CHAPTER FOUR

W.S. Graham

From where I am, even I shout,
You will not hear. You climb in slow
Motion on silence on the face
Full of happy, full of woe.

(Graham 174)
W.S. Graham’s subject is language, and his Absentist poetry is the means he defines language. Language at the same time is an uncontrollable force and agent, and also the source of silence and inadequacies. Graham is the only Absentist poet who finds language as a source of absence. Therefore the term “Absentist Language” is the focal point in this chapter. The State of Flux in The Nightfishing, the Fluidity of Identity in Malcolm Mooney’s Land and the Quest of Self in Implements in Their Places, all are analyzed based on the grounds of language.

Language is the significant concern of Graham’s versification. The other significant theme in his poetry is; identity in relation with language. His themes concern identity, where he breaks “the subject-object relation of the artist to the world” (Lopez 9). He presents a fragmented self through “a voyage poem which explores the nature of the self through the experience of language” (9). Through language he redefines the world and existence. He constructs a world in language in order to think there, to get shelter there and to exist there. Although his idea with regard to language is significant and original, yet his poetry was not recognized by literary circles. Graham’s works never got the attention which they deserved, as T.S. Eliot said, although he is one of the significant Modernist poets. It was after 1979, when his Collected Poems 1942-1977 was published he got the attention of the national press as a major British poet. His works are quite different with regard to the variety of language and forms he used. His language sometimes though very simple and easy to understand is sometimes completely intricate and indistinct. He attempts different forms of poetry such as narratives, epistles, ballads, elegies, short lyrics and very long poems. “The early poems are perplexing in a different way from the later work, where a very plain diction and syntax are animated by strong and expressive rhythms and a surprising variety of modulations of tone” (Schmidt 51) his tone is optimistic,
confident and bright. He loved to read his poetry in literary circles and in public, for which reason he went on tour to Scotland, to read in Edinburgh for the festival and at the Third Eye Center in Glasgow. Another reason for his neglect was the long gap between *The Nightfishing* (1955) and *The Malcolm Mooney’s Land* (1970). During these years, he was almost forgotten. As Schmidt points out, Graham was an unlucky poet, because although he was original and innovative he was not praised by the audience. It is evident that a change in the taste of the audience had a negative effect on Graham’s position in England.

Graham’s poetry should be read and understood in the context of Scottish poetry. To appreciate Graham better, his career may be divided into two spheres: the early Graham from 1942 with his first book *Cage without Grievance* till 1955 with *The Nightfishing* and the later Graham in his career in 1970s. The focus of this study is the Absentist theme in the 1970s in the collections such as *Malcolm Mooney’s Land* (1970) and *Implements in Their Places* (1977). But the early Graham will also be discussed with specific reference to his “The Nightfishing”. The early Graham includes the classification of Neo-Romantic poets such as G.S. Fraser, Nicholas Moore, J.F. Hendry, and Dylan Thomas. Graham in his early work such as *The Seven Journeys* (1944) shows some adaptation to Surrealism.

The subject of Graham’s poetry is poetry itself. His subjects and his imagination serve each other in his poetry. Sea, the West Coast of Scotland, becomes the source of his imagination. Scotland where he spent his childhood and adolescence, gave him a poetic diction which is both traditional as well as personal. He achieved his individual voice which was idiosyncratic and obscure. For Graham “Poetry is language” (Koch 666). His language centers round a nexus of experience such as search for self, love, and morality as the source of reality. “The fiction of an I-narrator
serves as a hub spindle upon which centre the various data of these youthful explorations” (667).

Dylan Thomas is a significant Welsh poet of 1940s and 1950s. He was a great poet of his time and the Movement poets were influenced by him. The Movement poets after establishing their position in society stood against him. Actually the Movementeers were in opposition to The Apocalyptic movement of the Forties. They lay blame on the Forties as to be very irrational and illogical, because of the domination of themes such as myth and dream in their poetry. Therefore they stood against Dylan Thomas.

Dylan Thomas was the chief exponent of the Forties. Donald Davie (1922-1995) the principal critic of the Group in his review on George Barker, Graham, and Sheila Wingfield attacks the Forties; Graham and Thomas too were his targets. In poetry classification, after Modernism, Dylan Thomas is recognized as an apocalyptic poet. He was an established poet with his own reputation while a new movement named Apocalyptic started to form. It was The Apocalyptics who “needed Thomas as a reputable poet to add weight to their anthology” (Lopez 21).

The early Graham was influenced by Thomas. Bedient writes about this influence that it was like being “dazed” to be under the impact of Thomas. Graham “copying not only his sheer heart-in-the-throat tone but his loftily mannered phraseology… it was as if he had simply been taken over by the Welsh poet, had no resistant fibre of his own” (Eight 160). But Lopez finds out this influence is the matter of “common sources”, and in his later poetry one can find “Thomas-like phrasing” and coined words. Thomas of the thirties was the model for early Graham. Although Graham was not a religious poet, there is a “Christian language” in his poetry. This type of religious feeling in his early and mid-career is somehow the adaptation of Surrealism that connects his early poetry to Neo-Romanticism. The later Graham was
influenced by T.S. Eliot and Samuel Beckett, James Joyce, and Ezra Pound. Vivienne Koch observes that from the 2ND Poems in 1945 Graham sloughed off the influence of Thomas and Hopkins, and he came under the direct influence of James Joyce and the linguistics of *Finnegan’s Wake*.

**Absentist Language and Automatic Writing**

Surrealists experimented with automatic writing, the technique, analogous to the free association method of psychoanalysis, involving the attempt to achieve a state of mind in which rational thought is disengaged, to allow words to arise spontaneously from the unconscious. Matthew Francis in his article “Syntax Gram and the Magic Typewrite: W.S. Graham’s Automatic Writing” deals with automatic writing in Graham’s unpublished writing between 1967-1973. These ‘manuscripts are in Robin Skelton’s archive of Graham in the library of the University of Victoria, Canada. Graham’s prose manuscripts that experiment with automatic writing show the originality of his creative activity. One can observe traces of automatic writing as a significant factor in his *Malcolm Mooney’s Land* and *Implements In Their Places*. His automatic writing places him in Surrealism. The word ‘Clusters’ was selected by Graham himself for these pieces of automatic writing. “Cluster Traveling Out” has the technique of automatic writing, which was published in *Malcolm Mooney’s Land* (1970). But the poem “Implements In Their Places” with its fragmented structure generates more phrases and images from automatic writing. Matthew Francis writes: “Clusters, then, have become ‘implements’, implying that Graham has fashioned useful objects out of naturally occurring formations. The poetry seems to be both adopting and refashioning the automatic prose, making it public and more impersonal, a practical implement more than an intimate cluster” (Francis, “Syntax,” 87). He
suggests that the ‘Clusters’ need their own study. They are completely different from other works of Graham because one can find Freudian and biographical elements there. “The Clusters are deliberately self-revealing and self-exploratory beneath the disguise of a secret language.” (87)

It is the automatic writing that connects Graham to his time, which was Surrealism. Although his ‘Clusters’ are similar to Surrealism it is not exactly derived from them. Automatic writing actually takes power from the conscious mind and makes the unconscious mind more active, and what is created during this process is unknown to the writer. Thus one of the significances of automatic writing is the question of creativity which is free from laboured work and forceful writing. While automatic writers were associated with Freudian unconsciousness, Graham believes that the agency in automatic writing is language itself rather than the unconscious, because language has the “superhuman powers”. Graham’s automatic writing is in contrast with surrealist writers such as Andre Breton and James Joyce and even Freudian writers. With regard to Breton, Francis emphasizes on the elements of automatic writing such as the question of rapidity and absurdity. Breton writes;

I resolved to obtain from myself […] a monologue spoken as rapidly as possible without any intervention on the part of my critical faculties, a monologue consequently unencumbered by the slightest inhibition and which was, as closely as possible, akin to spoken thought. It had seemed to me, and still does […] that the speed of thought is no greater than the speed of language, and that thought does not necessarily defy even the fastest moving pen. It was in this frame of mind that Philippe Soupault […] and I decided to blacken some paper, with a
praiseworthy disdain for what might result from a literary point of view. (qtd. in Francis, “Syntax,” 87-88)

Thus as Breton says, he obtains “unmediated access” to what is the pure creativity free from “the unconscious” and “language” but “thought”, because the speed of speech is more than the speed of writing so speech has more access to the thought and it represents the “actual function of thought”. The second element is the absurdity. A surrealist text has to express the “extreme degree of immediate absurdity”. He finds out that “runaway” and “a creative elan”, release an “urge towards flux and sheer uninterruptedness” (89). In this regard Graham and Breton are similar, for both of them flux is a significant outcome of their automatic writing. Flux as we will read in “The Nightfishing” and even other poems comes in the form of the shift of tense from present to past and again shift to present. The frequency of the narrators is another form of flux in this poem. The image of water in different poems especially sea imagery represents flux and instability. In “Clusters”, Graham’s text of automatic writing, one can find all the above elements of flux. The “Clusters”, as mentioned earlier are not exactly surrealist texts, since Graham goes further from surrealists and comes closer to the dream-like narrative of Joyce’s Finnegans Wake. James Joyce’s influence on Graham makes him to walk away from the aesthetics of Surrealism and tries to imitate his literary hero. The “play-full and punning style” of Graham’s letters are an imitation of Finnegans Wake. In his last collection, Implements In Their Places, poems such as “Greenock at Night I Find You”, “To Alexander Graham” and “To My Wife at Midnight” adopt the practice of clusters and dream-language like narrations. Automatic writing always either surrealist or in Graham’s poetry were the “starting point” for further work. For instance, Implement 51 in the poem
“Implements In Their Places” at first was a cluster but eventually it appears in this poem.

ARTICULATED TRAILER LIFTS IMPEDIMENTED MAN OF 48 (Clusters 15 March 1967). Francis analyzes this cluster as ‘The ‘impedimented man of 48’ is Graham himself, whose 48th birthday was in November 1966, and who saw art as an ‘impediment’ to human relations and himself as maimed or ‘Graham-strung’” (Francis, “Syntax,” 91).

