

## Chapter Six

### Imitation, Poetic Vocation and Spiritual Integrity.

Much of Hill's poetry works through imitation or translation. Many of his poems are versions of pre-existing poems. Several Spanish poems have found their way into the sequences of *Tenebrae*, where Hill uses them to connect his spiritual anxieties back into that powerful tradition of metaphysical poetry. *The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy* incorporates gobbets from the French poet's writings in order to lead the reader into an engagement with his fierce and troubled attempt at spiritual and political integrity. 'Scenes with Harlequins' draws on Blok's poetry as well as his biography, bearing witness to the strange mystical, sexual and political complex that he lived and wrote.

*Brand* is Hill's greatest achievement in this field. *Brand* is a powerful manipulator of language, a man who can persuade himself and others to huge sacrifices through his verbal skill. Hill is fascinated by the potential rewards of the spiritual life, and the danger that one may misuse the abilities one has gained, or fall into solipsism. *Brand* seems to do both of these things; and yet, in his final moments with Gerd and the Chorus of the Invisibles, he seems to redeem himself when he directs his linguistic power towards a new, thorough-going, questioning of the self. In this drama, Hill has found an echo of his own difficulties, especially his fear that the poetic vocation somehow excludes him from the form of Christian discipleship he admires in Bonhoeffer and Weil. The fact that *Brand* had to be carried over into English contributes to its importance within Hill's work. Here we find Hill working in that arena of the impact of two languages which Walter Benjamin and George Steiner find so rich in potential. *Brand* addresses the problems of spiritual integrity, rhetorical power and human compassion that Hill is continually meditating. By working Ibsen's poetry into English, Hill opens English up to the discoveries of the Norwegian verse. His success is based upon commitment to technical matters. By labouring with form he manages to translate the 'poetic', to carry across the feeling, like the poet-translators Celan and Hölderlin. In his 'imitations' of

these two writers, Hill creates poems that pay tribute to their unyielding commitment to the spiritual exercise of making poems. While giving us versions of their work he communicates to us the existential risk of being a poet. This chapter will focus on Hill's versions of Ibsen, Celan and Hölderlin in order to identify the importance of the structure of translation for his work as a whole.

In *After Babel*, George Steiner gives an impressive account of the structure of translation, arguing that it is fundamental to our use of language. There is something self-defeating about the all-inclusiveness of his concept of translation, but some of his basic theses are useful. His book works with the myth of Babel:

Being of divine etymology, moreover, the *Ur-sprache* had a congruence with reality such as no tongue has had after Babel [...]. Words and objects dove-tailed perfectly. As the modern epistemologist might put it, there was a complete, point-to-point mapping of language onto the true substance and shape of things. Each name, each proposition was an equation, with uniquely and perfectly defined roots, between human perception and the facts of the case. Our speech interposes itself between apprehension and truth like a dusty pane or warped mirror. The tongue of Eden was like a flawless glass; a light of total understanding streamed through it. Thus Babel was a second Fall, in some regards as desolate as the first. Adam had been driven from the garden; now men were harried, like yelping dogs, out of the single family of man. And they were exiled from the assurance of being able to grasp and communicate reality. (Steiner, 1992, 61)

This account of the importance of Babel is the lynch-pin of Steiner's argument. Before Babel there was no need for interpretation or translation. Language was transparent. In the terms of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Adam intuited the names of things, and in knowing their names he perceived their natures. Our fall from this linguistic paradise is as galling as our exclusion from the garden of Eden.

Steiner demands recognition of the inescapability of interpretation after Babel:

In the absence of interpretation, in the manifold but generically unified meaning of the term, there could be no culture, only an inchoate silence at our backs. In short, the existence of art and literature, the reality of felt history in a community, depend on a never-ending, though very often unconscious, act of internal translation. It is no overstatement to say that we possess civilisation because we have learnt to translate out of time. (Steiner, 1992, 31)

In applying this passage to Hill, one must remark that he is a poet concerned with making that act of interpretation conscious. He looks into his roots because he is aware

that modern humanity is losing the ability to do some of this translation. We risk moving forward with ‘only an inchoate silence at our backs’. Whether Hill is delving into his own roots or working between languages, his poetry labours to stimulate and guide such acts of interpretation.

This act of re-connection by the contemporary artist with what has gone before is a dominant theme for Steiner:

Western art is, more often than not, about preceding art; literature about literature. The word ‘about’ points to the crucial ontological dependence, to the fact that a previous work or body of work is, in some degree, the *raison d’être* of the work in hand. We have seen that this degree can vary from immediate reduplication to tangential allusion and change almost beyond recognition. But the dependence is there, and its structure is that of translation. (Steiner, 1992, 485)

Hill’s work, with its intense engagement with language, history, landscape, spiritual tradition and the lives and works of artists from other cultures, exemplifies this ‘structure of translation’. His poetry offers fine support for Steiner’s argument, because it works creatively with pre-existent cultural objects. It demonstrates the human need for rootedness and the rich poetic potential of an intelligent and passionate use of this species of ‘translation’.

The danger with Steiner’s argument is that the specificity of translation between languages is lost. Steiner’s emphasis on the ubiquity of this ‘structure of translation’ is valid, but in what follows I shall focus on the potentials unleashed when a poet forces two languages together:

Hölderlin’s genius reaches its final realization in translation because the clash, mediation, and dialectic fusion of Greek and German were to him the readiest, most tangible enactment of the collisions of being. The poet brings his native tongue into the charged field of force of another language. He invades and seeks to break open the core of alien meaning. Having done so he cannot return intact to home ground. In each of these hermeneutic motions, the translator performs an action deeply analogous with that of Antigone when she trespasses on the sphere of the gods. The translator also is an *antitheos* who does violence to the natural, divinely sanctioned division between languages (what right have we to translate?) but who affirms, through this rebellious negation, the final, no less divine, unity of the logos. (Steiner, 1992, 349)

Hill responds strongly to poets who register ‘collisions of being’ by becoming translators.

Hölderlin’s example is particularly important because he makes explicit the ‘trespass[...]

on the sphere of the gods' that exercises Hill in 'Lachrimae' and elsewhere in his poetry. There is more than 'Europeanism' behind Hill's engagement with poetry from other European cultures. His work between languages interrogates the potential of human language, and the hazardous spiritual practice of a poetry that is mining the 'structure of translation' in order to gain insight into reality.

Hill's critics have, of course, noticed that much of his work takes the form of translation, or imitation, of both real and imagined texts. Vincent Sherry writes with approval of this aspect of Hill's work, claiming that his knowledge of other languages gives him 'an outsider's perspective on his own language' and 'a sense of the material reality of his words' (Sherry, 241). This thesis has been concerned with ways in which Hill works to become an insider in various traditions - literary, historical, geographical and spiritual. Sherry is right about Hill's sense of the materiality of language, but his comment about the 'outsider's perspective' doesn't go far enough. Hill's engagement with other cultures and their texts is undertaken in order to get an insider's perspective on them. And when he returns to the English language to write his own poem, he attempts to graft his discoveries onto his own culture; to make them available for English readers.<sup>1</sup>

For some critics Hill's engagement with other poets is less positive - as if he is working without an appreciation of the cultural and temporal distances involved. E. M. Knottenbelt therefore distrusts Hill's cultural foraging more than Sherry does:

Following Cabezon and de Vega, he is experimenting with how he might make poetry in English as if the Spanish tradition were his own as it was for the English poets Donne, Herbert, Vaughan, Crashaw, in the seventeenth century and as if he might re-write the English Metaphysical (meditative) tradition. (Knottenbelt, 1990, 215)

Knottenbelt's interpretation seems rather strange. There is no evidence that Hill thinks he is a seventeenth-century poet, or that he wishes to 'rewrite' a past tradition. Rather, he is drawing from a tradition. Since he aspires to write a poetry continuous with the

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<sup>1</sup> We can see the evidence of this process in Hill's recent poetry, which is more engaged in contemporary British politics. Living in America has given him the 'outsider's perspective' on something that he was previously very much inside. In this case the process works backwards, since in the other areas of Hill's work he has begun as an outsider and worked his way in. One might say that Hill needs both an insider's and an outsider's perspective to do his work. While his knowledge of foreign languages had put him in this relation to the English language, a long period of life and work abroad was necessary to do the same regarding contemporary Britain.

English poets Knottenbelt lists, he also goes to the Spanish poetry that influenced them. He writes with an awareness of history, not in an attempt to erase and rewrite it.

This misunderstanding of Hill's practice leads to the following verdict:

Perhaps Hill is relying too heavily on a tradition, meditative or popular, Marvell, Donne or Herbert could draw on, but which is unavailable to him. (Knottenbelt, 1990, 253)

I cannot see any grounds for this condemnation of Hill's poems, or of the principle that one can fruitfully engage with a tradition whose heyday is past. We have seen, throughout this thesis, that Hill's work frequently enables and encourages us to engage with the experiences of people from the past. Translating or imitating the works of such people is a fundamental technique facilitating such engagement. Knottenbelt's scepticism seems unfounded.

Michael Edwards, in his essay 'Hill's Imitations', makes a more positive assessment. He suggests that Hill uses other people's poems to 'engender poems of his own' (Robinson, P., 1985, 166) and even suggests that his 'imitations' of Spanish texts have 'produce[d] a kind of ballad poetry that is hardly recognisable as having existed in English before' (ibid). This is a truer description of Hill's achievement. In this chapter I shall discuss the concept of translation in precisely these terms. Translation is making possible, in one's own language, something which was previously unrealised. Just as Hill has worked to reconnect himself with the past, and with the experiences of other poets, he also works to enrich the English language through version of works from other cultures.

