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Chapter 2

CHRISTOPHER HILL'S WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN

1. The Problem of 1968

We have seen why 1968 is regarded as a watershed year in the more contemporary history of western radical thought. However, one of the seemingly curious features of the student-led radicalism of the late 1960s is the problem it posed for some western Marxists, particularly those of an ageing Marxist intellectual establishment. It might be thought that such figures would have been among the most enthusiastic supporters of the uprisings (as plenty of Marxists indeed were), particularly given that the American involvement in Vietnam was the most high profile point of unity across the Left, though even here there were notable exceptions such as Max Horkheimer. On the one hand, 1968 did overtly challenge dominant notions of power but, on the other, might not this radicalism be merely romantic and hopelessly ineffective? Or worse still, was it complicit or even potentially repressive?

Arguably the most famous example of Marxist establishment ambivalence was Theodor Adorno.¹ The final years and months of Adorno's life – at this point he was now denounced as a 'classicist' – involved some very personal tensions with the West German student movement. Infamous moments included the police being called in when the Institute for Social Research was occupied or when three women, with naked breasts on full show, theatrically confronted him with flower petals during one of his lectures. Some even blamed the student conflict for causing Adorno's fatal heart attack in 1969. This conflict was in part a debate over theory and practice but also the return of an old challenge from the radical Left. In 'Resignation' – an essay of defiance against his

1. For overviews and discussion see e.g. L. Jäger, *Adorno: A Political Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 192-208; S. Müller-Doohm, *Adorno: An Intellectual Biography* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005); D. Claussen, *Theodor W. Adorno: One Last Genius* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), e.g. pp. 1-2, 10, 201, 332-39.

perception of practice-dominated radicalism – Adorno laid some blame at the feet of a resurgent anarchism: ‘Its return is that of a ghost. The impatience with theory that manifests itself in its return does not advance thought beyond itself.’²

The British Marxist establishment was no exception to this ambivalence or even hostility. Eric Hobsbawm (1917–2012), a younger contemporary of Adorno, reacted in a number of ways to 1968, which included a fierce denunciation of anarchism that he saw as playing a prominent role in the upheavals. Hobsbawm claimed the main appeal of anarchism

was emotional and not intellectual... Admirable but hopeless... [T]he monumental ineffectiveness of anarchism...for most people of my generation...determined our rejection of it... Spanish anarchism [was] a tragic farce... [A]narchism as a revolutionary movement has failed... [T]he revival of interest in anarchism today seems so unexpected, surprising and – if I am to speak frankly – unjustified... [A]narchism has no significant contribution to socialist theory to make.³

That the prominence of anarchism in 1968, alongside the emergence of a range of playful (as well as serious) radicalisms, had the potential to cause problems for the generation of Marxists radicalised in the 1930s should not be that surprising. Furthermore, anarchism has, of course, had a long history of an uncomfortable relationship with Marxism, particularly over issues concerning the dictatorship of the proletariat and the role of the state, and highlighted most famously in the spats between Bakunin and Marx. To make matters worse for Hobsbawm, his politics and historical method were coming under attack from an emerging public intellectual with anarcho-syndicalist sympathies who also published in an influential book for the radical Left. In 1969, Noam Chomsky – who was until this moment better known for his study of linguistics – published his first major book on international politics, *American Power and the New Mandarins*. Among Chomsky’s criticisms of intellectuals was a sustained attack on establishment historians but which now included the Marxist Hobsbawm and his handling of Spanish anarchism three years prior in *New Left Review*:

2. T.W. Adorno, ‘Resignation (1969)’, in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 289–93 (292).

3. E. Hobsbawm, ‘Reflections on Anarchism (1969)’, in *Revolutionaries* (New York: New Press, 2001), pp. 97–108 (98–100, 105). For Hobsbawm’s ambivalent attitudes towards the political impact of the 1960s and 1968, see e.g. Hobsbawm, ‘Revolution and Sex’ (1969) and ‘May 1968’ (1968), in *Revolutionaries*, pp. 256–60, 279–91; E. Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times: A Twentieth Century Life* (London: Abacus, 2002), pp. 246–62.

the Spanish Civil War is not only one of the critical events of modern history but one of the most intensively studied as well. Yet there are surprising gaps. During the months following the Franco insurrection in July 1936, a social revolution of unprecedented scope took place throughout much of Spain. It had no 'revolutionary vanguard' and appears to have been largely spontaneous, involving masses of urban and rural laborers in a radical transformation of social and economic conditions that persisted, with remarkable success, until it was crushed by force. This predominantly anarchist revolution and the massive social transformation to which it gave rise are treated, in recent historical studies, as a kind of aberration, a nuisance that stood in the way of successful prosecution of the war to save the bourgeois regime from the Franco rebellion. Many historians would probably agree with Eric Hobsbawm that the failure of social revolution in Spain 'was due to the anarchists', that anarchism was 'a disaster', a kind of 'moral gymnastics' with no 'concrete results', at best 'a profoundly moving spectacle for the student of popular religion.'⁴

Around this time, the pair would also clash on this issue at the informal 'Problems of Contemporary Socialism' seminar at LSE where the challenges raised by student radicalism in the late 1960s were being hammered out in what is remembered as an electrifying environment.⁵

Questions relating to the re-emergence of anarchism more generally were also a serious issue for the Marxist establishment in the 1960s, and one full of ambivalence and ambiguity when such questions about the role of the state and the dictatorship of the proletariat inevitably meant (whether implicitly or explicitly) questions about the role of the Soviet Union. By 1968, the image of revolutionary Russia had long been tarnished, particularly due to Khrushchev's revelations about Stalin and the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, after which the Communist Party of Great Britain – previously the overwhelmingly dominant group on the radical British Left – had been haemorrhaging members.⁶ But now a range of post-1956 alternatives were becoming available in the more fragmented British radical Left, such as various Trotskyite movements and the emergence of CND in 1958, in which E.P. Thompson would find a new political home after he left the Communist Party in 1956. There were also various publishing endeavours (albeit with a shared family

4. N. Chomsky, *American Power and the New Mandarins* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1969), pp. 76-77, referring to E. Hobsbawm, 'The Spanish Background', *New Left Review* 40 (1966), pp. 85-90.

5. J. Derbyshire, 'The NS Profile: Ralph Miliband', *New Statesman* (30 August, 2010).

6. On the story of the post-1956 decline of the CPGB see e.g. F. Beckett, *Enemy Within: The Rise and Fall of the British Communist Party* (London: John Murray, 1995), pp. 124-228.

tree), such as *The Reasoner*, *The New Reasoner*, the *Universities and Left Review*, and the *New Left Review*, reflecting in different ways a new range of Marxist and leftist perspectives, including the more theoretically inclined strands of the New Left and the rise of British cultural studies, both of which would gain greater momentum post-1968.⁷

Of course, with hindsight it is easy enough to be a critic of the Soviet Union, but in the nineteenth century Bakunin had actually managed to make a famous and unnerving prediction about Marxism. He claimed that 'the revolutionary State' will be 'very powerful and highly centralized', that this State will 'establish a single state bank which will finance all labour and national commerce', that 'regimented workingmen and women will sleep, wake, work, and live to the beat of a drum' where 'the shrewd and educated will be granted government privileges', and that the State 'will be even more despotic than the former State, although it calls itself a Peoples' State'.⁸ And, after *Animal Farm* and 1956, Bakunin was proven right, was he not? And was he not proven *uncomfortably* right if you were a supporter of the Soviet Union who had lived through 1956? Was 1968 not a further warning to the old Marxist guard that their influence was waning?

This historic questioning of Marxism would pose a particular problem for a Marxist like Hobsbawm because of his personal investment in the Communist Party. Hobsbawm joined the Communist Party in 1936 after being converted as a teenager in Berlin in 1932 and, like many others radicalised in the 1930s, Communism seemed the only obvious choice in the face of the international ascendancy of fascism in Germany, Spain, and Italy, as well as the crisis of American capitalism and unemployment in Britain. Moreover, for this generation, the October Revolution was still a relatively fresh memory and the hope for world revolution was still very real. For the Jewish Hobsbawm, these concerns were more personal still as he came to England from central Europe after witnessing the fall of the Weimar Republic and the rise of German fascism. As he would later defend his post-1956 affiliation with the Communist Party, 'For someone who joined the movement where I came from and when I did, it was quite simply more difficult to break with the Party than for those who came later and from elsewhere'.⁹ Moreover, Hobsbawm, like other

7. See further D. Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left and the Origins of Cultural Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

8. M. Bakunin, *Selected Works* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), pp. 283-84.

9. Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times*, p. 218. See further E. Hobsbawm with A. Polito, *The New Century* (London: Abacus, 2000), pp. 158-62.

Communist Party members and sympathisers, justified his ongoing membership by pointing out that there was a genuine fear that America would wipe out the USSR and that the USSR was the only serious hope for socialism and related movements in the decolonising world.¹⁰ Siding with and using power for the perceived good of the cause, as well as a Popular Frontist mentality, would never leave Hobsbawm.¹¹

Hobsbawm's politics are not to be removed from his historical writing: he was a committed Marxist in both areas, even if being a historian was most crucial for his self-identity (a recurring theme in his autobiography, *Interesting Times*).¹² This is well illustrated by his active participation in the Communist Party Historians' Group (1946–56), which also broke up after the drama of 1956.¹³ The Communist Party Historians' Group would prove to be one of the most significant influences on British history writing. Its members (with lesser or greater commitment)

10. Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times*, p. 195.

