‘On the Cusp of Devotion’: Christian Forms and Difficulties in Geoffrey Hill

Madalina Ioana Potter

PhD
University of York
English

September 2019

Abstract

This thesis investigates the theological underpinnings of Geoffrey Hill's work, by focusing on how Christianity inflects his poetry, and the rhetoric of his sermons. Christianity is a constant presence pervading Hill's work, but the way in which it is allowed to shape his poetical writings and sermons is highly particular and at times unorthodox. Hill's approach to Christianity rejects an unquestionable espousal of doctrine, and is instead crystallised around a process of exploration of faith as anchored in immediate experience. The abstraction of theological thought and doctrine is made material within the poetic act, and within the rhetoric of his sermons. Hence his poetry tackles Christianity in a materially-engaged manner and engages with particular artistic and devotional forms in an attempt to concretise the intangibility of the divine. This thesis explores architecture, music, and prayer, as three artistic and devotional forms, which emerge as fundamental in anchoring his theological thought in the materiality of experience and of the natural world. In his sermons, theology is explored in a similarly engaged way, with his rhetorical choice being carefully considered, and religious exposition often hinging on a more immediate domain, such as literature, history, and Hill's personal experience of faith. The material anchoring of his poems and sermons, considered together, provides a new and useful lens into how Christianity finds its way into Hill's thought and works.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements

‘I speak this in memory of my grandmother’ (*BH* 107)

I would like to dedicate this thesis to the memory of my grandmother, Georgeta Bucatea (1936-2019).

I want to thank my mother and my grandfather for their unconditional support throughout my thesis, which I could not have completed without them. I am thankful to my husband, Martin, for his love and support throughout the writing of my thesis. I also want to thank him for being there for me as I was going through the process of exploring my own faith and my negotiation of various strands of Christianity as I was writing my thesis. I am very grateful to my friends Beatrix and Julia for their help, patience, and encouragement.

I would like to thank my supervisors, Dr. James Williams and Prof. Hugh Haughton for their guidance and support, for the intellectually stimulating discussions during our supervisions, and for their care and pastoral support. I also want to thank my TAP member, Prof. Brian Cummings, and the whole English Department at the University of York.

I want to express my thankfulness to the Rev. Alice Goodman for agreeing to answer some of my questions about Prof. Geoffrey Hill’s biography.

Author's Declaration

I, Madalina Potter, 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.

List of Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used for Hill's volumes. Complete references to the editions used are provided in the bibliography.

ATOCP A Treatise of Civil Power (2007)
BB. The Book of Baruch by the Gnostic Justin (2019)
BH. Broken Hierarchies (2013)
CCW. Collected Critical Writings (2008)
CP. Collected Poems (1985)
FTU. For the Unfallen (1971)
KL. King Log (1970)
MCCP The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy (1983)
OS. The Orchards of Syon (2002)
SS. Speech! Speech! (2000)
TTOL The Triumph of Love (2000)
WT. Without Title (2007)

I have used the original, individual volumes of poetry for referencing. Later changes and edits relevant to my analysis are referenced from *Broken Hierarchies.* The collections *Mercian Hymns, Hymns to Our Lady of Chartres,* and *The Daybooks* are referenced from *Broken Hierarchies.*

For simplicity, I use the following abbreviations in my footnotes to reference critical sources on which my analysis draws heavily:

GHAHC Piers Pennington and Matthew Sperling (eds), *Geoffrey Hill and His Contexts*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2011.

GHELW John Lyon and Peter McDonald (eds), *Geoffrey Hill: Essays on His Later Work.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

VP Matthew Sperling, *Visionary Philology.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Note to Reader

References to Hill's primary collections of poems and critical writings are given in parenthesis, in text.

References to the *Oxford English Dictionary* are given as *OED* throughout, and unless otherwise indicated refer to the 2nd edition, prepared by J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989, which was the edition Hill owned and used.

References to the Bible are to the King James Version, unless otherwise stated.

Introduction

Geoffrey Hill's relationship to Christianity is as complex as it is fundamental to his poetic oeuvre. Faith, religious practice, and devotion have been present in Hill's life from an early age, as part of his family upbringing. In an interview with Sameer Rahim published in its entirety in *Prospect Magazine* following his death in 2016, Hill said his mother's family were 'zealous non-conformists.'[1] This characterisation followed his wife, the Reverend Alice Goodman's observation that while his father's family were 'just Church of England', his mother's was 'religious'. Goodman's remark that 'your mother's were genuinely' is then interposed by Hill's succinct affirmation, 'zealous non-conformists'.[2] In a brief email correspondence in July 2019 with me, Rev. Alice Goodman clarified what was meant by 'zealous non-conformists'. She explained that:

> GWH's mother's family were variously Baptists and devout Primitive Methodists. His great uncle, Joseph Pinfield, was a lay preacher: something GWH was very proud of.[3]

Hill belonged to the Church of England, Goodman tells me, 'from 1936 until his death'.[4] Faith, devotion, and religion are themes to which Hill returns regularly throughout his poetry, critical writings, lectures, and sermons.

Christianity has inflected Hill's poetry in fundamental ways, but he can hardly be described simply as an 'Anglican poet', or even more broadly as a 'Christian poet'. To do so would be to reduce the complexity of his thought and feelings on religion to an implausibly

---

[1] Sameer Rahim, 'An Interview with Geoffrey Hill (1932-2016)' in *Prospect Magazine* (20 July 2016), at https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/WP_SITEURL/blogs/sameer-rahim/an-interview-with-geoffrey-hill-1932-2016

[2] Ibid.

[3] Rev. Alice Goodman in email correspondence with Madeline Potter, 4 July 2019

[4] Ibid.

simple, broad-brush classification. As Kenneth Haynes notes, '[w]hen Hill explores Christian themes, he is attracted to heterodox expressions of faith.'[5]

As a poet, he shows the influence of devout religious writers belonging to a variety of denominations, including the Jesuits Robert Southwell and G.M. Hopkins, the Anglican divine John Donne, and John Milton, among others. His religious language and thought are focused on particular devotional and liturgical objects and ideas, and he incorporates them into his writing. This thesis aims to investigate the relationship between Hill and Christianity through a consideration of how he is drawn to church buildings, the Church, and church music, as well as writers who have espoused Christian doctrine or borne witness to it in difficult times. I argue that Christianity – and specifically the doctrine of Original Sin – runs in the background of Hill's thought, and finds itself embodied in his close encounters with particular artistic and devotional forms.

In order to illustrate how these close encounters work, I take four main areas where these manifestations are made visible: architecture, music, prayer, and Hill's sermons. Architecture, music, and prayer are enduring concerns for Hill, and I argue that they are the most useful ways of gauging how Christian doctrine finds its way, in a concrete manner, into his poems. His sermons too show a different facet of this engagement, and demonstrate how theology materialises in the careful choices embodied in Hill's rhetoric as a lay preacher. There are numerous other forms inflected with theological concerns in Hill, such as the visual arts – 'The Humanist', for example, published in *King Log* in 1968, engages with Eucharistic imagery in a description of a '*Venice* portrait' (*KL* 21) as it is articulated via Classical humanist tradition. However, architecture, music, and prayer constitute a long-lasting appeal

[5] Kenneth Haynes, '"Faith" and "Fable" in the Poetry of Geoffrey Hill' in *Christianity and Literature*, Vol 60, No. 3 (Spring 2011), 399

to Hill throughout his poetic career, from his first volume *For the Unfallen* (1959) through to *The Book of Baruch by the Gnostic Justin* (2019).

Architecture provides a material means of poetic grounding for Hill's engagement with the historical legacy of Christianity, and it is crucial for an analysis of his own position in relation to tradition. It provides the tangible metaphor for his embodied historicist poetics. It allows him to explore poetic and architectural structure in close connection to each other, as he does most notably in 'An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture in England', published in *Tenebrae* (1978). Music in general, but specifically sacred and religious music, is one of the most consistent presences throughout Hill's poetry, and like architecture, it provides the ground for an exploration of an alternative artistic medium; he weighs the potential for theological knowledge of poetry against that of religious music, and considers music's different kind of access to the divine sphere. Prayer shifts the focus back to language, but the performativity of language now serves a way of assessing how and whether address, both poetic and prayerful, can make assent to the divine possible. What architecture, music, and prayer all provide for Hill are alternatives to or fraught paradigms of poetry as an artistic medium. The structure of architecture, the form of music, and the performativity of prayer allow him to attempt to escape the limitations of poetic expression. In a sense, they also allow him to write poetry as architecture, music, and prayer, as well as write them into his poems. In doing so, he can explore the possibility of extricating poetry from 'the imprisoning marble' in an 'impure' art form, as he describes it his essay 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"' (*CCW* 4). Hill quotes Michael Meyer on the image of Michelangelo's statues described as 'mighty figures straining to free themselves from the imprisoning marble', but argues that the image of the 'imprisoning marble' is better applicable to the arts relying on language.[6] Hill's

[6] Michael Meyer, *Ibsen* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), 244, quoted in *CCW* 4

sermons demonstrate how rhetoric and grammar are ways of encountering the same immediacy of embodied theological tension as in his poems, with a focus this time on a more direct account of his experience of faith and doubt.

I will argue that all these forms show how doctrinal matters are grappled with in Hill's poems and sermons as he situates them against specific historical moments or instances. My purpose is not to demonstrate doctrinal espousal or commitment to a prescriptive form of church practice or belief. Even at the pulpit, Hill does not preach doctrine, and he does not teach theology. Rather, ideas about the divine are wrestled back into the material dimension of human experience, in ways which tell of the limitations of human nature itself. The cover of the 1985 Penguin edition of Hill's *Collected Poems* shows an image of Jacob wrestling with the angel, a detail from Paul Gauguin's painting *The Vision after the Sermon* (*CP* 1985, cover). This image of wrestling with the angel offers a representation of how Hill's poetry and sermons grapple with the divine in the complex medium of language and within history: by turning it into a material strife. The weightiness of this wrestling is replicated by the weightiness of Hill's material ways of inhabiting theological doctrine; his writing brings the angel into the world of the senses – into the world of artistic expression – so as to attempt to understand it in ways which are of this world.

Any attempt to understand Hill's engagement with theology at an academic and artistic level needs also to be grounded in his biographical relationship to the Church. In the email exchange referenced earlier, I asked the Rev. Alice Goodman about the background of Hill's relationship with the Church. She explained that:

> In 1936 GWH and his parents moved from Bromsgrove to Fairfield, a few miles away where his father became the village bobby. The Hills attended St Mark's, the parish church. G's mother, Hilda Beatrice Hill (née Hands) was, at that time, baptized and confirmed in the Church of England. GWH, although he declined to be baptized at that time, attended Sunday School at St Mark's, and sang in the choir, where he was a soloist. That time was very

> clear to him. He did not remember ever having attended the Baptist and Methodist churches in Bromsgrove, although he had been put on the cradle roll (qv) of one of them when he was born.[7]

Instead, it was the Church of England that he was 'baptized and confirmed in […] in 1947, when he was 15', Goodman wrote to me.[8] The church remained a presence throughout his life. I asked the Rev. Alice Goodman whether Hill could be described as a practising Christian, either intermittently or regularly, or publicly or privately. She replied that:

> GWH was at various times of his life, a consciously self-excommunicate Christian, and a communicant member of the Church of England. His first marriage was in a parish church; his five children were all baptized into the Church as infants.[9]

Hill's relationship with the Church of England and faith emerges as complex. In the Ash Wednesday sermon preached at Trinity College, Cambridge, Hill indicated a separation between himself and the majority of Anglicans, and described his belief in terms of a curse:

> I would guess that perhaps 85% of practising Anglicans would regard themselves as lucky – prosperous – in their faith, finding strength in their renewed Easter commitment, comfort in their regular partaking of Communion, courage in their assurance of salvation in Christ. But what of the 15% of us who are unlucky in our faith, who feel almost as if God had cursed us to believe.[10]

His experience of faith is construed in terms of dissimilarity, and a separation emerges between belief and an experience of sharing in the joy derived from belonging to the Church. When considering his relationship with the Church, a differentiation between faith and matters of institutional practices needs to be taken into account. Goodman explains that Hill was 'deeply critical of the Church of England as an institution'.[11]

7 Rev. Alice Goodman in email correspondence with Madeline Potter, 4 July 2019
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Ash Wednesday: Trinity College Cambridge (6 February 2008)
11 Rev. Alice Goodman in email correspondence with Madeline Potter, 4 July 2019

So, although he was a member of the Church of England, he was at times quick to indicate the distance between him and the institution of the Church. In an interview with *The Oxford Student* he professed that

> 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 I believe.[12]

However, a separation between him and the church as an institution does not entail a separation between him and theology, and Hill adds, in the same interview that

> I adhere to certain old fashioned religious concepts such as the doctrine of original sin and therefore have been much influenced spiritually – not necessarily for the good – by St Paul, St Augustine, Luther and Karl Barth as well as the Hebrew prophets and the teachers of wisdom.[13]

This expresses a separation between institutional espousal of the Church and a pervasive interest in 'religious concepts', as well as doctrinal questions. It also demonstrates his self-consciousness about being 'influenced spiritually' by Christian theologians, while ironically reflecting this may not be 'for the good.'

Hill's writings reflect the idea that his experience of faith was unlike that of the majority of Anglicans. Brian Cummings writes about 'Recusant Hill', and his title is telling of the way in which Hill's thought engages not only with the idea of belonging to a persecuted or 'cursed' minority, but also of how heavily it draws on sources outside the Anglican tradition.[14] The concept of recusancy is associated with English Catholics, and at times in his writing Hill draws heavily on Catholic writers and theologians, including Southwell,

[12] Jessica Campbell, 'Interview: Geoffrey Hill, Oxford Professor of Poetry' in *The Oxford Student* (26 May 2011), at https://www.oxfordstudent.com/2011/05/26/interview-geoffrey-hill-oxford-professor-of-poetry/
[13] Ibid.
[14] See Brian Cummings, 'Recusant Hill' in *GHELW*, 32-55

Hopkins, Newman, Waugh, Pugin, Rahner, as well as unorthodox figures such as Péguy. Equally, he draws heavily on Protestant thinkers such as Calvin, Barth, and Luther.

This paints a picture of the complexity of Hill's theology, extending beyond denominational membership and doctrinal commitment. Yet inevitably, the poet's writings turn to the religious and theological matters. Over the span of his career, from his first volume *For the Unfallen* (1959) and up to the posthumous *Book of Baruch by the Gnostic Justin* (2019) Hill has explored such questions of faith with sustained interest and application. The first poem of his first volume, published in 1959, derives its title from the Book of Genesis, and tackles the problem of poetic creation and the revealed violence of the created world. The volumes *Canaan* (1998) and *Tenebrae* (1978) derive their titles from religious motifs, the former referencing an ancient biblical region and civilisation, and the latter denoting a service, consisting of lauds and matins, practised in Western forms of Christianity during Holy Week.[15]

References to religious and spiritual practices and beliefs are scattered throughout the canonical collected poems *Broken Hierarchies,* ranging from explorations of holy places such as 'Canaan', and 'Pisgah' (a reference to Mount Pisgah mentioned in the Book of Deuteronomy), and possible transfigurations of the local (Bromsgrove) into the transcendental (the Hopkinsian heavenly Goldengrove) in *The Orchards of Syon* (2002), to the sacred music implied by *Hymns to Our Lady of Chartres* (1982-2012), and the many references to psalms. The posthumous *Book of Baruch* (2019) also shows an interest in matters of faith and knowledge, and indicates the enduring appeal of such questions to Hill as a writer.

[15] See 'Tenebrae, *n.*', *OED*, Vol. 7

Donald Hall, in his introduction to Henry Hart's *The Poetry of Geoffrey Hill*, suggests a link between his relationship to the Church as a child and his later poetic engagements with Christianity, proposing that singing in the church choir infused Hill's language with a certain inclination towards the language and spirit of Christianity.[16] He writes that poetry 'found its beginning in the choirloft', in that Hill's poetry can be accessed through 'music analogy' as well as through the central position of the Church in his work. His interest in matters of 'power, doctrine, intuition, and history', as well as his lingering focus on martyrs, are manifestations of this centrality of the Church in his works; Hall suggests that Hill's 'language is Christian', although 'his spirit is never unequivocally redeemed'.[17]

What exactly Hall means by 'unequivocally redeemed' remains unclear, but the phrase does manage to convey a sense of anxiety and uncertainty which is central to Hill's relationship with faith and religion, and captures his focus on the possibility of redemption and the fraught way in which he approaches it.[18] In my thesis, I will argue that the majority of Hill's encounters with the theological are pervaded by anxiety, doubt, irony, and trenchant questioning of doctrine. In the chapter on *Mercian Hymns* of his *The Poetry of Geoffrey Hill*, Henry Hart argues that Offa's reign can be read as a 'reenactment of eternal rhythms' in a non-divine realm.[19] Offa's crowning, therefore, parodies Christ in paralleling him, and so it can be read as a mockery of 'Christ's Eucharistic sacrifice':

> Christ's body, once transubstantiated into bread, wine, and communion wafer, is now the pig's body ground into sausage and garnished (charitably) with mustard.[20]

[16] Donald Hall, 'Introduction' in Henry Hart, *The Poetry of Geoffrey Hill* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 1986), v
[17] Ibid.
[18] See ibid.
[19] Hart, *The Poetry of Geoffrey Hill*, 166
[20] Ibid.

Hart's commentary illustrates the mechanism which Hill often uses to plunge the divine into the realm of the known world. My thesis explores at length, through close readings, how the particular is inflected by the theological, often in highly unorthodox ways. Yet I propose that parody and mockery, while certainly part of Hill's engagement with Christianity, are not to be seen in terms of blasphemy or rejection of faith either.

Rather, my thesis aims to show that ironic and parodic moments are part of a more fundamental epistemological and moral view of the split between the human and the divine. At the same time, this process is grounded in his inability – which I will discuss both in connection to his poetry and his sermons – to experience fully and overwhelmingly divine love and unity. The divine sphere, Hill is quick to indicate on various occasions, is ultimately inaccessible to human beings. For example, Hill discussed his early poem 'In Piam Memoriam' on the BBC's Third Network 'Poetry Today', on 22 October 1964.[21] The poem describes the image of a saint painted on a stained glass window in these terms: '[c]reated purely from glass the saint stands' (*FTU* 58). Asked by Francis Hope whether the world of the stained glass saint and the one outside could 'inter-penetrate' in some kind of poetic resolution, Hill replied:

> No, that's why I wouldn't use the word 'resolve' myself which implies a kind of synthesis… they aren't so much evolved or simply erased. I think what is noticeable about the third stanza is: it's the only stanza, which commits itself quite simply to sensuous imagery. And this is why I called it an agnostic poem. Because you say that you can't feel any, shall we say, any organic development between the first two stanzas and the third, and I think this is entirely as it should be because the situation I'm trying to make manifest is in this poem is one in which there can be no development of that kind. There's got to be that separation.[22]

[21] 'Poetry Today', 22 October 1964. BC MS 20c Hill/8/7/1. Geoffrey Hill Archive, University of Leeds
[22] Ibid.

Though he notably calls it agnostic, the separation invoked presupposes the existence of the divine, whether we can know it or not. Again, in the sixth section his 'Psalms of Assize', first published in *Canaan* (1996), Hill affirms that 'we cannot know God', but also admits that 'we cannot / deny his sequestered power' (*Canaan* 65).

In the following chapters, I analyse Hill's engagement with the theological in terms of the tension between knowing and unknowing. I argue that since 'inter-penetration' and 'resolution' are impossible, Hill's writings are marked by an effort to bring the theological into the worldly realm. In the same discussion with Francis Hope on 'Poetry Today', Hill explained that 'outside' the world of the stained glass saint, there is 'the world of natural regeneration', but this world, he could 'understand and accept.[23] This highlights how important the tangibility of the natural world is in the process of knowledge. I argue that 'the world of natural regeneration', which humans can easily understand, provides the medium for active engagement with the theological. The world of the unknown, wrestled into the tangible, is made to inhabit it, and the conceptual is tested against this background of the concrete.

Hill's material engagement is often on the verge of parody, just as Hart's reading of Offa's crowning as a mimicry of Christ shows.[24] It is also often infused with irony and a tone which at times may strike the reader as peculiarly unorthodox if not downright impious. The key to understanding the source of any such apparent impiety is, I suggest, the very nature of this world, of which the poet is part. In the same 'Psalms of Assize', after saying 'we cannot know God', Hill also qualifies, 'in a marred nature' (*Canaan* 65). This 'marred nature' alludes to the doctrine of Original Sin, which, Hill has made clear in many places, is central to his belief. The metaphysical and ontological separation between the human and the divine

[23] Ibid.
[24] See Hart, *The Poetry of Geoffrey Hill*, 166

is replicated in all aspects of experience, ranging from the mundane to the artistic. In the sermon Hill preached at Balliol College Chapel, Oxford, for Remembrance Day 2007, Hill restated his belief in Original Sin in unequivocal terms, suggesting that

> If I am a Christian, it is because the Church's teaching on Original Sin strikes me as being the most coherent grammar of tragic humanity that I have ever encountered'[25]

Criticism about Hill's relationship with the church and its doctrine has focused heavily on the question of Original Sin, with Matthew Sperling's *Visionary Philology* being the most comprehensive study to date. Sperling explains Hill's entire theology of language through the prism of the doctrine of Original Sin. *Visionary Philology* brings to the forefront the significant degree to which Hill's poetic language and patterns of thought hinge on this doctrine. He draws attention to the multitude of instances where Hill himself has expressed his firm belief in Original Sin, such as:

> 'I cannot myself see any way of escaping complete assent to the doctrine of original sin'; 'attached as I am to a form of belief in Original Sin, one that is probably not too far removed from the orthodox'; '[b]elieving, as I have admitted I do, in the radically flawed nature of humanity and of its endeavours' (*CCW*, 362; 479; 481)[26]

Yet, as Sperling is quick to point out, it is not merely the explicitness of Original Sin as a theologically self-contained doctrine that influences Hill; rather, the concept of Original Sin provides 'a framework interpreting experience which might equally be interpreted psychologically or ideologically'.[27] Sperling draws on an example provided by Hill himself in a speech at Bromsgrove County High School, where he recounts an experience from his childhood:

---

[25] Remembrance: Balliol College (11 November 2007)
[26] Quoted in *VP*, 134
[27] *VP*, 135

> Any small boy who, reigning supreme in the kingdom of his own daydream, has woken to the dread realization that he has lost his dinner-money or his bus-pass, may be said to have received a lesson in the rudiments of philosophy or indeed of theology. In a brief but enduring moment he perceives that he simultaneously inhabits two distinct domains: one in which he seems to be the king of his own inner landscape; and another in which he is seen as a rather miserable little specimen in the landscape of another person, possibly a person in authority. This instant of time, in which the child dwells both within and without himself might be variously interpreted. […] A Christian theologian might suggest that in such moments we relive the experience of the Fall.[28]

Although Hill is not a 'Christian theologian', I suggest that in his poetry, as well as in his sermons, he obstinately construes his experience through the lens of man's Fall from grace.

Sperling's *Visionary Philology* focuses on the careful consideration Hill gives to matters of language, and the semantic implications of etymology and rhetorical choice. Words, Sperling shows, are always a deliberate choice for Hill, as he is heavily influenced by the *Oxford English Dictionary*.[29] Word choice always carries further historical, moral, or literary implications. One such example considered by Sperling is the term 'clavics', which Hill coins, and which lends the title to Hill's 2011 volume of poetry. As Sperling shows, the term is 'strongly derived from Latin *clavis*, "key"', which also, in turn, 'comes from *clavus*, "nail"'.[30] The implications extend further to Ruskin's *Fors Clavigera* – a title which, as Sperling points out quoting Ruskin means '"Force, Fortitude or Fortune", cast as "Club-bearer, Key-Bearer, or Nail-Bearer"', and to Hill's 'brooding' (*BH* 107) in Section XXV of *Mercian Hymns* over his family's background as nail-makers.[31]

---

[28] Bromsgrove County High School speech, BC MS 20c Hill/5/1/89. Geoffrey Hill Archive, University of Leeds, quoted in *VP*, 134-5

[29] *VP*, 7

[30] Ibid., 11

[31] See *The Works of John Ruskin*, eds. E.T. Cook, Alexander Wedderburn, (1903-12), Vol. 27, 28, quoted in *VP*, 11; Ibid.; see 'Brooding on the eightieth letter of *Fors Clavigera*, / I speak this in memory of my grandmother, whose / childhood and prime womanhood were spent in the / nailer's darg (*BH* 107)

It is through this kind of etymological bond within one word that the poet elicits a powerful 'religious symbolism'; this image of 'nails' and 'keys', as Sperling goes on to argue, gains symbolic power due to the fact that 'the nails driven into Christ's body punningly secure the Passion as the "key" to unlock the Christian mythology'.[32] He emphasises the importance of language and its implications, as he observes, for instance, how Hill considers 'the psychological and the religious' and the 'historical and cultural', and 'straightaway subsumes all these domains of inquiry into the semantic'.[33]

Original Sin needs to be understood as a fundamental theoretical framework at the basis Hill's thought, and of my analysis of his poetry. I engage more closely and explicitly with the question of Hill and Original Sin in the final chapter on his sermons.

I seek to show how the sinfulness incurred by humanity at the time of the Fall, pervades Hill's construal of experience. I uncover, through particular examples of his poems and sermons, the layers which, as Sperling demonstrates, Hill 'subsumes […] into the semantic'.[34] I uncover the historical, the cultural, and at times the personal-psychological dimensions by picking apart the semantic. Language, as Sperling shows, and as Hill himself makes clear, as he does for example in his essay 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"' (*CCW* 3), is tied in with sin.[35] In burying all these historical, and psychological layers within the dimension of language, Hill is then also unveiling the link between this range of domains and sin itself. The very act of writing about it makes the pull of the semantic inescapable; my close readings throughout the chapters of my thesis seek to uncover these underlying domains, focusing particularly on the historical and the cultural, and to examine their role in shaping Hill's relationship with theology.

---

[32] *VP*, 11
[33] Ibid., 137
[34] Ibid.
[35] See ibid., 134

The interaction between the semantic and the layers of historical, cultural, and psychological tradition and experience is complex; paradox and irony are often at the heart of their relationship, and also at the heart of Hill's relationship with his writing, and with his faith. Moreover, this relationship is not static throughout Hill's career; it reacts to context while at the same time considering its position in connection to tradition; it is exploratory and dynamic; it reveals the writer's introspective thoughts, uncovers his doubts, as well as his desire for divine love; it raises questions and presents the reader with paradoxes which seem insurmountable. It is, at its core, difficult.

Difficulty itself drives Hill's representations of the Church in his writings. W.S. Milne describes him as the 'poet of our time' most 'religious in nature', but adds that this 'nature was often struggling and difficult'.[36] '[I]n a marred nature' (*Canaan* 65), this difficulty is not surprising, and clarifications on the matter of difficulty come from Hill himself in unequivocal terms. As a poet, he has often been accused of over-intellectualism and difficulty. The former he rejected, but he has fully embraced the idea of difficulty, arguing that human beings are inherently difficult creatures, and to expect art to be simple would be to deny the nature of what it means to be human. In an interview conducted by Carl Phillips for *The Paris Review* in 2000, he stated that 'art has a right', ('not an obligation'), to be difficult:

> Let's take difficulty first. We are difficult. Human beings are difficult. We're difficult to ourselves, we're difficult to each other. And we are mysteries to ourselves, we are mysteries to each other. One encounters in any ordinary day far more real difficulty than one confronts in the most 'intellectual' piece of work. Why is it believed that poetry, prose, painting, music should be less than we are? Why does music, why does poetry have to address us in simplified terms, when if such simplification were applied to a description of our own inner selves we would find it demeaning? I think art has a right—not an obligation—to be difficult if it wishes.[37]

[36] W.S. Milne, 'Geoffrey Hill: 1932-2016' in *Agenda, '*Homage to Geoffrey Hill' Vol. 50, Nos 1-2, (Summer/Autumn 2016), 16

[37] Carl Phillips, 'Geoffrey Hill: The Art of Poetry No. 80' in *Paris Review*, Issue 154 (Spring 2000), at https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/730/geoffrey-hill-the-art-of-poetry-no-80-geoffrey-hill

Addressing further the implications of difficulty, he added that simplification is often a mark of tyranny. So, Hill draws on Theodor Haecker's assertion, in the context of Nazi Germany, that '[t]yrants always want a language and literature that is easily understood, for nothing so weakens thought'.[38] Hill points out that propaganda entails an 'oversimplification of language', which works because 'the minds of the collective respond primitively to slogans of incitement'.[39] On the other hand, Hill adds, difficulty, and complexity, to any degree, imply intelligence.[40] Hill then welcomes, in his poetry, the difficulty of the human condition, and the process of exploration of his own thoughts about the Church, faith, and theology is marked by the same sense of difficulty. This is a consequence of acknowledging the complexity of human thought and experience, and even more so, of his own experience of this difficulty. His poems and his sermons are pervaded by difficulties and complications on multiple levels. The title of my thesis, '"On the Cusp of Devotion": Christian Forms and Difficulties in Geoffrey Hill', acknowledges that difficult nature of Hill's encounters with Christianity in his work. I take the phrase 'on the cusp of devotion' from section 14 of *Hymns to Our Lady of Chartres*: 'though I confuse many by writing so / much on the cusp of devotion' (*BH* 164). His experience of faith itself was difficult. In my thesis, I consider doubt and struggles of faith as a means of immediate engagement with theology for Hill.

Andrew Michael Roberts suggests that Hill's poetry can be understood 'in terms of a lost dream of faith, confronted and undercut by a highly sceptical intelligence'.[41] I argue that Hill's poetry is indeed undertowed by a split between a 'cognitive' and a 'sensuous' experience of faith, but that it is in fact the latter that resists him, while cognitive assent is expressed. As Peter McDonald has shown, it is 'intelligence' rather than 'intellect' which is

[38] Theodor Haecker, *Journal in the Night*, trans. Alexander Dru (London: Pantheon, 1950), 100
[39] Phillips, 'Geoffrey Hill: The Art of Poetry No. 80'
[40] Ibid.
[41] Andrew Michael Roberts, *Geoffrey Hill* (Horndon: Northcote, 2004), 74-5

to be found in Hill's poetry, and the 'sensuousness' of intelligence 'is put to special tests and uses in poetry'.[42]

Assent to the divine is sought through the works of sensuous intelligence, but it is often the sensuous aspect which fails him, rather than the cognitive. I have already mentioned the contrast, in 'Psalms of Assize', between 'we cannot know God' but 'we cannot / deny his sequestered / power' (*Canaan* 65); in 'Lachrimae Coactae', which I discuss in my third chapter, he expresses his own inability to experience the love for and of Christ: 'Crucified Lord, however much I burn / to be enamoured of your paradise / […] / I fall between harsh grace and hurtful scorn' (*Tenebrae* 18). In 'The Bidden Guest', he suggests the existence of a gap between cognitive belief on the one hand – 'And I believe in the spurred flame'(*FTU* 21) – and a direct experience of divine love – 'but cannot come / Out of my heart's unbroken room' (*FTU* 21). About this same poem Hill has said, in a reading and commentary on the BBC's Third Network 'The Living Poet', broadcast in 1965, that it possesses the same 'agnostic appeal' as 'In Piam Memoriam'.[43] The questions about knowledge and experience of faith raised in these early writings come up regularly throughout his later writings, and appear to be accompanied in his sermons and late poems by anxiety about his failing health and anticipation of death.

One might ask then what the relationship is for Hill, between the construal of his personal experience of faith – or lack thereof – and the objectivity of morality in poetry. Hill rejects the idea of subjective expression associated with confessional poetry. Kathryn Murphy's essay 'Geoffrey Hill and Confession' tackles the topic from the point of view of a relationship between liturgical-theological confession and the problematics of morality.

---

[42] Peter McDonald, *Serious Poetry: Form and Authority from Yeats to Hill* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 190

[43] 'The Living Poet', 5 September 1965. BC MS 20c Hill/8/7/2. Geoffrey Hill Archive, University of Leeds

Murphy points out that it is the confessionalism of writers such as Plath that Hill rejects, as it entails a poetics of 'victims, not of witness'.[44] She quotes Hill's own protestations against biographical interpretations of *Mercian Hymns*, reminding us that he told John Haffenden, that 'one is resisting all the time the assumption that this has anything to do with the "confessional" mode.'[45] Instead, Murphy unveils a mechanism by which Hill broadens the strictly theological implications of the term 'confession'.[46] She shows how Hill expands the Christian-liturgical implications of confession so as to denote an active stance against the threat of oppression. She takes Hill's interest in the Bekennende Kirche — the 'confessional church' — of the Kreisau Circle, of whom Bonhoeffer and Von Haeften were members as an illustration for her argument.[47] She points out that for the Bekennende Kirche, confession is linked to an 'open adherence to a particular vision of Christian belief', but adds that '[w]hat Hill takes from it, however, is a broader sense of speaking out in danger against power, or on behalf of the persecuted: integrity in the face of threat'.[48]

Murphy's observation that the Christian meaning of the word confession is broadened to denote a particular moral stance is a useful tool in understanding how Hill's language is tied in with Christianity in an immediate way. My thesis demonstrates that such derivations of Christian language abound in Hill's poems; terms which would usually be associated with a well-defined, orthodox, Christian meaning are extrapolated to a secular context. This allows for them to be situated in precise moments in time, and to be embodied and materialised outside the domain of the theological. Recent criticism on Hill has been increasingly focused on this tendency to extend the applicability of Christian or Christian-derived terminology in order to pave out a poetic/moral position. Apart from Murphy's essay, Brian Cummings has

---

[44] Kathryn Murphy, 'Geoffrey Hill and Confession' in *GHELW,* 139
[45] Haffenden, *Viewpoints*, 95, quoted in ibid.,140
[46] Murphy, 'Geoffrey Hill and Confession', 136
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid.

also demonstrated that a similar broadening is at play in Hill's relationship with recusancy. Cummings's essay, 'Recusant Hill', discusses Hill's interest in the idea of recusancy, a concept which, he argues, can be extrapolated from the very specific focus on the Catholic recusants and understood as

> a form of vexed or even self-denying personal affirmation, or as an embrace of an idea of personal or political reformation that is also a rejection of the possibility of such reformation as conventionally understood.[49]

Recusancy, as a concept of fundamental importance to Hill's thought about the 'vocation' of the poet, Cummings argues, need not be viewed in its strict historical sense. Rather, he demonstrates that the implications of what it means to be recusant are useful for looking at a 'wider body of artists and writers important to Hill than "recusancy" in its specific historical meaning'. Cummings considers individual encounters between Hill and specific writers and artists he is interested in and who display this type of wider 'recusancy', such as G.M. Hopkins, Ivor Gurney, and Honoré Daumier, who at a first glance do not share a common ground, but who, he maintains, make it possible to identify strands of pervasive thought and influence for Hill and consequently 'trace the possibility of a genealogy of recusancy within Hill's writing'.[50]

I engage with Murphy's and Cummings's arguments, as I draw together the strands of criticism on Hill's Christian language in an account of how anchored his theology is in the materiality of the world. The negotiation of 'genealogy', as Cummings calls it, is important to Hill.[51] The quest to establish his own voice within the context of historical, cultural, and religious heritage is not one without problems, and critics working on Hill have noted that this often leads to a paradox. Both Cummings and Murphy write about this. Focusing on the

[49] Cummings, 'Recusant Hill', 32
[50] Ibid., 32-3
[51] Ibid.

'Lachrimae Verae' sequence, which I also discuss in the third chapter of my thesis, Cummings notes that the address to Christ in this sequence contains 'a paradox of self-presentation', adding that '[i]t is as if the rhythm of the verse works contrary to what is being said'.[52] In her essay, Murphy draws comparable attention to Hill's own admission, in his early poem 'September Song' — an elegy for a child victim of the Holocaust — that 'I have made / an elegy for myself it / is true' (*KL* 10).[53] This brings up the problem of an 'aestheticisation of violence and suffering, the appropriation of the voice of victims, and matters of decorum in speaking of horror.'[54]

A similar problem is brought up by Hugh Haughton in his essay '"How fit a title…": Title and Authority in the Work of Geoffrey Hill', in the 1985 collection of essays *Geoffrey Hill: Essays on His Work*. The 'Lachrimae' sequence, Haughton argues, can be seen as possessing a kind of Nietzschean uneasiness towards humility, as Hill's '[d]ominion is swallowed with your blood' (*Tenebrae* 20) can be read in two possible ways, suggesting both the suppression of the desire for dominion within the Eucharist, but also as a participation in this dominion through participation in the Eucharist. Haughton contends that this can be seen as 'akin to' the same kind of '"eerie triumphalism"', 'seen by Nietzsche in his analysis of the biblical axiom "he that humbleth himself shall be exalted"'.[55] Haughton's essay shows how important a role historical consciousness plays in Hill's poems, and it does so by highlighting the fact that Hill's historically-attuned mind emerges with the 'kind of formal violence and hermeneutic ellipsis more often associated with the aggressively modern'.[56] There is, then, a situating of the past against the flow of the modern, and a placing of the biblical within a kind

[52] Ibid., 38
[53] See Murphy, 'Geoffrey Hill and Confession', 139
[54] Ibid.
[55] Hugh Haughton, '"How fit a title…": Title and Authority in the Work of Geoffrey Hill' in *Geoffrey Hill: Essays on His Work*, ed. Peter Robinson (Milton Keynes and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1985), 143; see Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche* (New York: Meridian,1956), 158, quoted in ibid.
[56] Ibid., 129-30

of poetic closeness which can strike as 'somewhat baffling.'[57] Haughton uses the example provided by Hill in his poem 'History as Poetry', where the figuration of history into poetry 'is hedged about with suspicion'.[58] Haughton's analysis draws heavily on the linguistic implications of Hill's word choice, pointing out the 'slipperiness' of the word 'as', refashioned within the body of other words ('taste', 'ashen', etc.), drawing attention to the 'rootedness of speech in a world of bodies […] where physical atrocities are committed as a result of acts of language'.[59] His contribution is crucial in highlighting the embodied nature of Hill's thought, both at the level of poetic structure and form, and at the level of engagement with the world around, past and present.

What I hope to demonstrate in this thesis is that such paradoxes are not accidental; instead, they can be viewed as necessary, and Hill often embraces them rather than attempting to resolve them. Drawing together the arguments of Sperling, Murphy, Cummings, and Haughton is a sense of the historical and linguistic-semantic embodiment of Hill's thought, as well as the problem of his own position in relation to these dimensions. These critical accounts of his poetry, accompanied by Hill's biography, critical writings, and sermons, show that Christianity pervades his thought about art, culture, and history. This is, I argue, a crucial aspect in understanding Hill, and the removal of this morality from the picture can lead to misreadings of Hill's position on culture, history, and tradition. See, for example, Tom Paulin's observation that 'Hill's conservative imagination endorses the cleric's simple minded concept of national loyalty'.[60] In my first chapter, I take the time to address in detail the inaccuracy of such interpretations of Hill's work. It needs to be noted however at this point that one feature of such accounts is that they focus on Hill's engagement with history

[57] Ibid., 130
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid., 131
[60] Tom Paulin, 'The Case for Geoffrey Hill', in *London Review of Books*, Vol.7, No. 6 (4 April 1985), 13

and tradition without paying attention to the complexity of the theological-moral vein running in the background of his thought. Hill himself has emphasised the link between semantics, ethics, language, and theology. In his essay 'Language, Suffering, and Silence' Hill notes that endeavouring to frame a theology of language requires considering two points, namely

> a) [t]hat the shock of semantic recognition must be also a shock of ethical recognition […]; b) that the art and literature of the late twentieth century require a memorializing, a memorizing, of the dead as much as, or even more than, 'expressions of solidarity with the poor and the oppressed'. Suffering is real, but 'suffering' is a sing-song, that is to say, cant. (*CCW* 404)

In making the supernatural inhabit the material, as my thesis will show, time itself can become a paradox, being both linear and cyclical. I suggest here, in the same vein as Murphy and Cummings, that a broadening of the Eucharistic metaphor, as well as the Incarnation occurs. What takes shape then is not a sacramental poetics, but rather a kind of quasi-liturgical mechanism whereby linear time takes on some of the characteristics of divine time. However, no transfiguration of either time or place occurs, so the human world remains itself natural, while the divine sphere is lent some of its characteristics too, so as to attempt to make it accessible 'in a marred nature' (*Canaan* 65). Poetry can only happen within the boundaries of historical time, and history provides a reference point for the poet.

In his essay 'The Standing of Poetry' Rowan Williams argues that witness to historical violence and loss is crucial for poetry, which 'can allow memory to stand'.[61] Our inheritance of 'the century's evil' is an inescapable fact, and to be aware of this leads to a 'burden […] neither to immobilize nor to glamorize the past'.[62] In the context of my suggestion that the theological is wrestled into the historical then, Rowan Williams's argument that poetry can

[61] Rowan Williams, 'The Standing of Poetry: Geoffrey Hill's Quartet' in *GHELW*, 60
[62] Ibid., 60-1

only ‘gesture towards grace only by gesturing towards what is *there* to be remembered’ is crucial. History, as part of this world, is what is here, available for us; and if grace is in any way to be found, it needs to be sought within the tangibility of our existence within history, with all the problems that this entails. Williams too argues that time takes a different form in Hill’s poetry, and that ‘it enacts the imperative of accepting that the past is there in its solid otherness – “eternally there”.[63] The past is not celebrated, but rather it provides a measure against which a violent present can be understood.

This self-turn of poetry upon history is one of Hill’s many poetic turns, a topic addressed by Kathryn Murphy in an earlier essay, ‘Geoffrey Hill’s Conversions’, published in the volume *Geoffrey Hill and His Contexts* in 2011. She notes here the ‘congruence’ which Hill has placed between ‘language and theology’, and argues that Hill relies on ‘turns’ and ‘returns’.[64] There is, she writes, an ‘automatic’ bend; ‘the turn of “return” is deliberate’, and it ‘establishes a critical stance towards oneself, and entails attempted reparation for errors committed or wrong done’.[65] There are theological implications to this process, and she mentions that Luther’s account of ‘sinful man’ as *homo incurvatus in se* ‘echoes a conception of sin to which Hill has frequently returned’.[66]

She argues, with reference to Hill’s ‘Genesis’, that ‘through etymology’, ‘the mutual implication of agency and subjugation in the human predicament’ is shown.[67] Her observation here reinforces the strong tie between sin and language, but her argument also reveals how poignantly this tie is made manifest in the specificity of poetic articulation. *Metanoia*, Murphy argues, drives Hill’s poetics, and his returns are the ‘metaphorical articulations of the

---

[63] Ibid., 61-3
[64] Kathryn Murphy, ‘Geoffrey Hill’s Conversions’ in *GHAHC*, 63-66
[65] Ibid., 66
[66] Ibid., 69; Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 25, eds. Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut T. Lehmann (St. Louis: Concordia, 1955-86), 291
[67] Murphy, ‘Geoffrey Hill’s Conversions’, 71

human predicament in ethics and theology'.[68] My exploration in the present thesis of the embodied forms of Hill's theological thought is based on a similar principle, which entails the particular articulation of ethics, theology, and morality, in the form and content of a poem. In her essay, Murphy also uses the useful term 'embodied', as she notes that 'Hill develops a repertoire of poetic techniques in which conversion and turning are embodied in the "sensuous" elements of the poetry'.[69]

The critical accounts discussed here set the base for the argument of my thesis, in their careful and comprehensive consideration of the intricate relationship between theology, Original Sin, and language. What my thesis contributes to this is an engaged account of how theology and morality find their ways into Hill's poetry as architecture, music, and prayer, as well as into the rhetoric of his sermons. I dig beneath the semantic, and consider some of the domains which, as Sperling argues, Hill 'subsumes' to it.[70] Architecture, music, prayer, and sermons are all inhabited forms, where Hill tests the theological in a materially anchored manner. My thesis contains four chapters, which investigate the problematics of how theology inflects each of these particular artistic and devotional forms.

Chapter 1, 'Stress is at the heart of architecture', considers the way in which such matters of devotion, faith, and theology are shaped in and by Hill's writings about architecture. As Natalie Pollard has argued, architecture is an artistic form prominent in Hill's thought, and church architecture in particular plays an important role in providing the material channel for anchoring some of the theological and moral concepts he is preoccupied with.[71] Church architecture can act as a medium for testing out how sin and history are at play in the material, incarnate in its tangibility, but manifested non-liturgically. In this sense,

---

[68] Ibid., 72
[69] Ibid., 74
[70] See *VP*, 137
[71] Natalie Pollard, '"Like a Mason Addressing a Block": Materiality and Design in Geoffrey Hill's Poetry' in *Strangeness and Power: Essays on the Poetry of Geoffrey Hill* (Bristol: Shearsman, 2019), 223

church architecture, like poetry itself, can be seen as a sort of counterpart to the liturgical, in that in its accrual of both value and moral decay throughout the span of the centuries, it captures something invisible, intangible, in its own materiality, in a way which can be seen as reminiscent of the sacramental ritual of Eucharist and even of the Incarnation. Yet the buildings in question — and Hill is interested preponderantly in church buildings — remain, at least in a basic primary sense, part of this world, the world of the natural, that which can be assessed and understood through the senses. His interest in church architecture then also takes into account the building of the church as a threshold between various parallel planes, including historical memory, on the one hand, and its embodied material form on the other, and the already mentioned world of the known and that of the divine unknown. Architecture provides, as Paul Robichaud shows, the point where the pressing question of ethics is joined in with the aesthetics of artistic form; '[a]esthetic achievement', as Robichaud maintains, 'cannot be separated from the exploitation and violence characteristic of most historical periods, including the Middle Ages'.[72] The building of a church is steeped in its history, and often this involves a history of violence.

Chapter 2, '"Music Survives": Sacred Music, Fallen Poetry?', investigates sacred and church music as a medium of engagement for Hill, and explores how music is tested as a potentially freer medium than poetry is. As already mentioned, in his early essay 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"', Hill describes poetry — and literature in general — as one of the artistic media 'most impure in kind', comparing it to an 'imprisoning marble' (*CCW* 3). In contrast, in an interview with John Haffenden, he expresses an 'envy of the composer' for being more able to 'unite solitary meditation with direct, sensuous communication to a greater degree than the poet'.[73] I argue that sacred music floats the possibility of being a

[72] Paul Robichaud, 'Gothic Architecture in the Poetry of David Jones and Geoffrey Hill' in *Mosaic*, Vol. 35, No. 4 (December 2002), 183
[73] Haffenden, *Viewpoints*, 91

medium more removed from the bounds of Original Sin and from the consequent wretchedness of the human condition than poetry is. I argue that this possibility informs the way he relates to sacred and church music in his poetic writings, and that he tests this possibility in a way which tends to create a probing of music and poetry against each other as artistic media. Ultimately, however, I argue that this exploration reveals that the two are more alike than initially perceived, and sacred music reveals itself to be far more imbricated in the reality of history and sin than initially suggested by the phrase 'music survives' (*Tenebrae* 44) and the idea of the composer as possessing more freedom than the poet. Religious music, then, I argue, is not exempt from the same horrors which impinge on poetry, and Hill connects such pieces of sacred music with particularly violent times of history.

Chapter 3, 'If I had prayed at all', looks at the medium of prayer as a devotional and artistic mode of material engagement in Hill's thought. I argue here that references to prayer and prayer-like addresses in his poetry can provide a space where anxieties pertaining to the poet's experience of faith are unpacked in a way which enables him to eschew commitment to both doctrine and the medium of prayer itself as a theological and liturgical instrument. I argue that speech act theory, as developed by J.L. Austin in his *How to Do Things with Words* provides a useful theoretical stepping-stone for uncovering the way in which Hill's poetry threads the line between the sacred and the secular, drawing on the performativity of language so as to allow him to explore the metaphysical potential of immediate experience and material objects. In this connection, I discuss the way in which the poet sets off into primarily poetic but secondarily prayerful (in their performative potential) addresses to God or saintly figures (such as the Virgin Mary in *Hymns to Our Lady of Chartres*). Such addresses explore the self's experience of faith — or rather lack thereof, since Hill indicates that despite his desire for it, he has never been able to feel, sensuously, divine love. At the same time, these expressions of desire for being 'enamoured' of the Lord's 'paradise' (see *Tenebrae* 18) and of

his inability to find himself in this state can be read as prayers themselves, petitioning for the experience of a deeper, more direct, and more sensuous connection between the human and the divine.

Finally, Chapter 4, '"If I am a Christian…": The Sermons of Geoffrey Hill', marks a shift away from the poetry and focuses on the sermons which Hill has preached. Hill's sermons serve as insights into the particularities of his relationship between personal experience on the one side, and Church and theology on the other. The sermons, eight in total, and all but one preached during the final years of his life, reveal the anxieties, doubts, and questions experienced by Hill in a direct and personal manner, as they are marked by a shift to a more confessional rhetoric. I argue here that when assuming the preacher's role, Hill tests out the boundaries of the sermon as a genre, as he subverts the expectations of a contemporary sermon by tapping, as he often does in his poetry, into historical context, and allowing the lay university sermon to carry forward a type of performance which emerges as both playfully ironic, and serious in its exploration of theological matters. As he does in his poems, he tackles theological concepts through the immediacy of that which is available to us in this world.

The scope of this thesis is to look at these instances of engagement throughout Hill's career, and I discuss references to them throughout his poetry, focusing primarily on the collected volume *Broken Hierarchies*¸ but also taking in the recently published posthumous *Book of Baruch by the Gnostic Justin*, where relevant. The thesis hinges mainly on close readings of Hill's poems in the first three chapters, and on the rhetorical implications of his discourse in the sermon chapter. This allows for an applied analysis of these direct embodiments of the conceptual within the material.

