



# Kinesis, Kenosis, and the Weakness of Poetry

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# Kinesis, Kenosis, and the Weakness of Poetry

*La kinêsis, la kénose et la faiblesse de la poésie*

Jennifer Kilgore-Caradec

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## La *kinêsis*, la *kénose* et la faiblesse de la poésie

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### Abstract

Cet article essaie d'éclairer l'utilisation des mots « *kinêsis* » et « *kénose* » dans *The Triumph of Love* (1998) et aborde le rôle théologique que Geoffrey Hill donne à la poésie, ainsi que les limites que les genres humains et poétiques imposent. De nombreuses personnes nommées dans la poésie de Hill sont concernées par la christologie et la *kénose*, notamment Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Simone Weil et Charles Péguy. Cette étude s'achève sur quelques notes d'interprétation pour *The Triumph of Love*, CXLVI.



## Kinesis, Kenosis, and the Weakness of Poetry

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*We are goddis labourers* – 1526,  
William Tyndale's translation of I Corinthians 3:9.<sup>1</sup>

On April 30, 1956, T.S. Eliot filled the football stadium of the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, when fourteen thousand people came to hear him lecture on "The Frontiers of Criticism."<sup>2</sup> Today, what literary figure can draw such a crowd – unless it be Elizabeth Alexander reciting a poem at Barack Obama's inauguration? Certainly the crowd around Geoffrey Hill is smaller, but does that mean it is elitist? Is strong poetry the same as difficult poetry, something opposite, say, to rap music and the lines of the Beats? Does it have a mission to civilize? Is it a particular sort of *Guide to Kulchur*?

Some traits of Hill's poetry conform quite perfectly to Eliot's stringent prescriptions set out in "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919): "[...] the poet must develop or procure the consciousness of the past and [...] he should continue to develop this consciousness throughout his career."<sup>3</sup> Or later in "The Metaphysical Poets" (1921): "We can only say that it appears likely that poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be difficult."<sup>4</sup> Eliot in 1919 condoned "a continual extinction of personality."<sup>5</sup> However, his poems suggest a different story:

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<sup>1</sup> William Tyndale, *The New Testament 1526*, Original Spelling Edition, W.R. Cooper (ed.), London: The British Library, 2000, 353.

<sup>2</sup> Cynthia Ozick, "T.S. Eliot at 101" (1989), *Fame & Folly*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996, 6.

<sup>3</sup> T.S. Eliot, *Selected Essays*, San Diego, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978, 6.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 248.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

“The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (first published in *Poetry* in 1915) relates the awkwardness of the young man with women, a persistent preoccupation in Eliot’s early work as in his life. Undoubtedly it was impossible for him to totally make the “I” another, but what has Geoffrey Hill made of it – “‘*Je est un autre,*’ that fatal telegram” (*SP*, 135)?<sup>6</sup> Especially in his recent poetry, Hill has used the first-person pronoun associated with confessional poetry abundantly, but as Rosanna Warren noted: “For Hill, a Christian poet, confession does *not* mean self-advertisement.”<sup>7</sup> Performative redemptive action might be an accurate qualifier for some of those confessional pronouns, as well as the greater part of Hill’s poems. The poems certainly avoid any “cheap grace” to use the Bonhoeffer phrase mentioned in the first Tanner Lecture on Intrinsic Value (Oxford, March 6, 2000; *CCW*, 465). Concerning belief, many variations of Christianity are evident in Hill’s poetry, as a passage from “Hymns to Our Lady of Chartres” demonstrates:

... some

mettled by virtue, briskly taking Christ,  
and some as captives; those to whom the kiss  
of peace was torment in the midst of mass,  
those who salute you with a raised fist (*CP*, 179).

The Eucharist is always exposed and vulnerable to the reception it has. Perhaps this occurs in an even more radical way within Anglicanism where all, regardless of their view of transubstantiation, are invited to partake. The God who is incarnate in human weakness is received (with varying degrees of knowledge or ignorance) or shunned.<sup>8</sup>

Can Hill’s poetry be compared to the Eucharist in this aspect? It seems to me that the author seeks to provide moral and spiritual sustenance – often by provocation. The prophetic aspect of this poetry ensures its weakness. If the poetry itself is strong, it is at the moment of its reception that its weakness becomes evident since the poet cannot guarantee that we read the poem with the attitude in which it was written. Christopher Ricks has also suggested something about the weaknesses inherent to poetic creation and reception in the opening paragraph of his essay “Geoffrey Hill: The Tongue’s Atrocities” (1978):

<sup>6</sup> Works by Geoffrey Hill will take a standard abbreviation followed by a page number in the body of this text. *C* = *Canaan* (1996); *CCW* = *Collected Critical Writings* (2008); *CP* = *Collected Poems* (1985); *SP* = *Selected Poems* (2006); *TL* = *The Triumph of Love* (1998).

