

Cyrus Hamlin (1936–2011) *in memoriam*

Von

Charles Bambach

The death of a distinguished scholar provides us with an occasion to reflect on the significance of his work, but also, and perhaps more importantly, to think critically about the very meaning of scholarship itself, its limits and possibilities. Cyrus Hamlin's career as a literary scholar was long and productive. As a professor of German and comparative literature at Yale University (1982–2006), and at the University of Toronto (1970–1982), Hamlin introduced North American students to the hermeneutic practice of textual explication, especially in regard to reading works by the leading figures of European Romanticism such as Goethe, Schiller, Wordsworth, and Keats. At a time when Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida, J. Hillis Miller, and Geoffrey Hartman were transforming Yale into the leading center of deconstructive literary theory, Hamlin continued to position German hermeneutics as the more rigorous form of literary practice. He wrote widely on literary theory, the poetics of Romanticism, biblical literature, and Wagner, but it is his work on Hölderlin for which he will be best remembered.

Trained at the Freie Universität in Berlin (1958–59) where as a Fulbright scholar he worked with Uvo Hölscher and Bernhard Böschenstein, Hamlin was also privileged to have spent a sabbatical year in 1967–68 at the University of Tübingen, where he worked alongside Wolfgang Schadewaldt, Adolf Beck, and Friedrich Beißner. Such training informed Hamlin's work deeply. He learned to read Hölderlin manuscripts in their original form, becoming highly sensitized to the editorial peculiarities of Hölderlin's poetic style. On this basis he became one of the foremost critics of the various Hölderlin editions – from Beißner's *Große Stuttgarter Ausgabe* (his gold standard) to the *Deutscher Klassiker Verlag* edition by Jochen Schmidt, and various other editions

by Gerhard Kurz, Günter Mieth, Detlev Lüders, Dietrich Uffhausen, and Michael Knaupp, and the Frankfurter Hölderlin Ausgabe of D. E. Sattler (which he found problematic). At the very beginning of his career he worked on producing an edition of Hölderlin's 'Stutgard' from the London manuscript copy owned by Stefan Zweig in his exile. He was also quite active as a literary interpreter, publishing several articles in *Hölderlin-Jahrbuch* and other leading journals and collections on poems such as 'Andenken', 'Menons Klagen um Diotima', 'Heidelberg', 'An Eduard', 'Griechenland', and others. But his true contribution was to serve as the voice and conscience of North American Hölderlin scholarship, the critic who informed us all about the latest work being done in Germany, of its value and its limits. As Hamlin himself once put it, one of his primary concerns was "to address a general readership that might be unfamiliar with the poet's work in the original German."<sup>1</sup> He was to Hölderlin scholarship in the English-speaking world, what Michael Hamburger was to Hölderlin translation. In an age before the internet he kept up with the latest publications by both young and established Hölderlin scholars in Germany. Few could match his erudition or his critical eye for detail. But, one might ask, what were Hamlin's views? And why was his work so significant? Here I would like to briefly suggest some *Hinweise* for a fuller appreciation of his work.

Firstly, Hamlin was blessed with excellent training in both German and Greek. This allowed him to write authoritatively on the peculiarities of Hölderlin's poetic style – especially his translations of Pindar and Sophocles – and the way it shaped his odes, his elegies, and his late hymns. Moreover, Hamlin was discriminating in his attention to the labyrinthine design of Hölderlin's poetic craft – from the early Alcaic and Asclepiadeian meter through the late Pindaric hymns with their free rhythm. His work helped to make sense of the dense and sometimes impenetrable thicket of Hölderlin philology rooted in the study of alternate manuscript versions of important poems such as 'Patmos', 'Mnemosyne', 'Der Einzige', and others. He also expended great effort in coming to terms with Hölderlin's elusive poetological theory from the late 1790s and making it comprehensible to readers. As Hamlin put it, "there was a philosophical foundation for his [Hölderlin's] entire poetic

<sup>1</sup> Cyrus Hamlin: Hölderlin's Hellenism: Tyranny or Transformation? In: HJb 35, 2006–2007, 253. Hereafter HH.

career, which was both more original and more profound than for any other comparable writer of his own time or any other."<sup>2</sup> Yet Hamlin did not wish to reduce the language and texture of Hölderlin's poems to the schematic formulae outlined in the essays on tonal composition. On the contrary, what mattered most to Hamlin was that Hölderlin's poetry be given priority over every other dimension of his work. "It is as poetry, and not philosophy, that his poems succeed and must be interpreted" (SL: 302). It is not surprising then that, despite his appreciation of their depth, Hamlin did not enthusiastically receive the work of such philosophers as Martin Heidegger or Dieter Henrich. Hence, while he valued the sophisticated contributions of a scholar such as Lawrence Ryan, he was more appreciative of the philological labors of Beissner, Beck, Schmidt, and Binder.

