

From Genius to Poet:  
Herder's Genius Aesthetic as Background to Heidegger's Concept of the Poet

BY

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## 1 Introduction

Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) was an important philosopher, theologian and literary critic of the eighteenth century, whose thought profoundly influenced German poetics among his contemporaries. In this thesis, I examine Herder's continued influence upon poetics into the twentieth century, specifically the work of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), the philosopher known most for his work in fundamental ontology. I contend that Herder's project of defining the genius forms not only the core of the *Sturm und Drang* period in which he was a central figure, inspiring important literary figures such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832), but it also is a necessary backdrop for understanding Heidegger's project of conceptualizing the poet as the guardian of the *Haus des Seins* in the twentieth century. Herder's *failed project* appears to account for Heidegger's retreat into the mystical when he formulates his own concept of the poet, even if Heidegger does not explicitly acknowledge this background. Heidegger's poet, whom one might succinctly characterize as passively waiting for Being to speak and reveal poetic truth, may seem at first glance quite opposite from the active role of the genius in Herder's aesthetics, yet I will demonstrate the relevance of Herder's thought to poetics well past the eighteenth century by showing how his project informs Heidegger's in the twentieth century. Heidegger's turn to the mystical work of Meister Eckhart (c.1260-c.1328) in his use of concepts such as "Gelassenheit" (letting-go) in a description of the passive role of the poet vis-à-vis "Sein" (Being) has confounded

supporters and critics alike, who see this mystical turn as inexplicable and not strictly philosophical. In this thesis, I propose to explain this turn in Heidegger's thought from a point of view that, as of yet, has not been covered in scholarly work, by arguing that Heidegger's awareness of the failed genius aesthetic developed by Herder led him to develop his concept of the poet in such a way as to consciously avoid the problems inherent in Herder's theory. What appears to many as an irrational turn in Heidegger's thought is actually, in part, a consequence of a quite rational attempt to avoid the problems that Herder encountered.

With a proper understanding of Herder's poetics as a background for Heidegger's thought, therefore, the roots of Heidegger's project become quite clear. I will demonstrate that the failings of Herder's genius aesthetic, when addressed within the framework of Heidegger's ontological approach, explain Heidegger's development of the poet as seen in works such as Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes, published first in 1960 and based on lectures Heidegger gave in 1935-1936. Indeed, Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002), the renowned philosopher of hermeneutics and perhaps the person most intimately familiar with Heidegger's thought of any of Heidegger's students, left an important clue in this regard. In Gadamer's afterword to Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes, he mentions in passing that Heidegger's emphasis of the direct relationship of the work of art to Being is a conscious attempt to avoid the problems of the genius aesthetic, first established by Herder in the eighteenth century: "Die Charakterisierung des Kunstwerks durch das In-sich-Stehen und das Welt-

Eröffnen, mit der Heidegger einsetzt, vermeidet offenbar bewußt jeden Rückgriff auf den Geniebegriff der klassischen Ästhetik" (Gadamer in Heidegger, UK 105).

Gadamer's authority in making such a pronouncement cannot be understated, not only because of his well-documented relationship to Heidegger and his reputation for understanding his teacher's work, but also because this very afterword was endorsed by Heidegger as an important introduction to his later work (Heidegger, UK 5).

My methodology for this thesis is as follows. Following an explanation of Herder's genius aesthetic, I will examine its origin by examining the influences upon Herder's thought, principally those of the philosopher and theologian Johann Georg Hamann (1730-1788) and the poet Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock (1724-1803), and the intellectual environment to which Herder was responding with his arguments for a new literature (section 2). I will follow this in section 3 with a close reading of Herder's essay "Shakespeare," exploring his attempt to concretize the genius aesthetic into a historical figure. In doing so, I will also highlight specific themes of the "Shakespeare" essay which resonate with themes that I will later explore in Heidegger's work. After examining the culmination of Herder's genius aesthetic in his treatment of Shakespeare, I will give an overview of the crucial problems inherent in his approach (section 4). With the help of Peter Michelsen's critique of Herder, I will outline the possible ways in which one might go forward with that which might be salvaged in Herder's project. Michelsen's suggestion that one might sidestep the problems in Herder's project by reframing the question of genius within a model that

stresses the poetic universe of the genius, decoupled from the notion of “historical reality,” seems to me to describe the basic methodology adopted by Heidegger, which I will describe in section 5. I will show that Heidegger's procedure in developing his own concept of the poet owes much to Herder's project, in that it does appear to go forward with aspects of Herder's thought in a way suggested by Michelsen, with his application of fundamental ontology to poetics, specifically in his use of primordial time rather than the “historical reality” that caused Herder's theory to fail. To this end, I will examine Heidegger's recently published lecture notes on Herder from 1939 and his work on the origins of the work of art, to show the connection of themes between the former and the latter. I will explain how Heidegger's ontological approach not only "solves" Herder's problems in a way suggested by Michelsen, but also that Heidegger comes full circle to the questions at the origin of Herder's genius aesthetic, namely, Herder's debate with Hamann.



## **2 The Origin of the Genius Aesthetic in Herder's Thought**

### **2.1 The Genius Aesthetic in Relationship to the Enlightenment**

Herder's idea of genius in the *Sturm und Drang* is best understood if one first considers the thought against which Herder reacts with his aesthetic theory. Herder saw the Enlightenment tendency to propose universal rules for social and ethical behavior as an unwarranted leap from the justifiable claims of Enlightenment science of being able to know the physical laws of nature (Berlin 169). In spite of Herder's critique of the Enlightenment concept of genius, however, Herder was not anti-Enlightenment. As a leading *Sturm und Drang* proponent, Herder was not set on overturning the Enlightenment, but on correcting its excesses. By excesses, Herder meant precisely the restriction of the creative process through the insistence on following universal rules that did not respect historical, cultural and linguistic differences. This restriction comes about as a result of abstraction from nature, in which thinking becomes rational, philosophical and critical, and focuses on the creative process through the imposition of rules. In his theoretical work, Herder sought to create an image of the genius that overcame the restrictions posed by Enlightenment thought.

In his essay "Von Kunstrichterei, Geschmack und Genie," (1800) Herder outlines five characteristics of genius. First, genius is inherent; it cannot be acquired through study. Second, genius creates, generates and produces itself; as a living whole, it brings forth a work of art from itself. Third, the genius brings forth a

thought in its entirety and into creation in a godlike manner. Fourth, the genius' manner of creation is perfected, not in the lack of mistakes but in its idiosyncratic genius or form; the genius is not interested in imitating or judging others. Fifth, as we, too, partake in the spirit of nature, out of which the genius creates, we may become congenial [*mitgenialisch*] by feeling what the genius feels (Herder, VKGG 118-9).

In order to understand the genius' relationship to language, we must remember that for Herder, language itself is a creation of nature, and it develops historically in an organic fashion. In his essay “Über die neuere deutsche Literatur” (1766-1767), Herder shows how languages develop from the natural and the primitive to the abstract. Language develops as an organism according to Herder's organic view of history. That a language is born from the emotional passions aroused by nature is central to the *Sturm und Drang* ideal of emphasizing passion and emotion over cold reason, and of nature as an inspiring force to a heretofore unregulated, natural language. Herder explains this process when he states: “Man *sang* also, wie viele Völker es noch tun und wie es die alten Geschichtsschreiber durchgehends von ihren Vorfahren behaupten. Man pantomimisierte und nahm Körper und Gebärden zu Hilfe; damals war die Sprache in ihren Verbindungen noch *sehr ungeordnet und unregelmäßig in ihren Formen*” (Herder, Ausgewählte Werke 27, my emphasis).

After this initial phase of language development, according to Herder, there is a second one that is rich in imagery and metaphor, the youthful language of poetry: “[...] man sang im gemeinen Leben, und der Dichter *erhöhet* nur *seine Akzente* in

einem für das Ohr gewählten Rhythmus; die Sprache war sinnlich und reich an kühnen Bildern; sie war noch ein Ausdruck der Leidenschaft, sie war noch in den Verbindungen ungefesselt” (Herder, Ausgewählte Werke 27). The connection of an unregulated or more primal language to singing is reflected in Herder's praise for Klopstock over the English poet John Milton (1608-1674) in his work Briefe zur Beförderung der Humanität (1793-1797): "Daß Klopstock zu seinem »Hermann« ein Glück fand, daß er durch seine Gesänge ihn und andre seines Geistes zu dieser Gattung einfacher Musik weckte, gehöret mit zu den glücklichen Begegnissen seines Lebens; dem blinden Barden in Britannien ward mit seinem »Lycidas« und »Samson« dies Glück nicht” (Herder, Briefe 2:121).

As a language matures and takes on the character of wisdom and political staidness [*Gesetzheit*], in Herder's theory, the youthful phase of poetry fades into the adulthood of prose. In prose, Herder sees the alienation of art from nature: “Eine Sprache in ihrem männlichen Alter ist nicht eigentlich mehr Poesie, sondern die schöne Prose. Jede hohe Stufe neiget sich wieder zum Abfall, und wenn wir einen Zeitpunkt in der Sprache für den am meisten poetischen annehmen, so muß nach demselben die Dichtkunst wieder neigen. Je mehr sie Kunst wird, je mehr entfernt sie sich von der Natur” (Herder, Ausgewählte Werke 28). During this phase in Herder's poetics, the use of untranslatable, beautiful and “patronymic” *Idiotismen* of a language begins to shrink and the rhythms of poetry begin to be replaced by the sounds of prose, with words being no longer freely-placed but closed off from each

other by periods. As language loses its charms and impulse, beauty is replaced in importance by correctness (Herder, Ausgewählte Werke 28-9).

Genius for Herder promotes art in the same manner as nature, and it brings forth something whole. It must not, therefore, be constrained by rules that have come about through an alienation from nature. The fundamental and original difference between poetry and prose is evident in the fact, for Herder, that, “statt der Sprache der Leidenschaft ward sie eine Sprache des mittlern Witzes und endlich des Verstandes” (Herder, Ausgewählte Werke 31). Through a passionate and emotional connection to nature, the genius has the ability to tap into the primordial relationship of humanity to nature and orient a people [*Volk*] to rhythms of nature previously unknown. And so, as Peter Michelsen suggests in his article “Regeln für Genies. Zu Herders 'Fragmenten' 'Ueber die neuere Deutsche Litteratur,’” from the volume Johann Gottfried Herder 1744-1803 (1987), edited by Gerhard Sauder, the opposition to rules that would restrict that genius is a key component of Herder's theory, and of his critique of the Enlightenment: “So sieht Herder – Gedanken der Aufklärung folgerichtig weiterdenkend – die Sprache nicht als etwas Starres, ein für alle Male Gegebenes an, sondern als ein dem 'Gesetze der Veränderung' Unterliegendes, in der geschichtlichen Wirklichkeit Sich-Wandelndes” (Michelsen 226). We can better understand these aspects of genius, namely, the connection of genius to nature and the opposition of genius to rules, if we examine the influence of Hamann and Klopstock on Herder's thought. Herder's understanding of language develops as a consequence

of his study of Hamann, and his sense of the genius develops through his appreciation of Klopstock. Furthermore, by taking a look at the origins of Herder's thought, we will also find an important clue to Heidegger's reception of Herder.

