

# Stratigraphies: Forms of Excavation in Contemporary British and Irish Poetry

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## **Abstract**

This thesis intervenes in current critical debates about space, place and landscape in late-twentieth and twenty-first century British and Irish poetry, by examining models of excavation in selected work by Geoffrey Hill, Ciaran Carson, Geraldine Monk and Alice Oswald. It argues that the influence of the spatial turn on literary criticism over the last thirty years has led to the deployment of a limited set of spatial tropes as analytical tools for interpreting the spaces and places of poetry. By deploying excavation as a critical method it seeks to challenge existing approaches that tend to privilege ideas of space over time, and socio-spatial practices over literary traditions of writing place. In doing so it develops a new model for reading contemporary poetries of place that asserts the importance of locating spatial criticism within temporal and literary-historical frameworks. The four poets examined in the thesis exhibit a common concern with unearthing the strata of language as well as material space. Starting from a premise that excavation always works over the ground of language as well as landscape it investigates the literary traditions of landscape writing in which each of these poets might be said to be embedded. After surveying the critical field the thesis sets out four principles of excavation that it argues are transformed and renewed by each of these poets: the relationship between past and present; recovery and interpretation of finds; processes of unearthing; exhumation of the dead. The subsequent chapters contend that these conventions are put into question by Geoffrey Hill's sedimentary poetics, Ciaran Carson's parodic stratigraphy, Geraldine Monk's collaborations with the dead, and Alice Oswald's geomorphology of a self-excavating earth. The critical method that underpins the discussion in each of the chapters is also excavatory in that it unearths both the historical and literary strata of specific sites (the Midlands, Belfast, East Lancashire, Dartmoor and the Severn estuary) and resonances in the work of earlier poetic excavators (Paul Celan, Edward Thomas, Gerard Manley Hopkins, William Wordsworth, Dante Alighieri and Homer). Through careful exegesis of these poets and their precursors this thesis demonstrates that by transforming existing forms of excavation, contemporary poetry is able to renew its deep dialogue with place and literary history.

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## Introduction

The whole landscape a manuscript  
We had lost the skill to read  
—John Montague, 'A Lost Tradition'<sup>1</sup>

If much recent British and Irish poetry is concerned with the loss or inability to 'read' landscapes in the wake of post-war socio-historical and geopolitical changes, then literary scholarship has responded to these shifts by developing a new set of tools for interpreting the spaces and places of twentieth and twenty-first-century poetry. A critical field has emerged in the last thirty years that both coalesces around the subject of place, space, and landscape in contemporary poetry, and deploys spatial models and tropes as analytical tools. To make a distinction between spatiality as a *topic* of a text, or as a *tool* for considering that text, might seem a question of semantics. Yet as Eric Falci points out, one indication of the ubiquity of spatial thinking in 'current critical theory is that it does not need to be emphasised anymore; it has submerged itself within various intellectual discourses and fields, and at present is as much a framework for thinking as a topic of it'.<sup>2</sup> This thesis identifies three problems that emerge from the dominance of spatial thinking in critical accounts of contemporary poetry. First, the emphasis on the experience and materiality of place (due in part to the influence of geographical and phenomenological approaches) tends to overlook ways in which landscapes are already inscribed and aesthetically mediated by language and literary tradition. Second if literary history is overlooked in these accounts, time itself is also a poor relation to space, and thus the rhythms and temporalities that constitute place are often neglected. Third, this suspicion of temporality has been extended to spatial concepts associated with time: thus surface is privileged over depth, and mobility and displacement have replaced ostensibly static ideas of dwelling or excavation. While these particular tropes continue to dominate as methodological tools in the scholarship of contemporary poetries of place, their critical efficacy remains largely unexamined.

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<sup>1</sup> John Montague, 'A Lost Tradition', in *Rough Field* (Dublin: Dolmen, 1972), p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> Eric Falci, 'Place, Space and Landscape', in *A Concise Companion to Postwar British and Irish Poetry*, ed by. Nigel Alderman and C. D. Blanton (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 200-220 (p. 202).

This thesis provides a critical intervention in the field of contemporary poetry and place, by redeploying excavation as both a topic and a tool of analysis. I examine what contemporary British and Irish poetry is doing in and with place and literary tradition when it employs excavatory tropes. For in spite of the critical eschewal of depth, many poets still remain drawn to excavation as a model for writing. The archaeological imaginary is a well-known source for Seamus Heaney who desires ‘to get back to the first stratum of the language’, or Geoffrey Hill, who similarly attempts to plough ‘the deep strata of language’.<sup>3</sup> Yet writers more often associated with aesthetic practices of mobility and a concern with the surface of particular places also seem fascinated by what lies beneath landscape, language and literary history. For Ciaran Carson, locating a book in a library is ‘like mining geological strata’, and the subtitle of Alice Oswald’s recent exhumation of the dead in *Memorial: An Excavation of the Iliad* (2011) also suggests a literary archaeological method.<sup>4</sup> Through careful exegesis of work by Hill, Carson, Oswald and Geraldine Monk, I demonstrate how contemporary poetry variously deploys excavation as a model for deep dialogues with place and literary history.

Rather than just examining the presence of archaeological themes in such work, I extend the notion of excavation to encompass both poetic process and critical method. As it presupposes an engagement with the past, excavation is heuristically useful in that it enables me to consider both the literary histories and temporal unfolding of poetry in place, without adhering to a reductive model of depth-as-past or surface-as-present. Whatever the differences in aesthetic form and the politics of their poetry, these poets exhibit a common concern with unearthing the strata of language as well as material space. Starting from the premise that excavation always works over the ground of language as well as landscape, I investigate the literary traditions of landscape writing in which each of these poets might be said to be embedded. My own method is therefore also excavatory in that it seeks to uncover literary resonances of specific sites – the Midlands, Belfast, East Lancashire, Dartmoor and the Severn estuary – and existing models of sedimentation, stratification, exhumation and geomorphology found in Paul Celan, Edward Thomas, Gerard Manley Hopkins, William

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<sup>3</sup> Seamus Heaney, *Beowulf: A New Translation* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), xxxii–xxxiii; Geoffrey Hill, ‘Thus My Noblest Capacity Becomes My Deepest Perplexity’, sermon delivered at Great St Mary’s University Church, Cambridge, 8 May 1983.

<sup>4</sup> Ciaran Carson, *Shamrock Tea* (London: Granta Books, 2001), p. 170.

Wordsworth, Dante Alighieri and Homer which I argue underlie these more recent poetic excavations. Using this approach I develop new models for reading the poetry of Hill, Carson, Monk and Oswald that assert the importance of locating spatial criticism within the legacies of literary tradition, and which provide original accounts of their work.



## Field Survey: Review of Literature

A significant number of publications have emerged in the last thirty years on the subject of space, place and landscape in twentieth and twenty-first century British and Irish poetry which together constitute a heterogeneous critical field that traverses geopolitical boundaries of region and nation, the materiality of particular landforms and sites whether rural or urban, environmental concerns, and the politics of being-in-place.<sup>5</sup> In the following survey I introduce this growing body of scholarship as the critical context for my own study. Subsequent chapters provide more focussed critical contexts for each of the poets and their work. Therefore the purpose of this literature review is to trace the impact of spatial thinking on poetic criticism more broadly and to establish, on the one hand, the dominance of particular spatial tropes and on the other, the marginalisation of time and literary history. I begin with a discussion of the emergence of spatial thinking in the humanities before evaluating the way that ideas about place, space and landscape have changed in critical commentaries since Jeremy Hooker's championing of pastoral regionalisms in *The Poetry of Place* (1982) or topographical studies such as John H. Johnston's *The Poet and the City* (1984). It is necessary to begin the review of literature with a broad focus on the spatial turn in order to identify the

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<sup>5</sup> Questions of place and space have also received significant critical attention in the novel and other prose forms. Although it is with accounts of contemporary poetry that I am concerned here, it is worth pointing out some of the key studies that deal with fictional prose, not least for their attention to aesthetic form as well as spatial concerns. For two contrasting landmark studies of space and place see the formalist topographical method of Joseph Hillis Miller, *Topographies* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995) and Franco Moretti's geographically informed study *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800–1900* (London: Verso, 1999). Subsequent studies of the novel tend to follow Moretti in combining narratology with spatial theory from the work of cultural critics and geographers like Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey. For examples see Paul Smethurst, *The Postmodern Chronotope: Reading Space and Time in Contemporary Fiction* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000); Wesley Kort, *Place and Space in Modern Fiction* (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2004); David James, *Contemporary British Fiction and The Artistry of Space* (London: Continuum, 2008). The Bakhtinian concept of the chronotope is a recurring figure around which this type of analysis converges. While I do not take a narratological approach, the attentiveness of critics like James to the aesthetics of literary form alongside questions of place have been influential in my own reassessment of spatial thinking within a paradigm of literary tradition. Trans-historical and cross-genre studies of literature and place meanwhile, often situate themselves on one or other side of this geopolitical and formalist divide. For example *Literary Landscapes: From Modernism to Postcolonialism*, ed. by Attie De Lange and others (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) investigates the political geographies of literary landscapes, while *New Versions of Pastoral: Post-Romantic, Modern, and Contemporary Responses to the Tradition*, ed. by David James and Phillip Tew (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009) adopts a formal generic approach to place. *Literature & Place, 1800–2000*, ed. by Peter Brown and Michael Irwin (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2006) attempt to combine formal and geopolitical concerns.

problems and concerns that are subsequently translated into literary scholarship. I argue that in the last thirty years the critical trajectory in literary studies has shifted in the direction of more aggressively theorised concepts of the spaces and places of poetry, drawn particularly from human geography, phenomenology and the spatial turn more widely. These approaches appear comprehensive in their plotting of the geopolitical, experiential and social production of space and place; indeed, as Falci suggests, space and place are themselves 'seemingly exhausted frames' for examining 'contemporary British and Irish poetry'.<sup>6</sup> Yet as I demonstrate this emphasis on both the socio-historical and experiential domains has left an underexplored site in literary-historical and temporal interpretations of spatial poetics that this thesis will excavate.

## 1. The Spatial Turn

The demarcation of the late twentieth century as an era of *space* rather than *time*, which famously finds its expression in Michel Foucault's announcement of the 'epoch of space' and in Frederic Jameson's assertion that 'daily life' is 'today dominated by categories of space rather than categories of time', gained critical currency from the 1970s onwards in the work of cultural critics, sociologists and geographers such as Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, Edward Soja, and David Harvey.<sup>7</sup> Spatial thinking has for some time been in the ascendancy across the humanities, as is evident from studies such as Doreen Massey's *Space, Place, and Gender* (1994), Edward Casey's *Getting Back into Place* (1993) and *The Fate Of Place* (1997), Jeffrey Malpas' *Place and Experience* (1999), and more recent interdisciplinary perspectives such as *The Spatial Turn* (2008) edited by Barney Warf and Santa Arias.<sup>8</sup> In these accounts notions of absolute geometric space are superseded by the claim that space is inherently social. Where time had been associated with

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<sup>6</sup> Falci, p. 202.

<sup>7</sup> Michel Foucault and Jay Miskowiec, 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics* 16.1 (1986), 22-27 (p. 22); Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Edward S. Casey, *Getting Back into Place* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Jeffrey. E. Malpas, *Place and Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); *The Spatial Turn*, ed. by Barney Warf and Santa Arias (London: Routledge, 2009).

agency and change, and space was considered no more than an inert container in which temporal events unfolded, here space is understood as being dynamically produced by a multitude of intersecting socio-spatial practices.<sup>9</sup> The irony of this new attention to space is the increasing tendency to dismiss time as a universalising and homogenous concept; in other words as equally static as space was once assumed to be. Furthermore space itself becomes a hegemonic domain in which temporal experiences are subsumed.

Harvey and Doreen Massey have questioned the radical distinction between time and space, arguing that one cannot be thought without the other, that time and space are inextricably woven together.<sup>10</sup> In this respect Harvey follows Lefebvre's assertion in *The Production of Space* that 'time is distinguishable, but not separable from space'.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, as Tim Unwin points out, 'at the heart of [these] arguments' remains the tendency to treat space and time as separate concepts' even if they appear 'obstinately determined to try to bring them together'.<sup>12</sup> Thus Lefebvre conversely claims: 'Let everyone look at the space around them. What do they see? Do they see time? They live time, after all; they are in time. Yet all anyone sees is movements. In nature, *time is apprehended within space* – in the very heart of space.'<sup>13</sup> Here time is subordinated to space as it can only be understood and experienced from within a spatial register. Despite the need for a 'reincorporation of space into social theory' that both Lefebvre's and Harvey's work address, Unwin finds this privileging of space over time not only 'strange' but dangerous in that cultural theory is unproblematically moving toward a 'damaging new fetish of space'.<sup>14</sup>

Geographers Nigel Thrift and Jon May echo Unwin's critique of Lefebvre, Harvey and Soja, claiming that the spatial turn continues to found its discursive frameworks on a suspicion or rejection time, despite the influential critique of

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<sup>9</sup> David Harvey, *Explanation in Geography* (London: Edward Arnold, 1969); Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

<sup>10</sup> Massey, 'Politics and Space/Time', in *Place and the Politics of Identity*, ed by. Michael Keith and Steve Pile (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 141–161; Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

<sup>11</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 175.

<sup>12</sup> Tim Unwin, 'A Waste of Space? Towards a Critique of the Social Production of Space', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 25.1 (2000), 11–29 (p. 21).

<sup>13</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 95 my emphasis.

<sup>14</sup> Unwin, p. 22.

such dualisms by Massey.<sup>15</sup> They similarly suggest that ‘in place of an earlier and debilitating historicism it may be that social theory is moving towards a creeping and just as debilitating – “spatial imperialism”.’<sup>16</sup> As a gesture towards undermining the dominance of space over time they coin the term *TimeSpace* and call for a rethinking of ‘social time’ as a fundamental part of space and place. This rethinking of lived time in a contemporary global context would recognise that time is heterogeneous, unevenly experienced and determined by both natural and social rhythms or patterns. Yet, while these reassertions of time in discussions of space are useful correctives to the hegemony of the spatial turn, they are nonetheless tied to the methods and objects of sociological and geographical enquiry and thus when transposed to literary scholarship do not fully address questions of temporality and spatiality in the literary text.

Thrift and May’s corrective reveals further difficulties with the transposition of spatial metaphors across the disciplines, as the social meanings of time and space cannot be so readily mapped onto the formal, aesthetic and linguistic concerns of time and space in poetry. They comment on the problem of metaphoricity in spatial thinking, but for them it is the inability to transform concepts from the realm of metaphor into that of materiality that is at stake: ‘in the work of cultural theorists especially,’ they assert, ‘there is in fact very little to suggest that the ‘spatial turn’ has progressed beyond the level of metaphor’.<sup>17</sup> How far a move beyond metaphor is possible, is also a question that Neil Smith and Cindi Katz pose in ‘Grounding Metaphor: Towards a Spatialized Politics’. They suggest that ‘the widespread appeal to spatial metaphors’ is founded on a need to destabilise ‘previous fixed realities and assumptions’. However, in order that spatial metaphor can operate as a radical ground for challenging the ‘free-floating abstractions’ of time, ‘space is largely exempted’ from the same level of ‘sceptical scrutiny’. Nevertheless unlike Unwin, Smith and Katz remain convinced that Lefebvre’s own use of spatial metaphor is ‘opened to scrutiny’ simply through its assertion of the ‘social’

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<sup>15</sup> Jon May and N. J. Thrift, ‘Introduction’, in *TimeSpace* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 1–46, (p. 1).

<sup>16</sup> May and Thrift, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> May and Thrift, p. 1.

constructedness of space.<sup>18</sup> As in Thrift and May's work, the suggestion here seems to be that as long as spatial tropes are grounded in the social, and geopolitical realm of material space their metaphoricity requires no further investigation.

Yet as Caren Kaplan has pointed out, 'terms such as "borders," "maps," "location," "space" and "place" do not necessarily liberate critical practices from the very conundrum of aestheticization and universalization that spurred a search for alternative metaphors and methods in the first place.'<sup>19</sup> These terms might appear as material givens but as they travel across the disciplines they are deployed increasingly figuratively, through processes of 'abstraction and allusion'.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, these concepts tend to get polarised into categories of dynamism or stasis. Spatial metaphors associated with mobility and 'displacement', such as walking, nomadism, or exile, are understood as offering a radical alternative to the fixity of rootedness and 'dwelling', and are readily harnessed by critics for their resistant potential.<sup>21</sup> Ideas of rootedness and dwelling are also elided with the universalising operation of temporality, for to dwell means to inhabit one place over a period of time; where mobility suggests a continual shifting across the surface of space, rootedness and locality imply depth, the layering of history in one bounded spot of earth. Thus depth, rootedness, and dwelling are dismissed as spatialised-time, as they do not operate on the pure plane of space like concepts of mobility. Yet images of cartography, walking, boundaries, and numerous other tropes for the mobile and displaced body do not escape the metaphoricity of language.

Perhaps the notion that spatial frameworks can ever escape the realm of metaphor is really the issue here, and one to which literary studies is uniquely placed to respond. This is not to say that cultural geography or other disciplines that deal with the material conditions of life are unable to offer aesthetic or textual insights, but rather, that as Rochelle Tobias points out in her compelling study of nature in the poetry of Paul Celan, 'the object of poetry is not spatial but linguistic, which is why poetry is in a unique position to question the

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<sup>18</sup> Neil Smith and Cindi Katz, 'Grounding Metaphor: Towards a Spatialized Politics', in *Place and the Politics of Identity*, ed. by Michael Keith and Steve Pile (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 66–81 (p. 80).

<sup>19</sup> Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 144.

<sup>20</sup> Kaplan, p. 145.

<sup>21</sup> Kaplan, p. 143.

premises it borrows from other fields'.<sup>22</sup> It may be that in its hurry to adopt frameworks from spatial disciplines that literary criticism has temporarily forgotten that these concepts are culturally determined metaphors and tropes, not ahistorical models of analysis. David James similarly suggests that spatial tropes can be rather blunt instruments when it comes to tracing the 'relationship between literary form and the spatial imagination'.<sup>23</sup> In this sense spatial tropes do not necessarily travel well, especially when applied to divergent sociological and textual objects. At the very least this vocabulary needs qualification and investigation in terms of its usefulness in examining the spaces and places of texts. This does not mean abandoning the cultural geographer's lens on the lived practices of place but interrogating and expanding the range and rigour of these tools to ensure that they can account for the text as more than an arbiter of social discourse.

Unwin suggests that one reason why 'the social production of space' has 'been taken up as a cornerstone' of contemporary theory and travelled so rapidly across the humanities, is due to the way in which 'geographers have increasingly sought to engage with colleagues in the wider social sciences, seeing the reassertion of space [...] as an opportunity to develop innovative insights into contemporary social, economic and political practices.'<sup>24</sup> In literary scholarship these spatial 'insights' have offered, in the last twenty years at least, an attractive politically engaged corrective to the pastoral nostalgia associated with existing articulations of space, place and landscape in contemporary poetry, not least Jeremy Hooker's elaboration of the term 'poetry of place'. At this point it will be useful to clarify my own use of the terms 'space', 'place' and 'landscape' in this thesis.

## **2. Defining Terms: Space, Place and Landscape**

Although spatial theorists have sought to account for differences between 'space', 'place' and 'landscape', critical scholarship across the humanities still tends to use the terms interchangeably.<sup>25</sup> The over-determined

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<sup>22</sup> Rochelle Tobias, *The Discourse of Nature in the Poetry of Paul Celan* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006), p. 12.

<sup>23</sup> James, *Contemporary British Fiction*, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> Unwin, p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> For a critique of the indiscriminate use of place and space see Malpas, *Place and Experience*.

and overlapping nature of these concepts does make rigid distinctions difficult to uphold, and can tend to perpetuate critical entrenchments such as the suspicion of landscape aesthetics or the opposition of space to place. Regardless of whether critics are in favour of spatial or place-based approaches, space and place (not unlike space and time) are often understood as opposing concepts: space is categorised as open, vast, and abstract whereas place is enclosed, lived-in and stable. Moreover, place is usually imagined as a subset or static, temporally-bound instance of space. Thus for Yi-Fu Tuan space is marked by 'openness, freedom, and threat,' whereas place signifies 'security and stability'; 'space' is synonymous with 'movement', and 'place is pause'. If these forms are opposing they are also relational, so 'undifferentiated space becomes place [...] as we endow it with value'.<sup>26</sup> Where this 'value' is ostensibly under threat in a globalised world, space is often seen as the culprit, so for Casey the 'uniformity of space' has 'replaced' or 'displaced the priority of place'.<sup>27</sup> Similarly Elizabeth Grosz suggests that 'space (as territory which is mappable, explorable)' must relinquish its mastery as a conceptual category and give 'way to place (occupation, dwelling, being lived in)'.<sup>28</sup> Harvey also maintains the division between space and place, but unlike Tuan, Casey and Grosz warns of the dangers of 'place-bound identity' which depends 'on the motivational power of tradition' and inevitably allies itself with discourses of nationalist reactionary politics.<sup>29</sup>

Massey goes some way towards qualifying these distinctions, and it is her response to Harvey's dismissal of place as static and reactionary, that I will follow in my own use of the terms space and place. Massey asserts that both space and place are inherently social and open, as 'the identity of a place is formed out of social interrelations' which variously 'stretch beyond that 'place' itself'. Rather than existing in opposition to space with its 'vast, intricate complexity of social processes', place can be thought of as 'a particular moment in, the global network of those social relations'. Thus 'place' should not be conceived of as 'an inward-looking enclosure but as simply a subset of the

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<sup>26</sup> Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space And Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), p. 6.

<sup>27</sup> Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, p. 38; see also Casey, *The Fate of Place*.

<sup>28</sup> Elizabeth A. Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 123.

<sup>29</sup> Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (London: Blackwell, 1989), p. 303.

interactions which constitute space, a local articulation within the wider whole'.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore nor does the 'tradition' upon which place depends 'have to be merely closed and self-serving; it too can recognize a past' that is as radically open as the present.<sup>31</sup> In this thesis, then, space and place are often interchangeable, if imagined at different geographical scales. Whereas my use of 'place' will usually involve some kind of 'local articulation', space is a term that enables me to investigate the broader contiguities and gaps between the series of intersecting social, historical and aesthetic processes that delimit and constitute material and textual sites. Where cultural geographers like Massey have been keen to stress the social construction of places, I relocate these concerns alongside the aesthetic practices that also constitute places and their imaginative geographies.

If space and place have been central concepts of the spatial turn, then the idea of landscape has fallen somewhat out of favour in the humanities due to the implied ordering, control and ownership of space that arises with ways of 'ways of seeing' and perspective.<sup>32</sup> John Wylie suggests, however, that by addressing questions of landscape through phenomenology, the idea of a distanced observer gives way to embodied perception.<sup>33</sup> This relationship between seeing a landscape and being in a place is a fundamental impulse in contemporary poetry. In a study of landscape in twentieth-century American poetry, Bonnie Costello suggests 'if nature is not a 'scape,' if we cannot escape into a 'view,' viewing remains one of the primary modes of our relation to the physical world'.<sup>34</sup> That sight is the primary sense through which contemporary poets engage with the idea of being in place or space is also Falci's contention. He further aligns what he sees as a 'scopic tendency' within post-war British and Irish poetry with the vast body of work that conducts itself according to a model of excavation, where 'seeing is always a seeing into'.<sup>35</sup> Tim Ingold, however, challenges the elision of scape and scope in discussions of

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<sup>30</sup> Massey, 'Double Articulation: A Place in the World', in *Displacements: Cultural Identities in Question*, ed by. Angelika Bammer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 110–121 (p. 115).

<sup>31</sup> Massey, 'Double Articulation', p. 119.

<sup>32</sup> See Denis E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1984); W. J. Thomas Mitchell, *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

<sup>33</sup> John Wylie, *Landscape* (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 149–53.

<sup>34</sup> Bonnie Costello, *Shifting Ground: Reinventing Landscape in Modern American Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 13.

<sup>35</sup> Falci, p. 202.



landscape, as it incorrectly assumes an etymological affinity between the two terms that further defines the 'relationship between land and scape' as one that is structured through the 'sensory modality of vision'.<sup>36</sup> He suggests, 'we might do well to return to an earlier understanding of landscape – one which is closer to the ground, more haptic than optical'.<sup>37</sup> Ingold's etymological rethinking of landscape in terms of the Old English *landskap*, which means to shape the land, foregrounds an embodied or affective relation to place over the hegemony of visual modes.<sup>38</sup> For the poets discussed in this thesis, there is often a tension between sight as a framing device and as an embodied response to place. In the case of Carson, for example, seeing is always fraught by the conditions of a militarised landscape, a 'scopic regime' of surveillance and check-points.<sup>39</sup> For Oswald too, seeing is necessary if problematic; she ameliorates the mastery of sight through recourse to hearing, reordering the traditional hierarchy of the senses to create poetic soundscapes that adumbrate envisioned landscapes. While attempting to remain flexible in my use of the terms 'landscape', 'place' and 'space', I do so in the light of their contested conceptual histories. My main concern here, however, is to exploit the potential of these terms for examining the abstractions, local articulations and problems of interpreting the specific sites of the poetry – the Midlands, Belfast, Lancashire, Dartmoor and the Severn estuary. In the rest of this critical survey, then, I examine ways in which spatial discourses have migrated across disciplinary boundaries and into the study of late twentieth-century and post-millennial poetry. I address these studies chronologically to demonstrate the shift from approaches that implicitly rely on literary pastoral frameworks to those that deploy geographically informed socio-spatial models.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Tim Ingold, 'The Shape of the Land', in *Landscapes Beyond Land: Routes, Aesthetics, Narratives*, ed. by Arnar Árnason and others (New York: Berghahn Books, 2012), pp. 197–208 (p. 206).

<sup>37</sup> Ingold, p. 207.

<sup>38</sup> Ingold, p. 198.

<sup>39</sup> Shane Alcobia-Murphy, *Governing the Tongue in Northern Ireland: The Place of Art/the Art of Place* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2005), p. 104.

<sup>40</sup> Suggesting that pastoral frameworks are opposed to geographical ones may be to some extent an artificial distinction, but it is intended to demonstrate the shift in discussions of place, from models drawn from literary studies to those borrowed from socio-spatial and geographical disciplines. Each of the studies that I group under pastoral frameworks is invested in explicating the relationship between poetry and place, rather than providing an account of the pastoral in itself. Pastoral frameworks are deployed here in the service of thinking about place, as opposed to genre or form. For this reason I do not include here the several cogent studies of pastoral tradition in contemporary British and Irish poetry, as these are overwhelmingly concerned with pastoral form and its relationship to cultural or environmental loss, rather than the spaces and places of poetry. For recent pastoral studies in this vein see: Iain Twiddy, *Pastoral Elegy in*

### 3. Critical Contexts: Pastoral Frameworks (1981– 2000)

If 'in an increasingly spatialized world, notions of place have to change,' as claims Ian Davidson, then 'so too will notions of poetry'. Davidson goes on to oppose a 'traditional' idea of place as 'a bounded community with its own history' with the concept of place as a network of continually shifting 'social relations'.<sup>41</sup> In terms of its emphasis on the inherently spatial character of contemporary life and the socially determined nature of place, Davidson's account is clearly situated in the geographical discourse of critics such as Lefebvre, Harvey and Massey. I will return to Davidson in a moment, but for now I want to point out his location of a 'fixed' and 'historically' dependant 'poetry of place' in the work of poet and critic Jeremy Hooker.<sup>42</sup> Although the phrase 'poetry of place' is increasingly used pejoratively in 'backhandedly dismissive' terms as Falci's points out, it is an idea that Hooker has elaborated throughout his poetry and critical work.<sup>43</sup> In a volume of reviews and essays entitled *Poetry of Place* (1982), Hooker traces a history of poetries of place beginning with Wordsworth:

Poetry of place after Wordsworth cannot be understood, I believe, outside of a context of loss. The loss is comprehensive, of shared beliefs in an idea of order, mainly Christian in derivation, but shaped by local cultural traditions, which include a sense of nationhood, the Church, the English language. [A]s the poet's grasp on a common human world has loosened so he has sought to

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*Contemporary British and Irish Poetry* (London: Continuum, 2012); Donna L. Potts, *Contemporary Irish Poetry and the Pastoral Tradition* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2012). Pastoralism has also lent itself to discussions of environmentalism and ecology in post-war poetry. Pastoralism, ecology and place overlap as frames of reference in ecocritical studies: Lawrence Buell's, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Terry Gifford's *Green Voices: Understanding Contemporary Nature Poetry* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995). If the pastoral is not my primary focus, then neither is ecology, although my discussion of Oswald necessarily engages on the peripheries of these debates. Ecocritical studies themselves often draw on the theories and discourses of the spatial turn. Therefore while ecocriticism and pastoral traditions provide ways of thinking about space and place, I am more interested in the impact of the spatial turn on the critical field of contemporary poetry and the shift towards geographical models.

<sup>41</sup> Ian Davidson, *Ideas of Space in Contemporary Poetry* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 31.

<sup>42</sup> Davidson, p. 31.

<sup>43</sup> Falci, p. 204.

replace it with special relationships, with place in particular, and has come to stress the specialness of other poets above all in their relationship to place.<sup>44</sup>

For Hooker, poets from Arnold, Hopkins and Hardy to Edward Thomas, Ivor Gurney and David Jones share a response to place that cannot be imagined 'outside of a context of loss'. This loss encompasses faith, nationhood, and language but inheres in a fraught sense of Englishness, and is displaced onto the ostensibly more certain and stable ground of place. Thus whereas English poets prior to and including Wordsworth 'were grounded in an order, sacred and communal' later poets such as 'Gurney had nothing but the place' itself.<sup>45</sup> The acuteness of place for early twentieth-century poets is further intensified for poets working after 1945 through what Hooker describes as a 'shared' experience of 'life' and a 'community' of poetic tradition.<sup>46</sup> He counts Roy Fisher's *City* (1961), Basil Bunting's *Briggflatts* (1965), and Hill's *Mercian Hymns* (1971) as part of the 'upsurge' of place poetry in this period. Hooker's notion of the sense of loss and displacement articulated by such work resonates with Falci's suggestion that post-war geopolitical changes, revolutions in communication, the break-up of the British Empire and the devolution of Britain influenced and shaped late twentieth-century poetry. Yet where Falci and Davidson emphasise the political and poetic potential of this shifting ground in sequences such as Fisher's *City*, Hooker tends to assert the stability and totality of place.

Thus in an interview with Susan Butler in 1985, Hooker claims that 'a place is a totality, a place is all that has created it through the process of time, it is the history, the geology, the circumambient environment, and in addition to that, is the connection within a single compass of all those living forces.'<sup>47</sup> Here, forces of time, history and geology are dynamic processes that create and shape place, whereas place itself is described as a still point at the centre of these environmental forces. While Hooker gives precedent to place as the site in which these forces cohere, it is necessarily marked by loss and stasis, and as Davidson points out can only be materialised 'through an exploration and

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<sup>44</sup> Jeremy Hooker, *Poetry of Place: Essays and Reviews 1970–1981* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1982), p. 181.

<sup>45</sup> Hooker, *Poetry of Place*, p. 186.

<sup>46</sup> Hooker, 'Seeing Place', in *In Black and Gold: Contiguous Traditions in Post-War British and Irish Poetry*, ed by C. C. Barfoot (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), pp. 27–44 (p. 35).

<sup>47</sup> Hooker, interviewed by Susan Kirst Butler, *Common Ground: Poets in a Welsh Landscape* (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1985), pp. 200–219 (p. 203).

recovery of its past'.<sup>48</sup> Thus Hooker comes close to describing place as an inert container in which the forces of time unfold. A later articulation of the idea of place is Hooker's concept of 'ground' which relocates place in discourses of dynamism that were formerly only available to the operations of time. In 'Seeing Place' he states, 'what I like to call *ground* [is] place shaped, and continually being reshaped, by interacting forces – geology and ecology, history and society and culture – and shot through with personal and family and ancestral experience.'<sup>49</sup> Ground here seems more materially substantial than place; it is also more dynamic and shifting, 'continually being reshaped, by interacting forces'. The concept of ground moves towards the idea of place as a multiplicity of social and cultural practices, although Hooker remains convinced of the importance of temporal forces on the shaping of place.

While there are difficulties that attend Hooker's account of post-war poetries of place such as his assertion of the stability of place, and his tendency to totalise and fix ideas of place in regionalist agendas – all of which Davidson is keen to stress – there is also much that is worth retaining in his perspective on literary history and its relationship to place. To return to Hooker's observation of the 'special' relationship that post-romantic poetry has to place as a repository of loss, is also to note that these sites are already mediated by a poetic community or tradition that has already to some extent articulated that loss. Thus the post-war poet not only grounds his/her work in this 'special' relationship to 'place', but also in the 'specialness of other poets above all in their relationship to place'.<sup>50</sup> This attention to literary traditions of landscape writing runs through several of the following studies, but arguably starts to recede as geopolitically engaged critics begin to emphasise breaks rather than continuities between the way that poets engage with place and space. John H. Johnston's *The Poet and the City* (1984), Edward Picot's *Outcasts from Eden: Ideas of Landscape in British Poetry Since 1945* (1997) and Peter Barry's *Contemporary British Poetry and the City* (2000) all deploy pastoral frameworks to read post-war poetic engagements with particular sites, whether rural or urban.

Like Hooker, Picot sees landscape poetry in terms of loss; a response to environmental degradation that causes us to 'read the landscape in terms of

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<sup>48</sup> Davidson, p. 31.

<sup>49</sup> Hooker, 'Seeing Place', p. 34.

<sup>50</sup> Hooker, *Poetry of Place*, p. 181.

absences'.<sup>51</sup> His premise is that post-war British landscape poetry is invested in a long tradition of the Fall-myth which is central to 'cultural assumptions about the relationship between Man and Nature'.<sup>52</sup> He examines the work of five poets – Philip Larkin, R. S. Thomas, Charles Tomlinson, Ted Hughes and Seamus Heaney – arguing that in each case the poet engages with landscape through the mythological resources of Eden and the Fall. For Picot the renewed interest in landscape exemplified by the work of these poets is foremost a response to modern environmental crisis, although he does note the national tensions in the work of Heaney for example.<sup>53</sup> While Picot offers useful readings of these poets in terms of their pastoral nostalgia, he neglects the extent to which their work also exhibits anti-pastoral, or what Terry Gifford has called 'post-pastoral', impulses.<sup>54</sup> Furthermore, the framework of the Fall-myth, while enabling Picot to assert some sense of British literary tradition in terms of writing landscape, is too universal to account for either the specificities of place or particular literary precursors in the work of these poets.

Johnston's study is differently broad in that it offers a historical and geographical sweep. Johnston examines urban poetry from the seventeenth to the twentieth century in Britain and America in order to provide a framework that can account for literary-historical traditions and make connections between the 'motives', 'purposes' and 'techniques visible in many city poems'.<sup>55</sup> He begins with Virgil's *Georgics* and the 'nature-civilisation antithesis' as a prototype for later English topographical or 'loco-descriptive' poetry, which by the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is understood to either 'reflect the loss' of the pastoral 'perspective', or seek 'to restore it'.<sup>56</sup> This reluctance to move beyond pastoral frameworks results in a reading of these poets as either 'locked within the urban labyrinth as a prisoner [...] condemned to serve some unjust and incomprehensible sentence' or 'rooted elsewhere' contemplating 'the city from

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<sup>51</sup> Edward Picot, *Outcasts from Eden: Ideas of Landscape in British Poetry Since 1945* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997), p. 1.

<sup>52</sup> Picot, p. xiii.

<sup>53</sup> On Heaney's use of the pastoral as a way of reclaiming place and nation see Sidney Burris, *The Poetry of Resistance: Seamus Heaney and the Pastoral Tradition* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1990).

<sup>54</sup> For a discussion of the post-pastoral in Ted Hughes, see Gifford, *Green Voices*. For a development of this idea see also his *Pastoral* (London: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>55</sup> John H. Johnston, *The Poet and the City: A Study in Urban Perspectives* (Athens, Ohio: University of Georgia Press, 1984), p. xvi.

<sup>56</sup> Johnston, pp. xvi–xviii.

the moral and physical vantage point that is *not* the city itself.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, as Gary Roberts observes, Johnston's 'representational priorities' are evident in his use of spatial terms such as 'point of view, perspective, distance, proximity, selection, focus'; one might add here 'moral and physical vantage point'.<sup>58</sup> Roberts claims that Johnston's reliance on 'landscape' aesthetics neglects how the 'textual spaces' of the city are produced by 'social process'. The analysis of social space is particularly important for 'urban poetics' he suggests, because the native 'perspective' is often a 'mobile, ground-level vantage point', which is located in spaces that are constituted by 'structural and conceptual limits, such as walls, streets, and walking people'.<sup>59</sup>

Socio-spatial models adapted from Harvey and Lefebvre for thinking about poetic place are evident in Roberts' critique of Johnston, whose framework is seen as limited due to its reliance on landscape aesthetics, its tendency to render place as fixed rather than in 'process,' and its preference for a singular Gods-eye view over a 'mobile, ground-level' perspective. In attempting to account for the urban landscape within a long history of literary tradition, Johnston neglects the socio-spatial context of the poems and their specific engagements with the city. Yet the emphasis that Roberts places on social process, mobility, and ground-level perspectives is indicative of a model that comes to dominate critical thought and that tends to overlook the possibility that aesthetic form, literary tradition, and the temporal layering of particular sites might be intertwined with the production of place through networks of socio-spatial practices.

Peter Barry engages more closely with the textual and social fabric of city spaces, providing an increasingly theoretical model for considering urban sites in contemporary poetry. The impetus for Barry's book was that at the turn of the twenty-first century poetry was 'in trouble'. Marginalised on university syllabi in comparison to fictional prose and literary theory, and insufficiently profitable for major presses, poetry needed an injection of '*street-cred*,' as Barry puts it.<sup>60</sup> Using a framework of pastoralism against which to deploy his survey of urban sites, Barry asserts that the canon of contemporary poetry (which he aligns with

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<sup>57</sup> Johnston, pp. 128, 204.

<sup>58</sup> Gary Roberts, 'London Here and Now', in *The Nature of Cities: Ecocriticism and Urban Environments*, ed. by Michael Bennett and David Warfield Teague (University of Arizona Press, 1999), pp. 33–54 (p. 39). The list of terms that Roberts cites are from Johnston, p. 43.

<sup>59</sup> Roberts, 'London Here and Now', p. 40.

<sup>60</sup> Peter Barry, *Contemporary British Poetry and the City* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 3–4.

Hughes, Heaney and Hill) is too invested in the rural and nature; it is this 'narrow' range that risks poetry's demise.<sup>61</sup> Whether British and Irish poetry is still in trouble twelve years on is difficult to say, but Barry's study of urban poetry has been extremely influential in opening up debates and discussions about previously less well-documented poets of place such as Carson or Roy Fisher, whose work now appears more frequently in critical accounts. Barry is less able to account for women poets of the city as he claims that they tend to eschew 'geography' in favour of charting inner space.<sup>62</sup> This attempt to chart urban space using ideas from geography gestures towards the spatial turn, although Barry establishes a framework that is inherently tropological as much as it is topological. The three 'urban tropes' around which Barry organises his analysis are 'double visioning', 'setting' versus 'geography', and the 'chronotope'.

'Double visioning' claims Barry, 'arises from the tendency of cities to foreground time and change' in contrast with rural landscapes, which largely stand in for 'timelessness and continuity'.<sup>63</sup> As a 'multi-layered chronological perspective which typically superimposes one historical period upon another', double visioning focuses on one spot of earth (or tarmac) but imbues it with movement, dynamism and complexity.<sup>64</sup> There is little here to differentiate between Barry's 'trans-historical' urban palimpsest, which ostensibly signifies change, and Hooker's idea of place as a site of continuity 'within a single compass of all those living forces' of time.<sup>65</sup> In both accounts place is understood as shifting or stable in relation to the processes of time and change in which it unfolds, an idea that is challenged by Massey. If the layered histories of place can signify both 'change' and 'continuity' then surely this depends less on whether sites are definitively rural or urban and more on the way in which temporal/depth models are deployed and to what effect. That the relationship between time and space, past and present, change and continuity is not so straightforwardly oppositional is something that this thesis will demonstrate through its readings of rural and urban sites.

If double visioning offers a way of considering the timing of place, then Barry's second trope for examining city poetry is more explicitly influenced by

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<sup>61</sup> Barry, p. 4.

<sup>62</sup> Barry, p. 59.

<sup>63</sup> Barry, p. 45.

<sup>64</sup> Barry, p. 46. Double visioning is akin to Falci's notion of the doublet of 'seeing' and 'seeing into'.

<sup>65</sup> Barry, p. 46; Hooker interviewed by Butler, p. 203.

spatial thinking. He differentiates between 'setting' and 'geography' as modes for determining whether particular poems be included in his survey. Where 'setting' merely offers a 'generalised impression of the urban', poetry that proceeds by way of 'geography' is 'loco-specific' in that it attends to the fabric of place and is thus suggestive of a kind of 'cartographic precision'.<sup>66</sup> Geographic modes of writing then, which include street names and other loco-specific detail, are more efficacious than those that use generic setting as no more than a device of landscape aesthetics. As a symbol of external reality the geographical trope of mapping provides Barry with a critical tool that can account for the relationship between lyric self and the materiality of place. The ability to anchor the poem in specifics of time and space are crucial to Barry's topology. He turns to Mikhail Bakhtin's category of the 'chronotope,' which stresses the interpenetration of space and time in narrative forms as a third model for considering markers of time, place and movement in the urban poem.<sup>67</sup>

Neal Alexander suggests that the chronotope is an 'early intervention in the field of literary geography', one that is arguably more allied to discussions of narrative time, but which has nevertheless provided a framework for developments in spatial analysis such as Franco Moretti's landmark study of mapping and the European novel.<sup>68</sup> Moretti's work is an early example of scholarship that usefully traverses the boundary of two disciplines, literary studies and cartography. Following Bakhtin, but providing a more spatially situated model, Moretti suggests that '[s]pace is not 'outside' of narrative [...] but an internal force, that shapes it from within.'<sup>69</sup> The models for reading place that emerge in the work of Barry and Moretti across different forms (prose and poetry), and sites (rural and urban) point to a millennial turn away from literary conventions such as the pastoral towards what Alexander terms 'literary geographies'.<sup>70</sup> If as Alexander asserts it is incumbent upon literary critics to

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<sup>66</sup> Barry, pp. 48–9.

<sup>67</sup> Barry, p. 52; Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed by. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987).

<sup>68</sup> Neal Alexander, *Ciaran Carson: Space, Place, Writing* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), p. 34.

<sup>69</sup> Moretti, p. 70.

<sup>70</sup> Alexander, *Ciaran Carson*, p. 17. This term is adapted from Sheila Hones, 'Text as It Happens: Literary Geography', *Geography Compass*, 2.5 (2008) 1301–1317, which argues that the emergent field of literary geography is not yet functioning across interdisciplinary boundaries. One example of this is the tendency of literary critics to deploy approaches from geography and spatial theory (Lefebvre, Soja, Harvey, Massey) without acknowledging existing 'work on literary topics published in geographical journals' (p. 307). Hones gives examples of such cross-over work by geographers such as D. C. Pocock and M. Brosseau.



recognise the importance of space, I attempt to respond to this by tracing the value and limitations of literary geographical frameworks for my own approach, thus attempting to negotiate, as Moretti suggests, 'between a new geography, that we cannot ignore – and an old' formal, or in his terms, 'narratological matrix, that we cannot forget'.<sup>71</sup> The next section considers several more recent studies, which are indicative of the turn to geographical, geopolitical and socio-spatial ideas in readings of the poetry of place.

#### 4. Critical Contexts – Literary Geographies (2000–)

This section begins with a discussion of critical approaches that address spatial concerns in modernist literature, in order to show that the acceleration of geopolitical change after 1945 led to a reconsideration of space, place and landscape in the work of several late-modernist poets. In his discussion of the 'pocket-epic,' Nigel Alderman observes that after 1945 British poetry was shaped by twin forces of rapid geopolitical change, and the aesthetic concerns or 'particular demands' of 'historical geographies' that emerged in the wake of high modernism.<sup>72</sup> Thus the supersession of time by space and the particularity of landscape became important for poets such as Hugh MacDiarmid, David Jones, and Basil Bunting. Citing poet, Roy Fisher, Alderman suggests that post-war poetry is thereby distinguishable from the temporal and ostensibly universalising aesthetic of T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound in its desire to create 'a poem which gains its effects by the superimposition of landscape upon landscape rather than rhythm upon rhythm'.<sup>73</sup> As both the experience of time that is captured in the poem and the temporal movement of the poem itself, temporal rhythm is here opposed to landscape and the specificity of place. Yet as I will demonstrate in my analysis of Oswald's poetry particularly, rhythm is one of the ways in which the temporal and spatial are inextricably intertwined in the textual reproduction of material landforms and experience of places. While *rhythmanalysis* is indeed part of spatial theory's conceptual lexicon, this

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<sup>71</sup> Alexander, *Ciaran Carson*, p. 34; Moretti, p. 72.

<sup>72</sup> Nigel Alderman, 'Introduction: Pocket Epics: British Poetry After Modernism', *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 13.1 (2000), 1–2 (p. 1).

<sup>73</sup> Roy Fisher, *Furnace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. vii; cited in Alderman, p. 1.

temporal aspect of place and space has been largely overlooked in literary criticism.<sup>74</sup>

This distinction between rhythm and landscape is an indication that the tendency to align modernism with time and post-war poetry with place largely 'remains,' as Alex Davis and Lee Jenkins note in their introduction to *Locations of Literary Modernism*, 'a critical given'. The essays in this collection all work at some level to question this 'construction of modernism as an international, urban and yet placeless, phenomenon'.<sup>75</sup> The periodisation of modernism here is necessarily flexible, and there is therefore an overlap between poets who might seem more concerned with time (Pound and Eliot) and those such as Jones or Bunting, who later, as Alderman suggests, respond to temporal abstraction through a particular focus on place. Despite the alleged shift after 1945 away from time and towards space, Davis and Jenkins establish that concerns with region, nation, and locale are present across various poetic modernisms. Modernism, as Brian McHale suggests, had 'already undergone a spatial turn of its own'.<sup>76</sup>

For McHale, however, this spatial turn is only partial as its concern with plumbing the depths of landscape is still indebted to time. As a master-trope of high modernism, excavation is understood to spatialise time as a continuous succession of events each with a before and after. Furthermore, in its dependency on a Freudian archaeological model, modernist literary-excavation presupposes a coherent 'deep self' that underpins 'a discourse of epistemological mastery'.<sup>77</sup> According to McHale then, modernist tropes of depth and excavation are therefore inextricable from a rhetoric of hierarchy, mastery and tradition or cultural continuity. When archaeological tropes are deployed in late twentieth-century poetry, for example in the work of Heaney or Hill, they are understood to affirm the pieties of time. There is, however, an alternative archaeological genealogy, which produces a poetics that is

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<sup>74</sup> See Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time, and Everyday Life* (London: Continuum, 2004); also Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (New York: Orion Press, 1964). Isobel Armstrong draws on Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis in *Victorian Glassworlds: Glass Culture and the Imagination 1830–1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) and in 'Meter and Meaning', in *Meter Matters: Verse Cultures of the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Jason David Hall (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011), pp. 26–52.

<sup>75</sup> Alex Davis and Lee M. Jenkins, 'Locating Modernisms: An Overview', in *Locations of Literary Modernism: Region and Nation in British and American Modernist Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 3–29 (p. 3).

<sup>76</sup> Brian McHale, 'Archaeologies of Knowledge: Hill's Middens, Heaney's Bogs, Schwerner's Tablets', *New Literary History*, 30.1 (1999), 239–262 (p. 239).

<sup>77</sup> McHale, p. 254.

understood by McHale to properly conform to new concepts of space. This is found in Armand Schwerner's *Tablets*, which can be read as a Foucauldian archaeology in ruins, in that it resists the idea of origin and 'emphasizes the discontinuities of a particular archaeological stratum of discourse rather than its continuities with the strata 'above' or 'below' (before or after) it'. The 'vertical spatialization of 'deep time' in Hill's *Mercian Hymns* and Heaney's bog poems is ostensibly collapsed 'onto a single plane' in the work of Schwerner. For McHale the two approaches are not merely rhetorically or epistemologically divergent but effect a qualitative or material difference in the poetry itself. Where Schwerner is praised for producing a 'poetry rich in spatial event', Heaney and Hill are said to offer a 'rather meager, undernourished spatiality' that is too reliant on models of spatialised time.<sup>78</sup> Here, time is understood as a taint upon the pure plane of space. Despite this being a rather categorical indictment of two poets whose engagement with landscape is far from meagre, McHale also assumes a concept of linear time, which in itself could be described as 'undernourished' or inadequate. The 'materiality' that McHale ascribes to the poetry of Schwerner, which – rather than referring to a 'subterranean space' elsewhere – enacts 'spatiality itself', is always unfolding in a movement of time, or duration.<sup>79</sup> Where the modernist emphasis on depth spatialises time thereby reducing it to another dimension of space, McHale's framework attempts to completely excoriate time from space. McHale's perspective is indicative of the wider difficulty that spatial frameworks encounter when trying to properly account for time in literary landscapes. For the reasoning seems to be that if poetry is overtly concerned with time and the layering of history, it cannot also be adequate to the task of representing space or place.

Where McHale differentiates between the limited spatial engagement of modernist poetry and a more spatially aware postmodern poetics, other critics note the way in which a number of geopolitical concerns are evident across this divide. Region and nation, centre and periphery, localism and globalisation have thus become significant topics of analysis in recent studies of British and Irish poetry across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.<sup>80</sup> The perceived

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<sup>78</sup> McHale, pp. 254–5.

<sup>79</sup> McHale, p. 256.

<sup>80</sup> James A. Knapton, *Writings of England: The Political Imaginations of Philip Larkin, Ted Hughes and Geoffrey Hill* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Alcobia-Murphy, *Governing the Tongue in Northern Ireland*; Scott Lyall, *Hugh MacDiarmid's Poetry and Politics of Place: Imagining a Scottish Republic* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006); Elmer Kennedy-

impact of devolution coupled with developments in cultural geography and spatial theory has led to an increased critical interest in the poetry of the former peripheral regions and a critique of Englishness itself. This is nowhere more acute perhaps, than in the politically fraught context of Northern Ireland where as Gerry Smyth suggests, poetry (and perhaps criticism) is 'overdetermined' by such 'spatial concerns'.<sup>81</sup>

Shane Alcobia-Murphy's *Governing the Tongue in Northern Ireland* (2005), takes a decidedly 'geo-spatial' approach to examining the 'status and efficacy' of writing and art in a 'time of violence'.<sup>82</sup> Drawing on insights from Massey, Harvey, and Brian Jarvis' *Postmodern Cartographies* (1998), Alcobia-Murphy argues that Irish Studies has for too long relied on a 'Romantic conception of landscape' such as that expressed by Seamus Heaney. Instead, he suggests that a younger generation of Northern Irish poets who grew up during the Troubles take a 'constructivist approach to place rather than one which yields a sense of authentic, organic, rootedness'.<sup>83</sup> There is a suspicion here of a 'quasi-Heideggerian' idea of place which might be used to 'construct a rooted, nationalist discourse'.<sup>84</sup> This approach tends to reject any spatial representation that is associated with depth, tradition (literary or otherwise) and historical time, or that is not specifically urban. Like Barry, Alcobia-Murphy sees a shift from rural landscapes to urban space in this revised spatial poetics, one that is particularly urgent in the Northern Irish context as actual towns and cities are the locus of much of the urban redevelopment and political turbulence associated with the Troubles. Yet as his analysis makes clear, the spatial idiom of maps, borders, streets, walls, walking (or marching) that emerges in more abstract terms in Roberts' critique of Johnston's city poetry is here physically inscribed in the sectarian geographies of Northern Ireland. If this critical trajectory overlooks the revisionary potential of rural landscapes and tradition it nevertheless convincingly grounds spatial metaphors in the specificity of Belfast and other Northern Irish locations.

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Andrews, *Writing Home: Poetry and Place in Northern Ireland, 1968–2008* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008); Alexander, *Ciaran Carson*.

<sup>81</sup> Gerry Smyth, *Space and the Irish Cultural Imagination* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 56.

<sup>82</sup> Alcobia-Murphy, p. viii.

<sup>83</sup> Alcobia-Murphy, p. 100; See also Brian Jarvis, *Postmodern Cartographies: The Geographical Imagination in Contemporary American Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998).

<sup>84</sup> Alcobia-Murphy, p. 102.

Elmer Kennedy-Andrews' *Writing Home: Poetry and Place in Northern Ireland, 1968–2008* (2008), covers similar terrain in seeking to determine how far contemporary Northern Irish poetry 'represent[s] a move away from concepts of rootedness and towards a poetics and politics of displacement, mobility, openness and pluralism.'<sup>85</sup> Like Massey, Kennedy-Andrews asserts that place need not necessarily be understood as 'bounded, settled and coherent' but can be equally 'marked by mobility openness, change, hybridity and indeterminacy'.<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, while place can be understood as radically open, this openness predominantly applies to particular types of places, and so again the city is the privileged site of this mobile poetics of displacement with 'its ironic detachment and objectivity, its apparent indifference to 'depth,' 'meaning' and 'values'.<sup>87</sup> While Kennedy-Andrews is referring to Carson's poetry here, this 'postmodern style' with its eschewal of depth might speak more broadly of a poetics that opposes the Heaney, Hughes, Hill triad of rural place poetry. Although critics such as Kennedy-Andrews and Alcobia-Murphy rightly observe the movement from countryside to city in such poetry, this framework largely fails to account for the appearance of rural space in the work of poets like Carson. Thus rural imagery in Carson's early collection *The New Estate* is either dismissed by as being the 'only vocabulary available' (Barry), or recuperated as a parodic 'de-mythologising commentary' on 'Irish Nationalist ideology' (Alexander).<sup>88</sup> Alexander's critique of Barry's position is helpful in my own analysis of Carson's parodic excavations. However, I extend the concept of parody beyond 'a tongue-in-cheek rendition of romantic stereotypes' to investigate how parody functions as an excavation of poetic precursors that is always tied to its target texts, even as it opens up a critical space (*para*) beside text and place.<sup>89</sup>

Where these critical accounts are much concerned with geopolitics and questions of national identity, Davidson's *Ideas of Space in Contemporary Poetry* (2007) draws on spatial theory to consider the impact of changing ideas of space on the form as well as the content of contemporary poetry. He is particularly interested in the critical force of experimental poetry that draws on abstract art (Cubism, Surrealism) and the open-field poetics of Charles Olson.

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<sup>85</sup> Kennedy-Andrews, *Writing Home*, p. 3.

<sup>86</sup> Kennedy-Andrews, *Writing Home*, p. 9.

<sup>87</sup> Kennedy-Andrews, *Writing Home*, p. 222.

<sup>88</sup> Barry, p. 227; Alexander, *Ciaran Carson*, p. 39.

<sup>89</sup> Alexander, *Ciaran Carson*, p. 39.

Davidson's approach is useful in that it relocates debates of place and space usually associated with mainstream canonical figures in the sphere of small press experimental poetry and its frequently anti-lyric mode. His choice of poetry thereby lends itself to an account of the space of the poem as it is formally expressed on the page. However, this method tends to rely on distancing spatial poetics from time in several ways. First, in visual or concrete poetry 'the time of the line' is understood to be 'replaced by the space of the page'.<sup>90</sup> For, if the 'line' is an expression of the 'poem as a unit of "time"', both in the way that it 'creates rhythm within the poem, and as the primary influence of spatial organisation of the poem', then in the non-linear poem, time 'becomes arbitrary or absent'.<sup>91</sup> As my analysis of Monk's open-field poetics demonstrates, however, the visual spacing of language on the surface of the page does not necessarily preclude temporality, depth or historical consciousness.

A further eradication of time in Davidson's approach is his rejection of both an 'historical' method of analysis and an historical consciousness in the object of his study. To 'define a particular history of poetry' would be 'reductive' he claims, and would 'detract from the spirit of inclusiveness a more spatial perspective can bring'.<sup>92</sup> This idea of spatial methods as inherently inclusive verges on a kind of critical utopianism that echoes Foucault's assertion in 'Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias' that 'the determined inhabitants of space' would overtake the 'pious descendants of time'. Davidson proposes to liberate poetry from historical tradition in favour of situating it in a genealogy of spatial thought.

Although Davidson warns that it is 'all too easy to cherry-pick' ideas of space from different genealogies and map them onto contemporary poetry, he nevertheless mobilises particular spatial tropes against one another.<sup>93</sup> So metaphors of moving between places opposes Hooker's idea of residing in place. Ed Dorn's work for example is 'decentred' and 'rhizomatic', its spatial organisation frees it from 'recycling the past' and the poet's 'position in the world becomes increasingly nomadic'.<sup>94</sup> Time, literary tradition, the historical past, have no place in this discourse of mobility and displacement. Yet it

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<sup>90</sup> Davidson, p. 138.

<sup>91</sup> Davidson, pp. 131, 133.

<sup>92</sup> Davidson, p. 5.

<sup>93</sup> Davidson, p. 25.

<sup>94</sup> Davidson, p. 79.

remains unclear how these spatial metaphors free poetry from temporal concerns, or why this is indeed desirable. Davidson himself is uncertain of the efficacy of 'depthless' spatial practices in poetry; he claims to follow Massey in asserting the 'interconnectedness' of time and space, even though his actual analysis tends to betray an emphasis on spatial concerns.<sup>95</sup> If as he claims, however, 'spatialization is a process which foregrounds a "spatial awareness" over a "historical consciousness"', this process and its topology is as much a characteristic of the critical approach as it is a facet of the poetry.<sup>96</sup>

All of the studies that I have addressed so far have been multiple-author surveys, but the most developed and rigorous application of geospatial methods to the analysis of contemporary poetry to date can be found in Neal Alexander's single author study, *Ciaran Carson: Space, Place, Writing* (2010).<sup>97</sup> Alexander reads Carson's work through various spatial lenses, cartography, walking, labyrinths, and the topoi of memory and translation, proposing that Carson's 'street-level engagement' with Belfast opposes traditional perspectives that would construct the city as readable space.<sup>98</sup> My chapter on Carson moves away from this street-level perspective to explore the poet's fascination with subterranean spaces and what lies beneath Belfast and its rural-urban edgelands. What is most compelling about Alexander's approach, however, is the way in which he goes beyond the use of spatial frameworks as tools of analysis, by situating Carson in a genealogy of spatial theorists from Lefebvre to Michel de Certeau. So throughout the study 'Carson's writing of Belfast can be seen both to respond to, and complicate' among others 'de Certeau's extremely suggestive account of urban experience'.<sup>99</sup> This poetic street-level engagement is not merely analogous to de Certeau's, rather it is understood to refract and extend spatial practice in a way that establishes traditions of spatial theory and its proponents as Carson's writerly precursors, over and above literary-historical traditions. Alexander is clear that it is not easy to 'anchor' Carson's work 'in a stable framework of literary-historical explanation' despite

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<sup>95</sup> Davidson, p. 88.

<sup>96</sup> Davidson, p. 185.

<sup>97</sup> The emergence of a critical field that consolidates analysis and methods from geography and literary studies in the manner that Sheila Honess argues for is evident in forthcoming publications such as *Poetry and Geography: Space and Place in Post-war Poetry*, ed. by Neal Alexander and David Cooper (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), and Cooper, *Lake District Literary Geographies: Mapping the Post-Romantic Spatial Imagination* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>98</sup> Alexander, *Ciaran Carson*, p. 107.

<sup>99</sup> Alexander, *Ciaran Carson*, p. 107.

his ‘voracious incorporation of quotations from a wide range of literary and non-literary sources’.<sup>100</sup> For Carson’s misquotation and blurring of literary and non-literary allusion, ‘even if [they do] provide some clues as to his reading habits and influences’ seem ‘implicitly critical’ and serve more to destabilise ‘literariness and canonicity’ than to affirm it.<sup>101</sup> Alexander suggests that the poem ‘Calvin Klein’s *Obsession*’, which juxtaposes a misquotation from Edward Thomas’ ‘Old Man’ with references to pop art and pop music, is exemplary of Carson’s resistance to literary-historical frameworks. He further cites Fiona Stafford’s remarks on the ‘inability’ of the ‘English literary tradition’ to ‘mediate’ in the context of Northern Irish poetry.<sup>102</sup> While Alexander is correct to point out the slipperiness and critical edge of Carson’s intertextual references, he arguably replaces the need to investigate them further by providing a genealogy of spatial rather than literary precursors, in relation to whom Carson’s poetry becomes legible. I suggest that despite Alexander’s and Stafford’s assertions, Carson’s recent collection *On the Night Watch* (2009) deliberately harnesses English literary traditions of landscape poetry to the poet’s revision of place through mediating the work of Edward Thomas. My own literary-historical approach, therefore, attempts to explicate the presence of poetic precursors in the work of these contemporary poets alongside what Stafford calls a ‘local attachment’ to place.

In *Local Attachments: The Province of Poetry* (2010) Stafford examines the persistence of the ‘local’ since its appearance in the romantic period.<sup>103</sup> While she concentrates largely on romantic writing, she links the notion of ‘local work’ to current contexts through Heaney’s impassioned defence of place in his Nobel Lecture of 1995. Stafford’s account echoes Hooker’s idea of place rather than the geospatial approaches that I have outlined here, in that she observes the importance of ‘local attachment’ and a ‘felt’ sense of place.<sup>104</sup> While she largely ignores the criticisms of poetry of place mounted by the spatial turn, she does acknowledge anxieties about the potential of ‘local work’ to be harnessed for nationalist or regionalist extremism. ‘It is partly in answer to this kind of “ancestral dread”’ she claims, that ‘Heaney makes his eloquent pleas for local

<sup>100</sup> Alexander, *Ciaran Carson*, p. 154.

<sup>101</sup> Alexander, *Ciaran Carson*, p. 154.

<sup>102</sup> Fiona J. Stafford, *Starting Lines in Scottish, Irish, and English Poetry: From Burns to Heaney* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 257; also cited in Alexander, *Ciaran Carson*, p. 154.

<sup>103</sup> Stafford, *Local Attachments: The Province of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>104</sup> Stafford, *Local Attachments*, p. 300.



culture'.<sup>105</sup> While I would suggest a more critical reading of Heaney's notion of place and the local, I am persuaded by Stafford's idea that 'local attachment' emerges alongside 'literary attachment'. Giving examples from Heaney, Jones and Wordsworth she argues that 'local work does not derive power simply from an artist's first-hand knowledge of a particular landscape.' Their engagements with landscapes are instead 'conditioned by earlier writers and artists, whose work has opened up ways of seeing and expressing the best response.'<sup>106</sup>

Stafford claims:

Wordsworth expressed deep gratitude for the nurturing qualities of the surrounding landscape, but his ability to build 'a work that should endure' was dependent on the corroboration of other writers, past and present. His grateful sense of local attachment emerged in tandem with a recognition of literary attachments. The vital connections between an individual and a particular place could find permanent form only through the poet's connection with other poets.<sup>107</sup>

If the literary landscapes of Hill, Carson, Monk and Oswald can be said to be conditioned by earlier writers, however, their 'recognition of literary attachments' does not necessarily serve to corroborate and reinforce these 'ways of seeing' space and place. Instead, as this thesis demonstrates, their literary excavations frequently undermine and transform existing models as much as they affirm them. Rather than attempting to inscribe the relationships between 'an individual and a particular place' in 'permanent form', Hill's sedimentary homage to Celan, Carson's stratigraphy of Thomas and Dante, Monk's exhumation of Hopkins, and Oswald's metamorphoses of Wordsworth and Homer attest to the transience and contingency of self and world. The following section explains the selection of poets covered in this study, and sets out the critical methodology that I use to examine their work and that of their precursors in the subsequent chapters.

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<sup>105</sup> Stafford, *Local Attachments*, pp. 10–11.

<sup>106</sup> Stafford, *Local Attachments*, pp. 15–16.

<sup>107</sup> Stafford, *Local Attachments*, p. 16.

# Principles of Stratigraphy: Methodology

## 1. Cross-sections: Choice of Authors

This thesis does not claim to provide an exhaustive and complete account of the various excavatory strategies of late twentieth and twenty-first century British and Irish poetry. Rather, it offers in-depth readings of particular poets who, it suggests, have revised and renewed excavatory models found in their own work, and in the work of their literary precursors. While broad surveys such as Falci's are useful for highlighting the currents and trajectories of contemporary poetry, it is not an approach that I take here, as my own method of critical excavation requires a detailed exegesis of each poet and their work in relation to specific landscapes. This strategy allows me to attend to the singularity of poetry and the particularity of place in the context of wider concerns with literary-history, ethics, language and the lyric self. For this reason I have been unable to include writers such as Peter Riley, Roy Fisher or Jack Clemo who might otherwise find their way into a survey of twentieth and twenty-first-century poetic excavation.

My choice of authors hinges on their impulse to mine the strata of language and literary-history as well as material places. In order to demonstrate that place is not a mere backdrop or scene against which such poetry unfolds, I have selected poets who repeatedly respond to specific locations within the geopolitical confines of Britain and Northern Ireland. While Belfast, as one of these sites has understandably received significant critical attention in relation to contemporary writing, Dartmoor, the Severn estuary, Lancashire and the Midlands are less well documented in terms of their capacity for 'local work'. As existing discussions of excavation or archaeological poetics tend to focus on Heaney, I do not discuss his work here. Nevertheless Heaney's excavatory strategies necessarily subtend the discussion throughout this thesis, and he appears from time to time as an interlocutor for Ciaran Carson's parodic interventions. Another poet who is often associated with Heaney, in that they are both understood to imagine the 'past in chthonic or archaeological terms', is Geoffrey Hill.<sup>108</sup> In order to show that it is not just the task of those who come after to revise tradition, that indeed poets may renovate their own models of

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<sup>108</sup> Andrew Michael Roberts, *Geoffrey Hill* (Tavistock: Northcote, 2004), p. 22.

excavation, I begin with the work of Hill. Reconsidering Hill's excavatory strategies beyond *Mercian Hymns* enables me to situate the work of the other poets that I examine in a synergistic rather than oppositional trajectory. Carson's work is of interest here precisely because it is not usually thought of in terms of excavation, and as it is often opposed to the model associated with Heaney and Hill. The two remaining poets, Geraldine Monk and Alice Oswald, are not so widely discussed in current criticism. In the case of Monk who has been publishing since the early 1970s, this is partly due to her doubly marginalised position as a female poet in an experimental tradition; discussions of her work tend to foreground this aspect, perhaps inadvertently compounding her peripheral status. Oswald on the other hand is gaining critical interest and popular acclaim; although to date there are only a handful of articles on her work. Although the use of excavatory tropes in the work of Monk and Oswald has largely gone unremarked, both poets mine the material and linguistic terrains of their respective landscapes through exhumation and geomorphology respectively. By including poetry that cuts across aesthetic categories and revises entrenched models of writing place, I hope to establish some of the intersections and divergences among the various excavatory strategies of contemporary British and Irish poets. Each chapter is focussed around a single author and a selection of their work in the context of one or more poetic precursors. It is in a dialogue of critique and sympathy, revision and indebtedness that these poets respond to the precursors that I outline in this thesis; in this way Hill, Carson, Monk and Oswald transform and renew traditions of poetry and place.

## 2. A Justification for Excavation

A poem, suggests Michael O'Neill, is a 'place' where the 'most nuanced reading of a previous poem or poetry occurs'.<sup>109</sup> As a kind of 'literary criticism' poetry is conditioned by influence, not as a Bloomian 'struggle between male egos' but as 'an interplay between indebtedness and individuation'.<sup>110</sup> Where that poem is also a response to 'place' it thereby necessarily acknowledges, mediates and critically transforms the spaces, places, and landscapes of its

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<sup>109</sup> Michael O'Neill, *The All-Sustaining Air: Romantic Legacies and Renewals in British, American, and Irish Poetry Since 1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 11.

<sup>110</sup> O'Neill, p. 11.

poetic precursors. I contend that locating the insights of spatial criticism within literary-historical frameworks enables a more nuanced critical account of poetics of place, one that reveals ‘the hidden roads that go from poem to poem’ and back again; the stratified landscapes that lie beneath.<sup>111</sup> As O’Neill suggests, the critical approach that is an inevitable corollary to concerns with literary legacy is a ‘mode of close reading that allows attention to both individuality and relationship’.<sup>112</sup> In this thesis close reading and literary-history combine with a concept of excavation as a critical tool to enable new insights into contemporary poetry’s deep dialogue with place. While the scope of this thesis is limited to accounting for the various transformations of excavatory models in a selection of work by these poets and to some extent their precursors, I hope to provide a critical approach that can be applied more widely to the field of contemporary poetry and place.

I suggest that there are several advantages to using excavation as a critical model of engagement with contemporary poetry and place. First, as Falci observes, a vast amount of post-war poetry proceeds by way of the archaeological mode.<sup>113</sup> He names Heaney, Hill and Peter Riley as exemplary excavators in this vein, while also highlighting the urban stratigraphy of poets such as Carson and Fisher. In suggesting that poets like Carson revise and renew archaeological poetics Falci begins to unearth other genealogies of excavation besides the ostensibly dominant model of poets such as Heaney and Hill. However, this approach already tends to homogenise existing excavatory strategies, neglecting the way in which poets like Hill continually reconfigure their own models. Falci’s analysis is also necessarily limited due to the constraints of the topic within a single essay, therefore while his work provides a good foundation, it is unable to develop these excavatory models in any detail. While the volume of poetry that engages with excavation is one good reason for commencing such a study, my approach goes beyond accumulating observations of archaeological or geological tropes, and seeks to turn metaphor into model.

