

EDIT CHANT

For the survey launder nothing phlegmatic.
Foam flourishing out the mouth douses ice,
corners it, isolates it it puts
it out mutes it. A burnt question is nailed on.
Is this written too soon, should there be
more time for hatred to wane first,
for mourning to be allocated, to stop at
all where directed, re-own our desire to breathe
children beneath rock. But I won't
stop I lust like a sickened invert
gluey teeth sprout in this, is meted-out
platter of faces on a screenshot,
held like treasures of the deep contempt
for death which asphyxiates air, death
which way next, to extort from the vacant
sky a smash-up and roll into
the barrack mall, the next rational bout.
The next choice switch along is justice.
The freedom to spend is a defrosted asset.

Does this
chat-up line sicken you, take
pisses wherever
cut down
ask me a question
sleaze-eyed and rubble-mouthed
to agree with the minister that life has sacrosanct
components and we better grab a few
before they sell out, as the counterproposing
dropped-out heads in a heroin blur
all glitz up the street with their dreams.
Socialism will disconnect a palate from sick.
Bread and plastic robot-penisises coalesce.
Take your sliced-open plasticine eyeball and
what's the point
crying out like snapped-up poor fish
tanks sunny
in the mammal way cash acts, defend this way
of life way off the brutality and sex scale, credit
lizard
the thrill of an incorruptible love in
this arm. This arm is now around your head,
before rising to sleep you have this arm
with you, tender its fingers stroke off
temerity and insects from your face,
crass light gets stung out or wiped out—was in there
just closet the
warped astro-bar tout in
cabbage

diamond,

war is a principle of nature
you wake tight, onerous cloud thickens over
a snapped tooth-reel. Do not get out of your car.
Dream about this. You can laugh all you
like very happily, the knuckles are all foam-white
meat cabinet, recant all you

dispatches a blow-kiss to
the proposed exit wound. What would you do if
some crazy Arab smashed your children's head.

*As the planetary
spin made by punitive calm in endless
digits scrolls into endless sickness, to be
sickened, to have been sickened, the mental
sick-bag production line flourishes like
so in the sovereignty of liberal economics*

We are permitted to endure this. We endure
it blank, tin. Reconciliation beautifies pig shit.
Each vote stuffed in a box counts. After all what
else can he do, no government can be expected
not to respond to systematic brutality. Outside
glad severed hands leap about and salute
and veils from the faces of women are shredded,
hot codeine chars in through the sleeping bag.
We would so lose all credibility if not thrower bomb.

The pretence of events includes also an apache
rotor see from

which fire sprung and ripped heads off.
Swept up wind on hill tantamount to a screw-in
palate designates the hope for a speech replica
bongo noise. Romanticism. Nothing
you are stops

this and
that is a tree packed
look birds

collapses or, meat. Smash open the alarm shop.
That children has a black eye. White House
Commission on Aviation Safety And Security,
Final Report Feb. 12 1997: we are all now
the small minority about whom we do not
know enough and who merit additional
attention. Correct this deficit and disorder life.
Do then not disorder life. This one. Automated
hope profiling glistens in your eyes,
a vision of love for our partners in their desiccation
trash heap flashes across the pair, streaks out
of the mind in implicit proof of embargo: zap-cancel
gut red, saw up a donkey,

recapitulate
a hold on life,

barraged through a slit by visage
chaos ironed to
such a replete sheen, an amassed fling of irate presets
news in indelible snack form heads
with the laughter duct ripped wide, do you think
ever. That this margin coerced to flipside
temper fits and religious despair pales, next to
you walk in the street. I take the bike
down, subsequently we reverse this. Going
on with and
valuing not cracking to
to strict bits this
sick love frozen to a crisp,
asset sunset.

Would so not be credible unless reactor bomb
shift them with the flush break their
legs advertise discriminating gun hardware shin
brulee shin-oil, extradite the dinner you
ate to a virgin bag. This is the requirement
to live as a conscript to indifference,
throwing violent words against their own edges
wrappers, twisted bogus in intense felt
sorrow over that obligation. Throw them at the
pink which grass isn't. At ash string
along that gut reflex, the whole deictic
pose lubricated into a kind of hate-crime pathos
extradite the cat-flap,

so you're either with
or
and bandages its
torn with a flag. Correct this pose with data:
institute a revival of also non-sick pointing:
twenty-five Afghans per day are cremated by
Russian mines left scattered among their rubbish
dump homes, milk

haircut, new bag
glaze,
this is a war on terror
and it affects all of us. It is not America
which was attacked on the 11th September,
we should each expect reality. Remember
you how you eat. Who loves you most of all.

The conditions for war were already accomplished.
The United States expected this and will
push home the reactionary advantage worldwide.
The actual military build-up is a kind
of arrears, the coalition is the fundamental outcome
most to be resisted, the new global impossibility
of secession in the interests of the dominated, so that
it's merely the self-exposure of a false
socialist to insist that reprisals are a necessary

action in "the healing process," as if moral equilibrium were the goal of condoned rage and militant lending the pivot of a just balance. This argument must be rubbished wherever it's broadcast by TV-mouthed "humanists." The coalition is nothing to do with retributive or just response; it's the ransacking of precarious liberties worldwide for as long as it's economic: the thought-out tussle of bargain-hunters at a closing-down sale. And the castigation of "tired leftist slogans" as an inadvertent mission of self-isolation is precisely indicative: ditch them at the first chance to chant out in favour of solidarity by default, genus pacifist-nationalist, the newsworthy and liberal chorus of upright citizens who for the first time imagine themselves on a tour of the historical sick-bay. They have been there all the fucking time, running sores brightened by the flip intellectual band-aid of anti-accommodationist liberalism. They use words like "progressive," meaning the conscientious adjustment of sentiment one yard to the left of rationalized Capitalist indifference expressed in hateful fire, the world radiates with this "pacifistic" objectivity, which is the quiet prop suited to its impacifiable object. Progressivism is the fantasy of left-reform by a different name more catchy to technocrats. What is the history of terrorism: has the testament of Trotsky gone up in the fumes and ash of murder? The destruction of the twin towers itself was murder, and terrible beyond sympathy. But terrorism is more than death, more than the planned execution of disaster by opponents of a transnational economy impossible to ameliorate. It is the horrific kickstart of the whole reaction, not only the violence perpetrated by opponents of that economy but the opposition itself, the only true opposition to inflict itself damagingly. The condoned rage of the progressives is an echo, prepared in advance by the ruling elite whose criminal depredation these liberals are keen to protest in more boring times, like the savage ones to come. It's the final extension of the sovereign umbrella: how can we possibly fail to drop a guard so heartless, "at a time like this?" To be an opponent of Capital and its ruination of freedom is dialectical. What you hate passionately is the grand and systematic progenitor of passion itself. That goes for the terrorists and Capital alike, though not

anything like equally. There is no wholesaler of condemnation that won't make a sale to a downhearted liberal in the novelty of shock. Murder is despicable and we must hate it, as I try to impassioned despite the gross and mendacious injunction to do just that. But terrorism is not only murder. Murder is itself always, whether achieved by privately financed militias in a war against domination or by a standing army commissioned to defend the secret agendas of a ruling elite. Terrorism involves this hateful action. But it involves more, too—we hear forever how the combat of good against evil will be fought on many fronts: diplomatic, political, military, but do we ever hear that terrorism isn't a single and merely actual phenomenon. It is likewise dexterous, though despicable in its violence: the realized corollary of so much embittered and truthful life spent wasting beneath a lie. The attunement of consciousness within the unheard discord of its ruinous subordination is a goal and achievement of terrorism—the very consciousness of love also, which militates with unending tenderness against injustice; the same love which liberal capitalist democracies shrink-wrap into the merely willed denial of narcissism.

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The next issue of *QUID* will be a set of individually voiced oppositions to the new upsurge in U.S.-led imperialism: contributions by readers are invited. Readers are also advised that the space devoted to hate mail against *QUID* will be limited.

ROD MENGHAM • BAL

It is like

that end-of-the-pier feeling. The sea is a hall of mirrors, and each mirror has more depth than the last.

Droplets of condensation form upon the alphabet, make the letters peel away from words.

The only way to stay out of the room is to move endlessly away from it. Never go back again.

In the cubism of a dismantled lighthouse, its rotting wooden cage is the trellis for a beacon that sleeps through the winter.

A thousand miles away, a sanctuary for waterbirds sinks its differences. Those figures swimming in the pool to be fished meet the heron with his breakneck plunge.

Book, play or film. Film. Two syllables.
Each syllable is the larval form of a concept for which there is no sound as yet.

Spoils. Stratagems.

The room in the apartment at the end of the block where the underground river flows. It went missing for hundreds of years, but has never dried up.

In the futurism of a telephone booth, listing at an angle to the distant watch tower.

If the Gulf War did not take place, something else took its place.
All the empty sleeves that do not salute.

The witnesses to the accident congratulate each other on their choice of dress.

This is the kind of accident that wins awards.

Book, film or play. Play. Five syllables.
Each syllable is the germ which triggers an allergic reaction in all the others.

The room in the apartment on the roof where the information collects. In the autumn it starts to crystallize; this is the editorial stage.

In the unism of a fish and chip van, with matching fish, chips, newspapers and wooden forks.

Are you receiving me.

You are very faint. You are getting fainter. I can't hear you.

There are traces of heat in the air through which the memories pass. They leave their mark like the circle of moisture that lifts itself off the table as the film runs out.

A cloak of invisibility, lined with the memories that will not curl up and die.

The room in the apartment at the base of the mountain where the oracle resides. A membrane has formed around the old sewing machine on which mother made all their clothes.

In the suprematism of a highway, joining the dots in a history of the Richter scale.

In the constructivism of a shallow grave, from which the undead practice their back-flips.

Film, play or book. Book. One syllable.

The Swiss Gardens. The chain-pier. Each pile driven into bedrock, Norway firs tipped with metal and studded with bronze nails.

A boundary-dispute that predates the concept of boundaries. Cutting a ditch, building a wall; pushing it over and filling it in.

The bronze spear-tip travelled from Swiss copper mines directly into the spinal column.

The words for mirror always reflect an origin outside the dominant language. Objects in mirror are larger than they appear. The rear-view of historical convergence.

These semantic features do not heal before inhumation. On exposure to light and a cognate atmosphere, they proceed to splinter. Then other languages share the driving.

An axe of jadeite, a stone only found in the Alps.

Walking the Sweet Track, every consonant is waterlogged. Hurdles and trellises needing repair. Not needing the guarantee that spores will be released in eight or nine years time.

Rotting and subsidence on the Rialto. Ripples in the sand on a summer's day. An Arctic pool.

No sound as yet forms upon the air. Let them have their beacons, their individual pill-box, their Martello tower. Forty-foot gentlemen take the plunge.

Bark, pith or stem. Pith. And then stem—from which a whole series of larvae depends. At the other end is the Black Sea. But I'm coming to that.

ROD MENGHAM • WORK IN THE FIELDS

1. why do silver birches look different here?
2. the trees grow in laborious blackened spirals
3. sandy tracks along the edge of fields that turn off into birchwoods. The oaks all swagged with mistletoe
4. wooden railway trucks
5. old Russian lenses, Art Deco chandeliers—like premonitory sputniks
6. chimney extensions, each with its own monumental ladder
7. 24 hour shops, stuffed noodles, other people's brewing traditions
8. but there are certain things beyond our control: 1. sensibility; 2. the cabbage harvest
9. It was our pleasure to hoist you on board. Now don your masks.
10. health and safety
11. you. are responsible. for the devastation. of the hotel.
12. the wind in the flags sounding like rival currents of the Danube
13. every citizen has been trained as a physician, which makes for a lot of conflicting medical advice
14. the stars come out on the Great Hungarian Plain, and Orion's belt acquires a notch
15. as I live and breathe, as I move and stir
16. the best of times wait for no man
17. only beggars believe in a clean pair of heels
18. the meeting of waters in a small place
19. the signal becomes confused
20. a gambling man picks up the pieces
21. a quotation seldom used in these parts

**ROBIN PURVES • SOME MARGINALIA ON VAGUENESS, POETRY
(QUID 7B)**

auparavant ne convint-il spacieusement de s'exprimer, ainsi que d'un cigare, par jeux circonvolutoires, dont le vague, à tout le moins, se traçât sur le jour électrique et cru? and here it comes, the call to wake from a dream of precision into the waking dream of a perfect vagueness, and here it comes again, the immediate & pressing vagueness that you felt from the inside out and in from the out, from the get-out... What is this vagueness set against, and why? The opportunity for murder and ruin, which brings about a kind of precision as its desired outcome. 'Clouds *themselves*' are a donation to perception and to Heidegger's 'crypto-vatic' rediscovery of them 'in their being', the command in that identification being one precise relation to us all, a relation that prepares the ground for every requisition, by USAF/NATO as for WS's sonnet 28. So precision accommodates the disgrace that engenders it. The violent appropriation of sky and cloud-cover as airspace, for bombing raids by the USAF/NATO states a relation to sky and cloud which is more brutally precise even than a simple statement of existence, the mere existence of sky and cloud as is. Another example: with Gerhard Richter, we refuse to accept the pretence to clarity, sanity and eloquence of photography's specific focus, and that of what is called 'photojournalism' in particular. The *finesse* of its fine calibrations and specifications are the index of a more general and elective imprecision, and this imprecision, the essay persuades us, is the kind of precision to which no concession must be made...the word *vague*, at its Latin root, is 'loss of fixity...in a physical landscape...or in a cognitive occurrence', is a rootlessness rooted in the past, the past being what roots, where roots, when roots, until present history promotes an invidious, debilitating and rootless rootlessness that is vague and makes vague. History reverses the priority of the conditions for vagueness so that distance offers the opportunity of precision, some fixed bearings, while our current proximity is vagarious, unmoored. But if the historically-proximate, anxiety-inducing crisis is the result of being exactly where I am in space-time, as the child that I am, or in my residence at Cambridge, or on my summer vacation (a restorative cure in the Alps), and if there do seem to be persuasive reasons why poetry *now* should 'commit' vagueness, this desired attribute would not just resemble by *analogy* the indistinctness of an object viewed at a distance, or the condition of the historical present. Should that particular quality of language be determined by the spatial metaphor as it is determined, in some way, by the time being? Is there not a vagueness in language/cognition which should be acknowledged as precisely non-spatial? What matter if a quality of meaning which is strategically, irreducibly 'vague' gets confused with an optical model which can tend towards a precise focal point by degrees? The vague force exerted by poetry might just be the property that resists any optical-spatial metaphorization, and not in the name of a *postponed* clarity or exactness...is the present (qualified) desirability of vagueness just the desire for a *sublime*, configured as contemporary because almost entirely negative, the sublimity of a song against itself? Do the infinite degrees of vagueness foster a depressing/gratifying soft-porn sublimity by promising both more and less than the precision which evokes only a contained accuracy? See Richter's *Grau*, 1976, or conversely the sequence of works relating to the deaths in custody at Stammheim Prison of members of the Baader-Meinhof group: *18 Oktober 1977*...the poem will be vague. The vague poem will be read, when it is read, as the synecdoche for a matrix of general 'themes', invoked by the nominal elements that cannot help but refer to those general 'themes', and will be read, when it is read, as the excuse for the vague association of those general 'themes'. Or, there will occur a happy coincidence of unhappy and outright refusals to resolve *anything*, as the poem will make

nothing certain, and not every word will have had to be understood. As it fails at a sustainable rate, being deficient, perplexed and culpable, the life-by-default will provoke a prosodically felicitous and semantically variegated line-up: that is, the offer of *more poetry*, delivered from an ego-ideal to which every kind of offer is an anathema, there being no sickness sufficient...