## **2.2 Hamann's Influence on Herder**

When Isaiah Berlin comments on “linguistic patriotism” in his book Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder (2000), he notes that Herder, in the development of his thought, is building upon a conscious program that had been pursued by German theologians, men of letters and philosophers, by those who had been defending the German language against Latin and French since the time of Luther, including the vigorous campaigning of Martin Opitz (1597-1639) in the seventeenth century, and, of course, a number of Herder's contemporaries, such as Gottfried Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781) and Hamann (Berlin 169, 174). Hamann, in particular, was especially influential to Herder in this regard. In the following, I will address two aspects of Hamann's thought that were especially important in the formation of Herder's genius aesthetic: 1) Hamann's preference for the concrete realm of nature over abstract reasoning, and 2) Hamann's theological aesthetics, in which the poet is seen as a prophet in communion with God. These elements combine to form a particular view of the poet in relation to history and nature that, in the words of Isaiah Berlin, Herder took as an “article of faith” (Berlin 191). In Hamann's theological aesthetics, the genius has the role of being the vehicle for God to

communicate truth in poetic images, shunning the rationalistic explanations of truth common to Enlightenment thought. Hans-Georg Kemper presents this idea as follows in his article “Gott als Mensch -- Mensch als Gott. Hamann und Herder” from the volume Johann Georg Hamann: Der hellste Kopf seiner Zeit (1998), edited by Oswald Bayer:

Gott akkomodiert sich in seiner Offenbarung also nicht etwa dem Vorstellungsvermögen des Menschen, um ihm auf noch sinnliche Weise eine vernünftige Erklärung der Schöpfung zu bieten [...], sondern Gott bietet scheinbar Wesentliches auslassend und scheinbar Unwichtiges mitteilend auf eine selbst den Engeln rätselhafte und die Intelligenz des Teufels in die Irre führende, aber von den *Einfältigen* verstandene Weise eine ‚Erzählung‘ seines Schöpfungs- und Heilshandelns, also Narration statt wissenschaftlicher Explikation (Kemper 159, qtd. in Fleck 41).

This anti-scientific view of the origin of language, specifically its rejection of the reduction of language to a discrete object of study without reference to an understanding of the origin of language itself, is shared by Herder. Herder, however, differed from Hamann in his belief that the origin of language was no longer divine, but he took from Hamann the basis for his view of language as a living organism. Gerhard Kaiser, in his book Aufklärung Empfindsamkeit Sturm und Drang (1979), mentions that in Herder's “Über den Ursprung der Sprache” (1772): “...stimmt

[Herder] doch mit Hamann überein in der Würdigung der Sprache als eines Zugangs zum göttlichen Geheimnis der Welt, des Menschen und der Völker. [...] ist sie für Herder ein lebendig sich entwickelnder Organismus” (Kaiser 188).

This theological difference between Hamann and Herder is important, because it explains why Herder, while influenced by Hamann, was more inclined toward finding the sacred in the “living organism” of language, particularly in poetry. More specifically, the significant development in Herder's theological departure from Hamann is an understanding of truth within a cultural context, through the living organism of language as a means of bringing truth to a specific people. Christina Juliane Fleck offers a thorough explanation of the consequence of this view in her book Genie und Wahrheit (2005):

So können für Herder auch verschiedene Wahrheitsansprüche unterschiedlicher Religionen und Weltanschauungen nebeneinander gelten, da er alles auf den einen für alle täglich zu erlebenden Kern zurückführt. Diese Schöpfungshieroglyphie inspirierte die Menschen auf unterschiedliche Weise ein und dieselbe, die Gottheit offenbarende Wahrheit zu verkünden (Fleck 80).

Thus, the elevation of poetry as a means of expressing a divine truth within a culture comes about through Herder's answer to a theological problem, as an aesthetic response to the question of transcendence and immanence. Divine truth comes to light in various religions, mythologies and poetry, all specific to a given cultural

milieu for a people, as Herder argues in his essay “Älteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts” (1774-1776) (Fleck 80-1).

Herder, therefore, takes from Hamann both a preference for the concrete in the form of nature over the abstract, and a conception of the poet in communion with divine truth. Herder, however, takes an aesthetic turn in his theology that leads to the development of his genius aesthetic, namely, that the poet is no longer the prophet in communion with God as in communion with a pure, eternal truth, but rather, the poet sees truth in God's creation, in nature, and finds expression for this truth in culturally specific ways in light of the nature that s/he sees. Fleck describes this latter notion of truth as an “Urwahrheit” that for Herder consists of the presence of the divine in creation which can be evoked through poetic expression (Fleck 82). Indeed, Herder takes Hamann's statement from his essay “Aesthetica in nuce” (1762) that “Poesie ist die Muttersprache des menschlichen Geschlechts” as a starting point for a theory uniting poetry and language (Kaiser 188). When viewed in connection with the aesthetic turn away from Hamann as described above, however, Herder's understanding of poetry as the "mother tongue of the human race" can be summarized as follows: 1) poetry becomes for Herder not the result of cultural refinement, as it is viewed by the neoclassical school, but rather, much more the original expression of mankind's very *being* itself; 2) language, full of images and passions in its original state, develops gradually toward abstraction and conceptualism, losing in its fullness what it gains in precision; 3) poetic expression of mankind's state yields thus to prose;



4) the poet alone retains access to the origins, finding his creative power by means of language, producing again in poetry the youthful passions and images of the language; 5) the original language of mankind is poetry; 6) the poet, therefore, is the master of his historical period, in that he renews languages and the thinking of a people (Kaiser 188). These aspects of Herder's aesthetic theory informed Heidegger's concept of the poet.

### **2.3 Klopstock and the Development of the Genius Aesthetic for Herder**

Bearing in mind the influence of Hamann upon Herder, and Herder's theological deviation from Hamann, it is not surprising that Herder seized upon Klopstock's work in his development of the genius aesthetic. Indeed, Herder had already been stimulated by Hamann to study Klopstock's work, and it was Klopstock's lyrical poetry, his odes and elegies, that Herder valued above all of Klopstock's works (Lohmeier, as qtd. in Lee 54-5). While Herder in his essay "Über die neuere deutsche Literatur" agrees with Klopstock critics such as Lessing, that Klopstock does not adequately prepare his readers for the intensity of emotion and sentiment in his poems, he differs from Lessing in that he seeks to explain why this might have occurred. In her book Displacing Authority: Goethe's Poetic Reception of Klopstock (1999), Meredith Lee observes that "Herder takes great pains to clarify [...] how an individual of deep religious feeling might easily be moved by single images or thoughts that to others seem quite obscure and without effect. He uses the hymns

to articulate a more general concept of lyric poetry, one in which Klopstock excels” (Lee 55-56).

Let us examine more specifically how Herder views Klopstock's importance, and how these views build upon the influence of Hamann upon Herder and lead to Herder's theory of the genius aesthetic. As we have seen with Herder's appropriation and alteration of Hamann's theological position, the poet takes the role of a master within a historical period, rejuvenating the language and thought of a people by means of his access to the origins of mankind's being or original state, mediated by his poetic language. In Herder's references to Klopstock, it becomes apparent that Herder attempts to establish Klopstock as just such a figure for the German people.

In his “Über den Ursprung der Sprache,” Herder praises Klopstock in a manner that encapsulates exactly the points that Herder took from Hamann, namely, that Klopstock deals with the natural (as that which is concrete) over the abstract, and that Klopstock communes with the divine through nature. He makes these points by positing Klopstock as the counterexample to the Swedish mystical theologian Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772):

Dies ist so wahr, daß es sogar Schwärmern und Entzückten nicht möglich ist, ihre neue Geheimnisse aus der Natur, aus Himmel und Hölle anders als durch Bilder und sinnliche Vorstellungen zu charakterisieren. Schwedenborg konnte seine Engel und Geister nicht anders als aus allen Sinnen zusammenwittern, und der erhabne

Klopstock – jenem die größte Antithese! – seinen Himmel und Hölle nicht anders als aus sinnlichen Materialien bauen (Herder, Ursprung 1:179).

Herder continues to make points about Klopstock in comparison with other literary figures throughout his writings, and this technique of definition is in keeping with the *Sturm und Drang* preference for the concrete examples over abstract concepts.

Herder not only opposes the abstraction of neoclassicism, he also gives concrete examples of how other literary figures pale in comparison to Klopstock.

This need for concretization and avoidance of pure theory will eventually lead to a very concrete example of Shakespeare as a representative of the genius aesthetic, as we shall see in the following section. It is worth noting that Herder compared (and contrasted) Klopstock with another English poet in putting forward the program that he adapted from Hamann's theology, John Milton. In his discussion of these two poets, Herder emphasizes the importance of poetic imagery in Klopstock. In the eighth collection of his letters Briefe zur Beförderung der Humanität Herder mentions that Klopstock, with his religious epic verse, is regarded by many as “der deutsche Milton,” but Herder sees a fundamental difference between the two poets, specifically with regard to their *poetic* muses, in spite of the fact that “Beide Dichter haben heilige Gedichte geschrieben” (Herder, Briefe 2:121). Indeed, Herder writes that Milton (referring here specifically to Milton's works Lycidas (1638) and Samson Agonistes (1671)) and Klopstock stand in contrast to one another in a manner similar to Moses

and Christ, to the Old and New Testaments: “Miltons Gedicht, ein auf alten Säulen ruhendes durchdachtes Gebäude. Klopstocks Gedicht, ein Zaubergemälde, das in den zartesten Menschenempfindungen und Menschenszenen von Gethsemane aus über Erd und Himmel schwebet” (Herder, Briefe 2:121). That Milton's poetry moves throughout rooms of the “old” and “thought-out” building, whereas Klopstock's image-laden poetry paints pictures that bring heaven and earth together, is itself a suggestive *poetic* image that illustrates the *Sturm und Drang* program in both content and form: Klopstock's language is "new" in that it returns anew to the primal phase of language in imagery, and at the same time shows the "old" language of Milton's as too thought-out, abstract and unpoetic in comparison.

Herder goes on to point to the connection between Klopstock's muse and the world imagined in his poetry, and how it captures the souls of his contemporaries. He also contrasts this with Milton's “thought-out” odes: “Die Muse Miltons ist eine männliche Muse, wie sein Jambus; die Muse Klopstocks eine zärtere Muse, die in Erzählungen, Elegien und Hymnen unsre ganze Seele, den Mittelpunkt ihrer Welt durchströmet” (Herder, Briefe 2:121). In this respect, according to Herder, Klopstock fulfills the role of the poet as one who, through his command of the language, rejuvenates his people much more than Milton does: “In Ansehung der Sprache hat Klopstock auf seine Nation mehr gewirkt, als Milton vielleicht auf die seinige wirken konnte, wie er denn auch ungleich vielseitiger als der Brite über dieselbe gedacht hat. Eine seiner Oden im Geschmack des Horaz ist nach dem

Richtmaß der Alten mehr wert als sämtliche hochaufgetürmte britische Odengebäude” (Herder, Briefe 2:121).