Walter Benjamin's essay 'The Task of the Translator' sets out a theory which supports the high claims for translation that I have just made. Benjamin argues that works of art are not intended for their audience, and that the important things they communicate are not contained in their informational content. These arguments underpin his dislike of 'bad translations' which only manage to transmit this inessential information. Benjamin's position depends upon a theological view of reality:

One might, for example, speak of an unforgettable life or moment even if all men had forgotten it. If the nature of such a life or moment required

that it be unforgotten, that predicate would not imply a falsehood but merely a claim not fulfilled by men, and probably also a reference to a realm in which it *is* fulfilled: God's remembrance. Analogously, the translatability of linguistic creations ought to be considered even if men should prove unable to translate them. (Benjamin, 1992, 71)

Benjamin argues that it is in the nature of some works to be translatable (and therefore of some others not to be) but he points out that the absence of a translation at a given time does not mean a work is untranslatable - just that the person able to translate it has not yet appeared. His argument also implies that for some works only God may prove to be an adequate translator, but that does not mean that we should consider such works 'untranslatable'. Put together this seems more like an argument that all linguistic creations are, ultimately, translatable. However, Benjamin's article now moves to a discussion of what the phenomenon of translation tells us about the relationship between languages:

Translation thus ultimately serves the purpose of expressing the central reciprocal relationship between languages [...] As for the posited central kinship of languages, it is marked by a distinctive convergence. Languages are not strangers to one another, but are, a priori and apart from all historical relationships, interrelated in what they want to express. (Benjamin, 1992, 73)

Benjamin refers obliquely to the myth of Babel, asserting the original unity of languages. He appeals to a vision of common origin for human beings. We are all human, we all wish to communicate ourselves, therefore all our languages are, at base, engaged in the same enterprise. Benjamin argues that all languages are striving towards some objective statement of the human condition. Such an expression is impossible for any one language alone, after Babel - but translation opens new possibilities:

Wherein resides the relatedness of two languages apart from historical considerations? Certainly not in the similarity between works of literature or words. Rather, all suprahistorical kinship of languages rests in the intention underlying each language as a whole - an intention, however which no single language can attain by itself but which is realised only by the totality of their intention supplementing each other: pure language. (Benjamin, 1972, 74).

Benjamin's term 'pure language' is of great interest. He seems to be suggesting that a kind of writing that approximates to the original objectivity of Adamic speech is discoverable, not by tracing back languages to their distant shared origins in Indo-

European or some other Ur-sprache, but in the act of translating literature from one language to another.

One would wish to contrast Benjamin's thesis with Hill's statement that every 'fine and moving poem bears witness to the lost kingdom of innocence and original justice'(Haffenden, 1981, 88). Hill avoids Benjamin's suggestion that the 'pure language' can be re-created, although one assumes that the language spoken in his 'lost kingdom' is that pellucid one described by Steiner in the passages we have looked at above. Crucially, Hill phrases his comment in terms of witness. Poetry cannot redeem the language, but it can bear witness to a time when language, and human society, was immaculate.

Benjamin's belief in the creative clash of languages allows him to push further back towards the pre-Babelian human condition:

It is the task of the translator to release in his own language that pure language which is under the spell of another, to liberate the language imprisoned in a work in his re-creation of that work. For the sake of pure language he breaks through decayed barriers of his own language. (Benjamin, 1992, 80)

Benjamin's argument becomes metaphysical here. Just as we cannot know what God's translation of a text that no human can translate might be like, so we cannot grasp this 'pure language'. No matter how great the translation, no matter what violence a translator does to the rules of his own language, the text does not achieve the Pentecostal transcendence that Benjamin points to here. However, if we are prepared to accept the concept of 'pure language' as that which makes a text great but is not merely information, or as the aspiration of all language to the expression of the human condition, we may apply it to Hill's versions and imitations of Ibsen, Hölderlin and Celan.

For Walter Benjamin, Hölderlin was the poet-translator whose work demonstrated most clearly the potential of translation:

In them [Hölderlin's translations of Sophocles] the harmony of the two languages is so profound that sense is touched by language only the way an aeolian harp is touched by the wind. Hölderlin's translations are prototypes of their kind; they are to even the most perfect renderings of their texts as a prototype is to a model. (Benjamin, 1992, 82)

Hölderlin's translations of Sophocles are a different kind of work from Hill's *Brand*. Firstly, Hill did not work from the original language, and secondly his version does not allow sense and language to move apart in the way that Hölderlin did. However, it is interesting that, even before 1958, Hill was writing about, and in imitation of, the poet who epitomises the kind of translation that can release 'pure language':

Little Apocalypse  
Hölderlin 1770-1843

Abrupt tempter; close enough to survive  
The sun's primitive renewing fury;  
Scorched vistas where crawl the injured and brave:  
This man stands sealed against their injury:

Hermetic radiance of great suns kept in:  
Man's common nature suddenly too rare:  
See, for the brilliant coldness of his skin,  
The god cast, perfected among fire. (*NCP*, 33)

The poem suggests Hölderlin was a man continually risking himself, putting himself in danger of burning. One might want to see the fire that runs through the poem as the sun, or the volcano into which Empedocles hurled himself, but it also represents the power of God. Hölderlin 'tempts' fate by approaching the power of the sun. He is 'close' enough to be killed, but also close enough to purity to survive. The scorched, injured people crawling around him show his superiority. He is 'sealed against their injury' in the sense that he is protected by his attainments; he is not hurt by the heat. However, he is also sealed in the sense that he does not feel for them. Like the man in 'An Order of Service' there is a suggestion that he is indifferent. Hill also intends us to read the word 'close' as close-lipped. He is unwilling to share his knowledge, to help people to achieve what he has. This kind of closeness also contributes to his safety. One feels the power he approaches would not take kindly to vulgarisation. The second stanza of the poem develops the image. The poet now keeps the radiance of the suns 'in'. While in the first stanza we saw a man standing too close to the sun, here we see one who also has the power of suns inside him. That he keeps it in suggests both that he protects those around him and that he is callously denying them the benefits of his power. He is 'hermetic': both sealing up things that are dangerous, and denying knowledge to the uninitiated. He is



therefore 'too rare' - removed from humanity to the extent that his skin is cold despite all the heat there seems to be inside and outside his body. The final line recalls Empedocles very strongly. At one level it suggests the man who has perfected himself, become a god, throwing himself into the volcano. But we could also read it as the creation of an idol, a piece of art-work cast in metal: perhaps by Vulcan, whose workshop is traditionally located in the heart of Etna.

As we shall see, Hill's poem is a version or imitation of Hölderlin's work. At the time when Hill was writing this poem, Michael Hamburger's edition of Hölderlin's poems<sup>2</sup> did not include translations of the fragmentary *The Death of Empedocles* or the poem 'Empedocles', but there was a version of 'Patmos' and the introduction featured a long section on Empedocles. It is certain that many elements of Hill's poem were inspired by his reading of Hamburger's edition and Gascoyne's *Hölderlin's Madness*. Hill must have been impressed by Gascoyne's book, in which he discusses Hölderlin's commitment to poetry:

For Hölderlin, as for almost all the romantics of his period (and particularly Novalis), and for Rimbaud (as for the Baudelaire of *Correspondances*), the writing of poetry was something far more than the act of composition; rather was it an activity by means of which it was possible to attain to hitherto unknown degrees of consciousness, a sort of rite, entailing the highest metaphysical implications and with a non-euclidean logic of its own. (Gascoyne, 1938, 11)

Time and again, in Hill's work, we have seen the conception of poetry as a form of spiritual exercise, which may actually conflict with, for instance, one's relationship with Christ. Gascoyne's engagement with Hölderlin's 'madness' is also influential. Gascoyne's vision of poetry as a method for storming heaven incorporates an awareness of its dangers:

Yet it must be remarked immediately that, in order to catch even so much as a glimpse of Paradise, the poet has to pay the price; for his undertaking is an attempt to transgress the laws of man's universe. The gates of Paradise are barred against us by the angel with the flaming sword; and the poet-seer, in attempting to escape that terrible interdiction is guilty of a promethean crime. Rimbaud, more than

<sup>2</sup> That Hill encountered Hölderlin via Hamburger and Gascoyne's volumes is attested to by Raymond Hargreaves, a Professor of German and a contemporary of Hill's at Leeds. The information cited here originates in conversations between Hargreaves and myself. I would like to thank Raymond Hargreaves for this opportunity, and for his help in reading an earlier draft of this chapter.

Hölderlin, was aware of this [...] If he had not become silent and renounced his work, he too would undoubtedly have gone mad. (Gascoyne, 1938, 12)

While Hamburger sees Hölderlin's madness in terms of his relationship with his mother, and his unfortunate love-life, Gascoyne put it into this mythic framework. Gascoyne also differs from Hamburger in valuing the poems of Hölderlin's madness above the work he produced while sane. Indeed, for Gascoyne, it is Hölderlin's willingness to go mad for poetry that makes him a supreme poet:

In Hölderlin, in fact, we find the whole adventure of the romantics epitomised in its profoundest sense: he carried within himself the germ of the development and the resolution of its contradiction. He was one of the most thorough-going of romantics, because he went mad, and madness is the logical development of romanticism; and he went beyond romanticism, because his poetry is stronger than despair, and reaches into the future and light. (Gascoyne, 1938, 2)

Just as Hill responds to those who have risked their lives in order to bear witness to truth, through literature, political resistance or undergoing religious persecution, so he must have been fascinated by a man who sacrificed his sanity for poetry. While Hamburger considers the poems of Hölderlin's final years to be but weak echoes of his former work, Gascoyne rates them very highly, suggesting that there is something about the state that people call 'madness' that is superior to sanity:

During these years, Hölderlin did not cease to write. For some time he was capable of writing only fragments, obscure and lacerated; but by the time his madness (which would today be called *dementia praecox*) had reached a certain stage, he began to write rhymed poems, in perfectly balanced form, expressive of great peace and wisdom. (Gascoyne, 1938, 7)

Perhaps there is some correlation between Benjamin's statement that Hölderlin's translations of Sophocles, despite (but actually because of) the disturbing way in which sense and language come adrift in them, are prototypes of ideal translation and Gascoyne's argument that Hölderlin's late poems express 'peace and wisdom' despite (but actually because of) his madness:

The room where Hölderlin was shut up during all those thirty years, looked out upon a landscape of snow-capped mountain, dark forest and green valley, through which the Neckar flowed. In his madness, he transformed this earthly scene into the unearthly beauty and serenity of his last days.

