Abstract Geoffrey Hill’s approaches to memorializing the Holocaust in his poetry have been widely examined for his innovative, self-conscious, elegiac practice and their embodiment of the anxieties of the postmemorial witness. His 1998 book-length poem *The Triumph of Love* attempts to bear witness to the trauma of the Holocaust through numerous cross-cutting and argumentative sections which meditate on history, memory, and the role of the poet after atrocity. What is most striking about Hill’s witnessing of the Holocaust in *The Triumph of Love* is his linguistic representations of photographs of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (1943), a complicated encounter between word and image which has not been previously examined. Hill selects photographs taken by Nazi photographers during the suppression of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in his poetic memorialization of the Holocaust. I argue that Hill depicts these photographs in order to refocus the narrative of perpetration embedded within the images. These reimagined photographs become linguistic objects capable of fostering a state memorialization within Hill’s poem. I investigate *The Triumph of Love* by considering the role that perpetrator photographs can play in literary representations of post-Holocaust memory.

Keywords the Holocaust; Holocaust poetry; Geoffrey Hill; poetry; photography

Throughout his career stretching over five decades, Geoffrey Hill frequently represented the Holocaust in his poetry. His 1968 poem ‘September Song’ is an oft-cited example of non-victim representation of the Holocaust in literature, and has been absorbed into the canon of post-Holocaust memorial poetry. Its famed parenthesized declaration:

(I have made an elegy for myself it is true)¹

questions whether Hill’s poetic memorialization can be an adequate offering to victims of Nazi persecution. This anxiety of the post-Holocaust witness is articulated in different ways in each of his Holocaust poems. A less frequently explored example is a poem published three decades after ‘September Song’ in 1998: *The Triumph of Love. The Triumph of Love* is a vast and complex book-length poem made up of numerous cross-cutting sections that exist in conversation and contradiction with one another. In the poem, Hill makes expansive meditations on history, memory, and the role of poetry after catastrophe and violence. The Holocaust is present in Hill’s poem as a legacy of human atrocity that is pervasive and devastatingly consequential. The poem faces the enormity of the Holocaust and memorializes victims of Nazi persecution. What is most striking about Hill’s witnessing of the Holocaust in *The Triumph of Love* is his linguistic representations of perpetrator photographs. I use the term ‘perpetrator photographs’ to refer to images taken during the Holocaust by the Nazis, their collaborators, and their allies. In the poem, we are faced with photographs taken by Nazi photographers during the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto in Hill’s memorialization of Jewish people persecuted and murdered by the Nazi regime.

This essay focuses on three sections of *The Triumph of Love*: XIX, XX, and LXXV, which contain the poem’s most explicit engagements with the Holocaust. Intrinsic to Hill’s representations of the Holocaust in these sections is his reference to perpetrator photographs. This essay explores the way in which perpetrator photographs are drawn on and depicted in the poem through two strands of theoretical inquiry. First, I consider the ethical complexities of engaging with photographs taken by and for Nazis, particularly through Marianne Hirsch’s writings on the Nazi gaze embedded in perpetrator images.² Second, I consider the representation of perpetrator photographs in the poem to demonstrate the creation of prothetic memories through Alison Landsberg’s theory as outlined in her monograph *Prosthetic Memory.*³ These theoretical approaches help me to construct an in-depth and ethically considered analysis of Hill’s memorial witnessing of the Holocaust in *The Triumph of Love,* and to evaluate the implications of the use of perpetrator photographs in the poem. I argue that Hill represents perpetrator photographs in order to refocus the Nazi gaze of the images. This act of refocusing allows for a reimagining and repurposing of the photographs as images of commemoration, active memorialization, and sustained memory.

I interpret the photographs to which Hill refers in *The Triumph of Love* as being of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and liquidation.⁴ He writes about ‘stills of the burning ghetto’⁵ and appears directly to describe photographs taken during the burning and liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto.⁶ During the resistance uprising in 1943, SS General Jürgen Stroop ordered the systematic burning of all buildings inside the ghetto. Thousands of Jewish people were burned alive and
of that deed but also the desire to flaunt and advertise the evidence. Photographs provide evidence not only of the perpetrator’s deed but also the desire to flaunt and advertise the evidence of that deed. She suggests that, “This photographic addition to the record of the ghetto’s liquidation shows more than the details of the roundup and deportation: it shows the particular ways in which Jews were overpowered and humiliated by their captors.” The photographs contained in The Stroop Report are not solely a documentation of evidence by the Nazis; they also show the act of relishing in the deportation and murder of thousands of Jewish people. Janina Struk refers to The Stroop Report as ‘a commemoration of the liquidation of the ghetto’ and notes its celebratory and self-congratulatory purpose. This is the very specific contextual background to the images Hill chooses to depict in his poem: they were taken by Nazi perpetrators for Nazi perpetrators and functioning in a propaganda report celebrating the suppression of a Jewish uprising.