ANDREA BRADY • REVIEW: *THE MASTER THIEF, A POEM IN TWELVE PARTS* BY CAMILLE GUTHRIE (SUBPRESS, 2000)

Camille Guthrie's first book, *The Master Thief*, claims the techniques of epic while appropriating the lessons of fairy tales. The verse begins, suitably, *in medias res*: 'Already here, in a beginning.' Each of the twelve sections is preceded by a false précis, editorial advice found frequently enough in eighteenth-century novels as a pre-emptive summation of the events to follow. Yet, as this is fairy tale, and the aid of the gods has ceded to the riddling and often unreliable advice of natural helpers or demonic agents, this advice is misleading.

Throughout, the presence of a demanding listener is signaled by interruptive questions, italicised judgements, directions and refusals to believe. Within the narrative, the heroine's choices are determined by benevolent warnings and disembodied commands. Alternately, she confronts spectral presences of the embodied imaginary, demons and trolls; her willingness to respond, 'You know very well you're not real,' is proof of her fearlessness and power, and a deliberate corruption of the code of fantasy. These various interventions hoist up the counsel which, according to Benjamin, story-telling traditionally offered to neighbours and listeners.

Her first section opens, 'The Marked Child begins a dangerous voyage'. Guthrie acquaints herself with the fruits of voyaging in the chaotic experiences of the epic wanderer, rather than the vocational self-discovery typical of the bourgeois *Bildungsroman*. The voyage is not acquisitive, but backward and dangerous, leading through damage to a happy ending through the cunning of the speaker(s) – not through an understanding of the natural world achieved in personal development.

Guthrie's characters voyage from the Garden of Miltonic epic towards the Black Forest of trial, initiation, and magic. Like Hercules, they must complete twelve 'labours'. The natural sovereignty of the magnificent individual is tested through subjection to overwhelming domestic trials, making a giant's bed etc. It is through labour, too, that Guthrie addresses one of her primary concerns: the labour of women, domestic, artistic and intellectual, and its power to redeem others. Labour to give birth becomes one of the book's dominant themes. Despite images of weaving that appear in the book's resolution, this labour is never seamless, and often resented.

The sister's devotion to the white shirts of her twelve swan brothers is a model of female domestic labour as a distraction from creative expression. The memory is occupied with small things. 'One day, feeling fanciful & silly' the speaker 'plucked all the bright garden lilies,' and for her whimsical distraction from ritualised household duties she invites disaster onto the family. The raven-brothers promise an anonymous ritual revenge in return, against any 'girl' they might find. As punishment, the sister must keep silent for seven years, 'muzzle every figure' and expression of creativity with the timidity of domineering self-repression.

Against these rapine brothers and huntsmen, the master thief defends herself with magic and cunning. She evades traps and writes. Rather than giving (life, ease, an heir), the master thief takes freedom. As a traitor to the protection of property which structure common law, she loses her hands – the instruments of her domestic labour, and therefore

of her good. She is exiled, 'for weeks on end | inhabiting the pines,' forced into the forest,
from where

“I must report
The truth, bring back some part
Of the fruits of my labours, bring it back alive”
But all my failures I cannot leave
Outside formality’s gates,
Outside What-cannot-be, I cried to my fate,
“Have you brought what you have promised me?
Who has ever completed such deeds?
And tell me now, of what use am I?”

The perplexity of the speaker will be resolved through experience, not through introspection or the reflections of an interpretive narrator. Although the arc of the fairy tale reassures the reader that she will return back through formality’s gates, to sovereignty in the kingdom of the good, she will do so without her hands, damaged permanently by the sacrifices required to keep living through hostility.

Literary references, both pointed and elliptical, are part of the author’s ‘thievery’. The rowboat episode from Wordsworth’s *Prelude* is recalled in ‘Rowing towards the horizon | Towards distant jagged shores’ (p. 10), and the ‘bright mouth’ of Blake’s ‘tyger’ burns in the forest. Marlowe’s poem ‘Come live with me and be my love’ is quoted (p. 32). Mary Shelley’s diary is excerpted and manipulated in ‘It Was a Ghost’ (pp. 59-64), while Emily Dickinson’s plea to the reader to ‘judge tenderly’ of her is repeated (p. 46). *Kublai Khan* (p. 64) and Milton (p. 62) are named; Emilia from *Othello* makes an appearance (p. 75-87), and the Mephisto of *Doctor Faustus* (p. 79) and Archimago of the *Faerie Queene* (p. 79) are given as two possible names for Rumpelstiltskin. Shakespeare’s sonnet ‘Let me not to the marriage of true minds | Admit impediments’ is quoted (p. 87). The references often invoke works where locations, especially movement into new ones, are essential to the possibility of imaginative transformation.

References to Greek myth also appear. The speaker is ‘Afraid to speak in case | I should low like a heifer’, and watched by Argus’s ‘whose hundred | Impeccable eyes on guard.’ More generally, there are the magical transformations typical of Greek myths of sexual conquest. The residues of these transformations haunt her in that blank ‘happily ever after’. While they leave her sexually at the mercy of others, they also test her, challenging her to prove her true form or identity. Though revelation in ‘my true form’ is promised by an unidentified speaker, the pangs of entrapment in false forms are more vivid. The book argues that this kind of confusion combined with delectation of the strange are familiar from social life. Manipulating the self to fit into a repetitive, often repressive social agency allows us to fall more easily into the role of producers, of children, text or object, through a vocational magic dependent on estrangement.

Transformation also occurs through the violent and alarming life-voyages of pregnancy and birth. Guthrie envisions the epic voyage as a confrontation with fallen nature, to leave the garden for the forest. ‘Go into the woods and confront the tree | Whose fallen leaves made us guilty,’ an anonymous daemon instructs. Guthrie links the garden, with its room for ‘rupture’, to the exterior world of epic via natural causation: ‘Chains of events, green chains of everything.’ Marvell’s wonderful ‘The Garden’ is conflated with the golden chain of being, associating human activity with a cosmos whose hierarchy is divinely ordered. Marvell reappears, closer to his true form in a section called ‘The Animal’:

I speak from
the promiscuous quietus
never identical
ever in green shade

Cultivated nature does not lead to contemplative 'quietus' but to the moving dangers of the forest. Breaking out of Eden was the beginning of human history; a subset of that post-history of the fall was domestic life, and the division of domestic labour.

The only houses in the forest are 'abandoned', occupied by a delinquent old crone whose abandonment of her domestic duties and relations gives her access to the occult, but also makes her dangerous: it shows that she can abandon morality to serve her own appetite. She seems likely to consume the good child, replace the dutiful woman, because she has refused to replicate those roles through her own body. In *The Master Thief*, she tries to trap the heroine in her own house: to enforce an exchange which would liberate the elder completely. Similarly, the evil stepmother, stock character for expressions of fear of the woman whose sexual jealousy might threaten the daughter, becomes a source of power as an example of renegade domesticity: 'into her blood dip your arrow | In order to share joy and sorrow.'

These invitations to absorb dissident female roles are unnecessary, for the heroine(s) is in enough trouble of her own. A sexually active young woman is banished to the woods for her transgressions in the garden. Her confusion, released from a maternal paradigm, prods her through a haphazard voyage from patriarchally determined identity to ownership of the child. This voyage is a dangerous one, written in blood (just as her name is written on her slippers, 'The right was marked with her father's name... | And on the left was written her own name'). Procreation which originates through pleas to the father, and the maternal instinct consequently developed by care for the brothers ('Father, I should like | Eleven companions exactly like myself'), are no preparation for random encounters with local woodsmen.

The loss of virginity and subsequent gestation are both violent ruptures with former selves: 'So I married, deflowered on a river bed | By an eager shark,' a sexual Herculean labour. From the embryonic observation 'I'm my primeval size' after a voyage through a 'porous' dress, the physical self is built up by 'a collapse | Atom upon bone upon | Fluid upon once | Upon the dark matter among us.' The 'once upon a time' formula here associates storytelling with birth and development, while the 'Excursion into the Interior' turns a creation myth into a physical journey. The burden of pregnancy is likened to the weight of the mattresses on the pea, 'this one persistent irritant | Then that illegitimate occupant' who disturbs the pleasures of 'seamless ecstasy' in bed. Meanwhile, intellectual work is contrasted with devotion to erotic motion; the girl 'unfed' by the former 'Feeds a wound's convulsive pleasure | Fluttring her throat over a floor'. If sexual desire feeds into constraining reproductive responsibility, magic allows the master thief to escape the maternal form by stealing the child, and stealing away.

The duty to procreate is hypostasised in a second myth, where the speaker offers the 'Huntsman' two children and her own body in exchange for her life. Her escape, through the exchange of children for 'two roses', leaves both author and huntsman feeling 'cheated.' This magical swap shows how, through cunning and high spirits, the heroines

of fairy tale elude the control of domestic forces. A man promises sexual gratification will cause him to restore her hands; but the children who follow are as paltry and disturbing as penis envy. The foundling, with his lonely eyes, and mother in her wheelchair, develop magically and gradually. 'Yet how I longed for my word-for-word memory', she says, having lost her literary recall and facility for allusion with the birth of her infant. Sickness and 'grudges' follow. The female servant, Emilia, repairs the damaged maternal self by sewing; the mother consumes her own body, until the child itself is threatened by this ravenous cannibalism. But, though occasionally elegiac, the speaker shows minimal regret for abandoning her monstrous children. Mary Shelley, recently bereft of her own child, attests 'Grief at least tells me I was not always what I am now | As it is, I am torn to pieces by memory.' The transformation of knowledge through birth and loss leave her prey to destructive memory; but memory itself is fragmentation, without the sewing together of literary work.

In the end, the speaker has not left the forest to find a new world: 'I go to no new Creation, | I enter under no new laws.' The questions about power and destiny, 'By what be conquered? To whom cede?' are not answered through the sacrifices and transformations of this liminal period. However, the regained power of writing secures her immortality and what may seem a paltry revenge. 'The typewriter turned to me and spoke, | It was only a paper pistol.' She begs as 'The evidence deteriorates' that her captors 'Leave me more | Than words to play with,' but the power of naming itself could secure her release from a forced marriage to the demonic Rumpelstitskin. By identifying him, the speaker reclaims her power of weaving – and thus of textual creation – back from the greed and manipulation of a male practitioner. Weaving and sewing are also, for her child and herself, gentle procreative acts.

ESTHER LESLIE & BEN WATSON • "WRITE TO LIVE; LIVE TO WRITE": TRADING IDEAS IN ACADEMIA AND JOURNALISM

"The writer, of course, must earn in order to be able to live and write, but he must by no means live and write to earn ... The primary freedom of the press lies in not being a trade."
Karl Marx, 1842 [Collected Works Vol 1, London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975, pp. 174-175]

"No man but a blockhead ever wrote, except for money."
Samuel Johnson, 1776 [Boswell's Life of Johnson, Oxford: OUP, 1953, p. 731]

EL:

Samuel Johnson was a lexicographer. This was a menial job, a waiter serving up words, fixing meanings rather than creating them. In addition, Johnson saw it as his lexicographer's duty to provide moral instruction for the semi-educated. So Johnson's business was weighty, but dull. It was a chore all round, and who would do it but for financial recompense? In 1759, needing money to pay for his mother's funeral, he wrote *Rasselas, Prince of Abysinnia*. It took a week and was barely subject to revisions. In his journal *The Idler* for April 1759, he noted that the powers found in *Rasselas* were necessitated by "great exigencies", and that "these happen but seldom, and therefore those qualities which have a claim to the veneration of mankind, lie hid, for the most part, like subterranean treasures, over which the foot passes as on common ground, till necessity breaks open the golden cavern." *Rasselas* had character named Pekuah, a figure worth "two hundred ounces of gold" who craves money. Coleridge admitted too that he wrote "compelled by the God Pecunia".

Johnson declares that writers write for money, and insists it is so and must be so - to act otherwise would be rank stupidity. Johnson's statement recognises brute economic actuality. It is realistic and not idealistic. That was Johnson's business, and he could more than imagine being paid by the word. But he was also expressing good old blank English instrumentalist empiricism, such as that promoted by the Royal Society. This demanded clear language, mathematical plainness, and preferred the language of artisans, countrymen or merchants to that of wits or scholars: poetry then by the yard, in an economy of language. Thomas Hobbes called metaphors absurd and likened true reasoning to adding up an account (*Leviathan*, 1651, II-22). Forty years later, John Locke opposed the age-old royal debasement of the unit of money: "the unit was and should be a definite weight of bullion, which must not be altered" ("*Further Considerations Concerning Raising the Value of Money*", 1695). Locke had the ear of Isaac Newton. Newton was made Warden of the Royal Mint in 1696. He undertook a recoinage, where nothing concerned him as much as counterfeiting of the realm's coins. Signs were failing to match up to their significations. These first-bourgeois ideologues were working on the very metal of the regime. In the realm of literature, Johnson was doing the same. He despised linguistic ambiguity for the moral and political threat it posed. He was, after all, paid for nailing down meanings and, so, halting the proliferation of language, the circulation of unmonitored signs. Rigidity sets in on language and meaning.

John Locke was the man for the firm-up task. He had learned from the Dutch system of banking and commerce, which was the most highly developed in Europe. In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke insisted on the necessity for classifying things under general or universal qualities, using general terms that can apply equally and economically to various similar but not identical objects. Locke wanted to apply such

rational classification to politics too, bypassing the accidents of birth that confer authority, and instead turning to Contract Law to form an agreement between governor and governed. But ultimate authority for everything came from God, and only science had the chance of emulating his divine knowledge, providing insight into the essence of things. Locke's categorical rigidity is mocked by Hegel, master of historically and dialectically determined knowledge:

"True" and "false" belong among those determinate notions which are held to be inert and wholly separate essences, one here and one there, each standing fixed and isolated from the other, with which it has nothing in common. Against this view it must be maintained that truth is not a minted coin that can be given and pocketed ready-made. Hegel [*Phenomenology of Spirit*, OUP, p. 22]

For Hegel, truth is historical. If it is historical then it is flexible, shape-shifting, and index-linked to developments across time. Regimes fix values in coin, but the promise of eternal security is undermined by inflation, devaluation and speculation. While the philosophers all disagreed amongst themselves, they were agreed on one thing: money is both a material and a metaphorical resource, and money's own historical development proves how tangled up those two aspects actually are. For them all, it is a matter of coining phrases - and for each, the economic is tangled with the expressive as they struggle to account for the new bourgeois reality of trade, circulation, exchange.

In his young Hegelian flush, Marx continues to reflect on the relation between economy and expression. The tokens are shuffled, and Marx reverses Johnson's thought: the writer must by no means "write to earn" (Karl Marx, "Debates on Freedom of the Press", 1842, *CW*, Vol. 1, p. 175)

BW:

Here we have a paradox. According to postmodernist rumour, Marxism is a methodology which totalises and simplifies, a reductive schema whose only coin is economic. If culture or poetry are to have any presence in this bleak outline, it will have to be supplied by some other source, such as psychoanalysis or feminism, phenomenology or deconstruction. Marxists discuss economics, so to talk about writing we need to turn elsewhere - to Roland Barthes or Jacques Derrida, perhaps, who foreground the "text" as their field of concern, or to Pierre Bourdieu with his dualist, neo-Kantian concept of "cultural capital". Actually, Marx started from a particularly clear-eyed view of writing and its effects - both the universality of ideas and the limitations of published discourse. This was based on an unsentimental assessment of his own place in society - which was that of a writer and journalist in a country subject to press censorship.

