Conclusion

> *Be influenced by as many great artists as you can, but have the decency either to acknowledge the debt outright, or to try to conceal it* —Ezra Pound.[1]

i. 'Mere domestic anecdotage'

As much as identifying particular traditions and histories which impinge on the work of Prynne's early career, the task of this thesis has been to make the simple point that such impingement happens at all. Even in the present context of increasing scholarly interest in Prynne, and despite the deeply historical tendencies of both his poetic and his critical work, this remains what he would term a 'non-trivial pursuit'.[2] Introducing the recent *Cambridge Introduction to British Poetry, 1945–2010*—notable for its acknowledgement of Prynne's important place in 20th-century literary history—Eric Falci mounts an extended defence of his essentially historicist critical approach, summarised in the following statement: 'History doesn't determine form, but a poem is nonetheless marbled by its context.'[3] It is striking that Falci feels moved to express his approach in such defensive terms, effectively denying in the first clause what he goes on to affirm—albeit in a weakened form—in the second. In seeking a metaphorical expression which will be acceptable to all sides, Falci risks abandoning determination altogether, when it is in fact the linchpin of his argument. Falci's statement is expressive of a contradiction in a certain branch of contemporary literary history, in which materialism must be affirmed at the same time as a taboo against biographical criticism is upheld. The structural implications of the marbling analogy are revealing: history gets *into* poems, like a mineral impurity, rather than shaping them from outside, and it does so automatically and without mediation. This might at first glance seem to be Prynne's own position, epitomised in the sarcastic remark from 'Mental Ears and Poetic Work': 'Look, the poet is wearing red socks! Now at last we understand everything!'[4] Yet everywhere from undergraduate teaching notes to his published commentaries on Wordsworth and George Herbert, Prynne makes extensive and unapologetic use of biographical material—not as 'colour' for the main analysis, but as a fundamental tool, showing *how* history gets where it does.[5]

[1] Pound, 'A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste', *Poetry* (March 1913), 200–06 (p. 202).

[2] Prynne, 'Mental Ears and Poetic Work', p. 141. The use of 'non-trivial', a loan from the vocabulary of mathematics, is itself an example of such historical-contextual influence.

[3] Eric Falci, *The Cambridge Introduction to British Poetry, 1945–2010* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 3.

[4] Prynne, 'Mental Ears and Poetic Work', p. 130.

[5] An example from Prynne's notes for students on Pound was given in this thesis's introduction. In the case of Herbert, he goes so far as to lament the lack of available biographical information, particularly about Herbert's library and reading habits (Prynne, 'George Herbert, "Love [III]" ', p. 16).

As long as literary analysis is restricted to the texts of individual poems and not extended to the poets who produce them, as well as to their non-poetic work, much of the historical marbling described by Falci will remain obscure. This point is made not from the standpoint of a decrepit and self-deluding 'common sense' but from that of materialism: to confine historicist analysis to individual texts is an error in the same category as the formalist evacuation of context against which historicist criticism itself reacts. In one of his clearest statements of aesthetic principle, Prynne writes that 'no poet has or can have clean hands, because clean hands are themselves a fundamental contradiction. Clean hands do no worthwhile work.'[6] That his choice of metaphor is bodily neatly illustrates the point in question. Poems do not get written without hands, and those hands inevitably do other things, from eating hamburgers to filling in ballot papers. This is something, Prynne claims, that he 'ha[s] believed throughout [his] writing career'.[7] Scholars of Prynne's work owe it to the truth of the first quotation not to take that of the second on trust.

Any biographically-minded approach to Prynne must, nevertheless, contend with the poet's own published comments on the irrelevance of such criticism to his work. This attitude is expressed explicitly in a prose piece from late 2015, a transcription of 'a faxed memorandum sent to [Josh] Kotin and [Jeff] Dolven, who recently interviewed the author for a forthcoming issue of *The Paris Review*.'[8] Here, apparently in delayed response to a question about the cover images used for the Bloodaxe editions of *Poems*, Prynne acknowledges that '[n]one of these publications shews a human figure, still less an author-likeness', attributing this firstly to his 'well-attested distaste for self-promotion or any kind of personality interest attaching to the writer as the performing origin ("ego scriptor") of text.' He continues:

> The self-life is mere domestic anecdotage, in its original sense, and there is not much overt idea of inherent personal opinion or life-story deployed visibly in my work (though under indirection may be another matter). It is in my view merely vulgar to publish work with your face run up the flagpole, in concession to reader curiosity when close engagement with the interior of writing work will open up many kinds of interiority, yours and mine.[9]

Prynne goes on to discuss what he considers to be a more important reason for avoiding author photos, to do with his own hyper-materialist view of poetic language (the poem, once created, is part of the resistant world external to the subject), but for the purposes of this thesis it is the first explanation which