11. Popular Frontism would mark Hobsbawm's political interests post-1968, including his involvement in Eurocommunism and the Kinnock-led Labour Party, where he was again highly critical of the Bennites as 'left sectarians' who would have left Labour as a 'marginalized socialist chapel' (Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times*, p. 272). While this was effectively the party line of the centre-left Labour Party of the 1980s (and Hobsbawm was famously known as Kinnock's favourite Marxist), it is an argument still framed more generally within a Marxist and Eurocommunist framework (pp. 263–81).

12. E.g. 'Fortunately, moving out of London had put me out of the range of London local branch work... for which I had no natural taste or temperament. From then on, in effect, I operated entirely in academic or intellectual groups... Why did we... find ourselves in the front line of opposition from the start? Essentially, because we had to confront the situation not only as private individuals and communist militants but in our professional capacity. The issue of what had been done under Stalin, and why it had been concealed, was literally a question about history' (*Interesting Times*, pp. 190, 207).

13. On the Communist Party Historians Group see e.g. E. Hobsbawm, 'Communist Party Historians' Group 1946–56', in M. Cornforth (ed.), *Rebels and their Causes: Essays in Honour of A.L. Morton* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1978), pp. 21–48; B. Schwarz, '"The People" in History: The Communist Party Historians Group 1946–56', in R. Johnson (ed.), *Making Histories: Studies in History Writing and Politics* (London: Hutchinson, 1982), pp. 44–95; H.J. Kaye, *British Marxist Historians* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1984), pp. 10–18; D. Parker, 'The Communist Party Historians' Group', *Socialist History* 12 (1997), pp. 33–58; S. Ashman, 'Communist Party Historians' Group', in J. Rees (ed.), *Essays on Historical Materialism* (London: Bookmarks, 1998), pp. 145–59; M. Perry, *Marxism and History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 88–94; D. Renton, 'Studying their Own Nation without Insularity? The British Marxist Historians Reconsidered', *Science and Society* 69 (2005), pp. 559–79.

included Hobsbawm, Dona Torr, Christopher Hill, E.P. Thompson, and Rodney Hilton, all of whom were or would become pioneering figures in 'history from below', and would be central in the founding of the now leading social history journal, *Past and Present*, in 1952. But there were certainly restrictions on discussions of the more ideologically sensitive areas of recent history, such as the British labour movement, the Soviet Union, and the Hitler–Stalin pact,¹⁴ and consciously or unconsciously Stalinism left its mark on the work of the Group.¹⁵ For instance, E.P. Thompson, who would become scathingly anti-Stalinist, had to remove 'a few Stalinist pieties' found in his 1955 book on William Morris for the second edition published in 1977, as well as explain that he previously held 'a somewhat reverent notion of Marxism as a received orthodoxy'.¹⁶ Yet, for Hobsbawm, who was cynical in some respects about the USSR, a 'reverent notion of Marxism as received orthodoxy' never really left his historical work. Readers only need look at Hobsbawm's treatment of the Spanish Civil War and political radicalism in his more recent magnum opus, *Age of Extremes* (1994), to realise that not only does Chomsky's earlier assessment of Hobsbawm remain relevant (and more broadly applicable than to the Spanish Civil War alone) but that its ideological perspective, while not entirely uncritical, was still heavily influenced by Popular Frontism and would have resonated with that of an official Communist Party line in the 1930s, at least in the sense that it largely takes the side of a perceived pragmatism of the Communists prepared to seize power.¹⁷

14. Hobsbawm, 'Communist Party Historians' Group', pp. 30-31; Ashman, 'Communist Party Historians' Group', pp. 148-49; Perry, *Marxism and History*, pp. 91-93.

15. Kaye, *British Marxist Historians*, pp. 17-18; Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain*, pp. 24-25; Perry, *Marxism and History*, p. 92; Ashman, 'Communist Party Historians' Group', p. 148 ('They were all, whether they liked it or not, apologists for Stalinism').

16. E.P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (2nd edn; London: Merlin Press, 1977), p. 769. See further Ashman, 'Communist Party Historians' Group', p. 148.

17. E. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914–1991* (London: Abacus, 1994), e.g. pp. 74, 142-77, 188, where the non-official Communist Party radicals (anarchists, Trotskyites, POUM, etc.) are typically 'insignificant', 'eccentric', 'ultra-Left' etc. See D. Evans, 'Spain and the World: Aspects of the Spanish Revolution and Civil War (7)', *Radical History Network* (August 31, 2011), <http://radicalhistorynetwork.blogspot.co.uk/2011/08/spain-and-world-aspects-of-spanish.html>.

The background of those radicalised in the 1930s gives us some indication of why a figure like Hobsbawm would have been so troubled by the perception of anarchism emerging as a potential alternative to Marxism–Leninism. From the perspective of such committed Communists, anarchism might at best be seen as an irrelevance and at worst a crypto-liberal alternative with no serious understanding of, or taste for, power and which needed to be combated. But whether Hobsbawm liked it or not (not), it also raised some uncomfortable questions about the nature of Soviet power which could only have been made more uncomfortable still after the experience of 1956. We might add that the more playful attitudes spawned in 1960s radicalism (which, as we saw in the previous chapter, was to be a significant trend in the shift towards postmodernity) would have raised further questions for a Marxism where a tradition of seriousness and austerity played a significant role.

Such an intellectual tradition of a kind of conservative or traditionalist Marxism, combined with his damning diagnosis of popular culture, can certainly help us account for Adorno's reaction, and this is not unrelated to issues which emerge in the cultural history of British Communism. Stephen Woodhams could likewise write about how being a (pre-1956) Communist was 'a serious calling', that the Communist Party 'would support a self-nurtured respectability', that the image of the Communist was as a 'serious citizen', and of 'the 'necessity to maintain civility' whether in the home or in the street. The Communist Party was not, Woodhams argued, about 'being subversive and undermining values of decency'; on the contrary, it was 're-enforcing them all the stronger'. There are a range of complex reasons for the emphasis on seriousness and austerity but one was the need to maintain self-respect during long periods of unemployment and provide discipline and cohesion 'in a world where all around were apparently lost to the lure of transient pleasures'.¹⁸ The semi-autobiographical recollections of Raphael Samuel give some insight into this 'lost world of British Communism':

Hollywood films were rubbish, popular reading 'trash'... Dance halls, despite a certain Party recruitment, during the 1930s and 1940s, in the Musicians Union, were viewed with suspicion, as apeing the manners (and the costume) of the bourgeoisie. (At YCL socials we sang American union songs but never, in my experience, danced... For one thing – at least in the 1940s and 1950s – they would have been suspicious of 'trashy American music'... So far as its working-class membership was con-

18. S. Woodhams, *History in the Making: Raymond Williams, Edward Thompson and Radical Intellectuals 1936–1956* (London: Merlin Press, 2001), pp. 103–104, 106.

cerned, the Communist Party made its recruits among the respectable. The appeal was to the studious 'serious-minded young workers' and, subliminally at least, to the clean... Whereas the Labour Party attracted a sprinkling of working-class rogues, Communists were noted for their strictness – or what was sometimes referred to as 'clean living'. They eschewed 'foul' language – the 'effing' and 'blinding' of the 'politically illiterate'. Members who ran up debts – 'borrowing' from Party funds – were expelled as a matter of course. So were those who got into trouble with the police, unless it was for political reasons... The Communist Party functioned as a kind of workers' university, and not the least of the satisfactions which it offered was that of opening up a vast field for those with a thirst for knowledge – the 'serious-minded young workers' to whom it directed its recruiting appeals... The Party also provided an elementary schooling in public life, teaching its worker-recruits how to be methodical and organized... It diffused, if unevenly, a reverence for culture—'good' books, 'serious' music, 'logical' argument.¹⁹

Raphael's recollections are reflective of a more working class Communist Party experience but the emphasis on discipline, dedication, efficiency, seriousness, and even purposeful tedium comes through strongly in Hobsbawm's own recollections; as he concluded: 'Communist Parties were not for romantics'.²⁰ While some of this tradition would not be wholly incompatible, we should not underestimate the extent to which 1960s radicalism was as potentially shocking to those who grew up in, or were associated with, the social world of British Communism as it was to the conservative mainstream political establishment and to non-Marxist conservative social mores.

19. R. Samuel, *The Lost World of British Communism* (London: Verso, 2006), pp. 185-200. Marion Maddox drew my attention to this more derogatory perception of communism and socialism from Dorothy L. Sayers, *Clouds of Witness* (1925): 'You know, Peter, if you will haunt low places full of Russians and sucking Socialists taking themselves seriously, you ought to know better than to encourage them by running after them, however futile, and given to drinking coffee and writing poems with no shape to them, and generally ruining their nerves'.

20. Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times*, p. 133. See, e.g., pp. 132-32 for Hobsbawm's account of life in the Communist Party. Compare also Hobsbawm's attitude towards Raphael Samuel's rethinking of Marxism in the face of Stalinism (Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times*, pp. 212-13): 'With two generations of Jewish revolutionary Marxists from Eastern Europe behind him, he dreamed of replacing the Stalinist authoritarianism of the Party with a free-wheeling creative mobilization of political minds, and what better centre for doing so than a café?... [A] real Soho café, in which people could discuss theoretical issues, play chess, consume *strudel* and hold political meetings in a back room, as on the continent before innocence was lost... It was a scheme designed for disaster.'

