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Hölderlin's 'Hälfte des Lebens' and the Fate of Reflection

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ABSTRACT
The article examines Hölderlin's poem as a tragic response to Romantic reflection as formulated by Fichte, and in this context shows that the poem's interest in Klopstock, recognized by recent scholarship, is a critical one. Hölderlin, like Hegel, discerns a continuity between Klopstock's emphasis on feeling and the problems of Fichtean reflection. The article concludes by looking at the poem's critical anticipation of later Romantic developments, and its significant relation to Goethe's 'Auf dem See'.

KEYWORDS
'Hälfte des Lebens'; 'Auf dem See'; reflection; Friedrich Hölderlin; F. G. Klopstock; J. G. Fichte; G. W. F. Hegel; J. W. Goethe; Winfried Menninghaus; Adonic foot

Mit gelben Birnen hänget
Und voll mit wilden Rosen
Das Land in den See,
Ihr holden Schwäne,
Und trunken von Küssen
Tunkt ihr das Haupt
Ins heilignüchterne Wasser.

Weh mir, wo nehm' ich, wenn
Es Winter ist, die Blumen, und wo
Den Sonnenschein,
Und Schatten der Erde?
Die Mauern stehn
Sprachlos und kalt, im Winde
Klirren die Fahnen.

Friedrich Hölderlin's poem 'Hälfte des Lebens' was completed in 1803 following revisions to drafts first produced in 1799/1800, and published in 1804 as one of nine *Nachtgesänge*.[1] Probably no other lyric in modern European literature does

[1]The poem is cited from Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke: Große Stuttgarter Ausgabe*, ed. by Friedrich Beißner and Adolf Beck, 8 vols (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1943–85), II/1: *Gedichte nach 1800: Text* (1951), p. 117. On the genesis and dating, see II/2, 663; Beißner (ibid., 667) gives 1799 ('in den letzten Monaten vor der Jahrhundertwende') as the origin of 'Wie wenn am Feiertage', from which 'Hälfte des Lebens' evolved. See more comprehensively the commentary in Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, ed. by Michael Knaupp, 3 vols (Munich: Hanser, 1993), III, 142–43, 263, 268.

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so much, with such apparent simplicity, in so brief a form. Within two short stanzas a gloriously abundant late-summer lake scene, untouched by self-consciousness, tips into wintry isolation experienced by a lamenting 'I'. The shift occurs between the stanzas, as swans on the lake dip their heads into the water, presumably towards the reflected image of themselves and of their surroundings, breaking the lake's surface. The poem is structured around this moment of reflection, which it does not, however, represent. Adorno wrote that nothing external ('äußerlich') connects the stanzas (their relation being one of 'parataxis'), but that they are linked by an intrinsic 'need' of each for the other ('Jede der beiden Stophen […] bedarf […] in sich ihres Gegenteils').[2] They are one with each other, though different. Each is the other's reflective reversal, or negative. To this, we must add that the poem is an expression of — and above all an uncertain, imperilled response to — a post-Kantian intellectual sensibility of reflection. Here we will try to understand the poem's relationship to the development of 'reflection' as a way of speaking about the self, arguing that this relationship is inseparable from the presence within the poem of two figures, one pre- and one post-Kantian: Klopstock and Fichte.

In his book-length study of 'Hälfte des Lebens', Winfried Menninghaus links the poem's thematic concerns to what he shows to be its central metrical feature, the Adonic foot, which comprises a dactyl followed by a trochee (as in 'Hālftĕ dĕs Lēbĕns').[3] This structure was known from classical poetry as the closing of the sapphic stanza. Klopstock, in his 'pseudo-sapphic' repertoire, had used it not only to end the stanza but also to begin it, thus producing a symmetry within the overall unit that was itself replicated in a second, final stanza. In these poems Klopstock had introduced the further innovation of Adonic titles, as in 'Fürcht dĕr Gĕlīebtĕn', the best-known and most accomplished of his pseudo-sapphic odes. Menninghaus demonstrates that 'Hälfte des Lebens', though not an exercise in sapphic form, is nonetheless haunted by it and by the drama of desire and loss embodied in the figure of Adonis. The influence, he shows, was mediated by Klopstock, whose practice the poem echoes in many subtle ways, most clearly when Hölderlin ends each stanza, or each 'half of life', with an Adonic foot that is a metrical recapitulation of the poem's title.[4] Reflection, then, is part of the poem's pre-Kantian, pre-Romantic inheritance, which, however, the poem turns towards the modern question of self-consciousness. For the actual 'half of life' pointed to by the Klopstockian process of recapitulation is the gap between stanzas, signifying Adorno's 'eliminated' middle element ('ein Mittleres […] eliminiert')[5]: the

[2]Theodor W. Adorno, 'Parataxis: Zur späten Lyrik Hölderlins', in T. W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann and others, 20 vols (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1970–86), XI: *Noten zur Literatur* (1984), pp. 447–91 (p. 473).
[3]Winfried Menninghaus, *Hälfte des Lebens: Versuch über Hölderlins Poetik* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 2005). On the Adonic in Klopstock and Hölderlin see especially pp. 22–24.
[4]'avanciert der Adoneus zu einer doppelten oder gar dreifachen Rahmung des gesamten Gebildes' (Menninghaus, *Hälfte des Lebens*, p. 25).
[5]Adorno, 'Parataxis', p. 473.

point of connection that has disappeared as totally as does a mirror's surface for one who gazes upon it.