It is this capacity of Klopstock's to captivate the soul of his contemporaries through the use of his imaginative, and indeed, image-laden, language, that Herder returns to in a passage from his Journal meiner Reise im Jahr 1769 (written in 1769, first published posthumously in 1846), in which he speaks of the power of Klopstock's images over the soul:

Allmählich schließt sich die Seele, d.i. sie verarbeitet die vorigen Ideen: sie wendet sie an, sooft sie Gelegenheit hat: dadurch werden jene zurückgerufen und gleichsam stärker eingepägt: immer zurückgerufen und immer stärker: das Gehirn also härter und fester: endlich werden sie eben durch die starke Erneuerung die einzigen und ewig. Sie kommen immer wieder, und die Seele kann nichts denken, ohne daß sie wiederkommen (Herder, Journal 1:256).

Once again, Herder captures his philosophical content in a poetically with reference to the impact of images upon soul, and he keeps to the *Sturm und Drang* ideal of avoiding rule-based abstraction in setting up a new model for literature. This component of the *Sturm und Drang* program, evident both in Herder's use of Klopstock as a concrete model of poetic rejuvenation for the German people and in Herder's poetic expression of that concrete example, which carefully avoids the contradiction of forming an abstract theory of the concrete, will feature in the next

two chapters as 1) the need for a concrete figure around which to form the genius aesthetic, and 2) the difficulty posed by forming a theory of poetics that must itself remain poetic.

### 3 Shakespeare as the Concrete Example of Herder's Poetic Genius

The fullest expression of the *Sturm und Drang* concept of the genius can be found in Herder's treatment of Shakespeare, as explained succinctly by Wolfgang Stellmacher in his book Herders Shakespeare-Bild (1978):

“Zum großen Leitbild für die Poesiekonzeption des Sturm und Drang wurde Shakespeare. In ihm erblickten Herder und die übrigen Stürmer und Dränger das Musterbeispiel eines charakteristischen Künstlers, der sein großes Werk frei von höfischen Einflüssen in enger Verbindung mit dem Leben des Volkes geschaffen hatte” (Stellmacher 146).

Shakespeare features in many of Herder's writings, including his fragments “Über die Neuere Deutsche Literatur,” Journal meiner Reise, “Von Ähnlichkeit der mittlern englischen und deutschen Dichtkunst” (1777), and his letters on Ossian. Most important, however, is his essay “Shakespeare,” (1773) in which Shakespeare takes a central role in Herder's formation of the genius aesthetic.

Shakespeare's role in Herder's conceptualization of the aesthetic genius stems from the fact that it is incumbent upon Herder to give a concrete example of genius, or otherwise risk being open to the same critique of excess abstraction in Enlightenment thought made by the theorists of the *Sturm und Drang*. This movement toward "concretization" in Herder's thought is apparent in his treatment of Shakespeare. In her book La formazione del canone shakespeariano tra identità nazionale ed estetica (Inghilterra e Germania 1700-1770), Gilberta Golinelli explains

Herder's purpose as follows:

Mentre nel saggio sulla letteratura tedesca, il genio è per Herder una *sorta di potenziale popolare-universale*, perché è un qualcosa che appartiene alle peculiarità della lingua e della cultura di un determinato popolo, cresciuto in precise condizioni climatico-naturali, nel saggio su Shakespeare il genio non significa solo ed esclusivamente un'entità astratta, ma è anche una figura concreta: è Shakespeare.

[Within his essay on German literature, the genius is potentially a *popular and universal type* for Herder, because it is something that belongs to the linguistic and cultural particularity of a certain people, having grown in precise natural climactic conditions. In the essay on Shakespeare, the genius does not simply and exclusively signify an abstract entity, but it is also a concrete figure: it is Shakespeare.]

(Golinelli 288, emphasis in original, my translation)

In Herder's Shakespeare essay, then, we see a determined shift toward finding a real-world example of genius that fulfills the theoretical demands of the *Sturm und Drang* movement. This task was important enough for Herder that he consistently revised and published his Shakespeare essay in consecutive years from 1771 to 1773 (Gjesdal 22). It is the most "radical" final draft that I will examine.

While Herder was far from being the first German literary critic to incorporate Shakespeare into literary theory, he makes it clear in the beginning of his essay that



his treatment of Shakespeare is unique, and he does this by defining his interpretation in opposition to previous critics, including those both favorable and unfavorable to Shakespeare. "Die kühnsten Feinde Shakespeares" for Herder are those who, while perhaps conceding his greatness as a poet, criticize him as a dramatist, given that he did not follow the model of the three classical unities of drama as prescribed by Aristotle and accepted by other great dramatists (Herder, "Shakespeare" 1:301). It was not only his unfavorable critics who viewed Shakespeare's lack of adherence to classical rules of drama as a weakness, but also "die kühnsten Freunde Shakespeares," who view Shakespeare as being great *in spite of* his lack of adherence to classical rules (Herder, "Shakespeare" 1:301). Hamann was just such a critic, who argued in his "Sokratische Denkwürdigkeiten" (1759) that Shakespeare's genius overcame his ignorance or violation of the rules of drama: "Was ersetzt bey Homer die Unwissenheit der Kunstregeln, die ein Aristoteles nach ihm erdacht, und was bey einem Shakesspear die Unwissenheit oder Übertretung jener kritischen Gesetze? Das Genie ist die einmüthige Antwort" (Hamann 55).

Against each of these preceding common interpretations of Shakespeare within the tradition of German literary criticism, Herder posits a striking contrast in his view of Shakespeare. He hopes to place Shakespeare "in ein volleres Licht" as a model for the *Sturm und Drang*, against the aforementioned viewpoints, each of which he viewed as falling victim to the same prejudice regarding Shakespeare:

Wenn ich zeige, daß man von beiden Seiten bloß auf ein Vorurteil, auf

Wahn gebauet, der nichts ist, wenn ich also nur eine Wolke von den Augen zu nehmen, oder höchstens das Bild besser zu stellen habe, ohne im mindesten etwas im Auge oder im Bilde zu ändern: so kann vielleicht meine Zeit, oder ein Zufall gar schuld sein, daß ich auf den Punkt getroffen, darauf ich den Leser nun festhalte, "Hier stehe! oder du siehest nichts als Karikatur!" (Herder, "Shakespeare" 1:301).

Before he gives his interpretation of Shakespeare's genius, Herder sets out to discuss the classical rules of Greek drama, which had been assumed by earlier critics to be valid for a discussion of Shakespeare, and he suggests at the outset that this assumption is false, given the entirely different cultures in which classical Greek and Shakespearean drama arose: "In Griechenland entstand das Drama, wie es im Norden nicht entstehen konnte. In Griechenland war's, was es in Norden nicht sein kann. In Norden ist's also nicht und darf nicht sein, was es in Griechenland gewesen. Also Sophokles' Drama und Shakespeares Drama sind zwei Dinge, die in gewissem Betracht kaum den Namen gemein haben" (Herder, "Shakespeare" 1:302). In view of the development of the classical Aristotelian rules for drama, namely the three unities of place, time and action, Herder argues that their development was, essentially, an organic development within ancient Greek culture, and therefore, entirely *natural* to that given cultural milieu. Consequently, it was valid for those dramatists, such as Aeschylus and Sophocles, who composed drama within that culture. (Herder, "Shakespeare" 1:303-4)

In explaining why these rules for judging art are no longer relevant, Herder introduces his view of history as organic, wherein art is an outgrowth of the nature of a people [*Volk*]. For Herder, Aristotle's standards for judging art are dead rules, never meant to be used for works of a different age: "O wenn Aristoteles wieder auflebte und den falschen, widersinnigen Gebrauch seiner Regeln bei Dramas ganz andrer Art sähe!" (Shakespeare 1:305). As nature itself changes, so must everything in the world change, according to Herder, including the rules for drama, which grew out of a bygone culture.

At this point, Herder begins to define the specific characteristics of genius that he sees in Shakespeare. They can be summed up briefly as follows: 1) Shakespeare is a "natural" artist, whose work is connected both to nature and to the people [*Volk*]; 2) Shakespeare's genius and originality are not *more* natural than those of the Greeks--he is instead a kindred spirit to the Greeks in that his work, like theirs, is natural, and not an imitation; and 3) Shakespeare's work represents an entire artistic "world" in the greatness of which the reader might become lost. These three aspects of Shakespeare's genius as Herder explains them, foreshadow Heidegger's thought in three distinct ways. Heidegger views the poet as connected to nature and a culture through a special relationship with Being. He also finds a kinship with the inner spirit of Greek art, if not in its outer form, in his conception of the role of the poet, and he explains the role of the poet in setting up a "world" for the reader.

### 3.1 Shakespeare's relationship to nature

Rather than simply adopting the rules of Aristotelian drama from a bygone era and culture, Shakespeare's approach is more "natural" to Herder in that it relates organically to the culture in which he lived, and because it speaks directly to the people [*Volk*] of that cultural milieu in a vernacular language unrestrained by concern for abstract rules. Herder concludes that Shakespeare *invented* drama for his era, precisely because he grounded it within the cultural understanding of his time and place, rather than imitating past drama:

Lasset uns also ein Volk setzen, das aus Umständen, die wir nicht untersuchen mögen, Lust hätte, sich statt nachzuäffen und mit der Walnußschale davonzulaufen, selbst lieber, *sein Drama zu erfinden*: so ist's, dünkt mich, wieder erste Frage: *wenn? wo? unter welchen Umständen? woraus soll's das tun?* [...] Es wird sich, wo möglich, sein Drama nach seiner Geschichte, nach Zeitgeist, Sitten, Meinungen, Sprache, Nationalvorurteilen, Traditionen, und Liebhabereien [...] *erfinden* – und das Erfundne wird Drama sein, wenn es bei diesem Volk dramatischen Zweck erreicht (Herder, "Shakespeare" 1:308-309).