[6] Prynne, 'Mental Ears and Poetic Work', p. 141.
[7] *Ibid.*
[8] Prynne, 'A Note to Josh Kotin and Jeff Dolven', p. 21.
[9] *Ibid.* The use of 'vulgar' here, though perhaps a deliberate adoption of an expected role, shows the continuing influence of a class-inflected Leavisite antipathy towards popular literature right up to the present day.

is most interesting. There is a fundamental contradiction implicit in Prynne's statement: disclaiming personal authority in a letter voluntarily sent as part of (or at least in the wake of) an interview for a literary magazine. The interview will form part of what is perhaps the most famous and comprehensive set of interviews with 20th-century writers; interviews, moreover, with an explicitly biographical focus—the blurb for a 2006 collected volume describes the *Paris Review* interviews as 'an essential and definitive record of the writing life.'[10] Importantly, it is Prynne's first substantial interview since his conversation with Peter Orr for the British Council in 1964 and forms part of a more general easing-up of anti-biographical vigilance in recent years. Representative of this tendency is the 2008 essay 'Huts', which is peppered with exactly the sort of biographical anecdote which Prynne deplores in his letter to Kotin and Dolven. (In fact, the term 'anecdote' is insufficient, referring etymologically—as Prynne implies in the letter—to 'things unpublished'.[11]) Near the beginning of the essay, for example, Prynne remarks that 'those of my generation who can remember being conscripted for National Service will surely recall being assigned to camp huts for training and manifest discomforts; I used to sleep in rolled-up newspaper, in effort to keep out the fierce winds that blew in under the floorboards'[12]. Later, he describes visiting huts in China, the Austrian alps and the German *Schwarzwald* over a period of more than forty years. This anecdotal style mirrors that used during readings at the beginning of his career: in his 1971 York Street Commune reading in Vancouver, Prynne covers topics ranging from his evacuation during the Second World War to his neighbours' cat, often spending more time on anecdotes than on the poems themselves.[13]

Biographical analysis allows Prynne to be reinserted into a broad, 20th-century literary tradition from which he is too often excluded, both by his supporters and by his detractors. Once the critical lens is refocussed, Prynne's position in this tradition is not at all difficult to see, emerging in areas as seemingly banal as his professional name. As Terry Eagleton notes in a recent review of D.J.

[10] *The Paris Review Interviews*, vol. 1 (New York: Picador, 2006), [dustjacket].

[11] 'anecdote, *n.*', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press, 2016), <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/7367> [accessed 29 June 2016].

[12] Prynne, 'Huts', p. 616.

[13] This apparently time-limited biographical recalcitrance is mirrored in Prynne's attitude to dedications. Prynne includes dedications in his very earliest major collections, *Force of Circumstance* and *The White Stones*—to his English teacher and his wife respectively—but subsequently abandons them. The elegy 'Es Lebe der König', published in *Brass* and dedicated to Paul Celan, is exceptional, and has rightly been read as such: in fact, it sits in an almost twenty-year period from 1969 to 1989 in which Prynne used no other dedications at all. (Prynne, 'Es Lebe der König', in *Poems* [2015], p. 169–70. Mellors describes it as 'the central poem in *Brass*', implying a certain divergence through centrality [p. 188].) *Word Order* (1989) is dedicated to an unidentified 'J.P.', who may be Prynne's daughter, but it is not until the 1990s that clear dedications to poets reappear: *Not-You* (1993) is dedicated to 'Che Qian-zi and Zhou Ya-ping | and [...] the ORIGINALS', a group of Chinese poets, while the 1999 Bloodaxe edition of *Poems* is dedicated to Prynne's French translator, Bernard Dubourg. None of the poets mentioned above wrote or writes in English; in fact, Prynne's first dedication to a poet who wrote in English—if not an English poet—does not come until 2005, fully fifty years after the beginning of his poetic career, with the offering of the second Bloodaxe edition of *Poems* to Ed Dorn, who died in 1999.

Taylor's *The Prose Factory*,

> [t]he Victorians did not generally call themselves by the initials of their first two names plus their surname [...] and neither do most authors from roughly the second half of the 20th century onwards. [...] Between these two periods, however, this largely male habit of self-designation spreads thick and fast: H.G., T.S., W.B., E.M., D.H., L.P., W.H. and so on.'[14]

