

Style and Faith in Geoffrey Hill

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Abstract

Few post-war Anglophone poets have constructed an intellectual hinterland as rich and problematic as Geoffrey Hill. This thesis examines one crucial strand of his thought: the deeply-implicated, yet uneasy imbrication of poetry and theology, style and faith.

In the essay 'Language, Suffering, and Silence', Hill proposes 'a theology of language', while in the preface to his 2003 collection of essays *Style and Faith*, he insists that with exemplary writers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, 'style *is* faith'. Finally, in 'Eros in F.H. Bradley and T.S. Eliot', Hill searchingly touches on the central problem in considering art in relation to faith: 'the fundamental dilemma of the poetic craft [is] that it is simultaneously an imitation of the divine fiat and an act of enormous human self-will.'

This thesis proposes that such a 'fundamental dilemma', while a source of anxiety for Hill's post-Eliotic poetics, energises and enriches his poetry. I argue that Hill's 'theology of language' is derived from two radically-opposed intellectual traditions: one lineage from the philological diligence of the English Reformation, the other from the apotheosis of style in the post-Romantic poetics of individuals such as Wallace Stevens and W.B. Yeats. I situate Hill's thoughts on the relationship of poetry to religious faith in terms of his intellectual and aesthetic engagements with literary precursors: John Donne, John Milton, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and W.B. Yeats.

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Geoffrey Hill (1932–2016)

‘I kiss my hand

To the stars, lovely-asunder

Starlight, wafting him out of it; and

Glow, glory in thunder’

‘The Wreck of the Deutschland’, Gerard Manley Hopkins

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My parents are owed gratitude beyond all telling. Their support, belief, wisdom, and love has fortified me during the tougher stretches in writing this thesis. I return their love, and I hope that this work makes them proud.

Author's Declaration

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for an award at this or any other, university. All sources are acknowledged as References.

Aspects of the final chapter on W.B. Yeats were first explored in a paper I delivered at the 'Fall Narratives' conference at the University of Aberdeen, June 2014. It has since been published as 'Language and the Fall in W.B. Yeats and Geoffrey Hill', in *Fall Narratives: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, ed. by Zohar Hadromi-Allouche and Áine Larkin (London: Routledge, 2017).

Introduction

Hill's 'theology of language': problems of history

On 30 June 2016, the United Kingdom still reeling from the results of a referendum on Europe, the poet Geoffrey Hill died. Obituaries and remembrances appeared from all corners to mark the passing of this 'great European', as Michael Schmidt described Hill in the editorial of *PN Review*.¹ Early in my doctoral research, I stumbled upon Hart Crane's elegy for Emily Dickinson. Hill himself wrote 'Improvisations for Hart Crane', which first appeared in *Without Title* (2006); Crane also has frequent cameos in *Liber Illustrium Virorum*.²

The harvest you descried and understand

Needs more than wit to gather, love to bind.

Some reconciliation of remotest mind³—

¹ Michael Schmidt, 'Editorial', *PN Review* 43.1 [231] (Sept-Oct 2016), pp. 2-3 (2).

² Geoffrey Hill, 'Improvisations for Hart Crane', in *Broken Hierarchies: Poems 1952-2012*, ed. by Kenneth Haynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 512-13. All subsequent references to Hill's poems are from this collection unless otherwise stated, and given parenthetically as *BH*.

³ Hart Crane, 'To Emily Dickinson', *Complete Poems and Selected Letters*, ed. by Langdon Hammer (New York: Library of America, 2006), p. 87.

One could quibble with ‘understand’ – Hill has described himself as a ‘blind-understanding poet’ – but these lines seemed to me then, and do now, as just and memorable a tribute to Hill’s vast, significant body of work as can be imagined.⁴

One of the most intriguing, vexing aspects of Geoffrey Hill’s oeuvre is what might be termed his “theological aesthetics”.⁵ I am not referring here to the surfeit of allusions in his work (conspicuous in contemporary poetry) to theology, ecclesiastical architecture and ritual, or Christian mysteries, the ‘imperious theme’ to which the ‘priests and martyrs’ populating Hill’s poems ‘parade’ (from ‘Annunciations’, *BH*, p. 40); these will of course be given their due in this thesis, but they are not the substantial interest of my study. Nor do I wish to consider Hill merely as a poet of “religious experience”: in his review essay ‘The Weight of the Word’ (first published in 1991), Hill raises the possibility of ‘[bringing] secular scholarship (and poetics and the “fine arts”) into the field of the theological judgement’, only to caution against ‘an effusive post-Symbolism’ – loose critical tropes on “religious” matter, the prevailing tendency which that effort has taken in the academy.⁶ As Hill further writes, ‘language [...] is a doctrinal solution’ (*CCW*, p. 363). I shall return to this significant point later in the introduction, but my hope is that this thesis avoids mere examination of religious “themes”.

⁴ A phrase adapted from Andrew Marvell’s ‘On Mr Milton’s Paradise Lost’, in Hill’s ‘Milton as Muse’ lecture, online audio recording, Christ’s College, Cambridge (29 October 2008) <<http://milton.christs.cam.ac.uk/hill.htm>> [accessed 15 August 2015]. See also Steven Matthews, ‘Finding Consonance in the Disparities: Geoffrey Hill, John Milton, and Modernist Poetics’, *The Modern Language Review*, 111. 3 (July 2016), pp. 665–83 (p. 669).

⁵ This term is adopted, perhaps with license, from Hans Urs von Balthasar’s multi-volume work, *The Glory of the Lord: a theological aesthetics*, 7 vols (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1982–1991 [first publ. 1961–69]).

⁶ Hill, ‘The Weight of the Word’, in *Collected Critical Writings*, ed. by Kenneth Haynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). Subsequent references given parenthetically as *CCW*.

In the same decade as ‘The Weight of the Word’, in his lecture ‘Language, Suffering, and Silence’ (first published 1999), Hill “seriously” proposes ‘a theology of language’, which would base itself on two fundamental premises: the memorialising and ‘memorising’ of the dead, and ‘a critical examination of the grounds for claiming [...] that the shock of semantic recognition must be also a shock of ethical recognition; and that this is the action of grace in one of its minor, but far from trivial, types’ (*CCW*, p. 405).⁷

Several considerations arise from these first principles in terms of my analysis in this thesis of Hill’s ‘theology of language’: firstly, it is profoundly *historical* in character; more than that, it involves a sustained dialogue – sometimes agonistic in character – with the dead, primarily, though by no means exclusively, theologians and/or poets. In *The Triumph of Love* (1998), Hill states ‘I / write for the dead’ (and, in a cutting enjambment, his Nobel prize-winning “rivals” for ‘the living / dead’; *BH*, p. 269). In the essay ‘Keeping to the Middle Way’, he describes Burton, Nashe, and Donne (figures we shall reencounter in chapter one) as ‘memorialists’ (*CCW*, p. 298), and the description suits Hill just as well. ‘Rewriting his own deepest reading. That / fair comment [...]’ (*Scenes from Comus*, in *BH*, p. 450) levelled at him by critics, is a conversation with what, in an essay profoundly influential on Hill, ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’ (1919), T.S. Eliot described as ‘the present moment of the past’.⁸ Given these contours of Hill’s ‘theology of language’, not only will this thesis attempt

⁷ For the earliest use of this phrase in Hill’s unpublished notes (from a typescript called ‘Comparative Studies’ (1994), see Matthew Sperling, *Visionary Philology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 133–34.

⁸ T.S. Eliot, ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’, in *Selected Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1952, first publ. 1932), p.22. Hill has mentioned on several occasions a 1949 Christmas gift of Eliot’s essays from his parents; see Hill, ‘Confessio Amantis’, *Keble College Record* (2009), p. 50.

to examine the intellectual history behind it, each chapter will also focus on Hill's 'memorising' of a particular 'dead poet' (I will introduce this pantheon at the end of the introduction, when the grounds for their inclusion have been met):

And, after all, it is to them we return.

Their triumph is to rise and be our hosts:

lords of unquiet or of quiet sojourn,

those muddy-hued and midge-tormented ghosts.⁹

The second consideration arising from the first principles of Hill's 'theology of language' is that ethics, and even the divine gift of 'grace in one of its minor, but far from trivial, types', are profoundly implicated in language. In *Visionary Philology*, Matthew Sperling grippingly tackles one major aspect of this ethical-theological compact: namely, a post-Romantic genealogy of philology, from Samuel Taylor Coleridge via Gerard Manley Hopkins and Richard Chevenix Trench to the compilers of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. The second half of Sperling's study draws this philological inheritance into a discussion of Hill's concern with theological doctrine: sin and the Fall, and the idea of prelapsarian language, with reference to Augustine, Calvin, Karl Barth, John Donne and others. Sperling's book is a crucial model and interlocutor

⁹ Hill, 'An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture in England', in *BH*, p. 125.

for this thesis, not only for the rigour and authority of its scholarship, but its diligent, dexterous enquiries into the nature of words. Yet as shall become apparent in the course of this introduction, I diverge from Sperling in one central argument of this thesis. Sperling's study admirably traces the vein of philological enquiry through Hill's dense, striated thought, 'igneous, sedimentary, / conglomerate' (*The Triumph of Love*, in *BH*, p. 253); yet in assiduously following this particular stratum, it inevitably shears the contrarian morass of Hill's intelligence of some of its contradictions.

In her essay 'Geoffrey Hill and Confession', an important contribution to understanding the complex status of faith in relation to Hill's poetic style, Kathryn Murphy surpasses most previous criticism on the subject (her essay predates *Visionary Philology*) by shifting the focus from a generalised emphasis on 'religious experience' to Hill's *historicised* sense of theology, and the crucial, troubling legacies of 'religious sectarianism'. Murphy argues that Hill's criticism is 'alive to confessional distinctions', and furthermore his sense of faith 'inextricably confessional'.¹⁰ Sperling has acknowledged Murphy's work as 'exemplary', adding that by contrast his purpose is:

to discuss the writer who can describe himself with broad brushstrokes as someone "much influenced spiritually – not necessarily for the good – by St. Paul, St. Augustine, Luther and Karl Barth", and draw poetic inspiration from each of these confessionally, historically, and doctrinally remote forebears along

¹⁰ Kathryn Murphy, 'Geoffrey Hill and Confession', in *Geoffrey Hill: Essays on the Later Work*, ed. by John Lyon and Peter McDonald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 127–42 (131, 129). Citations from this volume of essays hereafter given as *GHELW*.

parallel lines. I am concerned with what he makes of his theological reading as a poet, even if this is not the same as what his theological reading has offered him in doctrinal terms.¹¹

While Sperling is entirely correct to emphasise Hill's ecumenism, it seems unusual to suggest that this particular pantheon of theologians is only 'confessionally' or 'doctrinally' accessible along 'parallel lines': rather, they represent a recognisable strain of Reformed theology (with Ss. Paul and Augustine very much at the centre of Reformation disputation).¹² Moreover, the bifurcation between 'what he makes of his theological reading as a poet' and 'in doctrinal terms' sits at odds with Hill's dictum that 'language [...] *is* a doctrinal solution', as Murphy insists *avant la lettre*. Curiously, Murphy feels forced to lessen the strength of this insistence in her essay by conceding that 'Hill is [...] at pains to keep his poetry ecumenical', and 'a stanza of a poem is not a confession of faith'.¹³

One would not wish to dispute the conclusions drawn by both Sperling and Murphy – that Hill's poetry is ecumenical and irreducible to creedal statement – but in agreeing with them on this point, one is faced with ineluctable difficulties regarding how Hill's 'theology of language' is to be interpreted, given his insistence on a theological nexus of understanding that is not vague post-Symbolist "spirituality" or "religiosity". Christopher Hill wrote influentially of Milton that he was 'an eclectic, the disciple of no

¹¹ Sperling, *Visionary Philology*, p. 135.

¹² On the vital importance of Paul and Augustine to Luther's early controversies with Erasmus, see Brian Cummings, *Grammar and Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 144-47, 175-184.

¹³ Murphy, 'Geoffrey Hill and Confession', in *GHEW*, pp. 131-32.

individual thinker'.¹⁴ Geoffrey Hill's intellectual milieu is every bit as "catholic" as Milton's (perhaps the pun adumbrates some of the problems): in a 2009 interview, Geoffrey Hill stated, 'in the English 17th century I admire equally Hobbes and his great opponent Clarendon [...] I have learned equally from a Catholic (Péguy) and a Confucian (Pound)'.¹⁵ In Hill's 'theology of language', however, notwithstanding the magnanimity of his intellectual preoccupations, there is constant attention paid to the "weight of the word", distinctions, arbitrations, judgements being made for and against, and perhaps especially, historically-circumstanced contingencies: 'the language of repentance is not a kind of bubble on the surface of things' (citing D.M. MacKinnon, in 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"', *CCW*, p. 8); 'Language [...] is a doctrinal solution' ('The Weight of the Word', *CCW*, p. 363). I have stated that Hill's 'theology of language' implicates theological and ethical considerations in the very matter of semantics, while I have also maintained that Hill's 'theology of language' is necessarily historical. This is borne out by Hill's own treatment of the various genealogies from which he derives his 'theology'; he writes of the efforts undertaken by the compilers of the first edition of the *OED*:

[Their endeavours appear] morally correlative to, if not derivative from, theological disputations at the time of the Reformation, when the fate of souls could be determined by a point of etymology or grammar. It is no disparagement

¹⁴ Christopher Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979, first publ. 1977), p. 285.

¹⁵ 'Strongholds of the Imagination', an interview with Alexandra Bell, Rebecca Rosen, and Edmund White, *The Oxonian Review*, 9.4 (18 May 2009) <<http://www.oxonianreview.org/wp/geoffrey-hill/>> [accessed 11 May 2016].

to suggest that the labours of successive editors and associate editors between 1879 and 1928 seems more akin to the ‘diligence’ of Tyndale [...] than to the visionary philology of Trench’s spiritual mentors Coleridge (‘For if words are not THINGS, they are LIVING POWERS’) and Emerson (‘Parts of speech are metaphors, because the whole of nature is a metaphor for the human mind’) (‘Common Weal, Common Woe’, *CCW*, p. 270).

Note the care with which Hill phrases his distinction: ‘morally correlative to, if not derivative from’; ‘it is no disparagement to suggest’; ‘more akin to [...] than’: these judgements are couched in forensic, retentive grammar.

Hill adds that the ‘editorial stamina’ of the chief editor, James Murray, ‘may be preferred to Coleridge’s spasmodic, though intense, labours’ (*ibid.*). ‘Spasmodic’ was the pejorative assigned by W.E. Aytoun to a “school” of minor poetry following Shelley, and Hill’s usages in the *Collected Critical Writings* retain it as a term of denigration associated with romantic excess and subjectivity (see, for instance, *CCW*, pp. 117, 495, and 542).¹⁶ Nevertheless, as Sperling notes (and as his book more broadly and amply demonstrates), Hill identifies himself, at least at crucial points in his published and unpublished writings, as ‘an unredeemed romantic philologist’.¹⁷

In this thesis, I argue that the apparent contradiction within Hill’s ‘theology of language’ – between its ‘inextricably confessional’ aspect and its ecumenical breadth –

¹⁶ For an introduction to the “Spasmodic school”, see ‘Editorial Introduction: Spasmodic Poetry and Poetics’, Charles LaPorte and Jason R. Rudy, *Victorian Poetry*, 42.4 (Winter 2004), pp. 421–28.

¹⁷ From ‘Hopkins’, a lecture transcribed by Kenneth Haynes, BC MS 20c Hill/5/1/115 (‘Hopkins Lectures’), cited in Sperling, *Visionary Philology*, pp. 53–54.

is best approached from an historicizing approach towards Hill's intellectual milieu. My argument proceeds by discerning a deep fault-line between two radically-opposed intellectual inheritances that make up Hill's 'theology of language': one derived from the religious and civil controversies of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the other from the 'supreme fictions' of Romanticism.¹⁸ I read these two sources of Hill's most profound thinking on style and faith as locked in interminable conflict with one another, a collision that also accounts for a failure of style and faith to cohere, despite Hill's critical ideal. Furthermore, it is the very nature of this exemplary failure, and the energising dilemma between Reformation thought and Romanticism, faith and style, that accounts for the suave, anxious power of Hill's poetry.

Style and faith: the fundamental dilemma

Hill's theological aesthetics rests, then, on a more or less integral or intrinsic dilemma as the animating force of its achievement. Several critical works on Hill's poetics have delved into specific areas of Hill's 'theology of language': Peter Walker, and Robert Macfarlane on grace; Sperling on original sin; Rowan Williams on "standing" at the threshold of faith.¹⁹ David C. Mahan, in asking the question 'can poetry matter to

¹⁸ My phrase is from Wallace Stevens's 'A High-Toned Old Christian Woman': 'Poetry is the supreme fiction, madame', and his later poem 'Notes Towards a Supreme Fiction'; *Collected Poetry and Prose*, ed. by Frank Kermode and Joan Richardson (New York: Library of America, 1997, first publ. 1954), pp. 47, 329-52.

¹⁹ See Peter Walker, "'The Triumph of Love": Geoffrey Hill's Contexture of Grace', *Sewanee Theological Review*, 44.3 (2001), pp. 275-98; Robert Macfarlane, 'Gravity and grace in Geoffrey Hill', *Essays in Criticism*, 58.3 (2008), pp. 237-56; Sperling, *Visionary Philology*, pp. 134-60; Rowan Williams, 'The Standing of Poetry', in *GHELW*, pp. 55-69.

Christian theology’, examines poetic kenosis in *The Triumph of Love* (1998), concluding that the poetry ‘manifests its own form of theological expression’ [original emphasis].²⁰ Jean Ward has explored the way in which Hill, from an Anglican background, has ‘responded to [his] situation as [a Christian poet] in a society that has to a large extent abandoned Christianity’, an historical approach not dissimilar to mine in this thesis, although my interest is less in cultural commentary than in analysing Hill’s intellectual roots (and I believe that I come to markedly different conclusions than Ward).²¹ Other works that tackle a specific aspect of Hill’s theological thinking include essays by Jennifer Kilgore-Caradec (kenosis), Brian Cummings (recusancy), Kenneth Haynes (faith and fable), and Kathryn Murphy (conversion).²²

Aside from his proposition of a ‘theology of language’, the most significant statement from Hill pertaining to a theological aesthetics may be found in the preface to his 2003 collection of essays on sixteenth and seventeenth century writing, *Style and Faith*, from which the title of this thesis is drawn. The argument of Hill’s book is that ‘it is a characteristic of the best writing [of the period] that authors were prepared and able to imitate to original authorship, the *auctoritas*, of God, at least to the extent that forbade them to be idle spectators of their own writing’ (*CCW*, p. 263). Hill presents as

²⁰ David C. Mahan, *An Unexpected Light: Theology and Witness in the Poetry and Thought of Charles Williams, Micheal O ‘Siadhail, and Geoffrey Hill* (Cambridge: James Clark & Co, 2010), pp. 25, 204.

²¹ Jean Ward, *Christian Poetry in the Post-Christian Day: Geoffrey Hill, R.S. Thomas, Elizabeth Jennings* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2009), p. 7.

²² Jennifer Kilgore-Caradec, ‘Kinesis, Kenosis and the Weakness of Poetry’, *revue LISA*, 8.3 (2009), pp. 35-49; Brian Cummings, ‘Recusant Hill’, in *GHELW*, pp. 32-54; Kenneth Haynes, “Faith” and “Fable” in the Poetry of Geoffrey Hill’, *Christianity and Literature*, 60.3 (2011), pp. 398-401; Kathryn Murphy, ‘Hill’s Conversions’, in *Geoffrey Hill and his Contexts*, ed. by Piers Pennington and Matthew Sperling (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2011), pp. 61-80 (hereafter *GHC*).

one example of this capacity John Donne's 'God's grammar', a figure taken from his sermons (which I shall discuss in detail in the first chapter), adding:

With Donne, style *is* faith: a measure of delivery that confesses his own inordinacy while remaining in all things ordinate. To state this is to affirm one's recognition of his particular authority in having achieved the equation; one recognises also such authority in Milton and Herbert. They are not, generally, otherwise to be equated (*CCW*, pp. 263-64).

For Hill, exemplary writing in English of the post-Reformation achieves an equation of style and faith, and as we shall see, Hill suggests that the same applies to all writing of major technical achievement. In the majority of instances, however, 'style and faith remain obdurately apart', sometimes due to the otiosity or complacency of the stylist; more often, even where the labour is 'well-intentioned', due to 'a fundamental idleness' in language itself (*CCW*, p. 264).

A brief attempt to define 'style' and 'faith' in Hill's critical vocabulary must be attempted, although as Kenneth Haynes has cautioned, 'faith' is deployed with a 'range of meaning' in Hill's poetry.²³ My main working definition throughout this thesis should be understood as referring to sense III. 5 in the *OED*: 'belief in and acceptance of the doctrines of a religion', and the concomitant theological sense of 'the capacity to

²³ Haynes, "Faith" and "Fable" in the Poetry of Geoffrey Hill', p. 399.

spiritually apprehend divine truths'; the religion under scrutiny is undoubtedly Christianity. In saying that, I recognise (and this thesis is in some sense a response to) the limitations of such a definition in terms of Hill's poetry; political and social, as well as figurative usages more generally, should not be annexed out of my assignation 'faith' in this study. Style is somewhat more straightforward (although not without its own historiography, as we shall see); in 'Tacit Pledges', Hill provides us with an elegant definition:

particulars of syntax, rhythm, and cadence [...] in its negative aspect, a writer's style is what he or she is left with after the various contingent forces of attrition have taken their toll [...] more positively, style marks the success an author may have in forging a personal utterance between the hammer of self-being and the anvil of those impersonal forces that a given time possesses (*CCW*, p. 407).

The equation of style and faith in the 2003 preface ('style *is* faith') is an expression of identity: there is not merely coherence or overlap, but an essential sameness, an at-one-ness. Hill first discussed a similar aesthetic aim in strikingly theological terms in his 1977 inaugural lecture as Professor at the University of Leeds, 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"', in which he describes an 'ideally' simple theme for the lecture: 'that the technical perfecting of a poem is an act of atonement, in the radical etymological sense – an act of at-one-ment, a setting at one, a bringing into concord, a reconciling, a uniting in harmony' (*CCW*, p. 4), citing as one description of

this achievement W.B. Yeats's aperçu, 'a poem comes right with a click like a closing box', from a letter of September 1935 to Dorothy Wellesley.

In *The Force of Poetry* (1984), Christopher Ricks challenged the idea of Hill's 'radical etymological' alignment of atonement and 'at-one-ment', a remonstrance that he maintains in his 2012 essay 'Hill's Unrelenting, Unreconciling Mind': 'For the word "atonement" obdurately will not return to its radical roots, to "at-one-ment". At-one-ment is simply and finally, and unanswerably, not a word in the English language'. Ricks insists that while Hill correctly bases his defence of poetry on an admission of 'irredeemable error', there is 'insufficient concession' that it also rests on 'irrecoverable loss'.²⁴ If Hill has moved away from the metaphor of 'atonement/at-one-ment' in later writings, the tendency towards a final unity, a transcendental desideratum for poetic style is still felt in the locution 'style *is* faith', notwithstanding that the 'ideal' aspects of the equation are couched even more vociferously in this latter incarnation ('not, generally, otherwise to be equated').

Hill's 'theology of language', then, possesses an impulse to ideally reconcile style with faith, technique and quasi-transcendental reconciliation imaginably yoked. Yet, as I have already suggested, such a setting "at one" of very different spheres of human engagement is dogged by problems and cruxes. The first of these may be felt in the copula 'is' in Hill's ideal formulation, particularly how we are alerted to its problematic status by italicisation.²⁵ Hill writes, 'style *is* faith', which may be further compared to

²⁴ Ricks, 'Hill's Unrelenting, Unreconciling Mind', in *GHEW*, p. 8.

²⁵ For a pertinent discussion of Coleridgean ideas of the grammatical copula as it relates to an idea of 'moral copula', and the precedence of language to epistemology in Hill's reception of Coleridge, see Sperling, *Visionary Philology*, pp. 79-83.

his adamant insistence in ‘The Weight of the Word’ that ‘language [...] *is* a doctrinal solution’ (*CCW*, p. 363). In ‘Poetry as “Menace” and “Atonement”’, Hill notes that ‘the quotation-marks around “menace” and “atonement” look a bit like raised eyebrows [...], adumbrating the challenge of ‘resisting the attraction of terminology itself, a power at once supportive and coercive’ (*CCW*, p. 3); a similar point is made in ‘Our Word is Our Bond’ apropos the strengths and weaknesses of the *MHRA Style Book* on quotation marks as ‘a casuistically ideal language masquerading as a real one’ (*CCW*, p. 150). It seems clear from these two analogous examples that Hill uses italics for emphasis in ‘style *is* faith’ in full awareness that the proposed identity-equation is casuistically-ideal rather than real, and that his decision to do so is merely a recognition that words are what William Empson called ‘compacted doctrine’ – the fact that language is sedimentary with earlier imprecise usages, prejudices, evasions, and compromises.²⁶ Hill cites this phrase, from *The Structure of Complex Words*, hot on the heels of his forensic analysis of quotation marks in ‘Our Word is Our Bond’ (see *CCW*, p. 151).

Haunting Hill’s ideal equation of style and faith is the quandary I.A. Richards searchingly touched upon when he asserted that all thinking is ‘radically metaphoric’,²⁷ a point that Empson picks into an angry wound when he writes, ‘It would be an important step to decide what a metaphor must do if it is to tell an exact truth, even if we never in practice make it do that completely’.²⁸ Hill obviously feels the same itch; why else the consistent italicisation of what Simon Jarvis has called ‘the apparently innocuous copula “is”’?²⁹ The problem of analogical versus univocal predication is one

²⁶ William Empson, *The Structure of Complex Words* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1951), p. 39.

²⁷ I.A. Richards, *Interpretation in Teaching* (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1938), p. 48.

²⁸ Empson, *The Structure of Complex Words*, p. 337.

²⁹ Simon Jarvis, ‘Quality and the non-identical in J. H. Prynne’s “Aristeas, in seven years”’, *Jacket* 20 (December 2002) <www.jacketmagazine.com/20/pt-jarvis.html> [accessed 1 December 2015]

area of difficulty that dogs Hill's ideal troth between style and faith – whether the italics admits more of an analogy ('style *is quite like* faith') than the projected consummation of the two that its rare and exemplary instantiations in the writing of Donne et al. would suggest. Put very bluntly, the phrase 'style *is* faith', on a syntactical level, hints at the opposite of what it asserts: style is *not* faith. There is neither etymological or actual reconciling of these terms. 'A is B' is already underwritten by difference. Furthermore, as Empson has it, 'it is a weakness of these equations that the idea which is taken more seriously is in each case made the predicate'.³⁰ Hill, the poet, seemingly finds himself forced to take faith more seriously, as a matter of grammar. Another way of thrashing this out with and against Empson, however, would be to say that the statement of equation 'A is B' *would* wish 'A' to be an idea that is taken as seriously as 'B': in other words, Hill would risk equating what are not normally equable, the poet's singular style with the communal rigours (or divinely-bestowed gratuitousness) of faith.

Certainly, a central tension in Hill's development of a 'theology of language' and its ideal marriage of style and faith is a contrary, anti-Romantic impulse to avoid describing poetry in religious terms.³¹ In 'Eros in F.H. Bradley and T.S. Eliot', Hill quotes Eliot's preface to the 1928 edition of *The Sacred Wood*, agreeing with him that poetry is not 'religion or an equivalent of religion' (Eliot, cited in *CCW*, p. 539).³² Set

³⁰ Empson, *The Structure of Complex Words*, p. 316.

³¹ For a useful introduction to this aspect of Hill's thought, see Haynes, "'Faith" and "Fable" in the Poetry of Geoffrey Hill', especially pp. 399-400 on Hill's anxieties regarding the 'perilous' parity between 'faith' and 'fiction'.

³² Hill commends Eliot's refusal to describe poetry as religion but sees his ultimate resort to describing it as 'a superior amusement' as a tactical error and concession, having 'compromised himself and compromised his critical language', *CCW*, p. 555.

this alongside the absolute equivalence posited by the formulation ‘style *is* faith’, and one is confronted with a perplexing and cussed contradiction in Hill’s thought.

Difficult ontological problems regarding the metaphorical nature of language, which virtually skirt ‘the den of the metaphysician’, are one aspect of impasse or antilogy at the centre of Hill’s ‘theology of language’.³³ Another, also present in Hill’s anxieties regarding the Eliotic interdiction against confusing poetry and religion, concerns the extent to which these two categories have been intellectually, historically, and practically differentiated. In the preface, Hill commends post-Reformation English writers for imitating ‘the original authorship’ of God. To imitate God’s authority (in this case, as a stylist) is a curious crux of Christian theology. On the one hand, the *imitatio Christi* is at the heart of the believer’s way of life; on the other, imitating the majesty of God was the unmistakable sin of satanic pride, the ‘high disdain from sense of injured merit’ that Milton attributes to Satan.³⁴ Such an ‘imitation’ in Hill’s ‘theology of language’ is ambiguous, and havers between two scriptural “dark, hard sentences”: ‘I have said, “Ye *are* gods; and all of you *are* children of the most High”’ (Ps. 82:6) and the serpent’s promise in Genesis: ‘For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil’ (Gen 3:5).

The stylist imitating God as author in Hill’s preface is therefore situated within a broader sphere in which Christian dogmatics both commands and prohibits, in

³³ This phrase, originally from the Scottish physicist (and poet) James Clerk Maxwell, is the title of a provocative essay by the pioneering neuroscientist (and poet) Warren S. McCulloch, ‘The Den of the Metaphysician’, in *Embodiments of Mind* (MIT Press: Massachusetts, 1965). See p. 143 for McCulloch’s discussion of the term.

³⁴ Milton, *Paradise Lost*, I. 98, in *The Poems of John Milton*, ed. by John Carey and Alastair Fowler (London and New York: Longman, 1968), p. 248. All subsequent references to Milton poems from this edition, given parenthetically as book and/or line references.

different contexts, an imitation of divinity; in the preface, the imitation is nevertheless overwhelmingly positive; a repudiation of sorts, the other side of the coin, is advanced in 'Eros in F.H. Bradley and T.S. Eliot'. Writing of Charles Williams, Hill states:

As a Christian [...] he would have understood the fundamental dilemma of the poetic craft: that it is simultaneously an imitation of the divine fiat and an act of enormous human self-will. In one of his books of theology he writes that 'poetry can do something that philosophy can not, for poetry is arbitrary and has already turned the formulae of belief into an operation of faith'. 'Arbitrary' itself can mean either discretionary or despotic. Poetry can be in, or out, of grace [...] (CCW, p. 563)

Hill adds that the poet can imitate 'either God's commandment' or 'Lucifer's "instressing of his own inscape"', a coinage by Gerard Manley Hopkins (I shall discuss this fully in the third chapter).

What is interesting here is how Hill moves beyond seeing imitation itself as an ambiguous mode, to discerning the 'enormous human self-will' involved in poetry as part of its 'fundamental dilemma', i.e. something at the absolute heart of the craft. Style, even where it is otherwise magisterial, may (at least in certain contexts and instances) prove irreconcilable to faith, and yet this in a different kind as well as degree to what he diagnoses in the preface to *Style and Faith* as the majority of instances where 'style and faith remain obdurately apart' due to 'a fundamental idleness' on the part of the writer,

or merely within language itself (*CCW*, p. 264). In other words, Hill fleetingly seems to suggest in 'Eros in F.H. Bradley and T.S. Eliot' that even those rare exemplars such as Donne, Milton and Herbert are working under the 'arbitrary' sign of poetry, which even when it is stylistically graceful may be 'in, or out, of grace': rather than style brought to an equivalence with faith, as far as poetry is concerned the two seem to be involved in an energising, mutually-sustaining collision.

As the reference to Eliot's anti-Romantic repudiation of poetry as religion intimates, there is a broader historical background at work in relation to this later redress by Hill of his preface to *Style and Faith*, and one that I want to suggest animates his work from the very beginning; namely, the extent to which, in a post-Romantic context, 'style *is* faith' means something radically different to what sixteenth and seventeenth century writers could have conceivably understood by such a phrase. A brief analysis of Hill's tour de force 'Genesis' shall help to situate this difference:

Against the burly air I strode

Crying the miracles of God.

And first I brought the sea to bear

Upon the dead weight of the land;

And the waves flourished at my prayer,

The rivers spawned their sand (*BH*, p. 3).

The tenor of this bullish opening is unmistakably Romantic, patterned on the six days of creation in the Book of Genesis; although the Adam-like speaker is ‘crying the miracles of God’, he is not relegated to mere naming, but his word creates: ‘And the waves flourished at my prayer’.³⁵ The violence of later stanzas is similarly hostile to the ‘Gentility Principle’ espoused by Donald Davie and poets of the Movement, and akin to what Charles Tomlinson disapprovingly described in a 1963 essay ‘Poetry Today’ as ‘neo-romanticism’: ‘if the age is violent, then poetry must be violent’.³⁶ Hill’s later stanzas self-consciously parade their violent imagery, the unredeemed murderousness of nature: ‘The osprey plunge with triggered claw, / Feathering blood along the shore, / To lay the living sinew bare.’

The second stanza of part two of the poem begins to unravel the gnostic poesis that creates such amoral splendour: ‘And the third day I cried: “Beware / The soft-voiced owl, the ferret’s smile’; ‘And I renounced, on the fourth day, / This fierce and unregenerate clay’. The god-poet briefly flirts with a Yeatsian symbol, ‘the charmed phoenix [...] / In the unwithering tree’, surely some avian cousin of Yeats’s ‘miracle, bird or golden handiwork’ in ‘Byzantium’.³⁷ As with Yeats’s mystical artefact and its

³⁵ Matthew Sperling comments, ‘Adam seems promoted from nomothete to *fiat* creator’; *Visionary Philology*, p. 163.

³⁶ Cited in James Keery, ‘One from the Groves of Academe, the Other from Bohemia’s Seacoast’, *PN Review* 43.1, Issue 231 (Sept-Oct 2016), pp. 23–26 (26).

³⁷ W.B. Yeats, *The Poems*, ed. by Richard J. Finneran (London: Macmillan, 1983, 1989), p. 248. All references to Yeats’s poems are from this edition.

disdain of 'all complexities of mire or blood', the mythical bird in Hill's poem is suddenly abandoned as 'mire and blood' reassert their reality:

The phantom bird goes wild and lost,

Upon a pointless ocean tossed.

So the fifth day I turned again

To flesh and blood and the blood's pain. (*BH*, p. 4)

Hill's Romantic bard is forced to an admission, 'There is no bloodless myth will hold', and the seemingly even more nakedly-confessional 'And by Christ's blood are men made free', a line that is metrically and perhaps intellectually slack (Hill is known to dislike the poem); it is, in any case, qualified ironically by the lines which immediately follow: 'Though in close shrouds their bodies lie / Under the rough pelt of the sea; / Though Earth has rolled beneath her weight / The bones that cannot bear the light'. In this contorted agon, the post-Romantic lineaments of Hill's poetics are deeply felt: the desire to confess faith, the inability to do so without qualification; the grand celebration of the poet's fiat as a rival to God, at the same time as its violence and mythmaking are rendered suspicious and dark. These negative contortions are the very stuff of (post)Romantic mimesis.

This thesis traces a fault-line in Hill's intellectual hinterland as regards style and faith, between post-Reformation theological stylistics on the one hand, and post-Romantic poetics on the other. The essays in *Style and Faith* are almost exclusively concerned with early modern stylists. In the 2003 preface, Hill quotes Calvin's scrupulous gloss on the Hebrew word '*bachan*' as evidence of Hill's argument in the book of essays that writers of those two post-Reformation centuries were not 'idle spectators of their own writing' (*CCW*, p. 263). He has later returned to the 'nuance and fine distinction' that language could sustain in Elizabethan and Jacobean prose and verse 'in ways *not now* sustainable or understood' (my italics) in his Trinity Sermon on Ash Wednesday, 2008, examining Thomas More's vituperative attacks on Tyndale for translating *metanoia* as 'repentance' instead of 'penance'.³⁸ This concern with what he calls in 'Keeping to the Middle Way' 'resonances that are themselves part of the accumulating memory of post-Reformation written and spoken English' (*CCW*, p. 298) is one discernible strand of Hill's intellectual history, and a significant hinterland to his musing on style and faith. Yet a cleave exists in Hill's 'theology of language', and a second strand of inheritance is crucial to understanding his apperception of the 'fundamental dilemma' of poetry, as well as those dilemmas that vex the desired equation of style and faith: this strand is the Romantic conviction that 'words alone are certain good' as W.B. Yeats, one of the 'last romantics', puts it.³⁹

It is no overstatement to say that the first essay in Hill's *Collected Critical Writings*, 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"', is essentially a major statement on

³⁸ 'Ash Wednesday Sermon', Trinity College, Cambridge (6 February 2008) <trinitycollegechapel.com/media/filestore/sermons/HillAshWed2008.pdf> [accessed 20 May 2015], pp. 1-4 (1).

³⁹ Yeats, from 'The Song of the Happy Shepherd' and 'Coole and Ballylee, 1931', respectively; *The Poems*, pp. 8, 245.

the post-Romantic condition of art: how it relates to ‘the reproaches of life’ (*CCW*, p. 5), its self-critical faculty (*ibid.*, with reference to Coleridge), the Romantic mimesis of negative statements (*ibid.*, p. 6), and Romantic suspicion of ‘the high claims of poetry itself’ (*ibid.*, p. 7). Towards the end of the essay, he draws out ‘what has been implicit throughout this discussion’:

It is evident that my argument is attracted, almost despite itself, towards an idea by which it would much prefer to be repelled. But surely, one may be asked to concede, it is more than attraction. Is it not a passionate adherence; a positive identification with the agnosticism – some might wish to call it the magnificent agnostic faith – whose summation is in the ‘Adagia’ of Wallace Stevens? “After one has abandoned a belief in god, poetry is that essence which takes its place as life’s redemption” (*CCW*, p. 18).

Hill’s series of rhetorical questions, negative questions, are themselves ‘a form of Romantic mimesis’ (*CCW*, p. 6). He swiftly counters, as we have seen him do in later essays, the neo-Symbolist or post-Romantic stance exemplified here by Stevens, that such a ‘theological view of literature’ is ‘merely a restatement of the neo-Symbolist mystique celebrating verbal mastery [...] If an argument for the theological interpretation of literature is to be sustained, it needs other sustenance than this’ (*CCW*, p. 19). Yet this post-Romantic hinterland, which boasts such a major writer as Yeats and (with important caveats) Hopkins, is crucially important to Hill’s ‘theology of

literature', and in radical opposition to the literary culture of the Reformation which is its other *locus classicus*.⁴⁰ The final chapter shall consider one of Hill's earliest critical statements on Romanticism, his 1971 essay on Yeats "'The Conscious Mind's Intelligible Structure": A Debate', arguing that the Eliotic injunction against viewing poetry as religion is much less keenly felt at this early stage, with Hill finding 'the way of syntax' (style) as an acceptable alternative to 'a grammar of assent' (faith). He goes on to describe this as 'a common cultural predicament' – a Romantic given, although one that isn't without anxieties as far as Hill is concerned.⁴¹

Methodology

The imbrication of Hill's poetry with issues under examination in his critical prose presents problems of distribution for any scholar approaching his work. The term 'poet-critic' does not seem to do justice to the interwoven aspects of Hill's prose writing with his poetry; the style of both, and not just the poetry, seems to struggle mimetically out of the wellsprings of Hill's conflicted thought. I have attempted to give due consideration to both, as Hill's intellectual concerns regarding style and faith interpenetrate his entire oeuvre: 'theology makes good bedside reading' ('An Apology', from *Tenebrae*, in *BH*, p. 130).

⁴⁰ I follow Northrup Frye in seeing the major writing of the twentieth century, including its explicitly anti-Romantic statements, as 'post-Romantic'; see Frye, *A Study of English Romanticism* (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 15.

⁴¹ Hill, "'The Conscious Mind's Intelligible Structure": A Debate', *Agenda*, 9.4-10.1 (Autumn/Winter 1971/2), pp. 14-23 (16-17).

As I explored at the start of this introduction, Hill's 'memorialising' and 'memorising' of 'the outnumbering dead' ('Merlin', from *For the Unfallen*, in *BH*, p. 7) which he claims as fundamental to his 'theology of language' requires a consideration of his poetry and criticism within broader traditions, and in relation to poetic precursors; consequently, each chapter shall explore a different aspect of style and faith in Hill in relation to his reception of a specific poet. As my thesis argues that this 'theology' is riven by an internal contradiction resulting from dual inheritances, the Reformation and Romanticism, the first two chapters shall focus on poets from the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries, while the final two chapters explore Hill's engagements with post-Romantic poets. Hill's 'memorial' requirements for the 'theology of language' are Eliotic in character.⁴² So too is his profound anxiety about replacing religion with the ersatz "religion" of poetry. As such, Eliot is a spectral presence in this thesis rather than one of its protagonists. Not only has his influence on Hill been nimbly examined by Christopher Ricks, but ultimately Hill parts company with Eliot on the question of style and faith when the latter declares poetry is 'a superior amusement' (see earlier in the introduction).⁴³

The poetic-precursors to Hill's considerations of style and faith I have chosen to examine are, to one degree or another, problematic within Eliot's own inheritances; moreover, they give my thesis a purchase on the vexed questions outlined in this introduction. I do not adopt a specific model of influence, neither Eliot's tradition nor Harold Bloom's Freudian gnostic myth of agonistic inheritance, although both are

⁴² Cp. his approving quotation of the 'awkward syntax' of Eliot's vindication of dead writers ('Precisely, and they are that which we know') in 'Word Value in F.H. Bradley and T.S. Eliot', *CCW*, p. 541.

⁴³ Christopher Ricks, *True Friendship: Geoffrey Hill, Anthony Hecht, and Robert Lowell under the Sign of Eliot and Pound* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010).

undoubtedly important to my procedure. I make no grand theoretical claims about influence; my method is cautiously textual, pragmatic, and critical.⁴⁴ The first chapter looks at Hill's reception of John Donne in terms of 'confession', situating both poets within a vexed and complicated Anglican "rhythm". The second chapter examines Hill's engagement with John Milton, probing the poet's style as public rhetoric and the implications this has for faith. Both these pre-Romantic poets are among the exemplars named by Hill in the preface to *Style and Faith*, and Hill has paid homage to both (particularly Milton) in various ways. In his 1981 interview with John Haffenden, Hill stated, 'Of the Metaphysicals, I believed I most admired Donne'.⁴⁵ Hill has come to describe Milton as his retrospective muse, and paid homage to him explicitly in *Scenes from Comus* (2005) and *A Treatise of Civil Power* (2005/2007).⁴⁶ Both Donne and Milton, whatever their enormous differences, had access to the same 'cosmic syntaxes' – Earl Wasserman's term for the entire compact of the Western/Christian imaginary regarding nature, the Great Chain of Being, planes of creation, and Christian eschatology/interpretation of history. By contrast, the Romantic poets had to resort to 'subtler languages', articulating original visions of man's place in the universe.⁴⁷

The third chapter looks at a particular individual who yearns for a 'cosmic syntax' even as he articulates the subtlest of 'subtler languages', tempted to conceive of

⁴⁴ See T.S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' (1919), in *Selected Essays*, and Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

⁴⁵ Hill, in *Viewpoints*, ed. by John Haffenden (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), p. 79.

⁴⁶ *British Academy lecture: Poetry reading at the John Milton Quatercentenary symposium*, online audio recording, British Academy (6 December 2008)

<<http://www.britac.ac.uk/audio.cfm/assetfileid/9523>> [accessed 15 May 2016]. See also 'Milton as Muse'.

⁴⁷ I shall explore this shift in more detail in the course of the thesis. See Earl Wasserman, *The Subtler Language* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968), pp. 10-11. My argument is indebted to Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap, Harvard University Press, 2007).

poetry as Stevens's 'supreme fiction', but reconciled to apprehend it as the 'taste / Of Pentecost's ashen feast' ('History as Poetry', *BH*, p. 61). This individual is of course Gerard Manley Hopkins, the subject of many of Hill's writings, published and unpublished.⁴⁸ Hopkins's stance as a modern believer in a post-Romantic moment is arguably most revealing in terms of Hill's 'theology of language', not least because both figures exemplify a high degree of anxiety about style. Finally, I will look at Hill's avowed reverence for W.B. Yeats, whose poetry celebrates the neo-Symbolist 'mastery' that Hill's views with suspicion in 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"'. I will query to what extent Hill's admiration for Yeats's 'way of syntax' is, despite his intentions, an identification with the Romantic idea of style *as* faith, the apotheosis of style: 'Do words make up the majesty of man [...]?' ('Three Baroque Meditations', *BH*, p. 66); note the dual valences of 'make up': 'to compose' and 'to fictionalise'.⁴⁹

The extent to which Hill is unable to make the Reformation and Romanticism genealogies of thought on language and theology cohere, except in the evocative, anarchic-formal utterance of his own poetry, is a central concern of this thesis. More provocatively, I will examine whether Hill's reception of sixteenth and seventeenth century stylists can avoid discerning in their work 'the fundamental dilemma' between style and faith, suggesting that Hill's post-Romantic reception of John Donne and John Milton effectively reads them as proto-Romantics, who, like the lovers in Hill's poem 'Asmodeus' 'toy with fire brought dangerously to hand / To tame, not exorcise, spirits'

⁴⁸ See especially 'Redeeming the Time' and 'Alienated Majesty: Gerard M. Hopkins', in *CCW*, pp.88-108, 518-31. See also Sperling, *Visionary Philology*, pp. 25-39, for a discussion of Hill's unpublished writings on Hopkins.

⁴⁹ Hill: 'I revere Yeats [...] of all twentieth century poets writing in English he is perhaps the greatest'; *In Conversation with Peter McDonald on W.B. Yeats*, The Blue Boar Lecture Theatre, Christ Church, Oxford, online video recording, *You Tube* (29 May 2012) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hXc0tdg_HvY> [accessed 9 September 2013].

(*BH*, p. 14).⁵⁰ Ultimately, I argue that it is the magnetic attraction–repulsion between style and faith, and the dual lineages of Hill’s ‘theology of language’, that provide an enabling mythopoeia for Hill, accounting for his remarkably original voice within contemporary poetry.

⁵⁰ For studies on this theme, see Joseph Wittreich, *The Romantics on Milton* (Cleveland: Press of Case Western Reserve University, 1970); *Milton, the Metaphysicals, and Romanticism* ed. by Lisa Low and Anthony John Harding (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), and especially David Fairer, ‘Milton and the Romantics’, in *John Milton: Life, Writing, and Reputation*, ed. by Paul Hammond and Blair Worden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 147–67.

Chapter One

‘Fierce with darke keeping’: the perturbed Anglican rhythms of Geoffrey Hill and John Donne

‘God’s grammar’: style and faith in Hill’s reception of Donne

The introduction to this thesis has explored Geoffrey Hill’s preface to *Style and Faith*, in which he delineates poetry’s aspiration to John Donne’s ‘God’s grammar’, which is here understood as a trope and paradigm of the kind of equivalence of style and faith that only obtains in exemplary creative endeavours such as Donne’s own poetic and spiritual writing. The phrase is from a sermon Donne preached at St. Paul’s in 1626/7:

The Devils [sic] grammar is *Applicare Activa Passivis*, to apply Actives to Passives; where he sees an inclination, to subminister a temptation; where he seeth a froward choler, to blow in a curse. And Gods [sic] grammar is to *change* Actives into Passives: where a man delights in cursing, to make than man accursed.⁵¹

⁵¹ Donne, sermon ‘Preached to the King, at White-Hall, the first Sunday in Lent’ [February 11 1626/7], *The Sermons of John Donne*, ed. by George R. Potter and Evelyn M. Simpson, 10 vols (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1953-62), vol. VII (1954), p. 367.

Notwithstanding that the Dean of St Paul's is conspicuously absent from the vast and ecumenical body of writing cited by John Milton, this grammatical conversion is strikingly replicated in a phrase from his 1649 tract *Observations upon the Articles of Peace* (concerning the Duke of Ormond and Irish rebels).⁵² Hill refers to the phrase in *The Triumph of Love*:

[...] Milton writes of those

who 'comming to Curse... have stumbled into

a kind of Blessing' [...] (*BH*, p. 282)

Whereas Donne's 'God's grammar' operates within an economy of justice, Milton's operates within an economy of salvation (the curser not accursed, but made a blessing in disguise, perhaps to his or her own self as much as the object of their calumny). Nevertheless, both pivot on a chiasmic reversal, a blurring even, of the distinction between active and passive grammar. This shared species of theological-grammatical dubiety, despite the vast gulf between the respective ecclesiastical polities of both

⁵² 'And God wee trust hath so dispos'd the mouth of these *Balaams*, that comming to Curse, they have stumbled into a kind of Blessing'; Milton, 'Observations Upon the Articles of Peace' (1649), in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. by Don M. Wolfe and others, 8 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953-82), III (1959), p. 322. Subsequent references to Milton's prose abbreviated as *CPW*. As the multi-volume Oxford University Press *Complete Works of John Milton* are still in progress, I have opted to cite from the older scholarly edition.

writers, is arguably the fruit of post-Reformation English thought. In his 1994 essay 'Keeping to the Middle Way' (an essay crucial to this chapter), Hill posits as much:

There is [...] a particular complicity of actives and passives invoked by these [early seventeenth century] writers which may take its bearings from Calvin's interpretation of Augustine on free will and the bondage of free will [...] 'Man receaved in deede to be able if he would, but he hadde not to will yt he might be able' (*CCW*, p. 314).

Hill picks out *paronomasia* and *traductio* as the rhetorical figures aligned to this reception history, admitting that he struggles in certain cases to distinguish one from the other. It is certainly *traductio* that Hill seems to be playing with when 'God's grammar' crops up in *Clavics* (2011), eight years after the preface to *Style and Faith*:

Somewhere is sacramental belonging.

Here we find but banking with God's grammar

Strung unstringing

Grace from chance, worked like a novice stammer (*BH*, p. 813).

‘Sacramental belonging’, the *raison d’être* of the Church Militant in Anglo-Catholic ecclesiology (i.e. the church that exists here on earth), is seemingly unforthcoming in Hill’s view. It is *somewhere*, perhaps only realised in the Church Triumphant (which according to the same ecclesiology exists in heaven and enjoys the beatific vision). Such a ‘crabbed and ambiguous syntax’⁵³ forecloses determinate meaning, oscillating between an entirely orthodox suggestion that saintly community transcends immanent existence, and a hostile resistance to the claims of Anglican ecclesiastical polity. The nebulous quality of ‘somewhere’ is not so much vague as calculatingly ambivalent. In ‘Word Value in F.H. Bradley and T.S. Eliot’ (2001; publ. 2008), Hill explores the frequent recourse Bradley has to the word ‘somehow’, noting that it is ‘a word which lends itself to evasion, prevarication, cop-out, vague aspiration, inarticulacy’. While accepting this rap sheet, Hill argues that Bradley’s particular resonance of the word, ‘an actual syntax of metaphysics’, is in its context able to rest ‘in its own intelligibility’. As an analogous context, to explain what is essentially intelligible but not reducible to paraphrase, Hill instances the creation of a poem, the poet searching for the *mot juste* for days (in Hill’s case, read ‘years’): ‘its absence is a felt presence. Suddenly it is here. How? Somehow it has come to be [...] a *somehow* of realisation’ rather than abdication (*CCW*, pp. 532–34). The absence of ‘sacramental belonging’ in the poem, ‘*somewhere*’, is like Bradley’s ‘*somehow*’, a felt presence, and like it ‘more than a verbal tic or subterfuge though [...] it is frequently no more than these’ (*ibid.*, p. 533).⁵⁴

⁵³ From W. Milgate’s commentary on Donne, *The Satires, Epigrams and Verse Letters* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 228; cited by Hill in ‘Caveats Enough in their Own Walks’, *CCW*, p. 216.

⁵⁴ Cp. ‘somewhere elsewhere there is ah well where! one, / One’, ‘The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo’, a poem Hill has recited at more than one public reading; Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. by W.H. Gardner and N. H. MacKenzie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 4th edn, 1967), p. 92. Subsequent references to Hopkins’s poems given as *Poems of GMH*. The poem closes with an echoed ‘yonder’ as the ‘where’ of its ‘somewhere’, itself both a precise response and

As ‘sacramental belonging’ is both determinately and indeterminately suspended in this ‘*somewhere*’, the line suggests that the church might not necessarily be where it resides. Instead, Hill seems to imply that ‘here’ (i.e. here on earth, here in the obdurate give and take of daily life) we ‘find but banking with God’s grammar’ – those rare instances where style and faith are apparently reconciled in language, as for instance Bradley’s ‘*somehow*’, and by way of homage, Hill’s ‘*somewhere*’. The syntax (‘we find but’) conveys a sense of making do – if in the Preface to *Style and Faith* an equation of identity is realised in Donne’s writing (‘style *is* faith’), here ‘God’s grammar’ is more of a stop-gap; short of ‘sacramental belonging’, it is nevertheless something to ‘bank with’, rely on and invest in: ‘a sad and angry consolation’, to adopt Hill’s definition of poetry in *The Triumph of Love* (BH, p. 286). Consequently, rather than the neat equation of the 2003 preface, the poem from the 2011 volume *Clavics* exposes a crucial antilogy or impasse at the heart of Hill’s reception of Donne’s ‘God’s grammar’.

As Sperling writes, ‘strung unstringing’ is ‘both active and passive at once’.⁵⁵ The grammatical slippage is a kind of *traductio*, which as we have seen, Hill associates with seventeenth century Augustinian-Calvinist doctrinal lemmas. Poets who approach ‘God’s grammar’ as manifested in supreme instances of linguistic rectitude are ‘strung’, as though passively strung-up in a kind of nervous fettered condition by dint of it being a ‘consolation’ rather than a religious redemption. Nevertheless, for all the passivity of that condition, they are themselves actively ‘unstringing’ instances of ‘Grace from chance’: for instance, the *mot juste* from the multiple alternatives that ineffectually

a further deferral. Cp. also the Hopkinsian (and Sondheimian) flourish of the first word in three out of five stanzas in the final part of ‘Improvisations for Jimi Hendrix’, including the close: ‘Somewhere the slave is master of his desires / and lords it in great music / and the children dance’ (BH, p. 503).

⁵⁵ Sperling, *Visionary Philology*, p. 160.

clamour for position in the poem before it can ‘*somehow*’ come right.⁵⁶ In ‘The Tartar’s Bow and the Bow of Ulysses’, outlining his concern with the way in which judgement is not only ‘conveyed through language’, but the difficulty of clearing its terms which are predicated on circumstance and contingency, Hill reaches for a metaphor: ‘the writer as a player upon an instrument’, quoting Joyce Rathbone on the musician’s prescience and skilful timing. A few paragraphs later, he takes the measure of Donne’s scabrous wit in strikingly musical terms: ‘[Donne] deliberately tunes in to the harshness, makes comically wretched “business” out of a bad business’ (*CCW*, pp. 201–202). ‘Strung unstringing / Grace from chance’ is therefore a matter of both deliberate, opportunistic tuning, and passive constraint.

Sperling notes that ‘the poetic implications of Hill’s “theology of grace” have been well discussed’, mentioning in particular Peter Walker’s essay ‘*The Triumph of Love: Geoffrey Hill’s contexture of grace*’ among other critical essays.⁵⁷ As discussed in the introduction, in ‘Language, Suffering, and Silence’, Hill’s “serious” proposition of ‘a theology of language’ would base itself on two fundamental premises: the memorializing and ‘memorizing’ of the dead, and ‘a critical examination of the grounds for claiming [...] that the shock of semantic recognition must be also a shock of ethical recognition; and that this is the action of grace in one of its minor, but far from trivial, types’ (*CCW*, p. 405). Hill sees the writer’s patient, attentive craft in collusion (or collision) with chance, the fortuitous conferral of the *mot juste* (which also might be ‘a

⁵⁶ Cp. ‘a poem comes right with a click like a closing box’, W.B. Yeats in a letter to Dorothy Wellesley, September 1935, cited in ‘Poetry as “Menace” and “Atonement”’, *CCW*, p. 4.

⁵⁷ Sperling, *Visionary Philology*, p. 134. n. 3 gives a comprehensive list of critical work on grace in Hill, to which can be added the following article since Sperling’s book was published: Stefan Hawlin, ‘Wales and the Spirit: Reading Geoffrey Hill’s *Oraclau* | Oracles’, *Literature and Theology*, 30.1 (2016), pp. 1–14.

frightful discovery of morality')⁵⁸ as a '*type*' of grace [my italics]; the word is typically ambiguous, and can be taken to mean a singular manifestation of grace, or 'an imperfect symbol or anticipation of something' (*OED3*, n. 1. b).⁵⁹ Moreover, it is unclear whether the shocking 'action of grace' is purely an agency of 'alien' language, rendering the recipient passive, or whether, as Hill seems to suggest with the active form 'unstringing / Grace', the writer is *actively* involved. In the economy of grace, the fundamentals of Hill's 'theology of literature' thus contains two crucial aporia: whether the 'action of grace' belongs to language, the writer/reader, or a "co-operation" of the two; and secondly, whether the human actions of a reader or writer, however felicitous, or even for that matter the "action" of language may be truly said to be an 'action of grace' – which according to Reformed theology from Luther onwards is the gratuitous, unmerited salvation of the soul by God – rather than merely analogous to it.⁶⁰

In his Oxford Professor of Poetry Lecture 'A Deep Dynastic Wound'. Hill once again alludes to the preface from *Style and Faith*, and his argument that Donne's manifestations of 'God's grammar' reconcile style and faith. Hill adds in the lecture to 'God's grammar' another phrase from Donne's sermons: 'God carries us in his Language'. The context is Donne's rejoicing in the fact that biblical Hebrew is a

⁵⁸ T.S. Eliot, 'Thomas Middleton' (1927), cited in 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"', *CCW*, p. 11,

⁵⁹ Cp. Origen's phrase in *Jesu Nave*, his commentary on the book of Joshua: 'typus et umbra cessavit', usually rendered in Anglican hymnody (in the anglicised *Tantum Ergo*) as 'types and shadows have their ending'; see Gerald E. Caspary, *Politics and Exegesis: Origen and the Two Swords* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1979), p. 17, n. 22.

⁶⁰ These difficulties are compounded by the fact that it would seem, as I argue in this chapter, that Hill elusively propounds an Anglo-Catholic theology – both Catholic and reformed. As Brian Cummings writes, a post-Tridentine idea of the sinner as capable of 'active co-operation' in his or her salvation hinged on whether natural human powers (*humanae naturae vires*) were ineffectual in any event, or only ineffectual 'without divine grace through Jesus Christ' (*absque divina per Christum Iesum gratia*), which would allow for some form of co-operation (the Canons of Trent, according to Cummings, were cautiously ambiguous); see *Grammar and Grace*, pp. 328-46.

tenseless (aspectual) language; conflating what modern scholarship describes as the perfective aspect with the “past tense”, Donne writes that being so carried means to rest secure ‘upon that which is past, upon that which he hath done already’.⁶¹ The grammar suggests Calvin, in this case discovering in Hebrew a grammatical *coup de foudre* that seems to argue in favour of predestination.⁶² Hill asks:

where at any point later than [...] eighteenth century hymnody [...] do our poetry and prose take as a given such a sense of the mutual architectonics of cosmic pattern and divine intervention in individual destiny expressed as *language*, the very matter and nature of the medium in which one works?⁶³

Hill’s conclusion is that such a sense of language as ‘God’s grammar’ is scarce in modernity; where it is found, it exists exclusively as parody: he instances James Joyce and Samuel Beckett’s essay ‘Dante, Bruno, Vico, Joyce’. He implies that Beckett’s ‘arrogant’ style, which sees Joyce’s ‘sense forever rising to the surface of the form and becoming the form itself’, is an inverted recollection (figuratively-speaking) of Donne’s ‘God carries us in his Language’; in the perhaps ‘inordinate’ parodic modernity of the

⁶¹ Donne, ‘The second of my Prebend Sermons upon my five Psalmes. Preached at S. Pauls’ (29 January 1625/6), in *The Sermons of John Donne*, vol. VII (1954), p. 62. Cp. also Brian Cummings: ‘future tenses uttered by God [...] behave like present or past tenses’, with implications for ‘the theology of sin and grace’, *Grammar and Grace*, p. 134.