Second, using excavation as a model enables me to widen the debates around existing uses of critical spatial tropes. Part of my criticism of current

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<sup>111</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 96; O’Neill, *The All-Sustaining Air*, p. 11.

<sup>112</sup> O’Neill, p. 11.

<sup>113</sup> Falci, p. 202.

approaches to place, space and landscape in literary studies is the tendency either to accrue too much political potential to abstract spatial metaphors, or to ground metaphor so firmly in place as to render poems no more than arbiters of socio-spatial practice. My approach tries to tread a line between these two poles, recognising both the suggestive metaphoricity of excavation and the need to locate its allusiveness in aesthetic as well as social practices of particular places. If recent discussions of literary landscapes are often limited to the social practices of place, I contend that critical excavation opens out the possibilities of accounting for a richer palimpsest of place, constituted by the intersection of various different strata – aesthetic and historical as well as social.

A third advantage to excavation is its association with temporality, whether this be the deep time of geological science which extends beyond a human lived experience of time, or the historical time more often associated with the stratification of human communities and the recovery and interpretation of archaeological finds. It is important to note here that excavation is a necessarily broad term when applied to the writers under discussion, who draw simultaneously on geology and archaeology, and also from the conceptual registers of farming, gardening, burial practices and geomorphology. Each of these repositories of knowledge or experience function according to different timescales and rhythms, which often intersect in the material and textual sites of any given poem. The model of excavation that I develop is an attempt to tease out the complexity of relationship between past and present, and to observe the collision of temporalities present in these various poetics of place.

This critical approach also enables me to combine spatial criticism with literary-history, a balance that I suggest is in need of redress. As an interpretative strategy excavation reveals how poets themselves unearth literary traditions of writing place; Oswald entitles her own rewriting of Homer's *Iliad* in these terms. It also describes my own approach to conducting research for this study. Whether allusion to previous writers is explicit or suggestive in the work of these poets, my own excavatory strategy has required mining the layers of earlier texts for resonances and echoes.<sup>114</sup> By deploying excavation as a critical tool in this way it may appear that I resort to an epistemology that seeks to

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<sup>114</sup> This has included undertaking archival research in the Geoffrey Hill archives at the University of Leeds, and using published versions of other primary source materials, such as Gerard Manley Hopkins' letters and draft versions of Paul Celan's Meridian speech.

uncover what is 'hidden' in text and landscape, and which perhaps naively reaffirms the notion that the 'whole landscape' is indeed 'a manuscript' that 'we' have 'lost the skill to read'. Although I do suggest that recent emphases on reading the socio-spatial within texts has to some degree inhibited our critical ability or at least desire to read for aesthetic resonances, I do not adhere to the notion that there is a point of origin, textual or otherwise, that can be recovered and reconstructed into a singular coherent tradition of writing place.

As Philip Schwyzer points out in his cogent analysis of excavation in Renaissance literature, many of the terms for 'acts of reading and interpretation' use archaeological language. He further suggests that the use of this 'excavatory lexicon' in literary criticism has less to do with any contact between the disciplines of archaeology and literary studies, and is more likely a result of the abundance of archaeological metaphors in the work of thinkers such as Freud, Walter Benjamin and Foucault.<sup>115</sup> The preponderance of spatial theories, over and above methods drawn directly from the discipline of geography that Sheila Hones observes in recent literary criticism bears out this suggestion.<sup>116</sup> Schwyzer points out that whether allied to a model that seeks to unearth what is buried (Freud) or which renounces depth (Foucault) these 'radically different literary-critical methodologies can be perceived by their practitioners as equally "archaeological"'.<sup>117</sup>

While is not my particular intention to draw explicitly on either Freud's or Foucault's model of archaeology – indeed, if Schwyzer is correct, then these metaphors and ways of thinking are necessarily implicit in any critical excavation – my approach is nevertheless more aligned with a 'Foucauldian archaeology [that] never seeks the origin or its absence' as Giorgio Agamben puts it.<sup>118</sup> According to Agamben this model of interpretative archaeology must 'engage anew the sources and traditions' in order to establish *how* the 'archē', the origin or precursor is constituted and read in the context of these traditions.<sup>119</sup> The 'archē' or archaeological find is not a critical 'given' or a 'substance', however, neither is it in the context of landscape writing a textual or historical shard that attests to a contiguous tradition; rather as Agamben

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<sup>115</sup> Philip Schwyzer, *Archaeologies of English Renaissance Literature* (Oxford: University Press, 2007), pp. 6–7.

<sup>116</sup> Hones, p. 1307.

<sup>117</sup> Schwyzer, p. 8.

<sup>118</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Signature of All Things: On Method* (New York: Zone Books, 2009), p. 79.

<sup>119</sup> Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, p. 89.

suggests it is an 'operative force' within a 'field' of historical tensions.<sup>120</sup> In this sense what I attempt to unearth in these poetic landscapes is a less an origin or coherent tradition than a series of interconnected 'currents' – textual, historical, social and natural – in which the poem and its precursors are constituted and become at least partially legible. The suggestiveness of reading, writing, and interpretation as processes of excavation make this particular spatial trope a good foundation for constructing a model that is able to account for these various dimensions of the spaces and places of poetry.

### 3. An Etymology of Excavation

In order to ensure that the framework for this study is both flexible and robust enough to encompass the different excavatory strategies of the writers that I examine, I draw on concepts associated with archaeology and geology alongside a broadly philological approach; the latter seeks to tease out some of the resonances of the term excavation especially in its relation to writing, inscription and the act of making. Interleaving the conceptual register of disciplines concerned with material spaces and places, with one whose object is language and text is also in the spirit of this study with its overarching aim of locating spatial criticism within a literary-historical framework. Although reading and interpretation are metaphorically aligned with archaeological practice, there are also long-standing associations between writing and excavation that a little etymological digging reveals.<sup>121</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives 'excavate' from the Latin 'excavāre', meaning 'to hollow out'.<sup>122</sup> This is not only the act of making something 'hollow by removing the inside' but also means to excavate something into another 'form' through the process of hollowing. Excavation thus implies creative making as well as demolition or unearthing; the removal of earth out of (ex-) the ground produces a material and symbolic space – a cave or *cavus*.<sup>123</sup> The production of space entailed in excavation is as much an aesthetic act of inscription as it is a hollowing out of physical terrain.

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<sup>120</sup> Agamben, *The Signature of All Things*, p. 110.

<sup>121</sup> See Schwyzer, p. 6, for a brief discussion of the association between reading, interpretation, and archaeology.

<sup>122</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. 'excavate'.

<sup>123</sup> The cave is of course an archetypal space in Western literature and culture from Homer, Plato and Dante, to Mallarmé, Heidegger, Bachelard and Derrida.

This dual effect of hollowing out and formation is also found in the Old English verb *grave* or *graef* which despite its different philological roots, also means to ‘dig, form by digging, to dig out, or excavate’.<sup>124</sup> Claudia Brodsky Lacour observes that by the thirteenth century the meaning of ‘grave’ had expanded to include ‘the notion of excavation both as historical uncovering and aesthetic formation, the partial removal of matter signified by ‘carve’ and ‘engrave’.<sup>125</sup> Again the potential to make or form something through digging is implied here, and is more clearly demonstrated in the additional definitions of ‘grave’ as ‘to form by carving’ or ‘to engrave an inscription, figures, upon a surface’.<sup>126</sup> The shift between unearthing and inscription displaces the potential abstraction of a void, indeterminate in shape and volume, onto a permanent form, for to ‘grave’ becomes ‘to impress deeply’ or ‘to fix indelibly’.<sup>127</sup> As Brodsky Lacour suggests, the removal of matter from one place to another and the subsequent opening in the ground (*the* grave) is the prerequisite for another kind of displacement, the body that takes ‘the place of the earth it displaces’. Thus ‘the artificial production of space as meaningful form’ and the ‘placement of a body’ converge in the obsolete but nevertheless suggestive term ‘grave’ – to bury, and to engrave.<sup>128</sup> Literary excavation is both a hollowing out and an act of engraving, a process through which a space or surface is formed and inscribed with meaning, the dead are emplaced and displaced, and something is uncovered or laid bare. Poet-excavators therefore inhabit all of these meanings as they write places into existence, unearth the dead, ventriloquize the past, hollow out and reproduce landscapes and literary traditions.

Aside from my etymological definition of excavation outlined above, literary studies has already begun to plumb the depths of the ‘archaeological imagination’.<sup>129</sup> Scholars like Michael Shanks, and Ian Hodder,

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<sup>124</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. ‘grave’. Both ‘excavate’ and ‘grave’ were in use in this manner during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

<sup>125</sup> Claudia Brodsky Lacour, *In the Place of Language: Literature and the Architecture of the Referent* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), p. 136.

<sup>126</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. ‘grave’.

<sup>127</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. ‘grave’.

<sup>128</sup> Brodsky Lacour, p. 36.

<sup>129</sup> There have been several recent publications on the subject in Renaissance, Victorian and Modernist literature and a number of trans-historical studies, all of which suggest a renewed scholarly interest in the dynamic between excavation and literature. For period specific studies see: Schwyzer; Virginia Zimmerman, *Excavating Victorians* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009); Sasha Colby, *Stratified Modernism: The Poetics of Excavation from Gautier to Olson* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009). For more general trans-historical approaches see Jennifer Wallace, *Digging the Dirt: The Archaeological Imagination* (London: Duckworth, 2004); John Hines, *Voices in the Past: English Literature and Archaeology* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2004); Karin



working in the discipline of archaeology, have provided the foundation for subsequent discussions of the 'archaeological imagination' in other areas of the humanities such as literary studies.<sup>130</sup> Such an 'imagination' Shanks suggests, exceeds the discipline of archaeology itself, and 'is rooted in a sensibility, a pervasive set of attitudes towards traces and remains, towards memory, time and temporality, the fabric of history'.<sup>131</sup>

Transposed to a literary context, the term is often used as a catchall to describe the use of archaeological, geological and other excavatory tropes in literary texts; indeed Heaney's use of farming and gardening (plough, spade) metaphors for writing are often referred to in this way. As Karin Sanders remarks, the conjunction of archaeology and 'imagination' offers both the writer and the critic the 'freedom to 'abstract' from material realities'. Nevertheless, while it is an 'elastic term' open to various definitions there are a recognisable set of principles that characterise the archaeological imaginary in literary criticism.<sup>132</sup> As with concepts borrowed from other spatial disciplines, any account of excavation in literary texts struggles with the abstraction or simplification that takes place when principles from one field, archaeology, are transferred to another, literary studies. It is to ameliorate this problem that I began with an account of excavation situated in the object of literary enquiry – language and etymology. The only way to negotiate this difficulty is to acknowledge the metaphoricity and linguistic resonances of excavation while simultaneously challenging the reduction and reification of archaeological paradigms in literary scholarship. This is precisely what my reading of these poets attempts to effect. Throughout the subsequent chapters, I argue that their work transforms and revises the conventional excavatory principles that I outline here: 1) the relationship between past and present; 2) the recovery and

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Sanders, *Bodies in the Bog and the Archaeological Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). There has also been some useful work on Heaney and on Hill's *Mercian Hymns*, although there has been little if anything on other contemporary poets in respect of excavatory poetics. See Christine Finn, *Past Poetic: Archaeology in the Poetry of W.B. Yeats and Seamus Heaney* (London: Duckworth, 2004); McHale; John Kerrigan, 'Earth Writing: Seamus Heaney and Ciaran Carson', *Essays in Criticism*, 48.2 (1998), 144–168; C. D. Blanton, 'Nominal Devolutions: Poetic Substance and the Critique of Political Economy', *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 13.1 (2000), 129–151; Robert Macfarlane, 'Gravity and Grace in Geoffrey Hill', *Essays in Criticism*, 58.3 (2008), 237–256.

<sup>130</sup> See Ian Hodder, *Interpreting Archaeology: Finding Meaning in the Past* (London: Routledge, 1995). Michael Shanks has published widely on the subject of the 'archaeological imagination' and 'sensibility' but for an up-to-date account see his, *The Archaeological Imagination* (Walnut Creek, Left Coast Press, 2012).

<sup>131</sup> Shanks, *The Archaeological Imagination*, p. 25.

<sup>132</sup> Sanders, p. 14.

interpretation of finds; 3) the processes of unearthing; 4) the exhumation of the dead. Inevitably there is a degree of overlap between these principles; there is also a cross-over in the ways that Hill, Carson, Monk and Oswald transform these concepts in their work. Therefore, while I demonstrate some of these conventions in Seamus Heaney's discursive and poetic practice in the following section, I do not at this stage align these principles or their revision with the other poets in this study. Instead, the chapter outlines that conclude the introduction summarise the ways in which these poets engage to different extents with each of the four principles set out below.

#### **4. Four Principles of Excavation**

The first principle of excavatory poetics hinges on a retrieval of the past from the perspective of the present, and a corollary representation of depth as spatialised-time. Virginia Zimmerman notes that the archaeological imaginary is necessarily founded on a relationship between space and time that is expressed through the excavator's assertion of some kind of 'authority over the past'. Such mastery is necessary to overcome the uneasy disjunction between past and present that is inscribed in the discontinuous layers of the dig. Zimmerman finds this anxiety over time is most acute not in archaeology but in its antecedent discipline, geology, which sought to define and surmount the gap between 'an individual life and the immensity of time' found in the rock strata.<sup>133</sup> Tracing this relationship between past and present in archaeology is the objective of stratigraphic analysis, a method adopted from geology which investigates finds according to their chronological deposition in layers or strata. In terms of the archaeological imaginary, this temporal relationship is often expressed as a spatial one; as Sanders puts it, the 'relationship between depth (past) and surface (present)'.<sup>134</sup> The problem with Sanders' abridged version of geological or archaeological method here is that it irons out the complexity of stratigraphic relationships, which do not necessarily conform to such a chronological ordering. Stratigraphy is in theoretical terms bound by the law of superposition, formulated in the seventeenth century by Nicolaus Steno who established that sedimentary rocks were formed in horizontal strata arranged in

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<sup>133</sup> Zimmerman, p. 4.

<sup>134</sup> Sanders, p. 14.

a temporal sequence, with the oldest layer on the bottom.<sup>135</sup> In practice, however, the stratigraphy of many sites violates the principle of superposition, as natural or man-made disturbances of the sedimentary layers alters the chronological order. The equation of depth with past time and surface with present time thus transforms what is a potentially unstable and disjunctive paradigm into a metaphor for temporal, spatial and cultural continuity.

Sanders finds the depth-as-past/surface-as-present model useful in her discussions of cultural responses to bog bodies, even though she argues that such an easy equation is disrupted by the emergence of these preserved bodies in the historical record. She suggests that ‘bogs’ provide a unique terrain in which the ‘regular historical and chronological layer-upon-layer-ness of time’ is disturbed. Bogs thus have the capacity to ‘subvert the proper archaeological “order of things”’ and ‘disrupt the logic of “normal” historical processes’.<sup>136</sup> However, while the preserved and entire state of bog bodies almost certainly disrupts expected temporal processes of decay, and the interpretive act of reconstructing the fragment or shard, it is questionable whether these artefacts challenge the ‘proper archaeological “order of things”’, as this order has never been understood in the discipline of archaeology at least, as so strictly chronological.<sup>137</sup> In the archaeological imaginary, however, the contiguities between different spaces, times, and histories enabled by the depth/surface model continue to resonate in contemporary poetry and criticism. For despite Sanders’ claim it is arguably the reductive metaphor of depth-as-past/surface-as-present that Heaney relies on in his correlation between the sacrificial histories of P. V. Glob’s bog people and the violent political context of Northern Ireland. If Sanders is right that bog bodies *should* ‘destabilize our sense of natural and historical order’ and even of ‘national space’, they have arguably been deployed to the reverse effect in Heaney’s mythifying poetic.

According to Sasha Colby this concern with time and disjunction shifted from the geological to the archaeological imagination in the nineteenth century when it became a site for conflicting responses to modernity and history. For the modernist inheritors of these discourses, archaeology imagined a ‘science of the future’ enmeshed in the ‘evolutionary ideology of human progress’ and a

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<sup>135</sup> Edward C. Harris, *Principles of Archaeological Stratigraphy* (London: Academic Press, 1989), pp. 30–1.

<sup>136</sup> Sanders, p. 10.

<sup>137</sup> See Michael Shanks, Jeffrey T. Schnapp, and Matthew Tiews, ‘Archaeology, Modernism, Modernity’, *Modernism/Modernity*, 11.1 (2004), 1–16 (p. 10).

search for 'origins' through 'establishing concrete, material bonds with the distant past'.<sup>138</sup> The search for and interpretation of origins, whether expressed as the 'primary' rock in geology, or the buried shard in archaeology, is a second important principle of literary excavation that has persisted into contemporary poetics particularly in the work of Heaney. The search for the *archē* is tied to the relationship between past and present, as it assures a 'revelation of the self to the self' and the 'restoration of the culture to itself'.<sup>139</sup> Thus, as McHale suggests, Heaney's 'analogy' between Iron Age ritual murder and the Troubles is both 'an expression of the poet's power [...] to forge correspondences' and a claim for the continuity of 'mythic or archetypal patterns in contemporary events (on the Freudian model)'.<sup>140</sup> For Heaney these correspondences and continuities are immanent not only in 'archaeological finds' but also in poems that achieve the status of the 'buried shard' with all the 'aura,' 'authenticity' and sense of cultural 'continuity' that this implies. He purposefully mixes metaphors here, to associate archaeological processes with a more productive rooted idea of landscape, so poetry becomes 'a dig, a dig that ends up bearing plants'.<sup>141</sup> The problem with interpreting the shard or fragment as a point of origin in which the present and future is rooted is that it invites us to reconstruct a past in its totality, and on that past build a present that is similarly complete, no longer open to question or undecidability.

While the status of material finds and their interpretation remains contested, the processes of digging or unearthing generally receive less attention in discussions of the archaeological imaginary. Nevertheless, 'process' is an increasingly significant area of investigation in the discipline of archaeology, where 'post-processual' theory has become more concerned with ascribing meaning to the processes of excavation, than the artefacts themselves. Jennifer Wallace suggests that if 'excavation' in post-processual terms is understood as 'a creative act involving artistic decisions of style and technique, then the process of digging and the archaeological site itself can be

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<sup>138</sup> Colby, p. 6. The search for origins is also evident in geological discourses of the eighteenth century, which sought to explain the age of the earth through the correct classification of 'primary' or 'primeval' rock. Igneous rock such as granite was mistakenly thought to be the oldest rock until James Hutton overturned these ideas. See Noah Heringman, *Romantic Rocks, Aesthetic Geology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), pp. 110–117.

<sup>139</sup> Heaney, 'Feeling into Words', in *Preoccupations: Selected Prose, 1968–1978* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), pp. 41–60 (p. 41).

<sup>140</sup> McHale, p. 248.

<sup>141</sup> Heaney, 'Feeling into Words', p. 41.

interpreted as well as the objects uncovered there.’<sup>142</sup> Ironically, the metaphorical tools of archaeological poetics are often traditional agricultural implements – shovel, spade, plough – not strictly archaeological tools at all. Even the shovel is a limited tool for real fieldwork. The archaeologist employs a variety of survey methods before s/he even begins to dig: reconnaissance walks over wide areas, surface artefact collecting, random sampling, remote sensing, and a range of geophysical and geochemical techniques. All of these processes presuppose the human penetration of the earth’s surface either by physical or visual methods. Yet as the alteration of stratigraphic relationships through natural disturbances of soil, rock and other geomorphological processes demonstrate, the landscape does not require human intervention in order to continually unearth itself. Indeed, the shaping of the earth’s surface and its depths takes place largely outside of the limited temporality of human experience, across the vast and deep stretches of geological time.

Anxieties about the disjunction between the time of an individual life, historical time and the immensity of geological time converge in the final characteristic of literary excavation, a concern with past life, or the ‘traces of the dead’.<sup>143</sup> The writers that I examine in this study are less concerned to bury or ‘grave’ the dead than to exhume them, as they attempt to uncover or negotiate the circumstances surrounding the deaths of named and unknown individuals, the larger horrors of genocide, or their debt to literary precursors. Schwyzer suggests that literary exhumation is a kind of ‘necromancy’, a desire to speak with and resurrect the dead. The danger of speaking with the dead is that we are of course speaking for them; in this sense they are no more than ‘mental constructs of the living’.<sup>144</sup> Shanks describes archaeological practice in similar terms. ‘Archaeology excavates a hollow’ and leaves ‘emptiness’ in its place: ‘The raw existence of the past is not enough, insufficient in itself. What is needed is our desire to fill the hollow, raise the dead. This is archaeology’s necromancy.’<sup>145</sup> In the act of producing space, poetic excavation accordingly re-inscribes and re-inters these bodies in the landscapes of the poem, and the ethics of remembering or speaking with the dead becomes embroiled in aesthetics. Yet this process of *engraving* is never fully able to fix or embed

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<sup>142</sup> Wallace, *Digging the Dirt*, p. 14.

<sup>143</sup> Schwyzer, p. 19.

<sup>144</sup> Schwyzer, p. 23.

<sup>145</sup> Shanks, *Experiencing the Past: On the Character of Archaeology* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 91.

these figures. These landscapes contain the dead, and give them up to the poet, but as Angela Leighton has suggested: ‘The question of where the dead are – in the mind, in the past, in the landscape or the grave – leaves them rattling around in the poem’s pod, never quite “subdued”’.<sup>146</sup>

## 5. Site Plan: Chapter Outlines

The principles of excavation outlined above which find their expression in the buried shard or primary rock, the chronology of past and present, exhumation of the dead, and the processes of unearthing are put into question by Hill’s sedimentary poetics, Carson’s parodic and reverse stratigraphy, Monk’s collaborations with the dead, and Oswald’s geomorphology of a self-excavating earth. Two of the chapters focus on geological models (Hill and Oswald), while the other two deal with archaeological modes (Carson and Monk). This divergence allows the discussion to cover a broad range of excavatory approaches, and enables the exploration of different rhythms, experiences and forms of time.

In Chapter One, I examine the extent to which Hill appropriates Paul Celan’s ‘science of sediment’ in order to negotiate a concern with aesthetics and ethics.<sup>147</sup> My critical intervention here is twofold in that I move beyond current readings of Hill’s dialogue with Celan in *Tenebrae* (1978) and *Orchards of Syon* (2002) to argue that a specifically geopoetic engagement with the Romanian-born poet is refracted more extensively in Hill’s work. A corollary to this is my assertion that Hill’s excavatory model can no longer be simply read via *Mercian Hymns* as conventionally archaeological or even geological; rather his excavations are complicated by ideas of erosion, deposition, and the composite substance of sedimentary rock. The chapter focuses on *Triumph of Love* (1999) and *Orchards of Syon*, and the landscapes of the Midlands and Hodder Valley that they invoke. It suggests that Hill transposes Celan’s geopoetics to his own landscapes of home, but that in excavating this familiar terrain he finds neither geological permanence, nor any consolation in the historical strata. Instead the shifting nature of Celan’s sedimentary poetics undermines the supposed certainties of home. The heart of my argument is that

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<sup>146</sup> Angela Leighton, *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of a Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 227.

<sup>147</sup> Tobias, p. 15.

Celan's 'science of sediment' provides Hill with an ethical solution to his problem of poetic vision; how to account for historical events that impinge upon, but are not within his own experience. Nevertheless as I argue, Hill's excavations must acknowledge the limits of borrowing this sedimentary lexicon, and also the limits of language itself, and the attendant difficulties of domesticating either Celan's neologisms or his abstractions of landscape. Having established an alternative model for reading Hill's excavations, I go on to consider the work of Carson, a poet who poses a more explicit challenge to archaeological poetics, although this is usually attributed to his mobile street-level poetics rather than excavatory practice.

Chapter Two is primarily concerned with two works by Carson, his translation of *The Inferno* (2002), and his more recent collection, *On The Night Watch*. Unlike Hill, whose excavatory impulses are well documented albeit in terms of conventional models, Carson is rarely considered in terms of archaeological poetics.<sup>148</sup> The argument in this chapter provides a supplement to existing accounts that characterise Carson as a 'Belfast poet' and focus on his mobile street-level poetic practice, by establishing a framework for reading his frequent use of excavatory tropes and subterranean perspectives. While Carson's excavations also tend to be mobile, radiating outward from his home city, to urban edge-lands and global contexts, I tease out a hitherto unrecognised aspect of poetic-archaeology, which I argue is significant to his engagement with place – parodic stratigraphy. Parody always requires altering some aspect of the target text for comedic or critical effect, and Carson's parodic gesture is to renovate the principles of poetic excavation found in the work of literary precursors and their landscapes, from Dante's infernal cartographies, to Edward Thomas' England, and Heaney's rural North. Like Hill does with Celan, Carson relocates the landscapes of medieval Florence, Hell, and early twentieth-century rural England onto his already palimpsestic native Belfast. As the chapter demonstrates, however, these domesticating strategies are always confounded by the poet's deliberate mismapping of one place onto another. Carson returns to the sites once excavated by his literary precursors to find them littered not with shards of the remote past, but with relics of the contemporary world. What emerges in Carson's 'world turned upside down' is

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<sup>148</sup> Kerrigan touches on excavation and Falci also notes the stratiographical texture of Carson's work.

an archaeological poetics that undermines the fixity of the past through subjecting it to both the vicissitudes of the present and the radical openness of the future.

Unlike Hill and Carson who layer literary landscapes from elsewhere onto their respective sites of home, Monk excavates the literary-historical repository of her native Lancashire. Chapter Three examines Monk's multiple exhumations of the dead in the long poem sequence *Interregnum* (1994), arguing that her deep dialogue with the landscapes of Northern England must be read through her renewal of the literary and historical sources and traditions that are entwined with these places. The chapter augments recent criticism that has overwhelmingly positioned *Interregnum* and other of Monk's work within debates about environment and identity.<sup>149</sup> It argues that these discussions produce overly-generalised accounts of the particular landscape of *Interregnum*, neglecting the ways in which the poet's response to place is deeply embroiled in political history and literary tradition. The central historical event of *Interregnum* is the well-known fate of the Pendle witches. In critical accounts of the poem, the figure of the witch tends to eclipse the presence of other exhumed voices, such as the Quaker, George Fox, or Gerard Manley Hopkins. Nevertheless Monk reworks Hopkins' poetry as a source for the voices of the witches, referring to this citational method as 'collaboration' with the dead.<sup>150</sup> Monk's so-called 'collaboration' with Hopkins has been largely overlooked, and even discussions of the alleged witches tend to gloss over the political, religious and socio-economic contexts of the early-modern period in which much of the sequence is situated. This chapter contends that while Monk may seek to embed her contemporary concerns with gender, voice and history in the Lancashire landscape she is unable to do so without engaging existing sources and traditions, in particular Hopkins' sacramental poetics of place.

The various unearthings of sediment, contemporary ruins, and bodies in previous chapters work on the assumption that excavation is a process that requires human hands, vision and a set of tools with which to hollow out and

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<sup>149</sup> See Harriet Tarlo, 'Home-Hills: Place, Nature and Landscape in the Poetry of Geraldine Monk', in *The Salt Companion to Geraldine Monk*, ed. by Scott Thurston (Cambridge: Salt, 2007), pp. 28–61; also Tarlo, 'Radical Landscapes: Contemporary Poetry in the Bunting Tradition', in *The Star You Steer By: Basil Bunting and British Modernism*, ed. by James McGonigal and Richard Price (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), pp. 149–180.

<sup>150</sup> Geraldine Monk, 'Collaborations with the Dead', in *The Salt Companion*, ed. by Thurston, pp. 178–187. Hereafter cited parenthetically as 'Collaborations' followed by page number in arabic numerals.



reshape the landscape. In the final chapter, I overturn the idea that human intervention is a necessary aspect of producing place by showing that in Alice Oswald's poetic excavations at least, the earth unearths itself. Like Carson, Oswald is more readily understood as operating at the surface of landscape rather than plumbing its depths. Indeed during a recent reading of *Memorial: An Excavation of the Iliad* at the Bath Literary Festival, the poet herself suggested that the idea of excavation was something new and specifically textual in her poetic output. She remarked that she had always been somewhat suspicious of deep historical engagements with place, and that the presence of the past in her earlier collections is always conditioned by the need for the remnants of history to be extant and visible in the present landscape.<sup>151</sup> Nevertheless by reading Oswald's work through the lens of geomorphology, specifically fluvial and igneous processes, I suggest she does renovate poetic concerns with the past and with depth. Her textual excavations of Homer in *Memorial* can therefore be seen as an extension of the morphological work of natural forces that expose and shape the surfaces and depths of landscape in *Dart* (2003) or *Sleepwalk on the Severn* (2009). Moreover human tools of excavation do appear as metaphors for writing in her work, more often than not in the guise of familiar gardening implements. While Oswald seems to echo the conventional archaeological poetics of Heaney and perhaps Hill in this respect, her idea of digging is in fact quite different. Despite making an analogy between writing poetry and digging, Oswald is suspicious of accounts of place that accede too much to metaphor and that place emphasis on lyric intervention in landscape. Thus rather than wielding the spade, Oswald suggests that the poet must 'move alongside' it, learning to sense that which the spade unearths on its own terms.<sup>152</sup> Oswald is not so much excavating the ground herself, she would have us think, as attuning her senses and her labour to the slow 'pace' of change within the earth itself. These 'deep slow' changes are also suggestive of the geomorphological processes that have over millions of years shaped the landscapes of Oswald's poetry – Dartmoor, the Severn Valley and the Troad region. Unlike the archaeological trajectories of other poets covered in this

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<sup>151</sup> Alice Oswald, 'Reading of Memorial', poetry reading delivered at Bath Literary Festival, Bath, 10 March 2012.

<sup>152</sup> Oswald, 'The Universe in Time of Rain Makes the World Alive with Noise', in *A Green Thought in a Green Shade: Poetry in the Garden*, ed. by Sarah Maguire (London: The Poetry Society, 2000), pp. 35–48 (p. 40).

thesis then, Oswald's work emphasises the excavatory work of nature itself, whether these are geological processes originating deep inside the earth, rivers and oceans that are visible at the surface, or extraterrestrial forces such as the effect of the moon on the tidal patterns.

Whether negotiating ethical or ecological concerns, or raising questions about literary descent and the efficacy of lyric voice, these poets all use excavation as a model for their deep dialogues with particular places and the social, historical and textual strata that constitute them. In doing so they are exemplary of an archaeological impulse in post-war poetry that is currently overwhelmingly associated with Heaney. This thesis provides the first full-length study of the archaeological imagination in contemporary British and Irish poetry that attempts to go beyond the constraints of a Heaneyesque model. It provides an original contribution to an emerging field of literary geography by combining spatial frameworks with a literary-historical approach that both widens the debate concerning the efficacy of archaeological tropes in contemporary poetry and criticism, and that offers new insights into the work of Hill, Carson, Monk and Oswald.

# I. 'No one conjures our dust': Geoffrey Hill's Science of Sediment

IN THE AIR, there your root remains, there,  
in the air.

Where what's earthly clusters, earthy,  
breath-and-clay.

—Paul Celan, *Die Niemandsrose*<sup>1</sup>

Let me be, says the dying man, let me fall  
upwards toward my roots.

—Geoffrey Hill, *Without Title*<sup>2</sup>

## 1. Introduction

For Sheridan Burnside the potential for 'intersubjective ethical relationships' in the work of Geoffrey Hill hinges on the possibility that 'acts of poetic saying' might stand in for the failure of divine intercession in the atrocities of the twentieth century – the Holocaust and other genocides.<sup>3</sup> Burnside suggests that Hill's 'literary response to the duty of remembering the dead' is predicated in part on an engagement with Paul Celan; however, for Hill as for Celan, poetic address is always fraught by the insufficiency of 'linguistic resources' in the 'fulfilment of that duty'.<sup>4</sup> The failure of poetic or theological address to offer absolution for the suffering of others that Burnside identifies, seems partially located in a tension between the aesthetic and the ethical uses of language as a means of witness, confession and remembrance. This chapter explores the way in which Hill plies between an aesthetics and an 'ethics of pity' through recourse to the work of Celan, but where Burnside connects the two

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Celan, 'In the Air' ('In der Luft'), in *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, trans. by John Felstiner (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), p. 395/GW 1:290. First published in *Die Niemandsrose* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1963). Hereafter Felstiner's translation is cited parenthetically as *SPP* followed by page number. Standard references to Celan's work in the original German are from his *Gesammelte Werke* in 7 volumes. All citations from English translations are hereafter appended with a reference to Celan, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. by Beda Allemann, Stefan Reichert, Rolf Bücher, 7 vols (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1975–), abbreviated as *GW* followed by volume and page number in arabic numerals.

<sup>2</sup> Hill, 'Insert Here', *Without Title* (London: Penguin, 2006), p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Sheridan Burnside, 'The "Tenebrae" Poems of Paul Celan and Geoffrey Hill', in *Geoffrey Hill and His Contexts*, ed. by Piers Pennington and Matthew Sperling (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011), pp. 151–170 (p. 167).

<sup>4</sup> Burnside, p. 162.

poets through their use of Christian liturgy, I unearth commonalities in their excavation of the linguistic resources of landscape – the language of rock and stone.<sup>5</sup> My particular contention here is that Hill's poetic response to the suffering of the other operates via the adoption of a sedimentary lexicon drawn from Celan. This chapter thereby intervenes in existing debates concerning Hill's work in two ways. First it extends recent critical accounts that deal with Hill's explicit engagement with Celan in *Tenebrae* and *Orchards of Syon*, by suggesting that a vein of geopoetic dialogue with Celan adumbrates Hill's remembrance of the atrocities of war and the Holocaust in *The Triumph of Love*.<sup>6</sup> It also reassesses the assertions of early Hill criticism, which tend (positively or negatively) to identify the poet's mode of excavation with the archaeological poetics of *Mercian Hymns*. In doing so it demonstrates that Hill renovates his own excavatory strategies and thus his unearthing of particular sites can no longer be simply understood as conventionally archaeological and subsequently indicative of a trenchant chthonic nationalism. Instead this chapter argues that the poet's renewed model of excavation, emerging as it does from concepts of erosion, deposition, and sedimentation, forges new possibilities for ethical dialogue between self and other through the mediating frames of both intimate and unknowable landscapes.

My contention is that as Hill transposes Celan's abstract topography to that familiar 'body of England', he exposes the ostensible certainties of home and the self to the vicissitudes of sedimentary processes. Looking into these landscapes, home and abroad, Hill finds neither permanence written into the geological record, nor consolatory shards of history, but merely particles of ash, sediment and sand that attest to nothing but absences. Rather than ventriloquizing either his own landscape of home, or European sites of trauma in a consolatory act of atonement for the dead, the arguments that I make

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<sup>5</sup> I borrow the term 'ethics of pity' from A. T. Nuyen, 'Lévinas and the Ethics of Pity', *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 40.4 (2000), 411–421. Nuyen argues that 'pity' offers a phenomenological approach to morally grounding Levinasian ethics. Despite its association with derision or contempt, 'pity' he suggests is in fact closer to 'piety' (Latin *pietas*) meaning 'dutifulness', which implies feeling of responsibility and desire to 'substitute oneself' for an other who is suffering. More significantly, in respect of Hill's poetry, 'pity' is a concern of ethics when: 'The pitier realizes that the responsibility to stop the suffering cannot be discharged, that the desire to do so cannot be satisfied, that all that can be done is to suffer the suffering of the pitied' (p. 418).

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of Hill's 'Two Chorale-Preludes' in *Tenebrae* (1978) see E. M. Knottenbelt, *Passionate Intelligence: The Poetry of Geoffrey Hill* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990). Jeffrey Wainwright provides a brief discussion of Hill's reference to Celan's *atemwende* ('breathturn') in *Orchards of Syon*. See Wainwright, *Acceptable Words: Essays on the Poetry of Geoffrey Hill* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).

suggest that Hill's appropriation of Celan's 'science of sediment' is always caught between the necessity of voicing responsibility and the impossibility of ever speaking with or on behalf of the dead who remain unlocatable. The first section evaluates the critical debates surrounding Hill's archaeological poetics and the associated charges of recalcitrant nationalism and reactionary nostalgia that accrue to his work.

## 2. Critical Contexts: Local Roots and Deep Strata

In a letter to author Geoffrey Trease dated 30<sup>th</sup> September 1993, Hill recalls the strong impression made on the 'Worcestershire bobby's son of eleven' by the 'powerful evocation of the body of England' in the children's adventure story *Missing from Home* (1937).<sup>7</sup> The 'body of England' which captured Hill's childhood imagination has continued to provide a particular geography and a rich 'strata of language' to which his poetry continually returns and 'burrows deeply'.<sup>8</sup> Hill was born in 1932, a few years before the onset of World War Two, in Bromsgrove, Worcestershire, where he lived until his family moved to the nearby village of Fairfield in 1936. He was educated at the village school, and then the County High School in Bromsgrove where he regularly published poems in the school magazine which show an early interest in the landscape of the West Midlands, and a political sensibility connected to the rural; as the poet remarks of his eleven year old self, he was 'by instinct [...] an old-fashioned agrarian Tory Radical'.<sup>9</sup> The loss of such rural landscapes and cultural traditions to which Hill's work ostensibly attests has often led to charges of chthonic nationalism, an imagination that is 'essentially Blut-und-Boden'.<sup>10</sup> Since Tom Paulin's inimical attack in the *London Review of Books*, and the ensuing exchange of letters between Hill's defenders and detractors in 1985–6, critics have spent much time debating the politics of his poetry. The evidence for Hill's chthonic nationalism is seen to reside in his use of elegiac pastoral modes, and his emphasis on the significance of local roots and the deep strata of self, language and landscape.

<sup>7</sup> University of Leeds, Brotherton Collection, MS 20c Hill/6/TRE, letter from Hill to Trease, 30 September 1993.

<sup>8</sup> Hill, 'Thus My Noblest Capacity'.

<sup>9</sup> MS 20c Hill/6/TRE, letter from Hill to Trease, 30 September 1993.

<sup>10</sup> Tom Paulin, *Minotaur: Poetry and the Nation State* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 279; See also Adam Kirsch, 'A Stick to Beat the Century With: Review of the *Triumph of Love*', *Times Literary Supplement*, 29 January 1999, pp. 7–8.

Hill's claim in his 1983 sermon at Great St Mary's, that 'ploughing down into one's own selfhood and into the deep strata of language at one and the same time' is a necessary vocation of the writer, is frequently cited as exemplary of his poetics of depth.<sup>11</sup> By figuring linguistic resources and the self as a rural site awaiting the unearthing of the plough, Hill gestures to the importance of situating his poetry in local roots and an ancestral landscape, much as he had already done in *Mercian Hymns*. A considerable amount of attention has been paid to Hill's excavations of the English language and the Midlands landscape in *Mercian Hymns*.<sup>12</sup> These perspectives on Hill's archaeological poetics offer a useful point of departure from which to understand the importance of landscape, history and memory in his work, but I will argue that this model is in need of further elaboration if it is to shed light on the poet's subsequent geological strategies.<sup>13</sup>

Andrew Michael Roberts suggests that like Heaney, Hill imagines the 'past in chthonic or archaeological terms', drawing on imagery of the earth and its 'remains' alongside the notion of 'language' as a 'repository' of both public and private memory. For Roberts language is understood as a process of unearthing in *Mercian Hymns*, which echoes Wordsworth's *Prelude* in its recollection of the 'intimate relationship between the child's growing sensibility and the landscape'. This recalling of a childhood experience 'is pervaded by images' that 'work reflexively as metaphors for the processes' on which the act of 'writing' relies: 'memory, research, discovering and uncovering, observation and recording.'<sup>14</sup> The poet's vocation to observe, uncover, record and inscribe

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<sup>11</sup> Hill, 'Thus My Noblest Capacity'. For references to the sermon see Roberts, *Geoffrey Hill*; Matthew Sperling, 'Hill and Nineteenth-Century Linguistic Thought,' in *Geoffrey Hill and His Contexts* ed. by Pennington and Sperling, pp. 107–131. As Sperling's analysis demonstrates this sermon is as geologically inflected as it is archaeological in its tone.

<sup>12</sup> See David Annwn, *Inhabited Voices: Myth and History in the Poetry of Geoffrey Hill, Seamus Heaney and George Mackay Brown* (Frome: Bran's Head, 1984); Henry Hart, *The Poetry of Geoffrey Hill* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1986); Heaney, 'An English Mason,' in *Geoffrey Hill*, ed. by Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1986), pp. 49–53; Vincent B. Sherry, *The Uncommon Tongue: The Poetry and Criticism of Geoffrey Hill* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1987); Knottenbelt, *Passionate Intelligence*; McHale; Blanton.

<sup>13</sup> It is important to note that ideas drawn from the registers of geology, archaeology and farming all subsist in Hill's poetics of depth and are broadly categorised by critics as 'archaeological poetics'. It is my intention to tease out the differences between the archaeological and the geological in this chapter.

<sup>14</sup> Roberts, *Geoffrey Hill*, pp. 21–2. For Hill's own remarks on the importance of his childhood landscape see Hill, interviewed by John Haffenden, 'Geoffrey Hill', in *Viewpoints: Poets in Conversation with John Haffenden* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), pp. 76–99; Hill, 'A Poet's Vision of His Local Roots', talk delivered at Bromsgrove, 13 February 2004; Hill, interviewed by

the landscape as text further depends on another aspect of language – the ability to hear the authentic speech of childhood or ancestral voices. As David Annwn remarks, along with Offa the ‘land’ is ‘the most important single force’ in *Mercian Hymns*. Through the interjection of Offa Hill ventriloquises the land’s history, artefacts and remains in order to attain ‘that which he admires in George Eliot, “the speech of the landscape”’.<sup>15</sup> What matters here is that the landscape might speak for itself, voicing an authenticity that is only available to the poet through the exhumation of interred remains, the fragments of a buried childhood self, or of some historical precursor.

Here Hill’s poetics come close to Heaney’s claim for ‘poetry as revelation of the self to the self’ or as a ‘restoration of the culture to itself’. Emerging from the strata of language and the self the poem performs its work of cultural ‘continuity’ carrying the ‘aura and authenticity’ of the past across the divide of history and into the present. In this sense a poem for Heaney is more akin to a ‘buried shard’ than a ‘buried city’; it is not fixed in any particular location as a large excavation of a lost city might be, rather its value as *archē* relies on the fact that the poem can be grounded in any terrain that the poet chooses, in the self, in language, and in rural landscapes rather than sites of earlier urban civilisations. As *archē* the poem then becomes an assurance both of the poet’s mastery in mining the resources of language, and of his/her ability to establish a continuous tradition, or correspondences between practices and events that unfold in particular places and landscapes across time.

Thus, in addition to closing off the past, present and future to alternative interpretations, the archaeological poetics espoused by Heaney, and to some extent practised by Hill, make as McHale suggests, an ‘implicit’ but discomfiting ‘statement about the persistence of ‘deep’ perhaps mythic or archetypal, patterns in contemporary events’.<sup>16</sup> The forging of such connections suggests an inevitability to historical events which are merely repeating the mythic cycle of the past.

If this has been a problem in the context of Heaney’s attempts to poetically chart the turbulence of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, the difficulty for Hill in his struggle to articulate the atrocities of the Holocaust and other

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Damian Walford Davies and Richard Marggraf Turley, ‘Cambrian Readjustments’, *Poetry Wales*, 46.1 (2010), 10–13.

<sup>15</sup> Annwn, pp. 53–4.

<sup>16</sup> McHale, p. 248.

twentieth-century injustices is even more pressing. The danger is that in aligning the ancestral past of a Midlands landscape with the sites of twentieth-century conflict, those recent events are legible only as myth. And yet the poet is necessarily thrown back onto his own cultural resources and experience as a point from which to formulate an ethical responsibility towards those who have suffered these events. Hill is thus convinced of the need to begin with the intimate pastoral landscape of home, and therefore of the requirement to invest this site with an ethical and moral force that would allow him to discharge this poetic duty to the dead.

Yet as Roberts notes, it is this 'moral significance' of a 'relationship with the land' that has met with critical remonstrance as it is seen to educe a 'strand of organic, romantic conservatism' that is seemingly at odds with the poet's espousal of an ethical poetics.<sup>17</sup> Hill has defended this accusation of nostalgia on a number of occasions, including an interview with John Haffenden, where he states:

[T]here's been an elegiac tinge to the air of this country ever since the end of the Great War. To be accused of exhibiting a symptom when, to the best of my ability, I'm offering a diagnosis appears to be one of the numerous injustices which one must suffer with as much equanimity as possible.<sup>18</sup>

Whether Hill's work reinforces or confounds such an 'elegiac tinge', his frequent return to the 'body of England' echoes the response of the Georgian poets to the horrors of World War One. As Paul Fussell suggests, a turn to the 'model world' of pastoralism became increasingly acute for poets like Rupert Brooke.<sup>19</sup> Brooke's soldier, once 'A body of England's, breathing English air / Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home', now interred in and thereby Anglicising foreign soil, is eternally connected to the English landscape through a violence echoed in Hill's excavatory claims.<sup>20</sup> For while 'ploughing down into one's own selfhood and into the deep strata of language at one and the same time' is a necessary act, Hill acknowledges that this exhumation 'takes effort

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<sup>17</sup> Roberts, *Geoffrey Hill*, pp. 53–4.

<sup>18</sup> Haffenden, p. 93; also cited in Roberts, *Geoffrey Hill*, 54.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 232–3.

<sup>20</sup> Rupert Brooke, 'The Soldier', in *The Collected Poems of Rupert Brooke*, ed. by George Edward Woodberry (New York: John Lane, 1918), p. 111.



and may be painful.<sup>21</sup> In Brooke's poem, body and language converge in the hollowed out site of the grave, where the body's displacement of the earth is also the process through which landscape or national space is inscribed with meaning. As Margot Norris suggests, the poem 'registers' the 'hidden logic' that renders the 'human body, in its injury and destruction, the instrument and expression of the nationalisation through which the causes, issues, and justifications of war are articulated. In Georgian England, that nationalisation was expressed as idealised pastoral imagery'.<sup>22</sup>

For Hill language and selfhood must be subject to processes of exhumation rather than burial, however, and instead of masking a horror as Brooke perhaps seeks to do, such a process should the poet claims, 'forcibly' draw our attention to the 'perils of language' and its misuses.<sup>23</sup> Nevertheless Hill's excavations of language, self and place are marked by a similar tension between English pastoral landscape and the anti-pastoral sites of war and torture, that Fussell identifies in the poetry of the World War One. He contends:

If the opposite of war is peace, the opposite of experiencing moments of war is proposing moments of pastoral. Since war takes place outdoors and always within nature, its symbolic status is that of the ultimate anti-pastoral. In Northrop Frye's terms, it belongs to the demonic world, and no one engages with it or contemplates it without implicitly or explicitly bringing to bear the contrasting 'model world' by which its demonism is measured. When H. M. Tomlinson asks, 'What has the primrose to do with old rags and bones on barbed wire?' we must answer, 'Everything'.<sup>24</sup>

This antithesis of pastoral/anti-pastoral is condensed in the ineluctable proximity of primrose and barbed wire for these earlier war poets, whereas for Hill writing after 1945, it is the juxtaposition of 'sprayed blood' and a 'salvo of poppies' ('Churchill's Funeral') or 'sunflower' (*T XV*) and 'ash pits' (*T XVII*) that constitute the terrain of the twentieth century.<sup>25</sup> Where the pastoral mode of poems such as 'The Soldier' offer an idealisation of war and a bucolic salve for

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<sup>21</sup> Hill, 'Thus My Noblest Capacity'.

<sup>22</sup> Margot Norris, *Writing War in the Twentieth Century* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000), p. 41.

<sup>23</sup> Hill, 'Thus My Noblest Capacity'.

<sup>24</sup> Fussell, p. 231.

<sup>25</sup> Hill, 'Churchill's Funeral', in *Canaan* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), pp. 43–50 (pp. 49–50); Hill, *The Triumph of Love* (London: Penguin, 1999), hereafter cited parenthetically as *T* followed by canto in roman numerals.

its horrors, the critical difficulties that obtain to Hill's concern with the atrocities of World War Two have been his appropriation of the experience of another, the sufferers of war and the victims of the Holocaust. Rather than anticipating the death of the soldier, or his own death as Brooke does, Hill's poetic concern with the victims of history works analeptically. Being born too late to be drafted incurs a responsibility or guilt evident in sequences such as *The Triumph of Love* which as Wainwright remarks, 'is dominated by Hill's effort to grapple with, to honour and [...] to do justice by all these un-lived and unliveable lives'.<sup>26</sup> If Hill's poetry repeatedly returns to particular regional and national landscapes, his 'body of England', then home operates as a point of departure for an outward movement towards European and global sites of war, and a gesture of responsibility towards the dispossessed victims of these places. Thus as Michael Edwards contends, glossing sections from *The Triumph of Love*:

If Hill is concerned to make a poetry of place, of the geography and history of a region, he rejects explicitly the lure of being 'rooted' – so right a thing to be one might have thought – so as to inhabit the earth rather than hover mindfully above it [...] Yet he honors those who were not rooted but 'dispossessed' (LVIII), the 'survivors' (XVII) and those who did not survive, the victims of so many atrocities to which he continues fearfully to be drawn.<sup>27</sup>

Despite Edwards' claim that Hill 'rejects explicitly the lure of being "rooted"', the excavatory motifs that continue to emerge in his poetry and prose suggest that roots and strata remain a captivating force, even as he 'honors' the 'dispossessed'. For, inhabiting and digging deep into the resources of his native landscape and language is essential if the poet is, as Matthew Sperling suggests, to 'strike at the root of things' and register the historical tensions recorded there.<sup>28</sup> In the discussion that follows I suggest that the lure of roots and strata for Hill has less to do with the political taint that clings to chthonic organicism, than the poet's anxiety over the power of language to exert a gravitational pull on the writer. If Hill's archaeological poetics do come close to embedding selfhood as *archē* or a buried shard in the linguistic and material strata of home, then this mastery of a deep self is tempered by a language of

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<sup>26</sup> Wainwright, p. 72.

<sup>27</sup> Michael Edwards, 'Quotidian Epic: Geoffrey Hill's *The Triumph of Love*', *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 13.1 (2000), 167–76 (p.168).

<sup>28</sup> Sperling, p. 131.

rock and a 'science of sediment' in which the poet finds resources for turning towards an other. The following section examines the extent to which Hill's work might be understood as geological rather than archaeological, before mapping out the specifically sedimentary model of excavation that characterises the poet's geopoetic dialogue with Celan.

### 3. Strategies of Excavation: Language of Stone, Science of Sediment

In a recent essay on Hill's debt to nineteenth-century linguistics, Sperling comments on the stratified 'philological matter' of the 1983 sermon, observing that the poet turns to the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the geological language of its originator, Richard Trench, thus taking up a nineteenth-century mode of 'figuring language as a land-mass'.<sup>29</sup> If as Colby asserts, the geological imagination gave way to an archaeological sensibility by the early twentieth century, then Hill's return to this nineteenth-century geological lexicon prefigures the shift that I identify in his later poetics of depth, which moves away from the strata of an archaeological dig towards a language of rock and stone. Staying with the geological motifs in Hill's sermon, which perform a linguistic excavation of their own, Sperling goes on to 'cite Hill citing Trench citing Emerson' on the idea of 'language as "fossil poetry"'.<sup>30</sup> For Emerson 'language is fossil poetry' inasmuch as it 'is made up of images, or tropes, which now, in their secondary use, have long ceased to remind us of their poetic origin just as a 'limestone' is an indeterminate and 'infinite' mass 'of the shells of animalcules'.<sup>31</sup> Here, language is a living multitudinous entity that when subject to the pressures of time and history is calcified, turned to rock, a permanent record in which its original meaning is still somewhere inscribed. However, as Hill goes on to suggest in his sermon, Trench finds Emerson's 'fossil poetry' too narrow, and expands this geological lexicon to encompass language as 'fossil ethics, or fossil history'. If it is possible to read the aesthetic origin of a given word as 'fossil poetry', Trench suggests that 'words' also 'embody facts of history or 'moral common sense'; furthermore, where 'that moral sense may be perverted' as 'fossil ethics', language 'will bear witness and keep a record of

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<sup>29</sup> Sperling, p. 121.

<sup>30</sup> Sperling, p. 122; See also Hill 'Thus my noblest capacity'.

<sup>31</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Collected Works*, ed. by Alfred R. Ferguson, Jean Ferguson Carr and Douglas Emory Wilson, 7 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971–), III: *Essays: Second Series* (1983), p. 13; also cited in Sperling, p. 122n29.

that perversion'.<sup>32</sup> Sperling suggests that if Hill takes up Trench's 'fossil ethics' and 'fossil history' it is in the discursive field of poetic language (Emerson's 'fossil poetry') that these principles inhere; poem LI from *The Triumph of Love* is he claims, an exemplary conjunction of poetics, ethics and history expressed in geological terms. Yet as he contends, whatever Hill might mean by a '*moral landscape*' (T LI), the 'slippage between the vocabulary of the earth sciences and the vocabulary of human values' registers the 'difficulty' that the poet has in 'imagining a natural history of morality'.<sup>33</sup> For if 'fallenness' is a 'constitutive condition of language' then Hill's preoccupation with roots and strata, his 'diligent alertness to the history of words, their birth and derivation' is as Sperling suggests, less a 'yearning for a lost golden age of lexical perfection' than an excavation of the 'bloody human contestations' recorded in the strata of language.<sup>34</sup>

Robert Macfarlane also refers to Hill's work as geological rather than archaeological. For McFarlane, however, it is Hill's early period that is geological or subject to the forces of 'gravity' (1959–1984), while his later work is characterised by a poetics of 'grace'.

The poems of this [early] period, laid down in their characteristic triplets, exhibit the permanence of geological structures. They are written in a form so pressurising that grammar and syntax are often crushed within it, and meaning is densely compacted. The second epoch, the epoch of grace, began following a twelve-year poetic silence, and is still occurring. In 1996 Hill published *Canaan*, a collection whose slender, aerated forms declared their distance from the dark mineral triplets of [his earlier work].<sup>35</sup>

McFarlane's critical analogy suggests a conceptual and formal immutability in Hill's early use of linguistic form akin to geological permanence and the sheer weight of rock. This sense of the permanence and weight of language also recalls McHale's description of *Mercian Hymns* as 'slabs of prose'.<sup>36</sup> The gravitational pull of geological mass colludes with language,

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<sup>32</sup> Richard Trench, *On the Study of Words: Five Lectures Addressed to the Pupils at the Diocesan Training School Winchester* (London: John W. Parker, 1851), p. 5; Cited in Hill, 'Thus my noblest capacity', and also Sperling, p. 122.

<sup>33</sup> Sperling, p. 124.

<sup>34</sup> Sperling, pp. 126, 131.

<sup>35</sup> MacFarlane, p. 241.

<sup>36</sup> McHale, p. 255.

grammar, and syntax to produce ‘the inertial drag of speech, the weight of the word’ that McFarlane observes was ‘an almost overwhelming concern of Hill’s earlier work’.<sup>37</sup> As language is inexorably ‘fallen’ then the meanings that accrue to Hill’s frequent use of the word ‘gravity’ express what McFarlane aptly describes as ‘the lapsed state of [all] words, their massy sinfulness’.<sup>38</sup> If the poet’s task is to dig down into this ‘massy’ strata then it is in order to ‘neutralise or control the “gravitational pull” of language’, for as McFarlane’s and Sperling’s analyses both suggest, ‘to escape it completely is an impossibility’.<sup>39</sup> Like Sperling, McFarlane claims that Hill’s ‘delvings’ into the ‘word-ward’ are an attempt to ameliorate the ‘inertia’ and weight of language, to unearth the historical injustices inscribed in its misuse.<sup>40</sup> Linguistic excavation alone is not enough, however, to counter the fallenness of language, for the reworking of words into some kind of conciliating or ethical speech must be accompanied by the action of grace. Thus grace, which is for Hill the ‘unlooked-for’ and inexhaustible gift of kindness or favour from a Judaeo-Christian God, is a counterforce to the gravity of language.<sup>41</sup> Of course, as McFarlane notes but does not expand upon, the ‘unlooked-for’ encounter with grace ‘must also be a shock of ethical recognition’, and Christian ethics for Hill always involves a three-way structure of moral responsibility, an extension outwards from one human being towards another.<sup>42</sup> Thus as O’Neill points out, the ‘deep shocks of recognition’ that Hill put forward in his earlier essay ‘Redeeming the Time’

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<sup>37</sup> McFarlane, p. 244.

<sup>38</sup> McFarlane, p. 237; For examples of Hill’s use of the term ‘gravity’ in his critical prose see *The Lords of Limit: Essays on Literature and Ideas* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1984); *The Enemy’s Country: Words, Contexture, and Other Circumstances of Language* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995); *Style and Faith* (Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 2003).

<sup>39</sup> McFarlane, p. 238.

<sup>40</sup> McFarlane, pp. 238–9.

<sup>41</sup> Hill, ‘Language, Suffering, Silence’, in *Collected Critical Writings*, ed. by Haynes, pp. 394–406 (p. 404); McFarlane refers to the original publication of this essay as ‘Language, Suffering, and Silence’, *Literary Imagination*, 1.2 (1999), 240–55 (p.253). McFarlane shows that Hill’s theology of ‘grace’ is drawn from number of thinkers including Augustine, Thomas Bradwardine, Karl Barth and Simone Weil.

<sup>42</sup> Hill ‘Language, Suffering, and Silence’, pp. 404–5; also cited in McFarlane, p. 246. It is important to note, however, that in Christian ethics such as those espoused by Karl Barth or Dietrich Bonhoeffer (both of whom Hill follows) divine grace is sufficient to itself. That is to say that grace does not require human action in order for it to be fulfilled. Rather as Gerald McKenny points out in *The Analogy of Grace: Karl Barth’s Moral Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), the recipient of divine grace is able to ‘participate’ in its ‘movement’, and it is in gracious conduct towards others that we ‘acknowledge ourselves as recipients of that grace’ (pp. 210–211). For an alternative perspective on the ethical possibilities of Christian grace outside of a transcendent model see Adam S. Miller, *Badiou, Marion and St. Paul: Immanent Grace* (London: Continuum, 2008).

already 'involve a conviction that poetry is answerable speech'.<sup>43</sup> How this poetic address to the other as an action of grace can be concretised in language is the concern of McFarlane's essay; Wainwright also asks in what form 'Bradwardine's version of presence' might be 'apprehended'.<sup>44</sup> I will return to the apprehension of grace in the following section, but for now it is sufficient to observe that McFarlane locates Hill's grace in images of air and light: the 'sky', 'wind', 'the hoop of a rainbow'.<sup>45</sup> If the gravity of language takes geological form in his assessment, then grace is 'aerated' and not of the earth. This distinction between gravity and grace, 'dark mineral triplets' versus 'slender aerated forms' while suggestive, depends on the mass of rock as a signifier of the permanent weight of sin, an idea of the subterranean which perhaps owes something to the ancient opposition between sublunary corruption and empyrean divine grace.

Yet the vast time-scales of geological processes indicate that such permanence and fixity is illusory or at least only partial. While the formation of igneous or metamorphic rock is subject to the kinds of force and compaction that McFarlane suggests and that Hill's notion of gravity implies, thereby producing landforms such as mountains which seem permanent from the perspective of a limited human temporality, sedimentary processes are subject to more obvious contingency and erosion. Whereas McFarlane sees aerated grace pulling language out of the gravitational field of geological mass in collections such as *The Triumph of Love*, I suggest that processes of aeration, porosity, and erosion are embedded in Hill's geological lexicon through a 'science of sediment'. Thus grace, as an ethical address towards the other is actualised in the traces of sediment and sand that permeate the sequence; rather than escaping the massy sinfulness of the poem's geology, Hill's sense of responsibility, his Christian ethics of grace and pity, saturate the rock-strata.

Heaney provides a useful analogy drawn from the rock cycle that reveals one way in which such a sedimentary poetics might operate when he suggests that Robert Lowell's poetry 'begins igneous and ends up sedimentary'.<sup>46</sup> Here sedimentary signals a process of going back over the same terrain, reworking and reshaping earlier intrusions of the poet's own (igneous) poetic matter. Hill's

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<sup>43</sup> O'Neill, p. 167.

<sup>44</sup> Wainwright, p. 92.

<sup>45</sup> McFarlane, pp. 245–7.

<sup>46</sup> Heaney, 'Lowell's Command', in *The Government of the Tongue* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), pp. 129–47 (p. 129).

return in *The Triumph of Love* to the intimately known landscape of *Mercian Hymns* might be understood as just such a reworking of igneous matter through sedimentary processes. The discontiguous overlapping of various types of rock formation in the later sequence is also suggestive of the interplay between permanence and contingency in Hill's account of the different temporalities of individual lives lived, events of human history, and the expanses of geological time. This oscillation between igneous and sedimentary underpins my discussion in section three, which examines apprehensions of geological time and substance in the poet's native 'body of England'. Hill's sedimentary poetics do not simply signal a return to his own poetic ground, however, even if the poet does revisit familiar childhood landscapes; rather the texture of his late work is dense with literary precursors, often martyrs and survivors, and especially those who grapple with the difficulties of language and ethics. Hill's more recent collection *Odi Barbare* (2012), is just so wrought from layers of literary tradition often refracted through the strata of landscape; his 're-cadencing' of 'Sidney's sapphics' (I) compresses the 'rooted tide-wrack' of the poetry's 'striated cliffs' and 'sea-beaches' into the sustained difficulty of the sapphic stanza (XXI).<sup>47</sup> As the final two sections of the chapter go on to demonstrate, this sedimentary terrain, the aerated earth of *The Triumph of Love* and *The Orchards of Syon*, re-cadences the poetry and thought of Romanian-German Jewish poet and translator, Paul Celan.

Born in Czernowitz in 1920, Celan was twenty-one when his parents were deported to an internment camp where they later died. Celan survived the Romanian labour camp where he was confined until 1944, although his life and poetry remained shadowed by his experiences; he drowned himself in the Seine in 1970. As one of the most significant European poets writing in the aftermath of the Holocaust, Celan is an exemplary figure for Hill. While barely mentioned alongside other key writers, theologians and thinkers in Hill's extensive critical writings, explicit reference to Celan is made in two collections: *Tenebrae*, and *The Orchards of Syon*.<sup>48</sup> In both collections this allusion proceeds by way of translation. In *The Orchards of Syon*, which I will return to in

<sup>47</sup> Hill, *Odi Barbare* (Thame: Clutag Press, 2012), pp. 9, 29.

<sup>48</sup> Hill briefly refers to Celan in 'Tacit Pledges', in *A.E. Housman: A Reassessment*, ed. by Alan W. Holden and J. Roy Birch (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), pp. 53–75; and *Rhetorics of Value*, The Tanner Lectures on Human Values, delivered at Brasenose College, Oxford, 6 and 7 March 2000 <[http://tannerlectures.utah.edu/lectures/documents/Hill\\_01.pdf](http://tannerlectures.utah.edu/lectures/documents/Hill_01.pdf)> [accessed 18 March 2013]. Both are reprinted in Hill, *Collected Critical Writings*, ed. Kenneth Haynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

the final section, Hill acknowledges the difficulty of translating Celan's opaque neologism 'Atemwende' ('Breathturn'). The earlier poems from *Tenebrae*, 'Two Chorale-Preludes: on melodies by Paul Celan', are also loose translations of 'Eis, Eden' and 'Kermorvan' two poems from Celan's *Die Niemandrose* (1963).

Observing that Hill's notes to the chorales claim that they contain 'a few phrases of free translation with phrases of my own invention', Roberts suggests that such a 'free reworking across two languages itself represents a negotiation of self and otherness'.<sup>49</sup> It is this relationship between self and other in Hill's sedimentary dialogue that I suggest calls into question the ostensibly assured selfhood of his archaeological poetics. In the chorales otherness operates through the loss of an internalised landscape: 'There is a land called Lost / at peace inside our heads. / The moon, full on the frost, / vivifies these stone heads'.<sup>50</sup> As Roberts points out Hill echoes Celan's sense of home-land as both 'absolutely lost and yet integral to the self'.<sup>51</sup> The transformation of the topos of 'home' from an assured ground of the self to a site that is rendered unstable through constant unearthing, emerges in my reading of Hill's excavations of the intimate landscape of his childhood, in the next section. This as I have suggested might be understood as a revision of conventional archaeological modes of figuring the deep self as a buried shard, through a shift towards the geological imagination. The final image of the opening stanza of Hill's first chorale also deploys one of Celan's central geological metaphors, stone modelled after flesh.<sup>52</sup> In Michael Hamburger's translation of the opening lines of 'Ice, Eden' this exact geological image is absent: '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' (*P* 177/*GW* 1:224).<sup>53</sup> Hill possibly draws his vivified 'stone heads' from the conjunction of earth and eye ('Augen' and 'Erden') in Celan's original. (He makes a reverse gesture in LXVIII of *The Triumph of Love* where he echoes Ezekiel 11:19: 'Remove my heart of stone. Replace / my heart of stone'.) Tobias observes that

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<sup>49</sup> Hill, *Collected Poems* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985), p. 204n, cited in Roberts, *Geoffrey Hill*, p. 25.

<sup>50</sup> Hill, 'Two Chorale-Preludes: On Melodies by Paul Celan', in *Tenebrae* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1979), pp. 35–6 (p.35).

<sup>51</sup> Roberts, *Geoffrey Hill*, p. 26.

<sup>52</sup> See Tobias, *Discourse of Nature*, p. 41, for a discussion of the figuration of stone as flesh and vice versa.

<sup>53</sup> Celan, 'Ice, Eden', ('Eis, Eden') in *Poems of Paul Celan*, trans. by Michael Hamburger (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 1995), p. 163. Hereafter cited parenthetically as *P* followed by page number.



the geological terms most often used by Celan also signal the human body, particularly the face; these motifs thus enable 'the poems to sketch a landscape that not only attests to loss but also gives loss a face'.<sup>54</sup> That the image is absent from the source poem, yet is so redolent of Celan's geological lexicon suggests that Hill is reworking more than a particular poetic moment. Indeed as my subsequent analysis argues Hill writes self and home into Celan's expansive discourse of rock and stone, that language which Adorno famously described as 'that of the dead speaking of stones and stars'.<sup>55</sup>

Tobias takes up Adorno's description of Celan's 'inorganic' poetics when she explains how the poet's use of 'language' as 'a space' renders his poems as 'physical bodies' akin to 'geological sites or astrological formations'.<sup>56</sup> These poem-terrains are figures of a 'world abstracted from itself' and any subject or self that appears in relation to that world is similarly displaced.<sup>57</sup> Yet, as Tobias asserts, Celan's poems do not attempt to console or overcome this displacement, instead they 'amplify their uprooted condition by comparing themselves to landscapes in upheaval'. Thus Celan is drawn to models from 'natural phenomena' irrupting in space and time: 'the site of a volcanic eruption or a comet that is about to crash into the earth'.<sup>58</sup> Despite the abundance of such imagery, Tobias notes that Celan remained suspicious of the power of images to substitute themselves for the self, and thus lead 'one to forget' the contingencies of existence. Like the originary force of the *archē* or the illusory permanence of geological formations, the endurance of the image must be made and unmade by Celan whose 'poems push the figures they construct to the point of their collapse, so that they may be revealed as conceits that expose in space the poem's vulnerability and exposure to time'.<sup>59</sup> That these images always remain figures for language is key to Tobias' assertions here. Contrary to Peter Szondi and Uta Werner who insist that Celan's poems are landscapes in themselves, Tobias alerts us to the importance of recognising that, however, permanent and solid they appear, these images of earth, are only available to

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<sup>54</sup> Tobias, p. 15.

<sup>55</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, ed. by Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (London: Routledge, 1984), p. 405.

<sup>56</sup> Tobias, p. 3; For additional discussions of a geological lexicon in Celan's work see James K. Lyon, 'Paul Celan's Language of Stone: The Geology of the Poetic Landscape', *Colloquia Germanica*, 8 (1974), 298–317; and Uta Werner, *Textgraber: Paul Celan's Geologische Lyrik* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1998).

<sup>57</sup> Tobias, p. 2.

<sup>58</sup> Tobias, p. 6.

<sup>59</sup> Tobias, p. 12.

the writer as linguistic forms.<sup>60</sup> Celan's excavations always unearth the strata of language as much as they are concerned with material landscape.

