

'Psyche among friends': Michael Hamburger's BBC radio broadcasts

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[Prepublication manuscript for *German-Speaking Exiles in Great Britain* (Yearbook of the Research Centre for German and Austrian Exile Studies 3), edited by J. Ritchie, Rodopi 2001, 87-104.]

Unlike other German and Austrian émigrés who worked for the BBC German Service during the Second World War, Michael Hamburger only came to the BBC in 1949. Nearly all his broadcasts have been in English, on the Third Programme. For over thirty years, his talks on German writers and translations of German poetry and drama helped change British attitudes towards German literature. Radio work, by nature ephemeral, has been neglected in accounts of Hamburger's life and work. Struck by Apollo, a dramatised biography of Hölderlin broadcast in 1965, shares central concerns with Hamburger's poetry, criticism and autobiography.

From propaganda to culture: émigrés in the BBC

The part played by émigrés in the BBC has been a subject of growing interest, but recent research has not unnaturally focused on the German Service during the war years.¹ The BBC German Service, which closed down in March 1999 after sixty years of broadcasting, was a valuable source of income for German and Austrian émigré writers, actors and musicians in the years during and after the Second World War. Many were employed as readers, performers, announcers or translators, some as editors and producers. A few were given scope for self-expression in commissioned programmes or series. Bruno Adler (who published under the pseudonym Urban Roedl), Carl Brinitzer, Robert Ehrenzweig (known as Robert Lucas), Hans Flesch-Brunningen, Richard Friedenthal, Sebastian Haffner, Karl Otten and Walter Rilla are among those whose input has been written about by themselves and others. Even poets like Theodor Kramer and Erich Fried were able to read from their work at irregular intervals.

For some émigrés who stayed on in Britain after 1945, BBC broadcasts remained, or became, an important part of their professional lives. Erich Fried's features and political commentaries for the German Service, which continued up to 1968, and led to his breakthrough as a writer in Germany in the 1960s, have been examined by Volker Kaukoreit and Steven

Lawrie.² It is less well known that a number of émigrés made their careers in the BBC, either graduating to, or starting with, the Third Programme.³ The Third Programme was founded in 1946 to complement the BBC's Light Programme and Home Service as a cultural network. Aimed at an educated minority audience, it broadcast concerts of classical and modern music, opera, drama, lectures, prose and poetry, and came to play a crucial role in disseminating the arts and discussing vital issues of intellectual life in the postwar decades. 'Difficult' contemporary music was accompanied by demanding criticism, and among the more memorable voice programmes were the lectures of Isaiah Berlin on philosophy and Fred Hoyle on the expanding universe. It was a conscious experiment in Leavisite culture, seen by its founders as promoting 'something fundamental to our civilisation' and as contributing to the 'refinement of society'.⁴ The Third Programme acted as a patron of the arts, 'discovering' Dylan Thomas, a 'natural' for live radio, whose *Under Milk Wood* reveals the formal influence of the radio feature, and promoting the playwrights Harold Pinter and Samuel Beckett, Joe Orton and Tom Stoppard. The commissioning of works for broadcast by the BBC Music Department was similarly a crucial step in Benjamin Britten's career. John Wain and Ludovic Kennedy edited and introduced the *First Reading* series from 1953 on, presenting young writers such as Kingsley Amis and Philip Larkin, and Patrick Dickinson produced a series entitled *The Poet and the Critic*. Though poetry readings never attracted an audience of more than a few thousand listeners, the Third Programme was for many years the single largest source of copyright payments to poets.

The Brecht expert and drama critic Martin Esslin, who had joined the BBC Monitoring Service during the war, worked alongside Ernst Gombrich and William Epton, and became Director of Drama on the Third Programme in the early 1960s. Stephen Hearst was another émigré who ended up in a position of influence, becoming Controller of Radio 3 in 1971. Hearst was born in Vienna, but emigrated as a child, served in the British Army, and went up to Oxford in 1946, before joining the BBC as a scriptwriter and producer for Richard Dimbleby and making a name for himself as a writer-producer. Like Hearst, Michael Hamburger emigrated young (he was nine years old

when his family left Berlin in November 1933) and had long been naturalised by the time of his first contact with the BBC.

Michael Hamburger: poetry, cultural mediation and the negotiation of identity

Too young to have become a German writer, as he comments in his autobiography, *String of Beginnings*, but old enough to have grown up with the German language, Hamburger left behind a ‘pampered but [emotionally] deprived’ childhood⁵ – his grandfather was a merchant banker, his father a paediatrician with a flourishing private practice – and adapted seemingly smoothly to life in Britain. Educated at Westminster School, where he began to write at the age of fifteen, he won a scholarship to study Modern Languages at Christ Church, Oxford, before interrupting his studies to serve in the Army from 1943 to 1947. The appearance of effortless adjustment, facilitated by social and educational privilege as much as personal ability, is, however, deceptive. Reading and writing poetry, and writing about literature, were activities which offered the teenage Hamburger opportunities to work through pressing personal difficulties. The ‘melancholy romanticism’⁶ of his early writing betrayed loneliness, fear of change, and an emotional numbness he associates in his memoirs (SoB 58) with the responsibilities he had to bear after his father’s untimely death in 1940. Uncertainties about his national, cultural, ethnic and sexual identity were intensified rather than alleviated by the repression of emotions which went life in public school and Oxford. Though his poetry and prose writing was in English, it went hand in hand with the attempt to preserve continuity with his childhood through the translation of German poets and playwrights with whom he shared affinities (SoB 44). Hölderlin in particular, but also Rimbaud, Kleist and Shakespeare’s Prospero served as models for paraphrase and poetic *personae*. Baudelaire, Büchner and Rilke provided further congenial objects for study, into which he projected his own tensions and longings.⁷