⁶² The resonance of that particular past participle should chime with Donne’s riddling wordplay elsewhere on his name, especially in ‘A Hymn to God the Father’. This is discussed later in the chapter.

⁶³ Hill, *A Deep Dynastic Wound*, Oxford Professor of Poetry lecture, online audio recording, University of Oxford (30 April 2013) <<http://www.english.ox.ac.uk/news-events/regular-events/professor-poetry>> [accessed 23 April 2015].

former there is ‘the dynamic motion of the volcano’, and in the pre-Romantic ‘ordinate’ style of the latter ‘the descent of the dove’. Writ large, Hill’s ‘volcano and dove’ analogy is a metaphor for the different relationship literary style has to faith prior to an eighteenth-century rupture in ‘universally accepted cosmic ideas’, to quote Charles Taylor in a recent interview.⁶⁴ However, the reality of Hill’s engagement with pre-Romantic writers such as Donne and Milton, and moderns influenced by Romanticism to one degree or another such as Hopkins and Yeats, is more complex than this metaphor of rupture allows. As I have already intimated, Donne’s ‘God’s grammar’ may indeed ‘take as a given’ cosmic order; Donne may, as according to Hill in the preface to *Style and Faith*, follow ‘a measure of delivery that confesses his own inordinacy while remaining in all things ordinate’; yet beneath this apparent coherence of style and faith in Donne’s writing, there is a darker subplot. To put it whimsically, Donne’s dove, emissary of ‘God’s grammar’, has the stench of parodic-volcanic lava about it, the ‘sullen vapour’ of Matthew Arnold’s Etna.⁶⁵

Crucially, Hill is consciously aware of this, as I have suggested in the introduction to this thesis with regard to the copula ‘is’ (‘style *is* faith’). There is a textual crux that captures this conscious counter-strain to his sense that in Donne and other isolated examples, style and faith cohere, a quotation in Hill’s essay on T.H. Green; Hill cites Samuel Taylor Coleridge commenting on Donne: ‘Yea, it is most

⁶⁴ ‘Our subtler languages: an interview with Charles Taylor’, by Rebekah Cumpsty and Karl O’Hanlon, *Eborakon* (4 August 2016) <http://www.eborakon.com/2016/08/04/our-subtler-languages-an-interview-with-charles-taylor/> [accessed 5 August 2016].

⁶⁵ Matthew Arnold, ‘Empedocles on Etna’, II. 4, in *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, ed. by Kenneth Allott, 2nd edn ed. by Miriam Allott (London and New York: Longman, 1965, 1969), p. 186. Like ‘Dover Beach’, Arnold’s lyrical drama is an ambivalent lament, drenched with melancholic nostalgia for a *deus absconditus*. Cp. Hill’s trenchant criticism of Arnold’s exclusion of *Empedocles* from the 1853 edition of his *Poems*, on the questionable grounds that (to quote Yeats on the same), ‘passive suffering is not a theme for poetry’, ‘Language, Suffering, and Silence’, *CCW*, p. 402.

affecting [...] to see the Struggles of so great a mind to preserve its inborn fealty to the Reason under the servitude to an accepted article of *Belief*?

As Hill recognises, this ‘stands as a paradigm for some of the most significant Romantic and post-Romantic debate’ on the status of literature in relation to society (*CCW*, p. 110). If Hill’s essay wishes to apply this ‘discrepancy’ in Donne to Green, it is a central claim of this thesis that such a dilemma animates and vexes Hill’s own poetics. There is no need to extrapolate this ‘Struggle’ beyond its status as a textual matter; future biographical studies might ‘complement’ critical studies of Hill’s work, but this is an order that ought not to be inverted.⁶⁶ The intention here is not to arrive at a comprehensive biographical statement of Hill’s difficult Anglican faith, much less to adjudicate on matters of sincere personal belief; rather, the aim is to recognise that the ‘paradigm’ he plucks from Coleridge not only complicates his sense of Donne’s ‘God’s grammar’, implicitly endorsing a Romantic reading of an early modern mind, but also places Hill’s own poetry and criticism within a post-Romantic milieu. In the introduction, I discussed the fact that Hill’s ‘theology of language’ cleaves along two intellectual genealogies, one derived from the theological semantics of the Reformation, and the other from the ‘subtler languages’ of Romanticism, when the widely-shared ‘cosmic syntaxes’ (of the Great Chain of Being, the Trinity, God, and so on) are in decline, and so the poet must ‘make us aware of something in nature for which there are no established words’.⁶⁷ Hill’s Donne (like Hill’s Milton) oscillates across this crucial

⁶⁶ ‘Dr Haffenden recalls his earlier *John Berryman: A Critical Commentary* (1980), and hopes that it will “complement” [his biography of the poet]. I would reverse his emphasis and suggest that, at its best, the present volume admirably complements the previous study’; Hill, ‘Lives of the Poets’, *Essays in Criticism*, 34. 3 (July 1984), pp. 262–69 (262–63).

⁶⁷ See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, pp. 352–76 (353). The phrase ‘cosmic syntaxes’, as noted in my introduction, is adopted by Taylor from Earl Wasserman’s study *The Subtler Language*.

watershed – in ‘A Deep Dynastic Wound’ he praises Donne as an exemplary of the pre-Romantic adherence to ‘cosmic syntax’, the ‘given’ of language as a pattern of divine governance and individual destiny; at other times, Hill reads Donne almost as distressed proto-Romantic, as much in possession of Coleridge’s compensating ‘secondary imagination’ as that self-described “last romantic”, W.B. Yeats.

In the same Oxford lecture, Hill suggests that Milton, a non-conformist republican, shares with his elder near-contemporary ‘Anglican hierarchist’ Donne an understanding of ‘God’s grammar’, even as Milton’s ‘sublime semantic animus’ is seen by Hill as dangerously akin to a post-Romantic volcanic parody of that same grammar.⁶⁸ The Dean of St. Paul’s is himself a dangerous foil to the Jesuit martyr Robert Southwell in Hill’s 1979 essay on the latter; Southwell’s ‘absolute reasonableness’ of style is contrasted with Donne’s ‘masculine perswasive force’:

For Southwell, ‘force... of minde’ is manifested in the power to remain unseduced and unterrified, whereas Donne’s words relish their own seductive strength. Helen Gardner has fairly remarked that Donne forbids us to ‘make any simple equation between the truth of the imagination and the truth of experience’ (*CCW*, pp. 36-7).

⁶⁸ *A Deep Dynastic Wound*.

Hill's approving quotation of Gardner in this Southwell essay (Donne forbids 'any simple equation' between imagination and experience) is strikingly contrary to the 'given [...] of cosmic pattern' that Hill discerns in Donne's poetry and prose in the 2013 Oxford lecture.⁶⁹ Clearly Donne inhabits a shifting scale in Hill's thought, at times paradigmatic of a pre-Romantic concurrence in language between divine ordinance and human action ('style *is* faith'), at others disrupting such a 'simple equation' in his poetry's proto-Romantic 'seductive strength'.

In this chapter, I will begin by establishing the first genealogy from which Hill's 'theology of language' is derived: sixteenth and seventeenth-century religious culture. I argue that Hill's engagement with varied theological understandings of language in Elizabethan and Jacobean literature, types of 'God's grammar', situates itself in relation to the inchoate ecclesiastical polity of the *via media*, a 'centre of gravity' that Hill believes eluded Eliot in his Clark lectures on metaphysical poetry, and which he believes was subsequently discovered and articulated by Helen Gardner: 'To read the *Essays in Divinity* or the Sermons [...] is to feel at once that Donne has absorbed [Richard] Hooker's conception of the *via media* so deeply that it has become the basis of his own thinking' (cited in 'Dividing Legacies', *CCW*, p. 367). It is within this hinterland, the confessional patrimony in which Hill finds himself a 'distressed and errant lay person' ('Of Diligence and Jeopardy', *CCW*, p. 289-90) and sometime preacher, that Hill explores both Donne's columbine aspirations to reconcile style with faith, as well as what I am describing as Donne's proto-Romantic resistances to such an *entente*. Focusing on Hill's sense that the *via media* is an important 'centre of gravity' for

⁶⁹ Compare Hill's citation of Gardner in this essay to his sense elsewhere of Donne's 'recognition of the simple rightness of the things of virtue', 'Caveats Enough in their Own Walks', *CCW*, p. 216.

understanding Donne, I argue that the same historical ecclesiastical polity forms an Anglican “rhythm” against which the eccentric style of both Donne and Hill is realised: a magnetic field of attraction and repulsion between style and faith.

An Anglican “rhythm”

On 9 October 1843, less than two years after her crucial decision not to attend Trinity Church with her father Robert Evans, George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans) wrote a letter to Sara Hennell remarkable for its tonal indeterminacy:

We find that the intellectual errors which we once fancied were a mere incrustation have grown into the living body and that we cannot in the majority of causes [*sic*], wrench them away without destroying vitality. We begin to find that with individuals, as with nations, the only safe revolution is one arising out of the wants which their *own progress* has generated. It is the quackery of infidelity to suppose that it has a nostrum for all mankind, and to say to all and singular, ‘Swallow my opinions and you shall be whole.’⁷⁰

⁷⁰ George Eliot, cited in Rosemarie Bodenheimer, *The Real Life of Mary Ann Evans: George Eliot, her Letters and Fiction* (Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 75.

It is not fanciful to chart in the slippage from a defiantly placed ‘I’ of previous letters to the resolutely neutral (and neutered) ‘we’ a curtailment of the ‘fringes and ribbons of happiness’ that had accompanied Eliot’s first skirmishes in her ‘Holy War’.⁷¹ Rosemarie Bodenheimer suggests that Eliot’s letter betrays tensions beneath the surface of her decision to become non-practising: ‘Whose errors have grown into the living body? [...] Was her own revolution, arising most certainly from the wants which her own progress had generated, not a “safe” one [...]?’ The diction represses these questions.’⁷²

Geoffrey Hill has written variously on the ‘gravitational pull’ of language as everyday circumstance: ‘language gravitates and exerts a gravitational pull’; ‘our stubborn [sic] language’; ‘in making a choice one is also drawing down, as though by natural gravity, that which one has not chosen but which is an inextricable part of the “circumstance”’ (*CCW*, pp. 91, 187, 251 and *passim*).⁷³ Hill is keen to stress ‘a “hinterland” of style’, decidedly historical, as a substantial aspect of such quotidian circumstances (‘The Absolute Reasonableness of Robert Southwell’, *CCW*, p. 29). In his 1972 essay ‘Redeeming the Time’, Hill positions Eliot in relation to the Anglican tradition she had left:

In 1859, the year of *Adam Bede*, she wrote in a letter of ‘a sympathy... that predominates over all argumentative tendencies. I have not returned to dogmatic Christianity... but I see in it the highest expression of the religious

⁷¹ Ibid. p. 74.

⁷² Ibid. p. 75.

⁷³ On ‘gravity’ and language, see also Robert Macfarlane, ‘Gravity and Grace in Geoffrey Hill’.

sentiment that has yet found its place in the history of mankind.’ Being able to think in these terms – [Gerard Manley] Hopkins would have considered it a sloppy form of idealism – enabled her to stay imaginatively, if not actually, “in stride” with the Anglican parochial and national life. The power of this Anglican “rhythm” should not be underrated [...] (*CCW*, p. 104).

Hill’s musing on George Eliot and an Anglican “rhythm” in ‘Redeeming the Time’ is contemporaneous with the original publication of ‘An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture’ in a festschrift for George Barker, edited by John Heath-Stubbs and Martin Green.⁷⁴ Just as the essay quotes Evelyn Waugh on the ‘medieval cathedrals and churches’, social hierarchies, and liturgy that derived from Elizabethan England, which explains the initial sense of loss felt by the Anglican convert to Roman Catholicism, Hill’s poem parades this patrimony self-consciously – Coleridge, Pugin, Tennyson, the British Raj, and Victorian revivalism. As Hugh Haughton writes apropos the poem’s title, ‘it might even tempt the modern reader into classifying its author as a deviously nostalgic revivalist of outmoded poetic and theological architecture [...]’.⁷⁵ However, the poem, as Haughton recognises, is alert to the conditions of nostalgia and sentimentality of those ‘old hymns of servitude’ (*BH*, p. 125) that compose its images. It is later published in Hill’s 1978 volume *Tenebrae*, sections of which first appeared as

⁷⁴ See Kenneth Haynes, ‘A Bibliography of Geoffrey Hill’, in *GHEW*, pp. 170-204 (183).

⁷⁵ Haughton, “‘How fit a title...’: title and authority in the work of Geoffrey Hill”, in *Geoffrey Hill: Essays on his Work* ed. by Peter Robinson (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1985), pp. 129-48 (129). Hereafter, *GHEW*. Haughton’s scrupulous modal phrasing proved too subtle for the critic Tom Paulin, who in his review of this collection of essays succumbed to the temptation and then some, describing Hill as a ‘chthonic nationalist’; see ‘The Case for Geoffrey Hill’, *London Review of Books*, 7.6 (4 April 1985), pp. 13-14.

part of ‘Ad incensum lucernae’, a cantata with music by James Brown performed at the University of Leeds, 4 February 1975.⁷⁶ On being asked in an interview in 2011 what influence his religion has on his poetry, he replied ‘Very little. There was a brief period when the Church of England took me up after I published *Tenebrae* but subsequent books have once more put a distance between us, to our mutual relief.’⁷⁷

Notwithstanding his evasive reply (and the slightly unconvincing “brevity” of the involvement)⁷⁸, the timing of such a patronage bears scrutiny in relation to the liturgical style and vexed theology of the poems in that volume, and the ‘Anglican “rhythm”’ which Hill sees as forming George Eliot’s hinterland in a contemporaneous essay. When Hill writes that such an imaginative pace-keeping with Anglican ‘parochial and national life’ despite formal renunciation ‘should not be underrated’, is he still only thinking of George Eliot?

Vincent Sherry has written that Hill’s is ‘a poetic idiom rooted in an idea of culture, but he sings a late liturgy in an uncommon tongue’.⁷⁹ More than ‘an idea of culture’, however, I want to suggest that the Anglican “rhythm” he ascribes to George Eliot (notwithstanding her ‘self-excommunication’ and the social ostracism she suffered) is equally a hinterland to Hill’s own vexatious poetics on style and faith. His

⁷⁶ See Haynes, ‘A Bibliography of Geoffrey Hill’, *GHEW*, pp. 183–84.

⁷⁷ ‘Interview: Geoffrey Hill, a Ruskinian Tory’, by Jessica Campbell, *Oxford Student* (26 May 2011) <<http://oxfordstudent.com/2011/05/26/interview-geoffrey-hill-oxford-professor-of-poetry/>> [accessed 8 May 2016].

⁷⁸ See, for instance, Rowan Williams’s enthusiasm for Hill’s work, including a 2008 interview printed in the introduction to Pennington and Sperling, *GHC*, pp. 1–3, and Hill’s friend Peter Walker, *quondam* Bishop of Ely: ‘one finds oneself searched, as a Christian and as a Churchman, by this poetry [...] searched in one’s sense of what the Church is in fact about’; ‘The Poetry of Geoffrey Hill’, *The Cambridge Review* (June 1985), p. 104; cited in Jennifer Kilgore-Caradec, ‘Kinesis, Kenosis and the Weakness of Poetry’, p. 49.

⁷⁹ Vincent Sherry, *The Uncommon Tongue: The Poetry and Criticism of Geoffrey Hill* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1987), p. 36.

writing is simultaneously attuned to the theology and ecclesiastical polity of the Anglican church, and in tension with it. As we have seen in the introduction, ‘Genesis’ is paradigmatic of the broader friction between religious faith and poetic vision that energises his work, and poems in *For the Unfallen* such as ‘Holy Thursday’ and ‘God’s Little Mountain’ harness that post-Romantic collision. Yet in ‘The Bidden Guest’, a Miltonic peroration against empty ceremony, the specific context of Hill’s Anglicanism is foregrounded. Not only did Hill sing in the local church choir until going up to Oxford; he also attended Sunday school: ‘six days / a week – Saturdays off – the sustained, / inattentive, absorbing of King James’ English’ (*The Triumph of Love*, in *BH*, p. 271).⁸⁰ In the 1981 John Haffenden interview published in *Viewpoints*, Hill adopts Joseph Cary’s description of a poem by Eugenio Montale, ‘Iride’, to describe his faith: ‘a heretic’s dream of salvation, expressed in images of the orthodoxy from which he is excommunicate.’⁸¹ In Hill’s case, that ‘orthodoxy’ and its images are mid-twentieth century Anglicanism, derived from the articulation of a *via media* by Hooker and others at the start of the seventeenth century that he exhaustively researches in his later teaching and criticism. Donne comes to be an important figure in Hill’s Anglican “rhythm” for his contribution to the *via media*, not only as a corrective to the vitiated, residual aspects of Anglican sentiment to mid twentieth century British public and domestic life, but more crucially for Donne’s distressed improvisations on that late-Elizabethan/Jacobean *basso ostinato*.

As I’ve made clear in at the outset of this chapter, a study of Hill’s style and faith and its contradictions is not intended as a crude counterpoint between biography and

⁸⁰ See Peter Robinson, introduction to *GHEW*, p. ix.

⁸¹ Hill, in *Viewpoints*, in John Haffenden, p. 98.

text, whereby the poetic style is seen to be either a transparent copy of, or an artistic stand-off with the poet's personal beliefs. The magnetic 'field of force' (to purloin one of Hill's Oxford Professor of Poetry titles) that exists between style and faith in his work is more interwoven than blocs of opposition, and I am interested in how that collision and collusion operates within the matter of language. Where biographical and contextual material becomes important is in helping to situate Hill within the particularities of the surrounding Anglican "rhythm" – the vast changes in religious and public life in Britain from the Second World War to the millennium. As he writes in 'Redeeming the Time' (again, ostensibly apropos George Eliot), an Anglican "rhythm" constitutes 'a pattern of inherited living, in which the interchange of expectation and limitation constitutes the private drama' (*CCW*, p. 105). Naturally, Hill's own 'private drama' is shaped by a very specific historical moment.

The Anglican church into which Hill was baptised and sang as a choir member in his youth was markedly different to that of Donne, and perhaps at another remove again from that in which his wife, the librettist Alice Goodman, still ministers as a priest, and in which Hill occasionally delivered sermons in later years.⁸² In the essay 'Civil Polity and the Confessing State' (2008), in addition to praising the courageous witness of the Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer against Nazism (Hill pays homage to Bonhoeffer in 'Christmas Trees' from *Tenebrae*), Hill singles out two separate gestures by Anglican churchmen – 'beautiful, profound, heart breaking, forlorn' – as instances of the civil action he is praising: George Bell's opposition to heavy bombardment of

⁸² For a brief overview of the Church of England in twentieth-century Britain, see Andrew Chandler, 'Faith in the Nation? The Church of England in the 20th century', *History Today*, 47. 5 (5 May 1997) <http://www.historytoday.com/andrew-chandler/faith-nation-church-england-20th-century> [accessed 10 August 2016].

German cities and attempts to have the existence of a German Resistance acknowledged, including the *Bekennende Kirche*, and Robert Runcie's remembrance of the Argentinian war dead during Margaret Thatcher's 'triumphalist Falklands service of Thanksgiving in St. Paul's'.⁸³ These, however, are isolated acts. As we have seen, in 'Dividing Legacies' Hill excoriates T.S. Eliot's Clark lectures for misdirecting their 'centre of gravity' vis-à-vis Donne from the proper consideration of his *via media* to an irrelevant consideration of Dante. He lambasts Eliot's critical neglect of the attention paid to the 'pitch' of words, their semantic distinctions, by the Anglican divine Richard Hooker, before concluding that *Four Quartets* replaces such 'pitch' with 'tone', its concession to 'known habits of association' (which Wordsworth's 1800 'Preface' to *Lyrical Ballads* holds in suspicion).⁸⁴ Hill writes, 'the residual beneficiaries of *Four Quartets* have been Larkin and Anglican literary "spirituality", two seeming incompatibles fostered by a common species of torpor' (*CCW*, p. 377-79).⁸⁵

Clearly, Donne's seventeenth-century *via media*, and those rare, stark acts of civil disobedience by the twentieth century bishops Bell and Runcie, constitute a very different "rhythm" of Anglicanism to such 'torpor'. According to Hill, however, when he returns to late Eliot in a 2001 memorial lecture in the poet's hometown of St. Louis, Missouri, it is the latter form that has been the dominant rhythm in the twentieth century, not only in the church but in public life more generally:

⁸³ Hill, 'Civil Polity and the Confessing State', *The Warwick Review*, 2.2 (2008), pp. 7-20 (14-15).

⁸⁴ For a critical review of Hill's pitch/tone distinction, see Peter Robinson, 'Toiling in a Pitch', *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 26.3 (Autumn 1997), pp. 263-269.

⁸⁵ Christopher Ricks, whose enthusiasm for Larkin and Eliot is met with chagrin by Hill in a hefty footnote to this citation, has since replied in his book *True Friendship*, arguing that Hill's ingratitude to Eliot (and even Larkin) belies deep affinities.

In *Four Quartets* [...] Eliot is invested in [...] what is accepted. You can object that he is addressing as a communicant Anglican a nation which is only in a nominal or residual sense Christian. Nevertheless, half a century ago in Britain, particularly in the Britain of 1939–45, it was not difficult to prompt a form of immediate assent from that vast but amorphous body of residual Christian acceptance (‘Word Value in F.H. Bradley and T.S. Eliot’, *CCW*, p. 541).

Hill’s sense is that despite increasing secularism in the twentieth century, wartime Britain was consolidated by an underlying Anglican “rhythm”, one in which public opinion and Eliot’s late poetry exist in mutual connivance. He writes of ‘the seamless way in which the language of *Four Quartets* merges into the faintly rhapsodic language of the Anglican commentaries upon it’ (ibid), singling out the ‘*bienpensant* soliloquies’ of John Booty’s *Meditating on Four Quartets* (1983).⁸⁶ Such literary “spirituality” (Hill encloses the term in scare quotes) is denigrated in *Speech! Speech!*:

[...] Spiritual osmosis

mystique of argot—I like the gestures

⁸⁶ n., *CCW*, p. 700. Hill is careful to insist that he is not impugning either the sincerity of Eliot’s faith, or the prayer of contemplative orders with which *Four Quartets* has been awkwardly conflated by its enthusiasts.

that come with it: a kind of dumb thieves' cant.

SPI-RI-TU-ALI-TY I salute you (*BH*, p. 298).

Hill's indictment of 'cultic pathology' (*ibid.*) in the poem is mirrored in the sonic qualities of 'SPI-RI-TU-ALI-TY', an aural equivalent to "air quotes" that question the spirituality of ritual.⁸⁷ Hill's feelings, however, are dubious: 'I like the gestures'. In *The Triumph of Love*, this casuistic alertness to 'pitch' that he finds wanting in the Anglican afflatus of Eliot's late work is once more at the service of satire: 'for religious read religiose [...] For iconic priesthood, read worldly pique and ambition' (*BH*, p. 250); 'let us continue to abuse one another / with the kiss of peace' (p. 251). In this modern jeremiad, he excoriates what he describes in his Remembrance service sermon at Balliol College (11 November 2007) as 'nationalist-pantheist-chthonic' sentiment (that last adjective, a piquant allusion to Paulin's attack on Hill's own politics).⁸⁸ Of the so-called 'Guilty Men' and their policy of appeasement, Hill writes:

their Authorized Version—it had seen better days—

'nation shall not lift up sword against nation'

or 'nation shall rise up against nation' (a later

⁸⁷ On the context-dependent value of scare quotes according to Hill, see 'Our Word is Our Bond', *CCW*, p. 150.

⁸⁸ 'A Sermon Preached in Balliol College Chapel, 11 November 2007', in *Balliol College Annual Record* (Oxford: 2008), pp. 24-7 (26).

much-revised draft of the treaty) (*BH*, p. 241).

The connection of disastrous misgovernance in the 1930s to the hierarchical sway of James I over the 1604 Hampton Conference and his ‘Authorized’ bible bears comparison to Hill’s Balliol sermon, where he defines the same quotation from Micah 4:3 as ‘a Brotherhood of Man soundbite’, which outside its ‘valid Scriptural [context]’ produces only ‘indefinite, indiscriminate pathos’.⁸⁹ Hill insists, therefore, that the tenor of this condescending and authoritarian national piety is not confined to areas of religious belief, but informs political and civil society more broadly, even such august secular institutions as the ‘ubiquitous voice of the BBC’ (*CCW*, p. 541).

However, the twenty-first century Church of England’s “rhythm” certainly does not escape his censure in *The Triumph of Love*; its ritual, and perhaps especially, aspects of parochial life. Sections LXVI and LXVII implicate, and juxtapose, John Donne with this historically-removed Anglican setting:

[...] Why do I

take as my gift a wounded and wounding

introspection? The rule is clear enough: last

⁸⁹ ‘A Sermon Preached in Balliol’, p. 24.

alleluias *forte*, followed by indifferent

coffee and fellowship (*BH*, p. 258).

Here, Hill's gloomy, scrupulous solipsism is both superior and inferior to the cheery mediocrity of modern Anglican worship, its 'rule' a travesty of the 'official doctrine and formal elegance' of the Church of England as formulated in Hooker's *The Lawes of Ecclesiasticall Politie* ('The Eloquence of Sober Truth', *CCW*, p. 342). 'Rule' in this context is not magisterial 'common' form (which Hill finds chiefly expressed in syntax and word "pitch" such as that of Hooker), but petty parochial convention. The zeugma of the last two lines is vicious, damning the after-service coffee as 'indifferent' but implying that the 'fellowship' is similarly wanting.

'A wounded and wounding introspection' evokes the 'particular complicity of actives and passives' that, as we have seen, Hill sees as characteristic of seventeenth century writers, and which may be influenced by Calvin's interpretation of Augustine on free will (*CCW*, p. 314). The grammar and interiority recalls one of Hill's most significant tropes for original sin, taken from Luther's Augustinian formulation '*homo incurvatus in se*'.⁹⁰ More specifically, Hill's self-retorting syntax plays on Donne's own rendering of that theological crux in several of his *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*:

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 25. Hill offers in the sermon 'an item of elementary further reading', Matt Jensen's *The Gravity of Sin: Augustine, Luther and Barth on homo incurvatus in se* (London: T & T Clark, 2007). Cp. '*cor curvum in se ipsum*' in 'Language, Suffering, and Silence', *CCW*, p. 400. Matthew Sperling's section on this Augustinian-Lutheran crux is illuminating: *Visionary Philology*, pp. 142-48.

But what have I done, either to *breed*, or to *breath* [sic] these *vapors*? They tell me it is my *Melancholy*. Did I infuse, did I drinke in *Melancholly* into my selfe? It is my *thoughtfulnesse*; was I not made to *thinke*? It is my *study*; doth not my *Calling* call for that? (cited in 'Our Word is Our Bond', *CCW*, p. 161).

I am a recipocrall plague: passively and actively contagious [...] our selves are in the plot, and wee are not onely passive but active too, to our own destruction' (cited in *ibid.*)

In 'Our Word is Our Bond', Hill writes that 'Donne, while conceiving of a passivity which he strives to separate from malignant intention, precludes, in that very conceiving and striving, the completeness of the distinction' (*CCW*, p. 161). Hill insists that this is not to be confused with Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, which 'wilfully and perversely [confounds] licentiousness with study'; nevertheless, he is forced to admit that such 'being in the plot' can easily be thought of as 'the peculiar nature and burden of that activity we are accustomed to call "thinking experience"' (*ibid.*, p. 162). Hill's poetry, to be clear, is no Faustian duel with faith; the 'blind god' of Hill's art, unlike the sightless deity in his early poem named after Marlowe's play, knows well that 'it is blind' (*BH*, p. 31). As with Donne's syntax in *Devotions*, Hill's 'wounded and wounding introspection' retorts upon itself self-accusingly, 'exhibiting the symptom at the very moment' that Hill diagnoses the condition (*CCW*, p. 162). The zeugma that archly

suggests that Hill's Anglican parish entails 'indifferent' fellowship as well as just mediocre coffee is counterweighted by Hill's rebarbative Donnean syntax, the sense that his morbid introversion may be as much if not more to blame for the indifference of fellow laity.

Ironically, Hill returns to Donne's phrase 'our selves are in the plot' as a lay preacher to that same 'indifferent' company, in his sermon in Balliol College chapel: 'What Donne means,' he says, 'is that we are existentially compromised', before going on to list Donne as one of those writers he encountered in his lifelong career as a lecturer who contributed to his 'deep and abiding sense of the reality of original sin'. He concludes:

yet, paradoxically, it is within this contexture of necessary, ineluctable circumstance that our hope lies. What is grace? In one of its many dimensions it is the gift of vigilance within the contexture of circumstance [...] Somehow (a word much favoured by F.H. Bradley) we must encounter the Logos within the lawlessness and inarticulacy of our daily being.⁹¹

As in the line from *Clavics*, 'banking with God's grammar' in which the poet is 'unstringing / Grace from chance', the sermon again recommends 'vigilance within the contexture of circumstance', the crabbed 'actives and passives' of Donne's Augustinian

⁹¹ 'A Sermon Preached in Balliol', p. 26.

syntax which, as we have seen, broach the difficulties of reconciling divine grace with human agency.

The effect of this immersive struggle with language can divert the poet from preconceived intentions: in the section of *The Triumph of Love* that immediately precedes this recollection of Donne's *Devotions*, Hill sets out to satirise the rites of the Anglican church:

Christ has risen yet again to their

ritual supplication. It seems weird

that the comedy never self-destructs.

Actually it is strengthened – if

attenuation is strength. (Donne

said as much of gold. Come back,

Donne, I forgive you; and lovely Herbert.)

But what strange guild is this

that practices daily

synchronized genuflection and takes pride

in hazing my Jewish wife? [...] (*BH*, pp. 257-58).

Hill initially mocks the ‘comedy’ of millennial Anglicanism, its narrow conformity (‘synchronized genuflection’) and English snobbery towards Hill’s wife, the librettist Alice Goodman who converted to Anglicanism from Judaism in the early 1990s, and subsequently entered Holy Orders. Yet in the very ‘contexture of circumstance’ he finds himself ‘*somehow*’ in admiration of its perverse self-subsistence; its ‘attenuation is strength’, like malleable gold. The allusion is to Donne’s ‘A Valediction Forbidding Mourning’, where the same conceit converts his mortal separation from his wife into a spiritual refinement:

Our two souls therefore, which are one,

Though I must go, endure not yet

A breach, but an expansion,

Like gold to aery thinness beat.⁹²

In the ‘ineluctable’ position of having to write an elegy which urges a moratorium on mourning his beloved, with heartbreaking fortuitousness Donne stumbles upon the simile of gold’s ductility for the continuance of their spiritual union. Similarly, Hill’s

⁹² Donne, *The Complete English Poems*, ed. by A.J. Smith (London: Penguin, 1971, repr. 1996), p. 84. Janel Mueller has edited Donne’s works for the Oxford University Press 21st-Century Authors series which is an authoritative edition, but I have chosen to cleave to the range of scholarly editions available to Hill during his academic career.

allusion acknowledges that despite his rancour against the Anglican church, he admires its perseverance, especially as manifested in ‘solitary ardours of faith’ (to steal a phrase from Hill’s short biographical note on the French Catholic Charles Péguy, ‘self-excommunicate but adoring’).⁹³ Donne is exempted from the rant against the ‘strange guild’ of which Hill is a sceptical member: ‘Come back, / Donne, I forgive you’. In *The Triumph of Love*, after savaging sanctimonious ‘regular morning and evening / glossolalia’ and ‘proud ignorance of doctrine’, he salutes ‘the protracted, indeterminate, / passion-through-history of the English Church, / the Church of Wesley, Newman, and George Bell’ (*BH*, p. 269). The Methodist ‘desperado’ (see *CCW*, p. 344), the most famous Victorian convert to Rome, and the episcopal thorn in Churchill’s side are Hill’s ‘passion-through-history’ English Church: this is the ‘indeterminate’ Anglican “rhythm” to which Hill is attuned, in an idiosyncratic extrapolation of *via media* diversity.⁹⁴ If it is certainly “broad”, it is necessary to add that it does not fit comfortably within the recognizable tradition of latitudinarianism, which was equated with national apostasy by Newman, Keble, and other nineteenth-century high churchmen highly-regarded by Hill; see, for instance, his approving quotation of the Catholic convert Hopkins’s parodic rendering of Robert Browning’s Broad Church school ‘bluster’, ‘the air and spirit of a man bouncing up from table with his mouth full of bread and cheese and saying that he meant to stand no blasted nonsense’ (cited in ‘The Exemplary Failure of T.H. Green’, *CCW*, p. 118).

⁹³ Hill, *The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy* (London: André Deutsch, 1983), p. 31.

⁹⁴ Latterly, Hill has commended the Anglican style of Anne Ridler in Judith Aronson’s *Likenesses: with the sitters writing about one another* (Manchester: Lintott, Carcanet Press, 2010), p. 77, and also Charles Williams, throughout his unpublished Oxford Professor of Poetry lectures, and in the final two essays in *CCW*, esp. pp. 562-63, 572-73; the last prose work published while Hill was alive was a review essay on Williams, ‘Mightier and Darker’, *The Times Literary Supplement* (23 March 2016) <<http://www.the-tls.co.uk/articles/public/mightier-and-darker/>> [accessed 12 August 2016].

Clearly, Hill's 'English Church' identification is markedly different to that "rhythm" of mediocrity that Hill detects in the rhetorical tempo of British public life in the latter half of the twentieth century. In his Great St. Mary's sermon "Orderly Damned, Disorderly Saved", celebrating the ordination of women and challenging evangelical homophobia, he states of the contemporary Church of England 'its rule is mediocrity, not as [...] Donne [and other early divines] would have understood and employed the term, to convey the measured plenitude of the *via media*, but in its debased sense [...]'⁹⁵ Hill characterises *that* mediocrity as amorphously, obliquely "Anglican" in the character of its institutional pieties, with Eliot's pitch-less lyric address in *Four Quartets* as exemplary of its style. By contrast, Hill's 'protracted, indeterminate' Anglican "rhythm", as we have seen, pulses from the alert, active-passive linguistics of the Reformation, language as the instrument of correction and ethical insight, rather than a passive vehicle for high-minded "spiritual" cliché.

As Hill states in his *Paris Review* interview, 'the seventeenth-century English metaphysicals are the greatest example' of such a recognition; 'Donne, Herbert, Vaughan—in which the language seems able to hover above itself in a kind of brooding, contemplative, self-rectifying way'.⁹⁶ All three poets were proponents of the *via media*, which Hill asserts eluded Eliot in the Clark lectures as the proper 'centre of gravity' of

⁹⁵ Hill, "Orderly Damned, Disorderly Saved": A Sermon Preached at Great St. Mary's, University Church of Cambridge (16 October 2011)

<<http://www.gsm.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/Geoffrey-Hill-2011.pdf>>

[accessed 20 May 2015].

⁹⁶ Hill, 'The Art of Poetry No. 80: An Interview with Geoffrey Hill', Carl Phillips, *Paris Review*, 154, (Spring 2000) <<http://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/730/the-art-of-poetry-no-80-geoffrey-hill>> [accessed 12 August 2016].

metaphysical poetry, especially Donne. It is to the complex historiography of that theology, and more importantly Hill's reception of it, that I now turn.

The Middle Way

In the 'Preface' to *Style and Faith*, Hill follows his insistence that 'with Donne, style *is* faith' with an important sub-clause: such an equivalence is 'a measure of delivery that confesses [Donne's] own inordinacy while remaining in all things ordinate' (*CCW*, p. 263). As Matthew Sperling writes regarding this statement, John Donne is 'chief among Hill's masters of ordering the inordinate'.⁹⁷ Sperling exhaustively traces the inflexions of 'inordinate' in Hill's unpublished thought, chiefly his 1996 lecture 'Thou Ailest Here, and Here', noting the vexed Augustinian theological roots of Hill's usage and the ambiguities, as in the second poem in *Scenes from Comus*:

That we are inordinate creatures

not so ordained by God; that we are

at once rational, irrational – and there is reason (*BH*, p. 421).

⁹⁷ Sperling, *Visionary Philology*, p. 128.

As Sperling writes, Hill's 'sermonizing gambit' of placing divine ordinance remotely above and against human inordinacy is rhetorically undercut by the 'rational, irrational' compact of inveterate human nature.⁹⁸ Such dissonant counter-strains to Hill's Anglican "rhythm" are central to the argument of this chapter in terms of how rhetorical style complicates and ultimately frustrates a vaunted resolution with faith, but for the moment I want to explore a little further Hill's tacit suggestion that Donne confesses inordinacy while keeping to the ordinate. The sermon that Hill quotes in the Preface to instance Donne's equation is an act of syntactical funambulism, carefully treading the fine distinctions of words: 'The Holy Ghost is an eloquent Author, a vehement, and an abundant Author, but yet not luxuriant; he is far from a penurious, but as far from a superfluous style too' (cited *CCW*, p. 263). When in 'Keeping to the Middle Way' in the same essay collection, Hill touches once again on this Reformation impulse for verbal precision, it is to further situate it historically: "vehemencie of affection" / "vehementest affection": in Anglican apologia of this period the line between the inordinate and the ordinate can be as fine as this' [the first quotation is Hooker's pejorative, the second is an approving phrase from Donne] (*CCW*, p. 312).⁹⁹

Hill's Ash Wednesday sermon at Trinity College, Cambridge on 6 February 2008 returns to 'nuance and fine distinction' in 'the prose and verse of the English sixteenth and seventeenth centuries [...] Roman Catholic as well as Anglican and Separatist.'¹⁰⁰ The Augustinian resonances behind ideas of 'ordinate/inordinate' semantic distinction, as with many areas of contention, provided a common language

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 126-27.

⁹⁹ The "inordinate" valences of 'vehemence', as Hill explores the word in relation to Milton, are discussed in the second chapter.

¹⁰⁰ Hill, 'Ash Wednesday Sermon', p. 2.

that was shared across confessional divides in Reformation, even as the true “grammar” of that common language was itself being vehemently debated. Nevertheless, in ‘Keeping to the Middle Way’ as in much of the critical essays in *Style and Faith*, it is Anglican ecclesiastical and religious writing that concerns Hill, the ‘passion-through-history of the English Church’, where the ecumenism and breadth of his definition to include Wesley and Newman is doctrinal rather than sentimental.

As we have seen in the introduction, Kathryn Murphy’s essay ‘Geoffrey Hill and Confession’ is an extremely important contribution to understanding the vexatious status of faith in relation to written style in the work of Geoffrey Hill. Murphy argues that Hill’s criticism is ‘alive to confessional distinctions’, citing Hill’s adamant insistence in ‘The Weight of the Word’ that ‘language [...] *is* a doctrinal solution’ (*CCW*, p. 363).¹⁰¹ Hill’s obtrusive italics are at issue again, typography asked to reconcile what syntax seems to strain against. Murphy’s essay goes further than any previous criticism in moving discussion of Hill’s sense of theological history from a generalised emphasis on ‘religious experience’ to the crucial, troubling legacies of ‘religious sectarianism’: ‘style *is* faith,’ she writes, ‘and faith inextricably confessional’.¹⁰² Yet in asserting the importance of recognizing Hill’s alertness to confessional and doctrinal differences in his search for ‘God’s grammar’, Murphy is somewhat at a loss to explain how this can be accommodated to the evident “ecumenism” of his poetry (and, for that matter, his prose). Murphy is right to stress Hill’s self-identification with “self-excommunicate” figures like Péguy, Simone Weil, and Aleksander Wat’.¹⁰³ Certainly, this tendency to

¹⁰¹ Murphy, ‘Geoffrey Hill and Confession’, in *GHEW*, pp. 127-42 (131, 129).

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 129.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

closely identify with vexatious or otherwise idiosyncratic expressions of faith complicates the ‘ordinate’ measure of style he commends as typical of ‘God’s grammar’ (and explains the actual nature of his affinities with Donne). Similarly, Murphy also correctly identifies the way in which Hill’s paronomasia in early poems closely traces doctrinal cruxes of Elizabethan and Jacobean writers, resulting in ‘dubieties’ that hold ‘two confessional options simultaneously in mind’.¹⁰⁴

For Murphy, however, a poem or a stanza is not ‘a confession of faith’, and Hill forecloses settled definitions: ‘it is important for the drama of the poetry that these dubieties are not resolved, and do not declare Hill’s own confessional allegiances.’¹⁰⁵ There are therefore unresolved issues in Murphy’s essay, which are in fact acutely responsive to the central antimony that exists in Hill’s ‘theology of language’. On the one hand, Murphy asserts that Hill sees language as inescapably doctrinal, that ‘style *is* faith’; on the other, she states in precise terms the exact counterfactual position: ‘a stanza of a poem is not a confession of faith’. Murphy therefore seems unable to avoid accepting the fact that style, or as she terms it ‘the drama of the poetry’, exists in its own exclusive sphere decidedly apart from doctrine and faith, Hill’s ‘own confessional allegiances’. Far from a critical blind spot, I believe there is every indication that Murphy is aware of the contradiction, and putting her finger on a vital fault-line.

In this chapter, I want to build on Murphy’s apperception that Hill’s sense of faith is decidedly historical and therefore confessional, doctrinal. I further want to suggest that the ecumenical character of Hill’s poetry as well as the broad theological

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., pp. 130-31.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p.131.

cast of his intellectual hinterland is, as far as Hill is concerned, coterminous with the particular Anglican “rhythm” to which his own wracked confessional soundings remain eccentrically-attuned. The rich ambiguities of Hill’s poetry are, by his own reading, analogous to if not historically-determined by aspects of *via media* Anglican eloquence which Hooker exemplifies, and which in turn is richly variegated by figures like Burton, Clarendon, even Nashe and Hobbes.¹⁰⁶ Donne, as we have seen, is for Hill (following Helen Gardner) an icon of that *via media*, at the same time as his stylistic originality and verbal power refuses to become an iconic instance of it, or at least not merely that. As already mentioned in the introduction, Hill has stated, ‘Of the Metaphysicals, I believed I most admired Donne’.¹⁰⁷ The ‘crabbed and ambiguous syntax’ (Milgate) that one encounters in Donne’s language is both a recognisably Anglican register for Hill to tune into, at the same time as Donne’s poetic peculiarities are a discordant riff on the recognisable “rhythm”. The *via media* is therefore an historical and theological force-field into which Hill enters with Donne as his exemplar; its particular verbal energy, released during its nascent formation under the Henrician Reformation through to Donne’s sermons at the Jacobean court, provides Hill with a decidedly-confessional ‘theology of language’ (albeit, as shall become apparent, one characterised by contentious and/or ecumenical breadth). It is within the workings of such an Anglican “rhythm” that one encounters Hill’s emulation of ‘God’s grammar’, the ‘ordinate’

¹⁰⁶ See the essays collected in *Style and Faith*: Tyndale’s ‘diligence’ is of a piece with later Anglican manifestations of ‘sixteenth-and-seventeenth-century moral energy and scruple’, (‘Of Diligence and Jeopardy’, *CCW*, p. 295), while even Shakespeare is (via Nashe) beneficiary of ‘the accumulating memory of post-Reformation written and spoken English’, ‘Keeping to the Middle Way’, *CCW*, p. 298.

¹⁰⁷ In Haffenden, *Viewpoints*, p. 79. Tara Christie has paid tribute to Henry Hart’s elicitation of allusions to Donne and Crashaw from Hill’s poetry, adding that there is work to be done on Hill’s ‘career-long Metaphysical engagement’; Christie, “‘For Isaac Rosenberg’: Geoffrey Hill, Michael Longley, Cathal Ó Searcaigh”, in *The Oxford Handbook of British and Irish War Poetry*, ed. by Tim Kendall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 542-63 (550).

attempts to make style and faith cohere, which as we have seen is an extremely ‘fine line’. Yet even as Donne is the paragon of this elusive equivalence, his original and eccentric style ultimately frustrates such a simple equation (such is Hill’s post-Romantic sense of Donne as a proto-Romantic): as Hill writes most keenly in ‘Keeping to the Middle Way’, although ‘inordinate’ is ‘his characteristic pejorative, [Donne] himself inclines to the inordinate’ (*CCW*, p. 312).¹⁰⁸

The *via media* Anglicanism that Hill posits has been the subject of critical debate in contemporary historiography. Nicholas Tyacke has baldly stated the case ‘the idea of an Anglican *via media* is a myth’ owing largely to the nineteenth century revisionism of the Library of Anglo-Catholic Theology.¹⁰⁹ Hill, in writing that Helen Gardner later made the ‘necessary conjunction’ in asserting the significance of the *via media* to Donne’s thinking which went unremarked in Eliot’s 1926 Clark lectures, observes that she did so as a ‘disciple of Eliot’, who in his essay of the following year on John Bramhall ensured that ‘the *via media* once more came into acceptable critical parlance’ (*CCW*, p. 368). This would seem to support to some degree Tyacke’s account of Tractarian and later “revisionism” creating a mythological “middle way”. In contrast, Peter White has defended the historical validity of the *via media*, noting that ‘the Elizabethan settlement was intended to be as inclusive as possible [...] The result was a Church that stood in an unmistakably intermediate position between the more “precise” Churches of the

¹⁰⁸ Cp. Eliot: ‘[Donne] is not wholly without kinship to Huysmans [...] He is dangerous only for those who [...] fascinated by “personality” in the romantic sense of the word – for those who find in “personality” an ultimate value – forget that in the spiritual hierarchy there are places higher than that of Donne’; from ‘Lancelot Andrewes’ (1926), in *Selected Essays*, p. 352.

¹⁰⁹ Tyacke, ‘Lancelot Andrewes and the Myth of Anglicanism’, in *Conformity and Orthodoxy in the English Church c.1560-1660*, ed. by Peter Lake and Michael Questier (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2000) pp. 5-33.

continent and the Church of Rome.’¹¹⁰ The approach taken by Peter Lake and Michael Questier, itself a ‘middle way’, seems persuasive: they view orthodoxy and conformity (and therefore “the middle way”) ‘not as stable quantities but rather as sites of conflict and contest’.¹¹¹ The Donne scholar Jeanne Shami has stated that if the crude binaries of Catholic/Protestant (with Anglicanism as a *via media*), and later Anglican/Puritan in the Jacobean Church are woefully insufficient, the terminological spectrum that has superseded them in current early modern historiography (ranging from crypto-popery through Calvinist conformism to radical nonconformism) scarcely improve on the oversimplification. Furthermore, she adds that the polarising controversial literature of the time has the effect of reinscribing the identities that scholars have taken pains to deconstruct.¹¹²

Clearly, Hill’s sense of Donne as a figure of the *via media* is profoundly influenced by the Anglo-Catholic sensibilities of scholarship on early modern literature that dominated the middle half of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to think that his interpretation is naïve: he rejects Eliot’s famous formulation from the preface to *For Lancelot Andrewes* which includes the description ‘anglo-catholic in religion’ as ‘in the spirit of the flâneur’ (*CCW*, p. 558). While Tyacke is correct that nineteenth-century high church propaganda “mediates” a twentieth century sense of the *via media*, it is an overstatement to conclude that it is a belated

¹¹⁰ White, ‘The *via media* in the early Stuart Church,’ in *The Early Stuart Church 1603-1642* ed. by Kenneth Fincham (London: Macmillan, 1993) pp. 211-30 (213).

¹¹¹ Lake and Questier, eds, *Conformity and Orthodoxy*, xx. On the ‘complex and controversial’ religious identities of post-Reformation Europe, see also Brian Cummings, *Grammar and Grace*, p. 417. Peter Milward’s *Religious Controversies of the Jacobean Age: A Survey of Printed Sources* (London: Scolar Press, 1978) offers an expansive but by no means exhaustive overview of the sheer volume of controversial literature in the era of Donne’s ministry.

¹¹² Jeanne Shami, *John Donne and Conformity in Crisis in the late Jacobean Pulpit* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2003). p. 16.

invention with no actual purchase on early modern religious identity as such, however fractious and contested. In his Ash Wednesday sermon, for instance, Hill (quite correctly) describes Donne's sermon against 'a Doctrine of ease and a Religion of liberty' (referring to Roman Catholic auricular confession and penance and the Geneva Catechism respectively) as a defence of the 'more rigorous [...] penitential procedures of the *via media*'.¹¹³ As Kathryn Murphy writes, Donne sees the Anglican solution as avoiding the Catholic temptation of 'the confessional as insurance' on the one hand, and on the other 'an institutional structure [to counter] "the spiritual malaise, wildness, eccentricity, imperilling of soul by soul"' that Donne believes afflicts the Calvinist separatists.¹¹⁴ Donne is consciously framing the doctrines of Anglicanism as an exacting 'middle way'.

If in the Ash Wednesday sermon Hill praises the doctrinal rigour, the 'ordinate' character of Donne's *via media*, in his sermon "'Orderly Damned, Disorderly Saved'", it is the 'inordinate' intelligence of the *via media*'s 'casuistry' that earns his esteem: that is to say, its own contributions to the feral, opportunistic elements of Reformation-polemical alertness to semantics and circumstance. Measuring Donne against Jesuit near-contemporary adversaries such as Robert Southwell, he now compares rather than contrasts the 'skill in casuistry' of these recusant stylists to 'the signal pitch of authority' that is Donne's own forensic voice. Later in the sermon, Hill shares with the auditory an insight by 'a priest-friend' concerning how the Prayer-Book of Queen Elizabeth, 1559, compounds both the 1549 and 1552 versions – the latter of which seemed to

¹¹³ Hill, 'Ash Wednesday sermon', p. 2.

¹¹⁴ Murphy, 'Geoffrey Hill and Confession', *GHEW*, p. 134. For a recent scholarly articulation of Donne's *via media*, see Shami, *Conformity and Crisis*, pp. 19-20, 31 especially.

impugn the doctrinal implications of the first as regards Communion. It is ‘a supreme instance of our Church, having in mind merely political compromise, creating, in a sense despite itself, a vertical dimension of belief, a true new-minted theology’.¹¹⁵ The ‘Erastian botch’ of 1559, Hill surmises, achieves a yoking together of the theological disparities within the previous two books, and perhaps unintentionally converts mere casuistic expedience into a veritable form of Anglican mediation. The Ash Wednesday sermon extols the doctrinal discipline of the *via media*, while the “‘Orderly Damned, Disorderly Saved’” sermon praises the unintentional, ‘fortuitous coinherence’ of doctrinal toleration. Hill’s *via media*, therefore, although undoubtedly shaped by a mid-twentieth century concept of it popularised in no small part by T.S. Eliot, is more historically-sensitive and exacting than contemporary scholarly suspicion of the term might allow.

A *via media* Anglican “rhythm”, then, is for Hill a matter of how the ‘ordinate’ line that its stylists tread in order to reconcile style and faith is also the measure by which ‘inordinate’ style is recognised; the contrapositive has been asserted by Hill with reference to Donne, in which ‘things of virtue’ must be grasped ‘by way of the “crooked”’ (*CCW*, p. 216).¹¹⁶ Naturally, Hill’s identification with ‘self-excommunicate’ or otherwise vexed forms of confession inflect this concern with the ‘inordinate’ or the “‘extremes”’: in his Ash Wednesday sermon, Hill identifies with the 15% of practising Anglicans who ‘feel almost as if God had cursed us to believe’.¹¹⁷ Perhaps Hill imagines Donne somewhere in that minority, for he writes in *Liber Illustrium Virorum*,

¹¹⁵ Hill, “‘Orderly Damned, Disorderly Saved’”, p. 4.

¹¹⁶ See also Hill’s Oxford Professor of Poetry lecture, *Poetry and Disproportion*, online audio recording, University of Oxford (10 May 2011) <<http://www.english.ox.ac.uk/news-events/regular-events/professor-poetry/professor-sir-geoffrey-hill.html>> [accessed 14 Dec 2012].

¹¹⁷ Hill, ‘Ash Wednesday Sermon’, p. 3.

‘Anyway, bring out the *Sepher / Tephelim*, slowly; soothe the awkward squad’ (*BH*, p. 721), where the Hebrew seems to refer to phylacteries and specifically the Psalms. In a sermon of c.1622, Donne punningly refers to ‘*Sepher Telim* [...] the book of Heapes, where all assistances to our salvation are heaped’ (cited in ‘Keeping to the Middle Way’, *CCW*, p. 315). The ‘awkward squad’ are perhaps the melancholic and unlucky 15% of Anglicans, who would seem to gain some strange spiritual nourishment from acts of farouche paronomasia.

Hill, as he says of Donne, often ‘inclines to the inordinate’ (*CCW*, p. 312): in ‘Caveats Enough in their Own Walks’, Hill refers to ‘Donne’s tributes to “mediocrity” (e.g. to Herbert’s mother, Lady Danvers: ‘her *rule* was *mediocrity*’, cited *ibid.*, p. 212); he adds ‘there is, however, another kind of middle way [...] the “betwixt” of constraint, enforcement, or perplexity’ (*CCW*, p. 214). It is this second kind of ‘middle way’, one of vexed circumstance, that Hill sees as strikingly operative in Donne, and which further distresses the reconciliation of style and faith.

The ‘crooked lybeck’: style and spiritual equivocation

In ‘Keeping to the Middle Way’, Hill notes that the stylists of the Anglican *via media* c. 1590-1630 were heirs of ‘a semantic opportunity (or possibly opportunism) that had accompanied the small grammatical shift from the Church in England to the Church of England’ (*CCW*, p. 302). Hill further emphasises the degree to which this inheritance involved extreme cognizance of the ‘excruciating deaths’ of the victims of Marian

persecution, and an adherence in the final years of the same century to the ‘formal reasonableness’ of the preface to the 1549 Book of Common Prayer ‘to appease all suche diuersitie’ (ibid.). One manifestation of this inheritance was ‘a particular strength of resonance in their use of the word “common” [...] the Anglican apologists are masters of tonal indeterminacy and ring changes on [“common”]’ (*CCW*, pp. 301–02). As we have seen, the rhetorical figure that Hill most closely associates with such “change ringing” is *traductio*. The *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* defines *traductio* as ‘the witty repetition of a word in a changed sense’ (citing Quintillian’s *Institutes of Oratory* for the definition).¹¹⁸ We have already encountered the way in which Hill links *traductio* to the ‘doctrinal-grammatical dilemma’ of Calvin-Augustinian musing on free will, as well as playing with it in allusion to Donne on the nature of religious melancholy (‘a wounded and wounding / introspection’). In this section, I want to argue that for Hill, Donne’s specific post-Reformation style of *traductio* further problematizes a reconciliation between style and faith or what I’ve been troping in this chapter as ‘God’s grammar’. The specific “middle way” that garners Hill’s special attention to the *via media* of Donne is one not so much of ‘diligent mediocrity’, but the ‘crooked’, ‘extreme’, or ‘incongruous’. It is this ‘middle way’ that characterises the Anglican “rhythm” of Hill’s poetry, and nowhere more markedly than in *Tenebrae*.

In ‘Caveats Enough in their Own Walks’, Hill notices that ‘in [Donne’s] ‘H.W. in Hibernia Belligeranti’, [he] engineers a conceit out of the curve-necked alchemical vessels, the “crooked lymbecks”, to argue that the morally crooked world may be made

¹¹⁸ ‘Polyptoton’, *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. by Alex Preminger and others (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965, enlarged edn 1974), p. 34.

to retort upon itself [...] Donne perceives that language itself must be a “crooked lymbeck” (*CCW*, p. 216). In such a contorted retort, however, Donne’s particular *via media* style is revealed. Hooker, by way of contrast, is seen by Hill as possessing ‘semantic ingenuity’ that may be predicated on an idea of ‘equity by fiat of the commonweal and the administrations of the 1559 *Book of Common Prayer*’ (*CCW*, p. 376): in other words, the *traductio* of Hooker’s ‘peaceful and lofty sentences’ (A.P. D’Entrèves, cited *CCW*, p. 329) is at liberty to sort and settle the ‘middle way’ as a matter of policy. In Donne, the situation is more complex. The “crooked lymbeck” may be, as with Hill’s own active–passive scholarly solipsism, the kind of ‘vain curiosity’ of which Hill believes Hooker would reprove, citing as an example ‘Donne [drawing upon himself] as a perverse example to his own congregation: “I pray giddily, and circularly, and return againe and againe to that I have said before, and perceive not that I do so” (cited *CCW*, p. 305). *Traductio* here is dangerously close to spiritual impaction, repetition as a kind of mimesis of Luther’s ‘*homo incurvatus in se*’, whereas Hooker would wish such a style to be expansive rather than intensive, reciprocal rather than self-encumbered.

In *Oraclau* | *Oracles*, the elaborate, torsive stanzas of which are modelled on Donne’s ‘A Nocturnal upon S. Lucy’s Day’, Hill views a winter scene as ‘alchemic-carnal’, and ‘the sun arraying itself in the brittle llyn / A limbeck of itself or of the moon’ (*BH*, p. 750). The strange sense of alchemical doubling, of a process by which the sun’s reflection in the ‘llyn’ or lake transmutes itself so that it might be thought of as ‘the moon’, is of a piece with Hill’s late fascination with alchemy as a strange, perhaps fruitless counterpart to poetry and by extension the transformations that faith proffers. As Stephen James writes, there seems to be an allusion to ‘love’s limbeck’ in ‘A

Nocturnal', and 'the "new alchemy" that love can generate when one is in a state of intense grief. James concludes, however, that 'it is by no means clear' that the transmutation of mourning in Donne's poem 'finds an emotional correlative in Donne's vision'.¹¹⁹ Certainly, what seems at stake in both poems is a sense that such doubling back, such retorsive lingual-chemical experimentation, can lead to emptiness: in Hill, reflective solipsism that cannot be properly distinguished from appearance, and in Donne the savage interiority of grief; 'I, by love's limbeck, am the grave / Of all, that's nothing.'¹²⁰

Hill's most sustained use of *traductio* appears in *Tenebrae*, which as we have seen caused him to be associated with Anglican religious verse. In Hill's 'Lachrimae' sonnets, for instance, there is sustained use of the rhetorical figure, as well as the kind of 'knotty riddle' of language ('To Sir Henry Wotton') that Hill discerns in Donne's paradoxes (*CCW*, p. 209) in the love lyrics, the public verse epistles, and the 'Holy Sonnets'. 'Lachrimae Verae' opens with a typically Hillian *naufrage*, Christ 'the castaway of drowned remorse': 'Crucified Lord, you swim upon your cross / and never move' (*BH*, p. 121). Perhaps the image, as well as being almost a blasphemous visual pun on the crucifixion as a kind of breaststroke, perceives Christ swimming through the "true tears" of the title.¹²¹ Certainly, a similar image appears in Donne's 'The Cross', a defence of the sign of the cross in baptism against the puritan Millenary petition of 1603:

¹¹⁹ Stephen James, 'The Nature of Hill's Recent Poetry', in *The Salt Companion to Geoffrey Hill*, ed. Andrew Michael Roberts (Cambridge: Salt, 2015), pp. 1-32 (11).

¹²⁰ Donne, *The Complete English Poems*, p. 72.

¹²¹ I am indebted to Hugh Haughton for this convincing suggestion.

Who can deny me power, and liberty

To stretch my arms, and mine own cross to be?

