REFLEXIVITY AND IMPERSONALITY IN THE POETRY OF GEOFFREY HILL

by

ANDREW MICHAEL ROBERTS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a critical study of the distinctive qualities and the development of Hill's poetry. It identifies two characteristic features of his work. The first is the pervasive presence of reflexivity. While there is a reflexive element in much poetry, Hill's poems are marked by a sustained scrutiny of their own medium, expressing an intense concern with the moral and intellectual risks of poetic utterance. The second feature is the aspiration to impersonality. This has a direct source in T.S. Eliot's critical writing, but Hill's poetry exhibits a high degree of sophistication in its engagement with this modernist ideal, employing a range of strategies to renegotiate the role of the subject in poetry.

The first two chapters of the thesis seek to locate these two features in relation to Romanticism, modernism, the Movement, aspects of contemporary poetry, and certain strands in twentieth-century philosophy. In the remaining chapters the changing relationship between reflexivity and impersonality is used to chart Hill's poetic development and to articulate the relationship of his work to modernism and postmodernism. An early phase in which reflexivity serves as an alternative to the presence of the speaking subject is seen to lead to a crisis of self-revocation, in which reflexive mistrust generates increasing obscurity. This crisis is resolved in the late 1960s by the location of the poet's subject-position, most crucially in 'September Song' (1967). Various forms of mediation of the subject are analysed in 'Funeral Music' (1966), 'The Songbook of Sebastian Arrurruz' (1965-68) and Mercian Hymns (1971). It is shown that the first two sequences of Tenebrae (1978) achieve a form of resolution of mystical and sceptical impulses through the use of musical models, while 'An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture in England' (1973-77) and The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy (1983) use reflexivity to explore the relationship between history as event and history as discourse or representation. Finally, Hill's most recent poems are assessed in the light of this account of his development.
## CONTENTS

**Abbreviations and note on texts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Introduction**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Chapter 1 Impersonality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Introduction</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Readings of Eliot's Principle of Impersonality</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Versions of Romantic Subjectivity</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Modernist Mediations of the Self</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Subjectivity in Hill's Poetic</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 The Lyric of Occasion and Subjectivity</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7 Hill and the Movement</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.8 Hill and Heaney: Reactions to the Romantic model</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.9 Conclusion</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Chapter 2 Reflexivity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Introduction: Definition of Reflexivity</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Reflexivity in Literature, Philosophy and Criticism</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Hill's Poetic of Reflexivity</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Poetry as Action</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Poetry as Exemplary</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6 Language as Register</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7 Language and Physicality</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8 Conclusion</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Chapter 3 The Crisis of Hill's Early Poetry

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Introduction</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 The Myth of the Imagination: 'Genesis'</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Reflexivity and Paradox: 'Solomon's Mines'</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 Mystical and Sceptical Paradox: 'An Order of Service'</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5 Psychological Paradox: 'The Turtle Dove'</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6 Paradox in History: <em>For The Unfallen</em></td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7 The Crisis: 'Annunciations' and 'September Song'</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8 Conclusion</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 5</th>
<th>Mutuality in Mercian Hymns</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>The History of the Self</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Rhetoric of Closeness and Distance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>Reflexivity and Mutuality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>Images of Writing: Digging, Raking and Collating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>The Poet's Voice and the Performative Utterance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 6</th>
<th>Tenebrae and Reconciliation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Introduction: Paradox and Mediation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>'The Pentecost Castle' and 'Lachrimae': Epigraphs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>'The Pentecost Castle': Sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>'The Pentecost Castle' and Musical Variations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>'Lachrimae' and False Relation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>Conclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 7</th>
<th>History and Representation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>'An Apology': Title and Epigraphs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>'Quaint Mazes' and Muddy Ghosts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>'The Herefordshire Carol' and Kitsch Nostalgia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>The Mystery: Péguy as Antithetical Mask</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>Event and Representation in The Mystery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>Pseudo-Pastiche</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 8</th>
<th>'Scenes with Harlequins' and 'Carnival'</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>Introduction: Hill and Blok</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>Epigraphs: The Self and the Sounds of History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>Violence and the 'Prophetic Intelligence'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>Dialogue, Distance and Duality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>'Carnival'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conclusion</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>Bibliography</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notes</td>
<td></td>
<td>375</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td></td>
<td>376</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ABBREVIATIONS AND NOTE ON TEXTS

Works of Geoffrey Hill: Poetry

KL   King Log (London: André Deutsch, 1968)
MH   Mercian Hymns (London: André Deutsch, 1971)
T    Tenebrae (London: André Deutsch, 1978)

Poems are quoted from the volume in which they were included (FTU, KL, MH, T, TM) unless otherwise indicated. At the first mention of a poem, and subsequently if relevant to the context, the following information is given in brackets: (1) date of first publication, or of first broadcast, or of composition where this is given in the text of the poem (whichever is earliest); (2) The volume in which the poem was subsequently included; e.g. 'The Turtle Dove' (1954, FTU). Page numbers are not given, except in references to CP. In the cases of The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy and 'Scenes with Harlequins', section and stanza are indicated in the form: 3.9 (= section 3, stanza 9); IV.2 (= section IV, stanza 2).
# Works of Geoffrey Hill: Prose and Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CF</th>
<th>Interview with Hermione Lee, <em>Book Four</em>, 2 Oct 1985, Channel Four television</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>JR</td>
<td>&quot;What Devil Has Got Into John Ransom?&quot; (1980)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JS</td>
<td>'Jonathan Swift: the Poetry of &quot;Reaction&quot;' (1968)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OW</td>
<td>'Our Word Is Our Bond' (1983)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PMA</td>
<td>&quot;Poetry as &quot;Menace&quot; and &quot;Atonement&quot;&quot; (1977)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PP</td>
<td>&quot;Perplexed Persistence&quot;: the Exemplary Failure of T.H. Green' (1975)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RS</td>
<td>'The Absolute Reasonableness of Robert Southwell' (1979)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RT</td>
<td>'Redeeming the Time' (1972)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sermon</td>
<td>A Sermon Delivered at Great St Mary's University Church, Cambridge, 8 May 1983</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TC</td>
<td>'&quot;The True Conduct of Human Judgment&quot;: Some Observations on Cymbeline' (1969)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VP</td>
<td>'&quot;The World's Proportion&quot;: Jonson's Dramatic Poetry in <em>Sejanus</em> and <em>Catiline&quot;</em> (1960)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Those essays and lectures marked with an asterisk are included in *The Lords of Limit: Essays on Literature and Ideas* (London: André Deutsch, 1984) and page references are to that volume. The dates given are those of delivery, in the case of those essays that were originally lectures, and those of first publication in other cases. References are given in brackets in the text, with page number; e.g. (VP, 99). Excerpts from Hill's broadcast interview with Hermione Lee are taken from a transcript.
Primary Texts by Other Authors

SE   T.S. Eliot, Selected Essays 1917-1932 (London: Faber and Faber, 1932)

Secondary Works

Agenda 1979  Agenda: Geoffrey Hill Special Issue, 17.1 (Spring 1979)

The separate articles in Agenda 1979, Ricks and Robinson are listed in the bibliography. References to all the above works are given in brackets in the text, with page numbers; e.g. (CPPE, 25); (Robinson, 39). Where there is a local frequency of a reference for which no abbreviation is given above, the author's surname is used after the first reference, and the first endnote indicates subsequent use of references in the text.
The poetry and criticism of Geoffrey Hill are widely regarded as a body of work which stands apart from, and in opposition to, both the literary practices and the cultural assumptions, of postwar Britain. A typical statement of this view is that of John Bayley, who argues that "the most significant thing about Hill is his solitary position on the contemporary poetic scene, the unlikeness of his tone to that of any other poets writing today. This solitude is essential to what his poetry does" (Robinson, 195). There is much truth in this view, but there are also certain dangers involved in treating Hill as an isolated figure. One is the danger of judging his poetry too exclusively on its own terms, or terms drawn from his prose essays. Criticism needs to be responsive to, but also sceptical of, Hill's own account of his poetry. It is therefore helpful that both Eric Griffiths and Christopher Ricks have pointed out instabilities within Hill's critical position, and discrepancies between that position, and the achievement of his poetry. There is also a risk of neglecting the extent to which Hill's work springs out of dominant concerns of the twentieth-century, and more especially of the post-war period, and the way in which these concerns connect it to contemporary poetry, criticism and theory.

Hill himself has stressed the oppositional stance of his work. He has alluded unfavourably to the Movement poets of the fifties, to the confessional poets of the sixties, and to the Martian poets of the late seventies and eighties. Perhaps more influential in promoting this
impression of isolation is the way in which he rarely names any contemporary poets, while at the same time packing his work with allusions to poets of earlier periods. Yet there are poets writing today with whom he has considerable affinities. In the broader cultural sphere, Hill has feelingly denounced 'the social evils, the cruelty, the injustice, the sheer thoughtless mayhem of our time' (CF) and the 'shorthand words we tend to use these days' (CF). In reply to the suggestion that the expectations of his students might have led him to 'qualify or modify' his creative work, he replied: 'I've not found that anybody's expectations have led me to qualify or modify my own work' (VP, 81).

I concentrate on two features of Hill's work, reflexivity and the aspiration to impersonality. It is possible to present both of these features as indicative of Hill's estrangement from the contemporary scene. Hill has consistently represented his allegiance to the principle of impersonality as a resistance to the 'commodity exploitation of personality' in contemporary life and literature (VP, 87). The reflexive scrutiny of the nature of poetry in Hill's work, issuing from what Christopher Ricks has termed Hill's 'principled distrust of the imagination' (Ricks, 285) often seems to rebuke contemporary poetry which is less suspicious and wary of its own powers and temptations. But both impersonality and reflexivity also connect Hill to intellectual currents of our time. Hill's allegiance to impersonality has rightly been considered in relation to modernist principles, particularly those of Eliot. But, as critical studies of modernism have increasingly shown, the effect of such principles is not to dispose of the personal, but to render the personal problematic, often with the paradoxical effect of drawing attention to the self as a category. In declaring his allegiance
to Eliot's principle, and in employing strategies for the abnegation and mediation of the self in his poetry, Hill is engaging with the concern over the nature and boundaries of the human subject which arises in Romanticism, develops through a process of reaction in modernism, and remains potent in the present age, an age which is still engaged in a dialogue with those movements. The discourses of post-structuralist critics have revealed, like the work of Eliot before them, that, in the words of Georges Poulet, 'Chase away subjectivity, it returns at a gallop'. In the first chapter of the thesis I consider influences on, and affinities to, Hill's approach to impersonality and the subject. Reflexivity is crucial to twentieth-century philosophy, both to the continental tradition which passes via Nietzsche and Heidegger to deconstruction, and to the tradition of empiricism, logical positivism and linguistic philosophy which has been stronger in England. It is also central to the proof of Gödel's theorem, a revolutionary development in logic and the theory of mathematics. It is a significant aspect of literary modernism, and a defining feature of literary postmodernism. In the second chapter I seek to place Hill's poetry in the broad context of such developments, as well as tracing sources in German Romanticism and Renaissance literature.

My argument is that the distinctiveness of Hill's work arises from the interaction of these concerns (which he shares with many of his contemporaries) with a Christian mode of thought, which understands experience, and literature, in terms of the paradigms of the Fall, the Incarnation, and the Atonement. The pervasiveness of contraries and paradoxes in Hill's work is a result of a powerful tension between a desire for the affirmations of faith, and a rigorous intellectual
scepticism about two basic requirements of such faith: a belief in absolute truth beyond language, and a belief in the transcendent subject or soul. In addition to his Christian allegiances, Hill is passionately convinced of the importance of history and the recognition of the truth of historical events. But his view that human suffering in history 'commands our belated witness' (CF) is attacked by his own reflexive acknowledgement that such witness can only take place in the unstable medium of language. Thus Hill's work evokes areas of concern, such as the responsibility of utterance or the textuality of history, which are matters of contemporary debate. That it does so in such distinctive, even maverick, terms is part of its interest, but should not obscure the fact that it inhabits the intellectual climate of our age.

Hill's allegiance to impersonality has been variously regarded by critics as a delusive mask for a highly personal voice, as a strategy for distancing and controlling emotive material and as a mystical decreation of self. I see it rather as a developing renegotiation of the relations of language, author and reader, which starts as a reaction against the confessional and anecdotal in poetry. This reaction, however, creates moral and logical problems for Hill, which are progressively resolved by strategies for the mediation of the self.

Reflexivity was defined as a key aspect of Hill's poetry in Christopher Ricks's 1978 lecture, "Geoffrey Hill and "The Tongue's Atrocities"" and has been widely noticed, in various forms and under various names, as a general feature of his work. I aim to consider the intellectual context of this reflexivity, including theological, literary and philosophical sources and analogues. My overall objective, which has determined the structure of the thesis, is to give a
developmental account of Hill's poetry in terms of reflexivity and impersonality, which I see as forces within the poetry, interacting in an intimate but complex manner so as to generate Hill's continuing innovations of form and style.
Notes to Introduction

1. Knottenbelt describes Hill as 'in a class of his own, an outsider from first to last, apparently unaffected by the work of his contemporaries' (Knottenbelt, p. 385). V.S. Milne claims that Hill's poetry reacts against the 'broken experience' of our 'rational and scientific' age, and 'transfigures, in a poetic and religious context, the fragmentary nature of twentieth century life' (Agenda 1979, p. 36). Donald Hall suggests that 'Hill's poems reveal again what poetry is for' (Hart xii). For key to references given within the text, see table of abbreviations on page 6.

2. While Bayley's statement typifies a general view, his particular reasons for asserting Hill's difference are ones with which I profoundly disagree. See Chapter 1, note 54.

3. This point is well made by Sherry, who points out that 'to let a poet lay down the lines of a critic's inquiry may invite uncritical attitudes. Geoffrey Hill's powerful, preemptory style in prose may induce the illusion that modern poetry resonates only in the heady enclave of his own concerns' (Sherry, p. 4).

4. Griffiths argues that 'whereas in the poems the elaboration of religious quandary through the torque of metaphors achieves writing of the last honesty, the criticism throws clouds of hesitant and impulsive glorification around what Hill supposes the artistic imagination achieves' and that Hill's lecture, 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"', 'only enacts its own dilemma' (Robinson, p. 183). Ricks argues that 'the poems of Tenebrae [...] put up a profound resistance to a central tenet of [...] "Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement" [...] partly because it is the way of poems to resist tenets, and partly because this particular tenet does not hold firm', adding that 'there is a hopefulness here in the criticism, an unremarked irreconcilability, such as the poetry of Hill would have had to extend to and attend to' (Ricks, p. 319).

5. Sherry comments acutely that Hill's 'concern with T.H. Green, R.C. Nettleship, J.L. Austin, and others may serve two needs: it allows the poet to enter the mainstream of British intellectual life; at the same time he may avoid direct discussion of his own background and place in literary history' (Sherry, p. 3).

6. See the passage from Hill's sermon quoted in Section 1.3 of this thesis (p. 26), and the excerpts from Hill's interviews with John Haffenden and Hermione Lee quoted in Chapter 1, note 65.


9. A systematic attempt to reconcile relativism and Christian faith is made by the theologian Don Cupitt, who has argued that "the programme of active theistic religion is true precisely in so far as it courageously affirms its own relativity" and that "the spread of relativism is a sign of spiritual vigour" (Don Cupitt, *The Leap of Reason* (London: Sheldon Press, 1976), p. 97). Where Cupitt takes an affirmative view of the impact of relativism on faith, Hill's view is a tragic one, in which relativism and scepticism estrange the individual from a belief which is desired but unattainable.

10. Questions of subjectivity and the responsibility for utterance are crucial to the debate concerning J.L. Austin's speech-act theory, and Derrida's critique of this theory. Derrida's critique appears in, 'Signature Event Context', *Glyph*, 1 (1977), 172-97. Speech-act theory is defended by John Searle in 'Reiterating the Difference', *Glyph*, 1 (1977), 195-208. Questions concerning the possibility of objective historical fact, and the textual nature of history are central to the debate concerning New Historicism. For example, Hayden White presents a view of history that suggests the potential for the exploration of historiographic issues in poetry, but also suggests the possible undermining of a belief in the reality of the past. He argues that "the historian performs an essentially poetic act, in which he prefigures the historical field and constitutes it as a domain upon which to bring to bear the specific theories he will use to explain what was "really happening"." White also points out that "Continental European thinkers [...] have cast serious doubts on the value of a specifically "historical" consciousness [and] stressed the fictive character of historical reconstructions". Hayden White, *Metahistory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), pp. x, 3-4.

11. For the view of Hill's impersonality as a delusive mask, see Knottenbelt, pp. 282, 355, quoted and discussed in Section 1.6 of this thesis. For ideas of distance and control, see the comments of C.H. Sisson, Andrew Waterman and John Bayley quoted in Section 6.1. The idea that the impersonality of Hill's poetry represents a form of decreation is argued by W.S. Milne (see Section 6.5).

CHAPTER 1: IMPERSONALITY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The topic of impersonality is one which Hill himself has introduced into the discussion of his poetry by choosing to align himself with Eliot's famous statement on the subject. In 1978 Hill wrote: 'when I was twenty I thought that Eliot, at the end of the second section of 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', was absolutely right; and at forty-six, having been taught to be broad-minded and wary, I still think that he was more right than wrong'. Hill has also specifically disavowed the confessional and the spontaneous in poetry, stating, for example, on the same occasion in 1978 that 'although a poet must put a great deal of himself into his work I have never been able to agree with those who say that poetry is "self-expression". ' Five years later he put the matter in stronger terms, saying that 'my true feelings coincide with the American poet Allen Tate's beleaguered minority opinion that "self-expression" is a word that "should be tarred and feathered"' (Sermon, 1). In October 1985, when asked by Hermione Lee whether he used the persona of Sebastion Arrurruzz as 'an avoidance of a kind of confessional poetry' he replied: 'I don't take the confessional poetry quite seriously enough to think that I have to go to great lengths to try to avoid it -- I just don't like it very much and get on with my own work' (CF).

In his prose writings Hill frequently uses the indefinite pronoun 'one'. That he does so even (or especially) when he is evidently speaking for himself sometimes produces a mildly comic effect. For example, in discussing the 'predicament' of Simone Veil as someone drawn
to the Catholic Church but 'unable, finally, to assent', he comments as
follows:

She has been dead nearly thirty years; the issues have long
been public; one is not trespassing on any privacy. It needs to
be said equally strongly that one is not trespassing on one's
own privacy. There is nothing 'confessional' about this debate.
(CM, 16-17)

However much one respects Hill's privacy and his reasons for defending
it so trenchantly it is hard not to read this last statement as meaning
the opposite of what it says. Nevertheless, the passage indicates
something of his sensitivity to questions of the responsibility of
utterance. 2 Edwin Morgan, in a review of Tenebrae, comments that 'the
overall effect and presence of the poetry are original and unmistakable:
a nice instance of that mysterious process by which secretive and
apparently self-denying poets like Eliot and Hill, working from
"impersonality" theories of artistic creation, are nevertheless drawn and
extruded through their writings like veins in a rock'. 3 While Morgan
elides the crucial difference between distinctiveness of style and
personal subject matter, the suggestion of pressure in his geological
metaphor is helpful. Hill is a poet in whose work the question of
personality figures as a point of pressure, whether this is conceived of
as the pressure of suppression, or the pressure of strenuous creation.

Impersonality is notoriously difficult to define and, as an idea,
needs to be placed in context, both historical and contemporary. I shall
propose that Hill's poetic theory and practice (though not identical)
emerge from a dialectic between Romanticism and modernism. Much
contemporary poetry continues to define itself in relation to one or
both of these two poles, not least because modernism itself was partly a
reaction against Romanticism, and partly a covert continuation of it. 

In this chapter I will attempt to identify the elements of Romanticism and modernism that Hill incorporates into his poetic theory and the process by which he uses each to modify the other, with particular reference to ideas about impersonality and the place of the self in poetry. I then go on to consider the prevailing view of such matters in the early 1950s, when Hill started publishing, before finally examining two poems, one by Hill himself and one by Seamus Heaney, which may be taken as representative of two responses to the Romantic legacy.

1.2 READINGS OF ELIOT'S PRINCIPLE OF IMPERSONALITY

Any consideration of the topic of impersonality in twentieth-century English poetry can scarcely avoid discussing the influence of Eliot's theory and practice. As has already been noted, Hill has more than once invoked the *locus classicus*, but on the most recent of those occasions he proposed his own interpretation. In his 1981 interview with John Haffenden, Hill stated that he still saw no reason to quarrel with the celebrated passage from Eliot's 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', which does not deny personality but enters caveats against the false equation of poetry with a certain kind of luxuriating in personality. 'Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things.' The word 'escape' was not a particularly happy choice and left Eliot vulnerable to misinterpretation, but if we can accept that he means 'transcendence' I see very little to quarrel with in the statement. (VP, 86-87)

Hill's reworking of Eliot's principle here perhaps draws on the heritage of German Romantic theories of poetry. Kathleen Wheeler, discussing
Illusionstörung, 'the disturbance or destruction of illusion characteristic of much romantic writing' describes the aim of self-transcendence, as advocated by German early-Romantic critics such as Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel, in terms which associate it with a form of reflexivity: 'the self-criticism that involves a humorous parody or ironizing of the self and leads to transcendence of the self as ego is represented in the work of art when it, too,ironizes itself, and when the authorironizes himself or his audience'. Hill's own poetry consistently ironizes itself, in ways that the next chapter will explore, while humour (as Hill himself has pointed out) is a feature of his work that is not always sufficiently recognized by critics. In his earlier work the text ironizes or parodies itself, as in the comic obscene puns of 'Annunciations' (1961, KL) (for example 'the mere diurnal grind'), while 'The Songbook of Sebastian Arrurruz' (1965-68, KL) uses a self-ironizing persona.

The problematic nature of 'impersonality' as a critical concept applied to poetry is partly attributable to the German Romantics; as M.H. Abrams has pointed out, they introduced into literary criticism terms and concepts 'from Kant's epistemology and aesthetics, but with admixture from Christian theologians', and these included 'a set of cross-distinctions revolving about the terms "subjective" and "objective"', with a consequent complication of 'the discussion of the extent to which art is impersonal or self-expressive'. In the modernist era, the complexity and even confusion thus introduced were perpetuated by Eliot's pronouncement on the subject. The subsequent critical debate has emphasized the intractability of the concept of
impersonality and the elusiveness of satisfactory definitions in this area.

The first problem is that when Eliot makes his assertion, he refers to 'poetry' as if it were an ideal Platonic form, an absolute, rather than something which one person writes and other people read, and therefore omits to tell us whether it is the poet, the reader or the poem (or some combination of the three) that escapes from emotion and personality. The implication seems to be that the poet escapes (at least for the duration of the writing of the poem), and because biographical information about Eliot suggests his need for such an escape, it is tempting to consider impersonality in terms of the poet's experience. C.K. Stead in The New Poetic takes broadly this line, not in a biographical manner, but focussing on theories concerning the process of artistic creation. He reaches the eccentric conclusion that poetry which expresses abstract thought (such as much of Four Quartets) is excessively personal, since it 'has been directed, however gently, by the conscious will', whereas he praises as impersonal The Waste Land, which he says 'is composed of a series of projections of "states of feeling", having no fixed centre but their common origin in the depths of one man's mind'. It would be easy to reverse the terms of this judgment: the sense that The Waste Land is impersonal depends on us accepting Stead's interesting but contentious assumptions as to the role of the unconscious in Eliot's creative method, and the 'impersonal' nature of those 'depths' (which seems to depend on a vaguely Jungian idea of the unconscious). Stead also uses an author's normative judgments as value criteria for his own work.
More helpful is the account given by Mowbray Allan of the philosophical basis and development of Eliot's theory of impersonality. He is one of a number of critics to point to Romantic elements in Eliot's avowedly anti-Romantic theory of poetry, locating the source of many of Eliot's early critical concepts in idealist theories of knowledge, and suggesting that Eliot's reaction is against subjective idealism, rather than against all idealism. Allan would seem to provide support for Hill's reading of 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' in concluding that Eliot agreed with Romantic critics as to 'the fact of the inescapable subjectivity of human experience', but saw it as 'a terrible limitation, to transcend which the effort of a whole lifetime is not too great a price, even though that effort can never succeed'.

But here it is necessary to distinguish different senses of the word 'transcendence'. Two senses of transcendence would seem possible in reading Eliot's statement. One is the movement to create a self or soul which is spiritually or intellectually higher or more developed than the contingent, personal self of ordinary social intercourse. As has been suggested, it is possible to read Eliot thus in the light of the German Romantic theory according to which

the goal and unity of art as knowledge of the spirit through self-conscious cultivation and self-criticism involves both the spectator and the artist -- the latter educates himself and develops his 'transcendental self', his spirit, through creating works of art, the former through recreating these works of art in his 'uniquely personal (but not merely subjective) way'.

Allan suggests such a reading of Eliot, while acknowledging the 'diverse, and sometimes conflicting, values' of Eliot's criticism, and noting a shift in the late twenties away from 'the concept of the individual
point of view on which the early criticism is based'. 12 The other form of transcendence of self which Eliot's statement may imply is one which remains closer to the connotations of escape, and closer to the strand in Eliot's essays which seeks to reject Romanticism outright. This is transcendence of self as a move away from subjectivity, not towards a higher self, but towards collective abstractions such as 'the mind of Europe' or 'the tradition'. The setting up of such abstractions as absolutes in opposition to Romantic subjectivity and relativism is consistent with Eliot's declared allegiance to classicism in literature. 13

It is perhaps futile to debate what Eliot really meant, especially in the light of his later admission that: 'It may be that I expressed myself badly, or that I had only an adolescent grasp of that idea [of impersonality] -- as I can never bear to re-read my own prose writings, I am willing to leave the point unsettled'. 14 His addendum to his main statement in the original ('But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things') represents a shift of tone, from one implying the formulation of a spiritual aspiration to what sounds more like a put-down of the vulgar. Eliot's statement remains ambiguous, not only because, as Hill suggests, his choice of words may not have been felicitous, but because his thought is full of paradoxes and unresolved contradictions. Maud Ellmann has explored these paradoxes perceptively, pointing out, for example, that Eliot and Pound

often smuggle personality back into their poetics in the very terms they use to cast it out. Eliot, for instance, insists that poetry originates in personal emotion, implying that the author's subjectivity pervades the text, yet at the same time he deplores this intervention. 15
Ellmann also elucidates the theoretical and political ambivalence of impersonality as a concept in twentieth-century theories of literary creation, noting, for example, that: 'For Eliot, impersonality implied a reinstatement of traditional authority; for Barthes, the deconstruction of authority *per se*.'

The idea that Hill's reading of Eliot is influenced by Romantic theory is supported by his comments on the positive role of the personality in poetry, comments which centre on the idea of creation or discovery of the self (involving self-criticism), and the heuristic and constructive role of language. In his 1983 sermon he described the writing of poetry as follows:

One is ploughing down into one's own selfhood and into the deep strata of language at one and the same time. This takes effort and may be painful. Selfhood is more vital, recalcitrant, abiding, than self-expression. [...] The pains to which I refer are those examples of self-discovery and self-rebuke which seem inseparable from the technical process itself, when the most accomplished maker turns upon his own mastery. (Sermon, 2)

Hill's account of selfhood in his interview with John Haffenden, some two years earlier, includes the same elements of discovery, pain and creativity, but alludes to Nietzsche's radically ironical conception of the self:

But if, by personality, we mean the true selfhood of a person, then it would be foolishness to deny the connection between poetry and a man or woman's self [...] The crux of the matter turns upon creative expression of personality versus commodity exploitation of personality. There's a fine ironic phrase of Nietzsche's about 'this delight in giving a form to oneself as a piece of difficult, refractory and suffering material'. In such a phrase the difficulties, refractoriness and suffering of the personality and the difficult and refractory nature of language itself are seen to cohere. (VP, 87)
According to the passage from *Genealogy of Morals* from which Hill quotes here, the coherence of the aesthetic with subjectivity is a result of repression and guilt. In Terry Eagleton's account of Nietzsche's genealogy, "the old barbaric law yields to the Judaeo-Christian invention of the "free" subject, as a masochistic introjection of authority opens up that interior space of guilt, sickness and bad conscience which some like to call "subjectivity". Nietzsche's association of the making of self with artistic technique implies a more agonized and masochistic conception of selfhood than Hill's phrase 'creative expression of personality' might suggest:

This secret self-ravishment, this artists' cruelty, this delight in imposing a form on oneself as a hard, recalcitrant, suffering material and in burning a will, a critique, a contradiction, a contempt, a no into it, this uncanny, dreadfully joyous labour of a soul voluntarily at odds with itself that makes itself suffer out of joy in making suffer -- eventually this entirely active 'bad conscience' -- you will have guessed it -- as the womb of all ideal and imaginative phenomena, also brought to light an abundance of strange new beauty and affirmation, and perhaps beauty itself.

It is not clear to what extent Hill has been influenced by Nietzsche's theory of the nature of the subject, but it seems likely that Hill's own sceptical, tormented, moralistic attitude to subjectivity responded to the ambivalence of Nietzsche's rhetoric, which at once denounces the moral self as perverse and self-violating and celebrates it as a masterful artist, creator of itself. In invoking Nietzsche, Hill is drawing on Romantic conceptions of the self. Nietzsche's view that the moral subject approaches the state of the 'authentic art work', which is
'creature and creator in one' has its roots in Romantic theories of the imagination. 19

The simplistic view of poetry as self-expression assumes that the self is a fixed, pre-existing entity which is unambiguously the subject or agent of a constructive process: the self constructs a linguistic structure which somehow reflects or expresses its own essential nature. Hill's version of the doctrine of impersonality recognizes that the self is in process and is involved in a mutuality of subject-object relations with the not-self, in this instance with language. This is in accord with one strain in Eliot's early prose work. In his thesis on F.H. Bradley, Eliot asserts that

we have the right to say that the world is a construction. Not to say that it is my construction, for in that way, 'I' am as much 'my' construction as the world is; but to use the word as best we can without implying any active agent: the world is a construction out of finite centres. 20

Mowbray Allan provides a suggestive gloss on 'finite centre', linking it to Romantic and symbolist conceptions:

What Coleridge calls the primary imagination and Pater a dream of a world, Bradley calls a finite centre. Eliot, in his theories and in his early criticism, uses the alternate terms point of view and world [...] [Eliot] (following Bradley) would not allow any term like Coleridge's imagination, which suggests that some function on the subject side of experience is an irreducible principle. 21

Both Eliot and Hill (quoting Nietzsche) talk of a constructive process ('giving a form to oneself'). Eliot suggests a mutuality of construction between self and world. Similarly, Hill writes in 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"' of a process in which 'from the depths of the self we rise to a concurrence with that which is not-self' (PMA, 3). For
Hill, though, this process of mutual construction takes place in language, reflecting both his concerns as a poet of rigorously demanding technique and his absorption of the shift in philosophy from the Kantian critique of thought to the analytical critique of language. Language and the self 'cohere' in their 'refractoriness' and discoveries are made simultaneously in each. This implies that the poet's technical engagement with language can displace concern with the expression of personality, while still involving a form of self-discovery or self-creation. Again there is a model in the principle of Romantic irony. Since the 'transcendence of the self as ego' that Wheeler describes involves both the author ironizing himself, and the work of art ironizing itself, a coherence is implied between reflexivity in the text and the poet's self-ironization, a self-ironization which is also a form of 'transcendence' or creation of a higher self. The reflexive irony of Hill's poetry provides the possibility of avoiding the overt presence of the self, while seeking to construct or develop what he terms 'selfhood'. Thus for Hill the medium always has a crucial role; through a prolonged engagement with language the poet seeks a creative definition of the self in its relation to the not-self, but this involves acknowledging the power of language, including both its liabilities and its rich opportunities.

So, by reading Eliot's modernist poetic theory in the light of aspects of Romantic theory, Hill draws out one strand, present in Eliot's thought although contradicted by other strands: that of self-creation through an engagement with language. Though considerably suppressed in Eliot's prose writing, this principle is widely discernible in his own poetry and in that of other modernists such as Pound and Yeats. I shall
argue that Hill's own poetry develops through adaptations of such modernist strategies of self-creation, although this development is preceded by a phase of reaction against the idea of 'self-expression'. In this early phase a more radical and absolute form of impersonality is sought, in poems that exclude any representation of the self.

1.3 VERSIONS OF ROMANTIC SUBJECTIVITY

While Hill reinterprets Eliot's principle in the light of Romantic theory, he also selectively remakes the Romantic legacy by bringing to bear on it the suspicion of self-expression and the preference for technique and tradition that he finds congenial in Eliot. There is ample evidence in Hill's essays to show that the English Romantic poets, in particular Wordsworth and Coleridge, represent crucial points of reference for his own poetic. He has, however, criticized certain contemporary versions of Romanticism. Hill's most overt object of disdain is twentieth-century confessional poetry, and just as he interpreted Eliot's principle, so he gives his own interpretation of Wordsworth's poetic theory, claiming that the 'dogma' of poetic self-expression is based on

a serious misreading of a sentence from Wordsworth's 'Preface' to Lyrical Ballads which begins 'For all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings...'. It is dangerous to take words out of context, as the consequences of this reading amply demonstrate. Wordsworth qualified his own statement in various ways, distinguishing carefully between 'powerful feelings' and what he elsewhere called the 'degrading thirst after outrageous stimulation'. A simple failure to understand or accept this basic Wordsworthian distinction encouraged the torpid frenzies of the 'Beat' and so-called 'confessional' poets, the notorious festal 'happenings' of the sixties. (Sermon, 1)
Nevertheless, Hill rejects more of Romanticism than a mere vulgar misreading of its principles. Many of the features of contemporary poetry which he attacks when defining his own points of resistance have a Romantic ancestry. He endorses Edward Mendelson's irony at the expense of 'artists whose only subject is their personal psychology' (Sermon, 1). But the development of such poetry is in part a consequence of the Romantic 'expressive theory' of art as described by M.H. Abrams:

A work of art is essentially the internal made external, resulting from a creative process operating under the impulse of feeling, and embodying the combined product of the poet's perceptions, thoughts, and feelings. The primary source and subject matter of a poem, therefore, are the attributes and actions of the poet's own mind; or if aspects of the external world, then these only as they are converted from fact to poetry by the feelings and operations of the poet's mind.  

Robert Rehder argues that Wordsworth's great contribution to the development of Western culture is precisely that he chooses his own mind as his central subject and that he is 'radically more self-conscious than any poet before him'. Rehder's idea of the Romantic attitude to subjectivity is based on an implicitly melioristic assumption that European culture is 'the record of an increasing consciousness'. Nevertheless, his celebratory view of subjectivity represents a popular, if simplistic form of the Romantic inheritance. Robert Langbaum's earlier interpretation provides a corrective to such a view, and is closer to Hill's own position. Langbaum argues that 'subjectivity was not the program but the inescapable condition of romanticism' and that the 'whole conscious concern with objectivity as a problem, as something to be achieved, is in fact specifically romantic'. I would suggest that Romantic poetry is characterised by a profound ambivalence about
subjectivity, and an alternation between affirmation and desolation in relation to the power of mind to create a world. Langbaum's phrase 'inescapable condition' is very much in accord with Hill's style of thought; it is such a condition of subjective knowledge that the reflexivity of Hill's own poetry serves to indicate.

Hill has also criticized his contemporaries for writing poetry which combines attention to the visual with the personal, describing himself as

a radically traditional poet who finds himself at the moment at odds with a temporary but very powerful convention [...] which says that poems are word-photographs. I think a lot of the poems one sees in magazines could very well be described as stills from home movies. (CF)

Edward Larrissy has argued that contemporary English poetry suffers from an 'obsession with description' and an accompanying empiricism, and that these represent only an exacerbation of 'the old Romantic problem of how (or whether) to infuse a world of fascinating but chaotic sense-data with transcendent meaning when one is deprived of agreed myths'. Rehder observes that, for Wordsworth and the poets who follow him, only landscape provides a metaphor 'commensurate with the moods of the mind' and that therefore 'poetry is increasingly filled with objects and precise observation'. The combination of 'self-expression' with the 'obsession with description' produces those 'stills from home movies' that Hill dislikes.

Hill, then, feels the need to reject certain elements of the Romantic legacy, while accepting others. In the following passage Hill acknowledges that his resistance to one form of Romanticism is participation in another:
There is perhaps no need for me to point out that my thesis is as much symptomatic as diagnostic, that in its account of certain aspects and effects of Romanticism it is itself a part of that which it describes; in some respects its tendency to 'swim up against the stream' of much current thinking about the nature and function of poetry is itself a minor Romantic trait. The major Romanticism of our time, or that which some propound as the major Romanticism, sees the poet's vocation as a 'searching for a way of reconciling human vision with the energies, powers, presences, of the non-human cosmos'. (PMA, 15)

Hill, alluding to Ted Hughes, seeks to distance himself from a current conception of Romanticism. At the same time he traces a strain in the Romantic tradition with which he feels a sense of continuity. Martin Dodsworth has distinguished between Hughes and Hill in terms which clarify Hill's point here. Dodsworth contrasts Hughes's 'lopsided anti-intellectualism' unfavourably with Hill's poetry in which sensuous and intellectual experience 'grow out of one another'. This accords with Hill's comment, which seems to reject the glamour of non-human 'powers' and 'presences' in favour of a strain in Romanticism in which the self-scrutiny of the intellect is more prominent. But Dodsworth also argues that English poetry of the 1980s, including that of both Hill and Hughes 'is still a Romantic poetry, one that prefers individual insight to the conventional values of its society, and that tends to see itself as a privileged, indeed sovereign and unique, way of looking at life and judging it'. Hill recognizes that in resisting the version of Romanticism represented by Hughes, a more popular and widely-acclaimed poet than himself, he is making a Romantic gesture, claiming a vision superior to that of his time. I would add to Dodsworth's comment that Hill's poetry, though it presents its insights as oppositional, does not project the poet's own subjectivity as guarantor of those insights.
The nature of the strain in Romanticism with which Hill seeks to associate himself emerges clearly from his prose writings. He identifies it, in Arnoldian terms, as self-criticism expressed in the movement of return or recoil of a line of thought upon its own assumptions, limitations, blindness, fallibility. This is a movement which he praises in the prose writings of Coleridge and in the poetry of Hopkins, Wordsworth, Yeats and Keats, and detects here and there in the work of Edmund Burke, Cardinal Newman and T.H. Green. He conceives of it as a 'recognition of the force of the contemptible, in oneself and in others' (CM, 18), and hence as a form of resistance, both to the dangerous tendencies of one's own mind, and to those of one's times. 'Return' seems the right term when the mood is primarily critical, 'recoil' when the sense of guilt predominates, but the two are not separable for Hill. Thus he writes of 'that obsessive self-critical Romantic monologue in which eloquence and guilt are intertwined' (PMA, 3-4) and comments that 'Romantic art is thoroughly familiar with the reproaches of life. Accusation, self-accusation, are the very life-blood of its most assured rhetoric' (PMA, 3). It is in relation to the topic of self-expression and his own experience of writing poetry that he speaks of 'the euphoria of self-assertion and the recoil into self-reproach and humiliation' (Sermon, 1), acknowledging that the egotism which he disdains in others is present in himself, and again exemplifying the process of the return. Thus the self-critical return is both implicated with self-expression and a reaction against it.

'Resistance' is a key word for Hill, and he invariably uses it as a term of praise. Often it is oneself, or at least a force felt within one's own pattern of thought, which is resisted, so that what Wordsworth
evinces is 'the capacity to go against one's own apparent drift' (PP, 108). It draws on self-criticism and uses the strength thus gained to oppose various drifts: the drift of complacency, of insufficiently controlled language, above all, of the assumptions and prejudices of an age and a society (swimming 'up against the stream'). Thus Wordsworth's 'Immortality Ode' 'thrusts up against the arrangement' of its own rhythm, resisting 'custom's pressure' (RT, 87), as 'the immediate, abrupt surge with which the "joy" of [stanzanine's opening lines resists, pulls away from, the gravitational field of the closing lines of stanza eight' (RT, 88). Swift's creative intelligence is described as 'at once resistant and reciprocal' (JS, 67); both poetry and scepticism may function as 'a kind of marginal resistance' to 'the drift of the age' (VP, 88).

The link between self-criticism and resistance is made explicit in discussion of Coleridge: 'Coleridge's concern is not so much with thought as with "the mind's self-experience in the act of thinking" and [...] this "self-experience" is most clearly realized by the process of "win[ning one's] way up against the stream"' (PMA, 5). Thus in 'Redeeming the Time' Hill writes of 'making a burnt offering of a powerful and decent desire, the desire to be immediately understood by "a common well-educated thoughtful man, of ordinary talents"'. This sacrifice takes the form of the return: 'its structure is a recognition and a resistance; it is parenthetical, antiphonal, it turns upon itself'. (RT, 94) He goes on to make it clear that what is being resisted is: 'the detrition of general taste' (RT, 95). Although Hill borrows the phrase concerning 'a common well-educated thoughtful man' from a letter of Coleridge's (RT, 93), I take it that Hill also alludes here to Wordsworth's wish to use the 'real language of men', an oppositional gesture in its time, but one which has
now become something of a cliché. A passage in "Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"" brings together Coleridge, Burke and Keats as writers employing a valuable movement of return, and notes that, in Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale', 'what is revoked is an attitude towards art and within art' (PMA, 5); according to this reading of Keats's poem a reflexive position is revoked by a corrective reflexive gesture. Hill's continuing interest in the constellation of associated ideas which the return represents is apparent from his mention, in the second of his 1986 Clark lectures at Cambridge, of Bacon's description of words as like the Tartar's Bow, turning back on the person who uses them. 33

Of especial relevance to the style of Hill's own poetry is his emphasis on the return as a linguistic and stylistic manoeuvre, as well as a conceptual shift. This emphasis on language and the discipline of technique, already noted as crucial to Hill's ideas of self-creation and self-discovery, is a frequent theme of his critical writing. In his sermon Hill himself refers to 'examples of self-discovery and self-rebuke' (again the movement of assertion and recoil) as 'inseparable from the technical process itself, when the most accomplished maker turns upon his own mastery' (Sermon, 2), and his own instances of the return operating in poetry pay attention to shifts in meaning at a high level of particularity. For example, the revocation which he identifies in the 'Ode to a Nightingale' is concentrated in the shift on the word 'forlorn'. Hill's comments on the return are full of phrases such as 'in the form and texture'; 'our attention is forcibly drawn to "the very word"' (Sermon, 2), 'the very recalcitrance of language' (CM, 21). He sees the process of return as emerging from the writer's engagement with language. The technical concentration of poetry perhaps makes this more
true of the poet than the prose writer: 'In Yeats's case (as opposed to
that of Burke, however, one does not refer so much to the conceptual
intelligence operating through language-as-medium, as to the intelligence
activated by the pitch of words' (CX, 21).

In Hill's poetry the processes of recoil, return, revocation operate
with a high degree of simultaneity, by means of puns and syntactical
ambiguity. The self-assertion and the recoil, the obtuseness and the
insight, are manifest at the same moment as two alternative readings of
the same lines. Christopher Ricks has explored in detail the 'drama of
reason' which Hill creates by the use of parentheses, relating this to
the 'rhythmical triumphs' by means of which the return is articulated in
the work of Wordsworth and others (Ricks, 309-18). Brackets, as Ricks
reveals, can create two worlds within a single sentence: 'a simple
bracket may establish a co-existing zone which is only a contained
breath away and yet which breathes the pure serene of another planet.
"(There is nothing, over the white fields, amiss)"
(Ricks, 312). Hill's
puns are yet more compact, bringing two worlds into collision in one
word so that, for example, 'superb graft' ('A Pastoral'; 1958, FTU)
alludes both to a triumph of organic continuity and to the shameless
corruption of 'graft'. Hill has also borrowed Keats's effect of
enharmonic shift (on 'forlorn') for the transition between sonnets 4 and
5 of 'Funeral Music':

[... an unpeopled region
Of ever new-fallen snow, a palace blazing
With perpetual silence as with torches.

As with torches we go, at wild Christmas,
When we revel in our atonement
Through thirty feasts of unction and slaughter,
Here the repetition draws attention to the shift or revocation. When the process is simultaneous, as with 'graft', there is a risk of obscurity, and Hill acknowledges this in the passage quoted above (p. 31), where he sees the return as a resistance to depravity of taste, and resistance as involving the sacrifice of the desire to be readily understood.

The main thrust of Hill's own thinking about Romanticism would seem to be that what was, in the best work of the Romantic poets, a discovery and expansion of self and self-consciousness, a process involving transcendence of the contingent self through self-criticism, has declined, in some twentieth-century poetry, into an habitual reliance on a less critical and more complacent conception of self-expression as a value-criterion in poetry. In this he can be seen to be valuing a feature of Romanticism related to that rejected by Eliot when establishing his doctrine of impersonality. Eliot asserts that: 'Romanticism is a short cut to the strangeness without the reality, and it leads its disciples only back upon themselves'. Hill sees a similar movement, but reads it as a redemptive self-criticism rather than a symptom of solipsism: the return or 'self-accusation' of Romantic rhetoric.

1.4 Modernist Mediations of the Self

I have suggested that Hill's theory of impersonality is constructed out of a dialectic between modernism and Romanticism. A brief consideration of the categories of impersonality in modernist poetry will provide a context for a later discussion of forms of impersonality in Hill's poetry. A threefold distinction may be made between the Yeatsian mask, the personae of 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' and 'Hugh Selwyn
Mauberley', and the absent or fragmented self of The Waste Land. Hill makes use of some version of all three strategies for the elision or mediation of the self. Many of the poems of For the Unfallen exclude any coherent self as does The Waste Land; 'The Songbook of Sebastian Arrurruz' constructs an ironized persona who has a certain amount in common with both Mauberley and Prufrock; Mercian Hymns, The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy and 'Scenes with Harlequins' engage with figures who could be seen as forms of antithetical masks.

Yeats's idea of the mask, in Richard Ellmann's view, had as one of its early meanings a defensive armour of detachment, requiring the poet to live like an actor. However, the mask was from the start also a 'weapon of attack', and it is the antithetical nature of the mask, and hence its complementary relation to the self, which Yeats was to develop, especially once he had started communicating, through a medium, with a being who announced himself to be Yeats's opposite. Yeats, Ellmann tells us,

welcomed this new theory that his opposite, instead of being solely a mask, a conscious product of his own mind with slight independence of its creator, might be a spirit or daimon with a full personality of his own [...] The conflict which Yeats had visualized as internal and psychological might be an external battle between a living man and a dead one, between this world and the next.  

Such an antithetical mask or daimon serves to set up a dialogue between self and other, and here the effect is arguably not impersonality so much as a dramatization of the self. In many ways Yeats is the most personal of poets, as comments such as the following assert: 'Of recent years [...] I have tried for more self-portraiture. I have tried to make my work convincing with a speech so natural and dramatic that the
hearer would feel the presence of a man thinking and feeling'. 38 This
does not contradict the doctrine of the antithetical mask, since writers
who speak with a strong, idiosyncratic voice in their work need an
opposing principle in order to employ the full power of that voice
without becoming overbearing and didactic. This is the need for
'antinomy' which D.H. Lawrence recognized and, in his best work,
achieved. 39 Hill, in a 1968 interview, cited as one of two statements
'summing up a good deal' of what he felt, Yeats's recollection: 'I took
pleasure alone in those verses where it seems to me I found something
hard and cold, some articulation of the image which is the opposite of
all that I am in my daily life'. 40

The persona, as used by Eliot in 'The Love Song of J. Alfred
Prufrock', and Pound in 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberley', has affinities of
temperament and situation with the poet without being identical with
him. The persona is usually subjected to a degree of irony which marks
the poet's distance from him. Maud Ellmann notes that Eliot, in his 1924
Introduction to Valéry's Le Serpent, implies that impersonality is a way
of protecting the private personality of the poet. 41 If the Yeatsian
antithetical mask is a means to the dramatization of the personality,
then the persona is a way of drawing on, while also protecting, the
poet's personal experience. Prufrock and Mauberley are not Eliot and
Pound, but it is the affinities between each which set up the play of
identification and distance, of similarity and difference in these poems
(in 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberley' the play is so complex as to have provoked a
long-running debate as to which parts of the sequence 'belong' to Pound,
and which to Mauberley). 42
The *Waste Land* represents the abnegation of the personality through the absence of the self. Tiresias is sometimes given the role of an organizing central consciousness. However, much of the poem shows no sign of being spoken by such a character, and indeed can only be interpreted thus by extending Tiresias so far that he becomes a metaphysical principle rather than a personality. As Maud Ellmann observes, 'the speaker [of *The Waste Land*] cannot be identified with his creator, not because he has a different personality, like Prufrock, but because he has no stable identity at all'. In this respect Hill's early poetry resembles *The Waste Land*; it excludes any stable image of the self. There are, however, considerable differences: *The Waste Land* is dramatic, giving the effect of many voices, so that there is a local sense of particular personalities in certain lines and passages, and this is on the whole not true of the poems of *For The Unfallen*. Poetry in which any coherent self is absent would seem to be the most impersonal, except insofar as the need for such abnegation opens itself to psychoanalytical (and extra-textual) interpretation as a feature of the author's personality in the form of repression.

### 1.5 Subjectivity in Hill's Poetic

These three categories, the mask, the persona and the absent self, are clearly unstable, but represent varying forms of an inherently paradoxical principle. One curious effect of the absence of the self in much of Hill's earlier poetry is that the use of a persona in 'The Songbook of Sebastian Arrurruz' seems, in comparison, to introduce more personal elements, although such a technique is generally associated with modernist impersonality. The impersonality of much of Hill's poetry
is not a denial of the subject but rather an attempt creatively to renegotiate its place in the poem. The term 'subject' is used here for the presence in a poem of an 'I': an identity which writes the work and is written by it. This is to avoid the tendency to identify the constructed subject with the poet, an identification which is more appropriate in certain poems than in others. I shall argue that in 'September Song' (1967, KL) the function of the 'I' or subject is very specifically to stand for the poet himself, as a crucial acknowledgment of moral responsibility. On the other hand, the 'I' of 'Funeral Music' (1966, KL), and Mercian Hymns (1971), though it includes some autobiographical reference (at least in the latter work), is involved in processes of doubling and interweaving of voices. Although the term 'subject' in this sense is a prominent feature of contemporary literary theory with Marxist or materialist foundations, I do not wish to take over these specific ideological implications; it is not used here to imply that the subject is a 'bourgeois' category. Coleridge, in Biographia Literaria, uses the term in a manner which he defines as 'its scholastic sense, as equivalent to mind or sentient being, and as the necessary correlative of object'. 45 This definition is certainly relevant, but again, I do not intend to evoke Coleridge's idealist epistemology as a methodological assumption. I use the term 'subject' in the first instance as a term of rhetorical analysis, but with the assumption that, while the boundaries of the self, and the degree of autonomy that it exercises, are problematic, it remains an essential term in both literary studies and ethics.

Hill's sense of the nature of human subjectivity is a complex one. In common with post-structuralist conceptions he does not represent the
subject as unitary, nor language as a pure expression of subjectivity. But neither does he abandon the idea of the transcendent subject or soul. As a moral category the subject remains central to his work. He represents self and language as mutually constructive, an intermediary position between the deconstructive or materialist claim that the subject is wholly discursively and socially constructed, and a humanist view of the subject as autonomous and unitary, the origin rather than the product of discourses. Thus, in his essay on John Crowe Ransom he alludes to the idea of poetry as an escape from personality, quoting Ransom's version of Eliot's idea: 'The author of "a good poem", he [Ransom] once suggested, is in its making "freed from his juridical or prose self"'. Hill goes on to suggest that "the "juridical or prose self" can be taken as a figure of speech referring to the empirical, quotidian self which is to be distinguished from the "I" of the "poem" (whether in verse or prose)" (JR, 122). Set alongside Hill's statement that 'even so shrewd a stylist as Ransom does not entirely possess his style, self-possessed as he may seem; but neither is he wholly possessed by it' (JR, 121), this suggests that the distinction between the empirical self and the subject constructed in discourse helps to establish a balance or reciprocity between the action of the self upon language, and the action of language upon the self. Hill's limited affinity with post-structuralism in regarding the self as, at least in part, discursively constructed or transformed, may arise from a common source in Nietzsche, who has influenced, or at least parallels, Hill's conception of self-creation through an engagement with language. Hill's perspective remains, however, radically at odds with post-structuralism in that both the Christian paradigms which structure his work and the
moral concerns which permeate it demand a conception of the subject as the location of moral responsibility.

1.6 THE LYRIC OF OCCASION AND SUBJECTIVITY

I have suggested that much contemporary English poetry employs a Romantic model of the inter-relation of subjectivity, language and meaning. This model involves the creation in the poem of an 'I' or subject which represents the poet's consciousness; this subject is characteristically contending with experience and attempting to name it or give it verbal articulation. This form of lyric, which has remained common since the Romantics, shapes itself by describing the occasion which gave rise to it and the feelings and thoughts of the poet-as-subject in relation to that occasion. Implicit in this form is an inspirational model of creativity (an experience is what produces or inspires a poem) and a stress on the sensibility of the narrator. Typically, at some point in the poem a moment of plenitude and transcendence is achieved or recalled, that is, a moment when this 'I' experiences a sense of understanding, transcending contingency, and often involving some escape from the vagaries of ordinary language into a purer form of comprehension or articulation. The following passages from the poetry of Wordsworth provide examples of this effect:

'God', said I, 'be my help and stay secure;
I'll think of the leech-gatherer on the lonely moor!'
('Resolution and Independence') 47

[...] well pleased to recognize
In nature and the language of the sense
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being.
('Lines Composed [...] Above Tintern Abbey') 48
Both leech-gatherer and natural scene have become transcendent signs, signifying a direct perception of truth or value. There has been a shift from ordinary language to a higher mode of apprehension, a language 'of the sense': what the poem seems to offer us is not a verbal construct but the embodiment of an experience which itself signifies on a higher level than the words which contain it. Political or moral authority is displaced from the established social ethos and recentred on the poet as a man of vision. This theme allows of variations and inversions such as the loss of vision, or, as in 'Tintern Abbey', the loss of it in one form and its recuperation in another.

The moment of plenitude is one of imaginative perception as described by Robert Langbaum:

Romanticism is both idealistic and realistic in that it conceives of the ideal as existing only in conjunction with the real and the real as existing only in conjunction with the ideal. The two are brought into conjunction only in the act of perception when the higher or imaginative rationality brings the ideal to the real by penetrating and possessing the external world as a way of knowing both itself and the external world. 49

Hill's poetic theory inherits the reciprocity implied in the last clause quoted, but as a reciprocity between self and language rather than between self and world. He remains sceptical about the transcendence of language and resistant to the imagined conjunction of ideal and real, imagining rather their disjunction.

In the form of Romantic lyric that I have described, the moment of plenitude or transcendent meaning becomes the centre of the poem with which the reader is asked to identify, the essence of its value. As a result of such an identification the reader's consciousness of verbal
artifice may be reduced and the poem experienced as a transparent medium through which the reader perceives a consciousness and its unmediated communion with experience. This model of the lyric may be termed the lyric of occasion and subjectivity; it is obviously a simplified paradigm, and is susceptible of many variations. Marjorie Perloff identifies the continuation of such a form as 'the dominant poetic mode of early modernism', a mode she describes as

the lyric [...] in which the isolated speaker (whether or not the poet himself), located in a specific landscape, meditates or ruminates on some aspect of his or her relationship to the external world, coming finally to some sort of epiphany, a moment of insight or vision with which the poem closes.  

One complicating factor is that the model describes both a type of poetry and a way of reading. While some poetry asks to be read in this way, the habit of such reading can also lead to the model being applied to poems where its appropriateness is not evident (ironically, many readings of The Waste Land show this effect). The habit of conceiving of poetry as the communication of personal experience and therefore of language as a barrier through which that experience has to pass, tinges the comments of those critics who see the impersonality of Hill's poetry as evasion or concealment. Neil Corcoran writes that the poems' manner of proceeding -- costive, allusive, highly polished -- is the self-protective stylistic shield of a man appalled before his own experience, and before what he understands to be the experience of his race in history. The procedure protects with ironies that attempt to render the self invisible. The poems stubbornly refuse statement, assertion, resolution -- or, if they allow these things, they allow them only within a dramatic context, a fictional location.
In one sense this gives an eloquent impression of Hill's poetry. Yet to suggest that his style is a shield is misleading, since Hill's originality lies in the creation of a style that uncovers meanings and causes them to resonate. Empson points out that a critic may imagine that a poem is obscure, when in fact 'he is wrong to expect a meaning at the point he has chosen'. A critic may also be looking, not at the wrong point, but for the wrong kind of meaning. Corcoran experiences Hill's style as a concealment because what it reveals is something other than what he is expecting. Similarly, Knottenbelt's critique of *The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy*, though closely argued, is one that I would reject. Suggesting that the poem is 'spiritual autobiography in disguise' (Knottenbelt, 282), she adds in a note:

I am aware of the danger of making such a statement, yet, [...] Hill is, for all his convictions about the 'impersonality' of the poet, his reticence, and whether he likes it or not [sic], one of our most 'personal' of contemporary poets. [...] It is perhaps Hill's attachment to and incapacity, in the end, to let go of his ideas about the nature of poetry and of the poet's role, based on his strong conceptual sense of language (and as this in important ways in fact contradicts his intuitions on a more deeply emotional level), which may be the reasons for what in the final analysis is the relative failure of the sequence. (Knottenbelt, 355).

I would argue that Hill's 'strong conceptual sense of language' is the basis of the originality and success of *The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy*: Knottenbelt's view is based on a reductive assumption that the form of mediation between self and other in that poem, partaking of the modernist technique of the mask, is merely a disguise for the personal. The fully developed mask is not a concealment, but an antithetical principle.
The assumption that, ideally, poetic language should be a transparent window through which we view the personality of the poet also enters John Bayley's argument when he suggests that 'the trouble is that we seem to be seeing the author from a great distance [...] he seems to be keeping us so far away because he does not want us to see through into him; and our impression is that there might not in fact be much to see' (Agenda 1979, 40-41). Bayley rather equivocally comments that this quality in Hill's poetry 'is not a weakness but it may be a limitation of a sort'. 

It may be true that Hill does not wish us to 'see through into him'. However, I would suggest that his poetry achieves something more interesting than the revelation of personality. It invites us to look at what is revealed within language by its structure, grain and texture. Hill's technique does not exclude an engagement with experience, nor indeed an exploration of aspects of personality, but it maintains an awareness of the mediating role of language.

1.7 HILL AND THE MOVEMENT

The lyric of occasion and subjectivity persists in post-war English poetry, including some poetry that presents itself as anti-Romantic. At the beginning of the fifties, when Hill started publishing poetry, what came to be known as the Movement was coalescing. Hill's time as an undergraduate at Keble College Oxford (1950-53) saw the publication of Larkin's *XX poems* and Wain's *Mixed Feelings* (both 1951), the founding of *Essays in Criticism*, which was to publish prose and poetry by Movement writers, and the publication in 1952 of Donald Davie's *Purity of Diction in English Verse* (1952), which retrospectively was to acquire the status of a manifesto. 

These developments, charted in detail by Blake
Morrison in *The Movement: English Poetry and Fiction of the 1950s*, initially emerged from literary circles based in Oxford and Cambridge, but led to an effective London launch of the Movement through the Third Programme broadcasts *New Soundings* and *First Reading* (1952-53) and the *Spectator* article 'In the Movement' of 1954, which gave the Movement its capital letter. As Morrison shows, the early roots of the Movement can be found in Oxford undergraduate friendships of the 1940s, initially linking Larkin, Amis and Wain.

Hill, then, started his career as a poet against the emergence of a group (however nebulous at first), which defined itself, and was defined by others, partly in reaction to both Romanticism and modernism, and his awareness of this group can only have been sharpened by his time at Oxford, its first home. The common attitudes of the Movement, as these developed between the early forties and the publication of *New Lines* in 1956, involved not only hostility to the forties neo-Romantics, but also a lowered valuation of the Romantic poets, and a suspicion of their influence. In this the Movement writers followed Leavis and Eliot. In aligning himself in 1952 with Eliot's attack on self-expression, Hill was therefore part of a trend. Looking back on his time as an undergraduate some thirty years later, he distinguished his own view of poetry from those of contemporaries, identified either as 'Empsonian in the most arid sense' or as 'narrating amorous adventures and travel anecdotes' (VP, 78-79). Hill reacted against aspects of Romanticism and was influenced by Empson, but did not wish to be associated with the dryness which represented one aspect of the Movement, nor with the shrinking of the visionary Romantic poet into the poet-as-ordinary-man.
That it remains important to Hill to stress such distinctions may be because his early career involved him in Movement circles, and because he has a number of superficial, primarily biographical similarities to the typical Movement writer, insofar as such a person existed. John Holloway described such a writer as from a background which was 'lower middle-class and suburban (often staunchly non-conformist, often in the industrial or semi-industrial Midlands or North of England)' and probably teaching 'in a "red-brick" provincial university'. Another recognizable feature of the typical life-history is going to Oxford on a scholarship from a grammar school. Hill's background was perhaps closer to working-class than middle-class and somewhat on the rural side of suburban, and though his mother was a Baptist she joined the Church of England when he was a child. But he was indeed brought up in the West Midlands, attended a grammar school, won a scholarship to Oxford, and subsequently taught in a provincial University. A less circumstantial link is provided by Hill's involvement with Oscar Mellor's Fantasy Press. Hill appeared in 1952 as number 11 in the Fantasy Press pamphlet series, which included six Movement poets between 1952 and 1954. The great divergence between Hill's early work and that of Movement poets is attributable to a wide range of influences on Hill, outside the relatively narrow Movement canon. These included Christopher Smart, William Blake, Isaac Rosenberg, A.E. Housman, Richard Eberhart and later Allen Tate, poets notable for visionary strains. The significance of the Movement for Hill's work is therefore neither as an influence nor as a direction, but rather as a part of the ambience in opposition to which he sought, in his own words, to follow 'in the wake of a vision of life that goes before him and which he cannot grasp, a
cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night'. This self-description from Hill's 1954 'Letter from Oxford' indicates, as does his poem 'Genesis' (1952, FTU), that for Hill the Romantic model of the poet as visionary was crucial, although the 'young student, the poet' of the 'Letter' is nevertheless, in somewhat Larkinesque fashion, pursuing his vision 'hunched in his mackintosh on the top of a bus in the Banbury Road'.

