W.S. Graham's Three-Accent Line: "The Gradual Construction of a *Timbre*"

1. On Verse Repertoire

Imagine entering a retrospective exhibition for a poet, as one regularly does for a visual artist, and

dwelling (as in this museum-goer's experience is normally the case) particularly in the early rooms,

where sketches, studies, experiments, chart the developments of the techniques, tropes, practices of

composition that will eventually characterize that artist. The "retrospective" is inevitably teleological, its

early rooms providing context for the "mature" work; yet it is in the early rooms that one most readily

sees on display a thinking in progress. This is a thinking with and through materials: the materials of

making are simultaneously vehicle and object of thought. What is being searched for is not simply the

development a signature "style", but a *repertoire*: a set of techniques, strategies, attitudes--a whole praxis

of making.

The current essay can be read as a response to Simon Jarvis's call "to renew and extend the poetics

of repertoire." As Jarvis observes, literary scholarship has been less inclined to dwell on questions of

technique than art history or musicology, and largely approaches these with a hermeneutic-interpretive

bent. Jarvis's proposal is not for a formalism without regard for meaning, however: when he defines

verse repertoire as "the quasi system of local expressive forces that individual prosodic gestures may

take on or develop in particular authorships, coteries, periods, and genres,"[1] the focus on "expressive

force" and "gesture" points to modes of meaning irreducible to "content". In the below I chart the

emergence of an individual repertoire: the Scottish poet W.S. Graham's (1918-86) articulation of what

he variously called a "three-stress metre," a "three-accent metre," and a "three-foot metre." This was,

he said, "not a typical line of English poetry… not three iambics necessary, but three-accents on every

line";[2] drawn from Hopkinsian sprung rhythm and early Scots versification,[3] it would subsequently

come to be recognized as his "standard metre."[4] This little-known episode in the history of twentieth

century versification is particularly apposite for sketching out a poetics of repertoire: Graham's own

notebooks and letters indicate that a concerted effort to develop what, in a 1949 notebook, he called

"the gradual construction of a timbre."[5]

Befitting a poet trained as a singer, the word "timbre" recurs throughout Graham's writings; in a 1967 letter to the musician Ruth Hilton he writes: "The thing is to find or create (in this case the same thing) a language, a timbre or thought or voice, which I will live in."[6] The word "timbre" often stands in for the distinguishing trait of an artist: in a later letter to Hilton, he says of a new poem "you would recognise the Graham timbre",[7] he also writes to his friend the poet-critic Robin Skelton, "I miss the timbre of your verse",[8] and an unpublished poem, PORTRAIT OF AUDEN SIXTY (1967-68), includes the address:

> your particular timbre of thought
> Has moved like music in to come part
> Of the word's subjective counterpoint.[9]

Such usage of "timbre" is not restricted to poetry: he writes in 1956 to the painter Roger Hilton (Ruth's first husband) that Hilton's paintings struck him with their "timbre of voice"—a strikingly synaesthetic image.[10] "Timbre" is at once literal and figural: metonym for style, and synthesis of the different art media. However, just as musical timbre is produced as much by the instrument as the instrumentalist, so the "timbre" of the artist's voice or thought is also endowed with its own singular agency: as "language" or "the word's subjective counterpoint." And most alluring is the suggestion that "timbre" is something to be "lived in". In Graham's phrase "gradual construction of a timbre", the spatial connotations of "construction" are crucial.

Graham regularly depicts poetic composition as a form of "living in". Perhaps its most eloquent expression comes in 1958, in a sketched introduction to a reading of his poem LETTER IV, of how he attempted to compose according to the three-accent line:

> While I was writing those letters [SEVEN LETTERS, composed 1950-53] I tried to almost
> live inside this three stress metre I had chosen. I hoped that I would be able to utilise the very
> stricture they seemed to impose on my voice. In my notebook I made myself try to say all

kinds of things which seemed impossible to say in this metre. I wrote pages of verse saying to myself that it didn't matter whether it was poetry or not. And, of course, most of it was not but, to some degree, it seemed to tap, at times, a kind of sensibility which I didn't know was in me. Before I begin to go through LETTER IV let me digress for a moment and read you one page of this kind of exercise verse from my notebook. And let me read it very strictly & metronomically, if that is a word…[11]

In and through meter, the maker orients themselves among their materials. When Graham speaks of "stricture", one can hear a response to that perennial question facing late modernist poetics: namely, what kinds of rhythmic organization are possible in the wake of free verse, and indeed what kind of "freedom" is in question. Writing to Moncrieff Williamson in 1949, he complains of "a lack of definite rhythmical movement" in his friend's poems, concluding: "I think you should try to write in definite metres. This 'free verse' with lines all prose in rhythm is the most difficult kind of verse to make successful. Even Eliot's 'free verse' is not 'free' but ordered into a pattern."[12] In 1975 he described his three-accent line (favorably!) as "a kind of straitjacket",[13] and throughout his writings the "metronome" recurs as a figure of rhythmic ordering: "Although I love the ever-present metronome in verse, I am greedy for my rhythmic say;"[14] "I need to know where I am, counting out my lines inside myself—as though a metronome were going—to allow myself to make things with the beat, which of course makes rhythmic shapes more easy to do."[15] His celebration of the metronome could be read as a rejoinder to Ezra Pound's dictum: "As regarding rhythm: to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome."[16]

To this degree, Graham's thinking on, and in, meter, might be seen to repeat a familiar schema: constraint/freedom, isochrony/*durée*, abstract/concrete, meter/rhythm. However, describing the metronome as allowing him "to know where I am" moves beyond an account of meter as external stricture, towards one of meter as *habitus*. Here Graham is building on the account of poetic composition given by Paul Valéry in "Poetry and Abstract Thought", in which the poet is "suddenly *gripped* by a rhythm which took possession of me and soon gave me the impression of some force

outside myself. It was as though someone else were making use of my *living-machine*."[17] When Graham says that the meter "seemed to tap, at times, a kind of sensibility which I didn't know was in me", he too attunes himself to the automatism of verse composition. But if anything, he goes further than Valéry. His two deft puns—the "tap" of metrical beat, the "times" of prosodic duration—intimate that the external "stricture" of meter opens up the interiority of the speaking subject: the metrical "taps" "tap" this sensibility into being. It is the same in the 1985 interview, when he talks of "counting *out* my lines *inside* myself." There is a porosity of interior and exterior which the movements of meter would traverse, and open up.

At this juncture, the technical question of how one might "live inside" a meter expands outwards into a question that is metaphysical in scope. What initially makes Graham's experiments with the three-accent line so compelling is that they constitute a concerted effort to construct a distinctive metrical idiom: a "timbre" through which individual gestures attain motive force. But in the gradual construction of Graham's timbre, there emerges something beyond this idiom: a sustained thinking of our inhabitation of language as a whole. Skelton has described Graham's long poem, THE DARK DIALOGUES, written in 1957-58 (and thus shortly before this notebook entry), as the "first airing" of "a mode of speech and of metaphysical enquiry" that would characterize Graham's poetry for the rest of his life.[18] And indeed, this inquiry centers around the question of how we orient ourselves in language—"What I am making is / A place for language in my life", as he writes in WHAT IS THE LANGUAGE USING US FOR? (1973-74).[19] It would appear that, long before its formulation in THE DARK DIALOGUES, this enquiry is already operative in Graham's compositional practices. It was not a case of finding a verse idiom in which this problematic might find expression, but rather the opposite: Graham's inhabitation of verse forms gives on to a far-reaching reflection on our inhabitation of language.