Swim, and at every stroke, thou art thy cross,

The mast and yard make one, where seas do toss.¹²²

Donne is challenging the puritans to oblivate the presence of the cross from its similitude in nature, ‘material crosses’ such as ‘birds raised on crossed wings’ and ‘the meridians crossing parallels’. The conceit pursues an ordinate defence of the *via media* position on iconography, and yet the image itself is equivocal, ‘inordinate’ in comparing the act of Atonement with carnal resemblances. In Hill’s poem, Christ’s body is ‘twisted by our skill / into a patience proper for redress’, and there is something about Donne’s metaphysical imagination that “twists by skill”, that resists the ‘ordinate’ in the shocking eccentricity of its style.

The nature of the “true tears” envisaged in the title of this sonnet is virtually an enactment in verse of that same ‘wistful attention’ to Christianity that Hill attributes to Simone Weil in his 1971 essay on Yeats (I will discuss this fully in the final chapter).¹²³

I cannot turn aside from what I do;

¹²² Donne, *The Complete English Poems*, p. 326.

¹²³ See “‘The Conscious Mind’s Intelligible Structure’”, p. 16.

you cannot turn away from what I am.

You do not dwell in me nor I in you

However much I pander to your name

or answer to your lords of revenue,

surrendering the joys that they condemn (*BH*, p. 121).

In another deft essay, ‘Hill’s Conversions’, Kathryn Murphy has explored the idea of *metanoia* as a trope for various ‘turns’ in Hill’s poetry, a ‘critical’ turn upon the self, the sense of sinful incurvation derived from Luther, and the various rhetorical turns such as *traductio* in the verse passage just quoted. She writes, ‘the emphasis on turning is endemic in Hill’s poetry’, noting the ‘web of allusions’ that originate in the Virgilian pun on ‘verse’ in *The Georgics* before concluding that ‘these critical, ethical, and theological [turns] are articulated in a host of “sensuous” tropes’ and language ‘turned upon itself “in a sense most true”’.¹²⁴ One of these tropes is, as I have been exploring, *traductio*: here the word ‘turn’ changes minutely, almost imperceptibly in signification: to ‘turn aside from what I do’ surely means turning away from sin and towards the ‘Crucified Lord’ addressed in the sonnet; the second ‘turn’ is less amenable to such an unambiguous reading. ‘You cannot turn away from what I am’ means that the Lord

¹²⁴ Murphy, ‘Hill’s Conversions’, in *GHC*, pp. 61-80 (75, 77, 80).

cannot ‘turn’ away or overlook what the speaker perceives to be their most fundamental identity in relation to God, i.e. as a sinner; at the same time, the crucified Christ cannot turn away from what God perceives the speaker to be, an object of divine love.

There is a spiritual equivocation, then, on the second ‘turn’ which manages to conceive the “true tears” of the sonnet as hovering between signifying that the tears are those of true *contrition* rather than merely of *attrition*, the recognition of divine love rather than an exculpation premised on one’s inherent sinfulness. Hill’s Ash Wednesday sermon quotes Donne on the distinction as far as Anglican penitential discipline is concerned:

For, for contrition, we doe not, we dare not say, as some of them, that Attrition is sufficient – that it is sufficient to have such a sorrow for sin, as a natural sense, and fear of torment doth imprint in us, without any motion of the feare of God.¹²⁵

Hill adds, ‘in light of this fine-edged discourse [...] I have to confess that I seriously doubt whether I have ever truly repented. That is to say, I have experienced a persistent and overwhelming sense of attrition; I am much less certain that I have felt true contrition.’¹²⁶ ‘Lachrimae Verae’ by these standards seems less a sonnet of contrition, and “true” because “sufficient” (in Donne’s sense), but rather one of attrition and

¹²⁵ ‘Ash Wednesday Sermon’, p. 2.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

“true” because it is an honest confession of a lack of contrition. Its verbal mood is ‘cannot’ (which invites a heckle/theological quibble, “will not?”), and its motivation is fear of torment, ‘dreams of hell’. Here style is not faith, so much as a faithful rendering of faith’s lack. The rhetoric and imagery of many of the ‘Lachrimae’ sonnets allusively conjures Donne’s vexed spiritual states in the *Divine Poems* (and elsewhere): the fear of hell and *traductio* of ‘Lachrimae Coactae’ (‘you are the crucified who crucifies’); in ‘Pavana Dolorosa’ ‘your *nocturnals* blaze upon the day [my italics]’, an extremely rare use of sense 2 of the noun, as in Donne’s poem on the then-Winter Solstice; and finally the imagery of Christ at the door in ‘Lachrimae Amantis’ perhaps suggestive of that ‘knock’ from Donne’s fourteenth ‘Holy Sonnet’.¹²⁷

The mood of ‘Lachrimae Verae’ is reminiscent of a poem such as Herbert’s ‘Love (III): ‘Love bade me welcome: yet my soul drew back, / Guiltie of dust and sinne’.¹²⁸ The *traductio* itself is similar to rhetorical moves in Donne’s *Divine Poems*: one could evidence ‘Because I did suffer I must suffer pain’ from the third ‘Holy Sonnet’, the famous ‘Death thou shalt die’ from the tenth, and perhaps especially the refrain of ‘A Hymn to God the Father’: ‘When thou hast done, thou hast not done, / For, I have more’.¹²⁹ The sense of having “Donne” – a play on his own name that had already been made by London wits to greet his elopement with Anne More – touches

¹²⁷ Of course, the ‘Lachrimae’ sonnets are a brocade of allusions (see Michael Edwards, ‘Hill’s Imitations’ in *GHEW*, pp. 159-71); as well as being a Lope De Vega translation, ‘Lachrimae Amantis’ is perhaps also a nod to William Holman Hunt’s Pre-Raphaelite Christ in his painting ‘The Light of the World’ (1853), which Hill would have encountered in Keble College chapel as an undergraduate. Hill’s assignation of the Catholic (counter) Reformation as his major influence in writing the sonnets is not disputed (see Haffenden, *Viewpoints*, p. 92), and yet I argue, hopefully convincingly, for an underlying Anglican and indeed Donnean “rhythm” to the sonnets’ rhetoric and spirituality.

¹²⁸ Herbert, *The English Poems of George Herbert*, ed. by Helen Wilcox (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 661.

¹²⁹ Donne, *The Complete English Poems*, pp. 310, 312, 348.

upon the ‘knotty’ problem of justification, one that was achingly present in the Arminian controversy, namely the dangers of backsliding into sin and the status of conditional election as opposed to unconditional election favoured by Calvinists.¹³⁰

Traductio also gnarls the syntax of ‘Lachrimae Coactae’ (‘Forced Tears’): ‘What grips me then, or what does my soul grasp? / If I grasp nothing what is there to break?’ (*BH*, p. 123). Compare this to Donne’s ‘Holy Sonnet’ IV: ‘Yet grace, if thou repent, thou canst not lack; / But who shall give thee that grace to begin?’¹³¹ The implosion of actives and passives yet again evokes Calvin and Augustine on the ‘bondage of the will’ (*CCW*, p. 314).¹³² I have particularly focused on *traductio* for its theological and stylistic significance to Hill’s reception of Donne both critically and in his own poetry, but other rhetorical figures closely related abound, such as oxymoron (‘harsh grace and hurtful scorn’), syntactical recoil, and paronomasia: for instance, Hill’s “puritan” pejorative connotation of ‘devotion’ as outward show (*BH*, p. 124); cp. Donne’s ‘pharaisaical / Dissemblers feign devotion’.¹³³

For Hill, these rhetorical “turns” – which as I suggest emulate Donne’s rhetoric especially in the *Divine Poems* – are far from ornamental. It will have been noted that *traductio* as Donne uses it in ‘A Hymn to God the Father’ broaches theological paradox. Hill writes that the ‘mystery’ of words, their ‘dark and disputed matter’ (as Gerard Hopkins puts it) ‘is nothing more or less than “ordinary circumstances”, concluding that language’s “*bona fide* perplexity” is hardly distinguishable from obtuseness,

¹³⁰ See Shami, *John Donne and Conformity in Crisis*, pp. 96–101.

¹³¹ Donne, *The Complete English Poems*, p. 310.

¹³² See also Brian Cummings on the grammatical agonies of Luther’s *scholion* on Romans 1:17, *Grammar and Grace*, pp. 79–88.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 312.

instinctive flinching from disingenuous evasion. Donne, for example, freely invents “paradoxes and problems” but he also has problems that are not paradoxes, that cannot be “impudently” troped but must be rawly acknowledged’ (*CCW*, p. 161). Hill is at pains here to parse out the ineluctable problems of linguistic circumstance from poetic paradoxes, which court shows of sophistry; as I have been intimating, the reality of Hill’s poetry, as with Donne’s, is that their skilful involvement with language cannot completely exclude one from the other.

Robert Southwell, the poet and Jesuit martyr, provides the epigraph to Hill’s ‘pavans’ (modelled on the music of another less-zealous recusant, John Dowland): ‘Passions I allow, and loves I approve, onely I would wishe that men would alter their object and better their intent’ (from *Marie Magdalens Funeral Teares*, 1591, cited in *BH*, p. 121). Hill inverts the epigraph in ‘Pavana Dolorosa’: ‘Loves I allow and passions I approve’. The inversion is not a denigration of Southwell (in the vein of Donne’s 1610 tract *Pseudo-Martyr* and of 1611, *Ignatius His Conclave*).¹³⁴ Rather, as with the confessed ‘attrition’ of ‘Lachrimae Verae’ the chiasmus takes the measure of how much the speaker falls short of the Jesuit’s ‘absolute reasonableness’ and pursuit of equity.¹³⁵ Nevertheless, the inversion relies on rhetorical opportunism to make its point: style here recoils back from a confession of faith, albeit in mimesis of a perfectly understandable inability to grasp the Jesuit’s rare, heroic example of faith. In an unredacted version of Hill’s 2013 interview, released posthumously in July 2016, Hill stated that his inversion

¹³⁴ For the compatibility of Donne’s formative training in the Ignatian method with ‘the general requirements of late Anglican piety’ and an argument for its tenacious hold on Donne, see Anthony Raspa, ed. *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions* (Montreal and London: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1975), pp. xxv-xxvi, xxxi-xl.

¹³⁵ Compare the ‘reverence’ and ‘absolute astonishment’ that Hill confesses regarding Southwell’s martyrdom in ‘The Art of Poetry No. 80: An Interview with Geoffrey Hill’.

revealed him as ‘a very dangerous heretic to the Southwellian point of view [...] it’s saying life doesn’t conform to these formulae, but there is something very often exquisite in your presentation of the formulae’.¹³⁶ In his ‘Epistle’ (from the Waldengrave manuscript), Southwell writes, ‘Poetes by abusing their talent, and making the follies and feynings of love the customary subject of their base endeavours, have so discredited this facultye that a Poett a lover and a lyer, are by many reckoned but three words of one significacion’.¹³⁷ Hill has turned his forensic scrutiny on themes of ‘poetry and perjury’ several times, most recently in his Oxford Professor of Poetry lectures, and (with reference to Sidney’s ‘shrewd’ *Defence* of his art from such charges) in ‘Our Word is Our Bond’ (*CCW* p. 146). He vehemently refuted John Haffenden’s suggestion that his poetry is ‘an art of equivocation’, pointing out that the term only has ethical validity in the context of recusant mental reservation when faced with inevitable torture and death. When the questioner modifies his query to ask whether Hill would ‘resent the criticism that you address yourself to subjects in an ambiguous way’, he responds that ‘the ambiguities and scruples seem to reside in the object that is meditated upon’.¹³⁸

This chapter has endeavoured to show the extent to which the ‘contexture’ of words and circumstances perplex and baffle, making it, as Hobbes writes, ‘a great ability in a man [...] to deliver himself from *Equivocation*, and find out the true meaning of what is said’ (cited in *CCW*, pp. 195-96). The same ‘contexture’ that clouds meaning

¹³⁶ ‘An interview with Geoffrey Hill (1932-2016)’, by Sameer Rahim, *Prospect Magazine* (20 July 2016) [full transcript of an interview first printed in the *Daily Telegraph*, 14 December 2013] <<http://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/blogs/sameer-rahim/an-interview-with-geoffrey-hill-1932-2016>> [accessed 5 August 2016].

¹³⁷ Southwell, from the Stonyhurst MS A.v.27, in *The Collected Poems of Robert Southwell*, ed. by Peter Davidson and Anne Sweeney (Manchester: Carcanet, Fyfield, 2007), p. 1. For Southwell’s importance to ‘Lachrimae’, see Jeffrey Wainwright, *Acceptable Words: Essays on the Poetry of Geoffrey Hill* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), pp. 27-34.

¹³⁸ Hill, in Haffenden, *Viewpoints*, p. 90.

also enriches it: for instance, Donne's pun in 'A Hymn to God the Father' on the theological dubieties of justification is predicated entirely on an arbitrary coinherence of his name with the past participle of 'do'. Nevertheless, Hill's tetchy reaction and disavowal of Haffenden's drift belies the extent to which he has continually been troubled by aspects of this 'knotty' problem: the degree to which poetic rhetoric, or style, is compromised by something other than the 'fundamental idleness' (*CCW*, p. 264) that the Preface to *Style and Faith* diagnoses as vitiating much 'well-intentioned labour'.

In one of his earliest published essays, Hill refers to 'the dangerous anarchism' and 'high treason' of Donne's wit ('Jonson's Dramatic Poetry in *Sejanus* and *Cataline*', *CCW*, p. 52). Mid-twentieth century exchanges on the status of wit in relation to Donne's Metaphysical poetry contemporaneous with this 1960 essay by Hill were, naturally, governed by New Critical praise of verbal ingeniousness.¹³⁹ Notwithstanding the fact that Herbert Grierson's editions of Donne and Metaphysical poetry had been in print for several decades (with critical support from Eliot, and even Yeats expressing admiration), the post-war tributes to Donne's wit still read as though embattled, as if the rehabilitation of Donne and his contemporaries was still a work in progress. William Empson writes how 'the variety of irrelevant, incompatible ways of feeling' in Donne's poetry eschews a lyrical facility for cheap sincerity,¹⁴⁰ while Cleanth Brooks's *The Well Wrought Urn* (1947), which takes its classic title from Donne's 'The Canonization', celebrates Donne's paradoxes: 'the poem is not predetermined to a shallow and

¹³⁹ Cp. J.B. Leishman's title, taken from Carew's elegy, *The Monarch of Wit: An Analytical and Comparative Study of the Poetry of John Donne* (London: Hutchinson, 1935).

¹⁴⁰ Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1953), p. 145.

glittering sophistry. The method is an extension of the normal language of poetry, not a perversion of it'; Brooks shrewdly adds that the 'conscious' employment of paradoxes 'carries with it its own perils'.¹⁴¹

Helen Gardner comes closest to admitting the nub of the matter: 'the almost histrionic note of 'The Holy Sonnets' may be attributed partly to the meditations' deliberate simulation of emotion; it is the special danger of this exercise that, in simulating feeling, it may falsify it...' This she sets alongside Donne's knowing self-appraisal in his 1625 letter to Sir Robert Carr: 'You know my uttermost when it was best, and even then I did best when I had least truth for my subjects.'¹⁴² Hill's defence against Haffenden's implications regarding the equivocal potential of Metaphysical wordplay are to some degree conditioned by a New Critical defensive complex, and yet by the time he comes to deliver the Clark lectures in 1986 five years later, he has somewhat modified his position.

In 'The Tartar's Bow and the Bow of Ulysses', Hill defines the 'metaphysical' quality of Donne's Verse Letters to Sir Henry Wotton as 'the realization that their conceits, however strained, are less fantastic than the common effects of custom and habit and the everyday "wrestings" of accident or deliberate cruelty or malice' (*CCW*, p. 200). This is of a piece with his defence to Haffenden; however, he adds:

¹⁴¹ Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1949), p. 7.

¹⁴² Gardner, 'The Religious Poetry of John Donne', in *John Donne: A Collection of Critical Essays* ed. by Helen Gardner (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc., 1962), pp. 123-36 (130; 135).

In referring to the ‘strained metaphysical fancy’ [he here alludes to lines from Marvell, but metaphysical poetry by extension] I intend both ‘pushed beyond what is natural and reasonable’, and ‘purified’ from grosser elements. The grossness is not merely the bulk, weight, density of contingent circumstance; it is also the palpable awkwardness of method: the negative, threatening paradox at the heart of “Metaphysical” poetics is that the process of refining may itself be a gross piece of mechanics (*CCW*, pp. 201-02).

He goes on to situate Donne’s use of the word ‘cribate’ in a letter of April 1627 as ‘a distressed parody of the perplexed circumstance’, namely, one of his sermons being drawn on quite specious grounds into an argument between the Sees of Canterbury and Bath and Wells: [Donne] deliberately tunes in to the harshness, makes comically wretched “business” out of a bad business’ (*CCW*, p. 203).

The attribution of ‘gross mechanics’, ‘distressed parody’, and ‘tuning in to the harshness’ to Donne’s Metaphysical poetry complicates Hill’s sense elsewhere of the ‘God’s grammar’, style-and-faith equation, the peaceable descent of the dove. It also problematizes the degree to which rhetorical figures such as *trductio* are not only rendering ambiguities of circumstance, but are opportunistic *parodies* of those same constraints, and in terms of the Anglican “rhythm” of the *via media* as it pertains specifically to Hill and Donne, dissonances that ‘tune into the harshness’ rather than adopt ordinate cadences. If the *via media* stylists are seen in much of Hill’s prose as carefully tracing the fine line of ‘ordinate’ from ‘inordinate’, and refining ‘gross’ circumstance, I have been endeavouring to show in this chapter the ‘crooked’ or

‘extreme’ mediation that risks inordinacy. In ‘The Eloquence of Sober Truth’, Hill draws attention to ‘the semantic doubleness’ of sixteenth and seventeenth century public writing, instancing that word of ‘suspended judgment’ and ‘disabling perplexity’, ‘dexterity’: ‘[it] is at once the proper credential of a serious writer and a craft potentially sinister; a cunning spring-trap as likely to catch the magisterial author as it is to deal with the miscreant object of his censure’ (*CCW*, pp. 330-31). I am proposing that Metaphysical ‘dexterity’, in both its ‘serious’ and ‘sinister’ connotations, is seen as a key part of Donne’s style, and this dark subplot troubles Hill’s vision of ‘God’s grammar’, or style reconciled to faith.

The anarchic streak of ‘dexterous’ wit that Hill detected in Donne as early as 1960 constantly vents itself in volcanic gleams here and there, perhaps nowhere more famously than in the semantic ambiguity of that famous line from ‘Annunciations’: ‘Our God scatters corruption’ (*BH*, p. 40). Hill’s gloss on the poem in Kenneth Allott’s *The Penguin Book of Contemporary Verse* reads, “‘Our God scatters corruption’ = ‘Our God puts corruption to flight’ or ‘Our God disseminates corruption’”. I may have been thinking of Mr. Dulles’ idea of God as Head of Strategic Air Command’.¹⁴³

Hugh Haughton has written about a ‘paradoxical counter-pressure’ that Hill exerts on ‘a language of power’ (Haughton has in mind William Hazlitt’s dictum in his 1817 *Characters of Shakespear’s Plays*, apropos *Coriolanus*, ‘poetry is right-royal’). Haughton refers to the “‘dubious’ and twisted theology’ of the line, concluding that ‘Annunciations’ ‘fails to locate its theological drama in a plausible historical situation or

¹⁴³ Hill, in *The Penguin Book of Contemporary Verse*, ed. Kenneth Allott (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1962, 2nd edn), p. 394.

idiom'.¹⁴⁴ In fairness, Hill's comments on the American secretary of state John Foster Dulles – extrinsic though they are – might be brought to bear on a more sympathetic interpretation: that the dual resonances of a speaker being convinced that "God is on our side", a feature of American prophetic Cold War politics as much as it is found in the imbrications of pseudo-theological politics of our own day (by which I mean to include a theology of 'the Market' and hypostasized 'Liberalism' as much as any God), is apt to bring about a "dissemination" of corruption in God's name.¹⁴⁵ Yet at least one critic of the poem declares 'Annunciations' devoid of the 'historically, socially, or ideologically-situated' voice necessary for Bakhtinian dialogic utterance, resulting in the 'ideal "New Critical" poet' on show, 'whose sensibility is ultimately the main focus of the poem, manifested in a self-cancelling pattern of ironies, ambiguities and paradoxes'.¹⁴⁶

Hill's defence against charges that his poetry yields mere *splendida verba* is that language is *already* irremediably contextual, historically, socially, and ideologically-situated: as he puts it in his British Academy lecture on John Milton, language isn't an instrument for commenting on moral dilemma, but itself 'an activation, an embodiment of that crux'.¹⁴⁷ Moreover, he would argue (following Cleanth Brooks) that not only do rhetorical paradox, *traductio*, oxymoron, and other supposed essentials of a "New Critical" toolkit feature eminently in the best writing of the sixteenth and seventeenth century where they were felt as *vitally* situated, politically and theologically, but in a

¹⁴⁴ Haughton, 'How fit a title...', in *GHEW*, pp. 139-43.

¹⁴⁵ On the theological cast of Dulles's Cold War politics, see Townsend Hoopes, 'God and John Foster Dulles', *Foreign Policy*, 13 (Winter 1973-4), pp. 154-77.

¹⁴⁶ Neil Roberts, *Narrative and Voice in Postwar Poetry* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1999, repr. Routledge, 2014), p. 76.

¹⁴⁷ *British Academy lecture*.

more general way these rhetorical figures are the ‘various formalities’ of circumstanced language *per se*, which is ‘enacted [...] within the domain of a paradox: that its limitations and inadequacies are defined by its own cogency and eloquence; [while] there remain circumstances which baffle all attempts at definition’ (‘The Tartar’s Bow and the Bow of Ulysees’, *CCW*, p. 196).

Nevertheless, Hill’s inkling is that the cunning dexterity of formal wit as it is embodied in metaphysical poetry, and particularly in Donne, may be ‘anarchic’ rather than ordinate.¹⁴⁸ His own attempts to draw these ‘inordinate’ impulses back into the fold of a more ‘diligent’ measure of style are themselves characterised by the wild energy of opportunism: for instance, Hill’s wonderfully cowboy twist on Donne’s conceit of “turning” away from God (more *traductio*) who was thought of as *ad orientem*, in ‘Good Friday, Riding Westward, 1613’:

Law-breaking too is in the hierarchy,

and riding westward, post-haste. This

brings us to Michaelmas, its rule and riot,

its light a fading nimbus over Wales (‘Scenes from Comus’, in *BH*, p. 431).

¹⁴⁸ Cp. Hill’s criticism of John Berryman: ‘a vein of duplicity [...] lies [...] as it does in other excellent poets, at the point where extraordinary technical alertness and ordinary callousness conjoin and conspire *within the densities of language itself* [my italics]’, ‘The Lives of the Poets’, p. 268.

Hill affirms that inordinate ‘Law-breaking’ can be reconciled to order or ‘hierarchy’, which at first seems a recapitulation of his insistence in the preface to *Style and Faith* that Donne ‘[remains] in all things ordinate’; but the thrill of ‘riding westward’ to the festal ‘rule and riot’ of dark winter betrays Hill’s ‘inordinate’ leanings, from light towards obscurity. The final section of this chapter looks at Hill’s reading of Donne’s tenebrous ‘A Hymn to Christ, at the Author’s last going into Germany’, arguing that its dextrous stylistic power is ultimately read by Hill as Donne’s proto-Romantic repudiation of a coherence between style and faith; an apotheosis, rather, of style alone.

‘Inaccurate music’: Donne’s perturbed Anglican “rhythm”

In ‘Keeping to the Middle Way’, Hill is at pains to depict the coherent contours of the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth-century Anglican *via media*. Its early proponents were all ‘memorialists’ (*CCW*, p. 298), all to one degree or other cognizant of the ‘accumulating memory of post-Reformation written and spoken English’ (particularly that of the Erasmian humanists of the 1530s), and observant of the ‘diligent mediocrity’ or golden mean that they believed had to be asserted against the competing witness of recusant and separatist martyrologies, Rastell’s 1557 *Workes of Sir Thomas More* and Foxe’s 1563 *Actes and Monumentes* (*CCW*, p. 299). They were ‘masters of tonal indeterminacy’ with crux words such as ‘common’ (*CCW*, p. 302), and ultimately dedicated to ‘the new language of authority’ which they themselves were inchoately coining for the English church.

If the *via media* stylists appealed to the ‘formal reasonableness’ of the preface 1549 *Book of Common Prayer* in its catholicity of different observances, it follows that Hill is interested in the diversity that complexions the coherent style of the *via media*. So we have finely-meted distinctions: Burton is an ‘adventurer’, a ‘hunter after vulgar folly’ akin to the comedic genius of Shakespeare, whereas Hooker, the magisterial voice of the *via media*, is decidedly not, placing instead stylistic emphasis on ‘law and reason’ (CCW, p. 303). If Hill sees Donne as ‘closer to Hooker yet not wholly with him’ (CCW, p. 304), that momentary quasi-alignment of Donne with the strict diligence and ‘ordinate’ style of the *Ecclesiasticall Politie* is soon undone: ‘Donne [...] writes of “a rule that ordines and regulates our faith”; “inordinate” is his characteristic pejorative [...] yet he himself inclines to the inordinate’ (CCW, p. 312).

Hill briefly considers the ‘body of exegesis’ which undertakes a Freudian analysis of Donne’s supposed ‘death wish’ and his lifelong struggle against it, before insisting in mitigation that “‘*Cupio dissolvi*, To have a desire that we might be dissolved, and be with Christ” is Pauline theology’ (CCW, p. 312). The quotation is from Donne’s sermon on Paul’s letter to the Philippians 1:23: ‘For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ, which is far better’. Hill alludes to the tag in *The Orchards of Syon*: ‘We are – what, all of us? – near death. So wave / me your solution. *Cupio dissolvi*, / Saul’s vital near-death experience more / sandblasted than lasered’ (BH, p. 354). The morbid aspect of Donne, what Eliot termed his ‘being possessed by death’,¹⁴⁹ is also present in a tableau from *Speech! Speech!*: ‘Dr Donne’s top-knot shroud, / coroneted bag-pudding (*show-off!*)’ (BH, p. 327) referring

¹⁴⁹ T.S. Eliot, ‘Whispers of Immortality’, *The Complete Poems and Plays*, ed. Valerie Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), p. 52.

to Donne posing in a 'winding sheet' for his funerary portrait, later an effigy by Nicholas Stone in St. Paul's and the frontispiece engraving to *Deaths Duell*, his last sermon published in 1632.¹⁵⁰ Hill's epithet combines a visual jibe, Donne's winding sheet like a bag to boil a pudding in, and (in reversing the usual order of 'pudding-bag'), possibly an aural recollection of Bagpuss, the doleful saggy cloth cat of 1970s children's television. Hill's mockery of Donne's morbidity is in a spirit of self-castigation, as indicated by the parenthetical heckle which is normally undermining the poetic voice.

In 'Keeping to the Middle Way', however, Hill's focus is not on Donne's obsession with death so much as 'a minute particular of inaccurate music'. He quotes the final stanza of what he believes to be 'one of Donne's greatest poems', 'A Hymn to Christ, at the Author's last going into Germany':

[...] To see God only, I go out of sight:

And to 'scape stormy days, I choose

An everlasting night.¹⁵¹

Hill writes, 'from whatever point of witness a seventeenth-reader might approach Donne's words, "everlasting night" would surely strike eye and ear as a shocking

¹⁵⁰ See Ramie Targoff, *John Donne: Body and Soul* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), pp. 180-84.

¹⁵¹ Donne, *The Complete English Poems*, p. 347.

spiritual oxymoron or wild aural pun', and an 'inordinate' retort upon love's 'first, last, everlasting day' in 'The Anniversary' (*CCW*, p. 313).

In an undated lecture entitled 'Three Seventeenth Century Poems', Hill seems to develop a reading of 'A Hymn' that predates 'Keeping to the Middle Way', and which merits comparison with his published thought:

To assume that this poem, admittedly based on a familiar emblematic pattern, remains conveniently within the tradition of "sacred representation" is to ignore the *fierceness* of the renunciation, the isolation, in the final stanza. (A wonderful fusion isn't a phrase, here, of the idea of going out of sight, *over the horizon, below ground*, down to the 'root' below [stanza] 2, and into the *everlasting night*, which must be the darkness of God of the medieval mystics: the alternatives are, in the context of Donne's belief, unthinkable.)¹⁵²

Unthinkable until the publication of 'Keeping to the Middle Way': 'there is little point in appealing to the mystics. If the night is "everlasting", it cannot be either the dark night of the soul or the cloud of unknowing' (*CCW*, p. 313). Despite the imperative in Hill's 1994 essay to praise the 'ordinate' and 'diligent mediocrity' of Elizabethan and Jacobean Anglican polity, he voices in it what was 'unthinkable' in the earlier

¹⁵² Hill, 'Three Seventeenth Century Poems', in 'Donne (ca. 1968-1993)', the Brotherton Library, the University of Leeds, BC MS 20c Hill/5/1/56. Cp. Hill's positive remarks on Robert Lowell's *Imitations*: 'at the end [of the collection] is the "mania to return", *earthward, homeward, deathward*. This is an impressive, disturbing work'; 'Robert Lowell: "Contrasts and Repetitions"', *Essays in Criticism*, 13.2 (1963), pp. 188-97 (197).

unpublished lecture – namely, the profane spiritual darkness of Donne’s ‘Hymn’, its refusal to reconcile with articles of faith, a refusal that is also seen by Hill as the terrible virtue of its style. Comparing the poem to ‘A Nocturnal upon S. Lucy’s Day’, Hill opines that there Donne ‘offers up the sensuality of *Songs and Sonets* as the sensuousness of rectified affection’, whereas the ‘Hymne’ ‘ends with an enigma’:

I still regard the ‘Hymn’ as the greater of these two great poems, [but] it seems nonetheless that a price was paid and continues to be paid for its particular kind of power. The complicity of elegiac sophistry with spiritual equivocation has a touch of the ‘ferall’ about it [...] (*CCW*, pp. 313-14).

In contrast to Burton’s ‘accurate musicke’ like the sanative restoration of ‘*David’s harpe*’, Hill concludes that ‘Donne here eludes Burton’s progress *ad sanam mentem* and returns his own music to perturbation’, conceding that ‘rational objection scarcely touches the ultimate power of poetry such as this’, which he tags with Francis Bacon’s derogation of scholasticism, ‘fierce with darke keeping’ (*CCW*, p. 314).

Hill’s own ‘darke keeping’ is a resistance to the ‘diligent mediocrity’ or ‘ordinate’ Anglican “rhythm” to which his poetry might otherwise have been attuned. Still less does it approach the ‘debased’ mediocrity that he decries in contemporary Anglicanism, influenced for the worse by the ‘torpor’ of Eliot’s *Four Quartets*. In the final, unstopped line of *Broken Hierarchies*, there is a terrible malediction or ‘spiritual equivocation’ that illustrates how Hill follows Donne in returning his “music” to perturbation:

Yahweh himself not wholly disabused

Of procreation. Time is the demiurge

For which our impotence cannot atone.

Nothing so fatal as creation's clone.

The stars asunder, gibbering, on the verge

(‘from *Al Tempo De’ Tremuoti* in *BH*, p. 936).

Hill has repeatedly juxtaposed ‘common linear time’ with ‘eschatological time’ at right-angle intersections.¹⁵³ Here, the blind velocity of the former is in full sway, even ‘Yahweh himself’ virtually forced to enter into its carnal blunder. Rather than intersection, there is a sense of Manichean parallelism, the ‘demiurge’ of history as ‘creation’s clone’. The unstopped last line threatens to fall into the page’s white blank, just as the ‘gibbering’ unintelligible stars are ‘on the verge’ of cosmic annihilation. The

¹⁵³ See, for example, Hill’s reference to sacred mysteries of the Christian faith as ‘true instances of sacramental intersection’ with ‘common time’ in his sermon “‘Orderly Damned, Disorderly Saved’”, p. 1, and (on ‘common time’ only) his second part of ‘the Argument’ to the revised *Hymns to Our Lady of Chartres*: ‘that, as Henry Adams observed at Chartres, the twin powers of the modern world are inertia and velocity’, *BH*, p. 155.

bleakness of the line is undercut by ‘stars asunder’, an allusion to Gerard Manley Hopkins’s ‘The Wreck of the Deutschland’: ‘I kiss my hand / To the stars, lovely-asunder / Starlight’, where the faith of Hopkins’s nun dedicates to God the dissipation of cosmic violence and indifference of nature, ‘glory in thunder’.¹⁵⁴ Furthermore, the precarious ‘verge’ on which time and the cosmos seem poised at the end of Hill’s tome might well be that imagined earlier (the third line of the stanza):

Fixed and unfixed time: the endurance of dreams;

Light bending gravity. We shall emerge

Younger than we are now and see the verge

Of first love steadying beyond the farms (*BH*, p. 894).

Perhaps this ‘verge / Of first love’ achieves a kind of proleptic consummation of Hill’s inconclusive last line, the *rime riche* setting up what Hill calls (apropos Donne’s ‘The Canonization’) ‘the modish metaphysics of love’s oxymoronic power [accruing] from the mellifluous repetitiveness of [rhyme]’ (‘A Pharisee to Pharisees’, *CCW*, pp. 322–23).¹⁵⁵ Nevertheless, the last line of *Broken Hierarchies* ends in the ‘enigma’ of spiritual

¹⁵⁴ ‘The Wreck of the Deutschland’, in *The Poems of GMH*, p. 53. Hopkins’s attitude to nature is discussed in relation to Hill in the third chapter.

¹⁵⁵ Hill’s allusions to Donne frequently adumbrate elegiac metaphysical speculations on whether love survives death, an important and moving feature of his engagement with Donne that must unfortunately remain outside the purview of this thesis, but see, for instance, ‘Would you call an experience with Donne’s / *Elegies* providential? Where are tapers / tapers burning in the immortal vaults of love?’, *BH*, p. 447.

darkness, unreconciling and unresolving (note the sense of infinite postponement implied by the present participle 'gibbering').¹⁵⁶ Like Donne's 'everlasting night', Hill's ending is both equivocal and unremitting, style's fierce and inordinate act of non-conformity to the ordinances of faith.

From meta-theology to meta-poetics

Hill's stylistic reception of Donne perplexes attempts to reconcile style and faith, but without ever stinting the vigilant attention with which he credits that perceived 'equation' in the magisterial writing of the Reformation. The failure is exemplary, to be absolutely distinguished from those otiose solecisms that Hill believes vitiates much of even the most well-intentioned contemporary prose and poetry, where 'concentration' means 'heavy accumulation of data and not intensity of perception' (*CCW*, p. 350). One might further argue, as Hill argues regarding the final line of Donne's 'A Hymn to Christ', that the inability to realise 'God's grammar' is a necessary price paid for the elegiac, equivocal power of much of Hill's verse; it '[masters] the violence between the sacramental and the secular' ('Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"', *CCW*, p. 11) by producing poetry out of that apposite agon, what he calls (citing William Empson) 'a tug between [...] interests' (*CCW*, p. 297). In this, Hill's implicit reading of Donne complicates his early-modern theological semantics by adding a proto-Romantic sense

¹⁵⁶ Cp. Christopher Ricks's insistence, as mentioned in the introduction, that in Hill's poetics there is 'not only irredeemable error but also irrecoverable loss' and the importance of -ble to the possibilities and more importantly the impossibilities of poetry, 'Hill's Unrelenting, Unreconciling Mind' in *GHELW*, pp. 6-31 (8).

of words as ‘living powers’ (Coleridge) *in themselves*, and not just in so far as they are able to penetrate the accepted ‘cosmic syntaxes’ of the pre-Enlightenment imaginary. Thus ‘everlasting night’ cannot be reconciled to articles of Anglican faith, at least not without profound ambiguity, but its stylistic power relies on something of the ‘magnificent agnostic faith’ of Wallace Stevens’s ‘Adagia’ and the neo-Symbolist line of thought that Hill carefully parses in ‘Poetry as “Menace” and “Atonement”’ (*CCW*, p. 18).

In *The Orchards of Syon*, Hill again draws Donne into inordinate contexts: ‘Anarchy coheres. / Incoherence coheres [...] I had forgotten / Donne’s meta-theology. A road-drill / swallowed through tarred slab re-emerges fighting’ (*BH*, p. 368). In challenging the conventional dating of the entry of ‘Metaphysical’ into critical parlance with Dryden’s snooty condescension in 1692, Hill draws attention to ‘meta-theology’, a coinage by Donne in the *Essays on Divinity*, which is a deeper theological understanding than that countenanced by conventional theologians:

The analogy here is palpable [...] The knotty riddling of Donne’s verse prose moves from, and through, rhetorical bravado and ‘alarums’ (he himself enters the caveat) to an engagement with meta-poetics, a profounder poetry than that recognised by conventional instructors in rhetoric and conduct [...] Meta-poetry is immersed in the knowledge that it is so immersed (*CCW*, pp. 223–24).

Rather than the chimera of *identity* proffered by ‘God’s grammar’ (‘style *is* faith’), an *analogy* between poetic style and mysteries of religious faith is arguably the true ‘centre of gravity’ of Donne’s influence on Hill’s vexed “meta-poetics”. Walter Ong’s Thomist idea, cited by Hill in ‘A Pharisee to Pharisees’, seems accurately descriptive of the true relationship between style and faith:

Christian theology and poetry are indeed not the same thing, but lie at opposite poles of human knowledge. However, the very fact that they are opposite extremes gives them something of a common relation to that which lies between them. They both operate on the periphery of human intellection. A poem dips below the range of the human process of understanding-by-reason as the subject of theology sweeps above it (cited in *CCW*, p. 327).

Notwithstanding Hill’s sense that in certain masterful poems such as Vaughan’s ‘The Night’, theology and ‘the contingent nature of sensory material’ as the stuff of poetry can ‘briefly [be] made to chime’ (ibid.), the mastery of a poem such as Donne’s ‘A Hymn to Christ’ entrenches the polarity depicted by Ong, polarity of apposition and collusive collision though it may be.

To conclude this chapter, both Hill and Donne are deeply attuned to an Anglican “rhythm” of the *via media*, but they ‘return [their] own music to perturbation’, just as in *The Orchards of Syon* Donne’s ‘meta-theology’ is interrupted by the cacophony of a road-drill. Whether, as Hill enquires in *Speech! Speech!*, ‘the divine

spirit does grammar / to the power *x*' (*BH*, p. 297) is an immortal question, and certainly not one that I would dare to refute ('God is not mocked', as Hill says, 'nor, finally, is his language', *CCW*, p. 336). But ultimately, Hill's pursuit of a 'theology of language' might more properly be said to arrive at 'meta-poetry', a poetry held to be more profound than that recognised by poets.¹⁵⁷ Such a doubly-immersed knowledge is like the 'crooked lymbeck' of language, which Hill sees in *Al Tempo De' Tremuoti* as 'linguistic alchemy, / Vicarious redemption by the word' (*BH*, p. 904). Style, seeking alliance with faith, is confounded by the profound problems at the heart of divine grace and human agency, and retorts back on itself. The menacing knowledge that poetic style can only be "vicarious" redemption is perhaps, to quote Karl Barth, its 'noblest gift' (epigraph to 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"', *CCW*, p. 3).

¹⁵⁷ Cp. *OED3*, 'metatheology', n., 1. Hill's endnote dismisses the second signification, 'the philosophical study of the nature and methods of theology, esp. the analysis of religious language', as ulterior to his usage, *CCW*, p. 654.

Chapter Two

Sacred vehemence, magic structures: poetic rhetoric and civil polity in Geoffrey Hill and John Milton

'No Mean Endeavour': poetic rhetoric as public speech

In *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*, W.B. Yeats famously declared, 'we make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry'.¹⁵⁸ Yeats's declaration is itself rhetorical, a chiasmus predicated on the premise that exterior and interior 'quarrels' cannot possibly overlap. Instead, it is possible to see poetry as both a vigorous, even zealous rhetorical confrontation with the public, and as self-interrogation – a poetic rhetoric.

John Milton's 1644 pedagogical tract 'Of Education' makes a similar distinction between rhetoric and poetry, which may be the source of Yeats's chiasmus. Milton advocates the hierarchy of "organic arts", first logic, followed by rhetoric:

¹⁵⁸ W. B. Yeats, *Per Amica Silentia Lunae* (1918), in *Mythologies* (London: Macmillan, 1959), p. 25.

a graceful and ornate Rhetorick taught of the rule of *Plato, Aristotle, Phalareus, Cicero, Hermogenes, Longinus*. To which Poetry would be made subsequent, or indeed precedent, as being less subtle and fine, but more simple, sensuous, and passionate.¹⁵⁹

Hill has frequently resorted to this Miltonic description of poetry when defending the difficulty and erudition of his art.¹⁶⁰ Given Milton's pedagogical distinction between rhetoric and poetry, it perhaps seems strange to suggest that in his poetry, rhetoric is part of its most assured achievement; as with Yeats's formulation, in Milton's writing the two are never far apart.

This chapter examines the influence of John Milton on Geoffrey Hill's poetic rhetoric in terms of civil polity. There is no doubt that Hill's most concerted engagements with Milton emerge in the 1996 volume *Canaan* onwards, most notably *A Treatise of Civil Power* (2005, 2007) and *Scenes from Comus* (2005). In 2008, Hill delivered two lectures to honour the quatercentenary of Milton's birth: the Cambridge University Lady Margaret Lecture, 'Milton as Muse', and the British Academy symposium keynote address (the latter in the main a comparative reading of his own work alongside Milton's). In the same year, Hill contributed an essay to *The Warwick Review* entitled 'Civil Polity and The Confessing State', which resorts frequently to Milton in its analysis of the relationship between poetics and civil polity. Finally, as has

¹⁵⁹ Milton, 'Of Education' (1644), *CPW*, II (1959), pp. 402-03.

¹⁶⁰ For a good summary of the affinities, see Michael Molan, 'Milton and Eliot in the Work of Geoffrey Hill', in *GHC*, pp. 81-106. Molan has recently completed a doctoral thesis with a section on Milton in Hill, and there are other studies in progress on the topic. This chapter scarcely proposes a survey of that fascinating engagement, but only in so far as it explicates Hill's 'theology of language'.

already been mentioned in chapter one, Hill devoted a substantial portion of his 2013 Trinity term Oxford Professor of Poetry lecture, 'A Deep Dynastic Wound', to areas of theological and rhetorical reciprocity in *Paradise Lost*. These later overt dealings with Milton form the spine of this chapter, but Hill has confessed in the British Academy lecture to 'a gravitational pull' towards his precursor's work that started much earlier. The title of one of Hill's earliest poems, 'The Bidden Guest', as well as its themes of the spiritually-deadening effects of high-Anglican ritual, owe much to Milton's 1637 elegy *Lycidas*, where the false shepherds of the Laudian church 'shove away the worthy bidden guest' (118). In the first chapter, we have already explored Hill's engagement with Donne's eccentric *via media*; his fascination with the republican opponent of episcopal hierarchy is no less ardent. For Hill, Donne's poetry is dogged by intimate internal antimonies, chief among them the problem of poetic craft being both 'at once the proper credential of a serious writer and a craft potentially sinister' (*CCW*, p. 331). This chapter argues that Hill finds the same antimony registered with even greater conscious, apprehensive power in the writings of the author of *Paradise Lost*. Central to Milton's influence on Hill's idea of poetry as civil rhetoric is the poet as a private individual committing her or himself to public speech and, in Hill's case as well as Milton's, theologically-derived ideas of virtue; how does one distinguish the authority of well-crafted, 'dexterous' poetic language in aid of the 'commonweal' from virtuoso displays of rhetorical power? To resort to a Miltonic allegory in the Ludlow masque that exercises Hill's thought (and from which the title of this chapter is drawn), what separates the Lady's 'sacred vehemence' (794) from Comus's 'magic structures' (797)?

In Hill's poetics, the cause and effect of this internal stylistic conflict is implicated in the Christian doctrine of original sin. Matthew Sperling writes, 'at the heart of Hill's

theology of language is the idea of original sin – an idea which is, moreover, centrally important to his understanding of what it is to be human.’¹⁶¹ Hill mordantly summarises his adherence to that belief in his Remembrance Day sermon at Balliol College, 11 November 2007:

If I am a Christian it is because the Church’s teaching in Original Sin strikes me as being the most coherent grammar of tragic humanity that I have ever encountered. [... This] means no more but no less than that, as John Henry Newman says, there must have been some ‘terrible aboriginal calamity’ compounded with the very origins of the human race.¹⁶²

John Milton’s epic poem *Paradise Lost* is arguably the *locus classicus* for literary narratives of the Fall, but Hill’s interest in Milton’s ideas of original sin exceeds gestures towards the merely topical. In this chapter, I want to outline the elaborate aetiology surrounding original sin, poetic rhetoric and virtue that Hill derives from Milton; in his later lectures (including his Oxford Professor of Poetry lectures), Hill has articulated a theory of poetic discourse that proposes as a civic duty the resistance *Energieia* or forceful, well-crafted utterance offers to the ‘blind energy’ that characterises the inertia of and anarchic clangour of language in the twenty-first century *polis*. Hill closely relates this civil rhetoric to Milton’s radical Protestant endeavours in praise of free speech,

¹⁶¹ Matthew Sperling, *Visionary Philology*, p. 134.

¹⁶² Hill, ‘A Sermon Preached in Balliol’, p. 24. Sperling notes that the conditional syntax (‘if I am a Christian...’) imitates Newman’s: ‘if there be a God, since there is a God...’ *Visionary Philology*, p. 140.

frequently quoting Milton's translation of Euripides' *The Suppliant Women*, the epigraph to the title page of *Areopagitica*:

This is true liberty when freeborn men
Having to advise the public may speak free,
Which he who can, and will, deserves high praise,
Who neither can nor will, may hold his peace;
What can be juster in a state than this?¹⁶³

Perhaps the reader will be impatient to discover how, vis-à-vis Milton, I intend to make good my claim in the previous chapter that Hill's 'English church' and reading in post-Reformation stylistics is undergirded by an Anglican "rhythm". One hopes there is explanatory power in my stress in chapter one on an intellectual, ecumenical register of ambiguity, grounded in the *via media*, but construing the best of radical republicanism.¹⁶⁴ When Hill writes of civil and sectarian opponents 'fully competent to negotiate, for the best terms each can get, among a compact body of ambiguities' that are 'part ethical, part civil, part etymological' (*CCW*, p. 340), we can better gauge the

¹⁶³ *The Poems of John Milton*, p. 288. See also a facsimile of the title page in *CPW*, II (1959), p. 485.

¹⁶⁴ Cp. Hill's remarks on Hooker's 'politic concord, judicious censure, gestures of magnanimity' ('The Eloquence of Sober Truth', *CCW*, p. 334). Of course, construing is in the end inseparable from misconstruing, and that's the entire crux of the matter in terms of the conflict between Hill's Romantic Reformation and Romanticism.

nature of his equanimity towards Donne, the Anglican hierarchist, and Milton, the radical non-conformist: the equal approbation is held in light of their doctrinal hairsplitting, rather than despite it, and is itself a belated, philological register of *via media adiaphora*.

I would further contend that Hill recognises something volcanic, Miltonic, in Donne – scabrous, parodic, opportunistic; moreover, that he discovers this dangerous jesting *against the grain* of Donne’s apparent ‘diligent mediocrity’: conflict is contact, as Eliot said of Donne (cited in *CCW*, p. 370). Here again we encounter the “cleave” in Hill’s thought in terms of style and faith, between a post-Reformation theological-semantic *negotium*, and a post-Romantic sense of the poet’s ‘way of syntax’. Though it too has its cruxes, the *via syntaxis* is not a *via crucis*. Hill’s Milton, like Hill’s Donne, is to some degree a Romantic *avant-la-lettre*.¹⁶⁵

What in the first chapter I have termed a “dark subplot” again emerges in Hill’s reception of Milton. As we shall see, virtuous rhetoric (and rhetorical virtue) – Milton’s poetic *Energeia* – is seen by Hill as confronting ‘blind energy’, linguistic torpor, against a slightly sinister backdrop of Italian political thought as it had been variously interpreted in early modern England. The specific interlocutor that Hill identifies is Niccolò Machiavelli; consequently, the allegory of *Energeia* versus ‘blind energy’ is complicated by Hill’s assertion that forceful, well-crafted verse may remain malign – not virtuous, but virtuoso. Hill discerns this Machiavellian element (and Milton’s full awareness of it) within the very texture of much of Milton’s poetry and prose, but most

¹⁶⁵ In *Milton as Muse*, Hill commends a paper given earlier that day by a former student, David Fairer, on Milton’s legacy in Romanticism; see Fairer, ‘John Milton and the Romantics’, in *John Milton: Life, Writing, and Reputation*, pp. 147–67.

particularly in the discrepancy between the allegorical and rhetorical aspects of the 1634 Ludlow masque; Hill's poetry explores the potentially-malign aspects of poetic rhetoric throughout his poetic *oeuvre* by worrying at the crux word 'virtù'.

Over the course of this chapter, that implicit cross-current to Hill's ostensible engagement with Milton's reformed puritan theo-politics shall be adumbrated, but perhaps here it is worth spelling out in certain terms what aligns the latter with Donne's 'God's grammar' other than this proto-Romantic streak; according to Hill, 'the one common aspiration among these violently disunited spirits [...] was a belief in, a working towards, the eloquence of "sober truth"' (*CCW*, p. 347), and it is in terms of polity, 'entitlement to speak', that such an eloquence finds exacting form in Milton's Euripidean *Areopagitica*, the opening lines of which Hill quotes admiringly in 'The Eloquence of Sober Truth' and elsewhere: 'They, who to States and Governours of the Commonwealth direct their Speech, High Court of Parliament, or wanting such accesse in a private condition, write that which they foresee may advance the publick good; I suppose them at the beginning of no mean endeavour [...]'¹⁶⁶ Hill writes that 'the implications' of this public-private compact 'reach back through Hooker to such early Reform writings as Tyndale's *Obedience of a Christen Man*' (*CCW*, p. 348): a derivation at once curious (Milton's work of lèse-majesté owing something to the magisterial Anglican ecclesiast) and determinate – the writings of Reformers.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Milton, 'Areopagitica' (1644), *CPW*, II (1959), p. 486.

¹⁶⁷ Brian Cummings has explored the idea of 'Recusant Hill' in *GHELW*, pp. 32-54, in the process '[adumbrating] a much wider body of artists and writers important to Hill than "recusancy" in its specific historical meaning'; Cummings concedes, however, that these artists do not immediately belong together, even 'in Hill's personal pantheon' (p. 33). As I hope to have demonstrated in chapter one, Hill's admiration for recusant stylists such as Southwell is not in question, but his theological semantics arguably bears more affinities with the Reformed branches of writing.

Central to the philosophical and doctrinal preoccupations that inform Hill's highly-wrought mythopoeia of rhetoric is his insistence with Milton that virtue becomes "active" through an experience of evil. The biblical Fall and the Christian doctrine of original sin more or less formalised by Augustine lie at the heart of this radical Protestant poesis: the 'blind energy' of rhetorically-inert language is seen by both writers as unimpeachable evidence of tainted human endeavour, perhaps even indistinguishable from original sin itself. At the same time, such an inescapable fact of the human condition (in Hill and Milton's view) gives rise to the necessity for rhetorical virtue or *Energeia* – writing and speech as active forms of poetic civil rhetoric which discerns the good in the process of contesting evil. Put succinctly, Milton and Hill see virtue as a correlative of the Fall: 'freedom to fall is our stability' (*Al Tempo De' Tremuoti*, in *BH*, p. 901); 'Wales: are you in happier condition – / I trust so – by grace of original sin?' (*Oraclau | Oracles*, in *BH*, p. 766). The phrasal quality of 'by grace of', i.e. by virtue of, in consequence of, is amplified in suggestion by the aura of a genitive in the syntax – grace of [from] original sin. In the conative ethics of Milton as received by Hill, virtue is forged and tempered in exposure to vice, and even grace (a gratuitous favour of God) may emerge out of man's aboriginal fallibility.

The Machiavellian twist is that even such rhetorical virtue, the 'sacred vehemence' of the Lady in the masque which is distinguished from the inertia and velocity of common language, may be virtually indistinguishable from Comus's 'magic structures', language that is *actively* and *efficaciously* malign in its virtuosic energy. Hill's reading of Milton results in another paradox of style and faith: at the moment when attentive, energised, well-crafted style wrestles itself out of the grimpen of "bad faith", a moment when it might be fairly said that there seems to be an equivalence of

style and faith, that achievement might be ethically dubious, though in a different degree to the ineffectual. This Miltonic recognition, which Hill sees as owing debts to Machiavelli, leads to the productive anxiety that style might usurp the prerogatives of faith even at the moment when the two seem likely to converge.

Energieia: good and malign creative energy

The title of this chapter is drawn from Milton's Ludlow masque, hereafter *Comus*, which Hill has paid homage to in his 2005 collection *Scenes from Comus* dedicated to Hugh Wood, the composer of a 1965 symphonic setting of the masque with this same title.¹⁶⁸

Lady: Enjoy your dear wit, and gay rhetoric

 That hath so well been taught her dazzling fence,

 Thou art not fit to hear thy self convinced;

 Yet should I try, the uncontrolléd worth

¹⁶⁸ Hill follows the academic conventions of the time in using the title *Comus* in his 1980s lectures notes, and this chapter follows suit; since the malign rhetorical energy of the mage-villain is the important Machiavellian twist to Hill's Miltonic poetics, the misnomer has a felicitous edge. On the discrepancies regarding the title of the masque, see Ann Baynes Coiro, "A Thousand Fantasies": The Lady and the *Maske*, in *The Oxford Handbook of Milton*, ed. by Nicholas McDowell and Nigel Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 91.

Of this pure cause would kindle my rapt spirits
To such a flame of sacred vehemence,
That dumb things would be moved to sympathize,
And the brute earth would lend her nerves, and shake,
Till all thy magic structures reared so high,
Were shattered into heaps o'er thy false head (790-799).¹⁶⁹

The Lady's 'sacred vehemence' is, on the face of it, a style in strict opposition to Comus' 'magic structures', yet in actuality they are both types of "rhetoric", and that neutral description may encompass (without completely conflating) a nexus of ideas about virtuous speech, the rhetorical virtues of well-crafted speech, and/or unvirtuous verbal power; this neutrality might fairly be described as the *rhetorical* subplot of the masque, as opposed to the dichotomizing, didactic tendencies of its *allegorical* plot.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Significantly, this section of the Lady's speech, was only added in the thirty-nine page quarto 'printed for Humphrey Robinson at the sign of the Three Pidgeons in Pauls Churchyard, 1637', and is not in either the Trinity College Manuscript or the "stage-copy" of 1634, the Bridgewater Manuscript. Some scholars, such as John G. Demaray, have noted the didactic implications of this textual addition, bolstering the 1634 masque's implicit dramatic argument; see Demaray, *Milton and the Masque Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 139-40. On the contrary, I would argue that the interpolation of the Lady's speech countering Comus' Machiavellian skill transcends mere allegorical opposition and hints at areas of overlap, demonstrating in the process Milton's deep anxieties about the morally-neutral space created by rhetorical skill.

¹⁷⁰ For a standard view of the allegorical masque elements of *Comus* pitching high virtue against low vice and dismissal of its dramatic aspect, see Demaray, pp. 131-32. I follow Victoria Kahn's reading, which proposes that the allegorical and rhetorical plots of the masque are in conflict: in the former, Sabrina's divine grace is indistinguishable from Comus' magic powers in terms of efficacy and so a dichotomy is introduced extrinsically by allegorising, whereas in the "rhetorical plot", rhetoric is seen as a neutral and indifferent space to be used for 'various incompatible ends'; Kahn, *Machiavellian Rhetoric* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 202.

Hill has persistently commended ‘sacred vehemence’, situating it in a context of energised speech as ‘active virtue’, and within a constellation of terms that he profoundly associates with Milton: ‘*laus et vituperatio*’ (praise and blame), ‘zeal/heat’, ‘civil power’ and ‘civil polity’, and most recently, ‘*Energ[e]ia*’ (or energy). All these terms are united in Hill’s Miltonic idea of rhetoric, uniting poetry with civil speech acts. As Jeffrey Wainwright has commented, ‘in espousing rhetoric [...] Hill is pursuing a tradition which places poetry as a part of public discourse, an address to an audience which seeks to make use of its eloquence to persuade.’¹⁷¹

‘Sacred vehemence’ is allied to an idea of ‘heat’ in the Lady’s speech; the imagery of ‘kindling’ and ‘flame’ is a commonplace of Miltonic ‘zeal’ (cp. the ‘flame of zeal severe’ with which Abdiel counters the diabolical logic of Satan, *Paradise Lost*, V. 807). As Thomas Kranidas notes, ‘like the language of many of his fellow activists [sic], Milton’s language defies moderation and praises surrender to anger under the aegis of zeal: ζήλος, *zeilos*, means a kind of emulatory rivalry [...]’¹⁷² In seventeenth-century discourse, ‘zeal’ was inextricably linked with heat; Kranidas cites Milton, writing in *Christian Doctrine*: ‘an eager desire to sanctify the divine name, together with a feeling of indignation against things which tend to the violation or contempt of religion, is called ZEAL [...] opposed to zeal is the lukewarm’.¹⁷³ Hill has also noticed the theo-political valences of the word ‘heat’ in Civil War polemics, describing it in ‘The Eloquence of Sober Truth’ as ‘a term of seventeenth-century polity’ (*CCW*, p. 267). In an undated, unpublished lecture that likely dates from Hill’s teaching at Cambridge in the mid-

¹⁷¹ Jeffrey Wainwright, *Acceptable Words*, pp. 81-82.

¹⁷² Thomas Kranidas, *Milton and the Rhetoric of Zeal* (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 2005), p. 2.

¹⁷³ Milton, from *Christian Doctrine*, *CPW*, VI (1973), p. 697.

eighties simply entitled 'Milton', Hill tracks the word 'heat' throughout seventeenth-century political discourse.¹⁷⁴ Implying that the Lady in *Comus* is a prototype of Milton's ideal 'wayfaring Christian' [some editions give 'warfaring'] in *Areopagitica* (1644), Hill quotes and comments on lines from the tract:

'I cannot praise a fugitive and cloister'd vertue, unexercis'd & unbreath'd, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortall garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat.' [Hill:] Heat is exercise and pilgrimage and effort and *energy* [my italics]. If you exert yourself for what is right you will become heated (it is wrong not to become heated). And in his political pamphlets the austere, fastidious writer Milton was the most heated of polemicists: violent, scurrilous, often mordauntly funny [...] Milton believed, politically and rhetorically, I think – certainly at the relatively early stage at which *Areopagitica* was written – that heat is conviction purified and cauterized [...] In *Comus* temperance can certainly embrace what, in the masque, is referred to as 'sacred vehemence' [...]¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ Hill, 'Milton', ms numbered 1-32, the Brotherton Library, the University of Leeds, BC MS 20c Hill/5/1/133, p. 28. The undated lecture can be post-dated from 1978 given bibliographical details, and is likely part of Hill's teaching on the 'Dissentient Voices' course at the University of Cambridge in the mid-eighties. To distinguish from other mss in the same folder, I will refer to this 32 pp. lecture as 'Milton a'.

¹⁷⁵ 'Milton', Hill, BC MS 20c Hill/5/1/133. This commentary on *Areopagitica* is a revised typescript version of p. 28 of the lecture ('Milton a.'), appearing on one of two loose pages, paginated 3-4 (3) in the same folder (hereafter 'Milton b.').