<sup>7</sup> Rosanna Warren, *Fables of the Self: Studies in Lyric Poetry*, New York: W.W. Norton, 2008, 269.

<sup>8</sup> Prior to the Oxford Movement, Richard Hooker’s position on the Eucharist (close to “receptionism”) was dominant within Anglicanism. In *Treatise on the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* he explained that “real presence” depended on the faithful communicant rather than on the consecrated bread and wine. The *Works* of Hooker (c.1554-1600) were edited by John Keble in 3 volumes in 1836.

One triumph of the imagination is that it can be aware of the perils of the imagination, the aggrandizements, covert indulgences and specious claims which it may incite.<sup>9</sup>

“Kenosis” was a new term to Hill’s poetry with *The Triumph of Love*, but the theological reflection it suggested was already essential in much of his work. The word kenosis comes from the Greek *κενόω* which means to empty. When used in the early Christian hymn that Paul transcribed in Philippians 2, it was reflexive, as Karl Barth’s commentary of the passage emphasized by quoting Kierkegaard: “Christ humbled himself – not he was humbled.”<sup>10</sup> Interpretations about just what that phrase meant have kept commentators busy ever since. Tyndale translates the passage:

Let the same mynde be in you the which was in Christ Jesu: Which beyng in the shape off god, and thought it not robbery to be equall with god. Neverthelesse he made hymselfe of no reputacion, and toke on hym the shape of a servaunte, and becam lyke unto men, and was founde in his aparell as a man. He humbled hymselfe and becam obedient unto the deeth, even the deeth of the crosse.<sup>11</sup>

For Augustine, the kenotic hymn was a revelation of divine beauty, and a passage that could reconcile Psalm 44:3 and Isaiah 53:2.<sup>12</sup> In 1985, Father Albert Verwilghen’s landmark work about Augustine’s use of the kenotic hymn explained:

The Augustinian interpretation of Philippians 2:7b is one of the cornerstones of his Christology. The central idea is that God’s coming in *forma servi* did not keep the Verb from living among us [...] Kenosis signifies [...] that the Son hid his dignity and his divine power.<sup>13</sup>

Anglicanism’s significant contribution to the discussion began in the latter part of the 19th century, and was extended by the Russian Orthodox thinker S. Boulgakov (1871-1944) who maintained that divine kenosis occurred in the incarnation because there had already been kenosis within the Trinity and a divine kenosis during the Creation.<sup>14</sup> Boulgakov’s

<sup>9</sup> Christopher Ricks, *The Force of Poetry*, [1984], Oxford: OUP, 1995, 285.

<sup>10</sup> Karl Barth, *Commentaire de l’Épître aux Philippiens / [Erklärung des Philipperbriefes (1927)]*, tr. André Goy, Geneva: Labor et Fides, [c.1959], 63.

<sup>11</sup> W.R. Cooper (ed.), *William Tyndale, op. cit.*, 419.

<sup>12</sup> On this, see Carol Harrison, *Beauty and Revelation in the Thought of St. Augustine*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1992, 214-15 and 230-38.

<sup>13</sup> Albert Verwilghen, *Christologie et spiritualité selon Saint Augustin : L’hymne aux Philippiens*. Paris: Beauchesne, 1985, 227. “L’interprétation augustinienne de Ph 2,7b est une des pierres angulaires de sa christologie. L’idée maîtresse est que la venue de Dieu in forma servi n’empêche pas le Verbe de rester intégralement parmi nous. [...] La kénose signifie [...] que le Fils a caché sa dignité et sa puissance divine.”

<sup>14</sup> Emilio Brito, “Kénose,” in Jean-Yves Lacoste (ed.), *Dictionnaire critique de théologie*, Paris: PUF, 1998, 632.

notion of kenosis at the moment of creation recalls currents within Jewish thought. *Tsimtsum*, a term chosen by Rabbi Isaac Ben Solomon Luria (1534-1572) to demonstrate how God first created empty space by withdrawing so that the Creation could come into being, would be a parallel idea.<sup>15</sup> The kenotic hymn recorded by Paul was a song or perhaps a confessional formula of the early church in Aramaic, and like a number of other hymns, it is introduced by a relative pronoun, "the one who."<sup>16</sup> Simone Weil, whose faith largely depended on poetic texts, held this biblical passage as central to her thought. As she understood it, God withdrew to provide human existence and freedom. She linked the kenosis hymn to God's weakness in her sixth notebook (*Cahier VI*, written in Marseilles, 1941-42):

We must *empty* God of his divinity to love him.