Chapter 1: 'Stress is at the heart of architecture': Ec-centricity and Tradition

1.1. Framework

Church architecture is a central interest for Geoffrey Hill, throughout his career. His 1978 sonnet sequence 'An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture in England', published in *Tenebrae,* draws its title from Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin's architectural treatise. His volume *Canaan* (1996) contains imagery of church buildings, such as '[a]spiring Grantham' and '[c]rowned Ely' (*Canaan* 13). The sequence *Hymns to Our Lady Of Chartres*, composed between 1982 and 2012 (first published in 1984, and expanded and revised in subsequent versions) and the recent posthumous publication, first in the special issue of *Stand Magazine* in 2017 and then in *The Book of Baruch by the Gnostic Justin* of section 36, reinforce the idea that church architecture is central to Hill's thought.

Through direct descriptions of buildings, as well as through more oblique allusions to ecclesiastical or liturgical objects and settings, Hill creates an intricate patchwork of architectural referencing throughout his oeuvre. Some poems therefore involve explicit identification of churches, such as section 36 of *The Book of Baruch* where he writes about some City of London churches destroyed during the London Blitz (St Andrew Holborn, St Mary Abchurch, St Mary-le-Bow, to name a few); in other poems, Hill makes use of metonymy and synecdoche to depict church buildings, such as in the example from *Canaan* mentioned above, where St Wulfram's in Grantham is described as '[a]spiring Grantham', while Ely Cathedral becomes '[c]rowned Ely' (*Canaan* 13). At other times, still, the focus falls on devotional or artistic objects associated with church settings, such as, for example, candles and communion wafers, in 'The Pentecost Castle', published in *Tenebrae* in 1978:

At dawn the Mass

burgeons from stone
a Jesse tree
of resurrection

budding with candle
flames the gold
and the white wafers
of the feast (*Tenebrae* 9)

This intricate patchwork of architectural references in Hill's work is threaded by a focus on the historical grounding of architecture and built structure. In an interview with Jessica Campbell for *The Oxford Student,* Hill expressed his belief that literature cannot be extricated from its historical and socio-political contexts.[1] For this reason, he argued, any textual exegesis needs to take into account the specificity of historical background. Taking Milton's political sonnets as an example, he stated:

> I think at certain periods in our history some good poets have felt they have a vocation to speak up for a political truth. Milton clearly did and the early Wordsworth did and each of them wrote prose treaties [sic] to engage with what they had understood as political truth. But political priorities change very rapidly and you have to understand Milton's political writings not as some sort of divine abstract but as an engagement with the world of 1644 or 1658.[2]

Like Milton's political writings, architecture is understood as engaging with, and emerging from, a specific historical period, and consequently as shaped by its circumstances and history. Architectural presence in Hill's poetry is anchored in history, and church buildings are viewed as immovable products of such historical context. Yet history itself is a problematic concept for Hill; both in his poetry and critical writings, Hill's thought has been repeatedly turned to historical atrocity and destruction. In *Mercian Hymns,* we are faced with the tyrannical figure of the Anglo-Saxon king Offa, while 'September Song' and 'Ovid in the

[1] Jessica Campbell, 'Interview: Geoffrey Hill, Oxford Professor of Poetry' in *The Oxford Student* (26 May 2011), at https://www.oxfordstudent.com/2011/05/26/interview-geoffrey-hill-oxford-professor-of-poetry/
[2] Ibid.

Third Reich' (both published in *King Log* in 1968), bear witness to the horrors of the Holocaust. The title of his first volume, *For the Unfallen*, is a response to Laurence Binyon's 'For the Fallen', an ode first published in *The Times* in 1914, written for the soldiers of the British Expeditionary Force who perished on the Western Front during the First World War, and which aims to memorialise their presence through poetry: '[t]o the end, to the end, they remain'.[3] Apart from drawing attention to context, this focus on history reveals the architectural structure underlying Hill's poetry, whose foundation incorporates a complex patchwork of historical and literary references.

In this chapter, I will argue that the question of ecclesiastical architecture reveals a negotiation of tension between art and historical affliction. At the core of this process, an uneasy balance between integration into and non-alignment with historical and literary tradition emerges.

The question of history and its bearing on Hill's architectural enquiries in his poetry has intrigued critics writing on this topic. The crucial role of historical referencing in Hill's work is widely acknowledged, but nonetheless a number of readings of his work have tended to oversimplify the issue, as I shall illustrate presently. Such oversimplifications have entailed a construal of Hill as a culturally conservative writer, whose focus on the past supposedly shows nostalgic longings for an idealised England, now lost. The period between 1985 and 1987 saw a proliferation of such misreadings of Hill's work. These started with Tom Paulin's claim in the *London Review of Books* that 'Hill's conservative imagination endorses the cleric's simple minded concept of national loyalty'.[4] Two years later, Vincent Sherry, in *The*

[3] Laurence Binyon, 'For the Fallen' in *The Times*, 21 September 1914
[4] Paulin, 'The Case for Geoffrey Hill', 13

Uncommon Tongue, described Hill's 'Apology' as evoking a 'local traditional, graded society'.[5]

Writing in the same year as Sherry (1987), Calvin Bedient, in his essay 'The Pastures of Wilderness: Geoffrey Hill's "An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture in England"', interprets Hill's work from a similar perspective:

> Cultural conservatism cannot afford to be apologetic; an apology is the rope with which it hangs itself. Nor is 'An Apology' apologetic, unless Hill's typical tricky play with titles and allusions, not to mention irony, is construed as embarrassment, and not as a formidable show of force. All such diversions are fuses that the context has already lit, and lead to an intensification, not a forfeiture of power.[6]

These readings are reductive both in their treatment of Hill's engagement with English tradition, and in their disregard of the crucial role which European tradition plays in Hill's work. Although Sherry writes about Hill's volume *The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy*, first published in 1983, he presents Hill as an 'English likeness' to the French Péguy, and Péguy's concerns are transposed into an English context for Hill.[7] This interpretation ignores the complexity of Hill's thought on European tradition, which is for him a fundamental part of his own development as a poet, and which he does not regard as separate from his English heritage. To add to this, 1985 was the year which saw the publication of an edition Hill's *Collected Poems*, which included 'Three Hymns to Our Lady of Chartres'. This work eventually grew into a volume as the sequence *Hymns to Our Lady of Chartres*, published in its entirety as part of the collected volume *Broken Hierarchies* in 2012. The sequence highlights Hill's investment in architecture in the broader context of European culture. Even more crucial is the fact that the same edition of Hill's *Collected Poems* contains

---

[5] Vincent Sherry, *The Uncommon Tongue: The Poetry and Criticism of Geoffrey Hill* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1987), 156

[6] Calvin Bedient, 'The Pastures of Wilderness' in *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. 17, 'British Poetry since 1945 Special Number' (1987), 143

[7] Sherry, *The Uncommon Tongue*, 215

a note, reprinted from the first edition of *Tenebrae* (1978), where Hill explicitly acknowledges the influence of European poets on his work:

> Spanish and German poets have provided points of departure for several poems in this book. […] [T]he second sonnet of 'An Apology…' is an imitation of a sonnet by L.L. de Argensola (*CP* 1985, 204)

And yet such misreadings have persisted throughout the years, with Jonathan Bolton for example writing in 1997 about Hill's 'Apology', and reducing the sequence to a play between two contrasting directions, one vertical, and one horizontal.[8] These directions, he argues as he draws on the fact that Hill borrows the title of the sequence from Pugin, mimic the cruciform plan underlying Pugin's churches.[9] Bolton reads this as 'the perfect expression of the character of native belief and as a natural outgrowth of the northern European landscape', and adds that the vertical rises 'out of the English soil and extend upward to God', while the horizontal 'extends outward away from England and God.'[10] Landscape is important to Hill, but only inasmuch as it can facilitate some kind of divine revelation through the fact that it can be understood through its materiality and immediacy. As Marcus Waithe has written in connection to Hill's lines '[l]andscape is like revelation; it is both / singular crystal and the remotest things'(*MCCP* 17),

> Hill's evocation of Péguy's mystical conservatism recalls Ruskin's adaptation of a motif derived from Wordsworth's natural theology, namely his conception of nature as a book wherein one may read eternal truths.[11]

[8] Jonathan Bolton, 'Empire and Atonement: Geoffrey Hill's "An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture in England"', in *Contemporary Literature* Vol. 38, No. 2 (Summer 1997), 293
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Marcus Waithe, 'Hill, Ruskin, and Intrinsic Value' in *GHAHC*, 134; see William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, in *Poetical Works* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 473-4, quoted in ibid.,134

Landscape does not link religious experience with locality; neither are religious experience and God linked with the 'English soil' as suggested by Bolton.[12] Discussing Ruskin's influence on Hill, Waithe notes that 'Hill's form of poetic revelation is similarly figurative' to Ruskin's sense of 'prophecy' as 'removed from religious faith'.[13] Hill's account of landscape is not the Romantic nationalist's account of an idealised locality. As Waithe shows, 'his poems are not cries of despair settled and secured by their own orthodoxy'.[14] In fact, Hill's poems reject orthodoxy and gravitate towards what can be described as an eccentric position, as I shall show in this chapter. Landscape can only settle or secure the religious experience in providing a material grounding for the intangible, and it is in order to intimate the divine through the material, that landscape and architecture are brought together in Hill's poems.

In this vein, more recent criticism has provided useful and complex readings of the architectural form of Hill's poetry, with critics such as Natalie Pollard and Jennifer Kilgore-Caradec emphasising the palimpsestic fabric of Hill's poems, as well as the way in which they engage with a multitude of sources and traditions. In a special online issue of *Eborakon* magazine, published in 2016, Kilgore-Caradec writes about the European nature of Hill's poetry.[15] She provides an overview of the profusion of international writers who have influenced Hill's development as a poet, and provides a short sketch of such sources, arranging them alphabetically. She takes us from Aquinas, through to Barth, Calvin, Dante, Ibsen, Péguy, Rahner, Weil, and Wittgenstein, to name some of them.[16] In 2019, Natalie Pollard also stressed that readings of Hill's poetry as invested exclusively in English landscape are not useful. In her article '"Like a Mason Addressing a Block": Materiality and Design in Geoffrey Hill's Poetry', she argues that it is largely a focus on the subterranean and

[12] See Bolton, 'Empire and Atonement', 293
[13] Waithe, 'Hill, Ruskin, and Intrinsic Value', 134
[14] Ibid.
[15] Jennifer Kilgore-Caradec, 'On Geoffrey Hill' in *Eborakon. Special Online Issue: Europe*, at https://www.eborakon.com/special-online-issue-europe/kilgore-caradec-on-geoffrey-hill/
[16] Ibid.

a consequent disregard of Hill's interest in built structures that leads to a construal of Hill's historicity as 'motivated chiefly by representations of lost or denigrating English heritage, and nostalgic recollections of landscape and soil'.[17] She adds:

> There are other structures in place. Such accounts render invisible Hill's long-running investment in architecture, and his fraught attention to the politics of redeploying existing built forms.[18]

Such redeployments engage with a wide array of materials and traditions, and the complexity of Hill's historical thought is revealed through the multitude of architectural layers foundational to his poetry. The three sequences where architecture is central, i.e., 'An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture in England', published in *Tenebrae* in 1978, *Hymns to Our Lady of Chartres,* and the posthumous section 36 in *The Book of Baruch,* are all telling examples of how Hill seeks to position his poetry architecturally at the point of tension between an incorporation of tradition into his writing, and a resistance in the face of complete integration into it. R.S. Thomas, George Herbert, T.S. Eliot, Péguy, Pugin, Newman, Ivor Gurney, and Henry Adams are writers whose presence is made manifest in Hill's account of ecclesiastical architecture; but despite various degrees of affinity expressed with them throughout his writings, non-alignment remains a key element defining his position relative to the network of literary voices with which he enters into dialogue. The underlying reasons for Hill's positioning at a point slightly outside the centre of the tradition he writes about are as much aesthetic as they are theological. Undertaking a theology of language would entail that the 'shock of semantic recognition' is also the shock of 'ethical recognition', writes Hill in his essay 'Language, Suffering, and Silence' first published in 1999 (*CCW* 405). This flow from the semantic to the ethical is at play in Hill's architectural references

[17] Pollard, '"Like a Mason Addressing a Block', 242
[18] Ibid.

too, as he often makes the underlying patchwork of history recognisable enough to any reader familiar with the cultural heritage of 'Judeo-Christian-Senecan Europe', as Jennifer Kilgore-Caradec calls it, as a whole.[19] The shock of ethical recognition is achieved through Hill's negotiation of his own position within tradition, and his deliberate adoption of a position outside the centre of the matter. Situating himself as such enables him to bear witness to the past he engages with – and hence to attempt to atone for the historical sins which he sees Western Culture as having inherited collectively.

In terms of architectural presence, the poetic tradition with which Hill engages is rich and varied, and his approach to the topic shows an acute awareness of the historical and literary underpinnings of architectural thought. The relationship between architecture and poetry, Kirstie Blair argues in her study *Form and Faith in Victorian Architecture and Religion*, became a matter of central interest in Victorian times.[20] Neither building nor text were seen as self-contained, independent art forms, she argues, but rather as forms echoing each other – as well as music – in a continuous flow where form, materiality, and space are as much material as they are symbolic.[21] Blair uses Isaac Williams's introduction to his volume *The Baptistery* (1844) as a starting point for her argument:

> The Church,'tis thought, is wakening through the land,
> And seeking vent for the o'erloaded hearts
> Which she has kindled—pours her forth anew—
> Breathes life in ancient worship,—from their graves
> Summons the slumbering Arts to wait on her,
> Music and Architecture, varied forms
> Of Painting, Sculpture and of Poetry;[22]

[19] Kilgore-Caradec, 'On Geoffrey Hill'
[20] Kirstie Blair, *Form and Faith in Victorian Poetry and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 53-4
[21] Ibid., 53
[22] Isaac Williams, *The Baptistery, or The Way of Eternal Life* (Oxford: J.H. Parker, 1842), x, quoted in ibid, 51

The mention of 'music' and 'architecture' first in his list, Blair argues, is indicative of the fact that these forms played a crucial role in the 'revival of Anglican worship in the early to mid-nineteenth-century'.[23] Faith, she goes on to suggest, is made apparent through structure, and this enables a movement from the physical towards the symbolical. Buildings cannot ever fully embody the reality of God, but symbolism can help to make 'the divine comprehensible and present to fallen humans'.[24] A concern with how poetry and architecture can be similar in terms of composition, and how composition can symbolise the divine in a postlapsarian world, is not unique to the nineteenth century. George Herbert in particular is a poet grappling with such questions, with his *Temple* mimicking the structure of a church, and taking the reader from 'The Church-Porch' through to 'The Altar', as the structure of faith is laid out on the page in front of us, and explored artistically, symbolically, as well as theologically; and Isaac Williams's *Cathedral* was influenced by Herbert's *Temple*.[25]

Yet the Victorian era saw an escalation of interest in the church building itself, possibly as a consequence of a culmination of socio-political and demographic factors. Blair, in the same study, points out that there was an expansion of population in the nineteenth century, and the Church Building Act of 1818, which legislated the building of churches, acted as a driving force for the completion of many new churches.[26] Victorian medievalism was one of the reasons why the Gothic Revival movement reached its apogee in the nineteenth century; but the interest in Gothic architecture was not merely focused on the aesthetics of form. Rather, it emerged also as a question of religious and theological grounding. In this connection, it needs to be mentioned that the nineteenth century was also the period of the Catholic Emancipation, a process which culminated in the passing in 1829 of 'The Catholic

[23] Blair, *Form and Faith*, 51
[24] Ibid., 53-4
[25] See ibid., 73
[26] Ibid., 54

Relief Act', which allowed Roman Catholics to sit in Parliament.[27] With Roman Catholics no longer legally persecuted, and allowed to hold property and political office, the question of Catholic form and aesthetics also gained prominence. The socio-political debate on the situation of Catholics in the United Kingdom and Ireland occurred at a time when theological debate was also flourishing at the heart of the Church of England too.

It was also in this context that the Oxford Movement emerged. The Oxford Movement itself is an interesting departure point for Hill's 'Apology': it is institutional in nature, and at the same time, a quest for a return to a more inherent experience and understanding of faith. Eugene R. Fairweather's study *The Oxford Movement* informs us that

> the Tractarian Movement sought a renewed awareness of transcendent mystery and a renewed sense of human life as guided by a transcendent power to a transcendent god.[28]

The 'supernatural' emphasis in the practice and experience of religion is a concept which brings to mind the '[r]eligion of the heart' (*Tenebrae* 22) in Hill's 'Apology' ; it is nonetheless important to consider – both in relation to the Tractarian Movement and to Hill's 'religion of the heart' – that this does not entail a romanticised or idealised view of faith as experienced only instinctively. In the same study, Fairweather mentions that the members of the Oxford Movement were unlike the Evangelicals, who 'had been striving mightily in the service of a grace-centered Christianity, without developing an elaborate ecclesiology'.[29] The Oxford Movement, however, was influenced by 'the traditional High Church appeal to history', and 'saw the gospel as the story of God's real intervention in human history', and the Church itself was 'the tangible, historical link between the historical Incarnation and

[27] 'Roman Catholic Relief Act 1829', 1829 Chapter 7, 10 Geo 4, at http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo4/10/7/data.pdf.
[28] Eugene R. Fairweather, *The Oxford Movement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1964), 5
[29] Ibid.

believers in every day and age'.[30] This account of the Tractarian focus on history is a useful insight into Hill's own mechanism of historical awareness and grounding throughout his poetry. The idea of the Church as a tangible link between the human and the divine is complicated by Hill's focus on human existence within a postlapsarian world as marked by a separation from the divine. Ultimately, the Church as an institution, but also the church as a building, and as a liturgical space destined for devotion is meant to bring man closer to the divine. Still, it is also inescapably an object which exists within linear postlapsarian time, and which is therefore subject to corruption and dereliction.

In his study of the Oxford Movement, Fairweather quotes Newman's poem 'Sacrilege', which is an interesting point of contrast to Hill's take on the link between past and present when it comes to the Church. Newman's lines read as follows:

> The Church shone brightly in her youthful days
> Ere the world on her smiled;
> So now, an outcast, she would pour her rays
> Keen, free, and undefiled;
> Yet would I not that arm of force were mine,
> Which thrusts her from her awful ancient shrine.[31]

Newman's 'awful ancient shrine' ('awful' here is used in its archaic sense, meaning 'full of awe', rather than in its contemporary negative sense) again parallels the more intuitive form of religion expressed by Hill in the 'Apology'. However, the binary between a Church which 'shone brightly in her youthful days' and 'an outcast' at the time of writing does not emerge from Hill's poetry.[32] History, in the 'Apology', as well as in the other sequences exploring church architecture, such as section 36 of *The Book of Baruch* and *Hymns to Our Lady of Chartres*, is explored as a continuum of both destruction and devotion. For him, there is no

[30] Ibid.
[31] John Henry Newman, 'Sacrilege' in *Verses on Various Occasions* (London: Longmans Green, 1910), 143, quoted in ibid., 7
[32] Ibid.

separation between a good past and a bad present, but the past is seen as informing the present in a valuable way, as indicated by Rowan Williams in his essay 'The Standing of Poetry: Geoffrey Hill's Quartet'

> [t]he point is not that the past is good, and the present bad by comparison; it is that a present which has no sense either of gift or of loss in relation to the past is in serious ways a barbarized and impoverished environment.[33]

The past is in this sense made present rather than simply recalled, as the events, styles, and voices of history are brought to the forefront and allowed to inform the reader about history, and the poet attempts in this way to express a moral position about the human condition and its barbarity, both past and present.

1.2. '[T]he sacred well, the hidden shrine'

Hill's sonnet-sequence 'An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture in England' is formed against the background of an interest in the resurgence of Catholic artistic and devotional forms. Throughout the sequence, Hill's sonnets reference a variety of writers who have converted to Catholicism, ranging from Pugin, whose *An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture in England* lends the title to the poem, to Newman and G.M. Hopkins. Considered in the context of *Tenebrae*, the volume in which the sequence appeared, his interest in Catholic conversion becomes more evident, with the term being used to refer primarily to the Roman Catholic service which takes place during Holy Week. Yet the echoes of voices associated with the Oxford Movement and with the Gothic Revival are also

[33] Williams, 'The Standing of Poetry', 57-8

accompanied by echoes of Renaissance writing, as well as more recent, twentieth-century presences.

'And, after all, it is to them we return' (*Tenebrae* 22), reads the first line of the sequence, announcing a series of returns throughout the poems to 'them', which can be read as signifying the myriad of literary voices brought together as the basic structure of the sequence. The voices informing the architecture of the sonnets are at times rung loudly and directly, such as the borrowing of titles from Pugin ('An Apology') and Newman ('Loss and Gain'). At other times, they emerge obliquely, as they are assimilated into the structure of the sequence, and allowed to break out at particular times. Milton's '[s]isters of the sacred well' (Lycidas) is recognised in 'the sacred well, the hidden shrine' (*Tenebrae* 22).[34] Yeats's ending of 'Byzantium', 'that dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea', is refashioned as 'those muddy-hued, those midge-tormented ghosts' (*Tenebrae* 22).[35] There are Hopkinsian undertones to 'spires that / sprung / crisp-leaved as though from dropping-wells' (*Tenebrae* 24). The 'dropping-wells' Hill takes from Tennyson's 'dropping-wells of fire', but the lines also remind us of '[a]s tumbled over rim in roundy wells' in 'As kingfishers catch fire', while 'sprung' alludes to Hopkins's sprung rhythm.[36] John Keble's voice in his poem 'Third Sunday After epiphany' is heard throughout the sequence:

> Where far away and high above,
> In maze on maze the trancèd sight
> Strays, mindful of that heavenly love
> Which knows no end in depth or height,
> While the strong breath of Music seems
> To waft us ever on, soaring in blissful dreams.
>
> What though in poor and humble guise

[34] John Milton, *Lycidas: Annotated Poems by English Authors*, eds. Rev. E.T. Stevens, Rev. D. Morris (London: Longmans Green, 1877), 15

[35] W.B. Yeats, 'Byzantium' in *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1963), 280; see Christopher Ricks, '*Tenebrae* and at-one-ment' in *Geoffrey Hill: Essays on His Work*, ed. Peter Robinson (Milton Keynes and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1985), 64

[36] Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'As kingfishers catch fire' in 129 *The Major* Works, ed. Catherine Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 129; Lord Alfred Tennyson, *In Memoriam* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 98

> Thou here didst sojourn, cottage-born?
> Yet from thy glory in the skies
> Our earthly gold Thou dost not scorn.
> For Love delights to bring her best,
> And where Love is, that offering evermore is blest.[37]

In the context of a sequence engaging with ecclesiastical architecture, '[p]itched high above' (*Tenebrae* 28) reminds us of Keble's 'far away and high above', while 'mazes' and 'sojourn' in the first sonnet also bear resemblance to Keble's style.[38] The title of the first sonnet, 'Quaint Mazes', more directly references Shakespeare's 'quaint mazes in the wanton green' in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.[39] This suggests that the speaker of the sonnet is interested in landscape gardening:

> 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.
>
> On blustery lilac-bush and terrace-urn
> bedaubed with bloom Linnaean pentecosts
> put their pronged light; the chilly fountains burn.
> Religion of the heart, with trysts and quests
>
> and pangs of consolation, its hawk's hood
> twitched off for sweet carnality, again
> rejoices in old hymns of servitude,
>
> haunting the sacred well, the hidden shrine.
> It is the ravage of the heron wood;
> it is the rood blazing upon the green. (*Tenebrae* 22)

Michael J. Lewis writes, in *The Gothic Revival*, that the 'landscaped garden, that essential creation of eighteenth-century English culture' was the 'playground for indulging' thoughts

[37] John Keble, 'Third Sunday after Epiphany' in *The Christian Year* (London: Cassel, 1887), 10
[38] I want to stress Hill's connection to Keble and note that Hill read English at Keble College, Oxford, and was an Honorary Fellow of Keble. In 2016, a memorial service was held for him at Keble College. See http://www.keble.ox.ac.uk/about/events/memorial-service-for-professor-sir-geoffrey-hill
[39] William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, ed. Peter Holland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 160

about ‘violence’ and history, especially brought about by witnessing the ruins of abbeys from the Middle Ages.[40] For Hill, the language of remembrance is loaded with liturgical symbolism, as indicated by his use of the word ‘hosts’ – suggesting the Eucharistic ritual where the bread used for consecration is referred to as ‘host’ – as well as ‘pentecosts’, ‘sacred’, ‘shrine’, and ‘rood’. Liturgical symbolism is closely tied in with natural elements: the ‘shrine’ emerges as ‘hidden’ from the ‘mazes’ of the complex imagery and poetic voices underlying the sonnet. The structure appearing is tentative, and it is constructed through the use of separate references rather than direct depictions; the architectural substratum of the sonnet is similarly achieved through the incorporation of voices into itself. As he discusses the voices of the authors which Hill incorporates into his sonnet-sequence, Christopher Ricks notes that ‘Tennyson too is among the ghosts’, as he points out that Hill takes the phrase ‘dropping-wells’ from *In Memoriam*.[41] ‘[T]hose muddy hued and midge-tormented ghosts’ who rise ‘to be our hosts’ can all be viewed as the writers of the past, from Shakespeare through to Keble and Newman, as well as other voices bearing witness and creating a melee of voices from which Hill’s own writing emerges. As John Lyon has noted in ‘Geoffrey Hill and the Rack of the Sonnet’, ‘Hill was a poet of polyphony, many clashing voices’.[42] There is something Eucharistic about the representation of this polyphony as ghosts inhabiting the hosts, and this is representative of how the language of sacramentality inflects the architecture of Hill’s sonnets.

That Hill is concerned in this sonnet with structures and ecclesiastical architecture is also indicated by a note in *Tenebrae* (1978), explaining that the last line of the sonnet ‘is

[40] Michael J. Lewis, *The Gothic Revival* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2002), 14
[41] Ricks, ‘*Tenebrae* and at-one-ment’, 69
[42] John Lyon, ‘Geoffrey Hill and the Rack of the Sonnet’ in *Études anglaises*, 2018/2. Vol. 71., 140

indebted to Ronald Blythe, "Satan without Seraphs" in the *Listener,* 4 February 1971' (*CP* 1985, 204). What Hill is referring to is Blythe's passage, which reads:

> During the childhood reign of Edward VI the English spring cleaned the temples and there was an orgy of purification. But what did the ordinary parishioner feel as the rood blazed upon the green and the whitewash blotted out the saints?[43]

This confirms not only Hill's focus on the historical and dogmatic struggle brought about by the Reformation, but also the fact that the 'rood' is indicative of ecclesiastical architectural structure as rooted in historical context. Hill is hence turning his gaze towards Blythe himself, who is in turn looking at a very specific historical period, which saw the whitewashing of the interiors of churches in England. The image of the 'rood blazing upon the green' can in this context be read as a violent depiction of the opposition on the part of the Reformed Church to liturgical objects of cult, especially the veneration of images of saints, and crosses and crucifixes.[44] Burning crosses, sculptures, and images of devotion became a way of removing idolatry from the religious scene. As Eamon Duffy has noted, crosses such as the Boxley Rood – 'a long-discussed image which had movable eyes' – were seen as means of deception at the hands of monks.[45] The Boxley Rood was eventually burnt, and as Duffy writes, the destruction of the cross and similar objects of devotion was seen as a necessary means of putting an end to the practice of idolatry.[46]

The context of this 'blazing rood', then, contradicts romanticised readings of Hill as viewing 'the religion of the heart' as some sort of idealised version of an English past in tune

---

[43] Ronald Blythe, 'Satan without Seraphs', review of *Religion and the Decline of Magic,* by Keith Thomas. *Listener* (4 Feb 1971), 150

[44] John Calvin was a most vehement opponent of devotional objects such as crucifixes and icons as he viewed them as forms of idolatry: 'Do not men pay to images and statues the very same reverence which they pay to God? It is an error to suppose that there is any difference between this madness and that of the heathen. For God forbids us [..] to worship images'; John Calvin, *The Necessity of Reforming the Church*, trans. Henry Beveridge (London: W.H. Dalton, 1843), 15

[45] Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1992), 403

[46] Ibid., 404

with the English landscape and soil. Rather, it is a powerful and historically-grounded metaphor which depicts not unity with nature, but the violence done to ecclesiastical structures, mainly churches (the whitewashing) and liturgical objects. It also ties in with the Oxford Movement's focus on restoring an experience and practice of religion which was in touch with the immediacy of God's presence, rather than hinging on dogmatic rigidity. As Owen Chadwick writes in *The Mind of the Oxford Movement,* the movement was not 'dogmatic simply because it possessed or shared a particular theory of dogma'.[47] Rather, it 'saw dogma in relation to worship, to the numinous, to the movement of the heart, to the conscience and moral need, to the immediate experience of the hidden hand of God.'[48] In this sense, the fact that structure is suggested through objects of cult rather than direct description can also be read as part of Hill's engagement with Catholicism in the sequence.

This also depicts Hill's own concern with how the form of built structure can be symbolically represented through poetic form. However, the 'hidden' and tentative manner in which this is constructed indicates that despite the profusion of voices contributing to the sequence, Hill is obstinately refusing alignment with them. In this sense, his drawing on Catholicism in the sequence is not a matter of dogmatic endorsement, but rather a quest for a way to express an active stance of disagreement in the face of historical violence. Hill's 'Apology', is unrelenting in its refusal to position itself in utter harmony with the tradition with which he converses. A comparison with Herbert is useful in understanding how Hill moves through architectural space. The architectural structure of Herbert's *Temple* entails a progression through the physical space of the church, which is also indicative of a movement of faith. It moves from the porch – a space of in-betweenness, through to the altar, where

[47] Owen Chadwick, *The Mind of the Oxford Movement* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967), 11
[48] Ibid.

assent can take place. Writing about the historical grounding and secular functions of the church porch, Anne M. Myers notes:

> While most of the formal liturgical functions of the church porch were suppressed at the Reformation, the performative and socially binding nature of such rituals as baptism and marriage characterized many secular uses of the porch which were little affected by shifts in England's national religious identity. Like baptismal and marriage ceremonies, these uses had to do with moral or practical education, social surveillance, and the preservation of parochial histories. They were precepts and contracts cast in familiar, common, and often formulaic terms.[49]

But John David Walker notes that the porch is the space of conversion, where one becomes a candidate for priesthood, an argument which he fleshes out by drawing a parallel between Judaic and Christian ritual, as he writes:

> The Hebraic rite also prefigures Christian consecration in that (as St. Peter states) all Christians are a 'holy' and 'royal' priesthood (I Peter 2:5:9). In other words, Christian conversion, like the Hebraic ritual, makes every candidate a priest. Herbert, therefore, writing within this Christian tradition, bases the analogy between 'The Church-Porch' and the temple's porch on the ritual of priestly consecration.[50]

Indeed, as he reaches the altar, Herbert affirms that 'each part / Of my hard heart / Meets in this frame / To praise thy name.'[51] For Hill, however, the movement is not linear and does not progress towards full assent. It remains, to use a metaphor based on Hill's own phrase in 'The Minor Prophets', 'between the Porch / and the Altar' (*ATOCP* 1). The line break between 'Porch' and 'and the Altar' is indicative of the fragmented nature of Hill's assent.

[49] Anne M. Myers, *Literature and Architecture in Early Modern England* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2012), 110
[50] John David Walker, 'The Architectonics of George Herbert's "The Temple"' in *ELH* Vol.29, No. 3, (September 1962), 292
[51] George Herbert, 'The Altar' in *The Complete Poetry*, eds. John Drury, Victoria Moul (London: Penguin Classics, 2005), 26

At the same time, his architecture in the 'Apology' remains firmly anchored in tradition, as it incorporates the voices of past authors into its own fabric. The sonnets of the 'Apology' move through and also against this intricate patchwork of literary and historical references. This is a type of movement reminiscent of the description in his early poem *Genesis*, published in *For the Unfallen* in 1959, of the struggle of the salmon to move against the ebb: '[t]he tough pig-headed salmon strove, / Ramming the ebb, in the tide's pull, / To reach the steady hills above' (*FTU* 15). The struggle to reach the 'steady hills above' and the venture to erect the structure of a church or a poem both imply the same upward movement arising from a push against the flow. The fact that Hill's poetry is anchored in a resistance of some sort has been noted by critics. Kenneth Haynes writes in '"Perplexed Resistance": The Criticism of Geoffrey Hill' that Hill views resistance as manifesting itself in three different ways, namely as 'reciprocating, mutually inflecting interaction', 'redemption and transfiguration', and 'constant, vigilant self-heckling counterpointing', adding however that they are 'consistent' with a mediation of a relationship between the 'passive' and the 'active'. For Hill, Haynes adds, this relationship often takes the shape of 'conversion, co-presence, complicity, doubling, and straddling'.[52] A similar analysis of Hill's negotiation of tension comes from Brian Cummings in his essay 'Recusant Hill', where he writes that Hill's interest in recusant Catholic writers such as Robert Southwell is doubled by a literary 'recusancy' of his own. Cummings argues that

> the idea of recusancy – a form of vexed or even self-denying personal affirmation, or as an embrace of an idea of personal or political reformation that is also a rejection of the possibility of such reformation as conventionally understood – seems fundamental to Hill's concept of the vocation of poetry.[53]

[52] Kenneth Haynes, '"Perplexed Resistance": The Criticism of Geoffrey Hill' in *GHAHC*, 215
[53] Cummings, 'Recusant Hill', 32

The term ‘recusant’, Cummings stresses, is generally avoided by historians of the Reformation, with more specific terms such as ‘“England’s Catholic community”’ being preferred but Hill seems drawn to it, particularly to its ‘allusive, and precisely non-denominational resonance’.[54] A similar ‘broadening’ of religious terminology into a wider use which enables him to avoid the restrictions of dogmatism and explore theological questions in his poetry has also been noticed by Kathryn Murphy.[55] In the same volume on Hill’s later works, she writes about the significance of confession to the poet. Confession, Murphy argues, interests Hill in its historical and Christian sense, but he views it by extension as an obligation to speak out against injustice. This sense of confession, and more broadly confessionalism, is tangled up with the historical use of the term, and especially, Murphy points out, with the ‘Confessional Church’ of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Kreisau Circle.[56] However, she adds that

> [w]hat Hill takes from it […] is a broader sense of speaking out in danger against power, or on behalf of the persecuted: integrity in the face of threat.[57]

In a discussion of confessional poetry in the sixteenth century, Brian Cummings points out that confession ‘is a way of speaking’, ‘a ritual means of uncovering the truth’, but also ‘a way of constructing the language of truth’.[58] Hill’s building of structure through the incorporation of and misalignment with literary precedent is at once a form of recusancy and a confessional act understood both rhetorically and ethically. Historical awareness is inescapable, and it is also awareness of man’s separation from the divine, and therefore of the sinful nature of humanity.

---

[54] Ibid.
[55] Murphy, ‘Geoffrey Hill and Confession’, 136
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Brian Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 347

There are glimpses of darkness wrought into the form of the sonnets, indicating again that existence within history – both past and present – is marked by the pervasiveness of sin and human fallenness, and drawing attention to the necessity of bearing witness to it. The ghostly voices of the past are 'muddy-hued' – the earthy suggestion of 'muddy' hints that they are both bound to history and tainted by it, especially when the contrast of the symbolism of the purity of the Holy Ghost as a white dove is considered; they are also 'midge-tormented' (*Tenebrae* 22). The third section of the 'Apology', 'Who Are These Coming to the Sacrifice?' borrows its title from the first line of the fourth stanza of John Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn'. Liturgical language is here interposed with hints of institutional bickering:

> High voices in domestic chapels; praise;
> praise-worthy feuds; new-burgeoned spires that sprung
> crisp-leaved as though from dropping-wells. The young
> ferns root among our vitrified tears. (*Tenebrae* 24)

There is an ironic effect achieved by the repetition of 'praise' in the sequence 'praise; / praise-worthy feuds', indicating a gap between liturgical devotion in 'chapels' and personal and political investment. The language of the natural is interspersed with architectural features ('spires [...] sprung' and 'ferns root'). In Keats's poem too, there is mention of a 'green altar', as Hill's sonnet builds both its structure and meaning upon the past voices it draws on.[59] A new gap is highlighted in Hill's sonnet, namely one opening up between a more natural form of faith and devotion – perhaps the '[r]eligion of the heart' mentioned in the first sonnet (*Tenebrae* 22) – and dogmatic 'feuds'. The '[r]eligion of the heart' is connected to historical context rather than being simply a subjective experience, and is potentially referring to pre-Reformation religious practices in England. The idea that the poet

[59] John Keats, 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' in *John Keats: The Complete Poems*, ed. John Barnard (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), 345

might have this in mind is consistent with his dwelling in the sequence on the writings of authors who have converted to Catholicism, including John Henry Newman's novel *Loss and Gain*.

Feuds, institutional bickering, and considerations of the violence which took place during the Reformation show how bound human activity is to history. In a postlapsarian world all artistic, and particularly linguistically-artistic expression as Hill mentions in his essay 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"' (*CCW* 3), has been tarnished by Original Sin; in the same vein, extricating oneself from historical context is unattainable, as Hill mentions in his interview with *The Oxford Student.*[60] This makes the balance between using one's own voice to recuse, confess, and build new architectural structures, while at the same time resisting the pull of dogmatism, a fine one to strike. It is impossible to be aware of history and its contexts and, at the same time, to construe the 'religion of the heart' as an idealised devotional form which can exist outside the boundaries of dogmatism. To have a 'religion of the heart' outside the constraints of doctrinal commitment and dogmatic debate is to undertake an impossible task. The speaker of the sonnet-sequence is well aware of this, and the very dialogue initiated with Catholic convert writers is indicative of it. Critics reading Hill as a nostalgic poet rejecting novelty and falling back onto a notion of an idealised past have disregarded the historical reality of how fraught with violence this past really is, especially in the context of the history of the Catholic community in England. Hill's interest in the Catholic martyrs is a recurrent theme throughout his critical writings, with essays such as 'The Absolute Reasonableness of Robert Southwell' and 'Language, Suffering, and Silence' being concerned with the ethical implications of the actions taken by those persecuted for their faith in Elizabethan England. This is closely related to Hill's interest in other forms of

[60] Campbell, 'Interview: Geoffrey Hill, Oxford Professor of Poetry'

persecution and martyrdom throughout history, such as the Holocaust, the First World War, as well as the Armenian genocide, as shown by his poem 'The Songbook of Sebastian Arrurruz'. This further emphasises the breadth of Hill's engagement with global history, and with the universal violence of history.

Confession, then, in order to 'speak out' against violence and fulfil this broader role which Murphy writes about, needs to speak of such violence, and Hill's historically-attuned consciousness attempts to do so by voicing the past in such a way.[61] In the early poem 'History as Poetry', published in the volume *King Log* in 1968, the poet tackles a similar topic, when he writes '[p]oetry / Unearths from among the speechless dead' (*KL* 41). Poetry speaks for the speechless, and the voices of the past blend into each other forming this new poetic construction. In his 'Apology', Pugin bemoaned the adoption of styles as something impure, and saw this as something which went against the idea of a national, Catholic architecture. He writes about this:

> Amid this motley group (oh! miserable degradation!) the venerable form and sacred detail of our national and Catholic architecture may be discerned; but how adopted? Not on consistent principle, not on authority, not as the expression of our faith, our government, or country, but as one of the disguises of the day, to be put on and off at pleasure, and used occasionally as circumstances or private caprice may suggest.[62]

Yet in Hill's sonnet, it is exactly a 'motley group' of adapted styles which is embraced and allowed to act as a stepping-stone for the architecture of his poetry. Pugin's own call for pure form is incorporated into this palimpsestic structure of voices and styles. There is, for this reason, a great penchant for paradox in Hill's sequence, as his embracing of tradition through this incorporation of voices often stands counter to the semantic implications of his verse. At

[61] Murphy, 'Geoffrey Hill and Confession', 136
[62] Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin, *An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture in England*. (Edinburgh: J. Grant, 1895), 2

a linguistic level, this paradox often arises from a gap which can at times open up between the stylistic incorporation of past speech patterns and the actively confessional state in which the poet finds himself. Cummings, in 'Recusant Hill', draws attention to this paradox, stressing, in connection to the 'Lachrimae' sequence, that

> There is […] a paradox of self-presentation in this sequence. It is as if the rhythm of the verse works in a contrary direction to what is being said.[63]

The speech inflections and rhythms of Elizabethan England are particularly distinguishable in *Tenebrae*, Cummings argues, where Hill allows himself a 'grace' of rhythm rarely found elsewhere in his work. But the gap between the rhythms of speech and the poet's own voice reveals yet another gap, this time an ethical one, and pinpoints the ethical difficulty entailed by writing poetry in this way. There is an 'ethical constraint', as Cummings describes it inherent in Hill's position as confessor of historical sin and witness to historical suffering. To claim this history as one's own would be a gesture of 'wilful self-aggrandizement'.[64]

That the 'Lachrimae' sequence is telling of the paradox within which the poetic voice finds itself throughout *Tenebrae* has also been stressed by Hugh Haughton, in his essay '"How fit a title…": Title and Authority in the Work of Geoffrey Hill':

> The kind of Christian architecture that most interests Hill the poet, at least in *Tenebrae*, is paradox. Paradox subjects 'the language of power' to a different kind of critique by inverting its power-relations […] There is a vivid case of this at the end of '6. Lachrimae Antiquae Novae', where the speaker proclaims: 'Dominion is swallowed with your blood'.[65]

[63] Cummings, 'Recusant Hill', 38
[64] Ibid., 39
[65] Haughton, '"How fit a title…"', 143

'Dominion' here is a double-edged sword, since, Haughton argues, it can be read as either man taking part in Christ's dominion by drinking His blood, or man's swallowing of his own 'desire for dominion' along with Christ's blood; he adds:

> There is an eerie 'triumphalism' here, akin to that seen by Nietzsche in his analysis of the biblical axiom 'he that humbleth himself shall be exalted'.[66]

Escaping such paradox of self-presentation is arguably impossible for Hill, as breaking away from it would entail an abandonment of the necessity to 'confess' and bear witness to historical trauma; nonetheless, to 'confess' through the medium of poetry means to 'confess' artistically and through a show of aesthetic force, no matter how humble its aim is. There is, in this sense, an 'exaltation' of the poetic voice which is as impossible to extricate from what is being asserted in the poems as it is paradoxical to their 'confessional' intentions.[67]

In the same essay on Hill and confession, Kathryn Murphy also draws attention to the paradox of there being a 'personal dimension' to Hill's attempt to disengage from the sense of confessionalism associated with the poetry of Plath and Lowell. Confession, Murphy adds, is in this sense also 'concession', as illustrated by Hill's own admission, between parentheses, that '(I have made / an elegy for myself it / is true)' in 'September Song' (*KL* 19). An incorporation of this type of confession into the architecture of a poem also entails an acceptance of such a personal exaltation of the poetic voice through what Murphy describes as the problematics of an 'aestheticization of violence and suffering, the appropriation of the voice of victims, and matters of decorum in speaking of horror'.[68] This kind of tension inherent in form is expressed by Hill, much later, in *Expostulations on the Volcano* as '[s]tress is at the heart of architecture' (*BH* 668). The line in *Expostulations* appears not to

---

[66] Ibid.
[67] I use 'confess' and 'confessional' and in the broadened sense proposed by Murphy in her essay; see Murphy, 'Geoffrey Hill and Confession', 136
[68] Ibid., 139

relate to the preceding or following lines. It comes across as an authorial intrusion, but the thought that '[s]tress is at the heart of architecture' reemphasises the concept of tension as a bounding material for form. There is stress in most of the 'Apology', and its sources vary from the paradox between tone and semantics, to the way in which architecture itself is suggested and construed. Landscape is also such a source of tension, as it is often used in close connection to architecture, and employed as a means of drawing attention to the cyclicality of historical violence. In the final sonnet of the sequence, 'The Herefordshire Carol', the poet writes:

> So to celebrate that kingdom: it grows
> greener in winter, essence of the year;
> the apple-branches musty with green fur.
> In the viridian darkness of its yews
>
> it is an enclave of perpetual vows
> broken in time. Its truth shows disrepair,
> disfigured shrines, their stones of gossamer,
> Old Moore's astrology, all hallows (*Tenebrae* 34)

Here too, liturgical language and intimations of an ecclesiastical construction are obscured through the language of landscape. In this final sonnet, there is almost a symmetrical return to the ethereal intimation of built form in the first sonnet. The concealment of liturgical objects suggested in 'Quaint Mazes' continues here through suggestions of sacred forms within the natural landscape, such as the 'enclave of perpetual vows', the shrine again, and the 'yews', as trees which are commonly associated with churchyards. The 'shrines' here are 'disfigured', reinforcing Hill's preoccupation with the threat to and consequences of destruction on liturgical objects.

At the same time, even when landscape informs the language of architecture, what is being intimated is far from a natural-organic blend between nature and built form; rather, these juxtapositions are most often reminders of violence, acting as tokens of the overarching

cruelty which has shaped every aspect of material form – landscape and buildings included. The 'blazing rood upon the green' (*Tenebrae* 22) in 'Quaint Mazes' is a telling example of the uneasy connotations of the poet's bringing together of landscape, and liturgical objects and architecture. But such instances are numerous; '[t]he North Sea batters our shepherds' cottages' (*Tenebrae* 23), writes Hill in the second sonnet of the sequence, 'Damon's Lament for His Clorinda', showing the raw, destructive force of landscape in contrast with the manmade 'cottages' (*Tenebrae* 23.) The 'shepherds' cottages' can also be read as a reference to churches because of the Christian association of Christ with the Good Shepherd. Further, 'young / ferns root among our vitrified tears' (*Tenebrae* 24) in 'Who Are These Coming to the Sacrifice?', in an image where 'vitrified' suggests stained glass windows in churches ('to vitrify', according to the *OED*, means to 'convert into glass or a glasslike substance', from the Latin 'vitrum', meaning glass).[69] There is a sense of sadness wrought into the image of tears turned into glass, while the ferns taking root among them can suggest further ruination, as one can imagine ferns growing around the ruins of a disused building. 'A Short History of British India (II)' shows us further examples of the link between landscape, nature's cyclicality, and destruction: '[s]pring jostles the flame-tree' and '[t]he flittering candles of the wayside shrines / melt into dawn' (*Tenebrae* 26), create images of liturgical devotion ('candles', and once again 'shrines'), as well as violence and destruction through fire ('jostles', 'flame', 'melt').

In 'Loss and Gain', landscape and architecture are interspersed with each other and reemphasise the same indication of sadness and violence, with 'lone bells in gritty belfries' 'pitched […] above the shallows of the sea'; the idea of dereliction further intensifies as the poetic voice takes us through the 'brown stumps of headstones' which 'tamp into the ling /

[69] 'Vitrify, *v*', 1, *OED*, Vol 19; in French, the term 'vitrail', which shares the same root is used to refer to stained glass. See 'Vitrail, aux, n. *m*', *Le Nouveau Petit Robert, Édition de 1993* (Paris: SNL Le Robert, 2008)

the ruined and the ruinously strong.' (*Tenebrae* 28). Among the architectural forms intertwined with the surrounding landscape, 'Platonic England grasps its tenantry' (*Tenebrae* 28) with its 'wild-eyed poppies' reminding us of war, as the poppy is a symbol for remembrance of those fallen especially during the First World War. This however is not an image of nostalgic and praiseworthy remembrance, but a dual and uneasy image which both pays tribute to 'the ruined' and draws attention to the 'ruinously strong'. The sonnet continues:

> Vulnerable to each other the twin forms
>
> of sleep and waking touch the man who wakes
> to sudden light, who thinks that this becalms
> even the phantoms of untold mistakes. (*Tenebrae* 28)

'[S]udden light', then, does not atone for past mistakes, and the 'twin forms', read alongside the juxtaposition of architectural forms with landscape and natural cycles, shows that what is being explored is the problematics of history as a repetition of past mistakes. It becomes clear in this context that the 'Apology' is not a nostalgic poet's cry for a lost idealised England, but a confessional stance against the violence of history and its continuous, repeatable threat.[70] Writing about the prophetic voice in 'Canaan', Marcus Waithe notes that 'Hill associates the seer with an exasperated cycle of unfulfilled hope', and contends that '[t]he veil of human history has remained resolutely in place'.[71] The same cyclicality of history and its consequent inescapability is also at play in Hill's sonnet-sequence.

Hill's uneasy negotiation of history and tradition as both alignment and non-alignment is also reflected in the use of the sonnet form in his 'Apology'; each of the thirteen sections is

[70] I use 'confession' again in the broadened sense proposed by Murphy; see Murphy, 'Geoffrey Hill and Confession', 138

[71] Marcus Waithe, '"Whose Jerusalem"? – Prophecy and the Problem of Destination in Hill's "Canaan" and "Churchill's Funeral"' in *English*, Vol. 51 (Autumn 2002), 267

made up of fourteen lines, yet the way they align themselves with traditional sonnet forms follows the same pattern of eccentricity in relation to tradition. The sonnets can be described loosely as Petrarchan sonnets, but the two constituent parts of the traditional Petrarchan sonnet – an octave and a sestet – are each broken down into two halves. So, Hill's sonnets are made up of two four-line stanzas and two three-line stanzas. The rhyme pattern often does follow loosely the Petrarchan sonnet. To take the second sonnet, 'Damon's Lament for His Chlorinda' as an example: the rhyme pattern follows the ABBAABBA structure of the Petrarchan sonnet in the first eight lines: 'ridges' (line 1) – 'bridges' (line 4) – 'cottages' (line 5) – 'vestiges' (line 8) and 'Penistone' (line 2) – 'Don' (line 3) – 'sun' (line 6) – 'gone' (line 7). The broken sestet follows the CDCDCD pattern of the Petrarchan sonnet: 'child' (line 9) – 'cold' (line 11) – 'threshold' (line 13) and 'down' (line 10) – 'clown' (line 12) – 'own' (line 14) (*Tenebrae* 23). Other sonnets are more loosely based on the traditional pattern, but what this adherence to form accompanied by the fracturing of the octave and the sestet shows is the same concomitant desire for integration into and questioning of tradition. Form and symbolism mirror each other, and there is brokenness inherent in man's separation from God within history; 'perpetual vows' are 'broken in time' (*Tenebrae* 34) as written in the final sonnet of the sequence, 'The Herefordshire Carol'. This brokenness finds its way into the architecture of Hill's poetry, as suggested not least by the title of his collected volume, *Broken Hierarchies*.