In his ‘Cluster’, 13 March 1967 he writes “ITeenthirt March Four Two Seven away put started across which luminous sand know never shall”. ‘ITeenthirt’ inverts thirteen, related to 13 March 1967. The technique of inversion in Graham’s clusters reminds us of Samuel Beckett. For example, in this sentence “Poet young A was Maharg”, “Maharg” is an inversion for “Graham”. This example resembles “the M-names of Samuel Beckett’s novels Murphy, Molloy, Moran, Malone and Mahood” (Francis, “Syntax,” 92). Graham was under the influence of the game writing style of Beckett’s “the trilogy” in shifting names of the hero in his last volume, Molloy, Malone Dies and The Unnamable. The theme of the crises of identity in Beckett’s characters is the same lack of identity that Graham tries to depict in his language versification. Graham engages himself in “an endless quest for a name that would establish a full identity for him in the impersonal world of text” (92). One observes this quest in “Clusters” 12 March1967, “SHARES OF MARG ACHIEVE NEW CEILING” that later comes in the heading of “SYNTAX GRAM AND THE MAGIC TYPEWRITER” The word “MARG” is the inverted form of “GRAM”, the technique of inversion, inverted self to create a new self that is “a suitable inhabitant of the textual world”. This type of inversion is a symbol of the scattered self in the line of
the text, “To write is to submit to a reversal or scrambling of identity in order to permit oneself to become readable” (93). The ‘Clusters’ and his poems are full of puns. Graham uses different techniques such as “Paronomasia” and “portmanteau”. “Paronomasia” is a play on words. It is the distortion of an original phrase that can still be deduced by the reader”. “Clusters”, 13 March “Sign me a right in the pillow of cloudy night: By day a fire-distinguisher” (Graham 240). Francis explains that this cluster is a distortion and a condensation of the passage from Exodus 13.17: “And the lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud, to lead them the way; and by night in a pillar of fire, to give them light”. Graham changes “pillars” into “pillow”, and later he remembers that it must be “pillars of cloud by day”. But he cannot correct a written text according to the rule of automatic writing. So he reminds the reader about his right as a poet to alter, thus “sign me a right” is Graham’s request to make these changes. Then in “Implements” the cluster becomes “Sign me my right on the pillow of cloudy night”. He transforms the sign “pillar” to a new sign “pillow”. “Pillow” is a connotation for dream and night so he tries to justify and reassign the sign of cloudy to night. Cloud is an appropriate sign for dream and pillow. In the second part of ‘Clusters’,13 “by day a fire-distinguisher” and later in Implement 46 it is:

By night a star-distinguisher

Looking up through the signed air.

By day an extinguisher of birds

Of silence caught in my impatient
Too-small-meshed poet’s net. ²

He changes the sign of “fire” to “stare”, so the light of the fire at night will be a distinguisher to find the way and he also changes the sign of the “cloud” to the “birds”. Then “By day an extinguisher of birds” lead them to find the way. Graham is a master at using puns and paronomasia. In his game word style of writing one may be confused by the lines yet might also find a very novel and original way of writing.

The other technique of punning is “portmanteau”. In this technique two words combine and fuse together and create an object-word. For example “Paragriphos” is a fusion of “griffins” and “paragraphs”, “elephantinies” are tiny elephants, “donkrses” are donkey and arses and “zebracorns” are zebras and unicorns. Francis explains that these imaginary animals only exist in the “wonderland or looking-glass world of language”, so they are only words and need to have an inhabitant place in the text to exist there.

As Francis points out Graham’s “devotion to a superhuman language” in clusters is more than his other writings. He writes that in the cluster “‘the thing is to find or create … a language, a timbre of thought or voice, which I will live in’” (Francis, “Syntax,” 95). His later exertions are completely different from his early career and they are completely new experiences. He retains the Scottish identity in his entire work in spite of not belonging to the Scottish Renaissance movement (1920-1945). He uses the “Scottish speech habits and vocabulary” as also the forms and subjects of “the border ballads”. He was so thorough in Scottish poetry that he was able to write about the history and community of Scotland effortlessly. “He enriched

it [Scottish identity] by re-opening certain areas of subject matter and technique which had been lost, making them relevant to our time and tongue in a way that is quite his own” (Lopez 24).

To Graham, automatic writing comes due to the authority of his Absentist Language. Absentist language talks about meta-language; it is a language which deals with language as its subject of study. Thus it talks about the lack and absence along with inadequacy and indeterminacy at the core of language. Compared to the language of modern poetry the language used in Absentist poetry is more fragmented. He writes meta-poem; it is “a poem that takes itself as its own object of reference” (Francis, Where 22). His meta-poetry deals with the ambivalent relationship between the writer and the reader, the limitation of poetic utterances, and language as subject matter of the poems. Multi-mixed metaphors, syntax breaking are the other elements of this language. The common vocabulary of the Absentist poets are: frustration, hesitation, isolation, negation, despair and disappointment. Absentist language which is the language of “Absentist Poetry” deals with the language of the modern man who suffers from the problem of identity, a man who either has lost his identity or his core being is scattered. “There is thus some element of subversion in the enterprise, of referring through the welter of metaphor to basic conditions of bodily existence which are concealed or set aside by everybody discourses” (Riley 2).

This section on “Absentist Language and Automatic Writing” has six poems which are selected for analysis with focus on Absentist language. There are selections from two different collections: From Malcolm Mooney’s Land, “The Beast in the Space”, “The Constructed Space”, “The Dark Dialogues”, “Approaches to How They
“Behave” and “Clusters Travelling Out”, from *Implements In Their Places*, the poem bearing the same title.

“The Beast in the Space”

The poet talks about “the other side of the words” which is the technological or the beast language of our modern life rather than the traditional language of poetry which is the essence of our being. The beast language is the only medium through which the poet communicates with the reader. The poems struggle to be direct and communicative but the language itself becomes the essence of absence. “The Beast in the Space” was written in 1970, which was the time of rapid technological progress. This poem was penned in eight years advance to the lecture which Heidegger delivered on July 18, 1962 entitled “Traditional Language and the Technological Language”. The Beast language of Graham has the characteristic of the “Technological Language” of Heidegger; both of them dominate the essence of the human being. Wanda Torres Gregory writes: “The fact that language is interpreted and used as an instrument has lead us into believing that we are the masters of the language machine, but Heidegger urges that ‘the truth of the matter might well be that the language machine takes language into its management and masters the essence of the human being’” (5)

In this poem language is “The great creature that thumps its tail / On silence of the other side”. The poet who needs to control the mischievous behaviour of language thus tries to give order and chain it in the poem, but writing wakes him up so “The beast that lives on silence takes / its bite out of either side”. As long as the poet struggles with language while writing a poem, the reader must struggle to understand the poem. The beast language “pads and sniffs” between the poet and the reader, and “comes and laps” the “meaning up”. The terrain of the poem is scary, the poet needs
the reader but he is the “terrible inhabiter / Of silence”, there is no response from the reader expect for “silence”, Graham claims, “because the reader is never present” (Francis, Where 17). Through the poem the writer sends the beast language to the reader “He’s gone and if he’s gone to you / That’s fair enough”. It is late at night and the poet almost finishes his poem.

The heavy moth

Bangs on the pane. The whole house
Is sleeping and I remember
I am not here, only the space
I sent the terrible beast across. (NCP 158)

“To write is to imagine one’s own absence, a process akin to imagining one’s death” (Francis, Where 18). He will not be present when the reader, reads his poem. But from the other side he remembers that he was absent from his environment while writing the poem. The only place he was is the text. It is through the text which sends the beast language to the reader.

To any song he snorts or growls
And give him food. He means neither
Well or ill towards you. Above
All, shut up. Give him your love. (NCP 158)

The last part of the poem is the advice of the poet as to how one should understand the poem. One needs to pay attention to every detail; “To any song he snorts or growls”. One needs to feed the beast language by reading it and finally it needs love. Without love and interest for poetry, the reader can not understand it.
"The Constructed Space"

As the title of the poem conveys, it is a treatment of language as “abstract matter”. In such abstract space both the writer and the reader join and communicate. This poem is in contrast to “The Beast in the Space”, where language was introduced as a beast. Here “The Constructed Space” has a new point of view regarding the language. It is a space which the poet has constructed to meet the reader. The constructed space of the poem stretches between the writer and the reader. The interaction achieved here is “at least happy”.

Meanwhile surely there must be something to say,
Maybe not suitable but at least happy
In a sense here between us two whoever
We are.  (NCP 161-162)

Although the text is the only space which connects the poet and the reader, yet always one of them will be absent from the scene of the poem. The poem itself becomes another “obstacle” for the poet and the reader. As a space it separates them from each other.

... We know what we are saying
Only when it is said and fixed and dead.
Or maybe, surely, of course we never know
What we have said, what lonely meanings are read
Into the space we make.  (NCP 162)

Here the poet deals with “pure poetry”. In pure and authentic poetry even the poet himself does not know what he says. Graham says: “A poet doesn’t write what he knows but what he doesn’t know” (Snow 14)
It is clear that is the position of the poet which does not let the poet to know what he is going to write from the beginning. “The poet himself stands between the former-the gods, and the latter-the people. He is one who has been cast out-out into that between, between gods and men. (Heidegger, Existence 312). Because the poet stands between gods and ordinary men, sometimes the reader can not appreciate the poem, therefore the lack of comprehension of the poem appears as a silence from the reader’s side.

Graham in many poems uses the word “silence”; “I say / This silence here for in it I might hear you”, to convey that writing poetry is fighting against silence. “I say this silence or, better, construct this space / So that somehow something may move across / The caught habits of language to you and me.” (NCP 162)

His poetry is a constructed space full of silence. The probability of communication is so poor that he uses the words “somehow”, “something” and “may” the communication happen between the poet and the reader.

