Chapter One

Hunter of Forms - Hill and Language

This chapter will explore some ways in which Hill's work forces us to re-examine our concept of language. Language is the material through which history, identity, and roots are most commonly transmitted. Through readings of Hill's poetry and criticism I shall show how verbal objects can constitute history and identity; how they can search out and discover personal, cultural and spiritual roots.

This analysis will operate within the relationship between two apparently antagonistic ways of looking at language, and the ways in which both models are invoked and worked through in Hill's poetry and criticism. The first theory of language centres on the word 'contexture': a Hobbesian term that Hill has brought back into currency. Hobbes's dark view of human nature, and the problems of using language precisely, appeal to Hill, as we can see from the readings of Hobbes in *The Enemy's Country*. For Hobbes and Hill 'contexture' signifies the almost infinitely complex relationships that exist between words. Meaning is constituted through these relationships. We make ourselves understood by choosing words that fit most closely what we want to say, avoiding those that are connected by contexture to irrelevant material, and searching for those that bring helpful connotations. However, the very complexity of the network of contexture means that any use of language will be imprecise to some degree; everything we express in language will, to some extent, be accompanied by associations we do not intend.

The second theory of language I wish to focus on - the belief that words are 'living powers' - finds its way into Hill's work mainly through S. T. Coleridge. Hill's admiration for Coleridge tends to focus on his philosophical work, and especially on his ability to write a short phrase that beautifully encapsulates some element of critical thought. Hill frequently seems to have found a lucid phrase in Coleridge's prose that is enlightening in some (perhaps entirely different) critical context. In this way Hill's use of Coleridge demonstrates the concept of words as living powers. By transplanting a phrase Hill asserts that it is a living thing capable of transcending its problematic entanglement with contexture: it is an embodiment of consciousness, a monad.

In presenting these two ways of looking at language I want to stress their difference. If words are hopelessly snarled up in contexture, how can they transcend it and appear somehow alive, with an unmistakable essence? This chapter will show how Hill uses the opposition, and how he tries to achieve a synthesis of the conflicting terms.

Quoting Blake, Hill has described poetry as 'the struggle with incoherent roots and endings'. The phrase resurfaces in *Mercian Hymns* 'I was invested in mother-earth, the crypt of roots and endings' (CP, 108). One visits a crypt to re-establish continuity with one's roots, but it is a place which reconfirms the radical disjunction of the dead from the

living. Hill's investment in these roots may turn up gold (the solidus) through historical research; he might be imagining a kind of investiture into a priestly role, mediating between the past and the present. But to be invested in a tomb is to be buried. However we read these lines we cannot ignore the reference they make to language. Words are made up of 'roots and endings'. Etymological study allows us to discover the semantic history of words by tracing their roots. The morphology of words (their 'endings') is crucial to understanding the syntax of a piece of language.

Seamus Heaney has written about this anxious interest in 'roots and endings'. He believes that Larkin, Hughes and Hill have laboured to create an 'England of the Mind' in order to compensate for a sense of alienation from their country. This England is created partly through an intense response to the parts of the country with which they are intimate and partly through meditations on their relationship to the English language:

> I believe they are afflicted with a sense of history that was once the peculiar affliction of the poets of other nations who were not themselves natives of England but who spoke the English language. (Heaney, 1980, 150)

Heaney's comment illuminates how a poet might feel uprooted in modern Britain. The poet feels that s/he is using a language without owning, or belonging to, its history. Hill's use of Blake shows that he feels this impoverishment and alienation. He wants to re-root himself in a past to which he feels connected while also feeling excluded. In the terms of Simone Weil's influential book *The Need for Roots*, 'rootedness' is one of the most important needs of the human soul. We can see in Hill's use of Blake that he, along with Weil, believes that poetry should rediscover and nourish people's roots. Two of the most important things in which we have roots are our language and the land we inhabit. Heaney is interested in the conjunction of these elements in the strong sense of place that certain modern poets have developed. Heaney sees a 'piety' in this awareness of physical geography and linguistic roots.

> It is this feeling, assenting, equable marriage between the geographical country and the country of the mind, whether that country of the mind takes its tone from a shared oral inherited culture, or from a consciously savoured literary culture, or from both, it is this marriage that constitutes the sense of place in its richest possible manifestation. (Heaney, 1980, 132)

Hill's poetry is steeped in this twinned awareness of geographical and literary tradition; we see this in *Mercian Hymns* and many other of his poems. Hill's work is sometimes accused of being reactionary. Heaney shows us that it is curative. Hill is trying to find ways of reconnecting himself, and his readers, with his language and his place.

Merle Brown, writing on Hill, develops this conception of the writings of some modern poets as the attempt to root themselves back into their native culture. Brown diverges from Heaney by seeing the relationship between the poet and his/her culture as

less comfortable than the 'equable marriage' that Heaney talks about. Where Heaney sees a unity, Brown locates a doubleness.

> Perhaps creativity so powerful as to make poems with more than one self-originative center, or self-world could only come out of an internationalism suddenly become also provincial, a deracinated language miraculously rooted anew, a sense of one's predicament as involving alienation but also a return home. (Brown, 1980, 19)

In some ways this seems more in tune with Hill's reworking of Blake than Heaney's comment. Brown keeps more of the menace of the situation in his analysis. The relationship between the poet, the language and the nation is more like a tense *menage à trois* than a stable marriage. Hugh Haughton's essay '"How Fit a Title...": Title and Authority in the Work of Geoffrey Hill' alerts us to the ulterior motives one might have in such a relationship. He reminds us that one of Hill's motivations for such delving is to acquire linguistic power:

> Under its [*Mercian Hymns*'] studied mask of impeccable scholarship, it remains an astonishing portrayal of the poet's quest for poetic authority - and meditation on the disturbing analogies between the language of poetry and the language of power. It is still the best guide to the exemplary cave of Hill's poetry, and the richest clue to the elaborate repertoire of his oppressive kingdom, its 'crypt of roots and endings' (IV), and dreams of '"menace" and "atonement"'. (Robinson, P., 1985, 146)

What redeems Hill's poetry from being simply an exploitative search for power is precisely the doubleness that Brown indicates. Hill's poems seem to be conscious of their own temptation, glamour and menace. Michael Edwards formulates this in his essay 'Hill's Imitations':

> Isn't it also true, in one light, that all 'fine and moving' poems whatever their suspicion, or whatever their orientation towards the future - eventually bid to become the lost kingdom, themselves the objects of nostalgia, Edens of imaginative ease, of verbal fulfilment? Here is another significance of Hill's imitations: they 'return' to those places of hazardous repletion, and disturb them. (Robinson, P., 1985, 166)

Haughton and Edwards encourage us to dismiss the perception of Hill's relationship with his England as a marriage, equable or otherwise. They see a search for power, perhaps a version of the Oedipal drama through which the child acquires maturity. In order to be an individual, this poet has to revisit and challenge the idyllic myths of origin and childhood.

Because Hill's poetry is as complex and interesting as Merle Brown suggests, most critics agree that even the minutest details of his poems are charged with significance. Christopher Ricks's work on Hill is exemplary in its sympathy towards his technical perfectionism. In his essay '*Tenebrae* and At-one-ment' he writes:

> It may be said that to make this much of hyphens is far-fetched and murderously dissecting ('...murderously /To heal me with far-fetched blood':

> 'Three Baroque Meditations: 3. The Dead Bride'). But the general case for attention to minutiae in Hill's poetry is corroborated by his own sense that nothing is beneath notice. 'I would claim the utmost significance for matters of technique' [...].
>
> Hill is a poet preoccupied (some would say obsessed) with such minutiae. (Robinson, P., 1985, 79, 80)

Hill is fortunate to have a critic like Ricks who is prepared to enter into the interrogation of features like hyphens and brackets with such zeal. When he states that 'Hill was right to think that his is a poetic gift which must be profoundly and variously alive to what simple brackets can do' (Ricks, 1984, 292) he is also suggesting the kind of critic one has to be to engage fully with Hill's work.

Of course, this perfectionism and obsession with detail has not filled all critics with equal admiration. Vincent Sherry, in his book *The Uncommon Tongue* often displays reservations about Hill's attention to detail, for instance, 'Hill's intensities are more narrowly verbal than personal' (Sherry, 1987, 6). John Bayley, in his essay 'A Retreat or Seclusion', admires the solid making of Hill's work: 'every word in his poems gives the impression of having been carefully blocked in, as if it were a brick fitted into a solid structure; perhaps taken out again, scraped and examined, sometimes replaced' (Bayley, 1979, 38). But this very solidity can become empty formalism, according to Sherry:

> The sonnets of *Tenebrae* indeed seem to withdraw from the pursuit of that special intensity, the struggle between ascetic form and the physical body of language; they are more conventionally shaped, with octets [sic] and sestets clearly marked, but they seem to relax, to lapse into a more tepid correctness. (Sherry, 1987, 85)

Although there are critical voices that see Hill's poetry as obsessed with language and form to the exclusion of humanity and life, the majority see his work as, conversely, showing us the possibilities of life within language. Poole's essay 'Hill's version of *Brand*' alerts us to the necessarily dramatic nature of Hill's work, both at the level of the individual word - 'there is relish and distaste for the voice to find in such words as "smudge" and "blare"' (Robinson, P., 1985, 91), and more generally:

> His own poetry is necessarily dramatic in so far as it is deeply informed by the sense that all utterance is answerable, and that it is the condition of human speech to be denied the last word. (Robinson, P., 1985, 99)

Poole's version of Hill's poetry as always aware that it is not the last word, and as expecting, or ironically including, voices which subvert, seems diametrically opposed to the monolithic formalism some critics describe. But the work of Poole and Ricks supports, at the closely verbal level, the more general characterisation of Hill's poetry that we saw in Merle Brown's analysis.

Hill himself believes that poetry can make possible a profound relationship with other people, especially those from the past (these are the personal intensities Sherry thinks he fails at). Poetry allows us to engage with history and morality though the living examples of the men and women we engage with. Hill uses Simone Weil's concept of the

multi-dimensional creativity required when writing poetry to characterise this quality in his essay 'The Conscious Mind's Intelligible Structure: A Debate':

> A poet who possesses such near-perfect pitch [Yeats] is able to sound out his own conceptual, discursive intelligence. The simultaneous bearing in mind described by Simone Weil would here relate to Stallworthy's suggestion about pitch. The poet is hearing words in depth and is therefore hearing, or sounding, history and morality in depth. (Hill, 1971-2, 21)

Clearly Hill sees poetry as something which involves creating living relationships with other people through the power of words. A comment of Zbigniew Herbert, quoted in Hamburger's *The Truth of Poetry*, illuminates this area of interaction between words, history and a vital engagement with other people:

> I turn to history not for lessons in hope but to confront my experience with the experience of others and to win for myself something which I should call universal compassion, but also a sense of responsibility, a sense of responsibility for the state of the human conscience. (Hamburger, 1972, 227)

This dramatic doubleness, this sounding of words in depth, is in tune with Gabriel Pearson's comments on the appositional nature of Hill's work. In his essay '*King Log* Revisited' he points out that Hill 'is suspicious of his own medium to the point of paranoia' (Robinson, P., 1985, 40), and he stresses the resistance to monology in Hill's poems - their necessary drama:

> Hill's work is markedly a poetry of apposition, units of meaning which form chains of elements, where each element resists the tyranny of the syntactical energy which constituted it by a disconnective thrust that twists and shakes the chain almost, but not quite, to pieces. (Robinson, P., 1985, 32)

Clearly this plural quality in Hill's poems has been identified by various critics, and given different names. But I think they are all assimilable through mingled distrust of, and commitment to, words, linked with a belief that poetry should not close down 'antiphonal' voices. Eleanor J. McNees, in her book *Eucharistic Poetry*, has placed Hill's distrust of language at the centre of her understanding of his poetry:

> For contemporary poets like Geoffrey Hill, however, language and experience have colluded to produce hypocrisy and historical atrocity, not to praise God. Together they have killed the spirit - the possibility of redemption through incarnation and resurrection. Consequently the only way language can exonerate itself is to expose its own guilt, to turn itself inside out. Unlike Stevens and Williams who seek to restore the equation between word and thing in as spare a language as possible, Hill must indict language for its excesses, its bad faith. The punishment for such bad faith is to deny language real presence and to accept death without hope of transcendence. (McNees, 1992, 27)

Not all critics see Hill's relationship with language in terms as negative as these. Chris Miller focuses his discussion on the importance of the antiphonal voice, a key concept in Hill's criticism:

> In Hill's greatest poems, the antiphonal voices lie behind the ironic treatment, at once exacerbating the violence and questioning the poet's motives. It is these forces that have given us, in his first three volumes, that strange combination of sadism and magniloquence, those exquisitely self-conscious celebrations and rejections of mental and physical violence. And we might wish to say that the empirical guilt of his elaborate correctness is the attempt to compensate for this, to justify magniloquence with its own conscious betrayals. (Miller, 1992, 106)

This is a subtle analysis of the factors we have been examining, and it is important to note the distance between Hill's distrust of language and the theories of post-modernism. Hill's word-scepticism has more in common with that of Bacon and Hobbes, although it retains an admixture of a 'word-mysticism' reminiscent of French symbolism.

