

BACK ON INTO THE WAY HOME: 'CHARM
AGAINST TOO MANY APPLES'

Josh Stanley

J.H. Prynne, *Poems* [Newcastle upon Tyne, 2005], p. 68. All future references to poems will be given as *Poems*. Originally published in Prynne's 1969 collection, *The White Stones* (*Poems*, pp. 37-126).

and the smoke goes wavering into the atmosphere with all the uncertainty of numbers. (lines 9-11)
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This smoke,
rising from an
unseen fire,
informs us of
its history, in
and as what

Geoffrey Hartman calls the 'poetical smoke' of William Wordsworth's '*Lines* written a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the banks of the Wye during a tour, July 13, 1798' (Geoffrey H. Hartman, *The Unmediated Vision* [New York, N.Y., 1966], p. 7):

and wreathes of smoke
Sent up, in silence, from among the trees,
With some uncertain notice, as might seem,
Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,
Or of some hermit's cave, where by his fire
The hermit sits alone.

(William Wordsworth, "*Lines* written a few miles above Tintern Abbey, on revisiting the banks of the Wye during a tour, July 13, 1798" in *Lyrical Ballads and Other Poems, 1797-1800* ed. by James Butler and Karen Green [Ithaca, N.Y., 1992] ll. 18-23.) The *uncertainty* of Prynne's smoke draws us immediately to the 'uncertain notice' of

Wordsworth's. Prynne's, meanwhile, is self-consciously poetical smoke: Hartman means by this firstly smoke within a poem and secondly smoke as an idealist figure for poetry, both marking an origin and writing on the sky. Wordsworth's 'notice' is in parallel with *numbers*, which through the colloquial 'with | all through' operates as either comparison ('with an uncertainty like that of numbers') or as description ('with all the uncertainty proper to numbers, which is what the smoke is'). In the first case, we might read *numbers* as a figure of abstraction. (But, compare Wordsworth, "Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow | For old, unhappy, far-off things", "The Solitary Reaper" in *The Poems* Vol. I ed. by John O. Hayden [Harmondsworth, 1977], ll. 18-19). *Numbers* stands for verse: the *numbers* of metrical feet. Prynne's *smoke* rises with all the *uncertainty* proper to metrical verse suggesting the risks (perhaps of fruitless isolation) inherent in the writing of poetry and the tense relationship between poetry and public discourse; Wordsworth's *uncertain notice* hints at a break between sign or poem and its ideal – here the man who is always at home, even within this perhaps Platonic cave, watching shadows on the cave wall. Above I said that we are 'immediately' drawn to 'Tintern Abbey', but Prynne's allusion to Wordsworth might in fact be shown to be mediated by other, more recent, poetical smokes as we read on in 'Charm...'. While *The White Stones* engages on numerous occasions both with Wordsworth (e.g. 'As now | each to each good-bye I love you so', the end of 'From End to End' [*Poems*, pp. 62-63] quotes 'each to each' from Wordsworth's 'My heart leaps up' and could be read as a [temporary] loving farewell to Wordsworth, as *Fire Lizard* is to Olson [*Poems*, pp. 141-47]) and 'poetical smoke' (e.g. 'That this could | really be so & of use is my present politics, | burning like smoke, before the setting of fire' in 'First Notes on Daylight' [*Poems*, p. 69]), 'Charm Against Too Many Apples' seems to be a particular response to 'Tintern Abbey'.

Charm (title)

We know where we are. Charms, spells 'against' or 'for' physical and spiritual ailments and threats, are a genre of Old English poetry (e.g. "Against a Dwarf," "For A Sudden Stitch": Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxon Minor Poems* [New York, N.Y., 1942], pp. 121-123). I say *where* rather than *when* because though 'Charm...' is as such located in Old English poetic tradition, the charm poems that survive "in manuscripts of the tenth century or later" are "difficult to date" (R.K. Gordon, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* [London, 1926], p. 94). These charm

poems “preserve much superstition and folk-lore” but draw on both “Christian and pagan” beliefs (*Anglo-Saxon Poetry* [1926], p. 94). As such the knowledge they preserve is both pre- and post-Christian missions; they demonstrate the fluidity and inter-penetration of historicized bodies of knowledge – evidence against the simplistic notion that strict, uncrossable lines mark pagan England from Christian England.

At first, I understand the word *charm* as an object: a talisman or amulet. Etymologically, though, it derives from the Latin *carmen* meaning ‘song, verse, oracular response, incantation’ (*OED* 1: *charm* n.). The tension between two bodies of knowledge is encountered here, too, but the object-form originates in the oral-form, since the talisman is imbued with magical properties of protection by a song sung over it. In this way, the object is both a memory of the song, and also something which keeps the song present at hand. We see in this, holding the poem in a book, the conflict between the object form of the printed poem and its realization in oral (mental-oral) performance.

Too Many Apples (title)

Since it is possible to have too many apples, there is a right amount of apples to have. ‘An apple a day keeps the doctor away’ suggests itself, but I cannot work out how, in my daily life, I could have *too many apples*. This cannot be synecdoche, where apples stand for general woodland, so that *too many apples* is a figure for over-consumption, eating up too much of the earth’s fruits, thus warning against the domination of nature: *too many apples* is too open, and could as easily be a warning against over-production or the cultivation of nature that leads to bourgeois fetishization (conversion to garden). “[T]he road is lined with apple trees” (l. 4) describes a state of affairs on to which we reflect the design we ascribe to poetic construction, for these are apple trees *lining* a road in a line of poetry: the apple trees are a self-conscious aesthetic product. A road is, in the twentieth century, a path or way which has been purposefully constructed or developed for ease of travel (usually car travel); what describes the road we will instinctively put down to the intention of whoever built the road. Compare Wordsworth’s “hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines | Of sportive wood run wild,” which have been obviously roughened (Wordsworth, “Tintern Abbey” ll. 16-17). Any knowable specificity appears to be contained, then, in the *apples*.