The following will chart the thinking-in-process out of which this metaphysics emerges, from Graham's first extant poems that deploy the three-accent line, composed in 1944, up to THE DARK DIALOGUES in 1958. This involves technical developments, new expressive possibilities, new deployments of verbal materials; but the question of verse repertoire is not just one of individual

timbres or compositional choices, but entails a broader metaphysics of linguistic making. In this, the essay responds not just to Jarvis's challenge to contemporary poetic criticism, but also to a challenge laid down by Graham himself: "the 'help' the critic should give us … is towards understanding the 'language apparatus' that has been constructed."[20]

2. The White Threshold

Graham's success as a poet came early: associated with the "New Apocalypse" poets of the 1940s (whose most notable figures were Dylan Thomas, George Barker, David Gascoyne), he was signed by T.S. Eliot to Faber in 1948, and in that same year--in spite of having left school aged fourteen to work in the shipyards at Greenock, on the west coast of Scotland, and subsequently spent one year at the adult education college Newbattle Abbey aged 20--he lectured at NYU while recipient of an Atlantic Award.[21] However, he was ill-served by the austere anti-modernist backlash of 1950s British literary culture, and by the time of his death was unknown but to a small group of dedicated readers and fellow poets.[22] Ironically, the dominant critical consensus of recent decades disparages his earliest poems-- those which brought him a modicum of literary fame--as "disobligingly cryptic," even "maddeningly convoluted,"[23] compared with the austere clarity of his later work. Michael Schmidt in 1977 described Graham's early poems as "word-drunk, crowded, cacophonous,"[24] eliciting great protest from Graham himself. Graham's complaint was in Schmidt's broader tendency towards a narrative of "how I struggled up through my early poetry to gradually get better and better", concluding "It is not like that."[25] But critics have largely determined otherwise. For Ronnie Duncan, this is so self-evident as hardly to need elaboration, merely "a simple comparison of his language before and after this watershed [the 1955 collection *The Nightfishing*]."[26] Tony Lopez and Matthew Francis, authors of the only two monographs currently dedicated to Graham, go further, dividing his works (and their books) into "early", "middle" and "late" styles. Where critics have seen this in terms of a general sensibility,[27] of syntax and imagery,[28] even of a development in his thematic concerns,[29] I wish to suggest that at the crux of these transformations were his experiments in versification: Graham's three-accent line indicates a sensibility shifting away from the expansive, surrealist-inflected vatic mode of Thomas and

his contemporaries, towards a more impersonal, contained poetics of micro-gesture more aligned to Eliot's *Four Quartets* or Wallace Stevens (two continual reference points in Graham's notebooks from the late 1940s onwards); the three-accent line also, crucially, becomes a means of managing syntax and image. This latter technical advance is one of the great discoveries of *The White Threshold* (1949).

The White Threshold announces itself with Graham's new three-accent line. SINCE ALL MY STEPS TAKEN and LISTEN. PUT ON MORNING, in Lopez's description, "form a metrical group,"[30] and the meter returns throughout the volume, notably in the THREE LETTERS that Graham saw as "an epilogue" to the collection.[31] Over the course of the collection, we see a nascent repertoire finding form, with five recurrent features (a "quasi-system", as Jarvis puts it). Each of these is already at work in the first quatrain of its opening poem, SINCE ALL MY STEPS TAKEN:

> Since all my steps taken
>
> Are audience of my last
>
> With hobnail on Ben Narnain
>
> Or mind on the word's crest (NCP 59)

The line break after "last" plays a (1) <u>disambiguating role in the syntax</u>, identifying "last" as a qualifier of "step". If the lack of punctuation implies enjambment, the syntax and intonational contour of the three-accent line gravitate in the opposite direction: the line-break serves tacitly as punctuation. Indeed, even when syntax and lineation do not coincide, intonation is nevertheless mapped on to verse line, if not generated by it:

> The centuries turn their locks
>
> And open under the hill
>
> Their inherited books and doors
>
> All gathered to distil
>
> Like happy berry pickers

One voice to talk to us.

Each line break serves to shape paratactic accumulation into hypotactic subordination: the verse line provides not just a shared cadence, but an organizing principle. As Graham explained to Edwin Morgan, "Breaking the metrical framework" in his early poems "was, I thought, to preserve some feeling of rhetorical inevitability which had been got rather by accident than intention." By contrast, he now encouraged meter as a means of countermanding such "inevitability": "I am for order, for the selection of PROPORTION."[32]

It is perhaps unsurprising then that when Denis Driscoll complains that "much of [*The White Threshold*] is still maddeningly convoluted, with poems scarcely communicating among themselves as stanza coldly snubs fellow stanza," the poem he identifies as a "success" is LISTEN. PUT ON MORNING.[33] The three-accent line seems to serve as a negotiation between fragment and what Graham would call "the whole orchestra of a poem, the whole intricate organism which the poet has made."[34] A similar effect is found in THE WHITE THRESHOLD:

> Some move nearer a homecoming
>
> Out of the midnight stirred
>
> And the humancrowded song
>
> Of the lamenting sea.

As with "last" in SINCE ALL MY STEPS TAKEN, "stirred" here situates "midnight" as the site of the movement, but also creates a parallel between midnight, "song", and "sea." An extension of its punctuating role, then, is (2) <u>a structural role in managing images</u>. This is made programmatic in two couplets, in THE BIRTHRIGHT TWINS OUTRUN: "The martyr strapped to fire. / The intellect strapped to ice." and "I'm poured from serpent fire / and from the cathedral ice" (NCP 81), where the shift in "from", from unstress to stress, heightens the parallel.

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As each line separates off its locution from those surrounding it, we intimate (3) an "unrealised" fourth beat,[35] something distinctly audible in Graham's recording of SINCE ALL MY STEPS TAKEN for the British Council in the late 1950s, where the "rhythmic say" seems entirely subsumed in the metrical framework.[36] A paused line break can accommodate both iambic/anapestic openings and feminine endings, as in "And the **song sleeps** to be **wa**kened / By the **mor**ning **ear bright**" in 'LISTEN. PUT ON MORNING' (NCP 60-61). This indicates a further feature of Graham's three-accent line: the (4) variability in stress pattern, shifting between single, duple and triple feet, somewhat akin to Hopkins's "sprung rhythm." When, in the opening stanza to SINCE ALL MY STEPS TAKEN, the poetic voice alights on "the word's crest", we find a further rhythmical effect: (5) the condensation of compound stresses. In a meter that is accentual rather than accentual-syllabic, compound stress can both falls within the three-accent pattern, and can sound to syncopate against it.