However, we need to go further than this to see how Hill makes the transition from the dramatic through the moral to the spiritual. Martin Dodsworth in his essay 'Mercian Hymns: Offa, Charlemagne and Geoffrey Hill' points us in this direction:

> Poetry, then, is not simply a matter of technique; its 'uniting in harmony' transcends aesthetics and enters also, indeed combines with, the realm of morality. (Robinson, P., 1985, 54)

But it is Henry Hart who indicates the goal toward which Hill's poems aspire, while always being aware of the layers of irony pointed out by Edwards, Pearson and Brown:

> While the goal of meditation is to die from the world and, through an intensification of memory and imagination (composition of place), prepare the soul for a colloquy with God, Hill's quests aim to awaken moral perception and to re-create, linguistically, the world as it is. (Robinson, P., 1985, 4)

The context of spiritual exercise is of the highest importance for my thesis. We expect language to incorporate history, identity and personal and cultural roots; the concept of spirituality is rather more elusive. As Hart's comment implies, poetry is not necessarily central to the pure spiritual path towards a 'colloquy with God' that is somehow beyond words. But Hill's poetic vocation leads him to work at poetry as a spiritual exercise, with words and the world as his object rather than a union of the self with God. If we are prepared to see Hill's passionately intense handling of language as this species of spiritual practice, we shall be able to appreciate his attention to minutiae, his vision of poetry as essentially dramatic, and his commitment to morally responsible writing as the components of a program, closely related to Simone Weil's, intended to root himself personally, culturally and spiritually and to assist his readers in rooting themselves.

Hill´s lecture 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"' provides us with an excellent point of entry to his engagement with these antagonistic ways of looking at language in his work. He provides illustration of the concepts I opened with through two descriptions of the completion of a poem; he quotes Yeats's description of perfecting a poem - 'a poem comes right with a click like closing a box' (*LL*, 2) alongside Eliot's 'moment of exhaustion, of appeasement, of absolution, and of something very near annihilation' (*LL*, 2). Christopher Ricks has found this highly contentious:

> Those of us who are not poets and have not experienced such a moment might be able to imagine a poet's instinctive assent to one or other of the statements, but not to both. Hill's search for at-one-ment has led him to two descriptions of 'this act of atonement', each of which has indeed a 'beautiful finality' in its evocation of atonement as a finality, but the two of which are finally irreconcilable, tonally and totally. (Ricks, 1984, 320)

Ricks takes issue with Hill here on a number of levels. In his lecture Hill suggests that it would be disingenuous to pretend that he was not a poet, while speaking, as an academic, about poetry. He claims he will avoid special pleading. Ricks obviously feels he has over-stepped his mark here. He is tacitly accusing Hill of hiding behind his undeniable poetic ability in order to make vague, nonsensical, critical pronouncements. Ricks responds by denying, on grounds of logic, that Hill (or any poet) can assent to both these characterisations of poetic composition. Ricks is applying logic to an area from which he admits himself excluded by not being a poet. How should his logic therefore be able to prescribe how a poet might respond to the statements of Yeats and Eliot? I shall try to avoid this kind of reductiveness and attempt to understand how one might assent to both descriptions, how one might hold that words are 'living powers' whilst also accepting that they are snared in the web of 'contexture'.

Hill wants to assert the importance of the formal in making poetry, as well as the mystical experience that Eliot describes. He wants to bring them together and say that they are in some way the same thing. There is an interesting statement in Hartman's *Free Verse* which I feel illuminates this a little: 'No matter what his specific formal decisions, the poet after Coleridge understands form less as a box than an incarnation' (Hartman, 1980, 89). For Hill, as for Yeats and Eliot, form is not merely a box, but it is also not arbitrary: a poem cannot be formless. The word 'incarnation' denotes an object whose form has a close relationship with its nature. An Eliot poem has a specific formal structure even while it feels like annihilation of the self. A Yeats poem also is not merely a box, it is precisely a box that has been made to contain and express the consciousness Yeats wants to communicate. Coleridge is important for Hill because he is such a conscientious witness to the processes of thought, and especially creative thought. He understood that the form of a poem is not a pre-existent box into which the poem can be put. One finds the form - the physical incarnation, the 'shape', of the poem - while one struggles to write the poem.

This argument implies a respect for the past. The symbols and forms in which people before us have expressed themselves are meaningful in themselves. Although new generations will find different ways of working they cannot deny that they have partly been formed by the cultural material of their predecessors. No-one reading Hill's *Mercian Hymns* and David Jones's poetry could fail to notice the similar interweaving of autobiographical and mythical material. I take this chapter's title from David Jones's argument in his Preface to *The Anathemata*, which gives a full account of his concept of

the relationship between the writer, the language and their shared past. The phrase 'hunter of forms' functions like the monadic phrases of Coleridge that I have already touched on. Hill brings it into his poem 'Pavana Dolorosa":

> Self-seeking hunter of forms, there is no end
> to such pursuits. None can revoke your cry. (*NCP*, 137)

In this poem, dealing with the similarity between the true sacrifice of a saint and the insincere will-to-martyrdom of some creative artists, Hill touches upon something essential to his concept of creativity. Initially, Hill receives an intimation of a possible poem; next he searches for the form necessary to embody this potential. It is only through this process that he discovers what he 'intended' to write. Here Hill acknowledges that trying to find a form in which to express oneself is also a hunting after the self. His phrase 'self-seeking' hovers between an admirable desire for self-knowledge and the simple desire to turn things to one's own advantage. But despite the irony in this poem, which Hill must have in order to exclude a kind of self-expression he finds distasteful, he does believe that, in struggling with language, a writer discovers an affinity between the self and the medium. The attempt to make a poem 'come right' is, for Hill, analogous with meditational exercise, or acts of witness, even sacrifice. The poem will be an utterance of the self, even though it will not be 'self-expression'. This process is commented on by 'Whether Moral Virtue Comes by Habituation':

> It is said that sometimes even fear
> drops away —
> exhausted — I would not
> deny that: self
> expression — you could argue — the first to go
> immolated
> selfhood the last: (Hill, 1996, 7)

In this poem Hill brings moral and spiritual discipline together with poetics. The title questions whether one actually becomes virtuous through practice. As a poet Hill avoids autobiography, but is concerned in working on and with the material from which his personality is formed. Of course he knows that, ultimately, this will drop away, either in death or through spiritual exercise.

In the Preface to *The Anathemata*, David Jones explores this idea in a way that closely resembles Hill's own theory and practice. Jones takes for granted the kind of delving into language, liturgy, literature, tradition, landscape and history that constitutes Hill's 'search for roots'. It is a sign that he was a writer who had experienced a time when people were more rooted. He makes assumptions about his readers' response to his arguments that would not now be as secure as they were in 1952.

> This, you will say, is, in a sense, the task of any artist in any material, seeing that whatever he makes must necesarily show forth what is his by this or that inheritance. (Jones, 1972, 10)

Hill's work contantly explores areas that might constitute a kind of inheritance. He does not take for granted his connection to his inheritance; he has to unearth things that we have forgotten, or half-forgotten. In addition, he draws our attention to things we must become aware of, and continue to bear witness to, in order to preserve our humanity.

Hill believes in the importance of our living connection to 'mythus' in the same way that Jones did. But Hill knows that we have to work harder now to feel it and live in it. Jones's work chimes with Hill's in arguing for the same relationship between the self and the material out of which one makes poetry:

> 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. (Jones, 1972, 10)

Here Jones is suggesting that he is made up of these images and symbols. There is an interesting connection here to Jung's theory of archetypes. According to Jung, every significant event of our lives is provided for by an archetypal behaviour pattern. These 'archetypes', while they are primarily practical instructions for survival, are often found, in symbolic form, in works of art. The personality is formed by the way in which an individual realizes these archetypal patterns. In the work of an artist this means that the archetypal material will be modified by the self, and the particular historical and social context. Thus Jones identifies specific cultural materials as his constituents. This is a very illuminating idea, and one which has obvious applicability to much of Hill's work. In *Mercian Hymns*, for instance, Hill shows that he feels himself to be formed from the material about Offa and eighth-century Mercia that was the prevailing mythus of the region where he grew up. This level of intense involvement is present in all of Hill's passionately attentive prose and poetry.

Jones moves on to give a more explicit account of the kind of relationship with 'material' that he believes in and that Hill has dedicated himself to reclaiming.

> 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 *matière* 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 acts, *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. Whereas the art of poetry, even in our present civilizational phase, even in our hyper-Alexandrinian and megalopolitan situation, is, in some senses, still so occupied.

> T. Gilby, in *Barbara Celarent*, writes 'The formal cause is the specific factor that we seek to capture, the mind is a hunter of forms, *venator formarum*'. (Jones, 1972, 19)

Jones argues in effect that since the poet works in language, in the material by which most of our cultural belongings are manifest, s/he must have a closer relationship with the mythus than other 'makers' (although they too will be inextricably connected with it). The artist who works in language is essentially working on his/her self. The striking self-revelation of the maker, and his relationship with the *matière*, results from this reflexive quality of literary art.

Of course, it is the role of language that is paramount here:

> For one of the efficient causes of which the effect called poetry is a dependant involves the employment of a particular language or languages, and involves that employment at an especially heightened tension. The means or agent is a veritable torcular, squeezing every drain of evocation from the word-forms of that language or languages. And that involves a bagful of mythus before you've said Jack Robinson - or immediately after. (Jones, 1972, 20)

Hill is constantly aspiring to this level of tension. In his prose, as well as in his poetry, he selects his words with extreme precision and squeezes exactly the signification he wants out of them. Naturally this involves him with a whole 'bagful of mythus' and the development of a deep, personal involvement with mythus is one of Hill's major motivations for writing and teaching. In the light of his claim for writing poetry as a kind of spiritual exercise, and given the interesting parallel with Jung, Hill's work appears to be a kind of Jungian individuation: an attempt to be as complete a human being as is possible.

Literary form is something that is constituted out of the relationship of the writer with his/her material, not merely a pre-formed box into which poetry can be poured. Jones's remarks about writing bring in other criteria such as 'heightened tension'. Since this chapter is concerned with the possibility of transcending the conflict between contexture and words as living powers, between logic and a belief in living essence, the distinction between poetry and prose must be challenged. If poetry is constituted by the criteria we have already briefly touched on, the boundaries need to be redrawn. In his *Lords of Limit* essay 'What Devil Has Got Into John Ransom?', Hill uses Ransom's definition of poetry to allow him to class his critical essays as 'prose-poems'

> I [...] allude to his celebrated definition of the poem as 'nothing short of a desperate ontological or metaphysical manoeuvre'. If it is permissible to define a poem in this way - and it does seem, I concede, a formula at once all-embracing and exclusive - then Ransom's essays can be defined as poems, since 'desperate ... ontological manoeuvres' is what they are. (*LL*, 122)

If we accept Hill's concession to this definition,[1] then we may also decide that Hill's own essays are 'poems' since they too are 'desperate ontological manoeuvres'.