The detail with which Hill describes photographs of the Warsaw Ghetto liquidation in The Triumph of Love indicates that it is likely that he witnessed these images himself. The photographs had been shown in a number of exhibitions by the time Hill was writing his poem, including one at the Assembly Rooms of Hackney Town Hall in July 1961. The report was first published by Secker & Warburg in 1980 in the original German alongside an English translation, with reproductions of the photographs. More recently, Yad Vashem has catalogued photographs from the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and liquidation, including those contained in The Stroop Report, both in the Yad Vashem Archives and on the Yad Vashem website. It appears that Hill uses his experience of witnessing photographs of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and liquidation to construct his poetic memorialization of the Holocaust. The experience of witnessing evidence of Nazi atrocity has triggered the act of bearing witness in writing memorial poetry. His linguistic memorialization is focused through visual acts of witnessing, as he considers the role that perpetrator photographs can play in literary representations of post-Holocaust memory.

Writing and refocusing the perpetrator perspective

The poetical of The Triumph of Love is comprised of a dialogic interplay of multiple voices which compete, contradict one another, and overlap. Throughout the poem voices intermingle playfully and perspectives shift between contrasting positions. In section XIX, Hill introduces his construction of Nazi voices into the poetic stage of dialogic play in order to access memories of the Holocaust that are not his own, and this continues into section XX. I reproduce sections XIX and XX here:

XIX
If you so wish to construe this, I shall say only: the Jew is not beholden to forgiveness, of pity. You will have to go forward block by block, for pity’s sake, irresolute as granite. Now move to the next section.

XX
From the Book of Daniel, am I correct?
Quite correct, sir. Permit me: refocus that Jew—yes there, that one. You see him burning, dropping feet first, in a composed manner, still in suspension, from the housetop.
It will take him for ever caught at this instant of world-exposure.
In close-up he maintains appearance—
Semitic ur-Engel—
terminal agony none the less interminable, the young martyrs ageing in the fire—
thank you, Hauptmann—Schauspieler?
Run it through again and for ever he stretches his wings of flame upon instruction.

The first Nazi introduced to the poem’s cacophony of voices is overtly and violently antisemitic, saying that ‘the Jew is not beholden/to forgiveness, of pity’. Jews are referred to as ‘the’ and ‘that’ by the Nazis of the poem, in an explicit linguistic signifier of dehumanization and hatred. The first Nazi voice commands power and authority, giving instructions both to the other Nazis in the scene and to the reader of the poem. The Nazi breaks the boundary between poetic voice and reader by demanding ‘Now/move on to the next section’. Both Hill the poet and his fictional Nazi voices are in
conversation with the readers of the poem as an exchange of dialogue and memories traverses the line of experience and the boundary between the imagined and the real.

Stephanie Bird, in ‘Perpetrators and Perpetration in Literature’, argues that literature offers a space to represent perpetrators without necessarily reductively empathizing with them or resolving the perpetrator perspective. Literature, she suggests: ‘belongs to the realm of play and speculation, where it need not operate in the service of argument of coherence but can articulate multiple perspectives, imagine contradictions, and convey unresolved emotions and motivations’.16

The representation of perpetrators in literary texts can form part of linguistically creating a multiplicity of voices and perspectives. Bird’s discussion of the ‘dialogic and often incoherent interplay of voices’17 of literary texts which represent perpetrators and perpetration is relevant to Hill’s approach to writing Nazi perspectives in The Triumph of Love. Formal qualities of the poem are an inherent part of the representation of perpetration: poetic play with voice, perspective, and syntactic structure allows for an intermingling of perpetrator and non-perpetrator voices. The result is a representation of the perpetrator voice which does not resolve or endorse the Nazi perspective.

In section XX, the voices and perspectives shift and intermingle, creating a framing effect. The perpetrator perspective is written both through first-person Nazi voices and a second-person voice who comments on the Nazis’ actions and thoughts. Section XX opens with Hill’s appropriation of two Nazi voices in conversation with one another. It then moves to a second-person view of the Nazis who look at and talk about a photograph of a Jewish man dropping to his death from a burning building. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum captions this photograph ‘A Jewish man leaps to his death from the top story window of an apartment block during the suppression of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising’.18 The original caption in The Stroop Report read ‘Bandits jump to escape capture’. We only have Nazi sources of information on what happened in this image, and so it is impossible to know the exact circumstances in which this man died. The man may have chosen under these extreme circumstances to jump, to escape death by fire or to cheat the Nazis of his death by choosing suicide (although the extent to which one can ‘choose’ any option in such a situation is arguable). He may have been inadvertently or deliberately pushed by others trapped in the building. In the rest of this essay I will use the word ‘dropping/dropped’ to refer to the man’s movement. Although an imperfect option, this word allows for the scope of him choosing to jump, or being forced out of the window of the burning building. ‘Dropping’ is also the word Hill uses to describe the photograph in the poem.19

Acknowledging the agency of the man as a resistance fighter is important when discussing this image, alongside the fact that our frame of reference for understanding it is overshadowed by the Nazi perspective.

