

## CONTENTS

Acknowledgements .....	ix
Thinking of Hölderlin .....	xi
Introduction .....	xiii
SELECTED POEMS .....	25
SELECTED LETTERS .....	161
APPENDICES	
A: Michael Hamburger's Hölderlin .....	187
B: Syntax and Signification in Hölderlin's 'Andenken' .....	197
C: The End of 'Andenken' .....	221
D: A Spirit Voice in Loose Alcaic Measure .....	225
Notes to Poems .....	233
Select Bibliography .....	243
About the Translator .....	247
Index of Titles and First Lines .....	249

within six months, after nursing her children through measles, weakened by tuberculosis, she herself was dead. Forty years later and six months before his own death Hölderlin was asked about her, and he replied: 'Ah, my Diotima. Don't speak to me about my Diotima. Thirteen sons she bore me. One is Pope, another is the Sultan, the third is Emperor of Russia', then suddenly he broke out in his Swabian dialect: 'Ont wisset Se, wies no ganga ischt? Närret isch se worde, närret, närret, närret! (And do you know what happened to her? She went mad, she did, mad, mad, mad).'

## II

After this rapid sketch of Hölderlin – in which there are inevitably gaps and missing depths<sup>3</sup> – we should now dwell for a moment on some characteristic points in a poem of his Homburg period (1798–1800). I wish also to raise certain issues that are involved in translating Hölderlin. Reading him, one is faced with poetic language of a highly incandescent kind. The particles in these lustrous structures of language are active in peculiar ways. If there is any common ground between Hölderlin and Goethe it is this: for both poets every life experience is a linguistic experience.<sup>4</sup> *Logos* and *mythos* are not fixed stars any more (as they still had been, with a few variations, in the Baroque period). With his unique feeling for language, the poet as artificer expresses 'soul' as language; and this 'soul' is conscious of being in a time world, subject to fluctuations ('moods'). This new sense of the internality of language in space and time makes the poet not so much an imitator (as he was in any relatively fixed world of the *logos*) as an inaugurator, who has a hand in the continuous work of creation. The ensuing exploration of what we might call 'positive irrationality' marked as crucial a point in the life of the Western poetic mind as the exploration later, by such writers as Gogol, Dostoevsky,

3 Readers with German are referred to *Hölderlin: eine Chronik in Text und Bild*, Adolf Beck and Paul Raabe (eds.) (Frankfurt am Main: Insel Verlag, 1970), especially the chronicle (pp. 7–110) by Adolf Beck and Karl-Gert Kribben. Stansfield, Hamburger, and Salzberger can also be consulted (see Bibliography).

4 Rudolf Kassner, 'On Goethe's Greatness and his Fortune', translated by this writer, *Delos*, 5 (1970), pp. 74–97 (original in Kassner's *Umgang der Jahre* (Erlenbach-Zürich: Eugen Rentsch, 1949)).

## HEIDELBERG

Long have I loved you and for my own delight  
Would call you mother, give you an artless song,  
You, of all the towns in our country  
The loveliest that ever I saw.

As the forest bird crosses the peaks in flight,  
Over the river shimmering past you floats  
Airy and strong the bridge,  
Humming with sounds of traffic and people.

Once, as if it were sent by gods, enchantment  
Seized me as I was passing over the bridge  
And the distance with its allure  
Shone into the mountainscape,

And that strong youth, the river, was rushing on down  
To the plain, sorrowing-glad, like the heart that overflows  
With beauty and hurls itself,  
To die of love, into the floods of time.

You had fed him with streams, the fugitive, given him  
Cool shadow, and all the shores looked on  
As he followed his way, their image  
Sweetly jockeying over the waves.

But into the valley hung heavy the vast  
And fate-acquainted fort, by lightnings torn  
To the ground it stood on; yet  
Eternal sun still poured

Its freshening light across the giant and ageing  
Thing, and all around was green with ivy,  
Living; friendly woodlands ran  
Murmurous down across the fort.

BREAD AND WINE  
FOR HEINSE

I

The town around is hushed, the little street in the lamplight  
Quietens and the twinkling wagons rumble away.  
People filled with joys of the day go home to their rest,  
Pensive heads are content to be weighing profit and loss,  
Under a homely roof; and emptied of flowers and grapes  
The market, busy before, rests from manual toil.  
But music of strings floats from distant gardens, perhaps  
It is a lover playing, perhaps some lonely man  
Thinking of absent friends and the time of his youth; and fountains,  
Flowing as ever and fresh, sprinkle a flowerbed.  
Bells toll quiet in the dusky air, and a watchman  
Heeding the hours that pass, calls what o'clock it is.  
Now a rushing of wind has excited the treetops too,  
Look, and the moon comes, shadow image of earth,  
Secretly into the sky; the dreamer is coming, night  
Brimming with stars and caring doubtless little for us;  
There in her wonder she gleams, rising, strange among humans,  
Sad and splendid above the crests of mountain and hill.