After returning to Oxford briefly and graduating in 1948, Hamburger made his living as a literary journalist for several years, publishing translations and reviews in a range of journals. His first engagement by the BBC, in 1949, was probably facilitated by either his Oxford connections or his acquaintance

with a bohemian set of writers and publishers who met in the pubs of Soho during and after the war. In 1952, by this time married, he became a university lecturer in German (first under Leonard Forster at University College London, then, from 1955 to 1964, in Reading). In the mid-sixties Hamburger abandoned an academic career which left him insufficient time for either his own poetry or the reading necessary for critical works linked with his personal concerns, such as *The Truth of Poetry*. For a time, he accepted a series of short-term appointments as visiting professor, part-time lecturer and research fellow in the US and Britain, but he has since been a freelance writer and translator. Translation and criticism were means of exploring and appropriating not only English and German poetic tradition, but also congenial aspects of French and other literatures, leading to insights into the tensions between 'reason' and 'energy' (terms derived from Blake) which have been among his central concerns as a poet.

British critics and anthologists have been divided in their classification of Hamburger's poetry. The poet and art critic Edward Lucie-Smith placed him under the rubric 'Influences from Abroad' in an anthology published in 1970, but remarked on the 'English' flavour of his poems (SoB 331f.). As a young man he experimented with the style and diction of various contemporaries, striving to emulate Yeats and Eliot. The latter, Hamburger's principal poetic mentor in the forties and fifties, provided a model for the attempt to integrate and synthesise European tradition in a modernist English poetry. However, Hamburger began to experience Eliot's chiselled, abstract symbolism as a strait-jacket. He gradually detached himself from it and from Yeats's ascetic mysticism in the course of the fifties, finding his own voice in a language which was more concrete and more personal.

Hamburger reflects in a passage added in the second edition of his memoirs that he had originally written them because of 'a crisis in my personal life that made it necessary for me to discover as much as I could about my formative years, so as to break the pattern they had set up' (SoB 320). Only after an often painful process of self-analysis, conducted in his poetry and autobiographical prose were his foreign origins gradually to become a source of productive uncertainty and poetic creativity. Visits to

Germany in 1947, 1953, 1956 and 1962, and events such as the Eichmann trial of 1961, prompted him to delve into his past, and write his first and only book in German, *Zwischen den Sprachen*,⁸ and a handful of German poems. The essays of *Zwischen den Sprachen* were an eloquent expression of the destabilising effect of this recuperation of German as a medium for creative writing. The anxieties unleashed by his revisitation of the past and the ensuing tug of war between his first and second languages are encapsulated in his depiction of his position in a no-man's-land between the languages.⁹ Though he has published critical essays in German, spoken at many public events and given interviews on radio in Germany, he has chosen not to write poetry or autobiographical essays in German since. The crisis into which the undermining of confidence in his command of English plunged him was not, however, ultimately without beneficial consequences. The deautomatisation of language rooted in his switch from German to English as a nine-year-old, and painfully reactivated by renewed acquaintance with German in the 1960s, left him with an acute sensitivity for words and an epistemological scepticism which prompted the search for a poetic language with words more truly adequate to the objects they stand for. It is no accident that this preoccupation was shared by many of the German poets he chose to translate: Wilhelm Lehmann and Johannes Bobrowski, Günter Eich and Peter Huchel. In this respect, and in his black utopianism, his visions of a catastrophe which would sweep away the damaging effects of modern civilisation and return humankind to a state of naturalness akin to Heidegger's 'Andacht ans Sein', Hamburger's poems may be seen as an English contribution to a German poetic discourse.

Bobrowski, Huchel and other poets he translated, befriended, visited or invited to England such as Kunert, Celan and Kunze, shared a second thematic focus in Hamburger's poetry, 'home/ exile'. The themes of travelling and variation, which reflect an ongoing process of renegotiation of identity, have played a central role in his later verse. The bridge is a frequently encountered image in his poetry: both the poems and his critical writings have sought to bridge the gulfs dividing British, American and German literary traditions.

Hamburger's poetry attracts more attention in Germany and Austria than in Britain today. Walter Eckel described him in 1991 as the most frequently translated living English poet in Germany and Austria,¹⁰ and in a review of a 240-page German edition of his selected poems published in 1997, Alexander von Bormann called him 'einer der bedeutendsten Lyriker unserer Zeit'.¹¹ This rank is not given him in England, and there is considerably less secondary literature on his writing in English than in German.¹² German interest in his writing goes beyond any lingering sense of obligation to an émigré – Hamburger is recognised as contributing to a poetic discourse on the modern self. In Britain he remains known primarily as the author of critical studies of German literature and as a cultural mediator.¹³ This discrepancy between Hamburger's reception in Germany and Britain is reflected in his presence on British and German radio. Indeed, while his BBC broadcasts contributed to the establishment of his reputation as a cultural mediator, his comparative failure to place his poetry on air arguably accentuated the relative neglect of his poetry in Britain.

Hamburger's work for radio

Peter Dale writes in the 'Note on Michael Hamburger' prefacing his extended published interview that Hamburger 'divided his time between lecturing and writing and translation' from the early fifties on.¹⁴ However, this ignores the radio broadcasts that were an important aspect of his professional activity from the early fifties to the late seventies, alongside reviewing, criticism, translating, editing and the writing of poetry and autobiographical prose.