In each of these poems, Hölderlin creates a world: a world of extraordinary transparency - clear air and dazzling light. Everything stands out in light and shade, in height and depth. In movement, and yet timeless. The images pass away and yet Nature remains. (Gascoyne, 1938, 9)

The landscape that Hölderlin creates here sound like Hill's 'lost kingdom of innocence and original justice', or perhaps it recalls more closely the Averroen vision in 'Funeral Music 4':

Our lives could be a myth of captivity  
Which we might enter: an unpeopled region  
Of ever new-fallen snow, a palace blazing  
With perpetual silence as with torches. (*NCP*, 61)

Hill's poem recognises the distasteful element in such a vision. Our lives come to resemble the confinement of Hölderlin to his tower by the Neckar. The silence and lack of people suggest both Hölderlin's relative solitude, but also the difficulty of communicating with the poet for his visitors and Zimmer (the man in whose household the poet lived). Of course 'Funeral Music 4' is not 'about' Hölderlin, but Hill's hesitant longing for Averroes's 'region', where Intellect is absolute, is a longing for the transformation of landscape and experience of Hölderlin's late poems.

Hamburger, in the introduction to his 1952 edition, clearly agrees largely with Gascoyne, although he resists the use of a mythic framework, and thinks that Hölderlin's madness marks the end point of his truly valuable work:

In his poetry, Hölderlin finally attained what he desired, but only just before he surrendered to madness. At the same time, his unfinished drama, *The Death of Empedocles*, owes its originality and power precisely to the situation which Hölderlin describes: his hero is driven away from the crowd, into exile and self-destruction, because of his unwillingness to make compromises. (Hölderlin, 1952, 35)

Hölderlin, like Brand, Empedocles and Hyperion, refused to compromise. Both the high quality of his work and his madness are the results of this refusal. It is an interesting question whether Hölderlin was more thoroughgoing in that he was prepared to sacrifice his sanity, instead of tumbling into a volcano and ending his internal conflict. Whether we accept Gascoyne or Hamburger's opinion on this matter, it is clear that Hill saw, in

Hölderlin, a prototype not only of the ideal translator, but also of the man who is prepared to sacrifice everything for truth.

Although there is no translation of 'Empedocles' in Hamburger's 1952 edition, he does quote extensively from *Empedocles on Etna* and *The Death of Empedocles* in his introduction. And he includes a version of Hölderlin's *Patmos*, of which he writes:

To the serious reader, *Patmos* may be frightening, or at least disquieting. He may well wonder whether he should venture in good faith into a landscape lit by an unfamiliar sun, that of a rare mystical wisdom or that of madness; it is up to the reader to decide which of the two it is, to accept or reject the revelation. *Patmos* is truly an apocalyptic poem, as indeed are all the other great 'hymns' which Hölderlin wrote at this period; but, in all of them, the language is naked and precise, though the vision and thought expressed belong to a strange dimension. (Hölderlin, 1952, 66)

When we turn these works, it becomes clear that Hill's 'Little Apocalypse' is, in some way, a version or imitation of Hölderlin's poetry. The poem shows Hill's willingness to enter the strange dimension of these poems, his willingness to venture into an area that may be mystical wisdom or madness.<sup>3</sup>

Hölderlin's 'Empedocles' is as follows:

You look for life, you look and from the deeps of Earth  
A fire, divinely gleaming wells up for you,  
And quick, aquiver with desire, you  
Hurl yourself down into Etna's furnace.

So did the Queen's exuberance once dissolve  
Rare pearls in wine; and why should she not? But you,  
If only you, O poet, had not  
Offered your wealth to the seething chalice!

Yet you are holy to me as is the power  
Of Earth that took you from us, the boldly killed!  
And gladly, did not love restrain me,  
Deep as the hero plunged down I'd follow. (Hölderlin, 1994, 13)

The poem is ambivalent about the idea of sacrifice. Cleopatra's gratuitous waste of wealth seems like a parody of Empedocles's leap into Etna. The acts are linked via a speech of Panthea in *Empedocles on Etna*, in which she says:

Smiling he threw his pearls, the brave one,  
Into the ocean from whence they came.

<sup>3</sup> In what follows I use Hamburger's 1994 edition *Friedrich Hölderlin: Poems and Fragments*. While not all the material here was available in the editions available to Hill, the correspondences make clear how intensely Hill engaged with Hölderlin's work.

It was bound to be thus,  
 So the spirit wills it,  
 And ripening Time,  
 For we that are blind  
 Needed a miracle once. (Hölderlin, 1952, 45)

There is a world of difference between the exuberant waste of pearls by Queen Cleopatra and the sacrifice of Empedocles. But the poet sees some connection, made explicit in Panthea's suggestion that it is right for the pearls to be reabsorbed by the sea. The apparent waste actually reunites two forms of the same energy. While the words 'If only you, O poet, had not/ Offered your wealth to the seething chalice!' primarily refer to the waste of Empedocles' life, they also turn back on the poet who is allowing his potential for sacrifice and intensity to be spent in his love-affair with the queen. There is surely an explicit sexual metaphor here: the poet's pearls are dissolved in the queen's chalice; love and sex demand the energies and potential that might have led to spiritual growth. In this poem, Hölderlin admits the attraction of Empedocles' uncompromising spiritual intensity, but the claims of love are too strong for him to follow the 'hero' into the crater.

In the dramatic fragment *The Death of Empedocles*, Hölderlin shows us Hermocrates plotting the death of the hero because he has given away the secrets he has learned:

More ruinous than sword or raging fire  
 Is human spirit, though akin to gods,  
 If it can not keep silent and contain  
 Its secret unexposed. If in its depth  
 It lies at rest and proffers what is needed,  
 Wholesome it is; a wild, devouring flame  
 As soon as from its fetters it breaks loose.  
 Away with that man who lays bare his soul  
 And, with it, his soul's gods, recklessly seeks  
 To utter the unutterable, wasting  
 His dangerous wealth like water lightly spilt. (Hölderlin, 1994, 299)

While in the earlier poem Empedocles is the man who conserves his wealth and keeps himself holy by plunging into the fire (and therefore resembles the figure in Hill's poem) here he seems more like the poet who allows his talents to be wasted in wine and sexual activity. This Empedocles is perhaps even more dangerous, since he is upsetting the

hermetic principles by giving out secrets to the uninitiated. Hill's poem is a 'version' of these preoccupations. Empedocles himself talks of his achievements in terms of the sun:

The genii - great *Sun!* No man had taught me  
 To name, to know them; it was my own heart,  
 Immortally loving, drove me to immortals,  
 To you, to you, for nothing more divine  
 Than you, still light, I found here; and as you  
 Never stint life in your day's daily fullness  
 And lavishly, taking no care, expend  
 Your golden wealth, so I, being yours, was glad  
 To give away to mortals my best soul  
 And, fearlessly candid, so  
 My heart to serious *Earth* I dedicated,  
 The many-destinied; (Hölderlin, 1994, 317)

This Empedocles is not keeping the radiance of suns in, and that is why Hermocrates is plotting his death. By giving away his secrets he avoids the tendency to make an idol of himself that is a danger in Hill's poem.

In the later poem *Patmos*, there is an indication of the connection between Empedocles, Etna and this fashioning of idols:

For the work of gods, too, is like our own,  
 Not all things at once does the Highest intend.  
 The pit bears iron, though,  
 And glowing resins Etna,  
 And so I should have wealth  
 With which to form an image and see  
 The Christ as he truly was, (Hölderlin, 1994, 493)

The poet's vision of being transported to Patmos, the island where St. John received the Revelation, forges the link between Christ and Empedocles. The two sacrifices are paralleled and the poet considers making an image of Christ from the sanctified raw-material in Etna. He feels that the communication with God that St. John enjoyed is possible for him also, and that he will be able therefore to make a true image of Christ. But the terms of this image-making are disturbing, They suggest the idols and false-gods made by the Israelites. Also we find ourselves comparing Empedocles with Christ. Was Empedocles's holiness tainted by hubris? Was his attitude to the spiritual life, like Brand's, too wilful? Did he 'cast' himself into Etna to deify himself? Hill's 'Little Apocalypse' is a 'version' of these issues from Hölderlin's life and work. Hill imitates Hölderlin's use of the Empedocles myth in order to write a poem that addresses the

problems of a life sanctified, or sacrificed to poetic or spiritual attainment. Brand's sacrifice demands our respect while his lack of compassion and wilfulness can appal. 'Little Apocalypse' is a smaller work set to a finer balance. Hill does justice to the potential for insight open to those prepared to live a life of sacrifice. He ponders the advisability, the possibility, of passing on wisdom attained in this manner, and he reflects on whether taking on such a role implies compassion to one's fellow-beings or if it demonstrates an offensive elitism. Perhaps it is not too fanciful to see something of the poet-translator in this figure. If we agree with Benjamin's argument that all human language aspires to an ultimate statement of the human condition, the poet who has access to poems in another language has the opportunity to pass on wisdom, drawing it out of the original language and altering his/her own to re-express it. The danger of vulgarising the message is Scylla to the Charybdis of appearing hubristically aloof and obscure. Of course it is no coincidence that Hölderlin was a great poet-translator. If we take Benjamin's account of the possibilities of 'translation' seriously, as Hill seems to do, then we must be alert to the interpenetrations of the poetic and the spiritual in our reading of Hill's versions and imitations.