Section XX of The Triumph of Love closes by returning to the Nazi voices. Hill’s perpetrators witness a photograph together. Yet the second person poetic voice, who is not directly present in the scene, also describes the photographic object. The witnessing is layered through the perpetrators’ interpretation of the photograph and the second-person voice’s interpretation of both the photograph and the perspective of the Nazis who witness it. The photograph itself is a real-life object around which the imagined scene builds shifting and layered perspectives. I believe that Hill is suggesting that the Nazi officers are viewing the photograph by reproducing the still image using projecting equipment. The Nazi voice says, ‘refocus that Jew—yes there,/that one’, leading me to understand that the still photograph can be focused on and refocused—such as through a projector. Later, this same Nazi voice commands ‘Run it through again’, which I take to indicate that the photographs from The Stroop Report are being looked at in series by the Nazis projecting them in a photographic display. Here, the word ‘refocus’ refers to the photographic display being adjusted to make the image clearer, but the Nazi is also asking those present to draw their attention to the image of the Warsaw Ghetto liquidation. The photograph as an object of witnessing can be both focused on by the eye of the witness and focused through the reproduction of the image Hill describes.

Hill’s visual metaphor of ‘refocusing’ the photograph and the gaze upon it resonates with Hirsch’s writings on perpetrator photographs of the Holocaust. She argues that such photographs taken by perpetrators have embedded within them a ‘distinctive textuality’20 of perpetration, dehumanization, and violence. This distinctive textuality is produced by the Nazi gaze of the image and cannot be separated from the photograph. Hirsch writes that ‘perpetrator photographs are ruled by what we might term a “Nazi gaze” that deeply shatters the visual field and profoundly reorients the basic structures of photographic looking’.21 The role of the photographer as perpetrator is inseparable from the photographs they take. Taking photographs of people being tortured, humiliated, and murdered, and of their bodies after they have been killed, was a part of the Nazi machine of destruction. The ways in which the subjects of the photograph respond to and interact with the photographer shows this relationship of power and terror in the photographs. The Nazi gaze is an integral part of how and why these photographs were taken, and the gaze that ‘rules’ the image can be seen in the photographs themselves.

The distinctive textuality of the images that Hill represents in The Triumph of Love is found in the fact that they were taken by Nazi perpetrators to document the annihilation of Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto. Within this act of documentation lies the
desire to dehumanize and humiliate those who were murdered and deported, and to glorify the Nazi suppression of a resistance movement. Both violence and propaganda are embedded in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising photographs, and Hill acknowledges and responds to this in his linguistic portrayal of the images.

Hirsch goes on to argue that, although the Nazi gaze cannot be removed from perpetrator photographs, the ‘look’ that we bestow on an image is oriented and changed by each witness. She writes:

While the gaze is external to human subjects situating them authoritatively in ideology, constituting them in their subjectivity, the look is located at a specific point; it is local and contingent, mutual and reversible, traversed by desire and defined by lack. While the look is returned, the gaze turns the subject into a spectacle. Comparable with Roland Barthes’ ‘punctum’, Hirsch’s ‘look’ is the specific point that a person focuses upon when viewing an image. The look upon a perpetrator photograph is different for each viewer and is filtered through that viewer’s ideology and experience. Hirsch sees the potential that our look upon a perpetrator image can displace the Nazi gaze in a memorial or mournful act, whilst simultaneously acknowledging that gaze to be an inescapable part of the photograph. Although the original context about which Hirsch writes is the Holocaust, whilst simultaneously imagining the perspective of the children and grandchildren of survivors in the postmemorial

For Hirsch, refocusing the look is integral to using perpetrator photographs for memorial purposes by post-Holocaust generations. She writes that, ‘Through repetition, displacement, and recontextualization, postmemorial viewers attempt to live with, and at the same time to reenvision and redirect, the mortifying gaze of these surviving images.’ Postmemorial witnesses of perpetrator photographs guide and defined by lack. While the look is returned, the gaze turns the subject into a spectacle. Comparable with Roland Barthes’ ‘punctum’, Hirsch’s ‘look’ is the specific point that a person focuses upon when viewing an image. The look upon a perpetrator photograph is different for each viewer and is filtered through that viewer’s ideology and experience. Hirsch sees the potential that our look upon a perpetrator image can displace the Nazi gaze in a memorial or mournful act, whilst simultaneously acknowledging that gaze to be an inescapable part of the photograph. Although the original context about which Hirsch writes is the Holocaust, whilst simultaneously imagining the perspective of the children and grandchildren of survivors in the postmemorial generations, her ideas are also helpful in understanding experiences of postmemorial witnesses who do not have familial connections to the Holocaust.