From where we are it is not us we see
And times are hastening yet, disguise is mortal.
The times continually disclose our home.
Here in the present tense disguise is mortal.
The trying times are hastening. Yet here I am
More truly now this abstract act become. (NCP 162)

In the last third of the poem Graham focuses on a new idea “From where we are”, he questions our existence. Our existence is “hastened” by time; we as mortals have no escape “disguise is mortal”. The word “our home” refers to our existence. We are definitely mortal and doomed to absence, unless we construct a space against time, which is poetry. The poem according to Hester Jones is trapped between “Meanwhile” in the first line and “Now” in the last line. Thus in its fleeting time it is
in the danger of absence. The poet is immortal in his poetry thus he says “Yet here I am.” He discovers the self in the act of writing. The abstracted space of the poem which he makes out of the unconstructed language is the only place and time for the poet to “become”; “poetically, dwells man on this earth.” (Heidegger, Existence 312). The irony is that the constructed space of the poem in which either the writer or the reader are absent, is the only place for the poet to “become” and to “occur”. The poet finds himself in the space of the poem, alone and separated from the world. Peter Riley believes that “The Constructed Space”

Is formed which becomes fragmented and multi-faceted, in which the author’s space and the spaces of the world are cast against each other without being conciliated into a depiction. Access to it is partial or momentary, and the degree of visibility may vary along the course of a poem between transparency and complete closure. You might often call it a tantalising space, but the movement of the text is so emotively bonded by urgency of address and poetic artifice that we are transfixed before this restless surface where metaphors of body, earth and language mix and collide with each other such that we cannot, will not, and no longer want to, know exactly “where we are” in depictive, narrative or intellectual senses. (1)

“The Dark Dialogues”

This poem is one of the most significant works of Graham. Its thematic concentration is on language, writer and reader. It is also one of the longest poems of Graham with 254 lines in four parts. Alone with the title of poem, the word “dark” is repeated nine times in this poem to represent darkness. In these dark dialogues he applies four
different speakers for each part: the poet, his mother, his father and again the poet. This shifting of voice creates a gap and space in the poem which drowns the self in itself. “The Dark Dialogues”, begins with: “I always meant to only / Language swings away / Further before me.” The word “language” interrupts the phrase “I always meant to” when it swings before the poet, to get his attention

Language swings away
Before me as I go
With again the night rising
Up to accompany me
And that other fond
Metaphor, the sea. (NCP 167)

Night is the real company for the poet; he adds the metaphor of “the sea” as his companion. But it is the night and the darkness that makes both reader and the writer become absent. “One way of symbolizing this mutual absence is to have the meeting take place in darkness”:

And who are you and by
What right do I waylay
You where you go there
Happy enough striking
Your hobnail in the dark?
........................................
I speak across the vast
Dialogues in which we go
To clench my words against
Time or the lack of time

Hoping that for a moment
they will become for me
A place I can think in
And think anything in,

An aside from the monstrous. (NCP 167-168)

The constructed space helps him to save his words against time which is a destructive factor for a poem. There are two types of poems—poems which have an expiry date, because they are not deep and serious and after sometime nobody reads them or even remembers them, the other type is authentic and a pure work of art that will stay forever. Time can not make them old and they can communicate “the vast / Dialogues”. Such poetry gives the poet as well as the reader a place to “think in”, and “think anything in”. Man and his language are interwoven together; one without the other is meaningless. Man lives in language and language in man. Graham brings this fact that “always language / Is where the people are”.

In the second part a mother is the speaker. She is sitting by the fire place and her children are asleep. She insists on her presence “in this poem I am, whoever else where I am”, she expresses doubt about this. “it is only the stranger / Hissing in the gate”, indicating the presence of the reader. “As I sit here becoming / Hardly who I know” the question of self identity becomes the most essential motive for the poet. The speaker shifts to another element of identity which is a place: “This is the house I married / Into, a room and kitchen / In a grey tenement”

But very soon her doubt and hesitation dominates her:

But the place moved away

Beyond the reach of any
Word. Only the dark
Dialogues drew their breath. (NCP 169)

In the third part the voice of the speaking persona is a father. He insists on his presence in words.

Now in the third voice
I am their father through
Nothing more than where
I am made by this word

And this word to occur. (NCP 170)

In this part like the poem “What is the Language Using Us For?” Graham emphasizes on speech more than the written word, because for Francis “sound is portrayed as natural fulfilling while sight is artificial and alienating, yet in becoming a writer Graham has condemned himself to an endless attempt to bridge the unbridgeable gap between the two and suffer the resultant loneliness and silence” (Where 14):

I speak as well as I can

Trying to teach my ears
To learn to use their eyes
Even only maybe
In the end to observe

The behaviour of silence. (NCP 171)

To understand a poem one needs to hear with his eyes and observe with his ears, it is only in this case one will be able to observe the invisible unwritten lines between the lines of the poem. The comprehension of a poem is beyond the ability of hearing and observing. Absence is in the core of the Absentist language, and the professional reader needs to go beyond the difficulties of language. “In the resinous dark / And
swaying silences”. Language is not any more swaying but silence is. When language is not any more swaying but silence is. When language is not able to communicate effectively, this silence becomes the result of communication. Without language a human being is a “shell” without core and content. The act of “becoming” and “occurring” which Graham refers to many times show the being of man in its language, the sick language deals with sick beings. The poet in the last lines of part three goes back to his childhood memories; “The big wind blows / Over the shore of my child / Hood in the off-season. Being disconnected from the past, the poet uses a line break in the word “child Hood”. The childhood is split into two parts. The split identity of the speaker comes in the other line “as a shell / Of my former self”, “I am the shell”. In the fourth part the speaker is the poet himself. He leaves everything behind because of poetry.

    I put myself out
    Away from home to meet?
    Was it this only? Surely
    It is more than these words
    See on my side
    I went halfway to meet. (NCP 172)

The poet by writing the poem goes half of the way to communicate to the reader. He expects something more than “these words” which must be the result of the years away from home but there is nothing unless words and his poetry are in isolation and silence.

    The place where he feels he most truly is becomes, almost at once, a mere habit of speech and mind, a familiar, unconvincing claim. And Graham is rueful about this. He wishes he could more peaceably
expect and predict this unavoidable let-down, which comes all the more wearily after the writer has made so much effort to speak truly to another and to himself. The effort seems useless and the collapse of language into itself confirms isolation. (Pite 77)

What he is afraid of is

... the terrible times
Moving away find
Me in the end only
Staying where I am always
Unheard by a fault. (NCP 172)

What is this “fault”, the fault which causes the poet to be unheard? Is it the fault of language, and its difficulty which confuses the reader or the difficulties of ideas? The answer is that both, the ideas and the language are the source of ambiguity.

I stop and listen over
My shoulder and listen back
On language for that step
That seems to fall after
My own step in the dark. (NCP 173)

"Here the self that was, a few feet back down the road, is imagined co-existent with this speaking self which is drawn together out of this awareness in speaking, in language" (Lopez 98). Language and the poet both fall in darkness of the “inhuman place” of the text. The words of the poem make the reader blind to see

... whoever I meant
To think I had met
Turns away further
Before me blinded by
This word and this word. (NCP 173)

The poem is the home of the poet; he finds the voice of his parents, his childhood and his community in the words of his poem. “This is no other place / Than where I am, between / This word and the next”, the poem is the home of everything; the poet, his ideas, his play of language, and the words. This is the continuous struggle in the form of words that appear in the poem and disappear. They make what is Absentist poetry.

“Approaches to How They Behave” resembles Eliot’s Four Quartets. In Four Quartets, Eliot’s concern is with the imperfection of language but his difference with Graham is that for Eliot the inadequacy of language has root in the fallen state of nature, but for Graham, it is the human being who is in a fallen state. “Graham is a specialist, almost a technician, of voice. His speech is never natural, and never quiet, but beings unexpectedly and continues unpredictably” (Hofmann 310).

The poem “Approaches to How They Behave” in fifteen different fragments, deals with the Absentist language and the laments of Graham about language.

What does it matter if the words
I choose, in the order I choose them in,
Go out into a silence I know
Nothing about, there to be let
In and entertained and charmed
Out of their master’s orders? And yet
I would like to see where they go

And how without me they behave. (NCP 178)

The poet thinks about when the words of his poem do not convey anything unless “silence”, then he suggests that let us see “where they go /And how they behave”— it
seems the poem itself is the silence which the poet is afraid of. But at the same time the words and language are like active creatures and moreover they are independent of their writer.

Graham’s works depend upon three elements: the words, the interlocutor and the reader.

“Dependence on words which live independently of the writer is an irreducible difficulty and condition of writing poetry” (Robinson 115).

The second part shows the difficulty of speaking especially when one wants to be “exact”. A poem has different levels of meaning, the surface meaning and the deep meaning. The poet says; “the appearance” of words “must not be made to mean another thing”, but it is exactly the way word and language are. There are different meanings hidden in the words of the poem. The poet believes that “It is a kind of triumph” for the reader to understand the different levels of meaning.

The inadequacy

Of the living, animal language drives
Us all to metaphor and an attempt
To organize the spaces we think
We have made occur between the words. (NCP 178)

He emphasizes the inadequacy of language because the metaphors in language become incomprehensive. The general belief is that we human beings organize and construct language but actually it is the language which helps us to “become” and to “occur” in language. We exist in language.

In the third part the words just are ‘bad’, “The bad word and the bad word”. The words are bad because they force the writer to make some faces at himself. The worst thing about the word is their “silence”, after the poet writes them in the direction to
the reader. They turn to silence when they reach the reader, “afloat” and “freeze” in the mind of the reader. A silence conveys silence. The poet wants to write some other words and poems in support of the previous poems like “a convoy” and save them from silence. Fragment number five is in the form of a conversation between two words;

One word says to its mate O
I do not think we go together
Are we doing any good here
Why do we find ourselves put down?
The mate pleased to be spoken to
Looks up from the line below
And says well that doubtful god
Who has us here is far from sure
How we on our own tickle the chin
Of the prince or the dame that lets us in. (NCP 179)

This interesting conversation reveals some facts for us-first language and words have their own authority (independence) from the poet, second the writer is named as “doubtful god”, the writer is “far from sure” why he puts the words in such order. Number six very beautifully and clearly talks about poem in the arena of absence.

The dark companion is a star
Very present like a dark poem
Far and unreadable just out
At the edge of this poem floating.
It is not more or less a dark
Companion poem to the poem. (NCP 179)
“The dark star” is invisible like a “dark poem”. The poem is in the cage of a book, “unreadable”. In the arena of an absence, the poem is at “the edge” and at “the margin”. Like “The Dark Dialogue” where both the writer and the reader are absent, the poem itself suffers from being marginalized.

Number seven addresses the poets that the value of a poem is more than that to be “strut” and “busked out” and turn to silence. Poetry is the best form of language and it is valuable. “Language is expensive if / We want to strut, busked out / Showing our best on silence.”

Language for the poet is like his “dress up”:

Underneath

My overcoat of the time’s slang

I am fashionable enough wearing

The grave-clothes of my generous masters. (NCP 180)

Each person dresses up according to his own personality. Likewise the new generation of poets have not to imitate the other poets. They must have their own dignity and be “fashionable” for imitation is like “wearing the grave-clothes” of the masters. Words are “mum” and the poet questions the ultimate ability of words to be uttered in part eight. In contrast to number three, here number nine has “the good word” which speaks. They tell the poet “the more you use” them, they will be more convenient. Number ten tells the reader how to read a poem “we read / Read back as we gobble the words up” but one should read to understand it not just read it. One is “Allowing the poem to represent / A recognizable landscape”. Reading a poem has its own role, it should be read slowly.

The poem is not a string of knots

Tied for a meaning of another time
And country, unreadable, found
By chance. The poem is not a henge
Or Easter Island emerged Longnose
Or a tally used by early unknown
Peoples. The words we breathe and puff
Are our utensils down the dream
Into the manhole. Replace the cover. (NCP 181)

What is poetry and what is not poetry is answered in number eleven. Language and words are “our utensils”, implements, tool and “string of knots”. They are the things we experience the world with; they are our very existence of being. Through language and words the poet creates authentic poetry which stands for the essence of our being. Poetry is not just for pleasure in leisure time. Modern poetry is a serious art that deals with our origin of being.