Paul Celan was, like Hölderlin, a poet-translator who yearned to transform language through poetry, and who was prepared to pay the price of sanity in the pursuit of this vocation. Hill's 'Two Chorale Preludes' are 'based' on two poems by Paul Celan. In his notes Hill says he has 'combined a few phrases of free translation with phrases of my own invention' (*NCP*, 217). In his book *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew*, John Felstiner writes about the importance of 'translation' for Paul Celan:

Translation is already bred into this poem, since a Romanian version saw the light before the German original. [...] If only because Paul Antschel emigrated (with this poem?) from Czernowitz's German-speaking milieu to the Romanian capital and 'in strict collaboration' helped Petre Solomon turn the unpublished 'Todestango' into 'Tangoul Mortii' his premier piece of writing can be said to reach us under the sign of translation. (Felstiner, 1995, 32)

This was the first poem Paul Celan published under his new name. Antschel translates himself into Celan when 'Todesfugue' is published as 'Tangoul Mortii'. Celan, who

translated so much (including Blok and Mandelstam), felt the importance of the translator who (as Benjamin wrote), comes later and contributes to the continued life of a text:

Since any translator is making a repetition, the very process of translation bears an affinity to this poem [Todesfugue], which not only works by repetition but also works toward it. They who 'harvest the wine of their eyes' do it 'so that a mouth might thirst for this, later-/ a latemouth, like to their own'. This 'latemouth' (*Spätmund*), the poet's, belongs in turn to the poet's translator, who in voicing the repetitions of 'Die Winzer' becomes an even later *Spätmund*, a touch closer to the end of days hinted at in Celan's closing line by *endlich* ('at last'). (Felstiner, 1995, 83)

In this model, translation is a form of bearing witness. The translator makes it possible for us to speak the words of Celan's 'Todesfugue' in our own language. The translator furthers the life of this poem and drafts more people into the community of those bearing witness to the atrocities of the Nazi era. Like Hölderlin (and Hill), Celan sees the writing of poetry as more than just composition. In her introduction to Celan *Collected Prose* Rosemarie Waldrop writes:

It was not a game for him, not experiment, not even 'work'. Writing - as he tells us in 'The Meridian', meant putting his existence on the line, pushing out into regions of the mind where one is exposed to the radically strange, the terrifying other, the uncanny. And at the moment when existence is actually threatened, when his breath fails, when silence literally (if momentarily) means death - at this moment a poem may be born. If so, it pulls us back from the 'already-no-more' into returning breath and life. (Celan, 1986, viii)

In 'The Meridian' Celan speaks of a 'date'. The '20th of January' is the date of the Wannasee Conference at which, in 1942, Heydrich and Eichmann put into operation the 'Final Solution'. It is also the date on which Lenz (in Büchner's story), and Klein (in Celan's 'Conversation in the Mountains') go for their walks in the mountains:

Perhaps we can say that every poem is marked by its own '20th of January'? Perhaps the newness of poems written today is that they try most plainly to be mindful of this kind of date?

But do we not all write from and toward some such date? What else could we claim as our origin? (Celan, 1986, 47)

This date symbolises both the evil of the Nazis and the possibility of communication and renewal that the episodes in the mountains offer Lenz and Klein. It is unclear whether it is the 'menace' or the 'atonement' that is Celan's point of origin, and which is his



destination. Bearing witness to atrocity is primary for Celan. It is only through this that there can be a possibility for freedom. But the continual effort to bear witness may result in despair, madness and suicide. Nevertheless, Celan makes this bearing witness through poetry into a criterion for humanity:

We live under dark skies and - there are few human beings. Hence, I assume, so few poems. The hopes I have left are small. I try to hold on to what remains. (Celan, 1986, 26)

To undertake such witnessing is to be human, but to be fully human entails suffering. Celan's stays in mental health institutes and his eventual suicide testify to the price he, like Hölderlin, had to pay for this poetry.

Felstiner, discussing language, expresses the potentially regenerative effect of continually bringing oneself back to horror:

The language that passed through muting and death, Celan said in 1958 could 'come to light again, "enriched" by all that' - 'enriched' being a mining term, like the 'shaft of what's been thought up' in 'Die Winzer', the *Schacht des Erdachten*. And his word *erdachten* recurs in 1959: 'They dug and dug' and 'thought up' no language. So in 'Die Winzer', we touch the generation of poetic speech, like the deep source of Hölderlin's imagery in 'Patmos': 'Indeed the pit bears iron'. (Felstiner, 1995, 88)

The poet is like Empedocles. His greatness originates in the iron of the pit. Language may pass through the violence of the volcanic crucible and be enriched. But for the poet to encounter that deep source may bring on death. Just as, in *Brand*, Agnes has to die after she has seen the face of God through her extreme act of sacrifice, so Hölderlin and Celan find themselves consumed by the medium they worked in, a medium that offers menace in equal measure to its atoning power.

When poetry makes these demands, it is no wonder that Celan regarded it so highly. No wonder that he felt his translations of Mandelstam to be so important:

This selection in German is the first larger translation in book form; there have only been single poems published in Italian, French and English. I want to give it above all the chance which poetry needs most: the chance simply to exist. (Celan, 1986, 64)

Celan respects the struggle of another poet to be human and write poetry under 'dark skies'. It is necessary that such poems continue to reach out to a possible reader. Celan wrote 'I consider translating Mandelstam into German to be as important a task as my

own verses' (Felstiner, 1995, 134). For Celan, writing poems was 'in order to speak, to orient myself, to find out, where I was, where I was going, to chart my reality' (Celan, 1986, 34). It is only a rare dedication to bearing witness, and ensuring the continued life of poetry, that could lead Celan to make this equation. One might take this statement as a paradigm for Hill's staunch dedication to bearing witness to the sufferings of other writers, and other victims of atrocity. Like Hill's work on *Brand*, the translation of Mandelstam took over Celan's life for a time. Celan's comment on translating the poems also recalls comments by Hill: 'my chief concern, staying closest to the text, was to translate what's poetic in the poem, to render the form, the timbre of speaking' (Felstiner, 1995, 134). It is through a passionate engagement with the form of the original that the 'poetic' is translated. The feeling is embodied by the mannerism, the timbre of speaking in metrical technique.

One must take account of this charged atmosphere around Celan's life and poetry, and these resonant echoes between the work of Hill and Celan, when looking at 'Two Chorale-Preludes'. Hill's title indicates Bach's Chorale-Preludes, the folk-melodies of which acquired distasteful connotations during the Third Reich. Celan's poetry was a constant attempt to write in the language which had been tainted by Nazism. Perhaps Hill's poems 'on melodies by Paul Celan' are an attempt to purge a kind of popular and patriotic music from the taint of fascism. Further complexities enter at this point. Bach's preludes introduce a Christian, Protestant, Eucharist. Celan, the Jew, treats the Christian Logos with irony. And in Hill's own poems the Protestant title conflicts with the Catholic sub-titles 'Ave Regina Coelorum' and 'Te Lucis Ante Terminum'.

That these are not 'translations' is perhaps clear from the absence of their original titles. Hill heads each poem with a line of German. For the first Chorale-Prelude it is the opening line of 'Eis, Eden' *'Es ist ein Land Verloren ...'*:

There is a land called Lost  
at peace inside our heads.  
The moon, full on the frost,  
vivifies these stone heads.

Moods of the verb 'to stare',

split selfhoods, conjugate  
ice-facets from the air,  
the light glazing the light.

Look at us, Queen of Heaven.  
Our solitudes drift by  
your solitudes, the seven  
dead stars in your sky. (*NCP*, 153)

In Hamburger's translation Celan's poem reads like this:

There is a country Lost  
a moon grows in its reeds,  
where all that died of frost  
as we did, glows and sees.

It sees, for it has eyes,  
each eye an earth, and bright.  
The night, the night, the lies.  
This eye-child's gift is sight.

It sees, it sees, we see,  
I see you, you see me.  
Before this hour has ended  
ice will rise from the dead. (Celan, 1990, 173)

Hill's 'land' connects with the 'lost kingdom of innocence and original justice', but also to the silent captivity of Averroes's vision of Intellect as absolute. Celan's poem takes us onto the reedy water with the moon's reflection, and then beneath its surface into the eyes of the dead. Hill's version brings in a strange onanistic rhyme: the petrified heads do not have enough life or feeling to rhyme with anything else. The water has gone, there are only 'heads', and it is difficult to see if 'our' heads are 'stone' or not. In Celan's version we have died of frost, and so perhaps it is the moonlight that enables us to glow and see. In the opening of the second stanza, Hill seems to be commenting on the grammar of the original. His expression 'moods of the verb "to stare"' suggests primarily the moods of verbs (active, passive, subjunctive etc.), but it also suggests that verbs can have 'moods' - emotions. While Celan's poem might be described as conjugating the verb to see, Hill makes a point about how language, or rather grammar, can convey feeling. When Hill's version brings in 'conjugate' the word refers to the joining together of 'ice-facets': the crystals of snow being formed in the air giving the effect of 'light glazing the light'. The 'split selfhoods' seems to refer to the way grammar so-clearly defines subject and object.

The crystallisation of snow out of the icy air symbolises the objectivising grid of ‘selfhood’ we impose on experience: splitting ourselves off from each other, as if we were as unique as each snowflake, despite the fact that we all use shared language for this selving.

In the final stanza Hill turns to the Queen of Heaven with a gesture recalling the ‘Ave, Maria’. He asks her to ‘look at us’. He cannot ask for her prayers. She is alone as the stone heads are alone. In Celan’s poem the seeing is reciprocal: ‘I see you, you see me’. Perhaps the seven dead stars are the extinguished candles of the seven-branched candelabrum. Neither Judaic ritual, nor the Virgin Mary can assist the speaker of Hill’s poem. Here, not even ice can rise from the dead.

For the second poem, Hill quotes a line from ‘Kermorvan’ - ‘*Wir gehen dir, Heimat, ins Garn...*’. This is the final line of the first stanza of Celan’s poem.<sup>4</sup>

Hamburger’s translation of the poem is as follows:

You tiny centaury star,  
you alder, beech and fern:  
with you near ones I make for afar, -  
to our homeland, snared, we return.

By the bearded palm tree’s trunk  
black hangs the laurel-seed grape.  
*I love, I hope, I have faith, -*  
the little date shell’s agape.

A word speaks - to whom? To itself:  
*Servir Dieu est régner, - I can*  
read it, I can, it grows brighter,  
away from “kannitverstan”. (Celan, 1990, 203)

Hill’s poem is:

Centaury with your staunch bloom  
you there alder beech you fern,  
midsummer closeness my far home,  
fresh traces of lost origin.

