



QUID 17  
For J.H. Prynne

In Celebration

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TOM RAWORTH

POEMS

good stuff  
many returns



## JOSH ROBINSON

### 'Living in History'

The poem places us close to the sea, the site where the regular ebb and flow of the tide is perhaps most visible. We walk: perhaps purposefully, perhaps aimlessly, contemplating the passing of time. Our steps advance. Yet much of the movement is atemporal: while finite verbs cannot but convey tense, this poem repeatedly uses nouns to imply movement divorced from a specific time: 'bearing,' 'stretch,' 'ebb,' 'motion.' Meanwhile, 'his foot prints and | marks' transposes the almost-present footprints and marks, things that have already been created, into a simple present tense that makes us present at the point of their being made.

The steps with which we walk, following a path, resting occasionally, are perhaps analogous to the poem's rhythmical progression. If each syllable is a footfall, then this is not a brisk or determined march with a desired end-point to be reached, but a meander, an exploratory wander. The poem's first line opens with a stress-maximum, but the next eight all start with a weaker syllable before a rising to stress-maximum on the second syllable. The confident first line is followed by a sequence that feels more tentative, hesitant. Taking the typographical arrangement of the poem as a set of (small) flights of stairs, each to be descended in turn, it is not until this hesitancy is ended (with the monosyllabic line 'flames') that the poem is able to reach the bottom step of one of the flights, the furthest right of the three levels of indentation, as if the rhythmical structure of the lines up until that point is part of an attempt to go further, to arrive at a destination that cannot be reached directly. The steps taken, that is, are of no less importance than the point at which they end up.

And even this goal is one that isn't yet reached without doubt. The first line to reach that bottom step is followed immediately by a retreat to the left-hand margin, as if dipping a tentative foot into the water and drawing back on discovering how cold it is. The ebb is patient, we are invited to infer: it waits, it endures, it is passive. It is also wanted, but we do not know by whom. The one who wants is tentative. Accused of dishonesty, the 'footprints' become at once more regular and less like walking:



[...] his track  
in the fact of  
the evening  
the path where he grabs at  
[...]

This four-line section is in what seems to be a relatively regular triple rhythm, as if purposefully not progressing in a straight line. The initial tentativeness has been replaced by the more assured movement of one who ‘grabs at | motion,’ who makes each step with a definite intention.

In the transition from ‘Walk by the shore’ to the more assertive ‘Walk on it,’ the poem moves away from a set of rhythmical patterns where I feel a sense of disruption from the noncoincidence of intonational and syntactical units: for example, I feel compelled to put in a pause at the end of the second line, just after the comma has introduced a break that itself feels slightly strained. Towards the poem’s end, though, although the different sorts of breaks don’t coincide with each other to any greater extent (there’s still something slightly striking about the comma between ‘line’ and ‘of rest’), I feel them to be much more assured. There is still something in the phrase ‘a hope now lived up | to, a coast [...]’ that suggests a possible journey ‘up to a coast’ — but the choice of the particular phrasing feels much more definite, purposeful, resolved. Living in history requires the recognition that history is an unfolding process, and not something static.



## PETER MIDDLETON

### Thoughts on 'Charm Against Too Many Apples'

"Still there is much to be done" begins this poem from *The White Stones*. Since 1969 J.H. Prynne has indeed done a great deal as a poet, creating poems whose pertinent, thoughtful rigour one cannot imagine being without, poems that admonish and dance with ideas in one's mind on the "way into the city" as this poem expresses it. One feels extremely grateful for this and other poems by Prynne. He has written more complex, learned or startling poems, but this one so perfectly merges its reflections with central cultural metaphors that it achieves the rare poise of poetic inevitability. It takes worn metaphors from the bible and puritanism and animates them. The conceit that we are journeying between the ice ages from which emerged our own era the Holocene, whose relatively temperate and stable conditions archaeologists believe made possible the growth of civilisation, and the magnetic ideal of the celestial city, doesn't seem the least stretched or self-conscious. A voice in the crowd of travellers (traders, explorers, pilgrims, tourists?) gives an interview to the reader, a voice showing signs of a certain melancholic weariness with human stupidity and violence. How could we not be exhausted by the mundane trek away from our origins, the route through the forests, the long march through the institutions? The will to knowledge of modern science and industrialisation that transformed Western societies over the past two hundred and fifty years is comically represented as a search for fallen apples, as if we are trying so hard to find truth and facts we will take even the rotten fruit of understanding if we have to, we are so greedy for knowledge and ownership.

The images of sky as the edge of heaven, and the fruit of the tree of knowledge that helps us to gain control of fire and therefore power against the cold from which we came, bring with them a certain intermittent irony. Use of such traditional motifs one might say flatters the very faculty of knowledge that the poem is questioning. We readers are good collectors of information, greedy for it, and so can be assumed to have this knowledge of Christian eschatology, of Dante's *selva oscura*, or the symbolism of *pomona* sufficient for any demands of interpretation. We can pick up the fallen apples in the poem. So the poem presents to the reader a dilemma: what sort of response to the fruits of the poetic imagination, other than the interpretative journey, might be possible?



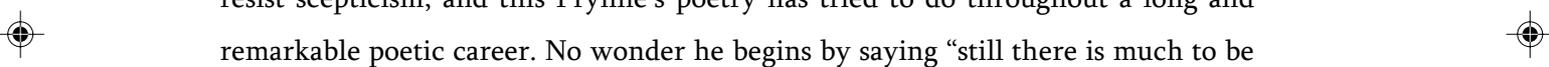
Melancholy is key to the poem's brilliant treatment of this question. At first the speaker appears merged into the collective intersubjectivity, but gradually a questioning tone intrudes: "And so we can't | continue with things like this, we can't simply | go on." This echo of Beckett's tramps sets off doubts that reach a climax in what Prynne would later call an "English emphatical:" "Knowing that | warmth is not a permanence, ah we count | on what is still to be done and the keen | little joys of leaves & fruit still hanging up | on their trees." Maybe calling it melancholy is misleading if that suggests the inertia of depression, for this is the melancholy of a scepticism that creates restlessness, a drive for more to be done. This disenchantment asks, what do you do when you have learned everything there is to be known, what good does this wisdom do you, does it reconcile you with the conditions of existence? The poem challenges the nearly automatic modern valorisation of science's investment in the growth of knowledge, of which Prynne has as much or more understanding than any living poet. Why do we need to go on gathering knowledge asks the poem? It could have settled for an easy scepticism masked by humanism or a self-congratulatory affirmation of high culture. Instead, reading the poem slowly one encounters an almost imperceptible line by line increase in the speaker's self-awareness that leads him to turn away with difficulty from his weariness with scholarship and art, as if Faustus had been able to reason himself out of the disillusion that made him such easy prey for Mephistopheles. The voice that begins by saying that there is "much to be done" ends up concluding that we are failing to recognise "the knowledge that *nothing* | *remains to be done*." It is not a Buddhist moment though exactly what it is, and what would occur if the "whole federate agency" were to "turn out into and across the land" with a "circling motion" is left largely to the reader's imagination. It would presumably not mean an end to reading and writing poems.

If this melancholy almost inevitably makes a reader familiar with literatures in English think of Hamlet the association is not entirely programmed by our education. Prynne's poem sits somewhat oddly on the page, set out as if it were a free verse still faintly acknowledging the glacial pentameter, because its form owes much more to dramatic performance than to the page structures and eye rhythms of modern verse. The visual presentation actually combines two distinct layers: one is the fluid rise and fall of the voicing that often extends over several lines without a pause, following



contours of thought and feeling only imperfectly indicated by modern punctuation. The second layer is the printed display that will break a word such as “incompletion” to create a momentary pun on “income” that is largely for the eye and interrupts the performance. It is as if the transcription of a performer’s speech were then edited to highlight certain ambiguities of sound and semantics. This performative voicing matters because it is always provisional, ready for interruption at every point, and the reader who can resist picking up shiny interpretations may instead continue an unvoiced dialogue with the speaker throughout, a “circling” shadow counterpoint that would constitute a shared commitment with the poem to challenge scepticism.

‘Charm Against Too Many Apples’ asks not only why we pursue knowledge, it questions itself, asks what poetry can do. Creatures formed by the cold millenia of the ice age, we long for warmth, shelter, clothing, and fire. As readers of poetry formed by a Judeo-Christian culture we want a life of steadily accumulating goods, spiritual goods too often ratified by the possession of more tangible ones. Waking up to this condition readily leads to melancholic resignation unless we go further and resist scepticism, and this Prynne’s poetry has tried to do throughout a long and remarkable poetic career. No wonder he begins by saying “still there is much to be done.”



## HANS THILL

### Aristeas : Biting the Air

Das epische Gedicht »Aristeas, in seven years« nimmt eine Sonderstellung ein im Werk Prynnes. Wer die gesammelten »Poems« zur Hand nimmt, wird feststellen, dass der Autor weder vorher noch später einen vergleichbaren Stoff bearbeitet hat. Der Text basiert auf einer halb mythischen, halb historischen Erzählung aus dem Vierten Buch der Geschichte Herodots, die auf eine ältere Quelle (die Arimaspeia) verweist (Herodot, IV, 13). Herodot erzählt vom Hörensagen die Reise des Dichter-Schamanen Aristeas aus Proconnesus, der sich zurückzog (für tot erklärte), um in Gestalt eines Raben bis zu den Hyperboräern zu reisen. Auf dem Weg in den Norden trifft er auf ein sagenhaftes Volk einäugiger Menschen, die Arimaspen, die alle anderen Völker (Issedonen, Kimmerer, Skythen) aus ihrem Gebiet vertrieben haben und nun mit der Gewinnung von Gold beschäftigt sind, das, so Herodot, in den nördlichen Ländern leichter zu finden ist, als im Mittelmeerraum (III, 116). Immerhin müssen sich die Arimaspen mit dem Vogel Greif auseinandersetzen, der das Gold mit dem Schnabel aus der hart gefrorenen Erde holt, es aber dann um so heftiger gegen jeden verteidigt, der es ihm nehmen will.

Die faszinierende Geschichte aus der Anfangszeit der Literatur vereinigt verschiedene Elemente in sich: Naturbeobachtung (der Greif als Gegenstück zur diebischen Elster) und Gesellschaftskritik (der Greif als Allegorie der Habgier, die Arbeit als Kampf gegen eine höhere Macht) treffen sich mit Reisebeschreibung und abenteuerlicher Erzählung, Ansätzen zu einer Völkergeschichte (die Siedlungsräume der Kimmerer und der Skythen), mythologischem Bericht (Aristeas erscheint 340 Jahre später in Metapontum/Italien und fordert die Bewohner auf, Apoll einen Schrein zu errichten) und Theologie: die gleichsam biblische Anlage von Abwesenheit - Tod und schamanischer Reise scheint Wunder des Alten und des Neuen Testaments vorauszuahnen (Himmelfahrt, Auferstehung); so erstaunt es nicht, dass der Internet-Rechercheur beim Stichwort Arimaspen auf ein muslimisches Portal verwiesen wird, in dem die Reise des Aristeas zur Untermauerung der Himmelfahrt Mohammeds auf seinem Pferd Buraq herbeigezogen wird, die vom Tempelberg in Jerusalem ihren Ausgang nahm.

Auch Herodot stellt die Aristeas-Episode an einen privilegierten Platz: Ganz am Anfang des vierten Buches, das der Muse Melpomene gewidmet ist. Ihr Name ist vom Geburtsschmerz abzuleiten, sie ist die Muse des Gesangs, erst in römischer Zeit des Dramas (Schrott, S. 127).

Prynne hat dem Gedicht in der Erstausgabe (Ferry Press, 1968) zwei Motti vorausgestellt, die sowohl den mythologischen als auch den ethnologischen Gehalt des Stoffes herausstreichen: die Vision des feurigen Himmels aus John Bunyans »The Holy City« und eine Beschreibung des Rechts Gastfreundschaft des Fürsten Kropotkin aus »Mutual Aid«: der heimatlose Wanderer tritt ein in eine Hütte und erhält Essen und Schlafplatz am Feuer. Ausserdem gibt Prynne dem Gedicht eine Literaturliste bei, schliesst eine »Note on Metal« an, die anthropologisch argumentierend eine Poetologie des Geldes entwirft.

Das Gedicht ist so heterogen wie seine Vorlage, besser gesagt: seine zahlreichen Vorlagen. Das Gerüst bilden rätselhafte Zeilen, die kursiv gesetzt und nummeriert sind, Zitate aus der Arimaspeia, dem Reisebericht des Aristeas, der nur noch in Fragmenten überliefert ist. Im Umkreis dieser Zeilen entsteht das Gedicht aus Momenten schamanischer Einfühlung (»Gathering the heat to himself, in one thermic | hazard, he took himself out«: gleichzeitig eine thermische Theorie des sich Aufschwingens), Erzählung (»And sprang with that double twist into the | middle world«), anachronistisch-aktualisierenden Elementen (»No | cheap cigarettes nothing | with the god in this | climate is free of duty«), die dem feierlichen Ton ironisierend entgegensteuern, historischen Fakten (»as the stages of Cimmerian | wandering, viz: | 1. 1800 - 13th Century B.C., north/of the Caucasus«). Das Gedicht endet in einer utopischen Umdeutung der Allegorie des Vogel Greif, der jetzt als Wächter gegen die Raffgier steht (»we should | pay them or steal«; vergl. auch Simon Jarvis S. 13).

Wie Prynne in seiner »Note on Metal« ausführt, bestand die Welt vor Erfindung der Metallurgie aus Gegenständen mit unveränderlicher Form. In seinem Aristeas-Gedicht, das eine emblematische Anekdote im Kontext dieser Umwälzung zum Thema hat, setzt er selbst die Technik des Umschmelzens poetisch ins Werk. Hier spricht der Philologe, der Ethnologe, der Schamane, der Reisende usw.: ihre Rede eingeschmolzen in einem Gedicht, das wie kein anderes in Prynnes Werk seine Quellen offenlegt.

Durch die Auswahl seiner Motti verweist Prynne auf das »Element« des Feuers als himmlisches Phänomen und kulturelle Grundausstattung des Menschen. Das Feuer ist auch Voraussetzung für die Metallurgie. Das Gedicht beginnt mit der »thermischen Bewegung«, mit der der Dichter-Schamane Aristeas die Hitze in sich zusammen nimmt. Aristeas verinnert als Person den Prozess des Umschmelzens wie es das Gedicht mit den Wörtern tut.

Mit »Aristeas, in sieben Jahren« befinden wir uns auf dem Gelände des Ursprungs, der elementaren Verhältnisse und gemeinsamen Gesetze. Die Physik gilt für alle Welten, eine Metaphysik wird nicht benötigt. Das elementare Denken, ein Materialismus der Frühzeit, fasziniert uns an der griechischen Mythologie.

Zwischen dem Aristeas-Gedicht und »Biting the Air« liegen mehr als 30 Jahre, eine Generation und unzählige Gedichte. Dennoch ist es mehr als ein Witz, wenn man beide Titel zusammenliest: Aristeas, der in die Luft beisst. Ein auffliegender Rabe mit menschlichem Kern (bei der Internet-Recherche wird man auch zu einer web-site geführt, auf der US-amerikanische Studenten die Frage diskutieren, ob es die Götter tatsächlich gegeben hat) darf durchaus als Luftbeisser angesehen werden. Schliesslich ist auch in »Biting the Air« von Geld und Arbeit die Rede (»sparse programme«, »hunger«, »whipping toy forms« »discount«), der Zyklus steht in der Reihe der Stücke vom Hörensagen wie »Bands around the Throat«.

Doch auch die Unterschiede sind beträchtlich. Der am antiken Erzählduktus ausgerichteten Sprache des Epos steht im Zyklus eine ostentativ aktuelle Sprache entgegen. Die mythisch elementare Welt ist der modern technischen gewichen. Melpomene ist längst Muse des Dramas.

Bereits die Eröffnung (»Pacify rag hands attachment in for muted | counter-march«) ist spektakulär: eine Demonstration, ein Schweigemarsch. Der Text führt sich assoziativ fort, in rascher Bewegung der zahlreichen einsilbigen Wort-Schritte, eher ein Gesprochenwerden als ein Sprechen, das sich mit neuester Technik konfrontiert sieht. Auffällig die Begriffe aus der Welt von Handel und Börse, ebenso auffällig das Sprechen als Leitmotiv: Protest (Anfang), Machtinstrument (»Altogether just say the word as lex loquens«), Mittel kollektiver Vergewisserung (»all tell you this«), auffällig auch die vielen Lärmwörter.

Prynne hat dem Zyklus ein Motto aus der Summa Logicae Ockhams vorausgestellt (»Every property ist the property of something, but it is not | the property of just anything«), ein Spiel mit Gegenständlichkeit und Abstraktion. Die zahlreichen Imperative, die den Text tragen, könnte man als sprachgewordene Rasiermesser auffassen, wenn man den Autor selbst nicht aus »Bands around the Throat« hätte lesen hören. Der ruhige, gleichsam versöhnliche Tonfall von Prynnes Lesung, der so gar nichts schneidendes an sich hat, lässt an einen inneren Monolog denken.

Wer ist der Luftbeisser? Wer spricht? »Biting the Air« konfrontiert den Leser mit dieser Frage wie ein Spiegel, während das Aristeas-Gedicht eine Person aus Fleisch, Blut (und Federn) präsentiert. Der Zyklus endet allerdings in einem sehr persönlichen Ton (»Don´t you yet notice | a shimmer on bad zero, won´t you walk there | and be the shadow unendurably now calibrated.«) Im öffentlichen Raum beginnend, führt uns »Biting the Air« zum Einzelnen zurück, der gewissermassen einsam den Text wie eine Bühne verlässt.

