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Doctor of Philosophy

*J.H. Prynne in Context, 1955–1975*

This thesis presents a partial survey of the intellectual and cultural environment in which the contemporary British poet J.H. Prynne began his literary career. Its primary contribution to knowledge consists of a reorientation of critical perspective towards Prynne's early career and its specifically British contexts, as well as a detailed literary-historical account of his relation to those contexts. This account proceeds by analysis of Prynne's prose works rather than his poetry, leading to a secondary contribution in the form of a number of new readings of those works and a consideration of Prynne's attitude towards prose as a form. Extensive use is made of archival material, much of which has not been examined in previous scholarship.

The Introduction sets out the methodology of the thesis and argues that existing work on Prynne suffers from interlinked biases against consideration of Prynne's early career and his British influences. Chapter 1 offers an account of a particular network of such influences centred on the University of Cambridge, looking at one regularly cited influence, Donald Davie, and arguing for recognition of a new one in F.R. Leavis. In Chapter 2, Prynne's involvement with the 'little magazine' scene is considered in detail and an extended reading of his 1967 piece 'A Note on Metal' is used to reflect on the relationship between prose and its publication contexts. Chapter 3, meanwhile, proposes a third key context for Prynne's early career in the prose fiction of Wyndham Lewis, Edward Upward and Douglas Oliver, before offering a model for Prynne's poetic thinking in this period based on the panspermia hypothesis. The Conclusion attempts to name this model more specifically, while reflecting on the validity of the thesis's semi-biographical approach.