar to Schlegel, seems both to have perplexed as well as to have impressed him.³²⁵

For Novalis, whose adaptations of the *Commedia* derive from precisely those cantos surrounding Dante’s Johannine vision, the manipulation of such a biblical poetics must have been particularly engaging. He and Friedrich Schlegel, as we know, had been tantalized by the throwaway remark in Lessing’s *Die Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts* (1780) in which Lessing, anticipating a coming age of peace and enlightenment, had augured that the appearance of a new, eternal gospel. In their correspondence, Novalis and Schlegel had theorized the possibility of writing a new Bible, with Novalis calling Schlegel a new Lessing, Schlegel calling himself a new Paul, and most notably, Schlegel calling Novalis a new Christ.³²⁶ The prospect of writing a new

³²³ Peter Hawkins, *Dante's Testaments: Essays in Scriptural Imagination* (Stanford, CA: Stanford, 1999), 4-5.

³²⁴ KAV II/1, 148.

³²⁵ AWSW III, 225-226: “Er selbst nennet es in der Dedikation an Can della Scala ein vielsinniges Werk (polysensuum). Vielleicht hatte er den versteckten Sinn nicht in jede einzelne Dichtung schon beim Entwurfe hineingelegt, gewiss aber wusste er ihn immer nachher herauszudeuten. Man muss sich hierbei an die damalige Auslegungskunst erinnern, die vorzüglich aus der heiligen Schrift so vieles hervorzulocken wusste und die fuer Dantes ewig sinnenden Kopf sehr verführerisch war. Er hat verschiedene seiner eigenen Canzonen kommentiert [...] nur Dante selbst hatte das Recht, den Genuss seiner lebendigen Dichtung durch solche heillose Grillen zu stören.”

³²⁶ Schriften IV, 508. The epistolary record of the plans for a new bible begins in Novalis’s and Schlegel’s letters ca. October 20, 1798 and continues until around the end of the year, occasionally accreting different resonances. The letter in which Schlegel compares Novalis to Christ is that of December 2, 1798.

bible appeared realizable, in fact, with Novalis even considering a collaborative effort between himself and Schlegel, Tieck, and Schleiermacher.³²⁷ The plans for such a project are indeed pervasive in Novalis's notes from the period around the composition of the *Christenheit* essay and *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*,³²⁸ and the topicality of the notion of a new Bible likewise emerged in Friedrich Schlegel's fragments on religion, the *Ideen*, published in the third volume of *Athenäum* in 1800 and critiqued by Novalis.³²⁹ To be clear, the project of a new Bible is to be understood within the framework of the new mythology, and not external to it; as Schlegel wrote, "In der Welt der Sprache, oder welches ebenso viel heißt, in der Welt, der Kunst und der Bildung, erscheint die Religion notwendig als Mythologie oder als Bibel."³³⁰ Or, as Novalis himself wrote in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, "Die Bibel und die Fabellehre sind Sternbilder Eines Umlaufs."³³¹ Indeed, in their correspondence over Schlegel's *Ideen*, Novalis and Schlegel had determined that there was a structural equivalence between the Bible and the Greek mythology.³³²

In addition to locating in Dante the dream poetics wherewith he could begin to craft a novelistic mythology of absolute idealism, therefore, Novalis found in the *Commedia* a particularly apt model for the new mythology qua Bible. In his fragmentary

³²⁷ Schriften III, 557.

³²⁸ In *Schriften* III, among other passages, see pp. 321, 557, 561, 565, 566, 569, 570, 586, 639, 669.

³²⁹ KFSA II, 265.

³³⁰ KFSA II, 259.

³³¹ Schriften I, 333.

³³² It should not be overlooked, by the way, that Novalis understood his encyclopedia project, *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, in reference to this material, describing it in fact as a "Versuch einer Universalmethode des Biblisirens [...]" (Schriften IV, 263).

encyclopedia of the sciences, the *Allgemeine Brouillon*, Novalis had written an especially telling entry in this respect:

Hist[orik]. Die Bibel fängt herrlich mit dem Paradiese, dem Symbol der Jugend an und schließt mit dem ewigen Reiche -- mit der *heiligen Stadt*. Auch ihre 2 Hauptbestandtheile sind ächt *Großhistorisch*. (In jedem Großhistorischen Gliede muß gleichsam die große Geschichte symbolische verjüngt liegen.) Der Anfang des neuen Testaments ist der 2te, höhere Sündenfall -- und der
 (Eine Sünde, was gesühnt werden muß.)
 Anfang der neuen *Periode*: Jedes Menschen Geschichte soll eine Bibel seyn -- wird eine Bibel seyn. Xstus ist der neue Adam. Begr[iff] der Wiedergeburt. Eine Bibel ist die höchste Aufgabe der Schriftstellerey.³³³

Heinrich von Ofterdingen commences, of course, with a dream of paradise; its division into two segments, *Erwartung* and *Erfüllung*, replicates the typological reading established in this particular fragment; and as a novel that loosely approximates the genre of the *Bildungsroman/Künstlerroman*, it too is a “Menschengeschichte.” What we should not fail to reiterate in this respect is the conspicuously biblical dimension of the dreams that Novalis mined from the *Commedia*. Not only are they linked in conversation, by Heinrich’s father, to the dream-visions of the biblical prophets that had inspired Dante’s Johannine visions, but they are likewise linked in the narrative to St. John. It was on *Johannistag*, for example, that as a youth Heinrich’s father had experienced the premonitory dream that he had long since suppressed, while it is just near *Johannistag* that Heinrich, too, experiences the prophetic dream that launches the action of the novel.³³⁴

³³³ Schriften II, 321. On the relevance of this passage to the structure of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, see likewise Mahoney, “Death and Resurrection,” 56. In this article, in addition to the structural elements I have enumerated, Mahoney stresses the vitality of “Wiedergeburt” to the novel.

³³⁴ Admittedly, *Johannistag* is the celebration of John the Baptist, not the Evangelist, and the baptismal imagery within Heinrich’s dream indicates as much. All the same, however, readers cannot simply overlook the father’s association of such dreams with the visions of the biblical authors, paradigmatic among whom was John, author of an eponymous gospel as well as the bible’s most famous vision, the book of *Revelation*.

The *Commedia* represented to Novalis, we might conclude, a complex and dynamic source for what was not conceived of, as Vietta has written, as a project of straightforward secularization through art. Rather it guides the poetic devices whereby Novalis seeks to realize the new mythology, which, to the extent that its philosophy of art is one predicated upon the revelation of the absolute, seeks to reintroduce the possibility of religion after the disenchantment of the Enlightenment. This of course did not signal a return to medieval Catholicism, as I have written above, but nor does this mean that the impetus behind Novalis's novel and other poetic work ought to be aligned with general impulses toward secularization. On the contrary, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, like the broader project of the new mythology itself, constitutes one outcome in the struggle to redefine religion according to the intellectual currents driving the German *Frühromantik*, among which featured prominently, but not exclusively: Plato, Kant, Fichte, Spinoza, and yes — Dante, too.

4

Mythologies of Nature: Schelling, Goethe, and the Reanimation of the *Commedia*

*Ich verhehle meine Ueberzeugung nicht, daß in der Naturphilosophie [...] die erste ferne Anlage jener künftigen Symbolik und derjenigen Mythologie gemacht ist welche nicht ein Einzelner, sondern die ganze Zeit geschaffen haben wird.*³³⁵

— Schelling, *Vorlesungen
über die Philosophie der Kunst*

On December 31st, 1800, in his Haus am Frauenplan, Goethe toasted the end of the eighteenth century and welcomed the nineteenth while in the company of two Swabians, Friedrich Schiller and Friedrich Schelling. His guests from Württemberg shared more than a name and origin: each had overcome Goethe's initial skepticism and won his friendship by having engaged the poet in a rigorous discussion of the natural sciences. In the case of Schiller, a friendship first blossomed six years earlier, after the two had left a botanical lecture in Jena and agreed that the lecturer had taken too narrow a view of his subject, thereby losing sight of its broader implications. Engrossed by the discussion, Goethe accompanied Schiller home, where he shared with him his theory of the metamorphosis of plants. Schiller judged Goethe's theory critically, remarking famously, "Das ist keine Erfahrung, das ist eine Idee."³³⁶ Goethe, who had already deemed Schiller too rigidly Kantian a thinker, was reminded of the reasons he disliked him in the first place and responded, not without a measure of smugness, "Das kann mir sehr lieb sein

³³⁵ SW V, 449.

³³⁶ FA I, 24, 437.

daß ich Ideen habe ohne es zu wissen, und sie sogar mit Augen sehe.”³³⁷ A congenial debate ensued, the gist of which pivoted on Schiller’s thoroughly Kantian objection: “Wie kann jemals Erfahrung gegeben werden, die einer Idee angemessen sein sollte?”³³⁸ Goethe, for his part, did in fact deem the theory of metamorphosis to be rooted in experience. When neither could overcome the other in debate, they discovered something altogether more valuable: a profound, intellectual friendship that would shape their work for years to come.

Goethe’s other guest on the eve of the new century, the twenty-five-year-old *Wunderkind* Friedrich Schelling, had likewise found his way into the poet’s good graces via Goethe’s abiding interest in the sciences. Unlike Schiller, however, who drew on Kant’s hegemony in eighteenth-century philosophical thought, Schelling would lead Goethe into the nineteenth century by attempting to transcend the limits of Kantianism with a new system of philosophy that could sanction Goethe’s longstanding devotion to the observation of nature. This friendship, too, was not without its initial hurdles. In January of 1798, Goethe had labored through Schelling’s recent contribution to transcendental idealism, the *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur* (1798), and — despite finding aspects of the tract remarkable — he had come away disappointed. Searching at this time for a reasoned mediation between idealism and realism, Goethe’s reading of Schelling left him with the distinct impression that “von den neuern Philosophen wenig

³³⁷ FA I, 24, 437.

³³⁸ FA I, 24, 437.

Hülfe zu hoffen ist.”³³⁹ As was the case with Schiller, it was a personal meeting that would convince Goethe otherwise, and the meeting was arranged by no one less than Schiller himself. Thus on May 28, 1798, Goethe and Schelling met at Schiller’s in Jena, with the philosopher Niethammer likewise present. In the days that followed, Goethe and Schelling conducted optical experiments that, as Jeremy Adler writes, “will have entailed Goethe explicating (and Schelling accepting) the principles of Goethe’s colour theory and, therefore, denying Newton.”³⁴⁰ Schelling must have performed admirably, as Adler points out, for already on May 29, 1798, Goethe enthusiastically recommended to Geheimrat Voigt that Schelling be appointed to the University of Jena.³⁴¹

That in the company of Schiller and Schelling Goethe bid adieu to one century and welcomed another is richly symbolic, for Schelling’s prodigious contributions to the development of German idealism, particularly in the years he spent in Jena (1798-1803), would open new philosophic possibilities to Goethe and influence his reception of idealism in the last three decades of his life. If in the final years of the eighteenth century Schiller had, by dint of his Kantian philosophy, softened Goethe’s “steifen Realism,”³⁴² Schelling’s incipient *Identitätsphilosophie* ultimately afforded Goethe the long-sought possibility of conceiving Idealism and Realism as the unopposed complements of one and

³³⁹FA II, 4, 479 (January 13, 1798).

³⁴⁰ Jeremy Adler, “The Aesthetics of Magnetism: Science, Philosophy and Poetry in the Dialogue between Goethe and Schelling,” in *The Third Culture: Literature and Science*, ed. Elinor S. Shaffer (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998), 66-102. Here: 72.

³⁴¹ Goethe says of Schelling, “Es ist ein sehr klarer, energischer und nach der neusten Mode organisirter Kopf; dabei habe ich keine Spur einer Sansculotten-Tournure an ihm bemerken können, vielmehr scheint er in jedem Sinne mäßig und gebildet. Ich bin überzeugt, daß er uns Ehre machen und der Akademie nützlich sein würde. Ich will etwa näher hören, ob er wirklich die Absicht hat” (FA II, 4, 553).

³⁴² FA II, 4, 479 (January 13, 1798).

the same absolute. And in the late 1790s, it was above all Goethe's hope for the future of philosophy that a path between Idealism and Realism be paved:

Mir will immer dünken daß wenn die eine Partey von außen hinein den Geist niemals erreichen kann, die andere von innen heraus wohl schwerlich zu den Körpern gelangen wird, und daß man also immer wohl thut in dem philosophischen Naturstande [...] zu bleiben und von seiner ungetrennten Existenz den besten möglichen Gebrauch zu machen, bis die Philosophen einmal übereinkommen wie das was sie nun einmal getrennt haben wieder zu vereinigen seyn möchte.³⁴³

After his initial debate with Schiller, Goethe had displayed a greater receptivity to Kantian philosophy and, without sketching his own credo, acknowledged at least that Schiller had been able to formulate his worldview *in nuce*, if only provisionally.³⁴⁴ The meteoric rise of Schelling at the turn of the new century, along with his string of tracts in the area of *Naturphilosophie*, elicited from Goethe however a new confession. To the young philosopher, he proclaimed “Ich wünsche eine völlige Vereinigung, die ich durch das Studium Ihrer Schriften, noch lieber durch Ihren persönlichen Umgang, so wie durch Ausbildung meiner Eigenheiten ins allgemeine, früher oder später, zu bewirken hoffe.”³⁴⁵ Just as Schiller had once undertaken a systematic study of Kant, so too did Goethe undertake a study of Schelling's texts in the summer of 1800 — employing Immanuel Niethammer, no less, as a private tutor in the endeavor. Schelling would move on from Jena, of course, taking positions in Würzburg and Munich, among others; but throughout his career, Goethe followed his publications with great interest and continued to

³⁴³ FA II, 4, 477 (January 6, 1798).

³⁴⁴ FA II, 4, 479-480 (January 13, 1798).

³⁴⁵ FA II, 5, 76 (September 27, 1800).

correspond with him periodically in letters marked by warm reminiscences of Schelling's years in Jena.³⁴⁶

The present chapter traces how, from the collaboration of Goethe and Schelling, there emerged a series of attempts to realize a new mythology of nature that would recuperate and manipulate the poetics of Dante and the *Commedia*. In modes untested by the Jena Romantics, Schelling and Goethe, who were outsiders in their own right anyway, would accommodate Dante and the new mythology to the tenets of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie* and *Identitätsphilosophie*. These efforts, fragmentary though they may have been, validated nonetheless Friedrich Schlegel's earlier dictum that Spinozistic philosophy — which lay at the heart of the Goethe-Schelling alliance — could find successful expression only in a mythology like that of Dante's *Commedia*. To this end, the chapter opens with an account of Schelling's early aesthetic philosophy (1799-1800), in which his statements on the advent of a new mythology will be elaborated. We will see that, for a brief time, Goethe and Schelling were poised to render a joint poetic contribution to the Romantic goal of uniting art and science, but that when Goethe backed out under the strain of other projects, Schelling strove under the influence of his Romantic contemporaries to imitate the model of Dante's mythology in a long *Lehrgedicht*. Failing to complete this Dantean mythological venture, however, Schelling would still supply two of the most groundbreaking Romantic statements on the *Commedia*: an essay *Ueber Dante in philosophischer Beziehung* and a series of lectures

³⁴⁶ It is true, however, that for a period the relationship cooled, with Goethe advising Voigt not to appoint Schelling to a second professorship in Jena in 1816, identifying him as a “katholisierenden Philosophen.” See FA II, 10, 1096.

on the *Philosophie der Kunst*, in which Dante figures prominently. The chapter returns again to Goethe when I argue that Schelling's work on Dante, together with that of the other Romantics, is indispensable for understanding Goethe's approach to the *Commedia*. To this end, I offer new readings of Goethe's *terza rima* poems, as well as an account of Goethe's last and most successful attempt at a naturalist mythology, which I term here *Faust: Eine Commedia*.

Schelling and the Philosophy of Revelatory Art

When Schelling arrived in Jena in 1798, he was just beginning to formulate the tenets of his *Naturphilosophie* and was not quite ready to transform it into the subsequent *Identitätsphilosophie* that would so radically alter the philosophical landscape. It was a period of remarkable transition in his thinking, such that even as he still pledged allegiance to Fichte and his first principle of the absolute ego, he was already articulating the doctrines that would ground the *Naturphilosophie*. In this way, Schelling's work had begun to show signs of what was to come: having attended lectures on physics, mathematics, and chemistry in Leipzig, his tracts in transcendental philosophy revealed a concern for the natural world — i.e., for objective reality — that was conspicuously absent from Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre*. The *Ideen zu einer Philosophie der Natur* (1797), for example, in which Schelling still maintained the ego's freedom from nature, nonetheless opened with an entire first book dedicated to the empirical study of topics like light, electricity, and magnetism. An interest in the underlying forces of nature received more radical expression in the tract *Von der Weltseele* (1798), which Schelling shared with Goethe. Here he sought to resolve the dilemmas inherent in mechanistic and

dualistic philosophy — namely, determinism in the former and the mind-body problem in the latter — by postulating for the first time that nature was not so much a mechanism as it was an organism: by this view, the mind ought not be regarded as a predetermined cog in the mechanism of nature, nor the antipode of nature, but rather its highest degree of organization. Here too, however, the tremendous potential of the *Naturphilosophie* was tempered by Schelling's willing subordination to Fichte; thus the forces of attraction and repulsion, which he explained as grounding the operation of the organism of nature, were ultimately traced to the activity of the mind.

In one of Schelling's most conspicuously Fichtean texts of these years, the *System des Transcendentalen Idealismus* (1800), we find articulated the beginnings of an aesthetic philosophy that revealed the influence of Schelling's Romantic contemporaries.³⁴⁷ This preliminary aesthetics would prove a crucial step in Schelling's approach to Dante in that it granted an epistemological authorization for the Romantics' enthusiastic veneration of art, transforming Jena's reverential but fragmentary approach to aesthetics into the pinnacle of a philosophical system. Written in late 1799, the *System* wrestled with the problematic legacy of Kant's philosophy, seeking a resolution to the fundamental contradiction, "wie können die Vorstellungen zugleich als sich richtend nach den Gegenständen, und die Gegenstände als sich richtend nach den Vorstellungen gedacht werden?"³⁴⁸ How do we square the contradiction, that is, that the subject seems to be determined by nature and yet capable of determining nature through volition?

³⁴⁷ For another reading of the place of myth in Schelling's *System*, as well as in his lectures on art, see Williamson, *The Longing for Myth in Germany*, 59-71.

³⁴⁸ HKA IX/1, 38.

Schelling's attempt at an answer represents in large measure a consolidation and reinterpretation of Fichte's own philosophy of the absolute ego: the contradiction can be resolved only if between both worlds, the ideal and the real, there obtains a predetermined harmony, which itself can be conceived of only if the activity that produces the objective world is ultimately one and the same as the activity that produces the ideal world. Schelling affirms that the activity producing both worlds is in principle one and the same, with one important distinction: the activity that produces volition in the ideal world is conscious (*bewußt*), whereas the activity that produces the objective world is unconscious (*bewußtlos*). Accordingly, Schelling establishes the identity of subject and object in a form of ontological monism, but not without ultimately subsuming it under the Fichtean first principle of the absolute ego. As Andrew Bowie explains, the conceptual grounding of Schelling's philosophy of nature appears in the *System*, "but as descriptions of the I. [...] Instead of a conception in which both nature and consciousness have their source in a higher activity, the Absolute, consciousness is given priority [...]." ³⁴⁹ Thus, in the history of consciousness that Schelling subsequently traces in the *System*, nature is to be understood as an unconscious phase of the ego; it is the unconscious, objective form that results from the original division of the Absolute into subject and object.

The originality of this broadly Fichtean account of subject-object identity, at least from the perspective of Schelling's burgeoning interest in art, lies in the book's final sections, in which Schelling posits the artwork as the revelation of the union of conscious

³⁴⁹ Andrew Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 46-47.

and unconscious activity in the Absolute. In general, objective representations of the Absolute lie beyond the realm of possibility, according to Schelling, because the objective arises in the first place only from the division of the Absolute. The artwork, however, presents a unique set of circumstances: it is created consciously by an artist who nonetheless stands “unter der Einwirkung einer Macht [...], die ihn [...] Dinge auszusprechen oder darzustellen zwingt, die er selbst nicht vollständig durchsieht, und deren Sinn unendlich ist.”³⁵⁰ In this sense, then, the artwork is the product of the contradiction that had propelled the *System* in the first place, that namely between determinism and freedom, and so functions as an objective representation of the union of the subjective and objective, conscious and unconscious principles of the Absolute. Schelling elucidates the implications of art for philosophy and knowledge in the final pages of the *System*:

Die ganze Philosophie geht aus, und muß ausgehen von einem Prinzip, das als das absolut Identische schlechthin nichtobjectiv ist. Wie soll nun aber dieses absolut Nichtobjective doch zum Bewußtseyn hervorgerufen und verstanden werden, was nothwendig ist, wenn es Bedingung des Verstehens der ganzen Philosophie ist? Daß es durch Begriffe ebensowenig aufgefaßt als dargestellt werden könne, bedarf keines Beweises. Es bleibt also nichts übrig, als daß es in einer unmittelbaren Anschauung dargestellt werde, welche aber wiederum selbst unbegreiflich, und da ihr Object etwas schlechthin nichtobjectives seyn soll, sogar in sich selbst widersprechend zu seyn scheint. Wenn es denn nun aber doch eine solche Anschauung gäbe, welche das absolut Identische, an sich weder Sub- noch Objective zum Object hat, und wenn man sich wegen dieser Anschauung, welche nur eine intellektuelle seyn kann, auf die unmittelbare Erfahrung beriefe, wodurch kann denn nun auch diese Anschauung wieder objectiv, d.h. wie kann außer Zweifel gesetzt werden, daß sie nicht auf einer bloß subjectiven Täuschung beruhe, wenn es nicht eine allgemeine und von allen Menschen anerkannte Objectivität jener Anschauung gibt? Diese allgemein anerkannte und auf keine Weise hinwegzuläugnende Objectivität der intellectuellen Anschauung ist die Kunst selbst. Denn die ästhetische Anschauung eben ist die objectiv gewordene intellectuelle. Das Kunstwerk nur reflectirt mir, was sonst durch nichts reflectirt wird, jenes absolut Identische, was selbst im Ich schon sich getrennt hat; was also der Philosoph schon im

³⁵⁰ HKA IX/1, 317-318.

ersten Act des Bewußtseyns sich trennen läßt, wird, sonst für jede Anschauung unzugänglich, durch das Wunder der Kunst aus ihren Producten zurückgestrahlt.

Aber nicht nur das erste Prinzip der Philosophie und die erste Anschauung, von welcher sie ausgeht, sondern auch der ganze Mechanismus, den die Philosophie ableitet, und auf welchem sie selbst beruht, wird erst durch die ästhetische Production objectiv.³⁵¹

This lengthy but important excerpt provides several crucial insights into Schelling's emergent understanding of the limits of philosophy and the possibilities of art: (1) concepts (*Begriffe*) will not suffice to represent philosophy's non-objective first principle to consciousness; (2) nor will an intellectual intuition on its own suffice, however, since the first principle is still non-objective; (3) an aesthetic intuition, on the other hand, functions as the objective form of the intellectual intuition; (4) in this respect, the artwork serves as the objective representation of the non-objective first principle, the Absolute that eludes the grasp of both philosophic reasoning and intellectual intuitions.

Nicholas Boyle has written that the *System*'s aesthetic capstone served as an homage to Goethe, the man who at the time seemed to have attained the pinnacle of aesthetic achievement.³⁵² There may well be some truth to this, but Schelling's first steps toward a philosophy of art resonated in overwhelming ways with statements sketched as early as the *Systemprogramm* (1795/96) and as recently as Friedrich Schlegel's *Rede über die Mythologie* (1800), each of which had voiced the imperative for a new mythology. It was in this tradition then that Schelling, whose interest in mythology stretched back to his years in Tübingen,³⁵³ crowned the entire *System des Transcendentalen Idealismus* not

³⁵¹ HKA IX/1, 325-326.