We should take Hill's use of Ransom seriously and treat his essays as poems. When trying to 'define' poetry, recent writers find the issue of form something of a stumbling block. Hartman, in his book *Free Verse*, finds it impossible to offer any formal definition of verse other than writing that does not flow continuously all the way to the right-hand margin. Even in a volume that is focussing on formal characteristics, Hartman has to introduce a definition that does not refer directly to the technical nature of the poems: 'A poem is the language of an act of attention' (Hartman, 1980, 12). Hartman then introduces something that is more conventional 'the prosody of a poem is the poet's method of controlling the reader's temporal experience, especially his attention to that experience' (Hartman, 1980, 13). Hill's idea of poetry is fully in accord with Hartman's first definition. Indeed, a 'desperate ontological manoeuvre' must be a rather special example of 'the language of an act of attention', but it would be impossible to effect or observe such a manoeuvre without paying close attention to the language being used. If Hill's essays are also 'poems' they must be poems in which 'prosody', or the temporal dimension is not so important a feature as some other that makes it more convenient for it to be written as 'prose'. Although he is held to be a poet of extreme formality, one of his most popular volumes, *Mercian Hymns*, is in the form of 'versets of rhythmical prose'. We could see this delicate balancing act between the categories of prose, poetry, and prose poetry as an attempt to prove an essential continuity; or as a marker of their mutual limits. Hill does not put ideas into a form on the basis of a whim, or owing to some external pressure; the ideas intrinsically possess formal characterisics. Some of his ideas are fully realized when crystallized in a poem, others come into being as essays or lectures.

Having developed a working definition of poetry that allows us to consider Hill's essays as poems, I would now like to look at the problem of meaning, and specifically the relationship between the actual form of an utterance and its meaning. We have hopefully established that literature is a serious endeavour in which one works on the self with the intention of understanding, expressing, and even devloping, that self. The works of David Jones, and of Hill himself, raise claims of authenticity and value; they hint at a kind of signification that transcends some of the problems of language. It seems vital to look at the philosophy of language (broadly speaking on the contexture side of our dialectic) and to relate it to our concept of poetic language.

When we look at words, a basic problem is the relationship between what we 'mean to say' or what we 'mean by' something, and the actual words we have used. This is an area that Hill has explored at some length in his critical works. He is often drawn to

[1] This is no opportunistic adoption, since Hill uses the phrase in *The Enemy's Country* (*EC*, 67) when discussing the relationship between poets and arbitrary power.

engage with the logical or empiricist ideas of writers like Bacon, Hobbes, J. L. Austin and Wittgenstein. Hill wants to understand how language works, and he is willing to apply the precise tools of logic to it. However he often turns round on these writers when they treat poetry as an unserious use of language. He is keen to show how poetry can transcend the rules of logic and validate the claims of other writers that words are 'living powers'.

In his essay '"Perplexed Persistence" the Exemplary Failure of T. H. Green', Hill cites Green's pupil R. L. Nettleship's theory of language and expression. As the pupil, colleague and biographer of Green, Nettleship is an excellent guide to the qualities of thought that Hill admires in Green, especially since Hill focuses more on Green's pedagogic methods than on his philosophical writings. I would like to quote from Nettleship more fully:

> It would be truer to say that the expression *is* the completed feeling; for the feeling is not fully felt till it is expressed, and in being expressed it is still felt, but in a different way. What the act of expression does is to fix and distinguish it finally; it then, and only then, becomes *a* determinate feeling. In the same way the consciousness which we express when we have found the 'right word' is not the same as our consciousness before we found it; so that it is not strictly correct to call the word the expression of what we meant before we found it. (Nettleship, 1901, 132)

Hill's experience of writing leads him to assent to Nettleship's nice distinction. In interview he has echoed the theory in describing his personal experience of creativity:

> I don't think I've ever conceived a poetic argument as a thing in itself which merely required words to embody it. I can only discover my argument in discovering the words for it. There's a phrase of William Blake's from *Jerusalem*, 'the struggles of entanglement with incoherent roots', and in moments of either elation or depression I feel that phrase could stand as an epigraph to my whole writing life. (Haffenden, 1981, 82)

There is something disconcerting in the second part of this, as the Blake quotation clearly 'means' something different to Hill when he is elated from what it does when he is depressed. On the other hand, if the poetic argument is only present in the specific embodiment of the poem, it would be impossible to express the exact meaning of the poem in any other form. If we put these ideas together we might say that a poem does not have to have only one meaning, and indeed it might mean different things in different contexts, but it is something that is essentially not-paraphrasable. Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose language-game approach is admired by Hill, makes the same point with a more general application:

> Suppose we think while we talk or write - I mean, as we normally do - we shall not in general say that we think quicker than we talk; the thought seems *not to be separate* from the expression. (Wittgenstein, 1968, 104)

This suggests that it is very difficult to explain how we 'mean' something, as each restatement would be, in some way, a new thought. Wittgenstein uses a language-game to demonstrate this.

> Why should I translate the call 'Slab!' into a different expression in order to say what someone means by it? And if they mean the same thing - why should I not say: 'When he says "Slab!" he means "Slab!"'? Again, if you can mean 'Bring me the slab', why should you not be able to mean 'Slab!'? - But when I call 'Slab!', than what I want is, *that he should bring me a slab*! - certainly, but does 'wanting this' consist in thinking in some form or other a different sentence from the one you utter? (Wittgenstein, 1968, 8)

Does this suggest that if we read a poem while mentally supplying our own glosses and explanations we have not really understood it? There are basically two ways of looking at this. Firstly we could see the poem as a new object, which we can only understand through further symbols. As Nettleship argues, we 'get at everything through something else' (Nettleship, 1901, 129), we have to use symbols, all our thinking is 'representative' or 'discursive'. On the other hand, if we could take the poem into our being without re-interpreting it we would be thinking 'intuitively'. Nettleship wrote:

> To think without symbols would be to think directly, 'intuitively'. It would not be what we call thinking, and would imply that we were always and immediately one with things. All articulate human consciousness is consciousness of something through something else. If our experience were literally unsymbolic, if it *were* what it *means* it would not be what we call human consciousness. (Nettleship, 1901, 130).

This kind of consciousness is the aim of meditational prayer in the Christian mystical tradition - a union with the divine being which transcends ordinary human experience. Raphael talks about this intuitive reason in *Paradise Lost* V, 487ff. Human reason is mainly 'discursive', angelic reason 'intuitive'. But it is mankind's spiritual destiny to ascend the scale of being and regain the kind of intuitive reason that Adam possessed when he named the animals:

> I named them, as they passed, and understood
> Their nature, with such knowledge God endued
> My sudden apprehension. (*PL*, VIII, 352ff)

However, we are still able to do some of this kind of 'thinking'. Indeed Hobbes (whose thoughts on language Hill reflects upon with admiration in *The Enemy's Country*) recommends it for certain types of material.

> Therefore, when anything therein written is too hard for our examination, wee are bidden to captivate our understanding to the Words; and not to labour in sifting out a Philosophical truth by Logick, of such mysteries as are not comprehensible, nor fall under any rule of naturall science. For it is with the mysteries of our Religion, as with wholesome pills for the sick, which swallowed whole, have the vertue to cure; but chewed, are for the most part cast up again without effect.' (Hobbes, 1985, 410.)

This is not to say that Hobbes thinks people should learn prayers and so on 'parrot fashion' with no comprehension of what they mean (he castigates this in his treatise of *Human Nature*) rather he is suggesting that we should attempt a more intuitive understanding of certain materials. Nettleship's position seems to be that meaning is to be found only in the intricate inter-relations of 'contexture', while Hobbes (although an astute analyst of the power and danger of 'contexture') allows that some verbal objects might approach the status of 'living powers'. Wittgenstein seems to go rather further than Hobbes in being able to balance these antagonistic concepts:

> We speak of understanding a sentence in the sense in which it can be replaced by another which says the same; but also in the sense in which it cannot be replaced by any other. (Any more than one musical theme can be replaced by another.)
>
> In the one case the thought in the sentence is something common to different sentences; in the other, something that is expressed only by these words in these positions. (Understanding a poem). (Wittgenstein, 1968, 143)

Wittgenstein's analysis seems to fit neatly with what Hill says about the phrase from Blake's *Jerusalem*. A thought exists only in its expression in words, and some thoughts or feelings may be of such a specificity that they cannot be paraphrased; they exist only in the original expression of them. Hill has written of something very much like this in his comment on Ransom that 'cadence itself, at this pitch of intensity, becomes a form of substance, a monad' where he uses monad to mean 'at once a "material atom" and an "ultimate element of psychic existence"' (*LL*, 134). Taken together these arguments amount to a demonstration of how a poem can be a living consciousness.

Given this argument for the inseparability of form and content, how do we interpret Hill's comment: 'in writing, one is surprised by joy when what one thought one was going to write and what one has actually written come together in the closest possible way' (Haffenden, 1981, 84)? Does this contradict what Hill said about poetic argument and words? I think that the joy Hill mentions comes from a sense of having achieved a measure of success in the 'always exhausting, at times mortifying and ignominious, struggle with language' (*EC*, 34). There may be an intention to form a thought of a certain kind which the medium will not allow, despite the struggle of the poet. But also there will be times when the poet's intention is validated after his work by an embodied thought which admittedly did not exist in his intention previously, but which had been intimated by it.

There are several occasions in Hill's poetry where this contrast between a lifeless skill in language use is paralleled by true communication of a particularly sexual kind. In 'Three Baroque Meditations 3 The Dead Bride' there is a contrast between the husband's proficiency in languages, and the wife's sexuality:

> (By day he professed languages —
> Disciplines of languages)

By day I cleansed my thin tongue
From its nightly prowl, its vixen-skill,
    His sacramental mouth

    That justified my flesh
And moved well among women
In nuances and imperatives. (*NCP*, 79)

The wife's 'tongue' is not a mastered language, but a means of expressing her desire for, and frustration with, her husband. After each attempt at a real sexual engagment ('I writhed to conceive of him' - suggesting both his intellectual self-distancing, and her desire to become pregnant) she has to purify herself of the hate and frustration, and the physical residue of love-making. She prepares herself once more, while he continues to make his communication yet more abstract: a profession not a way of life; something disciplined not something passionate. The man's ability to talk to women masks his inability to communicate with his wife. Similar preoccupations come up in 'The Songbook of Sebastian Arrurruz'. In the poem 'From the Latin' a similar contrast is drawn between the pointlessness of polite conversation as opposed to the real communication between sexual partners.

There would have been things to say, quietness
That could feed on our lust, refreshed
Trivia, the occurrences of the day;
And at night my tongue in your furrow.

Without you I am mocked by courtesies
And chat, where satisfied women push
Dutifully toward some unwanted guest
Desirable features of conversation. (*NCP*, 86)

In the first stanza the lovers are able to enjoy a conversation with each other that includes silences, and pieces of trivia that are 'refreshed' and made worth talking about because of their relationship. They enjoy telling each other simply what they have spent the day doing. Their sexual activity is characterised by the man's 'tongue' (here he is not a mere disciplined language scholar) in the woman's 'furrow' - a word suggesting fruitful issue. The second stanza displays the inanity of 'conversation' where there is no deep relationship. I read these moments in the poetry as showing the possibility for language and 'tongues' to constitute a real relationship, real communication, when used with passion, as opposed to mere scholarly exactitude. It is only by having a passionate engagement with one's material, and really wishing to communicate to a potential reader whom one can feel love towards, that the poem will achieve its optimum form.

Hill's thoughts about finding the right forms, and thereby becoming able to say the thing one wanted to, come up in his essay 'Envoi (1919)' in *The Enemy's Country*. In the course of the essay he discusses Ezra Pound's sense of the need for appropriate form:

It seems to have been Pound's lifelong endeavour to find the means whereby that Dantean conception could be registered in the demonstrable

> technicalities of English verse. It was, one may add, the intuition that, at the highest level of technical accomplishment, the 'simple' embraces and is embraced by 'substance and accidents' that, in the first and second decades of this century, suggested to Pound an alternative to the arrogant provincialism of the American opinion on literary matters. (*EC*, 89)

Hill sees Pound's experimentation with form as a genuine attempt to adhere to an aesthetic principle without becoming bound by convention. This means that what seems to be 'poetry' may be mere formulaic verse-writing, and things which don't seem to be verse at all may be poetry. Hill sees part of this as jokiness in Pound, in which he sometimes disguises a strict conventionality under the guise of modern liberated verse forms:

> 'To break the pentameter, that was the first heave'; and this is indeed what 'The Return' and 'The Coming of War: Actaeon' succeed in doing. But in the second stanza of 'Envoi (1919)' the nine irregular lines are six regular pentameters in disguise. (*EC*, 100)

Hill appreciates this blague, just as he approves of Ransom's essays that adhere to a strict definition of poetry while also existing as 'prose criticism'.

