

‘Influence poetry once more’: Allen Tate and Milton’s ‘Lycidas’

Dr George Potts

University College London

[g.potts@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:g.potts@ucl.ac.uk)

**Abstract:** The standard narrative of the Milton Controversy in the early-twentieth century has frequently regarded the New Criticism as part of the modernist antipathy towards Milton, which was fostered by articles such as F. R. Leavis’s ‘Milton’s Verse’ (1933) and T. S. Eliot’s ‘A Note on the Verse of John Milton’ (1935). This essay challenges such depictions of two prominent New Critics – Allen Tate and John Crowe Ransom – as inveterately hostile to Milton, arguing instead that he occupies a significant place in their poetry and criticism. By also considering these American writers’ debts to Milton as a context in which to situate the early work of a British poet deeply influenced by them, Geoffrey Hill, the essay opens up new perspectives on Milton’s transatlantic reception in the mid-century and his importance to modernist poetics.

**Keywords:** modernism; poetry; criticism; transatlantic; Milton

### **‘Influence poetry once more’: Allen Tate and Milton’s ‘Lycidas’**

F. R. Leavis’s bold pronouncement in 1933 that ‘Milton’s dislodgement, in the past decade, after his two centuries of predominance, was effected with remarkably little fuss’, would linger uneasily over Milton criticism in the ensuing years.<sup>1</sup> The Milton Controversy, which Leavis’s words are often seen as explicitly inaugurating, looms large in histories of Milton’s reception and of twentieth-century criticism more generally, implicating within it many of the period’s major poets and scholars. Leavis credits Milton’s ‘dislodgement’ from the canon to the ‘irresistible argument’ of T. S. Eliot, an argument comprising the ‘creative achievement’ of *The Waste Land* (1922) and strengthened by the ‘few critical asides’ against Milton in Eliot’s essays.<sup>2</sup> The most famous of these asides comes in ‘The Metaphysical Poets’ (1921), as Eliot posits a ‘dissociation of sensibility’ as having taken place in seventeenth-century poetry, ‘aggravated by the influence’ of Milton and Dryden, whereas before there had been a ‘direct sensuous apprehension of thought, or a recreation of thought into feeling’.<sup>3</sup> Two years after Leavis’s article, Eliot elaborated his attack in ‘A Note on the Verse of John Milton’ (1935), critiquing the impoverishment of Milton’s ‘visual imagination’ and asserting that his ‘poetry could *only* be an influence for the worse, upon any poet whatever’.<sup>4</sup>

As is often highlighted, Milton’s ‘influence’ on modern poets is what chiefly motivates Eliot in his 1935 essay, a concern that had apparently subsided by 1947 when his second entry into the Milton Controversy appeared in print. Speaking about Milton as part of the British Academy’s ‘Lecture on a Master Mind’ series, Eliot does not retract his earlier polemic but draws from it the opposite conclusion, asserting instead that Milton’s poetry might be a profitable example for poets in the post-war world:

In short, it now seems to me that poets are sufficiently removed from Milton, and sufficiently liberated from his reputation, to approach the study of his work without danger, and with profit to their poetry and to the English language.<sup>5</sup>

The motivations behind Eliot's *volte face* are not entirely clear, reflecting what Louis Menand identifies as his 'habit of turning on the very literary tastes he had instilled' and, in the case of Milton, 'a calculated desire to run against those parts of the original modernist polemic that had by their success become popular prejudice'.<sup>6</sup> Yet despite the reversal in Eliot's stance, Milton's reputation was not instantly restored. Leavis in 1949 refused to follow Eliot, finding the 'the deference he exhibits towards the scholars [...] wholly deplorable' but acknowledging that he himself has been left 'exposed' by Eliot's change of stance.<sup>7</sup> The Milton Controversy would continue in the ensuing decades, not reaching its perceived end until the publication of works such as Frank Kermode's *Romantic Image* (1957) and Christopher Ricks's *Milton's Grand Style* (1963), which offered decisive rejoinders to Eliot and Leavis respectively.

Recent work by David Hopkins, John Leonard and Tom Lockwood has unearthed a far more dynamic history of Milton's reception in the early- to mid-twentieth century than this brief summary allows, with a plethora of competing voices and concerns widening the Controversy's focus from the twin poles of Leavis and Eliot.<sup>8</sup> However, Milton's reception across the Atlantic simultaneous to the Milton Controversy has received comparatively little attention. The central figures involved in what is often termed the New Criticism are frequently perceived as merely an American offshoot of Eliot's critical pronouncements, the unquestioning heirs to a remodelled literary canon from which Milton had been thoroughly relegated. Stephen Burt, for instance, writes that 'the American writers whom we now call

New Critics either could not agree about – or agreed in attacking – what seemed most exceptional in Milton’ and suggests that they derived this view in no small part from Eliot.<sup>9</sup> John Leonard similarly posits Cleanth Brooks’s admiring remarks about Milton – delivered in a lecture to the Milton Society of America at the MLA Convention in 1950 – to be the exception rather than the rule, writing that ‘most New Critics at this time were anti-Miltonists but Brooks was a New Critic *and* an admirer of Milton’.<sup>10</sup> Leonard’s is a particularly peculiar assertion given that Brooks himself in that lecture enlists two other prominent New Critics who share his feelings: ‘John Crowe Ransom and Allen Tate, for example, have steadily, and from the beginning, put on record their admiration for Milton’.<sup>11</sup>

As Helen Thaventhiran has recently argued, the grouping of writers such as Ransom and Tate under the catch-all title the New Criticism can be both unhelpful and misleading, as is the tendency to frame their views in relation to their English precursors: each of them has ‘their own particular contexts of writing and of influence’ and they are ‘are not always (or not long) in agreement’ with their critical forebears.<sup>12</sup> By focusing on one strand of Milton’s transatlantic reception in the early- to mid-century that has hitherto been largely overlooked, this essay explores how Milton’s ‘influence’ continued to be felt in poetry and criticism despite Eliot’s castigation of it in 1935. In doing so, I argue for the New Critical Milton as a particularly instructive example of how assumptions about literary-critical history are not necessarily borne out by actual examination of critics’ prose.