³⁵² Nicholas Boyle, *Goethe: The Poet and the Age*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) v. 2, 667.

³⁵³ See e.g. his "Ueber Mythen, historische Sagen und Philosopheme der ältesten Welt" (HKA I, 193-246). For an account of Schelling's early philosophy of myth, see Williamson, 41-48. The rest of Williamson's chapter traces the nuances and permutations in Schelling's thought on myth, particularly as it was situated in the context of Jena Romanticism.

with just another call for a new mythology, but with the prediction that philosophy itself would eventually transform into a new mythology: just as the sciences first sprang from poetry, so too would they return to the ocean of poetry, he writes, asserting that this reversion of science to poetry would take the form of a new mythology: “Wie aber eine neue Mythologie, [...], dieß ist ein Problem, dessen Auflösung allein von den künftigen Schicksalen der Welt und dem weiteren Verlauf der Geschichte zu erwarten ist.”³⁵⁴

Even if Schelling did not yet know how the new mythology would arise, it was his very own philosophic conclusions that signaled to Friedrich Schlegel, the most vocal of the mythology’s proponents, the trajectory leading to a new mythology. Schelling had outlined a model of Idealism that — even if it did not ultimately cede equality to objective reality — nonetheless accounted for it and demonstrated its potential for knowledge attained in the form of an aesthetic intuition. This was, not incidentally, precisely what Schlegel was predicting would happen when in the very same year he wrote the following in the *Rede über die Mythologie*:

Der Idealismus in jeder Form muß auf ein oder die andre Art aus sich herausgehn, um in sich zurückkehren zu können, und zu bleiben was er ist. Deswegen muß und wird sich aus seinem Schoß ein neuer ebenso grenzenloser Realismus erheben; und der Idealismus also nicht bloß in seiner Entstehungsart ein Beispiel für die neue Mythologie, sondern selbst auf indirekte Art Quelle derselben werden.³⁵⁵

Not having quite thrown off the yoke of Fichte’s Idealism, which Schelling himself would only manage in 1801-1802, Schlegel at the very least sensed the direction of Schelling’s thought and, together with his own growing interest in Spinoza’s philosophy

³⁵⁴ HKA IX/1, 329. Schelling’s reference of a return to the ocean of poetry recalls of course the prologue to Friedrich Schlegel’s *Gespräch über die Poesie*, wherein Schlegel describes how “alle Ströme der Poesie fließen zusammen in das allgemeine große Meer” (KFSA II, 284).

³⁵⁵ KFSA II, 315.

of nature, saw the new evaluation of realism vis-à-vis idealism as the locus of the coming mythology.

In the *Systemprogramm*, there had likewise been enthusiastic talk of a modern mythology that would function in much the same way that Schelling described in his new tract. The fragment, possibly authored by Schelling himself, explained the utility of a new mythology using a less technically rigorous account of the relationship of art and philosophy, but one that was nonetheless still written in the same spirit as the closing chapters of Schelling's *System*. Its author wrote of the need for the philosopher "ebensoviel ästhetische Kraft [zu] besitzen als der Dichter," of poetry as the "Lehrerin der Menschheit," and of a "Mythologie der Vernunft" that would transform philosophical reason into its primordial aesthetic form.³⁵⁶ These latter two features, both of which lay particular emphasis on the didactic capacity of the new mythology, depart from the more Schlegelian notion that conceived of mythology primarily as a common worldview and articulate instead a vision of a new mythology that works very much in concert with the Enlightenment's goals of universal education. The seriousness with which Schelling understood these claims is evidenced nowhere better than in his plans, together with Goethe, to write a great *Naturgedicht*. The ambitious undertaking would lead Schelling to Dante.

The Great *Naturgedicht* and Schelling's Romantic Turn to Dante

Around the end of May 1798, while still under the spell of his first encounter with Schelling, Goethe composed what is widely acknowledged as his greatest naturalistic

³⁵⁶ Hölderlin, *Werke*, IV, 310-311.

poem, “Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen.”³⁵⁷ He conceived of it as a “Versuch das Anschauen der Natur, wo nicht poetisch doch wenigstens rhythmisch darzustellen,” as he described it in a letter to the poet and naturalist Carl Ludwig von Knebel.³⁵⁸ The descriptor “Anschauen der Natur” is telling, of course, for it exemplifies the Spinozism inherent to Schleiermacher’s speeches on religion, which bound Goethe and the Romantics once their infatuation with Fichte had given way to a new estimation of nature in its reality.³⁵⁹ In his speeches on religion, for example, Schleiermacher would define religion as the “Anschauung des Universums,” a dictum echoed by Friedrich Schlegel in the *Ideen* of 1800.³⁶⁰ Schlegel himself intended for the *Rede über die Mythologie* to promulgate a “symbolische Naturansicht.”³⁶¹ Indeed, Spinozistic philosophy had prompted the Romantics around the turn of the century to endorse the representation of nature in art as a means of intuitive religious experience. Goethe, for his part, had been ahead of the curve, writing of Spinoza’s religious-epistemic praxis already years earlier in his correspondence with Jacobi. In what has now become an oft-quoted passage, he explained to Jacobi:

Wenn du sagst man könne an Gott nur *glauben* so sage ich dir ich halte viel aufs *schauen*, und wenn Spinoza von der Scientia intuitiva spricht und sagt: Hoc cognoscendi genus procedit ab adaequata idea essentiae formalis quorundam Dei attributorum ad adaequatam cognitionem essentiae rerum; so geben mir diese wenigen Worte Muth, mein

³⁵⁷ One might include with it, however, “Die Metamorphose der Tiere,” characterized by H.B. Nisbet as a naturalistic poem in the mode of Lucretius. See H.B. Nisbet, “Lucretius in Eighteenth-Century Germany. With a Commentary on Goethe’s ‘Metamorphose der Tiere,’” *The Modern Language Review* 81:1 (1986): 97-115. Here: 107.

³⁵⁸ End of June 1798. Seems absent from FA.

³⁵⁹ The Spinozism of Schleiermacher’s *Reden* pleased Goethe, too, though once the speeches depicted Christianity as the zenith of religious possibility, Goethe’s enthusiasm cooled. See Friedrich Schlegel’s letter of October 10, 1799 to Friedrich Schleiermacher in KFSa XXV, 10.

³⁶⁰ KFSa II, 260.

³⁶¹ KFSa II, XCI.

ganzes Leben der Betrachtung der Dinge zu widmen, die ich reichen und von denen
essentia formali ich mir eine adäquate Idee zu bilden hoffen kann.³⁶²

The “Metamorphose der Pflanzen” embodied the ideal of *Anschauen der Natur* in its profound reflection on the life of the plant, but its scope was hardly that which the Romantics had in mind in the following years when they heralded the coming of a new mythology.³⁶³

Between 1798 and 1800, however, Goethe and Schelling both conceived the possibility of writing a *Naturgedicht* that would be epic in scale, a modern counterpart to Lucretius’s poem, *De rerum natura*.³⁶⁴ The essence of the poem, which never materialized, remains nebulous, and even its plans can be pieced together from only a handful of letters and diary entries in that two-year span. Having sent “Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen” to Knebel, who himself was at work on a translation of Lucretius and the composition of his own elegies, Goethe continued to share with him his aspirations for the great nature poem, especially in the six months or so after having met Schelling, i.e. from the summer of 1798 into the following winter.³⁶⁵ In the month or so

³⁶² FA II, 2, 629 (May 5, 1786). The topic of Goethe’s reception of Spinoza has received careful attention in recent years. See e.g. Horst Lange, “Goethe and Spinoza: A Reconsideration,” *Goethe Yearbook* 18 (2011), 11-33; also Eckhart Förster, “Goethe’s Spinozism,” in *Spinoza and German Idealism*, ed. Eckhart Förster and Yitzhak Y. Melamed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 85-99.

³⁶³ Nisbet argues, however, that the “Metamorphose der Tiere” suggests the possibility that it comprises only the later portion of what was once a longer nature poem. See Nisbet, 107.

³⁶⁴ To this day, the authoritative study of this never begun yet nevertheless understudied plan remains the essay of Margarete Plath, “Der Goethe-Schellingsche Plan eines philosophischen Naturgedichts: Eine Studie zu Goethes ‘Gott und Welt,’” *Preußische Jahrbücher* 106 (1901): 44-74. See likewise Alexander Gode-Von Aesch, *Natural Science in German Romanticism* (New York: AMS, 1966), 262-265. On the intersection of poetry and science in the style of Lucretius in the eighteenth century, see Nisbet, cited above. The closest thing to a comprehensive study of Schelling’s poetry is the dissertation of Hans Kunz, *Schellings Gedichte und dichterische Pläne* (Zürich: Juris-Verlag, 1955). The article by Adler, cited above, is one of the more modern scholarly statements on the Goethe-Schelling alliance, though its focus is not primarily the joint *Lehrgedicht*.

³⁶⁵ See letters to Knebel from July 16, 1798; January 8, 1799; January 22, 1799; March 22, 1799.

before lectures at the university resumed, in September 1799, Goethe spent several weeks in Jena pursuing the topics that lay at the heart of the project of the nature poem: he learned about *Naturphilosophie* from Schelling, he discussed the relation of empirical and transcendental philosophy with Schiller, he discussed elegies with A.W. Schlegel, and prompted by the Romantic figures in Jena, he read Schleiermacher's speeches on religion and works of romantic literature written by Friedrich Schlegel and Ludwig Tieck. No matter how fruitful the friendship with Schelling had proven to be for Goethe, however, he ultimately relinquished the plan, as we read in a letter from Caroline to Schelling: "Goethe tritt Dir nun auch das Gedicht ab, er überliefert Dir seine Natur. Da er Dich nicht zum Erben einsetzen kann, macht er Dir eine Schenkung unter Lebenden."³⁶⁶ At the time, Goethe had resumed work on *Faust*, the scope of which no doubt would have lent the plan for an epic *Naturgedicht* the semblance of impossibility.

Schelling, however, had already taken his own first steps toward granting the principles of *Naturphilosophie* a poetic form.³⁶⁷ In 1799, while at work on the *System des transcendentalen Idealismus*, he composed the satirical poem "Epikurisch Glaubensbekenntnis Heinz Widerporstens."³⁶⁸ As its title suggests, the poem amounts to

³⁶⁶ Caroline Schelling, *Briefe aus der Frühromantik*, ed. Erich Schmidt, Bd. 2 (Leipzig: Insel, 1913), 6. Nisbet finds Goethe's "gift" less than charitable: "[Goethe] doubtless knew what he was doing: Schelling's poetic gifts were minimal, and what little survives of his neo-Lucretian efforts is eminently undistinguished." See Nisbet, 110.

³⁶⁷ That "Widerporsten" ought to be deemed an initial step in the project of a great *Naturgedicht* can be deduced from Friedrich Schlegel's remark on it in his letter of October 10, 1799 (KFSa 25, 11).

³⁶⁸ Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, who devote an appendix in their book to the poem, are correct that it is "an attempt to realize the 'speculative epic,'" if by the latter designation we understand the *Naturgedicht*, which belongs more broadly to Romantic speculation on a new mythology. In pairing it with the *Nachtwachen von Bonaventura*, however, and attributing authorship of the latter to Schelling, they arrive at the deeply flawed conclusion that the "romantic desire for the speculative poem [...] could only lead [...] to the carnivalesque genre" and that "the systematic vision of the absolute and the absolute vision of the system

a profession of faith as rendered by a natural philosopher who has lost all patience for the “hohen überirdischen Lehren” of Christians (l. 5).³⁶⁹ In this spirit, it lampoons the Romantic encomia of Christianity that had recently been written by Schleiermacher and Novalis.³⁷⁰ The latter, for example, found the contents of his epigonal speech on medieval religious unity reformulated to comedic effect. Whereas Novalis had reverentially spoken of the “schönen glänzenden Zeiten” when Europe was united by a single, spiritual “Oberhaupt.”³⁷¹ Schelling now wrote of the same age but employed the doggerel of Hans Sachs: “in den alten Zeiten, / da gab es nicht Zanken noch Streiten, / Waren alle Ein Mus und Kuchen [...]” (ll. 87-89). The faithful of this period, he writes, “hielten die Erde für’s Centrum der Welt, / Zum Centrum der Erde Rom bestellt, / Darin der Statthalter residirt / [...] Und lebten die Laien und die Pfaffen / Zusammen wie im Land der Schlaraffen” (ll. 93-98). Schleiermacher’s redefinition of religion likewise suffered at the hands of Schelling, since in the end, he could do no better than to propose Christianity as the ultimate expression of religion anyway.

face each other, stare at each other, and in a certain sense disfigure each other in the same satire of the work, in what amounts to a double parody of theory—or of religion—in the Work” (80). This tendency to render the romantic inherently irrational, as in many other deconstructionist treatments, originates in selective reading and less than careful philology. In citing Schelling’s pseudonym, Bonaventura, as an argument for his authorship of the *Nachtwachen*, the authors fail to mention that A.W. Schlegel had chosen the name as an alternative to Schelling’s favored pseudonym from youth onward, Venturus (See Haym, 635). Second, therefore, they appear entirely unaware that “Widerporsten” did not lead to the carnivalesque of the *Nachtwachen* (whose author has now been identified as Klingemann), but rather to the sober balance of Dante and Goethe in the pristinely regulated *ottava rima* of the stanzas that Schelling dedicated to Caroline Schlegel (Schelling). See below. See also Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, trans. Philip Barnard (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988), 80.

³⁶⁹ The poem is to be found in the volume *Aus Schellings Leben*. In *Briefen*, Bd. 1 (Leipzig: Hirzel, 1869), 282-289.

³⁷⁰ For an account of Novalis’s and Schelling’s responses to Schleiermacher’s speeches, see Friedrich Schlegel’s letter to Schleiermacher on October 10, 1799 (KFSA 25, 10-11).

³⁷¹ *Schriften* III, 506.

What bespeaks the poem's proximity to the plans for a great *Naturgedicht* are the naturalistic metaphysical confessions of its purported author, Heinz Widerporst. His derision of transcendent religious doctrines, in fact, is probably less incendiary than the positive claims he asserts: "Die Materie sei das einzig Wahre, / Unser aller Schutz und Rather, / Aller Dinge rechter Vater, / Alles Denkens Element, / Alles Wissens Anfang und End" (ll. 68-72).³⁷² This standpoint leads Widerporst not just to abandon the ethical models of transcendent religious systems, but also to invert and vulgarize them: "Mein einzig Religion ist die, / Dass ich liebe ein schönes Knie, / Volle Brust und schlanke Hüften, / Dazu Blumen mit süssen Düften [...]" (ll. 77-80). Christianity, he writes, would merit attention only should there be a natural temple revealed to him in which there were bells suspended by magnetic power, crucifixes formed through beautiful crystals, and petrified Capuchins (ll. 150-61). Widerporst revels in irreverence, claiming that until this day should come, he will "in Gottlosigkeit verharren" (l. 165). The poem draws to its conclusion with an acknowledgment of the doctrine of the *Weltseele* (ll. 190 ff.) and an elaboration of Schelling's own views on nature's process of unfolding self-consciousness.

It is little wonder that, despite Friedrich Schlegel's intention to publish the poem together with Novalis's speech,³⁷³ neither would appear in the pages of the *Athenäum*. Fichte, after all, had been officially dismissed from the University of Jena on April 1st

³⁷² For a philosophic summation of the tenets of Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, see Beiser's *German Idealism*, where he describes them as twofold: (1) transcendental realism, by which Schelling means that nature exists independent of consciousness and (2) transcendental naturalism, by which Schelling means that everything is explicable according to the laws of nature (483).

³⁷³ Kunz, 40. Letter to Schleiermacher.

1799, on charges of atheism leveled against him by the Elector of Saxony. Goethe, who had endured Karl August's ire over the affair,³⁷⁴ advised A.W. Schlegel not to publish the two texts that, despite their diametrically opposed religious sensibilities, could prove equally inflammatory to the region that had borne Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation. And yet there was something profoundly Goethean about Schelling's poem: composed in *Knittelvers*, it was described by Friedrich Schlegel as having been written "in Hans Sachs Goethens Manier [...]."³⁷⁵ In fact, Schelling had evoked the formal character of Faust's opening monolog in "Nacht," using the sixteenth-century verse to sanction the sixteenth-century doctor's apostasy – a circumstance no doubt inseparable from Goethe himself, whose "Prometheus" had some decades prior wrought religious upheaval in its own right. "Heinz Widerporsten" was too audacious, in any event, to fulfill its own didactic goals, as Schelling himself knew. He remained adamant that his name not be associated with it, to the point that when he did publish a short excerpt of it in his *Zeitschrift für spekulative Physik* (1800), he introduced the poem as if it were the product of an unknown poet.³⁷⁶

Far from discouraging him, the problems of "Heinz Widerporsten" gave way to new endeavors on Schelling's part to formulate a poetic vision of the worldview that had begun to emerge from his *Naturphilosophie*. As Friedrich Schlegel wrote in late summer, 1799, Schelling's turn to poetry would serve him as "der nächste und der wahre Weg sich aus der Rohheit herauszuarbeiten und ein Genosse der Hanse zu werden." And indeed,

³⁷⁴ Boyle, 625ff.

³⁷⁵ KFSA XXV, 24 (November 15, 1799).

³⁷⁶ HKA VIII, 428.

while Goethe continued to exert an influence on him, and their cooperation in matters philosophic, poetic, and scientific proceeded congenially, it was through intellectual commerce with the Schlegel household that Schelling now began to flourish. Early in 1799, Friedrich Schlegel and his future wife, Dorothea Veit, had moved in with A.W. Schlegel and his wife, Caroline. This coterie, together with Schelling, formed an earlier, German equivalent of the more famous American “Dante Club,” which would count Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and James Russell Lowell as its members. Dorothea’s letters to Schleiermacher and Sophie Bernhardt attest to the conviviality of the group’s Dante reading: “Auf den Abend wird Italiänisch in der Communauté getrieben. Nemlich Dante.—Schlegels sind Meister, wir übrigen die Schüler. Gegen 10 Uhr, ist jeder wieder in seiner Clause.”³⁷⁷ Again: “des Abends wird der Dante gelesen, Friedrich giebt Carolinen und Schellingens Unterricht darin, und ich habe auch Lust Antheil daran zu nehmen.”³⁷⁸ Dante propelled Schelling as well as the residents of the Schlegel household through the autumn and winter of 1799, such that by the new year they had finished reading the first half of the *Commedia*.³⁷⁹ Friedrich Schlegel, entranced at the time by Schleiermacher’s defense of religion, pled with him just after the new year, “Den Dante mußst Du doch auch einmal lesen; komme ich einmal wieder nach Berlin, so muß es mit mir geschehn.”³⁸⁰

³⁷⁷ KFSa 25, 12-13 (October 11, 1799).

³⁷⁸ KFSa XXV, 9 (October 7, 1799).

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 42 (January 6, 1800).

³⁸⁰ Ibid. (January 6, 1800).

Schelling's Adaptations of Dante

The effect of the *Commedia* on Schelling, who cared enough to solicit specific editions and commentaries from friends and family,³⁸¹ was profound.³⁸² By Christmas 1799, he had not only abandoned “Heinz Widerporsten,” but he had even composed the opening of a new *Naturgedicht* for which he ultimately planned to relinquish the irregular and colloquial character of Goethe's *Knittelvers* in favor of the ordered regularity of Dante's *terza rima*.³⁸³ The project excited Friedrich Schlegel, who wrote of it to Schleiermacher:

Schelling ist allerdings voll von seinem Gedicht, und ich glaube es wird etwas Großes werden. Bis jetzt hat er nur Studien gemacht und sucht Stanzen und Terzinen zu lernen. Er wird wahrscheinlich die letzten fürs Ganze wählen [...]. Gesehn habe ich noch nichts als 13 Stanzen die er zum Weihnachten an Caroline, mit der er sehr gut zusammenstimmt, als Ankündigung seines Werks gemacht hatte. Sie waren sehr schön und voll Begeisterung.³⁸⁴

What Schlegel describes, a poem of some thirteen stanzas that presumably would have been transformed into rhyming tercets,³⁸⁵ is nearly all that remains of Schelling's endeavor to compose the *Naturgedicht* according to the model of Dante's mythology. It serves nonetheless as crucial attestation of how the Jena Romantics, including Schelling among them, adapted the model of Dante's *Commedia* for the purposes of a new

³⁸¹ See Schelling's letter to his father of March 2, 1800, in SBD II, 217.

³⁸² Treatments of Schelling's reception of Dante are to be found in Clara-Charlotte Fuchs, “Dante in der deutschen Romantik,” *Deutsches Dante-Jahrbuch* 15 (1933), 89-97; Kunz (cited above); and Kurt Hildebrandt, *Leibniz und das Reich der Gnade* (Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1955), 457-462. Fuchs's pages on Schelling treat above all the essay *Ueber Dante in philosophischer Beziehung* while neglecting almost entirely Schelling's poetic projects and aspirations; Kunz, on the other hand, focuses on Schelling's poetry while citing Dante in reference to the *Naturgedicht* (30-31). Hildebrandt is concerned to show that the origins of Schelling's Dante essay lie in Leibniz and that Schelling's interest in Dante and myth represent a Hölderlinian attempt at realizing religion.

³⁸³ SW X, 447-451. It should be observed that the editor of the *Sämmtliche Werke* errs in locating the date of composition between 1807-1811. The poem, as we now know from Friedrich Schlegel's letter to Schleiermacher on January 6, 1800 (quoted below), existed in its present form by Christmas 1799.

³⁸⁴ KFSA XXV, 42 (January 6, 1800).

³⁸⁵ Contrary to Liliane Weissberg's statement, the poem is not actually written in *terza rima*. See Weissberg, “Weimar and Jena: Goethe and the New Philosophy,” in *Goethe und das Zeitalter der Romantik*, ed. Walter Hinderer (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2002), 173.

mythology. Written just after the Schlegels had begun tutoring Schelling in Dante, the thirteen stanzas contrast sharply with “Widerporsten,” particularly given the satirical poem’s composition just several months prior. Indeed, the transition from folksy *Knittelvers* to elegant stanzas of *ottava rima* only adumbrates the even more striking transformation of poetic tone: whereas Heinz Widerporst, a bawdy and blasphemous rogue, had spent equal time professing his own naturalistic credo and lambasting others’ faith in transcendence, there is no trace of irreverence or humor in the lyricist of the stanzas. While he deems glorious “nur, was mit uns geboren [ist]” (l. 17), and in this respect proves a devotee of Widerporsten’s same cult of nature, he employs a tone more reminiscent of Novalis than the epicurean who had mercilessly mocked him. If Widerporst, moreover, had professed the tenets of *Naturphilosophie* as plainly as a children’s fable, as if they were manifest to all, Schelling’s new lyrical voice suggests on the contrary that ultimate knowledge of nature is granted to the elect alone. The shift is a dramatic one, but one that was presaged shortly beforehand by Friedrich Schlegel, who wrote to Schleiermacher that “[Schelling] muß erst durch Poesie aus der Philosophie gerettet werden, ehe er zur Mystik gelangen kann.”³⁸⁶

At their core the stanzas represent Schelling’s attempt to depict the process of election to divine gnosis: whereby does one attain ultimate knowledge of nature, he sets out to answer. In this respect, Schelling again echoes Goethe’s *Faust* — not this time in

³⁸⁶ KFSA XXV, 5 (September 16, 1799). The transition in Schelling’s attitude toward the religious, which began in 1799 and must be regarded as inseparable from his reading of Dante, has been overlooked by accounts that neglect Schelling’s unpublished poetry. Williamson, for example, devotes a chapter of his excellent book to Schelling but fails to see him as anything but a “defender of the material world in the spirit of Goethe,” at least, that is, until his lectures on art in 1802-03. See Williamson, 56.

comedic mimicry, but rather in a quasi-sacral reflection on how one comes to union with “was die Welt im Innersten zusammenhält” (ll. 382-83).³⁸⁷ Schelling’s poetic response to this question of epistemology, which he had answered discursively already in the final pages of the *System*, was obvious: unimpeded access to the Absolute lay in aesthetic intuition alone — the poet himself would have to be the hero of the poem. This theory finds expression in the account of a process of revelation that is marked by images of both Christian and naturalistic provenance : the rigid earth is sealed off and only to be unlocked by the power of love “denn in das Herz, wo Liebe sich beweget, / [...] / Ist jede Gabe der Natur geleet” [...] (ll. 11-13). While the apparent inscrutability of nature alienates most men, “wen das Schicksal Einmal auserkoren, / [...] / Den hebt es früh empor aus dem Getümmel / Und öffnet über seinem Haupt den Himmel” (ll. 21-24). The process commences with the initiate’s being struck by a ray of eternal love (ll. 25-26), which in turn exposes his chest to all that heaven can offer: sacred fire, eternal ambition, the highest anguish, and the loftiest air. The ray of love brings with it the force of poetry; for powerful though love may be, it risks burning out should it not be sustained by poetry, which has provided form to the world itself from time immemorial (ll. 38-40).