This leads to a rhythmic indeterminacy peculiar to compound stress. In the title poem to *The White Threshold*, for instance, how are we to scan the following compounds, where four stressed syllables are placed in sequence: "young life broke through"; "quick room cropped up", as well as other lines which would appear to require four stresses: "And **bright air** of **each death**"; "The **strange sea borne** in a **ge**sture" (NCP 96)? The variability of syllable count complicates any scansion that would bring these lines to accord with their putative meter. Where a line like Shakespeare's "And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste", seems far removed from a heroic line, with its accumulations of "old woes new wail" and "dear time's waste", the conventions of accentual-syllabic scansion can parse this within a system of relative stress; such compounds can thus adhere to the alternating unstress-stress of the line without defusing the rhythmic force of their syncopations.[37] An exclusively accentual meter, by contrast, provides little way of navigating such questions of scansion. When Graham increasingly employs compound stresses, it might then be grasped within his broader thematics of how we navigate the words of the poem.

Graham's compound stresses are not just a means of thinking with and through meter, but also *about* meter. When in LISTEN. PUT ON MORNING we read "close upon / The public heartbeat" (NCP 60), should "heartbeat" be read as stress-unstress, or as compound stress? The metrical pattern would

suggest the latter, in order to provide a third accent; spoken lexical stress tends towards the former. TO MY MOTHER also puts pressure on "heartbeat", but where in the former case, "beat" seems not strong enough to sustain the three-accent pattern, in this latter case, the jarring syllable is "heart":

> My memory saves its breath.
>
> Its flowing stronghold with
>
> Crowds of the day and night
>
> Changes them each heartbeat. (NCP 101)

The half-rhyme scheme asks for stress to fall on "beat", to accord with "night" and the closure of the cadence, something furthered by the assonance with "each". At the same time, the accumulation of consonants in "ea**ch h**eartbeat" draws prosodic emphasis towards "heart". To complicate matters further, "heartbeat" can be read as the culmination of a series of similar compounds: 'My steps to a **great past**' (l. 4), '**What son** did you inherit?' (l. 12), 'Suddenly **some man** I am' (l. 23), 'stepping away from his / **Last home**' (ll. 25-26). Three incompatible voicings are suspended in the syncopation. That this should be organized around the word "heartbeat" holds an additional punning irony, given its conventional status as the physiological basis for poetic rhythm. Indeed, when Tony Lopez sees in Graham's verse of this period "a kind of primitive identification between breaking wave rhythms and the physical basis of verse rhythms in pulse, heartbeat and sexual arousal," and Adam Piette suggests that Graham "aligns heart-beat with the sea threshold", they introduce yet one further naturalizing figure for rhythm.[38]

    These are not the only times that Graham engages in metrical paronomasia. In the opening to SINCE ALL MY STEPS TAKEN, the "foot" has not just metrical but also paronomasic value—the "steps" described are simultaneously those of the walker navigating the hill, and of the poet navigating language. The three-accent line is crucial to setting up this parallel straight away, its syntactic-punctuating role placing the shoe against the "mind", and Ben Narnain against "the word's crest". The final image in the collection, from Graham's elegiac TO MY MOTHER, works a similar parallel, more

poignant than punning, however: she lies "Under (not ground but the words)" (NCP 101). TO MY BROTHER offers "feet", "breaks", "beats" and "measures":

> All on this emerged morning
>
> Between banks of shipbuilding
>
> The distilled and hurtled out
>
> Industry of mind and heart
>
>
> Floats us from hammer yards,
>
> Twin measures of these words. (NCP 99)

Where SINCE ALL MY STEPS TAKEN would parallel the foot on the mountain with the poet's foothold in language, here the "measures of these words" belong to "The industry of mind and heart". The physiological-naturalized basis of meter that Lopez and Piette identify is thus complicated somewhat. The rhythms here issue from the River Clyde between its banks, but as a site of shipbuilding rather waves lapping the shore—something complicated further in TO MY MOTHER, where

> The flowing strongheld Clyde
>
> Rests me my earliest word
>
> That has ever matchlessly
>
> Changed me towards the sea.

The transitive "Rests" alludes to a musical pause, alongside its image of the child lulled to sleep by the flowing water, and at the same time lulled into language.

   The three LETTERS show Graham handling the three-accent line with increased facility. Although only published in 1949, Graham had composed the poems of *The White Threshold* between 1944 and 1946; however, in Spring 1948 he wrote three LETTERS: "each 30 lines — 3 foot iambic — rimed

strictly in form — the verse tight",[39] which he appended to the collection, and considered "the most successful whole poems I have written, and the most mature."[40] In the six-line sentence quoted above from TO MY BROTHER, the meter serves to parse the sentence syntactically, but at the same time permits a countervailing prosodic-grammatical elongation across the lines, reaching its nucleus in "Floats", both as active verb and the culmination of the image. And in endowing full metrical weight on the polysyllable "matchlessly" (notably through its rhyme with "sea"), Graham has adopted a characteristic feature of Wordsworth's and Yeats's versification, far removed from the condensations of his earlier versification.[41] The enjambing break then affords a prosodic-syntactic parallel between "Rests" and "Changed", drawing out the dynamic structure of the sentence-quatrain as a whole.

The "maturity" Graham observes in these LETTERS thus extends to its metrical performance: it offers a distillation of the five features of the earlier repertoire, but exhibits a dexterity that their predecessors had only sporadically achieved. In the earlier instances of the meter, intonation had been mapped on to lineation, even where lineation diverged from syntax. Here, however, we see intonation contours starting to work both with and against the verse line. As Piette puts it, Graham's verse of this period embodies the "paradox … that where the voice breaks off, it also runs on."[42] One stanza of TO MY FATHER runs:

> These words this one night
>
> Feed us | and will not
>
> Leave us | without our natures
>
> Inheriting new fires. (NCP 100)

Once more, Graham mixes compound stresses with duple and triple feet: one could scan "one night / Feed us" and "will not / Leave us" as four consecutive stresses. The assonance of "Feed us" and "Leave us" strengthens their syncopating cadences; the five syllable patterns of "and will not / Leave us" and "without our natures" add a further dimension to this counterpoint (the second syllable of

"natures" offers further assonance with "us"). Increasingly, intonation contours traverse line breaks and stanza breaks, loosening the tendency towards an unvoiced fourth beat. In TO MY FATHER:

the still

Foundered man | is the oracle

Tented within his early

Friendships.

And in the opening to TO MY MOTHER:

Under (not ground but the mind's)

Thunder | you rest on memory's

Daily aloneness | as rest

My steps | to a great past.

If the "Under/Thunder" rhyme mimics that of "Feed us / Leave us", then "rest / My steps" echoes the opening image of the collection in SINCE ALL MY STEPS TAKEN, while anticipating the image of the Clyde that "Rests me my earliest word". Graham elongates firstly intonation contours ("rest on memory" becomes "rest on memory's / Daily aloneness") and then syntax ("as rest / my steps") across line breaks, until we find counterpointed metrical, intonational and syntactic units, before their resolution at the end of the stanza.