### **Literatur**

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## ALIZON BRUNNING AND ROBIN PURVES

### ‘Smaller Than The Radius Of The Planet’

We need to proceed through this poem bearing in mind a necessary precondition for arriving at a useful account of it: that none of the *Poems* are discrete and exhaustible, in their apparently solitary significations; that they are (also, only, mostly) meaningful inside their ordered and disordered relations with other poems, other discourses. So: the title introduces the idea of measure, a relation that could be set out as  $x < y$ , where we know  $y$  but not the identity of  $x$ . We know that “we are | small” [“The Numbers,” *Kitchen Poems* (1968)], either in the rain or out of it as here, and our presence can only appear insignificant when viewed *in terms of this kind of quantification*, just as the figure for the radius of the planet makes it appear the tiniest speck when measured against the spaces of the observable universe and beyond. *Knowing*, as we do, the length of the planet’s radius, however, along with a sense of other properties, such as the Earth’s mass, can allow us to calculate figures for the gravitational force that is exerted on objects standing on its surface, to state just one of the most pertinent examples for this poem. The first sentence seems to confirm the (purely) apparent demotion of human agents by deferring their introduction until the end of the second line, when one other option could have been to begin with the observers’ presence and proceed with their weather report: continuation of the sentence into the third line admits the fact that they are at the mercy of the elements: forced to come to rest by a wind that “tacks about,” that handles them roughly, that plays with them and upon them like they are instruments and which in some way just identifies them, via the line break, as existences, in a vaguely incriminating way: they are set up for arrest. “Stopped | fingered” can, of course, also refer to a text, when it or one of its parts is brought to a close, or when a finger passes with care along its lines to aid concentration. “Tacks about” is, however, a nautical term, usually to do with running a boat at an oblique angle against the wind: here, the action is transferred *to* the wind and, with the “patch like ice in the sky” our sky becomes a freezing sea. But “tacks” also suggests a joining together, as the forward slash used later (twice) mimics the tacking stitch: a little field of terms concerning fastening or mending, or healing, is inaugurated, with the proviso that these are only temporary solutions to problems of structural weakness or advanced

wear and tear. The first person pronoun is first used to inform us that “I lay out my | unrest like white lines on the slope,” the slope suggesting a particular topology: the gradient of the incline ahead. To “lay out” something might mean simply telling it, setting out the terms of the unrest to the companion or, more reflexively, writing or preparing to write the poem, the “white lines” being the irregular spaces between lines of black characters, or empty rows in a lined notebook, graphic silences. (The word “slope”, according to the *OED*, was used in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century by joiners to refer to a writing-desk.) This act is intended to have a consequence: the agent hopes “that something out of broken sleep will land | there;” the “white lines” are also the marks of a kind of landing strip, prepared for another kind of craft. What looks like an imperative, in the next sentence, introduces what seems to be a *non sequitur*. “Look up, a vale of sorrow opened by | eyes anywhere above us, the child spread out | in his memory of darkness.” This complex sentence points to its own possible decipherment (“Look up” as in a dictionary) and modifies again our understanding of the described environment: the vale, or valley, is located in the night sky; the sky is land as well as sea; they are linked as distances to be travelled. The title of a devotional hymn written by Thomas Hastings might identify the couple as “Pilgrims In This Vale of Sorrow,” in which case the course of a life-struggle or journey is “opened” by the owners of “eyes anywhere above us,” divine and fictitious, or parental and supervisory. The specificity of “the child”’s definite article threatens to confound the reader because it is specific in the absence of any particularized context: its only attributes are gender and the splayed arrangement of his limbs abandoned in sleep or anaesthesia (“spread out” recalling the simile at the beginning of Eliot’s “Prufrock,” whose “etherized” patience connects later to the “ethereal language of love in | brilliant suspense”). A new stage of abstraction is located at what sounds like an apex of meaningful relation: there is no finally determinable referent for “the child.” It might simultaneously or separately be the thought of a dead child, of a sleeping child or of a future child (since, in addition, the “question of future time (what next) is a specific dimension of landscape”<sup>1</sup>). Can the phrase (“the child”) here be said deliberately to avoid the possessive pronoun (“my child”) and could that avoidance push “the child” towards a generality that enables it to escape the determining function of genetic material? Or is the possession utterly assumed? Is “the child” so much my own that “my” need not be used? Whatever

our predisposition, there is an ineradicable pathos in the phrase (“the child”) and no method of extraction will work to deliver us of its sentiment, and leave us with an immaculately heartless concept. That iota of feeling reconnects to a shared, personal stake, introduces (“And so, then...”) Venus, the planet most clearly visible from this one, and goddess of magnetism, the force of attraction and procreation, which in turn re-introduces the first person plural: “we are still here.” “Still” is a word of persistence as well as immobility, but immediately the first person singular is reasserted, in the act of perception and in the absence of any discernible distraction, staring into an undifferentiated void: the sky as sky. An embedded quotation then refers to the practice of determining the distance, from this planet, of supernovae or globular clusters of heavenly bodies. Since we can directly measure the distance of objects inside our own galaxy, we can estimate the distance of objects outside of it by comparing the brightnesses of their intrinsic luminosities. This particular quotation, from an unknown source, may gesture outwards towards the death of distant suns or the limits of the observable universe if the “spread in intrinsic lumin-/osities” exhibits a decrease in detectable brightness across the array of observed objects. Line breaks shiver the words “de-/termined” and “lumin-/osities” displacing their parts to separate lines, drawing attention most noticeably to the terminal root of the former (“de-/termined” = infinite?), before a hyphen appears to identify the content of the scientific fragment with or, literally, as “the ethereal language of love,” said to be in a state of luminous abeyance, glittering deferral or lustrous indeterminacy and doubt. If the “hesitant arc” refers to the diurnal or nocturnal arcs, parts of the topography of the heavens which a body has to pass through above or below the horizon, it is “hesitant” perhaps because the transition to day appears overdue or at least very close but not yet. The horizon is the place where our day breaks, a time-limit, and the time of the poem is a pregnant pause before time begins again. Since, as we have already learned, the “question of future time (what next) is a specific dimension of landscape,” the imminence of day light *is* (or, more conventionally, *prompts*) a decision or an action; in this case, the continuance of the action of keeping, prolonging a constancy of contact, “one hand in my pocket & one in yours:” we return from the outer edge of the universe and are brought back down to earth with a touching, set out in a fragile condition of anticipation that can’t quite cancel the previously registered turmoil and uncertainty. “Yet I need it



too” could imply that this return is a shrinking back from the apprehension of a cosmic quality of love into the more needy privacies of the single figures: keeping something in your pocket is an act of suppression or concealment, whereas being ‘in someone else’s pocket’ suggests a risky relinquishment of personal autonomy: strung between the two is the attenuated but heavenly amorous discourse: ahead is the mere and meaningful picturesque, snow on the first dawn of a new year.

1. Letter to Peter Riley (14 Feb 1967). *The English Intelligencer* 1st ser. 16: 256–57. The most important prose text for proper elucidation of this poem remains “On Maximus IV, V, & VI.” *Serious Iron* [*Iron* 12] (ca. 1971): n.p., a transcribed lecture, given at Simon Fraser University, B.C., on 27 July 1971, which was reprinted in *Minutes of the Charles Olson Society* 28 (April 1999): 3–13. Here, Prynne outlines a cosmogony in which the “curvature of the universe is love,” where we look up and out in order to come back down and in, following the trajectory of centrifugal force and then gravitational pull. In 1971 the universe was curved; since about 2000, it has been more or less accepted that the universe displays zero curvature; we exist inside a flat universe that will, we are told, expand forever, without collapsing into what was referred to as the “Big Crunch” at the end of the curved model. Idiots might feel consoled.

## PETER RILEY

### 'Sun Set 4-56'

*Small flares skip down the coal / face...* I hear a voice from some strange poetry cupboard saying, "The poem is set by a warm fireside in winter..." We can't have this comfort at the start, the words are subtly displaced from it: slightly wrong or slippery. *coal face* is more than the side of a piece of coal, it's industrial, it's where the miner faces the rock, it's a work site. *flares* are also bright flaming things manufactured for use as signals (flares were used a lot in Rennes during the recent French demos) or to disperse fog. If the poet is by the fire, this magnification also places him in it. But he's in it by *skip* and *fancy*, he's in it "as if," which is easeful, a playful turn of poetry, giving in to indolence, how can I not? But the isolation of *face* makes it a pivot word — "How can I face..." so it's serious again.

*the / warm indolence of fancy...* The question is metamorphosis and this is the initial reluctance, ambiguously floated between desire and fear. There is a fracture at the stammer, *them/the*; the flares are singularised, and the issue is openly enunciated, but quite ambiguously. How can I refuse *fancy*: the sleepy mesmerisation before the flares, or the heroic torch passed into my hand. A whole question of allowing the organism its drift is engaged already, not ever to be really settled. The wobbly left margin and the persistent enjambment, especially line-ending with *the* or *&*, are the same hesitance, which goes much further into the poem, perhaps only the last line clear of it.

*solace of wheels muffled in sheep-skin...* How can I (face) refuse, then, an elected / protected position. The right not to be disturbed by the traffic, a work requiring an isolation and special terms. Sense of the creative venture impending as withdrawal, at least in its preludial course and uncertainty as to how deep that groove is. I feel that *solace* is a serious word, not casual, and the tension between threat and lure is being deepened here as a vocational scrupulosity, the shamanistic "let this not come to pass," reaching reluctantly for the animal cloak. I don't know when wheels were ever muffled in sheep-skin (on the road or wrapped round the wheels?) but the image seems archaic, the glimpses are of further and further distances. *skin* is the final and

isolated term of this entrance-passage because that's what it all is, all this drowsy reluctance.

Note that we are led through this first section by alternating steps of F and S sounds, like some old steam engine, reiterated fricatives, lulling/alarming slownesses, skin sounds culminating on their own emblem, until the entire sonority suddenly changes.

*then Bruckner on the radio...* The sound changes like a train coming out of a tunnel. Big U, big A, twice, moving faster in two longer sprung lines onto the big broad A, *hearth*. The poem has been moving within a domestic economy determined by provision and protection, feeling the strain of it, living on a ground which is "here" but figured like a dream of drifting away. It bursts out of this into the pivotal action which casts the spell, takes up the self and delivers it back in an instant. But it bursts also into the specific actuality, ... *the hearth & returned changed* ... full only of our immediate and domestic reach: Austria, radio, late 19th Century, self and music shooting through the air at unthinkable speeds and arriving as soon as they left. Breaking into the real: the real distance and the real place where it happened and what is there, breaking into experience, focused on the sacral word, *hearth*, which always carries and must carry resonance of both *earth* and *heart*, the substances of which it is made; this is after all poetry not some note to the cleaner. It seems to be the music which does this (possible problem with Bruckner? see below) and if it is, so it is, but presumably it could have been any number of things, as long as it does get done. And this self-loss, surrender, seizure, is precisely in the most intimate location, the actual "setting" that the poetry cabinet wanted from the start. For once, we know exactly where the poet is (and phrases like "on the radio" welcome and save us, phrases which admit us without questions asked, whatever pandemic distrust may lurk round the corner; verbal disjunction is here only a shadow on the offered hand) and this is the core and focus of settlement, the burning centre with its small total vacuum. The more given to it the more snatched from it.

*& unnoticed...* Also not breaking, into or through. For a healing continuity rides over the vocal changes and by it indolence still reigns, and the changeling is restored so as you would not notice, on the quiet (as against Bruckner, who is usually very much on

the loud) and that is all perfectly obvious — the nothing which has also happened, the commonplace. This is after all, only a poem.

*pulse of birch tar & molten amber...* But a poem which frees itself from both the chatter of the times and the science-master's ration and darts from zero to impossibility in a breath. Amber can't of course be melted. It's a fossil resin, and if heated it will soften and then burn (hence the German, *bernstein*). The conceit is as impossible as Herrick's "Lutes of amber" about which J.H. Prynne indulgently complained in *Force of Circumstance*. You would as easily distil gold from lead. The word is more rarely used to mean electrum, which helps (conjoining two failed histories of currency) but we need the resin: it is magnetic, attracts particles when rubbed, and we need the amber routes, major prehistoric trade routes from the Baltic down to the Adriatic and the Aegean, bringing amber to Mycenae and the whole "ancient world," probably forming boundaries decisive in the formation of European territorial divisions, creating islands such as Lithuania, enterprise and desperation. This is where amber moves and is "molten" by human agencies and hungers, this is where it is in the blood. At this point the imagination (which can be allowed if "fancy" can) finds itself in the further reaches of knowledge, sharing the *pulse* of the biosphere. Still rather charmingly hesitant in that American nervy-poetry style (another dangling *the*) though it should not be taken for some pseudo-Buddhist floatery; everything is logically pinned to its contingency. From the moment the small flares start skipping the casual attention is drawn into a climactic series: illumination out of dissolving, leaps across the earth.

*in the vein... the* dominates the end, that identity, definition, that titling. *The* splits the conventional verdict on poetry, "in vain," into an objective, anatomical/ geological site where the strange blood flows, so that it flows to a purpose. Imagination derives from fancy, fancy develops into imagination, there is no dichotomy. Metamorphosis is here achieved: whatever is wrong (with the world) there is hope. And not so metaphysical either. The estranged blood is also the stranger's blood. The self returned to itself at its epiphany, pulses with immense ranges of script, but also with common fate.

So, what are we left with in the end? I decided not to attempt to answer this question. There is a point where the poem has to be handed back to the world. All I've done is suggest some reading techniques, deliberately stopping short of "depth" analysis. For me the poem is on the surface, and what lies under it is not poetry and of no great interest, and the working of the poem on the surface is the only thing worth talking about. I leave this poem gratefully as a stunning little play of shadow and light, sombre and delight, on the world's flat time. You know it must be for the good by the breadth of the intake.

*Appendix: do you have a personal problem?* Yes I do. I have a personal problem with the number in the title, which I assumed to be time of day, thus mid-winter well up in the northern hemisphere. But we normally use a colon for that, not a decimal point, and questions arise of its being a quantity, or a date, or a count... I have to leave that to those who rejoice in such quests. But making "sunset" into two words is not a problem; it re-possesses the time as a verbal action and names the poem as a "set" or sequence of sun events descending from flare to amber and blood.

I have a bigger personal problem with Bruckner. I'd want to know which Bruckner, since he of the symphonies and he of the motets seem to me to be about as different from each other as it's possible to get within one *oeuvre*. Tone is all. I distrust the symphonies and find it hard to believe that that bombast, that mounting of sheer power, effected the central instant transformation; yet the motets are so rarely heard, especially on the radio in the late afternoon, and if ever there were a music designed to blast the listeners' heads into barrage balloons from Vienna to the Baltic and Crete, it's the symphonic Bruckner's. Perhaps the tone is "Bruckner, of all things."

I have a general personal problem because these days I feel I should be locating heavy political implications, hints at world power structures, and I don't. They are there from the birch tar to the coal and amber, the metamorphosis of vegetable substance into mineral, in which we intervene to gain our ornament, precious stones, fossil fuel. Compare *molten amber* and oil. What does oil do for us in the end but decorate us with shiny badges of supremacy, gained at immense cost to others? Or don't compare. I don't see a need to or feel a pressure to. And the last thing I'd want to do is start excavating "what was going on in the late 1960s." The poem itself drags



me away from such determinist clamps. War is before us, without our having to smear newsprint on our eyes. The blood is, as yet, still in the vein.

## MATT FFYTCHÉ

‘Es Lebe Der König (for Paul Celan, 1920-1970)’

The foundation of a world: its basis is collapse. At once cataclysmic (the sky is “hot with its glare,” “shrivelled hair on my wrist”) and sluggish (the fire “oozes,” the cloud “eases”). Hölderlin’s hymn ‘Der Ister’ begins “Now come, Fire!” For Heidegger, the calling of those who call forth this fire is poetry. Hölderlin’s ‘Brot und Wein’ invokes Dionysus, bringer of fire and honey, but tells us “we have come too late.” In his ‘Vulkan’ incandescence becomes hazy: “You come now, friendly spirit of fire, and wrap | The women’s delicate minds in a veil of clouds.”

Celan’s *Atemwende* is inflamed and riven: “The with heavens heated | firefissure through the world,” “The abyssverse on the fire red forehead.” He hears an abyss in German lyrical plenitude. ‘The Vintagers’ reworks ‘Brot und Wein’ as a litany of *weinen* (crying). German poetry distrusts “beauty,” it “wants to locate even its “musicality” in such a way that it has nothing in common with the “euphony” which more or less blithely continued to sound alongside the greatest horrors.” Celan marked his copy of Heidegger’s ‘Wozu Dichter?’ against the phrase “poet in a destitute time: singing on the trace of the departed gods,” but he turned down the philosopher’s request for a contribution to a *Festschrift* for his 70th birthday. In Prynne’s poem, too, the sublime is savage. Dionysus turned humans into animals—“fur brushing my knee-skin,” “void air taking pelt;” here we receive the inversion: animals whose “throats fur with human warmth.” Celan forms the compound “Tierblütige Worte:” words blooming and bloody like animals.

In his 1971 lecture on *Maximus IV, V, VI*, Prynne gives a lesson on the poverty of cosmology. Man is estranged from that which is most familiar. “What was most familiar was home...Home is the planet on which you live.” Not “that unbelievably gross photograph of the earth taken across the surface of the moon” but a home given in “the exactness and completeness of poetry.” Prynne points to the phrase that Heidegger drew out of Hölderlin’s ‘In Lieblicher Bläue:’ “poetically man dwells on this earth.” In ‘The Question Concerning Technology,’ Heidegger explores the way in which *techne* has lost its primary sense of revealing, being “at home in something,” which links it to *poiesis*. In modernity, appearance submits to a technology which “pursues and entraps nature as a calculable coherence of forces.” Agriculture is a conveyor-

belt for the food industry. Heidegger's term for this is en-framing. In 'Wozu Dichter?' he describes the ground as "the soil in which to strike root and to stand," and warns: "the age for which the ground fails to come, hangs in the abyss."

Here, enframing cuts towards the very limits of apprehension. Primal "fire" submits to the exactitude of the "Richter scale." The house "becomes technical," the flame is an "abstract review." The high points are technical: "peaks in the wire, purple layers in the glass format." The sublime is ordered as a standing reserve. A plum exudes a "fanatic resin" but this is "at once forced in, pressed | down," ignition for sacred boredom. Starlight becomes negative because light from stars no longer exists at its source: "The name is the sidereal display, it | is what we know we cannot now have." Language is "the house of Being." The "beloved enters the small house;" the house is impoverished, "it is not possible to | drink this again." Heidegger warns that "what once was called home will dissolve and disappear." He "who has been made so unclear," singing on the trace of the departed gods, "Great, glowing vault | with the | outward- and away- | burrowing black-constellation swarm;" "The world is gone, I have to carry you" (*Atemwende*); the poet who "with man-made stars flying overhead, who shelterless in the open, in this till now undreamed of and thus uncanny sense, goes with his being to language" (Celan, Bremen speech).

