

A Survey of Geoffrey Hill's "The Pentecost Castle" and "Lachrimae"

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Richmond, Virginia
Bachelor's Degree, University of Virginia, 2019

A Thesis presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the University of Virginia in Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Department of English

University of Virginia
May 2020

I. Introduction to *Tenebrae*

Following the widespread success of his book of prose poetry *Mercian Hymns* (1971), Geoffrey Hill published his fourth volume of verse *Tenebrae* in 1978. Using “tenebrae” as the title of the volume, Hill signals the deep involvement with historical and religious contexts in the poems. The word *tenebrae* appears in the account of Jesus’ crucifixion in the Vulgate Gospel of Matthew (27:45): “A sexta autem hora tenebrae factae sunt super universam terram usque ad horam nonam” (“Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour”).¹ In this paper, I will integrate the close reading of poems with historical discourse in a survey of the first two sections of *Tenebrae*—“The Pentecost Castle” and “Lachrimae.” Focusing on Hill’s engagement with religious and historical themes combined with traditional forms and ambiguous language, I will explore how Hill’s poetry remains relative to contemporary thought as it speaks to the human condition and to a faith that reckons with uncertainty and doubt.

As one of the oldest services of the Church, *Tenebrae* is thought of as a funeral service for Christ, honoring and celebrating His Passion, His descent to Hell, and His Resurrection. It takes place during the matins and lauds of the last three days of Holy Week: Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday. The main symbolic act performed during *Tenebrae* is the lighting of fifteen candles on a triangular “hearse” followed by the successive extinguishment of each candle until the church reaches utter darkness. One candle is kept hidden until it is restored to the hearse, the moment at which the congregants depart from the church. This one lit candle symbolizes Christ’s resurrection from the *tenebrae*, or “shadows” literally, of Hell.² In an interview with English poet and author Blake

¹ “The *Tenebrae* Poems of Paul Celan and Geoffrey Hill.” *Geoffrey Hill and his Contexts*, edited by Piers Pennington and Matthew Sperling, 2011, p. 152.

² “Passion Ritualized.” *The Poetry of Geoffrey Hill*, by Henry Hart, Southern Illinois, 1986, p. 193.

Morrison, Hill offers an understanding of the service of *Tenebrae*, emphasizing its duality of meaning:

Tenebrae is a ritual, and like all rituals it obviously helps one to deal with and express states which in that particular season of the church's year are appropriate—suffering and doom. *Tenebrae* does at one level mean darkness or shadows; but at another important level it clearly indicates a ritualistic, formal treatment of suffering, anxiety, and pain.³

As a highly ritualistic service dedicated to anticipation, remembrance and lamentation, *Tenebrae* offers a backdrop to the volume that defines the tone and theme of the poems.

Before its publication in 1978, many of the poems of *Tenebrae* first appeared in the literary magazines *Agenda*, *Poetry Nation*, *Shenandoah*, and *Stand*. The sonnet sequence “Lachrimae” received high praise from reviewers when it first appeared in the fifteenth anniversary issue of *Agenda*. Using ballad and sonnet forms in the book, Hill allows for the poems to achieve a succinct and tender tone while exploring the paradoxes of Christianity and demonstrating profound contemplation. Overall, the volume received positive reviews—with Scottish poet Edwin Morgan writing, “the sense of art is pervasive and inescapable,” and English poet Craig Raine pointing to the book’s concern with “Hill’s passionate yet agnostic relationship to Christ.”⁴ Eight years after the publication of *Tenebrae*, professor at the College of William & Mary and Poet Laureate of Virginia Henry Hart further expands upon what the reviews of Morgan and Raine were suggesting in the following quotation taken from his book *The Poetry of Geoffrey Hill*:

Tenebrae, like Hill’s other books, traces the creative mind’s wintry decent and vernal resurrection but provides the journey at all points with plangent music, roseate imagery, and guiding lights. It takes as its subjects the suffering inflicted by those who betray humanistic ideals of civilizations and compares

³Ibid.

⁴“*Tenebrae*.” *An Introduction to Geoffrey Hill*, by W. S. Milne, Bellew, 1998, p. 117.

their acts to Judah's betrayal of Christ. But if one theme predominates, it is the difficult voyage towards love, its attendant passions and nightmares.⁵

Henry Hart highlights the artistic elements as well as the religious subjects that prevail throughout the poems in Hill's *Tenebrae*. At the same time, he also calls attention to another defining feature of the poems of the volume—the theme of love. In my review of *Tenebrae*, I will trace the themes of love and religion that pervade the work.

II. “The Pentecost Castle:” Understanding the Terribleness of Desire

Coming as the first sequence of *Tenebrae*, “The Pentecost Castle” is comprised of fifteen lyrics—the exact number of candles lit and extinguished during the service of *Tenebrae*. The title of the sequence references the Holy Day of Pentecost, which commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles and other disciples following the Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension of Jesus Christ. The term “Pentecost” comes from the Greek word Πεντηκοστή, meaning fiftieth, because it was initially a Jewish feast celebrated on the fiftieth day after Passover. For Christians, Pentecost celebrates the beginning of the Church and its mission in the world: to spread the message of salvation through Jesus Christ.⁶

On the face of it, the other word of the title, “Castle,” appears like a strange juxtaposition with “Pentecost.” However, given that many of the lyrics are adaptations of medieval and counter-reformation Spanish lyrics, “castle” acts as a reference. It also signals the presence of both sacred love and secular love in the sequence as Christian and chivalric figures coexist. The sections of “The Pentecost Castle” that first appeared in *Agenda* had the following epigraph from R.O. Jones that celebrates both this comingling as well as the Spanish Renaissance influences throughout the lyrics:

⁵ *The Poetry of Geoffrey Hill*, p. 194.

⁶ “Sunday of Holy Pentecost - Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America.” *Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America*, Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, 2017, www.goarch.org/pentecost.

San Juan de la Cruz sang, as he danced holding in his arms an image of the infant Jesus snatched from a crib, the words of an old love song:
“Si amores me han de matar/agora tienen lugar.”⁷

Like their Spanish originals, the lyrics of “The Pentecost Castle” blend Christian themes with secular, romantic love. In an article published by the journal *The Poetry Book Society*, Hill confirms this noted theme, writing, “Many of the poems in *Tenebrae* are concerned with the strange likeness and unlikeness of sacred and profane love.”⁸ In this section, I will examine how Hill articulates various modes of love throughout the sequence—paying particular attention to the ways in which sacred love and profane love interact with one another. At the same time, as prompted by an idea put forth in the essay “Saving Love’s Face: On Geoffrey Hill” by University of Virginia Professor Kevin Hart, I also will show how, in the act of simply writing these lyrics, another form of love manifests in “The Pentecost Castle”—a notion seen especially in the first lyric.

