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“‘Mines aren’t really like that’: German Romantic Undergrounds Revisited”

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The title of this essay is taken from an undergraduate class paper on Novalis’ Romantic (and romantically unfinished) novel, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1802). Responding in particular to the celebration of the miner’s craft in the pivotal fifth chapter, this comment discloses the profound geo-historical disjunction between the connotations of mining for a twenty-year-old Australian in the early twenty-first century and the widespread fascination with subterranean regions and underground quests in German Romanticism. I moved swiftly in class to explain Novalis’ non-realist aesthetics and to historicize this narrative, highlighting the differences between contemporary mining for coal and iron ore, for instance, and the skilled extraction of gem stones and precious metals in which Novalis’ fictional old miner had been trained. My student’s skepticism towards Romantic mine mysticism prompts the question that I want to pursue in this essay: namely, what might it mean to reread the literary undergrounds of Early German Romanticism, composed as they were on the cusp of the fossil-fueled Industrial Revolution, in the horizon of the Anthropocene? In my own previous discussion of this novel, I construed the German Romantic celebration of mining, which finds its most pronounced and profound articulation in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, as complicit with those historical developments that have delivered us into an era of ramifying socio-ecological damage, escalating extinctions and calamitous global warming (Rigby, 2004, pp. 140-9). Now,

though, I wonder whether it might not be possible to recover from Novalis' subterranean sages an ecophilosophical ethos of human responsibility for more-than-human flourishing that answers to the exigencies of the present, in which "letting be" is no longer adequate? While not dismissing the former concern, it is the latter possibility that I wish to pursue here, guided by new research on the importance of Novalis' philosophy for rethinking human knowledge of, and relations with, the natural world (Nassar, 2014), along with contemporary reconceptualizations of materiality as a locus of more-than-human mindfulness, meaning, and moral salience (Mathews, 2003 and 2005; see also Iovino and Oppermann, 2014). Approaching Novalis' work this perspective, I endeavor to exhume from Heinrich von Ofterdingen's underground getting of wisdom an alternative way of thinking and doing (or desisting from) mining than that which prevails in the intensively extractive, and reductively materialistic, political economy of the present.

Heinrich von Ofterdingen was penned between December 1799 and October 1800 and left unfinished when its brilliant young author, one Georg Philipp Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenberg, who had recently adopted the *nom de plume* of "Novalis," died of tuberculosis the following year. It was to have appeared with the same press (Unger in Berlin) that had recently published Goethe's much-lauded *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (*Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, 1795-6). In light of Novalis' critical comments on this work (Novalis, pp. 544 and 545), and the pronounced divergence of his own from the Goethean prototype, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* was evidently intended as a counter-narrative to the older author's pioneering *Bildungsroman*, or novel of experience. In his major study of Novalis' work and its scholarly reception, Herbert Uerlings concludes that the principle theme of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* is not the development of an individual, but rather "the projection of a universally redemptive utopia ("der Entwurf einer universellen Erlösungstutopie"), whereby

the protagonist figures symbolically as an embodiment of the agency of the creative imagination, or “Poesie,” in realizing this transformative project (Uerlings 1991, p. 451). Novalis’ romantic utopianism, however, should be seen neither in the traditional theological terms, by which it is nonetheless clearly inspired, nor those of its secular modernist political counterparts, as culminating in a static state of Paradise regained. Instead, I read Novalis’ emancipatory vision as pointing towards a dynamic process of open-ended co-creation, in which techno-scientific know-how and ethical deliberation would work in consort with the poetic imagination in the interests of a more-than-human collective. While his pen-name might have been inspired by his medieval forbears’ self-designation as “de Novali,” or “clearers of new land” (Mahony, 2004), there are hints in his work, fragmentary though it remained, of a dialogic model of becoming that opens a space for the land, and its diverse denizens, to be recognized as active participants in the future development of the wider Earth community.