A crucial question is given unsatisfactory treatment in Menninghaus's identification of the poem's lineage. Why should Hölderlin, in 1803, have been concerned to draw on Klopstock in this unusual, seemingly deliberated way, when Klopstock had played a modest role for Hölderlin since the onset of his poetic maturity and when 'really there are none among Klopstock's poems […] which at all resemble Hölderlin's'?[6] Menninghaus is prevented from explicitly asking this question by his assumption that Hölderlin and Klopstock were comrades in a shared 'project' to renew classical verse forms (p. 30). Continuation and development of Klopstock's aims, according to Menninghaus, distinguished Hölderlin as poetically radical in contradistinction, above all, to the 'Dichterfürst' Goethe (the use of the patrician cliché is Menninghaus's), whose reticence on the subject of Sappho is taken to be significant (pp. 30; 32). Menninghaus does show how Goethe's own early experiments in Adonic metres, especially 'Grenzen der Menschheit', had some influence on Hölderlin's pre-1800 poetry, notably on 'Hyperions Schicksalslied' (1799) (pp. 29–31). But he implausibly regards Goethe's lack of interest in producing full-blown versions of Greek ode forms as licence for thinking that, overall, his concerns and Hölderlin's barely touched (p. 29). Dividing Goethe and Hölderlin along these lines neglects not only the marginality of Klopstock to the hymns and elegies preceding 'Hälfte des Lebens', but also that poem's deep and obvious affinity with a text which Menninghaus never mentions: 'Auf dem See', in which Goethe was distantly responding to Klopstock's 'Der Zürchersee'.[7] We will return to Goethe's poem at the end of this essay. First, though, we will pursue a natural implication of Hölderlin's interest in Klopstock in 'Hälfte des Lebens', namely, that his engagement with Klopstock should be understood as critical, and that the poem recognizes a subterranean, but vital, historical continuity between the 'reflective' structures to be found in Klopstock, and the major post-Kantian account of reflection demanding to be grappled with in 1803.

To begin answering the question of why Hölderlin, in 'Hälfte des Lebens', turned to Klopstock, we may consider the most trenchant analysis of Klopstock's significance produced by any of Hölderlin's contemporaries, or indeed subsequently. This is Hegel's discussion of Klopstock in his lectures on aesthetics. Evaluating Klopstock more than seventy years after 'Der Zürchersee', Hegel was in a position to take a long view of the historical, and political, character of Klopstock's poetry. On the one hand, says Hegel, we have in

[6]David Constantine, *Hölderlin* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), p. 233.

[7]Hölderlin will have known not only 'Grenzen der Menschheit' and 'Selige Sehnsucht' from the *Schriften* of 1789 (Menninghaus, *Hälfte des Lebens*, p. 30), but also 'Auf dem See', which appeared there too. On the publication history of 'Auf dem See' see HA, I, p. 509. See also Charlie Louth, 'Reflections: Goethe's "Auf dem See" and Hölderlin's "Hälfte des Lebens"', *OGS*, 33.1 (2004), 167–75.

Klopstock the primacy of the individual lyric voice (for Klopstock in the person of 'der *Sänger*'), and it is this primacy which makes Klopstock modern.[8] He gives unprecedented lyric expression to the subjectivity that is the central concern of modern art: 'einer der großen Deutschen, welche die neue Kunstepoche in ihrem Volke haben beginnen helfen' (HW, XV, 470). On the other hand, despite the historical achievement marked by Klopstock's subjective conception, the subjectivity of his work lacks historical substance. He felt the need for an authentically German mythology ('das Bedürfnis nach einer Mythologie, und zwar einer heimischen', 471), but this became the escape route to a hazy legendary past entirely disconnected from the contemporary circumstances which had led him to found his vision of the poet. Myth had its personal counterpart in feeling. Hegel suggests that Klopstock's 'modern' aggrandizing of the figure of the poet, and with it of the feeling self (what Hegel calls 'Tiefe und Empfindung', 471), was born of a need to define a realm free from the reality of absolutism, while evading any actual confrontation with the workings of political power. His poetry's consequent flight, whether into myth or into feeling, is, says Hegel, the sign that it is a poetry of realities denied, that it holds forth no adequate 'Ideal unserer heutigen politischen Existenz' (471).

Klopstock's 'Furcht der Geliebten' belongs to a group of odes in which, Hegel claims, indulgence of subjective perspective threatens to conceal any wider reality ('etwas Allgemeinmenschliches', HW, XV, 429).[9] Hegel's charge does have some force. The pseudo-sapphic doubling in 'Furcht der Geliebten' creates a reflection between beginning and end ('Cidli, du weinest' | 'Weine nicht, Cidli') which seems to want to overcome the initial lament of separation by restating a relationship.[10] But the relationship can be expressed only as the willed self-echo of the speaker, modulating from statement to command, and made possible ultimately by a divine commandment that conjoins with the speaker's own utterance ('Weine nicht') via assonance and trumps all finite relation with the beloved: 'Denn, der mich begleitet, der Gott gebots ihm!' Something parallel can be observed in the opening of 'Der Zürchersee', where an implicit, metrically reinforced caesura between self and Nature ('Auf die Fluren verstreut, schöner ein froh Gesicht') occurs as the poem expresses the idea that the self is in fact one with Nature, through the activity of thinking: 'Das den großen Gedanken | Deiner Schöpfung noch Einmal denkt.'[11] Klopstock's self wants to be the thinking-feeling origin of the world which it sees (the other sense of 'Gesicht' here), but as in the shorter, more personal odes, the two sides tend to break apart into isolation because the

[8]G. W. F. Hegel, *Werke*, ed. by Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Michel, 20 vols (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), XV: *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* III, p. 472. Subsequently HW.
[9]Hegel refers to 'Klopstocks Cidli und Fanny' (HW, XV, 429).
[10]Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock, *Oden*: *Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe*, ed. by Horst Gronemeyer and Klaus Hurlebusch, 6 pts. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010), I/1, 133.
[11]Klopstock, I/1, 95.

movement is entirely one of appropriation, laying claim to something and so actually placing it at a distance from the act of trying to own it.

