Book Section:
Piette, A.C. (2017) 'my soldiers': F.T. Prince and the Sweetness of Command. In: May, W., (ed.) Reading F. T. Prince. Liverpool University Press , Liverpool . ISBN 9781781383339

‘my soldiers’: F.T. Prince and the Sweetness of Command

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Modernist dramatic monologues drew from Browning and Tennyson the accents of self-involved, quasi-hysterical poetry dramatized as symptom of decadent or philistine culture. Browning’s Caliban, Andrea del Sarto, Sordello, and Fra Lippo Lippi (once we translate them back into contemporary concerns) represent versions of the post-Romantic poet locked into conventions that have lost purchase,[1] sensing new power relations in a secular age, yet subject to the superstitions written into the vocal resources at their command. Tennyson’s Ulysses, Oenone, Tithonus and the *Maud* persona speak to other forms of post-Romantic aesthetic anguish, a beleaguered sense of the poet as feminized, marginalized, so belated as to inhabit zones of being quite other to culture, powerless unless creatively on the move beyond this world. Pound and Eliot adopted the Victorian dramatic monologue as most radically challenging Victorian cultural norms, enabling a spirited post-Victorian aesthetic seeking both to satirize the anaemic, servile and redundant subject positions available to the artist as with ‘Prufrock’ or ‘Mauberley’, or to ground more virile Nietzschean personae as with Pound’s vocalizing of tough intellectual and hedonist troubadours, or Eliot’s exploration of the prophetic voice in *The Waste Land*. The choice between satirical weakling or art superman seems dependent on relations with an idea of apocalyptic or merely brutal politics. With the political turn of the 1930s as national cultures in Europe fell under the spell of Soviet communism and Italian and German fascism, modernist poets sought out the resources again of the dramatic monologue with a more considered and Browningesque exploration of the relations of art to power (implicit in

[1] ‘Prince, unusually for his era, seems to me a poet both supremely conscious of the conventions within which he presents a given poem as operating, and determined never to mock or undermine those conventions through irony.’ (Mark Ford, 33)

Tennyson too, if only in Oenone's intuition of Cassandra's sensing of warrior violence at the heart of cultural fears: 'a sound/ Rings ever in her ears of armed men'.[2] Pound took his personae and wove them into increasingly belligerent and bellicose performances in the Cantos, sensing the need to make alliances with a triumphalist fascism through impersonation by fragmentary quotation from comparably cruel and aesthetically virile cultures from the past, Confucian China, Guido's Italy. Eliot more cautiously gauged the measure of the new militarism with his broken monologues, 'Coriolan', 'Triumphal March', 'Difficulties of a Statesman' and 'Fragment of an Agon'. They blend menace and dark wit with a certain deliberately crazed and facile rhetoric of display, and rhyme oddly with the more overtly political poems by Auden which combined psychoanalytic and para-fascist posturing in an English consumed by the folk purities and violences being courted at the edge of reason. I would like to look at F.T. Prince's dramatic monologues of the 1930s collection, *Poems*, to test their political and aesthetic virtue in the light of this modernist political turn to the dramatic monologue – partly as a response to Geoffrey Hill's important assessment of them in the *PN Review* in 2002.[3] I will then turn to consideration of 'Soldiers Bathing', again in response to Hill's critique of its 'communing'. I'd like to argue that the poem is insufficiently understood as potentially dramatic and monologic and ought to be read with the political monologues of *Poems* in mind – doing so helps discover Prince's sense of the effect of the war on the relations between poetry and power, specifically the ways in which command over one's lines alters once command over killable bodies is assumed. Recognition of that change forces on our postwar consciousness acknowledgement of the limitations of a personae-constructed poetry, and of the need for a more precariously ethical, symptomatic and dramatized stance, that of the poet speaking truth about the temptations of power.

[2] 'Oenone', in *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Longmans, Green, 1969), ll. 260-1.
[3] Geoffrey Hill, 'Il Cortegiano: F.T. Prince's Poems (1938)'. Hill wrote to Prince about his sense of his affinity with his work: 'Our work already has a relationship, in being set apart from most poetry that holds the place of worldly power in our age' (1970 letter in Prince archive at Southampton, quoted by William May, p. 88).