The completed first part of the novel, entitled “The Expectation” (“Die Erwartung”), which was to be followed by “The Fulfilment” (“Die Erfüllung”), tells of the twenty-year-old medieval protagonist’s life-changing journey from his paternal hometown in the dour north of the German region to his maternal grandfather’s home in the more sybaritic southern city of Augsburg. While the physical path he pursues is relatively linear, the narrative of his journey is anything but, being studded with embedded songs and stories presenting a range of different voices and perspectives, but manifesting also certain recurring figures and motifs that appear in ever new contexts and guises. Heinrich’s endeavors to make sense of these many and varied texts take him on a spiraling ideational expedition that intersects with, and is enabled by, the physical journey, which he is undertaking at the prompting of his lovingly watchful mother, and in the company of a group of cultured merchants, who value his

mother's hometown as a center of flourishing arts and crafts, as well as trade, and who encourage Heinrich in the literary tendencies that they discern in him. This journey, then, is a rite of passage, and it culminates in Heinrich's initiation into the risky delights of erotic love and the discovery of his vocation as a poet.

That this was to be the protagonist's *metier* would have been obvious from the start to any reader who knew their history of German literature: "Heinrich von Ofterdingen" is the name of one of the imaginary troubadours who is said to have competed with such historical luminaries as Walter von der Vogelweide in the fabled "singers' battle on the Wartburg" in a thirteenth-century Thuringian poetry collection of that name. Moreover, the intimate connection between *poiesis* and *Eros* in Novalis's world (as indeed, albeit significantly differently so, for medieval minstrels or *Minnesänger*, literally "love-singers") is emphasized by the identification of the budding poet's beloved, Mathilde, as the daughter of his literary mentor, Klingsohr, whom Heinrich meets at the merry party that the travelers gate-crash on their arrival at his grandfather's home. Not insignificantly, Klingsohr is also the name of a renowned necromancer in Wolfram von Eschenbach's verse epic, *Parzival*, whom the earlier fictional Ofterdingen is said to have summoned to the "singers' battle": a hint for the cognoscenti that poesy is also capable of reconnecting the living and the dead. This was evidently to be fleshed out in Part Two, the extant opening of which begins with Heinrich grieving Mathilde's untimely decease. Intriguingly, he receives reassurance and new zest for life from a voice that he registers as hers, which addresses him from a tree, calling upon him to sing a song of praise. He is rewarded by the materialization of a young girl, Zyane, who leads him to a new mentor, the plant-loving Doctor Sylvester, who predicts that Heinrich will become a prophet once he learns to read the world and its history as "holy scripture," and to disclose this in words and stories, or, indirectly, by stimulating and awakening "higher

senses,” new organs of perception (Novalis, 1969, pp.276-77). And that poesy, allied with love, are to become the primary vehicles of the emancipatory “romanticization of the world” that Novalis called for in one of his fragments from 1798-1800 (pp. 384-85), is foreshadowed in the prophetic “fairytale” that Klingsohr tells at the conclusion of Part One, which culminates in the re-enlivening of a frozen world, from which, guided by Sophia (wisdom), war has been banished and love reigns supreme under the divine overlordship of Eros and his consort Freya (the Norse goddess of love, beauty, and fertility), with Fable (imagination) and Ginnistan (sensuality), the primary agents of this happy ending, their vice-regents on Earth. Moreover, it is in the pivotal fifth chapter that I had set for my Romanticism class that this utopian project is aligned with mining. This motif also has medieval precursors, with the descent to magical and dangerous subterranean regions figuring significantly as a testing ground and vehicle of transformation in the quest narratives of several authors (Classen 2012). Here, as elsewhere, though, Novalis’ recourse to earlier imagery is romantically modernizing, recoding the figure of the cavern or mine, both metaphorically and metonymically: here, the subterranean quest for hidden treasures functions as a figurative substitute for the poetic practice of redemptive romanticization; but it is also, literally, contiguous with it, figuring synecdochically as a key part of a wider eco-cultural undertaking.