In May 1842, Marx began his journalistic career by contributing to the *Rheinische Zeitung für Politik, Handel und Gewerbe* (Rheinisch Newspaper for Politics, Trade and Manufacture). Press censorship was the great issue of the day. Marx's earlier criticism of the Prussian censorship instruction of 24 December 1841 had itself been censored, only appearing in a collection of Young Hegelian writings published in Switzerland in 1843. Though a Provincial Assembly with representation from the urban and peasant estates was in regular session, the Prussian Government would not permit the publication of its proceedings. Liberal newspapers were subject to censorship, which often took the crude form of overprinting in blocks of black ink. Marx subjected this state of affairs to a trenchant critique, and made a big splash. The manager of the newspaper, Georg Jung, wrote to Marx to tell him that his articles had made him the toast of Berlin [*CW*, Vol. 1, p. 739].

Marx appealed to definitions of freedom that were familiar to his readers from Kant and Hegel. Nevertheless, he had a shrewd grasp of the limitations of both philosophy and

journalism: "to the amazement of all writing and reading Germany," he begins, "the Preussische Allgemeine Staats-Zeitung one fine Berlin spring morning published its self-confession." [CW, Vol. 1, p. 132]. In this Shandy-esque opening, Marx tempers the megalomania and mystification associated with the power of the written word - from St John to the Romantics - by reminding his readers of the limits of this particular manifestation of media amazement ("writing and reading Germany"). Marx's sober social-materialist assessment of his actual audience surfaced further on when he doubted that even "daily, unabridged publication by printing" of the proceedings of the Provincial Assembly could rightly be called "unabridged and public". "Is there no abridgement," he asks, "in substituting the written for the spoken word, graphic systems for persons, actions on paper for real action?" [CW, Vol. 1, p. 149]. The fact that Marx's words sound shocking today is a measure of how far Jacques Derrida has successfully resuscitated scripture as the guiding twilight for cultural analysis. If the written word is no longer the guarantee of theological authenticity, then enquiry must proceed to the situation of the scribe: the concrete power relations of publication.

EL:

Marx was replying to a series of articles supporting censorship which appeared in an official government organ. Marx reviewed the parliamentary debate on censorship laws, the Preussische Allgemeine Staats-Zeitung's position, and freedom of the press in general. He attacks the illogical and patronizing stance of the pro-censorship lobby. His arguments also delve into the material bases of thought production. Writing, he insists, cannot be a means to an end. Language, writing, thought, expression are the substance of freedom, not their torpid reflection. A system that equates words and money is a system which rewards the vile work of journalists who provide only what their editors - the managers of ruling-class "truth" - think the public will pay to read. The journalists actually deserve the "punishment" of censorship, Marx jibes, because - writing for money - their usual practice is unfree.

BW:

During the NATO-Serbia War of 1999, the NUJ called a meeting on the bombing of Yugoslavia called "Media Accuracy and Free Speech". John Pilger told an overflowing Westminster Central Hall that television and newspaper journalists were betraying their profession by dutifully repeating lies stemming from NATO and Tony Blair. A large banner proclaimed "the first casualty of war is truth". In the light of J.H. Prynne's critique of Peter Handke's formulation "the first casualty of war is language" (Quid No 6), was the NUJ's slogan yet another outbreak of Handke's sentimentality and error? Or was the slogan a pertinent summary of the issues facing liberal journalists when their country goes to war, a brave retort to a new offensive by the ruling class? (Mark Steel, whose membership of an international-socialist party, the SWP, entailed principled opposition to the war, lost his column in The Guardian just as war was declared). In their exclusion from a mass readership and the levers of power, poets are particularly prey to scholastic definitions of Truth - an Absolute that admits no Casualty. Such "rigour" entails the convenient conclusion that any attempt to act politically is by definition egregious and sinful.

EL:

Marx mocks newspaper editors who despise their own product and bow down before the value of large tomes, imagining the very weight of a bound volume to equal the importance of the thoughts contained within. The press colludes in its own devaluing, accepting hierarchy as found. No-one is more impressed by monumental unread books than the editors and journalists of newspapers which are printed in millions and are slim

enough to slip into a jacket pocket. In a satirical flourish, Marx amplifies the editors' quantitative prejudice:

Our time has no longer that real taste for size that we admire in the Middle Ages. Look at our paltry little pietistic tracts, look at our philosophical systems in small octavo, and then cast your eyes on the twenty gigantic folios of Duns Scotus. You do not need to read the books; their exciting aspect suffices to touch your heart and strike your senses, something like a Gothic cathedral. These primitive gigantic works materially affect the mind; it feels oppressed under their mass, and the feeling of oppression is the beginning of awe. You do not master the books, they master you. [p. 134]

Marx insists on the communicative, historically responsive, dialogic aspect of the newspaper. It is a master of no-one. Such a conception anticipates Walter Benjamin's Marxist-modernist proclamation in *One Way Street* that says that only prompt language is actively equal to the moment, because it is of the moment. Benjamin writes: "Significant literary work can only come into being in a strict alternation between action and writing; it must nurture the inconspicuous forms that better fit its influence in active communities than does the pretentious universal gesture of the book - in leaflets, brochures, articles, and placards [OWS, p. 45]. Benjamin carried this view over to his most notorious thoughts on art ("The Artwork In The Age Of Mechanical Reproduction"), where he states that bourgeois relations of production struggle to keep art as art, ordered around traditional categories, and conceived by critics and artists in terms of "outmoded concepts, such as creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery" - a religion of art. This is the respect for the aura which modernism destroys, just as the camera's flash destroys the intimate effects created by candles in restaurants decked out like chapels.

BW:

Marx's assault on theological mystification is both rationalist and passionate. He castigates the Christian concept of "evil" because it only recognises the bad heat of passion, and not the "hot passion of truth" [CW, Vol. 1, p. 157]. It is sometimes argued that the early writings of Marx are still "idealist" and haven't yet achieved the "scientific" objectivity of his later writings (an echo of Louis Althusser's "epistemological break"). However, this is more to do with measuring Marx's arguments - always determinate and polemical - against generalisations made from his later work than any political failing. In 1842, he quotes Voltaire saying that only to talk of freedoms in the plural is to reduce the project of universal freedom to a set of privileges - 'exemptions from the general servitude' [CW, Vol. 1, p. 178]. This was still his criticism of the Lassallean concept of 'rights' in *Critique Of The Gotha Programme*, written in 1875, towards the end of his life. Marx's polemic is shot through with hostility towards Platonic Idealism and its crushing of necessary contingencies by reference to the absolute eternal Idea (an animus which also motivated the doctoral dissertation on the natural philosophies of Democritus and Epicurus he had completed the previous year [CW, Vol. 1, pp. 25-88]). To try and haul Marx's pronouncements before the tribunal of abstract philosophy without investigating his stand on particular issues is to betray his method.

EL:

In their dialectical polarity, our epigraphs from Johnson and Marx provide access to the question - key for us all - of "why write?". Further, they address the materialist question of what to write, when and for whom or what. Where Samuel Johnson cynically states brute fact, Marx articulates, in dialectical connection, a desire for freedom of thought and liberation from the slavery of commerce. Two phrasings of materialism - on the one hand a tough bourgeois economic reductionism, on the other a proto-statement of Marxist

materialism - which prove Lenin's comment about intelligent idealism being closer to Marxism than vulgar materialism [CW, London: Lawrence & Wishart, Vol. 38, p. 276].

BW:

Whereas various brands of postmodernism celebrate the flux of the market versus the patriarchal law of tradition - thus providing a convenient means of replacing the concept of truth by that of career pragmatism - Marx immediately identifies the danger of using free trade as the battering ram against feudal hierarchy and privilege. He acknowledges that merchants and manufacturers will argue that a free press will result from free trade, because this is the freedom they know best, but contends that writers have a different task: "the poet deserts his proper sphere when for him poetry becomes a means" [CW, Vol. 1, p. 175]. Freedom of trade is a good enough programme for printers and booksellers, but inadequate for real writers (which we hope is what Quid means by "poets"). Marx's definition of the human essence as freedom, as a process of self-definition and unbounded exploration, cannot be reduced to the self-interest of private money-making.

He thought his conclusion important enough to italicise:

The primary freedom of the press lies in not being a trade. [CW, Vol. 1, p.175]

This formula was extraordinarily prescient. Marx was writing a polemic against feudal oppression - the Prussian censorship law - yet his close attention to the logic and material interests of the bourgeois opposition allowed him to diagnose the cultural problematic of the next hundred and fifty years: the inability of commercial media to tell the truth about the world.

EL:

The debates did not, however, only resonate in a commercial, journalistic context. A citation from these articles, which were never reprinted in Marx's lifetime, appeared in a manifesto, "Towards a Free Revolutionary Art". Written by Trotsky, Breton and Rivera in 1938 as a blow against Stalinist and Nazi abuse of art and artists, the manifesto cites Marx's lines on living to write not writing to make money. It is, in their hands, a criticism of the "free" market in ideas, words as trade - but also, more generally, a protest against the channelling of intellectual activity in the direction of ends foreign to itself. The market and the state: twin enemies of universal freedom.

But how can writers survive today? They are either paid by the state or up against the market. How do these freedom delimiters impact upon the material production of our ideas?

BW:

On Journalism

When Marx says "the freedom of the press lies in not being a trade", he shows how rigour in dealing with abstractions can break with error. He suspects that the concept - in this case "freedom" - is being used to blur differences in the actual world, in this case between the conscience of the writer and the economic interest of the publisher. Instead of appealing to analogy - the press should be free just as trade should be free - he posits the opposite. Free trade and freedom of speech are not inseparable. Indeed, they may contradict each other. His words should ring true for anyone who writes in the commercial sphere. The Hegelianism of Marx's approach lies not in its conclusions (which, for Hegel, were Christianity and the perfection of the Prussian state), but in its method - a search for determinate contradiction rather than abstract identity. Nor is Marx's ability to discern the

determinate contradictions masked by the concept simply a gift handed down from high philosophy. Marx deals with two speeches delivered at the Provincial Assembly. A speaker from the knightly estate defends censorship, and warns of the "siren song of evil" that will sound from an unconstrained press [CW, Vol. 1, p. 152]. Marx exposes the mysticism and elitism of his argument with a polemic that could equally apply to moral panics in the media today. However, the longest quote in Marx's piece is from a member of the peasant estate. This was precisely the species of discourse denied to German readers by the Prussian censorship laws:

From one who is not permitted to find fault, [says the peasant representative] praise also is valueless; in absence of expression it is like a Chinese picture in which shade is lacking. [CW, Vol. 1, p. 180]

Marx cites this spokesman from the lower classes because his emphasis on opposites is pure dialectics: extremes can paint a picture, whereas compromise can only paint in grey. This has always been the philosophy of the dispossessed and disempowered. Speculation which splits the concept - for example, the idea that freedom for trade may become its opposite for the press - allows us to descry the real antagonisms of social life.

Whether derived from Deleuze and Guattari, Marshall McLuhan or Timothy Leary, there are a battery of arguments to the effect that commercial culture is more vital and productive than that of educational institutions. An unholy alliance of post-structuralists, web-worshippers and post-punk techno-hippies assure us that a free trade in wish-fulfilling ideas - untrammelled by truth barriers - unleashes freedoms undreamt of by materialist and scientific party-poopers. Academic courses on the postmodern turn out ideology-trained media students, who then make documentaries in the style of commercials and The X Files. Academics sometimes tell me they envy my "freedom" as a music journalist. Actually, the quick rotation of styles in pop music is such that a writer can only remain "a music journalist" by abandoning precisely the commitment to a particular artist or scene that makes music mean anything. If one attempts to replace artistic principles with those of politics, then you exceed the brief of the music writer and cross swords with editors. One's success in publishing what you actually think then depends on personal "clout", which reproduces the scenario of war-of-all-against-all which is precisely the competitive market you are trying to criticise. One is driven back to various forms of Marxism - party or trade-union organisation, progressive campaigns, academic conferences with sessions on "theory" - to seek out the political solidarity that mere trade in ideas cannot deliver.

On Academics

However, in criticising the press as a trade, Marx did not spare academics either.

The learned men by profession, guild or privilege, the doctors and others, the colourless university writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with their stiff pigtailed and their distinguished pedantry and their petty hair-splitting dissertations, interposed themselves between the people and the mind, between life and science, between freedom and mankind. It was the unauthorised writers who created our literature. [CW, Vol. 1, p. 178]

EL:

Marx's criticism of academia is by no means accepted by all those who call themselves Marxists. Exclusive emphasis on the opening chapters of Capital - the critique of commodity fetishism - easily becomes a justification for non-commercial or

institutionalised thought, the notion that whereas journalism is from the start an unfree trade, academia is the pursuit of knowledge for the love of it, not for the wages. Consider these lines from a poem circulated by Drew Milne when the poet-academic achieved a post at Cambridge University.

Truth to tell, the still meagre stipend
Only stretches to Cava, which doesn't
Even make it in my pocket lexicon
And really we do it for the love

Or does such a thought merely recall a quaint once-was formation - an original academy where membership of the university imposed demands similar to those imposed on the clergy? The word "discipline" derives etymologically from the hair-shirts of religious training and education. In a previous epoch (and in the nineteenth century still, as Marx related wryly of Malthus), academics at Cambridge University took vows of celibacy and lived a life of confinement within the university's walls. Provided the gaze was averted from the market square, thought could be free of commerce. In fact, though, this meant that thought was free of having to measure itself against the world, and so untrue, unable to be scientific. Later on, these saintly types began to realise a worldly value from their specialisms. Leaving their monastic isolation, they became the authorized scribes who brokered between experience and thought, theory and practice, realising cash value by making the distinction between the two. The walls they lived in became less the stone ones of the college and more the conceptual ones of the discipline. Knowledge, subdivided and not made whole, is, however, not knowledge of real ends: it provides means for ends that are defined elsewhere.

BW:

Of course this situation has been criticised, nowhere more so than in the hinterlands of academic Marxism - Structuralist, Frankfurt School or Williamsite - ever keen to tackle the contradiction between Marxist cogitation and activity in the world. In contemplating the formidable ranks of the academic Marxists, ever ready to diss the untruths of "the culture industry", it does well to remember the scorn Marx reserved for what he called "authorised knowledge".

In defining freedom as concrete and necessary, Marx appealed to the differentiations and multiplicity of nature: "how wrong it would be to demand that the lion should adapt himself to the laws of the polyp!" [CW, Vol. 1, p. 173], recalling William Blake's epigram: "One Law for the Lion & Ox is Oppression" [MOH&H, 1790, p. 24]. Marx's positive reference to the pantheistic cobbler of Görlitz, Jakob Böhme [p. 176], shows that he preferred the radical ideas of independent-minded artisans - even if they wrote in terms that Stalinist professors later found mystical and absurd - to the lordly abstractions of "authorised knowledge". He learned his method from Hegel, but his appeals to concepts of freedom and the enlightenment have no truck with institutionalised authority: "Ptolemy would not have admitted that Copernicus had authority as an astronomer, nor Bernard of Clairvaux Luther's authority as a theologian" [CW, Vol. 1, p. 175]: history shows that authorised knowledge can no more guarantee truth than free trade. Neither academia nor journalism - still less some kind of slick postmodernist traffic between the two - can deliver Marx's idea of truth. It may be a nuisance for stipend-hungry writers to admit that professional life is not the whole of philosophy, but it is this percept that makes the texts of Blake and Marx more compelling than the average collection from Routledge.

