

M. Nikitiuk**NOVALIS: POETIC THINKING AS A MEDIUM OF THE SPIRITUAL
EXPERIENCE OF CULTURE**

The article offers a culturological analysis of the creative legacy of Friedrich von Hardenberg (Novalis, 1772–1801) as a key figure of early German Romanticism. It examines the biographical preconditions that shaped his poetic-philosophical worldview, characterises his principal works, and clarifies their significance for an understanding of poetic language as a medium of the spiritual experience of culture. Within the framework of the dissertation research "Novalis and Antonym: Phenomenology of the Spiritual Experience of Culture", the article outlines the phenomenological potential of Novalis's poetics and traces the typological trajectory "Novalis — Rilke — Antonym" as variations of a single European intuition concerning the poetic word as an event of disclosure of being. The article also analyses Novalis's influence on the European philosophical and literary tradition, as well as the state of reception of his work in the Ukrainian scholarly space.

Keywords: Novalis, phenomenology of culture, spiritual experience, poetic thinking, German Romanticism, Antonym, Rilke, Friedrich von Hardenberg.

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Statement of the problem. Is poetic language capable of being something more than a means of expression — can it itself disclose those strata of being that discursive reason merely registers without experiencing them? This question, which we pose in the dissertation research "Novalis and Antonym: Phenomenology of the Spiritual Experience of Culture", is not a purely theoretical one. It arises in the encounter with concrete poetic texts in which language behaves differently from what we are accustomed to expect of it: it does not describe — it enacts. Among the authors who posed this problem most acutely, Novalis (Georg Philipp Friedrich von Hardenberg, 1772–1801) occupies a special place. He did not merely reflect upon poetry — he produced a corpus of texts in which philosophical, poetic and natural-scientific thinking flow into one another without visible effort, as if for him these boundaries had never existed at all. When we juxtapose this practice with the poetics of Bohdan Ihor Antonym, a sense of typological kinship arises which, however, calls for cautious justification: it is all too easy to see commonality where there is in fact only external resemblance.

Analysis of recent research and publications. The state of Novalis scholarship is paradoxical: there is an extraordinary amount of material, but precisely this abundance complicates orientation. The critical edition of his works (Novalis Schriften, 1960–2006) has opened up access to texts previously known only fragmentarily, and this has substantially altered our understanding of Novalis. It has become clear that "the dreamy poet of the blue flower" is, rather, a later myth than the actual figure: a man who worked seriously with Kant and Fichte, studied geology and mining, and was engaged in administrative activity. Among recent editions, the volume by J. D. Reid (Reid, 2024) has proved most useful for our work — not so much for the completeness of the texts selected as for the introductory essay, in which

Reid convincingly shows that Novalis deserves serious philosophical reading alongside Kant, Fichte, Schelling and Hegel. The diary of 1797 in B. Donehower's edition (Donehower, 2007) allows us to see something that the "pure" philosophical texts do not give: how concrete experience of loss — the death of Sophie von Kühn — is transformed into a philosophical category. G. Schulz's biographical study (Schulz, 1996), notwithstanding its age, retains its value precisely through detail: we see the milieu, the everyday life, the daily routine against the background of which the ideas matured.

Three studies should be mentioned separately, each illuminating Novalis from an unexpected angle. G. von Molnár (Molnár, 1987) posed a question that is rarely raised in connection with the Romantics: not what Novalis thought about art, but what ethical position this art presupposes. For Molnár, Novalis is neither aesthete nor mystic, but a thinker for whom poetry is a form of responsibility. We consider this thesis exceptionally productive, though not free from a certain simplification: Molnár is at times inclined to see in Novalis more wholeness than the texts themselves permit. J. R. Hodgkinson (Hodgkinson, 2007), in his study of female figures in Novalis, has uncovered something important for our analysis: poetic thinking in Novalis is not the monologue of a genius but a dialogical structure in which the transformation of the subject occurs through encounter with the other. Finally, the recent work of O. Ware (Ware, 2024) on the Romantic "new mythology" has helped us to see that Novalis's "poetic Christianity" is not a restoration of an old faith but an attempt to create post-Kantian symbolic forms in which culture might articulate its spiritual experience.