Shakespeare invents drama here in the sense of a plant that grows from its native soil.<sup>1</sup> This natural process takes place as an *event* during which the creative spirit is allowed to flow naturally in its time and place, and not be constrained by the "rules"; it is in Herder's words an "Eräugnis" that comes to pass through the possibilities of

the new language of the time. This process has a corollary in Heidegger's later concept of *Ereignis*. Herder explains the "Eräugnis" seen in Shakespeare's work as follows:

Er fand keinen so einfachen Geist der Geschichte, der Fabel, der Handlung: er nahm Geschichte, wie er sie fand, und setzte mit Schöpfergeist das verschiedenartigste Zeug zu einem Wunderganzen zusammen, was wir, wenn nicht *Handlung* im griechischen Verstande, so *Aktion* im Sinne der mittlern, oder in der Sprache der neuern Zeiten *Begebenheit* (événement) großes *Eräugnis* nennen wollen (Herder, "Shakespeare" 1: 310)

In Herder's understanding of Shakespeare, this great dramatist's genius exists in his ability to capture the essence of his culture in language, to use language in such a way that it relates to the nature of life as it was lived in his culture. In so doing, Shakespeare *invents language and art* by returning to nature and throwing aside abstract rules that no longer applied to the Nordic peoples of his time. To write naturally, as it were, is to capture the essence of the soul of those within the culture, to raise that essence from the soil as organically as a plant does when it grows and extends into the ether, as Shakespeare's work did for the Nordic peoples. Herder notes: "Wenn in jenem eine singende feine Sprache, wie in einem höhern Äther tönet, so spricht dieser die Sprache aller Alter, Menschen und Menscharten, ist Dolmetscher der Natur in all ihren Zungen – und auf so verschiedenen Wegen beide Vertraute einer

Gottheit? – Und wenn jener Griechen vorstelle und lehre und rühre und bildet, so lehre, rührt und bildet Shakespeare nordische Menschen!" (Herder, "Shakespeare" 1:310). This comparison leads us to the second major aspect of Herder's "Shakespeare" essay: his view that Shakespeare, as a natural artist, as genius, was a kindred spirit to the Greeks.

### **3.2 The Genius of Shakespeare Makes Him a Kindred Spirit to the Greeks**

One must resist the misconception that Herder's arguments against the French neo-classicist use of ancient Greek rules for modern drama imply somehow that the ancient Greeks were not themselves natural, not possessed of genius. Rather, Herder's "Shakespeare" essay makes clear that he held the ancient Greeks in high regard, and he finds in Shakespeare the natural Nordic genius equivalent to the ancient Greek genius displayed in the work of Sophocles. Perhaps paradoxically, it is in Shakespeare's eschewing of the rules of ancient Greek drama that he rises to the level of genius last seen in ancient Greece. That is to say, in Shakespeare's originality, in his natural approach, in his culturally grounded art, he is the Nordic equivalent to the genius exemplified by the ancient Greeks, which the French neo-classicists vainly (in Herder's view) attempted to imitate (Herder, "Shakespeare" 1:307-8).

Whereas the French fall short of the greatness of Sophocles for Herder, Shakespeare is the Nordic equivalent to Sophocles as a genius of his own culture: "o

Aristoteles, wenn du erschienenst, wie würdest du den neuen Sophokles [Shakespeare] homerisieren! würdest so eine eigne Theorie über ihn dichten. [...] Würdest zu Sophokles sagen: male das heilige Blatt dieses Altars! und du o nordischer Barde alle Seiten und Wände dieses Tempels in dein unsterbliches Fresko!" (Herder, "Shakespeare" 1:310) Indeed, Herder even goes so far as to refer to Sophocles and Shakespeare as brothers, based on their inner similarities and natural approaches, in spite of the obvious differences:

Eben da ist also Shakespeare Sophokles' Bruder, wo er ihm dem Anschein nach so unähnlich ist, um im Innern, ganz wie er, zu sein.[...] Sophokles blieb der Natur treu, da er eine Handlung eines Orts und einer Zeit bearbeitete: Shakespeare konnt ihr allein treu bleiben, wenn er seine Weltbegebenheit und Menschenschicksal durch alle die Örter und Zeiten wälzte (Herder, "Shakespeare" 1:315).

In defining Shakespeare's connection to the Greeks, then, Herder's position against the French neo-classicists becomes most clear in his definition of genius. Whereas the French neo-classicists, for Herder, are pre-occupied with imitating the outer characteristics of past works of genius, and vainly attempt unnaturally to apply outdated rules from another culture to their own, Shakespeare is a genius precisely because of his inner connectedness to nature and rootedness in his own culture, in a manner comparable to the inner genius of the ancient Greeks. It is this inner genius that allows Shakespeare to capture the essence of his world.

### 3.3 Shakespeare's Work Captures the Essence of his World

This "natural" relationship to his world is what connects Shakespeare to the Greeks on an inner level of genius, but it also connects him to his readers. As a genius of the Nordic peoples, he speaks to their soul in a way that those imitating other cultures cannot. For Herder, Shakespeare creates drama that is as wide and deep as nature, and in doing so he also gives his audience the perspective to see such breadth and depth. For this reason, according to Herder, Shakespeare had no need of the three traditional Aristotelian unities in drama, for he was able to unite things as no one before him in an original, culturally modern way: "Fand Shakespeare den Göttergriff, eine ganze Welt der disparatesten Auftritte zu *einer* Begebenheit zu erfassen" (Herder, "Shakespeare" 1:312). That Shakespeare produced such a unity from within his own cultural perspective, and in so doing showed his contemporaries *their own cultural perspective as distinct from the perspective of the ancients*, is the basis of Herder's claim that Shakespeare gives his audience perspective, and it is central to Herder's choice of Shakespeare as a role model for his concept of genius.

In awakening his audience to their own cultural perspective, Shakespeare's genius shows a *wholeness* of his works as culturally grounded works of art that are so close to nature and the life of the audience that the people are able to lose themselves in the completeness of his work, speaking directly to their souls. Herder describes his own reaction to reading Shakespeare in these terms:

Mir ist, wenn Ich ihn lese, Theater, Akteur, Kulisse verschwunden!



Lauter einzelne im Sturm der Zeiten wehende Blätter aus dem Buch der Begebenheiten, der Vorsehung der Welt! – einzelne Gepräge der Völker, Stände, Seelen! die alle die verschiedenartigsten und abgetrenntest handelnden Maschinen, alle – was wir in der Hand des Welterschöpfers sind – unwissende, blinde Werkzeuge zum Ganzen *eines* theatralischen Bildes, *einer* Größe habenden Begebenheit, die nur der Dichter überschauet. Wer kann sich einen größern Dichter der nordischen Menschheit und in dem Zeitalter! denken! (Herder, “Shakespeare” 1:310)

Such a rhapsodic view of Shakespeare calls to mind the young Goethe, Herder's correspondent in Strasbourg, who praised Shakespeare's genius himself in such Herderian tones in his 1771 talk “Zum Shakespeares-Tag” that Hamann actually believed Goethe's talk to have been written by Herder himself (Lee 80). Goethe's talk, given while Herder was still revising his Shakespeare essay, gives an indication of the role that Shakespeare began to play for the *Sturm und Drang* as the concrete example of genius, specifically with respect to this question of “world creation” and its effect upon the reader. In a manner similar to Herder, Goethe describes his first reading of Shakespeare as follows:

Die erste Seite, die ich in ihm las, machte mich auf zeitlebens ihm eigen, und wie ich mit dem ersten Stücke fertig war, stund ich wie ein Blindgebörner, dem eine Wunderhand das Gesicht in einem

Augenblicke schenkt. Ich erkannte, ich fühlte aufs lebhafteste meine Existenz um eine Unendlichkeit erweitert, alles war mir neu, unbekannt, und das ungewohnte Licht macht mir Augenschmerzen. Nach und nach lernt' ich sehen, und, Dank sei meinem erkenntlichen Genius, ich fühle noch immer lebhaft, was ich gewonnen habe (Goethe 48-9).

Goethe then expounds on themes quite similar to Herder's as he praises Shakespeare's imaginative power in transcending Aristotle's rules for drama, criticizes French dramatists for their imitation of the Greeks, and finally claims that Shakespeare's works are beyond the reach of philosophers: “seine Stücke drehen sich alle um den geheimen Punkt (den noch kein Philosoph gesehen und bestimmt hat), in dem das Eigentümliche unsres Ichs, die prätendierte Freiheit unsres Wollens, mit dem notwendigen Gang des Ganzen zusammenstößt” (Goethe 50). Finally, Goethe connects Shakespeare's genius to a *Sturm und Drang* theme, namely the invocation of nature: “Und ich rufe: Natur! Natur! nichts so Natur als Shakespeares Menschen” (Goethe 51).

The idea of "ein vollkommenes Ganzes" is central in Herder's definition of Shakespeare's genius and, correspondingly, in his condemnation of the neo-classical critics of Shakespeare:

Und wenn nun in dieser glücklich oder unglücklich veränderten Zeit, es eben *ein* Alter, *ein* Genie gäbe, das aus seinem Stoff so natürlich,

groß, und original eine dramatische Schöpfung zöge, als die Griechen aus dem ihren – und diese Schöpfung eben auf den verschiedensten Wegen dieselbe Absicht erreichte, wenigstens an sich ein weit vielfach Einfältiger und Einfach-Vielfältiger – also (nach aller metaphysischen Definition) ein vollkommenes Ganzes wäre – was für ein Tor, der nun vergleiche und gar verdamme, weil dies zweite nicht das erste sei?

(Herder, "Shakespeare" 1:309)

The neo-classical literary critics, by clinging to a tradition based on abstract rules, are fools for Herder, because they overlook the perfection in Shakespeare's world-building. But Shakespeare's genius is not merely in his ability to build a world within art that corresponds to nature that is culturally grounded and moves the souls of the audience, but also, in conjunction with Goethe's ideas, in the idea that the reader of Shakespeare learns to see his own world anew as a result of the *completeness* of the articulated vision. Herder exclaims: "wie wird das Ganze der Begebenheit mit tiefster Seele fortgeföhlt und geendet!– Eine Welt dramatischer Geschichte, so groß und tief wie die Natur; aber der Schöpfer gibt uns Auge und Gesichtspunkt, so groß und tief zu sehen!" (Herder, "Shakespeare" 1:312).

At the same time, Herder is conscious of the fact that in discussing this aspect of world creation and the relationship to the soul, he runs the risk of formulating abstract rules, in much the same way as the neo-classicists whom he criticizes. Near the end of the Shakespeare essay, Herder speaks of Shakespeare's ability to create a

world, while claiming that it is impossible to adequately describe in words what Shakespeare achieves. The following passage is instructive, for Herder addresses this inadequacy in descriptive ability by reverting to the poetic metaphor that he used earlier in the essay of the plant that grows forth out of its native soil:

Hätte ich doch Worte dazu, um die einzelne Hauptempfindung, die also jedes Stück beherrscht, und wie eine Weltseele durchströmt, zu bemerken.[...] wäre es möglich, doch das in Worte zu fassen, wie das alles zu *einer* Welt der Trauerbegebenheit lebendig und innig gehöre – aber es ist nicht möglich. Kein elendes Farbengemälde läßt sich durch Worte beschreiben oder herstellen, und wie die Empfindung *einer* lebendigen Welt in allen Szenen, Umständen und Zaubereien der Natur.[...] geht es durch, versuche etwas der Art wegzunehmen, zu tauschen, es gar auf ein französisches Bretterngerüste zu simplifizieren – eine lebendige Welt mit allem Urkundlichen ihrer Wahrheit in dies Gerüste verwandelt – schöner Tausch! schöne Wandlung! Nimm dieser Pflanze ihren Boden, Saft und Kraft, und pflanze sie in die Luft: nimm diesem Menschen Ort, Zeit, individuelle Bestandheit – du hast ihm Otem und Seele genommen, und ist ein Bild vom Geschöpf (Herder, “Shakespeare” 1:315).