Having said that, it is not as if a tradition of challenging the Communist Party line was entirely absent from those associated with the Communist Party Historians' Group. There was a degree of openness in the discussions. There were, for instance, disagreements between the Party leadership and the Historians' Group over the writing of the history of the Communist Party of Great Britain, with the leadership edging towards a glorious history of past victories, if indeed it should be written at all, whereas the Communist Party Historians' Group were drawn to the idea of a more critical history.²¹ But it was the post-1956 generations of historians influenced by or involved with members of the Communist Party Historians' Group that would steer radical historians away from the Communist Party's dominance. Such younger figures would also embrace more libertarian aspects of the Left, most notably E.P. Thompson who effectively became the anti-Stalinist torchbearer for the post-1956 intellectual radical Left, as well as injecting a notable degree of agency, empathy, and humanism into Marxist history in his 1963 classic, *The Making of the English Working Class*. Indeed, Hobsbawm reflected on Thompson's landmark book, labelling it 'an erupting volcano of 848 pages...which captured young radical readers on both sides of the Atlantic overnight... Escaping from the cage of the old Party orthodoxy, it allowed him as well to join a collective debate with other hitherto isolated thinkers of the left old and new.'²² Certainly influenced by the older generation of Marxist historians (particularly Dorothy and E.P. Thompson), Sheila Rowbotham would push radical history in different directions untainted by the Stalinist politics of her older contemporaries. Rowbotham's formative years of radicalism were the 1960s. In particular, it would be the 1960s' take on feminism, radical thought, counter-culture, and – tellingly – embrace of the re-emergence of anarchism that would leave their mark on her work. Additionally, Rowbotham had a much more internationalist approach to, and understanding of, history and culture than most of her older British radical contemporaries. But Rowbotham hardly represents a complete break with the past; her first book, *Women, Resistance and Revolution* (1972), shows an interest not only in revolutionary women but also the Bible, particularly in seventeenth-century England,²³ a familiar haunt of the older generation of radical historians.

21. Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times*, pp. 207-209.

22. Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times*, pp. 214-15.

23. S. Rowbotham, *Women, Resistance and Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), pp. 15-34.

Some of the older generation of Marxist historians would come to regret not paying sufficient attention to gender and the role of women in history and historical change, even though they were writing prolifically as Rowbotham was starting to publish.²⁴ And one such figure who found himself in the midst of all the controversies and contradictions of post-war Marxist history – and who was also writing extensively about the importance of the Bible in seventeenth-century radical thought at the same time as Rowbotham – was one of the most prominent of all the historians radicalised in the 1930s: Christopher Hill.

2. Christopher Hill

Christopher Hill (1912–2003) is arguably still the most famous name in the study of seventeenth-century English history and was one of the more high profile figures among the British and English Marxists. In many ways, Hill embodied the tensions surrounding 1968 for those radicalised in the 1930s. On the one hand, Hill and Bridget Sutton (his second wife) were said to have ‘embraced the counter-culture of the sixties and celebrated the 1650s as a sister decade of free love and free thought’.²⁵ On the other hand, the radicalism of 1968 posed intellectual problems for Hill. As Penelope Corfield put it:

Hill was by no means an uncritical advocate of ‘let-it-all-hang-out’ alternative culture, which differed diametrically from his own reserve. Nor was he ever anything other than sceptical when faced with euphoric claims in 1968–9 that either ‘flower power’ and/or student unrest were about to topple international capitalism. He knew much too much about the resilience of established power-structures to believe that.²⁶

These tensions were deeply entrenched in Hill’s upbringing and major life choices. Hill’s background was certainly one of dissent. In addition to becoming a Marxist and Communist Party member in the 1930s, Hill was, like others in the Communist Party Historians’ Group and the Communist Party Group at Oxford and Balliol, from a Nonconformist

24. See Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain*, pp. 198–202, for the criticisms levelled at Hobsbawm’s reaction to, and engagement with, feminism and gender and the reception of Thompson’s *Making of the English Working Class* in socialist feminist historiography.

25. T. Hunt, ‘Back when it mattered’, *Guardian* (March 5, 2003).

26. P.J. Corfield, ‘“We are All One in the Eyes of the Lord”: Christopher Hill and the Historical Meanings of Radical Religion’, *History Workshop Journal* 58 (2004), pp. 111–27 (122).

background, even if some members were 'culturally' rather than 'religiously' so. As Rodney Hilton recalled, 'I think that many had a strong Nonconformist upbringing, or (as in my case) deliberately irreligious, though with all the cultural attributes of Nonconformity. In fact it was not difficult for people with this sort of background to become Communists.'²⁷ Although Hill would become a sceptic, his family had deep Methodist roots and he would never fully lose his attachment to this background: 'he was not militantly anti-religious... Hill never shed his nonconformist conscience, which, in a liberalized and secularized form, governed his personal moral code.'²⁸ Yet this same politically dissenting background could be culturally conservative. While not quite the working class Communist households and workers' groups described by Raphael Samuel, Samuel Beer still recalled Hill's father in the following manner: 'our rating of Mr. Hill was high: I would call him a strict, but genial Puritan. The strictness was fairly severe, even for those days: no drinking and no smoking – and no evidence, e.g. on the breath, of having indulged in either.'²⁹ Tensions or compromises between liberal, bohemian, and conservative morality would play out throughout Christopher Hill's life; Hill and Bridget Sutton may have embraced the aspects of 1960s counter-culture but 'he was no fan of the drugs culture'.³⁰

Like Hobsbawm, Hill's Marxism was firmly rooted in the political and economic situation of the 1930s ('slump, dreadful unemployment, danger of World War II, apparent successes of the USSR – the usual things'). Hill recalled that the dramatic events and horrors may have since become too familiar but that they had previously come as 'a terrible shock to middle-class English children brought up to assume that even if England was just not still top nation, still it was stable and secure' and that 'the bottom fell out of our universe in 1931, the year I went to Balliol'. Marxism for Hill and others appeared to make 'better

27. R. Hilton, 'Christopher Hill: Some Reminiscences', in D. Pennington and K. Thomas (eds.), *Puritans and Revolutionaries: Essays in Seventeenth-Century History Presented to Christopher Hill* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), pp. 6-10 (7).

28. Corfield, 'Christopher Hill', p. 114.

29. S.H. Beer, 'Christopher Hill: Some Reminiscences', in Pennington and Thomas (eds.), *Puritans and Revolutionaries*, pp. 1-4 (4). Compare also the comments (pp. 1-2) on the student Hill: 'I remember V.H. Galbraith, a tremendous admirer, reciting Hill's exploits of the previous day on the rugger field... The Spring of 1934 was glorious... For in spite of his gaiety there was no frivolity in Hill. He spent most of his time not in politics or womanizing or chit-chat, but working.'

30. Corfield, 'Christopher Hill', p. 114. On the general tensions, see further pp. 113-15.

sense of the world situation than anything else just as it seemed to make better sense of seventeenth-century English history'.³¹ And so it happened that he joined the Communist Party in 1934. The importance of the USSR in the development of Hill's Marxism cannot be underestimated (he visited in the 1930s), and there have even been suggestions that Hill was a Soviet spy in the 1940s, though he did a poor job in hiding his sympathies if this were the case.³² By the time of Stalin's death in 1953, he was, as a loyal Communist Party member, a Stalinist and orthodox Leninist. In 1947 Hill even published *Lenin and the Russian Revolution* for the popular Teach Yourself History series which effectively repeated the official Party line, much to the bemusement of the series editor A.L. Rowse. In this book, the treatment of Lenin was hagiographical, the continuity and collaboration between Lenin and Stalin emphasised,³³ and virtually all references to Trotsky were (therefore) implicitly or explicitly negative.³⁴ One example may give something of the flavour of the book: 'Generalissimo Stalin likes to be called Lenin's disciple. Even Trotsky... found it expedient to claim Lenin's authority for his views.'³⁵ More striking still, in 1953 Hill would write that Stalin was 'a very great and penetrating thinker... [A]ll countries will always be deeply in his debt.'³⁶ Little surprise, perhaps, that Hill and Hobsbawm, along with Robert Browning and A.L. Morton, would be the distinguished guests of the Soviet Academy of Sciences, with whom they

31. Hill interviewed and quoted in Kaye, *British Marxist Historians*, p. 102.

32. I. Cobain, 'Was Oxford's most famous Marxist a Soviet mole?', *Times* (March 5, 2003); O. Bowcott, 'Outcry as historian labelled a Soviet spy', *Guardian* (March 6, 2003); F. Mount, 'Stalin's ghost sits too easily among us', *Sunday Times* (March 9, 2003). Letters by John Saville and David Renton were published in the *Guardian* (March 10, 2003) defending Hill as an 'out' Communist at the time. The letters are available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/theguardian/2003/mar/10/guardianletters2>. Hill's alleged spying even gets an entry in R.C.S. Trahair (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Cold War Espionage, Spies, and Secret Operations* (Westport, Ct.: Greenwood Press, 2004), pp. 116-18.

33. Hill, *Lenin and the Russian Revolution*, e.g. pp. 90, 136.

34. For instance, we read typical phrases such as: Lenin, 'unlike Trotsky' was 'always realistic' about world revolution; 'such a view exaggerates, I think, the importance of Trotsky in the party'; 'morally, the oratorical spell-binder Trotsky "was incapable standing against Lenin as a flea would be against an elephant"', observed Bruce Lockhart'; and '...the romantic supporters of Trotsky' (C. Hill, *Lenin and the Russian Revolution* [London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1947], pp. 157, 196, 220-21, 226).

35. Hill, *Lenin and the Russian Revolution*, p. 216.

36. C. Hill, 'Stalin and the Science of History', *Modern Quarterly* 8 (1953), pp. 198-212 (209).

would collaborate in the USSR during the Christmas break of 1954–55.³⁷ To this general background, 1968 would pose more of those tricky questions.