But what are the apples? The title's protection against, and, as such, injunction against, *too many apples* switches into what is both matter-of-fact declaration and prayer that the amount that is *too many* is unlikely to occur: "No one can eat so | many apples, or remember so much ice." (ll. 30-31.) Eating so many apples is linked to remembering so much ice by the parallel structure of the semantic unit; what the "ice" is "was our prime matter" (l. 7), which is something we can 'remember', even if we cannot remember all of it. According to contemporary cultural Christianity in the west, apples are linked to knowledge, since the unnamed fruit in the Garden of Eden, which has the power to make you wise, is often represented as an apple: 'And when the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, and that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make *one* wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew they *were* naked.' (Genesis 3:6-7, Authorized King James Version.) But this is the affliction of self-knowledge and has no ties to memory: the wisdom the tree of knowledge provides is not recollective, but transformational. In "The Glacial Question, Unsolved" (*Poems*, pp. 65-66), Prynne considers "the matter of ice," the origin of our current "maritime climate" in the glacial Pleistocene Epoch, an Epoch of which "'it is questionable whether there has yet been | sufficient change [...] to justify a claim that | the Pleistocene Epoch itself | has come to an end'" (this is a quotation from one of the references Prynne provides alongside this poem, R.G. West and J.J. Donner, "The Glaciations of East Anglia and the East Midlands: a differentiation based on stone-orientation measurements of the tills," *Quart. Journ. Geol. Soc.*, CXII [1956], 69-87). That is to say, we may still be living in a glacial age. In "Frost and Snow, Falling" (*Poems*, pp. 70-71) Prynne writes "of man in the ice block | and its great cracking roar." In "Star Damage at Home" (*Poems*, p. 108-09) Prynne writes "the day itself | unlocks the white stone"; this "white stone" seems to be "the ice block" which, by thaw, releases man. This freedom from the ice block draws on a mythological framework usually referred to as Norse, the same pre-Christian framework which the Old English charm poems draw on. These myths are described in *The Prose Edda* of Snorri Sturluson:

High One said: 'When those rivers which are called
Élivágar came so far from their source that the yeasty

venom accompanying them hardened like slag, it turned into ice.’ [...] ‘That part of Ginnungagap which turned northwards became full of the ice and the hoar frost’s weight and heaviness, and within there was drizzling rain and gusts of wind. But the southern part of Ginnungagap became light by meeting the sparks and glowing embers which flew out of the world of Muspell.’

Then Third said: ‘Just as cold and all harsh things emanated from Niflheim, so everything in the neighbourhood of Muspell was warm and bright. Ginnungagap was as mild as windless air, and where the soft air of the heat met the frost so that it thawed and dripped, then, by the might of that which sent the heat, life appeared in the drops of running fluid and grew into the likeness of a man.’ [...]

‘He and all his family were evil; we call them frost ogres. [...] We call that old frost ogre Ymir.’ [...]

‘As soon as the frost thawed, it became a cow called Auðhumla, and four rivers of milk ran from her teats, and she fed Ymir. [...] She licked the ice-blocks which were salty, and by the evening of the first day of the block-licking appeared a man’s hair, on the second day a man’s head, and on the third day the whole man was there. He was called Buri. He was handsome and tall and strong.’

(Snorri Sturluson, *The Prose Edda*, trans. by Jean I. Young [Berkeley and L.A., C.A., 1966], pp. 33-34.) Man (in this case, Buri, who is the ancestor of the Norse gods) is both born from the ice while it thaws and also revealed in it; that is to say, both “the ice was our prime matter” and man was, in the beginning, “in the ice block,” but the thaw is not complete. This creation myth is not entirely dissimilar from the Greek creation myth recorded in Hesiod’s *Theogony*, which Charles Olson draws on at the opening of *Maximus Poems: IV, V, VI* (London, 1968 [unpaginated]); Olson cites the Norse creation in this volume (in book VI) in a poem called ‘Gylfaginning VI’:

a cow Audumla,
which had come into being to provide food
for Ymir, licked a man / not a
iotum / out of ice whose name was

Buri, whose son (or maybe it was Burr himself)
 Burr (or Borr) is the father of Odin

George F. Butterick suggests this poem was written in 1963, “when other Norse material” was being used by Olson (George F. Butterick, *A Guide To The ‘Maximus Poems’ of Charles Olson* [Los Angeles, C.A., 1978], p. 447). Prynne, in *The White Stones*, drew on a mythological framework which provides a localized alternative to the Greek myths embraced by the American Black Mountain poets, but there are loops in this parallel course which connect it back to Olson.

To ‘remember’ amounts of ‘ice’ (l. 31) refers to how much can be remembered back to the first appearance of man from out of the ice, since the ice has been in a process of gradual thaw. The Pleistocene Epoch may not be over and we that are young may be able to remember ice – some of which may have melted and disappeared during our lifetime. We cannot remember ‘so much’ though. To *remember so much ice* in this Norse context means to be ancient, even immortal. This is paralleled with eating *so many apples*, for in Norse mythology the gods were immortal because they ate particular apples, which were guarded by the goddess Iðun: “She keeps in her box the apples the gods have to eat, when they grow old, to become young again, and so it will continue up to Ragnarök” (Sturluson, *The Prose Edda*, p. 54). The apples we can eat too many of are apples which would keep us alive and young forever. The title, then, might be glossed as ‘Poem/Spell Against Immortality’ – but this straightforward meaning would involve erasing the bodies of knowledge and belief which actually define this meaning. It would be to gloss belief without reference to belief. Furthermore, it would ignore the backward looking philological tracks by which we reject the mistaken Christian reading of *apples* as *fruit from the tree of knowledge*, reject reading *charm* as *amulet* and reject the Christian overlaying of Old English traditions as evidenced in the charm poems.

<p>Still there is much to be done, (line 1)</p>
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The sentiment is of restraint and renunciation. What is being renounced might in fact be labeled stillness: those who

do nothing, who ignore or fail to recognize the demand of *there is*

much, as witnessed here. *Still* either indicates the continuation of a previous condition (OED 5: still, *adv.*, 4) – a condition of either the possibility or the need for action – or it is a response to an earlier statement, affirming, in spite of what has been said or conceded, the continuation of a previous condition (OED 5: still, *adv.*, 6.b). In the former sense, what is refused is the dual proposition that what was previously the case is no longer the case because what needed to be done or could be done was done. That is to say, both the ideas that what has gone before is over and that nothing needs to be done, or can be done, are refuted. *There is much to be done* restrains the emphatically moralizing senses of *things that ‘need’ or ‘must’ be done* by not disclosing (and therefore restricting) any possible action. However, in the context of ‘we can’t | continue with things like this, we can’t simply | go on’ (ll. 11-13), ‘need’ and ‘must’ are how we understand this *there is much to be done*.

