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# Remembering nature through art: Hölderlin and the poetic representation of life

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## ABSTRACT

For Friedrich Hölderlin, the mediatory role of aesthetics was central to overcoming the challenges of modern life, in particular human beings' antagonistic relationship to nature. This article claims that Hölderlin preserves and improves what is true in Kant's conception of the beautiful: that the experience of beauty concerns recognizing our dependence on nature, and that this recognition resonates in the works of artistic geniality as well. The article furthermore argues that the twentieth-century philosopher Theodor W. Adorno's interpretation of Hölderlin sheds light on how Hölderlin's late poetry constitutes a remembrance of nature that avoids fetishizing nature as an origin to which we should return, while still allowing for an acknowledgment of its priority. Hölderlin's poetry, as a work of spirit or mind, is exemplary in its commemoration of the precondition for spirit's achievements: finite, empirical life. In this way, the self-reflectivity of Hölderlin's poems also constitute a corrective to subjectivist tendencies that still reverberate in post-Kantian idealism.

## KEYWORDS

Aesthetics; beauty; genius; reconciliation; language; Adorno

## 1. Introduction: Kantian beginnings

Friedrich Hölderlin belonged to the first generation of post-Kantians and, just like his contemporaries, he found Kant's critical philosophy, which he began to study in 1790, and especially the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, which captivated him from 1794 onwards, immensely important.<sup>1</sup> In the third *Critique*, Kant attempted to reconcile the spheres of cognitive judgments concerning material nature and moral judgments concerning human freedom, which his two previous *Critiques* had severed. The purposiveness of nature, in other words the human ability (through reflective judgment) to regard nature as meaningful, is the main theme of the third *Critique*. Beauty is one way that nature appears as meaningful for us. In fact, it is the fundamental way, according to Kant. Beautiful nature indicates a purposive connection between our human faculties and surrounding nature, a connection that is "required for every empirical cognition."<sup>2</sup> The pleasure stemming from the free play of our cognitive faculties when we are faced with beauty does not generate any specific cognition, but rather constitutes the

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precondition for knowledge. The notion of beauty as foundational for cognition is echoed in Hölderlin's 1799 remark that "all cognition should begin with the study of beauty."<sup>3</sup> For Kant, the experience of beauty traces a harmony between our cognitive capacities and surrounding nature, a harmony that enables us to understand how we as rational human beings are related to our environment and are able to have an impact on it.<sup>4</sup> Natural beauty is given more attention than artistic beauty in the third *Critique*, and in the production of works of art it is also nature that provides the rule to art through the artistic genius, according to Kant.<sup>5</sup> A work of artistic geniality should also look as if it were a free creation: the "purposiveness in its form must still seem to be as free from all constraint by arbitrary rules as if it were a mere product of nature [*ein Product der bloßen Natur*]."<sup>6</sup> No arbitrary, external rules should constrain the work of art, and yet it should appear purposive; in other words, the work should appear as purposive in itself, like beautiful nature.<sup>7</sup> The third *Critique* can thus be said to make a claim about a *remembrance of nature in art* that, I will argue, is also crucial for Hölderlin's conception of the art–nature relation.

Kant remains ambivalent about the status of nature's purposiveness, however, and the dualism between nature and freedom resurfaces in the third *Critique* as well; in the first part, the reappearance is most striking in the discussion of the dynamic sublime in nature, which Kant ultimately transposes into the experience of reason's exalted position *above nature*. In his comparison of the beautiful and the sublime just before entering into a more elaborate discussion of the latter, it is almost as if Kant apologizes for what the sublime experience, in his interpretation, does to nature:

the concept of the sublime in nature is far from being as important and rich in consequences as that of its beauty, and [ . . . ] in general it indicates nothing purposive in nature itself, but only in the possible use of its intuitions to make palpable in ourselves a purposiveness that is entirely independent of nature. *For the beautiful in nature we must seek a ground outside ourselves, but for the sublime only one in ourselves.*<sup>8</sup>

Kant seems torn between, on the one hand, admitting that we humans need "a ground outside ourselves," which natural beauty reminds us of, and, on the other, elevating humanity completely above nature, to a sublime sphere of its own. This is the crossroads at which post-Kantians will embark in different directions. Hölderlin holds on to the need of "a ground outside ourselves"; this is fundamental both in his criticism of Fichte's radicalization of Kant<sup>9</sup> and in what can be summoned as a corrective to some of the more problematic tenets of Hegelian idealism, which, as we will see, is precisely how Theodor W. Adorno reads Hölderlin's late poetry.