We might say Klopstock expresses a tension between the subjective desire of a self which understands itself to reflect its divine or natural origin, and a world of people and things forming the content of the self's experience, which cannot become the objective medium of that reflection. So reflection is consistently hinted at by the formal structure of the poems, and equally consistently avoided in their argument. This tension becomes absurd, Hegel tells us, in another of Klopstock's pseudo-sapphic odes, 'Selma und Selmar'. Here there is empty longing ('leere Sehnsucht', HW, XV, 471): empty not only because it cannot be fulfilled, but because it is an individualist disposition inadequate to the ultimately social question the poem wants to address, that is, the significance of another's future death in relation to 'my' own. The poem's structure, especially its use of metrical doublings or reflections, suggests that beginnings and endings are intertwined, yet all the poem amounts to is a 'prosaic' deliberation on who will die first ('ob Selmar oder Selma zuerst sterben werde'), with the interlocutors both oblivious to anything connecting them beyond (their own individual) feeling, or 'unnütze melancholische Empfindung' (471).

Klopstock, then, stands for something historically important: for a convergence between a subjective, and hence modern, principle of identity, and an absolutist understanding of the self's relation (or non-relation) to the outside world. The reflective patterns of his pseudo-sapphic odes express feeling's need to master its environment, as the assertion of an ultimate principle (Selma and Selmar are not different at all, both are pure feeling), because feeling is irrevocably split from its environment (Selmar and Selma have nothing meaningful to say to each other) and must fill the gap with longing. Hegel's discussion of subjectivity and longing in Klopstock in fact recapitulates a much earlier argument of Hegel's, from a time when he was developing philosophical insights first gained by Hölderlin. In *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, begun in 1803, Hegel implicated the 'unendlich[e] *Sehnsucht*' (HW, III, 169) of German Romanticism as an element of the 'unhappy consciousness' ('das unglückliche Bewußtsein', HW, III, 168). By this he meant a self that is unable to integrate its rational capacities with its social world, because it is an 'infinite feeling' ('unendliche[s] […] Fühlen', 169) which treats objects as immediately present to itself, and thus denies them objectivity. Hegel's later comments on feeling and 'leere Sehnsucht' in 'Selma und Selmar' clearly echo this accusation. So, if we want to make a historical, rather than merely formal, connection between Klopstock and the Hölderlin of 'Hälfte des Lebens', we might ask: what manifestation of unhappy consciousness was current in 1803, when the poem was written, and how did Hölderlin relate to it? The answer to the first question is not, of course, Klopstock, though in a subsequent chapter of the *Phänomenologie* Hegel traced the cultural unhappiness to a confluence which Klopstock undoubtedly represented: the confluence

between various strains of religious inwardness, notably Pietism, and the primacy of the rational will, or 'Enlightenment'.[12]

The answer to the 1803 question is Fichte, who bequeathed 'feeling' and 'longing' to modern philosophy. From Fichte, Hölderlin received the convergence of inwardness and rationality in the form of a powerful argument about reflection. Here the earlier idea, determinative for Klopstock's poetry but derived intellectually from Leibniz, of the self that reflects God or Nature through its activity of individual feeling, opens on to the post-Kantian idea of reflection as self-consciousness: of the self that sees itself in objects, and realizes that this process involves difference, both from the world and from itself. Acknowledgement of meaningful difference is wholly absent in Klopstock, which is also why he can only with qualification be seen as founding 'modern' German poetry.

Kant referred to the process of 'transzendentale Reflexion', by which we form the concepts necessary for cognizing objects and thus become able to think of ourselves as subjects in relation to them.[13] Fichte thought that Kant had thereby cut the subject off too completely from the realm of objects which the subject's transcendental activity was said by Kant to constitute.[14] His solution, however, marked a radicalization not only of Kant, but also of the inward emphasis of the rationalist Enlightenment ('pure' reason) which it had been Kant's aim to criticize when he insisted that knowledge must be based on possible objects of experience, that is, on outside things given in space and time. Fichte's renewal of interiority makes it possible to link him back to Klopstock, as we will see Hölderlin do in 'Hälfte des Lebens'.

Outside things, for Fichte, were to be conformed to the ultimate, or absolute, reality of the I. In attempting to establish the I as first principle of knowledge, Fichte adopted, in his *Wissenschaftslehre* (1794–95), a method which he called 'abstrahirende[] Reflexion'.[15] By this procedure he worked outward from logical claims of identity ('A = A', FW, I, 92) to the existence of a self-conscious mind for which 'A' is given unconditionally ('schlechthin', 93), and which must therefore be regarded as 'positing' A. Not content merely with this demonstration, which depended on the empirical phenomenon 'A' and an empirical (hence not unconditioned) mind judging it, Fichte then sought to show how

[12]This is the sixth chapter, 'Der Kampf der Aufklärung mit dem Aberglauben'. See Jürgen Stolzenberg, 'Hegel's Critique of Enlightenment', in *The Blackwell Guide to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, ed. by Kenneth R. Westphal (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 190–208 (especially p. 197). On Klopstock, Enlightenment, and Pietism see the first two chapters of Gerhard Kaiser, *Klopstock: Religion und Dichtung* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1963).

[13]Immanuel Kant, *Werkausgabe*, ed. by Wilhelm Weischedel, 12 vols (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1974), III: *Kritik der reinen Vernunft 1*, p. 287.

[14]Cf. Peter Dews, *The Limits of Disenchantment: Essays on Contemporary European Philosophy* (London: Verso, 1995), p. 117.