Reading this line as a response, we speculatively configure what is responded to. *Still* is not the same word as ‘yet’ or ‘nevertheless’. It may also be an imperative to calm down. To say *there is much to be done* is not to argue, but to speak matter-of-factly. As such I can read this line as a response to an impassioned imaginative discourse, which has quickly moved into abstraction – a discourse that has dominated and forgotten the state of things, since all that this speaker can think needs to be done is then imagined done. *Still there is much to be done* returns an abstract utopianism to the dialectic between the utopian imagination and the world. This dialectic is fixed on the temporal contradiction of the word *still*, which expresses tranquility (continuation) and, here, actual and possible change (continuation) simultaneously: truly there is a way things are and truly there is a way that they could be.

Still reflects on a relationship between past and present; *there is much* describes a present state; *to be done* looks to the future and to the future’s past, glancing back at the moment of *doing* between the now *undone* and the future *done*. The proposition that something must be done is reliant on an understanding of time (whether relatively or universally) as a continuous process: I must do something because it needs to have been done, achieved. This is not to use the language of permanence, that once something has been done it will always be there, but of irreversibility. This temporal structure of continuance and irreversibility fits to both a materialist (that I do something and it matters and we go on and things change) and a messianic

understanding of time (that we irreversibly move forward toward an apocalyptic endpoint). What is shut out is a temporal structure of continuous re-beginnings, where all actions are mere repetition of what has been and what will be again because time is non-linear (with no basis in human finitude) and so nothing must be done because nothing can be achieved without the consciousness that at some point it will have never been, matched by the consciousness that it already has been, which is a consciousness of impotence. As Prynne expresses, after an assertion of continuation, a restrained desire for change, we hear Olson's "What does not change / is the will to change" (Charles Olson, "The Kingfishers" in *Selected Poems* [L.A., C.A., 1997], pp. 5-12).

The thought that change is merely a surface phenomenon, that the world remains the same beneath the mystifications of temporal process, is already flatly refused by *still*. *Still* contradicts Wordsworth's "again [...] Once again [...] again [...] Once again" ("Tintern Abbey", ll. 2, 4, 9, 15) which defines a relationship with the past as possible total return. "Five years have passed" (l. 1), but this long period is discovered to be in certain ways nothing: though Wordsworth returns matured, the scene is fundamentally unchanged, and in his maturation, though he has lost and also been freed from the "dizzy raptures" (l. 86) he experienced in his youth, he has gained "a sense sublime | Of something far more deeply interfused" (ll. 96-97). What the return, and thus time, reveals for Wordsworth is not change but the superficiality of change. Compare Prynne's treatment of the word 'again' later in *The White Stones*:

Again is the sacred
word, the profane sequence suddenly graced, by
coming back. More & more as we go deeper
I realize this aspect of hope, in the sense of
the future cashed in, the letter returned to sender.
How can I straighten the sure fact that
we do *not* do it, as we regret, trust, look
forward to, etc? Since each time what
we have is increasingly the recall, not
the subject to which we come. [...]

I know I will go back
down & that it will not be the same though

I shall be sure it is so. And I shall be even
deeper by rhyme and cadence, more held
to what isn't mine. [...] [W]e
trifle with rhyme and again is the
sound of immortality.

(“Thoughts on the Esterházy Court Uniform” in *Poems*, pp. 99-100.)
In a recent commentary, Prynne has in fact commented on Wordsworth’s “again” in “Tintern Abbey”: “The present visit is made ‘again’ after this double interval, part-clement and part-forbidding, and ‘again’ is a marker word which is itself repeated, so that these linked doublings establish a rhythm not dissimilar to the rhetorical patterns of the renaissance handbooks, or the looping journeys of a tour of visitations” (J.H. Prynne, “Tintern Abbey, Once Again” in *Glossator*, Vol. 1 [Fall 2009], 81-87 [81]). Depth is compulsive in “Tintern Abbey” (more deep, deep power, deeply interfused etc), so to read back the “*Again*” through “More & more as we go deeper” as a directed comment is not far-fetched. But even without these link chains, the above presents the experience of return as in itself an intimation of immortality, an immortality it knows to be only a sound, “increasingly the recall, not | the subject.” In the very experience of repetition and especially in its expression, change appears to be premised on what does not change, the immortal. In this way, “the profane sequence” is “suddenly graced” by the return. But the “sound of immortality” is a lie; it is “what isn’t mine,” since the act of return, of “coming back” is premised on change, on having left being beyond my control, beyond correction or recall. *Still* expresses the opposite of this “*Again*”; it holds up the mutual dominations of movement and repetition. As a response, it returns us from abstract thought to the way things have been and are. Time still moves on, we cannot go back, and this movement from abstraction into dialectical experience is the return *still* informs us of, a return conditioned by the recognition of change.

Edward Dorn’s use of *still* in his 1961 collection *The Newly Fallen* (which Prynne would have read, having corresponded with Dorn since before the publication of *The Newly Fallen*) contains both imaginative desires and the tones of the matter of fact:

still they whisper in the wind
we need you

still they whisper of green elegant glass
 there and of emerald plains and say who
 will they let in first.
 Still the lethal metric bubbles of science
 burst there every day and those sophisticated
 workers go home to talk politely of pure science,
 they breathe, go about in their cars and pay rent
 until they advance by degrees to ownership
 it is
 like a gigantic Parker game of careers.

No complaint.

Still we see the marvelous vapor trails
 across the face of the moon.

(Edward Dorn, “The Biggest Killing” in *The Newly Fallen* [New York, N.Y., 1961], pp. 15-18.) Imagination verges on metaphysics, and is able to survive on a rubbish tip of broken bottles. Restraint culminates in “No complaint”, which suppresses all other speculative reactions and holds them within spoken dissatisfaction, itself shut down. What is spoken is endurance. *There is much to be done* carries this out by restraining the usual attempt to know or show that which is to be done. *There is much to be done* does not oppose the later turn in the poem, “*nothing remains | to be done*” (ll. 37-38), as it seems to. It too says *nothing*, though it also may posit everything. Compare Martin Heidegger on anxiety, which he argues is always revealed as an anxiety about nothing, by which he means “the world itself”: “What oppresses us [...] is the world itself. When anxiety has subsided, then in our everyday way of talking we are accustomed to say that ‘it was really nothing’. And *what* it was, indeed, does get reached ontically by such a way of talking.” (Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* trans. by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson [Oxford, 2008; this translation first published in 1962], p. 231.) Whilst Dorn pronounces endurance, endurance is demanded by Prynne. We no doubt strive to know what is to be done, but such a reaching after enlightenment here carries the prospect of imagined attainment, from which we are called back. We have to accept not knowing what must be done in the same moment that a something to do is pressed upon us. Compare Prynne’s analysis of Wyatt’s “They fle from me / that sometyne did me seke”: “the identity of *they* is out of reach for the