## 2. Hölderlin and idealism

Dieter Henrich has emphasized Hölderlin's crucial role for the evolution of German idealism, and especially for the development of Hegel's philosophy.<sup>10</sup> However, as Frederick Beiser has demonstrated, Hölderlin's writings (both his philosophical and his literary works) point beyond the limits of the traditional "subjectivist interpretation of German idealism" which has its roots in Hegel's own history of philosophy: the later Hegel's interpretation of his own system as the fulfillment of German idealism has "had a deep impact upon the historiography of German idealism."<sup>11</sup> In *German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivism, 1781–1801*, Beiser focuses on the importance of the

early romantics – among whom he counts Hölderlin – for the development of another version of idealism which “consists not in an increasing subjectivism but in the very opposite: a growing realism and naturalism.”<sup>12</sup>

The critique of idealism that we find in Hölderlin is also the reason why he is so important for Adorno, whose own struggle against subjectivism – to borrow Beiser’s expression – shares the effort to counter “the priority of spirit” that Adorno, despite his indebtedness to Hegel’s thought, found deeply problematic.<sup>13</sup> Adorno’s philosophy develops to a large extent through a critical re-reading of Kant and Hegel, often playing them against each other, and this is especially striking when it comes to Adorno’s comprehension of the relationship between art and nature.<sup>14</sup> In Adorno’s most elaborate analysis of Hölderlin, however, the essay “Parataxis: On Hölderlin’s Late Poetry” – first published in the journal *Neue Rundschau* in 1964 and later included in Adorno’s *Notes to Literature*<sup>15</sup> – it is evident how much he actually owes to Hölderlin. Contrary to scholars claiming that Adorno is merely projecting his own philosophical views on Hölderlin, there are, as I have previously argued, deep affinities between their conception of nature and their understanding of the relationship between art and nature.<sup>16</sup>

While attentive to Hölderlin’s place within German idealism, and emphasizing how much Hölderlin shares with Hegel – for example, the notion that the absolute (roughly: the living, infinite relationship between everything that is) must manifest itself in time, and “the critique of Fichte’s absolute ‘I’”<sup>17</sup> – Adorno also claims that, through his poetry, “Hölderlin breaks out of the idealist sphere of influence and towers above it. His poetry expresses, better than any maxim could and to an extent that Hegel would not have approved, that life is not an idea, that the quintessence of existing entities [*der Inbegriff des Seienden*] is not essence [*Wesen*].”<sup>18</sup> In other words, for Adorno there is a materialist (or realist and naturalist, in Beiser’s vocabulary) bent to Hölderlin’s late poetry in its emphasis on life as empirical, sensuous, particular, finite. This is one of the chief ways in which his poetry – as a work of spirit (*Geist*) – acknowledges the priority of nature. While Hegel, so to speak, takes the road of the Kantian sublime when claiming nature as spirit’s other,<sup>19</sup> or dismissing natural beauty from aesthetics,<sup>20</sup> Hölderlin can be said to preserve and improve what is true in Kant’s conception of the beautiful: that the experience of beauty fundamentally concerns recognizing our dependence on nature, the prerequisite of “a ground outside ourselves,” and that this recognition resonates in the works of artistic geniality as well.

### 3. Remembrance and thankfulness

Attempting to move beyond the dualism that still reverberated in Kant, Hölderlin holds on to the conception of aesthetics as the primary mediating instance between nature and humanity, just as it was for Kant. In a letter to Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer on 24 February 1796, Hölderlin voices his plan to write a series of letters which he intends to call “New Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man,” indicating that he believes it necessary to improve on Schiller’s “old” effort published the year before. In these new aesthetic letters, Hölderlin wants to explain why “an aesthetic sense [*ästhetischen Sinn*]” is indispensable for overcoming “the conflict between the subject and the object, between our selves and the world.”<sup>21</sup> What exists of these aesthetic letters is

most likely what goes under the name “Fragment of Philosophical Letters.”<sup>22</sup> Here Hölderlin writes of the natural human drive to rise above need and live a “higher human life” in which there is a “more than mechanical *connection*, a higher *fate* between [man] and his world.”<sup>23</sup> In order to be able to achieve this state, we need to “represent [*vorstellen*]” the bond between ourselves and the world.<sup>24</sup> Hölderlin emphasizes the prerequisite of remembrance and thankfulness,<sup>25</sup> and argues that “this higher connection cannot be repeated in thoughts alone,”<sup>26</sup> but has to be concretized with poetic means in order to create a unity that is able to combine both the particular (shorthand for manifold sensuous nature) and the universal (ditto for that which gives the manifold a form) in a non-hierarchical manner.<sup>27</sup>

In Hölderlin’s poetry, the attempt to reconcile the conflicts between subject and object, between human being and natural world, is not a backward movement to some original unity before separation, but a thoroughly dialectical interpretation of what are usually thought of as opposites. In the ode “Natur und Kunst oder Saturn und Jupiter” (“Nature and Art or Saturn and Jupiter”), written in around 1800, the traditional opposition between *physis* (nature) and *technē* (art) is portrayed in allegorical fashion and, as Adorno notes, “Hölderlin takes the side of fallen nature against a dominating Logos.”<sup>28</sup> The mythic figures of Saturn and his son Jupiter indicate, however, that it is not a matter of strict duality but rather of affinity, and the need to commemorate the precondition for the possibility of art is emphasized. The fifth stanza reads:

Denn, wie aus dem Gewölke dein Bliz, so kömmt  
Von ihm, was dein ist, siehe! so zeugt von ihm,  
Was du gebeutst, und aus Saturnus  
Frieden ist jegliche Macht erwachsen.<sup>29</sup>

For as from clouds your lightning, from him has come  
What you call yours. And, look, the commands you speak  
To him bear witness, and from Saturn’s  
Primitive peace every power developed.<sup>30</sup>

