

Violence in the Work of J.H. Prynne.

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Abstract.

This doctoral dissertation situates close readings of J.H. Prynne's poetry in an investigation of the theoretic, philosophical and poetic contexts by which violence is represented and interrogated in his work. My readings of Prynne's poetry are coextensive with the thematic continuity of Prynne's poetic oeuvre, utilising specific textual examples that highlight a theoretical understanding of the manifold manners in which violence is handled by the poet. The texts adduced here displace a lengthy exegetical investigation across Prynne's oeuvre by instead focusing on a systematic interpretation of texts in which the operation and representation of violence forms the basis of the exposition. This thesis and its attendant investigations focus upon specific poetry collections in which violence is a predominant theme, and bring awareness to the manner in which the operations of violence and its representation construct a position of ontological awareness.

The poems are situated against a number of philosophical constructs which they utilise, contest and exceed. This dissertation tracks Prynne's eventual distancing from Heideggerian thought, towards a lineage which instead relies upon the work of Alain Badiou. While Martin Heidegger's work informs Prynne's early poetic development and his conception of dwelling, Prynne begins to establish distance from the philosopher starting with the collection *Brass*. From this point onwards Prynne stresses the connection between political resistance and poetic creation which can be read through the late philosophy of Alain Badiou, and which would later inform Prynne's essay 'Poetic Thought'. The philosophical underpinnings of the text posit the poet's role, through the depiction violence, as a representative of heightened political

awareness supporting a position of ontological resistance. Such resistance is, in Prynne's poetic philosophy, crucial to the creation of new poetic thought. This dissertation focuses on the connection between philosophical categories of being and theories of violence and bearing witness, as subtended through a discussion of Prynne's poetics wherein these concepts are coextensive. It also investigates the relationships established between lyric, the authorial voice, and violence as a poetic theme.

Student Declaration:

Statement of Candidate Contribution:

I certify that this thesis has been written by me, and reserve my rights as the author of this work. This thesis contains **only sole-authored** work, some of which has been published and/or prepared for publication under sole authorship.

I certify that all sources of information and assistance used in the research for and writing of this thesis have been properly acknowledged.

I certify that the work in this thesis has not been previously submitted, whole or in part, for the requirements of any other degree.

Matthew Hall

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Introduction.

In the journal *In lit*, Jeremy Prynne delineated the foundations of a poetic project already many years in development, writing, 'It has been my own aspiration, for example, to establish relations not personally with the reader, but with the world and its layers of shifted but recognisable usages; and thereby with the reader's own position within this world.'¹ Due to its scope, excess and complexity, Prynne's poetry problematises an experience of the world inextricably knotted with the manners in which it may be understood. Prynne's poetry and its political inclinations function in a manner which contest the need for and the function of poetry in contemporary culture. The perpetration of violence, its integration into power structures and its representation form systematic and methodological constructs by which Prynne begins to establish with the reader an awareness of this poetic and political questioning.

This thesis is about violence. It sets out to develop a critical methodology for the analysis of violence operative in a poetic, using contemporary philosophical arguments and poetic theory to explicate and define the correlation between instances of violence and their effects upon a poetic. This thesis, and its attendant investigation, brings awareness to the manner in which violence and its representation are substantiated in the poems and condition the function of the poetic. The central task of this dissertation is to produce a survey of Prynne's oeuvre which examines the ways in which an engagement with and representation of violence is manifested in Prynne's poetry and the manner in which it performs and influences textual, poetic, and ontological operations. Exploring Prynne's

¹ J.H. Prynne, "A Letter to Peter Riley 15/9/1985," *In lit* (1992) [unknown page numbers].

oeuvre through this methodology examines the ways that violence operates in varying texts and demonstrates how this violence conditions the function of each poem and potentially limits its expression.

A methodological selection of Prynne's books was undertaken to evaluate the varying poetic functions associated with the textual construction and representation of violence. Rather than attempting to detail the historical and political specificity of each representation of violence, this dissertation seeks to observe the emergence, manifestation and function of violence as it develops and changes across Prynne's poetic. The central task is to produce a series of investigations that analyse the role of violence as experienced through a close reading of the texts. In most instances the occasion of violence is represented in a manner which functions upon a number of operative axes, from the philosophical, to the ontological and the political, and which problematise the poet-subject relation through poetic structure, the contestation of the lyric voice and the effects of violent experiences upon poetic rendition. While the function of violence may manifest itself across any number of these positions, each instance of violence in the texts selected signifies an intentional development in the meaning and cognition of only one of these positions at any given time. As the violence at play within Prynne's poetic acts upon these axes in differing proportions, analysis of these axes will contribute to the comprehensive understanding of the role of violence across Prynne's oeuvre.

The positional stratagem of this thesis entails both a metastructural analysis of the role of violence within a poetic and an exploratory inquiry into violence and its representative constructs. Each chapter couples instances of violence with a philosophical investigation on the basis of the historical paradigm of the poem itself. That is, the poems themselves utilise and interrogate the socio-historical and linguistic structures of a

particular language history, contingent upon the events that they describe which in turn can be revealed and understood through philosophical investigation. Strategic analysis of the codices and histories of the language used to represent violence will highlight the effects of violence on the poem at a structural level. This methodology is used to apprehend the ways in which violence delimits or otherwise alters the epistemic status of the poem.

The analysis and the contextual investigation into patterns of violence in Prynne are couched within an analytic reading of the poems themselves, building upon extant critical investigations by Keston Sutherland, Anthony Mellors, Rod Mengham and other contemporary critics, while offering new avenues of exploration and new critical formulations. As thorough critical examination of Prynne's poetry is at a burgeoning stage, there remains much to be gained from a sustained and methodological investigation of this type. This dissertation focuses on understanding the varying axes of informational exchange within each poem and accentuates a close reading practice to highlight the effects of violence upon the poetic, as well as the ramifications of violence on the reader, poet and axes of poetic expression.

Chapter One of this thesis comprises an analysis of 'Es Lebe der König' from the 1971 collection *Brass*. The salient themes of this chapter on Prynne's elegy to Paul Celan are the treatment of the pastoral elegiac form, the contestation and interrogation of literary antecedents, the role of bearing witness, and the effects of ontological resistance upon experience. This reading of 'Es Lebe der König' examines the development of Prynne's poetic as he moves from Heideggerian philosophy towards a poetic which can be read through Badiou's notion of the event. From this position, 'Es Lebe der König' is contextualised against Celan's 'Meridian Speech' as well as the historical problem of writing lyrical poetry after Auschwitz. Highlighted throughout this analysis is Prynne's

capacity to create new poetic thought that is linked with a position of political resistance defined by a subjectivity maintaining fidelity to the event. The capacity of the poet to enact resistance, it is argued, is inseparable from the poet's capacity to create new poetic thought that seeks to preserve the testimony of the witness.

'Es Lebe der König' is a poem of extreme density and depth, reflective of the difficulty of approaching its cultural context, the Holocaust and the death of Paul Celan. While structured against the history of the pastoral elegy, the poem is incorporative of a fugal form, referencing Celan's 'Todesfuge', and it employs exceptional referentiality, reminiscent of Celan's poetic methods. The poem explores the notion of bearing witness to atrocity and Celan's notion that 'no one bears witness for the witness.'² Set against the human suffering and atrocity of the Holocaust, 'Es Lebe der König' outlines a poetic aimed at reconciling the preservation of the truth of human suffering with an ontology unified with the forbearance of nature.

The treatment of natural and sustentive elements within the poem shows continuity with Celan's usage and forms implicit symbols in Prynne's poetic construction. Nature and the capacity to persevere in the face of human atrocity both stand in symbolically for Celan. In 'Es Lebe der König' the poet seeks to maintain fidelity to the event of Celan's suicide as well as to respect Celan's own personal and poetic relationship with the events of the Holocaust. The pastoral frame of the poem implicates the representation of the natural as a

² Paul Celan, "Aschenglorie," *The Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, trans. John Felstiner (New York; London: W.W. Norton, 2001) 260-1.

political utterance, which substantiates Prynne's claim that the landscape is 'acculturated by the subsistence of social memory.'³

Chapter Two focuses upon Prynne's 1977 collection *News of Warring Clans* and the function of mythic violence in that work. *News of Warring Clans* presents a dialectical engagement with the material constraints of language in the contestation of accounts of war. Thematically, *News of Warring Clans* rests upon the force of domination, transgression and expropriation of resources from an unspecified country by a dominant, military-industrial corporation. The political contexts of the poem, written the year after Mao's death in 1976, signify that this contest may involve the exploitation and capitalisation of China, and therefore involves the function of language in power blocs. The poem focuses on the systematic destruction of language and inequality of expression in times of conflict. The poem provides a contestation of the preferred definitions of war, engaged at social, economic and socio-linguistic levels, to investigate the processes of lexical expression towards an understanding of the manner in which expression is directed and controlled by the dominant force in the conflict.

Chapter Two's analysis focuses upon Prynne's theoretic exposition of the inequities of language in times of war and his utilisation of these constraints in the creation of his poetic. *News of Warring Clans* presents an experience of the limitations placed upon language by the dominant force in a conflict. The poem dramatises this relation between oppressor and oppressed by stressing the inherent limitation of cross-cultural communication and by structuring its mode of expression from within the constraints it is criticising. The poem actively contests the velocity at which technology transforms

³ J.H. Prynne, "A Letter to P Riley: 14th Feb. 1967," *The English Intelligencer*, 1st ser., 15 (Apr 1967) 284. Reprinted in Neil Pattison, Reitha Pattison, Luke Roberts, eds., *Certain Prose of The English Intelligencer* (Cambridge: Mountain Press, 2012) 74-78, 76.

language by highlighting how these forces direct the creation of poetic meaning and influence language functions. The discrepancy between modern conceptualisations of war and language and its traditional formulation is displayed between the dominant and the subjugated groups. The constrictions on expression in the poem and the engagement with contradiction and resistance are increasingly demonstrative of the incommensurable position of each side in the conflict. *News of Warring Clans* represents the constrictions inherent in language, the dominance instrumental in the functioning of power structures, and the poem's 'consumptive action,' which seeks to eradicate the possibility of expression or resistance.

The construct of mythic violence enters the poetic through the representation of power structures, based upon the military-backed group's appropriation of traditionally owned, resource-rich land. Dominant forces express this power in mythic terms, as Barthes has noted, with the intent to immobilise the world, and eradicate the possibility of resistance.⁴ Within the poem the dialectical relationship between the two sides in the conflict becomes one of forced coercion. This is related to mythic violence, as dominance shifts from an objective or conceptual potentiality to a mode of signification: an expression of absolute control. The poem utilises a number of metatheatric tropes, such as parabasis and asides, in its representation of the action at the poem's locale. This highlights the operation of language in power blocs and the divisions inherent between the groups. Prynne utilises these divisions to mask the divergence between the deep and surface play of the poem, between the narrative and the action at the *dramatis locus*. In utilising metatheatric tropes, *News of Warring Clans* critiques the use of deception and ploy in the perpetuation of conflict, and in late-modern capitalism.

⁴ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972) 155.

Chapter Three investigates Prynne's 1987 collection *Bands Around the Throat*, which represents and questions the function of violence at political, rhetorical, pathological, socioeconomic and linguistic levels. As each of the critics working on the collection *Bands Around the Throat* argue, the poems represent and interrogate violence during South African apartheid, the nuclear meltdown of the Chernobyl reactor in 1986, as well as systems of financial and economic control. The poems problematise the use of the English language, with its socio-linguistic history of power relations, in relation to media reports of the Chernobyl meltdown as well as violence in apartheid-era South Africa. The poems textual construction centre on the voicing of authority and communicative control in times of crisis. *Bands Around the Throat* functions politically by examining contemporaneous reports of necklace killings during South African apartheid, the casting of the Chernobyl disaster as an information crisis, and social and economic policy in Britain under the conservative government of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (1979-1990). *Bands Around the Throat* dramatizes the dialectical relationship between economic rationalism and the victims of such policies. In the collection Prynne highlights this relationship through the problematisation of black labour power in South Africa, as well as through the representation of sanctions on, and First World donations to, the Third World.⁵ *Bands Around the Throat* instigates questions not only about the role of socioeconomic power structures in contributing to violence, but also about the imposed limitations on expressions of suffering and the process of bearing witness.

⁵ In an attempt to situate the analysis of the collection *Bands Around the Throat* in its historical context the terms First World and Third World have been used to demarcate the socio-economic power blocs established between nations prior to the fall of the Soviet Union, while acknowledging that these terms are no longer preferred. 'First World' will be utilised to refer to those countries allied to the United State and Western Europe, 'Second World' will refer to those nations allied to the Soviet Union and 'Third World' will refer to nations allied to neither world power.

The thematic focus on Chernobyl highlights the communicative privilege of those in positions of power, which in turn instigates questions on the privilege of rhetoric functioning within a poetic, and the relation between authority and the lyric voice. The privilege of rhetoric is highlighted in an examination of the political decisions of the government of the Soviet Union, in addition to the failure of Scandinavian countries first aware of the disaster in intervening or offering aid to those suffering exposure to radiation. The lack of substantial intervention into the Chernobyl crisis, lack of direct offerings of help and the lack of a response by political leaders instigate questions about the privilege of exemption.

The privilege of exemption on which political leaders base their decisions extends over the poem a dialectic of care and control. The privilege of exemption raises questions regarding concepts of distanced engagement, the displacement of the lyric voice and the role of bearing witness to atrocity. In *Bands Around the Throat*, Prynne's response is poetically constructed and demonstrates the manner in which his resistance can be politically responsible as well as respectful to those suffering trauma. The poem seeks to offer actualised resistance to the forces that contribute to the violence experienced at subjective and systemic levels.

Fundamental to the construction of the poem 'Fool's Bracelet' in *Bands Around the Throat* is the inclusion of children's verse and the representation of game playing. The utilisation of children's verse in a poem discussing apartheid violence in South Africa instigates questions about processes of language acquisition and, following Jameson, examines how referential frames influence systems of knowledge acquisition.⁶ The poems

⁶ Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974) 4.

that focus on distanced intervention into the Third World reinstitute the textual construction of children's verse and games as part of their lexical pattern. Structuring the argument on the nature of language acquisition, this section of Chapter Three investigates the pattern of children's verse through Ludwig Wittgenstein and his theories on linguistic games as contributions to the development of language and social knowledge through the representation and understanding of trauma, dominance and empathy.

The representation of game playing ties to the broader thematic interests of *Bands Around the Throat* through the enactment of sacrificial violence at social and subjective levels. The socioeconomic disparity described in 'Fool's Bracelet' reveals the power relations between technology's masters and its end users, exposing layers of dominance inherent in the relations between First and Third Worlds. The cultural disconnect between these contradictory positions of dominance and subjugation demonstrates limitations inherent in claims to authority and in expressions of suffering. The role of bearing witness as represented in *Bands Around the Throat* reiterates many of the issues raised in 'Es Lebe der König' about agency, capacity for expression and the authority of those controlling the information as it relates to an atrocity.

The political and socioeconomic layers of dominance in the poem are paralleled through the use of textual elements represented in the African and Soviet contexts. The positions of master and slave and an individual's claim to agency are paramount to the collection, as they are throughout *Brass*. The representation of social stratifications based on wealth is at its most prominent in the poems 'Fresh Running Water' and 'Lend a Hand', which castigate neo-liberalism and the motivations of Western involvement in Africa. The close readings of these poems denote the manner in which affluence and guilt condition

one's response to trauma, calling attention to how the privilege of exemption functions at subjective and social levels.

The representation of the Chernobyl disaster through the interpolation of scientific data, laboratory testing and a biblical lexicon highlight frames of belief in shaping a response to trauma. Each of these lexical frames bears certain complex interrelations and coextensive meanings in poetic representation. The use of these lexical structures in the depiction of the Chernobyl disaster leads to an image-complex, most evident in the poem 'Marzipan', which casts disaster and human survival in apocalyptic terms, and where meaning is articulated and contested between divergent discourses. The function of music in *Bands Around the Throat* parallels the use of biblical dictum and scientific language, as elisions of subjective expression. Reiterating Brass's claim that music may represent the highest qualities and characteristics of human creation, in *Bands Around the Throat* reference to the Soviet Union's playing of classical music on all State radio stations as a form of censorship assures the reader that music is only ever an occlusion of suffering.

The systemic frames of the poem – pathological harm, socioeconomic disparity and censorship – culminate in the alliterative verse construction of 'Write-Out', the second-to-last poem in the collection. The embodied expression of 'Write-Out' uses poetic rendering, structural form and syntactical dissemination to exemplify the pressures on the voice of the witness, eliding the capacity for expression. 'Write-Out' is a cumulative, incorporative structure, which expresses a need for the reconstitution of lyric in the face of devastating violence.

Examining the poetic expression of *Bands Around the Throat* in conjunction with a close reading of the text highlights many of the axes on which a poetic is altered and

transformed through systemic and subjective violence. *Bands Around the Throat* interrogates these conditions through its representation of trauma, and in doing so reinforces the poet's position of offering social and political resistance against forces that perpetuate violence.

Chapter Four situates a reading of Prynne's 2002 poem *Acrylic Tips* in an investigation of poetic construction by which violence is perpetuated through colonial and technological dominance. *Acrylic Tips* presents the transformative pressures of colonial dominance upon the traditional, Indigenous, socio-historical space of Australia. As Australian Indigenous history and cultural traditions form a salient theme of the poem, at issue is the manner in which colonial and technological dominance extend through social and cultural trajectories. Stemming from the earlier collection *Her Weasels Wild Returning* are a number of contiguous thematic threads, such as a problematic articulation of the female pronoun and the utilisation of a 'synoptic language'⁷ in the poems, both of which speak to subjugation and the silencing of marginal voices in colonial conflicts. The conditions of violence in the poem are interrogated as they affect language, labour and cultural adaptation through post-colonial Indigenous culture.

In presenting the disparity and demarcations between such culturally divergent groups as the British colonialists and Australian Indigenous society, the poem draws attention to how cultures adapt and survive under external, transformative pressures. Through the juxtaposition of Western cultural practices with those of Indigenous Australians, Prynne castigates the degree to which ethnographic and cultural determinates are used as a motive for control, dominance and colonisation, and how these motives

⁷ Rod Mengham, "After Avant-gardism: *Her Weasels Wild Returning*," *Assembling Alternatives; Reading Postmodern Poetries Transnationally*, ed. Romana Huk (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2003) 384-88, 387.

reinforce structures of dominance within a society. *Acrylic Tips* incorporates Indigenous cultural traditions, such as Indigenous song, the geographic-spatial mapping of landscape by familial lines and an understanding of the earth as the female embodiment of the people in the creation of a poetic. In utilising these constructs Prynne protests the manner in which cultural practices and traditions are destroyed by the force of colonisation, arguing for the continuance of tradition through adaptation.

In establishing the poem's connection with the Australian continent and its people, an analogous reading of *Acrylic Tips* is undertaken, situating the poem alongside John Kinsella's 2000 work, *The Hierarchy of Sheep*, amongst others. This makes explicit the connection between the two poets by establishing shared experiences within Australia that inform their respective poems. While Prynne's connection with Kinsella and his family has long been established, the degree to which *Acrylic Tips* is reliant on their experiences together in Australia has not. Chapter Four will establish the dedication of the poem, 'To S. K.', as belonging to John Kinsella's brother, Stephen Kinsella. Locating *Acrylic Tips* in this way establishes the poem as occupying the trans-historical space of rural Australia at the turn of the twenty-first century, formulating the thematic space of the poem as belonging to the pastoral and connecting its poetic with the labour of sheep-shearing.

The poem outlines a narrative about the breakdown of a relationship and a couple's increasing tensions over custody of their daughter. As it is represented, the relationship exists cross-culturally, localising interpersonal, subjective and familial violence while forming a microcosm for the broader divisions between Indigenous and Western cultures. However, as the poem is also a cathartic expression of the pain of substance abuse and the violence this can inflict upon a relationship, this investigation does not wish to extend the particularities of one relationship to stand in for the full spectrum of inter-cultural relations.

Thus the focus of Chapter Four demarcates the violence experienced in the relationship narrative from the poem's broader concerns with colonial dominance, violence and the brutality of human-animal relations experienced in rural occupations such as shearing.

Acrylic Tips presents the history of colonisation as creating a pattern of violence that extends into contemporary social structures. In *Acrylic Tips* this aspect of violence is represented in relation to animals, technology, and labour. The 'synoptic language' of the poem gradually elides divisions between the ubiquity of violence in individual occupations and violence expressed in the social sphere. This investigation contends that colonisation entails sustained systemic violence which has influenced and contaminated intercultural relations, the relationship between humans and nature, the pastoral, and language itself.

These claims are substantiated by examining the forces of violence on language through investigation into the linguistic patterns, prosodic forms and referentiality of the poem's construction. The analysis explores the cultural language systems of the poem as developed and adapted on the Australian continent. The language of the poem presents a concatenated exchange in which technical language, patterns of landscape, colloquialisms and Indigenous structures of knowledge coexist and are mutually dependent. It is argued that an understanding of Australian language and culture requires that the particular and general be mediated through the forces of colonisation, adaptation, amelioration and coexistence. The poem enacts this understanding through its language, a poetic language that functions as a socially mediated matrix with its own history and its own socio-historical construction.

Chapter Five focuses on Prynne's poem 'Refuse Collection', which exemplifies a collation of subjective, systemic and ultra-subjective types of violence. 'Refuse Collection'

is an elegiac poem which takes as its thematic core the war in Iraq that began in 2003, and the release of images documenting torture inside Abu Ghraib prison in May 2004. The poem is an act of resistance against the forces of a global-hegemonic power and the collectivised will by which a democratic government supported an illegal war. The work is poetically constituted by media-based public language admixed with military argot, and represents disintegrating and shifting lexical registers. As the poem interrogates and contests democratic decision-making and individual will, while being poetically constructed from media-based language, a definition of the public and public language are explored. Concepts of the public and of public language are investigated through the theories of Jürgen Habermas, and the definition of public language is shaped to include counterpublics, which are inclusive of traditionally marginalised expression. Prynne's 'Refuse Collection' represents a coupling of poetic expression with the growing agency of public sentiment against the war, which 'forces the poetic-expressive character of counterpublic discourse to become salient to consciousness.'⁸

The poem is an act of resistance that maintains fidelity to the torture at Abu Ghraib as an event which fundamentally changed public consciousness. The poem's establishment as an act of resistance aligns the poem with Prynne's *Brass* and reinforces Prynne's reliance on Badiou's philosophy in which fidelity to an event is necessary for the enactment of resistance. The contiguity between Prynne's essay 'Poetic Thought' and the philosophy of Alain Badiou highlights the process of bearing witness to an event as compelling resistance, a process which can lead to the creation of new poetic thought.

'Refuse Collection' is textually constructed through synchronism, the entanglement of image-complexes structured on the photographs' release, and lexical structures mimetic

⁸ Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," *Public Culture*, 14.1 (2002) 49-90, 86.

of interview and reportage. The poem posits dehumanising transgressions and ultra-subjective violence as the acts of individuals intent on recreating the ideological image they hold of themselves and their prisoners. The enactment of this violence takes as its target the body as the locus of political and social power relations. In ‘Refuse Collection’, acts of torture and the transgression of prisoners’ rights by the U.S. forces operating without juridical constraint establish an *a priori* construct on the definition of subjecthood, paralleling Agamben’s *Homo Sacer*, or ‘bare life’,⁹ by which the prisoners’ rights are reduced and torturous treatment is enacted and ultimately ‘justified.’

Utilising extant work on the potential for photography to frame and define the viewer’s subjective understanding, the ideological and political ramifications of the photographs released from Abu Ghraib are examined. The photographs have the capacity to define collective and individual identities, and the poem explores how complexes of evidence correspond to or differentiate from presumed identification. The images are examined for the manner in which they extend the process of bearing witness to the viewer, and work to create and define subjective identities. The process evinces a determination in how one views the prisoners attacked and sexually humiliated, and also recreates the ideological presuppositions the viewer may have had of the captors in the situation. The involvement of the captors in the exploitation and denigration of human life, as well as the staging of performative acts of torture for the camera, initiates an understanding of the ‘*jouissance* of torture’.¹⁰ The enactment of violence in conjunction with the wilful display of barbarity exemplifies the systemic problem of the military unit, where identity is defined through potlatch and hierarchical power relations. Not only is the poem demonstrative of

⁹ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998) 89.

¹⁰ Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London; New York: Verso, 2010) 29.

the use of images in defining and eliding subjective identities, it represents an experience of violence witnessed at Abu Ghraib to elicit an understanding about the contaminating nature of violence. In the poem, that contaminant effect, mimicking the anonymity of torture and the elision of subjective guilt, is constructed poetically through ambiguous identification and blanching deixis. The pervasiveness of violence and its capacity to affect the perpetrator and victim is demonstrative of an experience of life at Abu Ghraib.

The demarcation between types of violence, distinguishing between systemic and ultra-subjective violence, is the point where violence figures in the casting of identity. Expressions of violence, supported by sovereign power, are enacted to denigrate human life and to reduce the prisoner to the terms of 'bare life'. Power relations within the military unit are investigated for the manner in which violence is enacted to establish interpersonal, hierarchical power. As displayed in the poem, military identity and the processes of enemy recognition are performative procedures. This conceptualisation is foundational to an understanding of Prynne's use of a media-derived lexicon and reportage in his poetic construction. The representations of violence in 'Refuse Collection' are performative procedures in that the representation of violence evinces a reframing of identity and, as with the theatricality of the staged images, acts as a simulacrum of real events.

As they relate to and evidence torture, the unilateral displays of sovereign power, which represent the violence done unto prisoners, are considered as acts of violent transgression. The work of Judith Butler and Elizabeth Grosz is utilised to understand the violence in 'Refuse Collection' as the inscription of history onto the corporeal body, arguing that the violence entails a re-writing of subjective identity. Grosz argues that the 'body is the privileged object of power's operations: power produces the body as a determined type, with particular features, skills and attributes. Power is the internal

condition for the constitution and activity attributed to a body-subject'.¹¹ In this manner 'Refuse Collection' parallels Kafka's 'In the Penal Colony', in which the operations of punitive power incorporate acts of corporeal torture.

Prynne argues in 'A Quick Riposte on Handke's Dictum about War and Language' that the relationship between war and language is a ritualistic event. The abstracted subjectivities within the poem and the violence to which they are ritualistically subjected are demonstrative of life under the control of U.S. military structures. The modus operandi of the military unit is depicted as exercising the breaking down of individuals, utilising the coercion of will, transgressing sexual, religious, and corporeal limits, and representing violence as an expression of sovereign power. Chapter Five identifies examples of violence specific to subjective and systemic categorisations. The conceptual effects of such categorisations are analysed in representations of identity and authority and in the poem's lexical expression. 'Refuse Collection' is an act of resistance designed to ensure the impossibility of forgetting the events at Abu Ghraib and the citizen's role in these crimes. It actively contests hegemonic power structures that eradicate the voice of the individual. The physical and ontological violence enacted in 'Refuse Collection', in which transgressions frame and define the value of human life, is a violence for which we are all culpable. For Prynne, the creation of new poetic thought, actively resistant to the forces of power, 'point[s] to the situation of a man whose self-knowledge and responsibility to others lies in vocational urgency.'¹²

The texts examined here have been chosen specifically because each exposes distinct and differential patterns of violence and problematises the relationship between

¹¹ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: towards a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994) 146.

¹² Andrés Rodríguez, "Enlarging History: The Poetry of J.H. Prynne," *Sagetrieb*, 10 (1991) 83-107, 98.

violence and the poetic in a distinct and defined way. This analysis aims to understand the possible roles of violence as it affects poetic thought operative in the thematic, social and historical milieus of Prynne's poetry collections. The poems present a range of concerns and areas of difficulty with the inclusion of violence in a contemporary poetic, which the analysis addresses and interrogates. The range of strategies and methodologies utilised form distinct investigations across the spectrum of Prynne's oeuvre. Each collection examined provides an opportunity to address the difficulty of the text as well as to investigate the encounter and engagement with violence operative on the axes of poetic construction. The reading practices presented address the manner in which Prynne creates meaning and highlight some of the social and historical traces functioning in Prynne's work. The close readings of the poems expose the texts to a fulsome engagement with a range of potential readings, among which the function of violence is but one component.

This analysis is concerned with providing a precise, defined and material encounter with violence as it functions across Prynne's works. I have no doubt that the methods and strategies presented and the readings this analysis makes possible will provide the opportunity for further investigations in which the encounter with violence in innovative poetics can be addressed differently or from a more defined political vantage. However, that is beyond the scope of this analysis, which intends to provide a material basis for the understanding of Prynne's poetry, as well as the range of strategies and theoretic principles that Prynne's poetry utilises and contests in its representation of violence.

This dissertation is only a beginning; it makes no claim to finality, nor purports to present a definitive spectrum from which violence functions in Prynne's poetry. It is intended to provoke readers of Prynne's work and readers of innovative contemporary poetry into an expansive engagement with the texts and to furnish them with an

understanding of the axes upon which violence functions across Prynne's oeuvre. It is my hope that it will provoke thought, conscious dialogue and an inspired resistance to forces that perpetuate violence.

Chapter One. 'Es Lebe der König'.

Introduction.

In 1966 Prynne stated the necessity for poetry was to 'emphatically reclaim the power of knowledge for each and any of us in our common answerability as the creatures of language.'¹³ The ekphrastic, proprioceptive and dedicatory analysis that Prynne demanded of his readers through *Kitchen Poems* and *The White Stones* reaches a point of crescendo with *Brass* in 1971. Paralleling a level of difficulty that Prynne found in Douglas Oliver's *The Harmless Building*, Prynne aimed to create a poem in which 'the ethical vector is violent and discontinuous, developing schizophrenia of the body—precept and [forcing] the embedding of the will within larger spiritual bodies, but also revealing moments of absolute truth.'¹⁴ *Brass*'s contestation of the propositions of *Kitchen Poems* and *The White Stones* allows its poems to retain the scope and complexity of the poetic Prynne had established in the preceding works. Instead of continuing in these directions and further enlarging the histories of representation in *Brass*, Prynne returns to the questions and discourses of his previous collections.

As Prynne suggests, *Brass* is the moment at which 'the question / returned upon itself'; a path of reclamation from a state of being where 'the devastation is aimless'.¹⁵ The engagements and enactments of language utilised in *Brass* begin to function as a

¹³ Keston Sutherland, "Hilarious absolute daybreak," *Glossator: Theory and Practice of the Commentary*, 2 (2010) 115-148, 117. Quotation amended for clarity.

¹⁴ J.H. Prynne, "A Letter to Douglas Oliver (9th January 1972)," *Grosseteste Review*, 6.1-4 (1973) 152-154, 152.

¹⁵ J.H. Prynne, *Poems* (North Fremantle, Western Australia: Fremantle Arts Centre Press; Newcastle-on-Tyne: Bloodaxe, 2005) 117,120. All other quotations from *Brass* will be noted with pagination in parenthesis. In this chapter all quotations from 'Es Lebe der König' will be given without pagination, as the poem is included as an appendix and will be reproduced in stanzaic form throughout.

mechanism of self- and social-recognition within the post-war period of European history. To approach *Brass* one must do so from a position of re-engagement with the contextual contiguities that follow from *Kitchen Poems* and *The White Stones*. *Brass* recasts authorial presence as disproportionately exiled in relation to the previous ontological position held. In this manner Prynne turns upon his own prior propositions and reinserts presence within the questioning framework of the poem. Sutherland notes that *Brass* ‘recasts the *Heinker* of fortune as paralytic transit from destiny to modern politics and it does so by evacuating lamentation rather than by universalising it’.¹⁶ The unifying praxis of colluding discourses in *Brass* is an engagement with threads of discourse which Prynne had previously described as ‘untying like a knot’ due to ‘violence reversed’.¹⁷ But violence reversed is not violence forgotten, as can be seen in numerous other instances in Prynne’s oeuvre where physiological wounding has manifold implications on the subjective identities within the poem.

One of the main thematic interests of *Brass* is the concept of loss, personal and social as well as ontic and ontological. In approaching the site of this loss, it is revealed that there is always a remnant that remains intact, despite the depth of loss experienced. As in Badiou’s philosophy, the collection signifies a residual knowledge that is sutured to the truth process of love, which remains through the violence of the event and is preserved by the subject’s fidelity.¹⁸ Badiou’s assertion can be read into the collection *Brass* and is fundamental to the poem ‘Es Lebe der König’, as love and nature’s perseverance are acts depicted as capable of withstanding the violence of the Holocaust. The poem is also reliant upon and connected with the pastoral elegiac form, which relates most prominently to how

¹⁶ Sutherland, “Hilarious absolute daybreak,” 120.

¹⁷ Prynne, “A Gold Ring Called Reluctance,” *Poems*, 21.

¹⁸ Alain Badiou and Simon Critchley, “Ours is not a terrible situation,” *Philosophy Today*, 51.3 (2007) 361.

one reads the landscape. Fidelity and preservation are foundational to the poem, for the manner in which Celan's death and the death of Holocaust victims affect the narrative is in the procession from loss to consolation. The landscape is invoked, principally as an evocation of the power of nature to persevere through tragedy. The descriptions of the landscape as a symbol of forbearance and sanctity replicate Celan's poetic and reinforce Prynne's argument that 'the landscape becomes acculturated by the subsistence of social memory'.¹⁹

Ideas of loss, reclamation and the possibility of redemption extend to the poem a growing awareness of social conditions within the post-war British poetic movement. The 'mythic vision' and the shamanic invocations referenced in *The White Stones* have taken on the tone of a 'Fascist invocation of art to redeem politics in a seductive vision of reparative return to the pure and whole'.²⁰ For Prynne, myth may have once been seen to have the functional ability to 'structure the realities of the world', but this is evidenced no longer.²¹ In *Brass* it is of no consolation that myth holds up the modalities of being in the world if individuals can never live up to the demands placed upon them. One of the main thematic registers of *Brass* is the exhortation of the individual to face suffering and to pursue knowledge without reliance on myth or religion. Through these means Prynne reaffirms a position of a radical, eventual subjectivity. Contingent to the argument in *Brass*, Prynne

¹⁹ J.H. Prynne, "A Letter to P Riley: 14th Feb. 1967," *The English Intelligencer*, 1st ser., 15 (Apr 1967) 284. Reprinted in Neil Pattison, Reitha Pattison, Luke Roberts, eds., *Certain Prose of The English Intelligencer* (Cambridge: Mountain Press, 2012) 74-78, 76.

²⁰ Patricia Waugh, *The Harvest of The Sixties: English Literature and its Background 1960-1990* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 74.

²¹ Following on from Prynne's *The White Stones*, the mythological process, shamanic evocation and subsequent marginalisation of the individual within the group proposed by the title 'L'Extase de M. Poher' is what gives weight to the satirical tone of that work. In an April 17th, 1964 letter to Charles Olson (quoted in Sutherland, "Hilarious absolute daybreak," 131), Prynne writes that he has been reading Mircea Eliade's *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries* (Eliade's book *Shamanism, Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* was also published about the same time), and relates Eliade's argument to Olson that 'all mythology is ontophany', and that myth in the contemporary world functions to 'reveal the structure of reality and the multiple modalities of being in the world.'

asserts that the rupturing of sociological norms structures the position of new knowledge and new poetic thought. For Prynne, ontological knowledge is confined to the same potentials and limitations as poetic knowledge, as ‘the methods of poetic composition [...] cannot be defined or contained by its shells but must break them to become altogether new: new poetic thought’.²²

In *Brass* it is the reader’s charge to march determinedly through the ‘waged incompleteness’ (169) of the articulations of meaning and come to an understanding of Prynne’s engagement with and subsequent refutation of the primitive mythologies of the human.²³ By presenting within *Brass* a position of active self-critique, Prynne works to re-authenticate the poem’s ontological questions in relation to the truth. Prynne argues that ‘[p]oetic thought does indeed demand the unreserved commitment of the poet, deep-down within the choices and judgements of dialectical composition; but before the work is completed, the poet must self-remove from this location, sever the links not by a ruse but in order to test finally the integrity of the results’.²⁴ Where Prynne calls for authorial removal, a removal of authorial identity from the poetic is required such that ontological truth remains sutured to the event and not to the poet or her or his expression. Therefore, the subjective dissemination within the poem functions as the site of arbitration between the poet and the subject, as opposed to attesting to the subject’s dissolution. From a critical perspective, the reader has access to authorial presence, but in making his claim about the removal of the poet Prynne works to foreground the ontological in a state of preservation and access.

²² J.H. Prynne, “Poetic Thought,” *Textual Practice*, 24.4 (2010) 595-606, 599.

²³ Anthony Mellors, *Late Modernist Poetics: From Pound to Prynne* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005) 186.

²⁴ Prynne, “Poetic Thought,” 598.

Brass is a poem about the effects of language, the conceits of transference and translation, and the construction of radical, linguistic and political relations which have been permeated by violence and which are experienced at personal and social levels. The pursuit of knowledge through loss replicates a central point of Celan's 'Meridian Speech', one which Prynne works into his poem in a demonstrable example of the overlaying of contingent discourses. The layered presentation of discourses, which is foundational to *Brass*, stands as a position of development that Prynne would carry forward throughout his oeuvre. *Brass* replicates Celan's idea that 'the poem becomes the poem of a person who still perceives, still turns towards phenomena, addressing and questioning them'. In this way, the poem becomes 'a conversation, [an] often desperate conversation' with one's accuser.²⁵

The scope of *Brass* ranges to topics as widely disparate as politics, geochronology, financial market forces, unionism and mining strikes, transcontinental currents, social memory and the radical materialisation of modern communication. The poem is characterised by an emphatic and ferocious intellectualism, biting satire and a self-demanding sense of interrogation. Lyric and its function within the elegy has lost the lexically coherent dimension it retained through *Kitchen Poems* and *The White Stones*, but, as Keston Sutherland points out, the prosody of the lines and the disruptive syntactic breaks in *Brass* do not inhibit reading comprehension. Sutherland argues that *Brass* represents 'a way to model a lyric, to make language a fact without desire'.²⁶ This analysis will argue that in *Brass* Prynne is working towards a lyric of radical, eventual subjectivity, through which he is attempting to create new poetic thought. Lost now is the reclamatory power of the lyric as the unifier of the subject to the dwelling of home. *Brass* satirises the power of

²⁵ Paul Celan, *Collected Prose*, trans. Rosmarie Waldrop (New York: Routledge, 2003) 50.

²⁶ Sutherland, "Hilarious absolute daybreak," 120.

the lyric and myth as it was sustained throughout Prynne's previous collections. Augmenting a maxim of Celan's, *Brass* foregrounds the proposition that 'language actualized, set free under the sign of a radical individuation [...] remains as aware of the limits drawn by language as of the possibilities it opens'.²⁷

The Front Matter.

The first edition of *Brass* appeared in 1971, printed by Andrew Crozier's Ferry Press and published shortly after the gradual decline in the publication of *The English Intelligencer*, an unbound A4 poetry journal that was produced in the late 1960s. The Ferry Press edition, limited to a quantity of 250, was printed in an oversize format in a deep auburn red. The title 'Brass' hangs impressed in golden block letters on the cover's upper margin, adding a distinct liturgical weight to the book. The cover does not contain any authorial designation, so the reader is left to confront the emblazoned title and to contemplate the polyvalence of the title's semantic and semiotic operation. The operative function of the title's 'double music' (169) carries with it the brassy trumpeting of angels as well as the potential for music to give order to one's life. Brass, as an alloy of copper and zinc, represents the union of the sun and fire, denoting a marriage of violent conflict.²⁸ The 'double music' of *Brass* is both a summons to a higher order as well as a testament to destruction. Implied within the title's block print are the violent overtones of recent European history and the lingering resonance of orchestral bands playing at Nazi internment camps. Reflecting on Blake's lines, 'I have taught pale artifice to spread his nets upon the morning. My heavens are brass

²⁷ Celan, "The Meridian," *Collected Prose*, 49.

²⁸ "brass," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2010, *Encyclopædia Britannica Online Academic Edition*, March 2010 <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/77876/brass>>.

my earth is iron',²⁹ reinforces David Trotter's assertion connecting *Brass* with Blake.³⁰ The cover of this collection announces both the sanctity and the threat of the music within.³¹

Titles such as 'The Bee Target on his Shoulder', 'Royal Fern', 'The Ideal Star-Fighter', 'L'Extase de M. Poher', 'Es Lebe der König' (Prynne's only dedicated elegy), and 'Nothing Like Examples' signal historical and theoretic directions towards which to begin an analytic reading. The title 'Nothing Like Examples' stands out for its self-referential tone and instils in the reader the understanding that the collection 'doubts its own capacity to affect its communicative and analytic aims'.³² This is a rhetorical effect which turns out to be foundational to *Brass* and one that provides the reader *a priori* knowledge of the poem's self-interrogative position.

The titles of the collection provide a basic layout for the established reading of the poems through socio-historical positions and established ontological aims. In a short

²⁹ William Blake, "The Four Zoas," *The Complete Writings of William Blake: with Variant Readings*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London, Oxford University Press, 1972) 290.

³⁰ David Trotter, "A Reading of Prynne's 'Brass'," *PN Review*, 5.2 (1977) 49-53, 50.

³¹ Of the first print run of 250, A-Z represented the first twenty-six, signed and inscribed as collector's editions. Numbers 27 to 250 were numerically designated. The collector's edition 'N' which I had access to through the Bruce Peel Special Collection at the University of Alberta contains a number of unique features worth noting. Directly after the title page is a blank page with two handwritten epigraphs. The first, in black ink, runs horizontally across the upper margin of the page, reading: 'ON EÛT CRIE BRAVO! OUVRAGE BIEN MORALE! NOUS ÈTIONS SUAVÉS', a quotation that appears as the epigraph of the Bloodaxe/Fremantle Press edition. In addition to this and establishing graphically the concept of a graphic plane on the page, in red script, running down the right-hand margin, is: 'As for the other Fingers, They were enveloped in some myth' (unpunctuated), which is quoted from the first chapter of Herman Melville's *The Confidence-Man*. Paired with these inscriptions, on the forty-second page, is an untitled poem:

Lack spreads like snow
back by the path to the iron pipe
flaking and not succeeding
and over this luck comes, the bird
making shadows like fortune,
like heat and light on the wing.
Lack warms, it is the conduit
of starlight through shut windows,
lack of love hot now, luck cool
by turn, the bird it likes.

This poem contains many of the symbols, tropes, significations and resonances as the printed poems of *Brass* and therefore should be maintained for any analysis as it pertains to this collection. This poem was part of the booklet *Into the Day*, published in 1972 and is collected in *Poems* (211).

³² Peter Middleton, "Institutions of Poetry in Postwar Britain," *A Concise Companion to Postwar British and Irish Poetry*, eds. Nigel Alderman and C.D. Blanton (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, 2009) 243-263, 254.

analysis of the social conditions of postwar poetics, Peter Middleton utilises Susan Stewart's work from *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* when he points out that

every formal feature is[...] a socio-historical feature and at the same time makes possible links and adaptations between and across social and historical contexts: [this] points in the direction that a critical response might develop. Such disjunctive surfaces and impeded referentiality are the understitching of a dominant pattern of verbal communication from which most hegemonic poetry diverts attention.³³

Where Prynne's socio-historical complexes differ from general history is on the point of providing a multifaceted view of each contextual situation, a multifaceted view that Prynne describes as the 'retrospective formalism of the occasion'.³⁴ That is to say, the poetic is never the historical, but articulates and preserves the unnameable aspects of history. In the essay 'Poetic Thought', Prynne writes, 'Poetic thought is empowered within and through energies of language under pressure', and although the poem represents and articulates the historical, the fact remains that 'the language of poetry is its modality and material base, but whatever its relation with common human speech [or experience], the word-arguments in use are characteristically disputed territory, where prosody and verse-form press against unresolved structures and repeatedly transgress expectations'.³⁵ In making this claim, and in making a claim for the authorial removal from a text, Prynne argues that the poem is an act of testimony to a singular truth, and not a subjective account of the historical.

Where the depiction of the socio-historical situation is predicated on the presentation of poetic subjectivity, Prynne's retrospective formalism of the event allows for

³³ Middleton, "Institutions of Poetry in Postwar Britain," 254. Quoting Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002) 252. Note the contiguities that exist between the 'understitching' of Stewart's reading of the aligned matrices of referentiality and Anthony Mellors's position of the 'determined opening' through which the reader can make headway into understanding or hypotheses about the subjective determinates of the poem.

³⁴ J.H. Prynne, "A letter to Andrew Crozier (13 Sept. 1966)," *The English Intelligencer*, 1st ser., 8 [1966] 109-10. Reprinted in Neil Pattison, Reitha Pattison, Luke Roberts, eds., *Certain Prose of The English Intelligencer* (Cambridge: Moutain, 2012) 20-22.

³⁵ Prynne, "Poetic Thought," 598.

the reader to locate the ideological challenge of the poem within the social circumstances that it represents. Through intertextuality and ekphrasis,³⁶ ‘Es Lebe der König’ depicts an experience of the Holocaust as an historicised event, which is developed by the reader’s knowledge of the event and Celan’s writing on this experience. For Prynne, as for Terry Eagleton, developmental subjectivity is ‘displaced from its privileged position as unitary, transcendental, self-generative origin and grasped instead as the incoherent effect of a transindividual process of material signification inscribed within certain definite, historically particular practices and apparatus’.³⁷ The following analysis of the poem ‘Es Lebe der König’ will work to explicate the socio-historical details as they relate to the poem, and to investigate the transindividual processes, vantage points and positions of expression entailed within this elegy and its depiction of life under Nazi occupation.

³⁶ Ekphrasis, from the Greek, conjoined the words ek (out) and phrazein (to tell, or declare), and originally meant ‘to tell in full.’ Ekphrasis first appeared in rhetorical writings attributed to Dionysius and Halicarnassus (Rhetoric 10.17). Later it became a school exercise, where it was defined as ‘an expository speech which vividly brings the subject before our eyes’ (Theon, 2nd C A.D.—Spengel). The Oxford Classical Dictionary defines ekphrasis as ‘the rhetorical description of a work of art.’ My own interpretation and application of the term follows the definition from the Oxford Classical Dictionary, in that ekphrasis pertains to the incorporation of, or references to, works of literary, verbal or graphic art within another work of art. As Heffernan notes in *Museum of Words*, Linda Hutcheon delivered a lecture on “Postmodern Ekphrasis”, at a Colloquium on Poetics at Columbia University in 1986, in which she used the term ekphrasis to include the incorporation of newspaper articles into the novels of Julio Cortázar and John Fowles. I would disagree with defining this incorporation as ekphrastic in relation to Prynne’s work, where newspaper reports, scientific data and other technical discourses are quoted, mimicked and utilised in the creation of Prynne’s poetic-construction. I would disagree that this is an example of ekphrasis, in that this usage pertains more to the incorporation of other discourses within a poetic, utilised extensively within *News of Warring Clans*, as a means to test and highlight the systems of language used in everyday communication, and does not refer to outside works of art (as it does in ‘Es Lebe der König’). The use of newspaper reports may provide contextual reference or data; however, there is a fundamental distinction between writing on a piece of art, and mimesis or incorporation of newspaper reports. “Ekphrasis,” *The New Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics* 1993, 192; James A.W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words: The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) 191-192.

³⁷ Terry Eagleton, “Ideology, Fiction, Narrative,” *Social Text*, 2 (Summer 1979) 62-80, 70.

The Idea of Subjectivity.

Similar to the philosophy of Alain Badiou, and expressive of the characteristics Prynne would later define in 'Poetic Thought', 'Es Lebe der König' depicts the creation of new knowledge that arises through the violence of the situation and is preserved by the subject's fidelity to the event. Badiou's theory works by repositioning the engagement of the subject to the event, in a sutured relation to a truth-process. Badiou argues that '[t]he event is that which ruptures the situational order of being in the domain of knowledge. And this is the order of truth and what you call the truth-event'.³⁸ As with Derrida, the event for Badiou is both a rupture and a redoubling; it is supplemental, for it entails the creation of a new subject in the process of the continuation of the subject.³⁹ As the concept of the event entails a real rupture of the situation, it is in maintaining fidelity to that event that a new subjectivity emerges. A subject who remains in fidelity to the event preserves this truth as a concept in the domain of knowledge. Thus all truth is created in the process of fidelity, and this fidelity in relation to 'Es Lebe der König' we can contextualise as bearing witness. In 'Es Lebe der König', Prynne utilises the concept of the naming of the void to signify the rupture of the situation to produce new knowledge: new poetic thought. This analysis will specify the naming of the voids in the poem as they relate to the natural, the domestic, the sustentive and the witness, invoked through the name of Paul Celan, to highlight the transfiguration each of these themes undertakes in the creation of poetic meaning.

The existence of the event forms the real and absent course of a truth. For Badiou, that a truth always begins as a naming of the void is based on his argument that the void is a real but ungraspable part of the situation. As expressed through *Brass*, the naming of the

³⁸ Badiou and Critchley, "Ours is not a terrible situation," 361.

³⁹ Badiou and Critchley, "Ours is not a terrible situation," 362.

voids in the situation reifies Badiou's position that 'a truth does draw its support not from consistency but from inconsistency. It is not a matter of formulating correct judgements, but of producing the murmur of the indiscernible'.⁴⁰ The poem 'Es Lebe der König' contextualises the circumstances of the Holocaust and the death of Paul Celan, and evokes the name of Celan as the murmur of the indiscernible. 'Es Lebe der König' attempts to actively preserve the lives of Holocaust victims and the life of Paul Celan, whose final moments before death we cannot know of with certainty. The poem represents, as Giorgio Agamben writes, a committed act of remembrance, in that '[r]emembrance restores possibility to the past, making what happened incomplete and completing what never was. Remembrance is neither what happened nor what did not happen but, rather, their potentialisation, their becoming possible once again'.⁴¹

In his elegy to Celan, Prynne names the voids through a metonymic patterning of natural as well as sustentive elements, such as snow, water, the alder and 'the small house'. Naming the voids of the natural has a formal effect of locating the poem within the social circumstances of the Holocaust. For Rochelle Tobias, 'the Holocaust is a place rather than a time and a near tautological claim that the undecidability of reference in Celan's work is a decided reference to the Holocaust, since the Holocaust is finally an undecidable event, that is, an unmasterable or unknowable one'.⁴² In this case Prynne has buried the indiscernible experience of the Celan's death within historical facts about the Holocaust, an event of suffering and persecution that was all too knowable, its effects all too real.

⁴⁰ Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth* (Minneapolis, MN.: University of Minnesota, 2003) 91. Quotation amended for clarity.

⁴¹ Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, ed. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999) 267.

⁴² Rochelle Tobias, *The Discourse of Nature in the Poetry of Paul Celan: The Unnatural World* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006) 37.

The indiscernible circumstances of the Holocaust, which assure that it is an event which cannot have been consciously experienced by a subject who experienced his or her own death in anonymity, can be applied to the conditions of Celan's death by drowning in the Seine. The naming of the voids within *Brass* enacts fidelity to the event, creating new poetic thought which functions as an act of remembrance. In evoking Celan's death and replicating the voids of Celan's life and writing, Prynne creates a poem that preserves the truths to which Celan was committed. In doing so Prynne attests to the forbearance of nature in the face of human atrocity, he ruptures the possibility of forgetting the Holocaust and creates new poetic thought. Against the events of historical violence, Prynne's elegy attests to the sanctity of humanity and to the life of Paul Celan. In this manner, 'Es Lebe der König' preserves the testimony of the witnesses through 'the creation of the possibility of naming that which was without name'.⁴³

Elegy for Celan.

'Es Lebe der König' is positioned as an active investigation of the bathetic social conditions and sense of alienation in the postwar world. Prynne's elegy to Paul Celan was composed the year after Celan's death, and utilises and responds to Celan's poetic. This poem was written, one should note, after Prynne's touring the United States with Edward Dorn and after his final break in communication with Olson in 1970. Olson did not rise to Prynne's aim of a poetic of 'total awareness', preferring instead to continue in his project of an anthropocentric cultivation of myth. Olson's unchanged poetic left Prynne feeling stranded, attempting to understand his own 'recklessly long absence' (169), and returned Prynne to a

⁴³ Badiou and Critchley, "Ours is not a Terrible Situation," 364.

position of alienation and marginalisation within the ‘prevailing darkness of the contemporary linguistic scene’.⁴⁴

‘Es Lebe der König’ exemplifies Prynne’s ability to answer loss with language, in a manner that reflects one of his oldest preoccupations, that the life of the heart is defined by how one knows the land. Reading ‘Es Lebe der König’ as a pastoral elegy reinforces Prynne’s declaration that ‘the consequence of this / pastoral desire is prolonged / as our condition’.⁴⁵ The poem, as well as the landscape depicted, are engrained within the history of the event, and comprise a poetic construction which is reliant on many antecedents, most notably Celan’s writing. In this manner, the representation of the landscape is always a political utterance, a framework that highlights issues of control, contortion and degradation. The prosodic form of ‘Es Lebe der König’ contains a number of features and concepts that establish its connection to the history of the elegy. The line count of the first three stanzas climbs from nine, to ten, to eleven lines, building from a Spenserian stanza to a curtal sonnet, representing a constriction of the Petrarchan sonnet form. The prosody of the poem, in this case, is also utilised by Prynne as a point of referentiality. In the second stanza, Prynne’s ten lines mimic John Keats’s ‘Ode to a Nightingale’, and Prynne’s line, ‘[i]t is not possible to / drink this again,’ reverberates off Keats’s ‘That I might drink and leave the world unseen’.⁴⁶ Also echoing off Keats’s line, ‘Here, where men sit and hear each other groan’,⁴⁷ is Prynne’s line, ‘we hear your / fearful groan and choose not to think of it’. This is the only uncapitalised sentence in Prynne’s elegy, indicating a deteriorating

⁴⁴ Ian Brinton, “Eyewear Review: Pierre Joris’s *Breathturn*,” *Eyewear*, May 9, 2008, *Eyewear*, January 14, 2011 <<http://toddschwift.blogspot.ca/2008/05/guest-review-brinton-on-celan.html>>.

⁴⁵ Prynne, “Moon Poem,” *Poems*, 53-4.

⁴⁶ John Keats, “Ode to a Nightingale,” *Collected Poems*, ed. Jack Stillinger (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982) 279.

⁴⁷ John Keats, “Ode to a Nightingale,” *Collected Poems*, 279.

agency of the subjective group depicted.⁴⁸ From the eleven-line strophe, the poem climbs to a strophe of thirteen lines, then a final strophe or coda of five lines, which is filled with declamatory statements verifying the events of which the poem speaks, ‘it is so’ and ‘you know’. The poem flits between strophic configurations as it vacillates between ode, elegy and pastoral conventions, with the final strophe providing the reader with a detailed and highly symbolic account of family love and forbearance. Prynne’s declaration that ‘the history of person / [is the] entire condition of landscape’⁴⁹ provides some incentive to believe that the prosodic vacillation of the poem’s linear count is striving towards a stanzaic pattern it can never reach, towards a model of lyric to which the social conditions the poem depicts cannot be reconciled.

‘Es Lebe der König’ is an attempt to render through language the horror facing Holocaust victims, rather than to represent and comment upon this horror. The poem’s semantic and semiotic ambiguity produces a connotative string of references and intertextual relations to Celan, as well as to elegiac and pastoral antecedents. David Trotter argues that Prynne turns towards the work of Celan to recover the strategy of the poem’s estrangement, in that the poem ‘requires self-estrangement, an endless iteration of mortality and gratuitousness, and Prynne’s poem for Celan explores, I think, the redeeming power of such ruthlessness’.⁵⁰ The passage from the pastoral frame to an image-complex structured on the Holocaust replicates the failed enframing of the poem in standard stanzaic or strophic patterns. As Geoffrey Ward argues,

⁴⁸ It should be highlighted that the uncapitalised line: ‘we hear your [...]’ appears in the 1st Fremantle/Bloodaxe edition where a full stop concludes the previous line. In the 2nd Fremantle/Bloodaxe edition a comma concludes the previous line.

⁴⁹ Prynne, “First Notes on Daylight,” *Poems*, 69.

⁵⁰ Trotter, “A Reading of Prynne’s ‘Brass,’” 51.

There is an awareness of a spectrum of experience through which the inner and outer are not separate, ranging from unity with Nature, to the self as conduit for social forces and signs. The first draws on an immersion in the European Romantic traditions shared by these writers, the second on the transition of Romantic phenomenology to an urban and secular realm.⁵¹

The poem finds coherence in the presentation of an experience of life under Nazi occupation and a subtext that creates a biographic trace of Celan's life. The poem leaves the pastoral realm and becomes immersed in and calibrated by the socio-historical circumstances of the Holocaust to express the persecution of its subjects. By maintaining fidelity to the events of Celan's life Prynne pays homage to the survivability of Celan's legacy, as testament to its perseverance. By enacting the moral horror through which Celan survived, but which ultimately cost him his life, the poem 'stands in relation to truth, by enacting the disappearance of subjectivity'.⁵²

The unknowability of the event of Celan's death, and Celan's subjective absence from the poem, can be strongly associated with the unspoken name of Celan. In 'Es Lebe Der König' the name 'Celan' acts as the unknown signifier that brings absence into presence. The invocation of a proper name (for example, the name of a political leader) allows the real of the Truth Event to be inscribed in the symbolic fiction of the poem.⁵³ The name of Celan functions in this manner in 'Es Lebe der König'. As Badiou argues, in the 'proper name, the ordinary individual discovers glorious, distinctive individuals as the mediation of his or her own individuality, as the proof that he or she can force its finitude. The anonymous actions of millions of militants, rebels, fighters, [in this case, victims]

⁵¹ Geoffrey Ward, "Nothing but Mortality: Prynne and Celan," *Contemporary Poetry Meets Modern Theory*, eds. Antony Easthope and John Thomson (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991) 142.

⁵² Mellors, *Late Modernist Poetics*, 176.

⁵³ Slavoj Žižek, *Living In End Times* (London: Verso, 2011) 128. Commenting on Badiou's use of proper names.

unrepresentable as such, is combined and counted in the simple, powerful symbol of the proper name'.⁵⁴ By retaining the unspoken name of Paul Celan, the poem 'Es Lebe der König' preserves the testimony of the witness. The biographic elegy to Celan allows Prynne the ability to detail a history without 'distorting the experience of truth.'⁵⁵ Invoking the absence of Celan, Prynne conveys 'poetics as truth' through a Badiouian proper name that symbolises historically 'in the guise of an individual, of a pure singularity of body and thought – the rare and precious network of ephemeral sequences of [poetics] as truth'.⁵⁶

In Prynne's elegy, Celan's name evokes the 'murmur of the indiscernible' which attests to the truth of the historical situation. The elegiac subject appears in the form of nature, 'the alder thrown over the cranial push,' which Prynne asserts is that which can withstand the atrocities of the human, paralleling 'the animals and their watchful calm'. In this manner 'Es Lebe der König' ensures the survival of testimony and preserves the truths that Celan sought. In focusing this poem around the Holocaust, and the death of Celan, Prynne 'enables the text to draw attention to the rupture that initiates it, a rupture that propels it into language'.⁵⁷ Paralleling the dispossession within Celan's work, 'Es Lebe der König' depicts the sentiment of a poet who is 'forced to occupy his estrangement deeply'.⁵⁸

Prynne's elegy appeared exactly one year after Celan's death by drowning, and it provokes a demanding philosophical encounter: it reflects both Celan's encounter with Heidegger and also Prynne's divergence with Heidegger's political, philosophical and linguistic trajectory. 'Es Lebe der König' is a poem about the power of the alienated individual to affect radical change through forbearance in a world dominated by violence.

⁵⁴ Alain Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis* (London: Verso, 2010) 249.

⁵⁵ Keston Sutherland, "Trade In Bathos," *Jacket*, December 2001, *Jacket* 15, November 12 2010, <<http://jacketmagazine.com/15/sutherland-bathos.html>>.

⁵⁶ Badiou, *The Communist Hypothesis*, 250.

⁵⁷ Tobias, *The Discourse of Nature in the Poetry of Paul Celan*, 7.

⁵⁸ Ward, "Nothing but Mortality," 140.

Brass is a call to a poetics of personal, social and political articulation; it is a call to right the moral mutation that has been introduced into the species described in ‘The Ideal Star-Fighter’. The full exploration of genetic and technological abrogation of the natural appears much later in Prynne’s *Acrylic Tips*, though already in ‘Es Lebe der König’ the systemic incursion of technology and its operations in the Holocaust form a dominant portion of Prynne’s ontological argument. The unifying themes of the technologisation of the land and the pastoral elegy across both ‘Es Lebe der König’ and *Acrylic Tips* denote the manner in which Prynne’s poetic constructions actively attest to the wounding, division and control of land, life and poetic thought.

Brass represents an attempt to instigate individual thought and action regarding the social circumstances that produce human atrocities, and it is intended to stimulate contemplation of the role that social complicity plays in these acts. Prynne enacts this address to the reader through the lyrical construction of the poems. According to Sutherland,

The poem implicitly announces a shift in the moralism of knowledge away from anything like eidetic phenomenology, with its bracketing of affectivity along with ontic commitments, towards the project of a lyric beyond subjectivity, that is, beyond memory, appetite, greed, and all the other consolations for predatoriness that make up the spiral curve of the bourgeois autobiography, a project that would come into full view only much later in Prynne’s work.⁵⁹

Where Sutherland distinguishes the aim of Prynne’s poetic towards a lyric beyond subjectivity, this dissertation will argue that this is rather a displacement of subjectivity from the personal, which asks for a reading of the poem as divorced from the physical author. In ‘Es Lebe der König’ Prynne is working towards a lyric of radical, eventual

⁵⁹ Sutherland, “Hilarious absolute daybreak,” 131.

subjectivity, which maintains fidelity to the socio-historical circumstances of the Holocaust and to the life of Celan. It is, in this regard, a poem with its sights set beyond subjectivity, as it tends towards a humanistic and ontological model for understanding history. Prynne's project is a call to resistance which lyric hopes to strike, and entails within it an ethic defined by and speaking from within the historical system it describes.

The ethical and ontological focus of Prynne's poems form, as Rodríguez writes, a set of conditions surrounding the ardent matter of Prynne's art. Reflecting on a letter Prynne sent to Duncan McNaughton, Rodríguez argues that Prynne's political poetic points

to the situation of a man whose self-knowledge and responsibility to others lies in vocational urgency. For this poet, whose verse is not a convention but content, cannot provide the 'intrepid prophecy' of a poet who stands apart as in some ivory tower. As for the 'alternative' – total action in the historical process at the expense of meditative preparedness, 'I gnash my words' sounds a clear and terrifying note of the system of feeling in Prynne's discourse. So the greater importance of tradition then and the point of irony in his work is that it all gets into human-natural facts, which is to say, it isn't isolated. On the contrary, it is incorporated into the imaginative disclosure of place and knowledge of living and dying.⁶⁰

The characteristics of Prynne's art culminate in a poetic expression of the event. There is a determined arbitration on Prynne's behalf, which balances the authorial position between action in and abstinence from the political situation. The pursuit of knowledge cannot solely be gained by direct and proximal relation to action, as Prynne's letter to McNaughton portends. For Prynne, lyric counterposes the denigration of the modern condition, and the project of lyric is, for him, not only a vocational pursuit but an ethical pursuit as well. For Prynne, this leads to a poetic response through which he can force readers to consider not only the atrocity but also their own social complicity in the acts of

⁶⁰ Andrés Rodríguez, "Enlarging History: The Poetry of J.H. Prynne," *Sagetrieb*, 10 (1991) 83-107, 89.

social inequality and violence that he takes as poetic subjects.⁶¹ Amongst competing ethical, vocational and familial responsibilities, the radicalised individual takes up his position in relation to the events about which he writes.⁶² Related through Jean Daive, all poetry is, as Celan said, an effort at assuring our survival, and ‘our survival we owe, just barely [...] to exposing our resistance’.⁶³

Analysis.

‘Es Lebe der König’ mimics the fugue style of Celan’s ‘Todesfuge’, where the motivic construction imbues the text with a relentless momentum, signifying the socio-historical circumstances that have befallen those facing persecution. ‘Es Lebe der König’ begins at the point at which the surrealist tracks pattern through the snowy landscape, where natural imagery turns ruthlessly upon itself and an environment of systemic violence engulfs the reader. The reader experiences the shriek of birds circling in the russet skies amongst the smouldering plumes of the internment camps and darkness falling at the edge of day. Just as Celan rearranged the day’s temporal structure in ‘Todesfuge’, Prynne’s construction of the natural sounds a discord that is inseparably linked with destruction. The reader is led to the abyss which swallowed Paul Celan, in which the unknowable circumstances of his death become a re-enactment of the event itself and where the colluding lexicons of *Brass* culminate in a resonance that is inimical and demanding.

⁶¹ Issues of complicity and a citizen’s responsibility for democratic governmental decisions form thematic threads in *Bands Around the Throat*, as well as ‘Refuse Collection’, as further discussed, respectively, in Chapters Three and Five, below.

⁶² Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1990) 17-18. Adorno writes, ‘The need to lend a voice to suffering is a condition of all truth,’ and it is a statement which has demonstrative implications within Prynne’s thematic arrangement of poems, their public function and their staging of a confrontation with realities external to him.

⁶³ Jean Daive, *Under the Dome: Walks With Paul Celan*, trans. Rosmarie Waldrop (Providence, RI: Burning Deck, 2009) 111. Quotation amended for clarity.

Prynne's title, which may be translated as 'The King Lives', gives rise to concepts proposed by the phrase 'Long live the King' as uttered by the character Lucile in Georg Büchner's play *Danton's Death*. This phrase is one of two taken from the play which Celan expands upon in 'The Meridian' speech, delivered at Celan's reception of the Büchner prize. In his 1960 speech, Celan argues that Lucile's utterance, which leads to her arrest and, one can assume, her subsequent death for speaking out against the state, is a naming of the void. Despite likely costing Lucile her life, the act of her utterance is ultimately declared to be an act of freedom, for Lucile accepts the consequences for speaking out against social wrongs. Celan argues that this is 'homage to the majesty of the absurd which bespeaks the presence of human beings'.⁶⁴ This line, in Celan's explanation, is twinned with a statement about Büchner's eponymous character Lenz, that 'it only sometimes bothered him that he could not walk on his head',⁶⁵ which represents Lenz's confrontation with the implacable horrors and ennui of the natural world. The realignment of the circumstances of life enacted by Lucile in Büchner's play *Danton's Death*, and by Lenz in Büchner's unfinished novella, is a righting of the conditions of reality. When the situation is such that the unreal is easier to fathom than reality, the naming of the void must be the event which renders truth. By naming the voids, Celan delineates the corresponding reality of 'an altogether other [...] on whose behalf poetry hopes to speak'.⁶⁶ For Celan, the poem constitutes the path 'towards the distant, perhaps vacant other, which it considers it can reach and set free, [as] it turns towards it, towards the poem'.⁶⁷ This is a conscious declaration of the redemptive power of the poet to right the conditions of the world and a testament to the power of the lyric. Celan consistently sought to create a poetic that

⁶⁴ Celan, *Collected Prose*, 40.

⁶⁵ Celan, *Collected Prose*, 40.

⁶⁶ Celan, *Collected Prose*, 48.

⁶⁷ Celan, *Collected Prose*, 48.

‘constantly calls and pulls itself back from the “already-no-more” to a “still-here”’.⁶⁸ Celan lent his voice to the persecuted and attempted to preserve the possibilities of life and language which existed before he was struck with ‘that which happened’.⁶⁹

The discordant images, metaphors and linear additions from one stanza to the next in Prynne’s poem give rise to numerous problems with interpretation of the event. Highlighting the methods of poetic construction Prynne would adapt from Celan, Pierre Joris remarks that the ‘lush complexities’ of Celan’s earlier works have given way to a poetic in which ‘the syntax grew tighter and more spiny, and his trademark neologisms and telescoping of words increased while the overall composition of the work became much more serial in nature, i.e., rather than insisting on individual, titled poems, he moves towards a method of composition by cycles and volume’.⁷⁰ For Celan, the demand of answering the call to language was about finding new means of expression within the confines of this ‘death-bringing language’ in developing his own poetic and means of expression. This impetus can also be read through Prynne’s abrupt change in syntactic, grammatical and lexical arrangements after his disowned early collection *Force of Circumstance and Other Poems*.