But starlight becomes negative in a second way. All stars become signs, all prints are divisive. Star of general, of jew. The cultural high-points are implicated in murderous collateral damage. Humanity divides those who "walk in the shade of the technical house." The plum exudes its fanatic resin, but "You know | the plum is a nick of pain." Peaks in the wire are barbs fencing captives, "numbered like | prints," the small house in which the beloved are erased.

A sickening honey irrupts from the smouldering ethical body. But the poem digs its teeth further, into the very collagen of lyric. Heidegger's lectures on poetry were already a saving retreat from passionate historical assertion. Hölderlin's 'Vulkan' states that man is godly by virtue of a withdrawal from forcefulness. Faced with fury outside he is "more himself and rests and ponders | Safe in his cottage, the free-born mortal." In Trakl "The spirit is flaming;" it is a flame that "inflames, startles, horrifies" us, but there is an "unborn element in the nature of mortals, which is quieter and hence more stilling" (Heidegger, 'Language in the Poem'): "The wild game's face



retracts into gentleness,” the animals have a “watchful calm,” “wild deer bedding down” (Oppen, ‘Psalm’), “Forbearance comes into the stormy sky”. The poem constantly resounds these notes of a turn from vehemence to calm, but it also grinds this tranquillity back into the heart of catastrophe. For Heidegger’s transfiguration of the sexual and inflammatory into “the peace of friendship,” and Hölderlin’s mortal safe in his cottage, merely abandon the outside to the night and fog of the Third Reich. The “animals with their watchful calm” are the counterpart of the “forced lust” of the long-tailed bird, whose “total awareness” is as technical and absolute as the sexual selection that produced its long tail. Forbearance is thus ethically neglectful, or methodical and hungry. A soulfulness founded on the embodiments of love and pain is potentially en-framed in the body’s own drive for gratification. The beloved enters the small house. The house is erotic, “your fingers | accompanying you far inside the crevasses’ (Celan). The plum is a sexual gland exuding a fanatic resin that is repressed and sublimated and only thus earns us “the respite, we have so long.” It is a sanguine fire, *Tierblütige Worte*.



Celan’s poems are on their way towards “an approachable you, perhaps, an approachable reality.” Surfing the pleasures of this triply disturbing calmness—evasive, predatory and erotic—“We stand just long enough to see you” but “We hear of your | fearful groan and choose not to think of it.” Your pain is as divided and removed as starlight. It is, with the poet, “as with the wretches in Phalaris’s bronze bull, who were slowly tortured over a slow fire; their screams could not reach the tyrant’s ears to terrify him; to him they sounded like sweet music” (Kierkegaard).

The sky has a homely curve; and groundlessness a vicious circularity. Lucile’s cry “Es Lebe der König” is an act of freedom: “It is a step...homage to the majesty of the absurd which bespeaks the presence of human beings.” But each new step sets off from the murderous trail: “We deny the consequence but the outset surrounds us.” Set the table for another sacred feast. The page is primed for white honey as standing reserve. We choke on music made from “the thousand darknesses of murderous speech.” Or it is spread for “prints in the new snow:” open the window and “white fleecy | clouds sail over the azure,” in lovely blueness. What we see is the freedom of “the most worthless accident,” is the homely curve of the sky. Something clouds our vision. “A man who walks on his head sees the sky below, as an abyss.”



*Tagschlucht.* “We try not to think of it.” “This pain, the great soul’s fundamental trait, remains pure harmony with the holiness of the blue” (Heidegger); “climb on a blackish field, the night | needs no stars” (Celan). Into the day and, maybe, out of it again.



## KATE FAGAN

### Poem for J. H. Prynne

Elementary guards outlandish  
& tawdry, even where specialty dowers  
pimp wares for plasma idylls

Precise anachronisms  
give as much comfort at 3am  
as found denotations or marginal glyphs

flourish secure while westbound  
kombis of surf atomics  
shuffle plots like acid hypnos

For another euro they'd do it again  
trade aside the killing fields  
snake-bright and darker than hard

The usual refrain won't signify  
Potentiate in spatters, nineteen fourteen  
showing up like collision rash

## JOHN WILKINSON

### *Into the Day*

*Into the Day* was the book by J.H. Prynne which first compelled me; through the frustration of attempting to close-read these poems, I understood poetry I could barely describe might provide rewards greater than what readily submitted. This plate just couldn't be polished off. *Brass* might have taught that lesson, but I did not encounter it – too expensive for an undergraduate – until I knew *Into the Day*. What does this book mean at some distance in time?

English poetry then offered nothing comparable. The poem cycle begins:

Blood fails the ear, trips the bird's  
fear of bright blue. Touching that  
halcyon cycle we were rested in ease  
and respite from dismay: strip to  
the noted bark, stop the child.

What goes on here? For that is the question I learnt to substitute for: What does it say? These lines sound like scene-setting, couched in historical narrative, proclaiming theme. Their syntax is correct, their movement lays down the law. Given though that 'we' and 'the child' are unattributable and fail to return in the first poem, and 'bright blue' might be the sky or the kingfisher's (halcyon's) own wings, and given too the poem's refusal to explain its moves, here, evidently, was 'advanced' poetry. Advanced poetry meant textual derangement, extremity of personal testimony, chance procedures or parataxis, each inviting swift recognition before engaging its dedicated reading mode. None of these seemed apt.

The language of *Into the Day* differed startlingly from *The White Stones*, whose urgency was discursive and founded in an ethics of inhabitation. Although this cycle alludes to Charles Olson's poem 'The Kingfishers,' it presents an emphatic shift in Prynne's poetic: henceforward he will cease primarily to 'hunt among stones' but cue to measure, to time. Disputational syntax now gives way to a conductor's authority. Who is being enjoined, insistently and in a discourse whose adjectival springiness



brooks no argument? This writing's articles and deictics assert that we know the score. Outrageously, because the model of the poem as a medium for a man's speaking to men is so inculcated that a poem exhibited or staged, to be approached, read around, considered at different times and in different lights; or the poem as a score or plough-line to be followed; or the poem as orchestration (intellectual and musical) to be attended to or entered; none of these possibilities can offer itself until the speech model has been closed off as resolutely as these first lines achieve in face of the obstinate reader. Although the cadences of speech in high rhetorical mode charge Prynne's prosody here, they eschew the assumed intimacy of contemporary lyric.

This departure from intimate speech is by a notably different strategy from the parataxis so important to Anglo-American modernism, handing over the poem to exegesis for formal resolution. Of course, exegesis might be otherwise solicited; the assurance of Prynne's first stanza could prepare for allegory and a process of disclosure whereby the reader's struggle for meaning becomes itself a moral or religious training.

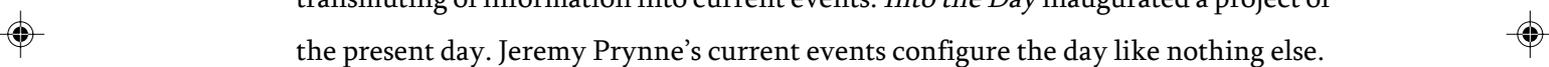
But the poetry does not need such strenuousness or devotion, even if it would attract it. The first stanza could be taken as a thematic announcement in a musical sense. Its elements will develop and both ear and mind follow their development with pleasure, within this cycle and in subsequent work of Prynne's (which requires an active memory). For instance, and reflexively, the ear closed in the first line is to be recognised in later passages both through its physical structure and through its attention to music. Crystal and quartz belong to the same thematic complex owing to their use in timing, in measure. A cluster opposing and closing the ear is announced in the word 'bark,' associated with other coverings such as paving-slabs, and with fear, blockage and aversion. There may be a link between covering and print, via lithographic stones and trays – in the second poem 'circa 1430' may refer to the invention of moveable type.

Elements such as ear and bark will recur altered by their context, because they are incorporated in a poem cycle tracking a diurnal cycle, one of several by Prynne (the distinction between diurnal cycles and books of poems seems lost with *High Pink on Chrome* three years later). The 1972 first edition of *Into the Day* presents this diurnality visually with its black disks at front and back and its yellow disks dividing the two parts of the cycle. The corpus of Prynne's poetry, from *Brass*



onwards, shares a character whereby what is presented seemingly as allegorical, is by degrees recognised as laid out openly: this is a poetry of open secrets. Some have identified the pilgrimage or trek as an organising motif, but its apparent teleology, as in depth, breakthrough or birth, is linked to recurrence rather than arrival or return and is more a heartfelt contrivance making it tolerable to go on. *Into the Day* inevitably returns to darkness, ‘from frenzy | to darker fields we go,’ but ‘in the set course’ there will be day again and in these temporal and measured terms it becomes possible to say ‘we go.’ What do we do with what we cue to, with our stewardship, will then become the main theme. Therefore later poems will darken. Even in *Into the Day* for all its gorgeousness, oil spills from the lamp and becomes ‘an arab | tide,’ and what becomes of the first stanza’s bird, is ‘its claw broken’ or is it reduced to ‘the Egyptian plover’s label’? Literal truths abound and must be seen for what they are.

What we hear and know of the world is constituted according to pre-set scripts, whether comforting, terrible or diverting, and our responses tend likewise, in assent, disinterest or impotent outrage. It is not invention we need from poets but the transmuting of information into current events. *Into the Day* inaugurated a project of the present day. Jeremy Prynne’s current events configure the day like nothing else.



## D.S. MARRIOTT

### 'Of Movement Towards a Natural Place'\*

\*I have chosen this poem because I intend what follows to be no more than a footnote to Douglas Oliver's excellent reading in *The Grosseteste Review*. Also because I read this essay "before" my first meeting with Prynne which meant it became the after-affect or trace of that meeting. If my nostalgia is false that was because I was already lost to the corpus of *Poems* before I became a poet; the circle of questions already tied to the inaugural and the myth-ridden, *Dichtung* and *Denken*. Suffice it to say, I'm not sure of the order of awakening nor of its passage. Besides, I was too nervously overwrought to have discovered then that this was indeed a moment of irony destined to repeat itself in the history of spirit.

First published in the 1974 collection, *Wound Response*, 'Of Movement Towards a Natural Place' requires an immensity of effort. The idea of connecting a phenomenology of time to neuroleptic transform; "remorse" to a pathology of syntax, presupposes connections and silhouettes that already assume that "poetic" thought is a form of speculative thinking. And maybe this explains the sardonic irony and tone: to retreat balefully from the complication of such speculative poetry is already to *misrecognize* why words misconstrue the real and deep and true actualities of intuition and the felt simplicities of sensation. Actually, perhaps "sensation" is too empirical, too British a word. 'Of Movement Towards a Natural Place' is a poem that wants to speak in Greek, Latin and German. At least, those languages in which ontology speaks and brings us near to those prereflexive moments wherein language itself is penetrated and image, word, and syllable converge in prismatic clarity. Or better put, the species-veil of tropes, metonyms and figures that we conventionally use to screen out the real are here offered up to immediacy as the horizon of "being-there." It's a classic modernist move in its emphasis on a dual, conflicted relation between meaning and being: it's an appeal to primacy of meaning via the most differential, abstract figures of indeterminacy. And maybe this is why Prynne's stop-start syntax and wrap around lines frequently cause me to squint, stutter; I know that repeated readings of this poem will not offer any clues to its future transparency. Nonetheless, I cannot imagine a more serious reflection on intuited phenomena—the meanings we invest in them; the

linguistic assurances that we use to cover over the primal structures of experience. All this in a poem that speaks in mimicry of how consciousness becomes grammatically idiosyncratic when pain breaks in on the rarefied verbs of *da-sein*.

So to the poem. As indicated above, 'Of Movement Towards a Natural Place' is about time. In sum, how time emerges in human finitude as becoming but also as a singular process of physical force, molecular datum, and remembered actualities. The dialectical unity of time-lapse and bodily process enters into the poem in terms of a comic play on the time internal to the self-reflexive awareness of a bruise. The sidereal time of sun and stars acts here as both the ineffable transcendental horizon to the causal chains of blow, pain, meaning and their *a posteriori* interaction. Trauma, in brief, only emerges after the event has been made sense of both logically, via the copula of a judgement, and psychically, via verbs of recall. It is therefore illegitimate to talk of time as somehow separate or outside the psychomimetic register of the "contre-coup." Pain lies in the incarnation of local events overshadowed by the meanings we give to existence. Even if recall is "false" one can still sense the temporal-neural ecstases of time whose "charge is still there." The medical term "contre-coup" renders this dialectic as a reversal of causal chains and of logic. Like the temporal-physical event of the blow, the contre-coup registers duration but its spreading internal sensation does not follow the temporal logic of syntax. The contre-coup, in sum, is heterogeneous to the way language affirms and represents violence. The fact that "blame" "patters like scar tissue" does not negate the arbitrary virtuality of the contre-coup, but language doesn't embody it either. This point also applies to measure and calculability and topology in the second stanza: the pain or affects that are logically contemporaneous with the actual blow should not be confused with "vulgar" accounts of time. Time itself unfolds. Just as the force of the blow is cross-referenced to the numinosities of the sun, the moral self is also burnished by the transcendental imagination.

At such moments of "godly suffusion" Prynne's Heideggerian references to Empodocles' early Greek theodicy strike me as austere, sublime, and ridiculous all at the same time. Why render the delay between lesion and judgement, molecular damage and sidereal motion, in terms of what can only be termed an ontology of "strife" and "love"? I understand the need to distinguish clock time from primordial time;



crystallization of the blood from both the *logical* order of syntax and the *phenomenal* temporality of “before” and “after.” But why translate—and I use this word deliberately—an existential analytic of bodily sensation into a worldly ontology of time and world where violence suddenly becomes a primordial surging? Why connect the false, intensional light of will to a metaphysics of chance or perfective gnosis? These questions are not really about the poem, but about my understanding of Prynne’s modernism: I find the need to mine an ancient source in order to register a modern poetics of calamity as paradoxical. Why? Because in a poem about the dislocation between meaning and being the need to recuperate a prior more original essence (be it the mythic and ritualistic progress of the sun through the ecliptic or the diurnal motion of the earth) is itself a “false” anamnesis. It is instructive in this regard to see how closely Prynne, during the 1970s, followed a path of *Aletheia* (truth as unconcealment) rather than the speculative violence of the later works with their systematic destruction of all forms of speculative logic. *Wound Response* is, in my view, the lavishly understated beginning of this destruction.



**JOW LINDSAY**

Excerpt from AN OPEN LETTER TO J. H. PRYNNE

Dear Jeremy,

I was trying to work out when we met. Was it in traffic? Whipping around the Trumpington/Lensfield roundabout the cyclist – all dispatch and vantage – not the motorist – drool boiling in a beam – attains the upper hand, and if he plays it right, the upper heart. So, an heretofore dependable exhilaration involving my hair was basically fucked by this fully-restored, hot pink, 1963 convertible Jaguar E-type roadster, its chassis twisted through 90° for the “shore crab” driving experience – the road being one of those texts best positioned in the corner of your eye – some largesse, exemplifying all this across three lanes – and, the iridescence on the cherry, parping your horn, not evidently on approach of hazard, nor to communicate to your rivals some dissatisfaction with their velocities, but *in time* to c.140 decibels of Johannes Ockeghem’s *Diligamus nos invicem*. ‘Tips on Road Rage,’ you handed me. Reiterating the combination of philological rigour and pimped vintage sportscars for which you are notorious is of course easier than conducting argufication in any degree controlled by your texts; I’ll come back to this stuff but first I have a newsflash about “The *Plant Time Manifold* Transcripts.”<sup>1</sup>

“The discussion was to have commenced with a paper from the Black Cosmos (*C. diversifolius atrosanguineus*) and some deeply serrated fibrillation was rumoured to have transpired; but there’s no smoke without fire and the inversion was set up by Grass, the pasturage team from some area whose name didn’t reach me” (241). Conspicuous, eclectic, insouciant erudition has become a standard feature of hysterical realist / maximalist prose, your Thomas Pynchon, your David Foster Wallace, your Mark Leyner, your . . . but with *this* poem we might as well be in 1601, it has the tumbledown fustiness of a Thomas Nashe originall, we might as well be in 1735, it has the neo-Pindaric table-talk variety of Pope’s Horatian epistles, we might as well be dining at Thomas Love Peacock’s *Crotchet Castle*, it has that compiled richness, indeed, we might as well be listening to Erasmus Darwin’s over-justified porno at the dawn of the nineteenth century, mightn’t we?

*Mightn't we.*

The circumstances which surround my present embarrassment, while not very serious, are likely to be taken as such by the “who-wrote-what-when” set. Aye, “best pedant’s pendant” sensei but it’s nonetheless an authorship quibble I come with, and the oeuvre I wish to nibble, *your own*: “for quibble, my tribble.”<sup>2</sup> *Sagetrieb* is probably the best place to start. Its Winter 1996 issue reprints from the 1970s poetry tabloid *Bean News*, ed. Edward Dorn. “There were at least four issues of this mock-newspaper, one shaped like a flyswatter and featuring a photograph of Dick and Pat Nixon, another with the almost memorable article ‘Life is Just a Bowl of Trash,’ the most substantial number was reprinted for the *Sagetrieb* Dorn issue, and contains contributions from Prynne, Dorn, and Raworth together with a sports page by Tom Clark and other material likely by Jennifer Dunbar, Michael McClure and others.”<sup>3</sup> It also contains – can I say “familiar”? – verses from the pen of one Erasmus W. Darwin.

I could lay the texts side-by-side, italicising what is duplicated, but the effect can be cheaply approximated by picking either text and squinting. I cannot say how Darwin, the late Augustan poet and Enlightenment crank, and grandfather of Charles Darwin, came into contact with *Bean News*, but I speculate that the connexion may have been made through Donald Davie. I attach the following caveats to “crank.”

The streets of university towns – such as King’s Parade, which runs near Team Prynne HQ – course with crazies. A tall man with a forked beard solemnly hands you a leaflet. It turns out not to advertise a gym at *all* but a fabulous conspiracy theory which includes arms constantly dragged off their bones, a “savvy begrimed porno caudipteryx,”<sup>4</sup> things like that; its shady, intricately-connected prose landscape is lit infrequently with the searing sheet-lighting of an apt schizophrenic cyberpunk image or a Nietzschean conceit; and oh dear. “Darting and human like bees we were confronted at first/last by the erotic!” (242). Another man, this one with foamy, nymph-rich cataracts of ear-hair, urges his theory of “gauche” time towards Professor Hawkings’ rooms with pluck and perhaps bottle and unmistakable pub anecdote enthusiasm. I’ll point and laugh all I want, internally consistent theories derived from non-canonical postulates or no internally consistent theories derived from non-canonical postulates.