Taking up this sedimentary-geological discourse Hill's poetry similarly mines and undermines the origins and certainties that the ground of language, landscape and personal experience is supposed to provide. Celan's geological lexicon thus offers an epistemological and ethical solution to the difficulties that attend Hill's poetic vision, namely how to respond to the magnitude of suffering that lies outside of the poet's own experience. If the words spoken by Hill's Peguy, 'why do I write of war? / Simply because I have not been there' (*MCP* 7) are as Wainwright suggests central to the poet's analeptic 'witness' then Celan responds with a different testimony of absence, 'we / were there, after all, and not there' (*P* 163/*GW* 2:217).<sup>61</sup> This geopoetic dialogue with a poet who can be counted among the 'dispossessed' enables Hill to refract his own sense of absence, the responsibility of having not been there, through Celan's 'science of sediment' the ash, sand, and traces of dust, which is often all that 'remains of the victims of the Holocaust'.<sup>62</sup>

In this section I have argued that Hill's excavatory strategies can no longer be simply understood as conventionally archaeological and indicative of a chthonic sense of self. I have suggested instead that the geological lexicon that critics have identified in his early poetry and other of his work, provides a different genealogy of poetic depth, one that shifts from the igneous to the sedimentary. The rest of the chapter offers detailed analysis of the wider geological and more specific sedimentary discourses at work in *The Triumph of Love* and *The Orchards of Syon*. It demonstrates that Hill's renovated model of excavation, emerging as it does from concepts of erosion, deposition, and sedimentation, forges new possibilities for ethical dialogue between self and other through the mediating frames of both intimate and unknowable landscapes. The next section focuses on an intimately known landscape, leaving Celan behind momentarily to examine Hill's return home to the previously excavated site of the West Midlands. I examine the geopoetic bedrock that is specific to Hill's 'body of England' and the temporal processes that constitute this landscape, the poem, and the lyric self that returns there in

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<sup>60</sup> See Peter Szondi, *Celan Studies*, trans. by Susan Bernofsky and Harvey Mendelsohn (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); also Werner.

<sup>61</sup> Hill, *The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Peguy* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1983), hereafter cited as *MCP* followed by stanza number in arabic numerals; See Wainwright, p. 7.

<sup>62</sup> Tobias, p. 15.

search of a mode of address that can articulate its debt to an unknown and unlocatable other.

#### 4. This Body of England

*The Triumph of Love* is a fusion of personal reflection, observation, and meditation on the atrocities and failures of the twentieth century, particularly those associated with the period of Hill's childhood during World War Two. The book-length sequence consists of one hundred and fifty poems of variable line-length, equal to the number of Old Testament psalms, and resembling the long modernist poem, what Alderman terms the 'pocket-epic' form. In this respect *The Triumph of Love* offers a stylistic and formal departure from *Canaan* (1996) and a return to the poetic terrain of *Mercian Hymns* and its landscape of childhood, a return that is perhaps all the more acute as a result of Hill's academic expatriation from the United Kingdom (Leeds, Bristol, Cambridge) to Boston, Texas where he lived and taught from 1988 until 2004. Roberts and Wainwright both remark that the sequence is Hill's most autobiographical poem since the mining of 'a rich and desolate childhood' in *Mercian Hymns* (V), and while *The Triumph of Love* reveals more of the 'Obstinate old man' and 'senex sapiens' (V) than earlier work, it is no surprise to find that the landscape of the poem's unfolding is again that of the poet's youth – Worcestershire and the West Midlands.<sup>63</sup> The repeated opening and closing one line poems immediately locate and frame the sequence within the confined geography of Hill's childhood, the district of Bromsgrove.

Sun-blazed, over Romsley, a livid rain-scarp. (T I)

Sun-blazed, over Romsley, the livid rain-scarp. (T CL)

In an anecdote related during a reading at Bromsgrove in 2004, Hill recalls the scarcity of Mars Bars during the war which came from far-away Manchester, as opposed to the plentiful local Bluebird toffee. In this period, Hill

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<sup>63</sup> Hill, 'Mercian Hymns,' in *New and Collected Poems: 1952–1992* (New York: Mariner, 2000), 91–122. Originally published as *Mercian Hymns* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1971), and hereafter cited parenthetically as *MH* followed by section/hymn in roman numerals.

remarks, 'one got to know an area of about five square miles intimately'.<sup>64</sup> Romsley is slightly outside this five mile perimeter but its proximity with Bromsgrove and Fairfield declare this image to be a memory from the poet's early years, even if as Wainwright suggests, it is 'perhaps too elusively personal for the reader's full grasp'.<sup>65</sup> References to Romsley occur several times during the sequence and according to Hill its repeated invocation is part imagined, part experienced. While the poet does remember the bombing of Coventry referred to in section VII, he did not view the blaze from the 'Spraddled ridge- / village' of Romsley (*T VI*), but from the yard of his Aunt and Uncle's farm some ten miles away at Lower Bentley.<sup>66</sup> 'I imagined' he says, 'standing on Romsley Hill by the water tower and watching Coventry'.<sup>67</sup> During the reading at which these childhood incidents are retold, Hill mentions revisiting the church of St Kenelm's at Romsley just prior to the event in order to familiarise himself with the place of his childhood and of the poem. Like the proper names Mercia and Offa in *Mercian Hymns*, Romsley is a 'name to conjure with' (*MH II*), and the repeated return to it has a cumulative sedimentary effect such that fragments of time and place are eroded, transported and redeposited in the textual layers of the sequence.

This sedimentary lexicon emerges from the outset; geology and meteorology conjoin in the image of 'rain-scarp', a visual disturbance, which recalls the evanescence of light on water and the solidity of rock. In Hill's notebook drafts, the stone that forms this image is a more tangible 'ironstone scarp / scarped ironstone', a sedimentary rock found in abundance in the Midlands and mined for its iron content in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>68</sup> Hill once brooded on his familial connection with this local industry in *Mercian Hymns* speaking 'in memory of' his 'grandmother, whose / childhood and prime womanhood were spent in the / nailer's darg' (*XXV*). Here in early and often crossed-through drafts of the opening lines of *The Triumph of Love* the poet considers whether the geology of familiar places is at all recognisable in a post-industrial age: 'Who would know / ironstone – would I know ironstone if I saw it?'<sup>69</sup> In *Mercian Hymns* Hill condemns in a Ruskinian manner the 'quick

<sup>64</sup> Hill, 'A Poet's Vision of His Local Roots'.

<sup>65</sup> Wainwright, p. 94.

<sup>66</sup> Hill, 'A Poet's Vision of His Local Roots'.

<sup>67</sup> Hill, 'A Poet's Vision of His Local Roots'.

<sup>68</sup> Brotherton Collection, MS 20c Hill/2/1/42, Hill, notebook, 1995.

<sup>69</sup> MS 20c Hill/2/1/42, Hill, notebook, 1995.

forge' of industrial capitalism that alienated the nail-maker from the products of their labour, and there is a sense here of nostalgia for a relationship to and knowledge of local landscape that such industries provided. As Falci suggests of Heaney and Montague such a loss assumes that 'landscape is readable: if we have lost the skill to read the landscape's manuscript' then presumably 'we once could'.<sup>70</sup> Things forgotten, as much as memories and histories converge in the earth and the sky 'over Romsley'.

This evocation of a single spot of earth might suggest a chthonic rootedness in place and the effort to maintain a stable sense of self that stems from a childhood or ancestral relationship to home. Hill is, however, acutely aware of the instabilities of time and place, and that return home is always predicated on an initial journey outwards which alters the possibility of ever coinciding with an earlier self. Furthermore, the inability to recognise the strata that underlies home goes far beyond a concern with the loss of an English rural landscape and its traditions that belong to Hill. Rather I would suggest that this sense of an unreadable landscape registers the irrevocable loss of home that Celan articulates as a condition of all post-Holocaust poetry. For Celan 'homecoming' is not predicated on a subject returning home to settle itself into the continuities of a place, its language and history. Rather coming home to the self is as Celan claims in 'The Meridian' speech, only possible by 'sending oneself ahead towards oneself' via the 'route of the impossible' towards a place of 'origin' that does not 'exist'.<sup>71</sup> This is not Heaney's idea of the poem as a 'revelation of the self to the self' then but an orientation 'towards oneself' that arises from an encounter or 'conversation' with 'otherness', a 'you'.<sup>72</sup> Hill's encounter with a past child-self, and a future self that is instantiated in the temporal movement of the poem thus contains the potential for an ethical return home, insofar as it acknowledges what Celan names the most 'essential aspect of the other' – 'its time'.<sup>73</sup> The non-coincidence of the various timings and emplacements of the self in *The Triumph of Love* thereby signals and precedes

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<sup>70</sup> Falci, p. 209.

<sup>71</sup> Celan, 'The Meridian', in *The Meridian: Final Version-Drafts-Materials*, ed. by Bernhard Böschstein and Heino Schmall, trans. by Pierre Joris (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), pp. 1–13 (p. 12). Where subsequent notes refer to manuscript and draft materials also collected in *The Meridian*, I give the manuscript reference (letter and number) assigned by the editors and the page number from the collected edition itself. 'The Meridian' was originally a speech delivered by Celan on the occasion of receiving the Georg-Büchner-Prize, in Darmstadt, 22 October 1960.

<sup>72</sup> Celan 'The Meridian', p. 9.

<sup>73</sup> Celan 'The Meridian', p. 9.

this more pressing singularity, which is the irreducible 'time' that belongs to the other. Christopher Fynsk explains why this irreducibility makes the conversation between self and other that Celan outlines always 'desperate' and fraught: 'for I may situate myself only in relation to an other, but my reach is toward an otherness of the other that I can never appropriate and that exposes me always to an alterity'.<sup>74</sup> In other words the time of the other is never my own; and this is something that Hill's sense of belatedness, of not being there, grapples with. Hill's recognition and address to the other in *The Triumph of Love* is therefore unsurprisingly temporal as well as spatial, embedded in the strata of an intimate yet estranging landscape. The image of 'rain-scarp' recalls therefore, not only Hill's 'body of England' but also a wider ethical terrain.

Edwards suggests that this 'image at once visionary and real', is reminiscent of Pound's 'In a Station of the Metro' although rather than the pure fusion of Imagist poetics, there is a disjunction between the natural phenomena of sun and rain, and the 'lividity' of 'wounds' and 'unhealthy flesh'.<sup>75</sup> The conflict between the image of gentle rainfall and wounded flesh are borne out in Hill's jottings for the opening line which appear to refer to Psalm 72:6 (AV) 'He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass: as showers that water the earth'.<sup>76</sup> In the Psalm rainfall is a figure for the peaceful reign of Solomon and the later incarnation and passion of Christ; in Hill's verse the image of 'rain-scarp' repeated in the first and final lines frames the 'moral landscape' of the poem 'a terrain' where 'particular grace, / individual love, decency, endurance, / are traceable across the faults' (*T LI*). Formed by movement along a fault line or the differential erosion of sedimentary rocks across time, scarp and its synonym, scar, are suggestive of the warring themes of 'Guilt and Redemption' (*T LXXXVI*), and the events of the mid twentieth century that are permanently inscribed in the landscapes of the sequence.

Shifts in time and place are also signalled by the substitution of commonplace determinants – 'a' and 'the' – in the repeated lines, which echoes the move from indefinite to definite article in Pound's Imagist poem. Whereas for Pound the two articles in the title/first line contract to produce the image of the metro-station which provides the spatial location for the following two lines,

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<sup>74</sup> Christopher Fynsk, 'The Realities at Stake in a Poem: Celan's Bremen and Darmstadt Addresses', in *Word Traces*, ed. by Aris Fioretos, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), pp. 159–184 (p. 177).

<sup>75</sup> Edwards, 'Quotidian Epic', p. 168.

<sup>76</sup> MS 20c Hill/2/1/42, Hill, notebook, 1995.

Hill's 'a' and 'the' function as both the extension and the limit of the poem sequence, separated by the force and weight of 'guilts [...] incurred' (T II). The shift between indefinite 'a' and definite 'the' is barely perceptible, yet there is a linguistic force and momentum that lies between and proceeds from the two articles. Indeed Hill acknowledges the force of rhetorical repetition from within the sequence when he glosses the eschatological revision of Isaiah 2:4 (AV) in the gospels remarking: "nation shall not lift up sword against nation" / or "nation shall rise up against nation" (a later / much-revised draft of the treaty). In either case / a telling figure out of rhetoric, / epanalepsis, the same word first and last' (TX). Just as the intention changes here depending on the repositioning of the 'same word first and last' so Hill's 'rain-scarp' oscillates between the two articles in a field of potential meanings. At first glance each article fixes the meaning of the noun it precedes; 'a' denotes something general or universal, whereas 'the' is particular or singular. Yet either article can signify a move from the general to the particular; the use of 'a' or 'the' in conjunction with 'livid rain-scarp' might be a general representation of English weather, a weather phenomenon particular to the West-Midlands, or a specific event witnessed by a lyric persona. Here it is the latter sense, whereby the vision of sheer rock face caused by the reflection of sun against rain is a 'particular / local intensit[y]' (T XXXVIII) apprehended by the lyric self who is constituted in the movement from 'child-soul' (II) in the second poem of the sequence to the 'Obstinate old man' of the penultimate psalm (CXLIX). Edwards further suggests that the substitution of articles marks a 'distancing' or taking 'leave' of this 'child-soul' for the 'contemplation of another's martyrdom and of the deepening of a new and spiritual child-likeness of the ageing adult'.<sup>77</sup> It is not simply the lyric self that subsists in this temporal field then; rather between the indefinite child-self and the definite 'old man' lie the other one hundred and forty-eight psalms through which, in Celan's words, 'the most essential aspect of the other [might] speak: its time'.<sup>78</sup> In a recent essay John Lyon has suggested that Hill's repetitions, these forms of epanalepsis, are examples of a broader 'mirroring effect' in his work which 'render self-consciousness inescapable': 'it is through the mirror' whether as image or as rhetorical device that the poet, he claims, 'hopes to rise "from the depths of the self to a concurrence with that which is not-self"' and to 'voice

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<sup>77</sup> Edwards, 'Quotidian Epic', p. 173.

<sup>78</sup> Celan, 'The Meridian', p. 9.

something of what is owed to the dead'.<sup>79</sup> Amplified through this mirroring process 'rain-scarp' is a concretised expression of the temporal moment of the poem in which the self and the other engage in what Celan describes as a 'desperate conversation'.<sup>80</sup>

The 'rain-scarp' must therefore be apprehended by the reader in its temporality as well as its substance. The definite article of the closing poem functions anaphorically, referring the reader back to the image already introduced in the first line. This anaphoric affect produces a temporal nick in which different spans of time collide: the time of an individual life 'child-soul' (T II) to 'old man' (V); secular time and eternity, 'long before Domesday' to 'the flash of Judgement' (LXXXII); and the indivisible time of the other, all of which reside in the temporal movement of the poem itself. The definite article can also function in a non-anaphoric sense, referring not to something introduced in the preceding discourse but to an absolute outside the text of which the audience is assumed to have prior knowledge. Eliot's repeated use of the definite article often functions in this way, emphasising the abstraction and fixity of meaning of the noun.<sup>81</sup> Hill is wary of the kind of 'metaphoric absolutism' that he sees in Eliot's 'Dry Salvages' preferring the suggestiveness of the anaphoric repetition which, rather than positioning the reader in relation to a definitive meaning, encourages a retrospective readjustment and re-reading.<sup>82</sup> Thus the motif of return in *The Triumph of Love* is embodied in its temporal and sedimentary structure; the small shift from one article to another announces the homecoming of the lyric self and the necessary return of the reader who must excavate the image of 'rain-scarp' for more than simply Hill's 'body of England'.

Romsley is typographically central to the lines of the opening and closing poems, the site where these moments of time intersect and converge. It is also the topological nexus of *The Triumph of Love*, and for the duration of the sequence at least, it is the locus of the poet's 'body of England'. Romsley is clearly significant for Hill as the 'home' to which he poetically returns, but it also

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<sup>79</sup> John Lyon, 'Geoffrey Hill's Eye Troubles,' in *Geoffrey Hill: Essays on His Later Work*, ed. by John Lyon and Peter McDonald (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 112–126 (pp. 122, 124). Lyon cites from Hill's essay 'Poetry as 'Menace' and "Atonement"' in *Collected Critical Writings*, ed. by Haynes, pp. 3–20 (p. 4).

<sup>80</sup> Celan, 'The Meridian', 9.

<sup>81</sup> See George Rostrevor Hamilton, *The Tell-Tale Article: A Critical Approach to Modern Poetry* (London: Arden, 1950), pp. 63–94.

<sup>82</sup> For Hill's remarks on Eliot see Brotherton Collection, MS 20c Hill/5/1/61, Hill, 'Lecture Notes on Gerontion', 1975.



functions as a place of departure from which he can perform the public 'Memoria' (*T CXXII*) of the sequence. As such the potentially solipsistic personal memories and regional myths that constitute Hill's Romsley are undercut by the responsibility to look outwards towards the graves and camps abstracted in Celan's ashen landscapes. Despite its beginning and ending there, Romsley is never just Romsley; as Wainwright points out the poem does not remain 'in that revealed moment'.<sup>83</sup> This layering of place in the 'rain-scarp' is perhaps signalled by the interchangeable nature of Romsley in the working drafts of the opening and closing poems. In notebook 43 which covers the period from 29<sup>th</sup> January to 28<sup>th</sup> February 1997 the 'rain-scarp' appears variously 'by Tyseley sheds' and 'above Saltley' before settling 'over Romsley'.<sup>84</sup> Tyseley sheds and Saltley were both sites of importance for the railway industry from the late nineteenth to the mid twentieth century, and although these locations are excised from the published lines, they appear unnamed in references to 'the uprooted / midlands railways' (*T CVII*). If the 'uprooted' and abandoned sites of Tyseley and Saltley were not sufficient to anchor the polyvalence of Hill's 'rain-scarp', then why 'Romsley, of all places!' as the poetic voice exclaims in section VII? The idiom is answered by the proceeding lines which inform that Romsley is a 'village sacred to the boy-martyr, / Kenelm'. Particular places invoke specific histories and myths that provide a ground for the poem's oblation:

Romsley, of all places! – Spraddled ridge-  
 village sacred to the boy-martyr,  
 Kenelm, his mouth full of blood and toffee.  
 A stocky water tower built like a stump  
 of a super-dreadnought's foremast. It could have set  
 Coventry ablaze with pretend  
 broadsides [...]  
 (*T VII*)

According to historical records Kenelm was the third Mercian king after Offa, although legend has it that the young monarch was murdered aged seven by his sister at the site of what is now St Kenelm's parish church in Romsley.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Wainwright, p. 93.

<sup>84</sup> Brotherton Collection, MS 20c Hill/2/1/43, Hill, notebook, 1997.

<sup>85</sup> Michelle Brown and Carol Ann Farr, *Mercia: An Anglo-Saxon Kingdom in Europe* (London: Continuum, 2005), p. 313.

While Offa presides over vast expanses of time and place in Hill's mythology, Kenelm has a more limited geographical influence, bound to the site of his demise.<sup>86</sup> The subject of his own martyrology, Hill's memories of a 'mouth filled with blood and [Blue bird] toffee' collide with the legend of the 'boy-martyr'. Kenelm, the innocent 'boy-martyr' is linked to the fallen of World War Two through the fictionalised memory of a small boy climbing Romsley hill for a better view of 'Coventry ablaze'. There is also a foreshadowing here of 'Isaiah's prophetically / suffering servant' (T XXIII) who appears in a later stanza as a figure of contention; for in Christian typology the suffering servant is a symbol of the Messiah, but in Judaism has come to represent the historical suffering of the Jewish people. The sacrificial logic at work in these typologies risks rendering real events into myth, with the injustices of the twentieth century that the poem seeks to memorialise becoming part of an inevitable re-cycling of human history. Yet as Hill's drafts indicate he is well aware of the dangers of stratifying this catalogue of suffering in the field of aesthetic composition, and so the sign of Isaiah's 'suffering servant' both resists and succumbs to the mythologising power of art: it 'can be reduced to' and 'is (not) reducible to victim-art', even though in the mastery of the writer's pen it risks being 'resurrected' as such.<sup>87</sup> A child's likely wish to see the blaze from a better position than his Aunt and Uncle's backyard offers a parallel, however, for the poet's continual striving for an appropriate perspective on events of World War Two. If Romsley is snared in myth then it is also the terrain from which the poetic gaze and the poem itself 'heads out' as Celan would have it 'towards some other'.<sup>88</sup> Only by refracting his poetic vision through the poetics of an 'other', in this case Celan, can Hill reconcile these child and adult selves and perform his duty to the dead. As he suggests in *The Orchards of Syon* such 'Redemption / is' always necessarily 'self-redemption and entails crawling / to the next angle of vision' (XXXIV).<sup>89</sup>

In a later invocation of Romsley the imperative voice bids, 'Go back to Romsley, pick up the pieces' but this phrase, this place 'becomes / a somewhat unhappy figure' in the text. Last seen through 'a spinning bike wheel', Romsley is the site of return for the 'unhappy figure' of an 'old man' who imagines that he

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<sup>86</sup> Hill, *Collected Poems*, p. 201n, describes Offa as 'presiding genius of the West Midlands, his dominion enduring [...] until the middle of the twentieth [century] (and possibly beyond)'.

<sup>87</sup> MS 20c Hill/2/1/43, Hill, notebook, 1997.

<sup>88</sup> Celan, 'The Meridian', p. 9.

<sup>89</sup> Hill, *The Orchards of Syon* (Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 2002). Hereafter cited parenthetically as OS followed by section in roman numerals.

is journeying like Kenelm, through ‘enemy country’ (T LXXXII). Hill has previously spoken of the poet’s ‘travail’ through the ‘Enemy’s country’ where ‘words and rhythms are not his utterance so much as his resistance’ to the linguistic complacency of the age.<sup>90</sup> The poet’s duty to answerable speech, his travail, is thereby realised in the physical labour of cycling through a landscape of childhood, yet the only way that place can be confronted in memory is to ‘overrun it in fiction’, in words and rhythms of another age. Thus the evocation of myth becomes part of the poet’s arsenal of tools to strike against the roots and complacencies of language and the self. The legendary location of Kenelm does the vicarious work of an actual childhood place that resists the power of poetic language, for ‘Fairfield repels / my imperium, and always did’ (T LXXXII). There can never be an unmediated return to some childhood self or place for Hill, as home is always subject to the lens of his martyrology. Some places are possibly too close for comfort, but for ‘now’ this site of home must bear the burden of poetic inscription, personal and public guilt, and ‘take for good a bad part of my / childself’ (T LXXXII).

The geographical particularity of Romsley and the guilt ‘incurred’ there gives way to a more abstract terrain in LI where Hill excavates the phrase ‘moral landscape’. Unlike the specified location of the rain-scarp, the site of this geological ‘cross-section’ is undisclosed.

Whatever may be meant by *moral landscape*  
it is for me increasingly a terrain  
seen in cross-section: igneous, sedimentary,  
conglomerate, metamorphic rock-  
strata, in which particular grace,  
individual love, decency, endurance,  
are traceable across the faults.  
(T LI)

It is difficult to determine what ‘may be meant’ by the term ‘*moral landscape*’, which has become a cliché through its constant use in describing all manner of human values. This kind of language becomes tainted for Hill and yet through ‘deliberate’ utterance cliché may be ‘rinsed and restored to function as

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<sup>90</sup> Hill, ‘A Note on the Title’, pp. 173–4 (p. 173); and ‘Unhappy Circumstances’, pp. 176–91 (p. 179), both in *Collected Critical Writings* ed. by Haynes.

responsible speech'.<sup>91</sup> By breaking apart and reflecting on the individual words that comprise the cliché, Hill restores landscape to its material geological state, and morality to a Christian context of grace, revealing the difficulty of making these registers coincide. As Sperling has suggested 'the vocabulary of the earth sciences and the vocabulary of human values' cannot be readily mapped one onto another, and poetic labour is required to excavate the traces of 'grace', 'love', 'decency' and 'endurance' in the rock-record. Where the poet finds particular moral or ethical traces, however, his excavations also reveal the 'bloody human contestations' recorded in the strata of language.<sup>92</sup>

The vast temporal processes of the rock cycle are linguistically confined to seven lines and spatial terms such as 'terrain', 'cross-section', 'strata', 'across'. Yet the historical changes in language use that result in commodified forms of speech such as cliché are reflected in the deposition of organic and mineral material in sedimentary rock over much longer periods of geological time. Each type of rock is thus charged with meaning and particular qualities that resonate with the moral tenets of poem. From the Latin *ignis*, meaning fire, the igneous rock with which Hill begins his short rock cycle is formed in extreme temperatures at the earth's core. Molten magma cools to form the hard rock echoed in the poem's precept of 'endurance'. Such igneous processes are also significant for Oswald's excavations of Dartmoor. The latent fieriness of the rock further suggests an alternative process of purification which 'might purge and enrich clichés by exactness and resonance' as Hill has commented in his critical writings.<sup>93</sup> Internal forces of heat and pressure also cause metamorphosis in sedimentary and some igneous rocks. Like Hill's poetic transformation of the cliché here, geological metamorphosis often adds value to rock, shale becomes slate, limestone becomes marble, and gold ore is deposited in the process. Unlike sedimentary layers, metamorphic rocks are not typically found in strata, as Hill's hyphenated enjambment suggests. Yet placed just before the broken 'rock- / strata' the word 'metamorphic' signals a change of tone and the transfiguration of 'images / of earth' to those of 'grace' as Hill has written elsewhere (*MCP* 5). Here hyphenation could indicate a compound word or a typographical division at a line ending; the ability of the hyphen to divide and

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<sup>91</sup> Hill, "'The World's Proportion": Jonson's Dramatic Poetry in *Sejanus* and *Cataline*', in *Collected Critical Writings*, ed. by Haynes, pp. 41–57 (p. 48).

<sup>92</sup> Sperling, pp. 126, 131.

<sup>93</sup> Hill, 'What the Devil Has Got Into John Ransom', in *Collected Critical Writings*, ed. by Haynes, pp. 127–45. (p.130).

unite is emphasised by its suspension over two lines.<sup>94</sup> This nick in the surface of the poem provides a visual analogy for both a fault in the earth's crust and a credo of guilt and grace that is traceable across such a fissure.

While the three main rock types which make up the 'moral landscape' of the poem imply a universal 'terrain', the addition of 'conglomerate' returns us again to the geology of Hill's childhood home; conglomerate is similar to the sedimentary rock known as breccia, which is predominant in the Clent hills around Romsley. The embedding of moral values and the language of grace in the precise geology of home is something that Hill perhaps borrows from W. H. Auden whose 'In Praise of Limestone' tries to 'imagine a faultless love' and an eternal 'life to come' but can only 'see' in its place 'a limestone landscape'.<sup>95</sup> Hill reverses this trajectory from 'love' to 'limestone', preferring, however, a movement from universal geological formations to 'particular grace'. What Hill attempts here, as McFarlane and Wainwright have suggested, is to give grace 'corporeal shape' (*T IX*) through intimately known and carefully observed particularities of landscape. Glossing poem *CXXV* McFarlane observes that grace for Hill is 'apprehended in a form that is particular and local within time and space.'<sup>96</sup> Wainwright concurs giving examples from across the sequence (*IX*, *XXXVIII*, *LIII*) of '[m]oments of exact natural description' in which the poet 'apprehends "real Being"; 'the Creator's grace / [...] "already present in time as in nature"' (*T CXXV*).<sup>97</sup>

It is here in the fusion of rain and rock, the fragments of conglomerate and other natural phenomena belonging to Hill's landscape that the poet finds a mode of address that is sufficient for articulating a debt to the other. Grace, as first a divine gift and then the condition for gracious or answerable speech is 'traceable' in 'time' and nature' through sedimentary processes. It is in these 'particular / local intensities' (*T XXXVIII*) that the temporalities of an individual life (past, present and future selves) collide with the moment of the poem, and the time of the other. As Agamben has suggested of poetry more generally, these collisions make the sequence, 'a temporal machine, that from the very start, strains towards its end'; 'for the more or less brief time that the poem

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<sup>94</sup> For a detailed discussion of the hyphen in Hill's poetry see Christopher Ricks, 'Tenebrae and At-one-ment', in *Geoffrey Hill: Essays on His Work*, ed. by Peter Robinson, (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1985), pp. 62–85.

<sup>95</sup> W. H. Auden, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Edward Mendelson. 2nd rev. edn (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), p. 542.

<sup>96</sup> McFarlane, p. 247.

<sup>97</sup> Wainwright, p. 93.

lasts, it has a specific and unmistakable temporality, it has its own.’ And yet this time is not an endpoint or ‘eschaton’ as it must remain open.<sup>98</sup> Rather in Celan’s terms it takes the shape of a meridian, a linguistic encounter that moves in a ‘circular’ trajectory ‘that returns to itself’.<sup>99</sup> This encounter between times, which is for Celan more properly a dialogue between the time of the self and of the other – and therefore of a temporality that is simultaneously shared and irreducible – exists only in the brief time of the poem. Thus while the repetition and difference of the opening and closing lines, and the various invocations of Romsley mark out the ‘here and now of the poem’ as Hill’s ‘body of England’, even in this ‘immediacy and nearness’ the poem opens out towards unknowable landscapes and addresses the other which ‘brings its otherness’, ‘its time’, into the ‘momentary present’ of the poem.<sup>100</sup>

## 5. Projecting a Landscape

The terrains constituted by Celan’s science of sediment, are somewhat the reverse of Hill’s local attachment to the ‘body of England’, in that they are often abstract and difficult to locate in any precise time or place. As Tobias and Ulrich Baer both observe, Celan’s ‘Projection of a Landscape’ (‘Entwurf einer Landschaft’) is exemplary of such a lack of ground.<sup>101</sup>

Circular graves below. In  
four-beat time the year’s pace on  
the steep steps around them.

Lavas, basalts, glowing  
stone from the world’s heart.  
Wellspring tuff  
where light grew for us, before  
our breath.

(P 133/GW 1:184)

<sup>98</sup> Agamben, *The Time that Remains* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 779.

<sup>99</sup> Celan, ‘The Meridian’, p. 12.

<sup>100</sup> Celan, ‘The Meridian’, p. 9; see also Shanks, Schnapp, and Tiews, on the arrested ‘moment’ as one of four archaeological temporalities (p. 11).

<sup>101</sup> See Tobias, pp. 36–4; and Ulrich Baer, *Remnants of Song: Trauma and the Experience of Modernity in Charles Baudelaire and Paul Celan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 231–40.

The poem proceeds from hollowed out and ostensibly empty 'Circular graves below' and continues as Tobias argues, to enact its own coming into being in geological form, as it appears to have 'no external foundation' in place or time, 'no ground anterior to it'.<sup>102</sup> Tobias goes on to suggest that the abyssal hollow of the uninhabited graves nevertheless erupts to establish the terrain above: 'the steep steps around' and the graves are formed from solidified 'Lavas, basalts, glowing / stone from the world's heart'.<sup>103</sup> The dual meaning of 'Entwurf' as sketching/drafting and projection is thus encapsulated here in the en-graved circular hollows ('Rundgräber') from which the surface landscape is projected.<sup>104</sup> Baer reads this projected landscape in relation to Heidegger's use of the term 'Entwurf' as the projection or 'casting-out' of being ('Dasein'). 'Entwurf' in this context describes the ability to understand the self in relation to itself, but also 'the capacity of casting our understanding of ourselves within a horizon larger than the limits of our existence'.<sup>105</sup> For Baer and also Tobias, Celan's geological poetics thus project not only a world, but also a self that must understand itself in relation to that world. This attempt at emplacement is fraught, however, by the displaced condition in which existence ('our breath') is projected or comes into being. For, the ground of this stratified self is the grave, which is profoundly unlocatable and unreachable as it has its origin deep in the 'world's heart'. Tobias figures this hollow as a 'wound' from which the text originates and to which it returns, and it is in this sense that the poem, its landscape and its subjects have no ground except 'death and destruction before' them.<sup>106</sup> Not only are the dead buried here, they constitute the very ground of poem and therefore of what can be said in the face of such horror; the 'circular graves' and the 'steep steps around them' are inscribed in the terrain as a form of public discourse. Baer has claimed that Celan's projection is uncannily like monuments built shortly after the publication of the poem at Treblinka and Buchenwald. At Buchenwald he observes, 'three large funnel-shaped pits holding the remains and ashes of several thousand victims of the camp were incorporated into the structure of the memorial in the form of deep

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<sup>102</sup> Tobias, p. 37.

<sup>103</sup> Tobias, p. 38.

<sup>104</sup> See Tobias, p. 36, on the dual meaning of the verb 'entwerfen'. Hamburger translates 'Entwurf' as 'Draft' but Baer and Tobias both make compelling arguments for the alternative of 'Projection' in their readings of the poem via Heidegger's Dasein.

<sup>105</sup> Baer, p. 231.

<sup>106</sup> Tobias, p. 41.

walled-in circular graves.<sup>107</sup> Celan's seemingly abstract geological terrain projects a concrete form in which the dead are not only remembered but also disturbingly contained.

In this section I suggest that the substrate of Hill's familiar 'body of England' is refracted through these simultaneously abstract and concrete terrains thus further exposing the topos of 'home' to which the sequence returns ('over Romsley'), to the vicissitudes of sedimentary processes. While Hill draws on a number of sources for his geological lexicon (not least nineteenth-century linguistics), the geologically inflected chorale-preludes in *Tenebrae* suggest that he is already working in Celan's language of stone by the time he gets to *The Triumph of Love*. It is known that Hill has read Hamburger's translations of Celan and almost certainly the 'Meridian' speech from which he borrows the term 'Atemwende' in *The Orchards of Syon*.<sup>108</sup> I cannot claim of course that Hill has read all of the work from Celan that I draw on in the following section, or that *The Triumph of Love* directly translates Celan as Hill has done elsewhere. What I do attempt to show here is that Hill's sedimentary poetics are suggestively amplified when read through the stratified deposits of Celan's ashen landscapes; that Celan's language of stone provides a proleptic response to Hill's call for a 'language / to which I might speak which / would rightly hear me', a language 'Familiar to those who already know it / elsewhere as justice, it is met also in the form of silence' (*T XXXV*). It is of the injustices, horrors and destruction so evident in Celan's poetry that Hill feels bound to speak, and this, in the domain of poetry at least, is the ground that these two poets share. Rather than ventriloquizing either his own landscape of home or sites of atrocity such as the camps and graves of the Holocaust as some kind of conciliation, Hill's sedimentary poetics are like his precursor always caught between the duty of answerable speech and the impossibility of ever speaking with or on behalf of the dead who remain impossible to locate. The following analysis figures Hill's sense of poetic duty towards the dead as a projection of a landscape, after Paul Celan. This projected landscape is invariably composed of mineral substrate, and as with Celan these sedimentary phenomena are not always discernible as a given place or landscape as such. Nevertheless,

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<sup>107</sup> Baer, p. 238.

<sup>108</sup> On Hill's use of Hamburger's translation of Celan's poetry see W. S. Milne, *An Introduction to Geoffrey Hill* (London: Bellew, 1998), p. 28.



whether as foundation 'cinderblocks' of 'civic' memorials (T XIII), or whirling in the 'cell, of an hourglass' (IX), sand and ash condition Hill's vision of home, as the location of the sequence shifts away from Romsley to named European sites of conflict (Dunkirk, Leipzig, Prague) and 'Unnamed' (XIV) victims of the Holocaust.

Hill reminds us that 'Unnamed is not nameless', however, (T XIV), and the poet still strains to know in canto XIII, 'Whose lives are hidden in God? Whose?' Here Hill satirises the salvific sentiment of Colossians 3:3: 'For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God' (NASB). The verse is bitterly reversed in the landscape of the canto, where 'hidden' no longer refers to lives secure and safe in Christ, but millions of deaths concealed.

Whose lives are hidden in God? Whose?  
Who can now tell what was taken, or where,  
or how, or whether it was received:  
how ditched, divested, clamped, sifted, over-  
laid, raked over, grassed over, spread around,  
rotted down with leafmould, accepted  
as civic concrete, reinforceable  
base cinderblocks:  
tipped into the Danube, Rhine, Vistula, dredged up  
with the Baltic and the Pontic sludge:  
committed *in absentia* to solemn elevation,  
*Trauermusik, musique funebre*, [...]  
(T XIII)

Celan's 'Entwurf' is audible here in the ash constructed 'cinderblocks' of Hill's public memoria which are built upon lives 'ditched, divested, clamped, sifted, over- /laid, raked over, grassed over, spread around, / rotted down with leafmould', and subsequently memorialised in stone, 'accepted as civic concrete'. It is not possible to 'tell what was taken, or where' due to the systematic eradication of a people, their bodies 'tipped into Danube, Rhine, Vistula, dredged up / with the Baltic and the Pontic sludge'. The grossness of this concealment is signalled by a parodic 'funeral' replete with 'double string choirs, congregated brass', 'baroque trumpets' whereby these lives are 'committed in absentia to solemn elevation' and horror is ostensibly redeemed

in the tragic farce of 'Trauermusik'. The reader is unsure how to proceed via such acts of remembrance. Public discourse seems an insufficient atonement as the poet warns: 'It now appears / too much is owed, impossible to repay: / Memoria, the loan-shark' (T CXXII). Neither civic speech in the form of the poem nor civic concrete are in themselves a guarantee of reconciliation, as the poet further counsels: 'the Jew is not beholden / to forgiveness, of pity' (T XIX). Nevertheless the poet and the reader have no choice but to continue to 'go / forward block by block, for pity's sake, / irresolute as granite' (T XIX). Granite does not readily suggest itself as 'irresolute', full of doubt, rather as we have seen it is depended upon in poem LI for its 'endurance' as part of a 'moral landscape'. Yet here, as quarried block its moral value is less certain, it has become marked and perhaps marred by the aesthetic labour that would exploit the 'faults' of the rock strata to fashion its memoria. The grace that is apprehended in the 'local' geological 'intensities' of 'rain-scarp' and 'traceable across the faults' of igneous rock must be transformed into a form of ethical dialogue that recognises its inadequacy before the other that it addresses.

McFarlane suggests that the apprehension of grace in *The Triumph of Love* is more often 'figured in negative, as absence's edge', its concretion as responsible speech is far more fragile than the solidity of rock might otherwise suggest.<sup>109</sup> He observes this trace of something unlooked for in the transparent 'cell, of an hourglass':

On chance occasions –  
 and others have observed this – you can see the wind,  
 as it moves, barely a separate thing,  
 the inner wall, the cell, of an hourglass, humming  
 vortices, bright particles in dissolution,  
 a roiling plug of sand picked up  
 as a small dancing funnel. It is how  
 the purest apprehension might appear  
 to take corporeal shape.  
 (T IX)

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<sup>109</sup> McFarlane, p. 245. Wainwright also comments on this canto suggesting that this experience describes abstract being distilled into a precise natural form, p. 93.

The here-and-now of this apprehension is also a moment in which – as the presence of an hourglass indicates – another time, a future into which time passes, is immanent.<sup>110</sup> The glass is not simply a receptacle for the convergence of different temporalities, however; rather its constituent component (sand) is also contained within its ‘cell’ as ‘bright particles in dissolution’. This gathering of particles might also act as a figure for the self as it is constituted in that moment of gracious apprehension.

Here Hill may refer to another poet who glosses Augustine’s sense of the human being caught in time, Gerard Manley Hopkins.<sup>111</sup> Hopkins’ use of the hourglass in stanza four of ‘Wreck of the Deutschland’ is as a ‘wall’ that contains the self: ‘I am soft sift / In an hourglass—at the wall / Fast, but mined with a motion, a drift, / And it crowds and it combs to the fall’. Caught in time, the ‘soft sift’ of self is pulled downward by gravity through a landscape of ‘combs’, ‘fells’ and ‘voel’ towards sin, though it is fastened or ‘roped’ by a different kind of ‘pressure’, that is ‘Christ’s gift’ of divine grace.<sup>112</sup> In this falling we might catch too Hopkins’ ‘words as heavy bodies’ with a ‘centre of gravity’ that Hill would seek to leaven with his excavations of language as gracious speech.<sup>113</sup> James Cotter argues that Hopkins’ ‘analysis of time’ in figures such as this drew on Augustine’s dual axes of temporality where ‘extensio (or horizontal)’ stands for the historical progress of humankind towards eternity and the ‘intensio (or vertical)’ is an axis of sin to grace that conditions this extension of the human in space and time. ‘Man’ is thus ‘stretched back and forward’ according to Cotter ‘yet remains fixed and open to the moment’.<sup>114</sup> Hopkins’ ‘I’ in the ‘hourglass’ is caught in a similar fashion between ‘fall’ and ‘fast’ at the origin of the two axes

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<sup>110</sup> Hill ventriloquises the fourteenth-century scholar Thomas Bradwardine here as well as Eliot’s Augustinian convergence of times in ‘Burnt Norton’. Hill’s vortex is Eliot’s ‘still point of the turning world’, the ‘dance’ of ‘a white light still moving’ (‘Burnt Norton’) revived in ‘bright particles’ which form a ‘small dancing funnel’ as they move in the ‘wind’ (T IX). See T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1944), p. 9.

<sup>111</sup> For a discussion of Augustinian time in Hopkins see James Finn Cotter, *Inscape: The Christology and Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1972); also Emily Merriman, “‘Words, Those Precious Cups of Meaning’: Augustine’s Influence on the Thought and Poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins”, in *Augustine and Literature*, ed. by Robert Peter Kennedy, Kim Paffenroth, and John Doody (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006), pp. 233–254.

<sup>112</sup> Gerard Manley Hopkins, ‘The Wreck of the Deutschland’, in *Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Major Works*, ed. by Catherine Phillips, rev. edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 41–2. ‘Voel’ is Welsh for hill, in modern Welsh, foel.

<sup>113</sup> Hopkins, *The Notebooks and Papers of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. by Humphry House (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), pp. 221–403 (p. 223). Also cited in the notes to *Collected Critical Writings*, Haynes, p. 630n.

<sup>114</sup> Cotter, p. 120.

of time; in order to project itself forward into space and time the 'I' must remain open to the potential of grace. Hill's meditation on grace in the flux of the hourglass incorporates both axes of time, as the 'purest apprehension' of grace (*intensio*) takes 'corporeal shape' (*extensio*) not only as sand, but as answerable speech. The 'humming / vortices' necessarily propel the poem towards the other that it seeks to address; Hill's hourglass image is thus also implicated in a series of Celan's poems that deal explicitly with the Holocaust, and therefore with questions of how poetry can, as Adorno claims 'articulate unspeakable horror' through such abstraction.<sup>115</sup>

The hourglass is one of the tropes that Celan uses on several occasions in his reflections on time, where it symbolises death. This is a conventional function of the hourglass; it measures the passing of the present into the future, where the implied temporal event of this future is death. The time of an individual life runs out towards it, just as sand runs through the narrow sphincter from one globe of glass to the other. The difference between this traditional symbolism and Celan's use of the hourglass hinges on the context of death, however, for in his poetry it is not a sign of the inevitability of human mortality, but the systematised murder of death camps and mass graves. The first appearance of the hourglass as an acknowledgement of the dead rather than of generalised mortality is in Celan's Romanian poems written between 1947 and 1949.

As for me, I prefer that time is measured with the  
hourglass,  
let it be a time less tall, like your hair's shadow in the  
sand, and I will inscribe its outline with blood,  
knowing that a night has elapsed.

Yes, me, I prefer the hourglass so you can smash it when  
I tell you of eternity's lie.<sup>116</sup>

Here the hourglass is a figure of violence, outlined in blood, smashed, purveyor of a lie. 'The hair's shadow' cast in the 'sand' of the glass prefigures

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<sup>115</sup> Adorno, p. 444.

<sup>116</sup> Celan, *Romanian Poems*, trans. by Julian Semilian and Sanda Agalidi (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2003), 39.

Celan's later image in 'Death Fugue' ('Todesfuge') of the 'golden hair' of the German 'Margareta' reflected against the 'ashen hair' of the Jewish 'Shulamith' (*SPP* 31–33/*GW* 1:41–41). The sand escapes the confines of the glass here into Celan's wider sedimentary lexicon as it expands to form the terrain on which the shadow (another conventional way to mark time) is cast. Tobias suggests that the temporality at work in such geological figures is a 'concern with the past' and 'with the ways in which what once was determines the horizon of the future'.<sup>117</sup> Unlike for Hopkins and perhaps for Hill this horizon is not a temporal movement towards a Christian eternity, however, as the future is always founded on a past that is projected from the grave, and eternity turns out to be a 'lie'.

Vita Zilburg argues that Celan transforms conventional tropes of time such as the hourglass by defamiliarising clichéd images 'through the technique of prosopopoeia' whereby the 'animated object' effects a 'tangible' but uncanny 'presence'.<sup>118</sup> This effect is apparent here as it remains unclear whether it is the beloved's 'shadow' or the hourglass that is outlined with blood, and embodied in the poem. The hourglass thus operates like the stone modelled after flesh in Tobias' account, in that it goes beyond the symbolic and gives death a face. Hourglass and sand are animated much like Hill's 'roiling plug of sand', but here as a distinctive trace of the other. This transformation of cliché to 'deliberate' utterance also recalls Hill's notion of language 'rinsed and restored to function as responsible speech'. One can perhaps hear too an echo of Celan's uncanny in Hill's insistence that the 'strange relationship we have with the poem is not one of enjoyment', but 'more like being brushed past, or aside by an alien being'.<sup>119</sup> For Hill this process of 'self-alienation' occurs for the writer (and one can infer for the reader) when one is 'forced down under the surface by the resistance of technique' a 'process which, as it drives down into strata that are not normally encountered, may produce alien objects'.<sup>120</sup> Beneath the surface of language figured as geological strata, the poem moves 'towards the uncanny and the strange' and as Celan suggests in 'The Meridian' it is perhaps here 'with

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<sup>117</sup> Tobias, p. 13.

<sup>118</sup> Vita Zilburg, 'Engführung as a Case Study of Paul Celan's Poetics of the Uncanny', *Image and Narrative*, 13.1 (2012), 48–63 (p. 54).

<sup>119</sup> Hill, 'A Postscript on Modernist Poetics', *Collected Critical Writings*, ed. by Haynes, pp. 565–80 (p. 566). Celan's idea of the poem as uncanny or estranging runs through his defence of poetry in 'The Meridian' speech.

<sup>120</sup> Hill, 'A Postscript on Modernist Poetics', pp. 567–8.

the estranged I' that 'a further Other' is encountered.<sup>121</sup> The animation of the sand of the hourglass as an encounter between 'I' and 'you' continues in later poems.

Zilburg claims that 'hackneyed tropes of time' such as 'the shadow and the hourglass' are mainly to be found in Celan's early work yet both these figures appear again in 'The Hourglass' ('Das Stundenglas') from *Breathturn* (*Atemwende*) published in 1967 three years before the poet's death.<sup>122</sup>

THE HOURGLASS, deep  
in peonyshadow, buried:  
[...]  
it inherits that empire,  
where you, bogged down, scent.  
(*B* 133/*GW* 2:50)<sup>123</sup>

Pierre Joris renders 'versandend' as 'bogged down' which according to his translation notes 'has the sense of being progressively mired in sand, to 'silt up' (*B* 258, n.24). The ver- prefix thereby echoes the status of the hourglass which is also buried or 'vergraben'. This is a double or 'deep' burial, whereby the hourglass is buried in 'peonyshadow', and 'you' are buried in the sand of the hourglass. Where Hill's glass 'cell' refracts the 'bright particles' in order that 'the purest apprehension' might take 'corporeal shape', Celan's 'stundenglas' is a figure for 'that empire', 'the Reich' which saw millions of bodies murdered, buried, 'trapped in sand'.<sup>124</sup> At times it is uncertain whether these bodies are trapped in sand, or whether they are themselves sand; as it is made of sand and holds sand, the hourglass appears flexible enough a figure to signify both. Sand as the only trace of the dead is the focus of another poem in *Atemwende*.

The final lines of 'In Prague' ('In Prag') render the Jewish body as sand in the hourglass through a repetition of grotesque violence inflicted on the body after death: ' Bone Hebrew, / ground down to sperm, / ran through the hourglass / we swam through, two dreams now, tolling / counter time, in the

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<sup>121</sup> Celan, 'The Meridian', pp. 6–7.

<sup>122</sup> Zilburg, p. 52.

<sup>123</sup> Celan, *Breathturn*, trans. by Pierre Joris, 1st edn (Los Angeles: Sun and Moon Press, 1995). Hereafter cited parenthetically as *B* followed by page number.

<sup>124</sup> I refer here to an alternative translation by Yehuda Amichai, *Paul Celan, Glottal Stop: 101 Poems* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), p. 25, which makes this burial more explicit: 'they will inherit the Reich / where, / trapped in sand, you still / get whiffs of air'.

squares' (*SPP* 259/*GW* 2:63). Times collide here, as survivors of the Holocaust swim through the Prague Ghetto, which continues to hold traces of the dead. The final lines return to the opening of the poem, circling around the image of remains, which 'lay ash-image-true around us', however, the 'sperm' that animates this landscape seems to suggest a resistance to the future as a projection of the grave. As John Felstiner observes, 'Celan's lines end up "tolling / against time"'.<sup>125</sup> The potency of the sperm also functions as a reminder of the golem, the uncanny clay man of Prague created by Rabbi Loew in the sixteenth century to defend the Prague Jews from anti-Semitic attacks. The poem suggests a further connection to Loew by anchoring itself to a specific landmark of the city, 'Hradčany' Castle where the Rabbi was brought to a secret meeting with Emperor Rudolf II, and beneath which alchemists sought to turn base metals into gold.<sup>126</sup> The arcane assurances of Loew's hermeticism are undercut, however, by the negation and substitution of a failed transformation, the 'pure goldmakers-No' returns to the 'ash-image-true' (*SPP* 259/*GW* 2:63). Poem XXVI of *The Triumph of Love* also alludes to Hradčany but this time in mid twentieth-century Prague just before the annexing of Czechoslovakia by Hitler in 1938. Hill recalls the city as depicted by Expressionist painter Oskar Kokoschka who moved there in 1934 to escape the censorship of National Socialism in his native Vienna. Writing open letters and tracts against Nazism prior to and during his four years in Prague, Kokoschka is one of Hill's many exemplars of responsible public speech. Like the protection promised by Loew's incantation of the golem, the hopes of mid-century rhetoric are also reduced to 'common ash' (*T* XXVI).

If sperm replaces sand in the hourglass of 'In Prague' then ash is also a persistent image in the landscape of the poem. Tobias identifies ash in several of Celan's poems 'as the one remain that continues to circulate after all other traces of the Holocaust have disappeared or been eradicated.'<sup>127</sup> In 'Stretto' ('Engführung') from *Speechgrille* (*Sprachgitter*) the 'Asche. / Asche, Asche' is commanded to 'Go / to the eye', to penetrate another's body in order to be made visible. The conjunction of ash and eye signals the demand of the other to be acknowledged. Like Hill's 'bright particles' which must be 'picked up' by the 'wind' in order that they be apprehended, the ash here is caught in 'Gales, from

<sup>125</sup> Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 222.

<sup>126</sup> Felstiner, p. 222.

<sup>127</sup> Tobias, p. 17.

the beginning of time' and in this 'whirl of particles, the other' (*P* 140–153/*GW* 1:197–204). Another poem from the same collection, 'Streak' ('Schliere'), speaks of a 'Streak in the eye' as a 'sign borne through the dark', 'revived by the sand or (ice?)' (*SG* 99/*GW* 1:159).<sup>128</sup> Particles of ash and sand refracted in the eye or in the globe of the hourglass cause a visual disturbance akin to the anomalous geological dark or light streaks (schliere) found in igneous rock as the result of variance in the mineral composition of magma.<sup>129</sup> The process of 'liquification' during which schliere are formed in the rock-strata is suggestive for Tobias of traces or reminders of the dead.<sup>130</sup> The trace of the other in your eye that is manifest in Celan's 'eye-thou' thus compels a literal in-sight (*SG* 99/*GW* 1:159). Self-reflection of this kind that leads to a recognition of responsibility towards the other is what Hill describes as 'actuated self-knowledge, a daily acknowledgement / of what is owed the dead' (*T* CXIX). James Lyon suggests that 'Streak' was indeed designed to 'sensitize' the reader to 'the wounds and sufferings of Holocaust victims and survivors'. Celan wished to send the poem to Heidegger, with whom the poet had a fraught intellectual relationship, due to the fact that the German philosopher 'remained silent on the Holocaust and the persecution of Jews in his homeland'.<sup>131</sup> Although Celan's 'whirl of particles' and 'streak[s]' are materially 'the other', an other that demands to be seen and moved towards, these sedimentary phenomena also, like Hill's concretion of a 'conclusive / otherness', remain 'veil[ed]', impossible to 'grasp' fully in their abstraction (*T* VIII). In poem VIII, however, Hill speaks of the 'absolute' otherness of the 'origin-creating mind', the divine maker whom Celan conversely holds accountable for his absence in the events of the Holocaust. Both poets invoke divine making through a shared sedimentary lexicon of mud and clay as well as ash and sand.

In Hill's poem XI, the movement of the wind is no longer confined to the 'cell, of an hourglass', here '[a]bove Dunkirk' it transports another burning mineral deposit, 'oil-smoke' into the air. The 'wind / beginning to turn, turning on itself, spiralling, / shaped on its potter's wheel' again takes corporeal shape, this time 'the sheared anvil- / head of the oil-smoke column' (*T* XI). The orthographic

<sup>128</sup> Celan, *Speech-Grille, and Selected Poems*, trans. by Joachim Neugroschel (New York: Dutton, 1971). Hereafter cited parenthetically as *SG* followed by page number.

<sup>129</sup> See Tobias, p. 17–20 for the origin of Celan's metaphor in Franz Lotze's *Geologie* (1955).

<sup>130</sup> Tobias, p. 17.

<sup>131</sup> James K. Lyon, *Paul Celan and Martin Heidegger: An Unresolved Conversation, 1951–1970* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2006), pp. 66, 2.



shearing of 'anvil' from 'head' anthropomorphises the burning oil, as does the allusion to the Old Testament theme of the potter's wheel – 'We are the clay, and You our potter' (Isaiah 64:8, NASB). Biblical references to the potter's wheel can be understood in terms of what Elaine Scarry suggests of the scriptures more widely, 'narratives about created objects that enable the major created object, namely God, to describe the interior structure of all making'.<sup>132</sup> Human beings fashioned as pots on a 'potter's wheel' both describes the alterability of the embodied object and substantiates the existence of the 'primary' disembodied 'Artifact, God' – Hill's 'origin-creating mind'.<sup>133</sup> The alterable body is frequently invoked at times of disobedience or doubt, for instance Isaiah 45:9, 'Woe to the one who quarrels with his Maker. An earthenware vessel among the vessels of earth! Will the clay say to the potter, 'What are you doing?' Or the thing you are making say, 'He has no hands '? (NASB). Hill echoes these verses elsewhere: in *The Orchards of Syon* 'More sensual, more uncommitted clay, / our solicited Maker must make do with' (L), and in 'De Jure Belli Ac Pacis' (a poem in memory of a member of the German resistance, Hans Bernd von Haeften) the body is a 'stoup of clay' enlivened by 'Lucerna / the soul-flame' (VIII).<sup>134</sup> Yet if the maker is able to shape the vessel he is also free to break it, creation is conflated with wounding, and the body is consumed rather than inhabited by fire. The 'oil-smoke column', 'shaped on its potter's wheel' signals the unmaking of the human body to come in the 'fire-storm[s]' that 'were as yet unvisited / upon Judeo-Christian-Senecan Europe' (T XI). The absolute destruction of the body through burning is carried across the subsequent lines as Hill turns to the book of Daniel as a lens through which to view the 'intermittent terror' of destruction at Dunkirk, Leipzig, and Dresden. Yet the 'fiery furnace' of allied bombing in which the anti-Nazi politician Mierendorff perished in Leipzig failed to consume Daniel and his friends in the Old Testament. Thus, as Anthony Rowland points out, Daniel's 'specifically Jewish suffering (and triumph)' underscores the murder of millions of Jews who were not miraculously saved from the flames, thus 'draining' both the sacred text and Hill's poem 'of any sense of triumph'.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 181.

<sup>133</sup> Scarry, p. 182.

<sup>134</sup> Hill, 'De Jure Belli Ac Pacis', in *Canaan*, pp. 30–37 (p. 37).

<sup>135</sup> Anthony Rowland, *Holocaust Poetry: Awkward Poetics in the Work of Sylvia Plath, Geoffrey Hill, Tony Harrison and Ted Hughes* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), p. 76.

The failure of divine intercession is also recalled in Celan's references to the golem, another body conjured from dust and clay.<sup>136</sup> While the golem is traditionally a figure of salvation, Celan calls this messianic hope into question through the implicit power of the divine representative (the Rabbi) to both invoke and destroy the golem. 'To One Who Stood Before the Door' in *Die Niemandrose* refers to the original incarnation of the golem by 'Rebbe Loew' (SPP 171; GW 242–3). The poem describes a scene of creation and wounding through the symbol of circumcision. Circumcision (of 'soul' and 'word') delimits the 'dung-caked' and 'Bloody' origins of the 'chittering manikin' of the golem, a figure that is designated not quite human. As Jacques Derrida suggests of the poem, circumcision 'grants access to the community, to the covenant or alliance' yet it is also 'the circumcised who are [...] excluded from the community, put to death, or reduced to ashes: [...] at the first reading of a wound'.<sup>137</sup> The 'half- / baked' misbegotten golem attests to the power of his maker, but his traditionally mute or 'chittering' status distinguishes between imperfect human making and the absolute creative power of God.<sup>138</sup> The difference between the maker and the made is one of embodiment according to Scarry; the maker 'has no material reality' outside of the creation of a human body and 'the countless weapons that he exists on the invisible and disembodied side of'.<sup>139</sup> The mediating weapons here are the originary 'loins' of God, his priest, and the knife of circumcision, which like the 'oil-smoke column' in Hill's poem act as a sign of power, the power to make and unmake the human body. In the case of Hill's description of war, at one end of the weapon ('oil-smoke', 'fire-storm[s]') an unidentifiable, unnamed other is reduced to a body in pain. At the other end of the mediating weapon the pain of the other's body is converted into power.<sup>140</sup>

In Celan's 'To One...' circumcision is both a blessing and a curse producing another body in pain. Where there should be a 'hale- / making blessing' that will bring a hoped for health, there are only 'two / cripplefingers'

<sup>136</sup> See Cathy S. Gelbin, 'The Monster Returns,' in *Rebirth of a Culture: Jewish Identity and Jewish Writing in Germany and Austria Today*, ed. by Hillary Hope Herzog, Todd Herzog, and Benjamin Lapp (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), pp. 21–33 (p. 126).

<sup>137</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Sovereignities in Question: the Poetics of Paul Celan*, trans. by Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), pp. 62–3.

<sup>138</sup> William R. Newman, *Promethean Ambitions: Alchemy and the Quest to Perfect Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 186.

<sup>139</sup> Scarry, p. 200.

<sup>140</sup> Scarry, p. 56.

and 'the living / Nothing' inscribed on the 'soul' of 'this one'. Yet as Derrida suggests this body may also be 'the body of language' where the circumcision of the word is a necessary one: 'The German language [...] must be circumcised by a rabbi, and the rabbi becomes then a poet'. The final lines of the poem command:

Slam the evening door shut, Rabbi.

.....

Fling the morning door open, Ra- —

(*SPP* 171; *GW* 242-3)

The poem thus slams the 'door shut' on the 'Rabbi' in order to open it to the poet, who is to borrow Derrida's words, 'caesuraed in [his] origin, with the poem'. The question for the German-speaking Jewish poet is therefore: 'How can the German language receive circumcision [...] following the holocaust, the solution, the final cremation, the ash of everything? How is one to bless ashes in German?'<sup>141</sup> How to bless in language that is cursed also haunts Hill, and is perhaps encapsulated in his deployment of the praise and blame of epideictic rhetoric ('*Laus / et vituperatio*' [*T* XXIII]) throughout the sequence. For Hill there 'is an indecency in language' which may produce a 'hideously outrageous thing' if one attempts to make something (poiesis) out of such a brutal unmaking.<sup>142</sup> So when the poet recalls 'the scattering, the diaspora, / the shtetlach, ash-pits, pits of indigo dye', even the cut or caesuraed word, 'even broken speech presumes' (*T* XVII). The challenge of Celan's language of ash, sediment and sand for Hill then is how his own poetry can presume to speak on behalf of the dead at all. The concluding section examines the tension between aesthetics and ethics in Hill's excavations of Celan, and his concern to resist 'victim-art' in these invocations of the other.

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<sup>141</sup> Derrida, pp. 62–3.

<sup>142</sup> Hill, interviewed by Blake Morrison, 'Under Judgement' in *New Statesman* 2551, February 2 1980, pp. 212–4 (p. 213).

## 6. The Limits of Ethics and Aesthetics

As Schwyzer suggests, writers and scholars might be said to perform a kind of 'necromancy' when they attempt to speak with or on behalf of the dead. This conjuring effect is what Hill attempts with the mythological remains of Offa in *Mercian Hymns* and with Kenelm in *The Triumph of Love*. The aesthetic potency of invoking these *genius loci* as embodiments of local attachment is evident when the poet has a specific 'name to conjure with' (*MH* II), but what of the ethics of such conjuration when what is at stake are not the sacrificial archetypes of myth, but history's numerous unnamed victims? This chapter began by contesting the assumption that Hill's excavations are predicated on unearthing an *archē* which functions as an assurance of the poet's mastery of language and selfhood, and his ability to invoke correspondences between a mythological past and contemporary events. The search for such an origin may be figured as the 'primary' rock in geology, or the buried shard in archaeology, but whatever its form, the *archē* always contains a remnant or trace of human existence. Conjuration relies on the *archē* as a kind of talisman that guarantees a connection between different temporalities, as the dead are invoked in order to prophesy the present or near future. Thus as I have suggested, *genii loci* such as Kenelm are unearthed for their ability to function as sacrificial types that prefigure later antitypes. The mythical past is thereby understood as a pattern or model for subsequent historical events. If the *archē* that guarantees the poet's correspondence between past and present is a mythological 'name', a tutelary presence, then the risk is that the real lives eradicated by events of history are like Kenelm's domain of Coventry, poetically rendered to 'legendary dust' (*T* VII my emphasis). The demand that Celan's sedimentary poetics makes on Hill is to rupture the typology that would make history subject to myth, and renounce the poetic mastery that would conjure the ash, sand and dust, which represents the victims of twentieth century war and atrocity.

When Celan writes in 'Psalm', 'No one moulds us again out of earth and clay, / no one conjures our dust. / No one. // Praised be your name no-one.' (*P* 179/*GW* 1:225) one might hear such an imperative against the aesthetic conjuring of the dead. Yet the conjuring ('bespricht') of dust in 'Psalm' is like Rabbi Loew's double-edged invocation of the golem, a blessing and a curse, which suggests that for post-Holocaust psalmists like Celan or Hill poetry is a

necessary form of intercession even if it offers no real consolation. Jean Boase-Beier's observation that the competing meanings of 'bespricht' are lost in its various translations into English is helpful here. In German the word has at least four meanings including, to speak about, to call up, to cast out or ban, and to cure.<sup>143</sup> Boase-Beier argues that the ambiguity of Celan's use of 'bespricht' reflects the equally ambiguous 'bystander' (the 'no-one') in the poem. Now an established figure in Holocaust scholarship, the 'bystander' has broadened to encompass a range of positions, from those who could have spoken out but didn't, victims who live with survivor guilt, and later generations who avert their gaze or simply neglect to actively remember. Celan addresses the absent Judaeo-Christian God as such a figure when he intones 'Praised be your name no-one', but as Boase-Beier points out 'Psalm' also requires the reader to occupy the position of bystander and thus to acknowledge the ethical ambivalence between speech and silence. She glosses:

[T]he differences between to speak about (if no-one speaks of our dust, we are forgotten), to call up (if no-one puts us together, like the golem was put together out of earth and clay, then we are physically no longer existent), to cast out (no-one is able to get rid of the aftermath, the dust that remains after our extermination, and so we are here forever), and to cure (we are forever infected with what happened to us) [...] and their coming together in the word 'besprechen' [...] suggest an ambiguous state of mind: we are not spoken about, we are not reborn, we can never disappear or be healed.<sup>144</sup>

The term 'bespricht' thus expresses two sets of ostensibly incompatible meanings: 'if no-one speaks of our dust, we are forgotten', yet 'dust' remains regardless of the bystander's remembrance or forgetting. Similarly if 'no-one puts us together, [...] then we are physically no longer existent' but there is at the same time no act of remembrance that will resurrect the dead, nor is there any possibility of fully atoning for the 'Guilts [that] were incurred' (*T II*). Hill writes himself into this ambivalent position of the bystander in *The Triumph of Love*:

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<sup>143</sup> Jean Boase-Beier, 'Bringing Together Science and Poetry: Translating the Bystander in German Poetry After the Holocaust', *Comparative Critical Studies*, 2.1 (2005), 93–105 (p. 100). In the original German the lines read: 'Niemand knetet uns wieder aus Erde und Lehm / niemand bespricht unsern Staub. / Niemand. // Gelobt seist du, Niemand'. Neugroschel in *SG* translates 'bespricht' as 'incants' (p. 183), while Pierre Joris in *Paul Celan: Selections* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), gives 'evokes' (p. 78).

<sup>144</sup> Boase-Beier, pp. 100–101.

too young to participate in the events of World War Two except as witness to 'Coventry ablaze' from the hills above Romsley, the poet must respond to the demands of Celan's 'besprechen', remembering the dead with answerable speech but with due recognition that while 'Penitence can be spoken of' it 'is itself beyond words' (*T XVII*). For Hill, forms of remembrance require judiciousness in speech and recognition of that which is 'beyond words'; a discernment that 'the lyric cry' might be 'Incantation or incontinence' (*T CXLV*), close to 'cant' as the poet says elsewhere (*CXXV*), or a lack of self-restraint.

This is a different relation between speech and silence than Heidegger's silence on the Holocaust that arguably provoked Celan's poem 'Schliere'. Nevertheless speech and silence still pose an ethical dilemma for the bystander who has not known the 'silence of the Shoah', 'of total obliteration', as Hill avers in 'Language, Suffering and Silence'.<sup>145</sup> He says, '[i]f we weep it is to be in the right place; when we speak we are to speak advisedly; our taciturnity or silence, must be able to moderate itself. Weigh More's 'esteemed very light of your tongue' against 'it is a desperate state, to be speechlesse'. Both are true'.<sup>146</sup> In a discussion of the ethics of this essay, David-Antoine Williams suggests that Hill's writerly oblation does not usually take place on the 'plane' of 'silence'. How can Hill, 'at a remove' from both the 'silence' of 'final resistance' and of 'survival', Williams asks, 'acknowledge his debt to the dead without encroaching on them; how can he contain the unspeakable and the unsayable in poetry without causing offence?' The answer is that the poet is 'deeply sceptical that he can' even if he 'holds out a hope, against hope, of the possibility of ethical language that meets its own demands for justice'.<sup>147</sup> There is a tinge of overbearing querulousness in this demand which the poet recognises: 'Obnoxious chthonic old fart' he remonstrates with himself (*T XXXIV*), 'Even now, I tell myself, there is a language / to which I might speak and which / would rightly hear me', the language known 'elsewhere as justice' which 'is met also in the form of silence' (*XXXV*).

For Hill language 'must' in some sense be sufficient to 'moderate itself' whether in speech or silence. As the stratum that registers the injustices of its misuse as well as its ethical potential, the efficacy of language cannot depend

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<sup>145</sup> Hill, 'Language, Suffering, Silence', p. 399.

<sup>146</sup> Hill, 'Language, Suffering, Silence', p. 395.

<sup>147</sup> David-Antoine Williams, *Defending Poetry: Art and Ethics in Joseph Brodsky, Seamus Heaney, and Geoffrey Hill* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 201.

on the mastery of the poet alone. In this Hill echoes Celan's claim in his Bremen Prize speech for the agency of language to save itself (and by extension the poet) against all odds.

Only one thing remained reachable, close and secure amid all losses:  
language. Yes, language. In spite of everything, it remained secure against loss.  
But it had to go through its own lack of answers, through terrifying silence,  
through the thousand darkneses of murderous speech. It went through. [...]   
Went through and could resurface, 'enriched' by it all. [...] In this language I  
tried, during those years and the years after, to write poems: in order to speak,  
to orient myself, to find out where I was, where I was going, to chart my  
reality.<sup>148</sup>

Celan insists that his native German, the language that went through a 'thousand darkneses' can remain 'secure against loss' and be made not only to confront atrocity, but also to function as a linguistic ground for the subjectivity of those it had cast out with anti-semitic speech. By deciding to write his post-war poetry in German rather than the other languages available to him (Romanian or French for example) Celan 'refuses' as Beth Hawkins observes, to give murderous speech 'another victory by silencing the original voice of the dead'.<sup>149</sup> Language goes 'through' this 'terrifying silence' and 'resurface[s]' secured for the poet who must then subject it to another form of pressure, a circumcision of the word, which is expressed in poetic devices such as caesura and neologism. Celan's coining of words in German increases throughout his later work, the opacity and strangeness of many of these terms confront the concealing euphemisms of Nazi neologisms such as *Endlösung* (Final Solution) and *judenrein* (clean of Jews) that entered the German language during the 1930s and 40s.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> Celan, 'Speech on Occasion of Receiving the Literature Prize of the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen', in *Collected Prose*, ed. and trans. by Rosemarie Waldrop (Manchester: Carcanet, 2003), pp. 33–36 (p. 34).

<sup>149</sup> Beth Hawkins, *Reluctant Theologians: Franz Kafka, Paul Celan, Edmond Jabes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), p. 78.

<sup>150</sup> See Felstiner, 'Translating Paul Celan's "Todesfuge": Rhythm and Repetition as Metaphor', in *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the 'Final Solution'*, ed. by Saul Friedländer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 240–258 (p. 242), for an anecdote about Celan's response to a friend concerning his commitment to write poems in a 'language that fashioned *Endlösung* and *judenrein*, slogans meant to obliterate such things in his poetry'; Also cited in Hawkins p. 77.