By implication, Prynne’s title ‘Es Lebe der König’ (‘The King Lives’) is doubly or triply resonant. To utilise another of Celan’s phrases from ‘The Meridian’, the title works to give voice to ‘language actualised, set free under the sign of a radical individuation which, however, remains as aware of the limits drawn by language as of the possibilities it opens’.⁷¹ By its first utterance the title can attest to the presence and persistence of Celan,

⁶⁸ Celan, *Collected Prose*, 94.

⁶⁹ Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005) 52,108.

⁷⁰ Pierre Joris, “Introduction,” *Breathturns* by Paul Celan, trans. Pierre Joris (København; Los Angeles: Green Integer, 2006) 30.

⁷¹ Celan, *Collected Prose*, 49.

recalling his poetic and humanistic message despite suffering under the conditions which ultimately cost him his life. Lucile's statement, 'Long live the King', invites the reader to confront the fact that the historical circumstances through which Celan suffered and which he evoked in his speech still exist. Moreover, the confrontation of these historical circumstances still has the implicit power of sending resisting subjects to their death. To speak on behalf of the suffering, against systemic operations of power, is to invite death upon oneself. The naming of the void, this fight through persecution, exile and violence to 'the path on which language becomes voice',⁷² retains the implicit threat it always had. Prynne's title is therefore not only an elegiac sanctification of Celan's life but an active articulation of the knowledge of a continuing and systemic threat.

The first sentence of the poem ('Fire and honey oozes from cracks in the earth; / the cloud eases up the Richter scale.') implies a pastoral setting, despite the surrealist imagery, and harkens back to the first pastoral elegy, the *Idylls* of Theocritus. This allusion not only unifies the poem's opening with the Arcadian state presupposed as the wellspring of pastoral poetry, but also inaugurates the poem with issues of labour, ownership. The poem's opening line and its relation to biblical descriptions draws allusions to the complicities of spiritual and material providence.⁷³ 'Es Lebe der König' displays many of the conventional strategies of the pastoral elegy with an awareness of the physical and conceptual space within which pastoral elegies are created. Through the diminishing representation of the landscape, the poem begins to accentuate the attendant artifices and

⁷² Celan, *Collected Prose*, 53.

⁷³ There are many examples paralleling the opening line's description of pastoral rupture with biblical scenes; for instance, 'I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and how I wish it were already kindled! But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is accomplished!' (Luke: 12:49-50), or 'Perhaps people think that I have come to cast peace upon the world. They do not know that I have come to cast conflicts upon the earth: fire, sword, war.' (Thomas 16, non-canonical) In addition to these biblical connotations, there is also Sanskrit precedent, as in the description of Mithra's birth recounted by Elmur Suhr in his essay 'Krishna and Mithra as Messiahs' (*Folklore* 77.3 (1966) 205-221, 216.)

legislations of control imposed upon the land. The climactic effect is both ontological and pastoral, because the representations designate nature as mitigated and controlled by forces of technological mastery. The intractable horrors of the Holocaust nearly elide the sanctity and preservation made possible by the elegiac conventions, because the artifices of control are fundamentally dominant in the creation of the poem's image-complexes. The presence of nature in the poem, and the pervasive force of repetitious instances of 'white', fit the ceremonial role of mourning and seeking consolation. The endowment of nature with human, ontological and poetic associations invokes issues of renewal, continuity and sanctity common to commemoration. The personification and symbolising force of the natural emphasise the potential for poetry to preserve testimony, and attest to the sanctity and preservation inherent in nature. Thus the manner in which Prynne honours Celan's legacy is absorbed into natural representations and symbols that signify the continuance of Celan's effect. In this way the poem imitates Theocritus's pastoral elegy for Daphnis, though in utilising real death as its model it is also akin to Virgil's Tenth Eclogue. The elegiac mode in 'Es Lebe der König' is a frame for the discussion of social injustice, concerned with the effects of and responses to corporeal and geographic control. Thus the purpose of the elegiac framework is not to concretise mourning, but to foreground the ontological inquiry upon which the poem relies, as read through the landscape.

Rodríguez commits to the idea that 'Es Lebe der König' 'is not properly speaking a lament at all. It is essentially a landscape in which the elegist can place diffuse, intangible feelings of grief and thereby win relief from his suffering'.⁷⁴ However, one cannot assume that Prynne sought to extricate himself from this suffering through the writing of the poem, for the conditions of violence depicted within the poem subsume even this marginal

⁷⁴ Rodríguez, "Enlarging History: The Poetry of J.H. Prynne," 94-5.

possibility. If the poem does allow any feeling of sanctuary it is in maintaining fidelity to the beliefs Celan held and those truths he sought through language. In 'Es Lebe der König' the truth is retained through nature's forbearance and its ability to absorb, adapt to and remain throughout the atrocities of its human inhabitants. In this sense the poem comes more and more to resemble an ode than an elegy. In 'Es Lebe der König', nature, as it is evoked in the poem's striking first line, enacts a negation of natural relations. The destruction of natural order and inexplicable violence are presented as obstacles to be overcome by the exilic subject, who is himself caught in the anguish of his own non-relation. Prynne's elegy is, as Rodríguez points out, not a lament; it is an enactment of Celan's death to which Prynne maintains fidelity to uphold the truths that Celan sought. The event of Celan's death is one instance of the naming of the voids which takes place in the poem.

In a letter to Andrew Crozier that appeared in *The English Intelligencer*, Prynne invokes the constructs of fidelity and event, when he writes,

The occasional promise of event is just a spread over your abstract nouns: tenderness, bar, difference, what. [...] If a set of language is to need and deserve confidence it must keep its own kind of fidelity: it must be true to its purpose. [...] the purpose is of course the retrospective formalism of the occasion. [...] Thus pathos in this mode is actually another wedge between those transposed conditions (trust, desire, the open window) and the world intactly grabbed back into the silver forest: the very oldest idea of "nature" (causing the wild bees to swarm & produce honey as well as eloquence).⁷⁵

Utilising the 'retrospective formalism of the occasion' in the enactment of Celan's death, the poem presents a unifying moment, an act of fidelity to produce new poetic thought. For

⁷⁵ J.H. Prynne, "A letter to Andrew Crozier (13 Sept. 1966)," *The English Intelligencer*, 1st ser., 8 [1966] 109-10. Reprinted in Neil Pattison, Reitha Pattison, Luke Roberts, eds., *Certain Prose of The English Intelligencer* (Cambridge: Mountain, 2012) 20-22.

Prynne, as for Badiou, this articulation coexists between the poet's language, the ethical imperative to maintain his or her commitment to the poem, and fidelity to the event. Prynne's pastoral setting for this elegy aligns the condition of the human, the event of Celan's death, within the natural conditions, and 'thus forms the real and absent cause of a truth'.⁷⁶ Subjectivity arises from the fidelity to the situation, manifested in 'Es Lebe der König' as the enactment of Celan's death, and 'continues to hold within the situation even when the event has come to supplement or exist for it'.⁷⁷ Thus, in enacting the social conditions which surrounded Celan's exile and death, Prynne creates a poetic event in which the truths Celan sought are preserved.

The poem opens as 'Fire and honey oozes from cracks in the earth; / the cloud eases up the Richter scale', a seeming indictment of the natural conditions as they have been depicted. This compels the reader to think back to Lenz's desire to walk on his head and see the sky as an abyss. The unsettling scene exemplifies Prynne's previous understanding of the structure of nature as a unifying, ontological model. The disruption of the natural situates the opening of the poem in a depiction of atrocity, as if entire segments of the landscape have been swallowed or engulfed by the earth. 'The landscape rendered in "Es Lebe der König" is the landscape of our recklessly stupid and morally enormous world,' Rodríguez argues, and the poem reflects 'the poisoning of both the pastoral and the elegiac, and in the process tells of another kind of "condition", that of an entire world in the declension of historical time'.⁷⁸ The reader is not taken aback when 'starlight becomes negative', for the condition of nature has become severely disrupted and the sky has

⁷⁶ Alain Badiou, *Infinite Thought* (London: Continuum, 2003) 65.

⁷⁷ Alain Badiou, et al., *Theoretic Writings* (London; New York: Continuum, 2006) 115.

⁷⁸ Rodríguez, "Enlarging History: The Poetry of J.H. Prynne," 95.

become an abyss. Even starlight, which has provided a notion of sanctuary to humankind for eons, has lost all sense of pacification.

Later in the first stanza of the poem, after ‘you’ have re-entered the small house, the subjective group is led to those whose ‘throats fur / with human warmth’ when ‘we too are numbered like / prints in the new snow.’ In the first instance the ‘you’ who enters the small house recalls the heroic wanderer or shepherd returning to the comforts of home, whose past vanishes after he is received into the warmth of ‘the small house’⁷⁹ and he is encouraged to part with the travails of work and travel. This vanishing of the past represents an eradication of history, an eradication of the heritage which the group might claim as their own individuated histories. There is also a thorough indication that the houses to which the subjective ‘we’ are led is indicative of another of the voids within the poem, an eradication of the past signified by a naming of the void of history. In using the representations of the house as a signifier, Prynne is attempting to ‘nam[e] that which was without name’.⁸⁰ By naming these houses Prynne indicates that place retains the only testament to the atrocities committed at Auschwitz.

⁷⁹ Susan Stewart and John Kinsella, “An epistolary pastoral/an introduction,” *Tri-quarterly*, 116 (Summer 2003) 6. Taken from Stewart’s introduction, this notion of being received into the comfortable and well-known pastoral surroundings or sanctuary is usually defined by an absence which entails a violent occupation. Stewart argues that ‘[f]rom Virgil’s eclogues forward, the historical opposition between pastoral and violence is inseparable from a concern with the interface of morality and necessity. Returning veterans of war and the crisis of hospitality they evoke can be found in Virgil and Wordsworth alike: such veterans wander in pastoral landscapes that are their source and eventual refuge.’ [8] She continues her argument, asserting that not only in postwar conditions is the pastoral a poetic form which mediates through aggregates of violence but that this is one of its very conditions due to the contingency and complicity of its economies to the harvesting of animals: ‘As an artistic form, pastoral is not tied, as tragedy is, to a demand for sacrifice, yet pastoral is shadowed with the slaughter of animals and is evident in carnival’s etymology, communal, or village festivity is often organised around a plenitude of meat. [...] [P]astoral has always borne a connection to loss and elegy, as well as a connection to epithalamion and fertility.’ [9] These patterns of extenuating conditions applied to the characteristics of the pastoral simultaneously weigh on the references to sanctuary found within ‘Es Lebe der König’.

⁸⁰ Badiou and Critchley, “Ours is not a Terrible Situation,” 364.

The 'für' of their throats resonates with the term 'Führer' (German for 'guide' or 'leader'), the famous epithet of Adolf Hitler.⁸¹ It is because of these connotations that the throat voices the dictum of command and carries with it orders of coming atrocities, forcing the throats to transmogrify this animalistic intent into action. Writing on the deprivation associated with historical representation of huts, and commenting on Celan and Heidegger's meeting in the mountains, Prynne relates the characteristics of the hut in relation to human life reduced to animalistic conditions:

But also not to be forgotten is the theme of deprivation and violence and psychic disorder, of crushing poverty and exclusion from the ordered domains of humankind. If this theme is endemic to the thinking in cultural history about real huts and actual hovels, being no metaphor but conditions of specific livelihood and of the often isolated individuals or exiled and stranded populations that struggle to survive in them, what light shall this sub-theme shed upon the question of language and dwelling within its so-called special place?⁸²

The animistic transmogrification of the voice that delivers the command connects the poem further with apocalyptic imagery associated with the fall of man. Reversing the proposition of George Bataille, where the movement from animal to man 'is a setting in place [...] the value of a setting in place of social existence,'⁸³ the bestial utterance in 'Es Lebe der König' represents a deracination of the human values fundamental to social existence.

The solemnity, vigilance and comfort offered by the pastoral symbolism of the house also has a negative reading suggesting that as they enter the 'houses' of Auschwitz,

⁸¹ Jacques Derrida, "A Self-Unsealing Poetic Text," *Revenge of the Aesthetic: The Place of Literature in Theory Today*, ed. Michael Clark (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000) 201. In this essay Derrida deconstructs Celan's usages of the word 'für' in 'Aschenglorie' and its various connotations, pervading and disclosing the meaning of that poem's central phrase, "Niemand / zeugt für den / Zeugen." The readings of 'für' that Derrida provides account for a reduction of agency to bear witness, or even to a prescription not to.

⁸² J.H. Prynne, "Huts," *Textual Practice*, 22.4 (2008) 613-633, 628.

⁸³ Lucio Angelo Privitello, "S/laughter and Anima-Lēthē," *Reading Bataille Now*, ed. Shannon Winnubst, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007) 167-196, 170.

the subjects are ‘numbered like / prints in the new snow’ and are limited in their capacities to maintain the impression of where they have been. That the subjects are ‘numbered’ and facing persecution alludes to the physical branding and systematised deaths the interned prisoners were facing. The pastoral antecedents presupposed by the tradition of pastoral elegy do not negate this possibility, and the idea of transit and of losing one’s way in the action cements this loss of hope, directing us to the train station, on the way to the internment camps, ‘going over and over to / the landing-stage, where we are.’ It should be recalled that for Heidegger, ‘language is the house of being’, and therefore any instance of dwelling which substantiates harm is also an effect of language. That is to say, the capacity of the house to direct and control is an expression of language’s ability to control and dominate. Heidegger uses the concept of building or dwelling to reconstitute the ideal, the sacred, as implicitly associated with coming home.⁸⁴ However, Prynne argues,

The house of language is not innocent, and is no temple. The intensities of poetic encounter, of imagination and deep insight into spiritual reality and poetic truth, carry with them all the fierce contradiction of what human language is and does. There is no protection or even temporary shelter from these forms of knowledge that is worth even a moment’s considered preference [...] Because the primal hut strips away a host of circumstantial appurtenances and qualifications, it does represent an elemental form, a kind of sweat-lodge; but it is confederate with deep ethical problematics, and not somehow a purifying solution to them.⁸⁵

In utilising the house in the poem, Prynne creates an image-complex that implicitly refers to Heidegger, and though the threat to the subjective is never explicitly detailed, it speaks to ‘deep ethical problematics’ associated with dwelling in Heidegger’s philosophy. Implicated in the image-complex are the linguistic commands of the Nazi soldiers and the function of

⁸⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971) 226.

⁸⁵ Prynne, “Huts,” 631.

the technical house, as it is tied to the poem's fugal form and the creation of the fugitive, Paul Celan.

Prynne's use of snow in the line 'we too are numbered like / prints in the new snow' works contiguously in *Brass* in a metonymic pattern not dissimilar to the depiction of natural events which Celan's repetitions of *Schnee*, *Nacht* and *Asche* evoke in his own poems. These words are, as Ward argues, 'at home in their familiarity, signs of the faraway in their calmly non-human associations; welcoming yet distanced yet magnetic in a recognisable but elusive configuration. That the things they signal are mysterious takes nothing away from their articulations of fundamental human experience; quite the reverse.'⁸⁶ The symbolic presence of snow, sky and clouds marks them as fundamental to the sensory experience of the poem, and hence the connotations of Celan's usage resonate all the more definitively in 'Es Lebe der König'. For Celan, who strongly associated winter with the last moments of his mother's life,⁸⁷ the representation of 'snow' was laden with personal history. In 'With a Changing Key', Celan addresses himself:

With a changing key
you unlock the house where
the snow of what's silenced drifts.
Just like the blood that bursts from
your eye or mouth or ear
so the key changes.

Changing the key changes the world
that may drift with the flakes.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Ward, "Nothing but Mortality," 142.

⁸⁷ Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew*, 16. Celan's mother was shot by a German officer and died in a road-side snowdrift in the Ukraine. Celan's father, Felstiner notes, most likely died of typhus in a forced labour camp.

⁸⁸ Celan, "With a Changing Key," *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, 65.

In 'Winter', Celan stresses the ardent embrace of memory to give him the strength to refrain from sinking in the mire of personal grief and guilt: 'What would it be Mother: growth or wound / if I too sank down in the snowdrift of the Ukraine'.⁸⁹ The snow for Celan is not only a symbolic representation of past violence and the sanctity of memory but also the guilt of surviving. This usage is also evoked in 'The Conversation in the Mountains', in which Celan writes that 'Man is bound in the snow woods of his despair ... for his eyes they have seen what all have seen and more'.⁹⁰ In the final couplet of 'With a Changing Key' the same evocation is found, unifying Celan's suffering with the suffering of his mother: 'Just like the wind that rebuffs you / the snow packs around the world'.⁹¹

John Felstiner's biography and translations of Celan discuss a further historical account of the use of snow as a pastoral theme, adding further layers of connotations through which the 'snow' should be read, while bearing in mind the transfigurative account also given to the substance in Celan's poem 'Black Flakes':

Subtly this poem sets its face against facile expectation, against the old theme of love counteracting winter from the sixteenth-century folk song 'The Snow Has Fallen' in which a lover begs his beloved to wrap him in her arms and banish winter. No such homeliness, Paul [Celan] insists by echoing this song, will dispel the winter of 1943. Nor is Christian consolation to be had.⁹²

Prynne's use of snow in the line 'Their throats fur / with human warmth, we too are numbered like / prints in the new snow', as well as throughout the collection *Brass*, must be read with a cognisant awareness of Celan's usage of 'snow' and its attendant lexical relationship linking it with trauma and a transfigurative account of nature. Snow appears

⁸⁹ Celan, "Winter," *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, 9.

⁹⁰ Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew*, 52.

⁹¹ Celan, "With a Changing Key," *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, 65.

⁹² Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew*, 19.

prominently in Prynne's *The White Stones*, where it signifies the deterioration or faltering of the senses, such as 'a slow change / like the image of snow' (53), depicting the 'limits of survival and habitation, and with the possibilities of transformation of the self'.⁹³ In *Brass* its usage is more closely aligned with Celan's lexical associations, presaging loss and survival: "You sleep on, seeded by snowy drift." (159) Therefore, 'we too are numbered like / prints in the new snow' is both a vigilant look to the past and an evocation of memory as a means to gather strength in the face of coming adversity. The line carries with it the comfort offered by its traditional use in pastoral poetry as well as the heinous symbol of the ash-strewn snow falling in Celan's poem 'Black Flakes', where it threatens to annihilate the possibility of testimony itself.⁹⁴

Fugue.

The fugal form upon which Celan structured his poem 'Todesfuge' is both referenced in and informs the poetic structure of 'Es Lebe der König'. The fugue form is inseparably linked with both the baroque style and Bach, and therefore with German history. The incisive irony of Celan's 'Todesfuge' is that the poem not only utilises this compositional form, but the form is also etymologically related to flight and the fugitive. As Karl Weimar argues, 'it is a chilling irony that this eerie, frightening danse macabre should evolve out of the logical measured polyphony of the fugue. The title, "Todesfuge", is a stark concentrate of the poem's complex of content and form and a manifest sign of its intrinsically musical structure.'⁹⁵ As with the pastoral elegy, the fugal style is based on an exchange between

⁹³ N.H. Reeve and Richard Kerridge, *Nearly Too Much: The Poetry of J.H. Prynne* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995) 183.

⁹⁴ Derrida, "A Self-Unsealing Poetic Text," 183.

⁹⁵ Karl Weimar, "Paul Celan's 'Todesfuge': Translation and Interpretation," *PMLA*, 89.1 (January 1974) 92.

voices. The exchange between voices, typically located in a fugue's exposition, occurs in 'Todesfuge' in the

Unobtrusive unaccented shift from the third person pronoun 'it' in the opening line to the second person familiar for 'you' (*dich*) in the first line of the second stanza. It signifies a frightening change in the relationship between the captive chorus and the black milk, from one of detachment, indicating an innocent credulity perhaps, to a helpless, perhaps morbid, familiarity, which form then becomes fixed for the rest of the fugue.⁹⁶

The fugal pattern lends to 'Todesfuge' an irresistible momentum, symbolising the effect of violence in the control of people and their expression. The motivic complex of Celan's poem and the communicative exchange between subject and counter-subject reflect the musical structure of this contrapuntal development. As Weimar attests, 'Todesfuge' represents the ineradicable memory of Celan, invoked through the verbal and musical transmutation of experience.⁹⁷

Prynne's elegy references the fugal style of Celan, with the phrase 'the / double music strokes my hand', as well as in the mimesis of the fugal pattern displayed in Celan's poem. Considering Prynne's poem in the fugal form allocates the final stanza as a coda, a cadential recapitulation. The poem's first four strophes are divided by the aporetic break between the lines 'We stand / just long enough to see you, // we hear your / fearful groan and choose not to think of it', creating, in the break between stanzas, the place of death. The experience of death to which the group is witness loosens the subjective claim to agency over their lives and disrupts the poem's subjective representation. This is the poem's only uncapitalised sentence, which creates a looming dissonance and infuses the text with the gravitas of the Holocaust. Reading Prynne's poem in this manner is

⁹⁶ Weimar, "Paul Celan's 'Todesfuge'," 88.

⁹⁷ Weimar, "Paul Celan's 'Todesfuge'," 87.

strengthened by the rapid exchange from the expression of the singular pronoun in ‘the / double music strokes my hand’ to the possessive plural pronoun in the repetitive use of ‘we’. Just as Celan’s use of the fugal form displays many disparities and antitheses, Prynne’s rapid exchange between subject and countersubject, and the shifting, possessive expressions, display a dissonance that resonates beneath the artifice of the fugal order.⁹⁸

Considering the discrepancies of transposing a musical structure onto a poetic form, it would be useful to conceive of the fugue as a mode of composition and not as a rigid structure. If the final strophe in ‘Es Lebe der König’ is understood as the fugue’s coda, the structure of the four primary stanzas appears as a self-intersecting quadrilateral, with its midpoint structured around death in anonymity. It is this death which eradicates the subjective agency of the subjective group, ‘we’, opening the third stanza. The return to the opening key, at the close of the fourth stanza, is signified through the representations of nature, where ‘white fleecy / clouds sail over the azure’. The concluding phrase of the fourth stanza replicates the poem’s opening, where ‘the cloud eases up the Richter scale.’ Much of the natural descriptions within the poem’s opening stanza has diminished, yet the exchange between the first and fourth stanza highlight the balance presupposed in the fugal form. ‘[A]nimals too delicate and cruel’, in the first stanza, is balanced against ‘the animals / and their watchful calm.’ The ‘honey [which] oozes from cracks in the earth’ finds an incongruous home in the domestic: ‘set up / the table ready for white honey’. The pastoral wanderer who seeks to ‘re-enter the small house’ is walking ‘in the shade of / the technical house’ in the poem’s fourth stanza. This line is perhaps expressive of Celan’s biography, and his life outside of the structures of Nazi persecution, forever walking beneath its shadow. The bodily constrictions suggested by ‘Their throats fur / with human warmth’ is

⁹⁸ Weimar, “Paul Celan’s ‘Todesfuge,’” 92.

replicated in the fourth stanza's 'choking' of the domestic sphere. The horizontal movement of the fugue includes the passage beyond the horrors of the Holocaust, moving towards a position of consolation with the fourth stanza's final lines, and the repetitions of 'white.' That 'whiteness is a patchwork of / revenge too' implies that the symbols used, despite their connection with the pastoral elegy and notions of sanctity, retain an underlying threat. Yet by the final line the threat has lessened, and the poem registers the movement from the cacophony and dissonance of the opening image-complex to one in which the subject can 'open the window' where 'white fleecy / clouds sail over the azure'. The pattern of exchange in 'Es Lebe der König' and the return to the opening key all indicate that Prynne utilised the fugal structure of Celan's 'Todesfuge' as a mode of composition for his elegy. It also gives reason to surmise that the fugal model inherently conceals some of the contradictory expressions of music, violence and notions of preservation within the poem.

'It is not possible'.

The second stanza of 'Es Lebe der König', which warns 'It is not possible to / drink this again,' again spurs the reader to think of Celan's 'Todesfuge' and its description of life in the Nazi camps, as well as its ominous refrain 'Black Milk of daybreak we drink it at evening / we drink it at midday and morning we drink it at night / we drink and we drink.'⁹⁹

All substances for Celan contain the notion of transfiguration, bestowing a beneficence that can and does suddenly alter. This notion is used by Celan and Prynne in descriptions of snow and water in many of their respective poems. For Prynne the use of the sustentive to highlight the negative implications of a life-giving product signifies the void of nourishment present within snow, water, milk and honey, a pattern repeated throughout

⁹⁹ Celan, *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, 31.

Brass. Mellors claims that the use of life-giving substances, possessing positive and negative connotations, accounts for Prynne's use of 'white' within *Brass*. Mellors argues that this aligns Prynne's response 'to the figuration of danger and the violent event [which] remains at the level of formal abstraction'.¹⁰⁰ According to Mellors, turning the Medusa scene on its head and revealing the world as an abyss has the formal effect of highlighting the alternation 'between the voiding of figuration in the modernist project and its reinscription into thematic interests, where the meditation on pain sanctions an ethic based on what Prynne believes to be the literal, objective and physical response to experience that is the just order of being itself'.¹⁰¹ Earlier in *Brass*, in the poem 'The Ideal Star-Fighter', Prynne warns the reader: "Do not take this as metaphor; thinking to / finish off the last half-pint of milk, / look at the plants, the entire dark dream outside.' (166)

Prynne's call to 'not take this as metaphor' is a challenge to the reader, but if taken literally the line works to reference the stressed syllables of the refrain of 'Todesfuge', where the 'Black Milk' which appears as the subject introduced in the first lines of the poem turns out to be the object to which the poet speaks with a 'syntactic and rhythmic primacy'.¹⁰² This switch in address and the shift to dactylic meter evidence Celan's use of fugal composition, providing, in a second voice, the answer to the subject in the fugue's exposition. Just as the title 'Todesfuge' bears a violent and accentual symmetry, it loosens 'the German possessive's compactness-- the compact between death and music; nullity and order which are the word's two sides'.¹⁰³ This is replicated in the position of the sustentive, which Prynne asserts we can bear no more. The repetition of sustentive elements with negative connotations references the metaphorical nature of Celan's usage. The drink

¹⁰⁰ Mellors, *Late-Modernist Poetics*, 196.

¹⁰¹ Mellors, *Late-Modernist Poetics*, 196.

¹⁰² Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew*, 33.

¹⁰³ Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew*, 32.

Prynne proposes conveys the atrocity of subjugation, and suggests the failure of the human ethic. In Felstiner's view 'Black Milk' is a flagrant metaphor, and he insists upon this because 'it takes metaphor, our figure of speech that asserts something contrary to fact to convey a fact'.¹⁰⁴ The metaphorical nature of Celan's 'Black Milk' nullifies the nourishment vital to mankind, and thus in 'Es Lebe der König' the sustentive objects propose the negation of ethical nourishment. Prynne's line, 'It is not possible to / drink this again,' references the historical circumstances which gave rise to the Holocaust, a cycle which the refrain of 'Todesfuge' used without end, indicating that systemic violence justified through an ethical imperative leads to 'the poem's elemental gesture, a timing of degradation, a senseless inescapable cycle, such as Nietzsche called "the most dreadful aspect of eternal recurrence"'.¹⁰⁵ The cycle of violence and destruction, and the ruination of nature which both poets stress, is the end point of the failure of the human ethic.

Prynne's statement, 'It is not possible to / drink this again,' is a call to cease replicating the trauma of the event, as well as a notice to the finality of the subject's physical *ability* to consume the drink. The meaning implied in 'It is not possible' denotes a moment of incapacity, whereas if Prynne had written 'we cannot' or 'will not' it would indicate that the subjects involved continue to retain an element of agency within their own lives. The second instance of limiting the agency of the subjective group 'we' within the poem comes at exactly the moment when 'The house becomes technical'. Prynne begins the onslaught of violence and persecution when 'the beloved enters the small house' and closes the line with a full stop; in doing so he negates the possibility of any comfort asserted by the house's pastoral antecedents and traditional usage.

¹⁰⁴ Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew*, 33.

¹⁰⁵ Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew*, 35.

The line which claims that '[t]he house becomes technical' expresses numerous meanings simultaneously. This transfiguration of a place of comfort to a factory ruled by precise order condemns those who have entered the house to bear the processes for which it was designed. The second limitation on the agency of the subjective 'we' in 'Es Lebe der König' represents a systemic delimiting of agency, placing the mechanism in the hands of the operator. This limiting of agency has the effect of denigrating the subjective 'we' by reducing their claims to the operations of their own will; they cannot actively participate in their own lives, thus depriving them of any claim to individuation. Writing that '[t]he house becomes technical' is also to raise an issue with Heidegger and his support of the Nazi party. The line is also a reference to Celan's 'Todtnauberg'. 'Todtnauberg' is a poem about Celan's visit to Heidegger's house in the mountains, and Celan's hope to gain from Heidegger a refutation of the philosopher's previous support for the Nazi party and a wider public dismissal of these ideological aims. After arriving and noting the botanical species around the house, Celan signed the guest book, asking inconclusively whose names may have been written there before his. It concludes with an aborted walk taken by Celan and Heidegger, which Prynne depicts as taking place in a 'mossy pivot' (168) that divides them. The poem consists of a single sentence, divided into eight stanzas. The paratactic lexicon of the poem juxtaposes nouns and clauses, commenting upon and refracting Celan's experience.

As Joris argues, 'Todtnauberg' is 'nearly not a poem, the sentence feels like the remainder, the residue, of an aborted or impossible narration'.¹⁰⁶ It should also be noted that at Heidegger's house in the mountains Nazi indoctrination meetings were held, so the technical operation of the house is double-edged; it is an operative site furthering the role of

¹⁰⁶ Pierre Joris, "Celan Heidegger: Translation at the Mountain of Death," October 1988, *University of Buffalo*, 12 Jan. 2011 <<http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/authors/joris/todtnauberg.html>>.

the Nazi ideology and rhetoric, consequently justifying this irreparable human destruction on the account that it was sanctioned and supported by Heidegger. As it appears in Prynne's work, the transformative function of the house rearticulates this ideological operation, and highlights the problematised relation with Heidegger's concept of dwelling. In the essay 'Huts', Prynne makes the argument that 'the hut-place is not idyllic but is the site of alienation and its social costs. And as for Heidegger's upgrading of the hut or house to "the temple of Being", recall the comment of Peter Shaw as cited by Johnson, that "the hand which cannot build a hovel may demolish a temple"¹⁰⁷. The error of this position, as argued by Prynne, is that if technological means can produce an end, justifying the dehumanisation of individuals, limiting their agency and calling for their extermination, then our reliance upon those means cannot be trusted to bear any relation to the development of a moral ontological operation. Prynne's position here supports Sutherland's argument that where, in *The White Stones*, 'The devastation is aimless' (120), it was our fault, in *Brass* the devastation renders subjects beyond any means of control.¹⁰⁸

In 'Es Lebe der König' there remains a proposition reminiscent of Maurice Blanchot, when he writes, '[t]here remains a word still to be spoken beyond the living and the dead, bearing witness for the absence of attestation'.¹⁰⁹ The destruction of the human and the eradication of the subjective voice implied by the conditions of the poem relate the incontestability of the subjective loss suffered in the Holocaust. This subject is particularly marked in the poem's second stanza. The limitation of the agency of the group depicted at the stanza's opening is carried throughout the verse. 'The avenues slant back through the trees' can be seen as a departure from the metropolis back into the arms of the natural, but

¹⁰⁷ Prynne, "Huts," 629.

¹⁰⁸ Sutherland, "Hilarious absolute daybreak," 118.

¹⁰⁹ Derrida, "A Self-Unsealing Poetic Text," 205.

that the ‘avenues slant’ implies the capacity of motion to affect the image seen by the viewer. The line denotes a change in orientation imposed on the subjective viewer, heading out of the city, yet captive, which could imply transport by train. The line, ‘the / double music strokes my hand’, evokes for the first time in the poem the primacy of the individual, as fear isolates him (or her) from the collective. The second and only other instance of the possessive pronoun in this poem contains references to the hands of the individual, ‘the smell comes from / shrivelled hair on my wrist’, implying a proximal relation to the threat of the fire(s) in which bodies were burnt, and carrying the threat of being bound. This resonates with Celan’s repetitious use of the twining of hands, in ‘Aschenglorie’:

Aschenglorie hinter
deinen erschütterter-verknoteten
Händen am Dreiweg.

And later in the same poem there are the repetitious lines, ‘Aschen- / glorie hinter / euch Dreiweg- / Händen.’¹¹⁰ In ‘Es Lebe der König’ Prynne depicts the hands as if folded in supplication or prayer, implying the confines of bondage, and that hope is beyond the sphere of the possible. The reader should also recall Prynne’s handwritten epigraph, which concludes ‘As for the other Fingers, They were enveloped in some myth’, speaking to the self-appointed mythology of the Nazi party and *Brass*’s denunciation of any salvific or mythic possibility for humankind.

The pronounced individuation in the second stanza is indicative of the state of consciousness imposed by persecution. The ‘double music’ represents the precarious uncertainty of what will follow; it could be the repetitive thud of the train engine making its way through the countryside, but at the same time it may reference the heraldic voices of

¹¹⁰ Celan, *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, 260.

angels or a Nazi band playing a death march. The line also refers back to an earlier instance, in *Brass's* 'The Kirghiz Disasters', where the narrative depicts a relationship between the musicians and the violence which befalls the persecuted. 'The Kirghiz Disasters' depicts the interned prisoners playing music while the others were led to the gas chambers:

Tip tip

tip as the band refuses to watch, we don't like to
fix it so close to the keel. [...] they all stroll in
from the drill and its wreckage: they are all here.
All disgustingly crouched along the spinet, they
spin, they catch at enamel, they gasp at the
pollen count (158).

Aside from the forced labour to which all prisoners were bound, the musicians at Birkenau were forced to accompany 'the selections,' designating which new arrivals would face extermination. Finding themselves as accomplices and victims of Nazi persecution, the musicians suffered a moral repulsion despite the privilege their abilities offered them. It is the proximal relation of the band to the commanders and their ability to follow orders which ensures 'they are all here', returned from the atrocious scene they have witnessed. That 'they catch at enamel' implies the musicians' involvement with the bodies after death, and possibly the collection of dental remains. As such, the performance of music in the internment camps is *aporetic*: it offers all the possibilities of grace and humanism sounded in orchestral song, but the music of *Brass* is only ever an occlusion of suffering. One must not subscribe to the possibility that the music of the Third Reich in any manner veiled the atrocity of the situation, but, as has been attested to by many survivors, there was hope and distraction to be found in the sanctity of music.

The use of classical music as a means of censorship forms an intrinsic element of Prynne's critique of political power and decision making in the poem *Bands Around the Throat*. Rodríguez writes of this relationship, that 'such music is the obverse side of Prynne's pastoral, an apocalyptic imagery of nature and night which contains all blinding negation, embedded wish'.¹¹¹ This 'double music' is articulated in the natural imagery in 'The Kirghiz Disasters' as 'the fringes wither / with tight credal echoes, bringing fear into the homely / recital' (157), and is replicated in 'Es Lebe der König' with the plaintive 'Give back the / fringe to the sky now hot with its glare, turning / russet and madder'. The anthropomorphism of the image-complex underscores the consequences of the dark smoke overhead; the subject is calling for calm, to clear the air of the smoke of funeral pyres which block the sky. Again in 'The Kirghiz Disasters' Prynne relates that '[t]he fire is an unreal / mixture of smoke & damp; the reason for / this is unmusical, in stoic silence by the door.' (155) 'Damp' has the etymological signification of moisture or vapour, but also a noxious exhalation, one with specific connotations to coal mines (a narrative thread which filters through earlier poems in *Brass*) and more generally a depression of the spirits.¹¹² Due to this polysemy, the sky not only literally grows dark, but depresses the spirits of those who witness it, as it slowly fills with a noxious exhalation. At the same time, the use of 'damp' references the closing lines of Celan's 'Todtnauberg', about Celan's meeting with Heidegger and their aborted walk, which concludes, 'the half- / trodden log- / paths on the high moorland, // dampness, / much'.¹¹³

The line depicting the subject 'in stoic silence by the door' presents to the reader a silent witness, paralysed by fear, whose position puts him in full sight of the surrounding

¹¹¹ Rodríguez, "Enlarging History: The Poetry of J.H. Prynne," 90.

¹¹² "damp, n.1," *OED Online*, December 2012, Oxford University Press, 16 January 2011 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/47087?rskey=D4R6Iz&result=2&isAdvanced=false>>.

¹¹³ Celan, *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, 315.

atrocious. The burning of bodies which pollutes the air hangs over the heads of those ensnared in the 'factories' of the Third Reich, destroying all sense of order with cacophonous noise. It is this darkening of the scene which pervades the first half of 'Es Lebe der König' which forces the realisation that 'freedom would just / leave [them] stranded again.' (156) There is no longer any escape to be dreamed possible, and even personal survival implies almost total devastation. To adopt a phrase of Jean Daive, a former friend of Celan's, this atrocity is to 'leave the survivors keeping watch over the annihilated'.¹¹⁴

'we are trustful'.

As 'Es Lebe der König' moves from the second to the third stanza, the idea of forced confinement and transport grow in significance. The prosodic structure of the stanza break physically divides and distances the subject's view from the others:

going over and over to
the landing-stage, where we are. We stand
just long enough to see you.

we hear your
fearful groan and choose not to think of it.

The lines that conclude the second stanza and open the third stanza of the poem detail the chaos which pervades the scene. Noises jar the subjects and faces flash past, a moment of recognition is depicted as a longing for action, but no such action, the poem relates, can be taken. As has been discussed, the aporia created in the death of the subject is the pivot point in the fugal composition. The eradication of agency is almost complete, as the capitalised

¹¹⁴ Jean Daive, *Under the Dome*, 111.

expression of the subjugated falls from the lexis: ‘we hear your / fearful groan and choose not to think of it.’ The subjective group are already deprived of the prospect of action, and can only hope that the fearful groan does not become their own or foreshadow the end they will face.

Prynne continues:

We
deny the consequence but the outset surrounds us,
we are trustful because only thus is the flame’s
abstract review the real poison[.]

It is only in holding to a belief in the power of the human that the system can be overcome, however futile this may seem. As in *The White Stones*, where ‘[t]he devastation is aimless’ the subject counters by stating, ‘oh, I’ll trust anything.’¹¹⁵ This is a subtle disclosure regarding the necessity of belief, as ‘trust *is* an agency / of surrender’.¹¹⁶ If the abstract and industrious technologies of the Holocaust can be overcome and humanism can prevail, there could still be hope, and thus ‘We / deny the consequence’ and cling to what faith in humanity we may retain. The emphasis on the capitalised ‘We’ after denying the group this position one sentence earlier is suggestive of the capacity for hope to sustain the collective. It also attests to the irrevocable horror of bearing witness, as leading to an eradication of subjectivity. The point to be insisted upon is, as Paul Ricoeur observes, that ‘evil creates an intellectual *aporia* that a practical response can make productive’. Ricoeur further argues that ‘reflection on evil and suffering centres on the interpretation of scripture and myth

¹¹⁵ Prynne, “A Stone Called Nothing,” *Poems*, 120, 121.

¹¹⁶ Prynne, “In Cimmerian Darkness,” *Poems*, 74.

through which persons create a narrative of religious self-understanding'.¹¹⁷ Not only has Prynne created an aporetic analogy to incite discussion over the role of religion, ideology and humanism in the operations of the Holocaust, he has also indicated the exact moment in which he takes it that Celan has lost his faith. This is the moment at which the detained subjects whose beliefs that 'the real poison' of the situation can be overcome are engulfed by a series of observations tied to their captivity. They can feel the heat from the fires which keep them alive, but which may also represent their end. The proximity and complicity of the subjugated to the atrocities in the poem remains undefined, even as 'the smell comes from / shrivelled hair on my wrist.' This image reiterates the fact that many interned prisoners were forced to take part in the atrocities, just as musicians were forced to play by their side. The collation of observations that builds after the expression of hope in the opening of the stanza eradicates any hope of a beneficent end for the prisoners and in doing so eradicates the humanism of any music which resounds in the camps.

'the alder'.

The fourth stanza attains a great deal of resonance in the poem for containing its only specific, arboreal reference. In a collection which is filled with trees and gardens as thematic and poetic signifiers this bears importance. Adding to the weight of this reference is its placement in the poem, arising after the imagery of transport to the internment camps suffered by Jews, as well as the evocation of a plum (which can't but be read as plume) that 'exudes its / fanatic resin'.¹¹⁸ The plum was used as a symbol by many Germans writing on

¹¹⁷ Sarah Pinnock, *Beyond Theodicy: Jewish and Christian Thinkers Respond to the Holocaust* (Buffalo, NY: SUNY Press, 2002) 134. Utilising the writing of Paul Ricoeur.

¹¹⁸ Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, trans. Leslie Norris and Alan Keele (Columbia, SC.: Camden House, 2008) 29. The analogy of Kertesz also bears correlation to Rilke's *Duino Elegies* as well as Shelley's

the Holocaust, perhaps most prominently by Herta Müller in her novel, *The Land of Green Plums*. Another analogous use of the symbol stems from Robert Eaglestone's essay, 'Derrida and the Legacies of the Holocaust', in which Eaglestone quotes Holocaust survivor and Nobel laureate, Imre Kertesz, when he writes, 'Auschwitz must have been hanging in the air for a long, long time, centuries, perhaps, like a dark fruit slowly ripening in the sparkling rays of innumerable ignominious deeds, waiting finally to drop on one's head'.¹¹⁹ Despite the varied readings that can be drawn from Prynne's usage of the word 'plum', what should be stressed is the polysemy of the reference, and the metonymic connection established between the atrocity and the weather. The connection drawn between wounding, death and the weather directly links the poem with the pastoral elegiac tradition of signifying the processes of mourning through natural symbols. The poem's use of symbols such as plums and the alder stress the capacity of nature to endure through human destruction, and therefore link to Celan and familial love as constructs of forbearance.

The poem continues, '[o]nly / the alder thrown over the cranial push, the / waged incompleteness, comes with the animals / and their watchful calm.' In an elegy to Celan, whose botanical interests infiltrated his poems and retained lifelong fascination, this reference attains a unique position. Botanically, the alder referred to, *Alnus glutinosa*, is related to the birch tree, common in wet places across the Northern hemisphere, from Europe to North America and Japan. It is a wood especially noted for its resistance to decay

Adonais; the reference thus aligns Prynne's elegy to Celan with the elegiac tradition in Europe. The lines in Rilke which are related in content read: "And you especially | who fall daily | a hundred times| unripe, with the plummet| that only a fruit can know | from that tree | of jointly constructed motion | (that goes through | spring, summer | and autumn | in a few minutes | faster than water) | fall with a thump | on the grave." Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Adonais: An Elegy on the Death of John Keats," *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature: concise edition, Volume 2*, eds. Joseph Black et al. (Peterborough, ON.: Broadview Press, 2007) 390.

¹¹⁹ Robert Eaglestone, "Derrida and the Legacies of the Holocaust," *Derrida's Legacies: Literature and Philosophy*, eds. Robert Eaglestone and Simon Glendinning (London: Routledge, 2008) 66-75, 69.

for an indefinite period of time under water. The noun form of alder has its roots in Old English, connoting ‘parent’, ‘elder’ or ‘ancestor’ (chiefly in plural).¹²⁰ A second definition states that alder may have referred to the head of a family or clan, a patriarch, chief, prince or ruler. One of the earliest references is to Alexander Pope’s use of the word in his *Peri Bathous; Or, The Art of Sinking in Poetry*, in which Pope investigates the line, ‘and to the sighing alders the alders sigh’.¹²¹ It is of no great surprise that this reference, from the book which Pope introduces bathos as a concept into literature, would have resonance here. For Pope, ‘bathos’ meant a failed attempt at sublimity, whether a ridiculous failure to sustain it or more generally an anticlimax.¹²² As Sutherland wrote in ‘The Trade in Bathos’:

The origin of this criticism is affirmative: it is because Pope believed unshakably in the inherence of truth in nature, that he could express so negatively his anxiety at seeing it debased. Nature was for Pope the visible origin of truth, and our relation to nature is ideally a kind of freedom: freedom from error. This is a negative definition of freedom: we are free when we are capable of not distorting the experience of truth.¹²³

The word ‘alder’ itself is etymologically and referentially determinate in the interpretation of the line, for it at once unifies the ideas of reverence for loss and the unending capacity of the individual to sustain him or herself through memory. In conjunction with the direct symbolic relationship established by Celan’s death by drowning in the Seine, the line depicts the foundational failure of the system to achieve any directly sublime or humanistic end. These referential circumstances force the conclusion that this is the moment in which

¹²⁰ "alder, n.1; n.2," *OED Online*, December 2012, Oxford University Press, 16 January 2013 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/4754?rskey=swSEtZ&result=2&isAdvanced=false>>.

¹²¹ Alexander Pope, *The Major Works*, ed. Pat Rogers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006) 176.

¹²² Pope, *The Major Works*, 226.

¹²³ Sutherland, “The Trade in Bathos.”

Prynne evokes Celan's death.¹²⁴ The alder's ability to resist rot for indefinite periods of time establishes the waters in which Celan drowned as closely related to Celan's snow 'which surround[s] the world', thus preserving memory and sanctifying loss. This reinforces the fact that Prynne's poem is not only an evocation of Celan's suicide by drowning, but an act of preserving and commemorating the ideas Celan strove for in his writing.

As Prynne wrote to Peter Riley, 'The question of future time (what next) is a specific dimension of landscape, which is the magic of parts locked into the physical extension of the whole. [...] The landscape becomes acculturated by the subsistence of social memory'.¹²⁵ What is denoted in such a reference to the alder, as a symbolic representation of Celan's life, is an enactment of the forbearance and perseverance on behalf of the natural. Celan also used a trope of this sort in which a natural element came to stand in for the reverence of nature holding the place of memory through history. The use of the alder in signifying the perseverance of nature and in honouring Celan represents a typical trope of the pastoral elegy. Using the alder, which can survive underwater for an indefinite period of time, reifies Prynne's view of Celan's legacy as foundational to any poetic after Auschwitz. It is also an informed part of how one reads the landscape as a political utterance, in which symbols and poetic forms invoke the subsistence of social memory. In this manner the alder as a symbolic construct exemplifies the elegiac process of moving from grief to consolation.

¹²⁴ Rodríguez, "Enlarging History: The Poetry of J.H. Prynne," 95. 'Not only is there a similarity between Celan and Milton's Lycidas, drowned and mourned for. More importantly, it is impossible not to drink the water that took life, and give it back to the poet in the form of song, in spite of the horror in doing so.'

¹²⁵ J.H. Prynne, "Letter to Peter Riley: 14th Feb. 1967," 256-58, 257, 258. Reprinted in *Certain Prose of The English Intelligencer*, 74-78, 76.

Prynne utilises the botanical reference in this poem in a manner similar to his use of Australian flora in *Acrylic Tips*, where the botanical references function as symbols for destruction and regrowth. Relating to Celan's use of botanical references in his poems, Felstiner notes, 'To address his mother, he adopted from the Romanian folk song the elegiac *doină*, whose couplets typically make some plant or tree witness to personal despair'.¹²⁶ Felstiner provides an example of a typical *doină*:

what leaf trembles
when no wind blows?
The aspen leaf,
my love, with grief.¹²⁷

Celan adapted this traditional form in his 1945 poem 'Aspen Tree' while retaining the conceptual link between nature and timeless loss, as well as the solemn power of nature to persevere through trauma: 'Aspen tree, your leaves glance white into the dark. My mother's hair never turned white'.¹²⁸ Another example of this traditional form was utilised by Celan to create the haunting plaintiveness of 'Nearness of Graves': 'Can none of the aspens and none of the willows allow you their solace, remove all your sorrows?'.¹²⁹ Both of these examples and numerous others in Celan's poetry provide a poetic model which Prynne later adopts in referring to Celan as the alder within 'Es Lebe der König' thus create a symbol for that which is without name.¹³⁰ Prynne's utilisation of the alder as a signifier for Celan's life can be read as another void in the poem preserving the natural from technological destruction. In 'Es Lebe der König', the pastoral elegy is used as a form and a trope, which evinces and commemorates Celan's use of the elegiac *doină*.

¹²⁶ Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew*, 49.

¹²⁷ Felstiner, *Paul Celan: Poet, Survivor, Jew*, 49.

¹²⁸ Celan, *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, 21.

¹²⁹ Celan, *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, 11.

¹³⁰ Badiou and Critchley, "Ours is not a Terrible Situation," 364.

Violence, Love and Family.

The ‘watchful calm’ of the fourth stanza’s opening sentence attests to the power of nature to sustain the human through atrocity and to the sanctifying power of memory. This is contrasted with the enveloping repetition of ‘white’, which, while imbued with a sense of pacification, also speaks to the purity the Nazis saw as foundational to their ideology. Ward utilises Blanchot’s statement on the ‘white spaces, these arrests, these silences of Celan’s work as not being pauses, or intervals, but the positive, indeed rigorous, registration of a void, less a lack than a saturation, a void saturated with void,’¹³¹ to signify the contiguity between the silences in Prynne’s work and those in Celan’s. While the use of ‘white’ and ‘water’ does establish contiguities between Prynne’s and Celan’s uses of silence, it also reinforces the conventions of the pastoral elegy, where symbols of the natural are utilised to suggest purity, sanctity and perseverance. Through these descriptions, the natural is inscribed within an enveloping violence, and therefore comes to represent both sanctity and threat. Prynne’s use of the alder signifies not only the bathetic conditions through which Celan suffered and died, but also unifies the struggle of an individual in modern society whose work, like Celan’s, attests to the power of love. That an idea of the importance of love can arise from the circumstance of Celan’s drowning is maintained by Prynne through the evocation of the event of Celan’s death. Through this evocation Prynne is attempting to hold true to the thematic position of love, nature, memory and forbearance held by Celan.

Mellors writes that Prynne

¹³¹ Ward, “Nothing but Mortality: Prynne and Celan,” 145.

combines a belief in the values of negativity and obscurity with a highly luminous idea of their meaning: experiencing language as something totally distanced and other becomes a way to regain proximity. But if there is an emphasis on the *enactment* of this encounter with alterity, it is quickly enveloped by massive thematising statements as to the homely nature of that *proximity*, whether in terms of an occult heaven or of a cosmology of universal love.¹³²

For Mellors, ‘loss’ is the temporality on which the text is founded, a radical loss which is replicated thematically through the divergent narratives and broken syntax of Prynne’s poetic. Mellors argues that the discursive lexical elements ensure that the reader must constantly face her loss, thereby creating an effect of the gaze ‘which seems to recognize us, but which we cannot recognise’.¹³³ In ‘Es Lebe der König’, the gaze entails the reflection of one’s self from the view of the other members of the family, a position balancing loss and love, for which apperception is unavailable.

In the penultimate stanza, after the metaphoric death of Celan and the preservation of his name, the ideas of love and lust enter into the poem. If ‘forced lust’ is an attribute of ‘[t]he long-tailed bird’, then it is certainly a reference to the German coat of arms, and the commandment to follow the orders of the state. The argument then is that a lustful, animalistic vehemence overwhelmed the populace into acts which did not hold the necessary conditions of love. This might also be an attack on the self-appointed mythology adhered to by the Nazi Party. This unification of love and violence is also seen in the speaker’s reaction to the father in the poem ‘The Bee Target on his Shoulder’: “Together we love him limb from / limb, walking in the moonlight’ (151). Violence functions in its relation to the familial as a devotional act of love, which brings the reader to the point where there is ‘a growing disenchantment over the gap between what Prynne sees as the

¹³² Mellors, *Late Modernist Poetics*, 173.

¹³³ Mellors, *Late Modernist Poetics*, 185.

visionary state of the transcendent Real and the perception of physical response as a “wounding” of moral ideas. Pain, and the imperative that it be loved, is now regarded as a transcendent experience.’¹³⁴ This is an ethical category that Prynne continues to utilise and force into greater signification in his later poems. The response of *Brass* to violence is a reticent or passive one, as the subjects depicted are forced to accept their lot and are presented as having little agency to alter the circumstances to which they are bound. The line, ‘Give us this love of murder and / sacred boredom, you walk in the shade of / the technical house’, allows a return to the propositions of Heidegger, the sanctity of dwelling and the presentation of Being. This is also a call for closer scrutiny of the socio-historical conditions which brought about the Holocaust. If we follow Mellors in the argument that ‘the paradox of the “singular” and “double” presences is one informed by the structure of the autonomous self, which finds its identity by repressing its being-for an other’,¹³⁵ then the breakdown in moral and ethical norms of the human may reignite a primal, animalistic lust, or a ‘love of murder’.

The unification of love and violence also colours the textual reading of the family in the poem. Overlooked in *Brass*’s critical reception were a string of references to *The Babylonian-Assyrian Dream Book* relating familial love and violence. Prynne’s quotation of the line ‘If he eats the flesh of his hand: his / daughter will die’ (152) from *The Babylonian-Assyrian Dream Book*¹³⁶ divines on the idea of autolysis and familial cannibalism. Depicted in this manner, each member of the family unit is regarded as a commodity, a store of labour and a ravenous portion of the collective mouth. The position accentuated in the poem is the representation of the bodily politic of the familial unit,

¹³⁴ Mellors, *Late Modernist Poetics*, 198.

¹³⁵ Mellors, *Late Modernist Poetics*, 198.

¹³⁶ Naphtali Lewis, *The Interpretation of Dreams and Portents in Antiquity* (Wauconda, IL.: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 1996) 16-19.

depicted as a ‘circle of teeth by the cosy fire.’ (152) The family collectively forms an estranged mouth which ventriloquises its consumptive patterns and its own wounded utterances, creating song from the shadow cast by loss. This self-consumptive pattern reappears in Prynne’s ‘Marzipan’, where a ‘me’ appears whose response to atrocity and pseudo-apocalypse is posed as self or familial cannibalism, ‘to gnaw my flesh and blood.’ (348)¹³⁷ The use of the syllogisms stemming from *The Babylonian-Assyrian Dream Book* suggests that in the collection *Brass* there are some experiences are represented as in a dream-state to which the subject is not in immediate danger. These are circumstances which the subjects need to interpret to understand how they will manifest in their lives. As is developed more fully in the poem *Bands Around the Throat*, the use of dreams may account for a contestation of the privilege of exception and the provisions of safety in the family unit.

The family group in *Brass* occupies a position where self-consumption is both a means of sustenance and providence. Taking this thread back to the subjective family, *The Babylonian-Assyrian Dream Book* relates that ‘if [in a dream] he eats human meat, then [in the future] he will have great riches’,¹³⁸ thus providing a referential point for Prynne’s dream analogies. When in ‘Royal Fern’ the question arises, ‘How can you love me in dream, / always walking from field to field [?]’ (159), *The Babylonian-Assyrian Dream Book* offers the interpretation that for the family distress will follow distress. The line ‘we love him limb from / limb’ (151) solidifies Prynne’s thematisation of the family unit as a

¹³⁷ Simon Perril, “Hanging on Your Every Word; J.H. Prynne’s ‘Bands Around The Throat’ and a Dialectics of planned impurity,” *A Manner of Utterance: The Poetry of J.H. Prynne* (Exeter: Shearsman Books, 2009) 100. The use of the eschatological and the notion of survival at any cost are examined in Chapter Three, on *Bands Around the Throat*, below.

¹³⁸ Lewis, *The Interpretation of Dreams and Portents in Antiquity*, 17.

source and consumer of both material and labour.¹³⁹ This also lends significance to one of the poem's final lines, in which 'the plum is a nick of pain, is so and is also / certainly loved.' The act of cutting away at the body is sustenitive, productive, but ultimately self-annihilating, a sacrificial act which may produce love. As Prynne wrote, 'This is ethic certainty which makes the pain real and thus the love absolute'.¹⁴⁰ Anticipating the final stanza of 'Es Lebe der König', 'the image of suffered love is / scaled off, shattered to a granulated pathos'; it is an 'unpastured sea hungering for calm.' (166, 165)

Certainty.

The final stanza's five lines function as testimony to the atrocities to which the subjects were victim. The assertions in the final stanza, 'it is true' and '[o]ver and over it is so,' recapitulate the conditions of suffering experienced in the Holocaust. The duplication of the phrase 'over and over' from the second stanza attests to the continual condition of man's denigration, subjugation and persecution. The clausal 'it is so' reifies this position but also asserts that there is truth available in the aftermath of history. This concretises the conditions of knowledge Prynne later represents in *News of Warring Clans*, as they are available in the aftermath of history and through the dialectics of experience. The commanding 'You know' which concludes the second line of the stanza provides another assertion of the conditions of suffering under the Third Reich. Therefore 'You know' is an imperative put upon the reader; it is also a signal that Prynne has passed the weight of these experiences to the reader and that this is his ultimate act of resistance. That forbearance is

¹³⁹ In the poem 'Resolution and Interdependence', originally published in the collection *Noon Province*, Peter Riley writes seemingly similar lines: 'We must get back and think ourselves | Carefully apart and trade our love limb | for limb | As the swallowtails swarm. | As the dying flare.' *Passing Measures: Selected Poems* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 2001) 74.

¹⁴⁰ J.H. Prynne, "From a Letter to Douglas Oliver," 153.

placed within this realm also reinforces the sanctity of memory and the condition of familial love, with which Celan represented the graves of his parents as dug into the air. The fact that this poem ends with the tumultuous state of the water parallels Rilke's 'Ninth Elegy', which states that those dealing with grief and loss must 'Bear witness, [for] what comes to replace what we have sought' in the sanctity of memory 'is an event for which there is no image'.¹⁴¹ It is in this moment where love is 'the unpastured sea hungering for calm.' (165) The literary references in the elegy foreground the assertion that the landscape and the poems which reflect it comprise the subsistence of social and poetic history.

As Mellors argues, 'in Prynne's poetry, obscurity is combined with excess: there is always more language, more reference, more signification in an expenditure which may or may not be concerned to recuperate some core of meaning from its riot of utterances'.¹⁴² In Prynne's work, any effort to read meaning through the excess of presentation will necessarily result in a fragmentary and refractive image of the poetic subject or situation. As Prynne writes at the end of 'Es Lebe der König', 'Forbearance comes into the / stormy sky and the water is not quiet.' In doing so he renders the event of Celan's death as one which will still not produce a coherent reflection of the subject. The life of Celan is invoked in the reflection as the murmur of the indiscernible.¹⁴³ It is, as Agamben writes, an act of remembrance where '[r]emembrance restores possibility to the past, making what happened incomplete and completing what never was. Remembrance is neither what happened nor what did not happen but, rather, their potentialisation, their becoming possible once again'.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies*, 53.

¹⁴² Mellors, *Late Modern Poetics*, 169.

¹⁴³ Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, 91.

¹⁴⁴ Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, 267.

Not only does this image conclude the poem, but the figuration presented attests to the fact that, despite remaining in fidelity to the event, only a fragmentary understanding can be experienced. The interrogative process cannot maintain a coherent depiction of the whole, just as an evocation of Celan's death and a reinvestigation of the socio-historical circumstances of the Holocaust cannot, even figuratively, provide the reader with the experience of living through the Holocaust. It is the conception of nature as ideal, which asks for our patient perseverance but maintains its symbiotic relationship with the atrocities of humanity, that Prynne summons. The stormy waters that conclude Prynne's elegy are an end towards which the poet goes, according to Celan, 'with his very being to language, stricken by and seeking reality'.¹⁴⁵ Prynne's evocation of the natural also unifies the poem with the conventions of the pastoral elegy, creating a poetic which honours Celan's poetic and the truths which he sought.

The repetitious use of 'white', which invests the stanza with a commemorative, choral resonance, represents the unifying presence of nature. As nature is that which endures with 'total awareness', it encompasses the atrocity of natural human history, as well as the possibility of its sanctification; it reflects 'the subsistence of social memory'.¹⁴⁶ Prynne's wording has the dual intent of signifying a void of nature in the poem. In *Brass* water acts as a collection point for social acts, whether violent or beneficent, pastoral or technological. It also reinforces Prynne's use of elegiac conventions connecting the water in which Celan drowned to that of John Milton's drowned protagonist Lycidas. In the concluding image-complex, water is a residual record of the past which, through ingestion, influences our present and our future. This replicates Celan's usage of water, which 'is a

¹⁴⁵ Felstiner, *Selected Poems and Prose of Paul Celan*, 116. References Shelley's "Adonais," XIII, XIV.

¹⁴⁶ Prynne, "A Letter to Peter Riley: 14th Feb. 1967," 258, reprinted in *Certain Prose of The English Intelligencer*, 76.

positive image often associated with the subconscious, with memory, with life, and with survival'.¹⁴⁷ In *Brass*, water is the metonymic collector of the details of Auschwitz and of the drowning of Paul Celan. Water, as both sustentive and reflective, is nature's counterpoint to the family (as the ultimate symbol of love) in *Brass*, both life-giving and consumptive. This binary operation is depicted as essential and inescapable. In 'Es Lebe der König' where 'the water is not quiet' we still cannot see our reflection in the surface of water. Water, as social and collective consciousness, absorbs the atrocity and represents the moment where meaning has broken down, to a point that seems irredeemable. Nature preserves, but Prynne's suggestion is that the image which we may see, if an image appears, will not be human. If, as Prynne wrote in *The White Stones*, 'love is, always, the / flight back / to where / we are' (38), it is regaining the image of the human in the reflecting pool that is the struggle mankind now faces.¹⁴⁸ Humankind's own voice resounds with the 'double music' of *Brass*: it is a choir of angels as well as the shrill song of humanity's death-fugue. This 'double music' is mankind's own reflection; it is the image of the Other as symbol of love, as source of sanctity and perseverance which is now distorted. Anticipating the argument of Badiou, *Brass* asserts that the image we seek will be forthcoming and that this image is a testament to our love, preserved in memory 'as the visible origin of truth'.¹⁴⁹

Prynne's reclamation of the power of knowledge and history determines the engagement of the poet in contemporary life. Prynne's elegy to Celan is driven by a desire to face up to atrocity, to strengthen the voice of the victims and to articulate an earnest and

¹⁴⁷ James Lyon, *Paul Celan and Martin Heidegger* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006) 184.

¹⁴⁸ This line and the image-complex which it establishes can be read through the antecedent propositions of Shelley's elegy to Keats, "Adonais: An Elegy on the Death of John Keats," *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature: concise edition, Volume 2*, 390.

¹⁴⁹ Sutherland, "The Trade in Bathos".

hard-fought resistance against the forces of tyranny. Prynne presents a model of lyric which signals a reverence for loss, and actively attests to the propensity of the poet to lay claim to the historical. 'Es Lebe der König' functions as both elegy and ode by allowing the absorption of those same truths which Celan sought in his writing to substantiate the commitment of the poet in addressing the violence done unto others. The struggle to give voice to suffering is fundamental to both Prynne and Celan, and in 'Es Lebe der König' this necessity exists at the intersection of the imaginative and creative encounter, working to define the ardent nature of Prynne's poetic. To contest Adorno's statement that writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric, Prynne created a lyric which unifies the life and work of Celan and stands as testament to the necessity of honouring the past, such that the poem may attest to the very definition of '*who we / are*'.¹⁵⁰

¹⁵⁰ Prynne, "Numbers in Time of Trouble," *Poems*, 17.

Chapter Two. *News of Warring Clans.*

Introduction.

Prynne's 1977 poem *News of Warring Clans* presents a dialectical account of poetry in which 'poetic thought is brought into being by recognition and contest with the whole cultural system of a language'.¹⁵¹ As the title suggests, the collection is situated in a language concerning nomadicism¹⁵² and clan-style social structures which are forced, in a 'fiercely linguistic event',¹⁵³ to compete with the military-industrial complex in its ever-expanding search for resources of industrial production. As Prynne writes, 'The limit / of combat between spools lies at the capstan / north & west of Kalat, two miles out of Kendal'¹⁵⁴; the linguistic process, whether on the steppes of Chinese foothills, or on the River Kent, is the affect of a programmatic shift in associative language 'in which the whole identity and propensity of individual language-histories are worked out into the deepest complicity'.¹⁵⁵ It is under the strain of economic factions and the reach of the multinational resource sector that the sociolinguistic war is being waged. *News of Warring Clans'* poetic construction is imbedded within the intrinsically disputed and concomitantly damaged languages of this locale, the result of which is an exploitative imbalance in force which affects the processes and means of communication between groups. The poem

¹⁵¹ J.H. Prynne, "Poetic Thought," *Textual Practice*, Vol. 24 No. 4 (August 2010) 595-606, 598-9.

¹⁵² Claire Colebrook, "nomadicism," *The Deleuze Dictionary*, ed. Adrian Parr (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005) 180-183.

¹⁵³ J.H. Prynne, "A Quick Riposte to Handke's Dictum about War and Language," *Quid*, 6 (November 2000) 23-26, 23.

¹⁵⁴ J.H. Prynne, "News of Warring Clans," *Poems* (Fremantle, WA: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2005): 275-286, 277. Quotations from within the poem *News of Warring Clans* will, for ease of reference, be given in parentheses.

¹⁵⁵ Prynne, "A Quick Riposte to Handke's Dictum about War and Language," 23.

substantiates the notion that social existence under capitalism, the purchase and consumption of a commodity, is cannibalistic. The use of force in the appropriation of resources and in signifying dominance is primitivistic. In arousing the basest instincts in the subject, the capitalist structure that perpetuates dominance through power relations is all-consumptive.

In ‘Resistance and Difficulty’, an essay which appeared in 1961 in the journal *Prospect*, Prynne argues that resistance provides ‘an alternative criterion of intelligibility’.¹⁵⁶ Prynne writes, ‘the reality of the external world may be constituted [...] on the basis of the world’s perceived existence, the resistance that it offers to our awareness’.¹⁵⁷ The usurpation and subsumption of the lyric into the violence of exploitative and warmongering language is what *News of Warring Clans* utilises as its material constraints. Prynne thus integrates the dominant language into his poetic construction as a means of understanding the function of exchange in sociolinguistic practices. It is through these matrices of language control that Prynne’s poetic forces a rupture.

Showing parallels with Badiou’s concept of poetic structure, Prynne argues that ‘[p]oetic thought is empowered within and through energies of language under pressure, but is not definitively produced by this intrinsic agency’.¹⁵⁸ *News of Warring Clans* evinces the damage done to language systems by materialising the force of power to inflict semiotic transformation, which highlights the inequities that power relations enforce in the language

¹⁵⁶ J.H. Prynne, “Resistance and Difficulty,” *Prospect*, 5 (Winter 1961) 26-30, 27. In making this argument, Prynne outlines his developing definitions of resistance: ‘This brief account of some of the stages in the development of the idea of substance is necessary to my argument, as the concept of resistance can be seen, I suggest, to stand in a similar relation to substance as does Aristotle’s principle of contrariety. That is to say, the concept of resistance may provide an alternative criterion of intelligibility; one which does not undermine the “presence, actuality and existence” of an object or person, but which makes accessible the fact of its existence without impairing its status as a substantial, independent entity. And hence the reality of the external world may be constituted, not by an effort of the will as Maine de Biran contended, but on the basis of the world’s perceived existence, the resistance that it offers to our awareness’ (27).

¹⁵⁷ Prynne, “Resistance and Difficulty,” 27.

¹⁵⁸ Prynne, “Poetic Thought,” 598.

of exchange. Meaning is subsumed in language due to an overwhelming force of dominance, creating within Prynne's poetic a degree of untranslatability and incomprehension. The limits of lexical comprehension and the material difficulty of the poem are inherent characteristics of Prynne's poetic; in *News of Warring Clans*, however, the language that Prynne uses specifically reflects the unilateral domination of lexical exchange in the context of political and economic conflict. Writing on the manner in which Prynne tests economic language throughout his early poetic oeuvre, Tony Lopez notes that 'his use of the language of economies appears to be a serious attempt to examine how our understanding of the world is directed or limited by the dominant control languages'.¹⁵⁹ Prynne has been examining the complicit relationship between economically driving factors and everyday life since *The English Intelligencer* and his second collection, *Kitchen Poems*, in 1968. In *News of Warring Clans*, though, the dissemination of language-meaning due to the overwhelming force of the economic becomes directly foregrounded as a primary subject. In this poetic sequence, semiotic violence instigates and inaugurates a force equal to acts of mythic violence, constituting the poem's thematic content.