If Hill defined his own poetic path largely in contradistinction to the Movement, such a distinction must have been complicated by the fact that the Movement came to be defined largely in terms of reaction. While the poets associated with the Movement opposed the vagueness, mysticism and vatic inflation which they tended to attribute to Romanticism, they also reacted against modernist linguistic experiment in favour of 'consolidation'. They were inclined to regard modernism as 'a development out of, rather than a departure from, Romanticism'. It can be argued, however, that the Movement poets followed the procedure which they tended to attribute (with some plausibility) to modernism; that is they reacted against a somewhat inaccurate conception of Romanticism, while continuing to employ a Romantic model. Many typical Movement poems fall within the category of the lyric of occasion and subjectivity as I have described it (see Section 1.6), merely limiting its scope in certain ways: the occasion may be a train journey rather than crossing the Alps; the self may be modest and cerebral rather than inclined to the egotistical sublime; most crucially the moment of transcendence is minimal or uncertain rather than triumphantly affirmative. David Trotter, in his discussion of Larkin's 'Church Going', points out that 'the poem does eventually work through from jauntiness to an appraisal of the
enduring significance of holy ground'. Trotter detects in Larkin's poetry a 'gap between experience and meaning, between what he feels and what he feels he might feel if pushed' and it is perhaps this gap that marks Larkin's distance from Romanticism. Nevertheless, as Trotter writes: 'Nothing, like something, does happen; although as in "Church Going" we do not quite know how or why'; the revelation of an absence, or a tentative presence, can still be staged through the form of the individual subject recounting the occasion which gave rise to it. 

While Blake Morrison's argument that the Movement is significant as an historical phenomenon carries some conviction, the often-stated lack of coherence of the Movement is reflected in the ambivalent positions which its members took up towards a number of aesthetic and technical issues. Of the poems included in New Lines, those by Elizabeth Jennings tend to start from scenes or locations, and reflect on the relationship between the individual mind and the external world, and therefore on processes of perception and thought which mediate this relationship. They are poems of some delicacy and interest, yet not wholly remote from Hill's categories of 'home-movies', 'word-photographs' or postcards, evoking as they do the settings of Florence, or the Piazza San Marco, and their effect on the mind and feelings of the cultured, philosophically inclined observer. Kingsley Amis comments ironically on the lyric of occasion and subjectivity in 'Here is Where', a poem which starts with a parodic, mannered evocation of the physical world (a stream), before breaking off into reflexive irony:
Going well so far, eh?
But soon, I'm sorry to say,
The here-where recipe
Will have to intrude its I
Its main verb want,
Its this at some tangent.

What has this subject
Got to do with that object?  

The last two lines quoted ask the archetypal Romantic question, even if Amis's answer is cynical and deflationary: 'The country, to townies, / Is hardly more than nice'. In 'Something Nasty in the Bookshop' Amis refers somewhat ironically to poems of occasion and subjectivity written by men: "I travel, you see", "I think" and "I can read" / These titles seem to say'. But he goes on to imply that such poems are at least preferable to the embarrassing poems about 'love' written by women. John Wain, in 'Reason for Not Writing Orthodox Nature Poetry', registers a seemingly anti-Romantic plea for a 'sterner choice' which consists in acknowledging the love of natural beauty as something inexpressible, rather than writing about it. Yet that idea of a response to the natural world which transcends the verbal ('love that I can never speak by rote') is in itself highly Romantic. Andrew Crozier identifies in the work of the New Lines poets the importance both of the occasion and of the subject. He suggests that the impulse to 'apprehend or, at least, allude to the discrete' is reflected in the fact that 'the art object or the cultural site (both generally foreign) or the moment of experience (again, often in a remote setting) furnish occasions for the majority of their poems'. But he implies that these poets have an ambivalent relation to the Romantic model when he argues that 'occasions, however necessary they are to poets, are not felt to be trustworthy'. 
Nevertheless, the emphasis on the occasion as source is one which Gunn at least, of the Movement poets, retained as part of his own poetic theory long after the Movement’s moment had passed. In his Introduction to a selection of Jonson’s poetry, published in 1974, he asserted that ‘all poetry is in fact occasional [...] The occasion in all cases -- literal or imaginary -- is the starting point, only, of a poem, but it should be a starting point to which the poet must in some sense stay true’. 70 This view provided the title for Gunn’s collection of essays *The Occasions of Poetry*, and while it seems unexceptionable enough, an attempt to apply such a conception of poetic truth to Hill’s work suggests the limitations of Gunn’s formulation, and thereby perhaps the limitations of a poetry of occasion. If one considers, for example, ‘Two Formal Elegies for the Jews in Europe’ (1955-56, FTU), ‘Funeral Music’ (1966, KL) or ‘Scenes with Harlequins’ (1990), it would not seem adequate or appropriate to describe the holocaust, the Battle of Towton, or the life and death of Aleksandr Blok, as ‘occasions’, even allowing Gunn’s inclusion of occasions ‘of the imagination’. 71

As regards the place of the subject in Movement poetry, Andrew Crozier suggests that the poetic discourse of the Movement ‘is emphatically singular in many cases: the first-person pronoun “I” is characteristic [...] in Thom Gunn as well as in Larkin; while “we”, as uttered by Davie [...] implies a restricted group, and is far from being generously inclusive’. Crozier also addresses the relationship to the Romantic tradition:

It might be supposed that a poetic of objects, sites and moments placed its exponents in the tradition of enfeebled Romanticism, the decadence of conventional poetic emotions; and to a certain extent the poets of the Movement are to be understood in this light. But at the same time they place
themselves outside that tradition by earnestly demystifying its conventional occasions, by finding nothing there, nothing below the surface. The profound or sublime are closed options. 72

But again, as Trotter points out, this 'nothing [...] does happen', and happens to the poet so as to reveal a meaning of a sort. Morrison identifies Gunn's 'On the Move' as a 'key text' of the post-1945 period, and as one which displays a specific debt to Empson (a debt shared by other poets of the time). In this poem the last lines represent movement as a form of transcendence, despite the lack of an 'absolute': 73

For birds and saints complete their purposes.
At worst, one is in motion; and at best,
Reaching no absolute, in which to rest,
One is always nearer by not keeping still. 74

Morrison rightly points to the co-existence of Romantic and anti-Romantic tendencies in this poem. 75 The feeling is Byronic rather than Wordsworthian; indeed, Byron's Don Juan provides a model for the combination of Romantic and anti-Romantic sentiments. Gunn's destination, it would appear from his later poetry, was towards rather than away from the personal and even confessional modes.

So the practice and theory of the Movement, against the background of which Hill's early development as a poet took place, offered a confused message: an avowed but ambivalent rejection of Romanticism, combined with a tendency to work within a sub-Romantic model of the poem which, it would seem, Hill quickly found unsatisfactory. Hill shared with the Movement poets an impulse to ironize the romantic subject, but took a more radical path to this end, being unwilling to sacrifice visionary intensity.
1.8 HILL AND HEANEY: REACTIONS TO THE ROMANTIC MODEL

Hill is some seven years older than Seamus Heaney (born in 1939), so they could be said to belong respectively to the first and second generations after the Movement. Blake Morrison and Andrew Motion, in their 1982 anthology *The Penguin Book of Contemporary British Poetry*, exclude all poets included in Alvarez's *The New Poetry* (1962 and second edition 1966), along with those not in Alvarez's anthology 'who belong to older poetic generations than those we wish to represent'. By this means they exclude Hill (who is present in *The New Poetry*, but represented only by poems from *For the Unfallen*), along with other poets of a similar age such as Roy Fisher. This enables Morrison and Motion to argue that whereas 'Alvarez praised Lowell, Hughes et al. for dealing with their experience "nakedly", and [...] presented language as a mere instrument in a therapeutic transaction between writer and reader', British poetry 'has taken forms quite other than those proposed by Alvarez' as a result of the 'emergence and example of Seamus Heaney', leading to a 'new spirit' in British poetry which 'began to make itself felt in Northern Ireland during the late 1960s and early 70s'. This new spirit involves 'a degree of ludic and literary self-consciousness reminiscent of the modernists' and a view of language 'more oblique' than that held by Alvarez, exemplified by Heaney's delight in language, 'relishing it [...] as something that embodies politics, history and locality, as well as having its own delectability'.

Yet in 1966, the year in which Heaney published his first substantial volume, Hill was already arguing that 'Language contains everything you want -- history, sociology, economics: it is a kind of drama of human destiny', and had published such poems as 'Annunciations'
(1961, KL), 'Three Baroque Meditations' (1964, KL) and 'History as Poetry' (1964, KL) marked by an intense literary self-consciousness. Other poets excluded by Morrison and Motion in order to represent Heaney as a new presiding spirit, such as Charles Tomlinson and Roy Fisher, had been writing poetry which, like Hill's work though in very different ways, was very far from treating experience 'nakedly'. The self-consciousness about the process of literary creation which Morrison and Motion find in James Fenton and Paul Muldoon's pseudo-narratives is equally evident in Fisher's witty reflexive meditations, such as 'Suppose' (1971), in Tomlinson's figuring of the processes of creation along with those of perception, as in 'Lines' (1963), and in Hill's reflections on the moral vicissitudes of the imagination and its engagement with language, such as 'A Pastoral' (1958, FTU). Morrison and Motion also identify the emergence of the long poem after 'a period of dominance by the short lyric' but ignore Hill's sequence published in 1958-59, 'Of Commerce and Society' and Fisher's 1961 City, citing instead the work of Jeffrey Wainwright, a poet strongly influenced by Hill. I would argue, then, that Hill and Heaney should be regarded as of equal importance in the definition of a shift towards literary and linguistic self-consciousness. Reflexivity plays a major part in the work of each, yet they differ crucially in their treatment of subjectivity.

Seamus Heaney's poem 'The Tollund Man' (1972) and Hill's 'Elegiac Stanzas: On a Visit to Dove Cottage' (1957, FTU) represent two reactions to the lyric of occasion and subjectivity. I wish to consider the following questions in relation to these poems. How and to what effect do the words of a poem generate a sense of an individual voice addressing the reader, a self which we are invited to hypostatize as the
origin of the poem's meaning, the guarantor of an ultimate lucidity and unity behind the ambiguities of the text? What happens when a poem fails to offer such an image of an individual consciousness? What other sorts of origin are there if the poet-as-subject is either effaced or somehow edged away from centre stage? In a consideration of the work of both Hill and Heaney these questions interact with issues of moral and political responsibility. Much of Heaney's work has been ambivalently involved with the task of writing about political issues and political violence. Hill has what amounts almost to an obsession with the attempt to write decently and adequately about the victims of war, oppression and genocide. The two poets share an interest in the elegiac mode and a troubled sense of what it means to memorialize the dead: they are both alive to the risk that the raw-edged contingency of the lives which they commemorate may be transformed into a too-satisfying aesthetic closure. Christopher Ricks's *Geoffrey Hill and The Tongue's Atrocities* established such 'principled distrust of the imagination' as a defining feature of Hill's work (Ricks, 285). If the author places himself squarely in the poem as its speaking voice then judgments concerning moral and political responsibility are apparently simplified, since we may consider the poem on the analogy of ordinary speech or writing of a public nature. It is also tempting to feel that the poet is assuming the responsibility which is his if the poem acknowledges the common-sense view that it is created by a particular individual. However, this view tends to ignore the large role played by literary convention in generating the sense of an origin, and the influence of intertextuality and a specifically literary context on the reader's manner of comprehending a poem. Also unacknowledged is the
difference between the time of composition and the time of utterance. The person whom we imagine as speaking a poem seems to us to do so in an uninterrupted sequence at some normal pace and this in itself renders this person fictional, in that he is not the poet, who may have worked and reworked elements of the poem in any order and over a long period of time. The question of impersonality is thus inextricably linked to the issue which is such a preoccupation of Hill’s writing, and which it addresses through reflexivity, that of the moral responsibility involved in writing poetry.

Hill, in 'Elegiac Stanzas' is engaged in actively resisting the lure of the lyric of occasion and subjectivity, while writing about Romantic tradition and its place in our world.

ELEGIAC STANZAS
On a Visit to Dove Cottage

To J.P. Mann

Mountains, monuments, all forms
Inured to processes and storms
(And they are many); the fashions
Of intercourse between nations:

Customs through which many come
To sink their eyes into a room
Filled with the unused and unworn;
To bite nothings to the bone:

And the daylight between facts;
And the daylight between acts;
Groping of custom towards love;
Past loving, the custom to approve:

A use of words; a rhetoric
As plain as spitting on a stick;
Speech from the ice, the clear-obscure;
The tongue broody in the jaw:
Greatly-aloof, alert, rare
Spirit, conditioned to appear
At the authentic stone or seat:
O near-human spouse and poet,

Mountains, rivers, and grand storms,
Continuous profit, grand customs
(And many of them): O Lakes, Lakes!
O Sentiment upon the rocks!

The title of Hill’s poem not only refers to Dove Cottage, but also
imitates the form of Wordsworthian titles. For example, the phrase
'Elegiac Stanzas', is the sole title of one of Wordsworth’s poems, and
occurs in the titles of several others. More generally, the
circumstantiality of Hill’s subtitle recalls all those Wordsworth poems
which cite the circumstances of their composition, and it thus evokes
the tradition of the lyric of occasion and subjectivity. Having created
this expectation, Hill carefully disappoints it: the poem contains no
direct description of any visit, no personal pronouns and therefore no
explicit interplay between the poem and its occasion nor between the
poet’s sensibility and his material. Rather than culminating in an
experience that transcends verbal artifice, the poem draws attention to
the materiality of words, their ambiguity, and the yawning gaps between
them: in place of Romantic plenitude and unity it proffers an
articulation of the fragmentary. The whole poem consists of syntactical
fragments in apposition with no main verb, so that ‘the daylight between
facts; / And the daylight between acts’ is also glimpsed in the holes
between the stanzas and between the phrases, marked by rather abrupt
colons and semicolons, as if the fabric of poetry were being stretched
tight and found somewhat threadbare. Romantic transcendence, the poem
claims, is a verbal device,
A use of words; a rhetoric
As plain as spitting on a stick;

These lines acknowledge the plainness which Wordsworth consciously sought when he attempted to employ 'a selection of language really used by men', but bring to bear the sceptical viewpoint, which is somewhat unwillingly acknowledged in 'Our Word Is Our Bond':

This, then, is the direction in which impetus, or entropy, impels us. Wordsworth's 'real language of men' is, like his 'native and naked dignity of man', still a fiction, still one of those 'airy useless notions'; that Locke contrasts with 'real and substantial knowledge.' (OW, 141)

Here Hill is grimly recognizing what other people may think about poetry.

Hill's poem suggests that Wordworth himself, whether we seek his spirit in his poems or among the Lakes, is mediated by the very myth of timeless presence which surrounds his name: in the fifth stanza there is heavy irony implicit in the language ('conditioned', 'authentic', 'near-human'), while the fifth and sixth stanzas use the vocative 'O' in a parodic manner. The coinage 'near-human' is a characteristic Hillian oxymoronic pun; it simultaneously registers the myth of presence -- Wordsworth remains near to us in common humanity -- and debunks it -- what remains of him is only 'near-human'. The poet's spirit remains 'Greatly-aloof' and since those who come to Dove Cottage see artefacts which are now unused and clothes which are now unworn, their communion with the spirit of the place is primarily a communion with an absence, in which they 'bite nothings to the bone'. The peculiar character of such mementoes of a great poet resides in the non-presence of his voice. The language of Hill's poem manifests its own contingency and
participation in economic and social change by a tendency to fly apart into conflicting fields of discourse: 'Customs through which many come' are both the customary observances which lead poetry-lovers to visit Dove Cottage and also Her Majesty's Customs and Excise through which foreign tourists pass on their way to the Lake District (the word 'custom' or 'customs' occurs another three times in the poem). The phrase 'the fashions / Of intercourse between nations' is followed by a colon and a stanza break, suggesting separation rather than communication. Furthermore, under the mock grandiloquence of this phrase lurks a vulgar colloquial meaning: the ways in which nations screw each other.

By exploring the play of conflicting modes of discourse in ordinary words, registering the interaction of economics and poetry, the spiritual and the political, the grand and the bathetic, the poem records the impossibility of unmediated and unified perception outside historical contingency. The capitalised 'Sentiment' with its echoes of an Augustan confidence in the truth-value of such abstract terms, may lurk around the rocks of Grasmere, but is also in danger of shattering on the rocks of history. The phrase 'upon the rocks' also hints at the presence of intoxicating spirits. Here, then, is one alternative to the constructed self as origin of meaning: language itself is constituted as an origin for the poem: its ambiguities, clashes of meaning, harmonies, humorous collocations, gaps and evasions are an intimate and intricate paradigm of the forms of human experience.

We may contrast 'Elegiac Stanzas' with 'The Tollund Man'. In this poem Heaney converts the form of Romantic subjectivity and turns it to his own ends. Reflecting on the photograph of an ancient sacrificial victim, Heaney imagines a trip to see the corpse itself:
Some day I will go to Aarhus
To see his peat-brown head,
The mild pods of his eye-lids,
His pointed skin cap.

In the flat country nearby
Where they dug him out,
His last gruel of winter seeds
Caked in his stomach,

Naked except for
The cap, noose and girdle,
I will stand a long time.

He goes on to create a symbolic meaning for the corpse, transcending historical distance:

I could risk blasphemy,
Consecrate the cauldron bog
Our holy ground and pray
Him to make germinate

The scattered, ambushed
Flesh of labourers, [...] 

Out there in Jutland
In the old man-killing parishes
I will feel lost,
Unhappy and at home.

The phrase, 'Unhappy and at home', was used as the title for an interview between Heaney and his fellow Irish poet and academic, Seamus Deane. Presumably the phrase was felt to epitomize Heaney's condition as a poet in contemporary Ireland, a Catholic from the North then living and writing in the South. There is a certain irony here, in that it is partly Heaney's sense of himself as a Romantic poet, alienated from his society, that enables him to use his subjectivity as a metonymy for the alienation produced within that society by civil conflict. This poem is not a response to the occasion that it imagines, since it was inspired by a book, The Bog People, and since its project is the assimilation of
recent Irish history to ancient Danish ritual. But Heaney chooses to write himself into the poem as a subject, and to imagine a future visit to Aarhus so that the meaning of the poem can be centred on this imagined experience and his reaction to it. The act of going to Aarhus acquires ritual significance and the assimilation of the two cultures is validated by the way the 'I' or subject of the poem does (or might) feel.

Heaney's use of subjectivity here is a subtle and skillful one. The three stanzas beginning 'Some day I will go to Aarhus' hint at a merging of poet and victim, since syntactically it could be the poet who is 'Naked, except for / The cap, noose and girdle'. Nevertheless, the centrality of the subject in Heaney's poem indicates a crucial difference between Hill and Heaney, in spite of other affinities. Like 'Resolution and Independence' and 'Tintern Abbey', Heaney's poem points towards a perception of experience outside the socially-received interpretation of events, and the self constructed in the poem is both the location of this perception and the source of its authority. If Heaney's project is rather different, this is because he is concerned to use himself as emblematic of his race and nation, whereas the Wordsworthian self combines the unique and inspired poet with a ground of common humanity. Heaney offers us a subject who serves both as a representative of his race and as a focal point for the imaginative sympathy which the reader is invited to feel.

1.9 CONCLUSION

'Elegiac Stanzas' is a relatively early Hill poem, dated 1957 and included in For The Unfallen, the first collection. Hill avoided the lyric of occasion and subjectivity almost from the first, and has not
subsequently taken it up. The closest he has come to this form is the early poem 'God's Little Mountain' (1952, FTU). Versions of the Romantic subject appear in other early poems, such as 'Genesis' (1952, FTU), 'The Bidden Guest' (1953, FTU) or the uncollected 'Gideon at the Well'. But Hill moved rapidly to poems which exclude the subject altogether, while developing an intensity of reflexive rhetoric. When the subject reappeared in his poetry, it was in forms mediated by modernist strategies. Those poems which include an 'I' that might be identified with the poet-as-subject almost invariably combine this with some feature which works against any impression of spontaneous utterance: the 'I' corresponds to an imaginary persona, as in 'The Songbook of Sebastian Arrurruz', or there is an elaborate formal structure, as in 'Lachrimae' (1975, T). Sometimes, as in 'September Song' (1967, KL) or 'Tristia: 1891-1938: A Valediction to Osip Mandelshtam' (1964, KL), what is emphasized is the separation of the poet's sensibility from the experience which is the subject of the poem. It will be argued that these developments arise as the solution to a crisis born out of reflexive mistrust.

Impersonality can be seen as a partial displacement of the originating, active force in a poem from the poet-as-subject to the language: Hill, unlike Heaney, is not inclined to write his own subjectivity into a poem as a point of reference, preferring that language should constitute itself as a source of meaning. When he reintroduced self-ironizing and mediated versions of the subject, the reflexive techniques which he had developed were modified, but not abandoned, so that the idea of language as the source of discoveries, the resistant medium, the rock out of which the poem is hewn rather than a
transparent medium, remains crucial to Hill's style. This is closely related to his commitment to dealing with historical and communal subjects in his poetry, as can be seen from his early statement (already quoted) that language 'contains everything you want -- history, sociology, economics: it is a kind of drama of human destiny'. The technique by which Hill stages this drama in his poetry, by which he encourages his readers to see meaning in language rather than through language, is that of reflexivity, the subject of the next chapter.
Notes to Chapter 1


2. Christopher Ricks notes Hill's 'unsettled' shifting between 'I' and 'one' in a passage which, again, concerns religious faith (see Ricks, p. 323).


5. Neil Corcoran suggests that Hill learnt 'the modernist cult of impersonality, [...] most immediately [...] not from Eliot or Pound, but from the more hieratic, and more rigorously formalist, [... ] Allen Tate' ('Geoffrey Hill', in Contemporary Poets, ed. by James Vinson, 3rd edn (London: Macmillan, 1980), pp. 702-03 (p. 703)).


7. Hill responded with considerable feeling to John Haffenden's mention of the humorous element in 'The Songbook of Sebastian Arrurruz': 'It's good of you to mention the humour, since I think there's been the constant presence of humour throughout my poetry, and even a light-heartedness which I think many critics have either wilfully neglected to notice or innocently overlooked' (VP, p. 95).


12. Allan, pp. 120, 121.


18. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, ed. by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Modern Library, 1968), p. 523. Kaufmann's translation suggests a slightly more negative view of the process described than the translation quoted by Hill: 'giving a form to oneself' suggests creativity, whereas 'imposing a form on oneself' has overtones of repression.

19. The phrases quoted are from Eagleton, p. 238. The Romantic affinities of Nietzsche's doctrine here may be illustrated with reference to Wordsworth's lines concerning 'the infant babe': '...I his mind, / Even as the agent of the one great mind, / Creates, creator and receiver both' (*The Prelude* (1805), Book II, lines 237, 271-73; *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. by Jonathan Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams, Stephen Gill (New York: Norton, 1979), pp. 78-80). The phrase from Nietzsche that Hill quotes in VP ('this delight in giving a form to oneself as a piece of difficult, refractory and suffering material') also appeared as the epigraph to 'The Assissi Fragments' when it was published in *Stand* 6.1 (n.d.; appeared 1962), 6. However, the epigraph was subsequently omitted from both *King Log* and *Collected Poems*. In 'The Assissi Fragments' Hill echoes Nietzsche's idea of creature and creator: 'Creator, and creature made / Of unnatural earth'.


23. The index of *The Lords of Limit* lists twenty-seven references to Coleridge, and ten to Wordsworth (including references of several pages). The importance of Hill's 'intimate nexus with Coleridge' has been argued by Michael Hulse in his review of the *Collected Poems, A Heretic's Dream of Salvation: The Poetry of Geoffrey Hill*, *Prosopice* (Leek, Staffordshire), 19 (1986), 110-22 (p. 110)


27. I argue this view in an article to be published in *English* during 1991, 'Omnipotence and the Romantic Imagination'.


29. Rehder, p. 163.


33. Bacon's phrase also provided part of the title of the lecture, 'The Tartar's Bow and the Bow of Ulysses', the second of the four 1986 Clark Lectures given by Hill in the University of Cambridge, 4 February 1986. These lectures were entitled 'The Enemy's Country: Language, Judgment and Circumstance'. They will be published as *The Enemy's Country: Words, Contexture, and other Circumstances of Language* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991)

34. The line '(There is nothing, over the white fields, amiss)' is from the early uncollected poem 'Summer Night' (*The Isis*, 19 November 1952, p. 33). In addition to discussing Hill's use of brackets, Ricks also mentions his use of paradoxical puns, of words which simultaneously assert and revoke, instancing the word 'scatters' from 'Annunciations' (Ricks, p. 301). In his article on *Tenebrae* he examines the paradoxical consequences of Hill's use of hyphens ('Tenebrae and at-one-ment', Ricks, pp. 319-55). All of these effects in Hill's poetry may be related to the 'return' operating in a highly condensed manner.


39. 'Yet every work of art adheres to some system of morality. But if it be really a work of art, it must contain the essential criticism on the morality to which it adheres. And hence the antinomy, hence the conflict necessary to every tragic conception' (D.H. Lawrence, 'Study of Thomas Hardy', in *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays*, ed. by Bruce Steele, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 3-128 (p. 89)).

40. Interview in Leeds University Magazine (1959), quoted by Alan Page, anonymous review of *King Log*, TLS, 31 October 1968, p. 1220. The other statement which Hill quoted was from Ezra Pound: 'The poet's job is to define and yet again define. If the poet doesn't make certain horrors appear horrible who will? All the values come from our judicial sentences'. Hill was later to consider at length the problematic implications of Pound's assertion in 'Our Word is Our Bond'.

41. Maud Ellmann, p. 7.


43. For example, Donald Davie (though in an essay which he has since stated no longer represents his view), equates Tiresias with both mask and persona. What Pound called the "persona" and what Yeats called the "mask" are refinements upon Browning's model. Eliot's Prufrock and Gerontion, and his Tiresias who speaks *The Waste Land*, correspond to Pound's Mauberley, and so (though with certain important differences) do Yeats's Michael Robartes, his Ribh, and his Crazy Jane. To all three poets the device recommended itself because it helped them to [...] the effect of impersonality ('Ezra Pound's Hugh Selwyn Mauberley', p. 323). C.K. Stead argues that "the poet's mind is the mind of Tiresias, the "inclusive consciousness" that has "foresuffered all"" (Stead, p. 166).

44. Maud Ellmann, p. 92


46. See the section of Hill's interview with John Haffenden quoted in Section 1.2 (VP, p. 87).


49. Langbaum, p. 24.


51. As Maud Ellmann observes, 'most commentators have been so busy tracking its allusions down and patching up its tattered memories that they have overlooked its broken images in search of the totality it might have been' (Ellmann, pp. 91-92).

52. Corcoran, p. 702.


54. John Bayley uses the idea of transparency in a different and indeed somewhat contradictory manner in his essay 'Somewhere is Such a Kingdom: Geoffrey Hill and Contemporary Poetry' (Robinson, pp. 185-95). There he sets up a contrast between poetry that clarifies and intensifies 'a world which we are looking into' (p. 186) and poetry that invites attention to its medium. He places Hill's work in the former category, suggesting that 'in reading him we have no sense of an art other than his own: also that in re-reading him our sight goes more and more through the glass into the kingdom beyond, taking in further movements and features, in ever greater detail' (p. 195). My own view of Hill's poetry is directly contrary to this. His work is highly allusive, so that it constantly reminds us of other poetry and other arts. It also constantly draws attention to its own medium, working against the idea of the transparency of language, which Hill has rejected as 'itself an inherited and inherent opacity' (OW, p. 139).

55. Philip Larkin, XX Poems (Belfast: privately printed, 1951); John Wain, Mixed Feelings (Reading: University of Reading School of Fine Art, 1951); Donald Davie, Purity of Diction in English Verse (London: Chatto and Windus, 1952).


58. Elizabeth Jennings (no. 1, 1952), Thom Gunn (no. 16, 1953), Donald Davie (no. 19, 1954), Philip Larkin (no. 21, 1954), Amis (no. 22, 1954) and John Holloway (no. 26, 1954). Hill also edited, with Donald Hall, the 1953 Fantasy Press anthology Oxford Poetry, and edited, with Jonathan Price, the Fantasy Press anthology New Poems, Volume 2, No 2 (Winter 1953), including poems by Gunn, Jennings and Davie. In 1953 Hill read his own poem 'Gideon at the Well' on First Reading, BBC Third Programme, 1 July 1953. Morrison notes that 'First Reading has been seen as a crucial breakthrough for the Movement writers' (Morrison, p. 42).

59. Sherry sees Hill's opposition to the Movement writers in terms of their desire that language should 'have its meaning fixed by social conventions binding poet and reader' (Sherry, p. 37).


61. The word 'consolidation', as a term for the appropriate task of English poetry in the early fifties, was put into circulation by John Lehmann (see Morrison p. 44).


64. Assertions that the Movement lacked artistic coherence or was merely a publicity device have been made by a number of the poets involved, as well as by critics. These assertions are summarised and discussed by Morrison, pp. 3-5.

65. In his interview with Hermione Lee, Hill observed that 'the temporary but powerful convention which might find some of my poetry odd [...] says that poems are word-photographs [...] a lot of the poems one sees in magazines could very well be described as stills from home-movies, and they range across the whole spectrum of home-movies from "having a lovely time, wish you were here", or "this is our hotel, I have marked the bedroom with a cross", to [...] soft porn' (CF). The description 'word-photographs' presumably refers to the Martian poets, such as Craig Raine and Christopher Reid. Although Hill was speaking on this occasion of the 1980s, the tenor of his remarks is similar to his earlier comment to John Haffenden on fifties poets who 'were narrating amorous adventures and travel anecdotes in language that was the equivalent of painting-by-numbers' (VP, p. 79).


72. Crozier, p. 205.

73. Morrison, p. 7. The debt to Empson which Morrison points out is in the line 'A minute holds them, who have come to go', which, together with comparable lines by other Movement poets, he traces to Empson's 'Aubade': 'It seemed the best thing to be up and go' (Morrison p. 25).

74. 'On the Move', in New Lines, pp. 31-33 (p. 33).

75. Morrison, p. 186.


82. See, for example, 'Elegiac Stanzas' (de Selincourt, p. 275); 'Elegiac Stanzas: Suggested by a Picture of Pele Castle, in a Storm, Painted by Sir George Beaumont' (de Selincourt, p. 452).


86. 'Gideon at the Well', read by Geoffrey Hill on First Reading, BBC Third Programme, 1 July 1953, and published as 'Gideon at the Well (for Janice)', Paris Review, 4 (1953), 84-85.

87. Hill has frequently used images drawn from sculpture and quarrying to convey his experience of writing poetry; See Section 2.7.

88. See note 78.
CHAPTER 2: REFLEXIVITY

2.1 INTRODUCTION: DEFINITION OF REFLEXIVITY

It is central to the argument of this thesis that reflexivity, in various forms, is an important, indeed a defining element of Hill's poetry. The terms 'reflexivity' and 'reflexive' are used here to describe a text which comments on, or draws attention to, some feature of its own medium or its own status as a text, whether explicitly or implicitly. This is an effect which has been widely noted in contemporary literature (particularly that identified as postmodernist), although more attention has been paid to reflexivity in the novel than in poetry.

Various other terms are in use to describe this effect, including (in the adjectival form) self-reflexive, self-reflective, self-referential (or auto-referential) and auto-representational. 'Self-reflexive' is tautologous, even if appropriately so (enacting what it says), while self-reflective, self-referential and auto-representational all make assumptions about what it is that art does: that it reflects (or reflects on) the world (or itself); that it refers to the world (or itself); that it represents the world (or itself). While reference, reflection and representation are all important ways of conceiving of art (and the idea of reference will be used in defining two levels within much of Hill's poetry), it seems unhelpful to use a general term which presupposes that poetry should be always conceived, either on the referential model (that is, as reference to something) or on the mimetic model (that is, as a reflection or representation of something). The further disadvantage of 'self' prefixes in this context is that they introduce a possible
confusion between the text and the author. 'Self-reference', for example, can confuse reference by the text to itself with reference by the author to himself. Since the relationship between reflexivity and the poet's self (as evinced in the 'personal' or 'impersonal' qualities of the poetry) is a major concern of this thesis, it is undesirable to use a general term which might seem to prejudge (or confuse) this issue. Thus the term, as used here, does not necessarily imply any direct reference to a human self (although references to the poet can be one form of reference to the act of writing). 'Reflexive' and its cognate, 'reflexivity' will be used, based on the grammatical sense of reflexive, implying an agent's action upon himself, herself or itself, the agent in this case being the poem or text. The nature of the action (reflection, reference, comment, representation, subversion and so on) will be left for definition in individual cases.

'Reflexivity' is thus here used in a sense that is different from, though related to, Christopher Ricks's use of it in his essay on Marvell, where he is concerned primarily with the reflexive simile, a figure of speech 'which goes beyond saying of something that it finds its own resemblance, and says instead, more wittily and mysteriously, that something is its own resemblance'. Comparing an object to itself is different from alluding to the processes or nature of writing. Nevertheless, the 'self-inwoven' and paradoxical simile which Ricks examines is congenial to Hill's intricate wit and sense of the paradoxical, in particular the paradoxes of self and other:
Why does the air grow cold
in the region of mirrors? And who is this clown
doing his mask at the masked threshold
to selfless raptures that are all his own?
('An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture in
England: 2 Damon's Lament for his Clorinda, Yorkshire 1654';
1977, T)

Moods of the verb 'to stare,'
split selfhoods, conjugate
ice-facets from the air,
the light glazing the light.
('Two Chorale-Preludes on melodies by Paul Celan:
1 Ave Regina Coelorum'; 1978, T)

Mirrors and reflections are recurrent features of the self-inwoven
simile and, as Ricks points out, the fact of reflection offers an
explanation of the paradox of something being said to resemble itself,
since things resemble their own reflections (which both are and are not
themselves) (Ricks, 45). Hill's poetry contains many plays on the
reciprocity of self and other, sameness and difference. In the first
example above the 'selfless raptures' are raptures of that selflessness
which borders on self-congratulation. Anxiety over the proximity of
self-abnegation and self-congratulation, a recurrent concern of Hill's
poetry, is one reason why mirrors may be chilling; they give one an
opportunity to admire oneself being selfless. If the 'clown' is the poet,
then these lines show the other form of reflexivity too, commenting
sardonically on Hill's own use of masks in his poetry. But to remove the
mask is to enter a realm which is not one of unambiguous identity, but
of a paradoxical duality. The clown on the threshold would perhaps like
to be one of those 'liminal figures' identified by David Trotter in
Romantic and modernist poetry, who 'seem to have passed through the
distractions of subjectivity and come out the other side'. But he
remains at the threshold, and this threshold is itself masked, resembling the clown in its lack of self-identity. Ricks suggests a link between the self-inwoven simile and a reflexivity which involves the poem alluding to itself, noting that the poetry of Marvell's age and that of the Ulster poets of the 1960s and 1970s have a number of features in common, including both the use of the self-inwoven simile, and 'an intense self-reflexive concern with the art of poetry itself in poems' (Ricks, 54-55). The 'literary history for the self-inwoven simile' which Ricks charts (Ricks 44) is thus relevant to the question of Hill's reflexivity and its relation to his time, and provides support for the argument that this reflexivity connects Hill's poetry to contemporary literary currents, whereas other aspects of that poetry tend to set it apart. It is characteristic of Hill's ambivalent view of the imagination that a number of his metaphors suggest, less that something resembles itself, than that it consumes itself:

The line

falters, reforms, vanishes into the smoke
of its own unknowing;
(TM, 7.7-7.8)

A storm
Broods over the dry earth all day;
Consumes at night in its own downpour.
('From the Songbook of Sebastian Arrurruz', early version of 'The Songbook of Sebastian Arrurruz: 5) 5

Explicit reflexive gestures appear from time to time in Hill's poetry, often in positions of some prominence within individual poems. Each of the following four examples is from the last line of a poem, and
the fourth is the last line of a volume, and of the Collected Poems: 'At
times it seems not common to explain' ('Of Commerce and Society: IV';
1956-58, FTU); 'This is plenty. This is more than enough' ('September
Song'); "I liked that," said Offa, "sing it again" (MH: I); "in memory of
those things these words were born" (TM, 10.11). Implicit reflexivity is
more consistently present in Hill's poetry and is not created by overt
statements about language (although it can co-exist with these), but by
stylistic and technical features of the poetry which draw the attention
of the reader to qualities of language itself. These features, which
include puns, syntactical ambiguities and formal structures, promote an
experience of reading in which language is felt, not as a transparent
medium, but as a thick, resistant one, the locus of conflicts,
interlocking meanings and pressures. «

It might be argued that it is in the nature of poetry to explore
the qualities of language, and that ambiguity is a common feature of
poetic language, including that of much contemporary poetry. What
justification is there then for characterizing Hill's poetry as peculiarly
reflexive or self-aware? Certainly, it is not unique in this, and
comparable effects will be noted in both contemporary poetry and that of
earlier periods. However, in Hill's work a pervasive reflexivity is
produced by the sustained and frequent use of these devices combined
with a withdrawal from those rhetorical and generic structures (such as
the anecdotal, the narrative and the single unifying poetic voice) which
allow the reader to have a diminished awareness of the medium or
process and to read primarily for the content. Enforced slowness and
difficulty of reading also promote an analytical response. In the case of
many of Hill's poems the reader is obliged to construct an
interpretation through a process of slow brooding over words and lines and this in itself creates an intense awareness of the complex properties of his language and syntax. Insofar as we attend to the referential aspects of a work of art, to the story it tells, or to the scene or personality it evokes, we are liable to experience the medium as transparent, while in attending to the medium, we are liable rather to sense the existence of the work of art, not only as a representation of, or comment on, some part of the world, but as a system having its being within the world. The media of any art form (paint, stone, musical instruments and their vibration, language) are indicative of its participation in the material. The role of reflexivity in Hill's poetry is to promote a particular mode of reading. Much of his work requires considerable attention and familiarity before it is understood. It demands the suspension of certain habits of reading and the development of others and in that sense is a masterful and assertive poetry.

The opening stanza of 'Three Baroque Meditations' (1964, KL) provides an example of both explicit and implicit forms of reflexivity:

Do words make up the majesty  
Of man, and his justice  
Between the stones and the void?

This contains explicit reflexivity in the overt questioning of the status of language and, within this, implicit reflexivity in the form of verbal ambiguity: the phrase 'make up' (which may mean either 'constitute' or 'invent') brings the reader up against the awareness that the form of our thought is moulded by the arguably arbitrary divisions and multiple ambiguities of the language that we use. Where do we draw the line between these two distinct senses of 'making up' and how real
is that line? The combination of explicit and implicit reflexivity here means that language is what we are thinking about, and also what we are thinking with; this is the paradigmatic form of the reflexive gesture. The effect is to draw the reader's attention, during the act of reading, to the inextricable involvement of meaning and medium. Even when language is not the overt subject matter, the gesture crucially makes the reader aware of the text as being itself a part of its subject matter, in the sense that the language which it uses participates in the world's contingency and reminds the reader of that participation.

2.2 Reflexivity in Literature, Philosophy and Criticism

In both literature and philosophy, reflexivity has a long history, but has assumed a particular prominence in the twentieth century. A reflexive element is to be found in poetry of almost all eras, and this is not surprising, since we would expect poets to meditate on the nature of their vocation or activity and to do so, at times, in their poetry. There is, however, considerable variation in the forms of reflexivity, its frequency, and its degree of intensity. The highest frequency, and the greatest intensity, tend to occur in those periods and those writers most fascinated by, or most anxious about, the relation of art to experience. Such periods are likely to be those of experimentation and transition in artistic techniques, rather than those of relative stability when working within established forms is the rule. Such distinctions can, of course, only be relative, but in English poetry it is possible to identify the late sixteenth century and the seventeenth century, the Romantic period and the twentieth century. Examples of reflexive poems from these periods spring readily to mind. One might
name Sidney's 'Loving in truth, and faine in verse my love to show' (and many more of the sonnets in 'Astrophel and Stella'), Shakespeare's 'My tongue-tied muse in manners holds her still', Herbert's 'Jordan' I and II, Keats's 'If by dull rhymes our English must be chained', Wordsworth's 'Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room', Wallace Stevens's 'An Ordinary Evening in New Haven' (and many others), John Ashbery's 'Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror'.

As a number of these examples will suggest, reflexivity has a particular role in the sonnet, and Hill's extensive use of this form locates him in this tradition, as does his use of punning, paradox and plays on ideas of identity. To some extent one can distinguish a technical reflexivity, concerned with the construction of a particular type of poem (such as the examples from Keats and Wordsworth cited above), from a reflexivity that addresses wider moral and aesthetic questions about the writing of poetry. The example of 'Astrophel and Stella' indicates, however, the extent to which such wider questions may inhere in matters of technique and form, since Astrophel's engagement with the principles of Renaissance rhetoric is intricately interwoven with his concern over the relationship between loving and writing. As John Hollander's discussion of 'Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room' suggests, such an interweaving of levels continues in Wordsworth's poem, where the instances of contentment within constraints, overtly present as metaphors for the merits of the sonnet as a form, carry their own reflections on the human condition: 'In truth the prison, unto which we doom / Ourselves, no prison is'. Hollander comments as follows:
That Wordsworth's poem makes a powerful statement by invoking the paradox of 'the weight of too much liberty' is obvious. As a parable pointing to all of life, however, it remains morally potent only by retaining in its application the specific context of its trope.

The ability thus to anchor moral reflections in the specific context of the poet's act of writing is an important point in the defence of reflexivity as a literary practice.

The innovative projects of modernism gave rise to a considerable reflexive element, in such works as Ezra Pound's 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberley', T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* (especially *Burnt Norton* V and *East Coker* II), Virginia Woolf's *Between the Acts* and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. But in postmodernist literature reflexivity appears to have reached a new pitch of intensity. This is often attributed to the influence of post-structuralist literary theory, although such influence must be two-way, the reflexivity of theory reflecting, as well as promoting, the reflexivity of literature. John Hollander notes both a simplistic, and a more subtle version of such theory as it bears on reference in poetry:

> Since language can't refer to anything, poetry can't be 'about' anything except itself. Or (a bit more subtly), since language can't refer without some looseness or slippage, it is the condition of poetry to manifest that characteristic looseness more than practical discourse; and in the end, the knots and uncouplings and bendings that accompany any rigid designation are always the point of any poetic text.

These are statements about poetry in general, but it is possible to argue that such ideas about language have promoted the writing of poetry that overtly refers to itself. However, post-structuralism is predated by a concern with the role of reflexivity within analytical philosophy and mathematics. Reflexive statements which generate paradox have played
a major part in the self-scrutiny of mathematics and logic in the twentieth century. This development can be traced from the discovery, by Bertram Russell, of reflexive paradox in Cantor's set theory (as used by Frege), via the subsequent work of Russell and Whitehead, and Hilbert, culminating in the revolutionary Gödel's Theorem. This uses reflexive mathematical statements to demonstrate that 'all consistent axiomatic formulations of number theory include undecidable propositions' and thus offers a proof of the limitations of mathematical languages. The proof, which appeared in 1931, was achieved by making statements of number theory refer on two levels: as statements of number theory, and as (reflexive) statements about number theory. Since the proof demonstrates that no axiomatic system can exist rich enough to include amongst its consequences all true statements in arithmetic, it remains of great significance.

Parallels between reflexive statements used in mathematics and logic, and certain of those found in Hill's poetry, will be noted later. William Empson, with his mathematical training, may represent a crucial bridge to literary discourse. The Structure of Complex Words, published in 1951 when Hill was an undergraduate at Oxford, uses symbols borrowed from symbolic logic to analyse further the sorts of multiple ambiguities which Seven Types of Ambiguity (1930) had already brought to prominence in the minds of readers, critics and poets. Empson's analytical techniques encouraged the writing of poetry susceptible to such analysis, of which Hill's own poetry is a distinguished example. Hill's comments on the poetry scene of the early fifties indicate the importance of Empson's poetry; while he distances himself from imitators
of Empson, he does so in terms which suggest that the 'true qualities' of Empson's poetry, as he saw them, may have been more congenial to him:

It seemed to me that young poets of that time were writing poetry of one or two kinds, neither of which was my kind. They were either Empsonian in the most arid sense, writing cerebral conundrums, a travesty of Empson's real gifts; or they were narrating amorous adventures and travel anecdotes in language that was the equivalent of painting-by-numbers. (VP, 78-79)

Empson's poetry anticipates such features of Hill's own poetry as punning, intricate word-play, and use of paradox. His influence on the poets of the Movement is very apparent in poems such as Wain's 'Eighth Type of Ambiguity', which may be the sort of poem Hill had in mind in speaking of 'cerebral conundrums'. As in his relationship to Romanticism, we find Hill sharing certain aspects of the Movement ethos, while sharply distinguishing himself from others. The influences on Hill's early poetry are rich, but a significant element may have been formed by a cross-fertilization between the intricate, almost mathematical intellectual rigour of Empson, and a visionary, symbolist use of language learned from such masters as Blake. Such a combination is analogous to that which Hill praises in the Metaphysicals (another early enthusiasm), a 'fusion of intellectual strength with simple, sensuous and passionate immediacy' (VP, 80). It is not until 'The Songbook of Sebastian Arrurrrez' (1965-68) that Hill fully achieves such a fusion in his own poetry, but the quest for it is apparent from the first.

The prevalence in Hill's work of paradox, closely associated with reflexivity, has theological and philosophical sources which are considered in the next chapter. However, this prevalence may also owe
something to the critical ambience created by Eliot, Richards and Empson, and typified by Cleanth Brooks's 'The Language of Paradox' (1942), which identifies paradox as a defining characteristic of poetic language-use. Richards's attempt to emulate the precision of the exact sciences in his critical language in *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1924) helped to introduce into critical and literary discourse some elements of that logical reflexive scrutiny which was proving so important in mathematics and the philosophy of science. Also relevant to the intellectual context of the fifties, when Hill started publishing, is A.J. Ayer's *Language, Truth and Logic* (1936). Essentially an exposition and popularization of the Logical Positivism of the Vienna Circle, Ayer's book gained enormous attention and was much discussed in the fifties when Ayer gave expository lectures at Oxford based on the book. While logical positivism may seem remote from Hill's world view based on Christian modes of understanding, the rigorous scepticism which, in Hill's poetry, questions and subverts that world view from within, may owe something to the empirical and critical tradition in philosophy, and its attack on metaphysics. The confrontation which is staged in 'Our Word is Our Bond' between literary, legal and philosophical discourse brings into play ideas about language from this tradition, in particular the empiricism of Locke and the linguistic philosophy of J.L. Austin. For a writer and thinker such as Hill, as for others of his generation, philosophical challenges to Christian modes of discourse may have come as much from empiricism and logical positivism as from the Nietzschean legacy which has generated the intense scepticism of post-structuralism. Blake Morrison discusses the intellectual support provided for the Movement poets, such as Davie (in
his early work), by logical positivism and Ayer's book in particular. 19 Features of Ayer's book which are relevant to the reflexive scrutiny of Hill's poetry include his attack on the idea of 'a reality transcending the world of science and common sense', his questioning of the continuity of the human subject, his denial of the possibility of what Hill has termed an 'Archimedean viewing platform' (OW, 145), and his suggestion that grammar has led philosophers astray by encouraging them to postulate metaphysical entities. 20

The parallels between post-structuralism and certain features of Hill's work are nevertheless of some interest in the consideration of his relationship to contemporary literature and ideas. Such parallels include his insistence on the non-transparency of language (both in theory and in practice), his intense scepticism about the language of transcendence and his sense of the human subject as a problematic category. 21 While these views, in some form, are commonplaces of much contemporary theoretical and literary discourse, they take, in Hill's work, a very distinctive and far from commonplace form. This is precisely because he would seem to have reached them by a very different route, and because he combines such linguistic scepticism with an intensely moral view of the role of literature and a mode of thinking in which Christian paradigms and concepts are central. In contrast to that contemporary literature which adopts wholesale the post-structuralist view of language and meaning, Hill's work, while showing certain affinities with post-structuralism, holds these in tension with a powerful urge to a sacramental, redemptive view of poetry. 22 However, some recent work on Jacques Derrida has stressed the similarity of certain of his rhetorical manoeuvres to those of negative
theology and mysticism. The common ground between Derridean deconstruction and analytical philosophy is perhaps more readily observable. It lies in the scrutiny of language itself, regarded as non-transparent, and a scepticism about metaphysics, transcendence and the human subject.

Within a discussion of Hill's sources, a further area that should be mentioned is that of German Romantic critical theory. This theory may be mediated by Coleridge, whose prose is of particular importance to Hill. A major motivation for the reflexive self-scrutiny of Hill's poetry is his sense of the moral dangers of the imagination, and in this context he has more than once quoted Coleridge's notebook entry: 'Poetry -- excites us to artificial feelings -- makes us callous to real ones'. In addition, Hill has identified, as an exemplary aspect of Coleridge's own work, Coleridge's ability to criticize himself reflexively, to transfigure self-consciousness in the sense of awkwardness and self-doubt, into self-consciousness in the sense of 'being realistically accurate about one's identity' (PMA, 13). Here reflexivity seems to point to the poet's self, to be personal rather than impersonal. But, as has been argued, Hill's combination of reflexivity with forms of impersonality is in the direct line of the self-criticism and detachment advocated by such German Romantic theorists as Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel. Of particular relevance to Hill's poetry is one of Schlegel's 'Athenäum Fragments':

There is a kind of poetry whose essence lies in the relation between ideal and real, and which therefore, by analogy to philosophical jargon, should be called transcendental poetry. It begins as satire in the absolute difference of ideal and real, hovers in between as elegy, and ends as idyll with the absolute identity of the two. But just as we wouldn't think much of an uncritical transcendental philosophy that doesn't represent the
producer along with the product and contain at the same time within the system of transcendental thoughts a description of transcendental thinking: so too this sort of poetry should unite the transcendental raw materials and preliminaries of a theory of poetic creativity -- often met with in modern poets -- with the artistic reflection and beautiful self-mirroring that is present in Pindar, in the lyric fragments of the Greeks, in the classical elegy, and, among the moderns, in Goethe. In all its descriptions, this poetry should describe itself, and always be simultaneously poetry and the poetry of poetry. 25

This account of a range of relations between the real and the ideal is in interesting contrast to Robert Langbaum's description of Romanticism, quoted in Chapter One, where he argues that Romanticism 'conceives of the ideal as existing only in conjunction with the real' (See Section 1.6). Such a Romanticism is not available to Hill, with his intense scepticism about gestures of transcendence that may be facile. Schlegel's account, however, suggests a Romantic poetry that allows for a more problematic relation of the ideal and real. Schlegel's last phrase aptly describes Hill's poetry, which simultaneously engages with a range of historical, religious, personal and mythical subjects and maintains a reflexive awareness of itself. Schlegel's divisions of 'transcendental poetry' are also very suggestive. Much of Hill's poetry moves between the two poles of reflexive satire and reflexive idyll, without touching either absolute (while Langbaum's definition would seem to identify Romanticism exclusively with one absolute, that of reflexive idyll). Hill's poetry, when it tends towards reflexive satire, denies the possibility of achieving the ideal in words, and satirizes the commercial, exploitative and morally dubious aspects of poetry. When it tends towards reflexive idyll his poetry strives for the 'right, true poem' (CF) which bears witness to the 'lost kingdom of innocence and original justice' (VP, 88). 'Annunciations: I' is the closest Hill's work
comes to pure satire and 'The Pentecost Castle: 13' (1973, T) probably the closest to pure idyll, but neither is wholly pure. The poetry exists in an area marked out by these two absolutes of total scepticism and total faith, and therefore it is in accord with Schlegel's account that elegy should be its most characteristic and persistent mode.

Hill would seem to have made a connection between logic and analytical philosophy on the one hand, and Coleridgean theories of the imagination on the other:

Coleridge observed that 'to a youth led from his boyhood to investigate the meaning of every word and the reason of its choice and position, Logic presents itself as an old acquaintance under new names'. In post-Coleridgean chronology these 'names' include poetry and 'linguistic phenomenology'.

Hill goes on to suggest that 'both the New Criticism and Austinian verbal analysis are in this respect scions of that passage from Biographia Literaria in which Coleridge aligns "verbal precision" and "mental accuracy"' (ÖW, 150).

2.3 HILL'S POETIC OF REFLEXIVITY

While Hill himself has not used the term reflexivity of his own work, a number of the ideas which he has put forward concerning the nature and function of poetry are helpful in considering the role of reflexivity in his poetry. Four principal ideas may be identified: first, the idea of poetry as action; second, the idea of poetry as exemplary; third, the idea of language as a register; fourth, the envy of the physicality of media in other art forms. These four will be discussed in the four sections which follow. These ideas are all elements of Hill's poetic, his
theory of poetic creation as outlined in his essays and interviews, although the above list is by no means an exhaustive one. The common thread running through these ideas is a wish for poetry to be read as part of the world (in several senses), as well as a reflection of it. To describe the influence of these ideas on Hill's work in terms of a wish is, however, to simplify; what is implied is sometimes an ideal of poetry, sometimes rather a condition to which it is bound. In both cases there is a suggestion of a moral imperative, requiring the poet either to strive towards an ideal, or to recognize and acknowledge a condition. One way of interpreting the reflexive gesture in Hill's poetry is as a response to these imperatives. If poetry is claimed to be a part of the world as well as a representation of it, then 'the world' requires further definition. The following definitions are relevant: this world in a Christian sense (as opposed to the realm of the eternal); the world of immediate sensuous experience (as opposed to the abstract or conceptual); the world as the moral and political environment inhabited by the poet, in which to write is a social act (as opposed to any timeless realm of literary purity); the world as felt in the pressure of the assumptions and usages in opposition to which a poet carves out a distinctive body of work.

It is the first of these, the Christian conception of 'the world', which is primary for Hill. Such a conception is not, of course, unitary; there are currents and counter-currents involved. The Christian ethic may manifest itself in a rejection of the world and a desire for transcendence, but against this runs the imperative of recognizing an inescapably fallen present existence. Edward Said has commented on the 'worldliness' of texts, arguing that
texts are worldly, to some degree they are events, and, even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life, and of course, the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted. 

Hill's poems, like other reflexive texts, manifest this participation in the worldly rather than appearing to deny it. But rather than manifesting it primarily within the context of a Marxist or materialist view of history, according to which denial would be a form of false-consciousness, they manifest it within a Christian framework, in which the implications of worldliness are rather different. In this framework, the worldliness of the text means its participation in the consequences of the Fall of Man. Hill's texts do not simply condemn themselves outright as sinful (a virtually unsustainable position), though at certain points they approach such a total self-rebuke. Rather, they display an understanding of their own nature that centres on the Christian paradigms of Fall, Incarnation and Redemption. The sense of the poem as participating in the world of immediate sensuous experience is figured by the Incarnation; the physicality of Hill's poetry is tinged by the redemptive possibilities of the Incarnation, but also by the suffering of the Passion.

2.4 POETRY AS ACTION

The first of the four ideas put forward in Hill's prose writings, and exemplified in his poetry, is that of poetry as action: the poet is doing something rather than saying something, and moral issues concerning poetry may be reassessed in this light. Hence Hill's essay 'Our Word is our Bond' takes up J.L. Austin's examination of 'performative utterances', that is, utterances which are themselves the performance of some act
(not necessarily complete) rather than (or as well as) a report or description of such a performance. The status of an utterance as an act means that it cannot be characterized as true or false but rather as felicitous or infelicitous, according to whether the circumstances allow the action to succeed (Hill understandably takes exception to Austin's casual exclusion of poetry from 'seriously meant' utterances) (OW, 138-39). Reflexivity is a necessary feature of such an utterance, which must have the ability to 'refer to a reality that it [the utterance] creates itself, because it is stated under circumstances which make it into an act'. Hill uses performative utterances in his poetry in a rather special sense, more ambivalent than their normal use in ritual, commands and so on, though associated with ritualistic and commanding elements in the poetry.

A good example of the role of the performative is the first of two 'Soliloquies': 'The Stone Man' (1965, KL):
THE STONE MAN

To Charles Causley

Recall, now, the omens of childhood:
The nettle-clump and rank elder-tree;
The stones waiting in the mason's yard:

Half-recognized kingdom of the dead:
A deeper landscape lit by distant
Flashings from their journey. At nightfall

My father scuffed clay into the house.
He set his boots on the bleak iron
Of the hearth; ate, drank, unbuckled, slept.

I leaned to the lamp; the pallid moths
Clipped its glass, made an autumnal sound.
Words clawed my mind as though they had smelt

Revelation's flesh . . . So, with an ease
That is dreadful, I summon all back.
The sun bellows over its parched swarms.

The opening instruction to recall is at the same time an act of recalling, since the instruction is self-addressed. The poem explores the power and impotence of words as instruments of recall, considering what can be recalled and what is lost in the process. One type of infelicity which Austin identifies as liable to vitiate performatives is that in which the action is professed but hollow, in that the speaker lacks the necessary feelings, thoughts or intentions which should accompany the words. In Austin's positivistic world this is a relatively straightforward matter of correspondence between the external (words) and the internal (feelings, thoughts, intentions). In the poem, the word 'recall' registers a problematic interaction of internal and external. As an ideal internal act, recalling brings back the past so that it is present to the mind, but to accomplish this verbally is to re-call (to name anew) the experiences and thus to risk recalling (revoking) their
genuine pastness. This may be why the verbal felicity ('ease') with which 'I summon all back' is experienced as 'dreadful'. As Peter Robinson notes, 'summon' also suggests the legal power of summons, with a possible allusion to the fact that Hill's father was a policeman (Robinson, x). Such legal procedures are paradigmatic instances of the performative, and much beloved of Austin. Here the commanding quality of the poem in relation to the past inspires dread or reverence (using the older sense of dreadful), like a legal summons, but is undermined by a 'dreadful' hollowness or sense of loss.

The omens of childhood are physical presences: 'The nettle-clump and rank elder-tree', and, at the poem's centre, the archetypal simplicity of the father's physical actions conveyed in a sequence of words built around plosive consonants, so that the audible release of air in the enunciation suggests the corporeal and palpable: 'ate, drank, unbuckled, slept'. Set against the tangible immediacy of this memory of the father as physical presence is the awareness that past, present and future interact continuously in the field of consciousness. Childhood experiences were 'omens' of the future while the present is a dialogue with an internal kingdom of the dead parents (metonymically identified with the yard full of tombstones which is part of that kingdom of memory). The kingdom is 'half-recognized' both because its vividness is familiar but its absence strange, and because its sovereignty in the mind is only half-acknowledged (the political meaning of 'recognize' working with the metaphor of a kingdom so that the dominion of the past is half acknowledged by the present consciousness). A mental landscape lies 'deeper' beneath the physical landscape which serves to call it up, and is illuminated by memory, represented as a light (perhaps a lantern,
perhaps lightning), associated with the travels of the dead in the
underworld or in the mind of the poet. Already, as a child, that mind
was possessed ('clawed') by words which, predatory, followed the scent
of corporeal epiphany. 'Smelt' also suggests (by association, though not
grammatically), the process of a blast furnace as a metaphor for the
action of words: melting physical experience to extract the metal of its
revelation. Here Hill's intense anxiety about the moral status of verbal
memorialization of the dead widens into a deep ambivalence about the
power of words. Forming and structuring experience, subsequently
reshaping it, constantly manipulating something beyond their grasp, they
can seem to extract the essence in a technical process (poetic craft) or
savagely to pursue the tempting smell of physical being.

The poem ends in a surrealistc and reflexive image of poetic
creation. The father, associated with clay and the bleak hearth
(suggesting an unlighted fire) and with basic physical acts, is
implicitly contrasted with the fiery creative action of poetry. The
double connotations of 'smelt' (prominently placed at the end of the
line) alert the reader to the association of 'bellows' (in the last line)
with fire. This is not strictly a double-meaning, being grammatically
inadmissible, but rather a verbal association which enriches the
imagistic suggestiveness of the poem. The subliminal image of the
furnace suggested by the lamp, by the possibly immolated moths, by
'smelt', by 'bellows' and by 'parched', suggests one of Yeats's images for
the transformative power of poetry, the 'flames that no faggot feeds'.

The poems of Charles Causley, the dedicatee of 'The Stone Man',
contain frequent images of the sun as an observer of man's fate,
sometimes indifferent, sometimes anthropomorphized and engaged with
human activities and perceptions. Hill's title is borrowed from a short prose account, written by Causley, of the life of Burnard, the Cornish sculptor. In his account, Causley describes Burnard's life as a 'demonstration of the loneliness that is the essential condition of all artistic creation' and it is to this aspect in particular that Hill's poem responds. Causley has also written a poem about Burnard's life, entitled 'A Short Life of Nevil Northey Burnard: Cornish Sculptor, 1818-1878'. Causley's poem contains the line: 'He turned, as Midas, men to stone, then gold' and describes the sculptor as one who

Rubbed with sure hands the blinded eyes of day,
And through the seasons of the talking sun
Walked, calm as God, the fields of Altarnun.

The anthropomorphism of 'the talking sun' may have influenced the similar effect of Hill's phrase 'the sun bellows'.

Hill associates his own recalling of childhood with Causley's memorializing of the childhood and life of Burnard. Another sense of the line 'Half-recognized kingdom of the dead' is that Hill half recognized the world of Causley's poem from his own experience. What Hill and Burnard share seems to be that painful, mystical intensity of childhood experience which each turned into dedicated creativity. Causley has written poems which movingly recall childhood and the lives of members of his family, and he shares with Hill a strain of Christian diction and imagery. He participates in Hill's poem as one who has considered what it is to recall the past and the dead (though stylistically there is little similarity between the two poets). The ambivalence of this activity is contained in the ambiguities of Burnard's activity of turning men to stone and to gold: the stone of
death, the gold of art. The father in 'The Stone Man' has a stone-like physical presence and strength, but the poem transforms him into a dead image (a poem, a stone sculpture) even as it attempts to summon up his living quality. Burnard, in Causley's poem, 'Leaned on the stiff light, hacked childhood away'. Hill's phrase 'leaned to the lamp' may allude to this line. Does Hill celebrate the power of his art to shape a lasting image out of the past, or is he 'with an ease / That is dreadful' hacking away at his childhood, creating the artefact by detaching memory from its living context? This is, for Hill, a relatively personal poem, not in the sense that it is necessarily autobiographical (although an element of this seems likely), but in the sense that its reflexivity implicates the poem's human subject. Reflection on the action of the poem involves reflection on the speaker's action of recalling. Seamus Heaney's early poem 'Digging' is comparable in theme and in reflexivity, evoking the expert digging of the poet's father and grandfather, and concluding:

But I've no spade to follow men like them.
Between my finger and my thumb
The squat pen rests.
I'll dig with it. 33

The final line alludes to the digging (into memory) in which he has been engaged and digging is a metaphor for writing. It is, however, expressed as an intention rather than as a performative. Heaney's poem is, characteristically, more affirmative about the act of writing than Hill's, finding metaphorical parallels which help to bridge the gap between the poet's activity and the apparently very different work of the father. In 'The Stone Man', the structure of imagery places stone and clay (associated with the father) in opposition to the smelting fire of words
(associated with the poet), suggesting rather an estrangement. If Hill's poem, like Heaney's, does reflect on his own father, it does so far more obliquely, interposing the ambiguous figure of Burnard (an artist but, unlike the poet, a physical labourer).