He emptied himself of his divinity when he became man, then of his humanity in becoming a cadaver (bread and wine), thus matter.<sup>17</sup>

To represent God as almighty is to represent oneself in a state of false divinity.

*Man can only become one with a God WHO IS STRIPPED OF HIS DIVINITY (EMPTIED of his divinity).*<sup>18</sup>

*Love the powerless God.*<sup>19</sup>

Hill's emphasis of these notions comes to the fore in *Tenebrae* (1978), the first collection of poems to have a majority of predominately religious titles. The volume contains a poem for the Lutheran pastor and resistant

<sup>15</sup> According to Hans Jonas: "La création était l'acte de la souveraineté absolue, par lequel celle-ci consentait, pour la finitude autodéterminée de l'existence, à ne pas demeurer plus longtemps absolue – donc un acte d'autodépouillement divin." See Hans Jonas, *Le Concept de Dieu après Auschwitz / Der Gottesbegriff nach Auschwitz. Eine jüdische Stimme*, tr. Philippe Ivernel, Paris: Rivages poche, 1994, 37.

<sup>16</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, New York: Doubleday, 1997, 489-493. Brown cites the opening relative pronoun, "the one who" which also occurs in Colossians 1:15 and I Timothy 4:16. He lists a series of probable hymns, of which the most commonly agreed upon are: Phil 2:6-11; Col 1:15-20; Eph 1:3-14; Eph 5:14; I Tim 3:16; II Tim 2:11-13.

<sup>17</sup> Simone Weil, *Cahier VI*, in *Œuvres*, Florence de Lussy (ed.), Paris: Quarto, Gallimard, 1999, 907: "Nous devons vider Dieu de sa divinité pour l'aimer. // Il s'est vidé de sa divinité en devenant homme, puis de son humanité en devenant cadavre (pain et vin), matière."

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 908. "Se représenter Dieu tout-puissant, c'est se représenter soi-même dans l'état de fausse divinité. // L'homme ne peut être un avec Dieu qu'en s'unissant à Dieu DEPOUILLE DE SA DIVINITE (VIDE de sa divinité)."

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 909. "Aimer Dieu impuissant". God's weakness was developed in another text from 1942, *Formes de l'amour implicite de Dieu* (published as *Attente de Dieu* (1950, 1966): "La création est de la part de Dieu un acte non pas d'expansion de soi, mais de retrait, de renoncement. Dieu et toutes les créatures, cela est moins que Dieu seul. Dieu a accepté cette diminution. Il a vidé de soi une partie de l'être. Il s'est vidé déjà dans cet acte de sa divinité ; c'est pourquoi saint Jean dit que l'Agneau a été égorgé dès la constitution du monde. Dieu a permis d'exister à des choses autres que lui et valant infiniment moins que lui. Il s'est par l'acte créateur nié lui-même, comme le Christ nous a prescrit de nous nier nous-mêmes. Dieu s'est nié en notre faveur pour nous donner la possibilité de nous nier pour lui. Cette réponse, cet écho, qu'il dépend de nous de refuser, est la seule justification possible à la folie d'amour de l'acte créateur," (*Œuvres*, 723-4).



to Hitler, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the champion of living for God, without God, in a world come of age.<sup>20</sup> There is an epigraph by Simone Weil as well as the phrase “the decreation to which all must move” in the fifth section of “Lacrimae” (CP, 149). To explain this passage W.S. Milne quotes a fine explanation of Weil’s “decreation” by Frank Kermode from 1965:

‘decreation’ [...] depends upon the act of renunciation, considered as a creative act like that of God. ‘God could create only by hiding himself. Otherwise there would be nothing but himself.’<sup>21</sup>

In “Lachrimae Antique Novae,” the sixth section of “Lachrimae,” the sestet of the sonnet suggests that the idea of God’s omnipotence is no longer tenable. Consider the lines: “Triumphalism feasts on empty dread” and “Dominion is swallowed with your blood” (CP, 150).