Broadcasts are excluded in both Ralph Jeutter's near-comprehensive bibliography of Michael Hamburger's publications up to 1988 and Dale's more recent select bibliography of primary and secondary literature.¹⁵ The list appended at the end of this article was compiled in the first instance from references to programmes in the 'Talks', 'Scriptwriter' and 'Copyright' files on Hamburger held in the BBC Written Archives Centre at Caversham Park, Reading. These contain contracts and correspondence concerning projected talks, translations, poems and interviews. Findings were later checked against entries in the BBC's 'Talks' and 'Scripts' Indexes. (The scripts of many

programmes are preserved in Caversham on microfilm or microfiche.) The list is incomplete for several reasons. Firstly, I have ignored brief contributions to broadcasts such as individual poems in poetry programmes, and repeat broadcasts, of which there were many in the case of Hamburger's translations of Beethoven's letters. Secondly, there are gaps in the records. Some dates are missing, and it is unclear in the case of some of the projected programmes whether they were actually recorded and broadcast. In addition to this, the Caversham files end in 1974. Later records are held in the Records and Programme Information Centre in London, which is not accessible to the public. Several gaps in the information from the Caversham files were filled by consulting the BBC Sound Archive Index and the National Sound Archive's holdings of recordings. Finally, Michael Hamburger himself kindly clarified a number of references in two letters to the author.

Hamburger's most important and extensive radio work consists of talks. These are described in the 'Talks Index' as 'readings' of his translations of the author in question, but usually, if not always, included introductions and linking commentary. Some of the translations broadcast by the BBC, for instance Albrecht Goes's play *The Burnt Offering* and Hofmannsthal's *The Tower*, had already been published, while others, such as the translations of Günter Eich's radio plays and Peter Weiss's *The Tower*, were first commissioned for radio, and have only since appeared in print. Hamburger's radio talks were usually on writers he had previously either translated or discussed in his critical studies, and they were often linked with publishing projects (as in the case of Celan, Huchel and Goethe). Without examining the scripts, it is impossible to say how much new work they involved.

Hamburger's first work for the BBC was a talk on Rilke commissioned by the Talks producer, critic, and novelist P.H. Newby, who went on to become Controller of the Third Programme in 1958, and Director of Programmes (Radio) in 1971. This 20-minute programme consisted of a selection of passages from Rilke's letters and *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*. Hamburger, who had already translated some of Rilke's poetry during the war, supplied new translations of his own, and a linking narrative with critical commentary.

It was Newby again who arranged for Hamburger to put together a selection of poems by the Kafka translator and poet Edwin Muir in the following year. Hamburger had met Muir by chance on a trip to Italy in the summer of 1950, and struck up a lasting friendship. He writes in a letter:

'It's very likely that Edwin Muir was the only British poet I talked about [...]. Very early in my writing life I resolved not to write or talk about my fellow poets in English. Muir was an exception, because in those years he was neglected as a poet, and in fact was touchingly grateful to me for editing a selection from his poems for the BBC.'¹⁶

Comments from Newby, E.A. Harding and Anna Kallin are on file, agreeing on Hamburger's ability as a translator. Anna Kallin was an unusually colourful figure in the postwar decade of the BBC – she is described by Carpenter as 'the most remarkable member of Talks' (p. 66). Of Jewish stock, she was born in St. Petersburg, studied in Leipzig, and joined the BBC in 1940 as a monitor of Russian broadcasts. In 1946 she became a Talks producer, and soon gained a reputation as an 'explorer', engaging John Betjeman and Thomas Mann, and discovering Isaiah Berlin. In April, 1952 Kallin commissioned Hamburger to translate a 30-minute talk by Karl Jaspers 'The Idea of the Creation of the World'. In the same year Hamburger completed the translation and editing of Beethoven's *Letters, Journals and Conversations* for Thames and Hudson. The short talk on Beethoven, followed by a musicological discussion with William Glock and Winfrid Mellors, which Hamburger was invited to give on the Third Programme in 1953 was, in his own words, 'an unforeseen consequence'. 'I was mistaken for a musicologist', he writes in *String of Beginnings*, 'as well as being confused with Paul Hamburger, the pianist and music critic' (p. 290).

Struck by Apollo

Throughout Hamburger's life, Hölderlin has been a recurring preoccupation. He was only sixteen when he first sent translations of Hölderlin's poems to the poet and editor John Lehmann, and though Lehmann responded rather

unkindly by commissioning a volume of Hölderlin translations from the established translator J.B. Leishman, Hamburger found another publisher and actually won the race to bring out Hölderlin's poetry in English with a first collection of translations on the centenary of the poet's death in 1943 (see SoB 97f.). A revised edition was published in 1952, and Hamburger's translations, refined and extended in further editions over the ensuing decades (1961, 1966, 1980, 1986, 1994 and 1998), have served as models for younger German-English literary translators because of their accuracy, command of English idiom and mimetic faithfulness to the original. Among Hamburger's earliest published poems, written in his late teens, was a *persona* poem on Hölderlin. On various occasions from the early nineteen-fifties on, he proposed radio programmes on Hölderlin, but these may not always have been accepted for broadcast. He was approached by D.S. Carne-Ross in May 1955 asking whether his translation of 'Friedensfeier', a lost poem of Hölderlin's which he had recently discovered in London and translated for *German Life and Letters*, would be suitable material for radio listeners. Hamburger regretted it was too long for broadcasting, but suggested other Hölderlin poems. A 20-minute programme on the poet was recorded the following March, and a second programme on Hölderlin appears to have followed in December 1956. Almost a decade later Hamburger was invited to compile three 30-minute programmes on Hölderlin's poetry. The only ensuing broadcast for which evidence could be found was the 45-minute dramatised biography of Hölderlin *Struck by Apollo*, written in collaboration with Hamburger's wife, the novelist and poet Anne Beresford.

