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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

Faculty of Humanities

English

THE FROWARD MASTER;

OR, F.T. PRINCE AND THE POETRY OF TIME

by

Bevil Luck

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

September 2018



UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

## ABSTRACT

Faculty of Humanities

Department of English

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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The thesis is on the poems of F.T. Prince and is about time, and being out of time, or misplaced in time. It aims to build a way of reading that can help us to unlock or understand some of the peculiarities of Prince's poetry and thought. It is helped in this regard by the recent opening of the extraordinary Prince archive in the Hartley Library at Southampton. I make extensive use of new and unseen archival material in the hope of tracing the transformation or persistence of certain subterranean themes in Prince's work.

My first chapter isolates two images that recur in Prince's early work: the double and the desert. Exploring these, it discovers a strange and hidden identityless world at the heart of Prince's thought. My second chapter finds that absence is not so unpeopled as it first seems, and discovers a hidden character, a simultaneous attraction and profound distrust towards 'pure poetry', and an unfinished *ars poetica*, all built into the structure of one poem. Chapters three, four, and five serve as the tripartite core of the thesis. They show how Prince developed a highly unusual approach to tradition and the poetry of the past, working to weave together strands that are discrete but sympathetic. They themselves then weave together to finish the unfinished *ars poetica* found in the second chapter, now with the missing element: the wound of meaning. In doing so they reveal a latent and powerful critique of certain trends in 20th-century poetry, using Igor Stravinsky and Pierre Menard as co-conspirators. The last two chapters demonstrate the threefold relationship between the wound in Prince's thought, his Catholicism, and time itself. The first shows how the images and paintings that populate Prince's poems (and they populate more poems than it might at first seem) must be understood in terms of iconoduly. The final chapter returns to the identityless world found in the first only to name it, and reveal that all time exists within its vast empire. It shows that Prince understood the power of poetry and meaning as descending from this world, and how he began to see himself, his reception and career, in these terms too, being a vindication of his work. Finally it reveals how his misplacement in time—and his interest in objects misplaced in time—was, in fact, emblematic of Time himself.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements .....	iii
Abbreviations and Transcriptions.....	iv
List of Figures .....	v
Declaration of Authorship .....	vii
Introduction: Footprints.....	1
The Canon.....	1
The Reviewers .....	10
The Archive .....	13
Critical Patterns .....	15
1 The Double and the Desert.....	21
The Double .....	24
The Desert.....	31
The Sea-Wall and the Sea.....	36
2 A Sibyl's Word .....	40
Mythistorema and Maria .....	42
A Ballet of Fruits and Flowers .....	49
Empedocles.....	53
‘Pure’ Poetry.....	56
The Honeycoloured God.....	57
3 Old Hat .....	64
Stravinsky and Prince .....	69
Strambotti.....	<b>Error! Bookmark not defined.</b>
An Interesting Dream .....	80
Menard and Prince.....	83
4 Old Ships .....	89
Marble Doors.....	91

Fragment Poetry .....	98
A Note on Metre .....	102
5 Old Dog .....	109
Laughing Dog.....	110
Singing Dog.....	113
Sleeping Dog.....	124
The Wound of Meaning.....	127
6 Eikons and Shadows .....	134
Images of the Virgin.....	140
Resurgent Ἔικονες.....	153
7 The Sign of Saturn.....	158
The Dark Kingdom.....	159
An Old Horse.....	163
The Paradise in Sadness.....	166
Tongues of Old Gods.....	174
Conclusion: Mine Old Dear Enemy .....	179
Appendix .....	183
‘A star recalled by this revisit.’ .....	183
Stanzes.....	185
Scene with an Echo .....	186
The Yard .....	187
‘To believe is above all to be in love’ .....	187
The Goose Girl.....	188
‘The case rejected’ .....	188
Bibliography .....	189

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This thesis is dedicated to my Mum.

## ABBREVIATIONS AND TRANSCRIPTIONS

The following abbreviations are used in the thesis:

CP F.T. Prince, *Collected Poems: 1935-1992*, (Carcanet, 1993).

PFTP Papers of Frank Templeton Prince, Special Collections, Hartley Library, University of Southampton.

PNQ 'Personal Notes and Queries', unpublished autobiographical note from 1988 included in the Papers of Frank Templeton Prince, MS328 A834.

RFTP *Reading F.T. Prince*, ed. Will May, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016).

When transcribing quotations from the archive, I have used the following conventions:

{Curly brackets} For amendments or additions to the text.

~~Strikethrough~~ For deletions from the text.

^Caret For any carets made by Prince in the text.

[Square brackets] For my comments.

[?] For unclear passages.

\*...\* For illegible words.

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Detail from back cover of <i>Collected Poems</i> .	3
Figure 2 Detail of two pages from journal. PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/6.	52
Figure 3 A man and three women in European clothing, opaque watercolour on paper on paper.	83
Figure 4 Baudelaire's 'Moesta et Errabunda' translated into Anglo-Saxon, MS328 A834/2/1/4/13.	89
Figure 5 Figure of San Roc on gate in Mahon, Menorca.	113
Figure 6 'Morning' by F.T. Prince, PFTP MS328 A834/1/2.	136
Figure 7 Pen and ink drawing in sketchpad. PFTP MS328 A834/1/2.	138
Figure 8. Page from journal. PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/14.	140
Figure 9. Sandro Botticelli, 'The Mystic Nativity', oil on canvas.	144
Figure 10. Vecellio Tiziano, 'Presentation of the Virgin at the Temple', oil on canvas.	146
Figure 11 Fra Angelico, 'Madrid Annunciation', tempera on panel.	148
Figure 12 Fra Angelico, 'Cortona Annunciation', tempera on panel.	148
Figure 13 Fra Angelico, 'Florence Annunciation', fresco.	149



## DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

Print name:	
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Title of thesis:	
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I declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is my own and has been generated by me as the result of my own original research.

<p>I confirm that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. This work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;</li><li>2. Where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;</li><li>3. Where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;</li><li>4. Where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;</li><li>5. I have acknowledged all main sources of help;</li><li>6. Where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;</li><li>7. None of this work has been published before submission</li></ol>	
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Signature:		Date:	
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## INTRODUCTION

## FOOTPRINTS

‘Mine old dear enemy  
 my froward master’  
 as he was fifty  
 years ago in Rome,  
 I could see looking like  
 a life-mask in plaster.

(CP, 257)

Thus begins *Walks in Rome*, F.T. Prince’s late autobiographical poem, with a quotation from Wyatt. But who was, or is, the froward master? And why does he look like a life-mask in plaster—rigid, inert, a ghostly copy? This is the question this thesis sets out to answer.

## THE CANON

In January 2010 a discussion with the subject line “why the canon??” began on Charles Bernstein’s ‘Poetics List’—a listserv forum that ran for 21 years until 2014 and aimed “to support, inform, and extend those directions in poetry that are committed to innovations, renovations, and investigations of form and/or/as content, to the questioning of received forms and styles, and to the creation of the otherwise unimagined, untried, unexpected, improbable, and impossible.”<sup>1</sup> The discussion centred on the purpose of the canon in English literary studies—Steve Russell began it with a hint of paranoia:

why do certain writers last?  
 is it a conspiracy?  
 ...professors/universities protecting their precious niche?<sup>2</sup>

The first response from George Spencer was one which was quickly echoed by various members:

there must be alternative or anti-canon lists out there.  
 can anyone direct me to one or some?<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <<http://epc.buffalo.edu/poetics/welcome.html>> Accessed 4<sup>th</sup> January 2017.

<sup>2</sup> <<https://listserv.buffalo.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A2=POETICS;a510468c.1001>> Accessed 4<sup>th</sup> January 2017.

<sup>3</sup> <<https://listserv.buffalo.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A2=POETICS;4606065a.1001>> Accessed 4<sup>th</sup> January 2017.

The desire for an oxymoronic canonical anti-canonical was voiced in numerous posts and discussions on the Poetics List, and is indicative of an unresolved tension in contemporary Anglophone poetry. It is, of course, an impossible idea, as Mark Weiss points out in the same discussion: “The act of listing would turn it into a canon, alas.”<sup>4</sup> But if an impossible triangle can be imagined and sketched out, so too can the anti-canonical, and so duly some of the members set to imagining what it would look like. Unfortunately, to sketch an anti-canonical, we must first sketch the canonical, as Mark Francis Johnson goes on to acknowledge in the same thread:

Take, just for example, the works of the poet F.T. Prince. Are his poems part of the canon? I believe his collected is still in print. But I don't recall ever seeing his work mentioned outside an essay by Ashbery I read years ago. Auden admired him, too. He published a pamphlet with New Directions sixty or seventy years ago, so James Laughlin must've thought he had something. Is that enough? If it isn't, is it enough to get him on the anti-canonical list? If not, why?<sup>5</sup>

The criteria for being in the canonical seems to be readership: who has read F.T. Prince, and, presumably, who has in turn read them? Of course, the criteria for being in the impossible anti-canonical is also readership: what, after all, was the Poetics List if not a canon of readers? That the presence or lack of readership of F.T. Prince—a politically conservative Roman Catholic poet and Milton scholar born in the last vestiges of the British Empire before the first world war, who spent most of his adult life ensconced in the University of Southampton's English department—should turn up as a pinch point in a discussion of the value of the canonical and the potential formation of an anti-canonical on a US-based subscription-only leftist avant-garde electronic forum in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century seems unlikely at best. But there is history to it.

John Ashbery's interest in F.T. Prince has long helped keep Prince's name on the margins of the American avant-garde—his own contribution to the alternative canonical, *Other Traditions*, lists Prince as one of nine poets who “have meant a lot to me at various times”,<sup>6</sup> and David Shapiro records that Ashbery was at one time considering “editing a kind of anthology of Neglected Poets, one that could include Wheelwright, David Schubert, Samuel Greenberg, and F.T. Prince, bizarre cousins or in-laws of Ashbery.”<sup>7</sup> Partly through Ashbery's influence, Prince gained quite a large readership in the New York poetry scene, even if he himself reportedly joked that they had simply confused “F.T. Prince” for “J.H. Prynne”.<sup>8</sup> Paradoxically, it is in part Ashbery's inclusion of Prince in his own alternative canonical (and therefore his exclusion from ‘the’ canonical) that, for Mark Francis Johnson, could lead to Prince's exclusion from the anti-canonical, and possible inclusion or re-inclusion in ‘the’ canonical.

<sup>4</sup> <<https://listserv.buffalo.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A2=POETICS;4aaa469c.1001>> Accessed 4<sup>th</sup> January 2017.

<sup>5</sup> <<https://listserv.buffalo.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A2=POETICS;1c6f738.1001>> Accessed 4<sup>th</sup> January 2017.

<sup>6</sup> John Ashbery, *Other Traditions*, (Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press, 2000), p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> David Shapiro, ‘Urgent Masks: An Introduction to John Ashbery's Poetry’, from *A FIELD Guide to contemporary poetry and poetics*, edited by Stuart Frieberth, David Walker, and David Young, Revised ed., (Oberlin, Ohio: Oberlin College Press, 1997), p.248.

<sup>8</sup> As reported to me in a private conversation with the poet John Birtwhistle.

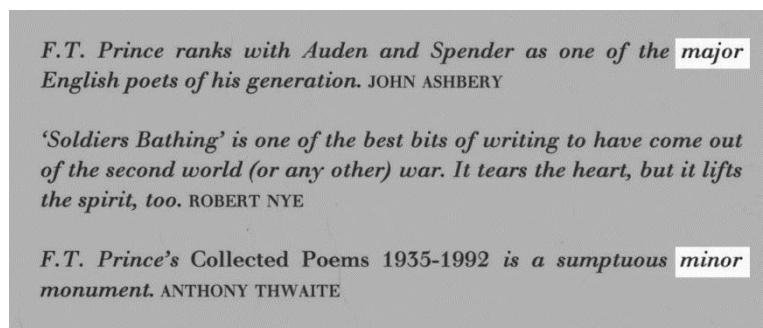


Figure 1 Detail from back cover of Collected Poems [my highlighting]

F.T. Prince's status or position in the canon is slippery at best. In one respect Prince is the epitome of the establishment poet, if we flatly take the term to mean a poet who had spent their life working and living in establishments: he worked as a lecturer at the University of Southampton from 1946 to 1974, being appointed Professor of English in 1957; after retirement he continued to take on professorial jobs, working at the University of West Indies in Jamaica, Brandeis University in the USA, and Sana'a University in North Yemen. Harold Bloom includes him in his Western Canon—perhaps the establishment canon of all establishment canons.<sup>9</sup> Yet despite this, his continued influence has been increasingly underground, counter-cultural, felt in poets as diverse as Geoffrey Hill, Ted Berrigan, John Ashbery, and Susan Howe, poets that themselves began as counter-cultural, marginal figures but by the great postmodern sleight-of-hand have been revealed as centres of the continuing Anglophone traditions. Prince has become, in effect, an underground establishment poet. A visually compelling demonstration of this can be found on the blurb of Carcanet's second edition of his *Collected Poems 1938-1992*, published in 2012 (see Figure 1). There are three quotes from writers, the first is by Prince's old supporter John Ashbery, and the third is by Anthony Thwaite. What is striking about these commendations is in part due to a typographical serendipity. The two words “major” and “minor” occupy exactly the same vertical position on the page, as the last word before the right-hand margin. The visual tension between the two statements is a concise illustration of the ambiguous or confusing nature of Prince's canonical position: is Prince a major or a minor poet?

David Herd, when paraphrasing the Charles Eliot Norton lectures Ashbery gave at Harvard in 1989 on writers who have influenced him, reduces the situation perhaps too much. He explains that Ashbery begins the first lecture by “dividing the writers into three categories, ‘major’, ‘minor’ and the ‘jump-start variety’”<sup>10</sup> and goes on to note, correctly, that Ashbery places F.T. Prince in the second group. But the three groups are not quite as unambiguous as Herd has it, for there is an important nuance in Ashbery's definitions. When introducing the list of major poets he has been influenced by, Ashbery describes them as “certifiably major”—suggesting the possibility that some poets could be major, but uncertified, or even uncertifiable. Ashbery introduces an element of doubt into his categories which is

<sup>9</sup> Harold Bloom, ‘Appendices, D. The Chaotical Age: A Canonical Prophecy’, *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*, (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994), p.524.

<sup>10</sup> David Herd, *John Ashbery and American Poetry*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press: 2000), p.207.

lost in Herd's paraphrase. Couple this with the fact that elsewhere, as we have seen, Ashbery classifies Prince as a 'major English poet', not a minor one, it suggests that Ashbery—one of the leading arbiters of taste in late 20<sup>th</sup> century American poetry—is not quite as comfortable with the binary categories major/minor as his poetic forebear Auden was (whose definition of major poetry Ashbery quotes from in the first lecture), and that F.T. Prince is—again—a pinch point.

At the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Harold Bloom found cause to call Prince "one of the best English poets of this century,"<sup>11</sup> and yet his obscurity and neglect is such that he provokes an anxiety—even in such a bellwether as John Ashbery—about the efficacy of the dual poetic categories, major and minor. Academic and public awareness of Prince's poetry has—until very recently—been so low as to be negligible, yet Prince has maintained a readership and a loyal band of followers throughout these years of critical drought. To find evidence of Prince's readership we cannot therefore look to the academic establishment, but instead must turn to traces in journal or newspaper reviews or discussions. Prince's defenders have at times been linked by a belief that his neglect is symptomatic of a wider erasure of a band of poets or—as Todd Swift puts it—an "innoculation"<sup>12</sup> of the British canon against the post-war modernist strain, as a foreign, un-English "disease"<sup>13</sup> that Andrew Duncan describes as having been "largely been written out of the record."<sup>14</sup> There have been certain taste-makers at whose door the blame has been laid at for a wider marginalisation of the post-war modernist strain in the British and Irish canon. Richard Caddell singles out Crawford and Armitage's *Penguin Book of Poetry from Britain and Ireland since 1945* as one amongst a host of anthologies that was engaged in "the snopaking out or erasing of the post-war generation of poets from the broadly modernist background", and William Scammell complains that "the editors have left out all the best Forties poets"—including in his list F.T. Prince.<sup>15</sup> Yet Prince can hardly even be said to fit in this grouping—the 1940s is the only decade from the 1930s until the 2000s in which Prince published no volumes of poetry: he has, in effect, 'snopaked out' or erased himself from the group to which he would most likely belong.<sup>16</sup>

There have been attempts at interventionist or reactionary anthologies which have sought to redress this imbalance. In 1996, Iain Sinclair published *Conductors of Chaos*, an anthology of British Modernism, particularly those poets associated with the British Poetry Revival, but which also included five "significant figures from previous generations"—David Gascoyne, David Jones, Nicholas Moore, W.S. Graham, and J.F. Hendry.<sup>17</sup> Chris Beckett notes that "other forgotten or neglected poets linked to the 1940s might have served with an equal claim the intended affirmative purpose: F. T. Prince, for

<sup>11</sup> Harold Bloom, *John Milton: Comprehensive Research and Study Guide*, Bloom's Major Poets, (Pennsylvania: Chelsea House Publishers, 1999) p.8.

<sup>12</sup> Todd Swift, 'The Forties: A Doctorate in Creative and Critical Writing', (University of East Anglia, 2011), p.56.

<sup>13</sup> Todd Swift, 'The Forties: A Doctorate in Creative and Critical Writing', (University of East Anglia, 2011), p.55

<sup>14</sup> Andrew Duncan, *Origins of the Underground: British Poetry Between Apocryphon and Incident Light 1933–79* (Cambridge: Salt, 2008), p. 15. Quot. in Todd Swift doctoral thesis, *Ibid*.

<sup>15</sup> <[www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books-needed-critical-svengalis-and-mad-ezras-1179074.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books-needed-critical-svengalis-and-mad-ezras-1179074.html)> Accessed 10/01/2017.

<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Todd Swift has described F.T. Prince and Dylan Thomas as the "two main sides of the British Forties Style". Todd Swift, 'F.T. Prince's Overlooked Lustre of Rhetorical Language', *Reading F.T. Prince*, p.147.

<sup>17</sup> *Conductors of Chaos: A Poetry Anthology*, ed. Iain Sinclair, (London: Picador, 1996), p.xix

example.”<sup>18</sup> Beckett, like Todd Swift and William Scammell, includes Prince in that “dismissed decade of poets whose work has been, until very recently, unfashionable, neglected, largely invisible, and, in some cases, unavailable for almost half a century”<sup>19</sup>—that is, the poets of the 1940s. But Beckett is optimistic about the rehabilitation of this decade, and regarded the publication of *Conductors of Chaos* as “a sign that attitudes to British poetry of the 1940s were shifting”. Beckett’s optimism is spurred by the discovery, in 2005, of Meary James Thurairajah Tambimuttu’s archive, in a cul-de-sac just outside of Oxford. Tambimuttu, often known as Prince Tambimuttu, was a Tamil poet and critic, and the founder of *Poetry London*—the magazine which first printed F.T. Prince’s most famous poem, ‘Soldiers Bathing’. Tambimuttu was a central figure to the loose band of poets we associate with the term ‘40s poets’, and the discovery of the *Poetry London* archive will be an essential element in the reassessment of this period of British poetry. Already it has revealed hidden treasures, including a hundred-page essay by William Empson, and over a hundred letters from poet Ronald Duncan.<sup>20</sup> More immediately relevant to this thesis, Tambimuttu’s archive also includes a typescript of an early version of Prince’s most famous poem ‘Soldiers Bathing’,<sup>21</sup> and mentions an unknown Prince poem entitled ‘The Orchard’.<sup>22</sup>

The neglect of this particular strain of British modernism has, undoubtedly, affected Prince’s reception, but there is something uneasy about Beckett’s interventionist inclusion of Prince as a precursor to that “late twentieth-century British avant-garde” that *Conductors of Chaos* had sought to represent. After all, Prince’s poem *Memoirs in Oxford*, in its Wordsworthian form and ambition, could hardly be described as avant-garde, or even particularly modernist—Prince was as much influenced in his poetic career by Shelley, Wyatt, or Ariosto as he was by Pound, Eliot or Valéry. Tony Frazer counts Prince as one of “a number of fine poets working in *more mainstream* styles who have also been ignored by most standard anthologies, for no obvious reason other than that of fashion.”<sup>23</sup> Ron Silliman, one of the foremost American avant-garde taste-makers, describes Prince in his obituary as one “of the various *conservatives* who were at different points adopted by the New York School – David Schubert & Edwin Denby are two others – Prince was the *most formal*.”<sup>24</sup> Formal, conservative, and mainstream, Prince hardly seems to fit the category of avant-garde poet. Prince’s shadowy existence on the fringes of the American avant-garde sometimes approaches the function of a shibboleth. Brad Gooch describes how “You had to fake it a bit to sit around the poet John Ashbery’s apartment sharing his thrill over his obscure recordings of Busoni or Ravel”<sup>25</sup>—to which we might reasonably imagine he could have added “and his obscure volumes of F.T. Prince”. Ted Berrigan originally believed that Prince was another hoax poet like Ern Malley—a poet who couldn’t really exist, an in-joke, as Ron Padgett describes:

<sup>18</sup> Chris Beckett, ‘Tambimuttu and the Poetry London Papers at the British Library: Reputation and Evidence’, *Electronic British Library Journal*, 2009, <<https://www.bl.uk/eblj/2009articles/pdf/ebljarticle92009.pdf>>, p.2.

<sup>19</sup> Beckett, *Ibid.*, p.1.

<sup>20</sup> Beckett, *Ibid.*, p.6.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. p.154.

<sup>22</sup> Possibly an alternative title for ‘The Yard’, cf. p.148.

<sup>23</sup> Tony Frazer, ‘Defining the Century’, *Chicago Review*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (Fall, 2001), pp. 121-138, [my italics].

<sup>24</sup> <<http://ronsilliman.blogspot.co.uk/2003/08/f.html>> Accessed 10/01/2017, [my italics].

<sup>25</sup> Brad Gooch, ‘Howard, Art, and the Seventies’, *Loss Within Loss: Artists in the Age of AIDS*, ed. Edmund White (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), p.43.

Another undercelebrated poet Ted "discovered" was F.T. Prince. He had found a few of Prince's poems somewhere, and then gotten hold of the newly published English edition of *Doors of Stone*, probably at the Gotham Bookmart. The tantalizingly few biographical details on the book's dust jacket made Prince even more mysterious. Ted and I figured out that Prince was a hoax, that someone had invented him and that his name gave a phonetic clue: F.T. Prince = footprints. Suddenly Ted had created, among five or ten of us, tremendous interest in Prince's work.

Years later at the Poetry Project, I got the chance to invite Prince to lecture (on Milton). He turned out to be an extremely likeable gentleman. When Bill Zavatsky and I met him and his wife in mid-town for lunch one day, we asked them where they would like to go.

"If you don't mind, we're rather fond of the Brew Burger," Prince said.

When I told Ted this, he said, "I told you he was amazing!"<sup>26</sup>

Later Berrigan came to champion Prince in his journal *C*—Padgett notes Prince's inclusion with some pride as an example of the diversity of the so-called New York Poets (or rather, as proof that the New York Poets were not a coherent group).<sup>27</sup> In another blogpost Ron Silliman selects Prince's poems as one of the antecedents to what he calls the "abstract lyric"—a form he associates with Barbara Guest.<sup>28</sup> In the poetry magazine *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, Charles North, in his rebuttal of a dismissive review of Prince's *Collected Poems*, calls Prince's poetry "distinctly modern".<sup>29</sup> Prince's chameleon-like, slippery status is once again confronted. Is he simultaneously an avant-garde poet—a precursor to Barbara Guest—and also a mainstream conservative poet?

Prince's status is marginal and paradoxical, and marginal figures often find themselves useful for defining the boundedness or otherwise of artistic movements. Silliman, writing about the problems found when attempting a definition of the movement with which his own work is most associated—that of Language Poetry—claims that "any literary movement, if it has any force, any serious social as well as aesthetic meaning, tends to incorporate any number of such 'border cases.' Is John Clellon Holmes a Beat novelist? F.T. Prince a 'New York School' poet?"<sup>30</sup> The question seems rhetorical, purposefully absurd—F.T. Prince is surely not a New York School poet, he is far too removed in time, place, style, and intention to be considered as such—yet it might have been intended seriously. Extraordinarily, Silliman, reminiscing about Donald Allen's anthology *The New American Poetry*, and about who had been left out who could have been in, calls for Prince to be included—seemingly forgetting that Prince *was not an American poet* (every other poet Silliman mentions—though a heterogeneous group—are all American).<sup>31</sup> Whether this is a mere slip of the mind for Silliman, or an intentionally provocative call for national boundaries to play second fiddle to poetic movements (in anthologies specifically defined by their nationality), it is illustrative of Prince's transatlantic position. Here is a poet who can—though somewhat reluctantly—provide a bridge between the apparently isolated poetic

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<sup>26</sup> Ron Padgett, *Ted: A Personal Memoir of Ted Berrigan*, (Great Barrington, Mass.: The Figures, 1993), pp.86-7.

<sup>27</sup> <<http://jacket2.org/interviews/dancing-straitjacket>> Accessed 12/01/2017.

<sup>28</sup> <<http://ronsilliman.blogspot.co.uk/2002/11/there-may-be-antecedents-to-abstract.html>> Accessed 10/01/2017.

<sup>29</sup> Charles North, 'Words from F.T. Prince', *L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E*, No. 11, January 1980.

<sup>30</sup> <[http://ronsilliman.blogspot.co.uk/2007\\_07\\_22\\_archive.html](http://ronsilliman.blogspot.co.uk/2007_07_22_archive.html)> Accessed 10/01/2017.

<sup>31</sup> <<http://ronsilliman.blogspot.co.uk/2007/06/donald-allen-theres-no-such-thing-as.html>> Accessed 12/01/2017.

landscapes of 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain and 20<sup>th</sup> century America.<sup>32</sup> In a review of Morrison and Motion's *Contemporary British Poetry* and Schmidt's *Some Contemporary Poets of Britain and Ireland*, John Matthias lamented the Atlantic division that gapes in the poetic landscape:

Thumbing in Williams's *Pocket Book of Modern Verse*, the first book of poetry I ever owned, I still find it natural to see the poems of D.H. Lawrence beside the poems of Ezra Pound, the Penn Warren just before the Vernon Watkins, the Delmore Schwartz after the F.T. Prince. And yet, familiar as these juxtapositions are, I know the book is from a vanished world.

For Matthias, Prince becomes a symbol of loss, of a vanished transatlantic harmony. Silliman seemingly can't remember whether Prince was British or American. To rediscover Prince is to rediscover one part of that bridge between American and British/Irish poetry that the 20<sup>th</sup> century had seemingly eroded. Now, in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there is a burgeoning awareness that the legacy of British and Irish modernism needs a major re-evaluation. Voices and communities that have been lost or marginalised have begun to be reclaimed; arbiters of taste have been weighed against other arbiters of taste; the global situation has changed. The heated movements and counter-movements that shaped the poetic communities of these islands, and the often troubled relationship with American poetry and with the poetry of other English-speaking countries, are—just maybe—distant enough now that we can begin to see them anew. Some attempts have already been made. In 2001, Oxford University Press published Keith Tuma's *Anthology of Twentieth-Century British & Irish Poetry*, causing Tony Frazer to begin his review with the portentous remark that “The anthology wars are breaking out in Britain again.”<sup>33</sup> In the introduction, Tuma states that his aim for the anthology was to “reflect a kind of pluralism.”<sup>34</sup> The anthology is arranged, not by movement or clique, but by birth—not a particularly unusual editorial choice, but the situation had become so polarised that the juxtapositions this decision produced were specifically remarked upon by Richard Caddel:

...it's a bit odd at first glance, to see, for instance Philip Larkin—a fairly consistent resister of modernism and its works—next to Bob Cobbing, and Elizabeth Jennings—who famously urged that one modernist poet she reviewed should be put down, as in done away with—sandwiched between Asa Benveniste and Christopher Middleton.<sup>35</sup>

This heterodoxy of styles was paraded as a selling point of the anthology, and Prince's position was amongst those used to illustrate this heterodoxy. In a highly unusual move, the note-writer for Tuma's anthology—Nate Dorward—decided to contribute a customer review of the anthology to Amazon's website. Naturally, the ‘review’ was more advertisement than disinterested comment, but it picked out

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<sup>32</sup> Not that his presence hasn't been felt elsewhere: the Australian avant-garde poets Ken Bolton and Kris Hemensley have paid tribute—Bolton acknowledges in his poem-essay ‘How I Remember Writing Some Of My Poems—Why, Even’ that the form of his ‘Traffic Noises, Cups, Voices’ was derived from *Memoirs in Oxford*, and Hemensley acknowledges his friendship with and admiration of Prince in numerous blogposts.

<sup>33</sup> Tony Frazer, ‘Defining the Century’, *Chicago Review*, Vol. 47, No. 3 (Autumn 2001), pp.121-138.

<sup>34</sup> *Anthology of Twentieth-Century British & Irish Poetry*, ed. Keith Tuma, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p.xxi.

<sup>35</sup> Richard Caddel, ‘Reviews’ *Jacket Magazine* 15, (December 2001).

precisely the slippery quality of F.T. Prince's position as a demonstration of the space the book's "pluralist" approach has opened, allowing in such group-less poets:

One thing [Tuma's] accent on nonmainstream poetries does is to undo such cliches: such writers as Mina Loy, JG Macleod, Thomas MacGreevy, Brian Coffey, WS Graham, Lynette Roberts & David Gascoyne are set beside better-known modernist figures like Eliot, Lawrence, Jones, Bunting & MacDiarmid. There are also many authors who aren't easily classified. What do you call Ivor Gurney? An experimentalist Georgian? Or Charlotte Mew--is she an avantgarde Decadent poet? What about FT Prince, or FR Higgins, or Elizabeth Daryush, or Nicholas Moore?<sup>36</sup>

A critically "pluralist" anthology should be welcomed, even if only for its intentions. But as an attempt at a diplomatic or even non-political solution to the political web of 20<sup>th</sup> century canonisation, Tuma's anthology did nothing if not prove how inflammatory the topic still is. Stephen Burt outlines one particularly frank exchange:

The prominent poet-critic Sean O'Brien labeled *Anthology of Modern British & Irish Poetry* "humorless" and "bizarre." Michael Schmidt, the editor-in-chief at Carcanet Press, retorted by accusing O'Brien of "willfull, self-serving" bigotry. Whence the food fight?<sup>37</sup>

And in turning to criticise Tuma's anthology himself, Burt also picks out Prince's poetry, upbraiding Tuma not for Prince's inclusion, but for the particular selection of his poems:

Reading Tuma's huge volume from cover to cover, I remembered how my own tastes favor precision and closure. Tuma—on the evidence here—loves long, open-ended, genre-bending works: he won't take quiet or compact lyrics if he can find anything else. As a result, I took exception, not to his daring selection *of* poets, but to his selections *from* poets whose work I knew. [...] F. T. Prince gets one long historical narrative: where are his Thirties lyrics?<sup>38</sup>

It is a fair criticism. Prince's thirties lyrics are, after 'Soldiers Bathing', his most commonly praised poems—'Epistle to a Patron', 'Words from Edmund Burke', 'The Moonflower', 'The Babiaantje'—and have been championed by, amongst others, Geoffrey Hill, John Ashbery, and Christopher Ricks.<sup>39</sup> They would seem the most likely candidates for inclusion in any anthology. Though perhaps this is precisely the point. What of Prince's poetry that has 'survived'—been reproduced in anthologies or noticed by critics—has only survived through the patronage of various movements or poets, and is invariably from his early period. If what defines Prince's position is his non-adherence to any movement, we might consider Tuma's choice of 'Strafford' as indicating an acknowledgement of the existence of those poets who do not fit into a pre-structured vision of the 20<sup>th</sup> century canon. The canonisation of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is far from being a cold, dead, done affair, and will shape much of the criticism of the century to come.

<sup>36</sup> <<https://www.amazon.co.uk/review/R2LKH6RYI6D9IZ/>> accessed 17<sup>th</sup> March 2017.

<sup>37</sup> Stephen Burt, 'Poetry Reviews', *Boston Review*, (December 2001/January 2002), <<http://bostonreview.net/archives/BR26.6/burt.html>> Accessed 4<sup>th</sup> January 2017.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> Geoffrey Hill's 'Il Cortegiano: F.T. Prince's Poems (1938)' and John Ashbery's 'F.T. Prince' both of which focus on Prince's early poems are both from *PN Review* 147, Vol. 29, No. 1, September - October 2002. Christopher Ricks includes 'Epistle to a Patron' in *The Oxford Book of English Verse*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

F.T. Prince—a poet who has spent his life on the margins of British poetry—is now a poet at the centre of these arguments, and an appreciation of his unusual position in the canon (or canons) will become vitally important to an understanding of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a whole. In a history dominated by rival sets—the Imagists and the Georgians, the Auden group and the New Apocalyptics, The Movement and the British Poetry Revival—F.T. Prince belongs to no set, other than that set which—like in Russell’s paradox—is defined by its adherence to no sets.

Harold Bloom notes in *A Map of Misreading* that “without what Shelley called a being washed in the blood of the Great Redeemer, Time, literary tradition appears powerless to justify its own selectivities.”<sup>40</sup> With the burgeoning critical re-appraisal of British Modernism, the discovery of the Tambimuttu archive, the resurgence of interest in the ‘Forties poets’, is it time to see beyond (though not ignore) the sometimes questionable patronage of the New York School and other golden opinions? To see Prince not as a proto-Ashbery, or proto-Guest, proto-Hill, or proto-Anyone, but instead as one of a group of iconoclastic poets who belong to no group—conservative, experimental, establishment, outsider—and who give the lie to a restrictive vision of poetry as only either nostalgic or progressive. It is these poets who stand aloof from movements, fashions, who will come to be seen—within the warring traditions that make up the Anglophone poetry of the twentieth-century—as the flies that defined the ointment. Time and again Prince’s name reappears in discussions or arguments over canon building in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. We can see now that, though explainable in its particulars, Prince’s appearance on the Poetics List forum was no freak occurrence. Here is a poet whose standing affects the shape of the whole of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Geoffrey Hill, in the first of his letters to Prince, wrote that “our work already has a relationship, in being set apart from most of the poetry that holds the place of worldly power in our age”<sup>41</sup> The irony that is now present in this statement is telling: when Hill died in 2016 he was one of the most celebrated English poets of his generation, had spent five years holding the prestigious position of Oxford Professor of Poetry, and was described by the ex-Poet Laureate Andrew Motion as “one of the greatest English language poets of the last 70-odd years, and time may well prove him the greatest of all.”<sup>42</sup> Hill’s self-appointed marginal status had been converted in his lifetime to one of iconoclastic titan—the same could be said of Howe, Ashbery, but it never happened for Prince. The subject of Prince’s marginality is one that has at times baffled, frustrated or appalled his most prestigious supporters. Ashbery begins his article in PN Review’s 90<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration of Prince with the complaint: “that a great poet could write and publish three collections of poetry over a period of twenty-five years and still remain undiscovered is an idea we find hard to accept today” before claiming that “it would be easy to invent a title for F.T. Prince like ‘best poet working in England today’—but is this necessary? Let’s leave it at this: Prince is one of

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<sup>40</sup> Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980) p.28.

<sup>41</sup> Letter dated November 1970. PFTP MS328 A834/4/2/5. Cf. p.172.

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Alison Flood, ‘Geoffrey Hill, ‘one of the greatest English poets’, dies aged 84’, *The Guardian*. [online] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jul/01/geoffrey-hill-one-of-the-greatest-english-poets-dies-aged-84> [Accessed 3 Dec. 2016].

the best twentieth-century poets.”<sup>43</sup> Likewise, Susan Howe writes to Prince, after a dismissive review by Donald Davie of Prince’s *Collected Poems*,

Your poetry has been and always will be a Beacon to me. [...] You have written some of the best poems in this century; that a larger public cannot see this is a sad sign of the present we live in. Time (not the New York Times) will tell. If I didn't believe that what would be the use of writing at all?<sup>44</sup>

For many of Prince’s admirers, the question of Prince’s marginalisation became a symptom of a detected greater malaise in poetry and the poetic community at the time. Even as early as the publication of Prince’s second volume, *Soldiers Bathing*, in 1954, David Gascoyne would write to Prince to express his “scandalized astonishment” that “work of such aristocratic quality” should have been dropped by Faber and have instead to be published by Fortune Press, concluding that he would “continue to protest against the irresponsibility of publishers and their rapidly deteriorating standards and integrity.”<sup>45</sup> Indeed, even ignoring the second wave of interest from the younger poets and from the New York School, the litany of significant and influential writers who expressed admiration for Prince’s poetry—either publicly or in private correspondence—is impressive, including in its ranks W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender, C.S. Lewis, T.S. Eliot, Vernon Watkins, Roy Campbell, Herbert Read, William Plomer, Ronald Bottrall, Edmund Blunden, Ian Hamilton, and E.M. Forster.

## THE REVIEWERS

When we speak of poets and a few select critics on Prince, we must speak with superlatives; when we speak of the general critical establishment and the general public we must speak of indifference and obliviousness. How is it that Prince, who began his poetic career publishing with Faber & Faber and with the applause of Eliot, should have become so under-read and under-valued?—to have migrated from small press to smaller—his last published poem being privately printed—and yet still to have retained a loyal and impressive band of followers?

The seeds of the critical unease that partly led to F.T. Prince’s banishment were already evident in reviews of his first book, *Poems*, published in 1938. Adjectives with a certain family likeness are deployed—hesitant insults or backhanded compliments that would praise Prince’s style but deplore his detachment. He is “too literary, too cultivated, too charming,”<sup>46</sup> he has a “sense of aloofness,”<sup>47</sup> a

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<sup>43</sup> John Ashbery, ‘F.T. Prince’, *PN Review* 147, Vol. 29, No. 1, September - October 2002.

<sup>44</sup> Letter dated April 8<sup>th</sup> 1979. PFTP MS328 A834/4/2/5.

<sup>45</sup> Letter dated 28<sup>th</sup> October 1953, the year before the publication of *Soldiers Bathing*. PFTP MS328 A834/4/2/3

<sup>46</sup> *The Listener*, 15<sup>th</sup> September 1938

<sup>47</sup> ‘A “New” Poet’, *The Oxford Times*, 2<sup>nd</sup> December 1938.

“gentlemanly restraint”,<sup>48</sup> the poems are “remote,”<sup>49</sup> “too obscure,”<sup>50</sup> and “Chinese in [their] urbane suavity,” with an “occasional preciousness of phraseology.”<sup>51</sup> As one reviewer in *Blackfriars* puts it—

The core of the poem is not sufficiently apparent to satisfy the mind that the juxtaposition of all these ‘jewels five words long’ is valid. It is as if Mr. Prince had written a set of Enigma Variations which were not completely satisfying in themselves, for the ear continually hungers after the lost theme.<sup>52</sup>

There is a sense that Prince’s poetry is not engaged enough with the ‘real’ world—presumably as opposed to the work of Spender, Auden, or MacNeice. Those reviewers who are kinder to Prince often seem at pains to emphasise that the poetry *is* engaged with the world and with the century he lives in, and at times they seem to protest too much: “he is alive to, and aware of, his century, and his poetry is not a symptom of it, as is so much modern verse, but a judgement passed upon it”<sup>53</sup> or “yet these amiable and elegant musings could have been produced only by a man alive in and aware of this century.”<sup>54</sup> In their insistence on his being “alive” and “aware” of his century, these reviewers inadvertently highlight just how much the poems themselves don’t always seem to be, that they instead offer only a “slow rich music, and suggest a more graceful, more cultured, and less turbulent age than ours.”<sup>55</sup>

Another aspect of Prince’s poetry the early reviewers found troublesome was Prince’s ventriloquism. In the *Glasgow Herald* the reviewer describes Prince’s assimilation of St. John Perse’s poetry and Arthur Waley’s translations from the Chinese, before lamenting that “it is difficult to discern a personal style in these poems, but talent for daring combinations of direct statement and evasive imaginative reference is there in plenty”.<sup>56</sup> Todd Swift has argued that this is a defining feature of the so-called 40s poets, their “lack of a personal voice,”<sup>57</sup> and it seemed to provoke a particular anxiety in Prince’s reviewers that Prince was suppressing his own emotions or experiences. The reviewer for *The Listener* suggests that “Mr Prince seems to step aside from his experience and say ‘such a feeling Catullus, or Yeats, or James at the end of his life, might have had’,”<sup>58</sup> and *The Criterion* expands on this point more severely:

Mr Prince’s poems raise the question—to what extent can an accomplished writer become a poet if he adds nothing to the vision of his carefully chosen models? In different poems, Mr. Prince shows the influence of Henry James, Eliot and Yeats; not only do his words and images recall words and images in their writings, but he chooses subjects with a family likeness to theirs, and adopts their attitudes towards these subjects.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Michael Roberts, ‘Distinction in Poetry’, *The Spectator*, 7<sup>th</sup> October 1938.

<sup>49</sup> ‘Poetry’, *Time and Tide*, 24 Sept, 1938.

<sup>50</sup> *The Weekly Review*, 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1939.

<sup>51</sup> W.H. Mellers, ‘Comments and Reviews’, *Scrutiny*, Vol VIII No. 1, June 1939.

<sup>52</sup> U.F., ‘Notices’, *Blackfriars*, January 1939.

<sup>53</sup> ‘Verse’, *The Month*, December 1939.

<sup>54</sup> W.H. Mellers, *Ibid*.

<sup>55</sup> ‘Poetry’, *Time and Tide*, 24<sup>th</sup> September 1938.

<sup>56</sup> ‘Nature and Solitude’, *The Glasgow Herald*, 5<sup>th</sup> January, 1939.

<sup>57</sup> Todd Swift, ‘F.T. Prince’s Overlooked Lustre of Rhetorical Language’, *RFTP*, p.131.

<sup>58</sup> *The Listener*, 15<sup>th</sup> September 1938

<sup>59</sup> *The Criterion*, January 1939.

Though this prompts the rejoinder: could anything be *less* like James, Eliot or Yeats, than a writer who deliberately adopts their attitudes?—this is the topic I return to in my third chapter, ‘Old Hat’.

These critical tensions persist through reviews of Prince’s later volumes. As Jane Hedley summarizes:

Most of the critics whose attention has been momentarily caught by *The Doors of Stone* have tended to dismiss F.T. Prince as an anachronism. They recognize his technical competence and often give honourable mention to “*Soldiers Bathing*,” but their reaction to the rest of his poems, even at its most favourable, usually reads something like this: “One gets the impression he finds it hard to speak out straight as himself. He needs a substitute self, a persona, to help him deliver his fine outflingings and outpourings.... Why must he always be translating himself? What’s the matter with being F.T. Prince?” Another critic goes even further when he accuses Prince of remaining “absorbed not by his own condition as a man but by the dilemmas of men already dead.”<sup>60</sup>

But even Hedley herself can only rehabilitate those persona poems within which she can discover the authorial voice. For her, the later dramatic monologues like ‘*Coeur de Lion*’ or ‘*Strafford*’ “seem to be little more than historical exercises”.<sup>61</sup> The defence of Prince’s aloofness relies on proving that it is not, in fact, aloof.

In his doctoral thesis Todd Swift summarises the events that surrounded the publication of Prince’s second volume of poetry:

In 1951 the post-war Labour government of Clement Attlee was defeated by Winston Churchill. In 1952, Elizabeth II came to the throne. In 1953 Dylan Thomas died in New York. In 1954, food rationing ended in Britain. A recognisable socio-political, historical and literary period – that of World War II and its immediate aftermath, ‘Austerity Britain’ – with the rise of the welfare state was ending.

It is ironic or maybe just unlucky, then, that F.T. Prince chose this moment to publish another collection, *Soldiers Bathing*, in 1954, at precisely the moment when his exotic, war-themed, elegant style would be least likely to find an appreciative audience.<sup>62</sup>

This is not, however, an isolated instance of misfortune. Prince’s publication history is littered with apparently ironic or unlucky timing, perhaps even *wilfully* unlucky. His first volume, *Poems*, is published—as he himself explains—in “a bad moment, at the height of the Munich ‘crisis’ in September 1938,”<sup>63</sup> and luxuriates in a refined and mandarin style more closely associated with Pound’s and Eliot’s verse of 20 years before than the politically motivated public poetry of the Auden, Spender, MacNeice generation. When the confessional poetry that Alvarez introduces to the British poetry scene begins to make waves in the sixties Prince publishes *Doors of Stone*, containing imitations of the form and themes of early Renaissance Tuscan *strambotti* and long scholarly dramatic monologues. When the New York School, reacting against the confessionalism of Lowell et al., look to Prince’s work as an impersonalising and

<sup>60</sup> Jane Hedley, ‘Imprisoning and Expressing Him: The Dramatic Monologues of F.T. Prince’, *The Malahat Review*, No. 7 July 1968, p.92. The quoted critic is Alan Ross in *London Magazine*, August 1963.

<sup>61</sup> Hedley, *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> Swift, ‘The Forties’, p.43.

<sup>63</sup> PNQ.

formally experimental antidote, he publishes an autobiographical poem in a metre derived from Shelley's 'Peter Bell the Third'. In 1976, the year after the end of the Vietnam War, when anti-war feeling was rife, Prince publishes a verse-essay on the life of Rupert Brooke—often best known for his poetic jingoism. In short, Prince's poetry is usually in the wrong time. Nor is Prince oblivious to his peculiar position. The opening of his mildly tongue-in-cheek mock interview *Not a Paris Review Interview* seems to revel in precisely this unfashionable quality:

Q. Now that few people need  
 A poem which requires them  
 To turn the page—it tires them:  
 Why in your work has a read  
 Of about three hundred lines  
 Lately become the norm?

(CP, 247)

The tone is light, but it is nonetheless made clear that Prince's fictional interviewer is aware that Prince is—like Hugh Selwyn Mauberley—"out of key with his time".<sup>64</sup>

## THE ARCHIVE

In Prince's monorhymed late poem, 'Finis Coronat Opus', Prince gestures towards the fate of his own activities:

Think, if at seventy the news is  
 That nothing done or won excuses  
 The hobbled life, the sprains and bruises,  
 The hopes one loses, fears one chooses,  
 To write what nobody peruses—  
 Think, how in databanks one snoozes  
 Safe in the bosom of the Muses  
 With Larkins, Harrisons and Hugheses.

(CP, 301)

But a snooze is, of course, a transient condition, and Prince had left behind him something to wake up. In 2012 Peter Robinson contacted the English Department of the University of Southampton to ask if the University was intending any celebration of Prince's centenary. The department then contacted the library to see if there were any documents related to Prince's time at the university that might be of

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<sup>64</sup> Ezra Pound, *Poems and Translations*, (New York: The Library of America, 2003), p.549.

interest. What they in fact discovered was that there was an extensive archive that Prince had left to the University, and which had only just opened, embargoed until his centenary. Consisting of a vast array of manuscripts, unpublished poetry, journals, notebooks, and letters from many of the major literary figures of the time, the archive is an extraordinary trove, and is invaluable not just to scholars of Prince's own work, but to scholars working in many other fields of 20<sup>th</sup>-century anglophone literature.

Evidence from within the archive—not to mention the wilfully belated opening of the archive itself—reveals Prince's preoccupation with his posthumous reception. In a journal entry from October 1981 Prince considers the possibility of a new poem, based on a memoir he had been writing (lost, but potentially a starting point for his 'Personal Notes and Queries'):

Now the thought comes, why not rewrite the new memoir (virtually completed last week-end) in verse? It would have to be massive and plain—fit for discourse and near prose—perhaps Hopkins's Alexandrines in St. Winefred's Well. It would still have to be buried, like an {un-}exploded bomb, to be published in, say, 2020.<sup>65</sup>

The poem is to be buried, but with every expectation that excavations will at some point take place, and what will be discovered will be something as anachronistic and yet as potentially powerful as the occasional discovery of a doodlebug. The very form of the archive highlights Prince's expectation of a future readership: nearly every journal, notebook, or letter has evidence of Prince's editorial hand. He cross-references journals with each other, rewrites important correspondents' names out in clear capitals, tears out pages from journals, arranges and rearranges, leaves out as much as he puts in: the archive bears the same relation to a more conventional archive as an autobiography does to a biography. It is, in effect, an archive designed to be *read*.

But perhaps this is to simplify the matter: the archive is also designed to be *ignored*. On multiple occasions Prince makes references to the sin of publishing or exploring what in a poet's life or work they have chosen to leave out—he seemed particularly appalled by what had been done to Philip Larkin (despite being ambivalent about the quality of Larkin's work). In one particular letter to W.G. Shepherd—which admittedly was posthumously added to the archive—he provides a plea to the future researcher:

All I put in  
Can't be good.  
Pity my in-  
eptitude.  
What I'm happy  
To reject,  
Let nobody  
Resurrect:  
Botches, dreams or

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<sup>65</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/13.

Mere mistakes,  
Let them lie for  
All our sakes.<sup>66</sup>

Read or ignored, the discovery of the archive was bound to make something happen. Before the discovery of the archive, there had been little serious critical discussion of Prince's work. A smattering of essays by admirers—Jane Hedley, Mark Ford, John Ashbery—and the occasional shorter appreciation, encyclopaedia entry, or tangential discussion, the latter often dismissive (for example, in Bruce Miller Meyer's thesis, Prince's poem 'Soldiers Bathing' is pompously batted away as being "largely a poetry of reportage, a writing which has little concern for contemporary aesthetic theory").<sup>67</sup> The publication of Alka Nigam's doctoral thesis, 'F.T. Prince: A study of his poetry', in 1983 was not succeeded by any wave of Prince scholarship, and it was not until Prince's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations in *PN Review*, containing six essays collected by Anthony Rudolf, that any hint of F.T. Prince returning to academic consciousness occurred. The next major critical event would not occur until after Prince's death.

All archives are embodiments of anachronism, though Prince's archive here at Southampton is particularly so. By delaying the opening of his archive, its belated power was increased, like his "unexploded bomb". Jeremy Tambling notes that "being made to feel anachronistic may be equivalent to feeling dumped, but it gives opportunities..."<sup>68</sup> The discovery of the archive gave opportunities: a flurry of publication followed its opening with two new books of poetry published by Perdika Press in 2015 and a book of essays edited by Will May with contributions from such well-known names as Derek Attridge and Peter Robinson in 2017, which marked the first sustained critical attention paid to Prince's work since Nigam's doctoral thesis 24 years before.

## CRITICAL PATTERNS

Todd Swift has written that the earlier critical writings on Prince (that is, preceding the publication of *Reading F.T. Prince*) are "often no more than appreciations", and have had to "take on more weight than a clutch of such texts might otherwise do",<sup>69</sup> but notes that although there is consensus around Prince's lack of status, there is little to no consensus on the specific qualities of his poetry. As any statistician knows, it is easier to see patterns in a larger data set, and so perhaps the publication of *Reading F.T. Prince* allows us to see patterns that have in fact continued throughout Prince's critical reception—patterns that were invisible to Swift at the time. Indeed, there is a continuity (though often in the form of rebuttal)

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<sup>66</sup> PFTP MS328 A4165/1.

<sup>67</sup> Bruce Miller Meyer, 'Sergeant of Outposts: One Editor's Role in Post-War British Poetry 1944-1987' (McMaster University, 1988), p.104.

<sup>68</sup> Jeremy Tambling, *On Anachronism*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), p.1.

<sup>69</sup> Swift, 'The Forties', p.69.

between Prince's academic reception and those anxieties of his early reviewers which I have already outlined: his aloofness, his misplacement in time, his ventriloquism, his historical preoccupations.

The relation between the historical, scholarly element of Prince's poetry and his contemporary relevance is one which his critics have returned to and often stridently defended. Fred Inglis notes, of one of the 'Strambotti', that "the theme is that of uncountable Elizabethan sonnets" but that Prince's "love poems, which never fail to be original and moving, have about them a deliberately courtly air, worn without any sense of anachronism";<sup>70</sup> and Michael Kirkham emphasizes Prince's aloofness from his age:

He has not been, in any sense that Michael Roberts, spokesman for modernity in the thirties, would have recognized, an interpreter of the times. But his interest in the past is that of a modern civilized, catholic intelligence maintaining continuity with its European heritage, illuminating and illuminated by intellectual history.<sup>71</sup>

Inglis sees this aspect of Prince's work as an antidote to the Alvarez school of confessional poetry of his own time,<sup>72</sup> of the ubiquitous desire for the response made by a "psychotic poet to a psychotic world" and what Prince offers is instead "a poet who maintains those traditions, assimilating at the same time the sensibility and techniques of the twentieth century, coloring them with his distinctive intelligence, but always keeping in touch with the values of the past, the 'picked experience of the ages'."<sup>73</sup> Similarly, Kirkham regards Prince's technique as one of depersonalization—he writes of Prince's poem 'Les Congés du Lépreux' that it exemplifies "two kinds of distancing procedure. Not only does the poet take on the sensibility of another age but also the period styles and voices he has chosen to imitate themselves generalize, or depersonalize, personal feeling."<sup>74</sup> Will May, in his introduction to *Reading F.T. Prince*, notes that Prince's poetry "often looks back to medieval or courtly tradition and doesn't offer the obvious historical prompts which have helped situate poets like Louis MacNeice or Stephen Spender as spokesmen for particular decades or historical events," but goes on to note that "his work can be at its most historical when its animus is contemporary"<sup>75</sup>—an echo of Eliot's assertion that "Pound is often most 'original' in the right sense, when he is most 'archaeological' in the ordinary sense [...] If one can really penetrate the life of another age, one is penetrating the life of one's own."<sup>76</sup> Todd Swift describes Prince's style as "a unique blend of artifice, sentiment, archaism and modernity"<sup>77</sup> and Mark Ford suggests that Prince explores the past "for its own sake, or perhaps rather, for the sake of poetry *per se*."<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Fred T. Inglis, 'F.T. Prince and the Prospects for Poetry', *University of Denver Quarterly*, 1:3 (1966), pp.28-9

<sup>71</sup> Michael Kirkham, 'The Poetry of F.T. Prince', PFTP MS328 A834/5/6.

<sup>72</sup> Though we might note that Alvarez himself rated Prince's work highly. In a review of *Doors of Stone* in *The Observer Weekend Review*, July 14, 1963, Alvarez wrote that Prince "has gone on doing his own work in isolation with complete integrity."

<sup>73</sup> Inglis, p.24

<sup>74</sup> Kirkham, *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> Will May, Introduction to *RFTP*, pp.2-3

<sup>76</sup> T.S. Eliot, Introduction to Ezra Pound, *Selected Poems*, Ed. T.S. Eliot, (London: Faber & Faber, 1933).

<sup>77</sup> Swift, *RFTP*, p.143

<sup>78</sup> Mark Ford, "A Wide and Wingless Path to the Impossible: The Poetry of F.T. Prince", *PN Review* 147, Volume 29 Number 1, September-October 2002, p.31.