Hill agrees that '[l]anguage under the kind of extreme pressure which the making of poetry requires, can on occasion, push the maker beyond the barrier of his or her own limited intelligence'. This would be the basis of a 'theology of language' for Hill, if he were to propose one. It would require the capacity of language to move beyond the limitations of self and towards an other. This would be achieved when a 'shock of semantic recognition', such as those caused by the defamiliarising action of Celan's compound or caesuraed words, brings with it a 'shock of ethical recognition'.<sup>151</sup> Examples of this unsettling of language (and along with it the reader) are everywhere in Hill, and in the work of poets that he emulates such as Celan or Hopkins – neologism, diacritical marks, rhetorical devices, attention to pitch and cadence comprise a few. 'Atemwende' ('breathturn') is a significant neologism of Celan's that bears on speech and silence, and which Hill borrows and repeats in six of the seventy-two cantos of *The Orchards of Syon*; it is no coincidence either that Hill's prominent interlocutor in this collection is Hopkins, that other practitioner of semantic shock.

In 'The Meridian' address, Celan deploys 'Atemwende' to describe the moment where poetic language falls unexpectedly silent, at the caesuraed word, or between units of sound.

[I]t is a terrifying falling silent, it takes away his – and our – breath and words. Poetry: that can mean an Atemwende, a breathturn. Who knows, perhaps poetry travels this route – also the route of art for the sake of such a breathturn? Perhaps it will succeed, as the strange [...] for this single short moment? Perhaps here, with the I – with the estranged I set free here and in this manner – perhaps here a further Other is set free?<sup>152</sup>

Recalling the 'terrifying silence' of 'murderous speech' in the poet's Bremen address, this 'terrifying falling silent' 'takes away' the 'breath and words' of the listener who must confront the horror of the Holocaust that resides in this pause. The 'Atemwende' instigates a turn towards the other out of this 'moment', and propels the poem on its 'route' through figural language towards the rupture of its own image as art. Celan's suspicion of image and metaphor is significant here as further manuscript notes reveal, for it is 'Not the motif, but

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<sup>151</sup> Hill, 'Language, Suffering, Silence', pp. 404–405.

<sup>152</sup> Celan, 'The Meridian', p. 7.



pause and interval, but the mute breath-auras, but the cola [that] guarantee in the poem the truth of such an encounter'.<sup>153</sup> The value of 'Atemwende' for Celan is not for its carefully wrought status as image or motif but as the silent 'truth' of an encounter between one human and another that is guaranteed by an exchange of breath – inspiration and exhalation. This is not to say that it is possible to avoid the metaphoricity of 'breathturn' as an image that registers the moment between speech and silence. Rather as Tobias suggests 'the metaphors that a poet chooses for language determine in turn the kinds of claims his texts can make about themselves'.<sup>154</sup> As a neologism, 'Atemwende' suggests itself as something straining beyond extant figural language, its 'origin' is like the cola of scriptural poetics, not 'aesthetic but respiratory', and its purpose is not mimesis but an encounter with the other.<sup>155</sup>

Celan refers to cola several times in his manuscripts notes as a paraphrase for 'breathturn'. The term refers to a group of prosodic clauses (singular colon), which in Hebrew biblical poetry are separated by natural pauses in breathing rather than visual punctuation, due to the sung nature of the verse. Celan's elaboration of 'breathturn' in 'The Meridian' speech, his poetry, and his manuscript notes echo Buber's and Rosenzweig's use of such breathing rhythms in their translation of the Hebrew Bible into German (1925–1929).<sup>156</sup> It is also strikingly similar to Buber's formulation of breath as 'the word' that operates between 'I and Thou', a fact that is perhaps unsurprising given Celan's veneration of the Jewish-German scholar.<sup>157</sup> It is worth quoting an extract at length here to observe the influence on Celan's thought.

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<sup>153</sup> Celan, MS C23, 3, in *The Meridian*, ed. by Bernhard Böschenstein and Heino Schull, p. 128.

<sup>154</sup> Tobias' argument here is that the frequency of landscape images in Celan's poetry expresses the 'idea that language is an infinitely extending space that can be configured in different ways' (p. 3).

<sup>155</sup> Ernst Simon, 'Martin Buber and German Jewry', in *Year Book III of the Leo Baeck Institute of Jews from Germany* (London: East and West Press, 1958), pp. 3–39 (p. 37). Simon remarks on the use of cola in the Buber-Rosenzweig Bible 'as a special rhythm, the origin of which is not aesthetic but respiratory, that is, fitted to the division of the scripture into segments divided according to the tempo of reading aloud' (p. 37); Also cited in Maurice Friedman, *Martin Buber's Life and Work*, 3 vols (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), II, 61.

<sup>156</sup> For further discussion of breath rhythms in the Buber-Rosenzweig translation see Zachary Braiterman, *The Shape of Revelation: Aesthetics and Modern Jewish Thought* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), pp. 105–110.

<sup>157</sup> Martin Buber, *I and Thou* (London: Continuum, [1923] 2004), p. 36. For discussions of the influence of Buber's *I and Thou* on Celan's dialogic theory of language see James K. Lyon, 'Paul Celan and Martin Buber: Poetry as Dialogue', *PMLA*, 86.1 (1971), 110–120; and Friedman, 'Paul Celan and Martin Buber: The Poetics of Dialogue and "The Eclipse of God"', *Religion and Literature*, 29.1 (1997), 43–62. Neither Lyon or Friedman note the similarities between Celan's and Buber's concept of breath.

Spirit in its human manifestation is a response of man to his Thou. Man speaks with many tongues, tongues of language, of art, of action; but the spirit is one, the response to the Thou which appears and addresses him out of the mystery. Spirit is the word. And just as talk in a language may well first take the form of words in the brain of the man, and then sound in his throat, and yet both are merely refractions of the true event, for in actuality speech does not abide in man, but man takes his stand in speech and talks from there; so with every word and every spirit. Spirit is not in the I, but between I and Thou. It is not like the blood that circulates in you, but like the air in which you breathe. Man lives in the spirit, if he is able to respond to his Thou. He is able to, if he enters into relation with his whole being [...] Only silence before the Thou – silence of all tongues, silent patience in the undivided word that precedes the formed and vocal response – leaves the Thou free [...]<sup>158</sup>

Like Buber's 'true event', Celan's encounter between I and the Other can only take place in the turning of breath, the space between two clauses or sounds, or the air which simultaneously separates and joins two breathing bodies. Celan's workbooks also contain annotations on his reading of Buber and the concept of breath. Here, however, the emphasis is on the gasp of 'breath' that takes place in the 'dark, and the readying silence' that occurs when the violence of 'murderous speech' is confronted.<sup>159</sup> Celan departs from Buber's analysis of the 'undivided word' insofar-as post-Holocaust language always requires a circumcision; the 'strange' and 'estranged' neologism or caesuraed word provides the kind of semantic shock that guarantees an ethical recognition. It is not from Celan's perspective 'silent patience' and trust in the efficacy of the divine or 'undivided word' that ultimately 'leaves the Thou free'.

The caesuraed word that interrupts speech is the condition for 'mute breath-auras', the 'terrifying silence' that Celan was convinced should occur when 'I' stands in recognition of its responsibility before the 'Other'. Atemwende as image, and in its other forms (Atemkristall – breath-crystal, Atemseil – breath-rope) is not a metaphorical end in itself for Celan, its true end is in the encounter. This encounter, as the epigraph poem to this chapter recalls, takes

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<sup>158</sup> Buber, pp. 36–7.

<sup>159</sup> Celan, MS Workbook II, 15, in *The Meridian*, ed. by Bernhard Böschstein and Heino Schull, p. 129. Celan translates and glosses Buber ('till there comes the great shudder, the holding of the breath in the dark, and the preparing silence') from *I and Thou*, p. 89.

place 'in the air' that we breathe, and in which the 'remains' of the dead circulate in traces of ash, sand and sediment, present in both 'breath-and-clay' (*SPP* 395/*GW* 1:290). This claim of encounter is that which Celan's sedimentary poetics makes about itself, and the condition that he argued all poetry after the Holocaust should register. Whether this is a duty that poetry can be expected to bear or not, it is certainly a responsibility that lies at the heart of Hill's poetics. The difficulty with Hill's appropriation of *Atemwende* is that it arguably fails to live up to this demand, in that it seems to make its presence felt more strongly as an image that adumbrates the poet's 'body of England', than as an encounter with his precursor, or an 'Other'.

In three of the six cantos in which it occurs, 'Atemwende' punctuates line-endings or beginnings. It first appears twice in canto XXVII, the second instance caesuraed across two lines.

Wintry swamp-thickets, brush-heaps of burnt light.

The sky cast-iron, livid with unshed snow.

I cannot say what it is that best  
survives these desolations. Something does,  
unlovely; indomitable as the mink.

[...]

Nothing prepares us  
for such fidelity of observation,  
I would observe. Nothing to be struck out  
of like finalities. *Atemwende*,  
CELAN almost at last gasp, *atem-*  
*wende*, breath-hitch, say; or HARDY, *The Souls*  
of the Slain. According to my  
palimpsest, always the first despairing  
calculation shows through. Frozen  
irresolution, eternal stasis;  
wintry swamp-thickets, brush-heaps of burnt light,  
the sky cast-iron, livid with unshed snow.  
(OS XXVII)

Here the term refers to Celan's suicide three years after the publication of the collection *Atemwende*: 'Atemwende, / CELAN almost at last gasp, *atem-* / *wende*, breath-hitch, say'. Now numbered as one of the dead, of which his own

poetry speaks, 'CELAN' becomes a name for Hill to conjure with as the breathturn comes to stand for the poet's 'last gasp'. Despite its various translations – 'breath-hitch' (XXVIII), 'catch-breath, breath-ply' (XXXI), 'breath-fetch' (XXXII), 'turn / of breath' (XXXVI), 'breath-glitch' (LI) – 'Atemwende' is not freely amplified in the canto, rather it is embedded between the epanaleptic opening and closing lines, which like Romsley, are framing images of Hill's 'body of England'. If Celan's sedimentary poetics expose the familiarities of Hill's home landscape to the uncertainties of erosion, here they seem to serve only the representation of a Northern English winter landscape in 'eternal stasis'.

Yet as well, these 'wintry swamp-thickets, brush-heaps of burnt light' and 'the sky cast-iron, livid with unshed snow' recall several poems from Celan's *Atemwende* collection: 'Threadsunns / above the grayblack wastes' (*B* 'Threadsunns' 85; *GW* 2:84), and 'the penitent's snow' where 'a breathcrystal' waits engraved in 'the timecrevasse', a geological sign of 'your unalterable / testimony' (*B* 'Eroded' 95; *GW* 2:31). It is perhaps Celan's 'breathcrystal' ('Atemkristall') of witness that 'survives' the 'desolations' of Hill's ice-ashen landscape; 'Something does, / unlovely' the poet avers. '[U]nlovely' returns us to another etched 'oblation', the 'burin-and-acid griming' of Georges Rouault's equally 'desolate' etching of World War One, *Miserere*, in poem XII of *The Triumph of Love*. '[E]ven there' the poet concludes 'it seems we must be brought / hard up against the unlovely / body of Aesthetics' (*T* XII). This 'unlovely' thing that survives the dead, the 'Atemwende' engraved into the landscape of Hill's poetry, risks impoverishment as part of his 'body of Aesthetics'.

Wainwright observes both the 'word-play' and the 'wintry' imagery that accompanies the appearance of 'Atemwende' in Hill's cantos. The former, he claims, signals an anxiety over the translation of 'Atemwende' into the English language, while the particularly English winter landscapes amplify Celan's 'breathturn' to suggest an 'involuntary reflux' of 'cold' catching the 'breath' in a 'moment of arrest, breath taken away in an astonishment that breaks up the ordinary'. It is also as he observes, the gasp that accompanies 'the threat or shock of death'.<sup>160</sup> While suggestive, this brief digest of 'Atemwende' is like Hill's translation of the term into his own poetics, somewhat domesticating, in

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<sup>160</sup> Wainwright, p. 122.

that it co-opts Celan's opaque metaphor for language into further discernible images of the Hill's 'England', his 'Orchards of Syon' (OS XXXII).

This is England; ah, love, you must see that;  
her nature sensing its continuum  
with the Beatific Vision. Atemwende,  
breath-fetch, the eye no more deceived,  
beggars translation. Her decencies  
stand bare, nor barely stand. In the skeletal  
Orchards of Syon are flowers  
long vanished; I will consult their names.  
Climate, gravity, featherlight aesthetics,  
pull us down. The extremities of life  
draw together. This last embodiment  
indefinitely loaned, not quite  
the creator's dying gift regardless.  
Clear sky, the snow bare-bright. Loud, peat-sodden  
the swaling Hodder [...]  
(OS XXXII)

Even if as Hill acknowledges, the term 'beggars translation' it must, in the spirit of Celan's poetics, carry the originator's breath. It is in this sense that we might read the concluding lines of this canto: 'Atemwende' is for Hill the 'last embodiment' of his precursor 'indefinitely loaned' but 'not quite / the creator's dying gift regardless.' Re-cadencing Celan comes with a responsibility to acknowledge the claims that words like 'Atemwende' make on language; it might not be an unconditional gift with which the poet can do as he pleases, 'regardless.' We are reminded too of the 'gravity' of language for Hill and his determination to excavate its heavy mass. Any hope that the medium of air contained in 'breath-fetch' might lift the poet's words out of the morass of language is undermined as even 'featherlight aesthetics, / pull us down.' For Celan 'Atemwende' was supposed to push the poem to the limits of aesthetic form and free it from the constraints of mimesis. Either Hill doubts the ability of language to perform in this way, or he recognises the difficulties that occasion his domestication of Celan's linguistic strategies.

Despite the ethical potential of Celan's sedimentary discourse, there nevertheless remains an irreconcilable fissure between a poet (Hill) who advocates digging down into the deep strata of selfhood and language, and Celan who has the Jewish prisoners in 'Todesfuge' repeatedly shovelling 'a grave in the air' (*SPP* 31/*GW* 1:39–42). For Celan neither the 'root' of self nor of language is ultimately grounded in any particular landscape, but is instead dispersed in the air, or present as a streak in the eye. Hill's excavations must therefore acknowledge not only the limits of appropriating this sedimentary lexicon, but also (as Celan repeatedly insists) the limits of language itself, and the attendant difficulties of translating either Celan's neologisms or his abstractions of landscape onto this 'body of England'. 'You could render / atemwende as breath-glitch' the poem protests, 'Speak in whispers' (*OS* LI): Hill's excavations of Celan, his etymological digging in the language of rock and stone moves through responsible speech towards silence but in the final analysis 'even [this] broken speech presumes' (*T* XVII).

The next chapter examines another poet known for his continual traversing of 'home' – Ciaran Carson. Unlike Hill, however, most discussions situate Carson's poetics at the surface of landscape, rather than beneath it. The next chapter considers the presence of a 'world turned upside down' topos in Carson's work, which it argues, disrupts the temporal and spatial coherence not only of Belfast, but also of the various 'local attachments' of the poet's literary precursors.

## II. *The world turn'd upside down: Ciaran Carson's Parodic Inversions and Stratigraphic Reversals*

Where is the ice? And how can he be lodged  
upside-down? And how, in so little time  
could the sun go all the way from night to day?  
—*Inf.* XXXIV, 103–5<sup>1</sup>

In Equivocal Worlds Up & Down are Equivocal  
—William Blake, 'Notes on Illustrations to Dante's "Divine Comedy"'<sup>2</sup>

### 1. Introduction

Ciaran Carson's preoccupation with the shifting topography of city space, and his continual return to Belfast as a ground for these imaginative geographies is now a critical commonplace. Cartography, toponymy, storytelling as labyrinth, and walking as narration are some of the recurrent tropes for the convergence of writing and urban space that commentators have identified in his poetry and prose.<sup>3</sup> This chapter argues that one topos which remains under-explored in Carson's writing is that of a 'world turned upside down'. Stan Smith touches on the reversal of worlds in his discussion of Carson's 'ambilocation', which is the 'matter of being always in neither place, or of being between places, or of being always in one place which may be Belfast, but also at the same time in many other places, dis-located, relocated, mis-placed, displaced, everywhere and nowhere.'<sup>4</sup> An example of this 'everywhere and nowhere' can

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<sup>1</sup> Dante Alighieri, *Dante's Inferno*, trans. by Mark Musa (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> William Blake, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. by David V. Erdman (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell, 1988), p. 690.

<sup>3</sup> For a broad ranging account of space and place in Carson see Alexander, *Ciaran Carson*. For cartography and pedestrianism see John Goodby, "'Walking in the city": Space, Narrative and Surveillance in *The Irish for No* and *Belfast Confetti*', in *Ciaran Carson: Critical Essays*, ed. by Elmer Kennedy-Andrews (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009), pp. 66–85; Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, 'Carson, Heaney and the Art of Getting Lost', in *Ciaran Carson*, ed. by Kennedy-Andrews, pp. 227–253; Temple Cone, 'Knowing the Street Map by Foot: Ciaran Carson's *Belfast Confetti*', *New Hibernia Review*, 10.3 (2006), 68–86. For the motif of the labyrinth see Kathleen McCracken, 'Ciaran Carson: Unravelling the Conditional, Mapping the Provisional', in *Poetry in Contemporary Irish Literature*, ed. by Michael Kenneally (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1995), pp. 356–72; Conor McCarthy, 'Ciaran Carson's Labyrinths', *English*, 54 (2005), 99–116.

<sup>4</sup> Stan Smith, 'Cruising to the Podes: Ciaran Carson's Virtual Realities', in *Ciaran Carson*, ed. by Kennedy-Andrews, pp. 106–124 (p. 106).

be found, Smith suggests, in the 'Saturnalian' inversions of *The Twelfth of Never* (1998) in which 'the world is turned upside down', or as Carson puts it in his fusion of East and West, the 'Podes and / Antipodes'.<sup>5</sup> For Smith, however, this topsy-turviness is understood as a secondary product of ambilocation, or what he has called elsewhere a 'topos of betweenness, interstitiality'.<sup>6</sup> This chapter contends that Carson's use of a 'world upside down' topos manifests itself elsewhere in terms of excavation, in the form of parodic inversions and stratigraphic dislocations or reversals of both landscape and literary *descent*. By examining Carson's engagements with Heaney and Edward Thomas in *On the Night Watch*, and his refractions of Dante in *Inferno*, and *The Star Factory* (1997), it demonstrates that the poet intertwines parody and stratigraphy to disturb the neat layering of space, time and literary genealogies that conventions of archaeological poetics might otherwise posit.

Carson's work is not usually understood in archaeological terms; indeed his work is often opposed to Heaney and Hill in this respect. The arguments made here augment existing accounts that focus on Carson's mobile street-level poetics, by establishing a critical framework for examining the poet's use of excavatory strategies and subterranean perspectives. The chapter establishes a connection between parody and stratigraphy by suggesting that Carson uses parodic form as an 'archaeological' tool, which as Margaret Rose suggests enables a literary text to excavate, transform and recreate a preceding text 'within itself'.<sup>7</sup> It argues that the poet is able to disrupt existing representations of place in the target texts by deploying parody's ability to hollow out a parallel space (*para*). Parody always requires altering some aspect of the target text for comedic or critical effect. In his translation of *Inferno* Carson achieves this by overlaying Dante's Florence/Dis with his own native Belfast. This is not a straightforward stratification of one twenty-first-century location over an earlier medieval landscape, however. Carson's dislocations serve to amplify the mis-mappings of Dante's original, and are further refracted through the prism of numerous literary *descents* via Dante that have preceded his own. The source or ground of Carson's diabolic landscape is therefore continually shifting and difficult to navigate. This problem with the stratification

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<sup>5</sup> Smith 'Cruising to the Podes', p. 118; Carson, *First Language* (Oldcastle: Gallery Books, 1993), p. 72.

<sup>6</sup> Smith, *Poetry and Displacement*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), p. 9.

<sup>7</sup> Margaret A. Rose, *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-modern*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 90, 273.



of place and literary history extends to Carson's deployment of the 'world upside down' topos in *On The Night Watch*. Here Carson undermines the equation of depth with past time, and surface with present time, found in the excavatory poetics of precursors such as Heaney, or Edward Thomas. Carson's parodic homage to these masters of plough and spade forestalls the impulse of archaeological poetics to forge a vision of origins and cultural continuity from its finds. Carson's reverse stratigraphies overturn the principle of superposition that regulates conventional stratigraphic relationships by ploughing shards back into the soil and depositing the detritus of the present beneath older strata. The poet's comic inversion thus creates a coexistent space alongside these texts, a world turned upside down, in which narratives of descent and tropes of excavation can be critically explored.

## 2. Critical Contexts: Beneath and Beyond Belfast

This section introduces existing critical frameworks that situate Carson's work in the context of space, place and landscape. In the first full-length study of Carson's oeuvre, Alexander asserts the centrality of spatial themes, locating these in the context of the 'importance of place and identity for Northern Irish poetry' more generally.<sup>8</sup> Like other commentators Alexander proposes walking as a figure for writing in Carson's work. Moreover the poet's 'street-level engagement' with Belfast's 'contingent and multiple specificities' is understood as a challenge to the bird's-eye perspective that seeks to organise the urban landscape as legible space.<sup>9</sup> Alexander brings two concerns into focus here that frame many discussions of Carson's work: the landscape of Belfast, and the poet's mobile street-level encounter with city-space. Born in Belfast in 1948, Carson has continued to live and work in the city for most of his life. Belfast is an abiding presence in his writing and the point of departure for the poet's engagements with other spaces and places that form part of the city's global nexus. As Alexander points out, Carson's protagonists also find it difficult to escape Belfast, and are often restricted to the south-west of the city, circumscribed by the compass points of Black Mountain, the River Lagan,

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<sup>8</sup> Alexander, *Ciaran Carson*, p. 16.

<sup>9</sup> Alexander, *Ciaran Carson*, p. 107.

Carlisle Circus, and Andersontown.<sup>10</sup> Where the city limits are transcended, Belfast operates as a 'lens upon the world', a way of 'domesticating' what is unfamiliar about other places. Yet at the same time the analogies that Carson invokes between places always exceeds possible representations, revealing a Belfast that is for Alexander, 'dynamically unsettled, internally plural and self-estranged'.<sup>11</sup> Smith also acknowledges Carson's ability to be both in Belfast and many other places simultaneously, or in neither place, 'everywhere and nowhere'.<sup>12</sup> Similarly for Fran Brearton this sense of being in two places at once links Belfast to other militarised locations, as the city opens out to wider geographical contexts and 'alternative time-zones' in the 'global theatre' of empire and war. Carson's charting of the Crimean battlefields in *Breaking News* (2003) is for example prefigured in the street names of 'Belfast Confetti' (Balaclava, Raglan, Inkerman) from which the protagonist cannot escape.<sup>13</sup>

However, the force of such a domesticating strategy installs contemporary Belfast as the site in which other places converge and obtain their full meaning. This elision of space and time tends to ignore the specific resonance of other places, particularly rural locations beside or beyond Belfast that do not fit into the urban framework within which Carson's work is generally read. Indeed while the poet remains engaged with his native city, his recent work has moved away from the urban Belfast landscape to explore new sites, nearby rural edge-lands (*On the Night Watch* 2009) and other more geographically distant locations (*Breaking News* 2003, *For All We Know* 2008). Rural images in early collections such as *The New Estate* (1976) have been understood either as inconsistent with Carson's later urban poetics or as 'a tongue-in-cheek rendition of romantic stereotypes' such as the *dinnseanchas* tradition favoured by precursors like Montague or Heaney.<sup>14</sup> While parody is a technique that Carson uses to overturn traditions of writing landscape, his evocations of Belfast's rural edge-lands must be understood as more than a straightforward dismissal of earlier or contemporary poetics of place. As this chapter suggests a parodic text is never entirely severed from its target, and so

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<sup>10</sup> Alexander, *Ciaran Carson*, p. 87.

<sup>11</sup> Alexander, *Ciaran Carson*, pp. 46, 49.

<sup>12</sup> Smith, 'Cruising to the Podes', p. 106.

<sup>13</sup> Fran Brearton, 'Mapping the Trenches: Gyres, Switchbacks and Zig-zag Circles in W. B. Yeats and Ciaran Carson', *Irish Studies Review*, 9.3 (2001), 373–386 (p. 373).

<sup>14</sup> Alexander, *Ciaran Carson*, p. 39. *Dinnseanchas* is Irish for place-lore.

remains in a state of ambiguity; the relationship between precursor and parodic inversion is always one of both transformation and transmission.

Carson's engagements with literary precursors are knowing and multi-faceted. Alexander points out that the poet's perverse use of misquotation, and piling up of literary and non-literary allusion, make it difficult to situate his work in any 'stable framework of literary-historical explanation'. Furthermore he suggests that even if the critic gains some insight into Carson's 'reading habits' or his cornucopia of 'influences' these serve more to destabilise 'literariness and canonicity' than to affirm it.<sup>15</sup> Alexander is undoubtedly correct to point out the slipperiness of Carson's allusions, but he arguably displaces the need to further examine their specific literary-historical resonances by situating the poet in a lineage of spatial rather than poetic precursors. This genealogy of spatial theory connects the poet to thinkers like de Certeau and Benjamin, and while the parallels that Alexander makes here illuminate Carson's response to urban space, they do not necessarily explain the poet's engagement with rural traditions of landscape poetry signalled by the presence of Edward Thomas in *On the Night Watch*.

For Alexander the poet's ground-level perspective is analogous to de Certeau's politicisation of spatial practice where every day activities such as walking resist the 'scopic authority' and omniscience of the surveyor, planner or architect.<sup>16</sup> Carson himself locates his work in such contexts; the opening paragraph of Benjamin's *Berlin Childhood around the Turn of the Century*, serves as an epigraph for part one of *Belfast Confetti* (1989).

Not to find one's way about in a city  
is of little interest ... but to lose one's  
way in a city, as one loses one's way in  
a forest, requires practice ... I learned this  
art late in life: it fulfilled the dreams  
whose first traces were the labyrinths on  
the blotters of my exercise books.  
(BC 14)<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Alexander, *Ciaran Carson*, p. 154.

<sup>16</sup> Alexander, *Ciaran Carson*, p. 76.

<sup>17</sup> Carson, *Belfast Confetti*, (Winston-Salem: Wake Forest University Press, 1989). Hereafter cited parenthetically as *BC* followed by page number.

Commenting on this well-known appropriation Alexander notes that Carson shares Benjamin's 'fascination with the politics of the everyday' and 'adopts' a similar 'strategy of writing texts that model their formal structures upon the city and urban spaces'.<sup>18</sup> Losing oneself in the labyrinthine yet planned cityscape requires effort, and such deliberate errancy constitutes a recognisable spatial practice that eschews the cartographic or organised bird's-eye view of space. Alexander observes Benjamin's response to the surface texture of the city in *The Arcades Project* (1999) ('streetcorners, curbstones, the architecture of the pavement') in Carson's resistance to aerial perspectives.<sup>19</sup> He gives the example of the poem 'Box' from *Irish for No*, which presents a poetic persona whose sleep is disturbed by the recollection of a homeless 'man with a cardboard box / perched / On his head'; 'don't ask me what was in there' the speaker states, 'that would / take / A bird's-eye view' (*IfN* 43).<sup>20</sup>

Jonathan Stainer points out, however, that Carson does sometimes adopt elevated or panoramic viewpoints.<sup>21</sup> In 'Ambition' the speaker climbs Black Mountain with his father to look out over the city of Belfast from which they have momentarily escaped. Nevertheless as Alexander suggests even moments like these deny the mastery of a strategic aerial perspective as 'smoke obscures // The Panorama' (*BC* 27).<sup>22</sup> These modes of being at ground-level or at least resisting elevated viewpoints offer a rebuttal to the spatial mastery attributed to poets such as Heaney and Hill whose scopic excavations might be seen to penetrate earth and language in a manner that parallels the gaze of de Certeau's 'voyeur-god', who looks down on the city from the summit of the World Trade Centre.<sup>23</sup> It is no surprise then that Carson's mobile spatial practice is often situated against Heaney's archaeological mode.<sup>24</sup> Carson's representations of the city are variously put forward as deterritorialising,

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<sup>18</sup> Alexander, *Ciaran Carson*, p. 89.

<sup>19</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. by Rolf Tiedemann, trans. by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 517; also cited in Alexander, *Ciaran Carson*, p. 91.

<sup>20</sup> Carson, *The Irish for No*, (Winston-Salem: Wake Forest University Press, 1987). Hereafter cited parenthetically as *IfN* followed by page number; also cited in Alexander, *Ciaran Carson*, p. 91.

<sup>21</sup> Jonathon Stainer, 'The Possibility of Nonsectarian Futures: Emerging Disruptive Identities of Place in the Belfast of Ciaran Carson's *The Star Factory*', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 23.3 (2005), 388–9.

<sup>22</sup> Alexander, *Ciaran Carson*, p. 112.

<sup>23</sup> De Certeau, p. 93.

<sup>24</sup> See Kennedy-Andrews, 'Carson, Heaney and the Art of Getting Lost'; and Rand Brandes, 'The Dismembering Muse: Seamus Heaney, Ciaran Carson, and Kenneth Burke's "Four Master Tropes"', *Bucknell Review*, 38.1 (1994), 177–94.

decentring, characterised by a street-level dynamism, whereas Heaney is seen to reterritorialise space, in an excavatory search for a lost *omphalos* or ground of being.<sup>25</sup> Archaeological depth, one of the master-tropes of high modernism arguably still at work in the vertical trajectory of Heaney's excavations – is implicitly overturned in Carson's street-level engagements with the city as a surface of perpetual re-inscription.<sup>26</sup> The ground-level spatial practice that Alexander and others outline thus provides a compelling lens through which to view Carson's representations of urban space. Nevertheless by emphasising the surface texture of Carson's poetics, perhaps to avoid associations between the poet and these archaeological precursors, commentators overlook his preoccupation with other spaces, those that lie beneath and beyond the city. Benjamin was of course equally fascinated by subterranean space as well as pavements and street-corners, as his writing on excavation and memory, and his references to Dante's infernal city in *Berlin Childhood* indicate.<sup>27</sup>

Like Benjamin, Carson views his native city through the prism of Dante's Dis but a preoccupation with the subterranean aspects of Belfast (sewers, underground rivers, geological foundations) appears much earlier in his work, prefiguring the modes of parodic inversion and reverse stratigraphy that I document in this chapter. These excavations proceed via the conventions of archaeological poetics, unearthing memories and histories in the primal scene of a childhood landscape. However, where Heaney might seek a coherent or deep self in the bodies and buried shards preserved in the wet acidity of Danish/Irish peat bogs, the alluvial substrate of Belfast offers Carson no such assurances of permanence.<sup>28</sup> The short prose essay 'Brick' from *Belfast Confetti* provides a parodic etymology of the city's geological and architectural foundation.

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<sup>25</sup> Kennedy-Andrews 'Carson, Heaney and the Art of Getting Lost', p. 227. Kennedy-Andrews adopts the terms deterritorialize, reterritorialize and nomadic from Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983).

<sup>26</sup> See McHale on Heaney as an inheritor of the modernist archaeological mode.

<sup>27</sup> Benjamin, 'Excavation and Memory', in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings and others, 4 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002–5), II.2: 1931–1934 (2005), pp. 576–594 (p. 576).

<sup>28</sup> While the bog bodies that found their way into Heaney's poetry are of course unearthed from Danish peat-bogs, these locations are displaced onto a Northern Irish context particularly in *North*.

Belfast is built on *sleech* – alluvial or tidal muck – and is built *of* sleech, metamorphosed into brick, the city consuming its source as the brickfields themselves were built upon; sleech this indeterminate slabbery semi-fluid [...] this gunge, allied to *slick* and *sludge*, *slag*, *sleek* and *slush*, to the Belfast or Scots *sleekit* that means sneaky, underhand, not-to-be-relied-on, becoming, in the earnest brick, something definite, of proverbial solidity. (BC 72)

The soft estuarine clay that underlies much of central Belfast in depths of up to seventeen metres was a useful mineral for the city's early brick makers. Today, however, 'this indeterminate slabbery semi-fluid' has proven itself to be an unstable foundation for the built environment and modern infrastructure of the city. Neither, as Carson is keen to point out, is Belfast's substrate a reliable metaphoric ground on which to construct a coherent sense of place or self. This excavation of Belfast's '*brack*' or brick shit substrate is also a digging about in language that parodies Heaney as an 'etymologist of roots and graftings'.<sup>29</sup> As John Kerrigan suggests, the 'mock etymological earnestness' of this piece 'does not find meaning in a bog but discovers a swamp in philology'.<sup>30</sup> Home, roots, and the certainties of place are disrupted by the endless revision and recycling of the city where the waste rubble of demolished buildings has been 'poured into the sleech of the lough shore to make new land; vast armies of binmen or waste-disposal experts laboured through the years transforming countless tons of brock into *terra firma*; the dredged-up sludge of the Lagan became Queen's Island, that emblem of solid work and Titanic endeavour' (BC 73). Carson's project exceeds the human scale of Heaney's bog bodies, requiring an archaeological method of industrial proportions to match the 'Titanic endeavour' of the 'binmen' and 'waste-disposal experts' who created Queen's island. Rather than finding buried shards or remains that might be reconstructed to restore a culture to itself, Carson's recycled brock disrupts a neat trajectory between past and present, revealing a society built on rubbish. 'Question Time', another prose piece from the collection, sees this 'junk sinking back into the sleech and muck' like the doomed Titanic built on Queen's Island: 'Pizza parlours, massage parlours, night-clubs, drinking-clubs, antique shops, designer studios momentarily populate the wilderness and the blitz sites; they too will vanish in the morning. Everything will be revised' (BC 57). The

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<sup>29</sup> Heaney, 'Glanmore Sonnets' V, in *Field Work* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), p. 37.

<sup>30</sup> Kerrigan, p. 159.

provisional nature of Belfast is also captured in the sleet brick of the city, whose broken shards have become the 'tried and trusted', 'ammunition' of 'rioters' – 'belfast confetti' as it is locally known (*BC 72*). Whereas Heaney turns to the permanence of iron age bog bodies to uphold continuities of Northern Irish landscape and identity in the context of political turbulence, Carson exploits the unstable post-glacial foundations of the city to effect the reverse – the contingencies of being and place. Thus, for Carson, Belfast's 'ongoing dispute as to what it was, what it is and what it might become, has provided a ground – a shifting ground, like the sleet on which the city is built – for the exploration of other modes of being, other possibilities'.<sup>31</sup> The sunken fragments of Belfast's past form the architectural fabric of the present and future city, which always and already harbours its own ruination. In this perpetually recycled city the expected archaeological order is turned upside down, as the artefacts of 'pizza parlours' and 'antique shops' amalgamate and sink to the bottom of Carson's re-stratified dig.

As Falci has suggested, Carson transforms 'the excavatory model' of predecessors and contemporaries such as Montague, Heaney and Hill.<sup>32</sup> The 'stratigraphical textures' and 'overlapping structures' of his work register the 'experiential flux of the city' and the 'multiple narratives and histories that constitute it'.<sup>33</sup> Thus unlike his precursors, Carson's excavations tend to be mobile rather than static, ranging over various sites rather than focussing on one spot of earth. Indeed this convergence of walking and writing characterises Carson's engagement with the subterranean space of *Inferno*, unsurprising perhaps given Dante's own journey of literary descent. The following section elaborates a model of excavation that goes beyond the imbrication and flux that Falci suggests are present in Carson's work. It sets out the intersecting excavatory strategies that the poet deploys to turn the archaeological models of his precursors upside down – parodic inversion and disordered or reverse stratigraphies.

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<sup>31</sup> Carson, interviewed by Kennedy-Andrews, 'For All I Know', in *Ciaran Carson*, ed. by Kennedy-Andrews, pp. 13–27 (p. 19).

<sup>32</sup> Falci, p. 217.

<sup>33</sup> Falci, p. 212.

### 3. Strategies of Excavation: Parody, Disorder, Stratigraphy

The figurative tools of archaeological poetics are usually traditional agricultural implements – spade, plough, coulter – not strictly archaeological tools at all, at least as far as a modern dig is concerned. In *On The Night Watch* we find such implements, although remote imaging and surveillance technologies also appear in the poet's arsenal of tools. Yet before s/he even begins digging the poet, like the archaeologist, must select a site for excavation, and this requires another set of tools and methods. For this purpose the archaeologist employs various field survey methods including reconnaissance walks over wide areas, surface artefact collecting, random sampling, remote sensing, and a range of geophysical techniques. These methods are combined with existing historical analyses, and knowledge or experience of particular locations. In selecting sites for his textual excavations Carson employs similar methods, assembling his poetry and prose from the artefacts and detritus that he mentally collects from the urban landscape as he moves through its labyrinthine streets.

These pedestrian field surveys enable the poet to observe, record and map traces of previous occupation, thus creating a palimpsest of the city. Carson's intertexts are not simply linguistic appropriations then, but also spatial dislocations, as the poet takes Dante's medieval Florence/Hell, Heaney's rural North, and Thomas' early twentieth-century rural England, and maps these locations onto his already complex stratification of Belfast and its edge-lands. The strata of the resulting textual landscapes are always difficult to navigate as the poet deliberately mis-maps one place onto another. The landscape of Carson's *Inferno* reads as a disordered sub-terrain that refracts other literary *descents* (Eliot, Yeats, Joyce Heaney) which makes it hard to tell whose version of Hell we are in at all. The parodic strain of the text raises questions about the poet's position in this genealogy of literary descent, which emerges again in his comic imitation of Heaneyesque digging in *On the Night Watch*. What initially appears to be a straightforward parody of Heaney's archaeological poetics turns out to be a more complex recapitulation of Thomas' poetry from Edna Longley's edited collection of his work. Carson's parodic gesture towards his precursors in this collection operates by transforming certain principles of poetic excavation: the recovery and interpretation of finds, and the relationship



between past and present as it is stratified in the layers of the dig. The poet either finds nothing to interpret in the empty space that he digs out, or he locates abandoned artefacts from the present, deep beneath older strata. Carson's tools may include the traditional plough and spade but his methods of parodic inversion and stratigraphic disruption put conventions of archaeological-poetic mastery into crisis by reasserting the disjunction between past and present in the discontinuous layers of his textual dig. His inversions and reversals thereby excavate a parallel space or *para* from within the target texts, a world turned upside down, in which these subterranean journeys and archaeological models can be transformed and renewed.

In *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-modern* (1993) Rose describes parody as an 'archaeological' tool, one which enables a literary work to analyse and 'reflect upon' another, but which also excavates its own structure, transforming and recreating the target text 'within itself'.<sup>34</sup> Carson's parodic archaeologies recreate and transform these earlier writings, from Dante's infernal cartographies, to the lyric spadework of Thomas and Heaney. If Heaney famously digs with his pen, Carson's excavatory tool of choice is parodic form. Critics have commented on the intertextuality of Carson's style and his parodic responses to Heaney's work in particular. Alexander notes that Carson 'goes out of his way to parody Heaney' in the poem 'All Souls' from *First Language* (1993).<sup>35</sup> Here Heaney's account of military invasion in 'The Toome Road' is lampooned by Carson's science-fiction invaders from 'Planet X' who approach noisily on 'their heavy Heaney tyres'.<sup>36</sup> This is an example of parody as literary genre, the comic imitation of style and form at the level of the individual poem. A more complex instance of parody which operates at the level of language itself is apparent in Carson's inter- and paratextual allusions and citations.<sup>37</sup> An early example of this in Carson's work is the title poem of *The Irish for No* (1987), which interweaves references from Heaney's early poetry and Keats' 'Ode to a Nightingale'. Corcoran finds only a critique of the romantic 'luxuriance' of Keats and the 'sensorial opulence' of Heaney. However, Patricia Horton asserts that Carson's 'parodic stance' complicates the poet's relationship to

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<sup>34</sup> Rose, pp. 90, 273.

<sup>35</sup> Alexander, *Ciaran Carson*, p. 101.

<sup>36</sup> Carson, *First Language*, p. 40; also cited in Alexander, *Ciaran Carson*, p. 101.

<sup>37</sup> Eamonn Hughes notes that Carson's 'inter-, intra- and paratextual play is itself part of [his] thematics'. Hughes, "'The mouth of the poem': Carson and Place", in *Ciaran Carson* ed. by Kennedy-Andrews, pp. 86–105 (p.104).

'literary tradition'.<sup>38</sup> Horton's recognition that Carson's intertexts reveal correspondences as much as oppositions to his literary precursors opens up parody beyond its more obvious function as a comic critique of the ostensibly serious *dinnseanchas* tradition. Recent collections such as *On the Night Watch* and *The Inferno* confirm the tongue-in-cheek inversions of parody as a significant poetic mode for Carson, but one that works at the level of language as well as in the individual poem. Parody is considered here then as both a generic device that functions largely via comic imitation and as a medium which operates within language itself, excavating a critical space alongside the texts and places which it takes as its target.

Most commentators agree on the dual etymology of parody, which derives both from *parodia*, a genre of Greek mock-heroic narrative poem, and *parodos*, singers who imitated the Homeric rhapsodists. The entrance of the term into modern discourse is generally attributed to Julio Cesare Scaliger who characterised *parodia* as the ridiculous inversion of rhapsody in his *Poetics* (1561), thus establishing subsequent generic definitions.<sup>39</sup> Rose suggests that this influential account led subsequent critics to reduce the comic element of parody to the category of burlesque, and thus dismiss it as a low form. Such negative characterisation has arguably persisted in modern literary criticism. The dismissal of parody as burlesque has produced another opposing but equally limited account; Rose observes that critics such as Linda Hutcheon have dismissed the significance of its 'comic effect' in an attempt to 'save parody from such denigration' and to expand its 'meaning and function to cover' other inter- and meta- textual forms characteristic of postmodernism. Instead Rose is keen to stress that parody integrates comic effect with the 'transmission of complex and serious messages' through textual play.<sup>40</sup> Thus, para- inter- and

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<sup>38</sup> Neil Corcoran, 'One Step Forward, Two Steps Back: Ciaran Carson's *The Irish for No*', in *The Chosen Ground: Essays on the Contemporary Poetry of Northern Ireland* (Bridgend: Seren Books, 1992), pp. 213–36 (p. 214); Patricia Horton, 'From Romantic to Postmodern: Imagining the Real in the Work of Ciaran Carson', *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, 25 (1999), 337–51 (p. 337); See also Mary Fitzgerald-Hoyt, 'Grounding Keats's *Nightingale*: Ciaran Carson's "The Irish for No"', *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies*, 19.2 (1993), 76–80.

<sup>39</sup> My discussion relies mainly on Rose; and Agamben, 'Parody', in *Profanations* (New York: Zone Books, 2007), pp. 37–51; For other accounts see Gerard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997); Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000); Simon Dentith, *Parody* (London: Routledge, 2000); Nil Korkut, *Kinds of Parody From the Medieval to the Postmodern* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009).

<sup>40</sup> Rose, pp. 28–29.

metatextual effects are not in themselves necessarily parodic, but must be accompanied by comic inversion in the context of serious parody.

Rose suggests that comic effect is partly achieved through the use of 'counterfeit' as a device to play with readerly expectations. The parodist counterfeits or imitates the original text, before interrupting the expected form or content through the insertion of comic disjunctions. Thus parody not only critiques the target text but calls into question the very possibility of imitation, origin and copy, through the 'structural use of comic incongruity'. The doubling of origin and copy extends to a series of further oppositions that are immediately recognisable as characteristics of parody: 'serious' / 'absurd', 'high' / 'low', 'ancient' / 'modern', 'pious' / 'impious'.<sup>41</sup> These contrasts serve to distinguish the parody from the target text, but are also co-located in the parodic work itself. The parody is never wholly in opposition or separate from the target text, but is always constituted in relation to it, and so contains opposition or ambivalence within itself. Such internal ambiguity is apparent in Carson's frequent and comic use of paratextual allusions which complicate the poet's relationship to the literary texts and traditions that he excavates. This ambiguity is contained in the prefix *para* (beside or beyond) which signals a combination of critique and acknowledgement, but also 'the creative expansion into something new'.<sup>42</sup>

Agamben also observes that parody is not structured as opposition but rather in terms of contradiction, as the resulting new text 'cannot claim to be identified with the parodied work', even though it necessarily takes place 'beside' it.<sup>43</sup> He turns to the being 'beside' of parody to its textual object in order to dismantle the generic functions that Rose outlines. By returning to underdeveloped ideas in Scaliger – the rhapsody of the Homeric poets, and comic parabasis – Agamben is able to address the limits of generic definition (such as the distinction between comic/serious) and explore the way that parody might interrupt language and being. He claims that in the classical world parody belonged to the realm of musical technique:

This definition made a distinction between song and speech, *melos* and *logos*.

In Greek music, in fact, melody was originally supposed to correspond to the

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<sup>41</sup> Rose, pp. 29–33.

<sup>42</sup> Rose, p. 51.

<sup>43</sup> Agamben, *Profanations*, p. 40.

rhythm of speech. In the case of the recitation of the Homeric poems, when this traditional link is broken and the rhapsodes begin to introduce discordant melodies, it is said that they are singing *para tēn ōidēn*, against (or beside) the song. [...] According to this more ancient meaning of the term, then, parody designates the rupture of the 'natural' bond between music and language, the separation of song from speech. [...] It is, in fact, precisely this parodic loosening of the traditional link between music and logos that made possible the birth of the art of prose with Gorgias. Breaking this link liberates a *para*, a space beside, in which prose takes its place. This means that literary prose carries in itself the mark of its separation from song.<sup>44</sup>

Parody is more than just a literary genre then, it disrupts the bond between song and speech liberating a space in which prose becomes possible. This archaeology of the term does not merely stop at the birth of prose, however, as the space that parody creates is opened up beside all language, and is therefore 'the very structure of the linguistic medium in which literature expresses itself'. According to Agamben then, 'parody is the theory – and practice – of that in language and in being which is beside itself – or, the being-beside-itself of every being and every discourse'. He thereby charts the emergence of parody from its infancy as a literary genre to its apotheosis as the 'only possible truth of language'. This trajectory is evident in Carson's parodic digging where what appear as generic examples of comic inversion, belie a more complex excavation of literary tradition. The parodic 'opening of a space' beside language and being, is, however, a 'space that must remain rigorously empty' as it fundamentally 'expresses language's inability to reach the thing'.<sup>45</sup> This process of hollowing out undermines the seamlessness of language and the coherence of being, making parody central to Carson's excavations. Unlike Heaney's archaeological sites, which are littered with poem-shards that attest to the poet's mastery over language and the self, Carson's excavated spaces turn out to be in Agamben's terms 'rigorously empty'.

If parody is one way in which Carson can reinterpret the shards of previous archaeological poetics, then it is also the sign under which his translation of Dante's *Inferno* already stands. Agamben suggests that Dante is

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<sup>44</sup> Agamben, *Profanations*, p. 39.

<sup>45</sup> Agamben, *Profanations*, pp. 46–50.

the exemplar of the 'parodic strain' in all Italian literary culture, and its twentieth-century descendants.

All poets are enamored of their language. But usually something is revealed to them through the language that enraptures them and occupies them so completely: the divine, love, the good, the city, nature.... With the Italian poets [...] something peculiar happens: they become enamored with their language alone, and this language reveals nothing to them but itself. And this is the cause [...] of something else that is peculiar, namely that the Italian poets hate their language as much as they love it. That is why, in their case, parody does not simply insert more or less comic content into a serious form, but parodies language itself so to speak. It thus introduces a split into language [...] The persistent bilingualism of Italian literary culture [...] certainly has a parodic function in this sense. [...] [W]hat is essential in each case is the ability to introduce into language a tension which parody uses to install, as it were, its central power source.<sup>46</sup>

That Dante established the vernacular as the language of Italian epic poetry is well-known. Agamben's claim that the object of Italian poetry thus becomes language itself (after Dante) is also borne out by the linguistic trajectory of the *Commedia*. Maria Fumigalli points out that 'Dante's gradual emancipation from the *auctoritas* of Latin' is illustrated by the correspondence between the dark wood (*selva*) in which the poet finds himself at the beginning of *Inferno*, and the *ytalia silva* (Italian wood) of dialects in which he searches for a noble vernacular when writing *De vulgari eloquentia*.<sup>47</sup> The ambivalence towards language that Agamben finds in Italian poetry more generally is also seemingly instituted in Dante's contradictory position towards Latin and the vulgate in *De vulgari*, where as Fumigalli suggests, the vernacular is the nobler form, compared with the *Convivio*, where Latin is superior due to its nobility.<sup>48</sup>

Doubleness in language appears as a 'split' which for Agamben suggests a 'dual tension' or 'duplication' of being'.<sup>49</sup> This split is always also a bond, for the parodic double occupies an intimate space 'beside' language and being. Fumigalli illustrates this sense of something that conjoins as well as splits when

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<sup>46</sup> Agamben, *Profanations*, p. 45.

<sup>47</sup> Maria Cristina Fumagalli, *The Flight of the Vernacular: Seamus Heaney, Derek Walcott and the Impress of Dante* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001), p. 10.

<sup>48</sup> Fumagalli, pp. 2–3.

<sup>49</sup> Agamben, *Profanations*, p. 49.

she says of the *Commedia* that Dante ‘seems less interested in establishing whether the vernacular, as opposed to Latin, has to be granted literary primacy than in proclaiming his absolute right to both languages (together with all the other available ones) in order to write his own poem.’<sup>50</sup> Language is described by Dante in the *Convivio* through the familial cleaving of one to another, and the subsequent cutting of a bond that is required for the poet to be born.

This vulgar tongue of mine brought together my two parents, for they conversed in it, even as the fire disposes the iron for the use of the smith who makes the knife, Wherefore *it is plain* that my *native* tongue had a share in begetting me, and thus is, in a sense the cause of my being. Moreover, this my native speech ushered me into the path of knowledge which is our final perfection, in so far as I began Latin with her aid, and with her aid I learned it, Latin which afterwards opened the way to go onwards.<sup>51</sup>

Born from the vernacular, and ‘ushered’ into Latin, the poet enters the duality of language, which opens a way ‘onwards’. While this seems like a smooth and linear transition to a nobler end of ‘final perfection’, we are immediately reminded by the metaphors of journeying (‘path’, ‘way’) that Dante’s passage through language requires a spiralling descent into an infernal landscape populated by inmates who suffer parodic punishments for their earthly deceit and double-crossing. Though vernacular language might be the ‘cause’ of the poet’s ‘being’, the doubleness of language is present from the beginning, and in the figurative descent into an increasingly material underworld.

In the foreword to his translation of Brian Merriman’s eighteenth-century Gaelic poem *The Midnight Court* (2005) Carson echoes this Dantescan ambivalence about a ‘first’ language: ‘I hesitate to call myself a native speaker: true, Irish is, or was, my first language, but I learned it from my parents for whom it was a second language’ (*MC* 14).<sup>52</sup> Carson’s typical prevarications make Irish paradoxically a second language before it is a first. The poet lays claim to both, and Irish, like Dante’s vernacular Italian enables access to a

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<sup>50</sup> Fumagalli, p. 15.

<sup>51</sup> Dante Alighieri, *Convivio*, trans. by William W. Jackson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), pp. 64–5.

<sup>52</sup> Brian Merriman, *The Midnight Court*, trans. by Ciaran Carson (Oldcastle: Gallery Press, 2005). Hereafter cited parenthetically as *MC* followed by page number.

parallel world. Echoes of the dark woods and divergence from the straight path of *Inferno* are evident here, as Carson makes his 'way through the translation': 'it sometimes seemed to me that I entered that other world where it is always nightfall [...], and I make my way through a dark wood before emerging into a mountainy region where a few lights glimmer on the hillside. These are the houses where the word-hoards are concealed' (MC 14). This delving into language (the poet's own or one foreign to him) is a descent into an underworld that exists alongside. Yet Carson comes too close to Heaney here for us not to notice the parodic appropriation of his precursor's 'word-ward'. 'Lie down in the / word-ward, burrow / the coil and gleam / of your furrowed brain' commands the older poet in 'North'.<sup>53</sup> It is no accident either that 'North' is the title poem of the collection that gave rise to Carson's infamous accusation of Heaney as a 'mythifier' and 'laureate of violence'.<sup>54</sup> Carson's belated retort in *Midnight Court* takes the shine off Heaney's 'word-ward': 'Sometimes I would work past midnight, or lie sleepless, haunted by an elusive phrase. I would get up and scribble the words down; often, when I looked at them in the morning they would crumble into dust, like jewels brought back from an enchanted realm, that cannot bear the light of this world.'<sup>55</sup>

Carson's lampoon of the 'word-ward' serves as a pressing reminder that mastery over language is less assured than Heaney's lines might imply. Agamben suggests that comic inversion such as this is integral to serious parody. In the *Commedia* serious parody 'aims to produce a double that is almost equal in dignity to the passages of sacred scripture that it reproduces'.<sup>56</sup> This ambivalence of reverence and profanity, acknowledgement and repudiation, structures the intimate relation between the poet and his precursors. As Carson's parodic excavation hollows out a space (or double) beside its target texts, it makes a serious challenge to literary traditions of writing place, whether those places are imagined as infernal cities or rural edgelands.

Carson finds that these spaces are either empty, contain treasures than 'crumble into dust', or they only offer up detritus of the present which is perversely buried beneath older strata. His parodic method thus extends to a

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<sup>53</sup> Heaney, *North* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), p. 20.

<sup>54</sup> Carson, 'Escaped from the Massacre?', *The Honest Ulsterman*, 50 (1975), 183–6 (p. 183).

<sup>55</sup> Carson, 'Foreword', in *The Midnight Court*, pp. 9–18 (p. 14).

<sup>56</sup> Agamben, *Profanations*, p. 45.

comic inversion of conventional modes of archaeological poetics that rely on a seamless relationship between depth-as-past and surface-as-present. As I have noted, this relationship is expressed in geology and archaeology via the principle of stratigraphy and Steno's law of superposition which determines that sedimentary rocks are laid down chronologically in horizontal strata, with the oldest layer on the bottom.<sup>57</sup> Stratigraphic analysis in archaeology thus investigates finds according to their chronological deposition in layers or strata. A similar temporal relationship underpins much poetic excavation, so Heaney's 'first stratum' is Old English, and the early medieval coins of Hill's Offa lie beneath the detritus of the poet's own childhood in *Mercian Hymns*.<sup>58</sup> The stratification of one spot of earth enables these poet-excavators to construct a series of connections across time and place whereby contemporary (and future) concerns exist as direct corollaries of a mythic past. However, in order to maintain the correlation between depth-as-past and surface-as-present as a metaphor for temporal, spatial and cultural continuity such poetics tend to iron out the instabilities and discontinuities of the stratigraphic record. The actual stratigraphy of archaeological sites sometimes violates the principle of superposition as natural or man-made disturbances of the sedimentary layers disrupt the seamlessness of the temporal sequence. This dislocation is known as 'reverse stratigraphy', and often occurs when soil from another location has been used to fill, or construct ancient buildings on top of even earlier sites of human activity. When such sites are excavated the discontinuities of the dig can lead to erroneous conclusions. Reverse stratigraphy on a smaller scale can be difficult to detect, as heavy objects such as coins can be transported to different strata by their own weight or by animal activity.<sup>59</sup>

Carson effects a similar disruption of the stratigraphic relationships that archaeological poetics relies on to forge correspondences between past and present. *On the Night Watch* unearths artefacts only to see them ploughed back into the soil, whereas Heaney's emphasis on the plough as a reliable tool of poetic archaeology overlooks the way in which such cultivation can disturb the stratigraphic coherence of the landscape. Carson takes this disruption of spatial and temporal contiguity further by inverting the stratigraphic record altogether.

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<sup>57</sup> See Harris, *Principles*, pp. 30–31.

<sup>58</sup> It is worth noting, however, that the continuity of time is not straightforward in either Hill or Heaney, as the present collides with various pasts.

<sup>59</sup> William R. Biers, *Art, Artefacts and Chronology in Classical Archaeology* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 19.



As with the sinking sleet-brick buildings of Belfast, modern constructions in *On the Night Watch* are deposited beneath older strata as mock ruins. Here Carson echoes Benjamin's excavatory strategies in *Berlin Childhood*, and *The Arcades Project*. Glossing Benjamin's description of the arcades as a 'prehistoric landscape of consumption' Richard Sieburth contends that Benjamin understood the 'historian's task as a palaeontological excavation of the fossilised (or reified) relics of capitalist consumerism'.<sup>60</sup> He suggests that while this archaeological imaginary echoes other modernist descents (Pound, Joyce, Eliot, or the 'psychic strata' of Freud), Benjamin counters the logical trajectory of excavation 'by situating the archaic' not in 'some remote place' or the past, 'but at the very heart of the familiar, in the uncanny passage of modernity into instant antiquity, instant ruins'. Thus for Sieburth, Benjamin's work performs a 'dialectical reversal' of modernist 'myths of descent (or descents into myth)' by unearthing these shards as historical 'products of concrete social and economic relations' rather than vestiges of mythical patterns at work in the contemporary. History, as the idea of progress, or as the cultural 'merchandizing of the New' must also be subject to this critical reversal, however, and is revealed to be no more than a 'degraded variant' of 'myth', the 'monotonous recurrence of the Same in the commercial guise of innovative change'.<sup>61</sup> Carson also challenges the relationship between archaeological poetics and myth by disrupting the conventional order of excavation in order to historicise the present as a site of ruination. Where *Belfast Confetti* renders teleological progress as myth through its image of a perpetually re-cycled city, the reverse stratigraphy of *On the Night Watch* takes place on the 'wasted land' that opens up beside the urban landscape of Belfast. Rural sites (fields, woods, wells) once excavated by precursors like Heaney or Thomas are dug over by Carson who finds that they are littered not with shards of the remote past, but with relics of his contemporary North.

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<sup>60</sup> Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, p. 993; also cited in Richard Sieburth, 'Benjamin the Scrivener', in *Benjamin: Philosophy, History, Aesthetics*, ed. by Gary Smith (University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 13-37 (p. 16).

<sup>61</sup> Sieburth, pp. 16-18.

#### 4. Parodic Mis-mapping: Carson's *Descensus ad Inferos*

This section examines Carson's twenty-first-century *descensus ad inferos* arguing that it intensifies the parodic inversion and mis-mappings of Dante's own model. I consider two parodic engagements with a Dantescan underworld in Carson's work: his rewriting of *Inferno*, which intentionally inter-stratifies Dante's Hell and medieval Florence with present day Belfast, and his prefiguring of this subterranean topos in the earlier prose work *Star Factory*. Carson uses parody to hollow out a parallel space alongside the locations of Dante's text, which he then populates with a specifically Northern Irish topography comprising surveillance towers and 'stinking bog[s]' (*Inf.* VI.12).<sup>62</sup> As Alexander notes Carson is 'adept' at furnishing the 'spatial environments and landscapes' of *Inferno* with particularly Irish landforms, including figural topography such as the 'gyre' (*Inf.* X:4, XIII:17, XXVIII:49) which he probably borrows from Yeats. Alexander also observes that the 'defensive spaces' and 'military barriers' (*Inf.* XVIII: 12, 15) of Carson's Malbolge echo the poet's earlier reference in *Belfast Confetti* to the surveilled city as Bentham's panopticon. Likewise the famously parodic Venetian shipyard of canto XXI recalls Carson's 'memories of Belfast's Queen's Island in its heyday'.<sup>63</sup> Rui Homem also points to the 'dislocation' of Carson's text, situating it in the context of Northern Irish translation, which more widely registers the instability of 'interlingual' and spatial 'relations that define the Irish experience'.<sup>64</sup> This sense of dislocation is arguably magnified in Carson's Belfast-inflected *Inferno* which according to Homem 'resists' the characteristic 'design and order' of Dante's text through its 'plurality of reference and linguistic resources'.<sup>65</sup> Homem seems to want to have it both ways here: on one hand he reads Carson's parody and paratextual play as a subversion of such design, yet he concludes that in the end, this 'juxtaposition of distinct places and times' serves only to magnify rather than undermine 'the sense of order' that necessarily obtains to an 'assumption' of

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<sup>62</sup> Dante Alighieri, *The Inferno of Dante Alighieri*, trans. by Ciaran Carson (London: Granta, 2002). Hereafter cited parenthetically as *Inf.* followed by canto and line number.

<sup>63</sup> Alexander p. 202.

<sup>64</sup> Rui Homem, *Poetry and Translation in Northern Ireland: Dislocations in Contemporary Writing* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 1. Both Homem and Alexander point out the etymology of translation as a spatial metaphor meaning variously 'displacement', 'transport' (Homem p. 1), or to 'carry across' (Alexander p. 175).

<sup>65</sup> Homem, p. 194.

Dante.<sup>66</sup> By sublimating Carson's parodic inversions and dislocations into a coherent design in this way, Homem insists on such consummate consistency in Dante's original. While I agree that Carson does indeed allow Dante to be his structuring guide, I suggest that Carson's parodic mis-mappings in these infernal landscapes are an intensification of the spatial disorder that already inheres in Dante.

John Kleiner observes that early illustrations of Hell which accompany versions of *Inferno* reflect this 'widely held conviction that Hell is an extremely ordered place designed by an extremely exacting poet.' He suggests the persistence of critical perspectives which elide an ostensible 'medieval "passion for order"' with Dante's design and tend to diminish the significance of 'imperfection, asymmetry and monstrosity' in the *Commedia*.<sup>67</sup> While modern translations generally eschew mapping Hell in 'miles and meters', scholars up until the seventeenth century believed that 'infernal cartography was a legitimate, if difficult science.'<sup>68</sup> One of infernal cartographies most well-known participants was Galileo Galilei, who calculated the location of the entrance to the underworld, the depths of its sea, and strength of its vaults.<sup>69</sup> Interest in infernal cartography may be accounted for by the rise of spatial mapping and representation during this period, but Kleiner also suggests that the emphasis on perfect ratio, harmony and ideal geometries in these early maps parallel what the cartographers understood as Dante's vision of a divinely proportioned underworld. The final measurements of the last six cantos provide the basis for these representations, as *Inferno* moves from qualitative to quantitative descriptions of hell. The eight measurements of these cantos can be used to calculate the circumferences of the ditches, the height of Satan and the giants, and the depth of the central well. However, Kleiner argues that this 'dense clustering of measurements' is neither a straightforward realist device nor 'accident'.<sup>70</sup>

In the course of Dante's descent, there is a continuous evolution toward more objective and exacting descriptions of the terrain. When the travelers pass

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<sup>66</sup> Homem, p. 197.

<sup>67</sup> John Kleiner, *Mismapping the Underworld: Daring and Error in Dante's Comedy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 3.

<sup>68</sup> Kleiner, p. 23.

<sup>69</sup> Kleiner, pp. 25–6.

<sup>70</sup> Kleiner, pp. 32–8.

through the gates of Hell in canto 3, the shadowy allegorical landscape of the dark wood is exchanged for a more stable, but still obscure, terrain. [...] Still deeper in the descent, when the travelers cross into the city of Dis, Hell is revealed as a coherently organized space articulated according to a clear plan. At the midway point in canto 18, Dante gets his first aerial view of this ordered landscape. [...] This gradual progression from the confusion of the dark wood to the clarity of lower Hell is especially striking because it is so unexpected. The poet has chosen to represent the surface of the earth as a dreamlike space existing nowhere and everywhere, while representing the otherworldly landscape as a realistic physical place whose shape and location can be charted and measured.<sup>71</sup>

Kleiner observes that by beginning in obscurity and moving towards clear vision, Dante reverses the trajectory of *Inferno's* Virgilian model. In *Aeneid* 6, the *descensus ad inferos* begins at a particular location above ground, the caves at Cumae, and ends in a disorienting otherworldly landscape which appears to have no fixed location. This reversal of the Virgilian pattern might be accounted for by the schema of conversion whereby the protagonist moves towards the truth, and therefore clarity of vision. However, Kleiner argues that the trajectory of *Inferno* is much more ambiguous. The conclusion of the infernal journey, he argues, does not bring the protagonist to a place 'where uncertainties are finally resolved and the risks of ironic reversal finally surpassed', as it is precisely at this point in the final circles when 'his own performance is put most at risk'.<sup>72</sup> Carson's *Inferno* appears to return to the Virgilian model by beginning in the specific location of Belfast:

Usually, I'd head for the old Belfast Waterworks, a few hundred yards away from where I live. The north end of the Waterworks happens to lie on one of Belfast's sectarian fault lines. Situated on a rise above the embankment is the Westland housing estate, a Loyalist enclave which, by a squint of the imagination, you can see as an Italian hill-town. ('Introduction to *Inf.*' xi)<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Kleiner, pp. 38–9.

<sup>72</sup> Kleiner, pp. 39–40.

<sup>73</sup> Carson, 'Introduction' in *The Inferno of Dante Alighieri* (London: Granta, 2002), pp. xi–xxi. Hereafter cited parenthetically as 'Introduction to *Inf.*' followed by page number in roman numerals.

The 'deeper' Carson gets 'into the *Inferno*' the more he feels compelled to walk through the 'blank abandoned spaces' of his own city, which feels as 'claustrophobic, cramped and medieval' as Dante's Florence ('Introduction to *Inf.*' xi–xii). By translating Dante's Florence into an Irish context, Carson begins to see the spaces and 'fault lines' of his native city more clearly. Conversely, although the poem's *descensus* begins in a clearly articulated space, it is one where vision must be deliberately distorted by a 'squint of the imagination'. The infernal landscape of this Northern Irish city gestures to the distorted perception and dislocation that already marks Dante's underworld, where nothing is exactly as it seems. Carson's conscious dislocations amplify what Kleiner discerns as deliberate mis-mapping in *Inferno*. In Dante's ambiguous and deceptive terrain he calculates, 'Satan is too tall for the space allotted him, Nimrod's head is too big for his body, the little bridges of the Malebolge are too long, and the deep pit at the center of the Malebolge is too shallow'.<sup>74</sup> These distortions of spatial relationship cause the protagonist to be confused about what he perceives in Hell, confusions that occur in the circles devoted to fraud and counterfeit. The concentration of these measurements in relation to the encounters with the fallen arts (Nimrod's failed architecture of Babel, Adamo's counterfeit coining) leads Kleiner to suggest that Dante's disordered landscape and landmarks parodically reveal the precariousness of his own poetic enterprise and 'pretensions' to divine justice.<sup>75</sup> An exemplary moment of distorted vision occurs in canto XXXI as the protagonist crosses the eighth circle, where he sees what appear to be 'towers' but are in fact 'giants'. As Homem points out, this is also the canto that Carson translated first, and one that shows the marked dislocation of Dante's Florence to contemporary Belfast.<sup>76</sup>

No sooner had my eyesight reached the target  
than I descried a group of high-rise towers.  
'What city's this?' I asked the master poet.

You're too much taken by your visual powers,  
said he, 'for what you see's an optical  
illusion, caused by looking from afar.

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<sup>74</sup> Kleiner, p. 47.

<sup>75</sup> Kleiner, p. 54.

<sup>76</sup> Homem, p. 193.

Wait for the close-up; it's incredible  
how much mere distance can deceive the eye;  
so let's move on, instead of standing still.

But just before we do, I'll clarify  
the picture for you, just to ease the shock.  
These are not towers. In fact, they're colossi;

And from the belly-down, they're stuck  
in this deep pit, as in some Irish bog,  
collectively immobilised by muck.'

(*Inf.* XXXI.19-33)

Now deep in the landscape of *Inferno* the poet-protagonist must squint, not to see an Italian hill-town but the contemporary skyline of Belfast. Homem observes the conjunction of Florentine towers and specifically Irish 'muck' which might allude to the Maze prison and the dirty protest of IRA prisoners in 1976.<sup>77</sup> Certainly the modern inflections of 'target' and 'high-rise' here suggest an urban militarised or surveilled space akin to Carson's experience of his native city. The question 'what city's this?' which appears in the original, is magnified as the reader is alerted to the presence of several places in the text – Florence, Dis, and Belfast. There are other incongruous word choices in Carson's rendering of this episode that further suggest Belfast. He translates Dante's 'gigantes' as 'colossi' rather than the usual giants, which emphasises their appearance as stone and their substance as flesh, but also alludes to an earlier poem 'Stone Hand' published in *The Irish Review*. Finding himself 'alone' in the oneiric space of the city, 'hemmed in by the Belfast labyrinth', the poetic persona of 'Stone Hand' imagines that the statues outside Belfast City Hall rise and walk the streets: 'It must have been the absinthe, / For everywhere the civic colossi were absent from their granite plinths'. Carson's repetition of 'colossi' in *Inferno* suggests that that the giants of the eighth circle are akin to these 'dignitaries of bronze and marble' who represent the language of officialdom, speaking in 'lapidary images of Parliament and Empire / That would not expire'.<sup>78</sup> As Horton observes, the 'civic colossi' of 'Stone hand' register Carson's concern with

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<sup>77</sup> Homem, p. 193.

<sup>78</sup> Carson, 'Stone Hand', *The Irish Review*, 15 (1994), pp. 110–11 (p. 110).