Unlike Hobsbawm, however, Hill would leave the Communist Party in 1957 after battling for greater Party democracy against the backdrop of Khrushchev and Hungary in 1956. While he would certainly come to regret his 'Stalinist pieties' (to use E.P. Thompson's phrase), he did not move towards the right, he would not give up his Marxism, and he continued to defend Marxist history against charges of decline and irrelevancy in his later career.³⁸ Furthermore, he regarded the discussions during the Communist Party Historians' Group years (1946–56) as 'much the greatest stimulus I have ever known'.³⁹ Nostalgia for a lost Communist past is found among other close associates who did not follow Hobsbawm and remain within the Communist Party fold. For example, his former associate in the Communist Party Historians' Group who left the Communist Party in 1956, Raphael Samuel, would claim: 'there was the "unity of theory and practice" which completely identified Marxism with the progress of Communism (even now, thirty years after leaving the Party, I still find it difficult to take the idea of non-Party Marxism seriously).'⁴⁰

37. Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times*, pp. 197–200.

38. Corfield, 'Christopher Hill', pp. 118, 123. On Hill's embarrassment at his Stalinism see Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain*, p. 266, who interviewed Hill in 1984: 'When interviewing Hill, I remarked that I was embarrassed to bring up this essay. Hill responded that he should be embarrassed, not me.' Compare the language towards the end of Hill's career: 'Russian revolutionaries worried about Bonapartism, military dictatorship, and did not notice Stalin creeping up from within' (C. Hill, *The English Bible and the Seventeenth Century Revolution* [London: Penguin Books, 1993], p. 8). This is why contextualising Hill's post-1956 work in the context of a dedicated Stalinism is not correct. With not untypical certainty of his own rightness, Ferdinand Mount wrongly implied that Hill was a lifetime devotee of Stalin: 'Here in Britain it is a pity that Stalin's most devoted admirer, Christopher Hill, the Marxist historian and former master of Balliol college, Oxford, should have died' (Mount, 'Stalin's ghost'). As this chapter hopefully shows, while there was certainly continuity in Hill's work pre-and post-1956, works such as *The World Turned Upside Down* are better contextualised in terms of Hill (and other Marxists) coming to terms with Stalinism and engaging with 1960s radicalism.

39. Kaye, *British Marxist Historians*, p. 102. Cf. Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain*, p. 25.

40. Samuel, *Lost World of British Communism*, p. 94. Cf. Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times*, p. 206: 'Wherever our political future was to take us – and even those who left or were expelled from the Party overwhelmingly remained on the left – all of us lived through the crisis of 1956 as convinced communists'.

But there is another twist to Hill's story. We should not forget that Hill was the only one of his generation of Communist historians to gain an Oxbridge position, and he was even Master of Balliol College, Oxford University, from 1965 until his retirement in 1978. While the general consistency of Hill's ideas over his career supports the argument that we should not make a stark distinction between the Hill before and the Hill after he became Master of Balliol, the importance of this position in relation to 1960s radicalism should not be underestimated. As a former pupil and Fellow of Balliol, Maurice Keen recalled, a decade after 1968:

Very few of those who elected Christopher to Master in February 1965 can have foreseen 1968, the year of student revolution. That year and what has happened since then have made sure that the headship of an Oxbridge College must carry with it strain, difficulty, and immersion in controversy. For Christopher Hill the problems must have been much harder than for almost anyone else. On the one hand his deep-seated views, feelings, and loyalties must have drawn him strongly toward the radical side, graduate and undergraduate; on the other the office of Master in itself has put him in the 'establishment' that radicals would wish to undo; and he has had a college and governing body to preside over in which every shade of opinion, to right or left, has had passionate and engaged partisans. His part has been one that could not be played without becoming involved in uncomfortable debate or without incurring harsh criticism from one quarter or another.⁴¹

Hill would face criticisms for being part of a leftist establishment⁴² which were not wholly unjustified, irrespective of whether Hill intended such a thing. We see, for instance, the tensions between radicalism and establishment Oxford at play in the reception of Hill (though stemming from Hill's own sentiments), notably in the obituaries after his death in 2003. While hardly downplaying the Marxist Hill, some of the more establishment writers could still claim him as one of their own. Tristram Hunt (a Cambridge-trained historian and now Labour Party MP for

41. M. Keen, 'Christopher Hill: Some Reminiscences', in Pennington and Thomas (eds.), *Puritans and Revolutionaries*, pp. 17-21 (19-20). Similar comments are found elsewhere in Keen's recollections (p. 18): 'One thing about those parties [at Balliol] puzzled me, though. If one took a pint glass before one's third year one would be chided. I have never understood why so committed an egalitarian as Christopher should have given the impression of caring about such a curious status symbol. As Hugh Stretton, 'Christopher Hill: Some Reminiscences', in Pennington and Thomas (eds.), *Puritans and Revolutionaries*, pp. 10-17 (15), put it: 'Some issues were intrinsically difficult for the Left. They were against privilege – but they were employed in Oxford.'

42. Corfield, 'Christopher Hill', p. 116.

Stoke-on-Trent Central) pointed out that Hill scored an apparently 'famous' winning try in an intercollegiate rugby tournament nicknamed 'Cuppers', a sure sign that Hill was also 'a college man' according to an anonymous obituary in the *Telegraph* no less.⁴³ This intra-Oxbridge language shows how enshrined Hill's memory had become in the sort of event unlikely to resonate much with those outside, much less in the world of political radicalism, at least as we might conceive of it today.

So how does a figure such as Hill deal with something like 1968 and events which he should both endorse and oppose at the same time? The most obvious way this might have been done (consciously or unconsciously) was through his history writing. Hill was not only a prolific writer, he was a prolific writer of *revolutionary* English history. For all the nuances and qualifications, throughout his career Hill would argue that seventeenth-century England saw a revolution which should be deemed as significant as those in France and Russia. In fact, Hill claimed that there were two revolutions. The successful revolution was bourgeois in its consequences in that, with the power of the Crown and Church tamed by Parliament, it created a state ready for capitalist development and an international empire. The unsuccessful revolution was more radically democratic in its nature and, Hill suggested, generated ideas from proto-Communism and free love to questioning ideas about a creator God and the existence of Hell. While the support of the radical revolution was important for the bourgeois revolution, and, Hill argued, for regicide, once power was consolidated it then had to be suppressed.

The radical revolution was dealt with in detail in Hill's most famous and popular book, *The World Turned Upside Down*.⁴⁴ Published in 1972 (the same year as Rowbotham's *Women, Resistance and Revolution*), *The World Turned Upside Down* was a book clearly influenced by 1968 and 1960's iconoclastic youth culture.⁴⁵ This book looked at those typically pushed by scholars to the 'lunatic fringe',⁴⁶ from various radical individuals such as Gerrard Winstanley, Abiezer Coppe, James Nayler,

43. Hunt, 'Back when it mattered'; Anonymous, 'Obituary: Christopher Hill', *Telegraph* (27 February 2003).

44. C. Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas during the English Revolution* (London: Penguin, 1972).

45. J.C. Davis, *Fear, Myth and History: The Ranters and the Historians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 132-34 (which ties these historic influences with the intellectual influence of Marcuse and Gramsci in the 1960s); Corfield, 'Christopher Hill', p. 122.

46. Cf. C. Hill, *A Nation of Change and Novelty: Radical Politics, Religion and Literature in Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 212.

and the anonymous author of *Tyranipocrit Discovered* to various radical groups such as the Quakers, Diggers, Ranters, and, to a lesser extent, Levellers. Page after page discusses antinomianism, hostility to wealth, anticlericalism, antiroyalism, extension of democratic rights, land redistribution, class consciousness, idealism, utopianism, collectives, sexual freedom, and so on. Radical sentiments, which could be as much about the student-led radicalism of 1960s as the 1640s, penetrate almost every page of *The World Turned Upside Down*. To take a random example among many: 'The radicals, not unexpectedly, came from the younger generation of those who had no aspirations to an official career... Part of the ebullience I have been discussing springs from the youth of the actors. Young men of ability have far more chance of coming top in a revolution... It was a young man's world while it lasted.'⁴⁷

But it is arguably the most famous chapter – 'Base Impudent Kisses' – that is the most striking example for reading *The World Upside Down* in relation to 1960s radicalism.⁴⁸ This chapter gives us stories such as that of a woman who, in 1652, stripped naked during a church service and shouted out, 'Welcome the resurrection!' However, for at least some of the twenty-first-century readers of my book, there are less alien examples. In 'Base Impudent Kisses', Hill repeated phrases which would hardly be out of place when discussing 1960s radicalism, such as 'sexual revolution', 'sexual freedom', and 'free love'. It might be one thing to discuss sexually liberated Ranters or naked Adamites but this sort of language even gets used in the chapter's two subheadings with reference to a certain group not conventionally associated with sexual frivolity: 'The Puritan Sexual Revolution' and 'Beyond the Puritan Sexual Revolution'. Sometimes Hill would make the connection between the past and the present perfectly clear: 'Unfortunately Ranter theology leapt ahead of the technical possibilities of their society: equal sexual freedom for both sexes had to wait for cheap and effective methods of birth control'.⁴⁹ As Hill later reflected:

As I was doing the research which culminated in *The World Turned Upside Down*, analogies between the cultural circumstances of the period I was describing and of the period in which I was writing forced themselves upon me. I found some Ranter ideas interesting in that connection – not least their detestation of holy conservative humbug, not extinct today. I admitted recently to having perhaps over-stressed Ranter libertinism...⁵⁰

47. Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, pp. 188, 366.

48. Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, pp. 306-23.

49. Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, p. 321.

50. Hill, *Nation of Change and Novelty*, p. 210.

3. Christopher Hill's Bible

Hill's Nonconformist background was never far from his writings and the importance of Puritanism in developing bourgeois thought (and the significance of religion more generally) is integral to his thinking on the seventeenth century. But it was *The World Turned Upside Down* that marked the intensification of Hill's interest in the role of the Bible in the seventeenth century, an unfortunately overlooked area in the reception and discussion of Hill which, for all the detailed and important work done on Hill, betrays the kind of intellectual 'Bible-blindness' that is hardly untypical in research across the humanities and social-sciences.⁵¹ Not only does *The World Turned Upside Down* stand firmly in the tradition of the Radical Bible, it is arguably the pivotal book in both appreciating the modern developments of the Radical Bible and one of the most famous works *perpetuating* the contemporary Radical Bible.⁵² David Renton's comments from a different context equally apply to the case of Hill's use of the Bible in *The World Turned Upside Down*: 'Hill's essay was so sympathetic to its sources that a reader might lose track of where Hill was speaking, and where the 17th century began'. Nor would this be an unusual reading of Hill's work.⁵³ The Bible would become even more significant in Hill's work and he also went on to write *The English Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution* (1993), as well as starting to emphasise more and more the importance of Numbers 35.33 (cf. Judg. 9.24) in the regicide ('So ye shall not pollute the land wherein ye *are*: for blood it defileth the land: and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it').⁵⁴

A striking feature of Hill's discussion of Bible-use for our purposes is his constant focus on the Radical Bible, *despite* being perfectly aware of other uses of the Bible. *The English Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution* opens with a general statement of intent. 'My object in this book', Hill claimed, 'is to try to assess the part played by the Bible in

51. A notable exception is the biographical work of Penelope Corfield ('Christopher Hill') who knew Hill well and traced the importance of the Bible in Hill's early years and in his work, including *The World Turned Upside Down*. I owe the phrase 'Bible-blindness' to my colleague Hugh Pyper.

52. In academic biblical studies and theology in the UK, Hill's book had clearly had a profound influence on arguably the two leading socialist biblical scholars and theologians, Christopher Rowland and Timothy Gorringer.

53. Renton, 'British Marxist Historians', p. 564.

54. On the significance of Num. 35.33, Hill was influenced by P. Crawford, "'Charles Stuart, That Man of Blood'", *Journal of British Studies* (1977), pp. 41-61. See Hill, *English Bible*, pp. 324-31.

the lives of Englishmen and women during England's revolutionary seventeenth century'. He even notes that the ideas which divided the two parties in the civil war 'were all found in the Bible', before commenting, 'For my purposes the more traditional views of Catholics and high Anglicans seemed less relevant'.⁵⁵ The book also has two appendices, both overtly geared towards the Radical Bible: 'God the Highwayman' and 'A Note on Liberation Theology'.⁵⁶ To give some indication of Hill's overriding concern, we might turn towards the end of the book (page 397, to be precise), where he tellingly wrote: 'So far I have been discussing mainly radical uses of the Bible during the revolutionary decades. But there had always been more conservative readings.'⁵⁷ Aside from a comparatively minor discussion of conservative readings, and a few throwaway lines, we get little in the way of interpretation from 'the other side' in this 400-plus page book!⁵⁸ In other words, Hill's political interests in the Bible are clear.

In *The World Turned Upside Down*, there are the expected themes from the tradition of the Radical Bible. We even see this emphasis on the Radical Bible in the framing of the book and in the structure of his arguments. From the outset there is a clear indication of just how significant a role the Bible will play in the book because the epigraph contains three biblical quotations (King James Version) concerning the world turned upside down:

The Lord preserveth the strangers; he relieveth the fatherless and widow:
but the way of the wicked he turneth upside down. (Ps. 146.9)

The Lord maketh the earth...waste, and turneth it upside down... And it shall be, as with the people, so with the priest; as with the servant, so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress... The earth shall reel to and fro like a drunkard, and shall be removed like a cottage...the Lord shall punish the host of the high ones...and the kings of the earth upon the earth. (Isa. 24.1-2, 20-21)

55. Hill, *English Bible*, p. vii.

56. Hill, *English Bible*, pp. 443-51.

57. Hill, *English Bible*, p. 397.

58. A point picked up by, for instance, W. Lamont, 'Review: *The English Bible and the Seventeenth Century Revolution* by Christopher Hill', *English Historical Review* 108 (1993), pp. 979-81. In an interview on BBC Radio 4, Hill claimed that the Bible includes a 'great deal of anti-monarchical stuff' and 'a lot of democratic stuff', before adding with telling language, 'as well as stuff you can use on the other side'. The interview is with John Miller, 'Conversations with Historians', and available on http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qkf_oYvJVXM. The interview took place in the 1990s as it mentions John Major's government.

They came to Thessalonica...and Paul...reasoned with them out of the Scriptures... And some of them believed...of the chief women not a few. But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar...crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also. (Acts 17.1-6)

Corfield explains that Hill liked, and was inspired by, Acts 17.6 and the sentiment of the world turned upside down because of the subversive nature of truth and an egalitarianism available to the most lowly.⁵⁹ Such thinking ran throughout Hill's regular treatment of the Bible in *The World Turned Upside Down*. Typically we are introduced to a not-inherently radical general issue relating to the use of the Bible before a conclusion (often at the end of a paragraph) concerning something politically radical to such seventeenth-century uses.⁶⁰ The following sentence (concluding a paragraph) illustrates this well: 'The Bible should be used to illustrate truths of which one was already convinced: Winstanley was prepared to use Acts 4.32 to justify community of property'.⁶¹ In another paragraph on relative cheapness and accessibility of the Bible, Hill soon shifted the emphasis. We are given the example of the Welshman Arise Evans, who came to London in 1629, and shown how his attitude towards the Bible 'changed in the decade before the Revolution'. The paragraph finishes first with a quotation from Evans ('I am as Paul of this time...he was a mechanic, a tent maker, Acts 18.3. I am a tailor') before finally concluding with a quotation from William Dell: 'Poor, illiterate, mechanic men turned the world upside down'.⁶²

Conversely, note the following example where the final sentence is almost a throwaway line as more space is covered explaining the radical and progressive ideas that *really* underpinned strange acts such as prophecy:

The idea that there was a secret traditional wisdom, Egyptian or Hermetic, to be wrung from nature, died very hard... Ordinary Bible-readers in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries wanted to democratize these mysteries;

59. Corfield, 'Christopher Hill', p. 112.

60. There are, of course, the now expected references to prophets versus monarchs. E.g. 'The Reformation, for all its hostility to magic, had stimulated the spirit of prophecy... The abolition of mediators, the stress on the individual conscience, left God speaking direct to his elect... And God was no respecter of persons: he spoke to John Knox rather than Mary Queen of Scots... The common man, Luther, Calvin and Knox showed, could remake history if kings and princes did not' (Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, p. 91, end of paragraph).

61. Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, p. 144.

62. Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, p. 94.

to abolish mumbo-jumbo men, whether priests, lawyers or scholars. They believed, on good protestant authority, that *anyone* could understand God's Word if he studied carefully enough, and if God's grace was in him. And then the Bible could be made to reveal the key to events in his own time.⁶³

The idea of the popularist, millenarian Bible versus the elites and intellectuals is another common theme and again it was given a radical spin. For instance, in a discussion of millenarianism and predictions of the end, Hill made the following point: 'English translations and popular summaries of the works of Napier, Brightman, Mede and Alsted were published, all seeming to underpin the utopian hopes of less scholarly readers of the Bible'.⁶⁴ Of course the spirit-led and democratising enthusiasm described throughout *The World Turned Upside Down* was seen as providing a challenge to the traditional authority of the Bible. Hill certainly did not shy away from the ways in which the inner light can overrule the Bible but a theme emerges of the ongoing importance of Jesus who does not get so downplayed, a theme we saw was a significant part of the Radical Bible tradition. To take one example, when paraphrasing William Dell, Hill wrote, 'we can hear what Jesus Christ will say to our spirits and stick to it'.⁶⁵

One of Hill's more sustained themes concerning the Bible and radicalism is his treatment of Antichrist (Hill drops the definite article), a theme developed elsewhere at book length.⁶⁶ While Hill traced the Antichrist myth through medieval Europe and the Reformation, it takes on anti-Anglican and anti-Royalist meaning in the English Civil War. By the 1650s, Hill argued that there was something of a millenarian consensus, namely the fall of Antichrist, possibly marking the beginning of the Second Coming. Note in the following example the implicit distinction between limited bourgeois-Puritan use and the ongoing radicalism of Hill's radical democratic revolution in words that – of course – end a paragraph: 'This underlay the confident energy, the utopian enthusiasm, of the Puritan preachers in the early 1640s. With what subsequently seemed to them naïve optimism, they called the common man to fight the Lord's battles against Antichrist'.⁶⁷ This was taken in

63. Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, p. 93.

64. Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, p. 96.

65. Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, p. 370.