In the phenomenological key, the works of K.-Y. Lau (Lau, 2016) and of L. Embree and M. Daniel (Daniel and Embree, 1994), which justify the possibility of a phenomenological approach to cultural phenomena, are important to us. Yet we must acknowledge that these authors do not address Novalis directly, and the application of their methodological foundations to Romantic poetics is our own initiative, the validity of which still requires verification.

In Ukrainian scholarship, the problem of Novalis is concentrated mainly in the area of literary history and comparative studies. B. B. Shalahinov (2010) has developed a coherent conception of early German Romanticism as a "modernist project", and it is precisely this perspective — Romanticism as a project rather than a "style" — that has proved most productive for us. D. S. Nalyvaiko (2001) consistently argued for the necessity of viewing Ukrainian literature within an all-European context, which provides a methodological basis for our comparison. Particularly valuable for us is the work of I. M. Yudkin-Ripun (2020), where the phenomenological methodology of cultural-text interpretation is developed precisely as a culturological rather than a literary-critical procedure. The contributions of K. O. Shakhova (2001) and I. V. Kozlyk (2004) likewise remain important, although none of the named authors poses the problem of the phenomenology of spiritual experience in relation to Novalis — and this is precisely the lacuna we attempt to fill.

Exposition of the main material. Let us begin with what often remains outside attention: Novalis grew up in a Pietist family. His father, Heinrich Ulrich Erasmus von Hardenberg, after the death of his first wife underwent a profound religious conversion and went on to raise his children in the spirit of strict inner piety (Schulz, 1996, pp. 17–19). Why is this important? Because Pietism is a tradition in which spiritual experience precedes its rational comprehension: first you feel God, then you reflect upon Him. We see here a direct analogy with the Greek-Catholic piety in which Antonych was formed: in both cases we have a milieu in which experience precedes the word, not the reverse. Of course, this analogy remains typological — we do not assert any direct connection between eighteenth-century Saxon Pietism and twentieth-century Galician Greek Catholicism.

Novalis's educational path is striking in its breadth: law in Jena (1790–1791) under Schiller and Reinhold, the continuation of legal studies in Leipzig (1791–1793), where his

friendship with Friedrich Schlegel began, the law degree at Wittenberg (1794), service with the magistrate in Tennstedt. The encounter with Fichte in 1795 became a turning point: the young lawyer and poet was transformed into a serious philosopher who, over the course of the following year, produced the body of notes known as the "Fichte Studies" (Reid, 2024). But it was the death of fifteen-year-old Sophie von Kühn in March 1797 that, in our view, marks the genuine beginning of Novalis as Novalis. The diary of that year (Donehower, 2007) records an extraordinary process: private grief is transformed into a philosophical category, loss becomes a threshold. Here the vector that will define his entire subsequent poetics is formed: the movement towards night, towards the invisible, towards what lies beyond the visible surface of things.

Then came the Mining Academy at Freiberg, geology under Werner, and within some five years — the entire literary corpus: the collection of philosophical fragments *Pollen* (*Blüthenstaub*, 1798), the political aphorisms *Faith and Love* (*Glauben und Liebe*, 1798), the polemical essay *Christianity or Europe* (*Die Christenheit oder Europa*, 1799), the unfinished novels *The Disciples at Saïs* (*Die Lehrlinge zu Saïs*) and *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, and the lyric cycle *Hymns to the Night* (*Hymnen an die Nacht*, 1800). Death from tuberculosis on 25 March 1801 — a few days before his twenty-ninth birthday. Five years — and a corpus of texts on which hundreds of scholars are still at work today. Here a temptation to heroisation arises, and we wish deliberately to resist it: Novalis was not a tragic genius who "burned out". He was an industrious, disciplined man who combined poetry with administrative service in the salt mines.

Now to the heart of the matter: how, exactly, does Novalis conceive the function of the poetic word? In our view, the key lies in the distinction between language-as-representation and language-as-disclosure (*Erschließung*). In the *Fragments* Novalis claims that the poet apprehends nature more deeply than the scholar — and this is no mere Romantic aphorism. Behind it stands a definite philosophical position: discursive reason analyses, that is, breaks the whole into parts; poetic thinking holds contradictions in unity. The visible and the invisible, the finite and the infinite, the individual and the universal — these are not oppositions to be dialectically "sublated", but poles between which the poetic word moves. It is very tempting here to draw a direct line to Heidegger and his "disclosure of being" (*Entbergung des Seins*), and Heidegger himself did indeed read Novalis (Reid, 2024). Yet we deliberately avoid this identification: Novalis's "disclosure" takes place still before the crisis of metaphysics that Heidegger diagnosed, and it has a fundamentally different timbre — more trustful, less tragic.

The novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, although it remained unfinished, allows us to see this logic at work. The blue flower (*Blaue Blume*), which became a pan-European symbol of Romantic longing, is not simply an "image of the ideal". It is a structural element: it appears at the beginning of the novel as that which sets the movement going — and it was meant to return in the second part, where fairy-tale, natural science and religion would have fused into unity. As Shalahinov (2010) notes, not all of Novalis's brilliant designs were realised, yet it is precisely the boldness of these designs that defines his place in European thought. We would add: the unfinished state of *Ofterdingen* is not accidental, nor is it solely the consequence of an early death. The fragmentariness here is meaningful: to complete this novel would be to fix that which by its very nature cannot be fixed.

Hymns to the Night is, perhaps, the most important text for our investigation. Here Novalis carries out a radical reversal: night ceases to be the negation of day and becomes the space of a higher reality, in which encounter with the deceased Sophie and with the divine becomes possible. But it would be a mistake to see here only "a poetic experience of death". Before us is an experience of transcendence, articulated by means of poetic language which thereby acquires a quasi-liturgical function. And it is precisely here that the fundamental

difference from Antonych becomes apparent: while Novalis moves from earth to night, from the bodily to the invisible, Antonych performs a directly opposite movement — immersion in the immanent, in the elemental corporeality of vegetal being. And yet — and this is essential — both authors share a fundamental intuition: the poetic word does not describe reality but discloses its invisible strata. The difference lies in the direction of the movement, not in its nature.

It is worth pausing here and asking: what exactly makes the Hymns such an unusual text? In our view, the matter is not only thematic — death, night, transcendence. The matter is in how Novalis handles language. In the Hymns, poetic speech constantly oscillates between prose and verse, between philosophical discourse and prayer, between description and incantation. This is not a stylistic whim — it is a form adequate to the content: an experience of passage between the visible and the invisible cannot be fixed within a single register of language. When we compare this with Antonych's transitions between "bookish" and "folk" language in *The Green Gospel*, we see an analogous strategy: both authors unsettle the linguistic register because the experience they articulate does not fit into a single linguistic modality. This observation, we believe, is significant for the phenomenology of culture: it shows that spiritual experience requires not merely different content but a different form of speech.

The Disciples at Sais — an unfinished philosophical novel that often remains in the shadow of *Ofterdingen* — deserves separate attention, as for our analysis it is no less important. Here Novalis treats artistically the relation of the human being to nature, and does so not through a *Naturphilosophie* treatise but through narrative, in which nature appears as a living whole that speaks to the human being if he or she is capable of listening. The central motif — the search for the "word" or "cipher" by which nature can be "read" (*Natursprache*) — develops an idea close to Schelling, but with the poetic turn characteristic of Novalis: nature is not an object, but an interlocutor. In our view, it is precisely this intuition that has the most direct bearing on Antonych's poetics. When Antonych writes "I am a possibility of a tree", he is not metaphorising — he is articulating an experience of belonging to nature which Novalis expresses through the motif of the "reading" of nature's language. Both authors refuse to see in nature a backdrop or an object of cognition: for both, it is an element into which the poet immerses himself — but Novalis immerses himself spiritually, while Antonych does so corporeally.

This moment deserves a separate comment, for here we approach what we consider the heart of our comparative thesis. *The Disciples at Sais* contains the famous allegory of the veil of Isis: the disciple who lifts the veil from the goddess finds beneath it — himself. This is no mere Romantic paradox. It is the articulation of an experience in which subject and object of cognition turn out to be inseparable: to know nature is to know oneself as part of nature. Antonych, without knowing this allegory (at any rate, we have no evidence of acquaintance), arrives at a structurally identical conclusion by a different route — through the bodily experience of vegetal being. Such convergence, we believe, cannot be accidental: it testifies that both authors touch upon one and the same stratum of experience, though from opposite sides.