While the lyrics of “The Pentecost Castle” imitate—with some even representing a modified translation of—the ballads written during the Spanish Renaissance of the sixteenth century, they still manage to hold a uniqueness that can only come from Hill and his poetic genius. At a harpsichord recital by Rafael Puyana—which included Antonio de Cabezón’s composition ‘Diferencias sobre el canto del Caballero’—Hill became introduced to these Spanish ballads. He describes this encounter and his ensuing interest in Spanish ballads in the following passage taken from *Vienpoints, Poets in Conversation*:

It struck me as a piece of such stunning power and beauty that from then on I was entirely enthralled by it, and I struggled until I could find some competent show of it on the piano. I then discovered that the theme for these magnificent variations was a little folk tune which gave Lope de Vega the motif for his play *El Caballero de Olmeda*. Again by a lucky accident I had been browsing through *The Penguin book of Spanish Verse* and had discovered one of the religious sonnets of Lope de Vega which

⁷ *The Poetry of Geoffrey Hill*, p. 198.

⁸ ‘Geoffrey Hill writes:’ (about *Tenebrae*). *Poetry Book Society Bulletin* No. 98, Autumn 1978.

enchanted me so much that I began to try to translate it. These two figures, Cabezón and Lope de Vega, were united by this tiny thread of folk song. I began to read my way into Lope de Vega's work—that play in particular—and I pursued every clue I could between the Cabezón piece and that snatch of folk song. The words of the little song became the first lyric of the “Pentecost Castle” sequence.⁹

Hill divulges not only the inspiration for the lyrics of “The Pentecost Castle,” but also the excitement with which he pursued the project of writing these lyrics. In his essay “Saving Love's Face,” Hart identifies this level of enthusiasm as a form of love, writing the following:

There is a sort of love, a bestowal value, involved simply in writing a poem; for even if one is writing for oneself, as the self-serving saying has it, a poem also is directed to others who know the language (or for whom it can be translated) and who may read it. The fiercest satire or the most despairing lyric bespeaks a certain regard for the unknown reader, even if it is merely the sense that the sacrifice one makes (of time, of energy), and of honoring language and the world acts of attention, might be for his own good.¹⁰

Thus, in addition to exploring the subjects of secular and profane love, the lyrics of “The Pentecost Castle” are enriched by Hill's own love associated with the act of creating them.

Below is the first lyric of “The Pentecost Castle” (left) and Lope de Vega's lyric from *The Penguin Book of Spanish Verse* (right):

They slew by night
upon the road
Medina's pride
Olmedo's flower

Que de noche mataron
al caballero,
la gala de Medina,
la flor de Olmedo.

Shadows warned him
not to go
not to go
along that road

Sombras le avisaron
que no saliese
y le aconsejaron
que no se fuese
el caballero,

⁹ *The Poetry of Geoffrey Hill*, p. 195.

¹⁰ Cohen, J. M., and Philip Lamantia. *The Penguin Book of Spanish Verse. With Plain Prose Translations of Each Poem.* Penguin Books, 1988, p. 288.

weep for your lord la gala de Medina,
Medina's pride la flor de Olmedo.
Olmedo's flower
there in the road

The side-by-side comparison calls attention to the visual similarities and differences between the lyrics—namely, the similar line lengths yet different numbers of stanzas and stanza lengths. In a closer look, one will note that Hill's forgoes the use of commas and periods found in Lope de Vega's lyric. This pure syntax—that is almost wholly unpunctuated except for the possessive case and hyphens in later lyrics—can be found in all fifteen lyrics. Without punctuation, each line runs over from one to the next, limiting pauses and creating a simple, unadorned tone and opening the way for various ambiguities. Scottish poet and critic W.S. Milne attributes the syntax to “set[ting] up an idealistic artifice of poetic voice at the beginning of the volume.”¹¹

In order to study Hill's rendition of the verse—the changes he made as well as the lines that he kept—I am including the following transliteration Lope de Vega's poem found in *The Penguin Book of Spanish Verse*:

It was by night they killed the knight, the pride of Medina, the flower of
Olmedo.

Shadows warned the knight not to go out, and advised him not to depart, the
pride of Medina, the flower of Olmedo.¹²

As shown, Hill's verse borrows many of the original lines from Lope de Vega's lyric, including the references to the Spanish towns of Medina and Olmedo. Another similarity between the lyrics is the overall repetitive nature found in the lines. In Hill's lyric this is apparent with the last word of each line appearing two or three times. One of the crucial

¹¹ *An Introduction to Geoffrey Hill*, p. 137.

¹² *Penguin Book of Spanish Verse*, p. 288.

exceptions to the pattern takes place with the singular appearance of the word “lord” at the end of the ninth line. The singularity of “lord” in the lyric echoes the Christian belief that there is only one Lord. Catholics, as well as other members of Christian denominations, reiterate this belief during Sunday Mass as they profess the first statement of Nicene Creed, which is “I believe in one God.”

In further comparing the two lyrics, the word “lord” replaces the word “caballero”—or the Spanish word for “knight”—found in Lope de Vega’s verse; thus, placing Christian figures alongside chivalric ones within Hill’s lyric. In seventeenth century English and Spanish devotional verse, Christ was sometimes represented as a knight coming from the “battle” of Crucifixion. Looking at the ninth line as a whole, “weep for your lord,” the word “weep” is also an addition made by Hill. As pointed out by Henry Hart, weeping further adds to this comingling of chivalric and Christian figures as it can be an indication of sacred or profane love: “Mary Magdalen’s lament for her slain lord, a Spaniard’s lament for his feudal lord, or any person’s lament for St. John of the Cross, who journeyed through similar dark nights, suffered wounds, and came from Medina.”

Hill maintains the overall storyline of Lope de Vega’s lyric, that is one in which a hero ignores the warnings not to take a certain path and, ultimately, dies for dismissing these signs. However, Hill’s narrative implies a religious journey, arising from the two titles related to the sequence—the volume’s title *Tenebrae* and the sequence’s title “The Pentecost Castle.” The holy day of Pentecost in itself is like the start of a journey, for it represents the beginning of the Christian mission to spread the word of God. Similar to the way in which the knight is murdered in Lope de Vega’s lyrics, many Christians have died seeking to fulfill the Christian mission. Just as a knight represents the hero of a chivalric tale, a Christian who sacrificed his life becomes a saint of the church. Following this Christian metaphor, the

“shadows” stands for those who do not believe in God—for in the Bible, darkness connotes all that is at odds with God (5). The shadows’ order “not to go” appears as two consecutive repeating lines and relates to the repeated opposition that Christians faced in trying to follow God (6, 7). However, despite these warnings and challenges, Christians continued “along that road,” the path of faith. Selecting the word “road” as the only one to appear three times as an end word to a line, Hill highlights its importance for Christians see the path towards God as leading to salvation.