reader, and in this case the obscurity is perhaps a trial or test of the reader's own constancy, to endure the pain of unknowing." (J.H. Prynne, *They That Have Powre to Hurt; A Specimen of a Commentary on Shake-speares Sonnets*, 94 [Cambridge, 2001], p. 3.) This imagined attainment would, for Prynne, involve a moral abstraction, producing a contemptible counter-earth variety to the mind. Keston Sutherland has suggested that for the philologist "who takes etymology as a means of recovering the senses of words that we *need*, the etymological history of 'ought' is evidence of progressive dispossession. To recognise this insight buried in etymology is, for Prynne, to recognise the falsity of any vigilant preoccupation with 'ought' as a moral abstraction" (Keston Sutherland, "J.H. Prynne and Philology" [unpublished PhD thesis, Cambridge, 2004], p. 174). Restraining any particularity in *there is*, Prynne restrains the desire for moral abstraction, refusing to give in to it. Compare Wordsworth's abstract fatalism: 'Yet 'tis not to enjoy that we exist, | For that end only; something must be done [...] Each Being has *his* office' ('Home at Grasmere' in Wordsworth, *The Poems* Vol. I ll. 664-69).

on the way into the city, and the sky as yet (lines 1-2)
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The word *city* derives from the Latin *civis*, the citizen; the condition of being a *civis*, citizen-ship, and, later, a community

of these citizens, was called *civitas*; this then became a name for the *urbs*, as we use it (*OED*, *city*). This distinguishes it from Olson's polis, since the Greek word for a city-dweller, πολίτης is derived from the word for city, πόλις. Sutherland has argued that Prynne's *city* throughout *Kitchen Poems* (1968) and *The White Stones* is an inalienable "'whole' in which we live," thought through Thomas Aquinas' conception of the city ("J.H. Prynne and Philology," p. 166). However, as Sutherland recognizes, this is a broad scheme, and throughout *The White Stones* we encounter Prynne questioning from poem to poem that which at one point seems irrefutable. *The city*, in the context of the reserved and as such austere *there is much to be done*, ringing out a utopian longing now seriously grounded, sounds equally like an urban center and like heaven. It is both practical and ideal.

While Prynne heads *into the city*, Wordsworth could not wait to be out, "A lover [...] of all that we behold | From this green earth"

("Tintern Abbey," l. 104-06): the "forms of beauty" of the Wye valley had been a source of "tranquil restoration" for Wordsworth when "in lonely rooms, and mid the din | Of towns and cities" (see ll. 23-31). Compare the start of book seven of *The Prelude* (1805) in relation to "Tintern Abbey," which opens with the identical "Five years": Wordsworth sings as he pours out from London (William Wordsworth, *The Prelude: 1799, 1805, 1850* ed. by Jonathan Wordsworth et al. [New York, N.Y., 1979], Book VII, ll. 1-9).

our time (lines 3-4)	we take all
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To get to the city *we take all our time* and the suspense continues: who are *we*? This question

returns more pressingly after *all our time*. I may take my time to do something and something may take up all my time; the former is relative, the latter with reference to my day-to-day understanding of my life. If something takes up all my time, my time that is taken here refers to time in which I would do different things, and, as such, means other possibilities which I can personally imagine. Something taking up *all our time* could be understood in this way as inflected through an I or according to a shared desire to be doing something else. But here there is no I-conscious, wanting to be away – we are taking our time in pursuit of the longed for – nor is our time being taken up by something: we are taking it. *All our time* must then be a tolling up of all of our time, all the time of the group. Time is personal yet plural in terms of the work of *much to be done* we may read the *way into the city* as: two people working for a day is more time than one person working for a day. *Our time* must be a united effort of several individuated *my times*: there is no reason for these *my times* to be contemporaneous; and *all*, momentarily separated from first-person relativity by the line-break, hints at the 'eternal' vision with which the poem ends (l. 39). If *all our time* might be the eternal, the *we* might not be only those with whom I interact daily (as they would be for Olson) but could be humankind. The response, in the following sentence, to this sounding "too obviously prolonged" is after all "the ice was our prime matter," where the "our," premised on a creation myth, refers by potential to humankind, and only by hint to a small community within the kind.

way (line 2)

One does *take one's way*, though, and it is *on the way into the city* where *we take all our time*. To take one's way

is to journey or set out on a journey. *We take all our time* echoes *we take our way*: I want to correct *all our time* and it is revealed as part-proxy for *our way*. The Christian structure of the Fall haunts this echo, in the final two lines of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, "They hand in hand with wandering steps and slow, | Through Eden took their solitary way." (John Milton, *Paradise Lost* ed. by Alastair Fowler [1998, Harlow; second edition], Book XII, ll. 648-49.) This "solitary way" is in some senses an "illimitable walk" (Wordsworth *The Prelude* [1805], Book VII, l. 159) but, of course, it is only "illimitable" until the Second Coming, Judgment Day; by this I mean it is a "way" that could be understood as *all our time*. The meaning of the English word *way* has been influenced by the Latin *via*, meaning road (*OED* 4: *way*, n.1). It derives from the Old English *weg*, meaning to move, journey, carry (perhaps carrying a burden in Milton). *On the way into the city* implies a marked road, and in fact *way* seems to be synonymous with *road* (l. 4). But in its relation to *all our time*, *way* becomes a distinct act of journeying: a journey can be measured by time, while a road is measured by distance. We are on our way and also on a road. The *way* here may then, also, be a variety of "illimitable walk," if it is *all our time*. Alastair Fowler notes that Milton draws on *Psalms*, 107:4, "They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in." Milton's Adam and Eve leave Eden, which might be read with the *Psalms* in mind as a city left or a city never to be reached again by them. But the *way* in Prynne, even if it is not a direct road as it first appears, leads *into the city*. If the solitary way in Milton is what is taken *from Paradise*, is *the way into the city* perhaps *to Paradise*, i.e. is *the city* death, which it takes *all our time* to reach, for *all our time* is our very lifespan?

