

Friedrich Hölderlin: The Death of Empedocles. A Mourning Play. A new translation of the three versions and the related theoretical essays with introduction, notes, and an analysis by David Farrell Krell, Albany, NY: State University Of New York Press 2008, 306 pp.

I am uncertain whether anyone in Germany has yet noticed, but a sustained and serious interest in the work of Friedrich Hölderlin is beginning to take root in the English-speaking world. Over the last five years we have seen the publication of three new translations of the poems ('Odes and Elegies', 2008, trans. and ed. Nick Hoff, Wesleyan University Press; 'Selected Poems of Friedrich Hölderlin', 2008, trans. Maxine Chernoff and Paul Hoover, Omnidawn Publishing, and 'Selected Poems' (2013, trans. Emery George, Kylix Press); a new translation of the 'Essays and Letters' (2009, trans. and ed. Jeremy Adler and Charlie Louth, Penguin Books); a new translation of 'Hyperion' (2008, trans. Ross Benjamin, Archipelago Books) and now, a new translation of Hölderlin's 'The Death of Empedocles' in all its three versions by David Krell. What to make of this burst of activity? And how are we to assess the significance of this English-speaking scholarship within the larger context of Hölderlin scholarship in general? As far as I am aware, no critic has yet attempted to make sense of this emerging phenomenon and its significance for the study of Hölderlin. And yet, I think one can make a good case that we are experiencing a kind of Hölderlin renaissance in Anglophone circles that exceeds anything from the previous two generations. Still, this outburst constitutes merely a starting point, for we are only beginning to understand the philological, philosophical, poetical, and aesthetic problems that attend to any serious reading of Hölderlin's work. Before we can hope to let Hölderlin's poems, essays, and other writings find a proper readership in the Anglophone world, we need both a critical-commentary edition of the poems (something akin to Jochen Schmidt's Deutscher Klassiker Verlag edition) and an extensive volume of Hölderlin's letters (to build on the fine beginning of Charlie Louth from his Penguin edition). Moreover, we need to

come to terms with the controversy surrounding the textual integrity of previous Hölderlin editions, especially those of Friedrich Beißner, Jochen Schmidt, Michael Knaupp, and D. E. Sattler (both the so-called Frankfurt and Bremen editions). The new translation of 'The Death of Empedocles' by David Krell makes a strong beginning in the process of coming to terms with a number of these issues simultaneously.

Krell's edition makes available for the first time in English all three of the different versions of Hölderlin's dramatic play, as well as Hölderlin's "Frankfurter Plan" (1797), his plan for the third version of the play, four "essays" towards a theory of the tragic, and a sketch towards the continuation of the third version. Moreover, he includes a brief chronology of Hölderlin's life and works, a general introduction to the history, composition, and interpretive meaning of Hölderlin's texts as well as providing extensive notes (comprising more than 50 pages) and an "Analysis" at the end. But Krell also decided to include 12 facsimile pages from Hölderlin's Stuttgarter Foliobuch with handwriting samples and accompanying transcriptions/translations that "offers readers a glimpse of the manuscripts – in all their complexity – and provides a sense of the poet's manner of composition and emendation" (197). The effect of this new edition is to offer readers the most thorough-going scholarly edition of Hölderlin's work hitherto available in English. Krell dons various guises here as translator, editor, orthographer, and analyst in addition to his shifting roles as poet, philologist, historian, and philosopher. What emerges from his work is a complex portrait of Hölderlin as a poet and thinker, someone for whom the given metrical and conceptual structures of late 18th-century German literary-philosophical culture proved too narrow and delimiting. In Krell's presentation, Hölderlin appears as a poet who comes alive in the fragment, the sketch, the draft, and the outline – a writer who plays with the surface of the text in order to exploit its palimpsestic possibilities for multiple meaning(s) and variation(s). By considering Hölderlin's ingrained practice of revising manuscripts and writing across, beside, through, and in place of older renderings of the "same" text, Krell is able to show his readers in detail how important the manuscript trail is to an interpretation of the texts themselves. I know no other work in English that has yet to exploit these idiosyncratic traits of Hölderlin's style in a way that concretely points back to the text and shows us how this works. On

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this score alone, Krell's work is far advanced over earlier translations in English – and I would argue – his volume might serve as a model for future English editions of Hölderlin, especially for the late hymns and fragments. In his careful exposition of the different stages on the way to the composition of 'The Death of Empedocles', Krell has succeeded in making this text readable and comprehensible to both tutored and untutored alike.