As regards the reception and influence of Novalis, his significance reaches far beyond the bounds of German literature, and this is important to register in order to justify our comparative approach. Already in the nineteenth century, T. Carlyle, in his essay on Novalis, observed that here was an author who fits none of the customary categories — neither "dreamer", nor "mystic", nor "rhapsodist". R. W. Emerson and the American Transcendentalists assimilated Novalis's ideas about nature as a living whole and about the poet as a mediator between the visible and the invisible. In the twentieth century the situation grows more complex: W. Benjamin and M. Heidegger develop Novalisian intuitions about

language and poetry, but each in his own direction, often polemical with regard to Romanticism itself. The English poet-philosopher O. Barfield, important for T. S. Eliot, C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien, was also under his influence (Reid, 2024). F. Nietzsche, who considered himself an anti-Romantic, was indebted in many respects to Novalis in his understanding of the role of style and of the poetic in philosophical work — and this irony has not escaped scholars. In the twentieth century, M. Maeterlinck called Novalis his teacher, and the blue flower became a pan-European symbol of Romantic seeking — often cited by those who have never read Ofterdingen. This breadth of influence — from Carlyle to Tolkien, from Benjamin to Maeterlinck — testifies that Novalis touched upon something that exceeds the bounds of any single current.

Between Novalis and Antonych there is a mediator without whom this typology risks remaining abstract — Rilke. The presence of Novalis in Rilke's poetic thinking is not an isolated episode of reception but one of the leading motifs of his mature poetics. Already in the early period, in large measure through Lou Andreas-Salomé, Rilke discovered Novalis as the poet who first articulated the poetic word as an organ of access to the invisible (Ryan, 1999). The famous formula from his letter to W. von Hulewicz of 13 November 1925 — concerning the "transformation of the visible into the invisible" (*Verwandlung des Sichtbaren ins Unsichtbare*) as the poet's mission — reads as a modernist variation on the theme of the Hymns to the Night.

What is fundamental for us here is this: Rilke effects a decisive shift. Novalis's orientation towards night and the invisible begins, in Rilke, to return to the earthly, to place, to the utterance of the thing itself. The attested significance of Rilke for Antonych — from the note in the journal *Vohni* in 1932 to his translations of Rilke — allows us to trace a concrete channel of cultural transmission. Antonych carries Rilke's return to the earth all the way to the full immanentisation of the poetic medium in *The Green Gospel* and *The Great Harmony*. Thus a typological trajectory of three stages emerges: Novalis's transcendence — Rilke's transitional openness — Antonych's immanence. We are aware that this scheme simplifies reality, but we consider it heuristically useful: it allows us to see both poets not as isolated national phenomena but as variations of a single intuition, an intuition methodologically grounded in the works of I. M. Yudkin-Ripun (2020) on eidetic reflection and the hermeneutics of interpretation.

Let us return to Novalis. When we read Molnár (1987), what becomes evident is that which complicates any unequivocal reading: Novalis fits neither into the category of "poetic dreamer" nor "German mystic". His work forms an inseparable unity of life and poetry — and Molnár shows that this unity has not only an aesthetic but also an ethical dimension. For Novalis, art is not an isolated game, but a form of ethical relation to reality. In our view, this is fundamental: the spiritual experience of culture, articulated in poetic thinking, is not only a cognitive act but also an act of responsibility before being. Art does not simply "reflect" — it obliges. We would like to underscore this point, because it is precisely what distinguishes the Romantic understanding of poetry from later aestheticism: when Novalis "romanticises" reality, he does not embellish it but takes upon himself the responsibility of seeing in it more than what is visible on the surface. This ethical stance, as it appears to us, is shared by Novalis and Antonych, although it is realised in them differently: Novalis answers before the invisible, Antonych — before the earth.

Another dimension that cannot be passed over is the role of the feminine. Hodkinson (2007) convincingly shows that female figures in Novalis — from the real Sophie von Kühn to the allegorical figures in Ofterdingen — are not merely objects of love but media of the subject's transformation. The very title of his book — "Transformation beyond Measure?" — refers to Novalis's dialogue of 1798: "Jeder Mensch ist ohne Maafs veränderlich" ("every human being is changeable beyond measure"). Here we see something important for our

comparison with Antonym: in Antonym too the feminine and the natural appear as forces of transformation, although in a fundamentally different, bodily-vital key. Sophie in Hymns to the Night is at once a concrete deceased girl and a transcendent threshold; the earth in Antonym's Green Gospel is at once soil and a sacred space. What is shared here, in our view, is precisely the structure of double meaning: the poetic image in both authors fundamentally resists univocal fixation — it is at once "this" and "that", concrete and symbolic, and it is precisely this irreducibility that makes it a medium of spiritual experience.