1.3. '[D]rama and trauma'

Tied to the idea of form and its inevitable brokenness is also that of poetic tone, and this concern is made evident by Hill in his analysis of Gurney's 'achievement' in 'Andromeda Over Tewkesbury', which Hill views as composing an 'architecture of rhythm and phrasing that is at once "laboured" and "bare" and "exalted"' (*CCW* 444).[72] What he notices in particular is that Gurney's poem is made up of 'hoarded bits and pieces', and that the rhyme and syntax structure can make it sound '"amateurish"' (*CCW* 444) at times. The 'heavy burden of echo and obsessed recollection' (*CCW* 444) which Hill attributes to Gurney's verse is reminiscent of his own burden of echo and recollection in his engagements with architecture. Like Gurney's '[s]quare tower, carved upward by the laboured thought', Hill's own poetic architecture is carved through a careful labour of thought, semantics, form, and an act of witness through recollection.[73] Tone, speech, syntax, and rhythm remain pervasive concerns for Hill throughout his writings, and section 36 of *The Book of Baruch* shows how enduring his preoccupation with these questions in connection to architecture is. The first stanza of the sequence reads:

> Like much else rebuilt out of brick dust, ash, and silt of soot; a holocaust in
> that word's true cast: a multiplex burnt offering, residue of scorched
> hollows, roast flesh, hallows torched, when the City went up.
> Roman and Saxon roused from half-houseled sleep where they had housed.
>
> The font cover here a static fountain of detail divinely stressed.
>
> All Hallows Barking: let her take precedence in this litany and purview of holy
> residence; saint-neighboured neighbourhood, its subterrane of the
> uncanny; and lost detritus of the not to be doubted many who were tried

[73] Ivor Gurney, 'Andromeda over Tewkesbury' in *Collected Poems of Ivor Gurney*, ed. P.J. Kavanagh (Oxford Oxford University Press, 1982), 120

> in faith, who stood forth for one truth or another, of whom no record survives in the decommissioned hives of ecclesiastical and common law, but of whom some 'noble essences' – Thomas Browne – remain. (*BB* 15)

Here, the poet initiates what can be seen as an inventory of City of London churches which have suffered destruction, a theme which shows his pervasive interest in the question of ecclesiastical architecture and its relationship to violence. The speaker's linguistic choices once again blur out the boundaries between expressions of shocking violence and liturgical-religious connotations.

One image suffused with such duality is that of the 'holocaust', which, considered in its 'true cast', means literally 'a whole burn offering', etymologically derived from the Greek 'ὅλο-ς' ('whole'), and 'καυστός, καυτός', meaning 'burnt'.[74] A 'burnt offering', Hill emphasises, as he draws attention to the primary, literal meaning of the word. Liturgical implications also surface, as inherent in the term is the allusion to the Judaic 'burnt offering', a sacrifice where, according to *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, 'all of the animal's flesh is consumed on the altar'.[75] It is hard, however, especially with a poet as historically aware as Hill, to ignore the other implications of the word 'holocaust', i.e., the systematic murder of over six million Jews in Nazi Germany during the Second World War. In drawing attention to the historical use of the term to signify the Jewish sacrificial offering, the poet is retreating into the 'taciturnity' (*CCW* 29) of that which remains unspoken. This is a concept which he explores throughout his critical writings in essays such as 'The Absolute Reasonableness of Robert Southwell', 'Language, Suffering, and Silence', and 'Tacit Pledges', as he considers the question of silence as an action itself. 'Taciturnity' (*CCW* 29), Hill argues while taking Robert Southwell's refusal to speak as a stepping-stone for his

[74] 'Holocaust, *sb*'1, *OED,* Vol. 7
[75] Baruch J. Schwartz, 'Burnt Offering', in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, ed. Adele Berlin and Maxine Grossman, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 154

analysis, is an act of eloquence, and plunges us into the 'hinterland', or 'back-country' of 'what might, for better or worse, have been said' (*CCW* 29-30). 'Tacit Pledges' is a title borrowed from Henry James's novel *The Tragic Muse*, and particularly from the scene which depicts Nick Dormer, who in the presence of Charles Carteret

> [f]ound himself immersed in an atmosphere of tacit pledges which constituted the very medium of intercourse and yet made him draw his breath a little in pain when, for a moment, he measured them.[76]

What James's style seeks to do in its 'alertness of intelligence and sensibility', Hill contends, is to 'measure' the 'tacit pledges', as well as the 'pain', and 'to do so with a measure of decorum' (*CCW* 410-11).

In its revelation of the 'holocaust' in its 'true [etymological and liturgical] cast', the poem too is made to operate within this 'hinterland' of style (see *CCW* 29-30), and perhaps to attempt to assuage the paradox of confessing while appropriating the voices of victims at the same time.[77] Hence there is 'a sense of decorum' (*CCW* 411) sought in Hill's bearing witness to historical violence and suffering in section 36 of *The Book of Baruch*, as he attempts to avoid direct reference or naming. It is impossible to ignore the implications of 'holocaust', especially in the context of a poem sequence about the London Blitz, which happened at the beginning of the Second World War, and yet these implications remain 'tacit pledges' (*CCW* 410), resisting explicit enunciation. This is a way of bearing witness, but speaking of such atrocities carries with it the uneasy question of the aesthetic appropriation of violence.

In this posthumous sequence, architecture itself is placed at the centre; unlike the earlier 'Apology', where past voices intricately contributed to the architecture of the sequence, here it is ecclesiastical architecture (and its destruction) that lies at the core of the architecture of

---

[76] Henry James, *The Tragic Muse* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), 199, quoted in *CCW* 410
[77] See Murphy, 'Geoffrey Hill and Confession', 139

the poem itself. Writing about Isaac Williams's *Cathedral* in relation to Herbert's *Temple*, Rodney Stenning Edgecombe argues that Williams's *Cathedral* 'systematises a structure intermittently present in Herbert's *Temple*' and 'creates interesting tensions between the materiality of the poem and the materiality of the structure it internalises'.[78] For Hill, a similar tension and play between the actual, material space and structure of ecclesiastical architecture and the architecture of the poem are at work. This kind of poetic architecture based on ecclesiastical architecture potentially enables the speaker to alleviate the pressure of the 'paradox of self-presentation' which Cummings observes, while at the same time still bearing witness to and confessing the violence of history.[79] In a certain way, then, the palimpsestic nature of literary voices coming together in the 'Apology' is replaced here by a collage of church buildings. But the complication and paradox of tone and content still remain, and echoes of past voices are still part of the structural making of the poem, as indicated, for example, by Hill's incorporation of Thomas Browne's phrase 'noble essences' into his poem.[80]

A gap between tone and content is further instantiated, as the description of how churches were destroyed continues in the next verse:

> St Andrew Holborn for some years appeared woe-begone, as did other Wren masterworks after Blitz drama and trauma.
> St Mary Abchurch, for example, that intricate reredos torn into two thousand bits, grieved for, retrieved by sublime near-microscopic sleights, reset as if the miraculous were simple.
> Burning St Mary-le-Bow, in ravishing show, saluted by her own bells, a last cascade of thrashing, mangled squeals as down they go.
> St Margaret Pattens: she came through it in better state. We should not spiel the less well of her for that.
> St Andrew Undershaft is home to the tomb of John Stow. He is shown stuck patiently with his craft, the writer's perpetual motion requital of things sedulously or by chance bereft. (*BB* 15)

[78] Rodney Stenning Edgecombe, 'Allegorical Topography and the Experience of Space in Isaac Williams's *Cathedral*' *in English Studies*, Vol. 80, Issue 3 (1999), 224
[79] Cummings, 'Recusant Hill', 38
[80] Sir Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1862), 64

In this case, a fracture occurs between the seriousness of what is being said about the historical damage suffered by these churches, and the light-hearted, almost childish tone which is reminiscent of nursery rhymes. In its 'inventory' of City of London churches, and in its rhyme pattern formed by short syllables, the lines remind us mostly of the popular 'Oranges and Lemons', a traditional nursery rhyme and folksong about the sounding of bells in churches in or close to the City of London. 'I'm sure I don't know, / Says the great bell at Bow', reads the penultimate couplet of 'Oranges and Lemons', and Hill's lines emerge almost as a continuation of the same rhyme, employing the same pattern between 'Bow', 'show', and 'go'. Even in its apparent contrast between the simple rhyme pattern and jocular tone on the one hand, and the sinister implications of the content, the poem remains engaged with the nursery rhyme, as the final couplet of 'Oranges and Lemons' itself takes on a more sinister tone, reading '[h]ere comes a candle to light you to bed. / And here comes a chopper to chop off your head'.[81] The connection between nursery rhymes and City churches is reprised in section 49 of the book, where the link between architecture and theology is also made explicit:

> In the City of Wren spires seem infinitely variable in the logometrics of time,
> spiritually intrinsic, the patterns of quickened stone acclaiming suitably,
> as in a children's rhyme or the one hundred and fiftieth psalm.
> But whatever they do towards God's glory they do not know it, as Hopkins
> more or less said, that admirably level-headed and objective poet. (*BB* 23)

There is an implication in these lines of natural innocence and a turn towards the divine as intrinsic to the buildings themselves. '[T]he patterns of quickened stone' themselves praise the Lord, as suggested by the reference to Psalm 150, which has at its core the bid to praise

[81] Iona Opie, Peter Opie, *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951), 338

God.[82] And yet, the natural innocence of architectural patterns praising God blends with the implication of lack of knowledge and consequently lack of moral choice as informed by free will. Once again, Hill turns to Hopkins. In 'Pied Beauty', Hopkins writes:

> All things counter, original, spáre, strange;
> Whatever is fickle, frèckled (who knows how?)
> With swíft, slów; sweet, sóur; adázzle, dím;
> He fathers-forth whose beauty is pást change:
> Práise him.[83]

'Praise him' in Hopkins's poem links with Hill's mention of Psalm 150 and the idea that the church buildings praise God. The world as naturally inclined towards a manifestation of the inner self as praise is also explored by Hopkins in 'As kingfishers catch fire', when he writes: '[e]ach mortal thing does one and the same: / Deals out that being indoors each one dwells; selves'.[84] Yet Hopkins soon turns from the domain of the natural world to a consideration of the human condition, as he writes:

> I say móre: the just man justices;
> Keeps grace: that keeps all his goings graces;
> Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is —
> Christ. For Christ plays in ten thousand places,
> Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his
> To the Father through the features of men's faces.[85]

Hopkins focuses on the expression of God's likeness in the human condition, and views the 'selving' of the 'just man' as a manifestation of an inner grace.

For Hill, however, the expression of inner grace remains in the domain of things, with the City church spires being 'spiritually intrinsic', and 'the patterns of quickened stone

[82] See 'Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness / Praise him with the sound of trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp'; Psalm 150: 2-3
[83] Hopkins, 'Pied Beauty, 133
[84] Hopkins, 'As kingfishers catch fire', 129
[85] Ibid.

acclaiming suitably', as they do something 'towards God's glory' (*BB* 23). They do so without any self-awareness; as soon as human presence is implied, however, the picture changes from one of inner grace to one of sin, violence, and destruction, and acknowledgement of the effect of this historically accrued violence upon church buildings.

The City churches brought together at the core of section 36 are themselves, just as Hill's poems are, architecturally and historically, palimpsests of styles, and monuments telling of layers upon layers of destruction. The Parish Church of All Hallows Barking, the first one in Hill's sequence, and the first ecclesiastical monument listed in the Tower Ward section of the *Royal Commission of Historical Monuments* on the City of London, displays a complex structure of layers of styles; its early parts date back to the mid-thirteenth century. According to the *Royal Commission of Historical Monuments*, 'the *Chancel*-arcades' were erected '[i]n the first half of the 15th century', which is also when 'the E. arch of each of the nave-arcades was widened.'[86] It was an explosion in 1649 and the consequent injury to the West end that led to the taking down of the tower, and to the later addition of a new tower at the 'W. end of the nave in 1658-9'.[87] New fittings were added to the church in circa 1705, and later significant restorations were carried out in 1814, 1860-2, and 1883.[88] The architectural changes and additions to the original building throughout the centuries have transformed the building into a palimpsestic structure incorporating features belonging to various historical periods, ranging from its 'early 14th-century E. window', to its Cromwellian period tower, and to various 'late 17th or early 18th-century' settles.[89] This display of architectural features dating from various historical periods speaks both of the aesthetic sensibility of a specific era, and of how violence can actively change the shape of a building,

[86] *Royal Commission of Historical Monuments, (England.): An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in London.* Vol IV. *The City* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1929), 176
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid., 176-80

because new features were added or restored in response to violence. In this sense, the building of All Hallows Barking resembles the palimpsestic structure of Hill's poetic architecture in his 'Apology'. In Hill's sequence the lyrical rhythm and speech inflections of various writers from the past are assimilated into the architecture of the section, and used in order to draw attention to the problematic aspects of the historical eras from which they emerge.

The adding of features throughout history as a reaction to destruction shapes the current form of the churches, in a way similar to how the incorporation of voices in Hill's 'Apology' shapes the form of the poem. Hill's account of architecture in both sequences indicates another way in which he is ironically both countering tradition through his engagement with Pugin, and bringing Pugin's ideas into actuality. In his *Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture*, Pugin stresses the importance of each architectural feature having a purpose and meaning, while criticising added-on features and styles:

> Architectural features are continually tacked on buildings with which they have no connection [...].
>
> In pure architecture the smallest detail should *have a meaning or serve a purpose;* and even the construction itself *should vary with the material employed*, and the designs should be adapted to the materials in which they are executed.[90]

The churches chosen in section 36 of the *Book of Baruch* have had features added onto them, and have undergone considerable modifications throughout the ages. These changes themselves act as a source of meaning (and it is arguably for this reason that the poet presents us with this particular set of churches), in that they help situate the buildings historically, and act as witnesses to the 'drama and trauma' (*BB* 15) of history. So, underneath this depiction of the complexity of ecclesiastical architecture within the City of London, the threat of

[90] Augustus Welby Northmore Pugin, *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture,* (London: John Weale, 1841), 1

destruction remains constant. It is destruction itself that constitutes the driving force for many of the architectural changes and additions, as the buildings were restored as a response to the calamities that befell them. Restored after the Great Fire of London, or after the Blitz, the architectural layers of these churches reveal the underlying layering of destruction itself; as such, they become physical testimonies of the violence of history, and bear silent witness to it. Artistic form, like the architecture of churches and like that of Hill's poems too, becomes a consequence of destruction. Hill's poetic witness comes in, at a particular point in time, to remind us of the continuous threat of such violence.

Yet Hill also identifies a different, internal, source of destruction:

> The bishops destroyed more Wren churches than the Blitz did. But not well-adorned, well-husbanded St Bride.
> Incendiaries overrode sacred boundaries; were caddish and delivered: fireworks at first snapped magnesium-white; afterwards took hold, grew black-reddish, unfurled, stood forth in dark flagrant gold.
> Water carried to the spot in a tin hat or by a Heath Robinson machine proclaimed ingenuity, courage, and 'an unquenchable spirit of fun'.
> Sand was more effective than water, as by belated directive. Neither available against that wind, the first fire-storm of pan-Germania's multi-hecatomb. Or did Warsaw grab that claim? Or Coventry? Or Rotterdam?
> It is permissible to be grieved for intricate carved woodwork that could not be saved. Grief lacks the cultural aura of Pity, to which Blake once gave short shrift and which has so endowed and enriched Coventry city.
> Pathos is not faith. Coventry's ruin merited rebuilding and restoration stone by stone; as in Europe they have indeed done so many times.
> It ought not to have remained, a perpetual reproach to those destructively inclined, like a medieval pool — say, a bone-dry St Winifred's Well — that Alice's retaliatory weeping could never fill. (*BB* 16)

In the 1998 edition of Bradley and Pevsner's *The Buildings of England*: *The City Churches*, the authors write that one of the main events to threaten architecture in the City was the Second World War.[91] They further stress that it was the Blitz that 'turned the churches into emblems of threatened English civilisation, and they were valued more highly thereafter'.[92]

[91] Simon Bradley, Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England*: *The City Churches* (London: Penguin, 1997), 64
[92] Ibid.

However, the violent destruction wrecked by the Blitz is the apogee of a gradual and sustained process of destruction, which had been carried out up to this point through demolition and ruination. Bradley and Pevsner point out that the years following 1840 saw a significant decline in the population of the City, with many workers being moved outside its boundaries, and with buildings being converted into premises for 'commerce and trade'.[93] 'The consequences for the City churches', Bradley and Pevsner add, 'were drastic', with many being demolished in order to make room for commercial premises, such as St Christopher le Stocks in order to build the Bank of England, as well as St Bartholomew Exchange and St Benet Fink in order to make room for the Royal Exchange. Such demolitions continued well into the twentieth century, up to 1940.[94] 'The bishops', Hill indicates, 'destroyed more Wren churches than the Blitz did', in a poetic move which brings the backlog of destruction to the forefront, by stressing the whole history of demolition which preceded the bombing of City churches. It is now the 'hinterland' (*CCW* 29) of the unspoken, which once again rises to the surface, as all the historical layers of destruction are tied in together, mapping out the City of London. 'Incendiaries overrode sacred boundaries' as holy buildings were bombed, but the guilt is not simply the guilt of 'Pan-Germania's' 'fire-storm', but the collective guilt of civilisation, just like the shared guilt of the atrocities of the Holocaust which Hill explored in his earlier poems, such as 'Ovid in the Third Reich' and 'September Song' in *King Log* (1968).

As the speaker launches into a dire criticism of historical destruction and expressions of guilt, the poem takes on liturgical implications again, as it becomes at once confession – of incurred collective guilt – and recusancy.[95] The geographical confinement to the City of London is abandoned through the mention of Coventry – also bombed during the Second

[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid.
[95] See Murphy 'Geoffrey Hill and Confession', 136, and Cummings, 'Recusant Hill', 33

World War, an event whose consequences Hill witnessed, from a distance, as a child. Hill told Sameer Rahim that he '[s]aw the glow in the sky: a kind of pulsing glow. It was too far away to see it being bombed', and as Rahim mentions, Hill wrote about this experience in *The Triumph of Love* in 1998.[96] This shows the breadth of both destruction and guilt as expanding and becoming all-encompassing. So, Coventry, the speaker mentions, deserved 'rebuilding and restoration stone by stone; / as in Europe they have done indeed so many times' (*BB* 16). In 1938, Donald Gibson 'was appointed City Architect' to Coventry.[97] It is arguably his postwar reconstruction of the city of Coventry that the poet refers to as having transformed the city into a 'perpetual reproach to those destructively inclined' (*BB* 16). The patchwork of poetic voices tied into the architectural making of the poem at this point includes the reverberations of Hill's own voice as heard from earlier volumes, most notably *Canaan*, where the perversion of morality and ethics by sheer monetary value and greed plays a central role.

'The bishops destroyed more Wren churches than the Blitz did', and the trenchant and ironic remark '[g]rief lacks the cultural aura of Pity' (*BB* 16) remind us of some of Hill's bitterly ironic inflections in *Canaan* in 1996, for example: '[w]here's probity in this - / the slither frisk / to lordship of a kind / as rats to a bird table?' (*Canaan* 1) in 'To the High Courts of Parliament ("Where's probity in this…")' and his architecturally-based ironic jab at Thatcherite Britain in the opening lines of 'Dark-Land ("Aspiring Grantham")', '[a]spiring Grantham / Rises above itself' (*Canaan* 13). 'Pathos is not faith' (*BB* 16), the poet stresses in section 36 of *The Book of Baruch*, widening the gap between the cultural display of 'pity' and the idea of faith as bearing the liturgical implications of grief. The 'paradox of self-presentation' which Cummings has noticed in connection to Hill's 'recusancy' in *Tenebrae*

[96] Rahim, 'An Interview with Geoffrey Hill (1932-2016)'
[97] Louise Campbell, 'Donald Gibson and Coventry' in *Man-Made Future: Planning, Education and Design in Mid-20th Century Britain*, ed. Iain Boyd Whyte (London: Routledge, 2007), 121

takes shape again in this stanza, after being slightly diminished at the beginning of the sequence.[98] In his sharp criticism of how pathos has come to replace faith and of inadequate displays of grief, the poet's witness to and indictment of violence has the same vein of 'eerie triumphalism' running through it, as he indicates his position both inside and outside this cultural tradition.[99]

In section 36 of the posthumous book, just as in the earlier 'Apology', tradition as developed in history is at once embraced and questioned. To say that '[p]athos is not faith' (*BB* 16) is to criticise sharply those who practice faith as pathos; this indicates that the speaker is attempting to distinguish himself from this group, stepping away from this marring of faith. On the other hand, the previous forty-three lines have been spent bemoaning the violence suffered by church buildings throughout history and meditating upon how they have been reconstructed, both in England and more broadly in Europe. This shows integration, and gives a glimpse into just how much the speaker views himself as part of this tradition. Hill has often avoided being pinned down to a certain group or trend, questioning and resisting commitment to particular doctrines or movements. His Christian faith itself is one of the most striking examples of this type of questioning, as suggested most notably by his affirmation, in his 2007 Remembrance Day sermon at Balliol College, Oxford:

> If I am a Christian, it is because the Church's teaching on Original Sin strikes me as being the most coherent grammar of tragic humanity that I have ever encountered.[100]

The message here is that of a profession of Christian faith, but one marked by the caveat that what lies at its basis is not an orthodox and unquestioning acceptance of all its precepts; rather, his acceptance of the faith hinges on one very particular aspect of it, i.e., Original Sin.

---

[98] Cummings, 'Recusant Hill', 38
[99] See Haughton '"How fit a title…"', 143
[100] Remembrance: Balliol College (11 November 2007)

There is a conditional clarification present here, along the lines of 'I am part of this, but…', and this is also part of the architecture of his poetry, and his movement into and away from tradition. For example, in the 'Apology', the way in which multiple past literary presences are wrought into the form of the sonnets shows an embrace of tradition and an indication of 'I am part of this', but the emphasis on violence, and his focus on Catholic convert writers indicate once again questioning and misalignment. Similarly, section 36 of *The Book of Baruch* is pervaded by a strange blend of integration into and questioning of tradition. One term which is particularly useful in describing this self-assigned position within tradition but determinedly outside its centre is 'eccentric', understood both in its common and in its etymological sense, meaning 'outside the centre', from the Greek 'ἐκ' ('out of') and 'κέντρον' ('centre'), via the Latin 'eccentricus'.[101]

Eccentricity is a concept of great appeal to Hill. His second Oxford lecture, for example, entitled 'Eccentrique to the endes of his Master or State', draws on a discussion of the term, as Hill focuses from the on its history, and emphasises the idea of asymmetry inherent in a position being outside the centre.[102] It is worth noting that the few instances where Hill seems to abandon the questioning position, are moments when he expresses his affinity with other writers or historical figures who can be described as adopting similarly eccentric positions. In the sequence 'De Jure Belli ac Pacis', published in *Canaan* in 1996, the poet writes:

> To the high-minded base-metal forgers of this common Europe,
> community of parody, you stand ec-
> centric as a prophet. There is no better
> vision that I can summon: you were upheld
> on the strong wings of the Psalms before you died. (*Canaan* 33)

[101] 'Eccentric, *a.* and *sb.*', *OED*, Vol. 5
[102] Geoffrey Hill, 'Eccentrique to the endes of his Master or State' (8 March 2011), at http://media.podcasts.ox.ac.uk/kebl/general/2011-hill-poetry-2.mp3

Rarely does Hill's poetry take on such reverential resonances as in these lyrics addressed to Von Haeften, who was tried for treason and hanged for his part in the planned assassination of Hitler by the Kreisau Circle. Here, Von Haeften is elevated to the status of prophet, and the idea of him being 'upheld on the strong wings of the Psalms' indicates that the speaker gives full recognition to the righteousness of von Haeften's actions. His moral choice is tied in with biblical theology through the association with the Psalms, and 'upheld' shows the triumph of virtue. As far as the Psalms are concerned, they are of great significance, and play an important role in Hill's relationship with theology, a topic which I discuss in the following chapter of my thesis. 'Ec-centric' as he might be, it is only through his belonging to this tradition that von Haeften can become its 'prophet'. For Hill too, the eccentric position does not involve in any way a severing of cultural heritage. This is further expressed elsewhere in 'De Jure Belli ac Pacis', as in the lines where the poet writes about the '*Vexilla regis* / uplifted by Rüdiger Schleicher's violin' (*Canaan* 34) The 'Vexilla Regis', a Latin Christian hymn suggests, belonging to and integration into cultural tradition. Accompanying this, there is Schleicher's violin. Schleicher was Bonhoeffer's brother-in-law, and, according to Renate Bethge, a violin-player, who often used to play music together with Bonhoeffer and Eberhard Bethge.[103] This mention of the 'Vexilla Regis' here foreshadows the moral imperative to 'confess' the violence afflicting the same tradition at a certain point in history.[104] Cultural memory itself is construed as a dual mechanism, encompassing both the memory of violence, and, in speaking out against violence and injustice, a potential means of atonement.

In its material dimension, church architecture is a telling example of how memory speaks about violence, because the buildings are reconstructed as a reaction to and as a consequence of destruction. Rebuilding these churches can – as expressed in the posthumous

[103] Renate Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Brief Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 42-3
[104] See Murphy, 'Geoffrey Hill and Confession', 136

section 36 – be seen as an act of grief, and the implications of grief as opposed to pity tie in with the question of memory. This particular concern with pity itself can be traced back to the same sequence 'De Jure Belli ac Pacis', which reads:

> […] This pity is shameless
> unlike memory, though both can draw
> sugar from iron.
> Pity, alone with its rage,
> settles on multitudes
> as the phoenix sought
> from a hundred cities tribute of requiting flame. (*Canaan* 32*)*

Pity is once again shown to be 'shameless', standing in contrast this time with memory, although Hill admits that memory too can 'draw sugar from iron'. This is arguably a recognition of the paradox arising from artistic memorialisation of historical atrocities occurring at the same time as the aestheticisation of violence through the poetic act. Here pity is contrasted with memory, while the posthumous section 36 draws a parallel on the one hand between grief and pity, and on the other hand between faith and pathos. Bearing this parallelism in mind, we can contend that memory, grief, and faith are viewed by the poet as interconnected. Memory and grief then are connected to expressions of faith, while pity stands at the opposite end of the spectrum. The link between memory and faith in this case shows that the question of architectural rebuilding of the City churches destroyed throughout the centuries (whether by the Great Fire of London, the Blitz, or the bishops themselves) grows into a matter of theological concern, rather than being a mere historical preoccupation with the preservation of cultural heritage.

1.4 '[F]aith resurgent'

Another one of the key eccentric figures with whom Hill expresses affinity, and who also plays a crucial role in one of the sequences where Hill engages with church architecture most significantly (*Hymns to Our Lady of Chartres)*, is Charles Péguy. The *Hymns* are a meditation on both literary and church architecture, and explore the topic of eccentricity and tradition again, through Hill's parallel between his own voyage – both spiritual and physical, to Chartres – and Péguy's. The first section of the sequence indicates the analogy between them:

> [..] When last we laid bare
> our manifest otherness cable
> television had not been installed here.
>
> For what other reason are there notebooks,
> intemperate archives? Bring me to dance,
> who cannot dance, your features of botox
> and I shall consider temperance.
>
> You are my fancy; nor do I accost
> her royal highness directly: Virgin
> to the eccentric spires where I went lost
> tracking down Péguy and faith resurgent. (*BH* 157)

The phrase 'our manifest otherness' indicates the speaker's accord with Péguy, with the emphasis falling on their 'otherness'. They are both outcasts, manifesting a clear 'otherness', but the pronoun 'our' is inclusive, suggesting that the speaker experiences this 'otherness' together with Péguy. Also, the idea of taking up a position outside the centre is reinforced by the architectural references to the asymmetrical spires of Chartres Cathedral, described here as 'eccentric spires'. Although not hyphenated here, the image of the 'eccentric' spires can be read as physical architectural picture of the 'ec- / centric' 'prophet'.

Non-alignment, then, is the main architectural feature of Chartres Cathedral, and at the same time, it is a way of describing both Hill and Péguy. Hill's trip to Chartres, as indicated

here, seems to have been prompted by his desire to track 'down Péguy and faith resurgent' (*CCW* 157). It emerges in this context as a trip of both cultural-literary and religious significance. Yet, Hill is quick to point out, right at the beginning of this sequence, that his tracking down of 'faith resurgent' does not mean that his verse operates within the realm of liturgical devotion. He indicates in this direction that it is not the Virgin of Chartres Cathedral who is being addressed: 'nor do I accost / her royal highness directly' (*BH* 157). Throughout the sequence, however, the poems are often close in mode to prayer, as address is often explored in dual ways, implying both the reader and the Virgin, as I will show in my third chapter. Initially, Hill's pilgrimage to Chartres emerges as a literary one. This happens as the architectural form of the sequence once again comes together around a patchwork of literary voices and references, ranging from Henry Adams to Henrik Ibsen and Charles Péguy. Hill's pilgrimage here retraces Péguy's own, to which the French writer attributes almost magical dimensions in his spiritual development. In his 'Lettres et entretiens', he writes about apprehending the belfry of Chartres Cathedral from a distance, and describes how this sight prompted a spiritual cleansing:

> On voit le clocher de Chartres à 17 kilomètres sur la plaine. De temps en temps il disparaît derrière une ondulation, une ligne de bois. Dès que je l'ai vu, ç'a été une extase. Je ne sentais plus rien, ni la fatigue, ni mes pieds. Toutes mes impuretés sont tombées d'un coup. J'étais un autre homme […]. J'ai prié, mon vieux, comme jamais je n'ai prié, j'ai pu prier pour mes ennemis.[105]

This image of Chartres described by Péguy as rising up from the broadness of the plain appears to have been of great interest to Hill; the Geoffrey Hill Archive held at the Brotherton

[105] One sees the belfry of Chartres at a distance of seventeen kilometres, from the plain. Every now and then it disappears behind a rise in the land, a line of trees. From the moment I saw it, it was all ecstasy. I no longer felt anything – neither my tiredness, nor my feet. All my impurities vanished all of a sudden. I was a different man. I prayed, old friend, as I'd never prayed before, and I could pray for my enemies. Charles Péguy, 'Lettres et entretiens', *Cahiers de la quinzaine* (Paris: L'Artisan du livre, 1925), 157-8, quoted in Romain Rolland, *Péguy* (Paris: La Découverte, 2015), 306

Library, University of Leeds, contains a postcard showing the same image of the cathedral, seen from a distance, and standing in contrast with the extending fields.[106] This same idea of a church building emerging at a distance and then occasionally disappearing behind landscape which Péguy describes in his pilgrimage is one also described by Hill in a different context in *The Orchards of Syon* – the one volume where a certain transfiguration of the local into the heavenly is tentatively explored. Here, he writes, most likely with reference to York Minster: 'tri-towers, Christ silos, rise from, retract / into, the broad Ouse levels' (*OS* 17). But unlike Péguy, and despite his great affinity with the French writer, Hill's poetry does not intimate the ecstatic vision which exalted Péguy's pilgrimage.

Architecture, or, more broadly, the material, is a twofold image for Hill, and the idea of moving towards theological assent is always held back by the pull of the material, and a sense of decay and deterioration is always present. From the 'disfigured shrines' (*Tenebrae* 34) in the 'Apology' to the 'ravishing show' (*BB* 15) of the collapse of St-Mary-le-Bow in section 36 of the *Book of Baruch*, the physical reality of architecture is always tied in with the reality of destruction and existence within linear historical time. So, too, is the body, and Hill is unable to experience the kind of complete detachment from the ailments of the body that Péguy describes. Hill's account of the material is often tied up with images of deterioration; one example is the way in which his theological reading of Rahner in 'On the Reality of the Symbol' is accompanied by images of bodily disease and decay, such as '[p]arturition of Psalm like pissing blood', and 'the prostate's / a nasty beast at the best of times' (*WT* 9). The human body, like the architectural body of a church and the architectural structure of a poem, cannot be extricated from the violence and decay of man's existence in a fallen world. Throughout the *Hymns*, then, the idea of architecture as both facilitating a vision of heavenly

[106] BC MS 20c Hill/2/1/26, 'Notebook 26: Péguy', Geoffrey Hill Archive, University of Leeds

salvation and purity, and holding the poet back from it, is explored repeatedly. In the seventh section of *Hymns to Our Lady of Chartres*, the poet writes:

> Trumpets again, as this is Sion's twin city
> or city-in-law. Across France the great west
> windows are full of the sun's holocaust,
> the dying blazons of eternity
>
> secured in mazy lead and beveled stone. (*BH* 160)

The sound of trumpets and the suggestion that Chartres is Sion's 'twin city' can be read as another nod to Péguy's vision of the transfiguration of the local into the heavenly. However, the verse soon becomes infused with Hill's own sense of bitter irony in the face of the possibility of his apprehension of such a vision, as indicated by the qualification 'or city-in-law' (*BH* 160). The ironic effect is achieved through the bringing together of a biblical suggestion of a heavenly vision, with the mundanity of 'city-in-law'. The intimation of violence in the next lines appears as inevitable, and the poet pulls the reader back into the historical realm and its problems. The idealised vision of Sion quickly melts into that of a real-world, tangible place. We are not faced, ultimately, with a transfigured heavenly place, but with one which remains subject to the cyclicality of historical time. We are now no longer treading through the vision of Sion, but are instead carried '[a]cross France', where 'the great west / windows are full of the sun's holocaust'. These lines create an image of the sun shining through the stained glass windows of churches throughout France, most likely at sunset, as suggested by the 'west windows', and reinforced by the 'dying blazons' in the next line, with 'dying' connecting to the idea of ending, and the light of day dying off. However, like in section 36 of the posthumous collection, the idea of the holocaust cannot be extricated from its historical connotations, and it is therefore unlikely that the word is to be read strictly in 'its true cast' (*BB* 15). In *Visionary Philology* Matthew Sperling traces the historical implications

of Hill's use of the word 'moldywarp' (*BH* 94) in *Mercian Hymns*.[107] He argues, following this analysis, that the image of the 'ludo-cup' (*BH* 91), in its etymological indication of play, is telling of Hill's 'cauldron of poetic composition, its mixture of linguistic play, whirring etymologies and historical allusion'.[108]

The image of the 'holocaust' in *Hymns to Our Lady of Chartres* and in *The Book of Baruch* has at its core the same play on etymology and allusion. In his interview with John Haffenden, Hill himself affirmed that 'etymology is history'.[109] It is, however, as Hill indicated, not simply the history of postlapsarian existence, but a dual kind of history, pointing both to the prelapsarian world, and to its loss:

> I think there's a real sense in which every fine and moving poem bears witness to this lost kingdom of innocence and original justice. In handling the English language the poet makes an act of recognition that etymology is history. The history of the creation and the debasement of words in a paradigm of the loss of the kingdom of innocence and original justice.[110]

As Rowan Williams has argued, '[t]o know loss is not to have lost entirely', and hence to write poetry bearing witness to historical violence is an expression of loss within history, and also an expression of the knowledge of the original loss instantiated by the Fall.[111]

This inescapability of semantic historical implication exposes the manner in which history forestalls any kind of unfettered assent to the divine love. The experience of faith, both semantic and personal, remains constrained by existence within history while at the same time reaching towards an act of witness to the loss of the prelapsarian. There is, in the stanza quoted above, but also throughout the sequence, a doubling of the poet's voice: the

---

[107] *VP*, 16
[108] Ibid.
[109] Haffenden, *Viewpoints*, 88
[110] Ibid.
[111] Williams, 'The Standing of Poetry', 58

tendency to move towards an experience of 'faith resurgent' similar to Péguy's, is constantly accompanied by the painful awareness of the implications of being bound to historical time. So, the vision of sunlight in the west windows and its intimation of a heavenly realm is balanced out by an awareness of both historical background and materiality itself. The reference to the 'holocaust' here is also a reference once again to how church buildings themselves, in their material form, change in response to violence. Architecture itself both points towards the hope of the heavenly and reminds of earthly violence. It becomes both the driving force for theological assent and the mechanism for its breakdown, leading the poet towards an exalting vision, but then immediately pulling him back to the earthly realm. The contrasting association of 'eternity', in the fourth line of the first verse, with 'dying blazons' (*BH* 160) is indicative of this process of push-and-pull between the heavenly and the local, in the midst of which the poetic voice operates. That the vision of eternity is doomed to fail through the very material which prompted it to begin with is also shown by the description of these blazons of eternity as 'secured in mazy lead and beveled stone'. The stained glass windows, with their depictions of heavenly scenes and saints, remain secured in the stone and lead of the church building itself. The corruption of the sacred vision through the very fact of existing within the boundaries of historical time continues in the same section, as the poet writes:

> Outside the glass, pigeons rancid as gulls
> roost in their stucco-dung on the tiered sills.
> The candles blur the air before your throne. (*BH* 160).

The world outside the vision of the 'glass' (*BH* 160) is filthy and rancid, while the candles, themselves devotional objects 'blur the air' (*BH* 160) before the Virgin's 'throne' (*BH* 160); 'blur' (*BH* 160) is significant in its expression of lack of clarity about the divine as brought about by the material.

Similar images of a struggle between an instinctive move towards the sacred instantiated by the contemplation of architectural forms as experienced by Péguy, and its limitations, are scattered throughout *Hymns to Our Lady of Chartres*. The concept of stained glass as associated both with a sacred vision and with violence is also explored in the eighth section:

> The seraphim with stark pinions aglow
>
> look blankly at us: we who may be spared,
> as well as other ecstasies, the hues
> of burning and the damned at their old cries,
> your varied mercies, variously adored. (*BH* 161)

The angelic vision of the seraphim's wings being illuminated by the sun shining through the stained glass windows is contrasted with the fiery image of hell, where the damned are burning. The glass is both a vehicle for divine contemplation, and a reminder, through its burning hues, of the more sinister implications of burning. An indication of the fallenness of historical existence explored in conjunction with divine adoration is also present in the second section of the sequence, where, drawing on Henry Adams and his account of the Virgin and the Dynamo, the poet writes:

> Velocity and inertia Adams
> plumbed at Chartres; fixing grief's effigy
> caped in a spout-downpour; nature's bad sums
> righted by grace not time's coprophagy (*BH* 157)

In the chapter entitled 'The Dynamo and the Virgin' from his biography *The Education of Henry Adams*, Adams writes about the 1900 Paris Exhibition, and finds himself drawn to 'the dynamo in the galley of machines'.[112] He consequently finds himself extrapolating the technological principles of the dynamo's rotation and pondering over them in terms of his

[112] Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams* (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 345

experience of the forms of Chartres Cathedral.[113] Ignorance in education, Adams stresses, 'accumulates in the form of inert facts', while the rotation of the dynamo stands for a 'symbol of infinity', and 'a moral force', much like the Cross for 'early Christians'.[114] Adams then goes on to counterpose the Virgin of Chartres with the force of the dynamo, noticing how in France she possesses a great energy which would have been unknown to the American mind, as he writes:

> All this was to American thought as though it had never existed. The true American knew something of the facts, but nothing of the feelings; he read the letter, but he never felt the law. Before this historical chasm, a mind like that of Adams felt itself helpless; he turned from the Virgin to the Dynamo as though he were a Branly coherer. On one side, at the Louvre and at Chartres, as he knew by the record of work actually done and still before his eyes, was the highest energy ever known to man, the creator of four-fifths of his noblest art, exercising vastly more attraction over the human mind than all the steam-engines and dynamos ever dreamed of; and yet this energy was unknown to the American mind. An American Virgin would never dare command; an American Venus would never dare exist.[115]

The juxtaposition of sacredness with the mechanic is drawn into Hill's poem. This happens as he focuses on the idea of velocity as the moving force for both machine and faith, and the inertia of ignorance, which Adams 'plumbed at Chartres'; furthering the language of science, he mentions 'bad sums', and states that they can only be righted by grace, not 'time's coprophagy'. This is perhaps one of the most striking images of the rottenness of time and history in Hill's work, as 'coprophagy' induces disgust and shows utter corruption. And yet Hill's poetry remains acutely anchored in time; the eccentric voice of the poet traces the eccentric steps of Péguy and it is within this tracing, and perhaps despite 'time's coprophagy', that an intimation of Hill's own 'faith resurgent' can be tentatively apprehended.

---

[113] Ibid., 344-9
[114] Ibid., 344-5
[115] Ibid., 349

In the thirteenth section of the *Hymns*, the speaker suggests that a formation of meaning amidst the chaos of time and sin is indeed possible, as he admits that '[u]nsurely / words appear to meet me on what I mean' (*BH* 163); this is despite the fact that, as shown in the sixteenth section by using the same faecal metaphor to refer to the corruption of language and hence literature, '[o]lder than Falstaff or Lear I have crap / perfuming my right hand' (*BH* 165).

As it has emerged from this chapter, the church architecture encountered in Hill's poetry is constituted by palimpsestic constructions and added-on features, and this reflects the effects of time and history upon church buildings. The poetic form chosen to explore this topic often mimics this complex architectural form, and this is done with close consideration of what the poet sees as the moral imperative of form. Yet the incorporation of multiple, even diverging, styles and forms into his own poetic architecture complicates things, as this can drown out the active moral stance attempted, and thus minimise the confessional aim of the lyrics. For this reason, then, a certain degree of non-alignment is necessary. However, it is exactly the deliberate adoption of such an eccentric poetic position, slightly outside the main current of tradition, which can open up the paradox of aesthetics and ethics, which has been noted by critics such as Cummings, Haughton, and Murphy.[116] Perhaps the exploration of the self in terms of eccentricity (as in his paralleling of Péguy's eccentricity), can be seen as shifting the focus away from the eeriness of paradox and onto a question of self-exploration, often tackled ironically and with tendencies to self-deprecation. While the paradox cannot be overcome, it is through the concept of eccentricity that the implications of self-exaltation are appeased, as this achieves a mixture of moral obligation and self-exploration which allows both individual failings and a serious ethical stance to come together.

[116] See Cummings, 'Recusant Hill', 38; see Murphy, 'Geoffrey Hill and Confession', 139; see Haughton, '"How fit a title…"', 143

Chapter 2: 'Music Survives': Sacred Music, Fallen Poetry?

2.1. Prelude

Isaac Williams's *Cathedral* poses both music and architecture at the forefront of the dialogue between faith, form, and structure which Kirstie Blair describes as characteristic of Victorian culture in her study *Form and Faith in Victorian Poetry and Religion*.[1] Music, as much as architecture, provides the impetus for much of Hill's thought about religion, culture, and art. This is made clear by the consistent engagement with music throughout his work. The nature of his poetic architecture itself, in its focus on polyphony, indicates a preoccupation with music as an artistic medium, and Hill's sustained interest in music is inflected by his investment in Christianity. This interest in music and Christianity leads to an analysis, carried out in an exploratory way by Hill in his poetry, of how religious music can help humankind to reach out towards the divine. In this connection, the question of how music can facilitate an understanding of the divine differently from poetry arises.

Geoffrey Hill's poetry, from his first volume *For the Unfallen*, up to *The Daybooks*, is rich in references to music. Hugh Haughton has written, in his article '"Music's Invocation": Music and History in Geoffrey Hill', that Hill is 'a composer', whose repertoire comprises 'a requiem', 'a book of songs', 'two "Chorale-Preludes"' and the sequence 'Funeral Music'.[2] Three of Hill's volumes – *Tenebrae* (1978), *Hymns to Our Lady of Chartres* (1982-2012), and *Mercian Hymns* (1971) – use explicitly musical terms in their titles. The late volume *Clavics* draws on musical terminology to express what Hill has deemed, in *Oraclau*, 'the alchemy of keys' (*BH* 754). Handel, Brahms, Henry Lawes, William Lawes, and Jimi

[1] Blair, *Form and Faith*, 51
[2] Hugh Haughton, '"Music's Invocation": Music and History in Geoffrey Hill' in *GHAHC*, 187

Hendrix are figures who make an appearance in Hill's poetry. However, his interest in music goes beyond the 'deep and passionate love of music' which he has spoken about in his interview with John Haffenden.[3] It is central in the shaping of his thought on the adequacy of language itself as a tool for artistic expression, especially within a Christian context. As a poet who, on several occasions, has expressed his concern about the shortcomings of language as an artistic medium, Hill's interest in music maps out the territory for an alternative exploration of art and Christianity. Hill's poems show an interest in how, and whether, music can eschew the fallenness to which language is bound. In the same interview with John Haffenden, Hill talks about an 'envy of the composer', and in particular, of the composer's ability to unite 'solitary meditation with direct, sensuous communication to a greater degree than the poet'.[4] Hill, as a poet who has described linguistic arts as trapped in an 'imprisoning marble', in 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"' (*CCW* 3), envies the freedom of the composer to move beyond such limitations. As Matthew Sperling has shown in *Visionary Philology*, '[a]t the heart of Hill's theology of language is the idea of original sin'.[5]

Music, then, unlike poetry, can potentially be explored as possessing a greater degree of independence from the Fall and its consequences. It can be tested as being more removed from the horrors of history to which language is tied, and which I have discussed in the previous chapter. However, to see music as completely detached from the limitations which weigh down on language would imply an idealised view, which is far from Hill's take on artistic activity in general. Art – not just poetry – Hill maintains in his *Paris Review* interview, has 'a right […] to be difficult', as such difficulty reflects the very nature of human

[3] Haffenden, *Viewpoints*, 91
[4] Ibid.
[5] *VP*, 134

beings, who are inherently 'difficult'.[6] The difficulty of art itself, viewed in conjunction with the view that the composer possesses a greater capacity to join 'meditation' with 'sensuous communication' provides the framework for a complex consideration of music as a vehicle for artistic expression. As regards this question, Hill's forays into the matter are often accompanied by a reflection of how music and poetry are both alike and different in their relation to history, the Fall, and God.

In this chapter, I aim to explore how music can enable a disposition of the human towards God and facilitate an understanding of the divine. For this reason, the chapter will explore religious forms of music, in particular the Psalms and hymns, and look at how religious music is construed poetically in Hill's verse. I argue that although the poet does at times display a certain impulse towards a perception of music as disentangled from the restrictions which apply to poetry, this is tempered as the complications of the relationship between music and history are considered. It is, somewhat paradoxically, through this exploration of the consequences of Original Sin contrastively on music and poetry that the possibility of language to ascend towards a freer status is also expressed.

A comparatively positive view of music in a religious context is most clearly expressed in the poem 'Tenebrae'. The title 'Tenebrae' itself suggests the association of music with religious devotion. The term 'tenebrae' is used to refer to the religious service used mainly by the Catholic Church in Holy Week, and it is associated with the Passion of Christ. 'Tenebrae' is Latin for 'darkness', and the Holy Week service includes a specific ritual, during which candles are extinguished so that at the end of the ceremony, there is complete darkness. The *OED* defines the term 'tenebrae' as:

> [t]he name given to the office of matins and lauds of the following day, usually sung in the afternoon or evening of Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday

[6] Phillips, 'Geoffrey Hill: The Art of Poetry No. 80'

> in Holy Week, at which the candles lighted at the beginning of the service are extinguished one by one after each psalm, in memory of the darkness at the time of the crucifixion.[7]

The service has made the subject of musical compositions, from Tallis and Byrd, to the contemporary James MacMillan's *Tenebrae Responsaries* (2013). First published in 1978, Hill's eponymous volume engages with and continues the tradition of associating the church service with musical composition. Yet on top of this tradition, poetry is now also introduced in the equation, and considered alongside music.

In the last verse of 'Tenebrae' Hill writes: 'music survives, / composing her own sphere' (*Tenebrae* 44). In doing so, he articulates the possibility that music can stand on its own in a way that poetry, trapped in its 'imprisoning marble' (*CCW* 3) of language, cannot. Arguably as an attempt to get away from this 'marble', Hill's poetry draws heavily on technical musical vocabulary. This ranges from his framing of mourning in musical terms in 'The Songbook of Sebastian Arrurruz' – 'Oh my dear one, I shall grieve for you / For the rest of my life with slightly / varying cadence, oh my dear one' (*KL* 54) – to the more recent coining of the term 'clavics', suggesting different kinds of keys, including musical ones, and perhaps the clavier. At times, Hill's poetic lines edge towards a mimesis of music, indicating both the affinity and the split between poetry and music. Musically-derived titles (*Tenebrae*, 'September Song', *Clavics*, etc) suggest musical form, yet Hill's composition remains inescapably poetic and linguistic. It is for this reason that religious music in particular can provide a way to enable music to 'survive' (see *Tenebrae* 44) in a way that language cannot.

Still, the idea that '[m]usic survives, / composing her own sphere' is accompanied by the clarification that it is accosted 'with real cries' (*Tenebrae* 44). Here, both an idealisation of music and an expression of its limitations occur. Music is described in these lines as

[7] 'Tenebrae, *n*', *OED*, Vol. 7

associated with the divine and with royalty – 'Angel of Tones', and 'Queen of the Air' (*Tenebrae* 44); and its 'own sphere' reminds us of the ancient theory of the 'music of the spheres'. This theory is attributed to Pythagoras, who, according to Pliny the Elder, held that the vibrations of the planets, the sun, and the moon, can be understood in musical terms, with the sounds produced being akin to a celestial harmony.[8] However, inherent in this potentially purer form of music is also a degree of studied composition which can hinder the expression of the real, fallen, and painful nature of humanity, as suggested by the idea that 'we would accost her with real cries'.