Number twelve has a post-modern idea about multi-meaning of poetry.

The words are mine. The thoughts are all
Yours as they occur behind
The bat of yours vast unseen eyes.
These words are as you see them put
Down on the dead-still page. They have
No ability above their station.
Their station on silence is exact.
What you do with them is nobody’s business. (NCP 181)

In this poem like “Implements in Their Places”, the reader has his own right to make his own meaning. After the poet creates his poetry, the poem does not belong to the poet anymore but it keeps producing new meanings in each new reading. Without a
reader, a poem is dead. It dies in its silence. Number fourteen drowns in its silence. Number fifteen is in the form of a conclusion.

Having to construct the silence first
To speak out on I realize
The silence even itself floats
At my ear-side with a character
I have not met before. Hello
Hello I shout but that silence
Floats steady, will not be marked
By an off-hand shout. (NCP 182)

The “scattered” and “broken” identity of the poet speaks out of the silence. No communication happens in the absence of the poet. The poet cannot break the silence of language in the domination of absence over everything. Douglas Dunn in his Foreword to W.S. Graham New Collected Poems writes: “Graham was more interested in, more obsessed with, communication itself, with the imperatives of listening and reading, and the improbability of being entirely heard or understood. It is his major subject, and, like a songbird’s, it has no nationality unless one is imposed on it arbitrarily” (Dunn xvi)

The environment in “Clusters Travelling Out”, according to Tony Lopez, could be “claustrophobic containment” of a prison, a mental hospital, a slaughter house or a concentration camp. The speaker does not assure us about this. But wherever they are, they are remote from the everyday experience. The ambiguity about the setting of the poem helps the reader to feel the speaker’s ambiguous state of mind. The reader will be able to feel the suffocated place that the writer wants to communicate. He starts:
Clearly I tap to you clearly
Along the plumbing of the world
I do not know enough, not
Knowing where it ends. I tap
And tap to interrupt silence into
Man made durations making for this
Moment a dialect for our purpose.
TAP TAP. Are you reading that taptap
I send out to you along
My element? (NCP 191)

In this quintessential poem of prison, communication happens not through language but through the tap tap on metal and between the unknown speaker and unknown audience “you”. This indeterminate voice in such a strange confinement continues to speak and communicate. He emphasizes on the adverb “clearly” but in this strange type of communication nothing is clear. The metaphor of “the plumbing of the world” for language which he does not “know enough, not / Knowing where it ends” creates an image of language as an instrument and tool. It works when he taps on that otherwise there will be silence. This “Tap Tap” is man made “dialect” for his purpose. The setting of this poem does not give any choice to man to communicate unless through ‘tap on the pipes’. Here the role of the ‘pipe’ as a means for sound and communication is more than language. Graham reduces language to less than a tool. It is not the language which helps the captive speaker to communicate but the sound of “Tap Tap”. Again here Graham prefers sound and speech to written language. The captive speaker’s aim is “to interrupt silence” to communicate in the world of absence
of language itself. But the poem exactly conveys the sense of silence, as if the writer is scared of silence and wants to get out of it.

Tapping on the typewriter is another possibility that Lopez mentions. Thus writing is in fending off the absences and silence of language but in the inauthentic language, writing itself becomes a means to fall in absence. When language is reduced to an instrument and silence rules, the absence of communication is felt more. The language with the characteristic of inauthenticity, its communication is “TAP TAP”. “Are you reading that tap tap / I send out to you” and the poet continues “To answer please / Tap tap quickly along the nearest / Metal”. Only when mankind is reduced to a machine his language is reduced to “jargon” or “lipless language”, which is the language of Absence.

I am presuming

You know who I am. …

……………………………………

… When you hear from me

Again I will not know you. Whoever

Speaks to you will not be me.

I wonder what I will say (NCP 191)

These expressions regarding language lead us to the Heideggerian concept of existence. The inauthentic Being does not know who he is, as in this poem the speaker lost in his words does not know who is he/ or who the audience is. Moreover he refuses to accept that he is the speaker. The identity of the writer shifts from a patient-prisoner to a speaker poet, thus the identity of the persona breaks down.

In the second section, in the force of loneliness, the writer out of the fear of absence writes:
Remember I am here O not else
Where in this quick disguise, this very
Thought that’s yours for a moment. I sit
Here behind this tempered mesh.
I think I hear you hearing me.
I think I see you seeing me.
I suppose I am really only about
Two feet away. (NCP 192)
The speaker - poet puts emphasis on his present; “I am here”. He wants to reduce the
distance between himself and the reader; “I am really only about / Two feet away”.
Still he is absent he is “behind this tempered mesh”. Still he emphasizes that he sees
us, he hears us. “I think I hear you hearing me. / I think I see you seeing me”. The
speaker of these lines is full of hesitation and suspicion. The inauthentic existence is
not sure about anything either himself or others.

I try
To not be the first to speak. there is nothing to say.
Burn this, I do not dislike this place. I like
Being here. They are very kind. It’s doing me good. (NCP 193)
After being frustrated with the silence and absence of language, he decides to stop
talking. In part 5 we read:
If this place I write from is real then
I must be allegorical. Or maybe
The place and myself are both the one
Side of the allegory and the other
Side is apart and still escaped
Outside. (NCP 193)

The speaker is in doubt of the reality of the place he is writing from. Both the place and the setting of the poem along with identity of the speaker are “allegory”. By questioning history he questions the entire human society. The environment in this poem wherever it is, is not a pleasant place. It is a place for pain and isolation of the human being.

History

Princes with canisters of gas
Crystals to tip and snuff me out
Strangled and knotted with my kind
Under the terrible benevolent roof. (NCP 191)

“Canisters of gas”, immediately connects us to the Nazis and their concentration camps. There are the other environments in the poem such as “poorhouse” and “slaughter house” which are in the Madron. The poem belongs to the age of terror and wars, where “corridors have their character. I know well / The ring of government boots on our concrete”, the reader in the lines of the poem can feel fear and insecurity. The poem portrays mankind trapped in such situations; the language of a trapped man in the abyss.

“ Implements in Their Places” is the last significant poem in this Collection. It is written in the epigrammatic style. The narration of the poem does not have a linear progress but it has a closed and circular narration. The first and the last fragments are the same. Some of the evidence in the fragments echoes in other fragments. Resonance, the technique Graham uses in “ Implements In Their Places” is taken from The Art and Thought of Heraclitus by C.H. Kahn. He writes, “a relationship between fragments by which a single theme or image is echoed from one text to another in
such a way that the meaning of each is enriched when they are understood together’’ (qtd. in Lopez 109). “ Implements” is a metaphysical poem and his purpose is to “create a sense of language as inhabited space”. Graham as an Absentist poet deals with language, writing, and the difficulty of communication. The poem is full of strange places, unfamiliar objects and animals. Graham uses the word substitution as a great technique in the “ Implements”. In the following lines: “My barrier of propped word” (sec.4), “The flat / Thrown poem” (sec.10), “Commuting by arterial words” (sec.28), “The poem’s horned head” (sec. 38), “I want out of this underword” (sec.42), “She lifts my words” (sec.51), Graham substitutes “word” and “poem” for something else. Thus the reader reads about the other elements of the world such as stone, wood, roads, trees and beasts while reading Graham’s poetry. In his Heideggerian study of Graham’s poetry, Lopez writes:

Heidegger’s examination of ‘Being–in–the–world’ relies entirely on ‘ Implements’, because it is through their use that we know the world: through hammering, for example, we know the specific ‘manipulability’ (Handlichkeit) of the hammer. We thus also know things from nature: wood and metal’. (Lopez 106)

The poem starts with these lines; "Somewhere our belonging particles / believe in us. If we could only find them". The belongings of a man are the identity of man which consist of the self and language. The poem especially emphasizes on this point that our belonging becomes scattered particles and almost absent. Through challenging language, the poet challenges our existence in the lack of self-knowledge. The very first function of language, communication, will not happen when the speaker and the audience are in faulty duet.

Who calls? Don't fool me. Is it you
Or me or us in a faulty duet

Singing out of a glade in a wood

Which we would never really enter? (NCP 240)

The reason for this lack of communication has root in our being “Man is thrown into existence”. As the last line says man is thrown into a wood either the jungle of mistake of communication or a dark jungle of real or imaginary and scary place of the world. The Being is insecure in this existence, the poet sits “Behind” his “barrier of propped words”, he needs to take shelter in this unconstructed world, but he will not find the language a proper domain to take shelter there because language itself is the source of another absence and inadequacy. “He has been given a chair in that / Timeless University. / The Chair of Professor of Silence.” (NCP 241)

The poet as a teacher teaches society. This is the same voice in Number 40, “Do it with your pen”. The world is a “timeless university” and the poet is a “professor of silence”. The ultimate aim of a poem is to communicate, but in Absentism the chain of language is doomed to silence. The poet feels insecure when his efforts drown in the abyss of language. "The alien outsidedness of space, the insubstantiality of time and identity, the isolation belying language and love-against these he lacks protection."(Bedient, “Absentist,” 18)

The insubstantial and inauthentic man reflects in these lines: “that cheeky part of me which thinks / It like to have its own way”, self division is the result of fragmentation of faith and the presence of violence and evil as potential of being; "My father's ego sleeps in my bones". This ego, violence and selfishness are involved in our nature and here they demonstrate themselves as a lack in the ambiguous language of the poet. These are the characteristics of Absentist language which is the language of silence and complexity. The ‘authentic’ and ‘pure’ poetry suffers from lack of
audience, because it is difficult to understand it. Eliot praised Graham’s poetry that it “was ‘intellectual’ poetry and would go slow because people just were lazy about thinking” (Snow 103).

In my task’s husk a whisper said
Drop it It’s bad It’s bad anyhow.
Because I could not gracefully
Get out of what I was doing, I made
An inner task come to fruit
Invisible to all spectators. (NCP 244)

In this implement, the poet wants to drop writing because “It’s bad it’s bad anyhow”. The poet cannot bear the “fruit” of his task to be “invisible to all spectators”. Number 22 again addresses the reader not to hold his message “upsidedown”. Ignore a poem; seal it under a specific theory the feeling which kills the poet.