In 'The Stone Man' the performative utterance is reflexive because the poem is an act of recalling but is also 'about' recalling. It is therefore 'about' itself but not because of any excessively self-conscious literary hermeticism. Hill's art is reflexive, not primarily because he writes poetry about poetry (though he does this on occasion) but because, whatever the subject, the fact that what he is doing is writing a poem, is never effaced but is thought through in the poem. The power of the performative utterance (it can 'refer to a reality that it creates itself') is one of the triumphs of poetry, but when applied to memories and the memorialization of the dead, it can also be experienced as destructive. Creating its own reality, the poetic utterance may fail to attach to itself that reality of the past which it seeks: recalling may be revocation.

2.5 POETRY AS EXEMPLARY

Following on from the idea of poetry as action is the idea of poetry as exemplary in both a positive and a negative sense: 'Poetry is responsible. It's a form of responsible behaviour, not a directive. It is an exemplary exercise' (VP, 99). The positive sense lies in the fact that the poet's engagement with language can exhibit an exemplary rigour, associated with accuracy, prolonged and exacting thought, and self-critical awareness. The negative sense arises out of that self-critical scrutiny, and involves the fear that language cannot be
definitively redeemed, the reflexive acknowledgement that the poem must
illustrate the liabilities and constraints of language. As Hill implies
in the opening paragraphs of 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"', his
remarkable prose style reflects his view that the writer has an
obligation to be exemplary in a positive sense (cautious, scrupulous,
oblique, continually aware of nuances, wary of misunderstanding) and his
sense of his own writing as exemplary in the negative sense
(constrained, attacked by the liabilities of the medium):

Behind the façade of challenge is the real challenge: that of
resisting the attraction of terminology itself, a power at once
supportive and coercive. [...] That it [my thesis] is here
presented garnished and groaning with obliquities is due less to
a simple sensuous and passionate wilfulness than to an obvious
yet crucial fact. Language, the element in which a poet works,
is also the medium through which judgments upon his work are
made. (PMA, 1-2)

The observations which Hill wishes to make concerning the negative
('Menace') and positive ('Atonement') valencies of the exemplary must be
made in language which manifests these features itself, and in a text
which manifests its awareness of these features in its own language.
This requires frequent gestures of reflexivity with which the text
attempts to place itself in terms of the rhetorical manoeuvres which it
uses and the patterns of inter-textuality which it establishes: 'My title
may well strike you as exemplary in fashion [...] it presents little more
than a conflation of two modernist clichés' (PMA, 1); 'a debate of this
nature is committed to a form of mimesis' (PMA, 3); 'It is perhaps
fitting that a debate such as this should convey an apprehension of its
own trespass' (PMA, 14). The combination of negative and positive
valencies of the exemplary is registered in the following images of
sickness or imprisonment from this essay, and from 'Our Word is Our Bond':

my thesis is as much symptomatic as diagnostic, [...] it is itself a part of that which it describes. (PMA, 15)

we are not only active but passive too, exhibiting the symptom at the very moment that we diagnose the condition. (OW, 152)

As Coleridge said, 'our chains rattle, even while we are complaining of them'. (OW, 142)

These three statements occur in different contexts and concern different (though related) subjects, but they share not only a strain of imagery but a reflexive form. The first refers to the central thesis of Hill's essay 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"':

I am suggesting that it is at the heart of this 'heaviness' that poetry must do its atoning work, this heaviness which is simultaneously the 'density' of language and the 'specific gravity of human nature'. There is perhaps no need for me to point out that my thesis is as much symptomatic as diagnostic [...] (PMA, 15)

It is in such acknowledgements of the implicating consequences of using language that Hill's rhetorical manoeuvres parallel those of deconstructive thinkers, in the attempt simultaneously to work within a discursive field and reflexively transform it. Hilary Lawson attributes the prominence of reflexive concerns in contemporary thought to the linguistic-centred nature of modern philosophy.

Reflexivity, as a turning back on oneself, a form of self-awareness, has been part of philosophy from its inception, but reflexive questions have been given their special force in consequence of the recognition of the central role played by language, theory, sign and text. Our concepts are no longer regarded as transparent -- either in reflecting the world or in conveying ideas. As a result all our claims about language and the world -- and implicitly all our claims in general -- are reflexive in a manner which cannot be avoided. For to recognize
the importance of language is to do so within language. To argue that the character of the world is in part due to the concepts employed, is to employ those concepts. To insist that we are confined by the limitations of our own problematic, is to be confined within those very limits. 36

This sense of being reconfined in the limitations of language and thought in the very act of acknowledging them is figured in Hill's metaphor of simultaneous diagnosis and exhibition of symptoms, but also in Coleridge's metaphor of language as chains, which implies that to complain of limits is to make those limits audible, but not to escape from them. In a comparable manner, Derrida asserts that 'the writer writes in a language and in a logic whose proper system, laws and life his discourse by definition cannot dominate absolutely. He uses them only by letting himself, after a fashion and up to a point, be governed by the system'. 37 This statement parallels the second of the Hill passages quoted above ('we are not only active but passive too [...]'). Hill is writing about 'thinking experience', but particularly in relation to the writer's engagement with language. He is drawing together apparently disparate forms of involvement, constraint, sickness, participation. Donne's observation that in the case of intemperance and licentiousness 'ourselves are in the plot, and wee are not onely passive, but active, too, to our owne destruction' is inverted and extended beyond such recognized human weaknesses to a general human condition in which the poet is particularly implicated because 'vocationally compromised' by his commitment to language (OW, 152-53). 38 Hill then equates Donne's sense of being 'in the plot' with what T.H. Green calls being 'within the process'. Hill is here referring back to his earlier quotation of Green's philosophical acknowledgement of involvement and constraint, when Green
argues that 'to place ourselves "outside the process by which our knowledge is developed" is to conceive of an untenable "ecstasy", whereas to recognize our being within the process is to accept our true condition' (OV, 149). Hill's sources and references offer further evidence that, as Lawson acknowledges, such linguistic self-awareness is by no means a prerogative of the twentieth century.

While noting parallels between Hill's thought and that of Derrida, a crucial distinction must be recognised. Deconstructive thinking tends to celebrate as an absolute the impossibility of any truth beyond textuality. For Hill, the condition of being trapped within language is indicative of a fallen world, and is therefore redolent of loss, and of longing for a transcendence of language. If this longing must remain unfulfilled, this is not in order to assert the fallacy of transcendence as an idea, but to protect it from false transcendence. Derrida's diction in the passage quoted above reflects the quasi-scientific manner of his structuralist forbears ('the system'); Hill's strategy in 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"' is to attempt to trace a form beneath startlingly various modes of discourse and subject matters (licentiousness, epistemology and poetry). In spite of his wariness about synthesis, Hill brings to this matter a unifying discursive impetus which reflects a theological sense of the condition of Man and of the poet. For Hill the archetype or paradigm of this exemplary, symptomatic involvement (of poet with language, language with 'the world', thought with its conditions and genesis) is the Fall of Man. He does not resolve this multiplicity into simply an assertion of sinfulness, but finds in Christian statements of the condition of sin the most powerful images of this structure of self-awareness. In 'Our
Word Is Our Bond' he goes on from the image of sickness quoted above to define the writer's position in such terms and in doing so illuminates the link between the reflexive gesture and the idea of the exemplary:

Nygren says that 'in Augustine, the sinful soul is "bent down" to earth; in Luther it is "bent upon itself"'. Whether we ourselves cling to the Augustinian or to the Lutheran emphasis our conclusion must be that the language a writer uses and the writer who uses a language are inextricably involved and implicated. If Hopkins's words are 'heavy bodies' they are 'bent down to earth'; if the creative spirit is necessarily 'bent upon itself' then its deepest intuitions are ineluctably compounded with its most inveterate stubbornness and incapacity. (OV, 152-53)

The exemplary nature of the text, its participation in the world ('bent down to earth') parallels the reflexivity of the creative process ('bent upon itself'). 'Bent' suggests both distortion and intention or concentration, so that again the dual valency of the exemplary is present. For Hill, the power of the reflexive gesture is its fidelity to a conception of the conditions of human experience and knowledge. This conception is not confined to a particular set of terms but is rather a form, gesture or movement which may be traced in various systems of ideas (the description of that movement in terms of a 'bending down' associates it with that discursive movement of the 'return' which has been discussed). The attempt to trace the various manifestations of this form is presumably the rationale of some of the giddying leaps between diverse areas and styles of thought in the prose essays.

When Hill describes poetry as an 'exemplary exercise' the word exemplary needs to be read with its dual sense in mind: the constraints of language are an example of the form of a wider human condition; the
poet's attempt to confront these constraints should be 'exemplary' in its rigour. The importance of the medium needs to be re-emphasized here. It is by means of an intense involvement with the technical problems of mastering this medium that the poet avoids the untenable 'ecstasy' of apparent mastery, objectivity, externality; what in post-structuralist terms would be the fallacy of an assumed meta-language. Coleridge's phrase, quoted in 'Our Word Is Our Bond' ('Our chains rattle, even while we are complaining of them', OW, 142) refers in its original context in *Biographia Literaria* to the corruption and debasement of language 'by the affectations and misappropriations, which promiscuous authorship, and reading [...] disproportionally most conversant with the compositions of the day, have rendered general'. "The medium, vulnerable to all the vicissitudes of public life, is that which chains the poet. The corollary is that while we rattle our chains, we will not forget that they are there and the play of meaning which the poet creates by means of puns, ambiguities and semantic collisions is precisely this rattling of the chains of language. Thus the medium is a sign of the poem's involvement with this world. More particularly, this is an involvement with the world's contingency, in philosophical terms, and with the world's sinfulness, in Christian theological terms. If this world is regarded as contingent and fallen, then reflexive language acknowledges the poem's complicity with these conditions and represents a form of askesis, consisting in self-scrutiny. Here Hill's poetic draws on theological sources (such as the work of Karl Barth) and on Christian traditions of monitoring the self.
2.6 LANGUAGE AS REGISTER

The third sense in which Hill seeks to emphasize the 'worldliness' of language is defined by the fact that language is the medium of a vast range of human activities, so that its structure and development are intimately involved with the structure and development of society. It shapes and is shaped by social attitudes and assumptions, and it acts as a register of historical process. Hill exploits these qualities by means of a sensitivity to the nuances of etymology and their cultural significance, and by an ability to make different modes of speech or writing resonate with each other. A frequent effect in the poetry is that of high seriousness humorously undercut by punning colloquial meanings. In the second line of "Annunciations: 2", the commercial diction of the pawnshop chimes uneasily with the language of Christian devotion:

O Love, subject of the mere diurnal grind,
Forever being pledged to be redeemed,
Expose yourself for charity;

A more contemporary colloquial undertone is heard in 'grind' and 'Expose yourself'. Sententious moral injunction is threatened by high comedy in doubtful taste (Lady Godiva perhaps providing the link in 'Expose yourself for charity'). The poet discovers these ambiguities and clashes in the language and uses his craft to draw out their significance. This sense of the partial displacement of the origin of meaning from the poet's subjectivity to the language as a store-house of communal human experience is associated with the quality of impersonality in Hill's poetry. To some extent this conception of language is common to contemporary poets concerned with our collective relation to the past.
(we may compare, for example, Seamus Heaney's idea of the 'wordhoard'). The sense of etymology and semantic structure as a hoard of what Coleridge calls 'reversionary wealth' also marks Hill's affinity with Coleridge. This displacement is less absolute than the dissolution of the subject advocated by Roland Barthes or Michel Foucault; what is perceived is an interplay of individual subjectivity, communal patterns of experience, and language, in which language is both expressive of and constitutive of the former two entities.

In Mercian Hymns Hill discovered a way of writing about his own childhood while avoiding the confessional mode which he dislikes, precisely by means of a radical rethinking of the relations of language, history and self. Mutuality is crucial to this rethinking; the sequence attempts to go beyond the dualisms of origin and utterance, perceiver and perceived. For example, Offa's reign and Hill's childhood co-exist in the sequence, neither being subordinated as metaphor for the other. Both Hill and Offa have a place in the sequence as a voice, but neither as its origin; they share in a linguistic continuum. This mutuality is established from the first hymn:

King of the perennial holly-groves, the riven sandstone: overlord of the M5: architect of the historic rampart and ditch, the citadel at Tamworth, the summer hermitage in Holy Cross: guardian of the Welsh Bridge and the Iron Bridge: contractor to the desirable new estates: saltmaster: money-changer: commissioner for oaths: martyrrologist: the friend of Charlemagne.

'I liked that,' said Offa, 'sing it again.' (MH: I)

Offa speaks in the hymn, but speaks about it. Like the poet, he is listening to a song about himself. Hill is discovering the sources of
his self in *Mercian Hymns* by listening to the words he writes. What he
hears includes the grandiose and the comic:

I was invested in mother-earth, the crypt of roots
and endings. Child's-play. I abode there, bided my
time: where the mole

shouldered the clogged wheel, his gold solidus; where
dry-dust badgers thronged the Roman flues, the
long-unlooked-for mansions of our tribe (MH: IV)

Hill's child self was an investment made by his parents or his
country, to mature amongst chthonic influences into a poet; in his
childhood games he invested himself with the dignity of Offa, imagined
as the spirit of the region; more simply, he had half-buried himself, and
was covered in earth. But the games were part of the maturing, and
getting himself dirty was part of his imaginative identification with
local history. In the word 'investment', Hill discovers a rich nugget of
meanings. Hill's reflexivity is thus diametrically opposed to that form
proposed by Oscar Wilde when he wrote that 'Art never expresses
anything but itself [...] the only history that it preserves for us is the
history of its own progress'. Yet Wilde also wrote that 'so far from
being the creation of its time, it is usually in direct opposition to it'
and, as Hill's practice suggests, being in opposition to one's time may
be a way of charting it. 45

2.7 LANGUAGE AND PHYSICALITY

The fourth sense in which the poem may be said to be worldly is in the
physicality of language, a quality which many critics have noted in
Hill's poetry. This impression of Hill's language as corporeal is
achieved by the powerful evocation of the physical in description and in
metaphor, by the condensation of meaning and by aural effects such as consonance. Condensed meaning and punning create semantic thickness while certain combinations of sounds make the reader aware of the movements of mouth and vocal chords required to speak the poetry. All of these effects may be observed in the following lines from 'Locust Songs' (1961, KL):

This must be our reward:
To smell God writhing over the rich scene.
Gluttons for wrath, we stomach our reward.

One of Hill's best known lines is from 'Genesis': 'There is no bloodless myth will hold'. The muscular quality of this early line may be illustrated by comparison with a rather similar statement in a poem by Terence Tiller, entitled 'Substitutes': 'No myth will ever come to any good: / but biting the wasp's apple; being blood'. Tiller's lines seem diffuse by comparison, and this is particularly because the verbs, 'come to' and 'being', are not, unlike Hill's 'hold', verbs of physical action. In this concern to reinscribe physicality in poetry Hill participates in a reaction against the cool, cerebral quality of the Movement, a reaction he shares with Hughes and Heaney. In these three fundamentally very different poets there is an aspiration towards the metaphysical combined with a strong attachment to the physical. This leads each to confront the spiritual with the facts of physical death and decay, as Hill does in 'Funeral Music' and 'Two Formal Elegies: for the Jews in Europe', as Heaney does in his bog poems, and in 'Station Island', and as Hughes does in 'The Knight'.

When Hill has drawn comparisons between poetry and the other arts he has frequently done so in order to stress the importance of the
medium, but has also expressed a sense that poetry is peculiarly
estranged from its medium. No doubt this is partly because he regards
language as corrupted by misuse and specious rhetoric. In 'Poetry as
"Menace" and "Atonement"' he quotes Auden's remark that 'it is both the
glory and the shame of poetry that its medium is not its private
property' (PMA, 15). In the same essay Hill uses an image drawn from
sculpture to express the negative liabilities, the constraints and
contaminations of language:

Language, the element in which a poet works, is also the medium
through which judgments upon his work are made. That
commonplace image, founded upon the unfinished statues of
Michaelangelo, 'mighty figures straining to free themselves from
the imprisoning marble', has never struck me as being an ideal
image for sculpture itself; it seems more to embody the nature
and condition of those arts which are composed of words. The
arts which use language are the most impure of arts [...] however much a poem is shaped and finished, it remains to some
extent within the 'imprisoning marble' of a quotidian
shapelessness and imperfection. (PMA, 2)

But Hill has also used the analogy of sculpture and the quarrying
process which it involves to draw attention to language as a place of
discovery for the poet, who is thus provided with an impersonal
technical resource which counterbalances the elements of personal
content:

If my grandmother is in that twenty-fifth hymn, her presence is
felt in it, I think, in virtually the same way that Henry Moore's
mother is a presence in those Madonna figures [...] it is not a
naturalistic portrayal of my grandmother and in the course of
writing that hymn [...] I was equally interested in seeing what I
could quarry out of the body of language. (CF)

By associating the poet's medium with the more obviously material
medium of the sculptor Hill seeks to emancipate the poet from the
imitative fallacy. The sculptor creates the sculpture, but he does not create the stone, and may conceive of himself as releasing its potentialities. This includes both the fanciful but engaging idea that the statue is already hidden inside the block, and the more technical point that the texture, shape and grain of the stone play an active part in the shaping process. The poet is finding the poems which potentially exist in the language and for Hill etymology, ambiguity and the previous use of language (both in common life and in literary tradition) are the grain and texture. His art sometimes requires him to go against the grain, and this involves strenuous work, as he has stressed in interview, inadvertently miming the difficulty as he stumbles over his words: 'I write poems by moving painfully, slowly, forwardly inch -- I go forward inch by inch, chiselling away at the face of the rock, so to speak' (CF).

Finally, Hill has also expressed his envy of the composer in terms which suggest the importance for him of the physicality and actuality of the medium, commenting that "those signs [musical notation] are translated into the immediate, sensuous configurations of sound, the actual iconic presence of brazen instrument and shaken air, in a way that poetry can only envy" (VP, 91). Again poetry is felt to be at a disadvantage, to be defined by an absence or lack of continuity with the physical world. The denseness and musicality of Hill's poetry contend against this lack.

2.8 CONCLUSION

The main body of Geoffrey Hill's poetry to date, in the form which he has chosen to give it in his Collected Poems, begins and ends with
forms of reflexivity. To open such a volume with a poem entitled 'Genesis' is to equip the poetry with a myth concerning the origin of the imagination; the first poem is not only the beginning, but is about beginnings. Harold Bloom, who notes that 'Genesis' is 'a perfect "first" poem', also describes it as, in Blakean manner, regarding 'the Creation and the Fall' as 'the same event'. The reflexivity which signifies the fallen state of the poem's words is thus co-extensive with the oeuvre, enacting the view presented in 'Genesis' that the creative imagination falls as it creates. As Hill tells us in the 'Notes and Acknowledgements' to the Collected Poems, he placed the 'Hymns to Our Lady of Chartres' (1985, CP) out of chronological sequence in order that the book should conclude with The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy, and with its last line: "in memory of those things these words were born". Again the poetry refers to its origins, summarizing two of its own central features: a commemorative, memorializing relationship to its subject matter, and a concern with the correspondences and the estrangements between words and actions.
Notes to Chapter 2


2. Hutcheon uses all of these terms and more and discusses the question of terminology (pp. 1-2).

3. 'Andrew Marvell: "Its Own Resemblance"', Ricks, pp. 34-59 (p. 34).


5. 'From the Songbook of Sebastian Arrurruz', TLS, 29 July 1965, p. 648 (early version of 'The Songbook of Sebastian Arrurruz: 5').

6. Hill has commented that the poet 'is really juggling with tremendous conflicting forces in a very tiny unit' (CF) and has quoted with approval Jon Silkin's view that 'the minute particulars of word-choice may be ultimately traceable to "enormous social forces"' ('Gurney's "Hobby"', F.W. Bateson Memorial Lecture delivered 15 February 1984, *Essays in Criticism*, 34 (1984), 97-128 (p. 106)).

7. Ricks, in 'Andrew Marvell', limits the full flowering of the reflexive or self-inwoven simile to the late seventeenth century and the Ulster poets of the 1960s and since. My own category of the reflexive is clearly a wider one, but as a feature of poetry reaches its peak of intensity in the seventeenth century, and the postmodern period.

9. Hollander, p. 89. Hollander's discussion of reflexive sonnets (pp. 86-104) includes 'Nuns fret not at their convent's narrow room' and 'If by dull rhymes' (pp. 86-91, 93-96).


11. This argument would be unlikely to be acceptable to a post-structuralist theorist, however, since it reads the qualities of an author's language in terms of the influence of ideas on his work, a procedure to which the post-structuralist view of language is not amenable.


17. While Richards distinguishes between the scientific and emotive use of language, associating poetry with the latter, he attempts to produce critical discourse which manifests the former. See Principles of Literary Criticism (1924; 2nd edn, 1926; rpt. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), pp. vii-ix, 206-14.

18. Morrison notes that logical positivism 'was enjoying such prestige in the early 1950s that it was spoken of as "the official English philosophy of the time"' (p. 158). Wallace Stevens recorded in 1948 that 'during the last few months, the New Statesman of London has been publishing letters growing out of a letter sent to it by a visitor to Oxford, who reported that Professor Ayer's book [Language, Truth and Logic] had "acquired almost the status of a philosophic Bible"' ("Imagination as Value", rpt. in The Necessary Angel (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), pp. 131-156 (p. 138)).


21. 'The very idea of a "transparent" verbal medium is itself an inherited and inherent opacity' (GW, p. 139).
22. Knottenbelt is thus only partially right to describe *The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy* as a 'post-modernist, even a post-structuralist poem' [...] calling up associations with the post-structuralist novel of the kind being written by Umberto Eco' (Knottenbelt, p. 358). Hill's poem is postmodernist in its view of history, but seeks for a reconciliation of words and things, where post-structuralism asserts their separation (see Sections 7.6 and 7.7).


29. Austin, p. 22.

30. The same complex of meaning occurs in 'Picture of a Nativity' (1956, FTU): 'an attitude / Recalling the dead'.

31. OED, 'dreadful'.


40. Hill has shown no overt interest in post-structuralism, but there is a possible common influence in Nietzsche (see Section 1.2).


43. See *Biographia Literaria*, pp. 51-52, note 3.


CHAPTER 3: THE CRISIS OF HILL'S EARLY POETRY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this and the following chapters I trace a line of development in Hill's poetry in terms of the interaction between the two features which have been identified: reflexivity and impersonality.

From the start of his career Hill has been preoccupied with the nature and value of the poetic imagination, of which he has taken an ambivalent view. His mode of thought has been shaped by Christian archetypes, but these have been held in tension with a strong sense of exclusion from any assured faith. He has also exhibited a rigorous awareness of the necessary ineffability of the transcendent. At times this awareness seems to amount to a sceptical denial of the very possibility of the transcendent; at other times it suggests rather a wish to protect the purity of the transcendent from contamination and appropriation in language. All of these features of his work are conducive to paradox. Hill's ambivalence about the moral status of the imagination produces a poetry sceptical about its own value and therefore liable to self-revocation. His highly complex relationship to Christian belief has involved him in drawing on traditions of devotional rhetoric that employ paradox in the attempt to speak of what is beyond speech. His own scepticism about such attempts has tended to add further paradox to his manner of employing such rhetoric.

In Hill's earliest collected poems paradox is localised, and is contained within limiting frameworks. An example is 'Genesis', in which the working of the imagination is conceptualized through a form of
Christian mythopoesis, and paradox has a primarily symbolic force ('The phoenix burns as cold as frost'). In 'God's Little Mountain' and 'The Bidden Guest' a first-person narrator tells of the inaccessibility of religious experience, and paradox is an aspect of his subjective experience. However, during the second half of the fifties and the first half of the sixties, Hill developed a style in which impersonality is achieved by the exclusion of the poet-as-subject. The element of narrative in the early poems also disappears, and in place of these structures there is an interplay between multiple meanings in highly condensed language. Both individual words and syntactical relations are in many cases highly ambiguous. Paradox becomes more frequent, and its effects more radical. The preoccupation with the status of the imagination manifests itself in reflexivity, and this reflexivity both generates, and is generated by, paradox. Such paradox is presented, in Hill's poetry of this period, not as a feature of a particular subjective experience, but as a pervasive uncertainty and tension. Logical paradox is accompanied by moral distaste, and the latter becomes most extreme where the subject matter of the poetry is death, suffering and human cruelty. The combination of paradox and distaste provokes a double crisis in the poetry: a crisis of meaning, in that the poetry approaches total self-revocation; and a moral crisis, in that it approaches equally close to self-condemnation. The poetry of this crisis is of great originality and power, though it is also formidably opaque. But the scepticism and disgust which it contains would seem to offer its author little possibility other than the abandonment of poetry. This chapter traces the development of Hill's work up to the climax of this crisis, which is also the point at which a way forward is discovered.
3.2 THE MYTH OF THE IMAGINATION: 'GENESIS'

'Genesis' (1952, FTU), which stands at the beginning of Hill's Collected Poems, is frequently interpreted as an account of Hill's own beginnings as a poet. Like 'God's Little Mountain' (1952, FTU) and 'The Bidden Guest' (1953, FTU) it has both a first person narrator and a narrative structure:

Against the burly air I strode,
Where the tight ocean heaves its load,
Crying the miracles of God.

And first I brought the sea to bear
Upon the dead weight of the land;
And the waves flourished at my prayer,
The rivers spawned their sand.

And where the streams were salt and full
The tough pig-headed salmon strove,
Curbing the ebb and the tide's pull,
To reach the steady hills above. 

John Bayley argues that, in 'Genesis', "the "I" [...] the prophet, and creator, is not the poet himself, or any extension of his own person" (Robinson, 191), but other critics have generally made some such identification. Henry Hart treats this figure as 'the artist-god', and suggests that the poem sketches Hill's "genesis" as a young man (Hart, 2). Both Jeremy Hooker (Robinson, 25) and Vincent Sherry regard the 'I' as the poet, and Sherry suggest that the poem includes 'a story of the origins and developments of his poetic language' (Sherry, 40). It seems to me that to identify this 'I' with Hill, or to read the poem as a description or testing of his role as a poet, reduces the scope of the poem and risks leaving the poet open to ridicule. For a young poet, near the beginning of his career, to portray himself as 'the artist-god striding by the ocean [who] breathes in the wind or spiritus, the divine
breath which is the afflatus of inspiration' or as a 'creative spirit struggling to shape a dead chaos into vigorous order which, like God's miraculous creation, is also his work or poem' (Hart, 3), would betoken an unreasonable hubris. Hill does take his role as a poet very seriously, but not with the sort of naive self-aggrandizement which Hart and Sherry unwittingly attribute to him.

I would argue that 'Genesis' is reflexive, not in the sense of referring to the poet's self, but in the sense that it addresses experience while simultaneously maintaining an awareness of the implications of making it into a poem (although the reflexive punning techniques which Hill employs for this purpose are not at this stage highly developed). In my own reading, the 'I' corresponds to the activity of the imagination. Valuable here is Christopher Ricks's reference to Coleridge's Primary Imagination: "'Genesis' [...] sees all creation as one ('a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM', in the words of Biographia Literaria)" (Ricks, 339). Jeremy Hooker has a useful development of this idea, although I think that he identifies incorrectly the symbol of the imagination in the poem:

At the beginning of 'Genesis' the poet, or the 'I' of the poem, is located in the metaphorical geography that will recur throughout the book: between sea and land, God's Creation and the imagination that will recreate it in human terms, glimpsing an absolute, immeasurable 'order' but defining the human relation to it by images and myths, composing a world. (Robinson, 25)

This reading of the land as the symbol of the imagination does not accord well with the phrase 'the dead weight of the land'. If, however, the 'I' is identified with the imagination, then 'Genesis' need not be
read as a hubristic early poem about the God-like poet, but rather as an attempt to construct a myth of the human Primary Imagination (perception in general). The reflexive level in the poem represents the parallel operation of the Secondary Imagination (the act of poetic creation): 'The secondary I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation'. Rather than indicating self-aggrandizement, the reflexivity of the poem enriches its consideration of a general aspect of human experience.

As Harold Bloom suggests, 'Genesis' imagines the Creation and the Fall as identical. Since perception is, in Coleridge's terms, also creation, this implicates perception with man's fallen state (whether this is taken in a dogmatic sense as a state of sin, or, more metaphorically, as the state of subjective and contingent knowledge dictated by our involvement in what we perceive). Thus the Romantic view of perception, when combined with a Christian sense of man's fallibility, assimilates creativity and error, figured by the Creation and the Fall. The poem also refers to the Incarnation, the Crucifixion, and the Last Judgment, and thus touches on the Christian archetypes which are persistent paradigms in Hill's poetry. Similarly, 'The Bidden Guest' is built around pentecostal imagery. In 'Genesis' both the Crucifixion and the Incarnation are suggested by the lines:

Where Capricorn and Zero cross,
A brooding immortality --
As Sherry notes, the intersection of the Tropic of Capricorn and the zero meridian is an 'absolutely particular place' (Sherry, 42). However, the zodiac sign of Capricorn is associated with the element of earth, so its intersection with zero is an appropriate symbol of the paradox of incarnation, the intersection of the earthly and the eternal (zero implying the absolute otherness of the eternal). The combination of particular place with abstract paradox is itself an appropriate image of the Incarnation, a unique and miraculous event which is held to have occurred at a specific time and place.

In his discussion of the absolute qualitative difference between God and man, eternity and time, Karl Barth envisages Jesus as the 'undimensional line of intersection' and, quoting Kierkegaard, states that 'Jesus as the Christ, as the Messiah, is the End of History'. Christ is the end of history in two senses: the fulfilment of its purpose and, at his second coming, its cessation. He is also its beginning, since he is one with the creator, and since the year of his birth is given the designation of zero. In Hill's poetry the Incarnation is not only a paradigm for the paradoxical relation of the worldly and the eternal, but also stands for a mode of apprehension of experience: a mode which combines spiritual concerns and high intellectual abstraction with sensuous immediacy and powerful physicality. In the last line of 'Canticle For Good Friday' (1956, FTU), the paradoxical nature of the Incarnation, its combination of eternal design with physical contingency, is condensed in the puns on 'issue' and 'congealing': 'Creation's issue congealing (and one woman's)'. The same sense of the bloody reality of Christ's sacrifice, and a concomitant ambivalence about the Christian dispensation, are expressed in the fifth section of 'Genesis':
On the sixth day, as I rode
In haste about the works of God,
With spurs I plucked the horse's blood.

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.

The fifth line states the paradox in the Christian view of suffering: what appears in worldly terms to be ravaging is, in eternal terms, redemption. But the next line turns the stanza into a statement, not about the way things are but about the way we understand them; not 'the world' but the 'myths' by which we live (with a reflexive application to the myth which the poem seeks to create). This line also retrospectively modifies the sense of 'By blood we live'.

The references to the Last Judgment in the poem are contained in an oblique Biblical allusion (a frequent feature of Hill's poetry): 'For behold, the Lord cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood and shall no more cover her slain' (Isaiah 26. 21). The italicized words here inform the imagery of the fifth section of 'Genesis' (the next chapter of Isaiah contains a reference to Leviathan, which is mentioned in 'Genesis'). Isaiah 26 and 27 prophesy the Last Judgment, and promise bodily resurrection. The latter is perhaps the doctrine that renders the reconciliation of faith and ordinary experience most difficult, so this allusion is an appropriate culmination to the ambivalence expressed in Section V of 'Genesis' about the myth of blood sacrifice.
'Genesis', then, mythologizes the activity of the ordering human imagination manifesting itself in Promethean attempts to control the world: 'And first I brought the sea to bear / Upon the dead weight of the land'. The consonance and assonance which link 'strode' ('Against the burly air I strode') with 'strove' ('The tough pig-headed salmon strove') acknowledge the pig-headed element in this activity. In sections III and IV the imagination turns to the making of unworldly spiritual myths, but in V is brought back to the physical body which it inhabits and confronts the paradoxical and potentially dangerous nature of faith. The poem also considers the response of the imagination to violence; observing ('I stood and saw') or warning ('I cried: "Beware [...] "').

In the treatment of these themes Hill's rhetorical power is already in evidence, but his technique is not as yet fully adapted to his concerns: both the use of an 'I' and the narrative structure based on the Book of Genesis are somewhat misleading. They are really pseudo-structures: they provide a framework, but do not carry the weight of the meaning of the poem. It is neither essentially about a person (even an allegorical one), nor essentially about a sequence of events (even a mythical one). Jon Silkin suggests such a view when he writes:

The sequence of days is important to the poem structurally, and through it Hill tries to initiate an image of growing consciousness. Yet it is only a proper sequence as it refers back to God's six days of work. The poem itself does not have narrative coherence so much as a sequence of formulatisations; in his subsequent work, Hill abandoned this kind of stylisation, and to a lesser extent, the incipient narrative structure.
In the poems written between 1954 and 1967 Hill develops a rhetoric of reflexive paradox, so that a sense of discoveries and conflicts within the texture of language replaces narrative and voice.

3.3 Reflexivity and Paradox: 'Solomon's Mines'

Reflexivity and paradox are closely related, since each tends to generate the other. The process whereby reflexivity can produce paradox is observable in formal mathematical languages, and in logic, as well as in natural language:

In formal languages (and, in general, in descriptive languages) self-reference leads to logical circles, to paradoxes, or, if we try to avoid logical circles, to demonstrations of certain inadequacies of language.

One of the best-known examples of this in logic is Bertrand Russell's paradox, while the clearest example in natural language is Epimenides's paradox: the statement 'this statement is false', which, by reflexivity, is true if it is false and false if it is true. Analogous effects may be observed in Hill's poetry. Thus 'Solomon's Mines' (1955, FTU), a poem about the discovery of a cultural inheritance, is reflexive both in that it illustrates such a process of discovery through its literary allusiveness and in that the metaphors which it uses for the process of discovery seem also to be metaphors for its own structure:

SOLOMON'S MINES
To Bonamy Dobrée
Anything to have done!
(The eagle flagged to the sun)
To have discovered and disclosed
The buried thrones, the means used;
Spadework and symbol; each deed
Resurrecting those best dead
Priests, soldiers and kings;
Blazed-out, stripped-out things;

Anything to get up and go
(Let the hewn gates clash to)
Without looking round
Out of that strong land.

The allusions in this poem, to Rider Haggard, the Bible, Isaac Rosenberg, William Ainsworth, the myths of Icarus and Orpheus, Tennyson, Allen Tate, Whitman, Melville and T.S. Eliot have been noted by critics. Its metaphors are self-illustrating: 'the means used' and 'Spadework' suggest poetic technique, 'symbol' suggests poetic symbolism and the phrase 'discovered and disclosed' represents the poem's archaeological mining of language. This reflexivity issues in paradox: the poem begins with a desire to have finished with the process which it both describes and enacts. It seems to achieve this wish in its form which, rather than neatly clicking shut like a box, as Yeats suggests a poem should, slams awkwardly shut with the clashing half-rhymes of 'and go' / 'clash to', and 'round / land'. Yet ending with an allusion to Orpheus (who did look round), the poem is shut into, rather than out of, the 'strong land' of its cultural inheritance. The poem has its whole being in the desire to escape from what it is. The correspondence with logical paradox here is only a loose one, but it is significant. The parallels are much closer in the case of 'September Song', as my later discussion of that poem will suggest (see Section 3.7).

The absence of the human subject is important to the paradoxical quality of 'Solomon's Mines'. Critics have read this poem in reflexive but also personal terms, seeing it as concerned with Hill's 'struggle
with historical fact' (Sherry, 59), his 'scholarly romance with the past' (Haughton, in Robinson, 140), his 'ambivalence towards romantic tradition' (Hart, 28). I would not quarrel with the general tenor of these interpretations, but would point out that the poem, with its appositional syntax, contains no overt reference to Hill, or to a human subject. This means that it reads less as the expression of an individual's ambivalence about a task than as an autonomous, self-divided complex of meaning.

This is only one of many poems by Hill in which reflexive gestures produce paradox. The inverse process, in which paradox produces reflexivity, is a specific case of a more general principle: the principle that features of the poetry which draw attention to the medium, including puns, typographical devices and formal structures, introduce reflexivity. By obtruding onto the reader's notice the fact that, in their case at least, language does not refer in a straightforward way to a reality beyond it, they establish the linguistic medium of the text as a subsidiary referent. The passage quoted above (p. 121) concerning formal mathematical languages serves in addition as an illustration of this principle: 'if we try to avoid logical circles' we are led to 'demonstrations of certain inadequacies of the language'. Awareness of paradox (logical circles) makes us aware of a quality of the medium or language: here of its limitations or inadequacies. Paradox in poetry sometimes makes us aware of the limitations of language, but equally it may generate forms of attention to language which emphasize its richness of implication. The following is the first stanza of Hill's 'The Distant Fury of Battle' (1955, FTU):
Grass resurrects to mask, to strangle,
Words glossed on stone, lopped stone-angel;
But the dead maintain their ground --
That there's no getting round --

The third line suggests both that the dead maintain their inert condition, remaining in the ground and performing no actions, and that the dead maintain (keep up, look after) their ground by fertilizing it, making the grass grow (with an ironical, excluded sense, according to which the dead 'maintain' their ground by trimming the grass, weeding and so on). The paradox is more interesting on its metaphorical level, conveying the sense in which the dead both do and do not provide the 'ground' (of culture, of consciousness), upon which the living stand. Awareness of the double meaning invites a close attention to the word 'maintain', and a concomitant sense of the limitations of language as well as its effectiveness. It also promotes a reflexive consideration of the way in which the poem may not succeed in 'getting round' the matter. 'The Distant Fury of Battle' explores, though of necessity it cannot fully articulate, the way in which the dead can seem to be both absolutely absent, and an active force in the lives of the living. It leads us to question whether this is an enigma of experience or primarily a feature of the language with which we order and shape that experience, since our conception of what it means to be an active force is bound to our grammatical structures. Thus the exploration of the paradox in the poem invites a reflexive attention both to language, and to its use in the poem.
3.4 MYSTICAL AND SCEPTICAL PARADOX: 'AN ORDER OF SERVICE'

Hill has referred to 'this volatile and very treacherous instrument, paradox' (UJ, 212) and generally his use of it is marked by delicacy, subtlety and intricacy, a skilful if risky control. At certain points, where his use is less delicate, the poetry does become highly mannered, as in parts of The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy. John Bayley has commented on the way in which Hill's paradoxes are drawn towards, but do not attain, a mystical resolution: 'The paradox haunts Hill's poetry, giving a peculiar air of perpetual expectancy, awaiting the unvouchsafed mystery, the miracle that can never take place' (Robinson, 192). Jeremy Hooker similarly distinguishes Hill's paradoxes from those of assured faith, suggesting that 'unlike Christian poets for whom the paradoxes of their religion contribute to its comprehensiveness, for him the double meanings keep open a divided mind' (Robinson, 29). Taking up some of the implications of these comments, I wish to suggest that a distinction may be made between the mystical paradox and the sceptical paradox and that certain developments in Hill's poetry may be described in terms of the tension between these two uses of paradox.

The mystical paradox implies the existence of a higher plane of knowledge than that of human understanding, and may take two forms: firstly, a contradiction which exists on the human plane, but is reconciled on a transcendent plane, and secondly a contradiction between the significance of something on one plane, and its significance on the other. The mystical paradox is, in the traditions and practices of Christian mystics, an object of meditation intended to direct attention towards the ineffable. It indicates the insufficiencies of language, but also in a sense attempts to surmount them, in that it uses words in an
attempt to concentrate the mind on that which they cannot express (a paradoxical ambition in itself). The passage quoted above (p. 121) concerning formal and mathematical languages indicated that the paradoxes generated by reflexive statements exposed the inadequacies of the language (which is what happens in the proof of Gödel's theorem). The mystical potential of such an awareness of the limits of the provable is apparent from Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, where the claim that metaphysical statements have no scientific meaning is made:

The right method of philosophy would be this. To say nothing except what can be said, i.e. the propositions of natural science, [...] and then always, when someone wished to say something metaphysical, to demonstrate to him that he had given no meaning to certain signs in his propositions.

However, unlike Ayer, who claimed that metaphysical statements have no valid meaning at all, Wittgenstein does not seek to demolish the transcendent but to assert its full ineffability, to place it outside discourse: 'There is indeed the inexpressible. This shows itself, it is the mystical'. In mystical poetry reflexive paradox is used to gesture towards the ineffable, as in 'Burnt Norton V', where a meditation on language includes such paradoxical reflections as the following:

Or say that the end precedes the beginning,  
And the end and the beginning were always there  
Before the beginning and after the end. (CPPE, 175)

Mystical paradox is a pervasive rhetorical technique of negative theology, as in the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite:
I pray we could come to this darkness so far above light! If only we lacked sight and knowledge so as to see, so as to know, unseeing and unknowing, that which lies beyond all vision and knowledge. For this would be really to see and to know: to praise the Transcendent One in a transcending way, namely through the denial of all beings. 

In poetry mystical paradox can be used to create a formalistic, highly-patterned incantation, as in the work of Robert Southwell:

I live, but such a life as ever dyes;  
I dye, but such a death as never endes;  
My death to end my dying life denyes,  
And life my living death no whitt amends.  

Hill makes comparable use of poised, harmonious mystical paradox at a later stage of his work, in 'The Pentecost Castle' (1972-78, T):

depths of non-being  
perhaps too clear  
my desire dying  
as I desire  
('The Pentecost Castle: 15')

In the poems of For the Unfallen and King Log, however, the mystical paradox is evoked, only to come under attack from the sceptical paradox.

The sceptical paradox presents a contradiction and implies that no reconciliation or synthesis is possible. It may arise out of a pluralistic view, according to which there are many modes of discourse or of understanding which co-exist simultaneously, or it may express a despairing or revolutionary fragmentation of cohesion and rationality. It may also question or subvert existing structures of understanding and belief. The sceptical paradox may therefore take moderate or radical forms. In practice this is probably true of the mystical paradox, which may vary in intensity according to the temperament of the writer and
the rhetorical context, but in principle the mystical paradox is always radical, seeking to replace worldly modes of understanding with the absolutely other.

Sources or analogues may be identified for these two forms of paradox, and they point towards an underlying and crucial tension in Hill's work. The mystical paradox may be found in the work of a number of writers in whom Hill has shown interest. Simone Veil employs it frequently and in the following passage also offers an explanation of its function:

God is at the same time personal and impersonal. He is personal in the sense that his infinitely mysterious manner of being a Person is infinitely different from the human manner. It is only possible to grasp this mystery by employing at the same time, like two pincers, these two contrary notions, incompatible here on earth, compatible only in God. 

The sense that faith involves an understanding which is not that of this world is particularly strong in theological writers who are suspicious of religious institutions and their worldly power and authority. Such writers include not only Veil but also Karl Barth, who provides the epigraph to 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"', and is referred to in that essay, in Hill's sermon, and in the essay on T.H. Green (PMA, 1, 15; Sermon, 3-4; PP, 116). In The Epistle to the Romans (1919), Barth writes:

Wherever the qualitative distinction between man and the final Omega is overlooked or misunderstood, that fetishism is bound to appear in which God is experienced in 'birds and fourfooted things', and finally, or rather primarily in the 'likeness of corruptible man' -- Personality, the Child, the Woman -- and in the half-spiritual, half-material creations, exhibitions, and representations of His creative ability -- Family, Nation, State, Church, Fatherland. (Barth, 50).
Quoting Kierkegaard, Barth also asserts that 'Jesus as the Christ can be comprehended only as paradox', thus implying a scepticism about those who would claim to represent Christ on earth (Barth, 29). The mistrust of power and authority, especially when it claims transcendent derivation, is a strong force in Hill's work, and is a point of affinity with certain of those religious thinkers to whom he refers. When such mistrust takes the form of an insistence on the ineffable nature of truth, mysticism is found in proximity to a certain form of scepticism; scepticism about language and reason. Thus Barth's theology is in a strict sense anti-mystical. Barth and his associate, Emil Brunner, attacked the mysticism of Schleiermacher and the nature of their attack is indicated in the following passage, from a book which Hill refers to as a 'pioneering study, in English, of Karl Barth's theology' (PP, 116): 'Brunner) fights [mysticism], and all attempts at synthesis, at bridging the gap between Faith and the Word of God and the faith of man in himself.' 19 Thus, if mysticism is defined as 'an immediate knowledge of God attained in this present life through personal religious experience', the primary emphasis of Barth's writing is anti-mystical, falling on the otherness of God, His inaccessibility to human knowledge. 20 Nevertheless, in attempting to write about this otherness, Barth is obliged in some sense to describe it, and in describing it he uses some of the same rhetorical techniques (in particular paradox) as mystical writers use to describe their experience of God. Paradox is a way of referring to the ineffable. Whether, in so referring, a travesty is produced by making that which cannot be an object of knowledge appear to be one, is of course a key question, but one that can only be answered in terms of belief, and not by rhetorical analysis. Barth
repeatedly stresses that no human faculty can encompass divine truth: 'And even faith, if it proceeds from anything but a void, is unbelief' (Barth, 57). His writing further exemplifies the paradox as a means of both stating and transcending limits: 'When our limitation is apprehended, and when He is perceived who, in bounding us, is also the dissolution of our limitation' (Barth, 45).

Veil also uses the concept of the 'void', as in the following passage where she formulates the mystical paradox in the form of a contradiction between worldly and transcendent truth: 'For the good which we can neither picture nor define is a void for us. But this void is fuller than all fullness'. 21 This implies that what the senses, intellect or emotions can perceive is a void; it is only in transcendent terms, which depend on faith, that this void is defined as 'fullness'. Here the potential for proximity to extreme scepticism is evident in the dependence on the transforming power of faith; it would only require a loss of faith for gazing into the void to become gazing into the abyss: 'And when you gaze long into an abyss, the abyss also gazes into you'. 22 This is Nietzsche, a major exponent of the radical paradox of scepticism. This proximity is explored in Hill's 'An Order of Service' (KL), a poem which was not published until 1968, but which articulates with particular clarity the problem of reflexive paradox which develops in the poems of For The Unfallen.

AN ORDER OF SERVICE

He was the surveyor of his own ice-world,
Meticulous at the chosen extreme,
Though what he surveyed may have been nothing.

Let a man sacrifice himself, concede
His mortality and have done with it;
There is no end to that sublime appeal.
Under consideration here is the value of solitary dedication to some ideal. This may be the dedication of a poet to a highly romantic conception of his work, of a religious enthusiast, or of some other single-minded follower of an ideal principle. The ideal is transcendent in the sense that it is not based on social values or empirical usefulness, but on another order of value, not generally perceived. Whether this supposedly transcendent order belongs to a realm of eternal truth, or is the delusion of an isolated and obsessive mind is a question which the poem leaves uncertain, an open-endedness which results from its numerous double meanings.

The title of the poem suggests at first liturgy, a formal and public enactment of faith, but the order referred to turns out to be, not the familiar sequence of public worship, but a mysterious order of meaning (perhaps the private faith of the mystic), or an order in the sense of a command (the protagonist is commanded, or self-commanded, to this service). In the second stanza the phrase 'Let a man sacrifice himself' proposes (or permits) a course of martyrdom, whether literal or metaphorical, which may simply amount to the futile destruction of the self, or may be the means to a mystical attainment of the true, eternal self. This ambiguity is illuminated by Barth's statement: 'God is the Personality which we are not, and [...] this lack of Personality is precisely what dissolves and establishes our personality' (Barth, 45-46). Furthermore, although the first stanza proposes that 'what he surveyed may have been nothing', this possibility is less dismissive if read in
the light of the rhetoric of the void practised by Barth and Weil. The phrase 'concede / His mortality and have done with it' may be read as:
(i) acknowledge his mortality and accept that his transcendent aspirations are delusions; or (ii) give up his mortality (through a sacrificial death) and enter into a new, eternal existence. 'Have done with it' hovers between finality of transcendence and despairing recognition of failure. 'There is no end to that sublime appeal' asserts that the spiritual call of martyrdom is eternal, but this confidence is simultaneously revoked by the alternative senses of 'no end'; either futile repetition in time of a specious appeal, or, more simply, an appeal which has no purpose.

Hill shares something of Barth's sense of the relation of human understanding to the ultimate, with a concomitant view of the constraints on anyone who attempts to speak of it. These constraints take the form of a rigorous need for revocation. Barth's view, somewhat crudely summarized, is that the nearest we can come to apprehending the transcendent is to know fully that we cannot apprehend it (essentially because we live in a state of sin), while also maintaining faith in it. Hill's view of the poet's situation is that his involvement with his medium, language, enacts his involvement with sin or error.

Karl Barth remarked that Sin is the 'specific gravity of human nature as such'. I am suggesting that it is at the heart of this 'heaviness' that poetry must do its work, this heaviness which is simultaneously the 'density' of language and the 'specific gravity of human nature'. (PMA, 15)

In these terms, the literary equivalent to Barth's view concerning the apprehension of the eternal is that the nearest a poem can come to transcending its medium is to acknowledge that it cannot transcend it.
Reflexivity is a form of such acknowledgement, and a bulwark against what Hill terms 'easy abdication' (PP, 116). Baldly stated, such a strategy of reflexivity sounds rigorous but sterile. What averts sterility is in part that density of language to which Hill refers, and which is so evident in the highly compressed ambiguity of 'An Order of Service'. The 'work' which the poetry seeks to do includes the playing off against each other of different modes of understanding as embodied in words. So, in the last stanza of the poem, the metaphorical density of the word 'light' is explored, setting enlightenment against blinding dazzle. 'In such a light' brings suggestions of divine illumination up against the matter-of-fact, colloquial sense, which here implies a tone of discouragement, inviting a sceptical response in the light of what has been said. 'Appeal' and 'unappealing' end consecutive lines, asking us to feel through the complexities of those things which may somehow call to us and yet repel us.

The poem as a whole explores the vicissitudes of the mystical paradox. If faith is lost the void of the ineffable becomes the abyss of doubt. Furthermore, since the mystical paradox points to what is necessarily beyond the medium of language, its use in poetry can readily become a specious transcendence. Reflexivity plays a dangerous role here. It can function with paradox to point to what is beyond language precisely by not including it; for the transcendent to be genuinely evoked it must remain something which cannot be directly referred to, and thus has to be perpetually balanced on the point of a paradox. Hill's early poetry enacts a drama of the balance of the mystical paradox, and the fall into the sceptical.
3.5 PSYCHOLOGICAL PARADOX: 'THE TURTLE DOVE'

The moderate form of sceptical paradox may represent a form of psychological insight. Since Freud, the co-existence of opposed impulses, and even the psychologically complementary nature of opposites, have been widely recognized:

For repression is often achieved by means of an excessive reinforcement of the thought contrary to the one which is to be repressed. This process I call reactive reinforcement.

thoughts in the unconscious live very comfortably side by side, and even contraries get on together without disputes -- a state of things which persists often enough in the conscious. 23

Moderate scepticism tends to imply an informed knowledge of the world and its ways and is a feature of Hill's love poetry, such as 'The Turtle Dove' (1954, FTU):

Love that drained her drained him she'd loved, though each
For the other's sake forged passion upon speech,
Bore their close days through sufferance towards night
Where she at length grasped sleep and he lay quiet

As though needing no questions, now, to guess
What her secreting heart could not well hide.
Her caught face flinched in half-sleep at his side.
Yet she, by day, modelled her real distress,

Poised, turned her cheek to the attending world
Of children and intriguers and the old,
Conversed freely, exercised, was admired,
Being strong to dazzle. All this she endured

To affront him. He watched her rough grief work
Under the formed surface of habit. She spoke
Like one long undeceived but she was hurt.
She denied more love, yet her starved eyes caught

His, devouring, at times. Then, as one self-dared,
She went to him, plied there; like a furious dove
Bore down with visitations of such love
As his lithe, fathomig heart absorbed and buried.
This poem shows one of Hill's primary techniques: the discovery and unfolding of paradoxes lurking within the dictionary definitions of English words. These contrary senses or connotations are then made to resonate in the poem. In this poem the effect may be compared to the 'drama of reason' which Coleridge sees as a product of parentheses. 24 Jeremy Hooker sees the rhetorical power of this poem, and others in similar style, as a danger, to deal with which Hill was obliged to develop the 'drama of reason' in a very acute form. 25 I would suggest that such a drama is already present, though it certainly becomes more acute; in later poems of For The Unfallen the drama threatens to disrupt the reason, as moderate scepticism is replaced by radical scepticism. In seeing the power of these earlier poems as dangerous, Hooker seems too much influenced by Hill's own suspicion of poetic mastery.

In 'The Turtle Dove' the conflicting senses of the words serve to offer insights into the contrary or double nature of many human impulses and feelings. The paradoxes of 'The Turtle Dove' are not radical, in that they do not threaten the coherence of language or reason, but rather employ the richness of language to articulate forms of psychological aperçu. The poem's abstraction from circumstantial detail focuses it on the partly conscious and partly unconscious interaction which is a continual process in intimate relations. This interaction is not, for those involved, a matter of rational decision, but nor is it beyond the reach of rational analysis. Hill employs a language of enriched abstraction to convey the shifts taking place on this level, with little use of overt metaphor or simile. Sherry points to John Crowe Ransom as a model (Sherry, 49-50), but Auden is also a likely influence here. The only trope which obtrudes itself on the reader's
notice is 'like a furious dove', although there are a number of implicit metaphors.

The first line suggests both that love is draining the energies of the couple, and that it is draining away. The syntax does not allow the latter sense, but here, as often in Hill's poetry, I would argue that the high degree of condensation and ambiguity invites the reader to construct patterns of ideas beyond those which are syntactically explicit. 'Forged passion upon speech' implies that there is a narrow line between the sort of forging that creates very strong links and the sort that involves falsification or impersonation. If we read 'forged' in the first sense, then speech is figured as an anvil, referring to its power as a generator of erotic feeling. The second sense of 'forged' implies a process analogous to forging a signature upon a cheque. A pun on 'close' ('close days') represents the reality of estrangement within intimacy: the couple are close to each other, but shut off from each other ('close' suggesting both oppressive and shut), sharing an intimate knowledge of a loss of intimacy. 'Secreting' condenses the contrary impulses and effects of concealment (keeping secret) and expressing (secreting, exuding). To model ('modelled her real distress') may be to give shape and form to something, or it may be to act or pose as a model. 'Poised' hints at 'posed'. To turn one's cheek may be to turn an indifferent, assertive or even cheeky face to the world, or it may be to 'turn the other cheek', to allow oneself to be struck and hurt again (and in this context the latter may be the effect of the former). 'Like one long undeceived' may mean either: (i) like one who had long been disillusioned, perhaps having known her partner to be unfaithful; or (ii) like one whose partner had for a long time been faithful. Finally, the
last word of the poem, 'buried', carries the connotations both of incorporating and making safe, and of killing and making disappear.

It is important for the poem's success that this vertical richness of pun and paradox works within a strong forward movement. This is achieved in part by the skilful manipulation of syntax within the iambic pentameter, and quatrains rhyming abab or abba (employing half-rhymes such as 'work' / 'spoke'). For example, line one opens with a trochee ('Lóve thât') and concludes with two iambs ('shē'd lóved, thōugh eách'). A certain difficulty in the transition from the trochaic to the iambic rhythm, as the reader senses the predominance of the latter, mimes the strenuousness of the relationship being described, emphasized also by the repetition of the word 'drained'. This shift of rhythm also makes the first clause, and therefore the first line, seem long; a dragging out of a draining process. The dynamic use of rhyme is shown in the linking across the second stanza of 'guess' and 'distress' (distress is part of what he is guessing), enclosing 'hide' and 'side' (two words which suggest again the paradox of intimacy and estrangement condensed in 'close' and 'secreting'). Throughout the poem the behaviour of the couple is portrayed in active, physical verbs: 'drained', 'forged', 'bore', 'grasped' (even sleep is something to be actively engaged with). The sense of division in intimacy is strengthened throughout by the pairing of the pronouns, so that everything that takes place in the poem, even separation, estrangement, concealment, takes place between 'him' and 'her':

'drained her drained him'
'she at length grasped sleep and he lay quiet'
'Her caught face flinched in half-sleep at his side'
'All this she endured to affront him'
'He watched her rough grief'
In this poem, as in 'The Troublesome Reign' (1954, FTU) and 'Asmodeus' (1955, FTU) the paradox of moderate scepticism is employed in the service of emotionally telling and psychologically acute explorations of sexual relations.

3.6 PARADOX IN HISTORY: FOR THE UNFALLEN

The field of the mind and of personal relations is one where insight may readily take the form of paradox. When Hill considers the relation of the living to the dead, paradox becomes rather an inescapable condition of thought. This relation is the dominant theme of For The Unfallen, as the volume title ironically implies. As Michael Edwards notes (Robinson, 159), the title alludes to Laurence Binyon's First World War elegy 'For The Fallen'. The change to 'unfallen' sets up a number of ironic resonances. First, it makes the same acknowledgement as the parenthesis of 'September Song' (1967, KL):

(I have made
an elegy for myself it
is true)

or the less ambiguous concession of 'Metamorphoses: IV Drake's Drum' (1954-56, FTU):

Neither our designed wreaths nor used words
Sink to their melted ears and melted hearts

That is, to claim that elegies or memorials are 'for' the dead is in some sense self-deceiving: it is only the needs of the living (the unfallen)
for consolation or ritual that they can fulfil. The inaccessibility of the dead locates them in a totally other realm, so that to consider their relation to the living is to consider the relation of two realms which do not intersect. According to Christian faith, Christ, as the intersection of the eternal and the temporal, offers a paradigm of such a relation, in the form of a mystical paradox, a reconciliation which cannot be explained, but in which it may be possible to believe. However, the double meanings of 'Metamorphoses: IV' express a radical scepticism about consolation: wreaths which are 'designed' to commemorate the dead risk having designs on the exploitation of sentiment, and words which are 'used' to elegize them may be both second-hand and exploited. It is in poems about the dead that the sceptical paradox becomes most violent and self-lacerating, and threatens a conclusion in despairing silence. As several commentators have noted, the title of For The Unfallen also hints that the living may delusively regard themselves as unfallen, when they are fallen in a Christian sense. 26 The context of the phrase 'For the unfallen', in the last poem of the volume, 'To the (Supposed) Patron' (1958), adds further associations:

For the unfallen — the firstborn, or wise
Councillor — prepared vistas extend
As far as harvest; and idyllic death
Where fish at dawn ignite the powdery lake.

In the Old Testament, 'the firstborn, both of man and of beast, is considered as belonging to God'. This turns out to be something of a mixed blessing: 'If of man, the child was redeemed, if of a clean beast it was sacrificed'. 27 The dubious implications of the Christian and Jewish heritage in which redemption and sacrifice are such closely
linked concepts are explored in 'Two Formal Elegies: For the Jews in Europe'. The sanctification of the firstborn originates in Jehovah's slaughter of the Egyptian firstborn for the benefit of the Children of Israel. Furthermore, 'to the firstborn son belonged the birthright, which included the headship of the family or tribe, and a double portion of his father's property'. Hill's 'Unfallen' may therefore allude to the power and prosperity of the peoples of Western Europe, to their unacknowledged sense of themselves as chosen, as entitled to privilege, and further allude to the sacrifice and slaughter implicated in the political foundations of this privilege. In his interview with Hermione Lee, Hill evoked the 'ritualistically' stated assertion that those fallen in war 'died that we might live' and, with reference to the First World War, commented:

the anger, as I say, flares up from time to time when one considers some of the social injustice, the sheer thoughtless mayhem of our time, and one thinks, well, was it for this that they died? (CF)

The figure of the survivor appears in an ambivalent light in a number of the poems of the volume:

[...] those whom war's chance saves
Without the law:
('Two Formal Elegies: For the Jews in Europe: I')

Survivors, still given to wandering, find
Their old loves, painted and re-aligned --
('A Pastoral')
In summer
Thunder may strike, or, as a tremor
Of remote adjustment, pass on the far side
From us: however deified and defied

By those it does strike.
('Of Commerce and Society: IV')

In the last of these passages the pronoun 'us' identifies the people of postwar Europe as survivors.

The title of the volume also resembles Larkin's title, *The Less Deceived* (published four years earlier) in that both seem to be commenting on the moral position of the poet's prospective readership and both do so in negative terms. The similarity is of more than passing interest because the poem from which Larkin takes his title, 'Deceptions', shares one of the principal themes of *For The Unfallen* (and indeed of Hill's œuvre): suffering, and what can and cannot decently be said about it by the poet. Evoking the story of a girl drugged and raped in nineteenth-century London, Larkin concludes:

Slums, years, have buried you. I would not dare
Console you if I could. What can be said,
Except that suffering is exact, but where
Desire takes charge, readings will grow erratic?
For you would hardly care
That you were less deceived, out on that bed,
Than he was, stumbling up the breathless stair
To burst into fulfilment's desolate attic. 251

For all the scrupulosity of 'I would not dare', Larkin arrogates the right to judge, to know better than the girl how bad her experience was. Hill's poems, with their reflexive worrying at the problem of suffering, make the reader highly sensitive to such arrogation. A reader familiar with Hill's work is likely to detect an impertinence in lines such as
'but where / Desire takes charge, reading will grow erratic'. This is one of the uneasy achievements of Hill's reflexivity.

For The Unfallen turns on the paradox of 'knowing the dead' ('Two Formal Elegies'): a knowledge of absence. The predominance of images of the sea in the volume reflects this theme:

Witness earth fertilised, decently drained,
The sea decent again behind walls.
('Of Commerce and Society: II The Lowlands of Holland', 1956-58)

The sea flickers, roars, in its wide hearth.
('Two Formal Elegies: For the Jews in Europe: II', 1955-56)

Water
Silences all who would interfere;
Retains, still, what it might give
As casually as it took away:
('The White Ship', 1956)

Those varied dead! The undiscerning sea
Shelves and dissolves their flesh as it burns spray
('Metamorphoses: IV Drake's Drum', 1954-56)

The indifference of the drowned is placed in ironic contrast to commercial activity: 'The sea creaked with worked vessels' ('Of Commerce and Society: I The Apostles: Versailles, 1919'). This recalls Eliot's 'Death by Water':

Phlebas the Phoenician, a fortnight dead,
Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep sea swell
And the profit and loss. (CPPE, 71)

However, both Robert Lowell and Allen Tate are influential on the volume, notably Lowell's 'The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket' and Tate's 'Ode to the Confederate Dead'. Both poems anticipate Hill's use of the sea as
a metaphor both for history, which brings all to oblivion, and for what cannot be known or grasped, as in the following lines from Tate's poem:

Now that the salt of their blood  
Stiffens the saltier oblivion of the sea,  
Seals the malignant purity of the flood,  
What shall we who count our days and bow  
Our heads with commemorial woe  
In the ribboned coats of grim felicity,  
What shall we say of the bones? 31

Tate's question, the question which the unfallen, in their 'grim felicity', must ask themselves, resounds through For The Unfallen. In Hill's next volume it is this question that brings to a head the dual problems of reflexive paradox and the place of the human subject in Hill's poetry.