The circumstances of the poem that deal with logical disputations, their contradictions and solutions, establish a meta-structure that represents the poetic event as a conflict of social forces directed by capitalist consumption. Discursive interaction in *News of Warring Clans*, according to Wheale, draws on the antecedents of Middle-Eastern shadow theatre. This establishes the parallel of Nerve and [V]erve, two named characters within the poem, with Karagöz and Hacivat, two prototypical characters found in Arabic and Turkish shadow plays.¹⁶⁰ Wheale suggests that by masking the discourse of the poem into the personas of Nerve and [V]erve, the poem becomes a shadow play, dragging the

¹⁵⁹ Tony Lopez, *Meaning Performance: Essays on Poetry* (Cambridge: Salt, 2006) 169.

¹⁶⁰ Nigel Wheale, "High Ethnography," *Poetry Review*, 68.3 (1978) 46-51, 47.

audience into the fray while the real action occurs elsewhere.¹⁶¹ The number of references to Aristophanes's play, *The Birds*, also steadily reinforces the construction of theatrical elements which are designed to highlight the difference between the deep structure of the poem and the surface play. Despite this subtle disclosure regarding the division between the structure and the surface play, Wheale argues that '*News of Warring Clans* requires the reader to draw on his or her own customary knowledge in order to interpret the tribalisms which he is avowedly studying. The poetic sequence in this way establishes its own primitive fictions, but then constantly turns back upon our inhabited present from that vantage'.¹⁶² This forces the reader to come to terms with the fact that the culture one is engaging with is at once alien and one's own.¹⁶³

Implied by this shadow play is another of the text's overlaying matrices of meaning, one which works to distance the poem's subjects from the sources of power which are, by necessity, functioning elsewhere. On the ground, 'The first scout said he meant what he said, / once again meaning only the hesitation' (283). The idea of a military-industrial-backed resource company engaging with the land's traditional owners means only coercing forced assent. The means considered in attaining this assent change from a show of force, as the scout's 'tracer sprays / peppered the dewy mountain air' (283) – in a scene that recalls the Vietnam-related violence of *Wound Response* – to open bribery, as, in a moment of conscious questioning, the scout asks aloud, 'does it pay / to count on paying' (283). The theme of labour, payment and reward is later continued with *Acrylic Tips*, where the father, in the midst of a custody battle, is '[d]oing / all turns' when 'plain payment [is] due' as a

¹⁶¹ Wheale, "High Ethnography," 47.

¹⁶² Wheale, "High Ethnography," 48.

¹⁶³ Wheale, "High Ethnography," 49.

means to return to his '[i]ntimated' position.¹⁶⁴ The line which unifies labour with reward is established in the protagonist going 'out overland toiled back and descending // In bright glance'.¹⁶⁵ These examples signify conscious decisions made by the poems' characters, in which the value of reward is compared with the personal costs of labour. In *News of Warring Clans* the political and economic system, by occlusion, force or monetary enticement, acknowledges the thinly beneficent means displayed over a core of force, with its aims firmly squared on its own ends.¹⁶⁶

That the patterns of language-meaning observed in the historical event on which Prynne is writing are intertwined within the poetic construction allows the reader to experience their operation. The process by which poetic thought may escape the innocuous tedium of 'slogan vestry' and lies 'polished to the gloss of air-line greetings' (282, 281) entails forcing against these structures and rupturing the confines of this experienced speech. Prynne writes that poetic thought is generated at

the extreme density of the unresolved, which maintains the high energy levels of language in poetic movement, its surreptitious buzz, [and] may resemble unclarity which it partly is; but strong poetic thought frequently originates here, in the tension about and across line-endings, even in functional self-damage or sacrifice as the predicament of an emerging poem determined not to weaken or give way. Thought in this matrix is not unitary (unlike ideas) but is self-disputing and intrinsically dialectical.¹⁶⁷

The poem becomes a construction cognisant and incorporative of self-disputing language claims, interrogating the force of violence through the act of writing the poem itself.

¹⁶⁴ Prynne, *Poems*, 546.

¹⁶⁵ Prynne, *Poems*, 546.

¹⁶⁶ The arguments presented in the poem offer a constant reiteration of the postulates of Clausewitz's idea that '[w]ar is a mere continuation of policy by other means'. Clausewitz further states that 'war [...] is an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfil our will,' and further still, that 'violence, that is to say, physical force [...] is [...] the means; the compulsory submission of the enemy to our will is the ultimate object' (101). Karl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. J.J. Graham (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968) 119, 101.

¹⁶⁷ Prynne, "Poetic Thought," 599.

The reader must approach the poem not as the locus of individual consciousness but as the site of poetic thought functioning within the confines of the language of reciprocity and intrinsic division, overwrought by an imbalance in force. The site of the play, the *dramatis locus* in the poem, hosts a cast of characters (from scouts and commander to traditional owners) who express a variety of views constellated around Nerve and [V]erve. The poem's narrative and dramatic structure allows these voices to be heard even if the capacity for expression is severely diminished. The elision of these voices is represented in the poem through the thematic depiction of action, as the boundaries of common discourse present an inequable exchange and the narrative, prosodic sections of the poem dominate over the verse insertions. It should be stressed that the commonalities and differences of exchange languages have been replaced by language in its most economic functionality, not as a limiter on the potentialities of lyric, but to stress the active control asserted by the dominant language. For Prynne, 'the focus of poetic composition, as a text takes shape [...] projects into the textual arena an intense energy of conception and differentiation, pressed up against the limits which are discovered and invented by composition itself'.¹⁶⁸ Thus the poem is not set in a discursive relation with the complexities of economic language, as in Prynne's earlier collections, but is inaugurated within those complexities as a demonstrative testing of their limits. For Prynne, the work of poetic thought is an act of resistance, one which gathers strength throughout the duration of the poem and which may rupture the confines of linguistic pressure. The narrative of the poem and its consumptive velocity create a shadow play whereby voices of resistance and the damage done to language are predominantly elided. Where there is a rupture of the narrative and poetic thought arises, it is from the confines of the poetic composition itself, a rupture manifest in its giving voice

¹⁶⁸ Prynne, "Poetic Thought," 596.

to resistance. Due to the pressure implicit in *News of Warring Clans*, the poem presents an engagement between the two groups struggling for control of their own language as ‘the working encounter with contradiction in the very substance of the object-reality and the obduracy of thought’.¹⁶⁹

Reading the Front Matter.

News of Warring Clans is a narrative poem, presenting a sequence of events and representing these events through manifold conflicting voices and registers. The interplay of voices, from authoritative recollection to ironic recapitulation, from the denunciatory to the resistive voice of the land’s traditional owners, provides contrasting views on the disposition of events. Inherent within the language of the poem is Prynne’s focus on the incursion of the technological, with the resultant transmogrification of the narrative due to its increasing velocity and the elision of the damage done to the language of communication. The velocity of the narrative poem does not allow for a historical tracking of the damage incurred, but the processes of this alteration and its linguistic complexity are constantly evinced through the dialogic patterns of the poem.

Excluding the prologue, the poem utilises an open verse structure, in strophes of varying lengths. Inserted amongst the dominant prosodic blocks of narrative are sections of syntactic and prosodic disjunction that range from a series of rhyming quatrains to lyrical cadences. In many of these insertions Prynne’s ekphrasis is explored, and references to William Blake and Ben Jonson as well as scientific texts occur in these verse sections. The structural emphasis placed on the insertions highlights the impact placed on lyric, which

¹⁶⁹ Prynne, “Poetic Thought,” 597.

limits the expression of the subjugated group in the poem. That the insertion of verse into the open form strophes is relatively minor highlights the prevailing effect of the narrative over the voices of the traditional owners of the land. The distinction between verse and prosodic modes of expression further highlight their structure and effect. Following the model of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the interanimations between verse and prosodic modes may be used to distinguish between the social rank of characters, as the rhythmic current of the lines distinguish between versified and prosodic speech. This is also indicative of the conditions of oral exchange within an historical milieu dominated by written narrative. The sentence structure, line length, lexical origins and modes of expression associated with the lyric have become dominated by the incursion of technical language and a dialogic mode of expression. In *News of Warring Clans*, speech forms and prosodic forms overwrite the subjugated group's expression in verse form, creating contrast and tension between divergent modes of expression. That the subjugated group's expression is given in verse form aligns this usage with the antecedent expression of visionary or prophetic passages in sonically patterned form.¹⁷⁰ In this manner, the versification of the inserted sections jolts expectations and, through regulated meter, underscores a tone of surprise when contrasted to the prosodic form of the narrative. The insertions of verse belie the dominant narrative as a smokescreen for the experiential conditions of the subjugated group, whose attempt at giving voice to resistance is slowly elided beneath that narrative.

Anticipating the thematic and theoretic concerns of the poem, *News of Warring Clans* opens with an epigraph from Edward Benlowes, and a prologue given in the form of a meta-structural historicisation of the conditions of the poem. The epigraph and the

¹⁷⁰ "Verse and Prose," *The New Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 1993, 1346-1351, 1349.

prologue are representative of a diverse and distinctive lexicon compared to that used in the poem. For this reason the front matter of *News of Warring Clans* should be approached primarily to ascertain the information by which we can direct our reading strategies further.

The epigraph appears on the unpaginated fourth page of the *News of Warring Clans* book as it was produced by Trigram Press in 1977, and appears in conjunction with the title in the collected Bloodaxe/Fremantle Press edition of *Poems*. The elegiac couplet that opens the collection, and is quoted without authorial designation, reads

Consulto Speculo geris Omnia; fallet Imago:
Te nam (au jurares) sera Ruina manet.

Each of the critics who have written on *News of Warring Clans* has worked at dissecting the palindromic second line of the epigraph, and has attempted to derive points of integration between the metaphysical couplet and the poem. Wheale provides the reader with a translation from the Latin: ‘You perceive All Things in a reflecting Mirror; the Image deceives: For you, whatever you assert, final Ruin waits.’¹⁷¹ The epigraph, for Johansson, ‘suggests that reality is perceived through a Platonic reflection of the world, echoing its biblical dictum that humankind perceives reality “through a glass darkly”’, while the second line ‘refers to the circumscribed human perceptive and analytic abilities, due to deceitful images in a “reflecting mirror.” The epigraph implies that perception creates impressions containing reversed images of reality and consciousness and is thus described as fallible.’¹⁷² The idea of ruin that is structured into sense perceptions overlays the surface play onto the external contexts of the poem. This implication is carried out through the epigraph, but also through references to theatre, such as ‘by-play’, that appear

¹⁷¹ Wheale, “High Ethnography,” 46.

¹⁷² Birgitta Johansson, *The Engineering of Being: An Ontological Approach to J.H. Prynne* (Umeå: Umeå Studies in the Humanities, 1997) 161.

throughout the poem. The poem uses metatheatric techniques, such as contrafact¹⁷³ and asides, which extend the frames of reference outward from the *dramatis locus*. The insertion of verse and figurative elements inside the narrative structure provide differentia, in that they highlight the growing intransigence of the historical narrative as it abridges and elides the experience at the location of the poem. The elision of the experience of the subjects in the poem, in which the reader ‘must believe this / sincere account’ (284), alludes to the dominance of the shadow play as constituting the poem’s narrative, and evinces that the experiences of the characters are largely relegated away from the action.

In focusing our attentions on the operation of the epigraph, it is important to note what Gregory Dobrov writes about this connection between ruin and metatheatrics:

The strategic use of *ἄτη*, ‘madness,’ ‘ruin,’ in tragedy (cf. *Aias* 123 and 643) may serve as a bridge that connects *ἄτη*, by folk etymology, to *ἀπάτη* with its connotation of ‘deception,’ ‘fraud,’ and even ‘dramatic illusion.’ Surface play enriches and problematises the dramatic fable at a given point by delimiting the boundaries of the fiction as a construct and, simultaneously, linking this construct in a self-conscious way to phenomena external to it.¹⁷⁴

Propelling the reader forward is the idea that our vocabularies are representative of the image we ourselves perceive in the reflecting mirror. The use of the reflecting mirror, as well as the shadow play in which the reader is to see him or herself, raises questions, following Jacques Lacan, about the development of apperception, subjectivity and language acquisition. Language acquisition and cognitive frames of knowledge will be explored in detail in the next chapter, on *Bands Around the Throat*. Perception and clarity of expression

¹⁷³ Gregory Dobrov, *Figures of Play: Greek Drama and Metafictional Poetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 16. Dobrov’s term ‘contrafact’ has its origins in James Patrick’s musicology, where, in the study of harmonic sources, contrafact or melodic contrafact denotes a borrowed harmony technique. In selecting the piece of music, the harmony is saved but the melody is discarded, and a new melody overwrites the original chord structure (16).

¹⁷⁴ Dobrov, *Figures of Play*, 14-15.

become the ‘criterion of intelligibility’,¹⁷⁵ the resistance offered when poetic language is overridden by technological language. Wheale argues that Prynne infuses poetic language with technological jargon in the same manner that Pound utilised classicisms in his collection *Lustra*: ‘they were never intended to be only sonorous or decorative, allusively authoritarian’, but this language ‘was to bear on contemporary life; in directly critical reflection.’¹⁷⁶ That technical and military language and the individuated reflection are seen as the fundamental conditions of experience within the poem dispels for the reader any assurances that he or she may have about the possibility of resolute outcomes. The ironic integration of these discourses into the poetic demonstrates that Prynne is ‘chary of the dangers of a technocratic elite of experts which can produce its own poetic nonsense’.¹⁷⁷ Within *News of Warring Clans* the parallel is established between new poetic thought and acts of potential resistance, by making the voicing of resistance – and the verse insertions which represent this resistance – a rupture of prevailing, linguistic dominance.

The distinctive presentation of the first page’s italicised set of four, six-line stanzas designates it graphically as an adjunctive, prefatory piece of writing. This disjunctive presentation is especially noticeable in the collected *Poems*, as the formally structured prologue sits alongside the open-verse style of the second page of the poem. From the second page onward, the poem is dominated by narrative stanzas in which the stanzaic shape and linear duration is controlled and its movement is methodical. The prologue’s italicised sestets, with their pattern of bilinear indentation, express a prosodic pattern of lineation reminiscent of Romantic lyrical poetry, such as John Keats’s ‘To Autumn’. However, any calculated attempt to describe the poem’s lyrical content is confounded by its

¹⁷⁵ Prynne, “Resistance and Difficulty,” 27.

¹⁷⁶ Wheale, “High Ethnography,” 47.

¹⁷⁷ Peter Middleton, “Imagined Readerships and Poetic Innovation in U.K. Poetry,” *Assembling Alternatives*, ed. Romana Huk (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2003) 130.

prosodic composition and dialogic tone. The lyrical presentation is overridden by a series of historiographic statements, such as ‘*The clan, très primitif*’ and ‘*in the clan’s prehistory / there was panic*’ (276), which define the prologue’s subtle irony. The deployment of historical, ethnographic expression in the opening of the prologue establishes the constitution of the speaker at great variance from the *dramatis locus*. If this is a panchronic presentation of the socio-historical circumstances which precede *News of Warring Clans*, concerned with abstracting the universal from the conditions given, then the idea related is that only history can be lyrical, and only a poem sutured to the historical whilst giving voice to victims can bear a relation to truth.¹⁷⁸ The linguistic determinates and warring language systems that comprise the dominant narrative of the poem subsume this as a possibility entirely. The ambiguity of the poem’s opening line, ‘*At some moment in the clan’s prehistory*’, elides the specificity of a synchronic account and relates to a setting more universally and broadly applicable. Relating this idea back to the conceptual structure of the prologue allows us to view Prynne’s πρόλογος (prologue) as a determinate form of *dramatikos*, explaining the setting, establishing the thematic functions of the poem, and establishing the relationship between the audience and the performance to come.

In this manner, Prynne’s use of the prologue reinforces the edifice of the shadow play which comprises the main portion of *News of Warring Clans*, and is used to divide the poetic from the action occurring at the poem’s locale. The artifices of news, shadow play and economic language replicate the manner in which readers come to an understanding of war in contemporary society, as dominantly derived from a technical, media-based representation. The prologue’s preternatural calm establishes the analogy of the reader as viewing only a shadow play of the action, in that the onset of tragedy in the poem

¹⁷⁸ This relationship and utilisation of the concept of Adorno is briefly explored in the first chapter of this analysis, on Prynne’s ‘*Es Lebe der König*’.

reinforces the substantive distance and difference between accounts. This is also highlighted in the movement from the prologue to the narrative portion of the poem. Moving from the prologue to the body of the poem represents a movement from subsequent narration to simultaneous narration. This creates the effect of displacement, indicating that both the reader and authorial position are removed from the experience of the poem.

The expression of the first stanza's two complete sentences is structurally analogic and prefatory:

*At some point in the clan's prehistory
there was panic that the high points would not
be completed on time. In the sense of "what
counts is strictly under age," emotional
negativism and fatuous serenity are states
like a loose rein on quite the wrong horse. (276)*

What these lines offer the reader is an ethnographic framework which describes the onset of a distressing situation where moral, emotional and physical states are provoked by a forthcoming event. Formal matters of temporality and issues of control are expressed in the line, '*there was panic that the highpoints would not / be completed on time.*' Despite the ambiguous insistence on the necessity of the highpoints,¹⁷⁹ the line quoted above provides

¹⁷⁹ Here Prynne is utilising the polysemy of 'highpoints' to point towards the use of strategic vantage in times of war. In addition to this, he is also sighting the development of ethnographic methodologies, and how varying groups account for history. Historical evolutionists posited that humans share sets of characteristics and patterns of thinking which transcend individual cultures, and that therefore the cultural development of a designated society will pass through a series of defined stages in its evolution. This implies that the development of individual societies could be measured against the developments of other societies, and establishes Western societies as a model for this development. To counter this type of cultural relativism, Franz Boas argued for a historicism which was not reliant on grand theories of cultural evolution, but that viewed culture as a set of customs, social institutions and beliefs that characterise a particular society. He argued that cultural differences were not due to race, but rather to differing environmental conditions and other 'accidents of history.' Further, cultures had to be viewed as fusions of differing culture traits that developed in different spaces and times.

the assurance that *'what / counts is strictly under age'*, and that the panic-induced state of siege should be read analogously as *'a loose rein on quite the wrong horse.'* The second stanza commences with a didactic and denunciatory description of the clan as *'très primitive'*; it reinforces the dictum of command and control given to the dominant side in the struggle, and also satirises the idea of high versus primitive social structures. When the reader moves through this stanza, a number of semantic anomalies appear: phrases and conjunctive units such as *'pig-style'*, *'crystal brows'* and *'[o]utlook vaulted'*, and further down the page, *'star-play'* and *'juggled racket'*. If, as the first stanza states, *'what / counts is strictly under age,'* temporal frames must begin to be established for reading comprehension. If *'what / counts is strictly under age,'* might this pertain to rituals, marriage affiliations and therefore power structures which regulate behaviour within the clan? The preface is semantically and semiotically dense and etymologically referential, to the point where paratactic divisions within sentences are often no more than the byplay of conflicting Borromean knots of discourse.

In Prynne's work, the collation of discourses and the lack of definitive contextualisation account for the rhapsodic nature of lines and their density. The density of the lines attests to the poem's expression of *'consumptive action'*, in that the narrative and the lack of contextualisation dominate and occlude the expression of poetic thought. This does not, however, determine the extent to which lyricism can impart a sensitivity and melic expression in the poem, as in the line, *'Far now into the white refuge this banquet / spreads over its days of hot rock'* (279), which details an engineer at work on determining the quality of minerals in a source. What is missing, however, is the contextual determinate to designate this as such, yet it lends a lyrical cadence and grace to an otherwise obdurate and inaccessible reference.

Another example of Prynne's use of polysemy can be found in the line, '*The clan [...] turned pig-style right down / on the shell.*' This example is one of many in which the thematic dimension of the clan can be shown to extend beyond the commonplace, as depicting two opposing sides in a battle. In the poem, the usage of 'clan' can also designate extant connections to animals, community, economics and conflict scenarios. Derived from Scottish, the term 'clans' refers etymologically to the organisation of people into decentralised groups, in which land claims designated a notion of territoriality.¹⁸⁰ With regards to *News of Warring Clans*, the 'clans' refer to nationalistic and militaristic alliances. The use of Cold War rhetoric in the poem calls to mind ideological and bloc clanship, triangulating Soviet, Chinese and American political and economic blocs. In the poem, concepts of collective work and the social relationships of traditional landowners are set in stark contrast to the industrial-capitalism which drives the dominant group. The difference between collective and private concepts of ownership is one of the concepts most foregrounded by juxtaposing the contrasting cultures, but also evidenced are concepts of collective consciousness versus the individual, and commodity societies versus gift societies. The cultural practices of the traditional owners present an agenda of mutuality incapable of being understood in the dominant group's terms. Thus the differences between the two clans are not only ideological but also semantic and semiotic.

Regarding the most cathartic cluster in the line, '*The clan [...] turned pig-style right down / on the shell*', 'pig-style' can denote a group being herded or gathered like pigs, or it can denote the idea of sleeping massed together like animals. The latter connotation is reflected later in the poem with the continued reference to 'rafts' (as a floating group of

¹⁸⁰ Rod Mengham, "'Performative Kinship' in the Language of Les Murray," *Counterbalancing Light: on the poetry of Les Murray*, ed. Carmel Gafney (Armidale, New South Wales: Kardoorair Press, 1997) 159-69.

birds), and it reiterates the denouncement of the clan as ‘très primitif’.¹⁸¹ In this case ‘pig-style’ reinforces the presuppositions of the prologue’s narrator, and presents the ethnographic detail in a tone of heightened disdain. This may be a commentary on the linguistic repertory of social discourse and ethnographic studies. In the statement relating to the clan’s family units, they are denoted as resultant from ‘*variable kinship with / notes on anomaly*,’ a description in which even the delivery is tainted with a sense of moral repugnance. In addition to these descriptions, a ‘pig’ is also an oblong mass of metal obtained from a smelting furnace, and, in Northumbrian argot, ‘pigs and whistles’ means ‘to go to ruin’.¹⁸² The possibility that ‘pig’ might reference pig iron, or is connotative of the process of industrial production, might seem to be the only anomaly among the definitions presented. However, tracking further through the prologue, the line ‘*Outlook vaulted with crystal brows*’ evinces ideas of architecture and emotive states, though if brows are revealed as ‘a galley in a coal mine, running across the face of the coal’,¹⁸³ a pattern begins to form. Following this subterranean path, a negative crystal, alluded to etymologically with the ‘negativism’ in the first stanza, draws the reader’s attention to ‘star-play’, setting the gaze upon a crystalline cavity in a mineral mass. ‘Star-play’, in geologic terms, is the act of making a radiating crack in a mineral sample, or a division marker to diversify strata by cracks or veins radiating outward from the centre of a mineral source.¹⁸⁴ ‘Star-play’ is also connotative of the production of the stars of antimony in the refining process. The weight of these references bear on the idea that the ‘*juggled racket*’ has become the process

¹⁸¹ "raft, n.1". *OED Online*. December 2012. Oxford University Press. 22 January 2013 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/157397?rskey=S8e7Wh&result=1&isAdvanced=false>>.

¹⁸² "pig, n.2 and adj.". *OED Online*. December 2012. Oxford University Press. 22 January 2013 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/143655?redirectedFrom=pigs+and+whistles>>.

¹⁸³ "brow, n.1". *OED Online*. December 2012. Oxford University Press. 22 January 2013 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/23829?rskey=7X1HkO&result=1&isAdvanced=false>>.

¹⁸⁴ "star, v.". *OED Online*. December 2012. Oxford University Press. 22 January 2013 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/189084?rskey=VixN0f&result=4&isAdvanced=false>>.

undertaken by the clan, attempting to retain what is theirs, by confronting those who would have it through threat of violence or other illegal means.

Wheale writes, ‘In the first stanza of the prologue [...] the ties of the racket become specific, take on the nature of Telex tapes, trailing from a carrion laden tanker that drifts like an apparition from *The Ancient Mariner*’.¹⁸⁵ The proposition that ‘*crow-lined*’ is strictly connotative of bodily (or animal) remains is a reiteration of the clandestine threat that ‘*dumbfounded the watcher’s own care*’ (276). Given the coal-mining language that infiltrates the prologue and the full poem, it could be argued that ‘crow’ is being used as an attribute to describe poor or impure coal.¹⁸⁶ The threat of mass trauma, as an urgent warning of imminent danger, is always a primary concern, as ‘Red alert is now nearly talked up and stitched / into the chute.’ (277) The awareness of threat and the potential to deliver on the threat is inherent in the state of military engagement. Phrases such as ‘[g]et weaving’ and ‘stitched / into the chute’ (277) highlight the use of military and air force argot within the poem. In this case ‘get weaving’ means to act upon a command with urgency. That ‘Red alert is now nearly talked up’ provides an obvious reference to China, and Mao in particular, and discusses the pervasiveness of anti-communist talk prolific in Western, capitalist societies. It also reinforces the localisation of the poem, as being linked to China after Mao’s death, and in dealing with claims of resource ownership there. Reifying the reading of the threat of trauma is the command dictum of the prologue’s final sentence:

*Add any distinct subversion but get your
prime up, its feed is greed and dental.*

¹⁸⁵ Wheale, “High Ethnography,” 49.

¹⁸⁶ “crow, n.1”. *OED Online*. December 2012. Oxford University Press. 22 January 2013 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/45022?rskey=1sGPIO&result=1&isAdvanced=false>>.

What becomes obvious is that force, subversion and distraction are all means by which the watcher may be dumbfounded on the surface yet below ground what is of the utmost importance is the cluster of crystals embedded within the coal.

Criticism and ‘Consumptive Action’.

It is perhaps due to the integration and overlapping of dramatic, technical and financial language systems in *News of Warring Clans* that there has been little critical engagement with the text. Wheale’s essay ‘High Ethnography’ was published in *Poetry Review* one year after *News of Warring Clans* appeared. The essay provides an accessible account of the epigraph of the poem, linking it to the poetic style of Martial, and discusses some of the strategic methods Prynne utilises in this collection, though it offers little engagement or critical analysis of the text. Birgitta Johansson, in her Heideggerian-focused reading of Prynne’s oeuvre as of 1997, discusses acts of circumscription within the poem. Where Johansson’s ontological focus and ekphrastic mining of the poem present their strongest argument is in relation to Prynne’s use of classical allusions and their compelling contemporary usage. Johansson argues, through Paul Virilio, that due to the expansive and increasingly rapid integration of technology into everyday life, language itself has become altered in its manner of creating meaning and in its manner of functioning.¹⁸⁷

Fundamental to the discourse relating to *News of Warring Clans* is Kevin Nolan’s essay, ‘Capital Calves: Undertaking an Overview’, which appeared in *Jacket 24*, an edition edited by Nolan and devoted to the discussion of Prynne’s work. Nolan’s analysis

¹⁸⁷ Johansson, *The Engineering of Being*, 162. Chapter Four, ‘Terrestrial Circumstances’, contains the subsection, ‘Circumscription in *News of Warring Clans* and *Down Where Changed*’: 161-167.

establishes a reading of *News of Warring Clans* that focuses on how the poem enacts the ‘devaluation of ethics to politics [as] the subsumption of the political sphere into more generalised models of economy.’¹⁸⁸ Nolan’s writing on *News of Warring Clans* is foundational, not only for the synthesis he provides in the critical engagement of issues of war and broader economic systems, but for his ability to provide analysis of the individual poems within a framework that takes into account the entirety of Prynne’s oeuvre as of 2003. The utilisation of economics has been a standing interest of Prynne’s work since *Kitchen Poems*. In *The White Stones* as well as in *Brass*, financial systems and their manifestation of pressure onto the language of composition are evidenced. But *News of Warring Clans* constitutes the first occasion where the functioning of economic systems, exchange and socio-industrial conquest is taken as a thematic focus, and as the language-event of the poem.

News of Warring Clans and the theoretical and poetic discourses which underpin the poem parallel Badiou’s formulation of the poem as ‘itself [...] a thing of language encountered – each and every time — as an event’.¹⁸⁹ In the case of *News of Warring Clans*, the event entails the functioning of power relations, manifested through resource exploration and appropriation, which is actively subverted by the drama. In that the shadow play provides a smokescreen for the slow damage done to communicative exchange, the subjective experience of the traditional owners is elided and mostly silenced. From Stéphane Mallarmé, Badiou takes the idea of the poem as ‘restrained action’. The poem thus conceived presents a post-evental state, and it is the reader’s task to reconstruct the

¹⁸⁸ Nolan, “Capital Calves: Undertaking an Overview,” [n.p.].

¹⁸⁹ Alain Badiou, *Theoretical Writings*, trans. Alberto Toscano (London; New York: Continuum, 2006) 240.

events depicted in the poem.¹⁹⁰ To utilise Badiou's methodological approach in reading a Prynne poem (post-*Brass*) I would like to further the definition of the term 'consumptive action', to recast the Badiouian notion in relation to Prynne's poetic. For the purpose of this analysis 'consumptive action' does not refer to the post-evental state characteristic of a Mallarmé poem, a state which induces the production of a veridical Truth.¹⁹¹ Nor does the 'consumptive action' of Prynne's poetic function like Rimbaud's, as Rimbaud depicts a pre-evental state in which instantaneous diffusion of the veridical Truth may be depicted across an entire expanse of experience. Due to Rimbaud's operative method of ambiguity

¹⁹⁰ Alain Badiou, *Conditions*, trans. Alberto Toscano (London; New York: Continuum, 2008) 88. In addition to its explication in Chapter Five of *Conditions*, titled Mallarmé's Method: Subtraction and Isolation, this definition of 'restrained action' is further expanded upon in Badiou's *Infinite Thought*, 58.

¹⁹¹ Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005) 16-27. To clarify the tautological reference it will serve to examine a series of quotations from Badiou's essay 'What is a Poem' which establish the correlative relationship between poetry and truth: 'Through the visibility of artifice, which is also the thinking of poetic thought, the poem surpasses in power what the sensible is capable of itself. The modern poem is the opposite of a mimesis. In its operation, it exhibits an Idea of which both the object and objectivity represent nothing but pale copies.'

This means that philosophy cannot grasp the couple that is the poem and the matheme through the simple opposition between the delectable image and the pure idea. Where, then, within language, does it place the disjunction between these two regimes of thought? I would say it is at the point at which both of these forms of thought find their own unnameable'. (21)

'Poetry makes truth out of the multiple, conceived as a presence that has come to the limits of language. Put otherwise, poetry is the song of language qua capacity to make the pure notion of the "there is" present in the very effacement of its empirical objectivity'. (22)

'Though when conceived as the thought of presence upon a background of disappearance poetry is an immediate action, like every local figure of a truth, it is also a program of thought, a powerful anticipation, a forcing of language enacted by the advent of an "other" language that is at once immanent and created'. (23)

'But at the same time as it is a power, every truth is also a powerlessness. For what truth has jurisdiction over cannot be a totality... [because, following Lacan] truth cannot be said "whole." It can only be half-said'. (23)

'When Mallarmé argues that "there must always be enigma in poetry," he inaugurates an ethic of mystery founded on that respect, by the power of a truth, of its own point of powerlessness'. (23)

'The mystery is, strictly speaking, that every poetic truth leaves as its own centre what it does not have the power to bring into presence'. (23)

'Every poem brings a power into language, the power of eternally fastening the disappearance of what presents itself. Or through the poetic retention of its disappearance, the power of producing itself as Idea'. (24-25)

and interruption, this possibility of veridical Truth is obscured until it ultimately eclipses the establishment of the pure event.¹⁹²

The application of the term ‘consumptive action’ with regards to Prynne’s poetry refers to acts of poetic thought that are depicted through the poem’s ‘textual derangements, extremity of personal testimony, and chance procedures or parataxis’.¹⁹³ From the confines of overlaid dominant discourses Prynne’s poetic thought functions demonstrably as ‘language itself, in its solitary exposition as an exception to the noise that has usurped the place of comprehension’.¹⁹⁴ As is evidenced, *News of Warring Clans* presents both lyrical insertions as well as the voices of the land’s traditional owners as actively contested and overrun by a dominant language and lexicon. If the registers of dramatic, technical, geological, military and financial language systems depict the event in the poem, poetic thought must be sought and engaged from within the maelstrom of linguistic action that threatens to consume it. Prynne’s poetry and poetic thought must be structured as acts of resistance if they are to operate within a system that functions to control and dominate expression. Just as the shadow play in *News of Warring Clans* elides the possibility of equal expression, the dominance of language systems threatens to consume or elide the expression of poetic thought. The function of poetic thought is to resist this consumption composed, as it is, within the language of dominant power relations: capitalism’s auto-cannibalistic language system. It is ‘the struggle of the poet to separate from it, project[ing] into the textual arena an intense energy of conception and differentiation, [...] pressed up against the limits which are discovered and invented by composition itself’.¹⁹⁵ To establish

¹⁹² Badiou, “Rimbaud’s Method: Interruption,” *Conditions*: 68-90, *passim*.

¹⁹³ John Wilkinson, *The Lyric Touch* (Cambridge: Salt, 2007) 33. These are characteristics which Wilkinson describes as commonplace operatives of ‘difficult poetry.’

¹⁹⁴ Badiou, *Theoretical Writings*, 241.

¹⁹⁵ Prynne, “Poetic Thought,” 596.

meaning through the confines and constrictions of the poem's 'consumptive action', poetic thought for Prynne must function as 'a dialectic energy working through the methods of poetic composition which cannot be defined or contained by its shells but must break them and become altogether new: new poetic thought'.¹⁹⁶ It is by these means that Prynne's poetic thought forces a rupture from within the 'consumptive action' of the poem.

Mythic Violence.

To begin to examine the function of violence in *News of Warring Clans*, one must undertake an examination of the matrices of informational exchange prefigured in the disputations and definitions of the title. The expression and representation of violence in *News of Warring Clans* will be read against Prynne's statement that 'Human language is the tribal continuity of expressive human behaviour'.¹⁹⁷ The formulations of meaning extending outward from the title should allow the reader to assert a set of foundational, theoretic frames through which to seize meaning from the confines of the poem's consumptive action. As Wheale argues in 'High Ethnography', '*News of Warring Clans* will not be compromised in its strategies; the distancing of its meanings is a self-imposed necessity to this poetry'.¹⁹⁸ To gain footing in the reading of *News of Warring Clans*, the reader must account for the manner in which wars are being fought, determine the parties through whom these concepts attain their definition and analyse how these factors influence our understanding of poetic language. In the poem, Prynne's representation of the historic event and the locale where the event takes place demonstrates the argument of Virilio, that

¹⁹⁶ Prynne, "Poetic Thought," 599.

¹⁹⁷ Prynne, "A Quick Riposte to Handke's Dictum about War and Language," 24.

¹⁹⁸ Wheale, "High Ethnography," 47.

war is experienced as the preparation of means and no longer as battles.¹⁹⁹ As Prynne writes, ‘the final arts are martial’ (282), yet, following Sun Tzu, the poem works on the claim that ‘those who render the other’s army helpless without fighting are the best of all’.²⁰⁰

The question that foregrounds our analysis is how the application of technologised means of violence, warring as an expression of force and its programmed rationality, functionally pits two enemies against one another in the experience of a language, the economy and in the collective sphere. Thus we shall continue this analysis with the most open parameters of definition, and through close analysis of the poem we hope to articulate a definition of war and warring as it pertains to *News of Warring Clans*. Once we can segregate the shadow play from the events of the text, the reader can begin to conceptualise Prynne’s utilisation of the term ‘Warring’ in an account of ‘how [war] emerges as meaningful in relation to other meanings which are themselves emerging, or already extant’.²⁰¹ As the issue of war in *News of Warring Clans* encompasses an array of social, economic and sociolinguistic practices in the unilateral pursuit of capitalist ends, we must begin with a concept of war as ‘raw competition in the state of nature’ representing ‘the desire for even greater capacity to fulfil unspecified desires’.²⁰² Under the conditions depicted we can advance with Clausewitz’s definition, that ‘war is a continuation of policy by other means’,²⁰³ reifying Thomas Hobbes’s position, that ‘the nature of war consisteth not in actual fighting, but in the known disposition thereto’.²⁰⁴ It is warring as an

¹⁹⁹ Paul Virilio, *Pure War*, trans. Sylvère Lotringer (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 1997) 157.

²⁰⁰ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Thomas Cleary (Boston; London: Shambala, 1988) 67.

²⁰¹ Nick Mansfield, *Theorising War: from Hobbes to Badiou* (Basingstoke, UK; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) 3.

²⁰² Mansfield, *Theorising War*, 13.

²⁰³ Clausewitz, *On War*, 119.

²⁰⁴ Mansfield, *Theorising War*, 11. Quoting Hobbes’s *Leviathan*, ed. J.C.A. Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 84.

expression of force that is displayed in *News of Warring Clans*, which posits the propensity towards violence as one of the ultimate expressions of power.

The expression of socioeconomic and sociolinguistic dominance is that which, in application, attests to the intensity of force established in power relations. As is exhibited by the dominant side, an expression of force is never more than the means of ensuring compulsory submission. The poem's enactment of violence through multiple, calculated and determinate means upon an inferior opponent reifies Clausewitz's position, that 'war [...] is an act of violence intended to compel our opponent to fulfil our will'.²⁰⁵ The representation of opposition in *News of Warring Clans* between a military-industrial backed force of economic expropriation and a clan-style (read: primitive)²⁰⁶ societal structure is hardly ironic and reifies the arguments about cultural evolution Prynne critiques in the prologue. In expressing violence and dominance in this manner, Prynne challenges the reader to examine the conditions of Derrida's postulate that combat must be read against a backdrop of 'fundamental anthropology, or ontology of "human life"'.²⁰⁷

The poem unfolds in a manner which displays the complex interstices of varying social and economic relations through language, as they have been modified and manipulated by the pressures of conflict. Echoing the words of Mansfield, Prynne enacts the sentiment, confusion and chaos of war in the poem, such that 'the consequences are that war itself can never be stabilised into a fixed and discrete identity, and must be understood not in terms of a set of knowable and manageable relationships with its other but in aporetic

²⁰⁵ Clausewitz, *On War*, 101.

²⁰⁶ David Marriott, *Haunted Life: Visual Culture and Black Modernity* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007) 150. In addition, Marriott's footnote 31 utilises John Locke and Franz Boas to examine the inherent inequities and self-referential statuses upon which the origins of ethnography and anthropology were determined. Thus, the classification and categorisation of 'other' is defined by a propensity towards homogeneity, and is inherent in the divisions of ethnographic classes and distinctions.

²⁰⁷ Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship* (New York; London: Verso, 1997) 123.

entanglements with them'.²⁰⁸ *News of Warring Clans* depicts the initial invasion of the social corpus through argot, technical and geological language, and military commands infiltrating the narrative of the poem. This includes lines such as 'Each *étage* bespeaks the cost / of the one preceding' (277), 'the two count up to the first skirmish, ready / as stout troopers to take the floor' (278), and 'conceive fear as a plan of relief and compute / the *mise-en-scène*.' (279) The poem represents a foreign force set out to expropriate another nation's resources (its industrial, economic, demographic, cultural, scientific, political and moral capabilities²⁰⁹). For Prynne this situation becomes newsworthy as the advancement of technologised means of war expand the threat placed on the economic and social sovereignty of a nation. As a metonymic structure the concept of 'news' defines the social and technological disparities between the oppositional forces in the conflict. Whereas news was once spread by word of mouth in a communicative exchange, it has, for the dominant side in the battle, become a pronouncement.²¹⁰ Marshall McLuhan argued that "Making the news" is a very strange phrase, but the media themselves can now create events that are so much bigger than people, so much bigger than the audience, that it really is a new mythic form'.²¹¹ As Prynne's poem appeared in 1977, a year after Mao's death, and discusses the possibility, presented as news, that '[s]everal coal and marble mines are already / reported to have been seized' (281), it engages with the idea of proprietary means of control, and the impetus for foreign investors to finalise claims of ownership. The economic forces advance with haste, despite the uncertainty of the news, for as the poem

²⁰⁸ Mansfield, *Theorising War*, 98.

²⁰⁹ Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dronology*, trans. Mark Polizzotti (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) 106.

²¹⁰ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Me: Lectures and Interviews* (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 2003) 158-173, *passim*.

²¹¹ McLuhan, *Understanding Me*, 70. Quoted from 'TV News as a New Mythic Form', a 1970 interview with Tom Wolfe.

reminds the reader, '[y]ou don't always get / what you want,' (282) and sometimes must '[t]ake what you get' (281).

Where the process of 'war footing' (277) becomes 'News' is the position at which 'the advance of technology has not only reduced the ability of war's other to check and challenge it, but has transformed it – specifically the social order of political decision making – into something war-like. In the form of the logistical, what is other to war takes on a war-dress. The difference between war and its other disappears.'²¹² The transformative function of the technologisation of war and its assimilative, infiltrative controlling mechanisms, found at all levels of society, represent the aspect of war that is new. This expression of force is the culmination of a range of points which lead Badiou to argue that 'war has been what historically attests to the present'.²¹³ If the perpetuation of war is what historically attests to the present, war enters a dehistoricised space 'becoming atemporal, and reflexive and axiomatic'²¹⁴, an entire system invulnerable to resistance. Discussing the concept of war within a specific historical space, Badiou writes:

From 1917 to 1976 (Mao's death), war and revolution constituted the transcendental regime of the present. Of this present, which bound together the localised force of war and the remote becoming of emancipation, nothing remains that might be activated at a moment [...] we are now in a limbo world, suspended between an old inactive dialectic figure (war and/or revolution) and a false commercial or military present that seeks to protect its future by dispensing with the present.²¹⁵

The representation of a multinational corporation waging economic war eradicates the possibility of conceiving temporal reality without the interventionist aspect of war. If the dominated side of the conflict cannot conceive of a reality without the perpetuity of war,

²¹² Mansfield, *Theorising War*, 130. Discussing Virilio's concept of 'pure war'.

²¹³ Alain Badiou, *Polemics* (London: Verso, 2006) 36.

²¹⁴ Mansfield, *Theorising War*, 156.

²¹⁵ Badiou, *Polemics*, 38.

‘[m]ore than a battleground on which armies struggle to assure the strategic and economic advantage of the societies they represent, [war becomes] the site of a struggle over *reality* [itself]’.²¹⁶ Prynne’s poem represents of this clash of civilisations, of technologically divergent enemies with divergent and axiomatic concepts of war fought at every level of society, perpetually, which ‘can historically attest to the present’.²¹⁷ To the capital structure of dominance, ‘news’ is the controlled commodification and selective dissemination of information, and is therefore that which can historically attest to the present.

The phrase ‘clash of civilisations’ was originally used by Samuel Huntington to describe how cultural identity – the historical, linguistic, cultural and religious traditions of a people – function, and how a growing awareness of this difference is and will be the primary source of conflict. The phrase has been actively critiqued since his original usage, with some critics arguing that it treats racial and religious identity as monolithic and static, and others arguing that it is binaristic and ignores the obvious plurality of civilisations. In the essay, ‘The Clash of Ignorance’, Edward Said provides a caustic and denunciatory attack on Huntington’s position, arguing that

Huntington is an ideologist, someone who wants to make ‘civilizations’ and ‘identities’ into what they are not: shut-down, sealed-off entities that have been purged of the myriad currents and countercurrents that animate human history, and that over the centuries have made it possible for that history not only to contain wars of religion and imperial conquest but also to be one of exchange, cross-fertilisation and sharing. This far less visible history is ignored in the rush to highlight the ludicrously compressed and constricted warfare that ‘the clash of civilisations’ argues is the reality.²¹⁸

²¹⁶ Mansfield, *Theorising War*, 159.

²¹⁷ Badiou, *Polemics*, 36

²¹⁸ Edward Said, “The Clash of Ignorance”, 4 October 2001, *The Nation*, 8 December 2011 <<http://www.thenation.com/article/clash-ignorance>>.

At the heart of *News of Warring Clans*, and operative also in *Wound Response*, *Acrylic Tips*, and the poems that deal with conflict in the Middle East, such as *Her Weasels Wild Returning*, is the representation of battle across cultural divides. Prynne's use of irony and his constant critique of ethnographic and ideological 'superiority' establish his position as more closely aligned to that of Said. In *News of Warring Clans* the binary between groups exists in the narrative of the shadow play, where issues such as technological or military 'superiority' quickly collapse into the moral degradation of war. Prynne's argument with the 'clash of civilisations' paradigm is tied to his criticism of cultural 'evolution' displayed in the prologue.

The poem *News of Warring Clans*, with its colluding discourses and an all but subsumed narrative thread, juxtaposes the harmonious 'song & dance of a small minority' (280), working cooperatively to defend their rights as the land's traditional owners, against those whose 'audacious lies pack the throat with steam' (285). The poem enacts, through consummate dialectic constraints, an experience through language of warring societal structures, with one side firmly in a state of dominance. Representing this dominance, the poem engages with mythical violence to show the immobilisation of the subjugated. In this way the poem represents the omnipotence of power, and in a war based on establishing the conquest of any resistance, this is its '*mode / d'emploi*' (284). It is the poem's consumptive action, played out at the language frontiers of exchange, which demonstrates the ominous violence of the resource sector and displays the elevation of force rising to the level of mythic violence.

To analyse mythic violence in *News of Warring Clans* it will serve to revisit Walter Benjamin's assertion, that 'mythic violence in its archetypal form is a mere manifestation of the gods. Not a means to their ends, scarcely a manifestation of their will, but first a

manifestation of their existence.²¹⁹ The poem enacts this relationship by elevating the technologically advanced opponent to a level of superiority only formerly attributed to gods and thus eradicating the possibility of resistance to this force of their will. For Barthes, the function of myth ‘is to immobilise the world’,²²⁰ which is effectively the dynamic expressed in *News of Warring Clans*, the forced surrender and assent to another’s will. The show of force necessary to equate the foreign force with the mythological transmogrifies its nature, such that it ‘is not an object, concept or idea, but a mode of signification’,²²¹ a form expressive of absolute control. This mode of signification is exacted in *News* as ‘[t]he wardens / conceive fear as a plan of relief and compute / the *mise-en-scène*’ (279), acknowledging that any peace or accord between groups will arise because ‘pain is feared’ (281). Karl Marx, as quoted by Mao Tse-tung in his essay ‘On Contradiction’, argues that ‘All mythology masters and dominates and shapes the forces of nature in and through the imagination; hence it disappears as soon as man gains mastery over the forces of nature’.²²² That is to say, the mythic force of the dominant side displays ‘aspects constituting a contradiction [which] have only an imaginary identity, not a concrete identity’,²²³ and hence represents the deceit employed in war strategy. When facing an enemy for which ‘no screen can chart / the hostility of his desire’ (278), we are constantly reminded that ‘the final arts are martial.’ (282) Resistance, when faced with ‘lies, each quite gross / and polished’ (281), is all but futile.

²¹⁹ Walter Benjamin, “A Critique of Violence,” *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken Books, 1986) 277-300, 294.

²²⁰ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972) 155.

²²¹ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, 109.

²²² Mao Tse-tung, “On Contradiction,” August 1937, *The Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, 10 September 2010 <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_16.htm>.

²²³ Mao Tse-tung, “On Contradiction.”

The argument that the poem *News of Warring Clans* enacts the ‘disobjectification of presence’²²⁴ through the deployment of the language of war must entail an analysis of the manner in which poetic language can enact these disputations. The poem is demonstrative of linguistic damage and the incoherence of communicative exchange because the confines of discourse represented enact the destruction of logical exchange. The disputation of expression is necessary, according to Eagleton, because ‘historical textuality is always a determined plurality of signifiers not a disorganised sense of sprawl’.²²⁵ For Eagleton, this conflux of forces not only ensures the inexpressibility of the subjective but eventuates in the expression of the work as ‘the incoherent effect of a transindividual process of material signification inscribed within certain definitive, historically particular practices and apparatuses’.²²⁶ The consumptive action of *News of Warring Clans* arises from the poem’s operation within the confines of a language system in a permanent state of dissolution. Due to the dialectic of eroding semantic integrity and a discontinuity of communicative exchange, the price to be paid is ease of reading comprehension and a knowable semantic register.

For Badiou, ‘control of a language equals control of the multiple’, and ‘a multiplicity can only correspond to certain properties and certain formulas at the price of the destruction (the incoherence) of the very language in which these formulas are inscribed’.²²⁷ The enactment of war where the disputation is territorial reiterates Prynne’s engagement with the pastoral. From the tribal conflict in *The White Stones* to the processes of colonisation in *Acrylic Tips*, the pastoral has been established as one of Prynne’s artifices for the creation and direction of meaning. However, the conditions of dominance in *News*

²²⁴ Badiou, *Theoretical Writings*, 241.

²²⁵ Terry Eagleton, “Ideology, Fiction, Narrative,” *Social Text*, 2 (Summer 1979) 62-80, 76.

²²⁶ Eagleton, “Ideology, Fiction, Narrative,” 66.

²²⁷ Alain Badiou, *Being and Event* (London; New York: Continuum, 2005) 39, 40.

of Warring Clans negate any possible recasting of the collective onto the perceptual contiguities of the landscape. Notions of control here are implicit: ‘The wardens / conceive fear as a plan of relief and compute / the *mise-en-scène*.’ (279) What is contentious, then, is language as it functions as the principal engine of dominance and vanquishment. For Nolan, Romantic sentimentality is necessarily disputed in *News of Warring Clans* by the force of violence and the division that the shadow play creates between the locale and the performance. This disconnection is represented as a severing of the intrinsic ties of the traditional owners to the land, as well as to voice. In the poem, ‘the “elegiac world” is more than self-divided, and its characteristic tones are therefore redeployed as internalized self-parody, as prophecy and elegy are married by the rituals of econometric speculation set against the political dictats [*sic*] of a polity geared up to its zero-sum conclusion, *there is no alternative*’.²²⁸ In Nolan’s account, from the thetic and aleatory presences working within the confines of this language system there is no escape; the confinement of expression makes resistance only possible in versification, which is, in the poem, dominated by the prose sections of narrative. Romantic sentimentality or connection to the land and its establishment in verse are no longer possible within the poem. Mythic violence in the poem creates a nearly unilateral field of expression, signifying a dominance to which resistance seems all but impossible.

‘this / sincere account of the negotiations’.

Reading *News of Warring Clans* as a staged combat between rival social groups frames poetic language within the confines of the physical frontier. The conflict comes to the fore

²²⁸ Nolan, “Capital Calves: Undertaking an Overview,” [n.p.].

as sociologically and technologically divergent groups are pitted against one another and their semblances and actions are described through divergent language systems. Where the dominant social group is described, the descriptions are dominated by technical language. The expediency of their actions and intentions are described through geological engineering terminology, military argot and the language of financial trading. As we have seen, the unilateral expression of power through the narrative of the poem replicates the rhetorical lines of demarcation as experienced during the Cold War. Language conforms to patterns established by power relations, linking the poem directly to resource exploration in China. Examples of this focus are found in lines such as ‘lapsed sibling policy’ and ‘Red alert is now nearly talked up’ (277), as well as in the division of language into dominant and controlling versus subjugated groups. Utilising language demonstrative of the ideological divisions of the Cold War evidences the impact of nationalist, political and ideological clanships in directing rhetoric and controlling language as a medium of exchange.

The ferocity of the military-backed perpetrator, who ‘would file [his] teeth / into hooks if [he] dared,’ (277) cannot be contained. The technological has taken hold of the group, inordinately and exponentially compounding their desire for action to the point where ‘no screen can chart / the hostility of his desire.’ (278) The rapacity and animistic (death) drive of the group, for whom ‘[a]ll risks are no risk’ (279) in their yearning desire for combat, is retold through military argot: ‘Get weaving with those terminals, / the scout shouts in a lost dialect, it’s time / for a war footing.’ (277) Discernibly awaiting the ‘tribal influx,’ they ‘stamp dourly or chafe the protocols’: ‘ready / as stout troopers to take the floor.’ (278). When the dominant group asks, ‘what kind of haemophiliac variant / is that,’ (278) it translates to: who is afraid of a little blood-letting? The articulated challenge is how they might restrain the ferocity of the combatants from within. The combatants’ ‘bravado

now doggo' (278) ('doggo' meaning 'to lie; to lie quiet, or to remain hidden'),²²⁹ shows them ready and willing to attack. The need for restraint and resolve is further explored when reflecting back on the Vietnam violence of *Wound Response*, where they were 'in the residue of upland grasses, holding fire.' (278)

The constraint of this propensity towards violence from within is a major concern for those who are in the command position. Control over the end results and the financial margins of this exploratory venture are all that is weighed. The question, 'does the option / wag the stock, with peace and gentle visitation?' (279), distinguishes each quantitatively calculated option, for in the midst of combat for resources '[e]ven the discounted / losses are stippled in' (280). In an age of deterrence, Virilio reminds us, 'the promotion of arms is already war',²³⁰ a statement which seems to focus steadfastly on the Cold War and the operation of language in power blocs. But the quotations from Prynne also speak to the use of strategy in war, as well as economic battles, where, as Sun Tzu states, 'one who is good at martial arts overcomes other's forces without battle, conquers other's cities without siege, destroys other's nations without taking a long time'.²³¹ Such strategic insight also signals the divergence between the deep and surface play of the poem, between the narrative and the action at the event's locale. It also raises the strategic aim of using deception and ploy in the conflict.

In an effort to find a shortcut to the results of forced acquiescence, the dominant group, while firmly set on vanquishment by force, tries their hand at another tactic. That '[t]he blood group orders new hardware, / with a flair for gearing its plan' (280), shows that continual acts of preparation for war are underway. Reading these actions through Sun Tzu,

²²⁹ "doggo, adv.". *OED Online*. December 2012. Oxford University Press. 22 January 2013 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/56454?redirectedFrom=doggo>>.

²³⁰ Virilio, *Pure War*, 91.

²³¹ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, 72.

however, it is argued that ‘military strength is regulated on its relation to semblance’,²³² and thus a show of arms, as Virilio argues, is a consummate expression of war. Opposition is an inexorable, nihilistic choice, though one which can possibly be avoided. ‘[D]oes it pay / to count on paying’ (283) is a lingering invocation of bribery or at least of making the pretence towards it. When the factions ‘make a *roux* to thicken up the money supply’ (282), they also ‘stamp about / looking for more cheap cuts and square deals’ (282), as if bargaining with those whose stomachs are full will make them feel as if they are already receiving their reward. The poem also seems to act out Sun Tzu’s strategic advice, ‘when the opponents are at ease, it is possible to tire them. When they are well fed, it is possible to starve them.’²³³ It is a dominant feature of the poem that violence and control are expressed in and through offerings of food and material goods coupled with the threat of denial. As the poem has it, ‘[s]ince / in an outraged moral system the lying report, / subject to efficient causes, is bound fast / to a truth mostly formal, the efforts / at mendacious gab exceeded all limits’ (282), and promise exceeds all intent. Nolan writes about the point at which ‘the traditional antimonies of lyric and epic may be invoked only as skirmishers in the move from the discrete poem to the interconnected book. *News of Warring Clans*, by contrasting visible vanquishment with epic reparation (snatching defeat from the jaws of victory) had tried to show the limits of synthesis, as a *coincidentia oppositorum*’.²³⁴ The exchange between these groups and their language systems are corrupted by ‘the lying report,’ (282) as the promise of material reward ‘kept them all without sleep, / greasing their eyes with mimic fire.’ (282) Thus their eyes are greased, hazy and sated, but also greased as in ‘bribed’ or gulled with false promises. ‘[M]imic fire’ reflects not only the incandescent shimmer of gold and its proximity, but with ‘mimic silk’ or ‘honey & milk,’ (280) describe

²³² Virilio, *Pure War*, 121.

²³³ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, 101.

²³⁴ Nolan, “Capital Calves: Undertaking an Overview,” [n.p.].

the rewards promised and the prospect of gain. Thus the promise of reward keeps minds glutted with the possibility of material wealth, and any offering for consumption acts as a forestalment of the use of force.

As *News of Warring Clans* questions acts of resistance to a provisional, hegemonic power, it will serve to examine Prynne's engagement with this idea as it was presented in his essay 'Resistance and Difficulty'. Utilising the writing of Peter Abailard, Prynne quotes a small section of *Ethica seu scito te ipsum*, where Abailard writes,

For where is the battle if the antagonist is away? Whence the great reward without grave endurance? When the fight is over, nothing remains but to reap the reward. Here we strive in contest in order elsewhere to obtain as victors a crown. Now, for a contest, an opponent is needed who will resist, not one who simply submits. This opponent is our evil will over which we triumph when we do not entirely destroy it. For we needs must ever to encounter our enemy [*sic*].²³⁵

In 'Resistance and Difficulty', Prynne uses a portion of this quotation to sustain his argument that the concealed logical assumptions demonstrated in encounters of resistance offer 'a quality that manifests itself [...] only in the context of process'.²³⁶ From this position, he continues by formulating the discourse into a poetic feature in which the 'reality of the external world may be constituted [...] on the basis of the world's perceived existence, [through] the resistance that it offers to our awareness'.²³⁷ In the case of *News of Warring Clans*, we must read the above quotation as an entirely new case: what if there is only an antagonist in the battle? In this case, resistance acts not as an empirical, phenomenological reification of our cognitive perceptions, but as a Foucauldian, capillary, reification of power. As the possibility of resistance is subsumed in the structural

²³⁵ Peter Abailard, *Abailard's Ethics*, trans. James McCallum (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1935) 22.

²³⁶ Prynne, "Resistance and Difficulty," 28.

²³⁷ Prynne, "Resistance and Difficulty," 27.

positioning of the oppressed against an impermeable force, a greater display of power enacts a unilateral elevation of the antagonist in the battle to a mythic level. As Judith Butler argues in *Frames of War*, the outcome of ‘the violent act is, amongst other things, a way of relocating the capacity to be violated (always) elsewhere, [and] it produces the appearance that the subject who enacts violence is impermeable to violence’.²³⁸ It is the dominant group’s omnipotence and incontestable capacity for violence which ensures that they are equated with the mythical. Whereas, according to Michel Foucault, power is secured in its position by constraining acts of resistance, in *News of Warring Clans* dominance is represented through an insurrectionary figure whose expression is unalloyed violence. The cognitive awareness of this force inaugurates in its opponent an awareness of the futility of resisting a mythic force.

Hegemonic constructs of control and the relation of sustentive objects capable of driving financial progress are measured against a temporal social structure placing developing societies and their capacity to harness their own resources clearly in inferior positions. One consequence of this relation is that the dominant social group proposes their own self-legitimation. Acts of reconciliatory or equitable exchange are subsumed as possibilities for the fact that the mere asking ‘takes / the getting out of wanting’ (282). In *News of Warring Clans*, unilateral dominance has eradicated the possibility of equitable exchange, for as Ian Davidson argues, ‘a hegemonic and temporary stabilisation of power [...] can never be inclusive but contains within itself the notion of exclusion’ and the proprietary weighing of one’s design.²³⁹

²³⁸ Judith Butler, *Frames of War: when is life grievable?* (London; New York: Verso, 2009) 178.

²³⁹ Ian Davidson, *Radical Spaces of Poetry* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) 151.

Prynne's use of the characters Nerve and [V]erve in the poem, the use of shadow play and the effect of creating and instigating a force perpetuating this mythic violence, create nothing but a dramatic staging of events. The performative aspects of war within the poem highlight Prynne's criticism of Cold War relations, acts of representation and misrepresentation which perpetuate a state of dramaturge. This may also be indicative of Arab-Israeli conflicts or more broadly of how reductive notions such as 'clash of cultures' posit difference and perpetuate war. Butler acknowledges the account of dominant social relations as a forced dramaturge, when she writes,

To imagine the state as a state of dramaturge, thus representing its power through an anthropomorphic figure, would be mistaken, since it is essential to its continuing operation that this power should not be seen and, indeed, should not be organised (or figured) as the action of a subject, rather, it is precisely a non-figurable and to some extent, non-intentional operation of power that works to delimit the domain of representability itself.²⁴⁰

Where for Butler the representation of this power will be anonymous and systematised, in *News of Warring Clans* the operation takes on a mythic force, preternaturally intent on its ends. In the same manner, the transmogrification and elevation of violence to the mythic level inscribes the affect of invulnerability onto the antagonist and instils a sense of inevitability upon the outcomes. For N.H. Reeve and Richard Kerridge, the fascist foreclosure of limits serves also as an expression of the consumptive action of the poem, highlighting its dramatic staging:

In the hardening of this attitude [emotion, and response to emotion, taken in the poem to the level of obduracy], the complete dismissal of other possibilities in quips like [...] 'Nerve and verve broke for lunch and were gone', there are traces of a

²⁴⁰ Butler, *Frames of War*, 73-4.

fantasy of totality; a pervasive enthusiasm for the completeness of a sealed economy of power, in which everything is *deployed* and all emotions costed.²⁴¹

As it is proposed and utilised in the narrative of *News of Warring Clans*, mythic violence functions as a stabilising force. It is an act which functions to ‘immobilise the world’²⁴² and to reduce the possibility of resistance. The dominant group’s incontestable propensity towards violence ensures that they are equated with the mythical. This is classic strategy, articulated by Sun Tzu when he wrote, ‘in ancient times the skilful warriors first made themselves invincible, and then watched for vulnerability in their opponents’.²⁴³

Strategic Restraint and Truth.

That ‘the ritualised war technology of today only serves as a temporary postponement of conflict’²⁴⁴ seems, as Wheale notes, to be at the forefront of the poem. This postponement of conflict is exemplified by the designed actions of the military-backed group. Establishing hierarchies of control within the dominant group, the command, while depending on them for intimidation, must be set to contain the force of ‘[t]he blood group’ (280). Strategic postponement of military engagement demonstrates the capacity to harm, and thus exercises an expression of power through the deliberate restriction of action. The relationship between the capacity to harm and the practice of restraint finds a point of lineage in Prynne’s study of Shakespeare’s sonnet 94, ‘They that haue powre to hurt...’, about which Prynne writes that

²⁴¹ N. H. Reeve and Richard Kerridge, *Nearly Too Much: the poetry of J.H. Prynne* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995) 114.

²⁴² Barthes, *Mythologies*, 155.

²⁴³ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, 84.

²⁴⁴ Wheale, “High Ethnography,” 48.

The tight phrasal bonding of ‘powre’ to ‘hurt’ opens only then to close a glimpse into much larger horizons, of power and tyranny, of sustained aggressive warfare, of prelatical dominion, of absolute monarchy and the limits of obedience and conscience, together with the historical understanding of power’s exercise within or above a rule of law and including the non-performance of reserve powers.²⁴⁵

Prynne goes on to argue that the ‘non-performance of acts which, if done, would inevitably cause harm, must command approval of the end even if also doubt about the means’.²⁴⁶ Restraint from harm, in *News of Warring Clans*, is an expression of capacity, a strategic device used in the procurement of acquiescence. The representation of a capacity to dominate codifies the argument of Virilio that war is experienced as the preparation of means and no longer as battle.²⁴⁷ The uses of ploy and deception in military-industrial strategy have an analogous parallel in the poetic. It should be noted that the pressures of the narrative establish a narrative hierarchy, which distinguishes the hegemonic expression of ‘News’ from subjective expression.

In this instance it is because ‘pain is feared’ (281) that the act of hesitation gains in its speculative currency. As the prologue reminds the reader the authorial command ‘to await “developments”’ is analogous to ‘*a loose rein on quite the wrong horse.*’ (278, 276) Amongst the scouts and the soldiers, ‘[n]o one can wait as the herbage is scorched off’ (278), a line which recalls Vietnam images of stoned soldiers and the drift of Agent Orange. The mercenaries are champing at the bit even before sufficient access to the site has been gained to reveal the material prospects of their operation. The line, ‘Down in that cheeky gorge a scheme of tokens / makes up an array we take for taking counsel’ (277), from the third stanza of the poem proper, very clearly reveals the intent: any forthcoming

²⁴⁵ J.H. Prynne, *They That Haue Powre to Hurt; A Specimen of a Commentary on Shake-speares Sonnets*, 94 (Cambridge, Privately Printed, 2001) 6.

²⁴⁶ Prynne, *They That Haue Powre to Hurt*, 17.

²⁴⁷ Virilio, *Pure War*, 157.

action will be revealed and chosen based upon what is found in the pit. The ‘array’ that is made is a topographic map of mineral seams, based on a series of mineral samples taken for trial and testing. Where the ‘[p]rospects converge from / that shadow,’ the infolding or crosshatching of materials ‘prolong the song like the scale of colours.’ (277, 277) The colouration found in these samples reveals the certainty with which the group can know of the presence of other minerals in the bed of coal, and hence the true value of that for which they are to fight.

War and its capacity to constrain subjective expression while transforming linguistic frontiers are exemplified in the text. The insertion of both French and German phrases (‘très primitif’ (276) and ‘Dīr scouts’ (279)²⁴⁸) draw allusions to the 1871 Treaty of Frankfurt, and the annexing of French territory. This may provide a detailed register of linguistic conflict and the possibility of irresolution, if drawing on the example of Alsace-Lorraine. In this way, the ‘array’ that is taken to test the clan’s prowess and propensity for resistance is an analogous test of the effectiveness of the shadow play, as well as its potential to be repeated. Is the ruin foretold in the prologue a ruin of culture, endlessly reliving instances of domination for the sake of material goods? Is this the condition of late-capitalism? And if *News of Warring Clans* entails history, how does the endless recurrence of war for resources signify ‘News’? Perhaps in the cyclic recurrence of the event, in which the shadow play is enacted again at a different location, the experience voiced can change the outcome.

Military command must undertake an interdiction to quell the ferocity of the ‘blood group’ (280) shouting, ‘it’s time / for a war footing’ (277), while the clan whose land is

²⁴⁸ This letter term may also be indicative of a deeply buried subtext referencing the contained competition of poetry and poetics in the UK.

being occupied watches on, tremulous with fear. ‘The wardens / conceive fear as a plan of relief and compute / the *mise-en-scène*’ (279), to pre-establish a meta-structural position from which to view and prepare the battlements. This occurs after preliminary bargaining, to which the dominant group ‘merely imitate attention’ to ‘each braggart [and] his plea bargain’ (282, 282). Despite the ostensible engagement with the land’s traditional owners, the tedium of pretending to meet these demands ‘struck a new high in feedback / whine; that tunnel was jammed with in- / sults inside and bardic butter overall.’ (283)²⁴⁹ The aim of the false promise and lofty talk of ‘bardic butter’ is simply a way to buy time. In the insertion of three rhythmic quatrains, in a section of the poem otherwise dominated by narrative action, the clan is assured that ‘[y]ou don’t always get / what you want,’ (282) and with the full knowledge that ‘[y]ou don’t always want / what you say, or / say what you / do (do you)’ (282). In the portrayal of meeting the clan’s demands, the stanza arrives announcing that any prospective bargain entails constrictions on the dominant group’s ability to deliver these promises:

Bashing the cloud cuckoos,
short of street sugar,
what we need
is hot milk:

The rest is allegory (282)

The demands of the clan are represented as lofty dreams, repeated incessantly to those set on calculating the costs of this acquisition. Being short of cash, the group needs another way to warm the bodies, a tempting *amuse-bouche* to entice others to the table to begin their discussion. Prosodically, the insertions of verse function to unify the voices and

²⁴⁹ ‘Bardic butter’ also entails its own promise of material reward, as it is sardonically linked to the lyrical position of the egotistical sublime and the spiritual plenitude presupposed as accessible in Romantic poetry.

demands of the clan with material reward. This prosodic connection reflects the capacity of the dominant group to limit the clan's feedback, to the point where there is a unilateral domination of the narrative. If the only responses allowed by the clan are demands for reward, this follows strictly on Sun Tzu's strategies, 'Seduce them with the prospect of gain, send interlopers in among them, have rhetoricians use fast talk to ingratiate themselves with their leaders and followers, and divide up their organisation and power'.²⁵⁰ Therefore Prynne's line that the plea bargain 'takes [...] the *Kung* out of *Fu*' (282) expresses that strategy has taken all effort out of the achievement.

Metatheatrics and *News of Warring Clans*.

One of the characteristics of *News of Warring Clans* which has received little critical attention is Prynne's use of parabasis, ekphrasis and the integration of modalities of metatheatrics within the poem. One should note the growing literary allusions to Aristophanes's play *The Birds*, where Cloudecuckooland (NEPHELOCOCYGIA) is set up as the city of the birds in an attempt to usurp the position of control over earth held by the Greek gods.²⁵¹ *The Birds* also contains a number of metatheatrical elements that Prynne references subtextually in *News of Warring Clans*. Reversing the agon in *The Birds*, in

²⁵⁰ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, 54.