Remembrance is not about returning to some claimed origin, but for art to come into its own, it must acknowledge its debt to nature, instead of denying it. Freedom in art, as in life, does not, for Hölderlin, turn on “leaving nature behind” like it does for Hegel,<sup>31</sup> but on remembering nature, along the lines of the Kantian conception of beauty. Around the same time as the creation of the poem, Hölderlin pens to his half-brother Karl Gok that, although man is driven by “the urge [ ... ] to rework, develop and perfect nature,” it is important that he

does not think himself the lord and master of nature and in all his arts and activity preserves a modesty and piety towards its [i.e. nature’s] spirit – the same spirit he carries within him and has all about him and which gives him material and energy. For human art and activity, however much it has already achieved and can achieve, cannot produce life, cannot itself create the raw material it transforms and works on; it can develop creative energy, but the energy itself is eternal and not the work of human hands.<sup>32</sup>

The proper attitude toward nature is one of humility and thankfulness, and of acknowledging our human dependence on it not only for survival but also for our advancement at the level of spirit. In the fragment “On the Standpoint from which we should consider Antiquity,” written around the same time as “Natur und Kunst oder Saturn und

Jupiter” and the above quoted letter, Hölderlin warns against the possibility of human beings’ natural creative drive going astray, and stresses the importance of knowing “*whence it came*” in order for this drive not to “[lose] *its way*.”<sup>33</sup>

Adorno elucidates how Hölderlin uses the mythic conception of hubris in order to expose humankind’s erroneous attempt to utterly transcend nature:

For the late hymns, subjectivity is neither the absolute nor the ultimate. Subjectivity commits a violation in setting itself up as absolute when it is in fact immanently compelled to self-positing. This is Hölderlin’s construal of hubris. It stems from the sphere of mythic conceptions, that of the equivalence of crime and expiation, but its intent is demythologization, in that it rediscovers myth in man’s self-deification. Some lines from ‘Am Quell der Donau,’ which are perhaps a variation on the celebrated lines of Sophocles, refer to this.<sup>34</sup>

The demythologizing move is thus directed at the modern myth of absolute independence from nature. Adorno goes on to cite from the second and third stanza from “Am Quell der Donau” (“At the Source of the Danube”, 1801–1802):

Denn vieles vermag  
Und die Fluth und den Fels und Feuersgewalt auch  
Bezwinget mit Kunst der Mensch  
Und achtet, der Hochgesinnte, das Schwerdt  
Nicht, aber es steht  
Vor Göttlichem der Starke niedergeschlagen,

Und gleichet dem Wild fast [...].<sup>35</sup>

For the powers of man  
Are many, by his art  
Flood, stone and fire are mastered,  
Nor, high-minded, does he shy from  
The sword, yet when faced  
With the gods, the strong are laid low,

Almost like the deer [...].<sup>36</sup>

The celebrated lines of Sophocles to which Adorno refers are the ones from the “*Polla ta deina*” chorus in *Antigone*, a play Hölderlin also translated (published in 1804).<sup>37</sup> In the chorus, humankind’s dominion over nature is portrayed in a very similar manner to “Am Quell der Donau”:

Wonders are many, and none is more wonderful than man; the power that crosses the white sea, driven by the stormy south-wind, making a path under surges that threaten to engulf him; and Earth, the eldest of the gods, the immortal, the unwearied, doth he wear, turning the soil with the offspring of horses, as the ploughs go to and fro from year to year.

And the light-hearted race of birds, and the tribes of savage beasts, and the sea-brood of the deep, he snares in the meshes of his woven toils, he leads captive, man excellent in wit. And he masters by his arts the beast whose lair is in the wilds, who roams the hills; he tames the horse of shaggy mane, he puts the yoke upon its neck, he tames the tireless mountain bull.

And speech, and wind-swift thought, and all the moods that mould a state, hath he taught himself; and how to flee the arrows of the frost, when ’tis hard lodging under the clear sky, and the arrows of the rushing rain; yea, he hath resource for all [...].<sup>38</sup>

The chorus also reminds mankind of his limitations, however: “without resource he meets nothing that must come: only against Death shall he call for aid in vain.”<sup>39</sup> In a similar check against human hubris, we also read in the fifth stanza of “Am Quell der Donau” that it is from “Nature [*Natur*]” that “every god-born thing / Emerges” (“entsteigt Dir / alles Göttlichgeborne”).<sup>40</sup>

The acknowledgment of dependence on nature for human cultivation is also very tangible in an earlier poem not discussed by Adorno, namely the 1799 “Mein Eigentum” (“What Is Mine”),<sup>41</sup> which opens thus:

In seiner Fülle ruhet der Herbsttag nun,  
Geläutert ist die Traub und der Hain ist roth  
Vom Obst, wenn schon der holden Blüten  
Manche der Erde zum Danke fielen.<sup>42</sup>

The autumn day rests now in fullness,  
The clear grapes are pressed, and the orchard is red  
With fruit, though many lovely  
Blossoms have fallen to Earth in thanks.<sup>43</sup>