I	<p>wish instead that the whole federate agency would turn out into and across the land. (lines 31-34)</p>
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A *federate agency* sounds like a government department in the US, and though it is not this we

cannot help overhearing a real institution. To be *federate* is to be joined in league, but the term has a particular reference as a translation of the French term *fédéré*, meaning "[a] member of one of the armed associations formed during the first French Revolution, or during the Hundred Days in 1815, or a member of the Commune in

1871” (*OED* 1: *federate*, a. and n., B.2). *The whole federate agency* is either an embodied community of these revolutionary figures, or an institutionalized league. If *the city* is a community of citizens, with a view to an ideal community, *the whole federate agency* grounds the concept of a city in the poem within a community. Accordingly, the answer to my last question must be ‘no’. It could be ‘yes’ as well, but *the city* is not only death or the afterlife. Though *the way* may not be a road, there is a *road* and so a physical city or living community as the goal of *the way* remains a potent concept.

<p style="text-align: right;">and the sky as yet only partly written over; (lines 2-3)</p>
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Compare the young Gyorgy Lukács: “No light radiates any longer from within into the world of

events, into its vast complexity to which the soul is a stranger. And who can tell whether the fitness of the action to the essential nature of the subject – the only guide that still remains – really touches upon the essence, when the subject has become a phenomenon, an object unto itself; when his innermost and most particular essential nature appears to him only as a never-ceasing demand written upon the imaginary sky of that which ‘should be.’” (Gyorgy Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel* trans. by Anna Bostock [London, 1971; first published in German in 1920], pp. 36-37.) To write over the sky is the dramatic act of the homeless consciousness, inventing a utopian world through the denial of life as it is and continually rewriting the word of this utopia’s law by graffiti: this is how Lukács’ objectified subject finds itself wanting to be, and so it cannot judge its actions in the world it really lives in. That *the sky* has *only* been *partly written over* may suggest gratitude or small pleasure that no more has been *written over*: writing out all of the real world (for there is a real sky for Prynne) is what *Still there is much to be done* warns against and draws the speculated abstract utopians back from. But as much as *the sky as yet only partly written over* may be an abstraction of the soul warned against, it may also be the urban development of a city. Skyscrapers and other tall buildings are referred to as a city’s sky-line; to pun on the sky-line as a form of writing does not seem unlikely, though banal. Compare Wordsworth: “Once again | Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs, | Which [...] connect | The landscape with the quiet of the sky” (“Tintern Abbey”, ll. 4-8). In Wordsworth, how things are, when beheld, impresses thoughts of balance, harmony and tranquility. In

Prynne, *the sky* stands, at least for the moment, for the future, which is either abstractly possessed by the solitary or gradually developed into by an urban community.

the sky is our eternal city and the whole beautiful & luminous trance (lines 39-40)

In “Numbers in Time of Trouble,” in *Kitchen Poems*, Prynne describes four cities, the last of which seems to connect to this *eternal city* (*Poems*, pp. 17-18): “we cannot | yet see the other side. But we deserve to, and | if we can see thus far, these are the few | outer lights of the city, burning on the horizon.” This developmental progression from city to city allows us to both move forward and always be at home, in the inalienable, current city, but this is not the case in “Charm Against Too Many Apples.” Two cities are posited, or one city is doubled, in this poem, a real and an ideal, but neither is reached or finished. *The sky* (as heavenly vault or firmament) is what will always border the earth I live on, no matter how high we build. *The city* I read as that which I am on the edge of: it is that which can be reached or produced by the physical exertions I know I am capable of and it is simultaneously the limit of my imagination. It is the horizon of the real and the ideal, in dialectical relation: “We are at the edge of all that” (“Bronze Fish” in *Poems*, p. 57). We are not alienated from *the city* but nor are we in it. It is what we know we can practically do but also the patient endurance of unlimited idealism.

While Adam and Eve are cast out from Paradise, they have some consolation. Eve says to Adam:

In me is no delay; with thee to go,
Is to stay here; without thee here to stay,
Is to go hence unwilling; thou to me
Art all things under heaven, all places thou,
Who for my willful crime art banished hence.

(*Paradise Lost*, Book XII, ll. 615-19.) Paradise has already been lost to them through the Fall, but they remain the homes of each other. For Milton, Paradise is the ideal home, but after the Fall, “all things” “all places” are contained in other humans, so that we may be at home

with them, “till one greater man | Restore us, and regain the blissful seat” (Book I, ll. 4-5). For Wordsworth in “Tintern Abbey,” by the blessings of Nature we may be led “From joy to joy” (l. 126). By remembering the sights of Nature, “with an eye made quiet by the power | Of harmony, and the deep power of joy, | We see into the life of things” (ll. 48-50). We might discover in what we encounter everyday “a sense sublime,” as it “rolls through all things” (ll. 96, 103), but we may not always be able to, so Wordsworth instructs Dorothy that her memory shall be her home:

[...] when thy mind
 Shall be a mansion for all lovely forms,
 Thy memory be as a dwelling place
 For all sweet sounds and harmonies; Oh! then,
 If solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief,
 Should be thy portion, with what healing thoughts
 Of tender joy wilt thou remember me,
 And these my exhortation!

(ll. 140-47.) The experience I am calling being at home is always available for Wordsworth, but not always achievable, though we may take it with us in memory. For most, it is located in specific places, but “chosen minds [...] take it with them hence, where’er they go [...] Perfect Contentment, Unity entire” (Wordsworth, “Home at Grasmere,” ll. 140-51). These “chosen minds” are the wanderer figures of many of Wordsworth’s poems, including the hermit of “Tintern Abbey.” These figures have no need for direction, while others may measure themselves by proximity as they move to and from their “Centre” – which for Wordsworth in the 1800s was Grasmere (“Home at Grasmere,” l. 148). In “Charm Against Too Many Apples,” *the city* is always beyond me, and I must always move according to direction, toward the specific limits of achievement, my own horizon. *The city* is the edge and future, and though it is ‘where we go’ (l. 5), it is by no means where we get to. Home, *the city*, for Prynne in this poem, is neither somewhere always available, as it is for Wordsworth, nor, as for Milton, somewhere we possess within us in compensatory form until redemption.

<p>the smoke spreading across into the upper air. (lines 41-42)</p>

These lines draw upon another

“Tintern Abbey” response, and also on a response to this poem in turn, and the memory is mediated. In the first instance, “The sluggish smoke curls up from some deep dell” and moves “With as uncertain purpose and slow deed, | As its half-wakened master by the hearth,” a changed version of Wordsworth’s smoke which moves “With some uncertain notice,” from a cave (perhaps) and not a hearth. This poem, by Henry David Thoreau, concludes:

First in the dusky dawn he sends abroad
His early scout, his emissary, smoke,
The earliest, latest pilgrim from the roof,
To feel the frosty air, inform the day;
And while he crouches still beside the hearth,
Nor musters courage to unbar the door,
It has gone down the glen with the light wind,
And o’er the plain unfurled its venturous wreath,
Draped the tree tops, loitered upon the hill,
And warmed the pinions of the early bird;
And now, perchance, high in the crispy air,
Has caught sight of the day o’er the earth’s edge,
And greets its master’s eye at his low door,
As some refulgent cloud in the upper sky.