²⁵¹ The fourth century B.C. play *The Birds* is one of Aristophanes's most notable; it is a political allegory about over-ambition and conquest told through comic fantasy. In the play, Pisthetaerus and Euelpides, discontented with life in Athens, convince Hoopoe, once King Tereus, to build a city in the sky. Hoopoe agrees, on the provision that the Athenians can convince the other birds. Initially distrustful of the humans, the birds are finally swayed by the Athenians. Pisthetaerus and Euelpides transform into birds and the city construction commences. Construction is interrupted by a number of visitors, including Meton, who would like to be the city planner but is finally banished. The goddess Iris causes alarm when she sneaks into the city, which is afterwards visited by a number of other Olympians. Pisthetaerus eventually outwits the gods, and is ultimately crowned king of Cloudecuckooland. The play ends with a wedding song, celebrating the union of Pisthetaerus and Sovereignty. Typical of the framework of Aristophanes's other works, *The Birds* includes a prologue, parados, parabasis, agon, song and exodus, and many of these metatheatrical elements are mimicked by Prynne in *News of Warring Clans*.

which Pisthetaerus and Euelpides make an argument to the birds for the creation of a new city and, due to a lack of any opposition, easily sway them, *News of Warring Clans* presents the argument as only from the antagonist's position, where the contrary argument is muted. The parabasic asides in *News of Warring Clans* imitate those in *The Birds*, where Pisthetaerus and Euelpides convince the birds that their genealogy entitles them to a vaulted position worthy of the original gods. Aside from the arguments and the conviction of the dominant group in *News of Warring Clans*, the reader encounters the lines, 'Bashing the cloud cuckoos, / short of street sugar, / what we need / is hot milk' (282), which reference *The Birds*. Furthermore, the line '[l]ike the dapper / butcher painted in phosphorus, the town planner / prowled round his snap-shots of triumph' (281) refers to Meton, who is listed in Aristophanes's stage notes as an astronomer and mathematician, and who walks around offering the city founders a set of town-plans.²⁵² Another possible reading of the 'star-play' (276), investigated previously in terms of its geological definition, connotes, in this instance, Meton's proposal to measure out the city and to design it so that 'the circle will be squared, you see, in the centre the market-place, to which all streets themselves will lead straight into the centre, just as with a star, which, though it is circular, sends straight rays out in all directions'.²⁵³ Having had enough of Meton's ineptitude and preposterous planning, Pisthetaerus finally rallies and banishes him from the city in the sky. The number of ekphrastic references to Aristophanes's play also steadily reinforces the production of theatrical elements designed to highlight the difference between *News of Warring Clans*'s deep structure and its surface play.

²⁵² Aristophanes, tr. James Manton, "The Birds," *Four Plays of Aristophanes* (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1983) 125 (l. 1004-1009).

²⁵³ Aristophanes, "The Birds," *Four Plays of Aristophanes*, 125 (l. 1004-1009).

The representation of food in the poem has been dramatically overlooked in its critical reception. The poem depicts a feast designed to satiate the appetites of those at the table but also intended to reify the clan's prospect of having their demands met. These are prospective desires the clan has been harbouring since the opening stanzas of the poem, where the prospect of a share in resource wealth was 'tonic to those who see what they can't eat.' (277) It also highlights the use of food in war strategy, and it references Prynne's usage of the sustentive in *Brass*, which connoted a negation of ethical nourishment. This connection between 'what we need / is hot milk' (282) and Prynne's use of milk in *Brass*, is also pertinent, as Prynne inflects Celan's 'black milk' to signify the atrocities of the Holocaust, forced starvation and death. In *News of Warring Clans*, the dominant group's offer of food is a maleficent and open bribery, a false promise of shared wealth. Anyone still proving resistant to the celebration who refuses to provide consent will be met with other means. A scout fires shots in the distance; echoing around the feast is an invisible force and the threat against resistance, multiplying with each repercussion. The verse insertions on page 283 are one of the few instances where the poem breaks prosodic convention and the voice of the dominant group is represented in verse. The reader is assured that this bribery will work; the circumstances of those in poverty are such that the will to resist becomes an unfathomable consideration:

These checks for travellers
 will bring him up sharp
as a knife. This

is not fair game is not
 by the lamb chop
the sport it seems.

After the feast it is acknowledged that '[t]he route signs / are quite subtle, just planetary appetisers' (283) to those drawing plans. Material acquisition is not 'the sport it seems' because offerings of material reward have taken the strain out of the conquest. In this case tangential violence, the killing of the lamb, displaces the violence done unto others. It serves as a substitution, the implied threat of violence all the more resonant because 'for every clone on the step / above the nature of hot food, some other variant / is watching from a step further into the menu.' (283) Resistance falls away, '[a]nd by / this narrowest pinch in the paid-up history / of our attentions the fear of surprise became / so intense it blew the fuse and satisfied / the hopes of almost the whole band.' (284) The reflective surprise of the dominant group can be taken as a literal admission, although the credibility of the command remains suspect.

Reaffirming the reader's suspicions is the satire-laden dictate, 'you must believe this / sincere account of the negotiations.' (284) The line appears less as a demand and more as a metanarrative aside to the audience, prefiguring the falsities of the shadow play in encouraging belief even amidst the audience's growing disbelief of the action. What is exemplified in the line, 'you must believe this / sincere account of the negotiations', is the use of parabasis, which, as Thomas Hubbard defines it, is 'precisely the nexus between poet, chorus, dramatic characters, and polis that gives us critical insight into the drama's articulations of meaning'.²⁵⁴ Prynne's use of metatheatrics and their connection to the economic force of the dominant group provide a thorough indictment of military-industrial commerce. The insincerity delivered in the 'account of the negotiations' reinforces the false promise of trickle-down economics and castigates the moral affectation of those in the

²⁵⁴ Thomas K. Hubbard, *The Mask of Comedy: Aristophanes and the intertextual parabasis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991) ix.

dominant side of the struggle. Reflecting on the strategy employed, the dominant group expresses surprise and surety of belief in the following parabolic stanzas:

The option prevailed over theft precisely
by means of ambush, and employed the same
rigid tracking.

The pause displayed as
its credentials shewed only the chagrin of
a recognised falsity cut like a rock wafer.
“Too late” came in before “not enough” and
the long-term end before the snack
in the long-stay dancing school. The *mode*
d’emploi proved a perfect dream, all com-
pletely rewired, you must believe this
sincere account of the negotiations. (284)

That the options for strategic advancement are unified with financial options, as described in an earlier line, ‘[o]ption trading has become / the hottest game in town’ (279), shows the degree to which war and economic gain are unified. The mock surprise expressed in the line, ‘[t]he *mode / d’emploi* proved a perfect dream,’ as well as ‘this / sincere account of the negotiations’, highlights the dominance of the narrative over the experience at the poem’s locale, again promoting belief in the face of obvious disbelief. The war over resources and markets also establishes a contiguous connection with Prynne’s other works, such as *Kitchen Poems* and *Bands Around the Throat*, which deal with market crashes and critique the cannibalistic systems that financial trading relies upon for the production of material wealth.

Further examples of metatheatrics in the text are presented through parabasis, contrafact and the reflective model of the *mise en abyme* within the poem, all of which coincide with a series of referential passages. In *News of Warring Clans*, metatheatrical

elements reference a number of political and literary sources, such as Blake, Aristophanes and Lord Russell, and highlight a break in the poetic framework where the dialogic margins of the poem open into theatrical space:

The gradients for soul passage at every level
are cast down for each class, as per
shuttlecock in a fancy tram-car. All risks
are no risk. Option trading has become
the hottest game in town.

And does the option
wag the stock, with peace and gentle visitation?
They rivet the stick
close to strike, shorting the stock
against call;
in the tree glide the lie sits like gall by
what you say it does, messenger creature. (279)

While Wheale's reading of this section provides the obvious Platonic analogy to the cave and the obfuscation of real events, Wheale skirts a number of other ekphrastic references and the representation of human development in the poem. The opening line, 'The gradients for soul passage at every level / are cast down for each class, as per / shuttlecock in a fancy tram-car', presents a meta-structural linkage, most immediately connotative of Dante, or Marx, for whom this description could fit. The apocryphal image in this stanza leads Nolan to his argument that, in Prynne's writing, 'dialectics is a conflict of faculties whose ultimate image is warfare, which for Wittgenstein signified the end of all relation, in which an Hegelian *aufhebung* is impossible. As in Blake's concept of a "generation", war cannot be a synthesis, let alone (in the Neo-Platonic tradition) a "fall" from grace in which some other Utopia is regainable.'²⁵⁵ The description of humanity in the line reinforces an impression of hierarchical class structure in which the leisure of the upper class is used to

²⁵⁵ Nolan, "Capital Calves: Undertaking an Overview," [n.p.].

throw light on the contrasting conditions of the other travellers. The allusion to Dante, and to the drudgery of work in a pit or an underground mine, for example, relates the complexities to which Prynne's argument is committed and elides any possible attainment of Utopia.

This section and its return to a thematic investigation of coal and mining might be supported by thinking about the 1926 general strike, and how strategies were devised to defeat the workers' resistance. The strategies for control over striking workers highlight contiguities with the appropriation of resource-rich land from its traditional owners. The strategic restraint of those in positions of power is, as always, coupled with the assurance of safety and sustenance. Nolan continues his argument regarding Prynne's employment of dialectics in *News of Warring Clans*, noting that

The final limit of war is the reciprocal self-confirmation of victor and vanquished, and a unity formed by subordination is not a synthesis. Taking his cue again from Blake rather than Hegel, Prynne argues that contrariety is not the same thing as opposition. But given that representational forms must collectively suffer under more or less permanent conditions of Red Alert, what can be offered in place of an all consuming contrariness [sic] that replaces intellection with gathered 'intelligence'?²⁵⁶

The line '[t]hey rivet the stick / close to strike' (279) shows the threat of force upon labourers. This is the surety of force that guarantees '[a]ll risks / are no risk.' (279) Moving unperceived through the woods, 'the lie' (279) – perhaps the threat, or the utopian promise of plenitude – then sits with assurance and asperity. Compare this account, which reinforces the prophetic vision of the 'messenger creature' (279), with a secondary account in the poem, where the preservation of the natural obfuscates the destructive imposition of this false promise on the heads of sleeping workers: 'For all around / the cool breeze murmurs,

²⁵⁶ Nolan, "Capital Calves: Undertaking an Overview," [n.p.].

rustling through branches, / while from shivering leaves and broken lights / streams down deep sleep, lying where it falls.’ (280) At base, ‘lying’ qualifies the description with a double inflection, unsettling thoughts of Aristotelian motion with the idea that even the natural has been corrupted. This is a demonstrable example of Prynne’s contrariness of which Nolan writes; suffering under the condition of constant threat, our most basic understandings of nature and the natural are compromised. An understanding of the contradictions of the natural can be sought through dialectical materialism. As Mao reasons, ‘every process, whether in the realm of nature or of society, progresses and develops by reason of its internal contradiction and struggle, and the movement of human knowledges should also progress and develop along with it’.²⁵⁷

Prynne’s reliance on Mao’s account of contradiction has longstanding relevance, manifesting itself in his critical prose and, markedly, in the poetic text *Kazoo Dreamboats; or, On What There Is* in 2011. In utilising block quotations to interrupt the medieval dream vision represented in *Kazoo Dreamboats; or, On What There Is*, Prynne quotes from Mao’s essay, ‘On Contradiction’. Prynne’s quotation of Mao, in conjunction with the depiction of natural events, casts a heavy blow on the experiential conditions represented in the poem via the medieval ‘I saw’ trope. In connection with the natural, and the limits of command over the military force in *News of Warring Clans*, it might serve to briefly consider Mao’s 1937 lecture ‘On Contradiction’, where Mao writes, ‘There is internal contradiction in every single thing, hence its motion and development. Contradictoriness within a thing is the fundamental cause of its development, while its interrelations and interactions with

²⁵⁷ Mao Tse-tung, “On Practice,” July 1937, *The Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, 10 September 2010 < http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_16.htm>.

other things are secondary causes.’²⁵⁸ As Mao goes on to state, the developmental characteristic of natural things, of plants and animals, is reliant on internal contradictions. Where the order of contradiction extends beyond the natural and becomes a dominant focus in *News of Warring Clans* is in contemplation of the question, What if there is only an antagonist in the battle? In his essay ‘On Contradiction’, Mao makes the argument, citing Lenin, that ‘antagonism is one form, but not the only form, of the struggle of opposites’.²⁵⁹ In this instance, contrariness, as distinct from antagonism, seems to be a comment on the limitations placed upon and the transgressions made possible by the dominant group. That is to say, hierarchical power relations within the group inherently delimit its ability to act with uniformity. As Mao writes further in ‘On Contradiction’,

But is it enough to say merely that each of the contradictory aspects is the condition for the other’s existence, that there is identity between them and that consequently they can coexist in a single entity? No, it is not. The matter does not end with their dependence on each other for their existence; what is more important is their transformation into each other. That is to say, in given conditions, each of the contradictory aspects within a thing transforms itself into its opposite, changes its position to that of its opposite.²⁶⁰

Utilising this description from Mao exposes the dynamic that substantiates and necessitates controlling the contradictory elements of the dominant group. This highlights the functioning of hierarchical power structures and contradictory elements within the dominant side, which otherwise appears externally as univocal. In that contradiction is a necessary condition to the operation of power, it allows and determines the flux of human prevarications to operate within a structural position held by the unit. As with all things, the military unit must, through force, control the contradictions of its components.

²⁵⁸ Mao Tse-tung, “On Contradiction,” August 1937, *The Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, 10 September 2010 < http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-1/mswv1_16.htm>.

²⁵⁹ Mao Tse-tung, “On Contradiction.”

²⁶⁰ Mao Tse-tung, “On Contradiction.”

Another metatheatrical element of the poem reinforcing Prynne's use of contradiction between the deep and the surface play, and highlighting the use of the *mise-en-abyme*, is given in the contrafactual quatrains,

The blood group orders new hardware,
with a flair for gearing its plan
to the time of the also-ran,
to a quick sally down a blind tube.

Cosmetic universals likewise choke
their line from the planet,
as a power cable in reverse or
right down the same drain.

And still to be dressed, still to be neat
is truth or riot in the street,
floating like the oil upon
the chartered streams of Babylon. (280-281)

The disruption of narrative hierarchy through the delivery of the end-rhymed quatrain is an explicit parody of the melic and melodic expression of the voice of the subjugated group. In *News of Warring Clans*, the group is depicted as having connotative qualities that relate it back to the chorus of Aristophanes's *The Birds*. The final quatrain in this section references both Ben Jonson and William Blake, aligning the poem to antecedent patterns of writers committed to writing against the state and against the artificiality of the 'cosmetic' in everyday life.

Johansson was the first to seize upon this ekphrastic reference in Prynne's contrafactual lines, noting that they are based on Jonson's comedy *Epicæne, or The Silent Woman*, wherein Clerimont's page speaks the line, 'Still to be neat, still to be dressed / As you were going to a feast'. The page's address is typically excerpted and referenced as one

of Jonson's most famous poems.²⁶¹ For Johansson, Prynne's reference to Jonson 'echoes classical discussions about the artificial versus the natural; it shows how ancient poets have already perceived tensions, which to us appear contemporary'.²⁶² The manner in which Prynne's quatrain interacts with Jonson's is in its arbitration and creative manipulation of the lines. As Gregory Dobrov writes in *Figures of Play*, 'the field of the contrafact and that of its model are necessarily at some remove from each other in time, form or style. The two (or more) texts are made to interact creatively in a way that dramatises their difference. The prominence of "old" material outlines a recuperable model behind the composition while the "new" operates at the contrafact's creative focus.'²⁶³ The use of contrafact in *News of Warring Clans* is consistent with Prynne's method of referentiality, although in this poem the references combine with additional metatheatrical elements to highlight the contradiction between the poem and its presentation, and analogously, between the 'News' and the reality on the ground.

'[T]he chartered streams of Babylon', which concludes the quatrain and leads this melic, parabolic aside back into the main portion of the text, is another example of a contrafact. The line provides reference to Blake's 'London', the opening line of which depicts the ruin of the city seen through the 'chartered streets'.²⁶⁴ Prynne's use of the 'chartered streams of Babylon' contrasts Blake's view of the city with the promise of Utopian plenitude. That the streams/streets are 'chartered' envisions the construct of financial overlays in the depiction of the city and the false promise of monetary freedom.

²⁶¹ Ben Jonson, "Epiccene, or The Silent Woman," *The Selected Plays of Ben Jonson*, ed. Johanna Procter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) 309 (l. 103-4).

²⁶² Johansson, *The Engineering of Being*, 162.

²⁶³ Dobrov, *Figures of Play*, 16.

²⁶⁴ Peter Ackroyd, *Blake* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1996) 157. Ackroyd argues that "'chartered" was one of the radical code words of the period that was directed at the oppression of the authorities. That is why "each dirty street" was changed to "each charter'd street," and behind the word one can hear the echoes of Tom Paine's *Rights of Man*' (157).

The lines concluding this quatrain also allude to another of Blake's images, in the depiction of Babylon 'as the Unholy city where the god of this world is worshipped'.²⁶⁵ In Blake's writing, Babylon is commonly associated with war and lust. In Blake's *Milton*, Babylon is 'The Mother of War', and the counterplay between Jerusalem and Babylon is an aspect of the inherent contradiction in the text.²⁶⁶ That Babylon represents an earthbound, mortal rationality, which is associated with sin, lust and war, demonstrates that these are the false virtues of reason, divorced from enlightened thought and therefore characteristic of the mortal realm. This expresses a parallel with the town planner wandering through *News of Warring Clans*, with the nonsensical explanations of Meton, from Aristophanes's play, providing a commentary on the underlying deceitfulness and ruinous quality of a society structured entirely on the basis of economic terms, relations and engagements. Prynne's contrafact represents a construct of the development of economics and urban space that has been interrogated by many antecedents.

Significant also in the metatheatrics of the poem are the quoted passages, 'solid and durable' (281) and 'it has not escaped our notice' (282), as both represent monumental decrees of social and scientific advancement. As Prynne describes the dominant group's plan to spread innumerable lies within the community alongside a concomitant offering of reward, he writes, '[t]he saturation / of what is "solid and durable" is cooled / to a sham-level of *killing frost*: pain is feared, / false danger triggers waste of fear.' (281-282) If an accord for a peaceful outcome based on the acquisition of resources is the optimum end point for the negotiations, then 'what is "solid and durable"' seems to connote material reward. However, as far back as 1860, Lord Russell used the phrase 'solid and durable' to

²⁶⁵ S. Foster Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and symbols of William Blake* (Hanover; London: University of New England Press, 1988) 33.

²⁶⁶ Damon, *A Blake Dictionary*, 34.

describe the state of peace between nations, set out as the platform for achievement in international relations in accordance with the Great Britain's principles of nationality.²⁶⁷ In considering the conditions established by Russell's 'solid and durable' peace, Prynne may imply that such 'peace' is a measure by which imperial or colonial power is maintained over the subjugated group, thereby ensuring stability. If this is the case, 'solid and durable' becomes not a peaceful resolution, but an armed and defensible system of power relations, ensuring dominance. As Achille Mbembe writes, colonial rule necessitated government stability, control and taxation, all characteristics of power which were coextensive with 'some organisation of coercion – that is, of a manner of "maltreating one's subjects", administering them, ensuring extraction from them, exploiting and dominating them'.²⁶⁸ Mbembe continues by arguing that '[o]rganising coercion always presupposed stable exercise of control over a territory's population. Such control only had meaning if it authorised access to some resource, goods, and services produced on that territory.'²⁶⁹ In *News of Warring Clans*, the stability proposed is the enactment of dominance to secure the continued political and economic advantage of the imperial power. But the pursuit of peace falters because, as the line concludes, 'pain is feared,' (281) and in this instance the threat proves the most effective stratagem to ensure dominance. The 'by-play' is 'fiscal' (283) because it is an action carried on beside or in the dumb-show during the main action.

The first complete stanza on page 282 contains a statement on the inability of men to rebuke the possibility of material reward. The stanza reads,

Again
 "it has not escaped our notice" that, by

²⁶⁷ Great Britain Parliament, *House of Commons, Accounts and Papers of the House of Commons: Thirty Five Volumes*, Volume 29, 24 Jan-28 August 1860 (London: Harrison and Sons, 1860) 21.

²⁶⁸ Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) 92.

²⁶⁹ Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 92.

song & dance, men cannot live or move out
in the midst of plenty. We munch and munch
along planned parenthood, getting and spending
on the same credit card. False tedium
bids up each braggart by his plea bargain,
to set the motif as if vicious, viz., *takes*
the getting out of wanting, but in fact
the *Kung* out of *Fu*; the final arts are martial.

The right indentation of the stanza's 'Again' lends rhetorical credence to the quoted passage. Often described as the greatest understatement in the history of scientific discovery, the quotation, 'it has not escaped our notice', from J.D. Watson and F.H.C. Crick,²⁷⁰ discusses the clonal reproduction capabilities of a double strand of DNA. Prynne places it in a line that seems like a castigation of middle-class existence. The line might also speak to the notion of appropriation in not only economic societies but the scientific community as well, as, for instance, Rosalind Franklin's x-ray research proved crucial to Watson and Crick's discovery. The 'song & dance,' as an elaborate and evasive story intended to deceive, may reference Watson and Crick as well as the function of the shadow play within the poem. Given the portrayal of the subjugated group as bound to material desires, the dominant social faction can exert their control because desire and its satisfaction are imbedded in systems of power.

Acts of bribery in *News of Warring Clans* forestall the act of warring because, as we have seen, satisfaction is only a mouthful away. But so too is the issue of survival, if, as in times of war, the food provided can intentionally be either sustentive or poisonous.²⁷¹ The

²⁷⁰ J. D. Watson and F.H.C. Crick, "Molecular Structure of Nucleic Acids: A Structure for Deoxyribose Nucleic Acid," *Nature*, 171.2 (25 April 1953) 737 – 738. The line referenced reads, 'It has not escaped our notice that the specific pairing we have postulated immediately suggests a possible copying mechanism for the genetic material.'

²⁷¹ The strategic deployment of poisonous food in relation to the acquisition of land and colonial conquest is a central concern of *Acrylic Tips*, further discussed in Chapter Four.

ostensible freedom of choice given to the subjugated group is ‘cosmetic’ and ‘pre-determined’ in its circumscription.²⁷² Discussing the wanton possibility of choice in the free market, Prynne writes that ‘within an efficient economy the small instances of functional inefficiency [or resistance] have, of course, their statistical justifications, because if a potentially influential class can be quieted by inexpensive and containable pleasures then the cost of that is no problem’.²⁷³ The irony of using a quotation regarding the discovery of DNA sequencing reiterates the claim that economics and material goods outweigh that which is most fundamental to humankind. The city built of material goods usurps the place of the gods because the desire for leading a life comparable to or greater than the lives of those around us is insatiable, and therefore ‘men cannot live or move out / in the midst of plenty.’ (282) The mirror in which one seeks his or her image brings ruin because we can only perceive ourselves in relation to that which we have.

The number of references to Aristophanes’s play within *News of Warring Clans* steadily reinforces the production of theatrical elements designed to highlight the difference between the deep structure of the poem and the surface play. This connects the poem proper with the theatrical elements in the prologue and establishes the epigraph as having a lasting resonance throughout the poem. If, as the epigraph declares, ‘You perceive All Things in a reflecting Mirror; the Image deceives’, it is a pre-acknowledgement of the force of the shadow play in dividing the action seen from the *dramatis locus*. The use of metatheatrics and dramaturgy also implicate military strategy and the news media as complicit in propagating rhetorical and ideological deception. This line of thought is displayed not only in this poem but also across *Her Weasels Wild Returning* and ‘Refuse Collection’. That the characters express to the audience, ‘you must believe this / sincere account of the

²⁷² J.H. Prynne, “A Letter to Steve McCaffery,” *The Gig*, 7 (2002) 40-46, 42.

²⁷³ Prynne, “A Letter to Steve McCaffery,” 42.

negotiations' (284), indicts the prefigured falsities of the shadow play which encourage belief even amidst the audience's growing disbelief of the action. The use of metatheatrical elements allows Prynne to frame his discussion of the media and military aggression by establishing the relationship between the poet, reader, dramatic characters and polis, providing also critical insight into the poem's articulations of meaning and constrictions of voice. The artifices of news, shadow play and economic language imitate the manner by which readers come to an understanding of war and the economy in contemporary society, as that understanding is derived from a dominant, technical, media-based representation set at a distance from the *dramatis locus*.

Conclusion.

The final stanza of *News of Warring Clans* reads

All
the reports, in echo of stylish lies, lay
stunned by drab hints from the sandy empires
of the plain. The old melisma in the frame
set by a new battle jittered like spring-water,
a painted stone in a painted picnic. Nerve
and verve broke for lunch & were gone. (285-6)

The final stanza is notable for its increasingly indented opening line: 'All' is a decisive hanging rejoinder at the bottom of page 285. The stanza announces the conclusion of the masque and the evacuation of the stage by the characters Nerve and [V]erve. The framing of the set as 'a painted stone in a painted picnic' adds an air of incongruity to the preceding report. The 'melisma', as a patterned melody, makes comment on the condition of the reports, which are 'in echo of stylish lies,' notable for their recurrence if not their

declarative statements. In conjunction with the use of contrafact, this demonstrates the perpetual recurrence of the play, a deceitful campaign that continues to garner its material rewards. The capacity to retain and commit to such an avaricious ploy for the sake of resources, and to set the old song ‘in the frame’ so that it corresponds to ‘a new battle’ seems a telling depiction of the use of theatricality and deceit in the performance of the poem. The poem seems to say that, despite the connection between war and language, in the presentation of the news, the staging is everything. The compounding disquiet of the exiting stage-characters leaves the reader caught in a moment of hesitancy, lingering on the question from the previous page, ‘could this be less real’ (284). Mao argues that ‘in myths or nursery tales the aspects constituting a contradiction have only an imaginary identity, not a concrete identity. The scientific reflection of the identity in real transformations is Marxist dialectics.’²⁷⁴ That is to say, the mythic powers of the dominant force in the poem are, of course, only ever imaginary and projective. The reader can make this discernment through dialectical thinking, and through careful discernment of the deep and surface levels of the shadow play.

Is Prynne implying that our belief in the lie is ‘the ace / of all desire’ (285)? Reflecting on the media-derived knowledge of war, the reader returns to the line, ‘[t]he most / audacious lies pack the throat with steam,’ replete with the instruction to ‘be frightened’ (285). The reader begins to understand that the circular pattern of transformation and disbelief that he or she is engaged in is a pattern other audience members must necessarily believe. As ‘News’ becomes the mythic form of communication, the ability to disbelieve it is relinquished. If doubt and disbelief are at the heart of all desire, the reader is assured that eventually the illusion ‘will fade away’ (285). The passage

²⁷⁴ Mao Tse-tung, “On Contradiction.”

towards understanding is two-fold: it is the hardest thing to be patient and resist the easy answers, and harder still to gain an experience of the world where you can distinguish the lies of the media from the reality of the witness. As Mao wrote in 'On Practice', 'all genuine knowledge originates in direct experience'.²⁷⁵ Belief, and our ability to challenge or surmount the media-derived reportage, requires experience. This challenge is articulated in Prynne's line, 'patience, hard thing, the very worst is yet / to splash your feet and get your gaiters wet.' (285) This line is a direct reiteration of Mao's argument, that '[t]he truth of any knowledge or theory is determined not by subjective feelings, but by objective results in social practice. Only social practice can be the criterion of truth'.²⁷⁶

The epistemic doubt that *News of Warring Clans* plays on is that in the face of a mythic violence, or a hegemonic and unitary informational source, dialectic knowledge is available in the aftermath of history, through experience. The misinformation and political interests inherent in the news, whether of war or resource acquisition, can be governed by the acknowledgement that the 'truth [is] mostly formal' (282). If, as Prynne remarks, 'poetic thought is brought into being by recognition and contest with the whole cultural system of a language',²⁷⁷ in *News of Warring Clans* it is our belief in the cultural system of language, and how this system defines communication, which we must begin to question.

²⁷⁵ Mao Tse-tung, "On Practice."

²⁷⁶ Mao Tse-tung, "On Practice."

²⁷⁷ Prynne, "Poetic Thought," 598-9.

Chapter Three. *Bands Around the Throat.*

Introduction.

Prynne's 1987 collection *Bands Around the Throat* is a text that operates as a public appeal to the constant threat from systemic control systems. *Bands Around the Throat* engages with these systems across the spectrum of the collection's thematic interests, with examples inclusive of pathological, sociopolitical, economic and linguistic systems. The text constantly rearticulates the inadequacy of safety measures put in place by a given system and it provides a critical account of fear as a tool of dissuasion built into power structures. The poems address violence in the context of South African apartheid, the nuclear meltdown of the Chernobyl reactor in 1986, as well as systems of financial and economic control. The poems expose these violent control systems as corrupt and bound for failure. As Simon Perril argues in the essay 'Hanging on Your Every Word: J.H. Prynne's *Bands Around The Throat* and a Dialectics of planned impurity', the parallels exhibited between the economic and nuclear fallout work to expose contiguities between systematic controls and their inevitable collapse.²⁷⁸ The dialectic position established through these historical examples, as well as through references to 'necklace killings' in apartheid-era South Africa and the development of psychoanalytic theories of fear as tested in laboratory conditions, juxtapose modern secular belief against 'primitive' and Christian faiths. In this regard, the collection's conceits function by focusing on systems of violence, the instrumentalisation of fear and the privilege of exemption and rhetoric. In many respects, the collection

²⁷⁸ Simon Perril, "Hanging on Your Every Word: J.H. Prynne's *Bands Around The Throat* and a Dialectics of planned impurity," *Jacket*, 24 (November 2003), 31 October 2009 <<http://jacketmagazine.com/24/perril.html>>.

proceeds by dividing measures of power and control from belief in their instruments and operations.

In addition to being privately printed as *Bands Around the Throat*, material from this collection was also widely republished. The practice of publishing poems in other venues was a rare occurrence for Prynne at the time, despite his growing international reputation as a poet of note in the 1980s. The poems 'Marzipan', 'In the Pink', 'No Song No Supper' and 'Ein Heldenleben' from *Bands Around the Throat* were published in *Scripsi* (Vol. 4, No. 4, 1987). The poem 'Marzipan' appeared as No. 2 in Peter Riley's *Poetical Histories* series, in conjunction with a French translation by Bernard Dubourg, under the title *Marzipan / Masepain* in 1986. The poem 'Fool's Bracelet' appeared in *High on the Walls*, the Morden Tower poetry anthology, and the entirety of *Bands Around the Throat* was reprinted in *The Exact Change Yearbook* in 1995. In addition to this, there was a letterpress print of 'Write-Out' commissioned by Charles Seluzicki and designed and printed in the United States by Inge Bruggeman. Considering the motivational factors that inspired the continued publication of these poems repositions *Bands Around the Throat* as a public point in Prynne's poetics of resistance. One must also note that the poem 'Refuse Collection' was released in the journal *Quid* and then distributed online through Barque Press's website, which establishes a connotative link between the poem as an act of resistance and its publication occasioned by a geopolitical event. The motivation behind the continued publications is therefore to instigate the reader's examination of his or her own belief in technologically-derived artifices of control and systems that demand obedience through fear.

The collection *Bands Around the Throat* and the publication of portions of the collection can be conceived as acts ‘of resistance [which are] offered to our awareness’.²⁷⁹ Andrew Duncan argues that social resistance against the movement to the political right, a movement brought about by the Thatcher government, is at the core of much sociopolitical poetry released throughout the 1980s.²⁸⁰ As was roundly satirised in Brass’s ‘L’Extase de M. Poher’, this time was rife with depictions of great political figures ‘leading’ the populace through periods of economic hardship, all the while demanding obedience through threat and coercion. An ironic account of hero-worship is engaged with in the poem ‘Ein Heldenleben’, which plays with the title of Richard Strauss’s Opus 40, ‘A Hero’s Life’. The political satire that runs through the collection *Bands Around the Throat* is particularly notable in the poem ‘Marzipan’. There remains much speculation as to the semantic and semiotic readings of the title ‘Marzipan’: Perril likens it to the phonetic enunciation of ‘massetain’ as it is given in Dubourg and Prynne’s French translation of the work.²⁸¹ Johansson ascribes to the title the implication of being ‘the icing on the cake’, with material wealth proposed as a touchstone of policy driven by economic rationalism.²⁸² I shall propose another possible set of connotations, which relate to an article in *The Times* that surely would not have escaped Prynne’s attention. The article was published under the title ‘The Times Diary: Bitter Sweet (94)’ on 11 October 1985, and shall be quoted here in its entirety:

The most repulsive product on sale at the Tory conference is a marzipan bust of Mrs. Thatcher. One, at least, has been sold – to a journalist who, during a dinner given by Ted Heath at The River House Restaurant, mischievously offered it to the former prime minister as a pudding, and was rewarded by seeing him carve it into

²⁷⁹ Andrew Duncan, *The Failure of Conservatism in Modern British Poetry* (Cambridge: Salt, 2003) 120. Duncan is referencing Prynne’s essay, ‘Resistance and Difficulty’.

²⁸⁰ For a more thorough analysis see Duncan’s *The Failure of Conservatism*. 173, *passim*.

²⁸¹ Perril, “Hanging on Your Every Word,” [n.p.].

²⁸² Johansson, *The Engineering of Being*, 184.

segments. The journalist then carried these to a nearby table where prominent government ‘wets’, including Peter Walker, Douglas Hurd and Kenneth Clarke, were seated. The ministers, however, declined the chance to eat a portion of their leader.²⁸³

While the direct connection of the poem’s title to the carved yet uneaten bust of Mrs. Thatcher remains dubious, it invokes a playful register, albeit one of political seriousness. This register also emphasises issues of consumption and sustenance within the collection. Highlighting the human cost of the Chernobyl disaster and the political violence of South African ‘necklace killings’, the title has the added suggestion of exposing demarcations between varying echelons of society, from the policy makers and political leaders to those suffering under conditions of enforced starvation as a result of social policy.

The disparity between positions of privileged exemption and the inescapable exposure to radiation following the Chernobyl meltdown is a juxtaposition with which the poem engages thoroughly. The sociological disparity, the human catastrophe and the contamination of the environment are examples by which the poem represents the extent of ongoing social destruction. The suppression of information and the paralysis of any European-led recovery efforts further exemplify the disparity between the status of those monitoring the situation from Scandinavia, and the people on the ground. The relationship further reinforces the analogous division between those with the privilege of scientific specialisation versus those reliant on dangerous technology left to fend for themselves in a time of crisis. Perril argues that by calling into account the complicity of Western society to

²⁸³ “The Times Diary: Bitter Sweet (94),” 11 October 1985, *The Times Digital Archive*, 15 April 2011 <<http://find.galegroup.com/tda/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=TTDA&userGroupName=uwa&tabID=T003&docPage=article&searchType=AdvancedSearchForm&docId=CS268669259&type=multipage&contentSet=LTO&version=1.0>>.

the violence in South Africa Prynne has cast the poem and the expression of lyric in the shade of structures of power, control and suppression.²⁸⁴

Structures of control, risk and exposure are examined through the manner in which, for Western nations, the Chernobyl meltdown was cast as an information crisis useful in addressing and augmenting nuclear energy policy, as opposed to making active redress for the situation. Failures in the system of communication, misinformation and deficiencies in reporting the dangers to those directly affected by Chernobyl were not only failures of the Soviet state, but also of the Swedish government and the SSI (the Swedish National Institute of Radiation Protection). Stig Arne Nohrstedt is one of the main theorists on the Chernobyl crisis and information policy, who, along with Daniel Nohrstedt, discusses the flaws in the system of communication as an exemplification of ‘latent distrust and power usurpation’²⁸⁵ that enforced communication failures and contributed to a crisis of legitimacy regarding the disaster. As is outlined in the Stockholm Report, Daniel Nohrstedt and Stig Arne Nohrstedt’s expanded argument is that systemic failures of communication were to a large degree based upon four conditions. The first condition is that ‘new information or knowledge presupposes a familiar context’, but receivers in the position of conduits had a lack of knowledge of radioactive materials, and hence confused the message. Secondly, a general blockage of lines of communication destabilised the ability of authorities to communicate coherently. Thirdly, there was a lack of ‘language common to senders and receivers’.²⁸⁶ Finally, discrepancies in lines of authority and command were also a contributing factor. Through these means the informational demands of the sender were elided on all accounts.

²⁸⁴ Perril, “Hanging on Your Every Word,” [n.p.].

²⁸⁵ Stig Arne Nohrstedt, “The Information Crisis in Sweden after Chernobyl,” *Media Culture Society*, 13 (1991) 477-497, 480. Nohrstedt is referencing Jürgen Habermas on communicative systems.

²⁸⁶ Stig Arne Nohrstedt, “The Information Crisis in Sweden after Chernobyl,” 481.

The communicative flaws in information exchange and transmission provide an analogy to Perril's insistence that the poem circumscribes the lyrical stance of the poet while a complex of voices elides authority and eradicates the receiver's trust in the system.²⁸⁷ For Jay Basu, the crisis is implicated by and implicit within the poem's system of information transmission, as 'Prynne systematically destabilises and decentres the notion of a unified, single subject-“voice”. Instead, the reader is confronted with the constant inscription of conditions which both guarantee and limit the individual point of view.'²⁸⁸ This additionally problematises the reader's ability to trust the authority of the poetic medium regarding issues of access, exposition and the privilege of expression.

The poetic register through which the disaster is represented details natural phenomena through reflections on biblical passages, a poetic-complex that instigates questions about the function of belief in systems of technological and ontological control. Articulating this representation, Reeve and Kerridge write:

The dispersal and continuing action, or immortality of radioactive particles released from the Chernobyl reactor is reabsorbed in traditional Christian mythology of nature. 'Here admit one at a time' suggests both the gates of Heaven and admission to some cultural spectacle, while Christianity's allegorical use of 'sheep' and 'dew' is a disturbingly exact fit over the literal account of Chernobyl's natural consequences.²⁸⁹

The references to 'dew' and its redemptive and cleansing connotations are subverted in the collection to a degree not witnessed since 'Es Lebe der König'. Atrocity forces the negation of any comforting assertions associated with the sustentive elements therein. The poem 'No

²⁸⁷ Perril, "Hanging on Your Every Word," [n.p.].

²⁸⁸ Jay Basu, "The Red Shift: Trekking J.H. Prynne's *Red D Gypsum*," *Cambridge Quarterly*, 30 (2001) 19-36, 30.

²⁸⁹ N.H. Reeve and Richard Kerridge, *Nearly too Much: The Poetry of J.H. Prynne* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995) 34.

Song No Supper’ and its thematic interest in auto-cannibalism, representations of the sustentive, and the effects of the Chernobyl disaster upon natural phenomena, are ideas to which this analysis will return. At this preliminary point it will serve to examine ‘Fool’s Bracelet’ in its representation of Africa. Through the concept of sword-play (mumming)²⁹⁰ and an examination of the distanced position of the witness, the poem critiques the dominant Western depiction and treatment of Africa.

This is an example in which, according to Fredric Jameson’s terminology, the dissemination of narrative relations in the communication and depiction of violent acts eliminates the possibility of ‘cognitive mapping’.²⁹¹ In this way, the distanced position of the reader of *The Times*’s newspaper accounts of ‘necklace killings’ in apartheid-era South Africa, constituting the thematic entry into the poem ‘Fool’s Bracelet’, enacts a desubjectivisation of those accounts by eradicating the possibility of any ‘ability to locate the experience of [the] situation within a meaningful [and contextualised, experiential] whole’.²⁹² Reflective of the immunity sought by Western governments that continued to fund South Africa throughout apartheid, the poem’s privilege of exemption is the ‘a dream to pass right on through’ (342) the contamination of language and ongoing atrocity.

²⁹⁰ It should be acknowledged that the mumming has a direct parallel in South Africa: ‘Intonga’, or stick fighting, is a common pastime amongst the Afrikaans and Zulu cultures. ‘Stick fighting allows Zulu people to reaffirm their ties with past traditions while moving into the future. It remains a living tradition in a changing country. Stick fighting still takes place in its traditional contexts, especially in rural areas, but it has also transcended its traditional borders. Under Apartheid legislation, black people were prohibited from carrying weapons, traditional or otherwise. For self-defense purposes, men carried inconspicuous sticks or umbrellas that could be turned into weapons. This practice continues in present-day South Africa. The techniques associated with using these objects as weapons relate strongly to stick fighting techniques.’ Thomas Green and Joseph Svinth, *Martial Arts of the World* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 2010) 22. Stick fighting and its connection to masculinity, as well as its role in violence in South Africa, is the focus of a study by Benedict Carton and Robert Morrell: “Zulu Masculinities, Warrior Culture and Stick Fighting: Reassessing Male Violence and Virtue in South Africa,” *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 38:1, 31-53.

²⁹¹ Fredric Jameson, “Cognitive Mapping,” *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, eds. C. Nelson and L. Grassberg (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998) 347-68, 347.

²⁹² Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008) 76.

Critique of Western misalignments of value and the privilege of exemption remains tantamount throughout *Bands Around the Throat*.

Language may be influenced by violence under contingent circumstances that distort the logic of symbolic communication, disrupting the semantic and semiotic operations of language.²⁹³ To explore the manner in which systems of language incorporate both latent and patent aspects of violence within their historical and etymological structure, Prynne introduces children's verse into the collection's lexicon. As we shall examine in greater detail, the poem 'Fool's Bracelet' and other poems in the collection pair children's lyrical verse with embedded reportage as a means of exemplifying the Cartesian threshold of what can and cannot be experienced in symbolic language. The idea that children may giddily sing songs about the Black Plague seems profoundly unlikely until one actually hears a child singing 'Ring-Around-The-Rosie'. This exemplifies the contradictions and violence implicit in language use and language acquisition experienced without a contingent, referential system.

An experience of language and an understanding of violence within that experience establish the need for a referential system by which to ascertain meaning. The same set of referential norms used to ascertain meaning in language is also presupposed in relation to issues of systemic violence. Žižek relates this parallel use of referential norms in the following manner: '[w]hen we perceive something as an act of violence, we measure it by a presupposed standard of what the "normal" non-violent situation is – and the highest form of violence is the imposition of this standard with reference to which some events appear as "violent". This is why language itself, the very medium of non-violence, of mutual

²⁹³ Žižek, *Violence*, 61.

recognition, involves unconditional violence.’²⁹⁴ To raise the issue of referentiality and an understanding of the conditions of violence depicted is to address the positional condition of the speaker and inherently raise questions about privileged, distanced exemption.

The polymorphous nature of violence expressed through poetic language and the adaptations of meaning through the process of language acquisition are exemplified in ‘Fool’s Bracelet’. In introducing this concept let us examine the following fragments of verse from the poem, following the dictate demanding the reader to ‘press on / without fear of explanation’ (342):

*Ah Curly do your day is done, The course
of woe is quickly run. Low without loss
your shining heart Has nothing but the better
part. The star of swords is put upon
his neck. He falls to the ground.*

[...]

*See what is won,
We have cut him down, Like the evening sun
His only crown. (342)*

The poem utilises lines mimicking children’s verse, which Ian Patterson informs us have sprung from *Revesby Mummers Play*, introduce the ideas of play, mimetic violence and violence as a sacrificial medium ensuring the consummation of harvest (and hence sustenance) as overarching manifolds of meaning within the text.²⁹⁵ Inherent in this account

²⁹⁴ Žižek, *Violence*, 55. This position of Žižek’s can be augmented and compared with Prynne’s own arguments regarding violence and language usage in “A Quick Riposte to Handke’s Dictum About War and Language”, in which Prynne argues that all language is complicit and concordant with acts of violence and is marked by ‘whatever depravity or nobility an exercise of linguistic analysis may discover within the human record’. Prynne further states that violence acts upon language as ‘a concatenation of intensely linguistic processes, in which the whole identity and propensity of individual language-histories are worked into the deepest complicity.’ (Prynne, “A Quick Riposte,” *Quid*, 6 (2000) 23-24.

²⁹⁵ Ian Patterson, “Fool’s Bracelet,” *Quid*, 17 (2006), ed. Keston Sutherland (Falmer, Brighton: Barque Press, 2006) 50-52.

of violence as play and displays of ritual violence are contexts of violence extending into acts of social conformity, potlatch and the practice of social sacrifice.

Constructs of violence and interventional assistance are also parodied throughout the collection *Bands Around the Throat* by the continual contrast of positions between the First and Third Worlds. This is explicit in the division of perspectives regarding Chernobyl and the black-on-black violence expressed in the early poems, as well as in the semiotic loop established in the poems 'Lend a Hand' and 'Fresh Running Water'. These two poems criticise the United Nations programmes that collect money for wells as a form of distanced intervention, which expresses a vicarious and contingent interaction with the subject. The poems express, mockingly, a First World subjugation of the Third World, 'learning [...] to be helpless by refusal,' (352) as the poem 'Lend a Hand' phrases it. The poem represents oppressive violence as subjectively experienced as systemic violence, which reinforces class structure as well as disparities in life expectancy and access to the basic materials of life, such as 'Fresh Running Water'. As such, the reader is engaged at a position of subjective removal, or through a system which ignores the potential for direct actions, in an operation designed to lessen one's guilt. Called into question are degrees of removal from the experiential conditions one supports by inaction. Just as expressions of economic sanction ('bans', punning on the titular 'bands') are conveyed through British nationalistic symbols, their semiotic operation functions on constructs of domination and power. The symbolic, referential power, depicted through British acts of mock-sacrificial violence is notable throughout the collection. The privilege of exemption is demonstrated through the representation of a 'necklace killing' as a pageant-like proceeding designed to ensure laughter and a good harvest in the First World. Symbols of violence maintain the semiotic expression of unconditional dominance and brutality in a referential system that includes

the experience of South African apartheid. As the British represent a dominance and colonisation over the Afrikaans and the Afrikaans represent a dominance and colonisation over the black South Africans, these symbols of oppression hang like so many bands around the throat – not as adornments, but definitive constrictions on the conditions of voice and expression. The poem functions on the parameters of domination by normalising this violence; whether it is the expressed concern of the poet or not, the symbolic force of these colonial relations bears more weight than has been previously read. The poem enacts a dialectic function of language by manipulating the causal connections, forcing the reader to question how language is wielded in the representation of violence and how this synecdochic relationship between language and violence is parodied, exemplified as a framework and problematised throughout the text.

The poems from *Bands Around the Throat* which deal most explicitly with violence stemming from sub-Saharan Africa are ‘Fool’s Bracelet’, ‘Punishment Routines’, ‘Lend a Hand’ and ‘Fresh Running Water’, respectively the first, seventh, ninth and tenth poems in the collection. Simon Perril establishes the image-complex relating the poems to African violence through political news reports of ‘necklace murders’ that were published in *The Times* (22 April 1986) and *The Daily Telegraph* (28 May 1987).²⁹⁶ What these specific poems do, in addition to exemplifying Perril’s argument about the ‘lyrical stance and the position of the poet’,²⁹⁷ is provide a synecdochic framework through which the collection addresses conditions of exemption from both catastrophe and inter-subjective violence. This framework also focuses attention on the dialectics of bearing witness, and the systematically-derived binaries of care and control. Prynne represents the vengeance-style ‘necklace’ killings – undertaken by placing a fuel-filled burning tire around the victim’s

²⁹⁶ Perril, “Hanging on Your Every Word,” [n.p.].

²⁹⁷ Perril, “Hanging on Your Every Word,” [n.p.].

neck – as experienced solely through news reports, and thus at the furthest possible physical remove from the site of violence. Socioeconomic policies that enforce systemic violence and oppression are established in the poems as complicit in the perpetration of subjective violence, providing the reader with a striking artifice to begin to discuss the political ramifications and the human cost of the Chernobyl meltdown, the poems' other major thematic image-complex.

Using the poem as a rhetorical instrument to discuss ongoing violence as well as subjective and collective complicity in the manifestation of oppression or colonial dominance has its limitations. These issues are addressed by Peter Middleton in the essay 'Who am I to speak? The politics of subjectivity in recent British poetry'. In this essay Middleton writes,

For political writing to be acceptable to the public sphere policed by the establishment, it must be possible to repackage it as an easily decodable work about universal human issues like the resistance to tyranny or the dangers of bigotry. Work that constructs its relation to the public sphere through an investigation of subjectivity in language, as most innovative writing does, especially poetry, does not lend itself to such appropriation, especially if it is committed to an emancipatory discourse close to home.²⁹⁸

As Middleton points out, the poem must strike at the failure of a political culture that cannot produce a dialogic system capable of establishing adequate understanding to discussions of the political conditions of thought. The pairing of acts of violence in the poem with children's lyrical verse also speaks to society's capacity for establishing systems of control. Indeed, the children's verse may also instigate thought into a Wittgensteinian theory of symbolic representations and language use that, through acquisition, work to

²⁹⁸ Peter Middleton, "Who am I to speak? The politics of subjectivity in recent British poetry," *New British Poetries; The Scope of the Possible*, eds. Robert Hampson and Peter Barry (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993) 112-18, 110-11.

define the categories of textual relation and referentiality. It is through one's reading of the collection that disparities in the operations of varying bodies of language take shape. This process also replicates the inscription of the historical onto the corporeal body, as is demonstrated further in Prynne's later poem 'Refuse Collection'.

The specialised languages of economic theory and financial trading, biblical dicta, reports on psychoanalytic testing, and nursery rhymes all have contingent and mixed operations within the poem. Signifying his agreement with Reeve and Kerridge, Mellors argues that the poems function upon 'contingent constructions of identity', but also work within the frame of Habermas's 'critique of the privatisation of the self' as a subjective identity borne through language processes, from acquisition into a sphere of shared language.²⁹⁹ For Reeve and Kerridge, this is accounted for

when Prynne confronts a reader with alien, specialist discourses, [and] he is challenging that reader to resist being pushed to the side; to enter, instead, intersubjective relations with a world most of which will always be external. The reader is not only asked to examine the conditions of his or her marginalisation in regards to powerful instrumental discourses, but also drawn from the margins into a kind of public space, for an encounter with these discourses.³⁰⁰

In *Bands Around the Throat* an encounter with these discourses entails an encounter with the process of language acquisition and frames of referentiality. The collection replicates the conditions of writing Mellors speaks of when he argues that 'avant-garde writing disrupts the symbolic's dominant hold on the semiotic by pushing communicative language beyond the bounds of sense, creating in its radical disjunctions of syntax and its stress on

²⁹⁹ Anthony Mellors, "Toy of Thought: Prynne and the Dialectics of Reading," *Salt*, 11 (1999) 55-68, 62. In addition, Reeve and Kerridge argue that a reading of Prynne should encompass an understanding of Habermas's idea of 'the "colonisation of the lifeworld" – the ways in which capitalism commodifies knowledge and makes discourses instrumental in the operation of power-structures'. This constitutes a definitive avenue for exploration in the poem *Bands Around the Throat*.

³⁰⁰ Reeve and Kerridge, *Nearly Too Much*, 134-5.

rhythm, word-play, etc., a space in which the semiotic is allowed to resurface'.³⁰¹ What this amounts to is a forceful imperative for the reader to assess how the act of witnessing is carried out at linguistic, social and personal levels, where violence is experienced through the poem as a 'continuous formation, rupture and reformation'³⁰² of sensation.

The poem replicates and utilises a polyvalent complex of voices and perspectives, which extends to the point of questioning an attestation of violence and eliding the voice of the witness. 'Necklace killings' were typically undertaken as a means of retribution within the South African black community when another member of the community had been suspected of complicity or collusion with government or pro-apartheid forces. Their appearance in the poems begs the question: at what point does the representation of violence done to a disenfranchised subject, by a group whose cultural and geographic distance could not be further removed from the writer's own, represent an additional oppression and violence done unto them? If the representation of this violence subsumes the possibility of self-expression, then the writer's privilege of rhetoric and representation establishes another level of systemic oppression over the victims. Does the fetishisation of violence done unto another and the author's vicarious interaction with the subject allow any possibility of expression from the locale of this violence? Is this a matter of contaminated expression? Bearing these preliminary questions in mind, we may begin to analyse the parallel textualities that run through the text and examine the binaries of care and control which are exerted from a position of rhetorical privilege in the poems relating to Africa. As a supplement to Perril's argument about the lyrical rhetoric present in the collection, it shall be argued that forms of oppression represented through economic and sociolinguistic means are ultimately the true constrictions placing *Bands Around the Throat*.

³⁰¹ Mellors, "Toy of Thought: Prynne and the Dialectics of Reading," 64.

³⁰² Reeve and Kerridge, *Nearly Too Much*, 121.

The Economy of a ‘Fool’s Bracelet’.

In the collection, a comparative structure exists which establishes juxtapositions between the macroscopic and the microscopic. It is this contrast which demands that the African violence within *Bands Around the Throat* be read as a synecdoche of global violence. As a structural device the reading of ‘bands’ has connotations not only to circular, constricting or confining enclosures (perhaps evocative of makeshift community dwellings amongst Africa’s poorest communities, thus evoking demarcations of class and the stratification of varying levels of society), but also to the collection’s textual architecture, where a layered pattern emerges if viewing these bands from a horizontal position. What the synecdochic relationship establishes is a comparative device that parallels relations to the vicarious engagement with violence, in which the reader is complicit even if that complicity is not forthright. Functioning as metonymic structure, these *Bands*, or layers, express designated levels of dominance and engagement suggested by Prynne’s selection of themes. This metonymic structure ‘presupposes a movement from the intrinsic to the extrinsic in its very structure, from the individual fact or work towards some larger socio-economic reality behind it’.³⁰³ Metonymy as an expression of emphasis establishes these global frameworks ‘as an implied comparison, and through its own construction sets the problem of the relationship to the socio-economic base or *infrastructure* as the precondition for its completeness as a thought’.³⁰⁴

What is established through this synecdochic focus is a parallel textuality that in turn highlights reading conditions through which violence is depicted. This comparative

³⁰³ Fredric Jameson, *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974) 4.

³⁰⁴ Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, 4.

analysis between textual levels inaugurates questions about scales of violence, its containment or extrapolative effect, the positional contingency of the reader to the violence, and the reader's own subjective position in relation to the causes of violence. The implication of this poem being written and dominantly received in the First World, free from all but occasional subjugation to violence, establishes a binary suggestive of G.W.F. Hegel's master-slave dialectic. For Perril, sociopolitical engagement is enacted through the conflicting positions of the lyrical register, where 'the lyric voice of protest and outrage is particularly dubious for its alignment with two conflicting positions: that of master – of the privileged and specialised instrument of song – and slave: an emotional and political identification with the dispossessed and victimised'.³⁰⁵ While Perril's argument applies to the lyric voice's relation to authorial privilege, it ignores the layers of dominance established through colonial violence taking place in South Africa, where the master-slave dichotomy is all too easily read. The master-slave discourse also extends to Chernobyl, juxtaposing the technological mastery of nuclear power's creators against its end users.

As Pierre Bourdieu discusses in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 'relations of domination have the opacity and permanence of things'.³⁰⁶ The comparison between the macro- and microscopic structures dominate the dialogic function of the African-focused poems. It will serve to examine Bourdieu's position with regards to the master-slave relationship to extrapolate a reading of the poem 'Fool's Bracelet', which parallels the associative logic and potlatch between dominant groups and the oppressed. Establishing these levels of dominance between groups, at a subjective as well as a systemic level, is reliant on expressions of economic force and control. As Bourdieu writes,

³⁰⁵ Perril, "Hanging on Your Every Word," [n.p.].

³⁰⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) 186.

The fundamental ambiguity of all the institutions which modern taxonomies tend to present as economic is evidence that contrary strategies, which, as we have also seen in the case of the Master-Khammes (slaves) relationship, may coexist under the same name, are *interchangeable* ways of performing the same function, with the “choice” between overt violence and gentle hidden violence depending on the relative strength of the two parties at a particular time, and on the degree of integration and ethical integrity of the arbitrating group. In a society in which overt violence, the violence of the usurer or the merciless master, meets with collective reprobation and is liable either to provoke a violent riposte from the victim or to force him to flee (that is to say, in the absence of any other recourse, to provoke the annihilation of the very relationship which was intended to be exploited) symbolic violence, the gentler invisible form of violence, which is never recognised as such, and is not so much undergone as chosen, the violence of credit, conference, obligation, personal loyalty, hospitality, gifts, gratitude, piety – in short all the virtues honoured by the code of honour – cannot fail to be seen as the most economical mode of domination, i.e. the mode which best corresponds to the economy of the system.³⁰⁷

This position is expressed in the focus on African apartheid violence and the Western issue of non-intervention in the disaster of Chernobyl, and presents, as Bourdieu writes, interchangeable ways of establishing the same operative function of dominance, dependent on the system with which it engages.³⁰⁸

Within the thirty-two lines of the poem ‘Fool’s Bracelet’ (342), there exists a determined culpability and anxiety for those ‘waiting clients [...] casting away deterrent hope’. If the ‘spate of root filling’ that awaits the clients brings associative images of dental surgeries to the site of ‘deterrent hope’, it also speaks to the effects of Cold War anxieties on the populace; this equation of fear, hope and pain is a cognitive and telling image-complex. The phrase, ‘[w]hat / don’t you want’, incites the oncoming economic language, and also draws allusive parallels to the Buddha’s first noble truth, ‘all suffering stems from

³⁰⁷ Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 192.

³⁰⁸ Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 191.

desire’, in a ‘consumer age where desire endlessly proliferates’.³⁰⁹ The line anticipates the proliferation of its own designs. It also exposes a reversal of the line, ‘the spirit proof coming off the top’, to the point where proof of spiritual existence has been excised. The spiritual desolation and secularisation of society is one of the dominant themes that Birgitta Johansson reads into the text. ‘The upside of the song’ describes an *a priori* malfeasance and continual threat, given by the ‘sing-song’ of the poem’s fourth line, which intones biblical intimations of the afterlife and ‘a dream to pass right on through’.³¹⁰ Concepts of manufacturing and the saleability of consumer products are also constantly in play, from the value of the song to the value and marketing of the burning tire. Johansson makes much of the ‘teflon throat’, relating this back to Patricia Schroeder’s description of Ronald Reagan as the ‘Teflon president’.³¹¹ For Perril, ‘non-stick like a teflon throat’ presents ‘a vivid simile for lyric voice’s culpability – its deceptive presentation of itself as immune to the very forces it is simultaneously claiming to be all engulfing’.³¹² Furthermore, not only does the line have a linguistic and lyrical authorial resonance, it also maintains a thread of relations to domesticity, establishing base-line relativisms that invite a readerly response and stands opposed to the retributive, halting force the reader faces in denser moralistic lines. This representation speaks to the power and privilege of exemption, enacting immunity to consuming threats of violence.³¹³

The resonances of balladry in the implied and sustained negations of ‘done’, ‘woe’ and ‘gone’, which appear in the insertion of italicised lines, provide a dampening effect to

³⁰⁹ Perril, “Hanging on Your Every Word,” [n.p.].

³¹⁰ Birgitta Johansson, *The Engineering of Being: An Ontological Approach to J.H. Prynne* (Acta Universitatis Umensis: Umeå Studies in the Humanities, 1997) 179-181.

³¹¹ Johansson, *The Engineering of Being*, 180.

³¹² Perril, “Hanging on Your Every Word,” [n.p.].

³¹³ Perril, “Hanging on Your Every Word,” [n.p.].

the cumulative expression of the poem. The line that initiates this primary incursion of italicised lines, followed by the first of the italicised sections, reads,

To press on
without fear of explanation, refusing the jab:
*Ah Curly do your day is done, The course
of woe is quickly run. Low without loss
your shining heart Has nothing but the better
part. (342)*

The italicised lyric appears as an appendage to the imperative to ‘press on / without fear of explanation’ (342). The familiarity of the internally-rhymed verse steadies the reader’s reaction, moving him or her apprehensively through the ‘syntactical, typographical deformations, incompletions and mutilations’³¹⁴ of the rest of the poem. ‘Low without loss’ references the financial trading lexicon of the poem, while the conclusion to the first italicised fragment offers a hint at a redemptive moral stance. That ‘part’ falls as an abortive conclusion, dropped to the following line of the stanza, mimics the linear position and stranded ‘access’ of the ‘part’ in the poem’s second-to-last line:

buy on the rumour, sell on the fact. Only
a part gives access to the rest, you get
in at the ground floor too: *And his dance is gone.*

While the placement of the italicised ‘part’ does have connotations later in the poem, its deferred placement also ensures that the lines that follow, discussions of ritual sacrifice and forced engagement as a social phenomenon based in potlatch, are to be read as associative, if not entirely connected, acts. The critic Michael Haslam argues that ‘what is ceremonially,

³¹⁴ Simon Jarvis, “Clear as Mud: J.H. Prynne’s *Of Sanguine Fire*,” November 2003, *Jacket*, 24, 1 October 2010 <<http://jacketmagazine.com/24/jarvis.html>>.

ritually sacrificed is an image of human sacrifice that has had a literary pedigree'.³¹⁵ Although this contestation may be noticed in the poem's sardonic, playful tone, something more sinister is afoot:

The star of swords is put upon
his neck. He falls to the ground. Why not?
It is a root and branch arrangement, giving
the keys openly to a provident reversal,
to net uptake.

This act of mimetic sacrifice, as it is taken to be once the reader is certain that *Revesby Mummies Play* is the source for the italicised lines preceding it,³¹⁶ has a very real, if forgotten, historical parallel in Africa. The poem represents the death of a very real victim, whose death involves excruciating suffering, and this is a fact very often left undiscussed amongst Prynne's critics.

That '[t]he star of swords is put upon / his neck. He falls to the ground', and 'Why not?' it is implored – an address given as if in stage directions – compels the actor to represent the falsity of his death as more real, and thus more satisfying. That it is a 'root and branch arrangement' implies dismemberment and functions as a reference to computation trees in computer programming, expressly discussed in *Her Weasels Wild Returning*. But the line also addresses the 'Why not?' – one of the poem's two punctuated question– with a seemingly syllogistic response, giving the upshot of a providential financial end. The reply sardonically calls into question the sacrifice-for-sustenance model of harvest ritual – note also the semantic allusions repeated in the title 'No Song No Supper' – and provides an automated, system-derived response.

³¹⁵ Michael Haslam, "Fool's Bracelet" *Quid*, 17 (2006) 56.

³¹⁶ Ian Patterson, "Fool's Bracelet," *Quid*, 17 (2006) 52-54, *passim*.

If it can be stated, and surely the mere point will raise a war footing amongst some critics, that there is a naivety in Prynne, then it should be squarely argued that this is where it lies. Here Bourdieu's position should be reiterated, that 'relations of domination have the opacity and permanence of things'.³¹⁷ Representing retributive acts of murder, which are the result of collusion or scapegoating as sustained by a culture stratified on the basis of race and ethnicity, may be allowable from a Western perspective. The point may be argued that this act of representation does nothing that is not done by reportage. However, in writing on authorial positions and political expression, Peter Middleton writes that '[p]oetry in Post-war England signifies cultural heritage. It sustains continuities with the past, with orderly class relation and with the rationality (reasonableness) that finds its outward symbols in the monarchy, church, the country estate and the educated voice.'³¹⁸ This is what is implicit in the language used to represent violence within the collection: a language with a heritage of colonisation, a language of sustained subjective and systemic oppression, a language secured in its privilege of exemption. Representing acts of murder through the guise of mumming, mimetic violence or theatrics provides a level of ambiguity surrounding the real events. The enactment of this violence through a literary antecedent encompasses those forms of dominance structured in the history of the language. Equating the death of a black African man on African soil with a British tradition of theatrical sacrifice eradicates the meaning of his death entirely. The act and the poet's vicarious engagement with this violence, its thematic objectification and ultimate eradication of the victim's voice, is an expressed act of violence. As Bourdieu further argues,

Objectification guarantees the permanence and cumulativeness of material and symbolic acquisitions which can then subsist without the agents having to recreate them continuously, and in their entirety by deliberate action; but because the profits

³¹⁷ Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 186.

³¹⁸ Middleton, "Who am I to speak?," 110.

of these institutions are the objects of differentiated appropriation, objectification also and inseparably ensures the reproduction of the structure of the distribution of the capital which, in its various forms, is the precondition for such appropriation, and in so doing, reproduces the structure of the relations of dominance and dependence.³¹⁹

Thus, through a vicarious engagement with the subject, a distanced exemption in the dialectic of witnessing, the victim's life as well as the violence of his or her death have been appropriated and re-represented as a symbolic death, a sacrifice given to appease a British god of the harvest. The synecdochic focus on Africa enacts the very same divisions inherent in subjective and symbolic violence. In representing the layers of economic and social violence over the South African black community, Prynne's 'Fool's Bracelet' engages with and problematises, yet still displays a structural acknowledgement, of the semantic and semiotic implications of the devaluation and expendability of a black South African life.

For the utilisation of these images in Prynne's poetic construction to be accepted without reproach, they must allow the reader a generative, positive response. The reader could begin to question the use of the images in framing a counter-narrative, as symbols used in the service of an ideological or political ideal. The poem is constructed from and problematises the language of governments and economic systems of control, which shows the poem to be actively resisting the nature of these languages. If the poem's aim is to break the ideological systems that control language by displaying how this language functions and infiltrates media reporting, his use of symbolic violence may be viewed in the same light. To envision this use of human symbols as generative, the reader must be able to ascertain where the poem problematises the language of representation and what outcomes

³¹⁹ Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 184.

the poem educates. Just as Prynne may seek the destruction of systems of language used to control information and capital, the reader would expect the same outcome regarding the use of human symbols. While his work may aim towards the destruction of language systems, Prynne would doubtlessly acknowledge this fight as unending and therefore incomplete. Yet it takes the destruction of commonly used language to highlight the manner in which this language is exploitative and to enact a cognitive change in how we collectively apprehend and respond to this language. For the use of these images to offer more than an exploitative symbol of racist power relations it must define an interaction with the oppressed that allows for the subjective expression of the victim and exposes the corruption of the symbols imposed upon them. In the representations of Indigenous Australian culture in *Acrylic Tips*, the subjective expression of the oppressed is coherent, encoded yet resonant, whereas in *Bands Around the Throat* no such allowance is made. If the reader is to create a generative response to these symbols, he or she must be able to acknowledge that the processes creating the cognitive frameworks of social knowledge are inherently problematic, limited in terms of engagement, derived from a distanced knowledge and devoid of the rigour of experience or interaction with the oppressed.

Beyond this singular, problematic human symbol, *Bands Around the Throat* represents the First World's relationship with Africa as resulting from neoliberalist capitalist incursion, expressed through the privilege of rhetoric and in the 'temporariness or volatility of almost all the arrangements of social existence'.³²⁰ Technology and modernisation and their resultant effects on the capitalist structure of developing nations is explored through Africa, as well as in relation to Chernobyl. Symbolic representations of

³²⁰ Jean Comaroff and Achille Mbembe, "Ethics of Scale: Relocating Politics After Liberation; Africa in Theory: A Conversation Between Jean Comaroff and Achille Mbembe," ed. Jesse Shipley, *Anthropological Quarterly*, 83.3 (Summer 2010) 653-678, 659.

dominance in the African context (and perhaps in the rhetorical ‘othering’ of the populace of the Soviet Union through the Cold War) must be dealt with as contingent upon and complicit in the development of capitalism. For political scientist and violence theorist Achille Mbembe,

There is the question of labour which, at least in the history of capitalism in South Africa, cannot be unlinked from the histories of race and of the body specifically the black body, the body that is at the same time a commodity, but a body-commodity which enters into the realm of capital under the paradoxical sign of the superfluous – superfluity. But what does the superfluous designate? In the history of race and capital in South Africa, the superfluous means, on the one hand, valorisation of black labour-power and, on the other hand, its dispensability – the dialectics of valuation and dissipation, indispensability and expendability. It seems to me this dialectic has been radicalised in the neo-liberal movement. The dialectics of expendability and indispensability have been radicalised in the sense that today many people are no longer indispensable specimens. [...] Today, the tragedy is not to be exploited, but to be utterly deprived of the basic means to move, to partake of the general distribution of things and resources necessary to produce a semblance of life. The tragedy is to not be able to escape the traps of temporariness.³²¹

The concepts of temporariness and the economic conditions that cause starvation in Africa are used sardonically and often as puns in the African-focused poems of *Bands Around the Throat*. Economic conditions and their relation to the sustenance instigate discord between developed and developing countries. ‘In the Pink’ plays upon a valuation of flesh and blood, as ‘In the Pink’ originally referred to being in a perfect state of health.³²² Doubling the pun, ‘in the red’ is connotative of being in a state of debt, which creates an interplay between health and capital intrinsic to the collection’s image complexes.