This long passage is noteworthy for several reasons. First, Herder introduces the example of Shakespeare, as we have noted, because the ideology of the *Sturm und*

*Drang* required a *concrete* example of genius to advance its aesthetic principles beyond the abstract rules of the neo-classical critics, but here we also see how that very act of making aesthetic pronouncements concrete finds its own limits in language. By raising Shakespeare to the height of the genius ideal, in this, his most radical essay, Herder approaches the limit of that which can be said about genius itself as an abstract notion. Second, Herder's use of poetic metaphor here to fill in the chasm in which discursive thought cannot operate is, within the framework of *Sturm und Drang* thought, perfectly consistent with the theory of poetry being closer to nature, and therefore, to the soul. If Herder is going to speak to the issues of the "Weltseele" and the completeness of the living world brought into existence by Shakespeare, the concrete genius, and cannot, therefore, dissect that world into dead abstraction, he must then move in the opposite direction. He must provide a metaphor consonant with his organic view of history in order to describe that development from *within* that organic movement, as opposed to the sort of abstract analysis from an outside perspective that would contradict the basic principles of the *Sturm und Drang*. Third, Herder's idea of world creation and its poetic metaphor, as the central motif brought to its limit here in the Shakespeare essay, informs Heidegger's ideas, when he explains his concept of "Welt" in such a way as to avoid the problems of Herder's genius aesthetic. It is therefore both necessary and appropriate to explain the flaws in Herder's theory, now that its limits have been shown, in order to better understand Heidegger's concept of the poet.

## 4 Flaws within Herder's aesthetics

### 4.1 Herder's Inconclusive Ending to the "Shakespeare" Essay

As we have seen, the ideology of the *Sturm und Drang* places a theoretical limit on Herder's ability to describe precisely how the genius sets about the task of creation. The problematic question that persists in Herder's aesthetic of the genius is the following: how can Herder define the process of a genius bringing work into being without contradicting himself and becoming a *Kunstrichter*? Herder reached the limits of his critique through the Shakespeare essay, and those limits emerge quite clearly in his concluding passage, in which Herder touches upon the question of *how* Shakespeare was able to form his own unity instead of adapting the unities proposed by Aristotle. Remarkably, Herder does not actually answer his own question:

Nun finge eben das Herz meiner Untersuchung an, »wie? auf welche Kunst und Schöpferweise Shakespeare eine elende Romanze, Novelle und Fabelhistorie zu solch einem lebendigen Ganzen habe dichten können? Was für Gesetze unsrer *historischen, philosophischen, dramatischen Kunst* in jedem seiner Schritte und Kunstgriffe liege?« Welche Untersuchung! wieviel für unsern Geschichtbau, Philosophie der Menschenseelen und Drama. – Aber ich bin kein Mitglied aller unsrer historischen, philosophischen und schön-künstlichen Akademien, in denen man freilich an jedes andre eher, als an so etwas denkt! (Herder, "Shakespeare" 1:318)

In his colossal two-volume work Herder (1877-1885), Rudolf Haym responds to this issue when he notes that Herder's treatment of Shakespeare, which Haym terms a "Rhapsodie," revolves around understanding Shakespeare principally as a poet rather than a dramatist, and that such a treatment explains why Herder backs away from the central question of explaining exactly how Shakespeare *the poet* created a new *dramatic* unity (Haym 1:469). Indeed, the fact that Shakespeare's genius can be acclaimed as having a cultural-historical grounding itself suggests that elements within it are recognizable as unity-forming, yet Herder shies away from showing how that unity is formed. Herder is caught between the iconoclastic aspects of genius as he defines it, with all of its opposition to rules and abstraction, and the need to explain abstractly, with some sort of standard, the process by which such genius can be recognized.

#### **4.2 Herder's Sense of "Reality" is Equivocal: the Poetic Universe vs Historical Reality**

Addressing the same above-cited passage from Herder, Eva Knodt, in a chapter from the book Johann Gottfried Herder: Language, History and the Enlightenment (1990), edited by Wulf Koepke, goes as far as to suggest that in shying away from answering the question that he indicates as being "the heart of the matter," Herder is implicitly denying the explanatory nature of his own model (Knodt 218). Knodt goes further than Haym when she suggests that the problem here is more than

a philosophical predicament for Herder as he attempts to avoid becoming a “critic.” Rather, Knodt points to Herder's silence on this matter as showing that his treatment of Shakespeare is itself not critical, but in fact, *poetic* in nature, a “‘rhapsody' that mediates between the aesthetic experience and its object by way of analogy and metaphor” (Knodt 219). Knodt, therefore, sees Herder as ultimately violating the form of Shakespeare's vision in order to create it anew *as* a form.

In more concrete terms, Knodt seems to locate the problem for Herder within the cultural-historical framework that informs his understanding of genius: if poetic genius can be recognized in Shakespeare's ability to transcend the Aristotelian frame of reference, and in his ability to draw spectators into his own poetic universe, then is such genius not actually manifest in its ability to transcend perceived historical reality and time itself while creating a world of its own? Knodt characterizes Herder's treatment of history in this regard as “‘history that ironically recognizes itself as poetic fiction – nothing but a 'dream' created by our own desire for order and self-justification – and yet *insists* on this fiction as constituting the *reality* of our culture” (Knodt 221, emphasis in original).

Here Knodt hits upon the fundamental flaw in Herder's interpretation in a way that merits further examination. If, as Knodt suggests, Herder recognizes Shakespeare's genius in the poetic universe that Shakespeare creates, a universe that rises above that within received historical tradition, then Herder faces the problem of explaining how one could locate this poetic universe as the ground for a cultural



reality, a reality that itself stands within received historical tradition. This problem is further compounded by the inherent contradiction in Herder's theory of proposing historical determinism in the development of language and culture while trying simultaneously to revive language and culture. Michelsen suggests that Herder tacitly addressed this contradiction in what went *unsaid* in Herder's discussion of dithyrambic poets. The dithyrambic poet, whose Dionysian attributes of composing with passion and without regard for rules correlate directly to the *Sturm und Drang* concept of the genius advanced by Herder, is described by Herder in hypothetical and optative tones, suggesting to Michelsen that Herder did not see the possibility of a revitalization of German language and culture through Klopstock or any other "genius" (Michelsen 235).

This problem is directly related to Herder's organic notion of culture, and to his concept of genius, rooted in the poetic vision that transcends dead historical models. If Herder recognizes the development of language and culture within a historical context that is *organic* in nature, then he is putting forward an irreversible process of development. What sense, then, can be made of the genius sweeping aside the dead historical models to revitalize a process that cannot be reversed? Herder's theoretical model does not permit an answer to this question.

#### **4.3 What can be salvaged from Herder's project?**

If anything, the objections by Haym and Knodt, as well as the point made by

Michelsen about Herder's implicit recognition of the impossibility of revitalizing the German language through a German dithyrambic poet, suggest that the relationship of genius to history must itself be redefined if any of Herder's project can be salvaged. Either the genius must be given more of a role in the foundation of culture itself, with less emphasis on the historicist model used by Herder, or the genius must be grounded in something other than the type of historicist model posited by Herder, with “origins” of culture and genius being located in something more akin to the development of a poetic universe, alluded to by Knodt and less related to “historical reality” as such. Michelsen frames the alternatives similarly in the following manner: “Der geschichtlichen Überlieferung – und den durch sie bedingten Fesseln – den Ursprung gegenüberzustellen, könnte bedeuten: alles Gelernte zu zerstören und nur das Ich erfinden zu lassen [...] Es könnte aber auch heißen [...], daß 'Ursprung' letztlich nicht als historischer, sondern als methodischer Begriff gedacht ist, ein Begriff, der weniger die Herkunft als [...] den Weg, anzeigt.” (Michelsen 236-7).

The option of giving the genius the primary role in culture creation, and putting the historicist model to the side, does not seem to continue Herder's project in any way that could be termed “salvaging” the project. Genius for Herder can only be recognized as such by a people [*Volk*] and grows from the soil of a culture; genius is recognized in the ability to bring forth in poetry the primordial relationship between man and nature—yet the genius creates poetry, not nature itself. Decoupling genius from history and tradition altogether could ultimately lead to a nihilist model that

would undermine not only the basic ideas of the *Sturm und Drang*, advanced in Herder's concept of genius, but also the Enlightenment ideas that Herder was trying to correct and balance by advancing such a concept.<sup>2</sup>

If, however, the question of genius is reframed explicitly within a model that stresses the poetic universe of the genius as a means of returning to the primordial relationship of man to nature, sweeping aside the dead models of history without stressing the “historical reality” of such a poetic model as the foundation of a new culture, Herder's project can go forward relatively intact. Haym's and Knodt's criticism of the problematic passage near the end of his Shakespeare essay can then be sidestepped. Rather than stressing the “how” in the question of the way in which a genius brings forth a new unity, the “how” could be viewed not as within the providence particular to and devised by a given genius, but rather as the method that gives birth to the genius, or perhaps better stated, to the works of genius. Thus, the works of the genius are made possible through the process of withdrawing from the old, dead models and viewing nature anew. This subtle change in methodology preserves the fundamental relationship between nature, poetry and genius that Herder stresses – but it places these elements not in a cause and effect relationship, but rather as co-dependent factors resulting from the process of withdrawing from “historical reality” into a “poetic universe.” It might even be plausibly argued that Martin Heidegger's approach to the use of poetry as a means of pursuing the question of man's relationship to Being is precisely a continuation of Herder's project along these

lines. In fact, Heidegger uses imagery remarkably evocative of Herder to draw out a more mystical and less Enlightenment-oriented relationship between genius, poetry and nature.

## 5 Understanding Heidegger's Poet as a Response to the Flaws in Herder's Genius Aesthetic

The role of the poet [*Dichter*], as described in Heidegger's middle and later works<sup>3</sup>, is perhaps one of the closest attempt made by anyone to salvage many of the main strands of Herder's project while reformulating the very parts that are the most troublesome, in an attempt to avoid the pitfalls of Herder's project. I must first issue a few caveats to make it clear what precisely I am claiming, and perhaps more importantly, what I am not claiming. I am not claiming that Heidegger's *Dichter* is merely an upgraded version of Herder's *Genie*, with the problematic areas of Herder's aesthetics neatly excised, for it is clear that Heidegger claims others, such as Meister Eckhart, as important influences in his development of the "poet." What I do claim is that Heidegger's explanation of the work of art and of the poet owes a lot to Herder's project, and therefore, finds in the failure of the former the beginning of its own approach, even if not explicitly acknowledged. We shall see in examining Heidegger's Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes and other related writings that he appears to consciously attempt to build his theory while avoiding the pitfalls inherent in Herder's work. I also argue that Michelsen's second suggested "solution" to the problems in Herder's genius aesthetic can be found in approximate form in Heidegger's work, which contains many of the same important characteristics of the genius aesthetic while making the adjustment suggested by Michelsen, that of approaching the question of origin from a methodological, as opposed to historical, perspective.