As Dennis Mahony’s excellent account of the publication and reception history of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* makes clear, this complex, fragmentary, and highly multivalent novel has been interpreted in a wide array of divergent and even contradictory ways since its publication in the first volume of Novalis’ works, edited by his friends, fellow Early German Romantics, Friedrich Schlegel and Ludwig Tieck (Mahony 1994). Having begun to make its way into the national canon of the newly united Germany with Rudolf Haym’s *Die romantische Schule: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des deutschen Geistes* (“The Romantic

School: A Contribution to the History of the German Mind/Spirit," 1870), Novalis' literary *oeuvre* received its first major scholarly treatment in Wilhelm Dilthey's influential *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung* ("Experience and Poetry," 1902). This was a foundational work of intellectual history (*Geistesgeschichte*), which unfortunately furthered "the ever widening gap between the humanities and the natural sciences in the latter half of the nineteenth century" (Mahony, 1994, p.19), thereby severing Novalis' poetic writing from his engagement with science, technology and industry. This began to be redressed in the late 1950s with Gerhard Schulz's pioneering doctoral research at the University of Leipzig on Novalis' work in the mining industry (Schulz, 1958), parts of which were published in a series of articles in the journal *Der Anschnitt* in 1959. Further research on Novalis and the sciences appeared from the mid-1970s (e.g. Hegener 1975, Mahony 1980, Uerlings 1997; see also Schulz's biography of Novalis, 2012). Novalis research in general had expanded and diversified towards the end of the 1960s, considerably aided by the critical-historical edition of his works initiated by Paul Kluckhohn and Richard Samuel in 1960, and carried forward in subsequent volumes and revised editions by Samuel in collaboration with Hans-Joachim Mähl and Gerhard Schulz, among others (Novalis, *Schriften*, 1960-2006; see also Schulz's edition of selected works, 1969). The concluding two parts of the final volume, 6.3 and 6.4 (of which the latter is still forthcoming), are particularly pertinent for the purposes of this discussion, as they contain previously unpublished writing and other documents relating to Novalis' professional work in the mining industry.

By the early 1990s, ecological approaches were finally beginning to join the raft of other new methodologies and perspectives, such as reception theory, semiotics, psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, neo-Marxism, and feminism, which were brought to the interpretation of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* over the preceding decades. Among these were Mahony's own

early work on Novalis' "poeticization of nature" (1980), along with essays by Hartmut Böhme and Christoph Jamme in a volume on Romanticism's continuities with, as well as criticisms of, the Enlightenment, co-edited by Jamme and Gerhard Kunz (1988; see also 1988b). While these discussions were strictly pre-ecocritical, they foregrounded the socio-ecological significance of Novalis' endeavor to frame a forward-looking alternative to alienating and instrumentalist constructions of human relations with the natural world within the emergent industrial modernity of his day. Interestingly, however, more recent explicitly ecocritical discussions frequently run a more critical line. Berbeli Wanning, for example, in her penetrating analysis of Novalis' poetics, observes that the assumption of an underlying identity of (external) Nature with the (human) subject within the *Naturphilosophie* ("natural philosophy") that she takes to underpin his work, "de-substantialises the concept of nature," thereby allowing the natural world to become a screen for anything the experiencing self might project onto it (Wanning, 2005, p. 36). Similarly, I too previously stressed the risk that Novalis' notion of introspection as a path to knowledge of (outer) nature could lead instead to the obliteration of "the difference between self and other, and between 'human nature' (whatever that might be) and the great diversity of other others (whoever and whatever they might be) that comprise the more-than-human natural world." (Rigby, 2004, p. 107) In addition, I discerned a hubristic tendency in Novalis' project of "educating," or, as one of the speakers in his (also fragmentary) novel *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais* ("The Novices of Sais," 1798/9) puts it, "de-wilding" the Earth, which I interpreted as implying the eradication of the recalcitrant alterity of the natural world (2004, pp. 108-110). More recently, Heather Sullivan has also observed that, in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, Novalis, in his enthusiasm for extraction, looks away from the "dirt and damage done by mining," as does the protagonist of E.T. A. Hoffmann's novella "Die Bergwerke zu Falun" ("The Mines of Falun," 1819) once he becomes fatally enamored of the stony queen of the subterranean deep, a text that effects a

kind of immanent critique of Romantic mine mysticism (2014, pp. 121-22).ⁱⁱ Here, however, emboldened by Novalis' own understanding of the true reader as an "extended author" (1969, p. 352), who uncovers unforeseen interpretive possibilities, I propose to dig down into Novalis' poetics of mining in order to exhume an ecological ethos that might provide a locus of resistance to today's political economy of extraction, and potentially open a path of more-than-human communicative co-becoming, such as is gestured towards in the fragmentary second part of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*.