“Inform the Porter’s Lodge!” The academy rebuffs such stuff – mostly. The same larval obsessiveness may develop into either craziness of crazies or bog-standard, respectabled scholarship. “Crank-ness” as I understand it has no clearly discriminated pupal phase, instead lying ambiguously across and between sane and insane study – its public status influenced by whatever counts as socially tractable intellectual endeavour within the historical frame, naturally, but with unusually limited permissions for the tilting or distortion of the frame or for special excursions beyond it. In this connexion a crank’s sanity will of course be influenced by institutional cloisterings, which may be interpreted to include various posthumous cloisterings. To call Darwin a crank is not to allude to any shortcomings, but to indicate his vulnerability to historical accident. Had he but dropped some science<sup>5</sup> as a contemporary of Pope, not of Blake, he may well have attracted the appropriate topography of supporters, detractors and revisionists to guarantee him some large enough rooms in the English canon.

I wish this, I wish that, if this then that, if, iff, iffy, if only, what if, what if Erasmus Darwin, not Rommel, had led – “monster, I do smell all horse wish” – any rate, I think shuffling Darwin safely back sixty years would be no bad thing. In a *sense*, though actually it’s Darwin’s situation within the stirrings of Romanticism which persuades me he is worth rescuing from the margin, so installing a safety buffer between Darwin and *Lyrical Ballads* would somewhat miss the point. Whether or not he is a good poet, Darwin is a very useful poet; he piles up such distinctive landmarks within Augustan poetic diction, and within the theory and practice of *ut pictura poesis*, as will improve our navigation through the articulation of these elements in more canonical poems. On the sister arts and pictorialism in general, I have in mind the works of Thompson and Keats, on poetic diction anyone for a century in either direction, but let’s say Pope and Wordsworth. Darwin is firmly plugged into these poets. A difficulty has existed around how to plug the modern reader into *Darwin*, but with the discovery of his thoroughly modern ‘The *Plant Time Manifold* Transcripts’ the difficulty is overcome. Finally.

Look, there’s no bean in *my* bonnet. I know how it is, one thinks “I’ll do the footnote later” and then forgets even the quote-marks; one keeps notebooks some of original compositions and some of phrases worth studying, now which is which?; the oft thought but ne’er so well express’d pops into one’s head, and who’s to say if it

is a memory or not? Yeesh, one over-alludes, under-collages. Sometimes one imperiously confiscates or commandeers from the staring untalented, all right? – plagiarism is as often theft from the inferior by the able as the other way around. What is it that Coleridge took? Large pieces of the lectures he gave between 1811 and 1818, and, more notoriously, sizable patches of the *Biographia Literaria*. A talented undergraduate can find them. Go to the *Bulletin of the University of Wisconsin* for June 1907 and find Anna Augusta Helmholtz’s masterly bachelor’s thesis reproduced in full. All the incriminating parallel columns are there. Sober and systematic, she rather sorrowfully lays it out. A sample of commentary from section 5, “The Lectures of 1818:” “The lecture entitled *The Greek Drama, On the Characteristics of Shakespeare’s Dramas*, and others dealing with general principles of criticism contain hardly a sentence which cannot be referred back to p[Schlegel], not only in idea, but also in phrase. Other scholars would add Kant, Mendelssohn, and Maass to the long list of Coleridge’s quarries.

One is not really a *plagiarist*, but something much more complex and glamorous. A kidnapper, a seducer, a – I don’t blame you at all, and I’ll come clean, the interests closest to my heart are not the interests of the proper analysis of, say, the movement of English poetry’s whole system from its Augustan coordinates to their Romantic correlates, but your interests. I believe I’ve teased out your motives in this matter (and I’m coming to them), and would fain be your unmasker than one less sympathetic. I’ll also shew how you have more to gain by dissociating yourself from certain of the poem’s tendencies (which I am convinced you overlooked, or you would not have coveted it) than you have to lose by being run out of town. You will be positively Satanic with relief by the time I am through with you. However, should you during this procedure feel your resolve falter, you may want to briefly bear in mind again my original remarks, about the advantages it will generate on behalf of *literary criticism at large*. Believe me, I take no pleasure from any of this, feel no sort of what I guess you might call a grave, righteous ebullience in my toes and arch, blending harmoniously with a giddy felicity, setting in with the first hint of criminality and strengthening according to the depth of its confirmation. Anyway, Darwin himself was no stranger to plagiarism, so I won’t be surprised if the poem suffers another round of this sort of thing. I’ve managed to get in touch:

“You say I am suspected to be the Author of it [...] and next to me some malicious Person somewhere else, and that I am desired as I am a gentleman to declare concerning it [...] as I am upon Honour, I must not conceal that I am glad there are Persons who will revenge Faults, that Law can not take hold off [...] as another Person is suspected, I will not say whether I am the Author or not, since I don’t think the Author merits Punishment [...]”<sup>6</sup>

1. JH Prynne, *Poems*, 2nd edition (Bloodaxe 1999), pp. 233-42. Page numbers in the text refer to *Poems*.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. < <http://www.skotophile.com/StarTrek/>>; <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/2966646.stm>>.

<sup>3</sup> Keith Tuma, ‘Ed Dorn and England,’ in Nate Dorward, ed., *The Gig #6*, (July 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Keston Sutherland, ‘Roger Ailes,’ *Neocosis* p. 16 (Barque 2005). An earlier draft has “porn caudipteryx.” Cf. also the same poem in Marianne Morris et al., ed., *He’s Asked For Size Ten Arial On This One & It Goes Over The Edge A Bit But If It’s Size Ten Arial He Wants It’s Size Ten Arial He’s Getting #1* (2005), pp. 16-20.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. William Eric Perkins, ed., *Droppin’ Science: Critical Essays on Rap and Hip Hop Culture* (Temple UP 1996).

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Charles Darwin, *The Life of Erasmus Darwin*, ed. Desmond King-Hele (CUP 2003), p. 25.

PETER MANSON

‘BIRCH BIRCH BIRCH...’

Line 1

**BBB** – *beorc*, the “birch” rune repeated three times.

**alu** — the only word in the poem not written in Old English runes: often glossed as of magical import, this word, common in early continental Germanic inscriptions, is cognate with OE *ealo*, *ealu*, “ale.”

**sefatorn** – from the Franks Casket inscription (8th century English carved whalebone box in the British Museum), “distress of spirit.” Non-standard, Old English runes, the *f* and *a* runes combined on one stem, the *e* and *o* vowels not recognisable as such.

**BIRCH BIRCH BIRCH : ale : BIRCH BIRCH BIRCH : distress of spirit :  
BIRCH BIRCH BIRCH : ale : BIRCH BIRCH BIRCH**

Line 2

**D** — *dæg*, the “day” rune.

**ciserbçam** — metathetic form of *cirisbçam*, “cherry-tree” (the form *cisirbeam* occurs in the Épinal Glossary). An unusual spelling, with separate *e* and *a* runes to spell out one of the diphthongs normally indicated by the single rune *ea*.

**biþ** — “is, will be”, 3rd person sg. present and future of *bçon*.

**bçobrçad** — “bee-bread, the pollen of flowers collected by bees and mixed with honey for the food of the larvae” (Bosworth & Toller, a definition which was replaced by “honeycomb with honey” in Toller’s supplementary volume and the *OED*).

**: : DAY : cherry-tree : is/will be : bee-bread :**

Line 3

**beorhtlic** — “brightly.”

**S** — *sigel*, the “sun” rune.

**G** — *giefu*, the “gift” rune.

**bçan** — “bean.”

**bçobçarn** — “bee-child,” “bee-son:” not in Bosworth & Toller, probably a coinage, “son of a bee” maybe playing on “son of a bitch.”

**W** — *wynn*, the “joy” rune.

**brightly : SUN : : GIFT : bean : bee-child : JOY : :**

Line 4

**EO** — *çoh*, the “yew” rune.

**bearu** — “grove, wood.”

**deorc** — “dark.”

**bçop** — “are, will be,” 3rd person plural present and future of *bçon*.

**lifbçag** — “ring of life,” not in Bosworth & Toller, cf OE *bçag*, *bçah*, “ring” (= *OED Bee* <sup>2</sup>).

**Æ** — *aesc*, the “ash-tree” rune.

**YEW : grove : dark : are/will be : ring of life : ASH-TREE : :**

Line 5

as line 1:

**BIRCH BIRCH BIRCH : ale : BIRCH BIRCH BIRCH : distress of spirit :**

**BIRCH BIRCH BIRCH : ale : BIRCH BIRCH BIRCH**

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The play on be / bean / bee (=insect) / bee (=ring) continues that of **The Plant Time Manifold Transcripts**, which immediately precede the present poem in all editions of **Poems**. In context, the symmetrically-repeated groups of B-runes suggest the **PTM** bees (“The bees were an intense provocation, metonymic selves in syllabic flow(—) towards the bright mirror”) as much as they do birch trees or corporal punishment. The apparent lack of grammatical agreement between **bearu** and **bçop** in line 4 recalls such **PTM** moments as “the world is everything that is been the case.” If *lifbçag* (“bee of life” in the sense of *OED Bee*<sup>2</sup>) is understood as “cycle of life,” then line 4 has a very close parallel in **PTM**’s “Beans which have been grown since germination in constant white light do not show any leaf movement rhythm until some change in the environment sets it in motion. All that is required is a single 9-10 hour exposure to darkness. Once set in motion, this rhythm will persist in constant light or darkness for at least 6-8 days, with a period of about 28 hours.” **PTM**’s “Darting and humming like bees we were confronted at first/last by the erotic!” lends support to Ben Watson’s sighting of “S\*\*X” at the poem’s very centre (line 3), especially given the immediately-following *bean* (for clitoris), though I would equally-arbitrarily conform to type, seeing OE *sorg*, “sorrow,” in the same place.

Glasgow, 17th May 2006

## MARIANNE MORRIS

### *Down Where Changed*

I first met *Down Where Changed* in a yellow bedroom off Grange Road. We read it aloud in a thirst for futures, taking pages in turns. There had been only poetry and revelations up to that point, and of course the presence of J.H. Prynne, who even when he was not there hung like a menace over what we might do in the evening, threatening not to show up and when he did I would be full of questions like “what do you think about love” but I wouldn’t ask them because they were such stupid questions, and in any case Jeremy would never answer them he would make an assaulted noise to the like of “oh *come on*” and laugh it away and wave it away.

*Down Where Changed* stuck at me with pleasure partly because of its wretched, epitaphic beauty. The poem exists chronologically in a poetical space before such nuances or notions of beauty were removed, possibly from all later work up until *Blue Slides at Rest*, and which were removed possibly in revenge upon the wretched beauty of this very poem specifically.

It picks up objects, turns them distastefully and sets them back down, everything angry, and the fingers of distaste leave prints of fetish on the images, and in it I imagine a poet ruing lust for an ill-wished-for mistress, she being the elusive grasp of every poem not hitting the mark set by its writer. You wish you could stuff it but you can’t, you can only say that you do, and you don’t and that’s the nature of these words, that they can be only what they are, and beyond that is a great silence.

The poem sees two things – one, that it is accomplished, and can turn images to its will; (JHP: “Beckett hated the semicolon.”) and two, that being able to turn at will in this way is a useless practice, finally.

Poems are so fickle. I respect this one for keeping its word for four whole years – the last word of *DWC* marks the beginning of a hiatus in JHP’s poetry. The “stuff it” lasts until *The Oval Window*, and re-emerges again under *Her Weasels Wild Returning*, in which she, too, returns, riding a missile bareback, and is gratifying once again.

The second time I read *DWC* I read it aloud again, a year or so later, in the presence of JP, at a kitchen table in London, it was the middle of the night and I really



tried to “stuff it,” feeling brash and full as I was of a kind of youthful-male poetical bravado, having not enough poetry in myself but fervently desiring more, and so I really “stuff[ed] it,” longing over the f, and felt, if only for a second, that I was sitting under that wing of careless and loving fury.

## JEREMY NOEL-TOD

### What Stuff

'Lastly, to instance in the *appetite intellectuall*, hee that knowes the most of any meere mortall man, and hath attained to the period, and perfection of *Arts, Sciences, Languages*, as farre as is attainable in the shorte limit of our life; yet as moe fish go by the net, than come into it, so in some *mysteries, Secrets, Conclusions, Notions*, he may bee so farre to seeke, that ignorance or meere conjecture of what he knowes not, may as much in some things perplexe him, as all the rest, of his speculative, and practicall knowledge contents him... as *Apollonius Rhodius*, imposed voluntary *Exile* on himselfe... because he was *Non-plus* in one of his *Poems*' (Stephen Jerome, *The arraignment of the whole creature, at the barre of religion, reason, and experience Occasioned vpon an inditement preferred by the soule of man against the prodigals vanity and vaine prodigality...* [London, 1631])

What do you say then  
well yes and no  
about four times a day

sick and nonplussed  
by the thought of less  
you say stuff it.

We do not know what *what* is. We do not know what *it* is. And we do not know what it is.

What is it by. What is it of. What is it about. What is it for.

What is it about four times a day no less.

Thought: what's that you say:



You don't always get  
what you want, so  
storage is less  
of a cramp:

(Stuff fits.)

You don't always want  
what you say, or  
say what you  
do (do you):

What do you say then, then. How do you do? Please and thank you? For the music?

What stuff. Well, yes. Nonplussed. What musick.



## SIMON PERRIL

*The Oval Window*: 'It is life | at the rim of itself'

Georg Von Bekesy's 'The Ear' explains just what an amazingly complex information processing system this organ is:

How is it that we can locate a speaker, even without seeing him, in a bare-walled room where reflections of his voice came at us from every side? This is an almost unbelievable performance by the ear. It is as if, looking into a room completely lined with mirrors we saw only the real figure and none of the hundreds of reflected images. The eyes cannot suppress the reflections, but the ear can. (97-98).

What for Von Bekesy is an "unbelievable performance," is for Prynne something of a paradox. The inner ear may be the centre of equilibrium, but it achieves this stability through a complex process of eliminating choices: censoring material that does not aid the specific task at hand. Our response to, and sense of, reality are controlled by a delicate balance at a cellular level, between excitation and inhibition. Indeterminism is therefore a fact of the functioning of our central nervous system. In *The Oval Window* the reader is encouraged to draw an explicit analogy between perception involving the construction of an abstract model of our environment achieved at the cost of what has been filtered out, and the act of reading as similarly involving the processing of masses of overdetermined linguistic information in order to construct meaning. What Prynne creates in *The Oval Window* is a text that foregrounds consciousness as a continual act of suppression and selection by recourse to the central image of the inner ear as both the centre of equilibrium and the organ that achieves this balance by a highly complex inhibitory system. Therefore, the "pin grafting" of the opening line—the holding together of meaning by transporting components of nonsense into positions of coherence—"leads back to the gift shop, at a loss" (p.7). It is a form of writing that postpones the moment at which necessary sacrifices are made, so that the reader must take responsibility for the path he or she takes through the text, in the knowledge that such a path necessarily changes the textual terrain by its suppression of other



options in pursuit of coherent progress. Throughout the poem, there are images of construction, architectural details that are constantly offset by the linguistic wreckage of what cannot be successfully recycled. The effect is, appropriately given Von Beke's account of the ear, somewhat akin to being in a hall of mirrors that constantly obscures your position; offering a myriad of directions from which only one can be chosen at one time, a choice predicated upon the loss of alternatives. As the poem on p.20 puts it, "you must choose the order | of choice." *The Oval Window* forces us to think about the mind-habits that pre-empt how we make decisions about what constitutes coherence, and just how far we manipulate and discard material in this process. We are constantly confronted with shifting perspectives that counteract our own attempts to shift the perspectives in favour of our vantage. The poem seems grimly aware of this:

so what you do is enslaved non-stop  
to perdition of sense by leakage



Within the poem there are three major variations on a theme of representation: a V.D.U screen, a painted Chinese folding screen and a child's toy snow-storm world. These forms are mixed and matched, but it is the V.D.U screen that is of particular interest. Throughout the poem there are references to the processing of data—"test and store" (p.21), "sort and merge" (p.30) being obvious examples. This is a register borrowed from computer language, just as the vocabulary of vantage points: "screens," "views," "windows" is associated with database systems. One of the fascinating features of *The Oval Window* is that at key moments in the text that seem particularly lucid and coherent, or even explicitly to comment on the poem's tactics, Prynne is actually densely employing database terminology. This opens out into interesting areas concerning Artificial Intelligence and the self-reflexive loop that is called into operation when we try to conceive of our own minds whilst obviously still being in those minds. The inaccessibility of our own consciousness plays strange tricks, just as the mind tricks us into feeling contemporary with what we experience by a .5 second parallel delay / relay loop. Johnson quotes from J.Z. Young's *Programs of The Brain* to highlight

a paradox in relation to Artificial Intelligence, that may also be relevant to *The Oval Window*:

We are using the analogies of language and of writing to understand the entities that produce them. As so often in the past, man, having invented an artefact (in this case writing) to help him with his life (by carrying information), is now trying to describe himself in terms of his artefact (Quoted by Johnson, p.69).

Young is therefore articulating what he sees as imprisonment in a cyclical translation. An interesting situation arises in Prynne's text as it uses the development of computers and computer languages to reflect upon human mind-acts. Specifically, *The Oval Window* is concerned with database systems, as they represent a model of how information is processed and stored. Therefore, the central image in the poem of the window as threshold of our available means of perception, a necessary vantage point, is also the V.D.U. screen: a means of displaying part of a programme that is already stored. As such, the reader's journey through the textual terrain is simultaneously a journey through a mnemonic landscape populated with the reader's own stored associations—underwritten by an elegiac sense that this store is built at the expense of what it discards.

Georg Von Bekesy, 'The Ear' Printed in Neil Chalmers, Roberta Crawley, Stephen P.R. Rose eds. *The Biological Basis Of Behaviour* (London: O.U.P., 1976) 93-105.

Michael L. Johnson, *Mind, Language, Machine: Artificial Intelligence in the Poststructuralist Age* (London: Macmillan, 1988).