In this unpublished lecture, the Lady's 'heat' and 'sacred vehemence' is implicitly linked not only to Milton's concept of adversarial virtue articulated in *Areopagitica*, but also to 'energy', an allusive term in Hill's later thinking on Milton and poetic language. The polemical style of such a mode – 'violent, scurrilous' – is viewed in the lecture as a confession of faith, both Milton's allusion to 1 Corinthians 9:24–25 and Hill's mention of 'what is right' and 'conviction'. Such an apparent equivalence in Miltonic rhetoric – the zealous, energetic style *is* the faith – must lie behind Hill's judgement in the preface to *Style and Faith* (2003) that the 'equation' of one with the other is met exclusively in the 'particular authority' of writers such as Milton (*CCW*, pp. 263–64). In the unpublished lecture, Hill further describes Milton's political philosophy as existing 'only within the sphere of eloquence that is *Areopagitica*, quoting A.C. Patrides that 'the style is [sic] the work'.¹⁷⁶ For Hill, Milton's commitment to a radical Protestant vision of liberty and 'active virtue' is inseparable from the energy of his rhetorical style. There is an intimation here that Milton's theological politics is rhetorical, an important fault-line in the equation of style with faith that I return to in the final sections of this chapter on Milton (and Hill's) Machiavellianism.

In his Cambridge lecture, Hill associates the Lady's 'sacred vehemence' with the 'heat and dust and energy' of *Areopagitica*'s active virtue, where 'energy' is Hill's interpolation. Hill has come to deploy the Greek term *Energeia* for this specific type of rhetorical force, notably in the 2008 Lady Margaret Lecture at the University of Cambridge, 'Milton as Muse'. Sir Philip Sidney brings the term into literary criticism in *The Defence of Poesy* (1595), railing against the counterfeit passions common in

¹⁷⁶ 'Milton a', p. 11.

contemporary lyric poetry: ‘so coldly they apply fiery speeches, as men that had rather read lovers’ writings [...] than that in truth they feel those passions, which easily (as I think) may be betrayed by that same forcibleness or *energia* [sic] (as the Greeks call it) of the writer.’¹⁷⁷ As R.W. Maslen notes, *Energeia* is ‘the first known use in English of a form of the word “energy”, coming in through Latin rhetoric by a Renaissance modification of the sense given it by Aristotle’ [in *Rhetoric*, III., ii, 14IIb].¹⁷⁸ Aristotelian early-modern rhetoric recognised four poetic virtues: wisdom, variety, *Energeia* (sometimes: *efficacia*), and sweetness.

For Hill, *Energeia* is a practical faculty of poetic craft that combines rhetorical efficaciousness, ‘forcibleness’, something akin to John Donne’s ‘masculine persuasive force’ (see chapter one) with Donald Davie’s definition of good poetic syntax, ‘the curve of destiny through a life or the path of *energy* [my italics] through the mind’.¹⁷⁹ *Energeia*’s fusion of vision or insight (personal or political) with poetic craft and forceful, persuasive speech reveals it to be a function of rhetoric.

As far as such terms as *Energeia* and ‘sacred vehemence’ constellate around Milton, Hill views their rhetorical function as a melding of the private citizen’s eloquence in aid of *res publica*. In the *Triumph of Love*, he casts this as ‘*laus et vituperatio*, public, forensic, / yet with a vehement private ambition for the people’s / greater good’ (*BH*, p. 246). This description draws on ‘sacred vehemence’ from *Comus*, but also, as we have seen, the ‘endeavour’ of the private citizen-poet addressing the

¹⁷⁷ Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry* or *The Defence of Poesy*, ed. by Geoffrey Shepherd, rev. 3rd edn by R.W. Maslen (Manchester University Press, first publ. 1965, 2002), p. 113.

¹⁷⁸ Maslen, notes in *ibid.*, p. 241.

¹⁷⁹ Donald Davie, *Articulate Energy* (London: Routledge and Paul, 1955) p. 157. See chapter four on the significance of Davie’s formulation for Hill’s understanding of poetic syntax, with particular regard to Yeats.

public from the opening of *Areopagitica*. This endeavour is undertaken by Hill in his triptych of poems from *Canaan* (1996) entitled ‘To the High Court of Parliament (November 1994)’; the date, Hill has revealed in various public readings, commemorates the 350th anniversary of the publication of Milton’s defence of unlicensed printing.¹⁸⁰ The next section looks at both the ‘blind energy’ that Hill believes characterises much public utterance at the outset of the second millennium, before moving on to a section on the adversarial ‘sacred vehemence’ of Hill’s own rhetoric in poems beginning from *Canaan* onwards.

Blind Energy and Blind Mouths

Following remarks made in his unpublished lecture from the 1980s at Cambridge, I have chosen to interpret ‘sacred vehemence’, the self-advertised rhetorical power of the Lady in Milton’s *Comus*, as synonymous with what Geoffrey Hill elsewhere calls *Energeia* and ‘active virtue’: a heated form of poetic rhetoric that is composed and ordered out of the contingency and necessity of language as ‘blind energy’, a rhetorical mode that addresses itself to and for the public good.

As has been intimated, in Hill’s poetics the theological given that necessitates the poet to rise to this endeavour is the social, political, and linguistic consequences of

¹⁸⁰ See for instance Hill, *British Academy lecture*, and also *Poetry reading at the Serpentine Gallery Poetry Marathon*, audio-visual recording, *YouTube* (17-18 October 2009) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SiuMKASXJLU>> [accessed 29 January 2016].

original sin. In the essay ‘Our Word is Our Bond’, the recurring trope of ‘infection’ accompanies Hill’s musing on the effects of original sin on language; Matthew Sperling has finely traced the various resonances of this characterisation, concluding that the most important context of the trope is Philip Sidney’s usage in *The Defence of Poesy* (1595): ‘[...] since our erected wit maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will keepeth us from reaching unto it’.¹⁸¹ Milton also uses the trope in *Paradise Lost*, where Sin relishes her future dominion over humanity: ‘Till I in Man residing through the Race, / His thoughts, his looks, his *words* [my italics], actions all infect’ (X. 607-8). The Latinate syntax ending the line with the crucial verb has the effect of showing the poet’s words as indelibly infected by circumstance, the sentence carrying ‘Sin’ through the various aspects of human nature so that every tendency (‘all’) is to that infection. It is against this inveterate nature of language as Hill and Milton perceives it that the need for an energised rhetoric arises. Elsewhere, Hill has used in place of this traducian idea of original sin as infection other metaphors, including gravity (*pondus*), and also anarchic volition – ‘blind energy’ and ‘blind mouths.’¹⁸²

‘Blind energy’ is itself a term with Miltonic valences. In his 2008 lecture ‘Milton as Muse’, he defines *Energeia*’s forceful and persuasive rhetoric in dialectical opposition to ‘blind energy’, a term cribbed from William Wordsworth’s 1809 tract *Concerning the Convention of Cintra*:

¹⁸¹ See Sperling, *Visionary Philology*, pp. 150-53.

¹⁸² Much has been written on Hill and ‘gravity’ as it pertains to original sin, but see particularly Sperling, *Visionary Philology*, pp. 18-19, and Robert Macfarlane, ‘Gravity and Grace in Geoffrey Hill’.

[...] the capacity to energise grammar, syntax, and rhythm, in such a way as to distinguish –and here I employ Wordsworth’s *Cintra* again – to distinguish ‘strong-holds in the imagination’, and a language and a ceremony of imagination, from, on the other hand, ‘blind energy [...] habits of daring [...] found in men who, checked by no restraint of morality, suffer their evil passions to gain extraordinary strength in extraordinary circumstances.’¹⁸³

It is not surprising to find Wordsworth’s tract providing a key term of pejoration for Hill’s Miltonic schema of poetic rhetoric; in ‘Civil Polity and the Confessing State’, Hill numbers *Cintra* with Milton’s *Areopagitica* as ‘major works of State’ which support his essay’s argument that ‘poetry is inextricably bound into the purpose and function of civil polity’.¹⁸⁴ The register of Wordsworth’s pamphlet on the shortcomings of British leadership in the crucial stages of the Peninsular War is profoundly Miltonic; he mentions Milton, in phrases that recall his ode ‘London, 1802’, as one of England’s ‘long train of deliverers and defenders [...] whose voice yet speaketh for our reproach’, and urges the Spanish combatants against Napoleon Bonaparte’s imperial aggressions to recognise that their strength ‘*chiefly* lies in moral qualities’, and particularly in ‘vehement passions, and virtuous as vehement’.¹⁸⁵ The syntax here, ‘as’ functioning as a comparison of equivalence between virtue and vehemence, nevertheless exposes an undercurrent of anxiety within this virtual *donnée* of English Protestant zeal: virtue is

¹⁸³ Hill, *Milton as Muse*.

¹⁸⁴ ‘Civil Polity and the Confessing State’, pp. 10, 7.

¹⁸⁵ ‘The Convention of Cintra’ (1809), in *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. by W.J.B. Owen and J.W. Smyser, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), I (1974), pp. 288, 235.

tempering the vehemence of those passions as much as complementing them. Wordsworth alludes even more directly to the Lady's speech in *Comus* in a later passage, in which his voice raises above 'the petty irritations' of the day to speak in 'the theme [of] justice and passion [...] passion *sacred as vehement*' (my italics).¹⁸⁶

In *The Triumph of Love*, Hill writes that he is 'convinced that shaping, / voicing, are types of civic action', citing 'Milton's political sonnets' and Wordsworth's 'great tract / on the Convention of Cintra, witnessing / to the praesidium in the sacred name / of things betrayed' (*BH*, p. 259). That volume excoriates various manifestations of 'blind energy'; for instance, amplified '[e]ntertainment overkill': '[f]or the essentials of the cadre, Wordsworth's / "savage torpor" can hardly be bettered' (*BH*, p. 253). 'Savage torpor', synonymous with 'blind energy', is from Wordsworth's Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), a blunting of 'the discriminating powers of the mind' which Wordsworth thought was caused by the effects of urbanisation, 'a craving for extraordinary incident' exacerbated by the burgeoning press (he mentions in this passage the neglect paid to Milton).¹⁸⁷ *The Triumph of Love* tunes in and out of the clangour of 'market-place charlatans and gross sibyls' in condemnation of 'the accessible [...] acceptable, accommodating, openly servile' (*BH*, pp. 245, 250). It is in *Speech! Speech!*, however, Hill's self-appointed 'most Miltonic' volume, that the 'dark materials' of creation (as he puts it in the British Academy lecture) are present in all their cacophony and soporific visuals, or as Andy Fogle comments in a review of the

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 295.

¹⁸⁷ 'Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* (1800)', in *The Prose Works of Wordsworth*, I (1974), p. 128. Hill alluded to this virtually synonymous phrase for 'blind energy' as early as the 1979 essay 'The Absolute Reasonableness of Robert Southwell', *CCW*, p. 24.

volume, the ‘general electric static’ and ‘blue-glazed indifference of the altar screen’.¹⁸⁸ In *Speech! Speech!* creation – artistic and divine – is not only generative but destructive, volitional, accumulative: in a word, blind.

A fuller analysis of ‘blind energy’ and its cognates in Hill’s poetic jargon would require a chapter of its own; suffice to say here that its Miltonic resonances are without question, linking it as he does in the 2008 lecture to ‘blind mouths’, Milton’s catachrestic term of abuse for Laudian prelates in *Lycidas*. Hill states that the ‘Wordsworthian use of blind’ in ‘blind energy’ is drawn from this rhetorical figure. The exclaimed reproach, as John Ruskin noted in *Sesame and Lilies*, is a ‘broken metaphor’ which plays on etymologies: bishop is derived from the Greek ἐπίσκοπος, ‘onlooker’ or ‘overseer’, while pastor emerges from the past participial stem of *pāscere*, ‘to feed, give pasture to’ (*OED*3). ‘Blind mouths’, as Ruskin elucidates, is a double insult: ‘[t]he most unbishoply character therefore a man can have is to be Blind. The most unpastoral is, instead of feeding, to want to be fed – to be a Mouth.’¹⁸⁹

As mentioned at the start of this chapter, Hill’s poem ‘The Bidden Guest’ alludes to lines in *Lycidas* that are in close proximity to ‘blind mouths’: ‘and shove away the worthy bidden guest’, a scriptural allusion to Matthew 22:3. The poem, amongst the earliest in Hill’s oeuvre, was first published in 1953 and conjures the speaker’s experience of feeling bidden but not worthy, the inability to come out of ‘the heart’s unbroken room’ exacerbated by the rigid rubrics of 1950s Anglican ceremony:

¹⁸⁸ Andy Fogle, ‘This Canon Fires’, review of *Speech! Speech! on Popmatters* <<http://www.popmatters.com/review/speech-speech/>> [accessed 20 January 2016].

¹⁸⁹ John Ruskin, ‘Lecture 1. – Sesame’, *Sesame and Lilies* (London: George Allen and Sons, 1908), pp. 39–40.

‘starved’, ‘unbending, ‘stiffly-linened’, the church’s vain attempts (in the words of Milton in ‘Of Reformation’) to ‘[draw down] the very shape of God himself, into an exterior and bodily form.’¹⁹⁰ As we have seen in chapter one, this puritan streak runs throughout Hill’s verse; in an unredacted interview released posthumously, Hill’s wife Alice Goodman characterises him as ‘communicant but resentful’, while Hill himself mentions that his mother’s family were ‘zealous nonconformists’.¹⁹¹ The antipathy to formalism in ‘The Bidden Guest’ is held in curious tension with the elaborately-enforced rhyme scheme and iambic tetrameter. The tension is perhaps best explained by an observation in one of Hill’s earliest essays published in *Geste* (1958), on the poetry of Allen Tate; Hill writes, “‘form, for the modern poet, is [...] both triumph and concession [...] In a chaotic society the poet creates his own moral world, his own pattern and order; yet through this very order he makes a claim to bourgeois respectability; he hands in a testimonial to the Accuser of this world.’¹⁹²

Perhaps the most striking aspect of ‘The Bidden Guest’ as a Miltonic protest against Anglican formalism is the repetition of tropes of blindness: ‘blind alleys’, ‘unwinkingly’, the snuffing out of altar candles rendered as ‘[a] server has put out its eyes’. ‘Blind energy’, therefore, need not necessarily be merely anarchic: it can be simultaneously deadeningly formal. One overt allusion to *Lycidas* outside the title of the poem is the catachresis ‘broken mouths’, congregants murmuring in rote response. Jahan Ramazani has compared Milton’s ‘blind mouths’ to the epithet ‘Blind Sun’ in ‘A Prayer to the Sun’ in memory of Miguel Hernandez, from Hill’s ‘Four Poems

¹⁹⁰ Milton, ‘Of Reformation’, *CPW*, I (1953), p. 520.

¹⁹¹ ‘An interview with Geoffrey Hill (1932-2016)’.

¹⁹² Hill, ‘The Poetry of Allen Tate’, *Geste*, 3.3, pp. 8-14 (12).

Regarding the Endurance of Poets' in *King Log*.¹⁹³ 'Broken mouths' from 'The Bidden Guest' seems an even more persuasive echo of Milton's epithet, as its hypallage ruptures the usual connection of 'broken' with, for instance, 'nose' or 'bone' to transfer the adjective to 'mouths', as Milton's strained metaphor transfers blindness to the mouths of Laudian prelates. The effect in Hill's poem is to make the prayers (compared to Anglican prayer beads spilling on to the floor) drool out of the 'broken mouths' with slovenly ease. Catachresis, wrenching metaphor which assaults common meanings and cliché, is a way of countering the 'blind energy' of language, but at the same time its animus draws on that same force. It is anarchically-strained metaphor contained within a formal rhetoric, in a way that might aptly be described as 'blind-mouthed', which as I noted in the introduction is a self-description that Hill confesses to in 'Milton as Muse'.¹⁹⁴ 'Sacred vehemence' opposes the anarchic and volitional 'blind' energies of late-twentieth and early-twenty-first century polity, but its own energised speech is composed out of the latter, and not always entirely distinguishable from it.

Sacred vehemence

In *Comus*, as Hill's lecture notes suggest, the Lady's virtue tested in the 'perplexed paths of this drear wood' (37) is a dramatic anticipation of Milton's rejection around a decade later in *Areopagitica* of 'blank virtue', unexercised by the 'dust and heat' of

¹⁹³ Jahan Ramazani, *Poetry and its Others: News, Prayer, Song, and the Dialogue of Genres* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. 133.

¹⁹⁴ The Miltonic resonances of 'blind mouths' has been mentioned in the introduction; see Steven Matthews, 'Finding Consonance in the Disparities', pp. 665-83.

dialectical and rhetorical opposition to vice. ‘Heat’, as I have argued, constitutes along with ‘zeal’ key words in Protestant polemics of the late–sixteenth and early–seventeenth centuries. Hill’s poetry first references the Lady’s ‘sacred vehemence’ in adjectival form in *The Triumph of Love*: ‘*laus et vituperatio*, public, forensic, / yet with a vehement private ambition for the people’s / greater good’ (*BH*, p. 246). Arguably, however, this poetic mode has its first major articulation in Hill’s poetry in the volume *Canaan*. In the British Academy lecture, Hill states that he was drawn to seeing Milton ‘almost retrospectively as a Muse’ following his ‘discovery of the political and apologetical sonnets’. He adds that although his twenty–first century poetry shows the most explicit affinities with Milton, the ‘gravitational pull’ began earlier: ‘I would look for the first connections with Milton to a book I published I think around 1996... *Canaan*.’ Hill’s poetry notebooks in the archive at the Brotherton Library show that he began drafting that volume around the mid–eighties, almost a decade earlier, and concurrent with his teaching on Milton and other seventeenth century writers in his ‘Dissentient Voices’ course at the University of Cambridge.¹⁹⁵ Three of the poems in *Canaan* are entitled ‘To the High Court of Parliament’, with a subheading dating their composition ‘*November 1994*’. Hill explains the allusion to Milton in the British Academy lecture:

when the book appeared it was suggested by many... not *many* people... not many people deigned to comment on me... a significant proportion of the small number of people who comment on me... suggested I chose November 1994 because I was

¹⁹⁵ ‘Poetry Notebook 29: Canaan’, BC MS 20c Hill/2/1/29, at the Brotherton Library, the University of Leeds, contains the first extant drafts of *Canaan*.

talking about a Thatcherite takeover of... a graveyard in London for a pound which was then... sold for millions... I called it November 1994 because it was... the 350th anniversary... of the publication of *Areopagitica*... the title [of the poem] is one of the opening phrases.¹⁹⁶

In the same lecture Hill reads the third poem in the sequence (which is the final poem in *Canaan*):

—who could outbalance poised
Marvell; balk the strength
of Gillray's unrelenting, unreconciling mind;
grandeers risen from scavenge; to whom Milton
addressed his ideal censure:
once more, singular, ill-attended,
staid and bitter Commedia – as she is called –
delivers to your mirth her veiled presence.

None the less amazing: Barry and Pugin's grand
dark-lantern above the incumbent Thames.
You: as by custom unilluminated
masters of servile counsel.

¹⁹⁶ *British Academy Lecture.*

Who can now speak for despoiled merit,
the fouled catchment of Demos,
as 'thy' high lamp presides with sovereign
equity, over against us, across this
densely reflective, long drawn procession of waters? (*BH*, p. 235).

The poem is both *laus* (Marvell, Gillray, Milton, Pugin) and *vituperatio* ('grande'es', 'masters of servile counsel', 'the fouled catchment of Demos'). The rhetorical 'who' of both the opening and the close of the poem is itself a spur for Hill to rise to the occasion, just as Milton imposes similar rhetorical spurs to his verse: 'Who would not sing for Lycidas?' (*Lycidas*, 10); 'that to the highth of this great argument / I may assert eternal providence, / And justify the ways of God to men' (*PL*, I. 24-26). Hill's imitation is in the vein of both Marvell's ode 'On Mr Milton's *Paradise Lost*' and Wordsworth's 'London, 1802', which closely model the Miltonic voice they praise.¹⁹⁷ Wordsworth's ode in particular is an important mediating presence for several poems in *Canaan* – compare 'England hath need of thee: she is a fen / Of stagnant waters' with Hill's 'Dark Land' and its veiled allusions to Thatcherite upward mobility: 'Aspiring Grantham / Rises above itself. / Tall churches wade the fen / on their stilts of glass' (*BH*, p. 182).¹⁹⁸

'To the High Court of Parliament' is littered with allusions to Milton, that strive to create a profounder, structural allusion in emulating 'sacred vehemence' as a mode of public rhetoric. 'Pugin's grand / dark-lantern' is evocative, capturing perfectly the

¹⁹⁷ See Nigel Smith's notes in his edition of *The Poems of Andrew Marvell* (London: Longmans, 2003), p. 182.

¹⁹⁸ Wordsworth, 'London, 1802', in *Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems 1800-1807*, ed. by Jared Curtis (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1983), p. 165.

umbrous, illuminated neo-Gothic majesty of the Houses of Parliament at night, its strange light clashing with the ‘unilluminated’ time-servers of the Commons. The phrase, however apt, is purloined from *Comus*, where the Lady remonstrates with ‘thievish Night’: ‘Why shouldst thou, but for some felonious end, / In thy dark lantern thus close up the stars...’ (194-96). Hill adapts the Lady’s imagery to attack the felonious, dim-witted politicking of Major’s government, even as he is drawing on political valences of the masque that Milton purposely obfuscated in the censorious 1630s. The connection between the image and *Comus* is later further consolidated by Hill’s virtual quotation of the Lady’s address to night, “‘thy” high lamp’, with the Miltonic archaism in quotation marks to both register the allusion and perhaps recapture a register of contempt lost to modern English in its evolution away from the T-V distinction.

The poem also harnesses Miltonic wordplay, particularly that which, to quote Christopher Ricks on Milton, ‘insists on the derivation of a word, and so expels the bizarre or fortuitous’.¹⁹⁹ This ‘etymological faith’ (Ricks) is shared by Hill in his vehement style of public address modelled on Milton: for instance ‘ideal censure’ – referring to *Areopagitica* – puns on the fact that Milton’s 1644 tract was written against Laudian censorship in Caroline England, an exploitation of the etymological root shared by ‘censure’ (adverse judgement or hostile criticism, *OED3* sense 3) and ‘censor’ (v.).²⁰⁰

The word ‘incumbent’ in the phrase ‘incumbent Thames’ is adjectival, punning on the more usual sense of the word, a noun meaning ‘the holder of any office’ (*OED3*, n. 2) and which the *OED* tells us is a sense peculiar to English. The ambience or

¹⁹⁹ Christopher Ricks, *Milton’s Grand Style* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 68.

²⁰⁰ Cp. Hannah Crawforth: ‘much of the energy of [‘On the New Forcers’] derives from etymological puns...’, *Etymology and the Invention of English in Early Modern Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 150.

suggestiveness of the word evokes simultaneously the smug entitlement of office (incumbency as a term of power rather than service), as well as Hill's conservative sense that it little matters who is 'incumbent' for the term of office in the 'anarchical plutocracy of late capitalism'; as he remarked on *Newsnight* apropos his feelings about the general election of May 2015, '[I have] a sense almost of incredulity that this farce is to be run yet again'.²⁰¹ The grammar, however, as opposed to the word as read within the thematic content of the poem, insists not upon the connotations of the noun but the word 'incumbent' as an adjective describing the river Thames: 'of things which hang or lean over something else: also of darkness, of breaking waves, etc.' (*OED3*, 1.b, poet.). This sense of pregnant looming, and the suggestion of both darkness and the river's natural force, create an atmosphere of Parliament's acts as carried along by the volition of history, 'blind energy'. The grammar also points to a possibility that Hill models the sentence on Satan's flight in *Paradise Lost*: 'Then with expanded wings he steers his flight / Aloft, incumbent on the dusky air' (I. 225-26). Christopher Ricks, with attention to the syntax ('adjective... on the... adjective... noun'), has described this line as a 'moment of horror' and a phrase of 'sinister mystery'.²⁰² Hill's syntax (adjective... the... adjective... noun) is remarkably similar, and partakes of the same horror and mystery. Ricks further suggests a syntactical parallelism between Satan's flight and the syntax of a line several lines earlier that compares Satan to Leviathan, 'haply slumbering on the Norway foam' (I. 203); Ricks defends the synecdoche of 'foam' for sea on the grounds of its strange effect. It might not be too far-fetched to read a Ricksian tinge to Hill's critique loaded in the connotations of the word 'incumbent' in his *Canaan* poem; in the

²⁰¹ 'Geoffrey Hill's election enthusiasm', *Newsnight*, BBC One (1 May 2015), audio-visual recording, *YouTube* <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FLQTTZXSegI>> [accessed 10 October 2015].

²⁰² Ricks, *Milton's Grand Style*, p. 16.

2015 Newsnight interview, he wearily admitted that he would vote in the general election, aware that ‘Parliament nonetheless moves in some Leviathan-like way which reduces the significance of [our vote] to absolute zero’. While Hobbes seems an obvious candidate for the allusion here, the kinetic aspects of the metaphor and the tacit link in the interview to Hill’s disgust with the repetitive nature of each elected Parliament also arguably conjure Milton and more specifically Ricks’s connection between Leviathan’s slumber and Satan’s flight; were this to be the case, it would further nuance Hill’s use of ‘incumbent’ in the poem.

The verb ‘balk’ in ‘balk the strength / of Gillray’s unrelenting, unreconciling mind’ seems designed to echo lines in Milton’s sonnet ‘On the New Forcers of Conscience Under the Long Parliament’: ‘That so the Parliament / May with their wholesome and preventative shears / Clip your phylacteries, though baulk your ears [...]’ In the Trinity manuscript the line originally read ‘Crop ye as close as marginal P–’s ears’, a reference to the cropping of William Prynne’s ears in 1634 for perceived lèse-majesté in *Histriomastix*, and a gibe at his excessive marginalia.²⁰³ The verb in the substituted line inclines more to clemency, ‘balk’ here meaning ‘to miss or omit intentionally’ (*OED*3, 2), although Hill seems to play with the ambiguity of another sense: ‘to check, hinder, or thwart’ (*OED*3, 5.a). This seems to be allusion by homophone, where the auditory quality of Hill’s word choice echoes Milton (fitting, in the context of the sonnet’s ‘ears’), but the signification (at least in one possible way of

²⁰³ See the notes in the Carey and Fowler edition, *The Poems of John Milton*, p. 297. Hill has alluded to Milton’s line in *Clavics*: ‘Pin it all on Prynne’s ear’ (*BH*, p. 826), which may also be coded invective against perceived failings in the auditory imagination of the presiding genius of the Cambridge school, J. H. Prynne.

reading Hill's usage) differs; the effect is to make one think of the deeper influence Milton has on Hill's public rhetoric than the more obvious allusions.

The invective that Hill's poem hurls at Parliament also makes use of oxymoron: 'masters of servile counsel' imitates the 'condensed violence' of Milton's oxymora regarding Hell (the most celebrated example being 'darkness visible') and the tenor of hellish parody as a whole in *Paradise Lost*.²⁰⁴ Hill's oxymoron bitterly appraises the combination of the slavishness of 'servile' parliamentarians (to special interests, their own vanity/greed) with the masterly way in which they carry out such an abasement of high public office. Similarly, the force of the syntax in the line 'as "thy" high lamp presides with sovereign / equity, *over against* us' (my italics) is achieved by the proximity and clash in signification of the two adjectives, an effect not dissimilar to oxymoron but in the context closer to pleonasm, where ruling 'against' the commonweal is both disruptive of Parliament's envisaged 'equity' and the logical conclusion of its sovereignty 'over' the people. This reconciliation of political skill with base motive in the rhetorical critique of Hill's effects of oxymoron arguably owes much to Milton's presentation of the fallen angels as a whole, not just his local use of oxymoron. Moreover, as the end of this chapter will argue, Hill's satiric effects in 'To the High Court of Parliament', read alongside his 2008 lectures, places Milton's writing in a tradition derived from Machiavelli, in which rhetorical power itself is seen as potentially malign, and the Lady's 'sacred vehemence' strangely similar to Comus's 'magic structures'. Hill is arguably aware, as Milton was regarding his context, that his poetic-rhetorical skill must tread a fine line in seeking to distinguish itself from the self-regarding rhetorical power of venal parliamentarians.

²⁰⁴ R. A. Sayce, cited in Ricks, *Milton's Grand Style*, p. 32.

Original sin and 'active virtue'

This discussion of 'To the High Court of Parliament' has sought to place it firmly within Hill's essential conviction in his memoir-essay 'Confessio Amantis', '[m]y belief, moderately expressed, is that that poetry rightly practised and understood is part of the nervous system of true polity'.²⁰⁵ The rhetorical technique of the poem is a formal correlative of Hill's idea of *Energeia*, in distinction to the 'blind energy' or inertia/volition that he believes stems from original sin. *The Triumph of Love* poses a question as to whether twenty-first century readers can fully grasp the nature of this view of poetic rhetoric as a speech act:

Active virtue: that which shall contain

its own passion in the public weal –

do you follow? – or can you at least

take the drift of the thing? [...]

Still, I'm convinced that shaping,

²⁰⁵ 'Confessio Amantis', p. 49.

voicing, are types of civic action [...] (*BH*, p. 259).

The italicised phrase is drawn from Philip Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry*, the persona of the historian confronting the philosopher: '[he] teaches a disputatious virtue, but I do an active. His virtue is excellent in the dangerless Academy of Plato, but mine shows forth her honourable face in the battles of Marathon, Pharsalia, Poitiers and Agincourt'. Only the poet is seen as combining the precept of the one with the example of the other, 'figured forth by the speaking picture of poesy'.²⁰⁶ The idea of 'active virtue' and 'shaping, voicing' as 'civic action' is central to this rhetoric of polity, and related to Milton's epistemology of good and evil in *Areopagitica*, *Comus*, and *Paradise Lost*.

One could add to Hill's conventional scholarly association of the Lady's rhetorical duel in *Comus* with adversarial virtue as allegorised in *Areopagitica* his namesake Christopher Hill's assertion regarding *Paradise Lost*: '[...] wisdom must lead to action. Michael's [...] correction [...] of Adam's formulation is [...] "only add / Deeds to thy knowledge answerable [...]" the active virtues.'²⁰⁷ Virtue in *Paradise Lost*, as in the polemical pamphlet and the Ludlow masque, is active; that is to say, a 'blank virtue' does not pre-exist circumstance or contingency, but emerges in dialectical struggle and exercise of choice: the Lady's 'sacred vehemence' would not have moral or existential meaning without its oppositional resistance to *Comus*' rhetorical 'magic structures'.

²⁰⁶ Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, pp. 89-90. Intriguingly, Yeats also uses the term in *Per Amica Silentia Lunae*: 'active virtue, as distinguished from the passive acceptance of a code, is therefore theatrical, consciously dramatic, the wearing of a mask', *Mythologies*, pp. 26-27.

²⁰⁷ Christopher Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution*, p. 389.

Hill acknowledges in the ‘Milton as Muse’ lecture and elsewhere that ‘*Energeia* and volition cannot be entirely separated out’. As we have seen, this imbrication of ‘blind energy’ and ‘*Energeia*’ is a result of Hill’s hyper-postlapsarianism, a trait he shares with Milton. In his deliberately provocative and whimsical essay ‘Civil Polity and the Confessing State’, Hill avers that his fantastical anti-utopian utopia would write penitential discipline into ‘the texture of legislation itself’:

and could one get away with saying that the Confessing State would take perpetual cognizance of the awful constant, some “ineluctable necessity” for sinfulness to lie at the heart of projected grace; would it take it up into the very language of its founding charter? Probably not, though Milton might not have dismissed it out of hand.²⁰⁸

This dialectical marriage of heaven and hell, creative order emerging from original sin, *Energeia* and ‘blind energy’, ‘sacred vehemence’ and ‘magic structures’, is to some degree rooted in Milton’s radical epistemology of good and evil, most succinctly stated in *Areopagitica*:

Good and evill we know in the field of this World grow up together almost inseparably; and the knowledge of good is so involv’d and interwoven with the

²⁰⁸ Hill, ‘Civil Polity and the Confessing State’, pp. 13, 19.

knowledge of evill, and in so many cunning resemblances hardly to be discern'd, that those confused seeds which were impos'd on *Psyche* as an incessant labour to cull out, and sort asunder, were not more intermixt. It was out from the rinde of one apple tasted, that the knowledge of good and evill as two twins cleaving together leapt forth into the World. And perhaps this is that doom which *Adam* fell into of knowing good and evill, that is to say of knowing good by evill. As therefore the state of man now is; what wisdome can there be to choose, what continence to forbear without the knowledge of evil?²⁰⁹

The verb 'cleave' ('two twins cleaving together') is apt; as David Antoine-Williams writes, 'the paradigmatic antagonym in the English language is cleave', where he posits 'antagonym' to mean 'self-divided, self-antagonistic words [...] which exist only and necessarily in conflict with each other, a conflict which may be seen to be mimetic of fundamental psychological, spiritual and artistical [sic] antagonisms'.²¹⁰ Hill has been drawn by the richness of this semantic mimesis from his earliest poems to his latest – 'Holy Thursday' to the first section of 'Al Tempo De' Tremuoti' ('this blur and cleave of centuries', *BH*, p. 889):

Child and nurse walk hand in glove

²⁰⁹ Milton, 'Areopagitica', *CPW*, II (1959), p. 514.

²¹⁰ David-Antoine Williams, 'Poetic Antagonyms', *The Comparatist*, 37 (2013), pp. 165-85 (171).

As unaware of Time's betrayal,

Weaving their innocence with guile.

But they must cleave the fire's peril

And suffer innocence to fall ('Holy Thursday', in *BH*, p. 6).

To 'cleave the fire's peril' means 'to pierce, penetrate (air, water, etc.) Also to cleave one's way through' (*OED3*, 'cleave, v.1', 1.b). One of the citations for this sense is from *Paradise Regained*: 'At their passing cleave the Assyrian flood' (III. 435). It simultaneously means 'to cling or hold fast to; to attach oneself (by grasping, etc.) to' (*OED3*, 'cleave, v.2', 3.) with a further implication of 'to remain steadfast; stand fast, abide, continue' (*OED3*, 'cleave, v.2', 5). The process of emerging triumphantly the other side is a scalding, disfiguring ordeal, and one that is potentially unremitting. The mutually-antithetical meanings of passing through and beyond the fire's peril, and holding fast to or abiding in it, are mimetic of the postlapsarian condition.

'Guile' is ambiguous; 'weaving their innocence with guile' suggests that virtue is arrived at by a faculty of conscientious discernment, active good the "warp" teased through the guileful "woof" of language's 'blind energy'. Yet the quasi-adverbial adjunct (to weave *with* guile, i.e. to do so guilefully) suggests something 'involv'd and interwoven', as *Areopagitica* frames it. Something similar lies behind Hill's metaphor for the tapestry of English nationhood in *Mercian Hymns*, which, as the notes to the

1971 edition reveal, is purposively conflated (‘with considerable impropriety’) with both the ‘Herefordshire school’ of twelfth century West Midlands Romanesque sculpture, and utilitarian metal work of the nineteenth century.²¹¹ ‘*Opus Anglicanum*, their / stringent mystery riddled by needles: the silver / veining, the gold leaf, volute grapevine, master- / works of treacherous thread’ (*BH*, p. 105). ‘Riddled’ means both permeated with needlework holes (*OED3*, ‘riddle v.1’, 3.a) and encoding, made into a puzzling artefact of the ‘stringent mystery’ of Englishness (*OED3*, ‘riddle, v.2’, 4. trans.). As Susan Howe writes: [t]he English word “text” comes from Medieval Latin *textus* “style or texture of a work,” literally “thing woven,” from the past participle stem of *texere*: “to weave, to join, fit together, construct.”²¹² Hill’s ‘riddled’ texts carry the burden of generations and centuries of ‘woven’ texts; their ‘treacherous thread’, the medium of the weaver, is by extension the poet’s medium – language, ‘its forthrightness and treachery [...] a drama of the honesty of man himself’.²¹³ ‘Active virtue’, therefore, in which poetry as ‘shaping, voicing’ is seen as a necessary response to the ineluctable reality of original sin and its effects on language, is in the last analysis inseparable from that very ‘blind energy’ which gives it dialectical identity. The next section examines one strand of that inseparability: the way in which ‘sacred vehemence’ as a mode to be

²¹¹ The notes reference A.G.I. Christie’s *English Medieval Embroidery* (Oxford, 1938), pp. 1–2, and G. Zarnecki’s *Later English Romanesque Sculpture* (London, 1953), ‘esp. pp. 9–15’. The reference to ‘utilitarian metal-work of the nineteenth century’ seems to draw upon both the livelihood of Hill’s grandmother, ‘whose / childhood and prime womanhood were spent in the / nailer’s darg’, and the eightieth letter of John Ruskin’s *Fors Clavigera*; Hill, ‘Acknowledgements’, *Mercian Hymns* (London: André Deutsch, 1971) [unpaginated].

²¹² Susan Howe, *Spontaneous Particulars: The Telepathy of the Archive* (New York: New Directions, 2014), pp. 19, 25.

²¹³ Hill, ‘Literature Comes to Life’, an interview with Michael Dempsey, *Illustrated London News*, 6629 (20 August 1966), pp. 24–25 (p. 25).

emulated is perilously close to the “*saeva indignatio*” of Milton’s fallen angels in *Paradise Lost*.

‘*Saeva indignatio*’

As we have already seen in chapter one, Hill’s 2013 lecture ‘A Deep Dynastic Wound’ compares the columbine, passive grammar of Donne with the eruptive ‘sublime semantic animus’ of Milton. In the first chapter, I complicated this schematizing analogy; here, I want to consider further Hill’s ideas of the dangerously parodic and violent rhetorical effects that shadow Milton’s aspirations to a style of ‘sacred vehemence’.

The lecture appropriates its title from John Crowe Ransom’s poem ‘Dead Boy’, used here as a metaphor for the doctrine of original sin (although Hill stresses that ‘it does bear other interpretations – socio-political readings, for instance’ in Yeats and Pound).²¹⁴ ‘The wound’, he insists, ‘is predominantly in the grammar, by which [is meant] syntax and cadence’. In a piercing grammatical analysis of the opening of *Paradise Lost*, Hill considers the ‘dynastic wound’ in terms of the ‘syntactical relationship between main and subordinate clauses in a verse paragraph’:

²¹⁴ Hill, *A Deep Dynastic Wound*.

The shape of the syntax in those first sixteen lines [of *Paradise Lost*] if you will permit me the trope, is sinuous or serpentine, a form appropriate to a tragedy of deviant ethics, but appropriate also to the writhings of an agon of painful redemption [...] I will here call Milton's verse syntax a 'dynastic syntax', because it is designed to embody and project simultaneously the hegemonies of derived rebellious power and the hierarchical grammar of salvation.²¹⁵

The hesitations, lachrymose deviations and overall 'design' of the enjambed unstopped first sixteen lines of the epic are a mimesis of Satan's careful plots, as well as the error and uncertainty endemic in fallen ratiocination; the style also indicates that, as Milton states in *Areopagitica*, 'the knowledge and survey of vice is in this world so necessary to the constituting of human virtue, and the scanning of error to the confirmation of truth'.²¹⁶ For Hill, Milton's success is a result of his cognizance of the fact that the virtues of language and human endeavour are both compromised by and constituted by the Fall; this awareness is not expressed in libertine reprobation, but in radical Protestant liberty which freely enjoins alert and responsible vigilance. As Hill relates in his essay 'Rhetorics of Value and Intrinsic Value':

²¹⁵ Ibid. On the harmonious ordering of the opening of *Paradise Lost* in relation to the "divine proportion" or golden ratio, see Lee M. Johnson, 'Milton's Epic Style: The Invocations in *Paradise Lost*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Milton*, ed. by Dennis Danielson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 71.

²¹⁶ Milton, 'Areopagitica', *CPW*, II (1959), p. 516. On the negative connotations with which Milton imbues the word 'design', see Nigel Smith's notes on Marvell's usage 'vast design' in his ode to Milton, *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, p. 182.

For the poem to engage justly with our imperfection, so much the more must the poem approach the nature of its own perfection [...] the great poem moves us to assent as much by the integrity of its final imperfection as by the amazing grace of its detailed perfection (*CCW*, p. 477).

In the 2013 Oxford lecture, illustrating what he means by Milton's volcanic harnessing of postlapsarian imperfection, Hill notes the dual valences to the words 'equalled' and 'bleating' in lines quoted from *Paradise Lost*: 'Jehovah, who in one night when he passed / From Egypt marching, equalled with one stroke / Both her first born, and all her bleating gods' (*PL*, I. 487-89). 'Bleating' connotes both the caprid-headed gods of Egypt and heaps scorn upon their efficacy, while 'equalled' refers to Jehovah's equal treatment of Egypt's first born and gods, and the sense of flattening, laying low. This 'turbulent' style, Hill avers, is both etymological and rhythmic, with Milton's enjambment a key factor in its achieved effects, adding that 'a great part of the energy of Book One [of *Paradise Lost*] is the energy of anarchy, as Milton gives voice to the monstrous truculence of the rebel angels':

The technical crisis for Milton, as for any didactic poet of his stature, is that the essential creative energy of the poet has elements within itself that are scarcely distinguishable from the *saeva indignatio* of those who, though ruined, yet retain even in distorted form some elements of their original authority. Satan, at line 98 of book one, speaks of his own 'high disdain' for God's ordinances. At the same

time, a part of what we value as Milton's own characteristic tone, whether on behalf of the triumphant republican cause, or speaking defiance on behalf of the buried republican cause, could also be characterised as high disdain.²¹⁷

'*Saeva indignatio*' is from Jonathan Swift's Latin epitaph, translated by W.B. Yeats as 'savage indignation'.²¹⁸ Zeal, as has been mentioned, formed both a watchword of seventeenth century Protestant polemics and a pressure point of acute anxieties about the violence of rhetoric. In 'An Apology Against a Pamphlet' (1642), Milton casts 'zeal' in imagery drawn from the *merkabah* or divine chariot vision in Ezekiel: 'the invincible warrior Zeale shaking loosely the slack reins drives over the heads of Scarlet Prelats, and such as are insolent to maintaine traditions, bruising their stiffe necks under his flaming wheels.'²¹⁹

The violent and potentially vicious aspect of 'zeal' was not lost on Milton; he goes in the 'Apology' to justify a 'sanctif'd bitterness against the enemies of truth', a direct counterpart to the Lady's 'sacred vehemence' in his masque. He observes Luther's professed inability to 'write in a dulle stile', and despite prolonged and contorted defence of Luther's 'tart rhetorick', admits 'if at other times [Luther] seeme to excuse his *vehemence* [my italics], as more then was meet, I have not examin'd through his works to know how farre he gave way to his owne fervent minde; it shall suffice me to

²¹⁷ Hill, *A Deep Dynastic Wound*.

²¹⁸ Yeats, 'Swift's Epitaph', *The Poems*, p. 245.

²¹⁹ Milton, 'An Apology', *CPW*, I (1953), p. 900.

looke to mine own.’²²⁰ As William Poole notes, ‘vehemence’ is derived from the Latin *vehementia*: ‘literally “away-from-mind”, mindlessness’.²²¹ Given Hill’s Miltonic ‘etymological faith’ in the paronomastic effects of derivation, it is interesting that he overlooks this overtone to the word in his unpublished Cambridge lecture while referring to the Lady’s ‘sacred vehemence’ as a ‘conviction purified and cauterized’. Similarly, the *OED* informs us that biblically-sanctioned zeal has a ‘contextual tendency to unfavourable implications (emulation, rivalry, partisanship)’ (*OED*3, ‘zeal, n.’, 1); a lot goes unsaid about the triumph of Anglican mediocrity in English institutional life post-1660 in that smooth phrase ‘contextual tendency’.

Milton in his antiprelatical tract *Of Reformation* which appeared the previous year to ‘An Apology’ indulges in what was becoming a commonplace of Puritan polemical exegesis, a reference to Revelation 3:16, the prophecy regarding the ‘lukewarm’ church of Laodicea and that God will vomit them out:

and it is still *Episcopacie* that before all our eyes worsens and slugs the most learned, and seeming religious of our *Ministers*, who no sooner advanc’t to it, but like a seething pot set to coole, sensibly exhale and reake out the greatest part of that zeale, and those gifts which were formerly in them, settling in a skinny congealment of ease and sloth at the top: and if they keep their Learning by some potent sway of Nature, ‘tis a rare chance; but their *devotion* most commonly

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 901. Cp. Also his remarks on Luther in *The Commonplace Book*, under the heading ‘Of Reproof’: ‘Luther refrained neither from harshness nor from jests that were now and then even a little shameful,’ *CPW*, I (1953), p. 390.

²²¹ William Poole, *Milton and the Idea of the Fall* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 182. Poole notes the appearances of ‘vehemence’ in *Paradise Lost* (*ibid.*)

comes to that queazy temper of luke-warmnesse, that gives a Vomit to GOD
himselfe.²²²

As Thomas Kranidas writes, as early at least as Thomas Brightman's commentary *Apocalypsis Apocalypseos* (Frankfurt, 1609), the emetic verse from Revelation 'becomes paradigm for violent rhetoric and violent behaviour by the righteous' in contest with the measured ecclesiarchs of Anglican *mediocritas* and "Holy Decency".²²³ The scatological excess of Milton's hot zeal is consciously following such precedents; yet once again he feels it incumbent to frame the violence of his language against pre-emptive criticism in the form of an oath:

And heerewithall I invoke the *Immortal* DEITIE *Reveler* and *Judge* of Secrets,
That wherever I have in this Booke plainely and roundly (though worthily and
truly) [...] inveighed against Error and Superstition with *vehement* Expressions
[my italics]: I have done it, neither out of malice, nor list to speak evill, nor any
vaine-glory; but of meere necessity, to vindicate the spotlesse *Truth* [...]²²⁴

Clearly, despite rhetorical and theological commitment to 'heat' and 'zeal' defined against temporising 'luke-warmnesse', and despite (or arguably as an exegetical by-

²²² Milton, 'Of Reformation', *CPW*, I (1953), pp. 536-37.

²²³ Kranidas, *Milton and the Rhetoric of Zeal*, p. 7.

²²⁴ Milton, 'Of Reformation', *CPW*, I (1953), p. 535.

product of) the ‘vehement Expressions’ within sacred scripture, Milton betrays anxiety about their intent and virtue in the context of Protestant polemical rhetoric.

Similarly, while in the Cambridge lecture from the 1980s Hill seems to suggest that ‘zeal’ and an animated, violent style are characteristics of Miltonic *Energeia* worthy of emulation, by the 2013 lecture ‘A Deep Dynastic Wound’ he links the very essence of the creative act to the warped zeal of Satan’s rebel angels: ‘the essential creative energy of the poet has elements within itself that are scarcely distinguishable from the *saeva indignatio* of those who, though ruined, yet retain even in distorted form some elements of their original authority’.²²⁵ The Swiftian term appears in that watershed Miltonic volume, *Canaan*, in the fourth poem of the sequence ‘Cycle’:

Are we not moved by

‘savage

indignation’ or whatever

strange

natürlich

dance with antlers

paces over and

²²⁵ Hill, *A Deep Dynastic Wound*.

over the same

ground (*BH*, p. 207).

As Thomas Day notes, the poem is ‘a dispassionate treatment of that most splenetic of the passions, indignation. There is ambivalence where we would expect fervent conviction [...]’²²⁶ This ambivalence is comparable to Milton’s anxiety-ridden justifications regarding the style of zeal: it is an anxiety about rhetoric. Both this forensic examination of ‘savage indignation’ in ‘Cycle’, and his 2013 remarks in ‘A Deep Dynastic Wound’ recognise the relationship of the ‘essential creative act’ to the ‘*saeva indignatio*’ of the fallen angels, and betray Hill’s fundamental scruples about the *Energeia* of the poet. This anxiety is not about stylistic weakness resulting in ‘bad faith’, such as he delineates in the preface to ‘Style and Faith’: ‘in some cases, despite the presence of well-intentioned labour, style betrays a fundamental idleness which it is impossible to reconcile with the workings of good faith’ (*CCW*, p. 264). Such ‘idleness’ is not *Energeia*, but a slack style incapable of mounting any dialectical opposition to ‘blind energy’, rather succumbing to it. On the contrary, Hill’s fears concerning the poet’s *Energeia* as analogous to the satanic retention of authority in ruin are exercised about those rare instances when ‘style *is* faith’, but in the very instant of equation, style seems at risk of usurping faith and becoming the sole arbiter of power. As has been noted crucially in the introduction to this thesis, William Empson’s observation on metaphor

²²⁶ Thomas Day, ‘Savage Indignation and Petty Resentment in Geoffrey Hill’s *Canaan*, *The Triumph of Love*, and *Speech! Speech!*’, *Études britanniques contemporaines*, 45 (2013) <<http://ebc.revues.org/779>> [accessed 10 October 2015].

is pertinent to this antimony in Hill's critical thought: 'it is a weakness of these equations ['A is B'] that the idea which is taken more seriously is in each case made the predicate'.²²⁷ 'Style *is* faith' can be interpreted as 'faith is reducible to style', in this case a zealous rhetorical power that would reduce everything to the poet's jurisdiction over language.

As I have argued, Hill is fully aware of this malign subplot to poetic '*Energeia*' and that awareness stands fully within his own, much earlier judgement on the trial of Ezra Pound in 'Our Word is Our Bond':

'*saeva indignatio*' is no guarantee of verdictive accuracy, or even perception, and it is lack of attention, or 'care', which brings Pound to the point of 'signing on the dotted line' for the rulers of the darkness of this world – not in spite of, but through, the mundane struggle, the 'being bound' to push on with the matter in hand, no matter what, where the matter is 'the heavy bodies', the 'solid entities', the 'compacted doctrines' (*CCW*, p. 164).

The conjunction in this 1983 essay of Pound's '*saeva indignatio*' with his service of 'the rulers of the darkness of this world', Fascist Italy, equates poetic zeal with potentially satanic consequences, a strategic error that is diagnosed by Hill as a 'lack of attention' to one's rhetoric.

²²⁷ Empson, *The Structure of Complex Words*, p. 316.

Hill's later pronouncements on Milton's *Energeia* are even more sceptical about avoiding such an error, *malgré* even exemplary conscientiousness on the part of the poet: artistic creation and poetic rhetoric, even in the act of resisting 'blind energy' or intrinsic malignity of language may be in the final analysis inseparable from the 'high disdain' and malign efficaciousness of style as its own arbiter, Comus's 'magic structures' cleaving essentially to the Lady's 'sacred vehemence'. Their distinction, by this reading, would be an allegorical one, not one made in terms of their respective rhetorical power.

In summary, Hill's poetry of civil rhetoric derives and harnesses from Milton an elaborate triadic scheme: the poet's *Energeia* or 'sacred vehemence' is pitched to advance the cause of the common good, confronting 'blind energy', the maelstrom of inertia and volition that oxymoronicly characterises common language. Both '*Energeia*' and 'blind energy' exist in a dialectic that in Hill's elaborate Protestant poesis stems from original sin, interlocking gyres reminiscent of Keats's marginalia on *Paradise Lost* (which Hill quotes approvingly in the British Academy lecture), that hell 'moves on like music, not grating and harsh, but like a grand accompaniment in the Base to Heaven.'²²⁸ *Energeia* as poetic creation orders and transforms the linguistic consequences of the Fall, itself composed out of those same 'dark materials' (*PL*, II. 916). The third vertex in the triad of Hill's Miltonic poetics is his realisation that *Energeia* need not necessarily be ordered to the common good; rhetorical efficacy in poetry, nevertheless distinct from the malign but ineffectual babble of 'blind energy', may be nonetheless malign. As I have been arguing, the 'vehemence' that characterises

²²⁸ Cited in Hill, *British Academy lecture*.

Protestant polemical rhetoric which Hill inherits from Milton as a particular mode of *Energeia* is fated to operate in a hyper-postlapsarian field in which good and evil ‘cleave together’, and ‘vehemence’ (as we have seen in chapter one with regards to Hooker and Donne’s diligent Anglican enquiries into the word) is apt to emulate the logic of Beelzebub as much as ‘the irrefutable / grammar of Abdiel’s defiance’ (*BH*, p. 245): ‘Among the faithless, faithful only he; / Among innumerable false, unmoved, / unshaken, unseduced, unterrified’ (*PL*, V. 897-99).²²⁹

In the essay ‘Unhappy Circumstances’ apropos Dryden’s version of *Paradise Lost* in heroic couplets, Hill notes that there is ‘no simple distinction between Hobbesian secularism and Miltonic theology’, before adding that ‘the rich, dangerous vein of proud, resentful, yet stoical consciousness of injured merit’ is the ‘stratum of deliberation’ in which Dryden works, and which stands in contrast to the ‘legislative style’ of Abdiel. Hill writes that Milton would have found the former ‘theologically and ethically dubious’ (*CCW*, p. 190). Nevertheless, by the time of the quatercentenary lectures and later, Hill has come to feel that Milton as much as his Restoration emulator works in that ‘rich, dangerous vein’, what he calls in ‘A Deep Dynastic Wound’ the ‘sublime semantic animus’ of Milton’s paronomasia.

Such rhetorical effects become most manifest in Hill’s work with the appearance of *Canaan*, as has been examined with reference to ‘To the High Court of Parliament’ earlier in this chapter. I want to return to that volume, to Hill’s poem on the Kreisau circle’s resistance in Nazi Germany, ‘De Jure Belli Ac Pacis’, in order to illuminate the

²²⁹ Note that the privative grammar of Abdiel is used to describe Robert Southwell in Hill’s essay on the Jesuit martyr, whereas ‘Donne’s words relish their own seductive strength’, *CCW*, p. 37.

Miltonic anxiety that agitates Hill, that ‘sacred vehemence’ is not ultimately distinct from civil rancour and even ‘injured merit’.

The first of the wrenched, unrhymed sonnets in this poem–sequence ends with several bitter puns and effects of enjambment that allude to Milton’s polemical energies:

Could none predict these haughty degradations

as now your high-strung

martyred resistance serves

to consecrate the liberties of Maastricht? (*BH*, p. 198)

Hill’s conservative temperament takes issue with how the memory of Hans-Bernd von Haefen, to whom the poem is dedicated *in memoriam*, and by implication other theorists of European, national, and civic identity (‘huge-fisted Comenius’) are traduced by what he sees as the assimilative, cynical co-option in the free-market economic integration ratified by the Maastricht Treaty in February 1992. The choice of the word ‘liberties’ alludes to this economic model, which Hill has of late styled ‘anarchical Plutocracy’ following William Morris.²³⁰ It also implies ‘presumptuous behaviour; licence’ (*OED3*, 5. a), a travesty of the European wartime resistance used to legitimate

²³⁰ For one of many instances of Hill’s adopting Morris’s coinage, see ‘Confessio Amantis’, p. 51. He sometimes refers to it as ‘plutocratic anarchy’.

hyper-capitalist liberalism. The political landscape post-Brexit for critics of the EU on the left (and possibly for many on the right) of British politics is markedly different, after a campaign marred by demagoguery and xenophobia, chillingly reminiscent of the ‘new farce’ unveiled in *The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy*, history as ‘supreme clown, dire tragedian’ (*BH*, p. 143).

Hill died suddenly two weeks after the Referendum. To risk the biographical fallacy, he is thought to have voted Remain; his wife Alice Goodman revealed in a blog post after his death that the last poem he had finished before his death ‘looks forward into the grim details of Britain’s withdrawal from the European Union’.²³¹ It might well be argued that Hill recognised, even leaving the viciousness of the Leave campaign aside, that its lurid fantasia of deregulated trade while strictly regulating movement of people is scarcely less of a ‘liberty’ than the 1992 agreement. Perhaps there is no contradiction in saying that, paraphrasing Frank Musgrove’s ‘indisputable’ conclusion that Hill cites in ‘Confessio Amantis’ (referring to the 1926 general strike and the abolition of grammars), both Maastricht and the 2016 referendum were profound betrayals of the English working class. Whatever his exact thought on the crisis, Hill’s politics, to the last, remained idiosyncratic, yet consistent.²³²

The pun on ‘liberties’ is drawn from one of Milton’s contentious sonnets: ‘licence they mean when they cry liberty’ (‘Sonnet XII’). Section VII of Hill’s poem refers to the ‘absolute / licence of the demons’ (*BH*, p. 204). Hill has since, in both his

²³¹ Alice Goodman, ‘Poetry gives us a way of reading the world’, *Church of England Comms Blog* (5 October 2016) <<http://cofecomms.tumblr.com/post/151398012257/poetry-gives-us-a-way-of-reading-the-world>> [accessed 12 January 2017]

²³² Cp. Hill’s self-description as ‘a sort of Ruskinian Tory. It is only Ruskinian Tories these days who would sound like old-fashioned Marxists’; Hill, ‘Interview: Geoffrey Hill, a Ruskinian Tory’.

Milton lectures of 2008, noted how in Milton's sonnet 'one word [shouts] across the line to the other [...] irreducible to paraphrase', and that the 'distinction is held within the constraints of the line, which paradoxically draws more attention to general applicability'.²³³ The suggestion, if we read Hill's comments in the 2008 lectures into his use of 'liberties' in his poem of more than a decade earlier, is that Milton's poetic rhetoric – his line unit simultaneously drawing together and distinguishing 'liberty' and licence' – has a general applicability, to the Major government of the early 1990s as much as the seventeenth-century detractors of Milton's divorce treatises at whom the sonnet was aimed (see Carey and Fowler's notes, p. 294). Perhaps, by a further implication, an even broader applicability to the difference between poetic liberty and poetic licence, a distinction that forms an area of increasing anxiety for Hill.

The 'sacred vehemence' of 'De Jure Belli Ac Pacis' seems to model much of its polemic on Milton's sonnets, which Hill has numbered in *The Triumph of Love* as one of the few persisting examples after Petrarch of 'the noble vernacular' (*BH*, p. 259), while in *Scenes from Comus* (2005) he draws attention to their 'rhetoric / like the exposed / innards of a jumping jack' (*BH*, p. 467), the rhetorical tricks of their astonishingly violent animation 'exposed' to the mechanic's scrutiny of the poet-critic. Hill's sardonic rhetorical pitch in the poem ('Where would one find Grotius for that matter, / the secular justice clamant among the psalms [...?]) is reminiscent of questions addressed to parliamentarians (and no one in particular) in 'To the High Court of Parliament' (see earlier in the chapter). The rhetorical strategy mimics that of Milton in the sonnets: 'Dare ye for this adjure the civil sword [...?]' ('On the New Forcers

²³³ Hill, *Milton as Muse*.

of Conscience under the Long Parliament’); ‘Why is it harder sirs than Gordon, / Colkitto, or Macdonnel, or Galasp?’ (‘Sonnet XI’). The sardonic question strikes not so much at the lack of answers provided by the imagined interlocutor, as at their fitness to answer at all.

The enjambments of Hill’s poem are as acerbic and poignant as anything found in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. ‘high-strung’ is defined by the *OED* as ‘characterised by or exhibiting great spirit, vigour, or tension’, which conjures both the magnanimity of the Kreisau dissidents as well as the strains incurred in their resistance. It also bitterly, shockingly puns – both verbally and in the dangling visuals of its enjambment – on von Haeften’s execution by hanging at Plötzensee Prison on 15 August, 1944.²³⁴ A similar energy of condemnation animates the opening of the fourth fourteener:

In Plötzensee where you were hanged

they now hang

tokens of reparation and in good faith

compound with Cicero’s maxims, Schiller’s chant,

your silenced verities (*BH*, p. 201).

²³⁴ Hill has paid tribute to the witness of members of the Kreisau Circle (Bonhoeffer, von Moltke) in other poems and throughout his critical writing, most notably in his ‘blueprint’ for a new polis in ‘Civil Polity and the Confessing State’, pp. 7-20.