3.7 THE CRISIS: 'ANNUNCIATIONS' AND 'SEPTEMBER SONG'

In Hill's poetry of the late fifties and early sixties the technique of sustained paradoxical punning becomes more extreme, to the point where violently opposed interpretations of events are being presented, without reconciliation. Allusions and associations multiply, creating a poetry of great richness but also considerable obscurity, which, detaching itself from the human subject, employs semantic multiplicity as an origin, but an origin without unity. The paradoxes are those of distance and closeness, knowledge and the unknowable, complicity and innocence. The most persistent impulse within this multiplicity is a reflexive one: a suspicion of poetry itself. Between 1958 and 1967 a number of poems were published which express a reaction of disgust, or of moral censure, at the writing and reading of poetry. These are 'Dr Faustus' (1958, FTU), 'A Pastoral' (1958, FTU), 'Orpheus and Eurydice' (1958, FTU), 'To The (Supposed) Patron' (1958, FTU), 'Annunciations' (1961, KL),
'A Pre-Raphaelite Notebook' (1962, T), 'The Humanist' (1963, KL), 'History as Poetry' (1964, KL), 'The Imaginative Life' (1964, KL), 'Three Baroque Meditations' (1964, KL) and 'September Song' (1967, KL). In several of these the writing and reading of poetry are represented in metaphors of consumption, of what Hill has termed the 'poetry banquet', in such a way as to imply that both activities are obscene:

Having stood hungrily apart
From the gods' politic banquet,
Of all possible false gods
I fall to these gristled shades

That show everything, without lust;
('Dr Faustus: II The Harpies')

These
Lips debate and praise --
Some rich aphorism,
A delicate white meat.
('The Humanist')

Lines such as 'Traversing the still-moist dead' ('Orpheus and Eurydice') queasily express a reflexive suspicion about the elegiac impulse. In the above passages from 'Dr Faustus' and 'The Humanist' this suspicion seems to have extended to a suspicion of poetry in general.

The key question to be asked of these poems is whether they condemn themselves, or whether they use self-criticism to atone for a possible exploitation of their subject-matter and therefore to evade censure. Merle Brown identifies, though he does not resolve, the moral paradox involved:

In the short poem "History as Poetry", [...] Hill articulates his sense that a poetry which resuscitates the dead can avoid moral condemnation only by subjecting itself to such self-questioning that its primary form becomes self-condemnatory.
Hill gives us every reason to think that his scruples and his devotion to his art are entirely genuine. Therefore, when he writes poems condemning that art, it is reasonable to believe that he is not involved merely in making scrupulous gestures, but in fact is attacking it, with all that that implies. My own view is that his scruples are at times excessive or obsessive, but are too profound to be read as a manoeuvre; when he is self-condemnatory, then this is to assert his guilt, not to achieve innocence by metaphysical sleight-of-hand. In 'September Song' he writes a poem ending, 'This is more than enough', and we should do him the justice to assume that this is not an attempt to pre-empt moral censure, but does indeed mean that he feels something to be amiss. Why, then, did Hill choose to publish such poems? This is a question which he has posed, and answered in his own terms, when, in 1977, he discussed the idea that the writing of poetry is both a source of guilt and an act of atonement:

Well, if one feels like this about it, why carry on? And why carry on so? And in public too! [...] let us postulate another impure motive, remorse, and let us suggest that a man may continue to write and to publish in a vain and self-defeating effort to appease his own sense of empirical guilt. It is ludicrous, of course. (PMA, 7)

The tone of half-jocular self-mockery here is very defensive, and the sense that Hill is occupying a position which he suspects is untenable is reinforced when he goes on to quote with approval Weil's suggestion that people should be sent to prison for making errors in printed texts or radio broadcasts, but is forced to concede that this 'may well strike others as unassailable evidence that the woman was merely an obsessional neurotic' (PMA, 8). It seems to me that here Hill is,
uneasily and retrospectively, reviewing a crisis in his own poetry, which had been resolved in technical terms ten years before, but remains troubling. A resolution was achieved in that Hill continued to write poetry, and developed a less self-revoking style, but this resolution involved an acceptance of the limits of what poetry could achieve, and a turning-away from an obsessional worrying at certain problems. This acceptance is implicit in the tone of the last paragraph of 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"': "He [the poet] may learn to live in his affliction, not with the cynical indifference of the reprobate but with the renewed sense of a vocation' (PMA, 17).

The fragmentation of meaning which takes place in the poems of the crisis is apparent in the way that the same words are increasingly used to express radically incompatible modes of understanding. Radical scepticism, expressed in paradox, is a feature of deconstructive discourse and its antecedents, in particular Nietzsche. Where moderate scepticism acknowledges a plurality of interpretations of a single world, perceived and understood differently by different individuals, radical scepticism would deny the existence of a reality beyond the interpretations of it. Thus Nietzsche claims that there are only perspectives:

The perspective therefore decides the character of the 'appearance'! As if a world would still remain over after one deducted the perspective! By doing that one would deduct relativity!

Deconstructive theory is generated by the application of this radical relativism to texts, issuing in the claim that there can be no fixity of meaning. Christopher Norris, discussing the paradoxes of deconstructive thinking, comments that
these are not problems that either resolve themselves on a more careful reading or simply settle down (like religious belief) into a system of self-supporting paradox. 34

But Norris is here reductive in his view of religious paradox, which no doubt can be complacent, but can also be quite the opposite. The extreme of mysticism and the extreme of radical scepticism can find themselves in close proximity, both being attempts to think and live in a manner which rejects reason and common sense as standards. Where mysticism attempts to transcend language using paradox, radical scepticism attempts to deconstruct language with the same tool; to rethink the conceptual basis of apparent contradictions:

How could something originate in its antithesis? [...] The fundamental faith of the metaphysicians is the faith in antithetical values [...] It may be doubted first whether there exist any antitheses at all, and secondly whether these popular evaluations and value-antitheses, on which the metaphysicians have set their seal, are not perhaps merely foreground valuations [...] frog-perspectives. 35

The poetry of Hill's crisis is possessed by a breakdown of the antitheses between self-condemnation and self-congratulation, between tact and exploitation. Christopher Ricks observes:

There would be something suspect about anybody who felt nothing of the impulse which voiced itself in George Steiner as 'The world of Auschwitz lies outside speech as it lies outside reason'. But then this very impulse can uglily become a routine, a mannerism, or a cliché. (Ricks, 287)

So, presumably, can the questioning of this impulse. The problem has been aptly described by Gabriel Pearson as that of 'an infinite regress: critic and poet get kudos from showing awareness in the poem of the danger of getting kudos from this "ultimate" subject' (Robinson, 43).
Infinite regress is a particular liability of reflexive strategies and in the context of such subjects creates a particular moral and artistic dilemma.

'Annunciations' (1961) is the key-note poem of this crisis, while 'September Song' is perhaps its most poignant expression, but also contains the germ of its resolution. 'Annunciations' represents the fullest development of the metaphor of the poetry banquet which figures the prurient consumption of images, frequently those of atrocities. 'Of Commerce and Society: IV' speaks of Auschwitz as 'a fable / Unbelievable in fatted marble' and refers to

Jehovah's touchy methods, that create
The connoisseur of blood, the smitten man.

In 'To the (Supposed) Patron' poetic agents prepare for poetry readers 'the inside-succulence / Of untoughened sacrifice'. 'Annunciations' also concerns itself with sacrifice, but is not about the holocaust, or other specific historical events. Rather, it addresses the writing and reading of poetry in general, but with particular reference to its exploration both of the physical and of ideals denoted by abstract terms: 'The Word' and 'Love'.
I

The Word has been abroad, is back, with a tanned look
From its subsistence in the stiffening-mire.
Cleansing has become killing, the reward
Touchable, overt, clean to the touch.
Now at a distance from the steam of beasts,
The loathly neckings and fat shook spawn
(Each specimen-jar fed with delicate spawn)
The searchers with the curers sit at meat
And are satisfied. Such precious things put down
And the flesh eased through turbulence the soul
Purples itself; each eye squats full and mild
While all who attend to fiddle or to harp
For betterment, flavour their decent mouths
With gobbets of the sweetest sacrifice.

'Annunciations' is unusual in having a commentary of some length written
on it by Hill himself. At the time of writing this commentary he also
gave it as his view that 'Doctor Faustus' is 'clearly the best poem' in
For The Unfallen. I do not share this view, but since Hill also said that
'Annunciations' was the most recent work with which he was content, this
lends support to the view that the two poems epitomize a particular
phase. The following is the first part of Hill's commentary:

I suppose the impulse behind the work is an attempt to realize
the jarring double-takes in words of common usage: as
'sacrifice' (I) or 'Love' (II) -- words which, like the word
'State', are assumed to have an autonomous meaning or value
irrespective of context, and to which we are expected to nod
assent. If we do assent, we are 'received'; if we question the
justice of the blanket-term, we have made the equivalent of a
rude noise in polite company.

Section I

I should take lines 6 and 7 as the key antithesis around which
the section moves: 'fat shook spawn' v. 'delicate spawn'. Line 6
stands for pain, lust, in the blubbery world; line 7 for pain,
lust, by the time it is distilled by the connoisseurs. The
connoisseur is as likely to be the poet as the critic. The
'setting' of this section is a banquet where the men who have
been hunting the beasts (the searchers) are in a mood of mutual
adoration with the chemists and distillers and picklers and
putters-right (the curers). And they listen to violin and harp,
because the function of art is to instruct by delight ('for
betterment' = 'for moral improvement'). At the same time, they
fiddle and harp, in the vulgar sense of the term, they pull
strings to get on (they try to 'better themselves'). Still a long
way from here the beasts go on copulating, steamily, breeding
more art-fodder; but this can be put behind us (as it is in the
imagery) because Art is 'decent': it 'reconciles the
irreconcilable'; it serves to pay lip-service to heritage (hence
the persistent sense of being at a banquet). It will not soil
the decent mouth.

The Word (line 1) is the impulse that makes and
comprehends. Poetry before the poetry-banquet. The Word is an
Explorer (cf. Four Quartets, passim). By using an emotive cliché
like 'The Word' I try to believe in an idea that I want to
believe in: that poetry makes its world from the known world;
that it has a transcendence; that it is something other than the
conspicuous consumption (the banquet) that it seems to be.

What I say in the section is, I think, that I don't believe
in the Word. The fact that I make the poem at all means that I
still believe in words. 

Here Hill expresses scepticism about the ability of art to achieve
that 'reconciliation of the irreconcilable', which is the objective of the
mystical paradox. He also acknowledges the logic of the abandonment of
poetry if scepticism should go further ('The fact that I make the poem
at all [...]'). The commentary resembles one of Empson's notes on his
poems, such as that on 'Sonnet': 'This free I am afraid only sounds an
offensively false use of the great emotive term [...] I was trying to
give the word the impact of a contradiction'. What the two poets have
in common would seem to be an analytical approach to words during the
process of composition.

Hill's poem represents in its most extreme form the combination of
reflexivity and impersonality which establishes language itself as the
origin of meaning, displacing the poet's self, without replacing it with
any persona or dramatic identity. Thus the impulse behind the poem is
'an attempt to realise the jarring double-takes in words of common
usage': the poem is primarily about the words it uses, rather than using
those words to express something else. It does, of course, express ideas about the writing and reading of poetry, but these ideas are secondary to the scrutiny of words, and are also highly contradictory.

Reflexivity is apparent in the 'key-antithesis' of lines 6 and 7: the repetition of 'spawn' in rhyme position (with the slight displacement effected by the bracket), renders the verbal texture highly obtrusive. Furthermore, the nature of the antithesis, between 'fat shook spawn' and 'delicate spawn' would suggest that the dualistic, paradoxical sense of words has penetrated to a highly detailed level. The antithetical nature of these phrases is not very apparent at first reading, especially since the parenthesis would encourage the reader to read line 7 as a gloss on line 6 rather than a contrast to it (a characteristic use of apparently appositional syntax, which involves the fragmentation of syntactical relations as well as individual words). Hill's own comments also illustrate the fragmentation of meaning in the radical nature of the contrary judgments implied: art is moral instruction; art is 'vulgar' self-improvement. 'The loathly neckings and fat shook spawn' recalls 'East Coker I': 'The time of the coupling of man and woman / And that of beasts [...] / Eating and drinking, Dung and death' (CPPE, 178). Hill's lines taint Eliot's idealisation of antique social harmony with a sense of prurience (as Hill's reference to Four Quartets in his commentary suggests, Eliot's poem represents an image of the possibility of transcendent reconciliation which is regretfully repudiated by Hill). 

'The flesh eased through turbulence' implies an ironic satire on the idea of catharsis as a moral value in art. The soul which 'purples itself' either ennobles itself (in a social sense) or bruises itself.
This fragmentation continues in the second of the sonnets:

II

O Love, subject of the mere diurnal grind,
Forever being pledged to be redeemed,
Expose yourself for charity; be assured
The body is but husk and excrement.
Enter these deaths according to the law,
O visited women, possessed sons! Foreign lusts
Infringe our restraints; the changeable
Soldiery have their goings-out and comings-in
Dying in abundance. Choicest beasts
Suffuse the gutters with their colourful blood.
Our God scatters corruption. Priests, martyrs,
Parade to this imperious theme: 'O Love,
You know what pains succeed; be vigilant; strive
To recognize the damned among your friends.'

Hill's commentary on this sonnet is as follows:

The 'germ', I think, is the key phrase in line 11. 'Our God scatters corruption' = 'Our God puts corruption to flight' or 'Our God disseminates corruption.' I may have been thinking of Mr Dulles's idea of God as Head of Strategic Air Command.

Lines 1 and 12. Two appearances of Love in the World: Line 1 -- as habit (the vulgarism 'grind' is intentional); line 12, Love as militant conformity (the whole army of martyrs is suggested). Any idea of Love, simply as Love, fails to appear. It struggles to be heard in the last two lines but is twisted by a pun.

O Love, acknowledge (admit, confess, recognize as valid) the claims of those in need (your friends) difficult though this may be (strive) and unsavoury as they may be (damned). This is a prayer for contact. OR: Love, look to yourself, you know the drill, among your friends some are non-elect: keep a sharp look-out for these (and, I hope to imply, when you do find them, look quickly the other way). But I want the poem to have this dubious end; because I feel dubious; and the whole business is dubious. \\

Something of the difficulty of such a style of poetry for the reader is acknowledged, whether consciously or not, by the statement that a key idea ('Love, simply as Love') 'struggles to be heard' but 'fails to appear' in the text: if it fails to appear, how do we know that it is
struggling to be heard? Quotation marks are frequently a reflexive device. Here those around the last sentence of the poem enclose a highly ambivalent moral imperative. This sentence could be imagined as spoken by 'Our God', but, in keeping with the impersonality of the poem as a whole, are rather an utterance of the poem itself, a statement of one of its own themes, echoing within the smaller enclosure of quotation marks its own opening words. 'What pains succeed' can mean either what suffering will follow on from indifference and lack of love, or what narcissistic, imaginative exploitation of suffering will lead to poetic success.

'Annunciations' makes reference to the decay and fragmentation of words by means of its echo of *Four Quartets*, but, as glossed by Hill, reverses the movement of Eliot's poem. In 'Burnt Norton' Eliot, faced with the sense of the decay of words, points towards the Word, a transcendent medium of God's will. Incarnate in Jesus, the Word is subject to temptation, but the pattern of *Four Quartets* as a whole implies a resolution in the eternal:

Words, after speech, reach
Into the silence. Only by the form, the pattern,
Can words or music reach
The stillness [...] (Burnt Norton: V', CPPE, 175)

Hill's poem rejects this mystical resolution of paradox, and turns back to a belief in words, a more prosaic, sceptical and relativistic version of the poet's vocation. 'Annunciations' exemplifies the radical scepticism which undermines the mystical resolution of paradox by denying or subverting its transcendent term. The poem presents the Word itself as a corrupted, exploited concept: as a word among others, not the
absolute truth which it is for Eliot. As Jeremy Hooker acutely observes: 'Geoffrey Hill's scepticism is Conradian in its focus on the very values -- vision, art, imagination, -- on which Romantic art has based its claim to transcend or transfigure reality, resolve contradictions, and reconcile opposites' (Robinson, 22). Yet the poem also presents 'words of common usage' as liable to fracture into opposed senses, and thus subjects the discourse of ordinary social activity, as well as the tenets of Christian faith, to a corroding scepticism. The process in 'Annunciations' is that subsequently described by Hill in 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"': 'a poet must also turn back, with whatever weariness, disgust, love barely distinguishable from hate, to confront "the indefinite extent" of language itself and seek his "focus" there' (PMA, 9). Here Hill is rejecting the 'stylish aesthetic of despair' represented by the 'desire for the ultimate integrity of silence to which so much eloquence has been so frequently and indefatigably devoted'; an aesthetic which is one response to the sense of poetry's inability to deal adequately with atrocities (the irony of 'so much eloquence' is presumably directed at George Steiner).

Disgusted with words (even if still believing in them), mistrustful of poetry, and rejecting the rhetoric of silence, where did Hill have to go at this point, except into actual silence (a very different thing from being eloquent about the desire or need for silence)? Hill's commentary on 'Annunciations' implies the possibility of rescuing poetry for a melioristic project by representing it as a lesson in linguistic analysis, promoting a politically and morally valuable awareness of the duplicity of words and their concealed ideological content. But the high level of impersonal reflexivity in the poem tends to implicate it in
those processes which it is censuring. If it were possible to read it simply as attacking the "home movies" style of poetry, then it would be a satire in the manner of The Dunciad, but its reflexivity makes its disgust self-directed.

For the twentieth-century Western European writer of Hill's generation, the most intense anxiety about the moral status of the imagination is provoked by the obligation to write about the holocaust. 'September Song' presents a crux of interpretation parallel to that of 'Annunciations', but where 'Annunciations' suggests self-directed disgust, 'September Song' confronts self-revoking despair.

SEPTEMBER SONG

born 19.6.32 - deported 24.9.42

Undesirable you may have been, untouchable you were not. Not forgotten or passed over at the proper time.

As estimated, you died. Things marched, sufficient, to that end. Just so much Zyklon and leather, patented terror, so many routine cries.

(I have made an elegy for myself it is true)

September fattens on vines. Roses flake from the wall. The smoke of harmless fires drifts to my eyes.

This is plenty. This is more than enough.

Critics have agreed that the crucial issue for 'September Song' is the problem of poetic tact, but have implied two conclusions which are subtly but crucially different. Some have implied that the poem achieves tact: others that the poem acknowledges that it cannot achieve tact
(possibly with the paradoxical conclusion that this awareness of its own lack of tact is a form of tact). Henry Hart belongs to the first group: his analysis of the poem concludes with a bland approval quite at odds with the spirit of the text: 'Hill remains sombre, stoical, sardonic, taciturn. He refrains from saying too much, since a garrulous fattening of language would indicate complicity with the decadent world he documents' (Hart, 111). But a sense of inescapable complicity is a primary feature of Hill's work as a whole; at this stage in his career one might even say a defining feature, issuing in reflexivity which constantly acknowledges that complicity. The point is precisely that Hill does not stand apart in any self-assured pose, that he has said too much. What is 'more than enough' if not too much?

Jon Silkin, with more subtlety than Hart, also conveys a sense of achieved tact: 'But he also modestly pleads [...] that whatever the reasons for his writing such an elegy, a proper regard for the victim, a true and unambitious feeling, was present and used'. Alastair Fowler is a representative of the second group:

Hill does not mean that the elegy itself has true feeling. Only a shallow feeler could claim to have imagined emotions decently appropriate to such a subject. Hill has gone perhaps further than most could, towards that goal. It was honourable to make the attempt, although perhaps inadvisable to try so frequently.

This is a judicious assessment which succeeds in standing outside the problems created by Hill's reflexivity. Hill's own sense of the recessive nature of tact is contained in the following lines from 'Three Baroque Meditations: 2':
For I am circumspect,
Lifting the spicy lid of my tact
To sniff at the myrrh 42

These lines bring us back to the problem of infinite regress: awareness of tact can be an infringement of it in the form of self-congratulation. To put it another way, we are presented with a moral version of Russell's paradox: applying the reflexive criterion that a poem on such a subject must acknowledge its inability to deal with it appropriately (and given the sensitivity and adequacy of the poem in other respects), the poem can only be appropriate if it admits that it is inappropriate. It is in 'September Song' that Hill's poetry comes closest to the processes of reflexivity in logic. As Fowler implies, the statement 'it / is true', if applied to the feeling expressed by the elegy, would itself imply a shallowness or inadequacy in that feeling. So Hill's 'it / is true' is a moral equivalent to Epimenides's logical paradox, 'this statement is false'. The situation is of course complicated by the ambiguity of 'it'. If we take 'it' to refer to the poem, then the statement makes a self-vitiating claim of adequacy. If we take the statement to be an acknowledgement that the elegy was written for the poet's own satisfaction, then this acknowledgement of a dubious motivation may rescue the truth of the elegy in another sense: it may be true because it is honest about itself.

Stephen Glynn describes the problem of such ambiguity accurately:

it seems to me that [...] he is both intimating that it is poetically/morally unacceptable to exploit such a powerful 'subject' in order to give one's work a power that it has not earned for itself, and asserting that this particular poem was composed with a 'true', unaccepting humility. Of course, the moment this point is made all the potential horrors of self-congratulation and moral superiority rush in. The awkwardness of this section perhaps enacts the poet's
realisation that he is being so frank that he could appear to be conceited about being frank [...] And so on ad infinitum.  

Although 'September Song' thus exemplifies the sceptical reflexive paradox in its extreme form, it also, as I have already stated, contains one solution to the moral and intellectual corner into which Hill had painted himself. Glynn seems to be feeling towards this solution when he comments:

And yet, however insoluble the dilemma, it is surely the poet's experience that dictates the poem's form. The response is Hill's own.  

Probably more exegesis has been devoted to the parenthesis of 'September Song' than to any other lines of Hill's work, and much of this exegesis has discussed the sense of 'it' and 'true' in relation to the line break between 'it' and the copula. But another crucial feature of these lines is simply the presence of the first person pronoun, 'I', and the associated prominence of 'myself'. It is this presence and what it implies that makes 'September Song', in my opinion, a moving and articulate poem where 'Annunciations', in which Hill sought to explore comparable issues in a context of near-total impersonality, is clever, technically accomplished, but cold and even sterile (I find Hill's commentary on 'Annunciations' more interesting than the poems themselves). The intellectual problem of reflexive paradox, and the moral problem of the imagination confronting the suffering of others, both require some sort of direct acknowledgement of subjectivity. In the case of the moral problem the reason for this is fairly clear. The experience of others is in some sense inaccessible: this is particularly so of their suffering, and true most of all when this suffering is of an extreme nature and in
extreme circumstances. To acknowledge this is to acknowledge, not a truth about the experience of the other person, but a truth about one's own viewpoint. Alastair Fowler's comment on the subject, quoted above, is eminently sensible, but notably depends on intentionality, on considering what Hill was conjecturally trying to do, which involves reinstating the concept of the poet as origin. The attempt in poems such as 'Annunciations', to explore these issues through the interplay of the connotations of words, with language as originating subject, effaced precisely the central problem of who is speaking. Hill is not alone among his contemporaries in addressing such concerns. Roy Fisher considers the danger of exploiting suffering by writing about it in a very brief poem, 'It Is Writing':

Because it could do it well
the poem wants to glorify suffering
I mistrust it.

I mistrust the poem in its hour of success,
a thing capable of being
tempted by ethics into the wonderful. 46

The difference in style and tone is considerable. 'September Song' is agonized, intense, an imaginative realisation of the problem in a particular instance, whereas Fisher's is epigrammatic, cool, an abstract statement of a general matter. Sparseness is, however, something which the two poems have in common and presumably for the same reason; in both there is a sense of restraint, a morally-weighed and weighted terseness which reflects a suspicion of eloquence and rhetoric. Fisher, like Hill, sees the danger, not of taking an immoral stance, but of relishing a moral one: 'tempted by ethics into the wonderful'. Both poems work with a dialectic of the personal and impersonal and in this, I take
it, they respond to the importance of locating the speaking self in writing about the suffering of others. In both poems I think that we, and the poet, take his initial impulse of compassion, sadness, outrage, to be a sincere and worthy one. The disquieting element of exploitation, relishing, glamourization, seems to arise from the act of verbalization and therefore, in a sense, to come from the language or the act of enunciation rather than from the poet. Hence Fisher's title: 'It Is Writing' (not 'I Am Writing'). It is the poem, not he, that 'wants to glorify suffering'; the 'I' stands aside and mistrusts. Yet this is surely to be read as implicit irony: the point of the poem is that it is the same 'I' that writes and that 'mistrusts' and that the manner in which language imposes on us cannot free us from the responsibility for our use of it. Thus Fisher's poem, in its oblique and understated way, makes the same point about such responsibility.

3.8 CONCLUSION

My argument here may seem to be implying that Hill's solution to the crisis was to abandon the principle of impersonality. The process by which his poetry has subsequently developed is, however, a more subtle one than such a claim would imply. The approach to the self is initially in the form of awareness of its isolation from its object of concern; this is true not only of 'September Song' but also of 'Tristia: 1891-1938: A Valediction to Osip Mandelstam':

Difficult friend, I would have preferred
You to them. The dead keep their sealed lives
And again I am too late. Too late
The salutes, dust-clouds and brazen cries.
Images rear from desolation
Look ... ruins upon a plain ... 
A few men glare at their hands; others
Grovel for food in the roadside field.

Tragedy has all under regard.
It will not touch us but it is there --
Flawless, insatiate -- hard summer sky
Feasting on this, reaching its own end.

Elegy is frequently an attempt to recapture, on a higher spiritual plane,
what has been lost on the material plane, as Lycidas reappears as genius
of the shore, or Arthur Hallam as an internalized spiritual presence. 47
But Hill's elegy is from the start a further parting, absence piled upon
absence. Mandelstam is a difficult friend in several ways: he was a
difficult person to know because his friends were liable to unwelcome
visits from the GPU; poets in our age must be difficult, wrote Eliot in
1921 (SE, 275), but 13 years later Mandelstam's poem denouncing Stalin
was unfortunately not difficult enough, and the poet was imprisoned; it
is also difficult for Hill to have as a friend a Russian poet who died
on his way to a labour camp when Hill was a six-year old schoolboy in
Worcestershire. 'Difficult friend' is really an oxymoron, an assertion of
connection across a vast gulf. The difficulty is nevertheless part of
the connection; Hill himself is nothing if not difficult, in both the
obvious senses of the word. But as Caliban implies in Auden's 'The Sea
and the Mirror', consciousness of a gap is not a bridge, and here
consciousness of a gap, or a gap of consciousness, is what is mainly
felt. 48 Trying to speak to Mandelstam as a friend, to achieve a moment
of plenitude, Hill finds only the grand but hollow gestures of poetic
memorialization available: 'The salutes, dust-clouds and brazen cries'.
There is a hint that it is rather brazen of Hill to address the great
Russian poet and that he may only have succeeded in raising a bit of poetic dust. Touching and not touching are powerful themes in Hill's poetry with strong resonances of presence and absence. Here he is touched (moved) by the tragedy of Mandelstam's life but not touched (struck down) by any similar fate.

In the two main sequences of *King Log*, 'The Songbook of Sebastian Arrurruz' (1965-68), and 'Funeral Music' (1966), and in the next volume, *Mercian Hymns*, the self is given a more active and central role. Having developed a style of ambiguity, condensation and paradox, and taken it to the extreme which an impersonal context allowed, Hill then went on to employ the technical achievements of this style in poems which obliquely discover or construct the self in language. Retaining a strong element of reflexivity, they maintain an active awareness of language as a source of meaning, but join to this a sense of the self's interaction with that language.
Notes to Chapter 3

1. The same is generally true of the early uncollected poems. For example, in 'An Ark on the Flood', in *Oxford Poetry 1954*, ed. by Jonathan Price and Anthony Thwaite (Oxford: Fantasy Press, 1954), pp. 14-17, section I ends with the line: 'The flame gives tongue upon the hush of cold' (p. 15). The contrast of flame and cold here reflects the paradoxical nature of the God of the Old Testament, who is both creative and destructive. Like 'Genesis', the poem is a pseudo-Biblical narrative.

2. The second line was excluded from the version in *Collected Poems*, presumably because the colloquial senses of 'tight' and 'heaves' produce an unfortunate comic image.

3. Sherry, in line with his general approach, which is more subtle than Hart's, qualifies this identification with his sense that the poem's 'five parts vary their voices, representing in different manners of verse his conflicting impulses to write both civil and vatic poetry' (Sherry, p. 40).


7. Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. from the 5th edn by E.C. Hoskyns (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), pp. 60, 29. Further references to this work are given in the text.


10. Russell's paradox is created by specifying the set of all sets that do not include themselves.

11. See Knottenbelt, pp. 19-20, Ricks, p. 81.

12. W.B. Yeats, letter of September 1936 to Dorothy Wellesley, quoted by Hill, *PMA*, p. 2. Christopher Ricks discusses the shutting effected by Hill's brackets in this poem (Ricks, p. 294n.).
13. A point that is made by Nietzsche: 'Are we not permitted to be a little ironical now about the subject as we are about the predicate and object? Ought the philosopher not to rise above the belief in grammar? All due respect to governesses: but is it not time that philosophy renounced the beliefs of governesses?' (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. by R.J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), section 34, pp. 47-48).

14. For example, the lines: 'To dispense, with justice: or, to dispense / with justice' (TM, 6.1).


22. Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, section 146, p. 84.


25. Hooker argues that 'For The Unfallen begins with "Genesis" [...] one of several poems (others are "The Turtle Dove" and "The Troublesome Reign") with a rhetoric powerful enough to suggest why, in order to counteract its intoxicating effects, Hill should have developed Coleridge's "drama of reason" in such an acute form: rhetorical power of this order, without scepticism, would stifle all moral
'intelligence' (Robinson, p. 24). My argument sees moderate scepticism as implicit in the paradoxical rhetoric of these poems.

26. See Hart, p. 84; Michael Edwards (Robinson, p. 159); Jeremy Hooker (Robinson, p. 23).


28. Cruden, p. 222.


31. Tate, p. 23.


38. Gabriel Pearson, writing on 'Funeral Music', comments: 'We find ourselves living in post post-Symbolism. It should therefore be no surprise to find Hill conducting a quiet, loving divorce from Eliot' (Robinson, p. 34).

39. See note 36.

40. Silkin, p. 147.


42. Silkin quotes these lines and comments: 'The images have a richness, but here he is not so much reproaching himself for that, although he implies such a possibility, but rather for the perhaps evasive caution which is characterized by "tact". The self-questioning exposes further recessions of self-doubt and questions, themselves seen to be faintly absurd' (Silkin, p. 148).


44. Glynn, p. 239.

45. Despite differences of style and interest, Fisher and Hill share an oppositional relationship to contemporary poetry (though from rather different standpoints) and a suspicion about poetry and its liability to exploit or be exploited. Philip Gardner suggests the second point when he writes that 'where Fisher and Hill are alike is in their attitude to utterance itself: both expend much effort in order to crystalize thought and feeling into hard verbal constructs that resist paraphrase, and are extremely reluctant to make discursive statements' ('A City of the Mind', review of Roy Fisher's Poems 1955-1980, TLS, 20 March 1981, p. 314).


CHAPTER 4: MEDIATIONS OF THE SELF

4.1 INTRODUCTION

During the latter half of the 1960s Hill is engaged, in his poetry, in feeling his way out of the moral and logical crisis expressed in 'Annunciations' (1961), and doing so primarily by confronting the question of the place of the subject in his poems. The poems of this period explore various ways in which subjectivity can be acknowledged while retaining certain elements of impersonality: in particular the sense of language as origin (involving an exploration of the social and historical matter inherent in the structure and history of language) and the avoidance of the projection of a unitary subjectivity in favour of an awareness of subjectivity as constructed in reciprocal relation with language, with other individuals and with the social. 'The Songbook of Sebastian Arrurruz' represents a major departure in the role of the subject in Hill's poetry.

If the place of the subject is a central issue brought to the fore by the paradoxes of Hill's early poetry, then the nature of history, and its relation to myth, and to the belief in the transcendent and timeless, are also crucial. These questions are explored in 'Funeral Music' (1966, KL), the other major sequence of King Log. This sonnet sequence belongs to the same period as 'The Songbook of Sebastian Arrurruz' and 'September Song', and represents a second way of working through the crisis, running in parallel to the first; it is discussed below.
4.2 'THE SONGBOOK OF SEBASTIAN ARRURRUZ'

'The Songbook of Sebastian Arrurruz' consists of nine poems and two prose poems. It was first published in complete form as the concluding sequence of *King Log*, in 1968, though parts of the sequence had appeared earlier in various journals. 'The Songbook' represents a change of subject matter, in that it is Hill's first love poetry since the third person accounts of sexual relations which had appeared over a decade earlier: 'The Turtle Dove' (1954), 'The Troublesome Reign' (1954), 'Asmodeus' (1955), 'Metamorphoses: V (sequence dated 1954-56, V published 1955)' (all in *For The Unfallen*). These poems, though rhetorically powerful, maintain a certain analytical distance. There are, however, links to 'The Songbook'. 'Asmodeus: II' employs the second person pronouns which are so prominent in 'The Songbook' (though the former has no first person pronouns) and concludes with a metaphor which finds an echo in one of the poems of 'The Songbook':

Since you are outside, go,
Closing the doors of the house and the head also.
('Asmodeus: II')

The metaphor holds; is a snug house.
You are outside, lost somewhere [
('The Songbook: 5')

Reflexivity is significantly present in the later poem: the lines from 'Asmodeus' employ a metaphor, while those from 'The Songbook' also explicitly mention a metaphor, and its failure to console. However, because of the presence of a persona who speaks the poems of 'The Songbook', this reflexive or secondary level of reference feeds back into the human experience which is the poem's primary level of reference. The sense of the exclusion of the addressee of the poems by the very words
which seek to recall her is a feature of Sebastian Arrurruz's experience as a poet and a man. Thus 'The Songbook' shares a pattern of feeling with 'September Song' (though the moral context is less extreme), but whereas in 'September Song' the location of the poet's subjectivity is marginal to the reality which the poem wishes to address (that of the dead child's experience), in 'The Songbook' the subjectivity of a fictional poet is central.

The publication dates of 'The Songbook' cover the period from 1965 to 1968, before and after the publication of 'September Song', and the view that 'September Song' and 'The Songbook' are part of the same process may be supported by the links which exist between them notwithstanding the considerable difference in their subject matter. The title of each suggests poetry conceived as song: a song of mourning and a love song. In both 'September Song' and 'The Songbook' the title is followed by a subtitle denoting an individual and the dates of his or her life (in the former poem the name is, of course, crucially absent). In the process by which Hill's poetry works its way out of the crisis, 'September Song' looks backward, and 'The Songbook' looks forward. That is to say, 'September Song' deals with the themes which had preoccupied Hill since the mid-fifties: the moral risks of poetry in its attempt to write of suffering, and to face the history of the twentieth century. But it also moves on from the self-revoking, paradoxical rhetoric of the earlier work by, however minimally, locating the poet as subject. The 'Songbook' takes up a new theme: its subtitle, in contrast to the absence of name which, in 'September Song', denotes the suffering victim from whom the poet is separated, names a fictional construct, a persona, through whom the poet may achieve a new lucidity. 4
Thus in the fifth poem of 'The Songbook', reflexivity and paradox are present, but tamed by their human context.

Love, oh my love, it will come
Sure enough! A storm
Broods over the dry earth all day.
At night the shutters throb in its downpour.

The metaphor holds; is a snug house.
You are outside, lost somewhere. I find myself
Devouring verses of stranger passion
And exile. The exact words

Are fed into my blank hunger for you.

The metaphor of the storm is ambiguously resonant. It suggests sexual consummation: 'it will come', 'throb', dampness succeeding dryness. But this is a fantasy or a memory of sexual consummation rather than its actuality. The word 'broods' implies an internal process of imagining and remembering, and also applies to the activity of writing the poem (that is to say, to Arrurruz's activity). Reading the first stanza, we imagine Arrurruz brooding over past passion during the day, his inner weather matched by the tension of an approaching thunderstorm. At night the storm bursts, but Arrurruz is denied the sexual fulfilment which would relieve his inner tension as the storm resolves the atmospheric tension. Instead he reads, and writes, poetry. Brooding is a word which Hill has elsewhere applied to the process of writing poetry and his gloss on the word in his interview with John Haffenden seems very relevant to this poem, in its use of ideas of creativity and exclusion:

*Brooding is a useful word [in discussing the process of composition] because of its range of connotation: it can suggest both an outward-turned creativity and an inward-turned depression. One can brood positively, in order to foster and bring forth, or one can brood in order to shut out and negate.*

(VP, 82)
A comparison between this comment (which dates from 1981) and the fifth poem of 'The Songbook' is illuminating in terms of Hill's use of the persona of Sebastian Arrurruz to explore aspects of his own temperament, although to phrase the process thus is to give the personal element an arbitrary primacy; one might equally say that he uses aspects of his own temperament to create the persona. The interview comment makes an analytical distinction between two opposed aspects of the creative process, in terms which arguably have some universal applicability, but nevertheless suggest particularities of Hill's temperament and method, in that negation and exclusion, and their close involvement with positive creativity, are recognizable characteristics of his work.

The poem represents these dual aspects of creativity, not analytically distinguished, but emotionally synthesized. Arrurruz's brooding over his lost love is consummated in the metaphor of the storm, which snugly sums up his experience, but since it is an experience of loss, serves only to reinforce a sense of the absence of the loved one. Line five of the poem, in a virtuoso turn of wit, employs a 'snug house' as a metaphor for the sense of exclusion generated in Arrurruz by the metaphor of the storm. The house is simultaneously part of the environment in which Arrurruz is reading, part of the metaphorical use which he makes of that environment to convey feelings, and part of a second order metaphor for his response to the first metaphor. The house functions as a metaphor for a particular felt quality of metaphor as a figure of speech: the way in which it catches something, neatly encapsulates it, at the cost of shutting out something else. Here is one of those Escher-like effects of Hill's poetry: like
many of Escher's drawings, lines 5-6 produce a sense of 'double-take' in the reader (or viewer); one can see two things going on simultaneously in the picture or poem, which is itself seamless, yet despite this seamlessness it is impossible to align these two things in one's mind. 

In the poem the failure of metaphor is also its success: the metaphor fails because it fails to capture for Arrurruz the full sense of the lost woman as a living presence; it succeeds because the poem movingly conveys this failure, this sense of loss. The exhilaration arises for the reader because, while the failure was inevitable, the success is an artistic achievement.

Arrurruz's experience of loss, and his experience of creativity, are closely connected, and the intricacy of the metaphorical structure enacts this involvement. Just as the ambiguity of the word 'recall' in 'Soliloquies: The Stone Man' expresses ambivalence about memory (see Section 2.4), so the metaphors of the storm and the house express ambivalence about the snugness of a poem as a crafted object. Hill has also remarked on the satisfaction of this neat completion:

There is that marvellous remark of Yeats about a poem coming together with a click like a closing box which is, I think, an almost perfect description of that moment of ecstatic completion, when the last true word you've been seeking with weariness and with near despair for so long, finally and miraculously moves into place. (UJ, 212)

The metaphor of the closing box, here taken up by Hill as an expression of aesthetic satisfaction, nevertheless has a certain latent ambivalence. Is the experience of which the poem speaks inside or outside the box (and if inside, is it alive or dead)? Hence the satisfaction of completion has a drawback:
My topic is 'self-expression' and its necessary consequences. Not only what T.S. Eliot describes as that 'moment of exhaustion, of appeasement, of absolution' but also the euphoria of self-assertion, and the recoil into self-reproach and humiliation. (Sermon, 1)

The precision ('the exact words'), and the completion ('a snug house') of the metaphor, and of the poem as a whole, are a source of satisfaction to Arrurruz, but also emphasize to him the discontinuity between the completion of metaphor and poem on the one hand, and the perpetual incompleteness and contingency of experience on the other.

This poem (5) was the first of the sequence to be published, so that in one sense 'The Songbook' started with an anticipation of the loss involved in closure; an anticipation of the 'odd words' and 'now-almost-meaningless despair' of the last poem (11), presaged in 5 by the 'verses of stranger passion' and 'blank hunger'. It is a blank hunger of absence, fed rather than assuaged by Arrurruz's reading of poetry expressing themes close to his own experience: passion and exile or loss. From the start he is troubled by the separation of poetry from the elusive quality of lived experience. Thus the pattern shared with 'September Song' is as follows: there is an experience from which the subject feels himself to be irremediably separated (the suffering of an unknown child; his own lost love and past happiness); the poem attempts to address this experience, but cannot do so adequately; it addresses its own failure, and this failure itself becomes a metaphor for the poet's separation. In failing to recoup the primary experience, the poem movingly conveys the secondary experience; that of separation. Clearly, however, the sense in which one could be said to be separated from the extreme suffering of an unknown other person is very different from the
sense in which one could be said to be separated from one's own past, when possessed by a sense of loss.

There is, however, a further difference between 'September Song' and 'The Songbook' in that the subject or 'I' of the latter work is presented as a fictionalized character. Thus there are two relations to consider in 'The Songbook': that between Arrurruz and his wife and that between Hill and Arrurruz. While the former involves a sense of separation and exclusion, the latter (though extra-textual and speculative) seems to show new possibilities of closeness. Gabriel Pearson describes the ninth poem of the sequence, 'A Song from Armenia', as achieving 'an unembarrassed directness and sensuousness of statement' new in Hill's work, and sees this as a result of the poem being 'so purely embedded in its fictional context' (Robinson, 47). Poem 5, published several years earlier than 'A Song from Armenia', has elements of abstraction and indirectness, reflecting self-consciously on its own metaphor in a way that recalls Hill's earlier suspicion concerning utterance, but the use of a fictional context mitigates the moral problem of speaking for another. To have invented or fictionalized the experience of the child commemorated in 'September Song' would have been, that poem implies, a dangerous presumption, whereas the poet is free to express Arruryuz's passions as well as gently to mock his pedantry.

We may observe the effects of this freedom throughout the sequence. The following is the opening poem:
Ten years without you. For so it happens.
Days make their steady progress, a routine
That is merciful and attracts nobody.

Already, like a disciplined scholar,
I piece fragments together, past conjecture
Establishing true sequences of pain;

For so it is proper to find value
In a bleak skill, as in the thing restored:
The long-lost words of choice and valediction.

Here the directness of utterance upon which Gabriel Pearson comments is immediately apparent. Strong emotion emerges through understatement, suggesting pain now controlled and habitual, and an attitude of precision and stoicism. The 'steady progress' of the days is enacted by the steadiness of the opening lines, their clear syntax and short sentences or clauses. Lines 5 and 6 imply the constructive role which poetry can play in relation to remembered experience: the sequences to which Arrurruz refers include his poetic sequence as well as the chronological sequence of his life, and the sequence of feeling, action and reaction in his relation with his wife. Thus 'true sequences', like 'it / is true' in 'September Song', comments reflexively on the poem and there is a comparable (though less extreme) uncertainty: true to what? 'Past conjecture' suggests conjecture about the past, conjectures made in the past and also certainty (beyond conjecture). The last sense makes the phrase another reflexive assertion of truth (the sequence is certainly true). But there is also a suggestion that the fragments may be past the ability of conjecture to reunite them, so that the sequence is true only as a fiction, and is false to the unity of experience which the fragments once composed. This ambiguity may be conceived as Arrurruz wondering about the nature of his activity as a poet, and it is
thus contained within the ironic treatment of his character, with its
touches of pedantry and self-pity. It is perhaps in this sense that, in
Gabriel Pearson's words, 'the extreme irony of the mask [...] permits a
release' (Robinson, 47). The rhetoric of contradiction and paradox which
permeated the earlier poetry is contained and distanced as the human
uncertainty of an individual.

The fact that 'The Songbook' was not first published as a complete
sequence, but appeared over several years, is a part of the fictional
context which is created. In poem 1, Arrurruz comments, with a touch of
self-mockery, 'Already, like a disciplined scholar, / I piece fragments
together', and it is thus appropriate that his sequence should have been
first available in fragmentary form, before attaining, in *King Log*, a
completion resembling that of a broken earthenware pot of which those
pieces present, and fixed back into shape, are enough to suggest the
shape of the whole, although the whole is not recoverable (in 'A Letter
from Armenia' Arrurruz considers 'shards glazed and unglazed'). Several
excerpts published in journals carried the title 'From the Songbook of
Sebastian Arrurruz', thus implying the fictional existence of a more
extensive collection, from which these poems were selected. This
fiction is extended outside the body of the sequence as published in
*King Log* and in *Collected Poems* by the appearance in 1972 of a further
'Copla by Sebastian Arrurruz', which has remained uncollected. The
sense of the poems as parts of an unavailable whole is reinforced by the
slight obscurity of the narrative. The sequence does not have the dense
obscurity of style of poems such as 'Annunciations' or 'Doctor Faustus',
but rather a quality of ellipsis, with touches of Jamesian enigma,
encouraging the reader to intuit what remains unstated.
There is a degree of uncertainty about occasions and persons: Hart thinks that the woman alluded to in the poems is in all cases Arrurruz's wife (Hart, 140-52); Sherry suggests that 'Arrurruz writes "A Letter from Armenia" (8) either to a recent mistress or, perhaps, as memory mixes with desire, to his wife' (Sherry, 122); Pearson comments that 'we cannot tell whether the "you" of the poem is real or an imaginary muse: she seems not to be identical with Arrurruz's wife, to judge by the oblique tentative figure delineated in "To His Wife" (Robinson, 47). 'To His Wife' is the most difficult poem of the sequence. The title seems at first sight to imply that the preceding nine poems, which we may well have taken to be addressed to an estranged wife, were addressed to someone else, while the central image of the poem is inherently confusing in that it seems to imagine presence and absence simultaneously.

TO HIS WIFE

You ventured occasionally --  
As though this were another's house --  
Not intimate but an acquaintance  
Flaunting her modest claim; like one  
Idly commiserated by new-mated  
Lovers rampant in proper delight  
When all their guests have gone.

[1921]

I take the title of 'To His Wife' as an instance of Arrurruz's fondness for experimenting with a range of forms, and with the use of formal titles: a prose poem entitled 'A Letter from Armenia', a series of three-line 'Coplas', and so on. The title suggests Arrurruz venturing, tentatively and with a certain formality, to address his wife, just as he describes his wife as having 'ventured [...] / Not intimate but an
acquaintance'. While it is quite possible to read the sequence as involving more than one woman, I find it more satisfactory to read its subtlety, delicacy, passion and irony as charting the range and variety of emotional nuance in a single marital relationship, with an element of doubling which is that of memory. Arrurruz is writing both about the past, in which he was with his wife, and the present, in which he is without her, but, through his poetry, is conducting a relationship with her memory.

It is primarily in the latter context, that of memory, that I read 'To His Wife'. Hart comments that the wife 'finds herself a foreign guest in Arrurruz's house of language' (Hart, 151), and this reading is supported by the continuity between the image of the house in this poem, and the 'snug house' of metaphor in poem 5. One might say that the mental and linguistic construct which seemed to exclude her in the earlier poem is now receiving a visit from her. Interpreted thus, the situation in the poem becomes clearer. The confusion arises because the descriptions of the wife as one who 'ventured' and as 'Flaunting her modest claim' seem to imply her presence, while the last three lines seem to imagine the 'new-mated / Lovers' as commiserating with her in her absence. However, taking the whole situation as a simile (which indeed it is announced to be by 'As though' and 'like one'), representing the role Arrurruz's wife has played in his life since their parting, it is appropriate that she should be, in respect of both his memory and his poetry, at once present as an emotional force, and absent as a living person. 'Coplas: i' implies that his possession of her has always been in doubt:
'One cannot lose what one has not possessed.'
So much for that abrasive gem.
I can lose what I want. I want you.

These lines are an instance of the intriguing and slightly teasing uncertainty of occasion in the sequence. This 'abrasive gem' of an aphorism might have been uttered by the wife near to the time of their parting, as some of the 'long-lost words of choice and valediction', but equally it might have been said earlier and recalled by Arrurruz in connection with the parting, or even have been a portentous utterance by Arrurruz himself, which he now recalls with self-mockery. If we take it as spoken by her, it sounds like a riposte to a complaint about his sense of loss. While the claim that he has never possessed her may well imply some failure in their relationship, she may also be alluding to the frequent human fantasy of sexual relations as possession, related to the fantasy of merging or union. A version, and possible source, of the 'abrasive gem' exists in Henry James's *The Golden Bowl*. During one of Fanny Assingham's discussions with her husband, in which she analyses the state of relations between the two couples at the centre of the book, the following exchange occurs:

She had paused there before him while he wondered. 'You mean she'll get the Prince back?'
She raised her hand in quick impatience: the suggestion might have been almost abject. 'It isn't a question of recovery. It won't be a question of any vulgar struggle. To "get him back" she must have lost him, and to have lost him she must have had him.' With which Fanny shook her head. 'What I take her to be waking up to is the truth that all the while she really hasn't had him. Never.'

The Jamesian echo is appropriate in several ways. A little later Fanny Assingham observes of Adam Verver and his daughter that 'they didn't
know how to live', a diagnosis which might be applied to Arrurruz. 11

Other Jamesian elements in Hill's sequence include the concern with the reinterpretation of past events (piecing fragments together being a very Jamesian activity), the theme of the aesthetic and its bearing on human relations, and the image of experience as a work of art or art object. As an illustration of the last of these links, one might compare the symbol of the bowl in The Golden Bowl with poem 4 of 'The Songbook':

A workable fancy. Old petulant
Sorrow comes back to us, metamorphosed
And semi-precious. Fortuitous amber.
As though this recompensed our deprivation.
See how each fragment kindles as we turn it,
At the end, into the light of appraisal.

Sherry makes the association between Arrurruz's Christian name, and Saint Sebastian (Sherry, 118), and this link also leads us back to James, since Hill's poem 'Of Commerce and Society: VI The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian' (1956-58, FTU), has the subtitle 'Homage to Henry James', and also contains echoes of The Golden Bowl, such as its use of the word 'crystalline'. 12

Arrurruz's response to the aphorism of 'Coplas: i' ('I can lose what I want. I want you') suggests a wryly observed petulance, but also implies that for someone of Arrurruz's temperament, desire for the unattainable state of absolute intimacy is already loss, so that the sense of her absence which haunts his memory and poetry at a later date started with a sense of her ungraspable presence. For Arrurruz the truth is something like 'I cannot but lose what I want'.

So, in 'To His Wife', Arrurruz's sense of his wife as 'Not intimate but an acquaintance' not only describes her place in his memory and
poetry, but also recognizes in retrospect something about the place which his sexuality allowed her in their living relationship. Both in respect of past and present, the 'new-mated / Lovers rampant in proper delight / When all their guests have gone' represent the world of Arrurruz's sexual fantasy, a world which only to a limited extent accommodates the presence of a real woman. That Arrurruz's longing for his wife involves sexual fantasy is apparent in the moving third poem of the sequence: it is one of the achievements of 'The Songbook' that it successfully combines frankness, ironic humour and emotional power:

What other men do with other women
Is for me neither orgy nor sacrament
Nor a language of foreign candour

But is mere occasion or chance distance
Out of which you might move and speak my name

What is acknowledged in 'The Songbook' is a parallel, under certain conditions, between solitary literary creation and solitary sexual longing. The moral anxiety of Hill's earlier poetry concerning the treatment of the suffering of others has an equivalent here, but the anxiety is a matter of emotion rather than ethics. The desire to become one with another person, which has its roots in infantile experience, is not fully compatible with an adult sexual relationship, which involves recognition and acceptance of the otherness of the partner. Inability to effect a psychological compromise in this respect can reduce a partner to a player in the individual's internal fantasy. There is a parallel with the risk that poetry which attempts to explore the experience of another may appropriate it, and this, in another context, is precisely the anxiety expressed in 'September Song', where the poet fears that he
may be imagining the sufferings of the child for his own purposes: to propitiate his guilt, or to gain a frisson from the contemplation of the extremes of experience, while remaining secure. This is one sense of 'I have made / an elegy for myself [...]'. Arrurruz, whom Hill has described as a 'shy sensualist' (VP, 95), is intensely aware that his poetry may diminish, rather than reinforce, his sense of the reality of his wife and the relationship that they once had:

I wake
To caress propriety with odd words
And enjoy abstinence in a vocation
Of now-almost-meaningless despair. (11)

His sensual pleasure in verbal propriety is in danger of destroying the meaning of his sense of loss.

'Proper' and 'propriety' invariably carry a heavy load of irony in Hill's work. In 'September Song' 'the proper time' registers the obscenity of well-organised genocide. For Arrurruz, propriety is an idea charged with irony:

For so it is proper to find value
In a bleak skill, (1)

cy press es
shivering with heat (which we have borne also, in our proper ways)
('A Letter from Armenia')

new-mated
Lovers rampant in proper delight
('To His Wife')

To caress propriety (11)

One source of this irony is Hill's sense that the idea of propriety carries a note of self-congratulation which is not 'proper'. The
etymological root of 'proper' in the Latin proprius (one's own, peculiar, proper, personal, characteristic) is also relevant. 'The Songbook' meditates on forms of possession and loss (the words 'possess', 'possession' and 'dispossession', like the words 'proper' and 'propriety', echo through Hill's work): memory as both possession of, and estrangement from, the past; sexual relations as enactment of an unrealizable fantasy of total possession (of love and of another person); art as a means of possessing experience which, like the click of the closing box, leaves something out. Arrurruz has learned that one can be self-possessed, full of propriety in one's words and behaviour, at the cost of being dispossessed of the impropriety of passion and the otherness of what is not 'proper' to oneself (in the sense of not belonging to oneself).

The relationship of 'The Songbook' to a shadowy narrative of a life and a relationship reinforces the reader's sense that here Hill is cautiously exploring the introduction of an image of the self into his poetry. This is not to imply that the full narrative, could it be reconstructed, would be autobiographical; it is clear that for Hill such a presence involves neither the representation of an unproblematic pre-existing personality, nor the direct recounting of the poet's own experience. Hill's reply when asked about the relation of 'The Songbook' to his own experience, though characteristically wary, acknowledged the emotional significance of the subject matter:

[John Haffenden:] Was it simply an excursion of fantasy for you, or did you feel implicated in his experience?

[Hill:] No more implicated in his experience possibly than any author would feel implicated in the loves and sufferings of his characters. I would have thought it's an area of common implication. A sequence of love poems, whether given to a
fictional character or not, is surely the area where everybody can say that Keats's axioms have been proved upon the pulses. (VP, 95-96)

As elsewhere in his comments on the personal, Hill is not here denying the importance of the poet's own experience, but attempting to resist a simplified model of how it finds its way into his work. Many common terms and phrases used to discuss literature make this resistance difficult and necessary. For example, John Haffenden, an intelligent and perceptive questioner, nevertheless unwittingly implies, in the above question, that one is not implicated in one's fantasies. The creation of a fictional poet encourages the reader to imagine the relation of the work, not to Hill's life, but to Arrurruz's life.

4.3 MODERNISM AND POSTMODERNISM IN 'THE SONGBOOK'

Arrurruz's role in 'The Songbook' somewhat resembles that of Prufrock in Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' (CPPE, 13-17). Arrurruz clearly has temperamental affinities with Hill, but is portrayed with a mixture of sympathy and irony which resembles Eliot's attitude to Prufrock. There are other resemblances: both personae write songs (as indicated by the titles of the poems), and write of failure in love. The first line of Eliot's poem, 'Let us go then, you and I,', with its uncertainty concerning the persons referred to, is matched by 'Coplas: iv':

It is to him I write, it is to her
I speak in contained silence. Will they be touched
By the unfamiliar passion between them?
Eliot's 'you' has been taken to indicate a divided part of Prufrock's self, an 'unidentified male companion' (Eliot's explanation) or the reader. Similarly, the 'him' to whom Arrurruz writes might be the reader of his poetry (which in one sense is addressed to the wife, who presumably does not read it), his own past or unrealized self (as his poems invent an unlived life of passion with his lost wife), or a male friend and confidant. Both Prufrock and Arrurruz imagine what it would be like to have a different personality: Prufrock fantasizes a decisive and impressive self, while Arrurruz, in the appropriately titled 'Postures', imagines 'that I am not myself / But someone I might have been', an activity which, as Sherry points out, invites us to consider Hill's activity in imagining Arrurruz (Sherry, 118). Ironically, though, Prufrock and Arrurruz, who would both seem to be personae for their respective authors, both imagine their Yeatsian antithetical selves, rather than inventing personae of their own. Arrurruz is not Hill, but has points in common: fastidiousness, a fondness for irony, an exacting approach to art, a strong sense of loss. Whatever the similarities and differences, Arrurruz does represent Hill imagining himself being someone else, which is very different from the abnegation of self in the earlier poetry. The notes to *King Log* include the statement: 'The Arrurruz poems contain no allusion to any actual person, living or dead'. Similar legalistic statements are familiar from the credits of films, normally those which manifestly do portray versions of real people, so that it is tempting to detect a straight-faced humour in Hill's statement.

In technique, then, 'The Songbook' is modernist. But to use such a technique in the 1960s is to allude to, rather than to be part of,
modernism. This effect of allusion suggests an element of postmodernist pastiche, and is further complicated by the way in which Arrurruz's biography is very carefully placed in relation to the literary history of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As Kill himself has pointed out, Arrurruz dies 'on the very threshold of modernity, without having had the advantage of reading The Waste Land or Ulysses' (VP, 95). He is born three years after Yeats, a poet whose career stretches from late romanticism right through the modernist era, and Arrurruz's failure in love suggests a participation in Yeats's dilemma:

The intellect of man is forced to choose
Perfection of the life, or of the work.  

At the same time Arrurruz's activities as poet and archaeologist, and the form of his book, suggest self-conscious allusions to modernism. The phrase 'I piece fragments together' suggests Eliot's 'These fragments I have shored against my ruins'. Another statement with which Arrurruz might concur is that of Yeats, who in 1921 wrote of himself in the late 1880s: 'A conviction that the world was now but a bundle of fragments possessed me without ceasing'. The idea that the modernist era was possessed by a sense of fragmentation has, of course, become a commonplace of literary studies, as has the image of the reconstruction of a broken vessel, which the archaeological references of 'A Letter from Armenia' invite us to apply to the sequence. For example, Michael Bell suggests that Joyce, in writing Ulysses,

like an archeologist restoring a jar of unknown shape, places a sufficient number of the fragments in a mutual relation so that we can intuit the form of the whole.
Thus, 'The Songbook' is in various senses a pre-modernist, a modernist, and a post-modernist text. Pre-modernist in terms of its fictional author and his life and technically modernist in its use of the persona, it is postmodernist in its oblique, self-conscious, almost jokey allusions to modernism, combined with a minimalism and a deceptive simplicity of style. It represents the work of a poet (Hill, not Arrurruz) who engages with the Eliotic ideal of impersonality, as well as with associated effects of difficulty, fragmentation and dense allusiveness. Thus the doubling of Hill and Arrurruz is a doubling of two poets, one profoundly influenced by modernism, the other precluded by his death from reading its archetypal texts. Arrurruz might, however, have read 'The Love Song of J.Alfred Prufrock' (1917) and 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberley' (1920), and have done so before writing some of his poems (In *King Log* 'From The Latin' and 'To His Wife' are dated 1922 and 1921 respectively, though these dates were removed from the versions in the *Collected Poems*). The apparently clear placing of Arrurruz in history is thus deceptive, masking a complex involvement of author, persona and text with the techniques and principles of modernism. This involvement playfully engages with Eliot's doctrine according to which 'the existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them' (*SE*, 15). Nevertheless, whatever the complexities of the relationship with modernism implied in 'The Songbook', Hill's use of a persona represents a clear development in his poetry. The use of a persona sets a limit to the infinite regress of reflexivity and mitigates, without wholly abandoning, impersonality. Since the persona is that of a poet the reflexive concern with poetry and language can be contained within
the fiction of his personality and of its effect on his vocation. It is a further paradox of Hill's relationship to Eliot that the technique of the persona, which for Eliot was a means to a form of impersonality, a protection of the private self, appears in Hill's work as part of a shift towards acknowledging the place of the subject.

4.4 THE VOICES OF 'FUNERAL MUSIC'

In 'The Songbook', then, reflexivity is tamed, and impersonality mitigated; neither is abandoned, but the poetry withdraws from the threat of total self-revocation which their free play threatened, and lucidity, humour and ordinary human sympathies find more room. 'The Songbook' confronted one source of paradox in the absence of the self. 'Funeral Music' (read in 1966 and published in 1967) confronts another: the mystical imagination. The most persistent subject of Hill's poetry is the imagination and its dangers and 'Funeral Music' seeks to place the dilemma of the imagination drawn to what may be loosely termed a mystical apprehension of experience: an understanding of human experience conditioned by the contemplation of the other-worldly, of the eternal. Within the historical setting of the sequence, that of the Wars of the Roses, this impulse is manifested in the form of neo-Platonism, but 'Funeral Music' does not only concern itself with this particular theory of the nature of the eternal, but evokes various forms of mysticism, and confronts them with both scepticism, and a rigorous Christian anti-mysticism, which maintains the impossibility of apprehending the eternal.

The remarkable achievement of this sequence of eight sonnets is its development of a profound meditation on a wide range of topics such as
the senses and the intellect, the material and the spiritual, death and the idea of the eternal, in an historically specific context. This meditation does justice both to the power of abstract ideas, and to the imaginatively realised quality of experience in a violent age. Such philosophical multiplicity is made possible by the use of multiple voices, involving the interaction of a modern, twentieth-century consciousness with those of imagined fifteenth-century figures. This confrontation is enacted in order to realize the dangers of mysticism: loss of contact with the contingency of history, with the reality of the material world, with the constraints and liabilities of the self. In the sonnets of 'Funeral Music' history, the material and the self, are brought into collision with ideas of the eternal. The use of multiple voices allows the poems to shift between various individual and collective consciousnesses so as to articulate both affinities and differences between different eras and persons. It is probably a common experience, in the study of history, to be struck, at different moments in one's reading, by the persistence of certain aspects of human experience on the one hand, and by a sense of the radical otherness of the past on the other. 'Funeral Music', by the flexible use of pronouns, tones of voice, and ambiguity, is able to weave a pattern which embraces both these reactions.