The fallen blossoms are depicted as a thanks to the earth, from which they have emerged, and to which, as they decay, they will contribute; the intertwinement and mutual dependence of living and non-living nature comes to articulation here. The poem can be interpreted as expressing its own gratitude to nature through its reflection on the thankfulness of the blossoms toward the earth and it is obvious that this sets an example for human conduct toward the natural world as well, for in the third stanza we read: “denn es wuchs durch / Hände der Menschen allein die Frucht nicht”; “for the fruits didn’t / Grow by human hands alone.”<sup>44</sup> It is the earth’s “abundance [*Reichtum*]”<sup>45</sup> – accomplished by the interdependence of organic and inorganic natural beings – and not merely human labor that constitutes the foundation for the orchard’s plenitude. In the ninth stanza, we furthermore read that “dying leaves grace / The tops of trees with gold” (“golden die Wipfel schmückt / Sein sterbend Laub”);<sup>46</sup> the lively red of the ripened orchard fruit is contrasted with the metallic hue of the withering leaves crowning the tree tops. These trees – with the “dying leaves” still clinging to their branches – in their turn protect the workers in the orchard, and the lyrical “I” wishes the apostrophized “song [*Gesang*]” to be his “friendly refuge [*freundlich Asyl*],” a “garden [*Garten*]” with trees,<sup>47</sup> that would, in a similar way, give shelter from tempests and heat. The metaphors are truly carriers from one realm to the other, mixing organic and inorganic: in the fifth stanza, the lyrical “I” also speaks of stars “that still bloom for me” (“Die blühend mir geblieben sind”),<sup>48</sup> creating the image of them growing in the night like flowers unfolding above the poet’s head. The poem can thus also be regarded as a questioning of the polarization of life and non-life, animate and inanimate, organic and inorganic.

In “Parataxis,” Adorno describes “real reconciliation” as reconciliation between “inner and outer,” or “in the language of idealism: reconciliation of genius and nature.”<sup>49</sup> Hölderlin’s poetry thus serves as a correction also of the hubris of idealism, exemplified by Hegel’s description of nature as spirit’s opposite, and of art’s independence of nature. Genius in art is the self-reflection of idealistic spirit – in other words, the acknowledgment of spirit as nature – according to Adorno.<sup>50</sup> This conception is surely indebted to Kant’s description of genius as a gift of nature, but takes it further; Kant after all

argues that judgment and taste should domesticate genius: “Taste, like the power of judgment in general, is the discipline (or corrective) of genius, *clipping its wings and making it well behaved or polished*.”<sup>51</sup> This is explicitly not the case with Hölderlin, according to Adorno, who claims that

[g]enius would be consciousness of the nonidentical object. To use one of Hölderlin’s favorite terms, the world of genius is ‘das Offene,’ that which is open and as such familiar, that which is no longer dressed and prepared and thereby alienated.<sup>52</sup>

Adorno also calls genius “the spirit of song, in distinction to that of domination,” and argues that genius is “spirit itself revealing itself as nature, instead of enchaining nature.”<sup>53</sup> This is indeed the kind of song the lyrical “I” hopes to achieve in “What Is Mine”: a sanctuary constituted by a reflective mimesis of the sheltering foliage of the orchard trees, ever mindful that this poetic commemoration has transient life as a prerequisite for its endeavors.

Another image of autumn, as Wolfgang Binder has clarified,<sup>54</sup> is implicit in “Der Winkel von Hahrdt” (“The Shelter at Hardt”), from the group of poems called *Nachtgesänge* (*Nightsongs*), published in 1804, in which a constellation of trees in a forest are described thus: “Knospen ähnlich, hängen / Einwärts die Blätter, denen / Blüht unten auf ein Grund, / Nicht gar unmündig.”<sup>55</sup> (In Nick Hoff’s translation it reads as follows: “the leaves turned inward / Hang like buds, below / A ground blooms up toward them, / Not at all speechless.”<sup>56</sup>) The blooming ground is, namely, according to Binder, composed of fallen leaves. The shelter of which the poem speaks – comprised of two large blocks of sandstone creating a hiding place where Duke Ulrich of Württemberg supposedly spent a night when he was on the run in the early sixteenth century – is surrounded by beeches and oaks, the fallen leaves of which make up the radiant forest floor. The thanks and remembrance is, so to speak, traveling upward in this poem: from the earth to the other, not yet fallen, but frostbitten and inward-turned leaves that resemble spring buds.<sup>57</sup> Here nature is rendered a voice, described as “Nicht gar unmündig” (“Not at all speechless”). This is something Adorno highlights in his interpretation, while Binder, despite his lucid commentary about the autumnal setting, ultimately claims that the expressiveness of nature here is due only to the historical importance the place has since Ulrich blessed it with his presence.<sup>58</sup> Binder thus misses the radical quality of Hölderlin’s poem: how it draws attention to the otherwise invisible background, implicitly condemning the notion of nature as mere material for historical progress.<sup>59</sup>