The savoured retribution of ‘they now hang’ – the licentious objects of the poem’s censure – is itself hanging in the balance, until the enjambment provides us with the compromised, perhaps contemptible demonstrations (wreaths, moral aphorisms) of European guilt, albeit made ‘in good faith’. The syntax here is operating within what Donald Davie termed (with regards to Milton) a ‘flicker of hesitation’, the transitive object of the verb changed from ‘they’ to ‘tokens’.²³⁵ As Christopher Ricks writes of Milton’s ‘fluidity of syntax’, ‘like a skilful advocate, Milton says something which would be impermissibly far-fetched, and then has it struck from the record. But his skill has lodged it in our minds or feelings’.²³⁶ Reminding ourselves that Hill desires that his *laus et vituperatio* be ‘public, *forensic*’ (my italics), it is fair to say that the juridical weight of his ‘far-fetched’ retributive fantasy lingers not only in its own articulation (‘they now hang’) but in the fact that what replaces it seems to further indemnify the European civil powers, who travesty the witness and memory of the hanged von Haeften with tawdry ‘tokens’.

The verb ‘compound’ mediates between signifying that the ‘tokens’ make adequate reparation for those ‘silenced verities’ (see the various nuances in *OED3*, v. II.), with a particular emphasis on senses which stress the pecuniary element or ease of this (e.g. II. 13. b), while also suggesting that these empty gestures ‘compound’ the original offence and even further drown out the ‘verities’ with rhetoric (v. 2. g, *fig.*). ‘Schiller’s chant’ refers to ‘Ode to Joy’, the poem ‘*An die Freude*’ written by Friedrich Schiller in 1785 and set to music by Beethoven in his 9th Symphony. Celebrating the

²³⁵ Donald Davie, ‘Syntax and Music in Paradise Lost’, in *The Living Milton*, ed. Frank Kermode (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960), pp. 70–84 (73).

²³⁶ Ricks, *Milton’s Grand Style*, p. 96.

‘brotherhood of man’, it became the official anthem of the European Union in 1971.²³⁷ As we recall from chapter one, in his Remembrance Day sermon in 2007 at Balliol College, Hill criticised contemporary usage of Micah 4:3 – ‘Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more’ – as ‘a Brotherhood of Man soundbite’.²³⁸ ‘Schiller’s chant’ sounds awfully close to ‘cant’.

Such aural effects are once again strikingly comparable to Miltonic rhetoric in the sonnets; for instance, the line ‘high-minded / base-metal forgers of this common Europe’ (*BH*, p. 201) seems to aurally suggest Milton’s ‘new *forcers* of conscience’ (my italics), an echo that suggests in the process the Machiavellian dyad, force and fraud (cf. Satan’s resolution ‘[t]o wage by force or guile eternal war’ on heaven, *PL*, I. 121).²³⁹ Milton’s own rhetorical strategies are full of such aural effects, ‘because you have thrown off your prelate lord’ seemingly a pun on Archbishop Laud, an effect that as Hannah Crawford says ‘[juxtaposes] words of contrasting derivations that resemble one another in sound’ (and, *pace* Ricks, courts ‘the bizarre or fortuitous’ elements of non-etymological pun).²⁴⁰ Crawford detects a similar effect in the slant cross-rhyme of ‘whore’ in the middle of line 3 of the sonnet with the end-rhyme ‘abhorred’ of line 4, where she argues that the sonic echo creates ‘an implied etymological union’ that does not in reality exist: abhorrence as the etymological logical outcome of the ‘whore plurality’, a “logic” perverted by the Presbyters.²⁴¹ Crawford writes that ‘the falsity’ of this pseudo-etymology reflects ‘the falseness of those clerics who practice pluralism’,

²³⁷ See Esteban Buch and Richard Miller, *Beethoven’s Ninth: A Political History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp. 87, 235–38.

²³⁸ Hill, ‘A Sermon Preached in Balliol’, p. 24.

²³⁹ For the metonymic counsel of imitation that Machiavelli introduces to Cicero’s maxim, see John Roe, *Shakespeare and Machiavelli* (Suffolk: DS Brewer, 2002), pp. 80–81.

²⁴⁰ Crawford, *Etymology and the Invention of English in Early Modern Literature*, p. 151.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

the holding of more than one church benefice. If this mimetic aspect is indeed an effect of the rhyme, it is one that nevertheless draws Milton's own rhetorical strategies into the same ethical dubiety: by "falsifying" semantics for rhetorical effect, Milton's sonnet and its 'sacred vehemence', in the very instance of critique, imitates the same false logic of the Presbyterian pluralists. This is not style lapsing to bad faith, however, but the apotheosis of style itself.

Hill has alluded to the closing line of the sonnet, 'New Presbyter is but old Priest writ large', in favourable and unfavourable contexts: in 'Milton as Muse', he refers to 'On the New Forcers of Conscience under the Long Parliament' as a 'comic poem in that kind of savage beauty' he also discerns in 'bleating gods' in *Paradise Lost*: of the last line of the sonnet, he commends 'that wonderful play on semantics, and orthography [...] this connection between the 'presbyter' and the 'priest' which completely cancels out, as Milton is saying, the false freedoms which are not given to interpretation [...]'²⁴² True liberty, Hill seems to suggest, is above all a commitment to the ontological reality of words (though as has been suggested above, Milton is not above exploiting the opportunities of mere sonic coincidence).²⁴³

In an earlier context, however, Hill's trenchant excoriation of postmodernism in 'Thoughts of a Conservative Modernist' (2002), in the course of stating that he does not understand postmodernism as a phase or period in late-twentieth-century culture but as 'a condition of mind, a *vis inertiae*', he attributes to this 'condition' an aggressive attitude: 'and in forms of *animus* we encounter politics: "New *Presbyter* is but old *Priest*

²⁴² Hill, *Milton as Muse*.

²⁴³ Cp. Hill's rejection of 'a wild subjectivity of interpretative animus' that he believes characterises the academic study of literature in the last quarter of the twentieth century, 'Confessio Amantis', p. 47.

writ large”²⁴⁴ Several years before praising the ‘wonderful play’ evident in this line in the Milton lectures, Hill’s quotation here seems ambivalent: on the one hand, it might be said that it implies that the innovations of postmodernism, the speciously-new animus it finds lacking in the modernist mind-set, are not innovatory at all, but “outdated”, analogous to how the Westminster Assembly’s attempt to impose Presbyterianism by force plays successor to Laudian absolutism.²⁴⁵ On the other hand, and this is less an alternative to that reading as a virtual corollary of it, Hill’s quotation implies that ‘we encounter politics’ and, indeed, “postmodernism” (as he interprets it) in the animus of Milton’s line: Milton’s political animus cannot in the end be neatly distinguished from the Presbyterian, Laudian, or “postmodern” types of the same; if the tenor is different (i.e. the object of critique), the vehicle remains identical (rhetoric). This antilogy or impasse encapsulates in miniature the creative dilemma that relates *Energieia* to malign energy, ‘sacred vehemence’ to Comus’s ‘magic structures’. How can Hill possibly be unaware of this in his 2002 essay?

In short, he isn’t – not entirely. The notes to this quotation of Milton in this essay are extremely revealing. Hill enters a caveat:

It was observed, in the discussion period, that ‘animus’ is too sweeping; and I was reminded that elsewhere I have quoted Pound – echt modernist for good and ill – to the effect that ‘a great deal of literature is born of hate and ... whatever is sound

²⁴⁴ Hill, ‘Thoughts of a Conservative Modernist’, in *Post-Modernisms: Origins, Consequences, Reconsiderations*, ed. by Claudio Véliz (Boston: Boston University Press, 2002), pp. 96-104 (98-99).

²⁴⁵ See the notes in Carey and Fowler, *The poems of John Milton*, p. 296.

in it emerges from the ruins'. Change to... a form of animus that employs 'ambitious,' 'difficult,' 'uningratiating' as simple terms of abuse.²⁴⁶

Yet the amendment does not allow Hill completely off the hook; his approval of Pound's modernist 'hate' and Milton's vehement 'savage beauty' *are* inextricably caught up with the 'sweeping' animus he is suddenly anxious to parse. Hill's quotation of Milton's animus, and its distinction from and relation to so-called "postmodern" animus, is casuistic and dramatic: it theatrically parses the fine line between 'sacred vehemence' and Satanic forcefulness, while drawing attention to the fact that both are types of efficacious, animated rhetoric. The final section looks at aspects of Hill's reading of Milton's 1634 masque, with specific reference to *Scenes from Comus*, arguing that the presence of Machiavelli in Milton's hinterland leads Hill to conclude that an effective rhetorical style is essentially ethically and theologically dubious.

'I would lie to anyone in all frankness': Milton, fable, and Machiavelli

The central contention of this chapter is that Hill's reception of Milton engages a rich fault-line in the poet's rhetorical style, whereby the allegorical tendency of Milton's theological and ethical thought is differentiate between 'sacred vehemence' and subtle, fraudulent 'magic structures' as types of rhetoric, while the actual *rhetorical* effect of

²⁴⁶ Hill, 'Thoughts of a Conservative Modernist', in *Post-Modernisms*, p. 99.

his writing (and the heterodox hyper-lapsarian epistemology evidenced in *Areopagitica*) recognises that they are not easily separated in practice.

The triadic formulation of Hill's reading of Milton has been troped earlier in this chapter as triangular, where the two main vertices, the style of *Energieia* or 'sacred vehemence' and the non-style of 'blind energy', are complicated by a third vertex, 'magic structures': the sense that zealous and heated rhetorical power which confronts linguistic torpor and inertia is shadowed by a malign counterpart. In *Comus*, the Lady's *Energieia* encounters 'blind energy' in multiple forms, the forest's 'sound / Of riot, and ill-managed merriment' (171-2), Comus's 'sensual sty' (77) as well as the prejudice and 'over-exquisite' expectations of her brothers concerning her virtue (359). However, it is not primarily this inert, disordered form of linguistic energy against which the Lady's 'sacred vehemence' is dramatically staged, but rather Comus's 'mighty art' of rhetoric (63), 'well-placed words of glozing courtesy' (161). When the Lady touches on 'the sage / and serious doctrine of virginity', it is significant that she does so in the context of argumentation and modality, a form of paralipsis: 'yet should I try [to convince...] dumb things *would be* moved to sympathise, / And the brute earth would lend her nerves, and shake' [my italics] (796-7).²⁴⁷ This metamorphic power of the Lady is nothing less than a supernatural ability of words to transform nature, 'add to the stock of available Reality', to crib a phrase from R.P. Blackmur (via John Berryman) that Hill has quoted approvingly.²⁴⁸ Such magical power aligns the apparently dichotomous

²⁴⁷ Cp. Milton: 'Methinks I see in my mind a noble and puissant nation rousing herself like a strong man after sleep, and shaking her invincible locks', 'Areopagitica', *CPW*, II (1959), pp. 557-58. Cp. also Hill's favourable reference to P.J. Harvey's album *Let England Shake* in his Oxford Professor of Poetry lecture, *Eccentric to the ends of his master and state*, online audio recording, University of Oxford (8 March 2011) <<http://media.podcasts.ox.ac.uk/kebl/general/2011-hill-poetry-2.mp3>> [accessed 23 April 2015].

²⁴⁸ Hill, in an interview with Rowan Williams as reported in the introduction, *GHC*, pp. 2-3.

rhetorical modes of the Lady's 'sacred vehemence' and Comus's 'magic structures'; there is an alchemical potency to her rhetoric that the son of Circe recognises with a chill in the blood:

She fables not; I feel that I do fear

Her words set off by some superior power' (801).

As with Donne's passive voice in 'God carries us in His Language', the Lady's words are 'set off' by divine favour, and yet the semantic resonances of the word 'power' establishes that both Comus and the Lady operate within the same sphere of rhetorical *Energeia* – forceful suasion, the virtue of which is not necessarily determined by its ethical character, but by its efficacy and internal artistic excellences. That *Energeia* might neutrally encompass moral polarities – in other words, that effective poetic rhetoric might remain ethically-dubious – unsettles the 'theology of language' in so far as Hill derives it from Milton, and in Hill's desired equation of style with faith, seemingly sacrifices the jurisdiction of the latter to the prerogatives of the former. 'Style *is* faith', I am arguing, because at such *tour de force* moments there is an apotheosis of style. The word 'fable' here ('she fables not') is significant. In 'A Deep Dynastic Wound', Hill praises 'the lovely cadence' of a line from Marvell's 'On Mr Milton's *Paradise Lost*':

That he would ruin (for I saw him strong)

The sacred truths to fable and old song...²⁴⁹

Marvell here fears that Milton would sacrifice faith to style, religion to poetry. Harold Bloom's 1989 book *Ruin the Sacred Truths: Poetry and Belief from the Bible to Present* follows a venerable line from Blake to Empson in arguing that not only are poetry and religious belief antithetical modes of knowledge, but that 'every sacred truth not one's own becomes a fable, an old song, that requires corrective vision'.²⁵⁰ Bloom's Romantic-gnostic mythopoeia is not that of Marvell or Hill, notwithstanding my sense that Hill must be read as post-Romantic in his dealings with religious faith. Bloom's grammar is imperative ('ruin the sacred truths'), while the original is modal ('misdoubting his intent, / That he *would* ruin'). The ambivalence is all-important in distinguishing Hill's Romantic reading of Milton from latter-day members of "the Devil's party" such as Bloom, as is his anxiety – a productive, creative anxiety – regarding the word 'fable'.

As Kenneth Haynes has argued, Hill's poetics has consistently nuanced the word 'fable' to mine its 'essential ambiguity', how 'Fable is at once, in variable and unsustainable proportions, the creative but fantastic word of the poet, the word of God, and the mass communications of our shared lives'.²⁵¹ David-Antoine Williams adds, 'the ambiguity captured in "fable" comprehends truth and untruth, real and unreal, fallen and potent—dichotomies and dualities that have formed lasting and productive

²⁴⁹ 'On Mr Milton's *Paradise Lost*', *The Poems of Andrew Marvell*, p. 183.

²⁵⁰ Bloom, *Ruin the Sacred Truths: Poetry and Belief from the Bible to Present* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989), p. 125.

²⁵¹ Haynes, "'Faith" and "Fable" in the Poetry of Geoffrey Hill', p. 401.

difficulties at the core of Hill's thought'.²⁵² If my account is accurate, the dichotomies are allegorical – the Lady's 'sacred vehemence' opposed to Comus's 'magic structures', 'fable' opposed to 'the sacred truths' – while on a *rhetorical* level their respective jurisdictions and powers merge and cleave under the overarching, Comus-like aegis of 'style'.

In *Scenes from Comus*, 'The Argument' of Hill's masque is about, inter alia, 'our covenants with language / *contra tyrannos*' (*BH*, p. 421), a commanding, vehement assertion of poetry as public rhetoric, Milton's 'no mean Endeavour'. Yet throughout his paean to the 1634 Ludlow masque as refracted through Hugh Wood's 1965 symphonic piece, he once again inclines to inordinacy, in this case the sensuous rhetoric of Comus. Beyond diagnosing the 'inertia of malevolence, or *pondus*' (*BH*, p. 423) which we have been terming in this chapter 'blind energy', he is constantly nervously attuned to his own rhetorical power of "fabling". In section 9, he conjures Manichean counterforces:

the *dark Aleph* and the *Father of Lights*.

I imagine them majestic in winter,

though not as they used to be still dangerous.

I say imagine them I mean create them – (*BH*, p. 425).

²⁵² David-Antoine Williams, 'All corruptible things: Geoffrey Hill's Etymological Crux', *Modern Philology*, 112.3 (2015), pp. 522-53 (524).

The ‘*dark Aleph*’ is from the alchemical writings of Robert Fludd, where it signifies a hidden and primordial God, converted by the cabalists into ‘bright and shining Aleph’: the Alpha and Omega respectively.²⁵³ The ‘*Father of Lights*’ is from James 1:17: ‘every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of Lights’, which Milton quotes in Chapter XVII of *The Christian Doctrine*.²⁵⁴ The poet therefore imagines a fluid interplay of both ‘sacred truths’ and ‘old song’, like a believing seventeenth century alchemist. The last line of the section chiasmatically retorts, ‘I say create them I mean imagine them’. There is a profound ambivalence about imagination as Romantic rival to creation, the poet’s fiat and the divine fiat (see the introduction).

In section 13, he writes ‘That I mean what I say, saying it obscurely. / I would lie to anyone in all frankness. / Rhetoric is weaponry’ (*BH*, p. 427); the idiomatic ‘in all frankness’ plays on the sense of disclosing honesty about one’s dishonest dealings with others, while also forcing an oxymoron into the line, the idea of “frank lies” reminiscent of Donne’s epigram in the 1625 letter to Sir Robert Carr. The conjunction of ‘rhetoric’ with ‘weaponry’ is Miltonic, and sits alongside the characterisation of Milton’s rhetoric in the sonnets later in the volume as having a ‘slightly / salty gunpowder odour’ (*BH*, p. 467). Rhetoric is something dangerous, even as his sequence emulates Milton’s ‘sacred vehemence’ in speaking *contra tyrannos*. Such a dangerous aspect is radically distinct from the ‘*troubled sea / of noises and hoarse disputes*’ that Hill cribs from Milton’s 1642 tract *The Reason of Church Government*, a type of ‘blind energy’: in

²⁵³ See Bruce Janacek, *Alchemical Belief: Occultism in the Religious Culture of Early Modern England* (State College, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), p. 67.

²⁵⁴ Milton, *Christian Doctrine*, *CPW*, VI (1973), p. 457.

moving out of that turbulent cacophony, vehement rhetoric nevertheless remains within ‘the sway of power, // the pull of power, its *pondus*, its gravity’ (*BH*, p. 427).²⁵⁵ In *Scenes from Comus*, this recognition is registered in the identification of the poet-speaker with Comus.

In section 15, Hill opines that ‘Milton’s *superbia* is a joy to have’, the Latin epithet for pride, the sin of Lucifer, adding ‘and this by virtue / of Comus’ gifts – not meant to be so taken’ (*BH*, p. 428), a riddling and reticent stanza that suggests that the masque is made superlative ‘by virtue’ of its villain, where ‘virtue’ here is deliberately poised against the allegorised ‘Virtue’ of the masque: ‘Love Virtue, she alone is free’ (1018). The dubious ‘virtues’ of Comus are paraded in *Scenes from Comus*, despite Hill’s observation that ‘masques are booked to be simple, sensuous [...] not overpassionate; / free from dark places and equivocation’ (*BH*, p. 433). An acquaintance with Comus is, like Milton’s epistemology of conative virtue, beneficial:

Chastity makes its bed

with sensuality, could not otherwise

use such authoritative vehemence

devoid of knowingness.

It’s an attractive doctrine to me now (*BH*, p. 437).

²⁵⁵ Milton, ‘The Reason of Church Government’ (1642), in *CPW*, I (1953), p. 821.

Such ‘knowingness’ shadows Hill’s ‘vehemence’, and leads him to be half-admiring, half-repelled by the rhetorician-mage: ‘Oh, and yes, Comus, back to our vanity’ (*BH*, p. 439); ‘it’s not impossible to be the child / of Bacchus and Circe, all imagination, / a demon made against his deeper will / a choric figure awed by what he hears’ (*BH*, p. 443); ‘a Comus child’ burning tree gum (*BH*, p. 450); ‘I know well / the bristling strut, demonic rectitude, / the rod and glass, the masks of his fixation’ (*BH*, p. 470). Hill identifies with the rhetorical zeal of Comus, excellent in its sphere: the ‘masks’ and the ‘rectitude’ (cp. *OED3*, n. 1. b, ‘direction in a straight line’) are the rhetorical tools of the poet. Hill cannot shake the anxiety that rhetoric, aspiring to a reconciliation of style and faith, advancing the common good, retorts back into demonic efficacy.

This chapter has been concerned with how, for Hill, on a rhetorical level Miltonic *Energeia* may be malign as well as virtuous. In ‘Milton as Muse’, Hill traces the ‘savage poignancies’ of lines from *Paradise Lost* such as the description of Beelzebub ‘And princely counsel in his face yet shone, / Majestic though in ruin’ (*PL*, II. 304-5) to Milton’s Italian hinterland, in particular a deep and profound engagement with the writings of Machiavelli, particularly his resonances on the word ‘virtù’. Victoria Kahn’s revisionary account of how Machiavelli was read in the Renaissance hones in on a central issue: how rhetoric and prudence after Machiavelli came to be associated with ‘astuteness or craftiness’, and a tension therefore between an older humanist idea of ‘rhetoric as an activity of ethical deliberation [...] and rhetoric conceived as an instrument or neutral technique of argument’.²⁵⁶ I have found no reference to Kahn’s

²⁵⁶ Kahn, *Machiavellian Rhetoric*, pp. x, 5.

book in Hill's writing, published or unpublished; nevertheless, in the 2008 'Milton and Muse' lecture, as well as in essays such as 'Courage in Shakespeare' (2002) and 'Il Cortegiano: F.T. Prince's *Poems* (1938)' (also 2002), Hill seems to strike upon the same tension within Milton's writing, between rhetorical good understood as humanist virtue and 'the acutest and pertest operations of wit and subtlety'²⁵⁷:

The peculiar problem with Machiavellian virtù is that while in the main it is a value word suggesting 'wit and subtlety' applied to good, it may also indicate a courage or strength of malign energy. In so deploying the word, Machiavelli helped to create the richest of semantic legacies [for Milton...] As a poet myself I am involved for hours a day with questions of efficacy, but the effective may be malign, though even then in a different quality or degree to the ineffectual.²⁵⁸

Hill's imagination has worried at the Machiavellian implications for humanism and writing since as early as *King Log*, in 'The Humanist': 'Virtue is virtù' (*BH*, p. 46).²⁵⁹ The skilful rhetoric of the poet, effective though it may be, vehement as it would wish, may be no more than Comus's 'virtue' ('the virtue of this magic dust', 165), or Satan's 'subtlety' (*PL*, II. 358). In 'A Deep Dynastic Wound', Hill recognises that his reading of Milton's dangerous edges in terms of style and faith may appear to drift

²⁵⁷ Milton, 'Areopagitica', *CPW*, II (1959), p. 557, cited in Hill, *Milton as Muse*.

²⁵⁸ Hill, *Milton as Muse*.

²⁵⁹ I am constrained from exploring Hill's Machiavellian Milton further in this chapter, something I hope to attempt in a separate essay.

towards ‘acceptance of Blake’s hypothesis in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, that “Milton was a true poet and of the devil’s party without knowing it”:

but the observation as popularly understood is radically misleading, and even when the words are rightly taken they suggest an emphasis without knowing it that fails to do justice to the poet’s consciously-exercised powers.²⁶⁰

For Milton as for Hill, *pace* Blake, ‘the poet’s *consciously*-exercised powers’ are caught in a triadic contest, the poet’s rhetorical *Energeia* or ‘sacred vehemence’ skilfully resisting the lumpen drift of linguistic and circumstantial ‘blind energy’, but even while doing so, unable to shake off its demonic shadow, the recognition that effective poetic style may – whether despite the poet’s efforts, or in line with their reprobate will – prove in the final analysis inseparable from rhetorical malignity, creative pride. Where ‘style *is* faith’, style is the arbiter of faith, and ‘the nominal the real’ (‘The Pentecost Castle’, *BH*, p. 118). Hill, close to a belief in animism as far as language is concerned, is no nominalist: the Miltonic agon delivers an intolerable situation. As Gabriel excoriates Satan, a self-described ‘faithful leader’, ‘O name, / a sacred name of faithfulness profaned!’ (*PL*, IV., 951). Such profound anxieties are the very meat of Hill’s Miltonic rhetoric, and the essential fascination for modern readers of *Paradise Lost*.

²⁶⁰ Hill, *A Deep Dynastic Wound*.

Chapter Three

'Not an innocent occupation': the perils of poetry in Geoffrey Hill and Gerard Manley Hopkins

Religious faith after Romanticism

The first two chapters have focused on the anxieties that underlay Hill's engagements with two major early modern poets, John Donne and John Milton. As I have implicitly argued, these anxieties are not best understood as 'anxieties of influence', *pace* Bloom; rather, they expose the intimate conflict that exists between style and faith in Hill's 'theology of language'. I have further claimed that while Hill's explicit poetic ideal is the equation of style and faith, such as he locates in the 'particular authority' of Donne and Milton (also Herbert; *CCW*, pp. 263-4), the actual workings of his own emulation of the style of both poets and, arguably, the true nature of their authority, witnesses a failure to reconcile these distinct magisteria. That failure is nevertheless stylistically and ethically distinct from the 'fundamental idleness' that Hill diagnoses as the common condition of much writing (and perhaps especially contemporary poetry). In my reading, the 'authority' of Donne and Milton which Hill recognises and in various ways imitates is on the contrary a product of their ability to harness the rhetorical and poetic energies created by the stubborn refusal of style and faith to coalesce. In short, this thesis

seeks to recover a hitherto unexplored genealogy, in which some of the most original and significant British poets from the Reformation onwards, whose poetry may be characterised as “religious”, are to some degree anxious about the rival jurisdictions of literature and theology, a rich line of creative antagonism to which Geoffrey Hill stands as heir.

The fourth and final chapter of this thesis sees some of these central issues regarding the antimonies between poetic style and religious faith culminate in Hill’s reverence for W.B. Yeats, one of the ‘last romantics’, who in many ways exemplifies the Romantic impulse to declare poetry as ‘the essence... of life’s redemption’ in a secular age.²⁶¹ There is an important historical juncture lying between these seventeenth-century Christian poets who, however heterodox, seek to reconcile style and faith, and the apotheosis of poetic style over religious faith embraced by W.B. Yeats; that historical moment may be approached via Hill’s reception of the Jesuit-aestheticism of the Victorian Roman Catholic convert, Gerard Manley Hopkins. Hill’s philological debts to Hopkins, particularly in terms of how his oeuvre is situated in relation to the emergence of *The Oxford English Dictionary*, have already been impressively elucidated in Matthew Sperling’s *Visionary Philology*.²⁶² By contrast, the very specific focus of this chapter is to situate Hopkins within virtually an identical post-Enlightenment cultural landscape as his younger near-contemporary, W.B. Yeats. Hill’s investment in the radically heterodox post-Romantic tradition of Yeats shall receive ample articulation in the final chapter, representing as it does a genealogy where, unlike

²⁶¹ Yeats, ‘Coole and Ballylee’, *The Poems*, p. 245, and Stevens, ‘Adagia’, *Collected Poetry and Prose*, p. 901; cited in Hill, ‘Poetry as “Menace” and “Atonement”’, *CCW*, p. 18.

²⁶² See especially pp. 25–39.

Donne and Milton, the intention is not so much to ‘*imitate* the original authorship, the *auctoritas*, of God’ (*CCW*, p. 263) as to assert the quasi-religious authority of the poet’s original and authoritative vision: ‘style *is* faith’ with regards to Yeats means something qualitatively different.

Charles Taylor’s exhaustive study on the historical development of secularism in the western world stems from a desire to answer the question how ‘we have [...] changed from a condition in which [religious] belief was the default option, not just for the naïve but also for those who knew, considered, talked about atheism; to a condition in which for more and more people unbelieving construals seem at first blush the only plausible ones.’²⁶³ Donne and Milton, for all that they were subtle and original thinkers at moments of crisis in the political and cultural life of England, were undoubtedly shaped by and shapers of religious milieux recognizably in tune with Western Christian culture; more significantly, both were historically circumstanced as to be virtually incapable of conceiving of themselves outside these milieux. This is patently not the case with either Hopkins or Yeats, regardless that one was a Roman Catholic convert sharing Donne and Milton’s belief in a transcendent Christian God, and the latter a *fin-de-siècle* initiate into an elaborate personal cosmology. As Taylor writes:

[t]he salient feature of the modern cosmic imaginary is not that it has fostered materialism, or enabled people to recover a spiritual outlook beyond materialism, to return as it were to religion, though it has done both these things.

²⁶³ Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p.12.

But the most important fact about it [...] is that it has opened a space in which people can wander between and around all these options without having to land clearly and definitively in any one.²⁶⁴

It is this free space – not merely political or cultural, but one that involves a radical shift in the social imaginary – which distinguishes the respective milieux of Hopkins, Yeats, and Hill on one side from Donne and Milton on the other.

Hopkins, then, is important to Hill's poetic and critical understanding of style and faith in that he was a modern believer, one who adhered fervently to Roman Catholic dogmatic theology. His conversion in 1866 came at great social and personal cost. Walter Ong has explored the 'rich and manifold' ways in which Hopkins as a Victorian was in possession of an 'articulate self-consciousness, outstanding in an unprecedentedly self-conscious age, [which] followed the direct line of development in the West leading to the more and more interiorised consciousness and more and more articulate self that are part of the modern world and of "modernism" in all its forms'.²⁶⁵ Ong is keen to stress the ways in which Hopkins's expression of Catholic faith, if at times anguished, was ultimately not a source of conflict for him in terms of his relation to his age, a contention exemplified in the title of the final chapter of Ong's study, 'Modernity: Faith Beyond Scandal'. Hill would raise no question as to the earnestness and the ultimate confidence with which Hopkins practised his faith (nor, for that matter, would I). However, the idea of 'faith beyond scandal' in modernity misses the point;

²⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 351.

²⁶⁵ Walter J. Ong, *Hopkins, The Self, and God* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), p. 154.

even if as staunch a believer as Hopkins refused to compromise his religious convictions in Victorian England, they were not and could not be held with the same *inevitability* as with which Donne and Milton held theirs.

Hill touches upon this state of affairs in another context, when in his 1971 essay on Yeats “‘The Conscious Mind’s Intelligible Structure’: A Debate’ he refers to ‘a common cultural predicament’, that in which ‘a grammar of assent’ – a belief that both the universe and the human mind is ordered to God’s will – may be rejected in favour of an alternative, ‘the conscious mind’s intelligible structure’ as approached by the poet’s ‘way of syntax’.²⁶⁶ The first phrase is a trope on the title of the 1870 philosophical investigation into the logical structure of religious belief by Cardinal Newman, who received Hopkins into the Catholic Church. The importance of this early Yeats essay to Hill’s ideas on style and faith will be discussed more fully in the final chapter; here, I wish to draw attention to Hill’s conclusion that an inability, for whatever reason, to realise a religious ‘grammar of assent’ may be for some ‘so common as to verge on mere truism’, and that with reference to Yeats, ‘[f]ailing a grammar of assent, syntax may serve’.²⁶⁷ What I want to suggest here is that although Hopkins opted for the ‘grammar of assent’ while his younger contemporary opted for ‘the way of syntax’, both were consciously aware of the alternative. Whereas the first and second chapters have shown the degrees to which Donne and Milton were aware that their poetic styles, ‘ways of syntax’ perhaps, could be in tension with faith at certain critical moments, that latent

²⁶⁶ Hill, “‘The Conscious Mind’s Intelligible Structure’”, pp. 16-17.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

awareness is qualitatively different to the self-consciousness ways in which the problem is addressed by Hopkins, Yeats, and Hill as moderns.

In essence, this chapter argues that Hill's reception of Hopkins pivots on the recognition that, like Donne and Milton, Hopkins seeks to reconcile style with faith, but (also like them) is dogged by the intimate conflict existing between poetic style and religion. More markedly than either seventeenth-century poet, the self-awareness of Hopkins about that conflict is inflected by his Victorian context, one in which Yeats's alternative 'way of syntax' was a live temptation to the English Jesuit, namely the danger of replacing a 'grammar of assent', or 'God's grammar', with the poet's creative authority, what Sara Lyons has called (apropos Paterian and Swinburnian aestheticism) 'a religion of life'.²⁶⁸

This self-knowledge was given dramatic witness by Hopkins in the so-called 'Slaughter of the innocents'. According to his journal entries, on 23 August 1867 in the chapel of the Poor Clares at Notting Hill, Hopkins first made his conditional resolution, 'if it is better', to burn his poems. On 2 May 1868 while on retreat at Manresa House, the Jesuit novitiate at Roehampton, he writes, 'This day, I think, I resolved.' On the 11 May there is the terse, sardonic entry, 'Slaughter of the innocents'.²⁶⁹ He later wrote to Robert Bridges that 'I saw they wd. interfere with my state and vocation.'²⁷⁰ Hill, whose earliest critical work recognises that the potentially-atoning act of poetry is counteracted

²⁶⁸ See Orla Polten, 'A Religion of Life?', a review of Sara Lyons, *Algernon Swinburne and Walter Pater: Victorian Aestheticism, Doubt, and Secularisation* (Oxford: Legenda, 2015), in *Essays in Criticism*, 66.3 (July 2016), pp. 390-96.

²⁶⁹ Hopkins, *Diaries, Journals, And Notebooks* ed. by Lesley Higgins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 397, 422-23.

²⁷⁰ Hopkins to Robert Bridges, 7 August 1868, in *The Collected Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins: Vol. 1 – Correspondence 1852-1881*, ed. by R.K.R. Thornton and Catherine Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 186.

by ‘menace’, briefly touches upon Hopkins’s dilemma in his essay on the latter’s liberal tutor at Balliol, T.H. Green, in which he compares Green’s alleged inarticulacy as ‘a form of vocational renunciation... as personal yet as formal as that of Hopkins to burn his early poems’ (*CCW*, p. 116). Renunciation is one way of glossing it, but another is to recognise in its ‘formal’ dramatic tableau an enunciation of deep misgivings about reconciling the literary and sacred. Robert Bernard Martin, Hopkins’s biographer, writes with equanimity on Hopkins’s relations with the Brasenose scholar and presiding genius of “decadent” aestheticism, Walter Pater, noting both Hopkins’s membership in the Hexameron Society founded to counteract the perceived pernicious morality of Pater, and the fact that he was personally unfazed by the latter’s ‘Neology’ – atheistic rationalism in the parlance of the 1860s.²⁷¹

This lack of prejudice towards a tutor (and friend) notwithstanding, the anxieties about the moral value of poetry are central to both Hopkins’s work and life; it is of note that he developed a lifelong esteem for the Florentine reformer Savonarola after reading George Eliot’s *Romola* during a period of convalescence in 1865, having already come across the first volume of Villari’s life of the firebrand Dominican.²⁷² It seems reasonable to suggest that Hopkins’s own ‘bonfire of the vanities’ was motivated by a comparable sense of faith’s conflict with style.

In the late essay ‘Alienated Majesty: Gerard M. Hopkins’, Hill roundly dismisses the commonplace assumption that Hopkins’s true form as ‘a wild nature poet’ was destroyed by his Jesuit vocation. Hill asserts that on the contrary the Jesuit order

²⁷¹ Robert Bernard Martin, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Very Private Life* (London: Harper Collins, 1992), pp. 130-32.

²⁷² See *ibid.*, pp. 77-8.

and in particular the *Spiritual Exercises* and ordinates of its founder, Ignatius of Loyola, inculcated in Hopkins a recognition that ‘poetry [...] is not an innocent occupation, even when, as in most cases, it escapes being confronted by the demands of a vocation such as his’ (*CCW*, pp. 521–22).²⁷³ This chapter aims to draw out Hill’s reception of Hopkins’s awareness of intimate conflicts between style and faith. I shall focus on three main aspects of this: Hill’s investigation of Hopkins’s prosody as both natural and artificial (and analogies with idiomatic intonation, prayer, and music); problems of creation (understood both as the poet’s relationship to the natural world, and the poet’s creative act); and finally, Hopkins’s shadowy intimations that the figure of Satan may be a troubling corollary to the vocation of the poet.

Exclamation, prayer, and passacaglia

Geoffrey Hill is perhaps one of the few scholars of recent times to draw sustained attention to Hopkins’s admiration for the poetic technique of John Milton, despite the Catholic convert considering the author of *Tetrachordon* and *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* ‘a very bad man.’²⁷⁴ Hopkins was particularly taken with Milton’s ‘rhythmic experiments’, having read an essay on Miltonic blank verse by J.A. Symonds published in *The Fortnightly Review*, December 1874; he confessed to Bridges in the

²⁷³ Hill’s choice of the word ‘innocent’ here seems pointed, given Hopkins’s pithy allusion to burning his poems. Martin refuses to read the word ambiguously, opining that the word choice suggests that Hopkins believed poetry ‘to be guiltless enough intrinsically’, *A Very Private Life*, p. 174. I challenge that view in this chapter.

²⁷⁴ Hopkins, to Robert Bridges, 3 April 1877, *Correspondence 1852–1881*, p. 267.

same letter that he had ‘mastered’ the choruses of *Samson Agonistes* and speculated that he might write on them.²⁷⁵ Hill concludes his 2008 ‘Milton as Muse’ lecture with a focus on Hopkins’s technical achievement in ‘That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the Comfort of the Resurrection’. Challenged by a member of the audience during the question-and-answer session that followed the lecture as to the supposedly arbitrary quality of the exclaimed interjection poem, ‘Enough! the Resurrection’ that breaks in on the poem’s catalogue of beautiful, transient nature, Hill quipped, ‘I would dispute almost every inference you draw... I’m not offering to... but I would...’²⁷⁶ In the same year as the Milton lecture, Hill did however advance a disputatious defence of Hopkins’s exclamation, in an essay that first appeared in the *Collected Critical Writings*, ‘A Postscript on Modernist Poetics’:

the first fourteen lines [of the poem] delineate aspects of the Heraclitean world, of infinite change, its eternal round of creation and destruction, which is all intricately and beautifully detailed as Hopkins imitates its wonderful thisness [...] Suddenly there bursts in an uncouth anacoluthon: “Enough! the Resurrection”. It is a great moment, one of the greatest grammatical moments in English poetry. It has been criticised for its arbitrariness, but arbitrariness is the making of it. The Resurrection is a kind of eschatological anacoluthon; no amount of standard grammar can anticipate or regularise that moment [...] It is the coming together of faith and what Yeats calls “tecnic”. That “uncouth anacoluthon” is an instance

²⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 266.

²⁷⁶ *Milton as Muse*. See chapter two, *passim*.

of the supremacy of technique – in the very instant and thereafter abandoned as technique (*CCW*, pp. 570–71).

The conjunction of ‘moment’ with ‘grammar’ should alert us to the fact that we are once more in similar terrain to Donne’s ‘God’s grammar’ – active, unanticipated grace. In ‘Keeping to the Middle Way’, as we have seen, this conjunction of style and faith is detected in Robert Burton’s prose where ‘the active declares itself in plain, even severe, statements of faith and practice that stand out from the tragic-comic welter like inspirations of “God’s grammar” [...] *In the name of Christ Jesus rise and walke*’ (*CCW*, p. 315).

Just as with seventeenth-century Anglican divines such as Burton and Donne, Hopkins’s attempts to effect in poetic technique an alliance of style and faith seem arbitrary and abrupt, a quality that Hill characterises as ‘uncouth’, a distinctly-Hopkinsian word as well as a wayward pun on ‘anacoluthon’.²⁷⁷ According to the *OED*, the etymological derivation of ‘anacoluthon’ means ‘want of sequence’ – in this case simultaneously a grammatical and biological/eschatological non-sequitur. In *Odi Barbare* (2012), Hill gnomically bays his own coinage for Hopkins’s technical effect into the gnarled rhythms of Sidnean-Sapphic verse: ‘Rumpus, uncouth anacolutha, bullish / Metamorphs treading out a line [...]’ (*BH*, p. 836). In his perhaps most Hopkinsian volume, *The Orchards of Syon* (2002), he urges us (in an imperative that sways between etymological excavation and jive-talk) to ‘dig the – mostly uncouth – language of grace’

²⁷⁷ See, for instance, ‘late-learnt skill uncouth’ and ‘clay uncouth’ in *The Poems of GMH*, pp. 26–7.

(*BH*, p. 415). What is most striking about Hill's discussion of 'Enough! the Resurrection' is that the arbitrary exclamation is seen as a consummation of 'the supremacy of technique' (i.e. poetic effect) with faith, not only Hopkins's Christian belief in Christ's Resurrection, but, by extrapolation, a belief that in such instances language overcomes its *pondus* to arrive at 'the workings of good faith' (see the Preface to *Style and Faith*, *CCW*, p. 264). At such moments style *is* faith, Hill wants to believe; the linguistic eruption grammatically corresponds to the miracle of Resurrection, and therefore the technical aspect of this particular 'uncouth anacoluthon' ceases to be available for emulation and can only be wondered at.

Hill's critical assumption regarding the inimitable quality of Hopkins's particular equivalence of style and faith requires challenging in light of his own repeated and evolving poetic experimentations with 'uncouth anacolutha'. Perhaps the most earnest attempt to emulate Hopkins's exclamatory brand of 'God's grammar' is to be found in 'Scenes with Harlequins', a poem in memory of Aleksandr Blok in *Canaan* (1996): 'The risen Christ! Once more / faith is upon us, / a jubilant brief keening without respite' (*BH*, p. 187). This 'uncouth anacoluthon' on the Resurrection of Christ weds the active volubility of the exclamation with the idea that faith acts *upon* humanity ('faith is upon us'), albeit a less satisfying sense of its action than exists in Hopkins's original: compare the satisfied interjection 'Enough!' with Hill's 'a jubilant brief keening *without respite*' (my italics). This grammatical shard echoing the anacoluthon seems to rebuke his later reverential conclusion that Hopkins's effect in 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire' cannot be emulated, as where style equivalences faith it ceases to be merely technical or formal; as 'Scenes With Harlequins' suggests, the reality of this poetic engagement is more complex, shadowed by a conflict between technique, by

virtue of definition amenable to imitation, and Hill's poetic desire for an abrupt and inimitable equivalence of style and faith.

The context of these remarks as critical analysis is important; to conclude that Hopkins's interjection is 'an instance of the supremacy of technique – in the very instant and thereafter abandoned as technique' has the virtue of exactly explaining the skill of Hopkins in grammatically rendering the shock of Christian Resurrection. However, in stressing that this is 'one of those once-for-all things' (*CCW*, p. 571) whereby faith and style are instantaneously aligned and technique thereafter abandoned, Hill's cogent explanation of why the technique is so rhetorically effective becomes strangely redundant. A more straightforward way of putting this last point is that if Hopkins's momentary 'anacoluthon' is not amenable as a poetic technical model, it can only be marvelled at in the vague way that Hill excoriates when (in 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"') he rejects 'neo-Symbolist mystique celebrating verbal mastery' (*CCW*, p. 19). Whether the poet's technical achievement is framed as a realisation of faith's jurisdiction over style in the unanticipated form of 'God's grammar' (as seems to be Hill's assessment of Hopkins here), or as some kind of post-Symbolist "raid on the absolute", in either case critically-apprehensible technique ceases to be of immediate relevance. This problem is not lost on Hill, who adds after his discussion of this 'anacoluthon' that its achievement 'imposes a great strain upon the nerves' (*CCW*, p. 571).

Perhaps lurking at the basis of this conundrum is the realisation that technique *qua* technique *can* be 'serviceable', that is, the supposed consummation of style and faith in which style-as-technique is extinguished in the act of faith is vulnerably exposed to a

contrary state of affairs, whereby faith may be performed or realised in an act of inspired technical craft (which as we have seen is a key concern in Hill's reception of Milton). The 'anacoluthon' from 'Scenes with Harlequins' is one instance of an earnest emulation of Hopkins (and, as I have argued, the very nature of emulation renders the supposedly inimitable and unamenable conjunction of style and faith as suspect under Hill's own critical desiderata). It may be nevertheless surprising to find that much more frequently throughout Hill's poetry there are ironic parodies of Hopkins's 'Enough! the Resurrection'. In his memorial poem for Robert Desnos, 'Domaine Public', the 'uncouth anacolutha' imitating Hopkins's effect are ambiguously poised between prayer and blasphemy:

If the ground opens, should men's mouths

open also? 'I am nothing

if not saved now!' or

'Christ, what a pantomime!' (*BH*, p. 57).

The poem finishes with a dramatic eschatological upheaval: 'Look, Seigneur, again we / resurrect and the judges come', a strong argument for placing this poem's exclamations as ironic parodies of Hopkins. The line break of the first exclamation

allows it to mediate between two potential readings: one, that the speaker idiomatically and zealously confesses his or her belief in salvation; the other, that the speaker voices a dreadful realisation that in this world of Terezin and other death camps no such salvation is possible, and the modality of the sentence is stressed, in which case the speaker is left to annihilation ('I am nothing'). The second exclamation seems a burlesque *avant-la-lettre* of Hill's later, unironic allusion to Hopkins's 'anacoluthon' in 'Scenes from Harlequins', whereby 'The risen Christ!' of Christian eschatology appears blasphemously as a swear-word denouncing the 'pantomime' of faith in a world that witnesses twentieth-century atrocity.

If, as I am arguing, Hill's poetry as early as *King Log* (1968) parodically and scabrously worries at his much later insistence in 'A Postscript on Modernist Poetics' on Hopkins's effect as transcending technique in order to elevate style to a virtual act of faith, in other essays he seems to suggest that Hopkins himself was utterly aware of the way in which the style-faith equation was bedevilled by intrinsic contradictions. As Hill writes in the 'Alienated Majesty' essay on Hopkins, the latter was distinguished with a Whitmanian gift of 'parody and self-parody' (*CCW*, p. 521). Some of the aspects that this knowing attitude takes in Hopkins towards his own abrupt exclamations are examined by Hill in 'Redeeming the Time', first published in *Agenda* in 1972. There, Hill posits that 'Hopkins's vital perception of the underlying ambiguities of nineteenth-century speech rhythms' is markedly present in two crucial phrases in his poetry: 'abrupt self' in 'Henry Purcell', and '(my God!) my God' in 'Carrion Comfort': 'for Hopkins man is revealed in his intense selfhood and his most frightful splintering' (*CCW*, p. 102). I will return to the connection between self, indeed Hopkins's Scotian idea of 'selving', and ambiguity later in this chapter; here I wish to concentrate on the

extent to which Hill's borderline-blasphemous parodies of the graced grammar in 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire' are already latently present in Hopkins.

'Enough! the Resurrection' bears resemblance to exclamations one encounters throughout Hopkins's *oeuvre*, which if they don't carry the full force of that theological non-sequitur – Christian hope of resurrection arraigned against the flown gorgeousness of igneous Nature – nevertheless have a similar sense of dislocation, abruptness, idiomatic immediacy. In 'Redeeming the Time', in addition to the phrases mentioned above as evidence of Hopkins's 'vital perception' of ambiguities in language (which I argue unsettle a reconciliation of style and faith), Hill adduces the agonised cries of the doomed Franciscan nuns in Hopkins's tour de force, 'The Wreck of the Deutschland'.

Away in the loveable west,

On a pastoral forehead of Wales,

I was under a roof here, I was at rest,

And they the prey of gales;

She to the black-about air, to the breaker, the thickly

Falling flakes, to the throng that catches and quails

Was calling 'O Christ, Christ, come quickly':

The cross to her she calls Christ to her, christens her wild-worst

As Hill notes, the appendix to *Immortal Diamond*, a book of critical essays on Hopkins, provides contemporary accounts of the shipwreck published in *The Times*, including that printed on the 11 December 1875 which describes ‘the chief sister [of the nuns], a gaunt woman 6 ft. high, calling out loudly and often “O Christ, come quickly!” till the end came’.²⁷⁹ Hopkins’s imagination hones in on the imprecation; the effect as it appears in ‘The Wreck of the Deutschland’ is one of profound ambiguity. Chiefly, the cry is a prayer that expresses the nun’s Christian hope that this tragedy of impending death (and worse, the suffering of its anticipation) is a prelude to an encounter with Christ, her ‘martyr-master’.²⁸⁰ Moreover, it is a form of the *Maranatha*, the Aramaic prayer in the New Testament meaning ‘Come, Lord Jesus!’²⁸¹ However, the mantra also carries an ambiguous double meaning: the accepted invocation of divine protection as it appears in the poem is not readily distinguished from willed extinction, a blasphemous wish (‘O Christ’) for an immediate end to suffering, the so-called unforgiveable sin of despair. This double-edged affair is arguably at the heart of martyrdom, as Eliot explores in *Murder in the Cathedral*, and it would be inordinate to suggest here that in his parodic or ambiguous effects Hopkins is being wilfully heretical. Hill’s comments elsewhere on the *Spiritual Exercises and Devotions* of Robert Southwell, himself a Jesuit and a martyr, are pertinent: “For Thy sake allow me to be tortured, mutilated, scourged, slain

²⁷⁸ Hopkins, *The Poems of GMH*, p. 59.

²⁷⁹ Cited in *Immortal Diamond: Studies in Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. by Norman Weyand (New York: Octagon Books, 1969), p. 368.

²⁸⁰ Hopkins, ‘The Wreck of the Deutschland’, *The Poems of GMH*, p. 58.

²⁸¹ For a discussion of this formula as invoking the ‘last or near-last words’ of the New Testament, see Ong, *Hopkins, The Self, and God*, pp. 51-52.

and butchered [...] I refuse nothing.” These [final] three words are of radical significance: they are the “wonderful alteration” of a hovering morbidity into a positive oblation’ (*CCW*, p. 36). My contention is not that Hopkins’s does not attempt such a ‘wonderful alteration’ in what I am calling his “parodic” stance towards his own exclamations, but that his poetry is too self-aware not to recognise that such a transformation is contingent on the deeply-compromised ‘wild-worst’ ambiguities of language.

As Walter Ong, S.J. has examined, Hopkins’s ‘particularist aesthetics’ (including his simultaneously passionate and dispassionately precise descriptions of the natural world) are not only inflected by his reading in Duns Scotus, but in the ‘Victorians’ exquisite consciousness of the self as self.²⁸² This Victorian milieu constituted and was constituted by a new emphasis on the particular in aesthetics and science, and an intensely interior turn, extending to spirituality (witness the minute calibrations of mental states in the writings of Cardinal Newman, Hopkins’s spiritual father, in *Apologia pro Vita Sua* and *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*). As Ong writes, such Victorian contexts melded in Hopkins with the ‘advanced analytic consciousness’ of Jesuit spirituality, particularly *The Spiritual Exercises* which Hopkins “made” every year.²⁸³ One might add to Ong’s contexts the philological densities excavated by Richard Chevenix Trench (see chapter two of Sperling’s *Visionary Philology*), and a concomitant sense from the late nineteenth century onwards of how ambiguity and irony enriches and imperils exegesis.

²⁸² See *ibid.*, especially pp. 7-53.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 69, 55.

In ‘Redeeming the Time’, Hill notes that the most impacted of these ‘wild-worst’ aspects of language are to be found at the level of the verbal unit, even wordless cries. Hopkins, he avers, discovered in the rhythms of late-nineteenth century language around him ‘the ambivalent power of short words [...] most eloquently realised in the final line of ‘Carrion Comfort’: ‘(my God!) my God’. In this compressed parenthetical repetition, ‘the expletive’ and ‘the bare word of faith’ commune (*CCW*, p. 106). Hill connects the ‘dreadful mingling’ of agony and sacrificial *offertorium* in Hopkins’s poetry to a phrase in Evelyn Waugh’s *Edmund Campion*, on marginalia that had been found in Campion’s copy of the *Summa* preserved at the Jesuit novice house in Manresa (where Hopkins resided from 1868–70): ‘it is annotated in his own hand and opposite an argument on baptism by blood occurs the single *mot prophète et radieux*, ‘*Martyrium*’ (cited in *CCW*, p. 106). It is intriguing that this prophetic, radiant word is the title to one of the ‘Lachrimae’ sonnets in *Tenebrae* (1978), five years after this essay’s publication; its line ‘torn clouds the cauldrons of the martyrs’ cries’ is particularly Hopkinsian: ‘Cloud-puffball, torn tufts, tossed pillows | flaunt forth, then chevy on an air- / built thoroughfare’.²⁸⁴

Hill concludes that Hopkins’s short words are ‘neither rooted nor uprooted, graced nor ungraced [...] they are the most elemental material, and they are the abrupt selving of prayer’ (*CCW*, p. 105). The connotations of the word ‘selving’ in Hopkins’s Scotian thought forms the focus of the final part of this chapter, but suffice it to say here that in ‘Redeeming the Time’, Hill glosses the idea as a kind of verbal and spiritual “nakedness”, a revelation of the self utterly different to self-expression: compare Hill’s

²⁸⁴ Hopkins, ‘That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire’, *The Poems of GMH*, p. 105.

lines ‘self / expression – you could argue – the first to go – immolated / selfhood the last’, again the link to martyrdom (‘Whether Moral Virtue Comes by Habituation’, *Canaan*, in *BH*, p. 177). It is a central conjecture of this chapter that the ambivalence of short words in terms of religious faith (‘neither [...] graced nor ungraced’) is part of what exercises Hopkins about the dubious business of poetry, a friction between style and faith, of which both the Jesuit poet and Hill are aware despite the desired equation of ‘God’s grammar’. It is out of this ambivalence that their creative energies are most energised, and yet as Hopkins’s ‘Slaughter of the innocents’ and both poets’ hyper-vigilant parodic effects around the ‘anacoluthon’ reveal, the fear that style encroaches on the jurisdiction of faith is unstinting.

The Janus-faced stance of Hopkins’s exclamations in a poem such as ‘Carrion Comfort’ and how they are emblematic of the problem implicit in Christian martyrdom are queried throughout Hill’s poetic *oeuvre*. In the revised *Hymns to Our Lady of Chartres*, he asserts ‘prayers are imprecations for a start’ (*BH*, p. 159), the idiomatic end of the line ambiguous, possibly meaning that graced oblation can begin in ungraced, carnal suffering. In *Al Tempo De’ Tremuoti* (2013), these are the imprecations clustering around the visceral birth of humanity simultaneous with Hill’s version of the Nativity: ‘the Word begets us crying *Fuck!* and *Ave!*’ (*BH*, p. 890). In *The Triumph of Love* (1998), he once more makes the connection in the form of a rhetorical question: ‘is prayer residual in imprecation?’ (*BH*, p. 257). Etymologically-speaking, it is; the *OED* has two significations for the noun: ‘the act of invoking evil, calamity, or divine vengeance upon another, or upon oneself, in an oath or adjuration; cursing’ (n., 1), and ‘a prayer, invocation, petition, entreaty’ (n., 2, *Obs.*). The *OED* might want to update the usage of the second signification to ‘rare’ or ‘poetical’ in light of Hill’s play on the

senses of the word (which is strikingly evocative of Hopkins's technique). The way in which Hill's usage of 'imprecation' and more importantly its effects in the form of exclamations or anacolutha throughout his poetic oeuvre is reminiscent of his observation in *The Triumph of Love*: 'Milton writes of those / who "comming to Curse... have stumbled into a kind of Blessing"' (*BH*, p. 282). The recognition of the intrinsic aptitude of rhetoric to backfire, a kind of in-built *peripeteia*, is characteristic of Milton, and forms an underlying anxiety to the relationship between theology and poetry in his *oeuvre* as explored in the previous chapter. Significantly, poem CXXXIX of *The Triumph of Love* where this quotation appears alludes in the next breath to one of Milton's more surprising literary acolytes, Gerard Manley Hopkins: 'Hopkins gave his best / self-coinings of the self—*inscape*, / *instress*— to inventing Lucifer' (*ibid.*). Hill's examination of Hopkins's philosophical discussions of Lucifer shall be discussed in the final section of this chapter, but it is highly significant that Hill links Hopkins's poetics to Milton's notion of language's 'dark materials'.²⁸⁵

The sense of Hopkins's 'short words' as 'imprecation' also potentially sheds light on Hill's 'florid grim music, shrieks' in 'Funeral Music', his sonnet sequence on the 'time-serving "martyrs"' of the dynastic War of the Roses: 'Crash. The head / Struck down into a meaty conduit of blood'; 'Among carnage the most delicate souls / Tup in their marriage-blood, gasping 'Jesus'; 'The world's real cries reached there, turbulence / From remote storms, rumour of solitudes, / A composed mystery' (*BH*, pp. 47, 49, 53).²⁸⁶ The macabre verb 'tup' for the strange, irreligious martyrdom of the

²⁸⁵ See also Matthew Sperling's discussion of the etymological vagaries of the word 'blessing', *Visionary Philology*, p. 10.

²⁸⁶ See Hill's description of the sequence in the endnotes to the André Deutsch edition of *King Log* (London: 1968), p. 67.

combatants at Bosworth and the agonal sensuality of the ecstatic enunciation of 'Jesus' draw the sonnets into the ambience of Hill's musing (four years' later) in 'Redeeming the Time', particularly the ambivalence of short words.

'Redeeming the Time' concludes by refuting Donald Davie's designation of Hopkins as 'jaded', unless, Hill argues, the word is re-interpreted to mean exhausted by his ministry and nervous anxiety; instead, Hopkins's work represents to Hill a 'dogged resistance' against the decadence of his day, which Hill mischievously employs to refer not to Baudelaire or Huysmans, but to J.S. Mills' concession of 'a certain laxity' for the sake of communication, amongst other forms of acquiescence to contemporary mores (*CCW*, pp. 107-08). As Hill notes in 'Our Word is Our Bond' (1983), the adjective 'dogged' is a Hopkinsian watchword, where the distinct valences of 'dogged in den' from 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' and 'dear and dogged man' in 'Ribblesdale' are read by Hill as 'shards or bones of "most recondite and difficult" matter within the simple hereditary accruals of the vernacular' (*CCW*, p. 160). Hopkins's resistance to the 'bad business' of Victorian English (as exemplified for Hill in Mill's servile concession to 'laxity' of expression) is in recognition of the 'most recondite and difficult' aspects of language, writing 'into the language'.²⁸⁷ As his letter to Bridges on 6 November 1887 indicates, Hopkins was well aware that the poet's 'subtle and recondite' resistance to lax expression came at the cost of being immediately intelligible, or even intelligible at all.²⁸⁸ The 'ambivalent power of short words' is at the centre of this Hopkinsian, and Hillian, resistance. Not only is this, as I am suggesting, a clash between exclamations of faith

²⁸⁷ See Matthew Sperling's discussion of the implications of this phrase, drawn from Hill's unpublished lecture headed 'Hopkins II', in *Visionary Philology*, pp. 28-31.

²⁸⁸ Hopkins, *The Collected Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins, Volume II: Correspondence 1882-1889*, ed. by R.K.R. Thornton and Catherine Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 905. See also Hill, 'Redeeming the Time', *CCW*, p. 98.

and exclaimed disbelief, but also between comprehension and uncomprehending speech: of invocations in ‘The Wreck of the Deutschland’ (‘O Deutschland, double a desperate name!’), Hill writes, ‘it is at such points, or nodes, where [the invocations seem self-stultifying], that poetry encounters its own possibilities’ (*CCW*, p. 160). The possibility of reconciling style and faith in the imprecations that both poets harness seems intensely, intimately checked by another possibility – poetry as what masters the violent friction between style and faith, an act of inhabiting contradiction.

In the several essays where Hill considers Hopkins’s short words, their effect is seen as a microcosm with the way in which Hopkins’s ‘sprung rhythm’ is “‘out of stride” if judged by the standards of common or (running) rhythm, while remaining “in stride” if considered as procession, as pointed liturgical chant or shanty’ (*CCW*, p. 102). Aside from these analogous musical forms, Hill advances three further key points of contact with the characteristic ‘sprung rhythm’ of Hopkins’s poetry which, as we have seen, includes his ‘anacolutha’ and imprecations: first, the intonation of living speech; secondly, Henry Purcell’s *passacaglia*; and finally, ideas of the self. As I will argue, each of these analogies further casts into relief the tensions between style and faith as they exist in Hill’s reception of Hopkins.

In a letter to Bridges on 21 August 1877, Hopkins explains ‘sprung rhythm’ as ‘nearest to the rhythm of prose, that is the native and natural rhythm of speech’.²⁸⁹ Hopkins paid close attention to utterances around him, especially dialectal or, in the case of his theologate at St Bueno’s, 1874-77, ‘the chiming of consonants [...] from the

²⁸⁹ Hopkins, *Letters to Bridges*, p. 46.