That Prynne's adoption of the style is a deliberate choice rather than a reversion to default is shown, paradoxically, by the indecision with which it is made. Prynne's first published poem, in the 1955 sixth-form magazine *Six*, is credited to 'J.H.', yet as late as *Prospect* 6, two years after the publication of *Force of Circumstance* (also 'J.H.'), he is listed as 'Jeremy'. The style would of course have been familiar from institutional contexts: the Jesus College yearbooks for the period of Prynne's undergraduate course consistently initialise names, as do some military records. Prynne's entirely optional decision to adopt it for literary purposes, however, signals a claim to occupy a certain tradition, the more so as the style had clearly gone out of fashion by the 1960s—in contemporary magazines, Prynne's is often the only initialised name on the contents page, and in circulation lists for *The English Intelligencer* he is accompanied only by his college friend R.F. Langley.[15] In Prynne's case, that tradition might owe as much to, say, R.P. Blackmur, the American poet and critic cited in 'Resistance and Difficulty', as it does to T.S. Eliot or even F.R. Leavis. Nevertheless, it *is* a tradition, and an eminently mainstream one at that.

Discussions of Prynne's influences are frequently divided along lines of will, choice or intention. On the one hand, he is presented—to some extent correctly—as a sort of polymath, evincing a deep knowledge both of the literary matters that constitute his immediate field of professional expertise and of a surprisingly disparate range of other subjects, including the technical and the scientific. This is a level of influence which might be described as self-directed, and whose already considerable scope seems to expand with every new reading of Prynne's work. When poetic influence in the more diffuse, environmental sense is discussed, however, Prynne appears as the product of a highly restricted field: Ezra Pound, Charles Olson, Ed Dorn and perhaps two or three more canonical poets such as Wordsworth are the only figures regularly acknowledged as major influences on Prynne's mature work, despite his evidently close and prolonged reading of scores of other poets, both in English and in other languages. Even in the case of the poets mentioned above, influence is often presented as something directed by Prynne: dissatisfied with the moribund state of English poetry in the late 1950s, he sought out new work from across the Atlantic. This thesis has made the implicit case for a new category of influences situated chronologically in the period

[14] Terry Eagleton, 'A Toast at the Trocadero', *London Review of Books*, 38.4 (18 February 2016), 9–10 (p. 10).

[15] Notices, in *Certain Prose*, 1:11 [173], pp. 24–25; 'Roll Call', in *ibid.*, 1:15 [266], pp. 78–79.

1955–75 and geographically in Britain. These influences differ from one another not only in content, but also structurally, and can be summarised as follows. The first is the literary and literary-critical culture represented by the poetry of the Movement and the criticism of F.R. Leavis, as well as their respective and mutual offshoots, considered in Chapter 1. Absorbed pedagogically and institutionally through the relatively homogeneous environments of the 1950s public school and Cambridge college, the traces of these influences accordingly emerge in the most pedagogical and institutional aspects of Prynne's life and work: the early lecture text on Victorian poetry, for example, or his much later notes for English students at Caius. The broadest of the three fields of influence examined in this thesis, it is also the most conventional, both in its cultural prominence and in its mode of operation. The second is the British side of the avant-garde little magazine scene towards which Prynne turned in the early 1960s, as described in Chapter 2. While apparently deliberate, this turn loses some of its force when the lack of any 'third way' for publication and distribution is considered, Prynne having by this point decisively rejected the mainstream channels offered by a figure like Donald Davie. Unlike the form of influence described in the previous chapter, in which specific critical attitudes or tenets are either adopted or negated, this *milieu* makes its influence felt structurally, as the material context in which Prynne's thought takes place. Accordingly, its effect is more like a negative imprint: its trace appears at the very moment that Prynne attempts to reach beyond it, most obviously in his letter to Peter Riley of 15 September 1967 and in the prose piece 'A Note on Metal'. The third and final field of influence explored in this thesis is more diffuse, being represented by the fiction of Wyndham Lewis, Edward Upward and Douglas Oliver, discussed alongside a number of other points of reference—notably the scientific work of Francis Crick and Joseph Needham—in Chapter 3. In this case, the process is a combination of the previous two: Prynne does not merely adopt elements of these writers' work in his own prose, nor does he simply write against or around them. Rather, certain works by Prynne, Lewis, Upward and Oliver form part of a broader nexus of conscious and unconscious concerns which comes into focus when they are read together. This nexus is comprised primarily of anxieties about national identity, sexual maturity and reproduction, and this thesis will conclude with an attempt to name it more specifically.

ii. 'The turning glance'

A powerful example both of the young Prynne's negotiation of interlocking literary obligations and of the usefulness of biographical data to literary analysis is provided by an uncollected early poem, a translation of Guido Cavalcanti's sonnet *Chi è questa*:

> Who is it, that
> in coming thus is
> so admired

the air lucid
with shaking
brightness

beside her
the very person
of love?