For Hirsch, refocusing the look is integral to using perpetrator photographs for memorial purposes by post-Holocaust generations. She writes that, ‘Through repetition, displacement, and recontextualization, postmemorial viewers attempt to live with, and at the same time to reenvision and redirect, the mortifying gaze of these surviving images.’ Postmemorial witnesses of perpetrator photographs guide and think critically about their own look upon a perpetrator image in order to redirect the Nazi gaze. In The Triumph of Love Hill represents both the Nazi gaze of the Warsaw Ghetto photographs and the shifting look of the postmemorial witness. He attempts to revert the mortifying gaze of the photograph of the man dying in the ghetto liquidation by writing the Nazi gaze and perspective and then deconstructing it through a shifting focus on the secondary witness within an overarching memorial objective.

In section XX a second-person shift arrives in the statement ‘You see him burning, dropping feet first’. The poetic voice of the poem has ‘refocused’ their sight onto the photograph, whilst simultaneously imagining the perspective of the Nazis who view the image. The photograph is described in the central part of this section through these two layers of witnessing which merge and have blurred boundaries. Here, Hill represents the Nazi gaze of the image and the look that he directs upon the image as a postmemorial viewer. The Nazis of the scene ‘refocus’ the image because they wish to see more clearly the photograph that depicts their act of forcing a Jewish man to a point where death is the only option. Hill’s poetic voice is refocusing his look upon the image in a different way. His act of refocusing his look is part of imagining how a photograph which is ruled by the Nazi gaze can be looked at, written about, and imagined as a memorial object. Hill’s act of refocusing hopes that this photograph can become a part of memorial witnessing that does not endorse the Nazi gaze of the image, despite the inescapability of that Nazi gaze.

Hill writes that ‘dropping feet first’ from the burning building ‘will take him for ever’. The perpetrators sadistically imagine that the existence of the photograph means that this moment of torture can continue to exist eternally, prolonging the man’s suffering indefinitely. In contrast, Hill’s voice suggests that the ‘terminal agony’ of his murder is ‘none the less/interminable’: paradoxically unending because of the photograph which preserves the moment in time. Hill highlights how the trauma of his death is preserved by the photograph in a way that militates against honouring that death. The victim is frozen in a moment of time before his death, and thus it is as if he is preserved in the Nazi gaze forever.

Hill writes that, due to the capturing of the man’s image, ‘for ever/he stretches his wings of flame/upon instruction’. The manipulation of the man’s image through the witnessing of this photograph is interpreted by the Nazis to be the victim acting forcibly ‘upon instruction’. In contrast, Hill’s poetic voice imagines the victim’s actions to be that of him ‘[stretching] his wings of flame’. The ‘wings of flame’ echo Hill’s poetic voice’s previous assertion that the burning man and other victims in the photographs from The Stroop Report appear as ‘martyrs’. These language choices acknowledge that the photographs show a Jewish resistance movement, and that the man whose death we are witnessing in this image was a resistance fighter. This perspective is modified by the Nazi voice that closes section XX on a separate poetic line, adding ‘upon instruction’. For the Nazis, photographing the victim’s death is a force of power over him. For Hill’s memorial voice, he is able to be envisaged as a ‘martyr’: a symbolic act of defiance. Hill’s language choices ascribe agency to the man and envisage his death as an act of resistance.

Hill’s poetic representation of layers of witnessing of a photograph animates what Hirsch calls a ‘retrospective scene of looking shared by those who survive’. Both the Nazis of the poem and Hill share a space of looking in the body of the poem. The Nazis bring a Nazi gaze based on the shared ideology with the photographer, and Hill approaches the image with commemorative goals and a
position of empathy with the victim. This retrospective space of imagining the moment when the photograph was taken can be shared both by Hill and his fictionalized Nazi characters because of the multiplicity of voices and perspectives that his poetic praxis allows. Writing a poem in which Nazi perpetrators and a postmemorial secondary witness observe and comment on the same photograph is Hill's complex and layered attempt to refocus and repurpose the atrocity image for his own process of memorialization.

Hirsch also writes about how postmemorial witnesses approach atrocity photographs, which helps us to understand the implications of Hill’s poetic depiction of perpetrator images. She writes of postmemorial witnesses of Holocaust photographs: ‘Too late to help, utterly impotent, we nevertheless search for ways to take responsibility for what we are seeing, to experience, from a remove, even as we try to redefine, if not repair, these ruptures.’ Hill’s poetic praxis is a representation of this process. In calling upon voices of both perpetrators and secondary witnesses he acknowledges that the atrocity he sees in the photograph from the Warsaw Ghetto liquidation cannot be repaired or undone. He attempts to experience that which he witnesses in writing his own poetic voice into the scene and imagining the brutal reality of the purpose for which this image was taken. His poetic voice stands as a counterpoint to the Nazi voices that he constructs. Hill attempts to redefine the gaze and narrative of the image from one of humiliation and devastation to one of resistance, memory, and mournful commemoration, without passing over the importance of the original intention of the image and its embedded gaze of perpetration.