Welsh, which is very rich in sound and imagery'.²⁹⁰ In 'Redeeming the Time', Hill quotes a letter of Hopkins to his mother from Stonyhurst, 2 March 1871, in which her son gives an epistolary revue of the Lancashire intonation, 'Ay!' In describing a conversation between two gardeners, he writes of the physiological 'Etna of assent' which seems to involve the entire body of the intoner: '[f]or this reason I believe it is a natural sign of agreement and not conventional [...] it is always intoned' (*CCW*, p. 103).²⁹¹ Similarly, in a letter 14 August 1879 he states that the legitimate use of dialect in poetry is 'that it sort of guarantees spontaneousness'.²⁹² The Lancastrian 'Ay!' finds its way into Hopkins's poetry, for instance 'ah! bright wings', the last phrase of 'God's Grandeur', and 'ah my dear' in 'The Windhover'.²⁹³ Hill concludes that 'one senses that the morpheme [...] of Lancashire speech [...] may be more significant to a study of his poetry than perhaps has been realised' (*CCW*, p. 107), noting in passing a comparable but not identical aspect to Hopkins's admiration for 'brisk and joyous' stateliness of Corpus Christi processions.²⁹⁴ Hill has alluded to the 'Ay!/ah!' intonation and these processions in *Clavics* (2011) (the italicised phrase taken from 'The Windhover'):

Come Ash-Wednesday,

Corpus Christi

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

²⁹¹ Cp. the second section of a Seamus Heaney poem, 'The Loaning', which attunes itself to a similar intonation heard in the north of Ireland: 'the wind / stirred up a rookery in the next long *Aye*', in *Opened Ground: Poems 1966–1966* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), p. 237.

²⁹² *Correspondence 1852–1881*, p. 364.

²⁹³ Hopkins, *The Poems of GMH*, pp. 66, 69.

²⁹⁴ See the letter 10 June 1882, *Correspondence 1882–1889*, p. 530.

When the bands play,

Catholic Lancashire,

Cry ah my dear!

For the likes of Tom Navvies and Poor Clares;

Doctrine of the Immaculate Concept.

Read back transcript

Of earth's desires:

Felix Randal.

Folk from Pendle

That woman with the slop

Pail on the step (*BH*, p. 819).

Hill has since expressed in verse his profound dissatisfaction with *Clavics*: 'I have reworked the least of me twelve times / For Cabbalistic humours' (*Expostulations on the Volcano*, *BH*, p. 641); 'Revise and greet wanly / With thankless doggerel / The air-treading / Crucifix-pose struck by that mousing owl' (*Liber Illustrium Virorum*, *BH*,

p. 736).²⁹⁵ Nevertheless, the calligrammic keys and wings (after Herbert) that make up that volume give it, at least at moments, something of a Hopkinsian ‘rollic’ and ‘robustiousness’ particularly suited to describing the obscene festiveness of Civil War battles, or as it does here, clamorous popular piety.²⁹⁶ A slew of Hopkinsian personae are present in this particular poem, including Felix Randal the farrier, and the unemployed ‘Tom Navvy’ from ‘Tom’s Garland’ (‘Tom seldom sick, seldomer heartsore’).²⁹⁷ The Poor Clares are perhaps those at Notting Hill where Hopkins first thought about his resolution to burn his poetry (see above). ‘The Doctrine of the Immaculate Concept’ – the strict syllabic structure of the ‘key’ calligram truncating the final word into an acerbic reduction of the Marian doctrine to mere fanciful idea (Hill in Miltonic anti-papist mode) – refers to Hopkins’s deep devotion to the Virgin Mary and to the Immaculate Conception, the Roman Catholic dogma that Mary is conceived without sin, which was promulgated in his lifetime.²⁹⁸ The uneven rhythm, as has been suggested, might charitably be described as possessing ‘rollic’ for all that large swathes of the volume descends into doggerel, and Hill’s comments on failures he perceives in ‘Tom’s Garland’ are pertinent: ‘it is as though the poet is implying that, because the

²⁹⁵ Hill mentioned at a reading at the Southbank Centre, 11 December 2011, that the cover of the Enitharmon edition of *Clavics*, said-mousing owl in cruciform, is an adaptation of a photograph by Eric Hosking, and that (according to Jennifer Kilgore-Caradec’s report on the reading) the book was written to some degree ‘for the cover’, reported by Kilgore-Caradec, ‘On the Feast of St Daniel’ <<http://geoffreyhillzinger.blogspot.co.uk/2011/12/on-feast-of-saint-daniel.html>> [accessed 22 April 2016].

²⁹⁶ See Hill’s discussions of these terms, drawn from the letters to Bridges, in ‘Alienated Majesty: Gerard M. Hopkins’, *CCW*, pp. 528–9.

²⁹⁷ This phrase is quoted in italics in a poem in *Oraclau | Oracles*, in *BH*, p. 745.

²⁹⁸ See Hopkins’s sermon on the Immaculate Conception, 5 December 1879, in *The Sermons and Devotional Writings of Gerard Manley Hopkins* ed. Christopher Devlin (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp. 43–46. He alludes in the sermon to the fact that one of its earliest advocates was his beloved Duns Scotus. Hill opposes the ‘sentimental late intrusion’ of the doctrine as it ‘infantilises faith’; see ‘the Argument’ to the revised *Hymns to Our Lady of Chartres*, in *BH*, p. 155; also: ‘Woe to the great Doctors: the Immaculate / Conception of our sane and mortal Mary – / Hers in her mother Anna – a fine theory; / the bond between God and our flesh traduced by that’, *Al Tempo De’ Tremuoti*, *BH*, p. 916.

men cannot work, therefore the poem itself cannot' (*CCW*, p. 102). With its images of a proud but clearly indigent Lancashire, this section of *Clavics* might be said to register in rhythm the poverty of the industrialising north ('*cry ah my dear!*' and the woman with slop pail whose unlettered actions 'give [God] glory too')²⁹⁹, while nevertheless celebrating the 'robustiousness' of their faith which, although not Hill's iconoclastic brand of Anglo-Catholicism, he seems to respect as 'feisty' and heartfelt.

Hopkins's 'significant' morpheme 'Ay!', then, is 'inclusive of passion and belief' (*CCW*, p. 107). It is curious to note that while Hopkins argues that the utterance is natural rather than conventional, his characterisation of 'Ay!' as 'intoned' also insinuates that the expression is formal, perhaps even technical; as Hill writes, as well as 'the manner and utterance of the tones of the voice in speaking' (such as those of the gardeners at Stonyhurst), intonation can also refer to 'the opening phrase of a plain-song melody' (*CCW*, p. 103). The liturgical and prescriptive aspects of this are crucial: Hopkins's opposition of 'natural' to 'conventional' is not equivalent to spontaneous or unstudied, any more than one could justly argue that the sprung rhythm 'nearest the native and natural rhythm of speech' is meant to be understood as spontaneous. The natural-formality of a Lancashire 'Ay!', both deeply physiological and yet 'intoned' as any musical note in a 'brisk and joyous' Corpus Christi procession, is revealing in terms of how those 'uncouth anacolutha' throughout Hopkins's poetry are simultaneously natural and formal. Greg Sevik has noted this contradiction in a probing essay on the 'troubled' analogy between Hopkins's 'sprung rhythm' and music, an analogy

²⁹⁹ From a sermon by Hopkins, *Sermons ad Devotional Writings*, p. 241. Hill quotes this sermon in 'Language, Suffering, and Silence', commenting 'Hopkins [...] sometime pupil of Walter Pater, leans away from the aesthetic equation, takes the weight of a world which, in justice, contains aesthetics as a good, but is not to be either ruled or saved by them', *CCW*, p. 406.

considered in more detail later in this chapter. Sevik writes apropos the infamous ‘Author’s Preface’ (of around 1883):

Sprung rhythm, [Hopkins claims], produces the same rhythms as naturally occurring uses of the English language, both ‘the rhythm of common speech and of written prose’. At the same time, he asserts, it produces the rhythm characteristic of most music, indeed, ‘of all but the most monotonously regular music’. Thus, aside from being “natural”, sprung rhythm also approximates the height of artifice, namely, the musical organisation of sound’.³⁰⁰

Sevik remarks that there is ‘a clear contradiction’ between Hopkins’s assertion that sprung rhythm constitutes both the rhythm of natural speech and that of music, since the former does not conform to ‘an underlying tempo or time signature’ and in Western music the latter patently does (p. 7).

What is significant about this contradiction in Hopkins’s discussion of his own prosody is how it seems to inform Hill’s reception of Hopkins’s exclamations, ‘inclusive of both passion and belief’; that is, as with the apparently ‘once-and-for-all’ anacoluthon in ‘That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire’, there is a discrepancy between the sudden and the premeditated, natural and artificial. Hill has elaborated at some length on this contradiction in his Oxford Professor of Poetry lecture ‘What you look at hard seems to

³⁰⁰ Greg Sevik, ‘Music and Poetry: Hopkins, Sprung Rhythm, and the Problem of Isochrony’, *Hopkins Quarterly*, 39.1-2 (Winter/Spring 2012), pp. 3-26 (6-7).

look hard at you’, the title drawn from an observation in Hopkins’s journal, March 1871.³⁰¹ He notices that Coventry Patmore was first to apprehend this paradox in Hopkins’s poetic thought; Patmore wrote in a letter 5 April 1884, ‘*how* such modes, or at least some of them, for example your alliterations, come to be the spontaneous expression of your poetical feeling, I cannot understand and I do not think I ever shall.’³⁰² In the lecture, Hill adduces as evidence for Patmore’s bewilderment, which he shares, such contradictory statements in Hopkins’s letters as ‘then again I have of myself made verse so laborious’ (15 February 1879) set against his description of the sonnet ‘Hurrahing in Harvest’ as ‘the outcome of half an hour of extreme enthusiasm as I walked home alone one day from fishing in the Elwy’ (16 July 1878), or again in a letter of 1 September 1885, describing his compositions as ‘inspirations unbidden and against my will’.³⁰³

I would argue that such tensions – between labour and inspiration, artifice and naturalness – are poetic counterparts to theological problems that bedevil the Christian economy of grace and nature. In the lecture, Hill states that the ‘strange hiatus’ between these distinct areas of Hopkins’s poetic imagination amounts to ‘a state of attention at once spontaneous and exacting’, an enlivening contradiction. He quotes from the letter to Bridges 21 August 1877 in which Hopkins defends his idiosyncrasies of verse:

³⁰¹ Hill, *What you look at hard seems to look hard at you*, Oxford Professor of Poetry lecture, audio recording, University of Oxford (6 May 2014) <<http://www.english.ox.ac.uk/news-events/regular-events/professor-poetry/professor-sir-geoffrey-hill.html>> [accessed 31 May 2016].

³⁰² Patmore, in *Correspondence 1882-1889*, pp. 667–68.

³⁰³ See *Correspondence 1852-1881*, p. 334, p. 308; and *Correspondence 1882-1889*, p. 743 respectively.

Why do I employ sprung rhythm at all? Because it is the nearest to the rhythm of prose, that is the native and natural rhythm of speech, the least forced, the most rhetorical and emphatic of all possible rhythms, combining, as it seems to me, opposite and, one wd. Have thought, *incompatible excellences* [my italics]'.³⁰⁴

That phrase – ‘incompatible excellences’ – is at the heart of my understanding of Hill’s reception of Hopkins: despite seeking an earnest reconciliation of style and faith, it is their recalcitrant incompatibility which energises the oeuvres of both poets. As Hill puts it in the lecture, ‘there is some mutuality between the antithetical powers which at its best makes him such an extraordinary writer’ (‘What you look at hard seems to look at you’).

The emphasis on artifice and the idea that living speech even as ‘natural’ as the ‘assent’ of the Lancastrian ‘Ay!’ may be ‘intoned’ and therefore formal ushers Hill’s thought on the exhaled short word into his broader appraisal of Hopkins’s technical achievement. In a late essay on Hopkins as part of the ‘Alienated Majesty’ series he delivered in 2000 as the Ward-Phillips Lectures at the University of Notre Dame, Hill draws attention to the dyad of ‘monumentality’ and ‘bidding’ from Hopkins’s letter to Bridges on 4 November 1882: by bidding, Hopkins meant ‘the art or virtue of saying everything right *to* or *at* the hearer [...] and of discarding everything that does not bid, does not tell’. Hill adds: ‘Hopkins goes on to make one of his most penetrating

³⁰⁴ *Correspondence 1852-1881*, p. 282.

observations: “It is most difficult to combine this bidding, such a fugitive thing, with a monumental style” (*CCW*, p. 529). The difficulty is analogous (although admittedly not interchangeable) with the way in which intonation might be thought of as embracing both the liturgical formality of plain-chant and the natural assent of the dialect-speaker’s breath. Not only are the Corpus Christi processions beloved of Hopkins seen by Hill in ‘Redeeming the Time’ as ‘[not spilling] over into the demotic, but [drawing] the demotic in’, the speech patterns of Lancashire also are a ‘simple coherence of spirit, voice and body’ (*CCW*, pp. 107, 105); this latter necessity in Hopkins’s prosody is not a world away from Charles Olson’s ideas on the importance of ‘the breath’ (although the connection would likely have irked Hill).³⁰⁵

‘Monumentality’ and ‘bidding’, these difficult but ideal bedfellows, are aspects of poetic speech inextricably related to music in Hill’s imagination. In *A Treatise of Civil Power* (2005/2007), he opens his poem ‘G. F. Handel, Opus 6’ with Hopkins’s terms: ‘*Monumentality* and *bidding*: words / neither yours nor mine, but like his music’ (*BH*, p. 585). Handel’s music is commended as ‘itself a treatise of civil power, / each phrase instinct with deliberation / both upon power and towards civility’.³⁰⁶ ‘Repetition of a theme’ is a key element of this. The composer most pertinent to ideas of assent and intonation, stylistic panache and the ‘bare word of faith’ as far as both Hopkins and Hill are concerned is not Handel, however, but Purcell.

³⁰⁵ See Charles Olson, ‘Projective Verse’, in *Collected Prose*, ed. by Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 238–49.

³⁰⁶ Hill has in several prose pieces considered Hopkins in relation to his longstanding musing on poetry and ‘civil polity’: ‘Civil polity – let us make the claim – is poetry’s natural habitat. To approach Emerson, Whitman, and Hopkins in terms of this claim is to place particular emphasis upon the nature of “alienated majesty” [...], *CCW*, p. 518. See also ‘Civil Polity and Confessing State’, p. 7–8, 15.

As we have seen, along with ‘(my God!) my God’ from ‘Carrion Comfort’, the phrase ‘abrupt sélf’ from ‘Henry Purcell’ is central to Hill’s argument surrounding the ‘ambivalent power of short words’ and ‘the abrupt selving of prayer’ in Hopkins’s poetry (*CCW*, pp. 102, 105). In his 2008 lecture ‘Milton as Muse’, Hill mentions the influence of Milton on Hopkins, quoting a letter of 1878 to Canon Dixon: “I quite agree with what you write about Milton... his verse as one reads it seems something necessary and eternal... So to me does Purcell’s music.” [Hill:] I should like to think that it was Hopkins’s involvement with Milton, in a manner at once deeply exploratory – inchoate even – and highly articulate, that lies behind what I consider one of the most essential instincts regarding poetry’. Hill is referring to the ‘monumentality’ and ‘bidding’ dyad, which he goes on in the lecture to link to Purcell:

I think that in Purcell’s music [...] as in [Dido’s Lament] you have a magnificent instance of ‘monumentality’ and ‘bidding’ coinciding [...] the technicalities of the music are built, I believe, on a kind of chaconne or passacaglia, which is a particular way of repeating certain basic melodic lines [...] Purcell has a genius for counterpointing the emotional emphasis of the singing voice against the formal restrictions of the music [...] Another instance [is] *The Blessed Virgin’s Expostulation*, which in fact if you look at the text, is a very neat verse of couplets by Nahum Tate [...] and what Purcell does is to musically anticipate sprung rhythm, because he completely breaks down and remakes Nahum Tate’s neat trim emphases into a series of wild cries [...] I think that Hopkins’s poem [‘Henry

Purcell'] is embodying that kind of recognition, that kind of acknowledgement...
(‘Milton as Muse’).

Hill quotes Hopkins’s letter defending his sonnet from Bridges’s criticisms, ‘my sonnet means “Purcell’s music is none of your d–d subjective rot” (so to speak)’.³⁰⁷

The sonnet praises the ‘great stormfowl’³⁰⁸ Purcell and commends his essential music:

Not mood in him nor meaning, proud fire or sacred fear,

Or love, or pity, or all that sweet notes not his might nurse:

It is the forgèd feature finds me; it is the rehearsal

Of own, of abrúpt sélf there so thrusts on, so throngs the ear.³⁰⁹

Purcell’s music, its ‘forgèd feature’ (and here again, perhaps, a marriage of artifice and natural trait) is praiseworthy for its ability to express the ‘abrúpt sélf’, not to be confused with the spasmodic utterings of self-expression (‘none of your subjective rot’).

³⁰⁷ Hopkins, a letter of 22 June 1879 to Bridges, *Correspondence 1852-1881*, p. 361.

³⁰⁸ Cp. *Expostulations on the Volcano*, where Hill references his revisions to *Clavics*, working ‘Buoyed by the storm music / of Peter Grimes; // Fancying myself a storm-petrel / With excellent reflexes and at ease / In the burly element I patrol’ (*BH*, p. 643). The ‘storm-petrel’ and the homage to Britten’s opera seem to resonate with Hopkins’s sonnet, as well as coyly allude to Hill’s ‘Genesis’ (‘burly’).

³⁰⁹ *The Poems of GMH*, p. 80.

Hopkins's peculiar and distinct use of the word 'self', and in particular its verbing in the coinage 'selving', is influenced by Duns Scotus. In the library at Stonyhurst in the summer of 1872, Hopkins discovered a sixteenth century edition of *Scriptum Oxionese super Sententiis*, a find that later caused him to write to Bridges, 'I care for [Scotus] more even than Aristotle and more *pace tua* than a dozen Hegels'.³¹⁰ I will elaborate more fully on 'abrupt sélf' and the influence of Hopkins's Scotism on Hill in terms of style and faith in the final section of this chapter.

Hill has made at least two direct allusions to Purcell as channelled through Hopkins's Scotian sonnet, the first in his Welsh praise-poem *Oraclau | Oracles*:

Near-ragged syncopations drive my verse,

Like Hopkins and Pete Townshend I revere

Purcell with his tone-haunted ear,

Discordant harmony as praise,

Passing notes rove-over

The hesitancies moving their fine lever.

Hopkins learned sprung rhythm thus: the shiver –

³¹⁰ See Martin, *A Very Private Life*, pp. 206-07, and Hopkins, 20-2 February 1875 to Bridges, *Correspondence 1852-1881*, p. 242.

ing of Tate's trim couplets; *the Blessed Virgin's*

Expostulation's transgressed safety-margins (*BH*, p. 778).

In an article on Hill and the Southern Agrarians, Steven Matthews reads 'Tate's trim couplets' as alluding to Allen Tate, but the 'Milton as Muse' lecture suggests that the line references Hopkins's emulation of the 'series of wild cries' that Purcell makes out of Nahum Tate's 'trim couplets' in such works as his libretto for *Dido and Aeneas* and *The Blessed Virgin's Expostulation*.³¹¹ The breaking of 'shivering' across the line evokes Hopkins's own poetic effects. In 'Spelt from Sibyl's Leaves', a poem which Hill has praised for its coinage 'disremembering', Hopkins breaks the word 'astray' across the line ending:

For earth | her being has unbound; her dapple is at end, as-
tray or aswarm, all throughther, in throngs.³¹²

According to Hill, the 'throughther', recondite elements of Hopkins's wordplay effect a 'metamorphic power' over their specific linguistic context, as Matthew Sperling has impressively demonstrated: "metamorphic power" may seem a tricky notion for a

³¹¹ Steven Matthews, 'Geoffrey Hill's Complex Affinities with American Agrarian Poetry', *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 44.4 (December 2015), pp. 321-40 (325).

³¹² *The Poems of GMH*, p. 97.

lexicographer to define, but Hill's interpretation of *disremember* as "dismembering the memory" is borne out by the paronomastic context'.³¹³ The forced enjambment mid-word effects a similar metamorphosis. Breaking the word 'astray' across the line doubly alienates the earth at evening, as if the word itself were not excommunicate enough and needed a further wrenching dislocation to get at the heart of the matter. Similarly, Hill's 'shiver - / ing' effects in the break a jolting imitation of the Purcellian qualities of Hopkins's sprung rhythm, 'near-ragged syncopation'. The method here, as Hill says of another typically baroque poetic technique in Hopkins (the possessive case-syntax of the final line in 'The Wreck of the Deutschland'), 'is arbitrary and laboured but the effect is one of hard-one affirmation' ('The Exemplary Failure of T.H. Green', *CCW*, p. 119).

Hugh Haughton has written an essay exploring the 'fraught structural analogy' between poetry and music in Hill's work, and argues that Hill's avowed 'envy of the composer' is 'in tension with his interest in ethical and political contestation'.³¹⁴ Furthermore, as Lawrence Kramer has taken pains to point out, music and poetry though at times linked 'with speculative keenness' have more often been brought into colloquy in 'vague, unsatisfying ways'.³¹⁵ Nevertheless, the essential link between Hopkins's poetry and music (especially in terms of sprung rhythm) is established by the Jesuit poet himself in the 'Author's Preface', notwithstanding Michael D. Hurley's important essay on the abecedary nature of the preface when compared with more nuanced, elaborate comments on the prosody of sprung rhythm elsewhere in Hopkins's

³¹³ Sperling, *Visionary Philology*, p. 32.

³¹⁴ Hugh Haughton, "'Music's Invocation": Music and History in Geoffrey Hill', in *GHC*, pp. 187-212 (187-88).

³¹⁵ Lawrence Kramer, *Music and Poetry: The Nineteenth Century and After* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. vii. See also Sevik, 'Music and Poetry', *passim*.

writing.³¹⁶ As well as multiple references to counterpoint, Hopkins writes in the ‘Author’s Preface’ that sprung rhythm is ‘the rhythm of all but the most monotonously regular music, so that in the words of choruses and refrains and in songs written closely to music it arises’.³¹⁷ Sevik has attempted to close the apparent deficit in the music-poetry analogy by describing Hopkins’s sprung rhythm as essentially isochronic, that is, with an approximate equality of duration between stresses.³¹⁸ At base, however, Sevik’s essay argues that the elusive identity of sprung rhythm, which for nearly a century has dogged a satisfactory account of it among critics, is essential to it: it *is* its discrepancies and counter-articulations, interior contradictions as well as over-arching patterns.³¹⁹

Of the recent scholarship on sprung rhythm, perhaps one virtually indisputable feature attributed to it can be emphasised in aid of Hill’s analogy between it and Purcell’s music: its spondaic character, ‘whose characteristic abruptness provides much of the “spring” of sprung rhythm’ (Hurley).³²⁰ Moreover, according to Sevik, that the ‘spring’ is indeed provided by ‘two strong stresses side by side’ in Hopkins’s poetry is corroborated by his letter to Canon Dixon, February 1879, ‘I shd. add that the word Sprung which I use for this rhythm means something like *abrupt* and applies by rights only where one stress follows another running, without syllable in between’.³²¹ The most Purcellian instances of this are detectable in what Hill terms the ‘near-ragged syncopations’ of Hopkins’s repeated words: ‘Have fair fallen, O fair, fair have fallen’.

³¹⁶ See Michael D. Hurley, ‘Darkening the Subject of Hopkins’ Prosody’, *Victorian Poetry*, 43.4 (2005), pp. 485–96.

³¹⁷ *The Poems of GMH*, p. 49.

³¹⁸ Sevik, ‘Music and Poetry’, p. 7.

³¹⁹ Within reason; Sevik, along with Hurley, rejects previous scholarly characterisations (Whitehall, Stephenson) of sprung rhythm as ‘dipodic’.

³²⁰ Hurley, ‘Darkening the subject of Hopkins’ Prosody’, p. 493.

³²¹ Sevik, ‘Music and Poetry’, p. 20.

Purcell's musical settings of Tate, as Hill notes in the 'Milton as Muse' lecture, interpolated repetitions that were not in the written text; Jonathan Keates, Purcell's biographer, describes *The Blessed Virgin's Expostulation* as a stroke of genius, 'with its increasingly frantic use of melisma, its startling repetitions, especially the four fruitless invocations of the archangel Gabriel [...]'³²² The fact that 'syncopations', 'startling repetitions' and spondaic rhythm are drawn variously from music and prosody and do not mean quite the same thing is testimony to the problematic analogy between music and poetry that Hill pursues.

While these incommensurate qualities of music and poetry are ineluctable, I am suggesting that there does seem to be a fruitful link to music in the 'abrupt' quality of Hopkins's sonic "textures", by which I want to include not just sprung rhythm, whatever it is, but the overall soundscape, which includes the anacolutha already discussed, consonance, assonance, alliteration and so on. As stated, the general impulse in recent scholarship exemplified in the work of Michael D. Hurley and Greg Sevik has been to recuperate the value of talking about sprung rhythm, albeit in recognition of its inherent difficulties (the argument-by-negation approach of Hurley in his article 'What Sprung Rhythm Really is NOT' is paradigmatic).³²³ The recuperation centres on the idea of rhythmic 'abruptness' as the *sine qua non* of sprung rhythm, in particular the spondaic character of Hopkins's verse, which Sevik discusses in terms of the music analogy as comprising of 'two stresses [...] compressed in one musical beat'.³²⁴ Hopkins's spondees, often full or partial repetitions (including effects of alliteration and

³²² Jonathan Keates, *Purcell* (London: Pimlico, 1996), p. 263.

³²³ See Michael D. Hurley, 'What Sprung Rhythm Really is NOT', *The Hopkins Quarterly*, 33.3-4 (2006), pp. 71-94.

³²⁴ Sevik, 'Music and Poetry', p. 20.

consonance), have influenced Hill's own verse from the earliest to the late work: for example, in *Mercian Hymns*: 'milledams, marlpools, eel-swarms' (*BH*, p. 89), or the mixed spondees and rocking rhythm of these lines in *The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy*: 'ancient landscape of green branches – crosshatching twigs and twilight, goldfinches / among the peppery lilac' (*BH*, p. 151).

Nevertheless, Hill as a poet does not seek the supposedly-unimpeachable *terra firma* of isochrony on which to base analogies between music and Hopkins's verse that Sevik desires. For example, the mention of Pete Townshend in the extract already quoted from *Oraclau* | *Oracles* illustrates Hill's looser, more allusive sense of analogy between Hopkins's poetry and music. In an interview in 1989 Townshend, the lead guitarist of The Who, mentions receiving an album of Purcell's works early in the band's history: 'it was just full of Baroque suspensions and I was deeply, deeply influenced by it [...] The Who's first album [is] just covered in those suspensions'.³²⁵ *Grove Music Online* defines 'suspension' as 'a dissonance configuration in which the dissonant or non-harmonic note is tied over from the previous beat'.³²⁶ Although there is clearly a rhythmic component to suspension, it is primarily a feature of harmony. The apposition in the poem of Townshend and Hopkins in terms of shared reverence for Purcell's 'tone-haunted ear' is generously allusive rather than prescriptive: it blends and blurs analogous qualities within music and poetry – suspension, tone, harmony, 'near-ragged syncopation', 'passing notes' – in a way that purposively risks the kind of capaciousness

³²⁵ 'Flailing your way to God', Pete Townshend in interview with Matt Resnicoff, *Guitar Player* (October 1989)

<http://www.thewho.net/?q=bibliography/articles/gp_89.html> [accessed 11 May 2016].

³²⁶ Julian Rushton, 'Suspension', *Grove Music Online*, *Oxford Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2001) <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/27149>> [accessed 20 May 2016].

that certain contemporary scholars of music and literature, for example Lawrence Kramer, caution against.

A poem, however, is not a thesis. Mercifully. The “generous” quality of a looser sense of symbolic exchange between Purcell’s music and Hopkins’s poetry that Hill conducts in verse in *Oraclau* | *Oracles* blends and blurs a rich variety of *analogous* rather than coterminous aspects, and does so in a way that harnesses the meta-poetic potential of his own and Hopkin’s poetry as a primarily verbal medium. In other words, Hill plays with the analogy in its paronomastic context as well as rhythmic or aural echoes. ‘Rove-over’ is plucked from Hopkins’s ‘Author’s Preface’, glossed by Bridges as ‘the running on of the sense and sound of the end of a verse into the beginning of the next’.³²⁷ The line break of ‘shiver - / ing’ evokes the word as stammered through chattering teeth, and as such its verbal meaning is not reducible to a rhythmic mimesis of Hopkins, Purcell, or even merely an allusion to similar effects in Hopkins’s poetry (‘as – tray’); rather, the specific word that Hill chooses seems designed to nudge towards an image, perhaps of a cold and distressed Mary searching for her missing child in Tate and Purcell’s devotional work. The music and poetry analogy for Hill, *pace* Sevik, is perhaps richer for its verbal quotient, the more allusive and less precise it is allowed to be.

It would be false to conclude that Hill’s association of Hopkins’s prosody with Purcell is therefore capricious; as I have been at pains to suggest, the last word on what sprung rhythm denotes is not forthcoming, and Hill’s freedom as a poet consists in agreeing with the best recent scholarship on what can be definitely said about it (it is overwhelmingly spondaic, idiosyncratic in terms of repetitions often without

³²⁷ Bridges, in the prefatory material of the 1918 edition of Hopkins, in *The Poems of GMH*, p. 254.

intervening syllables) while complicating and enriching his engagements with it on a verbal level – the appearance of analogous but not overlapping terminology (‘syncopation’ perhaps approximate to Hopkins’s idea of ‘outrides’, but certainly not identical) and paronomasia.

The successful combination of what I am calling the verbal, allusive elements with the aural, rhythmic elements in Hill’s Hopkinsian music-poetry analogy may be gauged by his only other direct reference to Purcell, in *Odi Barbare*:

Cast in their own sakes, let be blackthorn, whitethorn,

Branches fisting twigtight new-knuckled well-stubbed

Starry!—Purcell’s burgeoning brass chaconies

Stressed and in order (*BH*, p. 866).

Here, the particular sensory experience of intertwining blackthorn and whitethorn branches is explored by nigh-parodic experiments in sprung rhythm, the cluster of spondees in the second line with attendant assonance and consonance. The verb ‘fisting’ yields a metaphor of branches as pugilistic hands, ‘new-knuckled’, interrupted by the anacoluthon ‘Starry!’ which seems a Kantian recollection of Hopkins’s ‘The Starlight Night’: ‘Look at the stars! Look, look up at the skies!’³²⁸ Its abruptness, after the detailed

³²⁸ *The Poems of GMH*, p. 66.

description of the branches' pugnacious tussle, enacts the sudden emergence of starry night to the speaker's view, as if the intense focus until then on the minutest sensory qualities of the shrubs, their joints like knuckles on a hand, follows them to their highest point and is shocked by the night sky. The lines culminate in an allusion to Purcell's striking musical signature, 'burgeoning brass chaconies / Stressed and in order'. 'Stressed' conjures the idiosyncrasies of the stress in Hopkins's sprung rhythm, here linked with Purcell's 'chaconies' [sic], but also perhaps to the concept of 'instress' which Hopkins derives from Duns Scotus. This will be discussed in relation to 'abrupt self/selving', in the final part of this chapter.

As in his 'Milton as Muse' lecture, Hill's key musical term in assessing Hopkins's investments in Purcell is chaconne, virtually interchangeable with passacaglia. The musical mode appears in Hill's *Clavics*: 'ground bass to sustain a passacaglia, misc. saint' (*BH*, p. 814). The *Oxford Music Online* resource defines the chaconne/passacaglia as incorporating 'a set of ground-bass or ostinato variations' (especially post-nineteenth century), and 'built up of an arbitrary number of comparatively brief units [...] each terminating with a cadence that leads without a break into the next unit. This almost limitless extendibility allows for the creation of a momentum sustainable over an appreciative length of time [...]'³²⁹ In other words, the chaconne/passacaglia is based on an almost obsessive repetition; compare Hopkins's verbal repetitions, spondees (repetition of stress), alliteration (repetition of first consonants), assonance and consonance. The musical form marries this *ostinato* quality to 'momentum'. As

³²⁹ Alexander Silbigier, 'Chaconne', *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2001) <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/05354>> [accessed May 4 2016].

discussed in the last chapter, Hill has expressed a deep admiration for Milton's mastery of 'the verse paragraph', and in the passacaglia – Purcellian, Hopkinsian – Hill finds an even more appealing way of modelling large scale momentum, by building units seamlessly into a comprehensive whole. *Oraclau* | *Oracles* is perhaps most notable among Hill's later work for these 'chaconies':

Harmonious colours; dissonances

In miniature; percussive dancers;

Rattling cadences, remembrancers,

Mid-October, best of seasons,

Zest for the finding flash

Fruit of the horse-chestnut, its whorled varnish,

Its crack too fresh for gloss to diminish

Like drying pebbles. As to belong here –

My presence to myself no stranger (*BH*, p. 766).

Note how the semi-colons and commas signal the 'brief units' of the verse paragraph, 'rattling cadences' that lead without significant break into the next unit so that the full

stop is delayed until the end of what is essentially the tenth clause of the sentence. Hill would not begrudge the inspiration of such effects to his reverence for Hopkins and Purcell.

The stanzaic form in *Oraclau* | *Oracles* is adopted from John Donne's 'A Nocturnal Upon St. Lucy's Day' (see my discussion of this in chapter one). Hopkins, however, is a presence throughout, not entirely counter-intuitive given the book's Welsh setting. As Robert Bernard Martin writes, Hopkins's theologate at St Beuno's in the 1870s 'was to be one of the best periods of his clerical life', during which he felt at home in that part of Wales where the valley of Clwyd met the narrower valley of the Elwy.³³⁰ As well as his poem 'In the Valley of Elwy' ('Lovely the woods, waters, meadows, combes, vales, / All the air things wear that build this world of Wales'), Hopkins praised the country in 'The Wreck of *The Deutschland*' as 'the loveable west' where he was safe and sheltered during the tragedy that was taking place at sea.³³¹ In a letter to Bridges, 20-2 February 1875, he writes 'I have tried to learn a little Welsh, in reality one of the hardest languages'.³³² In the long letter of 3-8 April 1877 in which, as we have seen, Hopkins declares his passion for Milton, he adds to the influence of the latter's 'rhythmic experiments' on his poems 'the chiming of consonants I got in part from the Welsh, which is very rich in sound and imagery' (Hopkins was likely discussing 'God's Grandeur' and 'Starlight Night').³³³ He later recollects to Bridges in a letter

³³⁰ Martin, *A Very Private Life*, pp. 237-38. See, for instance, poem 13 of the collection, 'near St Beuno's', with its opening line – 'Despite the Commune, something of a Red' (*BH*, p. 745) alluding to his infamous letter to Bridges, 2 August 1871: 'Horrible to say, in a manner I am a Communist' (*Correspondence 1852-1881*, p. 210).

³³¹ *The Poems of GMH*, pp. 68, 59.

³³² *Correspondence 1852-1881*, p. 240.

³³³ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

dated 26 November 1882 that his sonnet ‘The Sea and the Skylark’ was (perhaps excessively) full of ‘*cynghanedd* or consonant-chime’.³³⁴

Such *cynghanedd*, of both “hard” and “soft” varieties, is not in short supply in Hill’s poem from *Oraclau* | *Oracles*, counterpointed with assonance: ‘colours’, ‘percussive’, ‘cadence’, ‘crack’, ‘dissonances’, ‘dancers’, ‘remembrancers’; this last word seems to faintly echo and counter Hopkins’s ‘disremembering’ already discussed, as well as Walt Whitman’s surmise of what grass is: ‘Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord, / A scented gift and remembrancer designedly dropt’.³³⁵ As with Whitman’s intense atomic, aromatic concern for the minutest vital thing, Hopkins crammed his early diaries and his later *Journal* (1866–75) with studies of nature (sometimes including sketches) that are precise, painterly but never merely picturesque; for instance, in 1864 he describes a ‘lasher’ in a canal at Wolvercote – the body of water running over a weir, a dialect word likely derived from Ruskin: ‘The shape of the wave of course bossy, smooth and globy. Full of bubble and air, very liquid. – For the rest of the lasher, all except the shoulder where it first sweeps over it is covered with a kind of silver links.’³³⁶

In his journal entry for 17 September 1868 during the ‘Long Retreat’ at Manresa House, Roehampton, Hopkins describes ‘Chestnuts as bright as coals or spots of vermilion’.³³⁷ This intense palette finds its way into ‘Pied Beauty’, his curial sonnet of eleven lines written at St Beuno’s in the summer of 1887: ‘Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls;

³³⁴ *Correspondence 1882–1889*, p. 551.

³³⁵ *Walt Whitman: Poetry and Prose*, ed. by Justin Kaplan (New York: Library of America, 1982), p. 187. As Hill notes in his essay ‘Alienated Majesty: Gerard M. Hopkins’, ‘Hopkins, while admitting that he knew his own mind to be “more like Whitman’s than any other man’s living”, objected to his American senior [...] because Whitman was “a very great scoundrel” [...] “indifferent” to moral and doctrinal issues which Hopkins took as matters essential to salvation’, *CCW*, p. 521.

³³⁶ *The Journals*, p. 147.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 468.

finches' wings; / Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow, and plough'.³³⁸ Those tactile semi-colons model for Hill a way of creating units of speech within a larger exultant momentum, and a combination of the “bidding” or eminently-sayable qualities of its units – for instance the parenthesis in ‘Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)’ – with the “monumentality” of the felt whole of the poem. Hopkins’s curial sonnet has only two full stops, the first after the sestet, and the second five lines later at the end of the poem. As well as harnessing this relation of clausal unit to verse paragraph, Hill’s passacaglia in *Oraclau | Oracles* turns a Hopkinsian eye on ‘dissonances in miniature’, a counterpart to the praise of ‘All things counter, original, spare, strange’ in ‘Pied Beauty’.³³⁹ The ‘Zest for the finding flash / Fruit of the horse-chestnut, its whorled varnish, / its crack too fresh for gloss to diminish’ seems a direct allusion to Hopkins in both subject and, as with the tussling branches in *Odi Barbare*, its sprung rhythm.

The passacaglia, like the intoned ‘Ay!’ of Lancastrian dialect and other intonations from Hopkins that informs Hill’s work, welds a natural ‘zest’ of lived speech to the formal properties of the verse paragraph – here, Donne’s strict stanza and the supererogatory effect of multiple clauses which creates a “chaconne” intensely focused on the rattling, snuffling colour densities of autumn. Walter Ong has convincingly argued that Hopkins’s fascination with the particular and minute emerges in the confluence of his identity as a Victorian, Jesuit, and Scotist, and has emphasised the Ruskinian fascination with ‘panegyric accuracy’ in art, a scientific attitude to artistic

³³⁸ *The Poems of GMH*, p. 69.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

representation that was attentive, clinical, meticulous.³⁴⁰ Furthermore, this particularist aesthetics fused a post-Romantic love for exterior nature with an increasingly interior sense of the particularity of selfhood: ‘what you look at hard seems to look at you’. These linked aspects of Hopkins’s phenomenology are the subject of the last two sections of this chapter.

Hill’s reception of Hopkins’s sprung rhythm in terms of its exclamations or anacolutha, imprecations where prayer borders on despairing cries, and the analogy with music, particularly Purcell’s passacaglia, centres on a recognition that its defining trait is a tension between natural and artificial, the ‘arbitrary’ grammar of grace and the arbitrated grammar of the poet. As we have seen in his Oxford Professor of Poetry lecture on Hopkins, Hill praises these ‘incompatible excellences’. Hill’s fondness for oxymoron has often latched onto similar dyads: compare his description of the poetry of John Berryman as ‘violent and formal’, or his desire in his Oxford Professor of Poetry lecture ‘Monumentality and Bidding’, 11 March 2014 (yet another dyad), that British poetry should, in the best manner of baroque passacaglia, recover a ‘wild and strict’ quality that has been lost to it.³⁴¹ The idea of ‘wildness’ and ‘strictness’ coinciding is a pertinent description of what is Purcellian about Hopkins’s poetry (Hill analyses Purcell’s passacaglia later in the same lecture). In Hopkins’s letter to Bridges 21 August 1877, he cautions ‘only remark, as you say that there is no conceivable licence that I shd. not be able to justify, that with all my licences, or rather laws, I am stricter than you and

³⁴⁰ Ong, *Hopkins, the Self, and God*, pp. 8–10.

³⁴¹ See my article, “‘The Violent and Formal Dancers’: John Berryman and Geoffrey Hill”, *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 45.3 (Sept 2016), pp. 208–23, and Geoffrey Hill’s Oxford lecture, *Monumentality and Bidding*, audio recording, University of Oxford (11 April 2014) <<http://www.english.ox.ac.uk/news-events/regular-events/professor-poetry/professor-sir-geoffrey-hill.html>> [accessed 5 May 2014].

I might say than anybody I know [...] In fact all English verse, except Milton's, almost, offends me as licentious. Remember this.³⁴² Wild, and strict.

In his exploration of the dangerous parodic potential of anacolutha and imprecation, the combination of natural and formal elements in sprung rhythm including its debts to dialect, liturgical chant, and passacaglia, Hopkins harnesses antitheses to create the peculiar power of his poetry, an ambivalent style that Hill emulates. Even as Hopkins and Hill desire an ultimate reconciliation of style and faith, as I have argued their considerable poetic achievements result from the *failure* to do so, exemplary though that effort may be. In the lecture 'What you look at hard seems to look at you', Hill states the case succinctly:

how to work oxymoronically or paradoxically is Hopkins's concern, how you write to such a pitch of artificial organisation that the result is the most strikingly natural expression that you can encounter in poetry of the Victorian period. Artificiality creates naturalness. If only that were better understood at the present time.³⁴³

Yet if in this late lecture Hill approves of the ambivalence, it has problematic implications for a reconciliation of style and faith. The problem, I would argue, strikes at a central issue in the relationship of Christian theology to written style and more

³⁴² *Correspondence 1852-1881*, p. 280-81.

³⁴³ Hill, *What you look at hard seems to look at you*.

broadly, to human endeavour: how can the supposedly free and gratuitous act of grace be reconciled with the ‘good faith’ of the poet’s work without suggesting that style “merits” grace? How can the ‘artificial’ or laboured act achieve the spontaneous gift of grace? Such a thorny question bedevils Christian apologetics from patristic times onwards, resulting in a vast body of theological jargon around the economy of grace (sanctifying versus actual, prevenient versus irresistible) not to mention centuries of bloody confessional strife. Unsurprisingly, the controversy (which comes to a head during the Protestant Reformation) has scriptural cruxes, including Psalm 90 which Hill commends in *Speech! Speech!* (‘Charles Ives’s / *Ninetieth Psalm*, found late, as grief’s thanksgiving’, *BH*, p. 314) and which appears alongside the dedication of *Broken Hierarchies* to deceased family members: ‘And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us: / and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, / the work of our hands establish thou it’ (Ps. 90:17). The strangeness of the *KJV* grammar draws attention to the theological impasse, the complicity of actives and passives. Hill’s use of it in the front matter of *Broken Hierarchies* could not be more pointed in terms of his own vocational dilemma.

As we have already seen at the outset of this chapter, the relationship of the work of the poet’s hand to faith takes on urgent new contours in a post-Romantic context, such as when T.S. Eliot deplored the legacy of Shelley and his confreres in the 1933–3 Norton lectures, citing Jacques Rivière: ‘It is only with the advent of Romanticism the literary act came to be conceived as a sort of raid on the absolute and its result as a revelation’.³⁴⁴ It is as a self-conscious Victorian, both in Ong’s specific sense and a

³⁴⁴ Rivière, cited in T.S. Eliot, *The Uses of Poetry and the Uses of Criticism* (London: Faber and Faber, first publ. 1933, 1964), p. 128.

broader sense of cultural anxiety (exemplified in the figure of Matthew Arnold), that Hopkins attempts to reconcile style and faith. If, as I have argued, Hill's poetic reception of Donne and Milton stresses the extent to which both were to some degree conscious of poetry and religious faith as potentially rival magisteria, Hopkins, an heir of Romanticism as well as Christian thought, experiences that dilemma even more personally and self-consciously. In the 1879 letter to Bridges in which he mentions making 'verse so laborious', Hopkins worries in explicit terms about the ambivalent nature of poetic creation in relation to his vocation: 'Feeling, love in particular, is the great moving power and spring of verse and the only person that I am in love with seldom, especially now, stirs my heart sensibly and when he does I cannot always make "capital" of it, it would be a sacrilege to do so'.³⁴⁵ The contradiction couldn't be more poignant: the inspiration of 'God's grammar' is what makes poetry possible, and yet writing it seems a sacrilege against the poet's faith; the 'way of syntax', which proffers its own creeds and liturgies, blasphemes against a 'grammar of assent'; style profanes faith.

The remaining sections of this chapter examine further the contours of this post-Romantic anxiety; the next section focuses on Hill's engagements with Hopkins's ideas of creation in terms of both divinely ordained incarnation and the blind Heraclitean world, while in the final section, I will also explore the specific 'pitch' of self that Hill commends as the hallmark of Hopkins's style, and Hill's realisation that, at its most intense, the poetic self is understood by Hopkins as hazarding an almost satanic pride.

³⁴⁵ *Correspondence 1852-1881*, p. 333.

'The achieve of, the mastery of the thing!': Hill, Hopkins, and creation

Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here

Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion

Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!³⁴⁶

As noted at the outset of this chapter, Hill has cautioned against misreading Hopkins as 'a wild nature poet' whose talents were marred by the Jesuits. Rather, in his lecture 'What you look at hard seems to look at you' – a close reading of 'The Windhover' – Hill describes Hopkins as an 'excellent pre-Raphaelite draughtsman and Ruskinian annotator of forms', a description borne out by the pictorial and verbal sketches of nature in Hopkins's diaries and journals. The Oxford lecture commends the accuracy of his attention to 'the kestrel's muscular reflexes' in the poem, while also noting that the Roman Catholic dogmatist warded off any misreading of it as 'Swineburnian paganism' by interpolating the dedication 'To Christ our Lord' several years after it was composed. Hill concludes that '[Hopkins's] own sensuousness troubled him deeply, because he knew and he expressed his anxiety, he knew how fine the line could be drawn between sensuousness and sensuality', this latter distinction drawing Hopkins into

³⁴⁶ Hopkins, 'The Windhover', *The Poems of GMH*, p. 69.

Hill's Miltonic musings in a way the Jesuit poet would probably not begrudge ('What you look at hard seems to look at you'). As the notes to Gardner and MacKenzie's edition of Hopkins's poems assert, '[the] pregnant sestet [of which the first three lines are quoted above] derives much of its power and fame from its controlled (or at least "significant") ambiguity' (p. 267). Does Hopkins address the kestrel, or Christ? Hopkins writes:

I *inscape* this windhover as the symbol or analogue of Christ, Son of God, the supreme Chevalier. May the human equivalents of this bird's heroic graces and perfectly disciplined *physical* activity be combined and brought to a much higher *spiritual* activity in my own being just as these attributes were once and for all so transmuted in Christ. It is the law of things that characteristic natural action or 'selving', however humble it may be, frequently gives off flashes of heart-stirring beauty; how much more then should characteristically Christ-like action (including conscientious toil and willing self-sacrifice) give glory and be pleasing to Christ our Lord.³⁴⁷

The petitionary, conditional grammar of Hopkins's gloss ('*may* the human equivalents...') perhaps reveals some of his apprehensions concerning the 'brute beauty' as an analogue of Christ, and the 'heart-stirring' of both the gloss and the poem ('My heart in hiding / Stirred for a bird') is not without its jeopardy, even as his sensuous

³⁴⁷ Hopkins cited in the notes, *The Poems of GMH*, p. 267.

poetic style seeks to reconcile the bird's sensuality to faith, an act 'lovelier, more dangerous' perhaps than even the kestrel's gorgeous flight.

Before further exploring this underlying problem of sensuous and sensual creation – poetic and natural – in Hill and Hopkins, it is necessary to begin by establishing what links the way their poetry perceives nature in its neutral or even positive aspects. Hill's later poetry volumes, particularly *The Orchards of Syon* (2002) and *Oraclau | Oracles* (2010), are indebted to Hopkins's 'panegyric accuracy' in regard to nature (to adopt Ong's phrase). The eponymous orchards of the earlier collection are frequently referred to as 'Goldengrove', the 'wanwood leafmeal' autumnal scene of the young child Margaret's coming to terms with mortality in Hopkins's 'Spring and Fall'.³⁴⁸ Hill melds this unseen, spiritual realm's 'phantom showings' (*BH*, p. 374) with real landscapes, including those of his youth in Worcestershire: 'I / wish greatly to believe: that Bromsgrove was, and is, Goldengrove' (*BH*, p. 388). The poems in *The Orchards of Syon* allude several times to the Jesuit poet, for instance 'patience which / as natural heart's ivy – Hopkins – must / surely choke it: it, here, being the heart' (*BH*, p. 393), a reference to 'Patience, hard thing'. More often, the volume drops in and out of locations associated with Hopkins: 'Stonyhurst's ample terraces confer with the violent, comely / nature of Loyola and English weather' (*BH*, p. 370); 'the Hodder burls' (*BH*, p. 409). That last verb is reminiscent of the first line in Hill's tour de force, 'Genesis': 'Against the burly air I strode / Crying the miracles of God' (*BH*, p. 3). As James Milroy noted in a 1971 article on Hopkins and etymology, the word 'burl' which

³⁴⁸ Cp. the early poem 'Holy Thursday': its Blakean title and allusions to 'Nurse's Song' from *Songs of Innocence* notwithstanding, there is a distinctly experiential theme to Hill's poem that is akin to 'Spring and Fall'.

recurs in his poetry is a dialect word and part of Hopkins's fascination with obscure, though certainly in his time, "living" language.³⁴⁹ It is curious to speculate that Hill's powerful and intellectually-surprising adjective, which along with the adverb and delay of the subject and verb to the end of the line thrusts Hill's voice onto the genteel decorum of the fifties poetry scene, might owe something to Hopkins.³⁵⁰

Deeper than these allusions of content, however, is the impressive 'panegyric accuracy' which has been one of Hill's greatest poetic strengths from the beginning: 'black, broken wattled, hedges appear / thinned through' (*The Orchards of Syon*, in *BH*, p. 382). One can find examples of this compelling verbal precision and representational accuracy throughout Hill's oeuvre: 'Heathland, new-made watermeadow. Charlock, marsh- / marigold' (*Mercian Hymns*, in *BH*, p. 93); 'luminous malachite of twig-thicket and bole / brightest at sundown' (Epiphany at Hurcott', *Without Title*, *BH*, p. 497); 'Novembering Wales, the flooded meadows / Pewter, lead-sheeting, briefly highlighted; / Grand sog of red woods gold leaf-fretted' (*Oraclau | Oracles*, in *BH*, p. 776). This last instance witnesses Hill's 'aural eye', to coin a phrase: the way in which his rhythms and other sonic aspects such as assonance and consonance combine with visual perception to yield syntax that is accurate and beautiful in apprehending natural phenomena. The "music" of such syntax from Hill's early poems to late, as the last section has argued, is often modelled on the spondaic sprung rhythm of Hopkins. Perhaps 'digital exploration in graphs' of Hill's poetry (such as already

³⁴⁹ James Milroy, 'Gerard Manley Hopkins, Etymology, and "Current Language"', *Critical Survey*, 5.3 (Winter 1971), pp. 211-218 (211).

³⁵⁰ Even, as seems likely, via Robert Lowell, a deeply Hopkinsian modern poet.

undertaken by David-Antoine Williams with regards to Hill's semantics) would reveal that where the poems treat nature directly, the rhythm is predominantly spondaic.³⁵¹

Stephen James has written of Hill's 'vivifying detail and sensuous particularity', noticing the poet's 'inclination to apprehend the metaphysical through the physical [...] to look for tokens of affirmation in a world of perplexing and dispiriting circumstance'.³⁵² Certainly this metaphysical bent has much in common with the inclinations (the watchword, here) of Hopkins's gloss on 'The Windhover': the poet's style, unique to her or him, 'inscapes' nature – seizes its formal distinctiveness and individual manifestations in a creative act. In terms of faith (here the Christian faith of the Roman Catholic Hopkins and the Anglican Hill), that act is ideally a response to 'God's grandeur' which "charges" the world, but also actively seeks a transmutation of the 'brute beauty', 'nature's bonfire'.³⁵³

Nature, then, presents the Christian poet with a creative dilemma, especially 'sensuous particularity' to which both Hopkins and Hill faithfully render. If in *Speech! Speech!* Hill levies at us a Miltonic imperative – 'Dissever sensual / from sensuous' (*BH*, p. 348) – his poetry's engagements with Hopkins show that this is no mean feat. How is the divine Creator acknowledged by Hopkins's fervent Roman Catholic and Hill's ambivalent Anglican faith to be distinguished from His creation? How might style jeopardise that distinction, especially a style of 'sensuous particularity' stressed in Hopkins's Scotian understanding of metaphysics (which Hill seems in part to adopt)?

³⁵¹ See David-Antoine Williams, 'Measured Words' (22 February 2014) <<http://poetry-contingency.uwaterloo.ca/measured-words/>> [accessed 7 June 2016].

³⁵² Stephen James, 'Geoffrey Hill's "Moral Landscape"', *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 41.4 (Winter 2012), pp. 422-43 (422).

³⁵³ Hopkins, 'God's Grandeur', 'The Windhover', and 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire', *The Poems of GMH*, pp. 66, 69, 105.

In *The Triumph of Love*, one of Hill's most intensely beautiful lyrical passages broaches the quandary:

Leave it now, leave it; give it over
to that all-gathering English light,
in which each separate bead
of drizzle at its own thorn-tip stands
as revelation (*BH*, p. 253).

The minute, 'especial' focus (to use one of Hopkins's favourite adjectives) – 'each separate bead / of drizzle' – is an intimation of divine mystery, *haecceitas* as 'God's grammar'. The syntax and lineation, however, masterfully complicates and enriches this: each droplet 'stands / as revelation' – they are figures for, not synonymous with, revelation; immanent nature bespeaks transcendent power but is not to be confused with it. The particle 'as' hones in on the metaphoric quality of poetry, a resistance to the language of logical denotation, and a challenge to Hill's assertion in the Preface of *Style and Faith* (2003) that in certain poets 'style *is* faith'. No such simple equivalence is forthcoming.

Hill has acknowledged in the Oxford lecture that Hopkins recognises this problem, as when he appends the dedication 'To Christ Our Lord' to 'The Windhover'. Yet this belated action, like the gloss quoted above, seems as much a form of authorial

intervention – “read me aright” – as it does a convincing vindication that the poem manages to distinguish creation from Creator, thereby reconciling style and faith. Hill’s lecture is more certain that ‘The Windhover’ keeps to this ‘fine line’ (as he calls it) than he seems to be in one of the poems of *Oraclau* | *Oracles* that alludes to it:

13: near St Beuno’s

Despite the Commune something of a Red;

Lover of Wales, the pity of her wrath;

Her language to be troubled with;

Griefs propositioning her dead.

Spiritual rhetor,

High Tory hiraeth, *seldomer heartsore*;

But knew his own mind, minding the ploughshare;

Knew his flinched heart hooked by the brute hebog;

Flint under the flensing beat, the havoc (*BH*, p. 745).

The last several lines of this poem about Hopkins explore some of his contradictions regarding nature. His ‘High Tory hiraeth’ seems not so much a nostalgia for a merrie

medieval England, but a spiritual condition felt in the phrase (wrenched from ‘Tom’s Garland’) ‘seldomer heartsore’.³⁵⁴ Where the line originally means that Tom was even less often ‘heartsore’ than ill, here uprooted from its context it suggests that Hopkins’s ‘hiraeth’ or homesickness is for spiritual and emotional rest denied in the ‘Heraclitean’ world. Compare Hill’s Hopkinsian lines on ‘Hendre Fechan, heart of hearth’s indwelling’ (*BH*, p. 874), those possessives evoking the last stanza of ‘The Wreck of the Deutschland’; as in *The Orchards of Syon*, landscapes both real and imagined or some perceptual combination of the two can briefly provide a surrogate for an uncreated eternal landscape that in the Christian imagination is divine Being. Hill’s last lines explore the irony: that Hopkins’s ‘heartsore’ longing for a stay amidst the flux of creation (‘Enough! the Resurrection’) was compounded by his sensuous love of nature in all its specific and particular glory; moreover, that he was aware of the irony: ‘Knew his heart hooked by the brute hebog; / Flint under the flensing beat, the havoc’. ‘Hebog’ is the Welsh word for hawk, and so the lines seem to refer to ‘The Windhover’. The verb ‘hooked’ is excellent, compounding a figurative sense of being caught in the predator’s talons with being virtually addicted to the wondrous particularities of its nature, its ‘selving’. It also captures the suspicion with which both Hill and Hopkins regard their own sensuousness: ‘brute’ nature, it is feared, in all its flinty callousness, the muscular force of its ‘flensing beat’, may yield nothing more than chaos, ‘the havoc’.

Such ambivalences towards nature seem present in some of Hill’s earliest poems: compare the astonishment of the speaker in ‘Genesis’: ‘The second day I stood and saw / The osprey plunge with triggered claw, / Feathering blood along the shore, / To lay

³⁵⁴ Ong: ‘Hopkins was not at all a sentimental medievalist. He had no desire to turn back any clocks’, *Hopkins, The Self, and God*, p. 8.

the living sinew bare' (*BH*, p. 3). Birds of prey as strange analogues/antitheses to Christian grace haunt Hill's imagination: compare 'an owl plunges to its tryst / With a field-mouse in the sharp night' ('Three Baroque Meditations', *BH*, p. 66), 'the glare of buzzards circling' the Calvinist combatants in the American Civil War ('Locust Songs', *BH*, p. 42), and the Eric Hosking photograph circa 1948 of a barn owl in cruciform with prey in its beak which Hill chose as the cover for *Clavics* (2011). As in 'The Windhover', in each of these instances the bird of prey becomes a crucial metaphor: as Hill puts it in his lecture 'What you look at hard seems to look at you' apropos Hopkins's 'kestrel', 'however graceful [...] it is not in a state of grace; however murderous its activities towards fieldmice, it will never incur damnation'. Hopkins's poem is seen as exploring the 'demandingness of his faith and vocation [...] sometimes radically at odds with sensuous responsiveness.' A deep, troubling ambivalence emerges out of responses to the world in both poets' work, about how the Creator's glory manifested in the natural world is (a) to be distinguished from the Creator, and (b) reconciled with His goodness given the violence, bloodiness and flux of creation.

The poet's creative act, then, stands at an oblique angle to that of God's fiat in the Christian poetics of Hopkins's and Hill: for the Jesuit-poet, the saint's *contemptus mundi* had to be held in equal observation against profound gratitude for the manifestation of divinity in all things (and certainly in Hopkins's case, the scales were often tipped towards the latter). Hence the world to Hopkins's was both 'Heraclitean Fire' and 'God's Grandeur'. Hill, an ambivalent Anglican, finds himself theologically and temperamentally sympathetic to this fine balance, which often becomes problematic. His sensuousness as a poet, like Hopkins, cannot in the last analysis be definitely severed from sensuality; this is particularly the case because of their shared

fidelity to a kind of poetic *haecceitas*, the utterly idiosyncratic individuality of things, things that fall back upon the earth, what Hill describes in *Mercian Hymns* as ‘the / sunk solids of gravity’ (*BH*, p. 94); like Offa in that volume, Hill and Hopkins have ‘[...] a care for natural min - / utiae. What his gaze touched was his tenderness’ (*BH*, p. 96).³⁵⁵

The poet in creating also imitates the authority of God (see the introduction where I discuss this in relation to Hill’s preface to *Style and Faith*, in *CCW*, p. 263), which is a double-edged affair. This final section focuses on this in relation to poetic voice and Hopkins’s theory of the self.