Technology’s reign is felt as ‘the word you give then / is padlocked by voiceprint,’ (350) referencing not only the constrictive conditions of technology but the manner in

³²¹ Jean Comaroff and Achille Mbembe, “Ethics of Scale,” 660.

³²² “pink, n.5 and adj.2”. *OED Online*. December 2012. Oxford University Press. 28 January 2013 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/144203?redirectedFrom=in+the+pink>>.

which technology functions as a controlling language system, with the ‘Punishment Routines’ of the poem applied with computational and systemic anonymity. This systemisation of violence attests to the changing nature of violence as it appears to South Africans, and the fluctuations in antagonism are intimately tied to the systems of capital. For Žižek, ‘therein resides the fundamental systemic violence of capitalism, much more uncanny than any direct pre-capitalist socio-ideological violence: this violence is no longer attributable to concrete individuals and their “evil” intentions, but is purely “objective”, systemic violence’.³²³ The poem ‘Punishment Routines’ (350) deals with the difference in infrastructural power relations by focusing on prospective change. The poem represents those ‘devoted to hope itself’ in a time when ‘[n]othing / changes the will to change nothing,’³²⁴ and it instigates questions of positive and negative freedoms when the populace has ‘[cast] away deterrent hope’ (342). At the poem’s closure there is the line, ‘Eat little / and speak less, bleeding inside the mouth’, which addresses points of conquest, sustenance and sacrifice as the effects of dominance infiltrate the system.

Language Acquisition and Children’s Verse.

In the poems ‘Lend a Hand’ and ‘Fresh Running Water’ ideas of violence and aid are mediated through an assemblage of neoliberal pursuits. ‘Fresh Running Water’ is a sardonic play on UNICEF’s advertising campaign aimed at collecting donations to dig wells and provide the basic necessities of life to remote African communities. ‘Lend a Hand’ seems an imploringly mocking comment on the moral imperatives of First World

³²³ Žižek, *Violence*, 11.

³²⁴ This line reinterprets Olson’s idea that ‘what does not change is the will to change’, from Charles Olson, *Collected Prose*, eds. Donald Allen and Benjamin Friedlander (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997) 246.

nations to be involved in Third World affairs as a lessening of their guilt. A reading of 'Lend a Hand' (352) shows the visitors 'hurt', learning 'to be helpless by refusal,' as those sent to directly provide aid are made to feel 'helpless' by a refusal of their offering. The poem mocks the moral vanity of aid workers who appear 'to seek redress' from their wellspring of guilt and righteousness and end up hurt by their incapacity to lend a hand. Then, '[o]ut in the swim' a new line of entrenched do-gooders arrive and the village can 'be rid of the old stock.' In this line 'swim' appears to mean the clear part of the liquid which floats above the sediment; as well as being connotative of the current of affairs or news or opinion.³²⁵ That the poem ends with the familiar cascade of 'and gently down the stream' unambiguously brings back concepts of language acquisition, child's play and the moralistic structure of children's verse.

The referential use of nursery rhymes in the collection is further explored in the poem 'Fresh Running Water', which introduces language games within the text. In using language games the poem reinforces ideas of contingent and dominant cultures, as 'the most striking aspect of the language game is culturally constructed: "What belongs to a language game is a whole culture"'.³²⁶ The language games and children's verse that filter through the collection function as a safety device, a childlike regression from the horror of bearing witness. The poem castigates the moral imperative of those whose sole aim is to help, but who do so without acknowledging the global-capitalist systems that establish disparities in life expectancies and unequal access to the necessities of life. In addition to their use as a safety device, the insertions of children's verse also represent something of a vicarious enjoyment, which again represents the problem of the spectator's fascination with

³²⁵ "swim, n.". *OED Online*. March 2011. Oxford University Press. 16 April 2012 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/195838?rskey=r5SkZV&result=1&isAdvanced=false>>.

³²⁶ Marjorie Perloff, "From Theory to Grammar: Wittgenstein and the Aesthetic of the Ordinary," *New Literary History*, 25. 4 (1994) 899-923, 906.

violence. The text is problematised not only through its representations of violence, but, perhaps more damningly, a vicarious enjoyment that exists even for those attempting to practice direct acts of intervention.

The children's verse and language games in the collection seem to address *how* one moves from processes of language acquisition into more complex forms of thought. The collection contains scientific, poetic and ekphrastic references from a striking array of sources, including *The History of English Law Before Edward II*, *The Book of Psalms*, Shakespeare's plays and children's verse. The diversity of these references call to mind Wittgenstein's statement addressing the complexity and cohesiveness of language as experienced through game-play. He writes, '[w]e might think that in teaching a child such *language games* we are not teaching him a language but are only preparing him for it. But these games are complete; nothing is lacking.'³²⁷ In *The Blue Book* of lecture notes, Wittgenstein writes,

I shall in the future again and again draw your attention to what I shall call *language games*. These are ways of using signs simpler than those in which we use the signs of our highly complicated everyday language. *Language Games* are the forms of language with which a child begins to make use of words. The study of *language games* is the study of primitive forms of language or primitive languages. [...] When we look at some such simple forms of language the mental mist which seems to enshroud our ordinary use of language disappears. We see activities, reactions, which are clear-cut and transparent. On the other hand we recognise in these simple processes forms of language not separated by a break from our more complicated ones.³²⁸

From the process of language acquisition and linguistic development, Wittgenstein's understanding is brought to bear upon the whole complexity of language, even if the

³²⁷ Perloff, "From Theory to Grammar: Wittgenstein and the Aesthetic of the Ordinary," 905.

³²⁸ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *The Blue and The Brown Books* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958) 17.

language exists as a component part within an undefined referential system. Echoing Wittgenstein, Prynne argues that '[n]ursery rhymes, like popular hymns, train their readers and hearers to learn quickly how to grasp their recognisable structures and features [... because they represent] part of the language process in its largest sense, and of the world to which it is connected'.³²⁹

To extrapolate a number of the ekphrastic references in the poem 'Fresh Running Water' (353), it will serve to begin by examining the prosodic form of the poem. Each of the poem's three eleven-line stanzas starts with a highly indented opening line and closes with half-lines. The stanzas each close with a punning refrain, refracting the 'Fresh Running Water' of the poem's title: 'there is no call / for any other run on the town'; 'no writ runs here, apart'; and 'to cram shut the stay / of the home run in time.' Most immediately connotative is the final line, with its striking relation to a heroic act in baseball – the national game of the United States and the official game of capitalism– in which a hit wins the game. The line also alludes to 'the home cage', referenced in 'Rates of Return' (345), and initiates thoughts on physical play as well as games of language acquisition in the establishment of socially mediated systems of knowledge, exchange and conquest. Implicit within this final line is the inference that the physical catalyst for South Africa's capitalist drive was as American as baseball or apple pie.

The poem's alliterative first sentence reads:

At a shout
rain downs in deep blue and in novel compliance,
a due date for departure triggers the odds
breaking over this news in terms of life
or cash. (353)

³²⁹ J.H. Prynne, *Stars, Tigers and the Shape of Words*, The William Matthews Lectures, 1992 (London: Birkbeck College, 1993) 1-61, 35.

In this line the constant repetition of the consonant ‘d’ is pronounced with a balanced stride, a command is given – ‘[a]t a shout’ – and the question, ‘[c]an you be helped to any less / warranty’, follows; the answer returns always with the promise of less. The following fragment, ‘Strike the shepherd / upon your sweet life,’ contains at least two references: *Zachariah* 13:7 has the line, ‘strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered’, mocking thoughts of Jesus as the shepherd and his prophecy as God’s will, perhaps alluding in ‘Fresh Running Water’ to the divine leadership role assumed by many politicians. ‘[U]pon your sweet life’, recalls Shakespeare’s *Millicent* stating, ‘Sweet life, farewell! ’Tis done: let that suffice’,³³⁰ accepting that death may be near and judgement day due. In ‘Fresh Running Water’ the line also summons up a notion of the valuation of a man’s life and labour, as discussed by Mbembe earlier. The following sentence from the poem, ‘Hang down / ye blood-red roses, hang down’, with its chanting quality and concluding emphasis, seems a suitable fit, as Stan Hugill identifies the phrase as one sung aboard Crimean troop transport ships, having the express purpose of organising labour to function efficiently in the raising of the halyard.³³¹

The ‘softened donation’ in the second stanza of ‘Fresh Running Water’ seems to speak to UNICEF’s money-for-wells campaign that ran throughout the late 1980s and early 1990s. The phrase establishes a semiotic loop which functions on the First World entitlements and disparities in life-conditions that afford First World citizens the expendable income to make such donations. The donation provides a well for a needy

³³⁰ William Shakespeare, *The Merry Devil of Edmonton* III, ii, 119-120.

³³¹ Stan Hugill, *Shanties from the Seven Seas: Shipboard Work-songs and Songs Used as Work-songs from the Great Days* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979) 366. A version of this line also appears in Peter Riley’s ‘Alstonfield VI’, in *The Day’s Final Balance: Uncollected Writings 1965-2006* (Exeter: Shearsman Books, 2007): ‘These are the ghosts in the white stone, / written in strata: Go down, you blood red roses. / And all the work in the land, as the stars fade, doesn’t / bear more result than a leaf reaching the ground, all / its joys a history’ (140).

community, but also alleviates the guilt occasioned by the disparities in lifestyles between the First and Third Worlds. Despite the laudatory efforts of the UNICEF programs, their reliance upon ‘softened donation’ functions upon the conceits of a system that pairs opulence with guilt, with the alleviation of this guilt viewed as a necessary imperative in motivating clients and soliciting donations. The historical connection between guilt and confession may also provide added emphasis to the ‘tokens’ which appear throughout the collection. One of the earlier definitions of ‘token’ which should be given weight is ‘A stamped piece of lead or other metal given (originally after confession) as a voucher of fitness to be admitted to communion’.³³² Thus the tokens represent not only authoritative command, speaking to or representing the act, but they also serve to demonstrate the divine power of authority. If the token is taken as a material object which signifies a debt owed, then its use in the collection connotes both material and moral value.

The opening lines of the second stanza of ‘Fresh Running Water’ present a parallel concept of self-image to that found in the poem *Wound Response*, referencing the process of material acquisition and the expectation of looking into a ‘brighter mirror’³³³:

Like a shadow
of softened donation the clouds screen her eyes,
the fair one at altitude, on a mirror-exchange
of historic cost basis, free as air, freely
rising to stare at the bypass graft list
as it flaps in the breeze. (353)

³³² "token, n., definition 9". *OED Online*. December 2012. Oxford University Press. 28 January 2013 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/202947?rskey=RHyc42&result=1>>.

³³³ Matthew Hall, “Past the Curve of Recall: A Reading of J.H. Prynne’s *Wound Response*,” September 2010, *VLAK* 1 (September 2010) 30-44, <http://issuu.com/litteraria/docs/vlak1_september_2010/1>. The phrase may be read as one of Prynne’s numerous references to Lacan’s mirror phase.

Just as the ‘brighter mirror’ in *Wound Response* plays with the circular notion of material acquisition and improved self-image, the analogy presented in ‘Fresh Running Water’ of being fit for Holy Communion is also mockingly deprecated. Further denouncing the disparity in valuations of life, and the possibility of salvation, is the starkly concentrated phrase, ‘ye contrite hearts’, which has its ekphrastic antecedent in Psalm VI in *Psalms for Social Worship*:

Rejoice, ye contrite hearts
The blood which Jesus spilt
While we with water you baptise
Will wash away your guilt.³³⁴

That the idea of Christian salvation, repentance before Holy Communion and baptism are some of the motivating factors for belief in, donation to, and voluntary work for UNICEF adds weight to the textual representation of natural atrocity through biblical dicta found earlier in the poem. Reinforcing the disparity between First and Third World nations, the line, ‘no writ runs here, apart’, instigates questions into the nature of law and entitlement.³³⁵

The third stanza shifts the focus of the poem, beginning with the second sentence:

With a fair wind
and a glancing blank look the action-pack
picks up speed from its place where to turn is harder
than stone; a little tired towards the close
of perfect play. (353)

³³⁴ Moravians, “Psalms for Social Worship,” *A collection of hymns, for the use of the Protestant Church of the United brethren* (Manchester: R. & W. Dean, 1809) 210.

³³⁵ Fredrick Pollock and Fredrick William Maitland, *The History of English Law Before The Time of Edward I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1898) 396. The phrase in reference is ‘No writ runs among them but the little writ of right.’

That the ‘action-pack / picks up speed’ presents a tautological proposition, as the phrase implies an *a priori* judgement on the state of motion undergone. ‘[T]o turn is harder / than stone’ may be a reference both to Olson as well as to a line from Shakespeare’s *Lucrece*, ‘Stone him with harden’d hearts harder than stones’.³³⁶ The ‘action-pack’ is also an imperative notion of the ongoing and consummate drive of the capitalist system; alongside the phrase, ‘never look / back’, given in the stanza’s third sentence, ‘action-pack’ implies that on the capitalist path there is no possibility for second judgements, and also no exit (punning on ‘bypass’). It implies that inclusion in the system negates and eradicates the idyllic past as well as any exchange system based on symbiotic benefit and communicative expression. ‘[P]erfect play’ is the behaviour or strategy which leads to the best possible outcome for the player, regardless of the response of the opponent. The term has its origins in Steinitz’s theories of chess, and has since invaded the modern baseball lexicon, indicating a no-hitter.³³⁷ This again reiterates the unification of American-style capitalism with game playing, exemplifying a ‘profits at any cost’ model.

Dwelling.

Under scrutiny in the latter half of the collection are changing concepts of communality and dwellings as social structures. These function as a metonymic structure within the collection, and they determine that conceptualisations of the domestic and acts of play are culturally constructed, acquired patterns of thought. The structural pattern of the house as the place of dwelling bears a connotative relation to the ‘House of the Lord’ as well as to the Chernobyl sarcophagus, named ‘ukrytiye’ (meaning ‘housing’). What is fundamentally

³³⁶ William Shakespeare, *The Rape of Lucrece*, 978.

³³⁷ Gary Danelishen, *The Final Theory of Chess* (Berea, OH: Phillidor Press, 2008) 13.

at issue is the idea of domesticity, challenged in cynical remarks about the saleability of the product. ‘The sills are rotten’ (353) implies a house which needs work, with the windows, as the basic frames of sight, unsealed due to weather-effects. The line ‘the rods / are good for years and years’ (353) describes the structural soundness of the commodity, with the nefarious reference to the rods from Chernobyl and radioactive immortality. The poem ‘Fresh Running Water’ doubles accounts of safety and domesticity, personal and procedural responsibility in the care of the *habitas*, with the line, ‘Prune what / you like’ (353). The reference to ‘gentle Jack’ stems from the story ‘The Friar and the Boy’ and the provisions of safety given within the tale.³³⁸ ‘[C]ram shut the stay’ seems an imperative attempt to seal the windows, ensuring their closure against the dangers imminent outside. The parodic closure of the children inside the house, as well as the phrase, ‘home run in time’, actively recalls the proverb, ‘a stitch in time saves nine’, which posits direct action as a salve against further work in an indictment of the inadequate safety measures in place at Chernobyl.

As has been highlighted, accounts of foreign and distanced violence positioned at a remove from the author, the language of play and language acquisition provide a prism through which conditions of voice in the poem can be examined. Mellors argues that ‘by giving voice to this withheld desire for play, the experimental text of the avant-garde put the subject both in process and on trial, allowing for the breakup and reformation of symbolic energy’.³³⁹ Thus the poem represents these issues as a means to examine the manner in which they problematise expression.

In allowing this linguistic play throughout the text, with its ‘disjunctions of syntax and its stress on rhythm’, the collection provides a space in which ‘the symbolic is allowed

³³⁸ Edmund Dulac, *Fairy Books: Fairy Tales of The Allied Nations* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1916) 119-129.

³³⁹ Mellors, “Toy of Thought,” 65.

to resurface'.³⁴⁰ However, the text is problematised by the causal connection between representations of violence and the onset of children's verse. The use of British folk tales and nursery rhymes provides a linguistic default setting to language in which reactions to violence are absorbed without any referential treatment. This process thus objectifies violence, and creates a situation in which experiential understanding is beyond the grasp of knowledge. The poem's textual construction contests remarks, such as that by Mellors, that 'the pleasure of a text is the creation of a space in which inner contradictions – of the text and of the reading subject – may be negotiated and accepted, the joy of going beyond the self that is the basis of play and intellection'.³⁴¹ What is criticised by Prynne is the idea of the pleasure of a text reliant upon the representation of violence. The representation of this violence has determinants in colonisation, and it is reinforced by the use of children's verse and folk tales of British origin in which layers of power are deeply embedded in the process of language acquisition and subjective development. The positional immunity implied by the inclusion of language games as a process of individuation presupposes a learned subjectivity complicit with acknowledged exemption. When systematic constructs of language have no means by which to present an understanding of subjective violence due to a lack of referential frames, language falls back to a default setting in which the act is only ever performative. It is the problem of bearing witness as tied to the subject's relation to social and systemic violence which is at the heart of the Chernobyl poems, and to which this examination will now shift its focus.

³⁴⁰ Mellors, "Toy of Thought," 64.

³⁴¹ Mellors, "Toy of Thought," 66.

Chernobyl and Imaginary Plenitude.

The discussion of the Chernobyl meltdown within the collection has a direct, thematic linkage to the poems ‘No Song No Supper’, ‘Marzipan’, ‘Rates of Return’ and ‘Ein Heldenleben’. While each of these poems variously represent the meltdown, it is ‘Marzipan’ which has received the most thorough critical attention. This fact may be due to the capacity of critics to formally link the poem to literary antecedents (to Dante and Eliot, for example) in addition to noting the poem’s overt representation of the Chernobyl disaster through language of natural phenomena and biblical dicta. As Mellors has pointed out in his essay-review, ‘Toy of Thought’, self-transcendence has long been at the core of much of Prynne’s poetry, from *Kitchen Poems* onwards.³⁴² This generally subsumed desire is not incompatible with the issue of collective presence and collective responsibility presented in the poems.³⁴³ In *Bands Around the Throat*, spiritual malaise is posited as a failure of belief.

Mellors makes the argument that

The desire for some form of transcendence, whether pastoral, political, or spiritual, is a necessary condition for moving forward, but it is also prone to mis-recognition as a hoped for imaginary plenitude, the filling of lack promised by the commodity form, nationalism, the family, etc. which, being impossible, inevitably results in a splenetic passive acceptance of the damaged lifeworld.³⁴⁴

Mellors’s assertion is of importance in the reading of the collection *Bands Around the Throat* against the Chernobyl record. ‘Imaginary plenitude’ is exemplified by the subject’s consumption of contaminated earth, ‘both gravel, dirt and mud,’ and ultimately by a familial or auto-cannibalistic act, ‘to gnaw my flesh and blood.’ (348) Implicit within the

³⁴² Mellors, “Toy of Thought,” 56.

³⁴³ In Prynne’s poem ‘The Common Gain, Reverted’, for instance, self-transcendence is the ‘impossible flame in the heart’ (89); it is presented as a relinquished hope, positioned in the singular body, of an individual within the collective.

³⁴⁴ Mellors, “Toy of Thought,” 56.

pattern of poems thematically centred on the Chernobyl disaster are scientific processes analysing fear as a learned behaviour. The poem utilises characteristics of experimental testing in its textual construction, emphasising the design of novel tests as well as the resignation and non-intervention characteristic of experimenters. Classical theories of learning and an aristocratic expectation of exemption are punningly criticised within the poem 'Ein Heldenleben'. Pragmatic concerns, such as censorship and the right to information, are engaged with through the Richard Strauss-derived title, which extends to a condemnation of the Soviet Union's playing of classical music on all national radio systems as an enforced silence against the release of information regarding the Chernobyl meltdown.

Issues of Heideggerian dwelling are also uniquely tied to this series of poems, and therefore issues of sustenance, starvation, bodily discipline, domesticity and corporeality are also raised with regard to the 'sarcophagus' erected over the damaged Chernobyl plant. It is through these metonymic structures that the poems of *Bands Around the Throat* play out, facilitating Prynne's creation of poetic constructs for the poem. A scene of horror, engaged with a privilege of distanced exemption and technological control, analogously indicts the ruling bodies within the Soviet Union as well as Western nations watching on with calculated indifference. If the individual was blessed with any hope for a life of transcendental meaning or the utopian promise found in *News of Warring Clans*, this has been eradicated by the text's fascination with the horror of atrocity.

'Marzipan' centres its concerns on restrictions upon the body politic, a moral preoccupation with restrained action and the redemptive voice. Consider the opening stanza of 'Marzipan' (347-8):

We poor shadows light up, again
slowly now in the wasted province
where colours fall and are debated
through a zero coupon, the de-
funct tokens in a soft regard.

This blanching of the spiritual, for Perril, has ‘become a desolate image of spectral existence, worryingly akin to Dante or Eliot’.³⁴⁵ Johansson and Perril are united in their identification of ‘the wasted province’ as tied into the spiritual vacuity of Eliot’s ‘The Waste Land’. Unifying the spiritual with the natural, Perril writes that ‘the “wasted province” is not just a modern consumer-hell, but is also the forested wetlands on the border between Ukraine and Byelorussia: land famed for its natural beauty’.³⁴⁶ The poor shadow that ‘we’ are designated as follows on from the transfigurative account given in ‘No Song No Supper’, where ‘in dark shadow you drop / silent’, a witness to the ‘green fire’ and incandescent cloud rising up in a ‘nuée ardente’ (344) from the source of the explosion. The ashen colouration of the image-complex indicates an irreversible change in weather and desolation commensurate with the spreading threat of radiation exposure. This natural description at the outset of a scene, ‘where colours fall’ (347), is unified with the plight of Dante through the phrase, ‘Un che piango,’ (344) from Canto VIII of the *Inferno*, where Filippo Argenti makes an appeal to the Pilgrim for pity but is addressed with an unusual sense of reprobation and disdain, finally to be shoved away by Virgil. Thus Prynne has already outlined a way to read the starkly vampiric afterworld, and in doing so questions the regard of those ‘pilgrims’ bearing witness to the suffering of others. The line, ‘Un che piango’ (‘one who weeps’), is an appeal for mercy as much as it reflects a

³⁴⁵ Perril, “Hanging on Your Every Word,” [n.p.].

³⁴⁶ Perril, “Hanging on Your Every Word,” [n.p.].

condemnatory stance. It also functions upon the conceits of the 'Other' and the notion of morality and mortality experienced and detailed in representations of suffering.

Concepts of corporeality and bodily materiality in 'Marzipan' also undergo a shift, noticeable between the subjective violence of the African-focused poems and the systemic and collective response represented through the Chernobyl crisis. Following on from the second stanza of the poem 'Rates of Return', 'Marzipan' aims at throwing the Christian allegorical treatment of belief into contrast with the controls and safety measures used during the Chernobyl disaster. The opening stanza of 'Rates of Return' (345) shall be examined as paralleling the austerity and controlled exemption inherent in the testing of fear as a learned device. The second stanza presents contiguities with the poem 'Marzipan' in its use of a biblical lexicon and in the absorption of scientific data and experiential observation into a negotiated allegorical discourse:

Here then admit one at a time
by sweet unremembered bounties at the door,
the sights of growth from immortal seed
acting like fallout on upland pastures
causing restrictions on the movement of sheep.
The margin is close but easy enough,
grateful as the dew on a roof line,
there is no question that the child
will be proof-wrapped, up to the eyes
of what we fade away to gain. (345)

In focusing on this stanza, Reeve and Kerridge discuss the negotiated process of meaning as a construct of divergent narrative threads. As they argue,

[The poem] sets up three [...] parallels, between the growth from seed and birth of a child, the passing of immortal souls through heavenly gates, and the sowing of seed in the form of particles from the Chernobyl reactor, dispersing and entering into bodies. [...] [T]his is a poem which makes its own reckoning, insisting that

Christian myth should either re-emerge fully, as a belief system with confidence in a world to come, or it will seem to be a dangerously obstructive remnant. The poem is therefore about a specific ‘legitimation crisis’, as religion, one of the most important pre-capitalist forms of legitimation, is obliged to emerge from its state of civic privatism and be tested in the public sphere.³⁴⁷

In ‘Marzipan’ it is systems of belief and control which are called into question. That the ‘red dust hangs, and fire drives / the gold star into a dark vapour’ (347), does, as Perril states, ‘allud[e] to the insistence upon the safety of nuclear energy that the industry constantly reinforces’.³⁴⁸ The ‘soft regard’ (347) is indicative of a diminishing regard for safety practices in the nuclear industry and for the means by which economic reward is tied to human suffering and manufacturing in the purchase of ‘futures’ and ‘options’.

Ideas of sustenance in ‘Marzipan’ are specifically underscored by notions of contamination, whether given in sacramental or scientific terms. ‘[E]nnui’ (347) may reference the Soviet Union’s radio silence and lack of communication to its own citizens, but it is also indicative of Western media reactions to Chernobyl, discussed in the work of Nohrstedt as a rapidly declining attention to the problem. As Johansson writes, the desolation of a modern society depicted through the stark underworldly terms of Dante and Eliot, in which ‘woodsmoke’ (347) represents a dietic offering, entails a level of technological reliance subsuming the position of nature in belief. This offering contains an implied secularisation that ‘enhances the effects of spiritual death’.³⁴⁹ The consumption of contaminated food was the only recourse left to victims in the immediate wake of Chernobyl, which, in addition to contaminated wood used for heating, provides Prynne

³⁴⁷ Reeve and Kerridge, *Nearly Too Much*, 143

³⁴⁸ Perril, “Hanging on Your Every Word,” [n.p.].

³⁴⁹ Johansson, *The Engineering of Being*, 183. What Johansson has overlooked in her examination of this line is the connection to George Oppen’s line, ‘The smell of wood-smoke from the kitchen,’ from the third section of “Blood from the stone” in *The Materials*, which opens with the line, ‘And War.’ George Oppen, *New Collected Poems*, ed. Michael Davidson (New York: New Directions, 2002) 52.

with an austere and caustic image of sustenance and the providence of the necessities of life.³⁵⁰ The systems of food production are contaminated and, in being presented as an offering the food contaminates the concepts of sacrifice and salvation in the poem.

The sustentive and material products used in the construction of the domestic are represented as fundamental to physical and moral wellbeing where the poem uses the imagery of the afterlife to exemplify conditions of contamination. ‘Marzipan’ and its allusion to the marzipan bust of Margaret Thatcher, which was carved but uneaten, is a telling image of the way that Prynne saw politics and the embodiment of leadership and virtue in Mrs Thatcher. The unification of embodied leadership and negative ‘spiritual’ nourishment is an indictment of Britain under Thatcher paralleling the Soviet Union’s handling of the Chernobyl meltdown. In the poem, political figures on both sides of the Cold War are viewed as contributing to the political and ecological crisis, leading to the resultant experience of a Dantean Inferno. The latter half of ‘Marzipan’ (347-8) is littered with the guile of moral and spiritual turpitude which invoke its own surrogate desolation: ‘scrape from the heart’; ‘bright-eyed fury’; ‘Her corpse hangs, burned to ashes’; ‘a graceless face it is our own’; ‘the heartland / is dug out for a life underneath’. The ‘bright-eyed fury’ (347) is also a Dante reference, with the Furies or Erinyes signifying the varying categories of sin.³⁵¹ The ‘deterrent hope’ (342) of the poem and the cumulative Dantean references recall Virgil’s description of Limbo as a place where ‘without hope we live in longing’,³⁵² which seems a suitable summation of the Cold War and of the period after the Chernobyl meltdown. As Reeve and Kerridge argue, ‘these meanings accumulate and fill the poem in an unmanageable excess of meaning which reveals the repressed and concealed

³⁵⁰ Perral, “Hanging on Your Every Word,” [n.p.].

³⁵¹ Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, trans. and eds. Robert and Jean Hollander (New York: Anchor, 2002) 178. Footnotes to Canto IX, lines 38-48, p.178.

³⁵² Dante, *Inferno*, 42 (Canto IV).

relations between discourses'.³⁵³ It is through overlaying conceits of meaning that 'Marzipan' functions: from political leadership, spiritual abatement, prolonged starvation, and the vulturine display of 'sieving the very soil itself' for 'loose change' or some 'small merc[y]' (348). Sieving through radiation-contaminated soil for a token of God's mercy is a harrowing enough portrayal of a spiritual condition, yet in 'Marzipan' preparation for the future is already underway.

The line, 'the heartland / is dug out for a life underneath // In broadest, magical daylight', presents the barest existence that the loss of the spiritual may leave. With 'the heartland' lit in 'magical daylight' implies being fanciful, expressive of its own myths and hence eschatological, and electric – a circuitry which seems to be reliant on the indefatigable generation of power. The 'me' (348) who appears towards the poem's conclusion is a harrowing reminder of the subjective experience of Chernobyl, and the devastating human cost. These ideas are enshrouded within the final stanzas from 'Marzipan':

You see
as in late spring, shrouded in mist,
the bright, smooth water. The price
is right, *eau minérale naturelle*
from the hypermarket and thousands

Of feet of glacial sand. Ten thousand
families in the mountains, starved
on mountain grass: and made me eat
both gravel, dirt and mud, and last
of all, to gnaw my flesh and blood. (348)

³⁵³ Reeve and Kerridge, *Nearly Too Much*, 10.

The perfect subjective 'me' has come to an understanding of the contaminated life-world. The 'hypermarket' lends a dystopian vision to the image which adds to the tone of pseudo-apocalyptic tales of survival and sacrifice – perhaps survival through cannibalism, with the body as its own offering in the process of rebirth and regeneration. The eschatological tone of the final lines alludes to the consumption of the body of Christ, consumed to ensure spiritual plenitude. 'Marzipan' presents a linguistic concentrate of the consumption of body as a prerequisite in sharing in a speculative afterlife. The contrast between systems of power and belief is displayed between the ecumenical consumption of the body of Christ and the consumption of radiation-laden food and water in the aftermath of Chernobyl.

The 'Rates of Return'.

The patterns presented in 'Rates of Return' (345) position representations of control and power in relation to psychoanalytic testing of fear as a learned behaviour. The poem casts the traits of objective distance and scientific removal inherent in scientific experimentation as characteristic of the Soviet Union's elite, as well as the Scandinavian government's position of non-intervention. The opening stanza of 'Rates of Return' reads,

Waiting to learn, learning to melt
a blade of sugar in the afterlight,
the patient markers set terms
of allegiance by the step back, into
the shade of the proof system. It will cover
more than the spread, by high yield
in excess of practice. Fear is conditioned
to the signal which predicts shock, and yet
novel fears presume attachment to comfort
in, how you say it, 'the home cage'. (345)

For Reeve and Kerridge, ‘learning to melt’, in the first line, ‘might have an irony in the particular circuit of Prynne’s own work, since melting in earlier poems meant a positive dissolution, a coming to life, as well as a threat’.³⁵⁴ The ‘shade of the proof system’ establishes a necessarily result-contingent expression, whether through intensive farming practices, gambling (to ‘cover [...] the spread’³⁵⁵), or financial investment. The ‘shade of the proof system’ also bitterly recalls the poem ‘Es Lebe der König’, in which the Holocaust and the process of bearing witness is cast ‘in the shade of / the technical house.’ (170)³⁵⁶ Reeve and Kerridge point out that ‘a recurrent theme in Prynne’s work has been a resistance to any discourse which demands obedience through fear’.³⁵⁷ However, a point of contention is to be raised against Reeve and Kerridge’s conclusion to this argument, that ‘its reference to fear’ functions as ‘a welcome inducement to remain in the cage’.³⁵⁸

The line, ‘Fear is conditioned / to the signal which predicts shock,’ (345) alludes to a 1972 panel report by Gerald Aronson, MD, in the *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, titled ‘Learning Theory and Psychoanalytic Theory’. The psychoanalytic experiments presented in Aronson’s report collate a number of the presentations given at the fall 1971 meeting of the American Psychoanalytic Association in New York. In Aronson’s report, a pattern is presented in the examination of fear as a learned behaviour. Aronson details this pattern of development when he writes, ‘[t]he hypothesis has been advanced by Mowrer that fear serves as a motivational drive and that escape from fear (or reduction in the intensity of anxiety) acts as a reward to reinforce

³⁵⁴ Reeve and Kerridge, *Nearly Too Much*, 142.

³⁵⁵ This harkens back to the collection *News of Warring Clans* in which gambling was a prominent linguistic operator and thematic focus.

³⁵⁶ As discussed in Chapter One, this is an image complex which links the ontological with Heidegger’s reliance on technology.

³⁵⁷ Reeve and Kerridge, *Nearly Too Much*, 142.

³⁵⁸ Reeve and Kerridge, *Nearly Too Much*, 142.

learning’.³⁵⁹ Following on from this development, and based on the examination of the locomotive activity of rats and mice tested in a device identified as ‘the home cage’, Aronson asserts that ‘[f]ear [...] motivates and escape from fear reinforces. The learning is the same as if the drive had been hunger and the reward food instead of a sudden reduction in the strength of fear.’³⁶⁰ In examining the phrases ‘novel fears’ (345) and ‘novel immunity’ (343) as they appear in *Bands Around the Throat*, one must consider the research parameters Aronson discusses for a ‘novel test’, in which the methodological pitfalls are aimed at being reduced through the isolation of experiential variables, thereby reducing the possibility that ‘behaviour is over-determined’.³⁶¹

Regarding the organisational structure in which the presentation of stimuli elicits a fear-response, Aronson comments on the divergences between Miller’s and Feather’s work, ‘that when unpredictable shocks are preceded by a brief warning signal, fear is conditioned to the signal, and there is less generalised fear between signals’.³⁶² It is Prynne’s utilisation of fear as a learned response, in representing the Chernobyl disaster and the caesura of information, that provides not only a critique of the detached positions of the experimenter but also an indication of the reasoning behind the lack of response and provision of information given by the Soviet government. In the language of *News of Warring Clans*, this paradigm was explored through the phrase, ‘false danger triggers waste of fear.’³⁶³ This reference alters the meaning of ‘Rates of Return’ from that of a reading of a financial investment system to the measure and understanding of the rate at which a given signal, with various gradations and rewards, will elicit an expected response. It is through the

³⁵⁹ Gerald Aronson, “Learning Theory and Psychoanalytic Theory,” *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, Vol. 20 No. 3 (July 1972) 622-637, 623.

³⁶⁰ Aronson, “Learning Theory and Psychoanalytic Theory,” 624.

³⁶¹ Aronson, “Learning Theory and Psychoanalytic Theory,” 630.

³⁶² Aronson, “Learning Theory and Psychoanalytic Theory,” 630. This may be seen to establish a connection to Soviet radio silence and censorship.

³⁶³ Prynne, *Poems*, 282.

image-complex of psychoanalytic testing that the privilege of observation is criticised, fully indicting not only the Soviet government for its lack of control but also the tacit positions of Western and Scandinavian nations. It is in this way that ‘novel fears’ become a disastrous, empirical question.

Secular Music.

Prynne’s discussion of Samuel Taylor Coleridge in the essay ‘English Poetry and Emphatical Language’ is pertinent to an understanding of *Bands Around the Throat*’s treatment of secularisation and destiny, as well as the collection’s emphasis on plenitude and the promise of utopia as a chimerical dream:

The marking of such culminating emphasis of anagnorisis and insufficient passion, by the use of the exclamatory particle which has its roots in imploration and the secularized operative, may even so seem to give weight to the counter-arguments which we have already noticed: that the claimed nobility and anguish of such moments, the trailing remnants of a discredited sacral destiny, are locked out of man’s social and historical nature and are thereby figments of unregenerate self-isolation.³⁶⁴

The line from ‘Marzipan’, ‘Attuned / to modest airs the conductor beats / time to flattened repeats’, is one that has attracted little critical attention. For Perril, the ‘conductor’ beating time darkly disguises the blipping of a Geiger counter. Alternatively, the ‘conductor beats / time to flattened repeats’ may be read against the Soviet Union’s practice of playing classical music in times of crisis. If this is so, the ‘flattened repeats’ represent not only an informational caesura, but an incrimination of the Soviet Union’s censorship of information

³⁶⁴ J.H. Prynne, “English Poetry and Emphatical Language,” *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 74 (1988) 135-69, 149-150.

about the meltdown. The allusion to hero-worship given in reference to the Strauss-derived title 'Ein Heldenleben' also represents an adroit constriction upon positions of leadership within the Soviet Union.

It was the potential of an ecological disaster which Anatoly Ivanovich Mayorets, the Soviet Minister of Energy and Electrification, was hoping to avoid expressing publicly when on 19 May 1985 he signed an order stipulating that '[i]nformation about the unfavourable ecological impact of energy related facilities (the effect of electromagnetic fields, irradiation, contamination of air, water and soil) on operational personnel, the population, and the environment shall not be reported openly in the press or broadcast on radio or television.'³⁶⁵ In *Chernobyl Record: The Definitive History of the Chernobyl Catastrophe*, R.F. Mould expresses the fact that the official Soviet information about the disaster was released only after Western radio stations had already begun to report on the circumstances, days after the catastrophe. Until 29 April 1986 the Communist media retained its radio silence.³⁶⁶ Given such 'flattened repeats' of false information, it is thus worth suggesting that the 'conductor' from 'Marzipan' is unified with the historical atrocity suffered from the Chernobyl meltdown.

The 'flattened repeats' of the conductor also allude to Friedrich Nietzsche's doctrine of the Eternal Return, which Prynne later utilises, in *Her Weasels Wild Returning*, to signify the reliving of trauma. This recurrence of trauma, and its patterned repetition in *Bands Around the Throat*, is a conditional response to the function of the lyrical voice and the position of the 'conductor' of the rhetoric under direct censorship. The sardonic tone of 'Listening to All' (349) reinforces the recurrence of trauma, in which 'the living day /

³⁶⁵ Grigori Medvedev, *The Truth About Chernobyl* (New York: Basic Books, 1991) 20.

³⁶⁶ R.F. Mould, *Chernobyl Record: The Definitive History of the Chernobyl Catastrophe* (London; New York: Taylor and Francis, 2000) 28.

blocks its truth to the same'. If 'Listening to All' and providing the best outcome for the greatest number of citizens summarised the Soviet Union's principles and characteristics ('the byword'), the Chernobyl disaster represented the establishment of positions of exemption and revealed the experiential principle of 'care annulled.'³⁶⁷

As has been mentioned, the poem 'Ein Heldenleben' (355) bears the title of Richard Strauss's Opus 40, a tone poem which translates as 'A Hero's Life.' This lends to the collection an eerie sense of dread, matching as it does *Brass's* representation of symphonic composition as the cumulative point of spiritual life alongside the spiritual desolation of bands playing at Nazi internment camps in the poem 'Es Lebe der König'. In *Bands Around the Throat* Prynne's interest in and representation of classical music is used to discuss the privilege of rhetoric as well as political censorship. The poem's translated title, 'A Hero's Life', extends to its contents an account of polysemy. Strauss was highly criticised for what was deemed an egomaniacal temperament and for writing a symphony that people assumed to be autobiographical. In accordance with Strauss's interest in polarising, larger-than-life figures, it was assumed that he cast himself in his composition's central role.³⁶⁸ The title is thus used in the poem as a sneering jibe to expose those governmental figures willing to sacrifice their own people for the sake of appearance. The poem calls into account the leadership which cost so many their lives and exacerbated the extent of ecological damage done through direct censorship of the conditions of radiation exposure.

³⁶⁷ Arch Puddington, *Broadcasting Freedom: The Cold War Triumph of Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty* (Lexington, KY: University of Kentucky, 2003) 285. Puddington writes of Mikhail Gorbachev's coming to power on the policy of transparent and open dialogue with Soviet citizens. There is evidence that the Chernobyl disaster did eventually lead Gorbachev to stop jamming foreign media and led, eventually, to a more open society.

³⁶⁸ "A Hero's Life," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2011, *Encyclopædia Britannica Online Academic Edition*, 16 April 2012 <<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/263642/A-Heros-Life>>.

Perril, who does not mention the poem ‘Ein Heldenleben’ (355) in his essay, instead takes his cues from the conductor, who ‘beats / time to flattened repeats’ in ‘Marzipan’ (348). Arguing for the uniqueness of Prynne’s critical use of lyrical register, Perril writes,

What marks out Prynne’s work as separate from many other ‘avant-garde’ writers is the degree of scepticism he has towards not just the rhetorical stance of the lyric, but equally the stance of the avant-garde as being similarly predicated upon a heroic rhetoric of risk. Such an idealised rhetoric of risk-taking sits uneasily alongside of the relatively comfortable conditions of artistic production in the liberal west, and problematises the nature of the ‘freedom’ it pertains to be fighting for.³⁶⁹

While Perril’s argument does well to explain the rhetorical exemption presented from an authorial position, it is primarily the positions of control and removal which the poem calls into question. The authorial position of exemption is demonstrated in the poem’s conclusion, through its comparison between psychoanalytic testing models and the political interference in northern Europe and within the Soviet Union. This position of exemption is ridiculed throughout the collection, just as the titles of the individual poems provide the reader with signposts to political displays of privileged exemption: ‘Listening to All’, ‘In the Pink’ (in the perfect state of health) and ‘Swallow Your Pride’ align in forming an indictment of the body politic.

As with other poems in the collection, ‘Ein Heldenleben’ creates a synecdochic image-complex from domestic and familial scenes. The poem’s first stanza begins with the lines,

Not in this voice, by the leaf-nubs
crowding upwards: the assent so free
is taken on paramountly (355)

³⁶⁹ Perril, “Hanging on Your Every Word,” [n.p.].

These lines represent the regenerative conditions of voice and its implicit union with nature, but the lines are also suggestive of a ‘crowning’ and the representative power of laurels. Nonetheless, the voice in the poem ‘expires / in spite of comforting words’ (355). The conditions of censorship and authority are brought in as the scene shifts to one of domesticity and preprandial occupation. The line, ‘you tell me / what’s for the best and left out, again // Like last time’, expresses an authoritative air on the packing of a picnic in addition to implicating the controlled release of information as it relates to Chernobyl. The scene of a pastoral Sunday excursion is subverted as the unnamed female character ‘glides in her napery / towards the lime-pits, topped in vain / by the fanning plumes above her brow.’ (355) The conceptual non sequitur about taking a leisurely excursion to a working lime-pit for lunch raises ideas of mass graves, the discovery of soap and domestic aphorisms such as ‘cleanliness is next to godliness’. The unnamed woman’s brow ‘topped in vain / by the fanning plumes’ carries forward to the final line of the poem, ‘[t]he line-up is openly cut off and in / prime time: seals of love and topped in vain.’ This final line echoes Shakespeare’s poem ‘Take, o take those lips away’, which reads:

Take, o take those lips away,
That so sweetly were forsworn;
And those eyes, the break of day,
Light that do mislead the morn!
But my kisses bring again,
Bring again;
Seals of love, but seal’d in vain,
Seal’d in vain!³⁷⁰

The seventh stanza works at compounding notions of leisure and care in the familial setting. Issues of raising children are also addressed in the ominous line, ‘[w]hat waits /

³⁷⁰ William Shakespeare, “Take, o take these lips Away,” *Measure for Measure*, IV, I, 1-6.

here is nothing to what comes next, call it / the very nurseling of first care.’ (355) As the exposition of the situation previously under censorship is revealed, those under the guidance of the paternal figure are posited as not only infantile in their beliefs but utterly reliant upon their protector. It also recalls Percy Bysshe Shelley’s line, ‘Forms more real than living man, Nurselings of immortality’,³⁷¹ commenting upon those seeking sanctity and security in the afterlife. Yet ‘dig[ging] deeper,’ domestic and social lives react to the trauma and move on, retaining ‘no hopes / for them’ (355). There are constant reminders within the collection that ‘it is difficult / to learn to perform ethically’. (354)

Leisurely movement and its pastoral associations, such as a picnic in the meadows, are radically juxtaposed against the imposed restrictions on movement for the people living in the direct line of fallout of the Chernobyl reactor. The Chernobyl clouds and the contamination they carry break the boundaries between states and countries. Ecological destruction unifies the nations by breaking the divide between East and West. That ‘the caravan jolts / at the toll booth’ (355) contrasts ideas of borderless nomadicism with government and economic control; it also strikingly calls to mind the line, ‘it is a brave sight– / such unencumbered gallantry’ (347), and this line’s original usage in relation to foreign reports of the Bedouin people.³⁷² Constricted movement contests the ability of society to process the situation and move on from it. As the seventh stanza and the opening line of the eighth stanza describe it,

Under the cloth so neatly spread, upon
the grass that lies ahead, we set our picnic,
cream and salt: and the rest, by default.
The rest is unvoiced like a broken reed,

³⁷¹ Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Prometheus Unbound: A Lyrical Drama*, ed. Vida Scudder (Boston: D.C. Heath & Co, 1892) 42 (i. 738).

³⁷² Michael E. Meeker, *Literature and Violence in North Arabia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) 20.

You close your eyes to it and temper mirth
with a mere minor anxiety. (355)

The preparation, given as it is in rhyming verse, refracts the ‘sugar and fretty’ line in ‘Almost Lunch-Time’ (354), transferring the imagery from children’s verse to a longing and an uncertain memorial for what has come to pass.

Along with the voice, hope too ‘expires / in spite of comforting words’ (355). As it is, ‘[t]his is the tale of a done thing,’ and those not fit to hear the news are ‘ready // [t]o be sent away now very quietly indeed, / in the logic of spirit deletion, bitterness / and bad blood.’ (355) The heroic position of authority is cast in familial terms; the materiality of language in dealing with the censoring of news is represented as a series of domestic, dialogic relations. Talk of atrocity appears as the details of a life-insurance policy: ‘Trading on pathos for / term cover, the *ombra* step spills down // Turning to stop there and pump by nature / with a topic indemnity’ (355). It is the meta-narrative structure of authority on which people rely that the poem addresses and contests, disallowing the discussion of atrocity in all but everyday conversations. Despite the muting of voices, in the silence given by music, hope finds its continuum in families returning to their everyday activities.

That the authorities retain their ‘topic indemnity’ (355) and their ‘novel immunity’ (343) forces the reader to examine the manner in which information is exchanged and the relationship between the authorities and the victims. These manners and relationships add to the prosodic and linguistically calculated patterning of the poem ‘Write-Out’, and reflect the way in which expressivity is affected by censorship.

‘Write-Out’ to the Conclusion.



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‘Write-Out’ (356) appears as the second-to-last poem in the collection *Bands Around the Throat*, and it is a graphic representation expressive of the layering effects of bands placed around the neck. These bands may be expressive of both wealth and adornment in nomadic societies, but the poem’s textual prosody reflects a sectionalised frontal view of the throat,

³⁷³ This is a copy of the 2004 letterpress edition of ‘Write-Out’ designed by Inge Bruggeman. Used with permission of creator, and available at <<http://www.texturaprinting.com/Inka/Broadsides/WriteOut1.html>>.

divided vertically by the trachea. It is thereby connotative of the power of the voice as the home of lyrical subjectivity. It may also represent a criticism of how the constrictions of bands within the poem affect the potential for personal expression. It is through the graphic, prosodic pattern of the poem that semantic and semiotic representations are dissected by a broken lineation. The poem functions on the dismemberment of lyrical expression through the constrictions on the lineation and the fragmented stanzas of the poem; through these patterns the poem speaks to the inadequacy of the lyric.

The poem's formal conventions and patterns allude to the idea of the grid as a means of manufacturing and remodeling the cognitive processes entailing perception, dialectic thought, awareness and expression. The poem represents the need for lyric to be reconstituted within the rhetoric of exchange. Without this idea of reconstitution, the poem and the polysemous readings that it allows present only clauses and minute syllogistic structures of verse readable as a type of parataxis. Formally, the poem parodies the sagic structure found in 'Ein Heldenleben', and through the conventions of alliterative verse 'Write-Out' forces the clauses into a processional vocable reading aimed at 'achieving parallelism between sound and meaning.'³⁷⁴ The alliterative verse pattern into which the musical and lyrical expressions of the poem are constricted recalls the treatment of alliterative lines by Charles Baudelaire, Paul Valéry and Stéphane Mallarmé. The line, 'If / to count, the stub burnt metal lives in / of a mental praise the dove slowly', presents a striking alliterative pairing of 'mental' and 'metal', utilised not for a euphonic function, but to express the inescapability of constrictions on the lyric. If, with the Romantics, alliterative 'effects were achieved which aimed to enhance the musicality of the language [...] rather

³⁷⁴ "Alliterative Verse," *The New Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton; Princeton University Press, 1993) 15.

than to produce rhetorical emphasis',³⁷⁵ a rather contrary purpose for such effects can be discerned here. The discord is emphasised by the vertical division of the lines that bifurcate the stanzas. Uniting the formal components of the poem with ideas of nomadicism and oral traditions of poetry, the alliterative meter works 'structurally, to link and emphasise important words within prescribed metrical units'.³⁷⁶ The origins of the alliterative tradition are unknown, though one may hazard to guess that alliteration was used as a mnemonic device in oral recitation.³⁷⁷ The alliterative pattern and structure of the phrasal unit emphasise the accumulative processes experienced in language acquisition. If alliterative meter has the potential to emphasise lyrical expression, the collection *Bands Around the Throat* represents a dismemberment of this possibility.

The confines placed on the linearity of the lyric represent a detailed constriction upon the expression of linguistic development and lyrical utterance, with the phrasal unit becoming bound by these limits. Constrictions on language patterning allude to the development and manipulation of causal connections and return the reader to questions of language acquisition. The clausal structure forces a focus upon the individual word as representative of a default setting, inexpressive of and without relation to the successive word. The force of constriction is detailed by the four unbroken lines that horizontally segment the poem. The lines are read as the testament or pronouncement of an official voice, speaking through a technical register. The first line, 'As a circumstantial infringement again loaned off' (356), recalls Alfred Tennyson's reading of his narrative poem *Enoch Arden*, when he writes

³⁷⁵ "Alliterative Verse," *The New Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 15.

³⁷⁶ "Alliterative Verse," *The New Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 15.

³⁷⁷ "Alliterative Verse," *The New Princeton Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 16.

Everyone who would read *Enoch Arden* truly must discover the relation which, with the poet, conventional laws hold to the spirit of morality – how that the latter may even be perfected into the loftiest spirituality by the opponent or circumstantial infringement of the former.³⁷⁸

While discussing the equanimity of moral law upon all peoples and nations, this line, and equally the second and the third – which may be discussing, in contractual terms, the relations between nations during the Cold War – thus speaks to the actionable control exercised in relations of power and authoritative rhetoric. The fourth unbroken line which concludes the poem, ‘Sporadically by bus into the heart of the country’ (356), reminds the reader of the freedom of mobility found in developed nations, and recalls the leisurely picnic in ‘Ein Heldenleben’. It also brings to mind victims of the Chernobyl disaster, weeks after the event, being evacuated by bus out of their contaminated country. In its more sinister reading it reinforces the idea of corporeality in the poem, highlighting the confines of expression represented by ‘yourself pallid’, ‘tears attack’, ‘lick tantalum’ and life depicted as only ‘a vital shred’ (356). Without the ability of self-expression, perhaps this ‘vital shred’ is all that remains. The ‘arranged dots’ allude to Ezra Pound’s writings on the Confucian Analects, where he writes, ‘points define a periphery. What the reader can find here is a set of measures whereby at the end of the day, to learn whether the day has been worth living.’³⁷⁹

The ‘arranged dots’ recall the process of learning to draw by connecting dots, and they semantically hint at the process of the slow accumulation of evidence in a legal case, or the uncovering of a mystery. This again aligns the poem with childhood development.

³⁷⁸ Alfred Tennyson quoted in Alexander H. Japp, *Three Great Teachers of Our Time: being an attempt to deduce the spirit and purpose animating Carlyle, Tennyson and Ruskin* (London: Smith, Elder & Company, 1865) 145.

³⁷⁹ Ezra Pound, *Confucius: The Great Digest, & Unwobbling Pivot* (New York: New Directions, 1951) 194.

Again, Prynne's collection and the constructive use of children's verse within the poems reference language in its default setting, representing a slow accumulative process of developing a capacity for expression and of developing the knowledge upon which judgements rest. The poem's use of play also functions as its own caesura, as play introduces a linguistic safety device, a default in language, upon which the capacity of the witness may recede.

From the confines of the poem and the formal representation of the inadequacy of lyric, 'Write-Out' is demonstrative of the processes of perception, developmental thinking and expression. The final line, 'Sporadically by bus into the heart of the country', resonates with the structures of belief, control and lyrical expression in William Wordsworth's poem 'Michael', subtly realigning 'Write-Out' with pastoral conventions. The reader is left travelling into the heart of a contaminated country without the means of expressing the horror of bearing witness, and with the knowledge of the eradication of the account of victims. It is the force of authoritative censorship, as an expression of pure violence, to which the poem speaks. 'Write-Out', punning on 'write-off', represents an urgent need for the reconstitution of lyric in the face of such devastating violence and censorship.

Chapter Four. *Acrylic Tips*.

Introduction.

In 2002 Barque Press published Prynne's *Acrylic Tips*, a slender edition with an earthen-red cover. The front and rear of the book have no publishing designation, aside from the poet's name in capital letters running horizontally across the front jacket, bisecting the vertical title that cascades down the cover's right edge. Graphically, the division rendered between the two words of the title by the author's name implies a division of the whole, through the insertion of the experiential and authorial register. The hue of the cover is less electric or lustful than what one would associate with painted fingernails or their acrylic counterpoints, yet also somewhat more artificial than the sandstone red of the gorges and ranges of the Kimberley, Western Australia, both of which may provide an insight into the poem's registers. Inside the small book, on the unpaginated third page, there is the dedication, 'For: S.K.', and on the fifth page there is an unattributed epigraph, 'The murderous head made from a motor car number-plate.' Running from the seventh to the sixteenth page, inclusively, are ten pages of six stanzas each, the stanzas composed of quatrains with regular and patterned bilinear indentation.

Prynne's poetic works released throughout the 1990s and the early twenty-first century exhibit a marked obduracy which operates through the systematic incorporation of disparate discourses. The excess of signification stems from an excess of lexical and discursive elements imbuing the poems with a sense of language existing under pressure. *Pearls That Were* (1999) is a striking anomaly amidst this syntactical and paratactic

pressure, as it exhibits a highly developed and articulate intensity of lyricism. *Acrylic Tips* elides the enclosed semantic and semiotic space of *Triodes* (1999) and draws the reader back to Prynne's work in *Her Weasels Wild Returning* (1994). As Rod Mengham writes on *Her Weasels Wild Returning* in his essay 'After Avant-gardism',

With the exception of one or two fragments, it is composed in a language which resolutely and systematically excludes any phrasing that retains the balances and tensions we would normally be able to detect in the manner of a speaking voice. What we get instead is not a discursive free-for-all filling the vacuum – not an intensifying of fracture and dispersal – but, off-puttingly, a weird concerted texture, that works hard to make the separate parts of the whole comply with one another. The language is more bizarre than ever, but it is also more heavily synthesised, more systematically correlated, simply more commensurable.³⁸⁰

In *Acrylic Tips* poetic language exists under pressure. The concretion of discourses, which exists not in collusive or jarring parataxis, is lineated in the transmigratory space of the poem. Both *Acrylic Tips* and *Her Weasels Wild Returning* contain thematic threads that unify social ritual with song; in *Acrylic Tips* this song extends to ideas of indigenism through the inclusion of Indigenous Australian ritual and song lines as mythic narratives of creation patterned on the landscape. From *Her Weasels Wild Returning* concepts of nomadism and exile carry through to *Acrylic Tips*, where they are read through the traditional Indigenous and colonial milieus of Australian history. Another interesting element that has carried through from *Her Weasels Wild Returning* is the attention given to the politics and lexical complexity of the female pronoun.

Many of the elements discussed in Mengham's review of *Her Weasels Wild Returning* function as not only contiguous thematic threads running through *Acrylic Tips*,

³⁸⁰ Rod Mengham, "After Avant-gardism: *Her Weasels Wild Returning*," *Assembling Alternatives; Reading Postmodern Poetries Transnationally*, ed. Romana Huk (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2003) 384-88, 384-5.

but also as contiguous critical elements linking Prynne's incorporative excess with socioeconomic structures. To exemplify the parallels between the texts it will serve to examine a portion of Mengham's analysis of *Her Weasels Wild Returning*, overlaying the larger critical structures onto *Acrylic Tips*. Mengham writes,

In *Weasels*, there is the same basic tension that lies behind the alternatives of settlement and nomadicism, but it is not imprinted from the same pattern of validation, with the same distribution of gains and losses. Settlement is figured in intensely domesticated terms, while the nobility of transit, the enhancement of spirit formally almost guaranteed by the nomadic option, is now jettisoned and replaced by stark alternatives, both equally dispiriting. One is the enforced flight of the refugee, for whom transit represents painful uprooting, for whom wandering is figured as a compulsion to 'escape', for whom being unsettled is seen as nothing more positive than a movement *between* conditions of safety and protection.³⁸¹

Andrea Brady's brief essay 'No Turning Back: *Acrylic Tips*' examines the forced transmogrifications of the feminine and the natural as inherently paralleling territorial and geographic division. Brady writes that the feminine is 'associated with the lineated and amputated body, the bound and divided land, is lyric'.³⁸² I will propose an alternative reading suggestive of the ongoing ramifications of colonisation and the increasing technological means of dominance both in social structures and cultural formations. This analysis is structured on concepts of social and technological advancement, and is incorporative of pathological models of harm and genetic engineering contrasted with notions of an Indigenous experience of the natural. Where Brady asserts that 'the bound and divided land, is lyric', this examination will focus on the manner in which, for 40,000 plus years, Indigenous Australians have used song as a cultural and spiritual practice establishing a relationship with and building knowledge of the land. For Indigenous

³⁸¹ Mengham, "After Avant-gardism: *Her Weasels Wild Returning*," 385-6.

³⁸² Andrea Brady, "No Turning Back: *Acrylic Tips*," *Quid*, 17 (2006) 82.

Australians, knowledge of land and its traversal is a pathway to spiritual embodiment and replenishment. At issue are postcolonial concepts of territorialisation and contemporary land usage, but also poetic language history as it corresponds to Prynne's definition of poetic thought, 'as brought into being by recognition and contest with the whole cultural system of a language'.³⁸³ The poetic language used in the poem embeds and articulates patterns of colonial and argotic usage, demonstrative of its etymological antecedents as well as its potential to evolve and adapt to new models of meaning, as constituted by a localised, Australian English.

In his reading of *Her Weasels Wild Returning* Mengham discusses the poem's gendered language and its representation in landforms:

So what I am suggesting is that the peculiarly powerful abstractness of the language in *Weasels* represents an attempt to deterritorialize both masculine and feminine, not by neutralising their differences, but by at least proposing to equalize them; by demonstrating how the only viable *terra nullius*, previously unoccupied, unsettled, unowned, is one that can be projected in a synoptic language that shows remarkably little interest in either *écriture féminine* or the masculine tradition.³⁸⁴

Acrylic Tips presupposes a nature, not explicitly Edenic – as is implied by the poem's first line, 'Assuming banishment for lost time back across nullity' (537) – which speaks to the origins of knowledge possessed by traditional owners of the land. This is made explicit in *Acrylic Tips* by contrasting a Western and culturally imperialistic position inherent in an account of colonisation with an Australian Aboriginal understanding of land use and ritual in the mythopoetic space of the poem. The exploitation of the earth endemic to patriarchal

³⁸³ J.H. Prynne, "Poetic Thought," *Textual Practice*, Vol. 24 No. 4 (August 2010) 595-606, 598. Regarding the specificity of a language history, I would assert that the modifications inherent in the Australian idiom and through Australian argot affirm the contention that the 'cultural system of a language' entails not only its relation to imperial England, but also to the modifications, transfigurations and colloquialisms that extend from settlement to a modern vernacular.

³⁸⁴ Mengham, "After Avant-gardism: *Her Weasels Wild Returning*," 387.

societies is contrasted with the Australian Indigenous perspective which traditionally understands the land as a living, identificatory embodiment of the people.³⁸⁵ The forced adaptations to a technologised pastoral represent a discontinuity from an ecological-based reading and the exposition of nature as feminine. The text expresses a legacy of imperial dominance as it is represented against the Australian landscape and Indigenous culture, a power dynamic that has its nascent structure in an anthropocentric colonialism which entails dominance over, exploitation of and barbarity towards nature. The characteristics of dominance reframe Prynne's engagement with the land as it is linked to the antecedents of the pastoral elegy, a reframing notable not only in *Acrylic Tips* but also in the collection *Brass* and the poem 'Refuse Collection'.

Colonial and technological dominance is expressed most concretely in the poem through the focus on human labour in rural environments, specifically the shearing and breeding of sheep. This expression of dominance represents a relationship that has embedded itself in social and cultural trajectories, as well as language histories as they have developed in Australia. It is in overlaying a Western view of nature, driven to excess by technological development, that the reader is expected to see horror; however, this does seem to forego the horror established by colonisation itself, and brings to the foreground the reader's understanding of Australian Indigenous society and culture in interpreting the poem.

³⁸⁵ A.P. Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1976) 186. See also, Deborah Bird Rose, *Nourishing Terrains* (Canberra: Australian Heritage Commission, 1996) 39. In the subchapter titled 'Centres of Life', Rose writes, 'Daly Pulkara told me that his people are "born for country". In many parts of Australia Aboriginal people believe that the spirit (or one spirit) that animates a foetal human is a spirit from the land: an ancestral Dreaming spirit, or a human spirit (baby spirit) resident in a particular locale. Known in English as "conception Dreaming", these beliefs promote special relationships between an individual person, sites and tracks, and Dreamings. These beliefs also situate people as part of the outpouring of life of the country. That is, country gives forth life, and included in that life are the people of the country.' (39)

Though Mengham talks about *Her Weasels Wild Returning* as introducing a ‘synoptic language’ that may be the only exemplary form of a ‘*terra nullius*, previously unoccupied, unsettled, unowned’ land, it is only in *Acrylic Tips* that this position seems to be tested against the historical *terra nullius*, Australia. In *Acrylic Tips* the contestation of the land and its 40,000 year history of use and ritual is contrasted with the theoretical space of which Mengham writes. This comes to fruition in *Acrylic Tips* through representations of Australia, where Prynne and Mengham both spent time in 2002. Prynne spent his time at Edith Cowan University, in Perth, Western Australia, and travelled north to the Kimberley region and south to the granite cliffs of Albany.

Prynne was in Australia in August and left in early September 2002, working as a visiting academic at Edith Cowan University, through the Language and Landscape Research Group, where he delivered a seminar on Edward Dorn’s *Gunslinger* and the contemporary epic cycle. He also performed a number of informal readings at Bunbury, E.C.U. and the University of Western Australia. An article was published in 2002, in the summer edition of *Overland* (Vol. 169), in which Barbara Milech recapitulates the involvement of Prynne, Mengham and Kinsella in the literary activities of the season.

John Kinsella’s ‘Oxidia: Go’, which was published in *Quid 17*, an issue dedicated to Prynne, provides details about Prynne and Kinsella’s trip to Country Peak and Yenyenning, prior to Kinsella’s still more detailed account in the ‘Mr. Sharpie’ chapter of *Fast, Loose Beginnings*.³⁸⁶ While the beginning of the poem provides an alternate poetic view of some of the landscape found in *Acrylic Tips*, the second portion of the poem has the most demonstrable resonance for a reading of the poem *Acrylic Tips*:

³⁸⁶ John Kinsella, *Fast, Loose Beginnings: A memoir of intoxications* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2006) 120-138.

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

That become couplets, even terza rima, relentlessly linked
but spooling from one string of language,

Implying a narrative where no narrative exists.³⁸⁷

To conceptualise Prynne's time in Australia it will serve to detail his involvement with various people in the country such that a reader can perhaps begin to make inroads through the poem. It is well known that Prynne spent time with John Kinsella and Tracy Ryan (who had previously proofed and sorted textual issues for the first Fremantle/Bloodaxe edition of Prynne's collected *Poems*), and while Ryan's poems provide little detail of their interactions, it is in establishing an analogous reading of Kinsella's work from 2001 that recognisable inferences can be drawn from their relations. Aside from 'Oxidia: Go', other works of Kinsella's to be utilised in this analysis stem from *The Hierarchy of Sheep*. This collection was published in Australia in 2001, by Fremantle Arts Centre Press, and in the United Kingdom by Bloodaxe Books months earlier in 2000, and, as this analysis will support, Prynne had read the collection before or during his time in Australia. The poem from which the book's title stems, 'The Hierarchy of Sheep – a report from my brother', details in four parts the treatment of rams, ewes, wethers and lambs in the processes of mulesing, shearing and slaughter. There are not only parallels between the situation described in Kinsella's 'The Hierarchy of Sheep' and *Acrylic Tips*, but instances in which it is reasonable to contend that if indeed this was a report physically delivered, then Prynne was entitled to its retelling, or at least had the opportunity to discuss the specifics of the work with John Kinsella's brother, Stephen, who delivered the original report. To provide a

³⁸⁷ John Kinsella, "'Oxidia: Go,'" *Quid*, 17 (2006) 97-98.

preliminary view of these parallels as they relate to pastoral violence, it will serve to contrast Kinsella's wordings with Prynne's in their respective poems.

John Kinsella's 'Ewes' begins,

All cut by a shearer at one time or another-
sewn together with dental floss or wearing their scars
gracefully ...

Later in the poem, Kinsella writes that 'older ewes', 'all of them full with young, milk veins / up and pumping hard to udders- / somewhere a nick with a blade has a vein / knotted off with needle and thread, / the myth declaring another will take its place'.³⁸⁸ These lines are tied into what Prynne relates of an infant that thirsts for an 'abrogated breast', the expectant wait for 'milk / at a lip trickle', with 'needlepoint decision', 'engorgement', 'grapple juices' and a mythic teat regrown in a 'post-hormone limb crisis'.³⁸⁹ Immediately apparent in the description of the animals is the reiteration and problematisation of the feminine as bound and divided, and of the female body as the site of harm.

While these parallels will be explored more fully in the developed reading of this chapter, it should be noted that very similar cross-readings can be made with John Kinsella's seven-part poem 'The Epistemology of Sheep', which is dedicated to his brother, Stephen. The fifth section of this poem appears to address the same reported events, and is quoted here in full:

5.

³⁸⁸ John Kinsella and Coral Hull, "The Hierarchy of Sheep – a report from my brother," *Zoo* (Sydney: Paperbark Press, 2000) 125-127, 126.

³⁸⁹ These references stem from pages 544, 538, 540, 539, 543 and 545, respectively.

The interconnectedness
of a handpiece that locks up
a grinder that seizes,
cutters so thin they tear
a sliced pizzle,
a torn milk vein,
a cut teat,
'shorn-through' wrinkles
in the neck,
a cut hamstring,
ribflesh flyblown
and the heart exposed -
all the world
sees.³⁹⁰

Accumulating this evidence one can begin to make the case for an unveiling of the S.K. to whom the poem *Acrylic Tips* is dedicated. This assertion is made not only by means of parallel structures in the development of Prynne's and Kinsella's collections but also in the transhistorical space developed in *Acrylic Tips*'s epigraph, from Donald Stuart's *Yandy*, as well as in the incorporation of Australian argot in the poem itself. The dedication to 'S.K.' in the Barque edition, the reader will surmise, is to Stephen Kinsella, who has previously been described by his brother John as an extremely hermetic artist making his living as a shearer.³⁹¹ From what little information is publicly available on Stephen Kinsella, a small introduction from John Kinsella's *Activist Poetics: Anarchy in the Avon* may suffice:

My brother, whose art is much talked about by those who know it, refuses to participate in the art world. I extracted some images from him for covers and things I've done recently, but that's it. He's truly hermetic. He despises the world of art

³⁹⁰ John Kinsella, "The Epistemology of Sheep," *The Hierarchy of Sheep* (Fremantle, WA: Fremantle Press, 2001) 49-52, 51.

³⁹¹ John Kinsella, "Introduction," *SALT Magazine*, 1 [n.p.].
<<http://www.saltpublishing.com/saltmagazine/issues/01/index.htm>> [According to SALT's publisher, as of January 2013, 'Due to server problems this site has been discontinued from service'.] A newly archived version has been made available by National Libraries of Australia Electronic Archive, at <<http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/93590/20130104-0809/saltmagazine/issues/01/index.htm>> (archived on 4 January 2013 accessed on 30 March 2013)].

and literature. He wrote poems once, but destroyed them all. He believes his 'nature' poetry is only useful to those who would read it as useful: compliant to their already satisfied view of nature.³⁹²

Approaching *Acrylic Tips*'s opening line with this dedication in mind, as well as Prynne's long-standing interest in and recording of Indigenous song as noted in Andrew Duncan's *Failure of Conservatism*,³⁹³ the reader may begin to acknowledge and understand a number of the informational axes and discourses upon which the poem communicates.