Although the opening sentence of Leavis’s 1933 essay is frequently quoted, the writer upon whom he subsequently turns his ire and who provides the impetus behind his attack on Milton is frequently ignored. After crediting Eliot’s poetry and criticism as the ‘irresistible argument’ behind Milton’s ‘dislodgment, in the past decade’, Leavis juxtaposes this recent

development in English letters with the opinions of an emerging writer from across the Atlantic:

And when a writer of Mr. Allen Tate's repute as critic, poet and intellectual leader, telling us that Milton should be 'made' to 'influence poetry once more,' shows that he too doesn't understand, then one may overcome, perhaps, one's shyness of saying the obvious.<sup>13</sup>

Leavis is quoting here from a 1931 review by Tate of the first volumes of the Columbia Edition of Milton's works, in which Tate laments that Milton is 'the most referred to, but, in the last half-century, the least read of all the great poets. The scholars know him but the poets do not'.<sup>14</sup> 'If the complete edition of his works is to perform its full duty', he asserts, 'it must make Milton influence poetry once more'. There is an allusion in Tate's words that Leavis himself 'doesn't understand' in his hostile quoting of them: that in demanding for Milton to 'influence poetry once more', Tate is invoking the opening lines of 'Lycidas' (1637) which acknowledge the poem's own influences by placing it at the culmination of the elegiac tradition: 'Yet once more, O ye laurels, and once more | Ye myrtles brown'.<sup>15</sup>

Tate's rallying cry for poets to embrace Milton as a model alongside other 'seventeenth-century influences' pointedly attempts to restore his standing to the same level as poets such as John Donne whom Eliot's essays had championed ten years earlier. His essay marks a rebellion against the newly formulated modernist canon, one which Leavis cannot abide and which precipitates his first overt denunciation of Milton in print. In the essay's revised form in *Revaluation* (1936) much of Leavis's aggression towards Tate is removed, although this initial dismissal of Tate's desire for Milton to 'influence poetry once more' remains.<sup>16</sup> But the impact of Tate's article is significant, despite the marginal status that posterity has

accorded it. Indeed, the title of Eliot's 1935 essay, 'A Note on the Verse of John Milton', is in fact an amalgamation of the titles of the two essays that had immediately preceded it: Tate's 'A Note on Milton' and Leavis's 'Milton's Verse'. The stimulus for Eliot's famous statement that 'Milton's poetry could *only* be an influence for the worse, upon any poet whatever', moreover, derives at least in part from Tate's opposite viewpoint from 1931.

While in England, Leavis and Eliot would respond to Tate's article by discharging the opening salvos of the Milton Controversy, by contrast American poets of the period viewed it favourably. Hart Crane commented in a letter the day after the article's publication that it was 'one of the best things in modern criticism',<sup>17</sup> while Ransom, whose *God Without Thunder: An Unorthodox Defence of Orthodoxy* (1931) opens with two chapters on *Paradise Lost*, would write to Tate that the article was a 'grand piece of critical work – the best thing written in years on Milton, inasmuch as *nothing* critical has been written on Milton in my time'.<sup>18</sup> Yet it was not republished in any of Tate's prose collections and has remained unremarked upon, surviving solely as the straw man quotation with which Leavis opens his famous 1933 essay.

Tate ventures that there are 'two ways in which the moderns might read Milton with profit': the first is as a 'craftsman', the second, 'closely connected with the first', relates to the religious framework of his poetry.<sup>19</sup> He acknowledges that it is this latter aspect that may be most troubling for twentieth-century readers. 'We believe that an elaborate mythology lies beyond the possibility of experience', Tate writes, 'and we denounce the continued use of mythological personages in poetry as unreal and insincere'. Tate views the development of Milton's poetry from the Nativity Ode (1629) to *Paradise Lost* (1674) as a 'steady growth' towards a more 'systematized mythology'. Yet it is not 'that Milton was increasingly

irresponsible about reality, and insincere', he cautions, 'but rather that the character of our imaginations has changed and taken on a defect'. This is a claim that Tate would also make elsewhere and which has been used to argue that he disliked Milton. In 'A Note on Donne' (1932), Tate argues that a 'settled belief in the relation between a fixed human nature and a perfect divine order [...] makes Milton's mythology possible', a belief that the modern reader cannot share:

Milton stood for the historical absolute, which is the myth. And unless it will again be possible for men to give themselves up to a self-contained, objective system of truths, the principles of Donne, whether we know him or not, will continue to be our own.<sup>20</sup>

Stephen Burt deduces from this that Tate, following the example of Eliot, regards Milton as a 'wrong or useless' literary model in comparison to Donne.<sup>21</sup> Yet although the reader may not share this 'settled belief' it does not necessarily follow that Milton, for Tate, is uninformative as a literary model. As Tate goes on to state in his 1931 essay, Milton's mythology can be appreciated irrespective of its applicability to the present condition: 'from Milton we learn only the meaning of craftsmanship – without a prescription for reproducing it; but it is a great lesson'.<sup>22</sup> Tate's ambivalence over Milton's mythology had first been voiced five years earlier in 1926 when, writing to Donald Davidson about how 'our culture is dissolving', Tate declares that he is 'convinced that Milton himself could not write a *Paradise Lost* now'.<sup>23</sup> Although Tate here is similarly placing Milton's mind-set at a far remove from the modern poet's, his statement is not simply dismissive. As Langdon Hammer has argued, Tate's 'curious determination that Milton could not write epic were he to stand in Tate's place' brings with it a 'complementary fantasy': 'that Tate, because *he* cannot write an epic, stands in Milton's'.<sup>24</sup>

The first of Tate's 'two ways in which the moderns might read Milton with profit', as a 'craftsman', is emphasised throughout 'A Note on Milton'. Milton is praised for his 'infallible sense of form' and upheld as 'the most perfectly self-conscious technician in English poetry'.<sup>25</sup> It is at the level of technique, Tate argues, that Milton's influence might be most profitably felt:

It is time for the Miltonic sense of form to reappear in Anglo-American poetry. It is high time that the modern poets, who feel strongly other seventeenth-century influences, came to a better view of Milton's significance for style. This does not mean that we must repeat 'Lycidas', or try to write Miltonic blank verse; I have no specifications for modern style.