By the time Novalis had his protagonist taken below ground on his *rite de passage* as a poet-in-the-making, caverns and mines had already become established as a site of major significance within the topography of early German Romanticism. As is by now well established (Böhme, 1988a and 1988b; Ziolkowski, 1990; Gold, 1990; Heringman, 2004; Rigby, 2004), the meanings associated with such places were multiple. From a scientific perspective, they revealed evidence for the past history of the Earth, both in their rocky strata and in the fossilized bones of now extinct species. As well as contributing to the development of the nascent disciplines of geology and biology, such discoveries informed the widespread Romantic reconceptualization of Nature as an evolutionary process of *ontopoiesis*, or self-formation and transformation, rather than as a static product of divine workmanship. Economically, mines had of course long been a source of precious gemstones and valuable materials for manufacturing, and with the patenting of James Watt's steam engine (1781) for use in both the extraction and combustion of coal to power the first Industrial Revolution, their potential for wealth-production was expanding exponentially. In addition though, and potentially in tension with this economic dimension, the rocky deep also held psycho-spiritual significance. For the alchemists of earlier centuries, this was a sacred space, where precious metals gestated in the womb of the earth (a process that they sought to appropriate

and speed up in their experimental laboratories). This notion was put on a new onto-epistemological footing by Romantics such as Novalis, who had taken on board his friend F. W. J. Schelling's philosophical postulate of the underlying identity of mind and matter, whereby human consciousness could be understood as an emergent property of the ceaseless productivity of nature. From this perspective, to venture below ground might be troped as an exploration of one's own un(der)consciousness ("das Unbewußte"), or a pathway of communication with what Schelling (drawing on an older Neoplatonic concept) called the "soul of the world" (*Die Weltseele – Eine Hypothese der höheren Physik zur Erklärung des allgemeinen Organismus*, 1798), the psycho-active dimension of the material universe.

All these aspects of the topos of mining are brought into play in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, where they become interwoven with the question of the human vocation in general, and the role of the writer in particular. Novalis was peculiarly well placed to achieve this synthesis. He was among a number of prominent German writers and intellectuals who studied at the internationally renowned Academy of Mining in Freiberg, under the directorship of the charismatic geologist Abraham Gottlob Werner, during the Romantic period. Among them were the famous explorer and bio-geographer Alexander von Humboldt, the *Naturphilosophen* Franz von Baader, Henrich Steffens and G. H. Schubart, and the poet Theodor Körner. Novalis, who had previously studied law at Jena (where he also attended Schiller's lectures in history), Leipzig and Wittenberg, was a student at the Mining Academy between 1797 and early 1799, taking classes not only mineralogy and mining, but also mathematics, physics, chemistry, and medicine, as well as continuing his intense engagement with philosophy (especially, during this period, the work of Schelling), researching Goethe's scientific work, and launching his own literary career. During this time, he started on the first of his counter-*Bildungsromane*, *The Novices of Sais*; wrote numerous aphorisms or

“fragments” (a favored form of the Early German Romantics), including his contribution of “Pollen” (*Blütenstaub*, 1798) for the avant-garde journal *Athenäum*, initiated by his friends Friedrich and Wilhelm Schlegel; and compiled extensive notes towards a planned counter-encyclopedia, intended to integrate different fields of knowledge and thereby disclose interconnectivities. He embarked on *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* in the few months following his graduation, completing part one in a creative burst prior to his appointment as an assessor in the salt mining industry in May 1799. Before his premature death in March 1801, Novalis also participated in a geological survey of Saxony, under the direction of Werner and the Academy’s professor of mathematics and cartography, J. F. P. Charpentier (to whose daughter, Julie, he was engaged), which was to play a crucial role in the subsequent expansion of coal mining in the German region. For Novalis, then, scientific research, philosophical reflection, literary imagination, and socio-economic development, especially with respect to the expanding mining industry, were inextricably interwoven.