Let it be clear that I am not claiming that Heidegger's work is a continuation of the genius aesthetic, nor that it is even an attempt to save the genius aesthetic *per se*. It is more that Heidegger takes Herder's failure as a starting point and then formulates a new concept of the poet. It is my hope that by relating Heidegger's project to Herder's, I might help elucidate how and why Heidegger came to form the portrait of the poet that he did. Indeed, I contend that an understanding of Heidegger's attempts to avoid the problems in the genius aesthetic is perhaps the key to understanding his mystical turn, because Heidegger, too, approached the limits of theory in much the same way as Herder did before him. Therefore, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore and define the mystical elements in Heidegger's thought and its relationship to Meister Eckhart. Rather, my task is to show how Heidegger's understanding of the poet develops first through his reaction to Herder and the genius aesthetic, and is *not merely* an experiment in mysticism, as is often supposed. In doing so, I hope to ultimately shed light as well on the continuing relevance of Herder's work for contemporary aesthetics and poetics.

My methodology for this examination is as follows: first, I will examine Heidegger's lecture notes from his Summer 1939 Oberseminar on Herder at the University of Freiburg, which have only recently been published as the 85th volume of the Heideggerian *Gesamtausgabe* (1999). These notes do not explicitly concern Herder's genius aesthetic, but are rather focused upon Herder's essay "Über den Ursprung der Sprache," which itself deals with the question of whether language is

divine in origin. However, there are observations within these notes that directly pertain to the very flaw that we have seen in Herder's thinking, and which relate to the different course that Heidegger takes in Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes.

Following this examination of some of the underlying elements of Heidegger's critique of Herder, I will examine Heidegger's view of art and of the poet. I will attempt to locate within Heidegger's philosophy important corollaries to the aspects of Herder's genius aesthetic that are outlined in the Shakespeare essay. To this end, I will group my observations in three sections that correspond to the three sections of my explanation of the Shakespeare essay in Chapter 3 of this thesis: 1) the sense in which the poet relates to nature and to a people, 2) Heidegger's understanding of the Greeks; and 3) Heidegger's opposition of the concepts of "Welt" (world) und "Erde" (earth), and how this opposition brings art forth. In all three of these aspects of Heidegger's thought, distinctly Herderian overtones are evident, while it is at the same time clear that the problematic aspect of Herder's genius aesthetic has been sidestepped. Finally, I will explain Heidegger's notion of the poet within the context of Heidegger's well-known dictum that "Sprache ist das Haus des Seins," and I will discuss how this formulation avoids the problems that Herder's genius aesthetic faces by taking a decisively mystical turn.

### **5.1 Heidegger's Seminar on Herder's "Über den Ursprung der Sprache"**

One of the key differences between Herder and Heidegger concerns exactly

that which is central to the flaw in Herder's thought outlined in Chapter 4: the notion of how to reconcile the poetic universe of the genius with the historical reality whose tradition, according to Herder, is both determined and deterministic. If, however, the question of origin for the work of art and the artist can be related not to a given cultural history, but rather to a methodology, as Michelson suggests, the strong form of historical determinism cited by Herder's critics will no longer constrain the poet/genius.

Heidegger's published lecture notes on Herder are just that--notes, rather than written lectures, and they are often merely collected phrases and references, as opposed to complete sentences. Still, we may discern Heidegger's intent, from our understanding of both Heidegger's and Herder's thought. Heidegger's main criticism of Herder in these notes that is relevant here is his continued questioning of Herder's lack of grounding on an ontological level, which, in Heidegger's philosophy, means that Herder's work is not grounded primordially in the question of Being [*Sein*] itself. The importance of this criticism is two-fold for our later explanation of Heidegger's poet in comparison to Herder's genius: 1) it represents a shift in emphasis for the poetic universe over and against historical reality, decoupling the two in such a way as to give primacy to the former as a question of Being, as opposed to attempting to ground the former in the mundane reality of the world of "beings," thus rendering *Boden* free of that mundane reality and the historical determinism that plagued Herder and his search for a revitalizing genius, and 2) it provides the ground for Heidegger to



de-emphasize the active role of the artist, who becomes more of a passive vessel, through which epochs of the history of Being speak, than an active genius. This frees Heidegger from the question that puzzled Herder: How does one explain what the genius does without giving "rules" for the process, as a *Kunstrichter* would? With this in mind, let us turn to the lecture notes.

In §20 of the lectures, entitled "Zur grundsätzlichen Auseinandersetzung mit Herder," Heidegger questions the metaphysical ground on which Herder's notions of language are based. Heidegger's fragmentary comments include the following:

Herder setzt Wesen der Sprache als Sammlung gefaßter Zeichen von Gegenständlichem -- Zeichen, die zugleich "äußern" -- voraus.

Die Frage ist:

1. *Recht und Grund und Richtung dieser Wesenssetzung,*
2. Entscheidungsbereich dieser Wesenssetzung.

Dazu nötig, Herders Wesenssetzung selbst (und damit die metaphysische überhaupt) ursprünglich zu fassen -- auf das zurückführen, *worauf* sie gründet -- was sie aber *nicht* als solches sieht und noch weniger zu erfragen *vermag*.

*Doppeltes* zu erfragen:

1. Wesensentwurf des Menschen      Seinverständnis -- Sein
2. Wesensentwurf der Sprache      Wahrheit des Seins -- Da-sein

(Heidegger AUUS 27)

As is the case in all of Heidegger's work, the ontological orientation toward Being comes to the fore in his questioning. In this case, the *grounding* of Herder's metaphysical assertions of the nature of language is important. As mentioned in section 2.2 of this thesis, Herder *shifted* Hamann's theological assumption away from the notion of language (in its poetic form) as a direct communication of the divine to the poet as prophet toward a view of language as a living organism. For Herder, the transcendent and immanent divine truths of language as a living organism are communicated through nature. He sees genius in the poet's ability to remain close to that source, while at the same time communicating in primal language the aforementioned truths to those within his linguistic and cultural milieu.

In the passage cited above, Heidegger questions the basis for that shift, not in the sense of arguing for a return to Hamann's theology, but rather in the sense of asking in a secular manner for the ground of Herder's metaphysical assumptions: what is the basis for this relationship between the poet as a human being, and language in its essence, that it allows such truths to be communicated? If such a connection is possible within any given historical-cultural context, as Herder suggests in the very core assertions of his views of language that form the basis for his development of the genius aesthetic, is there not, then, a deeper, more primordial connection between human beings, language and Being itself that is pre-supposed in such a metaphysics? These questions appear to form the core objection that Heidegger has to Herder's view of language, which becomes clearer when one

considers Heidegger's remarks in §32 of the lectures. In these notes, he outlines Herder's approach and praises him while at the same time criticizing him for lacking a proper ground for understanding language outside of its rejection of the neoclassical, rational models of his time:

Die "ursprüngliche Kraft" in allem gesucht und ihre unmittelbare Äußerung -- im Gewoge bleiben.

Geschichtlich wesentlich: erweckend -- vorausahnend und -weisend *für jenen Gang des deutschen Dichtens und Sagens und Handelns.*

Aber nicht "absolut" -- und vollends nicht *für sich* zu nehmen, seine Gegnerschaft ins bloße Positive umbiegend....

Herder: Geschichtlich eine große Besinnung für sein Zeitalter -- das die Aufgabe begriffen!

Wie aber -- wenn Herder zum Kronzeugen für etwas, was gleichsehr hinter ihm und der deutschen Bewegung zurückbleibt und nur aus der Ohnmacht des Denkens sein scheinbares Recht herleitet; wobei -- recht besehen -- ganz Anderes wirklich ist als das 'All-Leben' dieser kläglichen 'Lebenslehren' (AUUS 43).

If Herder's positive assertions are grounded in nothing more than the rejection of the abstract, rational rules of previous metaphysical conceptions of language, then according to Heidegger, the deeper ground of language is missed, as he claims in §33 of his notes:

Sicher und scharf in der Kritik des 'Rationalismus' und 'Sensualismus.'  
-- Und *dennoch*: ein sehr gefährliches Spiel, weil scheinbar im Recht  
*gegen* den Rationalismus und *für* das *Erleben*. Ein Vermischen und  
Verwischen alles Fragens -- und der echten 'Besinnung.'  
[...]Und wo er die Empfindung anruft und ihren Ton, da übersieht er,  
wie gerade all dieses auf einem tieferen Grunde ruht, der freilich nicht  
das Gegenstück zur Empfindung ist (die Vernunft) und nicht der  
Begriff und nicht der Absicht und die τέχνη -- aber die *Ge-stimmtheit*  
*des Seyns und seiner Wahrheit* (AUUS 44)

In other words, Herder's critique, while pointing out the weaknesses of the abstract theoretical models of literary criticism in assessing poetry, is not sufficient in itself to ask about the ground of its own truth. To put it another way, Herder's conscious avoidance of putting forth an abstract theoretical model, as shown in his poetic conception of language in and genius, merely avoids the question of its own ground by stopping at the level of poetic metaphor. Heidegger's critique addresses, in fact, the very problem Eva Knodt raises decades later with respect to Herder, when she argues that Herder paradoxically recognizes history as a poetic fiction while at the same time insisting that history serve to constitute the reality of our culture.

Heidegger's solution to this is the idea of primordial time, the idea that existence itself is temporal. Here he speaks not of chronological history, but of "historicity" (*Geschichtlichkeit*), of the being-historical character of existence: that

Being itself is revealed in epochs. Therefore, language arises neither independently and organically, nor as an outgrowth of specific historical cultures, it is rather that Being itself "speaks" or shows itself through language, and it is in this sense that Heidegger refers to the "Gestimmtheit des Seyns und seiner Wahrheit" in his lecture notes. In §45, Heidegger expresses the importance of "historicity," which one may contrast with Herder's concept of history. Historicity comes from the deeper ground of Being, which Herder does not investigate:

Unsere Besinnung keine Sprachphilosophie, auch keine Philosophie des Wortes. Die Philosophie hat überhaupt, zumal als seynsgeschichtliches Denken, kein "Worüber" als Gegenstand -- auch nicht das Seyn. Vielmehr "ist" sie des Seyns in der Weise, wie dieses die Geschichtlichkeit von Geschichte als Gründung der Wahrheit des Seyns entscheidet. (Die Loslassung in die Historie während des Zeitalters der Metaphysik.) (AUUS 51)

Heidegger thus avoids the problem that Herder encountered. Herder's attempt to ground the poetic universe of the genius within historical reality was burdened with having to explain how one could be both bound by a certain historical determinism and at the same time "rejuvenate" the culture that is handed down or determined. Heidegger's notion of primordial time, with its being-historical character, decouples the time of historical reality on the "ontic" level of beings from the ontological time of Being itself, which shows itself not as an object concretely through language or

words, but *speaks* itself as its own truth and is understood through language. This view of language through fundamental ontology allows Heidegger to create the sort of methodological approach suggested by Michelsen as a solution to Herder's problem.