“Implement number 24” is the confabulation of the poet with the reader about how he writes a poem;

It is how one two three each word
Chose itself in its position
Pretending at the same time
They were working for me. Here
They are. Should I have sacked them? (NCP 245)

He suffers from the disobedience of language, where in Number 26 he confesses that the words are devils and ghosts. In Number 37 words are impudent children: “Dammit these words are making faces /At me again”. In Implement 29 Graham directly writes about “graft and treachery in the name / Of communication” there is no real communication, “the real message” as he says in Number 31 “gets lost” so it is
reduced to corruption and betrayal. Language is a kind of barrier for the poet also.

Lopez talks about that as a language game. He believes that:

By creating the kind of language-games that he does by consistently representing language as animate and living, by setting up the hints that invoke the ancient Greek world and its gods, Graham is deliberately creating a poetic domain in the terms of Heidegger’s metaphysics. The form of the work is based on Heraclitus’s *Fragments*, not just in that the text is made up of bits, but because of the continual use of paradox and of the literary qualities that have been attributed to Heraclitus. (109)

It is in such a case that he says;

Language, constrictor of my soul,
What are you snivelling at? Behave
Better. Take care. It’s only through me
You live. Take care. Don’t make me mad. (NCP 247)

Graham feels “constricted” in the claw of language and in the abyss of words. The inadequacy of language constricts the soul of the poet. Such a poet deals with writing pure poetry.

Graham addresses the language and personifies it “Behave / Better”. These words in their present order on the page come to existence by the poet. Thus the poet has his own authority on them. This is in contrast with the first and the last lines in this fragment.

In the loneliness of the soul of the poet, he tries to imagine the reaction of the reader to his poem.

Do not think you have to say
Anything back. But you do
Say something back which I
Hear by the way I speak to you. (NCP 247)

The poet has all these abilities in his language as a “surrounder / Of everything”.
Writing is a rescue act a “suicide torpedo”. He knows that the poem may be forgotten
in its isolation in the absence of a reader.

In this fragment “As I hear so I speak so I am so I think / You must be. O Please
Please No.” He commits our thinking to our language. This idea is completely against
the Cartesian theory of being. Descartes says “I think, therefore I am”, which means
one exists because one is able to think. For Descartes the ability to think is the essence
of existence. But Graham sees the point in a completely different way, for him man
has language and is able to speak and hear that he exists, and then he thinks. In
Graham’s view aesthetic language is equal to existence and the ability to think builds
upon it.

Implement number 40 is a playful and untrustworthy poem with a conversational
structure. It has an empty space which indicates the absence of the author and needs
the reader’s participation to create meaning. This place actually increases the distance
between the reader and the writer. But the emphasis is on the relation between the
writer and the reader;

I leave you this space
To use as your own.
I think you will find
That using it is more
Impossible than making it.
Here is the space now.
Write an Implement in it.

You……………………………

You……………………………

You……………………………

You…………………………...

Do it with your pen.

I will return in a moment

To see what you have done.

Try. Try. No offence meant. (NCP 250)

The reader-response theory is that the reader should be able to deal with the text in a way that he is able to read the non-written lines of the text. Graham in “Notes on a Poetry of Release” writes: “The meaning of a word in a poem is never more than its position. The meaning of a poem is itself, not less a comma. But then to each man it comes into new life. It is brought to life by the reader and takes part in the reader’s change. Even the poet as a man who searches continually is a new searcher with his direction changing at every step” (Graham, “Notes,” 382).

This implement whether according to this theory or the poet’s idea about engaging the reader in the text, has a new responsibility for the reader. The reader is required to fill the unfilled lines of the poem to make his own meaning. The reader needs to be “unbinding” and “un-caging”.

Number forty five deals with the story of loneliness of the poet:

Tonight late alone, the only

Human awake in the house I go

Out in a foray into my mind

Armed with the language as I know it
To sword–dance in the halls of Angst. (NCP 250)

Writing is the only protection of mankind against anxiety and angst. In the strange loneliness of man of the contemporary time, to take shelter under the protection of writing and language will be the only relief for man.

Number fifty nine “This lack / Of communication takes all the sap / Out of me so far out” as the conclusion comes almost at the end of the poem. Lack of communication has another terrible result “My dear, I think / We have com in to the wrong wood”. Here the poet denies his entire endeavour in the difficulty of language to search “self” but he comes to know that he had come to “the wrong wood”.

“(Is where you listen from becoming / Numb by the strike of the same key?) / Its our hazard, Herakliton, listen” (256). This implement has allusion to Heraclitus ‘Fragments’, the Pre-Socratic philosopher who Graham was influenced by. It deals with the story of his “becoming”, the act of “becoming” and “occur” through language in the “hazard” of all great thinkers such as Heraclitus. Graham collected seventy-four pasted-in pieces of his conversations, dreams, memories and statements to reach the end of the process of his “becoming”. But again he finds himself at the starting point, as his trials fail and are absurd. He repeats “Somewhere our belonging particles / Believe in us. If we could only find them”.

Graham's Absentist Collection Implements In Their Places is a journey from language to silence, from scattered language to scattered self. The journey explores the nature of the self through the experience of language. His aim is to awake us to begin to exist. Bedient believes that: "Graham, of course, not only shapes himself as he reshapes the language; he shapes a new pleasure for his readers" (Eight 167).
While Peter Childs believes that “Modernist obsession with language has often been seen as indicative of the alienation from life and from history”, quoting from Terry Eagleton he writes that:

If objects and events in the real world are experienced as lifeless and alienated, if history seems to have lost direction and lapsed into chaos, it is always possible to put all of this ‘in bracket’… and take words as your object instead. Writing turns in on itself in a profound act of narcissism, but always troubled and overshadowed by the social guilt of its own uselessness. (99-100)

If Terry Eagleton writes about “‘The Waste Land’” as an example of literature and language in crisis” (Childs 100) in 1922 then W.S. Graham’s “ Implements In Their Places” (1977) is five decades advanced in frustration of human beings and is another example of the whole language and human existence in crisis. This poem “epitomises an attempt to free writing from its degradation as ‘a mere instrument of science, commerce, advertising, and bureaucracy’” (Childs 100). The crisis of discourse and communication in “Implements in their Places” leads us to a significant issue of the crisis of identity. It reminds us of “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”.

Graham’s entire project, the strategies of his poetry, the self discoveries in his lines, and the great reflection of the active participation of language, all these are relevant to Absentism. No other type of poetry perhaps will be able to bring the modern man so truly open on the stage except Absentist poetry.

The State of Flux in The Nightfishing (1955)

The collection The Nightfishing (1955) consists of “The Nightfishing” a long poem of over 500 lines, “Seven Letters” and “Two Ballads”. It is considered among the major works of early Graham. In this study thematically, “The Nightfishing” is analyzed as
a state of flux. Francis in his book *Where the People Are* writes that: “The essence of flux cannot be pinned down: it is a mysterious continuity which disappears on examination to leave a series of discontinuities or autonomous states” (95). It was G. S. Fraser who for the first time noted the theme of flux in “The Nightfishing”.

The meta-poem of “The Nightfishing”, in seven parts has a narrative structure about a voyage at night. On the surface level it is the experience of fishing but allegorically it is connected to the fundamental quest of the inner self. It is a poem about a poem. It is ‘self-referential’. “The Nightfishing” is based on the state of flux and the absence of certainty. G.S. Fraser writes:

… The theme of the tension between conceptual order and sensational flux. The sea for him [Graham] is a symbol for everything in human experience that seems to evade our attempt to impose order on it, and the word, the poet’s word, is a symbol for the struggle to impose or discover order which, nevertheless, we persist in … what is our anything’s identity within the flux? (69)

The different themes and ideas in the poem lead us to the reasons of the flux in the poem. The image of the sea in this poem is a fundamental image. The theme of flux has been the most significant strand of imagery in Graham’s poetry. The successful source of ambiguity has roots in the authentic knowledge of sea which Graham was aware of. The sea symbol signifies exclusively a particular thought of the unconscious and dream. Although in the title of the poem it does not figure, “fishing” represents the sea. The word ‘sea’ is in the second rank compared to the word ‘night’. Night represents darkness, dream and sleep, ambiguity and lack of light. This voyage takes us to the realm of “the spirituality, the sacred and the unconscious” domain of a human being. It is a quest to the unknown self.
How to get from his present self, which is hooked to the flying moment, to all his earlier selves, or across the abyss between any two words, or all the way to the reader intact, straitjackets, with interesting results, his lonely-sounding poems. He seems almost to take these difficulties as heuristic premises, so as to justify a more-than-American eccentricity of invention. His language is delightfully and almost alarmingly alive and strange. (Bedient, “Thick,” 40)

As Graham laments, it was always difficult for him to speak “from a fluid identity”. He introduces himself as “a genius of rivers” (Graham 6) and “a scholar of seas” (7). But Francis observes that “his work of the middle period juxtaposes such an identity with an intermittent model of time made up of separate moments, with the result that the ‘fluid identity’ is explained paradoxically by its discontinuity” (Where 95).

Fraser finds out that the problem of Graham in this poem is the struggle with the “identity-in-change” through language. Graham in most of his poems clearly speaks about a fluid identity. In the poem “The Nightfishing” different matters come together in a scattered way in order to maintain uncertainty. “The narrative of the voyage, the biography of the speaker, elements of Christian and pre-Christian allegory, and the business of writing, is presented in such a way that events are scattered, refracted and transposed” (Lopez 63).

The first section of “The Nightfishing” is a collection of some instances of the striking bells and calling out of his name by an absent subject: “Very gently struck / the quay night bell”, and “I hear / My name called from far out”. This abrupt beginning gives a sense of suspicion to the reader. From the beginning of the poem, the poet does not give enough details, instead, fosters the sense of doubt and
ambiguity by not going to the details and the expected word order. He increases the complexity of the poem by its lineation: a series of short and long sentences.

Very gently struck
The quay night bell.

Now within the dead
Of night and the dead
Of my life I hear
My name called from far out.
I’m come to this place
(Come to this place)
Which I’ll not pass
Though one shall pass
Wearing seemingly
This book I move as. (NCP 150)

Three stresses pattern the poem along with the pauses at the lines; they create a sense of uncertainty of the continuity of the piece. The short lines are like untied units which are not able to complete a motive of the poem in themselves. The structure of the poem resembles the waves of the sea.

In the two first sentences there is the past participle form of “struck” and the past tense of “called” and suddenly he switches to the present and future tense in the third and seventh sentences “come” and “I’ll”. The shifting of tense indicates a new identity. This continuous shifting between past and present in the entire poem conveys the lack of coherence in the events that show instability. Graham creates unusual
sentences by bringing two adjectives for the “bell”; “night” and “quay”. But the rest of the quoted lines try to give form and order.