Hill’s representation of refocusing the Nazi perspective as a secondary witness resonates with Susan A. Crane’s writing on ‘Choosing not to Look’ at photographs of the Holocaust. Importantly, Hill chooses not to include photographs from The Stroop Report in his poem, and so his readers can also choose not to look. Crane uses the concept of a ‘verbal caption’ to describe the reception of an atrocity image. A verbal caption is an ephemeral piece of evidence of the intended context of reception of a perpetrator photograph. When Nazi perpetrators viewed photographs taken for purposes of propaganda and humiliation their discussion of the image formed a verbal caption. That verbal evidence of the original reception of the photograph is lost, yet it forms the basis of the re-interpretation of that image in different times and contexts. Crane writes that ‘just as the reception of an atrocity image is constrained by the context of its presentation, discussion among viewers acts as a verbal caption and as a foundational collective memory’. Atrocity images are ‘shaped interactively within the social, cultural, and historical context of sharing images, and the meanings associated with photographs […] form within collective memories that are never recorded’. The Nazi perspective of photographs of atrocities of the Holocaust is embedded within each image itself. Yet the Nazi perspective is also found in the way in which the image is shared and spoken about, a form of verbal caption that is not recorded. The collective memory of atrocity images evolves from this initial context of reception.

In section XX, Hill imagines this context and records his own Nazi-voiced verbal captions linguistically in the poem. Verbal captions that were lost to history are re-imagined by Hill in his decision to voice the Nazis discussing the photograph of the death of a man in the Warsaw Ghetto liquidation. By writing the scene of Nazis witnessing the photograph, Hill acknowledges the reason for which they were taken. He creates Nazi voices in order to recognize the Nazi gaze that produced the photographs. The fictional verbal caption imagines the original and intended context of reception of the perpetrator photographs, before his own poetic voice brings a new frame of reference to the images in attempting to use them in his commemorative memorialization. Hill, as a postmemorial viewer of a perpetrator photograph, acknowledges the inescapable Nazi gaze whilst imagining that it is possible to honour the victim in this act.

**Perpetrator photographs and prosthetic memories**

The role of perpetrator photographs in *The Triumph of Love* reflects Alison Landsberg’s concept of ‘prosthetic memory’. Prosthetic memories are those which do not belong directly to a first-hand witness, but instead are formed of cultural technologies of reproduction and the potential for new memories that comes with this. Regarding post-Holocaust memory, Landsberg suggests that ‘alternative methods for transmitting and disseminating memories’ are necessary because of the enormous numbers of people murdered, and the attempted annihilation of Jewish life and culture by the Nazi regime. She writes, ‘We are facing the absence of survivors as well as the absence of specific memory practices, traditions, and rituals that might work to ground the event’. For Landsberg, a new vision of memory emerges in the experience of the post-Holocaust secondary witness:

This new form of memory, which I call *prosthetic memory*, emerges at the interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past, at an experiential site such as a movie theatre or museum. In this moment of contact, an experience occurs through which the person suturets himself or herself into a larger history […] In the process that I am describing, the person does not simply apprehend a historical narrative but takes on a more personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live. The resulting prosthetic memory has the ability to shape that person’s subjectivity and politics.
This concept helps in explaining the secondary witnessing of those who attempt to memorialize the Holocaust and were not first-hand witnesses to Nazi persecution. Landsberg writes that modern technologies of reproduction enable people who were not first-hand witnesses to 'suture' themselves into the traumatic history they encounter. She uses the word 'suture', a medical term for a stitch or row of stitches, to represent the process of attaching oneself to a traumatic history, and the experience of attaching new memories to a vision of one’s own identity and history. This process is ‘a sensuous phenomenon experienced by the body’, as the prosthetic memory feels like a physical part of the witness. The memory that is ‘sutured’ is a prosthetic: an additional attachment which was not inherently part of the secondary witness and their catalogue of experience but which now feels deeply personal.

I have explored the implications of writing and refocusing the Nazi perspective through perpetrator photographs in sections XIX and XX of The Triumph of Love. This use of photography in Hill’s memorial poem, along with later references to perpetrator images in section LXXV, echo Landsberg’s writings on prosthetic memory. Certainly, Hill is not acknowledging a theory that emerged after he wrote the poem. But examining the memories and images that the poem depicts through the framework of Landsberg’s theory helps us to understand the complexities of witnessing that take place in Hill’s memorialization of the Holocaust. Retrospectively examining the poem alongside Landsberg’s writings reveals the prosthetic memories in play within Hill’s poetic memorialization. Perpetrator photographs in the poem enable Hill’s poetic voice (and Hill himself as poet) to ‘suture’ themselves into the historical trauma of the Holocaust in their own memory.