This broad outline of revelation occupies the poem’s first five stanzas; its next four recount the specific process of election enjoyed by the particular lyrical subject of the poem. The lyrical subject addresses a specific recipient, identified as the “Leben meines Lebens,” and requests that she listen to “Was ich im innern Heiligthum vernommen” (ll. 41-42). What follows is the record of an apparently divine voice that has

³⁸⁷ FA I, 7.1.

charged our poem's subject with a cosmic poetic commission. It informs him that he has been elevated to new heights "Damit zu Höherem sich sollte schwingen / Die Kraft, die sie in deiner Brust genährt" (ll. 49-50). The one who will accomplish greatness, it tells him, must "überspringen [gar viele Stufen]" if he would fly to heaven, climb down, and unseal the eternal night of the earth (ll. 53-56). Indeed, the only one who can dispel the magic that has banished humanity from union with nature is he who "sich zum Abgrund gesellt," i.e. only he who dares "zum Quell des Lichts zu steigen" (ll. 57-64). The lyrical subject is admonished to fend off fear by steeling himself with strength, to maintain his course by following the stars, and to fly on love's wings when his own strength fails him (ll. 65-72). While the object of the poet's quest is entirely naturalistic, and thus distinct from any form of Christian transcendence, this account of the poet's path toward union with nature clearly recycles the imagery of the *Commedia*: a poet-pilgrim depends on the grace of love to lead him through the obstacles of a cosmological drama of salvation.

Schelling's fragment ends on the note of love's sustenance with four stanzas that contain an appeal to the recipient already identified as the "Leben meines Lebens." Described as a "himmlisch[es] Bild," she is commanded to go before him and to blaze the trail "Zur ew'gen Wahrheit" (ll. 74-76). She must, the lyrical subject says, draw him on with reminders of her love when his strength has diminished. In essence, Schelling formulates prescriptively what Goethe would write descriptively some thirty-three years later in the final line of *Faust*: "Das Ewig-Weibliche zieht uns hinan" (l. 12110). The fragment culminates in what, from a biographical perspective, proved to be both a painful and an awkward account of the love between poet and recipient. The subject states that a

god has wed (*vermählt*) the addressee to his very soul for eternity, and even if no future song should tell posterity of their love, “Doch wird aus des Gedichtes dunklen Chiffren / Sie das Geheimniß unsrer Lieb’ entziffern. / Was sorgsam wir dem Aug’ der Welt verborgen, / Das Glück, das nur die Unsichtbaren sehn, / Wird an des künft’gen Tages schönem Morgen / Aus dem Geheimniß glorreich auferstehn” (ll. 95-100). Dedicated to Caroline at Christmas 1799, the stanzas recount of course the illicit love that had blossomed between Schelling and Caroline, the wife of Schelling’s friend and teacher, A.W. Schlegel. Schelling’s affair with Caroline clearly constituted one of the fundamental impulses behind the scrapping of “Widerporsten” and the articulation of a great new *Naturgedicht*; but the other, which in its own way provided a model for incorporating Schelling’s new love in the poem, was Dante’s *Commedia*. The lessons that Schelling had learned from the *Commedia* were twofold.

First, and most conspicuously, the union of poetry and natural science in the formulation of a grand nature poem no longer seemed suited to the profane invective of an imp like Heinz Widerporst, but demanded instead a lyrical subject who could lay claim to the type of revelatory authority that had been dramatized in the *Commedia*.³⁸⁸ Dante the pilgrim, for example, who when he first learns of his mission from Virgil and denies his affinity to Saint Paul and Aeneas (*Inferno* 2.32), is later informed by Beatrice of his divine commission atop Mount Purgatory.³⁸⁹ Throughout the narrative, however,

³⁸⁸ The topic of Dante and poetic authority is enormous. An excellent and recent account can be found in Albert Russell Ascoli, *Dante and the Making of a Modern Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011).

³⁸⁹ *Purgatorio* 32.103-105: “for the sake of the world that lives badly, now hold your eyes on that chariot and, when you have returned from here to there, make sure to write that which you have seen.”

Dante the poet has carefully maintained for readers the illusion of his authority, to the point that even the pilgrim's initial reluctance to identify with Christian and classical prophets serves only to align him all the more closely with Biblical prophets like Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel – all of whom had doubted their divine assignments. At the commencement of the *Paradiso*, he can thus claim with all seriousness, “I was in the heaven that receives more of [God's] light and I saw things that he who descends from there neither knows how to nor is able to recount” (*Paradiso* I, 4-6).³⁹⁰ As Albert Ascoli has written, “to read the *Commedia* is to know that Dante [...] may well have hoped to be accorded authority greater than the pagan *auctores*, comparable, perhaps, to that of the fathers of the Church, or the human authors of the Bible.”³⁹¹ For his part, Schelling dispenses with the trope of ineffability, but in his lyrical subject's appeal to the reader (ll. 41-42), which is based on the pretense of his experience of revelation, he stylizes the identity of the author of his *Naturgedicht* according to the model of the fictive persona that recounts the action of the *Commedia*.

Like Dante, moreover, Schelling clearly employs a lyrical subject whose identity is intended to be read as one and the same with that of the poem's historical author: for while his name does not appear in his stanzas, it would be all but impossible — particularly given the references to a secret love — that Schelling wished for the lyrical subject to be identified as anyone but himself. His turn to poetry in the latter half of 1799, together with the overwhelming impression made by Dante, appears to have convinced

³⁹⁰ *Paradiso* 1.4-6.

³⁹¹ Ascoli, 4.

him that it was not sufficient that the great *Naturgedicht* should simply articulate in poetry what *Naturphilosophie* could say using discursive language: the great *Naturgedicht*, and more broadly any Romantic project of a new mythology, demanded the valorization of the poet himself. This notion would find theoretical expression in Schelling's lectures on aesthetics, in which he writes that in the age of Christianity, in which the infinite and the universal (as opposed to the finite and particular) predominate, religion can spread only through individuals who are "persönlich vom Allgemeinen und Unendlichen erfüllt, demnach Propheten, Seher, gottbegeisterte Menschen [...]." In these cases, precisely as we notice in Schelling's stanzas, "die Religion nimmt hier nothwendig den Charakter einer geoffenbarten Religion an [...]." ³⁹² This sacralization of the poet as mediator, which had already been discussed in Schleiermacher's *Reden*, was in any event an inevitable corollary of the crowning lesson of the *System* that, namely, experiential knowledge of the Absolute is to be had in aesthetic intuition alone. The force of Dante's own mythology owed in no small measure to the efficacy with which he had forged his own poetic authority, and Schelling — who was in almost constant contact with the Schlegels in Jena and Goethe and Schiller in Weimar — perhaps found it necessary to justify his authorship of a new mythological project by asserting a poetic persona. This justification lay, as the stanzas suggest, in his unique understanding of nature, which was altering the landscape of German idealism at the time. It is not just the stanzas, however, that reveal how Schelling's reading of Dante had led him to begin constructing an authoritative poetic identity, for the lyrical subject in another of his major poems from

³⁹² SW V, 438.

the same period strikes precisely the same pose of divine election. In “Lebenskunst,” a poem comprised of some thirty-three lines of *terza rima*, and thus a Dantean work in its own right, Schelling begins with the following imperative: “Die goldnen Lehren hört aus treuem Munde; / Wie sie ein Gott mir selbst hat eingegeben, / Empfängt von mir des Lebens sichre Kunde. / Zum Leben ward uns selber nur das Leben” (ll. 1-4).³⁹³ The last of these verses, which reformulates the stanzas’ proclamation that glorious is “nur, was mit uns geboren [ist]” (l. 17), continues to herald the stanzas’ relatively subdued doctrine of *Naturphilosophie*; more noteworthy, at least from the perspective of his poetics, however, is that Schelling’s renewed adaptation of Dante’s verse for the purpose of a *Naturgedicht* begins immediately by again foregrounding the privileged revelation that has been granted to the poetic subject. With Goethe having given up his stake in the project of a nature poem by October 1800, it was perhaps not imprudent for Schelling to have asserted himself so authoritatively. His work inspired confidence in Caroline, who called him her prophet and wrote to him that his work would assuredly culminate in a “herrliche[m] Gedicht.”³⁹⁴

Henrik Steffens, one of Schelling’s pupils in Jena, was so impressed by the poetic quality of Schelling’s *System des transcendentalen Idealismus*, though not necessarily by Schelling’s poetry, that he hailed him nonetheless as a philosopher-poet worthy of the laurel wreath:

Nichts hat mich so begeistert wie Ihre Transcendental-Philosophie. [...]. Ich [...] vergrub mich immer tiefer und tiefer in die Hölle der Philosophie hinein, um von dort aus den Himmel zu schauen, weil ich ihn nicht, wie der dichtende Gott, unmittelbar in meinem

³⁹³ SW X, 439-40.

³⁹⁴ Caroline. *Briefe aus der Frühromantik*, II, 34.

Busen habe. – Hier sahe ich nach und nach die Sterne hervortreten – bis plötzlich die göttliche Sonne des Genies aufstieg und alles erhellte. [...]. Nicht eine Stelle in dem Buch war mir dunkel. Es ist das wichtigste Geschenk, der transcendente Idealismus. – Und hier lege ich – ich darf mitsprechen – den Kranz vor Ihre Füße, den ein künftiges Zeitalter Ihnen sicher reichen wird.³⁹⁵

It is almost certainly no accident that Steffens describes Schelling's philosophy as a poetic revelation of the divine heavens that had helped to draw him out of philosophy's hell; on the contrary, his words allude to the Dantean persona that Schelling himself had begun to forge.

In addition to inspiring in Schelling a poetics of the absolute that was grounded in an absolute poetic identity, the *Commedia* convinced Schelling of something that rendered the content of his poetry far more traditionally Romantic: the priority, namely, of a poetics of love. In his *Rede über die Mythologie*, Friedrich Schlegel had asked what the new mythology were to be, if not the "hieroglyphischer Ausdruck der umgebenden Natur in [der] Verklärung von Fantasie und Liebe?"³⁹⁶ Novalis, in the biblical novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, as well as in a myriad of other poetic fragments, had written of the unitive force of romantic love as the condition of the Golden Age, which the new mythology would seek to evoke. In the drama of the lyrical subject's cognition of nature in Schelling's stanzas, it is the experience of love that both awakens him to nature and draws him onward to experiential knowledge of it. This account, which as I have already suggested will surface again in Goethe's *Eternal Feminine*, represents a reformulation of the central interpersonal dynamic of the *Commedia* itself, wherein the romantic object of Dante's earthly desire, Beatrice, functions as the pilgrim's guide through the spheres of

³⁹⁵ *Aus Schellings Leben. In Briefen*, I, 303-304 (August 8, 1800).

³⁹⁶ KFSA II, 318.

Paradise.³⁹⁷ The repeated insistence toward the end of Schelling's stanzas, moreover, that love would sustain the faltering lyrical subject's quest for knowledge echoes the very final lines of Dante's *Paradiso*. In beholding the Trinity, when the pilgrim's power of vision fails ("A l'alta fantasia qui mancò possa"), it is the synchronization of his will and desire with the momentum of the "love that moves the sun and all the other stars" that preserves for the pilgrim his harmony with the divine. Schelling's "pilgrim," if we may so identify him, aims of course not for knowledge of the Trinity, but rather of Nature or the Absolute; and despite this difference, it is precisely the propulsive force of love that Schelling suggests will sustain him.

The thirteen stanzas constitute Schelling's most ambitious poetic attempt at adapting the lessons of the *Commedia* that he had gleaned from the Schlegels' Dante primer in the winter of 1799; however fragmentary, they were the beginning of a grand work that, if ever carried through to completion, might have formed the beginnings of a Romantic mythology on the scale of Goethe's *Faust*. As Schelling wrote to A.W. Schlegel, "Ich glaube die Mythologie gefunden zu haben, welche allein alle Ideen in sich dargestellt enthält, welche ich darzustellen wünsche [...]"³⁹⁸ Without mentioning Dante, Schelling's words nonetheless evince the brightest hopes that the *Commedia* had inspired in him after his first encounter with it between the autumn and spring. As it turned out, Schelling abandoned the project while nonetheless continuing to compose poetry, and indeed, a rash of new Dantean poems. "Lebenskunst" (1802), a didactic lyric in *terza*

³⁹⁷ See esp. Kunz, 61-62. Haym also identifies Caroline in the stanzas as Schelling's Beatrice. See Haym, 635.

³⁹⁸ HKA III, 2.1, 212 (June 7, 1800).

rima, reasserted the pretense of Schelling's gnostic privilege while preserving the generally naturalist doctrines that stretched back to "Heinz Widerporsten." "Die letzten Worte des Pfarrers zu Drottning auf Seeland" (1802), a ballad composed in *terza rima*, resembled nothing else in Schelling's small poetic oeuvre and seemed to anticipate instead the poetic output of the English gothic.³⁹⁹ Yet another poem in *terza rima*, "An Dante," was affixed to the manuscript of Schelling's lectures on aesthetics and grants at least the outline of Schelling's idiosyncratic view of the *Commedia*.⁴⁰⁰ His lyrical subject states that Dante did not travel through "das Thor der göttlichen Gerichte"; instead, he went through the "Herz der Erde selbst zum ew'gen Lichte" (ll. 10-12). This particular distinction is noteworthy, for in it we find that Schelling reads the geography of Dante-pilgrim's journey in the *Commedia* as a validation of the primary assumptions of the *Naturphilosophie*: the pilgrim does not attain "den höchsten Sieg" through transcendence, but rather through nature itself (l. 9). The essence of this triumph, furthermore, is characterized by the activity of "schauen" (l. 3), which underscores that Schelling had located the uniqueness of Dante-pilgrim not in his guarantee of salvation but first and foremost in his penetration of "nie gesehnen Orte" where he arrived at experiential knowledge (l. 2). Dante was an intellectual explorer, in other words, the terrestrial character of whose poetic journey impressed Schelling precisely because it was not celestial.

³⁹⁹ Appeared in the *Musen-Almanach für das Jahr 1802*, edited by AW Schlegel and L. Tieck; Schelling published under the pseudonym Bonaventura, recommended to him by AW Schlegel in place of Venturus, and he likewise included three other poems: "Lied," "Thier und Pflanze," and "Loos der Erde."

⁴⁰⁰ SW X, 441. Under the poem was written "Reliqua desiderantur," suggesting that this Dantean work too was still to be finished.

From Poetry back to Philosophy

Schelling's initial encounter with and subsequent adaptations of Dante span a period in which the mercurial young philosopher abandoned old alliances, forged new friendships, and began reformulating his system of philosophy from the perspective of an objective rather than subjective first principle. These transformations would come to bear on both Schelling's interpretation of Dante as well as on his estimation of the potential of the *Commedia* to mold the shape of a new mythology. Between 1800 and 1802, after he had taken up his post in Jena, Schelling's collaboration with the Schlegels was strained by the weight of his affection for Caroline, while his relationship with Fichte, his first intellectual idol, had likewise suffered setbacks. Having rigidly adhered to his first principle of the ego, Fichte would not brook Schelling's radicalization of the *Naturphilosophie*, which the latter no longer preached as a regulative doctrine of nature under the framework of the *Wissenschaftslehre* but rather as a constitutive doctrine that grounded the possibility of self-consciousness in the first place. As Frederick Beiser has written, Schelling turned the *Wissenschaftslehre* on its head by positing the *Naturphilosophie* as its precedent, doing so most forcefully and clearly in the *Darstellung meines Systems der Philosophie* (1801).⁴⁰¹ There, following the model of Spinoza's *Ethics*, Schelling had articulated the tenets of his philosophical system in so geometrically rigid a method that he released a philosophical dialogue in the following year in the hope of rendering his system more intelligible.

⁴⁰¹ Beiser, *German Idealism*, 507.

Bruno, oder über das göttliche und natürliche Princip der Dinge (1802) functions both as a popular articulation of the doctrines of the *Darstellung* as well as a mild corrective to Schelling's *System des transcendentalen Idealismus*, which had garnered much attention in the preceding years. In particular, Schelling used the dialogue to redefine the relationship of art and philosophy that had figured so prominently in the *System*; indeed, since *Bruno* began with the same discussion of art in which the *System* had culminated, it almost seemed as if the dialogue were a sequel designed to mitigate the flaws of the earlier tract. Schelling now pursued the question of the relationship of beauty and truth and asserted that what the artist achieved objectively in aesthetic intuition the philosopher achieved subjectively in intellectual intuition.⁴⁰² Indeed, the philosopher had become the poet's equal. Douglas W. Stott explains the logic whereby Schelling arrived at this conclusion:

The fundamental notion is that the more closely a particular, actual thing approximates the perfection of its universal or idea, such that the idea itself (the universal) can be intuited in the particular, the more closely does that particular participate in beauty, which is thus defined as the concurrence of universal and particular intuited in the particular. This is the object of aesthetic intuition. The object of intellectual intuition, on the other hand, is the concurrence of the universal with its particular in the abstract, such concurrence them constituting truth. Hence, beauty (in the concrete) can be equated with truth (in the abstract), and the objects of aesthetic and intellectual intuition are actually the same identity of the universal and the particular, though viewed from opposite directions.⁴⁰³

In the *System*, Schelling had argued that the identity of the subjective and objective in the Absolute would come to consciousness not through the concepts of reason but through objective representation in the aesthetic intuition of the artwork. The positive force of this earlier conjecture is maintained in *Bruno*, but Schelling now asserts that intellectual

⁴⁰² Compare this for example to proposition twenty in the *Philosophie der Kunst*.

⁴⁰³ Stott, *F.W.J. Schelling: The Philosophy of Art*, xl.

intuition, too, provides for the consciousness of the Absolute in the abstract. Consequently, he can claim equality for the philosopher and the poet, saying that both perform the same “Gottesdienst.”⁴⁰⁴

This apparently diminutive shift in the operation of Schelling’s epistemology represents a transition in his thinking that marks more than just a distinction from the *System*, for if Schelling is to be identified with the author of the *Systemprogramm*, then his new esteem for the discipline of philosophy marks an important distinction from the position of one of the earliest calls for a new mythology. One cannot help but read the gradual dissipation of Schelling’s poetry and the abandonment of his plans for a new mythology, changes that occurred simultaneously with the development of the *Identitätsphilosophie*, as logical consequences of the new privilege afforded to philosophical knowledge. These changes likewise affected a transformation in Schelling’s appraisal of Dante: while art suffered no loss of potency in Schelling’s new system, and Dante’s poetry thus remained sacrosanct, Dante himself became the object of a curious new philosophical reception that Schelling did the most among the Romantics to advance. This particular reading, which anticipated Ossip Mandelstam’s pronouncement that “the future of Dante criticism belongs to the natural sciences,” treated seriously the possibility that in addition to being a world-class poet Dante was a world-class natural philosopher.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰⁴ SW IV, 239.

⁴⁰⁵ Ossip Mandelstam, “Conversation About Dante,” in *The Complete Critical Prose and Letters*, ed. Jane Gary Harris, trans. Jane Gary Harris and Constance Link (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1979), 411.

Fragmentary evidence of this development in Schelling's Dante reception emerges in his own philosophical writings in the years 1801 and 1802. In the second volume of his *Zeitschrift für spekulative Physik* (1801), for example, in an entry in which he discusses the natural scientist Johann Friedrich Blumenbach's doctrine of the *Bildungstrieb* — a formative drive that according to the school of vitalism is responsible for an organism's nourishment and reproduction — Schelling attempts to undermine the originality of Blumenbach's teaching by locating its source in Dante's *Commedia*.⁴⁰⁶ The same maneuver had been made, he writes, when one learned that William Harvey's discovery of blood circulation had already been taught by Salomonis; now “ein großer Gelehrter” (in all likelihood Schelling himself) could show that the pivotal new doctrine of vitalist biology had its origins in Dante's *Purgatorio*. Schelling thus excerpts the Italian of *Purgatorio* 25.37-51, 88-90, in which Statius explains to Dante-pilgrim why souls on Mount Purgatory grow thin despite the fact that they require no nourishment. The solution to the quandary, he explains, lies in the “virtute informativa” of the blood (l. 41), which Schelling then equates with Blumenbach's *Bildungstrieb*.⁴⁰⁷ The tendency to cite Dante in respect to either philosophical or natural scientific discussions continued, with Schelling even applying Dantean imagery from the *Commedia* to descriptions he provided of the Absolute in *Bruno*. Xavier Tilliette has written, for example, that

⁴⁰⁶ HKA VIII, 433.

⁴⁰⁷ Bruno Nardi provides commentary on the “formative virtue,” locating it as a concept in the history of western biological sciences. See Nardi, *Dante e la cultura medievale: Nuovi saggi di filosofia dantesca* (Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1949), 262-263.

Schelling's metaphors for the Absolute and its cognition rely as much on Dante as on Spinoza.⁴⁰⁸

What are we to make of these apparent shifts in Schelling's reception of Dante, in which his preoccupation with poetic authority and romantic love gives way to a scientific-philosophic reading of the *Commedia*? First of all, we might recall, Schelling's stanzas from 1799 and his subsequent poems in *terza rima* displayed a naturalism of their own that even then resonated with the tenets of his *Naturphilosophie*; second, the shift in emphasis occurs nearly simultaneously with Schelling's many adaptations, overlapping in fact with the composition of some of the poems. What the philosophic reinvigoration of Schelling's Dante reading signifies, therefore, is not so much a transformation of his initial Dante reception as much as an augmentation and enrichment of that reading. Indeed, as Schelling's own poetic ventures dwindled and he returned to composing philosophical tracts and lecturing on art, it was perhaps inevitable that he would have to account in more rigorously systematic fashion for the reason why Dante had elicited so powerful an initial response in him. While his turn from poetry to philosophy spelled the end of any potential Romantic mythology of nature undertaken in the style of Dante, it provided something that Schelling was far more capable of rendering: a series of expository statements that, including even A.W. Schlegel's remarks on the poem, still represent the pinnacle of the Romantics' theorization of the *Commedia*.⁴⁰⁹ These are

⁴⁰⁸ Xavier Tilliette, *Schelling: Une Philosophie en Devenir*, (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1970) v. 1, 369, n. 50; 392, n. 48; 398, n. 65.

⁴⁰⁹ Kurt Hildebrandt made trenchant remarks on both scores. On Schelling's (un)suitability to poetry, and consequent turn to a philosophical reading of Dante, he wrote that "Da aber Schelling auch Hölderlins Weg als Dichter, Seher, Profet nicht zu gehen vermochte, den Mythos nicht schaffen konnte, versuchte er es auf

found first and foremost in Schelling's essay *Ueber Dante in philosophischer Beziehung* (1802), published in the *Kritisches Journal der Philosophie*, which Schelling edited together with Hegel, and second of all in his lectures on the philosophy of art, delivered in Jena between 1802 and 1803 (and published posthumously).