(Henry David Thoreau, “The Sluggish Smoke Curls Up From Some Deep Dell” in *Collected Poems* ed. by Carl Bode [Baltimore, M.D., 1964], p. 13.) The smoke is, for Thoreau, what is beyond the man, what he could be. Wallace Stevens writes:

It makes so little difference, at so much more
Than seventy, where one looks, one has been there before.

Wood-smoke rises through trees, is caught in an upper flow
Of air and whirled away. But it has often been so.

(Wallace Stevens, “Long and Sluggish Lines” in *The Collected Poems* [New York, N.Y., 1990; first published 1954], p. 522.) Stevens alters Thoreau’s “the upper sky” to “an upper flow | Of air,” between which two Prynne finds a middle ground, *across into the upper air*. Compare Dorn: “the clouds | are drifting up on the breeze | their darkening undersides | the ballast | of a change” (“There was a Change” in *The Newly Fallen*, p. 30).

Flame is only
just invisible in sunlight
(lines 7-8)

The poetical smoke of “Tintern Abbey” is the marker of achieved trans-

cendence: “The Hermit of ‘Tintern Abbey’ is an image of transcendence: he sits by his fire, the symbol, probably, for the pure or imageless vision – the ultimate end of the greater and partially unavowed journey Wordsworth makes into the chosen vale and to his ‘hermitage’” (Hartman, *The Unmediated Vision*, p. 34). The *flame* in “Charm Against Too Many Apples,” though, is not pure. Rather, it is both otherworldly and worldly simultaneously. At night, when the rest of the world (most obviously the so-called natural) could potentially be *invisible* in the darkness, I know all too well that I will see the *flame* clearly.

the sky is our eternal
city and the whole beautiful & luminous trance
of it is the smoke spreading
across into the upper air.
(lines 39-42)

In Thoreau’s “The Sluggish Smoke,” as the man follows the smoke out of his house to begin his day, it moves to the “earth’s edge” into the “upper sky.” It marks the limit of where the man can go, and where he should find the “courage” to follow it (and himself, since it is the emissary of *him*). In “Charm Against Too Many Apples” *the smoke spreads across into the upper air*. Why *air*, rather than sky? Stevens’ “flow | Of air” describes how the smoke disappears in something which it isn’t but something which it can be dispersed in. *Smoke* would blot out *the sky*, perhaps, *spreading across* without *spreading into*. The sky is the furthest configured surface, the heavens: clouds may be *the sky* and clouds may also move *across* it. The air may be that which is between *the smoke* and *the sky, our eternal city*. But *sky*, as we mean it, derives from a word that meant cloud or shadow (*OED* 1: *sky*, n.¹); above the clouds, there is *air*, above the *air*, space. *The sky is our eternal city*, that which is unquestionably the horizon of our imagination and capacity, is true in the sense of furthest configured

surface or heaven (cf. ‘the sky’s the limit’, *sky*, n.¹ 3.d); in the sense of cloud, *the sky* is right now *our eternal city*: we are not beyond them yet. Compare Thoreau, “If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put foundations under them”; “The purity men love is like the mists which envelop the earth, and not like the azure ether beyond”; and “Shall we with pains erect a heaven of blue glass over ourselves, though when it is done we shall be sure to gaze at the true ethereal heaven far above, as if the former were not?” (Henry David Thoreau, *Walden: or, Life in the Woods* [New York, N.Y., 1991], pp. 260-62.)

The smoke is a *trance of our eternal city*. I read the *trance* as an intermediate state between sleeping and waking: it is part life and part dream, a dialectic of practical reality and the imagination as I conceive of *our eternal city*. *The smoke* is as such a metaphor for thought; *the flame* which produces it looks like some sort of divine soul. But it is also an intimation, a shadowing forth of what we must relinquish as beyond this dialectic: *our eternal city* is not only what is on our own horizon, but also the utopian vision we are instructed to restrain. The smoke is a shadow of the sky, which is itself a shadow of the heavens. Compare Stevens, in “Long and Sluggish Lines,” who uses a trance-like state in what seems to be a description of utopian longing, and what seems to be directed at Wordsworth: “... Wanderer, this is the pre-history of February. | The life of the poem in the mind has not yet begun. | You were not born yet when the trees were crystal | Nor are you now, in this wakefulness inside a sleep.” Compare Hartman: “We glimpse a universal paradox inherent in the human and poetic imagination: it cannot be, at the same time, true to nature and true to itself. If it is true to the external world, it must suspend all will toward relational knowledge; if it is true to itself, it must alter the external world by an action of the creative or moral will. The first leads to imbecility or mysticism, the second to artifice or sophistry; both spell the end of art” (*The Unmediated Vision*, p. 8).

<p>We even pick up the fallen fruit on the road frightened by the layout of so much <i>fallen</i>, the chances we know strewn on the warm gravel. (lines 17-21)</p>

I am quick enough to gloss *fruit* as *apples*, to cross temporal and spatial boundaries and misplace and read the Old English genre as a mistranslated moral from another myth fount: Atlanta, picking up the golden apples dropped by Hippomenes, thus losing the race against him, bound to marry him. Do the italicized *fallen* apples mirror her new *fallen* state: not in the Christian sense, but in the sense of losing her freedom to be a huntress, now part of a social norm? Compare Heidegger: “‘Fallenness’ into the ‘world’ means an absorption in Being-with-one-another [...] a quite distinctive kind of Being-in-the-world – the kind which is completely fascinated by the ‘world’ and by the Dasein-with of Others in the ‘they’” (*Being and Time*, p. 220). There is no reason to read so specifically here. These *fallen* are *fruit*, they are not *apples*. The *apples* demand specific tests of interpretation, while *fruit* refuses these tests as it refuses *apples*.