In its self-contained sphere, music is possibly purer than poetry and so 'survives'. On the other hand, the uttered cries of language are painful, and they reflect the fallen nature of humanity. These 'real cries' therefore interpose themselves against the music, breaking its rhythm and 'accosting' it, just as the poet's voice breaks off the expectation of hearing Elgar's melody in 'Churchill's Funeral'. The epigraph preceding the first section of 'Churchill's Funeral' is a phrase taken from one of Elgar's manuscripts, which reads:

> …one dark day in the Guildhall: looking at the memorials of the city's great past & knowing well the history of its unending charity, I seemed to hear far away in the dim roof a theme, an echo of some noble melody…[9]

Yet instead of what Jerrold Northrop Moore calls the 'busy rhythm' and 'near-sequential movement' of the melody, we encounter the jolting rhythm of the poem: 'Endless London / mourns for that knowledge' (*Canaan* 43).[10] This deliberate effort to 'interrupt' the music in 'Churchill's Funeral' with his own voice, and in 'Tenebrae' with the sound of 'real cries', shows that the poet seeks to align poetry as much as possible with the perceived freedom of

---

[8] Pliny the Elder, *Natural* History, Vol. 1: Books 1-2 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1938), 277-8

[9] Edward Elgar, 'The Question of Programme Music', undated manuscript at the Elgar Birthplace, quoted in Jerrold Northrop Moore, *Edward Elgar: A Creative Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 342

[10] Moore, *Edward Elgar*, 342

the composer to unite 'solitary meditation with direct, sensuous communication'.[11] At the same time, it also reveals that music's 'own', independent and universal sphere is in fact a mirage, caught in this continuous push-and-pull between itself and poetry.

'Tenebrae' acts as a link between the 'sphere' of pure, religious music, and historical circumstantiality. Here the voice of the poet is interposed to the musical setting. In its interventions into the musical theme, the poetic voice seems at first distracted, but then the flippant, comical tone takes a turn for the serious in the final line of the third section. This coincides with a return to specifically religious music, and early Christian hymns in particular:

> Veni Redemptor, but not in our time.
> Christus Resurgens, quite out of this world.
> 'Ave' we cry; the echoes are returned.
> Amor Carnalis is our dwelling place. (*Tenebrae* 43)

In the liturgical setting of the poem, an overwhelming feeling that the speaker is distracted emerges, as intrusive thoughts render him unable to concentrate on the celebration. The opening line of the hymn 'Veni redemptor gentium', composed by St Ambrose of Milan, is sung, but the hymn does not proceed in the expected way ('*ostende partum Virginis*')*.*[12] Instead, it is trenchantly interrupted by the jibing voice of the poet-heckler: 'but not in our time'. The sequence once again is pivoted towards the musical-liturgical, with 'Christus Resurgens' being sung. 'Christus Resurgens', is specifically associated with Easter week; it is listed in *Liber Usualis* as a communion hymn for Wednesday in Easter Week, and in the context of 'Tenebrae' this paints a picture of an Easter Week devotion, interspersed with the intrusions and distractions of the speaker's thoughts.[13]

---

[11] Haffenden, *Viewpoints*, 91
[12] St Ambrose, 'Veni, Redemptor Gentium' in Hermann Daniel, *Thesaurus Hymnologicus*, Vol. 1 (Leipzig: J.T. Loeschke, 1855), 12
[13] 'Christus Resurgens' in *Liber Usualis* (London: Burns, Oates & Washbourne, 1934), 795

Once more the poetic voice interrupts, adding ‘quite out of this world’. This intervention carries, on the one hand, an artistic-aesthetic evaluation which indicates that the speaker of the poem finds the musical performance exquisite; on the other hand, read more literally, it affirms that ‘Christus’ is ‘out of this world’. This marks a clear separation between the sacred and the secular-historical. While music attempts to move towards liturgical time and be ‘out of this world’, the poet and his art with its ‘real cries’, find their ‘dwelling-place’ in ‘Amor Carnalis’, as announced by the final line of the section.

The nature of music is more composed (structured and studied) in many senses; it is as if vocality itself derives from music, an interpretation which arises from Hill’s assessment of the ‘vocal’ (*OS* 40) in the fortieth section of *The Orchards of Syon*; but it is also due to its structured nature that both its aesthetics and its semantics can be questioned. This is expressed through a meditation on some experimental forms of music, in the same section of *The Orchards of Syon* (2002), which reads:

> Still, gratitude to music for making
> us vocal: music to find its place here.
> Estimable Saint-Saëns, firework cadenzas,
> Fourth or Fourteenth of July. Does music
> know or care how it sounds? (*OS* 40)

The enjambment between the first two lines poses an interesting question inasmuch as ‘gratitude to music for making’ amplifies the notion that music is in a certain manner akin to the divine, possessing the capacity to make. However, the following line immediately indicates that we are dealing with the way in which music is made available to us, and how it can ‘find its place here’. Moreover, the idea of vocality remains itself ambiguous in its reference to language, as it indicates the gift of voice and therefore the possibility of expression, communication, and linguistic art; it also suggests volubility.

The concept of music existing within its own sphere, as some kind of mode associated with the divine, is consistent with the suggestion that it might not 'know or care how it sounds'. There is a suggestion that sacred music exists within a dimension removed from the données of human knowledge, experience, and awareness. The implication of music existing within this type of ordered yet self-contained realm is that its capacity and manner to carry forth meaning might be limited. As Shakespeare puts it in Sonnet 8, it is 'the true concord of well-tuned sounds', and it is our construal of it that allows us to interpret it in particular ways.[14]

It is perhaps in connection with the intimation of this possibility that the poet turns to the equally liturgically grounded *Penitential Psalms* (written in order to celebrate the 1000th anniversary of the arrival of Christianity in Russia) by the experimental composer Schnittke in his suggestion that the ordered nature of music might in fact be denoting nothing but incoherence. So, in the same section of *The Orchards of Syon* he writes:

> […] Order construes
> the incoherent, widely as we need.
> Here's late Schnittke now, auditor
> *pro defunctis* and all-present, resuscitating
> organum. To summon from drone-tomb
> commotions of calm.
> […] *Penitential*
> *Psalms* on *dot edu.* Listen,
> Beryozka, birchling, this is so far
> true to my acclaim:
> aleatoric light that remains unfinished,
> as Schnittke and his music multiform,
> struck off in mean unpropitious time. (*OS* 40)

Schnittke's experimental style, described as polystylism, seeks to incorporate a multitude of styles into the same piece. Still, authors writing about Schnittke's polystylistic technique have also pointed out that the experiment transcends the mere clash of stylistic elements, and draws

[14] William Shakespeare, 8, in *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, ed. John Kerrigan (London: Penguin, 1999), 8

heavily on allusion. Constantin Floros, for instance, has remarked that Schnittke's compositions resemble a language understood by countless people throughout the world because his music contains a high emotional potential and because it is expressive, suggestive, and associative.'[15] While highly experimental in the case of Schnittke, polystylism is not necessarily a new technique. John Webb points out that

> Stylistic pluralism in music is nothing new: examples occur in Monteverdi, Bach, Couperin, Mozart, Beethoven, Schumann, Wagner, Mahler and, of course, Ives. However, it is only in the 20th century that polystylism has become a pronounced feature in some composers' works [16]

Ives and Mahler 'in particular', he adds, 'began to explore the potential of polystylism', 'at the beginning of the [20th] century'.[17] Charles Ives is a relevant figure, because Hill has expressed his admiration for him in *Speech! Speech!*, where he describes Ives's *Ninetieth Psalm* – a religiously-inflected composition, which reinforces Hill's interest religious music, as 'grief's thánksgiving', and further writes about the piece:

> [..] Time, here renewed
> ás tíme, hów it páces and salútes ús | in its ways. (*SS* 26)

One might ask why the poet would, over the span of two consecutive volumes, refer to pieces by two composers who share stylistic similarities in terms of 'incoherence' and 'unpropitious time' (*OS* 40) on the one hand, and salutation and renewal on the other hand. Despite similarities in style, John Webb notes that Mahler was a greater influence on Schnittke than Ives was, and suggests that:

> Mahler's more traditional brand of polystylism only partly accounts for his greater influence. It is rather that Mahler's tone of voice, his Angst, is more

[15] Constantin Floros, 'Remarks on Alfred Schnittke', in *Alfred Schnittke: A Complete Catalogue* (Hamburg: Musikverlag Hans Sikorski, 2000), 5
[16] John Webb, 'Schnittke in Context', in *Tempo* No. 182 (September 1992), 19
[17] Ibid.

> akin to the 20th-century zeitgeist than is Ives's optimistic, all-embracing view of the world.[18]

The idea of angst might seem closer in nature to Hill's experience of his own artistic craft and his faith, but I would venture to suggest that the kind of expressive angst in Mahler's music and which influences Schnittke's composition is closer to the kind of poetic confessionalism which Hill has criticised.[19] This is arguably a question about the ethics of music and art more broadly, where the allusive nature of reference remains self-contained and falls flat so long as it does not serve the ethical purpose of memorialising. Hill might not share in the 'optimistic' worldview of Ives, but nonetheless he embraces Ives's *Psalm*, which in its orientation towards the divine, praises and salutes.[20] Once again, in Ives's piece and in Hill's reference to it, the aspiration of music towards divine revelation is enacted.

Still, poetry and music remain different in the way they connect to the divine sphere. This distinction between the two art forms is further explored in Hill's wrestling with the biblical story of the Creation at two different yet significant points in his writing. He initially writes about the Creation story in the first poem, 'Genesis', of his first published volume, *For the Unfallen* (1959). He then revisits the theme in his late volume *Clavics*. In 'Genesis', the exposition of the story is approached from the perspective of the poet, as he announces: 'Against the burly air I strode / Where the tight ocean heaves its load, / Crying the miracles of God' (*FTU* 15), and the idea of poetry as 'crying' emerges again. In contrast to the poetic voice and its cries, in *Clavics* the biblical story is explored in a musical setting:

> I detect something false in this disquiet
> So let's mark time as it remains.
> Fiction may find itself
> Compatible
> With truth

[18] Ibid., 20
[19] See Murphy, 'Geoffrey Hill and Confession', 136
[20] See Webb, 'Schnittke in Context', 20

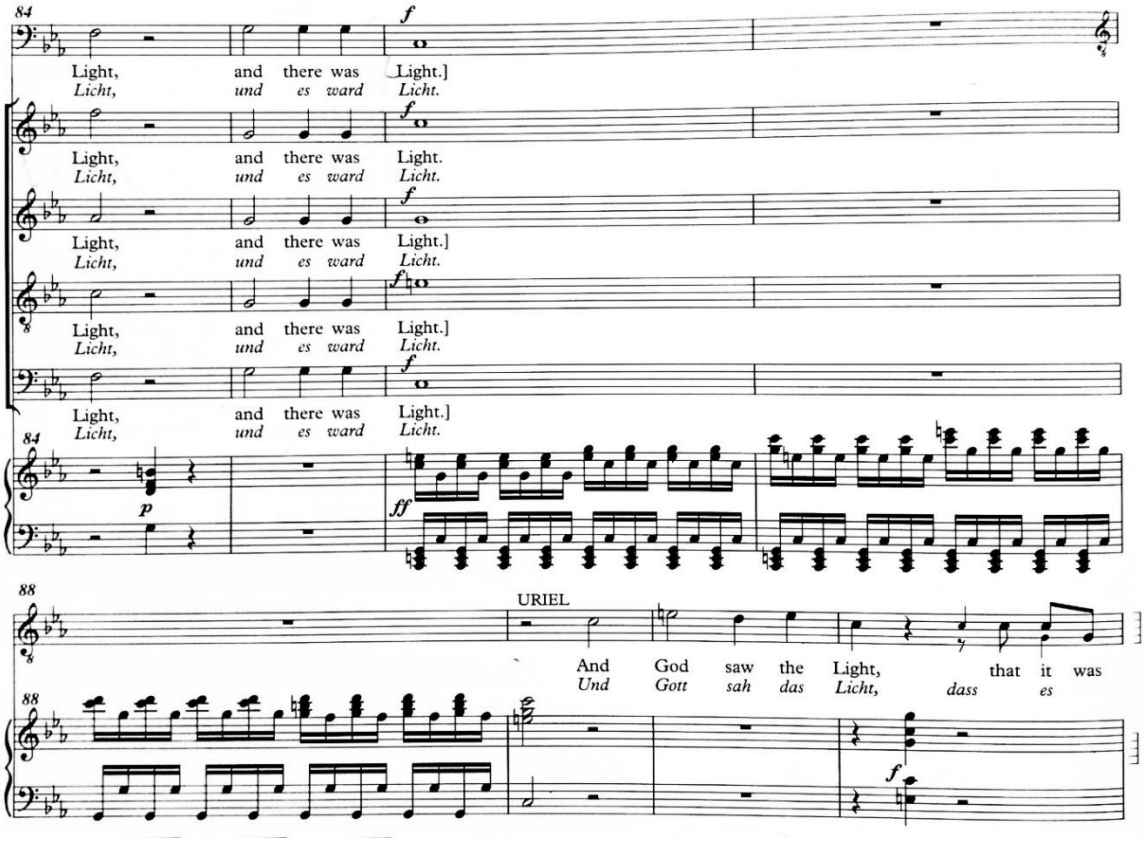
Like Ruth
In the Bible;
In a bright simple clef;
Sul ponte, bearing on the strains;
Break C minor to C major at LIGHT (*BH* 802)

The final line here is likely a reference to Haydn's *Creation*, a piece which, despite not being liturgical, remains essentially religious as it is based on the text of the Book of Genesis, and draws on the Psalms, as well as on Milton (this combination of religious, public, and literary text is essential to Hill's interest in how music and poetry can foster an experience of divine grace). 'Break C minor to C major at Light' is exactly what happens in Haydn's piece, where the resolution in C major coincides with the phrase 'and there was light':

> CHOR
> Und der Geist Gottes schwebte auf der Fläche der Wasser und Gott sprach:
> Es werde Licht, und es ward Licht.[21]

Accompanied by the following score:

[21] Joseph Haydn, *Die Schöpfung* (London: Novello, 1999), 4



22

This 'break', as Hill calls it, of C minor into C major, has been studied and analysed by critics with keen interest; Richard Kramer, for example, notes the parallel progression of chords and story towards a moment of both musical and narrative fulfillment:

> In the many rehearsals of the story that this music denotes, the plot is thick with the romance of evolution and its theologies. The moment of apotheosis comes at the creation of Light, a moment toward which all else ineluctably moves: toward the grand C major at 'und es war Licht'. This much celebrated C major chord 'resolves' all the dissonance of Chaos, and its seemingly impermeable C minor.[23]

Interestingly enough, however, the apotheotic break into C major from the tension of Chaos and its 'narration' in C minor does not happen at the first mention of the word 'light'; 'Licht' appears once before, when the choir tells the story of how God willed the creation of

[22] Ibid.
[23] Richard Kramer, *Unfinished* Music (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 155

light: 'Und Gott sprach: Es werde Licht!'.[24] At this point, the piece is still progressing in C minor, and the breakthrough has not yet happened. The choir's story, a reutterance of the biblical text, remains, at least at this stage, a mere narrative statement. This suggests that the break into C major can be seen as the moment where narration becomes performativity. God's utterance itself is performative, but in its narration through music it becomes indirect; nonetheless, the shift in key makes something happen in its reenaction of the performativity of God's Word and the consequent creation of light. Whether poetry too can make something happen in a similar way remains a question of central interest for Hill, and I write about the problematics of performative language in the next chapter of my thesis, in connection with prayer.

At first, Hill's 'Genesis' remains grounded in narration, as the poet tells both his own journey 'against the burly air', and the story of the biblical Genesis, as shown by his own matter-of-fact statement at the beginning of the poem: 'Against the burly air I strode / Where the tight ocean heaves its load / Crying the miracles of God' (*FTU* 15). The revised version of the poem, as it appears in the collected volume *Broken Hierarchies*, and in all reprints from 1985 onwards, is compressed to just 'Against the burly air I strode / Crying the miracles of God' (*BH* 3). This change removes the descriptive and hence shifts emphasis to the narrative dimension. Performativity in poetic language is achieved in the following verse, but it is only through the construal of poetry as prayer (which I discuss in my next chapter). Hill writes:

> 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. (*FTU* 15)

[24] 'And God said: let there be light!'; Haydn, *Die Schöpfung*, 4

There is an element of description in both the choir's narration of God's statement 'let there be light' in Haydn's *Creation*, and in Hill's opening lines of 'Genesis'.[25] In both instances this is followed by a move towards performativity, as poetry shapes itself as prayer in order to bring about action: 'And the waves flourished at my prayer / the rivers spawned their sand'. Music, on the other hand, with its burst into C major, coincides with the moment when the performative divine utterance becomes reality and light is brought into being. This suggests, that, at least for Haydn, the performative capacity of music is thought to parallel the performative power of God's creative statement.

This idea that music might provide a more direct link with the divine than poetry ever could is tested and explored by Hill in his poetry. Still, Hill's assessment of music remains anchored in text, as it is music based on religious texts, and not merely abstract or secular music, which can facilitate such an experience. For example, the possibility that music might have a stronger link to the divine is alluded to in 'Psalms of Assize', where once again sacred music is described as belonging to a higher dimension:

> hallowing consequence
> chants of the trace elements
> the Elohim
> unearthly music
> given to the world (*Canaan* 61)

The connection of music to the divine sphere is first indicated by 'chants of the trace elements / the Elohim'; this image, in its equating Elohim with 'the trace elements' suggests that God's presence is barely perceptible in the world, striking the same balance between certainty and doubt which the speaker expresses later in the same sequence, when he adds that 'we cannot know God / we cannot / deny his sequestered / power / in a marred nature' (*Canaan* 65). God's presence can only be known as 'trace elements' and his power remains 'sequestered';

[25] See Haydn, *Die Schöpfung*, 4

yet the speaker makes it clear that there is a link between this presence of the divine and this 'unearthly music', which comes from God, and is 'given to the world'. It is also interesting to note that the term 'elohim' is grammatically a plural term, and thus the idea of 'trace elements' of earlier forms of polytheistic worship is inherent in the form, and can be seen as connecting to inherited ancient practices and beliefs.[26] 'Unearthly music' reinforces this idea, indicating the divine origin of music, while 'given' in the following line ties into the language of divine gift, implying that music was 'given' to man by God. This 'unearthly music' picks up on the same theme, expressed in 'Tenebrae', of music being 'out of this world' (*Tenebrae* 44). Furthermore, the structure of the sequence makes it possible for the image to be read as a three-way parallelism between 'trace elements', 'the Elohim', and 'unearthly music'. With 'the Elohim' in the middle, this image, apart from reflecting the trinity, also brings forth the implication that the Elohim is – or at least part of His nature is made up of – 'unearthly music', and 'given to the world', and so music is in this sense part of divine kenosis.

Yet poised against music remains the idea of language, and poetry in particular. The relationship between the two, however, is not one of binary opposition, but far more intricate, as language retraces the path of music and attempts to imitate it. This is suggested at the beginning of the second section of 'Psalms of Assize', when the poet writes '[a]scend through declension / the mass the matter / the gross refinement' (*Canaan* 61). 'Declension' alludes to grammar, and so the idea of language is made manifest in these lines; yet 'ascension' is not something that Hill would usually associate with language, as a poet who has repeatedly emphasised the shortcomings of language as an artistic medium as a consequence of the Fall.[27] To 'ascend through declension' then, is to attempt to undo the fall of language through language itself, and to attempt to reach the divine through this arguably flawed medium. The

[26] See 'Elohim, n', *OED*, Vol. 5
[27] See *VP*, 134

tension between music and language is articulated in terms of music's existence as a thing 'given to the world' – though 'unearthly' - and the self-conscious effort of the artist whose tool is language to 'ascend through declension'. Music *is* 'unearthly', while poetry '[u]nearths from among the speechless dead' (*KL* 41), as Hill writes in 'History as Poetry'. Unlike music, poetry involves an active, self-aware process on the part of the poet to move against the limitations of language and 'ascend' towards and be heard by the divine. This distinction between music's capacity simply to be, and the effort of language to make things happen, is characteristic of the postlapsarian condition and in particular the effects of the Fall on language.

Nonetheless, Haydn's *Creation* indicates that the coming into being of light, accompanied by the burst from C minor into C major, is in fact brought about by the *words* uttered by God. It is, in this case, through the spoken word that music can burst out of chaos, in a move which makes the performativity of music here contingent on the performativity of language. Poetry, then, relying on language in its fallen form, is caught in a struggle between its imitation of the divine utterance, and the impossibility to break through, back into the prelapsarian, from its corrupt nature. The French philosopher Jacques Maritain, when discussing the nature of poetic intuition in his book *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, notes that the poetic idea mirrors in a sense the very act of Creation in its originating from the spirit's unfettered creativity, and its reliance on a free intellective process.[28] Yet, he adds, man is constrained by his own limitations, as well as by the limitations of language:

> Such is the supreme analogate of poetry. Poetry is engaged in the free creativity of the spirit. And thus it implies an intellective act which is not formed by things but is, by its own essence, formative and forming. Well, it is too clear that the poet is a poor god. He does not know himself. And his creative insight miserably depends on the external world, and on the infinite heap of forms and beauties already made by men, and on the mass of things that generations have learned, and on the code of signs which is used by his

[28] Jacques Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry* (New York: Pantheon, 1953), 112-3

> fellow men and which he receives from a language he has not made. Yet, for all that he is condemned both to subdue to his own purpose all these extraneous elements and to manifest his own substance in his creation.[29]

Maritain's account of the limitations of the poet's creative act in a fallen world is almost identical to Hill's concern with the inadequacy of language as a medium for art. But Hill's vision is more pessimistic than Maritain's, as the surrounding world, as Hill sees it, and its history are suffused with violence. Any kind of aesthetic impulse needs to incorporate the painful knowledge of atrocity and it is this incorporation of violence and degradation into poetry that can foster ethical achievement. In a discussion of Hill's Holocaust poetics, Antony Rowland also notes that

> The 'painful regard' of Geoffrey Hill's poems highlights a tension between the aesthetic – the 'brief gasp' between one cliché and another – and an ethical response to history. […] As a whole, these texts register an uneasy, but necessary, collaboration between the concentrated lyrical moment, and an appreciation of the potential 'barbarism' of unreflective writing in a post-Holocaust context.[30]

Music, then, emerges as a possible alternative: an art form which might potentially operate away from and beyond the ethical-aesthetic struggles of poetry, which bears the imprint of the Fall, trying to recover some sense of unity with the divine, but ultimately failing.

[29] Ibid.,113

[30] Antony Rowland, *Holocaust Poetry* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 62; 'Barbarism' refers to Adorno's claim about poetry in a post-Auschwitz era. See Theodor Adorno, *Can One Live After Auschwitz?* trans. Rodney Livingstone, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 34

2.2. '[T]he condition of music'

To say, however, that Hill regards poetry as intrinsically fallen and music as divinely-inspired would be to reduce the matter to unbefitting binary oppositions, to which Hill's poetry hardly ever lends itself. The fact that music is not subject to quite the same limitations as those which Hill attributes to language does not entail a capacity of music to stand outside historical contingency as some sort of divine mode of pure and absolute artistic expression. As Haughton notes in his essay '"Music's Invocation": Music and History in Geoffrey Hill', Hill is often drawn to the 'historical conjuncture' of both 'words and music', and it is through the affinity between poetry and music that Hill mediates the artist's relationship with religion:

> [Hill] is interested in the shared relationship of poet and musician to religion, and the ways to interpret and mediate the sacred texts of Judeo-Christian Europe.[31]

We might be tempted to think that Hill seeks to write poetry as imitating musical form as an attempt to escape from the 'imprisoning marble' (*CCW* 3) of language; nonetheless, he is quick to take a jab at Walter Pater's assertion that 'all art aspires to the condition of music'.[32] 'Not music', the poet writes in *Speech! Speech!* (2000), further adding: 'Hebrew. Poetry aspires to the condition of Hebrew' (*SS* 10). There is something ironically funny and equally confusing in this sudden reversal of the balance between the two artistic forms.

Envious as he might be of the composer's ability to unite 'solitary meditation with direct sensuous communication to a greater degree than the poet', Hill distances himself from the sublimation of music as the supreme art form professed by the nineteenth-century Idealists.[33] In this sense, though, Hill's quarrel is not with Walter Pater; nor is it with the

[31] Haughton, '"Music's Invocation"', 189
[32] Walter Pater, *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry* (London: Macmillan, 1888), 140
[33] Haffenden, *Viewpoints*, 91

Idealism of Schopenhauer, to whom he refers in connection to music in his essay 'Word Value in F.H. Bradley and T.S. Eliot', published in 2001 (*CCW* 546). A poet's dispute is with his own kind, and Hill's indictment of Eliot's stance on the relationship between music and poetry does not hinge on Eliot's idealisation of music, but rather, on the chief degradation of poetry which follows it:

> Eliot's self-laceration in *Four Quartets* over questions of verbal incompetence, matters of his own volition and which he presents to us with an enviable competence, gives not so much a syntax of self-recognition as a stasis of yearning, a yearning which is the negative correlative of a Schopenhaurian and Nietzschean exhaltation of music as the supreme art. (*CCW* 546)

Hill's yearning for sensuous and cognitive unity uttered in 'That Man as A Rational Animal Desires the Knowledge Which Is His Perfection' as the parallelism 'I imagine singing I imagine / getting it right' (*Canaan* 2) is different from Eliot's 'stasis of yearning' (*CCW* 545) and is not an aspiration to 'the condition of music'.[34] This aspect of Hill's affinity towards music is also noticed by Haughton in 'Music's Invocation', where he mentions the distaste expressed by Hill in connection to T.S. Eliot's 'gesture towards the condition of music' (*CCW* 11), a phrase which Hill uses in 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"'.[35] Yet, he adds, Hill's disagreement with Eliot raises the question of what the meaning of Hill's own 'reiterated gesture towards music' is, and how exactly it is different from Eliot's.[36] For Hill, he then contends, music is not simply a matter of sublimated sensuous expression, but, like poetry, an art-form bound by history:

> For Hill, as for Eliot, music is aligned to the sacred, but in Hill's case it also involves, in addition to that 'focus' on 'language itself', the 'historical sense' Eliot thought essential to poetry (but not, apparently, to music). In recreating

[34] See Pater, *The Renaissance*, 140
[35] Haughton, '"Music's Invocation"', 190
[36] Ibid.

> his own poetry of music Hill insists that we understand music not only as sensuously immediate but also as historically mediated.[37]

Music, then, while it might survive in its 'own sphere' (*Tenebrae* 44), is not completely free from the limitations which affect language. To deny this would be to posit an almost psychomachic artistic gap between music and poetry, with the former being a supreme art form, and the latter the utter expression of degradation, a view which Hill makes clear he rejects.

Hebrew might seem like an odd choice (yet not surprising for readers familiar with Hill's poetry, as it implicates biblical and religious history into the question) for the poet's amendment of Pater's claim that 'all art aspires to the condition of music'.[38] This swap of music for Hebrew turns the focus back on language and its theological potential. The matter is further complicated by the fact that Hebrew is the language of divine revelation. By this, the balance is further shifted in favour of language, as it is now its turn to have its divine origins emphasised. Sperling notes that Hill's swapping of 'music' for 'Hebrew' 'raises the possibility of a more original, less "compromised" language'.[39] Revelation as spoken word is also alluded to in *Speech! Speech!* through '[s]ay that it ís / a wind in the mulberry trees' (*SS* 10); these lines constitute a reference to the biblical story told by a passage in Samuel 2, where God commands David not to fight the Philistines before he hears a sound in the mulberry tree, which is to signify that God will lead him:

> And let it be, when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself: for then shall the LORD go out before thee, to smite the host of the Philistines.[40]

---

[37] Ibid.
[38] Pater, *The Renaissance*, 140
[39] *VP*, 182
[40] Samuel 2 5:24

Yet Hebrew, in its association with the Old Testament, is not merely a medium for the spoken word. It is instead, equally a medium for song, as Haughton also notes in his article when he argues that Hill's line 'reminds us that Hebrew has been one of the greatest sources of music in the psalms and elsewhere'.[41] That the author must have had the Psalms in mind when writing about Hebrew is strongly hinted at by the fact that in the preceding section, Hill mentions 'praise-songs' for the first time in *Speech!Speech!*, although he does place them in a secular context here:

> Faithfulness wrong-footed (this, now, in re
> Colonel F. Fajuyi, late Nigerian army)
> asks and receives praise-songs in lieu. (*SS* 10)

The praise-songs appear in a secular-military context, but through his reference to Nigeria, the poet is also indicating the African tradition of praise verse. Karin Barber writes about the African tradition of praise poetry; she notes that

> Praise poetry is notable for its fluid, disjunctive form, its vocative, second-person address and its simultaneous evocation of the past and the present, bringing the powers and potentials of dead predecessors into the centre of the living community'[42]

The fluidity between the past and the present, the evocation of the dead and their bearing on the present and the community, as well as the direct mode of address, are elements which Hill's own poetry of praise incorporates. Hill spent a period in the 1960s teaching in Nigeria, and it is likely that during his experience there he became familiar with this tradition. Not much has been written or said about Hill's time in Nigeria, but the topic was briefly covered during his 2013 interview with Sameer Rahim for *The Telegraph*. Following Hill's death in

[41] Haughton, '"Music's Invocation"', 197
[42] Karin Barber, *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons, and Publics: Oral and Written Culture in Africa and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 75

2016, a complete version of the interview was republished in *Prospect Magazine*. The following exchange between Rahim and Hill took place:

> R: Tell me about teaching in Nigeria in the 1960s.
>
> GH: I left two months before the civil war broke out. Things were pretty ropey even when I was there. There was already a link between the University of Leeds and University of Ibadan. I wasn't being a lonely explorer…it was generally understood that when you went you would be given a lot of free time to explore Nigerian culture and Nigerian landscape. When I arrived there [I] was to discover a very seriously depleted university and a very seriously depleted English department because the faculty had contained a very large number of Igbos who had fled to the East. I found myself taking on the lecturing load of about three people. I had a very hardworking three months or so. I did drive over to the east and fly to the north. I got around reasonably well.[43]

Asked whether he had met the Nigerian poet Christopher Okigbo, who went on to fight in the civil war and was subsequently killed, Hill confirmed their brief meeting, over 'lunch', and added, in response to Rahim's question about a poem dedicated to Okibgo, that it took him a 'long time' to find how he could 'effectively commemorate him'.[44] The poem in question is 'Ezekiel's Wheel', published in *Canaan* in 1996.

David Sherman writes, in an article about Hill's elegies published in and up to the volume *Canaan*, that Hill's elegiac poetics can be construed in terms of an 'oscillation' between Levinasian ethics and a Kierkegaardian absurdity of faith, manifested as a 'tension between the sacrifice of the self for the other and the sacrifice of the other for God'.[45] The way in which Hill draws on the Nigerian tradition of 'praise-songs' while also hinting at the idea of the Psalms themselves allows him to operate within this tension between the attempt

[43] Rahim, 'An Interview with Geoffrey Hill (1932-2016)'
[44] Ibid.
[45] David Sherman, 'Elegy Under the Knife: Geoffrey Hill and the Ethics of Sacrifice' in *Twentieth Century Literature,* Vol. 54, No. 2 (Summer 2008), 168

to sacrifice the self for the sake of elegising the other – in this particular case Okigbo – and offering the other up to the divine. However, the same 'paradox of self-presentation', which Cummings writes about is at play here, and remains poignant in the context of music as well.[46] It is arguably for this reason that Hill's musically inclined poetry seeks to operate within the tension between the sacred and the secular, and this complicates the Levinas-Kierkegaard tension of the question of sacrificing the self for the other and the other for the divine. In his elegy to Okigbo, Hill plays with and tests this tension between the sacred act of praise in memorialising and paying tribute, and the secular bounds of history. The second stanza of the poem reads:

> Praise-song for oil drums,
> a psalm of spillage:
> these things these men
> named and unnamed
> sold and selfsold
> to the generations.
> Ezekiel's wheel
> shall eternize all
> but to no end –
> posthumous sodalities
> of the traduced
> feasting traduction.
> Cannot? Why – what
> cannot you not think? (*Canaan* 57)

Here, the gloss of divine worship, represented by the traditional praise songs – and the implicit allusion to the Psalms – is melded with the secular-historical. The 'oil drums' and 'spillage' are likely to be remarks about a particular occurrence within history, namely the ecological catastrophe constituted by repeated oil spillages in the Niger Delta, with 'more than 7,000 spills between 1970 and 2000'.[47] However, there is also a kenotic suggestion

[46] Cummings, 'Recusant Hill', 38
[47] John Vidal, 'Nigeria's Agony Dwarfs the Gulf Oil Spill. The US and Europe Ignore It', *The Observer* (30 May 2010), at https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/may/30/oil-spills-nigeria-niger-delta-shell

inherent in the idea of 'spillage', and divine kenosis has often been associated with the Psalms. Donald Sheehan, for instance, in his introduction to his translation of the Psalms into English, describes the relation between David and Christ as 'a *kenotic* relationship', and maintains that right behind the Psalms lies the 'Cross of Christ'.[48]

The African tradition of praise poetry itself fosters a mode of artistic memorialising in which the object is plunged into the continuum of history through being rendered linguistic. In her study *The Anthropology of Texts*, Karin Barber points out the fact that praise-poetry mimics the presence of the object without attaching it to a particular physical thing, therefore enabling it to enter into a historical string of remembrance achieved through quotability. She argues that:

> Many […] African oral genres, including praise-poetry, are made object-like without the need for attachment to actual physical things. They are constituted as *objects of attention and recognition*, in two main ways: first, by constructing stretches of discourse to be *quotable*, fostering the perception that these formulations pre-existed their present moment of utterance and could also continue to exist after it; and second by constructing stretches of discourse to attract or require *exegesis*, so that they become the focus of sustained attention and discussion.[49]

This type of praise-poetry, as Barber stresses in the same chapter of her book, allows for a fluid 'evocation of the past and the present', thus eschewing the rigidity of other sacred praise forms.[50] Such praise, then, collapses history into text, and it is this kind of technique which can help us understand Hill's own attempt at praise 'songs' in his poems while accounting for the impossibility of sacramentality in his work. For him, history remains tainted by man's separation from God. The tug between the sacred and the secular also remains, as the two are intertwined. The problem of language and history itself is also then explored, as the poet

[48] Donald Sheehan, *The Psalms of David: Translated from the Septuagint Greek* (Eugene, OR.: Wipf and Stock, 2013), xxxviii
[49] Barber, *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons, and Publics*, 76-7
[50] Ibid., 74-5

mentions the 'traduced / feasting traduction' (*Canaan* 57). There is irony in speaking of 'traducing' – one sense of the verb is defined by the *OED* as '[t]o speak evil of, esp. (now always) falsely or maliciously; to defame, malign, vilify, slander, calumniate, misrepresent' – in what sets out to be an elegy.[51] The online version of the *OED* lists a theological usage of the verb: '[t]o derive, deduce, or obtain (something, esp. a soul or original sin) *from* a specified source.'; this initiates a play between its primary meaning as listed by the *OED*, i.e., 'to put into another form or mode of expression, esp. into another language; to translate, render', and the theological implications of the term.[52] Once again the link between language and sin is reiterated through semantic play.

The praise of the elegy, like the praise of the songs and the Psalms, is lost within the failings of linguistic expression itself. The impossibility of untangling oneself from these limitations is made clear through the use of 'cannot', followed by the confusing syntax of the question '[w]hy – what / cannot you not think?' (*Canaan* 57). In his study of Hill's elegiac poetry, Sherman emphasises Hill's desire to extricate 'the intrinsic value of language from its degradations'.[53] The strong ethical focus of Hill's elegiac mode, he argues, can enable us to 'consider Hill's poetry an attempt to create a relation to the past and the dead in which the self-interest of the living is not the organising principle'.[54] Hill's interest in the Psalms, however, extends far beyond this reference, and is deeply rooted in his understanding of what poetry should be.

[51] 'Traduce, v.' 3, *OED,* Vol 8
[52] 'Traduce, v.' 1, *OED* Online; 'Traduce, v.' 1b, *OED,* Vol 8
[53] Sherman, 'Elegy Under the Knife', 170
[54] Ibid., 173

2.3. 'Parturition of psalm'

In his interview with John Haffenden, Hill further stated that if poetry were to have any value, it needed to 'encompass the maximum range of belief or unbelief', and added that as far as European poetry was concerned, this problem had been 'solved […] by the poetry of the Psalms, the Book of Job, and the Divine Comedy'.[55] Belief and unbelief in connection to sacred music – and to his own poetry about it – are often tested and measured out against each other by Hill. In a sense, Hill's poetry, in its treading the line between the secular and the sacred, incorporates a range of both belief and unbelief. The Psalms feature heavily in Hill's poetry, and such tension is made manifest throughout much of his verse about them. The first mention of the Psalms is made by Hill in the third section of 'Locust Songs', called 'Amherst', and which was not originally published in *King Log* (1969), but included in *Broken Hierarchies.* Here, he writes:

> Redemption spurns parody. The first fruits
> Are spoken for beyond the call of shame.
> The elect dip their fingers in cruets
> Of reason; burnt feathers revive the psalm. (*BH* 41)

Redemption might spurn parody, but parody is unavoidable in poetry, operating within the 'imprisoning marble' (*CCW* 3) which is language, and tethered to its fallenness. Hill explores this, for example, in his later volume *Without Title* (2006), where in 'On the Reality of the Symbol', following a trenchant incursion into Karl Rahner's theology of the symbol, he adds:

[55] Haffenden, *Viewpoints*, 88

> Parturition of psalm like pissing blood
> I múst say, the formal evidence
> so much an issue. (*WT* 9)

The 'psalm' here is removed from its sacred dimension. Instead, it is linked to the line's somewhat troubling musicality achieved by the blending of plosives – /p/ in 'parturition' and 'pissing', and the silent /p/ in 'psalm', and /b/ in 'blood' – with the sibilant /s/ in 'psalm' and 'pissing'. A break in this musicality is marked by: 'I must say, the formal evidence / so much an issue'. However, the unsettling ring of plosives and sibilants is soon recollected and reverberates again as the poem continues:

> […] Though not painful
> pain's in the offing, somewhere signifies
> its needled presence. Plus, the prostate's
> a nasty beast even at the best of times. (*WT* 9)

Parody is also evident here, with Hill's secular lines intersecting with a liturgical plane. This is achieved through his mention of the 'psalm', as well as the Eucharistic implications of 'blood' and 'presence', only to be then brought back into the dirty and disturbing context of bodily decay through their unholy link with 'piss' and the disease of the 'prostate'. Yet the contrasting conjunction 'but' opening the following line indicates that this tension is about to be redressed. This balance the poet seeks to restore through '[b]ut for translation the old linguaduct / works not too badly. This is a translation.' (*WT* 9). Once again translation is brought to the forefront of the matter, and once again it is explored in relation to the Psalms. In a literal sense, his poem is not 'a translation'. Hill's title alludes to Rahner's 'The Theology of the Symbol', but he does not incorporate translated phrases from the original German text into his poem, nor does he enter into a direct dialogue with it. A translation, however, in its etymological sense, is a 'carrying across'.[56] And here, the sacred is carried

[56] Its etymology is the Latin '*translātiōn-em*' 'a transporting'. 'Translation, n', *OED*, Vol. 8

across into the fallen dimension of existence, tainted with decay and disease. 'Redemption spurns parody' (*BH* 41), but here, and elsewhere in Hill's poetry about sacred music, redemption is carried forth into parody, and through the tension struck between belief and unbelief, redemption stays 'in the offing', hidden inside this parody.

There is a fine balance emerging from this tension between redemption and parody, and one which lends an interesting light to Hill's replacement of Pater's 'music' with 'Hebrew' (*SS* 10). Beyond the ironic conversation with Pater lies an abandonment of the idea that 'music survives' (*Tenebrae* 44), and which implies a moral and ethical superiority to poetry. On the other hand, Hebrew is nonetheless a language, and it is thus still attached to 'that imprisoning marble' of which Hill speaks in his essay 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"', and any arts relying on language – including Hebrew – remain 'the most impure of arts' (*CCW* 3); one of the most significant texts written in the Hebrew language is the Old Testament; referring to Hebrew, he is likely to be thinking both of Scripture, and of the liturgical use of the language in Jewish services in synagogues. When considering Hebrew in relation to the Old Testament, divine revelation is then handed over to us via language, and so the Old Testament as the text of revelation, becomes a text which belongs, at the same time, to the divine and the worldly. It is through this word handed over directly from God that we can learn about the revelation, and it is through the medium language that we learn doctrine. Yet it is also through language that we learn of sin, as articulated clearly for example in the Ten Commandments. The Old Testament treads the boundary between the human and the divine, as knowledge is revealed to humanity through the use of language. It then both reveals and indicts, informs of the prelapsarian through the postlapsarian, and teaches about God through narrating the history of man's separation from Him. In doing so, it covers both redemption and parody.

Furthermore, the Book of Psalms, which Hill mentions in his interview with Haffenden as one of the works possessing 'the absolute freedom to encompass the maximum range of belief or unbelief', is a book in the Old Testament, and is written in Hebrew.[57] To add to this, it is also in the Book of Psalms that the poetic and the musical are brought together in an act of divine worship. In this light, poetry aspiring to the condition of Hebrew is more than a mere humorous disparaging of Pater's idealisation of music; 'Hebrew' replacing 'music' (*SS* 10) does not correct, but channels what is meant by music, as a metonymy for the Psalms is hinted at. In this suggestion, the musical is not lost and dissolved into the linguistic, but rather narrowed down into the specific. The aspiration to the condition of Hebrew, then, can be read as an aspiration to the condition of the Psalms, which is both musical and textual in nature, and which aims to cover the span between belief and unbelief which Hill is interested in.

However, this 'condition of Hebrew' remains obstinately unattainable to the poet, as the divine element is removed from the creative process. If the relationship between David and Christ as construed in the Psalms is kenotic, the same type of kenosis remains unreachable for the poet.[58] It is due to the removal of the divine from the relationship that the poet is left to operate within these various types of tensions, including the one noticed by Sherman between Levinasian ethics and Kiergaardian faith, in that it is through the 'sacrifice of the other for God' that the impossibility of ethics in poetry is sought to be undone.[59] When writing of the kenotic nature of the Psalms, Sheehan notes that '[e]very Davidic kenosis is made full, is *remembered*, by Christ in His death and resurrection'.[60]

[57] Haffenden, *Viewpoints*, 88
[58] See Sheehan, *The Psalms of David*, xxxviii
[59] Sherman, 'Elegy Under the Knife', 168
[60] Sheehan, *The Psalms of David*, xxxviii

In poetry, however, the mode of elegy can only be secular, and all liturgical implications of the process of remembering are secondary to it. Poetry, unlike the music of the Psalms, seeks actively to reintroduce the divine back into the question, to '[a]scend through declension' (*Canaan* 61); but the self-elegising effects of writing, which I have discussed in connection to architecture in the previous chapter, cannot be effaced. To write poetry like the Psalms, however, provides another potential way of minimising the paradox by relying on sacred music.

In section 26 of *Ludo*, Hill writes:

> Take the refrain;
> put it through the filters again
> […]
> the crouch-church at Kenelm
> the psalter to my psalm,
> and knack of half-rhyme;
> right love held so briefly,
> to speak truthfully
> of that righteous realm. (*BH* 613)

The half-rhyme established between 'Kenelm', 'psalm', and 'half-rhyme' is indicative of the three-way split between the three artistic forms discussed in the present and previous chapters, namely architecture ('the crouch-church at Kenelm'), music ('psalm'), and poetry ('rhyme'), as they chime with the 'righteous realm' as well. The rhyming pattern reminds us that these artforms do share similarities, while 'refrain' at the beginning of the section can be read as a further means of bringing together music and poetry. The term is used to refer to lines occurring repeatedly in poems and songs.[61] And yet once more the balance is tipped in favour of linguistic expression, as at the end of the section, he expresses a desire 'to speak truthfully / of that righteous realm'. '[T]o speak truthfully' marks a point of departure from

[61] The *OED* defines 'refrain' as '[a] phrase or verse recurring at intervals, esp. at the end of each stanza of a poem or song'. 'Refrain, *sb.*', 2., *OED*, Vol. 13

his earlier clear parallelism between song and apprehension of truth, expressed in 'That Man as a Rational Animal Desires the Knowledge Which Is His Perfection' in *Canaan* as 'I imagine singing I imagine / getting it right' (*Canaan* 2). This potential of language 'to speak truthfully' remains however unfulfilled, as the poet indicates in the following section, showing lack of clarity and confusion when it comes to language:

> I cannot comprehend the situation
> as I describe it;
> let verse enrobe it
> with lively fantasy of time and motion (*BH* 613)

There is a further point of tension in connection to the liturgical practice of praise and lament, which Hill mentions in 'Cycle', published in *Canaan* in 1996. The phrase 'praise and lament' in connection to the Psalms appears in Claus Westermann's study *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, and is identified by Westermann as central to the Psalter.[62] Westermann explains how praise and lament are used as modes of addressing God in the Psalms, and how, in some cases, the shift from one mode to the other is extremely fluid. He notes, for example, in connection to the thanksgiving Psalms, that

> [w]ithin these Psalms lamentation has been turned into praise. They already contain the 'thanks'. All these Psalms, in which lament and petition end in a statement that is already declarative praise are rather witnesses to the power of the praise of God, which can well up from the depths. It is no longer possible to speak of an absolute predominance of petition and lament.[63]

He goes on to argue that it is divine intervention that can, ultimately, awaken praise in the person who is lamenting, while his sorrow remains 'unchanged'.[64]

---

[62] Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 81
[63] Ibid.
[64] Ibid.

The idea of fluidity between the two modes, and the capacity of the Psalms to move the lamenting person to praise through an appeal to divine intervention is explored by Hill in 'Cycle':

> Natural strange beatitudes
> the leafless tints
> of spring touch red through brimstone
> what do you mean praise and lament
> it is the willow
> first then
> larch or alder (*Canaan* 38)

In likening a psalm to a spasm in the third section of 'Cycle' – 'a spasm / a psalm' (*Canaan* 38) – and adding '[a]re we not moved by / "savage indignation"' (*Canaan* 39), the speaker both acknowledges the awakening capacity arising from the fluidity of the two modes, and appears to question its validity. We are moved by something, he contends, but whether it is the play on praise and lament remains open to question, as he continues to ponder obstinately over the matter in the final section of the poem, with its broken reiterations:

> praise and lament
> praise and lament
>
> what do you mean
> praise
> lament
> praise and lament
> what do you mean
> do you mean
> beatitudes (*Canaan* 39)

This final section is also loosely a sonnet, as it is made up of fourteen lines, and it is through this sonnet structure that the poet once again taps into a tradition, while at the same time questioning its hierarchy and the possibility of perfect alignment with it, much as he does in connection to architecture in his 'Apology'. The short lines, the repetition of the phrase 'praise and lament', alongside the line breaks occurring in the middle of the phrase, and the

probing and questioning of meaning all suggest that structure – both musical and poetic – can only be grasped as fragmented and somewhat obscured.

The same idea of praise and lament resurfaces in Hill's meditation on Charles Ives's setting of the text of Psalm 90, where he writes:

> […] Charles Ives's
> *Ninetieth Psalm*, found late, as grief's thánksgiving;
> as full tide with ebb tide, the one in the other,
> slow-settling bell arpeggios. (*SS* 26)

Here too, the awkward balance between praise and lament is reflected by 'grief's thánksgiving' as an uneasy blend of solace and pain. This, Hill indicates, is echoed by the sound of the broken chords of Ives's music, his arpeggios capturing the coming together of 'full tide' and 'ebb tide'.

Still, in playing within the span of such various tensions, the author can at least attempt to escape the condition which he has described, in his 'Preface' to *Style and Faith*, published as a collection in 2003, as writers being 'idle spectators of their own writing' (*CCW* 263). Hill tackles the topic by referring to Calvin's observation, in his reading of Psalm 11, that translating the Hebrew word *bachan* as 'to approve' misses the fact that it 'often signifies *to examine or to try'* (see *CCW* 263).[65] Hill further quotes Calvin in his explication of the term as referring to God's distinguishing between who is righteous and who is unrighteous in 'such a way as shows that he is not an idle spectator' (see *CCW* 263).[66] Avoiding such idle spectatorship, Hill remarks, is what makes for the best English writing from the beginning of the sixteenth and up to the end of the seventeenth century:

> I am prepared to argue, and indeed this book is an attempt at such an argument, that it a characteristic of the best English writing of the early sixteenth to late

[65] John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, trans. Revd. James Anderson, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1949), 165, quoted in *CCW* 263
[66] Ibid.

> seventeenth centuries that authors were prepared and able to imitate the original authorship, the *auctoritas*, of God, at least to the extent that it forbade them to be idle spectators of their own writing (*CCW* 263).

Calvin spoke of the inadequacy of a translation to convey the meaning underlying the original Hebrew word; Hill writes about original writing tapping into and imitating the 'original authorship' (*CCW* 263) in a way analogous to translation, a context which lends new meaning both to the aspiration to the condition of Hebrew, and to Hill's assertion, in 'On the Reality of the Symbol', that '[t]his is a translation' (*WT* 9).

In the eighteenth section of *The Triumph of Love* (1999), the question of linguistic distinction and definition in relation to the Psalms is once again tackled:

> It is not [possibly a lacuna – ED]
> whether we have the Psalms in Latin or Hebrew
> nor by what authority such things are committed,
> dismissed among the aeonic dense snowflurries:
> it is not in the mortgaged conversions – the synagogues,
> the cathedrals – to Caesar and the great Pharaoh.
> Distinctions are as nothing, but identity
> is pulled apart. Try definition (*TTOF* 9*)*.