> 'The traditional methods are not antiquated, nor are poets necessarily the atavisms which they seem', he declared in 1912 [...]. When Pound writes 'traditional methods' he does not mean 'derivative convention'. In 1912, no less than at the present day, this was a distinction not easily pressed upon the consensus. (*EC*, 89)

What this means, in effect, is that the consensus has misunderstood what the real criterion for poetry is. If it is something like 'Dante's idea that you can bind the complex into a simple light' or 'desperate ontological manoeuvres', or 'the language of an act of attention' then many of the things we call poetry are mere verse (or often not even that) and many great prose works gain their power from being essentially poetic.

The issue of form and content reaches beyond the focus of what one means to say and what one has said. It spreads out to the more general issue of what it means to use language to make art. Early in his essay 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"' in *The Lords of Limit* Hill broaches the problem of language for the modern poet-critic:

> Milton's dictum that poetry, though 'lesse suttle and fine', is 'more simple, sensuous and passionate' than rhetoric is a saying to which I am sympathetically inclined. Ideally my thesis would be equally deserving of sympathy. That it 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. That commonplace image, founded upon the unfinished statues of Michelangelo, '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. (*LL*, 1)

Hill is embarking on an essay in which he will upset many of his audience by the contortions through which he puts the word 'atonement'. This engagement with Milton's ideas about poetry is meant to be taken as a disclaimer. The criticism that follows will be 'suttle and fine' (perhaps like the movements of the serpent in Milton's *Paradise Lost*) although it may lack the 'simple, sensuous, passionate' nature to which poetry should aspire. Hill makes a point of telling us he is a poet talking about poetic inspiration and yet trying to avoid 'special pleading'. But he is also clearly positioning his essay in relationship to Milton's ideal of poetic language. He is suggesting that his essay is a form of poetic utterance, albeit one debased by the fallen state of quotidian language.

Hill's comment about the sculptural image shows us that he knows there is no hint of the form that the sculptor carves pre-existing in the stone, no figure straining to free itself. Poetry, on the other hand, works in, and on, language. Even our quotidian use of language holds echoes of the purity and beauty that can be found in a fine poem. Poems and everyday conversations are both made of words. Comments on poetry are also made of words. Hill is trying to show us the paradox of writing about writing. How can writing about inspiration elucidate it? Could one explain a sculpture by making a second sculpture? And this analogy raises another question: few of us would presume to offer a sculpture as a comment on a piece by a famous artist, and yet critics offer their verbal creations as commentaries on the works of poets and other writers, and sometimes even assert that the work of criticism is equal to the work of art. How can Hill hope to communicate the 'act of atonement' he recognises in 'the technical perfecting of a poem' in such an environment?

Hill's essay, by forcing us to look at a word like 'atonement' in a new way, and through his examination of the conflicting accounts of poetic creation from Yeats and Eliot, encourages the reader to look at words anew. The essay is a 'desperate ontological manoeuvre' intended to make us accept that 'the technical perfecting of a poem is an act of atonement' (*LL*, 2) and that the menace of poetry is both 'mortality' and that of 'the high claims of poetry itself' (*LL*, 5). Words are not only the debased currency of our daily conversational exchanges; they can also be interrogated, combined and deconstructed in order to expiate shame, or to create fresh grounds for guilt. For Hill, writing poetry is a highly charged activity. The possibilities offered by the 'high claims of poetry' are very great, and Hill is dedicated to fulfilling those high claims; but writing is also menacing. Mandelstam was arrested and died in captivity due to a poem about Stalin, a poem of Ovid's earned him his exile; Sir Henry Wotton jeopardised his career with a witticism upon the role of a diplomat. Hill's admiration is reserved for those writers who take their writing this seriously, and are taken that seriously themselves, those who will - like Péguy, 'defend [their] first position to the last word' (*NCP*, 166).

When we look at the poems in the light of the ideas of thinkers like Owen Barfield, R. C. Trench and William Empson we shall see how Hill deals with the

relationships between words and emotions, propositions, history and morals. Two early poems 'Genesis' and 'God's Little Mountain' raise issues of the power of language and the relationship between what can be experienced and what can be said. 'Genesis' gives us a version of the creation in which the power of God's word seems to have been delegated to a human.

> Against the burly air I strode
> Crying the miracles of God.
>
> And first I brought the sea to bear
> Upon the dead weight of the land;
> And the waves flourished at my prayer, (*NCP*, 3)

Here the speaker's 'cries' seem to bring the miracles to pass. His 'prayer' wavers between the praise offered to God, and a polite request to the seas to flourish. The power of the speaker comes under suspicion in the second section where he shouts warnings, having witnessed the violence of creatures. This casts doubt over the first section - if the speaker who stands and sees the killing in this section brought it into being, why should he feel driven to warn about it. The third and fourth sections suggest the speaker has become a myth-maker, but in a rather abstract and bloodless way, finally he returns to 'flesh and blood and the blood's pain'. In the final section he seems more like a loyal steward 'in haste about the works of God' than the usurper of the opening of the poem, or the abstract myth-maker of the central sections.

> 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. (*NCP*, 5)

These final lines seem to assert the necessity of a joining of words and physicality - myth must be accompanied by blood. Christ saves men by his blood, not just his 'Logos'. And this seems to be because of the inability of human beings to 'bear the light'. Our remains have to be tucked away at sea or in the Earth. If the men are made free, despite being tightly bound in shrouds or under the earth, it must be something other than body that is liberated. Perhaps Hill envisions some non-physical existence in which 'men' can 'bear the light', in which blood and pain are not needed. But as a human poet he knows he cannot turn his back on the blood and pain, and that he cannot bear the light. The word must have some pure, spiritual existence as a 'living power'. But as humans we must acknowledge the reality of the flesh, of the messy complications of 'contexture'. Maybe by getting our meaning as clear as we can in the toils of contexture, we may get a better

view of the 'living power' that we feel to subsist within it. Or, in the more down to earth terms of the poem, perhaps we should imitate the one who goes 'in haste about the works of God', neither trying to escape into our own systems of abstraction, nor playing God ourselves.

In 'God's Little Mountain' these ideas are re-applied to the problem of religious experience.

> Below, the river scrambled like a goat
> Dislodging stones. The mountain stamped its foot,
> Shaking, as from a trance. And I was shut
> With wads of sound into a sudden quiet.
>
> I thought the thunder had unsettled heaven,
> All was so still. And yet the sky was riven
> By flame that left the air cold and engraven.
> I waited for the word that was not given,
>
> Pent up in a region of pure force,
> Made subject to the pressure of the stars;
> I saw the angels lifted like pale straws;
> I could not stand before those winnowing eyes
>
> And fell, until I found the world again.
> Now I lack grace to tell what I have seen;
> For though the head frames words the tongue has none.
> And who will prove the surgeon to this stone? (*NCP*, 6)

Hill opens this poem with some particularly vivid figurative language, investing the mountain and river with active life. The vigour of the language overrides our expectations and verges on paradox; the 'wads of sound' only serve to create 'quiet' and the stillness after the thunder seems to mark a greater destruction than the storm itself. The poem is largely about the limits of experience and language. The speaker has had some kind of religious experience, but finds it hard to explain what has happened. His limitation is not only linguistic, but in his nature as a whole. Like the bones that could not bear the light, the speaker cannot bear to be so 'uplifted'. No 'word' is given because the speaker is not sufficiently pure to remain with the angels in their region of pure force. The imagery of the opening of the poem (stunning the reader while it shows us how the narrator is stunned) contrasts with the supposed inarticulability of the experience and leads us rather to look at the inadequacy of the speaker. The head frames words, but only in that it wants to speak of things it could not bear to witness. Naturally, therefore, the tongue has none. These two early poems demonstrate Hill's faith in language. He does not blame language for its inability to express certain things, rather he points to the imperfection of human nature as a whole as an explanation for why some things seem 'inexpressible' to us. This aspect of the poem demonstrates once more the influence of Green and Nettleship:

> When we say that we cannot find words for our meaning, unless this implies that our consciousness is too undeveloped to be expressed, it indicates the fact that the words at our command are so fixed in meaning that they would have to be recreated to express our present consciousness, or (to vary the phrase) that this consciousness is potentially more than will go into the known forms of expression. In such a case a word may (very rarely) be invented, or a word may be used in a new sense, or a new combination of words may be found. Our inarticulateness, the inadequacy of words, thus means here simply the progressiveness of thought and of language, and it would be just as right to blame one's thought for it as to blame one's language. (As there are persons who feel more than they can say, so there are others who say more than they feel, and use sham rhetoric and the like. That is, they use words which, if taken in their full sense, mean more than is present in the consciousness of the persons using them. This phenomenon, like the other, arises from the contrast between the fixity of language and the fluctuation of human consciousness.) (Nettleship, 1901, 132)

Nettleship's argument might seem unduly positive when we look at the more sceptical theories of Wittgenstein, but at some level Hill is prepared to go along with this. Language does not let us down, we let it down by not having formed our thoughts clearly enough to be clearly expressed, or by not developing new vocabulary in areas where we are achieving greater accuracy of thought. One suspects that the truth of the matter is that those things which people call 'inexpressible' are those which, as in 'God's Little Mountain', are beyond their ability to experience and comprehend. Potentially, nothing is inexpressible.

If this seems too idealistic for speakers of our debased language, nevertheless Hill's poems often engage with the problem of how far we can trust language. When can we depend upon meaning in words, when can we take a statement as effectively bringing about its content? (Austin's 'performative utterances', Pound's 'judicial sentences'). Hill seems to believe (tentatively) that a poem can achieve a kind of formal perfection despite the fact that it must always partake of the anarchy of language that we find in our everyday lives. There does seem to be a paradox in this belief (like trying to pull oneself up by the bootstraps), one which Wittgenstein puts like this:

> When I talk about language (words, sentences, etc) I must speak the language of every day. Is this language somehow too coarse and material for what we want to say? *Then how is another one to be constructed*? - And how strange that we should be able to do anything at all with the one we have! (Wittgenstein, 1968, 48)

Wittgenstein, when he comes up against a problem that he cannot solve, wonders if it is because the language is not good enough, just as one might decide one needed a special tool for a special job, but he despairs at finding words which could describe language as if from outside itself, although that is the relationship of language to many other areas of our experience. This leads Wittgenstein to believe that some things are beyond the scope of language (and of thought). This is in stark contrast to the idea of Nettleship, who would (one imagines) set about creating a new vocabulary, so long as he could achieve a

clear idea of the new things to be expressed. Wittgenstein explores the problems involved in expanding the scope of language:

> ((I should like to say: 'These notes say something glorious, but I do not know what.' These notes are a powerful gesture, but I cannot put anything side by side with it that will serve as an explanation. A grave nod. James: 'Our vocabulary is inadequate.' Then why don't we introduce a new one? What would have to be the case for us to be able to ?)) (Wittgenstein, 1968, 159)

Here the situation seems different again. Wittgenstein finds language incapable of talking about emotion in music. Even though we are not asking language to discuss its own limitations, an awareness of those limits arises. It would be impossible for Wittgenstein to create a new vocabulary to describe the emotions aroused by music, since he could never be sure that people's feelings corresponded to one another.

Wittgenstein's arguments, despite their formal beauty, leave us wondering why it is that we do seem to understand each other as well as we do most of the time. When Hill reminds us of the link between poetry and criticism he uses it to make a point about the relationship of the language to the poems that are straining to get out of it. Wittgenstein ignores, or disbelieves in this internal living energy of language. Owen Barfield shows how this network of pre-existing meaning, or 'contexture', works to aid the artist, as well as to confound him/her.

> Even the most original poet is obliged to work with words, and words, unlike marble or pigment or vibrations in the air, owe their very substance ('meaning') to the generations of human beings who have previously used them. No poet, therefore, can be the creator of all the meaning in his poem. (Barfield, 1928, 50)

Barfield's viewpoint is less positive than Hill's. For Hill, the pre-existent 'meanings' of words embody a beautiful form imprisoned in the language, which the poet may, with skill, reveal in all its perfection. Barfield rather imagines that the meanings that have attached to words might hamper the poet's originality. Hill believes that language can be in some degree rescued from its 'quotidian formlessness' by poetry. Although he is aware of the problems that Wittgenstein, Barfield and others have raised, he feels that words, if he is sensitive to their history, and handles them carefully in a poem, can be made to recreate a 'lost kingdom of innocence and original justice' (Haffenden, 1981, 88).