In the second lyric of the sequence, Hill continues to explore the “likeness and unlikeness of sacred and profane love” as he creates images that evoke both traditional romance tales and Biblical stories:

Down in the orchard
I met my death
under the briar rose
I lie slain

I was going
to gather flowers
my love waited
among the trees

down in the orchard
I met my death
under the briar rose
I lie slain

With lines of the first stanza repeating verbatim in the third stanzas, they become the refrain in the lyric and the second stanza acts as the verse. The refrain creates a pattern, promoting a consistency and regularity as the lyric begins the same way in which it ends. At the same time, it distinguishes the second stanza from the first and third stanzas. Hill uses three verb tenses to describe the actions of the speaker in the lyric—the past simple tense, the present simple tense, and the past progressive tense, respectively. In the second line of the refrain, the speaker states that he “met [his] death,” rendering the perspective of the lyric to the

voice of a dead man—or a ghost (2/10). The use of the present tense found in the last line of the refrain “I lie slain” suggests that death of the speaker was a recent occurrence, for his body remains unburied (4/12, 1/9). The image of “the briar rose,” under which the speaker’s body lies, offers a host of connotations, metaphors and allegories (3/11).

Emblematic of passion and love, red roses are often exchanged between lovers. With the speaker referring to his “love” in the second stanza, the association of “the briar rose” with romantic love appears affirmed (7, 2/11). Connecting the romantic connotations of the second lyric with the first lyric of the sequence, the speaker represents the chivalric knight borrowed from Lope de Vega’s lyric.

At the same time, roses are highly symbolic flowers of the Christian faith. When worn as a crown by the saints, the rose represents Heaven and celestial bliss while its thorns often point to “Original Sin.” The Blessed Virgin Mary is often called the “rose without thorns” or “Rosa Mistica,” “Mystical Rose.” In Catholicism, the rose relates to the Rosary, which takes its name from the Latin word “rosarium” meaning “rose-garden.”¹³ The Rosary consists of a series of repeated prayers and is often visually represented as a garland of roses given to Mary.

Beginning the lyric with the words “Down in the orchard” followed by the image of the speaker’s “love wait[ing]/among the trees,” Hill alludes to the story of Adam and Eve found in the Book of Genesis of the Old Testament (1, 7-8). Seeing the poem as an allegory of this Biblical story, the speaker represents Adam, while the rose both takes on Christian meanings and remains an emblem of the romantic love between Adam and Eve. In the story of Adam and Eve, the first two human beings disobey God by eating the forbidden fruit on

¹³ “The Rosary.” *Catholic Answers*, 2019, www.catholic.com/tract/the-rosary.

the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The allegorical understanding of the lyric eliminates the notion of the speaker's literal death, but symbolizes rather the figurative death of Adam, commonly referred to as "The Fall of Man" for it describes man's first sin against God, the "original sin." The repeated first and third stanzas relate to the continual reminder of this original sin, the ultimate reason for God offering Jesus Christ as a savior.

In an alternative yet corresponding understanding of the role of religion in the lyric, the speaker represents Christ offering an account of the events of the "Agony in the Garden," the first Sorrowful Mystery of the Rosary and the First Station of the Scriptural Way to the Cross. Found in the New Testament, the Gospel tell the story of the night before the crucifixion of Christ, specifically when he went to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane, an olive orchard. The following passage taken from Luke 22 represents one of the four versions of the account:

He came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples followed him. When he reached the place, he said to them, "Pray that you may not come into the time of trial." Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, "Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done." [[Then an angel from heaven appeared to him and gave him strength. In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground.]] When he got up from prayer, he came to the disciples and found them sleeping because of grief, and he said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not come into the time of trial" (39-46).

Just as the speaker of Hill's lyric meets his death in the orchard, in this scripture, Christ comes to Mount of Olives to accept his betrayal and ensuing death. The angel, sent from God, represents his "love" that "waited/among the trees"—ultimately, leaving the love found in the lyric to be the mode of love reserved for God. Furthermore, in the Christian understanding of the lyric, the rose represents Christ's "sweat became like great drops of

blood falling down on the ground” and his sacrificial blood. The thorns of the rose can also denote the crown of thorns worn by Christ during his crucifixion.

Hill connects these two interpretations of the lyric with one image—the briar rose. He fulfills the reader’s common association between roses and amorous relationships through the allusion to Adam and Eve, the first lovers of the Bible. Meanwhile, the Christian meanings surrounding roses are realized in the interpretation of lyric as a Biblical story of Christ, the ultimate symbol of God’s love in the Christian faith. Although representing different modes of love, in each interpretation the rose offers a symbolic image of both the beauty and difficulty of love—regardless of whether it is sacred or religious love—through its thorns. Adam and Eve created a metaphorical thorn for humanity through their sins, while Christ literally bore a crown of thorns to save humanity.

In the fourth lyric, Hill breaks away the repetitive structures of the initial lyrics as he captures the emotions of *Tenebrae* through the image of the Jesse tree:

At dawn the Mass
burgeons from stone
a Jesse tree
of resurrection

budding with candle
flames the gold
and the white wafers
of the feast

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

The first line of lyric establishes the setting with the explicit mentioning of “dawn” and signaling of a church with capitalized “Mass.” In the Christian church both the daily

Canonical Hour of lauds and the Tenebrae service of Holy Week take place at dawn. Dawn, the time of day when the sun just begins to show, symbolizes hope and resurrection. Hill engages with these emotions while also representing them with the reference to “a Jesse tree/of resurrection” (3-4). In the Book of Isaiah, the prophet Isaiah introduces the image of the Jesse tree as an emblem of the coming of Christ:

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.
His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD (Isaiah 11:1-3 NRSVCE).

With the Jesse tree symbolizing Christ’s birth and Tenebrae awaiting his resurrection, together the two establish an integration of birth and rebirth—both leading to a sense of hope.