66. C. Hill, *Antichrist in Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971).

67. Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, pp. 92-93.

a more radical direction in Hill's reading of Winstanley. Whereas the more radical Puritans may have seen bishops or the Church of England as antichristian, and the Civil War as a crusade against Antichrist, Winstanley, so Hill argued, 'again pushed this farther still, seeing property itself as antichristian, embodied in covetousness or self-love'.⁶⁸

But one issue Hill the Marxist had to face is that of the logic of the democratization of the Bible and the guidance of the inner light leading to individualism, reflecting, of course, the tensions in Hill's reading of the English Revolution being both radical and bourgeois. Hill is aware of the importance of the role English translations of the Bible were playing. Of the Geneva Bible (which, thanks to its notes, could be used to justify the end of the divine right of monarchs) Hill points out that it

was published in pocketable editions, so that men could study it in the privacy of their own homes, or could produce it in a church or an ale-house to knock down an argument with a text... [T]he reading of books is even less possible to control than the reading of manuscripts. The pocketable Geneva Bible could be privately digested and privately interpreted. Once the masses of the population were called into political activity, whether in sixteenth-century Germany or seventeenth-century England, some were bound to demand salvation for themselves.⁶⁹

However, when discussing the radicals in *The World Turned Upside Down*, it is notable that Hill reined in any individualist-capitalist readings of radical interpretations, at least in their mid-seventeenth-century manifestations. For example, in his discussion of the Quakers and the ideal of the spirit of God within a believer being the only way to understand the Bible seriously, Hill acknowledged that 'we get an intense sense of the immediate personal relevance of the Bible's message' but qualifies this as a 'radical reply' to 'priests and scholars' who 'would have liked to keep interpretation of the Bible the monopoly of an educated elite...for seventeenth-century English radicals the religion of the heart was the answer to the pretensions of the academic divinity of ruling-class universities.'⁷⁰

Hill was aware that private readers of the Bible could lead to 'mere absolute individualism' but as a good Marxist he rejected this by stressing the importance of the congregation as a place for interpretations to be 'tested and approved', thereby guaranteeing 'the validity of the interpretation for the given social unit' as a check on what he tellingly labels

68. Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, pp. 148-49.

69. Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, pp. 93, 162.

70. Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, p. 95.

‘individualist absurdities’.⁷¹ Given the context of 1968, Hill also has his eye on another potential problem for a Marxist confronted by radical individualism in the source material – anarchism. While the language of anarchism was not developed to confront explicitly the anarchism re-emerging in the 1960s, there are certainly jarring similarities (and caricatures). Hill dealt with this particular problem in the same way as his treatment of other ‘individualist absurdities’. So, for instance, ‘acceptance of interpretations of the Bible by a congregation guarantees their relevance for the given group, [and] is a check against mere anarchist individualism’.⁷² What is striking about Hill’s phrase ‘mere anarchist individualism’ is that Hill also used the pejorative phrase ‘mere absolute individualism’, as we saw above and as we can see elsewhere.⁷³ It might be easy to dismiss this use of ‘anarchist’ as unrelated to more modern political uses (e.g. in the sense of ‘chaotic’) but Hill immediately follows this up with a contemporary comparison: ‘Today, in our atomized society, the appeal to the individual conscience, to the integrity of the isolated artists, is ultimately anarchistic, the extreme of illusory withdrawal from society’.⁷⁴ The ghost of anarchism was also lurking closely behind the back of the Balliol Marxist.

There should be little doubt that the Radical Bible was central to Hill’s understanding of his popular-democratic reading of one aspect of the English Revolution. But what is also striking is a sub-theme running throughout and which makes some sense in light of certain Marxist ambivalence towards 1968, that is, biblical interpretation as a *serious* work of scholarship and the Bible as a book of cultural importance, what was labelled in the previous chapter as the Cultural Bible. The importance of the Bible as a work of serious culture is clear enough in Hill’s reading of the radicals and we should not forget that Hill was also a pioneer in bringing literary figures like Milton – whose work is one of the most famous examples of biblical interpretation in the western literary canon – into the arena of historical research. In some ways the Cultural Bible protects Hill’s radicals against contemporary scholarly accusations of being on the ‘lunatic fringe’.

There are several examples of this tradition of the Cultural Bible in *The World Turned Upside Down*. The importance of the symbolism of the garden for Winstanley can, for instance, be compared to that of

71. Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, p. 95.

72. Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, p. 372.

73. Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, p. 371.

74. Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, p. 372.

Milton or Marvel.⁷⁵ Hill also argued that one of the two dominant approaches to the Bible by the radicals was to hark back to the classical tradition, 'to use its stories as myths, to which each could give his own sense, a sense that need not consider the original meaning of the text – rather as Bacon used classical myths in *The Wisdom of the Ancients*'.⁷⁶ But more than anything, it is the other dominant approach of the radicals identified by Hill upon which he placed greatest emphasis: the radical as *scholarly and rational* biblical interpreter. Hand-in-hand with a denial of the infallibility of the Bible was the idea of close textual analysis which, Hill argued, anticipated later developments in academic biblical scholarship.⁷⁷ While Winstanley was deemed to hold this sort of position, Hill gives a whole chapter (Chapter 11) dedicated to the (ultimately) Quaker interpreter Samuel Fisher. Hill has seemingly throwaway lines such as 'The scholarly underpinning of this position' and, of Fisher's *The Rustics Alarm to the Rabbies* (1660), he comments that it 'is a remarkable work of popular Biblical criticism, based on real scholarship'.⁷⁸ Such comments on the intellectual integrity of Fisher's interpretation can be found alongside more dramatic judgments ('no more and no less than renaissance scholarly standards of textual criticism applied to the Bible').⁷⁹

This emphasis on the scholarly nature of radical interpretations is perhaps an unsurprising judgment given Hill's lifelong career and interests. On the other hand, it might be surprising to a reader of *The World Turned Upside Down* given just how much stress Hill places on hostility towards scholars among the English radicals. Hill was aware of this tension and we have various arguments made about how shocking the exegesis of figures like Fisher must have been to 'University divines', effectively 'committing treason to the clerical caste, by using the apparatus of scholarship to expose the scholarly mysteries to public obloquy...'.⁸⁰ In fact, we could make the argument that Hill's reading of radical scholarly biblical interpretation in the seventeenth century was akin to their political contribution to historical development: bourgeois biblical interpretation may have won in the long run but not without the mark of popular radical interpretation. Not only did Hill claim that the Bible 'would never be the same again' after the 'revolutionary decades',

75. Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, p. 145. Hill would develop the importance of the Bible in English literature in *English Bible* (see below).

76. Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, p. 261.

77. Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, pp. 261-62.

78. Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, pp. 266-67.

79. Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, p. 268.

80. Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, p. 268.

but that a figure such as Fisher, like others, ‘deserves greater recognition as a precursor of the English enlightenment’.⁸¹ But what we may also see happening here in this understanding of biblical interpretation is Hill’s own re-reading of 1968 either with protection from anything *too* anarchistic or *too* playful, or as it really should have been: radical, fairly serious, and scholarly.

4. Experiencing Defeat: 1640s–1660s, 1960s–1980s

But this is not the end of the story of Hill’s use of the Bible in relation to 1960s radicalism. He again turned to the Bible in works ostensibly about revolutionary failure in the seventeenth century – such as *The Experience of Defeat* (1984) and *Milton and the English Revolution* (1978) – which have at least one eye on the post-1968 failures of the radical Left, as neoliberalism and Thatcherism were in the ascendancy and redefining the centre ground of political discourse. As discussed in Chapter 1, by the 1980s a significant strand of 1960s radicalism was morphing into the new political and economic establishment, or at least certain radicals were following that time-honoured pattern and becoming a more ‘moderate’ form of their former radical selves. The Radical Bible of Tony Benn and the Labour tradition was in decline as Kinnock’s Labour Party was shortly to pass the baton to the media savvy and Thatcher-inspired New Labour. At the same time, Marxism – certainly intellectual Marxism in the West – was losing its influence and postmodernity, in part, channelled the playful radicalism away from the politically revolutionary to the culturally subversive, as popular culture was less about a radical revolution within a revolution and more about collapsing high and low culture into market forces or provocative art. From the perspective of radical (leftist) political transformation, 1968 had seemingly failed as a revolutionary force. In what follows, it should be clear that I am implicitly reading Hill as an indication of differences in radical attitudes (or at least Hill’s) between the 1960s and the mid-1980s, as much as the differences in radical attitudes between the 1640s and 1660s (or 1668).

The Experience of Defeat (as with *Milton and the English Revolution* shortly before it) looked at ways in which people coped with the failure of the Revolution and how God might let this happen after such spectacular revolutionary successes against the backdrop of the Restoration and the rise of capitalism and the bourgeois Protestant work ethic.

81. Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, p. 268. Cf. ‘Modern Biblical scholarship has caught up with and justified them’ (p. 375).