This will have profound consequences for Heidegger's understanding of the role of the poet in response to the genius outlined by Herder. Heidegger's view of the poet's role in creation differs from Herder's view of the genius precisely because of this shift from the historically deterministic character of language to language as a characteristic of primordial time. How, then, does Heidegger's view of art and the poet shift away from Herder's genius aesthetic as a result of this change from Herder's historical determinism toward primordial time? In Heidegger's work Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes, we find the result of this shift in the way that Heidegger delineates the role of the poet.

## **5.2 The Origin of the Work of Art in Relation to Language**

In putting the question of the "origin" of the work of art into context for our comparison of Heidegger's poet with Herder's genius, it is important to recall yet another of Heidegger's comments on the origins of language with respect to Herder as it connects with history and art. Herder formed the question of the origin of language, but only really as a *question of origination*, within a given cultural milieu, and not as an aspect of fundamental ontology. Heidegger comments on this in his notes on

Herder in §84:

Dazwischen liegt: Kant -- (Humboldt, *Schiller*), der *deutsche Idealismus* -- (*Schelling*, *Hegel*), *Geist* -- *Geschichte* -- *Kunst* -- und verborgen und unerkant auch Hölderlin.

All dieses nicht da, nicht wesentlich, sondern *im Gegenteil*:

"Wissenschaft," "Forschung" und sonst bleibt es beim "Alten," d.h. wie Herder sie stellte, die Ursprungsfrage! Wie mußte er sie denn gestellt haben, daß *nur* die *Wege und Mittel* sich änderten -- Doch auch nur als *Entstehungsfrage!* (AUUS 103)

When we recall Herder's shift in understanding of the divine aspect of poetry and language from Hamann's theological conception (the very context in which Heidegger's above quotation comes in his Herder lectures), we remember that Herder's elevation of poetry as a means of expressing a divine truth within a culture is an aesthetic response to the question of transcendence and immanence. Divine truth comes to light in various religions, mythologies and poetry, all specific to a given cultural milieu for a people, as Herder argued in "Älteste Urkunde des Menschengeschlechts." For Heidegger the limits in Herder's approach have to do with the question that remains on the level of origination. Heidegger, having decoupled historical time from the equation of the origin of language, wants to go beyond this notion of origination and directly to the question of origin itself: that is to say, he wishes to ask not about language in relation to a culture, but about language in

relation to Being itself (which then later informs a culture). In *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*, Heidegger does precisely this.

### **5.2.1 The Relationship of the Poet to Nature/Culture**

As one might expect in a system that stresses origin as Being instead of origination within culture, the role of the poet in the act of creation is de-emphasized in Heidegger's thought in contrast to Herder's emphasis on genius in his aesthetics. Heidegger's ontological shift described above makes such a shift in emphasis of the poet's importance necessary from a theoretical standpoint. I will now examine this ontological independence of the work of art from the subjectivity of the artist. Following this explanation, I will proceed to an explanation of "world" and "earth" dichotomy in Heidegger's thought. I will address the concepts in this order because an understanding of Heidegger's ontological shift away from Herder is precisely the background that one needs to understand Heidegger's original concept of "earth" in opposition to "world," which is often misunderstood as merely mystical.

According to Gadamer, Heidegger's concept of the poet does not have the status of the genius for Herder. Heidegger, like Herder, does not draw a hard and fast distinction between beauty as an aesthetic concept and truth as a concept strictly within the purview of logic. For Heidegger, the truth of the work of art comes not from the greatness of the genius's ability to speak to his cultural milieu, but rather, from the being-historical nature of the work of art itself: "Das Kunstwerk eröffnet auf



seine Weise das Sein des Seienden. Im Werk geschieht diese Eröffnung, d.h. das Entbergen, d.h. die Wahrheit des Seienden. Im Kunstwerk hat sich die Wahrheit des Seienden ins Werk gesetzt. Die Kunst ist das Sich-ins-Werk-Setzen der Wahrheit" (Heidegger, UK 34). This is so because any way in which beings (here referring to that represented within the work of art) are shown is a manifestation of Being. This calls to mind Michelsen's suggestion for a methodological approach to origin outside of historical reality. Interestingly, Heidegger follows that passage directly with the following question: "Was ist die Wahrheit selbst, daß sie zu Zeiten als Kunst ereignet?" (UK 34). Here we come to the question of the *event* or *Ereignis* in which the work of art comes into being. This concept was described as well in Herder's work in terms of *Eräugnis*, whereby the creative spirit is allowed to flow naturally in its time and place, and not be constrained by the "rules." It is an *event* that comes to pass through the possibilities of the new language of the time. Heidegger describes much the same, but he removes the constraint of rules and the artist's intentions:

Doch ist das Werk jemals an sich zugänglich? Damit dies glücken könnte, wäre nötig, das Werk aus allen Bezügen zu solchem, was ein anderes ist als es selbst, herauszurücken, um es allein für sich auf sich beruhen zu lassen. Aber dahin geht doch schon das eigenste Absehen des Künstlers. Das Werk soll durch ihn zu seinem reinen Insichselbststehen entlassen sein. Gerade in der großen Kunst, und von ihr allein ist hier die Rede, bleibt der Künstler gegenüber dem

Werk etwas Gleichgültiges, fast wie ein im Schaffen sich selbst  
vernichtender Durchgang für den Hervorgang des Werkes (UK 35).

This "letting-go" of the artist for Heidegger certainly owes something to the influence of Meister Eckhart, who coined the term *Gelassenheit* that runs throughout Heidegger's middle and late philosophical work. However, given the context of Heidegger's admittedly (by Gadamer) conscious reaction to the genius aesthetic in this essay, Heidegger's motives for taking this mystical turn become clear. It is a necessary move to avoid Herder's problem of trying to explain the intention of the artist over and against the historical determinism he posited.

Not only does Heidegger's view correspond to a presumed corrective of Herder, Heidegger also seeks to make an argument against the work of art as an "object" and for it as an expression of Being, which he does by decoupling the work of art from the intention of the artist. In a manner familiar to those who know Herder's thought, this is part of an attempt to liberate art from its critics. By way of example, Heidegger mentions the way that specific works of the ancient world are received in the modern world, and how this reception falls short of appreciating the work of art as it would have been appreciated within its original cultural context:

Die "Ägineten" in der Münchener Sammlung, die "Antigone" des Sophokles in der besten kritischen Ausgabe, sind als die Werke, die sie sind, aus ihrem eigenen Wesensraum herausgerissen. [...]Weltentzug und Weltzerfall sind nie mehr rückgängig zu machen. Die Werke sind

nicht mehr die, die sie waren. Sie selbst sind es zwar, die uns da begegnen, aber sie selbst sind die Gewesenen. Als die Gewesenen stehen sie uns im Bereich der Überlieferung und Aufbewahrung entgegen. Fortan bleiben sie nur solche Gegenstände. Ihr Entgegenstehen ist zwar noch eine Folge jenes vormaligen Insichstehens, aber es ist nicht mehr dieses selbst. Dieses ist aus ihnen geflohen. Aller Kunstbetrieb, er mag aufs äußerste gesteigert werden und alles um der Werke selbst willen betrieben, reicht immer nur bis an das Gegenstandsein der Werke (UK 36).

This dismissal of the mission of *Kunstbetrieb*, along with similar references in the adjoining passages to *Kunstkenner* und *Kunstrichter*, relates the proper appreciation of art to historical reality. This is so, not in the deterministic sense of an art that grows from inside a culture, but one that grows through the prism of primordial time, and shows itself in the world as that which grounds a culture itself. It is this understanding that makes the work of art no longer an "object" of understanding, but a mode of revelation of Being itself. One might expect, then, that Heidegger does not attempt to articulate an appreciation for the art of another culture, whose artistic impulse would, according to his own theory, be foreign. However, like Herder, Heidegger feels a certain bond with the ancient Greeks.

### 5.2.2 Heidegger's kinship with the Greeks

In the above-quoted passage Heidegger refers to the inapplicability of today's cultural understanding to the greatness of the work of Sophocles. Similarly, Herder viewed Sophocles as the example of genius from ancient times whose cultural values were not applicable in the modern world. Heidegger, like Herder, shares an appreciation for the art of the ancient Greeks, while recognizing the futility of attempts to judge contemporary art by ancient standards. Each thinker maintains a certain kinship to the Greeks, independent of the standards or rules of art. Whereas for Herder this kinship was about an inner connectedness to nature and firm rootedness within a culture, Heidegger, with the ontological twist that I have described, modifies this understanding accordingly. It is not the inner connectedness to nature and rootedness within a culture that Heidegger sees as important in the ancient (here decidedly pre-Socratic) Greeks, it is their openness to Being on an ontological level.

Just as Herder would like to get back to this inner connectedness to nature once possessed by the ancient Greeks, *without* copying their rules for art, so too, does Heidegger wish to recollect the Greek concept of *aletheia* (unconcealedness) in understanding truth: "Wahrheit meint Wesen des Wahren. Wir denken es aus der Erinnerung an das Wort der Griechen [*aletheia*] heißt die Unverborgenheit des Seienden.[...] Ist dazu eine Erneuerung der griechischen Philosophie nötig? Keineswegs. Eine Erneuerung, selbst wenn dies Unmögliche möglich wäre, hülfe uns

nichts" (UK 48). The important thing here is that Heidegger, like Herder, sees in the ancient Greeks an inner notion of truth to be used in art *that is not meant to be copied in the outer properties of a work of art, but rather to be felt in connection with nature*, which for Heidegger, is then taken to the ontological level of Being.

### **5.2.3 World and Earth in Heidegger's Thought**

As mentioned above, for Heidegger the "letting-go" of the intentions of the artist is a necessary condition for Being to show itself through the work. This was necessary from an ontological standpoint as a device to avoid the problems of Herder's genius with respect to the historical determinism of his theory, which was grounded not in ontology, but in historical reality. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that because Heidegger has moved beyond the particularities of an artist/genius, that he has also somehow rendered cultural grounding in historical reality irrelevant to his understanding of the role of the poet and the work of art. Indeed, in his book *Gelassenheit* (1959), Heidegger discusses the difference between calculative thought, which rationally asks about the being of things as objects, and meditative thinking, which asks about Being itself, and connects the latter specifically to the task of the poet. Heidegger uses the example of the German poet Johann Peter Hebel (1760-1826) to relate the poet to nature and culture, in language that is evocative of Herder:

Wir werden nachdenklich und fragen: Gehört nicht zu jedem Gedeihen

eines gediegenen Werkes die Verwurzelung im Boden einer Heimat?