In the second stanza, Hill continues to follow the motif of Easter resurrection through presenting the image of a “candle flames,” one of the key components of the Tenebrae service (5). The concurrent image of the Eucharist, as heralded by “the gold/and white wafers,” serves as a reminder of Christ’s sacrifice of himself and the ultimate reason for coming to Mass to worship and pray (6-7). In mentioning “the feast,” Hill evokes the idea of the Last Supper, in which Christ raised the unleavened bread of Passover and said, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19 NRSVCE). As the flames of the candles are extinguished during Tenebrae, they remind worshippers of the darkness of Jesus’s death and the sins for which he sacrificed himself in order to redeem “lost humanity.” Thus, although the service is marked by a hope for Christ’s resurrection, there is also a feeling of sorrow, which Hill captures in the third and final

stanza of the lyric. Describing how “ghosts for love/void a few tears,” Hill depicts the sense of sadness while also alluding to the Holy Ghost, or the Holy Spirit, of the Holy Trinity (9-10). The final two words of the lyric “forlorn altars” highlight this despondent mood and honor God’s sacrifice, for the altar is the place of consecration during Communion (12).

Henry Hart understands each stanza as offering distinct representations of Christ, with this final stanza culminating in a vision that once again brings together sacred and romantic love: “In Hill’s vision, Jesus is the tree, the Tenebrae candle, the Holy Ghost, the spirit of love, but most importantly an image of the hurt, weeping lover.”¹⁴ In truth, seeing Christ as a “hurt, weeping lover” is not too dissimilar from how the scriptures of the Bible portray him. Christ was “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief,” as foretold by the prophet Isaiah (53:3). While he may be a “man of sorrows,” they were not his own:

Surely he has borne our griefs
and carried our sorrows;
yet we esteemed him stricken,
smitten by God, and afflicted (Isaiah 53:4 NRSVCE).

Christ so loved his people that he took their sorrows upon himself. Yet, even with this gesture of love, he continued to be “hurt” by mankind:

But he was wounded for our transgressions,
he was bruised for our iniquities;
upon him was the chastisement that made us whole,
and with his stripes we are healed (Isaiah 53:5 NRSVCE).

Despite the element of sadness in the lyric as particularly highlighted in the last line, the poem overall holds an air of hopefulness as supported by the meaning of the Tenebrae service. Although Tenebrae means “darkness” with gradual extinguishing of candles serving as the primary feature of the service, this darkness is not everlasting nor is it complete—

¹⁴ *The Poetry of Geoffrey Hill*, p. 202.

eventually, this darkness is dispelled with the appearance of the one remaining lit candle, symbolizing Christ's resurrection. Meanwhile, the external darkness likewise slowly lifts as the sun rises with the break of dawn, further reminding the communicants of hope and God's love. In another perspective, darkness for Hill, a humanist unable to quite commit to Christ, is his inability to opt for faith whereas light represents his desired faith.

In the seventh lyric, Hill offers a look at his own journey of faith, becoming the voice of the speaker. Placing himself as a child struggling to accept Christianity, he combines religious and profane love as he imagines Christianity as a seductive lover:

I went out early
to the far field
ermine and lily
and yet a child

Love stood before me
in that place
prayers could not lure me
to Christ's house

Christ the deceiver
took all I had
his darkness ever
my fair reward

The first stanza of the lyric establishes the setting, using the image of a "far field" with "lil[ies]" to create a scene of bounty in an allusion to the scriptures (2,3). In the following passage taken from the Gospel of Matthew, Christ tells his followers not to worry about food and clothing for God provides these to His people:

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these

things. But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well (Matthew 6:27-33 NRSVCE).

In giving up earthly desires to follow God, one will not only eventually reach Heaven, “the kingdom of God,” but also receive their earthly needs. Hill’s use of the image of an “ermine”—a stoat with a winter-white fur traditionally used in the making of ceremonial robes for kings and queens—symbolizes the abundance and riches available to those who abide by the will of God (3).

Hill imagines himself as a “child” with the choice to follow God standing before him: “Love stood before me/in that place” (5-6). In personifying “Love,” Hill underlines the capabilities of God’s love, for it is an active being. Yet, despite God’s offerings, Hill remains reluctant to observe the Christian faith, affirming that “prayers could not lure [him]/to Christ’s house” (7-8). The use of the word “lure” continues the mode of personification with the “prayers” of Christianity becoming seductive lovers. This connects to the theme of the conflict of desire surrounding both sacred and romantic love. Hill suggests the exploration of the theme of desire in these lyrics with his choice of epitaph for the sequence: “It is terrible to desire and not possess, and terrible to possess and not desire,” a quotation which comes from William Butler Yeats.¹⁵ In Christianity, earthly desires are often the precursors to sins—thus, they are detrimental to their relationship with God. Meanwhile, in romantic love, desire, as pointed out by Yeats, appears to be an essential ingredient to the feeling of contentment and pleasure in a relationship. In portraying prayers as alluring, Hill seems to call attention to this paradox of desire in the realms of romantic and sacred love.

¹⁵ Hill, Geoffrey. *Broken Hierarchies: Poems 1952-2012*. Oxford University, 2015, p.115.

In the final stanza, Hill contends that fully obtaining spirituality is an unreachable desire, finding truth in Yeats' statement that it "It is terrible to desire and not possess." Beginning the stanza with the words "Christ the deceiver," Hill displays a sense of hostility and anger, akin to that of an adolescent towards his parents (9). The epithet "the deceiver" reflects Hill's own relationship with Christ and his personal struggle to find spiritual love. It also alludes to verse Jeremiah 20:7, in which Jeremiah declares:

Oh Lord, you have enticed me,
and I was enticed;
you have overpowered me,
and you have prevailed (Jeremiah 20:7 NRSVCE).

Claiming that Christ "took all [he] had," Hill restates Jeremiah's feeling of defeat and reverses the portrayal of Christ in the first two stanzas for in his relationship with Christ, he feels a sense of loss instead of gain (10). Ending the stanza with the lines "his darkness ever/my fair reward," the lyric returns to the sequence's recurring motif of the darkness (11-12). Hill places himself in a spiritual darkness, which appears both a punishment and reward. The word "fair" implies that he is deserving of this darkness. Yet the word "reward" implies that he sees advantage in the darkness, for rather than becoming increasingly frustrated with seeking faith, he can now find complacency in his complete absence of faith.

Nevertheless, the lyric must be understood as an ironic display fueled by sarcasm—someone living in complete darkness, or a world completely devoid of God, would not devote an entire work of poetry to contemplate the complexities of faith. The final stanza also overturns Hill's complete rejection of God in the second stanza for rather than finding prayers and church unappealing, it appears that they would frustrate him in their reminder of his struggle with his beliefs. Ultimately, Hill's dedication to the art of poetry as a means of

exploring Christianity and his faith reveals the underlying mode of love nourishing this work—the love associated with the act of writing poetry.