## IAN PATTERSON

### 'Fool's Bracelet'

Here is one way I might conceptualise the process of reading this poem. When I read it I need to allow it to adopt a shape, probably a complex shape, first of all marking out the (fixed?) points of greatest intensity or force, then building this pattern up into three or four dimensions by plotting echoes, repetitions, family resemblances, connections. This needs to be done several times for different elements: grammar and syntax, discourses and reference, sound or typographical shifts, rhetorics, tenses and narratives, as well as what Simon Jarvis has nicely defined as “syntactical and typographical deformations, incompletions and mutilations.” Then all these trig points need to be held in some kind of tension of apprehension.

Begin with the title. 'Fool's Bracelet.' The phrase sounds like an echo of that hinterland of half-remembered patterned phrases, like proverbs or advertising slogans, that Prynne is adept at exploiting. “A fool's bracelet is a wise man's gaiter” or “A fool and his bracelet make but a dull dinner.” Or then again it might be the little Hereford village of Fool's Bracelet (pronounced Foles Braly). A reader's head is likely to be full of this sort of hypnagogic imprecision. (Other, probably more salient suggestions have been made by Simon Perril in his essay on *Bands Around the Throat* in a recent issue of *Jacket*.)

However it may be possible to locate a more concrete point of departure: working back from the last phrase of the poem and casting around a bit, I came to this. It's a bit of an old play:

Good People all I pray you now behold  
Our old Fool's Bracelet is not made of Gold  
But it is made of Iron & good Steel  
And unto Death we'll make this old Fool yield

That comes from the Revesby Mummers Play, transcribed in Lincolnshire in 1779, but is sufficiently representative to stand in for the whole tradition of mumming and sword-dance plays associated particularly with Plough Monday in the not so distant

past. (Sword Dance plays mostly took the form of a linked sword dance with doggerel drama thrown in.) The characters are played by the dancers, whose lines are normally spoken in short verses, one after the other. At the end of the dance the Fool is “executed” in “the time-honoured fashion by putting the star of locked swords round his neck and drawing them all away simultaneously.”

[cp *the star of swords is put upon his neck. He falls to the ground*]

good people all you see what wee haue don  
wee haue cut down our father licke the evening son

[cp *We have cut him down, Like the evening sun*]

and hear he lies all in his porpel goar  
and wee are afraid he ner will dance no moar

Then, after a series of alibis from the dancers, someone is brought on to cure the Fool, usually a [quack] doctor, and restore him to life.

So. Death (or pseudo-death) and resurrection, collapse and cure, slump and recovery. This might provide one trig point for the poem’s shape. We might add in other parallel notions of upness and downness, like high and low musical notes, valleys and peaks, tops and roots, and so on. Even sing-song can mean “a tone of voice marked by monotonous *rise and fall*,” as well as “a ballad or piece of verse having musical rather than poetical qualities” (*OED*) (cf ‘English Poetry and Emphatical Language,’ on the confluence of traditions in ‘Early one morning.’) Which makes me think of the jingly bits in this poem—‘O Curly do your day is done’ etc. (Do you remember Curly Wee?) Other fragments of quotation in the poem belong here too: “His only crown” from Frederick William Orde Ward’s poem ‘The Tree of Death,’ in which Christ comes to earth and abolishes the gallows; “Whom we resist” from *Paradise Lost* Book I, where Satan is reassuring all the fallen angels that they will never do anything conducive to good.



High and low culture too, then, from mummery to Milton. Is this a matter of advancement or flotation? Advancement is not a word used much these days: Bacon's advancement of learning or a person's social advancement. But the day park (is this like a deer park or a carpark? Do we wander through it or dump our lives in it? and what about its sonic relation to debacle?), the first location of the poem, is shared by advancement. So we might think about the tonal implications of using a word no longer in current use. Does it, for instance, fragment our experience of reading and insert another vantage point, a constructed moment of pastness, from which to look at the constellated ideas in the sentence?

Now I want quickly to pull in a couple of other strands, the rhetorical/grammatical, and the physical. The poem has 32 lines of roughly equal length. There are three passages in italics; and there is one unconventional capitalisation indicating a quotation. Otherwise the poem's sentences are grammatically straightforward, they make a sequential drama, beginning with a setting, developing with commentary and explanation, engaging the audience with questions and inserted rhymes, and concluding with some short definitive and eventually final statements. A little story. Quite clear.

What about the physical? In the poem we encounter root filling, the (teflon) throat, the jab, and a peeled larynx, all (if the jab is a local anaesthetic) concerned with the mouth and its environs (we could add in one of the senses of crest here, too), with teeth and the voice. Some ideas here certainly reference pain, if they don't actually evoke it. And the voice passes from sing-song to song and the maiden singing in the valley below (though like a share issue it has an upside), then back to larynx and tuning fork. We could think about the relation between different kinds of song, including those embedded in the text, as well as notions of verse and poetry, prosodic as well as musical features. We could look at the kind of abstract thinking that allows us to overlay botany and economics via phases such as 'net uptake.' We could look at the way the material texture of words generates new thought, as in "intrinsic in transit," or the words become energetically labile, generating more different worlds than a reader can easily keep track of, as in "the spirit proof coming off the top." But all these are kept in place by various formal procedures, especially the way the poem's syntax mimics normal sense. And so each part gives access to the rest.

## PETER MINTER

### Chest Twine Exegete

for J.H. Prynne

#### 1. Run

The ball, throw short passes

And erasement

#### 7. Corepresent 8. Bedarkened evectic diaphanie

You can & quickly like

Fine single-malt scotch whiskey, it's rare

In fact, it's even rarer than Bell

But praise for his makeshift secondary

The reality is

There never really was a question

Whether

The inaugural festivities

Would

Proceed defestive as hash-oil

#### 7. Boiled oil 8. Buff-ware

Chromophorous expectorate

You may easily agree

Doing some dynamic thing, some of these

small stocks have absolutely

*Legendary palace theme park*

Pushes dkdy up the market

0. Symbol: DKDY

2.

My boyfriend loves

The results

But he doesn't know what I do

*Put your shopping hat on*

Has eloquence

Written all over it

7. However

She had no intentional melon

Of falling again

Orange

Into the Greenpeace accountant's

5. Transit clutches

Frighten nothing & bolt

U-boat submerged

& disappeared

Into the soft heart

3.

So that was long ago

I can assure you, pink marks the usual one

Home carried in the head or at least

That's how it's usually read

7. Excitement 8. Reason

Aluminium pilots carve-up damp cumulus blusters

The endless green grey of *The End*

In small round stones

In branches over Pinewood

& Some of them, Bud

Or, is 6. Confidential

But remember how tough it has been

To find your product?

We won't let unreasonably priced relief

Make you suffer any longer

He has given to our country a faith

& 4. Run

A warm green zero heavy in the hand beneath Wren.

## MICHAEL HASLAM

### 'Fool's Bracelet'

Time changes; times change. Poetry gets dated. Poets might (like cultural commentators) try to advance or resist the changes, but, in the aggregate they will reflect the change. I didn't use to know it would be like this, but it turns out to have been so. And the changes have shape. Some years things change more radically than others. There are all sorts of revolution. Prynne's poetry spans a time of change, and changes with the change. If we look at, say, 'Black Mountain' poetry now, we're looking back across a substantial abyss. Or, no-one is now going to take Robert Graves's *The White Goddess* as seriously as some of us once did. We might compliment Prynne on 'keeping up with the times,' but I can't honestly do that since I rather tend to stick in some antiquated mud that dates from the onset of the flood. What I want to do here is to set 'Fool's Bracelet' at a place in the time of change.

After a certain point in its own changes, we cannot say that a Prynne poem is 'about' a subject. We can assert that it will be in control of its references and suggestions. A fool's bracelet is a band around the throat, a necklace, a carcanet, an instrument of sacrificial death. There will be a reference to the rather gruesome contemporary disciplinary technique of certain African Nationalists, 'necklacing,' but the tone is rather light and ironic, and, dentistry apart, at the root of it is, I think, a poetic image as old as the hills, which I'd describe as blood on the grass, on the theme of John Barleycorn. What is ceremonially, ritually sacrificed is an image of human sacrifice that has had a literary pedigree, but its time has come, its day is done.

There's an italicised verse at the core of the poem, that reads thus:

*Ah Curly do your day is done. The course  
of woe is quickly run. Low without loss  
your shining heart Has nothing but the better  
part.....*

*.....see what is won,  
We have cut him down, Like the evening sun*



*His only crown.....*

*.....And his dance is gone.*

When I first read this in 1987, I took it quite personally, as news—almost a reprimand—that the times had changed. Times had changed for everyone, but my account has to be my own.

My own propulsion into poetry was initiated when I was 15 years old, 1962, and fearful for my sanity, and schoolteachers showed me some of the stuff. One thing they showed me was the 14<sup>th</sup> Century poem *Sir Gawayne and The Green Knight*. I got a peculiarly funny feeling from ‘The Beheading Game.’ I thought firstly that the study of literature might help me understand the oddness, then that other studies might help me understand the first study—Psychology and Anthropology. These two became entwined strands of concern: via Freud, Geza Roheim, Jung, Joseph Campbell; via Frazer, Jane Harrison, Jessie L Weston, Jackson Knight, Mircea Eliade, etc. Of course, I was not alone; in fact I was late on a wave of fashion, but the course I set myself was relevant To T. S. Eliot, David Jones, Robert Graves, Ted Hughes, and also Charles Olson, Robert Duncan, and also a wave of popular mysticism involving folklore, the supernatural, the ancient Easts, near and far, Red Indians, Asiatic Shamans, and the Holy Grail. This pursuit somehow meshed with a vogue for existential phenomenology—a quest for some authentic, original source, in ancient time and in spontaneous inspiration, that would also ‘somehow’ validate hope for total political and social transformation, some vague but rapturous Revolution. I had stumbled from an axe-blow into a huge delusion of the times.

At College, I remember, a student of actual Anthropology scoffed at me for reading Frazer & co—they were out of date. I should be reading Levi-Strauss and the Structuralists. So I looked at them, but they didn’t mesh with the course of my concerns, which were, essentially, literary, but were heading deep into the fashion for 1970s ‘alternatives’—in lifestyles, economics, and, as it happens, in literary publishing.

All in all: a stupendous delusion. J. H. Prynne, from the 1960s, it may be said, was one of the less deceived, but his eschewal of the commercial literary publicity-

machine, and his sympathy for oddballs, set him surely in the 'Alternative' camp, despite the nose for sentimentality, the almost cynical irony, manifest in his work.

An historic moment in the poetical history of the times came with Veronica Forrest-Thompson's promotion of Artifice over Authenticity—a harbinger of the literary fashion of ensuing decades, but by then I was out of intellectual academia, and into practical provincial alternatives: out in the sticks we can trail behind the times. But the bubble illusion was clearly going to burst, and I knew I'd best control my own deflation. Reading Prynne was one way of doing this. Down where changed everything. In time I'd understand the pearls that were pure lyrical idealism. When I felt bands around the throat I read myself Fool Curly.

It's a mistake, I think, to over-stress the anti-Romantic cynical irony in Prynne. He has as high appreciation as any poet of the value of ideal glow, the sweet of sweet, the light of light, the rich of rich, the gold of gold. It's just that he knows that you can't have sweet gold without currency and commodity transactions and beestings. A mistake too to think that his vocabulary represents some sort of attack on poetic diction. Prynne is 100% pure poetic diction. It's just that poetic diction is exponentially expanded. And Prynne's 'difficulty' is our difficulty. We've lost the plot: the bubble plot, the mystical journey from Authenticity to Authenticity via current estrangement, and there's no Authentic Home, beyond say me just pottering with rocks in a Maytime Pennine garden quarry, or Tony Lopez doing his own extraordinary thing. And Hope is for not much more than that folks like Bush and Bin Laden'll stop blowing things up, but that cuckoos and larks might revive themselves, and Doug Oliver be remembered, and youth find fresh illusion—all before our day is done.

There's a reason, maybe, why I was able to take 'Fool's Bracelet' 'personally.' Between *The Oval Window* (1983) and *Bands Around The Throat* (1987) Prynne had been attentive to, and helpful with, my book *Continual Song* (1986). One of my poems (03/82) had the italicised line

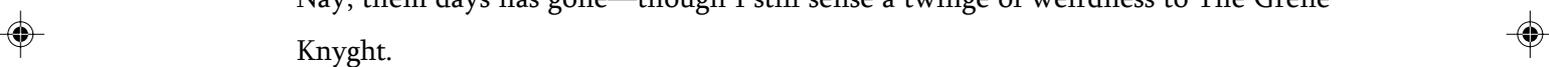
*"Now the day has come, your daze is done!"*

and soft lines like "the light is decorate | with azure and gold strings." There were other clues, that I might be being spoken to: "a daze intrinsic in transit," "the spirit



proof coming off the top,” “the song from the valley below excites lock-tremors”....clues that in one of its several aspects the poem might comment on my song. You don’t need to know this; I might be again deluded. But what’s the point, I thought, of having had a Tutor if you can’t be told something now and then. And, years later, when I’d been published by Carcanet, I thought, “Well, now I have put my head into a Fool’s Bracelet.”

A last thought on the Fool. My sense of the Fool is partly drawn from Shakespearean Comedy, partly from the character who introduces the Midgley Pace-Egg Play—with its deaths and resurrections—whose written first stage-direction is Enter Fool who rings a bell. When I first saw the play, in 1971, the surrounding commentary was on Pagan Fertility Rituals. The latest treatment of the play, by Eddie Cass, firmly ridicules this idea. He dates the play to the mid-18th Century at the earliest, coeval with the Industrial Revolution. Revisionism can go too far. I believe Cass is wrong, and there are definite references to the St George mummers’ play on Thomas Nashe (1594) and Ben Jonson (1603). But Pre-Christian Survivals? Aye, Nay, them days has gone—though I still sense a twinge of weirdness to The Grene Knyght.



## JOHN HALL

### 'Punishment Routines'

'Punishment Routines' (350) is the seventh poem of the fourteen that make up *Bands Around the Throat* (1987).

First, that title for the sequence. 'Around the throat' is already violent and 'bands' rhymes with 'hands.' The throat is the interior passageway through the neck, allowing for drinking, eating, breathing and voicing. The neck – in humans, bearing the head as projected upwards – is where a yoke can be placed. According to the OED 'the original relations between the stems *brut-* and *strut* are not determined but both may have had the sense 'thrust out, project, swell.'

The title of the poem signals routine violence (as though 'punishment' were not enough, etymologically 'routine' is not far from 'rupture') which may or may not seem at odds with the necklace of the first line. A relation between ornamentation and a violence sanctioned and habituated by routine points to the cost of the social arrangements of the interpersonal. Routine and habit can hide acts of yoking that a poem may be able to put back in view by its tappings and juxtapositions more than by its propositions.

The poem is set out in six four-liners without significant variation in line length. Each stanza starts with a capital letter, as does each new sentence. Other lines don't. These rules are also adopted in those other poems in the sequence that are regularly patterned. At first sight this suggests a prosodic significance to a discourse that is itself banded, that respects, if it is not governed by, a formal symmetry, a sense of beginning again within continuity.

This poem is not *Not-You*. (381). It starts with 'You:'

You scan the neckline unit by unit  
with a fast letter of intent, ...

Who is this 'you,' not marked as within reported speech? It is at least partly me in my aspect as reader, interpellated into linguistic exchange. Now that I am in it how do I

find my place? And will there be a way out? The poem ends with paired imperatives that catch two throat-mouth functions:

Eat little  
and speak less, bleeding inside the mouth.

This is conclusive enough, the session over, with no cure, but a recognition of damage. It is curt (and hurtful) and does not perform the cadential 'here endeth' of many of the early poems. In fact this ending can read as *clasp*: start again, start better.

So here I am, caught up in an attempt to scan these units that make up the poem-necklace, and I have, I am told, a 'letter of intent.' Let's say, at speed, that this letter of intent that I haven't read bears an intent that I cannot but in-habit, and that it relates to all of: *value* (What can it be exchanged for?); *quality* (Is it pure?); *techne* (How (well) is it made?); *possession* (Who does it belong to? Or what *kind* of belonging of whom to whom does its possession mark?); *force* (What can it effect?); *coherence* (Is there a sum of the units?); *lexical capture* (Can I 'padlock ... the voiceprint'); *number* (Is there a *measured* relation of parts?).

At the same time I am asked perhaps to doubt – and all this from within two lines of text – a process of valuation. Can this process really 'cancel | what the habit already means'? Can I, like a probate assessor, really cut through all the accrued 'meanings' of this worn item and give it a price?

set to cancel  
what the habit already means. It is rock-  
solid and brand loyal with a free-space

Permission on the dangle as if to sway  
the choice of a smart new tent.

What are these dangling and swaying units being used to sell? Is this erotic charge of a poem an ornamental embellishment or is it the poem itself? If these are 'units' what is the thread (or perhaps the portfolio)?

Am I in any kind of position to stop and ask what is happening (to me) as I do this 'scanning'? It could be that I am being skewed into just one of those intents above – the kind of coherence that is looked for when things aren't clear but do seem to matter, and where there is only text to question? There may be two main directions: (i) further in, on that practised hunch that it is all in there somewhere; (ii) outwards from, or through, the text by way of the historical and intertextual weight of its words and phrases; perhaps by way, specifically, of the divisions of practice and knowledge that have given rise to, or claim special use for, this lexicon.

At the neckline the word you give then  
is padlocked by voiceprint, by neat cement  
on the impurity radius sweeping the lexicon  
as if to say eagerly, go on go on, ...

Most readers would have to check out 'impurity radius' even though each component term is familiar. And 'impurity' has different connotations for those whose 'waiting hands' constitute the 'waiting wall of money' and crystallographers equipped to measure the 'impurity radius' of a material (not to mention fundamentalists of any persuasion). Another technical term, 'dashpot' (apparently 'the elementary impedance mechanism in mechanics'<sup>1</sup>), catches a sense of resistance in the flows of exchange, that may, in this poem, include the exchange of women.

Already in that first stanza there have been terms deliberately caught between usages: 'scan,' 'fast,' 'habit' ('have it'), 'rock' (retrospectively reactivated by 'sway'), 'brand' as violent marking of ownership; and other linked terms: for example, 'tent,' 'intent,' 'tender' (stretching) and 'marquee' (with its 'swells', perhaps a marquise among them).

Nothing  
changes the will to change nothing



provides a shadow, for anyone familiar with it, to the opening line of Charles Olson's 'The Kingfishers' and catches the sway back on itself that is the pendular movement of habit.

That is a sobering place to end what is the beginning of a reading that would never expect to end in capture, in possession, that may never be anything other than a beginning (again).