There is here an association between the question of 'whether we have the Psalms in Latin or Hebrew' with 'the mortgaged conversions', and hence with the language of monetary value, as well as secular praise of stately authority figures symbolised by the Caesar and the great Pharaoh. This link shows that once language and meaning slide into the question of distinction rather than definition, it can become irrelevant.

Hebrew, in this light, can only remain an object of aspiration for poetry inasmuch as it remains the language within which the Psalms voice their imitation and translation of divine authorship and therefore encompass both belief and unbelief – both praise and lament – in their sacred condition in a fallen world. This is to say that Hebrew in the Psalms remains relevant only so long as it can act as a means of definition and not a tool for distinction from

other languages such as Latin. The association between Hebrew and Latin, the bringing together of synagogues and cathedrals, and the Pharaoh and the Caesar, suggest that music – even in its liturgical mode – exists within the boundaries of history. Implicit in this imagery is the suggestion of biblical narrative, and the move from the Old Testament to the New Testament.

Placing the question of 'whether we have the Psalms in Latin or Hebrew' at the heart of the matter marks a disjunction from the imitation/translation of the divine authorship in which poetry should be engaged, as Hebrew is plunged into a man-made paradigmatic distinction; furthermore, the Psalms are no longer the subject of exegesis, but rather trenchantly assessed through the linguistic medium of their performance, as all awareness of the author is lost. With such awareness lost, we all become 'idle spectators' (*CCW* 263) to the Psalms, and all imitation of divine authorship is lost. In 'The Weight of the Word', Hill expresses an idea similar to that of imitation of divine authorship, when he speaks of 'natural mimesis' (*CCW* 360), which he defines, drawing on Charles Wesley, as

> the 'spontaneous' movement of a creative spirit at once submissive to reveal authority and hard-pressed by brute fact (*CCW* 360).

Yet 'brute fact' remains historical fact, and thus poetry and music both open themselves up to the paradox of aspiration towards divine imitation while being constantly weighed down by history.

Hill also mentions the Psalms in the sequence 'Psalms of Assize'; this is relevant in reaching an understanding of his view of how religious music and language bear on the question of divine eloquence in the context of historical circumstance. The title of the sequence itself conflates biblical language with legal terminology. 'Assize' is used to refer to

a ‘legislative sitting, statute, statutory measure or manner’ according to the *OED*, and also used to refer to ‘[t]he decree or edict made at such a sitting’, and

> Applied specifically in Eng. Hist. to various formal edicts, named sometimes from the place where they were made, sometimes from the subject with which they were concerned.[67]

The ‘Psalms of Assize’ then contain the idea of historical rendering of metaphysical truth; the Psalms, associated with divine revelation, are to be made the subject of a legalistic enquiry, whereby the process of language, grammar, and the potentiality of music are gauged. It is worth noting that from an etymological point of view, the term ‘assize’ can be traced back – via Middle English – to the Old French *assise*, the feminine past participle form of *asseoir*, which meant, according to the *OED*, ‘act of setting, settlement, fixation of imposts, assessment’.[68] Thus the sequence shapes itself along the lines of a legalistic type of assessment of the Psalms, and of eloquence as pertaining to the divine, a concept also ‘assessed’ in terms of how man can potentially grasp it. By this, divine eloquence is wrestled back into the realm of something which is immediate for us to assess and value, and hence its epistemological potential is explored.

In section VI of ‘Psalms of Assize’, Hill writes about ‘the instinctive / salutation’, and contends:

> if eloquent at all
> it is
> with the inuring of scars
> and speechlessness
> it does not improve Sion
> it has no place
> among psalms
> to the chief musician
> it goes without lament (*Canaan* 65)

[67] ‘Assize, *n.*’, I, I. 2a. *OED*, Vol 1
[68] Ibid.

Here, the speaker of the poem draws a distinction between the Psalms (with their inherent tension between praise and lament), and salutation. Salutation, in its instinctive assent to the power of God, acts as mere praise. Such praise, deprived of lament – 'to the chief musician / it goes without lament' – is devoid of any significant purpose, as 'it does not improve Sion'. Despite instinctive nature moving us towards praise, we 'cannot know God' (*Canaan* 65), as Hill asserts earlier in the poem. Furthermore, the dismissive tone of 'it has no place / among psalms', doubled by the slight concession 'if eloquent at all / it is / with the inuring of scars / and speechlessness', indicates that praise alone cannot 'endure', to use a term Hill himself has applied to poetry in his interview with *The Paris Review*.[69]

Salutation, as mere instinctive belief, is meaningless in its lack of tension; this is reflected by 'it goes without lament'. Nonetheless, music itself plays an important role. The eloquence of salutation is questioned as it is pointed out that it depends on it inuring 'speechlessness'. This term reiterates an aspiration to break away from the constraints of language and towards music, as its place 'among psalms' is tested and denied. This contrast is furthered by the fact that the speaker refers to 'the chief musician', another image which can be interpreted as either referring to God, or to a mediator between the human and the divine. The slightly awkward syntax of the sentence 'to the chief musician / it goes without lament' is meant to act as a psalmic reference, as the dedication '[t]o the chief musician' precedes several of the Psalms.[70] Similar images are at play in 'History as Poetry', where once again 'salutation' and 'speechless' are brought together in the first stanza:

> Poetry as salutation; taste
> Of Pentecost's ashen feast. Blue wounds.
> The tongue's atrocities. Poetry
> unearths from among the speechless dead (*KL* 41)

[69] Phillips, 'Geoffrey Hill: The Art of Poetry No. 80'
[70] See for example Psalm 18:1

Poetry, then, can attempt to gain its eloquence by inuring its 'speechlessness' through its memorialising of the dead and consequent bearing witness to the violence of history.

Yet the paradox of the 'imprisoning marble' (*CCW* 3) and the fallenness of language opens up again, indicated in 'History as Poetry' by the line break in '[p]oetry / unearths from among the speechless dead', a stylistic device which forces 'poetry' onto the same line as '[t]he tongue's atrocities'. The absence of a verb in this line, as well as the natural pause in speech marked by the full stop, creates a mirroring effect between the 'tongue's atrocities' and 'poetry'. It indicates, in this symmetry, the fact that poetry cannot escape the bearing of guilt on language. It is later, in the final stanza, that music and the Psalms are once again balanced against language as a medium for art, and the nature of praise as it arises from both is brought to the fore. 'Selah', the biblical exclamation so commonplace in the Psalms, indicates that once again the psalmic mode is sought through poetry:

> 'A resurgence' as they say. The old
> Laurels wagging with the new: Selah!
> Thus laudable the trodden bone thus
> Unanswerable the knack of tongues. (*KL* 41)

The idea of praise in the Psalms is here suggested by the laurel and reinforced by 'thus laudable'; yet once more the speaker indicates that even the Psalms are subject to historical narrative, as he alludes to the narrative of progression from the Old Testament to the New Testament through '[t]he old / Laurels wagging with the new'.

The intricacy of historical implication is complicated here by the image of the 'laurels' – presumably classical and pagan – 'wagging with the new', implying that biblical history is undertowed by various other strands of history, as the question of violence, lament, and almsgiving remains applicable. Nonetheless, the way in which history is construed in poetry,

as a secular artistic medium, is different from how it is represented in the liturgical medium of the Psalms. This is, for example, made explicit in *The Triumph of Love:*

> What remains? You may well ask. Construction
> or deconstruction? There is some poor
> mimicry of choice, whether you build or destroy.
> But the Psalms – they remain; and certain exultant
> canzoni of repentance, secular oppugnancy. *Laus*
> *et vituperatio*, the worst
> remembered, least understood, of the modes. (*TTOL* 12)

Hill tests the tension between belief and unbelief again in these lines, but in a more affirmative vein towards psalmody; yet here, the move from one to the other is fluid, as the sacred and the secular are bent upon each other. The Psalms – the liturgical songs of praise – remain, but so do some 'certain', rather indeterminate 'canzoni of repentance', and their 'secular oppugnancy'. As the biblical songs of praise are countered by the secularised and oppugnant music of the canzoni, so is the psalmic mode of address to the divine carried back – or translated – into a secular realm.

The mode of praise and lament is forced into the sphere of public discourse and shifts into praise and blame. Hence *laus et vituperatio* – praise and blame – marks a turn away from the liturgical focus on praise and lament in the music of the Psalms, and towards a mode which is anchored in political and social context. Jeffrey Wainwright, in his *Acceptable Words*, notes, in connection with the same passage, that 'Hill announces the poem's participation in public discourse'.[71] He adds, quoting Brian Vickers, that *laus et vituperatio* is a Latin rendering of Averroes's interpretation of the beginning of Aristotle's *Poetics,* and refers to rhetorical techniques used in opposing arguments.[72] In falling back upon *laus et vituperatio*, Wainwright contends,

[71] Jeffrey Wainwright, *Acceptable Words* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 81
[72] Brian Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 62, quoted in ibid.

> Hill is pursuing a tradition which places poetry as a part of a public discourse, an address to an audience which seeks to make use of its eloquence to persuade.[73]

The cleft between the liturgical music of the Psalms and poetry, steeped in secular history, is enacted along the movement from praise and lament towards praise and blame; and the shift from liturgical lament to public, socio-political blame is manifested by the change in the addressee, from the divine 'chief musician', to the human readers of poetry.

To attempt to counter the atrocities of history as a poet is to take a discursive stance against them. Doing so entails an espousal of those who, in the past, have also fought against them, hence Hill's broad interest in martyrs, ranging from the Catholic priest Robert Southwell, to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and fellow poets Paul Celan and Osip Mandelstam. In having their names 'unearthed' from the silence of history, they are praised and elegised. But poetry, as Hill indicates in 'History as Poetry' is 'salutation' (*KL* 41) and salutation, we are told in 'Psalms of Assize', 'has no place / among psalms' (*Canaan* 65). Lament, considered in its public-historical dimension then, must be linked with *vituperatio*, i.e., a public condemnation of history's monstrosities; and it is this that Hill attempts to do throughout his verse, including in 'Psalms of Assize', where the legal 'assize' implies the presence of a court and therefore of public indictment.

That such blame, for Hill, is derived from Christian belief, but placed into a broader context when it comes to poetry, has been suggested by Kathryn Murphy in her essay 'Geoffrey Hill and Confession', where she writes about Hill's interest in Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Kreisau Circle as linked to a certain understanding of 'confession' as derived from Christian doctrine but applied to the public domain:

---

[73] Wainwright, *Acceptable Words*, 81

> 'A confessing state' is 'one in which penitential discipline' – Hill's phrase in the Ash Wednesday Sermon – 'is inwoven with the texture of legislation itself'. The confessing state would be a counterpart to the corporate and public disciplines of penitence which Taylor and Donne had argued for. Hill offers as a 'blueprint' the writings of the Kreisau Circle, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*, thus associating the confessing state with the *Bekennende Kirche* ('confessing church'), and the resistance in Nazi Germany. For the *Bekennende Kirche*, of course, 'confessing' is primarily confessional: a matter of open adherence to a particular vision of Christian belief. What Hill takes from it, however, is a broader sense of speaking out in danger against power, or on behalf of the persecuted: integrity in the face of threat. [74]

This public 'speaking out' as *vituperatio*, then, can be read as a secular-poetic broadening of the lament in the Psalms; yet the composer of the Psalms, too, is very often speaking out against something, and is very often just as steeped in historical atrocity as the contemporary poet.

Through his blame, the poet indicates publicly his position against historical atrocities, and perhaps hopes, by seeking persuasion through eloquence, to prevent any such further occurrences. The psalmist, however, through his lament, seeks not prevention through eloquence, but direct divine intervention by triggering God's action. In his analysis of the modes of praise and lament in the Psalms, Westermann states that it is in the lament of the people that history is most clearly represented in the Psalms:

> The past forces itself into the present precisely in its contrast to the present. What *has* happened is heard as the antithesis of what *is* happening. […] The contrast cannot be so described, for properly speaking it is a contrast between what God has done earlier and is now doing. We need to be aware of why the concept 'history' neither appears nor could appear in the Bible. It is simply that the consciousness of the One who is active in what is happening is still too strong. *God* is confronted with former deeds in order to persuade him to do now, not what he is doing but what by contrast he had done earlier.[75]

[74] Murphy, 'Geoffrey Hill and Confession', 136
[75] Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, 215

This explanation, considered in connection with Hill's 'Psalms of Assize', can be extrapolated to his broader consideration of the relationship between music and theology: the musician's lament seeks to trigger repetition of a former divine deed. The poet, on the other hand, through his blame, seeks to prevent the repetition of historical atrocity by an act of persuasion addressed to human beings and an act of bearing witness offered to both humanity and divinity. The poet, unlike the psalmist, is reminded that he finds himself in the impossibility of bringing about divine action and needs to operate within the public domain rather than the strictly liturgical, as in 'To the Lord Protector Cromwell', published in *A Treatise of Civil Power* in 2007:

> 11
> There's an unfinished psalm doing the rounds
>
> 12
> in the vicinity of my skull. My tongue
>
> 13
> informs me this is not Hebrew but English
>
> 14
> or Brobdingnagian if I may construe it. (*ATOCP* 17)

The 'unfinished psalm', as well as the 'tongue', remind the poet that he cannot enter the mode of expression of the Psalms. They help to distinguish secular poetry from the liturgical music of the Psalms. The difference between lament and blame, then, resides in the fact that lament seeks reenactment of positive historical action on the part of the divine, while blame, as the poet's tool, seeks to atone for historical sin.

2.4. '[F]inal Measures'

Still, even music, as perhaps a less 'imprisoning' (*CCW* 3) artistic mode than poetry, can never break free from history. This is made clear by the fact that Hill draws heavily on musical vocabulary when he writes about historical atrocities. 'I have learned one thing: not to look down / So much upon the damned. They, in their sphere, / Harmonize strangely with the divine / Love' (*KL* 13), reads the final verse of 'Ovid in the Third Reich'. Any doubt that 'sphere' and 'harmonize' might be referring to music is cast out by the final line, where the speaker mentions the 'love-choir'; but in this instance, music's sphere is linked with the damned, and with the harsh realities of the Third Reich. Separated from the 'love-choir', the music of the damned, however, still harmonises, 'strangely', with the 'divine / Love' (*KL* 13). Implicit in this image is a consolatory idea of harmony as peaceful unity; but the implications of 'harmony', especially in connection to music are manifold. One sense of 'harmony' according to the *OED*, is '[t]he combination of musical notes, either simultaneous or successive, so as to produce a pleasing effect; melody; music, tuneful sound.'[76] This might suggest a kind of solace and consolation, but there is another sense of 'harmony', which denotes the most technical use of the term in music theory, namely

> [t]he combination of (simultaneous) notes so as to form chords; that part of musical art or science which deals with the formation and relations of chords; the structure of a piece of music in relation to the chords of which it consists.[77]

In a technical musical context, then, harmony is something that happens as a result of the deliberate sounding of certain notes and chords at the same time. Harmony happens, just as '[t]hings happen' (*KL* 13), and the focus on the technical aspect of harmony casts doubt over the moral implications of '[m]usic survives, composing her own sphere' (*Tenebrae* 44).

[76] 'Harmony, *n.*', 4, *OED*, Vol. 6
[77] 'Harmony, *n.*', 5, *OED*, Vol. 6

This could mean that music can always survive at a technical level, its 'sphere' being that of notes, pitch, and chords, and not the divine sphere of the Pythagorean theory of the music of the spheres.[78] So, Hill's envy of the composer seems justified, as music might indeed, 'unite solitary meditation with direct, sensuous communication' better than poetry, but only if one was to see music as primarily a technical choice of notes and poetry as primarily a semantic choice of words.[79] Yet even if music's semantic intimation is considered to be mainly derivative, this does not render it exempt from the bearing of history, and Hill reinforces this idea not only in 'Ovid in the Third Reich', but also in his decision to name an elegy for a child-victim of the Holocaust, 'September Song'.[80] Apart from this *song*, Hill also composes 'Two Chorale-Preludes: On Melodies by Paul Celan', recalling Celan's harrowing composition 'Todesfuge', where death and music are construed as one – 'Er ruft spielt süßer den Tod' ('He calls out more sweetly play death').[81] The term 'chorale-preludes' is associated with Bach, and the way in which Hill brings together Celan's melodies with the Bach-like chorale-preludes suggests that the Jewish tradition and the Christian and the ecclesiastical context of organ music are woven together.

At times, allusions are made to music's promise of a purer status, as is the case, for example, in the fifth section of 'De Jure Belli ac Pacis':

> Slurred clangour,
> cavernous and chained haltings, echo from time's
> inchoate music, the theme standing proclaimed
> only in its final measures –
> *Vexilla regis (Canaan* 34).

[78] See Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 277-8
[79] Haffenden, *Viewpoints*, 91
[80] 'September Song' is a popular song performed originally as part of the 1938 Broadway musical *Knickerbocker Holiday*. Hill's use of the title both emphasises the irony of relating it to the light-heartedness of a musical, and taps into the more serious political themes and allusions running through the musical's narrative. See https://www.ibdb.com/broadway-production/knickerbocker-holiday-11587
[81] Paul Celan, 'Todesfuge'/'Deathfugue', *Paul Celan: Poems*, trans. Michael Hamburger (Manchester: Carcanet, 1980), 50-1

The out-of-this-world sound of the *Vexilla regis* is soon qualified by the final line of the section as 'uplifted by Rüdiger Schleicher's violin' (*Canaan* 34), as it is once again pulled back into the historical context of the Third Reich. The use of the sacred *Vexilla regis* itself, with Schleicher's violin, suggesting the Third Reich and its horrors, is indicative of the connection between music and history, understood as both ecclesiastical history and history of war and violence. The phrase 'final measures' strengthens the link between historical atrocities and music, hinting both at the final measures of the musical piece, and, on a more sinister note, and in accordance with the context of the performance, to the Nazi 'final solution'.

In *The Orchards of Syon* (2002), Hill also writes about music's implication in the Fall, and its historical links, initiating a play between the concept of music as standing on its own, and music as a deeply historically-bound artistic mode. In section VI, for example, he contrasts chaos with order, with music wavering between them, as a lost achievement in the first case, and as 'heavenly music' (*OS* 6) in the second. 'In threads of chaos anarchy remains / the cryptic absolute whose clue is reason, / lost achievements, music lost among them' (*OS* 6), states the speaker, as he indicates that music is lost in chaos; yet lost is not vanished, and as Rowan Williams suggests in connection to Hill's *Orchards of Syon*,

> [t]o know loss is not to have lost entirely. […] [w]e are condemned, not to a simple and total displacement, but to exile.[82]

Music, then, like poetry, is not absorbed into chaos, ceasing to exist, but rather 'lost'. In its lost state, music seems to recall the state of order, the 'heavenly music', which Hill later in the same section associates with 'order'.

[82] Williams, 'The Standing of Poetry', 58

The exclamation '[h]eavenly music!' takes shape as a call to music out of chaos, in an attempt to summon a recovered sense of music. This is reminiscent of the desire, running throughout the volume, to see the local transfigured into the heavenly, and which culminates with 'I / wish greatly to believe: that Bromsgrove / was, and is, Goldengrove' (*OS* 38). Nonetheless, operating within the paradox of knowledge and loss, which Williams describes, neither lost music, nor heavenly music, are self-standing concepts.[83] This is because to apprehend the fact that something has been lost is to know of a state previous to the loss, while the very fact of being lost entails, at the same time, the impossibility of knowing what the state before the loss was like. Man can grasp the fact of existence before loss through reason, but can never fully experience this state.

Here, 'reason' is associated with 'chaos' and 'anarchy' ('[i]n […] chaos anarchy remains / the cryptic absolute whose clue is reason'), as well as lost music, while 'instinct' is associated with 'order' and 'heavenly music', as in '[h]eavenly music! / As order moves by instinct I say trust / faith so far as it goes' (*OS* 6). Towards the end of the section, the speaker introduces the bid 'Cite Emmanuel' (Emmanuel means 'God is with us', as pointed out in the Gospel of Matthew) and carries it across into the next section, where the hesitant question 'Author?' (*OS* 7) links back to 'cite' and therefore to 'Emmanuel'.[84]

The question can be read as either a rhetorical device meant to introduce the clarification which follows, i.e., '[a]uthor is all one word, like Faculties', or as a vocative interrogative phrase, addressing the Author directly.[85] This interpretation would have the following sentence read as an intrusive interruption of the speaker's train of thought, much like the disruptive voice cutting through the liturgical music in 'Tenebrae', which I have

[83] See ibid.
[84] See Matthew 1:23
.

discussed earlier. Linking up with 'Author?' is the next logical sequence, reading 'Can you / receive me?' (*OS* 7), a renewed attempt on the poet's part to recall and imitate the grammar of divine authorship. At the same time, however, the line break after 'can you' suggests the brokenness of human language and the reduced potential of the poetic medium. In contrast to the broken grammar of poetry, we find ourselves once again faced with the higher potential of music as an art form:

> Music arguably
> not implicated in the loss of Eden,
> held to its resolution. No
> question an affirmation. Tell him he ís
> alive – someone – and responsible. (*OS* 7)

While remaining tentative as indicated by the qualification 'arguably', the suggestion is that music, unlike language – which is inextricably linked to man's fall from grace – is not 'implicated in the loss of Eden'. This marks one of the most positive expressions of the status of music among the arts. However, not to be actively implicated in the Fall is not to be unaffected by it, and while the poet leaves open for debate the degree to which music is implicated 'in the loss of Eden', he makes it clear that the horrors of history are indeed implicated in the loss of music. Furthermore, as Sperling has shown, 'arguably' indicates that 'the poem itself enters into the grounds of the argument', and his argument once again draws attention to the place of language in any consideration of the arts in relation to the Fall and to God.[86]

Order, however, remains the realm of religious music, as is made clear in the later volume *Ludo*, published as part of the *Daybooks*, where the link is made manifest through '[l]et us have order and sacrament and song' (*BH* 617). The decidedly confident plural

[86] *VP*, 183

imperative marks a more assured affirmation of music's association with the sacred, from the positive yet hesitant profession of music as 'arguably not implicated' in the Fall.

This somewhat idealised vision of music as less bound by atrocity and free to move one's sensibility in a way not accessible to the poet continues throughout the *Daybooks*. For example, in *Clavics* we encounter one such instance:

> Music, you are the *absolute sole lord*
> Crashaw names *love.* Add Sidney's own *striker*
> *Of the senses*. (*BH* 827)

Hill refers here to Crashaw's definition of love as the 'absolute sole lord' in his 'A Hymn to the Name and Honour of the Honourable Saint Teresa' (it needs to be noted that the Crashaw's poem too follows a musical theme, as it is a 'hymn', and that it is about martyrdom, a topic which interests Hill in particular).[87] He adjoins it to Sidney's characterisation, in his *Defense of Poesie*, of music as the 'most divine striker of the senses', as music is equated with divine love.[88] This strikes the reader as an uncharacteristic move on the part of the same poet who has castigated Eliot for his idealisation of music, and who has been at pains to show the complicated relationship between music and historical horror, and remained reluctant to commit to the idea of music as an absolute art form.

The suggestion that music is now an 'absolute sole lord' of love, capable of unfettered access to artistic sensibility and linked to the divine, seems odd; but Hill soon makes sure to balance it out again, as he once again steps away from this endorsement of music as divine, and slides back into the parodic, perhaps in an attempt to strike a tension between belief and unbelief again:

---

[87] Richard Crashaw, 'A Hymn to the Name and Honour of the Honourable Saint Teresa' in *The Poems of Richard Crawshaw*, ed. J.R. Tutin (London: Routledge, 1896), 130

[88] Sir Philip Sidney, *Selected Prose and Poetry*, ed. Robert Kimbrough (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 135

And a demon to play;
[…]
I am minded to claim
Dark premises;
To ditch my new lover for you, old flame. (*BH* 827)

The idea of music as love suddenly takes on the carnal and the sinful, being played by a demon, and compared to a lover, and the passion felt for an 'old flame'. The representation of music here is just as dual, transitioning between praise and parody with the same fluidity which Westermann attributes to the modes of praise and lament in the Psalms.[89] Here, music strikes both the senses of an artist moved towards divine love, and those of a man lusting for his former lover. Interestingly enough, however, in *The Daybooks*, Hill employs the same metaphor of a former lover in connection to language as well, when, in *Oraclau*, he writes:

I would do gratefully what others claim
They could not: relive my adolescence
  If I were granted a special licence
  To learn Welsh and love you. Great shame
    I cannot speak or sing
This language of my late awakening
Nor ask you pardon, Beloved, nor bring
You, my bride, into the feasting house
Of first desire, dazed by your wedding dress (*BH* 780).

The Welsh language, here, like music in *Clavics*, is compared to a lover, as the poet expresses his grief at not having learnt Welsh as sadness for a lost love from his past. Nonetheless, while his reference is clearly linguistic in nature, just like his reference to Hebrew in *Speech!Speech!* (*SS* 10), he highlights the shared nature of language and music as artistic modes in expression. He does so by bringing them together in an image expressing loss: '[g]reat shame / I cannot speak or sing'. Furthermore, the parallel between Welsh and song becomes even more striking when considered in relation to the Welsh choral tradition.

[89] Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, 81

2.5. 'Mercian Hymns'

Hill's interest in the shared ground between poetry and religious music is also visible through his interest in hymns, which, apart from being mentioned in his verse, also make up part of the names of two volumes of poetry, *Mercian Hymns*, and *Hymns to Our Lady of Chartres.* Hill's treatment of the hymns can be understood as following the same patterns of praise and lament as the elegiac and yet careful engagement with the Psalms. In this connection, the question of praise as encountered in his 'Psalms' remains poignantly present and is developed further in his hymns. To begin with, it is important to note the fact that Hill's poetic interest in hymns as a mode is arguably a consequence of the very nature of the hymn itself. According to the *OED*, the etymology of the word is Greek, meaning 'ode or song in praise of a god or hero, taken by the Septuagint to render various Hebrew words, meaning a song of praise to God' and in its current usage, 'hymn' is defined as

> A song of praise to God; any composition in praise of God which is adapted to be chanted or sung; spec. a metrical composition adapted to be sung in a religious service; sometimes distinguished from *psalm* or *anthem* as not being part of the Bible.[90]

A hymn can refer to poetic compositions, but the focus on the musical is made explicit by Hill, for example, right at the beginning of *Mercian Hymns,* where the opening praise for King Offa is sung:

> King of the perennial holly-groves, the riven sand-
> stone: overlord of the M5: architect of the his-
> toric rampart and ditch, the citadel at Tamworth,
> the summer hermitage in Holy Cross: guardian of
> the Welsh Bridge and the Iron Bridge: contractor

[90] 'Hymn, *n.*', *OED Online*; 'Hymn, *n*, 1', Vol. 7

> to the desirable new estates: saltmaster: money-changer: commissioner for oaths: martyrologist: the friend of Charlemagne. (*BH* 83)

This is swiftly followed by his acknowledgement of such praise as song: '"I liked that," said Offa, "sing it again."' (*BH* 83). Yet the volume *Mercian Hymns* is hardly a collection of songs in praise of Offa, who becomes the subject of irony, parody, and ridicule, as well as celebration. In fact, the interaction between *laus* and *vituperatio,* which Hill writes about in *The Triumph of Love,* can be said to be at work in *Mercian Hymns* too. Offa is both praised and blamed, and although the praise is mainly voiced from the point of view of Offa's subjects, there are, throughout the sequence, strong indications that the poet's own voice partakes in it.

Such is the case, for example, when the enumeration of Offa's titles and qualities at the beginning of the poem includes 'overlord of the M5', a strikingly contemporary description, and one which strikes us as a profane litany, in its address to Offa by his attributes. This indicates that the timeframe of the poem is not merely historical Mercia, but rather a hybrid between historical imagination, transcendental time, and contemporary existence. That the temporality of *Mercian Hymns* moves freely and unexpectedly from Anglo-Saxon times into the twentieth century is a well-known feature of the volume, and has been mentioned by Hill himself, when he wrote, in a note published in the *Collected Poems* in 1985, that

> The Offa who figures in this sequence might perhaps most usefully be regarded as the presiding genius of the West Midlands, his dominion enduring from the middle of the eighth century until the middle of the twentieth (and possibly beyond). The indication of such a timespan will, I trust, explain and to some extent justify a number of anachronisms (*CP* 1985, 301).

Christopher Bode, has noted, in his article 'A Mercia of the Mind: Geoffrey Hill's *Mercian Hymns* and the Poetical Transcendence of Time and Place' that Offa appears to be an obvious choice for the sequence, as he was an 'intriguing compound of cruelty and creativity, of

greatness and meanness, both tyrant and creator of order and of law'.[91] Bode's description of Offa reflects the same tension between praise and blame which Hill strikes in writing about the Psalms, transferred to a non-liturgical setting. Both cruelty and creativity are indeed central to this poetic mode of praise derived from the Psalms, as in *Mercian Hymns*, where it is not merely the praise of Offa that is being sung, nor is it only his blame that is being voiced. Rather, in weaving the two strands of history together, the poet effects a cultural patchwork foreshadowing the continuity of blame throughout history. Given Hill's interest in history and the problematic nature of poetic elegy, with the threat of self-elegy looming over, the speaker in *Mercian Hymns* borrows the modes of praise and lament again from the Psalms, exploring them within the context of secular history.

Thus, for example, the lines '[e]xactness of design was to deter imitation; muti- / lation if that failed. Exemplary metal, ripe for / commerce. Value from a sparse people, scrapers / of salt-pans and byres' (*BH* 93) can be read, in addition to their main reference to the engraving of coins in Offa's Mercia, as a critique of the over-industrialisation of the West Midlands. Hill's investment in the matter is most strongly expressed through the lines '[b]rooding over the eightieth letter of the *Fors Clavigera*, / I speak this in memory of my grandmother, whose / childhood and prime womanhood were spent in the nailer's darg' (*BH* 107). At this point, a distinction within the mode of praise itself opens up. There is, on the one hand, the praise of Offa at the beginning of the poem, and on the other hand the praise offered by Hill for his grandmother in these lines. This is shaped across a divide between 'sing' in Offa's 'sing it again' (*BH* 83) and 'speak' in Hill's 'I speak' (*BH* 107). The tension between music and poetry, and their suitability to elegise, is once more brought to the forefront. In operating within this tension between song and word, and in titling his volume *Mercian Hymns*, Hill

[91] Christopher Bode, 'A Mercia of the Mind' in *Regionalität, Nationalität und Internationalität in der zeitgenössischen Lyrik* (Tübingen: Attempto, 1990), 317

places his poetic sequence at the intersection between these two modes. In doing so, he tests the potential of the two to memorialise, bear witness to history, and praise. Hymns then, both in their secular-poetic form and in their religious sense, are not unlike the Psalms in their aim to praise.

Indeed Claus Westermann, in his study on praise and lament in the Psalms, also shifts his attention to the hymn, and raises the question of how it can be defined. He points out that three possible ways of classifying the hymn have been proposed, namely 'a literary unit, or a cultic unit, or a mode of prayer'.[92] He further draws on Gunkel's analysis of the form, who, he argues, brings together the literary and cultic dimensions of the hymn, because, as a 'literary category', it 'does not have its real position in literature'.[93] To explicate the point, he quotes Gunkel:

> What then was the Sitz-im-Leben of the Psalms? Judaism made use of them in the cult, as the term *tehillim*, i.e., hymns, shows. The Babylonian psalms belong together with certain cultic practices… Thus we may venture the supposition that they were originally derived from the Israelite cult.[94]

As such, Hill's *Mercian Hymns* act analogously to the Judaic *tehillim*, but presenting, instead of the Old Judaic tradition, a local, Mercian tradition rather in the way that David Jones compounds Welsh and Roman in his prose-inflected poems, or poetry-inflected prose. Jones's poetic prose is arguably a model for Hill's hymns not merely in how they treat and weave cultural traditions, but also from the point of view of form, given that *Mercian Hymns* is made up of sections approaching narrative form. The layout of the 'hymns' – thirty in total, and each printed on a separate page in the collected volume *Broken Hierarchies* – allows Hill to play around with a derivation of Westermann's idea of 'literary units'.[95] He also

---

[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid., 20
[94] Hermann Gunkel, *Einleitung in die Psalmen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1933), 24, quoted in Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, 20
[95] See ibid.

suggestively ties the hymn in with the matter of history and its violence, and draws on the idea of fragmentation, a concept which is also central to Jones.[96]

The fact that a poet has to draw on his/her own cultural surroundings and history while, at the same time, paralleling in some way or another liturgical tradition, is crucial to David Jones; while he expounds his theory of religious analogy in his essay 'Art and Sacrament', the focus on the particular nature of poetry in this sense is emphasised in his preface to *The Anathemata*, where he writes:

> The forms and materials which the poet uses, his images and the meanings he would give to those images, his perceptions, what is evoked, invoked or incanted, is in some way or other, to some degree of other, essentially bound up with the particular historical complex to which he, together with each other member of that complex, belongs.[97]

In writing his hymns, Hill does not operate within a strictly literary tradition, but rather brings together the three main dimensions of the hymn: its literary and cultic dimensions, and its prayer mode. The fact that prayer is comprised and implied in his hymns is more obvious in the sequence *Hymns to Our Lady of Chartres* than in *Mercian Hymns*, a topic which will be explored at length in the next chapter. Nonetheless, the figure of Offa as a parody and mimicry of Christ, and the ritualisation of his crowning as a vulgar reenactment of the Last Supper, is an example of how the liturgical is woven into the fabric of the volume.[98] In keeping to his immediate culture and history, he does so by paralleling and parodying the divine, thus stretching his poetry within that maximum tension between belief and unbelief.

---

[96] Jones was interested in the theory of the 'break', which maintains that cultural shifts have occurred at particular times in history, which affect a culture's collective ability to decipher signs it has inherited. See the 'Preface' to *The Anathemata*, in David Jones, *The Anathemata* (London: Faber, 1972), 15

[97] Ibid., 19

[98] See Hart, *The Poetry of Geoffrey Hill*, 166

2.6. Postlude

The posthumous *Book of Baruch* contains a passage which confirms the persistence of Hill's preoccupation with the status of music among the arts, as well as its epistemological potential and its 'sphere':

> The planets that combust in their own dust and yet revive as we believe they must; their intellective spheres' sublime account that we find words for since we must invent: Mercator of the stars and hemispheres and the just wars; and subcreator even of our own stature in the arena of nature –
> I would have prayed to excel in mathematics and music if I had prayed at all (*BB* 11).

Music's association with mathematics, and the musings about the 'intellective spheres' echo the idea that it 'survives, composing her own sphere' (*Tenebrae* 44), and that it is governed by its own internal logic. Yet this logic remains elusive, and the passage shows that the speaker's wish for mastery of music would involve some kind of supernatural intervention: prayer.

The renewed intimation that music is a purer art form, is now complicated by the suggestion of prayer and its own theological/epistemological potential. Prayer is uttered in language, and this passage reiterates the unsure balance between the two. We can contend that Hill's relationship to music is hardly graspable in terms of a simple dichotomy between the two art forms, as I have shown in my chapter. Having admitted that Hill views the composer as more capable than the poet of striking a balance between the sensuous core of music and its cognitive and narrative bearing, it is impossible to disregard the fact that a tension similar to that found in language exists in music as well.[99] Music, then, for Hill, is not the pure 'music of the spheres', but rather an art form both fundamentally different from and

[99] See Haffenden, *Viewpoints*, 91

similar to poetry, engaged in its own quest to resolve its inner tensions and grapple with its historical conditioning so as to effect atonement.

Chapter 3. 'If I Had Prayed at All': Performativity and Materiality in Poetry and Prayer

3.1. '[T]he waves flourished at my prayer'

To pray 'if I had prayed at all' (*BB* 11) is a phrase encompassing the contradictions and explorations inherent in the very act of praying as tackled by Hill in his poetry. It is this complex and at times paradoxical nature of prayer that I endeavour to explicate in this chapter of my thesis, as I draw on a metaphysical/theological broadening of speech act theory and argue that making the abstraction of prayer subject to a material concretisation in poetry allows Hill to test its potential for revelation and hence the possibility that it might facilitate an experience of divine love.

The fact that music, like architecture, depends on the physical world and the constraints of history indicates that a trend emerges in Hill's poetry to try out various modes of accessing the divine in a way which enables the kind of sensuous assent which appears to resist him. There is a progression from the focus on violence of his architectural explorations towards the possibility of music as 'arguably not implicated' (*OS* 7) in the Fall. However, as shown in my previous chapter, music's meaning too is activated by context, and so it remains part of the texture of the postlapsarian world, despite its freer epistemological-sensuous impetus. In this sense, the parallelism between the known, sensual world of landscape and natural cyclicality and the divine sphere remains obstinately impossible to overcome. Having looked at how architecture and music, as artistic media, can be used to juggle this quest for knowledge and to incorporate the moral imperative of artistic expression into their aesthetic nature, the poet also resorts to devotional forms in order to try and move beyond the break instantiated by this kind of agnostic framework.

Prayer, then, is another potential way of bridging the gap between man and God, but also as an artistic tool which can provide the medium needed for the exhaustion of the self in the creative process, and for an exploration of his own faith through his poetic craft. This chapter looks at how prayer allows Hill to attempt to achieve a more direct and raw type of assent to the divine by moving beyond the agnostic parallelism of the two worlds. It also looks at how the absence of this experience finds its way back into his poetic expression. Over the course of this chapter, I draw on speech act theory as a means of theorising Hill's poetry as prayer, while at the same attempting to retheorise prayer itself in the specific context of poetry, and tie it in with Hill's specific concerns. I argue that by being made subject to the act of poetic utterance, prayer is wrestled into the material world, and so is its divine addressee. In making both address and addressee poetic rather than clearly liturgical-devotional, the divine is made to inhabit the material, leading to a kind of poetry inflected with prayer. In blurring out the distinction of address between prayer and poetry, the performative potential of prayer is buried within secular address, tested artistically. This allows the poet to be both removed from and involved in the uttered prayerful supplication, and hence to explore the two forms, as well as his own experience of faith through them.

Speech act theory, most famously put forth by J.L. Austin, is based on the idea that language does not merely communicate information about things, but that it rather changes reality through utterance.[1] In *How to Do Things with Words*, Austin explicates his theory by looking at the distinction between speech acts, which he categorises as being either locutionary, illocutionary, or perlocutionary, and which, he maintains, all move beyond the mere communication of information between people.[2] Whether reality is instantiated by the enunciation of an utterance, or whether a speech act seeks to convince, persuade, or elicit an

[1] J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 5
[2] See ibid., 101

action, all speech acts bear the seal of performativity. In fact, should the performative potential of an utterance fail, Austin argues, this is not through the fault of the language act itself, but rather due to a problem with either condition of speech, or intention of the act.[3] Early on in his study, he postulates that the performative effect of an utterance is activated by the application of a certain set of necessary conditions, and that their absence would render the act null. He argues:

> Speaking generally, it is always necessary that the *circumstances* in which the words are uttered should be in some way, or ways, *appropriate*, and it is commonly necessary that either the speaker himself or other persons should *also* perform certain *other* actions, whether 'physical' or 'mental' actions or even acts of uttering further words.[4]

Hill's 'Genesis', the poem which opens up his first collection of poems, *For the Unfallen* (1959), sees the poet announce: '[a]nd the waves flourished at my prayer / The rivers spawned their sand' (*FTU* 15). Here, he is attributing to his words an illocutionary force, similar to that which, three years later, in 1955, Austin theorised in the context of performativity during his William James Lectures at Harvard University, a theory which he developed in the book *How to Do Things with Words* (although Austin does not theorise speech acts in terms of the supernatural).

The poet's utterance is construed as achieving the desired effect in triggering these tangible changes within the natural world. And yet the question of performativity, in this case, is complicated at several levels. Primarily, there is the description of the speech act as 'prayer', a question which opens up the grounds for the main concerns of this chapter, as it is within prayer-in-poetry that the responsibility for effected change in reality is both eschewed and assumed. This happens because prayer operates on the premise that it is God who holds

[3] See ibid., 8
[4] Ibid.

the power of performativity, while the human is the one who utters the supplication. However, Hill's lines render the distinction between prayer and poetry fuzzy, and the illocutionary force of the poem-prayer effects reality: 'the waves flourished', '[t]he rivers spawned their sand' (*FTU* 15). It is almost as if the poet fashions himself as some kind of a god, especially as the narrative of the poem follows the biblical narrative of the creation of the world, from the title 'Genesis' and through to the detailed description of what happens each day. In *Visionary Philology*, Matthew Sperling writes, in connection to Hill's 'Genesis' that

> [t]he radically rebooted creation myth of Hill's 'Genesis' engages the linguistic consequences of the fall. In Hill's 'Genesis' Adamic language seems to exceed the power it has in the biblical account. In the original it is God who brings things into being *ex nihilo* by the power of his spoken *fiat*, while Adam's language only names animals that exist already. […] But Hill's poem plies ambiguities which seem to promote Adamic language so that it holds the power of *fiat* creation.[5]

As Hill's poem retraces the myth of Creation, the syntax of the poem also mimics the polysyndetonic structure of the Old Testament, where the conjunction 'and' is being repeated. For example, the passage of *Genesis* depicting where Creation begins reads:

> And God said, Let there be light and there was light. And God saw the light, that *it* was good: and God divided the light from darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.[6]

In a similar manner, Hill's own narration is interposed by 'and' in his own version of 'Genesis': '[a]nd the waves flourished at my prayer', '[a]nd where the streams were salt and full', '[a]nd the third day I cried', '[a]nd I renounced, on the fourth day', '[a]nd made the glove-winged albatross', '[a]nd, like the legendary ghost', and finally '[a]nd by Christ's blood

[5] *VP*, 162-3
[6] Genesis 1: 3-5

are men made free' (*FTU* 15-7). In an article tracing the composition of 'Genesis', Piers Pennington notes that in Hill's manuscript, the third line was also preceded by 'and', but 'it would be crossed out to begin the line with "The"', and notes that 'the I of the poem's speaking self had been absent from all of the notebook's passages, though "us" had been tried'.[7] This echoes God's referring to Himself in the plural in the Book of Genesis.[8]

However, the illocutionary performative power which Hill postulates in his 'prayer' does not shape itself as a persistent trend he attributes to prayer in all circumstances. The somewhat giddy observation on the effect of his prayer on the waves and the rivers stands in contrast with a far bleaker meditation on prayer, in his later work *Expostulations on the Volcano,* published in 2012 as part of the collected volume *Broken Hierarchies*. Here, he writes: 'I shall colloquize with the unfallen, / Unbelieving; though with some help I could / Revamp the late prayer to penicillin / Which could have saved my hearing as a child' (*BH* 646). Hill appears to be writing here about the 'severe mastoiditis' which caused 'deafness in his right ear'.[9] These lines invite the reader to imagine uttered prayers falling flat and the infection progressing in the absence of antibiotics, eventually leaving the young Hill deaf in one ear.

The sequence here is particularly telling of the ambiguities undertowing much of Hill's thought on prayer and prayer-as-poetry, and on the performative force of the prayerful utterance. 'I shall colloquize with the unfallen' (*BH* 646) suggests the establishment, at a meta-textual level, of a dialogue with his own earlier voice proclaiming and instantiating the very performativity of prayer in 'Genesis'. In this first poem of his first volume *For the Unfallen* he proclaims the performativity of prayer, while here the subtlety of the phrase

[7] Piers Pennington, 'The Manuscript and Composition of "Genesis"' in *GHAHC*, 31
[8] See Genesis 1:26
[9] Robert Potts, 'The Praise Singer' in *The Guardian* (10 August 2002), at https://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/aug/10/featuresreviews.guardianreview15

'colloquize with the unfallen' suggests that Hill might be entering into dialogue with his own voice in his first volume, if one reads it as a possible reference to its title. The failed prayer in *Expostulations* and the performative prayer in 'Genesis' are set in contrast to each other, with the later poem poised against the effects of the early one in an uneasy balance.

The expression of scepticism is pushed further by the privative structure of his syntax in *Expostulations*, instantiated by the use of the negative prefix 'un' in 'unfallen' and 'unbelieving'.[10] 'Colloquize' itself is a word rich in connotations, which Hill is likely to have been aware of, indicating a formal conversation, but also containing the suggestion of association, present in its etymology derived from the Latin '*con*', assimilated as '*col*', 'together'.[11] The desire to 'revamp' prayer as penicillin reiterates the association with the unbelieving, showing disillusionment with prayer and a wish to resort to something potentially more scientifically effective, like antibiotics with their known capacity to cure infection.

I have mentioned however that these lines retain a high degree of ambiguity, which is characteristic of Hill's exploration of prayer and poetry as performative forces in a broader sense; here, this ambiguity stems partly from the fact that his expression of unbelief is made dependant, paradoxically, on the belief in the performativity of language itself. The paradox is made manifest by the contrasting conjunction 'though', followed by the postulation that to revamp the prayer as penicillin remains a possibility ('could'), 'with some help' (*BH* 646). Given the posteriority of the time of utterance in relation to the events in cause and thus the impossibility to actuate this change, it follows that the kind of 'help' he is seeking is

[10] Matthew Sperling notes, in his discussion of Hopkins's use of the word 'unchancelling', that the OED 'gives an enormously detailed entry for the prefix *un*', thus giving 'language users' a broad freedom to use it as a negative. *VP*, 33. 'Unfallen' and 'unbelieving' (*BH* 646) are two of many examples where Hill makes use of the negative prefix.
[11] 'Colloquy, *sb*', *OED,* Vol. 3

supernatural in kind. In a contorted way, then, the poet's sceptical colloquy and play with unbelief take the shape of some sort of prayer, in acknowledging the need for supernatural 'help', or intervention. He is praying to undo the prayer. Or, at least, this can be seen as an exploration of the performative potential of illocutionary statements. The string of negations in '*un*'fallen and '*un*'believing is almost implicitly continued in the desire to undo events through the use of language.

The question that arises however from the two examples I have mentioned so far is: why does the poet's 'prayer' in 'Genesis' achieve action, while the prayer in *Expostulations on the Volcano* falls flat? Sperling writes in *Visionary Philology*, that when faced with

> A psychological and religious question, Hill shifts the ground to the historical and cultural, and straightway subsumes all these domains of inquiry into the semantic.[12]

In *Expostulations* we are dealing with a recalling of a prayer uttered outside the poem; in 'Genesis', however, the religious is 'subsumed' 'into the semantic'.[13] The biblical myth of Creation is made subject to the poetic, and this entails a process of rendering it concrete and immediate within the form of the poem. In making the biblical narrative inflect the language of the poem, Hill makes the myth of the Creation inhabit a domain which is immediate to both poet and reader. This is similar to his explication of his early poem 'In Piam Memoriam' (*For the Unfallen,* 1958) as possessing an 'agnostic appeal' in that it draws on the natural world of known landscape and sensuous experience.[14] This known world, Hill points out, runs in parallel with the world of the stained glass saint, which cannot be known and assessed through the senses. Hill's commentary on the poem precludes the possibility of inter-

[12] *VP*, 137
[13] Ibid.
[14] 'The Living Poet'. 5 September 1965. BC MS 20c Hill/8/7/2. Geoffrey Hill Archive, University of Leeds

penetration between the two worlds, as he notes that they 'run in parallel'.[15] What is interesting in this respect is that in a reading of some of his poems as part of 'The Living Poet' programme by the BBC's Third Network, Hill starts with a reading of 'Genesis', which he characterises as striking him, 'in retrospect', as 'dishonest' in its concluding 'flourish'.[16] Following the narrative of the Creation, 'Genesis' reaches the sixth day, after which it reads as follows:

> By blood we live, the hot, the cold
> To ravage and redeem the world:
> There is no bloodless myth will hold.
>
> And by Christ's blood are men made free
> 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. (*FTU* 16)

The impression that it concludes with a 'flourish' which seems 'dishonest' could be linked to the suggestion, through the use of sacramental imagery – instantiated in the previous stanza through the rhyme between 'God' and 'blood' – that the gap between man and God has not been bridged but perhaps narrowed.[17] The carnal language of blood, bodies, Earth, weight, and bones, and the association with the Eucharistic process of transubstantiation can indicate the kind of inter-penetration of the two worlds.[18] Inherent in the Eucharistic imagery is also the presence of violence, hinting both at the sacrifice of Christ, and the violence of the world. There is a duality between holiness and violence. As Matthew Sperling has shown in 'Geoffrey Hill and Nineteenth-Century Linguistic Thought', the term 'bless' carries the

[15] 'Poetry Today', 22 October 1964. BC MS 20c Hill/8/7/1. Geoffrey Hill Archive, University of Leeds
[16] 'The Living Poet'. 5 September 1965. BC MS 20c Hill/8/7/2. Geoffrey Hill Archive, University of Leeds
[17] See ibid.
[18] The use of the Eucharistic theme itself is enough to suggest an intersection of the two realms, as a sacrament is understood to entail a physical manifestation of divine grace. For example, the Council of Trent defined a sacrament as 'Symbolum rei sacrae, et invisibilis gratiae forma visibilis, sanctificandi vim habens', i.e., a symbol of sacred thing, and invisible grace in visible form, which has the power to make holy. (Concil. Trid. sess. 13, Cap. 3)

etymology of being marked with blood, and is 'historically contiguous with the different but homonymous verb derived from the French *blesser*' ('to wound').[19]

Yet up until this Eucharistic turn, the focus on the natural persists, and the poet's speech acts are shown to effect changes in the natural landscape – the waves, and the sand in our example. Images of the natural however are scattered through the whole narrative, and even the image of blood remains tied in with the natural landscape, and is not pervaded by any suggestion of sacramentality or liturgical connotation. So, 'the streams were salt and full', '[t]he tough pig-headed salmon', '[t]he osprey plunge with triggered claw / Feathering blood along the shore' (*FTU* 15), are images reiterating the focus on the natural world. The poet is exacting here the performative force of illocutionary statements upon the known, natural world, while imitating and alluding to the divine action. His poem mirrors Maritain's similar point in *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, where he maintains that man needs to resort to his surroundings and draw on the elements of the known world as a resource for the creative process, because godlike creation *ex nihilo* is not possible for him.[20] The idea that the process of poetic creation imitates the divine act of Creation but is limited by the necessity to draw on the resources of the known world, both materially and in terms of entering a network of signs established throughout history, reflects Hill's focus on the materiality of the natural world in the poem.