In the perspective of the chivalric knight, the sequence concludes with a lyric that reiterates the challenges of desire with a question:

I shall go down
to the lovers' well
and wash this wound
that will not heal

beloved soul
what shall you see
nothing at all
yet eye to eye

depths of non-being
perhaps too clear
my desire dying
as I desire

Beginning with the image of the knight seeking “the lovers’ well” to “wash [his] wound,” Hill immediately introduces the two forms of love—romantic and sacred (2,3). The Bible often relates the “washing of wounds” to the baptism of sinners with Jesus washing them with water and healing them of their sins. Today, the Christian church continues to use water to perform the sacrament of baptism. Catholicism attributes this sacrament to the freeing of people from original sin. Thus, the sort of “wound” associated with baptism is a metaphorical wound that comes from sin. In the Bible, wounds are also associated with the literal wounds inflicted upon Christ during his crucifixion, a sacrifice he made to heal the metaphorical wounds of sin.

The future tense of the statement—“will not heal”—anticipates the failure of the speaker’s mission at the “lovers’ well” (4, 2). It also implies a past failure to heal the wound—he expects that the wound will not heal because he has already tried and waited for it to heal. The final stanza of the lyric, with the words “depths of non-being” suggest that

the knight's mission in a sense does fail for rather than finding a lovers' well filled with lovers, he finds an empty, dark well.

Returning to Christian themes of baptism and sin, the failure of the knight's mission is a metaphor for Hill's own struggle to fully accept God. Following this notion, the speaker turns inward, addressing his soul with a question: "beloved soul/what shall you see" (5,6). The use of apostrophe allows for the soul of the speaker to become a distinct entity from his body, aligning with Christian beliefs about the nature of one's soul as a separate, living being. Through addressing the soul as "beloved," Hill likens the soul to a lover—again, forming an image that combines religious love with romantic love (5).

Lending the soul the ability to "see," the speaker adds to the living quality of the soul (6). Seeming to answer his own question with the sequential line "nothing at all," the speaker nonetheless offers no further clarification (7). Seeing the inability of the speaker to heal his wound as a sign of his sins from not being baptized, his soul sees "nothing" in the sense that it does not believe in God. The lack of understanding or enlightenment provided by this line further illustrates his lack of faith. One of the most challenging aspects of the Christian faith comes from the reality that man will never fully grasp it. However, even with questions and not being able to literally "see" God, Christians find the ability to "see" him metaphorically through their faith.

Referencing the expression to "see eye to eye," meaning to agree with someone, the speaker suggests that when he and his soul, "the depths of non-being," come together, both his inner and outer desires become "clear" (8, 9, 10). Returning to the Christian notion of the living body and soul, the body cannot live without the soul whereas the soul can live without the body. The last two lines of the lyric differentiate having desires from actively desiring: "my desire dying/as I desire" (11-12). The speaker's sensual desire diminishes as his

spiritual desires are fulfilled. The lines open up an infinity of paradoxes. He cannot get out of the cycle of desire: for he desires not to desire. Since the speaker's body is both separate yet connected to his soul, his soul possesses desire while his body—as indicated by “I”—desires. Ultimately, if the desire of the soul dies, then the body will not be able to desire.

In Professor Kevin Hart's *Poetry and Revelation: For a Phenomenology of Religious Poetry*, he clarifies that in understanding Hill's relationship with faith, one must realize that Hill is not necessarily a “religious poet” in the traditional sense:

There is good reason to think of Geoffrey Hill as a religious poet, though only if the adjective is taken to mark a field of inquiry, one in which doubt and analysis rival faith and even the desire for faith.¹⁶

Concluding “The Pentecost Castle” with the word “desire,” Hill echoes the initial epitaph, linking Yeats's message to the lyrics. Following Kevin Hart's discourse on Hill's relationship with religion, the terribleness of the desire and possession relate to Hill's own desire for faith and understanding of Christian doctrine.

III. “Lachrimae:” Hill's Poetic Rendition

On the back cover of the 1978 André Deutsch publication of *Tenebrae*, one will find the following *Guardian* review from Irish contemporary poet Michael Longley:

“The best poet writing in England... He makes exquisite, immaculate music.” Although speaking Hill's poetry as a whole, Longley especially captures the project of Hill's poetic rendition of the musical composition *Lachrimae*. Each poem in Hill's “Lachrimae” is an Italian, or Petrarchan, sonnet—a word coming from the Italian *sonnetto*, meaning “a little sound or song.” Following the pattern of this type of sonnet, the lyrics of “Lachrimae” are

¹⁶ Hart, Kevin. *Poetry and Revelation: For a Phenomenology of Religious Poetry*. Bloomsbury, 2018, p.93.

fourteen lines long divided into an octave and a sestet with the rhyme schemes of *abbaabba* and *cdcdcd*, respectively. The Italian sonnet encourages a twofold division of thought with the envelope patterned octave leading to the *volta* or “turn” in the sestet, a point at which an increase in rhyme takes place.

Given that the title of Hill’s “Lachrimae” mirrors that of the John Dowland’s music folio *Lachrimae*, it invites the understanding of it as a response and parallel to its musical namesake. In 1604, English Renaissance lutenist and singer John Dowland published the music folio *Lachrimae*, a work whose motive and scope of interpretation remain open for debate. In the dedication of the work to the recently crowned Queen Anne of Denmark, Dowland addresses her, offering insight into the meaning of the composition’s title *Lachrimae*, the Latin word for “tears:”

...I have presumed to Dedicate this worke of Musicke to your sacred hands, that was begun where you were borne, and ended where you raigne. And although the title doth promise teares, unfit guests in these joyfull times, yet no doubt pleasant are the teares which Musicke weepes, neither are teares shed alwayes in sorrowe, but sometime in joy and gladnesse.¹⁷

As suggested by the alternate title to Dowland’s *Lachrimae—or Seaven Teares Figured in Seaven Passionate Pavans*—the composition consisted of seven pavans, or processional dances. The titles of the seven pavans consist of eight Latin words: the repeating noun *Lachrimae* and seven different adjectives. Dowland placed the seven pavans of the folio in the following order: “Lachrimae antiquae” (old tears), “Lachrimae antiquae novae” (old tears renewed), “Lachrimae gementes” (sighing tears), “Lachrimae tristes” (sad tears), “Lachrimae coactae” (forced tears), “Lachrimae amantis” (a lover’s tears), and “Lachrimae verae” (true tears).¹⁸

One possible explanation for the source of these titles includes the matins of Holy Thursday,

¹⁷ Holman, Peter. *Dowland: Lachrimae (1604)*. 1999, p. 4.