Other commentators have highlighted certain dialectical or stylistic tensions, often employing paradoxes when describing certain aspects of Prince's work. Natalie Pollard cites Prince's poems as examples of the 'fugitive piece', which she defines as that which "takes shape as matter continually bent into new configurations. But it simultaneously holds firm and endures."<sup>79</sup> Fred Inglis writes of the ending of 'Gregory Nazianzen' that "the permanence of light, the impermanence of rock, are held in gentle conjunction, and made to embody the complexity of the love."<sup>80</sup> Adam Piette writes how 'Soldiers Bathing' is torn between strength and weakness, and that the 'us' in the poem is a "double-natured, divided subjectivity in command of these lines, this voice."<sup>81</sup> Anthony Howell notes that the verse of Prince's British contemporaries was socialism couched in conservative verse, "but Prince is not a socialist, nor are his forms conservative,"<sup>82</sup> and Michael Molan shows how, in the Milton controversy, Prince's apparent status of "scholar-poet" is at odds with itself.<sup>83</sup>

There is an unease at the heart of Prince's reception, a sense that certain things are wrong. He seems out of time, or in the wrong place at the wrong time, desperately and stubbornly out of fashion, or concerned with other fashions, other times. His heterogeneous poetry evinces a strangeness deep-rooted in paradox, tautology and oxymoron. Marginal or banished poets tend to be reclaimed through golden opinions and networks of influence (and Prince's select readership is an El Dorado of golden opinions) but these can be as detrimental as they are beneficial to a writer's reception, emphasising similarities and erasing or smoothing-out differences, judging the work by a set of aesthetic criteria which might have been alien to the writer. Prince is a strange writer, and no amount of smoothing-out can entirely hide this; this thesis intends to be a systematic study of this strangeness, taking as its springboard the critical unease I have outlined in this introduction. I have purposefully focused on those poems that have received little critical attention, as critics have tended to focus on the same small cluster of poems—all bar two of the essays collected in *Reading F.T. Prince* write about 'An Epistle to a Patron', and all bar three write about 'Soldiers Bathing', on the other hand, 'His Dog and Pilgrim' is mentioned once in passing and 'A Byron-Shelley Conversation' does not get a look in at all. There are poems of Prince's I have sadly had to omit from the thesis, or touch upon briefly, which nevertheless deserve thorough critical attention: from 'Chaka' and 'Campanella' to the extraordinary *Drypoints of the Hasidim*.

The thesis is about time, and being out of time, or misplaced in time. I begin in 'The Double and the Desert' by isolating two images that correspond to this misplacement—the titular double and desert—in an attempt to understand Prince's vision of history and the past. Through an exploration of Prince's earliest poetry, both published and unpublished, I discover a strange identityless world where things shift and mutate, and where the time works in surprising ways. The images and symbols I identify in the first chapter are then used for an exegesis of Prince's poem 'Apollo and the Sibyl' in chapter two. This chapter illustrates Prince's working method by describing the genesis of the poem through the

<sup>79</sup> Natalie Pollard, 'Fugitive Pieces: F.T. Prince and Sculpture', *RFTP*, p.183.

<sup>80</sup> Inglis, p.26.

<sup>81</sup> Adam Piette, 'F.T. Prince and the Sweetness of Command', *RFTP*, p.163.

<sup>82</sup> Anthony Howell, 'A Maverick Master', *PN Review* 147, Vol. 29, No. 1, September - October 2002.

<sup>83</sup> Michael Molan, 'F.T. Prince, Milton, and the Scholar-Poet', *RFTP*, pp.77-105.

traces and notes left in the archive. It shows him combining multiple disparate sources to create the textual substance of the poem and ultimately reveals a hidden character: the god who is absent. The relation of the poem to the god is shown to describe an unfinished *ars poetica* that evinces Prince's distrust of and attraction to 'pure poetry': the deep veneer of Apollo. If chapter two focused on the textual sources of one of Prince's poems, chapters three, four, and five—'Old Hat', 'Old Ships', and 'Old Dog'—focus on the stylistic sources, and serve as the tripartite core of the thesis. Chapter three introduces Igor Stravinsky and later Pierre Menard as useful analogies for Prince's method. Focusing on Prince's 'Strambotti', it defends these poems from accusations of cliché and shows how Prince wove together two identical but unrelated traditions to form them. Chapter four then shows how this method of restoration or synthesis of sympathetic but distinct traditions is found across Prince's oeuvre, informing his later development of a metrical homogeneity. Chapter five echoes chapter two in focusing on one poem—'His Dog and Pilgrim'—and shows how the poem is not as trifling as it first appears. An exploration in the archive reveals that Prince conceived the poem as a critique of a number of younger American poets, and the chapter traces what happened to this original conception. In the end the chapter shows how this critique eventually returns to the matter of chapter two, and completes the uncompleted *ars poetica* found in 'Apollo and the Sibyl'. Chapter six—'Eikons and Shadows'—brings in the matter of Prince's Catholicism, as a necessary adjunct to the conclusion of chapter five. This is a subject that, to be encompassed, would need a whole thesis to itself, so I elect in this chapter to focus on the relationship between images and artwork in Prince's poetry and his conception of Catholicism. It reveals a method of knowing that is shown to be as iconoclastic as it is iconodulic, and in which time collapses. This brings us to the matter of the last chapter, which returns to the identityless world of the first—"The Double and the Desert"—only to name and define it for the first time. It reveals Prince's interest in the material things which return from this identityless world and the power they bring with them, and shows how Prince considered himself and his work to hold part of this power, which is revealed as the very power of Time himself.

My method throughout this thesis requires a brief note of explanation. Although *Reading F.T. Prince* has been a welcome addition, the 'clutch of texts' written on Prince remains small. In fact, the archive reveals that by far the most voluminous commentator on Prince's poetry is Prince himself. Faced with this great messy corpus, crammed with information, I had to find a technique to allow me to make sense of it. This technique has remained fairly consistent across the thesis and involved beginning with the published poems themselves. Early on I began to identify certain themes and critical problems I wanted to address in the *Collected Poems* and other published material. Armed with these, I would search in the archive for entries that would help to shed new light on them, either in a partial database I had transcribed from parts of the archive or in the archive itself. My selections from the archive were informed by the poems, not the other way around. The poetry had to come first. I have also been careful not to take the archive at face value. It does not necessarily always give the truth about the poems—it is too curated an object for that—but it does give evidence of Prince's working methods, and the sheer labour he put into every one of his published poems. Prince's work seems at times like a submerged

mountain range: we can see the individual islands that are its peaks, but not the valleys that link them. There is not a continuous visible development—as, for example, in Eliot or Milton—nor is there a consistent unifying purpose, as in Herrick. Instead each poem seems to have little to do with what came before or after. Paul Batchelor, reviewing the *Collected Poems* in the *Guardian*, wrote that—

The mastery Prince achieved and the thrilling variety of his modes and voices means that [...] this volume reads like the highlights of a more copious body of work.<sup>84</sup>

In approaching his work I have tried to uncover certain images or preoccupations that recur or transform, and which underlie the poetry. In using unpublished or unfinished poems, notes, and scraps found in the archive I do not mean to suggest any parity between these and the published material, but they have been useful sources of illumination and have enabled the discovery of certain hidden continuities in Prince's poetic vision.

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<sup>84</sup> Paul Batchelor, 'Collected Poems 1935-92 by FT Prince – review', *The Guardian*, October 12<sup>th</sup> 2012.



## THE DOUBLE AND THE DESERT

...the wilderness, wherein there is no man...

(Job 38:26)

F.T. Prince's poem 'Gregory Nazianzen'—first published in his collected poems, *Doors of Stone*, in 1963—demonstrates the strange equivocality we find in Prince's poetry towards time. The poem is an historical monologue, set during the fourth century's Arian controversy, a theological dispute that arose around the specific nature of Christ and whether or not he had always existed. But the poem begins with an evocation of the timeless world:

"Sweet everlasting Love, daughter of God"<sup>1</sup>

The poem then continues in a historically vague, otherworldly mode throughout the first stanza—which exists as a sort of introductory prayer for the poem—hovering above or outside of historical time, even when the poem's actual historical content is addressed:

Enter the stony provinces of Greece  
Where thousands of blaspheming tongues are loose,  
And save us from their plague of babbling lies.

(CP, 101)

The language is austere and universal—shorn of any specific historical signage—but the next stanza evinces an immediate shift in register as the context of the situation breaks through the surface of the poem. Gregory Nazianzen demands that Love—

Come quickly, since for more than forty years  
Under Constans and Constantius, Valens, Julian,  
What have we done but war on one another?

(CP, 101)

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<sup>1</sup> F.T. Prince, *Collected Poems 1935-1992* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1993), p.101. All references are to this edition unless otherwise stated and are abbreviated 'CP'.

## THE DOUBLE AND THE DESERT

Prince then employs a list of historical bishops, presbyters, deacons, prefects to situate the reader in a defined world and time, and to wrench the poem out of its achronic status. But, significantly, the world we enter is not one of congruity, but of anachronism. Gregory Nazianzen desires Love to “Come quickly”—the situation that requires Love is *now*—and yet the situation has continued for “more than forty years”. We are brought into a world which is already too late. The call for speed seems superfluous, and the timelessness of the introductory prayer suggests that this is a prayer that has been uttered many times before, still waiting on Love to come down and heal the divisions in the early Church. The poem’s preoccupation with belatedness and anachronism leads into a reflection on time and old age, in the form of Gregory’s rebuttal of the accusation of his own belatedness:

I should deceive  
Neither myself nor God; and must offend,  
If I should give an answer when men say  
And laugh ‘Where is your talent? Time goes on  
But you can show no increase’; and they say  
‘When will you ever speak, and make an end?  
When will your light shine forth and show the way?’

My friends, why ask me when I mean to pay?  
Surely the last hour will be soon enough, old age,  
Grey hairs?

(CP, 102)

His own belatedness is a source of derision and amusement—to be anachronistic is to become a figure of ridicule—where men not only say or ask, but laugh.

The pathetic nature of anachronism is one which Prince introduces to the material, and is not to be found in its source text, Cardinal Newman’s *The Arians of the Fourth Century* (which is in turn quoting from Gregory’s orations):

‘When will you ever get to the end of this?’ say the all-hasty and unsafe, who are quick to build up and pull down. ‘When will you place your light on a candle-stick? Where is your talent?’ So say friends of mine, who have more zeal for me than religious seriousness.<sup>2</sup>

In Gregory’s oration it is the “all-hasty and unsafe” who seem the figures of ridicule, as Gregory questions their ‘religious seriousness.’ In the original Gregory is in complete control of the argument, and he paraphrases Ecclesiastes, following it by offering a litany of semi-playful aphorisms:

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<sup>2</sup> John Henry Newman, *The Arians of the Fourth Century*, (London: Lumley, 1871), pp. 395-6.

## THE DOUBLE AND THE DESERT

Ah, my brave men, why ask my season for acting, and my plan? Surely the last day of payment is soon enough, old age in its extreme term. Grey hairs have prudence, and youth is untaught. Best be slow and sure, not quick and thoughtless; a kingdom for a day, not a tyranny for a life; a little gold, not a weight of lead. It was the shallow earth shot forth the early blade.<sup>3</sup>

Gregory portrays himself as no anachronism, but rather prudent and wise, finding strength in old age. The “last day of payment” suggests the pay-off that old age brings: sureness and wisdom, and well-executed plans. In Prince’s version he substitutes the noun “plan” with the verb “pay”, completely altering the meaning: “Why ask me when I mean to pay?” Gregory is now not in equity, but in debt—he has no plans and he pleads his (and by extension the Church’s) belatedness. The triumphal tone of the original (at least in this short passage) is discarded and Gregory does not command an imposing army of aphorisms; instead Prince splices in an earlier section of the original oration which focuses on Gregory’s unease, doubt, and distraction:

Surely the last hour will be soon enough, old age,  
Grey hairs? For I am haunted night and day  
By fearful thoughts, they bridle up my tongue,  
And cramp me up and gnaw my bones and humble me,  
So that I cannot think of others,  
But only how myself can flee  
The wrath that is to come—myself be free  
Before I bid for others, and myself  
Draw near, before I summon those afar.<sup>4</sup>

(CP, 102)

The oratorical power in Gregory’s oration is reversed, and Gregory is a weaker figure—better illustrating what Cardinal Newman describes as “both the state of the times, and [Gregory’s] own beautiful character, though unequal to struggle against them.”<sup>5</sup>

The power-play in the row between Gregory and his critics is complicated further through the modification of one of the queries directed towards him: “When will you place your light on a candlestick?” becomes in Prince’s poem “When will your light shine forth and show the way?” The alteration is significant: in the original there is a delicate humour in the strange metaphor—it is a wittier, concrete image; in Prince’s poem it is transformed into a question of spiritual guidance. Though the questioners are crueler in the poem—they laugh at the old anachronism—there is a desperation and a hunger beneath the surface, a frustration at Gregory’s passivity, that lends a new pathos to the situation—the

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<sup>3</sup> Newman, p. 396.

<sup>4</sup> “These thoughts haunt me night and day; they consume my bones and feed on my flesh; they keep me from boldness, or from walking with erect countenance. They so humble me and cramp my mind, and place a chain on my tongue, that I cannot think of a Ruler’s office, nor of correcting and guiding others, which is a talent above me; but only, how I myself may flee from the wrath to come, and scrape myself some little from the poison of my sin. First, I must be cleansed, and then cleanse others; learn wisdom, and then impart it; draw near to God, and then bring others to Him; be sanctified, and then sanctify.” Newman, p. 395.

<sup>5</sup> Newman, p.395

people need a spiritual leader, but the question of whether anachronism is the very virtue that makes Gregory a great spiritual leader, or whether it is his greatest flaw, is left unanswered. In this chapter I intend to examine the purpose of the anachronistic in Prince's poetry—as both a flaw and a virtue—and ascertain whether, as Jeremy Tambling suggests, it “gives opportunités”.<sup>6</sup> I shall do this through the isolation of two images, two emanations of the anachronism, and show how they are central to an understanding of Prince's poetics.

I shall introduce the first of these emanations—the double—through a consideration of three early unpublished poems, which are stylistically related, and related precisely by this sense of linguistic doubleness. The first two are troubled by reflections, and the third is an echo poem—a formally double poem. I will show that doubling in Prince's work has no hierarchy of source and replica: this lack of hierarchy will have profound implications later in the chapter. I will find evidence within Prince's poetry to link doubleness with anachronism, through the identity these poems seem to evince between action and inaction, and the concept of indecision, as a decisive event which serves to shift us from the chronic—the ‘on time’—to the anachronistic—the ‘too-late’.

The second emanation—the desert—does not need such close-reading detective work to discover as does the double; it is an easily recognisable part of Prince's style: his preoccupation with wildernesses, margins, marginal figures. But what relation does the desert bear to the anachronism? I argue it is the landscape and symbol of the anachronism. From at least the time of the exile of the Jews onwards—if not before—the desert or wilderness has been associated with a dislocation in time: when John the Baptist came from the wilderness he had a ‘raiment of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle about his loins’,<sup>7</sup> a garb of the past: the same garb as Elijah once wore in 2 Kings 1:8. For the early Christian ascetics, in the desert ‘past and future become one and time moves from the sequential narratives of history. Memory, as a nostalgia for a time that never was, is liturgically gathered up into the total presence of the eternal present which is also perpetually anticipated’.<sup>8</sup> Mimi Levy Lepis writes that ‘within the Torah, the desert is the symbol of being placeless and transient’.<sup>9</sup> I will focus my discussion of the desert on three poems from Prince's first collection, which an exploration in the archive reveals were originally intended to be part of a unified sequence. The desert is an exile from history, and through a close reading of these desert poems I will show what a historical poem exiled from its own history can look like, and how it differs from so-called ‘timeless’ poetry.

## THE DOUBLE

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<sup>6</sup> Tambling, *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Matthew 3:4, KJV.

<sup>8</sup> David Jasper, “Time and Memory, Wind and Space”, *The Sacred Desert* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2004), p.43.

<sup>9</sup> Mimi Levy Lipis, “Spaces and Places in the Sukkah”, *Symbolic Houses in Judaism: How Objects and Metaphors Construct Hybrid Places of Belonging* (Farnham, Surrey; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), p.199.

## THE DOUBLE AND THE DESERT

In the archive at Southampton, amongst a sheaf of unpublished poems, there is an untitled, undated poem, neatly copied out, with relatively few subsequent alterations to the text. It is a mysterious and verbally dense poem (even by the standards of Prince's early poetry): the subject is obscure, the tone vaguely martial and somewhat reminiscent of the early draft of Chaka, suggesting a date of around 1934. The poem is effectively split into two parts: the first in the voice of the narrator, the second in a disembodied voice which suddenly "rings in the flushed, implacable wood" and chides—almost mocks—the narrator. Throughout the poem there is a strange doubleness—a sense of recurrence and shadowy mirrorings—that figure and prefigure the occurrence of this second voice. The poem begins with a short but complex sentence which demonstrates precisely this saturation of doubleness:

A star recalled by this revisit  
Jumped on the limping stream and stood  
Still in the sky.<sup>10</sup>

The speaker returns to a location, and by the action of this return a star, in its turn, is recalled—both are doubled across time. But the star is then doubled again: jumping on a stream and standing still in a sky. It is, presumably, the reflection of the star that jumps on the ripples of the stream, and the star itself that stands still in the sky, but Prince pointedly refuses to make this distinction. The reflection is not divided from its source—there is no hierarchy of image and reflection, the star is singular and both, and carries out two simultaneous actions, being multiple.

Likewise, in another undated manuscript from the same sheaf of poems, we find a similar preoccupation with the relationship between the reflection and the reflected:

In the untiring interest of these lakes  
Whose brilliance trammels distance and direction,  
Clouds are suspended in long loops and flakes  
To double their affirmative reflection.  
Cliffs mimic pines: and seeking water shakes  
Its falls through echoes without circumspection<sup>11</sup>

There are three doublings at play here, each of a different type. The clouds are reflected in "these lakes", the pines are doubled through imitation, and water is doubled in sound, as an echo. The doubling of the clouds is particularly illustrative of Prince's flattening or confusion of the reflective hierarchy. Here the reflection is "affirmative", that is, it affirms the presence or existence of the clouds—and not only this, but the reflection seems to have primacy: the clouds apparently exist solely "to double" their reflection.

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<sup>10</sup> PFTP MS328 A834 2-1-4-1 to 42.

<sup>11</sup> PFTP, MS328 A834 2-1-4-1 to 42. This poem was published in *Lysistrata* as 'Stanze', it should also be pointed out that the poems in this sheaf cover the time from when Prince was fourteen to when he was fifty-six. Nevertheless, from the handwriting and poetic style it is clear that three poems discussed in this section were written at a similar period, and they are adjacent in the sheaf.

## THE DOUBLE AND THE DESERT

Thus each affirms or creates the other, the hierarchy is flattened, and we are left with a spooky entanglement, a multiple object. In the second stanza we find humans—or more specifically lovers—encountering their reflections:

These colonies of lovers strip, relax  
No further than to dip into the glances  
Of the wet-looking glass that never cracks  
Their still uncertain unities<sup>12</sup>

The meaning of the third line is doubled by being divided across a line break: reading the line alone the glass—the water—merely “never cracks”, like a well-made mirror, but the next line reveals to us that the verb is not, as we first assume, reflexive. Instead we realise that the “wet-looking glass” never cracks their “still uncertain unities”. We too undergo a certain uncertainty when reading these lines, the poem immediately poses questions: is it that the vision of their own reflection never disturbs their unity, their sense of selfhood? and like the clouds earlier, are their reflections actually undivided from themselves, making a double unity? why are their unities *still* uncertain—does this suggest a future where they will become certain, or be broken? The poem seems to reside in a world of only questions, questions without yet answers. In the next line one of the lovers is “resentful of a glimpse of parallax”. To be resentful of parallax is to be disturbed by the idea of multiplicity, that something is not identical when viewed from multiple perspectives. The world of this poem is one that seems to be located in an Edenic innocence, before the knowledge of any other—or rather, on the cusp of knowledge of the other. The third and final stanza acts as a summary of the previous two, and of the movement towards knowledge of multiplicity (figured as the setting forth on a boat), and describes how this doubled, multiple world is yet united:

The shifting relics of rejected views,  
Remembered outlines  
[...]  
here compressed and twisted, fuse  
Together<sup>13</sup>

As at the beginning of ‘A star recalled by this revisit’, the multiples of this poem are stretched through time as well as space: to reject suggests a prior state, as does to remember, and though they are relics, historical objects, they “fuse” here and now—not only the hierarchy of reflection, but the hierarchy of history (which is the reflection of time) is flattened.

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<sup>12</sup> PFTP, MS328 A834 2-1-4-1 to 42.

<sup>13</sup> PFTP, MS328 A834 2-1-4-1 to 42.

A third poem in the sheaf that holds the previous two, and the last I shall deal with here, provides us with yet another instance of literary doubling. Prince titles it ‘Scene with an Echo’ and the form is—at first glance and minding the title—based on that of the echo verse tradition, specifically that of the first type as outlined by Elbridge Colby.<sup>14</sup> The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics defines echo verse as “A poem of which the final syllables of the lines are repeated, as by an echo, with the effect of making a reply to a question or a comment, often contrastive, punning, or ironic.”<sup>15</sup> However, the echo in Prince’s poem never truly acts as an echo, and usually has the most tenuous aural relationship with the line it is apparently echoing:

Nor truly nor by you.

*Do not, lost.*

[...]

Mutual trophies were not.

*Not for you.*

[...]

There being none but you.

*Who being you?*

[...]

And it seemed I was surrounded by a sigh.

*I was your sigh.*

[...]

In the disaster that the not replying made.

*As if dying without trying.*

[...]

How, however, had we never known, shall ever know?

*Never, no.*<sup>16</sup>

Prince was typically fastidious in his use of historical forms, so why here does he employ a traditional formal constraint—even bringing it to our attention in the title—only to utterly negate it? In typical echo poems, as J.A. Cuddon defines them, “the final syllables are repeated as by an echo with a change of meaning.”<sup>17</sup> Thus the echo is aurally bound to the speaker, but not semantically: there is a hint of consciousness in how many or how few syllables the echo echoes. In Prince’s poem this hint is enlarged into a full-blown consciousness: the echo is in rebellion against its duties as a sonic device. In an earlier title of the poem Prince had been more explicit about the rebellious nature of the echo, calling it ‘Dialogue with a Refractory Echo’.<sup>18</sup> What is lost by losing this merest *suggestion* of consciousness? One

<sup>14</sup> Elbridge Colby, *The Echo-Device in Literature* (New York: The New York Public Library, 1920), p.7.

<sup>15</sup> *The Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p.386

<sup>16</sup> PFTP, MS328 A834 2-1-4-1 to 42.

<sup>17</sup> J.A. Cuddon, “Echo Verse”, *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (Hoboken, N.J.: John Wiley & Sons, 2012).

<sup>18</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/2/1/2.

## THE DOUBLE AND THE DESERT

of the pleasures of an echo poem is a sort of poetic paranoia: the echo is either something extra-human—nature or fate or Wordsworth’s “recognised intelligence”<sup>19</sup>—that provides a commentary on the situation, or it is a felicitous accident, a natural phenomenon onto which the speaker projects their own consciousness. But Prince’s poem violently destroys this delicate balance, and neither explanation is admissible. The deliberate scuppering of the echoic voice provokes an anxiety in the reader as to who, or what, is replying to the speaker.

Prince also subverts the expectations of an echo poem in another way. Typically, the speaker in an echo poem is alone and either addresses themselves, or (illustrating the poetic paranoia detailed above) addresses the echo as echo. When the echo is addressed, it is addressed with a “conscious artistry in manufacture”<sup>20</sup> which Sir Philip Sidney helpfully comments on in the introductory passage to the poem ‘Philisides and Echo’:

[Philisides] began an eclogue betwixt himself and the Echo, framing his voice so in these desert places, as what words he would have the Echo reply unto; these he would sing higher than the rest, and so kindly framed a disputation betwixt himself and it[...]<sup>21</sup>

In Sidney’s poem, there is no pretence that Philisides is not alone, nor that Philisides himself would think otherwise: he even sings louder or higher on the words he wants echoed. Echo is little more than an auditory phenomenon to be whimsically engaged with. But in ‘Scene with an Echo’ the speaker is overtly conversing with the apparently independent echo, referring to past situations, and suggesting a prior relationship between the two. Echo is far more than a literary conceit or auditory illusion in this poem, but approaches an active character, there is a suggestion of backstory, hidden motives, a psychology. The status of Echo as echo is never entirely dismissed however, and there is a delicate and disturbing tension between Echo’s opposing statuses quite unlike the sophisticated whimsy of a typical echo poem like Sidney’s. The poem begins:

Since we have undergone a minor death  
May I not speak, and as I must? for I  
Can still address you, may be answered, though  
Your floating few replies are not renewed  
Nor truly nor by you.

*Do not, lost.*<sup>22</sup>

The speaker acknowledges the dependence the echo has, and the artificiality or falseness of the echo’s speech—its replies cannot be renewed truly, nor by its own volition. The echo seems to plead with the

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<sup>19</sup> William Wordsworth, “The Mountain Echo”, *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, Vol. 2 (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, and Greene, 1827), p.164.

<sup>20</sup> Colby, p.21.

<sup>21</sup> Sir Philip Sidney, *Arcadia*, quot. in Colby, p.21.

<sup>22</sup> PFTP, MS328 A834 2-1-4-1 to 42.

speaker not to speak, not to disturb “our happier muteness”—yet the speaker refuses, finding a sadistic delight in the domination of the echo:

You I have somewhat scooped and much repaired  
 To amuse my ear with this obedience. Mine  
 You are, a servant meant to shiver, starved  
 In a vault among elaborate ruins<sup>23</sup>

However, it is not so clear that the dominance or the dependence is entirely one-directional. Three times in the poem the added, extra-echoic words of the echo (that is, those words which cannot be heard as an echo of the previous line) come to be echoed back in the words of the following line or lines of the speaker. I shall underline the extra-echoic words in the echo, and then underline the secondary echoes that follow. After ‘*Do not, lost*’ we find ‘Not to hope that fondling absence may replace/Our happier muteness, often lost;’ after ‘*Not for you*’ we find ‘I may let you quibble if you like’; and after ‘*Who being you?*’ we find ‘Who should it be for me?’ It is especially striking in the first instance, where the word ‘lost’ appears at first to serve no purpose in the echo, but gains purpose only after it guides the speaker’s words one line later. Like the star and its reflection, the echo and the speaker are entangled, and cannot easily be divided as in a more conventional echo poem—indeed, the concept of a poetic paranoia that underlies an echo poem, through the careful transgression of the conventions of the genre, is in this poem enlarged and extended: ‘Scene with an Echo’ transplaces the paranoia about the status of echo from the speaker to the reader. The poem ends equivocally:

Or do I kill you now?  
 How we may repeat ourselves, as a silence  
 Will multiply a silence. What in a mist  
 We did, done; again, gone.<sup>24</sup>

What is it that kills echo?—is it speaking, or silence? If a silence will multiply a silence, then the repetition of silence *still counts* as repetition: the echo is not killed. And then there is something deeply troubling about the analogy Prince draws between the repetition of ourselves and the repetition of silence. There is a suggestion of identity between silence and action, doing and not doing, presence and absence. The suspicion forms itself—we cannot help it—that perhaps what seem fundamental and original opposites, thing and nothing, are in reality merely ghostly doubles of each other, reflections *without prior substance*. The awful suspicion seems confirmed by the close of the poem; absence and presence become merged in the image of the last echo, transcribed in mist: note the separating comma, the echo and its original are at one and the same time both “gone” and “again”.

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<sup>23</sup> PFTP, MS328 A834 2-1-4-1 to 42.

<sup>24</sup> PFTP, MS328 A834 2-1-4-1 to 42.

## THE DOUBLE AND THE DESERT

Where does this preoccupation with echoes, reflections, doublings-without-original stem from? To return to another disembodied voice, the voice that “rings in the flushed, implacable wood” from the first poem I looked at, we find an accusation made against the speaker:

‘You had the choice and though the chances lessened  
You had a choice yet and you never chose,

Chose not to choose, but asked for fortune  
So rich as to be conscious fiction,  
You waited for a fitting wing  
To clinch the match, you refused  
Too easily too many tenders.<sup>25</sup>

The accusation of indecision—or of delaying deciding until it is too late—is one which is levelled again and again throughout Prince’s corpus. See, for example, the confession in 1970 that “It was no choice, I could not choose” (CP, 134) from *Memoirs in Oxford*, or Prince’s insightful hypothesis in *Afterword on Rupert Brooke*:

...one can guess that Ka  
Could never do with less than two men whom she might  
Half choose and half refuse, to keep her hesitant  
And happy to be pressed and safely insecure.

(CP, 180)

The concept of indecision, or of choosing not to choose, and being “safely insecure”, has a causal relationship with the ghostly doublings I’ve already identified in these early poems. When we find ourselves asked to make a decision we are confronted by two—or more—possible futures: we take one road, but the road not taken remains as a distinct and alternate past, and the “footfalls echo in the memory/Down the passage which we did not take”.<sup>26</sup> If the choice we do take is the original, the source and the sound, all those other options are its echoes, reflections. But what happens when we never choose, when we choose not to choose and remain dithering in the yellow wood? Then both roads or passages will extend forever in front of us, both untaken possibilities, and both will become echoes of no original: the original act was empty and was no act at all. We are left as anachronistic echoes of an action or path in time which was never taken: time leaves us behind.

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<sup>25</sup> PFTP, MS328 A834 2-1-4-1 to 42.

<sup>26</sup> T.S. Eliot, ‘Burn Norton’, *Collected Poems 1909-1935* (London: Faber & Faber, 1936), p.185.

## THE DESERT

So far I have concentrated on the trope of the double, the *Doppelgänger*, the echo, as an image of anachronism. The double is not an immediately obvious trope in Prince's poetry—he never writes explicitly on this subject—instead it is one to be found hidden in his metaphors and distinctive turns of phrase, as I have attempted to reveal. I now want to turn my attention to a much more immediately apparent trope in Prince's poetry: that of the desert or wilderness.

The three poems I have focused on above seem to have been written in roughly the same early period of Prince's career, and were part of an unused cache of poems that were partially mined for the publication of his first volume, *Poems*.<sup>27</sup> In the archive they lie between an early draft of 'For Thieves and Beggars' and an early draft of 'Cefalù', though the order may be incidental. They were, as whole poems, discarded, despite there being much that is extraordinary in them, but a few crucial echoes found their way into the published volume. In the poem beginning 'A star recalled by this revisit' the disembodied voice in the wood tells the poet

What you wanted was a wilderness  
Which you have, which  
You have had, you will have and wander there.<sup>28</sup>

In the published poem 'For the Deserter' we find a corresponding phrase

'If I die, what will you do?' but what I have wished  
Be the wilderness I have and that he gave.

(CP, 38)

The situation is different, but the eccentric syntax that obsesses over the concept of possession, plus the very specific possession of a wilderness, suggests a genetic link between the two poems. The image of wilderness recurs throughout Prince's poetic career, and is particularly prominent in his first volume. 'For the Deserter' is part of a group of three poems that are linked both stylistically, by their proximity, and by their titles: 'For the Deserter', 'For Fugitives' and 'For Thieves and Beggars' are all adjacent. All three poems are set in similarly arid, wild, foreign situations, what Ashbery laudingly described as the poems' "anonymous but precise wilderness settings".<sup>29</sup> An exploration in the archive reveals that these poems were originally intended to be part of a sequence, tentatively titled 'Schemes' which were worked on in the first half of 1936.<sup>30</sup> On the 1<sup>st</sup> of June 1936, between an early version of 'For Fugitives' and an

<sup>27</sup> There is a notebook in the archive which contains cleanly copied versions of many early poems, including earlier drafts of these three. It is not unlikely that Prince was at the time considering it as a potential first and complete volume.

<sup>28</sup> PFTP, MS 328 A834/2/1/4/1 to 42.

<sup>29</sup> Ashbery, 'F.T. Prince'.

<sup>30</sup> PFTP, MS 328 A134/3/2/1/11 D.

early version of 'For Thieves and Beggars' (entitled 'Schemes I' and 'Schemes II' respectively), Prince transcribes for posterity their genesis from what is presumably a lost journal entry dated 18<sup>th</sup> December (most likely 1935):

I have been turning over in my mind the conception of a group of 'Tales' in verse—they would have to be short, no more than 200 lines, perhaps in varied octosyllabic couplets—to an effect not unlike the Waste Land, Anna Livia Plurabelle, or the Cantos, but the surface more coherent. A variety of {^the} dream poem, there would need to be a motive to underlie [unclear, looks more like underlf, underly] it, to generate a compelling irrationality. Ariosto a possible aid.<sup>31</sup>

These verse tales were presumably never fully realized—the longest of the three poems that were published is 33 lines, far short of 200 (even if we concede that it's unclear whether the 200-line maximum was meant to be for each or for all). But it is not impossible that the three unpublished poems explored in the previous section were also intended to be a part of the projected sequence—certainly they have a similar sense of a complex psychology, or a "compelling irrationality", and a historical situation only ever hinted at amid a vague idealised landscape. But whatever the intention at their conception, the three poems that come down to us are united by their marginality. They are set in the wilderness—the margin of landscape—and they are dedicated to the margins of society: to fugitives, thieves, beggars, and to the deserted.

These poems do not relinquish their secrets easily, if at all. Certain words betray their foreignness (of time as of place)—this is a world of tents, plains, towers, sentries with pikes, palatinates—but we cannot make any further assertions about their historical context, the language is too abstract, refined. What John Ashbery admired in these early poems of Prince's was precisely this absence: it is precisely their vagueness that marks them as the last evidence of "the history outside of recorded history, of the engulfing and engulfed past that is lost to us."<sup>32</sup> In short, the contexts or historical plots of 'Schemes' remain undisclosed, erased—and while I, as a critic, am weakened by their inscrutability, they grow stronger by it. I shall try to explain what I mean.

Rowan Williams once described W.H. Auden's poetry as possessing a "certain timelessness of perspective" and his poem 'Lullaby' as having a "lasting and classical quality".<sup>33</sup> "Timeless" is a common enough commendation for a poem, and it usually means a combination of two distinct but related things: one, that the poem is for all time—readers from any future historical period will be able to enjoy it—and two (which is related), the poem is shorn of its own historical time—events, persons, political contexts are universalised if they are present at all. The extent to which we might agree whether or not either of these conditions can actually be met is not what I wish to address here, instead I want to consider the second condition or implication of timelessness that I have (extremely briefly) outlined. Though the first condition is probably what we are most likely immediately to think of when we think of a 'timeless lyric', in actuality it might as well merely be a rubric for what constitutes good poetry as

<sup>31</sup> PFTP, MS 328 A134/3/2/11 D.

<sup>32</sup> Ashbery, 'F.T. Prince'.

<sup>33</sup> Rowan Williams, "A poetry of atonement", *The Guardian*, 12<sup>th</sup> March 2008.

## THE DOUBLE AND THE DESERT

opposed to bad. It is the second condition—at least it seems to me—that is more often what distinguishes between those poems we might be likely, perhaps somewhat lazily, to call ‘timeless’ and those which we probably wouldn’t: ‘Lullaby’ perhaps, but we would be less likely to use the ‘timeless’ epithet to describe a poem like Auden’s ‘Spain 1937’. It is, perhaps, pertinent to note here that the one Prince poem which has ‘stood the test of time’—if to be repeatedly anthologized is to stand the test of time—is one of the few of his poems obviously written about a contemporary situation: ‘Soldiers Bathing’. Locked out of the “Auden, Isherwood, Spender [...] triumvirate that relegated the poetry of lyrical psychology to some suppressed division,”<sup>34</sup> Prince—as Will May points out—has to wait until Auden has left for the US before his “unlikely election to Second World War poet.”<sup>35</sup> But this is beside—or even illustrative of—the point: ‘Soldiers Bathing’ contains no reference to indicate which specific conflict it describes, it is hardly as much about the Second World War as it is about all war.

What do we know of the situation of Auden’s ‘Lullaby’? The speaker lies with a sleeping lover in their arms before dawn, the affair is possibly illicit in some way, and the speaker admits their own faithlessness. Further than this we are not much compelled to look—the poem works fine with just this barest of plots. The poem does not motion for us to regard the historical time in which it is set, it is enough to know that it is night and no more: the poem is timeless, lasting, classical. With this—perhaps rudimentary—concept of timelessness in mind, I wish to turn to Prince’s poem ‘For Fugitives’.

Immediately upon beginning the poem the first line brings a nagging uncertainty into the reader’s mind:

For you who loved me too

(CP, 39)

The epithet would be unexceptional were it in the present tense, but being in the past we can only say that some property of the beloved has changed, but are unsure exactly what: did they die? fall out of love? disappear? The information is insufficient. The poem continues by engendering a series of further uncertainties that take us ever more away from any resolution.

...it is I who loved you  
And crossed the sea, the flawed air  
Allayed, now feel beneath my fingers  
The seal melt from the fountain  
And recall the lost palatinate.

(CP, 39)

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<sup>34</sup> Anthony Howell, ‘F.T. Prince, A Maverick Master’, *PN Review* 147, Volume 29 Number 1, September-October 2002.

<sup>35</sup> May, *RFTP*, p.2.

## THE DOUBLE AND THE DESERT

Why not, surely, the more conventional ‘I loved you?’—was the identity of the lover ever in doubt? We are unsure of the significance of crossing the sea—at first it might seem to be paraphrased by ‘because I loved you I crossed the sea to you’, yet the sea crossing seems to lead directly to the present ‘now’ which in turn dives back into the past in the act of recollection: the causal relationship is suspended. Likewise we are unsure of the significance of the seal, the fountain, the palatinate, and we do not know why it was ‘lost’. The stanza is overladen with the definite article—each noun seems to have such precise significance—yet we are painfully aware of our inability to grasp those significances as they pass before us. In a longer poem we might dismiss such details as scene-painting, but any event this poem describes is in and only in these details. The ending offers us no resolution, but the tension drops and the poem quietens as it focuses on the details of the present:

...the thin moon  
From the white kernel of her filmy almond  
Leans, and a causeless radiance fills  
The palm I dip among these hills.

(CP, 39)

The mystery of the poem comes from its suggestion of a weight of the past pressing down on the present. David Lowenthal, in a critique of ‘faction’ (a portmanteau of fact and fiction) in *The Past is a Foreign Country*, describes how “sheer verisimilitude made the late-Victorian novel seem historically valid, but it prevented public understanding of the past by denying, taming, or explaining away its utter strangeness [...] anachronism became decoration.”<sup>36</sup> This is precisely the trap that Prince’s ‘Schemes’ avoid: lacking contextual knowledge each situation is to us utterly strange, each detail or anachronism seems to hold an infinite spectrum of significance. It is like overhearing a private conversation about a serious matter and knowing nothing of what is spoken about, not as John Stuart Mill’s “feeling confessing itself to itself in moments of solitude”<sup>37</sup> but as half of a dialogue discussing events we have not been privy to: in a grope for understanding a sort of paranoia sets in. The extent to which this suspension of our full understanding magnifies the apparent significance of details is possibly best illustrated in the description of the beloved:

For you who loved me too,  
As the mistress of transparent towns that showed  
Like sea beasts the embodied ruins  
As their bones

(CP, 39)

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<sup>36</sup> David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.230.

<sup>37</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Essays on Literature and Society*, ed. J.P. Schneewind (New York: Collier, 1965), pp.109-110.

## THE DOUBLE AND THE DESERT

Already in the first three and a half lines of the poem our understanding is so utterly compromised we cannot tell apart fiction from fact. We are unsure to what extent we should take this description literally: is she mistress as in master, illicit lover, or merely person? Why are the towns described as transparent and full of embodied ruins? We cannot tell if the language is figurative, or descriptive. The ‘as’ would suggest we should read it figuratively—as an extended simile—but then it would be a vehicle without a tenor, and so find we must read it descriptively. Once again it is the presence of the definite article which suggests to the reader the reality of a withheld knowledge: this is one very specific “mistress”. The poem cannot be called ‘timeless’ in the way Auden’s ‘Lullaby’ is, but neither does it conventionally ‘have’ time either—any context that is needed in the way it might be for Auden’s ‘Spain 1937’ is gone. The poem disorientates us in time; we are confused by the situation, but conscious that it is important, even if we cannot divine how or why. The effect is a sort of historical vertigo. The poem is misplaced in time, shifted as if it had time-travelled, and, as we become aware that this is all we are going to get, the very reality of the poem—the details—becomes the poetry, as the poetry becomes the detail, confused and weighed down with unrecorded history.

To be misplaced in time is to be exiled. The desert is the arena of exile, banishment; but it is also, for Prince, the arena of time itself. There is a key passage in a journal from 1955 in which Prince explicitly links the imagery of the wilderness with time:

Mountains, rocks, flowers, sweet accents, seas, shores, a meaningless beauty, an emptiness, a repetition of space & freedom that is a person: From rocks, eagles, valleys, streams, gulfs—an impression of infinity, or rather time, inconceivable actual time, trans-universal changes or static matter.<sup>38</sup>

Actual time is inconceivable: it is we with our sense of historical time who are outside of it. Isolated from that Blakean eternity we are in exile from time. But the desert, which is the arena of our exile, is also the arena of that time from which we are locked out. In the first chapter of *Time and Narrative*, Paul Ricoeur cites the four “synthetic images” that Stanislas Boros finds in St. Augustine’s writings, claiming that each fuses “the sorrow of the finite with the celebration of the absolute.”<sup>39</sup> The third of these synthetic images is of particular interest:

... temporality as “banishment” includes the images of tribulation, exile, vulnerability, wandering, nostalgia, and vain desire<sup>40</sup>

As a sentence it could easily be mistaken for a synopsis of Prince’s *Collected Poems*. Compare it to Natalie Pollard’s inventory of essentially Princean features:

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<sup>38</sup> PFTP, MS328 A834/3/1/5

<sup>39</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), p.28.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

## THE DOUBLE AND THE DESERT

Archetypes of Genesis and the postlapsarian state, moral journeying, architectural disorientation and exile, crumbling signposts and readable structures, expulsion and vain struggle to return to a (lost) right path emerge repeatedly through Prince's career.<sup>41</sup>

The introduction of Boros's "synthetic images" is couched in a discussion of man's separation from God: Augustine writes that 'I discovered that I was far from you in the region of dissimilarity [in regione dissimilitudinis]' and Ricoeur glosses this as 'the radical ontological difference that separates the creature from the creator, the difference that the soul discovers precisely in its movement of returning to its source and by its very effort to know its origin.'<sup>42</sup> Thomas Merton wrote that in the modern age "everywhere is desert. Everywhere is solitude in which man must do penance and fight the adversary and purify his own heart in the grace of God."<sup>43</sup> The images of exile, wilderness, wandering, solitude, become the images of the anachronism which is the ontological essence of all of us, of every person's separation from God and eternity.

For if the holy sparks in things  
Are separated from God, so are the Jews.

(CP, 156)

## THE SEA-WALL AND THE SEA

These are two apparently dissimilar emanations of the anachronism—the double and the desert—but I would like to show they are not as distinct as at first they might appear. To return to the passage from Prince's journals I cited earlier that concerned the relation between the wilderness and time, there are two important points to make.

Mountains, rocks, flowers, sweet accents, seas, shores, a meaningless beauty, an emptiness, a repetition of space & freedom that is a person<sup>44</sup>

The wilderness is here not merely a wilderness, nor even a wilderness-that-is-time, but it is also the repetition of a person. It is unclear from the syntax whether it is the “repetition” which is a person, or the “space & freedom” which is a person, but the distinction is unimportant. We have already seen that

<sup>41</sup> Pollard, *RFTP*, p.202.

<sup>42</sup> Ricoeur, p.27

<sup>43</sup> Thomas Merton, "Aspects of the Spiritual Life", *Thoughts in Solitude*, (New York: Farrar Straus & Cudahy, 1958), pp.17-20.

44 PFTP, MS328 A834/3/1/5

the double in Prince's poetry has no "hierarchy of image and reflection." The desert is the double of the person, or the desert is the person and has a double—without the hierarchy of image and reflection the statements are identical. The wanderer and the wilderness they wander in are *equal* and each can replace the other. In the poem titled 'On the Shore' from his first collection—which he chose to omit from his *Collected Poems*—Prince invokes exactly this doubling of the desert to bring about the poem's startling conclusion. The poem is addressed to another, who is referred to only as 'my liberator and master' and 'great privateer'.<sup>45</sup> We are not made entirely aware of the relationship between the speaker and the spoken to—lover and beloved, servant and lord, subject and king?—but it suffices to know that they are in some sort of hierarchical relationship, in which the speaker is subordinate to the spoken to. The speaker at first walks in the wilderness:

Hearing the sound of some wind on the sea  
And of the sea on the sand in this wild hollow  
I have walked<sup>46</sup>

And, after considering a situation in which the speaker might displease the other, invites the other to do the same, to come to the wilderness. But the last line reveals the real nature of this wilderness, that there is an identity between the 'sandy solitude' and the speaker:

And yet because of that love, whenever you would  
You may come to this windy and sandy solitude  
And call on it again and it will follow.<sup>47</sup>

A "sandy solitude" cannot "follow"—the phrase borders on the meaningless. At first, perhaps, we might think it is "that love" which "will follow", but to say "because of that love you may call on that love" makes precious little sense either.<sup>48</sup> Thus we realise instead it is the speaker that follows: the speaker is or becomes the sandy solitude.<sup>49</sup> The ending surprises us—not least because the rhyme is from eight lines before ('hollow'/'follow')<sup>50</sup> and would have been almost out of earshot were it not for the unique feminine ending. As it is it reaches back into the first half of the poem and is an invitation to return and

<sup>45</sup> Prince, *Poems*, p.27.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Compare it to the source text for this line: "(But know) because of you, whenever you would call on it (lit. instruct) (again) then will it follow." R.S. Rattray, 'Hausa Poetry', *Essays Presented to C.G. Seligman*, ed. E.E. Evans-Pritchard, Raymond Firth, Bronislaw Malinowski, and Isaac Shapera, (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1934), p.262. Cf. p.98.

<sup>49</sup> See also the following lines from 'For the Deserted':

or of a sudden  
A twice desolated solitude (that's I)

(CP, 38)

<sup>50</sup> The poem employs an unusual rhyme scheme (I have indicated the feminine rhyme with lower case): ABBcDDABBEc.

## THE DOUBLE AND THE DESERT

reconsider or reimagine all the wilderness in the poem as the double of the speaker. All rhymes are anachronisms, dragging the reader or listener backwards to an earlier line, but this rhyme is able to reach into the past particularly far and particularly successfully, and in doing so demands everything in between be utterly transfigured. The poem repeats itself, but differently.

In the journal entry already quoted there is a further point to be teased out, and one that demonstrates how doubleness emanates from the problem of time in Prince's work:

...an impression of infinity, or rather time, inconceivable actual time, trans-universal changes or static matter.<sup>51</sup>

Just as absence and presence, essence and non-essence, are given one identity in Prince's work, so time, *actual* time, is of a twofold nature. It is both changes and stasis, and this doubled nature is part of why it is "inconceivable", part of why we are exiled from it. Prince's poetry usually has a coherent surface, but underneath this, on closer inspection, we find a strange and shifting reality, a reality where forms are not stable but melt into each other. The speaker walks alone in a desert. The speaker walks with another of himself in a desert which is both himself and the other. The entanglement of forms produces a contingency built into the heart of the poetic world, one which has to be continually propped up by the architecture of elaborate syntax: the conditions, qualifications, self-references that define Prince's earlier style.

The double and the desert, the two images of anachronism. There are two corresponding images Prince makes use of that relate to time which I should like to consider. Usually, when we consider time in the abstract, we think of time as either linear or circular. The line of centuries, millennia; the circle of calendars, birthdays, mealtimes, festivals. Heraclitus's rivers or Vico's cycles; time, and time again. But Prince offers us two other images by which to interpret time. In the poem 'A Byron-Shelley Conversation', from Prince's volume *Later On* published in 1983, Shelley and Byron walk in a landscape set beyond the grave, discussing their posthumous reputations, and Shelley gestures towards the sea:

and see the waves wash, travel  
up, weave and unravel

their web of bubbling froth.

Look, *there* is your time, my time  
and since, where the waves climb  
and slide out like a cloth,  
and pull back into the swim.

BYRON

I see no more here

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<sup>51</sup> PFTP, MS328 A834/3/1/5.

## THE DOUBLE AND THE DESERT

than in your Greek play—  
‘Worlds on worlds are rolling ever  
like the bubbles on a river  
sparkling, bursting, borne away...’

(CP, 238)

This is a variant of the time/river image, and Byron is by this reminded of a passage from Shelley's play *Hellas*. Yet a transformation has occurred—Byron is only partially justified in his reference. Time is no longer a river, but is now the sea. Time is now where all rivers end, where all personal histories end, and Shelley is able physically to point to different moments, standing as it were outside of time. In the poem, Shelley's character is more dominant, driving the discussion, and concluding it, and Byron is apparently incapable of fully comprehending the transformation of time Shelley gestures towards. He refers to Shelley's lines where time is figured as a river, but in fact misquotes Shelley's play, tellingly missing out the line “From creation to decay”<sup>52</sup>—the forward motion of time has been unsettled, and unsettles Byron's recollection of the poetry.

The second image or analogue of time Prince offers us is found at the end of ‘Gregory Nazianzen’. It is not offered to us as emphatically as in Shelley's dramatic gesture, but is introduced more quietly:

I watch the far sea bathed in pale blue light,  
And on the rough sea-wall the tone of time  
Comes out, and on the fundamental rock  
Scored over, lights and shadows pause and pass.

(CP, 103)

Time is written into the rough sea-wall, and is its tone and substance. It is history as reality's palimpsest. The sea-wall contains time, but twice: it holds back time as sea, it holds in time as tone. In Prince's poetry time is not—or not *always*—a river moving relentlessly downstream, its spring eternally unreachable, nor a wheel monotonously repeating itself, but can be as aimless and overwhelming as the sea, and as visible and static as the patina on the sea-wall. More than this—the past or the recognition of the past is a process of becoming, its tense is the present continuous: “the tone of time/Comes out”. All time is present, and is happening; history is aseptic—what records is also what is recorded. From these two images, we find that time has a number of distinct qualities: it is, or can be, directionless; it is a record, or archive, of itself; it is present; it is a becoming.

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<sup>52</sup> Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Poems*, Vol. III, ed. Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck (London: Ernest Benn, 1965), p.25.

## A SIBYL'S WORD

In a clearing a little way from the field where they grow their food someone has inexpertly scratched on a stone the Latin words that occur a number of times in the *Cantos*: ARAM NEMUS VULT. A self-conscious gesture, but the words look right there and surely Pound would not have objected to his poem being used in this way. All the same, the inscription will not do as it stands. The clearing may in some sense “want” an altar, but an altar is a raised stone upon which offerings are placed and we have no gods to receive our offerings. So he adds three more words: SED NUMINA ABSUNT.

(D.S. Carne-Ross, *Instaurations*, p.233)

‘Apollo and the Sibyl’ is the longest poem in Prince’s second volume of poetry, *Soldiers Bathing*. Critically it has been a sorely neglected poem: far more attention has been paid to its sister poem ‘The Old Age of Michelangelo’ and to ‘Soldiers Bathing’, the eponymous poem of the volume, despite Mark Ford’s opinion that it is “Prince’s most ambitious and—to my mind—successful of the poems collected in *Soldiers Bathing*.<sup>1</sup> Possibly this is due to its difficulty: it is not an easy poem to understand, though at first glance it may seem so. Its apparently conventional mythological theme belies a slippery and troubling poem, and should certainly be counted as another of those poems that Geoffrey Hill describes as “powerfully individual structures in which mannered statements are simultaneously instances of cloaked, equivocal speech and of naked revelation.” With guidance from discoveries made in the archive, and the source texts of the poem—the writings of George Seferis, Lawrence Durrell, Empedocles—some of the poem’s many mysteries can be unfolded (though not solved), and what is revealed is an uneasy and compromised *ars poetica*, and a poem that is not so empty as its provisional title, ‘Solitudes’, might suggest.<sup>2</sup>

Evidence of the genesis of ‘Apollo and the Sibyl’ is primarily stretched between two concurrent notebooks held in the Prince archive at Southampton. The first mention of the myth of the Sibyl as subject for a poem comes in an entry dated 10<sup>th</sup> February 1949. At that time, Prince was engaged on a series of unpublished poems entitled ‘Solitudes’ and had just completed ‘The Old Age of Michelangelo’. ‘Solitudes’, he explains in a letter to W.G. Shepherd, was the poem that would later become ‘Apollo and the Sibyl’,<sup>3</sup> and it is in an entry concerning ‘Solitudes’ that the idea of the Sibyl is first mentioned. I shall quote the passage in full:

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Ford, “A Wide and Wingless Path to the Impossible: The Poetry of F.T. Prince”, *PN Review* 147, Volume 29 Number 1, September-October 2002, p.32.

<sup>2</sup> Note the similarity between this provisional title and the Spanish baroque poet Luis de Góngora’s *Soledades*.

<sup>3</sup> PFTP MS328 A4164/1/1 to 37.

10<sup>th</sup> February 1949: Solitudes should be a poem of the conscience. Shelleyan, Platonic, longing for purity, simplicity, happiness of love: golden wildernesses, unresting seas, must be related continuously to the presiding idea of intellectual, moral integrity. La Jeune Parque is the only poem which offers a clue to this possibility of projecting a self-analysis, an analysis of the emotional being, into natural surroundings, a star- and sea- solitude (Le Jeune Parque was the poem which helped me most to launch out upon Chaka). There is the myth of Apollo and the Sibyl, which, suggested to me by Turner's picture, has sometimes seemed to offer something. But I should prefer to sever the poem from myth, to construct a new impersonal and unstoried myth. (Le Cimetière Marin is also relevant).<sup>4</sup>

This is the first piece of extant evidence of Prince's interest in the myth of the Sibyl, but it is clear that the idea had been circulating for some time before this, and that, if this is indeed the point in time at which Prince decided to embark on the creation of what would become 'Apollo and the Sibyl', it is only with a distinct note of reluctance. By the 11<sup>th</sup> February, the very next day, it is clear that Prince had made up his mind as he wrote: "Found today the story of Apollo and the Sibyl in Ovid's Metamorphoses, XIV. It gives so much that can be to my purpose that I don't see how I can avoid using it. So that now it can only be a question of working it out, and I have my task for the spring and summer."<sup>5</sup> The idea was, he writes, "suggested to me by Turner's picture". The concept of a Turnerian theme appears in an earlier journal entry, dated 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1949, as Prince muses on the subject and form of his next poem, having completed 'The Old Age of Michelangelo':

The element of direct statement is essential: Pound's *Cantos* and Stendhal: the lightness, hardness, concentration of statements, making for ease, for abundance. Once one learns to talk like that, one can talk on about anything; \* It seems to me that I can talk so, when I get hold of the thing to talk about.—Turnerian landscapes<sup>6</sup>

By the very next entry in this second notebook, dated 12<sup>th</sup> February, the day after he had apparently decided upon the Sibyl as an appropriate subject, work had begun on 'Apollo and the Sibyl':

12 February: The Sibylline consciousness.<sup>7</sup> Source some good coupes or transitions such as that I have always admired in Omar, 'Listen again: one evening at the close, etc'.<sup>8</sup> Vision must include vision of cities, poverty, war, disgrace, helplessness (conclusion of Lotus-Eaters & Tears of a Muse). Une ruine, par mille écumes bénie:<sup>9</sup> why does Turnerian (or 'classical') landscape<s> include always a ruin? (I don't want a base historical reason, Claude, etc, but a dialectical one). Anyway, ruins essential to my Bay of Baiae. Apollo is faithless to her, her youth lost. This [?] only when he has abandoned her that she knows her doom, survival without youth. 'I would either live or die'. I don't quite see how her refusal of his love fits—perhaps that should be altered.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>4</sup> PFTP, MS 328 A834/3/2/1/11, 3<sup>rd</sup> Notebook, pp.57-8.