This is not simply the management of different parts of "the whole orchestra", however: it is also an attempt to deploy plural modes of linguistic temporality alongside one another. The poem finishes:

Sometimes like loneliness

Memory's crowds increase.

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Suddenly some man I am

So finds himself endless stream

Of stepping away from his

Last home. I crave my ease

Stopped for a second dead

Out of the speaking flood.

Under (not ground but the words)

You rest with speaking hordes.

Graham starts by playing "Sometimes" off against "Suddenly", before alighting on "Stopped": as Fiona Green has noted, it is as though Graham, in what is after all an elegiac address, seeks to "wrest the temporal out of the timeless."[43] Green suggests that THREE LETTERS "proceeds in simple three-foot lines step by step to the point of walking away,"[44] but "walking away" would hardly do justice to the complex of temporal attitudes and experiences in these lines. Graham once again deploys sequences of compound stress ("some man I am / So finds"), indeterminacies in intonation (the phrase "I crave my ease / Stopped for a second dead / Out of the speaking flood" suggests multiple possibilities, depending on how we parse syntax and attribute images), and syntactic-paratactic condensation ("finds himself endless stream"). These prosodic intensities are all contained within the disjunction of memory and the present in which Graham says "I find myself", and the "rest" of the dead mother. This is the third appearance of "rest" in the poem, the first not to describe Graham himself: but once more, "rest" provides little stillness, buried under this elegiac address with "speaking hordes", a rather restless dead. With these plural temporalities, Graham's developing verse repertoire starts to unfold an understated metaphysics of prosody, fitting for a poet who would be most famed in his lifetime as an elegist. As his exploration of the three-accent meter progresses, he becomes increasingly attuned to the temporal dynamics of his verse medium.

3. THE SEVEN LETTERS

One of the most significant innovations in Graham's three-accent line is so inconspicuous that it might easily escape notice. In the penultimate verse paragraph of LETTER III (composed 1950-52), we read:

> Easy. Move as I move
>
> Through this breathless sea
>
> Rended openly. The deck
>
> Bleeds sudden fire and
>
> The binnacle like a clutch
>
> Of glow-worms glows. See.

Before coming to this, there is much that is more immediately noticeable. For instance, the aural echo of "**Through** this **breath**less **sea**" in "**Ren**ded **op**enly", which syncopates against a three-accent scansion for "Rended openly. The deck." Graham's notebook sketches for the SEVEN LETTERS indicate that he is often changing the length of his three-accented lines, indicating that he sees meter to govern lexical stress, rather than vice versa. Indeed, the opening line of the first LETTER goes through several different variants before arriving at its finalized version: "Welcome then anytime. Fare / Well as your skill's worth / […]" (NCP 121): "'Welcome anytime' / The sea first said to him"; "'Welcome anytime' the sea / First said to him in his prime"; "Welcome anytime, then. / What ear asks to listen?".[45]

Such effects are intensifications of the repertoire already developed in the poems of *The White Threshold*. What is new is the floating "and" at the end of the fourth line of the passage. This is the first time that Graham has used an unstressed syllable at the end of a line which was not part of a feminine cadence, and where the upbeat to a new intonation contour is begun just before a line break. Throughout *The White Threshold*, intonation and lineation were closely linked, such that lineation often served to disambiguate competing intonations; here the disparities are far more extensive:

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> The deck
>
> Bleeds sudden fire | and
>
> The binnacle |like a clutch
>
> Of glow-worms | glows.

Graham's verse is now balancing the demands of the meter with a newfound commitment to speech stress. As he puts it in the 1949 notebook, in his "mechanics notes": "any versification — but must remain organic to spoken conversation;" and a few lines later quotes Eliot: "The music of poetry must be a music latent in the common speech of its time."[46]

This arises from practical, as well as aesthetic, considerations. The SEVEN LETTERS constitute Graham's longest concerted treatment of the three-accent line, and makes up almost half of his 1955 volume *The Nightfishing*. The very length of this sequence rendered some of the features of the earlier experiments with the meter unmanageable: where earlier short poems had relied on prosodic intensity, modulation is required to sustain the verse over a longer period of time. Graham's letters and notebooks indicate that this was an abiding preoccupation leading up to their composition. In his letter to Morgan of 14 April 1949, commenting of Morgan's long poem "Dies Irae," his main complaint is that "the verse lets me down a lot." In part this is because "I would like the verse constructed more tautly", but this does not mean repetition: rather, "I long for some relief and distortion in the rhythm. They even all end ∪ –".[47] He ends the letter with another (mis)quote from Eliot's "The Music of

Poetry": "The poet should dispose the poorer among the richer. He cannot afford to overweigh the poem with the richer for it is only at certain moment that a word can be made to insinuate the whole history of the language."[48] His image of "the whole orchestra of the poem, the whole intricate organism" dates from a moment when he has completed one long poem, and is embarking on another extended sequence; when he sends Morgan a copy of THE NIGHTFISHING on 4 May 1950, he demands, "If there is any on thing I want your opinion on it is, Does it hold together as *one object*. I

don't want it to be a stream of verses."[49] In 1955 he tells Charles Causley that his first reason for attempting a long poem was "THE TECHNICAL CHALLENGE."[50]

This concern with sustaining a rhythmical performance over a longer work coincides with a new prosodic focus. Indeed, the second reason Graham gave to Causley in fact seems no less "technical": he chose the "vehicle of a long poem" for "the dimensions in which I could be to a certain extent DRAMATIC, and I mean 'dramatic' not so much in the sense of creating other spokesmen to speak for me but dramatic in the sudden shocking bringing together of different and seeming incompatible textures of narrative and gestures of language."[51] These "incompatible textures" include different linguistic registers, notably as he blends the highly wrought poetic diction characteristic of the earlier verse with an increased deployment of colloquial speech. The focus of the 1949 notebook is not simply on "speech" but "spoken *conversation*"—this was a poet who between 1948 and 1953 wrote ten poems entitled LETTER, and whose metrical experiments were working up towards another long poem, which started under the title LETTER *, and was eventually renamed THE DARK DIALOGUES. His concern is not just the prosodics of speech stress, but how to render broader communicative gestures in the verse line, whilst opening up the line itself to this palette of inflections, contours, dynamics. Elsewhere in the 1949 notebook he expresses the vain hope that "making art was not such a one-way contact,"[52] and this remains with him for the rest of his career. He prefaces his 1970 collection *Malcolm Mooney's Land* in the Poetry Book Society Bulletin of Spring 1970 by writing

> The poet only speaks one way. He hears nothing back. His words as he utters them are not conditioned by a real ear replying from the other side. That is why he has to make the poem stand stationary as an Art object.[53]

And it reaches is culmination in his 1975 elegy "Dear Bryan Wynter", a late instance of the three-accent line:

> Speaking to you and not

Knowing if you are there

Is not too difficult.