In the next sentence in parenthesis he corrects the sentence in a way that conveys “thrown to the place” or “thrown there” (come to the place). In this sentence the speaker invites the reader into the place of the text and the poem. It also signifies the place in which his existence takes place which is the poem. He “will not pass” unless with finishing “this book” he “moves as”. “This book” either “The Nightfishing” collection or the book of existence of his life, guides the reader “to pass” through it.

The next sentence is, to “stare” for a “second” brings the “being” to the awareness of his existence. He feels the horror and the insecurity of being in the place. There is a sudden change of the motive. He feels anxious from the moment he begins to know himself as a human being.

This staring second

Breaks my home away

Through always every

Night through every whisper

From the first that once

Named me to the bone. (NCP 105)

The existence of being starts from the mother’s womb, foetus forms then one comes to the chain of existence and “named” as “being” in “to the bone”. But by coming to existence one is doomed. It is the moment the state of flux starts. According to Heidegger’s philosophy of Existentialism, one feels pain and suffers when one comes to know that the anxiety and alienation are part of his existence and he is “thrown there”. “Man is ‘thrown’ into existence … in the sense that he can only and always
find himself already there” (Cruickshank 113). Anxiety and alienation are only about Being-in the world itself. Graham repeats “this place” more than ten times in the poem. “I’m come to this place”, “Yet this place finds me” (Graham 105), “I fell down into this place” (107), “So this is this place”, “At this place / The eye reads forward as the memory reads back” (117), “Here in this place no more / Certain…” (118), “Home becomes this place, / A bitter night”, “Now this place about me” (119), “This present place is / Become made into…” “This place” is the sea which he voyages on, or fishing for the self.

The world including whatever is there gets its form and importance in relation to a human being’s existence. If man does not exist on the earth, the world does not convey any meaning for him. But as long as man exists, he tries to interpret the world for his own benefit. Thus the universe with all animals and plants in the form of otherness, become important for him. He observes this otherness in the following lines:

Owls from on the land.
Gulls cry from the water.
And that wind honing
The roof-ridge is out of
Nine hours west on the main
Ground with likely a full
Gale unwinding it. (NCP 105)

Once more the speaker goes to the opening lines but this time with more control on the sentences:

Gently the quay bell
Strikes the held air.
Strikes the held air like
Opening a door
So that all the dead
Brought to harmony
Speak out on silence. (NCP 106)

The bells of the fishing boats and the ships that get ready for the voyage into the sea, strike to inform the moment of departure. The quoted lines resemble the resurrection of the dead, when “all the dead / Brought to harmony / Speak out on silence”. From the actual world of fishing activity he flashes back to the world of the dead. What they communicate is “Silence”. From the world of the dead he comes back to life, finds a strange self, the unknown identity, he turns into someone else:

I cupped

My hand to the glass chimney.

Yet it was a stranger’s breath

From out of my mouth that

Shed the light. (NCP 106)

This part shows the presence of others in the poem, an immature self, infant self, an innocent self or the self-consciousness, “From out of my mouth that / shed the light” the strangeness of man from himself indicates the scattered self. “The Nightfishing” that started with the fishing of the speaker and search in the sea continues the transforming of self; “He drowns, who but ill / Resembled me”. It manifests allegorical meaning to “utter” self by means of the sea and fishing; “I am befriended by / This sea which utters me”. Vivienne Koch writes;

The realistic documentation of the sea’s activity is put in the service of a philosophic inquiry which … is seen as a drowning of the past self.
The “exchanging sea” is like a bridge between two aspects of the self, the most recent self which drowns in the arrival of the new. That is, the self, as a movement toward a perfection, moves toward another death.

(669)

The second section of the poem deals with the dream as the narrative technique of the poet. The sea and the night and the dream stand for flux, instability, and undulating movement. The sea is against any attempt to impose order on it. The narration of “The Nightfishing” is another source for flux and disorder in the language. The narration of the poem is such that it presents a sense of restlessness and chaos. “I, in Time’s grace, the grace of change, sail surely / Moved off the land and the skilled keel sails / The darkness burning under where I go” (107). The first line shows the speaker in the flux of time “Time’s grace, the grace of change”, after which he shifts into the flux of the sea. What is important here is the employing of the vocabulary and the words in a way that goes beyond the descriptive task of recording a night’s fishing or a dream. The word “wake” is repeated thrice. As in the first part, the bell strikes constantly, to make the speaker aware. Here the word “wake” has the same role. “To work at waking. Yet who wakes? / Dream gives awake its look”. Like a dream it has the stream of consciousness narration and does not follow the sequence of the events.

At the final part of the poem “So I spoke and died /.../ words died and awoke” again Graham, brings the word awake, thus “This suggests the possibility that the entire experience of the fishing trip, with its nocturnal setting and uncanny quality, is a dream” (Francis, Where 138).

The progress of the incidents is under the flux and shifts from the fishing boat to his childhood and his family. The poem “without the potential of release with which the poet has charged the poem from his own experience, using the flux of always-
changing language as a sailor uses the flux of the always-changing ocean, no release would be carried across the gap to the reader” (Morgan, “The Sea,” 32). In section two, the birth is referred to as a ‘fall’ from the world of the spirit to the world of physic, equivalently birth is fall:

When I fell down into this place
My father drew his whole day’s pay,
My mother lay in a set-in bed,

The midwife threw my bundle away. (NCP 107)

Tony Lopez observes that the coming forth of a child from the womb and the departure of the boat are simultaneous; “when I fell from the hot to the cold”. The boat moves from the harbour to the sea. The word ‘fall’, apart from allegorical rendering to the “Fall of Adam”, also hints at the writing process. “To write words is to cause them to fall from the air to the page, from the live world of speech to the dead world of writing” (Francis, Where 45). The theme of death-rebirth is repeated in the poem. In section five, the dead world of his writing is full of the ‘vast’ information with reference to his childhood, his parents, the fishing activity, the crowded area of harbour, his loneliness in his room. “The poet is able to put motion into several levels of experience at once. The slow and tortuous movement of his verse is a perfect vehicle for his subject: that the event and the expression of the event have a mysterious and transmogrifying effect upon each other” (Zinnes 314). All the events of the poem are terrible surrounding, in a way that makes a mass and flux as the sea resembles it.

The third section of “The Nightfishing” the largest section with 304 lines happens at sea. “The Nightfishing’ describes a “voyage at night and fishing with the nets and is also a metaphor of a search in the mingling darkness of the memory…” for
a ‘home’, or for a conception of one’s self as one identity” (Snow 103). The darkness of the sea and the darkness of the unconsciousness of the speaker combine together. He starts the real voyage into the dark sea and into the territory of his psyche; “My changing motive pays me slowly out”. He gets “motive” to fish and to write. The reversal phrase “The sea sails in”, is a farfetched image. All he deals with is this darkness and unknown abyss of the sea and he tries to fish himself there, because it is an act of self-discovery. The reflexive pronoun “us” is a “deictic” and a source of ambiguity; Graham never makes it clear who these “us” and “we” are. This is an objection for Matthew Francis because Graham does not differentiate between dream and the realm of imagination with reality. But this is the technique of the poet to represent flux and ambiguity. The reflexive pronoun “us” in this line shows that there are other crew in the fishing boat as fishing is a group activity. “The quay opens wide its arms / And waves us loose”. At the same time “us” refers to the reader as the poet takes him into the world of the text. Edwin Morgan points out that Graham makes the reader “‘a companion, a co-voyager … who will feel that he has seen and brought back his catch’” (qtd. in Lopez 69). This voyage “sails you no more than your own”. He makes it clear and even gives the key to the reader that all the fishing trip and voyage is only a quest for self. Step by step what he finds is revealed to us; “Each word is but a longing / Set out to break from a different home. Yet in / its meaning I am”. “Experience and the experiencing self are always changing and language changes things in fixing things” (Tolley 80). He finds out that he is the meaning of his own experience. The words come from a “different home” of the mind of the poet to bring a “longing” of existence to the poet, thus the poet is at the core of his poetry. He exists in his art, immortal. Poetry for Graham is “‘the establishment of Being by the word’, countering inert industrialism (‘the Furnaced City’) with active imagination,
the ‘towering tongue of each discovering hour’, ‘wording the world awake and all its suns’. So the world is “wakened into miracle’ and poetry helps us to bear ‘the grave’s gravel’ of dust and sin, ‘the unmapped spell along the blood’” (Milne 85).

In “The Nightfishing” two metaphors go well together self-fishing and the writing-fishing metaphor, “The sea as metaphor of the sea”, and a metaphor of language. “The keel in its amorous furrow / Goes through each word” the substitution of the “word” for “wave”, and “words break”, depicts the flux in the sea as well as in language. Thus in the state of flux and meaninglessness which language drown, the human being suffers too. In these lines if sea stands for language, the pen of the poet, like the “keel” needs to go through each word and creates the perfect shape for it. But ‘sea’ itself is a metaphor for flux and instability, Graham deliberately selects the sea as metaphor of language, since language like the sea is deep and the source of flux and instability. This mixed metaphor expresses the difficulty of writing. The poet is like a sculptor; with this difference he engraves his words out of water. The innovation and coinage of the words is the most difficult act in versification. He creates his poem through these words “In these words through which I move”. In this section, he explains the difficulty of writing through the tough and risky act of a night’s fishing. He reads the signs of the sea and the sky;

My eyes read in

The fixed and flying signs wound in the light
Which all shall soon lie wound in as it slowly
Approaches rising to break wide up over the
Brow of the sea.

My need reads in light more specially gendered and
Ambitioned by all eyes that wide have been
Me once. (NCP 109)

He explains the act of fishing, how they spread their nets, “all ropes / Loose and unlinked”, and the turn of the ship. But on the other side, “These words take place” and the writing of the poem is in process. Morgan writes that; “the boat … sailing through dark seas of language for a shimmering catch of poetry (that is, the poem), and even beyond that, for a catch of near-mystic experience that may feed the speaker’s poetry in the future” (“The Sea,” 34). By writing words on the page, he wounds them, because the words are “fly sings” like fish they move and do not come to the net of the fishermen easily but “all shall soon lie wound” in the page. He is conscious of the difficulty of writing as in the fluidity of identity, “I am illusioned out of this flood as / Separate and stopped to trace all grace arriving”. While he crosses the sea and fishes for self he captures the scattered self gradually. He remembers he has been called by an unknown thing.

So I have been called by my name and

It was not sound. It is me named upon

The space which I continually move across

Bearing between my courage and my lack

The constant I bleed on. (NCP 111)

The passive structure indicates the passivity in the protagonist. In this part he deals with the relation of man to the universe, it is mankind that gives meaning to the universe.