¹⁸ "Schab, Alon. "Dowland's 'Lachrimae': A Passionate Interpretation." *The Musical Times*, vol. 157, no. 1935, 2016, p. 17.

which uses six out of the eight words throughout the different parts of the service.¹⁹ The possible connection to the Catholic Church places Dowland's *Lachrimae* at the heart of the religious controversy of his time. The anti-Catholic sentiment of late Tudor and early Stuart England rested in the conflicting allegiances to the crown and the Pope. Despite the oppression they faced from society, Roman Catholics in England overall managed to navigate these opposing forces and, occasionally, even prosper. Thinking about the religious and societal context of Dowland's *Lachrimae*, the matters with the Catholic religion become more complicated when taking into account the complex relationship that both the composer and the dedicatee of the work had with the Catholic faith. Dowland faced discrimination following his conversion to Catholicism in 1594, which he believed caused his rejection for a position as a court lutenist. Similarly, Queen Anne of Denmark's conversion to Catholicism in the mid-1590s strained her marriage with James I, who came from Scotland, which was strongly Presbyterian at the time.²⁰ In publishing the folio, Dowland made the implied Catholic meaning into a public one, involving the lives of individuals whose faith directly has an effect on royal succession and the government.

Although the Catholic message is largely based on speculation in Dowland's *Lachrimae*, this religious context is quite apparent in Hill's rendering of *Lachrimae or Seven tears figured in seven passionate Pavans*. Looking at the titles of the seven lyrics found in Hill's "Lachrimae," there is both overlap and discontinuity with Dowland's composition. Entirely forgoing the original order of the folio, Hill places the title of the last pavan "Lachrimae Verae" first in his series of lyrics, opting to put "Lachrimae Amantis" last instead:

1. "Lachrimae Verae"
2. "The Masque of Blackness"

¹⁹ "Dowland's 'Lachrimae,'" p. 19.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

3. “Martyrium”
4. “Lachrimae Coactae”
5. “Pavana Dolorosa”
6. “Lachrimae Antiquae Novae”
7. “Lachrimae Amantis”

Another key difference is the absence of three titles from Dowland’s composition—“Lachrimae antique,” “Lachrimae gementes,” and “Lachrimae tristes”—which Hill replaces with the titles “The Masque of Blackness,” “Martyrium,” and “Pavana Dolorosa.” Each of the alternative titles found in Hill’s work makes its own cultural reference with a Catholic undertone. Performed for Queen Anne of Denmark on January 6, 1605, *The Masque of Blackness* was an early Jacobean masque written by Ben Jonson, an English playwright and devout Catholic. The word *martyrium* originates from the Greek word martyrion, meaning “testimony,” as it refers to a site that bears witness to the Christian faith such as an event in the life of Jesus Christ or the tomb of a saint or martyr. Meanwhile, with the Italian word *dolorosa* translating to “sad” or “painful,” the namesake of the title “Pavana Dolorosa” is a song composed in the late 1590s by Peter Philips, an eminent composer and organist of the Tudor period. Philips was a Catholic priest forced to leave England in 1582, ending up in Brussels and later in Rome. The use of Dowland’s original titles and alternative titles drawn from history shows Hill’s commitment to and dual interests in religion and history that pervade throughout the work.

Geoffrey Hill opens “Lachrimae” with the following epigraph taken from Robert Southwell’s *Mary Magdalen’s Funeral Tears* (1591):

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

Similar to the work's other references to figures of sixteenth century England, Southwell's life as a Catholic was plagued with persecution. In 1595, he was convicted of high treason for being a Jesuit priest, resulting in his execution at the age of 33. In 1970, 375 years later, Pope Paul VI canonized Southwell as one of the Forty Martyrs of England and Wales. Just as the epigraph to "The Pentecost Castle" should not be overlooked, Southwell's words offer a glimpse into key themes of "Lachrimae"—namely, those of passion and love both guided and misguided towards God.

Beginning in the first sonnet "Lachrimae Verae" with the words "Crucified Lord," Hill places the founding moment of Christianity at the forefront of "Lachrimae." Repeating in the fourth and sixth sonnets of the collection, this opening address acts like a musical refrain, a unifying pattern that highlights the importance of the Crucifixion of Christ. Looking at the first eight lines of "Lachrimae Verae," the speaker addresses the unmoving body of the "Crucified Lord," creating a direct dialogue and acknowledging the separation between Christ and himself:

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

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

Although the body of Christ "moves to no avail" and "is at one with eternal loss" just as any lifeless body, its symbolic power is what separates it from other humanly bodies (3, 4). The separation between the speaker and Christ is amplified by the attribution of Christ's body to the roles of a "castaway of drowned remorse" and the "world's atonement on a hill," which

distinguish and set Christ apart from the speaker and the rest of mankind (5, 6). In one regard, the address to the crucified body of Christ bears resemblance to an invocation to a muse with the speaker looking to Christ as a source of inspiration. The image of Christ “on a hill” places Him above others, —He is both physically and spiritually closer to Heaven— similarly to a heavenly muse (6). At the same time, the word “hill” is a clever, yet subtle “name-dropping” that gives Geoffrey Hill the opportunity to enter the poem. Just as there were moments in “The Pentecost Castle” in which the speaker’s voice closely resembles Hill’s voice, Hill’s perspective comes through in “Lachrimae,” especially when we see the speaker doubting his faith.

The apparent separation between Christ and the speaker is further supported by the understanding that human action resulted in Christ’s crucifixion, which the speaker alludes to in the seventh line of the sonnet: “This is your body twisted by our skill” (7). The placement of “your body” and “our skill” within the same line underlines the causal relationship between the two. With the modifier “our,” the speaker aligns himself with the rest of mankind, accepting his responsibility in bringing Christ’s body to its position on the Cross. Skill, “the ability to do an activity or job well,” is an intriguing word-choice in that it subverts expectations, namely words like “sin” or “wrongdoing” that require Christ’s “patience proper for redress” (8).²¹ In the Book of Exodus, God bestows skills upon His people to help rescue them from Egypt, telling Moses: “I have given skill to all the skillful, so that they may make all that I have commanded you” (Exodus 31:6 NRSVCE). Carrying into the Christian faith and mission, this notion of skills applies to people they wish to fulfill the Commandments. When people use their skills in vain rather than for God, their skills become sinful—with the word “twisted” underlining the distorted and misplaced use of

²¹ Oxford University Press (OUP), “Skill,” Lexico.com, 2019.

human skills. This interpretation of these lines reiterates the message of the epigraph with Southwell wishing for men to “alter their object and better their intent” for ill-founded object and intent lead to a path of sin.