*The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy* also has links to Simone Weil. The title comes from Péguy’s *The Mystery of the Charity of Joan of Arc*. In that play which was published in Péguy’s *Cahiers de la Quinzaine* in 1910, Joan says a few things that sound remarkably like statements made by Weil in a letter to Father Perrin in 1942. Weil is explaining why she cannot join the Catholic Church. The church’s anathemas dismay her. Furthermore, she has never felt that God wished her to belong to it, in fact, she thinks that his will is that she remain outside the church, truly “catholic” in communion with all of humanity:

Yet I am always ready to obey any order. With gladness I would obey the order to go to the very heart of hell and stay there eternally. Of course I don’t mean that I prefer those kinds of orders. I am not perverse.<sup>22</sup>

Joan of Arc’s problem with the church, according to Péguy, is that some people are damned, and she (like Péguy) cannot bear the thought of eternal damnation. She says as much to the nun Madame Gervaise:

If it will save from the fires of Hell  
The flesh of the damned mad with their hurt,  
I give up my flesh to the fires of Hell,  
Take, Lord, my flesh for the fires of Hell.  
  
If it will save from the nought of Hell

<sup>20</sup> Only four days before the failed coup of July 20, 1944, Bonhoeffer wrote from Tegel prison to Eberhard Bethge: “God would have us know that we must live as men who manage our lives without him. The God who is with us is the God who forsakes us (Mark, 15.34). The God who lets us live in the world without the working hypothesis of God is the God before whom we stand continually. Before God and with God we live without God. God lets himself be pushed out of the world on to the cross. He is weak and powerless in the world, and that is precisely the way, the only way, in which he is with us and helps us.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters & Papers from Prison*, Enlarged Edition, Eberhard Bethge (ed.), New York: Collier, 1972, 360.

<sup>21</sup> W.S. Milne, *An Introduction to Geoffrey Hill*, London: Bellew, 1998, 128. See Frank Kermode, *Modern Essays*, [1970], Glasgow: Fontana, 1990, 311.

<sup>22</sup> S. Weil, *Œuvres*, 775.



Souls of the damned that are maddened there,  
I give up my soul to the nought of Hell,  
Have Lord my soul for the nought of hell.

Take my soul into nothing.<sup>23</sup>

Hill's poem about Péguy gives importance to two words, often present in both Weil and Péguy, "silent" and "nothing." For Simone Weil, the two notions were linked as early as 1925 in a commentary she made of Grimm's six swans.

The absence of action has a virtue. This idea relates to the most profound aspects of oriental thought [...]. Being quiet: that is our only way of acquiring power.<sup>24</sup>

In her sixth notebook, silence is linked to contemplation: "God's silence constrains us to inner silence."<sup>25</sup> At the end of the fifth section of *The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy*, there is a quotation: "'Having / / spoken his mind he'd a mind to be silent'" (CP, 189-90). In *Notre jeunesse*, the prose text published in the *Cahiers de la quinzaine* in July 1910 to defend the memory of those who stood for Dreyfus, Péguy wrote of silence:

Men who are quiet, the only ones who matter, the quiet ones, the only ones who count, the taciturn, the only ones who count, all the mystics remained constant, and unchanging. All the common people. Even us. [...]

Those who are quiet are the only ones whose word counts.<sup>26</sup>

Significantly, Péguy's portrait of Bernard-Lazare presents him as a silent one: "I will tell in these Confessions, how much he kept quiet."<sup>27</sup> In Hill's poem, Péguy himself takes on these traits. In the eighth section we read: "Say 'we / possess nothing; try to hold on to that'" (CP, 193). And in the tenth section, referring to Péguy's corpse: "he commends us to

<sup>23</sup> Charles Péguy, *The Mystery of the Charity of Joan of Arc*, tr. Jeffrey Wainwright, Manchester: Carcanet, 1986, 42.

<sup>24</sup> "Le néant d'action possède donc une vertu. Cette idée rejoint le plus profond de la pensée orientale [...] se taire: c'est là notre seul moyen d'acquérir de la puissance," in S. Weil, *Œuvres*, 804.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 906. Peter Walker, Bishop of Ely, refers to Hill's association of contemplation and the "pitch of attention" in two articles published in the *Cambridge Review*: "The Poetry of Geoffrey Hill" (June 1985) and "'Accurate Music': Geoffrey Hill's anatomy of melancholy" (May 1997). Perhaps Weil's "silence" and "attention" could also be linked to Hill's "brooding."

<sup>26</sup> "Les hommes qui se taisent, les seuls qui importent, les silencieux, les seuls qui comptent, les tacites, les seuls qui compteront, tous les mystiques sont restés invariables, inflexibles. Toutes les petites gens. Nous enfin. [...] Ceux qui se taisent, les seuls dont la parole compte," Charles Péguy, *Œuvres en prose complètes III*, Robert Burac (ed.), Paris: Gallimard/NRF, 1992, 47-48.