[15]*Fichtes Werke*, ed. by Immanuel Hermann Fichte, 11 vols (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1971), I: *Zur theoretischen Philosophie I*, p. 91. Subsequently FW. On this method, see Rolf-Peter Horstmann, 'The Early Philosophy of Fichte and Schelling', in *The Cambridge Companion to German Idealism*, ed. by Karl Ameriks, 2nd edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 154–81 (pp. 159–60).

the identity of the self-conscious mind, expressed by the sentence 'I am', can be considered an unconditional identity, prior to its expression as an empirical fact. He concluded that the I is an endless active positing of itself — a 'Thathandlung' (FW, I, 91), as he called it —, encompassing but in no way limited to its conditioned empirical dimension. For how else could it have the status of first principle? How else, indeed, could it be free?

Here a problem arises, of which Fichte was well aware and which shaped the entire subsequent question of reflection. How is this self-positing I to know itself, or take itself as an object, as self-consciousness requires? To put it differently, if I see myself and know what I am looking at, then there has to be some basis on which I am sure that seer and seen (subject and object) are the same: that what I see is me. My reflected image alone will not tell me this. So Fichte argued that any attempt to relate to ourselves as objects must be dependent on a prior familiarity we have with ourselves as the origin of that relation. Ultimately this became his doctrine of 'intellectual intuition', which was to have a profound influence on the development of (not just German) Romantic thought: the notion that the self, in the act of thinking, has an immediate sense of itself as a unity. Previous philosophers, wrote Fichte in his *Wissenschaftslehre nova methodo* of 1796–99, had regarded the self as a mirror in which an image is reflected ('ein Bild sich abspiegelt').[16] But the self which gives itself to itself in intellectual intuition is a mirror which 'sees' ('*ein Auge*; es ist ein sich abspiegelnder Spiegel').[17] It is not the more or less distant reflection of something statically distinct from it, such as the Leibnizian universal order or, in Fichte's view of the matter, Kantian things as they are in themselves. Rather it is an act of seeing and the fact of what is seen, all at the same time. The I is a mirror which sees itself: the process of reflection and the possibility of reflection. It can therefore underlie all activity of reflective judgement, all linking of subject and object terms. Crucially in respect of the Romantic lineage he is inaugurating, Fichte concludes his deduction by saying that the I is definable ultimately as its image: 'ist Bild von sich; *durch sein eigenes sehen* [sic] *wird das Auge (die Intelligenz) sich selbst zum Bilde*'.[18]

Seeing yourself is a struggle, though. Fichte spoke not only of 'positing' ('Setzen') but also of 'opposing' ('Entgegensetzen', FW, I, 103). In positing itself, the I opposes itself to what it is not. Indeed, only by being opposed by what it is not can it assert its own identity, for 'there can be no identity without difference'.[19] Opposed to the I's absolutely asserted identity, then, there must be an equally absolute 'not-I', exactly opposite to the I (FW, I, 104). Fichte says that the I has the power to posit this not-I. Since, however,

[16]J. G. Fichte, *Gesamtausgabe der Bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, ed. by Reinhard Lauth and Hans Gliwitzky, 42 vols (Bad Cannstatt: Fromann, 1962–2012), IV/2: *Kollegnachschriften 1796-1804* (1978), p. 49.
[17]Fichte, IV/2, 49.
[18]Fichte, IV/2, 49.
[19]Dews, *Limits of Disenchantment*, p. 122.

the I can really only posit itself, its positing of the not-I as something different from itself cannot be fully achieved in actuality but rather remains an aspiration of the I, an ideal ('ist ein Ideal', 261). At the infinite endpoint of the I's activity, the I would see itself as exactly different from the not-I, reflected in an absolute negative image which would, moreover, be the absolute confirmation of the I's own identity. Though this absolute reflection remains a forever distant achievement, Fichte nonetheless held that the I can be said to ground the prospect of it through its self-positing activity, by which it strives in the world of things, or of the not-I, to reflect ever more perfectly its own ultimate nature.[20] In this, he remained true to the core principles of the Leibnizian Enlightenment, with its conception of the individual monad striving endlessly to become the perfect reflection of its originating godhead — though in Fichte the godhead is the absolute I itself.[21] Because the I cannot find its ultimate reality perfectly reflected in the things surrounding it (the not-I), its activity in the empirical world has the character of constant striving ('Streben', FW, I, 261), which, when felt and given a name, is called longing ('Sehnen', 302). Full confirmation of the I's rational identity is withheld from it and substituted by voluntaristic attachment to its physical and emotional environment — though the attachment remains, for Fichte, as well-founded as was the inner conviction of the monad that it uniquely reflects its god. This is what gives Fichte's thought its powerful relevance to the Romantic sensibility of longing, often manifest as a linkage of mirrors with desire.