Sections XIX and XX of The Triumph of Love can be read in line with the two components of prosthetic memory: visual-focused acts of witnessing (facilitated through photography), and the suturing of prosthetic memories (performed by Hill himself). Sections XIX and XX demonstrate the ways in which photograph-induced prosthetic memories can be transmutable and multifaceted in the process of remembering the Holocaust. Landsberg claims that photography holds the ability to ‘open up a world of images outside a person’s lived experience, creating a portable, fluid and nonessentialist form of memory’. Hill’s poetics relies on a ‘portable, fluid and nonessentialist form of memory’, through which his poetic voice can shift between Nazi perpetrators and the second-hand witness, and can represent a complex view of memories of the atrocity and its lasting effect. This fluid form of memory enables Hill to enter into ‘a world of images’ outside his own lived experiences without reductively appropriating the suffering of others.

The scene of XX is built around a photograph which can be witnessed by people at a temporal remove from the moment that it captures (including Hill) because of technologies of photographic reproduction. Hill is able to imagine the Nazis of the poem sharing the experience of witnessing the photograph because of technologies that allow the endless reproduction and distribution of images. These contexts have the potential for suturing prosthetic memories because they involve technologies of reproduction and an image of atrocity. The next layer of potential prosthetic memories comes in Hill’s poem. His multifaceted appropriation of various voices, including the perpetrator perspective, demonstrates the fluidity of prosthetic memories, and their ability to enable witnesses to enter into experiences that are not their own.

Prosthetic memories in section XX form an integral part of Hill’s attempt to refocus the Nazi gaze of the photograph, and, in turn, his attempt to imagine how perpetrator photographs can exist within a memorial process for victims of the Holocaust. Hill imagines that the image from the Warsaw Ghetto can become an object of post-Holocaust witnessing and memorialization of those persecuted by the Nazi regime. This is possible because his experience of witnessing the photograph sutured prosthetic memories of the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto and the suffering of the one man captured in the image. These prosthetic memories enable Hill to understand the Nazi gaze and perspective embedded in the image, and also give him the ability to refocus his gaze and shift that perspective. The result is a memorial poem which offers a way of witnessing the photograph without appropriating its Nazi gaze. Section XX demonstrates its poet’s prosthetic memories and allows its readers into this space where prosthetic memories of the Holocaust may be sutured.

Section LXXV of The Triumph of Love is in direct conversation with XIX and XX. As we have seen, in XX Hill describes Nazi perpetrators viewing a projected photograph of a Jewish man being burned to death. In LXXV he describes ‘stills of the burning ghetto’ that he has viewed himself, referring to the rest of the photographs from The Stroop Report. The narrative of the poem connects the photographic objects depicted in XX and LXXV, and prosthetic memories are created by this representation of perpetrator photographs. I reproduce this section of the poem here:

LXXV

A centrally-placed small round window, closed under a pediment, caught and stared back my fear centuries before I opened The Franchise Affair. I am not unusually sensitive to atmosphere, but one or two fiery dreams of houses held mid-day séance through my seventh year.
LXXV traces the origins of the speaker’s feelings of ‘peculiar dread’ associated with fire. ‘[F]irey dreams of houses’ haunt him at seven years of age. He recalls later reading The Franchise Affair, a novel in which the eponymous Franchise House is destroyed by arson. Hill’s voice connects this ‘fear’ triggered by images of burning buildings to two examples of photographic imagery: ‘photo-negatives’ which show ‘black façades, gap-windowed with solid-glare flame, and with stark/figures caught in some unhuman/intimate torment’, and ‘stills of the burning ghetto’. These images, like the photograph of XX, are of the liquidation and burning of the Warsaw Ghetto. The witnessing of these images becomes the trigger for the speaker’s feelings of dread and fear about fire. Witnessing the perpetrator photographs also causes empathy towards Jewish people persecuted and murdered by the Nazi regime. The photographs depicted in this section produce prosthetic memories of the persecution and murder of the Jewish inhabitants of the ghetto. These prosthetic memories have the permeating effect of retrospectively suturing themselves onto all other and prior memories of burning buildings, and the feelings of horror and torment that emerge from these memories.

The prosthetic memories demonstrated in LXXV exist in the interim between the public and the private. Prosthetic memories form from both the poet’s individual, subjective experience and images of collective access. Photographs of the Warsaw Ghetto liquidation witnessed directly by Hill have formed and shaped his prosthetic memories. The unique and personal nature of these memories is depicted in the poem which, in turn, has the potential to produce prosthetic memories for readers. This echoes the way in which Landsberg describes the nature of prosthetic memories:

Prosthetic memories are neither purely individual nor entirely collective but emerge at the interface of individual and collective experience. They are privately felt public memories that develop after an encounter with a mass cultural representation of the past, when new images and ideas come into contact with a person’s own archive of experience.36

The prosthetic memories evidenced in LXXV are privately felt public memories formed of mass cultural imagery and a personal experiential archive. The connective feelings of childhood nightmares, reading The Franchise Affair, and the haunting presence of a fear of fire are uniquely personal to Hill’s archive of experience. These experiences become intertwined with photographs of the liquidation of the ghetto, which are described as being ‘originals of this peculiar dread’. In this language choice, Hill again plays with photographic terminology with multiple meanings. The dread originates with the photographs, which are ‘originals’: photographs from an original negative.