<sup>5</sup> PFTP, MS 328 A834/3/2/1/11, 3<sup>rd</sup> Notebook, p.58.

<sup>6</sup> PFTP, MS328 A834/3/1/6, p.1.

<sup>7</sup> "The Sibylline Consciousness" appears to be the working title at this point in time and occurs a number of times in the journals.

<sup>8</sup> Edward Fitzgerald, *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, (Auckland: The Floating Press, 2009), verse LIX, p.37.

<sup>9</sup> Stéphane Mallarmé, "Mes bouquin refermés sur le nom de Paphos", the line in question is translated as "A ruin blessed with myriad ocean sprays", *Oxford World Classics: Collected Poems and Other Verse*, translated by E.H. Blackmore and Elizabeth McCombie, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.81.

<sup>10</sup> PFTP, MS328 A834/3/1/6, pp.2-3.

The ruin is essential to his Bay of Baiae. Later he writes that “apparently the Bay of Baiae contains submerged ruins of an ancient city (see Shelley’s Letters). Find out about this.” Literal ruins never occur in the final version of ‘Apollo and the Sibyl’, but fragments of different pasts are embedded in the poem. Prince begins the poem with a search for antecedents or models of style, of theme or tone. Already in the passage quoted above Prince has turned to Edward Fitzgerald’s *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* for style, and Mallarmé, Tennyson, and his own earlier poetry for theme and tone. He then embarks on an analysis and synopsis of Valéry’s ‘La Jeune Parque’ on the same page, before dropping it as ultimately unhelpful. ‘Apollo and the Sibyl’ is a poem that is embedded with literary ruins and fragments. But they are not, as with Eliot or Pound, placed incongruously—standing out to demonstrate the writer’s modernity—but are quietly folded into the fabric of the text, and it is only with the help of the archive that Prince’s working method can be revealed.

## MYTHISTOREMA AND MARIA

There is another notebook that is undated in the archive, but is in the same set of notebooks as one of the journals which details the genesis of ‘Apollo and the Sibyl’. In this notebook there is a transcription of Jean Cocteau’s *L’Ange Heurtbise*, three lyrics of Laura Riding’s, and a complete transcription of all 24 poems of George Seferis’s *Mythistorema*, first published in 1935. The translation Prince uses is one made, partially, by Laurence Durrell, who was a friend of Seferis and who published a translation of Seferis into English with Bernard Spencer and Nanos Valaoritis (and George Katsimbalis, though his input was uncredited) entitled *The King of Asine and Other Poems*.<sup>11</sup> In the copious notes Prince makes towards ‘Apollo and the Sibyl’ he quotes from this translation a number of times, and later he lifts entire lines from *Mythistorema* directly into ‘Apollo and the Sibyl’. For example, in the thirteenth *Mythistorema* poem, ‘Hydra’, there is the line “White sails and sunlight and the dipping oars”, and in the seventh we find “On this cape naked to the south wind.”<sup>12</sup> These are lifted, modified, and spliced together into the opening lines of section I of ‘Apollo and the Sibyl’:

—White sunlight and the dripping oars!

Capes naked to the north wind, and besieged  
By honey-coloured poesy—

Prince primarily takes from Seferis’s poems a sense of the Greek landscape, the wildernesses, cliffs, and seas. But there is, I think, another key reason he looks to *Mythistorema* as a source text for ‘Apollo and the Sibyl’.

<sup>11</sup> *Encyclopedia of Literary Translation into English*, vol. 2, ed. Olive Classe (London: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> PFTP, MS328 A834/3/2/1/11, 9<sup>th</sup> Notebook.

## A SIBYL'S WORD

The theme of the Sibyl was, as we have already seen, a troubling one for Prince, and one that he took up reluctantly. In an undated journal entry he has this to say on the problems the theme poses:

I see the greatest difficulty in the mythological quality of the theme: those Greek gods, etc, what a bore, how difficult to deal with, at this date, in any effective way: the faintest Keatsian, Tennysonian, quality, Hyperion or Oenone, damns the whole ~~subject~~ poem How to get away altogether from such a danger?— The shore the pines and the stars.<sup>13</sup>

It seems at first reading to be a rather obtuse answer he gives to his own question—something more akin to a Buddhist kōan than a practical, practicable idea—but it is in fact a quotation from the first *Mythistorema* poem. Prince is looking to Seferis as a solution for how to write mythological poetry in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Rex Warner writes in the foreword to his translation of Seferis—

Throughout the poetry of Seferis one will notice his profound consciousness of the presence of the past, and of its weight. There is also to be observed an extraordinary freshness of vision. Objects, recognised and felt to be extremely old, are seen suddenly, as for the first time.<sup>14</sup>

It is precisely this ability to see old things as if for the first time that Prince discovers in Seferis. Seferis does not use myth as a tool to interpret or satirise the modern world, as Eliot had done in *The Waste Land*, rather the myth or the image becomes the thing in itself, the object becomes subject. As Seferis himself puts it:

MYTHISTOREMA—it is its two components that made me choose the title of this work: MYTHOS, because I have used, clearly enough, a certain mythology; HISTORY, because I have tried to express, with some coherence, a situation as independent of myself as the characters in a novel.<sup>15</sup>

*Mythistorema* and ‘Apollo and the Sibyl’ both employ a mythical theme, but do away with the mythological machinery that usually goes with it. Apollo apparently exists only in the title of the poem; the story is decidedly unpeopled: it is the Sibyl alone on a height, there is no clumsy scenery of warriors, heroes and titans.

The poem’s earliest inspirations or origins were not in its mythological content, but in specific landscapes. In a letter to W.G. Shepherd in January 1989, Prince explains one specific reason why he wrote ‘The Old Age of Michelangelo’ and ‘Apollo and the Sibyl’:

In all this there was a conscious effort to escape to the Mediterranean, to sunlight and warmth and the sea, as a reaction to war-time and post-war England. It is possible that unconsciously I was ‘thinking of the things that make me happy’, as Yeats was advised to do by an Indian mentor, and you may be doing yourself in contemplating the sun and the sky.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> PFTP, MS328 A834/3/1/6.

<sup>14</sup> George Seferis, *Poems*, translated by Rex Warner (London: The Bodley Head 1960), p.6.

<sup>15</sup> George Seferis, *Collected Poems* translated by Edmund Keeley and Philip Sherrard, revised edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p.277. Note that the Greek *ιστορία* can be translated as either history or story.

<sup>16</sup> PFTP MS328 A4165 1 to 37.

His notebooks at the time corroborate this. On the 7<sup>th</sup> of June 1947 Prince had written that “the mere memory or picture of places other than these—a Greek or Arab port with its white houses, barren cliffs and smooth water burnished in the heat—is enough to give me a sensation of happiness”<sup>17</sup> and these images of the Greek sea and earth, and specifically the “burnished” sea—as in the Sibyl’s line: “I only know the burnished tarnished surface, stretched/Over the wide sea” (CP, 71)—recur throughout his journals of the post-war years, and explain his preoccupation at this time with the paintings of Turner. For the specific imagery of the poem, Prince turned to Turner’s *The Bay of Baiae, with Apollo and the Sibyl*, and to

Drawings of Corfú by Edward Lear (Durrell’s *Prospero’s Cell*): bulky mountainous peaky promontories, bulging over clear seas, inlets, bays, creeks: upland slopes above precipitous blocky sides.—Also chalky quarry seen from train on way to { 1949 → } Templecombe last Saturday:<sup>18</sup> and the Wiltshire downs and valleys about Salisbury.”<sup>19</sup>

An ancient wilderness remade by the hand of a modern artist, a modern wilderness made by the hands of labourers—both are equally valid. We can assume that it was partly from Lear’s detailed illustrations of Corfú—as reproduced in Lawrence Durrell’s *Prospero’s Cell*—that much of the landscape of ‘Apollo and the Sibyl’ was generated. However, as is common with Prince’s journals, he leaves—almost as it were absent-mindedly—a clue to another source for the poem: that of a book that Lear’s illustrations are reproduced in, a sort of travel book-cum-journal-cum-amateur history of Corfú.<sup>20</sup>

*Prospero’s Cell* was not merely a repository of Lear’s illustrations for Prince, it appears that he also considered it a key source text for ‘Apollo and the Sibyl’. There are multiple occasions of barely-modified phrases of Durrell’s lifted straight into Prince’s poem. On page 46 of *Prospero’s Cell* we find the sentence “Golden eagles hover in the grey”, and in ‘Apollo and the Sibyl’ we find the corresponding line “Gold eagles hover in the grey” (CP, 66). Similarly on the same page Durrell describes how “far out in the straits the black shape of a boat sits motionless—or dragging slowly and uncouthly with the flash of oars” which corresponds to Prince’s “While far out in the milky straits/The black shape of a boat sits,/And drags itself..../Wet flashes on dipped oars” (CP, 66). Less obviously, Durrell describes the “Gulls turning down-wind; to-day a breath of sirocco and the sea grinding and crushing up its colours under the house...”<sup>21</sup> which becomes in ‘Apollo and the Sibyl’ “And gulls, swallows, turn down wind,/The sea toils, grinds and crushes/Marble to milk at cliff-base”, (CP, 70) and the line “the cypresses hang above their own reflections”<sup>22</sup> becomes “the smoke-black stone-pine [...] hangs over its own shadow” (CP, 72). Prince rarely used source texts carelessly: *Prospero’s Cell* was not only a database of phrases for Prince,

<sup>17</sup> PFTP, MS328 A834/3/2/1/11, 3<sup>rd</sup> Notebook.

<sup>18</sup> Potentially Chicks Grove Quarry.

<sup>19</sup> PFTP, MS328 A834/3/1/6.

<sup>20</sup> Lawrence Durrell, *Prospero’s Cell: A guide to the landscape and manners of the island of Coryra*, (London: Faber & Faber, 1945).

<sup>21</sup> Durrell, p.15.

<sup>22</sup> Durrell, p.46.

but was also a springboard for certain ideas encountered in 'Apollo and the Sibyl', and especially for the character of the Sibyl herself.

In *Prospero Cell's* hagiographic chapter, Durrell recounts how a Greek called Kalocheiritis had possession of both St. Spiridion's body (the patron saint of the island) and St. Theodora Augusta's body, both embalmed, and, fearing the Muslim threat to Constantinople, sets off with both on a long journey:

Kalocheiritis packed his two saints (very much as a pedlar packs his apparatus) in two shapeless sacks. He slung them, one on each side of his mule, and telling the curious that they contained animal fodder, crossed one fine spring morning into the enchanted landscapes of Greece.

The long conversations between Augusta and Spiridion as they jolted over the bare mountain tied in sacks, are not recorded by the hagiographers—and indeed have aroused the curiosity of none besides myself. I cannot believe however that such a long journey can have been passed without some exchange of theological pleasantries—though I do not claim the least gallantry or any such immodesty for Spiridion; but they could not have gone on together, day by day, roped like carrion in their stifling sacks, without feeling the necessity for speech.<sup>23</sup>

Although it is a whimsical account, the concept of what speech is or should be past the limits at which speech cannot go on, but does go on, is one which is answered in 'Apollo and the Sibyl': the Sibyl says she is "unrecognisable to myself,/Moving motionless to death", and yet still she speaks, she is "at last only a voice, haunting her cave at Cumae" (CP, 305). In the passage quoted earlier, Prince counts Tennyson's 'The Lotos-Eaters' and 'Hesperides' as among the poems that influenced 'Apollo and the Sibyl', but the (short) list is notable for its absence of 'Tithonus', a poem based on a myth nearly identical in its plot to the myth of the Sibyl. Tithonus was the lover of Eos, the goddess of the dawn, and being granted a wish, he too chose immortality, neglecting to stipulate—once again—that enduring youth be part of this. The poem ends with Tithonus asking to die, but fearful "lest a saying learnt,/In days far-off, on that dark earth, be true?/The Gods themselves cannot recall their gifts."<sup>24</sup> Tithonus, like the Sibyl, speaks from across that threshold, the "goal of ordinance", beyond which mortals were not meant to speak. The immediate point of difference between the two myths is obvious: Tithonus accepted Eos's love, the Sibyl refused Apollo's. But Prince develops the myth in such a way that there are further, subtler differences.

Mark Ford points out an important aspect of Prince's version of the myth:

...a reference to [the Sibyl] made in Petronius's *Satyricon* was used by T.S. Eliot as the epigraph to *The Waste Land*. Translated it reads:

For once I saw with my very own eyes the Sibyl at Cumae hanging in a cage, and when the boys said to her, 'Sibyl, what do you want?' she answered, 'I want to die.'

Prince's Sibyl, however, does not want to die.<sup>25</sup>

Death, for Prince's Sibyl is neither an option nor a desire: she does not plead with Apollo to die, as Tithonus does with Eos, and this means a different structure of desire is enacted in the poem. 'Tithonus'

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<sup>23</sup> Durrell, pp.28-9.

<sup>24</sup> *The Poems of Tennyson* ed. by Christopher Ricks, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Harlow, Essex: Longman Group, 1987), Vol. 1, p.610

<sup>25</sup> Ford, p.32.

### A SIBYL'S WORD

is not set, as 'Apollo and the Sibyl', on earth, but in the heavens to the east, with the rising sun, and Tithonus is eternally in a liminal state, between gods and men, life and death, "at the quiet limit of the world". He longs to be restored to "that dark world where I was born". The image of the liminal, the threshold, returns time and again in Tennyson's poetry, as when, for example, Ulysses aims "To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths/Of all the western stars",<sup>26</sup> or when in 'The Hesperides'—which Prince mentions as a model for the structure of 'Apollo and the Sibyl'—Hanno continues "till he reached the other sea."<sup>27</sup> In Prince's poem there is no such liminal sense, because there is no such desire for death. The structure of desire is instead orbital or—as Mark Ford suggests—"centrifugal": everything is always "Rising and slowly sinking", the Sibyl does not move, but time moves around her. In the Sibyl's reality "the crass blaze of our destinies but shudders/And utters nothing, only/Tracing slowly once again/The massive sorrow, the starred lineaments/Of silence and the infinite night" (CP, 69). She tells us "I remain in my pain that is/A golden distance endlessly" (CP, 72)—there is a sense of the wide horizon around her, the unimaginable distances of space and time stretching out on all sides: for her there is no limit, her world simply expands into an encircling infinity, as it does at the dazzling end of the poem:

—And the sky opens  
Like a fan its vault of violet light, unfolding  
A wide and wingless path to the impossible.

(CP, 72)

The path is as wide as a vault, and opens like a fan—that is, in a circular movement—like a hand gesturing to the whole of the horizon. That the poem could end in such a seemingly beautiful and exalted end is consequent on the Sibyl's final acceptance in section IV of her refusal and its ramifications:

And as I live my centuries,  
Rejoicing in my choice that was  
Either of happiness or this,  
As of terror or of bliss,  
I sing 'And I may live like this'  
I am not blind, I sing and see,

(CP, 71-2)

And what the Sibyl sees is the "burning young tumescent sea" and the landscape of Cumae (or Baiae, as this is where Turner's painting is situated), and rejoices in her own exile from the gods. Not any more than seven days after the conception of the poem, this scheme was already in place:

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<sup>26</sup> *The Complete Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson*, (London: Macmillan & Co., 1898), p.96.

<sup>27</sup> Alfred Lord Tennyson, *Selected Poems*, (London: Penguin, 1991) p.53

## A SIBYL'S WORD

17 February: The Sibylline Consciousness: the point of departure is the refusal, her refusal; if an acceptance, only an acceptance of the refusal. Avoid anything like the situation of that early poem I wrote in which the female character seeks the god-lover without success, 'fierce infamies', etc.<sup>28</sup> The god-lover is not sought in this poem, but refused: brilliant moon, sea and height, all that is the exaltation of that vision which is the consequence of this refusal. It is a jeune parque who accepts her sorrow, not immortal, but to live for hundreds of years, to become at last a voice: not eternally young, but not {^yet} old, at the time of this poem. Whether acceptance could make reality more beautiful than refusal has done?<sup>29</sup>

Acceptance or refusal: if acceptance delivers us a hard clear future, refusal allows us only the encircling distance of impossibility: "I remain in my pain that is/A golden distance endlessly". What would the Sibyl have been had she accepted, not refused? Durrell provides us with one possible vision.

The paragraph in *Prospero's Cell* that employs the image of the golden eagles is concerned with an older peasant called Maria:

You wake one morning in the late autumn and notice that the tone of everything has changed; the sky shines more deeply pearl, and the sun rises like a ball of blood—for the peaks of the Albanian hills are touched with snow. The sea has become leaden and sluggish and the olives a deep platinum grey. Fires smoke in the villages, and the breath of Maria as she passes with her sheep to the headland, it is faintly white upon the air. All morning she will sit crouched among the bracken and myrtle, singing in her small tired witch's voice, while the sheep-bells clonk dully around her. She is clad in a patchwork of rags, and leather slippers. In her hands she holds the spinning-bobbin upon which she is weaving her coarse woollen thread. Later on the treadle-loom in the magazine Helen will weave the coarse coloured blankets which the shepherd boys take into the hills with them where they mind their sheep in the deeper winter approaching. Maria watches the younger women picking olives through her wrinkled violet eyes and spits contemptuously before taking up her little song—which is about two ravens sitting in an olive tree. Golden eagles hover in the grey. The cypresses hang above their own reflections like puffs of frozen grey smoke.<sup>30</sup>

Durrell's depiction of Maria is archetypal, and his inclusion of the word "witch" is significant, she is emblematic of a particular trope: of the old woman, gone beyond the years of love and youth and beauty, still jealous of the younger women with a jealousy that manifests itself as contempt. It is an autumnal scene, as Maria herself is an autumnal figure—she is within her late time, and in harmony with the season. Earlier in the book Durrell imagines a woman who is still young, but includes a vision of her future:

Fragment from a novel about Corcyra which I began and destroyed: 'She comes down through the cloud of almond-trees like a sentence of death, all dressed in white and leading her flock to the very gates of the underworld. Our hearts melt in us at the candour of her smile and the beauty of her walk. Soon she is to marry Niko, the fat moneylender, and become a stout shrew drudging out to olive-pickings on a lame donkey, smelling of garlic and animal droppings.'<sup>31</sup>

The spring to Maria's autumn: in the spring of her life and surrounded by the spring (the cloud of blossom in the almond trees). She is a poet's muse, Lawrence Durrell's muse, who does not seem to choose marriage, but rather accept it, marrying an overweight, presumably unattractive but wealthy man.

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<sup>28</sup> Potentially another version of the poem on page 47 of MS328 A834-3-2-1-11, 5<sup>th</sup> notebook.

<sup>29</sup> PFTP, MS328 A834/3/1/6.

<sup>30</sup> Durrell, pp.45-6.

<sup>31</sup> Durrell, pp.20-1.

### A SIBYL'S WORD

Durrell has her grow old and prosaic and become a Maria—surrounded by a leaden and sluggish sea and images of arrested movement: eagles hovering, cypresses hanging, two ravens sitting in an olive tree—and lose her status as a muse. This idea is what the Sibyl, by her refusal, avoids. The Sibyl was, after all, *the muse to poets*, being beloved of Apollo, the god of poetry: “it seems my Muse is now a Sibyl”<sup>32</sup> Had she accepted his love it would have been for a divine version of the fat moneylender—it is clear by her refusal that she could not *choose* him—and her acceptance, though immortal, would have been no more exalted. Instead the Muse becomes the Sibyl, which is an anachronistic muse, a muse carried forwards beyond the limits of physicality itself, chaste and proud as Artemis, refusing love till her far-distant death.

The Sibyl, like the narrator of ‘A star recalled by this revisit’, chooses not to choose—she neither chooses Apollo’s love and the divinity that would ensue, nor does she choose to return to the world of men, and is instead suspended in a sort of half-state, in time and outside of time, both immortal and mortal. Her inclination to a refusing indecision even goes so far as to prompt her to wish for divine intervention from the very god she refuses:

‘Why did he then not force my love?’ add suddenly  
‘You should have loved me more, why did you not?  
You might have saved me.’

(CP, 66)

Unable, or rather, refusing to choose, the Sibyl is locked out of her natural time. Her own awareness of her displacement from natural time is rendered in the discord between her situation and the season:

Strange agony  
To stare on my disgrace through the soft spring!

(CP, 65)

Unlike Maria, or Durrell’s imagined woman, the Sibyl is a figure who is not in harmony with the season. As Mark Ford puts it, “throughout, radiant land- and seascapes are played off against her physical decrepitude and insistent doubts”.<sup>33</sup> In Section IV, as she accepts the consequences of her refusal, she attempts to equate this acceptance with the abundance of nature:

I sing ‘And I may live like this,’  
I am not blind, I sing and see,  
  
As balsam trees weep gum, as leathery pods  
Breed tufts of silk, as bees thieve honey and thrive:

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<sup>32</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/6, 1<sup>st</sup> Journal.

<sup>33</sup> Ford, p.32.

## A SIBYL'S WORD

My mournful calcined life  
Half-eaten by desires,  
Brimming with light and sorrow

(CP, 72)

The simile is successful only in so far as it says “they do that, thus I do this”—it can find no more concordance, for the Sibyl's is not a producing reality, but a decaying, self-consuming one.

## A BALLET OF FRUITS AND FLOWERS

I have said that the poem's origins are in landscape, but there is another way in which I mean this. On the 19<sup>th</sup> December 1950 Prince writes in his journal that “A plain is almost in itself an allegory: beginning of Pilgrim's Progress & the Fourth Book of Gulliver”<sup>34</sup> and on a page of rough notes for the poem he writes “Question of how, when she sings. Her song is in the wilderness.”<sup>35</sup> The wilderness, the desert, is the only setting that can accommodate her song—the question of how is also a question of when: her song is impossible, anachronistic. But the sentence can be read another way, which leads to a radically different understanding of the mechanics of the poem: that her song is *composed of* the wilderness.

At one point in *Prospero's Cell* Durrell transcribes a letter sent to him by his friend Zarian's wife, which describes her exaltation or ecstasy in nature, and within which she suggests to Durrell—

You should do a sort of ballet of fruits and flowers; chorus the rough blue of sea, the staple olive-tone washed in rotation by the wild pearfoam, and the lands under Spartila by peachmist and asphodelcloud. It is too much. Mist of plum, pear, almond.<sup>36</sup>

The concept of writing a poetic ballet was hovering, however lightly, around Prince's thoughts at the time of ‘Apollo and the Sibyl’. In 1948 Prince considered writing a poem called ‘My Faustus’ (after Valéry's ‘Mon Faust’, and using Marlowe's version of events; the theme was eventually dropped in favour of the theme of the Sibyl) which he described as “a sort of ballet of infernal joys”.<sup>37</sup> Likewise in 1951 (presumably still before ‘Apollo and the Sibyl’ was fully complete) he wrote “Theme for a Ballet: Atlante's palace in Ariosto, into which everyone is led by the image of his love.”<sup>38</sup> Later he would conceive ‘His Dog and Pilgrim’ in terms of Mozart and ballet. In a passage from his journals, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1949, Prince considered some possibilities of the longer poems he was engaged with writing:

The longish poem is my form, it should be exploitable as an elegy, metrically very flexible, intellectually solid and complex, yet expressed <mue> musically & with the music of images.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>34</sup> PFTP, MS328 A834/3/2/1/11, 3<sup>rd</sup> Notebook.

<sup>35</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/6, 1<sup>st</sup> Journal.

<sup>36</sup> Durrell, p.42.

<sup>37</sup> PFTP, MS328 A834/3/2/1/11, 3<sup>rd</sup> Notebook.

<sup>38</sup> PFTP, MS328 A834/3/2/1/11, 3<sup>rd</sup> Notebook.

<sup>39</sup> PFTP, MS328 A834/3/1/6.

The music of images: that images in themselves can be combined as music, and the concept of making the landscape a semi-active *character* in the ballet—"chorus the rough blue of sea"—is the idea carried through into 'Apollo and the Sibyl'. The poem opens not with the voice of the Sibyl, but with a collective chant:

*Thyme, tufa, sage, anemone,  
And we heard that music singing.  
The sea, the heavens, and all rivers  
Standing still to listen, the bare mountain  
Bulging in delight  
Rose hugely to heaven...*

(CP, 65)

Something is singing and is being witnessed singing. The "we" voice is what hears the music, and is thus allied to the landscape which also listens. The whole passage is printed in italics, and is separate from the main body of the poem, coming as it does before section I. Later in the same passage Prince echoes the famous Latin phrase "ave Imperator, morituri te salutant"<sup>40</sup> in the line

*Voices of those who are to die sing, shuddering.*

(CP, 65)

Who is it who sings? Who is it who is to die? It is not immediately clear, but in the Latin phrase Prince's line echoes it is the captive prisoners themselves who speak to Emperor Claudius, hoping to be pardoned, and this lends to the overture a suspicion that it is the "we" voices who also sing: they both sing and hear themselves singing. Writing of the early Greek chorus, Nietzsche describes how the chorus is "a reflection of Dionysiac man for his own contemplation. We can imagine this phenomenon most clearly if we think of an actor who, such is his talent, can see the role that he is to perform hovering palpably before his eyes"<sup>41</sup>—what the chorus witnesses is only itself. The voices in the introductory passage resemble the Nietzschean model of the chorus: they are sole witnesses of their own song, which is the song of the tragedy of the Sibyl, and which makes them bulge in delight, just as "every true tragedy leaves us [with the consolation that] life is at bottom indestructibly powerful and joyful."<sup>42</sup> But a further, stranger thought emerges. Nietzsche continues:

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<sup>40</sup> Suetonius, *De Vita Caesarum: Divus Claudius*, 21.6.

<sup>41</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* translated by Shaun Whiteside (London: Penguin Books, 1993), p.42.

<sup>42</sup> Nietzsche, p.39.

But now we know that the stage, and the action, were fundamentally and originally conceived only as a *vision*, that the sole 'reality' is the chorus, which generates the vision from within itself...<sup>43</sup>

Are the disembodied voices of the overture actually the only voices in the poem? Is the "I" voice of the Sibyl purely an emanation—almost a thrown voice, a ventriloquist's act—of the chorus? It seems at first to be a radical, nonsensical idea, but the startling opening of section IV corroborates this interpretation, as what is apparently the Sibyl's voice suddenly switches into third person:

And yet the Sibyl parches, caught and clutched within a fist of dust!

(CP, 71)

In one brief moment we become aware that it is not just the Sibyl's voice that speaks in the poem: the integrity of the speaking voice is threatened and other, lower voices seem to clamour under the surface. We can see from the drafts that Prince was unsure of whether or not to make this line first or third person. The line was originally in the third person, but Prince amends it to "my body" before again revising it back to third person in the finished copy:

Over the dust of the dead my shadow passes, and warms [?] ~~my~~ {and weighs}  
 {And warms [?] & weighs down, weightless, on my dream...}  
 Weightless, upon my wilful dream: O pitiless [?] glory, light...  
 And so ~~the sibyl~~ {my body ....} parches, clutched caught in a fist{^ful} of dust  
 Drifts, sifts to her death<sup>44</sup>

In this early draft the Sibyl herself gestures towards the unreality of the situation as, couched in a paradox, she weighs weightlessly on her dream, which is also the dust of the dead. The whole of the poem is transmuted into something far more unsettling: what seems at first simply an extended dramatic monologue becomes unreal, visionary, ephemeral. The chorus, which is allied to the landscape, the wilderness, persists throughout the poem: it is not merely in the overture-like opening, but speaks throughout through the Sibyl's mouth, just as the divine intelligence of prophecy does. The landscape and the Sibyl are not as separate as Mark Ford suggests: again we find an entanglement of voice and setting, double and desert; the multiple voices in the poem weigh down, weightless, on the dream of the poem itself. And yet there are still two voices that have yet to speak: the philosopher Empedocles and the absent god himself.

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<sup>43</sup> Nietzsche, p.44.

<sup>44</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/6, 1<sup>st</sup> journal.

Date: [Yellow Acacia] Looking down a yellow Acacia

25 Feb: Love & Hate: As they were formerly so also will be, I think  
 And never infinite time be confined of these two,  
 I will tell of a double person: At one time & another present  
 of many  
 Another time goes apart, many of one. Sometimes uniting  
 under the influence of love, at other times again nearly

Each moving apart through the hostile force of Hate ...  
 Hate & love and ~~as~~ <sup>the</sup> East & the boundless height of the  
 And also exercisable Hate apart from these, of equal weight in  
 all directions,  
 And love still in their midst, equal in length & health ...  
<sup>Observe her</sup> She it is who is believed to be implanted in mortal souls also,  
 though her they think purely thoughts and perform harmonious  
 actions, calling her joy and Aphrodite.  
 No man has perceived her as the more & prettier than.  
 All these are equal and of an age, but each provides in its  
 own office  
 And they prevail in turn in the course of time. And beside these  
 Nothing comes into being, nor does anything cease.  
 For if they had been perishing continually, ~~then~~ <sup>they</sup> would be no more:  
 And what could increase the whole? And whence could it have come?  
 Whether could it perish since nothing is empty of these things?  
 No but these things alone exist, many thoughts are another  
 they become different things at different times,  
 ever continually the same.  
 The power is seen clearly through the uses of mortal souls:  
 Sometimes through love all links the body has come together in  
 one  
 Life flourishing is a rose: at another time again perniciously  
 'bet enemies (feuds)

Figure 2 Detail of two pages from journal. PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/6.

## EMPEDOCLES

Mythistorema, myth and history. Prince not only employs a mythological prophet in this poem, he embeds an historical one too. In an entry dated the 19<sup>th</sup> February, Prince writes that there “Must be ballast, weight, provided for this poem” before scrawling a page of notes, crossing most of them out, writing “No” in large letters in the margin, and then finally writing

Empedocles: ‘In turn they get the upper hand in the revolving cycle, and perish into one another, and increase in the turn appointed by Fate.’ <[Yellow Acragas,> <|>Looking down a yellow Acragas.<sup>1</sup>

An echo of the second phrase finds its way into Section IV of the finished poem in the line “And looking down on the yellow town.”<sup>2</sup> The two phrases Prince jots down are both quotations from Katherine Freeman’s translation of Empedocles from the *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers*.<sup>3</sup> This is the final entry of the day. Six days later he begins to try to put the Empedocles into verse (or back into verse—Empedocles was one of the last Greek philosophers to write entirely in verse), writing so fast at times that his pen never leaves the paper. The following is a short sample of a much larger section (see Figure 2):

25 Feb: Love & Hate: As they were formerly, so also will be, I think {I think,}  
 And never infinite time be emptied of these two.  
 I shall tell of a double process: At one time it increased one out  
     of Many  
 Another time grew apart, Many of one. Sometimes unity  
     under the influence of Love, at other times again many  
 Each morning apart through the hostile force of Hate...  
 Fire & Water and Air Earth & the boundless height of Air,  
 And also execrable Hate apart from there, of equal weight in  
     all directions,  
 [...]  
 The process is seen clearly through the man of mortal limbs:  
 Sometimes through love all limbs the body has come together in  
     one  
 Life flourishing is a rose: at another time again sundered by  
     evil enmities ( finds

This is not a word for word transcription of Freeman’s text,<sup>4</sup> the line-breaks are Prince’s, there are contractions, and there are occasional divergences, for instance, “in the prime of flourishing life” becomes the oblique “Life flourishing is a rose”. The relationship between Empedocles’s philosophy and the theme of ‘Apollo and the Sibyl’ is not immediately obvious, but there are tonal concordances: Empedocles believed that “when one of the divine spirits whose portion is long life sinfully stains his own limbs with bloodshed [...]they] must wander for thrice ten thousand seasons far from the company

<sup>1</sup> PFTP, MS328 A834/3/1/6.

<sup>2</sup> CP, p.71.

<sup>3</sup> Kathleen Freeman, ‘Empedocles’, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1948).

<sup>4</sup> For the original see Freeman, pp.53-4.

## A SIBYL'S WORD

of the blessed [...] Of this number am I too now, a fugitive from heaven and a wanderer, because I trusted in raging Hate."<sup>75</sup> Empedocles is an exile from the gods, and like the Sibyl's reality, the world he lives in is a godless one. There is a complicated and difficult relationship between living beings and matter in Empedocles's philosophy, an uncomfortable mixture of materialism and metempsychosis; in one particular passage he writes:

8. And I shall tell you another thing: there is no creation of substance in any one of mortal existences, nor any end in execrable death, but only mixing and exchange of what has been mixed; and the name 'substance' (*Phusis, 'nature'*) is applied to them by mankind.

9. But men, when these (*the Elements*) have been mixed in the form of a man and come into the light, or in the form of a species of wild animals, or plants, or birds, then say that this has 'come into being'; and when they separate, this men call sad fate (*death*). The terms that Right demands they do not use; but through custom I myself also apply these names.

## 10. Death the Avenger.<sup>6</sup>

Is the Sibyl's fate proof or rebuttal of this philosophy? As she dwindle slowly and is "caught and clutched within a fist of dust" she is restored to her elements, but her voice remains: it is both a corroboration and a denial of Empedocles's materialism. The connection between the texts is left suspended; the Sibyl is the sphinx to Empedocles's philosophy.

In *Katharmoi* (Purifications), Empedocles sets out a vision of God:

134. For he is not equipped with a human head on his body, nor from his back do two branches start; (he has) no feet, no swift knees, no hairy genital organs; but he is Mind, which darts through the whole universe with its swift thoughts.<sup>7</sup>

The image of God as thoughts darting through the universe seems to correspond with one of the most unusual and striking passages in 'Apollo and the Sibyl':

And the emancipated, wild and noble sorrows  
Flash through the solitudes!  
Like the sea-swallows  
Swoop out and cut and glide, chafe joy and scud and skim,  
Twittering drunkenly in flight  
Their delicious scurrying music—dart upright,  
Climb, totter, drop incontinently,  
Grazing the low ground by the sea  
And single brownish flower

(CP, 69)

<sup>5</sup> Freeman, p.65.

<sup>6</sup> Freeman, p.52.

<sup>7</sup> Freeman, p.67.

## A SIBYL'S WORD

At first glance it seems a harmonious and pleasant enough passage in which sea-swallows dart about and sing, but then one remembers that the sea-swallows are an analogy, and it is the “emancipated, wild and noble sorrows” that are performing such extraordinary aerobatics. The image becomes at once peculiar and abstract; and when we realise that it has its source in Empedocles’s image of God as flying thoughts, we see that we are not just looking at a strange whimsical metaphor, but here on the heights we have found divinities encircling the Sibyl. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of May, 1949, Prince wrote in his journal:

I see the Sibyl now as poem of the same kind as Maurice de Guérin’s Le Centaure, that is, a theological poem: out go all ‘psychological’ problems. It is the statement of a position.<sup>8</sup>

‘Le Centaure’ is a prose poem that traces the life of the centaur Macareus, one time follower of Chiron, who berates him for searching restlessly after the secrets of the gods. The secrets are not revealed to Macareus:

Of old, when I used to keep the night-watches in the caverns, I have sometimes believed that I was about to overhear the dreams of sleeping Cybele, and that the mother of the gods, betrayed by a vision, would let secrets escape her; but I have never made out more than sounds which dissolved in the breath of night, or words inarticulate as the bubbling hum of rivers.<sup>9</sup>

As in the Sibyl’s world, the gods seem to be absent, indifferent to the mortal world. But Chiron tells us otherwise: the gods, while distant, are not merely indifferent to the lives of centaurs and humans—they are actively at enmity with them:

And we, centaurs, begotten by an insolent mortal in the womb of a cloud which had the semblance of a goddess, what help should we look for from Jupiter, whose thunderbolt struck down the father of our race? [...] It is noised about, that Aegeus, father of Theseus, hid, under the weight of a boulder by the sea-side, remembrances and tokens by which his son might on a future day recognise his parentage. Somewhere the jealous gods have buried the evidences of universal descent; but by the shore of what sea have they rolled the stone that covers them, O Macareus?<sup>10</sup>

If ‘Apollo and the Sibyl’ is similar to ‘Le Centaure’ in being a theological poem, a statement of a position, what position or relation does the Sibyl hold to those encircling divinities? Are they merely indifferent to her plight, or are they too actively hostile? And where is Apollo?

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<sup>8</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/2/1/11, 3<sup>rd</sup> journal.

<sup>9</sup> Maurice de Guerin, *The Centaur, The Bacchante* translated by T.S. Moore, (London: Hacon & Ricketts, 1899), p.14.  
<sup>10</sup> de Guerin, pp.15-16.

## 'PURE' POETRY

On January 27<sup>th</sup>, 1989, thirty-five years after *Soldiers Bathing* was published, Prince wrote a letter to W.G. Shepherd explaining the circumstances that led to the 'Apollo and the Sibyl':

The background of the two poems of mine which you ask about, the Sibyl and Michelangelo, is that as the war went on I became dissatisfied with the poetry I had been trying to write since 1938, and decided to give up, in about 1944, until the war should end. Of course I didn't give up altogether, but I knew I should have to make a conscious new start as soon as I could---which turned out to be in 1946 and 1947 [...] I tried to make a new start by going back to the more sensuous and liberated verse of my first book, but of course to develop it, to take it further.

'Apollo and the Sibyl' was, for Prince, an attempt to return to something he felt he had lost in his more recent, wartime poetry.<sup>11</sup> There are numerous entries in his journals at the time, records of conversations, notes on different poets, that evince a preoccupation with the idea of 'pure poetry'—a term associated with Edgar Allan Poe's writings and the French symbolists whom he influenced in this regard, from Baudelaire through Mallarmé to Valéry; it usually suggests a poetry whose sole appeal is to the aesthetic faculties, disregarding any other functions poetry is able to have (didactic, prophetic, political, etc.).<sup>12</sup> In October 1950, while considering his experiences as a poet in Oxford as the matter for a retrospective poem (a theme he would finally return to in 1970 with *Memoirs in Oxford*), Prince wrote:

A poem to H.B., to follow such early meditation on Cefalù, the poem to Jacqueline, other poems of those years (to Carl Wilhelm). Meditation on the evidence of the matter, experience, situation: pure poetry – or what I then thought was such.<sup>13</sup>

Prince had come to see—if he had not always seen—his youthful poetry as a failed attempt to write pure poetry. Nonetheless it was an attempt he was now apparently trying, in 'Apollo and the Sibyl', to return to and to further.

In an entry dated February 1947 he shows an awareness of the personal dangers of pure poetry, counselling himself: "Think of what I lost in youth, at Oxford especially, by this ambition to write pure poetry."<sup>14</sup> Nor is Prince unaware of the potential pure poetry has to jeopardize or undermine the value of truth, as he acknowledged in a note on Valéry and Mallarmé:

Mallarmé's own poetry tended in the same direction: a poetry of erotic symbolism, the conscious abdication of any kind of <truth> outward truth resulting in a value built on unconscious, primitive sensation and impulse. The divagation on 'Catholocisme' must mean the same thing: that the "true" Catholicism will consist in perpetuating the forms but in the consciousness that

<sup>11</sup> It is illustrative of this desire to return that Prince includes in *Soldiers Bathing*—alongside 'Apollo and the Sibyl' and 'The Old Age of Michelangelo'—three poems that date from his earliest poetry, before the publication of his first volume: 'Cefalù', 'The Babiaantje', and 'The Moonflower'.

<sup>12</sup> The term has had various differing but related meanings dependant on the poet or critic employing it. For a short overview, see the 'Pure Poetry' entry in *The Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4<sup>th</sup> Ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

<sup>13</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/4, p.26.

<sup>14</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/2/1/11, 3<sup>rd</sup> Notebook, p.38.

they have no validity as vehicles of “truth”; this state of mind leads to everything being ‘true’ in a different sense.<sup>15</sup>

In the same journal he criticises William Barnes, writing that “his poetry is a great deal too pure for me.”<sup>16</sup> Pure poetry is evidently something to be distrusted, even occasionally reviled... and yet it is also exactly its opposite. In an extraordinary entry from 1950, in a note towards a poem never completed entitled ‘The Blessed Virgin’s Expostulation’,<sup>17</sup> Prince links the idea of pure poetry with the Christian faith in a strikingly audacious way:

The Law & the Kingdom of Heaven: poetry and ‘pure’ poetry. Christ is intellectual rigour, ‘pure’ poetry.<sup>18</sup>

Christ is pure poetry. Or rather, Christ is ‘pure’ poetry—a suggestion, perhaps, that poetry in an infinite purity is *not* the same as the pure poetry of Mallarmé, Valéry, Poe. Pure poetry is, as it came to be for Valéry, an unattainable ideal, and while it is potentially dangerous, destructive, it is also related to the divine. ‘Apollo and the Sibyl’ was not just an attempt to return to this pure poetry, this dangerous divinity, it also enacts the very drama of this return.

## THE HONEYCOLOURED GOD

‘Apollo and the Sibyl’ is a poem obsessed with a threatening absence. The opening of section III is a single incantatory line that summons the brightness and barely subdued violence of a blustery spring day:

The sky brims with the ghost of a great rage

But its summoning is one of absence, of being after the fact; it is the temporal opposite of Dickinson’s “emerald ghost” that presages the storm. Images of an active absence or loss recur throughout the section that precedes this: around the “withered plumes of nothingness” the “furious and holy vacancy” of the night sky “mirroring our lost nakedness” is a “gaping veil” that “utters nothing”—the poem’s language forces us to acknowledge the paradoxical presence of this absence, it becomes a hole in the page, more dominant than what is present.

The original title of ‘Apollo and the Sibyl’ after ‘Solitudes’ was intended simply to be ‘Experiences of the Sibyl’<sup>19</sup> or ‘The Sibylline Consciousness’<sup>20</sup>—Apollo was entirely absent—and at first glance, the poem is empty of Apollo’s presence. Prince, as we have seen, was keen for the poem to be

<sup>15</sup> PFTP MS328/3/1/4, p.27.

<sup>16</sup> PFTP MS328/3/1/4, p.21.

<sup>17</sup> Perhaps a companion poem to ‘The Life of the Virgin’, cf. p.140.

<sup>18</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/2/1/11, 3<sup>rd</sup> notebook.

<sup>19</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/2/1/11, 3<sup>rd</sup> notebook.

<sup>20</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/6, 1<sup>st</sup> journal.

## A SIBYL'S WORD

unencumbered by a heavy mythological machinery, so it seems strange for him to have reintroduced Apollo's name into the title—perhaps the faintest suggestion that the gods, as Pound says, 'have never left us'.<sup>21</sup> In the notes and workings on the poem, Prince writes that "it seems to me that the poem begins with the first absence or defection [?] of the 'god'"<sup>22</sup>—yet Apollo is not as absent from the poem as this would suggest. In the same journal, in an early draft of part of the poem we find the lines

The great refusal...  
To know the nature of the god {^his honeycoloured body, limbs}<sup>23</sup>

And later, in his notes, that

The Sibyl must be aware that any decision, intuition insight, {^refusal} she makes must affect, make, \*....\* or modify, the divine love of poesy, the Minoan [?], which besieges her, the honey{sun}-coloured god.<sup>24</sup>

The divine love of poesy, the besiegement of the honey-coloured god—the phrases are shorn of the explicit connection to Apollo and combined in those first few lines of Section I we have already seen:

Capes naked to the north wind, and besieged  
By honey-coloured poesy—

Apollo is absent in the poem, and yet he is also present from the start, sublimated in his own images or emanations, his honey-coloured poesy.

When Prince returned to 'Apollo and the Sibyl' for his first collected poems, *Doors of Stone*, published in 1963, he excised and rearranged a number of lines from the first two sections of the poem. This became the final version of the poem. In Section I he excises the lines

I climb the hillside, the sea follows me.  
But 'What was it that you loved, that you refuse me?  
I cannot give what you refuse.' And 'I am one  
In whom this thought must always betray love.'  
'What if I loved because you must betray?'<sup>25</sup>

Even if they are only remembered or imagined by the Sibyl, these are the first lines in the poem which unequivocally have the voice of Apollo, directly questioning the Sibyl's refusal and fleshing out Apollo's character, giving a psychological motive to his love. Alerted to this, we find that an earlier line in the

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<sup>21</sup> Ezra Pound, Canto CXIII, *The Cantos of Ezra Pound*, (New York: New Directions, 1996).

<sup>22</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/6, 1<sup>st</sup> Journal.

<sup>23</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/6, 1<sup>st</sup> Journal.

<sup>24</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/6, 1<sup>st</sup> Journal.

<sup>25</sup> F.T. Prince, *Soldiers Bathing and Other Poems* (London: The Fortune Press, 1954), p.28.

## A SIBYL'S WORD

poem (that persists in the final version)—one we might have read as the Sibyl merely arguing with herself—is now tinged with the suggestion that it is also in Apollo's voice:

‘And are you sad, and are you satisfied?’  
‘I am sad, but I am not satisfied.’

Prince chooses to remove the explanatory lines—or the lines that hold the clue—and in doing so removes Apollo as a speaking subject; the poem is increased in its negative power, in its sense of loss or absence. By silencing Apollo, Prince makes him clang more loudly: instead of the speaking subject he becomes the organising subject, suffused into the structure of the poem.

In Section II Prince excises two lines from the poem, which I have italicised:

there,  
*The opaline and tranquil lamp*  
*The body heaven-veined and grained, and there*  
The softness of those mirrored loins  
Rises within my beating throat<sup>26</sup>

The subject of these lines seems to be the night sky, already described as

the whole wide sky  
A kind of wild white living glimmer  
Mirroring our lost nakedness

The Sibyl's loins are mirrored in the sky, but the “body heaven-veined and grained” coupled with the almost subjectless figure of the “opaline and tranquil lamp” lends a suggestion that something stranger than the mere night sky is mirroring the Sibyl: a heavenly body, a sexual divinity. In the notes I had made after reading the poem for the first time I found I had written “are all the flashes Apollo?” The poem is replete with instances of light, sun, glitter—the traditional associations of Phoebus Apollo—and we begin to be suspicious that each of these is an echo or double of Apollo himself. The very wilderness too seems to be colluding with the god. In some notes towards the poem, Prince jotted down a memory from his South African childhood:

XXX Think of South African landscape, how I thought everything calculated, everything deliberate, say in an avenue of trees leading to a ruined farmhouse. Aloes, etc.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Prince, *Soldiers Bathing*, p.30.

<sup>27</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/2/1/11, 3<sup>rd</sup> Notebook.

### A SIBYL'S WORD

There is a sense in 'Apollo and the Sibyl' of the landscape as more than mere chance or circumstance, but as something deliberate and calculated. In the excised lines already quoted above, just before we hear Apollo's voice for the first time, the Sibyl declares that "I climb the hillside, the sea follows me." The sea is given an extraordinary agency—are we just to dismiss this as a mere poetical nicety, a trick of the light, or is it something more real, more threatening: a trick of the god? Mark Ford writes that "the movement from self-pity to an exhilarating vision of noon and sea as lovers typifies the centrifugal drive of Prince's imagination"<sup>28</sup> in reference to the lines

Until the noon that climbs the air  
Troubles, makes more than ever now excessive  
—Rubbed and ruffled, thumbed—  
Outrageously more beautiful  
The burning young tumescent sea

Exhilarating perhaps, though Ford neglects to acknowledge the threat lurking in the words used to describe the vision: the noon "troubles", makes "excessive", and causes outrage. And, after all, rubbing, ruffling and thumbing are hardly the pure sweet gestures of the romantic lover. This is not merely exhilarating, but worrying. By the end of the poem the landscape seems to have attained a personality and a consciousness that is far in its extravagance from the hard Pound-like descriptions of Section I. Compare, for instance, from Section I:

White sunlight and the dripping oars!  
[...]  
Sad sapphire, soft as cloud  
Drizzles on glass-grey waters.  
[...]  
Gold eagles hover in the grey,  
Goats climb up crumbling gypsum.  
[...]  
Asphodel breaks grey stubble.

With these lines from Section IV:

—Burned and ribbed abysses, broken cradles, empty shores  
And the uneasy airy glitter, the slow glow  
And then the massive flash  
That answers irresistibly,  
And sobs and rubs and woos,

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<sup>28</sup> Ford, p.32.

## A SIBYL'S WORD

Mirrors and writhes and rocks itself and sighs  
And strives to glut itself with light  
[...]  
And the impatient flood of calm,  
To suffer but the mirrored softness, burns,  
  
And longs to melt its shores!...

The poem engenders, on a much larger scale, the same paranoia that we found in ‘Scene with an Echo’<sup>29</sup>—we do not know to what extent the wilderness which the Sibyl persists in is entangled with Apollo, or with the absence of Apollo. Like the echo, Apollo is at one and the same time ‘gone’ from the Sibyl and from her world, and ‘again’ in the landscape and the light which surrounds and besieges her.

Apollo is the god of poetry, and prophecy, and it is he whom the Sibyl renounces in the poem. At one point in his journals Prince writes “I am the sibyl, how am I sibylline; what is it to be sibylline?” What is it to inhabit a prophet who renounces the god of poetry and prophecy, and at one and the same time a poet who is attempting to return to a ‘pure poetry’? Despite—or perhaps because of—the suspicion of collusion in the poetry of the Mediterranean landscape, there is a strange disconnect of the ‘poesy’ in the poem from the poem itself. The most effective and beautiful descriptive lines are often cut off from the Sibyl, whether by a line break, as the incantatory lines that start sections I, III, and IV, or by a full stop. Section III is a particularly striking example:

But living and enduring, the sweet doom  
Like an imaginary face  
Springs out of the rough shrub, and floats in ambush  
To honey our disgrace.  
—Each grain of dust or grain of gold  
A universe of incense!  
And the birds and the birds’ cries  
Are blown about the empty plain and skies.

And there the section ends. The final two sentences are like fragments, detached from each other and from the body of the poem, which is the Sibyl. The voice of the Sibyl is threatened—is close to being overwhelmed—by the honey-coloured voice of Apollo, and by the collusion of the chorus of landscape, interjecting in fragments.

In a letter to Prince dated 18<sup>th</sup> September 1956, John Ashbery comments on Prince’s early poem ‘The Babiaantje’:

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. p.27.

## A SIBYL'S WORD

The charm of 'The Babiaantje', for example, has nothing to do with its 'meaning', which is obvious. Why is it such a beautiful poem? I wanted to write a similar poem in 'The Instruction Manual', in which the 'meaning' would be placed way over to one side so as not to interfere with the 'beauty'.<sup>30</sup>

Though the 'beauty' of 'Apollo and the Sibyl', the besieging poesy, is separated from the poem, the 'meaning' can hardly be called obvious—as Ashbery says of 'The Babiaantje'—for the meaning is precisely in the relation of Apollo to the Sibyl, and 'honey-coloured poesy' or 'pure poetry' to the poem. They are separate, but entangled. Near the end of the poem, the Sibyl declares that—

I only know the burnished tarnished surface, stretched  
Over the wide sea, rich  
Stretched like a rustling mirror, haunts the air,  
Flutters the glowing gulf  
—Supple and subtle, full of stirrings—

The surface is not the sea, but stretches over it, like a subtle mirror that rustles and stirs: a paradoxical deep veneer over reality. An earlier draft of the first two lines makes this more apparent:

Only I know the burnished tarnished surface  
Over the ~~depths~~ {hollows &} of {hollows} being, {the depth of longing} evil<sup>31</sup>

Only here is a crucial difference. In the draft the Sibyl seems proud of her unique gnosis: only she knows, and is in command of that knowledge. But Prince chooses to swap those first two words around, and suddenly the Sibyl is not in command of the knowledge, but the knowledge is in command of her: she knows nothing else. It is important, however, to note that depending on how the sentence is parsed, both meanings can now spring from the line: the latter is only *more likely* to spring first, being closer to everyday speech. The deep veneer of Apollo overwhelms the Sibyl or the Sibyl is in control of the deep veneer.

There is a double movement at play in 'Apollo and the Sibyl'—the Sibyl chooses to refuse Apollo, and Prince desires to return to a 'pure poetry'. The poem itself becomes a drama that enacts these opposing movements of return and renunciation, progression and monotony. In an early note on the poem, Prince had written "I don't quite see how her refusal of his love fits – perhaps that should be altered." But it is not altered, instead the simultaneous presence and absence of Apollo seeks to undermine it. The poem is a violent working out of the role of poetry, which ends in dispersion, but no conclusion. In the notes to the poem, Prince writes:

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<sup>30</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/4/1/1.

<sup>31</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/6, 1<sup>st</sup> journal.

XXX The besetting weakness of my poetry is a lack of finality. So, when I throw poetry over, that act is more poetic than anything I have been trying to write. 'I took farewell of this world in a chorus of little songs': Rimbaud's act of renunciation is the greatest of his poems. XXXXX XXX The way to use the sky image: a symbol of the absence which relieves, because it states the truth: a clearance. The ultimate solitude, ultimate indifference.<sup>32</sup>

Unable to conclude the paradox of 'Apollo and the Sibyl', Prince throws it over and ends with a vision of the sky, the absence which relieves, "the wide and wingless path to the impossible." Quarter of a century later, he would see this poem, which was a place of return, as a place to return to:

February 19, 1980: Emblem Book [...] See it as taking up the deadlock of Sibyl, but after all that has happened, all that came and has gone, come to an end. (Sibyl of course claimed to be the end, but it wasn't.)

'Apollo and the Sibyl' is not an end, because it could not end, it could only throw itself over to be again returned to so many years later. The poem simultaneously returns to where it was and escapes from where it is, and thus enacts a dramatic *ars poetica* of endless renunciation and return. In Prince's 1964 Warton Lecture to the British Academy, *The Study of Form and the Renewal of Poetry*, he begins, appropriately enough, with an anecdote on Samuel Johnson's reaction to Thomas Warton's poetry, in which he defends Warton in the following way:

For, whatever we may think, in our last judgement, of the whole business we call the Romantic Movement—so diverse, so uneven in its achievements, so ambitious in some aspects, so casual in others—no one would now deny that it was a great renewal of English art and imagination. And it is equally a matter of agreement that the renewal was prepared and stimulated by those eighteenth-century scholars like Warton, who studied the poetry of the past, and encouraged themselves and others to thaink that it was not wholly dead, but could in some way become a source of new life.<sup>33</sup>

The renewal of poetry is an anachronistic business, whether the renewal of an entire culture's poetry, or the renewal of the poetry of a single writer. 'Apollo and the Sibyl', in its tormented radiance, magnifies and examines this process of renewal. What is revealed is a dual and incomplete movement of renunciation and return, both divine and dangerous. The extent to which Prince's poetic practice is guided by this vision of renewal is what is explored in my next chapter.

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<sup>32</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/2/1/11, 3<sup>rd</sup> notebook.

<sup>33</sup> F.T. Prince, 'The Study of Form and the Renewal of Poetry', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 50, (London: Oxford University Press, 1964).

## OLD HAT

'Impossible! You can't do that!'  
 But, ~~comrade~~ {my friend}, who gave you the right  
 To bind our intellects and feelings  
 And hearing, touch & taste & sight—  
 Correct our taste & appetite?  
 —'old hat':  
 Yes, I intend to do just 'that'.

(PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/6)

'Autumn Journey', from Prince's third volume of verse, is a spooky poem. There is nothing specifically spooky about the situation of the poem: the speaker is on a train, and remembers part of a fairy story from his youth. Nothing else happens. The story he is reminded of is Hans Christian Andersen's 'The Snow Queen', in which a girl called Gerda sets off to find her lost friend Kay—who has been stolen by the Snow Queen—and is helped by various characters along the way. Prince's poem only narrates one brief scene in 'The Snow Queen'. Gerda has been told by a kindly (though ultimately mistaken) crow that Kay is to marry a princess and is in a castle nearby. The crow's wife—another crow, naturally—who works at the castle, agrees to take Gerda to the royal bedchamber. As they sneak into the castle, Gerda is surprised by the shadows of horses rushing on the walls, but the crow tells her that they are only dreams coming to take the inhabitants of the castle away while they sleep. When they finally reach the bedchamber, Gerda sees the boy and shouts with joy, thinking him Kay, only for the boy to awake and for Gerda to realise hers and the crow's mistake—it wasn't Kay after all. Ultimately he and the princess (who has also awoken) agree to help Gerda, and give her clothes, servants, and a carriage for her to continue her journey. This interlude occurs roughly halfway through the story, but Prince has his poem end with the boy awaking.

Prince changes no material aspect of the story: the narration is entirely faithful to Andersen's story, and it is difficult to tell what the poem's ulterior motive is: it seems to be mere synopsis. And yet it manages to become spooky, unsettling. If we compare the last few lines, when the boy wakes, with Andersen's original, one element of this spookiness can be teased out.

Each bed was shaped like a lily; in the white lily slept the princess, and in the red lily the young man who had won her. Gerda peeped into it and saw a head of long brown hair.

"It is Kai!" she shrieked with joy.

The dreams returned as fast as the wind and the young boy woke. Gerda held the lamp up a little higher. It wasn't Kai!

## OLD HAT

The prince was young and handsome, but only his hair was like little Kai's.<sup>1</sup>

Prince's rendering of this scene is condensed, but otherwise faithful:

And Gerda, while her heart beat fast,  
Came where he slept, half turned away,  
And called him, and the dreams rushed past,  
And he awoke, and was not Kay.

(CP, 115)

And there the poem ends. But in condensing the events of the story, Prince is left with only two ways to refer to its characters: by the simplest of pronouns and by the proper nouns. This is a key source of the poem's spooky power: the playoff between the indeterminate quality of the pronoun, and the determinate quality of the noun. Kay's first appearance in the poem and the first appearance of the word 'he' are separated by a full stop:

And Gerda looking for her Kay,  
Poor Gerda, when she met the crow  
Who led her in by the back way.  
So, as they climbed the castle stair  
To reach the bedroom where he lay,

(CP, 115)

The pronoun 'he' seems to refer to Kay, and continues to do so throughout the poem. There is nothing internal to the poem—until the last line—that would suggest a reader should doubt the one-to-one relationship of 'he' and 'Kay'. Oli Hazzard has shown that Prince's poem 'For Thieves and Beggars', with its "chain of undefined pronouns, drained of any clear referent", was a possible inspiration for John Ashbery's conception of pronouns as "variables in an equation".<sup>2</sup> What we find in 'Autumn Journey' is a distinct, though related, technique: throughout the poem we believe the pronoun 'he' to be not "undefined" but definite, not "drained" but full of Kay's identity. But the last line reveals this not to be the case, and suddenly we are spooked by the very action of language, as one identity becomes two, and we understand that we have enjoyed the company of a stranger without ever realising it. In Andersen's story, in contrast, the reality of the situation is heavily signposted the whole way through, and the *narrator* never confuses the sleeping prince and Kay. The prince is continually referred to as "the young boy" and by this careful circumlocutory language it is made quite clear to the reader that it is most likely *not* Kay who sleeps in the royal bedchamber—the confusion only exists in Gerda's mind.

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<sup>1</sup> Hans Christian Andersen, 'The Snow Queen', *The Complete Fairy Tales and Stories*, trans. Erik Christian Haugaard, (New York: Anchor Books, 1983), p.251.

<sup>2</sup> Oli Hazzard, ' "We see all things as they might be": F.T. Prince and John Ashbery', *RFTP*, pp. 120-4.

This is an internal reading of the poem, but of course, the source material for the poem, the original Andersen story, is one which will be familiar to many readers, if perhaps only half-remembered from their childhood. This half-recollection of a shared cultural event—perhaps that of being read to as a child, or of discovering Andersen's stories for oneself—does, in fact, introduce an element of doubt into the identity of the pronoun 'he', but it is one which the poem's grammar resists. We are encouraged, as readers, to forget what we know as the story is being told, as in a dream, but we cannot entirely, and so the pronoun 'he' gains a sort of binary, indeterminate state: for us it is both 'Kay' and 'not-Kay'. Only at the end of the poem does this delicate indeterminacy collapse, but this is not conclusion, only confusion. We move from a state of knowing, with a little doubt, to merely knowing that we do not know.

Freud denied that fairytales could be uncanny, writing that he "cannot think of any genuine fairy story which has anything uncanny [*unheimlich*] about it",<sup>3</sup> before going on to assert that this is a general rule. Yet 'Autumn Journey' is an uncanny poem. So far I have focused on those elements or material details that Prince keeps exactly the same as Andersen's story, but to understand how he makes this poem so uncanny we must now turn to those elements he introduces. In the same essay, Freud writes that—

... an uncanny effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolizes, and so on.<sup>4</sup>

The distinction between reality and imagination (even if Andersen's imagination, not Prince's) in the poem appears, at first, to be quite well defined. But there are a number of elements that suggests otherwise.

At the beginning of the poem we are quite clearly in the narrator's reality: he is on a train looking at the woods, and remembers Andersen's fairytale. The poem is titled 'Autumn Journey'<sup>5</sup> and may as well refer either to his journey on the train, when the birches have turned yellow, or it may refer to Gerda's. Gerda's journey begins in spring, and passes through winter, before she and Kay finally return in summer (the seasons are symbolic, and they return changed from children to adults); the part of the story Prince concerns himself with occurs in the autumn. It is the yellowed birch that seems to prompt his recollection of the story, as the first detail he recalls relates to trees:

And thought of dry leaves falling slow

(CP, 115)

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<sup>3</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', *Writings on Art and Literature*, trans. James Strachey et al., (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1997), p.223.

<sup>4</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', p.221.

<sup>5</sup> It was originally titled simply 'Autumn' and may have been intended to be of a piece with the uncollected poem 'Summer', published in *The Listener*, 27th May 1943, p.628.

## OLD HAT

And yet this is not an accurate recollection. In Andersen's original, as Gerda realises that it is autumn and she has tarried too long in the flower garden, there is one almost insignificant difference from Prince's recollection:

Water from the cold, autumn mist dripped from the willow trees, as their yellow leaves fell, one by one.<sup>6</sup>

The yellow birch may be repeated in the willow's yellow leaves, and the leaves Prince remembers fall slow, but he remembers them as specifically 'dry', whereas Andersen's original makes it very clear that they are wet. Perhaps it seems a pedantic point, but Prince was a fastidious poet and the discord is there for a reason: we are not yet fully in the world of the fairytale, but are in a liminal stage, between reality and (Andersen's) imagination.

In Andersen's story the horse-shaped dreams make an appearance twice, first when Gerda moves towards the royal bedchamber, and second when she wakes the young prince. In Prince's poem they appear three times: at both the moments Andersen has them appear, and also before the story has really begun, where they are seen not on the walls, but in the sky:

I saw from the gliding train  
A yellow birch in the woods below,  
And the dark pines close in again,  
And thought of dry leaves falling slow  
Under the cold cloud-shadows,  
Horses of shadow, loosed in dreams;

(CP, 115)

What in Andersen's story are reified dreams have become disconnected from their source: they are not dreams, but are instead "loosed in dreams", the dreams become the stuff of dreams. This same disconnect is evident the second time they appear:

Dark horses plunged like shadows,  
Long-legged on the wall, in dreams

(CP, 115)

The horses in Prince's poem are both dreams and something-that-is-not-dreams, and by making them something "in dreams"—as opposed to dreams seen from outside by someone who is waking, as in Andersen—we are confused as to whether or not we, and Gerda, are dreaming. In fact, we are also not sure whether the narrator is dreaming: the horses first appear alongside the conspicuously dry leaves,

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<sup>6</sup> Andersen, 'The Snow Queen', p.246.

## OLD HAT

and seem to creep out of the fairytale into the world of trains and reality. In Andersen's story they carry the sleeping inhabitants of the castle, in Prince's poem they seem to carry him and ourselves.

If we have been dreaming, or have slipped into dream just after the first line of the poem, we wake with the not-Kay at the end, and reality seems more like a dream than the dream did, confusing us like lost children. It is a common experience to find that dreams sometimes seem to give us a meaning or purpose that we find we lose or never had upon waking: we are trying to do this, we have to do that, this person must be freed. In a note from his journals in 1936, Prince writes,

Our world the converse of a dream. In a dream the multiple significance of all events: is our effort not to charge the real world with emotion and motive to the same degree? until every object and happening refers to innumerable hypotheses & visions...<sup>7</sup>

Having come to the conclusion of 'Autumn Journey' we are troubled and confused: this is not how a poem should end, a poem should give us more than this, surely? Prince chooses what is merely a minor interlude from a fairytale to make into a poem, and we are left unsatisfied by its inconclusive ending. Troubled by this we return to the start of the poem, suspicious now that it was, after all, only the sight of a yellowing birch that inspired this recollection. There must have been something else, what else did he *see* that should lead the narrator to recall this moment of mistaken identity. We find ourselves searching in "our world" for that very "emotion and motive" that the fairytale and the dream has, but the poem gives nothing else away. In another journal entry, this time from 1955, Prince has the following to say on the relationship of dream and reality:

We have a choice, or at least there are two ways of living & dying, whether we can choose or not: either live in dream (thought, desire, creation, interpretation, all forms of art or religion) in which case we shall understand and possess by understanding, but not possess the objects of our desire in any other way; or live in {act} <\*...\*>, by taking possession of what we desire, but in this case we shall never know what the reality is, or what we ourselves are doing. We can only understand by not possessing—losing or renouncing: possession gives an opaque reality, a knowledge which is incomplete. Perhaps we can pass between these two modes of life—perhaps most people spend their lives passing between them, with the confusion which must follow. Yet out of this confusion truth may spring, perhaps these two interacting [?] realities produce human life. Even the dreamer must seek possession of his desire before he can know that he is a dreamer, {that} it is a dream: even the active man must dream—must have dreamed, at least, for if he had not, he would not be moved to act.<sup>8</sup>

Prince describes the incompleteness of reality: we can either know, but not have, or have, but not know—if we are waking we do not understand what waking is, and can only understand waking when we dream. But—he allows—perhaps we exist in a perpetual confusion, variously stuck between the two states—we are both Kay and not-Kay, original and copy; all life is a palimpsest of itself.

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<sup>7</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/2/1/11.

<sup>8</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/4.

## STRAVINSKY AND THE STRAMBOTTI

On surveying Prince's oeuvre, what is most remarkable is how different each volume is from each other, and at times how different the poems within each volume are from each other. Todd Swift has characterised Prince's work as being "a poetry of various styles, disunity of subject and uncertain persona. His style is no style, one might say."<sup>9</sup> We find the genesis of this no-style in his first collection, *Poems*, where he manipulates, simulates, or distils the styles of, variously, Henry James's notebooks (in 'Tears of a Muse in America'), Eliot's translation of St. John Perse (in 'Chaka'), Renaissance correspondence (in 'Epistle to a Patron'), Pound's Catullian mode (in 'The Token'), and—perhaps most memorably—Edmund Burke's florid but decorous letters in 'Words from Edmund Burke'. We might have initially dismissed this as the enthusiasm of a young poet, who has not yet fully assimilated their influences, but the tendency to ventriloquism deepens and spreads throughout Prince's career—from the 'Love Poems' in *Soldiers Bathing*, that read like a lost metaphysical poet, right up to the affected 'minor poet' of *Senilia*. And there are few poets who have successively produced three more unlike volumes than *Doors of Stone*, *Memoirs in Oxford*, and *Drypoints of the Hasidim*. Prince's genius was that of that trickiest of categories: of the protean artist.

In an introductory speech to a reading by Prince in 1983 (and later printed in 2002 to mark Prince's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday) John Ashbery gave a very beautiful and subtle reading of Prince's poem 'The Babiaantje' which focused on the dislocation between the language and the "meaning", concluding:

We begin to suspect that his poem is far less classic than it seems to be. Its conventional surface is striated with uncertainties, mined by shifting, opposing forces, as in the music of Busoni, the one composer to meaningfully fuse classicism and atonality, and who is thus a spiritual forerunner of Prince.<sup>10</sup>

Although Ashbery was specifically concerned with 'The Babiaantje' here, in choosing Prince to be Ferruccio Busoni's heir, his speech made an arresting claim about the entirety of Prince's oeuvre. The claim is invaluable to us, as it gestures towards a broader phenomenon in 20<sup>th</sup> century music which may help us, by analogy, to understand the problems and paradoxes of Prince's reception and his poetics: that of Musical Neoclassicism.<sup>11</sup>

Neoclassicism is an infamously broad and vague category.<sup>12</sup> The term has never been satisfactorily defined, as Martha M. Hyde explains:

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<sup>9</sup> Swift, *RFTP*, p.131.

<sup>10</sup> Reprinted in Ashbery, 'F.T. Prince'.

<sup>11</sup> Busoni's own uneasy inclusion in this category is well-documented in Scott Messing's *Neoclassicism in Music: From the Genesis of the Concept through the Stravinsky/Schoenberg Polemic*, (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1998), pp.65-74.

<sup>12</sup> N.B. In using the term 'Neoclassicism' I mean the phenomenon found and described primarily in 20<sup>th</sup> century music and art, and *not* the Neoclassicism of the eighteenth-century literary, architectural, and artistic circles, which broadly coincides with the Classical period in music.

## OLD HAT

Any attempt to work out a theory of neoclassicism in music, or even to give coherent content to the term, confronts a long history of careless or tendentious usage. Alone among the other arts—architecture, painting, literature—music has been unable to distinguish between genuine neoclassical works and those that wear a ruffle here or perform a dance step there as witty gestures or momentary satires in an allusive pantomime.<sup>13</sup>

Richard Taruskin provides us with one way of thinking about Neoclassicism. In *The Oxford History of Western Music*, he relates the story of a young Aaron Copland's first impressions of attending a premiere in 1923 of one of Stravinsky's early neoclassical works:

Like everyone else present that October night in Paris, Copland was in for a shock. Almost twenty years later, still marveling at it, he recalled “the general feeling of mystification that followed the initial hearing”, of the new work, an octet for winds (flute, clarinet, and pairs of bassoons, trumpets, and trombones). “Here was Stravinsky,” he wrote—

...having created a neoprimitive style all his own, based on native Russian sources—a style that everyone agreed was the most original in modern music—now suddenly, without any seeming explanation, making an about-face and presenting a piece to the public that bore no conceivable resemblance to the individual style with which he had hitherto been identified. Everyone was asking why Stravinsky should have exchanged his Russian heritage for what looked very much like a mess of eighteenth century mannerisms. The whole thing seemed like a bad joke that left an unpleasant aftereffect and gained Stravinsky the unanimous disapproval of the press.

And yet, looking back in 1941, Copland could report an even bigger surprise:

No one could possibly have foreseen, first, that Stravinsky was to persist in this new manner of his or, second, that the *Octet* was destined to influence composers all over the world[...]<sup>14</sup>

What, inherently, was it about Stravinsky's *Octet* that was so mystifying, left such an unpleasant aftereffect, yet ultimately proved to be so influential? Returning at the end of the chapter to the *Octet*, Taruskin describes how “we may be relieved—or dismayed—to find that, taken on its own terms, it is such an innocently diverting little piece,” but, he writes—

...nothing ever comes “on its own terms,” and nothing can be taken that way. History provides everything with a context. And nothing, therefore, can ever be truly innocent (of history, that is). Copland's bewildered reaction to the piece—not the sort of reaction one normally has to an innocent diversion—has already established that much for us. What bewildered him was not “the music itself” but the context in which he heard it: a concert at which a Stravinsky premiere (i.e., if past performance was anything to go by, a scandal) was about to take place. Hearing an innocent little diversion rather than the expected shock was of course a shock; and as Copland tells us, it led to a press scandal after all.

Or again—“on its own terms” the *Octet*'s opening gesture, a trill in the two bassoons is courtly, decorous, charming. But those terms again depend on context: what is courtly, decorous, and charming in a work signed “Mozart” is brash and polemical in a work signed “Stravinsky” (at least the first time).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Martha M. Hyde, “Neoclassic and Anachronistic Impulses in Twentieth-century Music”, *Music Theory Spectrum* 18.2 (1996), 200–235.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Taruskin, *Music in the Early Twentieth Century: The Oxford History of Western Music*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.448.

<sup>15</sup> Taruskin, p.478.

It is as much the context, and perhaps more specifically, the manner of its reception that defines a neoclassical work. What might have been enjoyed as a light diversion if signed “Mozart”, or perhaps dismissed as ill-advised nostalgia if signed by, for example, “Tchaikovsky”, becomes when signed “Stravinsky” a potential neoclassic and a potential scandal. If the *Octet* had been dismissed as merely a “bad joke”, or as a light diversion, or as a piece of nostalgia, that would have been the end of it—there would have been no confusion, scandal, nor eventual imitation. Instead it was taken seriously as a work of art, lending an “innocently diverting little piece” the riddling status of neoclassic.

In 1963 Prince published his collection of ‘Strambotti’ in *Doors of Stone*. These poems were a set of separate love poems written in a form that had been derived from Tuscan folk song by Leonardo Giustinian in the fifteenth century. The ‘Strambotti’ are, perhaps most of all of Prince’s published poems, those that seem closest to pastiche or academic exercise. So much so that one of Prince’s otherwise staunchest defenders, Fred Inglis, would write of them that they “make me uneasy. It is here that Prince comes closest to cliché, yet the manner of the experiment shows how much store he sets by the poems.”<sup>16</sup> Like Stravinsky’s *Octet*, their apparent inauthenticity and antiquarian facade is a source of disquiet—but this was not the only reaction they provoked. In 1962, John Ashbery had published *The Tennis Court Oath*—arguably his most avant-garde and controversial collection, of which Ted Berrigan could write that it “made a big change in all our lives at the time it came out”—and in 1966 he would publish *Rivers and Mountains* which would go on to be nominated for the 1967 National Book Award. Here was a poet whose star was ascendant, who was soon to be surrounded and celebrated by a coterie of young experimental poets in the successive waves of the ‘New York School’, and who was poised to become one of the most influential poets in the English language—in 2002 Harold Bloom would be prompted to declare that “since the death of Wallace Stevens in 1955, we have been in the Age of Ashbery.”<sup>17</sup> Like Aaron Copland, Ashbery was on the cusp of greatness. Considering this burgeoning stardom, and all the poetic and social ferment and experiment swirling in 1960s Paris and New York, it is surprising to find in a letter to Prince dated February 3rd 1970 Ashbery declaring, “And I do love it, your work, more and more. ‘Strambotti’ was the high point of the sixties as far as I’m concerned.”<sup>18</sup> Like Copland, Ashbery’s reaction to the ‘Strambotti’ was “not the sort of reaction one normally has to an innocent diversion”, instead he elevates the ‘Strambotti’ to a status of decade-defining. Just as Taruskin observes of the *Octet*, this seems especially surprising when one considers the actual poetry in question: the ‘Strambotti’ themselves seem to be quiet imitations of some sort of courteous love sequence in an archaic Tuscan form, hardly—one would think—a definitional moment for 1960s poetry. Fred Inglis declared his purpose to “praise in detail the success of Prince’s deliberate re-creation of the courtly idiom in his ‘Strambotti’”,<sup>19</sup> but instead found himself unable to do so, as he was haunted by the sense that the ‘Strambotti’ were approaching cliché. The ‘Strambotti’ are undoubtedly imitative, but the question is,

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<sup>16</sup> Inglis, pp.23-44.

<sup>17</sup> From the inside blurb of John Ashbery’s *Chinese Whispers*, (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 2003).

<sup>18</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/4/1/1.

<sup>19</sup> Inglis, p.29.

## OLD HAT

imitative of what? To talk vaguely of courtly idioms is merely to skirt the question. In fact, as I will show, there is nothing like them in the English language, they avoid cliché altogether.

Had we no knowledge of the publication date of the ‘Strambotti’, and were told they were examples of 16<sup>th</sup> Century English strambotti, albeit with modernised spelling, would we believe it? I suspect not, though I have yet to try out the experiment. We might, however, have been a little hard pressed to place them with confidence in the century of their composition—the poems give little away. Faced with this uncertainty, perhaps the first two lines would have offered us a clue:

What thoughts could ride or hover in my mind  
Before we met, I cannot now recall.

(CP, 94)

There is a curiously modern flavour to these lines, despite their apparent antique decorum. To understand why, it may prove fruitful to read them against an opening of one of Wyatt’s sonnets—lest we forget, the only other poet to have written strambotti in English:

To rail or jest, ye know I use it not;  
Though that such cause sometime in folks I find.<sup>20</sup>

Both opening lines use the conjunction ‘or’ to connect two infinitives (“ride or hover”, “rail or jest”) that aren’t synonymous but are related, yet the difference is remarkable. In Wyatt’s poem we are catapulted into the argument, each verb adds a non-overlapping meaning and the sum is a larger verb: to rail-jest. Without either verb the literal sense of the line would be diminished by half. By contrast, in Prince’s poem the verbs act as a sort of verbal excess. Considered alone, the two verbs also appear to have non-overlapping meanings: consider the difference between a kestrel riding and a kestrel hovering. But it is not a kestrel that rides or hovers, it is thoughts. When we consider a kestrel riding and hovering we might imagine it soaring on a bank of air from field to field, before stopping to hover: two distinct actions. But the distinction between thoughts riding and thoughts hovering is much smaller. Though a thought riding might suggest a thought in motion, and one hovering might suggest a thought that is still (though not at rest), these are such abstract concepts that we feel the distinction is, at the very most, so small as to be negligible. Couple this with the fact that the thoughts are not only not recalled by the poet, but they only exist in a state of possibility—it is “could”, not “would”—and we are so far into the abstract realm that the addition of a second verb seems completely unnecessary. The effect of the phrase then is one of a superfluity of language: it has more in common with Eliot’s languid—

when the human engine waits

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<sup>20</sup> *The Poetical Works of Sir Thomas Wyatt*, Ed. Charles Cowden Clarke, (Edinburgh: William P. Nimmo, 1868), p.18.

## OLD HAT

Like a taxi throbbing waiting<sup>21</sup>

—than with the fierce and economical wit of Wyatt. This excess is likewise figured in the line's rhythm. Although the 'Strambotti' are the most strictly metered of Prince's poems—nearly every line is in iambic pentameter without any substitutions whatsoever<sup>22</sup>—they manage to achieve a great variety of rhythm through the skilful manipulation of quantity. Although qualitatively the first line is in conventional iambic, quantitatively it is a very different matter, and scans:

U — U — U U U U U —

Two long syllables where we should expect them, but then the line rushes to its conclusion; it introduces a delicate limpness of rhythm just when the verbal excess is made known to us—on the word “hover”—and throws away the penultimate two feet.

Though the first two lines proclaim the presence of a thoroughly modern sensibility, it is one that is intent on capturing something else entirely. The next lines reveal just how this feckless verbal excess is martialled to praise:

You are the thread of gold I would unwind,  
Until I wind it in a golden ball;  
You are the gate that I must pass to find  
My happiness, or find it not at all.  
Therefore all other thoughts I had give place  
To those good hopes I meet in your sweet face.

(CP, 94)

The poem is made up of two central metaphors for the beloved (thread and gate) sandwiched between a statement of fact regarding the poet's previous thoughts, and a conclusion about his current and future thoughts. Two metaphors is unnecessary, but it is decorous and generous. The limp excess has widened into a means of praise, a virtuous abundance, that is becoming in a courtly love poem. Writing of Pindar, D.S. Carne-Ross makes the point that “there is often, in the best poetry, an element of the gratuitous: more is given than could ever be expected.”<sup>23</sup> Yet despite this generous gratuity the poem simultaneously manages to create a sense of frugality of language—or perhaps rarity might be a better term. These are not complicated words, there are no far-fetched synonyms or specialised terms—nothing, in fact, that

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<sup>21</sup> Eliot, *The Waste Land*.

<sup>22</sup> By my reckoning 12 of the 168 lines deviate from strict iambic. Of these 6 deviate in the final couplet, and all of the rest bar one have trochaic substitutions in the first foot (the exception, XII, l.1, has a trochaic substitution in the fourth foot and the first). Put another way, of the 840 possible iambs in the 'Strambotti' I find only 15 (1.8%) are substitutions. To put this rather meaningless statistic into perspective, James Routh estimates 10.9% of feet in *Paradise Lost* and 27.3% of feet in *Macbeth* are substitutions (James Routh, 'English Iambic Metre', *PMLA*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (Dec., 1925), pp. 921-932). The 'Strambotti', that is, are surprisingly strict.

<sup>23</sup> D.S. Carne-Ross, *Instaurations*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), p.46.

would trouble a 10 year-old. Consider the nouns: thoughts, mind, we, I, you, thread, gold, ball, gate, happiness, place, hopes, face. Each is the barest and basest of words for the thing it describes. How different the poem would be had these words been replaced with considerations, intellect, filament, gilt, sphere, clew, portal, ecstasy, position, aspirations, countenance. The poem has a simplicity of language that emulates the folk-song inheritance of the form it carries. Each word winks like individual jewels or beads in a fabric, simple but woven into a decorous pattern.

The language of the first strambotto has an iterative quality that is found throughout the ‘Strambotti’, it is to a certain extent found throughout Prince’s oeuvre, but it is in the ‘Strambotti’ its full potential is realised. This iterative quality is not of the same order as, for example, that of Stevens’s ‘Anecdote of the Jar’—where the repetition of words serves to partially empty them of meaning or transform their meaning into something abstract and vertiginous—but has instead the quality of a folding of meaning, a syntax that is softly led by an harmonious music. It does not play against the literal meaning of the poem, but around and with it, as music does. Consider the sonic movement of the stressed vowels in this pair of lines. Starting with “gold”, halfway through the first line, they consecutively brighten (“gold”, “would”, “wind”) until the short “i” of “until”, whereupon they darken back to “gold” (via the brief respite of “in”—which is almost a half-stress) and pass beyond it to the darkest “ball”. Moreover, the repeated stressed syllables are precisely and evenly interwoven with the unrepeated stressed syllables: *gold* would *wind* til *wind* in *gold* ball. The movement is one of unwinding or unweaving and then rewinding past the original situation. We seem to follow the golden thread of sound up out of the labyrinth, only to find we are even more deeply in the centre. Anthony Howell described the ‘Strambotti’ as possessing “an unusual ‘retro’ sort of music.”<sup>24</sup> Both adjectives will be seen to be equally judicious, for the music of the ‘Strambotti’ is indeed retro, and also highly unusual—at least in English poetry.

In a letter to Stephen Spender dated 29<sup>th</sup> January 1956, held in the Bodleian Library, Prince commented on Spender’s recent translations of Stefan George and Hugo von Hofmannsthal:

...what pleases me is the way you have transposed into English the weight and movement of German verse. This alone would justify your versions—that they refresh the worn English verse-texture with a new poetic tone. So much English poetry nowadays has no verse-quality at all—people go for everything but that, and if one doesn’t pay any attention to it, it certainly doesn’t come of itself. Ezra Pound was right to assert that English poets must improve their verse by cultivating at least one foreign language. It was probably only the general feeling for Latin verse that kept us musical from Shakespeare to Tennyson, but Pound’s own translations show that verse-sense can come equally well from Provencal or Italian or Anglo-Saxon. It is one of the obvious things about poetry in English in this country, that it is only peped up by people with a new sense of language, usually of this sort (Dylan Thomas did it with his Welshness). Perhaps you will draw it from German—I know no other translations which suggest this as yours do.<sup>25</sup>

The imperative that poets should cross-pollinate their native verse with foreign influences is one that preoccupied Prince throughout his life—not least in *The Italian Element in Milton’s Verse*—and though his own earlier poetry had been more indebted to French poetry, he was now—like Milton—finding himself

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<sup>24</sup> Anthony Howell, ‘F.T. Prince: A Maverick Master’, *PN Review* 147, Vol. 29, No. 1.

<sup>25</sup> MS Spender 61, Stephen Spender Archive, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

more and more drawn to Italian poetry. In November 1954, having that same year published both *Doors of Stone* and *The Italian Element*, Prince had been turning over in his journals a sequence of madrigals he intended to write. Like strambotti, madrigals are rare in English poetry but common on the continent—there was a fashion for them during the Elizabethan period but since then the form has all but died out.<sup>26</sup> It is not impossible that Prince's projected madrigals, or at least the impulses behind them, were eventually transformed into the 'Strambotti', certainly the way he describes them would suggest a shared lineage:

**34st Later:** Petrarch: It is the intense, concentrated emotion that makes his power; the religious seriousness. How could he have obtained the reputation of mere sweetness, smoothness, artifice and grace? I begin to see why Leopardi, in his preface to an edition of Petrarch, insists that the common readers do not understand him. Strange, that in the so-called Petrarchan school in England it is this intense sadness that is most obviously missing: it simply hasn't entered English poetry at all. Could my Madrigals be Petrarchan in this way – really ~~dee~~ deep, true, sad, and yet plain? It would be something new in English – and 600 years old in Italy.<sup>27</sup>

Prince's evident satisfaction in the idea that the madrigals would be completely new and simultaneously 600 years old, is echoed in his proud assertion in the notes to the 'Strambotti', that strambotti had "not been written in English since Sir Thomas Wyatt introduced them from Italy" (CP, 305). Prince was not merely employing an archaic form as a historical curiosity, as, for example, Ashbery's use of the sestina for 'Farm Implements and Rutabagas in a Landscape', but as a route into a different language, age, and feeling, by which he could return with treasures alien to his own inheritance.

In the notes to the 'Strambotti', Prince emphasises that—

Collections of folk-songs made in Italy in the nineteenth century, such as Tigri's *Canti Popolari Toscani*, show that peasants were still singing *rispetti* and other poems of the kind Giustinian knew. (CP, 305-6)

The iterative quality of the 'Strambotti' owes little to the English tradition, but seems to derive straight from the same Tuscan folk-song tradition from which the strambotto was also derived. A comparison of Strambotto XIV and one of the folk-songs from Tigri's collection will serve to illustrate how Prince synthesises certain elements from the Italian folk-song tradition. Rispetto 1014 from *Canti Popolari Toscani* bears some formal and thematic resemblances to Prince's fourteenth strambotto, and it is productive to read them side by side:

Non abbadar che dalla lunga sia,  
 Son dalla lunga e ti vo' salutare;  
 E ti vo' mandà' scritto in fede mia,  
 E dalle stelle ti vo' fa' parlare.

<sup>26</sup> William Drummond of Hawthornden was the most notable practitioner of the form. Prince was aware of Drummond, having somewhat unfairly brushed aside his madrigals as "pedestrian versions" of Tasso's "witty trifles" in *The Italian Element*, p.64.

<sup>27</sup> PFTP, MS328 A834/3/1/4.

E ti vo' mandà' scritto per una breve  
 Lettere d'oro e quanto ti vo' bene:  
 E ti vo' mandà' scritto sur un foglio  
 Lettere d'oro, e quanto ben ti voglio.<sup>28</sup>

Counting the heavy days and heavy hours  
 I measure out the prison of this town,  
 And wear out stones with that desire of ours,  
 But not desire, by walking up and down.  
 And you are like a city full of towers  
 Set by a plain or river like a crown;  
 And you are like a sunset and a star:  
 But I am here alone, not where you are.

(CP, 98)

Both poems recognise the beloved's absence, and seek to praise the beloved. Both poems contain multiple lines that begin with the conjunctions 'and' or 'e' on the third, fifth, and seventh lines (and on the fourth in the rispetto). These conjunctions also form part of a wider repeated formula in both poems ("E ti vo' mandà' scritto" in the rispetto, and "And you are like a" in Prince's strambotto). The similarities between the two poems may be trivial or they may suggest a direct lineage, but the distinction is unnecessary. Prince so successfully emulated the folk-song of Italy that the resemblance between the two poems could easily be mere chance. In the 'Strambotti', Prince managed to bring a gentle Tuscan music to English, reaching beyond the strambotto back into its deepest wells in the folk poetry of the region, slipping across the dividing lines of time, location, and language.

Yet of course, as Taruskin reminds us, we can never be truly "innocent of history". Nor, for that matter, of language. The 'Strambotti' do not ignore the disjuncture between English verse and Tuscan verse, rather Prince turns the disjuncture to his advantage. Again in this strambotto we find that same virtuous abundance that we found in the first. The last four lines give us little new information about the speaker's situation that we cannot find in the first four, but are instead decorous and generous means of praise. This strategy could easily become monotonous, but Prince uses the alien nature of the form to sustain our delight. To English ears—especially to mid-twentieth century ears perhaps more

<sup>28</sup>*Canti Popolari Toscani*, collected and annotated by Giuseppe Tigri, (Barbera: Bianchi e comp., 1856), p.281. Translated in Grace Warrack, *Florilegio di Canti Toscani: Folk Songs of the Tuscan Hills*, (London: Alexander Moring Ltd., 1914), p.193 as:

Do not thou mind that I so distant stay;  
 I'm distant far, but thee to hail I seek;  
 A letter in my faith I'd send away,  
 And by the stars with thee I'd win to speak.  
 And I would send by written line to tell  
 In golden letters how I love thee well;  
 And I would send to tell by written sheet  
 In golden letters how I love thee, Sweet.

accustomed to free verse than *ottava rima*—the third two rhymes of the sestet sound exhausting. Prince does not shy away from this sense of exhaustion or overreaching, but emphasises it: the A and B rhymes have phonetically identical vowels and Prince has already used a homophone: hours/ours. This exhaustion is then further emphasised as Prince begins the sentence that starts the second half of the poem with the lame conjunction ‘and’—we are aware that not only is this third set of rhymes exhausting, it is also superfluous, like a speech from someone who talks too much. The formula which begins this half—‘and you are like a’—is then repeated at the beginning of the seventh line, the poet’s voice comes back for yet another superfluous statement, and yet another even more exhausting rhyme. But of course this doesn’t happen, instead of ‘bowers’ or ‘flowers’ or whatever else, the low clear call of ‘star’ rings out, taking us by surprise into the sad sobriety of the last line, like someone waking from an overly rich dream to the calm loneliness of night. The sonic exhaustion that the English strambotto entails is amplified while the sense of someone speaking too much is given a pathos, a short-lived dramatic irony: it is the voice of someone desperately clinging to a happy thought of their beloved to stave off the recognition of their absence.

The ‘Strambotti’ achieve certain effects, which might otherwise be impossible, through a synthesis of old and new, English and Italian. One of the extraordinary features of Prince’s poetry is the sense of age and tradition it conjures, while managing to be unlike anything that had gone before. The trick behind this is partly due to a collage of anachronistic or clashing traditions which are nonetheless *sympathetic* to each other. Writing of Chariteo’s strambotti, Patricia Thomson has the following to say:

...perhaps more surprisingly, the strambotto is not related to the *ottava rima* stanza inherited by Ariosto from Boccaccio. Though metrically identical, these are independent literary forms, the one essentially narrative, the other lyrical. In Chariteo’s hands the strambotto became a more sophisticated version of what had been a slight love song, its style rather mannered, its matter by no means lofty.<sup>29</sup>

The Tuscan strambotto, or *ottava toscana*, is a metrically identical but independent form from the better known *ottava rima*, and, significantly, it is sophisticated but slight, not lofty. Yet Prince’s ‘Strambotti’ are replete with images that seem to overreach their minor and lyrical status, gesturing towards a larger sense of narrative and adventure. Consider the content of the fourth strambotto:

I wish there were a passage underground  
 That led by magic to your house and bed,  
 So I could be beside you at a bound  
 When I had made the journey in my head.  
 Then I should disappear and not be found,  
 And neighbours be persuaded I were dead;  
 But I should be with you in Paradise,

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<sup>29</sup> Patricia Thomson, ‘Wyatt and the School of Serafino’, *Comparative Literature*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (Autumn, 1961), p.291.

## OLD HAT

Where I could laugh, and kiss your face and eyes.

(CP, 95)

To some extent this strambotto follows the generic pattern of the lover's complaint, yet the details are highly specific—an underground passage, the poet wishing neighbours think him dead, the almost naive blankness of the last line—and we feel a subtle disquiet. The events dreamt of in this strambotto have in fact a literary source: Matteo Maria Boiardo's epic romance *Orlando Innamorato*, written in *ottava rima*, and the precursor to Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*. In Book 1, cantos xxi and xxii, the princess Leodilla tells Brandimarte and Orlando the story of how she had come to be tricked into marrying an old man, Folderico, and how she in turn had deceived him with the help of his young and handsome rival, Ordauro. After she marries Folderico, Folderico is consumed with jealousy and locks her in a tower in Altamura's citadel to keep her away from other men, jumping into a rage if he suspects that even any of the *flies* in her room are male. Ordauro buys a palace nearby and, unbeknownst to Leodilla—

skilfully and lovingly  
He built a passage underground,  
Hidden, unknown to all but him,  
And one night, through this dark, close tunnel  
He entered Altamura's walls.<sup>30</sup>

Ordauro continues to visit Leodilla's chamber, but in the end they grow tired of having to hide each time Folderico comes to visit her, so they devise a plan. Ordauro tells Folderico he has married, and invites him to meet his bride. Leodilla, dressed as a bride, waits for Folderico at Ordauro's palace, and Ordauro claims that she is Leodilla's identical twin. Folderico immediately rushes home, but Leodilla beats him to it, and he finds his wife waiting for him. Thus Folderico is deceived into believing Leodilla is two different people: the inverse of Gerda's mistake. There are variants of this story found in many different literatures, but the stanza where Ordauro meets Leodilla in her chamber for the first time betrays the direct link between Prince's strambotto and Boiardo's poem:

I still think I'm in Paradise  
When I remember how I kissed him  
And how he kissed me on the mouth:  
That sweetness still affects my heart.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> ...con mente scalrita ed amorosa  
Sotto la terra avea fatto una via,  
A ciascuno altro incognita e nascosa.  
Per una tomba chiusa intorno e scura  
Gionse una notte dentro ad Altamura.

Matteo Maria Boiardo, *Orlando Innamorato*, Book 1, Canto xxii, Verse 23. Translation by Charles Stanley Ross, (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1995).

<sup>31</sup> Ancora esser mi par nel paradiso,

Lines which are directly echoed in the final two lines of Prince's strambotto: "But I should be with you in Paradise,/Where I could laugh, and kiss your face and eyes."

There is also at least one other event from *Orlando Innamorato* which finds its way into the 'Strambotti'. The fifth strambotto contains some of the most startling imagery in the whole of the sequence:

If I could seize that castle, hill and plain,  
 And have it compassed with a wall of glass,  
 And lead you in, and with a granite chain  
 Make fast the gates of adamant and brass;  
 When we were there shut up to entertain  
 Our love at leisure, no one else should pass,  
 But we in games and banqueting engage,  
 And never think of death, or grief, or age.

The image of the "wall of glass" is particularly strange—in his otherwise "anonymous but precise" (to borrow Ashbery's phrase) romance setting, the wall of glass strikes us as exceedingly specific for an invented scene. But the specific nature of the scene has already been announced in the first line; it is "that castle", not "a castle"—though the speaker is imagining a scene, the grand setting is real, it is as if he gestures towards it, his hand sweeping the horizon. The strambotto has been lent an epic scope that far exceeds its apparently modest aims as a courtly song, and it is has been lent this scope from *Orlando Innamorato*. In the second book, when King Agramante of Africa decides to invade France, he is advised that he should find the young orphan Rugiero first. However, Rugiero has been imprisoned by his guardian, the magician Atalante, because of a prophecy made about Rugiero—that he will convert to Christianity and be murdered shortly after his wedding night. Atalante is fiercely protective of Rugiero, and keeps him in an invisible castle on Mount Carena that, crucially, is surrounded by "un mur di vetro"—a wall of glass.<sup>32</sup>

The two events from *Orlando Innamorato* that Prince transposes into the 'Strambotti' are almost mirror opposites of each other: escape by trickery, imprisonment by trickery. Neither seem particularly suited to courteous praise of the beloved, and even prior to knowing of the two strambotti's provenance we feel a thin unease at the wildness of the lover's imagined scenarios, as if they were being a little *too* ardent, too fantastical. We feel the strambotti shift and strain beneath our fingers, as if they intended to give a little *too* much. The effect is beautiful, but uneasy, like hearing trumpets at night time. In pillaging scenes from Boiardo, Prince has welded two separate but sympathetic literary traditions, encouraged by

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Quando ramento come io lo baciai,  
 E come lui baciomme nella bocca;  
 Quella dolcezza ancor nel cor mi tocca.

Boiardo, *Orlando Innamorato*, Book 1, Canto xxii, Verse 24.

<sup>32</sup> Boiardo, *Orlando Innamorato*, Book 2, Canto xvi, Verse 17.

## OLD HAT

the accidental metrical identity of their forms—the *ottava rima*, and the *ottava toscana*—into something disquietingly different from either.

## AN INTERESTING DREAM

There is one further way of understanding neoclassicism that is pertinent to my argument, and it derives from neoclassicism's most famous detractor: Theodor Adorno. Adorno had already viciously attacked Stravinsky as a reactionary in his *Philosophie der neuen Musik*, published in 1949, prompting Schoenberg's outrage.<sup>33</sup> His reappraisal of Stravinsky in *Quasi una Fantasia*—published in the same year as *The Doors of Stone*—was then something of a rehabilitation, albeit a particularly barbed and unflattering one. But what concerns us is precisely how Adorno achieves this rehabilitation—by linking neoclassicism with another 20<sup>th</sup>-century artistic movement:

What really happened was that the original source of neo-Classicism, Winckelmann's 'noble simplicity and tranquil grandeur', received its just deserts. It was not installed as a norm, but appeared as if in dreams, not as a whole genre, but in the form of plaster busts on wardrobes in the houses of the older generation, individual pieces of bric-à-brac and remaindered goods. In this process of individualizing a whole style into a set of monstrosities, the style was destroyed. It was damaged and rendered impotent by dreams hastily cobbled together and arranged. The basic stratum of neo-Classicism is not far removed from Surrealism.<sup>34</sup>

In a feat of philosophical acrobatics Adorno resituates neoclassicism from a position of reactionary nostalgia to one analogous to surrealism. As Peter Bürger writes, "Stravinsky's music is not the reconstruction of a binding musical language but an artist's sovereign play with pre-given forms of the past. [...] By explicitly locating Stravinsky's as well as Picasso's neo-classicism in the vicinity of surrealism, Adorno now assigns the latter a place *within* modern art [...] It leaves open at least the possibility of seeing more in neo-classical works than a sheer relapse into a reactionary thinking of order."<sup>35</sup> Stravinskian neoclassicism now has the *potential* for modernity, at least. However, there is one side-effect of Adorno's rehabilitation of Stravinsky that was perhaps unintended: that historical forms are now recognised as having a substance akin to the unconscious or the stuff of dreams. Perhaps this might not have surprised Stravinsky so much—here, in conversation with Robert Craft, he describes the circumstances that brought about his *Octet*:

The *Octuor* began with a dream, in which I saw myself in a small room surrounded by a small group of instrumentalists playing some attractive music. I did not recognise the music, though I strained to hear it, and I could not recall any feature of it the next day, but I do remember my curiosity—in the dream—to know how many the musicians were. I remember, too, that after I

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<sup>33</sup> See H.H. Stuckenschmidt, *Schoenberg: His Life, World and Work*, trans. Humphrey Searle, (London: Calder, 1977), p.508.

<sup>34</sup> Theodor Adorno, 'Stravinsky', *Quasi Una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, (London: Verso, 1998), pp.155-6.

<sup>35</sup> Peter Bürger, *The Decline of Modernism*, trans. Nicholas Walker, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), p.35.

## OLD HAT

had counted them to the number eight, I looked again and saw that they were playing bassoons, trombones, trumpets, a flute, and a clarinet. I awoke from this little concert in a state of great delight and anticipation and the next morning began to compose the *Octuor*...<sup>36</sup>

It was extremely rare for Prince to record his dreams in his journal, but on January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1955, we find the following entry:

'Flu last week, rather a hurried bout. Last night Il Travatore, the Carl Rosa Company. Had an interesting dream in which I was given a volume of Wordsworth, a long poem in blank verse (say, The Excursion) which was beautifully illustrated & decorated with really fine engravings on the page, interwoven with the text, {delicate} trees or branches. The pictures and text were one, but the interesting thing was my joy of discovery, that this was good, was beautiful, that Wordsworth had written this divine and exquisite poem, and that I had not known {it}. Tears of exultation.<sup>37</sup>

It is on the very next day, the 31<sup>st</sup>, that Prince hits upon the idea that his madrigals would be “something new in English – and 600 years old in Italy”. We tend, perhaps, too often to think of modernist artists as merely dry formalists, still hungover from the heady abstractions of neoplatonism and theosophy, but what is striking in both Prince’s and Stravinsky’s accounts of the artworks they encounter in their respective dreams is the concern they show to the trivial details. Stravinsky says nothing of the formal qualities of the music he hears, he does not mention that the music is in the form of a rondo, or a fugue, or that it combines diatonic and octatonic pitch structures, or that it is built around a sequence of hexachords, instead he describes it merely as “attractive”—as someone uninterested in music might politely dismiss a piece they were forced to comment on—and then proceeds to count the instruments. Likewise Prince, rather than discuss the intricate form of the poem (beyond the fact that it is long and in blank verse), or the sophisticated interweaving of themes, or its position within the early nineteenth century cultural *milieu*, instead remembers the illustrations and decorations, as a child might when presented with a book they cannot yet read. For both artists, the surface detail *mattered*, and was key to the dream of art.

We can only know reality when dreaming, but cannot possess it—if we possess it we cannot know it. If fragments of time have some similitude to dream-stuff we can only know them in a dream of them—to wake in time is to be unaware of time, and unaware of reality. In 1935, after or during a trip to the British Museum, Prince recorded the following:

Reflections in the King Edward VII Galleries, 31st August {1935}: Is that form of irony dependent on the afterevent inferior to the more involved and interbalanced possibilites? As to put on a speech the attitude of the later Moguls to the Europeans they occasionally painted. The result of presenting an 18th century English merchant in such agreeable idioms  is to show him as but our incomplete variety of the oriental: his frock-coat and stockings are subtly transformed. These artists, also when they coloured & overlaid the French print of 17th century ladies dining beside a river, must have felt as if their experience and intelligence thoroughly embraced all the potentialities, or would do so if need be, of those foreign figures and scenes.

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<sup>36</sup> Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Dialogues*, (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press: 1982), p.39.

<sup>37</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/4.

## OLD HAT

James I's ambassador to Jahangir. Christianity, too, must have seemed an appreciable sect, witness the painting of a baptism, presumably among Indian Christians.<sup>38</sup>

The palimpsest of the French print is coloured and overlaid with a dream of the exotic, of what European life must be like—or what all the potentialities of European life must be like—informing by the Mogul artists' own experiences and intelligences. This more involved and subtly transformed picture of 17<sup>th</sup>-century Europeans, Prince suggests, is superior to any that could come after claiming the omniscience of hindsight. The dreams and the guesswork that make up our communion with the world around us are better measures of reality than any evidence discovered or analysis made after the event. The idea that reality is ungraspable without the dream seems to have remained with Prince throughout his life. On May 17<sup>th</sup>, 1982, Prince described in his journal some of the ideas behind a poem he was considering writing called 'On Destroying a Memoir':

Why destroy such a record written by oneself? Why the change of mind? First, because all such records designed as posthumous revelations are and must be false, dishonest. Whatever truths are told, the truth never comes out in full. Would Byron's memoirs have told us 'everything'? Surely not, they would have been in some way an exculpation. Secondly, what is essential is known in the end, even if partly guessed, as it is in Byron's case. What is half-known, half-guessed, is probably more like the living truth than any full transcription can ever be. And again, if one is a writer, one has put more of the truth into one's own fiction or poetry than can ever be put into 'fact' (think of Proust, Henry James, or Verlaine or Baudelaire). All this would reflect powerfully on vulgar assumptions, and especially on our current greed for full 'revelations', however nasty. Finally, there is the thought of everything being known only to God, in the mind of God, 'in the eternal Church'.<sup>39</sup>

The passage betrays Prince's historical agnosticism; the 'living truth' is beyond our grasp, and the full transcription, as with the irony dependent on the afterevent, is inferior to the half-known, half-guessed—the play of interbalanced possibilities—in approaching it. The only holder of historical gnosis is God, and the true and unfragmented archive is only in the eternal Church. Thus all mortal history is fiction, dream, guesswork: we hold the same relation to the past as the Mogul painters did to the European ladies dining beside a river.

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<sup>38</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/2/1/11, 6<sup>th</sup> Notebook.

<sup>39</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/15.



Figure 3 Painting. Recreation (?). A man and three women in European clothing enjoying refreshment on a terrace overlooking Frankish regatta and crocodile hunt. Opaque watercolour on paper on paper (European etching).<sup>40</sup>

## MENARD AND PRINCE

Perhaps the poet most alike to Prince, and yet utterly unlike, was Auden. Both poets were experts in ventriloquism, and yet to very different ends. Seven years after Prince had published his recreation of Henry James's voice in 'Tears of a Muse in America',<sup>41</sup> Auden published his self-proclaimed *ars poetica*, *The Sea and the Mirror*, of which part III is an address to the audience by Caliban in an imitation of James's late prose. Christopher S. Nealon explains this unusual stylistic decision by claiming that—

...the campiness of the style choice is bound up with an implicit catastrophe, the replacement of authentic (or at least traditional) authority with a sorry replica. [...] The implication is that everyone, the poet included, lives a simulacral or debased existence when measured by the possibility of *arete*, authenticity, or wholeness. So rather than devolved authority, it might be better to say that these scenes depict the rueful comedy of the disjunct between part and whole, occupant and role, that results from the sort of nonwholeness that Auden identifies with modern specialization.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Museum Number: 1928,0815,0.5, British Museum, 18<sup>th</sup> Century (early), [http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/collection\\_object\\_details.aspx?assetId=133316001&objectId=231680&partId=1](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?assetId=133316001&objectId=231680&partId=1) Accessed 08/09/2018.

<sup>41</sup> As 'A Muse for William Maynard' in *The Criterion*, 16.65 (July 1937), 603–5.

<sup>42</sup> Christopher S. Nealon, *The Matter of Capital*, (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2011), p.61

The loud disjunct, the deliberate anachronism of the style, are at work to imply something, to dramatise or depict a given idea. Caliban speaking with the voice of Henry James? (Or “mingling the mongrel and the aesthete”, as Nealon has it, pithily.) It has the effect of satire; the style becomes metaphorical. Nealon can find implications in the deliberate anachronism, extra-stylistic meanings; the text has the kick of historical irony we expect and enjoy in such ventriloquism.

What, then, does the ventriloquism of Prince’s ‘Tears of a Muse in America’ imply? Or what is the implication of the ‘Strambotti’? Or ‘Words from Edmund Burke’? They all richly gain from their unusual styles or voices, but one would be hard pressed to discern any extra-stylistic meaning—they lack the expected kick, they shun the “irony dependent on the afterevent”. The styles imply nothing, they are empty of *that sort* of meaning. Ashbery once commented of Ferruccio Busoni, the composer he saw as Prince’s spiritual forerunner, that the main element of Busoni’s style was “that it didn’t necessarily have to sound this way.”<sup>43</sup> For Ashbery it is the seemingly *arbitrary* and *exact* natures of the styles of Busoni and Prince that gesture outwards to multiplicity. And Prince was aware that there was something almost perverse about the ‘Strambotti’: “Sometimes the idea of the Strambotti strikes me as fantastic, misguided—but what poetry worth writing is not irrational, a kind of lunacy, etc?”<sup>44</sup>

The neoclassical work refuses to pack a punch or pull a grin, instead it wears a sphinx’s smile, beautifully aloof and austere—there is no hierarchy of original and copy, one pulling faces at the other across the chasm of history. The poet Simon Schuchat, writing of Prince’s ‘The Stolen Heart’, defended it from the charge of being “out-dated” by claiming that Prince could write it “because he enters into the conventions of the situation as naturally as Frank O’Hara entered into the conventions of a quick midtown lunch. & who gives a fuck if it was written in 1960 or 1660?”<sup>45</sup> The rhetorical question’s very presence is enough to give reply: Schuchat seems rattled, and with good reason. Copland reported that at first Stravinsky’s *Octet* seemed like a bad joke—bad, we might hazard, because it had no punchline. It is this emptiness where an extra-stylistic meaning should lie, this lack of a historical irony, that makes both critics and admirers nervous: the artist has apparently achieved a disappearing act into the material. What is expected is something new, but instead something not-new but also not-old is presented.

On June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1979, while working on the possibility of a poem that would be a retrospective on his poetic career, Prince jotted down a quote by Stravinsky in his journal:

Stravinsky: I am not a mirror, struck by my mental functions. My interest passes entirely to the object, the thing made.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Originally printed as a chapbook by Interview Press in 1965, republished online in 2011, <<http://thisrecording.com/today/2011/1/20/in-which-john-ashbery-and-kenneth-koch-start-making-sense.html>> Retrieved 19<sup>th</sup> October 2017.

<sup>44</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/5.

<sup>45</sup> Simon Schuchat, ‘F.T. Prince’, *The Poetry Project Newsletter*, No. 39, November 1<sup>st</sup>, 1976, ed. Ted Greenwald.

<sup>46</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/12. Apparently a misquote of: “I am not mirror-struck by my mental functions.” Igor Stravinsky and Robert Craft, *Expositions and Developments*, (Doubleday, 1962), p.115.

For both artists, the absolute involvement of the mind with the material was paramount, there should be no egoistic distraction from the artwork. Prince had complained to W.G. Shepherd that Robert Lowell had “always roused my hostility, for the reasons you indicate, the enormous arrogant assumption that everything he did, thought, or felt, or said, was of interest to all the world—a manic version of the shortest way to be an ordinary bore.”<sup>47</sup> Minute recordings of mental functions held no interest for Prince or for Stravinsky—the “organically formed self-expression”<sup>48</sup> that characterised much of Lowell’s verse, and much of confessional poetry in general, was anathema—arrogant, manic, and dull—to Prince the fastidious creator. Instead the self should be fused with the material, passed “entirely to the object”. In ‘Voice and Verse: Some Problems of Modern Poetry’, Prince had stated that “imitation, the attempt to emulate another man’s successful technique, is always useless.”<sup>49</sup> When Michael Black, comparing Prince’s dramatic monologues to Pound’s, wrote that “Prince has entirely suppressed himself in the effort to imagine the other person,”<sup>50</sup> he was half-right, but Prince is perhaps less suppressed than involved to the point of invisibility. Prince’s working method was not suppression, neither was it imitation, but was instead a sort of miraculous identification.