<sup>27</sup> Charles Péguy, *Œuvres en prose complètes III*, 63, translated here by Annette Aronowicz in *Jews and Christians on Time and Eternity: Charles Péguy's Portrait of Bernard-Lazare*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998, 54.

nothing" (CP, 195). The position of Péguy's body here, "flat on [his] face" (end of the fourth section) is one of prayer:

his arm over his face as though in sleep  
 or to ward off the sun: the body's prayer,  
 the tribute of his true passion, for Chartres  
 steadfastly cleaving to the Beauce, for her,  
 the Virgin of innumerable charities (CP, 195-6).

In his nothingness he recalls a description of Christ's kenosis given by Péguy in *Dialogue de l'histoire et de l'âme charnelle* (written in June 1912):

(a) humble God, (a) submissive God, (a) retracted God [...] a God fallen forward on his face [...] a God prostrate on the face of the earth.<sup>28</sup>

*Canaan* also presents a God who is hidden and far from triumphant. So it is that the German resisters to Hitler are at the heart of the collection in their witness and passion. In the fifth section of "*De Jure Belli Ac Pacis*" one finds: "those redeeming their pledged fear, who strike /faith from the hard rock of God's fallenness" (C, 34). In the second "Parentalia" poem, the biblical Daniel acts in God's absence. God is hidden in the world come of age, as in "A Song of Degrees":

Plight into plight; there you commit your law  
 to chance  
 inescapable witness (C, 67).

There is a tension maintained between lack of knowledge and God's distance versus unexpected grace. Consider:

We cannot know God  
 we cannot  
 deny his sequestered  
 power  
 in a marred nature (from "Psalms of Assize" VI, C, 65)

and contrast it to :

to terms of grace  
 where grace has surprised us –  
 the unsustaining  
 wondrously sustained  
 (from "Of Coming into Being and Passing Away," C, 4).

\* \* \*

If we can imagine Jesus with an ironic sense of humor, we may get closer to the meaning of some of the comic ironies in the more recent

<sup>28</sup> "[un] Dieu humble, [un] Dieu soumis, (un) Dieu retrait [...] un Dieu tombé en avant sur la face, [...] un Dieu prostré sur la face de la terre," Charles Péguy, *Œuvres en prose complètes* III, 758.

poems. In *The Triumph of Love*, the word kenosis is linked to humor at least twice. In section LVI, “ ‘if this is kenosis, I want out’ ” has us both laughing (who doesn’t want out!?) and wondering about the victim (TL, 30), and again in section LXXXVI: “Our theme was timely: ‘kinesis to kenosis’. Hold on – / that was the year after” (TL, 45).

Absent from the 1971 edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word “kinesis” is found in the 1989 edition where it is classified as obsolete. From the Greek *κίνησις* designating movement, the use of the word in English dates from 1904 and 1906, where it concerns chromosomes. But the root is the same as “kinetic,” “producing or causing motion” and the Greek *κίνημα*, motion, and *κίνησις*, movement, are the roots for cinema and cinematic.<sup>29</sup> There is something about the contrast of the terms kinesis and kenosis that suggests an outlook on society. Could kinesis refer to the empty motions of late capitalism as opposed to kenosis – the extreme action in favor of human good? Is there a Bergsonian opposition at work here between the mechanical and the organic? Is it to be related to the “Entertainment overkill” spoken of in *The Triumph of Love*’s section LIV (TL, 27) or to the “acceleration” and “velocity which is also inertia” of section LXXI (TL, 37)? The negative associations with the word are clear in section CII: “In whatever direction / kinesis takes me, it is no distance” (TL, 52). Our velocity (to be associated with money and possibly the internet) has taken away our roots. Simone Weil addressed this in *The Need for Roots*:

Even without military conquests, the power of money and economic domination can impose foreign influence to the point of provoking the sickness of uprootedness.<sup>30</sup>

Yet, the possibilities for explaining “kinesis” in section LXXXVI seem quite numerous, if one recalls that it contains the Middle English designation “*kine*.”<sup>31</sup> The juxtaposition of the two terms may well suggest a theological shift that seems to have become operative in the 20th century as well as in Hill’s poems where God is no longer seen as powerful, but as weak. (In section VIII one reads: “But how could there not be a difficult / confronting of systematics?,” TL, 3). This paradox would have God be both glorious and suffering. The end of *The Triumph of Love* seems to address this. Section CXLVI begins:

<sup>29</sup> Eric Partridge, *Origins, an Etymological Dictionary of Modern English*, 4th edition, London: Routledge, 1966.