Hill has indicated throughout his career, both in his poetry, and in his sermons as will be illustrated in my next chapter, that his faith hinges primarily on intellectual assent while resisting sensuous experience. He tackles this question in another early poem, 'The Bidden

[19] Matthew Sperling, 'Hill and Nineteenth-Century Linguistic Thought' in *GHAHC*, 108
[20] See Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, 112-3

Guest', which he also describes in 'The Living Poet' as an 'agnostic' poem, as operating within the same separation of knowledge.[21] He writes:

> And I believe in the spurred flame,
> Those racing tongues, but cannot come
> Out of my heart's unbroken room;
> Nor feel the lips of fire among
> The cold light and the chilling song,
> The broken mouths that spill their hoard
> Of prayer like beads on to a board (*FTU* 21)

The poem is threaded by a separation between the cognitive – 'I believe in the spurred flame' – and the sensory. The world of instinctive assent here is expressed through imagery pertaining to the Holy Spirit – 'lips of fire' – whose presence cannot be felt in the ritualised praise practised during the celebration – 'the chilling song' – and the prayer. What remains available to the senses is the natural world of landscape, and this is why the power of illocutionary statements can only be probed in a material context, as it is in 'Genesis'.

In *Expostulations*, the realm where the performativity of speech acts is explored is that of the supernatural. There is, for once, the retrospective idea of going back in time 'with some help', (*BH* 646) and changing the prayer for antibiotics. Both these questionings of performative prayer abandon the known world of landscape and sensory knowledge and operate within that hidden dimension where mysterious forces are at work. This kind of quest for the illocutionary effect of language seeks out divine intervention, but this remains ever elusive because, as Hill points out in 'Psalms of Assize', 'we cannot know God / we cannot / deny his sequestered / power / in a marred nature' (*Canaan* 65). Neither can we *know* God, nor can we *deny* his power, and this leaves His world one of continuous mystery. It belongs to a realm whose existence we can assent to intellectually, but which we cannot grasp as we do our immediate world of known and tangible experience. This means that the illocutionary

[21] See 'The Living Poet', 5 September 1965. BC MS 20c Hill/8/7/2.Geoffrey Hill Archive, University of Leeds

effect of prayer itself cannot be guaranteed, as its activation depends on a mysterious, external source. It is the implication of a divine addressee that complicates the question of speech act theory in relation to Hill's verse, as well as the fact that the address happens within a poem. For Austin, poetry is considered as not fulfilling the performative conditions. In his study, he construes poetry as akin to joking in the way it fails to meet the conditions of the performative:

> Surely the words must be spoken 'seriously' and so as to be taken 'seriously'? This is, though vague, true enough in general – it is important commonplace in discussing the purport of any utterance whatsoever. I must not be joking, for example, nor writing a poem.[22]

He resolves that 'Walt Whitman does not seriously incite the eagle of liberty to soar', and 'joking' and 'writing poetry' are 'remote from our three acts of speech'.[23] Maximilian de Gaynesford writes that Austin views the poet 'as either conceited and buffoonish or deceitful and knave-like'.[24] A poem will, Austin maintains, render the performative 'hollow or void'.[25] In *Visionary Philology*, Sperling notes that Hill's essay 'Our Word is Our Bond' 'offers a challenge to Austin's title, in his reinvention of the relation of *words* and *things*'.[26] Hill looks at Santayana's contention that 'mind is incorrigibly poetic' in the way it transposes practical facts into 'many-coloured ideas' (see *CCW* 150).[27] If 'such etiolations were true', Hill adds, Austin's claim would be favoured (*CCW* 150). Yet 'Romantic and modern poetry' Hill is quick to assert, is characterised by a yearning for the achievement of a sense of 'identity between saying and doing' (*CCW* 163). Still, as Sperling has argued in relation to Hill's final

[22] Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 9
[23] Ibid.
[24] Maximilian de Gaynesford, *The Rift in the Lute: Attuning Poetry and Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 45
[25] Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 22
[26] *VP*, 162
[27] George Santayana, *Some Turns of Thought in Modernity* (New York: Scribner, 1933), 22-3, quoted in *CCW* 150

lines in *The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy*, 'it would be too narrow to consider Hill's lines in relation to twentieth-century speech act theory alone, if it means disregarding the longer history of linguistic thought', while the relation between 'word' and 'thing', he adds, make the subject of 'one of the oldest concerns of linguistic speculation in theology and philosophy'.[28]

The problem with twentieth-century speech act theory in relation to Hill's work is that it fails to account for the theological dimension undertowing his poetry, and the consequent care to bear witness to history (both pre- and postlapsarian) through semantics, etymology, and form. In a study on speech act theory and prayer published in 2009, W. Graham Monteith argues that speech act theory is rooted in exact, tangible, and verifiable data, a fact which makes prayer the great absence from Austin's theory:

> Speech act theory works when there is evidence that someone has spoken and that the effect of that speech can be verified by its effect on another individual or society. This is not possible in the case of prayer because the effect it has upon God cannot be known or verified. This makes traditional speech act theory apparently impotent when it comes to analysing prayer.[29]

There is, Monteith adds, a metaphysical dimension to prayer, and in order to be able to analyse prayer through the lens of speech act theory, a metaphysical clause involving the conviction that one is indeed addressing God needs to be introduced into the equation. He argues that Thomas Reid had already introduced 'a metaphysical element into speech and its meaning', and uses Reid's theory to 'show that utterances in a prayer do constitute speech acts'.[30] For Monteith, Reid's account can be regarded as a 'theory of speech acts', and, while this might strike us as anachronistic – Reid wrote in 1788 – it does allow for prayer to be

[28] *VP*, 162
[29] W. Graham Monteith, 'The Reality of Addressing God in Prayer', in *Theology in Scotland*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (2009), 68
[30] Ibid.

included in an analysis based on speech act theory from the point of view of performativity.[31] With the introduction of this metaphysical assumption into the question, the speech act's validity is then not derived from the verifiable effect on the reality of the known world, but rather on a conviction that it has, through some workings of grace, reached God.

If considered from this point of view, the prayer for a cure recounted in *Expostulations* need not be viewed unquestionably as a failed one – it is only its effect on the perceptible reality that has failed to materialise, but the assumption that it might have been heard by God cannot be erased. In this sense, the distinction between the physical and metaphysical which Monteith explicates is analogous to the parallelism illustrated by Hill in his emphasis on the impossibility of 'inter-penetration' between the two worlds.[32] Hill's attention to the perceptible world of the natural is very finely attuned when it comes to engagement with the physical, as I have shown in my discussion of landscape and architecture in the first chapter of this thesis. Yet prayer, even in its poetic form and created by the poet, described by Maritain as a 'poor God', remains obstinately more elusive than architecture.[33] Even in its close entanglement with the natural world as shown in 'Genesis', the hidden metaphysical dimension cannot be extricated from the notion of 'prayer', a term which Hill uses to describe his poem (*FTU* 15). The agnostic poem, operating within the boundaries of postlapsarianism, presupposes the existence of the parallel world, and the prayerful utterance presupposes an attempted dialogue with it, even if the assumption is that it will fail.

Yet the introduction of Reid's metaphysical clause into the study of speech acts also complicates the matter beyond the mere division between verifiability of effect and conviction of effect.[34] This is largely because conviction of effect is made dependent on the

[31] Ibid.
[32] See 'Poetry Today', 22 October 1964. BC MS 20c Hill/8/7/1.Geoffrey Hill Archive, University of Leeds
[33] Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, 113
[34] See Monteith, 'The Reality of Addressing God in Prayer', 68

prayer being received by God as the main subject of address of the poem. This brings up the question of how direct address and communication between the speaker and the addressee can affect the dynamics of illocution. On the one hand, Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* carefully considers the details and circumstances which can ensure the performativity of a speech act, as well as the possible failings in contexts which he describes as 'infelicities', which can alter it or render it null.[35] These considerations are laid out systematically and due attention is given to how these circumstances can influence the performative potential of an utterance. Context, he argues, is crucial to the instantiation of the performativity effect, and inappropriate context — such as an already married man attempting to enter into a state of bigamy by uttering the performative 'I will' in another marriage ceremony — constitutes an infelicity which renders the performative itself meaningless.[36] Similarly, context may entail the dual dimension of dialogue, and so effect derives from not one, but two or more speakers and their communicative interaction. There are, he maintains, certain conditions to be met by all participants, and the failure of one of the participants to acknowledge, respond, and take on the intended performative effect of the utterance is ultimately abortive and invalidates the performative. He illustrates his point through a series of similar examples:

> My attempt to make a bet by saying 'I bet you sixpence' is abortive unless you say 'I take you on' or words to that effect; my attempt to marry by saying 'I will' is abortive if the woman says 'I will not'.[37]

On the other hand, there is the question of prayer, which itself demands the initiation of a dialogue between the speaker and God. In Austin's sense, prayer can be seen as a

[35] Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 36
[36] Ibid.
[37] Ibid.

misexecution. This is because there is no way to verify a response from God and assess the consequent performativity, as Monteith mentions in his study.[38]

If the introduction of Reid's metaphysical clause solves this problem for prayer, the question of dialogic dynamics and response remains problematic for poetry. This is especially true for the kind of poetry of 'agnostic appeal' which Hill writes.[39] Poetry can emerge as treading the space between the two parallels worlds — the physical and the metaphysical. Just as the poet writes within the tension between belief and unbelief which I explicate at length in connection to music in my previous chapter, his prayerlike poetry is also trapped within a similar tension, between the tangible and the intangible, and between the immediate and the remote divine sphere. Hill's poetry remains both like and unlike prayer: on the one hand, it acknowledges the existence of the metaphysical; on the other hand, it remains ultimately part of this world, and it therefore cannot make itself fully dependent on the metaphysical conviction that its performative force is activated by its being received by God. One question which emerges from the idea that poetry operates within this kind of space of in-betweenness is how communication between speaker and addressee influences its performative potential, a problem further complicated by the ambiguity of the addressee of a prayerlike poem.

Jahan Ramazani, in a study on how poetry and prayer might converge, argues following Nuttall, that poetry cannot take on the full sacramentality of prayer precisely because it addresses primarily not God, but its readership.[40] Nuttall, in his study on George Herbert, maintains that poetry remains a mere mimicry of prayer, arguing that poems taking on the form of prayer are 'really poems which imitate or represent prayer'.[41] This is because prayers are invariably addressed to God Himself, whereas with poems, God is only a 'fictional

[38] Monteith, 'The Reality of Addressing God in Prayer', 68
[39] See 'The Living Poet', 5 September 1965. BC MS 20c Hill/8/7/2. Geoffrey Hill Archive, University of Leeds
[40] Jahan Ramazani, *Poetry and Its Others* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 132
[41] A.D. Nuttall, *Overheard by God: Fiction and Prayer in Herbert, Milton, Dante and Saint John* (London: Avonmore, 2016), 199

addressee outside the poem', while the main real addressee, the 'inside' one, is always the reader.[42] To argue that grace is somehow made manifest in the dialogue between Herbert and God taking place in *Dialogue* would entail a 'radical interpretation', which presupposes that the voice of God is not Herbert's', but that it is made up of the utterances of grace itself.[43] The poem would then not be a mere 'dramatization of the relation between God and man', and not a 'mimetic performance', but rather a 'recorded conversation which once took place between Herbert and God'.[44] This interpretation poses evident problems, Nuttall points out, including questions of dual authorship of *The Temple* (Herbert – God Himself), and a blurring out of the lines between the poet as a 'dramatic character who frets in the first stanza' and the 'Herbert whose comprehensive theological understanding supplies the rest'.[45]

3.2. 'You do not dwell in me nor I in you'

Hill's prayerlike poetry pre-empts such radical readings through its very structure, in that it does not lend God a voice at all. Grace and its experience resist the poet, and the dialogue of Herbert's 'prayers' gives way to what seems to be a poetic monologue which exposes the lack of intersection between the divine and the human in all its starkness. This kind of address is at play in the 'Lachrimae' sequence, published in *Tenebrae* in 1978. The first section, 'Lachrimae Verae', opens with a direct address to Christ, which draws on the formulae of prayer, but which remains painfully unanswered. It reads as follows:

> Crucified Lord, you swim upon your cross
> and never move. Sometimes in dreams of hell

[42] Ibid.; NB.: The title of Nuttall's study on prayer and Herbert's poetry is itself telling: 'overheard' implies the same idea of God being an external, if not unintentional, recipient of the message.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid., 157
[45] Ibid.

the body moves but moves to no avail
and is at one with the eternal loss. (*Tenebrae* 15)

The imagery here is one of sterile address: the speaker reaches out to God as if in prayer but there is neither petition nor indeed praise inherent in these lines. Instead, the usual implication of the praise and/or supplication of prayer is replaced with an expression of desolation and removal from God. This is subtly indicated at a formal level through the suggestive rhyme between 'cross' and 'loss'; this subverts the association of Christ's Cross with man's salvation and replaces it with the idea of 'eternal loss', presumably damnation. There is then the suggestion of pointless movement, as if trying to advance but being trapped, 'in dreams of hell'. Christopher Ricks writes in '*Tenebrae* and At-one-ment', glossing over Hill's foray into the etymology of 'atonement' as 'at-one-ment' (see 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"', *CCW* 4), that the 'at one' in the stanza quoted above 'refuses to plead that it is or could be at one with "atonement"'.[46] He adds that '[t]here is an unbridgeable distance between "at one" and "atonement"'.[47]

The distance is emphasised by the contrast between the poet's body moving 'in dreams of hell', and Christ on the Cross, who 'never move[s]'. This image can be read as suggesting both a static representation of the crucified Christ in art and, if 'move' is to be read in its transitive sense, the idea that Christ does not move the poet towards assent to His love.

There is a sense of dehumanisation inherent in 'the body', and there is ambiguity as to whether this is the poet's body or indeed Christ's own. The use of the word 'body' instead of a more personal form also hints at a focus on the natural world: the body is simply an organic part of our world, which can be comprehended and known.[48] It is as if for any kind of

[46] Ricks, '*Tenebrae* and At-one-ment', 64
[47] Ibid.
[48] Hill discussed his interest in martyrdom in his interview with John Haffenden. He talked about T.S. Eliot's writing about the 'reluctance of the body to become a *thing'* and explained that he did not see 'why the making of lyric poetry out of one's mixed feelings of attraction and repulsion should be dismissed in some obtuse way

comprehension of Christ to occur, He needs to be reified and reworked into an object of this world, material and perishable, hence also the idea of the poet possibly looking at an artistic representation of the crucifixion. This is reprised in the second stanza of this section, where 'the body' becomes 'your body twisted by our skill', in an ironic metaphor suggesting both the skill of forging artefacts such as a crucifix, and the actual, real sacrifice of the Lord, as the cruel twisting of His body on the Cross:

> You are the castaway of drowned remorse,
> you are the world's atonement on the hill.
> This is your body twisted by our skill
> into a patience proper for redress. (*Tenebrae* 15)

The *OED* entry on 'twist' lists one of its definitions as '[a] turning aside, a deviation; also *fig.* a change of circumstances, vicissitude.'[49] It is also used to refer to '[a]n eccentric or perverted inclination; *esp.* a peculiar mental turn or bent; an intellectual or moral bias or obliquity' and 'wresting, perversion, distortion'[50] The negative moral implications of the word uncover a theological vision. The bending and turning present in this image can be understood in light of Murphy's argument, in 'Geoffrey Hill's Conversions', about Hill's poetic twists as linked to the concept initially drawn out by Augustine and later expanded by Luther, explaining man's sinful condition as *homo incurvatus in se*.[51] Matt Jensen writes of Augustine's account of sin as 'the wilful redirection of attention and love from God to the human self apart from God which results in alienation from God'.[52]

---

as a failure to grasp true and passionate religious experience'. Haffenden, *Viewpoints*, 91; T.S. Eliot, *The Cocktail Party* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1950), 184. The focus on the body in the 'Lachrimae' sequence and the expressed lack of assent to divine love is not explored merely as an absence; rather, attempts to recreate a sensuous experience, and to trigger a paradoxical experience of grace through the very focus on separation, as I shall illustrate shortly.

[49] 'Twist, *n*. 20', *OED*, Vol. 18

[50] 'Twist, *n*. 21 a, b', *OED*, Vol. 18

[51] Murphy, 'Geoffrey Hill's Conversions', 69

[52] Matt Jensen, *The Gravity of Sin* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 7

The repetition of 'you are' at the beginning of the first two lines reinforces the idea of parallelism, and the personal pronoun 'you' indicates man's separation from God. In the third line, 'this is your body' echoes the phrase 'this is my body', uttered originally by Christ at the Last Supper, and repeated by priests during the ritual of Eucharistic consecration of the bread during mass.[53] In uttering the phrase, the priest reenacts the actions of Christ and stands for Him as the host becomes His body to be received as communion by believers. 'This is your body' echoes the performative action which is believed to bring about transubstantiation, but the substitution of 'my' for 'you' renders it sterile and precludes the possibility of communion, replacing it instead with distance and separation. As Sperling notes, in 'Our Word is Our Bond', Hill's attention turns to Augustine's concept of the human will as 'bent'.[54] The passage in question comes from Augustine's *Expositions of the Psalms*, where he writes about the relationship between man and God as follows:

> You are twisted out of shape, but he is perfectly straight. How can you make a twisted thing sit well with a straight one? They cannot be aligned. […] God's will is level and yours is bent. You think his will is not straight because you cannot fit in with it; but you must straighten yourself to fit his will, not attempt to bend his to suit you.[55]

Yet in the image of Christ's body 'twisted by our skill', the poem does exactly what Augustine rejects: it bends God, subjecting Him to the 'twist' of human nature. But the implications of the brash move to subject Christ to the twisted nature of man of is not motivated by a mere selfish desire of the poet.[56] Rather, it is both an attempt to wrestle the divine into the worldly and to make it tangible in a quest to experience a sensuous kind of assent, and an act of restating the utter corruption and sinfulness of human nature.

---

[53] Luke 22: 19; *The Order of the Mass* (Exeter: Carmel Books, 1931), 26
[54] See *VP*, 144
[55] Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms*, Vol.1, trans. Maria Boulding, ed. John E. Rotelle (New York: New City Press, 2001–4), 294; see also Matthew Sperling's commentary in *VP*, 144
[56] See Augustine, *Expositions of the Psalms*, 294

The semantic-theological implications of 'twist' reinforce the unbridgeable separation between the human and the divine, and consequently between the natural world and the heavenly realm. But the 'agnostic appeal' which Hill defines as the two worlds running in parallel without any possibility of inter-penetration takes on a strikingly personal dimension here.[57] It is almost as if the two parallel worlds are embodied here: the natural in the poet's self, and the heavenly in the Crucified Christ. The raw bearing of the absolute separation between 'I' and 'you' illuminates how the two cannot intersect each other, and so how the human cannot share in the divine experience. The very basis of the Christian ritual of Communion is broken down in these lines, as they bring to the forefront the fact that its experience remains an impossibility for the speaker.

However, if we consider transubstantiation from the point of view of performativity, the priest's 'this is my body' can be read as a metaphysical illocutionary utterance, as the consecration prayer bids a change in the nature of the host. When spoken, it enacts the change from bread into the body of Christ, through the workings of grace and in a correct context (otherwise it would be an 'infelicity' in Austin's sense of words being uttered in the wrong circumstances).[58] The dependence of the action on the workings of the Holy Spirit would suggest the need for the same kind of metaphysical assent which Monteith notes in connection to prayer.[59] Yet Hill's poem is neither liturgy nor prayer, in its primary sense. This opens it up to the simple force of illocutionary performativity, which makes the sterility of Hill's statements on the human-divine separation paradoxically conductive of some kind of presence. The poetic, natural, non-metaphysical, and agnostic performative can attempt to make the body of Christ really present within the poem simply by the affirmation 'this is your

[57] See 'The Living Poet', 5 September 1965. BC MS 20c Hill/8/7/2. Geoffrey Hill Archive, University of Leeds
[58] See Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 14-5
[59] See Monteith, 'The Reality of Addressing God in Prayer', 68

body' (*Tenebrae* 15). There is a quasi-liturgical undertone to the poem, and the language of the Eucharistic prayer is extrapolated into poetic form. In becoming an object in the world – an object inside the poem – Christ makes Himself potentially subject to a type of knowledge which draws on the natural and which can perhaps appeal to the material world of the senses.

This is the kind of paradox with which Hill often grapples; here, it is through the denial of the transcendental that grace can at least tentatively be found. It is also through its appeal to the limitations of human knowledge and lack of assent to the divine that some kind of real presence can – again tentatively – be suggested. Paradox, Hill suggests in *Rhetorics of Value and Intrinsic Value*, is tied in with the possibility of grace in a poem, which in turn needs to draw on human imperfection. A paradox of value applies to the poem as a product itself, he maintains, following an incursion into the possible distinctions between monetary value, defined as that which can be 'assayed' (*CCW* 465), and intrinsic value, which cannot. It would be impossible to attempt to construe human value in purely abstract terms, Hill argues, without falling into the trap of what Dietrich Bonhoeffer has referred to as 'cheap grace' (*CCW* 465). Bonhoeffer explained the concept in his *Cost of Discipleship* (1937), when he wrote that 'cheap grace' was

> the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession... Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.[60]

In describing grace as 'cheap', however, the language of financial value seeps into the domain of grace. There is indeed an inescapable co-dependency between currency and intrinsic value, and Hill identifies Ruskin's *Unto This Last*, *Munera Pulveris*, and in parts *Fors Clavigera* as examples of how 'intrinsic currency value is somehow understood as underpinning and

[60] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R.H. Fuller (London: SCM, 2006), 4

validating intrinsic ethical or aesthetic value' (*CCW* 466). What Bonhoeffer describes as 'cheap grace' stands at the opposite end of the spectrum from vision of grace which emerges as grounded in history, tradition, and culminates in the materiality of Christ's Incarnation. In *Grace and Mortgage* Peter Selby writes about the 'forgotten wisdom' of the fact that economy need not exclude human and theological value, as he draws attention to the fact that knowledge about money can bring about knowledge of faith:

> So the ancient wisdom about money, not at all irrelevant but among the things we urgently need for the humanising of the world economy, turns out to bring with it access to an ancient faith as well.[61]

The poem however is a paradox where both monetary, and intrinsic ethical and aesthetic, values are at play. The poem negotiates its status as engaging with our human imperfection, while at the same seeking its own perfection:

> For the poem to engage justly with our imperfection, so much the more must the poem approach the nature of its own perfection. It is simply not true to say that the intrinsic value of a line or phrase cannot be assayed or proven in close and particular detail. (*CCW* 477)

Finally, Hill adds that a 'great poem' acts in such a way as to lead us to assent equally 'by the integrity of its final imperfection' and by the 'amazing grace of its detailed perfection' (*CCW* 477). The poem can and does possess intrinsic value, but it is due to the nature of human limitations and because of the formal structure of poetic language that it also lends itself to be assayed. This subjection to monetary value is necessary in order to be evaluated and understood. In 'the body' and 'this is your body' (*Tenebrae* 15), it is almost as if Christ Himself is made subject to this paradox of value through the performative utterance of the prayerlike poem.

[61] Peter Selby, *Grace and Mortgage* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1997), 143

The performativity of the poem, drawing on the immediacy of the material world, taps into the historical wisdom which both Selby and Bonhoeffer intimate. This is a history of faith experienced within history, through the sacraments, through the institution of the Church, and indeed through the very fact of human existence in the world. In rooting itself in this history, the poem attempts in a way to redo the Incarnation, perhaps in an endeavour to retrace the kind of epistemology of which Hans Urs von Balthasar spoke in his *Epilogue* when mentioning the idea that Christianity can foster a closer and more tangible connection between man and God due to the Incarnation.[62] But as much as this history is one of grace, it is also one of crushing and repeatable violence, going back in time, all the way to the violence suffered by Christ Himself.

Moreover, as indicated in Hill's poetry, the Incarnation is no longer available. What we have are material and tangible reminders of His grace, ranging from representations of the Crucifixion, to church buildings, and indeed musical compositions pivoted towards the sacred. But still Christ's presence remains secluded – 'sequestered' (*Canaan* 65), as Hill calls it in 'Psalms of Assize' – and it is through such paradoxes of poetic performativity that both His absence and presence can be made manifest. Eleanor McNees argues that 'Hill views prayer as twisting back on itself unanswered'.[63] Indeed, the poem turns back upon itself – in a movement reminiscent of the Lutheran-Augustinian curving upon the self – and upon the parallelism between the speaker's self and the divine self. The poem reads on:

> I cannot turn aside from what I do;
> 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. (*Tenebrae* 15)

[62] Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Epilogue* (San Franscisco: Ignatius, 2014), 33
[63] Eleanor McNees, *Eucharistic Poetry: The Search for Presence in the Writings of John Donne, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Dylan Thomas, and Geoffrey Hill* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1992), 168

The symmetrical opposition between 'I' – man – and 'you' – 'God' – becomes clearer here; as in the previous stanza, the repetition of structure ('I cannot turn' / 'You cannot turn') brings this parallelism into focus. The contention in the final line of the stanza reaffirms this symmetrical opposition with a desolate resolution that contact and communion are indeed impossible. Man mirrors God here in grammatical structure as much as in nature. Poetry, if we bear Maritain's argument in mind, retraces the divine creation *ex nihilo*, and Hill's lines add a reflection on the question of human and divine nature.[64]

In this connection, the idea of *Imago Dei* slips into focus; there is a reminder that, according to the biblical story, man was created in God's image, and therefore the symmetrical mirroring seems natural.[65] For Augustine, while having been 'defaced' as a consequence of the Fall, 'the image still remains'.[66]

However, the kind of mirroring here is a barren one, trapped in the continuity of parallelism and not facilitating the act of Communion. 'I cannot turn aside from what I do' is an expression of human nature being an inescapable given; the symmetrical '[y]ou cannot turn away from what I am' reinforces this limitation of human nature through the ontological 'I am'. It also posits the divine as existing on a plane far removed from this, with no intersection. 'You cannot turn away' is also interesting in that it continues the trend of attempting to make the divine subject to the world of human experience through the association of human limitation – 'you cannot' – with the divine, which is usually thought of in terms of omnipotence. It becomes clear that the poem operates on several levels and engages with such layers of complexity and paradox. Finally, this parallelism crystallises in

[64] Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, 112
[65] See Gen 1:26-28
[66] Augustine, 'On the Holy Trinity' in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church (St. Augustin on the Holy Trinity, Doctrinal Treatises, Moral Treatises)*, Vol. 3, ed, P. Schaff (Buffalo: The Christian Literature Company, 1887), 186

the desolate resolution that '[y]ou do not dwell in me nor I in you', a line which once again counterposes man and God in a relationship of symmetrical opposition, which highlights the impossibility of contact. Hillary Davies writes about of an 'uncrossable gap' between Christ and man being highlighted in this poem, and, as she moves on to discussing Hill's 'Of Diligence and Jeopardy', she contends that 'Hill remains within the compass of man's will and nature, within the compass of original sin'.[67]

Within the separation between man and God there is a sense of remorse and loss of hope, instantiated at a linguistic level through the repeated use of negatives: 'cannot' – 'cannot' – 'do not' – 'nor'. In this stanza, the paradox of grace explored earlier seems to give way to an exploration of the absence of grace in the speaker's experience. The idea of praise and supplication of prayer is replaced with the affirmation of this absence. In 'Terribilis Est Locus Iste' published in the same volume, *Tenebrae*, Hill uses the phrase 'marked / visible absences' (*Tenebrae* 39), an image which we can apply to my analysis of the kind of absence explored here. This engulfs the speaker, and it is through this affirmation that the separation is in a way made concrete and activated, for according to speech act theory, the notion of a descriptive statement is a mere 'fallacy'.[68] 'You do not dwell in me nor I in you' is not a simple expression of an absence, but it is absence itself that is being made present, paradoxically almost in sacramental terms. What follows is a new and more trenchant incursion into the known world, as the speaker resorts again to the language of monetary value. The pandering to Christ's name expressed in the first line of the next stanza can be viewed as referring collectively to an array of institutional and private devotional practices, including prayer, the liturgy, alms-giving, and so on. The image 'lords of revenue' on the

[67] Hilary Davies, 'Geoffrey Hill's Dialogue with David Jones' in *Études anglaises* 2018/2. Vol. 71., 165
[68] See Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 3

other hand seems to be aimed at the institution of the Church itself, and the ironic tone chimes in with questions raised throughout his career about the morality of finance and value.

In ‘Lachrimae Coactae’, the next ‘Lachrimae’ section, Hill writes:

> Crucified Lord, however much I burn
> to be enamoured of your paradise,
> knowing what ceases and what will not cease,
> frightened of hell, not knowing where to turn,
>
> I fall between harsh grace and hurtful scorn.
> You are the crucified who crucifies,
> self-withdrawn even from your own device,
> your trim-plugged body, wreath of rakish thorn. (*Tenebrae* 18)

The same pattern of address to the ‘Crucified Lord’ is maintained, and the poem keeps to the same prayerlike register, as it explores the idea of separation further. The ‘however’ in ‘however much I pander to your name’ (*Tenebrae* 15) is reencountered here, but in this case the focus falls on the speaker’s own internal desire to be moved by Christ’s love. The half-rhyme established between ‘paradise’ and ‘cease’ suggests the continuing separation. It further shows how the divine is made subject to the limits and restrictions of human knowledge in a way which cannot lead to a proper experience of Christ’s presence.

The idea of burning expressed in the first line ties in with the mention of hell, which frightens the speaker; but burning is also often associated with desire, and so the image here is pervaded by a duality which hints both at an all-consuming experience of divine love, and damnation in hell. The remorseful tone of the earlier section now seems to be replaced by a slightly more aggressive speech. The speaker now stands before the crucified Lord describing him as ‘the crucified who crucifies’ and attributing to Him ‘harsh grace’. The suggestion of two parallel worlds of knowledge, one accessible and the other ‘sequestered’ (see *Canaan* 65), is further implied in the double use of cognates of ‘know’. The poet mentions ‘knowing what ceases and what will not cease’, which can be read as either indicating that we can know

and understand the cyclical patterns of the known world, or indeed that cognitive assent to the metaphysical is possible, as expressed also in the early poem 'The Bidden Guest' as belief 'in the spurred flame' (*FTU* 21). At the same time, on a different plane, the speaker is 'frightened of hell', and 'not knowing where to turn' (*Tenebrae* 18). A new expression of what he has previously deemed 'the knowledge / of sensuous intelligence' (*Canaan* 2) resisting him takes shape here. The confusion as to where 'to turn' picks up on the idea of hell as involving some kind of disorientation of movement similar to 'the body moves but moves to no avail' (*Tenebrae* 15). Again, the symmetrical mirroring between 'I' and 'you' threads the sequence, and a return to the idea of 'breaking' as an opening up to a sensuous experience of the divine is also suggested, as the sequence continues:

> What grips me then, or what does my soul grasp?
> If I grasp nothing what is there to break?
> You are beyond me, innermost true light,
>
> uttermost exile for no exile's sake,
> king of our earth not caring to unclasp
> its void embrace, the semblance of your quiet. (*Tenebrae* 18)

Absence, again, is brought to the core of the poem-prayer. The poet is left with the experience of emptiness and quiet. The shift from affirmatives to the interrogatives in the first two lines of the first stanza marks an interesting trend of the prayerlike address which pervades the 'Lachrimae' poems. Questions and explorations of the self are part and parcel of the process of praying. This opening up of the speaker's self through the use of interrogatives brings his poetry closer to the prayer mode. However, the complication here arises from the fact that Hill's lines are not addressed simply to God, or at least not intended to be heard *only* by God. Nuttall's argument that poems are mere mimicries of prayers might seem reductionist and disregarding of the performative potential of poetry to make something present in a way

analogous to the liturgy.[69] Nonetheless, the fact remains that poetry as prayer does inevitably have two addressees: God and the reader.

This raises the problem of the self's presentation as related to the ethics of the poem. Following up on Nuttall's argument on how they are distinguished from each other, Ramazani notes that prayer rendered as poetry involves some degree of aestheticisation.[70] Poetry, he maintains, can be described as 'loosely' performative in Austin's sense, but this is only achieved by stepping outside prayer in order to 'inspect it'.[71] The problem of aestheticisation through art is central to Hill, and both Murphy's and Cummings's arguments about the paradox of the author's presentation which runs through much of Hill's poetry, demonstrate it.[72] Haughton's assertion in '"How fit a title…": Title and Authority in the Work of Geoffrey Hill' that the line '[d]ominion is swallowed with your blood' in 'Lachrimae Antiquae Novae' displays an 'eerie "triumphalism" […], akin to that seen by Nietzsche in his analysis of the biblical axiom "he that humbleth himself shall be exalted"', emerges as a central point when thinking about how prayer and poetry are complicated by the doubling of address.[73] Nuttall raises a related point in connection to Herbert, when he notes that the '*Jordan* poems' can be read as wielding a paradox 'familiar to readers of Protestant literature', namely that 'the disclaiming of merit is somehow felt to be itself meritorious'.[74] The Nietzschean-cum-Herbertian paradox of performance of humility in poetry ties in with Ramazani's argument about the aestheticisation of ritual in that it appears to be peculiar to poetry.[75]

[69] See Nuttall, *Overheard by God*, 199
[70] Ramazani, *Poetry and Its Others*, 133
[71] Ibid., 132
[72] See Murphy 'Geoffrey Hill and Confession', 139; Cummings, 'Recusant Hill', 38
[73] Haughton, '"How fit a title…"', 143
[74] Nuttall, *Overheard by God*, 10
[75] See Ramazani, *Poetry and Its Others*, 133

If Hill had been addressing only God in private, the 'I' would only be a vehicle for address, and not one carrying forth the aesthetics of the poem itself. When in his Ash Wednesday sermon Hill the preacher announces 'I pray that […] I do not fall *out* of the hands of God', the action of praying remains hidden despite it being performed publicly.[76] We do not know, in this case, how he is praying and what form his address might take, although the affirmation 'I pray' can be read as an act of praying, in a turn back on public prayer. The question of public versus private prayer can be traced back to the Reformation, when the practice of private prayer grew significantly. Cynthia Garrett writes that

> The Reformation, with its insistence on the unmediated relationship between the individual and God, created a demand for collections of prayers in the vernacular and gave new impetus to arguments over the purpose of prayer, particularly private.[77]

But prayer wrought into poetry is both public and private prayer; it takes the form of a direct, personal address, but it is also performed publicly, on display in front of the reader's eyes. The relationship between the speaker and God can never be completely unmediated so long as the reader exists; but it is also through the complicated nature of the dialogue within the poem that both a private relationship with God can be sought, and an objective sense of ethical achievement can be attempted.

Charles Taylor views the focus on direct address as specific to modern poetry and describes modern poetry as being marked by a shift away from the Romantic view of poetry as being a vehicle for the soul's self-expression, and towards a fundamentally dialogical

[76] Ash Wednesday: Trinity College Cambridge (6 February 2008)
[77] Cynthia Garrett, 'The Rhetoric of Supplication: Prayer Theory in Seventeenth-Century England' in *Renaissance Quarterly* Vol. 46, No. 2 (Summer, 1993), 328

dimension.[78] This indicates a turn towards a poetics where the reader plays the role of active witness, and hence the presence of the reader can in fact help to achieve the ethics of the poem rather than merely complicate the matter of address. He takes Paul Celan as a pivotal point and states:

> But more and more a dialogical understanding of language (implicit in the founding theories of Hamann, Herder, and Humboldt) makes its way, and it becomes clear that the resonances which matter are those that link speaker and hearer, writer and readers, and eventually (perhaps) whole communities. Poets may fail to be heard, but the end of the writing is to reach others and to effect a coming together in the Being revealed, or set free.
> The sense is central to Celan, as we saw above. In so many of his poems, the breaking through to a free-setting word coincides with the moment of address to a "du".[79]

It is perhaps at a particularly violent time in history – and for a poet who was personally a victim of this violence – that the imperative of a poetics of witness is made manifest in this particular way. In the aftermath of the atrocities of the Holocaust, poetic expression becomes even more fraught with the question of ethics. Adorno famously affirmed that 'to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric'.[80] Yet his statement does not read as a rejection of poetry in a post-Auschwitz world. As Antony Rowland has shown, it means that Adorno is attempting to define a change in what poetry is and does, necessitating a language which 'engages with the embarrassing struggle – which often ends in failure – to forge a language adequate to represent the horrors of the Holocaust'.[81] Hill's understanding of language as tainted by sin and of poetry as carrying the moral necessity to bear witness and atone entails an acknowledgement and acceptance of the barbarism of both history and language. For him, historical violence is a constant, and language needs to reflect this. The dialogical nature of

[78] Charles Taylor, 'Celan and the Recovery of Language' in *Dilemmas and Connections* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), 61
[79] Ibid.
[80] Adorno, *Can One Live After Auschwitz?*, 34
[81] Antony Rowland, 'Re-reading "Impossibility" and "Barbarism": Adorno and Post-Holocaust Poetics' in *Critical Survey*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (1997), 58

the poem works on a multitude of levels, much like the polyphony of past voices which I discuss in my first chapter in connection to Hill's 'An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture in England'. As Jon Silkin notes in his article 'War and the Pity', for Hill, '[t]he past […] could not be relegated to the past' and

> If the soul is immortal, its body's acts are also – those largely evil as well as those principally good. The slate cannot be wiped clean.[82]

Poetry carries the moral imperative to bear witness to these acts within the cyclicality of history. For Hill, it cannot simply be a setting-free of the self in an aesthetic manner, hence his rejection of a particular type of confessionalism in poetry.[83]

'Poetry / Unearths from among the speechless dead' (*KL* 41) he writes in his early poem 'History as Poetry', indicating the moral responsibility poetry has to bear witness to the atrocities of historical violence and to lend a voice to those who have been denied one. This means that the kind of 'setting-free', or activation of poetry, of which Taylor speaks in his essay depends both on its being carried forth to the reader, and to its reaching back to a specific point in time and hence bridging the two timelines in the act of memorialising.[84] This is arguably the moment when poetry is closest to prayer in doing what it can do to reach out towards the divine from within the boundaries of a postlapsarian world and its historical violence. It cannot lay a claim to some sort of transcendental knowledge or indeed some 'divine abstract' any more than 'Milton's political writings', which Hill refers to in his interview with Jessica Campbell, can.[85] Still, it can – through its dialogical nature and its performativity – bear witness to violence and move between timelines within the historical

[82] Jon Silkin, 'War and the Pity' in *Geoffrey Hill: Essays on His Work*, ed. Peter Robinson (Milton Keynes and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1985), 117
[83] See Murphy, 'Geoffrey Hill and Confession', 140
[84] See Taylor, 'Celan and the Recovery of Language', 61
[85] See Campbell, 'Interview: Geoffrey Hill, Oxford Professor of Poetry'

codes which Maritain argues inform man's creative process.[86] Poetry as agnostic prayer in a sense replaces the unknown dimension of the intangible 'Crucified Lord', with things of this world which can be known, and assayed; this can – and often does – involve a process of making violence and tragedy present through poetry's performativity in a way which both recalls the liturgy and twists it to make it adaptable to the world of human knowledge.

The anchoring of the prayer in poetic form and consequently in the material world does not mean that the poem itself cannot work in a way which enacts the performativity of prayer. It does however need to write itself as aware both of its limitations within this world, and as engaging with the knowledge that there is a transcendental plane, albeit unquantifiable and unknown. To do so also involves, at a practical level, an acceptance, if not an embracing, of the fallenness of man's existence, and of its consequences. This includes a great degree of ambiguity. 'Is prayer residual in imprecation?', Hill asks in *The Triumph of Love*, and answers '[o]nly as we equivocate', adding 'when I examine / my soul's heart's blood I find it / the blood of bulls and goats' (*TTOF* 33). Indeed, prayer and imprecation are etymologically linked: the Latin 'imprecatio', meaning 'to invoke evil' contains the verb 'precari', meaning 'to pray', and the prefix '*im*' (variant of 'in').[87] Hence, 'prayer' is contained – literally – in 'imprecation', and the etymological play joins in with the concept of prayer-in-poetry as rendered subject to the implications of man's Fall. It is necessary to consider the term 'equivocate'; in his interview with John Haffenden, Hill has rejected the term in relation to his writing, explaining that 'I resent the implication – taking the dictionary definition of equivocation – of my using words in a double sense or in order to mislead.'[88] When asked about whether he 'addressed [himself] to subjects in an ambiguous way', he explained that he also resented this description, 'though perhaps not as vehemently', and professed that his

[86] See Maritain, *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*, 112-3
[87] 'Imprecate, *v.*', *OED*, Vol. 7
[88] Haffenden, *Viewpoints*, 90

address is not 'some kind of settled policy', but reacts instead to the way in which 'subjects present themselves' to him, and that these subjects of his meditations are 'full of ambiguous implications.'[89] The relationship between poetry and prayer is itself ambiguous, and the ambiguities involved in writing about prayer derive from the apprehension of the complex dynamics between the two modes.

Negotiating prayer and poetry through grammatical-syntactical ambiguity so as to effect an inflection of poetry with prayer is something we can trace back to Herbert. E.B. Greenwood argues that Herbert's sonnet 'Prayer' is based on grammatical ambiguity in view of blurring out the lines between invocation and evocation, and thus construing his poem as prayer.[90] Herbert's sonnet, he notes, lacks any finite verbs and makes 'marked use of apposition'.[91] His grammatical artifices lead Greenwood to reach the following conclusion:

> I suppose that the whole sonnet is an example of what linguists call 'endocentric' structure, i.e., a structure in which the elements belong to one class, either a nominative expression or a finite verb expression. In this case I think that we can take our choice. We may take the linking verb 'is' as understood by ellipsis after the word 'Prayer' and view the whole sonnet as a chain of predication. Or we may take the whole sonnet as a single nominative expression. […] [I]t might be possible to view the whole sonnet as being in the vocative, despite the absence of a comma after the word 'Prayer'. […] The poem is not only an invocation but also an evocation.[92]

This enables Herbert, Greenwood argues, to play with the boundaries of poetic and prayerful address and to make the poem become prayer. Take Herbert's '[t]here is no articling with thee: / I am but finite yet thine infinitely'.[93] This marks, for Greenwood, a 'necessary incompleteness of statement', which according to him, has the capacity to bring the speaker

[89] Ibid.
[90] E.B. Greenwood, 'George Herbert's Sonnet "Prayer": A Stylistic Study', in *Essays in Criticism*, Vol. 15, Issue 1 (January 1965), 29
[91] Ibid., 28
[92] Ibid, 29
[93] Herbert, 'Artillery', 133

of the poem closer to the 'infinite Being'.[94] In writing about Sonnet LXVIII of Spenser's *Amoretti*, Hill notices a mechanism similar to the blurring out between invocation and evocation, as he focuses on the play between Spenser's 'dear loue', and 'dear Lord' (see *CCW* 152).[95] There is more going on here than a mere 'play of wit' (*CCW* 152); instead, we are witnessing 'a form of troth-plight between connotation and denotation' (*CCW* 152). He also points out the monetary connotations of 'deare', and the theological association of the term, as he writes that Christ's blood is '"deare" because it is precious', and 'it is precious because it was the price of man's ransom and it cost Christ dear in terms of dire suffering' (*CCW* 152).

The materiality of blood and the quantifiable nature of monetary value, expressed through grammatical structure, allow Hill too to collapse evocation into invocation and connotation into denotation, and consequently to inflect the poetic with the prayerful, the artistic with the devotional, and the material with the theological. The follow-up on the poet's reflection on the etymology of prayer and imprecation does this. Here, he uses the imagery of blood to draw the prayerful back into a world of the bodily. There is a blurring out of the lines between the human self and the animal, and between the sacred/spiritual and the tangible/material. A double genitive construction – 'my soul's heart's blood' (*TTOF* 33) – gradually reduces abstraction to the materiality of blood, and the self is bundled up together with bulls and goats. These two categories of animals are often associated in the Judaeo-Christian tradition with sacrifice. Blood is very much of this world, and it also holds an unbreakable bond with the idea of violence. It also intimates the Eucharist, and in this sense it belongs both to this world and to the parallel world of divine knowledge. It is a vehicle for both the unmaking and remaking of the world, or as Hill writes in 'Genesis', '[b]y blood we

[94] Ibid., 28; See Herbert, 'Artillery', 133
[95] Edmund Spenser, *The Poetical Work of Edmund Spenser*, eds. J.C. Smith and Ernest de Selincourt (London: Oxford University Press, 1912), 573, quoted in *CCW* 152

live, the hot, the cold / To ravage and redeem the world: / There is no bloodless myth will hold.' (*FTU* 17)

Catherine Pickstock in her book *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* uses the physical sign of the Eucharist, in which both past and present are blurred out to illustrate that paradox is what makes grace possible in language. She argues that the dichotomy of interior and exterior, as well as the distinctions of temporality, are collapsed into each other during the liturgy.[96] Liturgical prayer acts on both the exterior and on the interior, but the two planes are not mere abstractions; instead, their very activation is made physical by the possibility of linguistic utterance in prayer:

> The heart and the lips of the Deacon are worlded (*munditia)* and cleansed in the same action of verbal exteriorization. […]
> This prayer constitutes a petition for release from a 'sophistic' separation of language from desire, and for a worthy enunciation of the Gospel. [The prayer] requires the uniting of both heart and lips. This prayer […] not only communicates the 'site' of purity as that which issues from within language itself, which first of all arrives from without, but more particularly a linguistic issue which is combined with *eros.* […]. Such language therefore arises from both without *and* within. […] [T]he significant distinction is not that which obtains between orality and writing, between liturgical and non-liturgical language, that is to say, erotic and *an*erotic expression.[97]

3.3. 'Ora, ora pro nobis'

Hill's sequence *Hymns to Our Lady Of Chartres* holds a strong desire for a 'worlding' analogous to that described by Pickstock.[98] However, it furthers her erasure of linguistic distinction by not only blurring out the lines between orality and writing, but also between the

[96] Catherine Pickstock, *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 216-7
[97] Ibid., 217
[98] See ibid.

liturgical and the non-liturgical, and between the 'erotic' and the '*an*erotic', as I shall illustrate shortly.[99]

The sequence is pervaded by uncertainty of address arising on several levels, doubled by a desire to make the sacred material and so a subject and object of the world. Instead of the Lord, Hill now addresses the Virgin. This complicates the matter of dialogic address as the concept of intercession is introduced: to pray to the Virgin and the saints is understood as asking them to pray for us, as they are believed, in their holiness, to be in a position to intercede for us with God. Aquinas for example writes that if 'we offer prayer to any of the saints it is because they are united to God'.[100] Doctrinal considerations need to be taken into account here, as intercessional prayer is primarily a Catholic practice. As Garrett writes, [t]he English instruction manuals insist that prayer be directed only to the one, triune God'.[101]

At the same time, the very fact that it is not God who is being addressed directly, but instead Mary – who is a human being, albeit a saintly one – makes the exchange between the speaker and the addressee of the prayer easier, as it can mimic the patterns of normal human conversation. This can also mean that the dialogue entails a degree of self-reflection on what it is to be human. The removal of the supernatural from the matter can potentially lead to a deeper understanding of at least the world within which we exist. As Hill suggests in 'Funeral Music', '[w]hen we chant / "Ora, ora pro nobis" it is not / Seraphs who descend to pity but ourselves' (*KL* 29). The request for intersession mitigates the rawness of address directed straight to God and the emerging 'void' expressed in 'Lachimae Coactae' (*Tenebrae* 18). It also triggers a reflexive turn back onto the known world of human nature.

[99] See ibid.
[100] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae, Latin Text and English Translation*, Vol. 39, eds. Thomas Gilby, T.C. O'Brien (Cambridge: Blackfriars 1946-77), IIa-IIae; q.83, art.4, 57
[101] Garrett, 'The Rhetoric of Supplication', 333

So, beyond the question of intercession, there is also another significant element informing the focus of the poet's address on the Virgin: her very humanity. As I have shown, his address to Christ is fraught with the awareness of impossible communication. Garrett points out that sixteenth- and seventeenth-century praying manuals were often based on an assumption of absence of a response from God:

> the God portrayed in these prayer manuals often appears, at best, difficult to reach and, at worst, inclined to reject any communication which, for reasons not readily ascertainable, displeases him.[102]

Furthermore, Garrett notes, these manuals relied heavily on particular formulae, because 'prayer is so difficult, and the consequences of failed prayer so great', and 'instinct' and 'intuition' would not suffice for adequate address.[103] 'God is distant, difficult' (*KL* 13), as Hill writes in 'Ovid in the Third Reich'; but human communication is easier, immediately available, and potentially more intimate. Indeed the sequence *Hymns to Our Lady of Chartres* is prefaced by an 'argument' emphasising the humanity of her condition, and indicating the shared nature of all humanity: a rejection of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. So, Hill writes:

> that the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin in the womb of Anna, unlike the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Christ in the womb of Mary, is a sentimental late intrusion that infantilizes faith (*BH* 155).

This argument stresses Mary's humanity through something she shares with the rest of humanity, namely Original Sin. But it also establishes a differentiation between her (and humankind more broadly), and Christ, who is indeed free of Original Sin. The grammatical structure of his argument makes use of repetition of phrases: 'the doctrine of the Immaculate

[102] Garrett, 'The Rhetoric of Supplication', 332
[103] Ibid.