EL:

But what is the most heard refrain amongst academics these days? Less a sense of being sidelined in their state-supported, if genteely declining, ivory towers, and more the exhaustion at the exhortation to publish enough: a quantifying of material production decreed by the state and executed by the publishing industry. Back to endless tomes - though not bound this time - badly proof-read, more than likely not read, classified for RAE dummy runs and new job applications. Stakhanovism has taken over the university - manifestation of that Fordist factory slogan (even in these postfordist times): Don't discuss, produce!

There is a strange story to tell about the market, the state and academia. There was a time when a version of Marxist theory took over areas of the humanities. It spoke of ideology, ideological state apparatuses and the interpellated subject - and of how the state and its organs put restrictions on thought and served class interests. The concept of the free market too was understood to be a force of control, an ideological justification of class oppression. People picked over the productions of the media in order to understand how ideology worked, where its weak points lay. However, after a while they decided that ideology was really not so bad, and eventually they decreed that pleasures were to be had there - which was strange, because that only echoed what the media said of itself. The logic was a tautological assertion of "what is, is". This was an error Marx nailed back in 1842: "Was not legal serfdom a factual proof against the rationalist fantasy that the human body was no object for handling and possession? Did not the primitive method of torture refute the false theory that truth could not be extracted by opening veins, that stretching limbs on the rack did not break down the victim's silence, that convulsions were not confessions?". Marx's point is that truth is not to be found by appealing to what is or seems to be - but by analysis of concrete conditions from the perspective of universal freedom. Knowledge emerges only by a negation of what is, not via smarmy affirmation.

Still, postmodernist Cultural Studies decided, lured by the feel-good factor of spotting pleasure in transactions of commerce, that there was no longer any need for knobbly theory, theoretical work, or "theoretical practice". Academic investigators of the media slid into their objects of study - or so they hoped. From now on, theory would also be fun, undemanding, affirmative: as ephemeral as the objects it tracked. The Popsicle Academy was launched. The academy turns inside out. Postmodern theories and competition between universities provided twin legitimization, for the Popsicles rely on the collapsed notion of the academic life; orientation towards the fashionable, rather than the historically acute; the rapid deadline, rather than a lifetime of research; puff and hype replace criticism. RAE administrators are slaked by the increased production that results, and the guiding motif is less a critical utopia than a competitive and increasingly meaningless treadmill.

BW:

Marx's critique of ideology is a permanent revolution in thought, provoking controversy and instability in ideology just as ineluctably as capitalism produces crises, wars and revolutions. The intellectual evasions of reaction - the recourse to "what is, is" tautology, to smug pragmatism, to religious reconstruction - are just as ubiquitous today as they were in Marx's times. In his polemic against censorship, Marx says "the particular can be seen intellectually and freely only in connection with the whole" [CW, Vol. 1, p. 176]. The whole of post-modernism has been waged against this crucial insight, and has brought about nothing but confusion and intellectual despair.

Against the argument that press censorship must be right for Germany because it is already in place and working, Marx points out that this "is a truth of such a factual character that ... beyond certain frontier barriers, it ceases to be factual and true" [CW, Vol. 1, p. 139]. He was no doubt thinking of how his own censored articles were being

prepared for publication in Switzerland: only action (Genoa!) can prove how the self-evident "limits" of reaction are false and temporary.

The ability to discern how borders and nations make a nonsense of bourgeois rationality is the trump card of Marxist - or international socialist - analysis. If the universality of the idea is abandoned (as it was abandoned when Stalin formulated the concept of "socialism in one country"), then principled political orientation in the particular becomes impossible, both fruitless and dangerous. At the same time, without the ability to see how the concrete is made up of contradictory determinants, it becomes impossible to see beyond the justifications of power and the cheque from the publisher.

British people cannot credit the way American politicians talk about the "good guys" and the "bad guys"; it's too reminiscent of Hollywood westerns and space operas. However, social struggles in Britain over the last twenty years have provided an abstract vocabulary - that of anti-racism - ready for exploitation by the ruling class. When Tony Blair calls the bombing of Yugoslavia with missiles tipped with depleted uranium (weapons which have already caused chronic sickness, suffering and death for the Iraqi population) an "anti-fascist" measure, it's necessary to look into what contradictory determinants his pious abstraction conceals. Just as it's only those who actually take part in mobilisations against the National Front and the British National Party (mobilisations Blair and his supporters do absolutely nothing to aid) who understand how to stop fascism, so only Marxists with an international and historical perspective can assess the real motives of NATO - from Vietnam and the Gulf through to the bombing Yugoslavia and the strategy of pushing their sphere of influence further east. The abstract pursuit of "anti-fascism" using the weaponry of the modern state is actually its opposite, while the West's "free" trade in arms produced a distortion of facts in the media to rival the censorship of the Prussian state.

EL:

A Passion for Learning

Goethe once said that the painter succeeds only with a type of feminine beauty which he has loved in at least one living being. Karl Marx, 1842 [CW, Vol. 1, p. 137]

Knowledge must be practical - it must be instituted in actuality, not abstract. Marx goes on to say: "If I truly love something, I feel that its existence is essential, that it is something which I need, without which my nature can have no full, satisfied, complete existence." [CW, Vol. 1, p. 137] It is Marx's setting of passion at the heart of knowing that makes his analysis so impressive, and, indeed, unacademic. We have quoted the peasant who demands that in representation there should be shade: that is because their labouring selves know how important it is.

Practical knowledge, unauthorised knowledge and a commitment to changing what is are the crucial ingredients: a critical materialism which could smash the commodified, privatised and professionalised mode of knowledge of the university. Periodically, the outside does seem to crash in and change everything. It did in November 1989, with the collapse of Communism. 1989 did bad business for Marxism in the academy, although, in a way, it was good business - if notoriety is a measure. Marxism's corpse was never more picked over. In the process it was disfigured, a continuation of the Stalinist falsification of what Marxism is, was and could be (for that distortion was all many of these "Western Marxists" knew from the days of their own "practice"). But the cynicism and the bitter, self-castigating, "confessional" conjectures of postmodernism - damn seriousness, damn meaning, damn truth and rue my former errors - predate even that event.

In a review of the English edition of Walter Benjamin's selected correspondence and the Adorno-Benjamin letters, Fredric Jameson mournfully turned away from critical

theory and critical commentary [London Review of Books, 3 August 1995]. Like our paper, Jameson's review focused on the position of "the writer". But Jameson the writer is interested in Benjamin only in as far as he reflects Jameson back to himself. Analysis of the position of the writer is indeed essential if writing is to do more than justify the split between manual and mental labour. However, it can also become a grisly form of callousness, as in Jameson's response to Nazism. For a moment Jameson imagines a world without Hitler. The crucial difference would be "the existence of a German-language readership for Benjamin". The intellectual has become so bound up in a world where only publications and literary fame matter, that he seems unmoved by the suffering of those excluded from the game.

Ultimately, Jameson fails to find his mirror image in Benjamin, and that saddens him. It is, he rues, no longer possible to be a critical intellectual like Benjamin. Nobody listens to intellectuals any more. In a non-literary, mediatized public-sphere, they can no longer "form and inflect public taste". He continued on this theme in an edition of *Critical Inquiry*, a special on Walter Benjamin: "ours is an anti-theoretical time, which is to say an anti-intellectual time". These are the gloomy utterances of someone who can only struggle for the privileges that he believes are due to him, as intellectual, as theoretician.

But Jameson's major grievance about using Benjamin stems from a curiously fetishistic and historicist approach to the past. We cannot understand Benjamin any longer, Jameson pronounces, we are separated from the meaning of his thought by the passage of time, in a postmodernity that has abolished Benjamin's touchstones, and that reflects only the flattening-out and making equivalent of the world. Jameson is unable to see ways of using Benjamin's ideas, or to ask what is of use now even though things may have shifted, or what is of use now because things are still the same. He cannot see beyond the books on his desk into the world. He has none of Marx's passion for truth, and none of Benjamin's abandonment to the world. We should ourselves tire of such tired theorists, whose exhaustion makes them see the world as a pale memory slipping from their grasp.

BW:

When Marx quoted Goethe saying that the painter could only succeed in portraying a woman he has loved in the flesh, he wasn't perpetuating dead-white-male classicism, but making a materialist observation about the source of ideas. The idea is actually rejected by the very philosophers who claim to defend the western tradition. When Roger Scruton asserts that "sounds become music only when organised through concepts taken from another sphere" [*The Aesthetics Of Music*, p. 333], he not only contradicts every discovery made about sound since Arnold Schoenberg and Blind Lemon Jefferson, he contradicts Goethe's monist Naturphilosophie. However, Scruton's book was well received in the press because its transcendental dualism is the perfect complement to pragmatic positivism. In a hierarchical society, idealism - the notion that ideas descend from heaven rather than being produced historically by real human love and real human industry - is always going to look self-evident compared to the nuisance truths of materialist philosophy.

Conclusion

Bombing populations in the name of anti-fascism is merely the most recent and atrocious example of the subjugation of actuality in the name of abstractions. If we want the particular to have its say, we must revive Marx's method and analyse the particular in connection with the whole - which means interpreting the rhetoric of Tony Blair's "anti-fascism" in the light of the interests of international capital. To reclaim Marx's dialectical method, the Left will have to break with everything Stalin did in the name of Marx. This implies more familiarity with the details of revolutionary history and working-class

politics than the majority of either academics or journalists can admit to. To be a Marxist is to be a professional unprofessional, a contradiction only dialecticians can live.

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PETER MANSON • ENVOY

Go little, all of three years old
looping a sampled hate
you will not grow
to oil the wooden cog maquette
or tinpot stator.

MAFF made you a wick out of lamb
— the soft, yellow fat —
got on it clumsily,
something in the valley laughs
at your bursting, the forest can't
go with the wind, change, carrying torment
beyond reach of pollen,
boredom and the
fuck-you colossus larks.

¶ The words uttered by cartoon characters are usually presented in white ellipsoids held in place against some anti-gravitational force by a downward tethering nipple pointing at their speaker. These are the descendants of the speech balloons which began to appear intermittently in the new colour comics included as supplements to New York newspapers in the eighteen-nineties, and first became a consistent convention for the representation of utterances in Rudolph Dirks's 'Katzenjammer Kids' of 1897 (in the early frames they look uncannily like children's party balloons with long strings attaching the smallish print zone to a point near the mouth of the character). Balloon flight was an increasing preoccupation of the eighteen eighties and nineties, and navigability was the goal that remained elusive despite Henri Giffard's invention of a steerable balloon as far back as 1852. It was the well-publicized experiments of Alberto Santos-Dumont with petrol engined airships filled with helium (later known as blimps) between 1898 and 1905 in France, and the initially less successful attempts of the retired Count Von Zeppelin in Germany, which made balloon transport a possibility, and also made "the distinction between *ballon spherique* (the ordinary globular, drifting balloon) and *ballon dirigeable* (the elongated, power-driven balloon or airship)" of general interest. [this quotation and some of the other details are taken from Svante Stubelius, *Balloon, Flying-Machine, Helicopter: Further Studies in the History of Terms for Aircraft in English*, Göteborg: Gothenberg Studies in English, 1960, 171] Reports on these successes introduced the word 'dirigible' into English where it became well established until the first world war, when the navy, which in those days was responsible for aircraft, and had always preferred the term "airship," ensured that this more nautical word gained ascendancy. In any case, once the steering of a lighter-than-air craft could be taken for granted the emphasis on control was redundant. This was the second time the word had fallen from grace: "dirigible" was formerly used mostly as an adjective derived from the Latin *dirigibilis*, and by the early nineteenth century had come to refer to the alleged control of the mind over its own functioning, a control that by the late nineteenth-century, whether the mind was believed to be a stream, a hypnotisable dupe, or tied to a *dirigiste* unconscious, looked too implausible to sustain the old meaning. Naming the space of printed speech a speech balloon was therefore doubly appropriate, since the implicit ambiguity as to whether this balloon is dirigible or not, corresponded both to the history of intense interest in the dirigibility or otherwise of the mind, and the modernity of what was then the latest form of transport.

¶ William Blake's verbal art did not use speech balloons or anything equivalent—he wanted his text to be written across the cosmos of his images, to emphasise both that language inhered in this visualised world, and that the actual word-crossed image's representations could be trusted just because they manifested the visibility of understanding rather than retinal memory. Pictorial conventions of the comic, one of the most commercially active forms of art, would set writing apart from the visible world, keeping one sense from conjoining with another, and treating language as if it rose above the material world, to create an aesthetic ideology in which the diremption of language and world is made to appear unassailable. Only dirigibility remained as a faint trace of what was lost in tethering the balloon to an inner self and its vocalisations, or letting it drift at the mercy of the air.

¶ 'For H.D. the written image is already a palimpsest, written-over and redacted through centuries. Far from the young Pound's optimistically generative turbines, the "image" in H.D. cannot forget the errors and miswritings of the past.' [Elizabeth Willis, "All this very Queer Knowledge": or, From Ornament to Ontology: The Gender and Dualism of the Modernist "New"', *Sagetrieb* 16:3, 1997, 63-73, 69]

¶ From the north and into Middle English came *bal*, a globe or globular body to give the English the ball; from the south came the French *bal*, dancing, and from Italian, *ballo* to give the ball as dance party; from Italian also came *ballone*, a 'great ball or football' mentioned by Florio, giving balloons; and from the Latin *balare* came ballad and ballet, the latter of which gradually gave way to ballad in order to distinguish the dance of the intellect in verse from the dance of the social body. Globes, balls, dancing, balloons, poems: the dictionary cautions us not to confuse *bal* (ME) with *bal* (FR), or presumably, balloons with poems.

¶ As balloons are to the poet, so to the ground
Its varied assortment of trees. The more assorted they are, the
Vaster his experience. Sometimes
You catch sight of them on a level with the top story of a house,
Strung up there for publicity purposes. Or like those bubbles
Children make with a kind of ring, not a pipe, and probably using some
detergent
Rather than plain everyday soap and water. Where was I? The balloons
Drift thoughtfully over the land, not exactly commenting on it;
These are the range of the poet's experience. He can hide in trees
Like a hamadryad, but wisely prefers not to, letting the balloons
Idle him out of existence, as a car idles.

['The Skaters,' *The Mooring of Starting Out: The First Five Books of Poetry* (New York: Ecco Press, [1966] 1997, 200] Poems as child's play, self-advertisement, non-dirigible wandering thought (one perception leads directly to a further perception but not at the poet's will), reports on life's journey buffeted about by other systems and the glimpse of 'unknown horizons,' in response to which the poet as another Los is always 'inventing systems.' All these are familiar enough in contemporary poetry. This is not the end of Ashbery's meditation on the seeming helplessness of the poet, however, because he tentatively allows that the poet does sometimes take responsibility, is 'best' when 'placed squarely in front of his dilemma, on all fours before the lamentable spectacle of the unknown.' Poet on all fours, animal, fully embodied, and at last acknowledging the boundaries of knowledge, the omnipresence of the unknown in everyday life.

¶ 'How do we understand this boundary,' is a question that Lyn Hejinian also asks:
'Along comes something—*launched in context*.

How do we understand this boundary?