While there remains little critical attention paid to the poem *Acrylic Tips*, there is an essay by Andrea Brady and an examination of the poem by Jon Clay, in his *Sensation, Contemporary Poetry and Deleuze*. Aside from Brady's reference to Woomera asylum seekers, no mention of Australia is given in any of the critical literature on the poem to date. This is a confounding prospect, for as this reading proceeds it will demonstrate that the implicit structural patterns of landscapes, argot, botanical studies and Indigenous knowledge presented are uniquely tied to the Australian continent and Prynne's experiences there. Established in this manner, issues of systemic (colonial and techno-capital) violence will be implicitly detailed against Australian colonial and Indigenous history, tracing the foundations of dominance and violence as a socio-historical construct. The 'synoptic language'³⁹⁴ of the poem will be weighed against the history of Australia, starting with the land's designation as *terra nullius* by the British to give themselves grounds for colonial settlement of the continent.

³⁹² John Kinsella, *Activist Poetics: Anarchy in the Avon* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010) 74.

³⁹³ Duncan, *The Failure of Conservatism*, 127.

³⁹⁴ Mengham, "After Avant-gardism: *Her Weasels Wild Returning*," 387.

‘Assuming banishment’.

The epigraph of *Acrylic Tips*, from Donald Stuart’s *Yandy*, allows the reader to glimpse the transformation of the ritual hunt through a suturing of the material and cultural advancements prescribed by the dominant Western force, as the quote contrasts forms, registers and government control of transport and food procurement between cultural epochs. ‘The murderous head made from a motor car number-plate’³⁹⁵ applies not only an ameliorative positioning of cultures, but also suggests a culture of adaptation and survival, positioned at the margins of society. The vectors of speed demonstrated in the epigraph entail a destabilisation of cultural norms, rituals and cultural identity. Post-contact Aboriginal culture has undergone change; subjective identity, physical and social environments continue to adapt, and traditions alter based on dynamic and responsive social formations.³⁹⁶

Reading the first line of *Acrylic Tips*, ‘Assuming banishment for lost time back across nullity’ (537), through an informational matrix rooted in Australian history allows the reader to immediately unpack certain thematic threads of the poem. ‘Assuming banishment’ contains obvious referential allusions to Adam and Eve being banished from the Garden of Eden and to life after the fall. It also implies an ethnographic position of observation and categorisation, a condemnatory set of relations through which Prynne

³⁹⁵ Donald Stuart, *Yandy* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1978) 89. [originally published in 1959]

³⁹⁶ Ernest Hunter, *Aboriginal Health and History: Power and Prejudice in Remote Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 203. Hunter argues that the most telling adaptation necessary to Aboriginal culture was the understanding of historical time, as opposed to the subjective link to the mythic past, which was materialised through land and family moieties. Hunter writes, ‘The upheavals accompanying European colonisation transformed their physical and interpersonal environments, demanding a new level of adaptation. What was introduced was time – historical time. An examination of emerging constructions of self, of personal and group identity, necessarily requires both longitudinal and horizontal perspectives: “the development of society is both synchronic and diachronic... We have to think of societies in terms of both a set of simultaneous institutions (synchronism) and a process of historical transformation (diachronism)” (Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 3 vols. Trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) 38)’ 203. The notion of historic time is also discussed in Bain Attwood, *In The Age of Mabo: History, Aborigines and Australia* (St. Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1996) 42-46.

signifies the irony of assumed cultural hierarchies. That the Edenic, and the loss of the Edenic, is signalled from the outset adds weight to the line ‘his right arm / tied to creation’ (540), which implies humankind’s involvement in manifesting their way of life, and also alludes to assisted animal husbandry in providing an assertion of control over animal breeding. This line may also be indicative of artificial insemination, linking man directly to the genetic manipulation present in the creation of sheep with culturally desirable, and hence commodifiable, characteristics. The ‘[r]ibs of possession’ (537) which are grasped for in the poem connote an implicit need for control and show an *a priori* link between the technological and the feminine pronoun through the transformation it undergoes in the course of the poem. The emphasis on ‘his right arm’ as ‘tied to creation’ details a masculine register of possession which affects our understanding of control, dominance and the division of land within the poem. In such lines, the gendering of the natural within the poem juxtaposes culturally divergent knowledge of the land and its embodiments.

One could also establish a linkage between the registers of control over movement established in the epigraph, through the car’s registration plates, and the car scenes in the poem. The practice of registering one’s possession may also relate to early maps where land is not ‘named’ but numbered or referred to only by coordinates, where Indigenous place names and traditions were erased and reinstated in familiar, colonial contexts. While this may be used to incite discussion about the adaptation of the Indigenous hunt to its Western alternative, it may also signify the social context in which the theft of cars was an obsession of the right-wing talkback radio in Western Australia at the time. As the poem announces, ‘I heard it on the radio’ (541). This may position Indigenous youth, depicted as car thieves, as symbols of the potential for subjective violence and fear amongst the Western populace. Generalising particular instances of crime by Indigenous youth was

certainly a tactic of the right-wing media used to support their message of resistance to Indigenous land rights and equality. In this case the ‘banishment’ from the poem’s opening line may be indicative of these young people’s banishment from their community, or, at a macroscopic scale, may speak to the marginalisation of Indigenous culture within Australian society.

If the reader allows the word ‘nullity’ from the poem’s opening line its full weight it provides not only a caustic depiction of the Australian landscape but also, from a Western perspective, one of legal and foundational origins. To quickly recapitulate the colonial history of Australia and to provide some intimation of the sovereign authority of command in the decree of *terra nullius* over Australia, it will serve to examine this notion and its use in colonisation. In 1770 Captain James Cook anchored outside what is presently called Botany Bay, then sailed north, around the Cape York Peninsula, and proclaimed the land he sighted as belonging to the expansive British Empire.³⁹⁷ The legal rationale upon which the convention of colony acquisition was founded was one in which claims of ownership could be based on discovery and effective possession.³⁹⁸ As Attwood contends,

Aboriginal hunter-gatherers were adjudged to have no property rights because of the way in which their place in time was constructed by major seventeenth and eighteenth-century philosophical and legal authorities which, in turn, drew upon historical theories regarding human society. In the opinion of Grotius, Pufendorf, Locke and others, hunter-gatherers (or ‘savages’ in their terms) had no concept of property because they were in the original state of nature. This assessment was founded upon one or more ‘historical’ sources: the representations of antiquity found in classical history and the representation of the Americas as ‘the beginning [of] all the World’.³⁹⁹

³⁹⁷ Peter Russel, *Recognising Aboriginal Title* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005) 39.

³⁹⁸ Attwood, *In the Age of Mabo*, ix.

³⁹⁹ Attwood, *In the Age of Mabo*, ix.

These laws were based on the writings of Adam Smith, John Locke and Adam Ferguson, and demarcate, according to their beliefs, the stages through which a society should pass, each stage being characterised by particular concepts and institutions regarding law, property, government and commerce. At the lowest stage, that of the hunter-gatherer – in which the occupants of a land lived as part of nature – it was determined that there existed no concept of property, and therefore the lands of the Australian Aborigines were declared by British colonialists as ‘waste’ or ‘desert’.⁴⁰⁰ The decree of *terra nullius* over the already occupied land of Australia, whose Indigenous people Cook encountered, was upheld until the Mabo-Wik Judgement of 1992, with the recognition of land rights and the recognition of generational ownership.⁴⁰¹

The cultural imperialism underlying this decree of non-occupation was supported by the perspective that Edward Said relates as the ‘commitment that allowed decent men and women to accept the notion that distant territories and their native peoples should be subjugated’, and stemmed from ‘the almost metaphysical obligation to rule subordinate, inferior, less-advanced people’.⁴⁰² To forgo a lengthy discourse into the history of *terra nullius* and its application in colonial law, let it serve to note that the conference of *terra nullius* was reified by Cook’s view of the ‘noble savage’, and that it was further strengthened in the eyes and minds of the British legal system by Joseph Banks’s position on the Indigenous as ‘a timid, ill-armed and backwards people’.⁴⁰³ Thus New Holland was declared, subsuming the subjective status of the Indigenous population to the category of the continent’s flora and fauna. It was to remain this way until 1949, when the rights of full

⁴⁰⁰ Attwood, *In the Age of Mabo*, ix.

⁴⁰¹ Attwood, *In the Age of Mabo*, xvi.

⁴⁰² Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994) 10.

⁴⁰³ Peter Russel, *Recognising Aboriginal Title*, 69. Banks was the Royal Society’s official scientific observer to Cook’s voyage.

citizenship were granted to Australian Indigenous people. Equal voting rights for Indigenous Australians was only finally given in the 1967 Referendum.

The first line of *Acrylic Tips* and the connotations of ‘lost time’ evoke the racist notion of ‘lost time’ and the supposed ‘primitivisms’ observed by the first colonial fleet.⁴⁰⁴ As such, *Acrylic Tips* occupies the ‘lost time’ in which nullity functions as a description and decree. Reading Mengham’s proposition about *terra nullius* in *Her Weasels Wild Returning* through the trans-historical structure of Australian Indigenous and colonial history allows the reader to arrive at the conceptualisation of poetic language as determined co-extensively with national history. Mengham writes that

[t]he peculiarly powerful abstractness of the language [...] represents an attempt to deterritorialize both masculine and feminine, not by neutralising their differences, but by at least proposing to equalize them; by demonstrating how the only viable *terra nullius*, previously unoccupied, unsettled, unowned, is one that can be projected in a synoptic language.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰⁴ Remarking upon acts of ‘primitivism’ and accounts of encounters with Indigenous Australians can be found in *The Journals of Captain James Cook on his Voyages of Discovery*, Vol. 1, *The Voyage of the Endeavor 1768-1771*, ed. J.C. Beaglehole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968): 305-306; *The Endeavor Journal of Joseph Banks: Vol. 2*, ed. J.C. Beaglehole (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1962): 111-12, 123-30.

The relation between time measurement and the historical proclamation of *terra nullius* is discussed in Attwood’s introduction to *In the Age of Mabo: History, Aborigines and Australia*, where Attwood writes, ‘History, in this context and in the beginning was, in a sense, a European discourse; that is, it was particular to the Europeans but not to the Indigenes. One needs to appreciate, moreover, that while time (and history) is an indispensable component of the European horizon of understanding, prior to the intense disruption provoked by the British colonisation of this continent this might not have been so among its aborigines. Tony Swain has recently argued that aboriginal societies across Australia had a culture which accorded metaphysical primacy to place rather than time: “the essence of [Aboriginal] tradition is place, and ... the Aboriginal interpretation of changes in their life-world has been cast in terms of space rather than history.”’ (viii) Attwood further argues that ‘[h]istory, as a discourse which employs temporality as a marker of difference, has been the means by which Europeans have constructed Aborigines in terms of an absence or lack – they were either of another time or were ever timeless, and so were not of our time, that is modernity.’ (viii) Attwood concludes, ‘The conceptualisation of this new world as the old was, more importantly, integral to the British colonisation of *terra australis*, that is, to the very founding of what was later to be Australia. History originated the terms of the continuing relationship between “Aborigines”, Europeans and the space of “Australia” in the sense that the bearers of this imperial discourse believed that rights to place depended upon one’s “time”.’ (xiii)

⁴⁰⁵ Mengham, “After Avant-gardism: *Her Weasels Wild Returning*,” 387.

As Prynne claims in 'Mental Ears and Poetic Work', 'I want to present experimentally a scheme for the description and analysis of poetic language mounted in the domain of poetic discourse. The specific domain is that of English poetry and the English language considered as a system and as a history.'⁴⁰⁶ The poetic language of *Acrylic Tips* exists as co-extensive with and determined by the physical landscapes and colonial history of the Australian continent. This is a language that has developed under the pressures of colonisation, to become a 'synoptic language'. The referentiality upon which many of Prynne's poems rely is almost entirely subsumed within *Acrylic Tips* aside from a few allusions to other works; the poem instead focuses upon the adherence of a language 'which [is] cross-wired into the cultural history of a ramified national identity'.⁴⁰⁷ Prynne's interest is in the depiction of language existing under pressure and through the rubric of a language history, sutured to national history. The compression of discourses into an incalculably integrated register shows the implications of '[h]uman language [as] the tribal continuity of expressive human behaviour'.⁴⁰⁸ This is explicit when the human behaviour at issue is the exploitation, technological manipulation and transformation of the natural state for enterprise. For Prynne, imperialist control entails within it the mindset established during Australia's colonisation upon a campaign of dominance and sustained systemic violence, and it has been integrated into power relations which exist in cultural relations, religious fervour, the pastoral industry and language itself.

The linguistic and poetic structure of *Acrylic Tips* can be read as an intrinsic part of the framework the system has created. The poem does not function within the formal patterns displayed in *Brass* or *Bands Around the Throat*, but as with *Her Weasels Wild Returning* it works within the cultural and linguistic system that it is representing. The

⁴⁰⁶ J.H. Prynne, "Mental Ears and Poetic Work," *Chicago Review*, 55.1 (2010) 126-57, 126.

⁴⁰⁷ Prynne, "Mental Ears and Poetic Work," 127.

⁴⁰⁸ J.H. Prynne, "A Quick Riposte to Handke's Dictum about War and Language," *Quid*, 6 (2000) 23-26, 24.

social and political outcomes of this systemic imposition are inherent to the poem's operative register. *Acrylic Tips* operates between and across disciplines and discourses, demonstrative of a linguistic system that creates its own operative language and spatial relations.

Poetic language in *Acrylic Tips* functions as a system under pressure, a pressure which it partly self-creates, forcing the linguistic pattern away from the constructs of customary discourse towards an 'inclusive conjunctive synthesis',⁴⁰⁹ or what Mengham identifies as 'synoptic language'. Linguistic integration in *Acrylic Tips* gives rise to and strengthens Prynne's descriptions of the forced adaptations of the natural through the rubric of the technological. As Prynne writes in the essay 'Poetic Thought', 'Poetic thought is empowered within and through energies of language under pressure', and as it informs or commands the linguistic form and structure of the text, 'the language of poetry is its modality and material base, but whatever its relation with common human speech, the word-arguments in use are characteristically disputed territory, where prosody and verse-form press against unresolved structure and repeatedly transgress expectations'.⁴¹⁰ Thus the language of *Acrylic Tips* enacts in its linguistic deployment an actuated sense of the forced adaptations of the poem's thematic threads.

Guarded Knowledge.

Hierarchical structures of control are exemplified in the text through representations of colonial dominance, a practice with an explicit history in Australia and, as the poem recognises, a continuing formative relationship in the evolution of language and societal

⁴⁰⁹ Jon Clay, *Sensation, Contemporary Poetry and Deleuze: Transformative Intensities* (London: Continuum, 2010) 40.

⁴¹⁰ Prynne, "Poetic Thought," 598.

structures. *Acrylic Tips* works to contest dominant colonial perspectives and assumptions. While relations to land, such as are expressed in Indigenous song-lines and chthonic relations to country, are almost entirely subsumed within the text, this may be the result of the author's decision to not appropriate Indigenous knowledge, but to acknowledge both his respect for and his distance from Australian Indigenous cultural language and history. The relationship between the author's personal experience and his thematic interest in Indigenous Australian cultural histories determines the position of the lyric voice in the poem and the manner in which experiential knowledge is garnered and utilised. That the Indigenous knowledge exists in an encoded complex speaks to the conditions of guarded knowledge, a desire for privacy and a conditionally open discourse. That the Barque Press edition of *Acrylic Tips* bore the dedication 'For S.K.' highlights an almost singular position of address and the privilege of exchange within a poetic. This encoding may also intrinsically obfuscate personal and experiential aspects of the poem for readers who are unaware of the conditions under which it was written. Part of the complexity and polysemy of *Acrylic Tips* may be due to a polysemous system of address and an exchange of knowledge which excludes uninitiated readers.

The poem expresses sociocultural differences from Western dominance, such as Indigenous knowledge, through a subsumed but foundational representation of these differences throughout the poem. Just as the epigraph proposes a colonial perspective, as its author Donald Stuart was of British heritage, the poem attempts to mediate the claims of the privilege of exemption in part by representing the author's own experiences. In this manner Prynne frames differences of cultural milieus and cultural adaptations with a historical awareness that contextualises his interactions with indigenes and Indigenous culture. Demonstrating the areas and cultural situations out of which Prynne's

experiences took shape, and focusing on the utilisation of experiential knowledge within the poem, places this analysis at odds with the purview of most Prynne scholarship. While a prominent theoretic interest and a focus on the reclamation of the lyric define much avant-garde criticism, this analysis will focus on the ability of Prynne's poetic to adapt and correspond to specific cultural situations and contexts, such as is the case with *Acrylic Tips*. It shall be argued, with *Acrylic Tips* as an example, that the experiential is a touchstone of Prynne's work, even if the manner in which experiential knowledge is utilised is not explicit. Prynne's disinclination to use subjective expression and personal accounts does cast doubt upon the efficacy of subjective knowledge, but the focus upon how one knows what one knows is central to this project, suggesting a reliance on the experiential that is much more prominent than in many of Prynne's other collections. Using *Acrylic Tips* as an example allows for an analysis of the integration of experiential knowledge within the text in a manner demonstrative of how the author comes into the processes of understanding a cultural context other than the author's own.

The problematisation of the female pronoun and the lack of subjective expression display characteristics familiar to late-modernist poetry. However, the lack of subjective expression may also be an intentional distancing of the author from the material on which he is writing. As it relates to Indigenous culture, and the relationship represented within the poem, subjective expression would imply an order of association that the poem is not able to support. Subjective removal from the poem, in this instance, is an effort to refrain from cultural appropriation, and it works to keep the effects of colonisation as an objective reality which the poem can critique and discuss. The poem engages these issues not only thematically but also within the construct of the poem's semantic and semiotic expression, reflecting the linguistic history of the poem's subjects. Inherent within *Acrylic Tips* are the

experiential conditions and references that designate how Prynne comes into his knowledge of the culture on which he is writing. The lines bridging the first and second stanzas display the manner in which this discord takes place, subsumed within the thematic thread of the poem's action:

the grievance solitary; krook pathways risen up
To wheel and turn about spandrels high over submission
flexed to burnish and chomp get hungry for intimate
newsy entrances. Get plenty get quick. (537)

The chaotic demeanour of these lines and their acceleration from position to position shall invariably sow confusion and reading comprehension constraints within the work. To begin to unpack these lines slowly, 'the grievance solitary' entails the trauma and the brute reality of colonial oppression and the appropriation of Indigenous lands; a claim unremittingly singular in Australian history. As it relates to the father-daughter relationship depicted in the narrative of the poem, the 'grievance solitary' implies the isolation of the father, facing the loss of his daughter, and represents his increasing marginalisation. Tracing this line further into the poem's first page links the line to 'the promised riven grove; take heart / for rapt token incision along a defined track; to cry / and mourn for her as he goes, to bring her home' (537); these lines seem to entail a set of circumstances consequent to the removal of a loved one. Whether this progeny has been removed systematically, as in the case of Australia's 'Stolen Generation', or refers to a specific situation, the results are comparable.⁴¹¹ The 'rapt token incision along a defined track' (537) may refer to a bloodletting, a relinquishment of emotional trauma manifest through physical self-harm.

⁴¹¹Henry Reynolds, *Why Weren't We Told?* (Ringwood, Vic.: Viking, 1999) 70, *passim*. For discussions of Stolen Generation narratives and accounts of historical consciousness, see *Telling Stories: Indigenous History and Memory in Australia and New Zealand*, eds. Bain Attwood and Fiona Magowan (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 2001).

Scarring is an Indigenous rite often linked with initiation ceremonies, or grieving, practiced both in rural and urban societies.⁴¹² This linkage between trauma and self-harm is paralleled with the shearer who is cut by the handpiece, unifying labour with the ritual and chthonic acts which link Indigenous Australians with the land. This reading adds relevance to the ‘celestial scars’ (542) that appear in the poem after a cathartic moment of action, suggesting a paradigm which incorporates self-harm as a ritual practice. Where a ‘defined track’ may signify a traditional and sacred path through a piece of land given to the processing of grief, it may also signify a cultural place inherited through familial-geographic location. The promissory action entailed in mourning for loss or ‘bring[ing] her home’ details a protectionism associated with the male subject. But these pathways are ‘krook’ (Australian argot for ‘exhibiting physical sickness’, or, in a common association, sickly from consumption; Prynne’s line has the added substitution of ‘k’ for ‘c’ to satirise the political assumptions made regarding the sicknesses inherent to Australian Indigenous society, as cultural characteristics rather than as symptomatic of colonisation), and every option seems unattainable. The subject is left impotent to enact these options and is left to ‘wheel and turn about’, ‘high over submission’ (537), again linking ‘krook’ with the conditions of intoxication, perhaps accounting for the variegated emotional range of the poem’s first page. ‘[H]ungry for intimate / newsy entrances’, awaiting further reports from someone close, delivered by ‘the morning bulletin’, the subject ends up ‘all savage and reckonable’ (537). ‘[B]rowbeaten’, ‘high over submission’ and ‘mouthing actions, louder

⁴¹² Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines*, 194-199. On subincisions and cicatrisation, see also Hunter, *Aboriginal Health and History*, 166-172. In Elizabeth Grosz’s writing on the inscription of history on the body, she discussed ‘Cicatrisations and scarifications [which] mark the body as a public, collective, social category, in modes of inclusion or membership; they form maps of social needs, requirements, and excesses. The body and its privileged zones of sensation, reception, and projection are coded by objects, categories, affiliations, lineages, which engender and make real the subject’s social, sexual, familial, marital, or economic position or identity within a social hierarchy. Unlike messages to be deciphered, they are more like a map correlating social positions with corporeal intensities’. (Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994) 140). The conception of text as a body that is inscribed by history is further developed and explored in this dissertation in Chapter 5, on ‘Refuse Collection’.

into the swing' all tell of an unfolding story of the consequence of loss, with an attempt to 'raise a clamour to sober digits'; digits here may indicate a phone call, or may link the line to 'his right arm / tied to creation' (540) and the expression of paternal care and protection associated with a missing offspring. Sobriety stands as one of the most functional thematic pressures deemed necessary for the settlement of this accord, an inhibition to 'grasp for / Ribs of possession' (537).

Despite the treatment of the opening of this poem in a subjective and narrative-based reading, the poem's address does allow for a more thorough literary and socio-textual reading as well. Judeo-Christian beliefs hold a place within the poem, as is imparted through '[r]ibs of possession', '[m]iracle cheap shots', 'true bone' (537) and 'his right arm / tied to creation.' (540) It should be noted that, especially in rural environments, Australia maintains aspects of zealous reverence towards Christian moral imperatives as a fundamental part of its colonial history. The historical links between colonialism and the religious need no further exposition here than to note that they are implicitly linked with trauma, genocide and cultural depletion, adding further to the poem's political ramifications. This indicts not only the Australian government but religious institutions for assimilation and plans to 'breed out' Aboriginal Australians alongside other drives towards 'plan[ned] depletion.' (544) The history of Australian colonisation is also inherently tied to the histories of Christian missions and missionaries, who acted as agents for government forces and were instrumental in the implementation of education, health and welfare services in remote parts of the country, especially the Kimberley, the northern-most portion of Western Australia. The role of missions in the delivery of government services carried with it the mission's primary objective, conversion, and so entailed the renunciation of Aboriginal customs, traditions and languages as a prerequisite for accessing social

services.⁴¹³ Thus any discussion of the ecumenical in *Acrylic Tips* necessarily requires an understanding of the role of Christian proselytising in colonisation and in the decimation of Aboriginal traditions.

Command and Control.

Implicit in the socio-textuality of the poem and its registers of movement and observation are subsumed historical traumas. Much of the trauma of loss experienced in the poem's first page relates directly to ideas of authority and control. '[I]ntimate / newsy entrances' (537) is an especially poignant line in this respect, for it implies something supplemental and officious to what may account for 'news' in a small town. The fragmented line, '[g]et plenty get quick' (537), appears as a suffixal appendage, introduced by the authoritative pronouncement of news. In this instance Prynne is reliant on the idea of the sustentive and, as in many colonial conquests, the forced exchange of land for basic agrarian products and commodities. As it relates directly to the area of Australia where Prynne visited, John Kinsella's poem 'Sale of the Century', from *The Silo*, is pertinent here for exploring this exchange:

Sale of the Century

This town site was 'bought'
from the Nyoongahs
for a sack
of white flour
and a bent
shotgun.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹³ Hunter, *Aboriginal Health and History*, 43-47. See also, Elkin, *Australian Aborigines*, 191, for a discussion of other major problems with missions.

⁴¹⁴ John Kinsella and Dorothy Hewett, "Sale of the Century," *Wheatlands* (Fremantle, WA: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2000) 22.

In *Acrylic Tips*, both the indictment of ‘chomp get hungry’ (537) and ‘don’t chew get bloated’ (537) speak to the issue of mass poisoning and the possibility that strychnine was mixed into the flour. ‘Copious infarct’ (537) speaks to suffering convulsive bouts of ‘engorgement’ (539), ‘groaning’ (539) under ‘vows’ ‘for simple feedstuff’ (539). It is in demanding ethical treatment that Prynne writes of this colonial exchange. The subversion of the specifics of these historical accounts tells of the offering which ‘all will give and grasp for’ (537), an offering from those who ‘[p]romise so much’ (538). As witnessed in *News of Warring Clans*, promises made as they relate to conquest and land appropriation are enacted through the domestic register: ‘they / make a dip at the table found amiss, give and given // By a preference issue refolded and are not fed up with / less for less. Or for less.’ (538)

There is a point of exposition, detailed in the sociocultural history of the land and language, which is significant here, despite being neglected by prior criticism on *Acrylic Tips*. A meta-structural analysis forgoes the specificity of the language as it has evolved out of a landed history with specific connections to the social life, religion and politics of Australia. *Acrylic Tips* represents and utilises an Australian English loaded with the complexities and connotations of colonisation. It functions, as Prynne argues, through ‘the pragmatic history of [...] the social and generically coded uses of a specific language’.⁴¹⁵ The observational thread that continues throughout the poem reflects Prynne’s position as an outsider, but the colloquialisms, argot and socio-historical semantic and semiotic operations of language in *Acrylic Tips* position its poetic language as co-existing with Australian history. It is in this manner that the trans-historical aspects of the poem show

⁴¹⁵ J.H. Prynne, *Stars, Tigers and the Shape of Words; The William Matthews Lectures, 1992* (London: Birkbeck College, 1993) 32.

that ‘poetic thought is brought into being by recognition and contest with the whole cultural system of a language’.⁴¹⁶

That ‘newsy entrances’ is followed by the command, ‘Get plenty get quick’ (537), pairs Prynne’s use of didactic commands, which are often presented along the lines of advertising slogans, with an ironic critique of what constitutes authority. Seven fragmented utterances are presented across *Acrylic Tips*, in terse, abortive sentences which are delivered to contest the notion of command and authority. These ‘newsy entrances’ – ‘Get plenty get quick’, ‘Or for less’ (538), ‘You prefer it’ (542), ‘Aim right out’ (544), ‘Give out currency’ (545) and ‘not coming back to back sounds’ (546) – all resonate with a consummate air of power and control. The officious tone of command circumscribes issues of indigenusness in the fourth stanza of the sixth page of the poem:

Falling citation infringed
to demand resettlement, search each house incident
wakeful, pleading to suck to flourish. (542)

While this sentence does connote contiguities with the architectural elements within the poem as they relate to housing and places of occupation, it is the idea of enforced dwelling (paralleling the argument linking authority, dwelling and genocide that was a prominent feature of *Brass*, and relating to Prynne’s utilisation of Heideggerian thought) that this analysis draws upon. The Indigenous people of Australia who have remained on their traditional land live in government-controlled housing. While the schemes have varied, issues of control over this type of settlement have not. As Indigenous people have been stripped of the capacity to own their traditional land, their occupation of the land is under the control of the government. The autocratic rule of housing means that searches and

⁴¹⁶ Prynne, “Poetic Thought,” 598.

infringements for failing to maintain standards of the house (due to mass occupancy and lack of available social housing) continue to be a prevalent problem within Indigenous communities. Communities on traditional land are referred to by the colloquialism ‘camp’ or ‘town camp’, indicative of the common rustic conditions experienced there, often plagued by overuse, and mixed with the semantic implications of the post-Auschwitz usage of the term. The mixture of authority and dominance embodied by the governmental control leaves Indigenous people, born into and attempting to lead a traditional life, ‘pleading to suck to flourish.’ (542) Analogously, the conclusion to this line has Aboriginal Australians pleading for ‘milk / at a lip trickle’ (538) from the ‘abrogated breast’ (544) of the motherland. The notion of choice and free will is impossible under such conditions:

Frontal instilled
 terebinth maybe taps up, clinamen infertile lipid
 Sack on split her mother rare spilling grilse for clipper
 rushes minimal. You prefer it. (542)

Speaking to the notion of sheep being mutilated during the shearing process, the ‘punitive cleft’ (542) encapsulates some of the reciprocal brutality experienced by men and animals in the shearing shed. ‘[M]ilkwort’ (542), as Andrea Brady points out, is often used to promote lactation.⁴¹⁷ ‘[C]ultus’ and ‘terebinth’ (542) provide contracted allusions to biblical dicta and issues of belief.⁴¹⁸ It is through the integration of discursive language structures that linguistic as well as bodily transformations and mutations take place. In this sense the synoptic language of the poem implicates the Australian government on account of its handling of Indigenous Affairs, but also touches on some of the more pressing issues

⁴¹⁷ Brady, “No Turning Back: *Acrylic Tips*,” 82.

⁴¹⁸ "cultus, n.". *OED Online*. December 2012. Oxford University Press. 21 January 2013 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/45754?redirectedFrom=cultus>>. "terebinth, n.". *OED Online*. December 2012. Oxford University Press. 21 January 2013 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/199357?redirectedFrom=terebinth>>.

of technological and agricultural power relations which influence social conditions within the country.

Further polysemous layers may be discerned in the line,

Falling citation infringed
to demand resettlement, search each house incident
wakeful, pleading to suck to flourish. (542)

These lines, in conjunction with the damning conclusion, ‘You prefer it’, seem to allude to Australia’s handling of refugees, especially during the 1990s and into the new millennium. In the decades that have followed, little has changed. The xenophobic culture and vitriolic rhetoric against ‘boat people’ continues to be a dominant sentiment, especially prevalent in politically right wing and rural communities. The effect of this attitude on the political system has meant that even parties on the left of the political spectrum maintain hard-line policies against refugees, as a manner of ‘protecting’ Australia’s shores from foreigners. Much of this rhetorical violence has stemmed from former Prime Minister John Howard’s statement, ‘We will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances by which they come.’⁴¹⁹ This theme continues in the last page of *Acrylic Tips* with the lines, ‘observing / mass stricken touch your lips sewn to silence at air / the stream by day care who does’ (546), which speaks to the insufferable treatment of refugees and their consequent protest,

⁴¹⁹ John Howard, “Prime Minister of Australia, in a policy speech,” 28 October 2001, *Australian Politics*, 30 October 2010, <<http://australianpolitics.com/news/2001/01-10-28.shtml>>. This political rhetoric has increased to the point where asylum seekers who arrive by boat are no longer allowed to live in Australia, but must be processed and resettled in Papua New Guinea, as was announced by Kevin Rudd on 20 July 2013. Bianca Hall and Jonathan Swan, “Kevin Rudd to send asylum seekers who arrive by boat to Papua New Guinea,” 19 July 2013, *The Age*, 21 July 2013, < <http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/federal-election-2013/kevin-rudd-to-send-asylum-seekers-who-arrive-by-boat-to-papua-new-guinea-20130719-2q9fa.html>>.

such as sewing their lips together, as actually executed at the Woomera Immigration Reception and Processing Centre.⁴²⁰

The Woomera detention centre was prominent in the news during the time in which Prynne was in Australia. The centre, which was originally designed to house 400 people, was holding nearly 1500 asylum seekers in April 2000.⁴²¹ Due to overcrowding, prison-like conditions and systematic delays in the process of asylum claims, Woomera became the site of many incidents of abuse, hunger-strikes and self-harm. Public protests as well as media reports of harm began to shape the public campaign of care versus control, wherein the provision of human rights was pitted against a right-wing ‘othering’ of asylum seekers as barbarous and capable of violence. Due to the increasing media attention and public outcry, Woomera detention centre was finally closed in 2003.⁴²² The hunger strikes and the sewing of lips together stand as powerful acts of resistance that initiated a campaign the Australian public could stand behind. Yet this did not conclude with the advancement of humane treatment for asylum seekers, but rather in additional governmental controls and continuing isolation for those seeking refuge. It is a political situation which continues to dominate political discourse to this day, with mass instances of self-harm, suicides and protests being reported from within the camps housing those seeking refuge, even as access to the centres is becoming harder for the media to gain. One should also consider the relation to the domestic that is implied by the gendered symbol of sewn lips, and the relation of the plight

⁴²⁰ Lauren Ahwan, “50 sew up lips in hunger strike, detainees claim,” 27 June 2002, *The Age*, 30 October 2010, <<http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2002/06/27/1023864626046.html>>.

⁴²¹ Australian Broadcasting Commission, “About Woomera”, 19 May 2003, *Four Corners*, 12 November 2010, <www.abc.net.au/4corners/content/2003/transcripts/s858341.html>.

⁴²² Australian Broadcasting Commission, “About Woomera”, 19 May 2003, *Four Corners*, 12 November 2010, <www.abc.net.au/4corners/content/2003/transcripts/s858341.html>.

and silencing of the voices of refugees to the invisibility of the female in traditional patriarchal societies.⁴²³

Land and Elegy.

The line, '[T]he ploughshare has been through / the ground browbeaten' (537) links the poem with Hesiod by establishing a connection to his *Works and Days*,⁴²⁴ and therefore the history of the pastoral, and functions as a volta in the poem's first page. This incites questions of nomadicism versus sustained, settled civilisations and the practice of agricultural production. The ploughshare reference reintroduces the demarcation presupposed in the hierarchical evolution of societies, discussed earlier, upon which the decree of *terra nullius* was founded. The implication is to announce a colonial and agrarian fixedness to place and the rise of technology as a means for attaining a model of civilisation, which also implicates the role of capitalism in this evolution. The line is a geographic marker as well, designating the demarcation line between the fertile inland soils of Western Australia's Wheatbelt region and the infertile sands of the northern deserts as well as the uncultivable sandstone region of the Kimberley. This line of demarcation, based on the notion of fertility, parallels the rendering of the poem's narrative from a male protagonist's perspective and highlights a corporeal and physical distancing from the female.

Acrylic Tips displays many of the conventional strategies of the pastoral elegy, yet as with many of Prynne's other collections, the generic conventions of the elegy are dealt

⁴²³ Julie Cox and Stella Minahan, "Unravelling Woomera: lip sewing, morphology and dystopia," *Journal of Organisational Change Management*, 17.3 (2004) 292-301.

⁴²⁴ R.M. Frazer and Hesiod, *The Poems of Hesiod* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1983) 120.

with critically, with an effort to hybridise and contemporise their usage. The poem synchronises divergent cultural traditions of mourning in Western and Indigenous practices, creating a hybridised discourse and poetic space where slippages between and across cultural traditions and milieus comprise relations to sorrow. The narrative of the poem deals with loss, with the connection to land and the process of attaining consolation for loss; aspects associated with traditional, European, elegiac conventions. The inclusion of ethnographic details such as scarification rituals and references to travel on Indigenous songlines as a forms of consolation, add a level of ambiguity to the poem and the complex human processes of mourning. Traditionally pastoral elegies contain not only evocations of the natural world as a source of unification and continuance, but also involve questioning the role of initiation, vocation and inheritance. *Acrylic Tips* enacts and embodies this elegiac strategy, but does so in a manner which extends across cultural divides. The synchronistic confluence of mourning traditions creates a poetic in which colonial and Indigenous values and traditions are both present, but where Western traditions do not predominate over traditional Indigenous practices nor create a hierarchical structure subordinating the validity of traditional knowledge or non-Western ways of perception.

The narrative of the poem contains all of the conventions of a pastoral elegy: experience of loss, outbursts of anger and criticism, appeals, offerings of tribute, and the use of image-complexes which evoke the natural world as a site of renewal. The poem's narrative which relates the breakdown of the relationship between a couple, and the male subject's despondence, is signalled from the outset of the poem, 'to cry / and mourn for her as he goes, to bring her home' (537), and by the end of the poem some form of consolation is attained. The most defining aspect of pastoral elegiac conventions within the poem is Prynne's use of the natural as a symbol for fertility and creation. In this definitively

Australian context, the association to the natural world and the processes of renewal and continuance is framed within the function of fire in the regeneration of Australian trees and shrubs. The disparity between antecedent traditions of the pastoral elegy and the construction of mourning in *Acrylic Tips* may provide contextual inhibitions for readers but conceptualising the utilisation of Indigenous traditions as well as Prynne's use of Australian flora and fauna establishes contiguity with the elegiac mode.

The development of technology, even basic technology such as the ploughshare and its connection to labour and the land, is linked with the evolution of societies and is therefore implicit in the hierarchical power structures in colonial states and civilisations. Inherent in the poem's elegiac conventions, and perhaps demonstrative of its motive, is the criticism of a dominance of technology on traditional agrarian life, and the inherent violence and unending sense of loss this dominance creates. The poem is demonstrative of the pressures of the technological which are implicit within the production of language. Alongside and often concurrent with the 'newsy entrances' (537) are a series of repetitive manipulations of language which exemplify the conceits of language under pressure. Following the phrase already mentioned, 'Get plenty get quick' (537), is 'Acrid flash over over' (543), which mimics a transmission over CB radio. This line is connected to shooting expeditions and expressions of camaraderie which are codifications of pastoral dominance. Awareness of the omnipresence and proximity of violence is indicative of a rural life, yet the presence of this in the poem is foregrounded through an awareness which is conjoined with unease, perhaps indicating that this is not a commonplace reality for the author. Implicit in the repetitions of the poem is a fragmented and fractured signification expressed through the confines of technological dominance. The other lines that replicate this pattern include 'set up set back' (543), 'Poised on a lip, sip token' (543), 'Need no more no rested

fabric' (544), 'You look your laurel basket, you hover' (540), 'first touch first ready-made // Relentless' (544) and 'at a narrow a hitch a plate broken' (545). These phrasal manipulations speak with a detailed specificity to experience, often while serving as plaints in search of the verification of meaning.

The Australia depicted in the poem *Acrylic Tips* is one displaying the characteristic traits of a land in the midst of neo-colonial dominance.⁴²⁵ Epistemic violence dominates the poem, eliding the possibility of expressing traditional knowledge forthrightly. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak argues, the elision of agency by which the subaltern may speak is characteristic of and essential to marginalising and oppressive colonial power.⁴²⁶ In this manner, restrictions on the voice of resistance or the expression of traditional knowledge unify the conditions of isolation and the lack of voice suffered by refugees, the Indigenous and the female under patriarchal society and colonisation. Aspects of a recovery from this dominance are occasioned in the poem, through the representation of Indigenous traditions and knowledge in a hybridised and encoded complex. However the impress of colonial power is still apparent. If the effects of colonisation are still dominant, and the hierarchical power remains oppressive, have we forgone any notion of the *post*-colonial? Expressions of post-colonialism or post-imperialism, in this case, may be regarded as representational terms that refer to the constancy and unending dominance of colonisation. The continuance of this violence and its integration into contemporary systems of power has a permanent legacy in sociopolitical, lexical and hierarchical power relations, the characteristics and

⁴²⁵ It shall be argued that the conditions of colonisation in the poem are inherently active. They have determined and continue to determine cultural perceptions, identities and practices, and thus call into question the 'post-' condition of Australian colonialism.

⁴²⁶ Rosalind Morris, ed., *Can the Subaltern Speak?: reflections on the history of an idea* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2010) 35-37.

conditions of which are also discussed in detail with regards to Prynne's poems focusing on Iraq ('Refuse Collection') and South Africa (*Bands Around the Throat*).

Where Prynne's critique of colonialism diverges from other critiques is in the representation of conditions of imperial dominance. *Acrylic Tips* presents an encoded and subsumed expression of Indigenous traditions, knowledge and practices, adaptive and assimilative forms in use for thousands of years. In so doing Prynne creates an intellectual space defined by hybridity, in which cultural traditions, relations and practices coexist and are co-determined, even if in unequal degrees. The fact that the expression of this cultural synchronism is so deeply embedded within the text may represent the outright dominance of colonial subjugation to which Prynne was witness. Or, as discussed earlier, the utilisation and embedding of Indigenous knowledge in the poem may pertain to guarded knowledge, a desire for privacy, and may speak to the privilege of address. In *News of Warring Clans* there is no expression of traditional knowledge or customs, and Prynne's critique focuses on the exploitative and destructive systems of industrial imperialism. The linkage between imperialism and resource appropriation entails an ever-expanding cycle of human and land exploitation for the sake of profit, and the form of mythic violence in *News of Warring Clans* is critiqued as the voice of a degenerate model of capitalism. In *Acrylic Tips* notions of cultural adaptations and cultural coexistence are foregrounded, indicating that within Australian society there exists a greater degree of hybridity between cultures. That is not to say that Australian Indigenous peoples are not marginalised, victims of systemic violence and racism, but rather that their traditional ways of knowing and perceiving underlie and uphold much of the Australian experience. Analogously, this bi-cultural register speaks to and exemplifies the cultural heredity of the daughter in the poem, who, nearing the poem's conclusion, begins to speak for herself, taking the initiative in

resolving the ongoing dispute between her parents. This may pertain to another of the elegiac patterns in the poem, a form of consolation which exists as the answer to loss (loss of a culture and possibly loss of progeny): a daughter with a ‘prism dialect’, for whom both cultures are ‘bound up’ with the aim ‘to let nothing fall’ (546). This signifies that the ‘[b]urning child’ (546) who finds her voice may represent a resolution for the couple, as well as establishing the possibility of resolution between colonial and Indigenous Australians.

As was expressed in the epigraph, ‘The murderous head made from a motor car number-plate’ (535) entails a culture in the process of adaptation, an altered tradition of making, which necessarily amends itself to the destabilising movement enforced by a system of registration and control. The hunting party from Donald Stuart’s *Yandy* is juxtaposed with the technology-driven hunting party in *Acrylic Tips*, establishing a binary between the ritual Indigenous hunt and the technology-driven hunt as a recreational, colonial practice. The caustic description of the contemporary hunting party shows contiguous elements with the structures of dominance and control over nature which survive from nascent power structures:

The sky

Harmful, the ground slapped in a bundle, come across
for simple feedstuff taken back in refracted glare
of the front halogen raptors; give back a dew line
repayment soon enough before fixed mastic furrow,

Sorrow will you turn remain muzzle gripe, yet sign
off abject partition truly. (539)

The synoptic language is charged with the threat of the technological, most fittingly in ‘the front halogen raptors’, which amplify the hunt to a totemic image. However, the phrase likely refers to a series of lights strapped to the front of a ute or four-wheel drive vehicle common across rural Australia. The phrase may even refer to the specific brand of the lights, as inherent within the name of the lights is their marketing as a device purportedly advertised for safety but sold under the condition of expedited killing; the ominous slippage from description to naming perilously affects the reading of the line. While the illumination of the road may give the measure of added safety, here the sky is ‘[h]armful’ and the animal that has come across ‘for simple feedstuff’ is ‘taken back in refracted glare’. This suggests an animal startled, blinded and fixed fast in the blaze of light shone by these devices. The animal, most likely a kangaroo, is described as having its ‘[s]weet mane lap below lens failure by // Light bent back at lintel regression.’ (540) The rapacity associated with the lights adds further weight to the animal’s certain death as it stands transfixed. The ‘[s]orrow’ expressed at the sixth stanza’s opening leaves the vehicle’s occupant ‘abject’ and implies a restrained or subsumed guilt about the occasion; however, the emotional expression is later overridden in the tumultuous and frantic pace of the hunt. ‘[T]he ground slapped in a bundle’, provides an image of men out camping, or on an extended hunt, where their ‘bundle’ or swag invokes a romanticised image of the Australian swagman living in the bush (with the gendered exclusivity that this image entails), solitary, surviving and traveling as he needs, and invoking the neo-nomadic practices marketed to colonial Australians in the pursuit of recreation.

These romantic images, in contrast with the Indigenous hunting party as well as the technologised ‘roo-hunting’ vehicle, are deadened in the wake of further phrases which detail the inconspicuous nature of the hunt. ‘[P]eel off’, ‘he puts the hammer down’ (542)

and ‘spear swap’ (543) all reiterate the transformation of the hunt through technological means, aiming down the road with the ‘[c]avity grill’ where the animal is ‘at a target run.’ (544) ‘Aim right out’ (544) is the command bantered between mates, ensuring that neither the vehicle nor its mirrors, if shooting from the truck, is hit by ill-aimed bullets. The line, ‘Limit smash best beast interfere, massive engine’ (545), provides a direct account of the hierarchical regime of power and the deployment of technology in expressions of hegemonic and, in this case, patriarchal power structures in everyday Australia.

The hierarchies of power and control in relation to nature stem from a top-down relation to the history of colonisation. This is a power structure which is systematically imbricated within a society, involving its treatment not only of Indigenous Affairs and multiculturalism, but also, as expressed in *Acrylic Tips*, the relationship between humans and nature. Chief amongst these expressions of anthropocentric dominance is the human and natural experience of trauma in the shearing shed. It is appropriate that the location of these experiences and expressions of dominance and trauma should be represented by the Australian shearing shed, ‘the greatest university in the world’⁴²⁷ and the historical hotbed of social and labour relations as they developed in Australia. Stemming from the 1890s Shearers’ Union actions and continuing to the present day – and despite a growing disillusion with politics experienced at all levels in Australian society in the past decades – the shearing shed has been home to an active and participatory expression of labour politics. That the shearing shed is the location of much of *Acrylic Tips* sutures the poem’s temporal frame and expressions of the technological, such as genetic engineering, to the country’s foundations of colonialism and pastoralism. The shed is a microcosmic expression of the whole history of Australia’s hegemonic and patriarchal hierarchical

⁴²⁷ John Kinsella, *Contrary Rhetoric: Lectures on Landscape and Language*, eds. Glen Phillips and Andrew Taylor (Fremantle, WA: Fremantle Press, 2008) 152. A comment attributed to Stephen Kinsella.

power structures, which finds extension in acts of control, selection and outright dominance in genetic engineering.

As they relate to labour, technology and the pastoral elegy within the Australian context, some analogous readings may establish linkages between the violence detailed in *Acrylic Tips* and in John Kinsella's 'The Hierarchy of Sheep' and 'The Epistemology of Sheep'. An expression of brutality which relates to *Acrylic Tips* is found in Kinsella's 'The Hierarchy of Sheep':

Furious amongst the ewes, savage to its fellows,
headbutting and cracking the competition –
[...]
he watches nervously, fearing a vengeful shearer
as the feelers sense their way out of the sheath
of the ram's penis – cut by the handpiece
the ram is rendered "useless",
unable to find the ewe's cunt.⁴²⁸

The clipped penis of the ram has further implications in the reading of the lines, 'his right arm / tied to creation' (540) and 'arms roiled back into / sleeve fluid' (543), both of which imply assisted insemination and a discourse of technologic dominance to which this analysis will return. These lines also provide the most expressive and intricate experience of trauma as dealt by man upon animal. The account which Prynne provides, as it relates to Kinsella's poem, is taken from the fourth page of *Acrylic Tips*:

Prove him his
grain allocation unceased. Parry leafage, cut your lip
in mischief gashes all succulent racked, sudden frenzy
propulsed for her climbing averse to clip there count

⁴²⁸ Kinsella and Hull, "The Hierarchy of Sheep," *Zoo*, 125.

Heavy declined, deducted amen. In foetal daylight pits
sodden to famine direct slew glass under the tongue,
mask too rapid flim and stubborn, would you ever waste
shrinkage over the string line. Of a course petal

Resiled after shunning to pine slopes his right arm
tied to creation. Gristed born likeness reaches out
needlepoint decision, egg fillet glass handed handle
don't ever touch inherit. Retain first option in

Vert defection placement after birth foray, rake and for
sprinkle retrench to dormancy. Mend it not, brave
crevice through which beams pin out currency often late
starved infill. (540)

‘[M]ischief gashes’ implies not only the possibility that the ram’s frenzy has left him injured, but that the ‘mischief’ is caused by a vengeful shearer. As Kinsella recreates the report from his brother Stephen,

A ram horns its way into the blue singlet
of a shearer and through to his belly,
coiled like the spiral matrix of hatred
recognizing captivity.⁴²⁹

In Prynne’s poem the ram is ‘propulsed’, driven off or chased away; the ram’s shorn penis has him already showing signs of an inability to copulate, ‘averse to slip there count [their cunt?]’. ‘[P]ropulsed’, in conjunction with ‘[h]eavy declined, deducted amen’, alludes to the possibility that the ram will be shot. The reason for the weighted response in the poem to the wounding of the ram has ultimately to do with the correlation between fertility and productivity, and the ram’s place in the hierarchy of sheep. The gendered preference of the male over the female within the hierarchy opens up this register within the poetic, allowing the preference and hierarchy to extend to monetary and labour relations. ‘To clip [the]

⁴²⁹ Kinsella and Hull, “The Hierarchy of Sheep,” *Zoo*, 125.

count’, reveals the discourse of currency and exchange at work within the poem, as the ‘count’ relates to the total number of sheep sheared and amount of wool bailed in a day. ‘Resiled after shunning’ shows an animal withdrawing from the task after failure; ‘[g]risted’ represents a gnashing of the teeth (resonating with ‘mastic’ (539), as discussed by Andrea Brady⁴³⁰) at an offering of benevolence. ‘[H]is right arm / tied to creation’ puns upon ‘tired’, showing the strain and stress of the shearer’s labour. He ‘reaches out / [for] needlepoint decision,’ and while efforts to mend the wounded ram are attempted, a parallel is established linking the makeshift surgery to the tying off and trellising of a growing vine in ‘[v]ert deflection placement after birth foray, rake and for / sprinkle retrench to dormancy’, as well as in ‘tie off leaf after leaf’ (540). The phrase, ‘retrench to dormancy’, adds a fatalistic weight to the proposed stitching up of the injured, to the point where ‘[m]end it not’ is commanded. The shearer carries the wounded animal outside, where the ram faces an uneasy slaughter. ‘[H]aply tie[d] off’, the shearer must ‘bear up on shoulder level care’ (540) the weight of the animal. The line, ‘ruinously now surmounted’ (540), implies a devastating fate awaiting the animal, with the shearer standing over him. That ‘[a]im’ precedes ‘nothing heard’ (540) within the image-complex implies that the death is overridden with the noise of the shed, the animal’s death is displaced from the labour and the guilt of the shearers is somewhat lessened. The line, ‘ruinously now surmounted’, suggests the ram’s loss of utility and hence his loss of life. The line also resounds with the lines, ‘Again the feedstuff for ruin makes the level / “acceptable”, there is no choice but to / choose this’, from *High Pink on Chrome*, where the prospects of harm are weighed in decisions regarding pastoral production.⁴³¹ A similar register in *Bands Around the Throat* contorts the ethic of care into decisions regarding immanent threat and the valuation of

⁴³⁰ Brady, “No Turning Back: *Acrylic Tips*,” 82. ‘[...] furrows fixed in mastic, scraped out by an artillery of ploughshares: mastic, from the Greek for jaw, used by Hesiod for the gnashing of teeth.’

⁴³¹ Prynne, *Poems*, 257.

human life in the wake of the Chernobyl meltdown, represented with the line, ‘the bond of care annulled.’⁴³² The dialectic of care and control has resonance throughout Prynne’s oeuvre, and its human effect is most notable in *Brass*, where the Holocaust is figured in terms which presuppose that ‘freedom from care deflects the care itself’.⁴³³ All of these associations add to the polysemous account of the line, providing an ethical treatment of the decisions regarding the preservation or predation of another life. In the shearing shed, the poem implies, this slaughter has become habitual, just as animals displaying deformed growth conditions in the laboratory are so easily discarded.

Where *Acrylic Tips* utilises ekphrastic references, such as in the stanza beginning ‘Heavy declined, deducted amen’, referencing the shepherds of Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*, it is done in such a manner as to imply a burial of the reference, leaving no trace of the cosmopolitan and literary romanticism frequently utilised by writers in depictions of the traditional life of pastoral labour. What is exacting is the cumulative and continual experience of trauma and brutality displayed in the working conditions of the shed. The poem allows no allusions as to the nature of this work and quickly dispels any suggestion that it might be read as romantic: ‘Never at one blow to // Divvy up warm pleats’ (538). ‘Best at blood plastic / same time blent’ (539) presents a manipulation of genetic material echoed in the captive ‘bleat’ of the sheep. ‘Hand on the guard rail down most volition to slight / and planing sheer brings inert forwards, rifted for / them in the photograph acid’ (540) establishes a connection with ‘flim’ two stanzas later, in discussing the treatment of wounded animals after they are ‘tailed, castrated, ringed, earmarked and muled’.⁴³⁴ Both ewes and wethers receive similar treatment, as was discussed regarding the ewe’s shorn

⁴³² Prynne, *Poems*, 349.

⁴³³ Prynne, *Poems*, 173.

⁴³⁴ Kinsella and Hull, “The Hierarchy of Sheep,” *Zoo*, 127.

teat. Prynne represents this with the line, ‘Sack on split her mother rare spilling grilse for clipper / rushes minimal.’ (542) Prynne’s poem describes this brutality suffered by man and animals through ‘lamb for kicks’ (543) and ‘browsing hearts spear swap’ (543), where Kinsella’s poem ‘The Epistemology of Sheep’ details the injured as having ‘ribflesh flyblown and the heart exposed – all the world sees’.⁴³⁵

Raised in these lines is the connection of these animals to the sustenance of the shearers, a relation of violence compounded by proximity and complicity. The shearer is described with a tremendous appetite, ‘leaping to swallow the pride of daily bread’ (544), which instigates a semantic loop unifying labour to sustenance, as well as establishing connection to alcohol abuse amongst this labouring class. The line also accounts for the biblical dicta within the poem, drawing inferences to mourning and loss when paired with the lines, ‘Crawled to the step mourn arms having none to lift / like bread aloft’ (545). The connection demonstrates how intimate and intrinsically corporeal is the occupation of shearing, with the notion of labour becoming tied to the shearer’s subjective identity. The corporeality expressed in this line also speaks to the removal of a portion of the animal’s body for the sake of another’s survival. Inherent within the representation of the disfigured or disabled mourner is the condition of injured shearers whose lives are gutted when disengaged from their labour.

The experience of trauma is both animalistic and anthropocentric in nature. An ‘open grasping // Flickered up eyelash address. Open breech’ implies an unsealed wound on the abdomen, where ‘[s]till the insipid / blob of glory distends to circumflex,’ and the shearer’s myth of the self-healing wound is incited in a ‘post-hormone limb crisis.’ (545) As the accumulation of these circumstances mount, the brutality and trauma suffered is

⁴³⁵ Kinsella, “The Epistemology of Sheep,” *The Hierarchy of Sheep*, 51.

‘[i]njury too mounted in harm’ (545). The ‘contracted mammal’ (543) references both men and animals, dealing with ‘celestial scars’ (542) and ‘sunken capital’ (543). There is a certain indefatigable knowledge being subtly imparted in *Acrylic Tips*, in the unification of men to their labour, every day being measured in the count, paralleled in John Kinsella’s poetry from nearly the same time and place:

Work: proof of time
and natural presences.
Each run two hours.
Four runs to a day.
In lambs maybe two-hundred.
In the hard sheep
at the end of the asphalt
maybe one-thirty.⁴³⁶

The procession from runs to days to seasons, and the evaluation of labour in statistical quantities, is a condition of the occupation upon which reputations (“the gun shearer”) and livelihoods are built. In *Acrylic Tips*’s final pages Prynne writes, ‘By year end will send bitten / for carbon season indifferent new chasm revival tips // Sprung forth digressed, cicatrised.’ (546) For Kinsella, in an analogous reading, the ewes are ‘wearing their scars gracefully beneath the season’s haute-couture’.⁴³⁷ Prynne’s description of the wounds as ‘cicatrised’ unifies the wound with a ritualised act in Indigenous initiation ceremony, symbolising a transition rite ‘through which the initiate passes from one condition to another’.⁴³⁸ ‘Cicatrise’, by definition, is a wound’s healing via scarring, though in unifying this with aspects of Indigenous culture the term is associated with a notion of ‘archaeological damage’ done to a society, from which the emblematic and associative

⁴³⁶ Kinsella, “The Epistemology of Sheep,” *The Hierarchy of Sheep*, 52.

⁴³⁷ Kinsella and Hull, “The Hierarchy of Sheep,” *Zoo*, 126.

⁴³⁸ Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines*, 198. In this way, if the wounding represented is suffered by the shearer, it may be seen as its own initiation, a testament to the dangers of one’s occupation.

‘scar’ manifests itself in continual and multi-generational abilities and inabilities to adapt and come to an understanding of past trauma.⁴³⁹ *Acrylic Tips* proposes that this scarring, undertaken by Indigenous Australians, has manifested as a result of their cultural trauma, brutal treatment, ‘plan[ned] depletion’ (544) and genocide, which qualify their scars as ‘celestial’ (542). It is this type of internalised, experiential trauma and brutality which leaves shearers suffering the same fate, clinging to past actions, reputations and attitudes which continue the hierarchies of violence, power and control that regulate their lives. It is perhaps their hand in violence and the normalisation of human-animal power relations that becomes habitual to a pastoral way of life.

The pastoral elegy in *Acrylic Tips* is utilised as both mode and method. The poem is constructed upon and contains conventions of the pastoral elegy, which it utilises to discuss the hybridity of Indigenous and colonial cultures. The elegiac aspects of *Acrylic Tips* and its relation to the pastoral function as a means to frame Prynne’s discourse on the role of technology, bodily harm, colonisation and the sustensive, the dominant subthemes of the poem. The passage from loss to consolation is extended by the poem’s elegiac elements to direct the narrative and to abridge cultural differences. Elegiac expression is fundamental to the discussion of the increasingly technical methods of pastoral production and the ontological problems they entails for cultural understandings of the land. The role of technology and its influence on concepts of corporeality reflect this elegiac expression, but also contain influences of hierarchy and gendered preference which stem from colonial power relations. The colonial process of renaming and appropriating land expresses a

⁴³⁹ "cicatrise, v.". *OED Online*. December 2012. Oxford University Press. 21 January 2013 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/32953?redirectedFrom=cicatrise>>. As it relates to Indigenous Australia, see also Judy Atkinson, Jeff Nelson and Caroline Atkinson, “Trauma, transgenerational transfer and effects on community wellbeing,” in *Working Together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and wellbeing principles and practice*, eds. N. Purdie, P. Dudgeon and R. Walker (Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2010) 135-144. [Available online at <<http://aboriginal.childhealthresearch.org.au/media/54889/chapter10.pdf>>.]

dominance explored in Prynne's presentation of the technological, foregrounding a lineage of hierarchical power structures inherent in the culture of contemporary Australia.

The Domestic and the Technological.

In describing the intersecting themes in *Acrylic Tips*, Andrea Brady focuses her attention on the idea of dissemination, on land and bodies being rent, and on the land and bodies exemplifying the forces of division within the poem. For Brady, 'the lineated and amputated body, the bound and divided land, is lyric'.⁴⁴⁰ While she adeptly points to aspects of the poem that signify this position, the ideas of division and separation within the poem nonetheless remain mostly of a domestic nature. Where the act of suturing references a body, Brady's reading of scientific examination and genetic manipulation remains at the forefront. The suture in *Acrylic Tips* signifies a preceding wound or trauma, but to purport that this is only indicative of the function of Prynne's lyric forgoes other registers in which the suture operates. Aside from a number of instances in which the image-complex is technological or pathological, the strains of separation in the poem are of a domestic nature, and have to do with a child's forcible separation from her father. In a poem focusing on the dictates of the pastoral and colonial divisions of labour, the act of mending implies a matriarchal and domestic register. The repeated references to mending signify the continuous material labour of women, and it is therefore unified with domesticity. In this instance the 'abraded dreamer' (545) is also 'tied to creation' (540), appealing to the mending of words but also bearing the impetus to amend the situations of domestic strife, to 'dress admonishment' with 'drop threads' (546). The implied incapacity and failure to

⁴⁴⁰ Brady, "No Turning Back: *Acrylic Tips*," 82.

fix the domestic situation is found in ‘woven door traps’ and the desire to ‘discard the weaving frame’ (546). The discarded weaving frame leaves the trammelled protagonist ‘stitching a breath’ (546), implying that the very substances that give life necessitate an understanding and implementation of ‘useful toil’ (539) to render the domestic workable.

This is not to say that Brady’s claim is without some warrant, since the poem does deal with instances of forcible mutations, often in the abortive contestation of the natural. Brady’s reading of genetically manipulative technology and her explanations of the utility of ‘heparin’ (538) and ‘beads lenticular’ in the production of genetic manipulations should be read in full for its breadth of knowledge as well as for the manner in which Brady argues that *Acrylic Tips* ‘mimics linguistically the wounds and mishaps of the experimental body’.⁴⁴¹ Technical means of manipulation are incited in ‘needlepoint decision’ (540); the decision to ‘[m]end it not’ lends itself to readings of the abortive clamour over doing away with those experimentally manipulated animals suffering ‘defection placement after birth foray’ (540) while signifying the complicity of the religious in discourses regarding genetic control over animals. The result is an expression of ‘accusatory disgust’⁴⁴² mixed with ‘stultified relief’ (542). The phrase, ‘[f]ixative intrinsic’ (541), in pathological histology, signifies a fixation in the chemical process by which biological tissues are protected from the decay of autolysis or putrefaction, firmly anchoring this image-complex within the laboratory. A ‘[f]ixative’ in this function acts to disable ‘intrinsic’ biomolecules, protecting them from proteolytic enzymes that digest or damage samples in biological-laboratory work.⁴⁴³ There is a finite specificity of laboratory work built into the image-complex of genetic expression in the poem. A failure to produce a living subject such as Dolly the

⁴⁴¹ Brady, “No Turning Back: *Acrylic Tips*,” 81.

⁴⁴² Brady, “No Turning Back: *Acrylic Tips*,” 82.

⁴⁴³ Freida L. Carson and Christa Hladik, *Histotechnology: A Self-Instructional Text* (Hong Kong: American Society for Clinical Pathology Press, 2009) 2.

sheep, cloned in Britain in 1996, or Matilda the sheep, cloned in Australia in 2000, is suggested here, with the emphasis placed on the physiological miscarriage, physical mutation and premature death of these animals.⁴⁴⁴ In this manner, '[m]end it not' can be read as a command about an animal 'set for drilled sternum' (543), and relates to the unsympathetic phrase concluding that another animal is displaying an 'unformed casual / stem' (541), and a casting of this animal as a '[s]pinal attempt discarded.' (543) '[G]ene expression resentment' might hint at the moral ambiguity of the populace to the genetic production of the animals, though Prynne's lines about 'thumb printed' animals 'pinned to earth' implies more condemnation than contestation (544).

It is the decisive loss entailed in the forced mutation of these animals that Brady takes up when she writes of the poem, 'Between its beastly reveille and the elective mutism of its ending, the only possibility for resistance this poem enacts is the productive linguistic process which it encloses and consequently destroys'.⁴⁴⁵ For Prynne, it is that the 'why isn't ready yet' (542), and that acts of resistance and informed questions about the utility of such experiments have yet to be put forward. The continued, evolving process of genetically rewriting bodies, scarring them and excising them, is indicative of a similar geographic and cultural process which the poem foregrounds through its engagement with the colonisation of Australia.

⁴⁴⁴ Matilda was cloned at the South Australian Research and Development Institute (SARDI). Matilda was produced using techniques similar to those that produced Dolly. She died of unknown causes in 2003. Between Matilda's birth in 2000 and early 2005, four more cloned sheep were born and showed excellent health. SARDI researchers aim to develop the technology for use in livestock industries as well as to improve wool fibre production. <<http://www.biotechnologyonline.gov.au/human/cloninganimal.html>>.

John Kinsella's Bloodaxe version of *The Hierarchy of Sheep* (Newcastle-on-Tyne: Bloodaxe, 2000) has images of Dolly in a Warholian montage on the cover.

⁴⁴⁵ Brady, "No Turning Back: *Acrylic Tips*," 83.

The Australian Narrative, Music, Botany and the ‘Burning child’.

Jon Clay notes that in *Acrylic Tips*, ‘the poem both does and does not refer to a world; the different discourses that are imbricated in the poetry do not describe a recognisable world’.⁴⁴⁶ Clay contends rather that *Acrylic Tips* presents ‘the impossibility of straight forward interpretation (recognition) [and] immediately places readers in a strange place, smooth beyond recognition and composed of dynamic sensations’.⁴⁴⁷ Clay further argues that ‘there is no explanatory context for these phrases, which again considerably weakens any proposed representational function’.⁴⁴⁸ The quality of the landscape represented in the poem may have an unrecognisable quality to a British reader; however, recognisable landscape features, subjects and narratives do populate the poem in profound ways. It may be said that the weakness of ‘any proposed representational function’, by which Clay finds meaning obscured, is a common trait of innovative poetry and a matter for which the reader requires preparation. This difficulty does not, however, obfuscate or elide the representative function of language, as Clay argues. The manner in which to read a late poem of Prynne’s is with an absolute attention to detail, often scholarly research and an ability to accrue phrasal assemblages of details with other similar constructions. Ultimately the reader may render from these disparate connections the trace of representation. These traits are then positioned in a framework of sociopolitical circumstance or experience, which the poem shapes as a model of action, contestation and response.

In the case of *Acrylic Tips*, the main narrative is positioned around a situation of domestic division and separation. The thematic contents of *Acrylic Tips* are textually constructed through broken and fragmented narratives and clauses. The subject, as has been

⁴⁴⁶ Clay, *Sensation, Contemporary Poetry and Deleuze*, 147.

⁴⁴⁷ Clay, *Sensation, Contemporary Poetry and Deleuze*, 144.

⁴⁴⁸ Clay, *Sensation, Contemporary Poetry and Deleuze*, 145.

mentioned, is dealing with the possible loss and forced removal of a child, and while the poem deals with the breakdown of that relationship, there is also a parallel with the removal of children enforced by the state, constituting Australia's 'Stolen Generation.' There are also contiguous semantic allusions hinting at the idea that *Acrylic Tips* is patterned on an Indigenous love song, a *Yilpinji*, 'The Honey-Ant Men's Love Song'.⁴⁴⁹ The connection between *Acrylic Tips* and Indigenous song is supported by the reference to 'honey at due rain down partly / on useful toil,' (539) as well as the connection between labour and the sustenance in the poem. The journeying, notions of ensnarement (linked to stanza twenty-eight of 'The Honey-Ant Men's Love Song'), the sensual and erotic imagery associated with nature, and the instances of longing all parallel aspects of the Central Australian love song. This pattern also reinforces Prynne's longstanding interest in ethnographic recordings of Indigenous ceremonial song, and may express a mnemonic pattern of details in the poem, mimetic of Indigenous songs' structures of oral transmission.