A cursory reading of these documents displays the Romantics' well attested yet still almost inconceivably profound veneration of Dante, which was so absolute that neither Shakespeare nor Goethe, no matter how emblematic of Romantic theory they were, could match it; a more careful reading, however, confirms what has already been shown in the case of Schelling's poetry: that, namely, the veneration for Dante centered on the unparalleled mythology that had been realized in his *Commedia*. Schelling's essay, deeply indebted to the Schlegels' theories of art and poetry, spells out this Romantic reading of Dante clearest of all; but its primary assertion — the exemplarity of the *Commedia* as a modern mythology — makes little sense without an understanding first of all of Schelling's idiosyncratic philosophy of art, and second of all a grasp of Schelling's interpretation of literary history, particularly the glaring fissure between ancient and modern (Romantic) poetry. To begin, then, one must know that Schelling, for all of his interaction with the Schlegels, does not construct a theory of artworks based on aesthetic observation; nor is it a theory of aesthetic pleasure. Instead, Schelling's theory of art operates on the level of philosophic necessity, deriving the forms of art as the *a priori* consequences of his metaphysics of the Absolute. When he writes of mythology,

dem Weg der Religionsphilosophie, der Theosophie" (462). On the claim that Schelling's essay on Dante represents the pinnacle of the Romantics' theorization of the *Commedia*, Hildebrandt is stronger yet: "die Dante-Literatur enthält bis heute vielleicht nichts Großartigeres als diesen Aufsatz" (458).

therefore, he is referring to a very particular manifestation of the Absolute — and, indeed, a pivotal one, for Schelling defines mythology as “die nothwendige Bedingung und der erste Stoff aller Kunst.”⁴¹⁰ In the framework of the *Identitätsphilosophie*, which underlies this aesthetics, Schelling proceeds from a first principle of the Absolute that is understood as the absolute identity of universal and particular, the All that is simultaneously simple and infinitely complex. The relation of mythology to the Absolute is one of representation in the particular: in its union of the gods in a totality, mythology represents in art the simultaneity of differentiation and simplicity as they coincide in the Absolute.⁴¹¹ As Schelling explains

Der *nervus probandi* liegt in der Idee der Kunst als Darstellung des absolut, des an sich Schönen durch besondere schöne Dinge; also Darstellung des Absoluten in Begrenzung ohne Aufhebung des Absoluten. Dieser Widerspruch ist nur in den Ideen der Götter gelöst, die selbst wieder keine unabhängige, wahrhaft objektive Existenz haben können als in der vollkommenen Ausbildung zu einer eignen Welt und zu einem Ganzen der Dichtung, welches Mythologie heißt.⁴¹²

From a pragmatic standpoint, Schelling explains, there is only one way for the artist to execute the union of particularity and universality in the Absolute, i.e., to execute a mythology, and this occurs via the application of an artistic method that synthesizes the particular and the universal. Schelling locates this synthesis of particular and universal in the mode of symbolism (*Symbolismus*). Symbolism, he explains, is a mode of artistic

⁴¹⁰ SW V, 405.

⁴¹¹ That the gods represent particularity and their sphere of action represents universality may be less than intuitive to Schelling’s readers, but he renders a painstaking derivation of this concept from his first principle, with which the entire lecture series commences. In short, Schelling’s first principle is the Absolute, or God, which is understood as the absolute identity of the infinitely affirming (ideal) and infinitely affirmed (real) (think here of Spinoza’s *natura naturans*, *natura naturata*). Particulars that exist in the Absolute are called Ideas (*Ideen*) (par. 27), which when viewed under the guise of the real are known as gods (*Götter*) (par. 28). Their nature is that of limitation and absoluteness. Together the gods constitute a totality (par. 34), a fantastical world without which the gods (ideas) could not co-exist (par. 38).

⁴¹² SW V, 405.

production whereby allegory (representation of particular in universal) is reconciled to schematism (representation of universal in particular) and both are subsumed under the mode of symbolic representation. While mythology affords the possibility of both allegorical and schematic interpretation, it is ultimately comprehensible only as symbolism, i.e., as the synthesis of these competing modes of representation.

When Schelling published his essay on Dante, his notion of mythology was not yet as robust as the outline above, which first emerged in its entirety in the lectures on the philosophy of art; after all, the *Identitätsphilosophie* itself was still just blossoming. Thus, rather than referring to a synthesis of allegory and schematism in the *Commedia*, Schelling describes its narrative as a synthesis of allegorical and historical modes of representation. This is nevertheless significant, for the essay reveals that under the descriptors allegorical and historical, Schelling still understands universal and particular, infinite and finite. He cites Beatrice, for example, as a figure who wears the allegorical cloak of theology, yet who appears in equal measure as Beatrice Portinari, the woman whom Dante Alighieri loved.⁴¹³ This balance of allegorical and historical identity holds true, Schelling notes, for the *Commedia*'s other characters as well. Insofar as he thus underscores the uniqueness of the *Commedia*'s reconciliation of universal and particular practices of representation, Schelling designates Dante's poem an exemplary manifestation of what would be deduced as mythological art in the following year's lectures; indeed, one might even speculate whether the essay on Dante, the initial judgments of which must have been crystallizing since winter 1799, did not foreground

⁴¹³ SW V, 155.

the subsequent theory of mythology itself. Schelling's own statements in the Dante essay would seem to indicate as much:

Dante ist [...] urbildlich, da er ausgesprochen hat, was der moderne Dichter zu thun hat, um das Ganze der Geschichte und Bildung seiner Zeit, den einzigen mythologischen Stoff, der ihm vorliegt, in einem poetischen Ganzen niederzulegen. Er muß aus absoluter Willkür Allegorisches und Historisches verknüpfen, er mus allegorisch seyn, und ist es auch wider seinen Willen, weil er nicht symbolisch seyn kann, und historisch, weil er poetisch seyn soll. Die Erfindung, die er in dieser Rücksicht macht, ist jedesmal einzig, eine Welt für sich, ganz der Person angehörig.⁴¹⁴

Spectacular though this achievement of poetics may be, there is a grander vista yet from which Schelling marvels at Dante's synthesis of the universal and particular. This is perceptible only from the perspective of Schelling's historical understanding of the production of ancient and modern poetry.

Man kann die moderne Welt allgemein die Welt der Individuen, die antike die Welt der Gattungen nennen. In dieser ist das Allgemeine das Besondere, die Gattung das Individuum; darum ist sie [...] die Welt der Gattungen. In jener bedeutet das Besondere nur das Allgemeine, und eben darum ist, weil in ihr das Allgemeine herrscht, die moderne Welt die der Individuen, des Zerfallens. Dort ist alles ewig, dauernd, unvergänglich, die Zahl hat gleichsam keine Gewalt, da der allgemeine Begriff der Gattung und des Individuums in eins fällt, hier — in der modernen Welt — ist Wechsel und Wandel das herrschende Gesetz.⁴¹⁵

Appealing to this observation, Schelling describes the genesis of Homeric poetry, arguing in his lectures that his aesthetic conviction that the composition of mythology occurs as a collective endeavor is evidenced even in the philologist Friedrich August Wolf's thesis that the poet identified by the name "Homer" comprised perhaps dozens of poets. The difference in circumstances between ancient and modern poetic subjectivity leads Schelling to charge modern poets with an onerous imperative: "Das nothwendige Gesetz [der modernen Poesie] [...] ist: daß das Individuum den ihm offenbaren Theil der

⁴¹⁴ SW V, 156.

⁴¹⁵ SW V, 444. This view, of course, recapitulates the fundamental thesis of Friedrich Schlegel's *Studiumaufsatz in breve*.

Welt zu einem Ganzen bilde, und aus dem Stoff seiner Zeit, ihrer Geschichte und ihrer Wissenschaft sich seine Mythologie erschaffe.”⁴¹⁶ Given the individual character of the modern subject, however, this endeavor could occur only by means of the poet absolutizing or universalizing his individuality, thus rendering individuality itself universal and indeed mythic in scope. Having laid out these imperatives of modern poetics, Schelling concludes with four words: “Dieß hat Dante gethan.”⁴¹⁷ The rest of the essay, which underscores qualities of the poem that could be of use to modern poets — e.g., the notion that a tripartite division signals a prophetic work just as a five-act work signals a drama — spells out theories of the poem that are at once emblematic of Schelling’s philosophy as well as Romantic aesthetics.

No matter how neglected Schelling’s *Ueber Dante in philosophischer Beziehung* remains,⁴¹⁸ it is difficult to overstate its potential significance for our understanding of the period; indeed, it is a critical document in at least four respects: (1) first and foremost, the Dante essay constitutes one of the clearest and fullest statements in the Romantic discourse on the genesis of a new mythology, for which reason alone it deserves a place alongside the *Systemprogramm*, the *Rede über die Mythologie*, and Schelling’s

⁴¹⁶ SW V, 153-54.

⁴¹⁷ SW V, 155.

⁴¹⁸ Unlike Herder’s Shakespeare essay, for example, which became a canonical text of the *Sturm und Drang*, Schelling’s Dante essay has remained a curiosum of Schelling scholars, despite its philosophical and poetic overlaps with Romanticism. It receives perfunctory mention in Eva Höller’s chapter “Dante’s Long Road to the German Library: Literary Reception from Early Romanticism until the Late Nineteenth Century,” in *Dante in the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Aida Audeh and Nick Havely (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 228. A treatment that touches on Schelling’s reading of Dante in relation to his theory of allegory and symbolism is to be found in Daniel Whistler, *Schelling’s Theory of Symbolic Language: Forming the System of Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 64-65 and 238-239. Almost surprisingly, it appears translated and anthologized in *German Aesthetic Literary Criticism*, ed. David Simpson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

statements on mythology in *Philosophie der Kunst*; (2) by means of philosophical argument, it legitimates the Schlegel brothers' historiography of modern European literature, which commences with Dante, and thus fortifies the historical teleology that informs the project of a new mythology; (3) the essay launches a new mode of writing about Dante and the *Commedia*, the influence of which would surface in the scholarship of A.W. Schlegel and Erich Auerbach, two of the most respected *dantisti* in the European tradition, and certainly the most authoritative in the German tradition;⁴¹⁹ (4) finally, it constitutes a vital document for understanding Schelling in at least two respects: first, because it supplies an illuminating glance into the significance of Jena Romanticism for the astonishingly complex system of aesthetics that Schelling was about to formulate in his lectures, and second, because it sheds light on Schelling's self-understanding as a poet and attests to the significance of his Dante adaptations in the longer Romantic narrative of a new mythology. It is to the last of these points that we will turn our attention, for it builds a bridge to Goethe's Dantean mythology of nature.

In characterizing the *Commedia* as an expression of absolute individuality, Schelling was able to dismiss all traditional theorization of the *Commedia* as insufficient: Dante's poem is neither an epic, nor a novel, nor a drama, nor a didactic poem, Schelling writes: "Nicht ein einzelnes Gedicht, sondern die ganze Gattung der neueren Poesie repräsentierend und selbst eine Gattung für sich, steht die göttliche Komödie so ganz abgeschlossen, daß die von einzelneren Formen abstrahirte Theorie für sie ganz

⁴¹⁹ Schelling's essay is palpable in A.W. Schlegel's remarks on Dante, for example, in his *Vorlesungen über romantische Poesie*, 1803-1804. Auerbach's *Dante als Dichter der irdischen Welt* likewise echoes Schelling's discussion of allegory in the *Commedia*.

unzureichend ist, und sie als eine eigne Welt auch ihre eigne Theorie fordert.”⁴²⁰ In its universalization of the individual, Schelling claims, Dante’s poem transcends all hereto existing theory and inaugurates modern poetry itself. To be clear, the mythology achieved by Dante is not to be confused with that which had been created by “Homer.” Greek mythology had sprung from a different source altogether: its creation was necessarily collective and its roots, as Schelling would explain in the lectures, lay not in history and the spirit, as in Christian art, but rather in nature. The distinction between antique mythologies and modern mythologies was complemented in Schelling’s thought by the postulation of a third historical stage of mythic creation, one that — as we saw earlier — Schelling had written of at the end of the *System des transcendentalen Idealismus*.⁴²¹ Whereas the task of the modern poet was to follow the example of Dante by universalizing his individual existence in a new mythology, there was to come, Schelling wrote, an age in which one, universal mythology would comprehend all others.⁴²² This vision represents of course a reiteration of the historic-aesthetic teleology of Friedrich Schlegel’s *Rede über die Mythologie*, in which Schlegel anticipates the materialization of a universal mythology that is sustained by an all-encompassing worldview furnished by the reconciliation of Idealism and Realism. Indeed, just as Schlegel envisions the new mythology issuing from the philosophical promise of Idealism and Realism, so too does Schelling, with an important qualification. It is not in a generic Idealism, nor in a purely

⁴²⁰ SW V, 152-153.

⁴²¹ SW III, 629.

⁴²² On this note, one might likewise compare Schelling’s discussion of the *Lehrgedicht* and its relevance to the coming mythology (SW V, 662-667). See also Nisbet’s evaluation of this material for a qualitative assessment of Schelling’s projections (Nisbet 111 ff.).

Spinozistic Realism, that he locates the seed of the new mythology; rather, it is in his very own doctrine of *Naturphilosophie*: “ich verhehle meine Ueberzeugung nicht, daß in der Naturphilosophie, wie sie sich aus dem idealistischen Princip gebildet hat, die erste ferne Anlage jener künftigen Symbolik und derjenigen Mythologie gemacht ist, welche nicht ein Einzelner, sondern die ganze Zeit geschaffen haben wird.”⁴²³ Schelling’s naturalistic poems, in particular “Heinz Widerporsten” and the stanzas, thus represent Schelling’s attempts to realize not just any modern mythology, but the much anticipated mythology whose governing principle of *Naturphilosophie* would provide for true universalizability. We know, of course, from Schelling’s thirty-nine lines of *ottava rima* that, even if he were correct in exalting the doctrine of *Naturphilosophie*, he was not the poet to accomplish this tall order. In Schelling’s general reliance on Dante for the poetics of myth in the years 1799-1803, however, we document one more effort to realize what Friedrich Schlegel had called for: the formulation of a new universal mythology in the style of Dante’s *Commedia*.

Goethe and the Romantic Campaign for a New Dante

In the years around the turn of the eighteenth century, specifically 1799-1803, one thing was clear to the Romantics in Jena: none of them was remotely close to beginning let alone accomplishing the single greatest goal of merging art, philosophy, religion, and science in a new mythology. The Schlegels had always understood themselves first and foremost as critics; Schelling, for all his enthusiasm, had compiled little more than what would amount to negligible poetic fragments, as is attested by the unfortunate dearth of

⁴²³ SW V, 449.

scholarship on them; and Novalis, the most promising among the figures in the Schlegels' orbit, had died of tuberculosis in March, 1801. To be sure, the theorists of Romanticism — the Schlegel brothers and, to a lesser extent, Schelling — probably never truly harbored genuine hope that one among their coterie would realize so ambitious a project. To use Ernst Behler's words, the new mythology was "not a research project to be carried out in the near future, but one of those more fundamental tasks that, upon reflection, manifest both the impossibility and the necessity of their realization."⁴²⁴ Even Schelling, whose poetic ventures reveal no small degree of ambition, seems not to have deceived himself any longer than a couple of years into believing that he would be the one to do so. Amidst all the blustery theory, however, there existed the expectation and, of course, the rhetoric, that a new mythology would be realized by a new Dante; it just happened that the one capable of bringing it to life lived not in Florence or Jena, but in Weimar.

The belief in Goethe's herculean ability to create a new mythology, no matter how much it may have rested on the Romantics' conviction of his general transcendence as a poet, appears also to have originated in specific projects that Goethe had undertaken. If Schelling, for example, had imagined the new mythology to be a poeticization of *Naturphilosophie* and F. Schlegel regarded it as a "symbolische Ansicht der Natur," an artistic harmony of idealism and realism, then they both must have seen in Goethe's plan for a great naturalistic *Lehrgedicht* the template for a new mythology. Schelling, a collaborator in these years with Goethe, had been one of the impulses behind Goethe's desire to realize the project. The model of Lucretius's *De rerum natura*, moreover,

⁴²⁴ Behler, *German Romantic Literary Theory*, 164.

seemed to indicate a poem of significant proportions. Even if not a collaborator of Goethe, A.W. Schlegel was tangentially involved in these plans to the extent that he frequently met with Goethe throughout 1799 and did Goethe the favor of commenting on his friend Knebel's translation of Lucretius. Knebel, not incidentally, was Goethe's primary correspondent regarding the plan for a new Lucretian poem, rumors of which seem to have inspired F. Schlegel to begin reading Lucretius.⁴²⁵ Henrich Steffens, a pupil of Schelling, would remark in his memoirs that "In dem Kreise der Goethe, Fichte, Schelling, Schlegel bestand der bewußte, leidenschaftliche Wille, gemeinsam die philosophische Weltansicht zu vollenden, ihr in der Dichtung ergreifenden Ausdruck, im Leben Anwendung und Herrschaft zu verschaffen."⁴²⁶

As we know, Goethe's great *Naturgedicht* never came to fruition; he would settle, in fact, for cycles of naturalistic poems that he assembled as *Gott, Gemüt und Welt* (1815) and *Gott und Welt* (1822).⁴²⁷ But the Romantics' expectations of Goethe far exceeded the unrealized poem. Indeed, since at least the mid 1790s, they had witnessed in Goethe the potential of a new Dante: for a time, *Wilhelm Meister* came to represent the ideal of the Romantic novel, and the *Faust* fragment furthermore suggested that Goethe's novels, dramas, and lyrics would indeed give way to a poem of universal proportions. In point of fact, when Schelling had all but relinquished poetry and published his essay on Dante, he singled out Goethe's *Faust* as the only German work of so universal a scope that it

⁴²⁵ KFSa XXV, 11 (October 10, 1799).

⁴²⁶ Quoted in Plath, 45.

⁴²⁷ That the naturalistic poems, some of which were composed already in the eighteenth century, should have been revisited and rearranged by Goethe in didactic cycles, owes in no small measure to the input of Sulpiz Boisserée and Friedrich Wilhelm Riemer. On this, see what Karl Eibl has to say in FA I, 2, 1072-1074.

approximated the *Commedia*. After declaring Dante *urbildlich*, therefore, he wrote that “Das einzige deutsche Gedicht von universeller Anlage knüpft die äußersten Enden in dem Streben der Zeit durch die ganz eigenthümliche Erindung einer partiellen Mythologie, die Gestalt des Faust, auf ähnliche Weise zusammen.”⁴²⁸ Schelling repeated the comparison in his lectures on the *Philosophie der Kunst*, noting that Goethe’s *Faust* “eine wahrhaft Dantesche Bedeutung [hat], obgleich es weit mehr Komödie und mehr in poetischem Sinn göttlich ist, als das Werk des Dante.”⁴²⁹

The Goethe-Dante comparisons likewise emerged prominently in F. Schlegel’s *Gespräch über die Poesie*, the roots of which lay in Schlegel’s plans to transform his earlier essay on *Wilhelm Meister* into a broader treatment of Goethe.⁴³⁰ After having just asserted earlier in the dialogue that a new mythology could arise only in the style of Dante’s *Commedia*, Schlegel clearly lays the mantle of modern, mythic poetry on Goethe’s shoulders in the subsequent *Versuch über den verschiedenen Styl in Goethes früheren und späteren Werken*, which culminates in the claim that Goethe could be for modern poetry what Dante was for medieval poetry:

Goethe hat sich in seiner langen Laufbahn [...] zu einer Höhe der Kunst heraufgearbeitet, welche zum erstenmal die ganze Poesie der Alten und der Modernen umfaßt, und den Keim eines ewigen Fortschreitens enthält. Der Geist, der jetzt rege ist, muß auch diese Richtung nehmen, und so wird es, dürfen wir hoffen, nicht an Naturen fehlen, die fähig sein werden zu dichten, nach Ideen zu dichten. Wenn sie nach Goethes Vorbilde in Versuchen und Werken jeder Art unermüdet nach dem Bessern trachten; wenn sie sich die universelle Tendenz, die progressiven Maximen dieses Künstlers zu eigen machen [...] so wird jener Keim nicht verloren gehen, so wird Goethe nicht das Schicksal des Cervantes und des Shakespeare haben können; sondern der Stifter und das Haupt einer

⁴²⁸ SW V, 156.

⁴²⁹ SW V, 732. On Schelling’s comparisons of Dante and Goethe, see Kunz, 30-31.

⁴³⁰ See Behler’s commentary on the *Gespräch über die Poesie*, KFSa II, LXXXVII-LXXXVIII.

neuen Poesie sein, für uns und die Nachwelt, was Dante auf andere Weise für das Mittelalter.⁴³¹

These flattering remarks — together with the proclamation that a new mythology would demand a Dantean poem for a Spinozistic worldview — were composed in 1799, just as A.W. Schlegel was busy doing Goethe the favor of overseeing his friend Knebel's Lucretius translation.

Indeed, even the rather prosaic Romantic, A.W. Schlegel, who as a professional philologist generally forewent the fervid statements of his brother, seems to have been convinced that from Goethe's poetry there had emerged the possibility of infusing a Dantean poem of universal scope with a Spinozistic philosophy. We witness this conviction in Schlegel's lengthy narrative composed in *terza rima*, "Prometheus."⁴³² A clear product of Schlegel's interest in Dante, "Prometheus" was no less conspicuously indebted to what was perhaps the most inflammatory poem of the eighteenth century, Goethe's "Prometheus," which had indirectly sparked the *Pantheismusstreit* that would embroil Lessing, Mendelssohn, Jacobi, and others. While the action of Schlegel's poem took place in a more recognizably Greek antiquity and thus diminished the radical contemporaneity of Goethe's original, it nonetheless echoed the same contempt for the gods in the unmistakably Dantean verse form; in this respect, the poem renewed Goethe's Spinozistic "atheism" in a new aesthetic shell — that, namely, of Dante's *Commedia*. That Schlegel held the poem for especially meaningful can be gathered from the letter in

⁴³¹ KFS II, 347.

⁴³² On Schlegel's poem in relation to Dante, as well as the legacy of *terza rima* in German, see Hölter, *Der Dichter der Hölle und des Exils*, 204ff. For a broader consideration of the German tercet, see also Roger Bernheim, *Die Terzine in der deutschen Dichtung von Goethe bis Hofmannsthal* (Düsseldorf: Dissertation Verlag, 1954).

which he suggestively introduces the poem to Goethe, implying its wealth of meaning: “Um dem Eindrucke [des Gedichtes] auf keine Weise vorzugreifen, füge ich nichts über die Idee und Anlage des Ganzen, über den Styl der Ausführung und das gewählte Sylbenmaaß hinzu: hoffentlich ist das Gedicht nicht so stumm, daß es nicht Kenner über alles Nöthige durch sich selbst sollte verständigen können.”⁴³³ Too modest, perhaps, to state baldly that his poem revises an earlier “Prometheus,” Schlegel suggests rather that Goethe conclude its obvious potential for himself. The *Kenner* in Weimar, however, had a different response, complaining to Schiller that the *terza rima* “gar keine Ruhe hat und man wegen der fortschreitenden Räume nirgends schließen kann.”⁴³⁴ No matter how Goethe may have read the newly composed “Prometheus,” however, it embodied two of the dominant impulses that had begun to govern the imperative of Romantic poetics: the religious-philosophic radicality of Spinoza and the aesthetic universality of Dante.

The flattering, often obsequious manner in which Schelling and the Schlegels seemed to have conveyed this imperative of Romantic poetics to Goethe raised eyebrows in Weimar. The critic Karl Böttiger, for example, more or less implied that Goethe had allowed the Schlegels to blow smoke up his ass.⁴³⁵ Through their influence, he claimed, Goethe became “täglich herrischer und gewaltsamer in seinen Maßregeln.”⁴³⁶ Schiller was asked how Goethe “bei der Vergötterung [benimmt], die er mit Shakespeare, Dante

⁴³³ August Wilhelm und Friedrich Schlegel im Briefwechsel mit Schiller und Goethe, ed Josef Körner and Ernst Wieneke (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1926), 57f.

⁴³⁴ WA IV, 13, 71-72 (February 21, 1798).