Silvery the black cherries hang,  
the plum-tree oozes through each cleft  
and horse-flies siphon the green dung,  
glued to the sweetness of their graft:

immortal transience, a ‘kind  
of otherness’, self-understood,  
BE FAITHFUL grows upon the mind

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<sup>4</sup> Literally it means something like ‘We go to you, Home, in the yarn’.

as lichen glimmers on the wood. (*NCP*, 154)

Hill stays close to the original in the first couple of lines, especially when he repeats the 'you' in the second line, responding to Celan's 'du Erle, du Buche, du Farn'. 'Fresh traces of lost origin' is his attempt at the difficult line he quotes at the head of the poem. 'Garn' is a word like 'yarn' in English, meaning both thread and story. Idiomatically, to get into a 'Garn' is to be ensnared. The sensual second stanza is transformed in Hill's version by his image of the horse-fly. It seems that the date-shell 'agape', ('klafft' in Celan) has suggested the sap oozing out of a cleft in the plum-tree. The silvery black cherries eerily recall 'September fattens on vine'. This echo suggests the element of disgust and excess amidst sweetness that we feel at the horse-flies. Hill's central stanza elides Celan's catalogue of the Christian virtues in favour of this problematic opulence. In 'From the Latin', which we are told is itself a translation from a Spanish poem, the lovers enjoy discussing the 'occurrences of the day'. For them 'trivia' is 'refreshed' through the sensual basis of the relationship 'at night my tongue in your furrow'. Just as the boring matter of trivia is transformed by this relationship, so the horse-flies draw nutriment out of excrement. The slight shock in the implicit connection between the flies 'glued to the sweetness of their graft' and the image of the man performing cunnilingus registers the familiar twinning of menace and atonement, horror and enriching redemption, opulence and disgust. It is interesting that this image seems to resurface in poems that are concerned with 'translation' or 'imitation'. We should, no doubt, add another pair - the unpleasantness of the 'graft' involved in writing a version of a foreign poem, and the potential for creating something that is both one's own poem and a witness to another poet's labours.

In the final stanza Celan's solipsistic 'word' talking to itself is an ironic assault on the Christian Logos. Celan refers to a story in which a man's repeated 'kannitverstan' (I can't understand) is interpreted as a name by speakers of another language. His claim that he can read the word suggests that he has seen through the problems of 'translating' and he can tell the difference between a name and a message. If so, perhaps he can

discover something about the nature of God. The words we think of as names for God may have meaning when translated into human language. Of course they may turn out to mean 'I cannot understand'. Hill's 'self-understood' is more hopeful than such a word spoken to the self. The contemplation of the flies has led to an awareness of change and otherness. But Hill's reference to Walter Ong's 'Voice as Summons to Belief' reminds us that there must be an interior other before we can find the ability to reach out beyond ourselves:

Every human word implies not only the existence - at least in the imagination - of another to whom the word is uttered, but it also implies that the speaker has a kind of otherness within himself. (Abrams, 1957, 84)

The verse seems to offer us a psychology of the I-Thou relationship that is on the verge of falling back into solipsism.

Hill handles the problematics of belief differently from Celan. The suggestion that one might submit to God only in order to gain power in 'to serve God is to reign' is not present in 'BE FAITHFUL', but the final line and a half makes the imperative seem like a growth on the mind. It adds colour, perhaps augments the sum of life present, but there is a disquieting implication that it may shut the mind off from light and strangle it.

Hill's imitations of Celan's poems work because of the shared belief in the vital importance of poetry and the need to bear witness to poets, and to give their poems continued life. Hill respects Celan because he was a poet who attempted to reclaim the language that was used to administrate the Nazi regime, and its attempted genocide. German was Celan's 'Muttersprache', the 'menace' and 'atonement' offered by his language was ever-present. Like Brand, Hölderlin, Mandelstam and Hill's other exemplary figures, Celan was prepared to bear witness even at the cost of his sanity and his life. In these poems the natural world and language seem to be brought together, to conjugate. Language has the power both to join things, and to make beauty out of separateness. Hill's poems register the twinned sweetness and disgust in physical existence, as if this itself were a metaphor for translation, a corrective to solipsism and intellectual absolutism, the corrective to the self-satisfied belief that brings rigidity and

spiritual death. This cognitive and emotional connection between the bitter blend of pain and pleasure that is human life and the 'structure of translation' must also illuminate the nature of poetry. The 'menace' and 'atonement' of poetry is constituted by the poet's labour to bring this powerful 'structure' into consciousness, to give it an expression in form. In taking the risk of seeking knowledge through this work, in accepting the price of suffering that is imposed, the poet strives towards an understanding of the human condition and bargains sanity and happiness in exchange for the ability to encapsulate that insight and power in a creative medium.

Ibsen's *Brand* engages with this matrix of forces. It shows us the fruits of a sacrificial life - both the transcendent power and the galling pain. Brand's life is offered to a spiritual ideal; Ibsen's play connects with the problematics of the artistic life because Brand's spiritual authority is registered in his rhetorical power. Hill's version of Ibsen's *Brand* is, undoubtedly, his greatest achievement in the field of imitation. In his 'note on the text' in the Methuen edition of 1978, he wrote as follows:

This work makes no claim to be a translation of *Brand*. It is a 'version for the English stage' of a poetic drama which was not intended for the stage. It is based on an annotated literal translation by Inga-Stina Ewbank. She is not responsible for the liberties I have taken or for the errors into which I may have fallen. (Ibsen, 1978, 1)

Hill scrupulously refuses to take credit for something he has not done. One might want to think of the text as a 'translation' in a wider sense, while always bearing in mind that Hill has not 'translated' from one language to another, but made a verse version of a prose literal. Benjamin writes:

A translation comes later than the original, and since the important works of world literature never find their chosen translators at the time of their origin, their translation marks their stage of continued life. (Benjamin, 1992, 72)

Hill's version of *Brand* marks a stage in that text's continued life: it was essential to the revival of the play on the English-speaking stage. Despite the fact that Hill has not carried the play over from the Norwegian, he must be recognised as the play's chosen translator for contemporary English-speaking people.

Although one might want to apply Benjamin's ideas to Hill's *Brand*, one must be aware of the importance of Hill's description of his work. By 1981, when the American edition was published, Hill's attitude had not altered:

The essential caveat in my original 'note on the text' still stands: that this must be presented, and received, as a 'version', *not* as a translation, of Ibsen's work. Professor Kenneth Muir, in a review of the UK edition, suggested that my version 'has turned a dramatic poem into a poetic drama'. My prefatory remarks in 1978 would have been more cogent if I had had the wit or good fortune to anticipate his observation. (Ibsen, 1981, vi)

Hill's remark about Muir's comment smacks of raillery. Ibsen's play is called a 'poetic drama [...] not intended for the stage' in Hill's original note. Muir's fine distinction is merely a neat restatement of Hill's own definition of his work. In the Preface to the 1996 Penguin edition, Hill uses these terms almost interchangeably, omitting the sarcastic reference to Muir.

It is a version for the stage of a poetic drama, or dramatic poem, which was perhaps not intended for the stage. (Ibsen, 1996, vii)

The key word 'version', like Michael Edwards's term 'imitations', at once excuses Hill any liberties he may have taken from the text and also makes a case for his own creative contribution to the finished English text.

Like Ibsen's, my rhyme-scheme ranges from couplets to more freely interwoven patterns but I have not tried to follow the threads in his texture. I have rung the changes in metre and rhyme to achieve variety of pace and tone in the English verse; and have worked by intuition rather than by textual precedent. (Ibsen, 1978, 1)

The 'intuition' that Hill lays claim to here, half-apologetically, carries a similar charge to Edwards's line that Hill 'engender[s] poems of his own' as a result of his engagement with works by other artists. However, there is no sense here that Hill thinks his version 'produce[s] a kind of [...] poetry [...] hardly recognisable as having existed in English before', or of the potential for showing forth Benjamin's 'pure language'. While Hill seems to concur with Edwards on the kind of creative relationship one has with a text from another language, he resists making any claim for the ability of translation or imitation to make previously unrealised things possible in one's target language. We have seen that Hill is wary about claiming the possibility of reclaiming Benjamin's 'pure language'.



He believes that fine poetry bears witness to a 'lost kingdom of innocence and original justice' - the language of which would (one presumes) be pure. Hill resists claiming that poetry can redeem language, he limits himself to saying that poetry can bear witness to a language purer and more intuitive than ours. He is reluctant to see any potential for discovering such a language through translation. Hill's position is not merely a kind of modesty about the success of his own work. In his review of Robert Lowell's *Imitations*, Hill avoids making any larger claims for the potential of this kind of writing:

The indebtedness is obvious, but equally apparent is the imaginative kindling, the pungent life of Lowell's own metaphors. (Hill, 1963, 190)

Hill sees the 'indebtedness' and Lowell's 'own metaphors', but he does not suggest that these imitations expand the potential of English. Lowell's imitations are a mixture of his own creative powers and some features of the original; there does not seem to be the radical originality that Edwards perceives in Hill's 'imitations', which one might identify with the 'pure language' Benjamin describes. Hill goes on to write of Lowell's imitation of Thoreau:

In such a passage, the original grief for Warren Winslow, dead at Sea, the objective pity assimilated from Thoreau, are redefined by a fine management of technique. The writing is deeply-felt and strongly-mannered: the feeling is embodied in the mannerism. (ibid)

Although this was written fifteen years before the version of *Brand*, it is strikingly close to Hill's comments on his own work. In both cases technique is all important. The poet takes his raw material (objective pity, or the content of *Brand*) and uses technique, 'mannerism', to body forth that objective content as poetry in his own language. For Hill the primacy of the technical element is reconfirmed by a note to his Preface to the Penguin edition of *Brand*:

I also recall with gratitude an *aperçu* from Sir Peter Hall. At our earliest conference, we were discussing metre and I observed that I would have to resist the pull of the English dramatic pentameter against *Brand's* tetrameter. He agreed, adding, 'Why not try something even shorter than tetrameter?' The best gifts one person can make to another, in this field of endeavour, are technical details; it is the precise detail, of word and rhythm, which carries the ethical burden; it is technique, rightly understood, which provides the true point of departure for inspiration. (Ibsen, 1996, xi)

Sir Peter Hall's comment, and the remark of Ibsen's about the verse-form enabling him to 'career [...] as on horseback' were instrumental in convincing Hill that the project was possible for him. Hill has referred to this in his interview with John Haffenden, and Inga-Stina Ewbank mentioned it in her introduction to the American edition. The emphasis on technique is the same here as it was in the Lowell review. If Hill allows himself to go beyond his further statement and write about 'inspiration' it is only as something which becomes possible at the point of technical mastery. If Hill's poetic allows of a version of Benjamin's 'pure language' it is through this evaluation of the importance of technique. In the Preface to the Penguin edition, Hill makes this claim for the potential of verse in performance:

If I have succeeded, or at least come close to success, in fulfilling my intention, there will be no need for either director or actors to project feeling, empathy, into the verse; it will not be necessary for anyone to practise getting 'inside' a character; no one will need to do any background research. The verse itself is at once character and enactment; is itself both absolute will and contingency. The play can therefore move forward as swiftly as the essential requirement of accurate verse-speaking will permit.