A proper location of Hamburger's understanding of Hölderlin in the complex critical and artistic reception of the poet in the twentieth century, which has been determined as much by political events as by cultural debates, cannot be attempted here. A broad development from reverence through identification to critical dialogue has been outlined by Karen Leeder in an article on representations of Hölderlin in the GDR.¹⁷ Hölderlin's work, which explores the dialectic of art and life, and urges the revolutionary translation of ideal into reality, served throughout the twentieth century as a vehicle for discussion of the role of the artist in society. The nationalist

interpretation by the circle around Stefan George and Hölderlin's appropriation by the Nazis prompted Johannes R. Becher and other socialist writers in exile to reclaim the poet for the cause of progressive politics, as a strident social critic and revolutionary seer. After 1949, Hölderlin was remodelled in apologias of the GDR state as the purveyor of poetic visions of a harmonious future society. An influential critical reappraisal of the poet's relationship with the French Revolution marked a new phase of reception in keeping with the political and cultural upheaval of 1968,¹⁸ and Hölderlin, alongside Büchner, Kleist and Hauptmann, became a vehicle for the projection of contemporary concerns into the past. In the GDR, Hölderlin became a popular identification figure for 'dissident' writers of the middle generation in the 1970s, who increasingly questioned the political accommodation of Weimar classicism, and a symbol of exile and martyrdom for younger writers.

Hamburger has himself outlined the reception of Hölderlin in England in the 1930s and 1940s in a chapter of *Zwischen den Sprachen*, as part of the exploration of his own preoccupation with the poet. The Hölderlin poems of Edwin Muir, Stephen Spender, David Gascoyne, Herbert Read, Vernon Watkins and Christopher Middleton coincided with a trend away from the poetry of social criticism towards idealism, metaphysics and 'New Apocalypticism'. Hamburger's own understanding of Hölderlin was consonant with this trend, but at the same time deeply personal. It developed gradually from the direct emotional identification of the poem 'Hölderlin', written in 1941, to more objective appreciation of the poet's art. At the outset, as Walter Eckel has pointed out,¹⁹ Hölderlin's madness is interpreted as a voluntary 'inner emigration' from a world on which the Gods have turned their backs, which has lost its meaning and become a vulgar market-place. The thematic link with Hamburger's geographical and cultural displacement lies in the classical poet's silence, which parallels the loss of his own voice in the atrophication of German, his childhood language. At the same time, Hölderlin's ambivalent relationship with Germany echoes the tensions in Hamburger's feelings between disgust with Nazi barbarism and love of the 'other Germany', for which Hölderlin stood in his eyes as the supreme example. On a more

practical level, translating Hölderlin and writing poems which paraphrased and adapted motifs from his writing served a dual function of keeping contact with Hamburger's lost home and presenting the poetry-reading public of his new homeland a 'better' Germany. Müller-Wieferig confirms the emergence of Hölderlin as Hamburger's principal poetic 'anti-self', an identification figure in human, poetic and political terms, sharing his experience of outsidership and alienation.²⁰

Traces of this enthusiastic youthful identification are discernible in *Struck by Apollo*, alongside a more objective acknowledgement of the poet's mental illness and hints at socio-political factors in his alienation. The radio play laments the tragedy of Hölderlin's life, while illustrating the fixing of tensions and dissonances in his writing, and celebrating the triumph of art and his vision of a better future.

The 36-page typescript for the programme, which contains handwritten corrections, opens with a piano, extemporising the kind of music Hölderlin could have played in his madness: 'Strains of piano music, a phrase played several times with slight variations, the clicking of long fingernails on the keys should be heard' (p. 1). The music for the broadcast was played by Michael Hamburger himself.²¹ The biographical narrative, which is brought to life by quotations from the letters of Hölderlin, Schiller, Goethe, Susette Gontard and others, as well as extracts from several poems, is overshadowed by the poet's impending schizophrenia, described at the outset in the words of Wilhelm Waiblinger, a frequent visitor to the tower in Tübingen where Hölderlin spent thirty-six years in care. Reading the lively, informative and moving script, one is struck by the biographical parallels between Hamburger and Hölderlin, and their shared literary concerns: abrupt expulsion from a 'leisurely and unexacting' childhood remembered as close to nature, awkwardness in the presence of contemporaries, poetic ambition accompanied by philology and the study and translation of poetry, intellectual gifts but temperamental unsuitedness to a conventional academic career, and the finding of consolation for melancholy in music and spiritual companionship. 'Please write to me soon', Hölderlin writes to Casimir Böhlendorff in 1802, 'I need pure tones. Psyche among friends, the

generation of thought in conversation and letters is necessary to artists.’ (p. 31) Hölderlin’s periods of depression and self-doubt are sensitively traced, and illustrated by the poem is ‘To the Fates’, accepting death if only perfection can first be achieved in art. The disappointment following meetings with Goethe, whom he revered much as Hamburger did T.S. Eliot, and the pressures exerted by family duties reflect Hamburger’s situation in the 1940s, his only half-conscious feelings of isolation. The problematic drive to self-perfection which Hamburger depicts in his grandfather, his father and himself in the opening pages of his autobiography is reflected in Hölderlin’s words: ‘I must find my way out of twilight and slumber, I must awaken and mould half-developed, half-dead faculties gently or by force, if I am to avoid taking refuge finally in sad resignation.’ (p. 9)

A central theme (though some relevant passages were cut in the broadcast) is the need to reconcile ‘reason’ and ‘energy’, generalities with the concrete particular, idealistic aspirations with the ‘sensuous receptivity so essential to poetry’ (p. 13). Hölderlin’s ‘modernity’, most striking in the poems and fragments written when his schizophrenia was passing into its final phase, is located in his ‘reliance on particulars, the invocation of a person or a thing, where more conventional poets would have felt (and still feel) obliged to present a sequence of arguments or metaphors.’ (p. 33) This echoes the development of Hamburger’s own poetry. A further theme with obvious biographical relevance is Hölderlin’s ‘homecoming’, his ‘return to the source and to his origins’ in a ‘visionary reconciliation’ (p. 32) of his dual allegiance to ancient Greece and his native Germany. *Struck by Apollo* is unique, not only as the only piece Michael Hamburger co-authored with Anne Beresford, but also in going beyond his other radio talks in the extent of original material, the combination of elements of biography, criticism and radio essay in a dramatic framework, and the reflection of central preoccupations of his creative writing.