⁴³⁵ See Wolfgang Herwig, ed., *Goethes Gespräche. Eine Sammlung zeitgenössischer Berichte aus seinem Umgang*, Bd. 1 (Zürich: Artemis Verlag, 1965), PP. Böttiger writes:

⁴³⁶ Herwig, *Goethes Gespräche*, Bd. 1, 845.

theilen muß.“⁴³⁷ And Wieland wanted to know from Goethe how one could let himself be praised in such disgusting fashion by the Schlegels.⁴³⁸ In this context, by the way, one might call to mind the caricatures of Johann Gottfried Schadow and August von Kotzebue, both of whom mocked the Goethe-veneration practiced by the Romantics.⁴³⁹ For his part, Goethe knew well how over-the-top the Romantics' *Schwärmerei* was, so in friendly fashion, he reminded A.W. Schlegel that “Was meine jüngern Freunde gutes von mir denken und sagen will ich wenigstens durch unaufhaltsames Fortschreiten verdienen [...]“⁴⁴⁰

The notion that Goethe should have become a new Dante must have seemed less than improbable to Weimar's resident classicist. In learned circles around 1800, excepting that of the Romantics in Jena, Dante still counted for little more than a barbarian poet of the Catholic middle ages. When Goethe traveled to Italy, and later wrote of his sojourn, only his silence over Giotto's frescoes in Assisi was more deafening than the little he had to say of Dante. *Terza rima* meant nothing to him when he received Schlegel's “Prometheus,” indeed, its only effect on him was that of aversion. And when several of Schelling's Dantean poems were published in the *Musen Almanach* of 1802, edited by A.W. Schlegel and Tieck, Goethe seemed to mock their debt to the Italian poet, writing to Schelling of the volume's contributors, “Die Theilnehmer befinden sich weder

⁴³⁷ Friedrich Schiller, *Schillers Werke. Nationalausgabe*, Bd. 30, ed. Lieselotte Blumenthal (Weimar: Böhlau, 1961), 417.

⁴³⁸ Herwig, *Goethes Gespräche*, Bd. 1, 714.

⁴³⁹ Excellent reproductions of the caricatures are to be found in Rainer Schmitz, ed., *Die ästhetische Prügeley: Streitschriften der antiromantischen Bewegung* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1992). See too Schmitz's commentary on the images, 423-455.

⁴⁴⁰ FA II, 4, 559 (June 18, 1798).

auf Erden, noch im Himmel, noch in der Hölle, sondern in einem interessanten Mittelzustand, welcher theils peinlich, theils erfreulich ist.”⁴⁴¹ This is to say nothing, by the way, of the fact that Goethe would label Dante’s poetry “widerwärtig” and “abscheulich” when making notes to himself on Italian literature.⁴⁴²

Goethe’s Romantic Dante

Despite all this, a glance at Goethe’s poetry complicates the bromide that his view of Dante was wholly negative; indeed, Dante seems to have exerted creative influence on him on at least a few significant occasions.⁴⁴³ In the poem “Ilmenau,” for example, an ode dedicated to Karl August, Goethe clearly adapted the geography of the *Commedia* to his poeticization of the landscape of Ilmenau. The lyrical subject, a wanderer almost ubiquitous in Goethe’s early verse, loses his path in the middle of a dark forest: “Im finstern Wald, bei’m Liebesblick der Sterne, / Wo ist mein Pfad, den sorglos ich verlor?” (ll. 29-30).⁴⁴⁴ Like Dante’s pilgrim, the archetypical wanderer lost in a wood, Goethe’s

⁴⁴¹ WA IV, 15, 294 (December 5, 1801).

⁴⁴² FA 17, 331.

⁴⁴³ Arnd Bohm summarizes the sometimes brilliant, though often disappointing scholarship on Goethe’s reception of Dante in detail. See Bohm, *Goethe’s Faust and European Epic* (Rochester: Camden House, 2007), 66-74. Bohm’s own readings of *Faust*, however, in which he sees an intertextual link between “Auerbachs Keller” and Dante’s forest of suicides, require interpretive acrobatics. In my view, the best, most insightful, and most creative treatments of Goethe and Dante number three: Paul Friedländer, *Rhythmen und Landschaften im zweiten Teil des Faust* (Weimar: Böhlau Nachfolger, 1953); Ulrich Gaier, ed., *Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: Faust. Der Tragödie zweiter Teil* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2004); and Willi Hirdt, “Goethe und Dante,” *Deutsches Dante-Jahrbuch* 68/69 (1993/94): 31-80. Hirdt offers a thoroughgoing account of Goethe/Dante scholarship (48-56), with the wise reminder: “Alle Forschung, die sich mit der Rezeption Dantes durch Goethe befaßt, verbleibt mit ihren Ergebnissen notwendig im Bereich des mehr oder minder Wahrscheinlichen” (41). Any enumeration of the seminal studies in the area would have to include Arturo Farinelli, *Goethe e Dante* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1900), Emil Sulger-Gebing, *Goethe und Dante* (Berlin: Duncker, 1907), and the introduction to Karl Vossler, *Die göttliche Komödie: Entwicklungsgeschichte und Erklärung* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1907). For yet another overview of the scholarship, see Hölter, *Der Dichter der Hölle und des Exils*, 258-272, who reserves strong criticism for the interpretation of Gaier.

⁴⁴⁴ FA I, 1, 263-268.

lyrical subject arrives at an earthly paradise, “ein neues Eden” (l. 10). And just as Dante’s pilgrim bathes in Lethe, forgetting his earthly troubles, so too does Goethe’s subject bathe in the edenic landscape and experience a dream so powerful that (ll. 21-28), when it has vanished, he awakens to “[e]in neues Leben” (l. 165), itself of course a distant echo of Dante’s *Vita Nuova*. These images would all be recycled in “Anmuthige Gegend” when Faust delivers his famous *terza rima* monolog, and they would likewise reverberate faintly in *Torquato Tasso*, also without explicit reference to the *Commedia*, when the eponymous character paints a similar portrait in a passionate discussion with the princess of Ferrara.⁴⁴⁵ And, as some scholars have remarked,⁴⁴⁶ Goethe’s famous sonnet “Mächtiges Überraschen” reiterates the Dantean refrain of new life in the final lines of its sestet: a river that issues from the mountains rushes toward a valley but is held back by a dike, thus forming a sea, “ein neues Leben” (l. 14).⁴⁴⁷ Composed in the years just following Schiller’s death, the sonnet would prove prescient, for Goethe himself would continually seek new life, be it in his engagement with medieval German and Persian, in his publication of scientific poetry and research, or in his attempts to forge new life from old in biographical projects like *Dichtung und Wahrheit* and the *Italienische Reise*.

The Dantean moments to have emerged in Goethe’s poetry can best be described as sporadic and, with the exception of *Faust*, which we will discuss below, superficial. The character of his interest in Dante would change, however, beginning in the 1820s.

⁴⁴⁵ FA I, 5, 748.

⁴⁴⁶ I first heard reference to a Dante allusion in “Mächtiges Überraschen” when David Wellbery discussed it in his keynote address at the Atkins Goethe Conference in Chicago, 2011. See also Andrew Piper, “Reading’s Refrain: From Bibliography to Topology,” *ELH* (Summer 2013), 392. See also Dieter Borchmeyer, *Schnellkurs Goethe* (Köln: Dumont, 2005), 148.

⁴⁴⁷ FA I, 2, 250.

First of all, there exists good documentary evidence of a growing admiration for the Italian poet that seems not to have been present much earlier in Goethe's life. In December 1824, for example, Eckermann recounts a momentous encounter with Goethe in which the latter contemplates a bust of Dante and marvels over the poet's imposing greatness:

Ich ging [...] zur Zeit des Lichtanzündens zu ihm. Er saß [...] vor einem großen Tisch, auf welchem gespeist worden und wo zwei Lichter brannten, die zugleich sein Gesicht und eine kolossale Büste beleuchteten, die vor ihm auf dem Tische stand und mit deren Betrachtung er sich beschäftigte. "Nun?" sagte Goethe [...] "wer ist das?" "Ein Poet, und zwar ein Italiener scheint es zu sein," sagte ich. "Es ist *Dante*," sagte Goethe.⁴⁴⁸

Goethe's subsequent words intrigued Eckermann, who writes that Goethe spoke of Dante "mit aller Ehrfurcht, wobei es mir merkwürdig war, daß ihm das Wort *Talent* nicht genügte, sondern daß er ihn eine *Natur* nannte, als womit er ein Umfassenderes, Ahnungsvolleres, tiefer und weiter um sich Blickendes ausdrücken zu wollen schien."⁴⁴⁹ Was Goethe, at age seventy-five, beginning to measure his legacy against that of the poet whom the Romantics long ago suggested he might rival?⁴⁵⁰

Without Karl Streckfuß's translation of the *Inferno* in 1824, it is likely that Goethe's late engagement with Dante never would have occurred. Streckfuß, no acquaintance of Goethe, nonetheless sent the poet in Weimar a copy of his translation, which Goethe took up late in the summer of 1826. Inspired by it, he dedicated to Streckfuß a short poem in which he refers to a discussion between Dante and Virgil (*Inferno* 11.94-111).

⁴⁴⁸ FA II, 12, 126.

⁴⁴⁹ FA II, 12, 128-129.

⁴⁵⁰ An additional spark for Goethe's interest in Dante around 1826 may have been Bernhard Rudolph Abeken's *Beiträge für das Studium der göttlichen Comödie Dante Alighieri's* (1826), mentioned by Goethe in *Über Kunst und Alterthum*. On this, see Hirdt, 64.

Von Gott dem Vater stammt Natur,
 Das allerliebste Frauenbild,
 Des Menschen Geist, ihr auf der Spur,
 Ein treuer Werber, fand sie mild.
 Sie liebten sich nicht unfruchtbar,
 Ein Kind entsprang von hohem Sinn;
 So ist uns allen offenbar:
 Naturphilosophie sei Gottes Enkelin.⁴⁵¹

Goethe alludes to a discussion in the *Inferno* concerning usury, a topic that lies far afield of the poem he dedicates to Streckfuß. There Dante asks how it is that usury offends God, to which Virgil responds by explaining that usury inverts the natural order of the universe: insofar as nature takes its course from God, and human art takes its course from nature, there exists an order that permits one to speak of human art (*vostr' arte*) as God's grandchild (*nepote*); but usury inverts that order in that it uses artificial means rather than the natural order to compound money.⁴⁵² Goethe's poem displays the same preoccupation with tracing a natural genealogy back to the divine, though in his case, the plots on the chart are somewhat different: the union of male *Geist* and female *Natur* bears God's grandchild, but the offspring is not human art as in Dante, but rather *Naturphilosophie*.⁴⁵³ The liberality, indeed audacity, of Goethe's interpretation of the passage is telling, for it shows precisely how mediated his understanding of Dante had been by his association of the *Commedia* with the Romantics, and above all, with Schelling.⁴⁵⁴ Indeed, he translates

⁴⁵¹ FA I, 2, 813.

⁴⁵² See Charles Singleton, *Inferno*, v.2 Commentary (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 179ff. Note in particular the explanation of Aquinas, cited by Singleton, 182.

⁴⁵³ Nisbet insults Schelling's poetry, singling out in particular his antiquated application of male-female sexuality in the self-consciously Goethean poem "Tier und Pflanze" as a "crass example of male chauvinism" (Nisbet 110); in actuality, Goethe's poem to Streckfuß, manifestly indebted to Schelling, displays a no less simplistic and traditional application of the male/female binary to the concepts of *Naturphilosophie*.

⁴⁵⁴ Sulger-Gebing identifies three phases of Goethe's Dante-reception: (1) 1799-1824, the period marked by Romantic influence; (2) 1826-1827, the period sparked by the translation of Streckfuß; and (3) 1828-1830,

Dante's Aristotelian-Aquinian vision of the cosmos into a fundamentally Schellingian formulation that accommodates both nature and spirit. Goethe was no doubt aware of Schelling's attempts to blend the *Naturphilosophie* around 1800 with the poetics of the *Commedia*; it just so happened that his gracious thank-you poem for Streckfuß, one of the first times that he truly engaged with Dante, was also the first statement to register this fact. Significantly, though, it was not the last, for in his review of the letters of Jacobi in the following year, for example, Goethe scolded the polemicist for having undervalued both nature and *Naturphilosophie*, writing "Da lobe ich mir unsern Dante, der uns doch erlaubt, um Gottes Enkelin zu werben."⁴⁵⁵ More strikingly yet, the identification of *Natur* as feminine will provide a clue to the enigmatic concept of the *Ewig-Weiblichen* when we come to the final lines of Goethe's *Faust*.

Between Goethe's first reading of Streckfuß's *Inferno* and his review of Jacobi's correspondence, he composed two poems that were even more symptomatic of his new esteem for both Dante and the Romantics: the *terza rima* monolog of Faust in "Anmuthige Gegend" and the *terza rima* poem "Im ernsten Beinhaus war's," or as it is better known, "Bei Betrachtung von Schillers Schädel." That he would even deign to write in Dante's verse shows a marked change since the time when he had received Schlegel's "Prometheus" and deemed its metrics too restless; indeed, in a discussion of Eduard von Schenk's *terza rima* poem on the occasion of Antonio Canova's death,

a final phase initiated by the translation of Prinz Johann von Sachsen (Sulger-Gebing, *Goethe und Dante*, 65). This heuristic seems largely accurate, but I would urge us not to regard it as anything more than a heuristic – for, as my reading shows, the Romantic mediation of Dante never seems wholly absent in Goethe's adaptations.

⁴⁵⁵ FA I, 22, 815.

Goethe remarked that “Terzinen müssen immer einen großen, reichen Stoff zur Unterlage haben, wenn sie gefallen sollen.”⁴⁵⁶ Certainly the two instances in which he employs Dante’s verse fit the bill: Faust’s recommencement and Goethe’s encounter with Schiller’s skull could hardly be considered anything but singularly grand poetic statements in a career marked at every stage by monumental striving. Yet what do they have to do, specifically, with the way that Goethe taps into Schelling’s synthesis of *Naturphilosophie* and the *Commedia* and, more broadly, with the Romantics’ theorization of a new mythology in the style of Dante?

The question itself presupposes a view that is not standard, though also not unheard of, in Goethe scholarship: namely, that the two poems share a fundament that girds their adaptation of the unmistakably Dantean verse. While scholars have been quick to point out that the poems represent the only instances in Goethe’s oeuvre in which he deploys Dante’s tercets,⁴⁵⁷ only Paul Friedländer seems to suggest the possibility that the two poems may have once been intended to serve as gems linked on a longer pendant.⁴⁵⁸

That the one appeared in *Faust* and the other in the second version of *Wilhelm Meisters*

⁴⁵⁶ Herwig, *Goethes Gespräche*, Bd. 3.1, 590.

⁴⁵⁷ Among the myriad scholarly treatments of the “Beinhaus” poem, I mention the following: Karl Viëtor: “Goethe’s Gedicht auf Schiller’s Schädel,” *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 59 (1944), 142-183; Fritz Mautner, “‘Ist Fortzusetzen’: Goethes Gedicht auf Schillers Schaedel,” *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 59 (1944), 1156-1172; Günther Müller, “Schillers Reliquien,” in Benno von Wiese, ed., *Die deutsche Lyrik. Form und Geschichte*, Bd. 1 (Düsseldorf: A. Bagel, 1962), 279-289; Wolfgang Martens, “Goethes Gedicht ‘Bei Betrachtung von Schillers Schädel,’ motivgeschichtlich gesehen,” *Jahrbuch der deutschen Schiller Gesellschaft* 12 (1968), 275-295; Alfred Behrmann, “Goethes Terzinengedicht ‘Im ernsten Beinhaus war’s,’” *Studia niemcoznawcze* 32 (2006), 263-69. Since the fate of Schiller’s bones has become an object of curiosity in its own right, other works have assumed a more strictly historicist or investigative approach. See e.g. Albrecht Schöne, *Schillers Schädel* (München: Beck, 2002); Thomas Sprecher, “Bruchstücke einer großen Mazeration. Zu den postmortalen Wanderjahren Goethes und Schillers,” in Hans-Jörg Knobloch, Helmut Koopmann eds., *Goethe. Neue Ansichten — Neue Einsichten*. (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007), 197-226.

⁴⁵⁸ Friedländer, 2ff.

Wanderjahre would seem to dispute this notion, but in actuality, the composition history might indicate otherwise: fixing firm dates of composition is not possible, but both poems seem to have been composed in a roughly six-month span between 1826, i.e., just after the reading of Streckfuß's Dante, and 1827.⁴⁵⁹ Whether Goethe had planned a *Terzinenzyklus*, as Friedländer suggests, or not, the fact remains that Goethe's *terza rima* poems, no matter how often they are treated as discrete works, lend themselves on the basis of both philological reconstruction and hermeneutic investigation to a reading that treats them as contrasting counterparts.

Aside from the fact that Goethe used *terza rima* only twice in a span of more than half a century, and both times in a window of six months, the possibility that the two poems constitute a dialogue is above all evident in their lyrical subjects' contrasting encounters with nature. Whereas Faust ultimately enjoys no more than a mediated experience of nature, attaining not the sun's light itself but rather its refraction in the spray of a waterfall, the lyrical subject of the "Beinhaus" poem arrives at a mystical experience of the heart of nature, expressed most clearly in the poem's closing words, which tell of the revelation of "Gott-Natur." It is just such a revelation of nature, however, that is denied to Faust; indeed, in the moment in which the rising sun blinds him, he once again runs up against the same epistemological threshold that had been exposed in part one of the drama when he failed to comprehend the *Erdegeist*, signaling to readers Faust's ultimate inability to know "was die Welt im innersten zusammenhält" (II.

⁴⁵⁹ Goethe's diary entry of January 11, 1827, seems to indicate a *terminus ad quem* for the *Faust* monolog. Eckermann would later explain the decision whereby Goethe chose to publish "Im ernsten Beinhaus war's" in 1829 in the *Wanderjahren*. See FA II, 12, 485.

382-383). That Faust settles for knowledge of nature that is mediated, symbolized by the rainbow in the drama's most indelible image, constitutes the definitive epistemological statement of the *Faust* project as a whole.

Yet to ascribe this stance unreservedly to Goethe would belie the fact that he himself postulated and wrote about the possibility of direct knowledge of nature, speaking indeed of a "geistigen Auges" with which the human subject could access the essence of nature.⁴⁶⁰ In point of fact, this more piercing mode of cognition characterizes precisely the way in which the lyrical subject of the "Beinhaus" poem comes to comprehend nature: he enters a dank charnel house and observes rows of skulls and bones, an initial act that thereby indicates the centrality of visual perception, but one from which there arises an intuition that is spiritual in character: "Doch mir Adepten war die Schrift geschrieben / Die heiligen Sinn nicht jedem offenbarte / Als ich in Mitten solcher starren Menge / Unschätzbar herrlich ein Gebild gewahrte" (ll. 15-18). The gnostic account of this experience, uncannily similar to that in Schelling's stanzas, ultimately transitions to unabashed mysticism: "Wie mich geheimnisvoll die Form entzückte! / Die gottgedachte Spur, die sich erhalten! / Ein Blick der Mich an jenes Meer entrückte / Das flutend strömt gesteigerte Gestalten" (ll. 22-25). Finally, a rhetorical question that serves as a summation of the experience provides readers with an open clue to its interpretation: "Was kann der Mensch im Leben mehr gewinnen / Als dass sich Gott-Natur ihm offenbare?" (ll. 31-32). With the inclusion of *Gott-Natur*, Goethe alludes quite clearly to

⁴⁶⁰ On this topic see the excellent article by Eckhart Förster, "Goethe and the 'Auge des Geistes,'" *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 75 (2001), 87-101.

the philosophy of Spinoza, whose mantra of *deus sive natura* (god or nature) was emblematic of the Dutch philosopher's monistic ontology, as well as Goethe's (e.g., *Gott und Welt*).

In treating the two *terza rima* poems as counterparts, the allusion to Spinoza assumes double significance, for it underscores the epistemic experience of the "Beinhaus" poem's subject as immediate, direct, and intuitive in contrast to the mediated, sensory mode that Faust experiences in gazing upon the waterfall. Indeed, these contrasting models of knowledge and perception, far from being merely incidentally related, represent the two epistemological poles that had attracted Goethe since having learned of Spinoza through discussions with Herder and Kant through discussions with Schiller. Faust's insight that life is to be had only "am farbigen Abglanz" points on the one hand to the Kantian theory that knowledge of *Dinge an sich* is only to be had as it is processed by the categories of the understanding,⁴⁶¹ while on the other hand the "Beinhaus" poem portrays the possibility of a direct intuition of nature and thus envisions an act of knowing that had been widely postulated around 1800 as an alternative to the apparently restrictive epistemology of Kant. Even Goethe, inspired by Kant's discussion in the third critique of the possibility of intuition,⁴⁶² had written his own fragmentary essay in 1820 on the possibility of "Anschauende Urteilskraft."⁴⁶³ If around the turn of

⁴⁶¹ Although he does not cite Kant, Schöne reads Faust's experience of the rainbow as formulation of a "Goetheschen Erkenntnistheorie." See FA I, 7.2, 410.

⁴⁶² Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, in *Kant's gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Preussische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Abt. I, Bd. 5 (Berlin: 1900), 401-410 (paragraphs 76-77).

⁴⁶³ On this topic see the account in Robert J. Richards, *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 488-91. For a

the eighteenth century the interest in the possibility of intellectual intuition had grown, this was largely due to the Spinoza reception that had occurred via the *Pantheismusstreit*, which proved just as crucial to epistemology as it did to metaphysics.⁴⁶⁴ In the *Ethics*, as we have seen, Spinoza formulated the possibility of three modes of knowledge: empirical, discursive, and intuitive, the last of which purportedly enabled not the perception of an empirical form, but rather of the essence inherent to that form. In this way, intuitive knowledge, or as Spinoza calls it *scientia intuitiva*, furnishes the immediate cognition of a whole without demanding that one perceive the whole by means of its parts. The doctrine had exerted a powerful impact on Goethe in the 1780s, and one that would remain vital to him well into his old age. Indeed, in the revelation of *Gott-Natur* in the “Beinhaus” poem, we find the doctrine poeticized as an epistemic alternative to the model proposed by Goethe’s other great poem of knowledge, the *Faust* monolog. Not to draw too poetic a point of it, but in actuality, the *terza rima* poems express in 1826 the competing philosophies of knowledge represented by Goethe’s dinner guests on the eve of the nineteenth century, Schiller and Schelling. Ironically, and perhaps rather morbidly, it is in the reflection on Schiller’s skull that Goethe seeks to articulate an experience that transcends the Kantian philosophy so deeply at the heart of their friendship.

What does it mean for Dante and the new mythology, now, if Goethe’s two *terza rima* poems stage experiences of the eighteenth century’s two dominant and competing

contemporary philosophical account, read Gunnar Hindrichs, “Goethe’s Notion of an Intuitive Power of Judgment,” *Goethe Yearbook* 18 (2011), 51-65.

⁴⁶⁴ The standard work on the topic is Frederick Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987).

theories of cognition? To begin, it means that Goethe's engagement with Dante in the 1820s is inseparable, no matter how distant in time, from the Romantic and especially from the Schellingian reception of Dante around 1800. The "Beinhaus" poem, in particular, owes a debt to Schelling, for it revisits the Spinozistically charged *Naturphilosophie* that had animated Goethe's friendship with Schelling between 1798 and 1800 while deploying images that abound in Schelling's own Dantean poems of those years, in particular his *terza rima* poem "Die letzten Worten des Pfarrers zu Drottning auf Seeland," which Goethe had once appeared to mock.⁴⁶⁵ In adopting Dante as a poet of *Naturphilosophie* in 1826, moreover, Goethe had finally answered the Romantics' campaign for a new Dante, stylizing himself as the one who would find a way to navigate the convergence of Spinoza's philosophy of nature with Dante's poetics. On the one hand, this endeavor to give Romantic expression to a philosophy of nature exemplified Goethe's attempts in the mid-1820s to reconcile the classical and the romantic, of which he once wrote that "Es ist Zeit, daß der leidenschaftliche Zwiespalt zwischen Classikern und Romantikern sich endlich versöhne."⁴⁶⁶ Simultaneously, however, these poems in *terza rima* were thoroughly and classically Goethean, dating all the way back to the intersection of science and poetry in "Die Metamorphose der Pflanzen" in 1798. What in any event the *terza rima* poems did *not* signify was a new mythology: just as the project of the great *Naturgedicht* in 1799 had been transformed into smaller cycles of theosophic poems in *Gott, Gemüt und Welt* and *Gott und Welt*, the

⁴⁶⁵ See above, pp. 183-184.