O. Ware's study (2024) of the Romantics' "new mythology" has helped us to see another important aspect. For Novalis, the return to myth is not a regression to the pre-rational, but a deliberate attempt to overcome the limitations of Enlightenment rationalism. His essay Christianity or Europe (1799) is not a restoration of an old faith but a manifesto of "poetic Christianity", in which the poetic word takes on the function of the sacred. For the phenomenology of the spiritual experience of culture, this perspective is exceptionally productive: it shows how poetic thinking creates new symbolic forms. And it is precisely this function, in our view, that links Novalis with Antonym, whose Green Gospel and Christmas likewise construct a poetic sacrality — but not "above" rationality, rather "alongside" it, at the intersection of the Christian tradition and an elemental natural piety. It should be noted that Novalis's essay, although unpublished in his lifetime, provoked sharp polemic within the Romantic circle itself: Schlegel and Goethe had serious objections to its content, which testifies to the radicalism of the position proposed.

Let us pause separately on two notions which, in our view, have direct significance for the phenomenology of culture. The first is "romanticisation" (Romantisierung). Novalis defines it as the operation of giving to the ordinary a higher meaning, to the familiar — the dignity of the unfamiliar. This is not an aesthetic game — it is an act of culture-creation: through romanticisation, language is transformed from an instrument of communication into a medium of disclosure. In the Logological Fragments, this idea acquires the name "magical idealism": the spirit is capable of transforming reality not through external action but through a change of mode of seeing. Here lies a deep kinship with the phenomenological notion of intentionality — consciousness is always consciousness-of-something, and the poetic spirit is always a spirit-directed-towards-the-invisible (Reid, 2024). Yet we are cautious about this analogy: Husserl and Novalis work in different philosophical registers, and any direct identification risks distorting both.

The second notion is the fragment as a form. The fact that Novalis did not finish most of his texts is often attributed to his early death. But the early Romantics — both Schlegel and Novalis — understood the fragment as a genre that corresponds to the nature of the Absolute: that which cannot be exhaustively presented requires a form that preserves openness. In 1798 Novalis published in the Athenaeum 114 fragments under the title Pollen, which addressed the most varied themes — from the theory of consciousness to natural science, from politics to poetry. The pseudonym "Novalis" (from the Latin *de Novali* — "one who tills new ground") appeared for the first time precisely in this publication (Schulz, 1996, p. 9), marking the transition from a private person to a public intellectual project. The project of the Romantic Encyclopaedia (*Das Allgemeine Brouillon*, 1798–1799), in which over a thousand entries were composed in half a year, was meant to unite all the scientific disciplines through the principle of analogy and "symphilosophy" (*Symphilosophie*). For cultural studies, this project is important not as a historical curiosity but as a presentiment of the interdisciplinary stance which defines contemporary phenomenology of culture: the understanding of cultural phenomena not within the limits of separate disciplines but in the horizon of integral experience (Yudkin-Ripun, 2020).

Finally, on comparative methodology. We do not assert any genetic influence of Novalis upon Antonym — there are no sufficient documentary grounds for this. What is at

stake is a typological convergence conditioned by the belonging of both authors to a common Central European cultural field: Novalis with his Pietism and Naturphilosophie, Antonych with his Greek-Catholic piety and Habsburg cultural heritage. Both milieus, although separated in time, form a type of cultural consciousness in which spiritual experience is not reduced to rational reflection but preserves its primary intensity in the poetic word. As D. S. Nalyvaiko (2001) rightly observes, comparative literary study is called to disclose precisely such deep connections, which are not reducible to direct contact-influences. K.-Y. Lau (2016), in his concept of "the new cultural flesh", proposes an understanding of culture as a bodily-experienced horizon of meaning — and this provides us with a theoretical frame for seeing the poetic thinking of both Novalis and Antonych not as a "literary device" but as a way of constituting spiritual experience. As I. V. Kozlyk (2004) remarks, the analysis of artistic consciousness as a form of cultural self-awareness requires a movement beyond purely literary categories — and it is precisely such a movement that we attempt to undertake.