In its attention to detail, context, formal structure, holographic coherence, and philosophical nuance, Krell's work serves as a wonderful introduction to Hölderlin as a writer and thinker. He succeeds in situating Hölderlin's project within his life's work and in interpreting his attempt to write a "modern" tragedy in the Greek style. We learn, for instance, that Hölderlin's reliance on philological sources such as Henricus Stephanus' 'Poesis philosophica' (1573), as well as works by Hamberger (1756), Brucker (1742) and Cudworth (1680), included much of the material from Diogenes Laertius, Aristotle, Plutarch, Clement, Porphyry, and others but did not take into account the important fragments from Simplicius that covers Empedocles book 'On Physis'. Moreover, Krell's edition provides line numbers to facilitate comparison with the original German text and extensive notes to inform readers about philological and historical detail. He excels here in going back to the Beißner, Sattler, Schmidt, and Knaupp editions to situate his decisions about what to include in his translation and how these parts fit within the composition of the whole text. With philological precision and philosophical breadth, Krell offers a stunning vision of Hölderlin as a major figure within the Western literary canon, a poet and philosopher who stands alongside Goethe, Hegel, and Schelling in the modern pantheon of thinkers and poets. As Krell formulates it, "both his writing and his thinking are incomparable, and one may here with justice paraphrase D.H. Lawrence on Whitman: ahead of Hölderlin – no one" (viii). Hagiography and hyperbole aside, Krell's claim seeks to make Hölderlin relevant for modern English readers by asserting his axial status within European thought and literature, a status that – especially in the English-speaking world – has long been denied. Here one can only hope that rigorous editions such as Krell's will help to bring Hölderlin's work the attention that it deserves.

While there is much to recommend and admire about Krell's effort at translating one of the most difficult poets and some of this poet's most elusive and obscure texts, there are also problems that emerge in such an audacious venture. Krell himself was well aware of such dangers, granting that a philosopher's attempt at a verse translation of Hölderlin was well-nigh impossible. And yet, he claims, "there is a certain freedom in attempting the impossible" (xii). Still, Krell is not a poet, and though his language soars in many places, sometimes it overreaches its mark. When, for example, one compares Dennis Schmidt's more restrained translation of 'Der Tod des Empedokles' (version 2) with Krell, one is struck by the former's grace, simplicity, and prudence.¹ Krell is more daring and inventive as a translator and though his knowledge of German is excellent, he sometimes reaches too far for his own good, translating, for example, "dein Wiederkehren" as "your imminent recurrence" (123) which Schmidt simply translates as "your return" (179) or when again in the first version he renders "vernahm / Ich wohl dein Wiederkehren" as "I rightly sensed your sweet return" (47). But these perhaps are mere quibbles. There are many other places where Krell's translation keeps pace with the German text and lyrically captures the poetic grace of Hölderlin's language.

What emerges from Krell's effort is an interpretation of Hölderlin's 'Der Tod des Empedokles' as a poetic attempt at rendering Greek tragedy in a new German form, one that draws on the pre-Socratic philosophy of Empedocles to challenge both Kant and Fichte's notion of subjectivity. We can see this in the development of the character of Hermocrates in the first two versions who finally, in version three, evolves into the figure of Manes as both *Gegner* and brother, a situation which has parallels to Sophocles' 'Antigone'. Here the oppositional figure is no longer a carping, conniving priest or "evil spirit", but "something closer to a second self or alter ego for Empedocles" (162) – perhaps even, as Jochen Schmidt claims, an "interior voice" (170). Furthermore, the central problem of tragedy here is less that of a psychological "subject" than of the very tensions and oppositions within *physis* itself, a *physis* marked by the internal contradictions of a Heraclitean order. In this

¹ Dennis Schmidt: *On Germans and Other Greeks*, Bloomington, Indiana 2001, 173–190.