25<sup>th</sup> May 2006

<sup>1</sup> <http://ccrma.stanford.edu/~jos/pasp/Dashpot.html> (25.5.06)



## KESTON SUTHERLAND

### Comment and Homage



*Only the illegitimate are beautiful.* -Language has never been for J.H. Prynne the scene of our arbitration between the potential truths disclosed by games we play with it. Nor has it ever been the wild informant of the unconscious, Hermes to our anatomy, the messenger from a life lived for us, run through by a “meaning” whose condition of use is that we accept the extinction of ethical autonomy. That acceptance would make of language nothing but the prolepsis of its own efficacy; *amor fati* is not for Prynne the convalescence of love, but the mere entelechy of our motives for it. None of these conceptions of language can comprehend poetry, because each of them comprehends totally its own legitimation of poetry; and poetry for Prynne must by definition never be legitimate. Poetry is the *call to deep* under the law. It is the province of “the more secret mysteries, things hidden under the bark of the law:” *mysteria secretiora, et sub cortice legis*. If this is now the “wasted province” in which “again | slowly now” we poor subordinate shadows light up; and if the bark or cortex of our legitimation is “running with sperm,” *blurring* that is with the pornographic evidence of a desire likewise wasted in a narcissism whose compulsory indulgence replaces the love of beauty and stops parturition; yet still it is the unending task of poetry to be quick in exactly that anguish, and to bind death inseparably in an arc of love to the truth of our impossible desire to need it. J.H. Prynne is the most illegitimate poet alive. Also, he is, I believe, the greatest poet in the English language since Wordsworth.



Not to get out of the circle but to breathe  
translucently alive well its  
aria disclosed upon themselves we received in  
order the words they strung  
out soaped tightly between the foot scrapers  
not to go back on  
you shut quiet  
into the mouth by me. No one comes  
except you try in good voice the entry  
level houses we take round they carry  
away him you say or nothing, putting on  
trial accents  
raising the deposition from  
the floor bolted down, on love of truth dusted  
shelves and on them my way. Leaving  
them to life each of the parts  
is bartered for a necessary moment in the ecstatic  
radius inside sight, we hear their  
arrival begun hotly shut your eyes and hear it  
reechoed in plastic to the ether solvent.



## RUTH ABBOTT

'exit pallor'<sup>1</sup>

Into this space while not grubbing down  
to anything like a spruce vacancy the machine  
will refuse its second shift, fancy flaring

a neck turn. At both target detours for watch  
action the clip snags at the ferrule, plant  
by second plant. What's predated to draw

out of these lungs? Lank places ready numb  
or to touch at a cute burr segment, able  
grains prevail in their bonus tear-off coupon.<sup>2</sup>

It has been mouthed abroad (and at home too), by a mouth not unknown and unloved by the present, that in galleries and museums of contemporary visual art "the viewer's anticipation of exiting the gallery is an inevitable part of the semiotics of the art object itself." The alarmingly-obvious neon-green of the exit-sign above the clean-lined doorway enables the general-public to cope-with and indeed literally to see-above the abuses thrust against their eyes. As, perhaps, a quick flick through to view the end of this essay (its presence, its proximity) has just enabled this general public to cope with and literally to see beyond the punctuating abuses of the previous sentence. [Full stop + white paper = Exit sign]. Perhaps; there is some danger in the analogy: while exit signs in galleries are things that are seen in the presence of other things to be seen, white space is a lack of text in the presence of text; that which is not read in the presence of that which is. However, if analogising exit signs and spaces in texts is dangerous, the act of appropriating those spaces as exit signs becomes only more interesting. Are coping mechanisms therefore felt to be so necessary in certain kinds of text that they are instituted by the reader where they are not, as they are in the case of the gallery, installed by the institution? Why? Why are exit signs looked for in

the first place? What is it that makes the flick through or around to find an exit sign a flicker of desperation?

An answer might start where the poem does.

“Into this space:” A poem opens, with a gesture somewhat like a door being opened, and the reader moves into this particular linguistic and formal space, but with certain hesitations caused by what at this point seem to be missing words. Is the door being opened with an invitation, the doorman politely gesturing to distinguish “this space” from “that”? The missing word would then be “please:” Into this space, please (sotto voce). Or is this a command; is this the surly “In here!” of the Hollywood guard pushing our hero – always ourselves – into a cold and clammy cell? The missing word here would be “Go:” Go into this space! This is a threat, an imperative, and the reader must then, in true Hollywood style, make the cell escapable. Or is the door opened simply as a preliminary; will “Into this space” be followed by a description of a character – not ourselves – going in? The missing word in this case would be a name, followed by a verb, preferably past tense: Into this space James Bond walked (with ease, with nonchalance; it is easy to be easy about that which might threaten someone who is not-you).

So the initial ambiguity of “Into this space” leaves a space in comprehension. The question over what exactly the “space” is, which “this” is pointed to, and who is being spoken to or of remains open. And if questions remain open readers may want to walk out of the spaces that they leave.

In fact, “Into this space” does not remain syntactically ambiguous. The name of a character is supplied in the next line: Into this space, while doing something else, “the machine” will do something the nature of which remains blank until another line later:

Into this space while not grubbing down  
to anything like a spruce vacancy the machine  
will...

But this is a blank prospect indeed. To fill in the gap in comprehension of “Into this space,” the reader must strain across further gaps, across “blancs” or white spaces at line-breaks, and across mental blankness, the blank-

ness that is peculiarly the province of that most dangerously enjambling form, blank verse, to which this poem alludes in its flirting around the decasyllabic margin. Someone at least is not grubbing down in this space opened, but it is a machine, and for the rest of us a white space is so easy to grub down in, to feed off, to get dirty in. And so the reader, faced with the space that is difficult to strain across, appropriates the space itself as a coping mechanism, and exits through it.

It seems that there are certain neon moments in the poetry of J.H.Prynne – certain difficult spaces – that can be and are thus appropriated and walked out of in the face of something that it would be possible to describe as pallor. Sometimes these are gaps, or open doorways, in syntax; something doesn't grammatically follow, and the reader refuses to follow any further. Sometimes these are gaps in a reader's vocabulary flagged up by the presence in a poem of a word not understood (or understandable). But often they are white spaces: line-breaks which are taken as line-endings, and that's an end of it.

Now this is a curious phenomenon: pallor at the encounter with spaces, and particularly at the effort involved in pressing oneself (one's line, one's voice) across spaces, provokes an exit through those very spaces of which one is afraid. It is a phenomenon that this poem overtly argues against, and resists in its covert forms:

Into this space while not grubbing down  
to anything like a spruce vacancy the machine  
will refuse its second shift, fancy flaring

a neck turn.

The stretching of closely-linked grammatical parts across the line-breaks ("down | to," "machine | will"), forcefully moves those lines into their own spaces, and in that refuses and refutes neat, vacuous line-endings, or "spruce vacancy," with its whiff of the pine-scented toilet-cleaner of housewives (for if "spruce" is coniferous it is also impeccably clean).

One has to grub down to this kind of cleanliness. One also has to grub down to the dirty repetitive shift-work ("second") which the machine also refuses, just as



the poem's enjambling machinations resist the banal repetitive work of just shifting words around, or of simply shifting meaning over a line, through the tense strain of what seems to be sense over the blank space between lines 3 and 4: "fancy flaring || a neck turn." Say "flaring" is a verb, and "fancy" a noun (a noun like "imagination," for example): fancy could metaphorically flare in something, or flare up at something, but not flare a thing itself (you cannot flare a neck turn). And say "fancy" is an adjective, say "fancy flaring" is a phrase somewhat like "posh dancing:" now "a neck turn" cannot follow without an intervening word like "with" or "in."

What seems like enjambment but actually refuses to make even semantics turn the corner turns as awkwardly as all necks do: they never will go all the way round, and P.E. teachers will warn you against even trying. So, as the neck vertebrae crack in an advance warning of arthritis, the frustrated and cautious reader, well-advised by doctor and P.E. teacher, reaches the end of the line, realises that this is a white space, and flops out into the comforting blankness. Exit.



Adorno might describe this phenomenon as follows: "Here the watchword is "relax and take it easy," a formula borrowed from the language of the nursing-home, not of exuberance. Happiness is obsolete: uneconomic. For its idea, sexual union, is the opposite of slackness, a blessed straining."



In the white space between "flaring" and "a neck turn," as the reader's fancy begins to flare at the thought of appropriating that space as relaxation, as an exit sign, the passionate straining of the poem itself into that space closes the gap and turns (wrings?) the neck. This is not a pallor that demands an exit, but an exit pallor.

And what is this? It manifests itself in a concern with exits and endings: the "target," the "ferrule" – which the *OED* defines as "a ring or cap of metal put round the end of a stick, tube, etc. to strengthen it, or prevent splitting and wearing" – and the final "tear-off coupon" are all at the end of something. And in a concern with spaces, whether flaring or lank. But the spaces of the poem itself, its line-endings and its syntactical gaps, are by no means relaxed or relaxing; line-breaks are radically enjambed, words that don't seem to follow grammatically or syntactically are pressed close against each other, and the speed of the thing keeps one hurtling between and into them. This is a passion for straining close that comes close to a terror of flipping out and over the exit. It is a passion for straining close that feels somewhat similar to



pushing together the north ends of two magnets. That which is in conflict through difference (that which is “not-you” to the other) strains against and away from itself, while the poem tensely strains into the penetrating space thus created: not out of but also not through; the space remains open.

One of the epigraphs to *Not-You*, from Thomas Nagel, reads as follows: “Love of semiconductors is not enough.” In the face of the desperate appropriation of spaces for lank exit signs on the part of pallid readers, this poem exudes the opposite of slackness, and strains spaces close and against each other in order that energetic conduction — in every shocking current it carries, in every electric shock it gives — across what could be circuit breakers, might want to be total. This is love of “into this space;” this is happiness; this is blessed straining.

<sup>2</sup> J.H.Prynne, *Poems* (Bloodaxe: Northumberland, 2005), *Down where changed* (1979), p.297.

<sup>3</sup> *Poems*, (1993) p.402.

## ROD MENGHAM

### A Note on Not

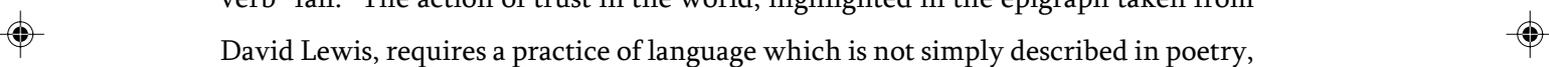
In its dedication to Chinese poets, in its allusion to sixteenth century Indian painting (“peacock in a rainstorm at night”) and in its citation of Michael Donhauser, the Lichtensteinian poet who has experimented with Japanese verse forms, *Not-You* puts down several powerful markers for the significance of Prynne’s increasing interest in a kind of reverse orientalism, in the performance of elective affinities amounting almost to a disavowal of inherited cultural relations. At the same time, the opening reference to twins and recurrent glimpses of domestic antagonism introduce the circumscription of genetic links and familiarised connections. Generic intimacy, ideologically sanctioned, is evoked precisely through instances of its failure, its reliance on surrogate forms of the discourse it is meant to embody: “Her hymnal by the bed, his sheltered | housing.” Across the sequence, there is almost a narrative of simultaneous coupling and uncoupling, with masculine and feminine pronouns swerving away from mutuality. The singularity of self is made to seem irremediable through linguistic replication; predicates do not extend the self into the world but suggest its infinite capacity for self-reflection: “*she shielded, he heating... We do weld*” (my emphases). That last verb is a typical recruit to the governing tension of a need to suture, or repair, various kinds of division: “We do weld, the | seam holding sun flakes scatters dis- | cussion forward only roused.” Technically, the poem “shakes apart” [*dis-quaterere*] that which its language holds together, and the enjambement provides a simple demonstration of its ability to enforce slanting links between elements that a linear reading would seem to break apart. In the longest poem of the sequence, resistance to horizontality arises from and consolidates a form of “trust:” “a rising vertical trust: enough to clear | line to line clasp essentials.” The enjambement also acts as a reminder of the writing’s unusual predilection for hyphenated phrases, the point being that you can hyphenate anything; create meaning through relations where none existed previously. The hyphenated title speaks of the necessity for this to be more than self-seeding; of the necessity for joining the self with what it is not.

The separateness of what is joined is a blighted condition arousing expectations of a need for treatment, specifically for “cure,” although “cure” is labelled “terrible” on



one page that counterpoints it with “care.” The final appearance of the word—“air’s cure”—converts it from remedy to a means of arresting decay, when accelerated decomposition might be preferable: “No acts | rot more slowly in the memory.” The penultimate page in the sequence instructs the reader to “Condemn this song... to lie down; not yet rising | star now clean slain to spare either.” Between the alternatives of mercy and condemnation, the focal role is that of “rising” trust, by means of which language hyphenates—both joins and separates—identical and non-identical elements. “Clean” and “slain” are not only half-rhymes, they also recall the separation of Western and Eastern branches of the Indo-European family of languages according to the *centum/satem* test, dividing languages into those which begin their word for a hundred with a “k” sound, and those which use an “s” sound.

A lack of trust is identified with the absence of certain kinds of reading, “causing the forest | to fail softly by watching leaves turn.” Organic decay is shadowed by the turning pages of a book; the double meaning is there in English, but is even stronger in Italian, whose “foglio” is premeditated in the slight vertical pressure exerted on the verb “fail.” The action of trust in the world, highlighted in the epigraph taken from David Lewis, requires a practice of language which is not simply described in poetry, but which in its meshing of identical and non-identical elements is ineradicably poetic.



## MARJORIE WELISH

### *Red D Gypsum*

*Reversion to earth* does not leave matters as they were before. Words capture deeds. In the course of environmental recuperation, the earths through which industrial wastes are made to pass implicate processes which complicate and compromise nature. Re: re-. The thing of it. The thing of it in *reversion*, and/or *resumed*, and/or *rejoinder*, and/or *reverse*, and/or *relinquish*, and/or *refund*, and/or *remix*—the very vocabulary would demonstrate recycling's interference with recall. "Forget it" leaves a trace. A trace nowhere more vividly than in the legal protocol enunciated in the phrase: Strike it from the record.

*Reversion to earth buy out* attaches an economic solution to an ecological problem, or, rather, substitutes an opportunistic economy in furtherance of compromise which leaves the problem intact. Re: re-. As in *reform purchase*, incommensurables collide; as in *reform purchase*, incommensurables collude, the ethics of situations flummoxed meanwhile. A poetry constituted of sampling core differences at their most extreme issues in critical instrumentality. Informed through conflict, montage may show *inter-plate reversion to earth buy out*.

Between terms, an interpolating text creates text. Re: inter-. Inter-mimetic are these minerals: *red, iron, liver*. *Infer, interval*. Earth through which vocabulary is made to pass, vocabularies made to pass, earth through which vocabulary would demonstrate remix, furthers interval. Remix the thing of it. And further the very strike: forget it!

And here, an opportunistic economy discrepant with earth. *Buy out*, trade off. Emissions copulate with earth, earth's shooting pains that the very strike complicates. Forgive and forget. Reverse diversionary gestures. *Reversion to diversionary sub-committee*.



Iron

Incorrigible minerals

Red

Liver

Unforgettable you

Antidote

Implicating

Processes

## ULF STOLTERFOHT

werde schwert (oder stirb beim versuch). für jeremy prynne

erstes gedicht der schöneberg artista proleta fraktion: schapf. der zehnte halb geleert. bevor die köpfe auf den biertisch sanken erklang ein sang wie folgt: pentateuch heißt mein scheid / liegeland unser kind / abgefickt deren magd - nun kennt ihr das textgespinst.

was aber wenn ( so monoton die neuköllner delegation): einer krautige hosen hat / und haberschlachtige strümpf? dann zwingend radikalprogramm: vierzig morgen und ein maultier. konzeptschwein. bzw. andock: der härteste schuftmann im rock. dem folgt verschämt

gedenkmoment. wonach mit urgewalt so siebenhundert newtonmeter auf die folgeverse wirken. alles mit versteht sich geregelt wurm. jetzt läßt man sie los. bloß: die achse hält dem druck nicht stand. gehalt knallt um die ohren - hierin "aufsteigenden vogel-

schwärmen nicht unähnlich". freilich wenig gedeihlich. weiteres zitat mit blut-leber-bindung - auf daß sich ein spektrales bild des kampfes ergibt: hast du zwei trotzki-beweinungen - trenn dich von einer! sie verstärken sich nicht! bezirk tempelhof-nord (et-

was einfacher gestrickt / mit gewerblichen künftlern gespickt) ergreift das wort / gibt zu bedenken: wenn unser stand / wenn unser wurzeln unbekannt / bewegung sicherlich zerrinnt / wie burgenbau aus zimt. nun ja. wenig glücklich formuliert. ungelenk.

aber wesentliches stimmt. die vielleicht verstörendste gliederung der stadt. sei weiterhin erinnert an: dem rebellen die menge was dem maulwurf der mulch. und ähnlich kruder klump. was letztlich blieb war ein papier für minimalisten. und ausreichend platz für notizen.

## WILL POOLE

### Seductive forms: *Unanswering Rational Shore*

On the track the news radiates like a planet auction,  
for the best rates hard to chew. If it seems too good,  
sucker, the pap is surely toxic, unless the glad  
hand goes your way, soft as velvet. The strokes  
of the palm not even touched, a waft of livid air  
gives the take its donation, sexual preening overtly  
lavish in symmetry; your flicker goes to mine and

locks into warranty, well why not. Over lush fields  
a rising sun pitches out its sulky damp shadow, in  
reminder of cost levels in the benefit stream. Oh  
fight this fight or sleep when others wake, the  
maze of a shining path leads on without a break;  
count the steps in retrospect, burnt umber places  
engrossed forever in dumb-struck dropped reward.

A solemn air, and the best comforter  
To an unsettled fancy, cure thy brains,  
Now useless, boil within thy skull. There stand,  
For you are spell-stopped.

... Their understanding  
Begins to swell, and the approaching tide  
Will shortly fill the reasonable shore,  
That now lies foul and muddy.

So Prynne's 2001 *Unanswering Rational Shore* probes the Shakespearean supposition at the end of *The Tempest* – that the tide of the understanding does and will meet the shore of the rational in a snug fit, and the muddy hinterland will go ... well, where?