The resulting prosthetic memories are evidenced in the poem itself, with evocative descriptions of the photographs, and an expression of affect towards those immortalized in them. The photograph in XX is of a man dropping to his death from a burning building, and Hill’s interpretation of the man and his experience is described intimately. In contrast, the level of access to the people photographed in the image in LXXV is distorted and limited, as they are inside the burning building rather than dropping from outside. These people are simply ‘stark figures’: outlines against the flames, concealed behind walls and accessible through gaps in the windows. The only access that Hill has to these people is a perception of their ‘unhuman/intimate torment’. Paradoxically, the figures appear like ‘unhuman’ shapes, yet Hill is still able to witness and interpret their ‘intimate torment’, a personal and subjective experience of suffering. Although the people in the building are only figures and outlines in the image he describes, the photograph has the capacity to produce rich, visceral prosthetic memories.

The prosthetic memories resulting from witnessing the perpetrator photographs allow for a greater understanding of ‘unhuman/intimate torment’ that the poetic voice ‘could not grasp/until [he] came to the stills of the burning ghetto’. A new feeling is ‘grasped’ directly because of the experience of witnessing perpetrator photographs. This ‘grasped’ feeling is a prosthetic memory of the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto, alongside the affect that is prompted by the prosthetic memory. Landsberg writes that ‘technologies of mass culture are a preeminent site for the production of empathy’,37 which is evidenced in Hill’s connective understanding of how his prosthetic memories sutured through witnessing the perpetrator photographs create in him an emotional reaction. The change resulting from prosthetic memories manifests in Hill’s memorial poem, which attempts to bear witness to the Holocaust, mourn those who were persecuted and murdered, and make sense of what part perpetrator photographs can play in this process.

The prosthetic memories evidenced in LXXV are intimately connected to the photograph of XX. The photograph projected in XX is one of the ‘stills of the burning ghetto’ referred to in LXXV. The mass mediated commodities of the ghetto photographs are able to form heterogenous prosthetic memories, envisaged from both a fictionalized Nazi
perspective and Hill’s own memorial perspective. The images become a commodity for propaganda and celebratory commemoration in the intended Nazi context but are also commodified in the widespread circulation that has enabled Hill to view the photographs himself. The multiplicity of these photographic objects echoes Landsberg’s statement that photography may allow for ‘a portable, fluid and nonessentialist form of memory’.38 Hill’s witnessing of the photographs forms a fluid memory without him having witnessed first-hand the Nazi atrocity. He is then able to depict that fluid memory of the photographs at a layer of remove through a dialogic poetics of memorialization.

Conclusions

Hill’s decision to depict perpetrator photographs in The Triumph of Love is an inherent part of his memorialization of Jewish victims of the Holocaust. In this article, I have analysed the ways in which photographs of the Warsaw Ghetto liquidation are examined and reimagined in Hill’s memorial context. The complex ethical questions raised through Hirsch’s writings on perpetrator photographs and the Nazi gaze have been further explored through thinking of the poem as a depicter and constructor of prosthetic memories. Without the use of photographs, the prosthetic memories of the poem no longer exist. In the use of perpetrator photographs Hill is able to represent the Nazi perspective without endorsing it. The multilayered witnessing constructed in the poem enables the poetic voice to ‘produce a memory that no one else has ever had’39 through their prosthetic memory. Hill’s use of perpetrator photographs in the poem produces a surplus of memory, which is added by his poetic process. This surplus of memory contributes to the act of memorialization that the poem constructs.

The implications of Hill’s use of perpetrator photographs in the poem can be interpreted through understanding the poem as a ‘transferential space’.40 Landsberg writes that transferential spaces are ‘arenas […] in which people might have an experience of events through which they did not live’,41 which in turn creates prosthetic memories. The Triumph of Love, as an object wherein an exchange takes place between reader and poet, becomes a space where memories can be transferred and prosthetic memories can be produced. Inside the world of the poem the spaces where photographs are viewed and discussed have the ability to be transferential. The poem which contains these depictions, and exists as an object of memorialization, may also be a transferential space itself. Prosthetic memories enabled by the memorial activity of the poem may be sutured both by the poet and the reader, as Hill takes his readers into a space of secondary witnessing through linguistically representing perpetrator photographs.