We are aware that our comparative position may meet with objections: too great is the distance between a Saxon aristocrat of the late eighteenth century and a Lemkian intellectual of interwar Lviv. Yet, in our view, it is precisely this distance that makes the comparison methodologically interesting. If two authors, separated by time, language, confession and social standing, arrive at a structurally similar understanding of the function of the poetic word, this testifies that we are dealing not with "influence" or "borrowing" but with something deeper: with a general structure of spiritual experience that can be realised in different cultural contexts. It is this very structure that we call phenomenological — and it is for the disclosure of this structure that we need that movement beyond literary studies into the space of cultural studies of which I. V. Kozlyk writes.

Conclusions. Let us summarise, mindful of the preliminary character of our observations. First, Novalis is not only a literary figure but a thinker who, most consistently among the early Romantics, developed the idea of poetic thinking as an autonomous mode of cognition. Second, his poetics of transcendence forms a productive opposition to Antonych's poetics of immanence, and it is precisely this opposition, in our view, that allows us to disclose the phenomenological structure of the spiritual experience of culture. Third, the typological trajectory "Novalis — Rilke — Antonych" is not merely a convenient schema but evidence of a real chain of cultural transmission that calls for further verification. Fourth, Ukrainian scholarship possesses a considerable, as yet not fully realised potential for a phenomenological reading of Novalis — a potential laid down in the works of B. B. Shalahinov, D. S. Nalyvaiko, I. M. Yudkin-Ripun, K. O. Shakhova and I. V. Kozlyk. We regard this article as a first step towards a more substantial comparative analysis, which will form the principal part of the dissertation research.

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НОВАЛІС: ПОЕТИЧНЕ МИСЛЕННЯ ЯК МЕДІУМ ДУХОВНОГО ДОСВІДУ КУЛЬТУРИ

Стаття починається з простого, але провокативного питання: чи може поетична мова бути чимось більшим за засіб вираження — чи здатна вона сама розкривати ті шари буття, що їх дискурсивний розум лише констатує, але не переживає? Серед авторів, які поставили це питання найгостріше, Новаліс (1772–1801) посідає особливе місце саме тому, що в його корпусі філософське, поетичне і природознавче мислення перетікають одне в одне без видимого зусилля. Робота свідомо протистойть спокусі героїзації: за пізнім міфом про «мрійливого поета блакитної квітки» стоїть людина, що серйозно працювала з Кантом і Фіхте, навчалася геології у Вернера, поєднувала поезію з адміністративною службою на соляних копальнях.

Центральним аналітичним моментом є розрізнення між мовою-як-репрезентацією і мовою-як-розкриттям (Erschließung): поетичне мислення утримує суперечності в єдності, а не розкладає ціле на частини. Стаття свідомо обережна щодо прямих паралелей з Гайдеггером і Гуссерлем — новалісове розкриття має принципово інший тембр, довірливий, а не трагічний. Особлива увага надана Рільке як посереднику між Новалісом і Антоничем: формула з листа Рільке до Гулевича 1925 року — «перетворення видимого в невидиме» (Verwandlung des Sichtbaren ins Unsichtbare) — читається як модерністська варіація на тему «Гімнів до ночі», а Антонич доводить рількевий зсув до повної іманентизації поетичного медіуму. Так вимальовується тристадіальна траєкторія: трансценденція Новаліса — транзитна відкритість Рільке — іманентність Антонича.

Стаття не стверджує генетичного впливу Новаліса на Антонича, а працює з типологічною конвергенцією, зумовленою належністю обох авторів до спільного центральноєвропейського культурного поля. Якщо два автори, розділені часом, мовою і конфесією, приходять до структурно подібного розуміння функції поетичного слова, це свідчить не про «вплив», а про загальну структуру духовного досвіду, що реалізовується у різних культурних контекстах. Саме таку структуру стаття називає феноменологічною; саме для її виявлення потрібен вихід за межі літературознавства у простір культурології.

Ключові слова: Новаліс, феноменологія культури, духовний досвід, поетичне мислення, німецький романтизм, Антонич, Рільке, Фрідріх фон Гарденберг.