Mediating contemporary German poetry

Hamburger’s breakthrough as a translator of contemporary German poets and playwrights came in the late fifties. In 1956 he wrote to Carne-Ross proposing a programme on recent German poetry, the translations to be

provided by himself and Christopher Middleton. It was accepted after the linking material had been 'lightened' and 'brightened' at Carne-Ross's request, and broadcast in April 1957. In the meantime his translation of Albrecht Goes's novella had also been broadcast in a dramatised version. In October 1957 he was invited by Christopher Holme (Third Programme Planner since 1949, then Chief Assistant to the Controller, and himself a translator of German literature), to translate one of Günter Eich's radio plays. Hamburger's initial response was to attempt to interest Holme in either Goethe's *Egmont* (which he had recently translated), Grillparzer or Büchner. Holme persuaded him to accept a commission to translate and adapt Eich's radio play *The Rolling Sea at Setubal*. Two other radio plays of Eich's, *The Girls From Viterbo* and *The Year Lacertis*, followed. In August 1961 Hofmannsthal's play *The Tower* was accepted for broadcast in Hamburger's translation, and in December 1962 Martin Esslin wrote recommending Hamburger consider translating a 'strange Kafkaesque' play of the same name by Peter Weiss. The play was broadcast, with Esslin as producer, in July 1964. Over the next twenty years, radio offered Hamburger the opportunity to present some of the most important contemporary German-speaking poets and writers to English hearers (Brecht, Enzensberger, Grass, Bobrowski, Kunert, Bichsel, Celan, Huchel, Kunze, Heißenbüttel). His 'last real contribution to what had become Radio 3', as he writes in letters to the author of 13/2/1999 and 20/12/1999, consisted of was three readings of Goethe's poems around the sesquicentenary of the poet's death in 1982. A projected broadcast of Hamburger's translation of Ernst Jandl's 'opera for speaking voices' *Out of Estrangement* failed to materialize because of the untimely death of the producer (letter of 20/12/1999).

Michael Hamburger's German Service broadcasts were fewer and probably involved less original preparation. The records reveal talks on several English poets he admired (Gerald Manley Hopkins, T.S. Eliot, Dylan Thomas and Edwin Muir). The last of these appears to have been in 1959. It was followed only by a broadcast of excerpts from the critical work *From Prophecy to Exorcism*, a programme for Sixth Formers on contemporary German poetry, and a number of unscripted interviews, ending in 1974.

Hamburger has, of course, also broadcast on German, Swiss and Austrian radio. But space does not permit an assessment of the extent and significance of his broadcasts for German radio here.²²

Hamburger's poetry on radio

The BBC seems not to have played a significant role in furthering Hamburger's career as a poet. In the first decade after the war, the BBC was heavily biased towards the Universities, in particular Oxford.²³ Hamburger's acquaintances and friends among the Oxford poets and the fraternity which met in Central London pubs and contributed to programming in the fifties included Philip Larkin, Dylan Thomas, Stephen Spender, Donald Davie, Christopher Middleton, Jon Silkin, John Wain, Robert Conquest, Kathleen Raine and Dannie Abse. However, he was too much of a loner to belong to the 'Movement', the most important grouping of English poets in the 1950s, of which Larkin, Davie, Conquest and Wain were members. Nor did he associate himself more than fleetingly with Dannie Abse's counter-grouping, the 'Mavericks'.

Records show individual poems of Hamburger's were broadcast from 1954 on, mainly on the Third Programme, in series such as *First Reading* and *New Poetry*, but also occasionally on the Light Programme. He wrote to Carne-Ross in June 1957, 'having just put together a new collection of poems' (*The Dual Site*), asking could he read a selection on the Third Programme. However, he was to wait till 1962 for his first significant broadcast. This was a twenty-minute programme in the *Living Poet* series, produced by George MacBeth, a central figure in the broadcasting of poetry and an influential dispenser of patronage from the early sixties up to 1976. Hamburger's failure to establish himself as a poet on radio may be due in part to the fact he was not considered a good speaker on air. He wrote to MacBeth, asking whether he could read some of his own poems, pointing out that though he had been 'written off as a broadcaster' after unsuccessful early attempts in 1949-50, he had since recorded for Bush House, Switzerland and Germany, including one appearance on TV, and three poetry readings in

America. In the event, his poems were read by his wife Anne Beresford and Hugh Dickson.

Hamburger's poetry never gained more than sporadic hearings, the last significant broadcast being in 1981. By this time his talks were also coming to an end. He has written of being told by a BBC producer in 1982 'not to bother to offer anything more to them', though he was later invited to contribute to what he refers to as 'chat shows' on Hölderlin and Celan, programmes 'of a kind I abominate' (letter of 13/2/1999). 'No poem of mine has been broadcast for decades by the BBC, but many in Germany and elsewhere. Typically, there will be a 1-hour programme on my work, including readings of poems, for my 75th birthday in March [22 March] on the WDR – nothing in Britain.' Hamburger does not attach great importance to his radio work: 'All this belongs to history for me', he writes, 'since I am now working mainly on my last poems and preoccupied with a dying culture and civilization, in which I have no function'.