Two years after Ransom wrote to congratulate Tate on this call to arms, he would publish his own consideration of the Miltonic sense of form. Ransom's 'A Poem Nearly Anonymous' (1933) offers an explanation of the metrical and formal irregularities of 'Lycidas': its verse paragraphs of varying length, its irregular rhyme scheme and unrhymed lines, as well as the fourteen trimeter lines which intermittently intrude upon the poem's dominant pentameter rhythm. At least since Samuel Johnson's notorious assessment of 'Lycidas' – 'the diction is harsh, the rhymes uncertain, and the numbers displeasing' – critics have been drawn to the poem's wildly varying prosody.<sup>26</sup> Ransom contends that 'Lycidas' was 'written smooth and rewritten rough'; that is, having composed a metrically uniform draft, Milton reworked the poem and consciously deformed its regularities.<sup>27</sup> His essay won considerable approval in American criticism in the decades following its publication, with C. A. Patrides, for example, who studied under Ransom at Kenyon College in the 1950s, including the essay in his influential collection *Lycidas: The Tradition and the Poem* (1961). In an article that seeks to debunk Ransom's thesis, Martin C. Battestin begins by establishing the high estimation that



critics – erroneously, in his opinion – have afforded it, writing that ‘since its initial publication’ Ransom’s essay ‘has been considered as perhaps the outstanding modern evaluation of Milton’s *Lycidas*’.<sup>28</sup>

Ransom’s thesis rests on shaky premises. As Battestin points out, he makes no reference to the Trinity Manuscript of Milton’s poetry to substantiate his claims about authorial revision and wilfully contradicts the established opinion that the prosody of Milton’s early poetry originates in the Italian *canzone* form. F. T. Prince’s *The Italian Element in Milton’s Verse* (1954), a work which would entirely supersede Ransom’s speculations on the poem, extensively demonstrates how the ‘combination of freedom and discipline’ in the prosody of ‘*Lycidas*’ derives from Milton’s interest in the *canzone*.<sup>29</sup> Despite acknowledging the argument that ‘*Lycidas*’ derives from a ‘free adaptation of the canzone’, an adaptation that Milton deployed ‘with almost destructive freedom’, Ransom instead pursues a different thesis about the poem’s composition.<sup>30</sup> His language consciously aims to depict the form of ‘*Lycidas*’ as anticipatory of modernist poetry: ‘when he has written smoothly, and contemplates his work, he is capable actually, if he is a modern poet, of going over it laboriously and roughening it’.<sup>31</sup>

More than any other epithet in Ransom’s article, ‘modern’ is used to define Milton’s poetic practice. Milton, we are told, ‘tends habitually towards the formlessness which is modern, without quite caring to arrive at that destination’ as well as having ‘much of the modern poet’s awareness of his public’, and in the poem’s ‘irregular stanzas and the rhymeless lines is registered the ravage of his modernity’.<sup>32</sup> Ransom’s alliance of Miltonic and modernist prosody is nowhere more explicit than at the outset of his essay, where he explicitly compares Milton with the twentieth-century poet who would denounce him in print several years later:

The poem is young, brilliant, insubordinate. In it is an artist who wrestles with an almost insuperable problem, and is kinsman to some tortured modern artists. It has something in common with, for example, *The Waste Land*, whose author as poet must be sympathetic even though, as critic, he might oblige himself to be censorious. In short, the poem is *Lycidas*.<sup>33</sup>

When 'A Poem Nearly Anonymous' was subsequently collected in Ransom's *The World's Body* (1938), the third sentence of this passage was reduced to 'it has something in common with, for example, *The Waste Land*', with the appearance of Eliot's 'A Note on the Verse of John Milton' in the intervening years a likely motivating factor.<sup>34</sup> Yet in describing Milton as 'insubordinate' while comparing him to Eliot, Ransom is not only being polemical. These sentences recall a controversial and highly unfavourable review of *The Waste Land* he had written ten years earlier, in which he criticises Eliot's poem for its 'extreme disconnection' and describes it as 'one of the most insubordinate poems in the language'.<sup>35</sup> It was Tate who had come to Eliot's defence in this instance. In a letter to the *New York Evening Post*, the newspaper in which Ransom's article had appeared, Tate objects that Ransom's hostility towards *The Waste Land* is predicated upon his inability to recognise formal irregularity as a valid and necessary component of modernist poetics:

But Mr. Ransom's worry on this point really is his inability to discover the form of the poem, for, says he, it presents meters so varied and such lack of grammar and punctuation and such a bewildering array of discrete themes, that he is at loss to see the poem as one poem at all. Whatever form may be, it is not, I dare say, regularity of meter.<sup>36</sup>

This was, at its heart, a debate about finding a viable poetic form to reflect the twentieth-century condition. As Mark Jancovich writes: ‘for Ransom, Eliot’s poem lacked form, while for Tate, it offered a radical, new way of conceptualising the world, and one which was a necessary response to new circumstances’.<sup>37</sup>

While less hostile towards ‘Lycidas’ in 1933 than he had been towards *The Waste Land* in 1923, Ransom’s ambivalence over the poem’s apparent formlessness is still palpable. ‘For the most part a work of great art’, ‘Lycidas’ is also, he remarks, ‘sometimes artful and tricky’. Nevertheless, ‘the critic will always find too many and too perfect beauties in it ever to deal with it very harshly’.<sup>38</sup> ‘Whatever form may be, it is not, I dare say, regularity of meter’, Tate might have replied. Indeed, the prosodic style of ‘Lycidas’ may have informed Tate’s earlier defence of *The Waste Land* by providing an exemplary precedent for metrical irregularity; it must surely have underpinned his desire to have Milton the ‘craftsman [...] influence poetry once more’ in 1931. At the conclusion of that essay he asserts: ‘I think it was Warton who said that “Lycidas” was the absolute test of poetry; it still is’.<sup>39</sup> Tate’s understanding of Milton’s poem was borne out of longstanding appreciation. In a letter to Donald Davison in 1929, Tate firmly situates ‘Lycidas’ within an Eliotic framework of ‘difficulty’ and ‘tradition’, acknowledging that his thinking on the poem derives from obsessive rereadings of it:

The people who opposed the Fugitives as radicals would oppose, certainly, such a poem as *Lycidas* if it appeared in a modern journal. Tradition is the intensest expression, or communication, the past has reached. This is always difficult [...] As to *Lycidas* again, it is certainly one of the most difficult poems ever written; I read it first when I was about fourteen years old, and in certain ways I understand it as little as I did then; and I must have read it three or four hundred times.<sup>40</sup>

Almost forty years later, ‘Lycidas’ still loomed large in Tate’s thought, significantly again in relation to Eliot. In the Postscript to *T. S. Eliot: The Man and his Work* (1967), which he edited in Eliot’s memory, Tate compares his memorial volume with *Justa Edouardo King Naufrago* (1638) by wishing that he were ‘capable of writing a formal pastoral elegy like “Lycidas”’ with which to honour his recently-deceased contemporary.<sup>41</sup>