A year before the publication of *Doors of Stone*, the first two English translations of Jorge Luis Borges’s great parable of originality and repetition, ‘Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*’, were published. Menard was a fictional 20<sup>th</sup>-century French poet who had set himself “the subterranean, the interminably heroic, the peerless” task of writing *Don Quixote*—that is, not copying it, but writing it again, “word for word and line for line”.<sup>51</sup> Borges tells us that two texts inspired Menard in this, one a piece of pulp fiction, the other a fragment by Novalis. Translated, the fragment in question is as follows

I demonstrate that I have really understood a writer only when I am able to act in the spirit of his thoughts, and when I can translate his works and alter them in various ways without detracting from his individuality.<sup>52</sup>

In the thirties Prince had begun a project to finish Henry James’s uncompleted novel *The Ivory Tower*—the project was never completed, but it served as the impulse and genesis of ‘Tears of a Muse in America’. In a letter to Stephen Spender Prince commented of the project that “it will be far more than literary pastiche, and I don’t think I shall make it any more Jamesian in manner than I truly am in my way of thinking, which, by this time, is quite a lot.”<sup>53</sup> If ‘Tears of a Muse’ is Jamesian, it is only Jamesian so far as Prince is Jamesian, so far as Prince understands James and can act in the spirit of his thoughts. The poem does not detract from James’s individuality, but neither does it detract from Prince’s, instead Prince

<sup>47</sup> In a letter dated October 13<sup>th</sup> 1988. PFTP MS328 A4165/1.

<sup>48</sup> Steven Gould Axelrod, *Robert Lowell: Life and Art*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), p. 16.

<sup>49</sup> ‘Voice and Verse: Some Problems of Modern Poetry’, *English* 20.108 (Autumn 1971), pp. 77–83.

<sup>50</sup> Michael Black, ‘Frank Prince’, *Criticism in Action*, ed. Maurice Hussey, (Feltham: Longmans, Green & Co. Ltd: 1969), p.161.

<sup>51</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, ‘Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*’, trans. James E. Irby, *Labyrinths*, (New York: New Directions, 1964), pp.38-9.

<sup>52</sup> As quoted in *The Cambridge Companion to Jorge Luis Borges*, ed. Edwin Williamson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p.114.

<sup>53</sup> Letter dated July 7<sup>th</sup> 1935. MS Spender 61, Stephen Spender Archive, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford.

has become James: they are repetitions of each other. Prince's ventriloquism is not merely a trick, it is instead a mysterious convergence of ways of thinking and speaking, echoes through history.

Pierre Menard tried two different techniques to approach the *Quixote*, the first he discards, as Borges reports:

The first method he conceived was relatively simple. Know Spanish well, recover the Catholic faith, fight against the Moors or the Turk, forget the history of Europe between the years 1602 and 1918, *be* Miguel de Cervantes. Pierre Menard studied this procedure (I know he attained a fairly accurate command of seventeenth-century Spanish) but discarded it as too easy. Rather as impossible! my reader will say. Granted, but the undertaking was impossible from the very beginning and of all the impossible ways of carrying it out, this was the least interesting. To be, in the twentieth century, a popular novelist of the seventeenth seemed to him a diminution. To be, in some way, Cervantes and reach the *Quixote* seemed less arduous to him—and, consequently, less interesting—than to go on being Pierre Menard and reach the *Quixote* through the experiences of Pierre Menard.<sup>54</sup>

Menard refuses merely to *become* Cervantes, he decides instead to maintain his own identity as a twentieth century poet and reach the *Quixote* through an extraordinary convergence—an impossible (or perhaps *quixotic*) task. His mind and Cervantes's mind must converge across the chasm of three centuries and the incongruity of their temperaments. Astonishingly, Menard partly succeeds in achieving this convergence, managing to produce "the ninth and thirty-eighth chapters of the first part of *Don Quixote* and a fragment of chapter twenty-two."<sup>55</sup> How are we then to compare the two writers, Menard and Cervantes? Are their outputs identical? Not according to Menard's principal commentator Jorge Luis Borges. Indulging briefly in some literary criticism, Borges compares the original *Quixote* to the exceptional facsimile:

...Menard's fragmentary *Quixote* is more subtle than Cervantes'. The latter, in a clumsy fashion, opposes to the fictions of chivalry the tawdry provincial reality of his country; Menard selects as his "reality" the land of Carmen during the century of Lepanto and Lope de Vega. [...] Cervantes' text and Menard's are verbally identical, but the second is almost infinitely richer.<sup>56</sup>

Menard and Cervantes, Borges insists, are very different writers who created very different works—the text is simultaneously the same but utterly different. Both Borges and Heraclitus knew that repetition was impossible. The doppelgänger is unlike any other supernatural entity in that there is nothing inherently strange about it, on the face of it it is merely a person—as with the archetypal Neoclassic, it becomes strange only through the context. We recognise someone we know, but it is only when we realise that they cannot possibly be there that the recognition becomes unsettling. What we see must be a repetition of the person, and in the acknowledgement of that repetition they are changed utterly. Prince acknowledges this difference in repetition in scrap lines for a discarded poem titled 'Trionfi':<sup>57</sup>

So in this pageantry of truth, this parting...

<sup>54</sup> Borges, *Labyrinths*, p.40.

<sup>55</sup> Borges, *Labyrinths*, p.39.

<sup>56</sup> Borges, *Labyrinths*, p.42.

<sup>57</sup> Presumably named after Petrarch's *Trionfi*.

## OLD HAT

Haunting in its wondrous melancholy, things are done  
That must be done again,  
It is the same and not the same,  
The same but different: 'not so sweet now as it was before'  
For it is not before, it is again<sup>58</sup>

The adverb 'again' is transformed into an adjective—it becomes a state, not a mode—of being "the same and not the same".

This paradoxical multiplicity and unity of repetition was for Prince as much a practical understanding as it was a spiritual or poetical one. In his Warton Lecture at the British Academy, *The Study of Form and the Renewal of Poetry*, Prince espouses the virtues of a cycle of creative rebirth that involves first a passionate misreading of the past, followed by a more sober integration. So Chatterton, looking back to the type of ballad published in Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, is "pseudo-medieval; he takes as a basis the metre and syntax of his own time, which is to him a source of strength, being a natural mode of expression. But his poetry is an entirely new creation, because he has had a vision of past civilization."<sup>59</sup> More specifically this vision is not necessarily 'accurate', as Chatterton's poetry springs from "a keen, confused delight in his vision of the Middle Ages."<sup>60</sup> This confused vision is transformed by Wordsworth and Coleridge into a clearer, more substantial re-imagining of the ballads of the past—and is integrated into a new creation:

And by that time their knowledge of the old ballads had entered into their critical theory, their conception of a new kind of poetry, with a new directness and truth, dictated by powerful, universal emotions.<sup>61</sup>

This pattern—Prince argues—recurs again and again, both within a single poet's development (the example he gives of this is Blake's early reimagining of Elizabethan song), and in wider shifts in poetic culture—Chatterton's revival of Medieval poetry is mirrored in the Pre-Raphaelites' revival of the *dolce stil nuovo*, transformed or refined by Eliot and Pound, and in the Renaissance revival of epic grandeur, transformed or refined by Milton and Dryden. Prince concludes his lecture by commenting—

We have seen that in the study of poetry, the poetry of the past has again and again, at different times and in different ways, contributed to a rebirth of creative art; and there is good reason to think that poetic vision cannot fulfil itself except in a society where literary studies keep alive the sense of what has been done supremely well, and may be done again—though of course it will always be done with a difference.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/4.

<sup>59</sup> Prince, *The Study of Form*, p.48.

<sup>60</sup> Prince, *The Study of Form*, p.52.

<sup>61</sup> Prince, *The Study of Form*, pp.48-9.

<sup>62</sup> Prince, *The Study of Form*, p.61.

## OLD HAT

In the apparently offhand and revisionary comment with which he ends the lecture we find the kernel of Prince's theory of time and tradition. Poetic vision can only be fulfilled if it is free to be different and again. This is a direct consequence of his historical agnosticism: tradition cannot be possessed because it cannot be recreated, it can only be known in dream, in fiction, where it is the same and yet not the same. The 'Strambotti' might have been exemplary poems in Renaissance England, were it not for the fact they were written in the twentieth century. For while the poems are unlike any others, they are not unimaginable. Prince has not achieved a mere pastiche or emulation, he has written like a great poet from that time, inventing and changing the tradition. They are a fictional intervention into the history of an aborted form (aborted, that is, in English). I have already illustrated the care that Prince took to explain that strambotti had not been written since Wyatt: Prince self-consciously positions himself as a fastidious continuer of traditions, but traditions that never existed. He is a ghost and the traditions he positions himself in are dreams of the past. This pattern recurs throughout Prince's career: he returns to complete and continue others' unfinished works, or experiments that didn't succeed, or fragments that never constituted a whole.

## OLD SHIPS

Was I merely trying to refit old ships while the other side—Schoenberg—sought new forms of travel? I believe that this distinction, much traded on a generation ago, has disappeared. (An era is shaped only by hindsight, of course, and hindsight reduces to convenient unities, but all artists know that they are part of the same thing.) Of course I seemed to have exploited an apparent discontinuity, to have made art out of the *disjecta membra*, the quotations from other composers, the references to earlier styles ('hints of earlier and other creation'), the detritus that betokened a wreck. But I used it, and anything that came to hand, to rebuild, and I did not pretend to have invented new conveyors or new means of travel. But the true business of the artist is to refit old ships. He can say again, in his way, only what has already been said.

(Igor Stravinsky, *Dialogues*, p.129)

## Moesta et Errabunda.

Sege nu, sefa þin siðian wolle  
blace beorge feorr, beorhte ideo,  
toward ormu wadum þær wait yf-geblond  
maese ond morgen-hwit, maeghade hrof,  
scirende grundleas scaep hunn hamas?  
Sege gyt, sefa þin þær siðian wolle?

Frefrep wið-eac we ferflocas, bealu  
haelec on heorte! hwele ellen-gaest  
onlak flode leopes frifet,  
huges gehealdes þare hrofe sangistre?  
A wacor utor-wese organon def,  
wundum samod þa wenigas frefrep.

Wegap me, waenas, weg flota ber me  
feorr, ellor feorr; het feallende teatas  
wanan wierpap, wean on dute.  
Saegp to sope sefa þin stundum:  
'Begeondan ormoduisse, ylftum ellor feorr  
wegap me, waenas, weg flota min!'

Hu earf þu heoran feorr. bluttor neorxawang,  
spel swetas steras þær call þa mon lyfap  
lifes wierpa sind; þær lebte under heofone  
seofum wynnum gewiñnung sigf.

Hu earf þu heoran feorr, bluttor neorxawang!

Haespre, groene ham grifes cildhades,  
cossis, gronem, geclueteras wystra,  
heapan heinnende behindan beoras  
mid swetole sefne ond syppan sefen cwom  
wada holtum innan wri of fulle;  
hwaet, se groene ham gingra lufena,  
weig neorxawang, wunna stolena  
gefillid ferri forp. gewat hit  
fanne India ond east-dael? afer maeg mon  
hider hit lapian mid hadore stene,  
waeras him eft fore afele neorxawang  
geweorpod cilla wynnum stolenum?

Figure 4 Baudelaire's 'Moesta et Errabunda' translated into Anglo-Saxon, MS328 A834/2/1/4/13

There is an undated manuscript in the archive (though the handwriting suggests early) containing a poem in Anglo-Saxon Prince had written (see Figure 4). On closer inspection it is not, in fact, an original poem,

but a translation of Baudelaire's poem 'Moesta et Errabunda'.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps he was encouraged in this by finding an equivalence to Baudelaire's predilection for synesthetic 'correspondences' in the Anglo-Saxon kenning, or feeling that the prominence of Anglo-Saxon formulae could provide an interesting variation on the repeated line in Baudelaire's poem, or that the general elegiac tone of much Anglo-Saxon poetry provided a suitable backdrop for Baudelaire's own poem of loss. Perhaps it was conceived as a mere whimsical exercise. Whatever the reason, it is at first quite a shocking transposition of 19<sup>th</sup>-century France into 10<sup>th</sup>-century England, but one that after a little while seems to make sense.

As the notes towards 'Apollo and the Sibyl' revealed, Prince's journals evince his conscious attempt to plug into something much larger than just himself, into a greater literary project, a network of tradition. But he is also drawn to the idea of a sympathy between disparate traditions. His early poem, 'In a Province' is built out of the first thirteen verses of an English translation of a Hausa translation of an ode by Imru' al-Qais—a 6<sup>th</sup>-century Arabian poet. I will attempt a reconstruction of the poem using the source material in italics to show the extent of Prince's role as editor and compiler:

Because of the memory of one we held dear,  
*Because of the memory of one (we hold) dear,*  
 Call to mind where she lived and the ruins there  
*and the place of (her) abode (lit. the place she alighted), let us halt and lament.*  
 Among the silken shrubs. I have dismounted where  
 Her children played, and watch the pale sky grow clear.

And as for me, standing between the silken shrub and the broom  
*And as for me, standing beside the pale thorn shrub*  
 And tasting the breath of the blue sage, I must stay  
 Though my friends are setting out with the first of the day,  
 And they murmur to me, 'Do not linger in that gloom;  
*My friends drew up their mounts beside it (the pale thorn) and they are saying, "Be not overcome (lit. do not die) because of sorrow*  
 Remember that tears make whole the heart.' But I say  
*But know that tears heal (a heart's grieving)*  
 'Is there nowhere I may rest among the shells  
*"Is there (never) a spot where I may rest amid the ruins,*  
 Of the ruins and the droppings of white gazelles?  
*You see the droppings of the white gazelles in their court-yards*  
 However brief my hours are, I would delay.  
*...however brief my hours?"*

The tears that fall from my eyes have wet my hands

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<sup>1</sup> There is what appears to be an original poem in Anglo-Saxon in the archive in PFTP MS328 A834/3/2/1/11, 5<sup>th</sup> notebook.

## OLD SHIPS

*The tears (that fall) from my eyes*  
Holding the reins of my horse. How many hours  
Were sweet to me because of women! These showers  
*Ah! many days were (made) sweet to you because of women*  
Bring to my mind that day among pale sands,  
Call to mind how one came with me unwillingly  
*Call to mind a day behind the sand dunes, when one unwillingly (came) with me*  
On an evening warm as another country's noons,  
And all seemed of long ago among those dunes  
And under a clear sky, under a clear green sky.<sup>2</sup>

(CP, 36)

Prince's interest in the felicities that arise from combining disparate traditions—French Symbolism and Anglo-Saxon elegy; Arabic, Hausa, and English poetry; *ottava toscana* and *ottava rima*—is a key feature of his work, and one that has not been written about in any detail before. This chapter aims to uncover the purpose and the outcome of such restoration and synthesis.

## MARBLE DOORS

In conversation with Robert Craft, Stravinsky described his approach to art:

But I was also born to a non-progressivist notion of the practice of my art, and on this point, though I have survived into a musical society that pursues the opposite idea, I have not been able to change. I do not understand the composer who says we must analyse and determine the evolutionary tendency of the whole musical situation and proceed from there. I have never consciously analysed any musical situation, and I can follow only where my musical appetites lead me.<sup>3</sup>

Stravinsky's reception by avant-garde tastemakers might very well have proved irksome to him—to be heralded first as a revolutionary, capable of inciting riots, then portrayed as a meagre reactionary, and finally as a penitent, humbly turning to the 12-tone fold—and there is a sense of frustration in these words, of being a relic—a survivor—of a previous age, and of having exterior demands placed upon him that are utterly unrelated to his “musical appetites”. A similar sense of frustration with exterior ‘progressivist’ demands is occasionally evinced in Prince's writings. Prince begins *The Study of Form and the Renewal Poetry* with an epigram by Samuel Johnson ridiculing Thomas Warton's poetry:

Whereso'er I turn my view,  
All is strange, yet nothing new;

<sup>2</sup> Every line in italics taken verbatim from the first thirteen lines of R.S. Rattray's translation of a Hausa ode. N.B. they are not all in the original order. Rattray, 'Hausa Poetry', pp.261-2.

<sup>3</sup> Stravinsky, *Dialogues*, p. 128.

Endless Labour all along,  
 Endless Labour to be wrong;  
 Phrase that Time has flung away,  
 Uncouth words in Disarray;  
 Trickt in Antique Ruff and Bonnet,  
 Ode and Elegy and Sonnet.

The little squib is also a serious critical judgement; yet it was not Warton's poetry that was 'wrong', but Johnson's criticism. A poem cannot be wrong, as a clock can be wrong, or a sum in arithmetic; for the poet 'nothing affirmes, and therefore never lyeth'. But a critic can certainly be wrong, and is never more likely to be wrong than when he thinks poetry can be said to be so.<sup>4</sup>

If a poem cannot be wrong (though, of course, it can be *bad*) then all prescriptive aesthetics go out of the window. There can be value in being "trickt in Antique Ruff and Bonnet". It is characteristic of Prince that in making this subtle but significant point he does not appear to argue with any modern theorists, but instead takes umbrage with Dr. Johnson—likewise when he intends to comment on the Poetry Revival, he does so by writing a long poem about the rise and fall of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Hasidim, a fact I think not even the most distinguished and careful reader would have divined without Prince's prompt. Prince's antagonism and insurrection pass so subtly and quietly that they almost go unnoticed. In 1979 Prince left traces of another element of his frustration in a note he made on poetic diction:

Feb 10, 1979: Why not 'write no language' like Spenser? For lyrics, Spenserian, and other, and all shades of modern idiom (Yeats's antic-romantic-intellectual—USA: demotic) begin to look like bondage or cliché. Keats's Chaucerian language in *St Mark's Eve*; Gower in *Pericles*. Phrases from Julian of Norwich or *Cloud of Unknowing*.<sup>5</sup>

In paraphrasing Ben Jonson's famous remark that Spenser "in affecting the ancients, writ no language"<sup>6</sup> Prince turns a censure into a possible source of liberation. Crucially the entry does not suggest that Prince should write merely an imitation of Spenser—Spenserian lyrics themselves falling into "bondage or cliché"—but instead that he should imitate Spenser in method, that is, escape from the bondage of the present through archaisms and the employment of a language that does not exist.

When Rupert Hart-Davis rejected Prince's suggestion to title his collected poems *Poems 1938-1962*, he asked Prince to come up with an alternative, and *Doors of Stone* was born. It's not immediately clear where exactly this title came from, or what it's intended to mean—the letters give no clue, and the phrase does not appear in any of the poems. But there is perhaps some clue in the palatial imagery of 'Strambotto XIII':

Who made this palace of so rare a stone,  
 Not to be daunted in a hundred wars?

<sup>4</sup> Prince, *The Study of Form*, p.45.

<sup>5</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/12.

<sup>6</sup> Ben Jonson, *Timber, or Discoveries Made Upon Men and Matter*, ed. Felix E. Schelling, (Boston: Ginn & Company, 1892), p.57.

OLD SHIPS

For many came and wished it for their own,  
But could not enter it with men and stores.  
Why should it open when I came alone?  
Yet I have passed, and shut the marble doors.  
And being in, now I must keep the key,  
For I'll have no one sharing it with me.

(CP, 98)

At first reading the palace seems a simple motif: it is the beloved's love and confidence, even bed, with suitors figured as besiegers. The question that begins the strambotto seems a strange one in this context—not impossibly strange, but enough for us to think twice. That the palace of love should be *made*, and not by the beloved but by some anonymous mason or architect, is an extraordinary thought: it brings to mind some divine hand; it is the beloved who becomes unreal, a vehicle for something else. But there is also the sense—in these highly literary poems—that the poet might be talking about the imaginative quality of his love, or even the poems themselves. The final strambotto, XVII, has the poem assume architectural shape in a typical Renaissance conceit, ending “This verse a tomb of pearl where we remain” (CP, 99)—it is not so great a leap to understand the palace of stone in XIV as signifying the poems too. The ‘doors of stone’ are thus the ‘marble doors’ of the palace, and the doors of pearl of the tomb, but also the poems themselves, doorways to other ages.

Five years before the publication of *Doors of Stone*, Prince began a poem that was titled 'Oceana' or 'Sero Te Amavi', and returned to it in 1968, but never completed it. In one passage, where the poet remembers his youthful undertakings and enterprises, it is—as with Spenser's 'no language'—again poetic diction that suggests a possibility of liberation:

The thirst for clarity that waded wide  
Through tides of languages and globes of books, their weight  
Finding a sweetness in that toil denied weariness  
And hunting further in numbers, motions, looks;

Each word should be an opening like a gate  
Or window opening over sky & sea  
Rivers and mountains, winding plain or straight  
Break through to past & future, set me free,<sup>7</sup>

The last line startles us, it is almost ungrammatical—to parse it we would have to consider “should” from three lines before to be the primary verb, and “be”, “break”, and “set” to be parts of an extended zeugma, i.e. “[each word should] break through to past & future, [each word should] set me free”: not a particularly natural way to read. Instead the present tense breaks upon us like a wave, urgent as a

7 PFTP MS328 A834/2/1/4.

spontaneous prayer; it is an attempt to unite past, present, and future, in hope of liberation. The cry comes out of the depths of the poet's past, but assumes the present—it is not a problem that has been solved, nor a desire that has been sated. Prince still longs for liberation from time through words. The doors and gates are ways in and also ways out—ways into other times, and ways out of the bondage of present time. Todd Swift has noted of the protean nature of Prince's poetry that—

Prince's style can be described as an 'anthology style' – on the surface eclectic and open to many various manners, techniques and traditions, the virtuosity and eclecticism operating as a sort of palimpsest of available poetic strategies. Prince, having developed his reading interests during a colonial, South African childhood, had only poetry books to guide him, and an unlimited sense of equality among them; his formative years having been non-judgemental and Catholic in taste, his style was always broad and open.<sup>8</sup>

Adding later in the same essay that "this 'anthology style' is especially apt for the dilettantish Prince, a sickly and privileged youth, who grew up on a far-flung farm in South Africa, surrounded by few friends and many books."<sup>9</sup> While Swift's argument neatly encapsulates Prince's propensity to shapeshift, his portrait does one disservice to Prince in characterising him as a dilettante. Prince's eclecticism is not the product of some feckless *flâneur* meandering through the byways of literature, a "sickly and privileged" des Esseintes, selecting this or that style on a whim—the journals alone reveal the self-torturing, scarifying labour and torment that went into each and every one of his poems. Rather there is a constant and conscious rebellion in Prince's work against a progressivist notion of art that seeks to bind the artist to a limited gamut of acceptable styles.

Besides, Prince's 'eclecticism' has another, stranger outcome, especially in his earlier poetry. In the same essay, Swift poses an important question:

If Prince is the master of a style of styles without an identity, how is it that those admirers who enjoy his work know it when they come across a Prince poem—or rather, enjoy a sense of continuity between the text? After all, their appreciation is for the oeuvre as a whole, and a style that arises, however fragmentedly, from that ambiguous eclectic gathering of texts.<sup>10</sup>

Prince's poetry is decidedly Princeian, even—or perhaps most—when it is consciously emulating something else: he is most himself when he is not himself. When *Poems* was published in 1938, it was not 'An Epistle to a Patron' that led off the volume, as it would in all of his collected volumes, but that strange imitative masterpiece, 'Words from Edmund Burke', perhaps Prince's greatest act of ventriloquism.

'Words from Edmund Burke', with its rich, musicalised texture and syntactical acrobatics, comes as close to the pure verbal music Mallarmé imagined as just about any poem in English has ever done. Lines such as—

of links

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<sup>8</sup> Swift, *RFTP*, p.137.

<sup>9</sup> Swift, *RFTP*, p.146.

<sup>10</sup> Swift, *RFTP*, p.132.

## OLD SHIPS

Of favouring lights, of medals, of hinges, my grammar  
My logic, vocables like faggots, triple cords, gongs, florets  
A whole chivalry of leaves: I mean  
An inordinate number of decorated reflections branching  
Into how many more I have hinted at, as well as joints  
Fans and ligaments and horns. I am an artisan of fire.

(CP, 26)

—or—

and not

The refuse and rejected offal of strolling players, nor the hazards  
Of a den of outlaws upon a doubtful frontier nor even  
My own colloquies at dawn with deplored fields,  
Will seduce me (I hope) or silence me.

(CP, 28)

—have an incantatory strangeness and obscurity that works primarily through the auditory imagination: we feel or catch the meaning of the lines long before we are able to parse them. It is perhaps of all of Prince's published poems the most purely 'pure' in this way, and yet it is nevertheless the monologue of an historical man who was, primarily, a politician, a monologue of a man concerned with and involved in matters of the state: in laws, political tracts, missives, power. It could not be a less suitable subject, on the face of it, for the null-subject of the pure poem.

As the title would suggest, part of the verbal substance of the poem derives from an intense condensation and rearrangement of Burke's words. Prince told Susan Howe that the poem grew out of "reading the speeches on the American Revolution, and going onto the French Revolution, and getting this excitement about the language",<sup>11</sup> and in fact the poem moves beyond the speeches to encompass the private letters of Burke too. For example, in a letter from Burke to Philip Francis, Burke complains:

I never read a transaction which contained such a number and variety of misdemeanours. It is a fistulous sore which runs into a hundred sinuosities. I am sure there are more than I have stated; but you are to judge whether there be enough of them marked, as you are of all the rest.<sup>12</sup>

This is then lifted directly into the poem, almost without alteration:

in both worlds

There is now this fistulous sore that runs  
Into a thousand sinuosities

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<sup>11</sup> April 21<sup>st</sup> 1978. <<http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Howe-Pacific.php>> Accessed 19/09/2018.

<sup>12</sup> Letter dated December 23rd 1785. *Correspondence of Edmund Burke between the year 1774-1797*, Vol. 3, ed. Charles William, Earl Fitzwilliam and Sir Richard Bourke, (London: Rivington, 1844), p.45.

The words are changed from a vexed comment in a tense historical moment—one that ultimately led to the impeachment of Warren Hastings for the destruction of a nation after the first Rohilla War<sup>13</sup>—to a prophetic statement on a mysterious vague wound that covers two ‘worlds’. The wranglings and embroilment of the British Empire are transfigured and abstracted, lent a strange visionary meaning, and a faint suggestion of hysteria and hyperbole is introduced as “a hundred” becomes “a thousand”—a hundred is still countable, when we say a thousand it is often purely gestural: a throwing-up of our hands, an arithmetic balk. Not just the letters of Burke himself, but those of his son Richard are included in the poem. In a statement on the conduct of the Irish Catholics Richard writes that—

It is a circumstance of good fortune which cannot be expected to last for ever. While time is, let it be used.<sup>14</sup>

Words that, in Prince’s poem, are placed in Edmund’s mouth, before being twisted back onto the speaker:

I am it would seem an acceptable tube; and therefore  
While time is, let me be used.

Prince catches the tenor of Burke’s (and his son’s) prose, but twists the words until they are caught “in a broken bundle of mirrors” and stand in utterly new relations to each other, brooding and full of mystery. “While time is” is certainly a peculiar formulation, but in its original context it is little more than a linguistic quirk—transplanted into the poem it gains a philosophical obscurity and portentousness, vague notions of death or apocalypse swim about it. Prince privatises a language designed for public office, reflecting the words back on themselves so that they are amplified and distorted as in an echo chamber—what Dick Gallup, referring to Prince’s rhetoric, enthusiastically described as “feedback in the gray room”.<sup>15</sup> It is almost impossible to say just how much of this poem is made of words from Edmund Burke or words from Prince. For example, do the lines—

What disarray of an irresistible weather damps the fag-end  
Of our day? And I bear it like a girl.

—derive from Burke’s phrase—

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<sup>13</sup> See Sir John Strachey, *Hastings and the Rohilla War*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1892).

<sup>14</sup> *Correspondence of Edmund Burke between the year 1774-1797*, Vol. 4, ed. Charles William, Earl Fitzwilliam and Sir Richard Bourke, (London: Rivington, 1844), p.111.

<sup>15</sup> Reported by Ted Berrigan in his review of *Doors of Stone* in *KULCHUR*, Vol. 5, No. 19, Autumn 1965.

## OLD SHIPS

...but in comes a gentleman in the fag end of October, dripping with the fogs of that humid and uncertain season...<sup>16</sup>

—or is it a mere coincidence that both Burke and Prince use the expression ‘fag end’ in close conjunction with damp weather conditions? It is impossible to say—Burke’s and Prince’s words are so deeply entwined in this poem that what seems quotation could be mere felicity, and *vice versa*.

The imagery in ‘Words from Edmund Burke’ is not, in fact, dissimilar to many of the poems in Prince’s first volume—we feel the presence of those “anonymous but precise wilderness settings”<sup>17</sup> that Ashbery so admired in phrases like “a doubtful frontier”, or “the infringements on dusty plains/Of a corrupted oriental cavalry”, or in Burke’s description of his own Irish heritage as having been “bred/In a transmarine province”—this is not a parody, it is a process of extraordinarily sympathetic assimilation: it is surely Burke, but it is also the Prince of *Poems*. That the process is successful can be shown in it having a strange and unexpected side-effect. Consider the following selection:

He shall  
As he does, overpraise and underprize  
And outvalue and contemn all those purities and powers  
Of sight and speech, the so true so rich fleece  
Covertly and attentively, and often too  
Fastidiously and rashly to neglect.

(‘The Tears of a Muse in America’, CP, 20)

Among gossip of moist leaves, tongues of an upstart court,  
To my gaudy establishment as general  
Many emissaries, bitter, brought the crane’s feather  
And offered many tokens to placate [...]

(‘Chaka’, CP, 47)

And none too soon, since the panting mind  
Rather than barren will be prostitute, and once  
I served a herd of merchants; but since I will be faithful  
And my virtue is such, though far from home let what is yours be mine, and this be a match  
As many have been proved, enduring exiles and blazed  
Not without issue in returning shows [...]

(‘Epistle to a Patron’, CP, 15)

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<sup>16</sup> Edmund Burke, ‘Letters on a Regicide Peace’, *The Works of Edmund Burke*, Vol. 3, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1837), p.317.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. p.27.

## OLD SHIPS

We can hear, in these passages, something of ‘Words from Edmund Burke’: the parasyntactic complexity, the striking combination of abstract and concrete nouns. Perhaps this is not so strange—it is all Prince’s hand after all. But turning now back to Burke’s writings, we find a passage such as,

...to kings, who know to keep firm in their seat, to hold a strict hand over their subjects, to assert their prerogative, and, by the awakened vigilance of a severe despotism, to guard against the very first approaches of freedom.<sup>18</sup>

In the same way that Borges could hear the influence of his friend Pierre Menard on certain phrases of Cervantes that Menard never essayed, so we seem to hear the influence of James, Leonardo, and even Chaka on Burke’s prose style.

## FRAGMENT POETRY

Peter Robinson was right to be sceptical of Prince’s description of a poem’s “autonomous insouciance”<sup>19</sup> in *Not a Paris Review Interview*—there is something disingenuous about the passage:

Not being mechanical  
And of no use at all,  
The poem can wear a smirk  
And float above, beyond  
Any test or measure.

(CP, 250)

The poem appears to present a somewhat short-circuited aesthetic theory which sits uncomfortably with what we know of Prince’s actual poetic practice. In the same year as *Not a Paris Review Interview* was published Prince gave his presidential address to The English Association, and decided to give it in verse. The resultant poem—titled *Fragment Poetry*—acts as something of a sister poem to *Not a Paris Review Interview*: outward-focused where it is inward, with a serious scholarly tone as opposed to that of a dandyish if somewhat belligerent old poet, yet both attempting a hybrid prosy verse-criticism.

*Fragment Poetry* begins with a discussion of a few fragments of unfinished verse from Shelley’s ‘To The Moon’, through Keats’s ‘Fragment of an Ode to Maia’ and Coleridge’s ‘Phantom’, to Tennyson’s ‘The Eagle’, asking along the way whether Keats or Shelley had ever paused

to wonder what he had done  
Or might do—whether  
in six lines or fourteen,

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<sup>18</sup> Edmund Burke, *The Works*, ed. Henry Rogers, (Henry G. Bohn, 1841), p.412.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Robinson, ‘F.T. Prince: Truth in Style’, RFTP, p.70.

He might have pointed to  
 a new-born, never-seen  
 Model or mode of writing?<sup>20</sup>

The poem then cycles back to examine the situation before the Romantics:

After Wyatt the short poem could be  
 A sonnet, a song, or  
 an epigram, but had to be  
 Composed, an object grounded  
 in grammar, shaped and rounded.  
 Sonnet and epigram,  
 the upper and the lower limit  
 Of brevity, as we choose  
 to build on it or trim it  
 Rule out all incompleteness.<sup>21</sup>

The passage is reminiscent of correspondence 15 years before between Prince and Lee Harwood. In one letter, Harwood concisely explains to Prince the predicament he finds himself in:

I mean at the moment I find myself really torn between, or rather astride the two camps. I mean between your ideas of the poem (as the fine object, to put it crudely) and the American idea of the poem being energy, a catalyst that is only a fraction of the whole act.<sup>22</sup>

Fraction and fragment have the same etymological root, deriving from *frangere*, “to break”, and what is at stake in *Fragment Poetry* is precisely the value of broken poetry. Prince often insisted that the American poets were too concerned with writing poetry ever to write a poem—what Harwood summarises as “the fine object”. In his preface to Alka Nigam’s thesis, Prince explained that a poet, looking back at his earlier poems and finding them not always to their taste, can—

...still be pleased to find that they are shaped, completed objects, and that the poem as an art-object can somehow capture and retain, and still release, its little charge of life, like a musical-box or a drawing or a sculptor’s mobile.<sup>23</sup>

It is the example of the musical-box that is the most instructive—an intricate technique, in the old sense, that will play out a song when it is needed. A fragment of a music-box could, of course, do no such thing: a broken toy, it could only gesture at the music it *might* have made. This is the charge that Prince puts to the “false” fragments of Blake or Yeats:

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<sup>20</sup> F.T. Prince, *Fragment Poetry* (London: English Association, 1986), p.4

<sup>21</sup> Prince, *Fragment Poetry*, pp.5-6.

<sup>22</sup> Letter dated 29<sup>th</sup> June 1971.

<sup>23</sup> Alka Nigam, *F.T. Prince: A Study of His Poetry* (Salzburg: Institut Fur Anglistik und Amerikanistik, Universitat Salzburg, 1983) p.ii.

But are these fakes,  
Their abruptness a disguise,  
since prophecy or symbol makes  
The least scrap a riddle or a rune,  
a sibyl's word,  
Some huge meaning overheard?<sup>24</sup>

But Prince does not give an answer, instead beginning again, this time in America, “where a new poetry / of fragments had begun”, and following his breadcrumbs back through Pound and Eliot to Dickinson and Whitman, finding in them the source of the American fragment poetry:

And so these two began, amazingly,  
the open-ended poetry, the ‘process’,  
Which has ruled in America  
from Pound and Carlos Williams  
To and ‘through’, as they say,  
Olson, Berryman and Lowell,  
Stevens, O’Hara, Ashbery<sup>25</sup>

The ‘process’, the attempt to write poetry rather than poems, nevertheless has an end, though it is an end that Prince seems distinctly unimpressed by:

But the end is that the details  
Mean, or are meant to mean, the more  
precisely for their lack of meaning;  
As in Williams, the red wheelbarrow.

‘So much depends upon’  
The red wheelbarrow. What then  
depends? What but the whole  
Theory of open-endedness,  
in poetry as in life?  
‘No ideas but in things’, he said;  
but the decree that poetry  
Must deal in things, not thoughts,  
always be physical,  
Not metaphysical, is  
in itself an enormous, empty,

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<sup>24</sup> *Fragment Poetry*, p.7.

<sup>25</sup> *Fragment Poetry*, p.9.

Bad *idea*.<sup>26</sup>

Prince's refutation of Williams—they are his italics—has something of the common-sense brusqueness of Johnson's famous refutation of Berkeley. The donnée of *Fragment Poetry* returns to the matter of another lecture he had delivered to The English Association 15 years before, this time in prose, published as 'Voice and Verse: Some Problems of Modern Poetry'.<sup>27</sup> Where in *Fragment Poetry* Prince only describes how "one sees in Pop Art / And Op Art the wheelbarrow / become a can of soup", he had expounded more fully in 'Voice and Verse':

However, the danger for most poets of the modern world is one of being taken over by a *persona*—but by a *persona* which is increasingly *collective*. It could be symbolized by the world of Pop Art and Op Art, the images of soup-tins and strip-cartoons, of scrap-metal, giant plastic hamburgers, and *graffiti*. All of which, we shall be told by our spiritual revolutionaries, is in conformity with Blake's dictum that 'Everything that lives is holy'. The new egalitarianism in art believes itself to be akin to the visions of prophets and mystics, in which nothing is beyond redemption, nothing is impossible to faith.<sup>28</sup>

*Fragment Poetry* is a distinctly unsatisfactory poem to try to draw a conclusion from, in part because Prince seems to 'switch sides' partway through. His blunt refutation of Williams makes it clear that he is not neutral in this matter—he is involved. But while Prince ends the poem arguing against Williams and echoing his own previous criticism of Pop and Op Art, he begins it apparently lamenting that the 'great wrecks' of Romantic poetry 'that postulate completeness' might 'obstruct the way' for the fragment poem. He asks if there could—

have been room  
In our schooled and lettered culture  
for poems of a few lines  
Felt and offered as a fragment?<sup>29</sup>

But no, there could not have been. The poets who followed Wyatt had developed a polished poetry that would 'rule out all incompleteness'—a culture that would persist until the interventions of Whitman and Dickinson, and Pound and Eliot. Yet there was another, older, tradition that allowed the fragment poem to survive:

Only song, the words for music,  
Could shelter still a snatch,  
a catch or charm surviving  
From before the 'courtly makers'  
and their art—like *Western Wind*.

<sup>26</sup> *Fragment Poetry*, pp.9-10.

<sup>27</sup> *English*, Vol. XX, No. 108, (The English Association, Autumn 1971), pp.77-83.

<sup>28</sup> 'Voice and Verse', p.81.

<sup>29</sup> *Fragment Poetry*, p.5.

There generations, ages  
 of rhymes, jingles and saws, not pages,  
 Not written, from the folk kingdom  
 of the old half-pagan Christendom,  
 Throb in the longing for the wind<sup>30</sup>

There is a sense, if one reads *Fragment Poetry* backwards, that Prince wishes to connect or reconnect the modern form of the fragment poem with the older, fugitive, charms and jingles of the ‘folk kingdom’. At the end of an interview with Anthony Howell, Howell refers to a phrase of Les Murray’s ‘about poetry being like a wound’, to which Prince gently demurs before briefly outlining a problem contemporary poetry had to face:

It could be seen like that—or as a kind of gum oozing out of a wounded tree. ‘Our poesy is as a gum which oozes/From whence it is nourished,’ Shakespeare wrote. That’s one of the great weaknesses of poetry in the modern period, and I mean going back earlier than the 20th century: that it has lost its folk sources and inspiration, in England anyway. While popular culture flourishes, it no longer feeds into the higher, more complex kind of literature.<sup>31</sup>

Read this way, *Fragment Poetry* half-performs an arbitrary reassignment of origins, an act that deepens and strengthens a tradition by grafting it onto an older stock, but one that is nevertheless sympathetic. It is the same process found in the ‘Strambotti’ with the *ottava toscana* and the *ottava rima*, a fragmented tradition is repaired or altered by a fictional restoration.

#### A NOTE ON METRE

Prince worked in a great variety of metres and forms throughout his life: unrhyming odes, madrigals, poems in monometer and dimeter, a long poem in the Peter Bell stanza, free verse, syllabic verse-essays. But towards the latter part of his career he began to attain a sustained formal homogeneity through the development of a metrical scheme that united various strands of his previous experimentation. In conversation with the poet John Birtwhistle—who had known Prince—he told me that Prince had very much considered himself to be a metrical innovator in this regard. Later, in a clarifying email, Birtwhistle went into more detail:

The metrical question is fundamental. Yes, he did specifically claim to be a metrical innovator. He repeatedly insisted to me that poetry had to keep renewing its relation to everyday speech, and even to prose, as *Lyrical Ballads* and *The Waste Land* had done in their time. For him, this project was not (I think) to embody a living vernacular, so much as to compose in a metric that would sound patterned yet unaffected. So he experimented with the metrical forms of Shelley, Bridges and so on, but combined this with ideas about stress in which he thought he was

<sup>30</sup> *Fragment Poetry*, p.6.

<sup>31</sup> Anthony Howell, ‘F.T. Prince in Conversation’, *PN Review*, Vol.18, No.3, (January/February 1992).

innovating. He once gave me a kind of tutorial about this in his study, illustrating it from his later poems. I confess that I could not fully understand this at the time, and remember even less about it now. I could not understand his rules, or quite hear what he was demonstrating.<sup>32</sup>

Note that Prince illustrated these metrical innovations “from his later poems”—it is only in the poetry published after his *Collected Poems* of 1979 that Prince discovered his new metrical system. Nevertheless the technical problems of metre and prosody had been present throughout Prince’s career. In *The Italian Element in Milton*, Prince complained of Bridges’ attempts to analyse Milton’s prosody that in the end he had—

...to concede to the traditional view that English prosody must be interpreted in terms of Classical prosody. This is what he concedes in regarding the decasyllabic line as ‘on a disyllabic basis and in rising rhythm’, and calling ‘the disyllabic units’ feet. It is precisely these conceptions which have weighed most heavily on all theories of English prosody.<sup>33</sup>

Prince proposed instead—by reading Milton through his Italian precursors—to “dispense with all these impositions of arbitrary rules, and to read the verse, as Milton wrote it, with a basis of very few fixed principles.”<sup>34</sup> It was the concept of metrical feet that Prince felt was particularly alien and unnecessary, writing that “in English verse such ‘feet’ do not exist, any more than they do in French or Italian”<sup>35</sup>—a reasonable observation given that the ‘feet’ of classical prosody were not mere abstract rules but were derived ultimately from the movement of dance, an inheritance unknown in England. The account of Milton’s prosody he ultimately gives in *The Italian Element* does away with any conception of feet and is made of only two principles—one pertaining to the syllabic nature of the line, the other to the accentual:

- I. The line has a theoretical ten syllables (not eleven, as in Italian).
- II. The tenth syllable must always have, or be capable of being given, a stress; one other stress must fall, in any one line, on either the fourth or the sixth syllable.<sup>36</sup>

Prince scolds Bridges for “devising structures in which he had no real faith,” and notes the “wavering and ambiguous quality of Robert Bridge’s judgements,”<sup>37</sup> and the evidence of “deep mental reservations concerning his method of analysis”<sup>38</sup>—yet Prince himself would later come to be equally uneasy about his own account of Milton’s prosody. In the note he added to the second edition of *The Italian Element*, eight years later, Prince stated “I now think that Milton’s blank verse line is based upon a notional pattern of ten syllables alternately stressed and unstressed, in rising rhythm.” A statement that bears a remarkable similarity to the very concession he resented in Bridges’ theory. The only critic so far to have engaged in a sustained discussion of Prince’s prosody has been Derek Attridge, who points out that the addition of

<sup>32</sup> Private correspondence with John Birtwhistle.

<sup>33</sup> *The Italian Element in Milton*, p.137.

<sup>34</sup> *The Italian Element in Milton*, p.138.

<sup>35</sup> *The Italian Element in Milton*, footnote on p.144.

<sup>36</sup> *The Italian Element in Milton*, p.143.

<sup>37</sup> *The Italian Element in Milton*, p.144.

<sup>38</sup> *The Italian Element in Milton*, p.136.

Prince's note to the second edition of *The Italian Element* in 1962 meant that "Prince was joining or rejoining the consensus".<sup>39</sup> Attridge continues:

But why, for a few years at least, should Prince, with his fine ear for the subtleties of English rhythm, have been misled into believing that Milton was being even more experimental, metrically speaking, than he is commonly agreed to have been?<sup>40</sup>

Attridge has Prince returning to the fold, a penitent after having been misled by Bridges' metrical theories. But this is not quite accurate. Whatever reasons Prince had for introducing the note to the second edition, his unease with traditional accounts of English prosody had not disappeared. In 1965—eleven years after the publication of *The Italian Element*, and three years after the second edition—Prince responded to an invitation from Ronald D. Emma to submit an essay on Milton's prosody for an upcoming book—presumably *Language and Style in Milton*<sup>41</sup>—with an explanation of his reasons for declining the offer:

My unwillingness to write on Milton's prosody is due to my awareness that my ideas on the subject have not advanced since the appearance of my book in 1954, and that I am not at all happy about the account of the strictly prosodic question that I there gave. Indeed I have never been satisfied with the confused inheritance or prosodic theory that we have in English studies, though I think that for working purposes (i.e. for teaching students how to read and appreciate the bulk of English verse since 1500) it is acceptable enough. One of the chief disadvantages in the traditional accounts is the use of Graeco-Roman terminology to describe verse in a language to which it does not apply. I have never been able to set myself to investigate the problem with any conviction, however, because I am not well enough equipped with Greek and Latin to start at the right point.<sup>42</sup>

Certainly Prince became uneasy about his own account of Milton's prosody, but this unease only heightened the unease he felt towards conventional prosody—Prince would not return to the fold. Indeed, in 1991—thirty-seven years after *The Italian Element* was first published—Prince would indicate to W.G. Shepherd that his distrust of English prosody had continued unbroken:

Ever since I worked on Milton's diction and verse I have felt that our traditional accounts of English prosody are only approximations to what really happens in the poets from Surrey to the 19th century. The use of terms from Greek and Latin verse in describing English is misleading—I suppose many people would accept that—since the Pound-Eliot innovations in rhythm.<sup>43</sup>

Prince did not outline an alternative prosody that could account for "what really happens in the poets from Surrey to the 19<sup>th</sup> century", but his own latter prosodic experiments point towards an interest in a dual system of syllabic and accentual counting, not dissimilar from the one he claimed to have discovered in Milton.

After the tightly controlled but conventional stanzas of *Memoirs in Oxford* and the almost-free verse of *Drypoints of the Hasidim* Prince first revealed his continued interest in Bridges' syllabic experiments in *Afterword on Rupert Brooke* and then in *A Last Attachment* which employ lines of twelve syllables and

<sup>39</sup> Derek Attridge, 'F.T. Prince's Syllabics', RFTP, p.13.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> *Language and Style in Milton*, ed. Ronald D. Emma and John T. Shawcross, (New York: Ungar, 1967).

<sup>42</sup> Letter dated March 16<sup>th</sup> 1965.. PFTP MS328 A834/4/2/4.

<sup>43</sup> Letter dated March 27<sup>th</sup> 1991. PFTP MS328 A4165/1.

alternating lines of thirteen and eleven syllables, respectively. The twelve-syllable line was the one favoured by Bridges in his own ‘neo-miltonic’ syllabics. Of the metre of ‘A Last Attachment’, Attridge points out that there does not “seem to be any precedent for the alternating 11 and 13 syllables”<sup>44</sup>—though perhaps we could see it as an extension of Dante’s preference for prime number syllable lengths in *De Vulgari Eloquentia*.<sup>45</sup> Attridge notes of Prince’s use of syllabics that “there is no consistent use of end-stopping; the sentences flow freely from line to line, often with a strong run-on”<sup>46</sup>—a statement which is true of the words as they are printed, but it should be noted that when Prince read extracts from *A Last Attachment* aloud for Susan Howe’s radio show he would leave a slight pause or hesitation at the end of a line, regardless of the punctuation, thus maintaining the lightest of verse effects—and we should too.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, to read *Memoirs in Oxford* in such a way is a travesty, there punctuation must be the sole guide to the vocal pause, the strict rhyme pattern should become what Prince described as “submerged rhyme”<sup>48</sup>—both *Memoirs in Oxford* and the two syllabic poems are exercises in conversational tone, but approach the rhythm from opposing sides of the equation, and therefore must be read in opposing ways.

Bridges proposed his neo-miltonic syllabics as an alternative to free verse,<sup>49</sup> but aside from Bridges’ daughter, Elizabeth Daryush, his experiments had little impact on the poets writing in the first half of the twentieth century—Moore’s syllabics were developed independently.<sup>50</sup> In looking to Bridges, Prince took up a failed alternative to free verse, a tradition that never became a tradition, and continued it as if it had succeeded. Attridge is ultimately unsatisfied by the notion of a purely syllabic-based verse form for the honest and simple reason that the pattern is not discernible by the listener, or even the reader. Prince, too, became dissatisfied with syllabics, writing in 1981 “the syllabics; try a few lines but I hate the counting, and don’t like the result” (grist to Attridge’s mill that syllabics cannot be internalised by the poet), then in 1984, “syllabics tend towards patter, and pitter-patter”, and finally in 1986, “but I don’t like syllabics.”<sup>51</sup> Bridge’s syllabics alone would not do, another ingredient was needed for them to become whole.

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<sup>44</sup> Attridge, *RFTP*, p. 19.

<sup>45</sup> Perhaps a trivial point, but a point I have not found made elsewhere: starting with the hendecasyllable, Dante prefers lines with odd numbers of syllables, in decreasing magnitude, except for the nine-syllable line, *viz.* eleven, seven, five, three. The nine-syllable line appears, he writes, “to consist of the line of three taken three times”. He goes on to object to lines with an even number of syllables because “they retain the nature of their numbers, which are subject to the odd numbers as matter to form”—that is, they rely on the odd numbers that make them up. What Dante objects to, therefore are the non-primes, the composite numbers, because they naturally decay into multiples of their primes—they have no intrinsic form. Dante also praises the conjunction of hendecasyllables with heptasyllables, as it makes the hendecasyllable “rise yet more illustriously and loftily in its stateliness”. Perhaps the obvious next step, therefore, would be the conjunction of 13-syllable lines with 11-syllable lines. *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, II.v, trans. A.G. Ferrers Howell, (Bath, England: Rebel Press, 1973), pp.58-60.

<sup>46</sup> Attridge, *RFTP*, p.21.

<sup>47</sup> April 21<sup>st</sup> 1978. <<http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Howe-Pacificica.php>> Accessed 19/09/2018.

<sup>48</sup> *The Italian Element in Milton*, p.79.

<sup>49</sup> For a discussion of Bridges’ relationship to free verse, see ‘Robert Bridges and the Free Verse Revolution’, Donald E. Stanford, *Journal of Modern Literature*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Sep., 1971), pp. 19-32.

<sup>50</sup> See Joseph Parisi, *Marianne Moore: The Art of a Modernist*, (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1990), p.85.

<sup>51</sup> All three quotations from PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/15.

Michael Molan notes of Prince's participation in the Milton controversy—that is, the debates about Milton's reputation that raged around the first half of the twentieth century—that Prince "never meets the controversy head-on."<sup>52</sup> True, but Prince *does* directly engage in a different Milton controversy—only not that of the twentieth century, but of the eighteenth. Samuel Johnson, writing of Milton's use of blank verse, famously complained:

The music of the English heroic lines strikes the ear so faintly, that it is easily lost, unless all the syllables of every line co-operate together; this co-operation can only be obtained by the preservation of every verse unmixed with another as a distinct system of sounds; and this distinctness is obtained and preserved by the artifice of rhyme. The variety of pauses, so much boasted by the lovers of blank verse, changes the measures of an English poet to the periods of a declaimer; and there are only a few skilful and happy readers of Milton, who enable their audience to perceive where the lines end or begin. "Blank verse," said an ingenious critic, "seems to be verse only to the eye."<sup>53</sup>

(Note the resemblance to Attridge's reserves about syllabic verse). In 1973, in a note in his journals, Prince boldly enters the fray—perhaps only a little belatedly—seemingly to side with Johnson, claiming "the only guarantee of verse in English is rhyme." It should be noted promptly, however, that this is not the same as saying "all English poems should rhyme"—Prince, the scholar of Shakespeare and Milton, could have hardly sanctioned that. Rather it must be seen in the light of Prince's desire to find a form that would be "patterned but unaffected", as John Birtwhistle put it.<sup>54</sup> In abandoning traditional ideas of foot-based prosody, and experimenting with Bridges' syllabics, Prince found—as Attridge suspected—he had little left to hold the verse together *as* verse. Verse can exist without rhyme—there can be many other principles used to pattern it, in the right hands—but make it rhyme and the verse-quality is *guaranteed*. We know it is verse immediately. After drawing this conclusion, Prince continued his metrical experiments, but never again published a poem that did not rhyme. By maintaining rhyme, Prince was free to pursue any number of rhythmical innovations, safe in the knowledge that the resultant poem would still be verse, come what may.

It was with the publication of 'The Yüan Chén Variations' in 1981,<sup>55</sup> and its subsequent absorption into *Later On* in 1983 that Prince's experiments in prosody brought forth fruit, and his late style began to be defined. Gone were the rich monologues and deft exercises in tone of the thirties, fifties, and sixties; gone too the sober and reflective verse-studies of the seventies. What emerged in the three extraordinary poems that made up the volume was a broad but definable style that Prince would continue in until his death in 2003. Clear, pared-down, usually short lines, a conversational rather than a rhetorical tone—in short a style easy to dismiss as trivial or minor but for the poems themselves. This brief description, however, is only made with the benefit of hindsight, of knowing what came next, for the three poems in *Later On* are as dissimilar to each other as they are to Prince's previous body of work.

<sup>52</sup> Molan, RFTP, p.84.

<sup>53</sup> Samuel Johnson, 'Milton', *The Lives of the English Poets*, (London: John Sharpe, 1831), p.56.

<sup>54</sup> N.B. Elizabeth Daryush also seems to have come to a similar conclusion: "According to Daryush, rhyme, though not essential to syllabics, is very helpful." Christopher Levenson, 'Roy Fuller and Syllabic Verse', *Roy Fuller: A Tribute*, ed. A. Trevor Tolley, (London: Eddie S. Linden, 1993), p.44.

<sup>55</sup> Published as *The Yüan Chén Variations* by Sheep Meadow Press in New York.

Nevertheless, they each show the evidence of his metrical discoveries, and this is best illustrated in the first of the poems to emerge, the *Yüan Chén Variations*.

A reworking of Arthur Waley's translations of Po Chü-i into something of a narrative, the *Yüan Chén Variations* is perhaps the finest thing Prince ever wrote—sad, serene, joyous, the language hard and clear. It is not the greatest of Prince's poems for the matter is light and minor, but it is nearly perfect: it has none of those snags from which critics like to hang their baubles. I intend to say little about it beyond a brief note on the form. It consists of a set of 'variations' on a basic stanzaic form. There are two types of line, the four/five syllable and two stress line, or the six/seven syllable and three stress line. Each line rhymes with one other line, giving a set of three rhymes. Within each variation the rules are strictly adhered to, including which lines are of the longer form. If the rhyme has a feminine ending the extra syllable is not counted. Prince explained some of the felicities of the form in a letter to W.G. Shepherd:

The 'effects' begin to emerge at once, as in

His old fame is dumb, 5  
and from his brush 4  
no new songs will come. 5  
In a dead hush 4  
his poems on silk must 6  
be collecting dust. 5

Rhyme is essential to the working of the syllabic pattern. The effects on rhythm are so various and even{also} indeterminate that they can't be easily defined, but you see that 'must' in the second-last line hovers between that and the last line (with something of the effect of Hopkins' sprung rhythms—'...on silk mùst').<sup>56</sup>

Both 'A Byron-Shelley Conversation' and *Walks in Rome* use variants on this basic pattern, while introducing the rule that each stanza has one line anywhere in it which rhymes with one line anywhere in the next stanza—the effect is comparable to a greatly loosened *terza rima*. Rhyme, as Prince notes, is *essential* to the otherwise variously flexible metre, for it guarantees the verse is still heard as verse. In a rather grumpy, though not unfair, introduction to his chapter on free verse, Philip Hobsbaum defines three varieties of free verse—free blank verse, cadenced verse, and free verse proper—before continuing—

Not one of those three varieties, however, answers to the following description, circulated by several scholars and put forward authoritatively by Paull F. Baum in his book *The Principles of English Versification*. Baum says that some kinds of free verse 'do not aim to be more than ordinary prose printed in segments more or less closely corresponding with the phrase rhythm or normal sound rhythms of language'. Such writing as this—and one must agree with Baum that there has been a good deal of it in the twentieth century—is not verse of any sort, free or otherwise.<sup>57</sup>

By resurrecting Bridges' metrical experiments, and radically transforming them, Prince found a way towards a greater degree of rhythmic freedom while managing to avoid the danger of writing Hobsbaum's despised non-verse. It was a system that allowed him a formality that was not reactionary, and a freedom that was not anarchic.