The use of voice in the sequence has been analysed by Merle Brown, and there is little that I would wish to add to his account of this aspect of 'Funeral Music', except to register disagreement on two points. Brown's account is centred on an idea of moral equality between the poet and the historical figures about whom he writes. This, he argues, is achieved through 'double lyrics or dramatic lyrics', in
which the modern poet judges the fifteenth-century soldiers, but also allows them to judge him, and themselves, and thereby judges himself.

The poems are

polycentric, including as part of them more than one originative center [...] One scene is always more than one, not only that constituted by him as maker and including his antagonist, but also that which his antagonist constitutes and which includes him. (Brown, 37)

He then goes on to indicate speakers for each poem: sometimes single (for example he sees poem 4 as Hill's 'single mortal combat with Averroes'), sometimes alternating (poem 3 is 'made up of four quite discrete voices'), sometimes, and most crucially for his argument, simultaneously doubled, so that poem 8 should be read two ways, once with the 'we' identified as the 'soldier-poets' of the fifteenth-century, and the 'they' as the modern 'poet-historian', and once with the roles reversed (Brown, 38-50). His general view is very much in accord with my own account of the dominance of reflexivity in Hill's poetry. Thus he notes that these poems 'first of all, implicate the act of their making by Hill himself' (Brown, 37), and he also echoes the concept of the return (see Section 1.3) when he comments that Hill has experienced the pull towards a detached, abstract and superior perspective on the past, but has 'bent himself back into a strange, dramatic oneness with men, both of the past [...] and the present' (Brown, 51).

Of my two points of disagreement with Brown, one is general, the other local. The general point concerns Brown's conception of Hill as earning 'a truly liberating release' from his sense of guilt by 'creating a poem-world in which he is judged as he judges, seen as he sees' (Brown, 40). I do agree that there is a sense of creativity released in
'Funeral Music', as there is in 'The Songbook of Sebastian Arrurruz', a release which indicates that the crisis of self-revoking reflexivity has been passed, though reflexivity itself has not been abandoned. Thus I am in accord with Brown's view that 'Funeral Music' 'exceeds the reach' of 'History as Poetry', a poem which, he argues, 'can avoid moral condemnation only by subjecting itself to such self-questioning that its primary form becomes self-condemnatory' (Brown, 40). 'History as Poetry' (1964) expresses the self-disgust of the crisis; 'Funeral Music' contains paradox and reflexivity within a structure which, like that of 'The Songbook', places them as an aspect of human experience among others, rather than according them a priority so that they absorb much of the energy of the poem. However, I feel that Brown is in danger of making Hill sound very complacent about his lack of complacency. Self-judgment, or judgment by fictional others which the poet creates, is hardly the same thing as judgment by real others. If one wanted to distinguish the latter, one might borrow the phrase which Hill himself borrows from Matthew Corrigan in "The Conscious Mind's Intelligible Structure": A Debate', the 'primary objective world ... its cruelty and indifference' (CM, 14), or one might mention critics who are fundamentally unsympathetic to Hill's work, such as Tom Paulin, critics for whom the whole discursive realm in which his poetry operates is to be dismissed as the mask of a politically dangerous ideology. 22 Paulin is, I believe, wrong, but the fact that such views exist illustrates that there are, and must be, judgments, antagonists, criticisms, which cannot be written into the poem and contained within it; dissent, hostility, incomprehension which cannot be averted by any amount of self-judgment. I believe that Hill usually manifests a sense of this limit. One point at which he may
lose sight of it is at the end of 'The Conscious Mind', where he asserts that the best answer to a writer's arguments or theories may be found within his own pages. There is a risk, in such a view, of pre-empting criticism. Brown essentially takes up this view, implying that Hill builds into 'Funeral Music' the best answers to the possible dangers of his own judgments as a poet. He does indeed build in some answers, and this is a major source of the value of the sequence, but the very power of this rhetorical device makes it all the more important that the reader should meet the poems with a sympathy which remains independent. The 'truly liberating release' which Brown detects in 'Funeral Music' is not the consequence of a rhetorical manoeuvre which does away with guilt, but the consequence of an acceptance of guilt as an inescapable part of human experience, while recognising that it is unwise to give it an excessive dominance. My point of dissent from Brown may seem to be only a matter of emphasis, yet I would argue that the difference is crucial; it is the difference between acknowledging the judgment of others, and denying it by pre-empting it.

My local point of disagreement relates to the ending of the sequence. In the last lines of the eighth and final poem, unexpectedly, the most personal tone of voice of the sonnets emerges:

Then tell me, love,
How that should comfort us -- or anyone
Dragged half-unnerved out of this worldly place,
Crying to the end 'I have not finished'.

The poignancy here is matched only by sonnet 6, in which the speaker addresses his son, and here too considers loss and comfort:
My little son, when you could command marvels
Without mercy, outstare the wearisome
Dragon of sleep, I rejoiced above all --
A stranger well-received in your kingdom.
[...] I believe in my
Abandonment, since it is what I have.

Brown considers poem 6 to be spoken by a dying fifteenth-century soldier-poet, and the last sentence of 8 by the modern poet-historian. I agree with this attribution, but not Brown's view of the end of 8 as scathing self-condemnation:

As he is heard here, squirmingly evasive, fudging, self-deceiving, soft, and craven, one feels that Hill is bringing the whole sequence to bear upon himself in the form of a self-judgment as pitiless as that which the soldier-poet of the seventh poem made of himself [...] Hill's 'love' has none, of course, of the romantic feelings of Arnold's (in the last lines of 'Dover Beach'); there is no 'ah', no 'let us be true'. No, his 'love' is a gutted word, it is the 'love' spoken by shopkeeper to customer. Hill's commonness and softness as poet-historian is exposed. (Brown, 49-50)

I too feel that the whole sequence is brought to bear on these last lines, but to a quite different effect from that Brown describes. I see them as asserting, with a poignancy which depends largely on the tragic context from which they emerge, a sense of common humanity -- the speaker is both the modern poet, and a dying fifteenth-century knight, and extends his feelings to what 'anyone' might feel. One of the gains of the resolution of the crisis of self-revocation is the appearance in Hill's poetry of more directly expressed common human emotion, evident in 'The Songbook' and, as here, in 'Funeral Music'. Such directness in poetry may depend for its success on that which precedes it, within the individual poem and even within the poet's overall output. Thus Hill's dense and difficult earlier poetry is almost certainly the necessary
preparation for the achievements of his mature work. In 'Funeral Music', the metaphysical subtleties and intricate ambiguities of the sonnets allow the sudden emergence of a touching simplicity of feeling without sentimentality. To interpret this as self-condemnation seems to me to be excessively, even obsessively, judgmental. It is true that in 'Funeral Music: An Essay' (KL) Hill describes the sequence as 'ornate and heartless music', but his description underestimates the level of compassion. The dialectic of the heartless and the pathetic is important, like the dialectic of the savage and the spiritual which Hill points out in the lives of the the dedicatees of the sequence. One of them, indeed, may have provided a hint for the poignancy of poem six, a dying man's address to his little son. The Duke of Suffolk, shortly before he was, in Hill's words, 'butchered across the gunwale of a skiff' by his political enemies, wrote a touching and tender letter to his son. 23

4.5 'FUNERAL MUSIC' AND TRANSCENDENCE

'Funeral Music' turns upon the apprehension of two worlds or realms which may be provisionally described as the mortal world and the realm of the eternal. The antithesis between these two is clearly subject to many qualifications and complexities, theological and philosophical, but to a large extent these are best considered as they appear in the poetry. Even to use such terms might seem to presuppose a poetry of religious faith, but this is not so: what is presupposed is rather a poetry of religious sensibility, which does not preclude a high degree of scepticism, and a critical view of the consequences of belief. To apprehend something may be defined as to grasp or perceive it by means of the senses or intellect. In Hill's consideration of the two realms,
equal importance is accorded to the vicissitudes and the achievements of
the intellect and to the power of the senses. The latter makes itself
felt in vividly corporeal language. Neo-Platonism, evoked by the
reference to cave and shadows in sonnet 1, holds that the world of
eternal ideas or forms is apprehended by the intellect, while the
inferior material world is apprehended by the senses; the two realms are
thus the realms of the intelligible and the sensible respectively. 24
Averroes, who is addressed in sonnet 4, and whose system was based on
the work of Aristotle rather than that of Plato (though with
neo-Platonic elements), divided the mortal and eternal realms
differently: he saw the two realms as linked by the intellect, in a
process whereby the passive intellect of the individual received
intelligible forms from the divine 'agent Intellect'. 25 The Catholic
mysticism of St John of the Cross, whose poetry is the source of the
phrase 'silent music' in sonnet 2, seeks an apprehension beyond both
senses and intellect, a union with a Divine Being which can only be
known as these modes give way to pure love. 26 The dialogue of the
sequence is not merely a matter of these various historical forms
of belief in the transcendent being met by a modern sceptical voice.
Rather, impulses of faith and scepticism intertwine in various
consciousnesses, and the consciousnesses themselves meet and separate.
Metaphorical ambiguities render up mystical and sceptical senses
simultaneously. The ironical undercutting which this process involves is
informed by a sense of the proximity of mysticism and scepticism at
their extremes.
There are three dominant metaphors in the sequence. One is that of places, of realms of experience, internal and external, sensible and conceptual:

With an equable contempt for this World, (1)
Psalteries whine through the empyrean. (1)
restless
Habitation, no man's dwelling-place. (1)
an unpeopled region [...] (4)
A stranger well-received in your kingdom. (6)
Each distant sphere of harmony [...] (8)
Dragged half-unnerved out of this worldly place, (8)

To term these metaphors raises a crucial question, for what is at stake is the validity of a dualistic or multiple conception of the universe, as made up of separate realms. This concern is given a ground of mundane reality by the naming of actual places in England, and by the vivid evocation of the earth itself, upon which such places substantially stand:

Pomfret. London. (1) 27

Recall the cold
Of Towton on Palm Sunday before dawn,
Wakefield, Tewkesbury: (2)
some trampled / Acres, (2)
With England crouched beastwise beneath it all. (3)

This juxtaposition of intimations of transcendent, ideal, fantasy or conceptual realms with a tangible reality of place culminates in two deadly serious puns:
A field
After battle utters its own sound
Which is like nothing on earth, but is earth. (3)

So they flashed and vanished
And all that survived them was the stark ground
Of this pain. (7)

In the first of these examples, the colloquial expression of mild horror, 'like nothing on earth', has a root sense which carries a suggestion of transcendence in the form of the supernatural, but any such idea of existence beyond death is brought down to earth by the bald statement of what these dying men are in the process of becoming -- earth. The sense of horror is exacerbated, because they seem to die during the sentence: at its beginning they are still crying out, but the relentless rhythm of the last clause, ending in an emphatic spondee ('but is earth') signifies that they have become inanimate matter. An effect is created whereby the field itself is felt to utter.

The second passage, turning over one of the main concerns of 'Funeral Music' -- what it is that may survive individual death -- uses a pun as a collision of opposing interpretations. Neo-Platonic Idealism would hold that the ground of human experience, that which underlies 'this worldly place', is a world of ideal forms, immutable and eternal, and Christian doctrine has its own version of this belief. Against this is set the materialist view that only the ground of the battlefield survives when the protagonists are dead. A third meaning ('ground' as in the musical term 'ground-bass') contributes to the strain of musical imagery in the sequence.

The second major cluster of metaphors concerns reflections, echoes and shadows, and hence our communion with forms which may be, or may appear to be, merely projections of ourselves:
Processionals in the exemplary cave,
Benedictions of shadows. (1)

Fire
Flares in the pit, ghosting upon stone
Creatures of such rampant state, (1)

imagine the future
Flashed back at us, like steel against sun, (2)

'Prowess, vanity, mutual regard,
It seemed I stared at them, they at me.
That was the gorgon's true and mortal gaze:
Averted conscience turned against itself.'
A hawk and a hawk-shadow. 'At noon,
As the armies met, each mirrored the other;
Neither was outshone. So they flashed and vanished [...] (7)

all echoes are the same
In such eternity. (8)

These images are concerned with the risk of solipsistic absorption which is encountered by the artist, philosopher, or other individual who addresses his mind to the transcendent or the intangible: the danger that he may see only the distorted reflection of his own psyche, that only mocking echoes may greet his attempts to speak out of his existential loneliness to something beyond the vicissitudes of his own nature. This risk is explicitly formulated in sonnet 5:

When we chant
'Ora, ora pro nobis' it is not
Seraphs who descend to pity but ourselves. (5)

As one reads the last line quoted, 'descend' abruptly shifts register, from the language of faith to that of sceptical self-contempt: rather than seraphs descending from heaven, we stoop to self-pity. The line drops suddenly, like an aeroplane hitting an air pocket, or a man treading on a step which is not there.
The mutuality of reflection in the images of sonnet 7 evokes the debate between neo-Platonic idealism and materialism. Is the sensible world a shadow or reflection of an ideal world of forms (an ideal world held by St Augustine to subsist in the mind of God)? Or is the idea of a spiritual and ideal realm itself merely a shadowy projection of the mind of man, a mind which exists only in a fundamentally material world? The materialist view may seem to have a common-sense solidity about it, but we are reminded that things as substantial as two armies have 'flashed and vanished' like a flicker of light. The opening four lines of sonnet 7 (quoted above) represent a reflexive mental process, a turning back upon beliefs and values, and convey the inextricable complexity of reflexivity and self-doubt to which such a process may lead, like the endlessly receding images in two mirrors (which is how the armies are represented). This mental process is best understood, as Merle Brown suggests, as taking place in the mind of one of the knights killed at Towton, although here, as in much of the sequence, there is a mirroring process in which the poet reflects on these historical figures, and finds aspects of his experience reflected in their lives, despite a huge distance of time and culture. There is in fact an ambivalence throughout in the use of images of reflection. One may look in a mirror or other reflecting surface (whether literal or metaphorical) in order to see oneself clearly or for reasons of vanity; one may also be dazzled by the reflection of light. The most direct sense of the opening lines is that the speaker is reflecting upon knightly virtues, including mutual regard or esteem among soldiers, and is aware of the shadow of violence and self-regard that accompanies them. This awareness, to him, is the Gorgon's gaze in three related
senses. First, it makes him experience his own values as a rigid code rather than as living beliefs (it seems to turn them to stone). Second, it makes him see himself as an iconic figure, epitomizing the values of an era, which involves imagining himself as dead, part of history, subject to the retrospective regard of others, and incorporated in their discourse (in the words of sonnet 8: 'Not as we are but as we must appear, / [...] not as we / Desire life but as they would have us live'). He perhaps imagines himself as literally turned to stone, a figure of a knight on a tomb, but turning to stone is a recurrent image in Hill's poetry, used by him to convey the ambivalent transforming process to which art subjects experience (as, for example, in 'The Stone Man'). The third possible meaning of the metaphor of the Gorgon's gaze (although this meaning is not on the surface of the poem) is that the knight is petrified (a dead metaphor jokily revived).

'Mutual regard' may also be read as a comment on the relation of prowess to vanity: a pair of qualities, like humility and self-pity, or guilt and complacency, which may be mutually involved in the psyche. The soldier is also, as the second line tells us, involved in a mutual regard with the idea of mutual regard (as well as those of prowess and vanity), and this serves to indicate something of the inescapable nature of personality and human weakness. If prowess can be vanity, then self-critical regard can also be self-congratulation for one's own moral rigour. The self-criticism of the conscience, repeatedly turning to scrutinize the motives of the self, must eventually turn against itself, and question the motives of conscience itself: 'Averted conscience turned against itself'. Here we see the dilemmas of the fifteenth-century soldier mirroring those of the twentieth-century poet, for we are back...
at the problem of reflexivity and infinite regress encountered in relation to such poems as 'Annunciations'. The trans-historical doubling of 'Funeral Music' gives a richness of imaginative context to this concern, though it does not put an end to the process of infinite regress. As Brown argues, Hill subjects himself to the regard of the soldiers, so that he too is involved in the ambivalent process of a mutual regard which is a form of self-regard. The symptom (self-regard in the sense of vanity) and the remedy (self-regard in the sense of critical self-scrutiny) may appear to take the same form, a problem which is imaged in the poem when one remembers that Perseus defended himself against the Gorgon with a mirror. Yet here it is the mirroring process itself which is compared to the Gorgon's gaze.

The density and complexity of these lines are essential to the poem's combination of philosophical concerns with imaginatively realized experience. The experience as registered by the senses (here the visual impression of the two armies as like two mirrors facing each other) is made part of the metaphor for the human condition as it inheres in that experience, so that the poem enacts the coinherence of the physical and the conceptual. Also being examined is the status of metaphor in philosophical and religious discourse, as well as in common speech. The pun on 'descend', which suggests the liability to self-deception of a belief in the numinous, has already been noted. In sonnet 8 there is a comparable pun on 'beyond' which has been summed up by Christopher Ricks: 'Beyond us? Serenely out of our sphere, or exasperatingly out of our comprehension? It's beyond me' (Ricks, 304). These puns work by the interplay of literal and metaphorical senses of the word. We are reminded here that the language of philosophy and theology is pervaded
by metaphors drawn from the realm of the senses, in particular spatial terms such as transcendence, depth, substratum, beyond, above, underlying and so on. Allen Tate, in 'The Unliteral Imagination; Or, I, too, Dislike It' sets out his criterion for the poetry of which he approves, maintaining that its metaphors should work on the literal level of the vehicle as well as on the metaphorical level of the tenor, so that 'the symbolic dimension [is] rooted firmly in a literal image or statement that does not need the symbolic significance in order to be immediately understood' and the tenor 'is completely fused with the vehicle, with the medium conveying it'. Tate suggests that this is difficult for modern poets to achieve, as a result of a condition which he describes using a modified version of Eliot's 'dissociation of sensibility'. In Tate's version 'what was dissociated was the external world which by analogy could become the interior world of the mind' (Tate, 460). Eliot, Tate and Hill share a sense of a lost cultural and mental unity, but where Eliot and Tate, with a degree of historical naivety, are inclined to detect this lost unity of being in earlier culture (for Tate, pre-Romantic), Hill's poetry conveys a sense that unity is always already lost, that the 'lost kingdom of innocence and original justice' is a pre-lapsarian, numinous ideal, rather than an historical actuality. But for Hill and Tate alike, the modern poet is impeded by the separation of world and mind, figured in 'Funeral Music' by the vertigo of these images of the transcendent. 'Descend' and 'beyond' evoke a faith in the numinous, and given this faith, they would acquire that fusion and rootedness which Tate admires; what was beyond our understanding would be so because it pertained to a world literally beyond our own. With the uncertainty of faith expressed in these poems, this symbolic unity of vehicle and tenor
falls apart. Tate suggests that poets of his generation would like to be able to write

poems that say much more than we have been able to say, while at the same time seeming to say less [...] even simple propositions in which denoted objects are predicated of other denoted objects, or in which philosophical commonplaces are given motion in a common experience. (Tate, 452)

The metaphors of 'Funeral Music' recognize the loss of the beliefs which gave a substantial meaning to transcendent terms, beliefs according to which, for example, a 'distant sphere of harmony' would be, not only a metaphor for the harmony of divine truth, but also a cosmological fact. Renaissance neo-Platonists saw a correspondence between harmony within the individual, and the harmony of the spheres, an idea derived from Boethius's *The Principles of Music*. Thus there would be a continual, unbroken hierarchical progression from this world to the eternal, and the language of transcendence could be literal rather than (or as well as) metaphorical. In the Christian version of the theory, each sphere corresponded to one level of the hierarchy of angelic beings, the seraphs inhabiting the sphere next to God. In the context of such belief, seraphs might literally 'descend'. Nevertheless, Hill avoids idealizing the past as an age of spiritual unity. 'Funeral Music' attempts an exercise in historical imagination, a realization of the violent context within which such men as Suffolk, Worcester and Rivers sustained a faith whose nature and value can only be speculatively reconstructed. The doubling of the mind of poet with these historical figures allows that, for them too, doubt may have been a condition of faith. For Hill, unity of being itself belongs in another sphere, not in the historical past.
This is not to say that Tate's technical requirement for metaphor is locally unachievable. In sonnet 3, the image of 'a comet's / Over-riding stillness' achieves a fusion of tenor and vehicle because the symbolic dimension of the comet, as asserting a truth inaccessible to the men beneath it, and thus over-riding the apparent significance of the scene, is supported by the fact that it literally rides over them across the sky. The tone of the poem combines awe and irony; it is half admiring of the courage and conviction of the fifteenth-century soldiers, and half horrified at their bloodthirsty resolution. There is black humour, and an accusation of arrogance, in the idea of a 'bespoke' domesday, a domesday being surely the last thing which one can 'engage beforehand' (though Hotspur, characteristically, does so in Part I of Shakespeare's Henry IV), and an awed horror in the exclamation 'they meant it by / God'. Neo-Platonism would have it that this world is merely one of 'appearances', and a version of such a belief may have both sustained the courage and justified the bloodshed. 'But few appearances are like this' challenges anyone to maintain such a view, in the face of an event which, as Hill's essay tells us, contemporary scholars described as a 'holocaust'. At the same time the portentous appearance of the comet hints at a fulfilment of the participants' eschatological anticipations.

The third strain of metaphor in the sequence, as the title suggests, is that of music. In 'Funeral Music: An Essay', Hill says that he was attempting a florid grim music broken by grunts and shrieks' and describes the result as 'ornate and heartless music punctuated by mutterings, blasphemies and cries for help'. These phrases describe only two of the range of tones in 'Funeral Music'. The florid quality is
evident in the baroque excesses of sound and meaning found in such lines as: 'we are dying / To satisfy fat Caritas, those / Wiped jaws of stone' (2) where, as Gabriel Pearson points out, 'fat cat' lurks in 'fat Caritas', and there is a 'species of vowel music' (Robinson, 33). There is also an uneasy hint of a mocking derision of the willed martyrdom evoked in the first sonnet, in the colloquial sense of 'dying' (we are just dying to satisfy fat Caritas). The other tone suggested by Hill's own descriptive phrases is that of the last lines of sonnet 3:

[... ] blindly
Among carnage the most delicate souls
Tup in their marriage-blood, gasping 'Jesus'.

Yet this death-cry is not merely a shriek or blasphemy, but condenses an uncertainty about man's eternal destiny: it may be the dying mind cursing with pain and fear, or the soul making its appeal to its saviour and mystical spouse (and the two possibilities are not mutually exclusive). The satirical, colloquial double meaning is again present ('he's a delicate soul') and the physical and spiritual are forced up against each other by a violence of imagery. ³² 'Tup', in this context, is shocking, emphasizing that the marriage of the soul, if not an illusion, is only achieved with a terrible physical ravishment. ³³

Thus even within the tones which Hill's note mentions, there is more variety than it implies, and it does not do justice to the range of other tones in the sequence: the elegiac, the meditative, the speculative. It is significant, though, that Hill identifies music with the elements of the sequence least amenable to humane feeling, with the formal elements, contrasted with the human cries by which they are 'punctuated' or 'broken'. For the metaphorical role of music in 'Funeral Music' identifies
it with the transcendent. Gabriel Pearson has examined in some detail
the way in which 'Funeral Music' picks up and modifies Eliot's use of the
analogy of poetry and music, both in his essays and in *Four Quartets*. In
particular he notes that 'silent music' (2) recalls section V of 'Burnt
Norton', and that 'Each distant sphere of harmony forever / Poised,
unanswerable' (8) recalls section V of 'The Dry Salvages'
(Robinson, 34-35):

Here the impossible union
Of spheres of existence is actual,
Here the past and the future
Are conquered, and reconciled, (CPPE, 190)

He finds Hill to be engaged in 'an almost silent process of
disengagement [from Eliot]', and 'a discrete [sic] and regretful
repudiation of Eliot's aesthetic sacramentalism' (Robinson, 34-35). As
his argument implies, the tentative, reflexive quality of Hill's vision of
an harmonious reconciliation in the lines '{Suppose all reconciled / By
silent music; [...]}' (2), its literal bracketing within the context of a
sequence which includes a mocking scepticism, and its juxtaposition with
the harsh physicality of the paralleled injunction, 'Recall the cold [...]',
contrasts with the confident achieved reconciliation in Eliot's lines.

Eliot's 'here' refers to the Incarnation, a crucial paradigm of
thought and belief in Hill's poetry, but one which remains highly
problematic. One way of describing Hill's distance from Eliot would be
to say that for the Eliot of *Four Quartets*, the Incarnation represents a
form of resolution, whereas in 'Funeral Music' the inherence of the
spiritual in the physical is a source of unresolvable paradox and doubt.
What is at issue here is a potential conflict between religious faith and
a literary vocation, a conflict in which music holds a symbolic place. In the following passage from "Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"" Hill identifies both music and silence (as ideas) with the temptation to abandon the literary medium:

In the essay 'Poetry and Drama' Eliot speaks of 'a fringe of indefinite extent, of feeling which we can only detect, so to speak, out of the corner of the eye, and can never completely focus ... At such moments, we touch the border of feelings which only music can express'. As Eliot well knew, however, a poet must also turn back, with whatever weariness, disgust, love barely distinguishable from hate, to confront 'the indefinite extent' of language itself and seek his 'focus' there. In certain contexts the expansive, outward gesture towards the condition of music is a helpless gesture of surrender, oddly analogous to that stylish aesthetic of despair, that desire for the ultimate integrity of silence, to which so much eloquence has been so frequently and indefatigably devoted. (PMA, 9)

'A poet must also turn back': this is not only a rejection of specious transcendence, but also a version of the 'return upon oneself', of the reflexive turn of language on itself, which generates a deconstructive scepticism about the immanence of the Logos, and a sense of language as itself of 'indefinite extent', subject to a free play or deferral of meaning which undermines the possibility of creating, through the patterning of the 'music' of poetry, an image of ultimate truth. *Four Quartets* draws on music for structural principles, and uses transfiguration through pattern to achieve the transcendence which cannot be contained in the referential meaning of words. Hill's comment asserts, on an explicit level, a form of moral or vocational duty not to slip into an idealization of another medium (music), or of an absence (silence), but to work within language.

The possible influence of Karl Barth on Hill's view of transcendence has already been discussed (see Section 3.4). Hill has praised Barth for
his rigorous abnegation (PP, 116), and a version of the return of a text upon itself is observable in Barth's *The Epistle to the Romans*, where it represents a resistance to specious transcendence. Barth lays great stress on the absolute epistemological and existential barrier between God and man, the realm of eternity and the realm of time. The true God, Barth asserts, is by definition the Unknown God, and

> is precisely no 'thing-in-itself', no metaphysical substance in the midst of other substances, no second, other Stranger, side by side with those whose existence is independent of Him. On the contrary, He is the eternal, pure Origin of all things. As their non-existence, He is their true being. 34

Even of the Gospel, the material and written record of God's word, Barth writes:

> Bound to the world as it is, we cannot here and now apprehend. We can only receive the Gospel [...] It can therefore be neither directly communicated nor directly apprehended. (Barth, 38)

Thus Barth's prose continually returns upon itself, as in the following passage:

> Even negation of this world and perception of the paradox of life; even submission to the judgement of God and waiting upon Him: even 'brokenness'; even the behaviour of the 'Biblical Man' -- if these proceed from the adoption of a point of view, of a method, of a system, or of a particular kind of behaviour, by which men distinguish themselves from other men -- are no more than the righteousness of men. And even faith, if it proceeds from anything but a void, is unbelief; for it is then once again the appearance of the slavery of unrighteousness seeking to suppress the dawning truth of God, the disturbance of all disturbings. (Barth, 56-57)

Hill's scepticism about the rhetoric of transcendence may owe something to his interest in neo-Protestant theology, a movement which,
under the influence especially of Karl Barth and his school, had sometimes been so emphatic in its denial of immanence as almost to imperil belief in a real Incarnation altogether. 35

In Hill's work as a whole two contrary theological influences are felt. One is represented by Catholicism and mysticism, the other by the negative dialectic of Barth. The latter predominates in 'Funeral Music', where the transcendent is felt as so absolutely other as to be speculative, and the ironic disjunction between physical experience and spiritual aspiration indicates a problematic sense of the Incarnation. In Tenebrae the Catholic and mystical strain is more in evidence and this is reflected in the central importance of music (as well as Counter-Reformation literary models) in that volume. 36

The last poem of Tenebrae, a sequence itself entitled 'Tenebrae' (1978), ends with an evocation of music as an image of a transcendent realm of completion, reconciliation, harmony, emphasizing its separateness, but also its survival:

Music survives, composing her own sphere,
Angel of Tones, Medusa, Queen of the Air,
and when we would accost her with real cries
silver on silver thrills itself to ice.

In 'Funeral Music' there is indeed an attempt to accost the 'silent music' of eternal reconciliation with the 'real cries' of the dying soldiers, but 'Each distant sphere of harmony' remains 'forever / Poised, unanswered' (8). The diction of the above lines from 'Tenebrae' ('composing' and 'real cries') also recalls the vision of a pristine, childhood world in 'Funeral Music: 6', suggesting an association of music with lost Edens as well as unattainable heavens:
On those pristine fields I saw humankind  
As it was named by the Father; fabulous  
Beasts rearing in stillness to be blessed.  
The world's real cries reached there, turbulence  
From remote storms, rumour of solitudes,  
A composed mystery. And so it ends.

Yet this is a memory of a real experience, that of a father sharing his  
son's fantasy world, and though it is past, it is accessible to the  
'world's real cries', especially perhaps to that most human of cries  
which ends the sequence as a whole: 'I have not finished'.

The implied rebuke to Eliot in 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"'  
given as a lecture not long before the publication of Tenebrae)  
represents Hill criticizing an impulse which has a strong appeal for  
him, but an appeal which he mistrusts. The criticism is as much on  
professional as doctrinal grounds, since Hill stresses the poet's  
obligation to language. The rebuke is softened by 'as Eliot well knew',  
and in 'Poetry and Drama' Eliot does indeed go on to acknowledge that  
'to arrive at the condition of music would be the annihilation of  
poetry', and that what he sees is 'a kind of mirage of the perfection of  
verse drama'. Nevertheless, the movement of Eliot's thought here is one  
towards transcendence of words; he represents poetry as a stage on the  
way to an ineffable spiritual state:

For it is ultimately the function of art [...] to bring us to a  
condition of serenity, stillness, and reconciliation; and then  
leave us, as Virgil left Dante, to proceed toward a region where  
that guide can avail us no farther. 37

So Hill's caution, like Barth's strategy of negation, is not a denial of  
faith, but an attempt to guard against an evocation of the transcendent  
which may conceal an abdication of the duty to engage with the
immediate. But the implications of turning Eliot's phrase 'indefinite extent', which he applies to a region of feeling, onto language itself are potentially more radically disruptive than Hill's essay acknowledges. In the terms of 'Burnt Norton', the 'Word in the desert' has succumbed to the words which 'will not stay in place'.

These three strains of imagery: realms, reflections and music, all serve to articulate a meditation on the relation of temporal reality to ideas of the eternal. From the forms of resolution or evasion which it evokes, 'Funeral Music' turns back to the uncertainties and deferrals of meaning inherent in language: the sequence ends with the human voice and with words of contingency and incompleteness: 'Crying to the end "I have not finished"'. These last words are an ironic reversal of Christ's penultimate utterance ('It is finished'), and thus evoke the idea of redemptive sacrifice only to subject it to uncertainty and contingency.

4.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter has concentrated on the two longer sequences of the *King Log* volume, 'The Songbook of Sebastian Arrurruz' (1965-68) and 'Funeral Music' (1966), and has sought to identify in these a resolution of the crisis of negative reflexivity, self-revoking paradox and disgust, a resolution developing out of the location of the subject in 'September Song' (1967). Thus the period 1961-65 is dominated by negative reflexivity and disgust, while the years 1965-68 represent the resolution of the crisis. These are only intended as approximate dates, since the process is not wholly linear and publication and composition dates may differ. For example, 'An Order of Service' was first published in the *King Log* volume (1968), but is marked by the self-revoking
paradoxes characteristic of the poems of the early sixties. 'Fantasia on "Horbury"' (1968, KL), though stylistically different from earlier poems in its use of a brisk, colloquial voice, is nevertheless, as Gabriel Pearson observes, dominated by 'the accusation it makes against itself' (Robinson, 44). However, the new lucidity and poignancy of utterance to which I have pointed in the two sequences are also apparent in the shorter poems of this period such as 'Soliloquies' (1965) and 'Cowan Bridge: At the Site of "Lowood School"' (1968), both evoking with moving clarity the experience of childhood (not necessarily that of the poet) and its legacy in later life.

There are also two short sequences in King Log: 'Locust Songs' (1961) and 'Four Poems Regarding the Endurance of Poets' (1964). The former anticipates 'Funeral Music' in its attempt at imaginative identification with the culture of another era (here with early America and with the American Civil War) and its attempt to trace some of the ideological roots of violence, but is marked by images of disgust characteristic of the earlier phase of Hill's writing: 'His natural filth, voyeur of sacrifice, a slow / Bloody unearthing'. However, these are not primarily reflexive images for the poem's own process of 'unearthing', but are part of an analysis of Puritan sensibility and its place in United States history. 'Four Poems Regarding the Endurance of Poets' (including 'Tristia: 1891-1938: A Valediction to Osip Mandelstam') belongs to perhaps the most persistent genre in Hill's oeuvre as a whole, that of the elegy. This form appears as early as the uncollected poem 'The Tower Window' (1953), and recurs most recently in 'Scenes With Harlequins' (1990). It is in elegy that reflexive mistrust of poetry's transformative and transcending powers finds its natural home. Though I
have described Hill's poetry as achieving a resolution of certain issues in *King Log*, this does not mean that the process of change and development subsequently slows. Rather, the achievements of the 1968 volume lead up to the radical departures of Hill's most personal, most accessible, and most rapidly written volume, *Mercian Hymns*. 39
Notes to Chapter 4

1. 'A Letter From Armenia' and '11' are identifiable as prose by the use of a justified right margin. Nevertheless, the convention according to which this signifies prose, based on the assumption that the line breaks are determined by the exigencies of type-setting, is undermined in '11', where the line breaks have expressive effect. Thus in the opening sentence: 'Scarcely speaking: it becomes as a / Coolness between neighbours', the effect of hesitation after 'a' is an instance of the constraint of 'scarcely speaking', while the gap between 'a' and 'coolness' enacts a form of coolness between neighbouring words. The effect is that of an inner monologue which, as a result of linguistic self-restraint, a careful weighing of words, approaches the condition of free verse.

2. The sections of 'The Songbook of Sebastian Arrurruz' were published as follows: 'From the Songbook of Sebastian Arrurruz' (version of No. 5), TLS, 29 July 1965, p. 648 (see note 5); 'From the Songbook of Sebastian Arrurruz' (Nos. 1-4) Agenda 4.5-4.6, (Autumn 1966), 34-36; 'From The Songbook of Sebastian Arrurruz: 9 A Song From Armenia', Stand, 9.3, (1968), 50; the remaining sections of the sequence first appeared when the sequence as a whole was published, in King Log (1968). See also note 9.

3. Sherry, writing about 'The Songbook', comments that 'the sequence provides an appropriate conclusion to a volume that has cultivated the paradox of erotic ascesis' (Sherry, p. 118), but the other poems of King Log, with the exception of the third part of 'Three Baroque Meditations', are concerned with the sensual and corporeal undertones of asceticism and aestheticism rather than with the erotic as such. They manifest, as Sherry himself observes, 'the corporeality of language' (p. 112), the 'sensuousness of art' (p. 112), 'the sensuality of words' (p. 114). While Sherry does identify significant continuities between 'The Songbook' and the other poems of King Log, and while I myself draw attention to the importance of the links to 'September Song', Sherry's account does, in my view, underrate the dramatic shift of style and subject-matter which 'The Songbook' represents (but see also note 4).

4. Here my account of 'The Songbook' has affinities with that of Gabriel Pearson, who, in his essay 'King Log revisited' comments that 'the atrocious European mid-century is for the first time being mislaid and humanity is allowed an unembarrassed intercourse with its world' (Robinson, pp. 47-48). My own sense of the development of Hill's poetry is indebted to this essay. I would alter Pearson's emphasis in the above sentence by suggesting that the theme of atrocity has been placed rather than mislaid. Sebastian Arrurruz is placed very specifically in history by his dates; he dies ten years before the child-victim of 'September Song' is born. The 'unembarrassed intercourse' of his 'Songbook' I see as dependent on the locating of the self in relation to the problem of atrocities which takes place in 'September Song'. Among
other critics who have written on 'The Songbook', Sherry tends on the whole to stress its continuities with Hill's earlier work (see note 3 above); he notes that 'Sebastian's idiom seems noticeably sparer, the rhythms sleeker, than Hill's; likewise the words tend to be more referential than resonant', but also comments that 'the language of some poems [in 'The Songbook'] does verge on the somatic density of Hill's best work' (Sherry, p. 119). Thus he sees the style of 'The Songbook' as limited by its fictional author, and not as fine as Hill's more dense work, whereas I see the use of the fictional author as a means by which Hill liberates his own style from a density which is at times excessive.

5. The self-inwoven effect was even greater in the first published version of the poem. Here the first stanza reads: 'Love, oh my love, it will come / Sure enough! A storm / Broods over the dry earth all day; / Consumes at night in its own downpour'. ('From the Songbook of Sebastian Arrurruz', TLS, 29 July 1965, p. 648). Thus the storm was imagined as self-consuming, like Arrurruz's passion and his art. The later version, in which the fourth line reads, 'At night the shutters throb in its downpour' was perhaps preferred by Hill as more evocative of the physical environment, as well as of sexual feeling.


8. See note 2.

9. A further 'Copla by Sebastian Arrurruz' appeared in Stand 14.1 (1972), 4. This copla was not added to the sequence in the Collected Poems.


11. The Golden Bowl, p. 313

12. The lines: 'Consider such pains "crystalline": then fine art / Persists where most crystals accumulate' appear in Hill's 'Of Commerce and Society: 6 The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian: Homage to Henry James' (1959, FTU). They may recall James's use of the word 'crystalline' and its cognates in The Golden Bowl; for example: 'She was now crystalline' (p. 315); 'it hung by a hair that
everthing might crystallise for their recovered happiness at his touch' (pp. 336-37).


14. These notes do not appear in the *Collected Poems*, but are in the 1968 André Deutsch edition of *King Log*.


20. 'Funeral Music' was read by Alan Wheatley, with an introduction by the poet, on 'Poetry Now', BBC Third programme, 20 September 1966.


27. Pomfret is a particularly evocative name in this context: in Shakespeare's *Richard III*, Earl Rivers (one of the dedicatees of 'Funeral Music') curses it on his way to his execution there: 'O Pomfret, Pomfret! O thou bloody prison, / Fatal and ominous to noble peers!' (III. iii. 9-10). Hill told John Haffenden that a re-reading of the *Henry VI* plays had contributed to the writing of 'Funeral Music' (VP, p. 81).


29. Allen Tate, 'The Unliteral Imagination; Or, I, too, Dislike It', *Essays of Four Decades* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 447-61 (pp. 453, 456). Further references to this volume are given in the text.


31. 'Come, let us take a muster speedily -- / Doomsday is near; die all, die merrily', *King Henry IV Part 1*, IV.i.133-34. 'Engage beforehand' is the OED definition of 'bespeak'.

32. The same ambiguity is found in the first line of 'The Imaginative Life' (1964, KL): 'Evasive souls, of whom the wise lose track'.

33. 'Tapping' is used in *Othello* (I. i. 89) and the appearance of 'tup' thus contributes to the Shakespearian element in 'Funeral Music'.

34. Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, trans. from the 6th edn by E.C. Hoskins, (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), p. 77-78. Further references to this work are given in the text.


36. Hill's first allusion, in his prose writings, to the work of Karl Barth dates from 1975 (FP, p. 116). Barth is also quoted or referred to in *PMA* (1977), pp. 1 and 15 and *Sermon* (1983) pp. 3-4. These references may of course reflect a much earlier knowledge of Barth's work, but it seems significant that Hill's references to this Protestant theologian coincide with the writing of poems which seem notably Catholic in spirit and sources ('The Pentecost Castle' and 'Lachrimae'). This is perhaps an example of Hill, consciously or unconsciously, resisting his own 'drift'. Whatever the point in time at which Hill became interested in Barth's work, that work provides a parallel to an extreme wariness about ideas of transcendence that has been a feature of Hill's poetry from an early stage.


39. 'I did immediately see it [*Mercian Hymns*] as an extended sequence, and it did come quite quickly for me -- in three years, which is rapid by my standards.' (VP, p. 94). *Mercian Hymns* was begun in the summer of 1967; it was finished precisely three years later [...] This apparently-novel fluency (between my first and second books there had been a gap of nine years) [...] might be seen as evidence of a diversion from earlier beliefs, attitudes, procedures. I would, however, be inclined to stress the likeness, the continuities.' ('Geoffrey Hill writes:', *Poetry Book Society Bulletin*, 69 (Summer 1971), unpaginated).
5.1 INTRODUCTION

Mercian Hymns stands out from the rest of Hill's poetic oeuvre both in form and in subject-matter. It consists of prose poems, a form with which Hill had experimented in the eighth and eleventh poems of 'The Songbook of Sebastian Arrurruzu', but which he has not otherwise used before or since. Each of the thirty 'hymns' consists of between one and four 'versets of rhythmical prose', in Hill's own words (VP, 93). His account of the reason for this structure is characteristic, but, at first sight, scarcely illuminating for the reader:

The reason they take the form they do is because at a very early stage the words and phrases began to group themselves in this way. (VP, 93-94)

This comment is not, however, merely the blocking manoeuvre which it may appear to be. It is a part of Hill's insistence that many features of a poem come to the poet from the medium itself, or from sources obscure to him, and are not the result of a premeditated plan. In an oblique manner, Hill is here disavowing intentionalism, and encouraging us (should we need encouragement) to start from the language of the poem, and to consider the forces exerted upon the form of the poem by the technical and aesthetic exigencies which the poet encounters during the creative process. Yet planning is not absent from his account. He also observed that he 'designed the appearance on the page in the form of versets' (VP, 93). He thus implies a complementarity, in the process of writing, between that which proceeds from the poet's conscious will,
and that which is discovered in, or emerges from, the medium. This complementarity in the creative act is paralleled in the text itself by other complementarities, in particular that between the child/poet and Offa. Complementarity, reciprocity, or mutually constructive and heuristic processes are crucial to Mercian Hymns.

5.2 THE HISTORY OF THE SELF

There is, nevertheless, a sense in which Mercian Hymns is Hill's most personal work. Here it is necessary to distinguish between subject-matter and rhetorical technique. The subject-matter of Mercian Hymns includes the poet's childhood, and while the usual caveats concerning an author's treatment of his own life are in order, this overt depiction of the author's own experience (fictionalized to whatever degree), together with elements of its social and physical context, does set this volume apart. The sequence includes references to the poet's grandmother, to a school-friend, to childhood games and outings, and to a memory of the coronation of George VI, and there is a rich sense of the landscape and sense impressions of childhood. Furthermore, the sequence is distinctly about the development of a poet's mind and is thus a form of poetic künstlerroman, Hill's equivalent to Wordsworth's The Prelude, Lawrence's Sons and Lovers, or Joyce's A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. The intimate relationship of the child with his physical surroundings contributes to his development into a poet.

The triple meaning of investment in the first sentence of hymn IV has already been noted (see Section 2.6):

I was invested in mother-earth, the crypt of roots and endings. Child's-play. I abode there, bided my time: where the mole
shouldered the clogged wheel, his gold solidus; where
dry-dust badgers thronged the Roman flues, the
long-unlooked-for mansions of our tribe.

Two of the senses of 'investment', the financial and the honorific, may
be read as referring to the child's potential as a poet: he was a
literary 'investment' on the part of his parents or country, or his
childhood experiences represented an investiture with the linguistic
sensibility of a poet. Christopher Ricks has pointed out the importance
of hyphens in Hill's writing (Ricks, 319-55). Here 'mother-earth' is so
familiar and archetypal a symbolic identification that the phrase
suggests that the child was invested in the habit of making symbolic
correspondences through linguistic structures, an implication which is
supported by the linguistic senses of 'roots' and 'endings'. Since the
etymological root of 'crypt' is the Greek word 'kruptos' meaning 'hidden',
this early 'investment' in a symbolic perception of experience is
represented as the linguistic hiding-place of the poet's roots. 4 This
hymn can also be interpreted as referring reflexively to the act of its
own composition, or rather to the internal process by which the poet
prepared to write it. This generates the following reading: the poet into
whom the child grows up (the 'I' of this hymn), returned to the origins
of his vocation, covering himself in linguistic sources: both the
collective social sources revealed in etymology and in the archetypal
symbolic association of mother and earth, and the personal sources to be
found in memories of his own childhood involvement with words and their
referents. The process of recall, of reflection, brooding over the
material, which precedes the composition of the poem, is, he ironically
reflects, 'child's-play'. It is not as easy as it sounds, but it does
resemble the play of a child (especially of this particular child) in its intense absorption, and its slow creative work. The poet inhabited the landscape of his past, biding his time until the poem was ready to be written; Hill has described the experience of having 'gone sometimes for ten years knowing -- in a curiously precise way -- that something is waiting to be written' (VP, 82). The place which the poet's imagination inhabited was also the intellectual realm of English history, literature and linguistics: for all the scrupulous propriety of the Acknowledgments of Mercian Hymns ('I have a duty to acknowledge that the authorities cited in these notes might properly object to their names being used in so unscholarly and fantastic a context'), there may be a certain irony about the liability of the scholars, historians and critics thronging the flues of the past to labour short-sightedly ('the mole / shouldered the clogged wheel') or to employ a dry style ('dry-dust badgers').

A process of self-discovery is apparent in the following three versets:

I who was taken to be a king of some kind, a prodigy, a maimed one. (V)

'A boy at odds in the house, lonely among brothers.' But I, who had none, fostered a strangeness; gave myself to unattainable toys. (VI)

'Not strangeness, but strange likeness. Obstinate, outclassed forefathers, I too concede, I am your staggeringly-gifted child.' (XXIX)

The first suggests something of the role of Offa in this process. The child, dreamy and introverted, but showing signs of intellectual precocity, is regarded by his family as 'a king of some kind'. They are right in the sense that he identifies himself in fantasy with King Offa,
and also in the sense that this fantasy presages the imaginative abilities which will make him a poet. But the adult poet, in considering and re-enacting this identification with Offa, finds it more ambivalent, since it also includes fantasies of power and violence (as in the episode with Ceolred in hymn VII).

In the verset from hymn VI, there is a complex recognition in the word 'fostered'. The 'strangeness' of a certain introspective disposition, given to absorption in fantasy, was on the one hand a form of substitute for siblings, and acted as a foster brother. But one usually 'fosters' a child, rather than a brother, so there is an implication that the child fostered himself, adopted himself (which would be a part of the strangeness). There is also a realization, in the more obvious reading of 'fostered', that the strangeness was something which the child cultivated, as well as something which was cultivated in him, and something which cultivated him as a poet. The verset from XXIX, the penultimate hymn, picks up the word 'strangeness', and revises it in the light of the self-knowledge which the adult poet has gained. With whom has he recognized a 'strange likeness'? In the first place, with his family and ancestors, who have been intellectually 'outclassed', and 'outclassed' too because the poet, moving into a literary and academic world, has moved into a different social class. Nevertheless, the obstinacy which led the child to foster a strangeness, and leads the adult poet to dedicate himself to the rigours of his craft, is something which they, in their own spheres, shared.

However, the poet has also recognized a strange likeness between himself and Offa; or rather, he has recognized this likeness in a new way, which represents a new discovery of himself. The theme of likeness
and unlikeness, closeness and distance, is evident from the start of the sequence: 'King of the perennial holly-groves, the riven sand-stone' (I). These opening clauses juxtapose continuity in time ('perennial') with separation in space ('riven'), a reversal of the actual relation of Offa and the poet, who are contiguous in space (the West Midlands) but separated in time. This is not to forget Hill's Acknowledgments, in which he describes the Offa of Mercian Hymns as enjoying a dominion 'enduring from the middle of the eighth century until the middle of the twentieth century (and possibly beyond)': this anachronistic Offa emerges from the interaction of the twentieth-century child and the eighth-century king, an interaction which, in the first hymn, is only just starting to be articulated.

The recognition of a 'strange likeness' between the poet and Offa is important in terms of the development of Hill's poetry, which has been troubled by the gulf between self and other, resulting in a reflexive guilt about the act of writing whenever he has attempted to exercise his imagination in speaking for, or of, the experience of another. Here there is a degree of reconciliation: not the bridging of the gulf, but a sense that it is mitigated by continuities; that both sides can make concessions ('I too concede'). A clue to the source of this reconciliation may be found in the phrase 'gave myself to unattainable toys'. The sense of the unattainable, of the 'lost kingdom' (VP, 88) is a key element of Hill's poetry. Mercian Hymns is not Hill's Paradise Regained; his lost kingdom is not the sort that can be regained. But it is a recognition of what is not lost, a recognition which both springs from, and makes possible, a discovery of the roots of the sense of loss: at least of some of the personal roots. 'I gave myself
to unattainable toys' could be read as 'I sacrificed my sense of self to my sense of the unattainable'. Toys might at first seem too frivolous for such a reading to work, yet if one considers the role of playing in the development of sensibility and creativity, of which *Mercian Hymns* shows itself fully aware, this is not so. For it is the rediscovery, and reinscription in poetry, of the self, which has made the sense of the unattainable less absolute, and therefore the sense of guilt less dominant, in Hill's poetry. Yet this positive note is tempered by the recognition of the desire for power and of violent impulses within the self.

5.3 RHETORIC OF CLOSINESS AND DISTANCE

*Mercian Hymns*, then, is personal insofar as it represents the development of a poet who is a fictionalized version of Hill himself. However, the subject-matter of the sequence also includes the historical: both the culture of Anglo-Saxon Mercia of the eighth century, and that of Worcestershire during the Second World War. Furthermore, the rhetorical technique remains impersonal in the sense of avoiding a unitary subject position, a single implied speaker, for *Mercian Hymns* as a whole.

Thus hymns III, IV and V are spoken by the poet, looking back at his own childhood. In the second verset of V the speaker is especially clear in that he refers explicitly to 'my rich and desolate childhood', and to occasions ('Exile or pilgrim') for revisiting its setting, whether literally or by an internal journey. In I, Offa speaks, but in quotation marks, and accompanied by 'said Offa', so again the hymn as a whole may be imagined as spoken by the poet; the nature of the deliberately
anachronistic relation between modern poet and Anglo-Saxon king is such that Offa may be appropriately regarded as commenting approvingly on the poet's performance in his honour, and the latter as reporting this approval. But in VII the poet (as a child) is referred to in the third person, while VIII (in the first person) sounds as if it is spoken by Offa himself (though anachronism is still present in the form of 'phone-calls at midnight'). This could perhaps be a fantasy of the child's, but in that case the present tense would seem inappropriate. IX may be spoken, as Sherry suggests (Sherry, 143), by one of the 'three mute great-aunts'; the irony that it should be spoken (as an internal monologue) by someone 'mute' (i.e. silent on the social occasion described) would be characteristic of the volume.

To a large extent such analysis of implied speakers is useful only insofar as it shows the shifting, blending and separating of identities in the sequence. The lesson of the long-running debate over Ezra Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* is perhaps that, while it is important that Pound and Mauberley are different, it is also important that we cannot always tell them apart (See Section 1.4). In *Mercian Hymns* the subjectivities of Offa and the poet are explored by a process of interactive identification. Kings sometimes behave like children and children sometimes imagine that they are kings. At some points, for example in X, it would be missing the point to try to disentangle the identity of the speaker. Elsewhere, however, and most notably in XXV, a definite speaker emerges with clarity and emphasis, and this may be regarded as the fruit of the process of self-exploration (on Hill's part), which the shifting subjectivities of the sequence as a whole represent. This technique is a development from both the use of the persona in 'The
Songbook of Sebastian Arrurruz', and the technique of doubling in 'Funeral Music'. Arrurruz, like Pound's Mauberley, is a persona who seems to resemble his creator in certain respects, but who is also treated with a certain ironical detachment. The inter-relation of the poet and Offa in Mercian Hymns is also one of similarity and difference, but, as in 'Funeral Music', this relation spans a very large cultural and temporal gulf. The antithetical principle of the Yeatsian mask is in evidence, contrasting different forms of power (the verbal and imaginative power of the poet and the political power of the king), as Yeats counterposed contemplative poet and heroic man of action. An important difference from the doubling of 'Funeral Music' is that, whereas in the earlier sequence the modern poet was present only as a consciousness reflecting on the past as it reflected back on him, in Mercian Hymns both Offa and the poet are placed in cultural, historical and material contexts, economically but effectively evoked. The poet of Mercian Hymns is a much more imaginatively realized figure than his equivalent in 'Funeral Music'. Similarly, while the relation between Hill and Sebastian Arrurruz remains extra-textual and a matter of speculation, the relation between Hill (or a fictionalized version of Hill) and Offa is dramatized in the text.

The effect, for the reader, of the mutual identification between Offa and the poet is somewhat like that of one of those drawings in which two different pictures can be perceived, though not simultaneously. The following versets, for example, can be read either as describing Offa being childish, or as an account of the child's games (involving the fantasy of being regal):
At dinner, he relished the mockery of drinking his family's health. He did this whenever it suited him, which was not often. (XIV)

He adored the desk, its brown-oak inlaid with ebony, assorted prize pens, the seals of gold and base metal into which he had sunk his name. (X)

This equality between the two subjects (Offa and the poet), and between the two contexts they inhabit only applies, however, to certain of the hymns. Some, such as XXI, essentially depict scenes from a wartime childhood, with only jokey overtones of Anglo-Saxon England.

5.4 REFLEXIVITY AND MUTUALITY

Reflexivity plays a new role in Mercian Hymns, involving the articulation of various forms of mutuality, of reciprocity, processes of mutual shaping or construction. In the earlier poetry reflexivity is employed to exclude the self by representing the language itself as subject and origin. In Mercian Hymns, however, it serves to draw attention to mutually constructive processes which can be seen as operating both between self and other and between past and present. Reflexivity can represent such a form because it asks the reader to attend simultaneously to what the poem is saying about the world, and to its medium. Thus the reader can be made aware both of the poem as a way of shaping experience, and of the poem as shaped in its turn by the structures and pressures of language which arise, at least in part, out of its social and historical role. Reflexivity can thus offer a paradigm of a reciprocal process. In Mercian Hymns the relations between self and other and between past and present are reshaped by the paradigm of
reciprocity, which allows for difference, yet mitigates it by a sense of involvement and exchange.

Hugh Haughton, commenting on Hill's simulation of the style of 'an erudite Anglo-Saxon chronicler and hymnodist' in parts of *Mercian Hymns*, has described how past and present are seen to be mutually constructive:

> Historical pastiche of this palpable kind draws attention to the way in which the historical past is necessarily fictive, in whatever degree, and a source of, as well as subject to, rhetorical contrivances and the consolations of poetry. (Robinson, 130)

The mutually constructive process between self and other is illuminated by David Jones in his Preface to *The Anathemata*:

> To continue with these three images, 'which I like', that is, the Battle of Hastings, the Nicene Creed and Flora Dea, and to use them -- as counters or symbols merely -- of the kind of motifs employed in this writing of mine; it is clear that if such-like motifs are one's material, then one is trying to make a shape out of the very things of which one is oneself made.  

For Jones, the other is represented by the past, as embodied in certain 'images'. *Mercian Hymns* also makes use of such 'images'; indeed Offa himself could be considered to be one. However, it also employs individual words and verbal structures in the same way: an example would be the sustained punning on the name of Offa as a ludic exploration of identity (*MH: I*). A little later in his Preface, Jones gives an interesting account of the particular position of the poet in relation to the shaping forces of culture:

> 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 or other, essentially bound up with the particular historic complex to which he, together with each other member of that complex, belongs. But, for the poet, the woof and warp,
the texture, feel, ethos, the whole matiére comprising that complex comprises also, or in part comprises, the actual material of his art. The 'arts' of, e.g., the strategist, the plumber, the philosopher, the physicist, are no doubt, like the art of the poet, conditioned by and reflective of the particular cultural complex to which their practitioners belong, but neither of these four arts, with respect to their several causes, can be said to be occupied with the embodiment and expression of the mythus and deposits comprising that cultural complex. 

This account sees the poet as specially involved with mutually constructive processes by the very nature of his art.

5.5 IMAGES OF WRITING: DIGGING, RAKING AND COLLATING

Mercian Hymns is pervaded by images and descriptions which have a reflexive sense in that they work as metaphors for the processes of writing poetry (and especially the processes of writing Mercian Hymns).

XII

Their spades grafted through the variably-resistant soil. They clove to the hoard. They ransacked epiphanies, vertebrae of the chimera, armour of wild bees’ larvae. They struck the fire-dragon’s faceted skin.

The men were paid to caulk water-pipes. They brewed and pissed amid splendour; their latrine seethed its estuary through nettles. They are scattered to your collations, moldy warp.

It is autumn. Chestnut-boughs clash their inflamed leaves. The garden festers for attention: telluric cultures enriched with shards, corms, modules, the sunk solids of gravity. I have accrued a golden and stinking blaze.

Christopher Ricks has noted one of the reflexive effects here: "Their spades grafted through the variably-resistant soil" [...] there the variably-resistant hyphen at once joins and divides, at once grafts and grafts through' (Ricks, 326). Digging is employed as an image for the
poet's activity in Heaney's poem of that title, which was included in *Death of a Naturalist* (1966). There the poet identifies with his father and grandfather by seeing his writing in terms of hard work and skill. Work is one of the senses of 'graft'. There may be a direct influence upon Hill here; at any rate *Mercian Hymns* is closest of all Hill's work to certain poems by Heaney, both in concern and in style. Their shared concern is with the past imagined in chthonic or archaeological terms. Each uses the soil, the ground, as an image of the collective cultural past and of the accumulations of personal memory and unconscious. Heaney's 1969 collection *Door Into the Dark* (which Hill could have read while writing *Mercian Hymns*) contains poems such as 'Bogland':

Our pioneers keep striking
Inwards and downwards,
Every layer they strip
Seems camped on before.  

The most striking similarity in style is in the relishing of the sounds of words, sometimes used with a suggestion of onomatopoeic effect and frequently emphasized by alliteration:

The cold smell of potato mould, the squelch and slap
Of soggy peat, the curt cuts of an edge
Through living roots awaken in my head.
(Heaney, 'Digging')

Clash of salutation. As keels thrust into shingle. (MH: XVI)

Coiled entrenched England: brickwork and paintwork
stalwart above hacked marl. The clashing primary colours—
(MH: XX)

The second sentence of XII ('They clove to the hoard') anticipates another Heaney poem, for what Hill's hymn cleaves to is something
akin to the 'word-hoard' of Heaney's 'North' (published later than
*Mercian Hymns*, in 1975):

It said, 'Lie down
in the word-hoard, burrow
the coil and gleam
of your furrowed brain [...]' 

Hill may have borrowed the phrase from David Jones, who uses it in the
Preface to *The Anathemata*.  In the lines from Heaney's poem quoted
above, 'It' refers to 'the longship's swimming tongue'. The poet, standing
on an Irish Atlantic beach, imagines the Viking longships which came to
Ireland as calling to him, warning him to build his poetry out of his
own heritage:

'[...] trust the feel of what nubbed treasure
your hands have known.'

The similarities and differences between the work of the two poets
are revealing. 'North', like *Mercian Hymns*, seeks to give a voice to the
past in the form of a mythologized historical entity: for Heaney, the
longship, for Hill, Offa. In each case this entity speaks to the poet
about his poetry: Offa says 'I liked that', while the longship says 'Lie
down in the word-hoard'. While Hill's first hymn contains this explicit
reflexivity, much of his sequence sustains a secondary level of reflexive
meaning: thus XII describes workmen, and the poet in his garden, but the
activities of both also serve as images of the poet's literary activity.
In 'North' the application of archaeological images to poetry is more
explicit, a turn in the last three stanzas, rather than a secondary
meaning throughout. A further difference lies in the fact that, in
Heaney's poem, the poet's subjectivity is central, and the poem is built
around an occasion: it starts 'I returned to a long strand'. It is true that in Mercian Hymns XII the poet is seen in his garden in the third verset. However, this is not presented as the framing occasion of the poem, but is rather a scene among others. Since XII is part of a sequence, where 'North' is a single lyric, the two pieces are clearly subject to different formal requirements. Nevertheless, it is significant that a comparable distinction can be made between these two as was made between 'The Tollund Man' and 'Elegiac Stanzas' (see Section 1.8). Heaney retains the form of the Wordsworthian lyric of occasion and subjectivity, whereas Hill's technique is modernist in collating disparate persons and occasions.

The men of hymn XII, remembered from childhood but now dead, are scattered to the poet's collations, as well as those of the mole (with a typical Hill joke in the suggestion of 'cold collations'). One of the voices of The Waste Land declares reflexively 'These fragments I have shored against my ruins' (CPPE, 75). The poet (or king) of Mercian Hymns is engaged in a comparable process, accrual of rich cultures. In Collected Poems Hill altered 'accrued' to 'raked up'. The chiming of 'accrued' (in its financial sense) with 'I was invested in mother-earth' (IV) is lost in this change, but the new version emphasizes the work of the poet as well as acknowledging the risks of arbitrary selection, and even muck-raking, when one collects fragments from the past. The poet perhaps hopes for some 'golden' results, but leaves us uncertain as to whether these would be the gold of fine art, or that of profit (where there's muck there's brass). 'Golden and stinking' seems right as a phrase for Hill's own poetry, which combines highly-crafted formal beauty with unashamed physicality.
The Preface to David Jones's *The Anathemata* reminds readers that the aspiration to collect and collate precious fragments is not a modernist invention, although it was incorporated into the modernist poetic of Pound and the early Eliot:

'I have made a heap of all that I could find.' So wrote Nennius, or whoever composed the introductory matter to the *Historia Brittonum*. He speaks of an 'inward wound' which was caused by the fear that certain things dear to him 'should be like smoke dissipated'. Further he says, 'not trusting my own learning [...] I have lispingly put together this ... about past transactions, that [this material] might not be trodden under foot.' 11

The poet of *Mercian Hymns* is much later in history than Nennius, and the 'telluric cultures' which he rakes up have already been trodden under foot. Furthermore, while he may share something of Nennius's wish to preserve, he would seem to be engaged (in hymn XII) in making a bonfire, so that it is by his agency that certain material will be, in Nennius's terms, 'like smoke dissipated'. This may indicate a more modernist sense that collation and reshaping of the past involves loss as well as preservation. It is not often remarked, when Eliot's line is quoted as a description of the processes of *The Waste Land*, that to use fragments to shore up ruins is not a good way of preserving the fragments, although it may be a good way of supporting the ruins (they are 'my ruins' rather than the ruins of the past).