As it influences the poetic construction of *Acrylic Tips*, the vacillation of rhythmic cadences into distinct and repetitive sequences suggests limitations and inhibitions on the movement of the poem. Indicative of the sonic patterns found in traditional Indigenous song cycles are descriptions of what seem to be the echoic and elemental resonance of the didgeridoo. Descriptions of the sound created by the didgeridoo and the act of performance are given in the lines '[p]oised on a lip' (543) and '[d]istress dilation,' (542) acknowledging the cyclic breathing used when playing the instrument, and giving rise to 'stultified relief throat vibration' (542). 'She forces her throat in / wards only pulse' (543) describes a songman or songwoman '[s]carce moving' providing 'even sound' (542): a 'body echo' of a 'voice in travail' (538). 'Ruck flutter at the mouth' (541) and 'potent spirit rattle' (540)

⁴⁴⁹ R.M.W. Dixon and Martin Duwell, ed., *The Honey-Ant Men's Love Song and other Aboriginal Song Poems* (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1990) 49-53.

could be read as descriptions of accompanying instrumental and vocal sounds in a traditional Indigenous song. While this description of traditional music might entail an experiential account of Prynne's time in the Kimberley, it is also possible that these descriptions relate to an account John Kinsella provides in *Fast, Loose Beginnings* of the interaction between Prynne and John's brother Stephen: 'I have one visual memory of their interaction: Jeremy leaning up against a wall while Stephen played the didgeridoo—Jeremy seemed to be staring into himself like someone undergoing a shamanistic drug ritual, a door of perception that had ironically opened and had then gone to some place without language or name'.⁴⁵⁰ If, as Kinsella noted in *Fast, Loose Beginnings*, the discussion between Prynne and Stephen Kinsella went all night, Stephen's ability to switch between instruments, Western and Indigenous, provides a model for reading the shift in rhythms in the poem, between those based on Indigenous songs and those of a Western register. In this case, the poem may be altering its rhythm to correspond to given contexts and places, and thus further heightening the mnemonic elements utilised in the creation of its poetic.

The rhythmic and linear patterns of *Acrylic Tips* seem to replicate the sonic and rhythmic sequences of Indigenous songs, such as 'The Honey-Ant Men's Love Song'. The grammatical patterns of Indigenous song are mimicked in lines such as 'Need no more no rested fabric' (544), as patterns of repetitive vocable stresses establish a connection to the recitative feature of Indigenous song structures. As Elkin explains, the lines sung may be complete and grammatical sentences, but in certain parts of the country 'they are usually very short, consisting of four or five words which provide a key to the meaning, or rather meanings, for these may be both patent and latent'.⁴⁵¹ The repetitive words and syllabic stress of Prynne's lines could thus have antecedents in Indigenous song cycles which utilise

⁴⁵⁰ Kinsella, *Fast, Loose Beginnings*, 131.

⁴⁵¹ Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines*, 291.

‘words and phrases [...] in a particular way to lead from one idea or scene to another in order to achieve continuity and to create a kind of verisimilitude’.⁴⁵² The shifting patterns of rhythm within the poem may therefore function as small volte, across which the poem instigates slippages of context and location.

The poem’s varying rhythmic patterns and forms of poetic construction, from abrupt dictates to lyrical passages, may be one means of exploring the divergence between cultural song traditions. The patterns of organisation within the poem pertaining to Western music and the technological incursion on language may be seen in the compressed and alliterative line ‘Assault liquid at stem // Assents tremulous, set up set back.’ (543) Lines such as these and the combative, polymorphous syllabic patterns they inspire stand in stark contrast to the plaintive, lyrical descriptions of the natural, such as ‘soon to leave to live commiserate in vivid suffusion’ (539), which drawls through syllables and creates an open-ended resonance, or the mnemonic pattern created in ‘recall shady woods paired / in sensual fast nutation.’ (544) The rhythmic patterns and pacing of the lines and the copulative exchange between organisational patterns in the poem can be read as the employment of a cross-cultural exchange of song.

The narrative element of the poem entails, from the opening stanza, the catharsis of the subject dealing with ‘the grievance solitary’ (537). The subject is struggling with the pressures of addiction, and opens the poem ‘mouthing actions’; ventriloquised utterances which are defeated by inhibitory circumstances that the subject is left ‘[t]o wheel and turn about’ (537). The male subject is willing to ‘give and grasp for // Ribs of possession’ (537), which, along with the growing construct of references, signifies a lost female progeny. Loss

⁴⁵² Ronald M. Berndt, *Three Faces of Love: Traditional Aboriginal Song-Poetry* (Melbourne: Nelson, 1976) 9.

in *Acrylic Tips* is almost exclusively a gendered process, which should inform how one reads Prynne's constructions of colonisation. The biblical allusion represented in the line 'give and grasp for // Ribs of possession' (537) represents loss as a corporeal excision of the subject. '[T]ake heart' is a command given alongside other paths to reparation; the possibilities of action for the subject are 'to cry / and mourn for her as he goes, to bring her home' (537). After receiving bad news, he is 'all savage and reckonable,' searching for an answer, to 'raise a clamour' for 'true bone' (537). Despite the narrative insertions throughout the poem's first page and across the volta, the stress of and insistence on the narrative monadically colonises the poem's other thematic interests.

References to domestic division accumulate within the poem. Where the phrase 'dejected by partner claimants' (538) appears, preceding 'out / pat on a moving front, muster to confirm a perimeter', it implies a group of people searching for a lost child, with the colloquial 'muster' indicative of a rural or pastoral property (538). '[T]heir kids besotted' (538) supplies news of a joyous reception of discovery, but also the possibility of intoxication.⁴⁵³ Another of the architectural traces in the poem, a conditional simile to the 'besotted' reaction of the children, is that they are under 'a felt roof'. 'in a snug rafter' (538),⁴⁵⁴ which again reiterates the sense that the building belongs to a rural property. As with many rural Australian schoolhouses, homesteads are built complete, and above them a tin roof is constructed overlaying the domicile, providing an expanded living space and protection against seasonal conditions. 'Win on green, give a toss' (538) implies that under the roof there is a group of people gambling, possibly playing 'two-up', a traditional gambling game of Australia, in which coins are thrown and their outcomes bet upon. The

453 "besotted, adj.". *OED Online*. December 2012. Oxford University Press. 21 January 2013 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/18120?redirectedFrom=besotted>>.

454 'In a snug rafter' might also be read as polysemous if this phrase is used in connection with the shearing shed, as it could describe the sling that shearers lean on while clipping sheep.

game has associations with the ‘digger[s]’ who appear in the following stanza, and is commonly played on Anzac Day in Australia. It is also an illicit form of gambling often played by children at schools across the country, again unifying this imperative with the architectural ‘snug rafters’. Gambling in Indigenous communities is also a prevalent social issue, and as such Prynne may be trying to extend the parallels between common Western practices and the problematic integration of these customs into Indigenous culture.⁴⁵⁵

The textual construction of Prynne’s poems cannot generally be read in a linear fashion. However, for the sake of demonstrating that a narrative is constructed throughout the text, this reading shall precede in a linear manner, noting the broken temporal and spatial relations that are presented. The accusatory, ‘Why should / she ever flinch,’ (538) evidences a (potentially violent) pattern of behaviour within the relationship. This is offset by the fragmented utterance, ‘Promise so much,’ (538) from the fourth stanza. ‘Why should it’ remains a digressional but suffixal condition of the situation’s ‘rank assessment’, placing the subject’s indecision under scrutiny (538). These phrases form a partial narrative that helps to clarify subjective identities and their relational statuses within the poem. The line, ‘both not replenished even liable or yet / parted,’ has the couple together, even if a decision or an amiable separation has not been mediated, asking, ‘Shall each cherish / defrayment [...] for certain delusive grips’ (539).

The instances of movement, ‘bearing into reverse’ and ‘turned off’, signify acts of departure (539). An assonantal misreading gives a further semantic connotation to ‘[s]orrow will you turn remain muzzle gripe, yet sign / off abject partition truly.’ (539) The

⁴⁵⁵ Hunter, *Aboriginal Health and History*, 231-252. Concluding a large chapter on the social and cultural function of gambling in the Kimberley, Hunter writes, ‘The potency of gambling lies, in part, in its ability to undermine not only the economic means of advancement but also the means of subsistence. Gambling contributes to the stagnation of plans for the future in order to sustain desperate hopes in the present. Gambling in this area of Aboriginal Australia is quintessentially the foreshortening of desire.’ (252)

grammatical structure of the line, in conjunction with its forced closure, implies a relationship that is defined by a growing distance. ‘[S]ign / off abject’ provides, if not a direct representation of letter writing, surely notice of the communiqué’s transmission and its characteristics. ‘[A]bject’ forces another remove, implying that this is a reported transmission as witnessed by a third party. The word ‘truly’ at the line’s end and its common association with letter writing provides further evidence of the growing distance between the parties, and evidences the sincerity of the ‘[s]orrow’ which opened the line. The pairing of ‘truly’ and ‘[s]orrow’ illustrates the emphatic, emotional fallout of the growing distance and division in the poem.

The representation of this close but tempestuous union continues to enable narrative threads, though the timeframes corresponding to the representation offer little acknowledgement of the pattern of the unfolding relationship. A sensual enactment of the division and separation is manifested in the line ‘soon to leave to live commiserate in vivid suffusion.’ (539) The line provides an acute colouration to the notion of departure, resonant with some degree of hope. However, the expression of the possibility of diseases, particularly diseases of the eyes, in the polysemous ‘suffusion’ has lasting resonance. ‘Suffusion’ is defined as ‘the deflection or extravasation of a fluid or humour over part of the body’, or ‘the action of suffusing a surface with fluid, moisture or colour’.⁴⁵⁶ Utilising these definitions allows a reading that contrasts with the implicit connotations of ‘dew line’ (539) from the previous stanza, with its transcendental associations stemming back to its usage in English Romantic verse, as was noted in the chapter on *Brass*. The line and the associated disease of the eyes parallels the animal caught in the headlights of the vehicle

⁴⁵⁶ “suffusion, n.”. *OED Online*. December 2012. Oxford University Press. 21 January 2013 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/193613?redirectedFrom=suffusion>>.

represented later in the poem, with '[s]weet mane lap below lens failure by // Light bent back at lintel regression.' (540)

The poem enfolds the temporal narrative of division, showing the couple's close and loving connection, with the departure from these conditions occurring frequently and circuitously. Despite the closeness depicted in lines such as 'her hair touching / his knee' and 'her hair stroking his cheek' (541), there is an implied arms-length separation enforced. Perhaps, then, this is not the male subject's partner, but the forced distance represented in his connection with his daughter. The forced distance is seen in connection with the moral imperative of the paternal figure in the line, 'Her unformed casual / stem by scope visible sheer drops at guilt reduction' (541).⁴⁵⁷ Despite the medical dictates of 'by scope visible', a more resourceful reading might view this as the representation of an optic scope, the subject watching his daughter from a distance, as the narrative later relates that the subject is camped out at the 'wasted floodbank' (545), near the place of habitation.⁴⁵⁸ Geographic distance is also evoked in these stanzas, with their reference to exposure, cresting shadows and darkening skies: 'across swum floodway always there,' he is '[r]esting allured' (541), or 'resting, lured' as a punning misreading allows. The distance between the subject and his daughter contracts in the poem, providing assurances of a division, albeit a bridgeable or amenable one. Camping nearby with 'no / furnace', he is 'summoned through open haze'; this calling to attention of the subject leads to the representation of the couple's estranged and escalating, violent relationship (541). '[R]evert trumpety marauded / whimpers' shows

⁴⁵⁷ The reference to 'unformed casual / stem' ties back to laboratory work, and the possibility that in the embryonic developmental stage of created life the central nervous system may lay claim to the dictates of the definition of life. While this remains veiled, it should be noted as another example of the overlapping matrices of information within the poem.

⁴⁵⁸ The reading of 'by scope visible' has connotations not only to laboratory work, and genetic engineering, but also to the possible reading of the scope as attached to a gun, perhaps an inoperative gun. If this is what is referenced in 'trigger defect damnable' (542), it attests to the rhetorically loaded impotence of the gun's intrinsic function.

the browbeaten subject on a 'level mission' chasing the promise of contact with his daughter, '[o]n offer prolix touch to grip', and striving for a resolution with his partner (541). '[L]evel mission' speaks to the representation of distance and travel, and, in conjunction with a resolution '[o]n offer', establishes the possibility of a journey of recovery and across the divisions of country and nation. The final stanza of the poem's fifth page indicates the increasing tension of the situation, an exchange of the couple's 'pleading and goading' (541). The situation falls into an intractable and circuitous pattern of an increasingly spiteful child custody agreement: 'rented child oration; spending / like water fountains spout to fume and cry off unclaimed.' (541)

Notions of harm in the poem are often created in image-complexes structured on Australian flora, which reiterates the connection between the natural and expressions of the pastoral elegy. The representation of regrowth and regeneration in the poem relies upon analogies of plants suffering trauma, much as was depicted in *Wound Response*. Suggestions relating to reproductive phenology are indicated in the phrases 'to root / by stolon rising' (545), 'raise up place' (545) and 'Fringes in sand' (541), as well as in the line 'Vert defection placement after birth foray, rake and for / sprinkle retrench to dormancy.' (540) Prynne parallels the narrative arc of the poem in which the relationship undergoes times of trauma with the possibility of regrowth through the analogy of fire and revegetation among Australian flora. Fire in the Australian environment has a considerable impact on the annual desiccation of trees, shrubs and wild grasses, and due to its annual presence (in its 'carbon season' (546)), it has a determined impact on budding, fruiting and flowering plants, as well as in the germination of seed-bearing capsules. '[S]tolon rising' (545) speaks to this process through its polysemy, and 'browsing hearts' (543) may also, if the phrase is taken as indicative of a plant's rhizomatous spread or evolutionary

development of lignotubers. Examples of this evolutionary adaptation in Australia include the *Pandanus* plant, which has leaf sheathes that protect it from fire. *Melaleucas* also regenerate from epicormic buds along their trunks after being burnt, and *Eucalyptus* trees resprout from lignotubers after a fire. These plant species attest to this phenological propensity and may provide insights into the representation of nature in *Acrylic Tips*. Fire, in the Australian context, plays an invaluable role in the continuance of specific variation, range and repopulation, and the use of resurrection plants is analogous to the narrative regeneration of scorched relationships in *Acrylic Tips*.⁴⁵⁹

The parallel structure between the relationships depicted and plant regrowth is most strongly indicated in the lines

Resting allured

Turning over extended pint upgrade nip retrieval no
furnace my long arrow summoned through open haze,
perfect glow encompassed with cloud banners final sunk
to root there. (541)

The frequency, fuel source and residency time of the fires determine the magnitude and extent of alteration to soil and nutrient conditions. Fire conditions and the resultant germination of seeds, lying dormant in the soil, offer the possibility of something rising ‘through open haze’ (541). This is a direct parallel to the *Banksia* or *Acacia*, which need the presence of fire to melt away their seed’s waxy cuticle to begin the process of germination, perhaps also providing another connotation to the poem’s title. The sexual nature of the language leads to a scene of a more domestic sphere. ‘Fresh choice’ is represented as ‘held

⁴⁵⁹ John Dawson and Rob Lucas, *The Nature of Plants* (Portland; Cambridge: Timber Press, 2005) 125-141. See also Neil McKenzie, David Jacquier, Ray Isbell and Katharine Brown, eds., *Australian Soils and Landscapes: An Illustrated Compendium* (Melbourne: CSIRO Publishing, 2004). Alan N. Andersen, Garry D. Cook and Richard J. Williams, eds., *Fire in Tropical Savannas: The Kapalga Experiment* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 2003).

to the very life', (542) commenting on the 'clastic' (544) grip of the female, which also alludes to extortion. The issue of substance dependency is again raised in 'soft sweet fury gums' and 'damnable' (542), if one connects alcohol abuse to halitosis. '[W]hy isn't ready yet' implies an absent pronoun, as if the condition of intoxication has suffused the subject's recall; 'now estranged', he is implored, 'why not try' (542). This evokes a domestic register, wherein the subject deals with a 'novel / terror' (542). '[c]hange the locks now' and 'domain revision' demonstrate a defiant change of heart, a possible reaction to 'browsing hearts' (543). The impossibility of communication hits a tumultuous peak with 'snap / line out phones, hear nothing. Dark screaming cries / loaned in prohibition their feasted slap-up decline.' (543) The caustic and increasingly violent nature of the reunion and separation of the couple represents an incorrigible pattern played out in front of the '[b]urning child' (546).

The collation of representations of rhetorical and subjective violence that consume the second- and third-to-last pages of the poem need little comment, as they clearly display much of the narrative basis for this discourse on domestic separation. Conditions of and references to alcohol dependency should be highlighted as signifying correlation to an escalation of violence. The theriomorphic trace that Brady summons in her essay, when she makes the claim that 'what is disturbingly characteristic of this rhetoric of forced nature is its pronouns',⁴⁶⁰ comes to the fore in the line, 'Her hands / on him clastic agile like monkfish whether feared / hurtle lifted, pressed up tunic liquor leave out tropic / at a target run.' (544) '[T]ropic' in this instance has a partial semantic alignment with 'troppo' via the condition of unrest and nervous expectation experienced in northern Australia during times of mounting inclement weather, usually comprised of electrical storms, intense humidity,

⁴⁶⁰ Brady, "No Turning Back: *Acrylic Tips*," 82.

high winds and a lack of rain. The mounting pressure parallels intoxication with ‘liquor’ and the ‘[o]ral limit’, equating the emotive with the experiential landscape and weather patterns, hinted at in ‘whether feared’ (544). The instances of people described with animal-like characteristics continue: ‘Working venom presumed his torsion self-locked to pay up / on invoice declared,’ (544) bringing up, also, the notion of child support in a more direct manner. The accusations are ‘[a]ll lies’ and lead to a further accusation of ‘untrue blood’ (544); a possibly incestuous relationship, or one outside the boundaries of a customary lineage in an Indigenous community. This line also has a resonance to ‘true bone’ (537) and the idea of Indigenous law and lore in controlling and setting the parameters for human relations.⁴⁶¹ This could well be seen as connoting questions of patrilineage. ‘[U]ntrue blood for neither / sliding sunlover, full under duress’ (544), punning on ‘fully undressed’, provides an image of better times in the relationship or the possibility of an extramarital affair. ‘[I]nfused righteous anger’ leads to an ‘[a]larm pulse’ of sirens approaching (544). The line ‘stand-up ovation deputy lined / body search reckless’ has ‘[o]ne seized’, and the question ‘will you disperse’ points to an escalating scene of domestic violence and police intervention (544). The aftermath leads to recollection – ‘recall shady woods paired / in sensual fast nutation’ – which could be an accusatory claim, or an offering of fond remembrance (544). ‘[S]he now / attached to her prey’ and ‘gene expression resentment’ allude to the continuing tensions over the couple’s daughter and invites doubt about a possible resolution (544).

⁴⁶¹ Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines*, 312-316. Elkin argues that the ‘true bone’ or ‘pointing bone’ is one associated with the practice of projective magic, and the act of ‘pointing’ which is often accompanied by ‘singing’ at the intended victim. Elkin writes, ‘In pointing the bone, the performer or performers adopt the correct ritual attitude, chant the prescribed song, and then usually point or jerk the bone in the direction of the victim.’ While Elkin is quick to note that this procedure is in essence imaginative and projective, reliant wholly on acts of will, the prevalence of and belief in the power of ‘singing’ or ‘pointing’ in Indigenous communities should not be underestimated.

The paternal figure is camped out '[i]n guest space at a wasted floodbank / *all for her* interval, half fired in tumid elation' (545, emphasis added). The polysemy of the image-complex created by the line '[c]rawled to the step mourn arms having none to lift / like bread aloft his worsted homage on first claim' attests to the toll that the battle has taken on the subject (545). The phrase 'all for her' (545) expresses the reason behind this continued suffering for his '[b]urning child' (546). '[F]irst claim' (545) may reference questions of paternity, but when combined with the 'liquor' (544), 'worsted homage' (545) and '[r]ehab feeding oracle' (545) it evokes the possibility that the claim is to sobriety. As with the issue of gambling, which is paralleled between colonial and Indigenous culture, the issue of alcohol dependency is vital to the discussion of Indigenous relations. As is often the case, coupled with ease of access, passive welfare models, cultural destruction and poverty, alcohol can be a potent mechanism for responding to powerlessness and lack of subjective agency, and can become a personal and ultimately generational problem for Indigenous communities. Alcohol abuse in the microcosmic relationship represented works to highlight internal dissension with a historical connection to colonialism, and also foregrounds the destructive potential alcohol has on traditional structures, health and familial relations through the violence that result in a self-reinforcing, generational cycle of dependency.⁴⁶²

The subject's claim to sobriety in the poem is undermined by the line '[i]n brio still toxic / for her abraded dreamer the batch open grasping // Flickered up eyelash address.' (545) This may represent the child's admonishment of her father's or mother's (the reference is open) drunkenness. However, the unification present in 'abraded dreamer' might reference both parents, as in an Indigenous cultural situation their daughter would normally take on the 'dreaming' of the father, though being taught in 'women's business'

⁴⁶² Hunter, *Aboriginal Health and History*, 90-132.

along the matrilineal, spiritual geo-spatial lines of the country. Extrapolating the violence and tensions associated with alcohol, the line ‘[a]sk yet did your time / insert coin, a new master traverse’ (545) represents the consequences of the police visit and implies the notion of required confinement, in rehabilitation or prison, and the limitations of telephone communication.

Attempts at communication continue unabated with ‘tongue mysterious spat’ and its associations with the sustentive, in the representation of the lamb to its mother, provides another caustic remark, in “[r]ehab feeding oracle / emission’ (545). The private relations and the manipulation of referential accounts still entail acts of violence, which are domestic in nature: ‘Who antic runs by front // Lines of credit, at a narrow a hitch a plate broken / and the rest of it swept off’ and ‘wiping a wrap knuckle’ (545) tell of this portentous violence in the domestic sphere. ‘Give out currency’ (545) again acts as a means of quelling the situation through child support payments, though by an intentional misreading the line can account for those ‘whose antics run for lines of credit’. However, there is an inherent sadness in ‘[i]njury too mounted in harm of sorts [...] turned off wanting the price ever twice over’, leaving the father ‘battered’ (punning on ‘bannered’) ‘whose heart / rate at a cub report [is] brought down to hacker’s amble.’ (545)

The precipitous and deteriorating state of the relationship continues to occupy the poem with a looming sadness and irreparable strain. ‘Burning child’ (546) opens the poem’s final page, which again unifies the child with the possibility of fire and regrowth in the Australian landscape. The position and address of the phrase illustrates the excruciating experiential position of the child in the midst of her parents’ fighting. The question, ‘shall we gather micron glass to / dress admonishment at the river-bed,’ represents the everyday nature of the father-daughter relationship, if one can approach ‘micron glass’ as simply

river sand (546). Observing the river, ‘limpet prized’ speaks to the close inspection or gathering of marine life, as well as gathering botanical products in ‘swift pine and juniper, grubbing roots’, all of which have various homeopathic and sustentive properties (546). The narrative in the conclusion of the poem allows a measured balance with a ‘bright glance’ mediating the ‘[i]mmobile tough / Stance’ of the couple (546). The proximity and compassion expressed in ‘touch your lips’ instils in the line a restrained notion of possible resolution, even if conjoined with ‘lips sewn to silence at air / the stream by day care who does.’ (546) This phrase, while having notable alternative political references in ‘lips sewn’, provides an emphatic account of the weight placed on the ‘[b]urning child’, where her quietude or reluctance to speak accounts for a greater internalised trauma (546).

The parental authorities, despite the child’s attempt to ‘dress admonishment’, remain ‘wired up hostile / and revered’ (546). Signifying a transformative account in the child’s development through the ‘carbon season’ (546), the child is the one who begins to provide support and comfort for her parents. ‘[R]eversed nursing’ (546) accounts for this ameliorating relationship. ‘[S]kull rims / close to fusion’ (546) alludes to a biblical reading of ‘true bone’ (537) and a conscious display of agreement, as well as understanding. ‘[S]he-child foiled prism dialect’ displays the child graduating into a vocable position mediating her parent’s relationship across linguistic, cultural and geographic divides (546). If, as previously shown, the paternal subject is indeed still camped nearby, there are growing signs of his increasing visitation with his daughter: ‘She at / bank, she told ready sight unseen taken by sign // Called down, each night over to dawn falling out ahead’ (546) attests to the notion of perseverance associated with Prynne’s conception of nature. The male subject’s position in the camp becomes a ‘venerated lodge’ where they may ‘lesson [punning on ‘lessen’] throat veins’ and quell what remains of the cathartic situation (546).

The father has once again taken his '[i]ntimated' place, despite the occasional need to go 'out overland toiled back and descending // In bright glance' to labour (546). The father returns '[d]oing / all turns' when 'plain payment [is] due' (546). The possibility of redemption and saving his relationship is intricately tied up in the willingness to communicate, work, travel and toil. His effort 'to let nothing fall' presupposes a balance being proposed:

The way chanted and bound up

Most to let nothing fall, not coming back to back sounds
fluent spill sealant entrance drupe, thrown by high
winds made away no word from either stitching a breath
let flow, pipes to ground glass to unslaked level fields. (546)

In her essay 'No Turning Back', Andrea Brady argues that

The poem closes with its own lyrical refutation, text's 'weaving frame' discarded while still in Woomera refugees wait with their 'lips sewn to silence.' Its anti-pastoralist last line, 'pipes to ground glass to unslaked level fields,' mocks the novitiate ending which pictures a new career in 'fresh Woods, and Pastures new:' this song is 'thrown by high / winds' back at the singer, nothing is let fall, the products are recoiled, toiled back. This self-defeating lyric literally turns on itself, and on the morbid beginnings which open the poem.⁴⁶³

Despite the Miltonian reference, the poem arrives at a sentiment of hope in the final line. If its ending is 'novitiate', the narrative would presuppose that the relationship is finding new feet, and the parties involved are coming to a means of communicating without violence. Despite the 'weaving frame' being discarded, the couple are 'stitching a breath' and slowly mending the strained relationship, as 'no word from either' will imperil the decision to hold to the aims of keeping their daughter safe, and their own voices muted, if not cordial (546).

⁴⁶³ Brady, "No Turning Back: *Acrylic Tips*," 80.

That the horizon is imputed to be ‘unslaked’ (546) alludes to the fact of undernourishment, which may simply be an attestation to the physical landscape of Australia, but may also allude to the unfulfilled nature of their relationship. ‘[L]evel fields’ (546) is representative of amenable prospects, of the ‘pathway’ (544) in sight, and to a balanced equation in power relations between the couple. The image-complex is shown as a materially derivative position, while ‘pipes to ground glass to unslaked level fields’ (546) speaks to a slow decay and dissemination of the natural, even at the molecular level, of sand slowly breaking down to become the site of growth. It attests to the slow destruction of the created, and hence the technological, back into a more natural state. The line, ‘pipes to ground glass to unslaked level fields’ (546), may also entail moving from a situation of abuse (pipes as a reference to narcotic consumption) to the ‘wasted floodbank’ (545) where the father has been encamped; then, alluding to the end of his distanced separation from his daughter, moving finally to the fields where he earns his living, ensuring the continual provision for his daughter. The conditional connotation of construction is also inherent here, with ‘unslaked’ possibly alluding to a wall hewn with lime, or ‘unslaked’ mortar. Coupled with the notion of construction inherent in the poem’s conclusion, the couple have as their aim ‘to let nothing fall,’ telling decisively of the hope for a positive future.

Conclusion.

The poem *Acrylic Tips* represents a relationship as a means of exploring a number of transformative accounts of Australian history. Through the microcosm of the relationship, Prynne formulates a poetic that can discuss patterns of subjective and systemic violence, from marital strife to the ‘plan[ned] depletion’ (544) of Indigenous communities. The

format allows his discourse to touch on issues of substance abuse and gambling, as well as the manner in which colonial forces and the incursion of technology change traditional ritual practices. At its heart the poem is cathartic in that it offers a release from the pressures of violence, both from the relationship depicted as well as from the long trace of colonisation on the social history of Australia through its substantiation and critique. The elegiac aspects of the poem unify the poem's narrative with cultural loss due to colonial violence, shaping and contextualising the thematic axes of the poem under the rubric of colonial relations. *Acrylic Tips* constitutes a rare instance in which Prynne's personal experience is inflected upon the poem, an incursion which is perhaps more common than criticism would suggest. The poem allows Prynne a means of representing the contaminant effects of colonial violence on a people, as well as on its language systems. While the depiction of a society is often measured in terms of a set of institutions and a process of historical transformations, Prynne utilises his experience and research into Australian colonial and Indigenous history to highlight deeper social and historical themes through the language of poetic construction. The purview of the poem is thus an experimental schema for the testing of poetic language as mediated and controlled by a domain of historical development and adaptation. The poetic language focuses on the adherence of a language 'which [is] cross-wired into the cultural history of a ramified national identity'.⁴⁶⁴ The poem balances the personal details of a tumultuous relationship with the history of Australia's Indigenous and colonial past, synthesising and deriving a poetic language from amongst the pressures of an historical, transformative violence.

To represent the locus and process of lexical development, Prynne creates a language inflected with the socio-historical conditions of Australia, expressing the

⁴⁶⁴ Prynne, "Mental Ears and Poetic Work," 127.

infiltration of colonial violence and its effects on contemporary power relations, language and people. *Acrylic Tips* presents a number of contiguous subthemes that are interrelated and demonstrate the historical effects of colonisation. The influence of colonial history and power relations defines how technology transforms ritual practices, subsumes Indigenous voices and augments the development of the pastoral and conceptualisations of corporeality. The establishment of colonial power relations has a noticeable effect on ontological conceptions of nature as they relates to both colonial and Indigenous traditions. Through these experimental linguistic means, the conditions of labour and the relation to the sustentive are also problematised. The poem's focus on land usage and labour relations, as well as the violence inherent in these processes, establishes the conditions of colonisation as still prevalent and influential in the Australian context. The utilisation of a model of pastoral elegy aligns the poem's narrative and Prynne's poetic construction of colonial conditions to a movement from loss to possible consolation. If consolation is to be found in the broader discourse, as it is in the poem's narrative, the positing of cultural hybridity in which Indigenous and Western values and traditions are occasioned and expressed represents the most providential conclusion that a nation founded on colonial violence could hope to attain.

Chapter Five. 'Refuse Collection'.

Introduction.

In one of the defining maxims pertaining to war, Clausewitz wrote, 'Everything is very simple in war, but the simplest thing is difficult'.⁴⁶⁵ Such is the case in J.H. Prynne's poem 'Refuse Collection'. Despite Prynne's utilisation of public language and military argot, with disintegrating and shifting subjective registers shorn of deixis, the poem and its thematic content are readily accessible. That is not to say the poem is necessarily easy to read, but its textual construction has an immediacy and adherence to clarity that many of Prynne's poems do not. 'Refuse Collection', as it was published in *Quid*, 13: IRA QUID (2004), is couched within the journal's headline, 'Poems in response to the atrocities at Abu Ghraib'. The poem was written in response to the publication of photographs depicting the torture and abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib at the hands of U.S. military personnel.

Compared with the usual length of any one of Prynne's collections, 'Refuse Collection' is a condensed text. Of the poem's eight stanzas, the longest is twenty-three lines and the shortest, the concluding stanza, only eight. The eight stanzas are dense, linguistically and lexically, composed with the aim of refusing the 'fast immediate satisfaction' of the reader. The bifurcated 'satis / faction', Colin Winborn argues, 'is split open to indicate the factional violence that is the poem's main theme and motive force'.⁴⁶⁶ The prosodic structure of the piece is reminiscent of the structure of *Kitchen Poems* and a

⁴⁶⁵ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (London; New York: Penguin, 1968) 164.

⁴⁶⁶ Colin Winborn, "'Derangement from deep inside': JH Prynne's 'Refuse Collection'," *PN Review*, 33.5 (2007) 55-59, 57.

number of other collections across Prynne's oeuvre. The only notable anomaly in the structure is the division between the fourth and fifth stanza, which is abridged with a single sentence, a comma separating the two, while all others close with a full stop. The sentence that connects these two stanzas reads,

Kick them around shall we do that be
sickened stamp on non-white body parts benchmark
yields huddled up naked,

land of the free
control respite deliverance.⁴⁶⁷ (4-5)

The division between these stanzas provides a declarative statement on the operation of the poem. It compiles the operations of torture – '[k]ick them around', 'stamp on non-white body parts' – and the fragmentation of the body as an operation of control associated with a financial benefit expected in 'benchmark / yields'. The jingoistic phrase, 'land of the free', has the dual implication of extending to Abu Ghraib the prospect of freedom while acknowledging that the military forces in the country operate without juridical constraint. The representation of potlatch within the poem signifies the acceptance of torture as a requisite for passage into the 'land of the free'. The breakage between lines therefore signifies an aporia in which the possibility of freedom may be coextensive with the lawlessness of military violence and the exercise of sovereign power.

'Refuse Collection' is one of Prynne's lamentations; the poem is elegiac and is linked to the pastoral elegy by establishing spatial locations that are unified with ceremonial mourning. The use of the pastoral elegy establishes connections with the poem

⁴⁶⁷ J.H. Prynne, "Refuse Collection," *Quid*, 13: IRA QUID (2004): [n.p.]. Due to the difficulty of accessing the journal, the text 'Refuse Collection' has been attached as an appendix to this chapter. Citations of lines from the poem are given parenthetically, supplying the stanza in which the quoted phrase appears.

Acrylic Tips, as well as ‘Es Lebe der König’, where the elegiac is a feature associated with landscape constructions. In the case of ‘Refuse Collection’ the poetic construction of landscape functions as a political utterance, a construct designed to show how the ‘landscape becomes acculturated by the subsistence of social memory’.⁴⁶⁸ There is also a lexical register which bears resemblance to the language of agri-business, with phrases such as ‘a seed trial’ (1), ‘out on batch stand-by’(2), ‘there is a country’ (3) and ‘value invest in safety in fields of plenty’ (6), further establishing connections with the pastoral. The destruction of the land, its military occupation and colonisation represent varying means by which it has been inscribed by the historical, and thereby parallels the marking of the body. For Peter Brooks, war or revolution instigate ‘the collapse of the old order and its laws, its social orderings, and its very systems of meaning, [and therefore] language must attempt to work directly on the external world, including physical bodies that ultimately compose the body politic’. The destruction of the land parallels the destruction of the body, demonstrating the fact that ‘the discourse of law is not merely abstract, but reality itself: the idea embodied’.⁴⁶⁹ This embodiment represents not only the subjugated and tortured bodies of the prisoners, but the body politic represented both by the Iraqi nation and the coalition of Western nations that led the invasion. The poem is elegiac, for it not only identifies the loss suffered by those whose nation was invaded but also represents the fragmentation of the body and of the land as the fracturing of the political body from the will of its citizens.

The connection between the text, history and the body will form an essential part of the examination of ‘Refuse Collection’. The poem establishes connections with fertility and

⁴⁶⁸ J.H. Prynne, “A Letter to P Riley: 14th Feb. 1967,” *The English Intelligencer*, 1st ser., 15 (Apr 1967) 284. Reprinted in Neil Pattison, Reitha Pattison, Luke Roberts, eds., *Certain Prose of The English Intelligencer* (Cambridge: Mountain, 2012): 74-78, 76.

⁴⁶⁹ Peter Brooks, *Body Works: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993) 56.

creativity that align the elegiac with the corporeal, as is demonstrated in the lines, ‘Fruiting bodies vintage / shagged out on batch stand-by, grander conceptual / gravid with foetor, sweet rot adoring placid / or regular’ (2), exposing the body as the locus of political and social power relations. The forces of creativity that Prynne invokes are associated less with the capacity for fertility in growth than with the destruction of the natural and the fertility of decay. The link between ceremonial mourning and bodily harm is a complex that Prynne utilises in *Acrylic Tips*, where Indigenous scarification abridges cultural differences between Western and Indigenous knowledge. However, in ‘Refuse Collection’ the wound is punitive, expressing an inscription of the body as a demonstrable form of dominance. Through these means, ‘Refuse Collection’ presents the semiotisation of the body, a convergence of corporeality and text which makes the body a vehicle of signification. From this type of wounding, there is no possible movement towards consolation.

The association with mourning links the poem to lyric and pastoral elegy conventions, as expressive of the suffering of others, yet ‘Refuse Collection’ forgoes the expression of tender or melancholic sentiment and is reliant instead on the contesting voices of witnesses. Place and its integration into the social context of the elegiac is also important for ‘Refuse Collection’, as it links but does not interrogate the relationship between Abu Ghraib, the ongoing wars in the Middle East and the position of the poet and reader. This spatial localisation is defined by enclosing perimeters and the establishment of a geo-spatial knowledge connected to the rustic, and to privatisation. This is evident in the lines ‘makeshift parlour chicken rape private / sold down DIY there is a country’ (2) and ‘a holy city ringed too close to call. Our land ours, / raw and forever.’ (8) This latter quotation, the final line of the poem, works to establish a parallel with the elegiac by extending to mourning the notion of privation. The tradition of pastoral elegy has a triple

function of lamentation, praise and consolation, and each of these is expressed in ‘Refuse Collection’. The poem expresses lamentation as a position of shame, remorse and collective guilt. The elegiac function of praising the dead cannot but be seen in ‘Refuse Collection’ as establishing a linkage between the degradation of the victims and the lyric voice, and through this, the capacity to enact resistance. Consolation is the most problematised of these functions within the poem, for as Prynne makes increasingly clear, the capacity of the land to stand for the forbearance of its people is overwhelmed by the Western forces’ notion of pillage, conquest and the capitalisation of the land and its resources as assets.

The poem enacts the condition of an incarnate subject as lacking, and mimics differential relations of authoritative control through discursive, inflective patterning. The poem is an act of resistance much as are Andrea Brady’s ‘Saw Fit’ and Keston Sutherland’s poems *Stress Position*, *Hot White Andy* and ‘Song of the Wanking Iraqi’: they collectively enact the degradation of the historical event through the language event of the poem. The homology between Prynne’s and Sutherland’s poems is daringly exact, and to further highlight this contiguity it will serve to examine Prynne’s review of Sutherland’s poetry, in which the event and its public reception enact conditional operators for the poem itself. The intersectional process between the historical and the poetic establishes continuity between the working practices of the two poets. Prynne writes,

Excess and degraded speech slide rapidly across registers that are riddled with disorder, yoked by violence and impacted into a blitz of damaged lexis and syntax. The narrator’s luridly partitioned body-image is split into numerous factions of agency, hemmed into states of sexual trauma and negotiation, all barraged by scads of hyper-obscure data. There is a rapidly intermittent gender-switching of copulative attachment, as reflexive images are distorted by frustration of desire and intact personhood.⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁷⁰ J.H. Prynne, “Keston Sutherland: *Hot White Andy*,” *Hot Gun!*, 1 (Summer 2009) 78-83, 79.

‘Refuse Collection’ never feigns ignorance of the atrocities committed, but moves precipitously through the tyrannical unreality of life as it was played out inside Abu Ghraib.

Two of the most densely laden words in the poem are given in the lexical cluster, ‘incarnadine incarcerate’ (1); the grouping sets up not only an alliterative meter that allows for elisions and slippages of expression but also defines the most expressive constructions of the poem. The lexical pattern and its repetitious engagement throughout the text will be discussed later in this analysis. From the outset, though, it should be noted that ‘incarnadine’, in denoting a crimson or blood-red colour, or the colour of flesh, establishes an *a priori* construct on the definition of subjecthood, paralleling Agamben’s ‘bare life’, or *Homo Sacer*.⁴⁷¹ The word works to not only signify militaristic definitions regarding the classification of enemies, but also signifies the sovereignty exhibited by the Western forces in enacting a state of exception and depriving prisoners the rights allotted to them by the conventions of war. It is through the connection between an ‘incarnadine’ (1) subject and the relation to being that conditions of subjectivity are represented and contested. As it is used in the poem, ‘incarcerate’ (1) establishes relations to the exhibitory displays of captivity; pathologically it is linked to strangulation and obstruction, indicative of unconditional torture experienced by prisoners, but also connotative of the rhetorical and legal definitions of humanity, as were invoked under sovereign rule during ‘Operation Freedom’.⁴⁷²

⁴⁷¹ Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998) 89.

⁴⁷² Leonard Lawlor, “Jacques Derrida,” *Fall 2011, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, May 21, 2012 <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2011/entries/derrida/>>. As Derrida argues, ‘the use of power, if it is to be sovereign, must be silent; the sovereign does not have to give reasons; the sovereign must exercise power in secret. In other words, sovereignty attempts to possess power indivisibly, it tries not to share, and not sharing means contracting power into an instant – the instant of action, of an event, of a

As Prynne noted of Sutherland's work, the image-complexes that contain intentionally knit bodies and partitioned subjectivities constitute a number of positional arguments simultaneously. They exhibit an acknowledgment of the privilege of exemption by blending multifarious voices and subjectivities in a manner which extends culpability to the whole. The tendency to write through a lexical complex allows an understanding of the porousness of thresholds and the violent transgression of the subjective body, exhibiting the operative function of law. This is indicated in the fact that the transgressions represented do not exclusively pertain to military-prisoner relations but exist more widely, interpersonally between military agents and ideologically and legalistically in the public sphere. Exhibited in the poem is a pattern of transgressions which deracinates personal limits through a domination of will, leading ultimately to the destruction of the body. The phrases, 'This way / can it will you' (1), 'It is we they do it' (2) and 'They do our will, to deny what they do is ours, / the wanton ambit of self possession'(8), allude to the complexity of interlaced personas, each a thread in a knot of poetic language.

The poem consecrates the irreplaceability of the position of the witness, and through the viewing of the images the public themselves become additional witnesses. Insofar as the Western populace supports the government responsible for such violations, they too are indicted as perpetrators, culpable to varying degrees. The poem seeks to replicate an experience through language in which resistance to atrocity is possible. The poem addresses the reader with an urgent social concern by utilising poetic language that reflects the poem's language event, with an acknowledgement of the cultural constructs of its

singularity.' From 'Basic Argumentation and its Implications: Time, Hearing-Oneself-Speak, the Secret, and Sovereignty.'

production and reception.⁴⁷³ Coextensive with Derrida's hypothesis from 'The Self-Unsealing Poetic Text', this analysis will argue that 'all responsible witnessing involves a poetic experience of language'.⁴⁷⁴ For Prynne, this is but one of an extensive list of examples from which his reaction to political events forms a poetics of resistance. To add to the complex of sovereignty, exemption and irreducible control, in 'Refuse Collection' we are left with 'the invincible singularity of the verbal body [which] already introduces us into the enigma of witnessing, besides the irreplaceability of the singular witness.'⁴⁷⁵ The ardent nature and reactive perspective of Prynne's poems detail the social responsibility necessary to Prynne's poetic, which, as Rodríguez has argued, 'point to the situation of a man whose self-knowledge and responsibility to others lies in vocational urgency'.⁴⁷⁶

If there is a rationale to designate this poem as an act of resistance, reiterating Prynne's position in 'Poetic Thought', that the poem must break with even its own limits to form new poetic thought.⁴⁷⁷ 'Refuse Collection' thus seeks expression of new poetic thought by maintaining fidelity to the event. It is this position where language must fight against continuous constraints, to become a truth, to become poetic thought, and to testify to the vanished event for which the name Abu Ghraib remains.⁴⁷⁸ It is the position of 'Refuse Collection' that the photo release that brought to light the torture and sadistic pleasure in violence taking place at Abu Ghraib is an event which changed the public fundamentally.

⁴⁷³ Ian Davidson, "Democratic Consensus in Prynne's 'Refuse Collection,'" *Radical Spaces of Poetry* (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) 147-164, 148.

⁴⁷⁴ Jacques Derrida, "The Self-Unsealing Poetic Text: poetics and the politics of witnessing," trans. Rachel Bowlby, *Revenge of the Aesthetic: The Place of Literature in Theory Today*, ed. Michael Clark (Berkeley: University of Berkeley Press, 2000) 180-207, 184.

⁴⁷⁵ Jacques Derrida, "The Self-Unsealing Poetic Text: poetics and the politics of witnessing," 181.

⁴⁷⁶ Andrés Rodríguez, "Enlarging History: The Poetry of J.H. Prynne," *Sagetrieb*, 10 (1991) 83-107, 98.

⁴⁷⁷ J.H. Prynne, "Poetic Thought," *Textual Practice*, 24.4 (August 2010) 595-606, 599.

⁴⁷⁸ Alain Badiou, "What is a Poem," *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, trans. Alberto Toscano (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005) 16-27.

'Refuse Collection' utilises the images of the atrocities committed at Abu Ghraib as they were received by the public, and is written in a style that quotes and mimics media language and reportage set on establishing an effective and unilateral position of control of information. Implicit in the formulation of poetic address is the definition of the public and of public language. Jürgen Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* is regarded as the primary source for postwar enquiry into the nature of the public sphere in Western civilisations, and will contribute markedly to the definitions utilised herein. For Habermas, the public sphere, or *Öffentlichkeit*, was a public space organised outside of the control of the state in which individuals met and exchanged positions on varying topics, fostering critical thought and typified by dialogue.⁴⁷⁹ The development of the public sphere, for Habermas, is demonstrative of a society which has moved from having a 'representative culture' to one in which citizens have an active, participatory role. Critics of Habermas's definition of the public sphere fall into two main camps. The first are those who argue that the development of the public sphere reinforced cultural hegemonic power relations and belonged predominantly to the Caucasian middle-class male, and therefore excluded marginal voices. These critics argue for the inclusion of counterpublics in theorising a representative model of the public. The inclusion of counterpublics 'is meant to underscore the heterodox and pluralistic nature of such spheres, which are often in opposition to the procedures of the dominant public sphere, as well as to sensitize us to the wide variety of normative ideals that regulate interaction in different areas of socio-cultural life'.⁴⁸⁰ Others argue that Habermas's definition has become antiquated with the rise of mass media and the ubiquity of communicative technology. Michael Warner's work in this arena, most

⁴⁷⁹ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge: Polity, 1989) 27-43, *passim*.

⁴⁸⁰ Michael Gardiner, "Wild Publics and Grotesque Symposiums: Habermas and Bakhtin on dialogue, everyday life and the public sphere," *After Habermas: New Perspectives on the Public Sphere*, eds. Nick Crossley and John Michael Roberts (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004) 28-48, 29.

prominently in *Publics and Counterpublics*, nominates the characteristics that define a public: ‘the self-organisation of publics through discourse, their orientation to strangers, the resultant ambiguity of personal and impersonal address, and membership by mere attention’. Warner continues his argument that these characteristics explain the development of the public’s main functions, which are that the ‘public is a social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse’, that ‘publics act historically according to the temporality of their circulation’ and that a ‘public is poetic world-making’.⁴⁸¹ From these positions, and inclusive of the discourse of counterpublics, the notion of the public and the public sphere will be defined. Prynne’s ‘Refuse Collection’ is a counterpublic discourse, aware of its marginal status as a poetic address, yet partly representing the growing agency of public sentiment against the Iraq war, which ‘forces the poetic-expressive character of counterpublic discourse to become salient to consciousness’.⁴⁸²

One must also make an effort to define public language, its constitutive relationship with the public sphere and its integration into the poetic register. Along with Tom Clark, and adjacent to the argument of Agamben, this analysis will advance the premise that ‘public language is a species of poetry,’⁴⁸³ in that public language is inclusive of

[t]he language that public speakers use to audiences and through mass media [...] Within the realm of the media, it includes media-generated language, as well as replayed or reported language. It is a polymorphous phenomenon, then, which we define more by the relationship between speakers and readers than by the specificities of its content or styling [...] it is conditioned and constrained by a range of social, educational, technological and rhetorical forces. These forces [are

⁴⁸¹ Michael Warner, “Publics and Counterpublics,” *Public Culture*, 14.1 (2002) 49-90. References from 63, 68, 82, respectively.

⁴⁸² Warner, “Publics and Counterpublics,” 86.

⁴⁸³ Tom Clark, “Towards a Poetics of Contemporary Public Language: the Poetic Formula in Focus,” *AUMLA*, 111 (May 2009) 103-129, 105.

continually in the process of development and] are reflected in rapid changes to the vocabulary and syntax of public language.⁴⁸⁴

The public language in 'Refuse Collection' utilises argot, quotation, military jargon and the language of economic speculation implicitly in the poetic construction, seeking to express private sentiment in the broadest public terms. 'Refuse Collection' utilises the power relations inherent in media-derived language as a means to satirise this authority, but also to lend agency to the poem's counterpublic message. As Tony Lopez and Anthony Caleshu conclude in their introduction to *Poetry and Public Language*,

Over and over we find a useful tension between the public and the private spheres, which correlates with the tension between specialised and restricted language-sets and the more general language or 'ordinary language' that seeks to encompass the whole range of human knowledge or experience. There is by now a long-established serious doubt as to whether such a unified knowledge is possible and yet it is not clear how poetry is possible unless such an imaginative synthesis is available. The turn to 'public language' – as subject, as axis to understanding, as screen between the individual and the world – is explored, for better or worse, as a turn towards social experience.⁴⁸⁵

A good deal of this analysis functions on the transformative relation between subjectivity and objectivity, as it relates to human presences and representations. It is from this position, of creating new poetic thought, where language arouses its utmost veracity. As Badiou relates in 'What is a Poem',

Every truth, whether bound to calculation or extracted from the song of natural language, is above all a power. Truth has power over its own infinite becoming. It can provide a fragmented anticipation of a universe without completion. It can force

⁴⁸⁴ Clark, "Towards a Poetics of Contemporary Public Language," 104.

⁴⁸⁵ Tony Lopez and Anthony Caleshu, "Preface," *Poetry and Public Language*, eds. Lopez and Caleshu (Exeter: Shearsman, 2007) 11-13, 13.

an inference about what the universe would be if the total effects of a truth still underway were limitlessly allowed to unfold within it.⁴⁸⁶

Through the power of language the poem articulates the poet's urgent social concerns, creating a poetic which maintains fidelity to the atrocities that occurred at Abu Ghraib.

The position of active resistance, and its relation to the constructions and determinations of subjectivity within the event-frame of the poem, is where Prynne initiates these thoughts. The poem's position, mitigated by compounding identities, individuated wills and the exploits of industrial-capital violence, represent the prevalence of systemic violence. Many of the soldiers responsible for the atrocities committed posited their account of their conduct as no more than an extension of duty. The poem works to include but ultimately defeat this rhetoric, in a manner which leaves the individuals as well as the broader populace culpable. The acts of violence committed and represented in the poem relate a 'violence [that] is no longer attributable to concrete individuals and their "evil" intentions but is purely "objective", systematic, anonymous'.⁴⁸⁷ What remains fundamental to the poem is that the acts of violence, including the worst of the torture, abuse and murder witnessed and documented at Abu Ghraib, form a pattern of ultra-subjective violence undertaken by Western forces as a means to define both themselves and the detainees. 'Refuse Collection' does not allow an escape from culpability, but hinges on collective responsibility, not permitting slippages of agency to deny guilt for the subjects involved nor for Western societies whose governments supported the war effort.

As it relates to the conceptual strata of citizenship, sovereignty and decision making as well as the constructs of personhood, 'Refuse Collection' is unrelenting in its

⁴⁸⁶ Alain Badiou, *Handbook of Inaesthetics*, trans. Alberto Toscano (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005) 22.

⁴⁸⁷ Slavoj Žižek, *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections* (New York: Picador, 2008) 12.

accusations. A reliance on accusations within the poem parallels the sovereign power utilised by the Western forces in confining and ultimately torturing individuals who were accused, or in coercing those individuals by threat or bribery to in turn accuse others. The lexical complexity and interwoven identities that populate the poem continue the argument that war defines and constructs identity itself. There is a dialectical balance which must be maintained between the systemic and subjective roles in this operation, highlighting the manner in which subjective individualisation operates in conjunction with procedures of industrial militarisation that are constituted in the ‘political double bind’ apparent in the structures of modern power.⁴⁸⁸ As a means of exploring and explaining this relation, Benjamin writes,

Militarism is the compulsory, universal use of violence as a means to the ends of the state. This compulsory use of violence has recently been scrutinized as closely as, or still more closely than, the use of violence itself. In it violence shows itself in a function quite different from its simple application for natural ends. It consists in the use of violence as a means of legal ends. For the subordination of citizens to laws—in the present case, to the law of general conscription—is a legal end. If that first function of violence is called the law-making function the second will be the law-preserving function.⁴⁸⁹

It was precisely when insurmountable evidence was found regarding the order and functions of violence used in Abu Ghraib that the U.S. Department of Defence enacted a state of exception to deny the function of violence set on the preservation of law. In this case, and as is exhibited in ‘Refuse Collection’, violence creates an aporia to which no judicial laws apply. This is a violence constitutive of the laws and identities of all participants. Within the military unit, the operation of potlatch and the loyalties of the

⁴⁸⁸ Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 5.

⁴⁸⁹ Walter Benjamin, *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, ed. Peter Demetz (New York: Harcourt, 2007) 241.

torturers regulate their encoded, hierarchical and often sexualised interactions with each other. As ethical judgements about the use of force are relegated to an unstated principle between military agents, they, as well as the state, are reliant upon a collective will in the performance and regulation of the treatment of prisoners. That the state of exemption allowed the habitual abuse and torture of prisoners is a condition extending culpability to the military command and ultimately to the governments that supported the invasion. The suggestion is that the democratic populace is ultimately responsible for the acts of their elected officials and the military units operating without constraint.

The poem protests against the edicts of judges and lawmakers, such as then Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, and others within President Bush's administration who doctored legislation and amended the Geneva Conventions to create an extra-judicial 'unlawful combatants' category for captured prisoners of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. The poem is actively resistant to the claims that the authentic subjective experience of one combatant can be defined through the denial of personhood over another. 'Refuse Collection' is an active contestation of the circumstances and instances of violence that became customary at Abu Ghraib, and to the caustic and degrading extra-legal positioning of this war. Ian Davidson argues that the poem and its utilisation of public language 'is so familiar that it loses reference and, in the context of war, becomes a barrier to experience rather than an expression of it [...] The poem breaks up the surface of that public language with private impassioned interjections or appeals to the truth of subjective feeling, but with a specialist and technical language, jargon and nicknames.'⁴⁹⁰ 'Refuse Collection' expresses an awareness of the culpability of Western democracies, yet actively resists the manner in which the war and its violent transgressions are represented. 'Refuse Collection'

⁴⁹⁰ Davidson, "Democratic Consensus in Prynne's 'Refuse Collection,'" 149.

maintains a fidelity to the event, through the creation of an active resistance and hence the creation of new poetic thought. Articulating this concept and establishing the connection to Prynne's 'vocational urgency' in writing, Badiou argues that '[t]he poem belongs to the ideal regime of necessity. It subordinates sensible desire to the aleatory advent of the idea. The poem is a *duty* of thought.'⁴⁹¹

The Event.

To undertake an analysis of the effect that the photographs documenting the torture of detainees at Abu Ghraib had on public consciousness, one must begin with the concept of the event. It shall be maintained that these photographs had the gravitas of an event, with the capacity to affect the viewers. The photographs published on 8 May 2004 by the *New York Times* and CBS News were released after being turned over to the Army Criminal Investigation Command (CID) by Spec. Joseph Darby on 13 January 2004. The manner in which the photographs challenged and changed the public's subjective understanding of war, not to mention the way they spurred a wealth of academic studies undertaken into the topic, attests to the definition of the photographs' publication as itself an event. As Badiou defines this relationship between the event and the subject,

I get to the concept of the event by thinking that when something really happens, you always have a real rupture. You have the creation of a new subject and you have the process of the continuation of the subject as such. Finally then we have in fact three fundamental concepts: event, subjectivity and fidelity, fidelity being the name of the continuation of the existence of the process of the new subject.⁴⁹²

⁴⁹¹ Badiou, "What is a Poem," 20.

⁴⁹² Alain Badiou and Simon Critchley, "Ours is not a Terrible Situation," *Philosophy Today*, 51.3 (Fall 2007) 357-365, 362.

The cognitive paradigm shift created by the release of these photographs explicitly affected the manner in which the world viewed the role of Western forces in the Middle East, and also implicitly affected the ideation of Western military involvement and its relation to terrorism. The demarcation between perpetrators of violence and the salvific rhetorical stance of ‘Operation Iraqi Freedom’ is a testament to the evident double talk propagated by U.S. command. The branding of the soldiers perpetrating these horrific crimes as traitors acting on their own authority, or as isolated rogue operators, was for the U.S. a means of managing and mediating the level of controlled culpability in the representation of its ethos. In framing the cases of torture as the work of isolated subjective agents, government officials were attempting to hide the systemic operation of violence and torture as a functional and fundamental paradigm of their involvement. Slavoj Žižek offers no allowance for this type of exemption, and reads the public displays of torture as necessarily contingent to the war:

Abu Ghraib was not simply a case of American arrogance towards a Third World people: in being submitted to humiliating tortures, the Iraqi prisoners were effectively *initiated into American culture*. They were given a taste of the obscene underside, which forms the necessary supplement to the public values of personal dignity, democracy and freedom. Bush was then wrong: what we are getting when we see the photos of the humiliated Iraqi prisoners on our screens and front pages is precisely a direct insight into American values, into the very core of the obscene enjoyment that sustains the U.S. way of life. The photos put into an adequate perspective Samuel Huntington’s well-known thesis on the ongoing ‘clash of civilisations.’ The clash between the Arab and American civilizations is not a clash between barbarism and respect for human dignity, but a clash between anonymous brutal torture and torture as a media spectacle in which victims’ bodies serve as the anonymous background for the grinning ‘innocent American’ faces of the torturers themselves. It seems, to paraphrase Walter Benjamin, that every clash of civilizations is really a clash of underlying barbarisms.⁴⁹³

⁴⁹³ Žižek, *Violence*, 176-7.

This analysis also ties into the nominal and axiomatic integration of subjective identities as displayed in Prynne's 'Refuse Collection'. It is an actionable intermeshing of the forces of violence as power, to which the subjective identities of the poem are subjugated. Characteristic of the relations of violence in Prynne's poetry, 'Refuse Collection' posits a context in which both the perpetrators and victims are subjected to injurious infliction and both are fundamentally redefined in this relation.

The images, as extant evidence of torture, provided the necessary impetus for the public to come to terms with their support of torture and abuse in the name of war. Arguing in a manner paralleling Fredric Jameson's cognitive framework, Judith Butler writes, 'just as the "matter" of bodies cannot appear without a shaping and animating form, neither can the "matter" of war appear without a conditioning and facilitating form or frame'.⁴⁹⁴ As the publicity of the war operation was dramatically reduced by military censorship, especially in comparison to the Gulf War, Western democratic involvement was very much determined by a single communicative point of information. Thus when the images of torture were released it became an event by the public telling of a secret.

'Refuse Collection' deals with the events of Abu Ghraib as if with a contingent enveloping event horizon. However, it will serve to underscore the implicit awareness of this event at the moment of recognition. It was the vision of the unspeakable amongst the controlled media representation of the ongoing war effort that lent such a determined weight to the release of the photographs. The public was collectively initiated into the atrocity, as witnesses to the instances of torture against identifiable men and women. The acknowledged disconnect requires examination of that trace of the secret which was overridden through the rupture of the event (the photographs' publication). As Fredric

⁴⁹⁴ Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?* (London; New York: Verso, 2010) 29.

Jameson wrote, in ‘The Dialectics of Disaster’, ‘it is important to remember that historical events are never punctual – despite the appearance of this one and the abruptness of its violence – but extend into a before and an after of historical time that only gradually unfolds, to disclose the full dimensions of the historicity of the event’.⁴⁹⁵ Jameson’s argument supports the contention that the photo release was an historical event, in which subjective identity was altered through the breaking of the secret. Prynne’s poem is reliant on the viewer’s fidelity to the event for the expression of his counterpublic message.

As the object around which the poem functions, the photographs of the atrocities at Abu Ghraib are treated in the poem as silent attestation, testimony and will. To rephrase Derrida, the poem must constitute its own poetics in a manner in which the experiential and cognitive operation of the photos themselves become part of the verbal body of the poem.⁴⁹⁶ This idea may also work to inform a reading of the prosody of the poem, in which the stanzas replicate the fragmented body, the fragmentary recording of experience. The text, understood as a fragmented body, represents the destruction of the body politic, and hence a dislocation of the populace within the nation-state. The photographs replace the irreplaceable singularity of the witness and place the reserve of culpability onto all those who see them. It is the telling of the secret which introduces the enigma of witnessing onto the populace.⁴⁹⁷

As Derrida argues in ‘How to Avoid Speaking’, ‘A secret is necessarily shared’. The shared secrecy adds an ethical weight to the voyeuristic testament of the photographs and the inevitable prospect of their becoming public. Derrida explains the process of

⁴⁹⁵ Fredric Jameson, “The Dialectics of Disaster,” *Dissent from the Homeland: essays after September 11*, eds. Stanley Hauerwas and Frank Lentricchia (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003) 55-62, 58-9.

⁴⁹⁶ Derrida, “The Self-Unsealing Poetic Text,” 180.

⁴⁹⁷ Derrida, “The Self-Unsealing Poetic Text,” 181.

withholding the secret as further compelling its release, for the secret is one which functionally concretises those aware of its propensity to be spoken. The exercising of the secret, as Davidson points out, is necessarily unified with the expression of sovereignty, and also determinedly linked to within the military unit. For Derrida, the denial or withholding of the secret transforms its bearers into agents of unilateral power. Thus the images recreate various realms of power relations: interpersonal, amongst the captors themselves, in a scenario where each tries to best the other and jostle for hierarchical power. This is also demonstrable in the acts of torture, and the action beyond the constraint of authorial command of the captors' treatment of prisoners, as well as in the relation of the combatants to the populace at large. The relation of torture to secrecy by its very function unifies the captors and the prisoners through a justificatory proof of 'what they just want' (1), as Prynne writes. The acts of torture depicted are a 'lustral panoply' (2) because they allow the torturers to enact a purification sacrifice, a ceremonial act invoking a physiological or spiritual protection.⁴⁹⁸ Thus the photographs become event-objects, eradicating the need for conscious apprehension and testifying to military triumphalism, demonstrative of the military's most 'rapacious' (1) capacities.⁴⁹⁹

The Body.

The body as represented in 'Refuse Collection' is the locus of functions of power, belief and will, a medium on which values are inscribed and in which the flow of power is based on transcription and reiteration. The sexual violence in the poem reinforces and reifies the

⁴⁹⁸ "lustral, adj. and n." *OED Online*. December 2012. Oxford University Press. 14 January 2013 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/111392?redirectedFrom=lustral>>.

"panoply, n." *OED Online*. December 2012. Oxford University Press. 14 January 2013 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/136916?rskey=JC0Sy7&result=1&isAdvanced=false>>.

⁴⁹⁹ Butler, *Frames of War*, 84.

political operations of torture because ‘the erotic body both animates and disrupts social order’.⁵⁰⁰ The fragmentation of the body politic, the control and destruction of land and the control and torture of prisoners establish parallels between corporeal harm and cultural destruction, reinforcing Prynne’s use of the elegiac model. ‘Refuse Collection’ highlights the guards’ need to relive experiences of power relations, evidenced by phrases such as ‘makeshift parlour chicken rape private / sold down DIY’ (2). Incidents of past trauma are recollected and enacted upon the prisoners as self-justifying, to recast the understanding of victimhood that the soldiers carry with them from civilian life. This passage from victimhood to being a torturer becomes something to ‘write home about’ (4). In ‘Refuse Collection’ more so than in any of Prynne’s previous poems, the body functions as the site and materiality upon which power operates and through which it functions.⁵⁰¹ The discussion of the body in this analysis is reliant upon the work of Judith Butler and Elizabeth Grosz, who argue that, ‘the body is a site where regimes of discourse and power describe themselves, a nodal point or nexus for relations of juridical and productive power’.⁵⁰² To further clarify the materiality of the body as realised by Prynne, Elizabeth Grosz’s conception of the body takes precedence: ‘by body, I understand a concrete material animate organisation of flesh, organs, nerves and skeletal structure, which are given a unity, cohesiveness and form through the physical and social inscription of the body’s surface’.⁵⁰³ For Prynne the poem is populated by ‘[f]ruiting bodies’ (2), ‘gravid with foetor’ (2), where enactments of torture and power target the body with an unchecked ferocity – ‘sodomised in a honey cell’ (2), ‘stamp on limp’ (2) – leaving the prisoners

⁵⁰⁰ Brooks, *Body Works*, 6.

⁵⁰¹ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: towards a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994) 146.

⁵⁰² Judith Butler, “Foucault and the Paradox of Bodily Inscription,” *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 86, No 11 (Nov 1989) 601-607, 601.

⁵⁰³ Elizabeth Grosz, *Space Time and Perversion: The Politics of Bodies* (St. Leonards, N.S.W.: Allen and Unwin, 1995) 382.

‘[p]rostrate, back-spavined and / fresh-crushed’ (4) and, reversing the opening line of the fifth stanza, in a land free of control.

For Grosz, ‘the body is regarded as the political, social, and cultural object par excellence, not a product of raw, passive nature that is civilised, overlaid and polished by culture’.⁵⁰⁴ The body that Grosz invokes is a body exposed to the imprint of history, an inscription of force which accounts for the destruction of the body.⁵⁰⁵ The sadistic pleasure that takes its focus on the body is demonstrated in the poem with a focus on programmatic abuse: ‘Kick them around shall we do that’ (4); ‘stamp on non-white body parts’ (4); ‘on a pulse, a bloodline stamp on whose neck’ (5), while all the descriptions are qualified ‘[i]n the curving / mirror of enlarged depravity daily and abhorrent a / comfort of disgust adjusted’ (6). The power enacted by the military unit is precisely where sovereign punishment is enacted in ‘Refuse Collection’ as an act of marking and defining the body. For Grosz, ‘power is the condition of possibility of these true discourses, the motivating force behind their profusion and the energy which inscribes them on bodies and pleasures’.⁵⁰⁶

In ‘Refuse Collection’ the torturous treatment of prisoners is a display of sovereign power which aims to ‘coagulate corporeal signifiers into signs’,⁵⁰⁷ to produce a meaning extending beyond the temporal constraints of domination. The intention behind the degradation of the body is to imbue the perceptual body with permanent marks of domination, ‘a semiotic process in which the body is newly emblematised with meaning’.⁵⁰⁸ The inscription of torture is therefore the means by which the body enters into

⁵⁰⁴ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 18.

⁵⁰⁵ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 146.

⁵⁰⁶ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 149.

⁵⁰⁷ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 141.

⁵⁰⁸ Brooks, *Body Works*, 55-6.

meaning; it becomes a vehicle for and symbol of historical signification. The inscription of the body is an act of transgression which makes the flesh reflective of a particular type of body, in this case primitive and beyond compassion. Bodily expression and the religious play into the poem as acts of prostration and prayer, as in the line, ‘head to the ground elated’ (1), revealing this coupling as a target for further punishment. The prisoners are ‘drilled by fierce devotion’ with a ‘sadism cut to measure’ (6). The examples of inscription in the poem will be further examined for the parallel presented with Franz Kafka’s ‘In the Penal Colony’. To exemplify how bodily inscriptions concretise power, Grosz writes, ‘there is nothing natural or ahistorical about these modes of cultural inscription. Through them, bodies are made amenable to the prevailing exigencies of power.’⁵⁰⁹ Prynne makes the argument that bodies in times of exception entail the presence and possibility of will, and are therefore the target of transgression. The attack on the body is associated with belief, as given in the line, ‘that’s us we don’t pray heads down / we watch the target’ (7), allowing the imposition on the prisoners of the torturers’ own ‘concept of possession’ (6), their ‘own-brand’ (6) marking of the flesh with the power to ‘stifle disbelief’ (6). As the processes of coercive torture extend the target shifts: ‘if the inside is now already / exposed then crush the outside’ (7); exposed to ‘unnatural cruelty’ (7), the prisoners are in ‘brutish metal restraints’ (8). The bodies of the prisoners, like the bodies of the soldiers, are involved in the political field; they are invested with it, trained to utilise it, to force the body to carry out tasks and to perform rituals.⁵¹⁰ The ‘body is the privileged object of power’s operations: power produces the body as a determined type, with particular features, skills and attributes. Power is the internal condition for the constitution and activity

⁵⁰⁹ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 141.

⁵¹⁰ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 149.

attributed to a body-subject.’⁵¹¹ The body is understood as a ‘structure of repressive signification which requires subjugation and the inscription of the body for the creation of new values.’⁵¹²

If the torture and inscription of the body is done as a means of creating new values for the prisoners, the coercive and sadistic sexual transgressions in the poem enact another type of domination. In relation to the body, ‘sex not only functions as a norm, but as part of a regulatory practice that produces the bodies it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce – demarcate, circulate, differentiate – the bodies it controls’.⁵¹³ Sexual torture as an operation of sovereign punishment connects the punitive with Foucault’s argument that gaolers are the controllers of biopower, as sexual power relations within the military unit and sexual torture against the prisoners act as the deployment point for relations of power. With regard to sexual torture and humiliation, that power is enacted for the subjugation, manipulation and control of the body. In ‘Refuse Collection’ the dialogic and the descriptive merge in representations of sexual abuse. The differentiation between the act and its representation slowly erodes, as can be seen in the lines ‘stripped canny / sex romp’ (1); ‘yes rape yes’ (1); ‘shagged out’ (2); ‘sodomised in a honey cell’(2); ‘food for / sex molest modest’ (2); ‘chicken rape’ (2); ‘cash for sex for punishment’ (4); and ‘stamp on non-white body parts [...] huddled up naked’(4). As Grosz contends, ‘sexuality is a particular privileged locus of the operations of power because of its strategically advantageous position at the core of individualising processes of discipline and training which intensify or realign bodily energies and

⁵¹¹ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 146.