sense we can read ‘Der Tod des Empedokles’ as a work that sets out to show in *tragic* terms what Hölderlin expressed at the end of the second volume of ‘Hyperion’: “The dissonances of the world are like lovers’ feuds. In the midst of strife is reconciliation, and everything that is sundered comes together again.”² In the coming together of love and strife the poet finds a way to grasp the situation of human being within being itself as an ever-recurring procession of oppositional energies that come together only fleetingly in a *kairos* moment that the poet designates as “the fitting hour” (120). Tragedy concerns the “fit” of human being within an order in which it often does not fit – or rather, is not seen to fit. What is truly fitting here is that we do not make the fit; we accede to it in a way that allows us to fit at all. Hölderlin reached far to try and make this fit work, but ultimately abandoned his project of a modern German “Greek” form of tragedy. And yet in the attempt to translate the tragic insight of Sophocles into the recalcitrant forms of German grammar and syntax, Hölderlin confronted the very irreconcilability at the heart of tragedy itself. That he failed in his attempt to reconcile this irreconcilability is part of the lesson that we might draw from his work. Perhaps reading this tragedy again we might grasp something of this great effort and of our own need to revisit these problems as a way of finding our proper fit within the great order of a world ever marked by the same forces of love and strife as in Hölderlin’s beloved ‘Empedocles’.

Charles Bambach

² Friedrich Hölderlin. Sämtliche Werke und Briefe [Klassiker Ausgabe = KA], hrsg. von Jochen Schmidt, 3 Bde., Frankfurt a.M. 1992–1994; hier KA II: Hyperion. Empedokles. Aufsätze. Übersetzungen, 1994, 175.

Eine Replik

Von

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Zunächst möchte ich mich bei meinen Rezensenten Luigi Reitani,¹ wie schon vor vier Jahren,² und bei Michael Franz³ sowie bei den Herausgebern des Hölderlin-Jahrbuchs bedanken, die meine Replik aufnehmen. Ich habe in meinem Buch fünf Probleme zur Sprache gebracht: 1) Die Datierung der Handschrift Marbach 53; 2) die Echtheit von ‘Der Spaziergang’ und ‘Das fröhliche Leben’; 3) ob Hölderlin im Juni 1802 in Frankfurt war; 4) die Urheberschaft von ‘Wenn aus der Ferne’; 5) die Enträtselung von „Killalusimeno“.

Beim ersten Punkt scheint Franz mit meiner Datierung (erste zwanziger Jahre) grundsätzlich einverstanden zu sein. Bei Punkt 2 beschränkt er sich darauf, mein „Verdikt“ – wie er es nennt – der Unechtheit beider Gedichte zu erwähnen, ohne sich zu dem Problem zu äußern. (Ich will hoffen, dies bedeutet ein stilles Einvernehmen, wie man auf italienisch sagt: wer schweigt, stimmt zu (*chi tace acconsente*). Insofern würde sich eine Replik erübrigen. Aber bei Punkt 3, 4, 5 divergieren unsere Meinungen. Zu Punkt 3: Ich versuchte, Bertaux’ These mit neuen Argumenten zu bestätigen. Franz hält diese für „mehr als anfechtbar“, und zwar allein auf Grund des angeblich langen Aufenthalts des Dichters in Paris während der Rückreise von Bordeaux. Zu Punkt 4: Ich habe die Authentizität von ‘Wenn aus der Ferne’ zunächst aus stilkritischen und

HÖLDERLIN-JAHRBUCH [HJb] 38, 2012–2013, Tübingen/Eggingen 2013, 313–321.

¹ Luigi Reitani: Una questione hölderliniana. Follia e poesia nel tardo Hölderlin. In: HJb 35, 2006–2007, 421–427 (Rezension der italienischen Ausgabe).

² Giuseppe Bevilacqua: Anmerkungen zu Luigi Reitani’s Rezension der Studie von Giuseppe Bevilacqua: Una questione hölderliniana. Follia e poesia nel tardo Hölderlin. In: HJb 36, 2008–2009, 364–371.

³ Michael Franz: G. Bevilacqua. Eine Hölderlin-Frage. In: Arbitrium 57, 2001, 229–234. – Michael Franz: „Killalusimeno“. In: HJb 37, 2011–2012, 273–281.