Massive and elaborate stage-machinery may also be dispensed with. I can envisage a heroic performance of this version in a puppet-theatre, always provided that those responsible for speaking the verse follow the tradition and discipline to which I have here paid tribute. (Ibsen, 1996, x)

Just as the 'feeling is embodied in the mannerism' in Lowell's imitations, here 'character and enactment' are present in the verse as a result of Hill's metrical technique. The purpose of a verse version is that it can embody feeling in ways unavailable to prose - through the precise control of rhythm and rhyme. Hill's comments refer to the possibilities of verse as a dramatic medium, they do not impinge upon his position that this text is a 'version'. However, in setting out so clearly the potentials of a verse version he recalls Benjamin's comments on what must be carried over in a true translation:

But do we not generally regard as the essential substance of a literary work what it contains in addition to information - as even a poor translator will admit - the unfathomable, the mysterious, the 'poetic', something that a translator can reproduce only if he is also a poet? (Benjamin, 1992, 70)

Hill 'breaks through the decayed barriers of his own language' not by means of the violence involved, for instance, in Hölderlin's translation of Sophocles, but through the intensity of his commitment to metrical technique.

It is this quality of Hill's version that has led commentators like Harold Bloom to praise it above all 'translations'. In her introduction to the American edition of Hill's *Brand* Inga-Stina Ewbank writes:

What Geoffrey Hill's version of the speech I have been discussing (34-35) suggests is that, if there is a solution, it lies not in a lexical faithfulness to the original and a transposition of the verse into an existing English poetic mode, but in a re-creation of crucial qualities of the original into a new mode. (Ibsen, 1981, xxiv)

The superiority of Hill's version over other translations is that it eschews verbal accuracy (Benjamin's 'inessential information') in favour of an attempt to make the 'crucial qualities' (in Benjamin's words 'the unfathomable, the mysterious, the "poetic"') of *Brand* possible in English. Ewbank continues:

This sequence of examples from Act II should have shown something of how Geoffrey Hill's version of *Brand* realises the potentials of the idiom and verse of the original and, in so doing, reveals new potentials in English. (Ibsen, 1981, xxxi)

Once again, the real achievement of 'chosen translators' is not to assimilate the alien work to the genius of the target language, but rather to force the target language to expand in order to make possible the expression of the essence of the text being translated. Ewbank's suggestion that Hill has enriched language chimes with Edwards' claim that he has made possible a new kind of ballad poetry and implies that *Brand* is an example of 'pure language'.

These claims for, and opinions about, Hill's 'version' can only be justified through a close reading of his text alongside the 'literal' provided by Inga-Stina Ewbank.<sup>5</sup> In this section I shall look at some passages which demonstrate the qualities of Hill's version. When, in the opening scene, Brand suggests that he should go on alone, the Peasant objects. The literal version is as follows:

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<sup>5</sup> I am indebted to Inga-Stina Ewbank for allowing me to work on her literal, and for discussing her collaboration with Hill with me.

PEASANT

Yes, if you're lost here,  
in this wicked weather the Lord has sent,  
and if it gets around, as it's bound to do,  
that we left home together,  
then I'll be dragged into court one day, ...  
and if you drown in bog and tarn,  
then I'll be sentenced to chains and iron ...

BRAND

Then you'll suffer in the Lord's cause.

PEASANT

I have no time for his and yours;  
I have more than enough with my own. (Ewbank, I, 6)

In Hill's version this becomes:

PEASANT: Stranger, think on! Suppose  
we go and leave you here;  
suppose you disappear  
in a snow drift or get drowned,  
suppose word gets around.  
I'd soon be up in court  
accused of God knows what.

BRAND: A martyr in His cause.

PEASANT: And that's not worth a curse -  
I'm done with God and you! (Ibsen, 1996, 5)

Hill's version of the Peasant's speech neatly weaves the repeated 'suppose's into the rhyme-scheme. Hill carries the blasphemous element of the Norwegian idiom for bad weather forwards so that Brand can turn the word back on the Peasant: 'His cause' picking up 'God knows what'. The contrast in the ways in which these two men use the Lord's name is clear from an exchange a few lines previously. Brand asks if the Peasant will give his life:

PEASANT

No, but there has to be a limit to ...!  
For Christ's sake, you mustn't forget  
That I have children and a wife at home.

BRAND

He whom you mentioned had a mother. (Ewbank, I, 5)

In Hill's version this becomes:

PEASANT: Life? now wait,  
now that's asking a lot,  
Christ it is! There's my wife,  
[points to SON]  
and him.

BRAND: Christ gave His life.  
Christ's mother gave her son. (Ibsen, 1996, 5)

In Hill's version the Peasant's reluctance is made more immediate by his pointing to the son that is present rather than referring to absent children. Hill's Brand does not just refer back to Christ, but repeats the name twice - not blasphemously but in order to impress upon the Peasant that Christ and his family made the same sacrifices that he is being asked to make. In both passages Hill's version emphasises that, for Brand, the names of Christ and God are not to be taken in vain; not because blasphemy offends the tender sensibility of a believer, but because God is real, and his 'cause' is the only true purpose of human life.

In his Preface, Hill talks about Brand as "uncompromising" yet compromised' (Ibsen, 1996, viii). The phrase 'A martyr in his cause' alerts us to the problematic in Brand in a way that 'Then you'll suffer in the Lord's cause' does not. Firstly, the Peasant doesn't suggest that he would be executed, so the word 'martyr' seems slightly wrong. Perhaps Brand's 'All or Nothing' means that he would prefer execution for one of his followers - the quick fix of martyrdom - to long imprisonment. More disturbingly, in the scenario the Peasant has laid out it is Brand who is dead. Therefore Hill's phrase allows the ambiguity that Brand may be the martyr. His words become an almost wistful description of the result of his death on the ice. Hill is pointing up the misguided will-to-martyrdom that is an aspect of Brand's character. The rhyme of 'cause' and 'curse' once more works both ways. Firstly, the Peasant is saying that he does not share Brand's high regard for suffering in the name of God. Secondly, we could read this rhyme as revealing the worthlessness of self-willed martyrdom, which we have already encountered in the theology of Bonhoeffer and Weil, as well as in Hill's poems.

Since *Brand* is a play that deals with religious questions that Hill himself is concerned with, it is not surprising that key terms from Hill's own work come up in his version. His use of 'martyr' at this point is analogous to the introduction of 'atone' at various stages of the drama. When discussing Christ with Einar, Brand, in the literal version, calls him 'one who, you've been told, came/ And took upon himself the great penal sentence' (Ewbank, I, 17). In Hill's version Brand calls him 'that poor Holy One/

sweating blood to atone' (Ibsen, 1996, 13). In Act Two also, in an exchange with the Mother, Hill introduces this heavily-charged word. The literal reads:

In every honest son-mind  
Another law has been engraved,...  
And this law must be satisfied. (Ewbank, II, 24)

Hill alters this rather in his version:

Mother, the Holy Spirit  
utters its own decrees,  
summons us to atone  
for what others have done. (Ibsen, 1996, 47)

The 'son-mind' - the feelings of a son for a parent - is not really the focus here, as Hill perceives. Instead, it is the 'law' of Brand's faith that demands atonement, and if Brand's Mother will not atone for her sins, Brand feels he, like Christ, must atone for them on her behalf. Hill takes a liberty here that would not be admissible in a 'translation', but which enriches his 'version' by introducing the vocabulary of his own troubled relationship with poetry and faith into the arena of conflict between Brand's vocation and his family relationships.