No man may
speak, except
to sigh

the turning glance!
love must say
that, not I

such containment
makes those around
her seem gestures, of rage

she gathers the
virtues to her
finest pleasing : no

words show her
goddess
of beauty

such height
the mind
has not known

nor such favour
that ever, truly
we might[16]

This is not a work which came down to Prynne unfiltered from the *Duecento*: translated twice by Pound, it is discussed at length in Chapter VI of Donald Davie's *Ezra Pound: Poet as Sculptor*, parts of which 'derive immediately from conversations with J.H. Prynne'.[17] Davie quotes Pound's translations—the

[16] Prynne, 'Chi É', *Prospect*, 6 (Spring 1964), p. 35.

[17] Donald Davie, *Ezra Pound: Poet as Sculptor*, p. vi. Mellors goes so far as to claim that the chapter was 'written with [Prynne's] assistance' (Mellors, p. 73). It was in any case published in 1964, the same year as Prynne's translation.

first from 1912, the second from 1929—in full, 'tak[ing] for granted that [the latter] is more to modern taste', then attempts to explain why.[18] The chief differences between the two, as identified by Davie, are a shift from relatively strict pentameter to a more varied metrical pattern, and a shift from Standard English diction and orthography with the occasional archaic abbreviation (''tis', 'ne'er') to an entirely archaic mode of presentation reminiscent of 16th-century English poets such as Thomas Wyatt ('makyng the air to tremble with a bright clearenesse'). Davie cites Pound's own denunciation in *Make it New* of the 'prevalent error [...] of dealing with Italian hendecasyllables as if they were English "iambic pentameter" ', along with his assertion that 'Dante's hendecasyllables were composed of combinations of rhythm units of various shapes and sizes'.[19] 'Although Pound goes on to claim that he had discovered this for himself "in Indiana" ', writes Davie, 'his versions of 1912 do not suggest as much.'[20] Having further compared this use of 'rhythm units' to Pound's practice in the Chinese translations of *Cathay* (1915), Davie draws the following conclusion:

> Because for purposes of polemic Pound chose at times to play the iconoclast, it is easy to see his abandonment of the traditional pentameter as something deliberate and programmatic; his translations of Cavalcanti from 1912 onwards suggest on the contrary that he broke with the pentameter reluctantly, grudgingly, and, as it were, of necessity.[21]

In the case of archaism, Davie pays attention specifically to l. 10 of the original—'*Ch'a lei s'inchina ogni gentil vertute*'—translated by Pound as 'For all the noble powers bend toward her' and 'In that every high noble vertu leaneth to herward'. He refers again to criticism, noting how in the introduction to *Sonnets and Ballate* Pound dissents from Dante Gabriel Rossetti's rendering, 'To whom are subject all things virtuous.' In the Italian, according to Pound, ' "she" acts as a magnet for every "gentil virtute," that is, the noble spiritual power, the invigorating forces of life and beauty bend toward her'; Rossetti errs in failing to emphasise this active movement.[22] As Davie points out,

> [i]n both of Pound's versions this meaning of *s'inchina* is duly reproduced[. ...] But it is in the later version that the point is rammed home, that the difference between Rossetti's version and Pound's is made irreconcilable. This is a function of the much denser and

[18] Davie, *Ezra Pound*, p. 105. Pound's translations were first published respectively in Pound, *Sonnets and Ballate of Guido Cavalcanti* (London: Stephen Swift and Co., 1912), p. 29 and Pound, 'Guido's Relations', *The Dial*, 86 (July 1929), 559–68 (p. 56).

[19] Pound, 'Cavalcanti', in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. by T.S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1954), 149–200 (p. 169).

[20] Davie, *Ezra Pound*, p. 106.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 107.

[22] Pound, *Sonnets and Ballate*, p. 5.

> more conspicuous archaism of the revised version; in other words, the much heavier archaism of the second version is not for the sake of loftiness and ornateness, but, on the contrary, it serves to cleave more closely to the sense as Pound perceives it.[23]