Tate must surely have felt chastened when his championing of the ‘Miltonic sense of form’ precipitated outright denunciation from the modernist poet whose work provided his other crucial formal example. Yet he had already followed his own advice in the composition of his most celebrated poem, ‘Ode to the Confederate Dead’, which was first published in 1928 and then again, substantially revised, in his *Selected Poems* (1938). Tate’s ‘Ode’ is an elegy for Confederate south, its speaker placed at the gates of a military graveyard, cut off from the dead soldiers’ experiences both by the failure of the Confederate cause in the American Civil War and by what Tate perceived as the erosion of the Southern way of life with the onset of modernity:

Autumn is desolation in the plot  
Of a thousand acres where these memories grow  
From the inexhaustible bodies that are not  
Dead, but feed the grass row after rich row.  
Think of the autumns that have come and gone! –  
Ambitious November with the humors of the year,  
With a particular zeal for every slab,  
Staining the uncomfortable angels that rot  
On the slabs, a wing chipped here, an arm there:

The brute curiosity of an angel's stare  
 Turns you, like them, to stone,  
 Transforms the heaving air  
 Till plunged to a heavier world below  
 You shift your sea-space blindly  
 Heaving, turning like the blind crab.<sup>42</sup>

The variant rhyme scheme of this fifteen-line strophe takes its inspiration, as Tate acknowledges in 'Narcissus as Narcissus' (1938), from the poem that he had read 'three or four hundred times' since he was fourteen:

The dominant rhythm is 'mounting', the dominant meter iambic pentameter varied with six-, four-, and three-stressed lines; but this was not planned in advance for variety. I adapted the meter to the effect desired at the moment. The model for the irregular rhyming was 'Lycidas,' but other models could have served.<sup>43</sup>

'*There* is rhymed with *year* (to many readers, perhaps, only a half rhyme)', Tate continues, 'and I hoped the reader would unconsciously assume that he need not expect further use of that sound for some time'.<sup>44</sup> Instead when the line that immediately follows, 'the brute curiosity of an angel's stare', carries an unexpected triple rhyme, the violence of its imagery should be 'further reinforced'. A fourth rhyme, 'air', 'prolongs the moment of attention upon that passage' but also begins 'dissipating the shock' of it as what was previously surprising becomes instead predictable. The formal precedent for Tate's strophe is the opening fourteen lines of 'Lycidas', in which the second line's ending 'never sere' is rhymed five times in 'year', 'dear', 'peer', 'bier', and 'tear':

Yet once more, O ye laurels, and once more

Ye myrtles brown, with ivy never sere,  
I come to pluck your berries harsh and crude,  
And with forced fingers rude,  
Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year.  
Bitter constraint, and sad occasion dear,  
Compels me to disturb your season due:  
For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime,  
Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer:  
Who would not sing for Lycidas? he knew  
Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme.  
He must not float upon his watery bier  
Unwept, and welter to the parching wind,  
Without the meed of some melodious tear. (ll. 1-14)

While Tate includes a caveat that ‘other models could have served’ for his ‘Ode’ his cautionary tone seems overstated, not least because the two poems’ formal connections extend beyond the ‘irregular rhyming’ that he here acknowledges, including too their strophic verse paragraphs and their use of varying line lengths to undercut a dominant decasyllabic rhythm – although Tate’s syncopation far exceeds Milton’s trimeter substitutions in ‘Lycidas’.

The similarities between ‘Ode to the Confederate Dead’ and ‘Lycidas’ extend beyond form, moreover, as Tate allusively situates his poem in relation to the ‘elaborate mythology’ of Milton’s, the second of the ‘two ways in which the moderns might read Milton with profit’ that he set out in 1931.<sup>45</sup> The passage of the Ode quoted above draws on the moment of

apotheosis at the conclusion of 'Lycidas', when the speaker announces the ascent of the departed shepherd to the heavenly realm:

Weep no more, woeful shepherds weep no more,  
For Lycidas your sorrow is not dead,  
Sunk though he be beneath the watery floor (ll. 165-7)

Tate's speaker also asserts that the 'inexhaustible bodies' of the deceased Confederate soldiers are 'not | Dead' although he, unlike Milton, does not offer recourse to a transcendent presence outside of the text. Broken across the line ending, 'not | Dead' refers merely to the organic decomposition of Confederate corpses, with Milton's divine landscape reduced to the disfigured stone angels that catch the eye of the Ode's speaker. The 'brute curiosity of an angel's stare', an instant of abrupt recognition underlined by Tate's unexpected triple rhyme, in turn precipitates a solipsistic anguish akin to drowning: whereas Lycidas is 'sunk low, but mounted high' (l. 172), the Ode's speaker is 'plunged to a heavier world below'. Although for Tate, as he acknowledges in 'A Note on Milton', an 'elaborate mythology lies beyond the possibility of experience', he responds by building a recognition of this into an integral element of his Ode.

As the title 'Ode to the Confederate Dead' suggests, the importance of Milton to Tate's imagination cannot purely be confined to matters of technique or religion but must surely extend to the political too. It was in the 1920s and 30s that Tate and his fellow Fugitive poets fully embarked upon Southern Agrarianism, their cultural movement desiring both a Southern literary renaissance and a reassertion of the region's values more generally. Agrarianism reached its zenith with the manifesto *I'll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (1930), a collection of nostalgic and reactionary defences of the antebellum South.