The attitudes of Barfield and Hill are essentially different interpretations of the effect of contexture on the writer's work. **'**Contexture' is a word from Hobbes that Hill has revived in his Clark Lectures, published as *The Enemy's Country*. In his note on the title, Hill gives this preliminary explanation of the term:

> My book's subtitle is wrenched out of Hobbes. 'Words, contexture, and other circumstances of Language' I take to signify the relation of word to word and of the body of words to those contingencies and accommodations marginally glossed among the 'Lawes of Nature' in *Leviathan*: 'covenants of mutuall trust', 'covenants extorted by feare', 'justice of manners and justice of actions', 'submission to arbitrement', etc. (*EC*, xii)

Already we can see the link between Hobbes's idea of contexture and the theory of language we saw in Nettleship. In spite of the interesting passage about things which need to be swallowed whole, Hobbes clearly sees language as a web of inter-relations. Just as Nettleship argues that we only understand anything through something else, so Hobbes points out that words are connected amongst themselves in all sorts of ways. Nettleship develops this to show how experience is necessarily discursive not intuitive, and in a similar manoeuvre Hobbes argues that language is necessarily equivocal - it always brings in connotations that we have not expected and may not require.

> Also all metaphors are (by profession) equivocal. And there is scarce any word that is not made equivocal by divers contextures of speech, or by diversity of pronunciation and gesture.
>
> This equivocation of names maketh it difficult to recover those conceptions for which the name was ordained; and that not only in the language of other men, wherein we are to consider the drift, and occasion, and contexture of the speech, as well as the words themselves; but also in our own discourse, which being derived from the custom and common use of speech representeth not unto us our own conceptions. It is therefore a great ability in a man, out of the words, contexture and other circumstances of language, to deliver himself from equivocation, and to find out the true meaning of what is said: and this is it we call understanding. (Hobbes, 1994, 37)

This passage is crucial to Hobbes's view of language, and the use that Hill makes of it. In his note on the title Hill makes a point of connecting the idea of contexture to the 'contingencies and accommodations' that exist within a commonwealth. In doing so he acknowledges that the potential accuracy of language is compromised not only by the equivocal nature of metaphor and the chaotic inter-relations between words, but also by political necessity. We have to abide by 'contracts' in our society (which is, for Hill, strongly Hobbesian), even if they are extorted by fear, we have to submit to arbitrement, we have to give up some of our rights in return for the security we need to study. These factors make any belief that words are 'living powers' quite hard to accept (although we have seen that Hobbes does believe that some expressions of truth are practically embodiments of their meaning, are verbal medicines). Hill does not assert a transcendent power for words, or a separate pure existence for them, without acknowledging the terrible compromises they are constantly making, and that they are treated as mere tokens, a debased coinage. However a glimmer of the ability of words to overcome, or control, contexture is seen in his remarks about Milton's sonnet to Henry Lawes.

> Thomas Hobbes stated, in his treatise of *Humane Nature*, that 'there is scarce any word that is not made *equivocal* by divers contextures of speech, or by diversity of pronunciation and gesture'. Milton's sonnet is a 'gesture' that takes as its topos 'diversity of pronunciation' ('Words with just note and accent', 'committing short and long'). Nor is it wholly without equivocation. It is not absolutely invulnerable to Hobbes's charge that '*Ratio* now is but *Oratio*'. It will be objected that Hobbes, like Bacon, regarded equivocation, all forms of ambiguity in language, as 'intolerable' and worked for their

> eradication; and, from that, it may be concluded that he and Bacon were at liberty to stand aloof from the 'intolerable wrestle/ With words and meanings'. Empirical observation confirms that this is not so. Bacon, in *The Advancement of Learning*, argues that 'wordes, as a *Tartars* Bowe, doe shoute backe vppon the vnderstanding of the wisest, and mightily entangle, and peruert the Iudgement'. (*EC*, 22)

Hill implies that he believes that a poem can attempt to free itself from equivocation through his appreciation of Milton's poem. Hill is worrying away at issues of accuracy of praise in Milton's sonnet. However he brings in Hobbes and Bacon in order to demonstrate his belief that words are tricky and turn against their users. Although Bacon uses a metaphor, which is therefore a worse equivocation than calling things by their plain names, it is one that deepens our awareness of the difficulty of handling words even in philosophical or critical writing. That there is some hope is shown by Hill's demonstration that Bacon cleared his meaning when translating his idea into Latin. Hill finds Bacon's metaphor powerful enough to offer the possibility of precision:

> In such writing we are at least given some ground for suggesting that words, even when they 'bend' or 'twist back' upon the progress of the argument, are not bound to do so destructively, as Bacon's figure of the Tartar bowman would suggest; it is not inevitable that words rebel against all attempts at better distinction, even when rebellion and loss of distinction are the matter of their contemplation. (*EC*, 31)

Even the enemy of metaphor, in the very act of condemning the untrustworthiness of language, can produce a precisely meaningful piece of figurative language. The reflexiveness of Bacon's image, and the further reflection that Hill points out about its creation, are crucial. Reflexivity is at the heart of all good work with language. One must work on the self, be reflexive, while one works with words.

Hill's essay goes some way to demonstrating the way in which a writer can attempt to clear his/her meaning through his concepts of 'hefting' and 'tuning'. These terms seems to function in two ways. Firstly there are some words which in themselves are more suited either to 'hefting' or 'tuning'; secondly the work of the poet consists partly in a large-scale 'hefting' of words to his purpose, and then a finer 'tuning' of the words to his precise requirements. Here Hill quotes Locke to make his point:

> Words, generally, may be taken as hefting words 'such ... as may serve for the upholding common Conversation and Commerce, about the ordinary Affairs and Conveniences of civil Life', the approximate meanings, the jargon, that 'Men make a shift with, in the ordinary Occurrences of Life, where they find it necessary to be understood, and therefore they make signs till they are so'. [...] By 'tuning' I mean to suggest something more than the Lockean ability to put words in their place. It has more affinity, as I understand it, with George Herbert's 'being true to [the] businesse'. (*EC*, 33)

These sentences show Hill allowing the sense to slide from something that is clearly attached to the words - some words are 'hefting words' - to a role that the user of the words must play in fitting them roughly, or precisely, to the task in hand. There may be a

world of difference between being understood and doing justice to the business. Hill seems to imply that some words are too rough to be useful for anything but hefting, although there is always the possibility that some writer will fine-tune one of these. When he turns to the necessity for 'tuning out' some senses he mentions Leontes's use of 'hefts' for vomiting in *The Winter's Tale*:

> I would agree that a judicious weighing of one's words might find intolerable such a grotesque eruption. On the other hand, an image of violent psychic and physical nausea is not inappropriate to an account of the always exhausting, at times mortifying and ignominious, struggle with language. (*EC*, 34)

It is interesting that even when he is talking about tuning out, Hill cannot resist pointing out a sense of 'hefts' that he actually wants to tune in to his uses. While 'heft' might seem one of the clumsier words - useful for getting things vaguely right, and while Hill suggests that he has hefted it in without worrying too much about its subtler overtones - on further examination it fits his purpose remarkably well. This must surely be because some 'hefting' words will have deeper significances that one can refine in the tuning stages of composition, and Hill does not present us with an example of his work at the hefting stage; even when he talks of hefting it is in words that are finely tuned:

> Endless London
> mourns for that knowledge
> under the dim roofs
> of smoke-stained glass
>
> the men hefting
> their accoutrements
> of webbed tin, many
> in bandages,
>
> with cigarettes
> with scuffed hands aflare,
> as though exhaustion
> drew them to life; (Hill, 1996, 43)

Here Hill uses the word 'hefting' in a way that is tuned by his use of it in his essay. It stands for an effortful manipulation of equipment. The word suggests working with materials that resist one's efforts, and yet affirms that the materials must be taken up and worked with. Hill has not tuned out the implications of nausea from *The Winter's Tale* for it serves here to highlight the state of fatigue out of which the men force themselves to new efforts 'as though exhaustion/ drew them to life'. The correct use of a word will create the consciousness the poet desires. It will give the reader a real, living access to a different experience, it can make the past alive again for us. An awareness of the complications of contexture, followed by the work of hefting and tuning, will enable the writer to exclude the elements that s/he does not require, and will enable the reader to experience the living power of words.

The use of language in the essays sheds light on language used in the poems. Hill accepts the muddled state of speech, the multiplicitous 'contextures', and he attempts to clear his meaning through the 'desperate ontological manoeuvres' of his essays and poems. Quite aside from any more spiritual belief in words as living powers, Hill insists upon the stubbornness of his medium; words will not do his work for him.

> The more gifted the writer the more alert he is to the gifts, the things given or given up, the *données* of language itself. Conversely, the otiosity and vacuity of formal language occur when the writer's energy of judgement is not equal to the force of circumstance, to the strength and activity or to the resistant inertia of 'our stubborne language'. (*EC*, 15)

Once more Hill is working through ideas that are implicit in Hobbes's descriptions of the nature of language:

> *Ratio*, now, is but *oratio*, for the most part, wherein custom hath so great a power, that the mind suggesteth only the first word, the rest follow habitually, and are not followed by the mind. As it is with beggars, when they say their *paternoster*, putting together such words, and in such manner, as in their education they have learned from their nurses, or from their companions, or from their teachers, having no images or conceptions in their minds answering to the words they speak. And as they have learned themselves, so they teach posterity. (Hobbes, 1994, 39)

This statement of Hobbes closely parallels the remarks of Nettleship on 'sham rhetoric [...] words which, if taken in their full sense, mean more than is present in the consciousness of the persons using them' (Nettleship, 1901, 132). Hill detests the kind of language that means more than is present in the consciousness of the utterer, he finds it otiose and vacuous. But he is also aware of the power of such language to move people. He feels it should be discouraged, and he praises T. H. Green for encouraging his more inarticulate students, while discouraging superficial eloquence.

> In *Prolegomena* he wrote of the scholar's or artist's 'temptation to be showy instead of thorough'. At the same time as an educational reformer, Green seems to have sensed that he had a duty to reveal the freedom of the word to those who were, in Wordsworth's term, 'shy and unpractis'd in the strife of phrase'. It is possible to see an inevitable strain and thwarting in this dual situation: discouraging the wrong sort of fluency and self-display at one level while encouraging the right sort of fluency at another level. (*LL*, 111)

Hill's search for the right sort of fluency is what leads him to Coleridge, and, like Coleridge, further back to the seventeenth-century writers like Hobbes, Walton, and Dryden. Like Coleridge, Hill writes a language that reflects the dynamic process of creative thought — Coleridge's water-beetle winning its way against the stream demonstrating the alternating reverses and victories that characterize the 'drama of reason'. That kind of fidelity to the texture of thought can only be sustained in 'connected' prose-writing, or poetry which does not exclude the antiphonal. Both men look back, with a certain nostalgia, to an era that was not dominated by mass media. Coleridge saw, in his favourite writers, a great example of connected writing. This contrasted with the

contemporary state of 'unconnected' writing which was the fault of the popularity and availablity of periodicals.

> I have attempted to illustrate the present state of our language in its relation to literature by a press-room of larger and smaller stereotype pieces which, in the present Anglo-Gallican fashion of unconnected epigrammatic periods, it requires but an ordinary portion of ingenuity to vary indefinitely and yet still produce something which, if not sense, will be so like it as to do as well. Perhaps better: for it spares the reader the trouble of thinking; prevents vacancy while it indulges indolence; and secures the memory from all danger of an intellectual plethora. Hence of all trades literature at present demands the least talent or information; and of all modes of literature, the manufacturing of poems. (Coleridge, 1965, 21)

Coleridge's criticism of the literature of his time is couched in an image that chimes closely with the remarks of Hobbes and Nettleship about the empty use of language that some engage in, and which is even accepted as literature, as 'poetry'. Hill follows Coleridge in admiring the earlier writers; he clearly believes that properly 'connected' writing can have significance, can be stimulating rather than soporific. As Coleridge wrote in his own periodical *The Friend:*

> It is true that these short and unconnected sentences are easily and instantly understood: but it is equally true, that wanting all the cement of thought as well as of style, all the connections, and (if you will forgive so trivial a metaphor) all the *hooks-and-eyes* of the memory, they are as easily forgotten: or rather it is scarcely possible that they should be remembered. (Coleridge, 1969, 20)

Hill has appropriated the homely image of hooks and eyes for his commentary on a line of Hopkins's, and this passage clearly holds resonances for the writers Hill has chosen to write on. Almost the whole of *The Enemy's Country* is devoted to writers from the period Coleridge praises, and in *The Lords of Limit* Hill focuses on writers from the seventeenth century and earlier periods, while also singling out writers who have not been enervated by living in the successive ages dominated by the feuilleton.