My words are used to that. (NCP 258)[54]

In the 1950 sketches for the SEVEN LETTERS, Graham tries to bring colloquialisms to fit the meter—or else loosen the meter to accommodate the colloquialisms. "No slur meant. So bear / Me no offence or grudge" reads one such experiment, where meter and line break combine to endow this snippet of conversation with the trappings of poetic diction. As he would write in the notebook given to Wynter, "I made myself try to say all kinds of things which seemed impossible to say in this metre." A phrase like "No slur meant" is "impossible" not so much prosodically as rhetorically; when Graham then speaks of discovering "a kind of sensibility which I didn't know was in me", this sensibility seems here to be concerned precisely with negotiating the relation of different linguistic registers and gestures. The three-accent line is not simply a question of the shaping of prosodic matter, but of bringing diverse linguistic dynamics into interplay.

Looking at Graham's notebooks for the SEVEN LETTERS shows a process of both gain and loss, rather than an inevitable march to success. For instance, the passage

Night moves. I am driven in

This word-engraving pulse

To break me from that false

Hooded hero's sight.

Break me out of this night[55]

Is eventually replaced by

Take heed. Reply. Here

I am driven burning on

This loneliest element. Break

Break me out of this night,

This silence where you are not. (NCP 124)

The latter version gains urgency by being situated in an implicit dialogue—the imperatives of "Take heed" and "Reply", the deictics of "Here"—but a dialogue in which the poetic voice nevertheless "hears nothing back". But the pun around the line break, which becomes "Break / break", is in the earlier draft counterpointed against the "word-engraving pulse": a potent image for meter, and which recalls not only the larger array of metrical puns in *The White Threshold* (measure, rest, foot, heartbeat, etc.), but also an echoes from THE NIGHTFISHING—"The iron sea engraved to our faintest breath" (NCP 111). If the disappearance of the rhyme scheme diminishes the poem's sense of "pulse", it also makes possible a greater plasticity of intonation contour: where the rhyme would mark a stronger pause, here the phrasing is "driven burning on".[56]

Graham often started with a scheme of off-rhymes before unmooring this scheme, so that when it surfaces it is less conspicuous, more undersong than organizing principle: most of the early drafts are in quatrains (of either couplets or cross rhymes), which are subsequently collated into larger verse paragraphs, with the rhymes made less regular. The openings of both LETTER I and LETTER II bear marks of a couplet rhyme scheme that in the published version is slow to enter. LETTER I at one point had the strained couplet "Welcome anytime, then. / What ear asks to listen?"[57]—another instance of meter and rhyme distorting lexical stress. But the final version reads:

Welcome then anytime. Fare

Well as your skill's worth,

You able-handed sea-**blade**

Aglint with the in**laid**

Scales of the herring host

And hosting light. Good morning

Said that. And that morning

Opened and fary **rose**

Keeping sea-pace with **us**

Sailed out on the long **kyle**.

Early there I could **tell** […] (NCP 121)

From here, (half-)rhyming couplets emerge and disperse, points of momentary coherence. The closing couplet—"These words said welcome. Fare / Them well for what they are" (NCP 122)—offers conclusion not just through the iambic lilt of the finalline, but also as "are" provides the rhyme of "Fare" that was denied in the poem's opening (in this respect, if no other, the poem constitutes a *Tristan und Isolde* in minature). LETTER II opens similarly with three non-rhyming lines—"Burned in this element / To the bare bone, I am / Trusted on the language" (NCP 122)—before falling into another long set of couplets. These are only broken during an autobiographical vignette from Graham's youth growing up in the Greenock shipyards, when "in a welding flash / He found his poetry arm" (NCP 123): the ending of the rhyme scheme coinciding with its poet's epiphanic, and strikingly manual, transformation from apprentice engineer into poet.

Graham would later speak of "get[ting] the beat established silently in the centre of the words and within the word's sense."[58] Through the increased eschewal of rhyme and the onus on intonation contours with ever greater independence from the verse line, the meter itself is indeed established ever more "silently". This can explain Morgan's description of "Graham's favourite unrhymed three-stressed line" as "not strictly metrical" but "dependent on our being aware of an underlying beat," or Peter Riley's salient suggestion that, in Graham's later verse, the three-accent line "is more of a compositional device than an effect".[59] Yet at the same time that Graham opens up his verse line to prose rhythms, there comes an increased prevalence of polymetricality, and in particular, of crosscurrents of pentameters against, and across, the three-accent line.

Among the various permutations Graham tries out while drafting the opening lines to LETTER I ("Welcome anytime. Fare") are two that take the pentameter:

> Grieve me the great midnight. Say after me
>
> "My dear, my dear of the night, my dear of Love,
>
> Welcome becomes ever farewells that move
>
> Always under us all like the walking sea

 and

> Grieve me the great midnight. Say after me
>
> "My dear of the night, my dear of Love, welcome
>
> Becomes ever farewell that moves under
>
> Us all."[60]

"Grieve me the great midnight" is one of Graham's great phrases, yet was never to find a home in a completed poem. Graham described the aim of the opening of LETTER I as being "to achieve a 'setting' for the opening 'bass' which is—'Grieve me the great midnight.'"[61] As we will see, the initial drafts for THE DARK DIALOGUES exhibit a similar aim, even if here too the "poem as organism" eventually trumped the individual line. But if the phrase disappears, the pentameter cadence does not; often they get incorporated into the three-accent line. One such snippet was first unfurled in a letter to Bryan and Susan Wynter, as one of a few "nice sweet little pieces of poesy": "I look the wide night's garment from my eyes" is designed "to be read aloud with the grand Marlow [*sic*] cadence."[62] In LETTER V this phrase is reworked, and embedded in the three-accent meter: "As you sail here **look the word's / Bright garment from your eyes**" (NCP 133-34). Similarly in LETTER II we hear "My musing love lie down / Within my arms" (NCP 125), in LETTER IV "It's from / Some family famous for / The sea," and in LETTER VII both "For her I have / The length and breadth of Love" and "To

meet you in the eye / And in the ear" (NCP 138). These cadences, juxtaposed with narrative and

interlocution, become an additional strand to be woven in to the poems' prosodic texture. That

Graham's verse repertoire should open itself both to the rhythms of "spoken conversation" and the

canonical accentual-syllabic meter of English verse, and at the same period, would bear out his stated

aim of "bringing together of different and seeming incompatible textures of narrative and gestures of

language."

4. THE DARK DIALOGUES

"Grieve me the great midnight" is also the phrase with which Graham starts his drafts of LETTER *,

the poem which would eventually become THE DARK DIALOGUES:

> Grieve me the great midnight
>
> So should it go in threes
>
> With again that old fond
>
> Metaphor, the sea.[63]

Once again, Graham is starting his draft with quatrains; once again, they will subsequently coalesce into

verse paragraphs, and once again the initial scheme of half-rhymes will disappear—only this time more

absolutely than in the LETTERS.[64] By the time that he writes to Alan Clodd with an account of his

slow progress ("I've been feeling specially exasperated over this long poem I'm working on which is

certainly proving the toughest poetic nut my blue-eyed brain has ever set out to crack"), the phrase has

been repurposed once more:

> I always meant to only
>
> Language swings away
>
> Further before me.