#### 4. Resistance to closure

Hölderlin’s late poetry is, according to Adorno, characterized by a resistance to closure which he interprets as a critique of the classicist conception of the beautiful work of art as a harmonious seamless whole. In order to express art’s dependence on nature, the poem cannot completely close itself off from what lies outside. In his “Seven Maxims” (from 1799 or possibly earlier), Hölderlin himself writes of the need to also incorporate the “unpoetic” in order to create “the highest poetry.”<sup>60</sup> Adorno regards Hölderlin’s employment of parataxis as his chief move to challenge subjective closure. In paratactic style, clauses and phrases are placed side by side, in contrast to hypotactic style, which connects



the elements in a sentence hierarchically through the use of subordination. While Hölderlin's poetry also contains "boldly formed hypotactic constructions," Adorno nevertheless finds that "the parataxes are striking – artificial [*kunstvolle*] disturbances that evade the logical hierarchy of a subordinating syntax."<sup>61</sup> Through these interruptions, Hölderlin is able to transform language, linking elements in a different way than in judgment; for Adorno this move is "musiclike"<sup>62</sup> in that language here tries to wrestle out of signification in order to become expression. And "[a]s in music," so Adorno claims, "the tendency takes over larger structures."<sup>63</sup> A poem like the famous "Hälfte des Lebens" ("Half of Life") – also published in *Nachtgesänge* – is "paratactical in the broader sense."<sup>64</sup> It reads as follows (first in German and then in Nick Hoff's English translation):

*Hälfte des Lebens*

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.<sup>65</sup>

*Half of Life*

With yellow pears,  
And full of wild roses,  
The land hangs in the lake,  
O dear inclining swans,  
And drunk with kisses  
You dip your heads  
In the holy, sober water.

Ah, where in the winter will  
I come upon flowers, and where  
The sun's light,  
And shadows of the earth?  
The walls stand  
Speechless and cold, in the wind  
The weathervanes clatter.<sup>66</sup>

Noting that first Friedrich Beißner, the main editor of the Stuttgart edition of Hölderlin's collected works, and later Peter Szondi, to whom Adorno dedicated the Hölderlin essay, stress that "each of the two stanzas of 'Hälfte des Lebens' has an inherent need of its opposite," Adorno argues that what breaks the stanzas apart is simultaneously what enables the poem to be expressive, both on the level of content – "the antithesis

of sensuous love and being cast out” – and on the level of form: “it is only the paratactical form itself that produces the caesura between the halves of life.”<sup>67</sup> Content and form are one, they are mediated through each other. Note the repeated use of “und” (“and”) as paratactic connective in the stanzas, as well as the sequential lining of phrases. That the lyrical “I” is cast out seems to be implied already in the first stanza’s use of the second person pronoun addressing the swans from a distance, longingly; a longing reflected in the mournfulness of the second stanza. The second stanza’s winter landscape, with its very different wordlessness (mute walls and artificial noise), also contrasts with the graceful silence in the first; both stanzas need each other in order for the pain, and the longing for the pain to end, to become eloquent.

Working with and against language at the same time, Hölderlin’s poetry is able to reveal “[t]he dual character of language,”<sup>68</sup> that is, its character of being both general and expressive. Finding a way to express something particular through something universal is of course what all poetry struggles with, but in Hölderlin this struggle becomes thematic. This is because Hölderlin not only rejects rigidified language in order to aim for expression, but opposes “the expressive ideal” as well.<sup>69</sup> Language is not pure subjective expression, it is also necessary for the manifestation of subjectivity; the subject is thus far from “immediate and ultimate,” but rather “utterly mediated.”<sup>70</sup> That language is a precondition for subjectivity also implies that language is not identical with subjectivity. In Hölderlin’s poetry, language engages in critical self-reflection and points to the need of a ground outside ourselves. Hölderlin gives up the period, that is, the syntactically closed unity, in order to reach beyond subjective intention and “allow language itself to speak,”<sup>71</sup> but Adorno emphasizes that this should be “understood polemically and not ontologically.”<sup>72</sup> What is reached is not pure language. Language is always also historically mediated; it is affected by usage, and when it is wrested free from subjective intention it is able to speak of the history sedimented in it: the history of subjectivity’s domination of nature, in other words, history as “its [i.e. history’s] identity with spirit,”<sup>73</sup> and, through this move, what is not identical to nature-dominating spirit is given voice. Subjugated nature is given voice, not by treating “what is dominated” as “something whole and wholesome,”<sup>74</sup> that is, as a primordial state to which we could return, but precisely by spirit’s self-reflection, which allows it to transcend its dominating tendency. “[L]anguage speaks for the subject” in Hölderlin,<sup>75</sup> but the subject it speaks for is the possible, non-dominating one, and hence also for the possibility of a nature liberated from domination.<sup>76</sup>

This kind of expression cannot be brought about merely through a willing on the side of the poet, but can be achieved only through working with and against tradition. “Hence,” Adorno writes, “on the one hand the dependency of Hölderlin’s undertaking on Greek culture wherever in his work language wants to become nature; and on the other hand the disintegrative moment in which the unattainability of the linguistic ideal is revealed.”<sup>77</sup> Poetic language wants to become nature, that is non-intentional, pure expression, but it cannot, as it is unable to completely rid itself of its generalizing character. In Hölderlin’s late poetry, language reflects on this tension and is able to indicate “for the first time what culture would be: received nature [*empfangene Natur*].”<sup>78</sup>