'language and power' and his resistance to a singular language such as that aspired to in the building of Babel, which here represents both the 'imperialist desire to dominate and colonize' and the 'attempt to build a unitary state'.<sup>79</sup> Where the giant Nimrod is 'immobilised' in the earth as a result of his pretensions to power, the statues of civic Belfast move with 'dreadnought step' keen to return to the security of their plinths. As respective representatives of Babel, the 'colossi' of *Inferno* and the 'civic' statues of Belfast are both reduced to the *contrapasso* of noisy babbling. The linguistic confusion gestured towards in the well-known nonsense phrase shouted by the giant of Babel in canto XXXI ('Raphèl maì amèch zabì almi') is magnified in Carson's version. The poet explains in his note to the line: 'I have taken the liberty of further garbling Nimrod's gibberish into a mixture of Ulster Scots, pseudo-Gaelic Irish, and Ulster English' (*Inf.* XXXI.67, n.290). The words of the statues are also 'amplified and garbled', a species of 'rant and cant' where the political power of language is turned into what the poet elsewhere calls 'babel-babble'.<sup>80</sup> What appears parodic and irreverent in Carson's translation turns out to be an expression of the split or tension within language (demotic or official) that already marks Dante's design. Rather than revealing a desire for 'reintegrative design' as Homem suggests, it is perhaps the presence of spatial and linguistic disorder already at work within the ostensibly unified structure of Babel, and the divine order of *Inferno*, that draws Carson to Dante in the first place.<sup>81</sup>

Carson claims to have been 'almost completely unfamiliar with Dante's work' prior to translating canto XXXI as part of a programme of contemporary poetic responses to be presented at the South Bank Centre in 2000. Nevertheless the ubiquitous presence of Dante in writers who already feature in Carson's intertextual canon (Benjamin, Yeats, Joyce) undermines the certainty of this claim. Even if Carson had not picked up a translation of Dante until this point, he had certainly cut his teeth on Joyce's 'Denti Alligator' and was familiar with Heaney's reworkings in *Field Work* (1979) and *Station Island* (1984). It is possible therefore to read an inchoate version of Dante in Carson's work prior to his fully-formed image of the poet-protagonist in *Inferno*. If Carson's Dante is less characterised by design and gravitas than mis-mapping and parody, then

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<sup>79</sup> Horton, "'Faery Lands Forlorn": Reading Tradition in the Poetry of Ciaran Carson', in *Ciaran Carson*, ed. by Kennedy-Andrews, pp. 161–181 (p. 175).

<sup>80</sup> Carson, *First Language*, p. 34.

<sup>81</sup> Homem, p. 196.

this double strategy of inversion and dislocation already presides over the subterranean topos of earlier work. Carson's image of Dante is born perhaps not in Florence but in the parallel space of Belfast, and thus reflects the Northern Irish poet's existing predilection for spatial disorder and textual inversion.

This is nowhere more apparent than in Carson's prose work the *Star Factory*, which recalls the poet's recurrent dream of Belfast located in the now demolished streets surrounding St Peter's Pro-Cathedral in the Lower Falls. The Cathedral is like a 'hub' with streets 'radiating' out, occupying what seems like 'medieval space' (*SF* 199).<sup>82</sup> These streets gesture to a sacred topology from the medieval period (the Cathedral is a nineteenth century version of a French-medieval design), but here have a secular industrial purpose to house the mill and foundry workers that made Belfast a 'once-great city' (*SF* 199). In Carson's dream the Cathedral has 'acquired a piazza' (*SF* 199); the allusion to St Peter's in Rome is plain, and confirmed by a later anecdote about an ashtray shaped like the Vatican owned by the poet's father. Yet this simulated French/Italian medieval setting is fronted by an architectural pastiche of buildings from numerous cities, and one or two small villages from across the globe, all of different styles and used for different purposes.

Of course, not all of the buildings on this menu appear simultaneously in any one version of the dream; but the space they occupy accommodates more than would appear feasible, and they are liable to mutate as the dream progresses, depending on what route you take through it; and the façades of the grand piazza will be different every time you enter it. (*SF* 200)

Alexander points out that some of the buildings represent different writers, Benjamin's 'Berlin brothel', Borges' 'Buenos Aires private library', or Dylan Thomas' 'Mumbles ice-cream parlour'. He further suggests that Carson's 'mutable, heterotopian piazza' is less a real landmark, than representative of conceptual or textual space – Borges' Aleph, which is 'an imaginary point in space that contains all other points simultaneously'.<sup>83</sup> Yet the sacred/secular 'piazza' which appears as the totality of all places, might also recall Dante, and

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<sup>82</sup> Carson, *The Star Factory* (London: Granta, 1997). Hereafter cited parenthetically as *SF* followed by page number.

<sup>83</sup> Alexander, p. 49; On the Aleph see also Carson, *Fishing for Amber: A Long Story* (London: Granta, 2000), pp. 265–7.



the civic space of the Piazza della Signoria in medieval Florence refracted in the totalising cosmology of the *Commedia*. The suggestion of Florence is underscored by Carson's reference to the now obsolete Irish florin. The 'lobby' of his dream Cathedral – reminiscent of the purgatorial vestibule of Dante's Hell – is populated with card players and pardoners from whom you can purchase an reasonably 'authentic' relic for about 'ten florins' (*SF* 200). The Florentine coin, which was the standard currency in Europe in Dante's time, appears as a symbol of counterfeit in canto XXX of *Inferno* and is integral to the overall schema of Hell as a reflection of corrupt and fallen Florence. The Piazza della Signoria was the civic centre of power in the Florentine Republic, and the residency of the Priors who alternated their office every two months. Dante held the office of Prior in 1301, and it was during this time that he was forced to authorise the exile of the leaders of both the Black and the White Guelfs, including Guido Cavalcanti, who died as a result.<sup>84</sup> This incident is referred to in canto X of *Inferno* when Dante implies his own personal guilt in the face of divine justice, through his protagonist's encounter with Farinata and Cavalcanti senior, the father of Guido.

Carson returns to the piazza with an increase of infernal parody in another essay in *Star Factory*, 'Barrack Street II'. Here the piazza is a glass imitation of the Vatican that perhaps more closely resembles the Aleph as *speculum mundi* in which one might see the whole world. The 'souvenir glass ashtray, which was a miniature of the great piazza of St Peter's and its huge basilica' also recalls the indulgences or pardons that Carson imagines on sale in the Cathedral lobby (*SF* 218).

At this point in time, it seems to me that flicking ash on to the glass piazza, or grinding cigarette-butts into it, would reek of sacrilege; I see the confraternities and consoriorities of pilgrims crushed into it from all the diocesan angles of the globe, babbling panic-stricken in their multitude of tongues, as the glowing red giant nose of the UFO descends on them like a precursor of Apocalypse. Yet, it could be argued that the Vatican *cendrier* had a sacramental function, as ash reminds us of our own mortality, and Wednesdays of incense: it was a small, heavy, pocket icon, a *memento mori*. Smudged and spotted, it resembled X-ray images of cancered, nicotined lungs, or classroom posters of the soul, dotted

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<sup>84</sup> Barbara Reynolds, *Dante* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), pp. 34–5.

with mortal-black and ash-grey-venial stubs of sin. I roll up and light an Old Holborn cigarette to bring me back to school in Barrack Street. (SF 219)

'[F]licking ash on to the glass piazza' might seem to 'reek of sacrilege', but this is a profanity that Carson of course enjoys, the kind of sacred parody that he identifies in Dante and amplifies in his rewriting of *Inferno*.<sup>85</sup> Just as Dante's parodic inversions and *contrapasso* are part of a greater design that will educate the reader in divine justice and bring the journeying soul to Paradise, so Carson's glass speculum has a 'sacramental' and pedagogic 'function' to remind us of 'mortality' and the risks of 'roll[ing] up'. The mock-Dantescan image of burning pilgrims suffering Carson's punishment of being stubbed out by a 'glowing red giant' butt mimics the state of the condemned in *Inferno*. If Carson's '*cendrier*' appears to parody Dante's *contrapasso*, however, it is with no more parodic vituperation than the medieval poet employs himself. Rather, the fate of Carson's 'confraternities and consororities of pilgrims' is a double-parody of Dante's pimps and seducers in the first ditch of the eighth circle. Here is the episode from Carson's translation:

Naked were the sinners to our view,  
as towards us in the wretched trench came some,  
while others went our way, but faster flew:

just like the Year of Jubilee in Rome,  
when, at the Angel Bridge, so massive were  
the crowds, with space at such a premium,

that two-way traffic had to be declared:  
as some towards Monte Giordano set their faces,  
so the others towards St Peter's fared.

(*Inf.* XVIII.25-33)

Carson's version does not depart much from the Italian here except to add the name of landmarks like the bridge of the Castello Sant' Angelo, or Monte Giordano, where Dante has simply 'lo ponte' and 'il monte'. Dante

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<sup>85</sup> On sacred parody see Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

devises the sinners of the first *bolge* as parodic inversions of the pilgrims that flocked to St Peter's in the Jubilee year of 1300 to be granted indulgence by Pope Boniface VIII. To receive the pardon pilgrims had to visit the Basilicas of St Peter's and St Paul's a number of times during that year, thirty times for residents of Rome, fifteen for those who lived elsewhere. Contemporary accounts note the crowded conditions in Rome during the Jubilee, which required the 'two-way traffic' that the pimps and seducers imitate in the underworld. Chroniclers also suggested that the Romans made a significant profit from the large numbers of pilgrims requiring food and shelter, and making religious offerings.<sup>86</sup> Although Rome is usually a figure for the heavenly city in Dante's schema, the corruption and pandering of the Roman Church that he condemns here has effectively already flicked 'ash' onto its 'glass piazza'. Carson's double parody transfers this 'sacrilege' to the streets of Belfast through the speculum of the '*cendrier*'. If the topography of Carson's Belfast piazza is multiple and disordered it is not necessarily an 'imaginary point'; it is perhaps instead refracted through the parodic disorder of Dante's medieval urban palimpsests which bear the ambivalent love and invective of the poet for his *patria*.

In *Star Factory* and in his reading and rewriting of *Inferno* Carson locates his own concern with spatial disorder and parodic inversion in a literary lineage that stretches back to Dante. We might recall here Heaney's assertion 'that when poets turn to the great masters of the past, they turn to an image of their own creation, one which is likely to be a reflection of their own imaginative needs, their own artistic inclinations and procedures' (5).<sup>87</sup> By amplifying this Dantescan world turned upside down, however, Carson not only asserts his place in a genealogy of writerly descent, but also effectively claims to *read* Dante more attentively than other poetic interpreters such as Heaney. The next section examines Carson's position in this genealogy, and his desire to establish himself as an exemplary reader of the divine comic.

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<sup>86</sup> Debra J. Birch, *Pilgrimage to Rome in the Middle Ages: Continuity and Change* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2000), pp. 196–202.

<sup>87</sup> Heaney, 'Envy and Identifications: Dante and the Modern Poet', *Irish University Review*, 15 (1985), pp. 5–19. Hereafter cited parenthetically as 'Envy' followed by page number.

## 5. 'And now, my reader...': Carson's Paratextual Excavations

Carson's *descensus ad inferos* also functions as an excavation of literary descent grounded in the poet's native terrain, its paratextual landscape registering previous literary engagements with the *Commedia* from Eliot to the specifically 'Irish Dante' of Yeats, Joyce and Heaney.<sup>88</sup> Homem observes that Carson has shown an 'aversion' to 'master narratives' and the inevitable genealogies of literary descent that obtain to such rewritings.<sup>89</sup> While Homem avers that engaging directly with Dante can be a 'daunting task', he considers the fraught contest between the poet's 'would-be-followers' to be even more significant. Drawing on John Freccero's claim that, '[t]o trace one's poetic lineage to Dante is tantamount to claiming the poet's laurels against all other contenders', Homem suggests that this agonism is particularly acute within contemporary Irish writing, not least in the work of Heaney whose Dantescan refractions include Yeats, Joyce, Eliot and Osip Mandelstam.<sup>90</sup> Homem further reflects that Freccero's remarks are borne out by an emergent "'Carson vs Heaney" critical topos' which is itself amplified in Carson's *Inferno* by the 'silences' and references to the 'older writer' who has made 'Dante a prominent presence in the space of contemporary Irish poetry and criticism'.<sup>91</sup>

Carson's means of gaining an advantage over his twentieth-century precursors relies on his parodic responses to the target text(s), and the spatial dislocations discussed in the previous section. Belfast might be the locus of Carson's mis-mappings but his infernal palimpsest also gestures towards Eliot's London, Yeats's Ballylee, Joyce's Dublin and Heaney's Station Island. The intertextual play of the translation leads Homem to consider it as more of a 'meta-*Inferno*'. This self-referentiality suggests that in itself the text comprises 'enough parodic self-subversion to balance the canonical claim that inheres in the assumption of Dante'. Homem worries, however, that the translation's 'postmodern parody' and 'ludic features' might diminish 'the more sober and

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<sup>88</sup> For more on the 'Irish Dante' see David Wallace, 'Dante in English', in *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. by Rachel Jacoff, 8th edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 237–258. Homem also discusses literary descent but adopts a limited view of parodic form, and ignores the paratextual apparatus of *Inferno* on which I focus.

<sup>89</sup> Homem, p. 197.

<sup>90</sup> John Freccero, 'Virgil, Sweet Father: A Paradigm of Poetic Influence', in *Dante Among the Moderns*, ed. by Stuart Y. McDougal (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), pp. 3–10 (p. 3); also cited in Homem, p. 49.

<sup>91</sup> Homem, p. 192.

awesome traits of Dante's text' and 'the terrible import of the figures and spaces visited – at the risk of jeopardising one of the dimensions that attracted Carson to the *Inferno* and justify its Northern Irish dislocation'.<sup>92</sup> Such concerns echo the anxieties of Hutcheon over postmodern parody and pastiche. Yet as Agamben suggests Dante's text is already marked by the contradiction of serious parody, which enables or forces it to produce a double of its original sacred text(s). The double parody of Carson's *Inferno* raises concerns less about the critical efficacy of parodic modes than, than about the poet's position in this Dantescan lineage, for it is not always clear which is the target text – Dante, or his various literary descendants. The arguments here consider Carson's refractions of Dante through the prism of precursors such as Eliot and Joyce, to find that all these converge in a poetic agon with Heaney. This struggle takes place, I will argue, as much in the critical glosses and paratexts of *Inferno* as in its *terza rima*. Carson does not simply balance the universal 'canonical claim' that obtains to the 'assumption of Dante', instead as I suggest, his paratextual apparatus forms a parodic and particular response to the 'Envy and Identifications' (1985) of Heaney. Alexander observes Carson's use of 'forewords and introductions' to 'mediate upon the process of translation', suggesting that the sheer scope of such paratextual material 'indicate[s] the seriousness' with which the poet approaches 'his task'.<sup>93</sup> There is, however, much that is playful and comedic about these paratexts, which in the case of *Inferno* at least suggests the role of serious parody in Carson's acknowledgement and challenge to his immediate poetic precursors. Moreover as I suggest, Carson not only sets himself the task of translating Dante fulsomely, but also of *reading* the divine comic accurately. To demonstrate this I now turn to some of the least excavated parts of Carson's *Inferno*, the acknowledgments page, introduction and the linguistic terminology of his *terza rima*.

As Carson notes '[t]here are many approaches to translating Dante' and some 'scholars are of the opinion that one should not translate at all, since *traduttore traditore*' ('translator, traitor') ('Introduction to *Inf.*' xix). Yet among poet-translators, how to correctly *read* Dante is as contentious as the manner in which he is translated. An interpretative proximity between translation and

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<sup>92</sup> Homem, pp. 196–7.

<sup>93</sup> Alexander, p. 200.

reading is further suggested when Carson claims to find himself ‘translating as much from English, or various Englishes’ than from the ‘Italian, Tuscan or Florentine’ (‘Introduction to *Inf.*’ xx). Carson parses many ‘Englishes’ as his acknowledgements page makes plain, and although these do not avowedly include his poetic precursors their presence is insinuated. His ‘primary source’ of the Cary Temple Classics parallel translation alludes to Eliot (‘Acknowledgements to *Inf.*’ ix).<sup>94</sup> While this edition was notably not Heaney’s first choice (he came to Dante via Dorothy L. Sayers), it was favoured by Eliot and Pound for its parallel translation and transportability.<sup>95</sup> Like Carson, Eliot could not read Dante in the original, but claimed to have learnt Italian through reading and memorising the Temple Classics translation: ‘I was able to recite a large part of one canto or another to myself lying in bed or on a railway journey’.<sup>96</sup> Carson also takes Dante out of the familiar confines of his study: ‘I’d leave my desk and take to the road, lines ravelling and unravelling in my mind’ (‘Introduction to *Inf.*’ Xi). While the politics of mobility is emphasised here and throughout Carson’s coming to Dante, reading also emerges as a site of contention. Carson’s disordered and demotic Dante is not Eliot’s own. Eliot was, however, similarly concerned with how one should read Dante as how to write in his wake. This poetic struggle over the correct way to read Dante is borne out by the number of well-known critical responses by poets that are arguably as notable as their poetic refractions. Moreover like Carson’s introduction to *Inferno*, these essays often give a personal account of reading Dante: for example Eliot’s essay ‘Dante’ (1929) is pitched against Osip Mandelstam’s ‘Conversation about Dante’ (1933) in Heaney’s response to the divine comic in ‘Enviés and Identifications’.<sup>97</sup> As I will demonstrate, Carson’s introduction recalls Heaney’s interpretation of Dante, and implies that the older poet’s reading and corollary ability to replicate the Dantescan style, is wanting in some

<sup>94</sup> Carson, ‘Acknowledgements’, in *Inferno*, p. ix. Hereafter cited as ‘Acknowledgements to *Inf.*’ followed by page number in roman numerals. Here Carson acknowledges his reliance on the Temple Classics, and other translations by Mark Musa, Warwick Chipman, Robert Durling, Roberta and Jean Hollander, and Heaney’s preferred version by Dorothy L. Sayers

<sup>95</sup> On Eliot, Pound and the Temple Classics version see Kathleen Verduin, ‘Dante in America: The First Hundred Years’, in *Reading Books: Essays on the Material Text and Literature in America*, ed. by Michele Moylan and Lane Stiles (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), pp. 16–52.

<sup>96</sup> Eliot, ‘What Dante Means to Me’, in *To Criticize the Critic and Other Writings* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965), pp. 125–35, (p. 125); from a talk given at the Italian Institute, London, 4th July 1950.

<sup>97</sup> Eliot, *Dante* (London: Faber and Faber, 1929); Osip Mandelstam, ‘Conversation About Dante’, in *Osip Mandelstam: Selected Essays*, trans. by Clarence Brown and Robert Hughes (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977), pp. 3–44.

respect. This *descensus ad inferos* not only establishes itself as a new rewriting in relation to other contenders then; for Carson '[t]ranslation' also figures as 'a form of reading' in which the true spirit of Dante (parodic/disordered) supposedly becomes properly 'intelligible' ('Introduction to *Inf.*' xx).

As William Franke suggests, where the 'roles of reading and interpretation' in the *Commedia* have always been acknowledged, they have been understood more recently as a method for 'orchestrating the poem as a whole'.<sup>98</sup> Since Eric Auerbach's claim that Dante's apostrophe to the reader was a 'new creation' not found in other classical or medieval texts, which established a 'new relationship between reader and poet' of 'brotherly solidarity', the *Commedia* has emerged as an allegory of reading.<sup>99</sup> Auerbach asserts that '[t]he reader, as envisioned by Dante (and in point of fact, Dante creates his reader), is a disciple.' As such '[h]e is not expected to discuss or to judge, but to follow; using his own forces, but the way Dante orders him to do.'<sup>100</sup> This scene of discipleship appears repeatedly in the critical responses of poet-translators. As Heaney observes in his 1985 essay, 'Virgil comes to Dante, in fact as Dante comes to Eliot, a master, a guide and authority, offering release from the toils and snares of the self, from the *diserta*, the wasteland' ('Enviés' 11). For Dante's poet-progeny to realise his possibility as a writer, however, he must first be created as a reader in the manner that Auerbach suggests. Auerbach posits an overly passive reader, however, as the parabastic apostrophes and ironic doubling of poet and protagonist suggest that the didacticism and object lessons of the *Commedia* are less certain.<sup>101</sup> The reader's and protagonist's positions are thus more precarious than Auerbach's model of readerly discipleship implies. Indeed as Lawrence Baldassaro argues, the often 'imitative response' of the protagonist to the 'sins' of *Inferno* indicates 'his limited ability to decipher the text properly'.<sup>102</sup> Heaney's critique of Eliot's Dante as a paragon of 'coherence and certitude' suggests a similar vexation

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<sup>98</sup> William Franke, *Dante's Interpretive Journey* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 1.

<sup>99</sup> Erich Auerbach, 'Dante's Addresses to the Reader', *Romance Philology*, 7 (1954), 268–278 (pp. 268, 271–2). See also Leo Spitzer, 'The Addresses to the Reader in the *Commedia*', *Italica*, 32 (1955), 143–65; Lawrence Baldassaro, 'Read It and Don't Weep: Textual Irony in the *Inferno*', in *The Indiana Critical Edition*, ed. by Musa, pp. 253–285; Franke, 'Dante's Address to the Reader and Its Ontological Significance', *Modern Language Notes*, 109 (1994), 117–127; Franke, 'Dante's Address to the Reader En Face Derrida's Critique of Ontology', *Annalecta Husserliana*, 69 (2000), 119–131.

<sup>100</sup> Auerbach, p. 153.

<sup>101</sup> See Spitzer and Baldassaro on the reader's passivity.

<sup>102</sup> Baldassaro, p. 260.

with the image of the poet as absolute 'master', 'guide and authority' ('Envies' 11). The younger poet rejects this 'stern and didactic profile' (14) for a heterodox Dante, who would act as 'a focus for all the impulsive, instinctive, non-utilitarian elements in the creative life' (18). Thus reading the *Commedia* appears as a circular hermeneutic process; Dante creates the reader, but the ironies and ambiguities of the text make space for the reader to make this Dante intelligible to him/herself.

Carson suggests an awareness of the interpretive duplicitousness of the *Commedia*, calling his reading/translation an 'exercise in comprehension' by which he seeks to make 'Dante intelligible to *myself*' ('Introduction to *Inf.*' xx, my emphasis). The personal inflection of his method serves only to emphasise reading as a private act compared with the public nature of writing. Carson's ostensible diffidence here echoes Heaney's equal hesitation 'in this mighty context, to get personal' about Dante or his would-be followers ('Envies' 18). This personalised manner of coming to Dante, which attempts to refrain from the kind of universal claim that Eliot famously made, is underscored by Carson in his rendition of the opening line of canto I – 'Halfway through the story of *my* life' – which is conventionally translated as '*our* life' ('*nostra vita*') (*Inf.* I.1, my emphasis).<sup>103</sup> Carson transforms this 'our', the first instance of the poet's apostrophe to the reader, into the staging of a personal reading of Dante that might trump all others, but perhaps especially Heaney's.

The acknowledgements page of *Inferno* charts the poet's coming to Dante, and his initial reluctance to translate a poet and a language with which he claimed to be unfamiliar. Nevertheless he describes how 'after much shilly-shallying' he 'managed to translate [c]anto XXXI' which was well received ('Acknowledgements to *Inf.*' ix). Alexander observes the repetition of 'shilly-shallying' in canto II where the protagonist has second thoughts about his incipient journey and worthiness for the task, a gesture which implies that Carson's 'retelling' of *Inferno* is also 'an oblique commentary upon his own journeying into Dante's text'.<sup>104</sup>

As one who unwills what he willed, and eyes  
another half-baked project, so I bore

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<sup>103</sup> All the English versions that Carson claims to have relied upon give 'our' or imply the plural pronoun.

<sup>104</sup> Alexander, *Ciaran Carson*, p. 204.



away from my initial enterprise,

And shilly-shallied on that twilit shore,  
while dim thoughts flitted through my cranium,  
obscuring what I'd once been eager for.

(*Inf.* II.37-42)

Even in the ostensibly unstudied and marginal glosses of the acknowledgements page then, Carson situates himself as an exemplary writer and reader of Dante, as his own hermeneutic journey is revealed to be traceable across the translation. The repetition also reveals that the poet's anxiety about the success of his 'enterprise' is present from his initial 'shilly-shallying' in the world of commissioning and publishing to his individual descent into the fabulous and disorientating world of the *Commedia*. This connection between the institutions of poetry (publishers, artistic venues, commissioning bodies, editors), the art of reading, and craft of writing, is underscored by Carson's departure in canto II from Dante's 'novi pensier' ('new thought') or second thoughts, to one who 'eyes / another half-baked project'.<sup>105</sup> Reading is clearly not a private enterprise; whatever the poet might wish us to believe. Acknowledgements pages are, as Mark Bauerlein points out, a site of 'professional pressure' where the 'author's standing' is at 'stake': 'The melodrama of the divulgences intensifies the creation of the book, makes it into a lengthy personal/professional struggle'.<sup>106</sup> Admittedly Bauerlein is discussing the merits of the acknowledgements of academic monographs rather than poetic translations, yet Carson's front matter establishes him as part of an equally 'evolving network' – that of Dante's descendants.<sup>107</sup> In an Irish or Northern Irish literary context dominated by the canonical presence of Heaney this shifting network is particularly acute. The promotional blurb makes a 'bid for canonical equivalence' as Homem points out, repositioning Carson at the forefront of an Irish Dantescan network by staking a claim to be 'the first ever version of Dante by an Irish poet'.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Musa (*The Indiana Critical Edition*) gives 'As one who unwilld what he willed, will change / his purposes with some new second thought' (II.37–38). Carson borrows his first clause of line 37 from this translation.

<sup>106</sup> Mark Bauerlein, 'A Thanking Task: What Acknowledgements Pages Say About Academic Life', *Times Literary Supplement*, 9 November 2001, pp. 16–17.

<sup>107</sup> Bauerlein, p. 17.

<sup>108</sup> Homem, p. 192. Homem cites from the first edition book jacket of Carson's *Inferno*.

If, as Bauerlein suggests, a ‘successful Acknowledgements presents’ the writer ‘as in-the-know, well-connected, heavily subsidized and hard-working’, then Carson’s is triumphant.<sup>109</sup> Yet the obvious allusions to professional colleagues, the financial and cultural apparatus of publishing, and the indebtedness to other translators, also disclose that the poet is very much ‘in-the-know’ when it comes to his Dantescan lineage. So while Carson’s ‘shilly-shallying’ on the ‘twilit shore’ recapitulates Dante’s diffidence towards literary authority – what Lucia Boldrini aptly names ‘the mask of the unworthy follower’ apparent in the preceding lines ‘I’m not Aeneas, still less Paul; in fact / I’m not at all cut out for such a mission’ (*Inf.* II.32) – it perhaps also mischievously alludes to another Dantescan precursor, Joyce.<sup>110</sup> To momentarily borrow Heaney’s formulation, Carson steals his slang from Joyce, as Joyce steals his vernacular expression from Dante. Carson unearths the ‘shillyshally’ and ‘shillyshallyers’ from Joyce’s ‘Eumaeus’ episode, relocating them into his own Dantescan lexicon as an act of literary acknowledgement.<sup>111</sup> In doing so Carson not only establishes his place in a lineage of Irish Dantes, but also stakes his claim on the Dubliner over and against Heaney who relies on Joyce as his Virgilian guide and interlocutor in ‘Station Island’ and in ‘Envies and Identifications’. Carson’s claim does not solely depend on the theft of words or phrases from Joyce, however. Rather it hinges on his overt recapitulation of Heaney’s reading of Dante in ‘Envies and Identifications’ as inherently musical, polyphonic and tied to vernacular, natural rhythms.

In this essay, and the excerpted lines from poem XII of ‘Station Island’, which it contains, Heaney advocates the restless energy of Joyce’s and Mandelstam’s Dante against the culturally orthodox image adduced by Eliot and Pound. As Heaney tells it, the ‘two Americans [...] both suggested what Mandelstam was at pains to mock, that Dante’s poem was written on official paper’. Instead ‘Mandelstam’s Dante is more like Eliot’s Shakespeare’, local and vernacular (‘Envies’ 16).

[H]e is not distinguished by his cultural representativeness, his conservative majesty or his intellectual orthodoxy. Rather, he is fastened upon and shaken

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<sup>109</sup> Bauerlein, p. 16.

<sup>110</sup> Lucia Boldrini, *Joyce, Dante, and the Poetics of Literary Relations: Language and Meaning in Finnegans Wake* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) p. 1.

<sup>111</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses: A Critical and Synoptic Edition*, ed. by Hans Walter Gabler, 3 vols (London: Garland, 1984), III, 16:1340, 16:1507.

into new and disconcerting life as an exemplar of the purely creative, intimate and experimental act of writing itself. This Dante is essentially lyric; he is stripped of the robes of commentary in which he began to vest himself with his epistle to Con Grande, reclaimed from the realm of epic and allegory and made to live as the epitome of a poet's creative excitement. Which is not to say, of course, that Mandelstam is not alive to the historical and literary contexts in which Dante wrote, what he calls the great 'keyboard of references'. ('Envies' 16)

Joyce might be Heaney's guide and interlocutor by the conclusion of the essay, but Mandelstam's reading of Dante as 'lyric' and musical provides an overarching model. This is a different universalism than Eliot saw in Dante. In his reading of Mandelstam reading Dante, Heaney distils what he understands to be a 'purely creative' element that potentially obtains to all poets regardless of their situation in time and place. Heaney does not discard the local and particular, however, the loss of which he reproaches Eliot for in 'Little Gidding' ('Envies' 8). The 'local intensity' (18) that Heaney admires in Dante is also present in Mandelstam's reading of the Divine Comic, described in musical or polyphonic terms as 'the great "keyboard of references"' (16). The significance of sound and music persists throughout Heaney's essay. Mandelstam accordingly 'possesses' the *Commedia* 'as a musician possesses a score, both as a whole structure and as a sequence of delicious sounds' (16). His Dante is 'voluble', a 'wood-cutter singing at his work in the dark wood of the larynx' (18), in contrast to Eliot whose lines are 'more affected' by the idea of Dante's language' than the 'actual sounds and idioms of those Londoners among whom [he] lived' (8).

Carson's critical gloss on his own process of translating/reading Dante is strikingly similar to Heaney's emphasis (via Mandelstam) on the 'phonetic reality of the work' ('Envies' 16). The younger poet's method therefore functions as both an acknowledgement and riposte to Heaney. Recalling Boccaccio's assertion that 'Dante took the greatest delight in music and song', Carson identifies a 'relentless, peripatetic, ballad-like energy' in *Inferno* that runs to 'a music which is by turns mellifluous and rough' (Introduction to *Inf.* xxi). He responds to this, and this is where his riposte to Heaney comes in, by fusing *terza rima* with 'the measures and assonances of the Hiberno-English ballad' (xxi). This method enables Carson, or so he claims at least, to 'accommodate

rapid shifts of register', but more importantly as he walks 'the streets of Belfast' to 'get something of [Dante's] music' (xxi). For Carson then, Heaney may read this infernal music correctly, but the older poet is unable to fully translate this quality into his own rewriting of Dante, or indeed of that relentlessly energetic Irish Dante, Joyce. As Michael Cavanagh suggests, even if Heaney overplays the 'swarming' restlessness of Dante's opening lines to *Inferno* ('*che la dirrita via era smarrita*') in 'Envies' the Divine Comic 'certainly has more music than Heaney's "where the straight road had been lost sight of"'.<sup>112</sup> Moreover he claims, 'if Dante were as "mobbish" as Heaney says he is, "Station Island" published in the same year as the essay and overtly a poem in Dante's manner, would sound consistently different than it does, more indeed like the Heaney of the early volumes.'<sup>113</sup> Cavanagh's observation of the inconsistency between Heaney's reading and rewriting of Dante perhaps says more, however, about the Irish poet than his precursor. Carson's rumbustious vernacular translation throws less doubt on the notion of Dante's mobbishness, than of Heaney's ability to effect the mellifluous sound of the street in his own poetry. The lines from the final poem of 'Station Island' that conclude 'Envies' invoke Joyce as guide and 'challenge' to the poet's anxieties about his own 'orthodoxy' in sonic or musical terms (19).

Your obligation  
 is not discharged by any common rite.  
 What you must do must be done on your own

so get back in harness. The main thing is to write  
 for the joy of it. Cultivate a work-lust  
 that imagines its haven like your hands at night

dreaming the sun in the sunspot of a breast.  
 You are fasted now, light-headed, dangerous.  
 Take off from here. And don't be so earnest,

let others wear the sackcloth and the ashes.

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<sup>112</sup> Michael Cavanagh, *Professing Poetry: Seamus Heaney's Poetics* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), pp. 157–8. Cavanagh cites Heaney's translation of *Inf. I* in *Translations by Twenty Contemporary Poets*, ed. by Daniel Halpern (New York: Ecco Press, 1993), pp. 3–15 (p. 3).

<sup>113</sup> Cavanagh, p. 157.

Let go, let fly, forget.  
You've listened long enough. Now strike your note.  
(‘Envies’ 19 and ‘Station Island’ XII)

This poem refracts various episodes from *Inferno* including Dante’s first encounter with Virgil (canto I), the crossing of the river Styx (III), and the descent on Geryon’s back (XVII); all moments when the pilgrim leans heavily on Virgil for guidance and support to continue with the journey ahead. Heaney’s guide or ‘prosecutor’, as Joyce is described, admonishes the poet for his deferral to the orthodoxies of poetic precursors and his crisis of linguistic and cultural identity: ‘don’t be so earnest’, ‘let go, let fly’, strike your [own] note’.<sup>114</sup> As Heaney makes clear in ‘Envies’ these precursors include other Irish writers that had made their pilgrimage to Lough Derg, alongside the Dantescan lineage of Mandelstam, Joyce and to some extent, Eliot (18). In its use of *terza rima* poem XII avowedly echoes the air raid section from ‘Little Gidding’, even as Heaney attempts to get more of the music of Mandelstam’s Dante into the lines than he perceives Eliot allowed in his own (‘Envies’ 8). Cavanagh suggests that Heaney is perhaps more indebted to the Eliot of *Four Quartets* in ‘Station Island’ than ‘Envies’ might admit.<sup>115</sup> As he observes, Heaney’s self-admonishment in poem XXI through the approbation of Joyce recalls Eliot’s self-criticism in ‘East Coker’: ‘A periphrastic study in a worn-out poetical fashion’.<sup>116</sup> Moreover where Eliot’s aspiration to create something new leads him in ‘East Coker’ II to condemn the ‘quiet-voiced elders’ of ‘Bequeathing us merely a receipt for deceit’ and a ‘knowledge of dead secrets / Useless in the darkness into which they peered’, Heaney stands accused by his Joycean interlocutor of passing into those very ranks: ‘You are raking at dead fires, / a waste of time for somebody your age’, ‘it’s time to swim / out on your own and fill the element with signatures on your own frequency’ (‘Station Island’ XII).<sup>117</sup> If Eliot’s lines serve more to establish his renewal of tradition than to truly admit a lapse into periphrasis, Heaney also ‘anticipates and deflates the criticism of

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<sup>114</sup> See Floyd Collins, *Seamus Heaney: The Crisis of Identity* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2003), pp. 107–154, on the crisis of national and cultural identity in the ‘Station Island’ sequence.

<sup>115</sup> Cavanagh, p. 88. Heaney does concede that the encounter with Joyce is ‘reminiscent of ‘Little Gidding’ (‘Envies’ 19).

<sup>116</sup> Cavanagh, p. 92. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, p. 17.

<sup>117</sup> Eliot, *Four Quartets*, pp. 17–18.

others' via the Joycean prosecution of his own lines.<sup>118</sup> Heaney may deflect and preempt the criticism that he is 'raking at dead fires', unable to 'strike' a new 'note', but Carson has the last word on 'worn-out poetical fashion'. In canto IV Dante-the-pilgrim leaves his classical precursors (Homer, Horace, Lucan and Ovid) in Limbo where they are consigned to the walls of the 'nobile castello'. Taking his own place in this Dantescan lineage of literary descent Carson parodies the mode of self-deprecation practiced by Eliot and subsequently Heaney, cunningly consigning his precursors to his own version of the 'castellated castle', where 'engirdled seven times with walls around' they are 'encircled by a periphrastic creek' (*Inf.* IV.106-9).

Homem observes the spilling over of a Dantescan impulse into Carson's work after 2000, for example in the attenuated lines that the poet adopts in *Breaking News* (2003). This collection, he argues, can be 'construed as a site of afterwritings that extend the space occupied by Dante's shadows' as the poetic voice 'walks "night / after night" through "the smouldering / dark streets", to note that "all lie / in ruins"'.<sup>119</sup> In the abruptness and fragmentation of these short lines Homem reads an evocation of Eliot's Dantescan 'fragments', 'shored' against 'ruins'; the exemplar of the Modernist 'mythical method' or *descent* into myth. Thus he maintains, Carson's work displays a desire for 'canonical voices' and 'reintegrative designs' that qualifies its critical reception as a renunciation of precursors and literary-historical traditions.<sup>120</sup> The short drilling lines of Carson's recent work are reminiscent of Heaney, who is also more indebted to Eliot's Dantescan vision than he perhaps concedes. As I argue in the following section, however, while Carson's *descensus* is necessarily implicated in questions of literary descent, these excavatory afterwritings do not seek to idealise the present as a corollary of the past; rather they refuse a descent into myth, foregrounding the present as a site of discontinuity and ruination.

## 6. Parodic Digging and Reverse Stratigraphy: *On the Night Watch*

The attenuated poems of *On the Night Watch* range over a series of sites from domestic interiors to semi-rural landscapes populated with identifiable landmarks from Carson's child and adulthood – ships at Belfast docks, a

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<sup>118</sup> Collins, pp. 151–2.

<sup>119</sup> Carson *Breaking News* (Oldcastle: Gallery Press, 2003), p. 51; also cited in Homem, p. 196.

<sup>120</sup> Homem, p. 196.

hospital bed, and the school playground.<sup>121</sup> Yet the poet and the reader also leave the carefully mapped toponymy of Belfast streets for the edgelands of the city, which contain minefields, wells, a nuclear bunker, woods and grassland, bell- and conning-towers. Moreover the formal structure of the collection, with its three movements, short line-lengths, and repetition of final lines as titles of every third poem has the effect of collapsing these various sites into one indeterminate and abstract location that takes place in the time and space of the page. The short fourteen-line couplets consolidate Carson's break with the long prosodic line first seen in *Breaking News*. Steven Matthews observes that the collection formally gestures to Heaney, the book's dedicatee, as the poems combine 'two forms' that the older poet has 'mastered; the blank verse fourteenliner, and the slim, arterial' verse of the '*North* era'.<sup>122</sup> The slender poems of *North* have been described by critics as archaeological tools in themselves, the short lines drilling down through language, and earth.<sup>123</sup> If *On the Night Watch* 'attains a true Heaneyesque mimeticism' as Matthews suggests, its formal imitation is nevertheless openly parodic and enables Carson to overturn traditional archaeological poetic models. Unlike the vertical precision of Heaney's linguistic drilling, the white spaces between the couplets of these poems resemble a landscape undermined by gaps between strata that might otherwise appear as contiguous layers. In an interview concerning the collection Carson states that the poems are partly 'about how gaps and silences can affect the syntax of what appears to be said.'<sup>124</sup> The orthographic gaps are suggestive of the empty spaces that the poet finds when he hollows out this landscape, where digging reveals nothing, or only archaeological finds that must be ploughed back into the soil. These digs also violate the seamless relationship between depth-as-past and surface-as-present, producing a world turned upside down where contemporary ruins are often located beneath older strata. Whereas Heaney looks to archaeological poetics to restore or shed light on contemporary concerns, processes of unearthing in Carson offer no such consolation. Rather than providing a key to unlock the present, these 'shards //

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<sup>121</sup> Carson, *On The Night Watch* (Oldcastle: Gallery Press, 2009). Hereafter cited parenthetically as *OtNW* followed by page number.

<sup>122</sup> Steven Matthews, 'Bodies of Work', *Poetry Review*, 100.1 (2010), 90–92 (p. 91).

<sup>123</sup> For the drill metaphor see McCarthy, *Seamus Heaney and Medieval Poetry* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2008), p. 99.

<sup>124</sup> Carson, interviewed by Jon Michaud, 'The Exchange: Ciaran Carson', *The New Yorker*, 18 May 2009, < <http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/books/2009/05/the-exchange-ciaran-carson.html> > [accessed 11 January 2013].

& hoards of bones' only parody such archaeological desires, confronting the reader with uncertainties (*OtNW* 80).

Like *Inferno* this indeterminate landscape refracts several literary landscapes, but particularly the earth writing of Heaney and Edward Thomas; the excavations of 'wasted land' (*OtNW* 27) occupy a textual space that lies between Heaney in the dedication, and Thomas in the final acknowledgements page.<sup>125</sup> Here Carson notes that a number of the poems came from his reading of Edna Longley's annotated edition of Thomas' verse (*OtNW* 143).<sup>126</sup> Sandwiched between the contents page and the title of the opening section, the dedication '*for Seamus Heaney*' suggests an acknowledgement of one poet to another, a literary debt or professional rivalry that might be glossed over by a reader keen to get to the body of the work. Such 'front matter' is 'undoubtedly part' of the poet's work, as Eamonn Hughes remarks. Through the use of epigraphs, acknowledgements and other paratextual devices Carson 'prompts us to ask where the text begins'.<sup>127</sup> Such devices also operate as a lens through which the reader is enjoined to view the work. The paratext is less a rigid 'boundary' that demarcates the body of the work from the textual by-products of its publication, than a 'threshold' through which boundaries between world and text are blurred, and access to the work is made possible.<sup>128</sup> Read in the light of a possible poetic agon between Heaney and Carson, the dedication acts as a commentary on the work and its public context, alerting the reader to the parodic strategy employed throughout. The public nature of this particular dedication also stands in sharp relief to the private ones that preface Carson's earlier collections, those to his father William Carson, his wife Deirdre, or friend, poet and photographer, Leon McAuley. Indeed its presence seems to deliberately prepare the reader for the subsequent encounter with an archaeological mode, albeit in parodic form.

Processes of ploughing, unearthing and plumbing the depths, which appear in many of the poems of *On the Night Watch*, can be read

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<sup>125</sup> There are also allusions to Eliot's Prufrock in the poem 'Let us Go Then' and a several instances of eyebright, the plant of Celan's 'Todtnauberg' (*OtNW* 27). Carson has read Celan in Pierre Joris' parallel translation; see 'For All I Know' in *Ciaran* Carson ed. by Kennedy-Andrews.

<sup>126</sup> Edward Thomas, *The Annotated Collected Poems*, ed. by Edna Longley (Tarsset: Bloodaxe, 2008). Carson's use of first-line titles in *On the Night Watch* also reflects Thomas' 'default-setting', as Longley calls it (p. 27).

<sup>127</sup> Hughes, "The mouth of the poem": Carson and Place', p. 91.

<sup>128</sup> See Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 1–2.



straightforwardly as Heaneyesque parody, although the acknowledged presence of Thomas' digging in English soil further complicates the manuscript of Carson's landscape. Longley says of Thomas that his 'deep allusiveness tests the best-read reader' even while his recapitulation of 'English poetic "tradition"' is cognisant of its 'language, forms, structures and genres' having been 'pitched into the war's vortex'. Thus, as she observes, 'France haunts the poetic landscapes that distil Thomas' experience of the English and Welsh countryside'.<sup>129</sup> Alexander and Stafford both claim that 'English literary tradition' is unable to "mediate" in a Northern Irish context.<sup>130</sup> Yet it seems that Carson locates his own resistance to traditions of writing place somewhere within Thomas' ambivalence to 'home' as it is continually refracted through a militarised landscape. If 'home' is 'ever unstable' in Thomas' poetry as Longley asserts, then so is the self, and the lyric persona frequently finds himself confronted by the ghost of an 'other' who has preceded him, and passed along this road before. These 'two' appear throughout *On the Night Watch*, where the existence of the speaker is always predicated on visual recognition by, or dialogue with another.<sup>131</sup> Longley observes that Thomas' 'portrait of the Other Man' is a form of 'self-parody' that 'satirises' his 'literary problems [...], his love of Nature and traditional things'.<sup>132</sup> Carson's adoption of Thomas' 'other' is a compounded literary joke on the continuities of poetic tradition which doubles as an affirmation of the self-reflexive mode that he finds somewhat lacking in Heaney's digging about in the rural landscapes of Northern Ireland. Thomas (mediated by Longley) provides Carson with a prism or lens through which the contemporary archaeological poetics exemplified by Heaney can be explored and challenged. This challenge is particularly apparent in poems concerned with two of Heaney's characteristic excavatory practices – ploughing and digging.

The motif of the plough appears several times in *On the Night Watch*, creating a temporal movement across the collection through the repeated unearthing and re-interring of archaeological finds. 'The Ploughman Sings' recalls Heaney's inclination to elide rural labour with the act of writing. For

<sup>129</sup> Longley, 'Introduction', in *Collected Poems*, ed. by Longley, pp. 11–24 (p. 18).

<sup>130</sup> Stafford, *Starting Lines*, p. 247; also Alexander, *Ciaran Carson*, p. 154.

<sup>131</sup> The ontological dependence of the lyric persona on the unknown other is particularly acute in Thomas, 'The Other', in *Collected Poems*, ed. by Longley, pp. 40–42. See also the episode in Thomas' prose work *In Pursuit of Spring* [1911] (Holt: Laurel Books, 2002).

<sup>132</sup> *Collected Poems*, ed. by Longley, p. 158 n.

Heaney the etymology of 'verse' connects the lyric voice with the imprint of the plough on the landscape. The Latin *versus* he observes, refers to 'the turn a ploughman made at the head of a field as he finished one furrow and faced back into another'.<sup>133</sup> In the first of the 'Glanmore Sonnets' 'Vowels' are similarly 'ploughed into other: opened ground' and 'art' is 'a paradigm of earth new from the lathe / Of ploughs'.<sup>134</sup> Heaney's 'poet as ploughman' confidently inscribes the landscape in a continuous movement that, as Daniel Tobin claims, 'embodies a promised ideal union of art and life' and suggests a 'deeper unity that might transcend history's brutal patterns of conquest and reprisal'.<sup>135</sup> This sense of contiguity between art, labour and landscape is disrupted in Carson's parodic version of the ploughman's song. The 'coulter' of Carson's plough 'strikes // an obstacle' that not only impedes the inscription of the plough across the field, but reveals that the existing site is profoundly unreadable. Rather than 'stone', which the ploughman might expect in rural pasture, the obstacle is an archaeological find, a 'shard / interred // & now / unearthed // some thing / the indecipherable // letters of / a name of some // forgotten king / for all we know' (*OtNW* 44). This found object is an explicit reference to Heaney's archaeological poetics, where the poem as 'shard' is significant for its ability to ensure 'continuity', the 'restoration of a culture to itself'.<sup>136</sup> In Carson's field, the shard is rendered as 'some thing', an unintelligible fragment that the enjambment suggests, is as 'indecipherable' as the 'letters' or 'name' inscribed on it. Hill's Offa is also recalled here and in the next plough poem of the sequence, 'Stumbling', in which a 'coin' is found that bears 'the head of / a dead king' (*OtNW* 72). Where naming is an essential part of conjuring the ruler of *Mercian Hymns*, however, Carson's nameless king is 'forgotten' and inconsequential in the present moment of the poem.<sup>137</sup> Forgotten, unknown, and unreadable, the shard remains irreducible and cannot be reconstituted as part of a cultural whole.

<sup>133</sup> Heaney, 'The Makings of a Music: Reflections on Wordsworth and Yeats', in *Preoccupations*, pp. 61–78 (p. 65).

<sup>134</sup> Heaney, 'Glanmore Sonnets' I, in *Field Work*, p. 33.

<sup>135</sup> Daniel Tobin, *Passage to the Center: Imagination and the Sacred in the Poetry of Seamus Heaney* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999), p. 158.

<sup>136</sup> Heaney, 'Feeling into Words', p. 41.

<sup>137</sup> Archaeological sites and forgotten kings inevitably recall Shelley's 'Ozymandias'. For a discussion of Romantic fragments and literary-archaeologies see Paul de Man, 'Shelley Disfigured', in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, ed. by Harold Bloom (New York: Continuum, 1979), pp. 39–74.

This disruption of the seamlessness between past and present, which should be guaranteed by the archaeological find and the cyclical temporality of the plough, is also found in Thomas. Thomas' well-known poem, 'As the team's head-brass' (1916), is refracted throughout Carson's plough poems in the form of dialogue and the reworking of individual words such as 'stumbling'. Unlike Heaney's formulation of an unbroken process of traversing the field to create the pattern of ridge and furrow, Thomas' ploughman stops each time the horses turn, in order to engage the poem's speaker in conversation. Longley notes that this interruption of the 'ploughman's circuits establishes a template for all the poem's structures: for the collapse of cyclical paradigms; for war-talk (including talk of dismemberment) breaking up blank verse; [...] for gaps, discontinuities and absences.' Carson appropriates these contingencies in *On the Night Watch*, magnifying Thomas' 'jagged' 'line-turns' (as Longley describes them) in the halting syntax of the attenuated lines.<sup>138</sup>

Longley suggests that 'As the team's head-brass' reworks Thomas Hardy's 'In Time of "the Breaking of Nations"' (1915), challenging its cyclical 'vision of history' as rural idyll. Thomas' poem instead registers 'war's intrusion into rural England' and the English pastoral, its 'oddly violent language' suggesting 'that farming and war are not wholly discrete products of human culture.'<sup>139</sup> The faltering steps of Thomas' ploughing team disclose the encroachment of war on pastoral landscape, circumventing the ability of the poet-as-soldier or poet-as-ploughman to assure the transcendence of art over war. In the concluding lines of the poem, the speaker 'for the last time' watches 'the clods crumble and topple over / after the ploughshare and the stumbling team', as furrows are figuratively turned to trenches.<sup>140</sup> If Thomas extricates 'stumbling' from Hardy's bucolic treatment as Longley suggests, then Carson amplifies its suggested violence in his first-line title. The speaker of 'Stumbling' trips 'on a tuft / of eyebright' tearing it 'from the earth' to find 'below // a sightless hoard / of bones' which register the prescient irony of Thomas' association of dismembered bodies with ploughed fields (*OtNW* 72). Heaney also reworks 'stumbling' in the poem 'Follower' which begins with the son faltering in the 'hobnailed wake' of his father at the plough, and ends with his father 'stumbling

<sup>138</sup> *Collected Poems*, ed. by Longley, p. 301 n.

<sup>139</sup> *Collected Poems*, ed. by Longley, pp. 300–1 n.

<sup>140</sup> Thomas, 'As the team's head-brass', in *Collected Poems*, ed. by Longley, pp. 123–4.

/ Behind' him in old age.<sup>141</sup> Heaney's treatment of stumbling has more in common with Hardy, however, in that it reasserts an uninterrupted cyclical pattern of life or history rather than the threat and contingency captured in Thomas and Carson. The interlocutor of a subsequent poem in *On the Night Watch* ('This Field of Eyebright') recalls a similar episode in conversation with the poem's speaker, but this time it is the 'coulter' that 'turned up // beside sod / the shards / & hoards / of bones' (80). The dialogue with this undisclosed figure (perhaps a ploughman) who remembers the field 'since it / was plough land' signals the abandonment and futility of the plough. Left undisturbed, eyebright, a parasitic plant purported to remedy failing sight and memory, has overtaken the formerly cultivated field. The exhumed dead of either poem provide no answers, however, and the plough, a symbol of regeneration for Heaney, is replaced by a field of eyebright and 'sightless hoard / of bones' which signal the foundering of an archaeological vision.

Another excavatory mode that Carson parodies in this collection is the practice of digging, both as a figure for writing and as a guarantor of cultural transmission. Heaney's 'Digging' repeats the pattern of a son following in his father's 'wake', this time with the spade (and pen) rather than the plough; three generations of men dig, plant and cultivate earth and language to ensure the continuation of cultural knowledge.<sup>142</sup> Carson transforms this generational cycle into a Sisyphean task in 'The Pit', in which the speaker is impelled to keep digging to no avail. In this poem the speaker is searching for something that is never disclosed. An earlier poem 'X Marks the Spot' records a similar quest for treasure that when unearthed turns out to be a coffin ('six-foot box') or a mine ('unexploded trove') (*OtNW* 73). The euphemism for a grave appears again in 'The Pit' as the speaker strikes 'oak boards' after digging 'six foot down'. Rather than a coffin the pit contains an oak floor 'bearing words / in cipher', and 'under that / another floor' (*OtNW* 96). The meaning of the inscription is not given, however, and there is no attempt to decipher the words, which seem less important than the act of digging itself. Finding that the earth does not give up its meaning easily is no deterrent to the speaker who just keeps on digging up one floor after another until he admits that 'for years I have / been digging so // to find myself / no further on' (*OtNW* 96). The poem offers a satirical jibe at

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<sup>141</sup> Heaney, 'Follower', in *Death of a Naturalist* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), pp. 24-5.

<sup>142</sup> Heaney, 'Digging', in *Death of a Naturalist*, pp. 13-14.

Heaney's digging as a ground for cultural continuity. Archaeological poetics reveals nothing here except its own interminable desire to unearth the past. Yet Carson's parody of Heaneyesque spadework is less straightforward when considered alongside Thomas' digging poems or 'Lob'.

The chthonic Englishness of 'Lob' seems at first sight antithetical to Carson's poetics. Nevertheless Carson finds a source for his satirical digging in the figure of the illusory old man, Lob. In the opening lines of 'Lob' the speaker recalls a recent conversation with an old man who he meets whilst walking across the Wiltshire countryside. The speaker is already 'travelling / In search of something chance would never bring', but the undefinable object of the quest becomes the old man himself, who the speaker wishes to encounter again. Whatever is sought, the old man is certain that the traveller will not find it by unearthing the past in the local landscape. Lob points out the 'mounds' that now mark the 'barrows' excavated by archaeologists 'Sixty years since': 'They thought as there was something to find there, / But couldn't find it, by digging, anywhere'.<sup>143</sup> The old man's remarks about the failed dig also comment upon the thwarted quest of the speaker for the 'something' (represented by the figure of Lob) that would connect past with present, and the various parts of England across which he travels. The attempt to restore English culture to itself, much in the manner of Heaney's excavations of Northern Irish landscape, is always disrupted by the mocking words of the old man. Thomas' work provides a valuable model for Carson because it registers an archaeological poetic desire for cultural transmission even while it acknowledges through self-parody, the impossibility of locating the origins of a culture (*archē*) in its soil.

Thomas' 'dark earth' does not yield easily to stable interpretation, and neither does the overdetermined Northern Irish soil. In Carson's poem 'The Soil', chthonic turf turns out to be nothing more than a language game: 'an anagram of silo / an underground // nuclear bunker / sunk so many // fathoms deep / below a graveyard' (*OtNW* 83). Carson's 'silo' anagrammatically reveals a perilous landscape where it is late twentieth-century technologies of war rather than the paraphernalia of ancient kings that lie deep in the earth awaiting interpretation. Northern Ireland has only one nuclear bunker, in Portadown. There is no indication whether this is where the poem is located, or whether the bunker is a generic symbol of a completely militarised landscape. Nevertheless,

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<sup>143</sup> Thomas, 'Lob', in *Collected Poems*, ed. by Longley, pp. 76–8.

like the Portadown bunker which was built between 1987 and 1989, and closed shortly afterwards in 1991, many British nuclear bunkers were decommissioned after the break-up of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall. Portadown was restored in 2008 to provide a heritage site and museum. If the nuclear bunker fulfils its original purpose it will necessarily lie 'below a graveyard', but decommissioned it is an almost instant ruin that functions as a mythic monument of the past (Cold War) and of total war supposedly as yet unrealised. In *Bunker Archaeology* Paul Virilio describes abandoned World War Two bunkers along the Atlantic seaboard as concretised symbols of 'total war [...] revealed [...] in its mythic dimension'.<sup>144</sup> The World War Two bunker he claims 'is the proto-history of an age in which the power of a single weapon is so great that no distance can protect you from it any longer'.<sup>145</sup> These ruined fortifications foreshadow the era of the nuclear bomb where the theatre of war is civilian space and it is no longer possible to tell the difference between threat or 'total war', and deterrent, 'total peace'.<sup>146</sup>

The extension of 'total war' over civilian space is of course acute in Carson's experience of home, just as the European theatre of war irrupts in Thomas' English soil.<sup>147</sup> The detritus of militarised space ('Belfast Confetti') does not merely occur on the streets of the city, however, as Carson's rural excavations demonstrate. The deep strata that should contain finds from a mythological past ready for plough or spade to uncover as guarantors of a connection with that past, instead comprise remnants of the modern world. Moreover Carson refuses to allow the archaeological impulse to remain wedded to anachronistic methods. Contemporary concerns must register their present contexts, so the plough is left behind, and instead as the poem 'Over Agincourt' discloses: 'a helicopter / ploughs // its infrared / furrows // scanning in / what artefacts // that rust / or glitter under // this hereafter' (*OtNW* 134).<sup>148</sup> Here the present is nevertheless suggested as some kind of corollary of the past, as artefacts from the medieval battle of Agincourt are connected with militarised

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<sup>144</sup> Paul Virilio, *Bunker Archaeology*, trans. by George Collins (Paris: Les Editions du Demi-Cercle, 1994), p. 12.

<sup>145</sup> Virilio, p. 46.

<sup>146</sup> Virilio, p. 22.

<sup>147</sup> For a discussion of modern war pastoral and Northern Ireland see, Edna Longley, 'War Pastorals', in *The Oxford Handbook of British and Irish War Poetry*, ed. by Tim Kendall, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 461–482.

<sup>148</sup> The reference to the battle of the Hundred Year's war in 'Over Agincourt' is another gesture to 'Lob'.

civilian space through the remote sensing or surveillance capability of a helicopter equipped with infrared technology. By locating the rusting detritus of both medieval (Agincourt) and modern (nuclear bunker) warfare in the discontinuous strata of the dig, Carson offers the reader a different way of 'seeing into' the modern world through an archaeological lens.<sup>149</sup>

Virilio describes the experience of encountering the ruined World War Two bunkers as a form of contemplation. 'Contemplating the half-buried mass of a bunker, with its clogged ventilators and the narrow slit for the observer, is like contemplating a mirror' he says. In it we see a 'reflection of our own power over death, the power of our mode of destruction, of the industry of war'.<sup>150</sup> Carson's bunker is also a place 'without sight / save the world // on the screen / save what // they read in / each other's eyes (*OtNW* 83). It is a hollowed out space whose function is, as Virilio observes, 'to assure survival, to be a shelter for man in a critical period, the place where he buries himself to subsist'.<sup>151</sup> It might purport to 'save the world' the poem retorts, but this buried monument (elsewhere Carson refers to a 'blind conning tower') offers no perspective 'save' (except) what is visible or reflected 'on the screen' or in 'each other's eyes'.

To excavate these instantaneous ruins is to interpret landscape in a different way, forcing a reflection on the detritus of the present rather than resorting to a descent into myth. Carson's parodic excavations operate by forestalling the interpretative work of archaeological poetics. Even the shards of the poems themselves cannot be reassembled to point definitively to one stable source or precursor. Instead they testify to the poet's superimposition of one linguistic stratum upon another, and the slippage that continually occurs between the various layers of these literary landscapes. This chapter has argued that Carson's work disrupts narratives of descent and the temporal contiguities of archaeological poetics, through the use of parodic inversion and the disruption of neat stratigraphic layers of past and present. These strategies rely on the appropriation and displacement of literary landscapes borrowed from Dante, Thomas, and Heaney, which are then transformed in Carson's texts in order to lay bare existing modes of excavation as a way of representing place.

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<sup>149</sup> Shanks, David Platt and William Rathje point out that '99 percent or more of what most archaeologists dig up, record, and analyze in obsessive detail is what past peoples threw away as worthless [...] Tips and middens are the kind of places archaeologists work. Archaeologists sift through detritus'. Shanks, David Platt, and William Rathje, 'The Perfume of Garbage: Modernity and the Archaeological', *Modernism/Modernity*, 11.1 (2004), 61–83 (p. 64, 67).

<sup>150</sup> Virilio, p. 46.

<sup>151</sup> Virilio, p. 46.

The next chapter focuses on the archaeological poetic desire to ventriloquise the dead, and to have their voices reverberate in the present. It examines Geraldine Monk's collaborations with poetic and historical precursors in the long poem sequence *Interregnum*. Unlike Hill and Carson who overlay the West Midlands and Northern Ireland with literary landscapes from elsewhere, Monk's exhumations are geographically confined to East Lancashire. The chapter demonstrates that speaking with the dead enables Monk to effect a dialogue with this landscape, as she endeavours to unearth points of connection between various spectral voices and the place of their articulation.



### III. 'Myself it speaks and spells': Geraldine Monk's Collaborations with the Dead

I wish I could show you this place. It is upon my word worth seeing [...]. There are acres of flat roof which, when the air is not thick, as unhappily it mostly is, commands a noble view of this Lancashire landscape, Pendle Hill, Ribblesdale, the fells, and all round, bleakish but solemn and beautiful.

—Gerard Manley Hopkins, 'Letter to Robert Bridges'<sup>1</sup>

My first encounter with place gradually dawned from August 1952 in Blackburn, Lancashire: that dour and dismal post-war decade of interminable Sundays and outdoor lavatories. Blackburn was a rain-sodden-smoke-ridden mill town surrounded by low-lush green-sodden countryside and prickly fells. There were dark days and bright days; days by the River Ribble or the Fylde coast.

—Geraldine Monk, 'A Mini-Biography'<sup>2</sup>

#### 1. Introduction

Geraldine Monk is less concerned to address the historical dead with answerable speech, than to summon them from their graves and commandeer their voices 'without permission' ('Collaborations' 181). Glossing this poetic method, Monk cites Gerard Manley Hopkins as a first 'significant' collaborator in her book-length sequence, *Interregnum* ('Collaborations' 179). A more recent example can be found in the poet's rewriting of John Donne's 'A Nocturnall Upon St. Lucie's Day' published in *Lobescarps and Finials* (2011). Unlike Hill's fraught sense of responsibility, Monk's more benign subject matter means that she has 'no qualms' in collaborating with the dead and she irreverently invites her 'requisitioned collaborators' to 'wreak their anger upon her celestial being' in the 'afterlife' should there turn out to be one ('Collaborations' 181). This chapter examines Monk's collaborations as a form of exhumation and reanimation of the dead in the long poem sequence *Interregnum*. It contends that the poet not

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<sup>1</sup> Hopkins, letter to Robert Bridges, 26–27 September 1882, in *The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert Bridges*, ed. by Claude Colleer Abbott, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 151.

<sup>2</sup> Monk, 'A Mini Biography', *West House Books*, <<http://www.westhousebooks.co.uk/gmonk.asp>> [accessed 18 January 2013]. Hereafter cited parenthetically as 'A Mini Biography'.

only ventriloquises the dead when she resamples their voices then, but also the landscapes to which they are eternally tied, and as such her collaborations are as she puts it 'galvanised' by her 'own emotional attachment' to 'place' ('Collaborations' 181). The poet's deep dialogue with the landscapes of Northern England must, it argues, be read through her renewal of the sources and traditions, both historical and literary that are tied to these places. Only through a careful critical excavation of the circumscribed locations of Monk's poetics, are the complexities of these political and literary histories revealed.

The chapter thus responds to the limitations of recent criticism, which it argues, produce generalised accounts of the particular landscape of *Interregnum*, neglecting the ways in which the poet's response to place is deeply embroiled in political history and literary tradition. By positioning the sequence and other of Monk's work within critical debates such as gender and environmentalism, these accounts tend to 'expand and collapse many social, political and historical myths' of place (to borrow the poet's own words) onto a limited number of contemporary concerns ('Collaborations' 181). While it is necessary to acknowledge Monk's collaborations in terms of gender and voice, for example she often co-opts masculine voices on behalf of silenced female ones, her excavations move beyond these concerns in that they are profoundly conditioned by other historical exigencies of place. The central historical event of Monk's *Interregnum* and the focus of most critical accounts are the well-known Pendle witch-trials; for this the poet draws extensively on Thomas Potts' contemporaneous trial report, *The Wonderful Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster* (1612). The fate of these men and women accused of witchcraft is so well known in Lancashire and beyond indeed, that the poet laments that she 'grew up with myth of the witches but not, alas, the realisation that Hopkins had lived so close by'. Monk draws on a number of Hopkins' poems as sources for the voices of the witches, referring to this rewriting as her 'first significant collaboration' with the dead ('Collaborations' 179). The sequence also charts the visit of the founder of The Society of Friends, George Fox, to Lancashire in 1652, weaving events from his *Journal* (1694) such as his vision on the summit of Pendle Hill into the fabric of the poetry. While Monk refers solely to poets as collaborators in her essay, she nevertheless disinters and ventriloquises these other historical voices in her poetry. These

collaborations, poetic or otherwise, have been largely overlooked by commentators, and even discussions of the alleged witches tend to gloss over the political, religious and socio-economic contexts of the early-modern period in which much of the sequence is situated.

This chapter excavates historical discourses of witchcraft to show that events that unfurl at the micro-level of village life and the poem itself, are played out against a backdrop of religious and political upheaval, and threat to sovereign power. It further suggests that while Monk does not deal directly with the Interregnum itself, this historical counterpart nevertheless overshadows her literary *Interregnum*. Thus the legitimised murder of Charles I at Whitehall, the locus of national power, is brought into dialogue with the earlier hangings that haunt this peripheral Northern region. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the nineteenth-century stratum of the sequence, demonstrating that while Monk might seek to embed her contemporary concerns with gender, voice and history in the Lancashire landscape she is unable to do so without excavating existing sources and traditions, and locating these in Hopkins' sacramental poetics of place.

## **2. Critical Contexts: Linguistic Experiment and the Poetics of Place**

A brief biographical note on the rear cover of Geraldine Monk's *Selected Poems* (2003) announces the poet's circumscribed geographical location, informing the reader that: 'Geraldine Monk was born in Blackburn, Lancashire in 1952. Via a variety of routes and circumstances she came to Sheffield, South Yorkshire in 1984. She has lived there ever since'.<sup>3</sup> Like the Midlands for Hill, and Belfast for Carson, the landscape of Northern England, its history and literature has been a shaping force in Monk's poetry since her earliest chapbooks and pamphlets. Monk began writing in the early seventies, publishing two chapbooks under her own Siren Press, followed by her first book collection, *Long Wake* (1979) which was published by Bob Cobbing's Writer's Forum. Numerous pamphlets, experimental sound recordings, and six major poetry collections followed from other small presses specialising in experimental

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<sup>3</sup> Monk, *Selected Poems* (Cambridge: Salt, 2003). All subsequent references to Monk's poetry are given from this edition and cited parenthetically as *SP* followed by page number in arabic numerals.

writing, such as Creation Books, Galloping Dog Press, and West House Books, which Monk runs with the poet Alan Halsey. The publication of Monk's *Selected Poems* and the first collected essays on her work, *The Salt Companion to Geraldine Monk* (2007), indicates an increasing critical interest in her oeuvre, albeit almost thirty-five years after she began writing at Staithes in 1974. This section sets out some of the critical contexts in which Monk's landscape poetics might be located. I consider the relationship between avant-garde practices and the poetics of place in her work, tracing various trajectories of formal experiment from British influencers like Cobbing, to transatlantic models such as Charles Olson's open-field poetics. Although her poetry has received little scholarly attention, *Interregnum* has been the subject of a number of essays; the section therefore concludes by considering selected critical responses to the sequence.

In its style and mode of production Monk's work is firmly situated on one side of a structural boundary between post-war poetry that is considered to be either mainstream, canonical, orthodox, or linguistically innovative, experimental, avant-garde. As such her poetry has suffered the fate of much experimental writing in Britain, namely marginalisation by larger publishing houses, and critical neglect. Where so-called traditional or mainstream poetry is understood as the arbiter of concrete experiences (things, places and historical events) experimental poetry is seen as primarily concerned with formal innovation, abstraction, foregrounding the gap between language and the world.<sup>4</sup> Yet as Drew Milne points out, 'emphasis on radical "innovation" [...] puts too much stress on formal methods, rather than recognizing the dialogue between poetic forms and the residual contents of language and experience'.<sup>5</sup> Neither form and content, nor language and experience are so easily segregated according to particular poetic method and style. Linguistically innovative poets like Monk enact experience through experiment, and thus a concern with form subtends other persistent themes in her work, such as gender, sound and voice, landscape and place, and the spectres of unresolved historical events.

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<sup>4</sup> Keith Tuma, *Fishing by Obstinate Isles: Modern and Postmodern British Poetry and American Readers* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1998); *Other: British and Irish poetry since 1970*, ed. by Richard Caddel and Peter Quartermain (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> Drew Milne, 'Neo-Modernism and Avant-garde Orientations', in *Postwar British and Irish Poetry*, ed. by Alderman and Blanton, pp. 155–175 (p. 162).

Harriet Tarlo considers this tension between ‘formal experiment and experience or observation of the world’ to be particularly acute when linguistically innovative poets attempt to concretise landscape or place in their work: ‘even as they refuse to deny the presence of the poet in the landscape’ she says, ‘we find in these poetries a radical questioning of the idea that land can be translated into words, and of the idea that we can fully perceive or understand the ‘nature’ we find around us’.<sup>6</sup> In this essay Tarlo devises a term for experimental poetry that challenges traditional ‘lyric’ modes of representing landscape (pastoral/sublime/romantic) through formal innovation – she calls this ‘radical landscape poetry’.<sup>7</sup> As Barry has suggested, however, the distinction between mainstream and experimental seems to owe as much to critical reception as formal experiment. Indeed in his study of contemporary urban poetry published in the same year as Tarlo’s essay, he claims that the idea that ‘meta-poetries of the deconstructed subject [are] still the exclusive preserve of an always-excluded avant-garde is simply to be twenty years behind the poetic times’.<sup>8</sup> While I am not suggesting that Tarlo makes quite such a blunt claim, her terminology does imply that the poetry on which she focuses is not only ‘radical’ in form, but in its political emphasis. Moreover the term also affirms an experimental orthodoxy, which assumes that only poets categorised as such, are engaging in formal innovation or challenging traditions of landscape writing. Certainly Tarlo’s own critical account of ‘radical landscape poetry’ (which includes Monk’s work) does not embrace poets like Carson whose work continually transforms traditional poetic forms, or Oswald who as the final chapter demonstrates writes back to romantic and classical landscape poetics. Like the other poets considered in this thesis, Monk’s landscapes are conspicuously mediated by and constructed in language, even if she uses different formal methods to achieve this. While Monk favours breaking formal constraints through emphasising the concrete effects of the printed word on the page, a canonical poet like Hill is no less attentive to the formal texture of his verse.