Like Coleridge, Hill deplores a state of affairs where speakers of English are unaware of the 'mythus' upon which their language is built. This also means that they are less sensitive to the precise manipulations of language that a poet like Hill uses to register his relationship with the past. Both men faced up to an atmosphere in which their works would soon become incomprehensible to the 'common reader' (if any such being still exists). There is however a more positive side to things. The links with the past are not severed, and a reader who is prepared to pay close attention to a poem may begin to unearth the precise pattern of contexture that the poet has created, gaining access to the living energy of the language itself. Earlier we looked at a quotation from Owen Barfield which suggested the way in which 'history' lives in words. He claimed that words are used by people and therefore take on the meanings they are given. The poet cannot just use a word with a new sense - s/he must indicate a relationship with one of the pre-

existent uses of the word. It is perhaps already clear that this can be a good thing or a bad one. Sometimes a word will have a connotation that the poet discovers is well-suited to what s/he wishes to write, on other occasions a word that seemed suitable will have to be rejected because it brings along unwanted associations.

Hill does not argue simply that we should strive to hold on to all the past uses of words. Indeed, in 'September Song' he demonstrates how history can take over a word in a way that gives our consciousness a feeling of repulsion. In the lines 'Just so much Zyklon and leather, patented/ Terror, so many routine cries' he forces us to see the effect that the new word 'Zyklon' has upon our understanding of 'patented'. The invented word for the Nazi's poison gas makes us relate the businesslike claiming of ownership of inventions to mass murder. It also allows a pun on patent leather, adding another layer of reference to the popular image of Nazis. The connection twists once more when we consider that a patent is taken out in order to stop someone copying one's design. The poem forces us to question our tendency to think of certain kinds of evil as the sole possession of certain people. The Nazis may have patented their specific form of it, but the impulse to cruelty is almost universal. This is implicit in the concept of patents, since they are necessary in an economic climate where companies compete for military contracts. That a word like 'Zyklon' can work its way into English must, the poem suggests, have an effect on other words connected with it. The poem that precedes 'September Song' in *King Log*, 'I Had Hope When Violence Was Ceas't' introduces the shortened German word '*raus*'. Here a common German word 'heraus' is connected with the vicious behaviour of Nazi concentration camp guards. The brutal use of the word is one we are all familiar with from film portrayals of Nazis, and Hill relies on the association of this truncated command to give us a direct sense of brutality. The word here definitely carries a kind of consciousness with it from recent history.

Although in these cases the new feelings and meanings that words have acquired is disturbing, they are useful in giving us access to other people's experiences. Most writers on the subject wish to preserve as much of the historical awareness that our words have as is possible; although it is fair to say that this often means prefering ancient meanings and connotations to the recent history that is found in words. Jonathan Swift, for instance, in *A Proposal for Correcting, Improving and Ascertaining the English Tongue* supports English spelling conventions against phonetic spelling on the grounds that the latter would render the relationships between words from different periods and different languages impossible to detect, and would therefore result in the impoverishment of the language.

Wittgenstein's concept of language does not seem to chime with such ideas. For him it is better to have words with single agreed meanings. This attitude comes out in his remarkable metaphor of language as a city. Although attractive, it lacks the depth that Swift clearly saw in English words.

> Our language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses. (Wittgenstein, 1968, 8)

The problem with this model is that words change their meaning over time. Wittgenstein's two-dimensional model makes no allowance for this - a street cannot move from one part of town to another. Owen Barfield gives us an image that seems more workable:

> It has only just begun to dawn on us that in our own language alone, not to speak of its many companions, the past history of humanity is spread out in an imperishable map, just as the history of the mineral earth lies embedded in the layers of its outer crust. But there is this difference between the record of the rocks and the secrets which are hidden in language: whereas the former can only give us a knowledge of outward, dead things - such as forgotten seas and the bodily shapes of prehistoric animals and primitive men - language has preserved for us the inner, living history of man's soul. It reveals the evolution of consciousness. (Barfield, 1954, 14)

Barfield's model, with its invocation of geological records, allows for movement - rocks move and words change meaning. His metaphor seems to have informed Hill's conviction that in handling the 'vertical richness' of the English Language 'the poet makes an act of recognition that etymology is history' (Haffenden, 1981, 88). Barfield adds another dimension to his model - that of consciousness and life. Language is made up, not of the inanimate buildings of a city, nor even of the fossils of dead things, but of the living consciousnesses of earlier users of the language, preserved in the words they used. The idea that consciousness is accessible through words, and especially in poetry, is a strong element in Hill's 'History as Poetry':

> Poetry as salutation; taste
> Of Pentecost's ashen feast. Blue wounds.
> The tongue's atrocities. Poetry
> Unearths from among the speechless dead
>
> Lazarus mystified, common man
> Of death. (*NCP*, 72)

Here Hill suggests that poetry has the power to raise Lazarus from the dead. He puns on the words 'speechless' and 'mystified'. The dead are 'speechless' simply in the sense that they cannot speak until raised by poetry, but also speechless with rage or indignation because Lazarus has been chosen instead of them. Lazarus is 'mystified' in the sense that his story is a mystery, a miracle (albeit one that Hill believes that poetry can repeat), but he is also 'mystified' by what has happened, he is also 'speechless' with amazement and the shock of being brought back to life.[2] Hill sees the power of poetry in several ways here. It appears blasphemous, like a dark version of Pentecost - the poet somehow finds

[2] Compare Alcestis's eerie silence in Euripides's play after being rescued from death by Heracles.

his own 'gift of tongues' - one that tastes like ashes.[3] The simple greeting or salutation may be wounding, an atrocity since the poet may use his gift to drag the long-dead reluctantly back to life, offending both the living and the dead. Hill clearly feels he is justified in his use of words in this way. He sees it as the poet's duty to 'bear witness', and that often means speaking difficult and unpalatable truths, reminding people of things they would rather forget.

During his interview with John Haffenden Hill makes his conception of the link between words as things and words as consciousness quite explicit:

> 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. (Haffenden, 1981, 87)

Nietzsche's 'phrase' comes in a passage from *The Genealogy of Morals* in which he is demonstrating how the 'bad conscience' created by Christianity's forced internalization of the natural human pleasure in being cruel can have positive results - namely in the works of art that this 'bad conscience' may produce. Here Hill sees his personality as the same kind of 'material' as language itself. 'Giving a form to oneself' in a poem involves work on the self, as well as on the words; the poem is a piece of the poet's consciousness preserved for history. In hunting after forms one is also seeking oneself. The suggestion that words can be consciousness is argued for by Nettleship, who rejected the facile distinction of words and things (which he saw as merely 'a distinction between the less full and the more full meanings of words' (Nettleship, 1901, 136)):

> In so far as words are really expressive, they *are* consciousness in a certain form which we call articulate, and do not need to be contrasted with anything of which they are the expression. (Nettleship, 1901, 134)

The poem can be a consciousness, it is not just an object. Although we may wish to reject any too close identification of poet and poem, we can still accommodate this idea of the poem into a modern conception of the poem. Hartman, in his *Free Verse*, writes:

> We comprehend the poem only as a process, not as an object. (Howard Nemerov has remarked that a poem is less a thought than a mind, thinking) [...] (The poem reports - inaccessibly - the author's experience; but it *is* the experience of the implied author). (Hartman, 1980, 85)

In a slightly different formulation Hill (who despises confessional poetry, and rejects the idea that poetry is 'self-expression') gives an account in which the poem is clearly a consciousness, a 'living power'.

> In the constraint of shame the poet is free to discover both the 'menace' and the atoning power of his own art. However much and however rightly we

[3] There may be an allusion to *Paradise Lost*, in that the Satan, as the serpent, claimed the apple had given him powers of speech; but when the fallen angels eat from a replica of it in Hell it tastes like ashes.

> protest against the vanity of supposing it to be merely the 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling', poetic utterance is nonetheless an utterance of the self, the self demanding to be loved, demanding love in the form of recognition and 'absolution'. (*LL*, 17)

Hill seems to be accepting Nietzsche's diagnosis of the modern guilty conscience, and the positive outlet it can find in writing poetry. If we can begin to accept that writing a poem is 'giving a form to oneself', that a poem is an utterance of the self and even a 'consciousness', then we find ourselves agreeing with David Jones that the poet is 'trying to make a shape out of the very things of which one is oneself made'. If this is the case, then the words, symbols, images and myths that we all use are not 'arbitrary signifiers' in any but the most superficial sense. Words are actually living powers.

One of the epigraphs Hill placed at the beginning of his volume *The Lords of Limit* is the following quotation from Chinuo Achebe's *Morning Yet on Creation Day*:

> The Igbo believe that when a man says yes his *chi* will also agree; but not always. Sometimes a man may struggle with all his power and say yes most emphatically and yet nothing he attempts will succeed. Quite simply the Igbo say of such a man: *Chie ekwero*, his *chi* does not agree. Now, this could mean one of two things: either the man has a particularly intransigent *chi* or else it is that the man himself is attempting too late to alter that primordial bargain he had willingly struck with his *chi*, saying yes now when his first unalterable word had been no, forgetting that 'the first word gets to Chukwu's house'. (*LL*, xii)

In this story we see a kind of power given to words of which Hill clearly approves. This goes further than 'our word is our bond' (the motto of the Stock Exchange that J. L. Austin and Hill have both written on). It establishes a metaphysical agent that regulates adherence to one's word, and will prevent success to projects that go against the 'first word' that has got to Chukwu's house, and therefore must be adhered to. At some level Hill believes that words have this power, especially if they have been strenuously crafted into a poem. The words will have a living energy, as Hartman puts it 'the poem represents - inacessibly - the author's experience; but it *is* the experience of the implied author' (Hartman, 1980, 85). Hill is interested in the way in which the poem incarnates authorial experience, how it can be a real living consciousness. He is drawn to writers who acknowledge this living power in words, and the responsibility it confers on them. Perhaps it is to be deplored that many writers do not appear to have a *chi*. People use inaccurate or false words, 'sham rhetoric', all the time, but still achieve success, and even literary reputations. Hill believes that the writings of those who have imposed the power of a *chi* upon themselves are clearly discernible. The kind of writing he respects is rigorously responsible, and therefore completely alive.

> To this extent we may say that Emerson is vindicated in his grand claim: 'Instantly we know whose words are loaded with life, and whose not'. (*EC*, 39)

What Hill wants is to create a precise concidence of word and thing in his writing. There is a simple example of this from *Mercian Hymns* that shows how the life in words can

spark out at us when thay are correctly hefted and tuned. When Hill writes 'he wept attempting to master *ancilla* and *servus*' he illuminates the relationship between the boy and King Offa in a striking and precise way. The boy's attempt to learn Latin means that he must learn the words for serving-girl and slave. He must 'master' their morphology in order to be able to use them. Similarly Offa must master his servants and slaves in order to rule effectively. The two sides of the comparison fit together beautifully because Latin was the official written language of early English administration. Land-grants, law-codes, even the markings on coins, were in Latin. Mastering the words is also mastering their referents. We can imagine Offa trying to learn Latin in order to be able to master his subjects more fully, to rely less on the clerical men who worked for him as scribes.

There is another beautiful consonance between word and thing in the word 'moldywarp'. Hill cherishes this word for mole in his phrase 'they are scattered to your collations, moldywarp' because it so closely describes the activity of the mole - turning over the earth - and therefore fits exactly with the mole moving amongst the remains of the dead workmen, perhaps feeding on their cold flesh.