How, if at all, does Prynne's translation fit into this narrative of progress provided by Davie? Its most obvious departure is formal. Where Pound's versions follow the two-quatrain, two-tercet layout of the original, Prynne's is composed of ten tercets, with very short lines of between two and five words. These lines are a clear attempt to replicate the 'rhythm units of various shapes and sizes' described by Pound, yet in a new arrangement. In translating *Chi è questa*, Pound avoids marking these units formally, though he does so in his version of Cavalcanti's *Donna mi prega* by 'spacing out the line in print, making it float or step across, as well as down, the printed page'.[24] Prynne goes one further, 'breaking the pentameter' almost completely by denying any possibility of its reconstitution through left-right eye movement.[25] The significance of this arrangement is revealed by the later stages of Davie's chapter, in which he discusses an apparent contradiction: enjambment, as the 'metrical sign of kinetic energy, of impetus', requires a relatively consistent metrical structure as a backdrop, something which is disrupted by the 'rhythmical dismemberment of the verse line from within' which Pound sought.[26] According to Davie, Pound's translations therefore lack consistent movement, petrifying into individual lines; writing of 'South-Folk in Cold Country' from *Cathay*, he claims that 'of the lines in this poem it seems more accurate to say that they are placed one beneath another, than to say that one comes after another.'[27] There can be few clearer examples of lines 'placed one beneath another' than Prynne's version of *Chi è questa*; yet it is also a poem which is relentlessly enjambed, including by a dramatic jump over the seventh stanza break. This ambiguous 'no', which in its spatial detachment from what follows risks negating the preceding three lines, reads as a deliberate attempt both to outstrip Pound and to prove Davie wrong: to combine enjambment with 'rhythmical dismemberment' in something completely new. At the same time, its separation from 'words show her' allows the whole phrase to be semantically inverted in a moment of textual self-consciousness unprecedented in previous translations: words *do* show her, including at this very moment. This in turn implies something important about what sort of a thing 'she', the 'goddess of beauty', is—namely, a factitious textual construction which is in fact highly amenable to being shown through words.

Nor does Prynne's poem map in any consistent way on to the structure of the original. While the first four tercets neatly represent the first four lines in

[23] Davie, *Ezra Pound*, pp. 108–09.

[24] *Ibid.*, p. 112. As Davie notes, this is a technique now more closely associated with the work of William Carlos Williams, who nevertheless 'seized' it from Pound.

[25] Of the poem's ten stanzas, only two contain exactly ten syllables, the rest ranging from seven to 14.

[26] *Ibid.*, p. 118.

[27] *Ibid.*

Cavalcanti, the poem roughly doubles in 'speed' after this point, condensing each of the subsequent three stanzas into two tercets. Ideas from Cavalcanti are also re-ordered: in the original version of the passage quoted above, the conventional expression of incommunicability comes before the section about the virtues. Some of the telescoping of source material is extreme: l. 13 of Prynne's piece, 'the turning glance!', substitutes for a much more semantically complex section, rendered in the later Pound as 'Ah God, what she is like when her owne eye turneth'. Keeping a de-archaised version of the 1929 'turneth' in preference to 1912's 'strays', Prynne nevertheless distils the entire apostrophe to God into an exclamation mark and completely loses the reference to semblance, which in 1912 leads Pound into the unidiomatic 'The thing she's like'. Prynne makes similarly free with the basic grammar of crucial phrases. His implicit intervention in the one-sided dispute between Pound and Rossetti over *s'inchina* is typically blunt: Prynne completely reverses the phrase, transferring grammatical agency from the virtues which 'lean', 'turn' or are 'subject', to the woman who 'gathers' them—she becomes a subject herself. In simplifying grammar, Prynne introduces subtle semantic modifications, as in ll. 25–27: 'such height | the mind | has not known'. 'Has not', here, is a significant step down from '*non fu sì alta già*' or Pound's 'ne'er before'/'never before', losing the implication that whatever hasn't been achieved in the past is in fact being achieved now. In Prynne's text, the mind might simply never reach such height. This sense actually corresponds more strictly to the overall meaning of the stanza, and makes possible the poem's final shift: 'nor such favour | that ever, truly | we might' (ll. 28–30). The use of the 'nor' from Pound's 1929 translation disguises a much quicker and cleaner transition from past to future conditional than in the older poet's version, some syntactical complexity notwithstanding. For Prynne, the mind has not (in the past) known such height, nor has it known such favour that we might ever (in the future) truly know such height. As Davie points out, Pound vacillates between reading '*in voi*' and '*in noi*' in the penultimate line of the original, causing the address to change radically.[28] Prynne completely avoids this issue; the female subject is indeed absent from Prynne's poem by this stage, allowing the focus to settle finally on 'we', the complex formed by the reader and speaker.

As part of his determination to transform rather than simply to translate Cavalcanti's poem, Prynne deliberately avoids the archaic diction which Davie praises in Pound. Whereas in Davie's assessment 'the much heavier archaism of the second version [...] serves to cleave more closely to the sense as Pound perceives it', Prynne aims for a different sort of accuracy—as the *s'inchina* issue shows, he is not afraid to depart from Pound even when that also means departing from Cavalcanti.[29] Prynne's vocabulary is, then, almost universally mono- or disyllabic, the sole exception being 'containment' in l. 16, a word which serves as a useful test of his principle of selection. Taken for Cavalcanti's *umiltà*, 'containment' is a seemingly inappropriate choice, the former deriving ultimately from the Latin *humilitas*, literally the quality of being close to the ground (*humus*).

[28] *Ibid.*, pp. 105–06.
[29] *Ibid*, p. 109.