Peter Middleton is right to read this poem as skeptical (skeptical, Middleton argues, of “[t]he will to knowledge of modern science and industrialisation”), but he is wrong to read it as determined skepticism, moving knowingly from *much to be done* to *nothing* (Peter Middleton, “Thoughts on ‘Charm Against Too Many Apples’” *Quid* 17: *For J.H. Prynne* [24th June 2006], 8-10). The phrase “form of knowledge” (l. 36) for instance may well be in total earnest. It is a phrase that recurs through Prynne’s writing, most recently in Prynne’s Morag Morris Poetry Lecture at the University of Surrey on Edmund Blunden, given on October 8th 2009. The phrase appears slightly altered, with the gerund “knowing” replacing “knowledge”, in “English Poetry and Emphatical Language”: “[T]he paradox of making and unmaking discloses a bitter, dignified amazement, one that prompts a sudden, deep contradiction of feeling which is itself a form of knowing, as it was for Gloucester whose sight had been so cruelly unmade that he could see only feelingly.” (J.H. Prynne, “English Poetry and Emphatical Language,” *Proceedings of the British Academy* 74 [1988], 135-69 [150-51].) This “form of knowledge” seems to involve, follow from or even be the destruction of certain

hierarchies or institutions, perhaps in a proxy flood of “circling motion” [l. 35], achieved by human action. That “we | would rest in it” is not to be immediately equated with a comedy of negative judgment. *Rest* correlates to the emphatic *still* of the first line. It is not the language of indolence, but of patience. Patience requires of longing a willingness to *rest* when *nothing remains to be done* then and there, and to *rest* may also mean “To remain, be left, still undestroyed” (*OED* 7: *rest*, v.²); what *rests* may also remain to be done (cf. “But fallen he is, and now | What rests, but that the mortal sentence pass | On his transgression, death denounced that day,” *Paradise Lost*, Book X, ll. 47-49). An analysis of the *fruit* would be carried out from mere curiosity. The line break and space between *road* and *frightened* is a temporal break with an interpretive shift marked by the now emphatic *fallen*, turned to a distinct vagueness of reference, while curiosity is turned to fear. The *fruit* ceases to be an interest in itself; the *fallen* have become a structure defined by relation to a former condition, a structure, the particularities of which are indifferent, but which by its presence frightens us. *Chances we know* are *strewn* on the gravel: does this provoke fear, that the layout reveals itself as without intention, or, is it that, though scattered, a layout has been produced, an omen that frightens us? The tongue sings that we are either afraid of being without that thing *meaning* or afraid of determinism. The reasoning each fear construes amounts to the knowledge that I will die. It is the inconstancy of the conditions for human life and of my human body that the sentence which follows witnesses, “Knowing that warmth is not a permanence” (“Charm...” ll. 21-22)."

But vagueness can be specific (see Keston Sutherland, “Vagueness, Poetry” *Quid* 7c [2001], 11-18), and it is here specific by reference. However, it might be worthwhile specifying our terminology here, and switch from vagueness to ambiguity. The poem which Prynne draws on in these lines is one of the most remarkable poems of the 1960s:

If It Should Ever Come

And we are all there together
time will wave as willows do
and adios will be truly, yes,

laughing at what is forgotten
and talking of what's new
admiring the roses you brought.
How sad.

You didn't know you were at the end
thought it was your bright pear
the earth, yes

another affair to have been kept
and gazed back on
when you had slept
to have been stored
as a squirrel will a nut, and half
forgotten,
there were so many, many
from the newly fallen.

(Edward Dorn, "If it should ever come" in *The Newly Fallen*, p. 31.) Prynne has *much* for 'many' and his *fallen* are not 'newly' so. Saying their farewells to time with good manners, the speakers who have greeted this 'it' recognize either the messiah or death. Quickly enough we interpret the 'fallen', but they are nuts, and the year moves on and time is not over. Messianics and utopianism are the central discourse of *The Newly Fallen* in the thinking patterns and speech rhythms of a community at the economic margins of America. I would like to compare this poem and the Prynne passage to a text Dorn might not have read at this point, but which Prynne probably had read:

Everyone is acquainted with what is up for discussion and what occurs, and everyone discusses it; but everyone also knows already how to talk about what has to happen first – about what is not yet up for discussion but 'really' must be done. [...] But when Dasein goes in for something in the reticence of carrying it through or even of genuinely breaking down on it, its time is a different time and, as seen by the public, an essentially slower time than that of idle talk, which 'lives at a faster rate'. Idle talk will thus long since have gone on to something else which is currently the very newest thing. [...] In the ambiguity of the way things have been publicly interpreted, talking

about things ahead of the game and making surmises about them curiously, gets passed off as what is really happening, while taking action and carrying something through get stamped as something merely subsequent and unimportant.

(Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp. 217-18.) This passage of Heidegger is entitled “Ambiguity.” It is this speaking of ‘the very newest thing’ that Dorn diagnoses with such pathos, mournfully ventriloquising the equivocating language and side-stepping engineering which is requisite in a discussion of the newest, both conceivable and inconceivable, thing: termed variously utopia, the end of time, the Second Coming. Prynne’s *fallen fruit* touches on this same ambiguity: a curiosity which we allow to write over what “must be done,” but which is not yet up for discussion as not genuinely in view. To discuss what is “really happening” one must refuse to surmise about what is beyond the edge. Here, too, Prynne is restrained, with all the force of decision. The same voices are acknowledged by Prynne as by Dorn, but Prynne refuses pathos. He struggles against these voices and determinedly presents their reliance on what they reject as “subsequent and unimportant” being done by others; for their (our) response to the inconstancy of the conditions for human life runs “ah we count | on what is still to be done and the keen | little joys of leaves & fruit still hanging up | on their trees” (“Charm...” ll. 22-25). Prynne knows from Dorn why some of these voices are as they are, but he decides here that he must put aside this knowledge. These may even be the same excited voices to whom he responds *Still there is much to be done*. But Prynne has decided that he must be a particular sort of poet – a poet unlike the one Dorn was in the 1960s: one who must restrain pathos and the urge to take up the voices of the disenfranchised. Otherwise, his spoken tones would be those which he cannot claim to be his own and they would lean toward exaggeration, as imagination attempted to close the relational gap. We can compare this with what Prynne knew Wordsworth would have known about the inhabitants of Tintern Abbey and the cause of the smoke he saw rising from the trees:

It is a curious fact that nowhere in the poem does Wordsworth mention Tintern Abbey itself, though we know that he must have admired it, for they returned from Chepstow to spend a second night there. Gilpin describes

its condition; the grass in the ruins was kept mown, but it was the dwelling-place of beggars and the wretchedly poor. The river was then full of shipping, carrying coal and timber from the Forest of Dead.

(Mary Moorman, *William Wordsworth: The Early Years, 1770-1803* [Oxford, 1968; first published 1957], pp. 402-403.)