5.6 THE POET'S VOICE AND THE PERFORMATIVE UTTERANCE

The anxiety about the work of the imagination which is prevalent in Hill's earlier work, and even the disgust at poetry which characterized 'Annunciations', are locally present in *Mercian Hymns*, notably in XVIII, the second of two hymns entitled 'Offa's Journey to Rome'. However, such
anxieties do not dominate the sequence. If one cannot, without anxiety, speak for others, one can win through to the ability to speak for oneself. Hymns XXIV and XXV represent the emergence of a voice which is distinctly that of Hill himself. This occurs through gestures of performative reflexivity, utterances which are also actions. In XXIV the action is that of the imagination, considering how to treat its material:

Itinerant through numerous domains, of his lord's retinue, to Compostela. Then home for a lifetime amid West Mercia this master-mason as I envisage him, intent to pester upon tympanum and chancel-arch his moody testament, confusing warrior with lion, dragon-coils, tendrils of the stony vine.

The titles of the hymns appear only as a list at the back of the volume, and were not reproduced in *Collected Poems*. Hymns XXIII - XXV are entitled 'Opus Anglicanum', a phrase which, according to Hill's notes, is 'properly applicable to English embroidery of the period AD 1250-1350', but which is 'with considerable impropriety, extended [...] to apply to English Romanesque sculpture and to utilitarian metal-work of the nineteenth century'. With only a little more impropriety one might extend the term to *Mercian Hymns* itself, and notice how phrases which appear in XXIII and XXIV as descriptions of tapestry and sculpture, are also appropriate as reflexive description. 'Master-works of treacherous thread' (XXIII) is a more positive image for the sequence's interweaving of strands than the bonfire of XII. Hill is very aware of his medium as 'treacherous'. Similarly appropriate are the phrases 'moody testament [...] confusing warrior with lion' (since Offa was something of a warrior, perhaps the poet imagines himself as a literary lion). There is much
creative confusion in *Mercian Hymns*, in the sense of a blending and intertwining which yields symbolic richness.

Up until the phrase 'as I envisage him' in XXIV, the procedures of these hymns are in accord with the use of reflexivity in the sequence as a whole. But this phrase comes as something of a surprise: it is very clearly not Offa speaking, and to distinguish the poet, as a construct, from Hill himself would seem, in this case, merely pedantic; this is Hill, the author of the sequence as a whole in the act of envisaging, a simultaneity of imagination and action being appropriately suggested by the sparse punctuation (the sentence having no punctuation until after 'him').

The author shares with the mason an aesthetic question: 'Where best to stand?'. This is a matter, not only of perspective, but of taking one's stand, and of where to stand (locate one's subjectivity) in the poem. 'As I envisage him' is not, strictly speaking, a performative utterance, both because the syntax makes the phrase adjectival, qualifying 'this master-mason', and because envisaging is not quite a performative verb, since it may describe a purely internal act. Nevertheless, since for a poet the act of envisaging can involve a public creation, for a poet to say 'I envisage' within the work which does so is to approach the conditions of a performative ('visage' in 'envisage' works with 'intent' to suggest the concentrated facial expression accompanying the creative act). The conditions of a performative are more fully met in the next hymn, by the words 'I speak this'. XXV begins and ends with the same verset:
Brooding on the eightieth letter of *Fors Clavigera*,
I speak this in memory of my grandmother, whose
colorhood and prime womanhood were spent in the
nailer's darg.

This emphatic and ritualistically repeated statement centres on a
performative utterance which fully identifies Hill with the speaker of
the elegiac versets which it frames. Harold Bloom suggests that 'there
is no present time, indeed there is no self-presence in *Mercian
Hymns*'. 12 This is a useful observation on the sequence as a whole, but
XXV, together with that single phrase from XXIV, are surely the crucial
exceptions in both respects. In XXV the speaker is unambiguously Hill,
the time the present in which he pays his respects to his grandmother.
The past is recalled, but is very clearly the past. It is as if such an
unambiguous directness of voice can only emerge, in Hill's poetry, from
amidst a shifting process of reciprocity, which has shaped and liberated
the self, freeing it to speak out. It is significant that the poem is an
elegy, since the elegiac is the dominant mode of Hill's poetry, and the
elegy the genre which most exacerbates the problem of speaking of the
experience of another. The separateness of the dead, their otherness, is
still acknowledged, but with the quiet acceptance of 'not to be shaken by
posthumous clamour', rather than the despair of 'The dead keep their
sealed lives / And again I am too late' ('Tristia', KL). The hesitant,
ambiguous and possibly self-reproaching parenthesis of 'September Song',
'(I have made / an elegy for myself it/is true)' is changed into the
resolute 'I speak this'.

5.7 CONCLUSION

In *Mercian Hymns*, then, a new openness about the idea of self, and about relations to others and to the past, is achieved. The personalities of the poet and Offa, and the contexts they inhabit, do not achieve any transcendent, timeless unity, but they do exchange gifts. The activity described in X -- 'He exchanged gifts with the muse of history' -- underlies the grateful sense of 'staggeringly-gifted'. Martin Dodsworth points out that 'prose avoids the characteristically vertiginous line-endings of Hill's verse' (Robinson, 55). No line endings are more vertiginous than those which contribute to the multiple ambiguities of the parenthesis in 'September Song'. The vertigo of immitigable difference in that taut, anxious, ambiguous poem has been succeeded by a more fluid and humorous explication of similarity and difference. The condensed, extreme paradox of the earlier poetry has been succeeded by a looser form, reflecting what Martin Dodsworth has described as the relatively 'genial and relaxed' tone of *Mercian Hymns* (Robinson, 49).

These changes are associated with the introduction of a larger element of the personal. Harold Bloom noted the element of reconciliation in *Mercian Hymns*, but anticipated that it would be short-lived:

Hill has succeeded, obliquely, in solving his aesthetic-moral problem as a poet, but the success is [...] equivocal and momentary [...] I have seen no poems written by Hill since *Mercian Hymns*, but would be surprised if Hill did not return to the tighter mode of *For The Unfallen* and *King Log*, though in a finer tone. 13

Bloom's prophecy has to some extent been confirmed by Hill's subsequent volumes. *Mercian Hymns* is literally central to the *Collected Poems* (if one regards 'Hymns to Our Lady of Chartres' (1984, CP) as an annex to
The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy. It is also a turning point: Tenebrae does represent in certain respects a return, though it is a return which assimilates aspects of the achievement of Mercian Hymns.
Notes to Chapter 5

1. There is a degree of consensus among critics that Mercian Hymns, in Martin Dodsworth's words, 'looks and feels different [from Hill's other volumes of poetry]' (Robinson, p. 49). See also Knottenbelt, p. 151.

2. Martin Dodsworth considers at length the significance of Hill's use of the prose poem in Mercian Hymns (Robinson, pp. 53-61).

3. For example, when asked by Hermione Lee about his choice of subjects, Hill commented: 'They choose me. By the time I realize I'm doing it, it has sort of already got me in its grip' (CF).

4. OED, 'crypt'.


6.1 INTRODUCTION: PARADOX AND MEDIATION

The poems of the Tenebrae volume, following the relatively accessible Mercian Hymns, struck many commentators as in some sense distanced: exhibiting or establishing a distance from the reader, or from the poet's own feelings, or from ordinary realities. Terry Eagleton described the poems as 'courteous, sententious liturgical acts which in one sense hold history at a distance [although] they are at the same time sensitively exposed to it'. A sense of distance is especially common in relation to the sonnets of the 'Lachrimae' sequence ('Lachrimae: or Seven Tears Figured in Seven Passionate Pavans', 1975). C.H. Sisson saw 'Lachrimae' as the work of 'a mind in search of artifices to protect itself against its own passions'. Jeffrey Wainwright commented that 'the sonnets are oblique and do not deal with "things and moments" even as directly as does Hill's earlier "Funeral Music"'. John Bayley wrote, in relation to 'An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture in England' (1973-78), that 'this air of seeing interesting and beautiful objects from a great distance is probably Geoffrey Hill's special thing' and mentioned a 'quality of remoteness in the lines' (Agenda 1979, 40-41). Cathrael Kazin wrote of 'barriers to understanding' in 'Lachrimae', and related this specifically to the overall course of the development of Hill's poetry, arguing that the poems of the Tenebrae volume fulfilled Harold Bloom's prophecy, by returning to a 'tighter form more reminiscent of "Annunciations" [...] than of Mercian Hymns' (Agenda 1979, 43).
My own argument is that the Tenebrae poems do indeed represent a return to certain earlier features of thought and style, in particular a rhetoric of paradox, expressing a tension between mystical impulses towards transcendence, and sceptical, satirical subversion of such impulses. However, these elements are subject to a transformation which effects a degree of reconciliation between sceptical and mystical impulses. This reconciliation is achieved by processes which might be described as distancing, but may be more usefully conceived of as processes of mediation. In the earlier poetry the dilemma of contrary modes of apprehension and thought had produced a crisis of self-revocation and disgust. In Tenebrae, however, these contraries are mediated by sources of authority external to the poems. These include traditions, (such as the tradition of paradox in Christian devotional writing), to which these later poems more overtly allude, other media (primarily music, which the poems both allude to and imitate), and the work of other artists (authors, composers, architects). To this list one might add ritual. Hill commented in an interview that 'Tenebrae is a ritual, and like all rituals it obviously helps one to deal with and express states' (UJ, 214). The result of these mediative processes is the creation of a framework which contains the contradictions and conflicts without effacing them, and a resultant emphasis on form or pattern. This displaces the conflict of mystical and sceptical modes onto the level of style, art or rhetoric; tension, resolution of tension, or the absence of resolution become elements of an aesthetic patterning analogous to musical structure.

The contrast between the radical fragmentation of Hill's poetry in the early sixties and the aesthetic patterning of Tenebrae may be
illustrated by a comparison of forms of paradox from 'Annunciations' and from 'Lachrimae': 'Our God scatters corruption' ('Annunciations 2'); 'I founder in desire for things unfound. / I stay amid the things that will not stay' ('Lachrimae: 5 Pavana Dolorosa'). The former, as Hill himself has noted, yields two diametrically opposed senses (see above Section 3.7) and these senses belong to different world-views: that of militant Christian faith, and that of doubt and anti-Christian critique. It is possible for the reader to construct a link between them by taking one to refer to 'our God' as we (mortals) conceive him, the other to refer to God's true eternal nature, so that the overall sense would be something like: our worldly, self-interested idea of God is a source of corruption, but the true God we are unable to comprehend is a destroyer of corruption. But such a reading feels very much like an ingenious attempt to harmonize ideas which remain in conflict in the poem. In the example from 'Lachrimae', the final lines of 'Pavana Dolorosa', the oppositions are elegant, ceremonious, melancholy, rather than disruptive. The words 'founder' and 'unfound' do not represent a logical contradiction, but a pleasure in the play of surface meaning; the line has the sound of a paradox without its sense. Similarly, in the last line the paradox of the stubborn persistence of the transient is separated out into an elegant antithesis between the speaker, who remains bound to the apparent solidity of worldly things, and the illusory nature of that solidity. The formal elegance of these lines is reminiscent both of the Counter-Reformation devotional poetry and Petrarchan love poetry. In the Tenebrae volume the mediating role is to a large extent played by Counter-Reformation works and modes, whether English or Spanish, literary or musical. The taste for paradox, punning, intricacy, formality,
ceremony and reflexivity which is apparent in such works, provides Hill with models and forms which embrace contraries with a formalistic harmony rather than a disruptive tension. In the case of 'Lachrimae', Robert Southwell is a direct source, providing the epigraph to the sequence. The lines quoted from 'Lachrimae: 5' may be compared with Southwell's 'Saint Peter's Complaint':

I fear'd with life, to die, by death to live:
I left my guide, now left, and leaving God.
To breath in blisse, I fear'd my breath to give,
I fear'd for heavenly raigne, an earthly rod.

Here the paradoxes are gestures of (troubled) faith founded on Christian dogma, such as the paradox of death as the entrance to eternal life, and a life of sin as a form of death. In Hill's 'Lachrimae', faith and doubt co-exist, but the rhetoric of paradox within which Southwell works provides a means to the formal ordering of this conflict. Since the poems of Hill's volume interweave human and divine love, it is important that the poetic traditions on which he draws employ similar rhetorical effects for both forms of love. An example would be the death / life paradox that appears in Spenser's Amoretti as part of a spiritual apotheosis of conjugal love: 'And if those fayle, fall downe and dy before her; / so dying live, and living do adore her'.

6.2 'THE PENTECOST CASTLE' AND 'LACHRIMAE': EPIGRAPHS

While Hill has made use of epigraphs with some frequency throughout his work, the Tenebrae volume is studded with them to an exceptional degree. The volume has an epigraph from Sidney Keyes's poem 'Sour Land' (though this was excluded from the Collected Poems). 'The Pentecost Castle' has
two epigraphs, taken from Yeats and Simone Weil. "'Lachrimae' has one 
(Southwell), but the title, since it is borrowed from Dowland, also has 
something of the force of an epigraph. "'An Apology for the Revival of 
Christian Architecture in England' has two epigraphs (Coleridge and 
Disraeli), and a title borrowed from Pugin. 'Tenebrae' has an epigraph 
from Imogen Holst. Hill has stressed the importance of the epigraphs 
to 'The Pentecost Castle' and 'Lachrimae', saying that 'the essential 
meaning of each sequence is contained in the very carefully chosen 
epigraphs to each of them' (VP, 92). However, Hill's use of the words 
'essential' and 'contained', which suggest an unproblematic summing-up of 
a unitary meaning, hardly conveys the complex and oblique nature of the 
relationship between epigraph and poem.

The following are the epigraphs to 'The Pentecost Castle':

It is terrible to desire and not possess, and terrible to 
possess and not desire.
W.B. YEATS

What we love in other human beings is the hoped-for 
satisfaction of our desire. We do not love their desire. If what 
we loved in them was their desire, then we should love them as 
ourself.
SIMONE WEIL

Yeats's dictum suggests a cynical hedonism, but also hints at the vanity 
of human wishes and the insufficiency of life to the demands of the 
soul. The worldly knowledge and the critique of merely human love 
implied by Yeats here echo similar statements in seventeenth-century 
devotional writing. A comparable observation is found in one of Donne's 
sermons: 'For to desire without fruition is a rage, and to enjoy without 
desire is a stupidity'. The sermon explains the close parallels between
worldly pleasures and spiritual ones, suggesting that the former may be converted into the latter:

[...] so that soul, that hath been transported upon any particular worldly pleasure, when it is entirely turn'd upon God, and the contemplation of his all-sufficiency and abundance, doth find in God fit subject, and just occasion to exercise the same affection piously, and religiously, which had before so sinfully transported, and possesst it. 12

The Veil epigraph gives expression to the scepticism about ordinary behaviour and sentiments which arises from judging by rigorously spiritual standards. In Gravity and Grace Veil sets out a programme for the transcendence of such limited human desire, again recalling Donne's concerns:

We have to go down to the root of our desires in order to tear the energy from its object. That is where the desires are true in so far as they are energy. It is the object which is unreal. But there is an unspeakable wrench in the soul at the separation of a desire from its object. 13

This idea that the energy of desire may be valuable, though the object be wrong, is matched in the Southwell epigraph to 'Lachrimae':

Passions I allow, and loves I approve, onely
I would wish that men would alter their object and better their intent.

Southwell's lines are an uncompromising demand for a life of faith and abnegation, masked by an apparent moderation of tone. 'Onely' carries the full weight of a turn in syntax which is also a complete reordering of life: the change, which Southwell requires of men, from ordinary human passions and loves, to the love of Christ. The obliquity of the relationship of epigraph to poem is evident in the ironic inversion of
the first line of the Southwell epigraph in the first line of the fifth sonnet of 'Lachrimae' ('Pavana Dolorosa'): 'Loves I allow and passions I approve'. This inversion creates a more musical rhythm than Southwell's original words, and hints at a reconversion from the spiritual back to the sensual, a return upon that conversion or transcendence advocated by Donne, Southwell and Veil. 'A 'Pavana Dolorosa' evokes an idea of 'ascetic opulence': a sensual pleasure in abnegation and its rituals:

Loves I allow and passions I approve:
Ash-Wednesday feasts, ascetic opulence,
the wincing lute, so real in its pretence,
itself a passion amorous of love.

'Ash-Wednesday feasts' plays on the verbal proximity of 'feasts' and 'fasts' to suggest, with a wry humour, that the individual drawn to the rituals of abnegation may 'feast' upon asceticism, like the Reverend Mother of 'An Apology: 10', who 'breakfastless, could feast her / constraint'. But 'Pavana Dolorosa' does not merely subvert the discourses of faith evoked by Hill's epigraphs; rather, it reinscribes the close parallels between spiritual desires and those of the flesh, noted by the authors of the epigraphs, in the form of an intimate sense of the complicity between different forms of desire and satisfaction. However, the unmistakable note of satire in Hill's 'Lachrimae', directed at the self-indulgence which may lurk beneath devotional practice, does indeed go beyond his sources; 'Pavana Dolorosa' employs two compoundings of 'self' to suggest the difficulty, for devotional practice, of evading the demands of the self: 'Self-wounding martyrdom, what joys you have'; 'Self-seeking hunter of forms, there is no end / to such pursuits'. These lines compare the 'self-wounding' martyr with the 'self-seeking' artist
(the "hunter of forms"), eliding their respective quests for a perfection, a completion, which is both part of, and apart from, the self. The possibility of a narcissistic element in the vocation of the martyr is strongly implied in T.S. Eliot's poem 'The Death of Saint Narcissus' in which, as David Trotter writes, 'martyrdom seems like a continuation of narcissism by other means, a different and more ingenious way of tasting oneself'. By linking martyr and poet in such terms as the above, Hill implicates the elegant patterning and achieved completion of the 'Lachrimae' sequence with the doubtful motivation which it postulates for 'self-wounding martyrdom'. Andrew Waterman observes that

the relation between the violent human content and the poetry's formal qualities and tones of elaborate stately melancholy enacts the paradox at the heart of Hill's preoccupations: his skill at implicating form in theme is more intensively managed than in Keats's Ode or even Yeats's two hammered-gold Byzantium poems. 17

A likely source for the connection of aesthetic completion with martyrdom is section III of 'Little Gidding':

Whatever we inherit from the fortunate
We have taken from the defeated
What they had to leave us -- a symbol:
A symbol perfected in death. (CPPE, 196)

Many elements of 'Lachrimae' have a source in Four Quartets which, while containing contraries such as faith and doubt, hope and despair, lyricism and abstraction, builds up an idea of its own overall pattern as an image of harmony and reconciliation, with music as the primary model for this patterning. In 'Pavana Dolorosa' the consideration of self and the decreation of the self recalls part III of Little Gidding.
There are three conditions which often look alike: Yet differ completely, flourish in the same hedgerow: Attachment to self and to things and to persons, detachment From self and from things and from persons; and, growing between them, indifference. (CPPE, 195)

Hill's poem is less certain that these conditions 'differ completely'. In 'Pavana Dolorosa' the 'moveless dance' of the seventh line is a clear allusion to Burnt Norton II and V, especially these lines in the former: 'the still point, there the dance is / But neither arrest nor movement' (CPPE, 173).

The traditions of religious discourse to which Hill's epigraphs point us, and which are otherwise evoked in 'The Pentecost Castle' and 'Lachrimae', share with Eliot this sense of complex, paradoxical relations of opposition and complementarity between worldly and spiritual, fleshly and ascetic. Donne (in certain poems), Lope de Vega (a source for 'The Pentecost Castle'), Saint John of the Cross (alluded to in 'The Pentecost Castle') and Southwell all worked within that tradition, which uses the language of sensuality for spiritual aspiration or vice versa. Donne, though not specifically alluded to, provides a useful comparison, since his work applies the parallels in both directions. His phrase, quoted above from a sermon, echoes his own poem 'The Canonization': 'You, to whom love was peace, that now is rage'. In 'The Canonization' Donne dignifies sexual love with religious language, yet goes some way to transfigure that love in the process.

In his introduction to the Tenebrae volume, published in The Poetry Book Society Bulletin, Hill stated that 'many of the poems in Tenebrae are concerned with the strange likeness and ultimate unlikeness of sacred and profane love; and it is this concern which, perhaps, creates
the dominant tone of this book'. Here again Hill's critical judgment of his own work tends to imply a more definite and unproblematic conclusion than a reading of the poetry itself suggests: the poems of Tenebrae leave unresolved the question of whether, ultimately, likeness or unlikeness are more to be emphasized. The fundamental dualities, between physical and spiritual, profane and sacred, worldly and transcendent, recall such earlier works as 'Annunciations' and 'Locust Songs', with their rhetoric of unresolvable paradox. But in Tenebrae, such duality is approached through an architecture of epigraphs, quotations and allusions, which form part of the mediating process to which I have referred. The formality, 'distance', intricacy of structure and density of allusion in the Tenebrae volume can be seen as part of a process of reintegration of elements which had, in Hill's earlier poetry, remained in tense opposition. For this reason the sequences of Tenebrae are best approached through their various mediating presences, including sources, allusions and musical elements. My analysis of the first two of these sequences will show how these presences contribute to a predominance of pattern.

6.3 'THE PENTECOST CASTLE': SOURCES

The primary mediating presence of the first sequence in the volume, 'The Pentecost Castle', is the Spanish Counter-Reformation sensibility which Hill found in the work of the composer, Antonio de Cabezon, and the poet and playwright Lope de Vega. Hill's description of the genesis of the sequence emphasizes a number of key elements for the Tenebrae volume as a whole, including process, envy of music, the iconic and hidden connections. In reply to John Haffenden's question, 'can you characterize
the appeal you found in the poetry of sixteenth-century Counter-Reformation Spain, and how it informed your poetry?" Hill said that he could 'only answer that by taking you through a process'. The process which he goes on to describe involves moving towards his own poem through the music and poetry of others (VP, 91-92). While it is important not to elide the genetic process of composition with the structures of the completed text, this process is manifest in the mediated features of the poem itself, in particular its enigmatic air of alluding to a concealed or effaced narrative. In Hill's own account, the establishing of a link between his own work and other artists, other media, another age, involved, and was validated by, a tracing of earlier instances of such mediation: de Vega and Cabezón both worked on and through a folksong (the lyrics and the music respectively), and are thus, in Hill's words, 'united' by this 'tiny thread' (VP, 92). The piece by Cabezón which Hill heard performed, 'Diferencias sobre el canto del Caballero', takes the form of variations ('Diferencias'), again a key word for the Tenebrae volume.

In de Vega's play, El Caballero de Olmedo, the folk song is heard in the third and final act. The hero Alonso (the 'Caballero de Olmedo') is on his way back from Medina to Olmedo at night, having triumphed in the bullfight, and on the brink of winning approval from his beloved's father for their marriage. He is about to be ambushed and treacherously murdered by his rival, Rodrigo. He feels a sense of premonition and shortly he hears the sound of singing, the first four lines of the folksong:
Que de noche le mataron
al caballero,
la gala de Medina,
la flor de Olmedo.

They killed him in the darkness,
The noble knight,
The glory of Medina,
The flower of Olmedo.  

The singer turns out to be a passing peasant, an enigmatic figure who, after completing the song, is questioned by Alonso, and says that he 'cannot tell you more about the song or its history than that I learned it from one Fabia' (Fabia, a character in the play, is a mixture of female pandar and generally benevolent witch).  

Jill Booty, the editor of an English translation of the play, notes that:

This snatch of an anonymous popular ballad probably gave Lope the idea of writing the play, which is based on an elaboration of its mood and constructed to provide a fitting explanation for the tragic ending.

Hill's sequence joins in the creative procedures of de Vega and Cabezon, in that it elaborates the mood of the song while also incorporating a version of it (a translation of the song forming the first poem of 'The Pentecost Castle'). Hill told John Haffenden: 'I began to read my way into Lope de Vega's work -- that play in particular' (VP, 92), and his fascination may be explained by the combination of passionate lyricism, formality and sardonic humour found in El Caballero de Olmedo, all notable features of Hill's own poetry. The dominant mood of de Vega's play is, however, that of melancholy longing, and it is this mood that Hill develops in 'The Pentecost Castle'. The lyrical strand in the play includes an equivalent to musical variations in the shape of the 'glosa', a Spanish form invented by the late fourteenth-century or early fifteenth-century court poets, in which a short stanza introducing a theme is followed by a series of stanzas, each explaining or 'glossing'
the original lines, and each concluding with one of those lines. The term 'glosa' was also applied, in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Spain, to a variation-like musical form. There is thus a formal link between de Vega's play and Cabezón's piece. In Act II of El Caballero de Olmedo Tello sings a complex glosa on a popular song, presented as the composition of his master, inspired by love for Inés. In Act III, Alonso's speech of parting expresses the paradoxes and melancholy of love:

Madam, I spend my days amid a host of terrible imaginings, mingling joy in all my sorrow and sorrow in all my joy. Sometimes my mind presents me so cruel a vision of losing you that I seem to feel the very hand of death upon me [...] But though the shadow of death may take me ere I come again, there can be no parting, for my soul remains forever in your keeping.

This speech is a glosa on a copla beginning 'One foot already in the stirrup, / I feel the very hand of death', and its elegant rhetoric of sorrow and joy, loss and eternity, is developed in 'The Pentecost Castle':

This love will see me dead
he has the place in mind
where I am free to die
be true at last true love [...] 

I die to sleep in love.

Poem 9, from which these lines are taken, identifies the lover who is addressed as Christ by its reference to 'his five wounds'. A precedent for the conversion of sexual to spiritual is offered by another Counter-Reformation Spanish poetic form, that of the poem 'contrahecha a lo divino'. This form, in which love poetry is recast as sacred, is discussed by R.O. Jones in a book which provided the epigraph to some of
the poems of 'The Pentecost Castle' when they were first published.²⁷ Lope de Vega was one of the practitioners of the 'contrahecha a lo divino' poem, which Jones describes as 'religious parody, or the rewriting of profane literature in religious terms'. He comments that 'nothing was thought inappropriate for transformation: in an age of faith there is no barrier between the profane and the divine: one can nourish the other'. Concerning the anecdote of St John of the Cross singing an old love song to an image of the infant Jesus, (an anecdote which formed Hill's epigraph), Jones adds that 'in this ecstatic interfusion of the secular and the divine he seems to embody the spirit of an age'.²⁸ Since Hill is not living in such an age, Jones's comment serves to emphasize the importance of the mediating role of a Counter-Reformation sensibility in the reconciliation of Tenebrae.

6.4 'THE PENTECOST CASTLE' AND MUSICAL VARIATIONS

Below is poem 1 of 'The Pentecost Castle', followed by the Spanish original, with a literal translation alongside:

1 They slew by night
2 upon the road
3 Medina's pride
4 Olmedo's flower
5 shadows warned him
6 not to go
7 not to go
8 along that road
9 weep for your lord
10 Medina's pride
11 Olmedo's flower
12 there in the road
Poem 1 of 'The Pentecost Castle' takes from the Spanish song of de Vega's play the short lines which, with some variation, are to be the model for the sequence as a whole, but whereas the Spanish lines vary in rhythm and length (between 5 and 8 syllables), Hill's version, in the first poem, is extremely regular. Every line has 4 syllables, except for the middle two lines of the middle stanza, where the repeated 3-syllable phrase 'not to go' gives an effect of catalexis, stressing the ominous warning. Every other line consists of two feet, the majority iambic, some trochaic. The first stanza, wholly iambic, sets up an incantatory regularity of rhythm. In stanzas 2 and 3, trochees serve to emphasize the shadows, ('shādōws wārned'), the warning ('nōt tō gō'), the tears (wēp fōr yōə lōrd) and, with a suggestion of horrified pointing, the corpse ('thrē in the rōd').

Hill's verbal changes from 'Que de noche le mataron' heighten the repetitive, circular quality already present in the Spanish. Instead of the rephrasing of the same content in lines 5-6 and 7-8 of the Spanish, the repetition of 'not to go' gives the English a symmetrical centre about which it turns; this is possible because the 11 lines of the original, separated in the play into 4 lines and 7 lines by Alonso's response, have become, in Hill's version of the song, a symmetrical
structure of 3 x 4 lines, a structure retained for the whole of the sequence. In 1, this structure emphasizes the repetition of the epithets for the knight present in the original. The effect approaches that of pattern poetry; the visual appearance on the page of 'The Pentecost Castle' contributes significantly to the sense of its sparseness and lucidity, and distinguishes it sharply from the rest of Hill's poetry. Yet there is also an effect of enigmatic, allusive resonance. While the allusions to Medina and Olmedo are clear in the context of de Vega's play (since Alonso comes from Olmedo and has triumphed in Medina), in Hill's sequence they become enigmatic and atmospheric. Medina (Medina del Campo) was where St John of the Cross first entered a Carmelite monastery, and while this may be fortuitous it adds an appropriate association. St John's 'Song of the Living Flame of Love' and 'Verses of the Soul that Pines to See God' are among the lyrics in *The Penguin Book of Spanish Verse* which helped to inspire 'The Pentecost Castle'.

The result of Hill's translation and adaptation in poem 1 is an insistent, incantatory lyric, suggesting a dishonourable murder and implying that the victim may be a type of Christ. Strictly speaking, a type must be found in the Old Testament, but the concept of typology has a certain aptness here. Frank Kermode, discussing forms of modern typological thinking, identifies the danger, in the assumption that 'histories and fictions cannot avoid conforming with types', that such thinking may become 'sentimentally ritualistic and circular'. This is certainly a risk in Hill's poetry, which revolves around Christian paradigms, such as the Crucifixion, the Incarnation and the Fall. Those suspicious of such aspects of Hill's work would be likely to point to the poems of *Tenebrae* as most open to the charge of embodying
'sentimentally ritualistic and circular' modes of thinking. The title of the volume announces its concern with ritual, and stylistically the volume is characterized by finely-wrought, intricate patterning, rather than free flow or energy. Indeed, the whole mediative use to which Renaissance and Counter-Reformation forms and modes are put could be criticized as governed by a sentimentalizing typology.

The typological element in de Vega's play centres on Alonso. His meeting with a ghostly double suggests that Alonso may shadow or figure a type. Indeed, one way of interpreting Alonso's extreme devotion to Inés (who talks of becoming a 'bride of Christ'), his nobility, his courage, his returning of good for evil (he saves his rival from a bull) and his tragic fate is to read him as a Christ figure. As Henry Hart notes, Hill's rendering, in his version of the song, of 'caballero' as 'lord' rather than 'knight' encourages (for the modern reader) the ambiguous identification with Christ (Hart, 199), although Hill may only be seeking to reproduce the effect on a seventeenth-century audience, for whom 'knight' would also suggest Christ through his association with knightly or courtly qualities. The change also stresses power rather than vocation. The non-specificity of 'The Pentecost Castle' in terms of narrative or event opens it to readings in terms of types. In contrast to 'Funeral Music', 'The Songbook of Sebastian Arrurruz' and Mercian Hymns, 'The Pentecost Castle' is not historically located, although its sources and stylistic mode may be historically locatable. This perhaps makes it liable to the 'unjustified archaism' which Kermode identifies as a temptation resulting from 'systematized typological insights'. The type or figure is an important concept for the Tenebrae volume; in Lachrimae the idea of figuration appears with musical and iconic connotations.
Poem 2 of 'The Pentecost Castle' continues the highly patterned effect of poem 1, using identical first and last stanzas (with the exception of the capitalised first letter). *The Penguin Book of Spanish Verse* provided models, more or less closely followed by Hill, for most of the poems of the sequence. Poem 2, rather than corresponding closely to any one lyric from *The Penguin Book*, partakes of the mood of several, especially those anonymous poems of the fifteenth and sixteenth century that tell of a journey to a grove and a lovers' meeting, hinting at both pleasure and remorse or pain. The effect of poem 2 is one of understatement, especially in the short lines placed among slightly longer ones: 'I met my death'; 'I lie slain'. Again, the possibilities of interpretation are left open, so that the poem could be based on an elaboration of the Renaissance sexual sense of die (a pervasive quibble in 'The Pentecost Castle'), or could be an account of a murder by a jealous lover, in the manner of a folk-song. I would like to suggest that this second poem, and indeed the sequence as a whole, can be seen as developing from the first poem in the manner of musical variations. *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* defines the variation as 'a form in which successive statements of a theme are altered or presented in altered settings', and states that 'for one section of a piece to be considered a variation of another certain elements must always remain constant'. Among the six forms of variation identified by Grove is the fixed-harmony variation, where harmony and usually form remain unchanged, while 'melody, part-writing, rhythm, tempo and dynamics are all variable or new'. In sixteenth-century Spanish music the art of making variations reached an especially advanced stage of development, and Cabezón, whose composition *Diferencias Sobre el Canto del Caballero*
initiated the process of composition of 'The Pentecost Castle', was particularly noted as a composer of variations. 33

My justification for analysing 'The Pentecost Castle' in terms of musical variations is not based on literal equivalence to melodic variation, in which words would correspond to notes. While the repetition of words, embellished or modified, in different lyrics, does play a part, such repetition is not the main structuring principle of the sequence. Such a procedure would be unlikely to be very productive in the verbal medium, resulting at best in something like the ludic effect of Edwin Morgan's 'The Computer's First Christmas Card'. 46 But if we look for less literal equivalents we can identify themes in the literary sense (love, death, loss) and mood (melancholy, longing) as elements which remain constant, though subject to the effects of changes in other elements. The absence of an overt narrative or story encourages the reader to seek structural principles in such elements. The first two poems are linked by syntactical structure and verbal echoes. Susanne Langer develops an idea of a parallel between poetry and music in terms of such patterning:

The tension which music achieves through dissonance, and the reorientation in each new resolution to harmony, find their equivalents in the suspensions and periodic decisions of propositional sense in poetry. Literal sense, not euphony, is the 'harmonic structure' of poetry; word-melody in literature is more akin to tone-colour in music. 41

In these terms, poem 2 may be seen to repeat and vary the 'dissonance [...] and resolution to harmony' of poem 1 as indicated in the following table, showing a combination of verbal and syntactical correspondences between the two poems:
Poem 1
upon the road
along that road
there in the road

Poem 2
under the briar rose (x2)
among the trees
Down in the orchard / down in the orchard

They slew by night
I met my death (x2)
I lie slain (x2)

not to go (x2)
I was going

Olmedo's flower (x2)
to gather flowers

There is a close matching of phrase structure, word order and sequence of parts of speech, together with some verbal correspondences. Recalling Christopher Ricks's emphasis on Eliot's idea that verse itself is a system of punctuation, and that the absence of formal punctuation may only emphasize this (Ricks, 342-43), we may postulate that the absence of marks of punctuation (other than hyphens) in 'The Pentecost Castle' serves to concentrate the ear and eye upon the 'harmonic' structure formed by syntactical relations and the movement of propositional sense. The 'musical' structure of 'The Pentecost Castle' is visible as well as audible, and to have given it formal marks of punctuation might have made the experience of reading it equivalent rather to score-reading than to listening.

The remaining poems of the sequence do not share the close syntactical parallels of poems 1 and 2. Nevertheless, there are sufficient continuities to sustain a broad parallel with the variation form, poem 1 acting as the model on which the variations are built. The strong linking between 1 and 2, placed at the beginning of the sequence, also alerts the reader to such continuities, rather as musical variations often begin with a relatively straightforward development of the theme,
and become increasingly complex as they proceed. The structure of three quatrains remains constant throughout, as do the short lines of two or three stresses, with between four and seven syllables. The use of patterned repetition (with small changes) within a poem recurs in poem 11, and the pair of identical lines found in the second stanza of poem 1 is matched in the first stanza of poem 12 (the symmetrical structures within 12 are considered in more detail below). Running through the sequence are a number of chains, made up of verbal echoes or clusters of imagery. The following list identifies the four main such chains by key words or phrases, followed by the poem number in parentheses. Chain A: 'among the trees' / 'in the orchard' (2); 'grove' (3); 'Jesse tree' (4); 'aspen tree' (5); 'balsam' (6). Chain B: 'slew' (1); 'slain' (2); 'blood' (3); 'pierced by the blade' (6); 'five wounds' (9); 'wounded' (14); 'wound' (15). Chain C: 'shadows' (1); 'among the trees' (2); 'I sleep in the shade' (5); 'darkness' (7); 'the night is dark' (11); 'splendidly-shining darkness' (13). Chain D: 'upon the road' (1); 'the road she has gone' (10); 'the way short' (11).

In the absence of either an overt narrative or a clearly defined subjectivity within the sequence, the reader’s strategy becomes one of listening to such structuring patterns, and building up around them a sense of theme, atmosphere, mood. Taking chain C as an example, we may note that a process of accumulating connotations is set in motion around images of darkness and shadow, in which the monitory shadows of poem 1 (the double and the peasant of de Vega's play) become associated with the shady groves which are locations of lovers' meetings in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Spanish lyrics, with the 'darkness' or mystery of Christ, with the dark night of St John of the Cross, and thence with
the transfigured 'spendidly-shining darkness' of mystical union with God. The reading strategy that is thus initiated finds a helpful analogy in musical variation; it is a strategy that remains alert to such patterns, without imposing an equivalence on the multiple strands of feeling and idea that are present. The sequence does not equate sacred and profane love, any more than it equates the sensibilities or philosophies which it evokes (such as those of Yeats and Weil). Rather, it articulates a patterned movement of interrelation between them.

Susanne Langer's conception of the reader of poetry as listening to the music of 'literal sense' describes accurately the way in which the reader of 'The Pentecost Castle' attends to meaning, but to the shape and rhythm of meaning rather than to paraphrasable content. This may be what John Bayley means when he suggests that we enjoy 'the feel of them (the poems of 'The Pentecost Castle'), like the shade and patina on walls' (*Agenda* 1979, 38). Certainly such poetry makes one aware of the poem as a made object. Bayley's comment, though half-admiring, hints at superficiality, and if depth is conceived of in terms of referentiality (profundy of paraphrasable meaning), then Hill's sequence can be regarded as superficial. But one might also pick up on Bayley's concrete analogy, and develop it in terms of Donald Davie's plea for a consideration of poetry as a special kind of art, on analogy with music or sculpture, rather than (or as well as) a consideration of poetry as a special kind of discourse. Here Hill's poetry is in the Poundian tradition.

If the musical analogy is productive for a consideration of the poetry of *Tenebrae*, and since I have proposed variations as the specific instance of that analogy in the case of 'The Pentecost Castle', then some
general comments on variations as a form may be apposite. Variations work by a sustained relation between changing and unchanging elements. This is appropriate to Hill's treatment, in 'The Pentecost Castle', of paradox, and of the sacred and secular modes, in that the poems do not push for a resolution, but create aesthetic clarity of a circling nature out of the play of contradiction, the tension of modes. The way in which paradox functions in 'The Pentecost Castle' as an harmonic effect may be described in terms similar to those used by Langer. However, she suggests a form of ambiguity which would suit more developmental, dynamic musical and poetic forms ('the suspense of literal meaning by a sustained ambiguity resolved in a long-awaited key-word'). The ambiguities of 'The Pentecost Castle' tend to be local, rather than sustained. An example would be the final stanza of poem 4:

and ghosts for love
void a few tears
of wax upon
forlorn altars

The mannered poignancy of these lines is created by an uncertainty as to whether the 'ghosts' are lonely mourners shedding wax-like tears, or candles, playing their ghostly role in the communion service. The operation of ambiguity may be illustrated in more detail with reference to a complete poem, number 12:

Married and not for love
you of all women
you of all women
my soul's darling my love

faithful to my desire
lost in the dream's grasp where
shall I find you everywhere
unmatched in my desire
each of us dispossessed
so richly in my sleep
I rise out of my sleep
crying like one possessed

In this poem, with a theme somewhat reminiscent of Tennyson's 'Locksley Hall', sexual rather than divine love is primary. The use of symmetry, verbal repetition and echoes, established in poem 1, is very evident here. The patterning of end words resembles the rhyme scheme of In Memoriam, but using repetition rather than ordinary rhyme. Christopher Ricks has commented on the circular 'plot' of Tennyson's abba scheme, 'especially suited to turning round rather than going forward'. The circular quality of the poem makes the allusions to Tennyson's poetry seem formally appropriate. The symmetry of Hill's endings in 12 is subject to a minimal but crucial skewing in the matching of words with part-words: 'where' is answered by 'everywhere', while 'possessed' is matched with its opposite, 'dispossessed' (echoing 'East Coker'). The poems of Tenebrae, and 'The Pentecost Castle' in particular, are the closest Hill's work comes to images of achieved transcendence. Nevertheless, achieved transcendence in language, even language relatively stripped of referential specificity, is never claimed in Hill's work. Another way of putting this would be to say that the sense of achieved transcendence is something which his work only evokes in order to identify such a sense as spurious or unattainable. Since it is the materiality of language and its participation in the social and human world which according to this view signify its fallen nature, the unsettling of iconic purity by grammatical asymmetry, as in the combination 'possessed / dispossessed', appropriately resists transcendence. Tennyson's 'Locksley Hall' ends with a characteristic
gesture of Romantic transcendence: 'Let it fall on Locksley Hall, with rain or hail, or fire or snow; / For the mighty wind arises, roaring seaward, and I go'. Hill's poem returns upon itself, not surmounting dispossession but remaining possessed by it.

In Memoriam is an ambiguous but important model here, in that it moves towards acceptance of loss and spiritual consolation, but also resists this movement, each individual stanza, in Ricks's words, 'returning to its setting out, and with fertile circularity staving off its deepest terror of arriving at desolation and indifference'. Tennyson's vast sequence ends with a gesture to the divine absolute which nevertheless evokes this absolute, not as a presence, but as the putative end of a continuing dynamic process:

That God, which ever lives and loves,
One God, one law, one element,
And one far-off divine event,
To which the whole creation moves.

Hill's smaller sequence ends with the paradoxical tragedy of acceptance: 'my desire dying / as I desire' (15), a paradox which is close to being an inversion of one found in section LXXVIII of Tennyson's poem: 'O last regret, regret can die!'. But the last lines of 'The Pentecost Castle', while they may express a fatalistic, despairing or stoical desire to be free of desire, may also match Tennyson's final vision of life as dynamic process: on this reading the speaker of 15 continues to desire, and his desire is dying simply because it is living, and not transcendent; because, in Eliot's words, 'that which is only living / Can only die' ('Burnt Norton V', CPPE, 175).
The paradox to which Tennyson's lines point, that a sense of loss can itself be lost, that a bereaved person may cling to his or her grief because it is what remains of that which is mourned, and therefore experience the emergence from grief as a further loss, is a recurrent theme of Hill's poetry, frequently joined with a meditation on the meaning and possibility of possession (see Conclusion). Here we come upon one of those meeting points, an example of that 'strange likeness', between sacred and profane love. For the speaker of poem 12 of 'The Pentecost Castle', loss of the loved woman, who has married another, becomes a mode of possession ('shall I find you everywhere'). Loss as a mode of possession is also crucial to certain forms of mystical discourse, such as that of Weil:

We only possess what we renounce; what we do not renounce escapes from us.

If we love God while thinking that he does not exist, he will manifest his existence. 51

The ambiguities of poem 12, created largely by the absence of punctuation, trace the patterns of paradox in such a manner of thought. Thus in the lines: 'my soul's darling my love // faithful to my desire', there is a primary ambiguity concerning the referent of the descriptive phrase 'faithful to my desire'. One group of readings applies this phrase to the woman ('my soul's darling'), while the other group applies it to 'my love' which, while it may be another term of affection for the woman, may also refer to the speaker's emotion. The first set of readings, which I will designate (I), describes the woman as faithful to 'my desire' in that: (Ia) she always awakens it; (Ib) she is someone whom I desire to be always faithful; (Ic) she is as faithful as I desire
her to be; (Id) she is only faithful while I desire her. The second set of readings, (II), describe his love as 'faithful' to his desire in that: (Iia) he only loves while he feels unsatisfied desire, suggesting the Yeats epigraph to the whole sequence, which hints that desire may last only until possession; (Iib) his love is tied to his desire in the sense asserted by the Weil epigraph: 'What we love in other human beings is the hoped-for satisfaction of our desire'.

Of this range of readings, some are more idiomatic, and some seem more appropriate to what we can deduce about the narrative situation, than others. Nevertheless, I would argue that the experience of reading the poem is determined by the presence of more possible readings than can be assimilated, or read simultaneously. One can trace patterns of meaning through a maze of paradox, but not resolve or synthesize. Another set of readings are generated if 'faithful to my desire' is taken as applying, not to the speaker's love, but to the speaker himself; this is equally grammatically possible, since in the next line, 'lost in the dream's grasp where', the speaker may be the subject of 'lost', so that the two phrases may be in apposition.

Line and stanza breaks function symbolically in this poem: for example they separate 'love' from both 'faithful' and 'desire', and 'my soul's darling' from 'my desire'. The poem explores love and desire both as dynamic concepts or forces, and as static concepts, or states of being. It remains poised between two models of the interaction or interrelation of love and desire. One model stresses the perpetual dissatisfaction of human feeling: desire for satisfaction may produce love (as Weil's epigraph suggests), and satisfaction may be achieved through possession, but then, as Yeats's epigraph implies, there is
always the risk that both desire and love will die with possession. The other model is a redemptive, mystical model of abnegation, acceptance of loss as gain. Such a view is expounded in Weil's *Gravity and Grace*:

If we go down into ourselves we find that we possess exactly what we desire.
If we long for a certain being (who is dead), we desire a particular, limited being; therefore, necessarily, a mortal, and we long for that special being [...] who died at such and such a time on such and such a day. And we have that being -- dead. [...] In such cases suffering, emptiness are the mode of existence of the objects of our desire. We only have to draw aside the veil of unreality, and we shall see that they are given to us in this way. When we see that, we still suffer, but we are happy.  

According to Langer's model, sustained ambiguity finally resolved provides a verbal equivalent to a process of harmonic development, moving towards an ultimate release of tension. I am proposing that, in 'The Pentecost Castle', recurrent unresolved ambiguity and paradox create an equivalent to the recurrent tension of continuity and change in the variation form.

The comparison with the musical variations form clearly has its limits; like all such comparisons it founders, if pushed too far, on radical differences between the musical and verbal media. But this does not mean that the idea of the imitation of musical form may not be influential. Hill's allusion, in his interview with John Haffenden, to the Nietzschean and Schopenhauerian view of music implies that for him, as for many symbolist and post-symbolist writers, music represents an ideal. Recently theoretical work on music has stressed that it is created, performed and listened to in social contexts which in part define its meaning. The 'purity' of music is therefore, arguably, a myth. Nevertheless music, and the imitation of musical form, may still
provide a potent representation of the ideal for such writers. In the context of Hill's poetic procedure in 'The Pentecost Castle', the variations form has a particular appropriateness because (where the initial theme or structure is a borrowed one), it provides a format for a work which integrates the pre-existing work of another artist into an idiom which the later artist creates. Thus the variation form serves a mediative function in relation to 'The Pentecost Castle' in three ways. First, the analogy with music itself involves a mediation by the structures of another art form. Second, the variation form is in many cases a mediative form in itself, in that it develops from the work of another. Third, since the specific piece which initiated the creative process for Hill, Cabezón's *Diferencias sobre el Canto del Caballero*, consists in variations, and turned out to be part of a web of literary and musical connections, it was via an example of this form that Hill's poem entered into the network of allusive relations which it employs.

6.5 'LACHRIMAE' AND FALSE RELATION

While variation provides a model for 'The Pentecost Castle', the musical device of false relation plays a similar role in the next sequence in *Tenebrae*, 'Lachrimae, or Seven Teares Figured in Seven Passionate Pavans'. This device is an important element in John Dowland's composition for consort of viols of the same title, which is dated 1604, and dedicated to Queen Anne. Diana Poulton, in her book on Dowland, writes of *Lachrimae* that 'suspensions, false relations, and the clash of parts moving against each other at temporarily discordant intervals are combined in a musical texture of extraordinary emotional intensity'. False relation is defined by the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and*
Musicians as 'a chromatic contradiction between two notes of the same chord [...] or in different parts of adjacent chords'. Grove further notes that the dissonance must be both semitonic and chromatic, and that the chromatic alteration must take place in another part (which usually means in another octave). Thus 'the falseness of the relation derives from the rule, common to most systems of classical harmonic theory, that chromatic changes must be melodic, that is, they must arise and be resolved in the same voice or part'. This requirement for two parts to be involved is significant for the possible literary analogies of the effect.

Hill himself has used false relation as an analogy for a literary effect, describing a line from Cymbeline as 'the taming of "false relation" to a new constructive purpose', and adding that 'dissonance is the servant preparing the return of harmony' (TC, 66). The best-known form of false relation is the simultaneous major and minor third, and Wilfred Mellers, in the essay to which Hill's note to the above passage refers us, uses this narrower definition ('a device whereby the major and minor third were sounded simultaneously in the same chord'). Grove notes that the English madrigalists of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were famous for the use of false relation for 'expressive text-setting'. Mellers comments that 'it is in their use of the tensions of dissonant harmony to reinforce verbal pathos that the English madrigalists were most audacious', and that false relation was almost always used 'in association with the idea of pain and anguish, on words such as "bitter" and "sting"' (Mellers, 394). While Dowland's Lachrimae is itself not a setting of words but an instrumental piece, it
uses expressive devices which became fashionable as part of the Renaissance interest in the close linking of music and words.

As a local, expressive use of dissonance between two parts, false relation provides an analogy for Hill's use of two or more conflicting strands of meaning, including dissonant puns. The first sonnet of 'Lachrimae', entitled 'Lachrimae Verae', centres on a paradoxical sense of connection with, and estrangement from, Christ.

Crucified Lord, you swim upon your cross
and never move. Sometimes in dreams of hell
the body moves but moves to no avail
and is at one with that eternal loss.

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.

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.

The duality between the true Christ and the speaker's comprehension of him is figured by two strands of reference, one to Christ himself, the other to a crucifix, icon of Christ's atonement. The latter strand has reflexive connotations, since Hill's sequence is itself a form of icon of Christ.

In the opening lines of the sonnet, the icon seems to swim before the eyes of the speaker, while Christ is imagined as a swimmer through the stream of time or history, an eternal being traversing an element not his own. There is also a sense of incongruity in the idea of Christ's outstretched arms as like those of a swimmer, a comparison
which humanizes but diminishes, and suggests the uncertainty of the speaker's faith. While the icon seems to move in front of his eyes, swimming with tears, the contemplation of Christ fails to move the speaker to a firm faith, or a transformation of his life. 'I cannot turn aside from what I do' suggests both 'I cannot reform my life' and 'I cannot avoid contemplation of my own sins, nor responsibility for them'. Line 3 continues the punning on 'move', with the paradox that it is dreams of a hellish state (in which the body makes muscular contractions but, in the dream, is unable to run away) which bring the speaker closest to Christ, in terms of imagining his suffering on the cross. At the same time, the dream experience parallels the failure of the penitent, who is, in emotional terms, 'moved' by Christ but unable to change. Line 4, by its reference to the atonement ('at one'), emphasizes the paradoxical nature of the fleeting sense of closeness to Christ which the dream offers; that it is a closeness to an experience of loss or separation. 'Eternal loss' suggests both damnation and loss of faith. For both the unabsolved sinner, and the atheist or agnostic, the atonement offered by Christ is lost (in different senses).

In 'Lachrime Verae' there is a skewed or twisted quality to the metaphors of the poem which conveys the unease and guilt of the speaker, his sense of being at odds. The idea of Christ as swimmer is followed through, but the metaphor shifts uneasily: first Christ is a swimmer on his cross, then he is a castaway on an island, presumably to be identified with the hill of the crucifixion. The relationship of 'castaway' and 'drowned remorse' is skewed, since a castaway is someone who, perhaps alone among his companions, escapes drowning. Here, however, Christ must be envisaged as 'cast away' on Golgotha either as a
result of the 'drowning' of remorse, or in such a way as to rescue
'drowned remorse' by arousing repentance. Furthermore, the drowned
remorse brings us back to the feelings of the speaker gazing at the
crucifix, his remorse drowned by his swimming tears, or by his inability
to move. Thus, while lines like 'You are the castaway of drowned remorse'
flow smoothly as regards metre and sound, the metaphor is coiled into a
baroque intricacy.

As the passage from Grove quoted above indicates, chromatic changes
had been acceptable in classical musical theory if they were melodic,
 occurring in the same part. Mellers comments that false relation had
'originally been evolved from the movement of melodic parts, yet there
is no doubt that the composers [...] came increasingly to exploit it for
harmonic effects' (Mellers, 394). As I have noted, these harmonic effects
also tended to be expressive of specific meanings. The false relations
of Dowland's Lachrimae create, in Diana Poulton's word, 'intensity',
rather than division or contradiction. In this they resemble the effects
of the madrigalists, associated with 'textual references to pain or
melancholy or an ecstatic sweetness' (Mellers, 395). If we consider the
dissonant puns of Hill's Lachrimae on an analogy with false relation,
this would imply a view of such puns, not as a combination of two
meanings (so that the reader must either choose one meaning, or accept
plurality), but as a clash of propositional sense in which the final
meaning or significance lies precisely in the effect of clash. Thus, if a
particular interval in Dowland's composition serves to suggest pain, or
melancholy waiting, then analogously, the 'interval' between the two
senses of 'moves' in the above poem, an interval which consists in the
gap between two signifieds for the same signifier, may itself be read as
a signifier for a particular experience: an experience of being moved and not moved.

While there is nothing unique, or uniquely musical, about such a manner of interpreting a pun, the interpretation does indicate the way in which the poem's evocation of musical form serves to unify the dualisms of Hill's poetry by creating a meta-level of signification through the patterning of tension and conflict. An example of this occurs in the seventh sonnet, 'Lachrimae Amantis':

What kind of care
brings you as though a stranger to my door
through the long night and in the icy dew
seeking the heart that will not harbour you,
that keeps itself religiously secure?

The main effect here is of harmonic dissonance between the two senses of 'religiously': 'in a scrupulous, conscientious manner' and 'in respect of religious practice'. The combined effect is both sharp self-condemnation (for scrupulosity exercised to protect selfish illusions) and an ironic reflection on the liability of institutionalized belief to be misused for such a purpose. A prominent feature of the sequence is oxymoron, which might be compared to false relation in adjacent chords (as opposed to the simultaneous notes of a pun). Examples in 'Lachrimae' include: 'celestial worldliness' (2); 'slavish master' (2); 'harsh grace' (4); 'void embrace' (4); 'ascetic opulence' (5); 'so real in its pretence' (5).

'Lachrimae' can be read as an account of an individual's troubled relationship to Christian faith, its symbols and its demands. Not only are Dowland and Southwell evoked as mediating presences, but the last
sonnet is a free translation of a Spanish sonnet by Lope de Vega. However, these elements can be seen as providing a supporting framework for the expression of an experience, by drawing on the creations of other artists with whom there is a shared aspect of sensibility. There is a reflexive strand in 'Lachrimae' that serves to associate the sequence with both the power and the vicissitudes of the icon (or sacred art object), of sacred objects generally, and of religious ritual. Thus reflexive doubt about the archaic and anachronistic aspects of the sequence as a twentieth-century literary work is indicated in the sixth sonnet, 'Lachrimae Antiquae Novae':

Beautiful for themselves the icons fade;  
the lions and the hermits disappear.  
Triumphalism feasts on empty dread,  
fulfilling triumphs of the festal year.

The suggestion here of an empty triumphalism which has substituted the ritual of the Christian year for substantial faith must reflect some unease back on to the status of ritual and formality in Tenebrae. 'Beautiful for themselves' may troublingly remind us of September Song's acknowledgement: 'for myself it / is true', and contributes to that awareness of the persistence of the ego which has already been noted, and which is manifest in the phrases 'Self-wounding' and 'self-seeking'. This awareness is maintained in spite of the counterbalancing evocation of 'the decreation to which all must move', that abandonment of the self which Simone Weil asserts as the essential prelude to communion with God: 'Decreation: to make something created pass into the uncreated [...] God can only love himself [...] Our existence is made up only of his waiting for our acceptance not to exist'. 
Frank Kermode links decreation to modernist impersonality: 'The function of such a work, [as Ulysses or The Waste Land], one has to see, is what Simone Weil called decreation [...] an act of renunciation, considered as a creative act like that of God'. E. W. S. Milne, who refers to Kermode's account, identifies 'Lachrimae' with these modernist works, suggesting that

the work of art exists in its own right only because the artist has withdrawn himself from it by the impersonal process of 'decreation' [...] Hill's poetry [...] negates the personal self in favour of adopting impersonal forms 'to purge what, in being merely natural and human, is 'also false'. (Agenda 1979, 67-69)

I would argue that here Milne succumbs to the glamour of Weil's radical mysticism; he quotes her statement 'we participate in the creation of the world by decreating ourselves' (Agenda 1979, 63). Yet from a psychoanalytical or sociological perspective it could equally be claimed that we participate in the creation of the world by creating ourselves; that the self is created in a process of interactive negotiation with the social world and that, however shifting the boundaries and multiple the identity, the perceived realities of world and self are mutually interdependent, not antithetical. Hill's poetry has progressively developed a sense of this reciprocity, so that while his early work might justly be compared with the modernist 'decreation' of The Waste Land, his work from the time of 'September Song' onwards, though it sustains a complex notion of the self via strategies such as the persona and the doubling of identities, never returns to the radical avoidance or 'decreation' of self found in the early poems. What Milne neglects is the existence of a third possibility, which lies outside the moralistic antithesis of, on the one hand, an egoistic or naive belief in free
expression of a supposedly unproblematically pre-existing self, and, on the other hand, the mystical ideal of absolute abnegation of self through decreation. This third possibility is that of a creative engagement or negotiation at the boundaries of self and world, the literary equivalent for which is an exemplary engagement of the writer with his medium in which discovery and self-expression, objectivity and subjectivity, are given due place. In 'Lachrimae' the relationship of reflexivity and the personal differs from that in the early poems, in that reflexivity does not elide the subject: 'I cannot turn aside from what I do' (1); 'I fall between harsh grace and hurtful scorn' (4); 'I founder in desire for things unfound' (5); 'I have drowsed half-faithful for a time' (7); these are not part of a work from which, as Milne claims, 'the artist has withdrawn himself [...] by the impersonal process of decreation' (Agenda 1979, 67).

The musical model provides an alternative formulation for the interaction of reflexivity and the personal in 'Lachrimae'. Alan Durant, in his book The Conditions of Music, devotes a chapter to 'False Relations and the Madrigal', and in this chapter he considers in detail the location in both musical and social history of a specific madrigal, Thomas Tomkins's 'Music Divine' (1622). 'Music Divine', like Hill's sequence, deals with the question of different forms of love, sexual and spiritual, and does so by means of ambiguity and reflexivity, though the ambiguity is finally resolved, in Durant's view, so as to make clear 'Tomkins's position: that use of music for secular "lustful" subjects is a discredit to divine music' (Durant, 139). Durant, analysing the opening bars of the madrigal, discovers a reflexive concern with the status of
music, and a threefold ambiguity in the lyrics which is supported by expressive musical devices:

It is only later in the lyric that preference is specified between at least three at this stage ambiguous, available senses of the opening two words, 'Music divine...': first, that music comes from and so reflects God, that is, the medieval Christian doctrine of a music of the spheres; second, that the music being performed is religious, devotional music; third, that music is metaphorically 'divine', that the opening bars themselves give exquisite pleasure. The ambiguities of the phrase are also underscored in opening harmonies, as initial motions within G major collide on the second uttered syllable of 'divine' with an altus part E flat in the third bar. (Durant, 139-40)

This analysis of the opening of the madrigal suggests ways in which it might be comparable with the opening of Hill's 'The Masque of Blackness', the second sonnet of 'Lachrimae': 'Splendour of life so splendidly contained, / brilliance made bearable'. The reflexive application, to the work of art, and therefore to the poem itself, is evident here. The ambiguity of 'contained', between the senses of triumphant encapsulation and limiting control, is supported by the dissonance (of both sense and sound) between 'Splendour' and 'splendidly', where the affirmation of the former is skewed by the suggestion of colloquial cliché or ironic deprecation in the latter (what Cathrael Kazin terms the 'arch tone of "splendidly contained"'). (Agenda 1979, 47).

The comparison between madrigal and poem exemplifies the extent of the affinities between Renaissance poetry and music and Hill's work, particularly in their shared use of ambiguity and reflexivity. As I suggested in Section 2.2, the high level of reflexivity found in Renaissance literature and in postmodernist literature indicates a shared sense of living in an age of transition, in which the nature and function of cultural formations, including art forms, are subject to
radical change, so that art forms themselves become pervasively concerned with charting, resisting or anticipating such change. Durant notes that 'both a religious traditionalism, and a degree of modernism, can be seen in the position Tomkins is adopting' (Durant, 42), a statement which, with the substitution of postmodernism for modernism, would apply very well to Hill, whose poetry combines modernist and postmodernist elements. In both the Renaissance and the twentieth century the status of the human subject is a key concern, since the humanist individualism which emerged at the Renaissance has been a primary target of questioning in postmodernism. It is in reflecting elements of this individualism that Tomkins's piece is modern, despite its traditionalist conclusion. Durant observes that

when considered in comparison with earlier forms of imitation in music (dominantly in medieval England that music should reflect proportions inscribed in the world by God), this form of literalism [in which, for example, the music ascends to match verbal references to heaven] in 'Music Divine' as in madrigals generally [...] takes on importance as a decisively new individualism of expression. (Durant, 142)

Furthermore, it is the existence of two levels of reference, one being reflexive, that generates this individualism, by invoking the creativity of the artist (both composer and performer) rather than the universal dispensation of God:

There is a play established between meanings for words of the lyric and the music's immediate sensory effect [...] This play, between a level of established reference and a reflexive allusion to the practical enunciation of sounds, has the effect of creating an entertainment of performance in suspensions between those levels [...] Shifts between a level of reference and one of enunciation create for the madrigal a suspension and lack of finality analogous to that created by the relative dissonances or 'bindings', or by the false relations themselves. (Durant, 145-46)
In this description, what Durant terms the 'level of reference' corresponds to what has been termed, in my discussion of Hill's poetry, the primary level of reference, while what Durant terms the level of 'enunciation' corresponds to what has been termed the secondary or reflexive level in the poetry. The fact that Durant identifies the play between these two levels as itself analogous to the musical figure of false relation suggests a wider significance for this analogy, in the implication that the 'musical' elements in *Tenebrae* may serve to integrate these two levels in Hill's poetry.