“Early grief, late woe ahead,” Prynne’s first segment negatively concludes. Despite constant approaches, the symmetry of tide and shore is continually disrupted in Prynne’s sequence, a fabled meeting: as the third in this sequence of fourteen fourteen-line poems opens, “fabled dyads;” not quite “fabled *dryads*,” but *dyads*, either atoms with the combining power of exactly and only two; or two musical notes with a sure interval between them; or – we play the dictionary game – in crystallography, a true axis of symmetry: “overtly/ lavish in symmetry,” perhaps, then, too lavish.

I’ve chosen to discuss this, the sixth section of Prynne’s 2001 work because it intersects with one of my own fascinations – geometry proffered and then qualified – and because it exemplifies some of Prynne’s more typical lexicons. So, in this segment of *Unanswering Rational Shore* are mixed the lexics of the media (“news”), of the market (“cost levels”), of the liaison (“sexual preening”), and of the struggle (“Oh / fight this fight”). In the opening line, axes multiply: the line (or “track”) dimensionalises into “news” – in origin an acronym for north, south, east, west – the vectors then becoming circumscribed (“radiates”), and then ensphered (“planet”): from point to three dimensions. (Later on, the rising sun and its shadow introduce the possibility of conics.) But all this, “overtly / lavish in symmetry,” is hard to swallow, it is suggested: “the best rates hard to chew.” It “seems too good,” this geometrical news of “cost levels” and “benefit stream[s];” and anyway who auctions planets? And who agrees to such a deal, “unless the glad hand goes your way,” perhaps the greased hand, the hand well-played, the hand of “sexual preening”? Well, why not?

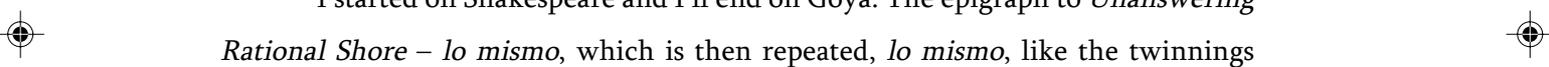
The poem carries its shade, however, like the “rising sun pitch[ing] out its sulky damp shadow.” The geometrical expansions of the market become in the second stanza a meandering trap: “the / maze of a shining path leads on without a break.” Mazes, we recall, come in two types: the maze of many paths, where there is a decision which way to go, and the one-track maze, like the nineteenth-century labyrinth near the west door of Ely cathedral, where the sole path indeed “leads on without a break,” tracing every precinct of the design until finally depositing its choiceless traveller in its unicursal centre.

Yet if the deal is “surely toxic,” there is complicity and temptation: “well why not.” The velvet-and-stilettos feel of the lines curling across the joint of the poem – “your flicker goes to mine and // locks into warranty” – reminds me of John Donne’s



weird lines in ‘The Extasie’ on threaded eyes: “Our eye-beames twisted, and did thred/ Our eyes, upon one double string.” Such reciprocity is apparent elsewhere: “gives the take its donation” wraps around transitivity: “the take” is something “give[n],” and something given is a “donation.”

However it remains so that many of the more syntactically coherent moments of the poem sound voices of warning: “If it seems too good, sucker, the pap is surely toxic;” “a waft of livid air;” and, most prominently of all, “Oh/ fight this fight or sleep when others wake,” an ultimatum to act, or to somnabulate. Similar calls appear throughout the collection: “Petrol in search of flame;” “Don’t ever now take heed of that;” “not a word left on the plate;” and, the final words of the collection, “implicit final appeal.” *Unanswering Rational Shore* keeps pressing the idea of symmetry upon the reader, an idea which sickens or warps the more it is pressed: “sexual preening overtly / lavish in symmetry” – “lavish,” etymologically a deluge, and behind that, a washing, *lavare*. Mutual preening, pecking and washing – a contract narcissism to be avoided.



I started on Shakespeare and I’ll end on Goya. The epigraph to *Unanswering Rational Shore* – *lo mismo*, which is then repeated, *lo mismo*, like the twinnings throughout of seven-line stanzas and the division of the fourteen poems into two facing sets – alludes to Goya’s series of 82 etchings, *The Disasters of War*, executed from about 1810-20 in the process of the occupation and liberation of Spain in the War of Independence. These unflinching, angry records of torture and mutilation each bear a terse inscription in Spanish: like “this is worse;” “bury them and be silent;” “that always happens;” “wonderful heroism! against dead men!” “Lo mismo,” “the same,” is one such caption from early in the sequence. Later on, it appears again in the variant form “it will be the same;” and later still, “the same elsewhere.” “Lo mismo” itself is the third in the series, and follows an etching marked “with reason or without” – so back to “unanswering rational shore,” the initial Shakespearean revision. Goya’s etching itself is symmetrical, after a fashion: armed men attacking armed men, in pairs. But the crudely weaponed Spaniard of the foreground, his axe chopping down on the flailing sword-bearing Frenchman, as his face stares somewhere else, “engrossed forever in dumb-struck dropped reward,” bears a look of terror, reciprocal, complicit despite itself.



## ANDREA BRADY

### No Turning Back: *Acrylic Tips*

In 2002, the year this acrylic/lyric was published, the war on Afghanistan was subsiding, the inspections regime got a new set of dentures, and the intifada kept scores in misery; Arafat was besieged in PLO headquarters, Palestinian fighters in the Church of the Nativity. Though it refers specifically to none of these events, *Acrylic Tips* is incised by 'newsy entrances,' 'split-screen seepage tills' and 'Miracle cheap shots' of this 'yet novel | terror.' The poem closes with its own lyric refutation, text's 'weaving frame' discarded while still in Woomera refugees wait with their 'lips sewn to silence.' Its anti-pastoralist last line, 'pipes to ground glass to unslaked level fields,' mocks the novitiate ending which pictures a new career in 'fresh Woods, and Pastures new:' this song is 'thrown by high | winds' back at the singer, nothing is let fall, the products are recalled, toiled back. This self-defeating lyric literally turns on itself, and on the morbid beginnings which open the poem. *Acrylic Tips* is a 'fatstock primeur,' publishing the early news of permanent war, the *morning* bulletin, the crush horizon, the ledge. It is engorged with topoi which debase the emotive and mimetic facilities of lyric, the ability of the turning plough of verse to make us *turn* towards the world, or away from it, and to *feel things*. I would divide its politically interpolated topoi into three main categories: first, the divisions of body and land; second, interiorisations – stunted limb buds, toxic introversions, tumid swellings and marshy slews; and third, the perplexities of lyric activity, including seeing, speaking, and eating.

Acrylic tips are nail extensions: decorative plastic claws. But there is another context for the title, suggested by the warning (8) that 'heparin || Regulation demeans and spoils the touchline.' Named from the Greek for *liver*, which Plato described as the seat of the appetites, heparin is derived from the intestinal tissue of slaughtered pigs. It is an anticoagulant used on medical devices, in 'needlepoint decision' to make a 'rapt token incision along a defined track.' Heparin offers a clue to the riot of amputation in this poem ('His arms roiled back into | sleeve fluid;' 'each clasping abrogated breast' – the repeal of the breast, and of the sympathies it inter; 'mourn arms having none to lift;' 'raise a clamour to sober digits'.) The 'lenticular beads' (13) could be heparin acrylic beads, used to insert genetic products into embryonic animals such as

limbless chicks. In experiments conducted in the early 00's, scientists transferred FGF2 on heparin acrylic beads into the limb bud mesoderm, and provoked the rudimentary formation of wing skeletons in chicks. The spoiled touchline, 'Prolix touch,' 'first touch first ready-made:' these experiments extend the mechanisms for feeling, as well as its anxieties ('post-hormone limb crisis'). Images intervene of 'flocking unkempt birds' whose 'overt wing tips' are cried up in the lab, then rendered as 'spatchcock pronation,' the roughly butchered halves face down, split and roasting. Try grasping the ready-to-hand in these conditions.

The body is axial, lineated ('lined | body search reckless'), its anatomical self-mirroring driven by proteins which form a 'generative carpet underlay.' The poem talks of 'sonic driven receptor sites:' one such protein is 'sonic hedgehog' (Shh). Discovered in 1993 and named bathetically after the Sega Genesis character ('his right arm | tied to creation'), Shh contributes to the specialisation of stem cells ('her unformed casual | stem'). Secreted from the notochord, it causes different types of cells to be developed in the ventral region of the neural tube. It induces the eye to separate into two bilateral fields: 'flickered up eyelash address;' it effects the specification of the mesoderm in *gut* formation: 'nominal drastic pathway, thumb printed | gorge;' and is implicated in the growth of *hair*, feathers, scales: 'her hair stroking his cheek | in compound reflected,' 'attach | to fissures nailed front and back: hair roots adrift' (12). It also causes medial hinge cells to form the floor *plate* of the neural tube ('loop the belay plate moulded at entrant | face value seared'). Its activities are fundamental to the differentiation of celluloid labour in the body, and so 'seared' into the constitution of the organism. In the ventral midbrain it causes a pattern of *arcs*. A linear source introduced perpendicular to the normal source generates a series of stripes that *wrap* around the brain like a barber pole or a belaying rope. 'To wheel and turn about spandrels high over submission,' an elemental drive blustering through the triumphal arches of the brain.

The malfunction of this protein produces genetic mutations, and *Acrylic Tips* mimics linguistically the wounds and mishaps of the experimental body: 'new chasm revival tips || Sprung forth digressed, cicatrised;' 'Each neck attempted | forearm reversed;' 'skull rims | close to fusion.' To pacify his Christian armies who were incensed by the fantasy of mutant children being bred from placentas but happy to

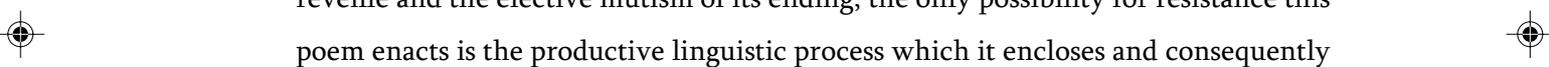
watch Iraqi children play in the depleted uranium dust, George Bush began his campaign to ban stem cell research in April 2002. As this poem makes clear, the clone and the colony are part of the rapacity of god-given nature: in the strawberry patch, open space is colonised by the clone, extended laterally from an auxiliary bud on the mother plant by a 'stolon.' Mammalian reproductivity is aligned with plant expansionism, the grubbing Mediterranean roots of pine, juniper, terebinth (a bower of shameful pleasure, Isaiah 1.29). Milkwort was thought to induce breast milk; it serves also as an expectorant, giving 'stultified relief' to the 'throat vibration' that substitutes for speech. Bay, 'laurel basket:' crown of emperor and poet or abortofactant? The rooting of plants in 'foetal daylight,' the rooting infant mouthing for its 'abrogated breast,' for 'milk | at a lip trickle:' these starvings are all mouth and no trousers. With the metaphysician's *timor natalis*, Prynne writes of 'defection placement after birth foray.' Birth is a dawn raid on the earth, from which only the brave infant of Saguntum defects. The fissile mania of the blastocyst splits the mother, and she spills her child on the ground: 'infertile lipid || Sack on split her mother rare spilling grilse for clipper.' An image bred between two stockfish? The erotic imagination is as cold as that. Penetrative mechanisms are violently lubricated and inserted into protein codes: 'Soaping up reduced | digits at a punitive cleft,' the regular accusatory disgust amid the option wrappers, 'why isn't ready yet,' parodies of castration analogised to the broken-winged bird. Though her grapple juices may not yet be flowing, 'why not try | On even broken surface folds,' push the breach a little too early. What is disturbingly characteristic of this rhetoric of forced nature is its pronouns: it's *she* who is cunning, agile, pressing out the 'tunic liquor;' her hands (she still has them – she is the predator, not the *mutilé*) 'on him...like monkfish,' angling for 'her prey gene expression resentment.' The monkfish, or allmouth: horrific bottom-dweller with a gaping maw and suspiciously attractive bit of tail. Pandora again, or any of the usual female demigods of destruction.

Motherlands in this text are also split, precincts under rasp, 'digger collapse ominous' of Rachel Corrie's murder in March 2003. Amputation of the olive groves, cut off by the wall which the Israelis began building in June 2002; furrows 'fixed' in mastic, scraped out by an artillery of ploughshares: mastic, from the Greek for jaw, used by Hesiod for the gnashing of teeth. Associated with the lineated and amputated body, the bound and divided land, is lyric. 'They glimpse the line torn in order | antagonist



ducted retention.’ Lines of genetic and poetic influence can flow with the beneficence of rain or honey, or incur injurious mutations. ‘Of the influence line my honey at due rain down partly | on useful toil.’ In a land of milk and honey, where the child was balmed or fed rather than shot for throwing pebbles at tanks, the line of poetry might take its place as ‘useful toil.’ But this air shrieks with radio waves and dark screaming cries. Down the ‘wire soundless no blip rented child oration:’ poetry must not be ‘rented’ to perform the obsequies for the dead children of Nablus and Netanya, to dance on a string for the ravishing vagrancy of the news.

It is no wonder that the poem ends with its own defeat, when the voices of the rented and burning children are an antiphon which enfolds the spasmodic variations of the lyric individual’s ‘dental roof.’ At the lip of a ‘pea mouth well versed’ in repudiation, the *vituperatio* turns back into the throat, ‘Doing | all turns, invert sweetness.’ ‘She forces her throat in | wards:’ the introverted throat becomes a mechanism for eating, not for speaking or retching. Limbs retreat into the body, eyes and throat turn away from the world, and the body swells with this contamination. Between its beastly reveille and the elective mutism of its ending, the only possibility for resistance this poem enacts is the productive linguistic process which it encloses and consequently destroys. However, it is worth considering what these experimental mutations in the linguistic field reveal about the directions our sensory and cognitive capacities for resistance can take. Do the results, extrapolated to four of the six generic human types (you, he, she, they), displace the particular burning child with a generalised condition? Is this eloquent testimony to the futility of lyric outreach in some sense a mirror, not a negation, of the incredible dream of human potentiality in the world with which Prynne’s early poems awakened us?



## ROBERT POTTS

‘Yes, why is it like this’

Or to ask the question another way, what is the impact of Prynne’s more recent and evidently “political” books, from *Triodes* onwards, with their unprecedentedly impacted language? Where do these go? What might be their effect and on whom? Any thoughts?

John Wilkinson

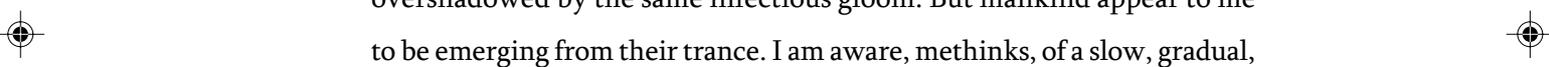
*Biting the Air* (2003) has, for a highly impacted late Prynne poem, a remarkable amount of “declared context;” even the poem’s completion, for instance, can be dated between September 20, 2003, when the *Economist* rued the collapse of the Cancun WTO talks as arising from “cynicism, delusion and incompetence” and December 5, when Equipage announced the poem’s publication. The line “it is easy to make a country prosperous” appears to come from the Latin American economist Hernando de Soto’s *The Mystery of Capital* (2000), quoted in September 2003 by Stephen Pollard in both a CNE paper and in *The Times*: “it is easy to make a country prosperous. It needs only security of life and property, and markets in which property rights can be valued and traded.”<sup>1</sup>

Much of the poem’s technical language – “parallel imports,” “protected gray markets” and so on – relate to details of the Cancun negotiations, especially in relation to the pharmaceutical industries. There are other direct quotations in the poem, and even the non-contemporary ones relate to issues of trade and poverty. The epigraph from William of Ockham’s *Summa Logicae* – “every property is the property of something, but it is not the property of just anything” – refers to linguistic properties, but its use quietly points to Ockham’s more controversial belief, as a Franciscan, that his order could not own property; and, in the words of the philosophy professor Paul Spade, “if everyone lived according to this ideal, so that no one owned any property either individually or collectively, then there would be no property at all. The Franciscan ideal, then, shared by Conventuals and Spirituals alike, entailed the *total abolition of all property rights.*”



The startling eruption of a trident of quotations on page nine of the poem – a singular disruption of the tight blocks which constitute the rest of the poem – adds further dimensions. “Only to avert disaster” relates to the US contemplating the inevitability of using nuclear weapons preemptively (“It would follow that our own preparation could no longer be geared to a policy that attempts only to avert disaster during the early ‘surprise’ stages of a war”).<sup>2</sup> “Except when compelling reasons” takes us back to the GATT treaties<sup>3</sup> and their ostensible obligation to reduce or eliminate barriers to developing countries’ exports.

The third quotation is from Shelley’s introduction to *The Revolt of Islam*, where he remarks on the spirit of pessimism afflicting his age and its literature:



inquiries into moral and political science, have become little else than vain attempts to revive exploded superstitions, or sophisms like those of Mr. Malthus . . . calculated to lull the oppressors of mankind into a security of everlasting triumph. Our works of fiction and poetry have been overshadowed by the same infectious gloom. But mankind appear to me to be emerging from their trance. I am aware, methinks, of a slow, gradual, silent change. In that belief I have composed the following Poem.

The durable triumph of a Malthusian view of scarcity and property – “A man who is born into a world already possessed, if he cannot get subsistence from his parents on whom he has a just demand, and if the society do not want his labour, has no claim of right to the smallest portion of food, and, in fact, has no business to be where he is. At nature’s mighty feast there is no vacant cover for him” – runs through *Biting the Air*.

The poem opens with a sarcastic invocation of horizons “blue and bright forever,” a quotation from Mahler’s *Das Lied von der Erde* (itself a quotation from Hans Bethge’s paraphrased translations of eighth-century Chinese poetry). Those horizons of a prosperous nation or an expanding trade zone recur throughout, in darker and darker contexts; it is worth noticing how many synonyms for liminality are disposed across the poem. As the G7 gives way to the G21, we race towards a moment of Yeatsian apocalypse; “this is the cancerous lace curtain fringing | a lake of toxic refuse, waiting to be born.” The “lace curtain” is the new Iron Curtain; a (militarily protected)



margin or horizon to prevent illegal entry into the expanded European Union. And the reference to the “minute-men” on page 11 now looks prophetic, as attitudes harden on the Mexican border.