Hill's delight in the way a word can focus exactly the connotations he wants to convey is evident in these examples. We can easily credit that the words have life and consciousness when they are arranged in such potent combinations. Of course the idea that words are alive is not only to be found in African religion. The Victorian Bishop R.C. Trench earns Hill's approval because of the 'radical' nature of his pioneering work on the importance of words for education. He probably would have had little time for Igbo philosophy, but strongly put forward an argument for words as 'living powers' in his influential book *On the Study of Words* :

> For I am persuaded that I have used no exaggeration in saying, that 'for many a young man his first discovery that words are living powers, has been like the dropping of scales from his eyes, like the acquiring of another sense, or the introduction into a new world'. (Trench, 1899, viii)

This is not an opinion that is particularly widespread today. But it is one that Trench had at least partly inherited from Coleridge. Trench pays tribute to Coleridge in his Preface because 'he so often himself weighed words in the balances, and so earnestly pressed upon all with whom his voice went for anything, the profit which they would find in so doing' (Trench, ix). This leads us back to Hill himself who quotes a passage from Coleridge's Preface to *Aids to Reflection* (in his essay 'Redeeming the Time', *LL*, 99), which I should like to quote more fully here:

> Reflect on your own thoughts, actions, circumstances, and - which will be of especial aid to you in forming a *habit* of reflection, - accustom yourself to reflect on the words you use, hear, or read, their birth, derivation and history. For if words are not THINGS, they are LIVING POWERS, by which the things of most importance to mankind are actuated, combined, and humanized. (Coleridge, 1993, 10)

Coleridge brings out this memorable phrase in a context which deals with intellectual self-improvement. Similarly Trench's book was intended as an aid for the practitioners of moral and academic education. However since these attitudes have not been shared by educators in more recent times, they have themselves become strange. To some they seem superstitious and vacuous.

Wittgenstein's model of language as without depth, as a system of labels or pictures, is much more familiar. It is often overlooked that Wittgenstein accepted the existence of meaning outside the world, which he felt to be inaccessible to logic, and therefore to language as he saw it. When we look at the models of Barfield, Trench and others who wish to add other dimensions of space and time to the schema of language we may feel that there is a possibility of speaking about some of the things Wittgenstein believes are beyond discourse. For Nettleship, Trench, Hill and others the problem is not that some things are beyond the capacity of language, but that language is being allowed to deteriorate. Wittgenstein despairs of establishing new vocabulary for matters on the boundaries of what can be thought - Hill and others consider that the problem is that the words people once used for the most subtle of matters have been so debased as to render their referents almost inconceivable. As an example of Hill's frustration with this deterioration I quote once more from his interview with Haffenden:

> This is one of the hazards of interrogation and discussion, one is surrounded by clouds of false witness: one is not only trying to describe as accurately as possible what one felt and how one worked, but one is simultaneously having to try to purge the very language of both long-established and recent perversions of its meaning and implications. (Haffenden, 1981, 95)

There seems to be something almost hysterical about this comment. To call Haffenden's genial questioning 'interrogation' risks comparing it to the imprisonment and torture of poets like Mandelstam. In fact, even 'discussion' is a dubious word here since Hill supplied his interviewer with a written copy of his answers (complete with footnotes), precisely to avoid the inaccuracies of verbal discussion. When Hill suggests that he is surrounded by 'clouds of false witness' we might think he was suffering from persecution mania, he implies people are telling lies about him. We must take this as a figurative expression for the way in which inaccurate use of language fogs the attempts of poets to make precise statements. The fact that Hill's account of his desire to avoid the vulgarization of language, and even to attempt its repair, is couched in terms that suggest persecution and torture should impress upon a reader that he, at least, does feel words as 'living powers'.

In his essay '"Perplexed Persistence" the Exemplary Failure of T.H. Green' Hill calls Trench's book 'more radical than anything by the "radical" Green'. He finds Trench's book more radical because it goes to the root (radex) of things by looking at words, because 'it was Trench who learned from Coleridge, via Emerson, "how deep an insight

into the failings of the human heart lies at the root of many words'" (*LL*, 112). Trench goes so far in his ascription of consciousness to language as to assert that it has wisdom:

> A language will often be wiser, not merely than the vulgar, but even than the wisest of those who speak it. Being like amber in its efficacy to circulate the electric spirit of truth, it is also like amber in embalming and preserving the relics of ancient wisdom, although one is not seldom puzzled to decipher its contents. Sometimes it locks up truths, which were once well known, but which, in the course of ages, have passed out of sight and been forgotten. In other cases it hold the germs of truths, of which, though they were never plainly discerned, the genius of is framers caught a glimpse in a happy moment of divination. A meditative man cannot refrain from wonder, when he digs down to the deep thought lying at the root of many a metaphysical term, employed for the designation of spiritual things, even of those with regard to which professing philosophers have blundered grossly; and often it would seem as though rays of truth, which were still below the intellectual horizon, had dawned upon the imagination as it was looking up to heaven. Hence they who feel an inward call to teach and enlighten their countrymen, should deem it an important part of their duty to draw out the stores of thought which are already latent in their native language, to purify it from the corruptions which Time brings upon all things, and from which language has no exemption, and to give distinctness and precision to whatever in it is confused, or obscure, or dimly seen. (Trench, 1899, ix)

Trench raises many issues in this pregnant passage. It seems as if the task of teachers is given a radically new sense by his concept of drawing out thought from language. Education is indeed often considered a drawing out, but Trench makes the language, rather than the pupil, the source of the knowledge. This ties in with the opening of the quotation where language is thought of as possessing, and using, wisdom; not merely containing it in a recorded form. The power of 'amber' to preserve insects and so on from decay, as well as the invocation of the mysterious electric power suggests that Trench is not looking to a simplistic inspiration of language from God. He is aware of the powers of human imagination, and he posits 'rays of truth' which, although they have come from God, are processed by the human capacity for language. Language exists in some relationship to God and man, but it possesses its own mysterious potency: something more than the strange properties of amber - a form of life. This is why Trench insists that teachers should try to purify and repair language.[4]

There have been dissenting voices. Hill engages with Dr. Johnson's dismissal of Swift's plan in his essay 'Jonathan Swift: the Poetry of "Reaction"'.

---

[4] This passage is quoted by Huxley in his *The Perennial Philosophy*. Huxley uses Trench's words to support his own belief that 'this insight [the oneness of all things] into the nature of things and the origin of good and evil is not confined exclusively to the saint, but is recognised obscurely by every human being, is proved by the very structure of our language' (17). Huxley, however, puts much less weight on the importance of words themselves 'the fundamental ideas of the Perennial Philosophy can be formulated in a very simple vocabulary, and the experiences to which the ideas refer can and indeed must be had immediately and apart from any vocabulary whatsoever' (27).

> Johnson remarks on the futility of trying to secure language from corruption and decay and of imagining that one has the 'power to change sublunary nature, and clear the world at once from folly, vanity and affectation'. One recalls Yeats's saying that Swift 'foresaw' Democracy as 'the ruin to come'. If this is so, it only intensifies the creative paradox of his poetry whose energy seems at times to emerge from the destructive element itself. (*LL*, 81)

Hill quotes Johnson with some irony here. He uses Johnson's words to make Swift's project seem a little foolish, but in doing so he recognises that if one could reform and preserve the language it would be the equivalent of clearing 'the world at once from folly, vanity and affectation'. As this is taken from the Preface to Johnson's *Dictionary* - one of the places where a language might be purified and preserved - we may take it that Johnson knows how difficult, and yet how valuable, any attempt to purify language is from his own efforts. But Hill turns the passage back on both of these academic works with his opinion that the energy of Swift's poetry 'emerge[s] from the destructive element itself'. Swift's work as a poet is more efficacious than both his tract on the English Tongue and Johnson's *Dictionary*. This argument is clearly in line with what Hill has said about the lost kingdom of innocence and original justice to which, he believes, every fine and moving poem bears witness. However subtle and fine the critical program, it is the simple, sensuous and passionate poem that can reveal the form struggling out of the shapeless block, free the energy from the destructive element of our everyday speech.

Some might wish to give Johnson's argument more credit. Moreover we could argue that poetry has very little effect upon the language as a whole. Hill's high claims for individual poems may be true for him and a select group of readers, but Johnson's 'Common Reader' no longer exists, and poetry cannot, in Eliot's words, purify the dialect of the tribe. A more basic objection might be made on more overtly political grounds. Raymond Williams is not one of those theorists and writers with whom Hill sees fit to engage, however his arguments, grounded in a socialist ideology, are an interesting contrast to Hill's conservatism. In *Keywords*, he attacks this passion for reform in the following terms.

> One of the effects of one kind of classical education, especially in conjunction with one version of the defining function of dictionaries, is to produce what can best be called a sacral attitude to words, and corresponding complaints of vulgar contemporary misunderstanding and misuse. The original meanings of words are always interesting. But what is often most interesting is the subsequent variation. (Williams, 1976, 18)

Williams is not suggesting that we disregard the history of words, but that we should not place all the emphasis on original meanings of words as if they, in every case, held the answer to contemporary problems of meaning. The dictionary's role is to chart the development of a living language, not to attempt to fix it in one form and prescribe 'incorrect' usage. In attacking a 'sacral' attitude to words he is suggesting that contemporary meanings are more valid than ancient ones because they have arisen in the living discourses of our contemporaries.

> It is not only that nobody can 'purify the dialect of the tribe', nor only that anyone who really knows himself to be a member of a society knows better than to want, in those terms, to try. It is also that variations and confusions of meaning are not just faults in a system, or errors of feedback, or deficiencies of education. They are in many cases, in my terms, historical and contemporary substance. Indeed they have often, as variations, to be insisted upon, just because they embody different experiences and readings of experience, and this will continue to be true, in active relationships and conflicts over and above the clarifying exercises of scholars or committees. (Williams, 1976, 21)

Williams concurs with Johnson's belief that it is impossible to purify and fix the language. But he also suggests that it would not be a good thing. In this he differs from other writers who assume that the changes in a language are for the worse, and that they make it more difficult to say anything clearly. On the contrary Williams sees language changing with the experiences of the people who use it. If the language didn't alter they would not be able to talk about their new experiences. Hill suggests that Swift's 'linguistic attitude is a kind of Tory stoicism', Williams's argument might find it a more disturbing kind of conservatism - one which effectively silences a section of society.

It is relatively easy to impress on people that they cannot totally purify the language - so many of our words have been imported from other languages through its history that no-one nowadays would undertake, as Sir John Cheke once did, to produce a translation of the Bible 'in which none but native words were to be used' (Barfield, 1954, 62). However a furore did arise when the Authorised Version of the Bible was supplanted in the Church of England. Even a hard-line campaigner like Trench agrees that there has to be some limitation to the search for linguistic roots.

> Those of the Eastern Church constantly urged that the Greek word for bread (and in Greek was the authoritative record of the first institution of this sacrament), implied, according to its root, that which was raised or lifted up; not, therefore, unleavened bread; such rather as had undergone the process of fermentation. But even if the etymology on which they relied (*artos* from *airo*, to raise) had been as certain as it is impossible, they could draw no argument of the slightest worth from so remote an etymology, and one which had so long fallen out of the consciousness of those who employed the word. (Trench, 1899, 173)

Trench's own etymologies are sometimes false, as helpful footnotes in more recent editions point out. In this case he does not explain why the Eastern Orthodox Church's etymology is wrong. And his argument that the etymology does not matter seems remarkably contradictory with regard to his overall thesis. Perhaps Trench merely uses the etymological evidence that suits his doctrinal leanings. As Hill puts it, 'Words are simultaneously true specie and specious' (*EC*, 35). When we read Trench's discussion of the languages of what he calls 'savage peoples' and their apparent lack of the vocabulary of the higher emotions necessary for the teaching of Christianity, there is something definitely unsavoury. His eagerness to use the reports of missionaries, who were

attempting to replace native cultures with Christianity, as valid and complete evidence about the lives and languages of the people they were oppressing is, at least, unscientific. There is an element of duplicity in the use of etymological and linguistic arguments to prove points of doctrinal rectitude or racial superiority that has to be corrected by Williams's more relativist position. Although we must reject Trench's racist linguistic theory, we must accept the value of his remarks about English, and perhaps regret that his theory of deterioration lead him to see 'savage languages' as corrupted and impoverished examples of the God-given human capacity to create language.