Another of his passionate concerns was understanding and explicating Hölderlin's idiosyncratic relationship to ancient Greece. He was adamant that a proper understanding of Hölderlin's Hellenism could not be narrowly analyzed in terms of the poet's own translations of Greek texts. It was not the mere influence of Greek poetic forms that shaped his Hellenism, but "a longing for what he early regarded as the highest ideal of art and literature" (HH: 256). In this sense, "Greece" was always more of a question and challenge for Hölderlin, the name for an unnameable topos whose topography could only be sketched out, but never truly entered into and experienced. As a result, Hamlin believed it was necessary to situate Hölderlin's Grecophilia in terms of the intellectual and historical currents of the late 18th century (Winckelmann, Voss, Chandler, Choiseul-Gouffier, Goethe, Schiller). Only through such study could we understand how Hölderlin's relationship to Greece was marked less by "tyranny" (E. M. Butler), than by "transformation". For Hamlin that meant that Hölderlin sought less to imitate the ancient Greeks than to transform their vision of beauty "to fit the conditions and possibilities of modern art" (HH: 257). Part of his interest in rooting Hölderlin's *Griechenlandbild* within its own time was to challenge what he saw as the extravagances and excesses of the Hölderlin reception in Germany. Here his aim was to free Hölderlin from the *George-Kreis*' attempts to achieve a "sublime communion" with the poet so

<sup>2</sup> Cyrus Hamlin: The Philosophy of Poetic Form. In: The Solid Letter, ed. by Aris Fioretos, Stanford 1999, 313. Hereafter SL.

that we might arrive at a sober, critical, and philologically rigorous appreciation of the poems for modern readers. Throughout his career he kept faith with the conviction that he offered in 1971: “the single most important question, which arises concerning the study of Hölderlin has to do with the poems themselves.”<sup>3</sup>

In the end what mattered to Hamlin was to bring all of our philological rigor, literary insight, and philosophical precision to a study of the poems themselves since, for Hölderlin, “poetry is finally seen to constitute the highest meaning of human existence.” I believe Hamlin shared this Hölderlinian ideal and that it shaped his own scholarly endeavors, endeavors that to the end were marked by a complex and infinitely subtle tension and contrariety. On the one hand, Hamlin was committed to the most rigorous standards of textual interpretation, language proficiency, orthographic soundness, and historical erudition in an effort to do justice to “Hölderlin’s best work [that] remains inordinately complex and elusive.” Yet, at the same time, he was also passionately dedicated to making these impenetrable poems more accessible to “a general reading public.” His work took shape in this difficult conversation between the arcana of the archivist, translator, and critic *and* the responsibility to be clear, organized, and accessible to an audience of non-specialists. Hamlin was a harsh critic sometimes, pointing out the obfuscations and pretensions of newly published academic work on the poet. Perhaps this is because he felt a deeply custodial responsibility to Hölderlin’s poems that wished to keep alive their inscrutability without descending into the realm of obscurantism and academic cant. Often in his writing he would remind us that, despite all of our collective work on the poet, we “still stand near the beginning” of understanding what such philological/philosophical efforts might mean for reading the poems themselves (SL: 313). Above all else, Hamlin was a deeply-learned beginner, someone who attempted to keep the spirit of inception, inauguration, and commencement alive so that we might enter into that festival of song to which the poet’s word beckons us.

<sup>3</sup> Cyrus Hamlin: Hölderlin in Perspective, 1770–1970, Seminar 7, 1971: 134, 142, 143.

„Eine zitternde Zeile, Hölderlin, lass mich schreiben ...“

Nachruf auf Andrea Zanzotto

Von

Luigi Reitani

Als Andrea Zanzotto am 18. Oktober 2011 verstarb, hatte die Kulturszene Italiens gerade seinen 90. Geburtstag gefeiert. Er wurde einhellig als der letzte Vertreter jener bedeutenden Tradition der italienischen Lyrik gewürdigt, die im 20. Jahrhundert mit Ungaretti und Montale ihre prominentesten Vertreter gefunden hatte. Vor allem wurde Zanzottos Arbeit an der Sprache unterstrichen, seine Geschicklichkeit, die Semantik der poetischen Rede durch das sich Verselbständigen der Signifikanten zu unterminieren und zugleich zu bereichern. So wurden seine komplexen, ja sich einem unmittelbaren Sinnverständnis versperrenden Verse ohne weiteres als kostbare poetische Dokumente in Zeitungen und Rundfunkbeiträgen wiedergegeben.

Solch eine allseitige Anerkennung war durchaus nicht selbstverständlich für einen Dichter, der nie den Erfolg angestrebt hatte und abseits der literarischen Zentren seinen eigenen Weg gegangen war. Als Sohn einer antifaschistischen Familie 1921 in Pieve di Soligo, einem Dorf in Venetien, geboren, hat Zanzotto, der als Lehrer an verschiedenen Schulen arbeitete, seine Heimat selten verlassen. Nachdem er aus Geldnot schon mit sechzehn Jahren eine Lehramtsprüfung abgelegt hatte, die es ihm ermöglichte, im Primarbereich zu unterrichten, studierte er in Padua Literaturwissenschaft und promovierte 1942 mit einer Arbeit über Grazia Deledda. Entscheidend in diesen Jahren war aber die Begegnung mit der europäischen Lyrik der Moderne. Rimbaud und – in außerordentlichem Maße – Hölderlin wurden für ihn zentrale Bezugsfiguren, die ihn ständig begleiteten. Seine Liebe zu dem Tübinger Dichter wurde so groß, dass er sich entschloss, Deutsch zu lernen, um ihn im Original lesen zu können. Noch im hohen Alter konnte er Hölderlins Gedichte

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