The poem is in no doubt about the inevitable violence with which inequalities of wealth are maintained or revolted against: “Don’t make sores if | you can’t pay to dress their origin, a globe toll | spoiling for animus.” The “hands” which appear though the poem – more than a dozen mentions across the twelve pages – shake in agreement, grab at property, “[pinch] the promised drip” (a fine metaphor for Big Pharma’s legal battle to avoid saving African lives), wash themselves clean. And in the final image, with its suggestion of nuclear conflagration, the poem completes its dramatic arc from the sorrowful, ironized opening to its desperate final question. A “bad infinity” of constant economic expansion becomes a “bad zero” of ever more calibrated levels of human poverty; new life arrives already stamped and branded with its value and life expectancy.

But “why is it like this, not even hand-set like / a headline reduction”? *Biting the Air* is composed so that, despite its dramatic momentum, it does not unfold line by line, but by the disposal of recurrent images and motifs and their shifting relation to each other. Those motifs include mensuration, gradation and asymmetry; patents, brands, generics; the suffering, sore-ridden body; religious language; biotechnology and eugenics. The overall effect is of a vicious, runaway process of constantly maintained advantage and disadvantage, in clear contrast to the fanciful language in which the issues around Cancun were discussed, on nearly all sides.

But the poem is, surely, more than a satire on the farce of the WTO talks, where bilateral bullying and back-room deals ensure the triumph of the wealthy over the poor; if it were only that, its surface topicality would sit perversely with the time-consuming effort of interpretation it requires of its readers. Wider and wider philosophical and political questions about language and property are being played out here.

The poem is studded with direct questions (“do you already know this;” “why not protect to salve...;” “don’t you wish now...;” “why is it like this;” “did you hear that told to you;” “why yours;” “can’t you stop this...;” “don’t you yet notice...”) and imperatives. The use of pronouns (especially “we” and “you”) is notable. It is an



unusually direct and urgent address; this song of the earth is a biting air. Does it really demand that “we” imagine something far beyond the marginal adjustments to inequity that the WTO talks produce – something, instead, akin to Ockham’s radical challenge to his own Pope? Or is it, as at times it seems to me, a poem of helpless pessimism, sceptical of the “sitcom” of human and political agency? Two years on from its publication, I am still unsure how to answer that question. This is, instead, my own small answer to John Wilkinson’s.

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.cne.org/pub\\_pdf/2003\\_09\\_04\\_EU\\_barriers\\_kill.pdf](http://www.cne.org/pub_pdf/2003_09_04_EU_barriers_kill.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Memo from Eisenhower to John Foster Dulles, September 8, 1953

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.wto.org/English/docs\\_e/legal\\_e/gatt47\\_e.doc](http://www.wto.org/English/docs_e/legal_e/gatt47_e.doc)

## OUT TO LUNCH

### *Biting the Air*

We make a dab list, warm sunny days, cynicism;  
delusion and incompetence. In peril by abatement  
subsisting, want a scrap don't take it, did you  
free the snick connect generic, sliding forth

Dear Jeremy, I flew, pooting forth, into the shug abyss, my marginal intelligence protesting the knees wet otter pad, my crime on lint, subtending to jealous hope moron panic batter, with fuse wire, monkey grease, whose chains came to Berrium. Some rulership poop ship in a fine relay composed of incerest, crabbed by hearkening hands in delight glad and hovering. Don't deny the rebuttal, hope hard in the surround ceram. Pink nettle. A festive gleam like a highlight, with frieze fuzzed to talk chalk, explicatory honesty as a quick pink margin. In Somers salts, reminder outlay scrolled by the pup deck, tentacle charm losing conundrum in pump-through mandible seizure. Fro to ebb an irony tab, yet hot credit well-I-never driving-license preformed in concrete, with reflect stipple key partly shewn yet queening onions set by the roof. Not minding to echo, letting the parrot brain have its ten-month-old bloomster, each daisy needing a sunburst in its heyday polyphony. With bratwurst esemplasm sunshine, the hope burning in the backburner surmise. Findalot Fido barks in the encounter, erstwhile not wilting, with syrup passage on the drip. Usedom Buxtehude with unguent massage, the pill-popped fop somehow flapping bunny atomistic. The battering ram went funny & rubbery at the Chinese wall, but I allowed affection to blush my pimple, innit. With residual nozzle-cream in a dream pope dairy-chain milkwort. Endless, sailless, corkscrew pergamont. In bunting. In Krupskaya. In concealed lettering promising all-which-ways noone else breathed to me.

made hand to lip, deal one. Help yourself dress up  
a dummy, slash tariff excluded painted to schedule;  
solar deep blue wave limit at a brink and over no  
compromise frontside residual, a slam to big

The camp was a known wretch, big V-sign planted on the grassy knoll. I fought Roderick, plumbline fasted to the foodstuff. I tried and tried, the main pattern was far too slow but I relished crumbs from the tabular foreskin droppermouth heave bet. In quandary. In wish a lot. In not being able. The Blakean shake-down shimmering in corridors of Paolozzi dead zone, with carpets slippery by the air duct and Ulli rabbiting to me. Like postulate. Like sticky pants. No rational frim-fram capable of pinning the butterfly on the blazer. Charles Baudelaire like an uneasy conscience, the thin Englishness made me run to Swamp Dogg. Yet yets stack. Abominable heap heap, rent totter logic, wondering what the fuzz says. Odd dick is wandering in the public lot, pretzel bar-b-que finishing with the twizzle-stick, same same plastered into the car lift. Can't agree, but can't not treat my thirst with its tricks. My wanting.

Only to avert disaster

get your peak on

mobile antagonise

fresh lender up

even vent

except when compelling reasons

hand grab this who

gets to say the off

feedstock prone

deficit, slippage

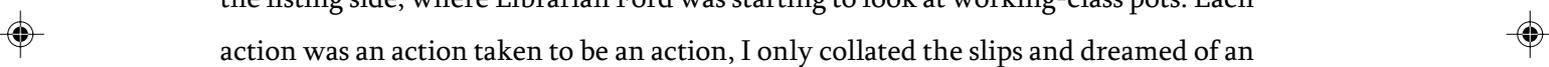
a security of everlasting triumph

Hungry Horace struck again, the logic washed over me like blue detergent, I held my nose and counted suds till the bill came. Bad ideas cast into an ironized pit, I balked but kept using the buzz, its quick retort to the *Guardian* inconsistency. With pale motes dancing before the duncecap, humiliation pent stiff against the classroom wall. Penderel's Oak was an alternative venue, Al's nose for a fact another cantankerous whoop of joy. And the big oar sticking out of my back, stickle press for the gently rotating stag partly roasted to the haunch vessel. With crime invites and sward fish in the wabe. My measly correctitude asserted that compromise and mediation had no dialect spark. The epigones cried no and blew my frock. I was left in a cardboard



refrigerator box in the Houston dawn, ramshackle novelettes leaking my Dietzgen replica all over the teenagers. All I learned turned like a gone-by matjas in my hydrochloric furnace, with asprin & bicarb harping up the white walls. The blunders were salutary, a cutting of all zealotry, a clear sign of the signal. With Paul Flowers waiting in the wings with a beer glass.

or gravitate to the entrance be steady indigent  
fastidious report prematurely slant balances.  
This is the cancerous lace curtain fringing  
a lake of toxic refuse, waiting to be born.



Wearing dead Dina Shore's shoes, truth had a habit of being a grit transferable between incompatible systems, bruise & hurt the symptom of actual ingest and congress. With flute passages and Stollen in the wig-hat seminary where the tied-bow salamander finds everything to be a curly tail. I hopped aboard the big alarm and careened over to the listing side, where Librarian Ford was starting to look at working-class pots. Each action was an action taken to be an action, I only collated the slips and dreamed of an extension to the English language. With sandwich runner-board feinting chrome Vittel, each ice wart a bottle of relief. Pen down in the pubic fuzz, with giggles somehow right behind the great groan. It burbled up monstrously, gave me the lift required, had a place at the table. Bitten, the air recedes into the filterless gasmask, reminding me of the ungrounded atmos, "along with rock the palatable gift of the biosphere." The technical ink spilt at the margins and the stain was indelible in the brains of the fervid living. Happy birthday.

Somers Town 6/6/6

## WILLIAM FULLER

### Biting the Air to Work

At delirium of train speeds *rag hands* are hermetic targets for smoothing multum in parvo huskiness. *Return flow block* is the old Enron, *risen in glory you | bantling screamers* out of my bones and sinews. At Clybourn observe clause management techniques. Richly seditious, the new day dangles *delusion and incompetence* like unallocated exemption. Sun over wet streets, wheel without wheel, densely clear, possessing a war-like reflected property, and the day delivers too much of it I thought. Some propositions

are labyrinths without walls. *Neither is safe*, but a shadow black and blossoming broad imperatives. Having enjoyed your *predicted funk*, come into the Garden with bad Intention, forehead harder than flint. Half the world is proprietary, the rest is bootstrapped. How sleepy the Intellectual Powers, wielding their *aphthous winch*; then they go crazy. A figure springs upward: the indemnitee, soaked with action—*blather, designate, render, put in to simmer. In peril by abatement/ subsisting*, the ‘draught of Voidness’ crosses the street—by manipulated sequence, to the banks above the whipping circle shores, *fresh lender up* your umbrella’s ears, inapprehensible precision, taut plurality.

*Don’t make sores if | you can’t pay to dress their origin* after which my sores ran all night. But this morning *pensive, precursory, and peckish*, projecting variable delivery forward to retain yield against the short, I realize that being other to other is not-other. The pieces are wholes, lakes, mirrors. Their stabil-ity dwells *on a tilted capital field*, ominously *did you crinkle did you*—I resist my own questions. Would it have been better to have looked more steadily at them? I happened to arrive just as they left. At the station, under the clock, in the rain.

Your language will vary according to your degree of learn-ing. Spot the non-repetition, then add fuel—here words are names of words, *tied up | to kin you would desire that*. Yes I would. ‘Every dog feels as I do the urge to ask questions, and I feel, like every dog, the urge to keep silent.’<sup>1</sup> Are the lights blinking in the cement mixer an effect of the text or inflationary perception? *Do you already know this or yet | allocate sufficiency*—the latter. There were other principles I was too rushed to think about



(the doghouse principle, for example). Yet among the foreseeable outcomes were gleaming representations through frayed showbread ecstatically to be gleaned.

<sup>1</sup> Kafka, *Investigations of a Dog*

MAZEN HIMYARI

As They Tie Whelps to the Bellwether: A Note on 'Refuse Collection'

*It is necessary to conceive of a parodic-serious stage where the accumulation of detoured elements, far from aiming to arouse indignation or laughter by alluding to some original work, will express our indifference toward a meaningless and forgotten original, and concern itself with rendering a certain sublimity.<sup>1</sup>*

*And so of all living creatures, whilst they are imprisoned, or restrained, with walls, or chayns; and of the water whilst it is kept in by banks, or vessels, that otherwise would spread it selfe into a larger space, we use to say, they are not at Liberty, to move in such manner, as without those externall impediments they would. But when the impediment of motion, is in the constitution of the thing it selfe, we use not to say, it wants the Liberty; but the Power to move; as when a stone lyeth still<sup>2</sup>*

Reason is not an end in itself, and liberation is not empowerment. 'Refuse Collection' drills its assembly of detoured elements into a militant lexicon, engaged in a process of interrogation and recruitment. It refutes the palatinate gardens of artistic value for the oubliette of propaganda, pleasure for utility, the nightingale for the owl. A quick, nasty, brutish little masterpiece, it leads us to our own improvised devices, only to find we are as distant as before. As such it is a treatise on craftsmanship and the possibility of what Guy Debord and Gil J. Wolman called 'literary communism.'

Hobbes laments man's distinction from those other political creatures, ants and bees, who manage to sustain their respective commonwealths 'without reason, speech' or any central pacemaker issuing commands.<sup>3</sup> They are guided simply by pheromone trails, instinct and basic rules, from which a colony emerges. Man's failing is, among other things, his obligation to a private nature, whereas for ants and bees 'the common good differeth not from the private.' 'Refuse Collection' abjures the autonomy of the private self and in doing so detourns the selfhood intrinsic to an expressionist poetics 'from deep inside.'



Tha hit beo soth ich do heom god.  
 An for heom ich chadde mi blod.<sup>4</sup>

It is this ultimate detournement that the poet-reader is implored, by example, to accomplish, to ‘stand outside the language...and understand its corruption.’<sup>5</sup> (Something this slavish commentary is abjectly failing to do.)

An important distinction Hobbes makes, which corresponds to that between power and liberty, is that between Command and Counsel, the former being for the benefit of the one issuing the command, the latter for the one receiving counsel:

For the words *do this*, are the words not only of him that commandeth;  
 but also of him that giveth counsel.<sup>6</sup>

The phrase ‘do it’ recurs throughout ‘Refuse Collection,’ but as a mock command, rhetorically displaced. For our socially conscious bee who has discovered a food source and needs to inform his comrades, an outright command will not do, it is understood by inference — ‘Come with me,’ it implies:

it raises its gaster and extrudes its sting bearing a droplet of liquid. This attracts nestmates to it in the nest. As soon as the first of these nestmates reaches the caller, the caller runs out of the nest and leads the nestmate to the food source.<sup>7</sup>

The bee undertakes neither command nor counsel, because it is not a private person but a public bee, and beholden only to its hive. The commonwealth that Prynne refers to in his poem (‘DIY there is a country,’ ‘Our land ours, | raw and forever’) is more than the metaphor of a *civitas*. What Prynne’s work establishes, taking the Situationists’ method to the ‘superior syntheses’ they predicted, is the use of poetic language in the construction of a biocultural niche. In contrast to nativist theories of the evolution of language, which regard it as genotypic, the notion of language as a biocultural niche regards it as phenogenotypic:





the capacity for the language is...a cognitive behavioural relationship between language user and the constituents of the language, just as the capacity for building a nest is a cognitive-behavioural relationship between the builder and the constituents of the nest.<sup>8</sup>

Inherent to the truthfulness of poetic language is a fidelity to usage and the rhetorical implications therein. The 'holy city' is 'ringed too close to call' as long as there is no clear distance between 'they' and 'we,' between the way 'they' use a concept and the way 'we' do. The poem is a rallying call for a militant lexicon in the 'civil war' Debord and Wolman identified half a century ago; when counsel is followed 'then is it turned into the nature of a command.'

The efficacy of counsel depends on who gives it and who receives it. I used the phrase poet-reader earlier because I think, as much as it was occasioned by a political media-event, 'Refuse Collection' is about writing poetry — militant, propagandist poetry. It is by such consciously political creative acts that we can determine the semiotic and behavioural factors that construct *our* biocultural niche.<sup>9</sup> The efficacy of such acts depends on their truthfulness, and that depends on how 'aghast' we are at whose 'demeanour.'

I asked the Hidden One: is there a purpose?  
Dear and doomed in brother and bird and tree,  
He answered, 'The purpose is creativity.  
What other purpose could there be?  
Am I not creating you - and you Me?'<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Debord, Guy and Wolman, Gil J (tr. Knabb Ken); *A User's Guide to Détournement*; bopsecrets.org (<http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/detourn.htm> - 24/5/2006)

<sup>2</sup> Hobbes, Thomas; *Leviathan* ; Part 2, Chapter 21; literature.org (<http://www.literature.org/authors/hobbes-thomas/leviathan/chapter-21.html> - 24/05/2006)

<sup>3</sup> Hobbes, Thomas; *Leviathan* ; Part 2, Chapter 17; Oxford; 1996; 113

<sup>4</sup> Gratian, J H G and Sykes, G F H (ed.); *The Owl and the Nightingale*; Cotton MS; London; 1935; ln. 1615; 51. Brian Stone translates this 'And though it's true, I do them good, / Because for men I shed my blood.' (*The Owl and the Nightingale*; London, 1971; 238)

<sup>5</sup> Prynne, J H (Pu Ling-en); *Keynote Speech at the First Pearl River Poetry Conference; Guangzhou, China, 28th June 2005; Quid16*; 2006

<sup>6</sup> Hobbes, Thomas; *Leviathan* ; Part 2, Chapter 25; Oxford; 1996; 169

<sup>7</sup> Bickerton, Derek; *The Origin of Language in Niche Construction* (quoting Sudds and Franks, 1987); bickerton.com; 2005 ([www.derekbickerton.com/ blog/\\_archives/2005/7/1/989799.html](http://www.derekbickerton.com/blog/_archives/2005/7/1/989799.html) - 24/5/2006) Bickerton posits recruitment in the foraging/scavenging niche as a central tenet in the origin of language.

<sup>8</sup> Sinha, Chris; *Language as a Biocultural Niche*; <http://www.cogling.org.uk>; 2006 (<http://www.cogling.org.uk/mambo/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=47> - 24/5/2006)

<sup>9</sup> 'if language originated as a result of niche construction, but is now biologically based (Lenneberg 1967), we have a clear case of feedback into the human genome from niche construction activities.' - Bickerton, 2005

<sup>10</sup> Pratt Green, F; *This Unlikely Earth*; 'Question and Answer'; Aldington; 1952; 13



JOHN KINSELLA

Oxidia: Go

1.

Slugs of lead, or sheets of lead folded  
and scrunched as a fist — flowing — wrap

contours and crags like lava on the verge  
of setting, the hunger of sheep eroding

County Peak, where purple hovea  
flowers at an altitude out of kilter with the wheatbelt,

the sullen salt lakes antagonising from below.  
And the sheets of asbestos smashed as litany

might be smashed, when liturgical oomph  
is caterwauled into abstraction; to repeat

the supposition, delete the lack of growth —  
the election of Wilson Tuckey in the Murchison

is concrete proof that the majority of voters  
in the part of the world are ignorant, selfish

and possibly dangerous, bigots who extend  
their idea of grace to air and soil, waste zones

of profit, productivity, and a system of prayer  
they only know. They say he came from here —

though I associate him with Carnarvon.  
He can't hear birds, nor cares.

2.

In the same way that Jeremy is fascinated by twine  
I am fascinated by wire — drawn out sentences

that become couplets, even terza rima, relentlessly linked  
but spooled from one string of language,

implying a narrative where no narrative exists.

3.

Scats — rabbit. Kangaroo. Fox.  
Warren is sand — salt mines.

Female redbacks trawling entrances.  
Elegant parrots in petite pairs.

Outwaiting 28s — Prynne in grey-  
wood, bleach of dead trees. Saltbed.

She-oaks on fringe, rim of failing melaleuca  
struggling, sparse — parsing multitudes

of ants, sultry Yenyenning winter. Opera.