William Empson's enquiry into the relationship between language, thought and feeling is more sophisticated than Trench's. His book *The Structure of Complex Words* attempts to set up some simple symbolic machinery to account for some of the problems we have in interpreting words with several meanings, or words with emotions attached to them, and so on. Basically he has attempted to create a method for finding a way through the hugely complex web of contexture. In the course of his discussions, alongside this 'machinery', his book develops a rationalization of the extent to which common usage takes precedence over the forgotten (although perhaps influential) lineage of our words. In one sense it is an attempt to overpower the idea that words are alive with a detailed classification and theory of 'contexture'. We may hope to find some responses to Hill´s questions in 'Three Baroque Meditations 1':

> Do words make up the majesty
> Of man, and his justice
> Between the stones and the void?
>
> How they watch us, the demons
> Plugging their dumb wounds! When
> Exorcised they shrivel yet thrive. (*NCP*, 77)

Hill asks whether words can exert force on us to act in a certain way, or if they are merely symbols that we attach to what we do. There is some narrative movement in the second stanza. The mistrust of the power of language and the difficulty of handling it leads us to 'exorcise' them. We take the living power out of words and they 'shrivel'. However even in this sorry state they 'thrive'. The implication is that words have the power to make up the majesty and justice of humankind, but we are afraid of that power, label it demonic and continue to live with the inanimate tokens words have become.

An example of Hill using his poetry to rediscover the living power of a word is found in *Mercian Hymns* XVII: 'His maroon GT chanted then overtook. He lavished on the high valleys its *haleine*'. Like the use of the name *Albion* for the boy's sandlorry in VII, *haleine* gives the poem a connection with the legendary world of chivalry. In *The Song of Roland*, *haleine* is used of the sound of the battle horn. The poem is ironically connecting the arrogant blast of the modern car-horn, used to signal a piece of aggressive driving, with the call of the horn that was used to summon or embolden the soldiers in

medieval Europe. The tragedy of *The Song of Roland* centres on the proud reluctance of Oliver (Roland's comrade) to summon help with his horn. This results in him being fatally wounded in battle, his men hopelessly outnumbered. The character in the Vosges (who may be Offa) is much freer with blasts of his horn. The poem's use of this heroic term, bringing so much history with it, adds greatly to our sense of the arrogant and unchivalrous behaviour of the driver of the GT.

Empson seems to concur with some of the writers we have looked at in giving words a certain power, even some life:

> A word may become a sort of solid entity, able to direct opinion, thought of as like a person; also it is often said (whether this is the same idea or not) that a word can become a 'compacted doctrine', or even that all words are compacted doctrines inherently. To get some general theory about how this happens would clearly be important; if our language is continually thrusting doctrines on us, perhaps very ill-considered ones, the sooner we understand the process the better. (Empson, 1951, 39)

Empson entertains the idea that words may be like people (although his suspicion that compacted doctrines are also like persons might make us feel his concept of a 'person' rather narrow). He certainly sees that words can exert force on us, perhaps without our noticing, sometimes for the better, but sometimes making us adopt 'ill-considered doctrines'. Something of this process is revealed in Hill's 'September Song' as discussed above, where the word 'zyklon' interferes with our ideas about businesslike practices and their relationship to evil. In *The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy* Hill shows how punctuation can force a phrase into two opposite meanings, thereby suggesting that a seemingly respectable intention might be twisted by ambiguity: 'To dispense, with justice; or, to dispense/ With justice'. In the first four words the comma makes the sense 'to rule, or distribute things, justly'; in the second version 'to get rid of justice'. If the identical words can change their sense because of a punctuation mark then we must be ever-vigilant in our use of language to prevent 'ill-considered doctrines' overwhelming what we wanted to say. Hill thinks the poet should be foremost in the attempt to use language precisely (although that does not mean without ambiguity). The lines from *The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy* show that he wants to use the intensity of verbal awareness in his poems to purify language by revealing areas of instability, and creating new regions of clarity. In the Haffenden interview, Hill makes his intentions explicit.

> Poetry is responsible. It is a form of responsible behaviour, not a directive. It is an exemplary exercise. Ezra Pound said in his *Letters* that 'The poet's job is to define and yet again define, till the detail of the surface is in accord with the root in justice'. (Haffenden, 1981, 99)

Empson's book attempts to introduce a more sophisticated method of definition through academic scholarship.

In *The Structure of Complex Words*, Empson makes a fairly long analysis of a passage from *The Perennial Philosophy*, in which Huxley argues that the fact that the

Sanskrit word *dharma* can mean either 'the essential nature of an individual' or 'the law of righteousness and piety' is the reason why Buddhists and Hindus do not tend to persecute people. Empson spends some time showing how his machinery can help us interpret this pair, and he compares *dharma* to the English word 'nature' which he thinks works in the same way. He then quite flippantly rejects Huxley's thesis.

> Incidentally, the double meaning of *dharma* is quite clearly not what prevented religious persecution among the users of Sanskrit, because there is a word in English and the other languages of Christendom which would yield practically the same covert assertion. The point that Aldous Huxley really wanted to make, as I understand him, was that Sanskrit speakers based their religious and moral position on something like Nature rather than on a transcendent God who revealed universal laws. (Empson, 1951, 71).

Empson's arguments seems to be that it is not the word that matters, but the importance of the concept behind the word in these non-Christian religions. Empson is so bound up in contexture, and especially in his own particular 'machinery', that he cannot accept the possibility of a living power in the word 'dharma'. In this way he resembles Ricks, whose commitment to logic prevents him from seeing how Hill can assent to both Eliot and Yeats's definition of how a poem is completed. Huxley (who is fully as aware of etymology and other kinds of contexture as Empson) would argue, with Nettleship and others we have looked at, that the thing cannot be separated from its expression in this facile way: its expression is its being. Huxley is not suggesting that no other word could have this range of meanings, just that this word, in the place of importance that it inhabits, has had a great influence upon the behaviour of Hindus and Buddhists.

Although Empson accepts that consciousness can be affected by words, often without our recognition of what is happening, he clearly feels that his analysis of 'contexture' wraps up the issue; there is no need for words to be credited with a living consciousness. Words can be reduced to being, at most, 'compacted doctrines'. When Empson tries to show how his method solves the problem of out-of-date etymological arguments, he does it much more skilfully than Trench himself did in his simple rejection of the argument of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Empson quotes Trench's argument that pain is punishment, and comments thus:

> If you came fresh from the factory conditions of the time and heard the good archbishop on this point you might perhaps have tried kicking that important figure. He might then have found himself claiming that though in pain he did not deserve to suffer. To be sure, the immorality of his argument does not prove that it is historically false. But an opposite argument is just as easy to invent. (Empson, 1951, 82)

Empson shows in what follows that he basically agrees with Trench's linguistic argument. He just rejects the interpretation. In Empson's terms punishment is painful, and therefore other painful things get called by the same name. But one cannot reverse the order of terms and say that all pain is punishment. For Trench there is a framework

which might allow us to reverse the terms. It is the condition of fallen man to suffer, therefore all pain comes from the fall and from our sin, it is in that sense punishment. We must, with charity, hope that the Archbishop would have agreed that he 'deserved' the pain of the kick just as much as the factory-worker 'deserved' the hardship of his working conditions. This is precisely the kind of transcending synthesis we were looking for at the outset of the chapter. What arises from this is that Empson seems at times to impose his mechanical framework upon statements that, in their own (Christian, Buddhist, historical) contexts evade his tools.

A useful corrective to Empson's scepticism, and one which supports Huxley's argument that the use of the word 'dharma' had a real effect on the practices of users of Sanskrit, is the argument that the introduction of new vocabulary can create the new sensibility that it names. Owen Barfield singles out the nourishing interaction between the secular and religious uses of words in Christianity.

> When Tindale and Coverdale came to make their translations of the Bible in the sixteenth century, they found ready to their hand a vocabulary of feeling which had indeed been drawn in the first place from the austerities of the religious life, but which had in many cases acquired warmer and more human echoes by having been applied to secular uses. And just as lyrical devotion to the Virgin Mary and to the infant Jesus had helped to evolve a vocabulary which could express, and thus partly create, a sentiment of tenderness towards all women and young children, so we seem to feel the warmth of human affection, as it were, reflected back into religious emotion in such creations as Coverdale's *lovingkindness* and *tender mercy*, Tindale's *long-suffering*, *mercifulness*, *peacemaker* and *beautiful* (for it was he who brought this word into general use), and in many of the majestically simple phrases of the Authorized Version. (Barfield, 1954, 126)

Trench, in contrast to Barfield, puts more emphasis on the enrichment that Christianity has given to language.

> Nothing, I am persuaded, would more mightily convince us of the new power which Christianity proved in the world than to compare the meaning which so many words possessed before its rise, and the deeper meaning which they obtained, so soon as they were assumed as the vehicles of its life, the new thought and feeling enlarging, purifying, and ennobling the very words which they employed. (Trench, 1899, 51)

So intense is Trench's belief that ideas and words are inseparable that he will not call members of the Roman Catholic Church "Catholics" lest that should imply he ascribed to them a universality which in fact he rejects. Trench does seem to contradict himself slightly when he argues first that Christianity caused many new words to be formed because it forced men to find names for ideas and feelings which had not previously existed; and then goes on to say that the absence of a word in a language (because 'men are so little accustomed, indeed so little able, to contemplate things, except through the intervention, and by the machinery, of words') usually means that no-one will notice the absence of the word or the thing to which it refers. Trench clearly believes that only the

influence of an external power, like that of Christianity, can force language-users out of their apathy and make them think new thoughts, and experience new feelings, through the machinery of new words.

In this chapter I have tried to adumbrate Hill's beliefs about the nature of language, and particularly poetic language. A large part of the power of poetry comes from its rhythmic form, and Hill would join with Owen Barfield and Simone Weil in tracing rhythmical form back to the earliest oral compositions, created at a time when humans lived with much greater awareness of the rhythms of Nature itself.

> Just as the myths still live on a ghostly life as fables after they have died as real meaning, so the old rhythmic human consciousness of Nature (it should rather be called a *participatio* than a consciousness) lives on as the tradition of metrical form. (Barfield, 1928, 146)

Hill himself centres his essay 'Redeeming the Time' around this power of rhythmic language:

> If language is more than a vehicle for the transmission of axioms and concepts, rhythm is correspondingly more than a physiological motor. It is capable of registering deep shocks of recognition. (*LL*, 87)

Of course, when one asserts that language and rhythm have this kind of potency, we are compelled to take our responsibities to the things we write and say, and our fidelity to such utterances, extremely seriously.

> Did Péguy kill Jaurés? 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? (*NCP*, 165)

In these lines from *The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy*, Hill draws together the responsibility that Péguy took for his writing and his exemplary behaviour at the beginning of the First World War. We might wish to question Péguy's fairness in writing the kind of emotive essays that might have incited someone to kill Jaurés. Péguy did not flinch from using strong language, and standing by it. But we have to admire him since he was also willing to follow his principles and go to his death at the battle of the Marne. Whether or not we hold the same sentiments as Péguy about nationhood, we cannot fault the integrity of his life. Péguy made his life a struggle to live up to his ideals. I have suggested that Hill sees his literary career as an ongoing discipline, almost a spiritual exercise, which has a similar aim, to make what he writes fully responsible and truthful, to bear witness. That this is a serious and challenging undertaking is suggested by the writers who have envisioned something similar. In Hill's terms poetry is an exemplary exercise, a kind of spiritual discipline. Coleridge sets out something which seems remarkably similar to the Buddhist practice of 'right speech' (which is considered to be fundamental to ethical Buddhist living):

> On some future occasion more especially demanding such disquisition, I shall attempt to prove the close connection between veracity and habits of mental accuracy; the beneficial after-effects of verbal precision in the preclusion of fanaticism, which masters the feelings more especially by indistinct watch-words; and to display the advantages which language alone, at least which language with incomparably greater ease and certainty than any other means, presents to the instructor of impressing modes of intellectual energy so constantly, so imperceptibly and as it were by such elements and atoms as to secure in due time the formation of a second nature. (Coleridge, 1965, 264)

The effects of this effort are everywhere observable in Hill's work. Of course this means that Hill's writings makes demands upon the reader - demands which any serious work, that we want to experience fully, must exact of us. When we recognize this kind of power in words and works of art, we can begin to draw spiritual benefit from them; but only if we are prepared to work on ourselves in some of the ways suggested by Jones, Nietzsche, Coleridge, and Hill. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy explores this demand in his *Figures of Thought or Figures of Speech*:

> In order to understand the work we must stand where the patron and artist stood and have done as they did; we cannot depend upon the mere reactions of 'our own unintelligent nerve-ends'. The judgement of an image is a contemplation, and as such can only be consummated in an assimilation. A transformation of our nature is required. It is in the same sense that Mencius says that to grasp the true meanings of words requires not so much a dictionary or a knowledge of epistemology as a rectification of personality. (Coomaraswamy, 1946, 181)