<sup>56</sup> Letter dated March 27<sup>th</sup> 1991. PFTP MS328 A4165/1.

<sup>57</sup> Philip Hobsbaum, 'Free Verse', *Metre, Rhythm and Verse Form*, (London; New York: Routledge, 2006), p.89.



## OLD DOG

...And asked if my satire meant  
 More than that  
 Sometimes  
 An old dog will bite.

(‘Renouncing an Epigram’, CP, 300)

In August of 1978, between the publications of *A Last Attachment* and *Later On*, Prince made a comment in his journals on an idea he’d evidently been ruminating on:

The idea of ‘doing’ the American New Poetics (‘open forms’, Olson, Duncan, Creeley, Snyder, Bly, etc) is akin to the wilder, really silly idea of ‘doing’ Barthes and structuralism, which came to me reading the English paperback selection in August. The Americans wd. be more manageable, but the doubt remains—can I even get going on a long poem with a predominantly critical, i.e. negative, motive?<sup>1</sup>

Yet he did get going on the poem, noting in November of that year that “Some ‘jelling’ took place yesterday, but must pause.” He bought copies of Denise Levertov’s *Life in the Forest*, Robert Lowell’s *Life Studies* and *History* and Robert Bly’s *Silence in the Snowy Fields*. Lowell in particular seems to have aroused his irritation, as he remarks that he “read him until late last night, and couldn’t get rid of the taste, couldn’t get him out of my hair”, before describing Lowell’s poetry as a “clutter”:

There is a grasping at everything, anything, to build up a basically ungenerous ego (history, art, big names, Boston family detritus). No denying the force, really a frenzy; but it is an art of violent clumsiness, disregard of others, etc. Look at the pieces quoting Robert Frost and WCW—who would want to be in RL’s gallery of friends, at that price?<sup>2</sup>

The poem never materialised, and there seems to be no evidence of it in the archive. But the idea of a poem with a “critical, i.e. negative motive”—one that was written in the mode of the poetry it criticised as a sort of parody poem—did in the end find an outlet.

F.T. Prince’s legacy in America is more secure than it is here in Britain, in part through his patronage by John Ashbery and the New York Poets. This curious debt has had sustained critical attention, most recently having been richly excavated by Oli Hazzard in his chapter ‘F.T. Prince and John Ashbery’ in *Reading F.T. Prince*. But the focus on this trans-Atlantic communion has been curiously

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<sup>1</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/8.

<sup>2</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/8. Cf. p.79.

## OLD DOG

one-sided. There has been no critical attention to what debt or effect it had in the *opposite* direction, from America to England, from the American poets to Prince himself. Prince is often depicted as a self-isolating outsider, uninterested or even ignorant of the great changes that were taking place in American poetics, and which would have such an effect on the British scene.<sup>3</sup> In fact, as I will show, Prince was carefully observant of the burgeoning aesthetics that arose around the New York School and the Black Mountain poets, and his own later work—especially ‘His Dog and Pilgrim’—shows evidence both of an assimilation and a radical critique of that tradition.

## LAUGHING DOG

‘His Dog and Pilgrim’ is a poem about the story of St Rock or Roch, a pilgrim who had travelled around Italy in the fourteenth century healing people stricken with the plague until he too was infected, before recovering, partly thanks to the bread brought to him by a dog from its master’s table. The poem is a monologue in five parts from the perspective of the dog, and is written in a colourfully artificial language formed of archaisms, neologisms, demotic speech, and puns, which Prince dubbed “dog-speak”.<sup>4</sup> The first two parts concern the dog’s nature and his relation to his unnamed master, the third part names his master as Rock and carries the story up to Rock’s sickness, the fourth part describes Rock’s miraculous recovery, and the fifth part finds the dog—now old—reflecting on its story. The poem had a long gestation. In a letter to W.G. Shepherd Prince described the poem’s origins:

The idea came to me in 1974, of the dog-consciousness and experience as material for a dramatic monologue. We were at Platres in Cyprus, {there was a big dog in the hotel}, and I had been reading Cervantes’ *Exemplary Tales*, one of which is a dialogue between two dogs. The dog-master relationship was to be the theme, and dog-language, ‘Dog-speak’, the vehicle. I made copious notes over a period of two years or so, and came back to the theme repeatedly, but the poem wouldn’t ‘take off’; and {I} decided it never would, probably because I didn’t really like dogs. This was, and is, not the whole truth. We had dogs in the family when we were children, and adored them, but in South Africa they raised no problems. Life in England, at least as I have lived it, makes them {into} problems; and I have {also} felt for years that I would be bored and irritated by the {other} demands dogs make—in a way, by doggy devotion.

[...]

I gave up the plan for the poem, in the mid 1970’s, but in my travels round the world I took with me all my notebooks, and the theme came to life {again} in 1982, in Yemen. I now think it was because of the horrible spectacle of the treatment of dogs there. They are outcasts, regarded as unclean, and survive ~~as~~ as scavengers—numbers of them in a city like Sana’a; and the complex of apartment blocks where we lived had a resident pack. (In the country they are or can be kept as sheepdogs, or whatever, and {brave} individuals can regard them kindly.) So some of the pitiful sights I saw provided an emotional charge.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Bruce Miller Meyer dismiss Prince’s poetry with the claim that it has “little concern for contemporary aesthetic theory”. Cf. p.15.

<sup>4</sup> Letter to W.G. Shepherd dated January 27<sup>th</sup> 1989, PFTP MS328 A4165, and entry dated May 16<sup>th</sup> 1982 in MS328 A834/3/1/14.

<sup>5</sup> Letter to W.G. Shepherd dated January 27<sup>th</sup> 1989. PFTP MS328 A4165.

## OLD DOG

The poem was written in two separate bouts of writing, from 1974-6 and in the spring of 1982: he had it finished by the end of June.

In his exposition of the poem's origins and themes to Shepherd, Prince had not been, however, entirely frank about one particular source for the poem. He had told Shepherd that—

A starting-point for the lingo (and the consciousness it is meant to convey) was the earlier poetry of Robert Creeley, which had a certain fascination for me, I found.<sup>6</sup>

—but this was not the entire truth, or was at least presenting the truth in a somewhat disingenuous light. Creeley's early poems did hold a fascination for Prince, but it was a qualified fascination, as a remark he made while drafting the 'dog poem' in 1974 illustrates:

26 April: Verse, form. Wouldn't the Williams-Black Mountain-Creeley 'stream' be just right? A combination of Ed Dorn's impressionistic account of the journey {(Nebraska?)} in Geography with lyrics like Creeley—the broken syntax; the flashes by which things are seen or told; the blundering, maundering reflections on 'the lady' & her dress & the room, in longer pieces—or the bewildered hero. (In fact, if one could only put Creeley together again on the basis that it is a dog's life and a dog's consciousness, it would all be there~~+~~.) But this of mine would be more sustained, unified, pointed—ironical, philosophical; and if as a side-effect it was also an implied critique of the scope of the Black Mountain consciousness, tant mieux.<sup>7</sup>

Creeley was there from the beginning, as Prince had told Shepherd, but the motive had been subversive rather than laudatory: a satirical-critical reimaging of Creeley's poetry as dog-consciousness because *more appropriate*. The impish idea that if one were merely to rearrange Creeley's poetry into the shape of a dog the poem would write itself obviously delighted Prince—though he apparently quashed his delight, crossing out the exclamation mark and replacing it with a more sober full stop. Yet Creeley's presence persisted in the poem until its completion. Compare the movement and syntax of Creeley's poem 'The Man' with the dog's half-comprehension of Rock struck down with the plague. First 'The Man':

He hie fie finger  
speak in simple sound  
feels much better  
lying down.

He toes is broken  
all foot he go  
rotten  
now. He look

he hurt bad, see  
danger all around he  
no see before

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<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/10.

come down on him.<sup>8</sup>

Now the dog:

then I sees  
edge of bed,  
he look sitting  
down his head  
forward bent

bent and spread  
wide his knees:  
nowhat said

(CP, 222-3)

Note in particular the similarity in the way the two poets use the infinitive form of the verb “look”—in both poems it is much a floating emblem of the act of seeing, an acknowledgement that we are seeing, as a part of ordinary grammatical speech. It mimics some primitive, subterranean operation of thought—the verb merely signifies a mode of being, or in these cases, seeing. Creeley’s poem seems to want to say “he look[’s like] / he hurt[s] bad”, and the phrase hovers between these two ways of talking, the primitive and the ordinary; to parse Prince’s poem in this way would be to end in a further degree of confusion: “he look[’s like he’s] sitting / down”—why the uncertainty? We are instead forced more fully to confront the emblematic, primitive speech—the dogspeech. Prince—described by Todd Swift as a ‘master of a style of styles without an identity’<sup>9</sup>—proved fully capable of assimilating the Creeleian style, and turning it to his own ends.

In *Personal Notes and Queries*, Prince explained of ‘His Dog and Pilgrim’ that “some of the effects were suggested by Robert Creeley’s early poems, others by Skeltonics.”<sup>10</sup> The journals record Prince’s preoccupation with trying to write Skeltonics—in October of 1981 he noted that “Skeltonics seem an odd medium, but it will be my business to make them right,”<sup>11</sup> and then later, ‘I am still drawn to Skeltonics, which appear to be spasmodic and flighty, yet do produce, in C. Clout and P. Sparrow, poems longer than what I want to do.’<sup>12</sup> ‘His Dog and Pilgrim’ accomplishes what *Fragment Poetry* prescribes, and grafts a fragmentary modern style—that of Creeley and the ‘Black Mountain Poets’—onto an older tradition, and—pertinently—onto the figure of John Skelton, the last significant poet to write before the arrival of what Prince in *Fragment Poetry* calls the “‘courtly makers’/and their art”—Wyatt, Surrey, and

<sup>8</sup> Robert Creeley, ‘The Man’, *The Collected Poems of Robert Creeley, 1945-1975*, Vol.1, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p.222.

<sup>9</sup> Swift, *RFTP*, p.132.

<sup>10</sup> *PNQ*, p.22.

<sup>11</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/15.

<sup>12</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/15.

## OLD DOG

their followers. If 'His Dog and Pilgrim' began with a 'critical, i.e. negative motive' as an 'implied critique' of the American poets, it became instead a qualification of their style, patching it into a submerged deeper tradition, a critique by example rather than by parody.



Figure 5 Figure of San Roc on gate in Mahon, Menorca. My thanks to Bricheno for giving me permission to use his photograph. <<https://www.flickr.com/photos/56546681@N00/15247238786>> Accessed 17/09/2018.

## SINGING DOG

Prince noted that the idea for the poem came to him in 1974, but in fact we can trace his interest in the story of St Rock and his dog to even earlier: to an entry in his journals from 1970, where he had transcribed most of the chapter on St. Rock from Sabine Baring-Gould's *The Lives of the Saints* before writing half a page of nebulous lines for a poem. On the inside cover of the journal Prince had added a brief gloss of its contents, suggesting that the idea had come to him during a holiday to Menorca: "Later,

## OLD DOG

in 1970, notes on what to do next. Saint Rock on gate in Mahon—quoted information on Rock and his cult”<sup>13</sup> (see Figure 5). However, Prince bookended the transcription of Baring-Gould with two remarks on music, the second being a riposte to Thomas Mann’s description of modern music, while the first is a note on Mozart:

Summer 1970.

Theme: Discrimination between Magic Flute and other operas (esp. Cosi and Figaro). I can ‘take’ Flute more easily <..> (with all its false rationalism) than the intensely real & penetrating – Shakespearean – vision of human weakness in the others  
S. Rock is represented as a pilgrim, [...]<sup>14</sup>

In 1975, Prince again returns to Mozart as a way to conceive ‘His Dog and Pilgrim’—at that point tentatively titled ‘A Dog’s Life’:

A Dog’s Life must have a ternary structure, like a Mozart concerto; in fact it must be like the Piano Concerto No. 9 in E Flat, from beginning to end.<sup>15</sup>

The idea of music is present at the genesis of ‘His Dog and Pilgrim’ and recurs, quietly and almost unnoticed, at various points along the work’s progress. When he returned to the poem in 1982, Prince copied out a cache of notes from 1975, including in it some advice to himself to “think all the same of ballet, to try to get everything formalised, musicalised.”<sup>16</sup> The year of its publication W.G. Shepherd in a letter to Prince described how the balancing of sections of the poem should be described “in terms comparable to those of musical structure”.<sup>17</sup> Four years later Prince was apparently reminded of the poem by the guitar music of Juanillo de Alba, describing how “the guitar speaks, dogwise”.<sup>18</sup>

In 1949, twenty-five years before he apparently began work on ‘His Dog and Pilgrim’, and thirty-four years until it was published, Prince had begun work on a poem or set of poems called ‘The Book of Airs’.<sup>19</sup> The journal entries at the time tell us little about it, other than he was thinking of Thomas Campion and also Henry Vaughan, and the idea was eventually discarded.<sup>20</sup> However, in 1978, after finishing *A Last Attachment*, Prince recorded in his journal—

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<sup>13</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/6, inside leaf.

<sup>14</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/6.

<sup>15</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/15.

<sup>16</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/14.

<sup>17</sup> PFTP MS328 A4164/1/1-37.

<sup>18</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/2/1/1-10.

<sup>19</sup> See PFTP MS328 A834/3/2/1/11, 3<sup>rd</sup> Notebook.

<sup>20</sup> If any of the poems from this unrealised project made it into his published work, my guess would be that we should look to ‘Mortimer’, ‘Handfast Point’, and ‘The Yard’ (cf. p.139). The latter two are in Campion’s favoured six-line stanza rhyme scheme, ABABCC, while ‘Mortimer’ is in a variation on this. ‘Mortimer’ and ‘The Yard’ share distinctly similar first lines (both relate the agency of March: ‘March has flooded meadows’ and ‘March dreams in the orchard’), and all three poems share the same strange interrupted cadence—a turning aside from the action to the natural world, a distraction (‘And a bird cries/To open the dull skies’, ‘And ghostly whispers pass/Through the dry grass’, and ‘And two flies buzz upon/The milk-stained stone). As it happens, the composer Jonathan Harvey chose ‘Handfast Point’ as one of three of Prince’s poems to set to music, consequently realising its song-like potential—perhaps at Prince’s suggestion.

## OLD DOG

4 Mar. (Sat.): Poetry still hovers and plucks at me. New forms, unrhymed or randomly rhymed lyrics like Tennyson's 'Many, many welcomes', Campion.—<sup>21</sup>

And then, in 1981, five months before he resumed work on 'His Dog and Pilgrim', and while he was writing the 'Yüan Chén Variations', Prince hit upon a way into his next poem:

Nov. 6: Call it Book of Airs, and make it a continuous statement, through varied stanza-forms, therefore parallel to Y.C. (Note that 'book of airs' idea goes back to '50's, and the fascination of Campion to the '30's.)<sup>22</sup>

In April 1982, when he resumed work on what would become 'His Dog and Pilgrim' after so many years, he began by giving it a new title, "Dog-book". The idea of the 'Book of Airs' went underground again, but it seems to have fed into the idea of the "Dog-book", of structuring a series of small lyrics into a "continuous statement". At this point it is worthwhile to look at a journal entry from 15<sup>th</sup> April 1974, where Prince had written "Così fedel son 'io. Music, weeping as in a dream".<sup>23</sup> The phrase "così fedel son 'io" is from an aria in Pietro Metastasio's libretto *Ipermestra*, and can be translated as "so faithful am I". For a while, it seemed, Prince used this phrase as another alternative title—or at least a placeholder—for 'His Dog and Pilgrim'.<sup>24</sup> Of course it would be a fitting epigraph or title for a poem about a dog "so faithful known", who follows his master round Italy and tends him when he falls sick, but there is another way we can understand the significance of this temporary title.

As the previous chapter showed, the publication of *Later On* marked a quiet change of direction in Prince's poetry. Except for his last surprise in 1995 with *Keats Country*, which surprised himself more than anyone, Prince would never again publish a poem with more than four stresses in a line. This may seem a trivial observation, but from a poet whose (admittedly slight) reputation had been built on such elongated and sinuous lines as—

The lintels and windows with mouldings as round as a girl's chin; thresholds  
To libraries; halls that cannot be entered without a sensation as of myrrh

('An Epistle to a Patron', CP, 13)

Or—

Last torments and last light, torn hesitations  
Between desire and fear, between desire and my disdain  
—Emerging into dusky rooms, high halls, rich architecture

('The Old Age of Michelangelo', CP, 79)

And whose previous publication, only four years earlier, could begin—

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<sup>21</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/8.

<sup>22</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/15.

<sup>23</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/10.

<sup>24</sup> See PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/14.

Spenser has Britomart on guard in the enchanter's house

(‘A Last Attachment’, CP, 187)

—it represents a substantial shift or change. ‘His Dog and Pilgrim’, in particular, would point forward—past *Walks in Rome*, *Not A Paris Review Interview*, and *Fragment Poetry*—to the scattered skeltonics of his *Senilia*. After the “slow rich music”<sup>25</sup> of all the poetry collected in the Collected Poems of 1979 his later work seems minor and insubstantial. Even the very title of *Later On* suggests an afterthought.<sup>26</sup> W.G. Shepherd compared the ‘Yüan Chén Variations’ and ‘His Dog and Pilgrim’ to the rest of Prince’s output as “divertimenti among symphonies”. And consider the following critique:

...those little strophs, which look such ridiculous appendages at the end [...] whose brief metre and recurring rhyme jar so painfully with the sustained blank verse, which are read off with a rapidity out of all proportion to the time required by what precedes [...] Those tripping, skipping rhymes, which seem, when read, such absurd vehicles for pathos or passion...

There is something absurd about the broken, small, essentially *minor* poems of ‘His Dog and Pilgrim’ and the *Senilia*, with their “tripping, skipping rhymes” and “brief metre”, after everything that had come before. But the passage is not describing Prince’s poetry—it actually describes the arias of Metastasio, from Vernon Lee’s *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy*,<sup>27</sup> the same arias from which the title ‘Così fedel son ‘io’ is taken. Lee continues by describing how these superficially absurd lyrics “are made by the composer into sustained and intense lamentation, or impetuous and whirlwind-like invective”. Prince of course had no composer to help him transform his ‘absurd vehicles’, they must stand on their own two feet, or four. But there *is* pathos and passion, hidden away somewhere, latent in these little lyrics. Despite its surface ease and triviality, ‘His Dog and Pilgrim’ conceals an emotional bedrock of both intense lamentation and whirlwind-like invective.

In 1977, Prince made an extraordinary remark in his journals:

13 Oct: The poet as composer: a way of expounding what I do (when I do it).

A mysterious and pregnant assertion written by a man nearly retired, with forty years of published poetry behind him. What he does and when he does it. It is perhaps too much to believe that the new style—or styles—of *Later On* and his subsequent publications was totally premeditated, but Prince knew some change was coming, some lattermath, and was preparing to expound or defend it. A modified form of this defence appears in *Personal Notes and Queries*, in an explanation for the unusual diction of ‘His Dog and Pilgrim’:

<sup>25</sup> Cf. p.11

<sup>26</sup> “Latterly” and “Lattermath” were alternatives Prince considered. At the poetry reading he gave at the University of Warwick on October 25<sup>th</sup> 1984, he explained the title “Later On” as merely “being later than the Collected Poems which was published in 1979.”

<<https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/writingprog/archive/writers/princeft/251084>> Accessed 19/09/2018.

<sup>27</sup> Vernon Lee, ‘Metastasio and the Opera’, *Studies of the Eighteenth Century in Italy*, (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1887), p.191.

In my poem the language is functional, linking the dog's limited consciousness to human limitations and anxieties. But it functions also mimetically as a dance of words, which can claim to be an end in itself.<sup>28</sup>

It is a peculiar claim, and one that goes to the heart of a dispute Prince was engaged in at the time, both with himself and with the American poets he set out to critique.

The journal entry we have already examined above continues:

Così fedel son 'io. Music, weeping as in a dream, where one can't really weep—the dog can howl, but not weep.<sup>29</sup>

This gives us a clue to the theme of the poem: that of imperfect, unrequited being—it is a poem of frustration and limitation as much as it is of joy, adventure, or hagiography. The dog can howl, but howling is not weeping, it is a pale imitation, a distorted alternative. I take it that Prince's meaning in referring to weeping in dreams is that occasional sense we have in dreams when a strong emotion overtakes us, or a strong desire to achieve something swells within us, and though our consciousness wills or desires it our dream-self, our avatar, is unresponsive or incapable. But Prince links these frustrated or impossible actions to the sensation of music. In 1952, while still struggling to find a way back to the intensity of vision of his earliest poems, Prince had noted in a journal:

When I listen to Mozart, when I read Rimbaud, I perceive something with an intensity greater than ever before. What this sensation is (beauty, order, pathos, joy) I cannot begin to say, but the mere fact of this perception in me, must surely mean that I can yet write poetry, if I can only find the way.<sup>30</sup>

He would spend his life trying to find various ways to do justice to this perception. Music, and particularly the music of Mozart, became for Prince an emblem of his frustration at being unable to speak—or sing—in fully satisfying ways. 'His Dog and Pilgrim' is in part a dramatization of this frustration.

The dog's language, or what Prince dubbed 'dogspeak', is an oddly halting version of speech. The pathos and meaning shine through, but often only as the result of an apparent effort on the dog's part, and the words hover between the clarity of human speech and what would otherwise be mere nonsense, the serendipitous chiming of vowels and consonants and little more. So, for example, in part II, the dog is at pains to understand the degree of separation between himself and his master:

drop-eared and sorry-eyed  
by foot or lap or  
knee  
not knowing  
it will never do

---

<sup>28</sup> *PNQ*.

<sup>29</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/10.

<sup>30</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/4.

## OLD DOG

—he asking fondly for  
some kind or kin  
or kindled godliness  
some goodly fondleness

unbearably

knowing  
not knowing that

it will not do, be  
never  
not be true

(CP, 215-6)

The words do not demand our attention: we can be satisfied by the change-ringing of “fond... kind... kin... kindled godliness... goodly fondleness” as we are satisfied by a child’s nonsense poem, lulled by the light and mindless music, unaware of or ignoring the presence of mind—much as we can choose to ignore an old dog lying in the street. But the dog *is* trying to say something—he knows his master lacks something, whether sacred or social, godliness or fondleness, that the dog is unqualified to provide. As in much of the poem, it is not entirely clear who the subject of the verb is, in this case whether it is the dog or the master who knows and does not know. The words are barely formulations, the meaning of the poem struggles to rise through the page, it exists embryonically, frustrated at its conception.

While reading ‘His Dog and Pilgrim’ at the University of Warwick, Prince spoke one particular passage in the following way:

ah, but himself  
since he had wish to take  
he took in hand,  
he took in me  
my education

ah, walking he walk far  
he not go back

—he, I, we not go back.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> <<https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/writingprog/archive/writers/princeft/251084>>  
Accessed 19/09/2018.

## OLD DOG

The passage *as it is written down* has one important difference: it is not “ah” at the beginning of those two lines, but “argh” (CP, 213). I had always been unsure how to read this exclamation, and had taken it to be pronounced “arf”, as a dog’s bark—the “gh” being an “f” sound, as in “tough”. But Prince chose to read it silently, making the word for his listeners indistinguishable from that hallmark exclamation of so much traditional English poetry—he read the word as one might read “ah! bright wings!” Prince did not *write* “ah”, nor—had he wanted that sound but had not wanted to associate it with the demonstrative “ah”—had he written something like “arr”, but had written a word whose pronunciation was deliberately vague. I had chosen “arf”, because I knew the poem was from the mouth of a dog, but perhaps the most obvious way to pronounce it would be “arg” or “arkh” or something like that, sounding more like the spluttering gurgle of someone drowning or despairing. In fact, the poem supports and encourages all three pronunciations: a poetical exclamation, a frustrated gurgle, and a simple woof. This dog is a liminal creature, stuck somewhere between sacred, profane and animal, and unsure of where it belongs. It tries to weep, or to sing, or even to shout, but finds it can only howl.

There are melodies in the poem that seem almost like nursery rhymes, or jingles children make up in the playground. When St Rock falls ill, the dog reports—

now he lies  
far away  
castaway,  
on his back  
head on pack  
in a shed

(CP, 223)

It is as reminiscent of Dr. Seuss as it is of hagiography. In part one the dog quotes some verse:

and he is mine  
'a visage fair  
and voice as rare'

(CP, 211)

Which seems to be misquoted from an eighteenth century riddle, some real doggerel:

Q.      A Visage fair  
And voice is rare,  
Affording pleasant charms;  
Which is with us  
Most ominous

## OLD DOG

Presaging future harms.<sup>32</sup>

The solution to the riddle is ‘*A Mermaid, which betokens destruction to Mariners*’, though it is more than probable the dog would not have got it. At times the poem dances through these various melodies and voices at breakneck speed. In the first few lines of the second section, the poem moves like a scherzo through a bewildering array of voices:

a wise dog

a nice dog

is twice dog:

*amicus* amorous

—the good brave generous  
and clever dog, bright boy!

—but oh you bagabond  
you poor old slavey chap  
poor crackpot, addled

classical lost heart!

(CP, 215)

Beginning with what seems like a vapid, childish epigram, the dog momentarily switches to Latin, like an old don, before three adjectives (“good brave generous”) are interjected that sound all too human-directed, but the next line reveals that they are an echo of the sort of meaningless things people will at times say to dogs: good dog, brave dog, bright boy. Turning again, the poem appears to direct a word of censure against the dog (“you bagabond”), but one that is misheard, or at least mispronounced, like it had been said whilst eating or drunk; this then becomes interfused with a sort of pity, as if the censure had been given too quickly, and the words suggest the sympathy we might extend to one who is harmless but mentally unwell (“you poor old slavey chap/poor crackpot, addled”). Then Prince leaves a space in the text—in the recording from Warwick he briefly pauses here—before the words and the sound of the words seem to broaden and deepen their comprehension of the creature before them, as the jinglings of “crackpot” and “addled” collide and concatenate in “classical”, and the dog is reappraised as an example of a wider set of pitiable things, those “lost hearts”. The passage acts as a tatterdemalion synopsis of man’s relationship to dogkind: moralising, philosophising, praising, scolding, pitying, and finally (perhaps) half-understanding. The dog, too, only half-understands the human words it here parrots, but it catches the drift of them. If you scold a dog, it will grovel, if you praise a dog, it will beam, but you cannot ask

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<sup>32</sup> Included in *Chap-Books of the Eighteenth Century*, ed. John Ashton, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1882).

## OLD DOG

it to lay the table. Prince's poem is uniquely successful at catching the tenor of this befuddled cross-species comprehension.

In *The Study of Form and the Renewal of Poetry*, Prince narrates the fate of the late-Victorian villanelle, how it "dwindled into prettiness" and was mocked and parodied by Walter Skeat, before finding "a new lease of life fifty years later":

The *villanelles* of William Empson in the 1930's, and a single example by Dylan Thomas in the 1950's, show the transformation of this apparently slight and tinkling form into a vehicle for intense, crackling or burning ferocity or bitterness. What was needed to produce these surprising pieces was the conjunction of a fragile but rigid form, divorced from the matter with which it had always been associated, and a new complexity of thought and mood. What was needed, in short, was that an individual genius should attempt, and succeed in, something *incongruous*.<sup>33</sup>

This emphasis on incongruity seems at first surprising, coming from a poet whose poetry is fastidiously researched, mannered and polished, and which rarely, if ever, relies on those effects of blatant or explicit incongruity that are so ubiquitous in the works of Eliot, Pound, Auden, Ashbery, to name a few. But Prince's poems have their own incongruities, built into the fabric of the poems, which, while not always immediately recognisable as such, are often part of what lends his poetry its richness and surprise. 'His Dog and Pilgrim' contains a prime example of this, hidden away in its leaping strangeness. The second part of the first section has the dog considering what its life would have been without his master, St Rock:

I was and were  
a country cur  
had he not me  
  
—would never be  
not mangy, skulking  
at Toms Hope, Cum See  
Mud River  
Just My Luck

at best to take off  
dancing 'here I go'  
—laughing and so  
away,  
    hey

answer  
  
to names like Long Dick,

---

<sup>33</sup> Prince, *The Study of Form*, p.53.

## OLD DOG

Rickashay and  
Chuff,  
Tell Bill and Willie  
Pee and Willie  
Flea and  
John-to-Wit

(CP, 212)

In 1975, Prince had accepted a visiting fellowship at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica—this, he tells us, was in the period where he had dropped the idea of his ‘Dog’ poem. Nevertheless, Jamaica made its mark on ‘His Dog and Pilgrim’. Of the peculiar litany of names in the passage above, I have been able to identify five out of the seven as common names for Jamaican birds. “Long Dick” seems to be a contraction of “long hopping dick” (*Turdus Jamaicensis*); “Rickashay” is more commonly spelt “rickchay”—the Jamaican Becard (*Pachyramphus Niger*);<sup>34</sup> “Tell Bill” is short for “Tell-Bill-Willie” (*Symphearia Semipalmata*);<sup>35</sup> while “Willie Pee” and “John-to-Wit” are alternative names for a Greater Antillean Pewee (*Contopus Caribaeus*)<sup>36</sup> and a Black-Whiskered Vireo (*Vireo A. Altiloquus*) respectively.<sup>37</sup> Choughs are found in Jamaica, and “Willie Flea” could possibly be an alternative name for “Willie Pee”. “Toms Hope” and “Cum See” from earlier in the passage are both places in Jamaica, “Mud River” and “Just My Luck” may also be local names for places, or they may be Prince’s own confections. In ‘F.T. Prince, Milton and the Scholar-Poet’, Michael Molan details and defends the ways in which Prince employs the epic or Miltonic catalogue in his lyric poetry, explaining that:

When we examine the use of such lists in poems from his earliest collection onwards, we repeatedly find a self-reflexive quality, as the purpose and rhetorical effect of each list is worked into the thematic texture of the poem.<sup>38</sup>

It is unlikely that many of Prince’s readers would realise that the catalogue in ‘His Dog and Pilgrim’ was one of Jamaican birds, but they might very well guess they are birds—it helps that most of the names are derived from imitations of the birds’ calls. This is, then, puzzling—that Prince should seemingly have his dog answer to the names of birds. The confusion, however, lies not with us, but with the dog. We know this dog can play parrot, repeating things it has heard without necessarily grasping their significance, and here it seems to be doing the same—repeating words or phrases that humans *have* given to animals, but not to him.<sup>39</sup> Most dogs will react to a word spoken to them, perhaps cocking an ear or tilting their head, eager to work out what it is you are trying to communicate. It seems often surprising to me that though dogs have no true language of their own, they seem well aware of the presence of language, just

<sup>34</sup> <<http://www.10000birds.com/local-names-for-the-birds-of-jamaica.htm>> Accessed 26<sup>th</sup> January 2018.

<sup>35</sup> <<https://sora.unm.edu/sites/default/files/journals/auk/v008n01/p0064-p0080.pdf>> Accessed 26<sup>th</sup> January 2018.

<sup>36</sup> James Bond, *A Field Guide to the Birds of the West Indies*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1999), p.154.

<sup>37</sup> Pete Dunne, *Essential Field Guide Companion*, (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), p.436.

<sup>38</sup> Molan, RFTP, p.90.

<sup>39</sup> Or perhaps they have—my grandmother had a small black dog called ‘Chough’, we knew her as ‘Chuffy’.

## OLD DOG

beyond their reach. Hearing an unknown word addressed to them, they are aware that it signifies *something*, whether something to chase or someone to greet or something to gnaw at, and are keen to work out what. But they can go no further, they are continually in a linguistically liminal state, aware of this great network of human thought, but unable ever to understand:

wanting  
perpetually

never out nor in

(CP, 219)

There is another, secondary, way that this litany affects the reader. After the sudden movement of the dog taking off, “dancing ‘here I go’/—laughing and so/away,/hey”, the flurry of birdnames seem to be the very things that he is leaping and snatching at—they are on the page but we see them in the air, and him excitedly in the middle—like a cartoon dog surrounded by diving and ducking birds, a dance of words.

Writing of the development of Prince’s employment of the catalogue, Molan notes that:

A change can be observed in the poems published after Prince has established his academic credentials in Southampton. The catalogue now offers a greater challenge to interpretation and points further beyond the bounds of the poem than the self-contained listing of a piece like Chaka.<sup>40</sup>

Before going on to show how Prince uses the catalogue in ‘Gregory Nazianzen’ to stand “in opposition to his literary benefactor [Milton] in a strikingly un-Milthonic manner: a defence of the Trinity that is self-deprecating and forgiving,” and in ‘Strafford’ “in order to demonstrate the rhetorical and political dangers of magnificence.”<sup>41</sup> Certainly both extraordinary feats, and richly unpacked by Molan, but Prince could also use the catalogue to point beyond the bounds of a poem for lighter, more whimsical ends. There is a traditional Jamaican work song that bears some resemblance to the passage we have been examining called ‘Chi Chi bud O’. Being a traditional song, the lyrics have many variants, here is one version:

Bud O! Bud O!  
Chi-chi bud O!  
Some a dem a halla  
Some a bahl  
  
Cling-cling, pitchary,  
Some a dem a halla,

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<sup>40</sup> Molan, *RFTP*, p.91.

<sup>41</sup> Molan, *RFTP*, p.93 and p.95.

## OLD DOG

Some a bahl

Chi-chi bud O!  
Dacta bud a cunning bud,  
Hard bud fe dead  
Cling-cling, groun' dove, hawk, stark  
John-crow, duck,  
Toady, John-to-wit, hoppin dick<sup>42</sup>

The song is usually sung as a call-response, each bird preceded by the phrase “Some a”, traditionally sung by one person, with the others all responding “Some a dem a halla / Some a bahl”. At other times the song is sung as it appears above, with the list of birds sung one after another.<sup>43</sup> The lyrics above are recorded in Martin and Pamela Mordecai’s *Culture and Customs of Jamaica*, and they have this to say of the song’s meaning:

Work, often back-breaking, was the central reality of life for blacks, slaves and free: roads to be cut through hillsides paved with stone, marl, and asphalt. Both men and women did heavy labor, though not necessarily at the same tasks. Singing, in time to the heave and bite of the pick-axe, cutlass, or mallet, made the work go faster; work songs were therefore encouraged by the planters. But some of the songs were commentaries, too, in codes that the singers alone understood [...] This apparent litany of Jamaican birds—sung in a rhythmic call and response to the heaving of picks, and with much miming—is in fact a mocking list of people, whites and blacks, whom the singers would all know.<sup>44</sup>

The song is still popular in Jamaica—it is not unthinkable that while he was there Prince might have heard a performance of ‘Chi Chi bud O’, or found a recording of it. The specific birds chosen depended on the situation and the singer, and so we could easily imagine a version that contains a rickashay, chuff, tell-bill, willie-pee, willie-flea, and a john-to-wit. But Prince was effectively a tourist in this situation, listening to a song in a code that he could not have understood—his military expertise in code-breaking notwithstanding. He may, however, have felt or known that there was a meaning behind the apparently senseless litany, one that he was not able—or not allowed—to grasp. Certainly the dog believed there to be meaning there, behind the vague song of human speech, and it is part of his essential condition to have that meaning just out of reach, the bone in the cupboard, unable to comprehend—or not allowed to.

## SLEEPING DOG

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<sup>42</sup> Martin Mordecai and Pamela Mordecai, *Culture and Customs of Jamaica*, (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001), pp.137-8.

<sup>43</sup> As, for example, in the recording found at <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mFAw35gTxgI>> Accessed 19/09/2018. I have been unable to find any more information about this particular recording.

<sup>44</sup> Mordecai and Mordecai, pp.137-8.

## OLD DOG

It seems then St. Rock travelled through Italy in the fourteenth century with a Jamaican dog. This is an incongruous and unexpected state of affairs, to say the least, but there may be a reason behind it. When Prince first conceived the idea of a poem about a dog, he intended it to be a poem about the dog's relationship to his master—the theme of St Rock was only to be a subplot, as he described on 15<sup>th</sup> April 1974:

The man he adores is only an earthly inferior version of the real master (he is told) who is in heaven; “and this man is his son”(.) The \*....\*{master} ages, but less than the dog. He laughs with his friend (the dog can't). The dog in dreams re-lives the story of Tobit, and the legend of St Rock; angels, \*....\*{visions}, etc. (Twitches in dreams.)<sup>45</sup>

This early scheme for the poem was dropped, but when Prince returned to the poem, in 1982, one element was retained:

April 18, 1982: Title: ?Dog's Life? xx The Rock story shd. be dog's dream, of service, of really doing something for the Lord, the loved one (the 'leader').<sup>46</sup>

The idea that the poem could be a dog's dream was one which repeatedly returned to Prince, and which helped him at various points towards the particular class of expression he was searching for. Immediately following the above entry, Prince copied out a paragraph on the poem from 1975:

Singing dog, rather than dancing? but think all the same of ballet, to try to get everything formalised, musicalised. Must be no realism in sense of supposed transcript or notation of consciousness. Is this where dream can be used? if it is all a dream, a re-living or ~~re~~imaging, not a real walk, chase, etc.<sup>47</sup>

I have written that the meaning of the poem is at one remove from the words, sometimes swimming into focus, sometimes swimming out again, and that this divorce between the words and the meaning is a way of portraying a dog's half-comprehension of human goings-on, but the effect is very similar to that of a dream—where events and their meanings are ever so slightly detached from each other, so that an apparently trivial thing can hold great joy or doom. In the final published version the suggestion that the whole thing could be a dog's dream survives only in one passage, near the end of the poem:

for now, who is this hound?  
why I could swear

the story an old story,  
but happens to be me

who sit and sigh and  
then stretch out and snuffle,

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<sup>45</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/10.

<sup>46</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/14.

<sup>47</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/14.

## OLD DOG

all give up and lie

but even, ever

so tired

glorify

and see by dreams we save

whole populations

(CP, 228-9)

It is barely a suggestion: we can read the passage with a straight face and merely see St. Rock's dog stretched out in its dotage, remembering past glories—but wink once and the dog has forty. A poem about the great pilgrimage undertaken by St. Rock and his faithful hound, or a poem about an old Jamaican dog sleeping and dreaming of adventures in fourteenth-century Italy.

Almost any poem can be read as a dream if one is inclined, and should we do so we would be bequeathed a sort of shadow library, filled with doppelgängers, a second corpus. Mimesis, by its very existence, opens up the disquieting possibility of further levels of imitation, the copy suggests the copy. But 'His Dog and Pilgrim' particularly encourages us to read the poem *twice*, and we can see this most strongly in section IV, in a passage that comes just after Rock has recovered from the plague:

and now foranever we

walk and away and

work

such wonders!

—look, you'll see

him stand as for a picture

standing with his hat

put off and slung, and wooden

dish and bat

and shows the sore

high

up on his bare thigh:

the tunic lifted and held by,

grey duffle hanging by its knee,

the russet hose undone and down,

pulled down to low above the knee

## OLD DOG

he looks at you, ignoring me

and on the smooth  
pale skin displays  
below the groin  
that visitation

(CP, 226)

The passage begins with the dog remembering and rejoicing in its good service to Rock, and in the good deeds they do together, and he invites us to view his master, telling us what we would see if we did—an imagined tableau. Pointedly, the dog tells us Rock will “stand as for a picture”, but as the passage goes on we begin to wonder if this was not a piece of doggy dissembling, or at the least confusion. The gradual shift from future to present tense sets the first alarm bell off, the second is sounded by the line “he looks at you, ignoring me”—why so specific? and why, in this imagined scene, does Rock seem to be outside of the artist-dog’s control? Gradually the thought begins to take hold that we, or the dog, really *are* looking at a picture—an icon, or a painting of St. Rock, with all his traditional assemblage of iconography. The vertigo of anachronism is sudden, and St Rock’s dog seems less real than the old dog that “twitches in dreams”. We become suspicious that what we have been reading has been no more than a mere “dance of words”—the dog is in danger of fading into irrelevance.

## THE WOUND OF MEANING

As the previous chapter illustrated, Prince was continually seeking sources of liberation from the present in the past, ways out of the impasse that immobilises. My argument has been that he found this in a communion of styles that is analogous to musical Neoclassicism, and in a fictional restoration of broken traditions. But this is not the whole story. Prince was still haunted by a spectre from much earlier in his career—that of the luxurious danger of ‘pure poetry’, the Sibyl’s concern. It is out of this disquiet that the final matter of ‘His Dog and Pilgrim’ emerges, and brings with it Prince’s most subtly damning indictment of the poetry of his day.

Just at the moment at which we realise that we—or the dog—might have been dreaming, is heard a second, imagined, voice in what is the most unsettling passage of ‘His Dog and Pilgrim’:

he looks at you, ignoring me

and on the smooth  
pale skin displays  
below the groin

## OLD DOG

that visitation

\*

discoloured, spiteful

like a dead

snake's head

or rotten-ripe, a plum

bruised or a nasty jewel

or blind a broken-lidded eye

that leers away confidingly,

as if it thought back to itself:

‘well, they can see—

there now!

without *me...*’

(CP, 226-7)

The plague-sore was a key element of St. Rock's iconography, placed, as Prince describes,

...in his groin or on his thigh. I remember a panel by Crivelli in the National Gallery, which is not now exhibited, in which the *bubo* is emphasised in gruesome detail.<sup>48</sup>

In Prince's poem the boil is given a voice, however briefly, whose menacing tone is in stark contrast to the dog's larking bark. It offers to us—the viewers of the picture and the readers of the poem—a challenge: to imagine the story of St. Rock without the wound, without his being struck down by the plague. We would be left with the mere pilgrimage, which is, as Prince tells us, “in itself one of the least demanding of spiritual gestures.”<sup>49</sup> Yes, there would have been the miracles, the healing of the wounded, but—as the dog further explains—no apotheosis, no sainthood:

without ‘that’, we and it

without, to wit

all three,

he, it

and me

his walk had be

---

<sup>48</sup> *PNQ*.

<sup>49</sup> *PNQ*.

## OLD DOG

no more than mine,  
but now divine

(CP, 229)

The pilgrimage would have been no more than the dog walk, no more than the dog-critic's "collating", "dating", and "snufflicating", no more than a mere simulacrum—the pretence of the neoclassic that fails to come true. It is only the wound—as the dog knows and the wound knows—that gives meaning to the pretence, and allows—as it were—Pinocchio to become a real boy.

In the letter to W.G. Shepherd dated January 27<sup>th</sup> 1989, Prince explained that "In the detailed treatment of the dog's walk I added another symbol of great activity which is a substitute for 'the real thing'; in this case scholarship and criticism, which is{are} parasitic on, and a substitute for, the literature they study. (Not, I trust, a fouling of my own nest, since my own scholarship has been derived from my commitment to 'creative' writing)"<sup>50</sup> In comparing F.T. Prince with Stevie Smith, Will May makes the point that "a writer who accused professors of covering poets 'with the vile slime of commentary' is not likely to take her place alongside a poet best known for his Milton scholarship."<sup>51</sup> Perhaps Prince's and Smith's feelings on literary criticism were not so dissimilar. After all "vile slime" is not really much worse than the particularly fragrant medium a dog uses for "dating" (CP, 216) a vital piece of evidence when on a walk.

In conversation with Howell, Prince demurs from describing poetry as a wound, instead preferring to describe it as the gum or sap from a wound.<sup>52</sup> The image of the wound holds a special significance in Prince's work, and first occurs in "The Moonflower".<sup>53</sup>

I too feel that caress—

Delicate, serene and lonely, peaceful, strange  
To the intellect and the imagination,  
The touch with which reality wounds and ravishes  
Our inmost desolation.

(CP, 35)

Later, in 'Soldiers Bathing' he kisses the "wound in thought". It is reality that wounds, and what is wounded in each case is a pristine reflection, an untouched simulacrum—thought and inmost desolation. These are perfect, self-enclosed, but ultimately unreal things, as the Sibyl knew Apollo's deep veneer to be. And the wound in each case is something to be venerated or cherished as much as avoided, it is what

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<sup>50</sup> PFTP MS328 A4165/1.

<sup>51</sup> Will May, "Obscure and Doubtful: F.T. Prince, Stevie Smith, and Legacy", *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary British and Irish Poetry*, ed. Peter Robinson, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.79.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. p.103.

<sup>53</sup> First, that is, if we take Prince's word that "The Moonflower" is an early poem—I am suspicious, and have found no evidence of it in the archive earlier than other poems from *Soldiers Bathing*.

gives meaning to the unreal—the wounded tree gives forth the sap of poetry, but without the wound in the first place the sap is mere excess. In 1980 Prince had been considering “taking up the deadlock of the Sybil”—the problems he had found writing the poem had returned to him, or had never left, and here he gives one answer to them. The simulacra, the deep veneer, the untouched and untouchable perfection of ‘pure poetry’ must be wounded—it seems—by reality, by meaning.

The problem of ‘pure poetry’, the problem of late nineteenth-century aestheticism, might seem at first to have little to do with the poetry of Prince’s day, but Prince held that the problem persisted. In the most explicitly provocative passage in ‘Voice and Verse’ Prince outlined how the contemporary poetic practice he witnessed about him was in fact a reprise of the practices of aestheticism, only in another guise:

The paradoxical outcome of the new art and poetry is that it does not in fact bring a liberation from form, but rather an obsession with it. What we have in practice is a new aestheticism. Current modes in art and poetry lead to a hypertrophy of technique; and what you say becomes far less important than how you say it. Indeed, the question of what you say will hardly be considered, if you appear to be saying it in a striking or unusual way. What is this but another version of the doctrine of ‘Art for Art’s sake’? [...] Just as in the nineteenth century aestheticism was supported by the growth of the ‘imaginary museum’ of the art of the past and alien cultures—exemplified by such poetry as Gautier’s *Émaux et Cameés* and Hérédia’s *Trophées*—so our modern aestheticism feeds on the vast growth of cultural references and communication.<sup>54</sup>

By freeing themselves from prepared forms, writers had become obsessed with their absence, with form in the abstract—it is the inverted movement of the artist’s plea to his patron: “I wish for liberty, let me then be tied”. The poetic culture around him had reverted to the deep veneer of aestheticism, and Prince lays the buck firmly in American soil, and at the feet of his erstwhile disciple Ashbery.<sup>55</sup>

Hazzard writes of Prince and Ashbery’s correspondence that “the sparring and aesthetic positioning which characterise their early correspondence was soon replaced, however, by simpler forms of mutual appreciation and support.”<sup>56</sup> But this is only to tell half the story: Prince continued to maintain a deep distrust of Ashbery’s aesthetic project, whilst concurrently remaining on warm and friendly terms with the poet himself. In a letter to W.G. Shepherd in 1986, Prince responded to a question about his marginal position in twentieth-century poetry:

One can’t help having human twinges of resentment or envy over the valuation of So-and-so or Such-and-such, but I find the way to settle those feelings is to ask myself if I would want to have written what they write.<sup>57</sup>

About precisely *which* So-and-sos or Such-and-suches Prince was thinking of, we find a clue in a journal from seven years earlier, in 1979:

<sup>54</sup> Prince, ‘Voice and Verse’.

<sup>55</sup> This should not be understood as meaning that Prince commended the British poets instead—his letters to Harwood in the British Library make it clear that he did not, though a different set of concerns are at play. It was the American situation, however, that held the most interest for Prince—he batted aside the British to focus on the Americans.

<sup>56</sup> Hazzard, *RFTP*, p.109.

<sup>57</sup> Letter dated September 12<sup>th</sup> 1986. PFTP MS328 A4165/1.

## OLD DOG

J. Ashbery: Thinking ‘Thank God I don’t write like that’, a transparent cage of statements, non statements, every word leading to a previous impasse<sup>58</sup>

And in a letter to Lee Harwood from 1967, Prince implicitly linked Ashbery to the new aestheticism he would come to define in ‘Voice and Verse’:

I find a parallel in Ashbery’s latest writing, since he too seems to have discovered how to write longer and longer poems, which communicate less and less (*The Skaters* is an example). I don’t underestimate the talent and skill which are needed to weave these extraordinary structures—I am not likely to take them for granted, because I know I couldn’t do them myself, however hard I tried. But in so far as I have any clue as to what Ashbery is doing now, it seems to me that he deliberately makes every part of a poem cancel out every other—nothing leads anywhere but back to a starting-point. This may be ingenious, and may be meant to be subtle or profound, but to me it seems consistent self-frustration—the abuse of language, which is a medium of communication, to communicate that one can communicate nothing. I don’t agree with the point made, but even if one does, it can be nothing but a bore, repeated over and over again. Mallarmé ran the risk of boring in the same way, and Wallace Stevens went ahead and did it.<sup>59</sup>

The phrase “extraordinary structures” bears some resemblance to some of the phrases from Prince’s earlier career—the “instruments”, “machinery”, and “rich web” of ‘Words from Edmund Burke’, the “civil structures of a war-like elegance” of ‘Epistle to a Patron’, the “muscular convexities” of ‘The Old Age of Michelangelo’. We hear in it an echo of the accusation of pure poetry, of aestheticism, of extraordinary structures for extraordinary structures’ sake. Prince goes on, somewhat spikily, to link this uncommunicative and pure poetry to the lifestyle of the New York poets:

I don’t think your poetry is as intellectual as Ashbery’s or Stevens’, and personally I consider that a mercy. But you leave me with something of the same effect of garrulity—of having found a way to patter on. Yet at the heart of it I perceive that there is a lived reality, and what puzzles me and, if you like, irritates me, is why so much sensitiveness and intelligence and truth to one’s own sense of things should tend to be so self-defeating—to waste itself for want of some ingredient which I can’t define, I have of course set myself to try to analyse it, {\*}, and I see it provisionally as part of that special cosmopolitan Bohemian intellectual way of life which is possible in Western Europe and America nowadays. It is a quite unusually secure and cosy kind of Bohemianism, really more American than anything else, and nothing could be more alien to the European past—more unrelated, that is, to the practical and intellectual problems which writers have had to be concerned with, to some extent, for the last 400 or 500 years. That is why the poetry you and they write seems to be so liberated, so ‘pure’. But it is liberated because the reality of life, for you, is also liberated from all problems and concerns except the artistic ones (and I suppose, a few minor practical ones which are easily solved within the ‘artistic’ world).  
{\* The poetry, not the ‘ingredient’}.<sup>60</sup>

But Prince *would* define the missing “ingredient” sixteen years later in ‘His Dog and Pilgrim’—what was missing was the boil, the plague-sore, the wound of meaning. The New York poets, as Prince understood them, lived in too cosy a world, a pure and liberated world that mirrored the pure and liberated poetry they wrote.

In a brief note in his journal, Prince finally settles on the name of his new poem, and also outlines the source of his mistrust of Ashbery’s poetry:

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<sup>58</sup> MS328 A834/3/1/12.

<sup>59</sup> Letter dated 30<sup>th</sup> August 1967. Add MS 88998, Lee Harwood Papers, British Library.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

New Title: His Dog and Pilgrim.—An Ashbery poem strives to remain in the realm of poetry; but that is what all bad poetry does, while even poor poetry can be redeemed by striving to do more than that.<sup>61</sup>

‘His Dog and Pilgrim’ dramatizes the wounding of a pretend unreality by reality—poetry too must be wounded by reality to become real. What Prince finds in Ashbery’s work is the “abuse of language”, language designed in such a way as to “communicate nothing”—what Karl Shapiro admiringly termed Ashbery’s “utter denial of intrinsic *logos*”.<sup>62</sup> In *Personal Notes and Queries*, after describing Crivelli’s depiction of St. Rock, Prince comments that “...the brutality of the early iconography is modified later, until today we have figures with a discreet sore placed, absurdly, on the shin.” The wound is a sexual wound as much as it is a spiritual wound. In a particularly disparaging moment, Prince asked himself, in a short gnomic note, “Ashbery a moral eunuch?”<sup>63</sup> The New York poets were seen by Prince, paradoxically, as both disfigured and inviolate—morally impotent *because* they were inviolate.

To prefigure meaning in poetry as a wound is to understand it as a marring, a flawing of the poetic surface, and therefore as something alien—or the effect of something alien. A poor poem can be redeemed by striving to do more than merely remain within poetry, by attempting the self-wounding leap to reality. There is a strong division in Prince’s thought between poetry and reality—in ‘To a Friend on his Marriage’ he explains to his friend his aim in writing the poem is to “deliver you up to fiction” (CP, 29). Poetry is fiction, and reality is alien to fiction—it must come through only by wounding the fictive, by making the fiction, the neoclassic, imperfect. A good poem is in some way a flawed poem—like St. Rock it must be wounded to escape the wonderful flawless but ultimately meaningless pretend-world of poetry. It is a messy affair, and necessarily always an incomplete one, but it must yet be attempted.

When Prince describes Christ as ‘pure’ poetry<sup>64</sup> we see, perhaps, the dim foundation of this theory. Christ, the divine, flawless thing, was wounded by reality, by what *Drypoints of the Hasidim* called “this-world”. But without the wounding—the crucifixion and resurrection—the story of Christ would have been monstrous and unreal, it would have meant *nothing*. In some stray verses on the back of an unpublished poem entitled ‘A Talking of the Love of God’, Prince gives Christ the sobriquet “wounded foot”—an echo of another tradition, of Oedipus. What Prince is saying is nothing new, we have always known that wounds can proffer the power of prophecy, meaning, holiness, even paradoxically wholeness. Jacob wounded in the thigh, Oedipus self-blinded by the vengeance of gods, Odin stuck on Yggdrasil. Meaning occurs at the point where the divine meets reality, where the flawless is flawed, and where the sap meets the tree’s wound. In an age in which we no longer believe our poets, or want to believe them, where we look more for play than prophecy, expecting them to be intellectual clowns and entertainers

<sup>61</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/15.

<sup>62</sup> Karl Shapiro, ‘The Meaning of Meaninglessness: The Poetry of John Ashbery’, *The Poetry Project Newsletter*, No. 30, 1<sup>st</sup> December 1975.

<sup>63</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/12. The entry is undated but is from 1979.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. p.52.

## OLD DOG

rather than the subtle teachers they have always been, Prince's work is vital, as it was preoccupied with finding a way towards—to borrow Peter Robinson's phrase—"a troubled attempt at truth".<sup>65</sup> Necessarily troubled, that is, because wounded.

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<sup>65</sup> Robinson, *RFTP*, p.58.