The development of *umiltà* into *omertà*, with its connotations of organisational secrecy and exclusiveness, may provide one way back to Prynne's usage, as might the modern English injunction to 'contain oneself'. More important, however, is the sound link with the etymologically and semantically unrelated *cotanto* in the original line, '*Cotanto d'umiltà donna mi pare*': through careful selection, Prynne induces an echo across languages and centuries, without sacrificing the sleekness and 'containment' of his own poem. The introduction of 'those around' in the following line—'such containment | makes those around | her seem gestures, of rage' (ll. 16–18)—siphons off the word's remaining obtrusiveness, making it part of a broader spatial structure, a system of interiors and exteriors.

In translating *Chi è questa*, Prynne could hardly have selected a poem more heavily freighted with both literary-historical and personal significance, already translated not once but twice by the totemic father of poetic modernism and discussed at length by his own sometime *Doktorvater* in *Ezra Pound: Poet as Sculptor*. The translation's significance is further heightened by its appearance in Issue 6 of *Prospect*, a publication whose aesthetic importance for Prynne as editor was described at length in Chapter 2. (The poem in fact appears on the page without any suggestion that it is a translation, the reader's familiarity with its convoluted history being taken for granted.) The four poems of Prynne's included in *Prospect* 6 are sandwiched tightly between work by Olson and Davie, the two influences most frequently acknowledged in introductions to Prynne's work. They are far from being homogenous, however: 'Chi É' is in fact markedly different in style from its neighbours, all three of which read like offcuts from *Force of Circumstance*, sharing that volume's concern for the natural world and commitment to relatively conventional stanza forms.[30] In summary, then, *Chi è questa* was carefully and deliberately selected, its translation composed in a strategically audacious style and published in a manner which ensured that it stood out, Prynne himself having absolute control over presentation. It is thus a rare and important instance of near-explicit acknowledgement on Prynne's part of poetic influence and inheritance, phenomena which more often remain subterranean presences in his work, and even in his correspondence. This perhaps accounts for the fact that 'Chi É' has never been collected in *Poems*, sharing this status with *Force of Circumstance*—a volume heavily indebted both to Davie and to Charles Tomlinson—and a handful of other individual pieces.

iii. 'The dyadic relation'

The conjunction of a number of anxieties or concerns about reproduction and their applicability to Prynne's thinking about poetry and the wider world was discussed at the end of Chapter 3. Beyond the localised concept of the 'good

[30] While they certainly show more of Olson's influence than some of the poems in *Force of Circumstance*, 'Salt Water, Fresh Water', 'At the Dark Centre' and 'Lie of the Other Land' were all read by Prynne for a recording accompanying his 1964 interview with Peter Orr; all of the other poems read were taken from his debut collection.

scientist', however, the composite that they form was not given a name. By way of conclusion, this thesis will test out one such name: fatherhood. From the implantation and nurturing of a literary sensibility in the mind of a child to the creation of the autonomous, resistant poem, and even to the 'seeding' of Earth itself, the structure of male reproduction—initial contact followed by withdrawal—seems to sit behind much of what matters most deeply to the Prynne that emerges in the foregoing pages. Ironically, this conclusion has been reached through a mode of analysis that has striven precisely to avoid any simply 'patrilineal' model of poetic descent—what Andrea Brady terms 'fantasies of all-male reproduction'—particularly the Pound–Olson–Prynne structure presented in works such as Mellors's *Late Modernist Poetics*.[31] As far as this thesis is concerned, Prynne's aesthetic, intellectual and ethical stance is the product of an exceptionally diverse (though differentially weighted) pool of influences. Yet the stance itself undeniably emphasises processes with a structural similarity to patrilineal descent. It was claimed in the introduction to this thesis that Pound would 'haunt every one of the following chapters'. What, then, is the structure of this 'haunting', and what does it say about that which it affects?

Like Prynne, Pound is a poet concerned at a deep level with problems of reproduction: one of the crucial charges against 'usura' in Canto XLV, arguably the centre-piece of the long poem that represents Pound's lifework, is that it 'slayeth the child in the womb'.[32] Pound is, however, much more ready than Prynne to acknowledge direct poetic influence.[33] The most famous example of such acknowledgement is the early poem 'A Pact', a short piece in which Pound explicitly positions himself in filial relationship to Walt Whitman: 'I come to you as a grown child | Who has had a pig-headed father; | I am old enough now to make friends.' Pound presents his task as one of refinement: 'It was you that broke the new wood, | Now is a time for carving.'[34] Prynne's *oeuvre* contains no such direct statement of influence. Yet, as was pointed out at the beginning of this thesis, the intellectual and contextual correspondences between Pound and Prynne are numerous, and far more compelling than any equivalent similarities with, say, Olson or Dorn. In particular, the blistering scorn of Prynne's private and semi-private tirades against poetic stupidity—matched only by the intellectual, social and even financial generosity of his attempts to

[31] Brady, p. 245.