21

Language swings away

Before me as I go

With again the night rising

Up to accompany me

And that other fond

Metaphor, the sea.

Images of night

And thre sea changing

Should know me well enough.

Grieve me the great midnight.[65]

"I always meant to only" had itself gone through many permutations: "I meant to only always / Before me goes language"; "I mean to only before / Me goes the language all ways"; "I meant to only always / Language —— away".[66] The final version offers a prosodic-syntactic tautness the others lack. The indeterminacy of "only" makes us at first unsure whether the intonation contour ends at "meant to" or continues on to the next line: after all, I always meant to *what*? Whereas in his earlier uses of the three-accent meter, lineation served as quasi-punctuation, disambiguating both sense and syntax, here a reader is presented with two intonational choices, neither of which coincide with the line break. In THE NIGHTFISHING he writes "The eye reads forward as the memory reads back" (NCP 117), a phrase he subsequently employed when he read his work on radio, to describe the temporal experience of verse on the page.[67] The phrase is particularly apposite here, as the intonation contour is determined retrospectively: as Tony Lopez puts it, "[t]he meaning is established by reading *back* and relocating the sense."[68] Piette goes further, arguing that what resonates out of Graham's poems is a "printed voice": these intonations inhabit the reading eye as much as the reciting voice; voice, breath, rhythm, emerge as textual productions.[69] Compared to "I meant to | only always", "I always meant to | only" places the indeterminacy closer to the line break, closer to the shift to the present tense in "Language *swings* away",

so as even to enact this swinging-away in its prosodic-syntactic texture. The three-accent meter thus becomes the site for the intersection of multiple temporal experiences—those managed by lineation, intonation, syntax, lexical stress, but also the temporalities of tense, shifts in register and deictics, different orders of narrative time. All combine into a multidimensional temporality of reading.

Graham's drafts for THE DARK DIALOGUES indicate that he is attempting to grasp these temporalities both at the localized, prosodic level, and at a structural level: again, the "whole orchestra of the poem, the whole intricate organism which the poet has made."[70] He writes: "The Poem to be in 5 sections of approx. 50 lines all 3 stress lines. To employ a wide range of device in the rhythm & with this." In the first manuscript draft, and with only the first two lines of the first section filled in, he has already decided that the long section would end with the phrase "Because always language / Is where the people are." <Figure 1>[71] The drafts thus emulate Valéry's account of metrical composition in "Poetry and Abstract Thought:"

> My poem *Le Cimetière marin* began in me as a rhythm, that of a French line… of ten syllables, divided into four and six. I had as yet no idea with which to fill out this form. Gradually a few hovering words settled in it, little by little determining the subject, and my labor (a very long labor) was before me. Another poem, *La Pythie*, first appeared as an eight-syllable line whose sound came of its own accord. But this line implied a sentence of which it was a part, and this sentence, if it existed, implied many other sentences. A problem of this kind has an infinite number of solutions. But with poetry the musical and metrical conditions greatly restrict the indefiniteness.[72]

In his notebook entry from November 1958, Graham wrote of "the stricture" that the three-accent meter "seemed to impose on my voice": these manuscript sketches indicate that the words were filled in gradually to a pre-existing meter and structure—Valéry's practice followed to the letter (or diacritic). He even staged this process on the slate board at his local pub. < Figure 2>

But perhaps the most interesting feature of this drafting process comes from a different source. In 1955, Graham put together a notebook of PENTAMETERS, which, like the sketches for the SEVEN LETTERS, seem at times wholly indifferent to "whether it was poetry or not" (how else to explain lines like "The blazing kneecap of the holy ghost"?).[73] Yet out of this notebook emerge firstly his love villanelle for his wife, Nessie Dunsmuir, I LEAVE THIS AT YOUR EAR FOR WHEN YOU WAKE; and secondly, a passage of THE DARK DIALOGUES itself.

One sketch reads:

> Those hewing cries are out to cut us down
>
> With striding lights and steering eyes Europa
>
> Feather your oars and hoist your ears aloft

And another, some pages later:

> With riding lights and starving eyes Europa
>
> And her high meadow bull fall slowly
>
> Their way across this monstrous makeshift where
>
> We ride the slow drift of the steller stoure [*sic*].

The final version of THE DARK DIALOGES incorporates this almost wholesale:

> Wanton with riding lights
>
> And staring eyes, | Europa
>
> And her high meadow bull |
>
> Fall slowly their way
>
> Behind the blindfold | and
>
> Across this more or less

Uncommon place.

If the lines started off as pentameter, then in one intermediary draft, this cadence was downplayed:

> Wanton with riding lights
>
> And staring eyes, Europa
>
> And her high meadow bull
>
> Fall slowly their way
>
> Across this common place.
>
> I hear the blind horn
>
> Mourning from Pendeen.
>
> Grieve me the great midnight.[74]

Both "Fall slowly their way" and "Across this common place" are elongated to accommodate the pentameter of the opening two contours:[75] such a sustained passage of polymetricality differs markedly from the snippets of pentameter in the SEVEN LETTERS, which emerge and disappear as isolated cadences. It is an effect he will return to in later instances of the three-accent meter, such as in MALCOLM MOONEY'S LAND (1966):

> Why did you choose this place
>
> For us to meet? | Sit
>
> With me between this word
>
> And this, | my furry queen. |
>
> Yet not mistake this
>
> For the real thing. […]
>
> […]
>
> | outside the tent

The bearded blinded go |

Calming their children

Into the ovens of frost?

These junctures are not simply the disparity of two metrical patterns, but rather two *kinds of meter*: the pentameter lines are accentual-syllabic, whereas Graham's three-accent meter is accentual only, with its variability of simple, duple and triple feet, of rising and falling cadences. As THE DARK DIALOGUES reaches its close, Europa and the bull re-enter briefly: "That not unnatural pair / Turn slowly home" (NCP 174). This phrase, too, is taken almost verbatim from his pentameter notebook: "That not unnatural pair go slowly home."[76] A heroic line is retrofitted to a couplet of six accents; lines such as "Uncommon place", "Behind the blindfold and", or "Calming their children", also ask to be read simultaneously as working within a three-accent (as Graham's meter would dictate) and having two beats (in order to fit the pentameter cadence). Polymetricality becomes one further means of placing multiple temporal experiences in counterpoint, this time at the level of scansion.

In his letter to Clodd, Graham writes: "In no other poem have I 'lived' so long for so little."[77] It would be another six months before the poem was complete, meaning a composition process of almost two years (and it incorporates motifs dating from much earlier than that). But it is Graham's somewhat self-conscious choice of "lived" to describe the composition that is so striking: it anticipates the journal entry of 19 November of that year, where he says he "tried almost to live inside this three stress metre I had chosen."[78] Just as do the scare quotes, "almost" implies that "live" is figurative, be it metaphorical or hyperbolic. And yet, the trope of inhabitation is particularly apt, not simply for describing the processes of composing within a particular repertoire, but also for the way this repertoire shapes Graham's work as a whole. On the one hand, Graham will increasingly thematize language as "place": "this is no other / Place than where I am, / Here turning betwen / This word and the next", he writes towards the end of THE DARK DIALOGUES (NCP 168). But more than this, it provides a phenomenological horizon within which we orient ourselves as we read, such that individual cadences, tautenings and loosenings of stress, ambiguities and disambiguations of intonation, announce

themselves as prosodic gestures, attaining motive force within "the whole orchestra of the poem, the intricate organism that the poet has made."