## EIKONS AND SHADOWS



(PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/14)

In 1941 Prince had sent a set of devotional poems to T.S. Eliot, presumably with a proposal that they could be published in a joint volume with Lawrence Toynbee (although Eliot's reply seems to suggest Prince was keen to excuse himself from this arrangement) but the proposed volume did not manifest itself, and the set of poems does not seem to have survived. Eliot's reply was to be typical of Prince's gradual dismissal from Faber and Faber's hallowed canon:

Dear Prince,

I should perhaps apologise for the delay in dealing with the poems you sent me on September 11 but I am always very deliberate in considering volumes of verse unless they are very bad verse. In the first place, we certainly should not want to publish a joint volume by yourself and Toynbee or by any two poets whatsoever, unless there was some obvious ad hoc justification for such a collaboration. You can explain to Toynbee perhaps that there is nothing in the least personal about this, it is just that there would be no demand for such a volume by two people. I hope this will make it easy for you to extricate yourself without his feeling hurt. Second, I think that in normal times a volume of devotional verse might be published with appropriate illustrations, but illustrated books of this type are now out of the question. That leaves the final question of publishing these poems by yourself{themselves}. My final judgement after much deliberation is that it would probably not be worth while [sic] to publish the religious verse by itself. I do not think that it is quite strong enough and in going out for the qualities which are attainable in this form, I think you have had to jettison a good deal of what people like in your earlier work and which they will miss. I should be more inclined to incorporate the devotional poems or some of them in a larger and more miscellaneous volume. Several of these I like very much especially No.8 and No.9 but it is a type of poetry in which one can never afford to be anything else than [sic] one's best and I think there are some weak spots in the collection. I hope that your duties whether here or abroad will not mean complete suspension of your work.

With all best wishes,

Yours ever,

T.S. Eliot

The poems in question are not to be found in the Eliot Collection, but Prince did send a photocopy of Eliot's letter to the collection in 1984, appending a short note explaining that the poems were "pieces which I later discarded, except for some lines which found a place in 'Drypoints of the Hasidim'."<sup>1</sup> It is likely, then, that at least two of the lines he refers to are those of the isolated gnomic couplet that begins section II of 'Drypoints':

To believe is above all to be in love,  
And suffer as men do who are in love.

(CP 153)

Lines which also begin a stray poem in the archive:

To believe is above all to be in love,  
And suffer as men do who are in love;  
And therefore I rebel, deny, despair,  
Distrust, am jealous of the very air;  
Often am self-abandoned, sunk in grief,  
And often lose you and sometimes belief;  
Until I can do nothing more and you  
Pity me for the things I cannot do,  
And then my love revives and lifts its head,  
Having received a little piece of bread.<sup>2</sup>

Beneath the poem Prince had written "1940?" which would tally with Eliot's letter. If, as seems likely, this were one of the poems Prince had sent to Eliot then Eliot's response is understandable—it is certainly not Prince's strongest work: the final couplet might have the self-effacing sweetness of a Herbert lyric but the middle section seems to lose its way, the rhythm limping and unpersuasive. In discarding the poem Prince was judicious to retain the extraordinary identical-rhymed opening couplet, which does as much work as the rest of the poem, and is better suited as an epigram. It is possible that two more of the poems were those that were eventually published in *The Windmill* in February 1946, which are equally unemphatic, consisting of some rather dry philosophising about how the soul reacts to the sexual act with faint overtones of Yeats (see for example the lines: "Tragedy's our religion: for the rest, / Whatever satisfies or satisfied / Personal loveliness or personal pride"). However, this would at most account for three of the poems, and we know from Eliot's letter that there were at least nine, so perhaps it would be unwise to attempt to judge the fairness or otherwise of Eliot's response. It is enough to say Prince felt—prompted by Eliot—that the attempt to write a set of devotional poems was a failure,

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<sup>1</sup> My thanks to Nancy Fulford from the T.S. Eliot Collection for finding this for me.

<sup>2</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/2/1/4/26.

enough of a failure, in fact, for him to ignore Eliot's suggestion that they should be incorporated into a miscellaneous volume of poems—none of them appear in Prince's next volume *Soldiers Bathing*.<sup>3</sup>



Figure 6 'Morning' by F.T. Prince, PFTP MS328 A834/1/2.

<sup>3</sup> Though it's not unimaginable that 'The Question' and 'The Book' could be two survivors.

One intriguing thing that Eliot's letter reveals is that the proposed volume was to have been illustrated, though it is not clear by whom: Prince was an accomplished draughtsman and Lawrence Toynbee was an artist, though it is not inconceivable that a third party was to be involved. Eliot demurs on this, citing the general belt-tightening that the war had caused. Prince never again requested any of his volumes be illustrated, though given the personal conviction many of his later publishers had in his work he might easily have tried to do so. It is significant that the only volume of verse that Prince had apparently intended to be illustrated was a volume of devotional verse. The visual arts, and especially Italian art, had fascinated Prince throughout his life and remained a constant presence in his poetry—from the Leonardo-figure in 'Epistle to a Patron' right through to Michelangelo and Caravaggio in *Walks in Rome* and on to Van Gogh in his short satire 'On a Report that in some Rest Homes Residents who are Depressed will be Charged at a Higher Rate' from *Senilia*. In a 1978 radio interview with Susan Howe, Prince explained the origins of this fascination:

Howe: You said in the workshop that—I heard—that you first wanted to be a painter. Love of art seems to be in a lot of your early poems, Epistle to a Patron, The Old Age of Michelangelo and Soldiers Bathing, but it's Italian Renaissance art that [inaudible]—

Prince: Well that goes back earlier too because I can remember in my boyhood, childhood even, that we used to take things like Arthur Mee's what's-it-called *The Children's Magazine* or *My Magazine*, or something like that.<sup>4</sup> The sort of thing that was published in England in the twenties with lots of pictures and he would give you pictures of Florence with sculpture and paintings and... for children, but I think that was probably the beginning of that feeling for Italy, from that rather unexpected sort of source.<sup>5</sup>

In the archive there are a series of precocious Beardsleyesque pen-and-ink illustrations from 1928—including three illustrating specific lines from Milton's 'Comus', one illustrating Keats's 'Lamia', and one illustrating an unknown poem, very possibly his own<sup>6</sup>—that evince Prince's early artistic talent (see Figure 6 and Figure 7). Later in life Charles Tomlinson would try to persuade Prince to take up art again,<sup>7</sup> and in his earlier years art at times seemed to offer the possibility of an alternative career:

1935

In London applied for post in V.& A., having decided to give up Eng. Lit. for art-history. Stayed in digs near Cromwell Road and read up Ital. Ren. sculpture in V. and A. library. Wrote An Epistle to a Patron.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The magazine in question could be either mentioned as both were magazines edited by Mee.

<sup>5</sup> April 21<sup>st</sup> 1978. <<http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Howe-Pacific.a.php>> Accessed 19/09/2018.

<sup>6</sup> The poem in question is as follows:

Round me the wilderness,  
Darkling and lonely—  
Wilderness only;  
Silently limitless,  
Lonely.....

<sup>7</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/4/1/16.

<sup>8</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/2.

Perhaps we should be thankful that Prince's first great poem about art was the outcome of this period, and not his turning away from literature. But the possibility remained with him—in a journal entry from eleven years later, in 1946, it reared its head again:

21 July: Went to Oxford Mon-Wed to see Peg & her baby. Seeing all the books on French painting at Blackwell's & Parker's, convinced myself I could yet be a painter,—if I gave up poetry. Day of delirium. (Yet I know I could be, could have been, a good painter).<sup>9</sup>

Prince considered the two to be, for him, mutually exclusive: only be a painter if he give up poetry, only be an art historian if he give up English literature.

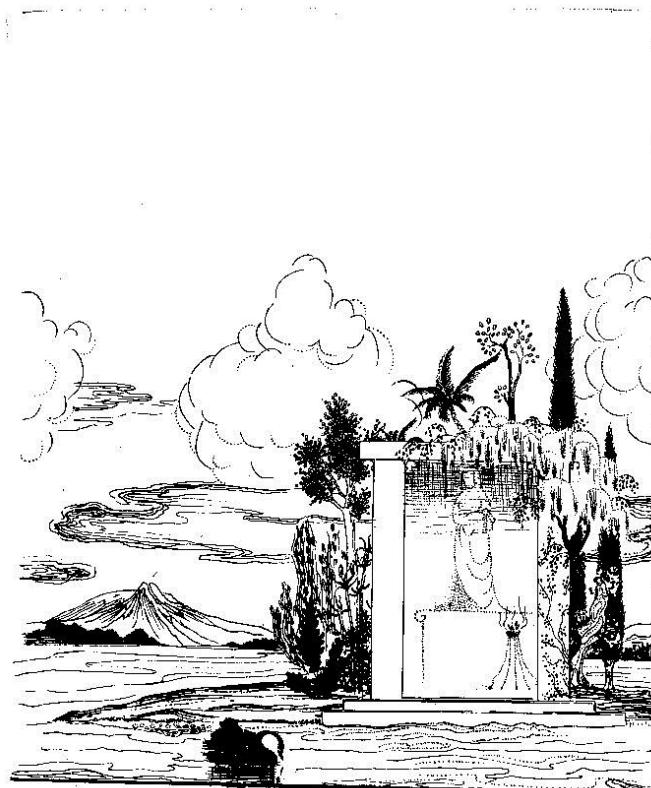


Figure 7 Pen and ink drawing in sketchpad. PFTP MS328 A834/1/2.

At the exact moment in 'His Dog and Pilgrim' at which we become aware that the dog might be dreaming, we find ourselves looking at a painting of St Rock. A journal entry from 1982 highlighted the importance of this moment:

What about idea that the picture is apotheosis (bubo a jewel, sacred wound), while dog lived through actuality (or dreams he did, of course). This cd. be interwoven with picture?<sup>10</sup>

The picture is apotheosis, it is the crystallization of the Rock story, but is also the moment in which Rock becomes St. Rock—'apotheosis' derives from the Greek ἀπό-+θεοῦντος, “to make a god of” and by the sixteenth century had come to mean the action of “elevation to divine status”.<sup>11</sup> Before Prince had

<sup>9</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/2/1/11 3rd Journal.

<sup>10</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/14.

<sup>11</sup> OED.

settled on a return to the dog poem he abandoned in the mid-seventies, and just after he had completed ‘The Yüan Chén Variations’, he had asked himself “the usual question after finishing a poem – ‘Where do I go from here?’”<sup>12</sup> Eight days later he began to see a possibility:

April 5: poem: The Naked Mass. I see this, it could be my Piers Plowman. The naked Christ on the Cross at the centre, over all, the naked priests giving out his body and blood; the whole of humanity stretching out beyond this focus, peripherically, doing ‘their thing’ but nakedly, in nakedness. Should it be ‘Instructions to a Painter’? Piers Plowman implies a vision.<sup>13</sup>

His *Piers Plowman*; the poem—some great religious scene—never apparently came to fruition, but what is striking is the pictorial bent of Prince’s mind when meditating on this idea. He sees the poem, Christ is “at the centre”, humanity is placed “peripherically”—the poem seems to take its first form as a painting. ‘Instructions to a Painter’ would be one way to escape back into poetry, but the religious core of the poem would be the painted image, whether real or imagined.<sup>14</sup>

In the summer of 1982, just after completing ‘His Dog and Pilgrim’, Prince returned to the idea of a pictorial devotional poem in a most striking way. There are four pages of notes in the archive that suggest that Prince attempted a visual poem (which he gave the helpfully banal title “Visual”) that was to render the Nativity in a hybrid mixture of art and poetry. The notes are nebulous, and are not explained or glossed in any way, so it is unclear exactly how he imagined the finished piece would be displayed (for example, would an external painter or draughtsman be involved? would it have been displayed as an artwork or as a book? was there to be only one scene portrayed?), or indeed if it were meant to be displayed at all. The overall scheme for the image-poem seems to be given by the sketch at the bottom-right of Figure 8. In this brief scrawl we can make out the figure of the kneeling Virgin at the centre—which corresponds to the figure of the Virgin at the bottom-left of Figure 8—with the star above her and the infant in front of her—which corresponds to the figure of the infant at the centre of Figure 8. Around the Virgin’s head and body flow the words “In Bethlehem she bore him then and now again for you and them”, with arrows indicating, presumably, the direction of reading. The arrows around the head of the infant Christ are particularly revealing of the ambition of the project—not only do they flow around the infant’s body, they also flow around his halo, turning back on themselves to do so. Various areas of each composition are marked with numbers, as an anatomical drawing. We can only guess what these referred to, whether words, lines, or something else entirely. The numbering of the infant’s body is particularly detailed: the intensity of signification—whatever it was meant to be—is brightest around the infant Christ.

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<sup>12</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/13.

<sup>13</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/13.

<sup>14</sup> In a separate journal entry three days later, Prince considered writing “a poem on Auden, Essay on Auden, which would absorb The Naked Mass which would be its climax of vision.”

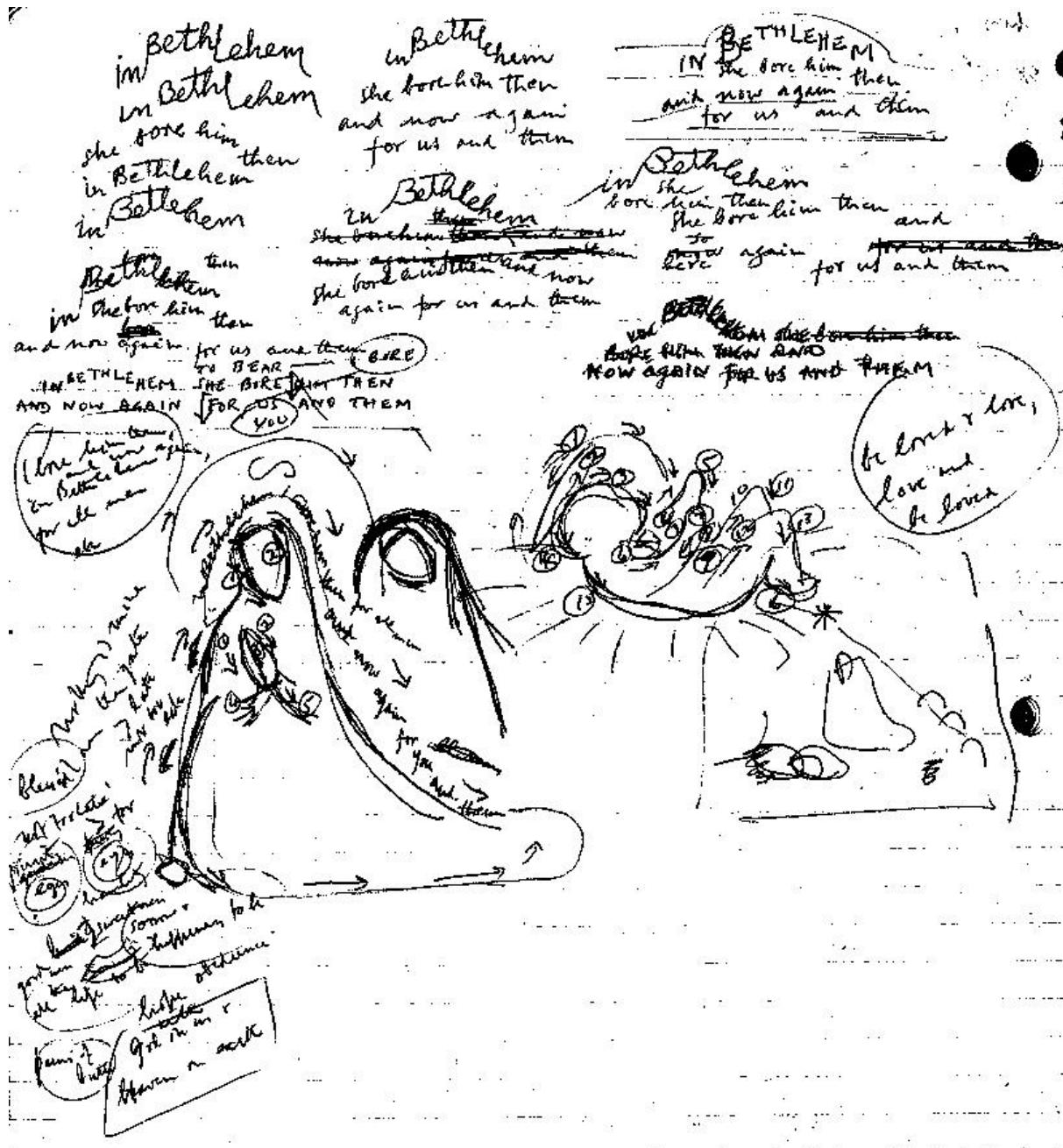


Figure 8. Page from PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/14.

## IMAGES OF THE VIRGIN

Prince's most substantial attempt to write a devotional poem came in 1949 with the publication of 'The Life of the Virgin'—a series of five scenes from the Virgin Mary's life: 'The Presentation in the Temple', 'The Annunciation', 'The Nativity', 'The Flight into Egypt', and finally 'The Death of the Virgin'. The poem was published in *The Month*, a magazine owned by the Society of Jesus and devoted to Christian thought. It begins with four sentences spread across eight lines, but the first verb only occurs in the eighth line:

Morning. A great clear platform.  
 All the pure brilliant air  
 Of this high town in the mountains.  
 The delicate wrought bulk  
 Of the prayer-house with its holies.  
 And a great wide flight of steps  
 Of marble, from the platform  
 Climbs to the coloured Temple.<sup>15</sup>

The lack of verbs gives the sequence a stillness, a mere report of static images. When a verb finally appears, it only brings the idea of movement, nothing actually moves—when we say steps climb to something, we do not mean they actually get up and climb over each other, what climbs is our line of sight as we look up them. Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch warned in ‘The Handicap of Poetry’ against “striving with words to embellish something stationary, vivid, demanding quick perception, better rendered by the brush”<sup>16</sup> before explaining that the idea of movement is crucial to literature’s validity:

This continuity of movement is the *first* redemption of literature from its handicap against painting. It has a competing vivacity of its own: it *goes* on: and merely by going on, it suggests life and challenges the *arrested moment* of any picture.<sup>17</sup>

The opening verse-paragraph of ‘The Life of the Virgin’ finds the zero point of this continuity of movement: the only thing that moves is our perception, our eyes. Witness also the preponderance of double-adjectives in this section: “great clear”, “pure brilliant”, “delicate wrought”, “great wide”—adjectives that qualify or change our perception of still things, but do not allow them to move. The poem opens by placing us in the position of observers of an image or a painting. The movement of our eyes up the steps of the temple prefigures and is joined by Mary who also climbs in the second verse-paragraph—I will quote it in full because the effect is cumulative.

The daughter of Joachim and Anne  
 Climbs the long steps to the Temple:  
 And the steps are like the sky,  
 Being gradual and joyful  
 And slowly purely pallidly  
 Ascending on themselves:  
 And the Temple is like the city,  
 The city is like the mountains

<sup>15</sup> F.T. Prince, ‘The Life of the Virgin’, *The Month*, (1949), No. 2. Hereafter quotations from TLotV will be referenced in brackets.

<sup>16</sup> Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, ‘The Handicap of Poetry’, *The Poet as Citizen, and other papers*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935), p.115.

<sup>17</sup> Quiller-Couch, p.119.

And the mountains are like God,  
 Who is the girdle of His people.

And that Israel,  
 That race of priests and lawyers,  
 Saints of Jews and Kings of Jews,  
 Shepherds and exiled princes, soldiers,  
 Generals of Jews,  
 Rebels and ingrates, obstinates, marauders,  
 Thieves of Jews,  
 Merchants and recusants, sealed to God's purposes  
 By the sign placed on their flesh

And the First Law and the Second  
 And the forty years and the four thousand years  
 Becomes this tiny climbing thing,  
 This figure of a child,  
 This little girl who mounts the enormous stairs  
 With difficulty, holding up  
 The small skirt of her dress,  
 Fixing her eyes above her, yet conscious of her parents' eyes  
 Fixed on her from below. And there

Alone upon the marble stairs,  
 Stiffly and solemnly, a stumpy doll,  
 She climbs towards that piety which knows  
 What she foreknows, has suffered and foresuffered  
 What she will know and suffer.

(TLotV, 295-6)

Our eyes climb, Mary climbs. A chain of objects takes us up and out—widening its range as it moves from the Temple to the city to the mountains to God—each image joined to the previous by a similitude; we are reminded of harmony, the harmonic order. The poem has to be still—were we to move we would break the symmetry that links us to Mary, and the Temple to God. This is an instant of apotheosis. And it is not only the regions of the spatial universe, but time is here enfolded into this instant: all the catalogue of Israel, its people, the law that her son would confirm, the law that her son would overrule, the years in the wilderness folded into the years of all creation, all of this is *seen* in the figure of Mary. She is the pinnacle of time, and all the history of the Jews prefigures “what she will know and suffer.” The passage is an attempt to capture, to paint “The concentration of the sky / Which sings upon the pinnacle of the Temple” (TLotV, 296).

Prince had sent ‘The Life of the Virgin’, alongside ‘The Old Age of Michelangelo’, to Eliot in 1949. Eliot’s response was lukewarm:

I have had your two poems which you sent me on the 5<sup>th</sup> February on my table for some time and have from time to time reread them. It doesn't seem to me that the first poem is anywhere near up to your best work. There is an alarming number of fumbling weak adjectives and the Blessed Virgin never seems to spring to life. The effect is rather as if you had been looking at fourteenth century paintings or fresco{e}s and had been inspired by them rather than by the real subject. At any rate the pictures which you conjure up in one's mind are those of early Italian painting; ~~on the other hand~~{not} a fresh sight of the original scenes.<sup>18</sup>

With Eliot's censure in mind, let us turn to a section from the third part of the poem, 'The Nativity'.

And in a friendly groin of rock  
 Half-cave, thatched with a straw-roof, cave of poverty,  
 Our supernatural nakedness is uttered.  
 It is cast up like a pearl on the grey shore  
 Or dead beach of the world under the pale sky, and a music  
 Gives the idea of space, a wreath of music  
 Woven by knots of angels.

(TLotV, 297)

The scene Prince conjures here certainly seems mannered and artificial, "not a fresh sight of the original scenes," and it does suggest something of a Renaissance painting. But the images are, at this stage, somewhat obscure: a wreath of music is particularly hard to *envise*, as we feel the poem wants us too. Happily, Prince returns to this image at the end of 'The Nativity':

She ignores the dance of angels  
 Over the cracked brown landscape,  
 The knot of ghostly music  
 And the embarrassment of the ox and the ass,

(TLotV, 298)

The angels are both weaving and dancing, and what they are weaving is a knot or a wreath, and what they are dancing to is music. It brings to mind the ring of dancing angels in that hallucinatory masterpiece by Botticelli, *The Mystic Nativity*, held in the National Gallery (see Figure 9).

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<sup>18</sup> Letter dated 17<sup>th</sup> March 1949. PFTP MS328 A834/4/1/6.



Figure 9. Sandro Botticelli, 'The Mystic Nativity', oil on canvas, inventory number: NG1034, The National Gallery, London, (1500), <<https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/sandro-botticelli-mystic-nativity>> [accessed 08/09/2018].

Looking closer, we can begin to see other details that correspond to Prince's poem. The "groin of rock", which is "half-cave, thatched with a straw-roof", or the "embarrassment of the ox and the ass":

That wait like heavy servants  
Not knowing what to do and standing  
First on one foot, then another,  
With sorrowful dull eyes

(TLotV, 298)

Were we to choose three adjectives to describe the expression that Botticelli gives the ox and the ass in his nativity, we might do very well with embarrassed, sorrowful, and dull. At the bottom of Botticelli's painting, we find an extraordinary and unnatural foreshortening so that he can include the pale road that winds up through a low cleft to the manger. This corresponds with Prince's

And far below, there opens  
Cracked wide, the pale brown valley  
Speckled with olive-trees, fields where the road they came  
Winds between low stone edges.

(TLotV, 297-8)

Where else could the road be but *in front* of the scene, the angels have to be "over the cracked brown landscape", but surely they have to be centred over the nativity itself—they can only be over the road as the top of the painting is over the bottom. Thus the road has to be in front. The image Prince gives us is decidedly flat.

The infant Jesus is described in two ways by Prince, one mysterious and divine, the other humbly human:

And the waters of eternity are whirled  
Through the world's fishing-net, cast up this pearl  
This golden O, this Other  
This Is, this glowing Nothing, and the child lies  
On a poor cloth on the earthen floor,  
Between the ox and the ass

(TLotV, 298)

All the characters in Botticelli's painting, Mary, Joseph, the angels, wear clothes of sumptuous colours: blues, greens, reds, whites, pinks, yellows. Only the Christ child is nude, and there is a startling otherness about his pale nude body: a humble state but a divine one. The arrangement of his limbs too are all akimbo, as if he were a creature that had just been washed into a net; precious and unexpected as a pearl;

the fisher of men caught in the world's fishing net. The position of the infant is not dissimilar to that found in Figure 8.

I have found no evidence in the archive that Prince had the Botticelli painting in mind when he wrote 'The Nativity', but there are enough correspondences between painting and poem to suggest a connection. In fact, the titles of each section of 'The Life of the Virgin' are generic titles given to numerous religiously-themed paintings: The Presentation at the Temple, The Annunciation, The Flight into Egypt, The Nativity, The Death of the Virgin. With this in mind, we return to 'The Presentation at the Temple', and find a clue near the end of the poem:

This little girl who mounts the enormous stairs  
 With difficulty, holding up  
 The small skirt of her dress,  
 Fixing her eyes above her

(TLotV, 296)

That little detail—that she holds up her skirt—suggests Titian's famous painting of the scene, *The Presentation of the Virgin at the Temple* (fig. 3), where the figure of Mary, as she ascends to the elders, holds up her skirt to stop herself from treading on the hem. It is a small detail, but I have not been able to find it in any other representation of the Virgin's presentation at the Temple. All the elements are there, the steps, the mountains, a synecdoche of the city in the crowd—if not much of the actual city itself. But the crowd also suggests the catalogue of the Jews in Prince's poem: the priests, lawyers, saints, kings, shepherds, exiled princes, soldiers, generals, rebels, ingrates, obstinates, marauders, thieves, merchants, and recusants. Prince's catalogue is a crowd seen *in detail*, as the artist has to see it.



Figure 10. Vecellio Tiziano, 'Presentation of the Virgin at the Temple', oil on canvas, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice, (1534-8), [https://www.nga.hu/html\\_m/t/tiziano/03\\_1530s/5presen.html](https://www.nga.hu/html_m/t/tiziano/03_1530s/5presen.html) [accessed 08/09/2018].

The second section of 'The Life of the Virgin' seems to combine two or possibly three versions of Fra Angelico's *Annunciation*: one housed in the Museo del Prado (hereafter the 'Madrid Annunciation',

Figure 11), one housed in the Church of Gesù in Cortona (the ‘Cortona Annunciation’, Figure 12), and one housed in the Convent of San Marco in Florence (the ‘Florence Annunciation’, Figure 13). Each is similar, but with a few significant differences. Each painting places the Virgin to the right side of the image, and Gabriel to the left. She sits in a columned porch, and Gabriel stands, bent forward, on the threshold—two of the paintings place the vanishing point to the right of the leftmost pillar, the Cortona Annunciation slightly to the left. The garden to the left of the porch corresponds in each to Prince’s description of being—

Tangled and sown with daisies,  
 The stretch of delicate grasses  
 Running towards the step below her feet is bowed and ruffled,  
 And carries on the backs of silvery waves  
 The breath brought by the Angel.

(TLotV, 297)

The bowing of the daisy-tangled grasses being a distinctive feature of all three, particularly so in the Cortona Annunciation, where they seem most reminiscent of waves. The most significant description of the Virgin herself seems to be suggested by the Florence Annunciation:

In a pale robe  
 She sits and prays  
 Under the low stone roof, the porch  
 That would be the first cloister  
 [...]  
 The blue cloak rumpled on the floor  
 Over her feet, she hesitates,  
 Leans forward,  
 And with soft open eyes  
 And lips that move no longer  
 Merely  
 Listens.

(TLotV, 296-7)



Figure 11 'Madrid Annunciation', tempera on panel,  
<[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e8/La\\_Anunciaci%C3%B3n%2C\\_by\\_Fra\\_Angelico%2C\\_from\\_Prado\\_in\\_Google\\_Earth\\_-\\_main\\_panel.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/e8/La_Anunciaci%C3%B3n%2C_by_Fra_Angelico%2C_from_Prado_in_Google_Earth_-_main_panel.jpg)> Accessed 20/09/2018.



Figure 12 'Cortona Annunciation', tempera on panel,  
<[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/96/Fra\\_Angelico\\_069.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/96/Fra_Angelico_069.jpg)>  
Accessed 20/09/2018.



Figure 13 'Florence Annunciation', fresco,  
 <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:ANGELICO,\\_Fra,\\_Annunciation,\\_1437-46\\_\(2236990916\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:ANGELICO,_Fra,_Annunciation,_1437-46_(2236990916).jpg)>  
 Accessed 20/09/2018.

The details correlate: the low stone roof of the porch, the pale robe, the blue cloak that is rumpled over her feet. But it is the description of the Virgin's face that seems particularly apposite. Compare the face of each Virgin:



There is a hardness to the eyes of the Madrid and Cortona Virgins, only the eyes of the Florence Virgin could be described as “soft open eyes”; there is also something about the incline of the neck—the head bent slightly further forward than the Cortona, tilted up more than the Madrid—that particularly expresses the idea of attentiveness, of merely listening.

The moment of the annunciation, the angel's speech, is conveyed by Prince through an unusual image:

This is the moment of arrested movement  
 And the locution of the Angel,  
 The significance of the silence,  
 And the soft flurry of silence,  
 When the music without notes

Ceases, and on the silent air the words form  
 Slowly, the gold speech shining  
 On the still air.

(TLotV, 296)

The angel is silent—the silence is emphasised three times—and the words instead appear on the air; the whole scene is as silent as a painting is, but nonetheless with *literal* meaning conveyed. Could we see it—our ears like Odysseus's sailors' blocked up—we would surely be able to hear the words, but Prince does not give us the words: for us the image is incomplete. Why does the angel speak to Mary in such a way? It seems at first to be a mere whimsy of the poet, an ornate shorthand for mysterious speech. But something else is happening: again, Prince is looking at a painting, and he means us to *see* the details he gives as a painting. It is the Cortona Annunciation he is looking at, and the gold speech, the annunciation, really does *shine* on the still air for it is written in gold leaf, the passage is literal. Prince does not see the Annunciation himself, he only sees what Fra Angelico saw. Prince is at two removes from the gold speech. This is second-hand religion—not to Eliot's taste, not “a fresh sight of the original scenes”—but it arises from a tradition that Eliot, despite the High Church flavour of his Anglicanism, could hardly be expected to countenance: that of *iconoduly*, the induction into—or meditation on—religious mystery through the veneration of icons, Catholic or Orthodox images of divinity. When Eliot wrote to Prince that “the effect is rather as if you had been looking at fourteenth century paintings or fresco{e}s and had been inspired by them rather than by the real subject” he was more accurate than perhaps he knew.

Eliot's comment that “the Blessed Virgin never seems to spring to life” seems to encapsulate the Catholic-Anglican confusion about the poem's aims. In describing the similarity between Eliot's ‘Journey of the Magi’ and Pound's ‘The Ballad of the Goodly Fere’, Russell Murphy unknowingly parrots Eliot's letter to Prince: he tells us that in Pound's poem “the imagined speaker, Simon the Zealot, is permitted to ‘come to life,’ as it were, to give a first-person account of Christ's crucifixion.”<sup>19</sup> This coming-to-life that Pound and Eliot achieve is achieved, Russell tells us later, by means of a psychological projection:

...in both 'Journey [of the Magi]' and 'Song [for Simeon]' Eliot is, consciously or unconsciously, projecting that personal spiritual psychology into characterizations of those who were among the first of humanity to experience firsthand an encounter with the enduring Christian mystery of the Incarnation.<sup>20</sup>

The figures ‘come to life’ through a method that involves the poet projecting his own psychology onto his characterizations. But Prince's method is different. It is the method of the outsider, the watcher and the worshipper.

<sup>19</sup> Russell E. Murphy, *Critical Companion to T. S. Eliot: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2007), p.276.

<sup>20</sup> Murphy, p.378.

In the margin of a typescript of ‘The Annunciation’, Eliot had underlined “We see the Virgin’s mind” and written “how? at this point”.<sup>21</sup> He was right to be concerned about the line—we don’t see the Virgin’s mind, nor should we need to for the poem to achieve its effect. The final section, ‘The Death of the Virgin’, illustrates the alternative potential of this poetic distance most clearly.<sup>22</sup> In part iii Prince describes the moment of the Virgin’s death only by omission—the poem turns away from the exact moment to watch the light on the mountains:

Gold sunset leaves the mountains,  
And the last dream dies. He was the way  
She went.

(TLotV, 301)

The last dream, the mother of Christ—Christ who is the golden O, the other, the Is, the glowing nothing—fades from the world and the mountains like the sunset. The occasion is too large—too *central*—to be compassed by the poem, and so with us it turns away. In ‘The Presentation at the Temple’ Prince described how—

The daughter of Joachim and Anne  
Almost vanishes in that great tide of light

(TLotV, 296)

And here at the end of the poem she does, finally, after all that has happened. It is a technique that Prince uses in a number of his shorter lyrics: witness the conclusions of ‘Mortimer’, ‘Handfast Point’, and ‘Keeper’s Wood’, as well as the uncollected poem ‘The Yard’.<sup>23</sup> But here the effect is doubly striking, for we are distracted from an image by another image—or to be more precise, from the whole of an image by a part of it. It is as if we had before us a beautiful painting of a momentous scene, and had ignored the central figures to focus instead on a few brushmarks denoting sheep in the distance. We are denied the full meaning of the situation, we receive, instead, a partial meaning. The full meaning would be, for us, unreal. We are there only as onlookers, and grateful ones at that. The poet tells us that—

As women lie in bed and pray  
She lies, propped on her pillows,  
Her face and hands of ivory,  
Surrounded by the weeping Church.  
The mother of the Lord

<sup>21</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/2/1/4.

<sup>22</sup> I cannot precisely identify which painting this section describes—if indeed it is only one—but the details of the Virgin lying in an upper room, with open windows, and her hands clasped as if in prayer, suggest certain early 16<sup>th</sup>-century Dutch paintings. For example, those by the ‘Master of the Death of the Virgin’ and the ‘Master of the Amsterdam Death of the Virgin’.

<sup>23</sup> *Quarto*, ed. James Reeves, No. 4, (1951).

Withdrawn, is drawn off further

(TLotV, 301)

The Virgin, whose mind we never saw, is now further withdrawn; the distance between her and us is elongated to infinity, to the mysteries of her death and His death. We are left with those surrounding her, “the weeping Church”, because the poem confronts a mystery which is impenetrable:

Her hands that are already dead  
Lie folded where that love was fed,  
And coifed within that ecstasy  
Of strangeness, of her death, she lies,  
They kiss her feet

(TLotV, 301)

They kiss her feet, but we, in fact, do not. The poem is careful to distinguish between the collective first and second pronouns—we are at a third, or possibly fourth, remove from the Virgin, who is herself at one remove from Christ; the poem dramatises the distance of faith. It ends in the collective first:

And we have seen the end of a journey  
Which we have not begun. She was our journey.  
But we, could we return  
To the place from which we came, we should do nothing  
But set out the way we went.

The rose fades, the fleece of mercy.

(TLotV, 302)

The poem sets a direct limit on our understanding: it was not our journey which we witnessed—were honoured to witness—but hers, our journey only begins and ends with her.

The collective first pronoun is used at only three points in the poem: at the end; in the garden where we (do not) see the Virgin’s mind; and in part ii of ‘The Death of the Virgin’:

And after the unique sorrow  
We have returned and found that everything  
Becomes a Church, the Palms, the Dominus Flevit  
And the Gallicantu, where the cock crew, where Christ lay  
In a deep pit that night. They are all Churches,  
The acts of love, the Kiss and the Desertion  
And the Desolation, Judgement and the Column  
The Spoliation, the Incoronation,  
And at the First Fall

At the first turn, by the narrow deep street-corner  
 There is now the Church of meeting, where they met  
 Our Lady of the Pang.

(TLotV, 300-1)

Throughout ‘The Life of the Virgin’ there is the shadow of Eliot—more so than in any other of Prince’s published poems—and here in particular it is the shadow of ‘The Journey of the Magi’. Both Eliot’s poem and the passage from ‘The Death of the Virgin’ cited above are concerned with the aftermath of an event—the birth of Jesus and the death of Jesus respectively—and both relate a return after that event. But Eliot’s poem is a dramatic monologue where Prince’s is not, and we remain entirely *within* the minds of the Magi for the infamously unsettling cadence:

This Birth was  
 Hard and bitter agony for us, like Death, our death.  
 We returned to our places, these Kingdoms,  
 But no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation,  
 With an alien people clutching their gods.  
 I should be glad of another death.<sup>24</sup>

The psychological realism of ‘The Journey of the Magi’ constrains Eliot to remaining entirely *within* the personae of the magi. Prince’s technique offers him a fluidity that allows him to step outside of the situation. Thus in the passage above we find time being concertinaed: the ‘unique sorrow’ over, returning to Jerusalem we find churches from centuries hence have sprung up on each site we had passed, each event, as flowers on graves, leaving nothing to fade entirely, but to remain as a presence forever—third, fourth, or fortieth hand. No longer are we the contemporary observers of the Virgin’s life, but are one of any pilgrim voyaging to Jerusalem down the centuries hence. The persona of the poem has flickered and shifted, and we are confronted by a sudden vertigo as we see in the far distance as in a mirror ourselves looking back to the time of the Virgin’s death. History, suspended over that moment of “unique sorrow”, collapses.

### RESURGENT 'EIKONEΣ<sup>25</sup>

Prince’s most famous poem—though perhaps one of his least representative—is ‘Soldiers Bathing’. It depicts a war-time scene of soldiers undressing to swim in the sea. The sight of the bathers prompts the poet to conjure first Michelangelo’s cartoon of *The Battle of Cascina* (1504)—where a group of bathing

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<sup>24</sup> Eliot, ‘The Journey of the Magi’.

<sup>25</sup> Ezra Pound, Canto LXXIV.

soldiers are interrupted by a skirmish and reach for their weapons—and then Pollaiuolo's engraving *The Battle of the Nudes* (c.1470). In his otherwise just analysis of the poem, David Kennedy makes an error regarding the function of the paintings in the poem:

The two paintings sit in Prince's poem not as an ekphrastic moment but as a kind of admonitory reminder of what could so easily happen to the soldiers' bodies in the blink of an eye. The Michelangelo and Pollaiuolo images also remind us, albeit distantly, of the ideals embodied in classical Greek and Roman aesthetics.<sup>26</sup>

Kennedy is right to think that this episode is not an “ekphrastic moment”,<sup>27</sup> but the conclusion he draws—that the two paintings serve as a sort of *memento mori*—seems strangely unsatisfying. For one thing, if the paintings had been introduced just to serve this purpose they would be largely superfluous—only eight lines before the introduction of the cartoon, we are well aware of the presence of death:

[he] forgets  
His hatred of the war, its terrible pressure that begets  
A machinery of death and slavery

(CP, 55)

It is an error to conflate the soldiers' experiences with the reader's: the soldier momentarily “forgets” but we—surely—do not, and if we have not forgotten the machinery of death, what use would an “admonitory reminder” be? Something far stranger is happening in the poem than Kennedy's reading allows, and it begins with memory and pretence.

In forgetting the horror of war, the soldier—

finds that he  
Remembers his old freedom in a game  
Mocking himself, and comically mimics fear and shame.

(CP, 55)

The soldiers have lost the shame of nakedness, but one remembers that shame and decides to imitate it, affecting a coyness that is not his, presumably for the humorous gratification of his peers. But Prince lends a subtly theological bent to the depiction. The line before describes the soldiers—or everyone involved in the war—as “each being a slave and making slaves of others”. This is contrasted with the “old freedom” that the soldier remembers, and it is this freedom which is linked to the shame of nakedness—the soldiers are slaves, and are unashamed of their nakedness, the memory of their freedom is the memory of, amongst other things, the freedom to be ashamed. What the soldier is mimicking, in fact, is the Fall itself: shame of nakedness was the first outward symptom of mankind exercising its free

<sup>26</sup> David Kennedy, ‘F.T. Prince and the Portrayal of National Bodies’, *RFTP*, p.172.

<sup>27</sup> N.B. Kennedy's argument here hinges on James Heffernan's fourfold description of ekphrasis in *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2004), p. 136.

will—the limits of freedom are defined by delinquency. The poet declares his intention at the start of the poem: confronted by the scene before him he states “my mind towards the meaning of it strives” (a somewhat clunky inversion). ‘Soldiers Bathing’ is a poem of abstraction—an attempt to uncover the hidden meaning behind the events before the poet’s eyes. Here, at the moment the soldier begins his horsing around, we find implicit the theological reading of the scene that later becomes explicit. Prince goes on to gloss the soldier’s mimicry by claiming “he plays with death and animality”—a line that only makes sense if we understand the soldier’s game as one that re-enacts the Fall. Consider Adam’s cry of horror in *Paradise Lost* on seeing death for the first time—a direct consequence of his exercise of free will:

But have I now seen Death? Is this the way  
 I must return to native dust? O sight  
 Of terror, foul and ugly to behold,  
 Horrid to think, how horrible to feel!

(Paradise Lost XI, ll.462-5)

To be ashamed requires knowledge, and knowledge is knowledge of death, thus to mimic shame is by extension to play with death.

Iconoduly and its opposite—iconoclasm—have a vexed history in the Roman Catholic Church,<sup>28</sup> but the sources of this vexation are to be found much earlier. Returning to our old friend Gregory Nazianzen we find he has this to say on the venerateds of icons and images:

Either they look at things visible and make of these a god—a gross mistake, for what observable thing is more sublime, more godlike than the observer, and to what degree, that it should be the object, be the subject, of worship?—Or they discover God through the beauty and order of things seen, using sight as a guide to what transcends sight without losing God through the grandeur of what they see...<sup>29</sup>

The image (and Gregory here means more than the icon, he has in mind all images, including those imagined) *must* be transcended—even Dante’s *Paradiso* ends with the *alta fantasia* failing (and Wagner counselled Liszt not even to *start* the *Paradiso*)—before God can be discovered. Iconoclasm—iconoduly’s opposite—is hid in the very heart of iconoduly: the icon contains its own destruction, the last act of the iconodule is iconoclasm. Gregory later returns to consider the value of his own mental images of God:

...there is nothing that fastens my thought on the examples when I contemplate the mental image I have, unless one takes part of the *eikon* and wisely discards the rest. So, in the end I resolved that it was best to have done with eikons and shadows, deceptive and utterly inadequate as they are to express reality.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>28</sup> For an overview of shifting attitudes to icons in the Roman Catholic Church, see chapter 2 of Jeana Visel’s *Icons in the Western Church: Towards a More Sacramental Encounter*, (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2016).

<sup>29</sup> *Orations* 28:13. As quoted in Jostein Børtnes and Tomas Hägg, *Gregory of Nazianzus: Images and Reflections*, (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2006), p.43.

<sup>30</sup> *Orations* 31:33. Børtnes and Hägg, *Gregory of Nazianzus*, p.52.

Gregory resolves to abandon images, after finding them inadequate. The dialectical movement of iconoduly is neatly expressed in a sentence by the poet Charles Williams, admittedly an Anglican, as “This is Thou; neither is this Thou.”<sup>31</sup>

Whilst observing the soldier’s game, Prince introduces Michelangelo’s *Battle* in the following way:

And reading in the shadows of his pallid flesh, I see  
The idea of Michelangelo’s cartoon  
Of soldiers bathing

(CP, 55)

The movement here is not as simple as one image reminding the poet of another. This is a search for an underlying gnosis behind the visible: Prince does not see, but reads—in the shadows of the soldier’s flesh he finds hidden characters revealing not a mere similarity to Michelangelo’s cartoon, but an identity with the idea behind the cartoon. To some extent, then, the surface similarity between the cartoon and the scene before him is accidental, though neat. The poem is hermeneutic—Prince reads the shadows, the idea he finds is identical with Michelangelo’s, both are then revealed to be a “commentary” on the Crucifixion; this is seeing as reading. If ‘The Life of the Virgin’ detailed the experience of icon veneration, ‘Soldiers Bathing’ reveals the mechanism.

There is another curious aspect of the poem’s movement from the soldiers, through Michelangelo and Pollaiuolo, to the Crucifixion. Prince reads the shadows of the soldier’s flesh, Pollaiuolo was “shadowing men’s bodies on a sinister red ground”,<sup>32</sup> later we are told—

the picture burns  
With indignation and pity and despair by turns,  
Because it is the obverse of the scene  
Where Christ hangs murdered, stripped, upon the Cross.

(CP, 56)

We seem to move upwards (or backwards) to the Crucifixion by way of the underside of things, first by shadows then by the obverse of the Crucifixion. It is as if we could arrive at the terrible meaning merely by flipping the image and then flipping it again, going each time deeper—or, put the other way, on the underside of the Crucifixion we find a painted scene of raging war, and on the underside of *that* we find a real game of pretence. Prince slips through time by hidden ways, by pretences, by shadows and doubles.

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<sup>31</sup> As quoted in Kerryl Lynne Henderson, “‘It is Love that I am Seeking’: Charles Williams and The Silver Stair”, *Charles Williams: A Celebration*, ed. Brian Horne, (Leominster: Gracewing, 1995), p.132. It should be noted that although Prince described Williams as a “distinguished writer” in *Personal Notes and Queries*, he also decried his “Anglican froth” in his 1981-6 journal MS328 A834/3/1/15.

<sup>32</sup> Presumably “red” being a confection by Prince: Pollaiuolo’s work was an engraving.

The picture—the painting—is a special sort of shadow, and its appearance in a poem means that time is being concertinaed, allowing us to reach back through it to an ungraspable and incomplete meaning:

And even we must know, what nobody has understood,  
That some great love is over all we do,  
And that is what has driven us to this fury

(CP, 56)

It is an incomplete knowledge—we cannot understand it—but it is the wound that gives the soldiers and the paintings meaning. Every image in the poem is shown to have been only half-comprehended—half is always broken or left in darkness. The poem closes with a symmetrical pairing of an internal and external action:

And kiss the wound in thought, while in the west  
I watch a streak of red that might have issued from Christ's breast.

(CP, 57)

In an early version of the poem—held in the British Library—Prince is at once more explicit and vaguer about the nature of the wound, and more passive in his response to it:

And feel the wound of love, while in the west  
I see a streak of red that might have issued from Christ's breast.<sup>33</sup>

Feeling and seeing, kissing and watching. Peter Robinson has described this description of the sky as “the more strenuously worked-towards metaphor”<sup>34</sup>—strenuous perhaps, but only because it is actively *sought*, and so the whole poem is made to work for it. The imagined wounds the soldiers may have yet to endure, the wounds we see them inflict in Michelangelo’s cartoon and Pollaiuolo’s engraving, the wounded knowledge that the scenes represent, the wound of the Fall, the “wound in thought” or “wound of love”, all these are given final full meaning when they are understood as incomplete on their own: as being only whole when in some way representative of the wounding of Christ’s side at the Crucifixion.

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<sup>33</sup> Add MS 88907/7/16/14, The Papers of Meary James Thurairajah Tambimuttu 1935-1972, British Library.

<sup>34</sup> Robinson, RFTP, p.63.

## THE SIGN OF SATURN

Are not my days few? Cease then, and let me alone, that I may take comfort a little. Before I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness and the shadow of death. A land of darkness, as darkness itself, and of the shadow of death, without any order, and where the light is as darkness.

(Job 10:20)

In 'The Book', one of Prince's most mysterious poems, two lovers lie on the cusp of sleep—or having woken from sleep—and turn to a 'worn hornbook'. Undoubtedly the shade of Donne looms in the poem, as it does in all the 'Love Poems' of *Soldiers Bathing*, and we might read it (as did many of the contemporary reviewers) as a mere, if brilliant, pastiche. But on closer inspection we find that the poem is much stranger, more shifting, than any of Donne's poems: there are discrepancies, incoherences, logical interferences that prevent us from reading it—or 'unlocking' it—via the usual metaphysical apparatus. For example, what exactly *is* the titular book? Donne's poem 'The Ecstasy'—perhaps the quintessential metaphysical poem—can propose one solution:

Love's mysteries in souls do grow,  
But yet the body is his book.<sup>1</sup>

A neat concordance of body and book, which seems at first to correspond to the introduction of the book in the second stanza of Prince's poem:

But body, now be deep:  
Worn hornbook  
[...]  
keep  
Your foxed and wormed and rusty pages whole

(CP, 61)

Yet does Prince switch addressee here? The typical answer—the answer suggested by 'The Ecstasy'—is no: the book is a metaphor for the body, and this is the interpretation that one recent commentator

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<sup>1</sup> John Donne: *The Complete English Poems*, ed. A.J. Smith, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1971), p.55.

favoured.<sup>2</sup> But why then does Prince name the book, and name it multiple times, as variously *Mirror of the Sinful Soul*,<sup>3</sup> *Abbey of the Holy Ghost*,<sup>4</sup> *The Keep of Spiritual Valour*,<sup>5</sup> *Encheiridion*, or *Salutaris Hostia*—why be so specific and yet so indecisive? We become uneasy about the neat equivalence of body and book. The fact that each of the books recalled is from *no later* than the Renaissance (and the last is not a book at all but a prayer by Thomas Aquinas), and that they are each tomes of personal spiritual guidance—the first three written by or to women—does nothing to allay our unease. There is no satisfactory answer to why the body should be *specifically* these books. The unease seems then to stretch out and compass the identity of the speaker: we begin to search for a historical persona—some neat answer or situation into which we can tuck the frayed edges of the poem. It is as if Prince fiddles with the Platonic machinery of the metaphysical poem so that it loses focus, seems more inaccessible—perhaps absolutely so. The symbols, denied their clear referents, become fuzzy around the edges, and seem to gesture towards vaguer, wilder notions.

The shifting and multiple world we encountered in the first chapter, in Prince's earliest poems, is one in which identity is dissolved, or partially dissolved, and exists past certain limits, beyond the boundaries of experience. This world seems to threaten the careful watchlike machinery of the metaphysical poem, replacing a cog here or a lever there with something mutable and shifting, even gloopy. Prince never completely returned to the abstract Góngorean-Mallarméan style of his early poems, but the quiet subterranean presence of that identityless space he discovered in them would trouble and define his poetry throughout his career, breaking the surface only occasionally and assuming different forms each time. Only once does he record its name.

## THE DARK KINGDOM

In the third stanza of 'The Book', the speaker addresses the book—or, as it may be, the body:

You are periphery;  
 And we would be the centre, if we could  
 But break your circle, or could be  
 Without you, inconceivably  
 Ourselves our multitude and solitude.  
 You would be nothing then,  
 As now all other things and men  
 Are turned to nothing at a touch

<sup>2</sup> Carol Rumens, 'Poem of the week: The Book', *The Guardian*, (August 4<sup>th</sup> 2014).

<sup>3</sup> A translation of the title of Queen Margaret of Navarre's volume of devotional verse *Le miroir de l'ame pecheresse* (Queen Elizabeth I's translation was titled *Glass of the Sinful Soul*).

<sup>4</sup> A medieval prose allegory, ca. 1350. Consisting of advice for lay women on how to live a contemplative life outside of a monastic setting.

<sup>5</sup> Possibly refers to *El Castillo Interior* ("The Interior Castle") by Teresa of Ávila.

## THE SIGN OF SATURN

Of hand or lip; again,  
We'd seek the soul and having passed  
Through you and through ourselves, at last  
Find the dark kingdom which denies that such  
As selves, and thoughts or bodies, matter much.

(CP, 61)

Passing through the body and the book—the sexual knowledge or the spiritual knowledge—were it possible, they would find themselves in an inconceivable multitude and solitude, where thoughts, bodies, and *selves* have no reality—are in fact forcibly denied—a place without identity. And now we are told the secret name of this place, or one of the secret names: the dark kingdom. It is a vague title, and it signifies a vague dismal world, variously compassing death, sleep, the unconscious, the prelapsarian state, the cloud of unknowing. But also the unrecorded history of time—what Valéry calls “l'abysme de histoire”.<sup>6</sup> After all, time is only death stretched out: conquer death and time disappears, eternity is in an instant. It is this dark kingdom of time, death, sleep which continually threatens the coherence of Prince's fictions; it is the multiple space that haunts his imagination. And surely it is a world far more extensive than that which is written in the “book of the day”, the mere conscious recorded world. It is the endless unimaginable void which surrounds us and into which every act, thought, body or self must eventually fall—some faster, some slower, but with no possibility of escape either way: a horizonless darkness within which all trees fall and finally make no sound. The dark kingdom is the wound in Prince's poetry. It is the place where the walls between fiction and reality are breached. It is theological and existential, poetic and real. We cannot deny its existence, but we cannot venture there. In the double book of God, it is the first, primal volume, of which the book of the day is but an appendix.

Prince began a reading of *Drypoints of the Hasidim* in Warwick with a brief introduction to the history of the Hasidim, and the interest they held for him, and concluded by telling his audience:

Well one of the fascinations of the theme for me, perhaps the thing that may not come through, is the idea that something could be buried, completely unknown, for so long, and then suddenly emerge; and buried because, first of all, all the material, all the basis of our knowledge of these people was oral tradition, stories, sayings handed down from one generation to another, finally written down in Yiddish, and then of course finally in our century translated, sometimes into German but mostly into English. So it's an extraordinary case of something which was dead by the time it came to be really known in the West.<sup>7</sup>

Later, in the same reading, he responded to a question about his poem *Afterword on Rupert Brooke* by linking it back to the point he had already made about *Drypoints*:

There's another case if you like of something which takes forty years to come out or fifty years to come out because his dear old mother would never allow anything to be written which was really—

<sup>6</sup> Paul Valéry, *Œuvres*, Vol. 1, (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1957), p.651.

<sup>7</sup> <<https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/english/writingprog/archive/writers/princeft/251084>>  
Accessed 19/09/2018.

Sadly the audio is cut at that point. But the point is clear enough: what links *Drypoints* and *Afterword* is that they are both concerned with a situation which had been buried, hidden, and only emerged long after the situation had disappeared or changed beyond recognition. In fact this pattern recurs throughout Prince's poetry. When Strafford is granted time before his execution to make a speech—

Delivered standing on the hollow wood,  
And turning words and gestures to the multitude;  
Unheard by most and yet, it may be, not misunderstood

(CP, 113)

—his words—and with them a few drops of his blood, hardened to a stain—would re-emerge, to be heard or unheard, long after his death:

And the piece of paper whence he read  
Flutters and drops, unheeded  
For the trophy of the bleeding head;  
But gathered up by Rushworth,  
Creased, and speckled with a faded red  
Comes to be published after fifty years  
—When most who could remember would be dead,

Or only wished that Strafford were forgotten.