Who is that poor sea-scholar,

Lost in his book of storms there? It is myself.

So he who died is announced. This mingling element

Gives up myself. Words travel from what they once
Passed silence with. Here, in this intricate death,
He goes as fixed on silence as ever he’ll be.
Leave him, nor cup a hand to shout him out
Of that, his home. Or, if you would, O surely

There is no word, (NCP 115)

The poet refers to himself as the “poor sea-scholar”, who is lost in his writing that is full of storm and “yelling gale” like the sea. His voyage is the voyage in the language. He applies the signs of sea such as “storm”, “mingling element”, and “nerve” as the element of his writing. Writing is like the sea, it has its own force and power. The writer can drown there, in “the streaming sea” as he is thrown in “the mingling world”. He deals with the flux of language, a flux that can swallow him. When the “mingling element” of language “gives him up”, then he is not sailing in the sea of language but it is language and words that sail in him. “The Nightfishing” is arguably Graham’s most Eliotian poem and he also writes about it’s terms reminiscent of Eliot’s aesthetics. Realizing specific objects as fully as possible provides a way of going beyond them into ‘a deeper problem’, ‘another intensity’. The particular words reach into a universal silence” (Pite 70).

Language sometimes creates “silence” in the meaning of an “intricate death”. What he utters or writes is only silence; even the share of the reader is silence. Silence is one of the significant words in Graham’s poetry. It has both positive and negative meanings. Here Graham concentrates on the negative meaning of silence in language. Silence is a kind of death, “there is no word”. In Graham’s aesthetics of “The Nightfishing”, the role of the reader is significant. The reader is like a fisherman, equipped with all the tools he needs for fishing-reading goes to the sea of the text. His success in fishing-reading depends on his ability and experience about fishing-reading and his
knowledge of the sea-text. If he is well equipped, certainly he will bring home a good
share. Otherwise, he may be trapped in the “mingling element” of the sea-text. He
will lose himself in the “book of storms”. He is in “This intricate death / He goes as
fixed on silence as ever he’ll be”.

Graham in many of his poems shows that language and existence are equal as here “I
uttered that place / And left each word I was”. On one side he is in the words when he
says “I am / My fruitful share”. He finds his goal; he collects the scattered pieces of
his writing. On the other side: “Words break”, word stands for absence of faith in
Christianity. “The Nightfishing” is full of Christian connotations. It “can hardly be
read without considering Christ the fisherman, in the parable where he makes his
disciples into fishers of men” (Lopez 72).

The following Christian images reveal Graham’s attention to the sacredness of
words, mentioned in the Bible; “In the beginning there was the word, and the Word
was with God, and the word was God” (Gospel of St John). He refers to other
illusions in the Bible and Jesus Christ; “Time’s grace, the grace of change” (NCP 107); “The cross-tree light (NCP 109); “Cross in the air” (NCP 111), “that white
grace” (NCP 113); “All words change in acknowledgment of the last”, “As cross on a
ball of wool” (NCP 117), “Walks its waters again” (NCP 119); “Words died and
awoke” (NCP 120). These different instances which have Christian imagery scattered
throughout the poem, indicate the scattered faith of man. But in this regard Lopez
looks at it as:

“Cross- tree light’ and ‘Cross in the air’, moreover, pick up on the
transformed mast image as developed in Rahner’s account of the
Christian use of Homeric symbolism...; and this sets the fishing-trip in
the Christian tradition of a voyage home, passing through the cares and
temptations of the world to reach heaven and union with God. (72)

Fish is the symbol for immortal soul in Christianity, for which Jesus and the disciples
“fish”. He remembers Jesus Christ and his sufferings;

He befriended so many

Disguises to wonder in on as many roads

As cross on a ball of wool.

Who sits here in his place.

But human beings after him have forgotten every thing even faith in God. Now who
can replace him on the earth? “What a man arrived breathless / With a look or word to
a few / Before he’s off again”. Jesus Christ brings his “look” as his love and affection
and his “word” as gift of peace to human beings. “The Nightfishing” in this part is
fishing for the lost faith in the abyss and the darkness of human calamity.

As Tony Lopez points out, “The Nightfishing” is not a ‘statement of faith’ but
through religion, Graham reflects the separated particles of the consciousness and
identity. The speaking self continuously lost in the flux of different events again re-
asserts itself in the voyage. The self constitutes the experience of fishing and writing.

In sections 4, 5, 6 and 7 which are short, the narrator comes home from
fishing with his “fruitful share” of herring. The fourth section with its refrain; “O my
love, keep the day / Leaned at rest, leaned at rest”, sets the poem in a new situation.
Lopez argues that this poem can be a “love lyric”, because fishermen bring home their
“fruitful share” as a “love-gift”.

In the sixth section, Graham gives a different shape to the structure of the
poem. He puts five stanzas in the middle and frames it with three stanzas before and
after. In these five stanzas he talks to an unknown audience that is present in his imagination, most probably he talks to Jesus Christ.

   Lie down and serve. Your death is past.
   There the fishing ground is richest.
   There contribute your slight of cast.

   ....................................................................
   You're come among somewhere the early
   Children at play who govern my way
   And shed each tear which burns my eye.
   Thus, shed into the industrious grave
   Ever of my life, you serve the love
   Whose motive we are energies of. (NCP 119)

The sixth section deals with the process of writing while he is seated in a room at a table.

In the final section Graham is composing poetry to make a “home” or a “constructed place” that is sacred place.

   Now this place about me
   Wakes the night’s twin shafts
   And sheds the quay slowly.

   ................................................
   This present place is
   Become made into
   A breathless still place
   Unrolled on a scroll
   And turned to face this light. (NCP 120)
“This present place” is made of the words of the poem. He constructs a space to get shelter in to “think in”, to “thing anything in” (NCP 168). But the writer is absent in this place; ‘I am not there’ (NCP 148). This is a painful truth about writing, the death and the absence of the author. Thus he says;

So I spoke and died.
So within the dead
Of night and the dead
Of all my life those

Words died and awoke. (NCP 120)

According to Roland Barthes’ theory of ‘the death of the author’, the poem is in the hands of the reader. The reader reads the text, awakens it bringing it to life again.

I sat rested at the grave’s table
Saying his epitaph who shall
Be after me to shout farewell. (NCP 105)

The poem “The Nightfishing” as a place (a place like a crowded harbor in Scotland, or a place like a stormy sea) is full of disorder and flux as the elements of Absentist poetry. It represents the world with all its complexity and ambiguity. The world of flux that Graham portrays is “the mingling flood” (NCP 95), “the streaming sea”, “the mingling elements” and “the mingling world”.

“The Nightfishing” takes benefits from different material which intercut together in the description of events, the act of nightfishing, fishing for words and fishing for self, which is enriched with the memories of his childhood. So the poem in the wider sense portrays the whole life of human society in the state of flux and instability. The setting of the poem is a sea at night as a symbol of darkness, loneliness, instability and death.

The collection of *Malcolm Mooney's Land* of nineteen poems was published in 1970, after a fifteen year gap from his earlier book *The Nightfishing* (1955). Graham’s writing completely changes “both in manner and subject” from what he wrote before. This collection is significant because of its direct address to the reader and the relation between the poet and the reader; and deals with the problems of communication. One of the best poems in this collection, is the one which carries the same title; “Malcolm Mooney’s Land”. The important idea in this poem and many other poems is the idea of the exploration of self through the exploration of actual land and the exploration of the imaginative domain of language and writing.

As its title conveys it creates a “fictional territory” and the sense of the place. It is “a particular place with its own natural history and its own community of strange inhabitants. … It is a place of terror and madness, inhabited by monsters, beasts and gods. … a place of physical, emotional and psychological extremity” (Lopez 80).

“Malcolm Mooney’s Land”

The first poem in the collection, “Malcolm Mooney’s Land” has 141 lines in five parts. It is about exploration of the “Malcolm Mooney’s Land” and modeled on the heroic Arctic voyages of Nansen and his ship *Fram* on Franz Joseph Land. The imaginative domain of language along with the actual land of Malcolm Mooney is the prominent setting of the poem. It is in the form of a diary. Some passages begin with the name of days, “Today Tuesday” and “Today Friday”. But its different from a dairy in that there is no logical connection between the different incidents which is necessary for a diary. It is full of ambiguities and fragmentations due to its puzzling nature and scattered structure. The reader in this wonderland needs to canvass the absence of the author.
Today, Tuesday, I decided to move on

Although the wind was veering. Better to move

Than have them at my heels, poor friends

I buried earlier under the printed snow. (NCP 153)

He starts the poem with the verb “move” from his previous experience in writing poetry “poor friends”; which he buries under the “printed snow”. His previous experience forms an identity for him which he prefers to leave them behind. In the “Footprint on foot / print, word on word and each on a fool’s errand” he uses a line break to indicate the adrift situation of the narrator between his writing activity and the quest for self. Tony Lopez finds out that “Malcolm Mooney’s Land”

[Is] a journey of exploration into a boundless frozen wasteland of isolation and loneliness, where heroism and psychological extremity are explored. The emotional basis of the poem is a comparison between the work of a poet reaching into the unknown self through his struggle with language, and that of a national hero and explorer such as Captain Scott or Fridtjof Nansen, who travels far beyond the domestic to confront nature and try the limits of the self, for what are ostensibly patriotic reasons. (83-84)

The exploration in the actual world always takes the explorer away from his family and his social world into a hostile and unknown environment. In the same way the exploration of the unknown world of language, takes the author away from the past self into the unexplored identity. Graham accepted the “life as a process of sloughed skins–except that the old skins are not lost, and we live our dead selves as well as with unknown selves to come” (Morgan, “Poetry,” 191).
Graham in his poem again gives us a very candid example. The character “Elizabeth” and “boys” are from the social world that the speaker-poet leaves behind. They belong to the past and are not any more present unless in the world of his imagination and the world of the text; “Elizabeth / Was in my thoughts all morning and the boy.” “Furry Queen” is a pun on the first Elizabeth and Spenser’s *Fairy Queen*. It is also an allusion to Anderson’s *Snow Queen*.

Tell him a story.

Tell him I came across
An old sulphur bear
Sawing his log of sleep
Loud beneath the snow.

He puffed the powdered light
Up on to this page
And here his reek fell
In splinters among
These words. He snored well.

