# CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking of Hölderlin</td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>xiii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SELECTED POEMS</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SELECTED LETTERS</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>APPENDICES</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A: Michael Hamburger's Hölderlin</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: Syntax and Signification in Hölderlin's 'Andenken'</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: The End of 'Andenken'</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D: A Spirit Voice in Loose Alcaic Measure</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes to Poems</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select Bibliography</td>
<td>243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the Translator</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Index of Titles and First Lines</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
within six months, after nursing her children through measles, weak-
ened 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. Thir-
teen 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, när
ret, 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⁢ – 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 trans
lating Hölderlin. Reading him, one is faced with poetic language
of a highly incandescent kind. The particles in these lustrous struc-
tures 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.⁴ 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 ir
rationality’ marked as crucial a point in the life of the Western poetic
mind as the exploration later, by such writers as Gogol, Dostoevsky,

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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).

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-gladd, 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’.\textsuperscript{18} 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

\textsuperscript{18} Hölderlin quotes freely here from Goethe’s poem ‘Grenzen der Menscheit’. 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 syn-
tax, 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 recol-
lects 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 roll-
ing, 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, perma-
nence 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 rec-
collections 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 witness-
ing 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 beauti-
ful 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 subse-
quent 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 com-
ponent 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 vormals, denn 32
Was schläfst du, Bergsohn, liegest in Unmuth, schief, 96
Wenn aus dem Himmel hellere sind, 156
Wenn aus der Ferne, da wir geschieden sind, 156
Wenn nemlich der Rebe Saft, 130
Wie Meeresküsten, wenn zu baun 126
Wie Vögel langsam ziehn 124
Wo bist du? trunken dämmert die Seele mir 34

ENGLISH TITLES

A Life’s Course 55
Being Diffident 95
Bread and Wine 67
Brevity 33
Ganymede 97
Greece 147
Heidelberg 47
Homeland 129
Hyperion’s Song of Fate 51
If from the distance… 157
In Socrates’ Times 153
Like Sea Coasts… 127
Like slow flying birds… 125
Man 39
My Possession 43
On a pale yellow leaf… 135
Patmos 105
Remembrance 121
The Ages of Life 99
The Farewell 57
The Half of Life 103
The Neckar 51
The Poet’s Vocation 61
The Rhine 79
The Titans 135
…the Vatican… 141
Tilted Stones at Hardt 101
To the Fates 37
To the Sungod 35
Vulcan 93
When I was a boy… 27
When out of heaven… 155
When the juice of the vine… 131

ENGLISH FIRST LINES

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