For Tate, the biographer of Jefferson Davis and Stonewall Jackson, Milton the polemicist and political poet must have resonated powerfully for having ultimately been on the losing side in an earlier Civil War, either when lamenting ‘*the good Old Cause*’ on the eve of the Restoration in *The Readie and Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* (1660) or when alluding to his own defeated position in *Paradise Lost* (1674): ‘fallen on evil days, / On evil days though fallen’.<sup>46</sup> However, it is far more difficult to reconcile another of Milton’s preeminent self-representations, as the champion of political liberty, with Tate’s attitudes on race in the 1920s and 30s, which were closely aligned with those of the Confederate South that he defended in *I’ll Take My Stand*: the contrast between Tate’s racism and social conservatism and Milton’s political radicalism is an unresolvable tension at the heart of their literary relationship. But the image of Milton as revolutionary, republican and the favourite poet of Thomas Jefferson – in R. W. Griswold’s famous phrase, as ‘more emphatically *American* than any author who has lived in the United States’ – was nonetheless instrumental in ensuring a longstanding admiration for him in American culture that other twentieth-century poets who were close to Tate explicitly endorsed.<sup>47</sup> This was the opinion of Robert Lowell, who told an interviewer in 1965: ‘You might almost say that American literature and culture begins with *Paradise Lost*’.<sup>48</sup>

Lowell studied under Tate and Ransom at Kenyon College in the late 1930s and, like his mentors, he was captivated by Milton’s poetry, sharing in particular Tate’s admiration for ‘*Lycidas*’. Stanley Kunitz recalls visiting Lowell at McLean’s Hospital in Boston after he had suffered a manic episode, during which Lowell ‘read “*Lycidas*” aloud to me, in his improved version, firmly convinced that he was the author of the original’.<sup>49</sup> Although we can only speculate as to what form Lowell’s ‘improved version’ might have taken, his seminal early poem ‘The Quaker Graveyard in Nantucket’ (1946), an elegy for his cousin Warren Winslow



who drowned at sea, may be the closest equivalent to his revised version of 'Lycidas'. Just as his friend and mentor Tate had done for his Ode, Lowell used 'Lycidas' as the model for his elegy's form, with trimeter syncopations punctuating the poem's patternless rhyming strophes. Stephen Burt has extensively catalogued Lowell's prosodic debts to Milton in 'The Quaker Graveyard' and other poems but views these as having emerged in isolation, arguing that Lowell 'used his own understanding of Milton to declare his imaginative independence from Ransom and Tate'.<sup>50</sup> I would contend instead that Lowell's understanding of Milton developed out of his New Critical mentors, in particular 'Ode to the Confederate Dead', and hence his poetry can be seen as continuing the Miltonic sense of form on which both Ransom and Tate had written about appreciatively in previous decades.

On one level, Tate's opinions prove a significant exception to the assumption that Anglo-American modernism was inveterately hostile to Milton, but they also provide an avenue through which Milton's writings might have fed back into English poetry and criticism from across the Atlantic. One such figure who may have discovered aspects of Milton through Tate is Geoffrey Hill. On a trip to Birmingham in 1948, when Hill was fifteen, his father purchased him Oscar Williams's anthology *A Little Treasury of Modern Poetry* (1947), a volume which would prove significant for his own poetic development. Speaking about it decades later, Hill remembers that he carried it 'in my jacket pocket all over Worcestershire for several years until it disintegrated: I think there was probably a time when I knew every poem in that anthology by heart'.<sup>51</sup> Writing elsewhere, Hill has singled out one poem in particular that he discovered in Williams's collection:

Allen Tate's 'Ode to the Confederate Dead' struck me like a bolt from heaven;  
overnight I became a modernist [...] At that time I had not read Eliot's 'The Function of Criticism' and 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' but in being so abruptly and so

profoundly affected by Tate's poetry, I was – as I now realize – receiving the Eliotian stresses at second hand.<sup>52</sup>

Hill's image of quasi-supernatural inspiration is striking, as is his privileging of Tate's modernist poetics over those of Eliot. Langdon Hammer, echoing Hill's words, comments that 'Tate mediated Hill's approach to other American poets – John Crowe Ransom, Pound, and Eliot'.<sup>53</sup> Yet it should be added that Hill, through his reading of Tate's Ode, was also receiving the Miltonic stresses at second hand and that one of the poets whom Tate mediated Hill's approach to, albeit in a less obvious way than those Hammer lists, was Milton.

Writing of what it was about Tate's Ode that had so affected his fifteen-year-old self, Hill places the emphasis firmly upon the poem's form: 'I knew simply and immediately that this was the structural presence, the technical daimon, that would show me how to shape my own work so that its built-in strengths would prove self-sufficient'.<sup>54</sup> The prosodic detail that Hill subsequently highlights in the same article – 'the classical economy of the rhymed strophes, the minimal subsistence-economy of the broken unrhymed couplets' – is not the exact formal property that Tate derived from Milton. Yet Hill's detailed description of the jarring clash between the Ode's strophic paragraphs and the couplets that punctuate them, the former of which do develop out of Tate's reading of 'Lycidas', evidences an appreciation of the poem's Miltonic qualities, however unaware Hill was at the time that such qualities left Tate in Milton's debt. That such a debt exists suggests the oblique yet considerable extent of Milton's influence, even in a period where his 'dislodgement', as Leavis terms it, is still often seen as having been decidedly accomplished.

Hill has acknowledged that he read Leavis's *Revaluation* as an undergraduate at the University of Oxford in the early 1950s and, on reading 'Milton's Verse' in that collection, he must surely have been struck by the quotation from Tate against which Leavis defines his own critical stance: 'that Milton should be "made" to "influence poetry once more"'.<sup>55</sup> Although for many subsequent readers Leavis's opening dismissal has merited little attention, a young poet steeped in Tate's poetry is likely to have met Leavis's ire with scepticism and Tate's words with curiosity. Tate's *Poems 1920-1945* (1947) had appeared in Britain from Eyre & Spottiswoode several years before Hill arrived at university, and its impact on his early poetic development is well documented.<sup>56</sup> Lowell's *Poems 1938-49* appeared in Britain from Faber in 1950 and, having been recommended it by his Oxford contemporary Donald Hall, Hill purchased a copy as an undergraduate.<sup>57</sup> Lowell, alongside Tate and other American poets such as Ransom and Richard Eberhart, had a profound impact on Hill's early work; in his reading of American poetry, Hill inherited the reimagined Miltonic forms that Tate, and through him Lowell, had produced, with these two precursors providing a route through which aspects of Milton might feed back into Hill's early poetry from across the Atlantic.