The significance of the subterranean realm is signaled from the start of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, figuring initially in its association with the unconscious. In the opening chapter, Heinrich dreams of climbing a forested mountain and entering a cavern with a spring, the water from which forms a pool in which he immerses himself with voluptuous delight; swimming deeper into the mountain, he falls asleep, subsequently awakening to find himself lying on a meadow near a second spring, besides which grows a blue flower that turns towards him as he approaches, opening to reveal floating in its corona a woman’s delicate face. As a quick search on Google Images reveals, the figure of the anthropomorphic blue flower has since ‘gone viral’; but within the narrative frame of Novalis’ avant-garde novel, it is far less corny than it might seem today. To begin with, it is important to note that this dream actually has three phases, the first of which involves the dreaming subject in an array

of worldly activities. The shift into a more mystical mode marked by the ascent up and into the mountain should not be read as a retreat from this world, in my view, but as slipping, as it were, beneath its skin, to catch a glimpse of what I later term the inner, subjectival dimension of the material realm. In this second phase, the dreamer initially enjoys a sensuous experience of this hitherto hidden reality in a distinctly solipsistic manner: the watery female figures that press themselves against him when he enters the pool are de-individualized, the boundaries between self and other blurred (Hodkinson, 2007, p. 173). In the final phase of the dream, however, the possibility of mutual recognition is re-constituted when he is returned to the sunlit world, and encounters the blue flower that turns to meet his gaze with a human face. This incipiently erotic encounter is disappointingly interrupted by Heinrich's mother's wake-up call. It is nonetheless his relation of this dream, reminding his rationalistic father of the blue flower that he too once dreamed of as a youth, that prompts Heinrich's mother to determine that he is ready for the *rite de passage* entailed in their journey to her father's home in the south: one that will take Heinrich down an actual cavern and into the arms of a real woman, as well as under the mentorship of a famed poet.

The onto-epistemological and ethical implications that I want to draw from this opening dream scene are critical for how I propose to reframe Novalis' poetic project. Read through the lens of Mathews' neo-Spinozan panpsychism, the venture below ground might be seen to trope a getting of wisdom (the *flors sapientia*, or blue flower of the wise) that entails the suspension of the strictures of the everyday social, or discursive, self. While this might be called a 'mystical' experience, Novalis' sensual imagery indicates that it is also intensely corporeal. This is consistent with his conception of "romanticization" as a reciprocal movement of "elevation" and "lowering," implying that the moralization of nature necessitates also the naturalization of the human (Novalis, 1969, p. 384-85; see also Nassar,

2014, pg. 68). While this dissolution of conventional ego boundaries has a solipsistic moment, this is presented as but the first stage of a movement towards a mode of perceiving and interacting with the world in which self and other are reconstituted within an erotics of mutual recognition: in this carnal kind of knowing, as Mathews stresses, “the mysterious other retains their capacity to surprise” (Mathews, 2003, p. 78). That the other who is thus encountered might be other-than-human, moreover, is signaled not only by the floral form of Heinrich’s dream woman, but also by the way the dream is framed within the narrative: namely, as precipitated by the tales of a visiting stranger, which prompt Heinrich to recall that “in ancient times beasts, and trees, and rocks” are said to have “conversed with men”, and to feel that even now, “they appear every moment about to speak to me; and I can almost tell by their looks what they would say” (Novalis, 1842, pp. 12-13). This motif of a pansemiotic “natural language” (*Natursprache*) – a key figure within German Romanticism (Goodbody, 1984; Rigby, 2015) – recurs in the merchants’ retelling of the story of Arion, an ancient Greek poet and musician, who is said to have lived at time when all of nature was animate, and who was saved from murderous thieves by a sea monster enchanted by what the poet thought was to be his death song. Whereas the pansemiotic arts of Arion’s fellow poets could be seen as sorcerous—they are said to have caused seeds to germinate, tamed wild animals, stilled raging waters, and made stones dance—the creature who comes to Arion’s rescue responds to his sorrowful song of its own accord. As such, the happy ending of this tale could be read, in Freya Mathews’ terms, as “ontopoetic” (Mathews, 2006a), revealing the communicative order that inheres in the world understood as a “psychophysical field within which we and all other creatures have our relative being and with which it is possible for us to be in a state of ongoing communication and attunement” (2003, p. 75). While individual creatures communicate with one another *biosemiotically* in species-specific ways, the world, as One, Mathews posits, addresses the Many *ontopoetically* through symbolic constellations,

responding to our manner of relating to it, to our “invocations,” as Mathews puts it (including unintentional ones, as in the case of Arion), in unexpected, but meaningful ways. In this “world hidden within the world” (Mathews, 2006b), all manner of non-human entities might become narrative actants in stories that are woven out of our erotic encounters and imaginative interactions, whilst eluding our authorial control. There is already a hint here, then, that the poet qua speleologist, miner, or earth-diver, is tasked with disclosing the world in its subjectival dimension, as a “Thou,” as Novalis put it in one of his notes, rather than as an objectified “Not-I” (“(statt) n[icht] I[ch] – Du,” 1969, p.489), thereby restoring voice, agency, and ethical significance to “beasts, and trees, and rocks” (Novalis, 1842, p. 12).