Let's begin by posing it as a dilemma. The term comes from the Greek, *dilemmatos*, and means "involving two assumptions," and so we begin by proposing that the boundary is not an edge but a conjunction—that the dilemma bears the *meaning* of conjunction: encounter, possible confusion, alteration exerted through reciprocal influence, etc.—the kind of situation that is typical, I might add, along borders between nations, between speakers of different languages, between neighboring ecosystems, etc. [...] *Dilemma* in this sense, constitutes that part of a poetics which we could call its *prepoetics*—a prepoetics functioning not as a condition either logically or chronologically prior to the formulation of a poetics but as a condition necessary and simultaneous to it—a current

running through it.' [Lyn Hejinian, 'Reason,' *The Language of Inquiry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000, 337-354, 339)] She is wary of any dirigibility of poetic imagination, 'a reason that plows its way to authority,' and cites Hannah Arendt's discussion of the boundlessness of action in *The Human Condition* in support of the belief that 'authority over being is thus dispersed [...] in the boundlessness' (352) (although the use of such citation might appear to spring from the furrow of authorship's power), and so concludes that poets should 'enter and inhabit' the boundaries, not try to rise above them in their vehicles of poetic imagination, or 'totalize' them with systems of explanation. Prepoetics is the condition of the poetry for which Hejinian speaks, although to use this word 'condition' so ballasted with philosophical freight might be misleading, since what she is outlining might be better named, in Giorgio Agamben words, a 'being-thus,' or more conventionally, a context. But what is this condition?

¶ Arendt's discussion of action's unbounded range of effects is careful to emphasise that although these futural ripples cannot be known at the launch of an action, and can never be encompassed by one perspective, they are nevertheless specific, and potentially intelligible, however unpredictable. Unboundedness is therefore only one face of the unknown. She also points out that this unpredictability does all too often present a lamentable face in the 'frailty of human institutions and laws.' Dirigibility can only emerge from the labour of recognitions and histories that painstakingly sustain the tattered public realm.

¶ The recent convergence of thoughtful essays on Prynne's later poetry by John Wilkinson, Robin Purves and Drew Milne is cause for celebration. [John Wilkinson, 'Counterfactual Prynne: An Approach to *Not-You*', *Parataxis* 9, 1996, 190-202; Robin Purves, 'Apprehension: or, J.H.Prynne, His Critics, and the Rhetoric of Art,' *The Gig* 2, March 1999, 45-60; Drew Milne, 'Speculative Assertions: Reading J.H.Prynne's Poems', *Parataxis* 10, 2001, 67-86] They have made explicit the difficulties of reading and interpreting the later poetry of J.H.Prynne in a manner which is at once highly perceptive, well-argued, attentive to aesthetics, philosophy and psychoanalysis, and above all willing to admit with admirable honesty to their own provisional understandings and residual doubt. All three openly speculate as to whether the poetry's asseverative enfolding of readers by the force of its syntactical emulations of urgent moral appeal, and its apparent promises of achievable insight, should be trusted. They draw attention to an alleged interpretative deficit in the accounts of Prynne's work over the past fifteen years. Wilkinson does this by reading *Not-You* (1993) closely, and Milne by reading *For the Monogram* (1997). Purves goes farthest in expressing doubts in his essay: 'Critical consensus about the ethical centre of Prynne's poetics flourishes without seeming to have understood anything he has written in the last fifteen years, being a consensus with baffles attached, evincing a fixation with a dogma which no single constituent seems willing, or able, to profess.' (53) Leaving aside the polemical exaggeration of total incomprehension, there is considerable agreement that there is justice to this criticism. My own ill-tempered review of Reeve and Kerridge's book overreacted to their unwillingness to take the poetry's illegibility into account and locate it in the histories of modernism. [Peter Middleton, Review of *Nearly Too Much: the Poetry of J.H.Prynne* by N.H.Reeve and Richard Kerridge, *Cambridge Quarterly* XXVI: 4, 1997, 344-353] But what is this dogma and its secret bond to which Purves alludes?

¶ My copy of Webster offers as a main definition of poem, 'a composition in verse,' which still seems evasive even when this definition is compounded with the entry for 'verse': 'metrical language.' Although the second definition for poem appears at first sight just as circular, its concentration on the unity of the text and the link to the readership

perhaps unwittingly does reveal the tacitly assumed ontology of poetry with considerable accuracy—'a piece of poetry designed as a unit and communicating to the reader the sense of a complete experience.' A poem is a 'piece' that is, it is all of a piece, a 'unit,' which communicates with another unit, the 'reader,' and what is communicated is 'complete.' The poem's essential characteristics are imagined in terms of a relation between a single agent, the poet, composing the text with the intention of producing something that forms a coherent whole, and a single reader, whose eyes track across the writing as his or her mind processes the information. For some purposes this simplified abstraction can be adequate, but it occludes many strategies which modernist and avant-garde writers deliberately chose to practice, and leads to the neglect of some features of earlier poetry too.

¶ Close reading of poetry is perilously out of date. Available languages and concepts for discussing prosody, literary devices, emotion, cognition, ethics, genres, allusion, image, performance and a myriad of other practices internal to the text's relation to readerships by which meaning may appear, are cut back by narrowly conceived literary political debates and restricted canons of exempla. How has this come about given the opportunities presented by contemporary poets? Later modernist poets have attempted many new modes of utterance and invited different acts of reading, which challenge and guide their readers, and in doing so have opened many backward passages into earlier poetry's newly evident mitochondrial efforts, while literary criticism has disappointingly proffered few commensurate recognitions. The short answer would be that the rejection of the techniques of practical criticism as a naturalisation of ideology by literary theorists, coupled with the shift to both ideological critique from the directions of feminism, postcolonialism, queer theory, and to the emulsification of literary texts into discursive economies managed by the New Historicism, has overdetermined the formalist stigma of such literary techniques. Meanwhile the readership of poetry became so adept at the formal steps of new critical and modernist hermeneutics that its skill led to a largely unnoticed impasse between such metropolitan command of the usual routes and the ollies and nollies of contemporary poets who wanted to show other possibilities to their readers. This is not to say that the problems raised by Wilkinson, Purvis and Milne can be resolved by running up some new interpretative tools and decks according to a few designs by contemporary poets. A more promising response would be to unfold the social histories sedimented in the tail slizzers, the gnar potential, raging seshes, or for those of you not familiar with the chilled skate zones, the repertoire of semantic musics emanating from the instruments, forms, friendships, beliefs, authorities, anarchisms, and even deaths reception.

¶ Visual admiration of the building is only a small part. Its rooms, halls, stairs, mezzanines, orifices and passages, heights and basements, reflections and inlets to the sun, all choreograph the movements of people who live or work there. It enters their memories as continuity and frame for innovation. It accomodates, stashes, feeds and excretes, fades to dailiness, however much awe starts inhabitation. Protected, temperature controlled, given easily circumnavigable horizons to saturate with themselves. No, there is little to see, at least compared to what is eidetic only in time, felt in habit memory. Buildings are no more poems than they are brick umbrellas and this is the visibility of the poem on the page.

¶ 'Prynne, it seems can have it both ways, being a significant source of dissent whether his work signifies or not.' (Purves's reproof to Wilkinson and others) Whether the poetry 'signifies or not?' The verb is deceptive here: it conflates singular historical actions of reception with logic's judgement. Can the question of interpretability be articulated as

the polar alternatives of *tabula rasa* and cornucopia? Obscurity, difficulty, strangeness, and the upwelling of the unknown in a text, are themselves part of the signification. Could we not argue that the effort, the false steps, the cogitation, the conversations, the letters, even the frustration mentioned by Wilkinson, are part of whatever it is the poem is and means? It is much harder to represent the perils of incomprehension than it might seem—realism is an extremely effective solvent whose neurotoxicity can be underestimated.

¶ Is solitary interpretation possible?

¶ Texts vary in their capacity for temporally extended interpretation or what scientists might call the terminability of citation lifetimes: think of the *Talmud* alongside the American constitution or a recent bestselling novel. It is easy to underestimate how much we don't understand in seemingly accessible contemporary verse let alone the exegetically encrusted poetries of the tradition. Prynne's recent 86 page essay on a single Shakespeare sonnet might be intended as a demonstration of the persistence of the uninterpreted in even the most overrun of texts.

¶ Poems which wear their literalism on their sleeves, are awash with realism, are much more secretive and uninterpretable than is usually allowed. Hear Lavinia Greenlaw talking about the new communication technologies in the one poem ('A World Where News Travelled Slowly') by which she is represented in a standard anthology of UK verse [Simon Armitage and Robert Crawford eds., *The Penguin Book of Poetry from Britain and Ireland Since 1945* (London: Viking, 1998), 408]. This third stanza follows what are meant to be amusing images of earlier modes of communication, the mail coach and the semaphore:

Now words are faster, smaller, harder
...we're almost talking in one another's arms
Coded and squeezed, what chance has my voice
to reach your voice unaltered and then to leave no trace?
Nets tighten across the sky and the sea bed.
When London made contact with New York,
there were such fireworks, City Hall caught light.
It could have burned to the ground.

The condition of the language of intimacy has changed, asserts the poem, and so assertively that asseveration almost overrides everything else. But where does this assertoric force stem from, what legitimates it, on what authority does it speak, and how much credence is expected? Look and listen more closely. Are *words* really faster, or is it their transmission, and doesn't the distinction matter? Text-messaging may encourage verbal squeeze, but elsewhere verbal haploidism is more the norm. Harder? Usually small words are cognitively easy catches. The echo of Yeats's description of the young, 'those dying generations,' who can only sing about their romance of desire and reproduction, leaves a trace lying about unexplored. What is an unaltered voice? And it is not just the slack logical assembly here, it's the inattention to interim semantics and sound (the subdued pun on coded/co-dead, the pause after 'leave' both suggest a quite different attitude to the intimacy) and the lack of questioning of the voice's own confidence that it can speak in and to a public without the very distortion it mentions, all contribute to a chaotic noise of meaning when up close. The closer in we get the less interpretable this becomes—are the words of the poem, the tiny kernels of hug, also supposed to be on speed, and how does chance shift them along, and why does the voice they represent want to leave no trace? Polymorphous enigmas and fuzzy clichés combine to create an

ordinarily secretive discourse at which even an ethnomethodologist used to eliciting the secrecies of the given might turn the page.

¶ From the omniscient altitude of an airship the world below has one horizon, a circle that fuses only with itself, as if it were a metaphor of a hermeneutics for which all other horizons had disappeared in a vision of total comprehension.

¶ Although the average contemporary poem has only a title and lineation to mark the boundaries, its voice markers usually indicate that the entire poem is a speech balloon ('my voice') into which an author is imagined blowing her or his spirit in words ('to reach your voice'). Balloons drift with the air currents determining weather unless chained to the ground (and as Lisa Robertson writes of weather's place in our lives in *The Weather*: 'It's an outcropping of cumulus; we are a sum of inescapable conditions.' [Lisa Robertson, *The Weather* (London: Reality Street Editions, 2001), 33]) and the speech balloons of personality poems also require the strong cables of individuality's affirmation to prevent their loss to cloudiness or even wetness.

¶ 'A text is just the surface, in some ways the skin and there is flesh underneath it and underneath that the bones. One single word, let's say "Hamlet," or even in one single letter of that, "H" can contain everything a man has ever felt, experienced or suffered.' [Robert Wilson, 'Hear, See, Act: Robert Wilson interviewed by *Der Spiegel*,' Patrice Pavis, *The Intercultural Performance Reader* (London: Routledge, 1996), 103] Can contain the history of friends, kin, community, nation? The first line of *For the Monogram* has ten words and forty two letters, enough for the answer to the universe. Hyperbole of course.

¶ Milne's scrupulous essay sets out the framework for a precise reading of Prynne measured against pertinent concepts from transcendental philosophy, phenomenology, and aesthetics, to check potential alignments and disjunctions. Hence, for example, a Kantian formulation that 'language is understood [in Prynne] as a condition of possibility rather than as a site of communicative action. The decisive issue is whether the recognition of expressive contradictions can mediate its inclusion within determinate structures of communication and not remain trapped within the fundamental presuppositions of language which encode experience.' Such care with the conceptual exactions allows us to read reflexively and ask whether these theories might themselves be part of the difficulty Milne investigates. Code is widely used as a metaphor of language's interdependence on signs and cognition for its practice, and some philosophers and linguists, notably Wittgensteinians like G.P. Baker and P.M.S. Hacker, and the historian of linguistics, Roy Harris, have questioned its appropriateness as metaphor. Of greater difficulty is the knowability of language, which necessarily exceeds all structuring models and theories, so that to talk of 'fundamental presuppositions' can be misleading. We speakers may make such presuppositions in a particular cultural moment, but there is no inevitable fit between them and language's worlds, and they could not generate language from the ground up as an ultimate linguistic axiomatics. Perhaps the Kantian concept of a transcendental condition is too aprioristic to grasp the parametric material conditions of reading? Milne himself admits that *For the Monogram*, because it resists reformulation as 'philosophical counter-proposals,' or indeed distillation into any conceptual theme, might be better thought of as 'a phenomenological exploration of the conditions of the possibility of experience which is qualitatively different from Kant's, and which invites reading and thinking beyond the explicit horizons of the text's language array' (82) (making the implicit suggestion that these are poems whose words are set out more like the elements of a mathematical matrix than a typical block of sentences and phrases). By the end these conditions of possibility have been deflated to

the scale of poetry itself: 'Prynne's poetry explores the limits of poetry in ways that could be described as a critique of poetry's conditions of possibility, but this poetry resists criticism without affirming or denying the limits of the speculative readings it provokes.'(86) There is a sense of defeat here, criticism on the ropes. Compare Steven Mailloux on reading nineteenth-century American literature: 'the current talk about historical acts of reading provides a welcome opportunity for more explicit consideration of how reading is historically contingent, politically situated, institutionally embedded, and materially conditioned' [Steven Mailloux "Misreading as a Historical Act: Cultural Rhetoric, Bible Politics, and Fuller's 1845 Review of Douglass's *Narrative*", in James L. Machor, ed., *Readers in History: Nineteenth-Century American Literature and the Contexts of Response* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1993), 3-31, 5]. Or Willis Buckingham on his methodology for study of the early reception of Emily Dickinson in the eighteen-nineties: 'in drawing on all known writing about the poet from the decade, it seeks what is common among poetry audiences as their fulfillment conditions for the reading of verse.' [Willis Buckingham, 'Poetry Readers and Reading in the 1890s: Emily Dickinson's First Reception,' in Machor, 164-179, 165] These historians of reading point us to a possible way through the dilemma that halts a criticism so scrupulous with its critical and phenomenological terms; they point us to the intersubjectivity and consequent extended temporality of reading as a plural act.

¶ When Derrida writes of the rhetoric that has sustained the concept of structure that 'the history of metaphysics, like the history of the West, is the history of these metaphors and metonymies'[Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference* trans. Alan Bass (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981, 279] is he making anything more than a specialist's claim to have met a force and tone important enough to become the leading predicate of history, in a sentence whose functor could be replaced with money, technology, drains or disease? Reverse the flow of this assertion and it deflates: trace out the implications and inferences of dominant metaphors and you will find their filaments reach into almost every domain of cultural life. Saggy contours of ordinariness are now evident. This is similar to the claim by George Lakoff for the centrality of certain atomic metaphors formed out of our sensorimotor experiences of being in the world, which may combine to create the dominant metaphors of our culture. Comparing life to a journey (think of "Charm Against Too Many Apples", *News of Warring Clans*, and a number of other Prynne poems) works by carrying over the inferences embedded in our experience of transport to the much more difficult to articulate concept, because largely intangible, of living a life. Their argument that these metaphors work by carrying the inferential patterns of one domain of thought over to another misses the significance of these domains themselves, which must already contain the inferential structures, and therefore rely on other cognitive and affective processes than metaphor. For Derrida's key metaphors and metonymies to wield such influence (his global statement only makes sense if these are a small number of gospel metaphors and metonyms; otherwise it would be tantamount to saying that history is equivalent to a subset of all utterances) there must have been similar domains of understanding for comparison and extension to do their work of persuasion. Finally, it is the "is" of Derrida's argument, its simulation of the transferential moment of metaphorical enlightenment, which treats language as a metaphor for history and thereby presupposes what is being argued, that creates a circularity waiting for rhetorical inflation. Metaphor and metonymy are an important part of our history, but these language forces are not metonymically the source code, or core pattern, repeated through a homogenous ontology.