<sup>30</sup> “Même sans conquête militaire, le pouvoir de l’argent et la domination économique peuvent imposer une influence étrangère au point de provoquer la maladie du déracinement.” S. Weil, *L’Enracinement, Prélude à une déclaration des devoirs envers l’être humain* (1943), in *Œuvres*, 1027-1217, 1053.

<sup>31</sup> The word *kine*, the archaic plural of cow, was already used by Hill in *The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy*. See CP, 186. The application here might be a slant joke about mad cow disease!

The whole-keeping of Augustine's City of God  
is our witness; vindicated – even to us – in a widow's portion of the Law's  
majesty of surrender (TL, 80).

The entire passage seems almost to present the “greatest hits” of lucid spirituality, so that the poem can be “our witness.” Thus, along with the *City of God*, one finds a bit of Tyndale's Bible quoted and in relationship to the presence of Ruskin. To this section could also be added the other witnesses from *The Triumph of Love* CVI: “the Church of Wesley, Newman, and George Bell” (TL, 55) as well as the Christian poets Donne, Herbert and Hopkins (TL, 34, 43). Preceded by the liturgical directive “(All who are able may stand)” in parenthesis and italics in section CXLV (TL, 79), given as a signal that the gospel will somehow now be proclaimed, section CXLVI seems to offer the heartbeat to the volume.<sup>32</sup>

“The whole-keeping of Augustine's City of God” could recall a passage from “De Jure Belli Ac Pacis” IV where Christian virtue is maintained by Hans Bernd von Haeften in the face of great evil and where the traditional view of evil, based on Augustine's *privatio boni* (lack of Good) is questioned:

Evil is not good's absence but gravity's  
everlasting bedrock and its fatal chains  
inert, violent, the suffrage of our days (C, 33).

The theology of suffering here seems to leave Augustine aside in favor of Simone Weil's heaviness (“*pesanteur*”). Indeed, “whole-keeping” may mean that the one who keeps company with Augustine may be called on to compensate for less insightful elements of his thought.<sup>33</sup> Or perhaps the “whole-keeping” may refer to a more balanced interpretation of Augustine's views on the Incarnation. In a talk given at Albert le Grand in Montreal in 1947, Etienne Gilson remarked that the personal dialectic of being and becoming which Augustine's *Confessions* developed corresponded to the historical development of society's being and becoming in *The City of God*.<sup>34</sup> Father Albert Verwilghen's 1985 study of the kenotic hymn in Augustine's writing demonstrates that for Augustine, the nature of God's glory and power are revealed specifically

<sup>32</sup> Concerning the verb “to stand” see P.K. Walker, “‘Accurate Music’: Geoffrey Hill's anatomy of melancholy”, in *The Cambridge Review*, May 1997, 38. To Walker's comments should also be added the coincidence [!?] of the periodical *Stand*, founded by the late Jon Silkin. In TL CXLVI, the link with steadfastness is explicit.

<sup>33</sup> See the 125th section: “Then there is this Augustinian-Pascalian thing about seeking/ that which is already found,” (TL, 67).

<sup>34</sup> “[...] à la dialectique personnelle de l'être et du devenir que développent les *Confessions*, correspond la même dialectique développée sur le plan de l'histoire par la Cité de Dieu. C'est exactement la même dialectique, parce que c'est exactement la même histoire, la première n'étant que le moment personnel de la deuxième.” Etienne Gilson, *Philosophie et Incarnation selon Saint Augustin*, suivi de *Saint Augustin Lettre XVIII, Sermon Contre les païens* (Dolbeau, 26), Geneva: Ad Solem, 1999, 36.

through the kenosis passage.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, in *The City of God*, the allusions to Philippians 2:7, writes Verwilghen, “were meant to highlight the human nature of the mediator who became like us.”<sup>36</sup> So, it seems that the “whole-keeping” of Augustine could mean the building of God’s city based on the beatitudes. This was not a place reserved only for Christians, but included all people of the promise.<sup>37</sup> That means poets too, if one takes into account section CXVIII where the narrator implores Sidney: “steady my music to your Augustinian grace-notes” (TL, 63).