Lowell's 'The Quaker Graveyard' is the primary model for one of Hill's last university poems, 'An Ark on the Flood', which was published towards the end of Hill's time at Oxford but was not subsequently collected in his first volume *For the Unfallen* (1959). The poem appeared in the student magazine *Isis* in 1954 and recounts an almost apocalyptic deluge and its eventual subsidence, taking as its imaginative impetus the Genesis flood narrative and Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851), both of which are also present in 'The Quaker Graveyard'. As Stephen James writes, it 'in certain respects reads as an apprentice piece, worked out in relation to Lowell's example, yet it generates its own considerable energy and

“pungent life””.<sup>58</sup> Critics who have written on Hill’s early poetry have consistently noted Lowell and Milton as the two authors most keenly felt in ‘An Ark on the Flood’. Henry Hart writes that it ‘imitates (and lampoons) great elegies of the past such as “Lycidas” and “Quaker Graveyard”’ and Steven Matthews similarly notes that these two are ‘the poem’s most immediate precursors’.<sup>59</sup> Although Hart records a number of Miltonic echoes in Hill’s poem, neither he nor Matthews pushes the comparison further. In contrast to Milton and Lowell’s metrical irregularities, ‘An Ark on the Flood’ is formally tight: it is written in intricately rhyming ten-line stanzas, in a consistent pentameter but with trimeter substitutions on the sixth line of each. The model is the fifth strophe of ‘The Quaker Graveyard’, itself modelled loosely on ‘Lycidas’. In taking one unit of Lowell’s poem and regularising it across ten stanzas, ‘An Ark on the Flood’ bridges the compact forms that are more characteristic of Hill’s early poetry and the variant prosodies of ‘Lycidas’, ‘Ode to the Confederate Dead’ and ‘The Quaker Graveyard’.

However, ‘Lycidas’ is not only present in ‘An Ark on the Flood’ as a distant formal precedent mediated through Tate and Lowell. Rather Milton’s elegy provides Hill with a model in poetic self-construction, suggesting how an emerging author might situate himself in relation to both the literary past and his own future development. This second aspect of Milton’s poem is one that Hill subsequently commented on. Writing in 1964, he takes issue with the contention of Elder Olson that ‘the “Once more” of *Lycidas* [...] has no profound verbal meaning; it is affecting because it implies the repeated suffering of bereavement’.<sup>60</sup> ‘It does imply this’, Hill concedes, but he counters that what is ‘equally apparent is the fact that Milton is here testing the acoustics of the pastoral elegy. The poem is an elegy which is also, to some extent, about elegy.’<sup>61</sup> In its opening refrain of ‘Yet once more, O ye laurels, and once more | Ye myrtles brown’, ‘Lycidas’ places itself at the end of an established tradition of

pastoral elegy, a tradition that it continually wrestles with until its ambiguous closing stanza in which the ‘uncouth Swain’ departs ‘to fresh Woods, and Pastures new’ (ll. 1-2, 186, 193). It is by alluding to this refrain in his stated desire to have ‘Milton influence poetry once more’ that Tate acknowledges his own debt to ‘Lycidas’.

Although Hill’s comment postdates ‘An Ark on the Flood’ by ten years, the critical argument he is echoing was first made several decades earlier. The point was first extensively articulated by E. M. W. Tillyard in his study *Milton* (1930), in which he suggests that, although ‘Lycidas’ was occasioned by the death of Edward King, the poem’s ‘real subject’ is poetry and Milton himself:

Most criticism of *Lycidas* is off the mark, because it fails to distinguish between the nominal and the real subject, what the poem professes to be about and what it is about. Fundamentally *Lycidas* concerns Milton himself; King is but the excuse for one of Milton’s most personal poems.<sup>62</sup>

Tillyard highlights the ‘contrast’ in the poem’s narrator ‘between the tones in which he speaks of the past and of the future’, a contrast Tillyard views as brought about because ‘to the future belong his hopes of poetic fame’.<sup>63</sup> After the violent deluge of Hill’s ‘An Ark on the Flood’ subsides, the poem concludes with a contrast similar to that which Tillyard discerns in ‘Lycidas’, introducing a regenerate landscape that still bears traces of its antecedent:

The orchards thicken; and where last the tide  
Stretched its long arms uneasily to the shore,  
The soil lies rich – though round a barren well  
From whose dry lips the herds may drink no more.

Old bones are brought to light and, where we dwell,  
The echoes have not died  
Of those who went beneath the clamouring sea.  
But Ishmael's ears are crippled to that sound,  
(O starry mouths amid the oozes drowned)  
The harp hangs silent from the windless tree.<sup>64</sup>

The contrast in Hill's stanza – analogous to the position of the developing poet – is between new potential where 'the soil lies rich' and an older form of sustenance that is no longer accessible, 'a barren well | From whose dry lips the herds may drink no more'. Though this image looks forward to its speaker's future poetic development, it cannot entirely dismiss the earlier literary works out of which he has emerged; the tension between these two recognitions sustains the ambiguity with which the poem closes.

'An Ark on the Flood' is above all characterised by its conspicuous ambition, presenting itself as the culmination of Hill's undergraduate poetry in its overt engagement with and attempt to move beyond earlier literary works. Although the speaker announces that the 'herds may drink no more' from the now 'barren' poetic source, his renunciation not only draws on pastoral imagery but also echoes 'Lycidas' in the very act of dismissing it. Towards the conclusion of Milton's elegy, the speaker returns to his opening refrain of 'once more' in a modified form in order to announce Lycidas' celestial apotheosis: 'Weep no more, woeful shepherds weep no more [...] Now Lycidas the shepherds weep no more' (ll. 165, 182). Just as Hill argues in 1964 that Milton's refrain of 'once more' at the beginning of 'Lycidas' functions as a comment on the poem's place in the elegiac tradition, so too does the echo of Milton's subsequent refrain 'no more' at the conclusion of 'An Ark on the Flood' situate

Hill's poem in relation to Milton's. Whereas Milton triumphantly announces the end of weeping, 'An Ark on the Flood' transforms this into a pessimistic declaration of the end of inspirational drinking. Despite the submergence of 'those who went beneath the clamouring sea', these voices continue to be heard in the poem's closing lines: 'Old bones are brought to light and, where we dwell, | The echoes have not died'. That this recognition of indebtedness occurs on the stanza's trimeter line places a particular emphasis on the poem's formal 'echoes' of Milton, Tate, and Lowell.

Henry Hart has described the ending of 'An Ark on the Flood' as 'ambiguously triumphant' in its 'battle with the mighty dead'; I would instead place a greater emphasis on the ambiguity of the poem's conclusion, which is palpably registered in an allusion that Hart misses.<sup>65</sup> The stanza's final line shifts to an image of gain through loss: 'the harp hangs silent from the windless tree'. This instrument is both flotsam and a symbol of future poetic creation, and the tension contained in it is heightened by the line's allusion to Psalm 137, in which the exiled Israelites refuse to sing when commanded to by their Babylonian captors:

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered  
Zion.

We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.

For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted  
us *required of us* mirth, *saying*, Sing us *one* of the songs of Zion.