The poems Prince writes in the 1930s collected in *Poems* ponder, in various forms, the menace and predicament of voices at moments of pause at some remove from the tyrannical action and corruption of the courts of power. This is most clearly the case in 'An Epistle to a Patron', which takes the relations of a Da Vinci artist/architect with his putative patron as paradigmatic of the political form of the weak, servile and marginalized subject position of the Victorian/high modernist dramatic monologue. The rhetoric of the poems is itself offered as tribute to the man of power, its glozing flatteries and intricacies of syntax a gift to the tyrant as if to say I treat you as my superior even in the realm I excel in, the realm of word and crafted image. The poem has been rightly keyed into its times, by Sean Pryor to the indecision and servilities of Munich, to a Goebbels-defined aesthetics by Geoffrey Hill: 'imagine the fictive "An Epistle to a Patron" as being written by the equivalent of Hans Pfitzner or Richard Strauss, or Furtwängler, or Paul Hindemith, to a patron resembling Goebbels' (Hill, p. 28). Han Pfitzner famously courted the Nazis during the 1930s, who treated him with some content due to rumours he was half Jewish and his friendship with Jewish musicians, etc.; and he ended up mentally ill and isolated towards the end of the war. It is nasty compromise stories such as these that flitter through the excessive, slick and backsliding lines. What the poem sets up, too, is something of an analogy between the patron's brutal power and love of luxuries and delicacies that only gifted craftsmen and artists could provide and the artist's own predilections. Based on the long and for the most part futile letters sent to patrons by Da Vinci, the poem stages the artist tempting the man of power to enter into a shapely and exquisitely well-made environment. That environment is a verbal and textual one too: the poem's delicacies and luxuriousness of phrase give savour of the more concrete art-works being offered up for sale:

Firm sets of pure bare members which will rise, hanging together
Like an argument, with beams, ties and sistering pilasters:
The lintels and windows with mouldings as round as a girl's chin; thresholds
To libraries; halls that cannot be entered without a sensation as of myrrh
By your vermilion officers, your sages and dancers.[4]

It is an erotic offering, the buildings conceived as naked bodies to be consumed by the all-powerful gaze; 'as a girl's chin' and 'sistering' sketching slave harem, the myrrh sensation purring of the gift of kings to Christ, 'vermilion' adding the tonality of decadence, sexualized-Ruskinian gorgeousness, combining millions with minions with a hint of blood-letting.[5] That erotic seduction is expressed *as* art rather than by means of art: for the pilasters and mouldings are shaped 'like an argument', ie combine aesthetic fit and oratorical/philosophical shape and persuasiveness. The erotic gift of myrrh is Da Vinci's, though, implying the artist as king: secretly it is Da Vinci's pride and sense of himself as kingly artist that runs alongside the servility – this emerges most radically towards the end of the poem, where the speaker admits he has let his mask slip and revealed his game: 'For my pride puts all in doubt' (p. 16). The epistle hints that tyrant and artist have equal status, especially when it comes to command over material. The tyrant has power over his subjects, vassals, parasites, to the point of ownership: 'your vermilion officers, your sages and dancers'. That is matched by the artist's power over his raw material: 'You should understand that I have plotted, / Being in command of all the ordinary engines / Of defence and offence' (p. 13). Like Da Vinci's experiments in the design of siege machines, the artist can offer to improve the tyrant's war making: but in terms of the poem itself, Prince hints at filiation between mastery of technique and the writer's command over

[4] F.T. Prince, 'An Epistle to a Patron', *Collected Poems*, 13-16 (p. 13).
[5] Cf Ruskin's footnote on Giorgone in the 'Hesperid Aegle' chapter in vol. 7 of *Modern Painters*: 'impression that the ground of the flesh in these Giorgione frescoes had been pure vermilion.'

rhetorical tricks of persuasion, offensive and defensive. The military nature of command is not raised overtly here, except in the next sentence's correlation between the 'war-like elegance' of his structures and the tyrant's power ('your nature is to vanquish'). Power to command officers, sages and dancers is brought into proud relation with the artist-architect's command over words, the 'ordinary engines' that make up the 'civil structure' of language.

The epistle begins to break down, as I have proposed already, when the writer's mask of servility begins to slip to reveal the righteous pride of the artist in his power as maker. That starts to happen when the Da Vinci persona strains against the obsequious role through the image of the lord's horses with their long backs 'seductive and rebellious to saddles' (p. 14) – which points to that other key poem of *Poems*, 'To a Man on his Horse', where the I-voice combines utterly servile abasement (he wishes to become the lord's horse's groom) with spirited satire (he prefers the horse to the aristocrat), mixes both in the positing of a sensual mastery over, and homoerotic relishing of, the lord's power as 'sweetness': 'And so his smouldering body comb / In a simple and indecorous sweetness'.[6] What breaks decorum is the sexual desire shaping the aesthetic appreciation of the creatures owned by the lord: the 'sweetness' may be being generated either by the lord's command over the horse, or by the artist observer hired to celebrate power ravishing the slave creature from its master in the name of art.

The mixed tone of seductive inferiority and rebellious pride in 'An Epistle' bursts forth in the extraordinary lines on light, strainedly combined with the 'fortresses' the architect promises to build for the lord:

[6] 'To a Man on his Horse', *Collected Poems*, p. 17.