“Tyndale’s / unshowy diligence” must speak to the efforts of his translation which comprised his own humility. Lost portions were re-translated. He was martyred for his efforts in the end, and his work has been unrecognized for centuries, as many of his verbal choices were incorporated into the King James Version (KJV) without acknowledgement. The “words [...] engrafted” may refer to Tyndale’s expressions within the passages memorized by the child(-Hill?) in section CX : “the sustained, / inattentive, absorbing of King James’ English” (TL, 57). “It is all there / but we are not all there, read that how you will” (TL, 80) brings a great deal of ironic humor into the text. In popular speech, the idea is that we are crazy. Or “we are not all there” could refer to the strict election of Calvinism, as it represents one interpretation of Augustine. Or the phrase could mean that we have not yet understood what the keeping of *The City of God* is about, and have not yet begun to live it. Perhaps it means that we have not yet caught the heart of mystical Judaism at the center of Christianity, the retracting God at the center of the kenotic hymn.

These “hundred words” must have something to do with the Law. The first biblical quotation in italics is from Deuteronomy 27:17, a chapter that describes a cursing ritual performed on Mount Ebal by the Levites, and this quotation is the third curse in a series of twelve that have numerous parallels to the Ten Commandments and recall other laws presented in the book of Leviticus.

Cursed be he that maketh any carved image...  
 Cursed be he that curseth his father or his mother...  
 Cursed be he that removeth his neighbour’s mark...  
 Cursed be he that maketh the blind go out of his way...  
 Cursed be he that hindreth the right of the stranger, fatherless and widow...

<sup>35</sup> “[...] l’intelligence de la pauvreté et de l’anéantissement du Fils in forma servi donne accès au mystère divin dans la mesure où elle découvre que la pauvreté, la faiblesse, la folie et la mort du Fils anéanti sont les lieux où se manifestent la richesse, la force, la sagesse et l’éternité divines.” Albert Verwilghen, *op. cit.*, 489.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 228. Verwilghen lists the quotations of the kenotic hymn in *The City of God* as: 9, 15.17; 10, 20; 14, 9.15; 17, 9; 18, 34.35; 20, 10.30 (227, footnote 108).

<sup>37</sup> I base this remark on Marie-Anne Vannier’s entry “Augustin d’Hippone,” in J.-Y. Lacoste (ed.), *op. cit.*, 108. She writes: “En fait, la Cité de Dieu qu’il évoque est en quelque sorte la cité dont parle l’Écriture et qui a pour fin la béatitude, le sabbat éternel.”



Cursed be he that smite his neighbour secretly...  
 Cursed be he that take a reward to slay innocent blood...  
 Cursed be he that maintaineth not all the words of this law to do them...<sup>38</sup>

The KJV translates it: "Cursed be he that removeth his neighbour's landmark." Ruskin may be seen as respecting and promoting this statement in his writings in favor of the preservation of medieval architecture in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*. Possibly one is to recall the tolerance which he links to Judaism. In his autobiography, *Praeterita*, he abandons predestinarian evangelicalism for a new doctrine: "[...] the old article of Jewish faith, that things done delightfully and rightly were always done by the help and in the Spirit of God."<sup>39</sup>

"Paul's reinscription of the Kenotic Hymn –" reveals Hill's sensitivity to exegetical issues. The hymn/poem/psalm of the early Christians was used by Paul as a persuasive argument to address the problems in the church at Philippi. The excerpts chosen here from Tyndale's translation include the verb *kenosis* and the *in forma servi* so important to Augustine.

The meanings of the word "manumission" remain ambiguous. It could refer to the human mission to imitate Christ. One historical and obsolete usage found in the *OED* refers to "a formal release from slavery or servitude." "Manumission" has sometimes been misused for "initiation." The other meaning, totally obsolete, is "graduation, laureation." To some extent, all of these meanings could find a place. Concerning servitude, a parallel could be drawn with section XL where "Is that right, Missis, or is that right?" (*TL*, 21) sounds like a slave addressing her mistress in the deep South. The commitment of that passage is to use words rightly – which is also a liberation. On a more fanciful note, manumission rhymes with "ammunition." One might advance that *kenosis* is the means to freedom from chaotic *kinesis*, if we become manumits (freed bondsmen) of Christ.<sup>40</sup>

The paradox of the phrase "Zion new-centred at the circumference of the world's concentration" is rather like a koan (*TL*, 80). The word "concentration" is heightened by memory of the concentration camps. The "widow's portion" must refer to the poor woman who gave her two mites, all she had said Jesus, to the Temple's treasury (Mark 12:41-44; Luke 21:1-4). The phrase "majesty of surrender" may also be speaking to

<sup>38</sup> Tyndale's *Old Testament*, David Daniell (ed.), New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992, 292.