Stimulated by Fichte's inspiring account, Hölderlin nonetheless demurred from Fichte's central claim that the ground of the I's reflective activity must be the I itself. Hölderlin objected not to the assumption of a prior ground as such (his philosophy retained that Fichtean allegiance), but to the identification of the ground with the I or with consciousness, which he thought could not, by definition and notwithstanding Fichte's insistence to the contrary, supply the criterion by which the subject can take itself as an object.[22] Laid out in a letter of 26 January 1795, this objection was the basis of Hölderlin's decisive influence on Hegel.[23] It is also the reason why Hölderlin's mature work lies to the side of all those who in some form accepted Fichtean intellectual intuition. Owing to their still largely Fichtean commitment to a prior ground, however, Hölderlin's own philosophical contributions did not move beyond Fichte's idea of opposition as the basic process through which the I comes to know itself in things. Notably in 'Urtheil und Seyn' (1795), opposition was between subject and object in consciousness or judgement, and between judgement and Being, the state of wholeness from which consciousness must be

[20]'Ein *Streben* […], das dennoch völlig rechtskräftig ist; denn es ist durch das absolute Setzen des Ich gesetzt' (FW, I, 261).
[21]On Fichte's strong affinity with Leibniz see Nicholas Boyle, *Goethe: The Poet and the Age, Volume II: Revolution and Renunciation (1790–1803)* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 210–11.
[22]See Charles Larmore, 'Hölderlin and Novalis', in *Cambridge Companion*, ed. by Ameriks, pp. 205–26 (pp. 211–12).
[23]Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke: Große Stuttgarter Ausgabe*, VI/1, 154–56.

assumed to have emerged, and which is reflected in it as absence, or as the promise of an ever-distant reconciliation that engenders longing.

Perhaps it is strange that 'Hälfte des Lebens' seems so concerned to reproduce these early oppositions, which in this schematic form are of little relevance to Hölderlin's previous major poems. This is less strange if we see the poem as showing Hölderlin fatefully cast back on to his original insight, inspired by Fichte, into the need of the self for a ground which it cannot provide. Crucially he is now without the belief, developed in his major poetry up to 1802, that this ground can be found in the unfolding of a historical process, manifest as the revolutionary upheaval of Hölderlin's earlier years.[24] This belief, rather than the idea of Being, had marked his true departure from Fichte. So what he is left with, following its collapse, is a Fichtean ghost: Being, or in the poem's terms Nature, reflected as absence. Yet as Hegel had come to realize by 1803, Being is no more adequate than intellectual intuition as a basis for the reflective activity of a self that is historical whether it likes it or not.[25] 'Hälfte des Lebens' struggles with the subjective experience of this inadequacy, and with the need to reinsert history into the understanding of the self when history has left the self destitute. Fichte's ghost both makes the need acute and stands in the way of its satisfaction, because all it offers is an image of fulfilment which is absolutely 'opposed' to the historical reality of selfhood, and to which that reality cannot, as Fichte thought, be made to conform.

Fichte's ghost, in the poem, is also Klopstock's ghost. The spectre of subjective Idealism is that of absolutist Enlightenment. We will see that Hölderlin recognizes these ghosts but that it is incredibly difficult for him to exorcize them, because they weigh heavily as factors shaping the historical situation the poem describes. He is, we might say, desperately aware that reflection cannot be grounded in the self or in any extension of it, yet he finds himself forced to inhabit the empty shell of Fichtean striving, to which he gives the structural form of borrowings from Klopstock. 'Klīrrĕn dĭe Fāhnĕn', the poem's last sad line, offers a metrical reflection of the resplendent 'heilignüchtĕrnĕ Wāssĕr' at the end of the first stanza, when Nature and individual perspective were momentarily conjoined as the swans saw themselves and the landscape on the lake's surface, before the image broke. But returning to the earlier moment can only be the starting point of a reinversion, as the image tips back to its counterpoint in those eery weathervanes. The stanzas can displace each other, infinitely. Another way of saying this is that they cannot be stabilized by any trust in the possibility that isolation ('judgement') will be taken up into plenitude ('Being'). Accordingly, these two parallel Adonics coalesce in the Adonic-as-title: 'Hälfte des Lebens', announcing the simple

[24]See for example Dieter Henrich, *Sein oder Nichts: Erkundungen um Samuel Beckett und Hölderlin* (Munich: Beck, 2016), p. 282.

[25]See Dieter Henrich, 'Hegel und Hölderlin', in D. Henrich, *Hegel im Kontext* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1981 [1967]), pp. 9–40 (p. 36).

fact of opposed identical elements and hence the possibility of an endless, groundless process of reflection between them.

Reflection wells up as groundless desire in the poem's mythic undercurrents. The initial moment of reflection, when the swans dip their heads into the lake, clearly recalls the moment when Narcissus sees his image, falls in love with it, and tries in vain to embrace it, shattering the image as he does so.[26] The stories of Narcissus and Adonis are closely related, as Menninghaus tells us,[27] and we can agree with his implication that the binding of the two stanza endings, via the repeated Adonic foot derived from Klopstock, marks an enclosed narcissistic movement of desire. But the most obvious relevance of the Narcissus story to Hölderlin's poem is not, as Menninghaus thinks it is, the story's libidinal character as described by Freud — whatever the Romantic parallels of that analysis.[28] Rather it is the story's problem of knowledge, the fact that Narcissus does not recognize himself ('se cupit inprudens […] quid videat, nescit').[29] He cannot, in the philosophical language used by Hölderlin to criticize Fichte, take himself as an object. This inability is what makes the Fichtean ego, for Hölderlin, properly speaking narcissistic. The poem's implication must be: the narcissistic swans see themselves in the 'heilignüchterne Wasser' but do not recognize themselves there; the 'ich' of the second stanza is the lived expression of that failure, and bears a preconscious rhythmical imprint ('Klirren die Fahnen') of the original glimpsed image. The swans are drawn to their image, the 'ich' is shadowed by its prelapsarian image as something unreachably different from itself. Both move towards the image without knowing what they see, in a perfect inversion or reflection of Fichtean longing. While Narcissus longs for another without knowing that other to be himself, Fichte's I longs to recognize itself in another (and, Hölderlin had argued in his letter to Hegel, will never be able to).