Johann Peter Hebel schreibt einmal: 'Wir sind Pflanzen, die -- wir mögen's uns gerne gestehen oder nicht -- mit den Wurzeln aus der Erde steigen müssen, um im Äther blühen und Früchte tragen zu können.'

Der Dichter will sagen: Wo ein wahrhaft freudiges und heilsames Menschenwerk gedeihen soll, muß der Mensch aus der Tiefe des heimatlichen Bodens in den Äther hinaufsteigen können. Äther bedeutet hier: die freie Luft des hohen Himmels, den offenen Bereich des Geistes. (Heidegger, Gelassenheit 14-15)

How should one understand the idea of *Bodenständigkeit*, however, if the work of art sets itself up as a manifestation of Being on an ontological level? This stands in opposition to Herder's idea of the genius that brings forth the work of art that is rooted in the culture. Heidegger deals with this in *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes* with the concept of "Erde" (earth). This concept is directly related to the act of overcoming the problems of the genius aesthetic. Gadamer follows his comment on Heidegger's reaction to the genius aesthetic (cited in section 1) with the following statement: "Es ist in dem Bestreben, die ontologische Struktur des Werkes unabhängig von der Subjektivität des Schöpfers oder Betrachters zu verstehen, daß Heidegger nun eben dem Begriff der Welt, zu der das Werk gehört und die das Werk aufstellt und eröffnet, den Gegenbegriff 'Erde' gebraucht" (Gadamer qtd. in Heidegger UK 105).

What, then, is the function of "Earth" in Heidegger's theory? Heidegger links it to the Greek notion of *Φύσις* (*physis*), as that on which man grounds his dwelling, not as a physical or planetary notion, but as that against which the work-being of art sets itself so as to first become present. To put it simply, the "earth" is that necessary backdrop of our mundane everyday existence against which the work of art is able to set up a "world." It is the historical grounding through which man perceives primordial time. "Earth" itself becomes visible as such only when the "world" of a work of art is set up: "Das Werk rückt und hält die Erde selbst in das Offene einer Welt. *Das Werk läßt die Erde eine Erde sein*" (UK 43). The transforming power of the work of art as a manifestation of Being shows the mundane ordering of beings for what it is. In this sense, "historical reality" as such is no longer a determining characteristic in the development of the ideas of the genius, but merely the staging ground against which the work of art sets up a world. Here Heidegger solves the contradiction that Knodt points to in Herder's work. Rather than posit historical reality as the necessary ground for the poetic universe in which the genius brings forth art, as Herder does, Heidegger grounds the work in the primordial time of Being, with "historical reality" becoming visible as "earth" first through the "world" of a work of art. With this methodological shift, Heidegger has successfully changed the relationship of historical reality to the poetic universe from Herder's problematic formulation, in a manner that accomplishes what Michelsen suggested when he argued for "origin" as a methodological rather than historical approach.

### 5.3 Language as the "Haus des Seins"

In looking at Heidegger's notion of the work of art in the context of Herder's genius aesthetic, it is important to return to the notion of language and poetry. Setting up a world through the work of art is, for Heidegger, essentially *poetic* in nature:

"Wahrheit als die Lichtung und Verbergung des Seienden geschieht, indem sie gedichtet wird. *Alle Kunst* ist als Geschehenlassen der Ankunft der Wahrheit des Seienden als eines solchen *im Wesen Dichtung*" (UK 73-4). In his essay

"Phänomenologie, Hermeneutik, Metaphysik" (1983), Gadamer explains Heidegger's view of language (which Heidegger famously formulated as "das Haus des Seins"):

"Sprachlichkeit ist das Element, in dem wir leben, und daher ist Sprache nicht so sehr Gegenstand -- von welcher natürlichen oder wissenschaftlichen Bewandnis immer -- als vielmehr der Vollzug unseres Da, des >Da<, das wir sind" (Gadamer 105-6). In

Heidegger's fundamental ontology, language has the role of being the "Ereignis" (event) in which Being becomes present, in which truth comes to light in the work of

art. It is this understanding of language, along with Heidegger's idea of art as essentially poetry, that forms the background for Heidegger's treatment of specific

poets and their works. For example, rather than view the poet Friedrich Hölderlin (1770-1843) as a genius in Herderian terms, Heidegger views Hölderlin's work as that

which sets up a "world" that shows the human being in its essence against the backdrop of the "earth," which in turn shows the human essence as being a

"*Gespräch*." To make his point, Heidegger in his *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins*



Dichtung (1944) interprets Hölderlin's unfinished poem: "*Viel hat erfahren der Mensch / Der Himmlischen viele genannt / Seit ein Gespräch wir sind / Und hören können voneinander*" as follows:

Wir – die Menschen – sind ein Gespräch. Dieses ist jedoch nicht nur eine Weise, wie Sprache sich vollzieht, sondern als Gespräch nur ist Sprache wesentlich. [...]Aber was heißt nun ein >>Gespräch<<? Offenbar das Miteinandersprechen über etwas [...]Das Hörenkönnen ist nicht erst eine Folge des Miteinandersprechens, sondern eher umgekehrt die Voraussetzung dafür. Redenkönnen und Hörenkönnen sind gleich ursprünglich. Wir sind ein Gespräch – und das will sagen: wir können voneinander hören (Heidegger EHD 38-39).

This "Gespräch" should not be understood as dialectic or as dialogue, however, but as "Ereignis" in which "die Götter uns in das Gespräch bringen" (EHD 40). The mention of "gods" here, when Heidegger previously spoke of a more secularized notion of "Being" (*Sein/Seyn*), may make one wonder if Heidegger is not retreating in some way from Herder's position to Hamann's theological aesthetics. Strictly speaking, this would not be accurate, although Heidegger was acutely aware of the debate between Hamann and Herder in this regard. This is evidenced by Heidegger's quotation of Hamann's letter to Herder from 10 August 1784, in which Hamann stresses that "Vernunft ist Sprache, [logos, language]" (Heidegger, *Die Sprache* 13). Heidegger's approach does not focus on language as reason, but rather it takes a

mystical turn away from reason and "calculative" thinking toward a "meditative" approach on language as such. It would seem, in the end, that Heidegger's embrace of mysticism along the lines of Meister Eckhart's theology is arguably the result, in part, of responding to the flaws in Herder's aesthetics. This can be traced back to the roots of Herder's thought, and it comes out of Herder's debate with Hamann. The poet as genius in Herder's aesthetics thus becomes reduced in Heidegger's work to the contemplative "Hausfreund," understood in the context of language as the "Haus des Seins."

## 6 Conclusion

It is my hope that I have shown that the intellectual background of Heidegger's poetics owes much to the genius aesthetic formulated by Herder in the *Sturm und Drang* period. In fact, Herder's failed genius aesthetic gave Heidegger a ready-made template with which to work, to which he was able to apply his ontological project to revive some of the key aspects of Herder's work. The significance of this finding is clear. The continuing relevance of Herder's work and the ideas of the *Sturm und Drang* in poetics, well past the eighteenth century, cannot be denied. If Heidegger's work owes a debt to Herder, Herder's work surely bears the need for closer examination. This is especially true if one considers the impact of Heidegger's work on poetics among scholars and authors within the field of German literature, informing as it does the work of Emil Staiger (1908-1987), Ingeborg Bachmann (1926-1973) and others. The originality of Heidegger's ontological approach is not undercut by the suggestion that Herder's failed project may have influenced it. Instead, the need for Heidegger's ontological approach is only emphasized further, and at the same time made more comprehensible, by understanding Herder's ideas, which Heidegger was dealing with when he formulated his own approach.

A number of possibilities for further research may result from the findings of this thesis. The wide-ranging consequences of Herder's theological debate with Hamann in understanding poetics and fundamental ontology is an area that seems rich with research potential. For example, how might Herder's ideas of language and

genius, when understood in the context of the later development of Heidegger's thought, relate to the development of hermeneutics that came about in response to Heidegger's observations on language as that which mediates our experience of Being? Can Heidegger's abandonment of hermeneutics be explained by the sorts of limitations in theory that ultimately doomed Herder's system to failure? Heidegger's difficulty in bridging the gap between theory and poetic metaphor in explaining what is affirmed in the statement that language is the "Haus des Seins," as distinct from Being itself, in conjunction with Herder's difficulties, may lead to a fruitful discussion of the usefulness of poetic metaphor when discussing language, and whether such metaphors ultimately limit our understanding of language, as opposed to what Herder and Heidegger intended. A better understanding of Heidegger's reaction to Herder's genius aesthetic as a background to Heidegger's poetics may help scholars understand the otherwise relatively unexplored inconsistencies between Heidegger's affirmation of language as the house of Being and the influence of Meister Eckhart's mysticism and its contrary emphasis on negation in understanding Being. Even the contemporary philosophy of technology, with its strong influence from Heidegger's use of the pre-Socratics to juxtapose the essence of art with technology, and its emphasis on *Bodenständigkeit*, might well be enriched with an understanding of Herder, whose reflections on the relationship of language and culture might give added weight to Heidegger's notions of *poiesis* taken from the pre-Socratics, even if only to explain why Heidegger felt the need to take this discussion beyond the level

of culture and into the realm of ontology.

Ultimately, the suggestion that Herder's call for a new literature within the *Sturm und Drang* program might explain the development of one of Heidegger's central trains of thought, may serve to open debate among Herder and Heidegger scholars alike on the relationship between art, poetry, language, nature and culture. This can only be a positive development for scholars who study Herder, and may serve to emphasize and heighten the relevance of Herder's work for a new generation of scholars.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Herder here evokes an image of *Boden* that will be echoed 150 years later by Heidegger in his concern for *Bodenständigkeit* when he uses the same image: "Und alle sein Wesen, Tugend und Vollkommenheit beruhe ja darauf, daß es nicht das erste ist: daß aus dem Boden der Zeit, eben die andre Pflanze erwuchs" (Herder, Shakespeare 1:309)

<sup>2</sup>In the late nineteenth century, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), who described himself as a genius unrestrained by the rules of critics, penned a collection of poems, the title of which, "Dionysos-Dithyramben," suggests a possible response to Herder's call for a German dithyrambic poet. Nietzsche's nihilist approach to genius, however, is at odds with Herder's project of *revitalizing* culture.

<sup>3</sup>See, for instance, the following middle and late works of Heidegger, all of which include passages relating to the poet: Gelassenheit. Stuttgart: Günther Neske, 1959; "Hebel--der Hausfreund" in Gesamtausgabe Band 13: Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1983; "Sprache und Heimat" in Gesamtausgabe Band 13: Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1983; "Wozu Dichter?" in Holzwege. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1950.

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### *List of Abbreviations*

AUUS= Zu Herders Abhandlung >>Über den Ursprung der Sprache.<<

EHD= Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung

UK= Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes

VKGG= Von Kunstricherei, Geschmack und Genie

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