How shall we sing the LORD'S song in a strange land?<sup>66</sup>

In the famous psalm of exile, the Israelites mourn the loss of their homeland, vowing to remember their tradition in the land of their captors. 'Memory', as Hannibal Hamlin writes, 'is at the heart of Psalm 137'.<sup>67</sup> Hill draws on this to express a similar alienation in his own

poet-speaker, who might similarly question how one can sing in a ‘strange land’ where literary inheritance is irretrievably lost. His allusion entails on one level a reversal of the biblical situation, with the harp in ‘An Ark on the Flood’ hanging silently as if awaiting someone to take it up, but it also registers something of the Israelites’ lament and refusal to forfeit their heritage. Yet Hill’s allusion to the Israelites’ weeping is also enriched by the way it resonates with the stanza’s earlier echo of the injunction to ‘weep no more’ from ‘Lycidas’, adding a further dimension to the poem’s ambiguous concluding interplay of optimism and pessimism.

The subtle but significant intertextual affinities between ‘An Ark on the Flood’ and ‘Lycidas’ exemplify the strand of literary inheritance that this essay has endeavoured to trace. Tate’s anomalous position in the Milton Controversy provided an important alternative to the hostility towards Milton that was associated with Eliot and Leavis. By exploring this neglected aspect of modernist criticism and using it to contextualise the triangular poetic relationship between Milton, Tate, and Hill, I have aimed to highlight a moment of transatlantic exchange that runs counter to what one might expect of two twentieth-century poets who are often seen as being under the sign of Eliot. In particular, this context provides one compelling source out of which Hill’s earliest engagement with Milton may have developed, a literary relationship that is increasingly important to, and foregrounded in, his Miltonically-titled collections of fifty years later, *Scenes from Comus* (2005) and *A Treatise of Civil Power* (2007).

---

<sup>1</sup> F. R. Leavis, ‘Milton’s Verse’, *Scrutiny*, 2.2 (1933), 123-36 (p. 123).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> T. S. Eliot, ‘The Metaphysical Poets’ (1921), in *The Complete Prose of T. S. Eliot: The Critical Edition*, ed. by Ronald Schuchard, 8 vols (Baltimore, MD and London: Johns Hopkins University Press and Faber & Faber, 2014-), II: *The Perfect Critic, 1919-1926*, ed. by Anthony Cuda and Schuchard (2014), pp. 375-85 (pp. 379-80).



- 
- <sup>4</sup> Eliot, 'A Note on the Verse of John Milton', *Essays and Studies*, 21 (1935), 32-40 (p. 33).
- <sup>5</sup> Eliot, 'Milton', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 33 (1947), 61-79 (p. 79).
- <sup>6</sup> Louis Menand, *Discovering Modernism: T. S. Eliot and His Context*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 158-59.
- <sup>7</sup> Leavis, 'Mr Eliot and Milton', *Sewanee Review*, 57.1 (1949), 1-30 (pp. 2, 5).
- <sup>8</sup> See David Hopkins, 'Dr Leavis's Seventeenth Century', *Essays in Criticism*, 64.3 (2014), 293-317; John Leonard, *Faithful Labourers: A Reception History of Paradise Lost, 1667-1970*, 2 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Tom Lockwood, 'Milton in the twentieth century', in *John Milton: Life, Writing, Reputation*, ed. by Paul Hammond and Blair Worden (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 167-86. The wider historical context of this article is indebted to these works.
- <sup>9</sup> Stephen Burt, "'Rebellious Authority": Robert Lowell and Milton at Midcentury', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 24.2 (2000-1), 337-47 (p. 341).
- <sup>10</sup> Leonard, *Faithful Labourers*, I, 230.
- <sup>11</sup> Cleanth Brooks, 'Milton and Critical Re-Estimates', *PMLA*, 66.6 (1951), 1045-54 (p. 1046).
- <sup>12</sup> Helen Thaventhiran, *Radical Empiricists: Five Modernist Close Readers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 7.
- <sup>13</sup> Leavis, 'Milton's Verse', p. 123.
- <sup>14</sup> Allen Tate, 'A Note on Milton', *New Republic*, 21 October 1931, pp. 266-68 (p. 266).
- <sup>15</sup> John Milton, 'Lycidas' (1637), in *Complete Shorter Poems*, ed. by John Carey, 2nd edn (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2007), ll. 1-2. All further references to Milton's shorter poetry will be to this edition and given in the text.
- <sup>16</sup> Leavis, 'Milton's Verse', in *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1936), pp. 42-61.
- <sup>17</sup> Hart Crane, letter to Slater Brown, 22 October 1931, in *The Letters of Hart Crane: 1916 – 1932*, ed. by Brom Weber (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1965), p. 384.
- <sup>18</sup> John Crowe Ransom, letter to Allen Tate, 23 November 1931, in *Selected Letters of John Crowe Ransom*, ed. by Thomas Daniel Young and George Core (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), pp. 204-05. It is testament to the obscurity of Tate's article that Young and Core erroneously attribute Ransom's comment here to Tate's later article 'A Note on Donne' (1932). On Ransom's appreciation of Milton in *God Without Thunder*, see Denis Donoghue, *Adam's Curse: Reflections on Theology and Literature* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), pp. 11-28.
- <sup>19</sup> Tate, 'A Note on Milton', p. 266.
- <sup>20</sup> Tate, 'A Note on Donne' (1932), in *Essays of Four Decades* (Chicago, IL: Swallow Press, 1969), pp. 239-46 (pp. 244, 246).
- <sup>21</sup> Burt, 'Lowell and Milton at Midcentury', p. 342.
- <sup>22</sup> Tate, 'A Note on Milton', p. 267.
- <sup>23</sup> Tate, letter to Donald Davidson, 14 May 1926, in *The Literary Correspondence of Donald Davidson and Allen Tate*, ed. by John Tyree Fain and Thomas Daniel Young (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1974), p. 166.
- <sup>24</sup> Langdon Hammer, *Hart Crane and Allen Tate: Janus-Faced Modernism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp. 44-45.
- <sup>25</sup> Tate, 'A Note on Milton', pp. 266-67.
- <sup>26</sup> Samuel Johnson, 'Milton' (1779), in *The Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets*, ed. by Roger Lonsdale, 4 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), I, 242-94 (p. 278).
- <sup>27</sup> Ransom, 'A Poem Nearly Anonymous', *The American Review*, 1.2 (1933), 179-203 (p. 189).