For the poem, these two movements are the same. The swans, trying to touch their image, break it and plunge the scene into alienation, giving rise to the fragmented winter world of the second stanza which simply expresses the existential truth of their initial narcissistic viewpoint, namely that subject and object are split wide apart. In Fichtean language, the I cannot posit itself within things, or the not-I, and so is not free. Conversely, the self of the poem's second half, trapped in this alien world of things, is haunted by the image that was broken — by some idea of itself as 'absolute', perhaps, or of a lost whole such as that which Hölderlin called Being. Whether we apply the one scheme or the other makes no difference; the poem collapses them. What is important is that the self seems, perhaps unconsciously, to strive for this

[26]See Louth, 'Reflections', p. 174: 'They are Narcissus-like swans, in love with their own image.'
[27]See Menninghaus, *Hälfte des Lebens*, pp. 48, 62.
[28]See Menninghaus, *Hälfte des Lebens*, pp. 54–55.
[29]Ovid, *Metamorphoses, vol. 1: Books 1–8*, trans. by Frank Justus Miller, revised by G. P. Goold (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916), p. 154.

image. This may be the sense of the formal, Klopstockian echo, as the poem tries to 'swim' back up to the surface. Possibly the poem intends a reminiscence of Narcissus exclaiming to his image that 'no mighty ocean separates us'.[30]

However, the self of the second stanza would no more be able to find itself in that image than were the swans of the first, for the simple reason that the self is nothing but the swans' reflected continuation — their image. The self strives for an image of itself, a self-reflection, and finds none, not because there is no image but because the self is already entirely one with the image, and so can occupy no position from which to relate to itself, to its image. Here we see the poem taking up, but subverting, Fichte's claim about the nature of the I in self-consciousness, that it is 'image of itself' ('Bild von sich') or 'becomes its own image' ('*wird* […] *sich selbst zum Bilde*'). Hölderlin's original, and in view of Romantic literary culture prescient, insight is that Fichte's I is above all an image not necessarily because, as Fichte had claimed, otherwise there is no way to secure its reflective knowledge of itself, but rather because of its (narcissistic) desire. It is defined by the idea that it exhausts what there is to look at — an idea which is presumably already present in Fichte's 'rational' assumption that the I is its own ground and can display itself to itself through a well-founded, if imperfectible, process of striving. But the poem puts the problem neatly: striving is not well-founded, and the self cannot meet itself across the deceptive watery distance of separation. If the self is an image, it cannot be an image for itself. So the point of reflection — the surface of the lake — is the point at which encounter and recognition fail. It can only be represented as a gap, hence as the empty space between stanzas. There are subject and object, but there is no interrelation between them. Unlike for Klopstock in 'Der Zürchersee', lack of interrelation is for Hölderlin a cause for lament, because it is a failure of the self to relate to itself. Accordingly, the two 'halves' of the self, subjective and objective, break apart, and the subject is tipped into confrontation with a myriad dumbly opposing objects.

'Hälfte des Lebens' amounts to more than an intricate demonstration of the pathology of Fichtean reflection. It does point beyond it, though at what exactly is far less clear. It points beyond Fichte by representing as an objective situation something assumed by Fichte to be central to self-consciousness — namely, the self's presence to itself as an image — while showing this to be the occasion for the failure of self-consciousness. Yet it appears to have only the Fichtean language of self and ground at its disposal. To appreciate how this tension marks a real crisis, we need to understand that when Hölderlin, on the brink of his sparse and mournful 'late' lyric mode, returns to Fichte by means of poetic structures derived from Klopstock, he is expressing a set of historical, not just philosophical, implications. After all, 'Hälfte des Lebens' suggests that if freedom, the idea of which was the touchstone of all post-Kantian

[30] '[…] nec nos mare separat ingens' (Ovid, p. 154).

thought, was to aspire to a form other than the void of empty longing, then collective frustrations — meaning specifically the dying of revolutionary hope — could not be compensated through recourse to an individualist, and ultimately absolutist, conception of the self. Still less could an intellectual and cultural idiom fashioned from that conception, the idiom of the self-grounding reflective subject, promise seriously to challenge the workings of political absolutism. The professional purveyors of the idiom, most notably Fichte, were effectively attempting, or rather (endlessly) striving, to unite themselves through their revolutionary pursuit of freedom to the only expression of real freedom apparent to them, the will of the state.[31] It was Hegel who, writing of Klopstock, recognized that the origins of striving lay in feeling and its inadequate political 'ideal'. In the parallel case, as Hegel also saw, Fichte had smuggled that pre-revolutionary ideal into post-revolutionary official culture under the guise of the self's autonomy. This is why Hölderlin's disappointments had to bring a reckoning with his Fichtean origins, a reckoning that was identical with a question about the continuing reality of absolutism in the personal and political life of a culture that proclaimed, above all else, the self's subjective freedom. The problem faced in 'Hälfte des Lebens' is that history seems to present no alternative — there may be nothing historically meaningful for the poem to embody. Or, put as a question: can the poem's actual disjunction between reflection and freedom nonetheless show us what a salutary form of reflection could look like?