Or, as Hill ended his introductory chapter with a reference back to his most famous book, 'knowing that many good and intelligent people believed this may help us to understand the elation of the fight and the desolation of defeat when they realized that the world was not after all to be turned upside down... A climax of elation was reached in 1649, only to be followed by the slow betrayal of the 1650s. How could the God who willed 1649 also will 1660?'⁸² If that did not set the tone, then the titles of the first two major chapters that follow (Chapters 2 and 3) should: 'The First Losers, 1649–1651' and 'The Second Losers, 1653–1660' (Chapter 9 has a telling subsection: 'Other Losers'). A comparison of endings illustrates both the theme of defeat and the idea that Hill's treatment of this theme tells us something about his present. *The World Turned Upside Down* ends in a positive fashion, even if qualified, with even the long-term future something worth celebrating: 'Our story ends by pointing towards the Age of Reason rather than the upside-down world. But the English Revolution's "teeming freedom" did liberate the imagination as Christ rose, however briefly, in sons and daughters'.⁸³ In contrast, *The Experience of Defeat* ends more ominously: 'In 1644 Milton saw England as "a nation of prophets". Where are they now?'⁸⁴

Topic-wise, *The Experience of Defeat* tackles a number of issues related to the experience of revolutionary defeat. For instance, it looks at the origins of apostasy and the establishment of the state or official church with its lord bishops, sometimes traced back to Constantine or even to the time of the Apostles, and which may even last until the Second Coming. In *The Experience of Defeat*, the importance of focusing on long-term apostasy of the illegitimate church for those experiencing the failed revolution is part of the necessity of patiently waiting while the true, sometimes persecuted, church remains in exile, as it had been for centuries. For Hill's defeated radicals and rebels, the present post-Revolutionary setting was a time when thinkers had to come to terms with the wicked flourishing and even put God's justice on trial. *The Experience of Defeat* is certainly not blindly pessimistic and hope always remains a theme, even if this hope now looks to sometime in the more

82. C. Hill, *The Experience of Defeat: Milton and Some Contemporaries* (London: Faber & Faber, 1984), pp. 28, 307.

83. Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, p. 414. Compare also Hill's *The English Revolution 1640* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1940), which stresses the importance of revolutionary struggles and the kinds of long-term influence such victories have even on those in power. This was published 300 years after the events described as the Second World War was under way.

84. Hill, *Experience of Defeat*, p. 328.

distant future, or rests on assurances of the idea of an Everlasting Gospel to always outlast the established church. And the ramifications for the present are not simply a message of vague promises but action too. Milton's experience of defeat, for instance, meant that he took his role as poet and prophet even more seriously. Yet Hill was aware that defeat really was defeat. He could argue that the universalistic tendencies in the revolutionary impulses and millenarianism of the 1640s and 1650s could be turned into English imperialism and that the combinations of revolution and restoration paved the way for eighteenth-century Whiggery, again with 'a sense of England's destiny to rule the world'.⁸⁵

As this already shows, Hill again paid a great deal of attention to the centrality of the Radical Bible in this line of post-revolutionary disappointment and now with a subtly different spin to correspond to the new context. While there are discussions of Antichrist and ongoing rule of the wicked in the post-revolutionary era,⁸⁶ there are other discussions of figures now using biblical stories for understanding the Revolution as part of divine necessity, purification, and reform, and of how tolerance (sometimes on both sides) was now needed.⁸⁷ There were also discussions of the Radical Bible becoming the Bible for more elite or bourgeois use. Hill, for instance, looked at how sects could now place a 'heavy emphasis' on Bible reading and biblical literacy and exclude the illiterate, confirming 'that they had little appeal for the very poorest classes in the community'.⁸⁸

The despair of failure in *The Experience of Defeat* can be compared with the same theme of defeat (and the accompanying use of the Bible) in *The World Turned Upside Down*, which is much more optimistic and written before Thatcherism and neoliberalism had so obviously started to take hold. For a start, the relevant section in *The World Turned Upside Down* carries a more positive subtitle – 'Defeat and Survival' (my italics) – than anything offered in *The Experience of Defeat*.⁸⁹ As this would suggest, defeat of the radical revolution could hardly be ignored even in Hill's most positive reading of the seventeenth century in *The World Turned Upside Down*. On this he is explicit:

85. Hill, *Experience of Defeat*, p. 325.

86. Hill, *Experience of Defeat*, e.g. pp. 91-95, 97.

87. Hill, *Experience of Defeat*, pp. 110-14, 262.

88. Hill, *Experience of Defeat*, pp. 291-92.

89. The chapter, 'Survivors', in *Experience of Defeat* (pp. 220-77) tends to focus, significantly, on those who were able to adapt and conform to the developing capitalist world and the restoration of state church power.

Property triumphed. Bishops returned to a state church, the universities and tithes survived. Women were put back into their place. The island of Great Bedlam became the island of Great Britain, God's confusion yielding place to man's order. Great Britain was the largest free-trade area in Europe, but one in which the commerce of ideas was again restricted. Milton's nation of prophets became a nation of shopkeepers.⁹⁰

But Hill immediately added a qualification important for understanding defeat: 'Yet nothing ever wholly dies'. For Hill, just as the Lollard tradition survived and fed into the English Reformation, and the radical Reformation fed into the English Revolution, so the radical ideas – including those about God within, no heaven or hell, and antinomianism – would survive in the underground and influence more radical thinking in the following centuries. Hill suggested that echoes of revolutionary ideas from the mid-seventeenth century may be heard in a range of contexts from the American Revolution and English 'plebeian radicalism' of the 1790s through to Blake and the rise of biblical criticism (see above). But Hill tellingly added an even more relevant example for our purposes where developments in biblical interpretation are part of similar developments in 1960s love-making:

Even more important, perhaps, for our generation, were their glimpses of a possible society which would transcend the property system, of a counter-culture which would reject the protestant ethic altogether... Again and again in this book we have noticed the seventeenth-century radicals shooting ahead of the technical possibilities of their age. Later Biblical scholarship and anthropology make better sense than they could of the mythological approach to the Bible; cheap and easily available contraceptive devices make better sense of free love.⁹¹

The radicals and the Radical Bible do not really leave the stage in the section on defeat in *The World Turned Upside Down*, whereas in *The Experience of Defeat* what we saw was adaptation to a post-revolutionary capitalist world, coping mechanisms, disappearance of the radical, and a future hope sometime in the not-so-imminent future. It is difficult not to see these different emphases telling us as much about differences in revolutionary experience between the 1960s and 1980s.

However, it is noticeable that in *The Experience of Defeat*, the Radical Bible does continue in the post-Revolutionary era and is combined, implicitly, with the Cultural Bible, in particular in its focus on Milton. As Hill was aware elsewhere, Milton could equally be labelled as part of

90. Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, p. 379.

91. Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, p. 383.

bourgeois elitism,⁹² though in the instance of his discussion of Milton's Bible we find a more sustained optimism beginning to break through. Hill's Milton, like other *dramatis personae* in *The Experience of Defeat*, was certainly confident in the victory of good over evil, even if the reign of Christ was pushed into the distant future, and the events of the 1640s remained a 'necessary phase in which tyranny and superstition would be overcome...'⁹³ More specifically, Hill read Milton's use of Samson as a type of Christ in *Samson Agonistes*, initially with all the connotations of heroic failure but ultimately with the hope of a future divine intervention. Through Milton's favourite – Martin Bucer – Samson and Christ are but the *beginning* of the liberation of the people of God and God's purposes will finally come to pass when history reveals them.⁹⁴ Hill pointed out that the history revealed to Adam in *Paradise Lost* (Books XI and XII) may appear to be a series of defeats but, like *Samson Agonistes*, there is 'hope' and the poem provides a challenge 'in the present. Some time we must break out of the cycle of failure and defeat.'⁹⁵ Indeed, Hill argued that from *Comus* to *Samson Agonistes*, 'Milton depicted characters capable of standing alone in discouraging circumstances against the power of evil'.⁹⁶ As with *The World Turned Upside Down*, the Cultural Bible provides protection for the survival of, and hope for, the Radical Bible.

5. A Radical, English Bible

The events of 1968, and the experience of defeat that followed, were not the only contemporary echoes in Hill's work. In fact, Hill played his role in the development of the defining myth of contemporary English and British identity: the Second World War. In 1940, Hill published a blunt, popularising account of events 300 years earlier in *The English Revolution 1640*. Here there is a thoroughgoing interest in the reclaiming of a radical English tradition running throughout but several arguments have obvious contemporary implications and with only a few changes of words could be as much about the battle against fascism:

92. Cf. Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, p. 400: 'Milton was a leisure-class intellectual, who never knew what it was to labour under a small taskmaster's eye. His contempt for the common people is explicit, at least from 1645 onwards. What I do suggest is that some of Milton's religious and political convictions...derive from the radical traditions of the Familiarist underground...'

93. Hill, *Experience of Defeat*, p. 319.

94. Hill, *Experience of Defeat*, pp. 312-13.

95. Hill, *Experience of Defeat*, p. 313.

96. Hill, *Experience of Defeat*, p. 327.

In time of war men must choose one side or the other... They were fighting a system... Nor was it a war of the rich only... Many of those who fought for Parliament were afterwards disappointed with the achievements of the revolution, felt they had been betrayed. But they were right to fight... The fact that the revolution might have gone further should never allow us to forget the heroism and faith and disciplined energy with which ordinary decent people responded when the Parliament's leaders freely and frankly appealed to them to support its cause... The important thing is that the social order was new and would not have been won without revolution... It is struggle that wins reforms, just as it is struggle that will retain the liberties which our ancestors won for us... That is the lesson of the seventeenth century for to-day.⁹⁷

Indeed, Hill came close to admitting this dual frame of reference when he claimed that he wrote *The English Revolution 1640* as 'a very angry young man, believing he was going to be killed in a world war... [It] was written very fast and in a good deal of anger, [and] was intended to be my last will and testament.'⁹⁸

While *The English Revolution 1640* was as much a rallying call for the English in 1940 as it was a popular work of history, we should not forget that it was partly a product of the Popular Front mentality against fascism. Conversely, while Hill's later use of the Bible may reflect a feeling of defeat on a global scale, we should not underestimate the importance of an experience of defeat, as well as the reclamation of a radical *English* tradition, in a specifically *English* context. Like E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* before him, Hill's focus is, of course, relentlessly *English*. After the war, Hill reflected in a programmatic element about the national element in Marxist history:

the Marxist conception of a bourgeois revolution restores the English revolution to its proper central place in the history of England; and that in itself helps to illuminate the whole course of English history down to the present. A correct appreciation of the seventeenth century revolution helps us to understand many otherwise unaccountable features of English life today – the survival of the monarchy and the House of Lords, English parliamentarism and 'the English genius for compromise', English non-conformity and the pacifist tradition in English radical movements. All these are due to specific characteristics like English bourgeois revolution... [T]he Marxist approach, and it alone, can restore to the English people part of their heritage of which they have been robbed. For every Frenchman 1789 has a deep significance; but for most Englishmen 1640 means nothing... [T]he absurd theory of the Puritan Revolution emphasizes the differences between our seventeenth century forefathers and present-day