¶ George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue that metaphor is intrinsic to all reasoning, and in particular, that 'there is no ethical system that is not metaphorical. We understand

our experience via these conceptual metaphors, we reason according to their metaphorical logic, and we make judgements on the basis of metaphors.' [George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999, 325)]. This confidence in the ubiquity of metaphor is based on the belief that the complex activities of rationality, imagination, and visualisation all depend upon analogies with fields of experience which are at root mostly bodily experience. 'We acquire a large system of primary metaphors automatically and unconsciously by functioning in the most ordinary of ways in the everyday world from our earliest years. We have no choice in this. Because of the way neural connections are formed during the period of conflation [when young children cannot fully distinguish between their thoughts and their sensory experiences], we all naturally think using hundreds of primary metaphors.' (47) These primary metaphors are built up into complex ones through 'conceptual blending,' whereby connections are made between different fields and these produce inferences that may be 'either conventional or wholly original.' If theorists do not reflect on the initiating metaphors they will derive inferences that appear logical to them even though they are generated by the matrix chosen from the unconscious metaphors. The authors' repeated message is simple: even the most abstract concepts derive from metaphors felt as deep habit. Here is a nascent poetics that treats originality of metaphor as a work of perceptive articulation of existing connections developing mostly below the surface of common recognition, which occasion this poetic representation of the historical experience and accompanying understanding seeded in the conditions which permit the metaphor, rather than showing-off the freedom of creative will. A poetics in which accuracy, observation, care, prolonged thought, and acuity are indistinguishable from the more usually salient inventiveness, wit, and imagination. Unfortunately, these linguists don't notice the deliberate mental labour accrued over history by the vast network of metaphors, nor do they reflect on the body's fashioning by socio-historic conditions. Without such correction their linguistics folds back into a crude positivism.

¶ Beginning to read *For the Monogram* (1997) uneasily, discomfited, in doubt of understanding and the text's designs, a sense of waking from slowly receding anaesthetic or a stroke, when words have lost their meaning, self-awareness and other subjects are suddenly beside the self or gone without in between. Do I *have* to keep reading this? A weariness 'beating and striking' my will, a 'wave shaping' my revealed stupidity 'from its own wreck in shadow play' of incomprehension, 'the sad sea ways' of knowledge for which I am no Newton, I cannot sing like Wallace Stevens' shoreline diva 'beyond the genius of the sea,' indeed a 'counter search' and a 'gain in deception' is all that seems to happen, I am unable to 'select an object with no predecessors' from these short poems since I hear Olson, Stevens, Arnold, Valéry, and Lucretius constantly at my back. How to read a fractal syntagm. If the sublime forces the imagination back on itself as it fails to comprehend the vast magnificence of the 'hot glory' of this creation, this feels to my educated doubt a reminder of intelligence's mortality rather than its mercy. My immanence 'passes through innervation' until I reach the 'merciful injunction' to consider pity a vice rather than a virtue, its empathy 'monoglot' with disavowed complicity in the object's predication. What does all this excess semantic complexity betoken: a secret communication, highly advanced expertise, hoaxing, an in-group elite's private exchanges, or a complex of ideas that I cannot grasp?

¶ Could a prosody be constructed from a rhythm of interpretative demands experienced as operating on several axes of readerly obsolescence as it were (of difficulty, of register, of proximity to literary tradition), so that part of the poem's music was this complex cognitive and emotional movement over the time of a reading which would be

irreversible, irreparable? It would not be reproducible. Once you know that lithium grease is an innovative lubrication for high-tech bearings do the exciting meanders recorded by Wilkinson in his reading of *Not-You* as he tries to elucidate the phrase, fade into the semantic murk, or does the slippery product speak more (poetry) than it knows?

¶ Perhaps this is a version of Brian Catling's impossible object the 'stumbling block,' that 'atlas swallowing its tongue' and 'ark of extinction.' [Brian Catling, 'The Stumbling Block Its Index,' Iain Sinclair ed., *Conductors of Chaos: A Poetry Anthology* (London: Picador, 1996), 13, 15] Or a version of this pop-galactic McGuffin: 'The artifact was black-body, an ambient anomaly, either almost completely massless, or—perhaps—some sort of projection, it seemed to make no impression on the skein, the fabric of space-time which any accumulation of matter effectively dents with its mass. The artifact/ projection gave the impression that it was floating on the skein, making no impression on it whatsoever, almost as though it was a blister on the skein itself, as though the signals the ship was sending towards it could never connect with a *thing* there because all they did was slide flickering over that blister almost as though it wasn't there and pass on undisturbed into space beyond.... Well, if you take the definition of an excession as anything external to the Culture that we should be worried about, this is an excession all right.' [Words from Iain M. Banks *Excession*, my syntax] Art's excession? Even more suggestive than the neologism's almost but not quite oxymoronic blend of destructive erasure with a coming forth that produces an inside far beyond what ought to be the limits of all interiority, are these awkward twin impressions which appear to cancel one another out, giving and taking away themselves. The gift of art—the gift as a sign of impossibility—art as a hieroglyph of exchange that does not yet exist.

¶ "The poet is affected by the "spirit" of language which is none other than the whole history of human imagination from which he draws his linguistic ideas. The appearance of the letter, its mere form, bespeaks a lost or unavailable content or referent. An event or experience is no longer associated with and hence intuited by such a sign; instead, a feeling of loss of meaning is generated. This loss notwithstanding, the hieroglyph stands as a witness to a past without representing it to us and without signalling a meaning for us.' [Angelika Rauch, *The Hieroglyph of Tradition: Freud, Benjamin, Gadamer, Novalis, Kant* (London: Associated Universities Press, 2000), 134] Rauch calls it a 'psychic archive' because she argues that it needs to be part of a general background knowledge to find its potential, or one might say, it needs unimaginable readers. Which offers a different reading of Prynne's own persistent interest in such matters, in *Stars, Tigers, and the Shape of Words*, and his afterword to *New Songs From a Jade Terrace*: 'Their poems summoned that tradition, by summoning the whole through a knowing presentation of implicative fragments.' This he calls a form of metonymy which 'depends on a pattern of figural components which are already associated together in the poetic discourse or context of formalisms from which combinations are produced, each local part of such a system pre-implicating the larger whole [...] the stylistic history, or occasionally the cosmology or other typological ordering, comprises the precursory system which makes the use of coded metaphor a metonymic rather than metaphoric procedure; and it is the subtlety on intelligible allusion, varied and superimposed, which here shews the power of metonymy both to support metaphor and to exceed it.' [*New Songs from a Jade Terrace* tr. Anne Birrell (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986), 387, 368] The hieroglyphs or monograms of Prynne's later poetry might be said to stand in such a relation as metonyms for a past set of traditions and their contemporary signs ('precursory systems?'), and therefore loss might be one of the semantic effects of the fast metaphors.

¶ The hieroglyphic “balloons” of comic strip speech are metonymic of a complex history of both mind and flight, and their conflicts. They were named balloons at the only moment when cosmology and typological divisions of space could be figured by this then most modern vehicle. A decade or two earlier or later and who knows? Bulbs, balls, bombs, radios or cars?

¶ Beginning to read *For the Monogram* by starting with the title. Monogram: insubstantial, as of a god; a shadowy figure; a personal signature; a signature formed of letters that share lines which are salient spatial markers. It might be a pun on the letter I, a figure for the individuality of the author in a ‘mono writing’, as much as a long shadow of absent ark or deity, or a singular measure of gravitas.

¶ How does interpretation of a phrase like ‘stay-put agreement’ begin (ref. the opening lines of *For the Monogram*: ‘At a point tunes beating and striking the plate for/ sylvatic break and drop there not so sunken away/ as in stay-put agreement; set off put off these crowds/ no free sky conversely’)? Let’s try the Internet, which usefully makes available samples of usage within specialised lexical fields. Through *Google* we reach the website for the U.S. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (<http://clercenter2.gallaudet.edu/KidsWorldDeafNet/e-docs/IDEA/section-2.html>) and learn that they use this phrase to mean an agreement in which the parties agree to implement changes on which they all agree, whilst keeping those provisions (related to issues over which there is disagreement) from the previous consensual decision. It might be a way of talking about how interpretive communities maintain their stability against attempts to change reading. How much does this search help? As important as the definitional restriction is, more important is surely the indication that the poem is working with a phrase whose significance derives from dissonance between one’s naïve literalism (I had assumed that this was not specialised jargon and only searched for this phrase on a whim) and a more knowing user’s habitus. ‘Stay-put agreement’ is not a phrase likely to be quickly traced in a dictionary, as is the case with many of Prynne’s usages. Searching for the phrase underlines for this reader the extent to which the culture is islanded into local specializations of the common language.

¶ ‘This much only we can assert: the *image* is a product of the empirical faculty of the productive imagination; the *schema* of sensible concepts, such as of figures in space, is a product, and as it were, a monogram, of pure *a priori* imagination [ein Produkt und gleichsam ein Monogramm der reinen Einbildungskraft a priori], through which, and in accordance with which, images themselves first become possible.’ [Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason* tr. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1933), 183, translation modified] The significance of the monogram that Kant introduces with a poet’s gesture, an ‘und gleichsam’ or ‘as it were,’ is demonstrated in the very form of the gesture. The monogram is a sign of the way that, as Paul Guyer explains, ‘Kant clearly perceived that there was some inescapable connection between self-knowledge and knowledge of objects’ because both were ‘intrinsically judgemental and necessarily involved logical structures as well as empirical inputs.’ [Paul Guyer, ‘The Transcendental Deduction of the Categories,’ in Paul Guyer ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Kant* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), 155] Monogram is not only a metaphor for the working of the schema, its use in the exposition metonymically demonstrates the co-authoring of expression by pure mind and historical matters.

¶ In his meditations on a future politics, Giorgio Agamben takes as one starting point Aquinas’s oddly literal speculation on the future of the world of things once the day of judgement has passed. He draws from Robert Walser the idea that this remainder of

the Creation will 'be just as it is, irreparably, but precisely this will be its novelty. The irreparable is the monogram that Walser's writing engraves into things. Irreparable means that these things are consigned without remedy to their being-thus, that they are precisely and only their *thus* [...] but irreparable also means that for them there is literally no shelter possible, that in their being-thus they are absolutely exposed, absolutely abandoned.'(38) But this scholastic nicety is also metonymic of the balance between destruction and opportunity in our contemporary condition: 'Because if instead of continuing to search for a proper identity in the already improper and senseless form of individuality, humans were to succeed in belonging to this impropriety [that 'even life in its nakedness is, in truth, improper and exterior to them, that for them there is no shelter on earth'] as such, in making of the proper being-thus not an identity and an individual property but a singularity without identity, a common and absolutely exposed singularity—if humans could, that is, not be-thus in this or that particular biography, but be only *the* thus, their singular exteriority and their face, then they would for the first time enter into a community without presuppositions and without subjects, into a communication without the incommunicable.'(64) Is this really 'the political task of our generation' as Agamben says, or no more than John Rawls's 'original position' that entails a hypothetical 'veil of ignorance' [that for justice to be possible, of the parties involved 'no one knows his place in society, his class position or social status' etc. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (London: OUP 1972, 137)]? What would a monogram of this irreparable singularity of a humanity be like? Is this another version of the philosophical insight that to be modern is to believe that one's self-identity is chosen, and it is this that must be overcome?

¶ Can one imagine an interpretive community in such terms? What responsibilities and care for friendship's thought and civic emotion would this require and what of its ethics?

¶ Questions: a world before fact and truth, of hope and setting to, whiling and wait, assuming answerability is possible, just that, risking failure's erasure.

¶ 'To interpret is to impoverish, to deplete the world—in order to set up a shadow world of "meanings".' [Susan Sontag, 'Against Interpretation,' *Against Interpretation*, (London: Vintage, 1994), 7] Meanings as monograms (shadowy figures)? Does 'for the monogram' translate as 'for the interpretation?' But what does Sontag offer in place except an appeal to in-your-face experience, the 'sensuous immediacy' of art. Is, as she argues, abstract painting really a flight from content? Doesn't such art have excessive content? Prynne's reading of an exceedingly non-figurative painting, de Kooning's *Rosy Fingered Dawn at Louse Point*, flourishes a proposed content in the face of another critic's claim that the painting's radiance overwhelms any form which might outline such content: 'If I wanted to propose a kind of counter-mischief I should say that this was a painting formed out of a quadrilateral syllogism, and its logistic quality or obscured middle term is to do with that management or force which comes from alleging the power of ethos and its historical and even its epic dimensions, and of working its attachment to the other power of this lyrical presence here, of interior pathos and even of sublimity.' [47] 'Lyrical presence' may sound like an attempt at a more licit nineties immediacy, cohabiting, as Prynne says, with expressiveness, yet his interpretation also replies to such fear of impoverishment through these figures of interaction (alleging, working) which reverse the monogram and unblock the illumination to dispel shadowy fears of pod art simulating the real with their mischievous insistence on a return to the painting's light.

¶ In a hoarse voice through an oxygen mask: 'They are listening to us now. We must find a way out.' Patient reader, how paranoid is the text's belief that its attempt to speak

in secrecy to those it trusts might be exploded by divulgence to those opposed to its plans? Compositional neoteny lingers in an encryption whose withheld evidence threatens even the closest kinships of reader.

¶ What are the poetics of secrecy? Peter Riley recently castigated British poets whose alienation and accompanying ragey emotions impel them to 'distort poetry into an ungainly and secretised discourse' through a writing 'which is primarily opposition rather than inquiry.' This poetry 'denies the reader's right of participation' (to which I can imagine the answer that we have yet to establish such a democratic right and therefore a text that appears to be bound by such a right is lying to us), presumably because such secrecy, as many modern thinkers have reminded us, gives power to its controllers. But maybe this ungainliness is somehow the formalist admission of a secrecy that emulates others? Michael Taussig would probably think so. He argues that 'the methodology of human science unites with the ancient methodology of public secrecy as both blur into the charade of scientific detachment.' [Michael Taussig, *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999), 75] It is the idea that 'secrecy magnifies reality,' however, taken from Georg Simmel, which enables Taussig to go further, and say that 'attempts to unmask appearances may actually compound the mystery thereof.' (56) Can it be that the more a poem like *For the Monogram* is unmasked or interpreted, the more interpretation becomes puzzling and overshadows insight?

¶ Oppositional rage is certainly there in some of Prynne's prose. 'J.H.Prynne's essay, 'A Quick Riposte to Handke's Dictum about War and Language,' [Quid 6, November 2000, 23-26] is scoriaceous with the debris of a volcanic anger at the West's 'acts of barbarism which implicate every human domain' in the Balkans. Greatest denunciation is shot at those liberals who protest between sips of vintage, whose 'protest [is] almost as distasteful as that against which it levels its superior moral allegation.' Are they really commensurable? The slaughter of fleeing Iraqi troops in Kuwait on a par with a superficial moral opposition to it? This might mean we would only value heroic gestures, kamikaze aesthetics, the total personal sacrifice of all-out revolution, and never the small incremental and mostly invisible public acts of resistance and reconstruction. When Prynne argues that 'human language is the tribal continuity of expressive human behaviour, and is marked in its very core by whatever depravity or nobility an exercise of linguistic analysis may discover within the human record' my reservations focus only on whether this reduces acts and events in which words are written and uttered to a projection onto a putative orthogonal verbal plane. Language is undoubtedly implicated, but the 'partially observant bystander' he repeatedly castigates is lit by the radiant glow of television's mediation, and is sitting down far away not standing nearby, is not, in other words, able to observe at all. Unless we acknowledge the intervening stages between bombs falling and everyday political comment, language is made too much the quark hypothesis of a fecundly generative hylomorphism.