While Heinrich’s dream has been subjected to many and varied interpretations, there is a passage in the following chapter that is frequently overlooked, but which provides a further key to the ecological ethos embodied to be drawn from Novalis’ poetics of mining. Here, mines figure more literally, namely as the source of materials from which treasured objects of everyday life have been crafted. Inserted between the decision to embark on the journey to Augsburg and their actual departure, this seeming digression retards the action of the story; but the narrator’s disquisition on the tender affection “for these silent companions of life” (1824, pg.19) held by people of the Middle Ages, when even aristocratic households were blessed with few possessions, presents an ethos of cherishing that is integral to Novalis’ poetic project. To dismiss this celebration of the charming poverty of earlier times as idealizing and nostalgic is to miss the point of Novalis’ critique of the growing material affluence, conjoined with dwindling reverence for material objects, of his own day: a critique that has only become more salient as the culture of consumerism then in the making has proceeded to trash the planet on an ever-expanding scale. Novalis’ advocacy of an ethos of cherishing, embracing not only naturally-occurring entities but also humanly made things,

mindful of the places and labor that have produced them - an ethos, which in Mathews' analysis, constitutes the true meaning of 'culture' (2005) - might be inspired by an idealized image of the past; but it also points towards an alternative modernity with an eco-civilizational orientation, in which human socio-cultural and techno-scientific progress would be rendered consistent with the ongoing interactive autopoiesis of the biosphere.ⁱⁱⁱ

According to the old miner whom Heinrich's party encounters *en route* to Augsburg, it was precisely his fascination with the materials that gleamed in the sacred objects housed in the shadowy church of his youth, his desire to know where they came from, and to discover the source of the sacred water drawn from the village well, that led him to take up his subterranean trade. In the first song that he sings at Heinrich's prompting, the miner's labors are presented as a form of love-making with the earth:

"He is unto her plighted,
And tenderly allied,--
Becomes by her delighted,
As if she were his bride.

New love each day is burning
For her within his breast,
No toil or trouble shunning,
She leaveth him no rest."

(Novalis, 1842, p. 56)

Only by disavowing avarice, and entering Earth's inner sanctum with ardent adoration, this song proclaims, might the miner be privileged to hear her tales of "long-*evanished time*" and be guided by to the treasures secreted in her "rocky holds": treasures that he dutifully "renders to the king": for the miner, while "lord of earth," "liveth poor with pleasure, / And makes no questioning." (56) While Heinrich is exceedingly pleased by this song, he, along with Novalis' reader, have by this stage been alerted to the propensity of such songs to consolidate collective identities of a decidedly ideological nature. In the previous chapter, the anti-Islamic drinking songs of the carousing crusaders whom the travelers encounter in a castle along the way are countered by the beautiful captive, Zulima, brought back as war booty, whom Heinrich hears singing mournfully outside, and who shares with him an opposing view of her culture and homeland, and of the senseless warfare that has torn it apart. In the case of the first mining song, one might therefore be led to suspect an element of ideological justification for the low wages historically paid to miners for their hazardous and arduous labor. While this suspicion should not be discounted, it is important to note that there is a socio-ecologically progressive element in the old miner's previous insistence that nature does not want to be "the possession of any single individual":

In the form of property it becomes a terrible poison, which destroys rest, excites the ruinous desire of drawing everything within the reach of its possessor, and carries with it a train of wild passions and endless sorrows. Thus it undermines secretly the ground of the owner, buries him in the abyss which breaks beneath him, and so passes into the hands of another, thus gradually satisfying its tendency to belong to all. (54)