This cross-fertilisation from Hill's personal vocabulary to Brand's, is strikingly evident when Brand offers a manifesto of his faith to Einar. The 'literal' is as follows:

#### BRAND

It's not a joke.  
Exactly like that he looks,  
Our country's, our people's family-god.  
Just as the Catholics make a fat baby  
Out of the Saviour Hero, so you here  
Make of the Lord a decrepit old man,  
Who is close to the infancy of age.  
Just as the Pope on Peter's chair  
Will soon have nothing left but his cross-keys,  
So you are narrowing, from pole to pole,  
You separate life from faith and doctrine;  
For no one is the issue *To Be*;  
Your strife is to raise your spirit,  
But not to live wholly and fully,  
You need, to get away with this,  
A God who looks through his fingers,...  
Like the people themselves, their God must go grey  
And be painted with a skull cap and a bald spot....  
But this God is not mine!  
Mine is a storm where yours is wind,  
Unbending where yours is deaf.  
All-loving where yours is slack;

And he is young like Hercules,...  
 Not an old godfather in his seventies!  
 His voice struck with lightning and terror  
 When, as a fire in the thorn bush,  
 He stood before Moses on Horeb's mount,  
 Like a giant before the dwarf of dwarfs.  
 He stayed the sun in the Vale of Gibeon  
 And performed miracles without number,  
 And would do so still,  
 If only men weren't flaccid, like you! (Ewbank, I, 20)

Hill changes this speech radically:

BRAND: 'No joke', you'd say?  
 Do you want sympathy?  
 You trim off faith from life,  
 haver from birth to death,  
 self-seekers who refuse  
 man's true way-of-the-Cross<sup>6</sup>  
 which is: wholly to be  
 the all-enduring 'I'.  
 My God is the great god of storm,<sup>7</sup>  
 absolute arbiter of doom,  
 imperious in His love!  
 He is the voice that Moses heard,  
 He is the pillar of the cloud,  
 His is the hand that stayed the sun  
 for Joshua in Gibeon.  
 Your God can hardly move;  
 he's weak of mind and heart,  
 easy to push about.  
 But mine is young; a Hercules,  
 not fourscore of infirmities.  
 Though you may smile and preen,  
 Einar; though you bow down  
 to your own brazenness,  
 I shall heal this disease  
 that withers heart and brain,  
 and make you all new men! (Ibsen, 1996, 14)

Hill omits the criticism of the Pope and the Catholic version of the Holy Infant. There is nothing essentially sectarian about Brand's faith, he merely objects to flaccidity. Hill amplifies Brand's explication of his spiritual principles. Hill expands and transforms 'for no-one is the issue *To Be*'. The phrase 'man's true way-of-the-cross' does not have a clear source in the literal; it is Hill's own clarification of Brand's rigorous demand for an imitation of Christ. 'Wholly to be/ the all-enduring "I"' works Brand's demand for suffering into the literal's statement about those who fail to *be* fully. Except through the

<sup>6</sup> In the two earlier editions this line read 'Man's true Way-of-the-Cross'

<sup>7</sup> In the two earlier editions this line read 'My God is the great God of Storm,'

accusation that Einar is worshipping a brazen image of his own devising, Hill's version plays down the emphasis on Einar's painting of God and focuses instead on the qualities of his own God. As we saw before, there is something 'compromised' in Brand's 'uncompromising' stance, and Hill points that up here. The original reference to Hercules alerts us to the problem: there is something slightly jarring in the comparison of the Christian God to this heroic Greek demigod. Does Brand hanker after the kind of deification through heroism that Hercules achieved? When Hill removes Brand's statement that God would still perform miracles if men weren't 'flaccid' ('Slapp' - a key word in the Norwegian text) and instead focuses on his claim that he is the cure for the disease that has infected men, we are made to see Brand as rather more hubristic than he appears in the original. Just as he suggests to the Peasant that they should walk across the ice-tarns, in imitation of Christ, here it seems that it is Brand, not God, who will perform miracles.

In this passage, Hill's version works, by omission, re-organisation and amplification, to bring out more strongly the nature of Brand's 'All or Nothing'. One can see this in the four lines beginning with 'He is the voice that Moses heard,' where Hill reshapes the speech in order to deliver a powerful tricolon within a pair of couplets which gather energy through alternating four and three beat lines. But in presenting us with a Brand who uses the resources of rhetoric so powerfully through this verse, Hill also sharpens our awareness of the danger of solipsism in this man's faith.

This transformation recurs throughout Hill's version. Another particularly powerful moment is that in which Brand defines martyrdom to Agnes. The literal is as follows:

One thing is left out; the will is what first  
 Must satisfy the law's thirst for righteousness.  
 First you must *will*, not only  
 That which, great or small, is feasible,  
 Not only where the act involves  
 A sum of effort and trouble, ...  
 No, you must will, strong and glad,  
 Through the whole row of terrors.  
*That* is not martyrdom: in agony  
 To be killed on a cross;



Only to will the death on the cross,  
 To *will* in the midst of the suffering of the flesh,  
 To *will* in the midst of the anguish of the spirit,  
 Only *that* is to seize your salvation. (Ewbank, III, 9)

Hill's version is this:

Agnes, if souls are athirst  
 for truth and righteousness,  
 let us assuage that longing first;  
 then speak of love.  
 Merely to perish on the cross,  
 or to writhe in the flame,  
 daily to be buried alive,  
 this is not martyrdom.  
 But to make a burnt offering<sup>8</sup>  
 out of the suffering,  
 to ordain the anguish  
 of our spirit and flesh,  
 that is salvation, there we seize  
 hold of martyrdom's prize! (Ibsen, 1996, 62)

Hill avoids the discussion of 'will'; instead he makes the focus of the speech Brand's vision of martyrdom as a 'prize'. Inga-Stina Ewbank makes it clear in her notes that the word Ibsen uses for 'seize' is the word one would use for a catch of fish or the capture of an animal. She says this is to show that martyrdom has to be 'fought for and "caught"' (Ewbank, III, note to p. 9). In Hill's version this has become something quite different: martyrdom is now a prize. It is something seized, but also perhaps something won in order to glorify the self, rather than just caught for the sake of survival, like an animal or fish. Brand's attitude toward Christ's death is also subtly altered. The 'merely' that Hill brings in implies a critical attitude to Christ; 'Thy will be done' is not enough for Brand, one must will the torture. Hill uses the idea of a 'burnt offering' suggesting Judaic sacrifice, rather than Christianity. The words 'burnt offering' also of course suggest the 'holocaust' of European Jews - with the rather chilling implication that the Jews ought to have 'willed' that anguish in order to seize their prize. Hill deepens our sense of unease with Brand's demands by this reference to events after the time of the play's composition. At the same time he uses the rhymes in the final three couplets of this speech to tie together the key words 'offering', 'suffering', 'anguish', 'flesh', 'seize' and 'prize'. Brand's

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<sup>8</sup> In the two earlier editions this read 'burnt-offering'

vision seems to be supported by the unanswerable pattern of his rhetoric. It is no accident that Agnes responds to this speech by begging Brand that, if she should weaken, he will 'speak then as you have spoken/ now'.

This is how Hill presents Brand's unflinching certainty, but his version also renders Brand's doubts in exemplary manner. At the end of Act three, facing the agonising need to sacrifice Alf, Brand demands: 'Answer me;/ Was I a priest before I became a father?' (Ewbank, III, 32). As Agnes points out, there is no answer to this question, or rather there is no 'choice' as the temporal priority of Brand's vocation is undeniable. But Brand insists that she has a choice. Hill's version makes Brand's question more open, but just as unanswerable:

Answer me!  
 What am I first?  
 His father, or their priest? (Ibsen, 1996, 85)

Here it is an existential priority that is being questioned. But the rhyme of priest and first rules out the option of saving Alf's life just as finally as the literal translation does with its rhetorical question.

Even at this moment of apparent doubt and inner conflict, Brand's words seem to set the problem out as a foregone conclusion. If anyone in the play comes close to undermining the power of Brand's language, it is Gerd. During their encounter at the end of Act one, Hill allows Brand to be more deeply unsettled by Gerd's faith in her Ice Church than he is in the literal. There is a subtle change in Brand's speech recalling the legend of the Ice Church. While the literal has 'There is supposed to be a chasm where the valley ends;/ The Ice Church I believe it was called;'(Ewbank, I, 27) becomes 'I'd forgotten that legend/ of the Ice Church: a great cleft/ in the rock' (Ibsen, 1996, 20). In Hill's version Brand is less inclined to doubt either the name, or the existence of the place. In accepting these things he is already that much closer to accepting the spiritual validity of Gerd's place of worship. Hill's version of Brand's analysis of Gerd's reliability has itself been re-written for the new edition. The literal reads:

Lost is your way and lost your soul,...  
 A harp with a cracked frame.

Of *bad* comes only *bad* quite simply....  
 But *evil* into *good* can easily be turned. (Ewbank, I, 28)

It is difficult to see quite what distinction Brand is making between bad and evil here, unless it is that bad is too lacklustre to ever result in anything, while the energy and intensity behind real evil demonstrates a potential for good. In Hill's versions of these lines this difficulty is passed over, while the more important question (whether or not Gerd is damned) has clearly presented problems. In the first edition we have only 'Her spirit struggles to be heard;/ flawed music from a broken reed.' (Ibsen, 1978, 18).<sup>9</sup> Whether this partial rendering of the four lines of the original resulted from a cut made for the performance, or for some other reason, is hard to ascertain. However, it is already clear that Hill's Brand is not so quick to condemn Gerd. Her music may be flawed, but she is not damned. In the American edition there are four lines:

Her spirit struggles to be heard;  
 flawed music from a broken reed.  
 Yet God in his strange mercy draws  
 such souls to Him, out of their flaws. (Ibsen, 1981, 23)

Here Hill has taken quite a great liberty with the original. Not only is Gerd not lost, but Brand even seems to single out her kind of soul as the sort God saves. The third edition brings Hill's version closer to the literal, while still keeping the increased sympathy for Gerd:

Her spirit struggles to be heard;  
 flawed music from a broken reed.  
 God in His judgement sometimes draws  
 evil to good. Not from *these* throws. (Ibsen, 1996, 21)

Hill still omits the initial condemnation of Gerd. Once again God is present although the literal suggest that it is Brand who can turn evil to good. In this third version mercy has become judgement, and Hill gestures at the literal's statement that Gerd is lost with the new, rather awkward, concluding half-line. Here we can see Hill wrestling with his attempt to stay close to the literal, while also making Brand somewhat more in tune with Gerd's faith.

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<sup>9</sup> Here, as in all three editions, this speech is an aside - there is no such stage direction in the original.