Using this as a model for the consequences of ambiguity and reflexivity in Hill's 'Lachrimae', we may observe that the reflexive meanings in that sequence allude to the poet's creation of meanings by participation in a human and social discourse, which cannot be isolated from other social practices. Thus his skilful twisting of words into poetic form is presented as complicit with the twisting of Christ's body, his attempt to contain splendour as complicit with its economic and sensual exploitation ('the God Amor with his eyes of diamond'). Thus reflexivity, and the play between reflexive and other levels of meaning, rather than, as in the early work, replacing the human subject by an originary language, manifests the activity of the poet, while at the same time figuring his dilemma in relation to faith. In so far as his poems are presented as a production of meaning within human discursive practice, rather than as a revelation of divine truth or harmony, they represent the separation from the divine, the involvement in human self-interest, indulgence, exploitation.
6.6 CONCLUSION

The two musical analogies which have been proposed offer possible models of a relation to a cultural tradition. To write variations on pre-existing words or on a tune is to allow the original to inhabit one's own work, but to give it life within one's own creative process, so that the variation is an integrative, mediative form. Such a model of interaction may be used to distinguish Hill's allusiveness in Tenebrae from the model offered by The Waste Land. The allusions of Eliot's poem remain fragments: the appropriate analogy for the structure is the mosaic or collage, the image of the sensibility of an age which experiences itself as fragmentary and hoards a fragmentary past. The poems of Tenebrae rather attempt to construct a modern sensibility as a variation upon a Renaissance sensibility. Here Four Quartets provides a model in its use of the English past. If The Waste Land offers us the poet in the imaginary museum of Western culture, lamenting the fragmentary collection, poor labelling, and his own enervated state, then in Four Quartets he has gone on a retreat and, despite his disclaimer that it is 'an occupation for the saint' to strive 'to apprehend / The point of intersection of the timeless / With time', such seems to be his project ('The Dry Salvages V'; CPPE, 189-90). As I have already suggested, Hill's sequences in Tenebrae resist, to a greater degree than Eliot's work, the movement of temporal transcendence, the stepping outside time to evoke a vision of eternity, or the intensity of a timeless moment.

The second musical analogy, that of false relation, implies a postmodernist relation to the past, in that the verbal effects which may be characterized as forms of false relation express an awareness of
cultural tradition which is not only self-conscious, but also highly ironic. The puns and oxymorons of 'Lachrimae' express the predicament of a modern sensibility deeply involved with past modes of thought and belief, but troubled by an awareness of this involvement with the past as fictional and constructed, 'real in its pretence', a false relation.
Notes to Chapter 6

1. Terry Eagleton, review of Tenebrae, Stand, 20.3 (1979), 75-77, (p. 77).


4. In 1980 Hill commented that: 'Paradox, and the closely related oxymoron, belong both to the tradition of mystical poetry and to the tradition of Petrarchan poetry, which are the main models for "The Pentecost Castle" and "Lachrimae" (UJ, p. 212).


14. Hill has described this inversion in musical terms. In the notes to a concert and poetry reading given in Emmanuel Old Library, Cambridge, 17 February 1982, he writes that: 'the epigraph is from Southwell's Marie Magdalens Funeral Tares: "Passions I allow, and loves I approve, onely I would wish that men would alter their object, and better their intent"; and the first seven words appear in "inversion" in the fifth sonnet.' This event, in which Hill read 'Lachrimae', 'The Pentecost Castle', 'Tenebrae' and 'Two Chorale Preludes' (T), interspersed between the playing of musical works by Thomas Tallis, Orlando Gibbons, John Dowland, John Jenkins and Thomas Tomkins, suggests that Hill attaches considerable importance to the close links between Tenebrae and Renaissance music.

15. Hill's idea of art as 'exemplary' (see VP, p. 99) tends to draw his idea of the artist closer to the idea of the martyr. He has also talked of martyrdom in terms which bring it closer to the technique of the artist: he commented to John Haffenden that 'to take the group who have interested me most in recent years, the Catholic martyrs of the age of Elizabeth I, there seems to have been what I might call a pedagogy of martyrdom, a scholastic process of training towards that deliberate goal' (VP, pp. 90-91).


22. Booty, p. 222, note 1.
27. Versions of poems 1, 2, 4, 6, 3 and 9 of 'The Pentecost Castle' appeared in Agenda, 10.4-11.1 (Autumn/Winter 1972-73), 66-70, with the following epigraph: 'San Juan de la Cruz sang, as he danced holding in his arms an image of the infant Jesus snatched from a crib, the words of an old love song: "Si amores me han de matar / agora tienen lugar". The epigraph is from R.O. Jones, A Literary History of Spain: The Golden Age: Prose and Poetry (London: Ernest Benn, 1971), pp. 87-88.
31. 'The Pentecost Castle: 14' has a debt to St John of the Cross, 'Cancion de la llama de amor viva' ('Song of the Living Flame of Love'), in The Penguin Book of Spanish Verse, pp. 220-23. 'The Pentecost Castle: 15' borrows its final paradox ('my desire dying / as I desire') at least in part, from the repeated line 'muriendo porque no muero' ('dying because I am not dying'), in 'Coplas del alma que pena por ver a Dios' ('Verses of the Soul that Pines to See God'), by the same poet, in The Penguin Book of Spanish Verse, pp. 222-27.
33. Tenebrae is the 'popular name for the special form of Matins and Lauds provided for the last three days of Holy Week', including 'the ceremony of extinguishing the lights in church one by one during the service' (The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, p. 1349).
34. Although this identification is not an explicit feature of de Vega's play, it is appropriate to his practice of the 'a lo divino'
elsewhere, and in accord with certain elements of the symbolism and imagery of the play.

35. The following are the main correspondences, given as the number of the poem from 'The Pentecost Castle', followed by the title of the Spanish source, and the page number in *The Penguin Book of Spanish Verse* (3rd edn): 1 -- 'Que de noche le mataron' (p. 289); 3 -- 'Velador que el castillo velas' (p. 287); 5 -- 'Con el viento murmuran' (p. 135); 6 -- 'Montesina era la garça' (p. 115); 9 -- 'Aquel caballero, madre' (p. 141); 11 -- 'Si la noche hace escura' (pp. 137-38); 12 -- 'La bella malmarida' (p. 139); 14 -- 'Aquel caballero, madre' (p. 141) and see note 31 above; 15 -- 'A los baños del amor' (p. 145) and see note 31 above. However, while there are some close correspondences (e.g. 11), in other cases Hill's poems draw on the atmosphere, imagery and vocabulary of a group or series among the Spanish poems, without closely following any single one. Although Hill used an earlier edition of *The Penguin Book of Spanish Verse*, the 3rd edn retains the relevant poems.


43. Eliot is well-known for his use of musical structures in poetry, but the precise manner in which he employed those structures is open to debate. Helen Gardner writes that 'each poem [of the *Four Quartets* is structurally a poetic equivalent of the classical symphony, or quartet, or sonata]' (*The Art of T.S. Eliot* (London: The Cresset Press, 1949), p. 36). Gardner therefore analyses the structure of the poems on the basis of sonata form. However, Stephen Spender states that Eliot's use of musical form in the *Four Quartets* was inspired by Beethoven's late quartets. These are not in conventional sonata form, and Spender goes on to suggest that 'Eliot was not trying to imitate Beethoven [...] But the so-called "posthumous" quartets provided him with an example of form at once fragmentary and having a unity of feeling and vision' (Stephen
Spender, Eliot (London: Fontana, 1975), p. 154). This implies a far looser use of the musical model than does Gardner's detailed analysis, and reference to sonata form. The forms used by Eliot in his earlier work, the prelude and the rhapsody, are notable for their lack of strictly defined form and while this does not invalidate Eliot's use of these forms, it does suggest that their function, like that of vers libre, was a liberating as much as a patterning one.

44. Langer, p. 220.


46. 'In order to possess what you do not possess / You must go by the way of dispossession'. 'East Coker III' (CPPE, p. 181).

47. 'Locksley Hall', in The Poems of Tennyson, ed. by Christopher Ricks, 2nd edn, 3 vols (Harlow, Essex: Longman, 1987), II, pp. 118-30 (p. 130).

48. Ricks, Tennyson, p. 228.


51. Simone Weil, Gravity and Grace, pp. 29, 15.

52. Gravity and Grace, p. 20.

53. 'I discovered at a relatively late date that my feelings about that [envy of music] were Schopenhauerian and Nietzschean' (VP, p. 91). Hill presumably alludes to the idea, expressed by both Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, of music as the supreme art form.


59. 'Que tengo yo que mi amistad procuras?', The Penguin Book of Spanish Verse, pp. 301-03.

60. Gravity and Grace, p. 28.


62. Alan Durant, Conditions of Music (London: Macmillan, 1984), pp. 119-166. Further references to this work are given in the text.
CHAPTER 7: HISTORY AND REPRESENTATION

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The poems of 'An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture in England' were published between 1973 and 1978; by the time of the appearance of the Tenebrae volume in 1978, only one (number 6) had not already appeared in some form. This sequence thus belongs to the same period as 'The Pentecost Castle' and 'Lachrimae', and shares with them certain features, in particular the use of mediating presences. In 'An Apology' these presences are evoked by the sequence title, by the epigraphs, by the titles of several of the individual poems, and by the use of pastiche and allusion. However, 'An Apology' also looks forward to Hill's The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Féguy, in that both have public and political themes and address issues which bear very directly on the twentieth century, whereas 'The Pentecost Castle' and 'Lachrimae' explored the realms of primarily individual experience.

'An Apology' treats the present as a dialogue with tradition and this, combined with the apparently elegiac tone of some of the sonnets in their images of the English countryside, has led to Hill's sequence being seen as a restatement of Eliot's political conservatism. For example, Tom Paulin suggests that 'Hill's imagination appears Eliotian in that he is drawing on the idea of a mythic traditional religious England threatened by collectivist ideas'. Hill's responses to questions about the element of nostalgia in 'An Apology' have laid claim to a form of impersonality which is essentially that of the observer, the poet who studies social phenomena, and registers their existence in his poetry,
without necessarily endorsing them. Asked by Blake Morrison whether he would accept the presence of 'a sense of loss and nostalgia' in the sequence, he replied:

I would, provided we can agree that the loss and nostalgia we're talking about in that sequence are for the most part England's [...] We have got to get away from the supposition that if such emotions and experience as nostalgia and loss are the subject of a poem, they must inevitably and necessarily be the nostalgia and loss of the poet himself. (UJ, 213)

To John Haffenden, he suggested that

There are [...] good political and sociological reasons for the floating of nostalgia: there's been an elegiac tinge to the air of this country ever since the end of the Great War. To be accused of exhibiting a symptom when, to the best of my ability, I'm offering a diagnosis appears to be one of the numerous injustices which one must suffer with as much equanimity as possible. (VP, 93)

These observations have in common with Eliot's theory of impersonality the idea of the poet as observer of empirical phenomena, scientist, sociologist or political scientist. In 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', Eliot not only uses the scientific analogy of the catalyst for the mind of the impersonal artist, but also suggests that art involves a 'process of depersonalization' and that 'it is in this depersonalization that art may be said to approach the condition of science' (SE, 17).

'An Apology' inherits from Eliot an idea of an impersonal registering of the power of the past (just as it inherits from Yeats an interest in a specific tradition, that of the Great Houses). However, Hill's technique for such registering involves an exploration of the ambiguities and paradoxes of the words in which traditions or versions of history are formulated. The poem resonates the interaction of
conflicting discourses in words: words which both have their own history, and are used for the writing of histories. As a result, 'An Apology' develops an awareness of relativism, of the material basis of ideological positions, and of the textual or fictive nature of historical interpretations. These awarenesses introduce a scepticism, and an element of postmodernist irony, which criticism such as that of Paulin wholly fails to recognize.

7.2 'AN APOLOGY': TITLE AND EPIGRAPHS

The title of 'An Apology', borrowed from Pugin, is allusive, punning and reflexive. In common with the epigraphs, it evokes a thinker who sought to privilege a particular tradition in aesthetics as authoritative, validating it by claiming it as the true expression of a national spirit, and using it to support a religious and political ideology. In Pugin's work of the same title he argues that 'the venerable form and sacred detail of our national and Catholic architecture' ought to be adopted 'on consistent principle, [...] on authority, [...] as the expression of our faith, our government, our country'. 3 He also celebrates the life of the traditional rural community as he imagines it:

We still see the grey tower of the parochial church rising by the seat of the manorial house; and, in many instances, the chantry chapel yet remains, with a long succession of family monuments, from the armed crusader to that of the parent of the actual possessor. [...] How painful is it to behold, in the centre of a fine old English park and vast domain, a square unsightly mass of bastard Italian, without one expression of the faith, family or country of the owner! How contrary to the spirit of the ancient mansions, covered with ancestral badges and memorials, and harmonizing in beautiful irregularity with the face of nature! 4
In the association of Gothic style, Catholic religion, ancient family and 'the face of nature' Pugin anticipates Eliot's ideas of tradition as they developed in his later work, in particular After Strange Gods. There Eliot praises lands 'in which the landscape has been moulded by numerous generations of one race, and in which the landscape in turn has modified the race to its own character'. But while Pugin uses the word 'Apology' in its old sense of a defence or justification, Hill's title may also be read in accordance with both the modern sense of the word and the colloquial sense, so that it becomes an ironic, self-deprecating statement. This reading seems particularly appropriate because Hill's poetry in general is characterized by Christian 'architecture' (form and concept), while its implications are more ambivalent or iconoclastic. The ambiguity of 'Apology' means that Hill both does and doesn't apologise for reviving issues which may seem antiquated or archaic, so that the need to apologise is itself brought under ironic scrutiny as part of a spirit of temporal provincialism.

The first epigraph, from Coleridge's Anima Poetae, is a short phrase, enigmatically out of context. The passage from which it is taken is marked by a self-conscious, even self-consciously self-indulgent, selectivity in the definition of this 'old England':

Let England be Sir Philip Sidney, Shakespere [sic], Milton, Bacon, Harrington, Smith, Wordsworth; and never let the names of Darwin, Johnson, Hume, fur it over. If these, too, must be England let them be another England; or, rather, let the first be old England, the spiritual, Platonic old England, and the second, with Locke at the head of the philosophers and Pope [at the head] of the poets, together with the long list of Priestley's, Paleys, Hayleys, Darwins, Mr. Pitts, Dundasses, etc, etc, be the representatives of commercial Great Britain. These have [indeed] their merits, but are as alien to me as the Mandarin philosophers and poets of China.
Coleridge shows an awareness that an intellectual tradition is created by a process of exclusion in accordance with subjective values, an awareness absent from Eliot's description of the 'ideal order [...] of European, of English literature' (SE, 15). Eliot's order is clearly Platonic, in its ideality and its supra-temporal qualities, qualities by which he seeks to place it above political and material considerations. It is very evident, from the two occurrences of the phrase 'Platonic England' in 'An Apology' that Hill's sequence seeks to reveal the fallacious nature of such a diremption of aesthetics and the material:

Platonic England grasps its tenantry (7) 

Platonic England, house of solitudes, rests in its laurels and its injured stone, replete with complex fortunes that are gone, beset by dynasties of moods and clouds.

It stands, as though at ease with its own world, the mannerly extortions, languid praise, all that devotion long since bought and sold, (9)

In the above lines the commercial, from which Coleridge sought to distance his 'spiritual, Platonic old England' is bound up with the Platonic ideal. While the Platonic realm of ideal forms is apprehended, or grasped, by the intellect, the 'grasp' of the heritage of feudal England is more material, being exercised through the terms of the leases of rural tenants. In 9 the 'mannerly extortions', the devotion 'bought and sold' similarly register the material conditions supporting the England of the country houses.

The historical sense that the sequence manifests may be usefully compared to that manifest in the theoretical practice of New Historicism. Aram Veeser includes the following two principles in a
summary of those shared by New Historicist critics: 'every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices' and 'every act of unmasking, critique and opposition uses the tools it condemns and risks falling prey to the practice it exposes'. The first of these principles coincides with Hill's interweaving of the discursive and the economic in 'An Apology', while the second is in accord with the exemplary, or symptomatic conception of his own poetry which Hill himself seems to hold, but also with the symptomatic reflexivity within his poems, by which they frequently define themselves as instances of what they criticize. Such an effect is apparent in the title of 'An Apology' which (implicitly in inverted commas, since it is a quoted title) works with a double irony rather like that of Ezra Pound's phrase: 'The "age demanded". Pound's inverted commas imply that what the age 'demanded' (in the sense of what was good for it, what it needed) was precisely not what it 'demanded' (in the sense of called for). Hill's title is apologetic about being an apology (in the deprecatory sense) rather than an apology (in Pugin's defiant, polemical sense). Or is it the other way round? Is Hill apologising for complicity with Pugin? The question seems unresolvable.

There would seem to be a further affinity between Hill's poetic discourse and the critical discourse of New Historicism in the attention to surprising and detailed congruences, rather than large-scale narratives. Hill's sequence juxtaposes Old Moore's Almanac and rose windows, Tennysonian idyll and sewage-treatment plants, Linnaeus and Yeats. Veeser notes that: 'Suspicious of any criticism predetermined by a Marxist or liberal grid, New Historicists eschew overarching hypothetical constructs in favor of surprising coincidences'. Hill has
suggested that 'Tenebrae shares withMercian Hymns and, indeed, with my
first and second books, [...] a sense of history (neither 'Whig' nor
Marxist) and a sense of place (neither topographical nor anecdotal')". ¹²
I am not seeking to present Hill as a New Historicist avant la lettre.
For Hill the idea of objective truth in history, of events and actions to
which the poet must bear witness, remains essential. But just as his
Christian world-view is continually held in tension with a sense of the
impossibility of achieved transcendence in language, so this belief in an
obligation to historical fact co-exists with an awareness of the
constructed nature of historical accounts.

The term 'Whig' is a surprising one to use, in 1978, to define one's
political views, even negatively. Hill has also used it in interview, in a
comment which is the closest he has come to stating an allegiance to a
political movement:

My admiration for Oastler and the whole radical Tory tradition
that he represents is considerable: I find it one of the most
attractive political traditions of the nineteenth century, and
something quite apart from what we now know as Conservatism.
Modern Conservatism, which is Whiggery rampant, could be
beneficially instructed by radical Toryism, but of course it
won't let itself be. Conservatives conserve nothing. (VP, 86)

The term recalls not only the Victorian hinterland of 'An Apology', but
also T.S. Eliot's literary authoritarianism, since 'Whiggery' is his term
of abuse, in 'The Function of Criticism', for the person who follows the
'Inner Voice' and rejects 'the existence of an unquestioned spiritual
authority outside himself' (SE, 29). Among the thinkers and writers
evoked in 'An Apology', not only Eliot and Pugin, but also Cardinal
Newman, advocated obedience to such an external authority. In Newman's
case the view that such authority was essential played a part in his
conversion to Catholicism. It is Catholicism that Eliot opposes to Whiggery and the 'Inner Voice', joining it to Classicism (SE, 26-29). Newman's novel of religious conversion, *Loss and Gain*, which provides the title for sonnet 7 of 'An Apology', specifically argues for the suspension of private judgment in favour of religious authority:

Had he asked a Catholic, he would have been told that we used our private judgment to find the Church, and then in all matters of faith, the Church superseded it [...] Now it need not be denied that those who are external to the Church must begin with private judgment; they use it in order ultimately to supersede it. ¹³

Hill acknowledges his own distance from Newman's position in regard to such assent to authority in 'The Conscious Mind':

In setting the phrase 'grammar of assent' in lower case type one is arbitrarily making a metaphor, a metaphor to take the place of Newman's reality. A *Grammar of Assent* is not the same thing as a grammar of assent; and one's metaphor exists to acknowledge the difference. (CM, 16)

The second epigraph to 'An Apology', from Disraeli's *Coningsby*, invokes a re-interpretation of English history which was consciously motivated by a political programme, that of the Young England movement, which the novel was written in order to launch. It is, in a sense, another conversion novel, since the eponymous hero, from a High Tory family, is led, through his acquaintance with Mr Millbank, one of a new breed of benevolent, paternalistic industrialists, and through his experience of the manufacturing districts, to formulate his new radical Toryism. J.W. Burrow comments on the importance, in Victorian political debate, of the re-interpretation of history, going back as far as two centuries:
Disraeli's attempt to restate a philosophical and historical basis for Toryism included a rehabilitation of the policies of Charles I.

The Tory-Radical critique of English society, as it had developed from the 1820s onwards, was essentially based on a primitive social history of England (...) Cobbett and Pugin had made the Dissolution of the Monasteries an issue in the contemporary debate over poor-relief.

There is a model here for Hill's manner of addressing contemporary political issues via the apparently archaic themes, title and allusions of 'An Apology'. Indeed, in his comment about modern conservatism, Hill seems to echo the eponymous hero of Coningsby, who states that 'before I support Conservative principles (...) I merely wish to be informed what those principles aim to conserve'.

Thus clear links emerge between the various nineteenth-century figures alluded to in 'An Apology'. An editor of Coningsby links it to the names of both Pugin and Newman:

[Tancred, the third part of Disraeli's trilogy is subtitled 'The New Crusade'] and the phrase echoes the contemporary quest for spiritual values in medieval forms, such as Gothic architecture, in which writers as dissimilar as Augustus Welby Pugin (...) and John Ruskin (...) discerned moral qualities. Young England had something in common with other contemporary crusades against the age, such as the Oxford Movement (...) (Frederick Faber, one of Newman's disciples, was a friend of Smythe and Lord John Manners).

Disraeli's biographer, Robert Blake, writes that

Disraeli, though superficial in comparison, belongs to the same strand in nineteenth-century English thought as Coleridge and Carlyle, the romantic, conservative, organic thinkers who revolted against Benthamism and the legacy of eighteenth-century rationalism.

The passage from Coningsby which Hill chose for the epigraph is somewhat enigmatic:
'Your situation,' said Coningsby, looking up the green and silent valley, 'is absolutely poetic.'
'I try sometimes to fancy,' said Mr. Millbank, with a rather fierce smile, 'that I am in the New World.'

Millbank's allusion to the New World is somewhat clarified by an earlier passage in the novel, when Coningsby is struck by the new experience of the industrial might of Manchester, and reflects that 'it was to him a new world pregnant with new ideas and suggestive of new trains of thought and feeling'. Since the industrialism somewhat naively celebrated here as presaging a new world has been the main cause of the destruction of the beauties of rural England, ambivalently elegized in the sonnets of Hill's sequence, Disraeli's utopianism seems highly ironic in this context. The epigraph serves to suggest one of the main themes of the sequence, the relation of idealism and ideas of the spiritual to economic and social forces. Key words are 'poetic' and 'fancy'. The latter suggests the dangers of fanciful utopianism, while the former raises the reflexive issue of the place of poetry in responding to such ideals. Millbank's 'fierce smile' at Coningsby's naive use of the word 'poetic' may remind one of the grim relish with which Hill himself has quoted a seventeenth-century use of the word 'poetry' meaning 'insincerity'.

7.3 'QUAINT MAZES' AND MUDDY GHOSTS

The first poem of 'An Apology' is entitled 'Quaint Mazes' and, as with the sequence title, archaic and modern meanings are audible simultaneously in an ironic disharmony. In its Shakespearean context 'quaint' means intricate, and Hill is all too aware that his intricate web of Victorian allusions may seem quaint to late twentieth-century readers. Since the phrase comes from a speech in which Titania
laments the disruption of the seasons resulting from her quarrel with Oberon, it reminds us that even the fairy queen can complain of a lost natural harmony. This suggests that Hill's poem is not a nostalgic evocation of a supposedly real harmonious realm, but a self-ironizing exploration of a recurrent mode of sensibility. The poem starts with a statement of a complex social, psychological and ritual relationship with the past:

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. (1)

As Michael Edwards points out (Robinson, 164), 'them' in this stanza can refer both to the historical figures evoked by the sequence title and epigraphs (Pugin, Coleridge and Disraeli), and to the 'Quaint Mazes' of the poem title. It can also, however, refer to literary and intellectual forbears in general, including not only the above three figures, but others evoked or alluded to in the sequence: Eliot, Yeats, Tennyson, Keats, Newman, and by extension the English intellectual inheritance of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. 'We' can therefore be read, either as a collective pronoun for late twentieth-century English society, or more narrowly as referring to the contemporary poet, the 'belated' poet in Harold Bloom's terms, or, in those of Donald Davie, the 'poet in the imaginary museum'. 22 This latter sense of 'we' continues the reflexive strand in the sequence, in which the poet's relationship with his literary inheritance, as manifest in the allusiveness of this particular series of poems, serves as a paradigm for the wider relationship of a culture to its past. 'The poet', however, is a
generalized figure, as indicated by the plural pronoun, not a persona or a romantic subject. There are no first-person singular pronouns in the sequence, and indeed, first-person plural and second-person pronouns predominate: 'We live like gleaners' (2); 'our vitrified tears' (3); 'you sip and smile' (3); 'patient for our destruction' (5); 'you stayed and were sure' (8); 'Your photo-albums' (12). The use of the second-person pronoun is accompanied by an extensive use of the imperative mood: including the whole of 4 and the first stanzas of 10 and 12. The overall effect is not so much impersonal as communal. The sequence reflexively represents itself as a metaphorical landscape, an 'enclave of perpetual vows / broken in time' (13). By its formality the sequence represents an idea of a transcendent or prelapsarian kingdom which is revealed as a dangerous, though alluring fiction. In my discussion of this reflexive strand I will look in detail at the first and last sonnets, 'Quaint Mazes' (1) and 'The Herefordshire Carol' (13).

The first words of the first sonnet, after all those allusions in the title and epigraphs, after all the work the reader is asked to do making sense of them, are 'And, after all'. A touch of wry humour, and also a recollection of The Cantos, starting as they do with 'and': 'And then went down to the ship'. Hill's poetry is very aware of coming 'after all' that has been written; it is easy to see why Harold Bloom should celebrate him as 'the strongest British poet now alive'. 'After' can mean both later in time, and in imitation of, or homage to. The conversational tone of 'after all', in its colloquial sense, prevents the acknowledgement of the temporal priority of Hill's literary masters from sounding too respectful. There is a touch of Auden's style in the assured but enigmatic tone of this opening.
The allusion to Shakespeare in the title, and the echoes of Yeats throughout the sonnet, support the interpretation of 'them' as a reference to literary forbears. Such past masters are accorded an ambivalent triumph in the opening lines. We are imagined as returning to them, either as readers or as belated poets. They 'rise', either from their seats to greet us politely, or from the dead, as elusive and perhaps overbearing ghosts. For the poet, they act as hosts, either welcoming him into their fraternity, or being sacrificed to his needs; the second sense of 'hosts' is created by the way in which its contiguity with 'rise' suggests the elevation of the host, a ceremony which symbolizes the offering of sacred elements to God and also exhibits the Eucharist to the congregation for adoration. The process is not quite under the control of the poet or his readers, though, since the hosts 'rise' (whereas the host is raised). Thus the literary masters of the dominant tradition present themselves for our admiring gaze, but in the reworking of their styles by the contemporary poet, and in the reinterpretation of their work by the contemporary reader, something of the identity or integrity of their vision may also be sacrificed to our needs.

The idea that the contemporary poet might perform a sacred or ritual function in relation to his society is often present in Hill's work, though it is treated with some suspicion. Here the metaphor of the (contemporary) poet as the priest in a ceremony, where past masters appear for our adoration (via allusions) is not without mocking humour, created particularly by line 4. Lines 3 and 4 register both the occasional storminess and the incessant, pestering quality of the poet's relationship to his literary masters. 'Unquiet' makes the risen dead seem
uneasy, and the poet seem uneasy in their company. 'Muddy-hued' suggests the difficulty of seeing them clearly, 'midge-tormented' perhaps the attentions of critics, while the comic echo of Yeats's 'Byzantium' ('That dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea'), is acknowledgement both of debt and of distance. The last lines of 'Byzantium' concern the creation of a work of art from the spawning images covered with the mire of experience:

the smithies break the flood,
The golden smithies of the Emperor!  
Marbles of the dancing floor  
Break bitter furies of complexity,  
Those images that yet  
Fresh images beget,  
That dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea. 

But the unending generation of images here could also describe the process in which poetry is fertilized by an existing tradition, a reactive process which may have both creative and destructive elements. There are ghosts in Yeats's poem too, images of the daimon, the soul of man in eternity, the nature of which is to be sought through a man's pursuit of his anti-self. Yeats's poetry and prose frequently return to ghostly figures and images which 'rise' before his mind's eye; they are part of the phantasmagoria which distinguishes the completed poet from 'the bundle of accident and incoherence that sits down to breakfast'.

Perhaps, then, we can detect in 'Quaint Mazes' a reflection on the process of self-creation in art, a process which involves the engagement of the poet's imagination with those literary predecessors who inhabit his imagination. This engagement, which is woven intricately into the texture of 'An Apology' becomes more explicit in The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy and 'Scenes with Harlequins'. 
In the second quatrain of 'Quaint Mazes' it is still Yeats with whom Hill is engaged. Hill's bushes, terrace-urns and fountains recall 'Ancestral Houses', from 'Meditations in Time of Civil War':

Surely among a rich man's flowering lawns,
Amid the rustle of his planted hills,
Life overflows without ambitious pains;
And rains down life until the basin spills [...]

O what if gardens where the peacock strays
With delicate feet upon old terraces,
Or else all Juno from an urn displays
Before the indifferent garden deities [...]

But take our greatness with our violence? 

In this poem Yeats considers the values, dangers and possible decline of the Irish aristocratic country house and its heritage. Hill returns to the English equivalent in his ninth sonnet, 'The Laurel Axe'. 'An Apology' reflects on the power of the country-house tradition as a cultural myth, and one which Yeats played his part in creating. This does not imply a denial of the material basis of the myth, but an awareness that its existence as an actuality and its existence as a signifier in a cultural system are distinct although inter-related features. Each involves a different form of power, the one social and material, the other ideological and literary. Yeats himself acknowledges this disjunction when he questions the validity of his own symbols:

Mere dreams, mere dreams! Yet Homer had not sung
Had he not found it certain beyond dreams
That out of life's own self-delight had sprung
The abounding glittering jet: though now it seems
As if some marvellous empty sea-shell flung
Out of the obscure dark of the rich streams,
And not a fountain, were the symbol which
Shadows the inherited glory of the rich.
Hill's poem is concerned with the manner in which such symbols speak to us. Linnaeus is known for his taxonomic system for naming plants in pairs of Latin words. The descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, preceded by 'a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind', made the Apostles 'speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance' (Acts 2.4). Hill writes:

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. (1)

Here 'blustery' is the effect of the 'rushing mighty wind', but hints at a bit of bluster in Yeats's rhetoric (and 'bedaubed' has similar overtones). A spirit of some sort expresses itself through the naming of these symbolic objects, and they speak in tongues, since a symbol has a certain power to speak to different individuals in their own emotional language. But speaking with other tongues is also part of Hill's poetic technique here; the reflexive level continues as a subtext. Linnaeus was a scientist, but naming things is a magical activity, and a means of exercising power, as in the case of Adam's naming of the beasts. In the realms of cultural and political myth-making which Hill's sequence inhabits, to name something authoritatively (as Linnaeus did with plants) is to give it ideological currency. The use of the scientific naming of plants as a metaphor for the creation of cultural symbols in
poetry is appropriate both to the pastoral mood of 'An Apology' and to its concern with a political tradition to which organic symbols were central. 'Linnaean pentecosts' may also be a trope for the dual nature of poetic art. Linnaeus, inventor of a taxonomic system, stands in for the schematic aspects of poetry (and of the sonnet in particular), regularities of metre, structure and so on, while 'pentecosts' alludes to poetry's visionary and communicative aspects. So it may also be poetic forms, such as the sonnet, to which 'we return', and 'Quaint Mazes', originally dedicated to the greatest of English sonneteers, may be placed in the tradition of the reflexive sonnet. 31

The sensuous oxymoron 'the chilly fountains burn' has a very Yeatsian feel: one might compare 'as cold / And passionate as the dawn', or 'that seemed as though ice burned and was but the more ice'. But what is the spirit of this pentecost? It is a 'religion of the heart', emotional, an act of faith, a little antiquated and fantastical with its 'trysts and quests'. The putative etymology of 'religion' in binding or tying suggests an emotional constraint or servitude which is picked up in the first three lines of the sestet. 32 The unhooded hawk is another Yeatsian symbol, used by him in 'The Hawk' to evoke the pride of the intellect. 33 But Hill's image of the hawk with its hood 'twitched off' recalls that the pride of the trained hawk is given rein only within bounds set by its master. The theme of constraint and oppression intensifies in the next line: 'rejoices in old hymns of servitude'. Yeats dreamed of a life which would 'never stoop to a mechanical / Or servile shape, at others' beck and call' but, while 'Ancestral Houses' acknowledges the violence of the aristocratic tradition, it remains unsure whether servility and servitude were an essential foundation for
such wealth and power. Yeats's technique is an overt debate with himself and others within the poem, most apparent in the questioning of his symbols quoted above, and in the last two stanzas of the poem, which are both rhetorical questions, asking 'what if?'. Hill's technique is an implicit debate grounded in the ambivalence of highly condensed phrases and elusive syntactical relations. This technique is used throughout 'An Apology' to comment on social structures and power relations which enable some to live in a way which might arouse envy and admiration, but at the cost of the oppression of others: 'the flawless hubris of heroic guilt' (4); 'Destiny is the great thing, / true lord of annexation and arrears' (5).

The last line of 'Quaint Mazes' is, as Hill's note tells us, indebted to a review in The Listener. The phrase, and much of the review, are concerned with the loss of symbols which were part of a pattern of communal belief (the destruction of religious icons during the reign of Edward VI). The author connects such patterns to the English landscape:

During the childhood reign of Edward VI the English spring-cleaned their 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? He was illiterate but not without wisdom. His learning, his art and his religion were interwoven with intuitions and beliefs which were connected with the natural forces belonging to the few miles of field and woodland in which he was likely to spend nearly every day of his brief existence.  

Like those parts of the work of Pugin, Disraeli and Eliot that have been discussed, this passage assigns a spiritual and moral significance to the relationship with the land. The source supports an interpretation of 'Quaint Mazes' in terms of the power of the past experienced through the myths, whether literary or social, which it bequeaths us. The reflexive
level and the more general level in the poem work together, each illustrating the other; the poem's consideration of its own relationship to literary tradition is bound up with a wider awareness of the inheritance of English culture. On each level there is a sense of the importance and value of the past but also of its oppressive weight. The assessment of this inheritance is pervaded by an awareness of the selective nature of the myths that we inherit and construct. Thus the last line of 'Quaint Mazes' ('it is the rood blazing upon the green') is about cultural nostalgia, but also reflects obliquely on the iconoclasm of Hill's sequence.

7.4 'THE HEREFORDSHIRE CAROL' AND KITSCH NOSTALGIA

It is to this theme of iconoclasm that the last of the sonnets, 'The Herefordshire Carol', returns:

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,

the squire's effigy bewigged with frost,
and hobnails cracking puddles before dawn.
In grange and cottage girls rise from their beds

by candlelight and mend their ruined braids.
Touched by the cry of the iconoclast,
how the rose-window blossoms with the sun!

The last two lines diagnose nostalgia by suggesting how attractive myths of the transcendent seem when one is about to lose them, or has lost them. In this poem any attempt to identify the English past with
'the lost kingdom of innocence and original justice', to which, Hill has claimed, 'every fine and moving poem bears witness' (VP, 88), is treated with scepticism. The opening phrase, like that of 'The Stone Man' (see Section 2.4), is a performative, but a highly ambiguous one. Indeed, by hinting at the phrase 'so to speak', it comments on its own ambiguity and on the ambivalence of the whole poem as a 'celebration'. One of the meanings of 'to celebrate' is to officiate at the Eucharist, recalling the ironic image in 'Quaint Mazes' of the poet as celebrant in a uneasy ceremony of poetic commemoration. Another meaning is 'to perform publicly and duly'. This definition, reminiscent of J.L. Austin's requirements for the validity of a performative utterance, nevertheless fails to exclude the possibility of someone merely going through the motions. So the opening phrase of the poem, by asking us to think about what sort of celebration might be going on, opens the possibility of an ironic connotation for the ritualistic element in Tenebrae. The suggestion of kitsch in this sonnet anticipates The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy. 'The Herefordshire Carol' ironically proffers an image of itself, its vision, as kitsch prophecy: the harmless nonsense of Old Moore's Almanac. The fictional, mythological realm of 'Platonic old England' is 'an enclave of perpetual vows broken in time': on the one hand, a location for eternal, transcendent truths, fragmented in the temporal world, but on the other, a source of delusive promises, broken only just 'in time' to save us, or its author, from the political and psychological dangers of such a belief.

'The Herefordshire Carol' is a poem of self-consciously false representations: a squire who is only an effigy (with an ominous suggestion of violent protest); a wig which is frost (or a squire who is
a rather frosty Whig); an ideal realm which is 'greener in winter', because it is a kitsch 'evergreen', because its beauty is musty and because it seems greener when it is not actually present. There is an ironic glance at the 'Midwinter spring' of Eliot's 'Little Gidding' (CPPE, 191). Shrines, which figure devotion, are disfigured; the transcendent 'truth' shows disrepair, and the reader may hear a faint echo of 'disrepute'; stones are gossamer. 'All that is solid melts into air', in Marx's phrase, in this postmodernist meditation on lost ideas of lost certainties. Remarkably, and again anticipating The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy, the poem nevertheless achieves a certain poignancy, making the reader feel the loss of what (as the poem acknowledges) was never really there ('One cannot lose what one has not possessed'. / So much for that abrasive gem. I can lose what I want', in the words of 'The Songbook of Sebastian Arrurruz'). The last couplet of 'The Herefordshire Carol' comments reflexively (and a little immodestly): how attractive I can make all this seem in subverting it! The blossoming of the rose-window is also its destruction, its final flowering as its pieces fly apart. It attains the poignancy of the living, which must pass. The reader, it is hoped, will be touched by Hill's iconoclastic cry.

7.5 THE MYSTERY: PÉGUY AS ANTITHETICAL MASK

While 'An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture in England' summoned up a whole array of historical and literary figures, The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy concentrates on one, and this has inevitably provoked speculation as to the degree of Hill's identification with his subject. John Kerrigan argues that
almost everything in the author's note makes you think of Geoffrey Hill on Hill as well as on [Péguy] [...] But 'making you think' prevents you lapsing. Autobiography here does not deface by being specular [...] Hill warily describes his own in another's features.

However, the author's note (in fact a short essay on Péguy's life, appended to the poem) needs to be distinguished from the poem. Knottenbelt comments perceptively on the apparent discrepancy between this essay, where Hill explicitly states his admiration for Péguy, defining his poem as a 'homage', and the poem itself which offers 'a reductive and deflated portrait' (Knottenbelt, 281). Knottenbelt perhaps overstates the deflationary element in the poem, which is at any rate a mutual deflation ('Péguy, you mock us now'; 2.8). She is, however, right about the discrepancy, which reflects a general one between Hill's poetry and his critical or expository prose. I would suggest that Hill's poetic technique, in which language itself is given a constructive role, tends to make his poetry more dialogic than his prose. In part this is a matter of different genres generating different manifestations of the same tensions. Thus the tension between affirmation and scepticism which emerges in the poetry as dialogic openness, reflexive self-questioning and ironical subtlety, tends too often in the prose to produce an obsessively introverted style of defensive irony.

Grevel Lindop gives Hill's relationship to Péguy a different emphasis, arguing that we find in the poem the childhood landscape of Mercian Hymns superimposed on the Beauce, as though 'to suggest that we can only understand the meaning of other people's myths by gathering to them some of the emotion that interpenetrates our own'. This merely implies that Hill draws on his own feelings in writing about the life of
another -- probably a universal process in literary creation -- not that he uses the life of another to write obliquely about his own. A comparison of *The Mystery* with *Mercian Hymns* in fact suggests crucial differences between Hill and Péguy. *Mercian Hymns* is partly about a child growing up in wartime, not old enough to be involved, but loving 'the battle-anthems and the gregarious news' (*MH*, XXII). Péguy's childhood, on the other hand, is presented in Hill's poem as a preparation for, even a prophecy of, his death in battle:

On the hard-won
high places the old soldiers of old France
crowd like good children wrapped in obedience
and sleep, and ready to be taken home.
Whatever that vision, it is not a child's;
it is what a child's vision can become. (2.3-2.4)

Here Péguy's patriotic vision is presented as vitiated by a sentimentality which is not that of a child, but which, Hill speculates, may have grown out of the fantasies and intense attachments of childhood, viewed retrospectively and endowed with political significance. This idea is developed in section 5 of the poem, where the child's toy soldiers are made to presage the casualties of real war: 'winds drumming the fame / of the tin legions lost in haystack and stream' (5.10). Thus, Hill is a survivor, whereas Péguy is a casualty. The importance of this to Hill's imagination, preoccupied as it is with the moral issues surrounding violent death, and its commemoration in art, cannot easily be overestimated. Furthermore, Hill ironizes his own childhood fantasies in *Mercian Hymns*, using Offa to suggest their links to some of the sources of real violence. Thus the figure of the child is mediated by an adult self who sees the dangers of 'what a child's vision
can become'. But in *The Mystery* Hill implicitly criticises the adult Péguy for failing to realize fully this danger. Interpretations of the poem as oblique autobiography therefore tend to underrate crucial differences in experience and attitude between Hill and his subject. What Hill may do is to reflect his own guilt off Péguy's very different guilt: the guilt of the survivor about the inadequacy of his words, against the guilt of the dead polemicist, whose words may have been all too effective: 'Did Péguy kill Jaurès? Did he incite the assassin?' (1.4).

Jeffrey Wainwright perceptively draws attention to the contiguity of words and things in the last line of the poem ('in memory of those things these words were born'), and sees *The Mystery* as a poem about words and what can be done with them:

Hill's whole poem travels over these two possibilities: circumstances in which the self-sufficiency, the given facts of the world, events themselves, are moved by words, and circumstances -- poetry itself may well be one -- where words seem without real object and yet are 'moving'. (Robinson, 101)

Of the two possibilities Wainwright describes, one is the source of Péguy's possible guilt, in that his words may have contributed to violent events, while the other is the source of Hill's sense of guilt, in that his words may excite feelings while remaining detached from reality: 'Poetry -- excites us to artificial feelings -- makes us callous to real ones', in the words of Coleridge, whom Hill is in the habit of quoting in relation to this issue. "Thus Péguy offers Hill a mirror image of his own sense of guilt. A poet who did not take part in war, who survived, who fears that his words may excite artificial feelings, writes about a poet who did take part, who died, whose words may have excited violent actions."
The Mystery starts and ends with these two possible fates of words; like 'An Apology', it also starts and ends with reflexive gestures. 'Crack of a starting-pistol', starting the poem, emphasizes its fictive nature; the relation of the poem to the events it records parallels that between a race and a war, between a stylised, ludic contest and a deadly one. Péguy's words, on the other hand, may have actually started a train of events (the assassination which they may have inspired, and the start of a war in which they played a part). The last line of the poem suggests what the poem may do, if it doesn't move events, which is to commemorate them. The line seems to provide a formally perfect conclusion (to the Collected Poems as well as to The Mystery) in that it ties up origins and ends, and accounts for its own genesis:

Take that for your example! But still mourn, being so moved: éloge and elegy so moving on the scene as if to cry 'in memory of those things these words were born.' (10.11)

But this perfection is disrupted by the inverted commas which emphasize the reflexivity of the line, and by the syntactical uncertainty with which the phrase is prefaced. The commemoration must remain a seeming ('as if to cry'), a cry like that of the iconoclast at the end of 'An Apology', ambiguously moving as the latter was ambiguously touching. The inverted commas identify the shift to a meta-level of discourse which is fundamental to reflexivity; the split between the words referred to and the words which refer. So the unity, the self-identity, the rapprochement between words and things which the last line might seem to proclaim, is disrupted by the reflexivity of words referring to words. The various conventional uses of quotation marks -- to indicate the speech of
Another, to indicate irony, to indicate 'mention' as opposed to 'use' in philosophy -- distance utterance or text from its apparent or immediate source, and call into question truth-claims. In 'Our Word is Our Bond' Hill suggests that

'Inverted commas' are a way of bringing pressure to bear and are also a form of 'ironic and bitter' intonation acknowledging that pressure is being brought. They have a satiric function, can be used as tweezers lifting a commonplace term out of its format of habitual connection. (OV, 142-43).

The pressure of events on words, and of words on events, is felt in this conclusion, as is the problem of what sort of truth the poem might record.

'As if to cry' avoids attributing the phrase in quotation marks to anyone. Who is crying? The phrase 'éloge and elegy' forms the grammatical subject of the sentence, and this phrase refers to the poem itself in its duality: éloge (French for eulogy) and elegy. Thus, as in Hill's earlier poetry, reflexivity provides an alternative source of utterance to that of a human subject. But the interaction of two human subjects, Péguy and Hill, is implicit in the other duality here, that of the French and English languages. For the translinguistic word-games of Péguy suggest an identification and difference between Hill and Péguy, the English and the French poets. While a degree of affinity between Hill and Péguy is important, it is the antithetical nature of Péguy's fate as a poet that needs to be emphasized.

7.6 EVENT AND REPRESENTATION IN THE MYSTERY

The Mystery is less a poem about the life of Charles Péguy than one about the processes of historical and biographical myth-making, of which
Péguy's life and associated events form an example. The title, *The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy*, suggests that the poem may attempt to penetrate the mystery of the French poet's character and behaviour, but in fact it conspicuously fails to do so. As Knottenbelt observes, Péguy is notably absent from the central sixth section (Knottenbelt, 325). Although the 'mystery' of Péguy is raised a number of times, there is a strong sense of it as eluding the poem, as a mystery raised only to be abandoned:

But what of you, Péguy, who came to 'exult', to be called 'wolfish' by your friends? The guilt belongs to time; and you must leave on time.

Jaurès was killed blindly, yet with reason: 'let us have drums to beat down his great voice.' So you spoke to the blood. So, you have risen above all that and fallen flat on your face among the beetroots, where we are constrained to leave you sleeping and to step aside [...] (4.7-5.1)

The reality of Péguy's death is registered as his obligation to leave us, ('you must leave on time'), matched by our obligation to 'step aside', to abandon any fruitless attempt to find an answer, an essence of character and fate. Although we turn aside in order to 'contemplate the working / of the radical soul', and although Péguy is clearly the exemplum of such a soul, what follows has a wide scope, being a meditation on 'instinct, intelligence, / memory, call it what you will'. Section 5 ends with Péguy's silence, and a rhetorical question, rather than an answer:

[...] 'Having spoken his mind he'd a mind to be silent.' But who would credit that, that one talent dug from the claggy Beauce and returned to it with love, honour, suchlike bitter fruit? (5.17-5.18)
The answers to such moral and psychological questions as those pertaining to Péguy's character and his possible guilt are often enough imponderable in life; when the subject is long dead, they must be more so. The poem refuses to answer such questions, in a way which can be frustrating, but finally seems scrupulous. Thus in section 1 the directly posed question of 1.4 ('Did Péguy kill Jaurès') is followed by an intricate, shifting word-play, and then a further rhetorical question. In section 2 Péguy is present only as his statue 'in blank-eyed bronze', while in section 3 the reader is seduced by a masterly evocation of a mythologized French countryside where, it is implied, the ideal or essential Péguy might be found ('here is your true domaine', 3.5), only to be faced at the end of the section with a brusque subversion of such a quest for an ideal, transcendent essence of personality, a door slammed in the face of a quest for the solution to the 'mystery':

Such dreams portend, the dreamer prophesies,
is this not true? Truly, if you are wise,
deny such wisdom; bid the grim bonne-femme
defend your door: 'M'sieur is not at home.' (3.10)

Sections 4 to 5 invoke the turning away described above, section 6 is about Dreyfus and history, and when Péguy reappears in 7, it is only to vanish again: 'The line // falters, reforms, vanishes into the smoke / of its own unknowing;' (7.7-7.8). In the last stanza of section 8, Péguy is ironically urged forward: 'En avant, Péguy!'. But this urging, which might be an urging to come forward and be recognized, is also an urging forward into battle, and thus into death. The section concludes: 'The irony of advancement. Say "we / possess nothing; try to hold on to
that". This advice acts as an ironic address to the reader. The poem represents Pégy as an absence: 'try to hold on to that' it challenges us. Section 9 is not primarily concerned with Pégy, while in the final section, 10, it is again the physical reality of his death which is dominant, as 'he commends us to nothing' (10.4); 'Take that for your example!' (10.11).

So the curiously skewed relationship between Hill's essay on Pégy and the poem, on which Knottenbelt comments, is a result of their different manner of approach to the material. The essay is, in a modest way, biographical, explicitly attempting to convey Pégy's temperament ('A man of the most exact and exacting probity') and to consider his political position ('He did not, in the end, have a great deal in common with Sorel'). This may lead the reader to expect a similar project in the poem, whereas in fact the poem asserts the fictionality of biographical knowledge. Rather than attempt to penetrate the biographical mystery, the poem generalizes it as the mystery of all historical knowledge, using reflexivity as its main tool. This reflexivity is less focused on anxiety about the moral risks of writing about the dead than in Hill's earlier elegiac work; to a certain extent, the process of appropriation and fictionalization involved in writing about the life of another person has been accepted, and is not instilled with the same degree of guilt. This is not to say, however, that the poem does not reflexively undermine itself. In section 2, the quest for Pégy's spirit, by visiting places associated with him, and the representation of him in art, are treated with ironical mockery:
Sieurs-dames, this is the wall
where he leaned and rested, this is the well
from which he drank.' Péguy, you mock us now.
History takes the measure of your brow
in blank-eyed bronze, brave mediocre work
of Niclausse, sculpteur, cornered in the park
among the stout dogs and lame patriots (2.7-2.9)

Does Hill's gesture in pointing his readers to the beetroot field where
Péguy died differ essentially from the guide's pointing out of the well?
Does the poem in fact rebuke itself as 'brave mediocre work'? Certainly
it is not mediocre work, but, as certainly, it does not escape
implication in its own satire on the process of paying tribute to the
dead.

The primary role of reflexivity in *The Mystery* is to draw attention
to the relationship between historical events, and their representation,
whether discursive, sculptural or pictorial. The peculiar quality of the
poem, the way in which it combines vivid evocation with a certain
detachment from what it evokes, arises from its persistent merging of
historical and biographical event with forms of discourse on, or
representation of, that event. This continues, and further develops, the
techniques of 'An Apology'. The equivalent to the ironized 'Platonic
England' of 'An Apology' are the 'shaky vistas of old France':

J'accuse! j'accuse! -- making the silver prance
and curvet, and the dust-motes jig to war
across the shaky vistas of old France,
the gilt-edged maps of Strasbourg and the Saar. (10.9)

Here, as throughout *The Mystery*, historical events and topographical
locations are interwoven with their representation, in this case in the
form of maps. The fist which strikes the table, sending the dust-motes
travelling across the map in a parodic representation of the generals' flags (themselves representations of troops), implicates the motivation of the war with the repercussions of the Dreyfus affair, including anger and guilt ('gilt-edged' as guilt-edged), and with economic forces ('silver'; 'gilt-edged' again, suggesting the stock market).

In section 1 we find history portrayed, first as a race (with an ironic reflection on the pre-war belief in progress, and on the arms race), and then as a tragic farce:

Crack of a starting pistol [...] 

History commands the stage wielding a toy gun, rehearsing another scene. It has raged so before, countless times; and will do, countless times more, in the guise of supreme clown, dire tragedian. (1.1-1.2)

The starting pistol suggests Sarajevo, while the image of history as manic director or hamming actor plays on questions of historical determinism: who has written the play or script? The alleged repetitiveness of history (a theme to which Hill returns in 'Scenes with Harlequins') is associated with the iterability of artistic representations: here the repetition of a play rehearsal; later in the section film is also used to stress recurrence. The third stanza alludes to Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, a work full of reflections on violence and the rhetoric of violence, and the relationship between the two:

In Brutus' name martyr and mountebank 
ghost Caesar's ghost, his wounds of air and ink 
painlessly spouting. (1.3)

Hill's lines recall Antony's repeated use of Brutus's name in his speech inciting the crowd (*Julius Caesar* III.i), but it is hard to be sure
whether Caesar is martyr and Brutus mountebank, or Brutus martyr and Antony mountebank. Hill transfers these uncertainties onto Péguy: was he a dangerous inciter of war and violence, or a martyr to conviction? The 'wounds of air and ink' are both the rhetorical wounds of violent speech and writing, and the gaping holes and darkening blood of real wounds. Blood figures in The Mystery as wine (1.1), ink (1.3) and beetroot juice (2.9) and, together with the allusion to Grand Guignol in 4.7, these metaphors look forward to Hill's 'Scenes with Harlequins', the title of which alludes to Aleksandr Blok's play The Puppet Booth, where the characters bleed cranberry juice.

In 1.4 the question of Péguy's responsibility for Jaurès' death is explored in a complex piece of word-play, whereby the sense of 'stand by' shifts between the moral and the material:

Did Péguy kill Jaurès? Did he incite the assassin? Must men stand by what they write as by their camp-beds or their weaponry or shell-shocked comrades while they sag and cry?

John Lucas, inexplicably, regards this as an undeveloped, perhaps even accidental use of a cliché when it is, if anything, too developed. Jeffrey Wainwright analyses it briefly, but, having described the first two lines of the stanza as 'a philosopher's crisp identification of questions', concludes that 'It is not easy to comprehend, plainly, what is being asked' (Robinson, 101). The word-play here includes the shock of contrast between the surface impression of 'crisp identification of questions' and the confusion into which further thought and analysis may plunge the reader. The nonchalant confidence implied by the syntax, in which 'as by' and 'or' make apparently unproblematic links between a
single verb and various indirect objects, is a challenging strategy. To
stand by what you write has a primary meaning which the OED gives as:
'To adhere to, maintain, abide by, (a statement, agreement or the like)'.
This definition hints at a link between being responsible for what one
writes, and being responsible for its consequences. As Wainwright points
out, J.L. Austin's 'perlocutionary act' is at issue here. The OED begs
Austin's questions very neatly, the crucial issue being whether an
utterance is a statement or an agreement. Hill's comment, in the essay
appended to the poem, further complicates the linguistic and moral
issues: 'By 1914 he was calling for his blood: figuratively, it must be
said'. Figurative language, as Julius Caesar shows, is effective for
inciting violence.

Standing by your beds is described by Wainwright as a 'comic
military cliché' (Robinson, 101). Certainly it has its comic aspect, but
rather than being a cliché it is an habitually used order, and the
military use of stock phrases has a serious purpose, which is to make
possible quick and simultaneous action by a body of men. A military
order is an excellent example of Austin's perlocutionary act. But the
syntactical symmetry between standing by what you write, and standing
by your bed, conceals semantic and philosophical differences. Standing
by your bed is not primarily taking responsibility for your bed; it is a
literal rather than figurative use of 'standing by'. However, since a
soldier is held to be responsible for the neatness of his bed, and the
occasion when he literally stands by it (an inspection) is the occasion
on which this responsibility is tested, the figurative sense of 'stand
by' is not merely absent here, but a possible meaning deliberately
excluded; using Empson's classification of senses in The Structure of
Complex Words, this is a comic use of '-A' (Empson's example, rather appropriately to The Mystery, is "when a history master speaks of a "bloody battle") . There is a further difference between standing by what you write, and standing by your beds. The person who stands by what he writes is the subject of a putative perlocutionary act (his words may produce an effect on other people, for which the question of his moral responsibility arises); the soldiers who stand by their beds are the objects of a perlocutionary act (the order, to stand by their beds). But is the poet, like the soldiers, to be thought of as subject to commands? 45

Thus the word-play in these lines interweaves in a highly complex manner ideas of responsibility, and displaced responsibility, of acting and being acted upon. But standing by your beds is not merely a physical act, it is also a symbolic enactment of discipline, cohesion, and readiness to fight (equipment must be laid out in good order on the bed). This restores the analogy with words, since Péguy's words were a sign of his readiness to fight. If words can be used to engage oneself to perform an action, then so can other sign systems, of which ritual is one, and military ritual a powerful example (frequently words and ritual combine, as in Austin's example of the marriage service). Significantly in terms of the themes of the poem, the distinction between words and actions becomes problematic in these lines. Standing by your 'weaponry' is partly a symbol of readiness, but partly an actual readiness, like laying out your equipment, but edging ominously closer to the actuality of fighting; in these areas the symbolic and the actual are not wholly separable. Standing by 'shell-shocked comrades while they sag and cry' points two ways at once. The primary sense would seem to be OED (c):
'fig. -- To support, assist, protect, defend (a person, cause, etc.), to uphold the interests of, take the side of, be faithful or loyal to'. But sense (a), while it passes into sense (c), starts as follows: 'To station oneself or remain stationed beside (a person)', and under military discipline this may well mean simply standing alongside someone in a line, which is indeed supporting or defending a cause (discipline, country) but is not assisting or protecting a person. If we invoke the term 'bystander' then we come close to an oxymoronic pun. The syntactical parallelism of these lines implies a comparable status for comrades, beds and weapons, which accords with World War I strategies which treated men as expendable items of military equipment.

These lines accord well with John Crowe Ransom's dictum which Hill has quoted approvingly: 'the density or connotativeness of poetic language reflects the world's density' (OV, 151). It is very difficult to read them while holding in mind all the possible connotations they imply. However, they meet Allen Tate's criterion when he suggests that 'good poetry can bear the closest literal examination of every phrase, and is its own safeguard against our irony'. The ambiguities and word-play of these lines are intimately connected to the themes and concerns of the poem as a whole at a deep level. Hill's poetry invites, or rather demands, 'the closest literal examination of every phrase' (though 'literal' is a contentious word here) but one has the sense that it is ultimately resistant to a full tracing of its implications, not so much in being too rigorous to be subjected to our irony (Tate's claim does not allow for some forms of irony, such as irony directed at obsessive rigour) as in rigorously subjecting itself to its own irony, a species of pre-emptive self-questioning which reflexive strategies can
produce. These lines are a rhetorical question, and one that goes unanswered. Starting from this position of undecidability, they add layer upon layer of implication, and in creating an intense awareness in the reader of the opacity and complexity of the verbal medium, tend to divert attention away from the (perhaps unanswerable) moral question of the precise degree of Péguy's moral responsibility for the death of Jaurès. Like much of the poem, they start from Péguy, his life and his situation, but lead towards meditation on forms of discourse and representation: here, on the linguistic, symbolic and ritual means by which our culture has represented and enacted commitment to fight. Like much of the poem, they also interweave writing and war, words and action, discourse and violence.

The poem's concern to link event and representation is most explicitly stated later in section 1:

Violent contrariety of men and days; calm juddery bombardment of a silent film showing such things: its canvas slashed with rain and St Elmo's fire. Victory of the machine! (1.7)

Here the figuration turns around contrast and correspondence. While some men (such as Péguy) may feel themselves to be spiritually at odds with their age, most men find themselves to be in accord with their age in being at odds with each other. Paradoxically, Péguy's maverick beliefs brought him into this accord of contrariness, involving him in battles of books, and eventually real battles. Similarly, the apparent contrast between the violence of events and the calm of their representation on film is undermined. The film takes on attributes of the events it shows, while events seem to unroll with the unreal quality of a film:
The brisk celluloid clatters through the gate;  
the cortège of the century dances in the street;  
and over and over the jolly cartoon 
armies of France go reeling towards Verdun. (1.8)

It would be possible to tease out in analysis the wealth of links between event and representation made here, but the point is that the two are felt as inextricable. The technology which produced film also produced tanks; films have become part of our understanding of historical events, and that understanding plays its part in shaping them. The 'cortège of the century' perhaps owes something to Hardy's 'the Century's corpse outleant' in his poem of 1900, 'The Darkling Thrush'. Hill's line picks up an ambiguity in Hardy's poem: do the 'land's sharp features' figure the corpse of the nineteenth century, or of the twentieth, 'benumbed at birth', a 'pale corpse-like birth' (in the words of another Hardy poem of the time). So the macabre carnival, as gun carriages dance through the streets of Paris, may celebrate a century, spiritually dying already in 1914, or the final passing of the pre-war dispensation and its continuities with the nineteenth century.

The poem is pervaded by the paralleling and the interweaving of events and people with discourse and representation. In 2.8 the bust of Péguy, despite being 'mediocre work', resembles the man in being both 'brave' and 'cornered'; in 5.14 the soldiers of France become 'bronze warriors resting on their wounds'. In 4.5 the 'unsold Cahiers built like barricades' recall the earlier suggestions of Péguy's literary and political battles as pre-figurings of the War: 'stubbornly on guard / among the Cahiers, with his army cape [...] / Truth's pedagogue, braving an entrenched class / of fools and scoundrels,' (1.5-1.6). Entrenched opinions and interests lead to the trenches. Similarly, 'the mystic
strategy of Foch / and Bergson with its time-scent' (3.8) implicates philosophy and military planning, while in 4.4 'the bereaved soul returns / upon itself, grows resolute at chess, war-games hurling dice of immense loss / into the breach;'. The sunlight which, it seems at first, 'pierces the heart-' of the dedicated lover of France, rather:

[...] pierces the heart-shaped shutter-patterns in the afternoon, shadows of fleurs-de-lys on the stone floors. (3.2-3.3)

That is, it pierces a representation of the symbol of France. In 7.5 the soldiers crouching to avoid hail, and a hail of bullets, look 'like labourers of their own memorial'. In 6.6 the howling mob, calling for the blood of Dreyfus, is transformed into grotesque 'scrolls // torn from Apocalypse'. Such transformations tend to implicate art and death, as living humans become statues, memorials or other representations. 48

7.7 PSEUDO-PASTICHE

There is a quality of pastiche or parody about many sections of The Mystery. Knottenbelt regards this as a fault, observing that 'it [...] feels like a pastiche, depending too much on our willingness to read into language rather than through it to what lies beyond' (Knottenbelt, 286). This statement does not take account of the fact that all of Hill's poetry, pre-supposing and demonstrating the materiality and non-transparency of language, requires such a willingness. To some extent the impression of pastiche given by The Mystery is a heightening of a general quality of Hill's poetry; as Hugh Haughton observes, 'There is an element of historical pastiche in all Hill's poetry' (Robinson, 130). As Haughton also notes (in relation to Mercian Hymns
and *Tenebrae*, such an element contributes to a reflexive awareness of the rhetorical and fictive nature of historical discourse:

Historical pastiche of this palpable kind draws attention to the way in which the historical past is necessarily fictive, in whatever degree, and a source of, as well as subject to, rhetorical contrivance and the consolations of poetry. (Robinson, 130)

What seems less clear when we turn to *The Mystery* is of what it is a pastiche. In *Mercian Hymns* there are recognizable elements of the troubadour poem (XVII), Anglo-Saxon poetry (XXVI), the Psalms (VI), the ritual naming of a King’s titles (I), while in *Tenebrae* the models are even clearer (primarily Spanish Counter-Reformation poetry). But *The Mystery* does not, as one might have expected, make significant use of Péguy’s own style. The verse sections of Péguy’s *Le Mystère de La Charité de Jeanne D’Arc* are most notable, in stylistic terms, for their use of repetition, particularly anaphora:

---
Tout cela se passait sous la clarté des cieux;  
Les anges dans la nuit avaient formé des choeurs.  
Les anges dans la nuit chantaient comme des fleurs.  
Par dessus les bergers, par dessus les rois mages  
Les anges dans la nuit chantaient éternellement.  