In 1803 both Hegel and Hölderlin felt that freedom, or what Hegel was already thinking of as the substance of history, was out of joint with historical reality. *Phänomenologie des Geistes* set about giving conceptual expression to what Hölderlin could not describe, because it was not there: a form of selfhood that knows itself to be free. For Hegel this meant drawing the necessary conclusion from Hölderlin's original response to Fichte, whereby Hölderlin had objected that the I, understood in Fichte's 'absolute' terms, cannot recognize itself as an object and so cannot become self-conscious. Since the I cannot achieve this knowledge simply by seeing itself reflected, and since, as Hölderlin had understood, we do not help it by conceding it immediate self-acquaintance or intellectual intuition, Hegel realized a different approach was called for, one not rooted in the I or in some wholeness of Being to which the I might return. His answer was that what makes self-recognition or self-consciousness possible is not any activity of the self, but rather the fact that this activity is exercised within a relationship in which it is not the only term: a relationship between self and world, subject and object, where neither can be thought without reference to the other. The self sees and recognizes itself in the world because it

[31] See Nicholas Boyle, 'Inventing the Intellectual: Schiller and Fichte at the University of Jena', *PEGS*, 81.1 (2012), 39–50 (p. 47): 'Sociologically speaking,' Fichte expresses the 'frustration that the German intellectual feels at being forced into a social role […] that does not give adequate expression to his desire for political freedom, that is, power.' The political dimension of Fichte's thought became explicit in his *Reden an die deutsche Nation* of 1807–08.

knows that the world sees it back. That is to say, the subject can take itself as an object because it experiences being taken as an object by something outside itself, and this experience is integral to saying what it means to be a subject. The self is inseparably both subject and object. Put in Hegel's terms, the self does not stand only for an activity of thinking and positing, independent of what this means in relation to others. It also expresses the significance this activity has when looked at, and therefore taken as an object: the way 'subjective' activity, as seen by another, presents a form of 'objective' being ('Anderssein', HW, III, 575).[32] Since my access to myself as an object comes from this being which I have for others, the basis of self-consciousness — in visual language, of seeing myself and knowing it is me — is my relationship with those others. They offer the only basis on which I can form an objective image of myself. This is, among other things, Hegel's answer to the problem of narcissism which Hölderlin, in 'Hälfte des Lebens', sees arising from Fichte, the problem that the self cannot be an image for itself.

Reflection, then, is not opposition but relation. Yet this means more than the term 'reflection' can imply, because when the self sees itself, it is seeing and acknowledging the embodied (non-reflected) reality of the other who looks at it. A relation in which I see myself because someone else sees me is not a relation of 'mere' reflection. It is what Hegel calls a speculative relation, that is, one which overcomes false oppositions: above all, the separation of (thinking) subject and (thought) object, found by Fichte in Kant but then radicalized by him via his own one-sided emphasis on the subject. That assumption dissolves once the subject is understood also as thought, and the object also as thinking. But the consequences of this are more than just logical. They are existential. For we could say that my image of myself is not 'mine' at all — it is not achieved by my striving to see myself. Instead it depends on my relation to another, who is not part of the image but who has a role in determining it. So how I see myself is never final, and is not controlled by my subjective activity. Rather it is always open to change on the basis of my relationship with that objective other. It exists, that is, historically. Reflection's blind spot, for Hegel, is the other, or history. 'Hälfte des Lebens' shows this just as conclusively, though more traumatically.

Clearly the problem in the poem is that there are no other people, only other things. For Hegel, we can know ourselves through our relation to made objects because they are the products of another person's subjective relation to the world which is the same as ours.[33] 'Hälfte des Lebens', however, ends among objects which appear incapable of human reference. This is the sense, surely,

[32]'setzt es [self-consciousness] *sich* als Gegenstand […] oder den Gegenstand […] als sich selbst' (HW, III, 575). Cf. Nicholas Adams, *Eclipse of Grace: Divine and Human Action in Hegel* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), p. 43: 'the subject can only be an object to itself in the course of orienting itself to objects other than itself.'

[33]This is integral, for example, to his account of work in the *Phänomenologie*: see HW, III, 153.

of walls that are 'sprachlos'. The self stares helplessly at things mutely 'there', which determine the self's situation, or make it historical, but offer it no release from its endless activity of looking. To put this with the full force of paradox it implies: when the looking, feeling subject has been emptied out, what choice is there but to use the language of looking and feeling to mourn that loss, by looking on the 'being' of objects as the expression of a subjective feeling of abandonment? And with this we are still, inescapably, within the sphere of a self that posits itself in things, or strives to — the sphere of the Fichtean reflective subject.

So is this where the poem leaves us: the Fichtean or Romantic relation of reflection and desire, carrying within it an unpurged undercurrent of absolutist Enlightenment, fails in its attempt to absorb the historical world into the activity of the self, but in failing still holds us in its grip? In one sense the answer is yes — and that is what makes it a visionary poem. 'Hälfte des Lebens' bleakly anticipates the logic of the reflective temperament as a form of canonized cultural illusion, by which German Romanticism in its intellectual *longue durée* sustained its conviction that freedom is individual and interior, seeing outside realities as a vehicle for the infinite perfectibility of the ego's self-image, but in doing so accommodating itself to those realities. Schleiermacher will assert in his later works, as in his earlier ones, the religious genius's unmediated feeling ('Gefühl') of God; Schelling's aesthetic genius will actually claim to bring about the reflection of his unitary self, in the work of art. Both will adapt the objective and material world to the supreme subjective image; the world will not look back. But 'Hälfte des Lebens' knows that the world does look back, as a historical, and finally political, reality that can be denied but not transcended. 'Klirren die Fahnen' can reflect 'heilignüchterne Wasser', the point of origin where the self became its image, but the process can scarcely be innocent. 'Fahnen' are not just weathervanes, they are flags, signs of the state, and so of the nineteenth century the poem sees coming.[34] The omen has force, in the poem, because it is inseparable from a way of looking which the poem shows to be historically intuitive, almost unavoidable. Certainly, trying to make these things reflect back to me my origin and destiny is wilfully, or at least willingly, to make them part of my origin and destiny. Romantic genius will never extricate itself from this danger. Even finding in them confirmation of my loneliness, however, can mean to identify with them, to insist that, above all, they apply to me (my 'ich'). This is the poem's true unhappy consciousness, and it is no slight on Klopstock's poetic achievement that Hölderlin's borrowing of his reflective rhythmical structures returns the nationalistic trappings of the new age to the absolutist literary culture of the old.