In his poem 'In Memoriam the Third Programme, 1996', he writes:

Not on the waves, forbidden him now,
Let one survivor of its going down
To the disc jockey patter, extracts from
Tapes not yet wiped, name-dropping 'hype'
Oppose a few home truths:
That on the scuttled vessel, never replaced,
Music was framed in silence,
The space a living thing needs around it
To be itself and breathe.²⁴

'Random noises' have replaced the music that was the 'food of love', and talk of literature is left 'high and dry/ Thanks to its celebrants, true art's destroyers', leaving Hamburger only the ultimate 'freedom to switch off'. Rather no music, no poetry, than the 'daily, nightly stew' of gossip, shop talk and self-congratulation, the 'flotsam and jetsam of venal vanity' with which they are interleaved by 'glib mixers'.

Hamburger has written with self-irony of the 'gloom' for which he was 'notorious' (SoB 323), and glossed a friend's nicknaming him 'Gloomburger' with the words: 'In a world always imperfect, I find nothing more boring than an obligatory cheerfulness.'²⁵ In fairness to the BBC, it should be recognised that from the mid-seventies on, when Hamburger's reputation was growing (not only in Germany, also in Britain), poetry programmes in general were allocated less time on air. The economic pressures on the 'Third' – in the nineties it cost something like 17% of the BBC's radio budget, but was only listened to by 2% of the audience – have mitigated against the existence of the programme as a whole, and against ambitious speech programmes in particular. Since the sixties, historical and literary subjects have yielded ground steadily to current affairs in discussion programmes. The whole history of the Third Programme, as Humphrey Carpenter reveals, has been one of an at times neurotic search for a larger audience. A first round of swinging cuts took place in 1957, when broadcasting hours were reduced by 40%. In 1964 the Features Department was disbanded, and there was a major restructuring in 1970, when the Third Programme became Radio 3, and focused increasingly on music and drama, while most speech programmes were transferred to Radio 4. Nevertheless, Radio 4 continues to run series today such as *Fine Lines* and *Adventures in Poetry*, as well as the popular request show *Poetry Please*.

Hamburger's choice of the Third Programme as a particular target in his condemnation of the development of modern society should not obscure the part that the BBC played in his career as translator and critic, if not as poet. For three decades, radio served him as a medium for the exploration and appropriation of German and other European poetic traditions, and the negotiation of his ever-shifting identity through parallels in the lives and works of writers from Hölderlin to Huchel.

Notes

¹ See for example Kevin Gough-Yeats, 'The BBC as a Source of Employment for Film Workers and Composers During the War', in *Zwischenwelt 4. Literatur und Kultur in Großbritannien*, ed. by Siglinde Bolbecher et al. (Vienna: Verlag für Gesellschaftskritik, 1995), pp. 215-240; Jennifer Taylor, 'The "Endsieg" as Ever-Receding Goal. Literary Propaganda by Bruno Adler and Robert Lucas for BBC Radio', in *Between Two Languages: German-speaking Exiles in Great Britain 1933-45*, ed. by William Abbey et al. (Stuttgart: Hans-Dieter Heinz, 1995), pp. 43-57; Uwe Naumann, 'Kampf auf Ätherwellen: die deutschsprachigen Satiren der BBC im zweiten Weltkrieg', in *Keine Klage über England? Deutsche und österreichische Exilerfahrungen in Großbritannien 1933-1945*, ed. by Charmian Brinson et al. (Munich: iudicium, 1998), pp. 31-38; Richard Dove, "'Marching on": Karl Otten and the BBC', *ibid.*, pp. 39-47.

² See Volker Kaukoreit, *Vom Exil bis zum Protest gegen den Krieg in Vietnam. Frühe Stationen des Lyrikers Erich Fried. Werk und Biographie 1938-1966* (Darmstadt: Jürgen Häusser, 1991); Steven Lawrie, *Erich Fried. A Writer Without a Country* (New York, etc.: Lang, 1996); Steven Lawrie, "'Das große Turnierfeld, auf dem sie sich versuchen". Erich Fried's Work for German Radio', *German Life and Letters* 51:1 (January 1998), 121-146.

³ The following information on émigrés who worked for the Third Programme is derived from Humphrey Carpenter, *The Envy of the World. Fifty Years of the BBC Third Programme and Radio 3 1946-1996* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1996).

⁴ Humphrey Carpenter, *The Envy of the World*, p. 97.

⁵ Michael Hamburger, *String of Beginnings* (London: Skoob Books, 1991), p. 8. References to this title are given in the following in brackets in the text as SoB with page number.

⁶ *Michael Hamburger in Conversation with Peter Dale* (London: Between the Lines, 1998), p. 27.

⁷ See Axel Goodbody, "'Eine Synthese deutscher und englischer Dichtungstraditionen": Erich Fried and Michael Hamburger as Translators and Poets', in *German-speaking Exiles in Great Britain*, ed. by Ian Wallace (Yearbook of the Research Centre for German and Austrian Exile Studies 1), (Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1999), 163-198.

⁸ Michael Hamburger, *Zwischen den Sprachen. Essays und Gedichte*, Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1966).

⁹ See Iain Galbraith, "'Home Beyond Home": Michael Hamburger's Poetry of Utopian Encounter', *Agenda* 35:3 (1997), 51-73, especially pp. 64-6.