<sup>39</sup> John Ruskin, *Selected Writings*, Kenneth Clark (ed.), London: Penguin, [1964] 1991, 51.

<sup>40</sup> Should a parallel be drawn with William Morris as well? Speaking in Manchester on March 6, 1883, he expressed: "a kind of hope that the time may come when our views and aspirations will no longer be considered rebellious, and when competitive commerce will be lying in the same grave with chattel slavery, with serfdom, and with feudalism." See William Morris, "Art, Wealth, and Riches," in *The Collected Works of William Morris*, London: Routledge, 1992, v.23, 162.

the notion of Christ the King, who is not to be seen as victorious through power or glory, but rather through goodness.

The word “surrender” may suggest “*vaincu*” – the way Charles Péguy grew up feeling about his country after its capitulation to Germany in 1871. There may be hints of Péguy at the end of this section, somehow linked to Ruskin, “some half-fabulous field-ditcher.” Ruskin’s seventh letter in *Fors Clavigera* did, after all, mention “the fighting in Paris.”<sup>41</sup> The “stone-wedged hedge-root,” in a glorious chiasmus of sound, seems to recall the natural images of *The Mystery of the Charity of Charles Péguy*. Péguy is present after all in section LVI, his “*mystique*” and “*politique*” preceding the cry “‘if this is *kenosis*, I want out’” (TL, 29-30). The flame there may recall both Joan of Arc, Péguy’s great patron, as well as the Dreyfus Affair, in its excesses of anti-Semitism all the while also suggesting the burning of the Jew, “caught” in the photo of section XX (TL, 10).

The association of Ruskin in his creative art to Christ is performed with multiple hyphens: “Fellow-labouring master- / servant.” The description makes him a type of brother-in-/Christ. Then might he also be a brother in creativity to the narrator? Ruskin said that he could write *Fors Clavigera* only:

[...] as a kind of play [...] by letting myself follow any thread of thought or point of inquiry that chances to occur first, and writing as the thoughts come, – whatever their disorder; all their connection and cooperation being dependent on the real harmony of my purpose, and the consistency of the ascertainable facts, which are the only ones I teach.<sup>42</sup>

The opposition of master and servant echoes the kenotic abasement and elevation. He also resembles Christ in being “scourged/ many times with derision” (once again, this seems to fit the narrator’s situation within *The Triumph of Love*). For Ruskin, all this is in association with his art, where he finds “the lost / amazing crown.” It would seem that for Ruskin, as well as for the poetic narrator, “the pain is in / the lifting” (TL XLII, 21). So, *The Triumph of Love* is “A Poem” – and a tremendous theological statement as well, if one considers that the theology is to be alive and not static, as in section LXX:

Active virtue: that which shall contain  
its own passion in the public weal –  
do you follow? -- or can you at least  
take the drift of the thing? (TL, 36).

<sup>41</sup> John Ruskin, *Unto This Last and Other Writings*, Clive Wilmer (ed.), London: Penguin, 1985, 294. Clive Wilmer notes: “Ruskin’s sympathies went out to the poor of Paris, but he was also greatly alarmed by reports in the press of churches and other monuments being pillaged and despoiled by the Communards” (335, footnote 1).

<sup>42</sup> Ruskin quoted by Sheila Emerson, *Ruskin, the Genesis of Invention*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, 229.



Hill's poetry has always borne witness to those who have lived out their passion in the public weal, those who have "suffered the Bloody Question" (TL, CXLII, 78).

In conclusion then, two quotations that represent the kenotic scope of Hill's poetry. The first was written by Simone Weil in a letter to Father Perrin May 26, 1942:

We must have the holiness that the present time demands, a new holiness which will also be without precedent.<sup>43</sup>

The second was a statement made by the Bishop of Ely in 1985:

[...] one finds oneself searched, as a Christian and as a Churchman, by this poetry. Searched about one's attitude to God, and searched in one's understanding of God, searched in one's sense of what the Church is in fact about.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> "Nous vivons une époque tout à fait sans précédent, et dans la situation présente l'universalité, qui pouvait autrefois être implicite, doit être maintenant pleinement explicite. Elle doit imprégner le langage et toute la manière d'être. Aujourd'hui ce n'est rien encore que d'être un saint, il faut la sainteté que le moment présent exige, une sainteté nouvelle, elle aussi sans précédent." S. Weil, *Œuvres*, 787.

<sup>44</sup> Peter Walker, "The Poetry of Geoffrey Hill," in *The Cambridge Review*, June 1985, 104.

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