[34]See Menninghaus, *Hälfte des Lebens*, p. 60: 'sie bezeichnen metonymisch […] den Staat — sofern Fahnen nicht allein die Wetterfahnen, sondern auch die Fahnen als staatliches Identitätszeichen meinen.'

Since the problem of reflection is the problem of unrequitable subjectivity, we can in the end escape the endless turns of reflection only by giving up some of our subjectivity, yielding to something for which we are an object. Hegel had this insight, and made it central to his account of self-consciousness. But 'Hälfte des Lebens' embodies it too. The poem knows it is caught in a vicious historical false opposition between the subjective and objective domains of selfhood, and because nothing in its horizon will allow it to resolve the opposition, it lives the opposition to the full, tragic, extent of the opposition's contradictions and presents that experience to us, its readers, as its subjective truth. We must note that this is only possible because the experience is tragic: because Hölderlin knows the self has no last resort which could allay the falsity of its situation. But since acknowledging this marks a limit to the self, the self's experience becomes something we can define and look at. It can therefore have a certain 'being' for us, and contain no longer just a subjective, but now also an objective, truth. One incontrovertible consequence is that, as long as we recognize this limit to the poem's selfhood, and so, crucially, also to our own selfhood as something that the poem's affects, then the viewpoint expressed in the poem, which we have called its unhappy consciousness, is not final. Rather, it has a future that is not the same as anything the poem is able to say, because saying is subjective and the poem would now be both subject and object, both an act of experiencing and an experienced thing.

Hölderlin cannot have faith that his poem will meet with readers able to share the experience it evokes, and it is perhaps no ultimate consolation that the encounter can be described conceptually, as it was by Hegel. So he finds the point of reflection and mutual recognition in another poem, to which 'Hälfte des Lebens' is clearly a deliberate response and to which we must now turn in concluding. Reflection in Goethe's 'Auf dem See' incorporates 'complex and variable two-sided relations'.[35] Goethe catches the moment of reflection as 'Auf der Welle blinken | Tausend schwebende Sterne'.[36] This reflected image of hovering 'stars', meaning presumably glittering, refracted sunlight,[37] is Goethe's own direct metrical echo of the trochee followed by an Adonic which comprised each third line of 'Der Zürchersee' — and 'Hälfte des Lebens' takes up 'Tāusĕnd schwēbĕndĕ Stērnĕ' as 'Hēilĭgnūchtĕrnĕ Wāssĕr'. Moreover, Hölderlin's poem seems to begin where Goethe's poem ends, and thus to constitute a type of reflection of it.

'Auf dem See' ends, and 'Hälfte des Lebens' begins, with a lake and with ripe (-ning) fruit. The difference is that, in Goethe's poem, the fruit is harmoniously,

[35]Nicholas Boyle, *Goethe: The Poet and the Age, Volume I: The Poetry of Desire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 205.
[36]MA, III/2, p. 21.
[37]See Louth, 'Reflections', p. 172.

and in linguistic terms hypotactically, already part of a reflection ('Und im See bespiegelt | Sich die reifende Frucht'), whereas in Hölderlin's the reflection occurs suddenly and is catastrophic. All reflection is reflection for a perceiving self, as we know from Hölderlin, but in this last stanza of 'Auf dem See' there appears to be no looking, and certainly there is no 'ich'. It would be truer, though, to say that the self looks here as pure response to its surroundings, and so has no need to name itself in relation to them, though it remains that which gives them meaning — fruit is mirrored only because it is seen, and, in being seen, understood also to mirror something more personal.

In terms which 'Hälfte des Lebens' makes necessary, we could say that Goethe here gives us the 'ich' as an object, without loss to its personality or subjectivity. What confers objectivity on the self is the (natural) world which gives it possibilities of subjective response, as the scene and image of the 'incomplete life-story'[38] that it tells itself. It has involvements and relationships which it shapes but which, equally, it knows it does not finally determine. 'Auf dem See' acknowledges, then, something close to the incompleteness of the self's perspective which 'Hälfte des Lebens' senses is needed for there to be a meaningful future. If Goethe's poem can banish doubts ('Weg, du Traum') and achieve openness to the future, while Hölderlin's must struggle and possibly fail to do so, that is because, for the post-Kantian generation, telling yourself a life-story meant either, like Fichte, vainly striving to make yourself the story's origin, or, like Hölderlin and Hegel, recognizing that your story was part of a wider, less tractable history which threatened the possibility of its coherence. 'Hälfte des Lebens' begins with 'Auf dem See' only really in the sense that it ends with it: the subjective state finally arrived at by Goethe's poem, perfectly balanced and nourished by its objective character, is meaningful for Hölderlin's because it is what the self there lacks. 'Auf dem See' arises in 'Hälfte des Lebens', that is, just as much as it precedes it, and gives Hölderlin the image of Nature regained not as the phantasmal home of longing, but as the sensuous context in which the self responds to the being of objects and is thus freed for ever deeper relationship with them. Because 'Hälfte des Lebens' can hope for that recovery or reversal but not fulfil it, and is forever dependent on being encountered by those who share its essentially tragic insight, it holds on to the fulfilment via its embodiment in Goethe's poem. More precisely, it makes of 'Auf dem See' what Goethe's poem made of its own final image of 'reifende Frucht' — a real, objective correlative to subjective feeling, containing movement towards a happily realized future, which can keep Hölderlin's poem company in the desolate landscape it unavoidably surveys. 'Hälfte des Lebens' looks at 'Auf dem See' as its reflection, but it is a reflection in which, at last, it is changed by what it sees.

[38]Boyle, *Goethe, Volume I*, p. 206.

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