Tarlo’s need to make claims on behalf of a specifically ‘radical landscape poetry’ is perhaps partly driven by the fraught relationship that British

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<sup>6</sup> Tarlo, ‘Radical Landscapes’, p. 151.

<sup>7</sup> Tarlo, ‘Radical Landscapes’, p. 149 n. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Barry, p. 12.

experimental poetry has had to a contemporary poetics of place. Tarlo places this concern at the centre of her argument claiming: '[w]ithin this already marginal avant-garde, landscape writing is a further marginalised interest. Critical writings on the modern and postmodern avant-garde have been more likely to focus on the city.'<sup>9</sup> While Tarlo's categorisation may offer a somewhat false distinction between mainstream and experimental treatments of landscape, it does open up debates about the place of the rural in poetry that would normally be understood to eschew such sites. While the significance of regional and rural geographies for late-modernist poets such as Bunting, Hugh MacDiarmid or David Jones has been well established, later avant-garde oriented poetry is often critically positioned as either tied to urban landscapes, or resolutely opposed to what Adrian Clarke and Robert Sheppard describe as a 'deadening [...] obsession with "place"'.<sup>10</sup> Clarke and Sheppard claim that linguistically innovative poetry of the 1980s had moved away from earlier concerns with place exemplified in poem sequences such as Roy Fisher's *City* (1961) or Allan Fisher's *Place* (1976). They chart a 'shift away' from the 'open field poetics' popular in the 1960s and 70s 'in favour of approaches that attend more closely to the paving slabs' and to 'language'; an obsession with place is thereby ostensibly 'superseded' in the 1980s 'by a willingness to deal with the materials that are readily to hand or impose themselves in the practice of writing'.<sup>11</sup>

The assemblage of ready-to-hand everyday materials, objects and experiences that Clarke and Sheppard favour here is evident in Monk's work of this period. Poems such as 'Divisions' from *Tiger Lilies* (1982) are composed from materials and experiences that 'impose themselves in the practice of writing'. The vertical composition of tea, gin and account books in the following excerpt, suggests an economy of writing literally teetering 'on the rocks':

twelve frayed  
letters  
more dull words sip  
tea

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<sup>9</sup> Tarlo, 'Radical Landscapes', p. 150.

<sup>10</sup> *Floating Capital: New Poets from London*, ed. by Adrian Clarke and Robert Sheppard (Elmwood: Poets and Poets Press, 1991), p. 122.

<sup>11</sup> Clarke and Sheppard, p. 122.

flip  
records  
accounts  
money or  
disturbance broke  
bout of  
drink  
port  
gin sucked  
grim  
inability

(on the rocks)  
(SP 36)

Monk's poetry also illustrates the 'shift' in perspective from the open-field poetics of Charles Olson to a close up view of 'the paving slabs' that make up particular urban geographies. A botanical 'downsloper / inspecting flagstones / volcanic origins / looking for shade / looking for pillowy plush' (SP 83) originally published in *Herein Lie Tales of Two Inner Cities* (1988) for example offers an abstracted vision of urban landscapes where 'inspecting flagstones' for roots and weeds becomes a kind of 'botanising on the asphalt', to borrow an expression from Benjamin. Monk's association with a new generation of British experimental poets who resist regional concerns is further emphasised by her inclusion in *The New British Poetry* (1988), where Ken Edwards' introduction to this group of younger writers locates them in an established 'body of specifically British but non-parochial writing'.<sup>12</sup> Though Edwards is likely using 'parochial' to describe the tone of poetry rather than its subject, his suggested 'body' of influence for this younger generation largely consists of poets associated with urban topographies or as Barry describes it the 'distinctive urban poetic sub-culture' of poets such as Roy Fisher, Eric Mottram, or Cobbing.<sup>13</sup> An early advocate of Monk through Writer's Forum, Cobbing was a key British figure in concrete, sound and visual poetry from the 1950s up until his death in 2002.

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<sup>12</sup> Ken Edwards, 'Introduction to Some Younger Poets', *The New British Poetry, 1968–88*, ed. by Gillian Allnutt and others (London: Paladin, 1988), pp. 265–70 (p. 267).

<sup>13</sup> Barry, p. 63.

While his writing practice developed from his experience as a visual artist rather than through 'direct connections with earlier avant-gardes' his compositions echo the radical typography of the Futurists or the assemblages of Kurt Schwitters.<sup>14</sup> Cobbing's influence is evident throughout Monk's work, in her concern with the arrangement of the printed word, her use of non-alphabetic characters, and her emphasis on performance and sound, from dialect words to the collaborative sound pieces *Angel High Wires* (2001) and *Fluvium* (2002). As section two demonstrates, while Monk's poetry has affinities with the urban poetics of this previous generation of poets, she nonetheless engages with regional and rural landscape at the formal level of the text, and in a style that still echoes Olson's compositional open field form and the deep dialogue with place exemplified by *The Maximus Poems* (1960–1975).

Despite Monk's perpetual digging away at particular landscapes, especially the North of England, critics have been slow to respond to this aspect of her poetry.<sup>15</sup> This may be due in part to a resistance to poetics of place in accounts of experimental poetry, or as the poet's connection to the North seems all too obvious a biographical source for her work. The more detailed accounts of landscape in Monk's work focus on *Interregnum*. Sean Bonney takes heritage and tourism as the focus for his essay in the *Salt Companion*. Some of his commentary on Monk's poetry is suggestive, but the arguments are undermined by inaccuracies in historical detail. For example he incorrectly suggests that those hanged as witches were all women. Arguing for the witch as a figure of political resistance, Bonney draws on Kurt Seligmann's 1940s study, the *Mirror of Magic* to trace a connection between witchcraft in early-modern Europe and a heretical current found in the work of artists and writers from Blake to Surrealism and Situationist International.<sup>16</sup> This genealogy ignores the differences between the emergence and prosecution of witchcraft in Europe and England, and the particular socio-economic and religious context of the trials that took place in Lancashire in 1612.

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<sup>14</sup> Milne, 'Neo-Modernism and Avant-garde Orientations', p.158; for further discussion of Cobbing see Sheppard, *The Poetry of Saying: British Poetry and its Discontents 1950–2000* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), pp. 214–5.

<sup>15</sup> Annwn situates Monk's Northern poetic in relation to Basil Bunting, but while his essay is useful in providing original commentary by Monk on her own poetics, there is little analysis of her assertions or her poetry. See Annwn, 'Her Pulse Their Pace, Women Poets and Basil Bunting', in *The Star You Steer By*, ed. by McGonigal and Price, pp. 123–48.

<sup>16</sup> Bonney, 'What the Tourists Never See: The Social Poetics of Geraldine Monk', in *The Salt Companion*, ed. by Thurston, pp. 62–78.



Bonney is one among several critics to also observe echoes of Hopkins in Monk's poetry.<sup>17</sup> None, however, have explored the centrality of Hopkins' poetry in *Interregnum* or as part of Monk's excavations of the particular site of Pendle. Tarlo's reading of *Interregnum* focuses on landscape and place, but overlooks the significance of Hopkins' presence, and like Bonney tends to gloss over the early-modern context of the alleged witches and George Fox. She suggests that Monk's 'portrayal' of the 'witches' voices' in 'Chantcasters' offers a feminine counterpoint to masculine conceptions of 'nature as mother'.<sup>18</sup> While noting that this association of nature with the feminine may reveal 'complicity' with patriarchal ideology, Tarlo nevertheless favours the idea that 'the freedom of the elemental space of nature' in the poem offers liberation 'in the midst of a confined life'.<sup>19</sup> Accordingly there is 'less emphasis' on the 'spiritual association' of nature and the feminine in the witches' song than 'nature as a place for a woman to be free "as air"'.<sup>20</sup> However, Tarlo overlooks the fact that Demdike's words, 'Wild air. / world-mothering air, nestling me everywhere', are taken directly from Hopkins' devotional poem, 'The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe', which according to James Najarian, attempts to 'stifle the earth's sensuousness with the figure of the Blessed Virgin enshrined in the air'.<sup>21</sup> Monk's use of Hopkins to evoke the moorland of Pendle as a wild, natural and feminine space is undercut by an ambivalence towards Catholic models of womanhood, which emerge elsewhere in *Interregnum* as a constraining rather than a liberatory force.

Drawing on socio-economic and gendered interpretations of witchcraft, Tarlo notes that 'issues such as locality, culture, class and gender are inseparable' from one another and from questions of place.<sup>22</sup> Rather than taking a deep historical approach to the contexts of *Interregnum*, however, Tarlo foregrounds the way in which the 'seventeenth century material' 'reflect[s] more

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<sup>17</sup> Bonney makes passing mention of Hopkins as an influence on Monk (p. 63). Frances Presley comments that Monk's use of compound words and diacritical marks echo Hopkins in "'Ring A-ring A-rosy": Girls' Games in the Poetry of Geraldine Monk', in *The Salt Companion*, ed. by Thurston, pp. 104–118, (pp. 111, 113). Chris Goode briefly examines 'incantation' and 'voice' in relation to Hopkins in, 'Speak and Spell: Geraldine Monk's Voiceprint', in *The Salt Companion*, ed. by Thurston, pp. 152–177, (p. 162).

<sup>18</sup> Tarlo, 'Home-Hills', p. 49.

<sup>19</sup> Tarlo, 'Home-Hills', p. 50.

<sup>20</sup> Tarlo, 'Home-Hills', p. 49.

<sup>21</sup> James Najarian, *Victorian Keats: Manliness, Sexuality, and Desire* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 121.

<sup>22</sup> Tarlo, 'Home-Hills', p. 29.

widely on issues which never disappear: gender battles, imprisonment, mass hysteria, scapegoating and the uses and abuse of language in the wider world outside poetry.<sup>23</sup> Such analysis usefully forges connections between past and present, but risks repeating the poem's somewhat anachronistic mapping of contemporary concerns such as fox-hunting onto an English seventeenth-century context of witch-hunts.<sup>24</sup> While theories about social scapegoating or gender politics underpin much contemporary witchcraft scholarship, historians nevertheless acknowledge the problem of generalising explanations for the outbreak of witchcraft cases in particular geographical areas, or in different time periods.<sup>25</sup> By extrapolating the fate of those hanged in Lancashire in 1612 to contemporary 'issues which never disappear' Tarlo neglects the specificity of the historical arena in which the accusations emerged.

Like Tarlo, Christine and David Kennedy emphasise the witch as a figure of liberation in *Interregnum*. In the original Creation Books publication, *Interregnum* was divided into three parts, 'Nerve Centre', 'Palimpsestus', and 'Interregnum'; 'Nerve Centre' and 'Interregnum' were divided into a number of subsections, which in turn each comprised a series of poems. As the Kennedys point out the subsequent reprint in *Selected Poems* alters the layout in 'Palimpsestus' and omits the final part three heading, 'Interregnum'.<sup>26</sup> Moreover the original headings, 'Nerve Centre' and 'Palimpsestus', are reduced to subsections, with the result that each of the three main parts are simply titled, 'Part 1', 'Part 2' and 'Part 3'. What is significant here in this complex structuring and restructuring is the repetition of the term *interregnum*, as the title of the sequence, and as the subtitle of the third part. The Kennedys suggest that the excision of this second appearance of 'Interregnum' from *Selected Poems* 'tends to dilute the important meaning of a period of freedom from customary

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<sup>23</sup> Tarlo, 'Home-Hills', p. 45.

<sup>24</sup> Tarlo, 'Home-Hills', p. 39.

<sup>25</sup> See for example Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Scribner, 1971); Christina Lerner, *Enemies of God: The Witch-hunt in Scotland* (London: John Donald, 1981); Lyndal Roper, *Witch Craze: Terror and Fantasy in Baroque Germany* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

<sup>26</sup> Christine Kennedy and David Kennedy, 'Poetry, Difficulty and Geraldine Monk's *Interregnum*', in *The Salt Companion*, ed. by Thurston, pp. 11–27 (p. 21). The Kennedys observe that in the *Selected Poems* reprint, the final part has no title. They do suggest, however, that the original titles of parts 1 ('Nerve Centre') and 2 ('Palimpsestus') are retained. This seems incorrect to me as the typesetting of 'Nerve Centre' and 'Palimpsestus' is the same as all the other subsections of the *Selected Poems* version. It seems more accurate therefore to suggest that each of the three parts has no title beyond its designated number.

authority which the Pendle witches exemplify'.<sup>27</sup> While the Kennedys rightly draw attention to the significance of the difference in layout between original and reprint, in doing so they favour the general meaning of the term *interregnum* and stop short of examining the historical resonance of the period between 1649–1660, to which the capitalised proper name that Monk uses in the title and subtitle must surely refer. While attentive to typography and formal structure, the Kennedys, like the other critics cited here give little consideration to the literary and historical strata of *Interregnum*. This is something that my own analysis attempts to redress in the close exegetical sections that follow. Before examining Monk's excavations of early-modern and nineteenth-century Pendle, however, I set out her poetic strategies for speaking with the dead, suggesting that this impulse is tightly bound up with the need to lay claim to 'place'. As Schwyzer's study demonstrates, speaking with the dead always takes place in place, at contested sites such as graves, ruins, or charnel houses. Pieters describes Flaubert's dialogue with the dead at the Roman arena in Nîmes in similar terms: it is a site 'where both the living and the dead, without distinction, feel at home', 'a place where the past can be made to speak through 'the concrete presence of its traces'.<sup>28</sup> It is such a convergence of voice and place that I put forward in the following section as a hallmark of Monk's archaeological poetics.

### **3. Strategies of Excavation: The Place of Articulation**

Monk claims that collaboration offers the poet a way of evading the self. 'Artists of all disciplines' she asserts, must 'try even harder' than other human beings to 'undermine or overstep our given social, temporal, geographic and individual entrenchments by experimenting with form and content'. The entrenchments of lyric voice might be evaded by 'psychic dabblings', 'surrealism', 'nonsense rhymes', experimentation with 'persona or pseudonym', but such 'subterfuge' has a limited effect as 'if we work alone we always have the last word'. The effective evasion of self therefore requires 'the invasive undermining or enhancement of an other'; for Monk this other is 'collaboration'. As collaboration with the living can 'lead to a very negative loss of control over

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<sup>27</sup> Kennedy and Kennedy, p. 21.

<sup>28</sup> Pieters, p. 86.

one's work', she collaborates 'with the dead' ('Collaborations' 178–179). There is a wry disavowal of the limitations of Monk's own methods here, as even in collaboration the poet always has the 'last word' by way of her signature on the final work. There is also a certain irony then when the poet mines her own 'social, temporal, geographic' experience of growing up in Lancashire in order to produce a poem sequence that claims to undermine authenticities of place and belonging. The efficacy of these collaborations with the dead is therefore tested in *Interregnum*, whose borrowed voices seem to amplify rather than evade the poet's personal attachment to place and its traditions. This section considers two interconnected elements of Monk's collaborations with the dead: her response to place, and her appropriation of voice.

Fellow poet and friend Bill Griffiths recalls visiting Monk in 1977 at her farmhouse in Staithes where he gained the impression that 'landscape was less an influence on her initial work than the sense of isolation, [and] memories of Lancashire where she grew up.'<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless Monk attributes her experience of the isolated environment at Staithes as critical to early collections such as *Long Wake* (1979), which evokes both a Yorkshire landscape and a Lancashire childhood ('A Mini Biography'). Yet Griffiths' comment is suggestive in foregrounding two overlapping ideas of place in Monk's poetry: the idea of landscape as a spatial composition, and place as a locus of social practices. This slippage between a 'view' of landscape (Hopkins) and a lived 'encounter with place' (Monk) is signalled by the two descriptions of East Lancashire that head this chapter, one an excerpt from a letter written by Hopkins while at Stonyhurst College, and the other from Monk's auto-biographical piece on the website of West House Books. Hopkins' description of the panorama of Ribblesdale viewed from the roof of Stonyhurst college reflect the visual imagination which pervades his journal writing and poetry, whereas Monk's piece creates a personal sense of place through the prism of memory and experience; 'interminable Sundays and outdoor lavatories' of post-war Blackburn and brighter days by the 'River Ribble'. This is not to suggest that Hopkins' Ruskinian landscape aesthetics are all about visual framing, or that the poet did not encounter East Lancashire or other locations in more

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<sup>29</sup> Bill Griffiths, 'Geraldine Monk in Staithes', in *The Salt Companion*, ed. by Thurston, pp. 1–10 (p. 1).

experiential terms.<sup>30</sup> His remark here to Robert Bridges that ‘unhappily the ‘air’ is ‘mostly’ ‘thick’, is to the contrary, indicative of the profound psychological and physical effects of the Lancashire weather and industrial smog on the poet.<sup>31</sup> Conversely for Monk, the North is not framed solely in terms of memory and experience; spatial composition and the textual scaping of place is an important feature of her work, as the typographic layout of early place poems like ‘Beacon Hill’ in *Long Wake*, shown below, suggest.

HOGRAH       SILPHO  
 STUFAST HILL  
 JUGGER HOW       SCALING DAM  
 LASKILL  
                   A                    A  
                   D                    S  
                   S                    T  
                   K                    K  
                   I                    I  
                   L                    L  
                   L                    A                    D                    K                    I                    L  
 (SP3)

Monk’s emphasis on the visual composition of both landscape and text here resonates with Olson’s open-field poetics, and perhaps Mallarmé’s typographic experiments in *Un coup de dés* (1897). This use of compositional technique is conjoined with memory, history and myths of place to represent a familiar location near Monk’s North Yorkshire home of Staithes. In the poem place-names and landmarks from the North Riding are constructed into a figural version of Beacon Hill; the attendant traditions and etymological roots of these places are names for the poet to conjure with. The orthographic ‘Beacon Hill’ is sculpted from a number of other place-names whose etymological root is also hill: ‘SILPHO’ from the conjunction of the Old English *scylfe* and *hōh* meaning ‘flat-topped hill-spur’ and ‘HOW’ from the Old Scandinavian word *haugr* which

<sup>30</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the influence of visual aesthetics on Hopkins see Catherine Phillips, *Gerard Manley Hopkins and the Victorian Visual World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>31</sup> Hopkins’ journals are full of similar descriptions of the inclement northern weather and the smoky atmosphere of northern industrial towns such as Leigh.

means 'place by the mound' or hill.<sup>32</sup> The convergence of language and landscape in the poems of this Yorkshire sequence, particularly the poet's fascination with hills and high places, re-emerges in *Interregnum* in the etymology of Pendle Hill. Thrice named 'hill' from the Celtic *penn*, Old English *hyll*, and the modern appendage, the site is named in the opening poem of *Interregnum* as the 'Nerve Centre', and as such it prefigures the tripartite structure of the sequence, and the numerous sacred and profane triads that appear throughout.

Monk's autobiographical account of her poetry and its relationship to specific places, is also instructive regarding the importance of both '-scape' and 'place' for the poet. She states:

This is an incomplete mapping of my poetry with places where I have lived that have become infused in my writing. I call it my 'emotional geography of place'. Not that all my writing concerns place nor have I included places merely visited. This is an alternative mini-biobib of key outscapes and interiors. I wrote elsewhere that 'I want the physicality of words to hook around the lurking ghosts and drag them from their petrified corners'. Those ghosts and corners exist in the real concrete world and the more you know a place the more you can hook its ghosts and corners. ('A Mini Biography')

Monk's catalogue of significant places includes her childhood home in Blackburn, a few years in Leeds, a 'bruiser of a city', the isolated farmhouse in Staithes where she began to write, and Sheffield where she has lived since 1984. This 'emotional geography of place' involves mapping particular sites, locations and spaces according to inner psychological states as much as external environment. The relationship between internal psyche and exterior space is underlined here by the inclusion of a series of photographs of claustrophobic interiors such as the cellar steps at Blackburn, and external views taken from the threshold of a door or through railings. These are visual compositions of the 'key outscapes and interiors' that surface in Monk's poetry as spectres of memory and local history. Apertures and framing devices such as doors enable a way of looking into that organises material space as a

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<sup>32</sup> A. D. Mills, *A Dictionary of British Place-Names* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), s.v. 'Silpho' and 'Howe'.

continuum from 'interior' to 'outscape'. Monk's 'outscape' recalls and inverts Hopkins' use of the term 'inscape' to describe the unique pattern or inner characteristic of a thing. Similarly Monk's 'outscapes' are uniquely patterned and plotted according to the emotional and perceptual co-ordinates of childhood memories and genealogical histories.<sup>33</sup> However, memory and experience are also conversely subject to external forces that always and already inscribe particular places. As Monk remarks in a letter to David Annwn dated 19 October 1999: 'Being from the north inevitably leads to a state of ambiguity and ambivalence about the whole geographic psyche-shaping of self [...] The north of England has qualities of such historical and geographical vividness that it has forged an identity and had an identity forced upon it [that] is both true and false'.<sup>34</sup> The cotton industry, the survival of Roman Catholicism, and local speech patterns are elements of Lancashire's history and geography that define the poet's memories and experience of place. Yet just as Monk is careful to point out that not 'all' her 'writing concerns place', neither does she wish to be labelled a 'northern poet' due to the accusations of provincialism that such a manoeuvre might entail.

One acknowledged precursor who attempted to 'forge a poetic music and sensibility' with 'the northern voice' whilst resisting provincialism is Basil Bunting. Monk claims that Bunting's experiment with the written and spoken word in Briggflatts is an important precedent for her own work, in that its 'verbal roots are flagrantly and firmly tucked into northern English', and it displays an 'intrinsic musicality of accent and dialect'.<sup>35</sup> Like Bunting's Northumbrian vernacular Monk often employs the rhythms and intonations of northern English in her poetry. 'Lyke Wake', the final poem in *Long Wake* for example, reworks and condenses 'The Lyke Wake Dirge', a medieval chant in the Yorkshire dialect.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> The term 'outscape' does appear once in Hopkins' writings. A diary entry dated 31 July 1868, during Hopkins' visit to Switzerland notes, 'a country of pale grey rocky hills of a strong and simple outscape covered with fields of wormy green vines.' Jeffrey Loomis argues that Hopkins use of 'outscape' here not only delineates the simple outer shape of the landscape as seen from the carriage of a moving train, but describes 'that merely physical shaping of nature which, by contrast with inscape' lacks the 'inner spirituality' that comes from the shaping of 'God's hand'.

<sup>34</sup> cited in Annwn, 'Her Pulse Their Pace', p. 138.

<sup>35</sup> Monk, letter to Annwn, cited in Annwn, 'Her Pulse Their Pace', p. 138.

<sup>36</sup> For a transcript of the dirge see John Aubrey, *Remaines of Gentilisme and Judaisme* [1686–7] (London: W. Satchell, Peyton and Co., 1881), pp. 31–2.

If ever thou                      meat or drink  
fire or shrink                    meat or drink  
If ever not known  
fire or bone                      meet the Brig o' Dread  
(SP 9)

According to John Aubrey who recorded the earliest written version in 1686, the dirge was sung by women at funerals in Yorkshire up until the 1620s.<sup>37</sup> It gives a folk interpretation of the Catholic doctrine of purgatory, and despite its theme survived the Reformation in northern counties where Catholicism maintained a strong hold. Monk is likely to have become familiar with the dirge while living at Staithes, due to the nearby Lyke Wake Walk instigated by Bob Cowley in 1955, which permanently inscribed the chant in the North Yorkshire landscape. Originally unmarked, the forty mile walk across the North York Moors to the coast begins at the trig point on top of Beacon Hill, the title of the earlier poem in this collection. The walk across tough moorland terrain was named after the dirge which tells of the even more difficult journey of the dead across the 'brig o the dead' to purgatory. Anyone completing the walk in twentyfour hours is entitled to membership of the Lyke Wake Club, receiving the title of 'Witch' or 'Dirger' and a black coffin shaped badge embossed with the club's initials in gold.<sup>38</sup> Monk's rendition of the Yorkshire dirge allows the poet a wry glance at re-imaginings of ancient places and traditions as part of a twentieth-century obsession with heritage and preoccupation with the past. This, and the intersection of place, dialect and mortality present in the bleak moorland song resurfaces again in *Interregnum*, in the voices of the hanged witches of Pendle.

Monk comments further on the relationship between place and voice in 'A Mini Biography', explaining the two types of regional Lancashire accents that 'creep into' her work:

As Blackburn and Lancashire were my only known universe everyone except the voices coming out of the radio spoke with sumptuous diphthong vowels and severe guttural 'r's'. Generally speaking women spoke more slowly and

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<sup>37</sup> Aubrey, p. 221.

<sup>38</sup> Information about club customs can be found on the club website at <<http://www.lykewake.org>>



deliberately than men because they spent their days word-miming and lip-reading in the deaf-out of the weaving sheds. It meant there were two types of Lancashire accent co-existing under the same roof: one a slow exaggerated enunciation, the other much faster and elliptical:

Therre. Is. Trub. Bull. At. The. Milll.

or

Thstrouble ut' mil.

My mother was fond of reciting Harold Munro's 'Overheard on a Saltmarsh' in the slower more melodramatic variety of Lancastrian. My father talked faster, never recited but was never lost for words. I was in-between. As children are.

The clichéd vernacular phrase used here to differentiate between two forms of speech is an example of the 'true and false' northern identity that Monk continually plays with in her work. The poet's textual representation of accent further emphasises its departure from standard English through the addition of consonants such as 'r' and 'l'. Marked pronunciation of the 'r', known as rhoticity, is found in regions of England such as Northumbria, Lancashire and the West Country; along with other aspects of dialect and accent it is associated with rusticity and lower social status.<sup>39</sup> Monk claims that 'place' partially resides 'in voice', as rhythms of speech develop through geographically bound and gendered economies such as the weaving sheds of the cotton industry. Here she comes close to Hopkins' assertion regarding the dialect poems of William Barnes in which it was 'as if Dorset life and Dorset landscape had taken flesh and tongue in the man'.<sup>40</sup> Like Hopkins and Bunting, Monk uses dialect and accent to heighten poetic language, and not simply to privilege place and region. Cary Plotkin argues that the 'heightening of current language into poetic language' in Hopkins' use of the vernacular is 'by virtue of the attention that dialect words draw to themselves as words rather than as transparent vehicles of meaning'.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> See William Downes, *Language and Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 133; Katie Wales, *Northern English: A Cultural and Social History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 77.

<sup>40</sup> Hopkins, letter to Robert Bridges, 1–8 September 1885, in *Hopkins to Bridges*, ed. by Abbott, p. 221.

<sup>41</sup> Cary H. Plotkin, *The Tenth Muse: Victorian Philology and the Genesis of the Poetic Language of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989), pp. 86–7.

In this, dialect serves the same purpose in Hopkins's verse as his coinages, his odd usages, his disruptive syntax, and his phonetic insistence and patterning – that is, the purpose of making the components of language obtrude into the foreground of the poem. [...] Hopkins was not a dialect poet because, rather than simply elevate regional language into regional literature, he assimilated spoken dialect as a whole to that 'modern speech' which was properly the basis of the language of poetry.<sup>42</sup>

The material presence of vernacular speech in Monk's work performs a similar disfigurement of syntax, grammar and form which foregrounds the gap between language and world. If the origin of Monk's own accent lies 'in-between' two types of Lancastrian speech, then her poetic voice is situated in a tradition of formal linguistic experimentation that stretches back through writers like Bunting, to Hopkins' 'rhythm of common speech'.<sup>43</sup>

If speaking with the dead is literary necromancy as Schwyzer suggests, then Monk's practice is a kind of direct-voice mediumship where typography replaces the vibration of the vocal chords to produce the pitch of another voice.<sup>44</sup> The written texture of Monk's poetry is significant because while she exploits the relationship between voice and place, the poem also registers the problems of ascribing too much to authentic speech. Monk's experimental form foregrounds the voices that rattle around in the landscape of *Interregnum*, not as spoken words, but as highly wrought typography. Moreover these inscriptions are already marked by collaboration in its broadest sense – the editorial hand of Fox's friends and Hopkins' poetic mentor Robert Bridges, and the second-hand speech of the alleged witches in Potts' trial report. Monk's poetry thus acknowledges that when we speak with the dead, it is not only their voices that we hear, but our own and those of their contemporary collaborators. These collaborations make proprietary claims on the authentic voices of the dead, but also on the places in which these interlocutors are still ostensibly

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<sup>42</sup> Plotkin, p. 88.

<sup>43</sup> Hopkins, 'Author's Preface', in *Major Works*, ed. by Phillips, p. 106–109 (p. 108).

<sup>44</sup> This was suggested to me by reading Steven Connor's work on the displacement of the medium's voice in Victorian spiritualism onto communication technologies such as telegraphy and non-alphabetic morse code. See 'The Machine in the Ghost: Spiritualism, Technology and the "Direct Voice"' in *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History*, ed. by Peter Buse and Andrew Stott (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), pp. 203–225.

located.<sup>45</sup> The figures in Monk's sequence are all metaphorically interred in the Lancashire landscape, although Hopkins and Fox did not perish in the environs of Pendle, and it is unlikely that the alleged witches would have been brought back from Lancaster gallows to be buried in consecrated ground. Pendle is, however, the place of their articulation, both in Monk's revoicing and in the trial reports (the eleven accused), diaries (Fox), and poetry (Hopkins) that are engraved in the landscape of the poem. As both compositional fields and sites where history and memory converge, Monk's poetry disinters and reanimates the dead as part of an excavatory process that inscribes her childhood landscape of Pendle with meaning.

In this section I have suggested that both voice and place are essential elements of Monk's poetic strategy of excavation, which together enable the poet to unearth Pendle's literary and political past and re-stratify her findings in the palimpsest of *Interregnum*. The rest of the chapter offers my own excavation of the historical contexts of two different periods on which the sequence draws heavily – the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. The next section focuses on the early modern voices of the poem, situating these in the context of Lancashire's post-Reformation connection with recusant Catholicism and Protestant religious dissent. It demonstrates that Monk's own 'emotional geography' or local attachment to Pendle must be understood in light of the political and religious tensions that converged on Whalley parish in the seventeenth century, tensions that were conveniently displaced onto the figure of the witch.

#### **4. Seventeenth-Century Stratum I: Witchcraft and Papist Plots**

The events of *Interregnum* take place in the Pendle area of Lancashire, and the county town of Lancaster. The 'emotional geography' of the sequence is signalled by the opening poem 'PENDLE' with its meta-title 'Nerve Centre'.

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<sup>45</sup> In a recent reprint of selections from *Interregnum*, timed to coincide with the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Pendle Trials, Monk accords Potts' account with a level of authenticity that is belied by the poem-sequence itself. She calls it 'an eyewitness account', a 'real version of reality rather than a version of fantasy'. See *Pendle Witch Words* (Newton-le-Willows: The Knives Forks and Spoons Press, 2012), p. 5.

Nerve Centre

PENDLE

(brooding dislocation)

limits

push

over

iced Pendle water warm English beer

sipspeed

under

grazing

headlights

catch

odd eye

startles

hearts

odd creatures

sometimes missed

sometimes hit

warm runny things

cold unmoving tarmac

(lascivious sprawl conscious and livid)

(SP 99)

Although more fragmented than the simple pyramid structure of 'Beacon Hill', 'PENDLE' also suggests a correspondence between language and the material landscape. The layout of the poem is reminiscent of an aerial view of the hill represented on an Ordnance Survey map. Rendering textual space as place, through the iconicity of a map (despite its being also a textual representation) might suggest one of the problems that Caroline Bayard identifies in concrete poetics: the 'iconic fallacy', or 'conviction that a sign has the same properties as its object and is simultaneously similar to, analogous to, and motivated by its object'.<sup>46</sup> Bayard's concern here is not simply over

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<sup>46</sup> Caroline Bayard, *The New Poetics in Canada and Quebec: From Concretism to Post-modernism* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989), p. 24. Bayard borrows the term 'iconic

aesthetics, for what is implied in such poetics is that in ‘changing the sign system’ it is also ‘modifying the political system’.<sup>47</sup> The elision of radical typography with revisionist politics obtains to other framings of experimentalism as I have already suggested in relation to Tarlo’s ‘radical landscape poetry’. Both Tarlo’s framework and Bayard’s critique suggest that poets using these techniques naively treat language as if it were a transparent system of signs, whose critical force is purely orthographic. However, though Monk foregrounds the linguistic construction of Pendle’s contours it is not necessarily because she is espousing a revision of landscape poetics purely in orthographic terms. Instead the gaps and layout of her method are more significant as a mechanism for the poetic recovery of the absent voices of those hanged as witches, which when read against their recorded speech in Potts’ trial reports, only works to highlight the permanent dislocation between word and event.

In terms of formal effect the gaps and discontinuities force the reader to slow down and register the effects of sound and silence. This is a figurative type of interregnum, what the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines as a ‘breach of continuity; an interval, pause, vacant space’ in sound and sense that Monk arguably borrows from precursors like Hopkins.<sup>48</sup> The use of techniques across the sequence such as white space, parentheses, ellipses and dashes to register breaks or caesura, create a space for the ‘Out-thoughts’ and ‘Replies’ of the dead that the poet feels compelled to redeem, as she picks ‘out what isn’t said / between the teething lines and / blocked out crevices’ of the historical texts on which she draws (*SP* 130). These silenced voices might have been lost in the five-hundred intervening years, but as Monk’s resurrected Chattox proclaims in part three of the sequence: ‘it is the way of words – / to leave yet / to remain: / to breed in / absence: / in the immaculate / space of decay’ (*SP* 139). ‘PENDLE’ is littered with road-kill, ‘odd creatures / sometimes missed / sometimes hit / warm runny things’ sprawled over ‘cold unmoving tarmac’, which prefigure the return of the long-dead witches who do not appear until the third section of *Interregnum*. The opening poem thereby indicates that the entire sequence will be an immaculately constructed ‘space of decay’, an exhumed gravesite waiting to be repopulated by the poet’s imaginings of these absent

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fallacy’ from Umberto Eco, *Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), p. 191.

<sup>47</sup> Bayard, p. 171.

<sup>48</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. interregnum.

words. It defines the geographical limits of *Interregnum*, even as it registers its 'dislocation' and the 'collision' of temporalities and 'worlds' engraved in the sequence.

The scattered words function as stratified traces of the various histories embedded in this landscape, from the 'iced Pendle water' sipped by Fox on his way down from the hill in 1652, to the 'warm English beer' packaged as witches brew and sold to tourists in the present day. In the section entitled 'Hill People', which follows 'PENDLE', Monk describes the site as a place of pilgrimage for 'GOOD FRIDAY HIKERS' and 'LATTER DAY PAGANS'. Pendle is part of The Forest of Bowland, an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty since 1964 that consists of gritstone fells, valleys and peat moorland. The hill and surrounding area attracts numerous visitors who are encouraged to experience the spectres of history by immersing themselves in the landscape of the area, following the forty-five mile witch trail from Pendle Heritage Centre to Lancaster Castle, or joining thousands of others in a climb to the top of the hill on Halloween, before returning to one of Lancashire's pubs for a pint of Pendle Witches Brew, Blond Witch or Black Cat. Monk's portraits of these visitors is rapidly followed, however, by an image of socio-economic decline. The next section, 'Hill Outriders', alerts the reader to the poverty that exists alongside the heritage industry. The poem 'SHIFT WORKERS' in part one, describes nearby mill-towns:

I don't stand around  
in ones and twos  
I stand in  
DOZENS  
on corners  
weaving through  
thought  
warping  
speech  
mouth  
spelling  
contortions pull  
and pull clap

bobbin hands over  
lips  
lick turning  
milk  
churns sour  
in the  
middle  
I  
come  
in the night  
black  
as

(*SP* 106, text centred in original)

Monk grew up in nearby Blackburn where she witnessed the historical poverty of a textile industry in decline. In the shadow of Pendle Hill itself lie former mill-towns such as Burnley and Nelson where ‘DOZENS’ of unemployed may have congregated ‘on corners’ during the Lancashire cotton famine of the nineteenth century (1861–1865), or the subsequent depression of the 1920s and 30s; later generations like Monk’s faced a similar employment crisis in the 70s and 80s. The poem overlays the subdued voices of 1612 with the silence of another era in the ‘warping / speech / mouth / spelling / contortions’ and ‘hands over / lips’ caused by the volume of noise generated by the ‘pull / and pull clap’ of the mill’s spinning frames. By the middle of the nineteenth century mills were fully mechanised, and many women who worked on the spinning frames and in the weaving sheds suffered from deafness due to the noise of the machinery. They developed an alternative form of communication for use in the mills that combined lip-reading with a sign language called mee-maw.<sup>49</sup> As she acknowledges in the *West House* books piece Monk draws on the local accent and intonation that she observed all around her as a child, which she asserts as an effect of this ‘word-miming and lip-reading in the deaf-out’ of the sheds. By the late twentieth century the decline of the textile industry had contributed to poverty and low house prices in the area, and the area is still one of the most

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<sup>49</sup> Thanks to Dr. Kym Martindale for sharing family anecdotes about the use of mee-maw in the mills.

deprived local authority areas in the UK.<sup>50</sup> Monk plots a trajectory between twentieth-century Pendle, which now relies on a myth driven heritage industry rather than its earlier industrial exports, and the seventeenth-century Pendle of the witches and Fox. 'SHIFTWORKERS' registers these connections by depicting the functioning of a modernised textile industry as a spell or incantation. The various historical and literary layers of the poem are therefore only fully resonant when put into dialogue with one another. The rest of this section examines the socio-economic, political and religious contexts of early-modern Pendle as the ground for Monk's palimpsest of place.

John Walton states that mid sixteenth-century Lancashire was one of the poorest of the English counties, seen as 'an obscure, remote, insular and backward corner of England'.<sup>51</sup> The image of a backward and geographically remote county persisted into the seventeenth century, somewhat perpetuated by metropolitan representations which emphasised 'its witches, its accents, its recusancy and peculiar customs'.<sup>52</sup> By the early seventeenth century the county largely relied on a combination of small-scale upland farming and a developing textile industry that still consisted of small independent manufacturers.<sup>53</sup> Historically poor, Lancashire struggled to cope with a series of 'subsistence crises' during this period which contributed to high mortality among cottagers and the labouring poor who were 'at the mercy' of bad harvests and the 'trade cycle' of the textile industries.<sup>54</sup> The condition of the poor was exacerbated by the relatively low level of charitable provision in Lancashire compared with other counties. Despite the introduction of the 1601 *Act for the Relief of the Poor* many relied on limited alms giving in their local communities. Walton suggests that 'sustained social tensions' over the 'informal relief of poverty' contributed to the charges of witchcraft at Pendle in 1612.<sup>55</sup> Many of the alleged witches regularly relied on charity from their neighbours, and the refusal of alms initiated accusations of *maleficium*, or harm caused by magic.

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<sup>50</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government, 'The English Indices of Deprivation 2010', (24 March 2011), 1–21 (p. 9) <[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/6871/1871208.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6871/1871208.pdf)> [accessed 17 March 2013].

<sup>51</sup> John K. Walton, *Lancashire: A Social History, 1558–1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), pp. 7–8.

<sup>52</sup> Walton, p. 33.

<sup>53</sup> Walton, p. 21.

<sup>54</sup> Walton, pp. 28–9.

<sup>55</sup> Walton, p. 44.



If the subsistence income of the labouring poor in this period was governed by the precarious nature of upland economies, the geography of Lancashire also contributed to another tension that underlies accusations of witchcraft. In a detailed historical study of the parish of Whalley, the location of Pendle Hill, Michael Mullett draws on Hugh Trevor-Roper's argument that witchcraft in early-modern Europe was often found in places where tension between Catholic and Protestant faiths was rife. According to Mullett, Whalley parish 'lay on just such a faultline'.<sup>56</sup> Mullett further suggests that the survival of Catholicism in Lancashire after the Reformation in 1559, and the witchcraft cases of the seventeenth century can be attributed to 'an over-grown parochial system'.<sup>57</sup> Walton's analysis of religious tensions in Lancashire supports these claims.

The religious complexion of Lancashire posed persisting an intractable problems of order and control for monarchs and their ministers in Elizabethan and early Stuart England. There was the strong survival of Roman Catholicism [...] which was perceived as a threat to the authority and stability of the state [...] At the other extreme, radical Protestantism became strong and assertive in the textile district. [...] Lancashire thus gained, and retained, a reputation for intransigent and enduring religious extremism and conflict.<sup>58</sup>

As Walton points out, the ostensible religious intransigence of the county was not only ideological but also geographical. Many of Lancashire's parishes were indeed sprawling, 'over-grown' and difficult for the less than adequately resourced clergy to manage. Often parishes crossed natural boundaries such as rivers, which coupled with poorly maintained roads made it difficult for parishioners to get to church, or for clergy to visit outlying villages during winter months.<sup>59</sup> Whalley itself was one hundred and eighty square miles, the largest parish in England at the time. Nevertheless fears that Lancashire and Northern England more generally were hotbeds of papist plots and potential Catholic uprisings persisted from the late sixteenth century. The ostensible threat to

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<sup>56</sup> Michael Mullett, 'The Reformation in the Parish of Whalley', in *The Lancashire Witches: Histories and Stories*, ed. by Robert Poole (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 88–104 (p. 97).

<sup>57</sup> Mullett, p. 88.

<sup>58</sup> Walton, p. 36.

<sup>59</sup> Walton, p. 37.

monarchy and state exemplified by the Northern Rising of 1569, or the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, which had supposed links with northern counties, emerged vehemently in the trial reports of the Pendle witchcraft case, in which Thomas Potts claimed: 'Thus at one time may you behold Witches of all sorts from many places in this Countie of Lancaster which now may lawfully bee said to abound asmuch in Witches of divers kindes as Seminaries, Jesuites, and Papists'.<sup>60</sup> Potts' trial reports thus further yoked Lancashire to the twin heresies of witchcraft and recusancy, and the added fear of political unrest.

The assimilation of the Lancashire witch trials of 1612 into the popular imagination is as James Sharpe suggests to some extent 'unique for England'.<sup>61</sup> Since Potts' contemporary account, the story of the Pendle witches has been recapitulated in fiction, dramatic form, local lore, and repackaged by the tourist industry. The allegations of witchcraft focused, as was common in English cases, on the issue of *maleficium*. On March 18, 1612 a local girl Alizon Device confessed to inducing a stroke-like illness in a pedlar John Law, after he refused to sell her some pins. Following questioning by magistrate Roger Nowell, Alizon, her grandmother Elizabeth Southern (known as Demdike), Anne Whittle (or Chattox) and her daughter Anne Redfearn were imprisoned in Lancaster gaol. A meeting of various friends and family subsequently took place at the Device family home, Malkin Tower, on Good Friday. This meeting was described to the court by Alizon's brother, James, as a witches' sabbat. Many of those attending were tried and hanged for witchcraft. Monk dramatises these events in part three of *Interregnum* beginning with 'The Great Assembly and Feast' allegedly held at Malkin Tower and ending with a series of 'Replies' to history, by each of the accused. The allegations of curses, familiars and other recognised signs of witchcraft played out against a background of inter-personal village tensions, followed the pattern of other witchcraft cases. Yet the Lancashire trials were unusual due to Potts' extensive and official account of the trials, the number of people simultaneously hanged for witchcraft, and the influence of continental theories of witchcraft on the trial report.

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<sup>60</sup> Thomas Potts, 'The Wonderful Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster', in *Early Modern Witches: Witchcraft Cases in Contemporary Writing*, ed. by Marion Gibson (London: Routledge, 2000), 173–265 (p. 249), numbered T2 in the original pamphlet of 1613.

<sup>61</sup> James Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in England 1550–1750* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1996), p. 1.

Stephen Pumfrey demonstrates that Potts' account employed a continental discourse of witchcraft in accordance with James I's *Daemonologie* (1597), which was in turn influenced by the theories set out in the inquisitorial *Malleus Malificarum* (1487).<sup>62</sup> The *Malleus* was drawn up by German Dominicans Henry Institoris and Jacob Sprenger as a manual for identifying and prosecuting cases of witchcraft. Institoris was an experienced inquisitor and in 1484 he went with Sprenger to Rome to ask for authority to prosecute witchcraft. This request resulted in the notorious 'witch-bull', the *Summus desiderantes* (1484) of Innocent VIII.<sup>63</sup> A poem entitled 'Spread' which follows 'The Great Assembly and Feast', describes the meal at the so called sabbat held at Malkin, and gestures to the legitimised violence unleashed with the issuing of the witch-bull by Pope Innocent.

[...]

vinegar sponges

assorted skins soaked in moonshine

little bone of wolf pizzle

ciborium of pace eggs

arteria magnus of man

wet friday fish

five stone loaves

stolen mutton

(done to a turn)

and midnight diminished to a sliding oyster

cruel communions drained

last sup

Innocent's Bull Blood

(SP 123)

The sinister spread is replete with references to Catholic food rites from 'wet friday fish' to 'five stone loaves'. Many of the symbols refer to the Passion, 'vinegar sponges', or Easter traditions in northern counties like the rolling of 'pace eggs'. The inclusion of cannibalistic images such as 'arteria magnus of

<sup>62</sup> Stephen Pumfrey, 'Potts, Plots and Politics: James I's *Daemonologie* and *The Wonderful Discoverie of Witches*', in *The Lancashire Witches*, ed. by Poole, pp. 22–41.

<sup>63</sup> Hans Broedel, *The Malleus Maleficarum and the Construction of Witchcraft: Theology and Popular Belief* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), p. 15.

man', or the 'cibarium' – a ceremonial vessel that contains the body of Christ in the form of the host – echoes the shift in Potts' account from the English legal requirement of proven malefic acts to a continental theory of diabolism that included sabbats, sexual deviancy, cannibalism, and which significantly only required a supposed pact with the devil as evidence of witchcraft.<sup>64</sup> The only plausible crime here concerns the 'stolen mutton / (done to a turn)' carved from the 'Wether' (sheep) which James Device confessed to stealing from 'John Robinson of Barley'.<sup>65</sup> In this sense as Robert Poole points out, witchcraft was an 'impossible crime', one that could be imputed despite the lack of 'a dead body', and which had to be meticulously 'constructed in the minds' of the accusers, the condemned and the court.<sup>66</sup> Despite any lack of direct evidence the accused were believed to have murdered several people in the Pendle area by diabolic means. Thus the Lancaster trials confirmed the Jacobean court's view that witchcraft was not merely a crime enacted at village level, but a 'diabolic threat to the social order', to the natural and political body of Christian monarchy.<sup>67</sup> Moreover this threat was associated with Catholic conspiracy, a concern that resonated in the allegations made against the Pendle witches. As Marion Gibson argues of Potts' pamphlet:

Its dedication to Thomas Knyvet, who helped to foil the Gunpowder Plot, [...] suggests a concern with local Catholicism: the plan to blow up Lancaster Castle described by some of the witches, as well as the collapse of the prosecution instigated by Grace Sowerbutts and, allegedly, her Catholic adviser confirms the suspicion that questions were asked about treacherous plots.<sup>68</sup>

Monk refers to the alleged plot to blow up Lancaster Castle twice in *Interregnum*. In 'The Great Assembly & Feast' the witches 'Ganged Malkin Tower to fest and murder plot. Grow semtex – / a likely', and 'GAOL SONG – PART 3', cited below, also draws attention to the unlikelihood of such a conspiracy.

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<sup>64</sup> See Stephen Pumfrey, 'Potts, Plots and Politics', pp. 27–8.

<sup>65</sup> Potts, 'The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster', p. 211 (numbered 12v in the original pamphlet).

<sup>66</sup> Poole, 'The Trials of 1612', in *The Lancashire Witches*, ed. by Poole, pp. 19–20 (p. 20).

<sup>67</sup> Gibson, 'Thomas Potts' "dusty memory": reconstructing justice in The Wonderfull Discoveries of Witches', in *The Lancashire Witches* ed. by Poole, pp. 42–57 (p. 53).

<sup>68</sup> Gibson, 'Thomas Potts's "dusty memory"', p. 52.

No messages allowed.  
Triggers & cues  
plot holes  
to fill with dynamite  
blow bleeding syntactical  
structures to smithereens  
(significant harm)

with bluff  
hysteria glowed  
blooded  
in raw red nights of  
panic police  
where (incubated and bred)  
public imagination grows  
a law unto itself  
unknown  
it ritualises abuse  
(*SP* 131)

The allegation itself was full of 'plot holes' large enough 'to fill with dynamite' which should have blown the 'bleeding syntactical / structures' of the courtroom 'to smithereens' (*SP* 122). The lack of criminal evidence was no object to the 'hysteria' fuelled 'panic', however. 'GAOL SONG' thus also echoes Poole's claim that these treasonous diabolic crimes has to be 'incubated and bred' in the 'public imagination' by the rituals of the legal system. If the witches were possible Catholic conspirators, however, so might their accusers paradoxically be denounced as popish plotters. As Gibson points out, Potts' pamphlet also contains an account of a witchcraft case of the same year at nearby Salmesbury. Grace Sowerbutts was revealed as having falsely accused three women at the behest of her Catholic priest, Father Christopher Southworth. Southworth it was implied, had conspired against their recent conversion to Anglicanism.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Pumfrey, 'Potts, Plots and Politics', p. 35.

If witchcraft was becoming an increasing ecclesiastical concern in this period, its association with recusancy, located Catholic idolatry – worship of the saints and the Virgin Mary – in the emerging continental framework of diabolism. Thus the Ave Maria and other creeds were presented as part of the witch’s stock of charms and spells.<sup>70</sup> The ‘charme’ recorded in the trial reports as used by Chattox to ‘helpe drinke that was forspoken or bewitched’ contains obvious Catholic references.

Three Biters hast thou bitten,  
The Hart, ill Eye, ill Tonge:  
Three bitter shall be thy Boote,  
Father, Sonne, and Holy Ghost  
a Gods name  
Five Pater-nosters, five Avies,  
and a Creede,  
In worship of the five wounds  
of our Lord.<sup>71</sup>

Monk deploys Chattox’s charm several times in the sequence, from direct citation in the hallucinatory and disjointed ‘Palimpsestus’ section cited below, to the poem ‘ALL SING’ which interleaves the witches’ words with lines from Hopkins.

...Three biters hast thou bitten  
(heart ill eye ill tongue)  
Three bitter fluids mixt  
run  
thickening in  
approaching fear  
approaching drunken storm  
approaching savage same note  
scraping between clenched  
tooth...

(*SP* 116)

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<sup>70</sup> See Sharpe, p. 27.

<sup>71</sup> Potts, ‘The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches’, pp. 195–6 (E2v and E3 in the original pamphlet).

Here the number three, symbol of the Trinity, and the creeds of Chattox's prayer form an incantation which Monk then uses to summon the demons of a twentieth-century Catholic childhood in the other poems of the 'Palimpsestus' section. 'Three o'clock Good Friday dinner / hits /floralwallpaper' in the poem '...(MOUTH DRIPPING VERBAL CRUCIFIXIONS)...' (SP 117), and childhood visits to the confessional are recalled in the '...Three aves / rise / RISE / RISE' of '...(MIND FULL OF MEAT AND FLOWERS)...' (SP114).

Dianne Purkiss notes the similarities between Chattox's charm and others that either date back to pre-Reformation times or purposefully hark back to them. She suggests that the continued articulation of prayers like these provided a kind of residual spiritual 'comfort' largely 'unobtainable after the Reformation'.<sup>72</sup> There seems little corresponding comfort in the Catholic imagery of Monk's lines, however, only 'fear', savagery and 'clenched' teeth. According to Purkiss the 'five wounds' are an addition of Chattox's that possibly refer to the 'insignia of the Pilgrimage of Grace, the series of northern risings of 1536–7 against Protestant reforms'. Chattox's spoken charm thus registers an earlier 'half-forgotten history', albeit one 'reduced to its power as sound by a process of forgetting its former context'.<sup>73</sup> Although attesting to a partially forgotten religious past, the geographical significance of these incantations was perhaps not entirely lost on Potts, whose carefully fashioned 'Discoverie' sought to demonstrate its claims that the 'Countie of Lancaster' might 'lawfully bee said to abound' in 'Witches' and 'Papists'. Although Monk does not include it in her rewriting of Chattox's charm, another poem in the 'Palimpsestus' section does refer to the 'five / bleeding wounds of passion' (SP 118). As well as drawing on the 'five wounds' to indicate a specifically northern recusancy, Monk also uses the figure of the Trinity to locate her incantation in a Northern landscape with its '...Three peaks. / .Three dream-rollers.' (SP 112). While Yorkshire's well-known three peaks – Whernside, Ingleborough, and Pen-y-ghent – are recalled here, the poem is more likely to refer to Lancashire's own three peaks, Longridge Fell, Easington Fell, and Pendle itself.

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<sup>72</sup> Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations*. (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 156–7.

<sup>73</sup> Purkiss, p. 157.

Although accusations of maleficium such as those made at Pendle were often geographically bounded, and located in village interpersonal relationships, the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I saw an increase of fears of malefic plots against the monarchy. By the reign of Charles I prosecutions for witchcraft were in decline, but the turmoil of the Interregnum period was to see the largest mass allegation of witchcraft in England, in East Anglia.<sup>74</sup> Interpretations of the Pendle account as in other English witchcraft cases have tended to focus on the socio-economic background of rural communities, particularly with respect to gender, emphasising the threat to local social and familial hierarchies by outsiders such as poor, older or widowed women. Nevertheless such local tensions are also understood to have been played out against a backdrop of religious and political upheaval, generated by the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, and as the title of Monk's poem suggests, the fate of kings.<sup>75</sup> The following section considers the only figure of the Interregnum period to appear in the sequence, the Quaker radical George Fox. It positions Fox as a dissenting voice in the text who emerges as a Protestant counterpart of the ostensibly papist figure of the witch. The section concludes by examining the resonance of the term interregnum as Monk's choice of title for her sequence.

## **5. Seventeenth-Century Stratum II: George Fox and the Interregnum**

George Fox was born in Leicestershire in 1624, the son of a weaver. His puritan upbringing did not offer the rigorous piety that Fox sought, and at the age of nineteen he left his 'relations' at the 'command of God, on the 9th day of the Seventh Month' 1643, breaking 'off all familiarity or fellowship with young or old'.<sup>76</sup> Finding little favour towards his preaching in London, Fox returned to the Midlands where his opposition to ecclesiastical and civil authorities led to imprisonment at Nottingham in 1649 and Derby 1650–1. On his release, Fox travelled through the Northern counties of Yorkshire and Lancashire spreading his antinomian message. In June 1652 Fox was again 'moved of the Lord', this time to ascend the summit of Pendle Hill where in a vision, he was shown 'in

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<sup>74</sup> Sharpe, p. 127.

<sup>75</sup> Sharpe, p. 6.

<sup>76</sup> George Fox, *The Journal of George Fox* [1694], 5th edn, rev. by John L. Nickalls (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952; repr. Philadelphia: Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, 1997).



what places he [the Lord] had a great people to be gathered'.<sup>77</sup> This founding moment where the worldwide expansion of Fox's Society of Friends was ostensibly revealed to him took place only forty years after the accused villagers of Pendle were allegedly plotting their own resistance to religious and civic order. Fox was also arraigned and acquitted at the Lancaster sessions in 1652, before being successfully tried and imprisoned at Lancaster Castle in 1660, and again between 1664 and 1666 for refusing to swear the oaths of allegiance and supremacy. Fox's itinerary, spiritual successes and persecutions are all recorded in *The Journal*, published posthumously in 1694.

Monk uses direct citation from *The Journal* in order to construct two poems in the 'Hill Outriders' section of part one of *Interregnum*. 'FOX HUNT' and 'FOX TROT' rewrite visions and persecutions recounted by Fox in the guise of an animal suffering the brutality of a hunt. There are of course parallels here between witch-hunts and fox-hunts but these are anachronistic at best, as they ignore the political and religious contexts that I have already outlined. Tarlo attempts this line of argument, further suggesting that the poem establishes the fox as one of the 'natural residents of Pendle' along with other 'Outriders' such as the local mill workers or the witches.<sup>78</sup> Fox himself was of course a visitor to Pendle, not perhaps so far removed from the tourists, Christians and pagans that Monk outlines in the preceding section 'Hill People'. In this sense the poems and their position in the 'Outriders' section licences such anachronistic correspondences between twentieth century and seventeenth century concerns, and in doing so the sequence itself also neglects the richer seam of historical connections between those accused of witchcraft in 1612, and the Quaker dissenter. Nevertheless, what remains forceful about Monk's lines is her use of direct citation to indicate the recovery of a dissenting voice, and her emplacement of this now lyric voice into the Lancashire landscape. Her lyric strategies are complicated here, however, by Fox's own mode of self-presentation and the authenticity of his recovered voice.

The title of Fox's autobiography is to some extent misleading as it is not strictly speaking a journal at all. Rather the original text was put together by Thomas Ellwood at the request of the Society, from various manuscripts belonging to Fox including letters, personal papers, and accounts of his

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<sup>77</sup> Fox, p. 104.

<sup>78</sup> Tarlo, 'Home-Hills', p. 37.

experiences which were often dictated retrospectively. The assembled Journal was devised as a testimonial of the Quaker movement, and as such it omitted a number of potentially controversial 'divine judgements' against the established clergy, in order to preserve the 'respectability' that the 'movement had begun to acquire'.<sup>79</sup> As John Knott points out the Journal was thus neither 'conceived' as a 'contemporaneous record of daily happenings' nor as 'a spiritual autobiography' akin to John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678, 1684), even if it had 'elements' of both forms.<sup>80</sup> Like the reported speech of the accused in Potts' trial proceedings, the retrospectively recorded and edited words of Fox undermine any notion of authentic voice that might be recovered by Monk's poem. This is not to say that the voice of this posthumous account does not belong to Fox, however, for even if as Knott suggests, it is difficult to 'identify a distinct persona' there are certainly 'modes of self-presentation' and self-dramatisation at work. Like Monk, adopting other voices was one such strategy for Fox, who drew on biblical models of suffering and triumph from the early church found in the Pauline epistles and in Acts.<sup>81</sup> One particularly dramatic account of persecution at Ulverston takes place in the September after Fox's climb up Pendle Hill. Fox interrupts a sermon in the church and is handed over to the mob by local Justice, John Sawrey. This experience is the basis for Monk's 'FOX HUNT'; words and phrases cited directly in the poem are emboldened in the journal entry below.

So of a **sudden all the people** in the steeplehouse were in an **outrage** and an **uproar**, that **they fell upon me** in the steeplehouse before his face, with staves and fists and books, and **knocked me down and kicked me** and **trampled** upon me. And many **people tumbled over** their seats for **fear** and were knocked down, and the Justice and the priests among them. And at last the Justice said [...] 'Give him me!' and he [...] **led me out** of the steeplehouse and put me **into** the **hands** of four officers and constables, and bid them whip me and put me out of the town. [...] **And the blood ran down several people** so **as I never saw** the like **in my life**, **as** I looked at them when **they** were **dragging me along**. And Judge Fell's son running after to see what they would

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<sup>79</sup> John R. Knott, *Discourses of Martyrdom in English Literature, 1563–1694* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 231.

<sup>80</sup> Knott, p. 231.

<sup>81</sup> Knott, p. 245.

do with me, they threw him into a ditch of water and **cried, 'Knock out the teeth of his head !'** And some got **staves** and **some got hedge stakes** and some got holme bushes and some got willows. And when they had led me **to the common moss**, [...] the constables [...] gave me a wisk over the shoulders with their **willow rods**, and so thrust me amongst the rude multitude which then [...] **beat** me as hard as ever they could strike **on my head and arms and shoulders**, and it was a great while before they beat me down and **mazed me** [...] [W]hen I recovered myself again, and **saw myself lying** on a watery common [...] **I lay a little still**, and the power of the Lord sprang through me, and the eternal refreshings refreshed me, that I stood up again in the eternal power of God and stretched out my arms amongst them all.<sup>82</sup>

As Knott suggests this episode is characteristic of Fox's adoption of biblical roles in the dramatisation of his own persecution. Although Fox doubtlessly underwent such an attack, his presentation and re-performing of the event in the Journal is exemplary of the discourse of martyrdom and suffering that the seventeenth-century Quakers were so keen to publicise.<sup>83</sup> Here Fox exhibits the forbearance and 'courage' of 'Christ set upon by mobs' and the subsequent resurrected body that would demonstrate not only God's eternal power, but Fox's suitability as a vessel for it.<sup>84</sup> His 'stretched out' arms deliberately echo not only the crucified and then risen body, but also the moment when Jesus presents himself to Thomas as physical proof of salvific power. Monk's 'FOX HUNT' is almost entirely composed of Fox's dramatic words as the lines below demonstrate.

Led me out and into hands  
And 'knock out the teeth of its head' they cried.

[...]

Dragged me to the common  
(moss)  
Willow rods beat on my head  
And arms and back and shoulders

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<sup>82</sup> Fox, pp. 127–8.

<sup>83</sup> See Knott, p. 216.

<sup>84</sup> Knott, p. 247.

till they mazed me  
till I lay a little still  
till at  
last  
I saw myself dying

then staggering and bled  
I rose red  
a reverse emblem  
(*SP* 108)

There are, however, some minor substitutions to the Journal citations – the ‘dying’ for Fox’s ‘lying’, and the ‘knock the teeth out of its head’ instead of Fox’s ‘his head’ (my emphasis). The amended, ‘I saw myself dying’, not only amplifies the martyrology of Fox’s more mundane, ‘when I recovered’ I ‘saw myself lying on a watery common’, but also suggests an out of body or trance-like state of the kind that made Fox and his Quaker colleagues prone to accusations of diabolism. Indeed Fox’s ability to quickly recover from the brutal attacks to which he was subjected, was not seen as testament to ‘the eternal power of God’ but as evidence of his being bewitched. Having failed to bring a successful prosecution against Fox at the Lancaster Assizes in 1652, the apparently enraged ‘priests and professors raised a report and a slander upon’ him, claiming that if ‘neither water could drown me nor could they draw blood of me’ then ‘surely [he] was a witch’.<sup>85</sup> Fox was frequently described as both a ‘bewitched and bewitching soul’ by the clergy and civic authorities that his radical ideas ostensibly threatened.<sup>86</sup> Diabolism of the continental kind that had suffused the charges against the Pendle witches was also used to accuse many Quakers during the Interregnum and after 1660. Fox himself was said to use devilish charms to ensnare his converts, and in a more extreme case in Sherborne, 1659–60, a large group of Quakers and Baptists were formally

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<sup>85</sup> Fox, p. 142. See also Peter Elmer, “‘Saints or Sorcerers’: Quakerism, Demonology and the Decline of Witchcraft in Seventeenth-Century England”, in *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe: Studies in Culture and Belief*, ed. by Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester, and Gareth Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 125–179 (p. 147).

<sup>86</sup> Roger Williams, ‘George Fox Digg’d out of his Burrowes’ (Boston, 1676), cited in Elmer, p. 147.

charged with diabolic acts, including copulating with the devil.<sup>87</sup> If continental theories of witchcraft had emerged as a useful discourse with which to quell the threat of Northern recusancy and papist plots during the early seventeenth century, by the Interregnum the Quakers and other dissenters were seen as sufficiently dangerous to be cast in Elmer's terms, as 'surrogate witches'.<sup>88</sup>

That Fox and his party can be understood as 'surrogate witches' in the politically unstable context of Interregnum England, makes a far more compelling connection between the Quaker dissenter and the Pendle witches than any that might be drawn between twentieth-century fox-hunts and seventeenth-century witch-hunts. While Monk's other minor amendment, 'his' to 'it', is therefore perhaps designed to serve the twentieth-century concern of the poem's title, and might be read anachronistically as indicating an animal, the impersonality of the pronoun also reminds us that the poet's collaborations with the dead are intended to evade the lyric 'I'.<sup>89</sup> In the companion poem 'FOX TROT' which I will turn to in a moment, this relationship between subject and object ('I'/IT) is even more fraught. Moreover these small changes demand that the reader, rather than relying solely on more obvious modern interpretations, must be sufficiently alert both to the sources on which the poet draws, and to the suggestiveness of her divergence from them. Monk does make more significant additions to the Journal entry in the final lines of 'FOX HUNT': 'then staggering and bled / I rose red / a reverse emblem'. These lines echo the typological register that Fox deploys, and also claim the dissenter and his voice for this particular county rather than other Northern locations like Yorkshire where his ideas also took hold. Lancashire's emblem of course is the red rose. While Ulverston is now in Cumbria, it was historically in Lancashire, and Monk confirms the county's claim over this seventeenth-century radical by revoicing what is allegedly the founding episode of the Quaker movement, which took place on Pendle Hill.

As we went I spied a great high hill called Pendle Hill, and I went on the top of it  
with much ado, it was so steep; but I was moved of the Lord to go atop of it; and

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<sup>87</sup> Elmer, p. 151.

<sup>88</sup> Elmer, p. 159.

<sup>89</sup> For a discussion of Monk's revisions of the lyric 'I' in her other work see, Linda Kinnahan, 'Experimental Poetics and the Lyric in British Women's Poetry: Geraldine Monk, Wendy Mulford, and Denise Riley', *Contemporary Literature*, 37.4 (1996), 620–670.

when I came atop of it I saw Lancashire sea; and there atop of the hill I was moved to sound the day of the Lord; and the Lord let me see a-top of the hill in what places he had a great people to be gathered. As I went down, on the hill side I found a spring of water and refreshed myself, for I had eaten little and drunk little for several days.<sup>90</sup>

The companion poem 'FOX TROT' renders this vision into an experimental form that plays with the positioning of the lyric voice and the self-presentation of Fox as martyr. Having refused 'meat', which the Lord had told him had the 'evil eye' upon it, at the home of a Baptist family shortly before his hill-climb, Fox was by his own confession in need of food and water, and susceptible to a vision.<sup>91</sup> Monk alludes to his state of body and mind where 'weavy path / magic quake', and 'bluster brain' are perhaps the result of 'wise words / weep meat / possessed /meet' (*SP* 109). These are Monk's elaborations of his vision, but the final lines of the poem rearrange Fox's own words.

I was moved to go up  
to top (IT)  
which I did (IT) was so  
very steep and  
(HIGH) I was come to top  
(IT) the hill (I)  
saw sea to top it the hill  
(I) (HIGH) saw (IT) (I)  
(*SP* 109)

Here 'atop' is split into two words, 'to' and 'top', the removal of the definite article suggesting breathlessness, confusion, and also a regional intonation. Although Fox was from the Midlands, and dictated his experiences, his words as cited by Monk register the omission of the definite article that characterises the grammar of the Lancastrian dialect. The first person pronoun that Fox uses repeatedly himself, appears several times, its intensity heightened by the description of increasing altitude, and the assonance of

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<sup>90</sup> Fox, pp. 103–4.

<sup>91</sup> Fox, p. 102.

'HIGH' and 'I'. In the Journal entry Fox's use of the first person takes a vatic tone. He presents himself as a prophet elected for the trial of ascending the hill, in order that he might be shown a vision of the true church. The echoes of Jesus' temptation on a high mountain in the wilderness that resonate in Fox's confidence of his calling, are undermined in Monk's poem by the bracketing of the lyric '(I)'. This suspended self in parentheses lacks the assurance of Fox's original vision, as '(IT)', the hill which must be climbed, seems to take precedence over or remain at least equal to the '(I)'. Where Fox claimed to see a vision of 'a great people to be gathered' under the Quaker banner that he himself had initiated, Monk's final two lines suggest that all '(I)' sees is '(IT)', the slopes of the hill itself. This destabilising of the lyric 'I' seem to run counter to Fox's own assertion of selfhood. Yet as Knott suggests 'self-effacement' and 'self-promotion' were not contradictory for Fox.<sup>92</sup> Instead the two together operate rather like Monk's emplacement and displacement of the lyric voice in her collaborations, as strategies that would both credit Fox's own oratory, and the power of the divine voice that inspired it.

According to Knott, what makes Fox's self-presentation in the Journal seem so self-assured compared to other spiritual autobiographers such as Bunyan, 'who looked primarily to some future vindication of the true church, is his habit of seeing God's power asserting itself in present events, through the agency of George Fox'.<sup>93</sup> This self-presentation extended to the courtroom where, as the Journal claims several times, the people marvel at Fox being too 'cunning' for the judges and magistrates.<sup>94</sup> As Knott shows, Fox demonstrates his ability to repeatedly confound trial officials, and the Journal is accomplished in dramatising these courtroom scenes, particularly the trial at Lancaster in 1664. Charges are resubmitted against him and Fox subsequently imprisoned, yet he never admits defeat, as Knott points out.<sup>95</sup> Instead he maintains a strong sense of agency in prison and 'supported' by 'the Lord's power' he does as much 'service for him and for his Truth and people, as the place would admit'.<sup>96</sup> Unlike the accused at Pendle in 1612, who according to Potts' trial reports at least, much more readily confessed to a concoction of diabolic crimes, Fox

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<sup>92</sup> Knott, p. 246.

<sup>93</sup> Knott, p. 251.

<sup>94</sup> Fox, pp. 296, 428, 480.

<sup>95</sup> Knott, pp. 249–51.