¶ For a poetics of secrecy? Poetry's once small art aesthetic has been so successful that all commerce and science are now practitioners and poetry as once practiced becomes consoling nostalgia for the good life.

¶ 'Inventor, firstly, was always testing technology.' What? Yes. This is what? Yes, it's a clue for *The Guardian* Crossword set by Orlando on June 22, 2001, and the answer is Watt (acronym of last 4 words). Crosswords are popular enough to sell newspapers on their strength alone. Word puzzles pass time, enact the mystery of reference and signification, and offer consolatory answers to still fears of other less amenable secrets and deeper unknowns, and they flatter intelligence as each clue is solved. An ability to

solve crosswords was a high recommendation for the recruits to Bletchley Park code-breaking teams during WWII. A clue: Matte emulsion silences annotation.

¶ And yet secrecy and alienated rage do seem to go together. A certain perfectionism links them, a sense that every institution, public value, and consensual moral guidance, falls so far short that an aesthetics of secrecy is the only fertile seed of a renewed public life because it enacts the necessary promissory rites of becoming known in shame and hope. And Riley is correct that sometimes this mode seems dominated by rage against injustice written out of the clenched teeth of elaborate verbal obliquity, a muffling anoxic foam protecting expression and reader from a destructive heat that might otherwise reduce language to crude polemic and its author to easily dismissable polemicist. I don't find this in Prynne's poetry. Its interest in limited interpretability is, however, connected to another mode of secrecy, the extensively repeated habitus of verbal secrecy of the governing institutions of modern Britain.

¶ 'The CX Milton gathered ["MI6's intelligence 'product' is known as 'CX'an anachronism from the earliest days of MI6 when the Chief, 'C' in popular fiction, was Mansfield Cummings"(59)] from the meetings was encrypted using highly secure but commercially available PGP encryption software, then sent to London over the internet. [...] Reading an MI6 file can be a slow and laborious job. The papers are arranged in chronological order but that is the extent of their organisation. They contain a vast jumble of information from many sources. Telegrams, letters, police SB reports, copies of military and DSS records of individuals mentioned in the file, titbits from GCHQ, contact reports, surveillance photographs. Many papers cross-reference to other files, so making sense of them means a trog down to the central registry to pull the file. One document in the file might be only peripherally relevant to the case, the next might be crucially important. It is easy to miss a vital titbit and so lose track of the big picture if not concentrating hard.' [Richard Tomlinson, *The Big Breach: From Top Secret to Maximum Security* (Edinburgh: Cutting Edge, 2001), 131, 180] Simple point: this mode of readerly expertise that deciphers secret texts, is one of many readerly competences whose formation is embedded in power, gender, education, religion, and other institutions. To read is to produce socialities.

¶ The viewer, the listener, the reader: useful abstractions when the simplifications they entail can be ignored. Messily historical, enflashed, and distracted persons can be treated for the sake of textual analysis as just the one line of process wholly defined by this vector of attention. Singular, present, and sensory abstract being poised in front of the art. This is a function with a restricted range, however, and its features may not remain stable when the scope is extended in time, community and distance. For many texts whose readership is already established around shared ritual, some familiarity of extra-textual encounter, expected behaviours, formulable prosodies, and a genre as fashion-conscious as any regular highstreet shopper, this abstraction works fine, but for Prynne's texts, which also repeatedly construct cross-register artifices that could not have a perfect reader. Poems like *For the Monogram* borrow from disparate languages that have split off into discrete, localised institutions of knowledge and economies, whose users might conceivably belong to several (the computer expert may be a botanist and musician), Prynne's poetry reaches out to so many registers that the fully consonant reader who would have to be situated in so many linguistic communities does not yet exist in our culture. Should we imagine such readers and how?

¶ The firm, restrained, would-be informative sentences of *For the Monogram* show no tentative reaching for expression despite the constant strangeness of what is written,

although this command of their resources is not why they could qualify as unsayable in Ann Banfield's sense. There is rarely an address or inscribed consciousness, and often little assertoric force. Affect is elusive, emulsified, streaky. Rhythmically, the poems are constructed around a six beat foundation, and their vocalisation (even sub) stretches the verbal muscles with elegant concatenations of syllable that suddenly jerk to a halt in anti-euphonious crash, or stutter into a new rhythm (many words or phonemes are repeated, a troubling of expression that could be read as a sign of muting distress), in which beats pile up in spondees or other longer tight clusters of emphasis. Metapoetics hovers everywhere, notably in the third poem which has the greatest homogeneity of register, because it uses a programming jargon that could also be a macro for the composition of the poem itself ('select an object with no predecessors' might both describe the poetic devices like the frequent use of anaphora without precursive textual identifiers, and also be readable ironically as the description of a poetics counter to Olson's injunction 'whatever you have to say, leave/ the roots on, let them/ dangle,' ['These Days'] when it continues 'clip off its/ roots'). This poem's mention of an 'array stack' offers a particularly inviting image of the poetic layout which recurs in the final poem where 'the arrays lie packed in a dark light,' although it's a sharply anti-poetic concept which also endorses the prominence of the many scientific and medical terms (mostly pathology). Certain words, images, topographies (notably the shoreline), and events, repeat throughout the sequence, intimating recursive patterning and a mind's dwelling upon one thing in a circling dance. A dense etymological and idiolectical polysemy is used to the full, as well as homonyms ('ponder arc setting' explicitly refers to an electrical arc for catalysing gases but in the context of the fifth poem's many allusions to Jerusalem as the site of conflict between Palestinians and Israelis is also a pun on the Ark of the Covenant) and puns ('madder clouds' are both red and further signs of conflict; 'flagrant unction' loops into 'extreme unction' administered to those dying in such conflicts, as well as the emollient rhetorics used by some political leaders). Odd moments of comedy (in the poem on urban mall life: 'Bored with fraud rowdy crowds flip/ coin exchange macaronics like polar bear packs/ propped on the escalator, freak anoraks heating up/ with hormone replacement hints.') are not regular hits of release from tension as in much contemporary avant-garde poetry. Here such larking about is jarred by a subsequent allusion to the black charred shadows and genetic mutations of victims of the atomic bombs in Japan in WWII ('shadows in concrete/ out to the n^{th} generation'), and then the bitter repetition of 'fun first fun rest' pushes at the limits of poem's permitted expression of anger at injustice. Although the reading expected is the antithesis of the crossword solver's indifference to content, the phrasing repeatedly invites a similar first response in which an unarticulated 'what is' might preface a phrase like 'a clinical denouement sunk far past its frolic.' No doubt about the task, but whose, to what end, with what promise?

¶ The interpretation of a poem by Prynne is a set of readings which are also complex actions, likely to include skimming, rereading closely, reading just a few lines, remembering images and moods as well as lines or phrases, and consequent discussions with others, ideas and expectations influenced by these readings, as well as misreading, error, partial attention, projection, and the distortions of intense emotion. Each of these readings is located in time and space, in a material history where it may or may not connect readily with other readings and related preoccupations with the poem, and these histories also co-exist, running in parallel as it were, sometimes intersecting and sometimes developing their own semi-autonomous interpretative momentum. Metaphors of interconnection such as web, weave, imbrication, network, and mesh, can help, but they all tend to underrepresent the extent, intensity and complexity of the history of engagements with the poem, partly because the assemblage of micro-histories also develops a certain autonomy of its own as particular interpretations and knowledges of

the poem gain some visibility, and other social interests push various aspects of the poem into prominence or oblivion. The time of readings may not be calendrically large, but the multiplicity of parallel histories of reading the text produce an aggregate depth of historical time that is. Phenomenologically, the poem is not a unit or object capable of being fully apprehended by one perspective, it is all this historical activity, much of which will never be recorded in writing or any other durable form, and could not be known in its entirety. There is nothing odd about this either, this is the condition of all texts in an age of rapid, cheap printing and other technologies of distribution, when there is a large Western audience of educated people potentially able to read it. All that is different about the poem from other forms of text is that it is much more likely to choose to select features of its participation in this textual condition for poetic emphasis which will complement the words and other poetic strategies that together compose its meanings. The 'meaning' of this extended poem would be a fluorescence of the entirety of these myriad occasions of interpretative reception. To treat the poem on the page subjected to a singular reading by even the most highly trained and knowledgeable reader, is similar to the treatment of a meaning of a word as exhausted by a dictionary definition. Almost all contemporary poetry works to some degree, however limited, or unconsciously, with this condition of textuality, although just as emphasis on sound, prosody, etymology or syntax may vary considerably, so does contemporary avant-garde poetry's selection of this deep time of reception for poetic salience.

¶ In 2001, Prynne self-published a pamphlet of about ninety pages entitled *They That Have Powre To Hurt; A Specimen of a Commentary on Shake-speares Sonnets, 94* [Cambridge: No publisher given, 2001], a phrase by phrase analysis of sonnet 94, a bravura *S/Z* (an *S/T* perhaps—sweet, sense, soul, speech/they, them, themselves, threat, terminally) which takes each significant unit in turn and offers several interlocking modes of analysis. Most salient is the use of other written usages from the immediate period of composition, which frequently leads to the observation of contradictory potential meanings ('adversary semantic pressures'(39)), as well as the mica complexity of possible meaning ('congested possibilities'(39)). A second mode of analysis is afforded by the presumed universality of emotion which can be calculated according to our own norms and observations. The poem's presentation of a behind the scenes activity by the implied speaker trying to make a 'decision about which of his many conflicting emotions to acknowledge as uppermost' has to be inferred by the modern reader: 'the reader has a secondary access to the question only by reconstruction of this route.' What, we might ask, does such reconstruction amount to—is this an affective hermeneutics at work? In Prynne's words, 'the reader is not much encouraged towards guesswork along these lines, nor provided with information.'(22) The final sentence of the essay rings out with a resonant anguish: 'By what ultimate measure of emotion, then, in a high-risk uncharted hazard, could it be that losing everything might still be less hurtful than merely not winning, or prudently not playing against such risks?' (86) Reconstruction is a backward-looking temporal relation which may implicitly assume that the present is somehow privileged towards this past because the present in which the reconstruction occurs carries this past as a latent information within itself. We should at least recognise the possibility that in some ways our moment may not be an outcome of, or a direct causal link to, that past, and that features of that past may have been irreparably lost. To assume that a reader can reconstruct, even as a possibility, is to vote for the optimistic option that at least in the area with which the analysis is concerned, continuity works, and a confidence that could be more examined that our own time's presumptions of what it is to read can be carried across to a distant past.

¶ Individual words and terse phrases are not the only carriers of a historical imagination and current sociality; clauses, sentences and even paragraphs, or still higher levels of linguistic integration, can also do so. Breaking them down this way may work sometimes, and in others produce symmetry groups rather than the thousand things of a universe.

¶ Will there be a Guide to Prynne analogous to the guides to Pound, Olson and other modernists? Many, perhaps most, of the surface obscurities of the first Pisan Canto, for example, can apparently be resolved within a few minutes by reading Carroll F. Terrell's *Companion*. Even the cage where he was incarcerated doesn't have to be imagined: the photograph in *Ezra and Dorothy Pound: Letters in Captivity 1945-1946* shows that it looked like a cross between a locked bicycle shed and a cage for large birds. Canto 74's 'ideogram of the guard roosts' turns out to be a remarkably apt description of the spindly legs of the boat-like lookout and its diagonal strokes of brace. What would it be like to read *For the Monogram* under similar conditions (or perhaps the question is whether such a guide would ever be possible?). Terrell is in no doubt about the gain his guide represents: 'Before a genuine dialogue is possible, the text of the *The Cantos* must be made more easily comprehensible to a sizable audience of students and professors as well as critics. Although some progress has been made, it becomes clearer, as time goes on, that the problems are not so much in the abstruse levels of thinking as in the extraordinary and wide-ranging fields of reference.' [Carroll F. Terrell, *A Companion to the Cantos of Ezra Pound* (Berkeley & Orono: University of California Press & National Poetry Foundation, 1980), ix] So *The Cantos* have been thoroughly read and critique can begin (the two must therefore be separate, both analytically and temporally). What is this 'genuine dialogue' (what other sorts of dialogue are there, and who is participating in this dialogue, and to what interim ends?) that cannot begin until the poem is 'more easily comprehensible?'

¶ A widespread model of interpretation is reading's hindsight, memory's abstraction of essentials from the ruck, a walker for self-consciousness. Reading may or may not be accompanied by degrees of verbal self-consciousness in its cognitive, emotional and physical acts which are not bounded by self, spreading into intersubjective projects and taking part in wider events.

¶ George Butterick begins his preface to *A Guide to The Maximus Poems of Charles Olson* with a quotation from a weary Olson complaining about the burdens of poetry, and adds that these also fall on the reader: 'The major difficulty, and it can be discouraging, is the large amount of reference needed to populate a poem that seeks to occupy and extend a world. The *Guide to The Maximus Poems* provides the scholarship useful for reading these poems which are as complex and allusive as Pound's *Cantos*.' [George F. Butterick, *A Guide to The Maximus Poems of Charles Olson* (Berkeley: California UP, 1978), ix] Do informed interpretations become slowly 'better', each scholar critic able to use the discoveries of predecessors as tools for the making of their subsequent contribution to a series of recorded critical judgements forming interim stages on a passage towards an ever more established and enhanced interpretation that will supervene on those earlier ones? Such an assumption about the work of interpretation would make it negate the imperfect present in which actual criticism always unfortunately occurs. Interpretation would be always waiting for its own demise.

¶ Is the difficulty of a contemporary poem by Prynne (or Maggie O'Sullivan, Clark Coolidge, John Wilkinson, Tom Raworth, or Lyn Hejinian, to name a few poets whose poems appear to anticipate exegesis) a difficulty similar to that which afflicted Pound's

earlier scholars? Are we living too soon to begin the dialogue that Terrell refers to? Is the difficulty a result of our limits as readers, limits that are temporal as well as the result of an informational deficit? Does induction promise a vacation from uncertainty?

¶ *A Kashye af a mayse*—a Yiddish phrase which Jonathan Boyarin glosses as “[what’s the point of asking] a logical question about a story?” What sorts of questions can be asked of a poem also remains moot. [Jonathan Boyarin ed., ‘Voices Around the Text: The Ethnography of Reading at Mesivta Tifereth Jerusalem,’ *The Ethnography of Reading* (Berkeley: California UP, 1993, 212-237, 226)]

¶ In *Stars, Tigers, and the Shape of Words*, Prynne talks of ‘reading with a heightened sense of the accumulated layers and aspects of association which form the significant resonance of previous usage: the whole prior history of the language-community can be tuned to allow and invite the vibrations of sense and suggestion and historical retrospect.’(18) But who is doing the ‘tuning’ here? The first part of this sentence starts with reading, so it might seem logical that it is the reader who works to tune the instrument making its remoter harmonies accessible enough to elicit those more distant and less commonly audible historical cries and hopes. Or is it the composition that facilitates this, already carefully set to make such evocations possible? Does the reader alone have sufficient opportunity to take words as onion-layered time-capsules, to loosen the forces of syntax that insist on completed and disambiguated propositions, and to be the entrepreneur of what the nameless narrator of Robert Browning’s *Sordello* calls the ‘dim/ Abysmal past.’ Or do readers need at least the co-operation of the poets who ‘know the dragnet’s trick’ because whether fate has decided to let the past live on as ‘silence or song,’ they control ‘a realm wherein she [fate] has no right’ and with their poetics ‘lo, the past is hurled/ In twain.’ Although Browning acknowledges that his readers must bring their attention to the text, hence the powerful emphasis on the single syllable (placed in the midst of a line), the ‘lo,’ the injunction to ‘look,’ whose poetic lexis brings to bear the long vowel associated with the emphatical language of a feeling which is still reaching for words, his poem’s own power is doubly underlined by the force of verb and adverbial phrase. And the past is divided in two.