This anti-proprietary relation to nature comes to the fore in the more mysterious second song, which the Old Miner admits he and his comrades never quite understood. Here, mining

is construed as emancipatory in a double sense: miners, who are characterized not only as devoid of avarice, but also as knowing, alert, and insightful, liberate the “king” (i.e. gold) from his subterranean keep; the more he circulates above ground, moreover, the more his dominion is anticipated to diminish, and the greater the number of “the free” to grow. No longer a scarce commodity coveted as private property, earth’s hidden treasures are to become the common wealth of a liberated society; and just as the subterranean waters held back to facilitate the mining process would ultimately flow back into the “castle void,” so too would humanity be borne gently “homeward,” namely, towards a utopian future (Novalis, 1842, p. 57).

This too, though, might well seem unpersuasive to today’s readers. As Noah Heringman has observed, Novalis’ emancipatory programme “calls for natural resources to make themselves perfectly available” (2004, p. 179). This is clearly troubling in a contemporary context of ever more invasive exploitation of the earth, to inequitable ends and with unecological consequences, when mining is likely to conjure images of blasted mountains, super-charged cyclones, and rising sea levels. Mining, however, is not going to end any time soon, not least considering that some of the materials required for renewable energy production also come from below ground. What we need, then, is an ethos for doing mining, along with other forms of working with the earth, considerably more discerningly (which might well mean desisting altogether in the case of fossil fuels), and for more just and life-sustaining purposes; and here, I think, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* has some pointers. Looking more closely at the miner’s strange second song, it is noteworthy that it was taught to the miners by a “remarkable diviner,” that is to say, somebody who is attuned to sub-surface realities. In addition, the text reworks mystical Christian imagery, in which gold, like blue in alchemical imagery, is associated with the wisdom of the soul (Roder, 1992). Here too, then, the literal and

metonymic dimensions of mining need to be reconsidered in relation to its metaphoric aspect, namely as figuring a certain kind of knowledge, and way of knowing, that would facilitate a transformed and transformative relation to the world.

It is explicitly in pursuit of knowledge that Heinrich and the merchants are taken on a nocturnal visit to the nearby caves by the old miner. Their first lesson comes in the guise of the fossilized bones, which their guide, a transitional figure embodying traditional lore and enlightened understanding, interprets as the remains, not of the recent meal of a lurking dragon, as feared by the local farmers most of whom beat a hasty retreat, but of extinct animals. Here, the romantic underground figures as the locus of a new understanding of Earth's ancient history, in which human history, as studied by the aging hermit whom they discover dwelling in a deeper cavern, was embedded. As Nassar (2014, pp. 62-65) remarks, the key idea that Novalis took from Goethe's scientific studies, however, was that empirical research needed to be complemented by poetic imagination in order to grasp nature not only as product, but as productivity, that is, in its creative or *autopoietic* dimension: a distinction that is also critical to Schelling's *Naturphilosophie*, and derived from Spinoza's distinction between *natura naturata*, "nature natured," and *natura naturans*, "nature naturing" (which he scandalously identified with God). The integrative kind of knowledge, which Novalis termed "active empiricism", combining diligent observation with imaginative insight, had previously been presented metaphorically in the merchants' tale of the secret marriage of the King of Atlantis' daughter, the visible soul of poetic art, to the son of a humble scientist. Now, it is elaborated upon by the eremite Duke von Hohenzollern, who tentatively discerns in Earth's more-than-human history a tendency towards pacification. The old miner agrees enthusiastically, opining that, "a concord ever becoming deeper, a more friendly intercourse, reciprocal aid and encouragement, seem gradually to have been formed; and we can look

forward continually to better times.” His optimistic assessment of how “the mind has become more susceptible and tender, the fancy more varied and symbolical, the hand more free and artistic” (Novalis, 1842, p. 66), such that the human acquisition and transformation of Earth’s subterranean treasures could only advance this felicitous process of pacification and refinement, is nonetheless countered by Hohenzollern’s recollection of the Crusades and the death of his children, and subsequently of his grieving wife, on their return from the East: the implication here, one that is subsequently elaborated poetically in Klingsohr’s tale, is that a peaceful future on a flourishing planet is not a natural pre-given, but must be consciously and creatively worked towards as an ethical achievement.