¹⁰ Walter Eckel, *Von Berlin nach Suffolk. Zur Lyrik Michael Hamburgers* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1991), p. 9.

¹¹ Alexander von Bormann, 'Selbsterstört getreu', *Der Tagesspiegel*, 1 February, 1998.

¹² Two book-length studies, a collection of papers, other scattered articles and a succession of detailed newspaper reviews of Hamburger's poetry in German – see Walter Eckel, *Von Berlin nach Suffolk*; Matthias Müller-Wieferig, *Jenseits der Gegensätze. Die Lyrik Michael Hamburgers* (Essen: Die blaue Eule, 1991); *Michael Hamburger. Dichter und Übersetzer*, ed. by Walter Eckel and Jakob K. Köllhofer (Frankfurt, etc.: Lang, 1989); Iain Galbraith, 'Michael Hamburger', in *Kritisches Lexikon der fremdsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur*, ed. by Heinz Ludwig Arnold, 41st fascicle, (Munich: Edition Text und Kritik, 1996) – contrast with the brief articles and reviews in English. A Special Issue of *Agenda* (a poetry magazine in which contributions on Hamburger's poetry had already appeared in the 1970s and 1980s) entitled 'A Tribute to Michael Hamburger' (35:3, 1997), and the 'printerview' *Michael Hamburger in Conversation with Peter Dale* are the most significant English publications on Michael Hamburger to date.

¹³ Hamburger's many distinctions in the latter respect began with awards from the Darmstadt Academy in 1964 and the Arts Council in 1969, and have included the Inter Nationes Arts Prize (1976), the Institute of Linguists' Medal (1977), the Schlegel-Tieck Prize (1978 and 1981), the Wilhelm Heinse Medal (1978), the Goethe Medal (1986), the European Translation Prize (1990), the Austrian State Prize for Translation, the Friedrich Hölderlin Prize (1991), the Petrarca Prize (1992), a Bundesverdienstkreuz, an OBE (1992) and two honorary doctorates.

¹⁴ *Michael Hamburger in Conversation with Peter Dale*, p.11.

¹⁵ Ralph Jeutter, 'The publications of Michael Hamburger: a bibliography', *Comparative Criticism* 10 (1988), 346-376; *Michael Hamburger in Conversation with Peter Dale*, pp. 69-76. Dale does, however, list four recordings (p. 74): British Council LPs released in 1959, 1960 and 1973, and a Library of Congress record dated 'post 1965'.

¹⁶ Letter to the author of 20 December, 1999. Cf. SoB 258-261.

¹⁷ Karen Leeder, 'Towards a Profane Hölderlin: Representations and Revisions of Hölderlin in some GDR Poetry', in *Neue Ansichten. The Reception of Romanticism in the Literature of the GDR*, ed. by Howard Gaskill, Karin McPherson and Andrew Barker (GDR Monitor Special Series 6, Amsterdam and Atlanta: Rodopi, 1990), pp. 212-231.

¹⁸ Pierre Bertaux, 'Hölderlin und die französische Revolution', *Hölderlin-Jahrbuch* 15 (1967/8), pp. 1-27.

¹⁹ Walter Eckel, *Von Berlin nach Suffolk*, pp. 13-53, here pp. 23-28.

²⁰ Matthias Müller-Wieferig, *Jenseits der Gegensätze*, pp. 67-83.

²¹ See SoB 290, one of the few passages in Hamburger's memoirs referring to his radio work. Unfortunately no sound recording has been preserved.

²² In a letter in the BBC's Talks file on Hamburger dated October 1958 enquiring about the possibility of a programme on Kafka, Hamburger mentions doing a one-and-a-half-hour programme on Kafka's influence in England for Norddeutscher Rundfunk. In a letter to the author (20/12/1999) he mentions a series of reviews done for a Swiss radio station, 'probably Basel', in the 1960s. Matthias Müller-Wieferig includes two radio broadcasts in his bibliography (pp. 275-276): 'Der unsichtbare Dichter. Zum 100. Geburtstag von T.S. Eliot'. Norddeutscher Rundfunk, 25/9/1988; 'Meine Gedichte', Norddeutscher Rundfunk, 15/12/1988; and three interviews with himself: "'Der ich Dinge und Orte mag ...". Michael Hamburger im Gespräch mit Matthias Müller-Wieferig', Deutschlandfunk, 8/5/1986; "'Wie übersetzt man Lyrik?" Gespräch mit Mathias Müller-Wieferig', RIAS Berlin and Westdeutscher Rundfunk, 29/5/1987; "'Zuhause - wo ist das eigentlich?" Gespräch mit Mathias Müller-Wieferig', Radio Bremen, 18/6/1988. The NSA also possesses a German Radio collection which may contain Hamburger recordings.

²³ See Humphrey Carpenter, *The Envy of the World*, pp. 125f.

²⁴ Michael Hamburger, *Mr Littlejoy's Rattlebag For the New Millennium* (London: Katabasis, 1999), pp. 22f.

²⁵ *Michael Hamburger in Conversation with Peter Dale*, p. 64.

Broadcasts by Michael Hamburger for the BBC

Susan Knowles of the BBC Written Archives Centre and Jane Harvell of the National Sound Archive are thanked for their assistance in compiling this listing. The dates are in most cases those of broadcasting. Where these are not known, the dates of recording are given in brackets.