¶ The second lecture of *Stars, Tigers, and the Shape of Words* ends with a brilliant summary of the consequent intricacy of this bilateral past. Prynne is primarily interested to show how the challenge to structuralist linguistics represented by the poetic strategies of literary language, its ‘secondary transgressions,’ might be incorporated into a broader schema that would not require complete abandonment of Saussure, and in doing so he intimates a historicity of reading as a less-material form of the medieval *catena* [See for example, Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: The Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, p.215):

How far these secondary transgressions can then be allowed to be themselves sense-bearing is a function of the interpretative consensus, or of the authority/reader contract, or of the successive sense-productiveness of generic text-types and sub-types; all of this makes up a network of practice which is socially and historically available around a central core of pragmatic accord, a working repertory. It is a counterpart and complement to essentialist analysis of structure, not so much because it operates more in one dimension than another (eg. historical time rather than conceptual space), but because it is an aggregating and proliferative instigation, recursively back-folding and cross-linking, and this kind of incorporative opportunism is idiomatic for a whole pattern of cultural practice in which language is a centrally-mediating agency.’(34)

There is still an ambiguity about the sense in which this network is *available*, and to whom. What restrictions and what openings might control this availability: education, specific knowledge of the local poetic aesthetic, introspection, the raising of the *habitus* or background expectancies to at least partial consciousness, historical (possibly requiring extensive work of recovery if considerable time has passed since composition), leisure, intellectual or other special capacities (a musical imagination perhaps), or even information about author and circumstances of the text's launch? To talk of 'accord,' 'consensus,' a 'whole pattern,' or collective 'agency,' could be to presuppose what does not yet exist, a condition that has to be worked for, just as democracy or the willingness to run a little magazine always require effort and prospective as well as retrospective orientations. One might counter by saying that the poem's composer can only work with what has already precipitated itself into the wells of language possibility, but this would then concede that we are talking now more of inception than reception and cut the present in twain, effacing the projective in favour of the already 'corporate & prolonged action/ of worked self-transcendence' ['Questions for the Time Being, '] available in language.

¶ If, however, we give more weight to the 'aggregating and proliferative instigation' as pointing along a temporal axis of rereadings that will certainly become part of the new reader's 'working repertory,' in both the scholarly sense of a secondary literature and as as everything from remembered gossip, perceived subsequent influences on other poems, to the end results of long chains of cognitive and emotional intersubjective activities which momentarily converge on this new reader, then this reader splits into a conceptual space and a history. The reader as abstraction does not then impose an invariance of cognitive reaction onto an unbounded series of specific historical readerly engagements with the poem.

¶ My reasoning may be adrift in one dimension at least. Am I treating Prynne's few prose texts as parts of an integral project in which every line is consistent and continuous? In a recent essay on the continuing dominance of organicism in literary criticism, Mary Poovey notes that this tendency 'simultaneously makes contemporary criticism resemble a romantic lyric and converts its analytic objects into lyric-like organic wholes' even where tropes of 'structure' replace overt organicism. She argues that 'the developmental narrative which links parts of the textualized and spatialized analytic object to the whole that theoretically contains them is affiliated with the metaphor of organic unity because the trope of development implies an organism that grows into maturity.' [Mary Poovey, 'The Model System of Contemporary Literary Criticism,' *Critical Inquiry* 27:3, Spring 2001, 408-438, 434] Endemic literary criticisms produce a ballooning Pound and Olson (and shortly may even produce a Prynne ready for take-off) whose vast shapes supposedly still retain the contours of the man and poet as they hover (or drift) across the landscape of contemporary critical industry.

¶ For obscurity? Henges, staddlestones, neolithic 'circuses.' How the words break up into pleading syllables repeating themselves for emphasis: 'sylvatic' into sylvan vatic and sylvatic vatic and even sly vatic. A break from the metropolitan vatic of high seriousness?

¶ Both Milne and Wilkinson speak of the need to confer some authority on the Prynne's poems, since the 'speculative inquiry,' as Milne calls it, of interpretation is 'a costly and expensive investment' and 'the poetry needs to be read against the faithful trust of expositors.' For Milne, the poetry's field of production is the imaginative activity of

response to the poetry that is engendered, so that speculative inquiry 'makes concessions to the authority of the work as an object which works against the interests it is made to serve.' (84) Wilkinson is more explicit about the authority he discerns in Prynne's poetry, even if he is puzzled, and asks in the face of the resistance to interpretation of the opening lines of *Not You*, 'why the authority which marks these lines, the impression that they say something which ought to be said? Their authority is a puzzling attribute, by contrast with the work of poets with whom Prynne has been compared—the eschewal of authority has been a cardinal principle of postmodernist practice.' (191) A cardinal principle of some of the more caricatured versions perhaps. Wilkinson offers some tentative explanations to his question. It is all in the syntax, the connectives, the absence of heart-wrenching appeals, explanation or justification, and of arm around the shoulder empathy (formality=authority?).

¶ *Aristeas* (London: Ferry Press, 1968) includes 'A Note On Metal' in which Prynne speculates on the archeological moment when 'the magical resonance of transfer' (15) of objects lost out to the force of mercantile distance, a situationist reading of prehistory that genuflects to the authority of scientists (citing *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* and *The Quaternary of the United States* for example in footnotes). 'The Glacial Question Unsolved' was given similar support from *Quarterly Journal of the Geological Society* amongst several other similar references. *Wound Response* cites an apparently scientific text with inverted commas ("By this I mean a distribution/ of neurons...some topologically preserved transform" (223)) in 'Of Movement Towards a Natural Place,' but neither this nor other similar citations are footnoted, nor are many other allusions to current scientific work even minuted, and this appears to be because the poem is asking what has happened to the values evident in earlier discourses of an agrarian cosmology's sacral ethics now that medical functionalisms ('The warmth of cognition not/ yet neuroleptic but starry and granular') assume the power to cure wounds to body and reason. *The Plant Time Manifold Transcripts*, from the same period, cleverly parodies scientific rhetorics of diminished agency and ballooning, but allegedly dirigible, abstractions ('Willbeen function has always been most powerfully implicated in bilinear time systems with differential enzyme signal rates [...] Monophasic dilation in stem-system time has now confirmed this model for plant process' (240)). By the time of *News of Warring Clans* the anthropological register (and by implication all these professional discourses of knowledge) seem little more than a 'mendacious gab' in the words of the poem, an authority best met with laughter and spitting rage.

¶ The poems of *The White Stones* try various means of resolving a recurrent difficulty with the address of the poem, its claim to authority for its judgements. Throughout the volume the poems pass judgements with the backing of a first person whose sincerity is frequently guaranteed by a tone of sad resignation that rises to poignancy and falls to gloom, and whose reliability is supported by the intellectual acuity, quickness, and scope of the expression. But this only exacerbates the problem. "Foot and Mouth" cleverly allows the poet to portray his own naivety as he waits for his "skilfully seasoned 10 ½ oz. treat" the cleverness co-exists with the gullibility sufficiently to raise the question again which hovered above the opening assertion that "Every little shift towards comfort is a manoeuvre / of capital loaned off into the jungle of interest." (107) When the poem "Questions for the Time Being" (a title whose pun might wait patiently through many readings before triggering itself: these are indeed questions for the Being whose existence is temporal) announces with a numeral three that "What goes on in a/ language is the corporate & prolonged action/ of worked self-transcendence," the statement carries itself syntactically and rhythmically as if taking part in a debate between professional philosophers or linguists, but it has only the poem at its back, unless a reader adduces

some putative authorial authority (the author who is himself a brilliant intellectual etc). Irony, incompleteness, metaphorical involutions, etymological twists of literalism, and many allusive intertexts to poetry and philosophy are not enough to either secure or sufficiently test this authority, so that, almost against its will, the poetry is repeatedly compelled to gestures of defiance that paradoxically only intensify the dilemma. This greatest twentieth century British work about the plight of the intellectual, leaves us in its final poem, "The Corn Burned by Sirius," with near despair as virtue still appears almost within reach, but the civic meets a red light, the passions fade, the sense of nothing is palpable, and the poet's own best self-description is as a nomad, with the diminishing authority this probably entails.

¶ At some point in Prynne's poetic career, trust in science's authority is lost as counter-values from 'the accumulated layers and aspects of association which form the signficatory resonance of previous usage: the whole prior history of the language-community' [J.H.Prynne, *Stars, Tigers and the Shape of Words* (London: Birkbeck College, 1993), 18] become more and more evident to this writer. Now the 'mean square error' may be a measure whose meanness for those on whom it worked can be glimpsed. A 'fulminant offertory' (*For the Monogram*) may be an angry anthem, a terrorist explosion (the gift of a bang) but it also allows that the sudden disease of giving (bribes, credence, faith) might have some wider ethico-sacral intent. Mutterings of historical experience that scientific language mostly silences are picked up by this aural and etymological amplification, and add to the thick semantics.

¶ "Our confidence is end-up like a roller towel" is a characteristically Prynnean witticism which tends to make exposition sound laboured—but in a roller towel the end goes up to be recirculated, and fresh confidence, fresh promise are guaranteed,' writes Wilkinson [201]. And to end up like one too, with all its associations of civic management of the hygiene risks from public filth. But why not just say that our confidence is endless and make reading more accessible? Is it the need to stay in authorial character, or the demands of wit, that insist on this intricate monogramming of ideas? Is the metaphor that unfurls the contemporary politics of confidence somehow more necessary than such explanations allow? One answer might be that the roller towel is not just a poetic metaphor: just as the appropriation of the balloon metaphor for comics in the eighteen-nineties was determined by a deep historical matrix of interests and topical concerns, roller towels might also be manifestations of belief, action and sociality out of which an abstraction like confidence emerges, rather than a metaphor with the roots clipped off.

¶ *For the Monogram* raises questions for its readership about the problem of acknowledging, critiquing, and expressing outrage at contemporary political violence. Poem seven, 'Brisket world animation come out to flay runtime take,' picks up Steve Reich's own 'array' composition, 'Come out to show them,' in which a recording of a black civil rights campaigner saying that he had to make the 'bruise blood come out to show them' (the people trying to help him challenge the use of violence by the police) is already evident in the first line's extrapolation into flaying. The last sentence runs over five lines and addresses a 'you' who would be variously the poet (the more American idiom of saying 'you' instead of 'one'), the reader, the young man whose voice is the music, and the artist who treated this report on his own suffering and the brutality of the white police in the world that treats black men as easy meat ('brisket world), as an aesthetic object: 'you got scarlet out to show it/ in the toy-pack acerbic notation' and 'easy/ bleed pastime.' Does the painful recollection 'flaunted out' by art effect any change of heart, or is it 'peeled easily off from these shores' ('sures'—'sureties'?). Perhaps there's a fading echo of Olson's opening of *Maximus*, 'I, Maximus, off shore' etc, which indicates from the start of

the sequence the problematic of the poem, the poet as prophet's relation to the city, its politics and history, inward and necessarily complicit or outside in what Gillian Rose called 'the holy city' of his own judgement? Poem ten also has many images of terrible violence to the body in a poem that recalls Joseph Beuys's self-mythology of his rescue by nomads in the Caucasus when he crashed as a Luftwaffe pilot and almost died, and the felt and fat that kept him alive. The end of the poem invites reflection on the career Beuys created out of this suffering and the war that occasioned it ('rush impure for famous eclectic margins). Much of the poem makes of me a speculative agent (to echo Milne).

¶ With 'accessible' poetry the obscurity of history and intersubjectivity in poetic form is obscured, so that a false confidence can distract attention from the harder questions. With 'difficult' poetry mere success in decoding can signal feet up from labour. The poem with echoes of Beuys doesn't allow me that leisure, but instead of perpetual labours of my own and a goal of understanding, I could think of this as a poem which is at this present largely elsewhere and elsewhen, so only partially available as impetus to thought and feeling. At some later date I may read along with others more, and find time has altered it, that more conversations, exchanges, history, and writing, have enabled it to say more (or less). I try to imagine Wilkinson, Purves, Milne and others talking and writing this poem again, and after all, although I first read Yeats's poem 'Sailing to Byzantium' thirty odd years ago it remains a guide to thoughts on art and vocation, and is not by any means a finished reading. I have confidence *For the Monogram* will push on a good way yet.

¶ 'You like to feel what the Americans call closure?', says an actor in a British TV mystery. How does closure feel?

¶ Left with awe at the sustained sprezzatura of long sentences perfectly controlling verbs, clauses, and the rapid cutting from register to register, meta-metonymics. The intelligence and beckoning ethical implications of the prose now at work behind the barely scenes. Admiration sampling unaskable questions: take me through this slowly? Bosch-like images of war in no.14 'By sorrow or swallow'; the ethnographics of the mall in no.16 'Prior guesswork'; or the glimpses of the Middle East in no.10 'For cycle down lower done to tire' where the pun on Tyre/tyre indicates the overpainting at work. I try to find informative parallels. Joysprick? Not full-mouthed revels of keeping your puns open. Coolidgean circumventions of all but the striking together of sharply noticed words? This is a poetry with much more design on a readership: 'the now livid/ face of a captured city centre immersed in colorants' is the face of a demand Coolidge would never make. And now I notice again with the pleasure of speculation which Wilkinson, Purves, and Milne all report, that the final line is dirigible: 'shadow under wing chalking the egg yolk cartoon.' But where is this hot air taking me, where are we, is this under control?

WILLIAM SIDDLE • TWO POEMS

Okay then place the turrets where they can be stitched,
relentlessly to bind the tops together. It is all now registered,
longly riven through stiletto ends, needles to the cornet bulb,
stinging the flex of crust with a finesse ripped off, tenderly skirted
to transit, innumerable, loopy; escort rubber

lace with lank cable to the tremolo cutlass, disparaged.
Cauterized, it is palmed like nylon twine on sunburn singing,
and although a laser sight has appeared now on the trumpet mute,
these prospects are hard-tuned. I.D.s dropped like bath-salts
on runaway cuttings. Sidings are benched on C grade lupines.

And imports dock, drop a line down the plumbing, a slender strap on
the bend of unbound slats, a butter-pat sawn with a water-cannon.
This polar stick is no longer *reasonable*, a fraction improper,
a whirlpool in reverse. You've seen frosted glass sinking, like bubbles, to the top.
A big fraction improper because there are separations on the plume,

so star them out in sequence, downward marks on the port-wall
to number off the trick-shot grain. With the log-flume too loose, pink serrations;
with five toes missing, spaced off; with tall, glacial spikes tilting-subsidence, culvert,
trematode, grenadine antlers of pure love. You glimpse fronds of spectacular sugar-work,
like cherries cast on the smelted raffia, and expelled herringbones of soap-scale.