- <sup>28</sup> Michael C. Battestin, 'John Crowe Ransom and *Lycidas*: A Reappraisal', *College English*, 17.4 (1956), 223-28 (p. 223).
- <sup>29</sup> F. T. Prince, *The Italian Element in Milton's Verse*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), p. 81.
- <sup>30</sup> Ransom, 'A Poem Nearly Anonymous', p. 184.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 184, 191, 189.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 179-80.
- <sup>34</sup> Ransom, 'A Poem Nearly Anonymous', in *The World's Body* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), pp. 1-28 (p. 2).
- <sup>35</sup> Ransom, 'Waste Lands' (1923), in *T. S. Eliot: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. by Jewel Spears Brooker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 106-08 (pp. 106, 108).
- <sup>36</sup> Tate, 'Waste Lands' (1923), in *The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. by Brooker pp. 109-10 (p. 109).
- <sup>37</sup> Mark Jancovich, 'The Southern New Critics', in *Modernism and the New Criticism*, ed. by A. Walton Litz, Louis Menand and Lawrence Rainey, *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), VII, 200-18 (p. 202).
- <sup>38</sup> Ransom, 'A Poem Nearly Anonymous', p. 203.
- <sup>39</sup> Tate, 'A Note on Milton', p. 268. Thomas Warton in his edition of Milton's *Poems* (London: James Dodsley, 1785) writes that: 'He who wishes to know whether he has a true taste for Poetry or not, should consider, whether he is highly delighted or not with the perusal of Milton's *Lycidas*' (p. 34).
- <sup>40</sup> Tate, letter to Donald Davidson, 18 February 1929, in *The Literary Correspondence of Davidson and Tate*, pp. 224-25.
- <sup>41</sup> Tate, 'Postscript', in *T. S. Eliot: The Man and his Work*, ed. by Tate (London: Chatto & Windus, 1967), pp. 386-90 (p. 387).
- <sup>42</sup> Tate, 'Ode to the Confederate Dead' (1937), in *Collected Poems: 1919-1976* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), ll. 10-24.
- <sup>43</sup> Tate, 'Narcissus as Narcissus' (1938), in *Essays of Four Decades*, pp. 593-607 (p. 602).
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 603.
- <sup>45</sup> Tate, 'A Note on Milton', p. 266.
- <sup>46</sup> Milton, 'The Readie and Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth' (1660), in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. by Don M. Wolfe, 8 vols (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1953-82), VII: *1659-1660*, ed. by Robert W. Ayers (1980), pp. 396-463 (p. 462); Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1674), ed. by Alastair Fowler, 2nd edn (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2007), VII. 25-26.
- <sup>47</sup> As quoted in John Shawcross, *John Milton and Influence: Presence in Literature, History, and Culture* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1991), p. 139.
- <sup>48</sup> Robert Lowell, 'Interview with A. Alvarez' (1965), in *Robert Lowell: Interviews and Memoirs*, ed. by Jeffrey Meyers (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1988), pp. 99-108 (pp. 104-05).
- <sup>49</sup> Stanley Kunitz, 'The Sense of Life' (1977), in *Interviews and Memoirs*, ed. by Meyers, pp. 230-35 (p. 234).
- <sup>50</sup> Burt, 'Lowell and Milton at Midcentury', p. 347.
- <sup>51</sup> Geoffrey Hill, interview with John Haffenden, in *Viewpoints: Poets in Conversation with John Haffenden* (London: Faber & Faber, 1981), pp. 76-99 (p. 78).
- <sup>52</sup> Hill, 'Acceptance Speech for the T. S. Eliot Prize', *Image: A Journal of the Arts and Religion*, 28 (2000), 72-76 (p. 74).

- 
- <sup>53</sup> Langdon Hammer, 'The American Poetry of Thom Gunn and Geoffrey Hill', *Contemporary Literature*, 43.4 (2002), 644-66 (p. 656).
- <sup>54</sup> Hill, 'Acceptance Speech', p. 74.
- <sup>55</sup> 'What many of us responded to, sixty or sixty-five years ago, in F. R. Leavis's essay on Keats in *Revaluation...*'. Hill, 'What you look hard at seems to look hard at you', Oxford Professor of Poetry lecture, 6 May 2014 <<http://media.podcasts.ox.ac.uk/engfac/poetry/2014-08-11-engfac-poetry-hill-3.mp3>> [accessed 28 February 2017].
- <sup>56</sup> As well as Hammer's article on Hill and Tate which is cited above, see Philip Horne, 'Poets and Prophets: Geoffrey Hill in America', *Symbiosis*, 2.2 (1998), 161-74 and Steven Matthews, 'Geoffrey Hill's Complex Affinities with American Agrarian Poetry', *Cambridge Quarterly*, 44.4 (2015) 321-40.
- <sup>57</sup> This is discussed by Hill in 'Fields of Force', Oxford Professor of Poetry lecture, 27 November 2012, available online at <<http://media.podcasts.ox.ac.uk/engfac/poetry/2012-11-27-engfac-hill.mp3>> [accessed 28 February 2017].
- <sup>58</sup> Stephen James, *Shades of Authority: The Poetry of Lowell, Hill and Heaney* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), p. 110.
- <sup>59</sup> Henry Hart, 'Early poems: journeys, meditations and elegies', in *Geoffrey Hill: Essays on his Work*, ed. by Peter Robinson (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1985), pp. 2-19 (p. 12); Steven Matthews, 'Hill's Uncollected Oxford Poems', in *Geoffrey Hill and his Contexts*, ed. by Piers Pennington and Matthew Sperling (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011), pp. 5-24 (p. 20).
- <sup>60</sup> Elder Olson, 'William Empson, Contemporary Criticism and Poetic Diction', *Modern Philology*, 47.4 (1950), 222-52 (p. 230).
- <sup>61</sup> Hill, 'The Dream of Reason', *Essays in Criticism*, 14.1 (1964), 91-101 (pp. 93-4).
- <sup>62</sup> E. M. W. Tillyard, *Milton* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1930), p. 80.
- <sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.
- <sup>64</sup> Hill, 'An Ark on the Flood', *Isis*, 10 March 1954, pp. 18-19.
- <sup>65</sup> Hart, 'Early poems', p. 14.
- <sup>66</sup> Psalm 137.1-4.
- <sup>67</sup> Hannibal Hamlin, *Psalm Culture and Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 235.