5. Coda

In 1966, Graham was envisaging a poem which resuscitated many of the motifs of the SEVEN LETTERS. All that remains is one manuscript page, dated 30 September 1966, with sections IV, V and two section VIs;[79] section IV is the only verse instance of Graham speaking about his verse line in verse:

> O do not let me be daft
>
> And taken over by the three
>
> Accent line nodding
>
> Like a pedagogic Metronome putting
>
> Me in my place, whatever
>
> Wherever my fleeting place is.[80]

Graham's speaker asks not to be "taken over" by the verse line, but this is precisely what happens in the elongated phrase that ensues. If the "pedagogic Metronome" seems more dismissive than Graham's other invocations of the metronome, then the double meaning of "putting / Me in my place" draws us back towards the philosophic crux of Graham's thinking on, and praxis of, meter. The "place" in THE DARK DIALOGUES is a provisional one, existing primarily not in space but within the movedness of language; here too the "place" is "fleeting". The "place" is apparently generated both by the phrase's forward movement, and the image's turning in on itself; it arises out of the tension between the compressed five syllable line "Accent line nodding" the expansive eleven syllable "Like a pedagogic Metronome putting", and by the gravitation towards four stresses in "Wher**ev**er my **flee**ting **place is**"—whose emphasis on "is" is countermanded by its provisionality. In this, it mirrors so many other

27

of Graham's "places": a temporal complex, only ever inhabited aporetically, mutably, "between this word and the next."

The "construction" of this "timbre" is at once technical and philosophical: the repertoire does not simply channel its "expressive forces", as Jarvis says, but grasps, deploys, dynamizes the multiple temporal vectors opened up as *materials of making*. As Graham's continual punning on meter indicates, this is part of a concerted thinking not just about the "breaking" of verse, but about its measures, its pulses, its timings. Ultimately, repertoire operates as the poet's mode of inhabiting their verse materials: prosodic matter, syntax, rhetorics, imagery, pragmatics. Indeed, the construction of a repertoire serves to delimit what precisely counts as "material". In Graham's trajectory, this question, implicitly to every poetics of repertoire, is turned into an *ars poetica*. If the critic, as Graham demands, is there to understand "the 'language apparatus' that has been constructed", then this "apparatus", and its "understanding", are double: both the individual technical achievement of the oeuvre, and the linguistic materials they render manifest. But more than this: if a poetics of repertoire starts out attending to the "timbre" of the individual poet, then as it inhabits this timbre, it must necessarily ask how we orient ourselves in language as a whole. Every prosody is a metaphysics.

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1 Simon Jarvis, "For a Poetics of Verse," PMLA 125:4 (2010), 931-35, 935.

2 "The Poet Speaks: Interview with Peter Orr and reading" (1 March 1968). British Council tapes C144/1385, track 2. The fact that he makes little distinction between stress, accent, and foot, will scarcely satisfy the terminological precision of the metrician. Indeed, when he employs scansion marks, he opts for the macron-breve notation of classical metrics, which measures ictus and non-ictus as long and short, rather than stress and unstress. For purposes of disambiguation I will stick to "accent", as distinct either from musical-metrical "beat" or lexical "stress".

3 In a letter to Norman Macleod, January 1960, he claims that one source is the 1568 Bannatyne MS. In Michael and Margaret Snow eds., *The Nightfisherman: Selected Letters of W.S. Graham* (Manchester: Carcanet, 1999), 172.

4 Tony Lopez, *The Poetry of W.S. Graham* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1989), 58.

5 W.S. Graham, "From a 1949 Notebook, Given to Elizabeth Smart," *Edinburgh Review* 75 (1987), 24-36, 33.

[6] W.S. Graham, letter to Ruth Hilton, 21 March 1967. *Nightfisherman*, 210.

[7] Letter to Ruth Hilton, 26 January 1969. National Library of Scotland, Acc. 13838

[8] Letter to Skelton, 9 February 1975. *Nightfisherman*, 287.

[9] NLS Acc. 13815. Graham always titled his poems in upper case, something that criticism has rarely adhered to. In this essay, I follow Graham's convention.

[10] Letter to Roger Hilton, 13 November 1956. *Nightfisherman*, 156.

[11] The notebook was given to his friend, the painter Bryan Wynter, on 26 May 1973, but written on 19 November 1958. *Nightfisherman*, 162-63. Ellipses in original. One of the notebooks referred to is now in the National Library of Scotland, Acc. 12468/4. I will discuss this notebook at greater length later on.

[12] Letter to Moncrieff Williamson, 25 March 1949, *Nightfisherman*, 90-91. Graham's invocation of Eliot is telling: Eliot was a mentor to Graham in the late 1940s, and Graham was delighted when Eliot said he had "a good sense of form and a wonderful sense of rhythm" (Letter to Edwin Morgan, 23 November 1949, *Nightfisherman*, 103).

[13] "W.S. Graham comments," James Vinson and D.L. Kirkpatrick, *Contemporary Poets* (London: St Martin's Press, 1975), 575.

[14] ibid.

[15] Graham, "I Would Say I Was a Happy Man: Interview with John Haffenden." *Poetry Review* 76:1/2 (1986), 67-74.

[16] Ezra Pound, "A Retrospect," in T.S. Eliot (ed.), *The Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1955), 3. Graham met Pound in New York in January 1952, reporting that they "got on well and talked fairly technically, which he [Pound] seemed to love." Letter to Elizabeth Smart, 17 January 1952, *Nightfisherman*, 134.

[17] Paul Valéry, "Poetry and Abstract Thought," in James R. Lauter (trans. and ed.), *Paul Valéry: An Anthology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), 136-65, 145. Graham is likely to have read Valéry's essay by 1942: see David Nowell Smith, "Poetry's Plastic Medium: The Example of W.S. Graham," *Modernism/modernity* forthcoming.

[18] Skelton, 24.

[19] W.S. Graham, *New Collected Poems* ed. Matthew Francis (London: Faber, 2004), 200. All subsequent citations in the main text with abbreviation NCP.

[20] Graham, "1949 Notebook," 25.

[21] The two articles on his poetry by Vivienne Koch, "The Technique of Morality" (*Poetry Quarterly*, Winter 1947) and "A Note on W.S. Graham" (*Sewanee Review*, Autumn 1948) remained until 2018 the only two articles published on Graham in American scholarly journals.

[22] The best account of Graham's career trajectory remains that of Tony Lopez (1989).

[23] Fiona Green, "Achieve Further Through Elegy," in Ralph Pite and Hester Jones, *W.S. Graham: Speaking Towards You* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004), 132-157, 142; Denis Driscoll, "W.S. Graham, Professor of Silence," in Duncan and Davidson, 51-65, 53.