Many of the furnaces, on the banks of the river, consume charcoal, which is manufactured on the spot; and the smoke, which is frequently seen issuing from the sides of the hills; and spreading its thin veil over a part of them, beautifully breaks their lines, and unites them with the sky.

(William Gilpin, *Tour of the Wye* [1771], cited by Moorman, *The Early Years*, p. 402 n. Moorman notes that the Wordsworths took this book with them on the walking tour during which Wordsworth wrote “Tintern Abbey.”) Wordsworth did not write about abject poverty and rapid industrialization in “Tintern Abbey” not because he considered them unimportant, nor because he valued the aesthetic over human suffering, but because he made a decision that this was not his ethical role in this poem. (Cf. Prynne on Wordsworth’s “The Solitary Reaper” in *Field Notes: ‘The Solitary Reaper’ and Others* [Cambridge, 2007], pp. 25-26.) Prynne relinquishes all claims to relational knowledge concerning the *flame* and *smoke*: we are in the forest, sure, but in such obscure geography we do not speculate if the flame belongs to one of us, to those others that we know of, or to vague figures produced by our politics and philosophy.

The sort of poet that Prynne decided to be was one who must endure the refusal of pathos and the cost of isolation this entails, in order to patiently reveal, and return to, in and as a practice, that which is dialectical. (Dorn would encounter isolation, too, but for him this was the risk that had to be endured for the sake of pathos, at least for a while.) The argumentative pressure, which this frame supports in “Charm Against Too Many Apples,” perhaps premising on time what Olson premised on geography, amounts to a demand to go further and do so by the mutual dominations of practice and thought, careful to refuse the desire which is not real desire to predict ourselves. For “What we bring off is | ours by a slip of excitement” (ll. 38-39). But

what is the difference between predicting ourselves by speculation beyond the edge and compulsive repetition and inconsequence? If we insist on predicting where we go, then if we do go there, we only return to our own abstraction unless we relinquish our initial prediction. As such, we would refuse the knowledge that doing is, and refuse ourselves the fact that things do change, valuing instead only abstraction under the name of insight and the immutability of this type of thought that displaces the real life we live and die in. Compare Thoreau: “A man can hardly be said to be *there*, if he *knows* that he is there, or to go there if he knows where he is going. The man who is bent upon his work is frequently in the best attitude to observe what is irrelevant to his work.” (Henry David Thoreau, *Autumn: From the Journal of Henry David Thoreau* Vol. VII [Boston, M.A., 1892], p. 293.) “I find it to be the height of wisdom not to endeavor to oversee myself, and live a life of prudence and common-sense, but to see over and above myself, entertain sublime conjectures, to make myself the thoroughfare of thrilling thoughts, live all that can be lived” (Thoreau, *Autumn*, p. 317).

CONCLUSION: A PERSONAL NOTE ON PROSODY

How can anyone hope,
to accomplish what he wants so much not
finally to part with.
(lines 15-17)

The falling rhythm of *How can anyone* breaks at the point of both its continuance and its

match in the fulfillment of the despondent tone: *hope* would be the next beat in this rhythm, to be followed by one or two offbeats, and is the rejected object of the melancholy question ‘How can anyone hope?’ But neither does the rhythm continue nor do I complete the question. Instead, there is a comma and I pause at the word *hope*. I first thought about these lines in December 2008, and they stuck with me then and stick with me now. When I go for walks around where I live, I often find myself saying them aloud; phrases from this sentence come into my head during conversation and I sometimes recall the whole sentence when I am sad. In December 2008, I read that comma after *hope* as the mark of hesitation inherent in *hope* itself. If I can hope my life will get better, then I may stop myself taking drastic measures to immediately change how it is. I was living in America at the time, Obama had just been elected, and since early November the language

of *hope* seemed to me contentless among many of the middle- and upper-class New Englanders I had been bumping into. (Their lives, after all, were going to remain comfortable in the same way, and, from their views, a little more morally grounded, as they were happy with their new president.) After the despondent tone and rhythm, and the break from this rhythm and also from sense at the comma (as the expected question mark is not there; nor is the direction-focusing 'hope for this particular thing') I find myself separating the sense from the rhythm. *To accomplish what he wants so much not finally to part with* I read in December 2008 as a comment on the joy which hope itself brings, as surrogate for the good thing desired: when I have achieved what I hoped for, I will be forced to relinquish all the joy (and reason to go on) that that hope has given me. To hope for something, it seemed to me, would provide me with every reason not to try and achieve it. The rhythm of *to accomplish what he wants so much not finally to part with* I read as a return to a rising rhythm. I elided *to a-* into a single syllable and stressed the *-ly* of *finally*. It then reads as six iambs with an extra syllable at the end, returning me to the sentence structure. This rhythm was to me then the enactment of going on, the forward rhythm that refused *hope*, . It broke through the pentameter, broke through a line break, leaving only *with* to return us to the sentence which this rhythm had, for me, overrun. Now, a year later, in December 2009, I do not read these lines in the same way. *How can anyone hope, to accomplish what he wants so much not finally to part with* I think implores us to continue to hope whilst recognizing that, when we do, we are not only bound to part with this hope once it is realized, but are also bound to, eventually, part with our accomplishments, with all our life as it is and as we want it. Things will change. I will die. I hear the same imploring tone in "Try doing it now," the final line of Prynne's 2006 sequence *To Pollen*. When I read *to a-* I find that I am able to hear simultaneously these sounds as both distinct syllables and as elided also into one syllable. The poem allows me the passion of meter here without it having precluded the passion of the sense. But I confront a decision in the word *finally*. To pronounce and hear the meter here, I have to reject the sense: the last syllable of *finally* is not stressed when I use it general conversation or when I begin a paragraph in an essay with it. I have a choice to make: whether to leave the sense behind, abstract the rhythm from it (Coleridge might say *distill*) and acknowledge it only as a starting point, whilst I derive pleasure from the passion of meter; or to not do this. I can aestheticize the line as I repeat it to myself, and enjoy a

moment of lyric flight. It is ridiculous to put this in terms of a choice, though; after all, can I really have much to gain or lose? However, if I refuse the passion of meter, and pay attention to the words I repeat to myself, I cannot exactly say ‘I think about death’ because I do not come to terms with it, but I do think about finality. In December 2009, I think about how even more ridiculous than taking these lines seriously it is to think unquestionably about eternal continuation. Perhaps what I mean is, when I think about these lines, what is more ridiculous than taking them seriously is not taking them seriously.