In the sestet of the sonnet, Hill uses first person point of view, lending a more personal tone to the speaker’s voice as he further distances himself from the addressee:

I cannot turn aside from what I do;
you cannot turn away from what I am.
You do not dwell in me nor I in you

however much I pander to your name
or answer to your lords of revenue,
surrendering the joys that they condemn (9-14).

The repetition of the pronoun “I” draws attention to the speaker as the poem shifts to become about him and his personal relationship to Christ. In these lines, the speaker contradicts the message found in the verse John 15:5, in which Christ offers the metaphor of himself as the “true vine” and his followers as the branches: “I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:4-5 NRSVCE). In latter, contemporary translations of verse John 15:5, the word “dwell” replaces the word “abide:” “I am the vine, you are the branches. If you dwell in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit.” This second translation highlights the distinct parallel that Hill makes between “Lachrimae Verae” and verse John 15:5.

Returning to the title of the sonnet “Lachrimae Verae” (true tears), the various meanings of the word “true”—namely, “genuine,” “rightful” and “devoted”—frame the understanding of these lines of the sonnet in multiple ways. Taking “true tears” to mean tears of genuineness, one could point to the speaker’s display of honesty and candidness with Christ about his ability to commit as a faithful follower. In this sincere moment of doubt, Hill speaks to the

contemporary moment of secularism in which he writes. Setting a tone of despondency in the last three lines of the sonnet, the speaker suggests an unsuccessful attempt to accept Christ despite obeying His commandments. This is where one could understand the “true tears” as rightful and legitimate as readers empathize with the speaker’s feelings of discouragement. However, in the very acknowledgment of his sins with the words “what I do” and his humanness with the words “what I am,” the speaker paradoxically makes himself out to be a faithful follower for “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23 NRSVCE). In the speaker’s recognition of his shortcomings, the “true tears” of the title become characterized by devotion to God. At the same time, the speaker’s understanding of the weaknesses of humanity likewise resonates with contemporary thought as it is willing to accept the imperfections of human nature.

The third sonnet of the series “Martyrium” reflects on the forgotten lives of martyrs, opening with an account of a martyr at his execution:

The Jesus-faced man walking crowned with flies
who swats the roadside grass or glances up
at the streaked gibbet with its birds that swoop,
who scans his breviary while the sweat dries (1-4).

Written in the third-person point of view, the sonnet has story-telling effect differing from the personal tone in the first sonnet. The first image of the stanza—a “Jesus-faced man walking crowned with flies”—alludes to the Crown of Thorns worn by Christ at His Crucifixion. Meanwhile, the ordinary images of roadside grass, birds swooping and sweat drying are juxtaposed with the grim and atypical occasion as indicated by one detail: the gibbet. The Catholic breviary hints at the Jesus-faced man’s role as a priest—and, presumably, the reason behind his hanging. This story could readily be that of Robert Southwell or of any of the other Catholic priests executed by British authorities during the

sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Capturing the collective nature of the martyr's story, the speaker imagines the scene of the first stanza as a faded, woven tapestry:

fades, now, among the fading tapestries
brooches of crimson tears where no eyes weep,
a mouth unstitched into a rimless cup,
torn clouds the cauldrons of the martyrs' cries (5-8).

The very article meant to commemorate the martyr fades over time like any other tapestry would do, giving the impression of fading or forgotten memories of the martyr's life. The "crimson tears" serve as a reminder of the sacrifices the martyr made for his faith—most specifically the sacrifice of his life as insinuated by the color crimson, the color of blood. Adding a sense of plurality along with sound to the visual scene, the "martyrs' cries" reiterate the shared nature of a martyr's story of self-sacrifice. Creating a double meaning, these could be cries of pain endured by martyrs at their deaths or of lament for a state of human nature wrought with sin and disallegiance to God. In the first stanza of the sonnet's sestet, Hill expands upon the occasion for the "martyrs' cries" as he reworks what Southwell says in *Mary Magdalen's Funeral Tears*:

Clamorous love, its faint and baffled shout,
its grief that would betray him to our fear,
he suffers for our sake, or does not hear (9-11).

In Professor Kevin Hart's *Poetry and Revelation*, he offers two understandings of the "Clamorous love," returning to the theme of sacred love intersecting with profane love in "The Pentecost Castle:"

The martyr allows tearful, importunate devotion, stemming from grief, which can easily become a displaced figure of our own fear of death. Yet "suffers" also takes on the usual, dark sense; the martyr experiences pain for us, just as Christ did upon the cross, and to the same end. Or is the "Clamorous love" entirely earthly, the tears of Eros that have not been directed to a divine object or bettered intent? And can we

trace the border between the holy and the profane with any confidence in the devotion of time, the poetry of time, or in “Lachrimae”?²²

Hart’s interpretation draws parallels between the “Crucified Lord” of the first sonnet and the martyr of this sonnet, recognizing both of their acts of self-sacrifice for us. According to Hart, these lines can be viewed as a third-person adaptation of epigraph with “Clamorous Love” aligning with the “Passions [Southwell] allow[s]” and the “loves [he] approve[s].” In this light, the martyr’s cries are an expression of loud and vehement love for God. Yet, Hart also points to the ambiguity of the phrase “Clamorous Love,” questioning its devotion to God and suggesting that it could be passionate cries of profane love. Recognizing the two understandings of these lines allows us to see the lack of a distinct line between sacred and profane love. This reiterates the theme of the “strange likeness and unlikeness of sacred and profane love” found in “The Pentecost Castle” while also showing the ambiguity of Southwell’s words as they fail to define what makes certain passions and loves permissible.

In the final stanza of the sonnet, Hill further likens the martyr to Christ:

above the hiss of shadows on the wheat.
Viaticum transfigures earth’s desire
in rising vernicles of summer air (12-14).

Hart sees the first line as “allud[ing] to the Eucharist metaphor of the martyr as the bread to be consecrated by his or witness to Christ.” This patristic metaphor imitates saints like St. Ignatius of Antioch who wrote the following to his friends in Rome before he suffered: “I am the wheat of God, and am ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may be found the pure bread of God.” The placement of “Viaticum,” the Eucharist given to people nearing death, in the second line of the stanza helps confirm the interpretation of the

²² *Poetry and Revelation*, p. 108

Eucharist metaphor. Rendering the Viaticum the capacity to “transfigure earth’s desire,” the speaker sees sacred love transform and overcome profane love.

Hill begins “Pavana Dolorosa” (“sad dance”), the fifth sonnet of *Lachrimae*, with an inverse of the epigraph and a short catalogue defining “allowed” and “approved” loves and passions:

Loves I allow and passions I approve:
Ash-Wednesday feasts, ascetic opulence,
the wincing lute, so real in its pretence,
itself a passion amorous of love (1-4).