⁴⁶⁶ FA II, 10, 547 (September 27, 1827).

terza rima poems could at best be regarded as the microcosmic expressions of what was expected to be a more macrocosmic artwork of the same worldview.

Faust: Eine Commedia

This dissertation has reached a crossroads of sorts: the Romantic obsession with Dante's mythology, born in the philological and theoretical work of the Schlegel brothers, attained only the most ephemeral expression in the efflorescence of Early German Romanticism: the fragmentary novel of Novalis, the abandoned poetic ventures of Schelling, and belatedly but relatedly, the minor *terza rima* poems of Goethe. These shards of a Romantic mythology, executed in the style of the *Commedia*, litter the path to what we must now regard as the era's fullest expression of a new, Dantean mythology: Goethe's *Faust II*. This statement will no doubt sound as reckless as it is comically grand, particularly given the contemporary wariness of anything resembling grand narratives; and while this prejudice has not yet impeded our path, there is admittedly something suspicious about pegging Goethe's *Faust* as the apotheosis of Romantic striving — indeed, would this not be tantamount to recycling the same Romantic *Schwärmerei* that inspired both laughter and disgust when Goethe collaborated with figures in Jena at the turn of the eighteenth century?

I begin therefore by dispensing with the claims that the present argument does *not* stake: the assertion that Goethe's *Faust II* represents a rescuscitation of the Romantics' project of a new mythology, adopting Dante no less as one of its integral models, does *not* signify (a) that Goethe understood *Faust II* as *the* mythology so eagerly anticipated by the Jena Romantics; nor does it signify (b) that *Faust II* represents Goethe's attempt to

measure himself against Dante, vying for a loftier perch in the pantheon of European poetry. What it does claim, however, is the following: (1) that *Faust II*, in addition to a myriad of other objects, engages the primary strands of German idealism that had preoccupied Romantic poets in Jena and that lay at the core of the project of a new mythology; (2) that like the Romantic poets in Jena, who had postulated mythology as a mode of art that could accommodate their intuitions of the universe, Goethe deployed a poetics of myth in *Faust II* as a means of providing for a symbolic representation of the universe; and finally, this argument claims (3) that Goethe consciously grounds his cosmic drama's mythic poetics of *Naturphilosophie* by reimagining the narrative of Dante's *Commedia*, appealing to the poet "der uns doch erlaubt, um Gottes Enkelin zu werben."

On his seventy-eighth birthday, Goethe received a surprise visitor: King Ludwig I of Bavaria had come, after a hunt with Karl August, to extend "dem Heros der deutschen Dichter" his wishes for a happy birthday.⁴⁶⁷ The unexpected visit aroused agitation in the Haus am Frauenplan, where other well wishers like August and Ottilie von Goethe, Chancellor Müller, Countess Julie von Egloffstein, Frau von Eichendorff, and some dozen English visitors now prepared for the king to call on the poet. Goethe himself, however, was unfazed; in fact, private meetings from a few hours later with the jurist Eduard Gans and the scholar Gustav Parthey reveal that Goethe was preoccupied not with royal visits, but rather with the reception of Hegel's philosophy in Berlin.

⁴⁶⁷ FA II, 10, 515.

In recent months, in fact, Hegel and Karl Varnhagen von Ense had inquired whether Goethe would not like to assist them in the publication of the *Jahrbücher für wissenschaftliche Kritik* (which, to a very limited extent, Goethe did).⁴⁶⁸ So on a day when Goethe entertained royalty, it was not wholly surprising that by early afternoon the morning's frivolity had been forgotten and Goethe was inquiring after philosophy in Berlin. Gans reports that, in respect to the efficacy of philosophy as a discipline, Goethe deemed it crucial that philosophy take it upon itself "auch auf die Sachen und Gegenstände, welche sie behandle, Rücksicht zu nehmen, so dürfte sie umso wirksamer werden, je mehr sie freilich auch mit den Empirikern zu tun bekomme."⁴⁶⁹ The concern for objectivity implicit in Goethe's statement recalls the "steifen Realism" that he once thought softened by Schiller's Kantianism; indeed, the conviction that philosophy ought to treat objects is consonant with both Goethe's abiding Spinozism and his longstanding engagement with *Naturphilosophie*. In Parthey's account of his conversation with Goethe, we witness a similar report in which Goethe denigrates the subjectivist strand of transcendental idealism and privileges its objectivist successors:

Kant ist der erste gewesen, der ein ordentliches Fundament gelegt. Auf diesem Grunde hat man denn in verschiedenen Richtungen weiter gebaut. Schelling hat das Objekt, die unendliche Breite der Natur, vorangestellt; Fichte faßte vorzugsweise das Subjekt auf, daher stammt sein Ich und Nicht-Ich, womit man in spekulativer Hinsicht nicht viel anfangen kann [...] Wo Objekt und Subjekt sich berühren, da ist Leben. Wenn Hegel mit seiner Identitätsphilosophie sich mitten zwischen Objekt und Subjekt hineinstellt, und diesen Platz behauptet, so wollen wir ihn loben.⁴⁷⁰

The dismissal of Fichte's principle of subjective self-consciousness and approbation of Schelling and Hegel for their approach to nature and objectivity reverberate this

⁴⁶⁸ See Goethe's letter of March 15, 1827, to Hegel and Varnhagen von Ense in FA II, 10, 453.

⁴⁶⁹ FA II, 10, 516.

⁴⁷⁰ FA II, 10, 521.

fundamentally Goethean stance; and indeed, the particular praise of *Identitätsphilosophie* — even if it does not acknowledge Schelling’s role in its articulation — evinces the same basic position that Goethe had taken three decades earlier when he wrote to Schiller that he wished to see a mediation between idealism and realism.⁴⁷¹ The same sentiments emerge again in a letter to Sulpiz Boisserée in the following spring when Goethe evaluates Schelling as a philosopher: “Ich habe mich immer nah an Schelling gehalten, nachdem ich das Mögliche von Kritizismus, Idealismus und Intimismus genutzt hatte. Schelling wendete sich gegen die Natur, ehrte sie und suchte ihr Recht zu behaupten, dies war mir genug [...]”⁴⁷²

Statements like these furnish a unique retrospective of German idealism from the perspective of a civil administrator who had overseen many of the organs that enabled idealism to flourish, as well as from the perspective of a poet and natural scientist who had often wrestled with the implications of idealist philosophy for the practice of art and science. More to the point, however, these statements in 1827 and 1828 about the philosophies of Kant, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel illuminate the philosophical purview from which Goethe composed the bulk of *Faust II*. In his critical commentary, Albrecht Schöne makes certain bird’s-eye-view observations that would seem to confirm that Goethe’s last poetic project engages only secondarily with a particular instantiation of human subjectivity, for it takes as its primary object the world itself. As Schöne notes, a full thirty percent of the text in part one had been occupied by Faust’s own words,

⁴⁷¹ FA II, 4, 477 (January 6, 1798).

⁴⁷² FA II, 10, 594 (March 2, 1828).

whereas this figure dwindles to thirteen percent in part two; conversely, collective speech accounts for a mere seven percent of the text in part one, whereas it expands to a full twenty percent by part two.⁴⁷³ As Goethe explained to Eckermann, “Der erste Teil ist fast ganz subjektiv; es ist alles aus einem befangeneren, leidenschaftlicheren Individuum hervorgegangen [...]. Im zweiten Teile aber ist fast gar nichts Subjektives, es erscheint hier eine höhere, breitere, hellere, leidenschaftslosere Welt.”⁴⁷⁴

In concurring with the general scholarly consensus that Goethe more or less abandons the perspective of the eponymous hero in the drama’s second part, I would suggest that this shift arises from Goethe’s more intent interest in the epistemic dilemmas facing idealist philosophy; in its mythic poetics, I wish to show, *Faust II* comes to approximate the Romantics’ own views on the relation of knowledge, nature, and art. This much seems intuitive, for example, in a cursory glance at the “Klassische Walpurgisnacht,” a mesmerizing panorama of ancient Greek sea deities that, more than any other composition of Goethe, resembles a mythology in its own right.⁴⁷⁵ If we consider F. Schlegel’s definition of mythology as a *Symbolsprache*, a series of “allegorische Bilder und Darstellungen, die, abgesondert betrachtet, als eine Art von Naturphilosophie anzusehen sind,”⁴⁷⁶ the classical Walpurgis night certainly seems to fit the bill: one need only think of the natural-philosophical debates that assume dramatic

⁴⁷³ FA I, 7.2, 388.

⁴⁷⁴ FA II, 12, 440-441 (February 17, 1831).

⁴⁷⁵ T.J. Reed, without seeming to tie the classical Walpurgis night to Goethe’s plans for a *Naturgedicht* around 1799-1800, nonetheless links it with Lucretius’s *De rerum natura* and “Greek myths and monsters and early theories of the earth’s genesis.” See Reed, *The Classical Centre: Goethe and Weimar, 1775-1832* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), 238.

⁴⁷⁶ KFSA XI, 14. As Ernst Behler writes, Schlegel came to understand ancient mythology as an anticipation of modern physics, a notion in keeping with the *Ältestes Systemprogramm*. See KFSA 2, XCI.

form there, including for example, the Neptunist/Vulcanist argument that erupts between Thales and Anaxagoras, as well as the accompanying geological, astronomical, and nautical activity. These representations correspond, too, to Schelling's dictum — cited as the epigraph to this chapter — that imagined the new mythology as an offshoot of *Naturphilosophie*.⁴⁷⁷ Granting this aesthetics of myth, which we will explore further, we need to ask what it has to do with the basic problematic driving German idealism: how does a human subject arrive at knowledge of extra-subjective nature?

Questions of this variety emerge at various points in the drama's first part: when Faust longingly observes the moon from his study, for example, and when he wishes to comprehend the *Erdegeist*, Goethe has already begun to mark *Faust* as a drama of knowledge. Yet the representations of this dynamic assume more narrowly philosophic connotations in the second part of *Faust*, with the indelible image of the rainbow, as I have indicated above, marking the commencement of action in the second part in a notably Kantian vein. If Goethe's poetic account of Kant's epistemology strikes an appropriately noble and tragic tone, then in the engagement with the philosophy of Fichte, comedy proves to be the more suitable mode. It is in the beginning of act two, when Mephistopheles enters Faust's old study, that Goethe stages a discussion that underscores the inane consequences of Fichte's first principle of an absolute ego. Dressed

⁴⁷⁷ On this note, we might point out that Goethe himself, in addition to seeking a reconciliation between classicism and Romanticism in the last decades of his life, had likewise expressed interest in theories of mythology spawned by the Romantic movement itself. Between 1815 and 1817, for example, he weighed in on the heated debate incited by Friedrich Creuzer's attention to the ancient Orient in *Symbolik und Mythologie der alten Völker* (1810-1812), concluding that while he found Creuzer's scholarship fascinating, his taste ultimately inclined toward Ionia and Homer. See his letter to Creuzer, October 1, 1817.

in Faust's old furs, Mephistopheles is called upon by the Baccalaureus, a smugly mature reincarnation of the naïve Schüler whom Mephistopheles had bamboozled in part one. An exchange with Mephistopheles quickly reveals that the Baccalaureus, for all his new learning, remains in essence a dolt. Yet Goethe seems not to revisit the character for merely dramatic effect — indeed, the introduction of the Baccalaureus is an otherwise awkward interruption in the narrative of Faust's recovery from his disastrous attempt to seize Helena. The purpose of the scene resides rather in the comedic culmination of the Baccalaureus's harangue: a ridiculous parody of Fichte's philosophy:

Dies ist der Jugend edelster Beruf!
 Die Welt sie war nicht eh ich sie erschuf;
 Die Sonne führt' ich aus dem Meer herauf;
 Mit mir begann der Mond des Wechsels Lauf;
 Da schmückte sich der Tag auf meinen Wegen,
 Die Erde grünte, blühte mir entgegen.
 Auf meinen Wink, in jener ersten Nacht,
 Entfaltete sich aller Sterne Pracht.
 Wer, ausser mir, entband euch aller Schranken
 Philisterhaft einklemmender Gedanken?
 Ich aber frey, wie mir's im Geiste spricht,
 Verfolge froh mein innerliches Licht,
 Und wandle rasch, im eigensten Entzücken,
 Das Helle vor mir, Finsterniß im Rücken. (ll. 6793-6806)

The Baccalaureus, who prior to this eruption of Fichteanism had revealed himself to be a cocksure twit, now spews a philosophical creed that goes so far as to sanction his massive ego. Professing the “Helle vor mir, Finsterniß im Rücken,” he forms a direct contrast to Faust, who in “Anmutige Gegend” resigned himself to a different outlook: “So bleibe denn die Sonne mir im Rücken” (l. 4715).⁴⁷⁸ Kant's philosophy of knowing, limited

⁴⁷⁸ On the Faust/Baccalaureus contrast, see Schöne's commentary, FA I, 7.2, 502f. In the reference to an inner light and outer shadow, Gaier sees a possible reference to Novalis (Gaier 88).

though it may have been, did not incite the self-assuredness, indeed the arrogance, that Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* had inspired in the youth, with whom Goethe associates it.⁴⁷⁹

What casts into relief Fichte's philosophy of the absolute ego and its attendant devaluation of nature is the mythic drama immediately subsequent to it, that of the so-called "Klassische Walpurgsnacht," in which both Homunculus and Faust seem to escape confinement in their respectively solipsistic realms. Created in a vial by Wagner, yet bereft of a body, Homunculus stages *Geist* itself, a paradoxically visual representation of the immateriality of human existence. As Riemer reported, "Goethe habe [nach Eckermann] damit die reine Entelechie darstellen wollen [...], den Geist des Menschen, wie er vor aller Erfahrung ins Leben tritt; denn der Geist des Menschen komme schon höchst begabt an und wir lernten keineswegs alles, wir brächten schon mit."⁴⁸⁰ Having been created in the moments just after the Baccalaureus's profession of transcendental idealism, this monad of pure spirit who simply wishes to "entstehen" (l. 7831) represents the absolute absurdity of the doctrine of absolute ego, which as the Romantics had come to realize, effectively precluded the reality of nature. Indeed, the entirety of Homunculus's prominent role in the "Klassische Walpurgisnacht," in which he seeks out the means by which to materialize in human form, stages the farce of a Fichtean ego detached from natural reality. But by the end of the festive evening, Homunculus has learned the means of *Entstehen* and pursues his plan: he smashes his jar of light into the

⁴⁷⁹ On Goethe's stance toward German youth, particularly with reference to Fichte's *Reden an die deutsche Nation*, see Dorothea Hölscher-Lohmeyer's comments in MA 18.1, 807.

⁴⁸⁰ Heinrich Düntzer, *Goethes Faust. Erster und zweiter Teil. Zum erstenmal vollständig erläutert* (Leipzig: Dyk, 1850-51), 525.

shell-throne of Galatea, the embodiment of feminine nature, and so conjoins *Geist* and *Natur* in a climax that rouses the communal voice of the cosmos and completes the mythic drama: “Heil dem Meere! Heil den Wogen, / Von dem heiligen Feuer umzogen! / Heil dem Wasser! Heil dem Feuer! / Heil dem seltnen Abenteuer! / Heil den mildgewogenen Lüften! / Heil geheimnisreichen Grüften! / Hochgefeiert seid allhier, / Element ihr alle vier!” (ll. 8480-8487).

While Homunculus undertakes his quest for actualization, Faust embarks on his own search for transcendent beauty as embodied in the person of Helena, the illusory vision of whom had cast him into a coma at the end of act one. And like Homunculus, who uses the opportunities afforded by the absolute beauty of the mythic realm to transcend the boundaries of Fichtean absurdity inscribed in his identity, Faust too discovers in the realm of myth the experiential possibilities that the tenets of subjective idealism would otherwise seem to deny. We mark this in his arrival at the lower Peneios, a scene that in various ways alludes to but inverts the epistemic limitations imposed by the idealist philosophical framework that underpins “Anmutige Gegend.” Whereas there Ariel had led a spirit chorus in tending to Faust, gently preparing him for the dawn, the river god, Peneios, now leads a group of nymphs who suggest to Faust that he slumber to the sound of their susurrations (ll. 7263ff.). As in “Anmutige Gegend,” however, Faust wakes (“Ich wache ja!” [l. 7271]) and finds himself at a river that, like Lethe in “Anmutige Gegend,” blurs the line between dreams and memories (l. 7275). The scene at the lower Peneios, in which Faust’s senses are titillated, recalls the intense sensory stimulation of “Anmutige Gegend.” Whereas there, however, he had settled for the sun’s

reflection in the water's mirror, the reflection of the object of his gaze in the river now provides a double vision: "Gesunde, junge Frauenglieder, / Vom feuchten Spiegel doppelt wieder / Ergötzttem Auge zugebracht!" (ll. 7283-7285). The efficacy of his vision, underscored again just five lines later, together with the imagery recycled from the earlier scene, signals that the sojourn in the mythic realm has enabled a mode of cognition that Faust was previously denied. Whereas nature had proven too overwhelming in "Anmutige Gegend," its intuition in the world of myth now accommodates Faust's powers of cognition and provides for an encounter with the beautiful — indeed, he is watching the very conception of Helena in the rendezvous between Leda and the swan.

Regarding the distinct quests of Homunculus and Faust, Cyrus Hamlin points out that the reader ought not overlook that the very creation of Homunculus occurs nearly in tandem with the comatose Faust's dream of Helena's conception.⁴⁸¹ In fact, distinct though their quests might be, we can press Hamlin's comparison further and assert that Homunculus's and Fausts's activities in the classical Walpurgis night together form a narrative pair that suggests the efficacy of mythic art in transcending the epistemic boundaries of idealist philosophy: that is, the sphere of myth enables each of them to transform dreams (quite literally, in the case of the sleeping Faust) into realities. The manner in which Goethe represents this efficacy, I would point out, is underwritten by an engagement with the Romantics' reading of Dante. Inasmuch as Homunculus's orgasmic eruption on Galatea's shell performs the cosmos-quaking marriage of male *Geist* and

⁴⁸¹ Hamlin, ed., *Faust*, trans. Walter Arndt (New York: Norton, 1976), 332.

female *Natur*, it enacts precisely that union Goethe had found sanctioned in his Schellingian reading of Dante's *Commedia*, of which he had already written in his poem of gratitude to Streckfuß. Indeed, it renews Schelling's gendered interpretation of the alternate aspects of the absolute,⁴⁸² mapping the femininity of *Natur* onto the celestial goddess, Galatea, and in so doing, articulating an expression of Dante's Eternal Feminine as mediated by Schelling.⁴⁸³ In Faust's vision of Leda and the swan, which signals the birth of Helena, readers are of course to understand once again that it is the Eternal Feminine of nature herself that undergirds the objectivization of subjective, male spirit. This reworking of Faust's mediated vision in "Anmutige Gegend," the monolog of which had been composed in *terza rima*, even reverberates the tones of that scene in the clang of its verses, for Goethe now writes the account of Faust's vision of the Eternal Feminine in a modified *terza rima*. Riffing on the traditional rhyme scheme of ABA / BCB / CDC / DED, etc., Faust's tercets at the lower Peneios now take larger steps but ultimately preserve the earlier concatenation in a steady march forward: AAB / CCB / DDE / FFE / GGH / IIH, etc. This acceleration of the earlier tercets' gait, now complemented by a plethora of participles of motion (e.g., *schwebend*, *brüstend*, *segelnd*, *schwellend*, *wellend*), both corresponds to the current of the river upon which Faust looks as well as his progression toward an experiential knowledge of beauty.

⁴⁸² See above, note 453.

⁴⁸³ On the topic of the eternal feminine, particularly as it is manifest in the classical Walpurgis night, see the perceptive article by Cyrus Hamlin, "Tracking the Eternal-Feminine in Goethe's *Faust II*," in *Interpreting Goethe's Faust Today*, ed. Jane K. Brown, Meredith Lee, and Thomas P. Saine (Columbia: Camden House, 1994), 142-155.

It is worth noting at this juncture that no small number of commentators have remarked on the Dantean resonances in the second part of *Faust*.⁴⁸⁴ Ulrich Gaier, in particular, has formulated what probably amounts to the most comprehensive, searching account of the parallels, allusions, and citations of the *Commedia* in *Faust II*.⁴⁸⁵ He reads the text as an inversion of Dante's path to salvation: at the start of the drama's second part, Faust awakes atop an alpine meadow in an earthly paradise, makes his way down the mountain and through the courtly affairs of earth in act one, wends his way through a modern-day inferno of war in act four before ultimately being assumed into paradise in the final scenes of act five. This sequence of events leads Gaier to draw the following conclusion:

Goethe hat also im *Faust* einen Gegen-Text zur *Divina Commedia* geschrieben. Nicht nur geht Faust Dantes Weg zurück, sondern, nimmt man die beiden Figuren als Repräsentanten der Menschheit, hat auch die Vergeistigung des Dante'schen Wegs in eine Einteufelung [...] verkehrt, trotz und gerade wegen der ständigen Versuche Fausts, Gott zu werden – *Divina Tragoedia*.⁴⁸⁶

Gaier's reading is no doubt compelling: the scale of Goethe's text, not to mention the mythic aura it has acquired, almost begs readers to draw comparisons between it and the *Commedia*, given that both occupy a sacrosanct domain in the canon of European literature. Yet Gaier, like many scholars before him, is at such pains to establish the

⁴⁸⁴ All of the major critical editions cite at least some of Goethe's allusions to Dante, while missing many others. Cyrus Hamlin is one of the few to acknowledge the special significance of Dante to *Faust* without however theorizing wherein the significance lay. See the numerous references in his commentary, found in Cyrus Hamlin, ed., *Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: Faust: A Tragedy*, trans. Walter Arndt (New York: Norton, 1998). I single out Gaier in particular because in addition to having identified many allusions to Dante, including more obscure ones, he has articulated a broader vision of how Goethe adapted the *Commedia*.

⁴⁸⁵ Gaier, 305-307.

⁴⁸⁶ Gaier, 307.

connections between texts that he loses sight of the specific history of Goethe's reception of Dante.⁴⁸⁷

Unearthed, polished, and interpreted by his Romantic contemporaries, the *Commedia* did not preoccupy Goethe first and foremost as a drama of salvation, the comedic antecedent to his tale of Faust's ostensibly tragic downfall; on the contrary, Dante's poem intrigued Goethe just as it had the Romantics — as an artwork whose integration of theology, geology, astronomy, etc. had seemed to provide for an exemplary aesthetic articulation of *Naturphilosophie*. That is to say, the *Commedia* captivated him for its powers of execution and representation, not for its narrative of redemption.⁴⁸⁸ Goethe had indicated as much in his review of Jacobi, as well as in his poem to Streckfuß. Inasmuch as his *terza rima* poems adopt the formal structure of the *Commedia* in sorting out contemporary theories of knowledge, they too embody this dynamic. It is from precisely this perspective that the adaptations of the *Commedia* in *Faust II*, composed in the same period, are to be read. To put a finer point on it: *Faust* is a drama that from its very beginning to its very end stages the question of how the apparently insuperable limits of subjective human experience can give way to an experiential unity

⁴⁸⁷ The temptation to postulate such overarching interpretations does so at the risk of distorting the text itself. Gaier claims, for example, that Faust's journey is an inversion of Dante's (Hell, Earth, Paradise), yet Faust's begins not quite in Paradise, but rather in an earthly paradise; moreover, his "quest" ends not in Hell, but like Dante's, in Paradise itself. Only in the most general of ways, therefore, and certainly not in the way Gaier traces it, should *Faust II* be regarded as an inversion of the *Commedia*. This observation entails that we be more critical of the notion that *Faust II* constitutes a "Gegen-Text" to the *Commedia*.