[32] Pound, 'XLV', in *The Cantos of Ezra Pound* (New York: New Directions, 1996), 229–30 (p. 230).

[33] This is not to suggest that Prynne is in any sense unaware of issues of poetic fatherhood and influence; self-conscious tics in his correspondence, such as referring to Donald Davie by his initials (D.A.D.), show that he is very much aware of them. Neither is it to suggest that Prynne is lax in his acknowledgement of source material in general, a notion dispelled by poems as diverse as 'The Glacial Question, Unsolved' and *Kazoo Dreamboats*. The point, as noted above in relation to dedications, is that he does not go out of his way to acknowledge specifically poetic influence, e.g. in matters of style, even in periods when his style has been recongisably derivative of, say, Olson or Tomlinson.

[34] First appearing in *Poetry* (April 1913), pp. 11–12, the poem was accompanied on its second page by 'In a Station of the Metro', a piece whose 'wet, black bough' constitutes a direct development of the 'new wood' that 'A Pact' attributes to Whitman.

support and promote those writers whose work he has considered important—is a characteristic which cannot but be linked to the author of 'How to Read'.

If Pound is to be considered a poetic 'father' to Prynne, it is in precisely the sense identified above: a relationship characterised by distance, like that of the good scientist and his creation, but which can also, with effort, be read backwards. The apparent conflict between the disparate influences identified in this thesis and grand theories of patrilineal poetic descent might therefore be dispelled by seeing Pound and his career as a sort of over-arching formal influence within which more local influences (Davie, Tomlinson, Leavis, etc.) emerge as content: an image of the father as a matryoshka doll containing a set of successively shrinking sub-fathers.[35] The apparent genealogical absolutism of this perspective is tempered if Pound and Prynne's relationship to him is understood as one formal structure or among many; thus, a thesis which took Olson rather than Pound as its implicit starting point may have come up with a quite different set of emphases and influences (or *vice versa*), even where these influences have only a formal or structural rather than a direct relation to Olson himself. It is important to acknowledge such underlying structures, even and especially when they emerge into view at the end of a process of argumentation which they have helped to generate. Through reflection on the concept as a crystallisation of the material that produces it (and that it produces), that material can be viewed from a bird's-eye perspective structurally impossible in the analysis itself.

In the present case, the fact that a particularly patrilineal, Poundian air emerges from a consideration of Prynne's early career has the potential to shed further light on the periodisation of his work. Would the selection of a period other than 1955–75 for contextual analysis—say, the period from the publication of *Poems* in 1982 to Prynne's retirement from academic life in 2005—have necessitated a different structuring force? Furthermore, what do the qualitative aspects of the structure that has emerged say about that which they subsume? The type of poetic inheritance which it is possible to extrapolate from the good scientist trope is, for one thing, entirely androcentric: descent is based structurally on the male side of the reproductive process, with almost no regard for the female.[36]

[35] Pound is perhaps even akin to the symbolic father described by Jacques Lacan, whose 'true function [...] is fundamentally to unite (and not to set in opposition) a desire and the Law' (Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. by Alan Sheridan [London: Tavistock Publicatons, 1977], p. 321).

[36] An obvious example of such disregard is Prynne's discussion of Shelley and Malthus in relation to contemporary reproductive policy, in which women are viewed as mechanical functions in a bio-economic system regulated primarily by male legislators. While a charitable interpretation would claim that it is precisely this system which Prynne is arguing *against*, it is nevertheless the case that the argument takes place within a material intellectual context—*The English Intelligencer*—which is only marginally less male-dominated than the 44th Parliament itself. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the proportion of recipients of *The English Intelligencer* who were women was, at this height of its admittedly limited circulation, less than seven per cent. The equivalent rate for female MPs after the 1966 election was approximately four per cent ('Women MPs & parliamentary candidates since 1945', *UK Political Info*, <http://www.ukpolitical.info/FemaleMPs.htm> [accessed 2 February 2016]). In any case, few of the female recipients of the *Intelligencer* participated actively in its discussions.

Any conception of poetic creation based even metaphorically on a 'natural' view of sexual reproduction is also heteronormative. To raise these issues is not simply to nitpick from a more enlightened cultural-historical position. It is not clear that poets' thinking about poetry can be placed on an (ideally) ever-advancing political timeline in the manner of, say, civil rights legislation, and even if it could it is not obvious that any advance which would afford the contemporary critic a privileged vantage point has in fact taken place. What is clear is that androcentrism and heteronormativity are recognisable parts of Prynne's thinking about aesthetic practice in this period—broadly encapsulated in the good scientist trope described at the end of Chapter 3—rather than unfortunate aberrations to be explained away. To put it plainly, when in the 1950s, '60s and early '70s Prynne refers to 'the poet', this idealised figure is more or less implicitly a heterosexual man.