‘A sounding [...] of his own trumpet and a hymn in his own praise’: Hopkins’s phenomenology of the self, the poetic voice, and the creative paradox

As I have argued, Hopkins’s ‘particularist aesthetics’ and fidelity to *haecceitas* so influential on Hill’s attitude to phenomena owes much to his curious and elaborate intellectual “system” which emerges out of various confluences, including the Jesuit emphasis on the Incarnation, a Victorian concern for scientific precision (taken over by post-Ruskinian aesthetics) along with his reading in the thirteenth-century philosopher Duns Scotus.³⁵⁶ ‘Inscape’ and ‘instress’, like sprung rhythm, are terms that have been notoriously difficult to define; Dennis Sobolev has produced an exhaustive analysis of

³⁵⁵ There is more to be said on the relationship of Hopkinsian *haecceitas* as it relates to Hill’s thought on intrinsic value.

³⁵⁶ See Ong, *Hopkins, the Self, and God, passim*.

Hopkins's philosophical semiotics, concluding with panache that the traditional view of 'inscape' as equating to *haecceitas*— Scotus's irreducibly individual 'thisness' – does not stand up to scrutiny, rather that the multiplicity of usages of 'inscape' in Hopkins's writing yield a (cumbersome) definition of it as referring to 'embodied organised forms' which may be either individual or generic; one could further problematize this by noting that Hopkins's occasionally verbs his term (see the gloss on 'The Windhover' quoted in the last section).

Building on and correcting the earlier critic W.A.M. Peters, Sobolev defines 'instress' as a compound of both the individual's 'powerful and transitory' perception of a thing or multiple things – again, rejecting the dominant interpretation of Scotist particularity – and 'the energetic depths of the world'.³⁵⁷ Hill, however, seems to cling to the traditional critical association of 'inscape' with *haecceitas*, unique individual identity. Whatever may be said about 'inscape', it is resolutely unplatonic: as Hopkins writes to Bridges, 'design, pattern or what I am in the habit of calling "inscape" is what I above all aim at in poetry. Now it is in the virtue of design, pattern, or inscape to be distinctive and it is the vice of distinctiveness to become queer'.³⁵⁸ In 'A Postscript on Modernist Poetics', Hill describes Hopkins as 'the supreme poet of "*haecceitas*" [... which] for Scotus is the *ultima realitas entis* ['the ultimate reality of being', my trans.]; it is also the *ultima solitudo* ['ultimate solitude', my trans.] (*CCW*, p. 570).³⁵⁹ 'Inscape' for Hill is the utterly irreducible *thisness* of individual substance, an abrupt sense of particularity. 'Instress' he seems to interpret more or less as Sobolev defines it, although

³⁵⁷ Dennis Sobolev, *The Split World of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2011), pp. 27-43.

³⁵⁸ Hopkins, a letter of 15 February 1879, *Correspondence 1852-1882*, p. 334.

³⁵⁹ The Latin descriptions are adopted by Hill from Christopher Devlin's notes to *The Sermons and Devotional Writings* (see the end of this chapter).

scattered references to it in the *Collected Critical Writings* evidence the inherent difficulty of the term, as shall become clear.

As I have attempted to demonstrate, it is ‘inscape’ understood as *haecceitas* that throws the problem of creation into relief for Hopkins and Hill: nature’s ambivalent relationship to divine creation and the Creator is at its most profoundly ambiguous in the irreducible specificity of the individual. The kestrel’s ‘abrupt sélf’ (to take the ‘short words’ from the Purcell sonnet) confronts Hopkins’s ‘instress’ in all its peculiar ‘inscape’, and ‘the mastery of the thing’ seems contingent on its ‘characteristic natural action, or “selving”’.³⁶⁰ That these “abrupt selves” are utterly irreplaceable heightens the pathos of mortality, as with Margaret’s experience of leaves in ‘Spring and Fall’, or ‘the sweet especial scene’ of felled trees in ‘Binsey Poplars’. If the ‘uncouth anacoluthon’ ‘Enough! the Resurrection’ provides the ‘comfort’ in the title of that Hopkins’s poem, its effect is not merely to counter anarchy, ‘nature’s bonfire’, but also a (counterfactual) search for consolation in the face of sensual love experiencing loss. Such a recognition haunts the anaphora of Hill’s line in ‘Pavana Dolorosa’: ‘I stay amid the things that will not stay (*BH*, p. 123). Particularity (‘inscape’) as it impinges upon the poet’s ‘instress’ or creative perception accentuates the distinctiveness of style; it may, as Ong argues, seek to place the mystery of Christian Incarnation at the heart of this style.³⁶¹ Arguably, though, it makes it difficult to accommodate the Neo-Platonic or even Thomistic analogical philosophies of being on which ontological ideas of faith within Catholic philosophy are commonly based. It is not without significance that Hopkins – Scotian

³⁶⁰ Hopkins, cited in the notes, *The Poems of GMH*, p. 267.

³⁶¹ For Hopkins’s commentary on Ignatius’s meditation on the Incarnation in the *Spiritual Exercises*, see Ong, *Hopkins, the Self, and God*, pp. 83-88.

among Jesuits trained in the neo-scholastic analogical philosophy of Francisco Suarez – reaches for the word ‘analogue’ in his gloss on ‘The Windhover’ to describe the relationship between the kestrel and Christ; it suggests a swerve away from the implications of Scotian particularity towards the prevailing orthodoxy of neo-Thomism.³⁶² Scotus’s univocal metaphysics, controversial from his heyday onwards, has ensured that he has not been canonised a saint in the Roman Catholic church.

The ‘selving’ of specific things is perhaps most heightened in the individual’s self-experience: as Walter Ong writes, ‘the self for Hopkins is something utterly immediate and unavoidable’, an ‘interior positive reality’ separating the ‘I’ from the ‘not-I’.³⁶³ In his retreat notes on 20 August 1880 in Liverpool, Hopkins meditates on the Augustinian phrase ‘*homo creatus est*’ [man is created/made; my translation], the beginning not of something but of somebody. Hopkins reads the creation of the self, rather, the jolting and stubbornly actual self, as the ‘most distinctive’ and direct experience of creation. His notes gather to the famous affirmation:

When I consider my selfbeing, my consciousness and feeling of myself, that taste of myself, of *I* and *me* above and in all things, which is more distinctive than the taste of ale or alum, more distinctive than the smell of walnutleaf of camphor

³⁶² For a summary of the predominant neo-Thomistic philosophy in Catholic seminaries during the nineteenth century, see *ibid.*, pp. 92–96.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 26–53 especially (26, 28), *passim*.

[...] Nothing else in nature comes near this unspeakable stress of pitch, distinctiveness, and selving, this self-being of my own.³⁶⁴

The basis of Hopkins's understanding of creation – including the poet's creative act, the 'selving' of the individual thing (including the poem) – rests on this astonished cognizance of self. Ong's excellent study on Hopkins's thought makes 'self' the second vertex in a tripartite exchange with God and the exterior universe. For his part, Hill's poetry when it alludes to Hopkins frequently references some variant of the word:

Hopkins, who was self-

belaboured, crushed, cried out being uplifted, and he

was stronger than most. He said that creatures

praise the Creator, but are ignorant

of what they do (*The Orchards of Syon*, in *BH*, p. 399).

Scotus shows

³⁶⁴ Hopkins, *Sermons and Devotional Writings*, pp.122-23. Hopkins's use of the word 'pitch' is another semiotic minefield, and it has impinged upon Hill's (no-less) vexed meaning of the term in his own poetics. A satisfactory discussion of 'pitch' would warrant at least a thesis chapter in itself, but in addition to Peter Robinson's essay 'Toiling in a Pitch' (see earlier in the thesis), Brian Cummings's essay provides a significant point of departure: 'Recusant Hill', *GHELW*, pp. 49-50.

necessity reconciled with free will – Hopkins,

himself soul-strung, haggard [...]’ (ibid., p. 406).

Although it was the basis of his metaphysics and the powerful centre of his utterly unique poetry, as the adjectives in Hill’s allusions suggest, Hopkins’s self-consciousness was not always experienced positively. The so-called ‘Terrible Sonnets’, and in particular ‘I wake and feel the fell of dark’, give vivid and heartbreaking testimony to this:

I am gall, I am heartburn. God’s most deep decree

Bitter would have me taste; my taste was me;

Bones built in me, flesh filled, blood brimmed the curse.

Selfyeast of spirit a dull dough sours. I see

The lost are like this, and their scourge to be

As I am mine, their sweating selves; but worse.³⁶⁵

³⁶⁵ *The Poems of GMH*, p. 101.

Whereas in his 1880 retreat notes the distinctive ‘taste’ of self is savoured, in the sonnet it is bitter punishment: ‘my taste was me’. Moreover, selfhood is equated with the punishment of the damned, ‘their scourge to be / As I am mine, their sweating selves’, almost adding ‘but worse’ as an afterthought of orthodoxy.³⁶⁶

As Christopher Devlin asserts in his notes to *The Sermons and Devotional Writings*, the primary metaphysic of *haecceitas* in Duns Scotus is both ‘*ultima realitas entis* [the ultimate reality of being...] and [...] the *ultima solitudo* [the ultimate solitude], a recognition that as we have seen Hill quotes in ‘A Postscript on Modernist Poetics’ (*CCW*, p. 570). If, as I have argued, particularity or Scotian *haecceitas* can in certain ways problematize the relationship of the poet’s creative fidelity regarding created being and the idea of a Creator, the self as ‘the ultimate reality’ can become solipsistic, proud, spiritually and socially desolate, or merely unintelligible. Hopkins, who as we have already seen expressed his fears about being intelligible, was pressingly aware of these ‘subtle and recondite’ ambiguities. For it is a revelation of self through poetry for which Hill seems to chiefly admire Hopkins; in the lecture ‘What you look at hard seems to look at you’ he prizes ‘abrupt sélf’ as an instantiation of both abrupt metre and appeal to ‘a particular form of idiosyncratic gift in a human being’, adding that it shows intent and utterance as ‘all of a piece’ in Hopkins’s poetry. In the lecture Hill coins the pithy phrase ‘Poetry is not a selfie’, and entertains the supposition that Hopkins would have supported the choreographer Mark Morris’s remark in a 2013

³⁶⁶ Cp. also the final line of ‘Spelt from Sibyl’s Leaves’. See Hill’s analysis of the ‘forensic dryness’ in Hopkins’s semi-colon and the qualification in ‘Translating Value’, *CCW*, p. 393.

interview, 'I'm not interested in self-expression but in expressiveness.'³⁶⁷ In his essay on Emerson, Hill quotes Franz Rosenzweig on genius, which 'depends on the self and not merely the personality', a distinction 'infrequently and insufficiently made' (*CCW*, p. 496).

Although Hill commends Hopkins for eschewing self-expression and choose the more difficult way, the essential revelation of the creative self through formal expressiveness, Hill is aware that this choice is riddled with anxieties, including the fear of being understood, isolated in one's own argot, or basking in a sensuous apperception of this revealed 'selfhood'. The final issue I wish to explore as regards Hill's reception of Hopkins, one that strikes at the heart of a rift between style and faith, involves the creative self as a rival to the Creator, and Satan's sin of pride.

One of Hill's most startling realisations about Hopkins is buried in the footnotes of the *Collected Critical Writings* accompanying 'Our Word is Our Bond', where Hill refers to the ambiguities of 'the world' (understood both as the exterior universe and the busy, intractable fact of earthly living, spurned by saintly hermits and cranks) as being exemplified in Hopkins's 'ambiguous, ungraspable, "world-wielding" force'. The phrase within quotation marks is from 'Hurrahing in Harvest': 'And the azurous hung hills are his wórl-d-wíelding shoulder / Majestic'.³⁶⁸ Unlike the competing exegeses of 'The Windhover', few critics would seem to dispute that the 'he' in question is rather unambiguously 'our Saviour' referred to in the previous stanza. Yet, as Hill notices in

³⁶⁷ See 'I can be very scary', an interview with Mark Morris, *The Guardian* (11 November 2013) <<https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2013/nov/11/choreographer-mark-morris-dance>> [accessed 7 June 2016].

³⁶⁸ *The Poems of GMH*, p. 70.

the footnote, a virtually identical phrase appears in Hopkins's correspondence with R.W. Dixon applied not to Christ, but Satan: 'Satan, who is the *κοσμοκράτωρ* ['kosmokrator'; my translation], the worldwielder, gave nature all an impulse of motion which should destroy human life' (cited in the notes, *CCW*, p. 628). As Hill queries, 'how does Hopkins come, within the space of four years, to apply what is essentially the identical term to both the Saviour and Satan without detecting, so far as I can see, his own "paradox and problem"?' (ibid., 629). Far from marginal, this peculiar and startling insight is, as I hope this chapter to have shown, a profound reading of the 'paradox and problem' with which Hopkins's poetic style broaches his earnest Catholic faith. The fear goes like this: the Christian poet is a 'world-wielder', who creates in the poem a visionary 'world'; even especially when faithful to the wondrous particularity of the sensual world 'charged' with 'God's Grandeur', she or he may divert glory from God to the sensual, or to the poem or the poet. The Incarnation, so central to Scotus and the Jesuit order in which Hopkins exercised his ministry, allows a celebration of Christ 'lovely in limbs, lovely in eyes not his'.³⁶⁹ Nevertheless, and as the journals detailing Hopkins's hairsplitting daily inventories of sin would suggest – for the poet who believes in the distinction, there is no guarantee that the sensuous and sensual are anything but formally dissevered. Hill, referring to Charles Williams, put the matter cogently in a query that, as we have seen in the introduction, is at the heart of my thesis:

As a Christian [...] he would have understood the fundamental dilemma of the poetic craft: that it is simultaneously an imitation of the divine fiat and an act of

³⁶⁹ Hopkins, 'As kingfishers catch fire', *The Poems of GMH*, p. 90.

enormous human self-will. In one of his books of theology he writes that ‘poetry can do something that philosophy cannot, for poetry is arbitrary and has already turned the formulae of belief into an operation of faith.’ ‘Arbitrary’ itself can mean either discretionary or despotic. Poetry can be in, or out, of grace; and the mind of the maker can imitate either God’s commandment or Lucifer’s ‘instressing of his own inscape’ as Hopkins splendidly and humbly described it: ‘it was a sounding, as they say, of his own trumpet in his own praise’ (*CCW*, p. 563).

The allusion at the end had appeared in Hill’s oeuvre a decade earlier, in *The Triumph of Love*:

Hopkins gave his best

self-coinings of the self—*inscape*,

instress—to inventing Lucifer:

non-serviam: sweetness of absolute

hatred, which shall embrace self-hatred,

encompass self-extinction, annihilation’s

demonic angelism (*BH*, p. 282).

The allusion is to Hopkins's 'Long Retreat' on 'Creation and Redemption' on 8 November 1881; his notes imagine Christ at the dawn of time leading the angelic host in 'a kind of *venite adoremus*', but Lucifer, a chorister 'aware in his very note of adoration of the riches of his nature', does not continue singing the mass, but carries on 'prolonging the first note instead and ravished by his own sweetness and dazzled [...] by his beauty'.³⁷⁰ This crime was 'an instressing of his own inscape', which lured other angels like 'a concert of voices, a concerting of selfpraise, an enchantment, a magic': the original Comus.³⁷¹ Lucifer both apprehends and further energises (instresses) his particular and essential angelic beauty (inscape) – his poetic self – in an act of creative perception. As Hill's contexts make clear, he is of no doubt that Hopkins's was thinking not only of the angelic fall, or of music, but of poetry's 'concert of voices'.

The post-Romantic agon of Hopkins's poetry as regards an entente between style and faith is ambivalent: the various effects of Hopkins's prosody and the relationship to theological cruxes, the problems of creation and the poet's sensuousness, and finally philosophical quandaries of selfhood, and the creative act of the poet as potentially rivalling the divine fiat in hymning its own praise, are the main currents in Hill's reception of the Jesuit's extraordinary body of work. The final chapter of this thesis turns to Hill's engagements with the poetry of Hopkins's younger contemporary, W.B. Yeats, which far from agonizing over these dilemmas, positively and proudly

³⁷⁰ *The Sermons and Devotional Writings*, pp. 179–80.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 200. The similarities to Milton's Satan are obvious.

'instresses its own inscape', making style 'the supreme fiction' and assimilating the prerogatives of faith to poetry's 'eminent domain'.

Chapter Four

'The Way of Syntax': W.B. Yeats and Geoffrey Hill – the apotheosis of style?

Taking heaven by magic

The poet-precursors of Geoffrey Hill examined in chapters one to three, both the pre-Romantics John Donne and John Milton and post-Romantic Gerard Hopkins, betray profound anxieties about the relationship of style to faith, poetry and religion, an anxiety that I argue animates and vexes the achievement of Geoffrey Hill's verse. All three poet interlocutors scrutinised in the preceding chapters belonged to various confessions of the Christian faith: Donne and Milton belonged to a pre-Enlightenment milieu in which there was both an impulse to reconcile authorial style with the 'cosmic syntax' of religious belief, and a concomitant, somewhat contradictory impulse to avoid conflating the 'sacred truths' with 'fable and old song'. I have further argued that in Hill's reception of both poets, there is an apperception of conscious failure to reconcile style and faith, and that Hill sees both Donne and Milton as 'perturbed' by this exemplary failure. Hopkins, as we have seen in the last chapter, was situated as a Roman Catholic convert whose early experiences of nineteenth-century aestheticism left a mark on his work, even though he ultimately rejected a Paterian 'religion of life'.³⁷² As such, his

³⁷² See Orla Polten, 'A Religion of Life?', pp. 390-96.

anxieties about the relationship between style and faith are even more self-aware and striking than those of either Donne or Milton, and in this he shares an inescapably post-Romantic outlook with Hill.

If, as I argued in the last chapter, the struggle to avoid conflating poetry with religion (as well as the dangers of making style the arbiter of faith) is crucial to Hill's reception of Hopkins, his reception of W.B. Yeats ought to be problematic, for Yeats triumphantly celebrates style as the apotheosis of faith: 'The arts are, I believe, about to take upon their shoulders the burdens that have fallen from the shoulders of priests, and to lead us back upon our journey by filling our thoughts with the essence of things, and not with things'.³⁷³

As I have examined in the introduction, Hill's markedly inaugural essay 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"' finds him wringing his hands in a series of negative rhetorical questions over whether he is attracted, despite himself, to the 'magnificent agnostic faith' exemplified by Wallace Stevens's apothegm in the 'Adagia', "After one has abandoned a belief in god, poetry is that essence which takes its place as life's redemption" *CCW*, p. 18). Hill proceeds to associate this particular 'theological view of literature' with the 'verbal mastery' over a hostile world championed in Arthur Symons's *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*, which 'celebrates the making of poetry as a sacred task', noting that the book was a major influence on Yeats as well as Eliot (*ibid.*). Hill critiques the 'neo-Symbolist mystique' as 'too often [...] not theology at all', but 'an expansive gesture' conveying astonishment at art's "lordship over

³⁷³ Yeats, 'The Autumn of the Body', in *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats, Vol. IV: Early Essays*, ed. by Richard Finneran and George Bornstein (New York: Scribner, 2007), pp. 141-42.

language” [...] an argument for the theological interpretation of literature [...] needs other sustenance than this’ (*CCW*, pp. 18-19). Over the entire course of his career as a critic and poet, Hill’s ‘theology of language’ has sought to conduct such an argument, and offer appropriate sustenance; as the previous chapters have shown, the rejection of a post-Romantic Symbolist celebration of art as surrogate religion has entailed Hill’s sustained engagement with the literary culture of the Reformation, its adherence to minute nuances of grammar and syntax as vital nodes of entry into transcendental mysteries. However, I have equally observed the extent to which not only does Hill’s own ‘theology of language’ cleave ambiguously along two distinct genealogies of poetry’s relationship to faith, one of which is derived from Romanticism, but more than that, his reception of Donne and Milton ascribes to these pre-Romantic poets a deeply anxious, proto-Romantic tendency to think of their own poetry in terms of its rivalry to religious belief, a “weakness” that late-Romantic Yeats proudly converts into strength.

The earliest reference to Yeats in Hill’s critical writings appears in one of his first pieces of prose, ‘Letter from Oxford’, published in *The London Magazine*, 1954: of fellow Fantasy Press poets who were contemporaries at Oxford, he writes ‘the gods whose knees we clutch, one or the other of us, are Yeats, Empson, Dylan Thomas, a diverse enough trio.’³⁷⁴ Hill has latterly stated of those among his peers in the fifties influenced by Empson ‘they were [...] Empsonian in the most arid sense, writing cerebral conundrums, a travesty of Empson’s real gifts’; he has since paid tribute to Empson in several of his Oxford Professor of Poetry lectures.³⁷⁵ On Thomas, Hill has

³⁷⁴ Hill, ‘Letter from Oxford’, *The London Magazine: A Monthly Review of Literature* 1.4 (May 1954), pp. 71-75 (73).

³⁷⁵ Hill, in Haffenden, *Viewpoints*, pp. 78-79.

generally been more circumspect; there is not a single citation in the copious index to the *Collected Critical Writings*. In a conference at Paris, 2013, however, Hill stated that Thomas's 1952 reading at the Oxford Poetry Society was one of the most memorable poetry readings he had attended, reciting from memory 'Twenty-Four Years'; he opined that Thomas, 'one of the great Victorian actor-managers', wrote beautiful poems.³⁷⁶

Of the three, however, it is Yeats whose poetry has arguably cast the most majestic shade over Hill's *oeuvre*, from the magniloquent and bloody rhetoric of *For the Unfallen* (partly channelled through those most-Yeatsian American poets, Allen Tate, Robert Lowell, John Berryman, and Richard Eberhart), to the last work published in Hill's lifetime, his 2016 translation of *Peer Gynt*: in the interview with Kenneth Haynes contained within the 'Afterword', Hill reveals that the 'fourteeners in Yeats's *The Green Helmet* provided a sudden sense of the possibilities of long lines' for his translation.³⁷⁷ In a 2012 interview with Peter McDonald, Hill stated, 'I revere Yeats [...] of all twentieth century poets writing in English he is perhaps the greatest'.³⁷⁸ Similarly, in 'A Postscript on Modernist Poetics', the last essay of Hill's *Collected Critical Writings*, Hill takes the measure of the critical dereliction of Eliot in his 'commonplace phrase – "the enjoyment of poetry"' as well as the 'abdication' of Eliot's later works, *Four Quartets* and *The Rock*, by brandishing in comparison the 'truly major' achievement of Yeats in *Last Poems and Two Plays*, June 1939 (*CCW*, pp. 565–80). In

³⁷⁶ Hill, a reading at 'European Paths and Voices in the Poetry of Yeats and Hill', Institut Catholique de Paris (6 September 2013), from my notes taken at the reading.

³⁷⁷ Hill, in 'Afterword: Translating and Recreating Ibsen: An Interview with Geoffrey Hill' by Kenneth Haynes, in Henrik Ibsen, *Peer Gynt and Brand* trans. Geoffrey Hill (London: Penguin, 2016), p. 346.

³⁷⁸ *In Conversation with Peter McDonald on W.B. Yeats*.

his study of influence, *True Friendship*, Christopher Ricks argues nimbly, although selectively, that Eliot is the effaced agonistic presence behind Hill's verse: 'the heart of Hill's matter, the heart of his fertile darkness, is undoubtedly Eliot'.³⁷⁹ As I suggested in the introduction, Eliot is indeed an agonistic presence in Hill's attempts to reconcile style and faith, and the nature of that agon will receive its fullest treatment in this chapter. Nevertheless, Ricks's account is too stratified; in a review of the book, Peter McDonald argued that 'Yeats is the element needed to make sense of Hill's relations to Eliot [...] Eliot's track record as an ingrate with regard to Yeats might serve to complicate usefully the slightly too simple pattern of poetic hierarchy which Ricks now implies.'³⁸⁰ This chapter is an attempt to perform that useful complication.

In *The Daybooks* (2007-2012), the multi-volume poetic sequence that closes *Broken Hierarchies*, Yeats is alluded to by name sixteen times, and there are multiple direct allusions to his work, including recurrent appearances of Mount Meru, a 'singing school', and italicised quotations from the Anglo-Irish poet's poetry and prose. In *Clavics* (2011), Hill even imagines himself superimposed onto a photograph of Yeats, as with that famous image of Yeats and "supernatural" ecotoplasm from his experimentation in spirit photography:

Guide, pray, the mentally disadvantaged

³⁷⁹ Ricks, *True Friendship*, p. 38.

³⁸⁰ Peter McDonald, 'Review of Christopher Ricks, *True Friendship: Geoffrey Hill, Anthony Hecht, and Robert Lowell Under the Sign of Eliot and Pound*' (April 2010), in *Tower Poetry Reviews 2004-2014*, selected and introduced by Peter McDonald (Oxford: Tower Poetry 2015), pp. 166-70 (170).

Safe to Urbino; Yeats and your author

Photomontaged,

Graciously inclined each to the other (*BH*, p. 803).

In *Liber Illustrium Virorum*, Hill praises the high-Romantic argument of Yeats's verse:

Who said: *a perpetual . . . trumpeting*

And coming up to judgement? Who decreed

Language like that as close to a great thing

As you could get amid drool, cant, and screed? (*BH*, p. 698).

The quotation is from Yeats's 1909 recollection of Synge, praising the latter's 'unmoved mind where there is a perpetual last day, a trumpeting, and coming up to judgement'.³⁸¹

The biblical imagery is ambiguous: the writer, while potentially subject to a higher court of 'judgement', is also in possession of mental rapture, and proud angelic trumpeting.

³⁸¹ 'Preface to John M. Synge's *Poems and Translations*', in *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats, Volume IV: Early Essays*, p. 225.

The resonances of Revelation are skewed into a Symbolist credo of the artist as apocalyptic, radiant prophet.

In the same volume, *Liber Illustrum Virorum*, Hill writes of Yeats ‘yet again I fail to avoid / him as my seamark’ (*BH*, p. 724). I have written elsewhere of the Shakespearian valences of ‘seamark’, which appears in *Coriolanus*.³⁸² The *OED* definition gives ‘a conspicuous object distinguishable at sea which serves to guide or warn sailors in navigation’ (2. a.), including figurative contexts (2.b) such as Hill’s; ‘guide or warn’ – Yeats is exemplary in both senses of the word.³⁸³ Yeats’s political dubieties in the thirties are one aspect of his example that Hill would not wish to emulate (I have explored this in the article on Yeats and *Coriolanus* in Hill); another, I would suggest, concerns Hill’s ambivalence towards Yeats’s Romanticism, an ambivalence that (as with Hill’s other aesthetic anxieties) is markedly Eliotic.

In contrast to Yeats, Eliot is mentioned only one time in *The Daybooks*, in *Oraclau* | *Oracles*, in a poem titled ‘T.S. Eliot in Swansea, 1944’:

Men with white mufflers, coal-greased caps,

Swansea-bound in crammed compartment

To a big football match,

³⁸² O’Hanlon, ““Noble in his grandiose confusions”: Yeats and *Coriolanus* in the poetry of Geoffrey Hill”, *English* <doi: 10. 1093/english/efw029>.

³⁸³ On exemplarity in Hill, see Bridget Vincent, ‘The Exemplary Power of Geoffrey Hill’, pp. 649-88.

Neither civility's nor salvation's catch (*BH*, p. 760).

The poem alludes to Eliot's essay 'The Function of Criticism' (1923), where he excoriates the Romantic 'inner voice', a phrase from John Middleton Murry. Eliot fulminates:

The inner voice, in fact, sounds remarkably like an old principle which has been formulated by an elder critic in the now familiar phrase of 'doing as one likes'. The possessors of the inner voice ride ten in a compartment to a football match at Swansea, listening to the inner voice, which breathes the eternal message of vanity, fear, and lust.³⁸⁴

In 'Eros in F.H. Bradley and T.S. Eliot', Hill has commented on this passage:

[Eliot's] brutish rage against working men [...] is a self-maiming travesty of Bradley's essay 'My Station and its Duties' [and its brutal dismissals of other thinkers...] Eliot [...] operates well below the levels of insensibility to which he consigns his foes. But that is the price we pay [...] to have his early critical writings, in particular 'The Function of Criticism' (1923), for [...]

³⁸⁴ Eliot, *Selected Essays*, p. 27.

distinguishing work of eternal intensity from work that is merely beautiful [... or...] charming (*CCW*, p. 558).

Hill is ambivalent. Eliot's 'brutish' snobbery is 'the price we pay' for his critical authority in his early criticism; Hill seems to suggest that Eliot is right to reject the Romantic notion of 'the inner voice', while his comportment in doing so is less than salutary. By the same token, Hill's ambivalences towards Yeats, his 'seamark', are the reverse side of this coin: Hill maintains a recognisably-Eliotic disdain for 'the neo-Symbolist mystique celebrating verbal mastery' (*CCW*, p. 19); 'the high claims of poetry' (*CCW*, p. 7); the '*symboliste*, or, one might say, Romantic-confrontational' (*CCW*, p. 480); 'Coleridge's "royal prerogative of Genius" or Santayana's "barbaric genius"' (*CCW*, pp. 184-85), and 'the sick romanticism of imperial duty and sacrifice' (*CCW*, p. 457): in short, an implacable hostility towards a certain kind of Romanticism and all its works, and all its empty promises.

In his prose and poetry, Hill associates tendencies in Yeats's personality and work with this 'sick Romanticism': for instance, in the essay 'Language, Suffering, and Silence', he lambasts Yeats's infamous Arnoldian exclusion of Wilfred Owen and the war poets from his 1936 edition of *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* ('passive suffering is not a theme for poetry'); Hill describes Yeats at this moment as a strutting, preening 'D'Annunzio in Irish tweeds' (*CCW*, pp. 402-03).³⁸⁵ In one of the poems from

³⁸⁵ Cp. Roy Foster's description of Yeats's politics in the mid-thirties as an attempt to become 'the Blueshirts' D'Annunzio'; R.F. Foster, *W.B. Yeats: A Life, Vol. 2: The Arch-Poet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 495.

Ludo (2011), Hill seems to poke fun at his own Romantic delusions regarding poetic status, the way in which the ‘anarchic and libidinous’ retort into ‘a few home truths’: ‘what an air, / eh, Yeats, great double-breasted winter coat / collared with fur!’ (*BH*, p. 610). The allusion is to George Moore’s wickedly satirical recollection of Yeats’s return from his American lecture tour in the summer of 1903:

[...] Yeats, who had lately returned to us from the States with a paunch, a huge stride, and immense fur overcoat, rose to speak. We were surprised at the change in his appearance [...] he began to thunder like Ben Tillett against the middle classes, stamping his feet, working himself into a great temper [...] we asked ourselves why our Willie Yeats should feel himself called upon to denounce his own class; millers and shipowners on one side, and on the other a portrait-painter of distinction; and we laughed, remembering AE’s story, that one day whilst Yeats was crooning over his fire Yeats had said that if he had his rights he would be Duke of Ormonde. AE’s answer was: I am afraid, Willie, you are overlooking your father – a detestable remark to make to a poet in search of an ancestry [...] He should have remembered that all the romantic poets have sought illustrious ancestry, and rightly, since romantic poetry is concerned only with nobles and castles, gonfalons and oriflammes.³⁸⁶

³⁸⁶ George Moore, *Vale*, in *Hail and Farewell*, ed. by Richard Cave (Gerrards Cross, Bucks: Colin Smythe, first publ. 1911, 1976), p. 540. Foster adds the detail that Yeats’s coat was chinchilla; Foster, *W.B. Yeats: A Life, Vol. 1: The Apprentice Mage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 315.

Hill's allusion self-accusingly commiserates with the hammy elements of Yeats's Romanticism, its taste for the theatrical and display.³⁸⁷ In his self-accusation, Hill rejects those 'airs' of Romanticism while admitting he has been tempted by them, something Moore seems to achieve in reverse with his sardonic commentary on romantic poetry's concern for 'gonfalons and oriflammes'.

Hill's antipathy towards Yeats's Romanticism centres on a rejection of Yeats's high jurisdiction of art seen as removed from the reality of twentieth-century slaughter and genocide; he would also doubtless chastise Yeats's rebellious (though not revolutionary) romantic zeal in early theatrical productions such as *Kathleen Ni Houlihan*, as when with reference to English patriotism Hill describes the poems of William Ernest Henley and Henry Newbolt's poetry as 'the sick romanticism of imperial duty and sacrifice' (*CCW*, p. 457). Politics is one sphere in which Hill rejects romanticism; religion, arguably, is another. As we have seen, he is critical of Eliot's phrasing when dismissing 'the inner voice', but not the dismissal in itself. The phrase, which evokes the 'inner light' associated with Quakers, is a religiously-loaded term. It implies a dismissal of non-hierarchical forms of belief, as Eliot confirms when he pledges allegiance to Catholicism (and its literary equivalent, Classicism) against the solipsistic rabble.³⁸⁸ I am far from suggesting here that Hill is at one with Eliot's *extra Ecclesiam nulla salus* attitude to both faith and (by figurative extension? – or something more than that?) aesthetic judgement; I have explored Hill's ecumenical outlook at length in the

³⁸⁷ Tom Paulin veered into Moore's catty territory in his 1985 review-essay on Hill, devoting a foaming-mouthed paragraph to how the portrait of Hill on the cover of *Geoffrey Hill: Essays on His Work* expressed 'that archaic humanist cop-out' of art's transcendence, with particular spleen reserved for Hill's sartorial fashion; 'The Case for Geoffrey Hill', *London Review of Books*, 7.6 (4 April 1985), pp. 13-14.

³⁸⁸ See Eliot, 'The Function of Criticism', *Selected Essays*, pp. 26-27.

first chapter. Rather, Hill's refusal to dismiss Eliot's injunctions against the 'inner voice' may reflect his approval, later in the same essay, of Eliot's insistence in the preface to the 1928 edition of *The Sacred Wood* that poetry is not 'religion or an equivalent of religion, except by some monstrous abuse of words'.³⁸⁹

As an important aside, we must therefore be somewhat baffled by Eliot's explicit equivalence, in moral weight if nothing else, of Catholic faith with a classical temperament in literature in 'The Function of Criticism' (1923), and later in his 'Preface' to *For Lancelot Andrewes*.³⁹⁰ Hill's problems with style and faith have already to some degree been pre-empted by Eliot. Nevertheless, Hill would seem to concur, albeit ambivalently, with one half of Eliot's favourable quotation of Jacques Rivière in his Charles Eliot Norton lectures, 1932-3: 'It is only with the advent of Romanticism that the literary act came to be conceived as a sort of raid on the absolute and its result as a revelation' (cp. Hill's 'an argument for the theological interpretation of literature [...] needs other sustenance than this', *CCW*, p. 19). The other half, where Rivière imagines that writers of the seventeenth century wrote '*pour distraire les honnêtes gens*', Hill would (and does) dismiss as a compromise of Eliot's critical language.³⁹¹

³⁸⁹ Eliot, 'Preface to the 1928 Edition', *The Sacred Wood* (London: Methuen, 3rd repr. 1960, first publ. 1920), p. ix. Hill cites this prohibition approvingly in 'Eros in F.H. Bradley and T.S. Eliot', although suggesting that Eliot's being reduced to declaring poetry 'a superior amusement' was 'the outcome of an earlier strategic or tactical error', *CCW*, p. 559.

³⁹⁰ By 1928, when *For Lancelot Andrewes* was published, Eliot has settled definitively on 'anglo-catholic' to describe his religion, contained within the famous formula 'classicist in literature, royalist in politics, and anglo-catholic in religion'; 'Preface', *For Lancelot Andrewes* (London: Faber and Faber, 1970, first publ. in 1928), p. 7.

³⁹¹ Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, p. 128. See also Hill, *CCW*, p. 555. Eliot first uses this phrase of Rivière ('pour distraire...') in the 1928 'Preface' to *The Sacred Wood*, as a corollary to 'Poetry is a superior amusement'.

Eliot famously paid qualified homage to Yeats in the same Harvard lectures, where the latter's Romanticism was to be deplored while his latent or inchoate modernism was to be lauded. Crucially, Eliot reaches his judgement by assessing the relationship of Yeats's style to faith:

There is another danger in the association of poetry with mysticism besides [...] leading the reader to look in poetry for religious satisfactions. These [are] dangers for the critic and the reader; there is also a danger for the poet. No one can read Mr. Yeats's *Autobiographies* and his earlier poetry without feeling that the author was trying to get as a poet something like the exaltation to be obtained, I believe, from hashisch [sic] or nitrous oxide. He was very much fascinated by self-induced trance states, calculated symbolism, mediums, theosophy, crystal-gazing, folklore and hobgoblins. Golden apples, archers, black pigs and such paraphernalia abounded. Often the verse has an hypnotic charm: but you cannot take heaven by magic, especially if you are, like Mr. Yeats, a very sane person. Then, by a great triumph of development, Mr. Yeats began to write and is still writing some of the most beautiful poetry in the language, some of the clearest, simplest, most direct.³⁹²

“Taking heaven by magic”, like Rivère's ‘raid on the absolute’, is a form of what Hill dismissively describes in ‘Poetry as “Menace” and “Atonement”’ as ‘not theology at all,

³⁹² T.S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, p. 140.

but merely a restatement of the neo-Symbolist mystique celebrating verbal mastery':
Yeats's 'words alone are certain good'.³⁹³

If Hill has consistently maintained Eliot's opposition to a conflation of poetry and religion, how is his insistence in the preface to *Style and Faith* that with exemplary writers 'style *is* faith' to be understood? What further complications arise in trying to take account of Hill's reverence for Yeats, who in some sense gives Wallace Stevens his most sumptuous and vatic statements: 'We say God and the imagination are one...?'³⁹⁴ But in fact, the complexity transcends the mere matter of Hill's esteem for Yeats, which could be explained by Hill valuing Yeats despite bad theology. Not so; for in 'Language, Suffering, and Silence', in its first published appearance, Hill places Yeats at the very outset of his 'theology of language'; indeed, Hill suggests that the final lines of 'The Second Coming', should he 'consider undertaking a theology of language', would be 'one of a number of possible points of departure for such an exploration' (*CCW*, p. 404). I will return to this crucial suggestion later in the chapter; here, I want to stress how central Yeats is to Hill's 'theology of language', despite the fact that elsewhere he seems chary of the Irish poet's apotheosis of style.

The eagle-eyed will have noticed my recurring periphrasis in this chapter, 'a *certain kind* of Romanticism'; what Hill rejects is not Yeats's Romanticism per se, but what he calls in his very early essay on the Irish poet 'the false mask' of Romanticism. Even Eliot by the time of his Charles Eliot Norton lectures had come to be wary of the term being used as a pejorative (which up until then he had been assiduous in

³⁹³ Yeats, *The Poems*, p. 8.

³⁹⁴ Wallace Stevens, 'Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour', *Collected Poetry and Prose*, p. 444.

promulgating): ‘In the interest of clarity and simplicity I wish myself to avoid employing the terms Romanticism and Classicism, terms which inflame political passions, and tend to prejudice our conclusions.’³⁹⁵ The next section of this chapter examines Hill’s critique of the ‘false mask’ of Romanticism, as he outlines it in his 1971 essay on Yeats. I will also explore Hill’s early poetic critiques of that specious variety of Romanticism, drawing them into colloquy with Yeats.

The “false mask” of Romanticism

One of the earliest critical works published by Geoffrey Hill is his 1971 essay “‘The Conscious Mind’s Intelligible Structure’: A Debate’. This ambitious essay focuses on the poetry of W.B. Yeats in order to stage its ‘brief but inconclusive debate’ regarding poetry’s relationship to “the objective world”, religious faith, political action, and Romantic legacies, to name just a few of its themes. It is no exaggeration to claim that it is Hill’s defence of poetry in microcosm, remarkable given its early appearance and the fact that it is one of several published essays not included in the 2008 *Collected Critical Writings*. Kenneth Haynes’s ‘Editorial Note’ advises that ‘while inclusion of an essay or lecture [...] even in revised form, does not necessarily indicate that Hill wholly approves it, nor exclusion that he wholly disapproves of it, that is nonetheless the general tendency’ (in *CCW*, p. 581). In the case of “‘The Conscious Mind’s Intelligible Structure’”, the caveat is crucial: far from disapproving of this early work, its insights

³⁹⁵ Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, p. 129.

are redistributed throughout later essays gathered in the *Collected Critical Writings*, a ghostly presence under the palimpsest. As well as verbatim re-deployments of its text in at least four essays of the collection, there are elaborations and revisions of its argument uprooted from the original context and disseminated throughout.³⁹⁶ This prolific reincorporation is compounded by the presence of numerous drafts of “‘The Conscious Mind’s Intelligible Structure’” in the Hill archive at Special Collections in the Brotherton Library, the University of Leeds, some of which bear only a slight resemblance to the essay as it was published in *Agenda*, but elements of which are again incorporated into later essays.³⁹⁷ Finally, there are intimations of the essay throughout Hill’s poetic *oeuvre*, most notably in sections 33 and 51 of *Al Tempo De’ Tremuoti* which first appeared in 2013, in *Broken Hierarchies* (*BH*, pp. 901, 914).

This ‘debate’, which Hill describes in the essay as ‘inconclusive’, is certainly that, to judge from these repeated attempts to return to the arena of its argument. Hill has spoken in one of his Oxford Professor of Poetry lectures of his ‘resonating memory’ as opposed to ‘photographic memory’, and poked fun at this in *The Triumph of Love*: ‘how this man’s creepy, though not creeping, wit [...] has buzzed, droned, / round a

³⁹⁶ The four essays are: ‘Poetry as “Menace” and “Atonement”’ (published 1978), ‘Translating Value: Marginal Observations on a Central Question’ (2000), ‘Language, Suffering, and Silence’ (published 1999), and ‘A Postscript on Modernist Poetics’ (published 2008).

³⁹⁷ Relevant material found at “‘The Conscious Mind’s Intelligible Structure’” BC MS 20c Hill/4/4, ‘Yeats’, BC MS 20c Hill/5/1/255, ‘Yeats’s Foreign Eye’ BC MS 20c Hill/4/44, and ‘Notebook 12: [Mercian Hymns]’ BC MC 20c Hill/2/1/12: all held in Special Collections, The Brotherton Library, The University of Leeds. Correspondences in the *Collected Critical Writings* to elements within the drafts in the folder on the 1971 essay that I have managed to track down include ‘Poetry as “Menace” and “Atonement”’, p. 11, ‘Jonathan Swift: The Poetry of Reaction’, p. 85, and ‘What Devil Has Got into John Ransom?’, p. 142. The ‘Yeats’ folder, in addition to holding another typescript draft of “‘The Conscious Mind’s Intelligible Structure’”, comprises of lecture notes, newspaper clippings and other material relating to Hill’s teaching on Yeats at the University of Leeds. ‘Yeats’s Foreign Eye’ collects notes and drafts towards a lecture given at the Yeats International Summer School, Sligo, 1970, contrasting Yeats’s poetry with that of Wilfred Owen, where some of that material is revisited in the drafting of the 1971 published essay (and some of which also finds its way into the *Collected Critical Writings*; in particular ‘Language, Suffering, and Silence’, *CCW*, pp.402-04). Finally, ‘Notebook 12: [Mercian Hymns]’ contains some lecture notes and annotations on Yeats.

half-dozen topics (fewer, surely?) / for almost fifty years' (*BH*, p. 267).³⁹⁸ The 1971 essay is the first sustained critical attempt to take account of Hill's ambivalence towards Yeats, particularly the latter's Romanticism. The critic E.M. Knottenbelt was among the earliest of Hill's critics to correctly identify a central dilemma in his poetics: an anxiety to '[define] his own place as a modern Romantic'. Knottenbelt correctly locates Hill within a post-war British literary culture that was coming to terms with 'the Manichean tendency' disseminated by modernism, that poetry had to be either/or: Romantic or classical, dramatic or lyric, traditional or modern, and so on.³⁹⁹ We have already seen the degree to which Eliot was a chief instigator of this bifurcation, although by the early 1930s he was adopting a more emollient tone. In the decades during which Hill began to write poetry, and simultaneously began his career as a lecturer at the University of Leeds, a critical rehabilitation of Romanticism was underway. A short digression on the contours of this milieu is necessary.

Northrup Frye's *Fearful Symmetry* appeared in 1947 and reprinted several times during the following decades; M.H. Abrams' *The Mirror and the Lamp* appeared in 1953, followed by *Natural Supernaturalism* (1971), his provocative and influential account of how in Romanticism God became 'the purely formal remainder of himself'.⁴⁰⁰ C.K. Stead's *The New Poetic* (1964) reads Eliot as a belated Romantic, a

³⁹⁸ On 'resonating memory', see Hill, "'Legal Fiction" and Legal Fiction', Oxford Professor of Poetry Lecture, online audio recording, University of Oxford (5 March 2013) <<http://media.podcasts.ox.ac.uk/engfac/poetry/2013-03-21-engfac-poetry-hill-2.mp3>> [accessed 13 December 2013]. 'Creepy, though not creeping, wit' puns on Fulke Greville's assessment of Sidney's writing: 'For my own part, I found my creeping Genius more fixed upon the Images of Life, than the Images of Wit', cited in Hill, 'Our Word is Our Bond', *CCW*, p. 153.

³⁹⁹ E.M. Knottenbelt, *Passionate Intelligence: The Poetry of Geoffrey Hill* (Rodolpi: The Netherlands, 1990), pp. 20-23.

⁴⁰⁰ See Northrup Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: a study of William Blake* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1947), and his *A Study of English Romanticism* (New York: Random House, 1968); M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York:

pointed reassessment that cuts to the heart of how the post-Eliotic academy had to reconcile their rehabilitated Romanticism to modernism – in the academy of the late fifties and early sixties, there was no question of maintaining Eliot’s either/or division, but championing Shelley and his latter-day ephebes.⁴⁰¹

1957 was a particularly notable year in the critical revaluation of Eliotic and New Critical shibboleths regarding the aesthetic “degeneracy” of Romanticism: John Bayley’s *The Romantic Survival* was published, Frye’s *The Anatomy of Criticism*, Robert Langbaum’s *The Poetry of Experience*, and Frank Kermode’s *Romantic Image*. In most if not all of these studies, Yeats becomes a paradigm of the vitality and modernity of Romanticism. Kermode’s book was especially influential in those years, situating Yeats in a nineteenth-century vein of Romanticism which he derives from French symbolists via Arthur Symons. Like many of these rehabilitations, Kermode emphasizes the quality of ‘dilemma’ or ‘problems’ inherent in approaching Romanticism after modernism, although the vexations begin even earlier, with Matthew Arnold both a ‘transmitter’ of Romantic thought and a diagnostician of what ails it, as Eliot correctly perceived.⁴⁰²

It is against this professional context that Hill’s ambivalences regarding Yeats’s Romanticism are to be apprehended; ‘dilemma’ was the watchword, and sure enough, Hill’s 1971 essay “‘The Conscious Mind’s Intelligible Structure’” has the subtitle ‘a

Oxford University Press, 1953), and *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York, London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1971).

⁴⁰¹ Hill quotes extensively from Stead’s book in an unpublished lecture on Yeats, presumably from the late sixties; see lecture notes entitled ‘Yeats C’, 9 ff. loose typescript, “numbered” by letters of the Greek alphabet, in ‘Yeats’ BC MS 20c Hill 5/1/255, p.1. On Eliot’s Romanticism, see also Michael O’Neill, *The All-Sustaining Air: Romantic Legacies and Renewals in British, American, and Irish Poetry since 1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 60–84.

⁴⁰² Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image* (London: Routledge and Paul, 1957), p. 12.

Debate'. Adopting Yeats's terminology from *A Vision* (1925), Hill carefully distinguishes between 'false and true masks' of Romanticism. The false mask he summarizes with Jacques Maritain's 'unnatural principles', 'the fecundity of money and the finality of the useful'.⁴⁰³ Associating 'the finality of the useful' with political proselytising (he instances the plays of Yeats's sometime-nemesis, George Bernard Shaw), Hill sees such moral pontification as ultimately reconcilable to the 'fecundity of money' – the edifying drama of the former making the latter 'finally useful'.⁴⁰⁴

Hill has probed the true nature of Romanticism from the earliest of his poems, often with Yeats as an important 'seamark', negatively and positively understood. One might detect allusions to Yeats in several poems from his early volumes of poetry, most famously, the beautiful and terrible Yeatsian cadence of 'those muddy-hued and midge-tormented ghosts' from 'An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture in England' (*BH*, p. 125): compare 'that dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea'.⁴⁰⁵ Instance also the anti-Romantic negation of delphine psychopomps in 'Drake's Drum', where, unlike the souls in Yeats's 'Byzantium' or the Holy Innocents in 'News for the Delphic Oracle', Hill's dead 'do not shriek like gulls nor dolphins ride' (*BH*, p. 18).⁴⁰⁶ The *melopoeia* of the poem's seascape seems more crucial to Hill's reception of Yeats than what W.H. Auden dismissively called his 'Southern Californian' aspect.⁴⁰⁷ The image recurs in the 2012 volume *Odi Barbare*: 'Shales the tide backward where it paused

⁴⁰³ "The Conscious Mind's Intelligible Structure", p. 15.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

⁴⁰⁵ Yeats, 'Byzantium', *The Poems*, p. 248. That entire sequence, with its 'Ancestral Houses', 'wild swans' (*BH*, p. 128), and obtrusive use of the demonstrative 'that' conducts an argument with Yeats.

⁴⁰⁶ E.M. Knottenbelt has also read 'Drake's Drum' (which takes its title from a Henry Newbolt poem) as an allusion to Yeats's 'News for the Delphic Oracle', 'stringently "shelv[ing]" and "dissolv[ing]" every wishful thought – as suggested by [...] Yeats – that the dead ride to paradise on the backs of dolphins', *Passionate Intelligence*, p. 42.

⁴⁰⁷ W.H. Auden, 'Yeats as Example', *The Kenyon Review*, 10.2 (Spring 1948), pp. 187-95 (188-89).

self-gathered; / Mutterings endless the salt wound of Being / Sutured by dolphins' (*BH*, p. 843). The word 'shales', aurally evocative of the tidal action it describes, interacts with the varied sibilance of 'self', 'salt', and 'sutured'; similar pelagic soundings are made in 'Drake's Drum': 'shelves', 'dissolves', 'flesh', 'spray', 'spume'. Hill has written in 'A Postscript on Modernist Poetics' in praise of the 'sonic triumphalism' in Yeats's last poems, particularly the bacchanal in 'some cliff-sheltered bay' of satyrs and nymphs in 'News for the Delphic Oracle' (*CCW*, p. 579).

The SS guard speaker of 'Ovid in the Third Reich' celebrates 'the love-choir' (*BH*, p. 39), which may be yet another reference to 'News for the Delphic Oracle': 'There sighed amid his choir of love / Tall Pythagoras'.⁴⁰⁸ Hill's attribution of the Yeatsian phrase to the wicked carnal blundering of a perpetrator of Nazi genocide revokes the "expansive gesture" of its Romantic tenor, the poets and legends in their Elysian fields (even if they are 'golden codgers'). One might detect another allusion in 'the gathering / Of bestial and common hardship' in Hill's seawracked Bethlehem, 'Picture of a Nativity' (*BH*, p. 19); compare this to 'The uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor' from Yeats's 'The Magi'.⁴⁰⁹ Both poems critique the assuaging imagery of Christ's birth, but Yeats substitutes for Christianity a *bijou* Romantic aestheticism, the 'pale unsatisfied ones' jewelled 'at all times' in the visionary gleam of his mind's eye. Hill remains ambivalent: the first verb in 'artistic men appear to worship' hovers between the sense of the Magi feigning worship, or merely descriptive, their 'appearing' at the scene. Moreover, Hill's 'bestial and common hardship' takes account of the carnal reality of believers, whereas Yeats's late-Romantic wrenching of the Incarnation is

⁴⁰⁸ Yeats, 'News for the Delphic Oracle', *The Poems*, p. 338.

⁴⁰⁹ 'The Magi', *The Poems*, p. 177.

interested in Christ's birth only as the herald of a new, moribund gyre, 'the uncontrollable mystery'.

Hill's poem 'The Death of Shelley' from the sequence 'Of Commerce and Society' (*For the Unfallen*) is one of his most potent critiques of the 'false mask' of Romanticism as it is expressed in the fecundity of money and finality of the useful. The Romantic poet-on-a-mission is figured as one questing aimlessly, then giving himself over to spectacular death, while the 'unchanging features / of commerce' endure, gathering soot (*BH*, p. 29). In his essay 'The Philosophy of Shelley' (1900), Yeats takes stock of his youthful enthusiasm for Shelley, mingling irony with admiration when he notes Shelley's fervent belief in a day when 'commerce, "the venal interchange of all that human art of nature yield; which wealth should purchase not," [will] come [...] silently to an end'.⁴¹⁰ In the essay, Yeats quotes Mary Shelley's 1840 'Preface' to her edition of Percy Bysshe Shelley's posthumous *Essays, Letters from Abroad, Translations and Fragments*, on her husband's views on the afterlife:

'Of his speculations as to what will befall this inestimable spirit when we appear to die,' Mrs. Shelley has written, 'a mystic ideality tinged these speculations in Shelley's mind [...] that those who rise above the ordinary nature of man, fade from before our imperfect organs; they remain in their "love, beauty, and delight," in a world congenial to them, and we, clogged by "error, ignorance, and strife," see them not till we are fitted by purification and improvement to

⁴¹⁰ Yeats, 'The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry', in *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats, Volume IV: Early Essays*, p. 54.

their higher state.’ Not merely happy souls, but all beautiful places and movements and gestures and events, when we think they have ceased to be, have become portions of the eternal.⁴¹¹

Yeats’s essay thus sets the Romantic hero, exemplified by the sacrificial drowned man, Shelley, against the venal trafficking of modernity, quoting with approval Mary Shelley’s grand anticipation of the Symbolist credo, the immortality of Beauty. Clearly there are religious impulses in such a gesture, notwithstanding the conventional assumption of Shelley’s atheism: as he wrote in *A Defence of Poetry*, ‘Poetry is indeed something divine. It is at once the centre and the circumference of knowledge; it is that which comprehends all science and that to which all science must be referred’.⁴¹² When in ‘Poetry as “Menace” and “Atonement”’ Hill critiques the general assumption that ‘the characteristic Romantic mode is an expansive gesture’, the line he cites as typical of this is from Shelley’s ‘Ode to a Skylark’: ‘Hail to thee, blithe Spirit! Bird thou never wert!’ (*CCW*, p. 7). Hill repeats the phrase ‘expansive gesture’ later in his essay to describe ‘the neo-Symbolist mystique celebrating verbal mastery’, distinguishing it from the type of ‘theological interpretation of literature’ that he would want (*ibid.*, p. 19). As Frank Kermode writes, ‘Symons, on grounds that Arnold might not have fully approved, calls the literature of the [Symbolist] movement “a new kind of religion, with

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.

⁴¹² Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*, in *Shelley’s Prose: Or the Trumpet of a Prophecy*, ed. by David Lee Clark (London: Fourth Estate, 1988), p. 293.

all the duties and responsibilities of the sacred ritual". Others spoke of poets as a third order of priesthood.⁴¹³

Yeats, and other belated Romantics such as Wallace Stevens, spoke in formulae that modelled Shelley's conflation of art with religion, divinity with imagination, and grace with style:

Have not poetry and music arisen... out of the sounds the enchanters made to help their imagination to enchant, charm, to bind with a spell themselves and the passers-by? These very words, a chief part of all praises of music or poetry, still cry to us their origin.⁴¹⁴

[Blake] announced the religion of art, of which no man in the world dreamed he knew... In our time we are agreed that we "make our souls" out of literature.⁴¹⁵

...like all who are preoccupied with intellectual symbols of our time, a foreshadower of a new sacred book, of which all the arts, as somebody has said, are beginning to dream.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹³ Kermode, *Romantic Image*, p. 110.

⁴¹⁴ Yeats, 'Magic', from *Ideas on Good and Evil in Essays and Introductions* (London: Macmillan, 1961), p. 43.

⁴¹⁵ Yeats, 'William Blake and the Imagination', in *Essays and Introductions*, p. 111.

⁴¹⁶ Yeats, 'The Symbolism of Poetry', in *Essays and Introductions*, p. 162.

As we have seen, not only does Hill resist Romantic attempts to make a religion of art, but he is equally hostile to what he sees as the ‘elitist’ elements of Romantic notions of genius (see citations earlier in the chapter), which is adumbrated by Mary Shelley’s ‘those who rise above the ordinary nature of man’.

Whereas Yeats in his essay contrasts venal commerce with the true Romanticism of the poet’s ‘higher state’, Hill sees the latter as a Romantic myth of status, and the commodification of personality involved in such a myth as entirely contiguous with the ‘false mask’ of Romanticism. Hill, in this the disciple of Eliot if nothing else, has been from the very earliest implacably anti-Shelleyan: for instance, in ‘Our Word is Our Bond’, he denounces Ezra Pound’s vatic dictum ‘all values ultimately come from our judicial sentences’ as ‘magisterially Shelleyan’ (*CCW*, p. 165); over two decades later in ‘A Postscript to Modernist Poetics’, he critiques a phrase from Austin Farrar’s *The Glass of Vision* (1948) ‘which strikes the ear as too Shelleyan’ (*CCW*, p. 572). In ‘The Death of Shelley’, we have Hill’s poetic criticism of Shelleyan Romanticism in advance of his prose critiques:

‘His guarded eyes under his shielded brow’

Through poisonous baked sea-things Perseus

Goes – clogged sword, clear, aimless mirror –

With nothing to strike at or blind

in the frothed shallows (*BH*, p. 29).

Hill's poem alludes to Shelley's 'On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci in the Florentine Gallery', published in Mary Shelley's posthumous edition of 1824. In that poem, the 'brazen glare' of the Medusa's serpentine curls make 'a thrilling vapour of the air / Become a [lacuna] and ever-shifting mirror / Of all the beauty and the terror there'.⁴¹⁷ Shelley makes capital out of the aesthetic of violence and terror: 'Yet it is less the horror than the grace / Which turns the gazer's spirit into stone', and 'Tis the melodious hue of beauty thrown / Athwart the darkness and the glare of pain, / Which humanize and harmonize the strain'.⁴¹⁸ Such Romantic ersatz redemption of suffering, Hill seems to suggest in his bleak poem – in which the blind hero Perseus is conflated with a drowning Shelley – is cant; worse, it is, to speak figuratively, as he says in 'Language, Suffering, and Silence' of other Romantic excesses, 'the whole post-Nietzschean panorama suddenly before you, the cultic "Theatre of Cruelty", the apotheosis of the Marquis de Sade' (*CCW*, p. 404).⁴¹⁹ Whereas in Shelley's poem Perseus's mirror, which kills the Gorgon in myth, is almost pointless confronted with the 'ever-shifting mirror' of the Romantic sublimity of Medusa, her terror-in-beauty, beauty-in-terror, in Hill's poem it is 'aimless', as if to suggest the Romantic aesthete is at the mercy of the excess she cultivates, or worse, that Shelleyan Romanticism spawns a commercially-appealing didactic realism, 'a mirror dawdling down a lane', as Yeats puts it in his critique of

⁴¹⁷ Shelley, 'On the Medusa of Leonardo da Vinci in the Florentine Gallery', in *Shelley's Poetical Works*, ed. by Thomas Hutchinson (New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, first publ. 1905, 1968), pp. 582-83.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 582.

⁴¹⁹ I am, one hopes with justice, linking elements of Hill's critique of Romanticism in its later manifestations to those of its earlier manifestations.