This is the style which André Gide described as:

like that of the very old litanies [...] like Arab songs, like the monotonous songs of the Landes; one could compare it to a desert [...] It resembles the pebbles of the desert, which come one after the other and look like one another, each looks like the other but is just a little different, and this difference corrects, relinquishes, repeats, or appears to repeat, accentuates, affirms, and always more certainly one advances.  

This slow, cumulative progress of Péguy’s verse, which Daniel Halévy describes as proceeding ‘pace by pace like a good infantry footslogger’,
is in general most unlike Hill's dense, convoluted, punning style in The
Mystery, which shifts its sense rapidly. Whereas Péguy's verse is
slow in its movement, Hill's poetry contains so much that it forces a
different sort of slowness on the reader, a need to work at lines, to
disentangle their allusion and connotation.

Nevertheless, some direct stylistic influence is perhaps detectable.
Hill makes occasional use of anaphora, as in stanzas 7.2 and 7.3, which
begin, respectively, 'What vigil is this, [...]?' and 'What is this relic
[...]?', and some of the longer descriptive passages in Hill's poem have a
rather mesmeric, ritualistic feel to them which faintly recalls Le
Mystère de la Charité de Jeanne d'Arc. An example would be 5.8 to 5.12,
part of which Knottenbelt cites as, in her opinion, too close to 'being a
sheer pastiche of Péguy's "artesian" yet "visionary" style'
(Knottenbelt, 321). But more importantly, Hill incorporates within his
own style a transformed, small-scale version of Péguy's technique of
endowing words with a cumulative power through modified repetition and
verbal echoes. Because this takes place within a few lines, rather than
over a large number, the effect is very different:

Patience hardens to a pittance, courage
unflinchingly declines into a sour rage, (5.14)

their many names one name, the common 'dur'
built into duration, the endurance of war; (7.6)

Here the way in which 'courage' becomes 'sour rage' and 'dur' becomes
'duration' and then 'endurance' might be compared with the following
lines from Le Mystère, where 'humanité' is transfigured into 'chrétienté':

Clameur qui sonne au coeur de toute humanité;
Clameur qui sonne au coeur de toute chrétienté;  62
Péguy's parallelism is symbolic, making material similarity between words (in sound and line position), figure a spiritual association. Similarly, Hill's lines figure the ascent of qualities ('dur' -- hardness which merely has to be suffered -- into 'endurance' -- a positive human attribute), or their decline (patience into a pittance). Such effects, which give The Mystery a mannered quality to which some critics have taken exception, are an extension of the concentration on the material qualities of words, and of the use of punning, which had long been a feature of Hill's work.  

But if this specific technique was suggested to him by his reading of Péguy, it also represents a process of oblique, transformative influence, a technique being picked up and reworked within a very different overall style.

I would therefore suggest that Knottenbelt is doubly unfair to Hill when she criticizes his poem, both for unsuccesssfully imitating Péguy's style, and for making a 'sheer pastiche' of it (Knottenbelt, 321):

> Although Hill here attempts to re-enact the cadenced lyricism and precision, the concreteness, of Péguy's poetry, where one image 'blossoms' effortlessly, organically, into another [...] Hill's imagery remains statically picturesque to the point of being quaintly English. (Knottenbelt, 320)

Hill's imagery in certain sections is indeed picturesque, even quaint, but only as part of a technique of pastiche, indicating a reflexive scepticism about historical myth-making. While Hill may have made a characteristically oblique use of certain features of Péguy's style, I would suggest that the pastiche feel of his poem does not arise primarily from any attempt (successful or otherwise) to imitate Péguy. Rather it might be compared with the postmodernist pastiche used by
James Fenton in such poems as 'A Vacant Possession', where some hints of specific literary allusions (e.g. to Yeats, Eliot and Wallace Stevens) are mixed in among lines which suggest allusions to unspecified films, novels, plays — that is, they have an air of familiarity, without being identifiable as an allusion, or else they suggest an allusion to a work which is incongruous, which does not fit into a pattern. They parody the modernist use of allusion, by creating a pastiche of nothing in particular. Fenton has acknowledged his fondness for 'joke references'. When asked about 'A Vacant Possession' and a companion piece 'A Nest of Vampires', he mentioned the appearance of John Clare in the latter, and commented that 'the idea of that is that you have someone coming on, rather like in an Ealing comedy film, when you suddenly recognize some famous character actor under a great pancake of make-up, and you think "Oh, that's old so-and-so"'. Thus the following passage suggests a scene from a film drama:

The difficult guest is questioning his rival.
He is pacing up and down while she leans against
A mossy water-butt in which, could we see them,
Innumerable forms of life are uncurling.
She is bravely not being hurt by his manner
Of which they have warned her. He taps his cigarette
And brusquely changes the subject.

Yet the effect of this association is not so much to allow us to build up an interpretation of the poem — since the rest of it does not illuminate this fragment of story — but rather to make us aware of the process by which we seek to create an interpretation, and in particular the role of intertextuality in this process.
The effect in *The Mystery* is somewhat different, since Péguys life history and its historical context provide an implicit narrative framework. Nevertheless, the local effects are comparable in a passage such as the following:

How the mood swells to greet the gathering storm!  
The chestnut trees begin to thresh and cast  
huge canisters of blossom at each gust.  
Coup de tonnere! Bismarck is in the room!

Bad memories, seigneurs? Such wraiths appear  
on summer evenings when the gnat-swarm spins  
a dying moment on the tremulous air.  
The curtains billow and the rain begins  
its night-long vigil. (9.6-9.8)

The description here is highly evocative: the threshing trees, the spinning gnats, are suggested with verbal skill and rhetorical power. Yet what is evoked is not simply the reader’s own experience of these things, but the reader’s experience of their representation in literature and film. The lines suggest a clichéd scene from a ghost-story or film, in which a storm, complete with thunder-claps and billowing curtains, presages the appearance of a ghost in a country-house. This is not an example of what Hill has termed ‘cliché rinsed and restored to function as responsible speech’ (WP, 45). Rather, cliché is used to suggest the inescapable influence of familiar representations on our understanding of historical events. For the rhetorical devices of the ghost-story, gently mocked by "How the mood swells to greet the gathering storm!", implicate the metaphorical level, on which the gathering storm is the approaching World War, the canisters of blossom prefigure shells, and the ghost is the memory of the Franco-Prussian War.
Suggestions of pictorial art are as important as suggestions of film:

There is an ancient landscape of green branches—
true tempérament de droite, you have your wish—
crosshatching twigs and light, goldfinches
among the peppery lilac, the small fish
pencilled into the stream. Ah, such a land
the Ile de France once was. (9.1-9.2)

The hints of the artist, crosshatching and pencilling in parts of the scene, render it a self-conscious representation of a representation, and ironize the apparently definite claim that 'such a land [...] once was'. Elsewhere specific artists are suggested:

the clinking anvil and clear sheepbell-sound,
at noon and evening, of the angelus;
coifed girls like geese, labourers cap in hand,
and walled gardens espaliered with angels; (5.12)

The coifed girls suggest Gauguin's Breton peasant girls, from the painting used for the cover of Hill's *Collected Poems* (though they are not visible in the detail chosen). The gardens 'espaliered with angels' are reminiscent, as Alan Robinson has pointed out, of the work of Stanley Spencer. We are aware of reading in terms of existing images of rural life. The phrase 'cap in hand' hints at a self-consciously clichéd portrayal of labourers.

In Fenton's poem, a scene is similarly evoked with a distancing self-consciousness:

The square, the café seats, the doorways are empty
And the long grey balconies stretch out on all sides.
Time for an interlude, evening in the country,
With distant cowbells providing the angelus.
But we are interrupted by the latest post.
The last line introduces a reflexive level, since it is the direction of the poem, rather than the activities of any character within it, which is interrupted; the next stanza shifts to an argument, with no obvious link to the preceding description. Hill's poem does not share the narrative inconsequentiality of Fenton's, since it revolves around Péguy's life. But one might compare Fenton's reflexive self-interruption with the shifting of levels within Hill's poem, as when Péguy's death constrains the poem, the poet and the reader (rather than any character) 'to leave you sleeping and to step aside' (5.1), or as when 'the metaphors of blood begin to flow' (6.12), as much in Hill's poem as in Péguy's writings. Hill and Fenton, then, could both be described as employing pseudo-pastiche. This is to be distinguished, on the one hand, from the modernist use of allusion by Eliot and Pound, which attempts to appropriate some of the resonances of the works alluded to, and on the other hand from straightforward pastiche or parody, which pays tribute to, or mocks, the style of another's work. Pseudo-pastiche draws attention to the process whereby the interpretation of a text is continuously shadowed by experience of prior representations.

The blending of event and representation justifies a description of the portrayal of history in The Mystery as postmodernist, in the terms defined by Steven Connor, who identifies the collapse in the postmodern period of the distinction between [....] history as real event, and history as narrative of real event. Always difficult to distinguish in absolute terms, the distinction has by and large been kept visible by chronological lapse. But the postmodern period is characterised by an unprecedented simultaneity of historical event and historical narrative, in which events have hardly time to be 'present' before being 're-presented'.

55
Hill's intense awareness of the moral importance of bearing witness to the truth of history as far as it can be ascertained sets him apart sharply from a postmodernist playfulness which relishes the breakdown of all distinctions between truth and fiction. However, his portrayal of history in terms of representation manifests a powerful sense of the difficulty of performing such an obligation in the face of the constructed nature of historical narrative and of the manner in which representation precedes as well as following event, in that human actions are conditioned by the manner in which we represent possible outcomes and scenarios to ourselves.
Notes to Chapter 7


6. Hugh Haughton suggests that 'Pugin's fighting title sounded a high trumpet-call for the Gothic revival, but it has acquired a somewhat ironic, almost Quixotic resonance at the head of Hill's thirteen studies in revivalist nostalgia (Robinson, p. 136). Haughton's use of the term 'studies' leaves it uncertain whether he sees Hill as analysing or indulging in nostalgia.


8. The line from sonnet 7 ('Platonic England grasps its tenantry') has been twice alluded to by Hill when defending his sequence against the charge of nostalgia: 'The celebration of the inherited beauties of the English landscape is bound, in the texture of the sequence, with an equal sense of the oppression of tenantry' (VP, p. 93); 'When I speak about "Platonic England grasping its tenantry" [...] I am referring to those processes of the past which were the original betrayals [...] in "the governance of England"' (UJ, p. 213).


11. Veeser, pp. xi-xii.


21. The version of the poem read in 1976, and published in 1978 (prior to inclusion in *Tenebrae*) made the allusion to Shakespeare more apparent. 'Quaint Mazes' appeared (with other sonnets) under the title 'On the Death of Mr Shakespeare' (and as a result of a commission from the World Centre for Shakespeare Studies) and lines from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (II.1. 102-11) were included as epigraph (these lines include the title phrase). See note 1.


24. Harold Bloom, 'Geoffrey Hill: The Survival of Strong Poetry', Introduction to Geoffrey Hill's *Somewhere is Such a Kingdom: Poems*
25. It is particularly the use of the first-person plural pronoun in the context of a rather abstract statement that recalls Auden. Compare, for example, the following opening lines: 'When all our apparatus of report / Confirms the triumph of our enemies' ('Sonnets from China: XIX'); 'Clocks cannot tell our time of day / For what event to pray' ('No Time'); W.H. Auden, Collected Poems, ed. by Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1976), pp. 156, 234.

26. Referring to Wallace Stevens's idea of poetry as a substitute for religion, Hill concedes uneasily that 'my argument is attracted, almost despite itself, towards an idea by which it would much prefer to be repelled' (PMA, p. 16).


32. The OED gives the etymology of 'religion' as Latin religion -em: 'of doubtful etymology, by Cicero connected with religere, to read over again, but by later authors with religare, to bind, [...] the latter view has usually been preferred by modern writers'.

33. The Collected Poems of W.B. Yeats, pp. 167-68.

34. Ronald Blythe, 'Satan without Seraphs', review of Religion and the Decline of Magic, by Keith Thomas, The Listener, 4 February 1971, pp. 150-51. This review, which contains much that would be likely to be of interest to Hill, refers to 'the entire national Christian maze' (which chimes with Hill's title, 'Quaint Mazes') and concludes with a sentence oddly reminiscent of Hill's prose style: 'In their virulent attempts to destroy it [magic] the seventeenth-century Protestants only revealed their own helpless involvement in it'.

35. OED, 'celebrate'.

36. Tom Paulin attacks Hill's poetry for what he claims is its 'kitsch feudalism' ('The Case for Geoffrey Hill', p. 13). In so doing he entirely fails to notice Hill's self-conscious and ironical use of kitsch elements to analyse the psychology of nostalgia.


39. See also Introduction, note 4.


41. See Chapter 2, note 24.


43. 'Charles Péguy' (Hill's essay appended to *The Mystery*), TM, p. 30.


45. In his interview with Hermione Lee, Hill argued that certain events 'command our belated witness' and suggested that his subjects chose him, rather than being chosen by him. This sense of being commanded by his subject-matter illuminates the implications of the play of meaning around ideas of military command and Péguy's literary and political commitments.


48. Hill's concern that art may feed off life in a destructive manner places him in a tradition that includes Thomas Mann, and Henrik Ibsen. The latter's late play *When We Dead Awaken* has striking affinities with Hill's work in this respect. William Cookson notes the close relationship between that play and *Brand*, of which Hill has written a version in English ('A Note on *Brand*', *Agenda* 1979, p. 89).


52. Péguy, Œuvres Complètes, p. 118.

53. For example John Lucas in his review of The Mystery (see note 42 above).


55. 'An Interview with James Fenton' (interviewed by Andrew Motion), Poetry Review, 72.2 (June 1982), 17-23 (p. 21).


8.1 INTRODUCTION: HILL AND BLOK

Hill's 'Scenes with Harlequins: In Memoriam Aleksandr Blok' appeared in February 1990, some five years after the publication of Collected Poems. The latter volume had included 'Hymns to Our Lady of Chartres', a form of reprise of the subject matter of The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy. Otherwise, 'Scenes with Harlequins' was the first poem published by Hill since The Mystery. Like The Mystery it consists of quatrains grouped into sections (though the sections are both fewer in number and shorter) but whereas The Mystery used a loose iambic pentameter, varying between elegiac quatrains, envelope quatrains and two-couplet quatrains, 'Scenes with Harlequins' is unrhymed and returns to the variable syllabic metre which Hill used in the first of 'Three Baroque Meditations'. Each quatrain of the sequence, with the exception of those in sections II and VII, contains lines of four, five, six and seven syllables, the ordering of the lines varying.

The first thing to strike many readers of the new poem is likely to be its continuity, both with Hill's work in general, and with The Mystery in particular. Insofar as the subtitle indicates an elegiac intention, the work is in the genre to which he has most persistently returned. The continuities with The Mystery are notable. Both 'Scenes with Harlequins' and The Mystery present themselves as a combination of elegy and ambivalent tribute to a major European poet of the turn of the century (Péguy lived from 1873 to 1914, Blok from 1880 to 1921). Both poets are probably known, in England, more by repute than by their work, since
neither translates particularly well, their work depending considerably on the emotional effect of the sound and rhythm. Neither poet is extensively or easily available in translation. They have other features in common: the combination of a strong mystical element in their poetry with troubled, but equally intense political concerns; a powerful attachment, strongly tinged with the sacrificial and regenerative, to their respective countries; a passionate but ambivalent engagement with the forms and doctrines of Christianity; a tragic role in formative events of twentieth-century European history. As a result, the question again arises of Hill's possible identification with the subject of his elegy. I have argued that differences of situation between Hill and Péguy are as important as any temperamental similarities, so that Péguy serves as an antithetical mask rather than a persona. The same, I would suggest, is true of Blok. The case for a temperamental affinity is anyway more tenuous in respect of the Russian poet. Blok's life, as it emerges from the biography which Hill himself read, was notable for its extremes of mystic dedication to art and demonic sexual debauch. Furthermore, it is a life that seems inescapably Russian in nature and context. Conrad's teacher of languages in Under Western Eyes would have had his prejudices about Russians confirmed had he been able to read Avril Pyman's two-volume biography, The Life of Aleksandr Blok, from which Hill draws his epigraphs for his poem. 

8.2 EPIGRAPHS: THE SELF AND THE SOUNDS OF HISTORY

The first of those epigraphs alludes to the question of a poet's identity as a man, and to the Nietzschean task of self-creation in terms of which Hill has expressed his sense of the positive role of the self in poetry:
Joyfully I accept this strange book, joyfully and with fear -- in it there is so much beauty, poetry, death. I await the accomplishment of your task. -- VOLOKHOVA, TO BLOK, 1907

The 'strange book' is Blok's cycle of poems, *The Snow Mask* (1907), dedicated to Natal'ya Nikolayevna Volokhova, an actress and noted Petersburg beauty. The 'task', which Blok had yet to accomplish, was to create himself through his poetry. Avril Pyman tells us in a note that:

In Moscow in 1960, I asked Natal'ya Volokhova what she had meant by 'the accomplishment of your task'. She thought for a moment, then queried with a little laugh in her voice: 'Didn't I say "miracle"? Blok and I often talked of a "miracle", of the possibility of his becoming a real, live human being. I suppose that is what I meant.... He avoided me after 1908 but of course I read his poetry -- later on, after he died mostly. I think, in the Third Volume, he achieved his miracle'. (Pyman, I 275n.)

This comment may have recalled to Hill's mind Nietzsche's phrase which he used as an epigraph to 'The Assisi Fragments', and quoted to John Haffenden in relation to the 'creative expression of personality': 'this delight in giving a form to oneself as a piece of difficult, refractory and suffering material' (VP, 87). Hill's admiration for this phrase centres on its bringing together of the refractoriness of language and of the human personality, so that it recognizes the poet's technical struggle with words as a creative engagement with personality. Volokhova's comment seems to make this recognition, despite the somewhat critical implication that Blok was not yet, in 1907, a 'real, live human being'.

Others also saw a lack of humanity in Blok, but correlated it positively with his poetic achievements; his friend Aleksey Remizov describes Blok as a 'non-human', to whom, as compensation, was given the gift of 'a different kind of ear; not our ear. Blok heard music'
(Pyman, I 276n.). Remisov's comment looks forward to the context of Hill's second epigraph, this time the words of Blok himself:

All the sounds have gone silent. Can't you hear that there aren't any sounds any more? -- BLOK, IN 1920.

The significance of this comment is explained by Kornei Chukovsky, to whom the remark was made, in his book on Blok:

Until the end of his days he could not forgive the Revolution for being unlike the one he had dreamed of for so many years [...] And he felt that only one thing was left to him -- to die. [...] He fell ill in March 1921, but the process of dying started much earlier, in 1918, immediately after he wrote 'The Twelve' and 'The Scythians'. [...] It was just at that time that something happened to him which was essentially equivalent to dying. He became deaf and dumb. That is, he could hear and speak like everyone else, but that wonderful ear and seraphic voice that only he possessed abandoned him forever. Suddenly a grave-like silence fell upon everything. He said that while he was writing 'The Twelve' there was an incessant rumbling or roaring in his ears for several days in succession, but that it all suddenly stopped, and he came to perceive this seemingly loudest and shrillest of epochs as total silence [...] Whenever I asked him why he was not writing poetry, his answer was always the same: 'All sounds have stopped. Haven't you noticed that there are no sounds at all?' [...] For Blok, space had formerly been filled with all kinds of sounds and he had been accustomed to refer to objects as 'musical' or 'unmusical'. [...] He had always been aware of the music of the world around him -- a music that he absorbed not only with his ears, but through his skin and his whole being. In the preface to 'Retribution' he had written that all phenomena in a given epoch had for him unified musical import; together they formed a single musical impulse. He could tune into this music of the epochs like no one else [...] It was this music that had now ended. 7

Blok commented that the 'great noise' which he heard while writing his apotheosis of revolution, 'The Twelve', was 'probably the noise of the collapse of the old world'. So the two epigraphs serve to evoke the personal and political aspects of Blok's achievement and his tragedy: what Pyman terms the 'Faustian pact' (Pyman, I 276n.) with his vocation
which made him not 'real', yet gave him the poetic power to create, not only 'beauty, poetry, death', but himself; the prophetic responsiveness to history which made him hear its music, but killed his voice when that history abandoned his vision. Similarly, the title of Hill's poem suggests the play of identity and mask, of author and actor, in Blok's drama of 1906 The Puppet Booth, with its ironic use of the commedia dell'arte figures of Harlequin, Pierrot and Columbine.

8.3 VIOLENCE AND THE 'PROPHETIC INTELLIGENCE'

Given Hill's intense concern with the moral vicissitudes of poetic utterance, the figure of Blok must be an exemplary and problematic one. Charles Tomlinson has accused Blok, in very specific terms, of preparing the way for violence:

Blok, too, wrote The Scythians
    Who should have known: be who howls
    With the whirlwind, with the whirlwind goes down.
    In this, was Lenin guiltier than you
    When, out of a merciless patience grew
    The daily prose such poetry prepares for? 10

'Scenes with Harlequins' does not address this issue as directly as The Mystery raised the question of Péguy's guilt: 'Did Péguy kill Jaurès?'
(TM, 1.4). But the dangers of prophetic visions are registered in images which evoke the quality of Blok's life and poetry:

    Tempestuous fantasies,
    blood-tinted opaline
    essential clouds,
    I am not myself

    I think in this last act
    without end. (III.2-3)
Here it is suggested that the bloodiness of some of Blok's sentiments, red tinging the semi-translucent white glass of his visionary poetry, is a clouding of his vision. Some of Blok's poetry does celebrate the shedding of blood. In Chapter One of 'Retribution' Blok regrets the advent, in the nineteenth-century, of a 'humanistic fog', in which:

The angel of all holy war
Himself seemed to have flown away:
There bloody feuds are found solution
By clever, skilled diplomacy;

In Hill's poem 'I am not myself' suggests the Yeatsian detachment which Blok advocates for the artist in the Prologue to 'Retribution' ('It is your lot dispassionately / To measure all that meets your gaze'), but also an apologetic self-doubt (as one might excuse unreasonable behaviour by saying 'I'm not myself today'). Comments made to Blok by his friend Zhenya Ivanov about Blok's play The Song of Fate suggest, on Blok's part, both a philosophical questioning of identity, and a fear of its absence:

One profound theme runs right through the play. That is the agonizing desire for incarnation: the words and dramatis personae are avid to take on flesh and blood, to become incarnate. In this there is a kind of reaching out on the part of the author himself to the first commandment of being, to the 'I am'.

It's something like that question of yours -- do you remember: 'Do I exist or not?'. (Pyman, II 59)

There is a similar suggestion of the interaction between Blok's troubled life and his artistic beliefs in 'this last act / without end'. In the light of Blok's ironic staging of elements of his own life in dramas such as The Puppet Booth, and the reciprocal dramatic and acted quality of elements of that life itself, there is a suggestion of
weariness at a drama lived out too long, as when, according to Pyman, the poem 'All that has been, has been, has been' expresses a sense of choking on 'thoughts of eternal repetition which underlined the necessity of self-renewal' (Pyman, II 58). In the Prologue to 'Retribution' Blok asserts the necessity of artistic ordering in the face of the unending recurrence of life:

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Life has no end and no beginning.
Chance waits in ambush for us all.
Above us hangs a gloomy pall,
Or God's clear visage, ever-shining.
Artist, believe implicitly
In ends and in beginnings. 13
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Blok's belief that 'all things repeat' is alluded to in the last section of Hill's poem: 14

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Decembrist blood! We are taxed
for their visions. The earth
turns, returns, through cycles
of declamation;

with feuilletons and iron
fantasies of the state
```

Pyman notes that Blok 'did in fact have Decembrist blood' (Pyman, I 150) and Hill has picked up the phrase and placed it so as to draw out its ambiguous connotations. In the poem it suggests, not only the blood of inheritance, but the blood of the executed Decembrist officers, and the blood about to be shed in the summer of 1917, when, in the uncertain months between the February Revolution and the October Revolution, the model of the Decembrists was evoked in some quarters (Pyman II 270n.). Blok himself was compared to one of the Decembrists by Andrey Bely
(Pyman, I 150) but, striving against the sense of repetition, he rejected
them as a model for the new revolution. 16

Hill's poem appeared in February 1990, after a year of new (if
relatively bloodless) revolutions in Eastern Europe. It was thus an
appropriate time to recall both the scepticism about progress which
accompanied Blok's sense of historical repetition, and his hope of
transfiguration. 'We are taxed for their visions' suggests, not only the
way in which Blok may have been 'taxed' with echoing the aristocratic
radical visions of the Decembrists some 92 years earlier, but also the
economic consequences of the 1917 revolution which, some 73 years later,
were and are still felt in Eastern Europe. Hill's lines suggest a
Conradian scepticism about political rhetoric. Following the line 'The
earth turns, returns, through cycles', the line break allows to the reader
to expect a phrase such as 'of history' or 'of destiny'. Instead, 'of
declaration' has a bathetic effect, suggesting that it is above all the
discursive and rhetorical manoeuvres of politicians and writers which
repeat themselves. The next two lines imply a somewhat Foucauldian sense
of the coinherence of discourse and power. Like the first section of The
Mystery, they evoke the discursive sphere in which political rhetoric
('feuilletons'), the psychology of oppression ('fantasies of the state')
and the exercise of physical power ('iron') interact. Blok at times
became involved in debate by feuilleton (Pyman, I 303), but protested
that 'I want to be an artist, not a mystic giver of talks and writer of
feuilletons' (Pyman, II 87). In 'Retribution' he described the nineteenth
century as an 'iron century' and an 'age of doom'. 16 He also wrote of
the 'iron emptiness of the day' during the years between the revolutions
(Pyman, II 266).
In recalling Blok's sense of the cyclical, of political oppression, of rhetorical decadence, as well as his resistance to all these things, at a time when Eastern Europe seems at another turning point of its history, Hill is, as in The Mystery, summoning up a 'prophetic intelligence' of our century to remind us of the inescapable bearing of the past upon the present and future. These lines use a doubling of voices which exemplifies the sense of historical repetition alluded to: the voice of Blok, looking back to the Decembrists, is also the voice of Hill, looking back to Blok. Hill shares with Blok a strong impulse towards the transcendent, combined with an insistence that the transcendent, by definition, cannot be contained in art. Pyman comments that:

Painfully aware that all things come to an end only to pass on into a new cycle of being, he would not knuckle under to the threat of everlasting repetitions, but sought always the point of transfiguration at which things become other than they seem, the 'end' or 'dormition' as he had said of Tolstoy, rather than biological death. Hope in the ultimate 'beyond all this' was the source of Blok's poetry, yet he differed from Vyacheslav Ivanov and the theurgists in that he faced up squarely to the fact that such hope could not be its subject. Art, he still maintained, involved self-limitation, and his energy was now bent on confining his own art to the cycles of mortal life. (Pyman, II 110-11)

8.4 DIALOGUE, DISTANCE AND DUALITY

'Scenes with Harlequins' differs from The Mystery in that Hill ventriloquizes Blok as he did not Péguy. Given Hill's acute concern about the morality of speaking for the dead (in art), this is a significant move. At certain points, as has already been noted, there is a doubling of voice. There is also some room for doubt as to the subject or speaker of certain parts, but the arrangement appears to be as follows: sections
I, II and V are spoken by Hill (or, more accurately, they represent the projection of his voice within the poem), while the remaining sections, III, IV, VI and VII are spoken by Blok, who is imagined as 'in this last act' (i.e. near the end of his life, looking back). The concluding lines of sections II and V mark the transition from one voice to another by heralding Blok; in the first case, as a prophetic voice among others of his time, and in the second case, as a poetic lord of his age, and maker of legends:

Still they outshine us
among the prophets. (II.4)

In this light, constrained spirit,
be a lord of your age.
Rejoice; let the strange legends begin. (V.3)

The second of these passages has a quality of formal invocation, suggesting a summoning of Blok's spirit. Hill, never averse to recycling one of his own puns, borrows 'In this light' from his poem 'An Order of Service' (KL), in which a visionary poet is dismissed: 'In such a light dismiss the unappealing/blank of his gaze [...] / Dazzled by renunciation's glare'. Blok is named as a lord of his age in the light of what has been written in Hill's poem as a whole, but also in the light evoked earlier in section V, a light which 'dabbles the earth' making a 'Motley of shadow'. This is perhaps the light of historical destiny. 'Motley' suggests clowning, and Blok's own self-imaging as Pierrot. 17 The lines which follow suggest a recurrent theme of Hill's poetry: the transformation of life into art: 'the malachite bronze / nymphs and sea gods, the pear tree's / motionless wooden leaves' (V.2). The ending of section II heralds Blok more obliquely with an acknowledgement of
priority granted to 'these / charred spirits' who 'outshine us'. These are perhaps certain of the poets and artists of Blok's time who, like the painter Mikhail Vrubel and Blok himself, seem to have foreshadowed the demonic and near-apocalyptic events of the twentieth century. The light with which they 'outshine us' is again the light of historical destiny, by which their 'vitreous eyes' perceive 'apocalypse' ahead. These 'vitreous eyes' are associated through imagery with the 'blood-tinted opaline' of section III, suggesting a possible distortion of vision, as well as a prescience.

The sections spoken in Hill's voice (I, II and V) acknowledge the distance between the English poet writing at the end of the 1980s, and the Russian poet writing around the turn of the century; they convey the strangeness of a life recorded in a biography, in words and photos, and the otherness of Blok's prophetic, apocalyptic vision:

Distance is on edge.
The level tide
stands rimmed with mercury.
Again the estranged spirit

is possessed of light.
The common things
glitter uncommonly.
City besieged by the sun

amid sibylline
galas, a dust
pluming the chariots
of tyrants and invalids,

peppered with mica,
granite-faced seer
scathed by invisible
planets as men dream of war

like a fresh sea-wind
like the lilac
at your petrified heart
as something anciently known... (I)
'Distance is on edge' because of the edginess of Hill's relationship to poetic forbears (as expressed in the 'unquiet sojourn' of 'Quaint Mazes'), but also because, if time is represented metaphorically by space, so that the 70 years between 1920 (Blok's death) and 1990 is figured as a distance in a single dimension, then turning that distance on its edge or side figures the mysterious closeness (in the face of distance), created by sympathetic identification and cyclical repetition. The line speaks of a likeness and strange unlikeness of poet and other. Distance also appears in Blok's own poetry as a metaphor for the 'edge' of the transcendent. In the final section of The Twelve the Red Guards are twice described as marching 'into the distance' ('vdal' in the Russian), and the poem culminates in a vision of Christ as the figure ahead which they follow. Pyman notes that:

    Basically, Blok's nostalgia for the future was a rejection of inertia and a reaching out towards a higher being, not unlike Nietzsche's longing for 'the distant'.

The 'sibylline galas' of this section suggest the parades and demonstrations of the revolutionary period in Russia, which could be seen as prophetic of much in the twentieth century. There are also echoes of Blok's poem 'Retribution' in this section. The galas suggest the description of a parade in St Petersburg at the end of the Russo-Japanese War in Chapter One, while 'as men dream of war' may echo the same passage, in which it is 'Visions of war' that 'persistently / Haunt each of them [the returned soldiers] by night and by day'. 'Granite-faced seer' and 'your petrified heart' may be illuminated by an observation made by Chukovsky and quoted by Pyman:
I have often heard and read that Blok's face was immobile. To many it seemed petrified, like a mask but [...] it was perpetually in strong, though scarcely-detectable motion. (Pyman, II 278)

The lilac ('at your petrified heart') alludes to Blok's phrase, the 'lilac worlds of revolution' (Blok used colours and scents to define historical periods).

Section II of 'Scenes with Harlequins' reflects on the material processes by which the images of Blok and his contemporaries are brought to us:

The day blinks; and birds
gust from the square.
Ferrous sulphate
vapours in the dens

of dead photographers.
With white seraphic
hair against the sun
who are these strangers--

or who are these
charred spirits glaring
their vitreous eyes
towards apocalypse?

They are not of our flesh
to do them justice.
Still they outshine us
among the prophets.

Many of the photographs in Pyman's biography give the appearance of glassy eyes; a notable example is one of Blok in 1907 in which the poet's eyes seem to be staring into some visionary prospect. His curly hair, though not white, appears so around the edges, where it is tinged with light. The photograph of Volokhova on the next page has comparable features (Pyman, I 272, 273). In his diary of 1907 Blok identified as a double an old man whom he saw in St Petersburg, his eyes glassy with
drink (Pyman, I 280), an ironical allusion, perhaps, to his own periods of visionary intoxication. He comments on the fascination of Volokhova's eyes, but it is Blok's own eyes which are repeatedly noted as striking by many who knew him, including Anna Akhmatova in the following lines:

He has the kind of eyes
That everyone ought to remember
But that for me, a cautious woman,
It were better not to look into.
(quoted, Pyman, II 193)

'Charred spirits glaring [...] towards apocalypse' suggests Blok's welcoming of revolutionary transformations in Russian society, as well as the demonic figures evoked by Blok and other artists of his time. In the literary circle to which Blok belonged in 1905 the term 'the Devil's doll' was in common currency to describe a figure:

related to but the obverse of Lermontov's lofty Demon, a Promethean figure of barren power and lonely pride, redeemed by the eternal anguish of one who has known and lost God. Having lost this anguish, the Devil's Doll has lost reality itself, and the only way to regain it is through ecstasy, revolution, miracle. (Pyman, I 193)

Blok and Ivanov saw the false mystics of their time (amongst whom they sometimes numbered themselves) as human representations of this spiritual figure. These became the puppets of Blok's play The Puppet Booth, 'clowns stuffed with sawdust and bleeding cranberry juice' (Pyman, I 193). Hill, who in The Mystery had ironized the representation of history in terms of 'wounds of air and ink / painlessly spouting' (1.3), and figured blood as a 'wine-puddle' (1.1) and 'the blood of beetroots' (2.9), picked up on these mocking doubles for the title of his poem, 'Scenes with Harlequins'. The theatrical metaphor for the 'staging'
of history which he had used in *The Mystery* is here continued, making appearances throughout the poem: 'sorrow and masquerade' (III.1), 'inspired débâcle / many times rehearsed' (III.4), 'Motley of shadow' (V.1), 'masks of foil' (VI.3) and 'cycles / of declamation' (VII.1). The metaphor serves a dual purpose, evoking the self-conscious manner in which Blok, and other Russian artists of his time, saw themselves as playing a part on the stage of historical destiny, and, reflexively, presenting Hill's poem as a 'staging' or rehearsal of aspects of Blok's life. The metaphor's double significance emphasizes the discursive construction of history. Hill's poem seeks to evoke in words certain aspects of a life and an era, with a full awareness of the vicissitudes of such a project.

Duality is central to the nexus of associations which Hill evokes in section II, and central to Hill's own affinity with aspects of Blok's life and work. Just as Hill's own poetry calls up images of mystical transcendence only to subvert them, so Blok mocked and ironized some of his own mystical impulses in *The Puppet Booth*. The revolutionary fervour in which Blok at times indulged was shadowed, on his own admission, by the destructive power of the 'lilac worlds of revolution'. Ivanov writes of a doubling which is important in Blok's poetry, that of Christ and Demon, in terms which may have suggested Hill's 'charred spirits' and 'granite-faced seer / scathed by invisible / planets':

> Just imagine if, in a purely human way, we should feel with all our being for all suffering, ... if we were to draw all sorrows into ourselves as a sponge absorbs water, imagine how our face would be altered by the sufferings of the world, it would be as though it reflected the bloody flames of hell; seared by these flames, would it not become the face of the Demon?

> We have seen the face of Vrubel's Christ in the grave. The face of the God-man who has been through hell, is it not
somehow akin to the hell-seared face of the demon? (Pyman, I 193)

Pyman comments that:

This whole line of thought not only runs right through Blok's poetry but is evident in the way his contemporaries later saw him as the incarnation of this poetry. 'A burnt face', a 'face that seemed to have been seared by the fires of hell', 'scorched'; such epithets we meet with again and again in descriptions of Blok in his maturity. (Pyman, I 193n.)

Blok was accused by Sergey Bulgakov of confusing Christ with anti-Christ in *The Twelve* (Pyman, II 301-02). Hill's work has frequently reflected on the doubling of the redemptive and the fallen: this is the double meaning of 'Our God scatters corruption' ('Annunciations', KL). The dangerous and ambivalent consequences of contemplating the suffering of others, to which Ivanov seems to point, were represented by Hill in similar terms (witnessing hell) in 'Ovid in the Third Reich' (KL): 'I have learned one thing: not to look down / So much upon the damned'.

So in sections I and II of 'Scenes with Harlequins' Hill registers again that paradoxical closeness and distance from a 'difficult friend', a 'sealed' life, in the words of Hill's 'Tristia: 1891-1938: A Valediction to Osip Mandelshtam' (KL). Since Mandelstam was one of the huge number of victims of the system inaugurated by the revolution that Blok welcomed, it is perhaps surprising that 'Scenes with Harlequins' does not engage more directly with the question posed by Tomlinson of Blok's complicity with violence. It might be argued that 'They are not of our flesh / to do them justice' concedes rather too much to a sense of historical difference. Blok and his contemporaries are no longer flesh, merely words and photographs in a biography, yet the awareness of
temporal distance, however salutary, should surely not be a total barrier to understanding and judgment. Section V, the third and last of the sections in which Hill's voice speaks, starts with an affirmation of a common human experience, one shared even with those who are 'not of our flesh'. This affirmation, however, takes the form of a dry, mannered ironic observation of a paradox in our relation to the past:

Even now one is amazed
by transience: how it
outlasts us all. (V.1)

Transience lasts, if nothing else does; a human experience of painful historical specificity which can hardly be historically specific. A poet for whom the ironies of time were a principal subject, Thomas Hardy, alludes to this paradox; in his address on receiving the freedom of Dorchester he alluded to 'a German author' who had said that 'Nothing is permanent but change'. There is an earlier source in Heraclitus. Hill's version is given a somewhat different emphasis by 'Even now', which may acknowledge Hill's previous meditations on the subject of transience (for example in 'An Apology for the Revival of Christian Architecture in England'). 'Scenes with Harlequins' is a poem about the ironies of time, and it ends with another such irony, of a more personal nature:

the unspeakable dull woe
of which I may have had
foreknowledge -- I forget --
in 'Retribution' (VII.3)

A poet forgets whether he once anticipated his present despair, in a poem which was about the consequences of his personal past and the national past ('Retribution' concerns both the history of Russia in the
nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and Blok's family history). This is an ironic juxtaposition of the poet as seer and the poet as vulnerable human.

Section III of 'Scenes with Harlequins', the first of those which adopt the voice of Blok himself, starts with him addressing his personification of the Eternal Feminine, one of the most persistent presences in his poetry (though in constantly mutating form):

Beautiful Lady,
in reverence
with sorrow and masquerade
how else should we have lived? (III.1)

The third stanza of this section seems to contain an interjection by Hill's voice, in response to Blok's assertion 'I am not myself': 'Lordly / and faithful servant of Life -- / what can one say?'. This address effectively characterizes Blok's combination of arrogance and humility; his 'lordly' demeanour and polemic assertiveness, combined with an intransigent dedication to his work and to the truth as he saw it. The fourth stanza of this section continues this evocation of the dualistic qualities of Blok's life, the joyous celebration and the desolation and, uniting them, the Nietzschean tragic gaiety:

By humour of lament,
spontaneous word of stone,
inspired débâcle
many times rehearsed, (III.4)

Here the second line alludes to the familiar paradox of an art which makes permanent the transient, while the 'inspired débâcle' may be the revolution, a reading which is supported by the next two stanzas:
look to abide
tyrannous egality
and freedom led forth
blinded by prophecies.

Now it is gleeting Venus
who so decrees and now
it is parched Mars,
Beautiful Lady. (III.5-III.6)

The 'Beautiful Lady' who is a muse and a transcendent ideal of the loved woman in Blok's early Verses about the Most Beautiful Lady, becomes, in the revolutionary poem The Twelve, Katka, the prostitute who is the special girl of one of the Red Guards, but leaves him for a renegade comrade, and is shot by the jealous Petya. Thus Mars succeeds Venus as the tutelary spirit of Blok's poetry. In Hill's poem the quasi-allegorical figure of freedom, blinded by prophecies, implies some criticism of Blok's own role as prophet of a revolution which produced 'tyrannous egality'.

Section IV alludes primarily to The Twelve, in which a group of Red Guards trudging through the snows of St Petersburg are finally apotheosized, at least in implication, by the appearance of Christ.

So they march on with sovereign tread. Behind is the hungry dog. Ahead -- with the bloodstained flag and invisible beyond the snowstorm and invulnerable to any bullet, with tender step above the storm, in a pearly scattering of snow, in a white crown of roses -- ahead is Jesus Christ.

The risen Christ! Once more faith is upon us,
a jubilant brief keening
without respite:

obedience, bitter joy,
the elements, clouds,
winds, louvres where the bell
makes its wild mouths:
Holy Rus -- into the rain's
horizons, peacock-dyed
tail-feathers of storm,
so it goes on. (IV)

In The Twelve, one of the guards urges: 'Comrade, keep a hold on that rifle: don't be afraid. Let's put a bullet into Holy Russia, into gnarled old peasant Russia with her wooden houses and her great fat arse'. Pyman comments on Blok's earlier fondness for "the old name, Rus" as, in 1906, he came to identify increasingly with his country. The Red Guards themselves disappear into the storm at the end of The Twelve (though a storm of snow rather than rain). In a journal entry of 1907 Blok wrote of Nekrasov's song 'Korobeyniki', which he used in his play The Song of Fate as a kind of theme song of Russia:

Korobeyniki is sung with a kind of secret sadness .... The voice loses itself tearfully in the rainy distances. In that voice are the great spaces of Russia. (Pyman, I 285)

After the interposition of section V, in which the reflection on transience perhaps arises out of the fading distances of IV, section VI alludes to Blok's life in the literary circles of St Petersburg before and during the revolution:

Of Rumor, of Clamor,
I shall be silent;
I will not deal
in the vatic exchanges

between committees,
mysticism by the book.
History is aglow
with bookish fires. (VI.1 – VI.2)

Blok was much involved with both committees and 'bookish' disputes between the fiery advocates of rival literary movements, such as
symbolism, mystic anarchism and Acmeism. He came to wish to distance himself from both. Pyman describes Blok's view in 1910 as follows:

How false the sensational aspects of the 'mystic anarchism' of that period (1906-08) had been, and how insignificant now seemed the academic disputes which so absorbed Apollon and its 'Academy', how needlessly rowdy the assertive advent of such new trends as Futurism and Ego-Futurism. (Pyman, II 86)

During 1917 Blok became involved in large numbers of revolutionary organizations and committees, and in 1919 he commented as follows: 'What remains? To sit on committees again, which is something I should so much like to avoid' (Pyman, II 343). The 'bookish fires' of VI.2 suggest, not only literary enthusiasm but, more ominously, the burning of books, or its equivalent, the banning of books; in autumn 1916 Blok was engaged in 'a prolonged struggle to rescue Andrey Bely's Petersburg, which it had been decided to pulp as part of the war effort', since the censor objected to the title, St Petersburg having been renamed Petrograd (Pyman, II 214). The phrase may also echo a journal entry of 1905 in which Blok, at his summer home, writes of his need for 'silence and simplicity' and his reaction against 'the shouting and sobbing and leaping flames' of the books he was asked to review (Pyman, I 201).

Section VI continues with enigmatic images for the literary figures of Blok's time:

Begone you grave jewellers and you spartan hoplites in masks of foil. (VI.3)

'Grave jewellers' perhaps alludes to the jewel imagery of the symbolists and 'spartan hoplites' may suggest warring ascetics. The poem then mocks gently those reputable critics who might interpret, not only Blok's
works, but even the silence which followed the loss of his auditory sense of history:

Orthodox arcane

interpreters of repute,
this is understood.
Why should I hear
further what you propose?

Exegetes may come
to speak to the silence
that has arisen. It is
not unheard of. (VI.3 - VI.5)

Hill himself is included here, since his poem, engaging in a form of dialogue with Blok, is speaking 'to the silence'. This characteristic note of reflexive irony also echoes Hill's earlier irony at those who are loquacious about silence. Silence is, indeed, not 'unheard of' (see p. 207).

So, despite the gap in years between Collected Poems and 'Scenes with Harlequins' the latter poem shows, overall, more evidence of continuity than of a new departure. As so often before, Hill is engaged in speaking 'to the silence' of the dead.

8.5 'CARNIVAL'

Hill's 1990 Remembrance Day poem, 'Carnival', is a satire on postwar Britain that ironically imagines it as a supposed New Jerusalem. The poem, which ends with a series of rhetorical questions, makes the same point, and asks the same question, as the following section of Hill's interview with Hermione Lee:

I think that if the previous generations, as we're sometimes told they did in memorial services, if they died that we might live, then from time to time one thinks we're not worth their
sacrifice [...] When one considers some of the social evils, the cruelty, the injustice, the sheer thoughtless mayhem of our time [...] one thinks, well, was it for this that they died? (CF)

These comments leave it unclear how far Hill subscribes to the sacramental view of the war deaths. He is clearly attacking the failure to value and live up to such sacrifice. But is he attacking or defending the rituals of commemoration? Does he believe, and ask us to believe, in what we are 'ritualistically told'? It would appear that he does, but the tone in which he refers to the memorial services leaves it unclear.

This uncertainty is apparent in the poem:

The brazed city
reorders its own
destruction, admits
the strutting lords
to the temple,
vandals of sprayed blood
and oblivion,
to make their mark.

The spouting head
spiked as prophetic
is ancient news.
Once more the keeper
of the dung-gate
tells his own story;
so too the harlot
of many tears.

Speak now regardless
judges of the hour:
what verdict, what people?
Hem of whose garment?

Whose Jerusalem --
at usance for its bones'
redemption and last
salvo of poppies?
If the 'strutting lords' are dignitaries taking part in Remembrance Day services, then the poem attacks these rituals, and the second stanza implies the complicity of such people with the establishment which initiates and controls wars as well as arranging memorials. According to this view, the redemptive conception of war is a fallacy, an ideological mask for economic and social causes, or for the self-interest and folly of political leaders. An alternative reading would take the 'vandals of sprayed blood' as an allusion to the Enniskillen bombing of Remembrance Day 1987, but such an interpretation would seem to narrow the scope of the poem, which goes on to satirize such features of contemporary life as the media guru or politician ('The spouting head'), the exploitation of personal grief ('his own story', 'the harlot of many tears') and the priority given to commercial considerations ('at usance'). The allusions to Jerusalem again imply an ambiguous view of the utopianism which the idea of a new Jerusalem evokes. Eric Griffiths suggests in his accompanying article that England emerged from the Second World War 'full of itself and its triumphs, but still on rations, a land where some supposed Blake's Jerusalem was coming true through education acts and the promise of a welfare state'. Was it foolish idealism to suppose such a thing, or is it a betrayal of sacrifice not to achieve it? Griffiths's commentary does the poem few favours, making its indignation sound fogyish: 'Hill writes in a vein of let-down, searched by the question of what people died for, if what they died for was this kingdom in its current state, an oasis of "flexible friends" and chummy politicians, makeshift ideal homes owner-occupied on endless credit'. Hill's anger is directed at social evils, not at credit cards and mortgages.
Stylistically the poem makes a characteristic satirical use of puns, implicating newspaper spikes with heads on spikes and the spouting of publicity or of empty clichés with the spouting of blood. The first line, I would suggest, is the least successful. A brazed joint is one soldered with an alloy of brass and zinc, so the line implies that the 'city' of postwar Britain, far from being bound by gold, is cobbled together with joins that are not even pure brass. It is, nevertheless, a culture brazen in its self-congratulation; 'brazed city' suggests an uneasy combination of brazen city and razed city. The line is clever, but does not read well. However, it is the 'spouting head' that raises the most difficult question. For 'they died that we might live' is just the sort of phrase that is spouted by spouting heads of state. Can such a belief be salvaged from its exploitation for political expediency? Are the millions of war deaths of our century somehow transfigured into redemptive sacrifice in spite of, and beyond, the corrupt forces which both caused them and, subsequently, appropriate them? The reflexive issue again arises, as an intensification of these dilemmas. Does the poem represent Hill himself as a 'spouting head / spiked as prophetic'? That is, can Hill use much-used ideas without being used by them? These are questions which Hill's poem leaves unanswered, and perhaps it is honourable to do so. Hill's latest poem, then, would suggest that, whatever the present direction of his work, his allegiance to reflexive self-questioning continues undiminished.
Notes to Chapter 8


2. In section I of the poem each four-line stanza has lines of 5, 4, 6 and 7 syllables, in that order. In sections III to VI inclusive each stanza has the same combination of lines, but the order of lines within the stanza varies. In sections II and VII every line has 4, 5, 6 or 7 syllables, but patterns within stanzas are variable: e.g. II.1: 5, 4, 4, 5; VII.2: 6, 6, 6, 5.

3. When Hill's 'Funeral Music' was published in Stand, 8.3 (1966-67), 4-6, the same number of the magazine included a translation of Blok's 'The Scythians' by Alex Miller (pp. 20-22), and 'An Introduction to "The Scythians"' by Avril Pyman (pp. 23-33), to whose biography of Blok Hill refers in 'Scenes with Harlequins'. It is possible that this served to arouse, or heighten, Hill's interest in Blok. If so, the long time lapse between 1967 and 1990 would be an instance of the slow maturing process that his interests and ideas characteristically seem to undergo.


5. Aleksandr Blok, Snezhnaya Maska (The Snow Mask) (St Petersburg: Ory, 1907). The dedication reads: 'To the tall woman in black with the winged eyes, enamoured of the lights and darkness of my snowy city'. The words which form the first epigraph to 'Scenes with Harlequins' were written by Volokhova in Blok's own copy of Snezhnaya Maska in acknowledgement of the dedication (Pyman, I p. 275).

6. See Section 1.2.


8. Kornei Chukovsky, 'Excerpts from A. A. Blok: The Man', in Blok: An Anthology of Essays and Memoirs, ed. and trans. by Lucy Vogel (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1982), pp. 64-89 (pp. 75-77). The slight difference in wording of the sentences in the epigraph to 'Scenes with Harlequins' is because Hill has used Pyman's translation of the words (Pyman, II p. 265).


13. 'Retribution', p. 266.

14. The phrase 'All things repeat' comes from Blok's poem of 1912, 'Night, the street, a lamp, the chemist's' (translation, Pyman, II p. 174).

15. The family of Blok's mother were proud of their connection with Yakushkin, one of the Decembrists, a group of young officers who had risen against Nicholas I on his accession in 1825. See Pyman, I, p. 150 and Pyman, The Twelve, p. 9.

16. 'Retribution', p. 268.

17. In Blok's play The Puppet Booth the relationship between Pierrot, Columbine and Harlequin suggets that of Blok, his wife Lyubov' Dmitriyevna and their friend Andrey Bely. See Pyman, I pp. 233-35.


20. Blok wrote of the Russian people during the 1905 Revolution: 'they demanded a miracle before the time was ripe and were reduced to ashes by the lilac worlds of revolution' (Pyman, I p. 193).


22. Stikh O Prekrasnoy Dame (Verses About the Most Beautiful Lady) (Moscow: Grif, 1905); Dvenadtsat' (The Twelve), 2nd and 3rd edns (Petersburg: Alkonost, 1918).


25. Geoffrey Hill, 'Carnival', with epigraph: 'The wounded who could not be brought in had crawled into shell holes, wrapped their waterproof sheets around them, taken out their Bibles and died like that.' The poem was published, together with a short accompanying article by Eric Griffiths, entitled 'Sentinel of the Sacrifice', in The Sunday Correspondent, 11 November 1990, p. 44.
26. The implicit contrast between the 'brazed' city and a golden, utopian city recalls one of the epigraphs to the *Collected Poems*: "How is the gold become dim! how is the most fine gold changed! the stones of the sanctuary are poured out in the top of every street" LAMENTATIONS 4:1' (CP, p. 11).
Hill's work is characterized by a profound ambivalence about the ideal, or the transcendent. His poetry is, in the terms of Friedrich Schlegel which were quoted in section 2.2, one 'whose essence lies in the relation between ideal and real'. In each of the areas of human experience with which it engages -- religious faith, sexual love, English history -- Hill's poetry laments a separation from the ideal, while maintaining a powerful scepticism about the very possibility of the ideal being genuine, of the transcendent becoming the immanent. On the one hand this scepticism serves to protect the ideal and transcendent from the contamination of travesty and appropriation. On the other hand, in reflexively resisting even its own impulse to appropriate, the poetry often seems close to subverting altogether that belief in the ideal to which Hill himself seems profoundly attached.

Critical debate on this issue has tended to focus on Hill's treatment of English history. This is perhaps because both religious belief and sexual relations have been regarded as private concerns, whereas in treating the social and political Hill is entering the domain of public debate. A widespread reservation about Hill's poetry was summed up by David Norbrook when he wrote that 'to the extent that the iconoclast is defined by the images he tries to break, Hill's poetry remains a symptom of the problem it so intensely tries to diagnose'. However, this reservation only echoes Hill's reflexive sense of his own situation: 'my thesis is as much symptomatic as diagnostic' (PMA, 15). Questions revolving around impersonality and the subject bear closely on
this issue. There is general agreement that nostalgia has a part in 'An Apology For The Revival of English Architecture in England'. The question of how far that poem analyses nostalgia, and how far it expresses nostalgia depends to a considerable extent on one's model of the relationship between the poet and the poem. If one conceives of a poem primarily as self-expression then the presence of impulses of nostalgia in a poem is a sign that the poet is in the grip of such impulses. If, on the other hand, one regards a poem as an exploration of social and historical forces as they bear upon language, then the poet may be regarded as registering nostalgia more than as expressing it. The latter view of poetry has been consistently maintained by Hill although, as I have argued, his concern with the moral problems of writing made it necessary for him to introduce forms of the self into his poetry.

If the political aspects of Hill's poetry arouse the most vigorous debate, it is the question of religious faith which is most central to his work so far. The tension between the impulse of faith and the strength of scepticism makes Hill's poetry a poetry of loss. Attempts to sum up the quality of his work often quote, quite rightly, his comment to John Haffenden:

Father Christopher Devlin has a very fine phrase to define the themes of Hopkins's sermons -- 'the lost kingdom of innocence and original justice', [...] and without in any way aligning myself hubristically with Hopkins, I would want to avail myself of Devlin's phrase, because 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. (VP, 88)

However, in order to take the full force of the word 'lost', one should also quote the following lines from 'The Songbook of Sebastian Arrurruz: Coplas':
'One cannot lose what one has not possessed'.
So much for that abrasive gem.
I can lose what I want. I want you.

Hill's work is haunted, not only by a sense of what is lost, but a sense that it was never possessed, perhaps could never have been possessed. This is as true of his historical and religious poetry as it is of his love poetry. Hill's poetry is, in particular, aware that innocence and justice, if they can be found anywhere, can at any rate not be found within language, which is always tied to the contingencies and debasement of its use in society, always unstable and multiple. The view that all human experience takes place in and through language, so that there is effectively nothing outside language is not, I think, one that Hill accepts. Nevertheless, I feel that he is very aware of this view, and very aware of the pervasive role of language as mediator of understanding and transmitter of power, and that this contributes to the sense of loss in his poetry. Since a poet's commitment is to language, the awareness that language excludes the 'lost kingdom' tends to give Hill a tragic sense of his own vocation. He is rescued from a despairing sense of that vocation by the possibility of technical atonement; of a completion, even a perfection, of a poem. Such completion does not free the poem from the complicity of language, nor enable it to attain the lost kingdom, but it does allow the poem to stand as an image of that kingdom, and of that loss. The separation of language from the ideal is figured in Hill's poetry by the Fall. However, since his is a poetry, not of religious faith but of religious doubt, it is in the paradoxical position of employing a central tenet of Christian faith to represent
estangment from that faith. It is indeed a poetry that knows what it is to lose what one has not possessed.

A number of external factors suggest that the 1990s may represent a new phase of Hill's work. His decision to publish the Collected Poems in 1985 gave a certain shape and finality to his poetry up to that point, emphasized by the concluding line of the volume: "In memory of those things these words were born" (TM, 10.11; CP, 196). Commenting on the publication of this volume, Hill said to David Sexton that 'the time seemed right for a number of reasons. Everything from now on is likely to be rather different'. Between 1985 and the end of the decade Hill published no new poetry, and considerable changes took place in his personal circumstances, including his move from Emmanuel College Cambridge to Boston University. Given Hill's strong sense of the pressure exerted by literary predecessors, the symbolic significance of the transatlantic move in twentieth-century poetry (Eliot and Pound in one direction; Auden in the other) is a concern that readers of Hill's work might expect to find registered.

It is characteristic of Hill's oblique or resistant response to the pressure of circumstances that his recent publications have suggested English roots rather than American discoveries. Since 1989 his work has appeared in the Times Literary Supplement, in English, and in The Sunday Correspondent (all British publications). His reviews have been of the most canonical of texts: the second edition of the Oxford English Dictionary and editions of Tyndale's New Testament and The Revised English Bible. It is true that these pieces appeared relatively soon after his move; it may be that the pattern will change. While 'Scenes with Harlequins' (February 1990) drew on a continuing interest in
Russian poetry, 'Carnival' (November 1990), a Remembrance Day poem, addressed itself to a specifically British context.

In terms of subject, style and technique, these two poems do not notably bear out Hill's remark to Sexton. 'Scenes with Harlequins' has, as I have argued, considerable continuities with The Mystery. 'Carnival' is characterized by a concern with the legacy of the First World War, a satirical edge and an ironical use of punning. All these features can be traced back in Hill's œuvre at least as far as 'Of Commerce and Society' (1956-58, FTU). It is too soon to say that Hill's remark was misleading, but I would suggest that the nature and degree of difference of the new phase of his work, if such it is, has yet to become apparent. Hill has commented on the slow 'process of accretion' by which he writes, so it is to be expected that the lead time for any changes in his work would be long one.

Hill's 1986 Clark Lectures may be an indication of the direction that his interests have been taking. They were as allusive, scrupulous, dense and resistant to summary as earlier lectures and articles such as 'Poetry as "Menace"' and "Atonement"' or 'Our Word is Our Bond'. However, two strands which emerged from the sequence of five lectures were a conception of the role of the poet as an oppositional and beleaguered one and a concern with the relationship of poetry to business, finance and economic necessity. The first of these strands was implied by the title of the series, 'The Enemy's Country', and was developed by Hill in the course of the lectures with references to the troubled careers of such figures as Ezra Pound and John Dryden. The second strand was explored in many ways, including a sustained wordplay on the Latin terms otium (leisure) and negotium (business), a
discussion of poets' need for time and money, and allusions to the involvement of poets in political and business activities. These strands are both of considerable relevance to political and social changes in Britain during the years of the Thatcher government and to the question of the response of intellectuals and poets to those changes. Achievement in the arts, as in other areas, has been increasingly defined, in the public sphere, in financial terms, while financial resources have been constrained. The status of academics, intellectuals and artists has been subject to attack and derogation.

Returning to 'Scenes with Harlequins' and 'Carnival' with such themes in mind, one may note that both poems allude to contemporary social or political issues. I have suggested that 'Scenes with Harlequins' may bear obliquely on recent political change in Eastern Europe. 'Carnival' directs much of its satire at the role of the media and the nature of public debate (and may allude to terrorism). Such allusions are not wholly new in Hill's poetry: 'An Apology: 11 Idylls of the King' glances at a landscape of new housing estates and missile bases. Furthermore, his treatment of nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century history in such works as 'An Apology', 'Of Commerce and Society' and The Mystery has implicitly reflected on late twentieth-century British culture and its relations with the past. I would, however, hazard a guess that the direction of Hill's poetry may be towards a greater engagement with matters of contemporary political debate. In such a development the matters of impersonality and reflexivity would remain crucial. The doctrine of impersonality provoked a crisis in Hill's earlier work when he confronted the need to locate the subjectivity of the poet in writing of the suffering of others. A comparable dilemma emerges in addressing
contemporary political issues: the need to define a standpoint while resisting the compromising drag of the clichés that dominate public debate. In 'The Enemy's Country' Hill referred to the poet's desire for a 'strategic position' and to the manner in which 'quotidian language is charged with an enormous power of the contingent and circumstantial'. Reflexivity is Hill's tool for both tapping and resisting that power. In the light of the development of his work to date, the concept of impersonality may be regarded as his way of putting up a resistance to the prefabricated versions of identity which are thrust upon the poet, as on us all. Hill's poetry has sought to resist such versions, first through the elision of the subject and then through strategies of active construction and negotiation. At the same time it has reflexively acknowledged its own inevitable complicity with the oppressive or exploitative use of language while struggling against that complicity. In contemporary political debate language is relentlessly appropriated for the exercise of power and cliché is created perhaps faster than ever before. If Hill does choose to engage further with that debate he will, no doubt, do so in oblique and unforeseen ways, but whatever these may be, his reflexive strategies for the defence and purification of poetic language will confront a considerable challenge.
Notes to Conclusion


2. Hill himself has referred to this paradox in applying to his poetry the phrase: 'a heretic's dream of salvation expressed in the images of the orthodoxy from which he is excommunicate' (VP, p. 98).


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Note on bibliography
This bibliography is divided into three main sections: I Works by Geoffrey Hill; II Works about Geoffrey Hill; III Other works. There is a full 'Bibliography of Works by and about Geoffrey Hill', by Philip Horne, in Robinson, pp. 237-51. This includes material published up to the middle of 1984. Sections I and II of the following bibliography do not repeat all of the contents of Horne's bibliography, but include material that falls into one of the following three categories: principal works; works cited in this thesis, or of particular relevance to its argument; works not included in Horne's bibliography. Entries falling into the third category are marked with an asterisk, so that taken together these entries represent an update of Horne's bibliography. In the case of poems by Hill which are cited in the text of the thesis, details of first publication (and first broadcast if earlier) are given.

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