Conception of […] in the womb of' (*BH* 155), distinguishing between Mary (conceived by Anna, with Original Sin), and Christ (conceived by Mary, without Original Sin). The effect achieved is similar to the one of the 'you' – 'I' mirroring in 'Lachrimae' (*Tenebrae* 15), but the poet's self is here replaced by a saintly figure. This indicates that the poet views her, at least to a certain degree, as subject to the same kind of limitations and restrictions as the rest of us.

In the first section of the sequence, the fact that the Virgin is part of the material world is emphasised. This happens as the poet construes her as broken down into the bits of her material/artistic representation at Chartres Cathedral:

> Amorous bounding putty, mosaic
> that breaks up features and wears colours false,
>
> discovered, how? I am pensionable
> and you have no news. (*BH* 157).

The poet appears to be looking at a representation of the Virgin in the mosaic, and instead of addressing her directly, turns to the materials which make up the image. This mechanism reminds us of his description of the stained glass saint in 'In Piam Memoriam', and the 'seraphim with stark pinions aglow' (*BH* 161) in the same *Hymns* sequence. At the same time as the Virgin is broken down into the materials of the made image, the material is lent human features, such as '[a]morous'. This '[a]morous bounding putty' is materially and semantically manifold. As Andy Connelly explains, a 'putty-like mixture of lime, lead and linseed oil' was used in medieval times to make stained glass panels waterproof.[104] This primary dimension of the object being fashioned, mixed together, is likely to be at work in Hill's imagery here. Beyond the breaking-down into material features, '[a]morous' contains erotic undertones, and 'bounding' suggests unity, which can also work with the sexual implications of the phrase,

[104] Andy Connelly, 'Heavenly Illumination: The Science and Magic of Stained Glass' in *The Guardian* (29 Oct 2010), at https://www.theguardian.com/science/blog/2010/oct/29/science-magic-stained-glass

and so the suggestion of passion renders the subject human.[105] At a different level, contained in '[a]morous' is also the simple indication of saintly love, while 'bounding' can be seen as attempting to bound the human with Christ's love. This is how the breaking-down of the subject into the object, or even objects, collapses Pickstock's distinction between the erotic and the *an*erotic.[106] What results is an awareness of all the semantic possibilities which arise simultaneously as we decode both the parts and the whole.

The apprehension of the object as a means of potentially moving towards an understanding of the transcendental is shown to be necessary several times in the sequence. There is a reference early in the sequence – '[v]elocity and inertia Adams / plumbed at Chartres' (*BH* 157) – to Henry Adams's 'Prayer to the Virgin of Chartres' and the ironic 'Prayer to the Dynamo', where address is held in a tension between parody and praise, as when Adams addresses the dynamo in an ironic prayerful manner as 'MYSTERIOUS POWER! Gentle Friend!'.[107] This reference shows Hill's attention to how Adams's address too forces the sacred back into the material-mechanical. In section 16, Hill writes

> Dust down the Chartres Virgin from the shelf
>
> Unless or until Peer Gynt skitters sled-
> drunk through my door, scattering the six cats
> from their dishes of liver and cold cuts,
> She shall remain the confidante of my need. (*BH* 165)

The imperative '[d]ust down' suggests the poet's turn towards the external addressee of the poem, perhaps a family member present in the room. At the same time, the saintly addressee, the Virgin herself, is represented as what is most likely a little statue brought back from a visit to Chartres Cathedral, gathering dust on the shelf. Yet objectification here fosters human

[105] 'Amorous, *a*' I.1: 'habitually fond of the opposite sex', *OED*, Vol. 1
[106] See Pickstock, *After Writing*, 217
[107] Henry Adams, *Letters to a Niece and Prayer to the Virgin of Chartres* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1920), 125-33

connection, and it is through this tangibility of the object that it can be cultivated.[108] Jennifer Kilgore-Caradec has noted how 'striking' 'the display of the sense of touch' in particular is in sequence.[109]

Plunging the sacred into the world of material objects and rendering it tangible, available to be perceived through the senses, makes it more accessible, and treading the line between praise and blasphemy can foster knowledge. The poem remains ultimately a poem and hence various degrees of fiction are explored; Peer Gynt and the Virgin co-exist on a similar plane. But the materiality of her presence as an object can enable her to exist in an immediacy of experience available to the speaker as an object of devotion. The materiality of Peer Gynt however is conditioned by 'unless' and 'until'. Everyday conversation takes shape from such familiarity of human connection, as illustrated for instance in the following lines:

> I would submit a prayer for your scald
> Aleksander Wat, whose incessant pain
> Forced a kind of ontological grin
> into his features; for the work that roiled.
>
> I think he thought you had forsaken him –
> things are, forgive me, too easily said
> within the testing limits of this trade.
> Dragonfly-blue the azure of your hem (*BH* 166).

'I would submit a prayer' creates a deliberate uncertainty as to whether prayer in this instance is really possible, as the dialogue with the Virgin is plunged into the formalities of a relaxed

[108] The way in which Hill uses the material and the object so as to attempt to overcome the parallelism of the two spheres is not unlike Hopkins's assent to the work of God through haecceity; it is however, far more tentative, and draws on what he views as the inevitable violence of the natural world instead of its aesthetic value. Contrast for example Hopkins's account of the beauty of the world in 'Pied Beauty' to Hill's description of the violence of creation in 'Genesis' ('the osprey plunge with triggered claw', 'cold eyes, and bodies hooped in steel / Forever bent upon the kill', etc). See 'Pied Beauty' in Hopkins, *The Major Works*, 132-3. In *The Book of Baruch*, Hill introduces a mediation on haecceity and links it to architectural features, which connects with the way in which he progresses from the tangible towards the more abstract through this kind of material apprehension: '*Haecceitas* appears out of black brickwork like evidence shallowly buried / for a hundred years.' (*BB* 117).

[109] Jennifer Kilgore-Caradec, 'Translating Mystical Politics: Charles Péguy and the Civic Good' in *Études anglaises*, 2018/2, Vol. 71, 173

everyday conversation. 'I think he thought you had forsaken him', as well as 'forgive me' are markers of a familiar, friendly conversation. Writing about Hill's address to the Virgin in *Speech! Speech!* in the line '(Pray for us sinners) – YOU THÉRE | LADY?' (*SS* 107), Christopher Ricks even speaks of 'bad manners'.[110]

The Virgin is now confirmed in her role as the speaker's 'confidante'. The contrived and prescriptive formulae of 'difficult' prayer to a 'difficult' God (see *KL* 13) are replaced by intimate markers of conversation.[111] Still, both formulae contain the subtle hints of prayer and direct address to God, and it is as if these are deliberately drowned in the familiarity of the conversation. 'I think he thought you had forsaken him' (*BH* 166) – here about the Polish poet Aleksander Wat – echoes Christ's 'My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?' on the Cross.[112] This subtle allusion makes it possible for the conversation to be read as being addressed to God as a retelling of Christ's words. 'Forgive me' can also be read as a prayerful appeal for forgiveness, and so it is almost as if prayer is taking shape through its very absence and denial.

I show earlier in this chapter how through the performativity of poetic utterance, the absence of Christ instead of his presence is paradoxically made present through a quasi-liturgical process in the 'Lachrimae' sequence. Here, it is through the linguistic act of not mentioning the sacred explicitly, and instead exploring it as a subtle implication, that it becomes impossible to ignore. The fact that the conversation with the Virgin is framed as friendly interaction and obstinately not as prayer elicits the act of prayer itself. If in James's *The Tragic Muse* 'tacit pledges' were 'the very medium of intercourse', then by analogy, the very medium of prayer here is its refusal to be mentioned explicitly.[113] Once again the

[110] Christopher Ricks, *True Friendship: Geoffrey Hill, Anthony Hecht and Robert Lowell Under the Sign of Eliot and Pound* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 28
[111] See Garrett, 'The Rhetoric of Supplication', 332
[112] Matthew 27: 46
[113] James, *The Tragic Muse*, 199; see *CCW* 410

distinction between liturgical and non-liturgical is broken down linguistically by plunging the liturgical into the what Hill has deemed, in 'The Absolute Reasonableness of Robert Southwell', the 'hinterland', or 'back-country' of style, arguing that:

> 'choosing not-to-say', just as much as a choice of words, presupposes a 'hinterland' of style, a 'back-country' of what might, for better or for worse, have been said. (*CCW* 29)

This kind of allusion to prayer is also at play elsewhere in the sequence; for example, in section 17, Hill writes 'Mary, / Mother of us, this is no diary / of things spiritual. Accept the racket' (*BH* 166). As in T.S. Eliot's 'Pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death / Pray for us now and at the hour of our death' there are echoes of the 'Hail Mary' prayer in Hill's 'Mary, mother of us', especially when considered in connection with similar addresses in the sequence, such as 'pray for those neophytes' (*BH* 166).[114] Christopher Ricks writes about Eliot's lines as acknowledging 'that their source is the close of the Hail Mary, and we are expected to take the force of the movement from *birth* to *death*'.[115] The acknowledgement of source in Hill's lines is clear too, but it is done more obliquely, as formulae of the prayer are swapped and worked into the speaker's own poetic address. He replaces 'God' in the phrase 'mother of God' with 'us' in the poem, in an image containing the paradox of both separation and tentative knowledge.[116] On the one hand, 'mother of us' emphasises Mary's humanity: she is one of *us*. On the other hand, it creates a connection between 'God' and 'us', and hence carries forth a faint suggestion of communion within this association. The expectation of prayerful address is further challenged, as the poet points out that this is not a spiritual undertaking, and tells the Virgin to 'accept the racket'. This replaces the desire for prayer to be accepted by the divine with the offering up 'racket' as an oblation instead. The

[114] T.S. Eliot, 'Ash Wednesday' in *Selected Poems* (New York: Harcourt, 2014), 84
[115] Ricks, *True Friendship*, 28
[116] 'Hail Mary' in *A Simple Prayerbook* (London: Catholic Truth Society, 2015), 4

phrase used bids the question of what this racket is and whether it is used to imply either prayer or poetry. I would suggest that the 'racket' is in fact both, bound up together in a space of in-betweenness and paradox, where unity can be tested through separation; and in the final two lines of the section, the association is finally made explicit, as the poet offers up the imperfection of his poetic craft as indeed prayer: 'These limping metrics receive as prayer; / absolve their being uttered true to type' (*BH* 166).

It appears then, that the kind of intercessional approach to prayer is a potential way of moving closer to an experience of the divine, albeit tentative and unsure. Drawing once again on the joint etymology of prayer and imprecation, Hill writes in the fourth section of the *Hymns* that

> Prayers are imprecations for a start;
> Piety may be possible with time;
> Plodding through metric and four-square of rhyme;
> A soul's conviction, ill-conditioned heart. (*BH* 159)

The possibility of moving beyond imprecation and towards a genuine experience of piety through the use of 'prayers' is finally expressed, but the kind of prayers mentioned here involve '[p]lodding through metric and four-square rhyme', thus denoting poetry.

As is the case when making the sacred material so as to experience it as an object of the world, prayer is also made concrete in the formal structure of poetry. It is made subject to the paradoxical mix of intrinsic value and the quantifiable value lent to it by its formal structure (see *CCW* 477). There is a sense of liminality between the modes of prayer and poetry, as the poet slides in and out of prayerful address. 'It is not you I address, great Chartreine, / nor the abundance of thy mercies' (*BH* 164), read the final two lines of the second stanza of section 14. This echoes the earlier renunciation of prayerful address to the Virgin early in the sequence, when he announces, 'nor do I accost / her royal highness directly' (*BH* 157). And

yet the 'her' is replaced here with 'you'. The use of the apposition, and of the personal pronoun in the second person create, a contradiction between the syntax and the semantics of the sentence. By rendering these lines self-contradictory, the poet reinforces the idea that there is a sense of slippage between the two modes, indeed a constant tug between them as one is disintegrated into the other only to emerge again. Robert MacFarlane has described *The Orchards of Syon* as 'a book of cusps', arguing that 'syntactic incoherence' or perhaps 'excess of coherences' in section XXVI are 'due to complexity of thought' and not 'failure of expression'.[117] In section 14 of *Hymns to Our Lady of Chartres*, we encounter the same effect of complexity of syntax, and 'cusp' is a word Hill himself has used in a reaffirmation of the confusion of address inherent in his writing, as well as of the fact that the relationship between the speaker himself and his own address can remain unclear:

> though I confuse many by writing so
> much on the cusp of devotion, so set
> in the metrics. And I misinterpret
> myself many times as inviting you in. (*BH* 164)

Inherent in the idea of writing 'on the cusp of devotion' is the struggle between prayer and poetry, between man and God, and between the immediate and the transcendental. The image provides a rhetorical counterpart to the physical, architectural representation of liminality in Hill's 'The Minor Prophets' as 'between the Porch / and the Altar' (*ATOCP* 1) Yet it is this liminality – this uneasy and confusing treading of the threshold between the sacred and the secular – that fosters the very possibility of devotion and the tentative presence of grace in Hill's writing, 'in a marred nature' (*Canaan* 65).

[117] Robert Macfarlane, 'Gravity and Grace in Geoffrey Hill' in *Essays in Criticism*, Vol. 58, Issue 3 (July 2008), 250

Chapter 4. 'If I am a Christian…': The Sermons of Geoffrey Hill

> And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken.
> (Genesis 3: 22-3)

Hill's sermons have not yet received the same kind of critical attention as his poetry and essays. I want to argue that they represent a crucial lens for understanding his theology. Hill preached his first sermon in 1983 at Great Saint Mary's, Cambridge, and it was not until twenty-four years later that he preached another, this time at Balliol College in Oxford in 2007; seven more sermons followed in the next eight years, with a frequency of approximately one per year up to his death in 2016. In 2008, on Ash Wednesday, he preached a sermon at Trinity College, Cambridge; on the 24th of November 2010, he preached another sermon in Cambridge, this time in Emmanuel College, and a year later, in April 2011, he delivered a sermon in Oxford, at Christ Church. Later in 2011, in October, he returned to the pulpit of Great St Mary's Cambridge, where twenty-eight years earlier he had preached for the first time.[1] All of Hill's sermons were preached at either Oxford or Cambridge, and were university sermons.

[1] There is no standard edition of Hill's sermons, though one is forthcoming, ed. Alice Goodman. Some of the sermons are available either online, or as archival sources, as follows: 'Thus my noblest capacity becomes my deepest perplexity': University Sermon at Great St Mary's (8 May 1983), at BC MS 20c Hill/5/1/158. Geoffrey Hill Archive, University of Leeds; Remembrance: Balliol College (11 November 2007), *Balliol College Record*, 2008. 24-7; Ash Wednesday: Trinity College Cambridge (6 February 2008), at http://trinitycollegechapel.com/media/filestore/sermons/HillAshWed2008.pdf; 'Orderly Damned, Disorderly Saved': University Sermon at Great St Mary's Sermon (16 October 2011), at https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/5084440/geoffrey-hill-16-october-2011-great-st-marys-church.The other sermons have been consulted in typescript editions kindly supplied by Dr. James Williams and the Rev. Alice Goodman. For simplicity, I reference the sermons by their occasions, locations, and dates.

Hill's sermons, both in being lay sermons and in being preached in an academic setting as university sermons, are striking and highly individual, especially when considered in relation to the practice of contemporary sermons preached in daily and weekly services in the Church of England and other Christian denominations. Yet while standing against the grain of the common practices of the contemporary sermon, Hill's preaching, much like his poetry, both taps into historical tradition and embraces the eccentric position which I explore in the first chapter of my thesis.

As a genre, the sermon has historically been associated with an ecclesiastical setting, and is widely understood as an address, usually by an ordained member of the ecclesiastical community, to a congregation. One *OED* definition of 'sermon' is '[a] discourse, usually delivered from a pulpit and based upon a text of Scripture, for the purpose of giving religious instruction or exhortation'.[2] As I will show in this chapter, Hill's sermons are not intended to give 'religious instruction or exhortation', and are instead informed by an exploration of the self's experience of faith similar to the one I have discussed in connection to his poems. His sermons also diverge from the usual expectations of the genre in that they are preached by a layman. Simon During and Lisa O'Connell view the lay sermon as 'a genre which found a niche in British intellectual and cultural history for over a century after about 1820'.[3]

As a lay preacher, Hill's academic and poetic background often pervades his manner of delivery in his sermons. For example, a reading of Hill's first sermon, preached at Great St Mary's, Cambridge, shows primarily the attention of a poet and an academic to matters of fine linguistic distinction, as theological principles are tackled through literary enquiry. Literature, rather than faith, provides the stepping-stone for his preaching in this first sermon, and the address more closely resembles academic modes of address rather than the role of the

[2] 'Sermon, *sb*', 2. *OED*, Vol. 15
[3] Simon During, Lisa O'Connell, 'Coleridge and the Lay Sermon', in *English Studies,* Vol. 98, (July 2017), 747

preacher-as-teacher associated with the ecclesiastical setting of a sermon. This can be viewed as an alignment with and an adaptation of the tradition of lay sermons. In his preface to Coleridge's *Lay Sermons*, Derwent Coleridge writes about a 'transfusion of a religious element throughout the social fabric' and explains that the theological character of Coleridge's discussion hinges on this.[4]

In Hill's first sermon then, it is through a focus on the manifestations of the confessional mode in poetry that he explores the moral implications of public and literary self-expression. He calls such confessional poetry a 'torpid frenzy', and associates it with the Beat poets.[5] He considers such confessionalism a corruption of self-expression, and points out that it derives from an error in interpretation of Wordsworth's equation of poetry with the 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings'.[6] Moving from the literary to the theological, Hill deems the failure to distinguish between this and what Wordsworth deemed the 'degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation' akin to the Pelagian heresy, which was based, as J. Tixeront explains, on a rejection of the doctrine of Original Sin.[7] In likening the practice of such poetic self-expression to the Pelagian heresy, Hill subtly inflects a discourse mainly concerned with matters of literary criticism with theological undertones. What is striking and highly peculiar to Hill's method here is not the fact that he is tackling theological questions, as expected in the context of a sermon, but rather that he is doing so through literary criticism. The theological discovery, then, bounces off questions of literary enquiry. However, while this particular way of linking literature and sermons might seem perhaps unusual to a contemporary congregation, the exchange between the two modes has historically been very

[4] Derwent Coleridge, 'Preface' in Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lay Sermons*, ed. Derwent Coleridge (London: Edward Moxon, 1852), xiii-iv
[5] 'Thus my noblest capacity becomes my deepest perplexity': University Sermon at Great St Mary's (8 May 1983)
[6] William Wordsworth, 'Preface' in *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. George Sampson (London, Methuen, 1940), 33
[7] Ibid.; See J. Tixeront, *History of Dogmas*, Vol. 2, trans. H.L.B. (London: Herder, 1923), 435-6; 'Thus my noblest capacity becomes my deepest perplexity': University Sermon at Great St Mary's (8 May 1983)

significant, with preachers often incorporating literary techniques and modes of expression into their sermons – and many noted preachers being important literary figures in their own right, not least Martin Luther, John Donne, Lancelot Andrewes, S.T. Coleridge and Cardinal Newman.

Michelle de Groot draws attention in her article 'The Literary Quality of Sermons', to the fact that the sermon has often been overlooked as a literary genre, both by churchgoers, and by scholars working on literary criticism. Nonetheless, she argues, one only needs to look at the history of sermons to notice that the relatively clear-cut distinction modernity makes between the quasi-liturgical sermon and other literary works, has not always been a given.[8] Medieval sermons, she points out, shared rhetorical and aesthetic elements with literature, including metaphor, and preachers were often preoccupied with 'rhetorical skill'; she notes that:

> The fifteenth-century English play *Mankind,* for example, contains long speeches by a figure named Mercy that reproduce many of the recommendations made by contemporaneous preaching manuals.[9]

Historically, the sermon was also seen as a genre in which language and rhetoric were to be displayed at their highest, as a consequence of them being held, more broadly in society, in very high regard. Hill's sermons tap into the tradition of careful rhetorical choice, a practice which can be traced back to the pre-modern history of the genre. John J. O'Meara, for example, points out, in his study *The Young Augustine: The Growth of St. Augustine's Mind Up to His Conversion*, that St Augustine of Hippo lived in 'the Golden Age of the grammarians'.[10] For Augustine, the teaching dimension of the sermon is a crucial aspect of

[8] Michelle de Groot, 'The Literary Qualities of Sermons', Contribution to Houghton Library Online Exhibition of Medieval Sermons (2012), at http://hcl.harvard.edu/libraries/houghton/collections/early_manuscripts/preaching/degroot_qualities.cfm

[9] Ibid.

[10] John J. O'Meara, *The Young Augustine: The Growth of St. Augustine's Mind Up to His Conversion* (New York: Alba House, 2001), 22

the genre, but he also holds the aesthetics of rhetoric to be of great importance, both when it comes to preaching, and when it comes to Scriptural exegesis.[11] In a passage from *On Christian Doctrine,* Augustine maintains that

> the expositor and teacher of the Divine Scripture, the defender of right faith and the enemy of error, should both teach the good and extirpate the evil. And in this labor of words, he should conciliate those who are opposed, arouse those who are remiss, and teach those ignorant of his subject what is occurring and what they should expect.[12]

The idea of a rhetorical 'labour of words' implies an act of linguistic and aesthetic choice, and denotes a creative process similar to literary creation, as it is understood by Hill. It offers a useful phrase to describe his own thought.[13]

In fact, Hill has often focused on the connection between literary work and labour in his critical analyses. In 'Unhappy Circumstances', first published in 1991, he argues, in connection to Dryden's translation of Book XV of Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* that the implications of the word 'labour' are manifold. There is, on the one hand, the suggestion of a 'commissioned undertaking', and on the other hand, the idea of mental exhaustion acting as a distraction; both these senses are further complicated, he adds, by the threat, expressed by Davenant in 'Vigilance and Labour', of being 'maliciously in Ambush', and the consequent state of alertness (*CCW* 181). For Pound, Hill further observes in 'Envoi (1919)', the difficulty of aesthetic achievement is itself laboured, as according to Pound, '[l]abour on the TECHNIQUE of singable words is honorable labour' (see *CCW* 254).[14] This 'labour of words' then lies at the core of both traditional forms of preaching like Augustine's, and the

[11] Ibid.
[12] Augustine, 'On Christian Doctrine', *in Readings in Classical Rhetoric* (London: Routledge, 1988), 136
[13] See ibid.
[14] Ezra Pound, *Pavannes and Divagations* (New York: New Directions, 1958), 220

creative poetic process.[15] This labour is not unlike the idea of the kenotic emptying which Hill, following Eliot, writes about in 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"' (*CCW* 6).

Inherent in the link between literature and preaching which is made manifest in Hill's sermons is also the question of dramatic potential, framed in terms of performance, as well as performativity (which I explore in relation with poetry and prayer in my previous chapter), both on the part of the preacher and the audience. In medieval times, the rhetorical labour of the preacher often prompted emotional responses from the congregation, as noted, for example, by John A. Sypert in 'Redeeming Rhetoric: Augustine's Use of Rhetoric in His Preaching Ministry', where he writes that people in the audience would react to what was being preached by 'clapping', 'shouting', and 'crying'.[16] While such indications of engagement from the congregation remain widespread worldwide, they have eroded in present times in Europe, and congregations taking part in the services of Western churches are most often expected to listen to the sermon and engage with it meditatively, rather than actively.

Yet it is a similar kind of emotional-visceral reaction – whether of awe or shock – that Hill appears to seek to elicit in his own sermons, through his wry irony, his overarching performance of doubt, and, perhaps paradoxically, through the intellectual vein of his preaching. At times he speaks in a style of academic addresses which resembles that of his Oxford lectures, though with a higher degree of self revelation and expression. In these respects, the intellectual nature of Hill's homiletic addresses, can be read in the context of that distinctive subgenre of the sermon, namely the university sermon. As already mentioned, from his first time preaching in 1983 to his last in 2016, Hill's sermons were all delivered in

[15] See Augustine, 'On Christian Doctrine', 136
[16] John A. Sypert, 'Redeeming Rhetoric: Augustine's Use of Rhetoric in His Preaching Ministry' in *Eleutheria*, Vol. 4, Issue 1 (Spring 2015), 21

University churches or college chapels, either at Oxford or Cambridge. Out of his eight sermons, six were preached at Cambridge, while the remaining two took place at Oxford University, one in 2007 at Balliol College, and the other in 2011 at Christ Church.

As with the broader genre of the sermon in general, the structure and patterns of university sermons have changed significantly throughout history. Officially called 'Sermons before the University', these addresses can be traced back to medieval times, specifically 1300; while there used to be far more such sermons preached throughout the year, the current pattern is to have six each year, with two sermons preached each term.[17] This subgenre, despite its long history, has not come under much academic scrutiny.

Preaching and academic discourse have historically been interconnected, as in the Middle Ages the Church played a far greater role in the public sphere than in present times. In *A Secular Age*, Charles Taylor discusses secularisation and its manifestations on various levels of society, and argues that various senses of secularisation need to be considered. He identifies three main strands of it, i.e., one affecting 'the most common institutions and practices' (particularly but not exclusively the state), one entailing the 'public spaces' of society and their 'emptying' of religious practice, and finally one concerning 'the conditions of belief'.[18] He considers Western countries to have become secularised in the second sense of the term, meaning that God and religious practice have eroded from the public sphere and that there is a separation between public and religious institutions (although this separation does not entail that religious belief and practice have faded away). He writes that the way in which 'we function within various spheres of activity – economic, political, cultural, professional, recreational' does not 'refer us back to God or any religious belief' but is

[17] See https://www.cam.ac.uk/news/university-sermons-0
[18] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 1-3

instead governed by an 'internal' rationality within each sphere, aimed at maximising benefits, such as 'maximum gain within the economy'.[19] This type of organisation of the public sphere, he argues, stands in contrast to 'earlier periods, when Christian faith laid down authoritative prescriptions, often through the mouth of the clergy, which could not be easily ignored in any of these domains'.[20] Furthermore, up until the late Middle Ages, universities were mostly religious institutions, as documented, for example, by Kimberley Georgedes in her study 'Religion, Education, and the Role of Government in Medieval Universities: Lessons Learned or Lost?':

> Apart from simply being guilds or corporations, the universities of the Middle Ages were either primarily religious in foundation, or secular, the latter of which was rare until the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as political and religious circumstance began to seriously divide Europe.[21]

Yet even in the late Middle Ages, academia and the religious establishment remained deeply interconnected, and preaching grew increasingly influenced by the patterns of academic speech. *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* notes that:

> During this period proof of the ability to preach became a requirement for obtaining a university degree in theology, and the 'university sermon' became a distinct literary genre.[22]

Hill's sermons, however, hardly fit into one 'distinct literary genre'. They combine elements of the pre-modern tradition of preaching, including the weaving together of academic discourse and homiletic rhetoric, with the context of a secularised society, and with the inflection of Hill's own anxieties, and doubts concerning his faith.

---

[19] Ibid., 2
[20] Ibid.
[21] Kimberley Georgedes, 'Religion, Education, and the Role of Government in Medieval Universities: Lessons Learned or Lost?' in *Forum on Public Policy: A Journal of the Oxford Round Table* (Spring 2006), 79
[22] David L. Jeffrey, *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1992), 632

University sermons on the one hand, and lay sermons on the other, Hill's sermons tread the line between genres, exploring both literature and Scriptural teaching in a playful, theatrical, but also deeply serious manner. Like Donne's they are unique, revealing the fears and thoughts of a man, who, finding himself in the pulpit, cannot teach the Scripture in the way expected in the genre; and unlike Augustine, his tone is never confident and self-assured, as he continuously rejects the role of the teacher and questions his suitability to preach.

Hill frequently stresses the inadequacy of his position in the pulpit. He does so, for example, in his Ash Wednesday sermon (2008), when he affirms that 'I am not a trained theologian', in his Emmanuel College sermon (2010), when he reiterates the statement 'I am not a trained and qualified theologian', and again in his St John's sermon (2014), when he utters 'I find myself occupying a high place from which I am drastically unqualified to speak'.[23] In doing so, he implicitly rejects homiletic didacticism while at the same time performing his anxiety about the role of preacher. Though he may overplay his incapacity for the role of a preacher-teacher, he simultaneously gestures towards the more performative dimension of the sermon genre. This is somewhat paradoxical given the scholarly tone of most of his sermons, but such an instinctual appeal to the congregation follows from his exploration of his own relationship with the Christian faith, and is aided by a number of playful and ironic remarks which might amuse or even shock the audience. Yet the lack of moral didacticism in Hill's sermons is not simply a downright refusal to embrace the role of the teacher in his sermons, but it is, most importantly, an avowal of his lack of knowledge. It also replays the kind of self-reflexiveness and self-irony at the heart of his later poetry and prose.

[23] Ash Wednesday: Trinity College Cambridge (6 February 2008); Commemoration of Benefactors: Emmanuel College (24 November 2010); St John's College Sermon (February 9, 2014)

In this context, the intellectual style of Hill's speech becomes itself the subject of an impersonal analysis, as he points out the coherence of his theological belief. The irony of such an endeavour further resides in the fact that he brands his theology 'eloquent', a term whose use has otherwise been scarce in his writings, given his incessant questioning of value and coherence in our postlapsarian condition. Yet the academic approach to theology is immediately followed up by a renewed analysis of the more instinctive aspect of faith – or lack thereof – as Hill says in his St John's College sermon in 2014 that he

> has shown no evidence either to himself or to others of having grasped the real presence of the incarnation and atonement sacramentally offered. Grasped them to himself, I mean, as distinct from acknowledging them in historical and theological descriptions by which one's attention can very easily be caught.[24]

These words pinpoint the impossibility of bridging the gap between actual faith and his own investment in theological language in different historical contexts. It is then, in this sense, that his inability to grasp divine presence through the senses informs the pedantic attention given to 'historical and theological description'. Hill the preacher is not different in any significant way from Hill the critic, as the tone of his linguistic and historical analyses is once again academic, often resembling the diligent scholarly testing and contesting of meaning he undertakes in his Oxford lectures, as when in the first of his Oxford lectures, given on 30 November 2010, he sets about exploring the implications of a poetic language as a tool of aesthetic revelation of the imagination, albeit a fundamentally 'perjured' one.[25]

Nonetheless, Hill's sermons are marked by an acute awareness of the seriousness of the issues touched on in terms of the immediate audience of his address and the expression of his own faith, with its anxieties and doubts. In this respect, we could compare them to his lectures

[24] 'From Amos to Soma and Back Again': St John's College (9 February 2014)
[25] See Geoffrey Hill, 'How ill white hairs become a fool and jester' (30 November 2010), at http://media.podcasts.ox.ac.uk/kebl/general/2010-11-30-hill-poetry-keble.mp3

as Oxford Professor of Poetry, where he built up a different kind of rapport with his audience, punctuating the gravity of his academic discourse with touches of humour – often self-jibes, in which he took upon himself the role of the heckler.

He frequently interspersed his lectures with practical questions or jokes addressed to the audience. In his inaugural address as Professor of Poetry, Hill repeatedly checked that he can be heard at the back of the room, and, playing on the fact that he was suffering from a cold at the time of the lecture, apparently spontaneously announced: 'I do apologise for this stupid, stupid infection… In this particular case I mean my chest, not poetics'.[26] The audience's reaction is quick to follow, as the hall resounds with chuckling laughter.

The context – the setting of a university chapel – and genre of his sermons, however, deter any comparable interaction. While Hill's sermons renounce the didactic role in favour of a more Augustinian approach to preaching, the possibility of spontaneous emotional reactions on the part of the audience would have been virtually null. There are no recordings for most of the sermons, but a recording of the St John's sermon, where Hill's discourse is only once interrupted, by a female voice uttering a responsorial 'Amen', following his introductory epigraph, indicates that the exchange between preacher and congregation is minimal. It is almost as if the audience is silent, and it is difficult to gauge, from the recording, an estimate of numbers.

Though in the absence of recordings it is difficult to ascertain audience response, the transcripts of the sermons indicate Hill's tendency to enact and perform himself an absent but projected dialogue with his audience. He anticipates and deflects audience reactions, a tendency which is also apparent in his critical essays and published lectures, although the projected dynamics between speaker and addressee are slightly different. For example, in his

[26] Ibid.

Clare College Sermon, Hill enacts an interaction between himself and the audience, as he anticipates, and consequently performs it:

> But, hold on a moment, you may be saying: we invited you here to speak on 'the power of language,' and since we understand that you are a poet, we anticipate that you will expatiate upon the word as image-maker, and Christian factor in, say, the *Holy Sonnets* of John Donne. I agree.[27]

There is a theatrical dimension to Hill's imagined dialogue here, as he performs the conversation by taking on the role of the audience, employing the plural personal pronoun 'we' as he acts out the audience's response to his words, as well as drawing on his primary status as 'poet' rather than 'preacher'. The stage-like character of the imagined exchange is further implemented through the switch in address from the 'you' in 'you may be saying' (the audience) to the 'you' in 'you are a poet' (Hill), and back to Hill's own 'I' in 'I agree'.[28] What this performance highlights, however, is the dialogical nature of Hill's self-exploration in the sermons. His refusal to teach and elucidate Scripture is at times so strong, that, in his sermon preached at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, in 2010, his speech eschews any kind of commitment to doctrine, focusing, rather, on the history of the college. This emerges in a sense as a homiletic counterpart to his refusal to commit to dogmatic principles in his poetry, as he allows, instead, history to be the main vehicle in conveying the moral imperative, bidding an actively involved and critically inquisitive stance both on his own part, and on the part of the reader, or congregation in this case.

As the occasion of the sermon was the 'Commemoration of Benefactors' of Emmanuel College, he focuses his discourse on the forming of community, with theological matters being marginally touched upon directly, and allowed instead to emerge from other related matters. In his first sermon, as I have mentioned, theology is made contingent on literature

[27] 'The Power of Language': Clare College (21 February 2016)
[28] Ibid.

whereas here it is impinged on by history. Thus, it appears, at least in this sermon, Hill's homiletic strategy consists in revelation through concealment, in a way similar to his strong allusion to prayer by refusal to mention it, which I discuss in my previous chapter. He recounts the story of a young man who left the College at a young age and died without getting a degree; through this history, he formulates the theological principles of remembering those whom history has forgotten, such as the young boy whom 'the College forgot for two and a half centuries', and who turned out to be the astronomer Jeremiah Horrocks.[29] This recalls his statement in 'History as Poetry' that '[p]oetry / Unearths from among the speechless dead' (*KL* 41), and its resolution that poetry is, or ought to be, a moral tool of witness and remembrance lent to those who would otherwise be forgotten.

As is often the case with his poetry, as well as his critical writings, Hill's attention in his sermons often turns towards the etymological underpinnings of words, as well towards matters of translation and definition, exploring the 'labour of language' and the hidden dimensions of words.[30] So, in his first St Mary's sermon, preached in 1983, he focuses his attention on Trench's significant contribution to the creation of the *OED*.[31] When he returned to preach at St Mary's twenty-eight years later, matters of linguistic accuracy remained central to his discourse. He draws attention to the implication of a word's semantic history and evolution, further pointing out that words exist within two temporal dimensions, one sacramental, or 'eschatological', and one quotidian.[32] Therefore, he adds, taking 'equity' as an example, a word acts as both an indicator of divine justice, and as a 'ploy to enabling us to

[29] Commemoration of Benefactors: Emmanuel College (24 November 2010)
[30] See Augustine, 'On Christian Doctrine', 136
[31] 'Thus my noblest capacity becomes my deepest perplexity': University Sermon at Great St Mary's (8 May 1983)
[32] 'Orderly Damned, Disorderly Saved': University Sermon at Great St Mary's Sermon (16 October 2011)

get the better of our opponent in casuistical argument'.[33] Pinpointing the history of the word's use, he further adds:

> Sometimes in the King James Bible of 1611, as in the four major Tudor translations that preceded it, the word *equity* translates the Vulgate's *aequitas,* and the *epieikeia* of the Septuagint. Sometimes it renders quite different Latin and Greek words; sometimes the Vulgate's *aequitas* and the Septuagint's *epieikeia* are themselves translated into English words other than *equity*; words such as *uprightness* and *judgement.*[34]

Adopting the grounds of the lexicographer and biblical scholar, Hill's argument confirms his commitment to the crucial importance of linguistic nuance to questions of historical ethics.

Still, while such intellectual care is given to the text throughout his sermons, they are also pervaded by an inescapable sense of self-exploration, through which he attempts to seek knowledge not only of theological doctrine, but primarily of how he personally positions himself in relation to the Church's teaching. In this sense, his exploration of faith is also woven into the careful intellectual, historical, literary, and theological implications of the questions he touches upon in his sermons. At the pulpit, a raw baring of the self in a process of exploration of faith and doctrine emerges with a kind of striking directness which has remained broadly hidden in *Broken Hierarchies*, as Hill has rejected poetic confessionalism (although the 'I' of the poet's self surfaces more in *The Book of Baruch*).

In connection with Hill's rebuttal of poetic confessionalism as associated with writers such as Plath, Kathryn Murphy has noted that the problem of confession was 'a matter of purging the word of its associations with intimate revelation, and suffering and sincerity as criteria of value in poetry'.[35] However, I want to argue that in his sermons, Hill's style is tangibly more confessional than in his poems. This is observed as questions about the self's

[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Murphy, 'Geoffrey Hill and Confession', 140

experience of faith and relationship to doctrine are explored in front of the audience. When in the 82nd section of *Al Tempo de' Tremuoti*, Hill writes presumably addressing Pound: 'I confess – I have not visited Urbino' (*BH* 128), the relative triviality of voicing an autobiographical fact is soon countered by a sense of a deeper and darker responsibility of this written confession:

> […] your
> Uccello-mob destroying the Jew's door;
> The little girl snucked in her mother's dress (*BH* 928).

In introducing the reference to witnessed violence against the Jewish population, Hill's confession takes on a moral dimension, and is thus pushed out of the realm of 'intimate revelation' and back into the historical network of reference to which he is making himself subject.[36] Yet in some of his sermons, this kind of factual-historical anchoring is also abandoned, and the confessional process takes the form of a trenchant investigation of how and whether faith is experienced – inevitably in a subjective manner – by himself as a believer with a rather complicated and particular way of relating and assenting to Church doctrine. Significantly the word 'confession' plays an important and deeply personal role in these sermons. So, in his Christ Church sermon, Hill writes 'I have to confess that I can't precisely say whether I am a Christian or not'.[37] The word 'confess' is used in its most personal sense, as he points out his own experience of doubt in faith, in connection with doctrinal assent to Christianity. In the sermon preached in St John's College, in 2014, Hill again openly acknowledges this confessional turn, adding that it is a natural consequence of his old age:

[36] See ibid.
[37] For the Oxford Literary Festival, on Passion Sunday: Christ Church (10 April 2011)

> At the age of 81, some kind of confessional role in the exordium appears to be called for. How about the woman gave me to eat, gave me of the tree and I did eat.[38]

His confessionalism and turn towards the personal pronoun however, remain inflected with the theological, as at this point he echoes Adam's words in Genesis 3:12, but not in a direct quotation, and he does not mention the biblical source.[39] It is as if he blurs out the lines between himself and Adam, reiterating Adam's admittance to the act of Original Sin. In doing so, he brings the history of Original Sin into the present moment, as he affirms his own in unequivocal terms. The confessional dimension of Hill's speech here can be read as a confession of sins, although the ritual of confession involves the acknowledgement of sins committed after baptism. In confessing Original Sin, Hill appropriates Adam's sin, and makes it his own, personal sin. At the same time, he reinforces how steeped humanity is in a continuous history of sin; if when the liturgy is celebrated, the celebrant stands in for Christ, here, instead, Hill stands in for Adam, hence professing the sinful and not the holy nature of man.

Nonetheless, once the confessional impulse is acknowledged, the tendency towards this is countered by a tone marked by intellectualism, doubt, and a degree of performance (as in the pedantic reference to an 'exordium' rather than 'opening'). Repeatedly, he falls back on the requirements of the genre, reminding the audience and himself of what a sermon 'ought to' do. Thus, in the context of a university sermon Hill pries the self open in an exploratory process meant to teach but also to make himself open to learning, and does so, to some extent, by taking on the role of both preacher and audience. It is through his self-proclaimed inadequacy to teach Christian morality as usually expected from a preacher, that he forces himself to partake in his sermons not simply as the preacher, but also as an addressee of his

[38] 'From Amos to Soma and Back Again': St John's College (9 February 2014)
[39] See Genesis 3:12: 'The woman whom though gavest *to be* with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat'

own discourse. Yet he does so with a deep sense of awareness of his personal implication in the preaching process, as he points out that

> the excessive presence up to this point of the personal pronoun, which ideally speaking has no place in a sermon. A sermon ought to preach the text and for that degree of pressure, a theologian who is also a person of faith is essential, of the essence.[40]

In his Ash Wednesday sermon, the discourse also takes on a personal-confessional turn:

> I frankly do not know how I would begin to make restitution to those persons, within my family circle and without, whom I have variously 'damnified' over the past nearly 80 years. I do not like having to confess this to you; but this was on the cards once I had made the capital error of accepting the Dean's invitation.[41]

Hill's turn to the use of the first personal pronoun, and public self-exploration of faith in his sermons, then, is driven on the one hand by his belief in his inability to preach a sermon from the required position as both a theologian and a person of faith, and, on the other hand, by the fact of his old age, and his preoccupation with his own death.

Underlying this gesture towards confessional rhetoric in Hill's sermons appears to be a desire for conversion as an experience of faith, powerful enough to bring about a full acceptance and embracing of the Christian faith. But he expresses his inability to experience the faith in its fullness, especially in terms of true contrition, as he does in his Ash Wednesday sermon when he says, once again playing on the word 'confess', that

> 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.[42]

[40] 'From Amos to Soma and Back Again': St John's College (9 February 2014)
[41] Ash Wednesday: Trinity College Cambridge (6 February 2008)
[42] Ibid.

At the same time, any kind of full embrace of Anglican Christianity with the entirety of his being appears to be resisted deliberately, being countered with the deep vein of rational, intellectual expression to which the speaker resorts again once the attempt at self-revelation has been made. Soon after his explanation of the use of the first person personal pronoun, Hill falls back onto the third person, which can be seen as an attempt to detach himself from his own earlier gesture towards confessionalism. He adds:

> Shifting to the third person singular, here we have a type, a creature, a miserable sinner, who has over the course of the past several years engineered for himself a satisfactory, if nor satisfying, nay, an eloquent, theology derived largely from Karl Barth, Neil Brunner, and Karl Rahner.[43]

Hill's return to the more impersonal tone a sermon 'ought to' have is once again ironic and unconventional, as he still remains the subject of his own words, yet it adds an impersonal dimension to his self-revelation as he becomes 'a type', 'a miserable sinner'.[44] While the change in the personal pronoun placates the rawness of the confessional 'I', it engenders a detachment between the speaker, and his intellect and spirit.

There is an almost grotesque aesthetics to the way in which Hill breaks away from his own self, and puts it on display as if to be inspected and analysed. Thus, with the phrase 'here we have', Hill's system of theology and faith is made similar to an exhibit, put on display as much to startle as to trigger some kind of contemplation and analysis. The idea that he is offering himself up for inspection is further reinforced by his description of the pulpit as a 'high place'; the pulpit as 'a high place' contains the suggestion of the preacher's moral standing as teacher, guiding the congregation, but the high place is also a place where someone is placed in full sight, open to scrutiny and inspection. In 'To Church', R.S. Thomas

[43] 'From Amos to Soma and Back Again': St John's College (9 February 2014)
[44] Ibid.

writes that '[t]he preacher spoke from the high / Pulpit'.[45] The enjambment makes the mind linger on 'high', underpinning the authoritative position both physically and didactically. The consequent capitalisation of 'Pulpit' also fortifies the importance of the preacher's position. For Thomas, everything is positioned right. With Hill, the preacher at the high pulpit is disintegrated, indeed depersonalised, into a 'creature' in a 'high place'. Both man and pulpit undergo a process of undoing, morphing into the generic creature and place, and the sense of position, both in physical terms at the pulpit, and in relation to teaching doctrine is replaced by the uneasy ramifications of sin.

Thus, Hill's discourse often wavers between the confessional impulse and an avowedly academic rhetoric. What is shaped in the midst of this kind of tension is an internal conflict, performed deliberately at the pulpit and touching upon both Hill's own experience of the Christian faith, and his daily existence. It is a discourse invested in his preoccupation with the suitability of his position as a preacher, and painfully aware of his strained relationship to faith. The question of performance also shapes itself as central to Hill's sermons viewed as a whole. Arguably as a consequence of his increasing awareness of his old age and of his failing health, Hill's sermons, like his Oxford lectures but more poignantly, are pervaded by a persistent preoccupation with his own death. Sophie Ratcliffe has noted a similar concern running through Hill's later poetry, which she describes, following Hill's self-description in 2002 as 'physically awkward', in terms of a 'new physical awkwardness' related to age.[46]

The consideration of death is at times made explicit, as is the case, for example, with his Ash Wednesday sermon preached at Trinity College, when he stated:

---

[45] R.S. Thomas, 'To Church' in *Poetry*, Vol. 100, No. 2 (May 1962), 81

[46] Sophie Ratcliffe, 'On Being "a man of the world"' in *GHELW*, 71; Geoffrey Hill, 'A Matter of Timing' in *The Guardian* (21 September 2002), at https://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/sep/21/featuresreviews.guardianreview28

> I fear dying and I fear the Judgement. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God; I pray that in the hour of my death I do not fall *out* of the hands of God.[47]

Such brooding over the self's mortality and the afterlife is, in most cases, not articulated as explicitly as here; rather, it is implied, hinted at, explored, and at times conspicuously performed, all in a manner which makes this thought about death impossible to overlook or ignore. Even here, however, the first person assertions derive from the biblical first person. Hill's 'Tacit Pledges' is again relevant here, as he draws on Henry James's phrase in the novel *The Tragic Muse*, and its applicability to Housman's grammar and syntax in his poetry (*CCW* 409-11).[48] This is, according to Hill, an illustration of how the unspeakable is made manifest through the fact that 'the tacit' itself 'must further contain' its 'presence' (*CCW* 411). How exactly the unspeakable can be spoken in poetry is a theme to which Hill has returned regularly throughout his critical writings. This is illustrated, for example, in 'Translating Value', where, following his analysis of Hopkins's focus on haecceity, he contends that he manages to articulate the 'unspeakable' (*CCW* 391).

In his Christ Church sermon, the question of death is once again addressed, this time with the focus on Christ's own death, and what Hill refers to, following the commentary in the 1611 King James Bible on Isaiah 53, as 'the scandal of the cross'. This scandal, he maintains, consists in the hermeneutic aporia posed by the difficulty of construing Christ's death on the Cross as both 'destroyed affirmation', and the indelibility of death as a necessity for salvation.[49] This paradox, he adds, is demanded by theology as 'salvation's paradox revealed as being at the very nucleus of the accursed penal oxymoron.'[50]

---

[47] Ash Wednesday: Trinity College Cambridge (6 February 2008); a play on Hebrews 10: 31:' It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God'

[48] James, *The Tragic Muse*, 199; see A.E. Housman, *More Poems XL*, in *Housman, Collected Poems and Selected Prose* ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Penguin, 1989), 186, quoted in *CCW* 409

[49] For the Oxford Literary Festival, on Passion Sunday: Christ Church (10 April 2011)

[50] Ibid.

Yet equally baffling and oxymoronic, Hill soon adds, is his own standing there, at the pulpit, himself and his argument caught within the radical gap between the expectation of the congregation to hear the reflections of a 'literary flaneur' and his reluctance to preach theology, a predicament which he jokingly describes as having been handed 'a brace of ferrets'.[51] Hill's playful and ironic digression appears at the same time to be calculated carefully, marking a shift in focus away from the philosophical endeavour to address questions about the theological implications of Christ's death on the Cross and the resulting paradox, and towards the physically visceral character of His death. He draws attention to the fact that it was Passion Sunday, a time when, he reminds the congregation, we need to be aware of the terrible 'spectacle' that was Christ's death, with all its 'degradation', 'humiliation', and 'torture', and which leads into the desolation of Good Friday.[52] Interestingly enough, Hill refers to the practices of Good Friday as 'awe-full', a theologically-loaded term which pinpoints, at the same time, the terrible reminder of Christ's death, emerging as the unspeakable being spoken by means of all the practices associated with Good Friday, as well as with the sacramental aspect of the celebration, indicated by the hyphenation between 'awe' and 'full'.[53] To readers familiar with Hill's poetry, as well as with his criticism – both his critical writings and his Oxford lectures – the recognition of the effect exerted by the semantic and etymological doubling of 'awful' as both terrible and full of awe is immediate. Like the sermon, Hill's poetry is highly charged with etymological implications, a fact which he himself playfully acknowledges in 'Ludo': 'Etymology one of my hobbies; / rubber-necking in cinema lobbies / another' (*BH* 606).

Given Hill's attention to etymology, what is striking about his sermon is the apparent disregard of this matter. While the spelling of the word as 'awe-full' indicates that Hill was

[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.

characteristically aware and interested in the theological implications of this semantic-etymological mechanism, one needs to bear in mind the fact that he was speaking to an audience, reciting, as it were, a text belonging to a genre meant to be spoken and listened to, and not read. Yet, despite this challenge, he quickly moves on, without expanding on the etymology of 'awful'. That any kind of sacramental implications are wrought into the term, then, only becomes visible in the written text of the sermon. Yet this is doubly problematic: firstly, it subverts once again the traditional character associated with the genre. Secondly, the performative aspect of the sermon is once more brought into focus, as Hill would presumably have verbally emphasised the etymological underpinning of 'awe-full' in his pronunciation.