After Gerd exits, Brand has a monologue in which he considers her version of religion. This too has undergone change. The literal reads:

So *that* was a churchgoer too.  
 In the valley ... on the heights: which is better?  
 Whose course is the worst and the most lost,  
 Whose groping is the furthest from peace and home?... (Ewbank, I, 28)

These four lines relate to the following seven in Hill's version:

So that's churchgoing too;  
 those howls are hymns of praise.  
 But is she worse than those  
 who seek God in the valley?  
 And is her church less holy?  
 Who sees? And who is blind?  
 Who wanders? Who is found? (Ibsen, 1996, 21)

Hill's Brand accepts that Gerd's howls are hymns, something that does not feature in the original. The very phrasing of the next question seems to favour Gerd's way, since Brand's God is a God of the heights - the mountain episode at the opening of the play, the emotional 'heights' of the crossing of the stormy fjord - not the flaccid God of the valley. Hill's version, in asking whether her church is holy, goes several steps further than the literal. He admits Gerd has a church, that it may be holy, in a line that has no equivalent in the literal. In this scene Hill's version shows us how deeply Brand is affected, even shaken, by Gerd. As such it prepares us for the moments later on when she will accuse him of making an idol out of Alf, and when her Ice Church will seem the only possible refuge.

The link with Gerd is subtly emphasised in Hill's version. For instance, during the speech in which Brand tells his Mother about watching her rob his father's corpse, Hill invents an image:

I stayed,  
 bewildered, afraid,  
 like a little owl,  
 crouched there, very still, (Ibsen, 1996, 44)

This owl recalls the 'nudging owl' of Hill's 'Summer Night' (Hill, 1952, 33). In this early poem Hill hears the owl 'stressing the dark with its long call' - the owl attracts to itself the poem's mood of tense waiting. The owl that 'nudges' seems neurotic, not a fierce bird

of prey; its cry stresses the dark because it upsets the silence like an anxious person's exclamations. But the cry also causes other beings to tense up, whether from fear of death or from the uncanny response to their own feelings the owl's cry offers. The literal has only 'I stood and stared from a corner' (Ewbank, II, 22). Gerd is the character we associate with birds of prey. Her fear of the hawk is one aspect of this, but her solitary, mountain existence, as well as her acerbic criticism of the flaccid valley dwellers makes her hawk-like herself. She often seems to swoop down upon Brand in order to deliver a withering word, just like an owl coming in for the kill. The young Brand has this potential himself, he also is an owl; but here he is a small, afraid, wide-eyed creature - not the formidable bird of prey he will become. As the play proceeds we find out that Gerd is the daughter of the man Brand's mother loved, but could not marry because of his poverty. There is some implication that Brand and Gerd may be half brother and sister. Their strange kinship comes through in details like this owl. The twinned sense of kinship with, and fear of, birds of prey is developed later in this speech. Brand, in the literal, says his mother 'pounced, like the falcon, on her prey' (Ewbank, II, 22) and a few lines earlier he says 'she tore, she clawed with angry hands,/ She bit it open with her teeth'. In Hill's version these details set up a resonance with the other imagery I have discussed:

She tears at it with her nails, bites  
and gnaws through the tough knots, [...]  
Her shadow swoops; it looks  
like a swooping hawk's.  
She tears open a purse  
as a hawk rips a mouse. (Ibsen, 1996, 44)

Hill connects the mother with the terrifying hawk. The boy Brand seems at once fledgling owl and the mouse which may be killed by the hawk-mother. In lines like this Hill convinces us of the kinship between Gerd and Brand.

The importance of the hawk reaches its climax in the final act, when Gerd shoots it with her rifle, bringing down the avalanche. At a crucial moment, Hill expands the exchange between Brand and Gerd. Where the literal reads:

GERD

I stole the reindeer-hunter's rifle,  
 Loaded it with silver and steel,  
 Believe me, I am not so mad  
 As they say!  
 BRAND  
 Hit your target! (Ewbank, V, lxii)

Hill's version is:

GERD: See what I have!  
 BRAND: A bullet?  
 GERD: Made of pure silver. I stole it  
 from a huntsman. They say it works  
 wonders against demons.  
 BRAND: And hawks?  
 Real phantom-hawks?  
 GERD: Who knows?  
 BRAND: Well, aim  
 to kill. (Ibsen, 1996, 157)

By augmenting the discussion of the hawk, Hill points up the connection between the two characters. Brand's astonishing 'And hawks?/ Real phantom-hawks?' shows us that he has some a long way from the hawk and hawk-shadow of his childhood memory. Brand recognises something 'real' in Gerd's half-mad beliefs. Despite the hint of insanity in the exchanges of these characters in this final scene, there is something in Gerd, and the vision of the hawk, that catalyses Brand into a realisation of his error. The literal version of Brand's final speech reads:

Tell me, God, in the jaws of death;-  
 Can not a scrap of salvation  
 Come through man's own will,  
 If it's *quantum satis*.... (Ewbank, V, lxvi)

Although Brand has had to come very far to be questioning the validity of his 'will', in Hill's version he has come further:

Tell  
 me, O God, even as Your heavens fall  
 on me: what makes retribution  
 flesh of our flesh? Why is salvation  
 rooted so blindly in Your Cross?  
 Why is man's own proud will his curse?  
 Answer! What do we die to prove? (Ibsen, 1996, 161)

Hill's Brand now knows that the will, which he thought was the only thing that could assure salvation, is actually a 'curse'. While in the original Brand seems to be clinging to some shred of his former doctrine, Hill's Brand has forsaken it completely. Now as he

questions the sacrificial basis of Christianity, or at least of his own version of it, he has finally been humbled, uncertain for what his Mother, Alf and Agnes, have died for. The Voice calling out after Brand has been buried gives us a deeply ironic and ambiguous answer 'He is the God of Love' (ibid). We cannot be sure Brand hears this reply despite the way that final couplet completes itself across the avalanche.

Hill's version of *Brand* presents us with a powerful central character. Brand's ministry is an act of translation. Although he does not have to hand his faith over across a language barrier, as he would if he had carried out his plan to be a missionary, he does have to make his way comprehensible and inspiring to his congregation. In this way he shares much with Empedocles, he is a man attempting to share an esoteric spiritual vision with his family and fellow towns-people. The inability of people to follow him, the resistance he meets from other priests, and above all the terrible personal sacrifices he has made and imposed, lead him into an icy version of Empedocles' plunge into Etna.

Hill's verse does justice to Brand's verbal mastery while also revealing the problems that haunt his 'All or Nothing'. Agnes also gains definition. When she reacts against Brand's near-taunting insistence upon Alf as corpse in Act IV, the literal reads:

Oh, why do you scratch the wound,  
Horribly, in the midst of my fear and anguish!  
That which harshly you call the *corpse*,  
The *child* is for me still.  
Soul and body are one and the same;  
Not yet have I the power, like you,  
To separate these two;  
Both are for me the whole;  
Alf who sleeps under the snow,  
Is my Alf up there on high! (Ewbank, IV, 5)

Hill turns this rather confused speech into one which preserves the pain of the original but makes more theological sense:

Why do you tear and prod  
at the wound, make the blood flow?  
The body and the soul  
go down into the soil  
together. Together they rise up  
out of our mortal sleep.  
I cannot discriminate  
like you; I cannot tell them apart.  
To me they are as one,

soul, body ... my son. (Ibsen, 1996, 91)

Agnes' opening words here go beyond the literal and suggest the kind of examination and re-opening of wounds that one might expect from a clumsy doubting-Thomas. In Hill's version Agnes does not confuse soul and body, but refers to the doctrine of the resurrection of the flesh. The love of the mother for her son is clear in the closing words of this speech, but Hill's subtle change makes Agnes's theological position clearer. Agnes is rather stronger in Hill's version. As such, her criticisms carry more weight. Thus when in the literal she says 'only the church is too small' (Ewbank, IV, 6), in Hill's version the lines read:

And for what? Your little church  
that crouches under the rock  
like a mouse from a hawk? (Ibsen, 1996, 92)

While in both versions Agnes echoes Gerd, in Hill's she strikes deeply into Brand's complex feelings about birds of prey and their victims. Hill shows that Agnes understands Brand, sees into his conflict. This is what one would expect from a woman who had chosen life with such a man.

From this analysis of Hill's version I think it is clear that, as Inga-Stina Ewbank puts it 'the work now before the reader is the greater for it' (Ibsen, 1981, xxxv). The quality of Hill's work, the fact that his version has made this text available in such a powerful form for the English-reading audience, qualifies him as its 'chosen translator'. Hill insisted upon the pungency of Lowell's own metaphors in his review of *Imitations*. He wrote that strong feeling was embodied there in mannerism and technique. The same applies to his version of *Brand*. Close reading of his version in comparison with the literal supports his claim for the power of his verse, regardless of stage-machinery, or the efforts of actors to research Ibsen's characters. Hill's comments in interview testify to the strange intensity, speed and excitement with which he wrote this verse. In this text the underlying purpose of human language has found a unique and almost transcendently clear expression.



Benjamin's rhetoric suggests that it might be possible for translation to recreate the Pentecostal miracle, a 'pure language' that all could understand, regardless of their ignorance of each other's languages. Hill's text does not, admittedly, achieve this. Like Celan's poetry, Hill's *Brand* is written 'from and toward' a '20th of January'. The suffering that we have experienced on our own '20th of January' is what threatens our existence, but also offers us the potential for creative work and perhaps redemption and atonement. If there is a sense in which Benjamin's ideas about translation are borne out, it is in the rich potential that is unleashed when languages impact upon one another. The poet-translator is the enabling figure at the heart of this matrix. Such a poet allows him/herself to experience the '20th of January', feels the necessity to bear witness to the work of other poets, and allows the violence of translation to open new arenas of 'menace' and 'atonement'. In Benjamin's terms, some texts are only translatable by God. The translator who is constantly working at the boundaries of translatability is imitating, or attempting to approach, God's understanding of human beings, God's openness to otherness. If writing poetry is a spiritual exercise, being a poet-translator is an intensification of that practice.

The field of imitation, especially when one imitates poet-translators who have paid an ultimate price for their search for truth, is rich and terrible ground on which to work. Hill insists on the twinned potentials of redemption and death-and-madness: Celan's '20th of January'. These inhere in any act of translation when it is a real attempt to bear witness to the existential risk of the poet, when it strives to assist the continued life of the poem that is the result of that risk. In doing so he confirms the essential kinship between the poet, the mystic, and the true translator.