[24] Schmidt, 298.

[25] Letter to Michael Schmidt, 16 December 1977. *Nightfisherman*, 335.

[26] Ronnie Duncan, "W.S. Graham: A Reader's View." In Ronnie Duncan and Jonathan Davidson (eds.), *The Constructed Space: A Celebration of W.S. Graham* (Lincoln: Jackson's Arms, 1994), 11-22, 15.

[27] Michael Schmidt, *An Introduction to Fifty Modern British Poets* (London: Pan, 1979), 297-300 and Calvin Bedient, *Eight Contemporary Poets* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 159-180.

[28]

[29] Robin Skelton, "W.S. Graham: A Poet's View," in Duncan and Davidson, 24-26.

[30] Lopez, *The Poetry of W.S. Graham*, 44.

[31] Letter to Sven Berlin, 12 March 1949. *Nightfisherman*, 87.

[32] Letter to Edwin Morgan, 14 April 1949. *Nightfisherman*, 92. He tells Schmidt that this is "the old cliché about me" (16 December 1977). *Nightfisherman*, 335.

[33] Driscoll, 53.

[34] Letter to David Wright, 15 May 1949. *Nightfisherman*, 100.

[35] The phrase comes from Derek Attridge, *Rhythms of English Poetry* (Harlow: Longman, 1982), 85ff. Alternatively, following Richard Cureton, we might say that Graham's three-accent line is marked by a "final coda." Cureton, "Meter in Temporal Poetics," *Thinking Verse* II (2012), 112-237, see 133-146.

[36] Undated recording, but the latest poems that feature in the reading were composed in 1956. National Sound Archive NSA C144.321.

[37] On the scansion of this sonnet, see David Nowell Smith, "Editor's Introduction: Scansion." *Thinking Verse* III (2013), 1-14, 3-5.

[38] Lopez, "Graham and the 1940s", in Pite and Jones, 26-42, 39; Piette, "'Roaring Between the Lines': W.S. Graham and the White Threshold of Line-Breaks," in Pite and Jones, 44-62m 52. Piette's focus on Graham's puns on line "breaks" fits within a larger understanding of line breaks as iconic representations of "thresholds", "liminality", and "horizons": "The line of poetry becomes, visually, the horizon line of the sea seen over the houses of the fishing village" (ibid.). Piette grounds this somewhat literalistic treatment of the whites of the page in Graham's dictum (adopted from Valéry) that "a poem is made of words" (in "Notes Toward a Poetry of Release." *Nightfisherman* 379-383, 379).

[39] Letter to David Wright, 25 April 1948. *Nightfisherman*, 75.

[40] Letter to David Wright, 15 May 1949. *Nightfisherman*, 99. Similarly, in a letter to Sven Berlin he calls them "a wee bit kinna mature" (12 March 1949). *Nightfisherman*, 87.

[41] Graham's account of the Clyde seems to reimagine Wordsworth's river Derwent, which would "blend his murmurs with my Nurse's song" and thus "sent a voice / That flow'd along my dreams." Wordsworth *The Prelude* (1805 version), I.273-76. Piette also identifies an influence of Wordsworth in Graham's management of line breaks. Piette, 44.

[42] Piette, 55.

[43] Green, 150.

[44] Green, 148.

[45] National Library of Scotland, Acc.12468/4. Notebook dated 27 September 1950, entitled "Notes for TWELVE LETTERS". Ultimately only seven letters were composed.

[46] "From a 1949 Notebook", 31. See T.S. Eliot, "The Music of Poetry" (1940), in *On Poetry and Poets* (London: Faber, 1957), 31.

[47] *Nightfisherman*, 95.

[48] *Nightfisherman*, 96-97; The quote also surfaces, in slightly different permutation, in "From a 1949 Notebook", 25.

[49] *Nightfisherman*, 113.

[50] Letter to Charles Causley, 23 June 1955. *Nightfisherman*, 143.

[51] *Nightfisherman*, 144.

[52] "From a 1949 Notebook," 25.

[53] reproduced in *Edinburgh Review* 75, 37.

[54] For accounts of Graham's use of epistolary address in his verse, see Green, and Rebecca Anne Barr, "W.S. Graham and Epistolarity," *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry* 4:1 (2012), 51-63.

[55] NLS Acc.12468/4

[56] Indeed, to be "driven … on" implies more forward propulsion than being "driven in".

[57] NLS Acc.12468/4

[58] Graham, "I'd Say I am a Happy Man."

[59] Edwin Morgan, "W.S. Graham and 'Voice,'" in Duncan and Davidson, 76-83, 77. Peter Riley, "W.S. Graham: First and Last," *Aquarius* 25/26 (2001), 95-105, 103.

[60] NLS Acc.12468/4

[61] NLS Acc.12468/4

[62] Letter to Bryan and Susan Wynter, undated but estimated at 1950 by Michael and Margaret Snow. *Nightfisherman*, 115. In 1976, Graham made a set of pentameter exercises, which he gave to Ronnie Duncan. Here he provides some preliminary notes: "We've got to watch not to make it roll too Marlowe-ish and yet not refine it too much by stopping & starting in the middle of the lines, to break them out of their old rhetorical 'waves.' If you break them up too much, they may as well be written in different measures, which would result in the same words in the same order but 'appearing' different in the mind." NLS Acc. 13815/1.

[63] Private collection of Marius Kociejowski. This is the first, but not last, time Graham will allude to his three-accent meter within the meter.

[64] Graham's *New Collected Poems* includes some draft stanzas from THE DARK DIALOGUES written in 1957, which start as cross-rhymed quatrains but eventually lose sight of their rhymes (NCP 323-324).

[65] Letter to Alan Clodd, 8 February 1958. *Nightfisherman*, 157-58.

[66] Kociejowski collection.

[67] For instance, his preliminary remarks to a reading of MALCOLM MOONEY'S LAND, on the BBC Third Programme, January 1968.

[68] Lopez, *The Poetry of W.S. Graham*, 58.

[69] Piette, 60. His allusion is to Eric Griffiths, *The Printed Voice of Victorian Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

[70] *Nightfisherman*, 100.

[71] Kociejowski collection.

[72] Valéry, 164-65.

[73] NLS Acc. 12468/6.

[74] Collection of Marius Kociejowski. Graham still hasn't abandoned "Grieve me the great midnight" at this stage.

[75] Indeed, "Across this more or less uncommon place" contains an echo of one of the pentameter lines that recurs most in his pentameter notebook: "I'm crossed with light in this immortal place." Acc. 12468/6, typed out in Acc. 12458/8.

[76] NLS Acc. 12468/6

[77] *Nightfisherman*, 158.

[78] *Nightfisherman*, 162.

[79] The first of these is about "Calum the tiller", the central character of LETTER IV.

[80] University of Victoria McPherson Library, Special Collections. W.S. Graham Fonds, Folder 19. The final line is in the margins, mooted as a replacement for "Place is mine for a moment."