⁴⁸⁸ In important respects, this is the thesis of Hirdt, who writes that "Es handelt sich [...] um das ästhetische Vermögen, den dargestellten Gegenstand in seiner Plastizität und Farbigkeit in unverminderter Lebendigkeit zur Anschauung zu bringen" (69). Concurring with Hirdt's focus on Goethe's admiration for the plasticity of Dante's representations, I would extend the reach of his thesis and argue that Goethe's admiration for these representations arises precisely from the aesthetic imperative of *Veranschaulichung* that lay at the heart of the *Symbolik/Allegorie* of the new mythology.

with the objective realm of nature. It is along precisely this plane — and not that of *Vergeistigung* or *Einteufelung*, as Gaier suggests — that Goethe's peculiarly Romantic/Schellingian adaptations of the *Commedia* ought to be read in *Faust*.

Hardly an inversion of the pilgrim's path in the *Commedia*, the second part of *Faust* offers readers two profoundly Dantean bookends, "Anmutige Gegend" and "Bergschluchten," that together suggest instead a directionally progressive parallel in the quests of Dante-pilgrim and Faust.⁴⁸⁹ As we saw above, Faust's famous *terza rima* monologue announces, above all, the boundary between subject and object, between human *Geist* and divine *Natur*. His inability to glimpse the sun's light exposes the threshold of human knowledge, signifying the human subject's inability to experience nature in its cosmic, panpsychic divinity; to adopt a different lexicon, we might say that Faust's intellectual faculties do not suffice to arrive at experiential knowledge of or mystical union with God. The shift in lexica is not wholly inappropriate, either, for Goethe appeals to a remarkably analogous moment in the *Commedia* in order to depict Faust's limitations in seeking mystical union. "Anmutige Gegend," a scene in which Faust awakens in an Edenic landscape, is bathed in Lethe's waters, and glimpses the sun's light in reflection, forms a direct parallel to Dante's earthly paradise, the Edenic garden in which the pilgrim is bathed by Matelda in the waters of Lethe. But it is what happens there in the *Commedia* that proves vital for Goethe's adaptation of it. Dante-pilgrim witnesses a remarkable procession, introduced by melodious song, that

⁴⁸⁹ In "Anmutige Gegend," Gaier cites allusions to the first canto of *Inferno* that seem unlikely. See Gaier, 24-25.

culminates in the appearance of a griffin-drawn chariot, which Dante-poet describes as superior even to Apollo's chariot.⁴⁹⁰ Leaving aside the biblical significance of the procession for the *Commedia* (and indeed for Dante's own stunning arrogation of poetic authority), we note that the pilgrim's vision of a procession resembles almost exactly the celestial object of Faust's sight in the alpine meadow: just as Dante's pilgrim witnesses a procession compared to Apollo's chariot, reveling in particular in its musical glory, so too does Faust witness the approach of Apollo's chariot, the entirety of which is introduced not by means of its visual appearance, but rather by its sonic effects (ll. 4666-4678). It is the central figure of each procession, however, that reveals the proximity of the scenes, for each bears a divine nature that transcends the cognitive reaches of Faust and Dante-pilgrim. In the case of the former, as we know, Faust fails to perceive the light of the sun without means of mediation, the form of which is supplied by the waterfall. Yet in the case of Dante's pilgrim, too, the divine figure in the procession eludes complete comprehensibility. Thus the griffin, an allegory of Christ in his two natures, appears to the pilgrim alternately as an eagle and a lion as he glimpses its image — not directly, but via the reflection in Beatrice's eyes.⁴⁹¹ Consider Dante-poet's account: "A thousand desires, hotter than flame, drew my eyes to those shining eyes, which still

⁴⁹⁰ *Purgatorio* 29.117-120.

⁴⁹¹ Gaier suggests that the adaptation of Dante in "Anmutige Gegend" is based not on the reflection of the Griffin in Beatrice's eyes, but rather on the reflection of the sun in her eyes in *Paradiso* I, 43-53. This too seems to be at the root of Goethe's depiction of Faust's vision of the sun, though it lacks the same theological force as the Griffin, a circumstance that seems to me to be at the heart of Faust's inability to gaze at the sun. It likewise occurs no longer in Dante's *Paradiso terrestre*, but rather in paradise itself. See Gaier, 24.

remained fixed upon the griffin. Just like the sun in the mirror, not otherwise did the double beast radiate within them, now with one nature, now with another.”⁴⁹²

Goethe drew yet again on the *Commedia* for the composition of the final scene of *Faust II* to portray the transcendent experience of Gott-Natur. As he explained to Eckermann, the scene was “sehr schwer zu machen”; in fact, Goethe says he could have lost himself in vagueness “wenn ich nicht meinen poetischen Intentionen, durch die scharf umrissenen christlich-kirchlichen Figuren und Vorstellungen, eine wohltätig beschränkende Form und Festigkeit gegeben hätte.”⁴⁹³ Dante, of course, had employed an entire rhetoric of ineffability, referring repeatedly throughout the final cantos of *Paradiso* to the difficulty of both remembering the experience of the Trinity and subsequently articulating it in poetry. Goethe, on the other hand, was able to avail himself of Dante’s already canonical imagery of the heavens. Having populated his celestial realm with a host of choirs and patristic figures, as well as angels, he alludes most explicitly to Dante’s paradise in the appearance of the very final figures, beginning with Doctor Marianus. The Marian doctor, who receives Faust and prays to Mary, the Queen of heaven, for the grace to ascend to loftier heights for a glimpse of God, forms a clear parallel to Bernard of Clairveaux, who in the final three cantos of *Paradiso* directs the pilgrim’s gaze to Mary, interprets for him the structure of the terraced rose upon which the blessed sit, and prays to Mary on his behalf.⁴⁹⁴ The governance of the celestial sphere in “Bergschluchten,”

⁴⁹² *Purgatorio* 31.118-126. The limits of Dante’s own vision, especially as regards the light of heaven, will be discussed extensively again in *Paradiso* 30, which details the pure light of the Empyrean.

⁴⁹³ MA 19, 456 (June 6, 1831).

⁴⁹⁴ *Paradiso* 33.1-39.

where Mary reigns as queen of Heaven, mirrors that of the *Commedia*'s final cantos, with two important exceptions: first, whereas Mary is perched atop the white rose and surrounded by various figures in ecclesial history, including theologians and evangelists, we find her in *Faust* surrounded by a group of penitential women: the Magna Peccatrix, the Mulier Samaritana, Maria Egyptiaca, and of course Gretchen herself, described as *una Poenitentum*. The second difference, which rests less on the structure of the sphere than on its depiction, stems from the fact that whereas Dante does in fact offer a record of his vision of the Trinity — three self-reflecting circles that become comprehensible only in a flash of light⁴⁹⁵ — Goethe stops short of doing so. In fact, Mary, the Mater Gloriosa, proclaims: “Komm! hebe dich zu höhern Sphären, / Wenn er dich ahnet folgt er nach” (ll. 12094-12095), and Marianus echoes her, saying “Blicket auf zum Retterblick / Alle reuig zarten, / Euch zu seligem Geschick / Dankend umzuarten” (ll. 12096-12099).

Yet what follows is not a vision from the higher spheres, but rather the well known lines of Goethe's Chorus Mysticus:

Alles Vergängliche
Ist nur ein Gleichniß;
Das Unzulängliche
Hier wird's Ereigniß;
Das Unbeschreibliche
Hier ist es gethan;
Das Ewig-Weibliche
Zieht uns hinan (ll. 12104-12111).

What I wish to underscore in citing the famous, oft-quoted last lines of *Faust* is and is not what the commentators seem so (justifiably) eager to emphasize, namely that the “Hier”

⁴⁹⁵ *Paradiso* 33.139ff.

to which Goethe refers is *Faust* itself, i.e., the book in the reader's hands. But what I wish to underscore first is what Goethe has *not* said, or more precisely, what the final lines of the drama have supplanted: they have replaced, namely, any record of the beatific vision to which Faust and Marianus presumably ascend at the behest of the Mater Gloriosa. This lacuna constitutes neither a failure on the part of Goethe, nor does it indicate authorial capitulation before the task of representing the divine. On the contrary, the inclusion of the Chorus Mysticus redefines the terms of salvation: if for Dante the experience of the divine had been transcendent, it is notably immanent for Goethe. Mystical union occurs not via one's being raptured into the heavens, but rather via the intuition of the *Gott-Natur* in the work of art. On this note, we will recall the intellectual-philosophical aim of the Romantics' new mythology, evidenced above all by F. Schlegel and Schelling: the project of a new mythology strives to provide for an intuition of a Spinozistically conceived universe in the work of art. The degree to which Goethe consciously reanimates this particular historical project of Romanticism in writing *Faust II* is impossible to determine, yet the placement of and assertions in the final lines signify nothing less than the claim of having accomplished the selfsame task.

Yet what of the *Ewig-Weiblichen*, that enigmatic and quasi-sacred hieroglyph before which Emil Staiger could only genuflect in silence?⁴⁹⁶ We know from the myriad commentaries that with this puzzling term Goethe alludes to the centrality of feminine mediation in the Romantic poetic tradition — Dante's Beatrice, Petrarch's Laura, now Faust's Gretchen and the host of penitential women surrounding the Mater Gloriosa. We

⁴⁹⁶ Staiger, *Goethe* (Zürich: Atlantis, 1959), Bd. 3, 466.

would do well, however, to recall Goethe's verses to Streckfuß: "Von Gott dem Vater stammt Natur, / Das allerliebste Frauenbild, / Des Menschen Geist, ihr auf der Spur, / Ein treuer Werber, fand sie mild." In concluding *Faust II* with a paean to the salvific force of the Eternal Feminine, Goethe reasserts for one final time the theology of his *Naturphilosophie*: the human subject attains to "salvation" only via nature, which Goethe repeatedly codes as feminine. In their essence, the final lines of the drama express conceptually that which had been sung by the community at the end of the classical Walpurgis night: a celebration of the manifold of nature. Just as there the goddess Galatea in a festival of Eros had enabled the materialization of Homunculus, Goethe now states categorically that it is in Mother Nature, so to speak, that human subjectivity finds its highest realization.

Gaier writes of Faust's *Einteufelung* vis-à-vis Dante's *Vergeistigung*, a structural inversion — as I have mentioned — that I think is not at play in the intertextual relationship of *Faust* and the *Commedia*. Yet this is not to say that the drama lacks an ethical dimension, only to say rather that, as the ethical dimension of *Faust* engages the *Commedia*, it issues from the same *naturphilosophische* interpretation that had led Goethe to commend Dante in contrast to Jacobi. This much seems clear from Goethe's adaptations of the *Inferno*, particularly those that draw on the circle of the violent.⁴⁹⁷ In the *Commedia*, that circle consists of three rings: in the outermost ring there reside those who were violent against their neighbors, in the middle ring those who were violent against themselves, and finally, in the innermost ring, those who were violent against

⁴⁹⁷ Goethe even tried his hand at translating the landscape of this circle. See WA II, 42.2, 71-72.

God: specifically, sodomites and usurers. It seems to be the last of these groupings that stimulated Goethe's imagination. It was a discussion on the nature of usury, for example, that had prompted him to praise Dante's commitment to nature.

The notion that Dante's representation of sodomites should have contributed to Goethe's *Faust* is perhaps unexpected, but textual parallels make it worth inquiring after this particular connection. In this respect, we will recall the penultimate scene of the drama, "Grablegung," when Mephisto and his devils attempt to ward off the heavenly angels who have come to claim Faust's soul. In a dramatically puzzling moment, Mephisto's concentration is broken because, rather than ward off the angels, he lusts after the young Cherubs (ll. 11767ff.). The bizarre scene has a notably Dantean hue, however, for amidst the strife between Mephisto and the heavenly hosts, the angels descend and ascend, strewing roses that turn to fire and burn the devils (ll. 11699ff.). This imagery of the flowers as well as the motion of the angels mirrors Dante's depiction of the Empyrean, where flame-faced angels pollinate the celestial white rose of paradise by descending from above and distributing petals of love.⁴⁹⁸ Inasmuch as the roses catch fire, however, their representation breaks with the imagery of *Paradiso* and alludes instead to the violent circle of *Inferno* and the punishment by which the sodomites there are afflicted: for figures like Brunetto Latini and his companions are rained upon by burning flames, a punishment intended to recall that suffered by Sodom and Gomorrah. It is with respect to this background that Mephisto's homoerotic interest in the angels, as well as the pain that he endures on their account, is to be understood. Goethe's final

⁴⁹⁸ *Paradiso* 31.1-18.

depiction of Mephisto, while not a moral condemnation of same-sex love, nonetheless employs it as a trope to advance the general injunction of the drama against that which contravenes the laws of nature. The same lesson ought to be deduced, of course, from Faust's monumental engineering project in act five, that namely whereby he seeks to reclaim land from the sea. The land-reclamation project, with its kinship to the endeavors of medieval Flemish engineering, likewise has its roots in the circle of Dante's sodomites, for it is in that ring where Dante explains that dikes had been constructed in the manner of those between Wissant and Bruges to channel the flow of Hell's rivers.⁴⁹⁹ Insamuch as Faust's project constitutes an overweening attempt to surmount and subjugate nature, it functions yet again as a creative manipulation of Dante's circle of the violent against God. We ought not forget that paired with the sodomites who populated Dante's ring of the violent against God are likewise the usurers, whose growth of capital via capital itself signified to Dante (as mediated by a tradition of medieval ethics) a sin against nature. There can be no doubt that insofar as this ethics of natural law impels Dante's philosophy of money, it likewise bears upon the not insignificantly devilish plot of Mephisto to create paper money, the value of which he claims can later be dredged from the earth.

The adaptation of Dante's *Commedia* in *Faust II* manipulates on the one hand the epistemological stakes of German idealism, and in a related vein, suggests an ethics predicated upon an absolute that is identical with nature. In these respects, Goethe's engagement with Dante constitutes a radicalization of that which had been *im Werden*

⁴⁹⁹ *Inferno* 15.4-12.

since the days of Jena Romanticism. We ought not mistake *Faust II* for Goethe's conscious intervention in a project whose contours had been sketched by Friedrich Schlegel in the *Rede über die Mythologie*, and yet it nonetheless falls squarely within this tradition in that its immensely creative repurposing of the *Commedia* clearly relies on Schelling's own hypothesis in 1799 that Dante suited the project of writing a great *Naturgedicht*. What Goethe realized, a work so monstrous that he ensured the timing of its posthumous publication, was received with considerable puzzlement and scorn. Indeed, it was a work that belonged to a generation that had by then already passed.

5

Death and New Life for the Romantic Dante

On March 9, 1927, at 8 p.m. in Munich, hundreds of listeners — including the likes of Josef Bernhart, Hans Brandenburg, Karl Muth, Ernst Penzoldt, Rudolf Alexander Schröder, Karl Vossler, Willy Wiegand, and Hans Carossa — packed the Auditorium Maximum of the LMU in order to hear the *poeta doctus* Rudolf Borchardt deliver a lecture entitled “Schöpferische Restauration.” Carossa would write that it was more sermon than lecture, opining afterward that “große Forderungen und wilde Anklagen in die Allgemeinheit hineinzuschreien, das frommt nicht mehr.”⁵⁰⁰ The *Bayerische Staatszeitung* described it as a “Mahnruf,”⁵⁰¹ which was probably an understatement, for in his speech Borchardt had excoriated what he observed as indicators of modernization in a ruthless jeremiad that railed against the “Bestialisierung” of the German nation.⁵⁰² Sickened that the by-product of capitalist urbanization had been “eine Abfallsmenschheit und ein Menschheitsabfall,” that capitalism had transformed the German *Volk* to a *Masse*, Borchardt called for a program of *schöpferische Restauration* that would demand that “wir niemandem die Zugehörigkeit zur Nation konzederen, der nicht [...] entschlossen wäre, dadurch daß er den Geist der deutschen Geschichte und die Geschichte des

⁵⁰⁰ Hans Carossa, *Tagebücher, 1925-1935*, ed. Eva Kampmann-Carossa (Frankfurt: Insel, 1993), 35.

⁵⁰¹ Quoted in *Rudolf Borchardt: Über den Dichter und das Dichterische, Drei Reden von 1920-1923*, ed. Gerhard Neumann, Gerhard Schuster, Edith Zehm (München: Rudolf-Borchardt Gesellschaft, 1995), 228.

⁵⁰² Rudolf Borchardt, *Schöpferische Restauration*, in *Gesammelte Werke in Einzelbänden, Reden*, ed. Marie Luise Borchardt (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett, 1959), 243.

deutschen Geistes in sich wieder erlebt und wieder erbaut, bewahrt, selber zu einem lebenden Stücke deutscher Geschichte und deutschen Geistes, deutscher Art wird.”⁵⁰³

In proposing such a bold plan, which would renew German national identity through identification with the *Geist* of what he saw as the harmony of antiquity and the Christian middle ages, Borchardt looked to the Romantic era for inspiration. For in addition to describing his plan for *schöpferische Restauration* as “das größte Programm [...], das seit den Anfängen der Romantik in Deutschland je an eine Fahnenstange gebunden worden ist,” Borchardt states that it involves rehabilitating German Romantic culture itself: “Wir ergreifen die deutsche nationale Tradition dort wo ihre zerfaserten Enden halten [...] und setzen das Werk der Romantik schöpferisch an den Stellen fort, an denen sie [unsere Zeit] es unter die Erde tauchend den Wissenschaften überließ [...]”⁵⁰⁴ Indeed, throughout the speech, Borchardt alludes to his own activity as *Wortführer* as analogous to that ambassadorial role assumed by A.W. Schlegel in his seminal lectures on Romantic art in Berlin and Vienna.

Given Borchardt’s reinvigoration of what he deemed a Romantic cultural program, it should hardly be surprising that one of the constitutive endeavors in his campaign for *schöpferische Restauration* happened to be foremost among the Romantic plans for the creation of a new mythology: namely, a modern appropriation of Dante’s *Commedia*. Between 1908 and 1928, Borchardt delivered some half-dozen public lectures on Dante to audiences in Bremen, Munich, Florence, and Rome. Indeed, he spent these

⁵⁰³ Ibid., 249.

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid., 250.

decades devoted to a radical translation of the *Commedia*, the publication of which in 1930 constituted a landmark of sorts in Weimar-era arts and letters. The proposition by Borchardt that the Italian poet ought to contribute to the reshaping of German modernity suggests, however, that the Romantic engagement with Dante never truly came to fruition. Borchardt says as much himself, when in his essay *Dante und deutscher Dante*, he calls attention to the aborted Dante translations of the Romantics:

Die Gestalt Dantes steht, zwar den wenigsten unter uns fühlbar oder kenntlich, seit längst im Hintergrunde unserer Zeit [...]. Die Romantiker entdeckten [Dante]: Ehe Wilhelm Schlegel sich durch die Eroberung Shakespeares für Deutschland zu einer nur ihm in der Weltgeschichte gehörigen Größe erheben sollte, streckte er die Hände nach diesem Raube aus; andere um ihn und mit ihm wandten wenn nicht die gleiche Übermacht so doch den gleichen Ehrgeiz einer gleichmäßig hochstehenden Zeit auf den gleichen Gegenstand. Diese Versuche sind bekanntlich gescheitert; keine dieser Terzinenreihen ist heut lesbar, auch nur für einen durchschnittlichen Anspruch akzeptierbar; die Gründe für dies Versagen mußten damals noch ganz undeutlich bleiben [...].⁵⁰⁵

While Borchardt's remarks refer solely to the unfinished translations of Romantics like A.W. Schlegel, his numerous lectures, essays, and translations suggest more than the failure of Romanticism to produce an adequate translation of the *Commedia*; they indirectly signal the failure of German Romanticism to have cemented Dante's legacy for contemporary German culture. Had the Romantics succeeded, Borchardt's endeavors seem to suggest, there would presumably be no need for the form of *schöpferischer Restauration* that takes its cue from Romanticism in the first place.

One could linger over such pointed interpretations, but in keeping with the focus of this dissertation, I wish merely to pose a question that arises from Borchardt's reflections: what happened to the Romantics' intensive recuperation and manipulation of

⁵⁰⁵ Rudolf Borchardt, *Gesammelte Werke in Einzelbänden, Prosa II*, 354-355.

the *Commedia*, such that by the publication of Goethe's *Faust II* in 1832, it seems to have lost all momentum? The obvious answer is that as the Age of Goethe gave way to the Age of Metternich, the aestheticizing propensity of Romantic literature itself fell out of favor. While this much is true, and quite readily accounts for the disappearance of myth as a legitimate mechanism for social transformation, it does not explain why a poet from whom the Romantics gained so much critical leverage, whom they deemed to be the father of modern European poetry, would once again recede into the "Schatten der Vorwelt" from which A.W. Schlegel had claimed to rescue him. On certain counts, of course, the reasons are clear: Novalis, whose affinity to Dante had occurred to A.W. Schlegel, Heinrich Heine, and Karl Immermann, died in 1801, just as his poetic career had begun to find traction. Goethe, octogenarian though he lived to be, only truly donned the Dantean mantle laid before him by the Romantics as he worked toward completion of the *Faust* project. Schelling's attention to Dante, mediated by the Schlegels, hinged on his burgeoning interest in poetry and aesthetics, which, as we know, waned as his relationships to the Schlegels deteriorated. And A.W. Schlegel, crucial though he was to laying the philological foundation of the mythological project, never truly featured as a theorist who envisioned its realization nor as a poet who worked toward that realization. But what of Friedrich Schlegel, who, after all, had been the first and most vociferous herald of Dante, linking him with Spinoza and the new mythology in the canonical manifesto of this most ambitious of Romantic projects?

To be clear, Dante never entirely disappears from the critical focus of Friedrich Schlegel, who continued to fill his notebooks with observations on the *Commedia* while

featuring Dante prominently in a variety of systematic works, like the *Wissenschaft der europäischen Literatur* (1804), *Über deutsche Sprache und Literatur* (1807), and the *Geschichte der alten und der neuen Literatur* (1812). But with the dissolution of the Jena circle in 1801, and his move to Paris in 1802, Friedrich Schlegel gradually relinquished his view of the *Commedia* as a programmatic document for the imminent unfolding of European literature, and instead began to assess the *Commedia* — as we might suspect — along the lines of his new allegiance to Christianity and, more specifically, Roman Catholicism. As the editors of the *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe* have pointed out, while Friedrich and Dorothea Schlegel converted to Catholicism only in 1808, their turn toward the Roman church is evident already in the immediate aftermath of Jena Romanticism.⁵⁰⁶ Not surprisingly, this shift in worldview entailed a reassessment of art in general, with the result that previous projects, like that of the new Bible, which belonged more broadly under the rubric of the new mythology, now fell by the wayside.⁵⁰⁷

Indeed, this much becomes clear when we examine the new criteria by which Schlegel extols the *Commedia*. While he still lavishes praise upon the poem, calling it for example the “vollendetste Meisterwerk” of Italian literature,⁵⁰⁸ he also contrasts it with and indeed exalts it over anything produced in antiquity by virtue of its theological value:

Es enthält die reinste Theologie und Philosophie in dem lebendigen, glänzenden Gewande der Dichtkunst, das römische Gedicht *De rerum natura* ist eigentlich bloße Philosophie. Eine solche Darstellung der gesamten Natur und Gottheit, verknüpft und

⁵⁰⁶ See KFSa VIII, CXVII-CXXX.

⁵⁰⁷ The point has been discussed more recently in an article by Ethel Matala de Mazza, “‘Alle Protestanten sind zu betrachten als zukünftige Katholiken.’ Schlegels Konversionen,” in *Athenäum: Jahrbuch der Friedrich Schlegel-Gesellschaft*, ed. Ulrich Breuer and Nikolaus Wegmann (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2008), 101-121.