II

Marvellous favours she brings, the night sublime, and nobody  
Knows whence they may come, or what her doing may be.  
Thus she bestirs the world and the hopeful souls of men;  
Even the wise cannot tell what she may hold in store,  
For such is his will, the highest god, who loves you, wherefore  
Better than her you love the conscient solar day.  
But sometimes even an eye that is clear may long for shadow  
And may willingly venture, before it is needful, to sleep.  
Or to gaze at the night may please a man who is loyal and true,  
Yes, to dedicate song and garlands to her is good,

PATMOS  
FOR THE LANDGRAVE OF HOMBURG

Near and  
Hard to grasp is  
    The God.  
But where danger is,  
    Deliverance also grows.  
The eagles  
    Dwell in obscurity  
    And across chasms fearless go  
        The sons of the Alps, on bridges  
Lightly built. Wherefore,  
    Since the peaks of time cluster  
    High all around  
And loved ones dwell  
    Near, languishing  
    On mountains farthest apart,  
Give us innocent  
    Water, O give us the wings  
With truest mind to travel  
    Across and to return.

Thus I spoke  
And a spirit  
    Rapid beyond my expectation  
    Carried me far  
From my house to where  
    I never thought to go.  
    The shadowy forest  
Darkened  
    In twilight as I went,  
And rivers of my native land,  
    Yearning; countries there were  
I never knew; but soon  
    In the first sheen rose

## THE TITANS

But it is not  
The time. They are  
Not fettered yet. Who stand aloof,  
The divine does not touch them.  
Then with Delphi  
They may reckon. Grant me, meanwhile,  
At my leisure and that I may rest,  
Thoughts of the dead. Many  
Have died, commanders in olden time,  
Beautiful women, and poets,  
And of late  
Many men,  
But I am alone.

and shipping  
Across the sea to ask the fragrant isles  
Where they have gone.

For something of them lives on  
In faithful writ  
And something in sagas of the time.  
Much by God is revealed.  
For clouds have long brought down  
Their influence, and a holy wilderness  
Has sunk roots, where much is being readied.  
Hot, that plenitude. For we lack  
Song, which frees the spirit.  
It would be consuming,  
It would be contrary to itself,  
For never does the heavenly fire  
Consent to be imprisoned.

the 'ancient holy father shakes from reddish cloud with an easy hand his benign lightning'.<sup>18</sup> For among all the things that I see of God, this sign has become my special elected one. Once I could rejoice over a new truth, a better view of what is above and around us, but now I have my fears that I shall end like Tantalus, who had from the gods more than his fill.

But I do what I can, as best I can, and, whenever I see that my way is leading me where it led the others, I think that it is a godless and mad thing to seek a way which is assured against attack; and that no grass grows for death alone.

Well, goodbye for the present, my dear friend. I am full of departure now. It is a long time since I wept. But it cost me bitter tears to decide to leave my homeland now, perhaps forever. For what do I love more in all the world? But they have no use for me. I shall remain German, and must, of course, even if the needs of my heart and the need to make a living were to drive me to Tahiti. [...]

To his mother [238]

Bordeaux, 28 January 1802

At last, my dear mother, I am here, am well looked after, am well, and certainly mean not to forget the gratitude which I owe to the lord of life and death. I cannot write much at present; I arrived this morning, and my mind is too much taken up with my new situation for me to tell you with equanimity things of interest about the journey now past. Moreover, so much has happened to me that I can hardly speak of it.

These last days I walked through a single beautiful Spring, but just before that, on the terrifying snow-covered heights of the Auvergne, in storm and wilderness, in the icy night and with loaded pistols by me in my rough bed – it was then, too, that I said a prayer which was the best I ever prayed till now, and which I shall not forget.

I am safe – give thanks with me.

My dears, when I had come through the dangers, I greeted you in

18 Hölderlin quotes freely here from Goethe's poem 'Grenzen der Menschheit'. Goethe has 'from rolling clouds' and the 'age-old father' and 'sows over the earth'.

which is not spoken' ('Le mystère dans les lettres'). In studying syntax, one is studying perhaps the 'unspoken' but legible signs of the originative animation which brought these and only these words into these and no other sequences. Syntax is the breathing in the 'singing out'. Further, this breathing of syntax is the 'great force' that connects the diverse memory-traces which the poem recalls or recollects into a consonance. The syntax conducts one form through the many elements which it animates and harmonizes.