Adorno thus argues that Hölderlin’s late poetry constitutes a self-reflection of language which is able to show a way of reconciling spirit and nature, and which is also able to escape the risk of degenerating into irrationalism. Hölderlin sees reflection

as to blame for the separation between spirit and nature, but he nevertheless “puts his trust in the organon of reflection, the word [*Wort*].”<sup>79</sup> Reconciliation is thus sought in and through what otherwise predominantly serves as a medium of separation in modernity (language as demarcating human exemption from the rest of nature): “In Hölderlin the philosophy of history, which conceived origin and reconciliation in simple opposition to reflection as the state of utter sinfulness, is reversed.”<sup>80</sup> Adorno goes on to quote from the fifth stanza of the first version of “Brod und Wein” (“Bread and Wine”), probably completed in 1801 or 1802:

So ist der Mensch; wenn da ist das Gut, und es sorget mit Gaaben  
Selber ein Gott für ihn, kennet und sieht er es nicht.  
Tragen muß er, zuvor; nun aber nennt er sein Liebstes,  
Nun, nun müssen dafür Worte, wie Blumen, entstehn.<sup>81</sup>

Thus is man; when the wealth is there, and a god himself  
Provides him with gifts, he won't see it and remains unaware.  
First he must bear it; now, though, he names what is dearest,  
Now he needs words, words that bloom forth like flowers.<sup>82</sup>

Reflection is necessary in order to break out of the state of oblivion, but reflection simultaneously needs to commemorate what it otherwise too readily sees as its utter opposite: silent nature.<sup>83</sup> “What is dearest” steps forward in the act of poetic naming, where “words [*Worte*]” are said to “bloom forth like flowers” (“wie Blumen, entstehn”), an admittance that not even words, “the organon of reflection,” are the work solely of humankind (or simply a gift from God to his chosen species), but a result of an encounter between reflection and its environment. The geniality manifested in the poem can thus truly be said to constitute “consciousness of the nonidentical object”; that is, of that which faces reflection and which can never be exhausted by reflection. The poem furthermore invokes what we saw Adorno referring to as “one of Hölderlin’s favorite terms,” namely “das Offene,” “the open.”<sup>84</sup> In the third stanza of “Brod und Wein,” it reads: “So komm! daß wir das Offene schauen, / Daß ein Eigenes wir suchen, so weit es auch ist” (“So come! Come behold the open / And search for what’s ours, however distant it may be”).<sup>85</sup> What is open is, as we saw Adorno pointing out, “familiar,” that is, recognizable, when we acknowledge our kinship with it, our dependence on it for our procedures of naming and reflection, and when we no longer dress and prepare it in alienating terms (as “spirit in its otherness” for example). Instead, the aesthetic experience of reading Hölderlin’s poetry crucially includes being reminded of our dependence on nature; it does not turn on an autonomous, self-sufficient whole – the work of art conceived solely as a product of spirit – reflecting another autonomous self-sufficient whole: the human being as merely spirit. Hölderlin’s poems would not have their enduring power did they not, in their commemoration of transient existence, their elevation of life into something lasting, simultaneously allow for mortality and vulnerability, thus remaining open to the finite world, to particular experience. Pointing us to the invocation of genius in “Blödigkeit” (“Timidity”) – a reworking of “Dichtermuth” (“The Poet’s Courage”) that was published in *Nachtgesänge* – Adorno quotes from the first stanza: “Drum, mein Genius! tritt nur / Baar ins Leben, und Sorge nicht!”<sup>86</sup> In Nick Hoff’s translation it reads: “So then, my genius, just step / Boldly into life without care!”<sup>87</sup>

Adorno also emphasizes that the reminder of human finitude in Hölderlin's poetry serves as a check against hubristic tendencies: "What serves as a sign of the reconciliation of genius, which is no longer hardened and enclosed within itself [ . . . ] is that mortality – as opposed to mythic infinity in the bad sense – is attributed to it."<sup>88</sup> He then cites the last stanza from the second version of "Dichtermuth" (completed in late 1800/early 1801), which reads:

So vergehe denn auch, wenn es die Zeit einst ist  
 Und dem Geiste sein Recht nirgend gebricht, so sterb'  
 Einst im Ernste des Lebens  
 Unsre Freude, doch schönen Tod!<sup>89</sup>

May it pass away like that too when the time at last comes,  
 And the spirit lacks nowhere its right, so may  
 Our joy die one day in the earnestness  
 Of life, but a beautiful death!<sup>90</sup>

Adorno comments that "[g]enius itself is also nature" and goes on to claim that the death of genius "in the earnestness / Of life" implies "the extinction [*Erlöschen*] of reflection, and of art with it, in the moment when reconciliation passes out of the medium of the merely spiritual and into reality."<sup>91</sup> On Adorno's reading, then, "Dichtermuth" indicates the possibility of an end to the domination of nature. Art (*qua* the self-reflection of spirit as nature) would then no longer be needed to give oppressed nature a voice; this would entail an end of art (as we know it) because its historically evolved idea would be brought to realization: reconciliation between spirit and nature.