It needs to be noted in connection to the content of the sermon that the continuity of any theological discourse is severed by Hill's drawing attention again to his unsuitability to preach the sermon. He does so at first subtly, by indicating his position as an academic rather than a churchman when he refers to the Oxford Literary Festival and the Professor of Poetry chair. Following this, he does so in a more startling manner, by publicly questioning his Christianity. 'I was not asked: are you a Christian?', he states, initiating a process by which he both questions his very status as a Christian, and highlights the incongruity between religion as ritualised practice and religion as an experience of faith.[54] On the surface, this ironic and playful foray into what makes a Christian – Hill adds, jokinly, that perhaps the church now has an anti-discrimination law, forbidding it to ask preachers whether they are Christian – foreshadows the irony of a man whose own relationship with faith has been fraught with anxiety and doubt, who is now delivering a sermon on Good Friday. The institutional incongruity between faith as belief and institutional practice is deepened by Hill's contemplation on the rituals of the Church, which he calls 'neither here nor there'.[55]

[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.

His having been baptised and confirmed, he contends, is inconclusive as to whether he may call himself Christian or not.[56]

A similar exploration of what a Christian might be is encountered in his Balliol College sermon, where he proclaims that

> If I am a Christian, it is because the Church's teaching on Original Sin strikes me as being the most coherent grammar of tragic humanity that I have ever encountered.[57]

Hill's grammar here is both reluctant and tentative towards Christian doctrine, with the conditional 'if' both suggesting assent to Christian belief, and hesitancy to commit to being classified as such. The 'if' used here goes beyond the mere analysis of Hill's personal manner of relating to the Church both as an institution and to its set of doctrines. As Matthew Sperling has noted, the construction mimics John Henry Newman's grammar in *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, when he frames his argument for God's existence through the same grammatical construction.[58] The phrase also reminds us of the language of formal logic, and the syntax of '[i]f I am a Christian' initiates a relation of co-dependency between the doctrine of Original Sin and the core of Christian belief in a way that parallels Newman's, as Hill incorporates Newman's voice into his own. In his *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, Newman employed a similar type of causal relationship and professed the same co-dependency of one concept upon the other:

> And so I argue about the world; – *if* there be a god, *since* there is a God, the human race is implicated in some terrible aboriginal calamity. It is out of joint with the purposes of its Creator. This is a fact, a fact as true as the fact of its existence; and thus the doctrine of what is theologically called original sin

[56] Ibid.
[57] Remembrance: Balliol College (11 November 2007)
[58] *VP*, 138-40; John Henry Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua: Being a History of his Religious Opinions*, ed. Martin. J. Svaglic (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 217-8, quoted in *VP*, 139-40

> becomes to me almost as certain as that the world exists, and as the existence of God.[59]

In *Visionary Philology*, Matthew Sperling writes about the similar syntax found in Hill's and Newman's sentences.[60] He argues that while 'Hill has taken the cadence and syntax of Newman's journey to faith into the body of his own discourse', it is impossible for him to 'follow Newman's grammatical self-revision', and move from 'if' to 'since'; Newman's syntax indicates a 'reinvigorated grasp on a grammar of assent', while Hill's only expresses his 'troubled mere desire for one'.[61]

What Newman does is to postulate God's existence through the use of the conjunction 'since', in order to introduce a conditional relationship between God's Being and man's state of Original Sin. There is a God, and because there is a God, it is evident that humanity is 'out of joint with him'.[62] What emerges from Newman's logical inference is a full and orthodox endorsement of the doctrine of Original Sin. Newman does not, at any point, question his own Christianity, God's existence, or, more generally, the validity of Christian doctrine as a whole; he merely places Original Sin as an ontological given, rendering it central to Christian precepts. Hill, on the other hand, in his refashioning of Newman's argument, reverses the antecedent and the consequent of the material conditional established between Christian belief and Original Sin, and, in doing so, derives belief from the perceived reality of sin. It appears, then, according to this conditioning, that any knowledge of God that might be available to humanity can only be derived from the knowledge of sin. In his inaugural lecture as Professor at Leeds entitled 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"' delivered in 1977, Hill also articulated the condition of man as a condition of sin (*CCW* 11). He argued that the

---

[59] Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, 217-8
[60] *VP*, 140
[61] Ibid.
[62] Newman, *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*, 217-8

existential anxiety experienced by human beings in a secular age is a consequence of the failure to understand human existence as being-within-sin (*CCW* 11).[63] The implications of this observation are twofold, and its bearing on Hill's own performance of the doubting man persona throughout his sermons is extremely powerful. Hill's voice here is that of a doubting layman at the pulpit.

As I have already mentioned, Hill's Balliol College Sermon, preached on the 11th of November, 2007, reiterates his espousal of the doctrine of Original Sin. As he discloses that his belief in Original Sin is fundamental, he also sets about providing an analysis of what exactly he views as essential about this belief. So, he adds, this is based on the fact that human existence as a whole cannot extricate itself from the overarching bearing of Original Sin. With a sardonic reference to literal readings of the Old Testament, he clarifies the fact that his commitment to the doctrine of Original Sin does not entail a conviction that some 'serpent traduced God and seduced a woman', or that sexual contact 'transmits evil like a kind of metaphysical HIV'.[64]

Yet it is paradoxically from the inescapabilty of man's sinful condition that he derives his affirmation of the 'integral nature' of human beings.[65] It is perhaps the voice of the self-proclaimed 'Manichean Gnostic', who affirms an espousal of Luther's concept of the *homo incurvatus in se*, adding, however, that it is due to the fact that sin is so inexorably part of the making of human nature, that one should consider the degrees of its manifestations.[66] In particular here, he is referring to war. He first stresses the fact that a certain type of war

---

[63] Ibid., 218
[64] Remembrance: Balliol College (11 November 2007)
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid.; Hill describes himself as a 'Manichean gnostic' in his Christ Church sermon. Manicheanism was a religious system incorporating 'Christian, Gnostic and pagan elements', and which was based on the view that there was a 'primeval conflict between light and darkness, and representing Evil as coeternal with God'. 'Manichaeism, *n*', *OED Online*. Hill's self-description as a Manichean gnostic' in the context of a discussion of his Christianity shows how strong his commitment to Original Sin is, indicating that Original Sin is a force perhaps equal to the divine good.

conduct – such as Hitler's, Stalin's, and Himmler's – follows on from an utter surrender to the power of sin; yet, on the other hand, there is a distinction between that and still being subject to sin while striving for good, as he points out that 'entirely decent men', such as Neville Chamberlain and Lord Halifax, were merely impaired by the sin wrought into human nature.[67] Through his words, Hill is hardly trying to make an apology for war for its own sake, or to play down the gravity of sin. However, he is, at least to a certain extent, attempting to explain the ethical complexity involved in urgent historical decisions as the sum of co-dependent workings of sin and grace. Hence, still referring to war, he argues that historical contexture can bid noble sacrifice, further adding, in more general terms, that

> 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. [...] I have known one, maybe three people, who strike me as being pre-elected by gift of temperament to salvation. Greed and sloth, pride and lust, did not seem a part of their natures. The rest of us must strive and, if we can, pray.[68]

In defining one dimension of grace as a 'gift of vigilance' within a network of circumstance, he is further articulating the impossibility of untangling sin and grace within the postlapsarian world, and replaying the intricate argument of 'Caveats Enough in their Own Walks' in *The Enemy's Country* about the bearing of Hobbes's '*drift*, and *occasion*, and *contexture*' on language (*CCW* 223).[69] This is because, to Hill, circumstance is not only influenced by and a consequence of sin, but also, as stressed elsewhere in this dissertation, simply impossible to ignore when interpreting a text, object, building, and so on. Furthermore, as Hill indicates in the same Balliol sermon, historical sin is not merely derived from the sinfulness of individual human nature, but rather, and more fundamentally, from the interaction and compounding of

[67] Remembrance: Balliol College (11 November 2007)
[68] Ibid.
[69] Thomas Hobbes, *Humane Nature, Or The Fundamental Elements of Policies* (London: T. Newcomb, 1650), 51, quoted in *CCW* 223

the sinfulness of all humanity in general. It is, in this sense, an intersection and cumulation of sin. He quotes his predecessor poet and preacher John Donne, who describes himself as a 'reciprocall plague; passively and actively contagious'.[70] Our natures both emit sin and absorb it; we sin and we are shaped by the sins of others. Hill, in summarising Donne's argument contends that we are 'existentially compromised'.[71]

Given that the individual is both an agent and a subject of circumstance, and given the reality of Original Sin, any form of grace can only arise within such circumstance, as Hill goes on to argue in the sermon. In the chaos of daily lawlessness, Hill argues, grace resides in one's quest to encounter the Logos.[72] Still, what emerges as most striking for a writer who has repeatedly drawn attention to the leverage of Original Sin on language and linguistic artistic expression, and who has 'laboured to explain' his own pessimism, is the hint in the Balliol College sermon at a possibility of salvation through language. Approaching the end of the sermon, Hill adds:

> For those of us who read and teach and write, grace may somehow be embedded deep in semantics and linguistic anthropology as they are encountered in Christology and Civil Polity. But I am, as they say, still working on that.[73]

If Original Sin is the 'most coherent grammar of tragic humanity', then the Balliol College sermon is the most coherent grammar of theological thought made accessible to readers of Hill's writings, as it is here that a full view of the implications of his belief in Original Sin and the corruption of language becomes most clear.[74] Furthermore, it is here that we encounter Hill at one of the most optimistic moments of his theological thought, as he hints at

[70] Remembrance: Balliol College (11 November 2007); John Donne, *The Sermons*, Vol. 9 eds. George R. Potter, Evelyn M. Simpson (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1953-62), 311
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.
[74] See ibid.

the possibility that grace may reside within semantics. Still, such optimism is kept in check, on the one hand, by the very fact that to encounter grace is only possible in the midst of sin, and on the other hand, by Hill's refusal to commit to his own words fully. This is suggested by his hesitant tone, as his sentences are scattered with markers of indecisiveness and conditionality, such as 'may' and 'somehow', as well as his qualification, in the end, that he is 'still working on that'.[75] The term 'working' summons up the same idea of 'labour', and Peter McDonald's argument that Hill's post-*Canaan* poetry does indeed 'refigure the laborious encounter between "viciousness" and "virtue"' also describes Hill's labour of words and thought in his Balliol College sermon.[76]

If Hill's theology in his sermons is intellectually coherent and rooted in biblical exegeses, his addresses are also pervaded by a desire for a more sensuous and instinctive form of faith. For example, he ends the sermon preached at Clare College, Cambridge by stating that

> the matter of faith ought to be far simpler than the process I have outlined here; something like a simple stepping aside off the treadmill of aggressive and masochistic intellectualism.[77]

Once again we encounter the 'ought to', but it is this 'ought to' that Hill seems incapable, or perhaps unwilling, to succumb to.[78] He still, in the midst of this, clings to the kind of 'aggressive and masochistic intellectualism' attributable to his critical writings.[79] In 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"', he assents to the idea that if one can speak of any kind of perfection in a poem, at a technical level, this can only be attained through a coming together of form and meaning in act of 'at-one-ment' in unity (*CCW* 4). There is something of an

---

[75] Ibid.
[76] Peter McDonald, '"But to my Task": Work, Truth, and Metre in Later Hill' in *GHELW*, 149
[77] 'The Power of Language': Clare College (21 February 2016)
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.

'instinctive assent', Hill argues, to this description of unity within a poem (*CCW* 4), an annihilation of the self within the creative act and an encounter of the self with 'that which is not-self (*CCW* 4). There is a sense of unity here between the immanent and the transcendental, and between sensuous and cognitive assent, an idea which reminds us of Hill's desire in 'That Man as a Rational Animal Desires the Knowledge Which is His Perfection', to see 'the knowledge / of sensuous intelligence / entering into the work' (*Canaan* 2). That the sensuous was joined with the cognitive was also argued by Hill in his interview for *The Paris Review*, when he scoffed at the idea that 'the intellect is somehow alien to sensuousness', and described himself, following Milton, as 'a simple and sensuous poet'.[80] Sebastian Arrurruz, too, Hill proclaimed, was a 'shy sensualist', and on the topic of sensuous assent, Hill has also expressed his own envy of the composer for his ability to 'unite solitary meditation with direct, sensuous communication to a greater degree than the poet', as has been noted in the second chapter of this thesis.[81]

In this context, what strikes us about the rhetoric of Hill's sermons is the obdurate persistence of his 'aggressive and masochistic intellectualism', and the absence of, or rather resistance on his part to, to any sensuous and instinctive assent to faith.[82] Throughout his sermons, Hill takes an intellectual approach to matters of faith, resisting and denying any kind of instinctive-sensuous knowledge of Christianity not as theological enquiry, but as experienced belief. For instance, in his sermon at Christ Church, in 2011, once he has performed an inventory of practices which might classify him as Christian, he contends that as far as the frisson of Christian experience is concerned, he has not felt that in a long time:

> But all the rest of faith's armoury, belief in the efficacy of Christ's redeeming,

[80] Phillips, 'Geoffrey Hill: The Art of Poetry No. 80'
[81] Haffenden, *Viewpoints*, 95; ibid., 91
[82] See 'The Power of Language': Clare College (21 February 2016)

> loving sacrifice, the sense of Christ as one's personal Saviour, either I have never felt it, or, having felt it for the flash of a half-second, many years ago, have been totally incapable of following through.[83]

Hill's language here is once again careful and calculating, as he focuses on his inability to feel faith. There is an almost mathematical, systematic consideration and taxonomy of his potential status as a Christian, and what he appears to be saying then in this passage, is, 'I have never felt belief' in 'Christ' as a 'personal Saviour'.[84] Not to have felt belief is not the same as not to believe, and his gloss signals the fracture between cognitive acceptance of theological doctrine, and the sensuous (or existential) experience of such cognition.

Hill appears to be enjoying and performing the role of the eccentric excommunicate, adopting the persona of the 'Manichean gnostic', of the heretic, and allowing it to subvert the sermon.[85] At the same time, it is also evident that his reluctance to accept the Christian label does not hinge entirely on personal reasons, but is also, to a considerable extent, institutional. Hill's dissatisfaction is not merely with his own inability to experience a more sensuous type of assent to religious doctrine, but also with the Church of England's failure to facilitate this kind of experience. If his reluctance to call himself a Christian, Hill admits, were to be subjected to the same aggressive intellectualism which runs through his sermons, the rational conclusion would indicate an institutional motivation to his decision. It is not simply his own inability to experience faith as one ought to that prevents him from calling himself a Christian, but also what he sees as the corruption of the Church's institutional conduct. He consequently affirms:

> If open to rational explanation the cause might be attributable to my response to the replacement of *majestas* (which the Church could legitimately teach) by an unholy brew of triumphalist finance and cringing populism.[86]

---

[83] For the Oxford Literary Festival, on Passion Sunday: Christ Church (10 April 2011)
[84] Ibid.
[85] See ibid.
[86] Ibid.

He adds that the Church is far too willing to 'allow mere hegemony to usurp the place of spiritual and moral hierarchy'.[87] These words delivered in 2011 are reminiscent of Hill's criticism of the institutional corruption affecting post-Thatcherite Britain in *Canaan*, from the acidic lines '[w]here's probity in this - / the slither frisk / to lordship of a kind / as rats to a bird table?' (*Canaan* 1) in 'To the High Courts of Parliament ("Where's probity in this…')', to his exploration of the connection between ecclesiastical architecture and the threat of moral decay, which I have explored in the first chapter of my dissertation. Yet while his criticism in *Canaan* falls in line with his view that it is a poet's role to call out moral wrongs and to take an active stance against the sins of history, his criticism of the Church of England in the Christ Church sermon seems to strike a deeper personal string. In practice, Hill is criticising the Church's practices for rendering the experience of faith even more difficult through its institutional policies by offering his own case as an example. There is something personal about Hill's explanation here of why he is reluctant to call himself a Christian, hidden beneath the vein of 'aggressive and masochistic intellectualism'.[88] In refusing to embrace the role of the preacher, Hill achieves, in his sermons, a certain baring of the self, which, both in his poetry and lectures is better shielded by his public investment in the role of poet and academic.

In his final sermon, preached five months before his death, the gap between Scripture and self is also made strikingly manifest, as Hill brings together two quotations: one from the Elizabethan Prayer Book, and a second, presumably imaginary, spoken by a doctor to an elderly patient, informing him that he is suffering from a particularly aggressive form of prostate cancer. This apparent paradox is soon explained by Hill in terms of Christianity,

[87] Ibid.
[88] 'The Power of Language': Clare College (21 February 2016)

pessimism, and suffering. Referring to the Old Testament Book of Job, he focuses on resilience in the face of suffering for the sake of salvation's promise:

> This book is the keystone of an acceptance of God's justice, in the midst of spiritual and physical torment, by a man, who, at the beginning is a good but somewhat platitudinous man and who at the end of the book is an existential man of faith. It is a book I reel back from, aghast; but it is the faith that repels me, not the suffering.[89]

His own pessimism, he later qualifies, he views as deeply un-Christian, as Christianity is pervaded by a resoluteness in the face of pessimism. There is something ironic about the profane statement '[i]t is the faith that repels me' resounding within the traditionally liturgical context of the sermon, as we are once again faced with the performance of a doubting layman persona.[90] It is under the weight of this utterance that the expectations associated with a sermon collapse; the sermon, in this sense, is subverted again here by the preacher himself, in a twist of irony marking the disintegration of the product at the hands of the maker.

Yet in subverting the presupposed liturgical context of the sermon, the words of the preacher open up a new realm in the experience of man's relationship to the divine. Hill, in embracing his own suffering – I say his own because the parallels between the old man in his story and his own failing health and old age are impossible to overlook – retraces the actions of the prophets. In doing so, he nonetheless rejects the smug self-assurance of the man who knows – both instinctively and cognitively – that salvation is real. It is the prescriptive faith of the Scripture that Hill rejects, suggesting that there are many other forms of faith to be experienced. Furthermore, it is not sin itself that he embraces, but rather the sinful condition of humanity. Unlike the preacher on the Mount, the preacher in the university chapel of Christ Church does not *know* the possibility of salvation. Each of these preachers, then, reveals to

[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.

the congregation the working of their inner selves: Christ, on the one side, appearing as grace incarnate, able to guarantee salvation; and on the other side, the old man baring the anxiety of his condition, embracing and affirming both the utter sinfulness of his spirit, and the decay of his body under illness and old age. Paradoxically, then, what Hill achieves through his mechanism of subversion in his sermon is a parodic and somewhat grotesque imitation of Christ's action in the Sermon on the Mount, yet nonetheless a very human expression of man being created in God's likeness.

Imitation, as shown earlier in this dissertation, involves or can involve parody, and ritualistic enactment does not suffice for real salvation. This issue is also explored in the earlier Ash Wednesday sermon, preached at Trinity College in 2008, where he points out the gap between practice and assent:

> I would guess that perhaps 85% of practising Anglicans would regard themselves as lucky – prosperous – in their faith, finding strength in their renewed Easter commitment, comfort in their regular partaking of Communion, courage in their assurance of salvation in Christ. But what of the 15% of us who are unlucky in our faith, who feel almost as if God had cursed us to believe. To whom the taking of communion has never emerged from the comminatory shadow of the prefatory sentences in the old Book of Common Prayer: 'so is the danger great, if we receive the same unworthily…we eat and drink our own damnation.'[91]

Here, Hill reiterates the perceived link between Christianity and luck and prosperity of the elected, yet this time places it within an institutional context. Of course, there is an inherent irony in Hill's play on statistics here. Still, once again, fear permeates his discourse in this sermon, as he concentrates not on the promise of salvation, but on the threat of God's wrath, triggered by the act of receiving communion in an unworthy state. What appears to frighten him here is the same inability to experience the love of God in a more sensuous way, as in the passage above, and as in the 'Lachrimae' sequence in his poetry, analysed in my previous

[91] Ash Wednesday: Trinity College Cambridge (6 February 2008)

chapter. Here he creates a contrast between those Anglicans who derive happiness from their practice, and himself, alongside also a small minority.[92] What further underlies this contrast is his description of the majority in terms of affect, resorting to terms such as 'happiness', 'comfort', and 'assurance', all suggesting peace of heart.[93] On the other hand, when speaking about himself, he talks about having been 'cursed to believe', with 'believe' once again indicating cognitive understanding of God's existence and the Christian faith, but also an utter inability to be moved by the sacraments and experience the 'happiness' and 'comfort' that other believers do. It is perhaps useful, at this stage, to provide the full context of Hill's reference, taken from the Book of Common Prayer:

> as the benefit is great, if with a true penitent heart and lively faith we receive that holy Sacrament; (for then we spiritually eat the flesh of Christ and drink his blood; then we dwell in Christ, and Christ in us; we are one with Christ, and Christ with us;) so is the danger great, if we receive the same unworthily. For then we are guilty of the Body and Blood of Christ our Saviour; we eat and drink our own damnation, not considering the Lord's Body.[94]

It is his inability to grasp 'the real presence of the incarnation and atonement sacramentally offered', doubled by his intellectual apprehension of the doctrine, which leads him to view himself as unworthy, and thus to fear that in participating in the Eucharistic ritual, he might in fact be partaking in his own damnation.

The implication of Hill's exposition of his faith in these sermons, is not as much an internal struggle between intellectual cognition of doctrine and sensuous apprehension per se; rather, the tension is exacted by the fact that his sensuous intimation of divinity is shaped by fear, pessimism, and doubt. And doubt, in this case, is not directed only towards God's existence. It is rather a type of self-doubt which prevents him from being able to view himself

[92] Ash Wednesday: Trinity College Cambridge (6 February 2008)
[93] Ibid.
[94] *The Book of Common Prayer, and Administration of the Sacraments, and other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church, According to the Use of the United Church of England and Ireland* (Oxford: W. Baxter, 1824), 583

as worthy of divine love, and which thus renders him utterly incapable of experiencing sacramental presence. Hill is not simply a doubting man whose lack of sensuous experience hinders intellectual assent, but rather someone whose inability to experience divine presence renders his hope of salvation difficult through the impossibility of contrition.

His Ash Wednesday sermon, too, opens with a similar process of self-flagellation, as Hill dwells on what he views as his utter incompetence as a preacher:

> The theology, church history, the very language of repentance, are fraught with peril for the inexpert; they are matter for trained theologians to debate and to administer. The Roman Catholic church rightly insists on rigorous training and discipline for its confessors; for they know that incompetence can imperil the spiritual wellbeing of those to whom they minister. I am just such an incompetent and it is all too likely that what I say in the next ten minutes or so will do you an ill-service and be to me a reason for much subsequent remorse.[95]

As Hill dwells on his inability to experience faith in a sensuous manner again, he equally seems to temper any such inclination by deliberately seeking out rational means of countering emotional experiences. An indication that he is, in fact, attempting to contain his emotional reactions to faith is given in the same Ash Wednesday sermon, where he describes his habit of reading theology as 'dangerous', and reveals his desire to counter such reactions:

> I read theology, which is a dangerous thing for someone in my state and condition to do; and I try to keep my aberrations, my wildness, my savage melancholia, under restraint by much reading of secular and church history.[96]

The 'aberrations', 'wildness', and 'savage melancholia' to which Hill refers all suggest not an incapacity for sensuous experience of faith, but rather, a dark and frightening assent of the senses to God's wrath. There is 'peril' and 'danger' in theology, and they feed the fear of being unworthy, and of falling '*out* of the hands of God', as Hill mentions in the same

[95] Ash Wednesday: Trinity College Cambridge (6 February 2008)
[96] Ibid.

sermon.[97] It is such fear that enables the speaker to waver between conversion – and consequently an embracing of his own darkness of belief – and a dismissal of such pessimism as fundamentally un-Christian.

Alice Goodman's typescript of the Clare sermon ends with a footnote, which reads: '[o]n the way down from the lectern, he missed the step and fell heavily, hitting his head on the choir stalls.'[98] The weight of Goodman's words is sad and revelatory at the same time, as Hill's actual, physical fall, seems to be suggestive not only of the theology which he strove to articulate throughout his sermons, but also, albeit unwittingly, to enforce the strength and theatricality of his performance of his own fallenness.

> Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in *his* kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God (Ephesians 2: 5-8).

[97] Ibid.
[98] 'The Power of Language': Clare College (21 February 2016)

Conclusion

‘Of my thesis this is the ghost score’ (*BB* 38)

> Thrice-refused thesis. The Word in Crisis. Serious judgement absurd.
> Fresh from your brain the wren as dinosaur.
> Conserve energy; enrage no nerve; deploy the curve. Preserve, not trample, the pieties.
> Funds ample; needs simple.
> Fix car; detox malign cosine. Do tax. Cry pax. (*BB* 4)

This passage – the third section of *The Book of Baruch* – moves through what Hill sees as the specifics of the relationship between the human and the divine, its reaffirmation of language’s limitations (‘[t]hrice refused thesis’, ‘[t]he Word in Crisis’), interwoven with mundanity (‘[d]o tax’) and with worship (‘[c]ry pax’).

‘Thrice-refused thesis’ can be read as alluding to the impossibility of communication between man and God; ‘thesis’ picks up on matters of linguistic eloquence explored in earlier works such as ‘Psalms of Assize’. At the same time, ‘thrice’ (perhaps in conjunction with the fact that this is the third poem in the book) hints at the Trinity. The capitalised ‘Word’ suggests the divine Logos, but the subsequent capitalisation of ‘Crisis’ reiterates the failings of language itself.

As soon as this refusal and crisis of communication and language are professed, absurdity emerges, and the poet turns his attention, once again, to the natural world, perceived through the ‘brain’. Still, his focus on the natural is inflected with perceptions of the subject’s evolutionary history: the ‘wren’ is construed as ‘dinosaur’. The reference to the bird’s evolutionary history shows the same kind of awareness of how things are made through their past. This awareness of historical determination shapes Hill’s attention to etymology, and,

also, as I have shown in my thesis, his understanding of architecture and music. I want to suggest that when the poem is read as a whole, this 'wren' is an irresistible foreshadowing of the 'Wren' of the churches discussed in the later section 36 (*BB* 16), where they are described as shaped by their own history of violence and destruction. Throughout this sequence, the mundane, the natural, and the immediate are interfused with the sacred; amidst this absurdity of human existence, however, the poet affirms that 'the pieties' are 'preserve[d]', and not 'trample[d]'. This third section of *The Book of Baruch* can be seen as bringing together the threads of thought which I have discussed in my thesis: the address to God, the world of the natural, history, and how the divine can be apprehended in the midst of the absurdity of the human condition, if at all.

Throughout the posthumous book, these concerns are often revisited with renewed aesthetical and ethical attention. 'We were then a spiritual people / revering a Wren steeple albeit in a downcast thumbs-up way. / Unsteepled if need be' (*BB* 6) and the reference to 'St Giles, Cripplegate ('tower without steeple') itself a blitz-cripple' (*BB* 8) show the endurance of his interest in the relationship between architecture and violence. Music continues to 'survive' as in 'the *War Requiem*, advanced by shellshocked loud- / speakers' (*BB* 9), and is brought together with both prayer and architecture in section 25, as 'I would have prayed to excel in mathematics and music if had prayed at all; / envying Wren and the musicians of the Chapel Royal; passacaglias and / Purcell; for that is where the mind stands to itself, albeit in hell' (*BB* 11). Sermons too draw the poet's attention, as he refers, in section 40, to John Donne, one of the great poet-preachers: 'Enter John Donne with his "melancholy hat", at need to put things right / with *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions* and creed and credence' (*BB* 19) refers to one of the great poet preachers. Lancelot Andrewes is also present, as Hill cites one of his sermons later – '"Christ is no wild-cat" says a preacher; but later, his words like a clawed spat on / the tiles' and 'though "Christ is no wild-cat" got to inspire Eliot I am

not his sort of spoiled priest' (*BB* 84). This raises the question of Hill and the sermon and reinforces his status as a poet rather than a 'spoiled priest'.

The reiteration of these concerns at the beginning of the posthumous collection shows their endurance, as well as the depth of the continuous exploratory process underlying Hill's relationship to God and the Church. In *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Oscar Wilde wrote that

> every portrait that is painted with feeling is a portrait of the artist, not of the sitter. The sitter is merely the accident, the occasion. It is not he who is revealed by the painter; it is rather the painter who, on the coloured canvas, reveals himself.[1]

Hill's poetry might reject the confessional style, but in his depiction of architecture, music, prayer, and in his sermons, he 'reveals himself', in all the complexities and difficulties of his faith.[2] And if Oscar Wilde's claim is to be given credit, then my exploration in the present thesis of Hill's faith is itself also a self-portrait, revealing myself and my own reflections on theology and faith, paralleling Hill's own self-revelation.

[1] Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 4
[2] Ibid.

Bibliography

A Simple Prayerbook. London: Catholic Truth Society, 2015.

Adams, Henry. *Letters to a Niece and Prayer to the Virgin of Chartres*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1920.

---.*The Education of Henry Adams*. New York: Cosimo, 2007.

Adorno, Theodor W., and Rolf Tiedemann. *Can One Live after Auschwitz?: A Philosophical Reader*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003.

Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologiae, Latin Text and English Translation*, 59 vols., ed. Thomas Gilby and T.C. O'Brien. Cambridge: Blackfriars 1946-77.

Augustine. *Expositions of the Psalms*, trans. Maria Boulding, ed. John E. Rotelle. New York, New City Press. 2001–4.

---.'On the Holy Trinity' in *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church (St. Augustin on the Holy Trinity, Doctrinal Treatises, Moral Treatises)*. Vol. 3, ed, P. Schaff. Buffalo: The Christian Literature Company, 1887. 3-228.

---. '*On Christian Doctrine*', in *Readings in Classical Rhetoric*. London: Routledge, 1988.

Austin, J.L. *How to Do Things with Words*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975.

Balthasar, Hans Urs von. *Epilogue*. San Francisco: Ignatius, 2014.

Barber, Karin. *The Anthropology of Texts, Persons, and Publics: Oral and Written Culture in Africa and Beyond*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Bedient, Calvin. 'The Pastures of Wilderness' in *The Yearbook of English Studies,* Vol. 17, 'British Poetry since 1945 Special Number'. 1987. 143–65.

Bethge, Renate. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Brief Life*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004.

Binyon, Laurence. 'For the Fallen' in *The Times*, 21 September 1914.

Blair, Kirstie. *Form and Faith in Victorian Poetry and Religion.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Blythe, Roland. 'Satan without Seraphs'. Review of *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, by Keith Thomas in *Listener*. 4 Feb 1971.

Bode, Christopher. 'A Mercia of the Mind' in *Regionalität, Nationalität und Internationalität in der zeitgenössischen Lyrik,* eds. Lothar Fietz, Paul Hoffmann, Hans-Werner Ludwig. Tübingen, Attempto. 313-343.

Bolton, Jonathan. 'Empire and Atonement: Geoffrey Hill's "An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture in England"' in *Contemporary Literature* Vol. 38, No. 2. Summer 1997. 287–306.

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship,* trans. R.H. Fuller. London: SCM, 2006.

Bradley, Simon, Nikolaus Pevsner. *The Buildings of England*: *The City Churches*. London: Penguin, 1997.

Calvin, John. *Commentary on the Book of Psalms,* trans. Revd. James Anderson, reprint edn., 5 vols. Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1949.

---. *The Necessity of Reforming the Church,* trans. Henry Beveridge. London: W.H. Dallton, 1843.

Campbell, Jessica. 'Interview: Geoffrey Hill, Oxford Professor of Poetry', 26 May 2011. https://www.oxfordstudent.com/2011/05/26/interview-geoffrey-hill-oxford-professor-of-poetry/

Campbell, Louise. 'Donald Gibson and Coventry' in *Man-Made Future: Planning, Education and Design in Mid-20th Century Britain*, ed. Iain Boyd Whyte. London: Routledge, 2007.

Celan, Paul. *Paul Celan: Poems. A Bilingual Edition,* trans. Michael Hamburger. Manchester: Carcanet, 1980.

Chadwick, Owen. *The Mind of the Oxford Movement*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967.

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Lay Sermons,* ed. Derwent Coleridge. London: Edward Moxon, 1852.

Connelly, Andy. 'Heavenly Illumination: The Science and Magic of Stained Glass' in *The Guardian,* 29 Oct 2010. https://www.theguardian.com/science/blog/2010/oct/29/science-magic-stained-glass

Council of Trent, Session 13. October 11, 1511. 'De ratione institutionis ss. huius sacramenti' in *Enchiridion Symbolorum: Definitionum et Declarationum de Rebus Fidei et Morum*, ed. Henricus Denzinger and Adolfus Schönmetzer. Barcinone: Herder, 1976.

Crashaw, Richard. 'A Hymn to the Name and Honour of the Honourable Saint Teresa' in *The Poems of Richard Crawshaw*, ed. J.R. Tutin. London: Routledge, 1896.

Cummings, Brian. ‘Recusant Hill’ in *Geoffrey Hill: Essays on His Later Work*, eds. John Lyon, Peter McDonald. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. 32-55.

---. *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Daniel, Hermann. *Thesaurus Hymnologicus*, 5 vols. Leipzig: J.T. Loeschke, 1855.

Davies, Hilary. ‘Geoffrey Hill’s Dialogue with David Jones’ in *Études anglaises*, Vol. 71, 154-67.

Donne, John. *The Sermons*, eds. George R. Potter, Evelyn M. Simpson., 10 vols. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1953-62.

Duffy, Eamon. *The Stripping of the Altars*. Yale: Yale University Press, 1992.

During, Simon, Lisa O’Connell. ‘Coleridge and the Lay Sermon’ in *English Studies,* Vol. 98, July 2017. 747-57.

Edgecombe, Rodney Stenning. ‘Allegorical Topography and the Experience of Space in Isaac Williams's *Cathedral*’ in *English Studies*, Vol. 80, Issue 3. 1999. 224-38.

Elgar, Edward. ‘The Question of Programme Music’, undated manuscript at the Elgar Birthplace.

Eliot, T.S. *The Cocktail Party*. San Diego: Harcourt, 1950.

---. *Selected Poems*. New York: Harcourt, 2014.

Fairweather, Eugene R. *The Oxford Movement*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1964.

Floros, Constantin. *Alfred Schnittke: A Complete Catalogue*. Hamburg: Musikverlag Hans Sikorski. 2000.

Garrett, Cynthia. ‘The Rhetoric of Supplication: Prayer Theory in Seventeenth-Century England’ in *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No. 2. Summer 1993. 328-57.

Gaynesford, Maximilian de. *The Rift in the Lute: Attuning Poetry and Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 2017.

Georgedes, Kimberley. ‘Religion, Education, and the Role of Government in Medieval Universities: Lessons Learned or Lost?’ in *Forum on Public Policy: A Journal of the Oxford Round Table*. Spring 2006. 73-96.

Greenwood, E.B. ‘George Herbert’s Sonnet “Prayer”: A Stylistic Study’ in *Essays in Criticism,* Vol. 15, Issue 1. January 1965. 27-45.

Groot, Michelle, de. ‘The Literary Qualities of Sermons’. Contribution to Houghton Library Online Exhibition of Medieval Sermons. 2012. http://hcl.harvard.edu/libraries/houghton/collections/early_manuscripts/preaching/degroot_qualities.cfm

Gurney, Ivor. *Collected Poems of Ivor Gurney*, ed. P.J. Kavanagh. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982.

Haecker, Theodor. *Journal in the Night*, trans. Alexander Dru. London: Pantheon, 1950.

Haffenden, John. *Viewpoints: Poets in Conversation*. London: Faber, 1981.

Hart, Henry. *The Poetry of Geoffrey Hill.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986.

Haughton, Hugh. '"How fit a title…": Title and Authority in the Work of Geoffrey Hill' in *Geoffrey Hill: Essays on His Work,* ed. Peter Robinson. Milton Keynes and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1985. 129-48.

---. '"Music's Invocation": Music and History in Geoffrey Hill' in *Geoffrey Hill and His Contexts*, eds. Piers Pennington, Matthew Sperling. Bern: Peter Lang, 2011. 187-212.

Haydn, Joseph. *Die Schöpfung*. London: Novello, 1999.

Haynes, Kenneth. '"Faith" and "Fable" in the Poetry of Geoffrey Hill' in *Christianity and Literature*, Vol. 60, No. 3. Spring 2011. 398-401.

---. '"Perplexed Resistance": The Criticism of Geoffrey Hill' in *Geoffrey Hill and His Contexts*, eds. Piers Pennington, Matthew Sperling. Bern: Peter Lang, 2011. 213-25

Herbert, George. *The Complete Poetry*, eds. John Drury, Victoria Moul. London: Penguin, 2005.

Hill, Geoffrey. 'A Matter of Timing' in *The Guardian*. 21 Sep 2002. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/sep/21/featuresreviews.guardianreview28

---. 'Bromsgrove County High School speech', BC MS 20c Hill/5/1/89. Geoffrey Hill Special Collection, Brotherton Library, University of Leeds.

---. 'Eccentrique to the endes of his Master or State'. 8 March 2011. http://media.podcasts.ox.ac.uk/kebl/general/2011-hill-poetry-2.mp3

---. 'From Amos to Soma and Back Again': St John's College. 9 February 2014. https://intranet.joh.cam.ac.uk › amos-soma-and-back-again

---. 'How ill white hairs become a fool and jester'. 30 November 2010. http://media.podcasts.ox.ac.uk/kebl/general/2010-11-30-hill-poetry-keble.mp3

---. 'Notebook 26: Péguy', BC MS 20c Hill/2/1/26. Geoffrey Hill Archive, University of Leeds.

---. 'Orderly Damned, Disorderly Saved': University Sermon at Great St Mary's Sermon. 16 October 2011. https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/5084440/geoffrey-hill-16-october-2011-great-st-marys-church

---. ‘Poetry Today’, 22 October 1964. BC MS 20c Hill/8/7/1. Geoffrey Hill Archive, University of Leeds.

---. ‘The Living Poet’. 5 September 1965. BC MS 20c Hill/8/7/2. Geoffrey Hill Archive, University of Leeds.

---. ‘The Power of Language’: Clare College. 21 February 2016.

---. ‘Thus my noblest capacity becomes my deepest perplexity’: University Sermon at Great St Mary’s. 8 May 1983. BC MS 20c Hill/5/1/158. Geoffrey Hill Archive, University of Leeds.

---. *A Treatise of Civil Power*. London: Penguin Books, 2007.

---. Ash Wednesday: Trinity College Cambridge. 6 February 2008. http://trinitycollegechapel.com/media/filestore/sermons/HillAshWed2008.pdf

---. *Broken Hierarchies: Poems 1952–2012*, ed. Kenneth Haynes. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.

---. *Canaan*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1996.

---. *Collected Critical Writings*, ed. Kenneth Haynes. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

---. *Collected Poems*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985.

---. Commemoration of Benefactors: Emmanuel College. 24 November 2010.

---. For the Oxford Literary Festival, on Passion Sunday: Christ Church. 10 April 2011.

---. *For the Unfallen*. London: André Deutsch, 1971.

---. *King Log*. London: André Deutsch, 1970.

---. Remembrance: Balliol College. 11 November 2007. *Balliol College Record*, 2008. 24-7.

---. *Speech! Speech!*. London: Penguin Books, 2000.

---. *Tenebrae*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979.

---. *The Book of Baruch by the Gnostic Justin*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

---. *The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy.* London: Andre Deutsch, 1983.

---. *The Orchards of Syon.* Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 2002.

---. *The Triumph of Love.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000.

---. *Without Title.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.

Hobbes, Thomas. *Humane Nature, Or The Fundamental Elements of Policies*. London: T. Newcomb, 1650.

Hopkins, Gerard Manley. *The Major* Works, ed. Catherine Phillips. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

James, Henry. *The Tragic Muse*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978.

Jeffrey, David L. *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 1992.

Jensen, Matt. *The Gravity of Sin*. London: T&T Clark, 2006.

Jones, David. *The Anathemata.* London: Faber, 1972.

Kaufmann, Walter. *Nietzsche*. New York: Meridian, 1956.

Keats, John. *John Keats: The Complete Poems,* ed. John Barnard. London: Penguin, 1977.

Keble, John. 'Third Sunday After Epiphany' in *The Christian Year*. London: Cassel, 1887.

Kilgore-Caradec, Jennifer. 'Translating Mystical Politics: Charles Péguy and the Civic Good' in *Études anglaises*, 2018/2. Vol. 71. 168-75.

---. 'On Geoffrey Hill', in *Eborakon. Special Online Issue: Europe.* https://www.eborakon.com/special-online-issue-europe/kilgore-caradec-on-geoffrey-hill/

Kramer, Richard. *Unfinished Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Le Nouveau Petit Robert, Édition de 1993. Paris: SNL Le Robert, 2008.

Lewis, Michael J. *The Gothic Revival*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2002.

Luther, Martin. *Luther's Works*, Vol. 25, eds. Jaroslav Pelikan, Helmut T. Lehmann. St. Louis: Concordia, 1955-86.

Lyon, John. ‘Geoffrey Hill and the Rack of the Sonnet’ in *Études anglaises*, 2018/2. Vol. 71. 137-53.

Macfarlane, Robert. ‘Gravity and Grace in Geoffrey Hill’ in *Essays in Criticism*, Vol. 58, Issue 3. July 2008. 237-56.

Maritain, Jacques. *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*. New York: Pantheon, 1953.

McDonald, Peter. ‘“But to my Task”: Work, Truth, and Metre in Later Hill’ in *Essays on His Later Work*, eds. John Lyon, Peter McDonald. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. 143-69.

---. *Serious Poetry: Form and Authority from Yeats to Hill*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

McNees, Eleanor. *Eucharistic Poetry: The Search for Presence in the Writings of John Donne, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Dylan Thomas, and Geoffrey Hill*. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1992.

Michael Meyer. *Ibsen*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974.

Milne, W.S. ‘Geoffrey Hill: 1932-2016’ in *Agenda*, ‘Homage to Geoffrey Hill’, Vol. 50, Nos. 1-2. Summer/Autumn 2016.

Milton, John. *Lycidas: Annotated Poems by English Authors*, eds. Rev. E.T. Stevens, Rev. D. Morris. London: Longmans Green, 1877.

Monteith, W. Graham. ‘The Reality of Addressing God in Prayer’, in *Theology in Scotland*, Vol. 16, No. 1. 2009. 67-78.

Moore, Jerrold Northrop. *Edward Elgar: A Creative Life.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Murphy, Kathryn. ‘Geoffrey Hill and Confession’ in *Geoffrey Hill: Essays on His Later Work*, eds. John Lyon, Peter McDonald. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. 127-43.

---. ‘Geoffrey Hill’s Conversions’ in *Geoffrey Hill and His Contexts*, eds. Piers Pennington, Matthew Sperling. Bern: Peter Lang, 2011. 61-80.

Myers, Anne M. *Literature and Architecture in Early Modern England*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2012.

Newman, John Henry. *Apologia Pro Vita Sua: Being a History of his Religious Opinions*, ed. Martin. J. Svaglic. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967.

---. *Verses on Various Occasions*. London: Longmans Green, 1910.

Nuttall, A.D. *Overheard by God: Fiction and Prayer in Herbert, Milton, Dante and Saint John*. London: Avonmore, 2016.

O'Meara, John J. *The Young Augustine*. New York: Alba House, 2001.

Oxford English Dictionary. 2nd ed., prepared by J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1989.

---.*OED Online* at https://www.oed.com/

Pater, Walter. *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry*. London: Macmillan, 1888.

Paulin, Tom. 'The Case for Geoffrey Hill', in *London Review of Books*. 4 April 1985.

Pennington, Piers. 'The Manuscript and Composition of 'Genesis' in *Geoffrey Hill and His Contexts*, eds. Piers Pennington, Matthew Sperling. Bern: Peter Lang, 2011. 25-43.

Phillips, Carl. 'Geoffrey Hill: The Art of Poetry No. 80', *Paris Review*, 154. Spring 2000. https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/730/geoffrey-hill-the-art-of-poetry-no-80-geoffrey-hill

Pickstock, Catherine. *After Writing: On the Liturgical Consummation of Philosophy*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000.

Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, Vol. 1: Books 1-2. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1938.

Pollard, Natalie. '"Like a Mason Addressing a Block": Materiality and Design in Geoffrey Hill's Poetry' in *Strangeness and Power: Essays on the Poetry of Geoffrey Hill*, ed. Andrew Roberts. Bristol: Shearsman, 2019. 223-51.

Potts, Robert. 'The Praise Singer' in *The Guardian*. 10 August 2002. https://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/aug/10/featuresreviews.guardianreview15

Pound, Ezra. *Pavannes and Divagations.* New York: New Directions, 1958.

Pugin, Augustus Welby Northmore *The True Principles of Pointed or Christian Architecture*. London: John Weale, 1841.

---.. *An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture in England*. Edinburgh: J. Grant, 1895.

Rahim, Sameer. 'An Interview with Geoffrey Hill (1932-2016)' in *Prospect* Magazine. 20 July 2016. https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/WP_SITEURL/blogs/sameer-rahim/an-interview-with-geoffrey-hill-1932-2016

Ramazani, *Poetry and Its Others*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014.

Ratcliffe, Sophie. ‘On Being “a man of the world”’ in *Essays on His Later Work,* eds. John Lyon, Peter McDonald. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. 70-88.

Ricks, Christopher. *Tenebrae* and At-one-ment’ in *Geoffrey Hill: Essays on His Work,* ed. Peter Robinson. Milton Keynes and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1985, 62-85.

---. *True Friendship: Geoffrey Hill, Anthony Hecht and Robert Lowell Under the Sign of Eliot and Pound*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Roberts, Andrew Michael. *Geoffrey Hill.* Horndon: Northcote, 2004.

Robichaud, Paul. ‘Gothic Architecture in the Poetry of David Jones and Geoffrey Hill’ in *Mosaic* 35. December 2002. 181-97.

Rolland, Romain. *Péguy.* Paris: La Découverte, 2015.

Roman Catholic Relief Act 1829, 1829 CHAPTER 7 10 Geo 4. http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Geo4/10/7/data.pdf.

Rowland, Antony. ‘Re-reading “Impossibility” and “Barbarism”: Adorno and Post-Holocaust Poetics’ in *Critical Survey*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (1997), 57-69.

---. *Holocaust Poetry*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005.

Royal Commission of Historical Monuments, (England.): An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in London. Vol IV. The City. London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1929.

Santayana, George. *Some Turns of Thought in Modernity*. New York: Scribner, 1933.

Selby, Peter. *Grace and Mortgage*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1997.

Shakespeare, William. *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*, ed. John Kerrigan. London: Penguin, 1999.

---. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, ed. Peter Holland. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Sheehan, Donald. *The Psalms of David: Translated from the Septuagint Greek.* Eugene, OR.: Wipf and Stock, 2013.

Sherman, David. ‘Elegy Under the Knife: Geoffrey Hill and the Ethics of Sacrifice’ in *Twentieth Century Literature,* Vol. 54, No. 2. Summer 2008. 166-92.

Sherry, Vincent B. *The Uncommon Tongue: The Poetry and Criticism of Geoffrey Hill*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1987.

Sidney, Sir Philip. *Selected Prose and Poetry,* ed. Robert Kimbrough. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969.

Silkin, Jon. ‘War and the Pity’ in *Geoffrey Hill: Essays on His Work,* ed. Peter Robinson. Milton Keynes and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1985. 114-28.

Spenser, Edmund. *The Poetical Work of Edmund Spenser*, eds. J.C. Smith, Ernest de Selincourt. London: Oxford University Press, 1912.

Sperling, Matthew. 'Hill and Nineteenth-Century Linguistic Thought' in *Geoffrey Hill and His Contexts*, eds. Piers Pennington, Matthew Sperling. Bern: Peter Lang, 2011. 107-31.

---. *Visionary Philology: Geoffrey Hill and the Study of Words.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Sypert, John. A. 'Redeeming Rhetoric: Augustine's Use of Rhetoric in His Preaching Ministry' in *Eleutheria*, 4:1. Spring 2015. 18-34.

Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age.* The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007.

---. *Dilemmas and Connections.* Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011.

Tennyson, Lord Alfred. *In Memoriam.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982.

The Book of Common Prayer, and Administration of the Sacraments, and other Rites and Ceremonies of the Church, According to the Use of the United Church of England and Ireland. Oxford: W. Baxter, 1824.

The Holy Bible, King James Version.

The Order of the Mass. Exeter: Carmel Books, 1931.

The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion, eds. Adele Berlin, Maxine Grossman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Thomas, R.S. 'To Church' in *Poetry*, Volume 100, No. 2. May 1962.

Tixeront, Joseph. *History of Dogmas,* Vol. 2, trans. H.L.B. London: Herder,1923.

Vickers, Brian. *In Defence of Rhetoric*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Vidal, John. 'Nigeria's Agony Dwarfs the Gulf Oil Spill. The US and Europe Ignore It', *The Observer*. 30 May 2010. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/may/30/oil-spills-nigeria-niger-delta-shell

Wainwright, Jeffrey. *Acceptable Words: Essays on the Poetry of Geoffrey Hill*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006.

Waithe, Marcus. '"Whose Jerusalem"? – Prophecy and the Problem of DestinEygenation in Hill's "Canaan" and "Churchill's Funeral"' in *English*. Vol. 51. Autumn 2002. 261-76.

---. 'Hill, Ruskin, and Intrinsic Value' in *Geoffrey Hill and His Contexts*, eds. Piers Pennington, Matthew Sperling. Bern: Peter Lang, 2011. 133-50.

Walker, John David. 'The Architectonics of George Herbert's "The Temple"' in *ELH* Vol.29, No. 3, (September 1962), 288-305.

Webb, John. 'Schnittke in Context' in *Tempo* No. 182. September 1992. 19-22.

Westermann, Claus. *Praise and Lament in the Psalms.* Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981.

Wilde, Oscar. *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Williams, Isaac. *The Baptistery, or The Way of Eternal Life*. Oxford: J.H. Parker, 1842.

Williams, Rowan. 'The Standing of Poetry: Geoffrey Hill's Quartet' in *Geoffrey Hill: Essays on His Later Work*, eds. John Lyon, Peter McDonald. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. 55-70.

Wordsworth, William. *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. George Sampson. London: Methuen, 1940.

Yeats, W.B. *The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats*. London: Macmillan, 1963.