In reversing the order of the original line (“Passions I allow, and loves I approve”), Hill promotes the inversion of the meaning of Southwell’s statement. The word “passion” derives from the Latin root *pati-*, meaning “suffering,” and in the Bible, the Passion of Christ refers to the week leading up to the Crucifixion and Resurrection. If we apply this derivation of passion to Southwell’s words, he sought man’s passions—or sufferings—and loves marked with bettered object and intent, implying those directed by faith and devotion to God. Looking at the sonnet, the speaker seeks not only sacred loves and passions, but also secular ones. At first, the speaker appears in agreement with Southwell, opening with “Ash-Wednesday feasts,” which commence the Lenten season (2). A cross of ashes adorns the foreheads of churchgoers on this Christian feast day—hence its name “Ash Wednesday.” Worn in God’s name, the ashes symbolize penance, grief and death—a reminder that “you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19 NRSVCE). Characterizing Ash Wednesday as “ascetic opulence,” Hill suggests an element of profanity in the midst of sacred adoration (2). Without proper consciousness of the ashes’ meaning, they become merely a superficial accessory for one’s own vanity. The description also suggests a play on the word “feast:” on many Catholic feast days, including Ash Wednesday, fasting occurs—

contrasting both the contemporary usage of the word “feast” and the lavish, grand feasts of English royalty during the sixteenth century. At the end of the stanza, the speaker introduces the image of the lute to sonnet, Hill’s first explicit allusion to John Dowland’s use of the musical instrument in his rendition of *Lachrimae*. The description of the “wincing lute” personifies it, allowing it to possess the ability to anticipate pain and connecting it to the Biblical understanding of passion as suffering (3). Nevertheless, the speaker concludes that lute is a sign of love, finding “itself a passion amorous of love” (4). In this line, passion and love are not related to God but rather to a love spurred by the sound of the lute.

In the latter part of the sonnet, the speaker addresses the martyr, reckoning with the relationship amid passion, suffering, and martyrdom:

Self-wounding martyrdom, what joys you have,
true-torn among this fictive consonance,
music’s creation of the moveless dance,
the decreation to which all must move.

Self-seeking hunter of forms, there is no real end
to such pursuits. None can revoke your cry.
Your silence is an ecstasy of sound

and your nocturnals blaze up the day (5-12).

These lines place an emphasis on sound through alliteration, especially in the word pairings “true-torn,” “must move,” and “self-seeking,” continuing with the first stanza’s reference to music (6, 8, 9). In line six, the speaker mentions a “fictive consonance,” reflecting the similarities between poetry and music. Consonance refers to both the repetition of constant sounds—a form of alliteration seen in this sonnet—and the combination of musical notes found in harmony with one another. Further linking Hill’s “*Lachrimae*” to Dowland’s *Lachrimae*, Dowland’s composition is noted for the way it plays with dissonance and consonance, with dissonance often dissolving into consonance and consonance dissolving

into dissonance.²³ In addition to consonance, there are also paradoxical, dissonant moments that color the prosody with obscurity: the speaker imagines music creating a “moveless dance,” silence that is as “an ecstasy of sound,” and “nocturnals blaz[ing] up the day” (7, 11, 12). These contradictory statements work together to reflect the initial contradiction noted by the speaker—the prevailing joys of a self-wounding martyr. The martyr experiences passion as a suffering with “no real end” with the darkness of “nocturnals” representing these sufferings (9, 12). In these lines, we see the sadness and pain suggested by the sonnet’s title “Pavana Dolorosa” are those belonging to the martyr. Nevertheless, joys and light persist—as implied by the word “day”—because as articulated by the Scriptures: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it” (John 1:5). At the same time, however, light does not fully overcome darkness—some darkness in the form of suffering and sins remains on the earth. Following this line of interpretation, we can see the likening of faith to music with each of them acting as a “decreation to which all must move” (8). In the martyr’s perspective, faith “moves” him to sacrifice his life for his beliefs. This sacrificial act of faith sets out to inspire others, summoning them to build or mend their relationship with God. In the act of writing poetry, Hill partakes in the “decree to move” as the sonnet itself spreads ideas to its readers, imploring them to ponder their own faiths and think deeply. In the last two lines of the sonnet, the speaker shifts the focus from the martyr to himself:

I founder in desire for things unfound.
I stay amid the things that will not stay (13-14).

“Things unfound” holds both material and immaterial understandings with “unfound” suggesting “lost” or “missing” while “unfounded” carries a more conceptual definition,

²³ Moorjani, Angela B. *The Aesthetics of Loss and Lessness*. Macmillan, p. 145, 1992.

meaning “baseless” or “unproven.” Meanwhile, the word “thing” refers to “an object that one need not, cannot, or does not wish to give a specific name to.”²⁴ Taking the abstract understanding of “things unfound,” Christian beliefs represent those “things unfound,” or things unproven, lacking a basis in fact. This line returns to an idea from “The Pentecost Castle”—namely, Hill’s personal desire for faith and acceptance of Christian doctrine. Following this interpretation, the speaker’s voice more than imitates Hill—it is Hill’s voice. The word “things” reappears in the last line of the sonnet, taking on a different meaning from the “things” in the previous line. While Christianity is intangible yet everlasting, the “things” in this line are those that “will not stay” (14). Aligning himself with these un-staying “things,” the speaker acknowledges that he both physically and figuratively will leave the earth: like all living beings, he will die and, unlike Christ, his name will eventually be forgotten. As a whole, the sonnet “Pavana Dolorosa” captures the distinguishing elements of Hill’s “Lachrimae,” specifically the precise attention placed on word-choice, sound, and allusions—all of which culminate in a work rich in religious and historical meaning.

IV. Conclusion

Geoffrey Hill’s “The Pentecost Castle” and “Lachrimae,” the first two sections in the volume of verse *Tenebrae*, invite a reading that draws from religious and historical references. This is apparent in the titles alone of the works, which make references to the Church service *Tenebrae*, the Holy Day of Pentecost, and the seventeenth-century musical composition *Lachrimae*. Both “The Pentecost Castle” and “Lachrimae” reflect the ambiguous language and traditional forms, like the sonnet, found in the rest of the volume. In closely reading the poems, the high level of detail and carefulness on Hill’s part becomes even more

²⁴ Oxford University Press (OUP), “Thing,” Lexico.com, 2019.

apparent. Intertwining little known references of Biblical verses and historical moments with universal themes of faith, love, suffering and desire, Hill creates poetry characterized by a distinct combination of obscurity and commonality. Through these universal themes, Hill's poetry connects with its contemporary readers searching for deeper meaning and pondering questions of human existence.

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