Even before the poem is read sentence by sentence it can be felt as a structure of speech waves having different lengths: some rolling, some abrupt. One certainly wonders, too, that the memories, or 'objects' of *an-denken* (thinking-of), are localized around Bordeaux, thus in a liminal situation, between land and sea: Hölderlin followed an older spelling, but *Bord d'eaux* means 'Waters' Edge'. Soon one is alerted to other aspects of this liminality: solid and liquid, permanence and flux – the sea/land nexus pervades the whole text. One thing not noticed at once is this: the poet is not so placeable as his recollections are. Where is he? In Swabia? It is odd – from the first words he is so close to what he is recollecting that one might forget that he is not actually in a faraway French place, to which the north-east wind from Swabia is blowing, and that finally he is not actually witnessing the confluence of the rivers as they flow into the sea. Presence and memory are coalescent, even if they do not quite coalesce. Yet the voice has only said: 'The northeaster is blowing, | Of all winds the one I love | Best, for it promises | Fiery spirit and a good voyage | For seafarers.' Then he tells the wind to 'go now and greet | the beautiful Garonne | And the gardens of Bordeaux', and he seems himself to have flown there with the message-bearing wind.

Now to the hazards of figuring the design of the sentences.

1. The first sentence provides a formal triadic matrix which subsequent sentences amplify and modulate:

- (a) a declarative verb phrase (*Der Nordost wehet*)
- (b) a qualifying phrase (*Der liebste unter den Winden | Mir*)
- (c) another qualifying phrase, here with a two-tiered main component and a conjunction at the outset (*weil er feurigen Geist | Und gute Fahrt verheißet den Schiffern*).



INDEX OF TITLES AND FIRST LINES

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| Warum bist du so kurz? liebst du, wie<br>vormals, denn 32    | Wenn nemlich der Rebe Saft, 130                 |
| Was schläfst du, Bergsohn, liegest in<br>Unmuth, schiefe, 96 | Wie Meeresküsten, wenn zu baun 126              |
| Wenn aus dem Himmel hellere 154                              | Wie Vögel langsam ziehn 124                     |
| Wenn aus der Ferne, da wir geschieden<br>sind, 156           | Wo bist du? trunken dämmert die Seele<br>mir 34 |

ENGLISH TITLES

- |                               |                                   |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| A Life's Course 55            | Remembrance 121                   |
| Being Diffident 95            | The Ages of Life 99               |
| Bread and Wine 67             | The Farewell 57                   |
| Brevity 35                    | The Half of Life 103              |
| Ganymede 97                   | The Neckar 51                     |
| Greece 147                    | The Poet's Vocation 61            |
| Heidelberg 47                 | The Rhine 79                      |
| Homeland 129                  | The Titans 135                    |
| Hyperion's Song of Fate 31    | ...the Vatican... 141             |
| If from the distance... 157   | Tilted Stones at Hardt 101        |
| In Socrates' Times 153        | To the Fates 37                   |
| Like Sea Coasts... 127        | To the Sungod 35                  |
| Like slow flying birds... 125 | Vulcan 93                         |
| Man 39                        | When I was a boy... 27            |
| My Possession 43              | When out of heaven... 155         |
| On a pale yellow leaf... 133  | When the juice of the vine... 131 |
| Patmos 105                    |                                   |

ENGLISH FIRST LINES

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| And no-one knows 129                                    | Like sea coasts when the gods begin to<br>build 127 |
| Are not many living creatures known<br>to you? 95       | Like slow flying birds – 125                        |
| At the forest's gate I sat among 79                     | Long have I loved you and for my own<br>delight 47  |
| But it is not 135                                       | Near and 105  |
| Come, friendly spirit of fire, and<br>wrap 93           | O you voices of fate, you 147                       |
| Did we intend to part, thinking it good<br>and wise? 57 | On a pale yellow leaf the grape 133                 |
| Grant me a single summer, you lords<br>of all, 37       | Scarce had the young peaks begun,<br>O earth, 39    |
| If from the distance, now we are far<br>apart, 157      | Shores of Ganges heard the paean for<br>the god 61  |
| In your valleys my heart awoke to<br>life, 51           | The autumn day rests in its fullness<br>now, 43     |
|   | The forest subsides 101                             |