<sup>96</sup> Fox, p. 487.

repeatedly presents himself as an innocent man whose suffering is a sign of upright dissent against the established order. In this sense even if it is possible to draw connections between the Pendle villagers and Fox, the accusations of witchcraft to which the Quakers were subjected are as Elmer puts it, 'of a different order from that normally ascribed to old, poor and obscure women'. Thus witchcraft should not be understood as a 'static' discourse, in the way that contemporary critics of Monk's sequence might suggest, rather the political, religious and social contexts of its deployment reshaped the figure of the witch in seventeenth century England.<sup>97</sup> Elmer argues that 'the politicisation of witchcraft would continue to grow apace with each political crisis', and it is against this backdrop that the accusations against Fox should be understood as exemplary of a wider agonism that was not taking place in the heavens between 'God and the devil', but on the soil of England, between subject and sovereign authority.<sup>98</sup>

Fox's presence in the sequence thus opens a vista not only onto the ostensibly sacred slopes of Pendle, but also onto the wider political upheaval of the Civil War and subsequent Interregnum period which saw the rise of such radical dissent. This section concludes therefore by examining the implications of Monk's use of *Interregnum* as a title and sub-title to her sequence. Although it is possible to interpret the title figuratively as a general sign of freedom from authority, this overlooks the compound political resonances of the term. The *Oxford English Dictionary* indicates that interregnum originated as a Roman constitutional term for 'temporary authority or rule exercised during a vacancy of the throne or a suspension of the usual government.' Once the name of the ruling authority itself, interregnum now more commonly refers to an 'interval between the close of a king's reign and the accession of his successor; any period during which a state is left without a ruler or with a merely provisional government'.<sup>99</sup> This latter meaning has come to stand for the period in English history between the regicide of Charles I in 1649 and the restoration of Charles II in 1660 during which time Parliament assumed the authority of the King. Monk's *Interregnum* does not deal directly with political events between 1649 and 1660; indeed she seems more interested in the lives and deaths of the

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<sup>97</sup> Elmer, p. 177.

<sup>98</sup> Elmer, p. 163.

<sup>99</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. interregnum.



dissenting poor and other social outsiders, or 'Outriders' as she calls them, than in the succession of kings. The experience of Fox on Pendle Hill is the only event of the Interregnum period to which the poem sequence refers. Sovereign death and return are implicit in the title, however, and it is this figure that both legitimises and overshadows the dissenting religious voices of the text, the Pendle witches, Fox and Hopkins.

The sovereign death which is absent in Monk's text, and the dead voices which reverberate in the landscape of Pendle are set in opposition to one another in the term interregnum; the kingly body versus the common body. Monk's speaking with the dead thus thematises what Jacques Ranciere refers to as the 'two extreme relations of the speaker with death: regicide and the Inquisition'.<sup>100</sup> According to Ranciere:

Regicide is unredeemable death, legitimacy that has collapsed in the turmoil of voices where no silent one may be heard, only chatterers. [...] Inquisitorial death, on the contrary, is redeemable death, which makes the silences and the silent ones of history speak. It is why the 'psychoanalysis' of the witch is the necessary detour at the foundation [...] of a history freed from the Medusa's head that is the king.<sup>101</sup>

Regicide is here opposed to inquisitorial death through the operation of speech. For the 'silent ones of history to speak' there must be a silencing of another voice, that of sovereignty. For Ranciere the figure of the 'witch' is the symbol of the voices and lives silenced by sovereign or state power throughout Western history. If the Inquisition is emblematic of state power, it was also exemplary in its ability to make the 'silent ones of history speak' through confession. Far more than the Jacobean court in England, which heard a relatively small number of witch trials, Inquisitorial laws created rather than silenced heretics. The regicide of Charles I is also significant here as it is a symbol of freedom from sovereign power, in that it altered the relationship between the political body of the king and the body of the subject. Paul Ricoeur glosses Ranciere's argument suggesting that the legitimised death of a king was required, 'in order to recover the silent voices of the poor and the masses,

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<sup>100</sup> Jacques Ranciere, *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. 74.

<sup>101</sup> Ranciere, p. 74.

and through them, common death. For the king dies just like everyone else.<sup>102</sup> The recovery of the silent voices of history is not simply predicated on the king losing his physical head, however, as the historian must perform a 'psychoanalysis' or written recovery of the 'witch' in order that history is truly 'freed' from the political 'head' of kingship. It is thus only through a textual retrieval of the silenced voices of history, a ventriloquising of the sources and traditions, that common death can be recovered. Monk effects a similar rewriting and recovery in her poetic redemption of the witches and figures such as Fox. Common death is no longer destitute or silenced; instead Monk's ventriloquism means that these voices resound 'through the centuries / of unrecorded silence' insisting 'That is my story' (*SP* 155).

*Interregnum* redeems these silenced voices in an exemplary historical gesture. As Ricoeur explains, the recovery of the dead is 'implied in the very act of doing history'; the 'historiographical operation' is the linguistic equivalent to the 'social ritual of entombment, of the act of sepulcher'.<sup>103</sup> The 'material place' of the sepulchre or cemetery is an 'enduring mark of mourning', transformed in historical writing to a 'place in discourse' which 'has as its counterpart the place of the reader to whom the writing of history is addressed'.<sup>104</sup> Likewise Monk creates a discursive space for recalling the dead, yet something of the material place, Pendle as an exhumed grave, remains as well. Here writing does not function as a one-way operation whereby the material site of the grave is transformed into a purely linguistic figure. Instead the words that Monk's writes with and through are already entombed in the landscape of Pendle as Potts' trial reports and Fox's Journal demonstrate.

However, if the redemption of common death is predicated on the death of the natural body of the king, the political body is not so easily excised from history, or from the poem. The idea that the figure of the witch might embody the concept of *interregnum* as a period of freedom, works through the opposition of the common body to the sovereign body, and freedom to authority. Yet this elision of body and politics overlooks the fact or properly speaking the 'fiction' of the king's two bodies. As the living law and representative of the body politic, the king cannot die. Hence the ritual cry of

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<sup>102</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 368.

<sup>103</sup> Ricoeur, p. 365.

<sup>104</sup> Ricoeur, pp. 366–7.

succession – ‘The King is Dead, Long Live the King’ – that signifies that while the natural body of the king dies; the political body of the king is immortal. The legitimised regicide of Charles I, however, suggests a disruption in the order of things sufficient to radically alter political power and sever it from the sovereign body. A suspension of usual sovereign authority did ensue and as I have noted, the Interregnum period saw the rise of radical religious groups such as the Quakers who were increasingly seen as a threat to established ecclesiastical and parliamentary authority.<sup>105</sup> According to Thomas Corns, like other nonconformists during this period, Fox himself believed that the second coming of Christ would ‘be accompanied by great apocalyptic forces that’ would ‘unsettle all the religious, social and political institutions and forms of the present age’.<sup>106</sup> Nevertheless it is arguable how far the rise of such radicalism could be called ‘freedom’ in the contemporary liberal sense that Monk’s commentators or even the poet herself might read in the term interregnum. Parliament and then the Protectorate took on the mantle of sovereign power under the name of a Commonwealth, and nonconformism was as we have seen, as much suppressed as Catholicism. Moreover, as Elmer points out, Quakers were further subjected to ecclesiastical and magisterial control after 1660, as the Restoration authorities also sought to curb the ostensible dangers of religious fanaticism.<sup>107</sup>

Ernst Hartwig Kantorowicz suggests that the ‘king’s body natural’ was in fact executed without ‘doing irreparable harm to the King’s body politic’.<sup>108</sup> Indeed he claims that Parliament exploited the ‘fiction’ of the king’s two bodies in order to legitimise the regicide, summoning ‘in the name and by the authority of Charles I, King body politic, the armies which were to fight the same Charles I, king body natural’.<sup>109</sup> Thus ‘A Declaration of the Lords and Commons concerning His Majesty’s Proclamation, the 27<sup>th</sup> of May, 1642’ decreed that the King’s authority is ‘not exercised in his own Person’ but on his behalf by ‘his Courts and Ministers’ and therefore ‘what they do herein hath the stamp of

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<sup>105</sup> Thomas Corns, *The Emergence of Quaker Writing: Dissenting Literature in Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 2.

<sup>106</sup> Corns, p. 27.

<sup>107</sup> Elmer, p. 178.

<sup>108</sup> Ernst Hartwig Kantorowicz, *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 23.

<sup>109</sup> Kantorowicz, p. 21.

Royal Authority, although His Majesty, seduced by evil counsel, do in his own person oppose or interrupt the same.<sup>110</sup>

Sovereign power is therefore not severed from the body politic as easily as was the head of the King from his natural body. Neither does the title of Monk's sequence licence an easy suspension of power in the figures of her various 'Out-riders', or outsiders. Agamben has argued that even a period of misrule or anomie – such as interregnum or the brief reversal of king and fool during ritual festival – inheres in the sovereign body as living law. *Nomos* (law) and anomie (life) are for Agamben two faces of the same authority, and as such dissent is contained and enfolded within sovereign power, and does not exist outside it. Thus the ritual mourning that traditionally characterises the period after the king's death works to suppress the potential anarchy of history, and so instead of being the sign of freedom, interregnum is conversely the mark of the continuity of political power.<sup>111</sup> Rather than inhering in the bodies of the Pendle witches or Fox as a force of resistance then, interregnum power is instead enacted upon them. The 'Arch and Gaffing / Lords misrule and twist' in the poem 'STRIP SEARCH', who suggest a world turned upside down, turn out to be accusers, gaolers and executioners (*SP* 133). As such Monk's resurrection of Fox as a 'reversed emblem', and the 'dangerously sweet /delights' of which the witches sing, sit uneasily alongside their persecution, imprisonment, and in the case of the Pendle villagers at least, violent deaths (*SP* 128). The voices that the poet gives to these figures, which enable them to tell their own story and speak of their own deaths, may turn out to have no more agency than the confessions of a 'truth telling' subject before the Inquisitorial spirit of the law (*SP* 134). These spectres reverberate in the landscape of the poem but do not speak for themselves; their voices are confined and mediated by historical sources – the recorded speech of Potts' witch-trial reports, and the heavily edited journal of Fox. It seems for Monk that it is only through the added literary stratum of her collaboration with Hopkins that these exhumed historical figures realise their full poetic potential. In *Speaking with the Dead*, Pieters suggests

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<sup>110</sup> 'House of Lords Journal Volume 5: 6 June 1642', Journal of the House of Lords: volume 5: 1642–1643, 106–113 (p. 112), *British History Online* <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=34816>> [accessed 18 March 2013]; also cited in Kantorowicz, p. 21, although note that Kantorowicz confuses the date of the King's proclamation (27 May 1642) with the declaration of the Lords and Commons which is actually 6 June 1642.

<sup>111</sup> Agamben, *State of Exception* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 65–72.

that 'the dead can be heard better and more intensely in literary texts than in non-literary [historical] ones'.<sup>112</sup> If this is indeed the case then Hopkins' poetry acts as an echo chamber in *Interregnum* amplifying the other historical voices and Monk's own.

## 6. Victorian Voices: Hopkins' Sacramental Landscape

Hopkins studied philosophy at the Jesuit college Stonyhurst, in Whalley, East Lancashire between 1870 and 1873, returning later to teach there in 1878, and between 1882 and 1884. Monk explains that during research for the sequence she was drawn to a similarity between the poetry that Hopkins wrote during his time at Stonyhurst, and the witches' spells; she found the 'convergence of people, place and religious belief [...] irresistible' ('Collaborations' 179). She suggests that 'making extensive use of [Hopkins'] poems' along with 'the witches' own spells' raises several questions about the interchangeability of the texts and their authors, and therefore the extent to which the 'balance' of their respective lives is altered by their 'placement in time, social position and gender'. Thus Monk claims that she is able to interrogate several 'social, political and historical myths' through effecting, or permitting 'these chance collisions of words and worlds' ('Collaborations' 180). The chapter concludes then with a discussion of Hopkins as Monk's primary interlocutor, one that reveals ambivalence towards the claims of unruly freedom that the poem and its commentators might otherwise suggest. This section concludes the chapter by showing that the poem's excavation of seventeenth-century sources and voices of Pendle, is incomplete for Monk without Hopkins' sacramental poetics of place.

Like Monk, Hopkins' imagination was pricked by the association of witchcraft with Pendle; his journal records the following walk over the hill during his initial stay at Stonyhurst in 1872.

Sept. 17 – I wandered all over Pendle with Mr. Sutton. There are some black scalped places on it that look made for a witches' sabbath, especially on the far side looking over the part of the country which the bulk of the hill between hides from us here, where the hillside is very sheer, and you might fancy them

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<sup>112</sup> Pieters, p. 9.

dancing on the black piece and higher and higher at each round then flinging off at last one after the other on her broomstick clear over the flat country below. And there is another odd thing by the same token here, namely that looking out forward over the edge while right and left and beyond is wooded [...] there lies before you a bare stretch of land almost without a tree it is so bleak and bare and in size and shape just such as might be covered by the shadow of Pendle at some time of day: as the shadow of a wall or tree scores off and keeps and shelters hoarfrost or dew and the sunlight eats up to the edge of it this seemed chilled and blasted with just such well-marked plotting of and bounding line.<sup>113</sup>

Much of Hopkins' journal entries are given over to observations of natural phenomena, the detail and pattern of clouds, water, flora and fauna. The act of imagining the witches also occurs directly out of the poet's experience of being on the hill, corresponding with his observations of form, pattern and design in the landscape. The 'black scalped places' on Pendle are reflected in an adjacent 'bare stretch of land' which the poet imagines as a shadow repeatedly cast by the hill. The shadow marks out the bare stretch of land like a draughts-person or artist 'plotting' the 'bounding line' of a shape or form. Hopkins' fascination with design and pattern is evident throughout his poetry and prose, but is as Catherine Phillips suggests, anticipated in his sketches and drawings, particularly in the privileging of 'line over tonal' shading and the sharp attention to detail.<sup>114</sup> This concern with pattern is, Phillips argues, integral to the poet's idea of 'inscape', although the artistic origin of Hopkins' term is generally she claims overlooked by critics.<sup>115</sup> In a letter of 1879 to Robert Bridges, his literary executor, Hopkins attests directly to the importance of artistic modes for the rendering of inscape in his poetry: 'design, pattern or what I am in the habit of calling "inscape" is what I above all aim at in poetry. Now it is the virtue of design, pattern, or inscape to be distinctive and it is the vice of distinctiveness to become queer.' The distinctive quality of inscape, or unique pattern of a thing, is apt to make it appear strange or 'queer' and Hopkins admits that his own poetry 'errs on the side of oddness'.<sup>116</sup> Here Pendle Hill is made as 'odd' as the history and myth embedded there, through the pattern and design that

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<sup>113</sup> Hopkins, *Notebooks and Papers*, ed. by House, pp. 168–9.

<sup>114</sup> Phillips, *Hopkins and the Victorian Visual World*, p. 34.

<sup>115</sup> Phillips, *Hopkins and the Victorian Visual World*, p. 35.

<sup>116</sup> Hopkins, letter to Robert Bridges, 15 February 1879, in *Hopkins to Bridges*, ed. by Abbott, p. 66.

Hopkins perceives in the 'bleak and bare' landscape before him. Landscape thus 'plotted and pieced' appears again in 'Pied Beauty', indicating a correlation between God's intelligent design and human agricultural enterprise. Yet here too all God's 'dappled things' run surprisingly 'counter, original, spare, strange' to the harmonious principles of Hopkins' Christian cosmology, or divine pattern. Commenting on inscape, Wilhelmus Peters remarks that 'the suffix scape in 'landscape' and 'seascape' posits the presence of a unifying principle which enables us to consider part of the countryside or sea as a unit and as an individual, but so that this part is perceived to carry the typical properties of the actually undivided whole.'<sup>117</sup> This sense of differentiated unity is key to Hopkins' sense of the unique patterning of a thing as it expresses the universal divine pattern.<sup>118</sup> As I have pointed out, principles of spatial composition, pattern and form are similarly important to Monk and her 'emotional geography' of the North.

When read via Hopkins, Monk's concern with form and linguistic play is increasingly evident. 'Outriders' for example which Monk uses as a section heading for poems about the shift workers, Fox and Hopkins himself, might be simply understood to indicate the marginalised voices of the hill, via the word's similarity with outsider. However, the unusual nature of the term suggests that it is drawn directly from Hopkins' theory of sprung rhythm, where 'outrides [are], one, two, or three slack syllables added to a foot and not counting in the nominal scanning. They are so called because they seem to hang below the line or ride forward or backward from it in another dimension than the line itself.'<sup>119</sup> While outrides are often difficult to distinguish from other metrical feet such as paeans or dactyls without the assistance of metrical marks in the manuscripts, they must not be so 'confused' according to Hopkins. The difference being that the 'strong syllable in an outriding foot has always a great stress and after the outrider follows a short pause'.<sup>120</sup> Such devices serve to effect a rhythm of common speech, one that disrupts the usual pattern of reading, a linguistic figure that simultaneously dramatises the origins and

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<sup>117</sup> Wilhelmus Peters, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Critical Essay Towards the Understanding of His Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 2.

<sup>118</sup> On science and differentiated unity in Hopkins, see, Daniel Brown, *Hopkins' Idealism: Philosophy, Physics, Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>119</sup> Hopkins, 'Author's Preface', p. 108.

<sup>120</sup> Hopkins, 'Note to "Hurrahing in Harvest"', in *Major Works*, ed. by Phillips, p. 354 n.

disjunctions of language, and therefore the self. The outriders in *Interregnum*, are never only subjects of history or symbols of particular regional identities, but linguistic figures through which Monk can explore the possibilities and constraints of representing the self through the rhythm and pauses that constitute the lyric voice.

The final voice in the 'Hill Outriders' section then is Hopkins himself, fondly parodied in the poem 'JESUIT BOY BLUES'. The lyric 'I' is posited in the 'Selfbent', 'Selfworn' figure which Monk excises from the final sextet of Hopkins' sonnet 'Ribblesdale' and repositions in her own octet.

And what is Earth's eye, tongue, or heart else, where

Else, but in dear and dogged man? Ah, the heir  
To his own selfbent so bound, so tied to his turn,

To thriftless reave both our rich round world bare  
And none reck of world after, this bids wear

Earth brows of such care, care and dear concern.<sup>121</sup>

The manuscript *A* version of 'Ribblesdale' includes a preface in Latin of Romans 8:19–20 that adumbrates the poem, describing the waiting of not merely the individual sinner, but the whole of creation for the final redemption: *Nam expectatio creaturae revelationem filiorum Dei expectat. Vanitati enim creatura subiecta est non volens sed propter eum qui subiecit in spem.*<sup>122</sup> The sonnet opens with a vision of the 'sweet' Lancashire landscape which 'dost appeal' to 'heaven' for its deliverance from 'selfbent' man, though it has 'no tongue to plead, no heart to feel' and can only plead through its very being, it only 'canst but be'.<sup>123</sup> It then makes its traditional turn via a shift into pathetic fallacy, as 'dear and dogged man' is now the embodiment of 'Earth's eye, tongue, or heart', and the 'Earth' also 'tied to [man's] turn', conversely wears

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<sup>121</sup> Hopkins, 'Ribblesdale' in *Major Works*, ed. by Phillips, p. 156–7 (p. 157).

<sup>122</sup> *Major Works*, ed. by Phillips, p. 369 n; Romans 8: 19–20 (NASB): 'For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God.'

<sup>123</sup> Hopkins, 'Ribblesdale', p. 157.



'brows of such care'. Hopkins frequently draws on observations of the natural world particularly meteorological phenomena, from his journals and other prose as a source for the coincidence of self and world in his poetry. In an article in the journal *Nature* he writes about the visual effect on his local landscape of the distant eruptions of Krakatoa in 1883: 'while these changes were going on in the sky. The landscape of Ribblesdale glowed with a frowning brown'.<sup>124</sup>

These descriptions aim to catch the 'inscape', the characteristic pattern or thisness of a thing, and the 'instress', the binding force that unites the particular with the universal and stresses the inscape of the thing within the observer.<sup>125</sup> In a journal entry of 14 September 1871, Hopkins asserts that the relation between subject and object, language and nature, must be governed by these two modes, not 'imposed outwards from the mind as for instance by melancholy or strong feeling', otherwise poetry would fall into pathetic fallacy.<sup>126</sup> Hopkins struggled with how one might reconcile self and world through intense perception. In an earlier journal entry of March the same year, he observes: '[w]hat you look hard at seems to look hard at you, hence the true and false instress of nature.' When nature appears to look back with either sorrow ('brows of such care'), or beneficence ('care and deep concern'), it is a false impression wrought from imposing the mind on nature. For Hopkins the restoration of the faculties seems to lie in the air, rather than the earth. After a meditation on the nature of clouds he concludes here that the solution to false instress is to 'refresh the mind from time to time' in order to 'remember [and] believe how deep the inscape in things is'.<sup>127</sup> Yet, as Daniel Harris suggests the 'encroachment of pathetic fallacy' in Hopkins' style becomes apparent in poems such as 'Ribblesdale' that immediately pre-date the more desolate 'terrible sonnets'. The speaker's melancholy at the abandonment of the 'Earth' by God dramatises the 'need to anthropomorphize nature in order to obscure, and thus ameliorate, the upsetting division between self and nature that [Hopkins] was then discovering'.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Hopkins, 'The Remarkable Sunsets', *Nature*, 29 (1884), 222–3 (p. 223).

<sup>125</sup> Phillips, 'Introduction', in *Major Works*, pp. xv–xxxv (p. xx); see also Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 91.

<sup>126</sup> Hopkins, *Notebooks and Papers*, ed. by House, p. 215.

<sup>127</sup> Hopkins, *Notebooks and Papers*, ed. by House, p. 140.

<sup>128</sup> Daniel A. Harris, *Inspirations Unbidden, the 'Terrible Sonnets' of Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 20.

Monk also registers the insurmountable division between self and nature throughout *Interregnum* as she documents the 'GOOD FRIDAY HIKERS' and their efforts 'to warble out' their 'naming of the / parts / of nature's / rambling / incoherence' (SP 101), or the 'crud', 'cheapo' attempts of the 'latter day Pagans' to 'pure Mother Earth fuck' (SP 104). Where 'Ribblesdale' has the Earth bearing 'brows of such care', Monk returns this expression to Hopkins himself in the poem 'JESUIT BOY BLUES':

Dear and dogged man. Selfbent, bound;

So tired and turned, brows of such care,  
World bare, and none to touch my everywhere

Perfumed, greedy guilt dreams of long-grass  
Love-boys, sea-shells, blue-breeze stings and  
Salts my tonguing meaty meatless sins to  
Whip the words across and cross my precious  
Selfworn, world-torn, aching bodybent. Ah!  
(SP 107)

No longer a representative of every man's sin, this 'Dear and dogged man' is here the tortured poet, who in Monk's own words this time, is charged with self-infliction of suffering, 'Selfworn, world-torn'. If Hopkins' 'man' is 'Selfbent' through original sin or concupiscence, Monk's figure is guilty of solipsistic masochism, 'greedy guilt dreams', and 'meaty meatless sins'. Like Fox, whose hunted animal form attests to abjection and death as well as redemption, Hopkins' 'dogged' points to the dual nature of man's state. As Geoffrey Hill suggestively puts it Hopkins 'is drawn down to a double nature within the etymological stratum, where *dōgd* (hounded) and *dō-géd* (tenacious) lie like shards or bones of 'more recondite and difficult' matter within the simple hereditary accruals of the vernacular.'<sup>129</sup> The excavation of the difficult 'matter' of language and the ambivalence that this generates is as we have seen in respect of Hill's work a demand that the poet must meet. For Hill as for Hopkins the poet must not let go of language in his struggle against the sinfulness of this

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<sup>129</sup> Hill, 'Our Word is Our Bond' in *Collected Critical Writings*, ed. by Haynes, pp. 146–169 (p. 160).

'rich round world', and in this sense poetry must retain some kind of salvific power. To be both 'dear' to God and 'dogged' by a sin that taints the whole of creation, man's only hope is a final redemption, one which is typologically found in the process of conversion, and in turn within poetry that expresses such concerns. While 'Ribblesdale' speaks of this final redemption, it does not enact the cry of conversion in the express manner of other Hopkins' verses such as 'As Kingfishers Catch Fire' or 'That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire'.

Nevertheless there is a vestige of this cry or groan for deliverance in Hopkins' 'Ah', which Monk emphasises through re-grafting the word to the end of her final line. Here it is the coda to a body reinscribed by its own words which 'Whip', 'across and cross my precious / Selfworn, world-torn, aching bodybent'. Hill writes of this 'ambivalent power of the "short words"' in Hopkins; they are 'the most elemental material', the 'abrupt selving of prayer'.<sup>130</sup> In the 'Ah', of Hopkins and its amplification in Monk's line, we find a communion between what Hill deems 'the expletive of a potentially filthy bare-forked animal' and 'the bare word of faith'.<sup>131</sup> Monk also registers the conjunction of abjection and belief in the histories and personal memories of Catholicism in *Interregnum*. For her, however, abjection (the witches, Fox) does not necessarily indicate original sinfulness, no more than belief guarantees salvation or resurrection.

The process of selving that Hill describes in Hopkins' poetry relies on a coincidence of the 'world bare' and the bare interior of man exposed to the redemptive power of conversion. David Downes explains that 'Hopkins expressed conversion in selving patterns', a hermeneutics of self, whereby, 'the positing 'I' is called from within and without the self to correspond to a gifting of new selving possibility. To do so means a realignment of the interior self in radical ways, a transformation that needs converting assent'.<sup>132</sup> Hopkins was influenced by John Henry Newman's 'theology of assent', which underlines the requirement to actively remake the interior self during the act of conversion; assent 'is the act of one's whole being, in which the mind becomes possessed by its belief'.<sup>133</sup> This notion comes close to what Scarry describes as the scene of wounding that accompanies scenes of doubt and conversely belief. She

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<sup>130</sup> Hill, 'Redeeming the Time', in *Collected Critical Writings*, ed. by Haynes pp. 88–108 (p. 105).

<sup>131</sup> Hill, 'Redeeming the Time', p. 106.

<sup>132</sup> David Downes, *Hopkins' Achieved Self* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2002), p. 163.

<sup>133</sup> Eugene Hollahan, *Gerard Manley Hopkins and Critical Discourse* (New York: AMS Press, 1993), p. 245.

claims that the ‘fragility of the human interior and the absolute surrender of that interior [...] does not simply accompany belief, [but] is itself belief’.<sup>134</sup> The realignment of one’s interior as evidence of belief or confession of some kind is a violent act that in *Interregnum* is continually written into the voices that the poem redeems, and onto the landscape itself. Monk ventriloquises the ‘Out-thoughts’ of Anne Redfearne, the only one of the accused not to confess (neither did she give evidence against the others) as a body and landscape turned inside out: ‘strange things in earth be /came familiar // membranes stranger / squatted – flared viral / – acuity mangled senses – / squatted and smeared through under / growth’ (*SP* 144). Whether this attempts to recall Anne’s experiences before or after her death, the landscape of the hill is certainly not a quiet grave. The sequence is replete with grotesque visions of human interiors, and many of these such as the ‘arteria magnus of man’ in ‘Spread’ are as I have already suggested, fused with Catholic imagery.

The realignment of the interior self through conversion is akin to the fiat or assent of the Virgin Mary at the Incarnation: ‘Behold, the bondslave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word’ (Luke 1:38, NASB). The circumstances of the incarnation of Christ, Mary’s assent and sinlessness surface in *Interregnum* through Monk’s treatment of her own Catholic childhood, and the experiences of the accused women of Pendle. Monk overlays seventeenth-century Catholic Lancashire with the nineteenth-century Marian devotion of Hopkins in the ‘Chantcasters’ section where Demdike sings lines from ‘The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe’. The other two poems in this section, ‘CHATTOX SINGS’ and ‘ALL SING’, also rework lines from Hopkins, this time from ‘The Leaden Echo and The Golden Echo’, his ‘Maidens’ song from St. Winefred’s Well’.<sup>135</sup> The surrender of the human interior to God that both of Hopkins’ poems touch upon, is not reconfigured as assent in *Interregnum*, however; instead Monk suggests a violent appropriation of the body in her reprise of Hopkins’ lines in Chattox’s song: ‘Whatever’s prized’ and ‘seems sweet to us of us’ is ‘swiftly’, ‘done away with, / undone’ (*SP* 126–7). ‘The Blessed Virgin’ is cited at length below, in order to highlight Monk’s divergence from Hopkins’ sentiment.

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<sup>134</sup> Scarry, p. 204.

<sup>135</sup> ‘The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo’, in *Major Works*, ed. by Phillips, pp. 155–6, reconciles initial despair with Hopkins’ customary salvation. Monk uses lines from both parts of the poem, but reverses Hopkins by concluding Chattox’s song with ‘despair’.



Laying, like air's fine flood,  
The deathdance in his blood;  
Yet no part but what will  
Be Christ our Saviour still.

[...]

Men here may draw like breath            66  
More Christ and baffle death;

[...]

Again, look overhead  
How air is azurèd  
Oh how! Nay do but stand  
Where you can lift your hand  
Skywards : rich, rich it laps  
Round the four fingergaps.  
Yet such a sapphire-shot,  
Charged, steepèd sky will not            80  
Stain light. Yea, mark you this:  
It does no prejudice.  
The glass-blue days are those  
When every colour glows,  
Each shape and shadow shows.  
Blue be it: this blue heaven  
The seven or seven times seven  
Hued sunbeam will transmit  
Perfect not alter it.<sup>136</sup>

Hopkins' 'Blessed Virgin' was composed at Stonyhurst in May 1883, to be hung up alongside other 'polyglot poems' in her 'honour'. Written in 'English in three-foot couplets' the poem was, Hopkins claimed 'partly a compromise with popular taste'.<sup>137</sup> Like his earlier 'May Magnificat' (1878) the poem adopts the style of other nineteenth-century May poetry such as Newman's 'The Month of Mary' (1850) or Aubrey de Vere's *May Carols* (1857). Converts to Catholicism like Newman and Hopkins understood their poetry to have a sacramental purpose; here this was part of the Catholic custom of May devotion

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<sup>136</sup> Hopkins, 'The Blessed Virgin Compared to the Air we Breathe', in *Major Works*, ed. by Phillips, pp. 158–161.

<sup>137</sup> Hopkins, letter to Robert Bridges, 11 May 1883, in *Hopkins to Bridges*, ed. by Abbott, p. 179.

which had been introduced to England from Europe in around 1840 by Rosminian priest, Aloysius Gentili.<sup>138</sup> Hopkins was critical of the poem for its acquiescence to ‘popular taste’, and it has received little attention in comparison to his other work, perhaps due to its formal limitations. Critics interested in placing Hopkins in nineteenth-century contexts have noted the influence of scientific developments in the poem. Gillian Beer has established the importance of nineteenth-century scientific materialism for Hopkins, particularly in the field of physics where the work of figures like John Tyndall on thermodynamics, and wave theories of sound and light were raising questions concerning ‘the relationships between ordinary human perceptions and science’.<sup>139</sup> ‘The Blessed Virgin’ uses the metaphor of air and light, to reveal the intercessory power of Mary as mediatrix. Beer demonstrates how Hopkins draws on a scientific address delivered by Tyndall before the British Association in 1870, which deals with the false perception that the colour blue is a property of the sky itself, to provide the conceit of the poem. As Brown further suggests the poem refers not only to the seven-fold spectrum of which Hopkins’ ‘blue heaven’ is one colour, but also to the manifold ‘gradations’ of ‘each chemical element’ as it is ‘registered in a specific wave-length’.<sup>140</sup> Hopkins’ ‘seven or seven times seven / Hued sunbeam [which] will transmit / Perfect’ combines, as Brown cogently argues, to form ‘clear white light’ which represents ‘the all-inclusive and ultimate ontological principle of God’.<sup>141</sup> As mediatrix between sinful man and the overwhelming light of the sun/Son, Mary refracts ‘God’s glory’ but her sinless nature means that like the ‘sapphire-shot, / Charged, steepèd sky’ she ‘will not stain [this] light’. As Angus Easson suggests the recently confirmed dogma of the Immaculate Conception (1854) was especially important for Hopkins as it was ‘championed’ by Duns Scotus, from whom the poet drew many of his theological and philosophical ideas.<sup>142</sup> In the *Ineffabilis Deus*, a papal bull of 8 December, 1854, Pius IX upheld the long disputed belief that ‘in the first instance of her [Mary’s] conception, by a singular privilege and grace granted by God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the

<sup>138</sup> Norman H. MacKenzie and Catherine Phillips, *A Reader’s Guide to Gerard Manley Hopkins* (Philadelphia: Saint Joseph’s University Press, 2008), p. 98.

<sup>139</sup> Gillian Beer, ‘Helmholtz, Tyndall, Gerard Manley Hopkins: Leaps of the Prepared Imagination’, *Comparative Criticism*, 13 (1992), 117–145 (p. 121).

<sup>140</sup> Brown, *Hopkins’ Idealism*, p. 202.

<sup>141</sup> Brown, *Hopkins’ Idealism*, p. 202.

<sup>142</sup> Angus Easson, *Gerard Manley Hopkins* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2011), p. 78.

human race, was preserved exempt from all stain of original sin'.<sup>143</sup> For Hopkins, 'Mary Immaculate', though 'Merely a woman' thus sustained by her 'presence' a 'power', 'Great as no goddess's / Was deemèd, dreamèd'.

Monk excises the references to 'God's infinity', the saving power of 'Christ our Saviour' and the doctrine of 'Mary Immaculate' in 'DEMDIKE SINGS'. The only refractions that take place here are the poet's own; she alters the emphasis of Hopkins' celebration of Mary's fiat, and his assent to her 'world-mothering air', at the same time using his own words to dryly acknowledge her appropriations: 'Perfect. // Not alter it' (*SP* 125). Rather than 'draw [Christ] like breath' as Hopkins would have it, Monk gives Demdike the refrain: '(Welcome in womb and breast / Birth-milk draw like breath)' (125). This is not to say that Hopkins does not also embrace the motherhood of Mary, Monk's lines are of course still direct citation: 'Welcome in womb and breast, Birth, milk, and all the rest / But mothers each new grace / That does now reach our race – Mary Immaculate'. For Hopkins, however, these aspects of motherhood, 'womb' and 'breast' are merely symbolic vessels for the incubation of God's grace, and Mary plays only a 'part' in this process. Just as Hopkins' subdues the wildness of the 'air' through the sinless mantle of 'Mary Immaculate' then, so Monk suppresses the sinlessness of Mary that would necessarily impute the abjection of the other figures that she gives voice to in 'Chantcasters'. The eucharistic 'nursing element' which is for Hopkins 'more than meat or drink' is transformed into the mark and stain of witchcraft in Monk's incantations: 'More than meat or drink. Better than stars and water. Words birthed, Made flesh. Took wing. Horrids and enormities. Chantcasters. Daubing lunarscapes. Stench polluting skies' (*SP* 124). Monk sets out in *Interregnum* to ventriloquise the lost voices of Pendle that were arguably suppressed by the legal language of Potts' trial reports. Her excavations led her to exhume and re-stratify these and Hopkins' dialogues with Pendle in the differentiated unity of *Interregnum*'s voice. Hopkins' 'Earth's eye, tongue, or heart' echoes Chattox's charm, and resounds in 'ALL SING': 'Earth's eye. Earth's tongue. Earth's heart. / Our counterparts cleaved. Wreathed. Cloven' (*SP* 128). Wrenched asunder from the gravesite of the hill, 'cleaved', 'Wreathed' and 'Cloven', Monk's *Interregnum* attempts to reconcile these spectral voices with the place of their articulation.

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<sup>143</sup> *Ineffabilis Deus*, Apostolic Constitution of Pope Pius IX, issued 8 December 1854.



This chapter has argued that Monk's avowed 'emotional attachment' to East Lancashire must be read alongside her engagement with existing historical and literary texts that already constitute its landscape. Monk's approach to excavating this site involves resurrecting its dead and making them speak. Despite the poet's claim of collaboration these spectres achieve limited agency through their voicing. They remain embedded in Pendle hill, en-graved there by their own hand or the inscriptions of others, in the form of trial reports, diaries, and finally in the poem itself. As with *Interregnum*, Alice Oswald's most recent collection, *Memorial: An Excavation of the Iliad*, ventriloquises the dead and the landscapes in which they are interred. These exhumations are examined in the following and final chapter. However, where the disinterments of Hill, Carson and Monk work largely on the premise that excavation is a process requiring human hands, vision or a set of tools with which spaces might be hollowed out and reshaped, Oswald's excavations overturn the idea that human intervention is a necessary aspect of producing place.

## IV. 'This is water's world': Alice Oswald's Geomorphology

and all the rivers of these men swell current to full spate  
and in the ravines of their water-courses rip all the hillsides  
and dash whirling in huge noise down to the blue sea, out of  
the mountains headlong, so that the works of men are diminished  
—*Iliad* 16.389–392<sup>1</sup>

There are streams sawing through hills  
Cutting up the grass into islands  
Everything is clattering to the sea  
This is water's world  
And the works of men are vanishing  
—Alice Oswald, *Memorial*<sup>2</sup>

### 1. Introduction

*Memorial's* reprise of Homer's *Iliad* is reminiscent of a dig. It is not simply that Oswald carefully removes the layers of plot, dialogue and the heroic deeds of the main characters to unearth 'the histories of the footsoldiers who died in their shadows exposed and gleaming, like rocks at low tide' as Sarah Crown describes.<sup>3</sup> The poet's textual excavation is also analogous to the geomorphic processes that have over millennia shaped the actual landscape of Homer's Troy, and which continue to assert their presence in *Memorial's* recapitulation of the Homeric simile. Oswald provides an apposite conclusion to the thesis because her concern with the ecologies of particular places marks a departure from the archaeological/geological trajectories of other poets covered here, in that she emphasises the excavatory work of nature itself. In modern geomorphological science, a range of specific processes, including water, wind, glaciation, rock formation, erosion and weathering, are analysed for their ability to shape the earth. The fluvial and igneous geomorphic forces with which Oswald's poetry seems particularly concerned, provides a model of excavation

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<sup>1</sup> *The Iliad of Homer*, trans. by Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951). This translation will be used throughout.

<sup>2</sup> Oswald, *Memorial: An Excavation of the Iliad* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), p. 40. Hereafter cited parenthetically as *M* followed by page number in arabic numerals.

<sup>3</sup> Oswald, interviewed by Sarah Crown, 'Haunted by Homer', *Guardian*, 10 October 2011, section G2, p. 20.

that eschews human agency, one in which the earth ostensibly unearths itself. Process, an essential concept in the science of geomorphology is key to Oswald's landscape ecology, underpinning the vein of non-human excavation that runs through her work.

In the discipline of archaeology, post-processual theory focuses on the process of excavation rather than the interpretation of artefacts or finds. Wallace suggests that if 'excavation' in post-processual terms is understood as 'a creative act involving artistic decisions of style and technique, then the process of digging and the archaeological site itself can be interpreted as well as the objects uncovered there.'<sup>4</sup> Moreover as the alteration of stratigraphic relationships through natural disturbances of soil, rock and other geomorphological processes demonstrate; landforms and landscapes can be shaped without human intervention. As with Carson's Sisyphean digging Oswald's methods favour process over the artefact itself. In Oswald's self-effacing lyric, however, excavation does not depend on human penetration of the earth's surface either by physical or visual means. Instead her excavations often occur outside the time and space of human experience, across vast stretches of geological time and deep beneath the earth's visible crust. Homer's Troy is as much 'water's world', as belonging to the heroic deeds or 'works of men'. The long action of rivers cutting through the rock of surrounding hills and mountains, carries sediment that when deposited transforms Troy's once natural harbour to alluvial plain.

The chapter begins by considering the emerging critical context for Oswald's poetry; including the poet's own commentary on her work. Critics have observed Oswald's desire to effect an intimacy with the non-human world in her work. For the poet, this may be accomplished through the twin impulse of diminishing the lyric voice through listening, and by allowing the non-human to speak for itself. The section argues that there is a consonance between this 'vanishing' lyric 'I' and the erosional work of the non-human. The second section locates Oswald's strategies of excavation in scientific and poetic traditions of geomorphological thought. It begins with her own account of more conventional tools for excavation including the spade and rake, and concludes

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<sup>4</sup> Wallace, *Digging the Dirt*, p. 14.

by establishing a connection between this human horticultural method of shaping landscape and a subsequent non-human geomorphological model.

The opening contexts and methods sections are followed by a discussion of fluvial and igneous processes of change in *Dart*, which, the chapter argues, is engaged in a dialogue with romantic geology. The next section examines tidal rhythms in *Sleepwalk on the Severn*, which reveals a landscape subject to gravitational forces that operate across different timescales. The chapter concludes with *Memorial* as it both exhumes and reinters the dead in its 'oral cemetery' via processes of erosion, flooding, and weathering (2). As with the other poets examined in this thesis, Oswald transforms the principles of archaeological poetics that I set out in my introduction: the relationship between past and present, the recovery and interpretation of finds, and the exhumation of the dead. Her emphasis on process, however, foregrounds a self-excavating earth shaped by internal geological processes, the transformative power of water, and the extra-terrestrial force of the moon on tidal flow.

## 2. Critical Contexts: Ecologies of the Lyric Self

Since the publication of her T. S. Eliot Prize-winning collection, *Dart*, Oswald's work has received wide critical acclaim. Early reviews which have now found their way onto book jackets, established Oswald as a poet whose work is 'embedded' deep in the 'bones of the landscape'; 'an heir to' Hughes, Heaney and Hill.<sup>5</sup> Emerging scholarship also tends to focus on Oswald's concern with the natural world, situating her work in various trajectories of writing place, from English romanticism to American modernism.<sup>6</sup> As with Carson, or indeed Monk, Oswald is understood to wrestle with these traditions of landscape poetics as much as she draws from them. Her particular concern is to challenge the ascendancy of the lyric self over the natural world, whilst at the same time

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<sup>5</sup> Rachel Campbell-Johnston cited on the book jacket of the 2003 Faber and Faber paperback edition of Oswald's *Dart*.

<sup>6</sup> On Oswald's anti-Wordsworthian lyric see Kym Martindale, 'Lyric Democracies in Alice Oswald's *Dart*', in *Process: Landscape and Text*, ed. by Catherine Brace and Adeline Johns-Putra (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), pp. 309–27. Tom Bristow gives William Carlos Williams's *Paterson* as a precursor for *Dart* in "'Contracted to an Eye-Quiet World": Sonic Census or Poetics of Place in Alice Oswald', *Symbiosis: A Journal of Anglo-American Literary Relations*, 10.2 (2006), 167–185. Not all scholarship focuses on nature and landscape, however, see Martindale, "'Not yet Not yet . . .": Forms of Defiance, Forms of Excess in the Poetry of Alice Oswald', in *Identity and Form in Contemporary Literature*, ed. by Ana Maria Sanchez Arce (London: Routledge, forthcoming 2013), pp. 200–224.

finding a way of mediating between human and non-human. Three interrelated aspects of Oswald's poetics emerge in recent scholarship: a desire for unmediated linguistic access to the non-human; the need to efface the lyric 'I' through a poetics of listening; an attempt to allow nature to speak for itself. As this chapter demonstrates, the impulse to erase the lyric voice with 'mutterings' of rivers, wind, rock and other natural forms is also part of Oswald's geomorphological poetics of a self-excavating earth (*D* preface).<sup>7</sup>

In the introduction to *Thunder Mutters* Oswald claims that if poetry is to be consonant with ecology it requires 'a kind of porousness or sorcery that brings living things unmediated into the text (x).'<sup>8</sup> This is best met, she continues, by the restlessness and 'accretive' nature of oral poetic forms. Elsewhere she suggests that oral poetries are more organic as they allow 'clauses' to 'grow' one out of another, leaving a 'space' for land-forms to be shaped by the poet into closer approximations of 'themselves': 'A tree in a Homer poem really is a tree – not Homer's tree, but a green, leafy, real thing. The puzzle I've spent my writing life trying to solve is, how does he do that? Every book of mine has been an attempt to work out how you can put a tree into a poem.'<sup>9</sup> Scholars are fairly uncritical about Oswald's explanations of her efforts to gain unmediated access to nature in her poetry. In a discussion of Oswald's 'gardener-inspired poetics' Mary Pinard glosses the poet's 'pronouncements' on 'the primacy of physical work as an acoustical mode for bringing living things unmediated into the text'.<sup>10</sup> For Oswald such direct contact between matter and text is achieved through the conduit of human labour; in *Thunder Mutters* this is the act of raking. Pinard explains that for Oswald, the sound made by the rake 'facilitates a meeting place for and a potential connection between the human and the non-human world', which can in turn be entered 'through listening'.<sup>11</sup> While observing that such 'access' is 'ideally

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<sup>7</sup> Oswald, *Dart* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002). Hereafter cited parenthetically as *D* followed by page number in arabic numerals. Where a reference is made to the unnumbered preface, this will replace the page number.

<sup>8</sup> Oswald, 'Introduction: A Dew's Harp', in *The Thunder Mutters: 101 Poems for the Planet*, ed. by Alice Oswald (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), pp. ix–x. Hereafter cited parenthetically as *TM* followed by page number in roman numerals.

<sup>9</sup> Oswald, interviewed by Sarah Crown, p. 20.

<sup>10</sup> Mary Pinard, 'Voice(s) of the Poet-Gardener: Alice Oswald and the Poetry of Acoustic Encounter', *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies: A Journal of Criticism and Theory*, 10.2 (2009), 17–32 (p. 26).

<sup>11</sup> Pinard, p. 18.

unmediated', at no point does Pinard challenge Oswald's assertions.<sup>12</sup> Tom Bristow's account of *Dart* similarly suggests that 'participation and co-evolution' overcome 'the need for transcendence' (associated with a post-romantic view of nature) through 'practical involvement' in the non-human world. He claims that this 'poetics of immersion' is able to establish 'bi-directional agency' enabling 'subject and object to become extensions of each other'.<sup>13</sup> Oswald echoes these ideas, relying on the hope that by immersing herself in the natural world through physical work she can avoid the pitfalls of poetic labour ('prospects, pastorals' and nostalgia) which inevitably produce a poem that 'mistakes the matter at the end of the rake for a mere conceit' (*TM x*). She rejects a poetics that reduces earth, leaves, the material world, to aesthetic concerns, but in doing so she appears to leave the highly wrought texture of her own verse somewhat unaccounted for.

Reasonably enough these critical accounts and Oswald's own glosses attempt to stake out new ground for her poetry in response to existing landscape and nature writing. In doing so, however, they sometimes risk overstating her ecological intervention, suggesting that her poetry is able to overcome the divide between subject and object, self and world. While Oswald undoubtedly produces deft and suggestive semblances of the non-human world, her work does not necessarily escape entrenched post-romantic conceptions that seek to reconcile self and world through the parallel union of the aesthetic realm with nature.<sup>14</sup> Instead of being an indictment of Oswald's poetics, however, it is her location within romantic traditions of representing the non-human world, and her transformation of, rather than escape from them, that arguably makes her work open to ecological concerns. Onno Oerlemans observes that such 'openness' is characteristic of the romantic 'desire for unmediated access to the material realm, a desire that is moderated but not erased by the inevitable failure to achieve this access'.<sup>15</sup> Oswald traverses a well-trodden post-romantic path, when she foregrounds the failure to project the self onto nature at the same time as registering the inevitable desire to do so.

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<sup>12</sup> Pinard p. 19.

<sup>13</sup> Bristow, p. 167.

<sup>14</sup> On romanticism and the birth of the 'environmental subject' see Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> Onno Oerlemans, *Romanticism and the Materiality of Nature: Economic Liberalization and Social Change in Nepal* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), p. 21.

*Dart* in particular acknowledges its romantic precedents in the guise of Wordsworth's leech gatherer as Kym Martindale has pointed out. *Dart's* 'old man' is less an affirmation of the Wordsworthian lyric voice, however, than a sharp rejoinder to the inscription of 'I' onto the non-human world. Oswald does not circumvent romantic legacies, this is not so easily achieved, but she questions and reworks the position of the lyric self in the landscape throughout her poetry.

The reformation of the self is most evident through its effacement, and this inevitably occurs when the non-human is allowed to speak for itself, and the erstwhile lyric voice is enjoined to listen. Bristow observes this in one of the many personas of *Dart*, that of the swimmer. The entrance of the swimmer is accompanied by the usual questioning that the poem uses to disturb the assured relationship between self and world: 'what am I, / spelling the shapes of the letters with legs and arms?' (*D* 23) This uncertainty is followed by the capitalised letters of the word 'swim' scattered across the page in a disjointed acrostic:

S SSS      W

Slooshing the Water open and

MMM

For it Meeting shut behind me

(*D* 23)

As Bristow notes, Swim, 'is missing the all important, 'I': the personal pronoun and the sacred vowel'.<sup>16</sup> The dropping of the 'I' coincides with the shifting of lyric voice to what he terms a 'third site' somewhere in-between the swimmer and the river. Instead of being a conventional poetic 'inscription upon the earth' Bristow suggests that 'the letters are the presentation of the earth/river actively foregrounding its own modes of address to the human world,

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<sup>16</sup> Bristow, p. 178.

to the right listeners'.<sup>17</sup> The physical movement of the swimmer in the water translated into language might be just another projection of self onto nature, but the body is tellingly encapsulated in the river that 'shut[s] behind me'. Water, the most suggestively transformative of all the elements, 'summon[s] itself by speaking' (*D* 1) but also through its effacement of the human voices in the poem: 'I know who I am' the river mutters, and 'you can tell it's / me / because of the wearing action of water on bone' (4). Only the 'right listeners' as Bristow calls them, can perceive the multitudinous voice of the river, however. Several times in *Dart*, the river urges the addressee to 'listen' (2, 11, 15, 21) and enquires, 'can you hear' (17, 18). By allowing non-human forces to act upon the human ('water on bone') the lyric voice is ostensibly quietened enough to listen.

Elsewhere Oswald refers to this process as 'quietening down the ego' in order to write. She thinks of listening as a way of getting rid of the self that allows the non-human to enter the poem without the interference of the lyric voice.<sup>18</sup> In an interview with Kate Kellaway in 2005 Oswald describes the poet's ear as a point of mediation between human and non-human in the context of gardening or physical labour.

I almost feel that I am not part of it. I believe the poet shouldn't be in the poem at all except as a lens or as ears. [...] I think about those years of gardening every single day. It was the foundation of a different way of perceiving things. Instead of looking at landscape in a baffled, longing way, it was a release when I worked outside to feel that I was using it, part of it. I became critical of any account that was not a working account.<sup>19</sup>

This 'different way of perceiving things' privileges the ear as the primary organ of sensory experience. The lens, for which we might read the eye, is mentioned, but seeing is always subjugated to hearing for Oswald; after all, 'when you look up [...] your eyes are still half in your ears'.<sup>20</sup> The rake she claims, also offers a 'mobile, more many-sided way of knowing a place than

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<sup>17</sup> Bristow, p. 178.

<sup>18</sup> Oswald, 'Get Writing: Poetry for Beginners', *BBC*, 2004, <http://web.archive.org/web/20080211213547/http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/getwriting/module18p> [accessed 18 March 2013]. This webpage is no longer available at [bbc.co.uk](http://www.bbc.co.uk) therefore the URL is given for an archived version.

<sup>19</sup> Oswald, interviewed by Kate Kellaway, 'Into the Woods', *Observer*, 19 June 2005, Reviews section, p. 17.

<sup>20</sup> Oswald, 'The Universe in Time of Rain Makes the World Alive with Noise' p. 36.



looking' because 'you can hear right into the non-human world, it's as if you and the trees had found a meeting point in the sound of the rake' (*TM ix*).

Drawing on the Oswald's own explanations, Pinard and Bristow both suggest that this acoustic model extends existing poetics of place. For Pinard, Oswald might emerge from a genealogy of 'lyric poets' (Homer, Hopkins, Hughes, Heaney) who respond to the 'rhythms, sensibilities, and non-rational utterances of the natural world', but she renovates such traditions through her commitment to the 'ear as perhaps our most undervalued yet most necessary sense'.<sup>21</sup> She concurs with Oswald that the 'ear – with its access to volume, depth and content – surpasses the surface tendencies of the eye' enriching visual perception through humility, complexity and mobility.<sup>22</sup> An opposition is set out here between acoustic modes that are 'non-rational', 'humble' and 'mobile', and vision that is implicitly instrumental, authoritarian and reifying. Poets such as Hughes and Heaney might register 'non-rational utterances' in their work but, Pinard suggests, they rely too heavily on the primacy of vision to accomplish the kind of hearing 'into' that Oswald ostensibly achieves. Oswald also acknowledges the traditions in which she is located, but claims that her strategies are 'different' to a poet like Hughes who 'taught people to approach their poems as if stalking an animal – utterly patient and focused and swift'.<sup>23</sup> 'Stalking' which is only accomplished through quiet stealthiness, suggests a mastery or authority over language and landscape that departs from Oswald's idea of the quietened ego. She contrasts this to her own practice, which she describes 'a primitive kind of echo-location, like they use on ships'. Instead of emitting sound waves she imagines herself as a listening device which sends out 'ear-wave[s]' to an 'echo-wall' that is located at the outermost point of space-time.<sup>24</sup> Rendered as a device that actively listens rather than emitting its own sounds, the poet claims to disappear from the poem. Bristow charts a different kind of self-effacement in *Dart*. Rather than excising the poetic self from the poem altogether, he observes that a 'larger, cumulative, self' is created which is 'a model of otherness-in-relationship that has both political and ecological resonance'. 'For Oswald', he claims, 'this extended self is dis-closed by a particular openness of being, which the poet correlates with a listening self,

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<sup>21</sup> Pinard, p. 31.

<sup>22</sup> Pinard, p. 30.

<sup>23</sup> Oswald, 'Get Writing: Poetry for Beginners'.

<sup>24</sup> Oswald, 'Get Writing: Poetry for Beginners'.

for the poem is primarily about voices, sound, and the river's mutterings'.<sup>25</sup> Oswald's 'echo-location' is as much an extension of self through the ear therefore as it is an eradication of the poet from the poem.

Despite Oswald's ostensible break with existing poetics of place, her preoccupation with the ear echoes Wordsworth's use of listening as a ground for intimacy with the natural world. Geoffrey Hartman observes that Wordsworth 'often singles out the ear as an "organ of vision" or a sense both intensely pure yet deeply in touch with earthliness'.<sup>26</sup> Stuart Allen also suggests that listening is given equal footing with 'looking' in his poetry.<sup>27</sup> Glossing lines from 'Tintern Abbey' ('While with an eye made quiet by the power / Of harmony, and the deep power of joy, / We see into the life of things') Allen observes that the 'visionary eye is presented' in 'aural terms'. He suggests that when 'quietened' or 'silenced', the 'eye', though 'not transformed into an ear', can 'perceive' the acoustic 'harmony'.<sup>28</sup> Like Oswald, Wordsworth uses the 'ear to criticize the eye', but according to Allen he refuses to ascribe to 'the ear a positive value'.<sup>29</sup> If Oswald's hearing 'right into the non-human world' is a riposte to a Wordsworthian seeing 'into the life of things', it does as O'Neill says of Auden's anti-romanticism 'less damage' to romantic 'pretensions' than it 'might seem to do' for the romantics are more alert to the 'gap between mind and nature' than their successors sometimes admit.<sup>30</sup> As with Oswald's ear as an organ of openness to the non-human other, Allen asserts that Wordsworth's 'act of listening [...] opens' poetry and the lyric self 'to some kind of exterior'. The 'cost' of this to the poet, however, is a 'breach of the self and concomitant diminution of agency'.<sup>31</sup> This internal conflict about the efficacy of listening is manifest in Book Five of *The Prelude* for Allen, where the Boy of Winander hangs anxiously awaiting the reciprocity of nature in the owls' cry ('Then sometimes, in that silence, while he hung / Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprise / Has carried

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<sup>25</sup> Bristow, p. 174.

<sup>26</sup> Geoffrey H. Hartman, *The Unremarkable Wordsworth* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 23.

<sup>27</sup> Stuart Allen, 'Wordsworth's Ear and the Politics of Aesthetic Autonomy', *Romanticism*, 9.1 (2003), 37–54 (p. 42). See also David P. Haney, "'Rents and Openings in the Ideal World": Eye and Ear in Wordsworth', *Studies in Romanticism*, 36.2 (1997), 173–199.

<sup>28</sup> Allen, p. 44.

<sup>29</sup> Allen, p. 37.

<sup>30</sup> O'Neill, p. 85.

<sup>31</sup> Allen, p. 47.

far into his heart the voice / Of mountain torrents' [1805, V. 381–4]).<sup>32</sup> Such 'studied ambivalence towards listening' might be 'the poetry's resistance to the absence of harmony in the world', but it does not offer as easy a conciliation as Oswald's post-romantic acoustic poetics hopes for.<sup>33</sup> As Allen asserts, such 'desired intimacy' is in the end 'predicated on unrelenting estrangement'.<sup>34</sup> Oswald does not recognise the erasure of self as a threat to lyric integrity in the same way, however, as 'I' does not simply disappear from the poem but expands to become a teeming composite of human and non-human agents. It is in this 'Slip-Shape' protean anonymity that the assertive voice of the poem coheres (*D* 48). If Wordsworth registers an ambivalence towards listening, Oswald might perhaps be said to want it both ways, in that she welcomes lyric self-effacement despite the fact that her work is predicated on the reassertion of a highly individual poetic voice, even if that voice ostensibly shuttles between various human and non-human agents.

For Oswald, quiet listening is the precondition for allowing the non-human world to speak for itself. As I have already observed, bringing living things into the text and giving them a voice in this way relies on the poet's use of oral forms. The oral is deployed in a number of different ways in Oswald's work particularly in her long poem sequences. This includes the use of oral histories (*Dart*), the overt staging of different voices (*Sleepwalk on the Severn* and *Dart*), and recourse to Classical oral traditions (*Memorial*). Oswald frequently prefaces her collections with a brief discourse on her acoustic method.

This poem is made from the language of people who live and work on the Dart. Over the past two years I've been recording conversations with people who know the river. I've used these records as life-models from which to sketch out a series of characters – linking their voices into a sound-map of the river, a songline from the source to the sea. There are indications in the margins where one voice changes into another. These do not refer to real people or even fixed fictions. All voices should be read as the river's mutterings.

(*D* preface)

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<sup>32</sup> Allen, p. 48; William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: The Four Texts (1798, 1799, 1805, 1850)*, ed. by Jonathan Wordsworth (London: Penguin UK, 2004).

<sup>33</sup> Allen, p. 38.

<sup>34</sup> Allen, p. 51.

Listening underpins the process of assembling the lyric voice of the poem from the poet's recollection of conversations with 'people who live and work on the Dart', alongside a textual soundscape distilled from her experience of the river itself. Oswald draws on three different models of the oral – 'sound-maps', Aboriginal Australian songlines, and oral history methods – all of which affirm a sense of immediacy and authentic encounter with the human and non-human agents in the landscape. Pinard suggests that Oswald's model of 'acoustic ecology' is informed by the work of soundscape artist and ecologist Raymond Murray Schafer.<sup>35</sup> The geographical mapping of sound that emerged in Schafer's work in the 1970s and that has provided the foundation for soundscape studies emphasises an acoustic ecological balance or equalisation between human perception and environment. The oral history methods that Oswald uses also foreground personal experience as a means of producing an unmediated account of local attachments to place. More problematically, the assimilation of Aboriginal songlines to the course of the Dart river, evokes orality as a primary authentic mode of being in landscape. While the shifting voices in the margins of the poem may not refer to real people, the discourses of timeless authentic dwelling evoked here could indeed be described as a 'fixed fiction'.

Nevertheless Oswald proceeds to undermine the notion of authenticity by turning these 'conversations' into the many and often conflicting 'mutterings' of the river. The crosscutting of different voices and 'registers' is also characteristic of *A Sleepwalk on the Severn* in which 'various characters, some living, some dead, all based on real people from the Severn catchment, talk towards the moment of moonrise and are changed by it' (*SwS* preface).<sup>36</sup> Rather than the water of *Dart*, it is the gravitational force of the moon that transforms human and non-human utterances into the lyric movement of the poem. The poem records the moon's agency, 'its effect on water and its effect on voices' (*SwS* preface). Here, Oswald correlates lyric self-effacement and the assertion of collective voice with the gravitational force of the moon and the sculpting work of the tides, geomorphic processes that signal a self-excavating earth. The foregrounding of these natural forces as agents that shape

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<sup>35</sup> Pinard, p. 19.

<sup>36</sup> Oswald, *Sleepwalk on the Severn* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009). Hereafter cited parenthetically as *SwS* followed by page number in arabic numerals. Where a reference is made to the unnumbered preface, this will replace the page number.

landscape and human life is underpinned by an acoustic poetics that hopes for reciprocity between human and non-human. Moreover just as the Wordsworthian 'organ of vision' resounds in Oswald's hearing 'right into the non-human world' so her post-romantic geomorphologies refract his earlier romantic geologies. The next section begins by returning to Oswald's account of raking, which she describes as a 'deep slow process' despite its taking place at the surface of landscape. It continues by drawing a connection between this horticultural process of shaping the surface of landscape and geomorphology as a mode of deeper excavation.

### **3. Strategies of Excavation: Geomorphology and 'deep slow process'**

That Oswald is keen to differentiate between her acoustic method and the poetics of Hughes and Heaney is perhaps unexpected given her preference for poetic accounts of place that are also 'working' accounts. Like these poets Oswald's writing has always been invested in horticultural or working landscapes. Her mother is garden designer Mary Keen, and Oswald herself is a gardener by profession. Just as the agricultural ploughshare offers a way of unearthing history, culture and language for poets like Heaney, Oswald reaches for familiar horticultural implements to connect human activity to specific landscapes. In an essay about a short residency in the gardens at Heale, Oswald aligns digging with poetry in a manner reminiscent of the Northern Irish poet:

It's certainly true that when you're digging you become bodily implicated in the ground's world, thought and earth continually passing through each other. You smell it, you feel its strength under your boot, you move alongside it for maybe eight hours and your spade's language (it speaks in short lines of trochees and dactyls: sscrunch turn slot slot, sscrunch turn slot slot) creeps and changes at the same pace as the soil. You can't help being critical of any account of mud that is based on mere glimpsing.<sup>37</sup>

Merely 'glimpsing' or taking a surface interest in landscape and nature is insufficient; digging enables the writer to 'become bodily implicated in the

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<sup>37</sup> Oswald, 'The Universe in Time of Rain Makes the World Alive with Noise', p. 40.

ground's world'. Spade and language are connected through aspects of prosody – trochees and dactyls – much like Heaney's versification of the ploughed furrow. Where the spade is transformed and displaced onto a 'squat pen' in Heaney's hands, however, Oswald is keen to stress the adequacy of the spade in its primary function as a gardening implement, which has a 'strength' and a 'language' all of its own.<sup>38</sup> Rather than learn to 'handle' a spade as Heaney admits he cannot do, Oswald suggests that the poet must 'move alongside', learning to smell, feel and listen to that which the spade unearths.<sup>39</sup> The poet is not so much excavating the ground herself, she would have us think, as attuning her senses and her labour to the slow 'pace' of change within the earth itself.

The slow pace of change effected by this ostensibly harmonious use of human tools is similar to Oswald's description of raking in the preface to *Thunder Mutters*. By remaining committed to the 'matter' at the end of the rake or spade poetry is capable of putting 'our inner worlds in contact with the outer world—a deep slow process that used to be the remit of the rake' (*TM* x). The association of raking with 'a deep slow process' is unintuitive. A rake barely scrapes the surface in comparison to the spade or plough, and its 'remit' seems opposed rather than consonant with the idea of depth. Raking, however, is not unlike tidal or other sorts of erosion caused by wind, rain, or rivers that work over long periods transforming the surface of landforms. Indeed 'deep slow process' might seem more applicable to the fluvial or igneous geomorphic processes that over millions of years, form the landscapes that Oswald is so attentive to.

'Sonnet' from *Woods etc.*, offers a condensed example of the model of geomorphic process that Oswald develops across the long poem sequences examined in the rest of this chapter:

towards winter flowers, forms of ecstatic water,  
    chalk lies dry with all its throats open.  
winter flowers last maybe one frost  
    chalk drifts its heap through billions of slow sea-years;  
rains and pools and opens its wombs,

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<sup>38</sup> The references from Heaney are from 'Digging', pp. 1–2.

<sup>39</sup> The olfactory response to recently dug earth here is also reminiscent of Edward Thomas' poem 'Digging' (1915).

bows its back, shows its bone.  
both closing towards each other  
at the dead end of the year – one  
woken through, the others thrown into flower,  
holding their wings at the ready in an increasing state of crisis.  
burrowed into and crumbled, carrying  
these small supernumerary powers founded on breath:  
chalk with all its pits and pores,  
winter flowers, smelling of a sudden entering elsewhere.  
(W 21)<sup>40</sup>

Geomorphic processes such as glaciation, erosion, rock formation, and weathering cause the earth's surface to undergo physical transformation. Here, at this undisclosed site, perhaps the limestone cliffs of Beer in Devon, chalk carries the memory of its origin in the sea, thirsty for the 'ecstatic water' which has been necessarily expelled in the process of becoming solid rock. The chalk beds of the United Kingdom, formed during the late Cretaceous period from millions of tiny plankton, are the drifting 'heap' in the poem.<sup>41</sup> These submicroscopic 'calcareous algae' or 'nanoplankton' drifted at the surface of the sea and sank to the sea-bed when they died, where, subject to forces of heat and pressure their 'skeletal remains' were metamorphosed into mineral.<sup>42</sup> Transformation is never finalised, however, as geomorphic actants such as frost and rain enter the numerous 'pits and pores' of the chalk, continuing to weather and shape it into physiological forms of 'womb', 'back' and 'bone'.

The ecology of 'Sonnet' includes other mutable or transitory forms of life that are reliant on the chalk bedrock: 'winter flowers' that 'last maybe one frost' are central to the poem's movement, but the many species of butterflies that rely on the flora and fauna of chalk grasslands in order to complete their metamorphosis are also suggested by 'wings at the ready in an increasing state

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<sup>40</sup> Oswald, *Woods etc.* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005). Hereafter cited parenthetically as *W* followed by page number in arabic numerals.

<sup>41</sup> Plankton is from the ancient Greek *planktos* (πλαγκτός) meaning drifting or wandering. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. 'plankton'.

<sup>42</sup> Rory Mortimore, C.J. and R. W. Gallois, *British Upper Cretaceous Stratigraphy*, (Peterborough: Joint Nature Conservation Committee, 2001), pp. 3, 9.

of crisis'.<sup>43</sup> The temporal crisis of the flower's and butterfly's brevity set against the chalk's longevity, reflects a similar tension in the poem's form. 'Sonnet' lays claim to convention in terms of its title and fourteen lines, but departs from either Italian or English sonnet form in its lack of rhyme, or clarity of the point of turn or volta. Rather than offering a tightly defined textual space through the acoustic structure of rhymed endings, 'Sonnet' coheres in the literal accretion of these 'forms of ecstatic water,' which become 'winter flowers' and 'chalk'. If it has no discernible turn (although a volta of sorts may occur in line 6 or 12), the poem presents its crisis through the conflict of temporalities. The 'slow' formation of 'chalk' and the 'sudden' blooming of 'winter flowers' do not take place in the same temporal frames, even if they appear to do so in the immediate presentness of the sonnet where they only exist through the observation of an unknown lyric persona. In other collections this poet-naturalist is Oswald's 'dream secretary' who records the vast and minuscule physical processes, along with the many voices, that shape landscape. To grasp that winter flowers and chalk-land belong to different times, but exist nonetheless in simultaneity, presupposes an exacting and analytical gaze that not only notices barely perceptible changes in landscape, but impels its audience to '*Notice everything noticing,*' as if rock, water, and organism are involved in a mutual process of seeing, hearing and responding to the protean nature of the observable world (SwS 13). Yet, although the landscape itself is observable at this level of detail, its 'form' is, in scientific terms, 'generated by non-observable (geomorphic) processes' that mostly occur beyond the space and time generally accessible to human perception.<sup>44</sup> It is in this continually shifting relationship between observable form and unobservable process that both scientific and poetic enquiry seek to represent and extract meaning from particular landscapes.

As well as being predicated on a direct observation of particular places then, Oswald's poetry is also located in a long tradition of geomorphological thought that encompasses scientific and literary interpretations of landscapes. Fluvial processes are prominent in theories of landscape evolution, from

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<sup>43</sup> See Roger Dennis, *A Resource-Based Habitat View for Conservation: Butterflies in the British Landscape* (New York: John Wiley, 2012), pp. 171-3, for the importance of chalk or limestone bedrock for British butterfly species.

<sup>44</sup> Kerry Gallagher, Stuart Jones, and John Wainwright, *Landscape Evolution: Denudation, Climate and Tectonics over Different Time and Space Scales* (London: The Geological Society, 2008), p. 35.