This transference takes place between Hill, as poet and witness of the Warsaw Ghetto photographs, and readers of the poem, who do not witness the images first-hand. Significantly, Hill chooses not to reproduce the photographs in the book of The Triumph of Love, nor to gesture explicitly towards them. Readers are forced to confront images they have not witnessed directly, but instead have experienced through the layered voices of the poem. This act of distancing from the photographic objects themselves calls into question the ethics of the post-war widespread circulation and publication of atrocity photographs taken during the Holocaust. Instead of enabling his readers to view the perpetrator photographs of the Warsaw Ghetto directly, through reproducing the images or explicitly guiding readers towards them, Hill filters this experience of postmemorial witnessing through his complex poetic representation of both perpetrators and secondary witnesses. Hill and the readers of his poem participate in secondary witnessing, though the readers do so at one level of remove further than Hill. The resulting poem is a complex, turbulent, and unresolved depiction of the process of attempting to reimagine perpetrator photographs as objects with the capacity to commemorate those immortalized within them.

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NOTES

1– Geoffrey Hill, Broken Hierarchies: Poems 1952–2012 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 44.
2– Marianne Hirsch, Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997); adem, The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); adem, ’Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory’, in Visual Culture and the Holocaust, ed. Barbie Zelizer (London: Althone, 2000), 214–46.
3– Alison Landsberg, Prophetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).
4– See the information available from Yad Vashem on the exhibition ‘Voices from the Inferno’, which contains video testimony of survivors of the Warsaw Ghetto liquidation: Yad Vashem, ‘Voices from the Inferno’, 2021, https://www.yadvashem.org/en/exhibitions/warsaw_ghetto_testimonies/index.asp (accessed 24 July 2020).
5– Geoffrey Hill, The Triumph of Love (London: Penguin, 1998), 44.
6– The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum catalogues photographs from the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. It is likely that the photograph described in XX of The Triumph of Love is photograph number 26568. I have decided not to include a reproduction of this image, but it can be accessed at the ‘Special Collections’, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2020, https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/psia16888291 (accessed 24 September 2020). John Burt, ‘History and Disaffection in Geoffrey Hill’s The Triumph of Love’, Sewanee Review 106, no. 4 (2001): 580–93; and Antony Rowland, Holocaust Poetry: Awkward Poetics in the Work of Sylvia Plath, Geoffrey Hill, Tony Harrison and Ted Hughes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 76–77.
consider that the Warsaw Ghetto is being represented in section XX of *The Triumph of Love*, but both suggest that Hill may be conjuring or imagining photographs or film footage, and so do not make explicit connections to the existent Warsaw Ghetto photographs. I take this a step further and argue that Hill is very likely to be drawing on specific images from the liquidation of the ghetto.

7–Israel Gutman, *Resistance: The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2004).
8–See Judith Keilbach and Kirsten Wächter, ‘Photographs, Symbolic Images, and the Holocaust: On the (IM)Possibility of Depicting Historical Truth’, *History and Theory* 48, no. 2 (2009): 54–76, for information about the photographs taken for The Stroop Report.
9–Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*, 139.
10–Ibid., 130.
11–Janina Struk, *Photographing the Holocaust: Interpretations of the Evidence* (New York: I. B. Tauris, 2004), 83.
12–See the Imperial War Museum’s catalogue entry for the pamphlet of this exhibition: ‘Warsaw Ghetto Exhibition’, Imperial War Museum, London, 2020, [https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/150088940](https://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/150088940) (accessed 27 July 2020).
13–See the Yad Vashem Archives collection of photographs from the Warsaw Ghetto: Yad Vashem, ‘Photographs from the Warsaw Ghetto’, 2021, [https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/warsaw_ghetto/introduction.asp](https://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/exhibitions/warsaw_ghetto/introduction.asp) (accessed 24 July 2020).
14–Hill, *Triumph of Love*, 10.
15–Ibid., 10–11.
16–Stephanie Bird, ‘Perpetrators and Perpetration in Literature’, in *The Routledge International Handbook of Perpetrator Studies*, ed. Susanne C. Knittel and Zachary J. Goldberg (New York: Routledge, 2020), 301–10, at 302.
17–Ibid., 307.
18–‘Special Collections’, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2020, [https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa1088291](https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa1088291) (accessed 24 September 2020).
19–Interestingly, in the earliest versions of section XX as seen in Hill’s draft notebooks, held in the University of Leeds Brotherton Library Special Collections, he uses the word ‘defenestration’, meaning the act of throwing someone or something out of a window; BC MS 20c Hill 2/1/42, Notebook 42: Canaan/*The Triumph of Love*.
20–Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*, 133.
21–Ibid.
22–Ibid., 135.
23–Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill & Wang, 1980).
24–Hirsch, ‘Surviving Images’, 237.
25–Ibid., 231
26–Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*, 138.
27–Susan Crane, ‘Choosing not to Look: Representation, Repatriation, and Holocaust Atrocity Photography’, *History and Theory* 47 (2008): 309–30, at 318. 28–Ibid.
29–Ibid., 320.
30–Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 2.
31–Ibid., 112.
32–Ibid., 2.
33–Ibid., 8.
34–Ibid., 18.
35–Hill, *Triumph of Love*, 44.
36–Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 19.
37–Ibid., 47.
38–Ibid., 18.
39–Ibid., 337.
40–Ibid., 34.
41–Ibid., 34–35.