Moreover, if humans are to realize their potential to act as nature’s “educators – her moral *tangents* – her moral stimuli (*Reize*),” as Novalis put it in a note for his encyclopedia project (1969, p. 450), they must first recover the capacity to hear her “inner music”: a capacity that had been blocked, according to the assemblage of scientific specimens who suddenly speak up on their own accord once the argumentative students leave the room in the *Novices of Sais*, by the objectifying assumption of mastery that had severed them from the wider communion of creatures (1969, p. 112-13). This call is echoed in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* in the vision that Novalis’ apprentice poet experiences prior to descending below ground with the old miner. Feeling “as if the world lay disclosed within him, showing him as a friendly visitor all her hidden treasures and beauties,” he sees:

a little dwelling built close to a lofty minster, from whose stone pavement arose the solemn foreworld, while the clear, joyous future, in the form of golden cherubs, floated from the spire towards it with songs. Loud swelled the notes in their silvery chanting, as

all creatures were entering at the wide gate, each audibly expressing in a simple prayer and proper tongue their interior nature. (1842, p. 58)

One of Novalis' notes for the fragmentary second part of the novel suggests that it is precisely towards the realization of just such a queerly inclusive communion, reconciling Christianity and paganism (1969, p. 288), and embracing what would conventionally be considered inanimate as well as living entities, that Heinrich is journeying: "Humans, animals, plants, stones and stars, flames, tones, colors must act and speak together as One family, or society, like one kind" (1969, p. 289).

Meanwhile, left alone to explore the hermit's library, Heinrich becomes entranced by a book written in a language that he cannot decipher, but that appears from its illustrations to be about himself, and is subsequently identified by Hohenzollern as is "a romance, relating the wonderful fortune of a poet's life, wherein the art of poesy is represented and extolled in all its various relations." (69-70) This imaginary book-within-the-book, however, is unfinished, and Heinrich is tasked with completing his open-ended story above ground, in and through his interactions with a diversity of others, human and otherwise. For readers of Novalis' similarly unfinished fiction, this suggests that the venture into the underground of the onto-poetic imagination should not be seen as an end itself, but taken as a prompt to ethical action in the everyday.

In the era of the Anthropocene, it is no longer hubristic to think that humans bear considerable responsibility for the future of life on earth (while nonetheless humbly acknowledging the potential of a super-volcanic eruption or mega-asteroid strike to put all our worst efforts thus far in the shade). In this context, Novalis' vision of the "education" of

the Earth as the potentiation of nature's inherent orientation towards the creation of an ever more inclusive communion-of-creatures, would enjoin, at the very least, the swift replacement of the fossil-fuel economy, in the development of which Hardenberg himself played a part, in favor of forms of energy generation and socio-economic organization more conducive to the pursuit of collective flourishing and transpecies justice. In the face of escalating extinctions, moreover, the project of redemptive "de-wilding" advanced by one of the novices of Sais might best be recast as restorative "re-wilding" (Frost, 2012), enabling free-living fellow creatures to interactively regenerate damaged ecosystems and enhance their capacity to adapt to an anthropogenically changing climate. And as philosophers such as Mathews, join scientists, such as Karen Barad (2007), in challenging the reductive materialism that has prevailed in modernity, the time might just have come for the romanticization of the world through onto-poetic stories and songs, subtly undermining capitalist consumerism through the encouragement of eco-civilizational practices of cherishing both natural materials and things of human making, the production of which would enhance rather than destroy earth's creative potential.

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ⁱⁱ See also Sullivan's pioneering ecocritical work on mining and the earth sciences in German literature and natural history around 1800 (Sullivan, 2001 and 2003). For my own earlier discussion of this topic, including a detailed reading of *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* alongside Tieck's "Runenberg" ("Rune Mountain," 1802), Peter Hebel's "Unanticipated Reunion" ("Unverhofftes Wiedersehen," 1811) and E. T. A. Hoffmann's "Mines of Falun," see Rigby 2004, pp. 140-56.

ⁱⁱⁱ "Ecological civilisation" is a Chinese concept with roots in Taoist philosophy that Mathews has been studying for several years. Mathews currently holds the position of Adjunct Professor of Eco-Civilisation Studies at Monash University's Institute of Sustainability:

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