97. Hill, *English Revolution 1640*, pp. 56-58, 80-82.

98. M. Kettle, 'Obituary: Christopher Hill', *Guardian* (February 26, 2003).

Englishmen, between their struggles and ours...all these and many more are figures of whom the progressive movement today, in England and elsewhere, may well be proud. In 1949 it was the Communist Party which recalled the revolutionary achievements of the English people 300 years earlier.⁹⁹

It is not without reason that the place of Hill, Hilton, Hobsbawm, Morton, and Thompson in the Marxist canon is due not only to their role as historians but also to the perception that this is *Anglicized* Marxism and a rescuing of an English radical and popular tradition. Though, again, it should be stressed, this cannot be removed from internationalism nor from the Popular Frontism, or possibly even from a form of left-wing/Communist Party nationalism, none of which ever left these British Marxist historians radicalised in the 1930s.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, *The World Turned Upside Down* opens with the following words: 'Popular revolt was for many centuries an essential feature of the English tradition'.¹⁰¹ We find similar important emphases when Hill, hardly for the first time, lets the dispassionate historian's guard down. It is of no minor significance that at the heart of this tradition for Hill was his great hero, Winstanley, who is effectively shown to be the dominant figure working innovatively with, but firmly within, a particularly English radical tradition.¹⁰²

This stress on the 'Englishness' of the radical tradition comes through by way of contrast and uniqueness claimed by Hill's subjects, but also through Hill's analysis of them. On the one hand we get Hill looking at

99. C. Hill, 'Historians and the Rise of British Capitalism', *Science and Society* 14 (1950), pp. 307-21 (321).

100. For further discussion see e.g. Kaye, *British Marxist Historians*, p. 120; Schwarz, "'The People" in History'; Dworkin, *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain*, p. 41; Ashman, 'Communist Party Historians' Group'; Renton, 'British Marxist Historians'; D. Renton, 'English Experiences: Was There a Problem of Nationalism in the Work of the British Marxist Historians' Group?', <http://dkrenton.co.uk/research/cphg.html>.

101. Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, p. 13.

102. Such an emphasis runs throughout C. Hill, 'The Religion of Gerrard Winstanley (1578-1604)', in C. Hill, *Religion and Politics in 17th Century England* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1986), pp. 185-252, e.g., 'He has been classed with Richard Coppin as one of the first English universalists... They may have been the first to make the positive point in print; but the heresy was attributed to Elizabethan Familiarists, and John Penry said in 1587 that such beliefs were popular... Anti-Trinitarianism has a long history in England, going back to the Lollards, the Marian martyrs, Familiarists and the last two heretics to be burned in England, in 1612... Winstanley's equation of the rights of Englishmen with the creation of liberties of all men, including the descendents of the free Anglo-Saxons, drew on the same traditions [of the Norman Yoke]' (pp. 194, 197, 219-20).

the acceptance of the idea of England as 'the chosen model to the world' from Winstanley to Milton.¹⁰³ On the other, Hill might analyse the genealogy of the English radical tradition, aware that historians may find sources or antecedents in 'Italian Neo-Platonists' and 'German Anabaptists' but stressing that 'what gives life and vigour to these ideas is the relevance which men felt that they had to the affairs of England in the revolutionary decades... [T]he form and shape [of their ideas] were their own, drawn from experience of their daily life in England.'¹⁰⁴ A notable point of comparison here might again be Hill's younger contemporary, Sheila Rowbotham, who as we saw above published *Women, Resistance and Revolution* in the same year (1972) as *The World Turned Upside Down*. Rowbotham was part of the general intellectual movement of radical British historians, influenced by figures such as Thompson and Hill, and likewise looked at seventeenth-century revolutionary thought (including reference to the role of the Bible) in a chapter called 'Impudent Lasses' (compare Hill's 'Base Impudent Kisses'). But Rowbotham does not focus attention on England alone and has a much more overtly internationalist perspective as she looks at women and revolutionary struggles from France to China, from America to Vietnam. By contrast, Hill's voluminous output looks positively provincial.

As might be expected, the Bible was integral to Hill's recovery of a radical English tradition. The 'revolution' of the English Bible is developed most thoroughly in Hill's later work, *The English Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution*. By the seventeenth century, the vernacular Bible had become popularly available and in the hands of Hill this of course meant that it had become popular for lower class resistance. When 'Englishmen had to face totally unexpected revolutionary situations in the 1640s and 1650s', they could not turn to a Rousseau or a Marx but had to improvise with the only guidance they really knew: the Bible. By the time of the Revolution, Hill argued, the survival of the English Bible was a part of a deep-rooted tradition of lowly illegal gatherings in the time of Wyclif where participants could find the 'profoundly subversive messages' in the Bible which had ultimately been placed in the hands of the revolutionary English because of the martyrdoms of the subsequent English Reformation.¹⁰⁵ However, this Bible in English, he argued, was part of the development of the Protestant English nation.¹⁰⁶ And again, tied in with this radical and quasi-nationalistic

103. Hill, *Experience of Defeat*, p. 39.

104. Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, pp. 363-64.

105. Hill, *English Bible*, pp. 8, 10.

106. Hill, *English Bible*, p. 8.

Bible, we again get the idea of a Cultural Bible. The availability of the English Bible was not only 'a great stimulus to learning to read' but was also 'a cultural revolution of unprecedented proportions, whose consequences are difficult to underestimate'.¹⁰⁷ Moreover, in *The English Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution*, a book, as we saw, dedicated to the Bible and radical politics, there is a major section on 'The Bible and English Literature'. The radical edge was not lost but what Hill did additionally stress was that the 'century from the 1580s to the 1680s is the greatest age in English literature' and the importance of 'the English Bible...in the transformation of English literature in this crucial period'.¹⁰⁸

One distinctive area of historical research running throughout much of Hill's career, and one which brings all these strands of biblical interpretation together, is Hill's work on the 'Norman Yoke', that is, the idea that despotism is a foreign (Norman) import alien to the more benign Anglo-Saxon mentality.¹⁰⁹ Hill studied the history of this myth in radical English tradition and it can be understood, he argued, as a variant of the peasant myth of a golden age. In *The World Turned Upside Down* and elsewhere, one of the revolutionary seventeenth-century arguments, Hill would argue, was to blend the myths of the Norman Yoke and The Fall through a non-historical, 'poetic' reading of the Bible. In other words, radicals (notably Winstanley) could go beyond a call for the restoration of Anglo-Saxon laws and look to a pure state of humanity before the Fall where Adam and Eve, and therefore humanity, should have rights to the products of nature, whether on waste or common lands (see Gen. 1.28).¹¹⁰ Further seventeenth-century biblical topics intertwined with the myth of the Norman Yoke and picked up by Hill were ideas that lawyers and priests represent the Norman army of Antichrist's laity and clergy respectively and that the Norman Yoke could be coded as 'Philistine'.¹¹¹ More broadly, the very development of a Bible in English was, for Hill, part of this resistance to the Norman Yoke. In line with a

107. Hill, *English Bible*, p. 11.

108. Hill, *English Bible*, p. 335, in the section on 'The Bible and English Literature', pp. 335-93.

109. The classic essay is C. Hill, 'The Norman Yoke', in J. Saville (ed.), *Democracy and the Labour Movement* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1954), pp. 11-66.

110. Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, pp. 134, 145; C. Hill, *Liberty against the Law: Some Seventeenth Century Controversies* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), pp. 87-88.

111. Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, p. 271; Hill, *English Bible*, p. 32.

key emphasis in *The English Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution*, the Bible is said to have played 'a large part moulding English nationalism' by 'asserting the supremacy of the English language in a society which from the eleventh to the fourteenth century had been dominated by French-speaking Normans'.¹¹²

However, in the grand scheme of English history, not to mention Hill's career, the English Bible is both a recovery of a radical English tradition and also its decline as the ramifications of the bourgeois revolution became embedded. We saw above how we might read Hill's use of the Radical Bible as part of Hill's bourgeois revolution: bourgeois biblical interpretation may have won out but the Radical Bible left its mark, especially in the rise of Enlightenment biblical criticism. For Hill, particularly as he experiences defeat, there is another angle to the dominance of the bourgeois Bible: *which* Bible would win the day. The radical revolution was about the recovery of a more radical *Geneva Bible* but, due in part to 'market forces', the state-authorised *King James Version* (Hill uses 'AV', the abbreviation for Authorized Version) would go on to be the dominant Bible. Hill argued that the AV was 'far cheaper to produce than the Geneva Bible with its copious notes, illustrations and other accessories' and, with the 'decline of theological politics, consequent on Parliament's victory in the civil war, failure to reach agreed solutions and the fading of the millenarian hope', the Geneva Bible's notes lost their revolutionary relevance and led to the conservative (and bourgeois) victory of the Authorized Version.¹¹³

As we will see further in Chapter 9, similar things could equally be said of the fate of the Radical Bible post-1968.

112. Hill, *English Bible*, p. 7.

113. Hill, *English Bible*, p. 435.