Here, it is important not to misunderstand Adorno's concept of reconciliation. It would neither be tantamount to an undifferentiating harmonization of spirit and nature (as in the classicist conception of integrative harmony as closure), nor would it be something achieved once and for all (the reconciled condition perceived as static). That genius is able to revoke the domination of nature is because it admits to being "also nature" and mindful of its own mortality, in contrast to the idea of absolute (infinite) spirit as the annexation of nature *qua* otherness through reflection. Such a reimagination of reconciliation, where we humans would no longer attempt to transform nature completely in our image, but instead would allow it to be diverse and other than us – while not excluding it as utterly alien – is evoked in Hölderlin's late poetry. As I have tried to show, Adorno's interpretation manages to do justice to the way Hölderlin's poetry discloses not only the predicament of the alienated modern subject,<sup>92</sup> but also, and importantly, to the way it suggests a transformation of the relationship between human beings and nature into one that would no longer be predominated by conflict and destruction.<sup>93</sup>

## Notes

1. See e.g. his letter to Hegel on 10 July 1794, in Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters*, 29; Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke: Große Stuttgarter Ausgabe* (hereafter cited as StA), vol. 6.1:128. For further discussion, see Waibel, "Kant, Fichte, Schelling," 90–4.
2. Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 77 [Akademie-Ausgabe (=AA) 5:191]. See also *ibid.* 75 [AA 5:189] about pleasure preceding the cognition of the object.
3. Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters*, 242.

4. Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 79 [AA 5:193]. See also Bowie, *Aesthetics and Subjectivity*, 103.
5. Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 186 (§46) [AA 5:307].
6. *Ibid.*, 185 (§45) [AA 5:306].
7. But we have to be aware that it is art, and not mislead to mistake it for nature, see *ibid.*, 185–6 (§45) [AA 5:306–7].
8. *Ibid.*, 130 [AA 5:246] (my italics).
9. Hölderlin's sharpest criticism of Fichte appears in the 1795 fragment most familiar under the title "Urtheil und Sein" ("Judgment and Being"), in which he argues that subjectivity cannot be absolute, as it needs an object in order to become subject in the first place. See Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters* (with the editorial title "Being Judgement Possibility"), 231–2; StA 4.1: 216–17. For discussion, see Henrich, "Hölderlin on Judgment and Being"; Beiser, *German Idealism*, 387–91.
10. See, for example, Henrich, "Hegel and Hölderlin."
11. Beiser, *German Idealism*, 9.
12. *Ibid.*, 3.
13. Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, 13; Adorno, *Drei Studien zu Hegel*, 261.
14. For discussion, see Paetzold, "Adorno's Notion of Natural Beauty"; Gasché, "The Theory of Natural Beauty and Its Evil Star"; Flodin, "Of Mice and Men"; Hammer, *Adorno's Modernism*, chap. 2.
15. The essay is a revised version of a paper originally delivered on the annual gathering of the Hölderlin Society in Berlin in 1963; a paper which caused a "minor scandal," as Savage describes it in his book *Hölderlin after the Catastrophe*, 97. This was due to the sharp criticism Adorno delivered of Heidegger's reading of Hölderlin. For discussion of Adorno's critique of Heidegger's interpretation, see Mörchen, *Adorno und Heidegger*, 173–5; van den Bergh, *Adornos philosophische Deuten von Dichtung*, 158–63; Kreuzer, "Adornos und Heideggers Hölderlin"; Savage, *Hölderlin after the Catastrophe*, 96–149; Savage, "The Polemic of the Late Work."
16. See Flodin, "The Eloquence of Something That Has No Language."
17. Adorno, "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry," 122; Adorno, "Parataxis: Zur späten Lyrik Hölderlins" (hereafter cited as GS 11), 462.
18. Adorno, "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry," 123; GS 11:463.
19. Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, 13–16.
20. Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 1–2.
21. Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters*, 68; StA 6.1:203.
22. Treated by Beißner, the main editor of StA, as a late piece which he gave the title "Über Religion." Wolfram Groddeck and D.E. Sattler date it to 1796/97, and supply the title "Fragment philosophischer Briefe," see Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke: Frankfurter Ausgabe*, vol. 14, 11–12. For a more elaborate account of Hölderlin's argument in this fragment, see Flodin, "Hölderlin's Higher Enlightenment." For further background and perspectives on Hölderlin's planned "aesthetic letters," see Förster, "To Lend Wings to Physics Once Again"; Louth, "jene zarten Verhältnisse"; Fischer, "Hölderlin's Mythopoetics."
23. Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters*, 235; StA 4.1:275.
24. Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters*, 235; StA 4.1:275.
25. Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters*, 235; StA 4.1:275.
26. Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters*, 237; StA 4.1:277.
27. Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters*, 239; StA 4.1:281.
28. Adorno, "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry," 140; GS 11:482.
29. StA 2.1:37.
30. Translation by Michael Hamburger in Hölderlin, *Poems and Fragments*, 223.
31. I am referring to Robert Pippin's take on Hegel; see Pippin, "Leaving Nature Behind, or Two Cheers for 'Subjectivism.'"
32. Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters*, 136–7; StA 6.1:329–30.
33. Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters*, 246; StA 4.1: 221.