(CP, 114)

The tales of the Hasidim, Brooke's torment, Strafford's final act—all were, briefly, a part of the anonymous majority that is the secret essence of history, lost in the world without identity. But each had returned from the dark kingdom, one way or the other, and that return allots them a power and a poetry they would not otherwise own. Perhaps this may seem as if I am stretching the idea too much—after all, we have all found things that we had thought lost or remembered things we had thought forgotten, if only briefly. But we often forget, in these slight domestic matters, how close our actions, possessions or words are from oblivion, from joining that lost multitude that counts within its ranks the sounds of the music of the Indus Valley, the language of the Beaker people, the taste of silphium. When something is lost or forgotten in such a way it exists—if it exists at all—only as a sort of ghost, in some dark part of the world we are not given access to. I have struggled to find a word that gives precisely the meaning I intend. The closest word in English I have found is that French-English word *revenant*, that which returns, from *revenir*. Things, people, situations, ideas, that were thought lost—if indeed they were thought about at all—that entered the dark kingdom only, miraculously, to re-emerge and trouble the world of light. So I choose the word *revenant* as a shorthand for *that which re-emerges*, and in its re-emergence *gains a disruptive potency*: old things, broken things, things too easily ignored.

In Michel Foucault's 'Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias' he proposes the concept of heterotopias and defines them as "real places—places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society—which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted."<sup>8</sup> Foucault gives a number of examples of what might constitute a heterotopia, including cemeteries, gardens, Jesuit colonies, and ships—the concept is typically vague and open to interpretation, it might have been easier to state unequivocally what is *not* a heterotopia. But the heterotopia I am concerned with is explicitly given as an example, and is outlined in the fourth principle, which relates to time and the heterochrony:

...there are heterotopias of indefinitely accumulating time, for example museums and libraries. Museums and libraries have become heterotopias in which time never stops building up and topping its own summit [...] the idea of accumulating everything, of establishing a sort of general archive, the will to enclose in one place all times, all epochs, all forms, all tastes, the idea of constituting a place of all times that is itself outside of time and inaccessible to its ravages, the project of organizing in this way a sort of perpetual and indefinite accumulation of time in an immobile place, this whole idea belongs to our modernity.<sup>9</sup>

The general archive, according to Foucault, is not an anachronism, though it hides many. It is a project of modernity, and aims to imitate the patina of time on the sea-wall, building up its stores unselectively—unlike the selective antiquarium. And, as a heterotopia, it is an effectively enacted utopia which represents, inverts, and most pertinently *contests* the 'book of day'. The archive is the real expression of the unreal kingdom; the dark kingdom the utopia, the archive the heterotopia.

Susan Howe, in her hymn to archives *Spontaneous Particulars: The Telepathy of Archives*, describes a particular type of illuminatory experience:

Often by chance, via out-of-the-way card catalogues, or through previous web surfing, a particular "deep" text, or a simple object (bobbin, sampler, scrap of lace) reveals itself *here* at the surface of the visible, by mystic documentary telepathy. Quickly—precariously—coming as it does from an opposite direction.<sup>10</sup>

Anachronism: from the Greek ἀνά, up or backwards, and χρόνος, time.<sup>11</sup> Backwards or upwards through time, the anachronism reveals itself *here*, and by extension, *now*. To work in a literary archive is sometimes a ghostly, unsettling experience. You feel, and are often suspicious of, the guiding presence of the author. The archive is the double of the literary figure it emanates from and it allows the semblance of a private conversation beyond the limits when one should be able to. It is a fragment of a heterotopia, an exile from time, but is also the image of time itself. Fragments of the past exist and are built up side-

<sup>8</sup> Michel Foucault, "Des Espace Autres", trans. by Jay Miskowiec, *Architecture/Mouvement/Continuité* (October 1984), the basis of a lecture given by Foucault in March 1967.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Susan Howe, *Spontaneous Particulars: The Telepathy of Archives* (New York: New Directions, 2014), p. 18.

<sup>11</sup> *OED*.

by-side in a directionless array—there is no one way to move through an archive. Like Susan Howe, Prince is concerned with the ‘simple objects’ that return, the revenants:

Old histories, pale, stained, yet beautiful,  
Unfold from yellowing papers, tarnished print,  
Their tales of times of trouble, fear and war,  
Dry death and living love.

And still unsatisfied

Strafford lives on

(CP, 108)

## AN OLD HORSE

In 1963 Prince published ‘The Goose Girl’—a poem based on the folktale of the same name, collected by the Grimm brothers—in ‘The Listener’. It was never republished in a volume, though it is possible he had considered republishing it in his 1979 *Collected Poems*: in a letter to Prince the founder of Anvil Press, Peter Jay, had noticed that the poem had been included in the index, but not in the text. In the Grimm story, a princess is sent by her mother to a faraway kingdom to be married (her father, the story tells us, has been dead many years), so she sets off with a maid and a magical speaking horse named Fallada. On the way her maid forces the princess to exchange clothes and places with her, and makes her swear an oath that she will never reveal the switch. When they arrive at their destination the young prince carries off the chambermaid, believing her to be his betrothed, and the princess is sent to help Curdken, the gooseherder. The chambermaid demands Fallada be decapitated, so that he cannot reveal her secret, but the princess bribes the knacker to hang his head beneath a gateway, so she could still see him every day as she passed. Fallada’s head, it turns out, could still speak, and in the end the king—prompted by Curdken—hears the princess and the horse’s head conversing and realises what has happened. The princess is restored to her rightful place, and the chambermaid is executed by being placed naked in a barrel studded with nails which is then dragged by two white horses through the street—a punishment she herself had invented. Prince’s poem is written from the point of view of Fallada, and seems at first to be little more than a relatively straight-forward and faithful retelling. But—as with Andersen’s story in ‘Autumn Journey’—there are a few subtle but significant changes made to the story that is being told. I will reproduce the poem in full, as it is as short as it is hard to find.

When will you remember,  
Though you have changed your dress,  
With goose-herds on the common,  
You are the princess?

## THE SIGN OF SATURN

But the wicked maid  
Wished you a maid as well,  
And bullied and betrayed;  
Caught you in a spell.

Now through the grass and grease  
Barefoot and milky-white,  
You wander while the geese  
Go marching left and right.

How long must the wind blow  
And you comb your hair,  
Till you tire of Curdken,  
And wonder why you are there?

But I am only the old horse  
Hung up by the gate:  
'Fallada, do you hang there?'  
You say, and will not wait.<sup>12</sup>

In the Grimm version of the tale, it is not a spell that the chambermaid uses to gain power over the princess, but an oath. Consequently, the princess never *forgets* she is a princess—as she does in Prince's poem—but, bound by her honour, is unable to tell anyone who she really is. The head of Fallada is—aside from the chambermaid—the only other thing which knows the truth of the situation, thus their recurring sing-song conversation each morning—

Alas, Falada, hanging there!

To which the head replies—

Alas, young queen, how ill you fare!  
If this your tender mother knew,  
Her heart would surely break in two.<sup>13</sup>

In her Jungian reading of the fairy tale, Marie-Louise von Franz associates Fallada first with the god Wotan—noting that the ancient Germans “nailed horse skulls to trees and used them as an oracle”—and then with the princess's dead father, before explaining that the horse therefore symbolises a

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<sup>12</sup> *The Listener*, Vol. 69, No. 1780, (May 1963), p.795.

<sup>13</sup> 'The Goose Girl', *Grimm's Fairy Tales*, trans. Margaret Hunt, (Philadelphia: Penn Publishing Company, 1922), p.245.

composite “pre-Christian pagan father spirit.” This—according to von Franz—is because Fallada’s head is a remnant of the past, or of a past worldview:

Psychologically speaking, it is like this: when a spiritual worldview dies, it means it is no longer being used, or no longer exists in the heads of people—in their conscious awareness. But where does a worldview go when it disappears from consciousness? It falls into the unconscious. It simply goes back to where it once came from. And this has a very strange effect. When a worldview has been historically superseded and, as a result, becomes unconscious again, it is not simply a matter of it “vanishing” and a return to the status quo, but it also has a sort of civilizing effect upon the unconscious. It remains in the unconscious as a sort of spirit of the unconscious. So one can say that when some aspect of culture that was once lived by people disappears, it has not by any means disappeared.<sup>14</sup>

The head of Fallada is a relic from a previous hierarchy, an emanation of a subconscious knowledge, a gruesome *aide-memoire* of an alternative order. Yet once it has been discovered by the old king and brought back into the light it gains the power to disrupt events, to foil the chambermaid’s plans. It is potent *now*, and—like St. Spiriridion’s and St. Augusta’s decapitated heads—has a power long after it should have stopped having any power, far beyond the usual limits placed upon us.

Yet Prince has it differently. The princess is under a spell, she cannot remember who she is. She seems only to half-recognise the head, asking it “Fallada, do you hang there?” instead of “Alas, Fallada hanging there!” and does not tarry to hear his answer—the answer that could bring about the change of her condition. The situation is static: a deadlock or impasse to which we cannot see a way out for her or for Fallada. After his rhetorical address to her Fallada concludes with a self-deprecatory gesture—“But I am only the old horse”—his status is diminished in the poem: he bears witness, but no-one is listening. Not the old king, not the princess—Fallada does not speak in time. We only learn that the speaking voice is Fallada at the very end of the poem, when it is too late. His potency is locked within his lateness, it is a circular problem: his lateness is what lends him his disruptive potential, but is also what prevents the potential being realised.

Of course, the word revenant has also come to possess some ghoulish connotations: zombies, the undead, the vampire. I do not mean it in that way, but—in fact—even these connotations are relevant. During the composition of ‘A Byron-Shelley Conversation’, we find a peculiar entry in Prince’s journal:

At one point in the last few days I thought ~~is~~ my only way forward would be to go ‘back to old age’ (after Dog, which is something else). But again I find (or try to) a way round it, and a poem by a living dead man about two dead men who are alive (in poetry, in real time) looks like a good <\*\*> long-short cut.<sup>15</sup>

Byron and Shelley are brought back from the dead, exhumed, or are discovered to be alive in “real time” which is poetry, in a poem that—amongst other things—damns the horrors of twentieth century Communism and extols the value of “erotic fury”.<sup>16</sup> But the poem is written by one who sees himself as

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<sup>14</sup> Marie-Louise von Franz, Lecture held at the Psychology Club Zurich November 14<sup>th</sup> 1970, published in *Stone by Stone: Reflections on the Psychology of C.G. Jung*, ed. Regine Schweizer-Vüllers, (Einsiedeln: Daimon Verlag, 2017).

<sup>15</sup> PFTP MS328

<sup>16</sup> Revised to “that prophecy” in the collected editions (CP, 244).

## THE SIGN OF SATURN

dead, as a living dead man. Prince ends an unpublished poem from 1941, over forty years earlier, on a similar note. The poem is a short lyric which apparently reports the speech of a man (referred to only as 'he'):

I am twenty-five  
And wish that I were dead  
For I survive  
Myself, O I am dead.

So he said.<sup>17</sup>

It is not my intention to make vain suppositions about Prince's life regarding *why* he saw himself in 1982 as a living dead man: the art is distinct from the biography. It is enough to know that this structure of thought—the person who has survived his own life, outlived his life, and is now dead—had an existence in one form or another in Prince's mind that apparently persisted for at least forty years.

## THE PARADISE IN SADNESS

In a journal entry from 1970, Prince made a remarkably perceptive assessment of his work and his reception:

19 November: Discovery: I am destined to be the Gissing of poetry, of our time. Fifty years after my death—always supposing that I ~~w~~ live long enough ~~to~~ {and} write enough—there will be a cult. During my lifetime there will be a handful of admirers, whom I baffle and exasperate with my performances and non-performances. Gradually (if I live), I shall add one solid work to another—all perhaps flawed, all in an idiom which is never completely that of its time: there is Gissing's authenticity, and Gissing's Complex temperament—streaked with what others find sentimental; deeply fervent, yet ~~maske~~ masked with a kind of dryness or pedantry. And everything we write is above all literary; the fervour for writing is common to both, the laborious truth to personal experience; the generally awkward stance, the failure to cultivate—or to have cultivated (it is too late)—the right or usual social-literary setting.<sup>18</sup>

The next three poems Prince would publish—*Drypoints of the Hasidim*, *Afterword on Rupert Brooke*, and *A Last Attachment*—would move steadily towards an appearance of increased dryness, pedantry or scholarliness, with a detached commentary tone. But this is—as Prince tells us—a mask, and underneath they are “deeply fervent” poems.

The last of these poems, and the one that best illustrates what I mean, was *A Last Attachment*—a poem which concerns itself with Lawrence Sterne's *Journal to Eliza*, not published until 1904, 137 years after it was written. Prince told Susan Howe that his interest in the *Journal* had begun as an interest in a literary problem:

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<sup>17</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/2/11 2<sup>nd</sup> Notebook.

<sup>18</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/9, loose pages from 1970-7 journal.

## THE SIGN OF SATURN

Well again there was a certain literary background to this because [...] there's a book that's called the Second Journal to Eliza which was reprinted in the fifties [...] Now it had been regarded always from time of publication [...] as a forgery, one of the many imitations [...] The plan of the Second Journal to Eliza is similar to the plan—we're told by Sterne—would have been the plan of the book [Sterne and Draper would] have written together. She'd have kept her journal, he'd have kept his journal, they'd have brought them together, written them up in a final book, wasn't that the idea? And so that there's some—this person whoever it was—who wrote the Journal to Eliza, Second Journal to Eliza, must have had some access to the letters. But—um—anyway I became interested in this problem, it's a literary problem, and I—then I subsequently—*subsequently*—read the authentic Journal to Eliza and found it a little bit disappointing. And then I didn't think about it at all for a long time, it's not a thing I became interested in writing up at that time, but suddenly I saw in this situation and a... in a sense a vehicle... and went back to it, and then it all came to life. And I read up—all the usual process of reading up [laughs]—good editions with annotations and so on and getting involved in the—. You can live through—if you read the Journal to Eliza as it is reprinted, for example, in the collected edition of Sterne's letters with—exactly reproducing the manuscript—you begin to get a feeling for your being with—your sitting there with Sterne, your living through it all, and you reconstruct the whole situation... blossoms out of the words on the page, you know? You put it together.<sup>19</sup>

The ‘usual process’ for Prince is one of a scholarly examination of all the material he could get his hands on. The specific literary or critical problem of the second journal does not actually arise in the final poem, but the poem maintains the detached tone of the critic, the dryness or pedantry of the scholar. It opens with another literary problem:

Spenser has Britomart on guard in the enchanter's house  
Reading over every iron door 'Be bold',  
And on and on 'Be bold', until over the last door  
'Be not too bold.'

(CP, 187)

Iris Tillman Hill explains that “for long one of the curiosities of *The Faerie Queene* has been those mysterious words *Be bold*, *Be not too bold* written over the doors within the House of Busyrane. Like Britomart, most readers of and commentators on the Third Book stand perplexed before them.”<sup>20</sup> As a specialist in Renaissance literature, Prince would have hardly been unaware of this mystery, but he avoids weighing in on their meaning, instead subjecting them to a critical thought experiment—tralling various words to replace “bold”:

One might vary it: 'Be plain,  
Be sad, true, deep'—see with the addition how they do.  
But for the bundle we have here (including  
Not only the diary and letters found in a loft  
Among lumber and waste paper by a boy  
Who played and rummaged) the only right word is 'Be late.'

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<sup>19</sup> April 21<sup>st</sup> 1978. <<http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Howe-Pacific.php>> Accessed 19/09/2018.

<sup>20</sup> Iris Tillman Hill, ‘Britomart and Be Bold, Be Not Too Bold’, *ELH*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (John Hopkins University Press, 1971), pp. 173-187.

## THE SIGN OF SATURN

Which is, even with 'Be not too late', I daresay  
No famous old device, but vows to serve Eliza  
And Yorick and the *Journal to Eliza*

(CP, 187)

The poem begins much as one might address a lecture theatre, and it begins by using one literary problem or curiosity to address another—not specifically that of the authorship of the second journal, but more generally of the surprising late love affair between Sterne and Elizabeth Draper. Yet beneath this dryness and pedantry—the mask of the disinterested scholar—there is a fervency in the poem, and as it emerges it brings with it a clarity and a sympathy. In the *Journal to Eliza*, Sterne had written to Draper of the imagined future scholar:

I have brought y<sup>r</sup> name *Eliza!* & picture into my work—where they will remain—when You & I are at rest for ever—Some Annotator or explainer of my works in this place will take occasion, to speak of the Friendship w<sup>ch</sup> subsisted so long & faithfully betwixt Yorick & the Lady he speaks of—Her Name he will tell the world was Draper—a Native of India—married there to a gentleman in the India Service of that Name,—who brought her over to England for the recovery of her health in the Year 65—where She continued to April the Year 1767. It was abt three months before her Return to India, That our Author's acquaintance & hers began. M<sup>rs</sup> Draper had a great thirst for knowledge — was handsome — genteel — engaging — and of such gentle dispositions & so enlightened an understanding, — That Yorick (whether he made much opposition is not known) from an acquaintance — soon became her Admirer — they caught fire, at each other at the same time — & they w<sup>d</sup> often say, without reserve to the world, & without any Idea of saying wrong in it, That their Affections for each other were unbounded...<sup>21</sup>

But, Prince tells us, this is not exactly how it fell out. In part 4 he gives us a brief catalogue of the various critical reactions to the *Journal to Eliza*—“from Thackeray to Ian Jack”<sup>22</sup>—under the guise of Sterne’s “own Smelfungus and Mundungus”, as they “peer/Prod and finger it and sniff”:

‘He wrote to practise sentiment’  
‘Cheat, *poseur*’  
‘Tells downright lies of being ill’  
‘Fibs to her about dates,  
his wife’s arrival—to break it off’  
‘Not Sterne  
but Yorick plays the fool, sighs, laughs and cries and even  
bleeds and dies, but it is art and effigy...’

(CP, 190)

<sup>21</sup> Laurence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy and Continuation of the Bramine’s Journal*, ed. Melvyn New and W.G. Day, (Indianapolis; Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2006), pp.209-10.

<sup>22</sup> PFTP MS328 A4165/1/1 to 37. Letter dated May 6<sup>th</sup>, 1993.

—A liar, a cheat, or else a grimacing artist falsifying a passion for his art, even falling into an artificial illness that would kill him (Prince added in his letter to Shepherd that “To deny he was really ill, when he died a few months later, is typical”). The poem decries the attempts of critics to ‘make sense’ of the senselessness of the *amour-passion*.

*A Last Attachment* is written in syllabics, as *Afterword on Rupert Brooke* is, though instead of maintaining a twelve-syllable line throughout it alternates between thirteen and eleven syllables. Prince explained in *Personal Notes and Queries* that “the combination of shorter and longer lines is meant to convey the feverish excitement and frustration of Sterne’s passion for the absent Eliza Draper”, and yet earlier in *Personal Notes and Queries* he had explained that he had chosen syllabics partly because of his “belief that their lack of emphatic rhythm is a check on emotional intensity.”<sup>23</sup> These seem to be two conflicting statements—that the meter should have the effect of feverish excitement whilst also being a check on emotional intensity is not easy to square. Certainly Derek Attridge was unsure about the poem’s final effect, comparing it unfavourably to *Afterword on Rupert Brooke*:

The poem incorporates even more quotation than *Afterword*, and this is perhaps one reason why it seems less engaged than the earlier work, less expressive of the poet’s complex and powerful response to a life of thwarted possibilities.<sup>24</sup>

Yet Attridge, it seems to me, is wrong in his evaluation. While it is true that the poem maintains a distance from its subject, perhaps more so than in *Afterword*, and is more emotionally checked, yet it is also simultaneously more feverish and fervent, *more* engaged, and its total effect derives from the tension between these two qualities. Consider the opening of section 2:

‘A month has pass’d, in two months  
you will have doubled the Cape—I’ll trace thy track.’  
So he scrawls, quivering: ‘loose touches of an honest heart’  
‘projecting happiness’ ‘the Ache of doubt—doubt,  
did I say? but have none; cross it out ...’  
Poor fool, poor wit,  
So caught by *La Belle Indian*, the unhappy

Eliza Draper—young, ‘handsome genteel engaging’,  
But unhappy above all.

(CP, 188)

The passage is—as Prince has it—‘lavish’ in its quotation. The poet seems to have the role of mere editor and compiler—the role Attridge objected to—and yet there is something else at play here. The passage

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<sup>23</sup> *PNQ*.

<sup>24</sup> Attridge, *RFTP*, p.22.

begins with a self-contained and complete stand-alone quotation, a full sentence, but the next three quotations are fragments, which can only be made sense of if we know they are fragments: “loose touches of an honest heart projecting happiness the ache of doubt” is nonsense. So we have to hear them as fragments of Sterne’s prose, and each thought therefore starts and is cut off before a new thought abruptly interrupts—the texture of fragmentation imitates a febrile and disordered, even frantic, mind, and this is all achieved through a cut-and-paste technique. The third thought, too, is interrupted, but this time by the calm, sober voice of the commentator, with three long syllables “poor fool, poor”, gently assessing the situation. The effect is to distance the fever of the collage, but in doing so it adds a pathos that was not there in the lines before: that of the recognition that *all this is past*—the pathos of history. We look back with the commentator and feel the ache of loss: that all of Sterne’s words to Eliza should have been for nothing, the reality of their passion melted into air, and that all we can attempt is a dry and scholarly circumscription of what is forever gone. This is an effect that could only have been achieved through the exact “lack of engagement” Attridge decries.

The poem is one of loss, as is so often with Prince, and the dryness is the effect of that loss: the commentator cannot really show us Eliza’s unhappiness, because there is no ‘documentation’ that would suffice—her unhappiness has been lost to time—he can only tell us in a bare statement that she was unhappy. But he tells us twice, in a double statement that encircles three adjectives from Sterne, “handsome genteel engaging”—alone they are not enough, the commentator has to supply the missing information. The line break here acts as a hesitation<sup>25</sup>—we seem to hear the missing information before it is said, and the reiteration is all the more painful coming as it does from the disinterested calm voice of the commentator, not the hysterical frenzy of Sterne’s pen. The poem is, therefore, one of double loss: Sterne’s loss of Eliza, and then the loss of both of them and the whole situation to inevitable time. It is an expansion of a theme that had preoccupied Prince since his earliest poems:

that fever over,  
To which my passion lit  
Dry sticks of unlucky wit,  
And the silence were your lover.

(In The Wood, CP, 18)

Or as an unpublished poem from 1936 has it: “But above is love / And is pure loss.”<sup>26</sup> The double loss of love: the loss of the beloved, and the loss of the situation, the living reality.

What is lost is usually inaccessible to us, it becomes like a ghost or a dream, but sometimes a revenant can return from the dark kingdom. Sterne’s *Journal to Eliza* didn’t emerge until 84 years after it was written, and was not published until 1904, 137 years after it was written. As Prince explained to Howe, the beginning of Sterne’s and Draper’s affair was something of a mystery—

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. p.90.

<sup>26</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/2/11 6<sup>th</sup> notebook.

## THE SIGN OF SATURN

We don't know very much about the earlier stages of it—it seems to have been only two or three months before she left that he came to know her, but clearly it was the last stages of her having to go and her parting and—intense feelings suddenly came out then, I think.<sup>27</sup>

And the *Journal to Eliza* is incomplete, it comes from the darkness, and part of it was left behind there:

the opening, out of things unknown  
And just as he left it, the first pages gone,  
Sent after her

(CP, 187)

It is a text that has been wounded, but its wounding was its apotheosis—the pages that are missing alone co-occupy the place where Eliza is, which is both India (the pages were sent to Eliza via a Mr. Watts, who was travelling to Bombay) and that hidden oblivion, the place of ‘things unknown’.

In a letter to Harwood, Prince had ended a critique of the younger poet’s work on an affirmative codicil, telling Harwood that “you are overwhelmingly a love-poet, and I can understand that better than anything.”<sup>28</sup> It was the wound of love that could lead a poem out of the impasse of pure poetry. In an attack on the New Criticism which he makes in his inaugural lecture at the University of Southampton—‘In Defence of English’—Prince addresses an error Cleanth Brooks makes whilst analysing Robert Burns’s ‘My luve is like a red, red rose’:

But the critic discusses this poem on the assumption that in speaking of ‘my Luve’ the poet means, not his lady, his beloved, but the emotion of love which he is trying to express. Even a superficial acquaintance with the English language informs us that the expression ‘my love’ for ‘my darling’ was in common use for centuries, and has not died out even to-day. Nor is the error trivial, though it may seem absurd. One of the finest and most striking qualities of Burns as a love-poet is precisely the clear-cut vision with which he looks out of himself and is carried away by the object of his passion. What could be more damaging to this quality in Burns than the assumption that his mind is turned inward upon his own emotion, that he is contemplating the beauty of his feelings, and not the glowing flesh-and-blood reality of the woman he loves?<sup>29</sup>

Love forces us to be wounded by reality, to look out of our “inmost desolation”, our flawless system, and behold the beloved. Burns “looks out of himself” to the “glowing flesh-and-blood reality”; he is not merely “contemplating the beauty of his feelings”. This is what saves Burns from ineffectually languishing in the realm of poetry, and it is what Prince thought could save Harwood too. Love seeks to wound the flawless surface of the interior in order to contemplate the exterior reality of the beloved. Likewise Sterne suffers (and it is a suffering) a similar wounding—not of his poetry of course, but of his wit, his prose:

‘I can’t get out’ the starling said.

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<sup>27</sup> April 21<sup>st</sup> 1978. <<http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Howe-Pacific.php>> Accessed 19/09/2018.

<sup>28</sup> Letter dated 16th May 1969. Add MS 88998, Lee Harwood Papers.

<sup>29</sup> ‘In Defence of English’, pp. 8-9.

## THE SIGN OF SATURN

And his gambol of wit, from star-crazed innuendo  
To the blank or marbled page, was born of that:  
Would try, cry for a way out, fling, tumble out a way,  
Dance, babble it, tease, pray.

(CP, 193)

Prince links the extraordinary and eccentric effects of Sterne's prose—his formal abandon, his gimmickry, his provocations and collocations, his jests and innuendos—we are meant of course to think particularly of *Tristram*—to the half-crazed flutterings of the starling encountered in *A Sentimental Journey*, the same starling Sterne chooses to be his emblem. The extravagant surface detail of Sterne's prose is discovered to be wounded by a meaning beyond mere play. The effect is as if we had been watching a dolphin, or some other wild animal, performing tricks for us, but had only later come to realise that its amusing gambols and capretties were in fact the writhings of an intense anguish caused by pain or captivity. The starling does not sing in its cage from joy but from agony.

—And yet not quite, it is not a perfect analogy, for the gambol of wit *is* still sought for its own sake, *is* still delighted in, but has now been renewed and ennobled by its wounding:

And there, there is the lucidity  
That seeks an old delight, but new in sadness—

(CP, 194)

It is another variant of the return the Sibyl attempts. A partial return to the deep veneer of pure poetry, or pure wit, now irrevocably pierced. A way back, and a way out—

But there is no way,  
Then or now, none. The way is only what he has done  
And does, counting it 'one, a singular blessing

of his life to have been almost every hour of it  
miserably in love.'

(CP, 193)

This is Prince's answer to Smelfungus and Mundungus. They accuse Sterne of lying, dissembling, acting the lover for the sake of his art: Sterne, by his deception, remains pure. They can only maintain the pristine surface of Sterne's life and art by disavowing his passion for Eliza. Prince's commentator instead has the pristine surface broken or wounded by the fervour of Sterne's passion, but in being broken it becomes significant, means something.

In the fourth part of the poem, Prince turns from the *Journal to Eliza* to *A Sentimental Journey*

And for the *Journey* he 'has her picture off by heart';  
 O Cupid, prince of God and men—the fragment

Chants it, her absent presence; he points it with her name,  
 'the pure flame of Eliza.' To have and have not  
 Throbs in remembered France, and Abdera as in Yorkshire

(CP, 190)

The chapter Prince refers to here is chapter XXIII, 'A Fragment', in which Sterne relates a story taken from Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, who in turn had it from Lucian. After a performance of Euripides's *Andromeda*, the citizens of the town of Abdera were afflicted with a fever which had the curious symptom of making them all cry out in iambics, most commonly singing or reciting Perseus's speech beginning (as Burton has it) "O Cupid, prince of gods and men!"<sup>30</sup> Sterne changes the emphasis of the anecdote, making it a celebration of the power of Cupid, the god working through the play. The chapter contains no mention of Eliza, but Prince insists she is there—"her absent presence". However, he does not claim that it is Sterne's *chapter* that chants her presence: he writes "the fragment" not "A Fragment", which is the title of the chapter. It is not entirely clear what Sterne was referring to in naming his chapter in this way. In Burton and Lucian we find the story anecdotal but basically complete, self-contained. *Andromeda* is a lost play, and we have it only in fragments—one of which is Perseus's speech—but the Abderites would have had it complete. It is only at the end of the chapter, in one of the more obscure passages, that Sterne refers to the "Fragment" of the title:

'Twas only in the power, says the Fragment, of the God whose empire extendeth from heaven to earth, and even to the depths of the sea, to have done this.<sup>31</sup>

This is not in Burton or Lucian, and it is unclear where Sterne got it from, or indeed if it were his own invention—it is not to be found in the extant fragments of Euripides either.<sup>32</sup> If we take the fragment to refer to the speech of Perseus—which seems the most likely explanation—we find that Sterne entangles cause and effect in this passage: the fragment of Perseus's song which causes the Abderite fever is found to be a commentary on that very event. The god's power extends from heaven to earth, but also across time: Euripides's words prophesy the extraordinary effect they shall have on the audience. In *A Last Attachment*, this contraction and overlapping of time is found to be of an even higher order, after all "the fragment//Chants it, her absent presence"—Euripides's words are not only prophetic of the Abderite event, but here also of the person of Eliza. Eliza throbs in a fragment of Euripides, simultaneously

<sup>30</sup> N.B. In Euripides it is 'Eros' (*Ἔρως*) not Cupid.

<sup>31</sup> Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey*, p.50.

<sup>32</sup> Melvyn New and W.G. Day make the tentative suggestion that Sterne is recalling here the Lord's Prayer and Psalm 95:5. This does not solve the mystery: for one thing, neither of these could be considered a fragment, and it seems much more likely that the God referred to here is Cupid, or Love, than the Christian God, Sterne's ministry notwithstanding.

## THE SIGN OF SATURN

present and absent in the words, as she was present and absent in Sterne's life at this point—its chronological impossibility is reminiscent of John Ruskin searching for Rose La Touche in Carpaccio's St. Ursula. The fragment chants Eliza's loss, her deep and irreparable loss—even if Sterne does not know it yet—and in that loss reveals Eliza's double in the dark kingdom, she herself becomes a sort of revenant—her youth, her absence, her sadness, her *impossibility*. All combine in her person, so that Prince can write—

and there in her,

Strangely we see concentrated, living, that 'Be late—Be  
not too late' of his brief headlong art and fame.

(CP, 193)

I chose this poem to be the last poem I analysed in depth because it seemed to me it was the most emblematic of Prince himself. A colleague recently asked me about an idea they were musing on of writing a biography of Prince. I said that I thought it would have to be a strange sort of biography, as so much of what made Prince extraordinary was unseen. He appears on the surface serene, even detached, as his poems do, and yet the journals reveal the emotional and intellectual flurry and torment going on beneath—like a swan. I have had conversations with people who knew him from the English Department at Southampton who had no idea that he was even a poet.

## TONGUES OF OLD GODS

One last significance of the revenant is that Prince saw poetry itself—and by extension dreams, fictions—as holding this revenant power. In a journal entry from May 14<sup>th</sup> 1968, in the notes that would eventually become *Memoirs in Oxford*, Prince sketched out the idea for a poem on a poem:

Poem: (a) Begin with a poem, poetry, buried in a book, faded dusty damp-stained etc, shut up yet ready to wake, breathe, glow—"he" reading English poetry (Shelley, Keats), the lives of poets, finding unutterable sweetness, excitement, dream, passion—all living forever, beyond life, the real life, what life should be, what it really is. (b) Then see this as in a dismal, cold, narrow English 19-20<sup>th</sup> century setting (suggested by idea of Tagore's stay in England as a youth)—the muffled torment of English middle-class life and morality, the frozen bullied suppressed English character etc (think of Bournemouth in the 1920's, Oxford in ~~the~~ 1931). This was the people, the society which produced that (the joy, sorrow, longing, soaring hope and love of Shelley, etc). The basic contrast between the world and love, between life as it is, and life as it longs to be. Fix form of that 19-20<sup>th</sup> cent. bourgeois world. (c) Then turn to present—the 'new society' of this century turns out to be only another machine of horror (think of its theory of poetry, Marx & Freud, etc). Yet the real thing lives on, buried suppressed indestructible (as in the book, as in

the older social order). I think of my own life ('his'), as it has turned out—compared with what I thought, dreamed, it could be. Wretched, yet the other lives on too, within it, the true life...<sup>33</sup>

The dream of life, of poetry, is also “what it really is”, and though it be suppressed is indestructible, hidden away, waiting to “wake, breathe, glow”. Poetry is what various powers in the world desire to quash, precisely because its fictitiousness contains within it a potential—or indeed realised—reality. Earlier in the same journal Prince had railed against Yvor Winters’ treatment of Robert Frost:

Yvor Winters is a killjoy: ‘Go and find out what little Willie enjoys doing, and tell him to stop it’. If R. Frost and the American public understand one another, if the American public enjoys Frost’s work, they must be told it is sentimental, anarchistic and decadent, {^that} such stuff is dangerous, and will be their undoing. If you can’t kill poetry, you can at least condemn it; if you can’t kill life, you can kill joy—Take the joy out of poetry, or life, by a system of abstract values, a theory of history, or morality, or psychology.<sup>34</sup>

Prince saw much of modern thought, theories, criticism—especially those that aim to systematise—as the enemies of poetry as of life, and saw his own poetry as a conscious act of rebellion against this, especially in its anachronistic or unfashionable qualities. In a notebook currently held in private hands Prince had sketched out ideas for what appears to be his “Mock-Malory-Language Poem”<sup>35</sup> in which he makes clear his thoughts on the relation between love, poetry, and his own personal sense of being anachronistic:

[Poetry like amour-passion—everyone tries to domesticate it, to get take it under control, to deflate it.]/The foolishest knight that has been... [foolish enough to think that there might be truth and meaning in old ways, old beliefs, old hopes. So he—I—looks v. silly beside the glib, wry, désabusé but merely smug & shallow, sceptics & ironists—and pornographers—But in the long run? Who is going to look foolish, or weak, or inadequate?...]<sup>36</sup>

Poetry, amour-passion, a belief in old ways—all are foolish, and yet all have in some way a primal power, they are chaotic, out of control, and others try to place them under control. In order to deny or ignore these forces people become glib, wry, disabused, skeptical, smug, ironic—in short, they develop an intellectual or emotional system that prevents any wounding. They construct a veneer that cannot be wounded by faith, love, poetry, or the past. This was a malady that Prince felt was endemic to modern poetry, as he explained in a letter to Jacintha Buddicom:

The whole mood and aim of modern poetry is to deny history, to deny the reality of time; its supporters consequently have to maintain that art and poetry are expendable—and their own certainly is.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>33</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/5. I think it is likely that this idea eventually informed the last section of Memoirs in Oxford.

<sup>34</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/5.

<sup>35</sup> See PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/14.

<sup>36</sup> My thanks to Richard Ford Manuscripts for allowing me to see the notebook in question.

<sup>37</sup> Letter dated January 7<sup>th</sup> 1972. PFTP MS328 A834/4/2/5.

## THE SIGN OF SATURN

It is “their own”—Prince does not count himself among their band: he felt a keen sense of having the status of an outsider, with all the freedom, defiance, and marginality which that entailed. It was precisely this status that Geoffrey Hill seemed to admire in Prince when he wrote—

Our work already has a relationship, in being set apart from most of the poetry that holds the place of worldly power in our age...<sup>38</sup>

Both poets felt themselves to be outsiders, “set apart”, perhaps powerless, but nevertheless defiant.<sup>39</sup>

In 1981, frustrated by the bureaucracy of getting a driving licence in Yemen, Prince found occasion to consider his own position:

Struggling to get the business done with Pat Montegrifo, I thought of Saturnians, Olympians, demi-gods & heroes—and myrmidons. Pat wd. be a myrmidon, Chris a hero—the Ambassador and others who run the system are Olympians. It is a question of the degree and type of intellect. The Olympians impose and sustain order, exiling Saturn and his fellows. Saturn is the inspired but erratic creative intellect, as in Greek and medieval thought, the melancholic seer and thinker. I am Saturnian. The rule of the Olympians is a struggle to ward off the influence of Saturn, and punish and discredit him.<sup>40</sup>

Prince allies himself with Saturn, the old god, the titan dethroned by his son Jupiter—a living relic of a previous age. The Romans associated Saturn with Cronus, the father of Zeus in the Hellenic tradition, but also with Chronos—that is, sequential Time.<sup>41</sup> Father Time himself is dethroned, exiled, becomes the past, or of the past; he is divided: Chronos becomes anachronistic. Nevertheless, his influence re-emerges to threaten the stability of the Olympians, who therefore constantly fight to bring him and his followers under control—or to discredit them. It is the analogy I have been groping towards, for that which re-emerges, and in its re-emergence gains a disruptive potency, the revenant god. Prince’s belatedness puts him under the protection of this eternally threatening, divine outsider.

The revenants Prince finds or uses are all in this way Saturnian—they come from the Dark Kingdom, the secret throne of Saturn, to worry the Olympian order. To commandeer D.S. Carne-Ross’s phrase, they bear witness to a deviant knowledge<sup>42</sup>—deviant, that is, and defiant. Yet Prince knew this deviance, exile, defiance would fail—had to fail—it was doomed to be a tragic enterprise, an escape that was no escape, as his notes towards *Memoirs in Oxford* illustrate:

Yet after all, rationality, ‘bourgeois’ morality, Greco-Roman perennial philosophy, liberty, work, pietas etc., is still our only practical hope, the world’s only solution;—with vision, everlasting gospel, eternal terrors & ecstasies, beyond it. ‘Ecstasy’ means ‘standing outside’ going beyond. We must live by faith in miracle, but order our lives as if it might never happen... [“I grieve that we could not be friends – It ~~hurts~~ hurts...”] Important to get the sense that I am in it too – perhaps in a sense I have escaped, I escape into poetry (with Love implied), but I also fall out, the process depends on conflict unresolved, unintegrated needs, a living experience of death as well as life...<sup>43</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Letter dated November 1970. PFTP MS328 A834/4/2/5.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. p.9.

<sup>40</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/13.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, ‘Saturn-Cronus’, *Encyclopedia of Time*, ed. Samuel L. Macey, (New York: Routledge, 2013), p.543.

<sup>42</sup> Carne-Ross, p.234.

<sup>43</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/6.

## THE SIGN OF SATURN

This failure of the alternative deviant knowledge to be an adequate “solution”, the failure of the miracle never occurring, is inherent. It is a consequence of the exile, the non-existence of such life, of its habitation of the space between the late and the not-too-late. Prince returned to the ‘poem about a poem’ idea the next day, and appends a bathetic conclusion which illustrates this failure:

15 May: Add to the poetry-in-book idea, that by the time one has acquired the learning needed to appreciate Greek or Latin poetry, one has lost the capacity to ‘live’ it: just as by the time one has run through the mistakes and miseries needed to teach one how to love, it is too late—by the time one has ‘found out’ about the New Testament one has lost one’s power to love and believe in Christ... xx Perhaps I was just poet enough to become a professor.<sup>44</sup>

Belatedness is potent, but the potency is unable to be realised. Just as Fallada’s head found, it is all far too late.

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<sup>44</sup> PFTP MS328 A834/3/1/5.



## CONCLUSION

### MINE OLD DEAR ENEMY

Scholars wind a rope of straw,  
Call it a golden chain.

(‘Moult sont Prud’hommes les Templiers’, CP, 88)

In the interview with Stephen Devereux published as part of the NELM Interview Series, in answer to a question on ‘Soldiers Bathing’, Prince had explained that elsewhere he had not “written personal poetry of that direct kind”, before going on to deny that even ‘Soldiers Bathing’ was personal: “I think that, in any case, in that poem the “I” is a very limited mouthpiece. It’s not a very personal poem is it? [...] It’s not a deeply personal poem.”<sup>1</sup> But Devereux was not to be put off the scent, and went on to ask an astute question, to which Prince gave an apparently simple answer:

*Another poem in the Soldiers Bathing collection, "The Inn," concerns a pair of lovers who are about to be separated because the narrator is going off to war. Is this a deliberate echo of your own situation in 1943, when you married just before being sent to Cairo?*

Yes, certainly. That group of poems are personal, love poems.<sup>2</sup>

It is a personal poem, a love poem. But Prince perhaps agrees too quickly. In fact, the poem tells us outright who the “pair of lovers” are:

That you may not be but the winter-queen  
Of schism in Bohemia, nor I  
Elector of an exile where I’ll die.

(CP, 58)

The poem refers to Elizabeth Stuart, the ‘Winter Queen’ of Bohemia, and her husband the ‘Winter King’ Frederick V, who after gaining his crown in 1619 and losing it 1620 went into exile in The Hague and became Elector of a Palatinate government-in-exile. He would never return to Bohemia and would die in exile. The syntax here is particularly convolved, and the poem never makes us *certain* that this is Frederick and Elizabeth, or merely another couple from the same time thinking of Frederick and

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<sup>1</sup> Devereux, *F.T. Prince*, p.15.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Devereux, *F.T. Prince*, NELM Interviews Series no. 3 (Grahamstown: National English Literary Museum, 1988), p.16.

Elizabeth (W.G. Shepherd one joked that he would write an essay on Prince called the “8<sup>th</sup> type of ambiguity”<sup>3</sup>). I am inclined to believe it is Frederick and Elizabeth, if only for the following lines:

A royal woman and a man  
 Were joined like puppets to beget a love  
 Imputed by the plot, and set to move  
 Apart, together, as you come, I go  
 To the unknown the way I do not know

(CP, 58)

Frederick—if it is he—begins by considering their situation at one remove, but is drawn back into the texture of the poem by the force of his emotion. If it is not he, it is a somewhat irrelevant anecdote which should be ended by a full stop before the speaker starts describing their own situation. The poem is a “personal, love poem” surely, but it may be more than one person, and more than one love.

In his review of *Reading F.T. Prince*, whilst writing about ‘The Tears of a Muse in America’, Mark Ford declared that the poem’s original title, ‘A Muse for William Maynard’, “signals its origins in a relationship with an American presumably met during his spell as a graduate student at Princeton in 1935.”<sup>4</sup> I can find no evidence for this supposition. In fact, Anthony Rudolf explained that “William Maynard was an invented name and Prince later decided to depersonalise the title.”<sup>5</sup> It seems to me likely that the young poet was simply emulating the practice of Pound and Eliot—with ‘Hugh Selwyn Mauberley’, ‘Hecatomb Styrax’ or ‘J. Alfred Prufrock’—and we can suppose that one reason he might have dropped the invented name was that he did not make it fantastical or grotesque enough: perhaps he was tired of being asked who ‘William Maynard’ was—a question we can doubt was ever asked of Mr Styrax. At any rate, as has already been mentioned, the poem grew out of an attempt to finish James’s *The Ivory Tower*—it is not impossible that ‘William Maynard’ was intended to be an additional character (though I have no proof for this supposition). But Ford is not the only critic to have had to invent an entire character or person in order to make sense of Prince’s poetry. In an essay on *Walks In Rome* which I otherwise feel a profound sympathy towards, Nicholas Poburko made the curious decision to introduce a new character we have not come across before:

[Prince] is in Rome because his Latin tutor from fifty years ago had asked to meet. Too late, he cannot get free, while Prince has booked a room for seven days.<sup>6</sup>

The solution to Poburko’s problem is much simpler, and I gestured towards it at the beginning of this thesis. Prince tells us outright who the person he meets in Rome is:

<sup>3</sup> PFTP MS328 A4615/1.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Ford, ‘In Fiery Letters’, *London Review of Books*, Vol. 40, No. 3, 8 February 2018, pp.31-3.

<sup>5</sup> ‘I have written other poems you know’, *PN Review* 147, Vol. 29, No. 1, September - October 2002. In a clarifying email Anthony told me he couldn’t entirely remember where he had heard this, but felt it was probably from Prince himself.

<sup>6</sup> Nicholas Poburko, ‘Poetry, Past and Present: F.T. Prince’s *Walks in Rome*’, *Renaissance: Essays on Values in Literature*, (January 1999), pp.145-63.

MINE OLD DEAR ENEMY

As Wyatt's 'dear enemy'  
was Love, so mine,  
that both lover and hater  
of self, was myself, me

(CP, 259)

Not his Latin tutor, but his self. It is Prince who sees his own double across the void of time, staring back like a piece of *bric-a-brac*, made of plaster. It is Prince who is the foward master, his "young backward self" (CP, 260). His old self haunts him as a double and a revenant, a piece of detritus or graffiti like those that line the walls in Rome, and becomes another *objet d'art* he passes on his walks, another face in the portrait gallery:

And all, so dead and gone  
look in no way antique,  
  
unless in that they might  
be thought, here, to have waited:  
—as they wait still

(CP, 277)

There is something about Prince's work that causes us to see ghosts, doubles, masks where there are no masks, to find characters where there are no characters, or otherwise to miss characters who are already there. His poetry is difficult, dry, haunted, passionate—it is, in a word, foward. The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives as its first definition of 'foward'—

Disposed to go counter to what is demanded or what is reasonable; perverse, difficult to deal with, hard to please; refractory, ungovernable;

And as its second—

In a direction that leads away from the person or thing under consideration;

That is, the opposite of 'toward'. To which I would add one further definition, based on experience. Having used the word in correspondence to refer to this thesis, I have had a number of people think I had misspelt 'forward'. I like this thought: 'foward' is a foward way to spell 'forward', fowardness upsets forwardness.

Too often we see Anglo-American poetic successes in the 20th century as part of a homogenized progression—the experiments of Williams and Stevens lead to Ashbery and O'Hara, Ashbery and O'Hara lead to Silliman and the Language Poets. But there are other voices, other pressures that exert a Saturnian influence on this steady progression, a foward mastery. Prince was one of these voices, and his influence was felt and heeded by a number of the brightest stars in 20th-century poetry: Harwood, Ashbery, Hill, Berrigan—Prince's influence cannot be discounted. And more than this, Prince's own

work must come to be recognised as equally bright in the firmament, uneclipsed by those other bodies. His poetry and thought are a unique contribution to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and it is my hope that his work will be discovered and rediscovered by the readers, critics, and poets of the future.

I had originally intended to give this conclusion the title 'The Holiday Poet', and focus it on the ways in which the idea of holiday—of fiction, escape—had determined Prince's poetry: from the early holidays in Italy, through his sojourn at All Soul's with *Memoirs in Oxford*, his feeling for the Jamaican landscape in 'His Dog and Pilgrim', and finally his return to Italy with *Walks in Rome*, not to mention his intellectual holidaying in various historical periods. But Prince's work is not about holidays—or rather, it is about the cusp where holidays turn into holy days, where the neoclassical play or the deep veneer of pure poetry is wounded and begins to point beyond itself, and where the past breaks through into the present—in short, where artifice gains truth. Prince is foward because he had a vision that did not fit with his age. Irascible, obscure, conservative, experimental, backward, his work is a maze of contradictions, the output of a startling mind working in a tawdry age. This thesis, I am sure, has its fair share of invented characters, but it has been the rope of straw I have wound to lead me out of the maze, and from this phantasmagoria of doubles, deserts, dogs and composers, icons, wounds, shadows, kingdoms and revenants, one thing should, I hope, be clear: F.T. Prince was a master.

## APPENDIX

Unpublished or rare poems  
(in the order in which they appear in the thesis)

## ‘A STAR RECALLED BY THIS REVISIT...’

A star recalled by this revisit  
Jumped on the limping stream and stood  
Still in the sky. Our bones were swallowed  
By widowed acres, from the head  
The bruised eyes trodden with which we watched  
That gleam among such blooms as touched  
With brown under nearing night  
With white and fresh rough tatters covered  
The river's face. In the bare bed even  
Our greed looks now to be confused,  
For those deep warm places must have left a place  
And such poverty must feed us. Still, what is dirt  
Was lips and tongue. But what was that?  
Who are you?  
The dying winter firstly lets me know; lets me know

The calamity perfected with a stroke  
In which black trice. I recognise  
A full defeat in the snows that melt,  
The valley open, the several streams, but will  
Reverse my reverse and while the trees  
Threaten a purple I will use  
A closely flattering prudence, slip  
The martial impositions  
Of reflowering swags and clouded cars.

Yet this display is routed by a voice  
Which rings in the flushed, implacable wood, ‘What  
Can you choose?’  
The complicated water shimmering still,  
‘You had the choice and though the chances lessened  
You had a choice yet and you never chose,

Chose not to choose, but asked for fortune  
So rich as to be conscious fiction,  
You waited for a fitting wing  
To clinch the match, you refused  
Too easily too many tenders.  
How your accusations of betrayals  
Sound thinly when  
‘Tis plain you would entirely trust to none.

Then to be met by features hard

As the trough of withered torrents, waking  
 Alone with strangers, idle at noon  
 In severe green shires and, not to be  
 A stranger, stranger to yourself:  
 What you wanted was a wilderness  
 Which you have, which  
 You have had, you will have and wander there.

The native graces you impute  
 To those you exploit and who escape you,  
 Whom you abandon, not escape,  
 Are the self-lit baits of the debaucher;  
 But your malady had to taste more sharp  
 Till your cities luminously sprawl  
 Like barbarous courtesans  
 Who do no tricks except in dialect.

From the pool and the useful field  
 That breathes a female permanence  
 Your hunger drew and abstruse cream,  
 Meadows and sweets in meadowfuls  
 And signs, airs, leaves, looks  
 (For you remember here a meeting  
 And there the wearing flowers)  
 You took for clumsy shifts, left as restless lies:  
 And what you dream turns true  
 As true at least, for all you know,  
 As all you knew:  
 So who will dare to say what is the least that you may say?

And there is nothing you can do  
 Unless you say, – not entering  
 That stone country of your own  
 Of dead limbs and toppled architraves,  
 Which would be nothing new, do not  
 Attempt the slaughter of these vegetable tides  
 And not withdraw your waves and loves:  
 But you may say you will not lose,  
 But go to bed with swords, embrace  
 The holdings of a lucid fury,  
 But be a weeping fire, but leading  
 Cheaply a highly coloured life,  
 You could say that when light burns  
 Light is ignorant, but that you again  
 And again would flame and see and not consume.'

## STANZE

In the untiring interest of these lakes  
 Whose brilliance trammels distance and direction,  
 Clouds are suspended in long loops and flakes  
 To double their affirmative reflection.  
 Cliffs mimic pines: and seeking water shakes  
 Its falls through echoes without circumspection  
 Evening and morning the old man takes fishes  
 As lucid as the moon who illustrates wishes.

After a nightlong of disputes and dances  
 These colonies of lovers strip, relax  
 No further than to dip into the glances  
 Of the wet-looking glass that never cracks  
 Their still uncertain unities; but one lances  
 (Resentful of a glimpse of parallax)  
 On the early patience his exploring boat:  
 Bend sail, swim shore, press wind and ripples, float!

The shifting relics of rejected views,  
 Remembered outlines, inexperienced lies  
 Such as uneasy ignorances use,  
 Dead bundles ready for another's eyes  
 To kindle, here compressed and twisted, fuse  
 Together; speed remoulds and clarifies.  
 So search extends and evidences grow:  
 The sail bows, the boat runs, the ripples flow.

## SCENE WITH AN ECHO

Since we have undergone a minor death  
 May I not speak, and as I must? for I  
 Can still address you, may be answered, though  
 Your floating few replies are not renewed,  
 Nor truly nor by you.

*Do not, lost.*

Not to hope that fondling absence may replace  
 Our happier muteness, often lost? Yet madness,  
 Yet cruelty inveterates and therefore  
 You I have somewhat scooped and much repaired  
 To amuse my ear with this obedience. Mine  
 You are, a servant meant to shiver, starved  
 In a vault among elaborate ruins, and as a tenant  
 Of the bitter passages where also mine  
 Is the moonlight, is the cunning of the maimed: while alone,  
 No longer hanging on a younger anger,  
 With muttering I search myself  
 The subject and the knife; but still for you  
 Nothing could simplify what was so clear:  
 Mutual trophies were not?

*Not for you.*

I may let you quibble if you like,  
 But I had sooner have you say, 'We were,  
 Golden we were, of gold,' and to pursue  
 You should add, 'In shuddering summer I have hidden  
 My head to kiss among the leaves of night.'  
 Yet you needed for that too another mouth  
 Which was mine, there was no other mouth than mine,  
 Which was to fill the matter out, to prove  
 How we repeat ourselves, to ask  
 If it were true that there were none for you but me,  
 There being none but you.

*Who being you?*

Who should it be for me? but none but me  
 Declining luminary of ill will diluted  
 A darkness much too tender to be kind,  
 And it seemed I was surrounded by a sigh.

*I was your sigh.*

For loving all our seeing was like dying,  
 Living fleeting our foreseeing, till one evening  
 Lake-full of echoes, though nothing like tonight,  
 When for the last time we were solid as the gray light, we  
 Impatient of the panting horn and of the hunt accelerated  
 The disaster we saw flying by not replying  
 In the disaster that the not replying made.

*As if dying without trying.*

And so early had we (had we?) killed and killed each other?  
 How, however, had we never known, shall ever know?

*Never, no.*

Or do I kill you now?  
 How we may repeat ourselves, as a silence  
 Will multiply a silence. What in a mist  
 We did, done; again, gone.

## THE YARD

March dreams in the orchard,  
 Noon glows overhead;  
 The yard is bare, a bicycle  
 Leans by a shed.  
 Some milk spilt on the stone  
 Dries in the sun.

And there floats out a low clatter  
 Of dishes, and a laugh:  
 A chair scrapes, voices wrangle  
 Goodhumouredly, or chaff.  
 And I pause to despise  
 My life of lies.

But a cloud blows, and the orchard  
 Fades at the heart.  
 Pale white blossoming glow and glare  
 Are deadened and depart.  
 And two flies buzz upon  
 The milk-stained stone.

## "TO BELIEVE IS ABOVE ALL TO BE IN LOVE"

To believe is above all to be in love,  
 And suffer as men do who are in love;  
 And therefore I rebel, deny, despair,  
 Distrust, am jealous of the very air;  
 Often am self-abandoned, sunk in grief,  
 And often lose you and sometimes belief;  
 Until I can do nothing more and you  
 Pity me for the things I cannot do,  
 And then my love revives and lifts its head,  
 Having received a little piece of bread.

## THE GOOSE GIRL

When will you remember,  
 Though you have changed your dress,  
 With goose-herds on the common,  
 You are the princess?

But the wicked maid  
 Wished you a maid as well,  
 And bullied and betrayed;  
 Caught you in a spell.

Now through the grass and grease  
 Barefoot and milky-white,  
 You wander while the geese  
 Go marching left and right.

How long must the wind blow  
 And you comb your hair,  
 Till you tire of Curdken,  
 And wonder why you are there?

But I am only the old horse  
 Hung up by the gate:  
 'Fallada, do you hang there?'  
 You say, and will not wait.

## 'THE CASE REJECTED'

The case rejected,  
 The rose is dead;  
 The sea reflected  
 The summer ~~that is~~ shed.  
 So he said.

Since I have lived  
 After youth's bitterness,  
 I have survived  
 My own life, more or less.  
 So he said.

What shall I say?  
 It was a golden cloud  
 Melted away.  
 I am no longer proud.  
 So he said.

I am twenty-five  
 And wish that I were dead  
 For I survive  
 Myself, O I am dead.  
 So he said.

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