Herodotus' (c. 484–420 BCE) observations on the accumulation of silt in the Nile delta, to the nineteenth-century theories of Charles Lyell, and later William Morris Davis, which posited the slow action of geomorphic processes such as rivers on the shape of the earth. While Britain has no watercourse on the scale of the Nile due to its small landmass and island status, the quantity of rainfall ensures that rivers and streams are a significant part of the landscape, providing a source of power for industry and the rural economy, and a site for leisure activities. Rivers have also long provided a source of inspiration for British poets, from Michael Drayton's *Poly-olbion* (1612) to Ted Hughes' *River* (1983). More recently there has been an increased interest in effluvia in British poetry. In the past ten years three T. S. Eliot prize-winning collections, Philip Gross' *The Water Table* (2009), Sean O'Brien's *The Drowned Book* (2007) and Alice Oswald's *Dart* (2002), have explored particular river systems and their landscapes – the Severn, the Tyne and the Humber, and the East and West Dart. In *Dart* and *Sleepwalk on the Severn*, river systems act upon the landscape and its inhabitants, and in the case of the Severn the tidal river is in turn subject to an extra-terrestrial geomorphic process, the gravitational force of the moon. If tidal change provides a visible diurnal example of shifting landscapes, the changes that shape their underlying bedrock are less tangible to human perception. These deep slow processes of interaction between water and rock are as fundamental to Oswald's poetic excavations, as they are in the evolution of the material landscapes that she describes.

The poet's exhumation of Homeric landscape in *Memorial* draws on processes of sedimentation (the water-rock interaction of draining rivers and eroding mountains) to reinter the ancient dead in the alluvial soil of the Troad region. Although the generally accepted critical perspective on the topographical accuracy of the *Iliad* is one of skepticism, John Victor Luce has argued convincingly that a 'too narrowly aesthetic approach' overlooks the possibility that the landscapes of the poem were 'underpinned by personal observation'.<sup>45</sup> Luce may have been incorrect about the whereabouts of specific sites, but geomorphological science has shown that Homer's topography, once thought to be the province of mythology and fiction, has a strong basis in actual

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<sup>45</sup> John Victor Luce, *Celebrating Homer's Landscapes: Troy and Ithaca Revisited* (New York: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 8, 10.

landscapes.<sup>46</sup> If the rivers and alluvial plains of the *Iliad* evoke real landforms as Oswald's *Memorial* tries to suggest, then a romantic fascination with rock and stone also finds its way into her poetry.

John Wyatt charts the correlation between geological 'explanation' and poetic 'description' in poetry of the romantic period where he states, 'there is a landscape of the mind and a landscape of actuality, a landscape that geologists' and poets still, as they did in previous eras, attempt to 'identify' and 'explain'.<sup>47</sup>

Parallel with description, the geomorphologist attempts an explanation. How did a distinctive shape come to be different from other forms in the landscape? Is the shape related to the mineral content of the rock? [...] Are the strata and the faulting of the rock the reason for a dramatic feature? Massive limestone, granite tors, igneous intrusions, and dykes are examples of this. Alternatively, is the process of change, the history of the landscape, the explanation for this feature? These questions reach right to the heart of theoretical models for the geologist.<sup>48</sup>

As Wyatt has demonstrated Wordsworth was familiar with some of the 'competing hypotheses of explanation of landforms'; debates which were at the core of changing perspectives on the relationship between human beings and nature, the age of the earth, and developments in scientific method in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.<sup>49</sup> What emerges in his study and in others is the shared impulse of poet and geologist/geomorphologist to make sense of landscape, and to measure vast geophysical processes in relation to human concerns. In modern geomorphological science, the well-known Huttonian dictum that 'the present is the key to the past' has been transformed into creating models of future landscape evolution, often in order to investigate

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<sup>46</sup> See John C. Kraft and others, 'Harbor Areas at Ancient Troy: Sedimentology and Geomorphology Complement Homer's *Iliad*', *Geology*, 31.2 (2003), 163–6. The authors conclude that, 'The synergy among the written word, the archaeological record, and the sedimentologic and paleontologic data clearly leads to an interpretation superior to the findings of the separate disciplines. We have demonstrated that geologic, geomorphic, and fossil evidence can be correlated with the ancient literature for a more complete understanding of the places and events of the *Iliad*.' (166). For repudiation of Luce's assertions about the location of Ithaca see Robert Bittlestone, *Odysseus Unbound: The Search for Homer's Ithaca* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>47</sup> John Wyatt, *Wordsworth and the Geologists* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 30.

<sup>48</sup> Wyatt, p. 30.

<sup>49</sup> Wyatt, p. 30. See also Heringman; and Alan Bewell, *Wordsworth and the Enlightenment: Nature, Man, and Society in the Experimental Poetry* (New York: Yale University Press, 1989).

and mitigate environmental problems. Oswald's poetic engagement with geomorphology is inflected by ecological concerns, which she articulates through recourse to Classical landscapes, and romantic geopoetics. Her poetry harnesses rivers, tides and igneous rock to excavate landscapes that are especially notable for the geomorphic forces that have shaped and continue to shape them and the lives of their inhabitants – Dartmoor, the Severn Estuary and the Troad region. The next section examines the first of these locations, Dartmoor, and the romantic geologies that are echoed in Oswald's representation of this watery yet impervious granite landscape.

#### 4. 'The wearing action of water on bone': *Dart*

*Dart* charts the journey of the river Dart from its source high on the moor to its apotheosis in the sea at Dartmouth. Most discussions of the poem focus on its primary subject and voice, the river itself. Nevertheless it is the interaction between water and rock that provides the material ground of the poem. While I revisit the river this section, I also situate its noisy 'jostling' against the silent granite bedrock across which it flows (*D* 42). The surrounding area of Dartmoor is underlain by sedimentary rock – limestone, shale and sandstone – laid down in the Devonian and Carboniferous eras, but the moor itself is distinctive for its igneous granite intrusion. Dartmoor's granite substrate is part of the large Cornubian batholith that covers much of Devon and Cornwall. Batholith, from *bathos* (depth) and *lithos* (rock) is the term given to a large exposed area of igneous rock at least one hundred kilometres across. It is formed by molten magma, which melts the surrounding rock, and as it cools forms an igneous intrusion that solidifies under the earth's crust. It is only exposed through continental uplift caused by the heat of subterranean processes, and subsequent surface erosion by rain, ice, and rivers. The Cornubian batholith is the largest in Britain, comprising a series of exposed granite outcrops from Dartmoor to Land's End, including the Isles of Scilly.<sup>50</sup> Each area is known as a pluton, a classification that has its origins in the eighteenth-century theory of Plutonism put forward by Hutton in his *Theory of the Earth* (1795), and which in turn derives from Pluto, god of the underworld. Hutton's new theory was the

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<sup>50</sup> Julian Ashbourn, *The Geology of Britain* (New York: Springer, 2010), p. 65.

catalyst for the well-known geological debate between Neptunists and Plutonists. Where Neptunists held that all rocks resulted from the crystallisation of sediment beneath vast oceans that covered the early earth, Hutton proposed that rocks like granite were formed by intense heat beneath the earth's crust, through which, on cooling, they intruded.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless the consensus among geologists up until the 1820s remained Neptunist (or Wernerian), until Hutton's ideas were revived by geologists such as Lyell and Adam Sedgwick. Dartmoor and its granite has an important place in the history of these early theories of geomorphic change. What became known as the Devonian controversy began with an argument about the correct stratification of older sedimentary rock in the county of Devon.<sup>52</sup> At the beginning of the 1820s geologists such as Sedgwick believed granites to be the 'true Primary rocks of the region' which were overlain by sedimentary rock; by the 1830s he and colleagues had changed their minds, as their investigations had revealed that Hutton's earlier theory of the intrusion of granite offered a better explanation for the stratification of sedimentary rocks. The Dartmoor granite was in fact emplaced much later than the Devonian and Carboniferous limestones and sandstones, which had been metamorphosed and transformed through the igneous intrusion.<sup>53</sup> Until recently Dartmoor was thought to be too far Southwest to have been shaped by glaciation in the Pleistocene, except for freeze-thaw cycles that contributed to erosion of sedimentary layers above the granite. It is now known that glaciation is partly responsible for the topography of the Northern moor, although Dartmoor's distinctive tors were mainly formed by igneous processes, weathering, and the action of several rivers that rise high on the pluton.<sup>54</sup> Along with the other Dartmoor Rivers, the East and West Dart drain the boggy

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<sup>51</sup> For a brief account see Wallace Pitcher, *The Nature and Origin of Granite* (New York: Springer, 1997), pp. 1–3.

<sup>52</sup> Martin Rudwick, *The Great Devonian Controversy: The Shaping of Scientific Knowledge Among Gentlemanly Specialists* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 5. This was not a debate between geology and Genesis. As Rudwick points out, geologists had accepted the vast timescales of geomorphic change since the beginning of the nineteenth century, and it is thus incorrect to assume that the debate was between scriptural versus scientific geology.

<sup>53</sup> Rudwick, p. 87.

<sup>54</sup> Recent research undertaken by the Universities of Exeter and Durham show that Northern Dartmoor had an ice cap, which suppressed the creation of tors. See David Evans and others, 'The Glaciation of Dartmoor: The Southernmost Independent Pleistocene Ice Cap in the British Isles', *Quaternary Science Reviews*, 45 (2012), 31–53.

moorland, which with its underlying granite, concentration of sphagnum moss, peat and high precipitation sustains a number of important wetland habitats.<sup>55</sup>

The East and West Dart rise high on Dartmoor, within half a mile of Craw- or Cran- mere pool, which is no longer a pool but a peaty indent on the moor. Often thought to be the source of several of Dartmoor's rivers, (the Taw, Tavy, Teign and Okement also rise nearby) and the site of the first letterbox placed there in 1854 by James Perrott, Cranmere is a popular destination for walkers. *Dart* begins with 'an old man', a 'walker', 'seeking' this place as Oswald's marginal gloss tells us, 'the source of the Dart – Cranmere Pool on Dartmoor, seven miles from the nearest road' (1). Yet as we discover it is the headwater of the East Dart which rises as a mere 'trickle' in the reeds between 'Black Ridge and White Horse Hill' that the walker actually seeks, his OS map 'folded' in his 'mack pocket' (*D* 1–2).

[...] Get dropped off the military

track from Oakenhampton and head down into Cranmere pool.

It's dawn, it's a huge sphagnum kind of wilderness, and an hour in the morning is worth three in the evening. You can hear plovers whistling, your feet sink right in, it's like walking on the bottom of a lake.

(*D* 2)

Blanket bog covers an area of 120 square kilometres and is one of the significant wetland environments of Dartmoor. Much of the bog centres on Cranmere pool, once an area of high-altitude forest, transformed by Mesolithic land use. More than a thousand years of systematic burning stimulated peat development, and the spread of the various sphagnum mosses that form much of the surface of the blanket.<sup>56</sup> The high and lonely moor is indeed only a 'kind of wilderness' as its morphology is founded on early human interventions in the environment. The former existence of a pool at Cranmere is also figured as an affective memory of an ancient landscape, activated by the experience of feet sinking into the bog, which is 'like walking on the / bottom of a lake'.

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<sup>55</sup> Ashbourn, p. 67.

<sup>56</sup> Daniel Charman, *Peatlands and Environmental Change* (New York: John Wiley, 2002), p. 170.

The experience of placing 'one foot in front of another', 'South-south-west and / down the contours' is central to the walker's ability to read the hills and valleys of the present-day landscape, but the impact of doing so also forms the future shape of the moor (*D 2*). In the search for the origin of the Dart, not only walking, but also listening becomes part of the process of reading the landscape. The bowl shape of the moor contains and stifles the sound of the river, a mere trickle at its source. The walker must listen carefully:

[...] I go slipping between Black Ridge and White  
Horse Hill into a bowl in the moor where echoes can't get out

listen,  
a  
lark  
spinning  
around  
one  
note  
splitting  
and  
mending  
it

and I find you in the reeds, a trickle coming out of a bank, a foal  
of a river

one step-width water  
of linked stones  
trills in the stones  
glides in the trills  
eels in the glides  
in each eel a fingerwidth of sea  
(*D 2*)

Unlike the trickling horizontal river, the high-flying lark can escape the bowl of moor, it spirals up and dives back down, drilling the air with its sound.

All the river can do in its early 'foal' stage is echo the larks 'trills' in its own 'trickle'.<sup>57</sup> Nevertheless hearing rather than looking is the prerequisite sense for finding the source of the East Dart. The walker must slip down into the bowl of the moor and listen for the action of water on rock, the 'trills in the stones'. The river's journey from source to sea is captured in 'one step-width' of water, which is a microcosm of its geomorphology: 'linked stones', 'trills' and 'glides' all contribute to the channel pattern and flow of the river.<sup>58</sup> After flowing approximately eleven miles and dropping over one thousand feet, through moor, clitter, and ancient wood, the East and West Dart converge at 'Dartmeet – a mob of waters' (*D* 10). From here the conjoined Dart cuts its way through the granite landscape, carving a deep sheltered gorge as it leaves the moor and passes through the towns of Buckfastleigh, Dartington and Totnes on its way to the sea at Dartmouth.

Dartmouth's deep natural harbour and its resulting maritime history – naval, fishing, shipbuilding and leisure – is dependent on earlier drowned river valley. Like many river mouths of the South West, Dartmouth is a ria estuary, characterised by a dendritic structure, steep banks, and a disproportionately large estuary for the size of the river that empties into it. South West ria estuaries formed during the Pleistocene when unglaciated river valleys were submerged by rising sea levels and rapid elevation of the land.<sup>59</sup> The geomorphologist's goal to ascertain why and how particular landforms such as ria estuaries occur, is echoed in Oswald's accretion of unfinished questions about the nature of the Dart as it passes the weir and bridge at Totnes, before becoming part of the tidal ria: 'why is this jostling procession of waters'; 'why is it so bragging and surrendering'; 'why is it so sedulously clattering'; 'why is this interweaving form as contiguously gliding / as two sisters'; 'why is this flickering water'; 'why is this river not ever / able to leave until it's over?' The subject of the accumulated whys is the river, but the object and purpose of the question is deferred until the concluding 'why is this river not ever / able to leave until it's over?' Beyond Totnes, the Dart is quite literally unable to 'leave' before it is 'over', almost drying up at low tides, as is characteristic of a small river that empties into a larger tidal ria. The dendritic pattern of the ria is given fleshly

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<sup>57</sup> Trill is another word for trickle.

<sup>58</sup> Glides are geomorphological units in the classification of riverbeds.

<sup>59</sup> Gerardo Perillo, *Geomorphology and Sedimentology of Estuaries* (London: Elsevier, 1995), pp. 83–4.

form by the poem, described as a 'huge vascular structure'. The wilful 'bragging' and 'jostling' of Oswald's anthropomorphic river, with its 'side-long looks' and 'language of oaks', which seems to stubbornly refuse its apotheosis in the sea, speaks to a series of much deeper, longer processes of landscape evolution, processes that are continually shaping the surface of the moor, and that once formed the valley now hidden beneath the 'flickering water' of the Dart estuary (*D* 42–3).

If the river enters the estuary couched in series of questions, this impulse to interpret and make sense of the landscape is present from the beginning of *Dart*, which opens with a question:

Who's this moving alive over the moor?

An old man seeking and finding a difficulty.

[...]

Who's this issuing from the earth?

The Dart, lying low in darkness calls out Who is it?  
trying to summon itself by speaking...

An old man, fifty years a mountaineer, until my heart gave out,  
so now I've taken to the moors. I've done all the walks, the Two  
Moors Way, the Tors, this long winding line the Dart  
(*D* 1)

As Martindale has suggested, the old man's answer, in fact only 'leaves us with two more questions: 'what is the difficulty?' and more importantly, 'why seek out difficulty?' She goes on to suggest that these subordinate and 'unspoken questions are precisely what 'haunt[s]' the 'writing and reading' of both poetry and nature. The difficulty here is one that romanticism would set itself the task of overcoming, how to 'read the environment as a moral text to the self' and then re-interpret and re-inscribe that self back onto nature. Martindale interprets this opening section of the poem, where the walker's voice and sensibility wrangles with that of the Dart, through Wordsworth's 'Resolution and Independence'. This reading she suggests, demonstrates the 'rebuke' that



*Dart* offers to the masculine ‘authority’ of the Wordsworthian lyric, and its assumption – a romantic legacy that is still prevalent in nature writing – that the environment and its occupants are so readily ‘available’ for poetic inscription.<sup>60</sup> The ‘black slugs’ and imagined ‘figure far away on the tors’ certainly invoke the sudden appearance of Wordsworth’s leech-gathering old man:

he sits clasping his knees, holding his face low down  
between them,  
he watches black slugs,  
he makes a little den of his smells and small thoughts  
he thinks up a figure far away on the tors  
waving, so if something does happen,  
if night comes down and he has to leave the path  
then we’ve seen each other, somebody knows where we are.  
(*D* 3)

There is a neat parallel between Oswald’s walker ‘moving alive over the moor’ and Wordsworth’s ‘Traveller’, ‘upon the moor’, both of whom fail to find their usual solace in nature. Neither the sound of the ‘long winding’ *Dart*, nor the ‘distant waters’ of Ullswater offer any comfort (‘Resolution and Independence’ 17).<sup>61</sup> Yet, as Martindale suggests, Oswald’s ‘old man’ might figure both as Wordsworth, the ‘Grand Old Man of the epic poem of wilderness’, and the leech-gatherer, the ‘Old Man’ of the poem whom the ‘Traveller’ meets at the moment when he is overcome by ‘Solitude, pain of heart’ and ‘distress’ (‘Resolution and Independence’ 35).<sup>62</sup> As with Wordsworth’s traveller who invests mountain, moor, and mist with sublime ‘fears, and fancies’ (‘Resolution and Independence’ 27), Oswald’s walker locates his sense of desolation in the landscape itself, as the river turns ‘loneliness in all directions’, the ‘whole / unfolding emptiness branching and reaching / and bending over itself’ (*D* 3).

In the moment that Wordsworth’s traveller and Oswald’s walker are almost undone by their feelings of isolation from nature, a figure unexpectedly appears, an antidote to the loneliness and abjection that only the

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<sup>60</sup> Martindale, ‘Lyric Democracies’, p. 311, 314–315.

<sup>61</sup> Wordsworth, ‘Resolution and Independence’, in *Selected Poems*, ed. by H. M. Margoliouth (London: Collins, 1959), pp. 425–9. Hereafter cited parenthetically by poem title followed by line number.

<sup>62</sup> Martindale, ‘Lyric Democracies’, p. 316.

acknowledgement or recognition by another can provide. This other appears in 'Resolution and Independence' as both an old man and a 'huge Stone' (64). Another more geologically inflected reading of Wordsworth's poem within the opening section of *Dart* is therefore possible, one that hinges on the tension that Noah Heringman observes between 'old-man stone' as a 'redemptive figure of stability' and as a symbol of the absolute otherness of rock.<sup>63</sup> The melancholy and 'untoward thoughts' of Wordsworth's traveller are interrupted by a 'peculiar grace' incarnated in the form of a 'Man' who appears 'before' him 'unawares': 'The oldest Man he seem'd that ever wore grey hairs' ('Resolution and Independence' 50–7). No sooner than the ancient figure appears, however, he is turned to stone:

As a huge Stone is sometimes seen to lie  
Couch'd on the bald top of an eminence;  
Wonder to all who do the same espy  
By what means it could thither come, and whence;  
So that it seems a thing endued with sense:  
Like a Sea-beast crawl'd forth, which on a shelf  
Of rock or sand reposes, there to sun itself.  
(*'Resolution and Independence'* 64–70)

Heringman suggests that the poem deploys this 'geological romance of origins' in order to provide the certain ground required to constitute and maintain the lyric self against the impermanence of nature. If neither 'landscape' nor 'the speaker's intermittent connection to it' has until now been able to 'provide a reliable material and affective base for the poem's ideas' then the association between 'thing' (inert rock) and 'sense' (sentient man) must compensate.<sup>64</sup> The moment where the transformation from man to stone takes place is like the refrain of an epic simile: 'As a huge Stone is sometimes seen to lie'; 'Like a Sea-beast crawl'd forth'. Furthermore the use of simile over metaphor puts these two entities in contact with one another while maintaining their distinctive identities.<sup>65</sup> The similitude between the 'Old Man' and the 'huge

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<sup>63</sup> Heringman, p. 49.

<sup>64</sup> Heringman, pp. 30, 36.

<sup>65</sup> See Marie Louise von Glinski, *Simile and Identity in Ovid's Metamorphoses* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 4.

Stone' lying 'on the bald top of an eminence' is reprised in a single phrase in *Dart*: 'he thinks up a figure far away on the tors / waving' (3). While Oswald's figure is clearly imagined by the walker as some kind of redemption from loneliness, like Wordsworth she emphasises the isolated location of the tor and its material presence. Thus the rock in both poems functions as both 'sense' and 'thing', as a humanised source of stability and as something profoundly and materially other. Heringman asserts that the romantic 'aesthetic discourse on rocks articulates the sense of a real, physical world, a planetary depth of experience that can either enable or confound economic agency'. This romantic investment in the landscape's 'power to negotiate the real' animates Oswald's *Dart* where rock and stone anchor human perception while simultaneously dislodging lyric certainties.<sup>66</sup>

Wordsworth's erratic boulder, which lies on a hill of another kind of bedrock, is as much a puzzle as the origin of the old man, and more importantly a key to reading both the leech-gatherer and the traveller's relationship to the landscape. The domain of the geologist – how to read the landscape, in terms of its age, external form and meaning – subtends the problem that the poet has in finding ways to negotiate and make sense of human experience. The similitude between the old man and the stone enables the poem to deal with the question of 'embodiment' and create space for a 'moral allegory'; 'Like ore from rock, the 'man's 'moral dignity' can be extracted'.<sup>67</sup> Accordingly Wordsworth draws on a set of tropes common to aesthetic geological writing in this period: rocks are signs of 'substance or solidity' and of the 'vastness and stability of external nature'.<sup>68</sup> The vastness and hardness of rock also implies a physical resistance to human endeavour, in terms of perception, classification, and economic extraction. The poet could harness problems over the temporal classification of older rock strata, and competing arguments about the origin of igneous rocks and the movement of erratics to posit questions about events on a more human timescale ('By what means it could thither come, and whence?'). Yet the physical qualities of hardness, and vastness also suggest a restriction or diminution of human agency. If rocks and mountains inspire a sense of awe due to these qualities, then for Heringman the 'ultimate wonder is the rocks'

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<sup>66</sup> Heringman, p. 62.

<sup>67</sup> Heringman, pp. 30, 34.

<sup>68</sup> Heringman, pp. 31–32.

resistance to aesthetic categories themselves: they do not simply become humanized or sacralised others, but stand outside this structure'.<sup>69</sup> While rock and stone offer the poet a means to extracting moral lessons then, the substance also resists any complete anthropomorphic transformation. The process of metamorphosis that begins with the transformation of inert stone to sentient man via the intermediary 'Sea-beast', which is primitive and yet sensing, is never fulfilled, always remaining at the level of similitude. Like the multiple protean voices of the Dart river, 'anonymous' and 'Slip-Shape', Wordsworth's erratic resists identification with the human.

Oswald's reworking of 'Resolution and Independence' suggests that contemporary ecological poetics can never entirely escape the legacy of a romantic response to the non-human world – the relationship between 'thing[s]' and 'sense'. Material things must not be reduced to poetic conceits for Oswald, but can nevertheless only be apprehended through sense, both in terms of cognitive ordering, and through the body's sense organs. Listening is an important device for negotiating things and sense, and bringing the non-human into the text. To examine how Oswald transforms Wordsworth's old-man stone, through the 'ear' as a means of dislocating the lyric voice of her own 'old man' I will return to the opening questions of the poem.

The river's initial question ('Who's this moving alive over the moor?') is followed by a counter-question (Who's this issuing from the earth?'), which seems to originate with the old man. Issuing is an antiquated way of describing the headwater, which teasingly adopts the idiom of the King James Bible to describe the river's origin and birth. The suggestion of the earth as pregnant, is underlined by the Dart 'lying low in the darkness', waiting, hidden until its moment of discovery by the walker. Like the plutonic, once molten granite over which it flows, the source of the river is deep within the earth. The trickle of the river's beginnings echoes the slow processes by which the rock is emplaced and exposed at the surface of the earth; yet the difficult stuttering emergence of both rock and water is deceptive. Although some of the force of the rock and water cycles is hidden deep underground, both have the power not only to transform landscapes, but here to turn human flesh into stone, and water into sound or language. The river 'summon[s] itself by speaking':

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<sup>69</sup> Heringman, p. 62.

this secret buried in reeds at the beginning of sound I  
won't let go of man, under  
his soakaway ears and his eye ledges working  
into the drift of his thinking, wanting his heart  
(D 1)

This is the point at which the walker's response to the river's initial question – 'Who's this' – slips back into the persona of the Dart, the 'I' that 'won't let go of man'. The sound of the river recalls the voice of the leech-gatherer as perceived by the Wordsworthian speaker: 'now his voice to me was like a stream / Scarce heard; nor word from word could I divide' ('Resolution and Independence' 114–5). Oswald takes the voice of this human other and gives it back to the river itself, attempting to realign the relationship between Wordsworth's traveller and the leech-gatherer to one of equilibrium. The lyric voice in *Dart* does not belong to one speaker, but resides in the river and its 'many selves' (48). Like the hard impenetrable rock, the fluid interchangeable voice(s) of the river limits human agency and acts an agent of material transformation. As the control of the 'I' shifts from walker to river, man is transformed from subject to object, from sentient being to inert thing. This contact between rock and human in the form of metaphoric substitution does not result in the rock being humanised; rather man is subject to geomorphological processes of the hydrologic and rock cycles. The metamorphosis of the sense organs into features of the landscape and vice versa, acts as a retort to the man who searches for the source of the river, only to find that his body parts are transformed into a man-made 'soakaway' or land-drain, and his eyelids to 'eye-ledges'. The instantiation of geological time in the lifespan of a man whose rocky 'eye ledges' work their way painfully slowly into his mind, turns his body – rather than as we might expect the landscape – into excavated ground. His 'soakaway ears' are dug over in the process of land management and his eye ledges are subject to geological 'drift', the re-deposition of rock via glacial movement much like Wordsworth's Lakeland erratic. The term 'drift' appears in several places in Oswald's work, and is not always used to infer glacial movement. Here the term is somewhat disconnected from the environment of the walker, as the tors and clitters of

Dartmoor are not the result of glacial drift. Instead it is the river that imitates geological time and the process of glaciation, refusing to 'let go of man', and working its way into his mind and 'heart'. By transforming the walker into stone, the river answers its own question ('Who's this moving alive over the moor?') thus affirming itself as the many-voiced lyric persona of the poem, and as an agent of geomorphic transformation. The geomorphic conceits of *Dart* give the appearance of a self-aware and self-excavating earth, where fluvial and igneous processes continually alter the observable surface of the moor and its less accessible depths. The transformative power of water is also the subject of the following section, but here it is the extraterrestrial force of the moon's gravitational pull that reveals the mutability of landscape and its many temporal rhythms.

##### **5. 'Moon-shocked': *Sleepwalk on the Severn***

According to Owain Jones, material landforms are more mutable, fluid and shifting than is visible to the human eye, constituting a series of intersecting flows that move at 'multiple speeds, durations and rhythms'.<sup>70</sup> The slow emplacement of molten igneous rock that forms the granite tors of Dartmoor and the swiftly moving rapids and glides of its rivers are examples of the different rhythms and flows that constitute particular landscapes. The intersection of temporal ecologies in *Dart* among rock, water, and human life, also surfaces in *Sleepwalk on the Severn*, which takes place 'at night on the Severn Estuary'. Like *Dart*, *Sleepwalk* is a book-length poem that interweaves the voices and experiences of 'real people', 'some living, some dead', from the 'Severn catchment'. 'Its subject' says the poet in her explanatory preface, 'is moonrise', and the poem 'aims to record what happens when the moon moves over us – its effect on water and its effect on voices' (*SwS* preface). The main geomorphic impact of the moon that the poem charts is its influence on the tides of the Atlantic Ocean.

Jones notes that tides are an under-explored phenomenon in social science disciplines such as cultural geography. Tidal zones are also often

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<sup>70</sup> Owain Jones, 'Lunar-solar Rhythmpatterns: Towards the Material Cultures of Tides,' *Environment and Planning A*, 43.10 (2011), 2285–2303 (p. 2300).

neglected as sites of public interest.<sup>71</sup> Mainly consisting of mud, such spaces are less attractive to the aesthetic imagination, and their shifting marginal quality makes them less open to mimetic inscription. Nevertheless tides are formidable geomorphic agents, which more so than other fluvial processes transport vast quantities of water and sediment in their diurnal movement. The continual reshaping of coastline and riverbed by the force of tidal geomorphology is an excavatory process that occurs across different timescales: millennia, yearly, monthly and daily cycles. Tidal flows exhibit a similar kind of temporal crises between drastic and gradual metamorphosis that Oswald's 'Sonnet' on limestone habitats suggests. Sediment built up over long periods by tidal flows can be swept away by unusually high tides caused by a combination of weather, lunar cycle and other localised phenomena such as tidal bores. Landscapes that appear in stasis, such as coastlines, are in fact continually shifting and changing. Although some of these geomorphic changes are imperceptible, the diurnal motion and excavatory activity of tides is observable and spectacular in extreme intertidal zones like the Severn estuary.

Moreover these fluvial processes are dependent on extra-terrestrial forces, distant planetary motions that constitute nearby earthly spaces, and as such are integral to an archaeology of place. The gravitational force of the Moon and to a lesser extent the Sun causes the tides in the Earth's oceans. Yet the movement and impact of tides is not universal, but is dependent on local landforms. Rachel Carson observes that the dual origin of tides presents us with 'a striking paradox' as 'the force that sets them in motion is cosmic', a universal agent on the earth, while the 'nature of the tide at any particular place is a local matter'. The gravitational pull of 'heavenly bodies' determines the motion of tides, but their effects 'depend on such things as the slope of the bottom, the depth of a channel, or the width of a bay's entrance'.<sup>72</sup> Tides therefore suggest not only crosscutting temporal flows, but also complex spatial relationships, as they are dependent on the tension between proximity and distance – local and extraterrestrial processes. The temporal and spatial flux of tides is exacerbated by diurnal, monthly and annual rhythms of tidal flow. The moon and to a lesser extent the sun, exert a gravitational force on the oceans resulting in the familiar

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<sup>71</sup> Jones, 'Lunar-solar Rhythmpatterns' pp. 2286, 2293.

<sup>72</sup> Rachel Carson, 'The Sea Around Us', in *The Sea* (London: Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, 1964), p. 145.

daily tidal cycle from low water, rising tide, to high water, before the tide turns and falls to low water again. Twice a month the rhythm is disrupted by a higher (spring) and lower (neap) tidal range, caused by the alignment of the moon and the sun at new moon and gibbous moon. The highest of these tides takes place at the summer and winter equinoxes twice a year due to the nearness of the moon to the earth.<sup>73</sup> It is therefore significant that tidal excavations of the landscape in *Sleepwalk* are tied to specific places and times, and to a number of intersecting temporal and spatial rhythms. The poem is only recorded at night, but time shifts across the monthly cycle of the moon's phases. This movement is anchored by what appear to be italicized stage directions. The poem, though 'not a play' according to Oswald, is structured much according to the rules of Greek Tragedy, which has the following parts: prologue, episode, *exode*, and a choral portion divided into *parados* and *stasimon*.<sup>74</sup> Each episode is associated with a phase of the moon. The italicized header sections of the episodes therefore set the scene and the timing of the moon's various appearances on stage.

*New Moon*

*Flooded field by the Severn. Waveridge Sand  
only walked on by the Wind. Almost dark. New  
Moon not yet risen. Car noise continuous.*

*Two sleepwalkers struggling along, one painfully  
thin with eyes closed (that's the Moon), the other  
writing, (that's me). I'm always out here, noting  
things down in my nightbook being interrupted...*

(SwS 5)

There are two rhythms of the moon at work here: the daily ebb and flow of the tide and the monthly pattern of spring tides which coincide with new and full moon, are indicated by the '*flooded field*' on the banks of the Severn. Waveridge Sand is an intertidal mudflat near Slimbridge, which provides a haven for migrating birds. There is also evidence of human temporal rhythms, the traffic noise of a nearby road at commuting time, and the sleepwalking

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<sup>73</sup> Jones, pp. 2287–8.

<sup>74</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1970), p. 76.



dream secretary who appears in each episode, recording changes in the landscape, and who is the last voice we hear in the final *exode*. Once the poem has fixed its location in space and time, the action and dialogue of the episode begins. Here it is a birdwatcher's exclamations concerning a blow-in that suggest additional natural rhythms that are out of synch: 'Rare visitor. Rare? Not breeding surely! Not now!' (SwS 5). The location, environmental conditions and temporalities are also repeated in the later '*Moon Reborn*' episode, which emphasizes the monthly tidal rhythm. As Jones suggests 'diurnal and tidal sequences' exemplify the 'complexity of temporal ecologies': 'Tidally animated waters present endless repetitive/novel sets of relational processes resulting from the ceaseless gravitational interactions of the heavenly bodies which, in turn, are multiplied by earthly variations.'<sup>75</sup> Thus in the repetition of the New Moon phase of the poem sequence, the protagonists (birdwatcher, fisherman and dream secretary) return to the scene repeating their earlier dialogue, with some alterations which signal that a month has passed and different species, such as the Bewick's swan, are sheltering on Waveridge Sand (SwS 25–6). As the '*New Moon*' rises for the second time in the sequence, a '*razor-sharp / wince of light*' is seen by the '*Dream Secre- / tary*' who is '*recording all this at moonrise, 31<sup>st</sup> of the / 8<sup>th</sup> and hereafter. Notice the water rising.*' (SwS 26) There is a tension here between repetition and the singular event; the monthly rhythm of the spring tide causes the water to rise and flood the adjacent fields yet again, but this is a particular point in time as well as space – moonrise on 31 August 2008 overlooking Waveridge Sand.<sup>76</sup>

Oswald was commissioned to write *Sleepwalk on the Severn* as part of the Severn Festival, which took place in Gloucestershire in 2009, and so the various spaces and times of the poem are to some extent constrained. Rather than obscuring its origin and limits, however, for the sake of aesthetic unity, Oswald weaves the context, dates, times, places and people, into the fabric of the poem. By charting some of the sites most notably affected by the continual flooding of the sea the sequence must negotiate the geomorphic and social effect of the tides on the estuary. The Severn estuary has the second highest tidal range in the world due to its position in the Atlantic Ocean and its funnel-shape which forces the rising tide into a narrow channel. The most profound

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<sup>75</sup> Jones, p. 2290.

<sup>76</sup> New Moon was 30<sup>th</sup> August in 2008.

effect of the moon on the estuary is the Severn bore, which interrupts the diurnal rhythm with its extreme tides. Twice a day the sea rushes up the narrow estuary against the flow of the river, and at higher tides this results in Europe's largest tidal bore. A bore or eagre forms when a flood or high tide enters a river as a single mass. In addition to the tidal range, the mouth of the river must be so shaped as to hold back the tide until the build up of force causes a hydraulic jump that moves as a single wave up the river channel.<sup>77</sup> Oswald describes the bore in a section/poem entitled 'crowds lining the banks' where the moon 'visits her rivers / Dragging her wave like a ghost-robe' (SwS 32). The bore is a well-known tourist attraction, and there are many spots along the estuary where the crowds gather to see this phenomenon, or surfers run 'through the fields in wetsuits' hoping to 'ride' the 'rim of the river-wheel / To be rolled bodily along in its drowning' (SwS 32). The cosmic force of the moon's gravitational pull, causes the reverse flow of the tide to 'push / The river right over' (SwS 33). This effect does not just apply to the water, as the 'earth' itself is thrown into chaos 'dangling in emptiness / With its feet kicking in the air' by the 'havoc' of the moon (SwS 33).

The contrast between the 'weight of the sea' and the chaotic 'emptiness' of the earth's surface is reflected in the rapidly changing and extreme environment of the estuary, which alternates between deep water and the indistinct and precarious intertidal zone of sand terraces and mud banks, an unfamiliar landscape which 'Glimmers and glimmers like the Summer of the Underworld' (SwS 32). *Sleepwalk on the Severn* opens, as Greek drama dictates, with a prologue that introduces this strange and shifting littoral landscape.

prologue  
 Flat stone sometimes lit sometimes not  
 One among many moodswung creatures  
 That have settled in this beautiful  
 Uncountry of an Estuary  
 (SwS 3)

The Severn is the longest river in the UK, and its 'beautiful / Uncountry of an Estuary' is a vast area of five hundred and fifty-seven square kilometres.

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<sup>77</sup> See Carson, 'The Sea Around Us', p. 152.

Approximately one hundred square kilometres of this is intertidal, the littoral zone between high and low tides. The littoral margins comprise a number of important wetland environments including mudflats and salt marshes. The range and speed of the tides carry large quantities of sediment to and from the estuary; more than thirty million tonnes of silt is shifted on an average spring tide. Jones suggests that this movement of sediment renders estuaries like the Severn 'time-space geographies' that consist almost entirely of 'mud'.<sup>78</sup> The intertidal zone of the Severn is indeed an 'Uncountry', a site where materiality is uncertain, and it is difficult to determine where land, river, and sea, begin and end. Throughout the poem's prologue the negative prefix 'un-' is attached to the estuary and its primary actant, the moon, which is characterised by its 'endless wavering' causing an 'unsolid unstillness'. This is an indeterminate zone where nothing can take up residency or dwelling with any sense of permanence. It is a 'reedy layby of a vacancy / Where the house of the sea / Can be set up quickly and taken down in an hour'. Paradoxically sterile and fecund, the intertidal mudflats and salt marshes are both 'barren mudsite and a speeded up garden'; a site which must 'continually 'unwill itself' with each ebb and flow of the tide (SwS 3).

Listen this is not the ordinary surface of a river  
This is not a river at all this is something  
Like a huge repeating mechanism  
Banging and banging the jetty  
[...]  
Yes this is the moon this hurrying  
Muscular unsolid unstillness  
This endless wavering in whose engine  
I too am living  
(SwS 3–4)

The poem reaches for negative comparison and simile to describe the estuary, which forms the channel basin of the river, but is 'not a river at all'. Like the hardness of igneous rock, its 'surface' is resistant to the human gaze, and

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<sup>78</sup> Jones, p. 2293.

its less than 'ordinary' appearance is best perceived through listening to the sound that it makes 'Banging and banging' against the 'jetty'. This supposedly natural thing is 'Like a huge repeating mechanism' whose 'engine' is the moon. The trope of the machine is repeated in relation to other geophysical forces and suggests the industrial applications of water, and the relationship between geomorphology and social processes. The wind blows, '*Ninety- / mile-an-hour [...] across sand with machine / marks of hard-worked water. [...] It's an estuary you see. And when the wind / blows up you can be walking like this leaning / forwards and you'll still be going backwards...*' (SwS 11) Water in the Severn estuary is 'hard-worked', both by tides, wind and industrial processes. The Severn supports several large urban and many smaller rural communities. In addition, four nuclear power stations, various ports and harbours, and two large road bridges occupy its shores. The large tides of the estuary are a constant cause of controversy over hydraulic engineering proposals to create a barrage for flood protection and to harness the energy of the sea.<sup>79</sup> The muddy cracked salt terraces that appear barren, though they are teeming with life, are put at risk by the aggressive engineering solutions that threaten to transform the estuary into a kind of living death zone.<sup>80</sup>

Plans for a barrage that would protect farmed and developed land, and harness the energy of the tides have been proposed a number of times. While *Sleepwalk* does not directly engage this controversial issue the poem does chart human interventions in the morphology of the estuary landscape:

moon	Can't sleep. Little light left on. Low tide along- side me like a ploughed field. Nothing growing. Only the fresh cracked fat of the mud.  [...]
	This is wetlands.
	Full of wildfowl. Keep looking. This is sediment. This is ordinary surface stuff with a shoe sticking out of the mud with a leg in it. Or is that a heron standing out of bounds on the reservoir Wall. which'll soon be twenty foot underwater

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<sup>79</sup> Tidal processes are charted and classified according to machine-like metaphors; in fluid mechanics phenomena such as tidal bores are known as hydraulic jumps.

<sup>80</sup> See Jones, p. 2300.

(SwS 6–7)

Without the kilometres of sea walls that protect the coastline of the estuary the highest tides would flood further inland altering the shape and ecology of the landscapes. The poem gestures towards the feats of engineering – dams, flood storage reservoirs, sea defences – that hold back and rebalance the force of the tides. Here it is low tide but the landscape and man-made defences which are currently ‘out of bounds’ of the estuary mudflats will ‘soon be twenty foot underwater’. Unlike the engineering works, which work against the excess flow of water, the tides are presented as working alongside the moon to sculpt and pattern the landscape, the cracked surface of mud, and the water each reflect the shape of the other ‘like a ploughed field’. There is a similar affinity between water and rock, but here it is moonrock that draws and attracts the seawater up the river channel. The less than ‘ordinary surface of a river’ is transformed into very ‘ordinary surface stuff’, the mud that we don’t notice unless it impedes progress. For a moment at low tide the shifting indeterminate landscape materialises more certainly: ‘This *is* wetlands’; ‘This *is* sediment’; ‘This *is* ordinary surface stuff’ (my emphasis). The creatures that inhabit this briefly stable environment (wildfowl, heron, human) must take advantage of the rhythm of the tide to perform their particular activities, feeding, fishing, reproducing. At low tide the mudflats provide a source of food for the thousands of waders and wildfowl that feed on the marine worms and other invertebrates that inhabit the mud. In contrast, at high tide the saltmarsh becomes a roosting haven for the birds. As Jones suggests, the nesting and feeding patterns of the birds ‘are practised in time with the tides as the mudflats are repeatedly exposed and inundated’. These temporal ‘rhythmpatterns then extend out into social systems’, encompassing those who work on the estuary, and those who use it for ‘recreation’ (birdwatchers and walkers) timing ‘their activities to high and low tides and the movements of the birds’.<sup>81</sup> The intertidal ecology of the poem is populated with a series of human, non-human and half-human objects that have accumulated over many years. The moon seems doomed to wander the estuary collecting or auditing these items each time she rises:

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<sup>81</sup> Jones, pp. 2294–5.

I can't remember what I'm looking for  
but I've found shoes and skirts and ribbons here.  
And old crab lines and fossils being wintered  
away and of course hundreds of half fish half  
human molluscs and marine worms doubled up  
in their undoing being slowly slipped out of the  
mud and made fat again.  
(SwS 13)

There is a sense of weariness about the repetition of diurnal, monthly and annual rhythms. Climbing in the sky at each moonrise requires that the moon be 'Very strong' as she is 'Tied to the earth' and its landforms, 'Having no choice / But to be moon / Of all this space' (SwS 8–9). It is the unison voice of the chorus that gestures towards the irony of the moon's fate. The gravitational force that ties the moon also causes tidal friction, which in turn is slowly pushing the satellite away from Earth. Carson explains: 'the moon has receded' over millions of years 'driven away by the friction of the tides it creates'. As it recedes, its influence over the tides will lessen and it will also 'take the moon longer to complete its orbit around the earth'. Eventually the length of the day and month will coincide, 'the moon will no longer rotate relatively to the earth, and there will be no lunar tides.'<sup>82</sup> These are the millennial rhythms of the moon, which are not visible to the human eye and are more akin to the slow processes of the rock cycle than attuned to human daily, monthly or seasonal patterns. Like the primitive 'half / human molluscs and marine worms' here, or the sea-beast of 'Resolution and Independence' which pull the past into the present, the millennial rhythms of the moon and the strange topography of the mudbanks prefigure a future unimaginable landscape. The final *exode* of the poem contains several individual voices of the chorus, the bystanders and agents of such landscape evolution.

fisherman  
Another thousand years,

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<sup>82</sup> Carson, 'The Sea Around Us', p. 149.

The moon, mother of many rivers,  
Has grown young again.  
It could happen to anyone  
Whose being both dims and widens  
As if carried by the wind.

A man for example,  
Sitting very still in his bone-web,  
Dipped in old age up to the eyes,  
When the tide recedes, his arms  
Draggle to his sides  
As hollow as reeds.

Another thousand years,  
Every twelve hours,  
Every vein in the valley re-fills its syringe  
At the thought of the moon:  
The marsh grass prickles its hackles  
And the trees speak out with shadows in their voices.

And a man for example,  
Sitting very still in his bone-web,  
Dipped in old age up to the eyes,  
When the tide returns he runs  
Thigh-deep through the Severn,  
Chasing the lightning of a salmon.  
(SwS 29)

The fisherman witnesses the different temporal rhythms of the moon-sculpted landscape which remains extant over several 'thousand years', yet alters '[e]very twelve hours' as each 'vein in the valley re-fills its syringe / At the thought of the moon'. This 'man' appears to have been 'sitting' here very still' like Wordsworth's old-man-stone, as material evidence of some ancient past, his life span synchronised with tidal flux and the lunar cycle. As with old-man-stone, or Oswald's walker on Dartmoor, the man's body is transformed to non-human 'reeds' through the geomorphic effect of the tide. Over time water acts on his body ('Dipped in old age up to the eyes') as it does the mud shoreline,

hollowing out, and eroding his flesh to 'bone-web'. The effects of tidal erosion on the body also recalls romanticism's 'geological romance of origins' that reads intruded rock as evidence of primordial materiality. In Wordsworth's *Guide to the Lakes* (1822) the intrusions on the top of Scawfell are described as 'skeletons or bones of the earth not needed at the creation'.<sup>83</sup> Where inorganic rock is made legible here as part of an organic system whose ground is human life, Oswald's post-romantic ecology reverses the analogy eroding fleshly form back into landform. As in *Dart* the boundaries between organic and inorganic are breached: 'bone-web' protrudes from estuarine mud, the dry cracked river valley is patterned like arteries or veins, the 'marsh-grass' has animal 'hackles', and trees have voices. Just as the moon is tied to the Earth, so all beings that dim and widen, are bound to the moon and its unalterable course. Unlike the nicely rounded and regular twelve-hour pattern suggested by the fisherman's song, however, the tides do not have a permanent temporal rhythm. Rather, as each stanza passes through '[a]nother thousand years' the moon shifts in its orbit, the days lengthen imperceptibly and the tidal rhythms will change, eventually disappearing and erasing the existing landscape and its inhabitants. The quietening of the human voice in order to achieve intimacy with the natural world is always undercut in Oswald's poetry by the return of lyric agency. In *Dart* this was the protean river, but in *Sleepwalk on the Severn* it is Oswald's 'dream secretary', who is responsible for recording the observable and imperceptible geomorphic processes of this strange 'Uncountry of an estuary' that has the final word. The moon's final exit is not then subject to the extraterrestrial forces that underpin her work on the landscape, but one constrained by the human domestic setting in which the 'dream secretary' places her: 'Sometimes the moon is more an upstairs window, / Curtains not quite drawn but lit within and lived in' (SwS 40).

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<sup>83</sup> Wordsworth, *A Guide Through the District of the Lakes in the North of England*, 5th edn (Kendal: Hudson and Nicholson, 1835), p. 117. 'Excursion to the top of Scawfell' was included in the 3rd edition of the *Guide* in 1822. The description is drawn from Dorothy Wordsworth's letter to William Johnson in 1818 (see Heringman 188–90).



## 6. Exhuming Homer's Troy: *Memorial*

Oswald and reviewers of *Memorial* see the collection as a departure from her riverine long-poem sequences.<sup>84</sup> Yet the fluvial and igneous geomorphic processes that enable her poetic excavation of the surfaces and depths of Dartmoor and the Severn estuary reappear in *Memorial*, which uses images of weather, water and sedimentation to exhume and reinter the dead in the alluvial soil of the Troad region. Since at least its discovery at Hisarlik in Turkey by Heinrich Schliemann in 1868 Troy has been a potent site for the archaeological imagination.<sup>85</sup> Oswald's excavatory strategy is less concerned with the archaeology of Troy than the Homeric text itself. Her translation of the poetic past and its dead reveals itself to be more conventionally archaeological than it first appears, however, in that Oswald reprises all the principles that emerge in the other poets covered in this thesis: the relationship between past and present; the recovery and interpretation of finds; the process of unearthing; and the exhumation of the dead. Nevertheless these principles cohere in Oswald's concern to bring the non-human world into the text in the guise of geomorphic processes that have over millennia shaped the actual landscape of the *Iliad's* setting. Part of the reason that Troy's original natural harbour is now several kilometres inland is due to the 'rapid infilling of coastal embayments' in the region that that resulted from a 'high-rate of sedimentation of rivers draining the adjacent lofty and erodible mountains'.<sup>86</sup> The *Iliad's* epic similes are notable for their use of geomorphic processes such as floods, waves, wind, and erosion. Oswald chooses not to depart much from the original text in her translation of the similes. By stripping away plot and heroic events and recontextualising the similes, however, she amplifies their resonance, offering a window onto Homer's literary landforms and onto her own concerns about the relationship between the human and non-human world. Obviously she cannot really return

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<sup>84</sup> I refer to her response to questions posed at a 'Reading of Memorial' in 2012 and the Guardian interview with Kellaway.

<sup>85</sup> For a discussion of earlier aesthetic responses to Troy see Thomas Greene, *The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (New York: Yale University Press, 1982); also Alan Shepard and Stephen D. Powell, *Fantasies of Troy: Classical Tales and the Social Imaginary in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2004).

<sup>86</sup> Tony Wilkinson, *Archaeological Landscapes of the Near East* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2003), pp. 25-26.

us to these ancient landscapes, but she claims to use the original Greek words as 'openings through which to see what Homer was looking at' (*M* 2).

As with Monk's speaking with the dead, *Memorial* attempts to unearth the forgotten names of the *Iliad*, the minor characters that are eclipsed by the usual heroic narrative. In the preface to *Memorial* Oswald explains that she is drawn to the 'vocative' and '(in common with lament) [...] invocative' qualities of the *Iliad*. She observes that Homer's poem always 'addresses Patroclus as 'you', as if speaking directly to the dead', although she does not adopt this interlocutory tone. Unlike her other long-poems the use of the first-person pronoun is also markedly absent in most of the poem.<sup>87</sup> The lyric voice of *Dart* is replaced by lists of names and accounts of killings interspersed with translations of Homeric similes that are each repeated twice. This accretive structure mirrors the sedimentary plains on which the heroic past is inscribed, and is also reminiscent of a stone memorial or monument, beginning as it does with a list of the fallen, whose capitalised names fill the first eight pages of the sequence.<sup>88</sup> Oswald sees Homer's original 'as a kind of oral cemetery' which 'in the aftermath of the Trojan war' was 'an attempt to remember people's names and lives without the use of writing' (*M* 2). It is this oral lament that she tries to capture through her exhumation of the dead, but which she also achieves by inscribing their remains into the landscape of the poem. The printed page does of course fix the oral tradition in writing, but Oswald attempts to ameliorate this through formal elements that imply speech or voicing, such as the repeated simile stanzas, lack of punctuation and enjambment. The eroding work of the natural world is also a conceit that Oswald emphasises to suggest the disappearance of the written word. 'Like leaves who could write a history of leaves' but whose 'ghosts' are blown 'to the ground' so the 'names' and memories of the heroic dead are either swept or blown away. Oswald is at her most admonishing against war here when she writes, 'When you remember them remember this / Dead bodies are their lineage / Which matter no more than the leaves' (*M* 73). It is the earth itself then that exhumes and reinters those who are left 'uncried for' and 'unburied' because of the 'death-curse' of

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<sup>87</sup> There are exceptions such as Agastrophus' death (*M* 42) and Hector (*M* 72).

<sup>88</sup> Jason Gurland makes a similar observation about the monumental structure in his biting review of the poem: 'Rosy-Fingered Yawn', *PN Review*, 39.1 (2012), 55–6. On lists in Homer see Elizabeth Minchin, 'The Performance of Lists and Catalogues in the Homeric Epics', in *Voice into Text: Orality and Literacy in Ancient Greece*, ed. by Ian Worthington (Leiden: Brill, 1996), pp. 1-20.

the battlefield: 'that was the earth's moment' (*M* 29). Whether they are like 'MNESIUS rolled in sand' or 'THRASIUS lost in silt', a catalogue of 'beautiful armour underwater' and 'white bones sunk in mud' (*M* 71), these bodies wait to be unearthed from obscurity and properly en-graved in *Memorial's* revisioning of the *Iliad's* landscape.

The *Iliad* draws on the familiarities of everyday life and the natural world for its similes in order to facilitate the audience's connection with the events it describes. These domestic or bucolic images sometimes stand in sharp relief to 'the works of men' and their heroic battles (*M* 44; *Il.* 16.389–392). However, the violent battles are more often than not accompanied by natural cataclysms such as storms, strong winds, floods and tumultuous seas. Irene de Jong suggests that these similes show human beings in 'a losing struggle' with one another and with 'nature': 'Just as heroes have their battles to fight, ordinary man is engaged in an unending struggle to survive in an often hostile natural world'.<sup>89</sup> Weather is often 'even more violent than war' in the *Iliad*, appearing as 'an image of pure force unleashed into the world' as James Redfield also notes.<sup>90</sup> The 'storm-bred' waves of *Iliad* 15, which are induced by 'screaming winds' and 'hurricane[s]' are part of a catalogue of geomorphic similes that attend significant events of war. Here the pair of wave similes describe Hector's advance on the Danaan/Achaean defences, and their initial resistance to his attack.

But even so he could not break them, for all his fury,  
for they closed into a wall and held him, like some towering  
huge sea-cliff that lies close along the grey salt water  
and stands up against the screaming winds and their sudden directions  
and against the waves that grow to bigness and burst up against it.  
So the Danaans stood steady against the Trojans, nor gave way.  
But he, lit about with flame on all sides, charged on their numbers  
and descended upon them as descends on a fast ship the battering  
wave storm-bred from beneath the clouds, and the ship goes utterly  
hidden under the foam, and the dangerous blast of the hurricane  
thunders against the sail, and the hearts of the seamen are shaken

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<sup>89</sup> Irene J. F. De Jong, 'Introduction', in *Homer: Iliad Book XXII* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 22.

<sup>90</sup> James M. Redfield, *Nature and Culture in the Iliad: The Tragedy of Hector* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), pp. 190–1.

with fear, as they are carried only a little way out of death's reach.  
(//.15.618–28)

Thomas K. Hubbard observes that the *Iliad* evokes struggle through the structural juxtaposition of similes as much as their hostile imagery. The movement from 'an unsuccessful attack to a successful one, from successful resistance to failed resistance' is heightened by the proximity of antithetical images drawn from the same natural 'realm'.<sup>91</sup> The Danaans are at first 'like some towering / huge sea-cliff' resisting the 'bigness' of the Trojan 'waves', and then they are as the deck of a 'fast ship' overwhelmed by the 'foam' of a 'battering wave'. It is telling that in Homer's geomorphological paradigm, rocks signify a superior form of resistance compared with man-made objects such as ships, regardless of whether these are designed specifically for warfare. In the endless struggle against one another and the non-human world, it is the works and voices of men that ultimately disappear. *Memorial* maintains the original proximity of the wave similes of *Iliad* 15 even if it associates these images with less heroic scenes and pairs of minor characters (Isos and Antiphos, Peisander and Hippolochus) instead of Hector and Zeus. Oswald does dispense with Homer's antithetical pairing of the similes, however, opting for the accretion of one image of the eroding force of nature upon another. She also reverses their order, so that there is no preceding resistance to destructive force, and an increased emphasis on the disappearance of the human. The first pair of 'boys', Isos and Antiphos pass from view 'Like a boat / Going into the foaming mouth of a wave' where 'Everything vanishes / And the sailors stare at mid-air' (*M* 36). As with Homer's resistant cliffs 'the waiting rocks' of Oswald's second simile appear to 'Outstare the winds and the big waves / Running at them open-mouthed' (*M* 37). The wave in both similes is an inevitable agent of erosion, however, and its gaping mouth is also a grave, analogous to the episode described in the preceding lines where the Trojan, Antimachus, stands accused of opening 'a door in the earth' through which 'a whole generation entered' (*M* 37). Oswald subtly transforms the *Iliad's* natural similes to amplify a struggle between human and non-human world that echoes the jostling Dart and the Severn tides, which are responsible for the diminution of human agency in her earlier work.

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<sup>91</sup> Thomas K. Hubbard, 'Antithetical Simile Pairs in Homer', *Grazer Beiträge*, 10 (1981), 59–67 (p. 61).

The Troad is known for its windiness and although wind and sea seem appropriate enough as ‘images for the people of the Aegean sea basin’ they also recall the geomorphic forces of Dartmoor and the Severn estuary.<sup>92</sup> This overlaying of one landscape on another is evident in Oswald’s redeployment of Homer’s simile of a man irrigating a garden, which is removed from its original context of Achilles struggle against the river Scamander.

And as a man running a channel from a spring of dark water  
guides the run of the water among his plants and his gardens  
with a mattock in his hand and knocks down the blocks in the channel;  
in the rush of the water all the pebbles beneath are torn loose  
from place, and the water that has been dripping suddenly jets on  
in a steep place and goes too fast even for the man who guides it  
so always the crest of the river was overtaking Achilleus  
for all his speed of foot, since gods are stronger than mortals.  
(*Il.* 21.257–264)

Like when a ditch-maker takes a mattock to water  
To cut it loose from its clods at first  
It’s just a secret trickle under nettles  
But then the pebbles shout out *water*  
And it runs downhill calling to his crops and orchards  
Leaving him staring  
(*M* 27)

In the *Iliad* the simile describes Achilles successful crossing of the Scamander (albeit with help from the gods). The river rages against him in waves filled with bodies and armour that are intended as obstacles to the Greek warrior, and as reminders of the mass slaughter of the battlefields for the listener. *Memorial* uses the image to evoke a much shorter and less prominent episode from book six, the birth and death of the twins Pedasus and Aesepus; the latter is named after another of the many rivers of the Trojan plain and its deity. The twins are offspring of Bucolion (who is not named in *Memorial’s* account of their genesis) and Abarbarea the naiad, who is herself the daughter

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<sup>92</sup> William Clyde Scott, *The Oral Nature of the Homeric Simile* (Leiden: Brill, 1974), pp. 62–5 (p. 62); see also Alex C. Purves, ‘Wind and Time in Homeric Epic’, *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 140.2 (2010), 323–350.

of the river-god Aeseopus. Both Homer and Oswald use the power of water to stand for the death that is unleashed on the battlefield, and the rapidity with which one figure after another is struck down. Rather than focus on Achilles as an exemplar of the human impulse to control the forces of nature (much like the farmer who channels the river), however, Oswald foregrounds the connection with the detritus of war, the twin bodies who are born out of water, and who end up as effluent in the river along with the rest of the dead. These two with their watery origins are reminiscent of the twin source of the Dart river (East and West) that tussle with one another and with the human figures on the moor. Like the rivers of the *Iliad*, Oswald's Dart contains many dead (the canoeist, the scout) and manifests its desire to get hold of man and not let him out of its watery grasp. The Dart, a 'secret buried in reeds', and the irrigating rivers of the Trojan plain which emerge from the ditch as a 'secret trickle under nettles' betray their common origins. The 'ditch-maker[s]' stream does not simply have its source in the landscape of the *Iliad*, but in Oswald's ability to use Homer's ancient landscape as a lens through which she can better see the more familiar landscape of home. Given her propensity to allow the non-human to speak for itself, it seems odd that Oswald does not hand over lyric voice to the Trojan rivers at any point, even though there is precedent in the *Iliad* for doing so. This is especially noticeable when compared with the Achilles episode in Homer, where the rivers and their identically named deities, Scamander and Simoeis, exhibit fury and anger against the works of men. Whereas Oswald's Dart proclaims its origins in the first person, 'I / come from the little heap of stones' (*D* 4), in *Memorial* the river is speechless, and it is 'the pebbles' that instead 'shout out *water*'.

The combined effect of water and wind in diminishing the works of men is evident from the very first simile that Oswald uses: 'Like a wind-murmur / Begins a rumour of waves / One long note getting louder / The water breathes a deep sigh / Like a land-ripple / When the west wind runs through a field / Wishing and searching / Nothing to be found / The corn-stalks shake their green heads' (*M* 14). The wave that will eventually wash away the bodies in the rest of the poem begins to build here, before it moves out across the battlefield like an archaeological survey, 'Wishing and searching' for the dead, of whom it finds nothing more than mere traces in helmets, hairclips and bones. *Memorial* uses

artefacts that also appear in the *Iliad* to register the absence of the bodies of those killed. If the dead cannot be found, they are suggested in negative relief: 'ECHEPOLUS' may have disappeared but 'You can see the hole in the helmet just under the ridge / Where the point of the blade passed through / and stuck in his forehead' (*M* 14). His former presence is verified by the absence of the 'hole'. Human form and agency is similarly displaced and diminished in the case of 'DAMASOS the Trojan' who foolishly runs 'at a man thinking kill kill / In years to come someone will find his helmet / Shaped like a real head' (*M* 44–5). Unlike organic substances metals are relatively durable, so the human body disappears and is replaced by an equivalent archaeological find. Thus 'Poor Iphidamas' who challenged Agamemnon with his 'spear-tip' which 'bent like lead' and is now reduced to 'iron / Sleeping its iron sleep' (*M* 38), and 'EUPHORBAS died / Leaving his silver hairclip on the battlefield' (64). Helmets, hairclips and other artefacts register the human but appear unable to conjure the dead back to life.

The erasure of human agency and voices from this landscape registers much more the cost of such a disappearance, as living or non-human things seem to enter the text only through death. 'This is water's world' and in the end *Memorial* does not reveal these geomorphic forces of rock, river, wind or sea to be benevolent or in harmony with human desires for intimacy with the non-human. 'You would think the sea could do something' the unidentified lyric voice of the poem wistfully remarks:

But it just lifted and flattened lifted and flattened  
 Like a stone  
 Stands by a grave and says nothing

Like a stone  
 Stands by a grave and says nothing  
 (*M* 46–47)

Despite the ostensible indifference of Oswald's self-excavating earth to human concerns, the mute stone and silent sea in this simile disclose what Shanks and Schwyzer have described as the principal impulse of the archaeological imagination. This is the 'desire to fill the hollow' left behind after

excavation by replacing the displaced earth with a re-animated body – the desire to raise and speak with the dead. In the original Homeric simile, which Oswald shifts to a fluvial geomorphological register, this process of *engraving* is more apparent, even if it is the non-human that still speaks in some way. Here it is not the sea, but the immortal horses of Achilles weeping over the death of Patroclus (and human mortality more generally) that are stationary in their lament:

but still as stands a grave monument which is set over  
the mounded tomb of a dead man or lady, they stood there  
holding motionless in its place the fair-wrought chariot,  
leaning their heads along the ground, and warm tears were running  
earthward from underneath the lids of the mourning horses  
(//. 17.434–438)

A ‘monument’ or ‘stone’ stands as a site of mourning, and although it may be mute (‘says nothing’), the action of ‘warm tears’ or the lifting and flattening of waves marks the surface, and produces space through the process of *engraving*. Oswald’s production of monumental space in *Memorial* via this series of exhumations, excisions, and accretive re-interments of the Homeric dead returns us to the notion of engraving as excavation put forward by Lacour – where such excavation is ‘historical uncovering and aesthetic formation, the partial removal of matter’ that inscribes spaces, places and landscapes with meaning.



## In Conclusion: The Prospect of an End

The result, therefore, of our present enquiry is, that we find, no vestige of a beginning, no prospect of an end.

—James Hutton, 'Theory of the Earth', 1788<sup>1</sup>

This thesis has examined different forms of excavation in late-twentieth and twenty-first-century British and Irish poetry in order to widen current debates about the status of space, place and landscape in literary studies. While recent critical debates have acknowledged the importance of socio-spatial practices in relation to any given text, I have suggested that this focus has largely overlooked the way in which the mediation of landscapes by literary histories and traditions is *itself* part of a socially constituted practice of place. My own critical excavations in this thesis have brought the insights of spatial criticism to bear on literary-historical frameworks in order to unearth a richer seam of interconnected currents – aesthetic, historical, social and natural – that runs from one poem to another. Tracing the trajectories between various poets has not meant asserting the existence of an unbroken tradition of landscape writing in the context of this thesis, however. Rather I have sought to demonstrate that the relationship between any given poem and its precursors is always subject to the contingencies and limitations of other factors such as ethics, history, and time. Thus each poem is only ever partly legible in the discontinuous strata of language and literary tradition, and like the *archē* or archaeological find attests to a desire for origins and continuities that is always undermined and never fulfilled.

I have traced the impulse of archaeological poetics across the work of four very different poets – Geoffrey Hill, Ciaran Carson, Geraldine Monk, Alice Oswald – who nevertheless share a common concern with unearthing the strata of language and landscape as part of their deep dialogues with particular places. Their work, I have argued, moves beyond the constraints of existing models of excavation such as those found in the work of Seamus Heaney, transforming the conventions of archaeological poetics such as: the correlation

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<sup>1</sup> James Hutton, 'Theory of the Earth', in *Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh*, 1 (1788), 209–305 (p. 304).

between surface/present and depth/past; the recovery and interpretation of finds; processes of unearthing; and the exhumation of the dead.

By examining Hill's sedimentary poetics, Carson's parodic stratigraphy, Monk's collaborations with the dead, and Oswald's geomorphology of a self-excavating earth, in the context of various literary precursors and their 'local attachments' to place, I have sought to demonstrate that poetic excavation can be deployed outside of the framework of chthonic nationalism so closely associated with Heaney, and the early work of Hill. Instead I have argued that these poets use excavatory models to explore wider concerns with ethics, the politics of literary tradition, history, and ecology.

I have also argued that these poetic excavations must acknowledge the limits of digging down into the strata of language and landscape. The necessary failure to accomplish an archaeological desire for origins, or to speak with the dead, appears in Carson's parodic Sisyphean digging in 'The Pit' in *On the Night Watch*, and in the eroding work of Oswald's natural forces that roam over the landscape of *Memorial*, 'Wishing and searching / Nothing to be found'. The limitations of excavatory poetics are perhaps nowhere more striking, however, than in Hill's dialogue with the sedimentary discourse of Paul Celan, where the possibility of mining that 'deep strata of language' is continually called into question by the remains of 'a grave in the air' (Celan). These ethical limitations are not only a problem for the 'archaeological imagination' as it appears in literary contexts. Julian Thomas describes the 'ethical task of archaeology' itself, as 'bear[ing] witness to the other human being in his or her difference'.

Archaeology may have arisen from modernity, but it has the unique capability to bring us into contact with lived worlds that are utterly alien from our own, *even if they at one time occupied the same space* as ourselves. This encounter gives us the possibility of recognizing the particularity and contingency of our own way of living [...] but it is essential that in doing so we recognize that there is some element of the difference of the past other that will always elude us.<sup>2</sup>

Whether mapping several different places one over another, (Carson, Hill and Oswald) or excavating the chronological layers of a singular landscape

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<sup>2</sup> Julian Thomas, 'Archaeology's Place in Modernity', *Modernism/Modernity*, 11.1 (2004), 17–34 (p. 32).

(Monk) these poets attempt an ethical encounter with the past much as Thomas describes; one that emphasises the particularity of their own 'local attachments' while at the same time registering the contingency and openness of time, place and the others that they briefly encounter there.

Thomas' remarks suggest an affinity between archaeology and literature that I have largely avoided discussion of in this thesis, as my intention was less to assert such a connection than to explore how excavation in its broadest sense might be said to operate as a model in contemporary poetry. Nevertheless some of the questions that have arisen in the discipline of archaeology in recent years, concerning its contemporary relevance as a system of 'knowledge' that 'emerged' from the 'nexus' of modernity, resonate with the accusation of anachronism with which excavatory poetics has often found itself charged. If archaeology and *ergo* the 'archaeological imagination', are, as Thomas suggests, 'inconceivable' outside of the 'historical conditions' we call modernity, might such models not find themselves 'moribund and obsolete?' Moreover, he asks, is archaeological thinking 'so intrinsically tied to a particular set of conditions that it can only be of use (or interest) to a particular kind of society?'<sup>3</sup> These questions also return to haunt the excavatory poetics of each of the poets discussed in this thesis. For example, how can contemporary poetry justify the metaphorical use of archaic implements such as the horse-plough or even the spade as tools for representing current concerns? Carson and Oswald eschew such devices to some extent, as is evident from the intrusion of modern mechanisms and tools into the landscapes of their poetry. In *Dart* the 'water abstractor' works in the treatment works beneath 'the weight of all the water for the Torbay area', 'countervailing against decay' by adding 'chlorine', and removing 'the finest particles' with the purifying sand of the 'rapid gravity filters' (25–6). If the archaeological imagination in such poetry is to adequately register contemporary contexts, it must surely, in Carson's words, see what is 'before' its 'eyes'.<sup>4</sup> Thus it is not a plough or a spade that governs the vertical topography of his contemporary literary landscape, but 'a helicopter that marks out the earth, its 'infrared / furrows // scanning in' rather than unearthing the 'artefacts' that will 'rust / or glitter under // this hereafter' (*OtNW* 134).

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas, 'Archaeology's Place in Modernity', p. 32.

<sup>4</sup> Carson, 'Escaped from the Massacre?', p. 186.

Thomas suggests that although 'archaeology' is somewhat tied to the condition of 'modernity', it might nevertheless extend beyond the concerns of the late-nineteenth and twentieth centuries ('classificatory mode[s] of knowledge'; 'narratives of social and technological progress'; 'the rise of the belief that new knowledge can be made from material things'; 'the emphasis on depth models'; 'the belief in the naturalness of bounded human groups that arose alongside the nation-state') by 'augmenting its present concerns with those kinds of knowledge that modernist thought tends to excise: ethics, politics, aesthetics and rhetoric'.<sup>5</sup> It is not yet apparent what trajectory or forms excavation will take in British and Irish poetry of the later twenty-first century, but it will doubtless return to some of the exemplary excavators discussed in this thesis, for its imaginative ground.

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas, 'Archaeology's Place in Modernity', p. 32.

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