⁵⁰⁸ KFSa XI, 149.

modifiziert durch den katholischen Geist und Glauben, ausgeführt von einem denkenden, durch das gründlichste Studium aller Wissenschaften so literarisch gebildeten und das reichste Leben so schön und kräftig genährten poetischen Genie wäre im Geist der Griechen nicht möglich gewesen, weil dort Philosophie und Poesie zu sehr getrennt waren.⁵⁰⁹

Clearly Schlegel's assessment of the poem is still colored by those associations of early Romantic theory; indeed, the comparison to Lucretius's *De rerum natura* is one that, as we know, Schelling had already contemplated, likewise deciding in Dante's favor. Yet the paean to the poem's theology, as well as its Catholic spirit and faith, suggest a departure from its most common previous associations for Schlegel with categories like myth, vision, and prophecy. Indeed, even Schlegel's praise of the poem's poetry — which, he says, sets it apart from Lucretius's *Naturgedicht* — suggests an ornamental concept of poetry that ultimately displaces a criterion of aesthetic substance in favor of theological merit. Whereas during the height of Romantic theory the poem's excellence was regarded as fundamentally representational, irrespective of the truth of the worldview that underlay it, by 1804 Schlegel writes in a quite different spirit that “Dantes große Dichtung ist nicht nachgeschöpft aus leichten anmutigen Märchen, willkürlichen phantastischen Erfindungen; sie entfernt sich daher auch mehr von dem Romantischen. Nein, die Wahrheit selbst scheint den Stoff dazu hergegeben zu haben [...]”⁵¹⁰

Schlegel's earlier association of the *Commedia* with the theory of Romantic mythology persists in shaping his later interpretation of it, yet his gradual conversion to Catholicism begins to provide a different framework according to which he understands the relationship of myth and poetry. Whereas Greek mythology, he writes, had

⁵⁰⁹ KFSa XI, 149.

⁵¹⁰ KFSa XI, 149.

interwoven its religious tenets with legendary historical events, Christianity “[gründet] sich auf wahre Geschichte [...], nicht auf alte Sagen.”⁵¹¹ For this reason, he insists, Christian writers do not content themselves with legendary narratives that would in any way muddle the authentically historical dimension of their religion; instead, they generally maintain the strictest of divisions between allegorical and historical senses and thereby preserve the integrity of both. Under this rubric, “das Allegorische Mythologische hat bey Dante [...] entschieden die Oberhand [...]”⁵¹² Indeed, as he writes elsewhere: “Allegorie als Wesen der christlichen Dichtkunst. Ubi? Beym Dante.”⁵¹³ Dante, in other words, remains a preeminent figure in the poetics of myth, but Schlegel’s concept of myth has lost all the force that Romantic theory had once supplied it and becomes instead a reinstantiation of the Enlightenment notion of myth as allegorical fable. The interpretation of Dante as a primarily allegorizing poet undermines the readings of A.W. Schlegel and Schelling, who had maintained the equal validity of historical and allegorical senses of the *Commedia*, and makes Friedrich Schlegel the object of Hegel’s criticism in his lectures on aesthetics.⁵¹⁴

In addition to his new exegesis of the *Commedia*, which reasserts the arguments of Dante’s earliest commentators and discounts the purely literary dimension of his poem, Schlegel begins during the years of his conversion to count Dante among a Christian theological tradition that looks conspicuously different from his earlier canons

⁵¹¹ KFSA XV, 51.

⁵¹² Ibid.

⁵¹³ Ibid., 235.

⁵¹⁴ See note 163 above.

of Romantic poetry. This much is evident in Schlegel's increasingly Catholicizing contextualization of Dante: whereas in the Jena period Dante was frequently or prominently compared to figures like Goethe, Spinoza, Calderón, and Böhme, beginning around 1804 the comparisons change rather drastically, with Schlegel associating Dante most closely with scholastic theologians and poets. Bonaventure, for example, assumes such importance that Schlegel muses over whether it is not in his writing that poetry and philosophy find their fullest union, proclaiming of his relation to Dante, "Man sollte den Dante nie ohne ihn [Bonaventura] lesen."⁵¹⁵ Dante finds his place in Schlegel's new canon of the "großen Riesengeister des Mittelalters und der katholischen Litteratur," which, in addition to Bonaventure, includes the likes of Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas.⁵¹⁶ Whereas Schlegel had once envisioned a new mythology that would manifest the union of idealism and realism, by 1805, his notion of a modern counterpart to ancient mythology has become completely allegorical in character, an inkling of which he believes to have discovered in scholasticism: "Die scholastische Philosophie ist [...] ein Keim der noch gar nicht ausgeführt ist, und so sehr zu billigen. [...] Dadurch würde die christliche zur vollständigen Allegorie entwickelt sein, die so reich wäre, als die alte Mythologie. — Anlage dazu im Dante und Calderone."⁵¹⁷

Schlegel's transition to a more distinctly medieval, Catholic conception of Dante and the *Commedia*, while diverging from the readings of the Jena Romantics and even

⁵¹⁵ KFSA XIX, 133.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., 143.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., 72. As Senkel writes, "Friedrich Schlegel [temperiert] seine enthusiastische religions-poetische Programmatik zum interesselosen Wohlgefallen an der Frage, von welchem Scholastiker Dante hauptsächlich abhängt." See Senkel, 63.

from those of Hegel, resonated on the other hand with more traditionally orthodox Catholic writers, like for example the late Romantic poet, Joseph von Eichendorff (1788-1857), an admirer of the conservative impulses of Heidelberg Romanticism. Eichendorff's first major foray into the German literary scene was *Ahnung und Gegenwart* (1812), a highly reflexive novel that charts the story of a pious and good-natured young noble, Friedrich, as he makes unexpected friendships and undertakes a series of adventures. Like Novalis's *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, Eichendorff's novel may be read as a Romantic *Bildungsroman* intended to refashion the mold first established by Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*; and like Novalis's unfinished novel, *Ahnung und Gegenwart* reveals an assortment of veritably Dantean allusions and features. Yet much in the way of the novel, including the appropriation of the *Commedia*, can be read as a critique of the *Frühromantik* in general and of Novalis in particular. Indeed, Thomas A. Riley has put forth an elaborate interpretation of *Ahnung und Gegenwart* as an allegorical novel that emerged from Eichendorff's engagement with Dante, arguing that the allegory stages fundamental conflicts between Catholicism and Protestantism, as well as between true and false Romanticism.⁵¹⁸ It may well be that Riley's reading, which pegs the novel a "poetisch-theologische Reisebeschreibung" à la Dante's *Commedia* is overly ambitious;⁵¹⁹ but his having located an affinity between Eichendorff's novel and Dante's poem is too rich not to contemplate within the space of this epilogue. We will content

⁵¹⁸ Thomas Riley, "Die Allegorie in *Ahnung und Gegenwart*," in *Aurora: Jahrbuch der Eichendorff-Gesellschaft* 44 (1984), 23-31.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

ourselves, therefore, with a glance at the novel's pivotal twelfth chapter, in which Eichendorff lodges a withering critique of German Romanticism.

The action unfolds at an unnamed royal court, where Friedrich has arrived after searching for the object of his romantic interest, Rosa. Invited to a private residence for an evening of tableaux, he recognizes Rosa among the models — indeed, she is the central figure in the tableau, dressed in celestial white and holding a cross upward to the heavens. At her feet, there are gathered a host of shapes who bow before her heavenly glory, including a “lebenslustige” Greek figure who has been turned to stone “vor dem Glanze des Christentums.”⁵²⁰ The antipode implied by the tableau's distinction between a pure Christianity and a carnal heathenism extends to the models themselves: Countess Romana, who portrays the Greek figure, tries brazenly to seduce Friedrich while Rosa, on the other hand, remains ever out of his reach. But the differences between these female characters emerge in other respects as well, with Rosa, for example, assuming clear associations with a northern, Germanic *Volks poesie* and Romana, on the other hand, embodying the dangers inherent in a *Kunst poesie* inflected by the south.⁵²¹

The contours of this distinction, as well as their significance for Eichendorff's reception of Romanticism, are sharpened as the evening unfolds, for Romana delivers a virtuosic poetic recitation in which she recounts the tale of a magical princess who lures men to her castle. When afterward a spectator suggests that Romana's princess might be

⁵²⁰ Eichendorff, *Ahnung und Gegenwart*, in *Werke*, ed. Wolfgang Frühwald (Frankfurt: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1985), II, 191.

⁵²¹ For a lengthier discussion of the tableau, as well as its significance in the relation of Rosa and Romana, see Hans J. Hahn, “From Image to Vision, from Artist to Prophet: Observations on the Perception of Art and Religion in the Work of Eichendorff,” in *Text into Image: Image into Text*, ed. Jeffrey Morrison and Florian Krobb (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), 159-168.

an allegory of the Virgin Mary, the pious Friedrich has had his fill of the “künstlerischen Abendandachten” and launches into a tirade in which he harangues attendees, declaring

Sind wir doch kaum des Vernünftels in der Religion los und fangen dagegen schon wieder an, ihre festen Glaubenssätze, Wunder und Wahrheiten zu verpoetisieren und zu verflüchtigen. [...] Wer aber hochmütig und schlau diese Geheimnisse und einfältigen Wahrheiten als beliebigen Dichtungsstoff zu überschauen glaubt, wer die Religion, die nicht dem Glauben, dem Verstande oder der Poesie allein, sondern allen dreien, dem ganzen Menschen, angehört, bloß mit der Phantasie in ihren einzelnen Schönheiten willkürlich zusammenrafft, der wird ebenso gern an den griechischen Olymp glauben, als an das Christentum, und eins mit den andern verwechseln und versetzen, bis der ganze Himmel furchtbar öde und leer wird.⁵²²

The chapter ends when Romana — despite Friedrich’s outburst, which effectively ruins the frivolity of the evening — engages him in conversation and inspires such jealousy in Rosa that she decides to leave the salon.

The chapter that includes these events has become a locus of sorts for the interpretation of *Ahnung und Gegenwart*, for in the depiction of Romana, as well as those of several other effete poets, including the so-called “Schmachtende,” the “Dithyrambist,” and the “heilige Thyrusschwinger,” scholars have been able to establish the guiding principles behind Eichendorff’s critique of contemporary German Romanticism. Indeed, Dirk von Petersdorff has described with great insight how Eichendorff uses parodies of poets Otto Heinrich Graf von Loeben and Gerhard Friedrich Abraham Strauß to criticize the manner in which early Heidelberg Romanticism (ca. 1807-1808) had readily assumed the habit of consecrating art in the sort of aesthetic Catholicism evangelized by Novalis.⁵²³ In no uncertain terms, Eichendorff disapproved

⁵²² Eichendorff, *Werke*, I, 203.

⁵²³ Dirk von Petersdorff, “Korrektur der Autonomie-Ästhetik, Appell an das ‘Leben’: Zur Transformation frühromantischer Konzepte bei Joseph von Eichendorff,” in *200 Jahre Heidelberger Romantik*, ed. Friedrich Strack (Berlin: Springer, 2008), 53-65.

profoundly of Romanticism's reduction of Catholicism to a system of art. As he would write many years later, "die Romantik wollte das ganze Leben religiös heiligen. [...] Aber die Romantik [...] wollte es [...] mehr oder minder durch eine unklare symbolische Umdetung des Katholizismus," which, as Eichendorff goes on to write, could occur within the life of the Church alone.⁵²⁴ Concomitant with this disapproval of the confusion of art and religion is the broader and ultimately more damning judgment that Romanticism, in its unwavering faith in the salvific power of art, had lost touch with "life." As Petersdorff writes of this whole chapter of the novel, "Eichendorff geht es um die kritische Darstellung eines Kunstsystems, in dem ästhetische Reize erzeugt und rezipiert werden, die außerhalb der Welt der Kunst keine Bedeutung und keine Folgen haben, nicht mentalitätsprägend wirken, keinen normativen Anspruch mehr erheben."⁵²⁵

These criticisms basic to Eichendorff's view of the Romantic movement, I wish to show briefly, are quite dexterously advanced by *Ahnung und Gegenwart's* intertextual engagement with the *Commedia*, important signs of which we see at the outset of the chapter in question. There we find Countess Romana, whose enigmatic poem at the salon will cause such a stir, already engaged in a questionable act of narration. Playing host to Rosa, she regales her trusting guest with a tale from her adolescence. It is the story of her having fallen in love, and it begins with a trope familiar to us from the beginning of Dante's *Inferno*:

[U]nser Schloß lag sehr hoch zwischen einsamen Wäldern, ein schöner Garten war daneben, unten ging ein Strom vorüber. Alle Morgen, wenn ich in den Garten kam, hörte ich draußen in den Bergen ein Waldhorn blasen, bald nahe, bald weit, dazwischen sah ich

⁵²⁴ Eichendorff, *Werke*, VI, 115.

⁵²⁵ Petersdorff, 55.

oft einen Reiter plötzlich fern zwischen den Bäumen erscheinen und schnell wieder verschwinden. Gott! mit welchen Augen schaute ich da in die Wälder und den blauen, weiten Himmel hinaus! Aber ich durfte, solange meine Mutter lebte, niemals allein aus dem Garten. Ein einziges Mal, an einem prächtigen Abende, da der Jäger draußen wieder blies, wagte ich es und schlich unbemerkt in den Wald hinaus. Ich ging nun zum ersten Male allein durch die dunkelgrünen Gänge, zwischen Felsen und über eingeschlossene Wiesen voll bunter Blumen, alte, seltsame Geschichten, die mir die Amme oft erzählte, fielen mir dabei ein; viele Vögel sangen ringsumher, das Waldhorn rief immerfort, noch niemals hatte ich so große Lust empfunden. *Doch wie ich im Beschauen so versunken ging und staunte, hatt ich den rechten Weg verloren, auch wurde es schon dunkel. Ich irrte und rief, doch niemand gab mir Antwort. Die Nacht bedeckte indes Wälder und Berge, die nun wie dunkle Riesen auf mich sahen, nur die Bäume rührten sich so schaurig, sonst war es still im großen Walde.* – Ist das nicht recht romantisch?« unterbrach sich hier die Gräfin selbst, laut auflachend.⁵²⁶

Romana's narrative, with its description of her lost in a dark and fearsome wood, constitutes a clear reimagining of the spectral landscape in which Dante's pilgrim finds himself in *Inferno* 1; yet her interjection, directed to Rosa — "Ist das nicht recht romantisch?" — induces a moment of narrative dissonance inasmuch as the Dantean story she recounts is by no means romantic, but in actuality quite terrifying.

Why Romana, in narrating the experience, would so clearly misinterpret its character manifests itself in a subsequent remark to Rosa, whose response to the story is, quite appropriately, that of suspenseful terror:

Aber mir scheint gar, du glaubst mir wirklich alles das Zeug da, sagte hier die Gräfin, da sie Rosa über der Erzählung ihren ganzen Putz vergessen und mit großen Augen zuhören sah. – Und ist es denn nicht wahr? fragte Rosa. – So, so, erwiderte die Gräfin, es ist eigentlich mein Lebenslauf in der Knospe. Willst du weiter hören, mein Püppchen?⁵²⁷

Presumably, the novel's readers are not as credulous as Romana's puppet, Rosa, and see her tale for what Eichendorff intends it to be — namely, a fiction. Indeed, this would account in large measure for Romana's insouciant narration of what Rosa takes to have been a dreadful experience. But what does the appropriation of Dante's *selva oscura* have

⁵²⁶ Eichendorff, *Werke*, II, 182-183. The emphasis is my own.

⁵²⁷ Ibid., 183.

to do with Romana's artifice? Inasmuch as Romana, whose very name suggests her affinity to the *Romantik*, serves as a quasi allegorical representation of the dark side of the Romantic,⁵²⁸ her misreading of the *Commedia*'s central agon, the pilgrim's spiritual crisis, paints the Dante-mania of the early Romantics as fundamentally misguided. For in using fiction to appropriate Dante's crisis and then characterizing it as "recht romantisch," Roman(a)tik commits what Eichendorff regards as the quintessential error of Romanticism: she reduces the ethical core of human existence to an object of art whose sole virtue lies in the aesthetic pleasure it affords. It is precisely this impulse toward aestheticization and away from "life" that Eichendorff locates and condemns in the Romantic reception of the *Commedia*.⁵²⁹

Needless to say, Friedrich Schlegel's early approach to Dante, which involved appropriating the *Commedia* for the sake of a new mythology, would certainly not have won Eichendorff's approval. Only with his shift toward evaluating poetry from the vantage point of his Catholicism could Schlegel have earned the respect of so thoroughly pious a critic of Romanticism as Eichendorff, who ultimately came to extol the once-upon-a-time author of Romantic blasphemies like *Lucinde*:

Schlegel [...] erkannte, daß das Werk der Heiligung alles Lebens [...] in der alten Kirche still fortwirke und daß die Romantik nur dann wahr sei und ihre Mission erfüllen könne, wenn sie von der Kirche ihre Weihe und Berechtigung empfangen. Durch Fr. Schlegel daher, den eigentlichen Begründer der Romantik, ist diese in der Tat eine religiöse Macht geworden, gleichsam das Gefühl und poetische Gewissen des Katholizismus. Jene göttliche Gewalt der Kirche aber in allen Wissenschaften und Lebensbeziehungen zu enthüllen und zum Bewußtsein einer nach allen Richtungen hin zerfahrenen Zeit zu bringen, wurde von jetzt ab die Aufgabe seines Lebens.⁵³⁰

⁵²⁸ An observation by no means my own. See for example Catriona MacLeod, *Embodying Ambiguity: Androgyny and Aesthetics from Winckelmann to Keller* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 154.

⁵²⁹ On Romana's proclivity to fiction, and her "association with the imaginary realm," see MacLeod, 153ff.

⁵³⁰ Eichendorff, *Werke*, VI, 116.

When viewed from the perspective of their respective receptions of Dante, however, there is rich irony in Eichendorff's almost sanctimonious avowal of Schlegel. For, from that vantage point, Schlegel ultimately one-ups the orthodoxy of the Grand Inquisitor of the Romantic school by distancing himself from Dante on theological grounds.

To be clear, Schlegel neither repudiates Dante in his later writings, nor does he go so far as to dismiss him as heretical, but his comments on the *Commedia* eventually signal the poem's insufficiencies as the representative work of Catholic poetry. This is in evidence nowhere more explicitly than in Schlegel's 1812 lectures on the *Geschichte der alten und neuen Literatur*, where he states that the *Commedia* does not blend poetry and Christianity "in vollkommner Harmonie"; that it is only occasionally, but certainly not in its entirety, a theological *Lehrgedicht*; and, finally, that there reigns everywhere in the poem a "verbreitete gibellinische Härte."⁵³¹ Indeed, Schlegel dwells at some length over the last and most severe of these flaws, which clearly troubles him as someone who both admires the poem yet pledges allegiance to the Roman Church. He sums up his ambivalence in the following way: "Immer aber bleibt die gibellinische Härte, welche sich im Dante gewiß in einer nicht unedlen, und wohl erhabenen Gestalt darstellt, am Dichter ein Tadel, da sie nicht bloß auf die äußere Schönheit und Form, sondern auch auf die innere Schönheit und Gefühlsweise ihren rauhen Einfluß erstreckt."⁵³² With what rings like a begrudging acknowledgment of the need to reconcile orthodoxy and beauty,

⁵³¹ KFSA VI, 214ff. It is worth noting that Eichendorff attended these lectures when Schlegel delivered them in Vienna. Höltschmidt gives an excellent account of F. Schlegel's criticism of Dante's allegory, which, in Schlegel's words, had been "überwuchert" by scholasticism and laden with "toten Begriffen und leeren Abstraktionen." See Höltschmidt, 436.

⁵³² KFSA VI, 216.

Schlegel concludes that “Dies sind die Flecken, welche ich der verdienten Bewunderung unbeschadet, an diesem größten aller christlichen und aller florentinischen Dichter glaube bemerken zu müssen.”⁵³³

To the extent that Schlegel’s enumeration of Dante’s *Flecken* reads as an obligatory gesture, which I believe it does, it remains open to interpretation how deeply Dante’s theological idiosyncrasies truly altered the Catholic Schlegel’s appreciation of the poem. It is worth observing, for example, that the lectures were delivered before large crowds in the imperial city of Vienna, where Schlegel’s listeners included a cabal of Catholic nobles. On an entirely different occasion, however, when in 1818 his stepson Philipp Veit was commissioned to paint scenes from the *Commedia* in a Roman villa, Schlegel voiced tremendous enthusiasm at the prospect of once again donning the mantle of *dantista* that he had worn when teaching Italian to Philip’s mother some two decades earlier.⁵³⁴ On the other hand, in private notes from 1823, Schlegel contravenes the basic literary sensibility of early Romantic theory and groups the *Commedia* in the same series of failed Christian epics as Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and Klopstock’s *Messias*. Having conceived a plan for his own Christian epic, he writes that it will do what Dante, Milton, and Klopstock sought to do in vain. For “Dante ist nur ein Lehrgedicht in einer Reihe von Visionen, die zum Theil willkürlich sind und auf falschem Boden beruhen. Milton ist eine nachgemachte Mythologie von Paradies und Hölle; und Klopstock nebst dem

⁵³³ KFSa VI, 216.

⁵³⁴ KFSa XXIX, 495.

Nachhall von Milton – eine hexametrische Paraphrase des Evangeliums.”⁵³⁵ We can only say with certainty that in the years since the collapse of the Romantic circle in Jena, Schlegel’s views of Dante remained in flux. In any event, the notion of a new mythology was out of the question, and any grand poetic undertaking for the post-conversion Schlegel would be ordered by his own theological vision of the world.⁵³⁶

Beginning in the pre-Romantic *Studiumaufsatz* and culminating in the *Rede über die Mythologie*, Friedrich Schlegel had characterized modern poetry as the accumulated expression of myriad subjects, the common ground of which lay only in its idiosyncratic difference. With the dissolution of the new mythology, and indeed of Romanticism itself, there would be little hope for the appearance of a new cultural-aesthetic system the likes of which the Romantics believed the *Commedia* had modeled. Hegel, who never shared the Romantics’ enthusiasm, surmised as much in his *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik*, when he famously declared that “Kein Homer, Sophokles usf., kein Dante, Ariost oder Shakespeare können in unserer Zeit hervortreten; was so groß besungen, was so frei ausgesprochen ist, ist ausgesprochen.”⁵³⁷ Borchardt himself imagined that, as the Romantic movement unraveled, its attempts to integrate Dante in contemporary cultural life migrated beyond German borders and gave rise to new artistic vigor in the work of English and French figures like the Rossettis, like Victor Hugo, or like the French

⁵³⁵ KFSa XVII, 469-473.

⁵³⁶ On this note, it is worth examining some of Schlegel’s latest remarks on Dante, which were written in conjunction with the prospect of writing a Christian epic. See KFSa XVII, 469.

⁵³⁷ Hegel, *Werke*, XIV, 238.

Symbolists.⁵³⁸ The Germans, it would seem, had repeated the blunder of Dante's Florentine contemporaries, which is to say, they had banished him in exile.

Dante's *Commedia* would in fact have a legacy in the remainder of the German nineteenth century, but this legacy became largely intertwined with the development of German philological scholarship and translation.⁵³⁹ It is no accident, for example, that the two most vocal proponents of a rehabilitation of the *Commedia* in the era of German modernism — Stefan George and Borchardt himself — were both translators of Dante. Borchardt, in fact, was a leading philologist trained professionally in Berlin, Bonn, and Göttingen, while George, true to Borchardt's own theory, had studied poetry under the guidance of the French Symbolists. In their creative adaptations of the *Commedia*, however, and in what they designed to be cultural programs centered on the weight of the *Commedia*, both George and Borchardt understood themselves as the heirs of the German Romantic tradition. An examination of the Neo-Romantics' renewal and transformation of the German Romantics' Dantean mythology must be delayed, however, until this dissertation can be expanded.

⁵³⁸ Borchardt, *Werke, Prosa II*, 358ff.

⁵³⁹ There are of course exceptions, most famous of which is Conrad Ferdinand Meyer's novella, *Die Hochzeit des Mönchs*, in which Dante functions as the narrator of a *Binnenerzählung*.

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