34. Adorno, "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry," 143; GS 11:485.
35. StA 2.1:127.
36. From HYMNS AND FRAGMENTS by Friedrich Hölderlin, translated and introduced by Richard Sieburth. Copyright © 1984 by Princeton University Press. Reprinted by permission. Hölderlin, *Hymns and Fragments*, 55.
37. For Hölderlin's translation, see StA 5:201–62.
38. Sophocles, *The Antigone*, 68–75 (lines 332–60).
39. Sophocles, *The Antigone*, 74 (Greek), 75 (English), (lines 361–2).
40. From HYMNS AND FRAGMENTS by Friedrich Hölderlin, translated and introduced by Richard Sieburth. Copyright © 1984 by Princeton University Press. Reprinted by permission. Hölderlin, *Hymns and Fragments*, 59; StA 2.1:128 (lines 90–1).
41. I also discuss this poem from a slightly different angle in Flodin, "Hölderlin's Higher Enlightenment," 267–8.
42. StA 1:306.
43. Translation by Nick Hoff in Hölderlin, *Odes and Elegies*, 69.
44. StA 1:306 (lines 11–12); Hölderlin, *Odes and Elegies*, 69.
45. Hölderlin, *Odes and Elegies*, 69; StA 1:306 (line 8).
46. Hölderlin, *Odes and Elegies*, 71; StA 1:306 (lines 34–5).
47. Hölderlin, *Odes and Elegies*, 71; StA 1:307 (lines 41 and 43).
48. Hölderlin, *Odes and Elegies*, 69; StA 1:306 (line 19).
49. Adorno, "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry," 146; GS 11:488.
50. Adorno, "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry," 146; GS 11:488.
51. Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 197 §50 [AA 5:320] (my italics).
52. Adorno, "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry," 146; GS 11:488.
53. Adorno, "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry," 146–7; GS 11:488.
54. Binder, "Hölderlin," 352.
55. StA 2.1:116 (lines 2–5). Here the old spelling of the village name is retained.
56. Hölderlin, *Odes and Elegies*, 183. Hoff uses the modernized spelling of Hardt in his translation.
57. Cf. Binder, *Hölderlin-Aufsätze*, 352.
58. Ibid.
59. For a more elaborate analysis of this poem (to which Adorno repeatedly returns in his writings and lectures) expanding on this topic, see Flodin, "The Eloquence of Something That Has No Language," 5–12.
60. Hölderlin, *Essays and Letters*, 241–2; StA 4.1:234. Beißner gathers the aphorisms under the title "Reflexion." Adorno quotes the second of them, in which Hölderlin questions the usefulness of syntactic periodicity for poetry, in order to support his claim about the importance of parataxis for Hölderlin. I discuss this further in Flodin, "The Eloquence of Something That Has No Language," 12–13.
61. Adorno, "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry," 131; GS 11:471.
62. Adorno, "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry," 131; GS 11:471.
63. Adorno, "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry," 132; GS 11:473.
64. Adorno, "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry," 132; GS 11:473.
65. StA 2.1:117.
66. Hölderlin, *Odes and Elegies*, 181.
67. Adorno, "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry," 132; GS 11:473.
68. Adorno, "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry," 136; GS 11:477.
69. Adorno, "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry," 136; GS 11:477.
70. Adorno, "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry," 137; GS 11:478.
71. Adorno, "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry," 137; GS 11:478.
72. Adorno, "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry," 137; GS 11:478. This is of course aimed at Heidegger.
73. Adorno, "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry," 132; GS 11:472.
74. Adorno, "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry," 143; GS 11:484.

75. Adorno, "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry," 137; GS 11:478.
76. It is misleading to claim, as Hannah Vandegrift Eldridge does when discussing different interpretations of Hölderlin's poem "Angedenken," that it is "in line with Adorno's reading of Hölderlin's oeuvre as a whole" to interpret the poem "as a lament for the failure of language and expressivity." Vandegrift Eldridge, *Lyric Orientations*, 107n40 and 107. Vandegrift Eldridge has illuminating things to say about the apparent paradox in Hölderlin's theoretical reflections on poetry's ability to reveal things philosophy cannot, though I interpret this paradox differently. See Flodin, "Hölderlin's Higher Enlightenment," 265–70.
77. Adorno, "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry," 137; GS 11:478.
78. Adorno, "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry," 136; GS 11:477.
79. Adorno, "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry," 147 (trans. modified); GS 11:489.
80. Adorno, "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry," 147; GS 11:489.
81. StA 2.1:92–3 (lines 87–90).
82. Translation by Nick Hoff in Hölderlin, *Odes and Elegies*, 139.
83. See also Flodin, "The Eloquence of Something That Has No Language," 21.
84. See note 52.
85. StA 2.1: 91 (lines 41–2); Hölderlin, *Odes and Elegies*, 135.
86. Adorno, "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry," 146; GS 11:488. For the quote, see StA 2.1:66 (lines 3–4).
87. Hölderlin, *Odes and Elegies*, 177.
88. Adorno, "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry," 149; GS 11:490.
89. StA 2.1:65.
90. Translation by Nick Hoff in Hölderlin, *Odes and Elegies*, 113.
91. Adorno, "Parataxis: On Hölderlin's Late Poetry," 149; GS 11:491.
92. Successfully emphasized in, for example, Richard Eldridge's reading of Hölderlin in Eldridge, "'Doch Sehrend Stehts/Am Ufer Du' ('But Longing You Stand on the Shore')."
93. For a recent reading of Hölderlin that also focuses on poetry's ability to indicate a possible reconciliation between human beings and nature, see Fischer, "Hölderlin's Mythopoetics."

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