Elizabeth, my furry
Pelted queen of Malcolm
Mooney’s Land. (NCP 156-157)

Graham like the “Snow Queen” takes the reader into the mysterious world under “the laws of distance”. The vastness of the land of Malcolm Mooney is the distance between the old self and the present self, “Dear Pen / Pal in the distance,” the line break makes the impediment and his past (159). The space and distance in the poem “Malcolm Mooney’s Land”, like the wilderness of the sea in “The Nightfishing”, is an environment full of obstacles that the self is trapped in. He finds himself alone as the
act of writing is an isolated act. "Isolation, self-imposed or imposed by social failings … is a feature of Graham’s life and work. But this isolation seems always on the verge of breaking through to authentic communication, either with another human being or with the best part of oneself" (Cameron 58). The first consequence of writing for a writer is loneliness and solipsism, but it is where he finds himself. It is by the words and sentences that the poet makes himself.

I have made myself alone now.

Outside the tent endless

Drifting hummock crests.

Words drifting on words.

The real unabstract snow. (NCP 157)

Graham is one of the “intensely self-communing writers who can be said “write for God’, but because of the use of the word ‘reply’. ‘What does not reply is the answer to prayer, wrote C.H. Sisson memorably. But Graham reverses this. God has spoken; how should one reply? (Cameron 60).

The last lines deal with the understanding of the poem by the reader. “It is not snow that is unabstract but the snowlike drifting of words” (Francis, Where 22). There is a shift of voice in this poem with regard to its fluidity of identity. It shifts from narrative to the thought of the narrative, from an imaginary explorer to a poet-narrator:

An adventure of the multiple self, deeply engaged with paradox: every move forward is a return, every revealing is a concealment, every action is passive, every birth is into a death. And the condition of writing, or writing poetry, is itself the total embodiment of this paradoxical theatre of action and suspension”. (Riley 2)
“Wherever I speak from or in what particular / Voice, this is always a record of me in you.” Thus the motive of the poem quickly changes from the exploration of actual land to explore the self and the inner land. These two themes are interwoven with the writing process and language.

Come bonny friendly beasts, brother
To the grammarsow and the world-louse,
Bite me your presence, keep me awake
In the cold with work to do, to remember
To put down something to take back. (NCP 154)

In these two poems “The Nightfishing” and “Malcolm Mooney’s Land” the poet struggles to save the self from the fluidity of identity in the state of flux. Graham portrays the situation of the modern man who suffers from the laws of distance, the space between the scattered self. Man is not able to explore the self because of the objects in his way.

The similarity between “The Nightfishing” and “Malcolm Mooney’s Land” is that Graham “explored the nature of flux and came to believe that measurement and memory, like writing itself, transformed it into a series of virtually autonomous moments” (Francis, Where 97).

The Quest for Self in *Implements in Their Places* (1977)

The Collection is an examination of the poet’s quest for the absent self through language as a domain outside the normal experience. The structure and language of Graham’s poetry since 1945 became easier and easier, thus *Implements* is lucid and simpler than *The Nightfishing* and *Malcolm Mooney’s Land*. The territory of language in “Implements in Their Places” is full of monsters, beasts and gods. This Collection
endeavoured to open up the new idea of Graham regarding self. In this collection, “What is the Language Using Us for?” and “Language Ah Now You Have Me” will be discussed with reference to the search of self through language. The important themes in these poems are: language, communication, the writing process, Graham’s personal life, self and the sea imageries. He has an instinctive love of the linguistic theatre. Michael Schmidt says that: “his theme is, as often as not in his mature work, language, its value in fending off silence, its limited capacity for communication.” (52)

“What Is the Language Using Us For?”

The first poem in the collection *Implements in Their Places* (1977) is a poem which manifests Graham’s idea of language as the essence of being. The poem is divided into three parts and each part starts with the question “What is the Language Using Us for?” This question is repeated in the poem several times, but Graham does not give any explicit answer to it. It is the way Graham sees things, experiences them, and writes about them. Graham reverses his expectations from language. Thus we are not using language but it is language which uses us. “The central theme of the whole book is the familiar aesthetic one. The artist’s conflicts, fantasies and concerns, and his personal selection of circus animals, are altered by the language and the artistic medium, with uncontrollable results. We are formed by the culture we inherit: the predisposition of the language shapes our thoughts” (Lomas 83).

This poem is the continuation of “Malcolm Mooney’s Land”. Here Graham wants to continue his previous experience with an emphasis on language.

What is the language using us for?

Said Malcolm Mooney moving away

Slowly over the white language.
Where am I going said Malcolm Mooney. (NCP 199)

The fluidity of identity in this part confuses the reader. The poet poses his question using Malcolm Mooney as his mouth piece. A few lines further he says:

Let us get through the suburbs and drive
Out further just for fun to see
What he will do. Reader, it does
Not matter. He is only going to be
Myself and for you slightly you
Wanting to be another. He fell
He falls (Tenses are everywhere.)

Deep down into a glass jail. (NCP 199)

The identity of “He”, is a source of another confusion. Graham assures us that Malcolm Mooney is only himself thus he is the person who asks us the question “What is the Language Using Us for?” He changes his identity as well as ours “You / wanting to be another”. He shifts back to Malcolm Mooney when he says “He fell / He falls” - we fall into the abyss of language and communication in this poem.

I suppose you open them under the light
Of midnight of The Dancing Men.
The point is would you ever want
To be down here on the freezing line (NCP 199)

He invites us to “the freezing line” of the poem and wants us to “open” his poem and read it. His poems are in the form of messages he sends to us. He finishes the first part with these lines;

Slowly over the white language
Comes Malcolm Mooney the saviour.
My left leg has no feeling.

What is the language using us for? (NCP 200)

This time Malcolm Mooney is the saviour, who will help the speaker of the poem trapped in the snow, actually this is again the poet who is the saviour and helps the reader to get out safely from the white land of language. He considers language as a page which is white. Finally the same question is repeated here “What is the language using us for?”

In the second part again he repeats the same question with a short answer. Language “uses us all and in its dark / Of dark actions selections differ.” What are the dark actions of language? Language as a “House of being” is the center of everything. One knows the self through language. Again here he writes in reverse, it is the self and identity of the poet which “take[s] place” and “occur” in the language; “What I am making is / A place for language in my life” (NCP 200). He makes a place for language, actually that is the language as Heidegger says makes home for man “language as home”… “a residence, a dwelling place for the life of man” (Heidegger, Poetry 190). In this part Graham gives the importance to speech in contrast to the first poem where “white” represents page and writing; “I want to be able to speak / And sing and make my soul occur” (NCP 200). The ability of using language helps him to establish his existence. Thus he answers the question of the poem. Being able to use language and to communicate helps man to establish self and know what he wants. “I would like to speak in front / Of myself with all my ears alive / And find out what it is I want.” (NCP 201)

The adjective “alive” in the second poem is repeated thrice to emphasize on speech. In Part Two from the second poem along with a memory which he remembers, he concentrates on language again. He compares language with the weather “From the
prevailing weather or words / Each object hides in a metaphor.” As in the snow where objects from the nature are hidden, so also in language, metaphors hide the elements of language. It emphasizes the use of language from us in its dark action. In Part Two of the third poem he says:

The sailing men had sailing terms
Which rigged their inner-sailing thoughts
In forecastle and at home among
The kitchen of their kind.  (NCP 203)

Whatever the sailors catch, they take them home. In the poem likewise the poet sails his terms and his inner thoughts and brings it to the page in the form of the poem. In the last part of the poem in answer to his question “What is language using us for?” he says “I don’t know”, because language is an unknown land as Malcolm Mooney was, is a vast, unfamiliar and hostile place.

What is the language using us for?
I don’t know. Have the words ever
Made anything of you, near a kind
Of truth you thought you were? Me
Neither. The words like albatrosses
Are only a doubtful touch towards
My going and you lifting your hand
To speak to illustrate an observed
Catastrophe. What is the weather
Using us for where we are ready
With all our language lines aboard?
The beginning wind slaps the canvas.
Are you ready? Are you ready? (NCP 203-204)

He laments the lack of language and of communication. He brings the reader as witness and asks whether language has done anything for them? “You lifting your hand / To speak to illustrate an observed / Catastrophe”, very ironically communication happens not through the words of language but by the lifting of the hand, in order to speak and to illustrate an “observed catastrophe”. The “observed catastrophe” is what happened to a being, he is alienated from his language and himself. The quest for the self is repeated in the much latter work such as from A Dream Of Crete:

I try to introduce myself
I try to speak what I think is
My home tongue. I had hoped
Not attempting the least edge
Of that language, my dream’s creatures

Would shelter me and be interested. (NCP 344)

He hopes to get shelter in language. Although he knows that his poetry is his imagination.

“Language Ah Now You Have Me”

In this poem the element of reality and imagination conflate together for example “in the rain forest beside the Madron River”. Here Madron is a real place, it is a village near Penzance, in Cornwall, but “Madron River” and “rain forest” do not exist. This poem like other poems in this Collection addresses the questions of language and the absence of transmission. The poem has a tone of lament, as if the speaker is in the chains of language.

Language ah Now you have me. Night-time tongue,
Please speak for me between the social beasts
Which quick assail me. Here I am hiding in
The jungle of mistakes of communication. (NCP 207)

Being a prisoner in the claws of language makes a broken self for him. He asks his
tongue to speak for him on his behalf. The domain of this poem is a jungle of
language, in this dark jungle not only is he able to speak but also has been attacked by
the social beasts; “pigmies hamstring Jumbo and the pleasure / monkey is plucked
from the tree” and the supernatural great and small beasts. In the next stanza he
reveals that the jungle of language is an “unkempt place”, which flying toward him,
whenever he wants to ready himself to speak. Finally he gives up and accepts that the
jungle of language is his home.

How pleased I am
To meet you reading and writing on damp paper
In the rain forest beside the Madron River.
Which is my home. (NCP 208)

In his quarrel with language the poet creates the poem. Being an inhabitant of the
jungle language shows us how to handle the beast of language.

Do not disturb me now. I have to extract
A creature with its eggs between the words.
I have to seize it now, otherwise not only
My vanity will be appalled but my good cat
Will not look at me in the same way. (NCP 208)

With the chain of language “we are the ones hanging / on here and there” and even
the words as watchman, watch us to see “If we speak clearly”. Under the power of the
control of language how a being could be himself “trying to be myself but changed
into / the wildebeest pursued or the leo pard / Running at stretch beside the Madron River”. The German- African orthography in the “wildebeest” and the broken archaic word “leo pard” are the result for man in the chain of language. The broken self, has no choice except a broken language:

Too much. I died. I forgot who I was and sent
My heart back with my bearers. How please I am
To find you here beside the Madron River
Wanting to be spoken to. It is my home
Where pigmies hamstring Jumbo and the pleasure
Monkey is plucked from the tree. (NCP 209)

The Absentist language is the language of a man who has forgotten himself, thus his poem is an endeavour to reform the broken self by the magic medium of language.
Works Cited


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