

# The New Criterion

## Features

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### Geoffrey Hill's civil tongue

by [David Yezzi](#)

On Geoffrey Hill's *A Treatise of Civil Power*.

In the late plays of Shakespeare, John Updike recently noted, “storms, terrors, and confusions give way to recognitions, reunions, forgiveness, and reconciliation. But a silvery chill blows through these romances.” Geoffrey Hill’s latest book of poems, *A Treatise of Civil Power*, revisits a number of the storms that have raged in his poems from the beginning: “the tongue’s atrocities,” “the slither-frisk to lordship of a kind as rats to a bird-table,” and the bitter realization that “no bloodless myth will hold”—in other words, unflinching and melancholy interrogations of language, political power, and history.

Hill has softened his more slashing and querulous tones (at their shrillest in *Speech! Speech!* from 2000), affecting as much of a reconciliation as he is likely to muster, though a silvery chill still blows through these poems. Hill’s lat ...

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