Talks and Translations

- 26 December, 1949 'Orpheus'. Talk on Rainer Maria Rilke. A selection of passages from Rilke's letters and *Malte Laurids Brigge*, in MH's translations, with linking narrative (20 min)
- 3 April, 1950 'Baudelaire Rediscovered'. A review by MH of a translation of Charles Baudelaire's *Intimate Journals*
- 27 November, 1950 Talk on Edwin Muir. A selection of Muir's poems with linking commentary (20 min)
- 12 January, 1951 Translation of Heinrich von Kleist, 'On the Gradual Construction of Thoughts during Speech'
- 13 April, 1951 Translation of Kleist, 'On the Puppet Theatre'
- 21 June, 1952 Translation of Karl Jaspers, 'The Idea of the Creation of the World' (30 min)
- 1 May, 1953 Talk on 'Late Beethoven' (10 min) and discussion on Paul Hindemith with Wilfrid Mellers and William Glock in the *Studies in Music Criticism* series
- 1954 on Excerpts from MH's translations of Ludwig van Beethoven's letters used repeatedly in music programmes
- (March, 1956) Talk on Friedrich Hölderlin (20 min)
- 3 December, 1956 Translations of Hölderlin's poems, read by Denis McCarthy and Walter Rilla
- 14 January, 1957 Translation of Albrecht Goes, *The Burnt Offering* (60 min) [NSA holding]
- 29 April, 1957 Talk on 'Contemporary German Poetry' with translations of poems by Benn, Loerke, Lehmann, Eich, Hagelstange, Höllerer, Krolow, Piontek (20 min)
- 6 August, 1957 'Reason and Energy'. Talk based on MH's book of the same title

- 3 June, 1958 Translation of Günter Eich's radio play *The Rolling Sea at Setubal*
- 31 August, 1959 Translation of Eich, *The Girls from Viterbo*
- 7 July, 1961 Translations of poems by Ingeborg Bachmann, Günter Eich and Günter Grass in 'Conscience and Creation'
- 26 November, 1961 Translation of Eich, *The Year Lacertis*
- (28 January, 1962) Translation of Hugo von Hofmannsthal, *The Tower* [NSA holding]
- 3 July, 1964 Translation of Peter Weiß, *The Tower* produced by Martin Esslin
- December, 1964 3 30 min talks on Hölderlin projected
- 7 July, 1965 'Struck by Apollo. A Biographical Impression of Friedrich Hölderlin (1770-1843)', by Anne Beresford and MH (45 min)
- September, 1965 Translations of poems by Bertolt Brecht in 'Anti-Poetry', by J.M. Cohen
- 1966 Talk on Hans Magnus Enzensberger (30 min)
- (19 January, 1966) Translations of poems by Grass: Christopher Middleton introduces Grass translations by himself and MH [NSA holding]
- (May, 1966) Talk on Johannes Bobrowski commissioned (30 min). Possibly identical with NSA holding, rec. 2 August 1967: poems of JB, with readings in English and German
- 10 October, 1967 Translations of Günter Kunert, Georg Trakl, August Stramm in 'Poetry and War in the 20th Century'
- 31 May, 1970 Translation of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Egmont* used in musical broadcast (Beethoven), adapted and produced by John Powell [NSA holding]
- 1970 Talk on Paul Celan after the poet's suicide in May
- 1971 Translations of two stories by Peter Bichsel
- 18 May, 1971 Talk on Paul Celan. Memorial programme including Celan reading 'Todesfuge' (15 min) [NSA holding]

- 27 January, 1974 Talk on Goethe and Hölderlin (30 min)
- 28 November, 1974 Talk on Peter Huchel. PH reading a selection of poems, with commentary and translations by MH (30 min) [NSA holding]
- (February, 1977) Talk on Helmut Heißenbüttel
- 1981/ 1982 3 talks on Goethe
- 4 April, 1981 Contribution to 'There was a Publisher', a portrait of Erica Marx (publisher of Hamburger's early poetry) [NSA holding]

Poetry

- 1954 on Individual poems of MH's included in poetry programmes
- 30 May, 1958 2 poems from *The Dual Site* included in *New Poetry* by Robert Conquest
- 19 September, 1962 MH introduces a selection of his own poems, read by Anne Beresford and Hugh Dickson, in the *Living Poet* series (George MacBeth). [NSA holding]
- 22 June, 1965 MH reads extracts from 'In a Cold Season' in 'Anglo-Jewish Poetry' [NSA holding]
- 12 September, 1968 Contribution to 'Embassy 68'. Excerpts from a US Embassy conference on 'British and American Poetry Today' compiled by Anthony Thwaite [NSA holding]
- 1971, 1974, 1978 Interviews with MH on his poetry, including interview with A. Cox 1971 [NSA holding]
- 30 September, 1974 2 of MH's poems included in *Poets on Music* (20 min)
- 16 January, 1975 *Poets on Music*. MH talks about the effects of music on his work and life
- 13 July, 1981 MH reads own poems at *Poetry Cambridge* festival

German Service Broadcasts

- 24 March, 1955 Talk on T.S. Eliot (30 min)
- 5 May, 1955 Contribution (3 min) on Dylan Thomas for Austrian Service programme 'Europe Ten Years After'

- 15 September, 1955 Talk on G.M. Hopkins (20 min)
- 18 May, 1958 Brief contribution to programme on Dylan Thomas
- 21 June, 1959 Contribution (4 min) to Edwin Muir feature
- 17 January, 1960 'The Dual Site' included in a programme on 'Young Poets'
- 1965- 1974 About a dozen unscripted interviews, e.g. 'Cheltenham Festival', 7 October, 1965; 'How Writers Live Today', November, 1965; 'Arbeit und Leben', June 1966
- 14 July, 1966 Excerpts from *From Prophecy to Exorcism* broadcast in German translation
- 5 (or 8) December, 1966 'Deutsche Dichtung der Gegenwart' (20 min) in the series *German for Sixth Forms*