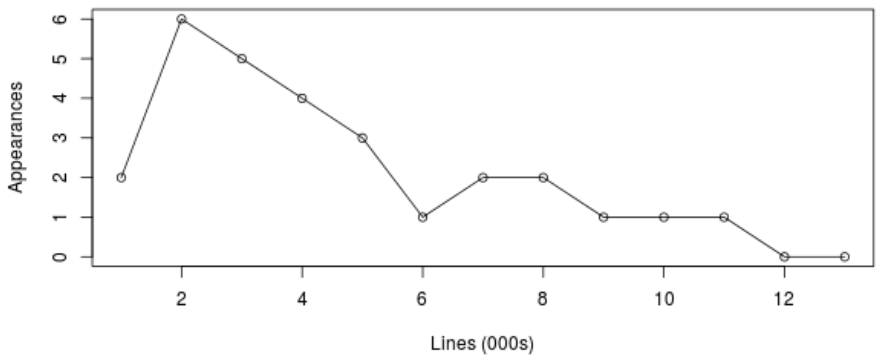

Figure 1: Appearances of 'man' per 1,000 lines in *Force of Circumstance* (1962) and *Poems* (2005)

The chronological qualifier in the last sentence is necessary, and—if a poet's thinking about poetry can be assumed to leave a trace in the work itself—the restriction it imposes is to some extent backed up by statistics. Figure 1 shows the results of analysing concatenated scanned texts of *Force of Circumstance* and the 2005 edition of *Poems* according to a very crude approximation of androcentricity: appearances of the word 'man'—used either as a singular noun or to refer to 'mankind'—per 1,000 lines. A clear trend is visible, consisting of a spike around the beginning of *The White Stones* (l. 1,800) and a steady drop-off thereafter.[37] For reference, the chronological scope of this thesis terminates with *High Pink on Chrome* (1975) at around l. 8,350. Such analysis violently flattens the semantic complexity of Prynne's work—it is impossible to tell whether any

[37]The usage of similar terms such as 'human' or 'woman' across the text does not show any comparable trend.

given usage of 'man' is sincere, ironic, direct, reported, and so on—but offers a sort of knowledge which can only be gained through such flattening, rather than through readily disputable readings of individual usages. While it would be foolish, then, to use Figure 1 as evidence of the androcentricity of Prynne's work, if that quality is established by other means then the diagram can be used to trace its probable contours.[38]

Writing to Douglas Oliver in 1994 on the subject of intellectual and ethical consistency, Prynne claims that 'it is not facile to speak of ethical style, and to recognise that even within a single lifetime there is room for many shifts which can nonetheless preserve a thread of purposeful mutation.'[39] This implicitly genetic model, in which the subject is neither absolutely changeable nor absolutely consistent, is perhaps helpful in coming to terms with Prynne's own evolving opinions. For his part, Prynne is well aware of changes in his own thinking and practice, acknowledging later in the same letter that 'my own habit now is sharply altered from only a few years back.' In the recent lecture-essay 'The Poet's Imaginary', which presents a conception of poetic composition as involving a sort of introjected double-self, Prynne tackles the relation between poetry and gender directly:

> the dyadic relation of poet and imaginary [...] may not be accompanied by determined gender assignments. Either figure may be male or female, or may include features of both, like a system of Christian angels who, rather than owning no sexual identity at all, may present as equally responsive to both genders and both bodily incarnations, in cherishment and in trust.[40]

That this statement might now be objected to for its binarism—'both genders and both bodily incarnations'—neatly illustrates how poetic thought exists in relation to a constantly shifting historical context; a context from which, as Prynne would be the first to acknowledge, it does not have the luxury of severing itself. Earlier in 'The Poet's Imaginary', Prynne writes that 'being a good poet and continuing to meet the self-challenge of not lapsing into mediocrity is continuously difficult, a matter of struggle not easily handled because intrinsically hard to recognize accurately'.[41] Part of this difficulty—and something that Prynne has striven to do throughout his career, with varying degrees of success—is to acknowledge the intersection of the poetic and the political, even when they appear to be most separate, and especially when the content of the latter is necessarily remote from the poet's own personal experience.

[38] Without claiming it as 'seal of approval' for the statistical approach, it is interesting to note that Prynne himself has made use of similar analyses; discussing his compositional process in 2014, he described checking words against a digital text of his collected poems to review past usages (Prynne, 'A Dialogue with Nicholas Royle').

[39] Prynne to Oliver, 5 September 1994.

[40] Prynne, 'The Poet's Imaginary', p. 104.

[41] Prynne, 'The Poet's Imaginary', p. 96.