⁵¹² Butler, “Foucault and the Paradox of Bodily Inscription,” 603.

⁵¹³ Judith Butler, “Bodies That Matter,” *Feminist Theory and The Body: A Reader*, eds. Janet Price and Margrit Shildrick (New York: Routledge, 1999) 235-245, 235.

pleasures'.⁵¹⁴ In relation to sexual trauma as a form of punishment, the torturers' task is to unify the unit and subjugate the prisoners even more fully to the biopolitical control of bodies, which is to ultimately destroy subjective control under the realm of sovereign power. It is, as Prynne writes, a way of enacting 'derangement from deep inside.' (6) Referencing the photographs of Lynndie England dragging a collared prisoner across the floor on a leash, Prynne writes, 'Privation mate / leashed up mental famine' (6), evincing bodily domination in its most barbarous form.

As the domain of values, the body is inscribed by history to signify; the body as medium or text is destroyed and rewritten according to the writing instrument. The prosodic structure of the poem thus substantiates and is substantiated by the fragmentation of bodies and bodily experience. For Foucault, 'this political investment of the body is bound up, in accordance with complex reciprocal relations, with its economic use; it is largely as a force of production that the body is invested with relations of power and domination'.⁵¹⁵ In representing the body as a medium for the inscription of cultural forces, Prynne's poem mimics Kafka's story 'In the Penal Colony'. Using the bodies of victims and perpetrators as a medium for the production of punitive judgement is demonstrative of the systematic, mechanised forms of violence used by the military unit. In 'In the Penal Colony' the accused is subjected to a machine that takes the body as its object and inscribes the body with a writing technique that, when fully realised, brings the weight of the crime to the accused's consciousness just prior to ultimate death. Parallels and evocations of bodily inscription as punishment in 'Refuse Collection' are represented in the lines 'insert tool this way up' (1); 'stamp on limp'(2); 'drilled by fierce devotion'(3); 'Brutal finish / this sentence' (3); 'finish as you never will in / a heap on the ground' (4); 'assault and quell and

⁵¹⁴ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 152.

⁵¹⁵ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 149. Referencing Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 25-26.

kill'(4) (punning on quill); 'write home about it' (4); and 'respite deliverance' (5), the last of which also entails an alternate meaning of enforced sleep deprivation as a means of torture. 'Data vow to thee' (5), '[t]he truth of faked report / on a pulse, a bloodline stamp' (5) and 'written down' (5) all continue the association of punishment with the written inscription on the body. The punitive inscriptions of power on the body are accusations 'on a display promotion' (7), with the demand to 'give blood shed / more' (7) of the body 'ringed' (8), 'raw and forever.' (8) Thus the body in 'Refuse Collection', the corporeal locus of cultural forces and power relations, is relentlessly inscribed with the cultural values of domination, and is regarded by the oppressors as a medium that must be destroyed for the production of new cultural values.

The Image Illiterates.

The breaking of the secret and the release of the photographs is the evident promise of the torture having happened, and, in the Derridean sense, testament to its repeatability. For Susan Sontag, who writes on the use of photographs in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, photographs become the manner in which we possess the event.⁵¹⁶ For the captors, the use of the photos may have a disseminating, 'bleaching of the moral response',⁵¹⁷ but for the public the photos preserve the possibility of remembering, which is an ethical act, and has an 'ethical value in and of itself'.⁵¹⁸

In analysing the photographs as constitutive of subjectivity 'Refuse Collection' responds to the events at Abu Ghraib by exhibiting synesthesia through the alignment of

⁵¹⁶ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Picador, 2003) 81.

⁵¹⁷ Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 81.

⁵¹⁸ Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 81.

varying sensorial experiences. The synesthesia developed in the poem is the result of the overlaying of subjective experiences with meta-structural commentary, to the point at which an individual subject is inaccessible or undefinable through textual analysis. Thus, in examining the manner in which the public came to know of the images and the manner in which these event-possession define subjectivity in contextual frameworks, it is imperative to examine the relationships the photographs have in the construction of identity. What is contested in the poem is the impact and understanding of our predominant image-mediated knowledge of war. For this reason, the constructive and cognitive relations between the images and the poetic are the means through which issues of representation, sovereignty, exception and subjectivity are defined.

There is an alternate approach to the discourse of the image in its relation to building contextual frames of knowledge about a situation. For Walter Benjamin, ‘the image illiterates’.⁵¹⁹ Taken at its most incendiary, this could mean, as Sontag argues, that ‘the image can only affect us, not provide us with an understanding of what we see’.⁵²⁰ However, this notion should be contested as grievous, if not altogether wrongheaded. The images are evidentiary proof of the atrocities committed at Abu Ghraib, and are an active attestation to the event and its very public trace. If we are only affected, as Sontag would have it, our emotive register would in no way provide us the means of utilising the knowledge gained through this public release of information to actively enable change. It is in holding fidelity to the situation by which the poet, or protester, is enabled to alter the proceedings. Butler provides the very basis of counter-argument against Sontag, using the images released and the fecundity of our awareness of the atrocities to frame her argument about the public’s understanding of war and secrecy:

⁵¹⁹ Paul Virilio, *Information Bomb*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2000) 38.

⁵²⁰ Butler, *Frames of War*, 66.

Sontag would doubtless rejoin that the judgement whether an atrocity has taken place is a kind of interpretation, verbal or narrative, that seeks recourse to the photographs to substantiate its claim. But this is a problematic response for at least two reasons: first, the photograph builds evidence and, so, the claim; the second, Sontag's position misunderstands the way that non-verbal or non-linguistic media make their arguments.⁵²¹

The crux of Butler's counter-argument relies on an *a priori* notion that we enter the world not as users of language and images but as bodies that perceive.⁵²² This analysis understands Benjamin's notion of illiteration as a manner in which the images force a caesura around exculpating language, relying upon the images to provide evidence to our referential frames of knowledge.

The photographic evidence provides an authentic relation to the event where the witnesses are culpable and therefore un-reliant, or, on the victims' side, they fail to be authentic witnesses due to the trauma of the event.⁵²³ The images of torture do affect the viewer, and do so in a manner which builds upon the collective necessity to respond. The event of the photographs' release has the power to transform, and it inaugurates the radical-evental subjectivity by shattering the "performative force" of the ideological illusion itself.⁵²⁴ 'Refuse Collection' represents the transgression of subjective thresholds and the lack of demarcation between public and private experiences of pain and deprivation.

The first indication of the commodification of sexual torture in 'Refuse Collection' appears in the lines 'Go on, do it, we'll photograph everything, home / movies hold steady on while they is we do it, / by eye it takes oozing huge debt' (2), and 'war for oil, oil for

⁵²¹ Butler, *Frames of War*, 70.

⁵²² Jenn Webb, *Understanding Representation* (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2008) 65.

⁵²³ Renata Salecl, *On Anxiety* (London; New York, Routledge, 2005) 132.

⁵²⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real: Five Essays on September 11th and Related Dates* (London; New York: Verso, 2002) 59.

food, food for / sex molest modest'(2). Both lines provide a lexical account of financial motivations, notions of familial remembrance, domesticity and a cultivated visual relation to transgression and growth. The manner in which the poem introduces and induces the reader into the abrogated relations and definitions of the poem's subjects is jarring to a provisional reading. The employment of created and projected warring identities is not unique to the poem, but reflects a complex of media-controlled images projected across broader society.

One of the functional operations of the photographs, in the media as well as in the poem, is to depict the terms of life of the victims. In articulating acts of torture and dehumanisation, the images are testament to the capacity to restrict life, as undertaken by Western forces. The images afflict the victims further by creating an aporia in which their lives and humanity cannot be apprehended as such. As is depicted in 'Refuse Collection', the lack of humanity makes the '[e]ntire violation / natural' (8). The lack of subjective identities within the poem⁵²⁵ alludes to the prisoners as less than human, and their being subjected to torture reinforces this representation. However, the lack of definitive identities reveals the torturers in the same manner; it shows how individuals are shielded by the system, and their culpability expunged. The images compel, they enact and display the most inhumane barbarism, which 'Refuse Collection' mimics through the cloak of anonymity and a derided subjective register. As Butler concludes in her argument,

⁵²⁵ It may be argued that in the detailing of the interpersonal relations of the military unit in the poem, one person, Lynndie England, is identified. For her involvement in the abuse she was convicted of one count of conspiracy, four counts of maltreating detainees and one count of committing an indecent act. She was also pregnant at the time, with the child of Spec. Charles Granger, perhaps the most notorious of those convicted for the mistreatment of prisoners in Abu Ghraib. The terms that may identify her within the poem include a reading of 'incarcerate' attentive to its alternative definitions, as, in pathology, it pertains predominantly to strangulation or obstruction with regard to a placenta. In addition to this term, '[f]ruiting bodies' add weight to the reference, which is further secured with the line 'gravid with foetor, sweet rot adoring placid / or regular.' The definition of 'gravid' adds to this identification, as do the punning words 'foetor' (for 'foetal') and 'placid', which accounts for an abortive pun on the suffixal misreading of 'placid' for 'placenta'. This suggested reading is completed by the line in the poem's last stanza, 'standing room / only, seats reserved for women in labour.'

referencing Agamben's *Homo Sacer*, 'What we are left with are photos of people who are for the most part faceless and nameless. But can we nevertheless say that the obscured face and absent name functions as the visual trace – even if it is a lacuna within the visual field – of the very mark of humanity?',⁵²⁶

The images of torture work to shatter the ideological illusion of the ongoing war effort because they represent the normalisation of coercively breaking down the prisoners, of subjugating them to the barbarism of military superiority and enacting violence as power. The images define and frame the evidence of torture by a relentless turning out, a projection of the characteristics of the torturers. The dissimulation and overlaying of subjective identities within the poem mask this self-abhorrence as 'the wanton ambit of self possession.' (8) For Butler, 'at work in this mode of implicit rationalisation is a crude deployment, exploitation of the norm of "freedom" as it operates in contemporary sexual politics, one in which "freedom" becomes not only the means of coercion, but what some might call "the *jouissance* of torture"'.⁵²⁷

Democracy and Complicity.

One of the most discernible patterns highlighted in 'Refuse Collection' is the cooption of the public into the democratic process of decision making. As the fragmented body politic suggests, the apparent inclusion of the public in this decision making was a deception, a means of controlling public sentiment for decisions made elsewhere. Davidson's essay on the topic, 'Democratic Consensus in Prynne's "Refuse Collection"', is fundamental for discerning the manner in which acts of sovereign power have been undertaken to impose a

⁵²⁶ Butler, *Frames of War*, 94.

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

state of exception (such as those previously theorised by Agamben) and create an aporia of combat which exists peripherally to the laws and conventions of war. The dismantling of authorial command and accountability within prisons such as Abu Ghraib allowed the military personnel to further mistreat the prisoners while preventing culpability from rising within the military command. The relationship between combatant and prisoner depicted in the images reinforces the altered subjective positions of both combatant and prisoner. The images are demonstrative of the conventions of war no longer mediated by authority or juridical precedent. Davidson, for his part, centres his analysis on the operation of public language and public images mediated through technology, to exemplify that consensus 'becomes a temporary result of provisional hegemony (Mouffe 1996, 10), a temporary stabilisation of power that can never be inclusive but contains within itself the notion of exclusion'.⁵²⁸ It is from this position that the poem functions to envelop the reader and the public within the realm of assenting individuals. Davidson argues that the poem actively tries to subvert this inclusion through deconstructing meaning, functioning as a critique to refuse the manner in which 'photographs of torture at Abu Ghraib become part of the production of a cultural consensus'.⁵²⁹ While Davidson's assertions largely accord with this analysis, it will still serve to examine the manner in which provisional hegemony and sovereign power are utilised in the creation of a state of exception to recast and reinforce augmented subjective identities and the very definitions of war.

Chantal Mouffe argues in the opening of *The Democratic Paradox* that 'the modern democratic society is a society in which power, law and knowledge experience a radical indeterminacy'.⁵³⁰ Nowhere is this dialectic complex more fully tested than in the operation

⁵²⁸ Davidson, "Democratic Consensus in Prynne's 'Refuse Collection,'" 151.

⁵²⁹ Davidson, "Democratic Consensus in Prynne's 'Refuse Collection,'" 161.

⁵³⁰ Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000) 1.

of the public media reporting in times of war. 'Refuse Collection' is mediated through financial, technological and public language as a gauge of how this democratic complex is exercised. For Agamben, the state of exception brought about by the declaration of 'war on terror' imposes a state of exception upon public perception, as well as on the rules of engagement and the categorisation of prisoners as 'enemy combatants.' Agamben writes,

In this sense, the state of exception is the opening of a space in which application and norm reveal their separation and a pure force-of-law realizes (that is, applies by ceasing to apply [dis-applicando]) a norm whose application has been suspended. In this way, the impossible task of welding norm and reality together, and thereby constituting the normal sphere, is carried out in the form of exception, that is to say, by presupposing the nexus. This means that in order to apply a norm it is ultimately necessary to suspend its application, to produce an exception. In every case, the state of exception marks a threshold at which logic and praxis blur with each other and a pure violence without *logos* claims to realize an enunciation without any real reference.⁵³¹

It was the state of exception that allowed prisoners of war to be subjected to torture and disestablished the chain of command upon which combatants regulated their treatment. The political and ethical eclipse that engulfed the U.S. forces, with examples of unlawful torture and abuse stemming from Guantanamo Bay to Abu Ghraib as well as 'black site' prisons across Eastern Europe, demonstrated the allied forces operating outside of the conventions of war and in contradiction of the Geneva Conventions. To exhibit the legal and rhetorical means by which the U.S. Forces bypassed the conventions of war is not to condone these actions, but to demonstrate the state of exception in which the Western forces were operating. What Agamben terms the *dis-applicando* of the conventions of war and rights of prisoners makes the torture and its justification all the more reprehensible, and is

⁵³¹ Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005) 40.

demonstrative of a systemic procedure that allowed the U.S. Armed Forces to operate without accountability for the torture and murder of their prisoners.

It was through the process of severing the connection between violence and law that prisoners were reduced to ‘bare life’. The state of exception, as it relates to the poem, is an operative mechanistic structure which worked to sever the bonds of prohibition and induced the use of violence as pure means, ‘which shows only itself without relation to an end’.⁵³² It was this programmatic operation which allowed the combatants to reduce prisoners to the state of ‘bare life’. It is Agamben’s reasoning that the state of exception has brought us to the point at which violence rules and defines:

Though the notions of *state of siege* and *martial law* express a connection with the state of war that has been historically decisive and is present to this day, they nevertheless prove to be inadequate to define the proper structure of the phenomenon, and they themselves must therefore be qualified as *political* or *fictional*, terms that are themselves misleading in some ways. The state of exception is not a special kind of law (like the law of war); rather insofar as it is a suspension of the juridical order itself, it defines law’s threshold or limit concept.⁵³³

The obfuscation of the rule of law is evident in ‘Refuse Collection’, and is exhibited in a manner in which ethical discretion is unified with belief.

Belief in ‘Refuse Collection’ entails the religious, but also functions on the positional information which led to collective governmental support of the war. Prynne writes, halfway through the poem,

It is to be believed by
living daylights voided moral defection by blank
horror for terror of sacrifice, stairway to air
drilled by fierce devotion, say yes. (3)

⁵³² Agamben, *State of Exception*, 88.

⁵³³ Agamben, *State of Exception*, 4.

While the subjective identities are undisclosed, this lexical pattern of indoctrinal ritual has application to both those within the allied forces as well as their prisoners. The rapaciousness of the line, while not excluding the U.S. forces, does add a weight that is indicative of coercive techniques of breaking prisoners and forcing confessions. The poem represents acts of violence as means without end, which instigates the transgression of limits, and exemplifies the state of exception imposed by the combatants and U.S. Command. Žižek, who argues that the Hegelian rule of ‘objective’ excess is necessarily supplemented by ‘subjective’ excess, sees such acts of violence in states of exception as a demarcation point in the definition of allowable norms. Once this coextension exists it determines the new norm of the allowance of excess. Žižek argues this point in relation to the definition of subjectivity pace Etienne Balibar, who, he writes,

Distinguishes two opposite but complementary modes of excessive violence: the ‘ultra-objective’ or systemic violence that is inherent in the social condition of global capitalism, which involve the ‘automatic’ creation of excluded and dispensable individuals [...] and the ‘ultra-subjective’ violence of newly emerging ethnic and/or religious, in short racist, ‘fundamentalisms.’⁵³⁴

For Prynne, the distinction between the systemic violence and ultra-subjective violence plays out through the guise of fundamentalist⁵³⁵ categorisation, when he writes, ‘consider this your / zone of inclusion that’s us we don’t pray heads down / we watch the target this time ah yes right we / are the target let’s go faster now and self-abhor, / get there first.’ (7)

⁵³⁴ Žižek, *Violence*, 14.

⁵³⁵ ‘Fundamentalist’ here is used to characterise an act of perception or violence in which race and ethnicity play a determining role in the decisions taken. This transforms violence into ultra-subjective violence, given that its thresholds are predetermined judgements that rely on ingrained, or taught, presuppositions regarding the subjective status of others as less than human. ‘Fundamentalism’ in this case, while not avoiding the religious element, refers to a devotional belief in and adherence to an ideology that reinforces this conception. As Žižek argues in *Violence*, ‘Fundamentalism “naturalises” or “essentialises” historically conditioned contingent traits’ (125).

The fundamentalist aspect of this violence is the concession given to further acts of transgression: ‘Mutilation and self-rape / defilement on a display promotion, give blood shed / more, greedy bright halo.’ (7) Through the state of exception, any act of violence is depicted as the coercion of will and of active participation, thus further removing the prisoners from their relation to the realm of the human. Butler’s discussion of the relation between torture and inhumanity coincides with the display of punishment found in the poem:

In this sense, the victim’s status as less than human is not only presupposed by the torture, but reinstated by it. And here we have to see – as Adorno cautioned us – that violence in the name of civilisation [cf. Prynne’s phrase ‘Call-sign freedom’] reveals its own barbarisms even as it ‘justifies’ its own violence by presuming the barbaric sub-humanity of the other against whom that violence is waged.⁵³⁶

It is from this point of suspended belief in the system and its limits where the subjective identities of ‘Refuse Collection’ are found and embodied. The subjects’ authenticity and individuation relies upon the knowing break from the real. In the absence of any structural status, and in a sense nameless and faceless themselves, the soldiers broke with the rule of law governing the treatment of prisoners, to become somehow new, to become bestial in the act. The argument presented in ‘Refuse Collection’ is that ‘authenticity resides in the act of violent transgression’.⁵³⁷

One of the most consuming aspects of the poem is the transfer of private acts, including torture and sodomy, into the public realm. The overt and ungracious account and display of sexuality tell of a media-obsessed, hyper-sexualised culture, not to mention its operative extremes in the Armed Forces. One of the most despicable aspects of the images

⁵³⁶ Butler, *Frames of War*, 93.

⁵³⁷ Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, 6.

was the manner in which the perpetrators used sexual transgression and humiliation as a means of dehumanisation, a move with striking resonance when compared against the rise of internet-driven gonzo-style pornography. The phrases of 'Refuse Collection' most demonstrative of this sexual dehumanisation include: '[g]o on, do it, we'll photograph everything' (2) and '[c]amshot spoilers' (1). The hyper-reality of the event, as a constructed and orchestrated display of dominance, adds to the very unreality of the photographic evidence. In 'Refuse Collection' the images play out as follows: 'on stirrup trade in / crawled to many bodies, uncounted' (1); 'insert tool this way up' (1), signifying acts of sodomy as torture; and 'they took to fast immediate satis- / faction or slather, new slave' (1), referring to copulation, compulsion and an obviated breaking of the person from the event. The image-complexes of 'posture writhing' (1), '[c]amshot spoilers' (1) and 'like a bear dancing stripped canny / sex romp' (1) all add to the surreal grotesquery of the scene. The phrases 'Confess sell out the / self input, yes rape yes' (1) and 'sodomised in a honey cell' (2) warrant attention as examples of ultra-subjective violence, though the phrases preserve the possibility that this action is also taken amongst the military unit itself. '[B]odies vintage / shagged out' (2) and 'gravid with foetor, sweet rot adoring placid' (2) tell of a deep devotional affection, a longing, but also the prospect of pregnancy.⁵³⁸ The construct of these images justifying acts of torture as a means of forced coercion is evident in 'food for / sex molest modest' (2); 'makeshift parlour chicken rape private' (2) and '[f]lush with / cash for sex for punishment' (4). 'Warranted buggery' (7) reifies this approach, because in the eyes of the torturers the '[e]ntire violation [is] / natural' (8). It is not the ubiquity of sexualised images of torture which inform the viewer of the systematic application of these techniques, but the goading lines, such as 'Go on, do it, we'll

⁵³⁸ Davidson, "Democratic Consensus in Prynne's 'Refuse Collection,'" 156.

photograph everything' (2) which are the most spellbindingly indicative of the normality of this behavior in times of exception.

The conversion of this private torture into a public object is an aggressive circuit that transforms oppressive pleasure into a raw sadistic form.⁵³⁹ The combatants' degradation of the prisoners demonstrates the most atrocious form of exploitative subjugation and domination. Butler writes, 'The scene of torture that includes coerced homosexual acts, and seeks to decimate personhood through that coercion, presumes that for both the torturer and tortured, homosexuality represent the destruction of one's being. Forcing homosexual acts would thus seem to mean violently imposing that destruction.'⁵⁴⁰ This is not to equate homosexuality with violence, but to demonstrate what the U.S. Forces took to be the most traumatic violation of cultural taboos, the sexual dominance and humiliation of the Arabic prisoners. Through the images, the poem seeks to address the manner in which subjectivity, a prisoner's relation to the conditions of life and the barbaric transgressions of these limits constitute the *jouissance* of torture. The exposure of prisoners to coerced homosexual acts is evidence of this, but also acknowledges the coercive homo- and heterosexual acts upon which the military operates and its community functions.⁵⁴¹ Thus the abstracted individuation within the poem is also an illustration of the conditions of life within the U.S. Forces, a breaking down of individuals, a transgression of their limits and a recognition of potlatch in its most barbaric forms.

In Prynne's 'Refuse Collection' the representation of the combatant-prisoner interactions, as well as combatant-combatant interactions, has led to the position where identity is sutured to acts of transgression. The poem represents the combatants jostling for

⁵³⁹ Butler, *Frames of War*, 90.

⁵⁴⁰ Butler, *Frames of War*, 90.

⁵⁴¹ Žižek, *Violence*, 171.

power and reiterates the claim that, ‘to the militant, identity is everything’.⁵⁴² For the militant, as well as the public, constructed identities become objects, signifiers, which allow access to power and legitimate this access. It is the construction of hierarchies of power within the military unit, as well as the public’s image-based knowledge of war, which reinforces the idea of capacity being based on its resemblance to power. The public discourse surrounding the photo release was predicated on the dialectic of torture, domination and pleasure which the images depict. Thus the projected capacity is twofold: ‘if the violent act is among other things, a way of relocating the capacity to be violated (always) elsewhere, it produces the appearance that the subject who enacts violence is impermeable to violence’.⁵⁴³

The photographs’ release took on the tenets of an event by the very fact that they were capable of altering the subjective identities of military subjects and their prisoners, as well as altering the public’s perception of identity and ideology in its involvement in the war. This publication created identity-objects out of the Arab subjects, by documenting the coercive enactment of torture, and by casting this identity for the public.⁵⁴⁴ The hierarchical struggle for interpersonal power – the hallmark of the military unit – was brought to light in the public, exemplifying the competition for power, potlatch and shared guilt.

Discussing the relations of power within the military unit, Sontag writes, ‘the subject is therefore castrated, i.e., powerless by himself, and only by occupying a certain place in the symbolic order does he temporarily get some power or status’.⁵⁴⁵ Prynne replicates this process of powerlessness in the face of anonymity and incurs, in the casting of identities and through acts of interpersonal violence, an experience of subjugating

⁵⁴² Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 10.

⁵⁴³ Butler, *Frames of War*, 178.

⁵⁴⁴ Maurice Blanchot, *Writing the Disaster* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986) 21.

⁵⁴⁵ Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 21.

affliction. And while the pronouns ‘we’ and ‘our’ in the poem reference the dominant side of the state of exception’s power relations, this functions to extend the manifold of guilt and culpability to the broader populace of Western nations. As it functions, the construction of military identities, as well as enemy recognition, is always a performative procedure.⁵⁴⁶ ‘Refuse Collection’ utilises the polysemy of the title’s first word to refuse collectivisation and represent the silencing of people’s voices. In its refusal, the poem actively fights against the recasting of identity and takes a definitive stance against authorisation of anonymous torture. This represents the poem’s refusal to accept the anonymous other as a media-derived object, a refusal of the abolition of the humanity of the enemy.

War and Language.

War and its engagement with language has always been a ritualistic event. That mass technology has aggregated and compounded this propensity leaves the public with the language of ‘refuse.’ War-footing as well as the account of war are played out among the detritus of the media. The manner in which media technology, politics and the corporeal experience has been determined and intertwined has been a thematic thread throughout Prynne’s work, since at least *Aristeas, in Seven Years* and *Wound Response*. As Prynne wrote in ‘A Quick Riposte to Handke’s Dictum about War and Language’,

Warfare between nations is most often waged across language-frontiers, as a fiercely linguistic event, even if often for reasons not fully conscious or not admitted into full public view; but the mounting up of a war programme, in advance of the hostilities and to justify their methods, is a concatenation of intensely linguistic processes, in which the whole identity and propensity of individual language-histories are worked into the deepest complicity. By the time war ‘breaks out,’ that is, is declared by one nation or tribal cohort confident of subjugating

⁵⁴⁶ Žižek, *Welcome to The Desert of the Real*, 110.

another, the cascade of positional alterations to language use has largely been completed.⁵⁴⁷

While 'Refuse Collection' relinquishes *Wound Response*'s focus on bodily regeneration, it does retain one parallel of note, that of recasting the presumed or presumptive measure necessary for an attack. In *Wound Response* this position, reversing the syllogistic premise of being attacked as the motive for attack, is played out under the argotic definition of 'wound response' as a successful attack upon the enemy. However, in 'Refuse Collection' the premise for attack unfolds dialogically, through military command, in the words of soldiers, and is unrelenting in its self-justification. For Prynne this is predominantly played out in the final stanzas of the poem: 'Pre-set threat assessment at deferred / base precision, risk profile vamps up by alert to / stockade fire lines' (7), and 'we watch the target this time ah yes right we / are the target let's go faster now and self-abhor, / get there first. Civil defence, rights issue give / before robbed in-store.' (7) All the ungovernable actions of the war are predicated from the outset on the false proposition of attack; they are all depicted as '[t]he tasks of / self-defence.' (8)

It is the attack justified as self-defence which makes the '[e]ntire violation / natural' (8). It is through the extraordinary language clusters and lexical formations that presence and embodied experience are obfuscated. The confusion between positions of victim and torturer results in the increasingly intertwined representation of embodied presence. As Davidson notes, 'the poem develops aspects of a meditation on embodied presence and on the difference between seeing, or spectacle, and presence',⁵⁴⁸ to the point at which agency and embodied presence are intertwined in the pain of torture and the obscene pleasure of

⁵⁴⁷ J.H. Prynne, "A Quick Riposte to Handke's Dictum about War and Language," *Quid*, 6 (November 2000) 23.

⁵⁴⁸ Davidson, "Democratic Consensus in Prynne's 'Refuse Collection,'" 155.

enacting it. Thus the self-justification presented in the poem anticipates and mimics the divergent conceptions of accountability felt by participants, and the poem, while actively highlighting and resisting this pressure, displays this through its language. Further on in ‘A Quick Riposte on Handke’s Dictum about War and Language’, Prynne writes, ‘Human Language is the tribal continuity of expressive human behavior, and is marked in its very core by whatever depravity or nobility an exercise of linguistic analysis may discover within the human record’.⁵⁴⁹ In this manner, the poem is a replica of the public record.

As has been a characteristic of many of Prynne’s collections, ‘Refuse Collection’ presents an experience of the event horizon of the poem through language, rather than attempting a representative, subjective expression of these details. The complexities and complications of voice, as handled in ‘Refuse Collection’, do not easily lend themselves to a recognisable expression of the victim’s perspective. The poem, however, embodies this position, even as it traces the dialogic experience of the torturers, the dicta of command and the countervailing artifice of publicly mediated language. The compliance and representation of voice in ‘Refuse Collection’ reaches towards Prynne’s position as expressed in *Bands Around the Throat*, for as it develops an intertext of pitying the victim and stressing the torturer’s voice, it does so in a manner which counterbalances lyric’s stance. In ‘Refuse Collection’ lyric expression is adulterated by elision and a polymorphous register of subjectivities. It is, by and large, a poetic framed by the Abu Ghraib event, through which the poetic construction mimics the public experience as a cacophony of voices. This practice extends Perril’s argument as it relates to the privilege of rhetoric and the privilege of exemption: ‘What marks out Prynne’s work as separate from many other “avant-garde” writers is the degree of scepticism he has towards not just the rhetorical

⁵⁴⁹ Prynne, “A Quick Riposte to Handke’s Dictum about War and Language,” 24.

stance of lyric, but equally the stance of the avant-garde as being similarly predicated upon a heroic rhetoric of risk'.⁵⁵⁰ In 'Refuse Collection' the rhetorical position is utilised dialogically, for in this manner it accentuates the subjective, communicative form, as derived from media accounts experienced by the public. Utilising dialogic expression also highlights authorial removal from the piece, by reinforcing the constrictions upon which the poem is constructed. By utilising these phrases dialogically, Prynne expounds upon the performative procedure undertaken in the war of propaganda. In 'Refuse Collection' the reader experiences a sundering of identifiable subjective relations and is belied by the synchronistic, experiential circumstances within Abu Ghraib, thereby bringing to light the *arcantum imperii* [secret of power] and confusion experienced in times of warfare. The resultant complex of subjectivities in the poem casts the subject in a manner which blurs his or her relation to power, fighting in the state of exception as in an 'essentially empty space, in which human action with no relation to law stands before a norm with no relation to life'.⁵⁵¹ The lyrical position and the presence of refrains of media-derived language have the effect of interpolating the reader into the collectively constituted public, through which individual voices are drowned out and culpability becomes further expansive.

As Keston Sutherland investigates in 'XL Prynne', there is a connection between Prynne's lyric poetry, the expression of suffering and the notion of truth. As Adorno characterises it, lyric poetry entails 'the need to lend a voice to suffering [as] a condition of all truth'.⁵⁵² Sutherland argues that

[t]he truthfulness of this voice given to suffering is itself the problem in Prynne's poetry from *Brass* downward. The problem is not that the voice given to suffering is in fact untruthful, so that we disbelieve it [...] For Prynne's poetry, the problem is

⁵⁵⁰ Perril, "Hanging on Your Every Word," 100.

⁵⁵¹ Agamben, *State of Exception*, 86.

⁵⁵² Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1990) 17-18.

more deeply intractable. It is that ‘we are immune to disbelief’ (‘The Ideal Star-Fighter,’ *Poems*: 165). Once realism is discounted as radical illumination, the voice given to suffering is believed to be truthful both if it is successful on the terms of realism and if it is unsuccessful on those terms; and that is both what makes possible a moral anthropology untied from realism as its foundation and terminal emphasis, *and* what makes pathos so treacherous. The condition of all truth is unavoidably rigged up so as to be met in advance by a proleptic assent posing as ‘instinct,’ because our belief in this truth is not a radical act, it is our definition of health.⁵⁵³

The unification of the lyric with the condition of suffering is not, for Prynne, found in the creation of the suffering subject, but pertains to the manner in which poetry can speak to the condition of suffering. The lyric poem attests to the condition of the world; it creates an experience through language for the contemplation and interrogation of the reader, and it remains for the reader to formulate a mode of response. The poem presents illustrations of suffering and asks the reader to formulate her or his own judgements with regard to the experience of suffering, a judgement the reader must create and defend from her or his own position within the world.⁵⁵⁴

One aspect of Prynne’s poetic which has become increasingly concentrated in the decades following *Brass* is the function of the command, used in close proximity to alliterative, onomatopoeic word clusters. The function of commands in ‘Refuse Collection’ matches the degree of force it had in *Her Weasels Wild Returning*, as well as *Acrylic Tips*. The ubiquitous commands in ‘Refuse Collection’, starting with the most sexually transgressive, could be derived from a brochure of technical writing: ‘insert tool this way up’ (2), or later, ‘Confess sell out the / self input’(1). The commands quickly accumulate in their conflation of identities: ‘It is we they do it’ (2); ‘Go on, do it, we’ll photograph

⁵⁵³ Keston Sutherland, “XL Prynne,” *A Manner of Utterance: The Poetry of J.H. Prynne*, ed. Ian Brinton (Exeter: Shearsman, 2009) 104-32, 109.

⁵⁵⁴ J.H. Prynne, "A Letter to Peter Riley 15/9/1985," *In lit* 1992 [page numbers unknown].

everything' (2); 'say yes' (3) ; 'Brutal finish / this sentence, go on do it' (3); 'give blood shed / more' (7); 'Force them' (8); and 'They do our will, to deny what they do is ours' (8). Not only do the commands provide the direct impetus for the subjects to commit acts of torture and violence, they also display the degree to which culpability and the chain of authority is imbued within the dialogic statements. The formulaic and repetitive language used in these utterances resonates with the experience of mnemonic structures in the oral tradition. As Tom Clark argues in 'Towards a Poetics of Contemporary Public Language', formulaic phrases have

an aura of knowingness, of truth value, because they present themselves as things people have said – and therefore known – previously. Their phrasing often fails literary (prose) standards of authenticity for the very reasons why it is both vital and trusted in an oral context: heightened or distinctive sound quality aids recognition and recall; syntactic self-closure enables ready reuse across a wide range of grammatical contexts; and the semantic arbitrariness that we may infer from many usages of formulas merely highlights the clash between performative dynamics and analytical standards.⁵⁵⁵

The repetitive language in these phrases mimics the media-derived language Prynne is seeking to interrogate. The voice is characterised by a dialogic tendency patterned on command and justification, as may have been excerpted from interviews or transcripts.⁵⁵⁶ These phrases enact the idea of will within the command, where the force of aggression and domination is masked as free choice. And, as Žižek argues, '[o]ur freedom of choice effectively often functions as a mere formal gesture of consent to our own oppression and exploitation'.⁵⁵⁷ Thus the derangement operative in the command to undertake acts of violence is its own accomplishment; it is command without relation to order and without

⁵⁵⁵ Tom Clark, "Towards a Poetics of Contemporary Public Language," 120-121.

⁵⁵⁶ This would also establish working parallels between 'Refuse Collection' and Andrea Brady's 'Saw Fit', which utilises and embeds interview transcripts within the text.

⁵⁵⁷ Žižek, *Violence*, 125.

the relation to agency. The relation of language to being is therefore eclipsed by the normative construct of commands. For Blanchot, the derangement of the command and its relation to atrocity plays out at the point where '[t]he language of being is a language which subjects and reverts to being, saying obedience, submission, expressing the sovereign audience of being in its hidden-disclosed presence. The refusal of being is still assent; it is being's consent to refusal.'⁵⁵⁸ At the heart of this statement by Blanchot lies the true impetus of the commands in 'Refuse Collection', in that they are ciphers of command representing a departure from language's semantic dimension while still emphatically reliant upon language's ability to signify. For Prynne, emphatic language remains 'a marker for the boundary of one discourse, where it is momentarily exceeded by another',⁵⁵⁹ which is signified in 'Refuse Collection' by the self-interrogation of formulaic language.

The glossolalic tendencies of the language-clusters in the poem exhibit a willed tendency of overt derangement. The most obvious form of this is in the line 'nim nim' (1), or 'non-important message', but outside of military argot, it relates etymologically as 'to seize; to capture'.⁵⁶⁰ The assonantal and alliterative clusters in the poem form patterns of linguistic obstruction, while imbuing the poem with subsumed semantic meanings. Paralleling the use of 'nim nim' (1), the alliterative cluster, 'incarnadine incarcerate' (1), extends an illuminating set of matrices upon the poem which entail a denigration of the human, and a forced obstruction or enclosure upon which this operation functions. Further to this example are the phrases 'capital genital' (1); 'sex molest modest' (2); 'mine makeshift' (2); 'horror for terror' (3); 'Warranted buggery word / chewed' (7); and, from

⁵⁵⁸ Blanchot, *Writing of the Disaster*, 88.

⁵⁵⁹ Prynne, "English Poetry and Emphatical Language, Warton Lecture on English Poetry, 1988," *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 74 (1988) 135-69, 168.

⁵⁶⁰ "nim, v.". *OED Online*. December 2012. Oxford University Press. 14 January 2012 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/127135?rskey=mxkSkV&result=3&isAdvanced=false>>.

the concluding line, 'Our land ours' (8), with references to Robert Frost's 'The Gift Outright' and to The Lord's Prayer.⁵⁶¹ The frequent recurrence of such phrases in the poem alert the reader to the propensity of the language used to mediate a phono-symbolism and indicate the transformative effect of repetition. The dynamics of the phrase, 'incarnadine incarcerate' (1) obfuscate expressive interpretation and also depart from the intention to signify, characteristic of glossolalia.⁵⁶² The alliterative clusters enact a negation of the potential for words to signify, obfuscating and reverberating over the originating voice. In this manner, the frequency of glossolalic lines in the poem forces the dialogic phrases into a degenerative language, where intentionality and authenticity are subsumed by a polysemous and consuming glottal sonority.

An integral parallel between the glossolalic language and the depiction of violence is the manner in which language and image-complexes inaugurate and present changed materiality with respect to the image. To mitigate the proximity of the torturers to their victims, the torturers use photographs to create a simulated distance between themselves and their actions. The photos of torture testify to a recasting of subjectivities in which a performed identity encapsulates the distance between personhood and reality. Prynne also uses the semblance of the real, posed as unreality, to highlight the ongoing and contaminant commodification of 'Call-sign freedom' (4), the photographs themselves and the newly defined subjective identities of the victims. From the opening stanzas of the poem the reader encounters phrases of exchange: 'slap-up / barter' (1); 'on stirrup trade in' (1); 'oil-for-food' (1); and 'rapacious in heavy / investment' (1). However, right alongside the

⁵⁶¹ The connection of the line 'Our land ours, / raw and forever' to Robert Frost is asserted by Catherine Martin ('No Way Out', *Pores: A Journal of Poetics Research*, 5, Part One: Poetry and Public Language (n.p.)) while the connection to the Lord's Prayer was articulated in Winborn's essay, "'Derangement from deep inside': JH Prynne's 'Refuse Collection'." *PN Review*, 33.5 (2007) 55-59.

⁵⁶² Giorgio Agamben, *The End of the Poem: studies in poetics*, trans. Daniel Hellen-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999) 67.

language of exchange, identity itself is commodified, as with the phrase ‘new slave’ (1). It is in the analogy of depicting the victim as a consumed, commodified life, as in fact a slave, that the reader encounters the racial reification of beliefs justifying the use of ultra-subjective violence.

The virtual experience is played out through surreal violence in phrases such as ‘like a bear dancing’ and ‘makeshift parlour chicken rape private’ (2), although these phrases also instigate the thought that the torturers are playing out events from memory in which they were the victim, and hence connect to the domestic and the ‘DIY’ (2) representation of the action. In staging torture as an act to be photographed, the torturer finds a manner in which to distance himself from his or her own childhood memories of trauma. This is done by creating from this trauma a sense of ownership, an object and a commodity. As D.S. Marriott writes in *Haunted Life*,

It’s [a particular] point of view that sees commodity fetishism as the virtual enchantment of the modern world and the ontological slavery of persons as its perpetual unveiling. That said, it remains unclear why slavery appears to be one moment in the history of capital *and* the ongoing persistence of the radical ontology of the virtual. If language (and image?) of the commodity is, as Marx tells us, haunted by the unreal, illusory character of value, it is not clear to me whether Wideman views racial disavowal as a specific example of such commodification or its fetishized remainder? But if, again recalling Marx, capitalist illusion is never simply an illusion veiling an underlying reality but a fiction which people have forgotten as such, doesn’t this complicate Wideman’s opposition between ‘bare life’ and virtuality, capital and ontology?⁵⁶³

It seems logically certain that the crux of the financial language populating the unreality of the poem is to depict the ‘panoply’ of the torturer’s relation to the virtual, to the public and to the victim’s alterity. With the casting of a prisoner as a ‘new slave’ (1) in the

⁵⁶³ David Marriott, *Haunted Life: Visual Culture and Black Modernity* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2007) 12.

sadomasochistic, sexualised use of the term, the torturers come into the possession of an alien presence, a new self-identity. The reader would do well to pose the question, as Marriott does further in his argument,

But why if the only way to include multiple presences is to protect the self from the other's alterity, to lower that interference to one single coherent message, is the encounter, or response, more open to the heterogeneity of the many than the [photographic]? Why is this art of refusal not also haunted by [the photograph's] spectral stimulation of otherness conceiving, as it does, multiple presences within the logic of identity, the either/or that the dialect of deception and sacrifice merely repeat?⁵⁶⁴

In its function in the poem, the graphic and surreal violence occupies the non-representable horror of the reality of 'bare life'. This surreal violence frames the subjective identities of those who, by sovereign decree, have only the right to die a death devoid of value.⁵⁶⁵ Is this ultimately the expression of the economics of invasion? In the functioning of sovereign power in 'Refuse Collection', life is marked by the certitude of unreal suffering which casts identities through violent transgressions.

Conclusion.

'Refuse Collection' is one of Prynne's lamentations; it is elegiac in the sense of moving towards the retention of an event which, like the photographs, assure that the torture committed at Abu Ghraib cannot be forgotten. The poem is a refusal to believe the media-led depiction of war, a refusal to forget the atrocities committed and a refusal to frame the lives of others as less deserving of human rights. It is actively resistant to the collective,

⁵⁶⁴ David Marriott, *Haunted Life*, 16. With references changed from the televisual to the photographic.

⁵⁶⁵ David Marriott, *Haunted Life*, 227.

passive will of a populace that might allow the Iraq war and the atrocities committed to slip from collective memory – a war predicated on the destruction of the body politic, that enacted the ruthless sundering of land and torture of victims as an expression of the economics of invasion. ‘Refuse Collection’ is an elegiac poem steadfastly set on the materialisation of ‘truth as power’.⁵⁶⁶ It is a poem sutured to the atrocities and cover-up of torture at Abu Ghraib, expressing the truth as it relates to those experiencing the events. It is a call for all those of us ‘in our common answerability as creatures of language’⁵⁶⁷ to resist the media-led distortions of war and to actively resist passive acceptance. For Badiou, ‘Every truth, whether bound to calculation or extracted from the song of natural language, is above all *a power*’,⁵⁶⁸ and it is just this power which Prynne incites and utilises in the poem ‘Refuse Collection’.

For Prynne, the violence enacted, physical and ontological, and the manner in which transgressions frame and define the value of human life, undertaken by democratically elected officials, is a violence for which we are all culpable. That the poem actively resists the collection of individual voices into homogeneity reveals it as performing a duty of thought.⁵⁶⁹ ‘Refuse Collection’, in its capacity to represent the barbarity of the invasion of Iraq, aims at exposing the atrocities committed at Abu Ghraib. The poem and Prynne’s impetus in writing it are testament to the notion that, with poetry, ‘what characterises its effect is its capacity to manifest the powers of language itself. Every poem brings a power into language, the power of eternally fastening the disappearance of what presents itself. Or, through the poetic retention of its disappearance, the power of producing presence itself

⁵⁶⁶ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980) 131, *passim*.

⁵⁶⁷ Keston Sutherland, “Hilarious absolute daybreak,” *Glossator: Theory and Practice of the Commentary*, 2 (2010) 115-148, 117.

⁵⁶⁸ Badiou, “What is a Poem,” 22.

⁵⁶⁹ Badiou, “What is a Poem,” 20.

as Ideal.⁵⁷⁰ The poem effectuates this power through poetic assemblages, and it draws its power from ‘the latent song of language’,⁵⁷¹ from the language used in its media-led representation. As Badiou argues, ‘Poetry cannot fasten this infinite, precisely because it is to the infinite of language itself that the poem addresses itself in order to direct the power of language towards the retention of a disappearance’.⁵⁷² Thus the poem enacts the experience of the event horizon at Abu Ghraib in such a manner that the poem’s resistance is the fidelity which ensures the retention of the event in our memories. The synaesthesia and the experience of the reader encountering this language-event are testament to the idea that ‘the poet working with poetic thought requires to activate every part of the process, into strong question where the answer is obscure, or into what looks like strong answer where the question evades precise location’.⁵⁷³ ‘Refuse Collection’ is a direct act of poetic resistance, which reflects the ethical commitment and political consciousness of a poet steadfast in assuring that acts of violence and subjugation are never wiped from the public consciousness.

⁵⁷⁰ Badiou, “What is a Poem,” 24.

⁵⁷¹ Badiou, “What is a Poem,” 25.

⁵⁷² Badiou, “What is a Poem,” 25.

⁵⁷³ Prynne, “Poetic Thought,” 597.

Conclusion.

Through an examination of the role of violence in transforming a poetic, this analysis has explored the role of the poet in dealing with the ethical challenge of representing violence. That the representation of social forces exists at an intersection with the imaginative and creative encounter allows the reader an understanding of the social consciousness of Prynne's poetic. In these works, the representation of violence exists across the axes of poetic construction, determining the meaning of and limitations placed upon the representation of the landscape, the corporeal and the sustensive. Through the increasing integration of technology into the operations of dominance, constrictions and limitations are placed upon those subjugated, nearly eliding the capacity for subjective expression. It is from within the confines of the dominant power structure that Prynne's lexicon is drawn and poetic constructions are formed. Through, and against, these forces of dominance, Prynne's poetics of resistance speaks. The struggle to give voice to suffering defines both the poet and his work; by providing resistance, Prynne adds to the very definition of "*who we / are*".⁵⁷⁴

In Prynne's writing, the representation of the landscape is always a political utterance, a literary framework which highlights issues of control, distortion and degradation. The use of the landscape to frame the discussion of historical events is a notable feature across Prynne's oeuvre, and one which must form an integral part of any examination of Prynne's poetic. The analysis of the landscape as invoking literary history and informing the poem's thematic event reinforces Prynne's conceptualisation of poetic

⁵⁷⁴ J.H. Prynne, "Numbers in Time of Trouble," *Poems* (Fremantle, WA: Fremantle Press, 2005) 17-18, 17.

thought ‘as brought into being by recognition and contest with the whole cultural system of a language’.⁵⁷⁵ The representation of the land and the connection to the pastoral elegiac form attests to the fact that the ‘landscape becomes acculturated by the subsistence of social memory’.⁵⁷⁶ In this regard, the representations of landforms are acculturated by literary and social history, and frame the historic expressions of violence and hegemonic power which Prynne can evince in his works. In this manner, it is demonstrated that poetic languages as well as the representations of landforms are conditioned by the social and literary history of place, for they too reflect the very definition of ‘*who we / are*’.⁵⁷⁷

Prynne’s collections incorporate the forms and tropes of landscape usage, in which the representations create meaning from differing versions of the pastoral condition. In *Brass*, this is highlighted through the embodiment of the literary and social history of the Holocaust, which informs the semantic and semiotic operations of Prynne’s biographical elegy to Paul Celan. The use of the pastoral substantiates the ontological commitment of the poem, and frames the movement from grief to consolation in the elegy. The link between the landscape and bodily harm is a complex that Prynne explores in *Acrylic Tips*, where Indigenous scarification bridges cultural differences between Western and Indigenous knowledge of the land. However, in ‘Refuse Collection’ the wound is punitive, and is represented through the inscription of the body and the land as evidence of the operation of sovereign power. Paralleling the destruction of the land, ‘Refuse Collection’ presents the semiotisation of the body, a convergence of corporeality and text which frames the body and the land as vehicles of signification. The representations and articulations of

⁵⁷⁵ J.H. Prynne, “Poetic Thought,” *Textual Practice*, Vol. 24 No. 4 (August 2010) 595-606. 598.

⁵⁷⁶ J.H. Prynne, “A Letter to P Riley: 14th Feb. 1967,” *The English Intelligencer*, 1st ser., 15 (Apr 1967): 284. Reprinted in Neil Pattison, Reitha Pattison, Luke Roberts, eds., *Certain Prose of The English Intelligencer* (Cambridge: Mountain Press, 2012): 74-78, 76.

⁵⁷⁷ Prynne, “Numbers in Time of Trouble,” *Poems*, 17-18, 17.

landscape create structures of poetic knowledge incorporative of literary antecedents and historical events, in which violence forms a component part. This incorporation influences the representation of land, its constrictions and access, and codifies its usage as signifying ‘the history of [the] person / as an entire condition of landscape’.⁵⁷⁸

Since *Wound Response*, conceptions of corporeality and pathological harm have been intrinsic to the development of Prynne’s poetic. The expression of corporeal wounding represents a point of integration where the poetic construction incorporates physiological and pathological technical discourses. Coextensive with the corporeal construct is the integration and critique of economic systems and the language that these systems utilise, which control and direct the lives of citizens. The economic structures and discourses of the poems are unified with bodily and corporeal expression through the problematisation of labour power and the sustenance, providing a referential frame for understanding how economic systems create and reinforce conditions of subjugation and violence.

Reading expressions of corporeality in ‘Refuse Collection’ through Butler and Grosz demonstrates that the enactment of ultra-subjective violence established an *a priori* construct on the definition of subjecthood, by which the prisoners’ rights are reduced, and torturous treatment is enacted and ultimately justified. In ‘Refuse Collection’ the inscription of the body and the destruction of the body politic stem from an event through which subjectivity is redefined. The effect of colonial violence on the gendered condition of poetic expression and the expression of Indigenous cultural traditions in *Acrylic Tips* attest to the capacity of violence to control and limit expression. What is further highlighted in *Acrylic Tips* is the manner in which the human and animal body become abrogated through labour

⁵⁷⁸ Prynne, “First Notes on Daylight,” *Poems*, 69.

and the incursion of the technological. This is a deliberately limited reading of the expression of corporeality in the poems, in which bodily control, definition and expression are unified with lyrical, subjective expression and inherently linked with the experience of violence.

As they relate to the condition of the corporeal, issues of the sustentive also populate Prynne's poems in numerous ways. Highlighting Prynne's usage of the sustentive in *Brass*, the natural is represented as a syntactic medium with the propensity to become negatively inflected, most notably in the transcribing and contextualising of Celan's use of these elements in representing his experiences during the Holocaust. The atrocities investigated in *Bands Around the Throat* directly negate any concept of nourishment which might be taken from the depiction of sustentive elements. The poems represent the effects of the Chernobyl disaster upon natural phenomena, and introduce the theme of auto-cannibalism, by which representations of the sustentive are constructed within a context of sacrifice and starvation. The interplay between health, nourishment, technology and capital is intrinsic to the construction of the poems, and fundamental to the representations of bodily and lyrical expression. The examination of the sustentive in this analysis and its relation to the ecumenical, the corporeal and the body politic may provide orientation for further investigations.

Throughout Prynne's poetic oeuvre, music is represented and interrogated for signifying ontological sustenance. The reliance of 'Es Lebe der König' on the fugal pattern informs the technical and thematic orientation of the poem, by creating fidelity to the event of Celan's death and evincing the role of ideology in perpetuating the Holocaust's inescapable cycle of violence. As with *Brass*, the roles of censorship and classical music in *Bands Around the Throat* are unified, and through their expression represent an occlusion

of suffering. For the reader, this music intones the cruel, parodic affirmation of the suffering represented in the poem. In *Bands Around the Throat* the inclusion of music is a caustic critique of the Soviet government's censorship of information, which prolonged the suffering of those exposed to radiation. The imperturbable classical music used by authorities to silence expression and knowledge of suffering stands as an ironic artefact of the graceless inadequacy of those authorities in deciding what is best for their citizenry. The influence of music in informing the poetic structure and technical operation of Prynne's poetry is one of the threads which are foundational to a continued exploration of Prynne's poetic construction.

A point of continued emphasis in Prynne's poetic is the development of technology into a thematic aim, which directs and controls modes of communicative expression and the construction of poetic language. Technology functions as an expression of dominance and ideological control in warfare, communication and labour. Confederate with the operation of technological violence is the coercion of will, the contamination of language and the threat of force to which end users of technology are subjugated. *News of Warring Clans* starkly concentrates the role of the technological in creating a unilateral expression of dominance in communication and war. Through the inequity of communications, the pressure and degradation of the semantic and semiotic operations of language are most prominently exhibited. As with a number of the collections analysed, *News of Warring Clans* utilises a poetic construction inclusive of technological and argotic language. In *News of Warring Clans* an imbalance is demonstrated through the poem's prosodic form and narrative hierarchies which eradicates the propensity towards communicative exchange. That the violence of a poem is evinced through a degraded or compromised language reinforces Prynne's pronouncement that language is the first medium in which

acts of war are plotted and staged. The constrictions on poetic language due to the incursion of the technological serve to frame and determine the lexical depth and dimension of the poem's range and potential for expression.

'Refuse Collection' represents an intersection of levels on which violence operates in times of war, from the systemic to the ultra-subjective instances of violence, and displays how evidence of this violence is understood by the public. The constitution of public language in the poem and its mimesis in poetic construction exemplify the constrictions placed upon the subjective voice. In Prynne's work, poetic construction operates with a damaged or degraded lexicon, reflective of the socio-historical contexts of the poem. Through the constrictions of the poem's 'consumptive action', which imposes limitations on the capacity for subjective expression through technological and linguistic domination, Prynne initiates a new line in poetic thought. The poem forms an offering of resistance, which ensures that the images, discussions and events of violence are not forgotten. In this manner, the poem gives voice to suffering by coupling the act of creative imagination with a fidelity to the event.

The compression of discourses into a singular, integrated register shows the implications of '[h]uman language [as] the tribal continuity of expressive human behaviour'.⁵⁷⁹ This includes not only the lexicon and discourses which pervade the poems, but also the manner in which ekphrasis and meta-theatrics, as well as literary forms such as the pastoral elegy, act as both forms and tropes in the creation of poetic meaning, incorporative of language history. The exposition of violence in the collections functions at political, rhetorical, pathological, socioeconomic and linguistic levels. The constrictions on language determine the lexical arrangement and operation of the poem, and therefore form

⁵⁷⁹ J.H. Prynne, "A Quick Riposte to Handke's Dictum about War and Language," *Quid*, 6 (2000) 23-26, 24.

a precursory determination in outlining Prynne's engagement with the representation of violence.

By representing the political and economic systems which perpetuate dominance, Prynne's poetic incorporates frames of knowledge indicative of the complexity of the violence inherent within these structures. Through examination of the systems which perpetuate violence, the reader is charged with formulating a response. To this purpose, the theories of Fredric Jameson were employed to investigate the role of referential frames of knowledge in understanding the socio-historical circumstances which perpetuate violence. Furthermore, the theories of Wittgenstein were utilised to conceptualise and codify the development of language acquisition in reference to systems which determine socio-historical power relations.

Prynne's poetic of resistance sutures the freedom of the imaginative act with a moral imperative to represent suffering in a manner which limits the exploitation of victims. His poems create an experience through language rather than a representation of the experience, and do so by utilising the limitations created and determined by the language of the dominant power structure. The violence represented enacts particular and contingent operations on the function of the poetic, to the point at which Prynne's poetic of resistance calls for a recalibration and reconstitution of the limits of expression. From this position Prynne creates a model of lyric reflective of the violence of the event, in which subjective expression and the ontological model of the poem may be preserved.

The preservation of the language of subjective expression is crucial to the relationship between violence and bearing witness, and determines the manner in which moral representations of violence and resistance are interrelated. For Prynne and Celan,

ontological resistance is constructed as a function of a poetic which acts in fidelity to a violent event. A set of theories based on the work of Alain Badiou, which Prynne utilised and highlighted in his essay 'Poetic Thought', was developed and adopted to establish the manner in which the poetic is sutured to the event. Through the enactment of resistance, new poetic thought establishes the capacity to bring awareness to the forces of violence and to preserve the ontological realm. As with Celan, Prynne's poetic of resistance must bear a relation to the truth of the event, actively attesting to the power of the witness to speak from within the confines of physical and linguistic dominance. In response to acts of violence, the task of the poet is to create new poetic thought, a response of vocational urgency for Prynne in resisting systems that create and enforce dominance. By lending his voice to the subject of suffering, Prynne brings notice of his resistance to the public discourse through the creation of new poetic thought.

New Lines of Exploration for Future Scholars.

As I have shown throughout this thesis, an understanding of the orientation and position of the poet compels and directs the representation of violence, and the manner in which the representation of violence operates as an influence upon the axes of poetic language. This analysis involved the defining of violence and the categorisation of its effects on poetic expression, and it utilised this conceptualisation for a greater understanding of the semantic and semiotic operations of the poems. Another proposition, contingent to this investigation, could be to utilise the definitions of violence to frame the political affiliations of the texts and to facilitate Marxist critical readings. This method deserves further investigation, given Prynne's association with Cambridge-based criticism and its relations to problems

contingent to poetics with specified political commitments, such as Marxism, postcolonialism and feminism. For such an investigation, a dissertation-sized analysis would be necessitous. However, as the critical assessment of Prynne's poetry is still very much a work in progress, it was felt that a focus of that type in the present investigation would have elided rather than elucidated the analysis of poetic construction and the manners in which Prynne creates meaning, crucial to establishing an understanding of the functioning of his poetic. In this way, the close and detailed readings, the exploration of poetic creation and the investigation into the manner in which violence affects representation and the poetic itself establish a springboard for future political readings.

Further application of the work done in this analysis may serve in the development of the discourses surrounding and contextualising the public receptions of war and philosophical poetics in the last century. An implication of these findings is that the thematic focus on violence and its effects on the development of a poetic should be taken into account when making further study of war poetry, or poetry committed to political resistance.

Stressing a singular theoretic discourse in the reading of Prynne's poetic, such as Jon Clay utilised in his *Sensation, Contemporary Poetry and Deleuze*, will always be at the expense of an understanding of the semantic and semiotic operation of the poems, and will insufficiently evidence how the poems function linguistically, and the manner in which they create meaning and are incorporative of sociolinguistic history. This coupling of a singular theoretic discourse with the poems is not to be recommended, as Prynne's poetic is resistant to straightforward explication, and any attempt to reposition textual analysis under the rubric of a single theorist is bound to display an inherent insufficiency of textual evidence. Prynne's incorporation, interrogation and development of theory over the course

of his poetic career limits the possibility that an analysis with such a singular focus could be substantiated. As such, it is imperative that a close reading and exploration of the text be integrated into any theoretic discussion, as a means to establish the coexistence and synthesis of text and theory, as Prynne's writing and theoretic interests change and progress.

Conclusion.

Through examining the role of violence on transforming a poetic, this analysis has demonstrated the role of the poet in dealing with the ethical challenge of representing violence. The duty of the poet working through historical circumstances where violence and power are operative is to create new poetic thought which 'must essentially be realised through directed political consciousness and commitment'.⁵⁸⁰ Prynne's is a poetic of resistance which asks that the reader 'become responsible for what knowledge they will value and what path of action they will choose'.⁵⁸¹ There, at the heart of his most openly poetic statement, is a testament of Prynne's capacity to create a poetic of human value and knowledge where the role of the reader is to face the challenge of understanding the representation and operation of violence, and to take to that challenge with the imperative of making an ethical judgement. As Prynne writes, 'Throughout all my poetic work, in writing and reading and staying open to the world of historical presence, the dialectical purpose has enhanced the fire of latent ethical seriousness, and at the same time has tested this seriousness against the disorder of unpurposed material reality and the contradictions of

⁵⁸⁰ J.H. Prynne, "No Universal Plan for a Good Life," *Sahitya Ra Jeevan Darshan* [= *A Collection of the expressions*], ed. Rajan Prasad Pokharel (Kathmandu, Nepal: Madan and Geeta, July 2010) 172-75, 173.

⁵⁸¹ Prynne, "No Universal Plan for a Good Life," 174.

human will.’⁵⁸² Make sense of the world, Prynne states, in all its contradictions and its inequities, and in all its violence and confusion, for by acknowledging violence and oppression you add your voice to a resistance which knows that ‘there are only two things in the universe which are simple, and one of them is the universe taken as a whole; and the other is its language, because its language is its capacity for love’.⁵⁸³ The capacity to sustain a moral, intellectual and imaginative passion for the world, and to create from this the practice of our lives, assures that the world is constantly renewed by our attention. It is to assure that our resistance to acts of violence and subjugation is a capacity we hold as most fundamental to our being in the world. The effort concentrated into the understanding of a poem is a momentary clarity, easily soluble; yet it renews our capacity to understand the manner in which our collective words and collective struggles are intertwined in the practice of our lives.

⁵⁸² Prynne, “No Universal Plan for a Good Life,” 174-5.

⁵⁸³ J.H. Prynne, “Review of Charles Olson, *The Maximus Poems IV, V, VI* (London: Cape Goliard Press, 1968),” *The Park*, 4-5 (Summer 1969) 64-66, 66.

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Appendices.

Appendix One:

'Es Lebe der König'

(for Paul Celan, 1920-1970)

Fire and honey oozes from cracks in the earth;
the cloud eases up the Richter scale. Sky divides
as the flag once more becomes technical, the print
divides also: starlight becomes negative. If you
are born to peaks in the wire, purple layers in the
glass format, re-enter the small house with
animals too delicate and cruel. Their throats fur
with human warmth, we too are numbered like
prints in the new snow.

It is not possible to
drink this again, the beloved enters the small house.
The house becomes technical, the pool has
copper sides, evaporating by the grassy slopes.
The avenues slant back through the trees; the
double music strokes my hand. Give back the
fringe to the sky now hot with its glare, turning
russet and madder, going over and over to
the landing-stage, where we are. We stand
just long enough to see you,

we hear your
fearful groan and choose not to think of it. We
deny the consequence but the outset surrounds us,
we are trustful because only thus is the flame's
abstract review the real poison, oh true the
fish dying in great flashes, the smell comes from
shrivelled hair on my wrist. That silly talk is
our recklessly long absence: the plum exudes its
fanatic resin and is at once forced in, pressed
down and by exotic motive this means the rest,
the respite, we have this long.

Only
the alder thrown over the cranial push, the
waged incompleteness, comes with the animals
and their watchful calm. The long-tailed bird

is total awareness, a forced lust, it is that
absolutely. Give us this love of murder and
sacred boredom, you walk in the shade of
the technical house. Take it away and set up
the table ready for white honey, choking the
white cloth spread openly for the most worthless
accident. The whiteness is a patchwork of
revenge too, open the window and white fleecy
clouds sail over the azure;

it is true. Over and
over it is so, calm or vehement. You know
the plum is a nick of pain, is so and is also
certainly loved. Forbearance comes into the
stormy sky and the water is not quiet.

Appendix Two:

'Refuse Collection'

To a light led sole in pit of, this by slap-up
barter of an arm rest cap, on stirrup trade in
crawled to many bodies, uncounted. Talon up
crude oil-for-food, incarnadine incarcerate, get
foremost a track rocket, rapacious in heavy
investment insert tool this way up. This way
can it will you they took to fast immediate satis-
faction or slather, new slave run the chain store
enlisted, posture writhing what they just want
we'll box tick that, nim nim. Camshot spoilers
strap to high stakes head to the ground elated
detonator like a bear dancing stripped canny
sex romp, webbing taint. Confess sell out the
self input, yes rape yes village gunship by
apache rotor capital genital grant a seed trial
take a nap a twin.

Fruiting bodies vintage
shagged out on batch stand-by, grander conceptual
gravid with foetor, sweet rot adoring placid
or regular. It is we they do it, even yet now
sodomised in a honey cell, pitted up against
the good cheat dimpled in a power cuff jersey,
shrug to fit waist for traffic, kick the door in.
Go on, do it, we'll photograph everything, home
movies hold steady on while they is we do it,
by eye it takes oozing huge debt. Reschedule
value credits, war for oil, oil for food, food for
sex molest modest reject stamp on limp abjected
lustral panoply. Little crosses everywhere, yours
and mine makeshift parlour chicken rape private
sold down DIY there is a country.

Bite off the
cap with a twist, upper strut invest cream off
profit on a visor, bench law pressure why would
you not credit that. It is to be believed by
living daylight voided moral defection by blank
horror for terror of sacrifice, stairway to air

drilled by fierce devotion, say yes. Brutal finish
this sentence, go on do it. Till they yelp and
will rise up against us in a storm of justice or
let's pause to redefine that run up a treaty sell
them into so-called paradigm.

Call-sign freedom
operation Sharp Knife, finish as you never will in
a heap on the ground. Prostrate, back-spavined and
fresh-crushed, then another explosion. Flush with
cash for sex for punishment, let's try a little
execution-only on mother's endorsement equity don't
work in a high tower no more indwell infidel on a
ranting stair. Profess exactly for take into cap-
tivity, assault and quell and kill thirsty work,
sweat running in our eyes, of course also looting
and kidnapping so write home about it, go on
do it invited spectacle dump. Tag evil so palpable,
fungus in the nail-bed, your choke on a concert
programme device. Die in battle, die in bed or maybe
on a trolley, be sick and feel better, desire even
a just peace. Kick them around shall we do that be
sickened stamp on non-white body parts benchmark
yields huddled up naked,

land of the free
control respite deliverance. Cut-off spoken abuse
postural forensic gag reflex fabric whitener, you
do know this. Global recovery now warming up:
running on all fours as the dollar oil price rise
is hedged and written down, corrupt reserves
declared to win. Simulate handcuff bunker take
out the turret like dirt fuel data vow to thee.
Is that what. Snatch attack wire hid for a circus
for venture cap life savings razor cut, recruit
to strip to sweet wince rat garbage trim ankle
go fetlock, to float there. Hands-on foot rack,
on carotid palpitation ravenous, lies and falsehoods
stalled credibly usual, our watch accepted your
finger your sacred thumb. The truth of faked report
on a pulse, a bloodline stamp on whose neck
why not credit dog kill.

In the curving
mirror of enlarged depravity daily and abhorrent a
comfort of disgust adjusted to market slippage
a pact encroached my face pouch your puffy demonic
exclusion so far, too far, no we know that and

never yes, quite probable, eye-rape transit to
twitch renege on membership, limbs blazing all out
famous by gorged access. Did you heart attack
hear these words your own mouth purse formation
broke their outline, just awaiting the chance of
derangement from deep inside. An occupying force
commits pillage the sadism cut to measure from
its concept of possession own-brand words rise up
in some necks to stifle disbelief, bite them down.
Go on, bite them encircling gloom some bright
ruined spark goes for broke power failure on-line
claw back from the entrails. Ticket of leave revulsed
sup on this horror story full house enduringly
feel-good recoil: the aghast demeanour our shield
our family and child-care we form a square to
defend value invest in safety in fields of plenty
occupation's gone to a rot clinic. Privation mate
leashed up mental famine.

All right core rescue
by concession of expendable defect, the option play
to transference to run hysteric barrage forward de-
ployment. Pre-set threat assessment at deferred
base precision, risk profile vamps up by alert to
stockade fire lines; if the inside is now already
exposed then crush the outside, consider this your
zone of inclusion that's us we don't pray heads down
we watch the target this time ah yes right we
are the target let's go faster now and self-abhor,
get there first. Civil defence, rights issue give
before robbed in-store. Mutilation and self-rape
defilement on a display promotion, give blood shed
more, greedy bright halo. Warranted buggery word
chewed spittoon upper rule of lawyers on *pro rata*
fee commission unnatural cruelty.

Entire violation
natural and brutish metal restraints standing room
only, seats reserved for women in labour. Force them.
They do our will, to deny what they do is ours,
the wanton ambit of self possession. The tasks of
self-defence. In our name longterm marching as, to
a holy city ringed too close to call. Our land ours,
raw and forever.

J. H. Prynne, 08.05.2004