Stendhal and naturalism.⁴²⁰ Hill's adjective 'clogged' to describe Perseus's sword seems a direct allusion to Mary Shelley's recollection, her distinction between the extraordinary Romantic genius of her husband and the presumptuous 'we, clogged by "error, ignorance, and strife"'. For Hill, the poet can claim no such exemption from original sin, error and its corollaries. His poet-Perseus is neither awed by the sublime art of the Gorgon, nor in proud possession of transcendent "love, beauty, and delight', but gropes 'in the frothed shallows'. For his part, Yeats's Romanticism, in so far as it was "false" or Shelleyan in the sense that Hill depicts, it was also tempered by the ineluctable weight of history, the violent gyres; as he phrases it in part VII of 'Vacillation', 'what theme had Homer but original sin?'⁴²¹

I would suggest that Hill's poem repudiates the 'false mask' of Romanticism, Shelley's high aesthetic claims ironically vulnerable to sloganizing and commodity, re-locating Romanticism within both the blackened monumental markets and human fallibility; I would further argue that his poem is engaging with Yeats's essay, and the Irish poet's complicated attitude to Romanticism more generally. A self-described member of 'the last romantics', Yeats was nevertheless sensitive to what Hill describes as 'the false mask' of Romanticism.⁴²² In 'September 1913', Yeats laments the death of 'Romantic Ireland', in one of the first instances of what he will perfect in his maturity to become at last (in Hill's words from *Clavics*) his 'crazy-final refrains' (*BH*, p. 820) of *New Poems* and *Last Poems*:

⁴²⁰ Yeats, 'Introduction to *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse*', in *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats, Vol. V: Later Essays*, ed. William H. O'Donnell (Schuster and Sons: New York, 1994), p. 194.

⁴²¹ *The Poems*, p. 302. Cp. Hill's comment in his Oxford Professor of Poetry lecture, *A Deep Dynastic Wound*, that there can be, as Yeats and Pound demonstrate, 'other readings' of original sin than theological ones; 'socio-political readings, for instance'.

⁴²² 'Coole and Ballylee', *The Poems*, p. 294.

Romantic Ireland's dead and gone,

It's with O'Leary in the grave.⁴²³

Even in this poem, elements of Yeats's growing suspicion towards Romantic nationalism, which have their most eloquent and ambivalent testimony in 'Easter 1916', may be detected in 'all that delirium of the brave'. By the time Yeats comes to write 'The Municipal Gallery Re-visited' in the late thirties, his attitude is encapsulated in his self-reported reaction to John Lavery's painting 'The Blessing of the Colours', with a bishop blessing the Free State flag: "'This is not" I say / "The dead Ireland of my youth, but an Ireland / The poets have imagined, terrible and gay"⁴²⁴ The lines return on the refrain of 'September 1913' (even in the echo down the years of the word 'dead'), and yet they are not a complete disavowal of 'Romantic Ireland': the 'terrible and gay' sublimity of Romanticism are sensed as false, painterly, and yet tragic gaiety remains the essence of Yeats's philosophy in these late poems ('Their ancient, glittering eyes, are gay').⁴²⁵

Yeats is nothing if not ambivalent in his later poems. 'Three Movements' (from the 1933 volume *The Winding Stair*) dramatizes the tidal flow of literary movements, without yielding a didactic message as such:

⁴²³ 'September 1913', *The Poems*, pp. 159-60.

⁴²⁴ 'The Municipal Gallery Re-visited', *The Poems*, pp. 366-67. See also Albright's notes, p. 800.

⁴²⁵ 'Lapis Lazuli', *The Poems*, pp. 341-42.

Shakespearean fish swam the sea, far away from land;

Romantic fish swam in the nets coming to the hand;

What are all those fish that lie gasping on the strand?⁴²⁶

Michael O'Neill reads the 'countdown triplet' as not so much about 'diminishment' but 'a bracing austerity, the need to adapt to a new, harsh element, to vaporise past oceans into a breathable air' – a Romantic survival, to adopt Bayley's title.⁴²⁷ There seems to be an echo of this poem in Hill's 'Death of Shelley': 'Rivers bring down. The sea / Brings away; / Voids, sucks back, its pearls and auguries' (*BH*, p. 29). The oceanic grandeur of Romantic idealism, such as Shelley's atheistic 'mystical ideality' where the mysterious poet-elect are alone granted access to the empyrean, suffers a sea-change in Hill's poem; carnal realities, the 'undiscerning sea' which throughout *For the Unfallen* 'shelves and dissolves' (*BH*, p. 18), 'voids' such gestures, especially in 'The Death of Shelley', even as those Shelleyan and Yeatsian archetypes, 'the bull and the great mute swan' still 'strain into life with their notorious cries'. Romanticism can re-invent itself, shedding its false masks; there is life in the mute swan yet. As Wallace Stevens equably puts it, 'it

⁴²⁶ *The Poems*, p. 290.

⁴²⁷ O'Neill, *The All-Sustaining Air*, p. 15.

can be said of the romantic, just as it can be said of the imagination, that it can never effectively touch the same thing twice in the same way.⁴²⁸

It has been implicit throughout my discussion of Hill's 'The Death of Shelley' in relation to Yeats that the 'true mask' of Romanticism, as Hill sees it, is implicated in the poem at the level of line, word choice, syntax: in short, style. The title of Hill's 1971 essay in *Agenda*, "'The Conscious Mind's Intelligible Structure'", is taken from Richard Ellmann's 1967 study of Yeats, *Eminent Domain*: 'to the end, even in his last poems where everything estimable is imperilled, he remained stubbornly loyal to the conscious mind's intelligible structure'.⁴²⁹ Such a loyalty is read by Hill as a form of 'objectivity', to be utterly distinguished from what he calls, citing Matthew Corrigan, 'the primary objective world... its cruelty and indifference'.⁴³⁰ Rather, in Hill's essay the poet's 'objective scrutiny' is seen as entering 'the arena with [... the] "primary objective world"', a paradigm that Hill believes is best described in an observation of Simone Weil:

Simultaneous composition on several planes at once is the law of artistic creation, and wherein, in fact, lies its difficulty.

⁴²⁸ Stevens, 'Two or Three Ideas', in *Collected Poetry and Prose*, p. 849. On Romanticism's power to re-invent itself, see O'Neill, *The All-Sustaining Air*, and George Bornstein, *Transformations of Romanticism in Yeats, Eliot, and Stevens* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1976).

⁴²⁹ Ellmann, cited in "'The Conscious Mind's Intelligible Structure'", p. 14; taken from *Eminent Domain: Yeats Among Wilde, Joyce, Pound, Eliot, and Auden* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, first publ. 1965, 1967), p. 52. Ellmann derives the phrase from Donald Davie's *Articulate Energy*: 'it is hard not to agree with Yeats the abandonment of syntax [by Pound] testifies to a failure of the poet's nerve, a loss of confidence in the intelligible structure of the conscious mind, and the validity of its activity', p. 129.

⁴³⁰ "'The Conscious Mind's Intelligible Structure'", p. 14.

A poet, in the arrangement of words and the choice of each word, must simultaneously bear in mind matters on a least five or six different planes of composition... Politics, in their turn, form an art governed by composition on a multiple plane.⁴³¹

This definition of poetic endeavour and its difficult, refractory task has become a mantra for Hill; it is significant to find it both first and last associated with the poetic practice of Yeats: here in 1971, and in ‘A Postscript on Modernist Poetics’ (published 2008), an essay that laments Eliot’s derelictions of artistic responsibility, and which so highly praises Yeats’s ‘eros of technique’, what Yeats called in a letter of April 1936 to his lover Margaret Ruddock, “tecnic” (*CCW*, pp. 565–80).⁴³² In ‘A Postscript’, Hill is once again contrasting false forms of Romanticism, Ruddock’s ‘inept self-expression’, with the expressiveness of the ‘alienated majesty’ of formal integrity, although it is important to note that troubled identification with Romanticism in his early essays has been subsumed into an examination of modernist legacies, with Yeats as an echt-modernist despite everything.

In ‘A Postscript’, Weil’s description is seen as ‘an uncondescending attempt to reduce [...] the intractable nature of poetry to a position of moral influence’ (*CCW*, p. 573). Such a position was already operative in “‘The Conscious Mind’s Intelligible Structure’”, with style seen as evincing and adumbrating a kind of ethical, quasi-

⁴³¹ Simone Weil, from *The Need for Roots*, trans. A.F. Wills (1952), cited in Hill, “‘The Conscious Mind’s Intelligible Structure’”, p. 15.

⁴³² See *Ah, Sweet Dancer: W.B. Yeats, Margot Ruddock: A Correspondence*, ed. by Roger McHugh (New York: Macmillan, 1971), p. 81.

transcendental reality: in short, Hill is already edging towards his formulation in 2003 ‘style *is* faith’, but the manner in which he does so in the Yeats essay is utterly revelatory, an iconic mimesis of the dilemma between poetic style and religious faith that I argue is the essence of Hill’s achievement.

As we have seen, it is at the level of ‘simultaneous composition on several planes at once’ that Hill’s poem ‘The Death of Shelley’ enacts its paradigmatic critique of the Shelleyan ‘false mask’ of Romanticism, commodity and utility. Its objectivity, its ‘stubborn [loyalty] to the conscious mind’s intelligible structure’, is inseparable from the texture of its style, and is itself one of the ways in which the ‘true mask’ of Romanticism can be discovered, as far as Hill is concerned. The same confrontation of a poem’s style with a debased form of Romanticism takes place in Hill’s ‘Elegiac Stanzas’, in which the style dramatizes the confrontation. The Wordsworthian ambience of the poem is apparent from its title, its dedication to the Romanticist Peter Mann (Hill’s colleague at Leeds), and its subtitle, ‘On a Visit to Dove Cottage’ – this itself perhaps a subtle, piquant jibe at the “documentary”, occasional, poems-as-postcards of the Movement.

As with ‘The Death of Shelley’, Romanticism is collocated with commercialism, maestro-worship, and strained sincerity, in hyperbolic, apostrophizing strains that mocks the “high argument”:

Mountains, rivers, and grand storms,

Continuous profit, grand customs

(And many of them): O Lakes, Lakes!

O Sentiment upon the rocks! (*BH*, p. 24).

Sentiment, in becoming what “‘The Conscious Mind’s Intelligible Structure’” refers to as ‘a potent arbiter of artistic motive and conduct’ in its debased guise, sincerity (‘a rhetoric / as plain as spitting on a stick’), founders on the crags of degraded custom and insatiable profit.⁴³³ The apostrophizing mimics the hyperbole of Romantic excess; at the same time, this sardonic note is undercut by the poem’s elegy for the Romantic debasement into mere sincerity, which is in tacit confederacy with cynicism and commodity, ‘Customs through which many come / To sink their eyes into a room / Filled with the unused and unworn; / To bite nothings to the bone’ (*BH*, p. 24).

There is perhaps a recollection in the line ‘a rhetoric / As plain as spitting on a stick’ of Yeats’s denigration of Wilfred Owen – that ‘revered sandwich-board man of the revolution [...] He is all blood, dirt, and sugared stick’.⁴³⁴ Hill has upbraided Yeats’s authoritarian snobbery in excluding Owen from his 1936 *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*.⁴³⁵ Nevertheless, he has consistently held the view that Owen, in his most celebrated poetry at least, transmitted a debased, ‘exhausted’ form of what he calls in

⁴³³ Hill, “‘The Conscious Mind’s Intelligible Structure’”, pp. 21–22.

⁴³⁴ Yeats, a letter to Dorothy Wellesley, 21 December 1936, in *The Letters of W.B. Yeats*, ed. by Allan Wade (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954), p. 874.

⁴³⁵ See *CCW*, pp. 402–04, discussed earlier in this chapter. See also Hill’s Wolfson lecture, *War and Civilization*, audio recording, Wolfson College, Oxford (6 May 2010) <<https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/war-and-civilization-series-lecture-2-war-and-poetry>> [accessed 10 April 2015].

his essay on Rosenberg ‘Romantic *paideia*’, the Wordsworthian notion of the poet as moral instructor (*CCW*, p. 454).⁴³⁶

If the allusion seems far-fetched, nevertheless the background to the poem in terms of Hill’s unpublished writing seems to situate aspects of Wordsworth’s legacy antagonistically in relation to Yeats’s ‘true’ Romanticism. The poem first appeared in 1958; by 1977, when Hill was both deepening and refining some of the arguments of “‘The Conscious Mind’s Intelligible Structure’”, he would write of ‘the vanity of supposing [poetry] to be merely the “spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”’ (*CCW*, p. 19), thereby laying a pernicious legacy at the doors of Dove Cottage. Hill’s admiration for Wordsworth is keen, and he distinguishes between this phrase from the 1800 Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* as it is ‘popularly misconstrued’ (*CCW*, p. 114) and the phrase itself in context.⁴³⁷ Nevertheless, he associates it with an interpretation of Wordsworth that is a powerful strain within the ‘false mask’ of Romanticism, as for instance the intellectual historian Melvin Richter’s characterisation of a vein of ‘Wordsworthian sentiment’ in T.H. Green, ‘a pantheistic conception of God as manifest in nature as a spiritual principle’ (cited in *CCW*, p. 114), a sentimental approach to nature that ignores the ‘brute’ behind the ‘beauty’, to purloin words from Hopkins’s ‘The Windhover’.

⁴³⁶ For Hill’s (mostly judicious) censure of Owen’s ‘false’ Romanticism, itself a flinching from the grand claims of art, see especially *CCW*, pp. 419–20, 435, 453 (‘Owen, the sincere Shelleyan among his pre-war occupations [...]’). His Oxford Professor of Poetry lecture, *Poetry and the “Democracy of the Dead”* (3 December 2013) indicts Owen’s sincere ‘rhetoric’, its ‘sentimental fallacy’, especially the 1918 Preface (‘My subject is War and the pity of war. the Poetry is in the pity’); audio recording, University of Oxford, <http://media.podcasts.ox.ac.uk/engfac/general/2014-12-05_hill_lecture_edited.mp3> [accessed 10 April 2015].

⁴³⁷ Cp. his praise for the periphrastic syntax of Wordsworth’s Preface, the ‘pitch’ (‘It is supposed, that’) pitted against Eliot’s ‘tone’, *CCW*, p. 378.

Hill first seems to broach this Wordsworthian ‘false mask’ of Romanticism in a lecture on Yeats from the late sixties while at Leeds; I have been unable to date the lecture, one from a series on Yeats, more exactly than that, beyond recognising that its hypothesis of false and true Romanticism works its way into “‘The Conscious Mind’s Intelligible Structure’” in 1971. Since it provides such a striking and unguessed-at connection between a very early poem, and this later drafting of an extremely crucial critical essay, I quote at length:

Both the true and the false bodies [of Romanticism] are born well-back in the 18thC, well before Wordsworth but both are channelled through him and through one text in particular, the *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*. While the *Preface* is a prime text of the true body of Romanticism, it nevertheless contains a statement about the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling – that wrenched of context, distorted and given connotations Wordsworth possibly did not intend, became a catchphrase of what I call the false body, or ‘Spectre’ of Romanticism. WW [sic] appears to be sponsoring, endorsing, the kind of rugged individualism that, within controlled limits, served Victorian society well; whereas the tenor of WW’s writing in itself does nothing to endorse such a view, and the tenor of true Romanticism holds just as powerfully against commodity [Hill’s emphasis] or narcotic art... A work of art or criticism that belongs to the true body of Romanticism is likely to seem anti-Romantic.⁴³⁸

⁴³⁸ Hill, ‘Yeats D’, 11 ff. numbered typed pages, proofed, in ‘Yeats’, BC MS 20c Hill 5/1/255, p. 1.

Hill goes on to list Yeats among those that belong to the ‘true body of Romanticism’ and the lecture develops into an analysis of several poems from *Responsibilities*, particularly ‘To a Wealthy Man who Promised a Second Subscription to the Dublin Municipal Gallery if it were proved the People wanted Pictures’.⁴³⁹ Thus, in linking Wordsworth and ‘false’ Romanticism with commodity and soporific custom, Hill invites us to read ‘Elegiac Stanzas’ in correspondence with Yeats’s poem, not necessarily to detect its influence on Hill’s early poetry (though this certainly cannot be discounted), but rather to understand how poetic choices made in the writing of ‘Elegiac Stanzas’ are later understood by Hill as an important ground for establishing Yeats’s ‘true mask’ of Romanticism, an exemplary type that becomes increasingly important in Hill’s thought on the relationship of style to faith.

Beyond the obvious similarity of critique – Yeats’s attack on “popular demand” and art among ‘th’ onion sellers’ – Hill’s on “poetry lovers”⁴⁴⁰ in pilgrimage to Dove Cottage to ‘bite nothings to the bone’ – there are affinities between the nuances of syntax in both poems, experimentation with new modes of ‘simultaneous composition on several planes’ by the middle-aged Yeats and the young Hill. Parenthesising aspects of the ‘false mask’ of Romanticism in order to ridicule them is a feature common to both poems:

⁴³⁹ *The Poems*, pp. 107–108.

⁴⁴⁰ Cp. C.K. Stead’s phrase, ‘the struggle between poets and “poetry lovers”’, cited by Hill in ‘Poetry as “Menace” and “Atonement”’, *CCW*, p. 12.

You gave, but will not give again

Until enough of Paudeen's pence

By Biddy's halfpennies have lain

To be 'some sort of evidence' [...]⁴⁴¹

Yeats's use of quotation marks implies more than attribution of speech to another (presumably, the villain of the piece, Lord Ardilaun); it implies a shift in register, a mocking tone undercutting the managerial, in the truest sense patronising officiousness of the apparently democratic appeal for 'some sort of evidence': it is reminiscent of Hill's admiration of the way in which Pound frequently resorts to quotations marks, as a way 'not of avoiding the rap but recording the rapping noise made by those things which the world throws at us in the form of prejudice and opinion, "egocentric naiveties" and "obtuse assurance"' (*CCW*, p. 150). Yeats's quotation marks corral a sentiment that manages to be both egocentrically naïve (pandering to middle-class Dublin) and obtusely assured (oligarchs assessing the 'evidence' from a position of unassailable wealth); one is reminded, in the context of Hill's enthusiasm for Pound's effect, that this poem was written during the first winter at Stone Cottage, with the younger poet as amanuensis.⁴⁴²

⁴⁴¹ Yeats, 'To a Wealthy Man who promised a Second Subscription to the Dublin Municipal Gallery if it were proved the People wanted Pictures', *The Poems*, p. 107.

⁴⁴² Where, incidentally, 'Yeats believed that he had "shocked" [Pound] by bringing seven volumes of Wordsworth to Stone Cottage [...while...] Pound needled Yeats that their visit from the local vicar had been brought on "by reading Wordsworth..."; James Longenbach, *Stone Cottage: Pound, Yeats, and modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) p. 143.

In a similar vein, Hill uses brusque parentheses twice in 'Elegiac Stanzas', in the first stanza quoted above, and in the last stanza: '(and they are many)', inverted the second time around to '(and many of them)'; these are used as an ironic coda to the almost thula-like lists that precede them: 'Mountains, monuments, all forms, / Inured to processes and storms' – a trotting out of romantic tropes. These parenthetical heckles are, as Hill later recognised in 'Redeeming the Time' (an essay from around the moment of his most sustained thought on Yeats and Romanticism), themselves derived from the Romantics, Coleridge in particular, with his '*drama* of Reason' (see *CCW*, p. 94). True Romanticism strains against its debased *semblable* in the poem, in ways that Hill seems to suggest (in his later indirect reading of his poem) are Yeatsian.

In the last stanza these elemental clichés of the sublime are explicitly linked to 'continuous profit, grand customs', where 'custom' means both atrophied cultural activity and the sway of commodity. The Shelleyan 'Greatly-aloof, alert, rare / Spirit, conditioned to appear / At the authentic stone or seat', is chillingly automatic ('conditioned'), while simultaneously possessing a threatening and withdrawn agency; compare the description of the dictator in Eliot's unfinished *Coriolan* sequence: 'And the eyes watchful, waiting, perceiving, indifferent'.⁴⁴³ There is an intimation, nothing more, of Hill's profound antipathy towards monopsychism, which forms the subject of one of the most ornate and bloodless images from the sonnet sequence 'Funeral Music' in *King Log*:

⁴⁴³ T.S. Eliot, *The Complete Poems and Plays*, p. 127.

Averroes, old heathen,

If only you had been right, if Intellect

Itself were absolute law, sufficient grace,

Our lives could be a myth of captivity

Which we might enter: an unpeopled region

Of ever new-fallen snow, a palace blazing

With perpetual silence as with torches (*BH*, p. 50).⁴⁴⁴

Such “Averroism” has its Romantic and pantheistic forms, where the world in its visible and invisible reality is an act of the imagination, and ancillary to style: Stevens sometimes sounds like this (‘the style of the gods and the gods themselves are one’), as does Yeats, quoting Sainte-Beuve: ‘there is nothing immortal in literature except style’.⁴⁴⁵ Hill was once tempted by such a gnostic Spirit’s unconditional exculpation, the revocation of original sin, but at some point he realised that this ‘blithe Spirit’ may be reserved, as in the Romantic conceptions Mary Shelley has about Shelley’s ‘higher state’: a Calvinist elect of the poets.

⁴⁴⁴ Cp. Hill’s comments on the ‘scary’ idea, one he once found ‘attractive’, of a single ruling Intellect; ‘The Art of Poetry No. 80: An Interview with Geoffrey Hill’.

⁴⁴⁵ Stevens, ‘Two or Three Ideas’, in *Collected Poetry and Prose*, p. 849; Yeats, *Dramatis Personae*, in *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats, Vol. III: Autobiographies*, ed. by William O’Donnell and Douglas Archibald (New York: Scribner, 1999), p.323.

In 'To A Wealthy Man', Yeats retreats to 'Urbino's windy hill' and the 'eagle's nest' of his own overweening imagination, which though rejecting the 'false' mask of Romanticism in the form of venal utilitarian philistinism, builds an impossible eyrie out of style: for Hill, art cannot exit the exigencies of life with such superior pilatical aestheticism. Hill remains suspicious not just of degenerate forms of Romanticism as didactic, utilitarian, commodity, and so on, but also the high claims of art, especially the conflation of the Romantic imagination with religion, 'Art whose end is peace' ('To a Wealthy Man'). Nevertheless, in the poem Yeats's experimentation with satire's tooth develops new modes of polemical energy against those who would equate aesthetic value with monetary value ('evidence' is rhymed with 'pence' in this base economy). Such an equation, Hill later asserts in "The Conscious Mind's Intelligible Structure" and elsewhere, belongs to the 'false mask' of Romanticism. A tension between what Hill calls the necessarily 'dramatic' qualities of Yeats's lyricism is one aspect of its 'true' Romanticism.

In light of Hill's oblique commentary on the poem in the later unpublished Yeats lecture, 'Elegiac Stanzas' seems an elegy for the true body of Romanticism, which is under threat not only from its attenuations and travestied forms, but also the after-shocks of Eliot's implacable hostility (which, as I have suggested, had to be accommodated to the critical revaluations of the late-fifties and sixties, and were arguably part of the cathartic renewal). C.K. Stead, whose input on Hill's evolving relationship to Romanticism has been noted, singled out the 'obscure spite' of 'To a Wealthy Man' and other poems in the 1914 volume *Responsibilities* as representing Yeats's 'new authority', and the 'difference between their "rhetoric" and the "rhetoric" of poets whose work Yeats deplored', going on to quote Yeats's epistolary defence to his

father of his “new poetic”: ‘I have tried to make my work convincing, with a speech so natural and dramatic that the hearer would feel the presence of man thinking and feeling...’⁴⁴⁶ Hill quotes the same letter in “‘The Conscious Mind’s Intelligible Structure’” to demonstrate his proposition that ‘lyric poetry is necessarily dramatic’.⁴⁴⁷ In 1970, on index cards he made while writing the lecture entitled ‘Yeats’s Foreign Eye’ for the Yeats Summer School in Sligo (which was in many ways an earlier version of “‘The Conscious Mind’s Intelligible Structure’”) a reference to that letter is accompanied with the note ‘[cf. C.K. Stead]’.⁴⁴⁸ If we can therefore detect the presence of Stead in this quotation in “‘The Conscious Mind’s Intelligible Structure’”, and the proximity of it to a description of Yeats’s speech as ‘forensic’ which I would suggest is taken from another post-war Romanticist, John Bayley, Hill’s thoughts on Yeats and his own poetry become deeply situated in a nexus of post-Eliotic attempts to forge a rehabilitated Romanticism – as ‘forensic’ and ‘dramatic’ as anything in modern writing.⁴⁴⁹

Stead throws his critical weight behind Yeats’s ‘mature style’, with a critical notice from Eliot lauding its ‘violent and terrible’ liberty.⁴⁵⁰ What Eliot was essentially praising was a departure from the Romanticism of his youth. Hill’s ambivalence about Wordsworth is itself Yeatsian: Yeats excoriated the presiding genius of Romanticism as one who, ‘after brief blossom, was cut and sawn into planks of utility’, and whose ‘moral

⁴⁴⁶ See C.K. Stead, *The New Poetic* (London: Hutchinson, 1964), p. 33.

⁴⁴⁷ Hill, “‘The Conscious Mind’s Intelligible Structure’”, p. 15.

⁴⁴⁸ Hill, index card in ‘Yeats’s Foreign Eye’, BC MS 20c Hill/4/44.

⁴⁴⁹ For Bayley’s strikingly similar use of ‘forensic’, to praise Yeats’s high-seventeenth-century “insincerity” which ‘redresses the balance of the Symbolist position’ (an overture to unreconstructed anti-Romanticists), see Bayley, *The Romantic Survival*, p. 96.

⁴⁵⁰ Stead, *The New Poetic*, p. 32.

sense has no theatrical element'.⁴⁵¹ In a letter to John Butler Yeats dated 1 January 1915, close to the publication of *Responsibilities*, he made this assessment of Wordsworth:

[Wordsworth] strikes me as always destroying his poetic experience, which was of course of incomparable value, by his reflective power. His intellect was commonplace, and unfortunately he has been taught to respect nothing else. He thinks of his poetic experience not as incomparable, but as an engine that may be yoked to his intellect. He is full of a sort of utilitarianism and that is perhaps why in later life he is constantly looking back upon a lost vision, a lost happiness.⁴⁵²

At intervals, Yeats had an almost-Eliotic disdain for Wordsworth ('withering into eight years, honoured and empty-witted'), and yet what he lamented was not Wordsworth's Romanticism, but his failure to remain truly Romantic.⁴⁵³ Yeats perceives that Wordsworth's "utilitarianism" vitiates his poetic utterance, and in the collocation '*poetic experience*' (my italics) indicates a process of creating and ordering, rather than tranquilised fidelity to a recollected emotion; and yet Hill would doubtless quarrel with the Shelleyan grandeur of wanting such 'poetic experience' to be 'incomparable'. Yeats's last sentence nevertheless strikes an odd note: notwithstanding his particular, vainglorious stoicism in the later poems (*'Cast a cold eye / On life, on death, /*

⁴⁵¹ Yeats, *Autobiographies*, pp. 193, 347.

⁴⁵² Yeats, *Letters*, p. 590.

⁴⁵³ Yeats, 'Anima Hominis', from *Per Amica Silentiae Lunae* (1917), in *Mythologies*, p. 342.

Horseman, pass by!), Yeats was an elegist of the keenest, most personal losses: ‘beautiful lofty things’, ‘Romantic Ireland’, ‘old themes’.⁴⁵⁴ His fusion of satire with elegy is arguably one of the most essential stylistic lessons for Hill in his attempts to recover a ‘true mask’ of Romanticism, especially, for instance, the mixture of irony and elegy in sections of ‘An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture in England’ from *Tenebrae*. In defining the ‘true mask’ of Romanticism, Hill’s 1971 essay “‘The Conscious Mind’s Intelligible Structure’” arrives at his earliest and most powerful apprehension of the struggle between style and faith that haunts post-Romantic poetics. It is to that definition I now turn.

The “True Mask” of Romanticism: The Way of Syntax

My implicit argument in the last section has been that the unmasking of false Romanticism in the very texture of poetic composition – all the aspects that make up the poet’s ‘forensic’, ‘dramatic’ style – is itself a creation of the ‘true mask’. In “‘The Conscious Mind’s Intelligible Structure’”, however, the ‘inconclusive debate’ is not quite so simple as that.

Hill gives two ways in which the ‘true mask’ of Romanticism, itself a way of apprehending ‘the conscious mind’s intelligible structure’, may be realised: ‘the first way presupposes a grammar of assent. The second way is available if the first is not; and

⁴⁵⁴ Yeats, ‘Under Ben Bulbin’, ‘Beautiful Lofty Things’, ‘September 1913’, ‘The Circus Animal’s Desertion’, *The Poems*, pp. 338, 303, 108-109, 347.

is the way of syntax'. Hill defines syntax as accommodating Donald Davie's definitions in *Articulate Energy* (1955) but also accommodating Weil's 'law of artistic creation', the poet's 'objective scrutiny' wrestling the cruelty and indifference of the world's objective actualities.

Hill frets over the fact that his lowercase 'grammar of assent' 'arbitrarily [makes] a metaphor' to take the place of 'Newman's reality', but stresses that the trope takes measure of the difference between the two. Cardinal John Henry Newman's 1870 study of the philosophical epistemology of faith, *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, presupposes a belief in the survival of the pre-Enlightenment 'cosmic syntaxes' that Earl Wasserman describes in *The Subtler Language* (1968): as Hill quotes Newman in the essay, 'As the structure of the universe speaks to us of Him who made it, so the laws of the mind are the expression, not of mere constituted order, but of his will'.⁴⁵⁵ Hill accords with Newman in the idea that 'the laws of the mind' or in Ellmann's Yeatsian version 'the conscious mind's intelligible structure' can resist reducing phenomena to 'mere constituted order'; nevertheless, he demurs at Newman's Catholic belief that nature, as well as the reciprocal fitness of the mind, are expressions of divine ordinance. He notes that Weil 'devoted a good deal of "wistful attention" to the Church but [...] was unable, finally, to assent', before unconvincingly insisting 'there is nothing "confessional" about this debate. The situation is far from being intimate. Arguably one is describing [...] a common cultural predicament'.⁴⁵⁶ Hill's argument, in its syntactical structures, is itself 'wistful': 'One cannot, however, pervert the purity of Newman's meaning'. He cites the Latin epigraph to Newman's book, from St. Ambrose: 'Non in

⁴⁵⁵ Newman, cited in Hill, "'The Conscious Mind's Intelligible Structure'", p. 16.

⁴⁵⁶ Hill, "'The Conscious Mind's Intelligible Structure'", pp. 16-17.

dialectica complacuit Deo salvum facere populum suum' ('it did not please God to save his people by dialectics' [my translation]). Whereas in his later formulations of a 'theology of language', particularly in the 2003 preface to *Style and Faith* where 'style *is* faith', Hill is at pains in this essay on Yeats and Romanticism to stress the exclusivity of faith, and by contrast the 'common cultural predicament', much more personal than he pretends, namely the inability to assent, for whatever reason; as he puts it in 'Funeral Music', 'I believe in my abandonment, since it is what I have' (*BH*, p. 52). Nevertheless, the dyad itself of style and faith is already in place, the great energising nexus that empowers and agitates Hill's most memorable poetry (and prose).

Hill briefly allows that there are forms of 'real assent' which are not reliant on a belief in the metaphysical realism of which Christianity has been both an inheritor (from Athens) and transmitter (in Scholasticism through to Barth, Rahner, and other modern theologians). He instances Conrad's polemical essays in 1912, pre-empting technical mystification on the part of shipbuilders to evade the cost of safety improvements after the sinking of the Titanic. Conrad's interventions combine 'moral indignation' with what Hill later calls in *A Treatise of Civil Power*, following the philosopher Gillian Rose, 'a *finite act / of political justice*' ('In Memoriam: Gillian Rose', *BH*, p. 589).⁴⁵⁷ Also later, in his Oxford Professor of Poetry discussions of 'the deep dynastic wound', he will allow that there are 'socio-political readings' of original sin, citing Yeats and Pound as examples.⁴⁵⁸ However, this Conradian political praxis is no more than a brief thrum in the essay; the main arena in defining the 'conscious mind's intelligible

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 16. See Gillian Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, repr. 1997), p. 25.

⁴⁵⁸ See Hill, *A Deep Dynastic Wound*.

structure' is divided between assent-as-faith and what Hill calls 'the way of syntax', and the latter is what will 'serve' 'failing a grammar of assent': a Romantic sense of poetry as surrogate religion, rather than a post-Reformation sense of 'God's grammar'. There is tremendous pathos in discovering Hill making this anxious claim some three decades before he explicitly rejects it, citing Eliot's 1928 preface to *The Sacred Wood*, in 'Eros in F.H. Bradley and T.S. Eliot' (*CCW*, p. 559).

We have already seen that Hill positions Weil's 'law of artistic creation' as the primary form that this 'way of syntax' assumes: the poet's scrupulous, attentive craft in balancing incompatibles, and the recalcitrance of *Energeia* in resisting the 'blind energy' of language (as it has been characterised with reference to Milton in chapter two). In the 1971 essay, Yeats is positioned once again as a 'seamark' – exemplary in the positive and negative senses of the word. Hill discerns a vitiating oscillation between action and inaction in Yeats's politics: 'in Yeats's poetry there is imagination; in Yeats's politics there is action; but the one does not enrich and deepen the other'; further, he follows Conor Cruise O'Brien's (at the time) controversial essay 'Passion and Cunning', published in an 1965 volume edited by Hill's colleague at Leeds, A.N. Jeffares, in discerning Yeats's politics as a marriage of vulgarity and elitism, 'a pseudo-aristocracy of the gutter'.⁴⁵⁹

Hill has maintained this distinction between Yeats's syntax and his political dubieties in later critical work. On the one hand, Hill's essay 'A Postscript on Modernist Poetics' argues that Yeats's search for 'an image of the modern mind's discovery of its own permanent form' (as Yeats writes in his 'Introduction to "The Words upon the

⁴⁵⁹ Hill, "'The Conscious Mind's Intelligible Structure'", p. 19.

Window-pane”) closely resembles a Bradleian establishment of ‘a grammar for the eros of the imagination in forms that abruptly align transient with eternal’ (*CCW*, p. 577) – one can sense here another flicker of Hill’s desire to reconcile style and faith (I will return to this at the close of the chapter). On the other hand, the late essay maintains Hill’s earlier censure of Yeats’s politics, adding that a ‘complementary’ rather than ‘antithetical’ combination of ‘aloof hauteur’ and ‘haughty rabble-rousing’ characterises much of Yeats’s late work, the ‘twin betrayals’ of political and apolitical aesthetics that haunt modernist poetry (*CCW*, pp. 577–80). In a poem from *Al Tempo De’ Tremuoti*, ‘to Hugh Maxton’, the pseudonym of the Yeats scholar and former colleague of Hill at Leeds, W.J. McCormack, Hill pays a terse tribute to McCormack’s work on Yeats:

Purgatorial spirits: those who, Yeats says,

Dance to escape realities of flame

By denying they dream

(Not to give that much credence to his plays) [...]

Say I invest things heavily in lieu.

Had I read you earlier I might have

Cast my words differently towards the grave.

Let stand these lurching paradigms to view (*BH*, p. 925).

The poem centres on the ‘boy soldiers and caulked whisky-mystics’ of the 1916 Rising, the subject of McCormack’s eccentric book *Dublin 1916: The French Connection* (2012), which argues that right-wing Catholic French nationalism had a profound influence on the architects of the Rising. The rebels are conflated in Hill’s poem with the sages from Yeats’s ‘Byzantium’, who twist in ‘God’s holy fire’, whereas here they are purified in Catholic purgatory figured as an escape from reality. In the Paris conference on ‘European Paths and Voices in the Poetry of Yeats and Hill’ (2013), Hill also situated the poem against his reading of McCormack’s 2005 book, *Blood Kindred*. The book takes as its nucleus Yeats’s reception of the Goethe Plakette in 1934 from Friedrich Krebs, Oberbürgermeister of Frankfurt-am-Main and a high-ranking official in Nazi Germany.⁴⁶⁰ In the echo of Yeats’s self-penned epitaph, ‘Cast a cold eye...’, Hill acknowledges that his censure ‘towards the grave’ of the Irish poet might have been even more severe had he discovered McCormack’s work earlier, perhaps eliciting the same energetic scrutiny that Pound’s fascism receives in ‘Our Word is our Bond’.

Nevertheless, Hill’s poems have probed Yeats’s grimly oblivious, vicious politics. I have discussed this elsewhere with reference to the later work.⁴⁶¹ One tantalising early direct allusion to Yeats occurs in the drafting of one of the poems in *Tenebrae*, the short lyric ‘Florentines’. ‘Notebook 4: King Log’ in Hill’s archive at the

⁴⁶⁰ Hill, reading at ‘European Paths and Voices in the Poetry of Yeats and Hill’. See W.J. McCormack, *Blood Kindred* (London: Pimlico, 2005), pp. 88-89.

⁴⁶¹ O’Hanlon, ‘Yeats and *Coriolanus* in the Poetry of Geoffrey Hill’.

Brotherton Library shows that the poem, begun as early as 1961, was at one time entitled ‘A Bad Dream – A Meditation on Thomas Kyd’, with an epigraph from *The Spanish Tragedy*, ‘for Justice is exiled from the earth’.⁴⁶² The short lyrical tableau is a night-piece, an equestrian *cauchemar* of brute savagery. Hill published this version in *Stand*, in 1963, alongside ‘I Had Hope When Violence Was Ceas’t’ under the overarching title ‘Two Fragmentary Variations’; he chose not to include it in either *King Log* or in *Preghiere*, the Northern House pamphlet that preceded it. Hill took the poem up again over a decade later; in ‘Notebook 21: Tenebrae’, dated circa 1975, the Kyd references have disappeared and the poem is titled ‘On the Boiler.’ W.B. Yeats’s notorious tract on eugenics was published posthumously by the Cuala Press in 1939, and exemplifies both tendencies that Hill deplores in Yeats’s late work – apolitical posturing, and political aesthetics. In the tract, Yeats preens himself over both the neo-Symbolist ‘pure, aimless joy’ he finds in Villiers de L’Isle Adam and Shakespearean tragedy, and at the same time relishes the prospect of a prolonged eugenic war, ‘with the victory of the skilful, riding their machines as did the feudal knights their armoured horses.’⁴⁶³ ‘Florentines’, the title that Hill finally chooses for this equestrian horror seems to locate it within Yeats’s (and Pound’s) ‘turbulent Italy’, what Hill calls in *Al Tempo De’ Tremuoti* the ‘faith-bedevelled centuries, the trials, / Assassinations, amnesties, espials; / Italia split all ways’ (*BH*, p. 917).⁴⁶⁴ The cunning and craft of a Romantic view of art (here specifically, the romantic vision Yeats had of the Quattrocento) can coincide with political

⁴⁶² Hill, ‘Notebook 4: King Log’, BC MS 20c Hill/2/1/4. Cp. the epigraph to *A Treatise of Civil Power*, which begins ‘Justyce now is dede’, from John Skelton, *BH*, p. 557.

⁴⁶³ ‘On the Boiler’, in *Explorations*, selected by George Yeats (Macmillan: London, 1962), pp. 448–449, 425.

⁴⁶⁴ ‘Whence turbulent Italy should draw / Delight in Art whose end is peace’, ‘To a Wealthy Man...’, *The Poems*, p. 107.

viciousness; Hill's poem refuses to romanticise these 'fierce horsemen'.⁴⁶⁵ Rather, they are figured as 'damnable and serene', perhaps a recollection of a line from William Faulkner's Appendix to *The Sound and the Fury*, where Caddy Compson is espied by a librarian in a glossy magazine, riding in an automobile alongside a Nazi staff-general in the French Riviera, 'her face beautiful, cold serene and damned'.⁴⁶⁶ Hill, perhaps with his habitual hostility to Calvinism, resists Faulkner's smug surety with the suffix '-ble': the horsemen are capable of damnation, but Hill refuses to rule on their salvific fate.⁴⁶⁷ His poem, however, does indemnify Yeats's lurid and obtuse late political fantasias – yet another form of debased Romanticism – as the stuff of nightmare.

A veer into Hill's critique of Yeats's politics has perhaps felt like an excursus from the discussion of 'a grammar of assent' versus 'the way of syntax' as Hill sets up this dialectic-cum-nexus in "'The Conscious Mind's Intelligible Structure'", and yet as we have seen with Milton, politics cannot be separated out of Hill's 'theology of language'. More specifically, in situating Yeats's style or 'way of syntax' as a 'sad and angry consolation' (*BH*, p. 286) when faith is not possible, Yeats suggests that one of the functions of this 'way of syntax' is to perform corrective 'returns' upon the poet's 'obtuseness', including his or her political (or apolitical) aesthetics. The idea of the 'return' has become a central feature of Hill's critical thought; it has its first outing in the 1971 Yeats essay, later presented in 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"'. Hill derives the notion from Matthew Arnold, in his essay 'The Function of Criticism at the

⁴⁶⁵ Cp. 'from mountain to mountain ride the fierce horsemen', the refrain from 'Three Songs to the One Burden', *The Poems*, pp. 328-330. Hill has explicitly challenged the 'trumpery' of 'Three Songs'; see 'A Postscript', *CCW*, p. 578.

⁴⁶⁶ William Faulkner, 'Appendix: The Compsons', in *The Portable Faulkner*, ed. by Malcolm Cowley (New York, London: Penguin, first publ. 1946, revised edn 1967, repr. 1977), p. 713.

⁴⁶⁷ See Ricks's discussion of this suffix, 'Geoffrey Hill's Unrelenting, Unreconciling Mind', *GHEW*, pp. 6-31.

Present Time’; Arnold saw that Burke’s integrity lay within ‘his capacity to “return... upon himself”’ (*CCW*, p. 7).⁴⁶⁸

The precise nature of ‘the way of syntax’ as a correlative of faith in “‘The Conscious Mind’s Intelligible Structure’” is amply demonstrated by Hill’s insistence that ‘it is the final lines of ‘The Second Coming’ that offer what is perhaps the finest of these “returns”’.⁴⁶⁹ The poem seems to be heading initially in a different direction:

A shape with lion body and the head of a man,

A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun

Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it

Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.⁴⁷⁰

Hill broaches the ‘petty romanticism’ (another variant of the ‘false mask’), the ‘volatile emotional essences’ that produced ‘this major Romantic statement’: namely, a possible link to Shelley’s ‘Ozymandias’ in Yeats’s vision, circa 1890-1, of ‘a desert and a black Titan raising himself up by his tawn hands from the middle of a heap of ancient ruins’, and (from *Wheels and Butterflies*) Yeats’s imaginative delusion that there was ‘always at my left side, just out of the range of sight, a brazen winged beast that I associated with

⁴⁶⁸ Cp. “‘The Conscious Mind’s Intelligible Structure’”, p. 18.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁴⁷⁰ Yeats, ‘The Second Coming’, *The Poems*, p. 187.

laughing, ecstatic destruction'.⁴⁷¹ Yeats's 'return' or corrective to this violent Romantic delirium occurs in what Hill calls, borrowing his locution from Jon Stallworthy, Yeats's 'near-perfect pitch [...] able to sound out his own conceptual discursive intelligence [...] hearing words in depth and [...] therefore hearing, or sounding, history and morality in depth'.⁴⁷² The 'return' occurs in the final lines of 'The Second Coming':

And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,

Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?⁴⁷³

If the 'acute historical intelligence' struggling against 'that obtuseness which is the dark side of its own selfhood' is enacted by Yeats in the poem's syntax, the revocation of its own lurid Nietzschean ecstasy in those final lines, Hill finds a comparable 'simultaneous review of several considerations' (Weil) in lines from 'Easter 1916'. His own description of the poem is itself a mimesis of what syntax can achieve in this mode:

It comprises middle-aged uncertain envy of those possessed by single-minded conviction, together with a humane scepticism about 'excess' and romantic abstraction. One is moved by the artifice of the poem, the mastery of syntactical

⁴⁷¹ *Autobiographies*, p. 161; 'Introduction to "The Resurrection"', in *Explorations*, p. 393. Hill cites Jon Stallworthy's *Between the Lines* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), a study of Yeats's manuscripts and poetic composition (see pp. 23-24 especially).

⁴⁷² "'The Conscious Mind's Intelligible Structure'", pp. 20-21.

⁴⁷³ *The Poems*, p. 187.

melody, that enacts this tension of ‘several considerations’; the tune of a mind distrustful yet envious, mistrusting the abstraction, mistrusting its own mistrust, drawn half-against its will into the chanting refrain that is both paean and threnos, yet once drawn, committed utterly to the melody of the refrain. It is not Newman’s real assent [...] One can say only that it is a paradigm of the hard-won ‘sanctity of the intellect’.⁴⁷⁴

He concludes that the poem is an ‘exact imagining’ of the struggle to maintain civilisation. Crucially, the way of syntax is not faith, *pace* Hill’s later formulations (‘style *is* faith’). In section VIII of ‘Vacillation’, Yeats measures the distance of his poetic faith, a faith *in* syntax or style, from the faith of the Catholic modernist, Baron von Hügel:

Must we part, Von Hügel, though much alike, for we

Accept the miracles of the saints and honour sanctity? [...]

Homer is my example and his unchristened heart.

The lion and the honeycomb, what has Scripture said?

So get you gone, von Hügel, though with blessings on your head.⁴⁷⁵

⁴⁷⁴ “‘The Conscious Mind’s Intelligible Structure’”, pp. 22-23.

⁴⁷⁵ *The Poems*, pp. 252-253.

In the original Clutag version of *Odi Barbare* (2012), Hill performs his own Yeatsian exorcism: ‘Blessings Frank Ramsey as for Yeats von Hügel’.⁴⁷⁶ Ramsey (1903–30) was a staggeringly-gifted mathematician and for the times an outspoken atheist; he was also brother of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Michael Ramsey.⁴⁷⁷ Hill inverts Yeats’s personages; whereas the Irish poet blesses a form of Catholicism that he finds sympathetic, Hill blesses a sympathetic form of atheism. His much earlier, ‘wistful attention’ to Newman’s *Grammar of Assent* (or at least the metaphor of a ‘grammar of assent’) before resorting to the ‘way of syntax’ is itself a sort of ‘get you gone, John Henry, though with blessings on your head’. There is pathos in Hill’s discovery that Yeats’s ‘paradigm of the hard-won “sanctity of the intellect”’ is not commensurate with Newman’s assent, particularly in the form it was registered in an earlier draft: ‘the poem [‘Easter 1916’] is a marvel. Civility is not faith. The debate continues [elided, and amended to, ‘the debate remains open and, in terms of simple linear issue, I see no immediate prospect of its being concluded]’.⁴⁷⁸ Hill is unable to reconcile ‘pitch’, such as it is manifested in Yeats’s poetic intelligence, with faith; the ‘inconclusive debate’ of the essay has raged ever since, and his poetry and criticism attempts a lifetime’s wrestling, wresting, to reconcile style and faith.

It is perhaps therefore astonishing to find that the ‘return’ of Yeats in ‘The Second Coming’ – which in “‘The Conscious Mind’s Intelligible Structure”” is the

⁴⁷⁶ Hill, *Odi Barbare* (Thame: Clutag, 2012), p. 16.

⁴⁷⁷ See the entry for ‘F.P. Ramsey’ in *Key Thinkers in Linguistics and the Problem of Language*, ed. by Siobhan Chapman and Christopher Routledge (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 225.

⁴⁷⁸ Hill, untitled draft of “‘The Conscious Mind’s Intelligible Structure””, 3 ff. loose, unnumbered, beginning ‘The title I have chosen for this brief and inconclusive debate...’ in “‘The Conscious Mind’s Intelligible Structure””, BC MS 20c Hill/4/4, p. 3.

prime example of the consolatory post-Romantic ‘way of syntax’, what will ‘serve’ when faith is unforthcoming – is put at the centre of Hill’s ‘theology of language’ in its first mention in public, the 1999 lecture ‘Language, Suffering, and Silence’:

There is a quality in Yeats’s auditory faculty, auditory imagination, which saves his poetry, at its best, from the worst excesses of Nietzschean doctrinal sentiment. The closing lines of ‘The Second Coming’ are a case in point [...] Language under the kind of extreme pressure which the making of poetry requires, can, on occasion, push the maker beyond the barrier of his or her own limited intelligence. If I were to consider undertaking a theology of language, this would be one of a number of possible points for departure for such an exploration: the abrupt, unlooked-for semantic recognition understood as corresponding to an act of mercy or grace (*CCW*, p. 404).

The final lines of ‘The Second Coming’ are no longer merely evidence of a post-Romantic stubborn fidelity to syntax as a way of ordering the brute incoherence and violence of experience in a faithless world, but the cornerstone of Hill’s ‘theology of language’, which, far from bifurcating faith and style along the parallel lines as he does in the 1971 essay in recognition of the ‘common cultural predicament’, reunites the ‘grammar of assent’ and ‘the way of syntax’, faith and style. His periphrasis ‘understood as corresponding to’ is an important nuance, and suggests residual problems: ‘semantic recognition’ is not grace, but corresponds to grace. We have already seen that he changes

this in his repetition later (a page later) in the same essay, to read instead: ‘the action of grace in one of its minor, but far from trivial, types’ (*CCW*, p. 405). This is more than a correspondence, but also, perhaps, something less than an assertion that syntax delivers or “is” grace.

Thus Yeats’s syntax is drafted into the complicated process of thought that will lead in Hill’s study of Reformation poetics to the most complete repudiation (or repression) of his conviction in the early Yeats essay, that syntax is a *surrogate* for faith (my emphasis) and that the two form exclusive, parallel ways of Romantic order. That repudiation arrives with Hill’s assertion in the preface to *Style and Faith* (2003), that with the major writing of the sixteenth and seventeenth century, and by implication other major works, ‘style *is* faith’. No parallels, no ‘wistful attention’, but a ‘theology of language’ quite distinct from what Yeats and other neo-Romantics might recognise by the phrase. What should be obvious as the thesis draws near a conclusion is that Yeats’s final lines to ‘The Second Coming’ and their demonstration of ‘auditory imagination’ are not – in terms of intellectual history – commensurate with, for instance, More and Tyndale’s ‘diligence’ concerning the word *metanoia*. As with Hill’s recognition that Coleridge’s ‘visionary philology’ is something quite other to the linguistic scruples of the Reformation in ‘Common Weal, Common Woe’ (*CCW*, p. 270; see the introduction), this is not a value judgment, but a descriptive statement – they belong to radically different philosophical approaches to language, and the collision of the two in Hill’s thought and poetry is the source of his most productive writing.

Hill has dramatized the twin genealogies of his intellectual inheritance as it shapes the ‘theology of language’ in a striking late poem from *Al Tempo De’ Tremuoti*:

I have outlived Yeats now. The old man h ad

Seen something, well, rhetorically tenable

Between the huge vortex and the little stable,

High tide, tempest, the raging Herod,

Innocents everywhere. The foul Troubles

Mock-countenanced with a Fool's ranty head,

Spurts of *jus primae noctis*... Also did

Marching songs for Bluto's blue-chinned rabbles.

Whatever wisdom he w on | rode on the verb:

Slouches – 'The Second Coming' – is one such,

The mayhem of his visionary lech

Reduced to tragic grammar, self's recurb.

Reason for writing: to hear a voice cry

Rise and walk, familiar alien call,

With its own absolute pitch, its own fall.

Freedom to fall is our stability (*BH*, p. 901).

Bayed into a mere four stanzas is a lifetime's wrangling with style and faith. Yeats's 'return' in 'The Second Coming' is no longer as imprecise as the 'auditory imagination' of his final lines, but "rides" on the verb, '*Slouches*': the onomatopoeia of the antichrist's movement, the 'brazen winged beast' as a thing crawling on its repulsive belly. The diacritical stresses on 'wón' and 'róde' suggest that Yeats's recurb to his 'visionary lech' (an exquisite verb there, too) rides on the phonics of language itself, and also provides a corrective balance to his political obtuseness: the Blueshirt leader Eoin O'Duffy, for whom Yeats penned 'Three Marching Songs' between 1933-34, is ridiculously conflated with Popeye's nemesis Bluto, who typically wore blue or brown shirts over his brawn, in an odd (and auditory) amalgam.⁴⁷⁹ '*Slouches*', Hill seems to suggest, in some way redeems Yeats's late authoritarian vulgarity and attitudinising. Yet the effect of this 'way of syntax' is not to produce 'God's grammar', but as stanza three has it, 'tragic grammar': there is an intimation once more of the insuperable difference between the Romantic conception of 'the word' and the Christian conception of 'the Word', even

⁴⁷⁹ See Foster, *The Arch-Poet*, p. 472 for Yeats's brief involvement with the Blueshirts.

though in early poems such as ‘Annunciations’ (‘the Word has been abroad’, *BH*, p. 40) Hill compounds the two in a dark, anarchic Romantic-Christian mythology.

The final stanza of the late poem on Yeats refuses to be drawn on whether Romantic style and post-Reformation faith are correspondent, style a surrogate in the absence of faith, or equivalent, interchangeable. The scriptural command ‘*Rise and walk*’ is certainly linked to Yeats’s ‘*Slouches*’ – Peter’s words of healing ministry (Acts 3:6) modelled on Christ’s own (Jn 5:8) are linked to the ‘absolute pitch’ of Yeats’s ‘conceptual discursive intelligence’ as Hill puts it in “‘The Conscious Mind’s Intelligible Structure’”.⁴⁸⁰ The phrase itself, although scriptural in basis, is drawn from Robert Burton’s 1621 *Anatomy of Melancholy*, a central focus of his essay ‘Keeping to the Middle Way’ in *Style and Faith*:

If any man, saith *Lemnius*, will attempt such a thing [exorcism], without all those juggling circumstances, Astrological Elections, of time, place, prodigious habits, fustian, big, sesquipedall words, spells, crosses, characters, which Exorcists ordinarily use, let him follow the example of *Peter* and *John*, that without any ambitious tearmes, cured a lame man, *Acts 3. In the name of Christ Jesus rise and walke* (cited in *CCW*, p. 311).

⁴⁸⁰ See Hill’s references to ‘pitch’ and the uncollected essay in ‘Translating Value’, *CCW*, p. 391.

Hill comments: ‘the manner in which the huge, “loose”, referential edifice of *The Anatomy of Melancholy* [...] can yet be so tellingly pointed and cadenced by one sentence – the simple authority of “In the name of Christ Jesus rise and walke” is wonderful almost beyond words’ (ibid.). There is an aporia in Hill’s remark: does he mean ‘pointed and cadenced’ by Burton’s faith in Christ’s words, by Burton’s stylistic ingenuity in their terseness amidst prolixity, or some fusion of these two aspects? The appearance in the late poem refuses to give up its secrets, but there is a frisson, in placing the words of Christ in juxtaposition with the verb that constitutes Yeats’s ‘true mask’ of Romanticism, that style *is* the true arbiter of faith, and that Hill’s ‘theology of language’, despite his wranglings in “‘The Conscious Mind’s Intelligible Structure’”, ‘Poetry as “Menace” and “Atonement”’, and the now-vast body of poetry, is haunted by what haunted the post-Romantic Eliot: poetry’s raids on the absolute.

Eliotic in this at least, Hill cannot reconcile his imagination to what Stevens celebrates in ‘Two or Three Ideas’, the imaginative logic of concluding that because ‘the style of the poem and the poem itself are one’ that ‘the style of the gods and the gods themselves are one’.⁴⁸¹ Hill’s belief in the unity of form and content suggests that he would agree with the first proposition, while his insistence in the late essays that Eliot was right to reject the idea of poetry as religion would suggest that he would balk at the second. Eliot’s injunction against the confusion of poetry and religion in the preface to the 1928 edition of *The Sacred Wood* was, however, qualified in his later Charles Norton Eliot lectures:

⁴⁸¹ Stevens, ‘Two or Three Ideas’, *Collected Poetry and Prose*, p. 849.

Beyond a belief that poetry does something of importance, or has something of importance to do, there does not seem to be much agreement [...] we have here the problem of religious faith and its substitutes. Not all contemporary critics, of course, but at least a number who appear to have little else in common, seem to consider that art, specifically poetry, has something to do with religion, though they disagree as to what this something may be.⁴⁸²

Hill sees Eliot's solutions, both in the 1928 preface ('poetry is a superior amusement') and these 1932-33 lectures (subjective taste: 'the poetry will be arranged in their minds in slightly different patterns'), as banal and pandering (*CCW*, pp. 555, 564). Hill's attempts to offer an answer to these immortal questions in the form of his 'theology of language' has not sought trim apothegms, as Eliot did, so much as performing a mimesis: his prose and poetry, in its strenuous forms, has mimicked the nature of the problem, and in that sense, is its own "solution".

The Bradleian yearning that he admires in Yeats (and mid-period Eliot) for 'a grammar for the eros of the imagination in forms that abruptly align transient with eternal' is one strong streak in Hill's post-Romantic modernism (*CCW*, p. 576). As Ricks has emphasised, the final essay in his collected prose, 'A Postscript on Modernist Poetics', does not end with Romantic 'creative eros', but shattered images of the beleaguered and outmanoeuvred, the thwarted and mad: a 'broken Coriolanus' from

⁴⁸² Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism*, pp. 125-26.

Eliot's *The Waste Land* and 'Swift beating on his breast in sibylline frenzy blind' from Yeats's 'Blood and the Moon' (*CCW*, p. 580).⁴⁸³ It would be interesting, and ancillary to the argument made in this chapter, to seek reasons why Hill examines Yeats under the aegis of Romanticism in his essay of 1971, and under modernism's aegis in the last essay of *Collected Critical Writings*, but such an endeavour must lie outside the purview of this thesis. Certainly, the 'mastery of syntactical melody' that Hill discerns in 'Easter 1916' in "The Conscious Mind's Intelligible Structure" is no longer the pinnacle of Yeats's 'way of syntax' that Hill would seek to emulate in his own later work: instead, he writes admiringly of the late poem by Yeats 'The Statues', '[in that poem] Yeats is recognizing that the rapturous symmetrical cadences of "Easter 1916" no longer suffice' (*CCW*, p. 578), a telling insight into the 'hierarchical-vernacular monad' (*ibid.*) and unlyrical style of Hill's own late work.

Whatever the impasse between Bradleian eros and the discordant heap of images in Hill's later writing, the poems have been made, and Hill can do nothing more to reconcile style and faith:

For Coriolanus, there is no escape

in the sublime, in God, or melancholy,

no music for his state, no martyrdom,

⁴⁸³ Ricks, 'Hill's Unrelenting, Unreconciling Mind', in *GHELW*, p. 7.

no reconciling with the truth of things,

but, crazy-passive, a last mêlée of spite (*BH*, p. 536).

Coda

‘But so much cannot be our final word’ (*CCW*, p. 580). The agon of trying to reconcile style and faith, and two different intellectual traditions in which fundamental ideas about them have been developed and sustained, puts a great tax on the nerves; the poet attempting such a Nessus-like mimesis of this post-Romantic contest may ultimately achieve no more than the resuscitation of ‘a broken Coriolanus’, and perhaps that ‘sad, angry consolation’ would have to suffice; but there are other possibilities. This thesis concludes with Hill’s vexatious engagements with Yeats because it is the logical finale to my argument, which has attempted to draw out the antinomies between poetic style and religious faith as it is manifested in the texture of Hill’s post-Romantic thought, and the threat that the poet’s *fiat* becomes a rival to the divine *fiat*.

However, as a poet Hill is closer to Hopkins, the Hopkins of such lines as ‘Somewhere elsewhere there is ah well where! one’, and ‘This jack, joke, poor potsherd | patch, matchwood, immortal diamond, / Is immortal diamond’.⁴⁸⁴ He is closer to Bradleian eros, and to Hopkins in believing that the world contains ‘aesthetics as a good, but is not to be either ruled or saved by them’ (*CCW*, p. 406), something that Yeats and most of the modernists, whether in political or apolitical mode, could not grasp. As mentioned previously, the last, unstopped line of *Broken Hierarchies*, ‘The stars asunder, gibbering, on the verge’ (*BH*, p. 936), seems to drop into Pascalian silences until one detects an allusion to Hopkins, the nun in ‘The Wreck of the Deutschland’

⁴⁸⁴ ‘The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo’ and ‘That Nature is Heraclitean Fire and of the comfort of the Resurrection’, *The Poems of GMH*, pp. 92, 106.

sacralising the atomistic flux and violence of nature to her God. Hill's poetry, ambiguous to the end, in a Hopkinsian style where even the absence of punctuation matters enormously, hovers on the 'verge' of faith.

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