And barracks, fortresses, in need of no vest save light, light
That to me is breath, food and drink, I live by effects of light, I live
To catch it, to break it, as an orator plays off
Against each other and his theme his casual gems, and so with light,
Twisted in strings, plucked, crossed or knotted or crumbled
As it may be allowed to be by leaves,
Or clanged back by lakes and rocks or otherwise beaten,
Or else spilt and spread like a feast of honey, dripping
Through delightful voids and creeping along long fractures, brimming
Carved canals, bowls and lachrymatories with pearls: all this the work
Of now advancing, now withdrawing faces, whose use I know. (p. 14)

The oratory, as Geoffrey Hill and Andrew Duncan have argued (this is Todd Swift's point in his thesis), is self-reflexively weighed in the balance in these lines. Syntactical complexity is given similitude in the architect-artist's transformation of light: 'Twisted in strings, plucked, crossed or knotted', a properly Browningesque line that alludes to the knottedness of his dramatic monologues, the self-involvement of the I-voice entrenched in the sinuousities and convolutions of its own lexical world. There is violence in the voice ('clanged back to lakes' has a Ransom-like ring), and sweetness too (the feast of honey spilt and spread) to figure the double nature of art's gift to the world: it will sweeten but it will also powerfully imitate in order to reflect back the clanging energies of the military caste and environment. The baroque excess, the aesthetic power over light, the combination of clashing opposites, the emotional torque and scope of the gift: what the artist *knows* rivals the tyrant's political and economic power, for the gift and the knowledge it grants the gifted is

more than oratorical; it smacks of a divine maker, whose plaything is the light of the world. The artist-architect goes on to plead to the lord for freedom through subjection ('I wish for liberty, let me then be tied'), but that paradox does not so much reveal an oratorical shapely contradiction on the tongue as a symptom of his barely concealed struggle against the gesture of servility: 'torn between strength and weakness'. Torn as he is, he reveals the true nature of the bid the epistle secretly makes: to bend tyrannical politics to the will of the artist: 'let what is yours be mine', he makes the mistake of saying. Once he reveals his hand, the real contempt for the Goebbels-patron shows forth: 'your miserly freaks / Your envies, racks and poisons not out of mind / Although not told, since often borne' (p. 15).[7] The sweetness and clanging power of oratory can outwit the tyrant, even in the expression of art's powerlessness and subservience, through the arrogance of its known power over light itself, the light of art as true vision of the world transforming the fortresses of art's structures. Though styling itself as beyond the 'war-like elegance' of a regime-sponsored, state-militarized poetics, and though the artwork is figured as flowering into open rebellious satire ranged against the evil powers at the close, Prince still uses the irony of the dramatic monologue to raise questions about art's ethical purity, however – for here we see the da Vinci persona corrupted by the dream of arrogating to himself the brutal casual command of the tyrant he envies.

'Let what is yours be mine': the contract between art and power is signed with the blood of the tyrant's victims, the luxury of the warlord's palaces tempting the artist to renege on the core pacific, ethical rebelliousness of a dissident making. Other poems from the 1938 collection explore the same territory. 'Chaka' inhabits the voice of an African tyrant, implying a switch from artist to man of power that is significant, as though the lyrical gifts most purely extracted from Prince's repertoire and imagination shoulder the same shameful dream, Yeats as Mussolini-senator, Pound as

[7] The petition, argues Sean Pryor, is 'so very calculated', yet 'knowingly punctuated by insults and ironies' (Pryor, p. 838).

totalitarian voice. 'My soldiers,' Chaka dreamily says, 'My soldiers weep with hurry at my commands',[8] and those commands issue from the palace of power, 'on the most delectable of my hills, / In the sweetest of fastnesses' (p. 47). The sweetness of art's honey-making power to delight is here the aesthetic kick a tyrant might feel at a remove from the bloody actions his commands entail; sweetness as aesthetic effect is under the control of power. As Chaka walks 'in the meadows a sweet steam / Floats up beneath one's foot' (p. 48). The sweetness in the end lies in the art of possession, comparable to the Da Vinci persona's pride in his knowledge, in the gifts he owns. Chaka's proud 'I have made my own' helps structure the pleasures he offers the reader, the pleasure of ownership of human beings ('My soldiers'); the power also to own all sweetness and light, Arnoldian culture cowering beneath his regal foot ('Light bubbled up and trickled to my foot' (p. 49)); the power to tax subjects with a quasi-divine command to adore ('We have dreamed / Of an adorable authority' (p. 51)). 'All these are ours': power *owns* subjects through fear, and owns through voice, too, imperially at a remove from the violence ordered, yet taking pleasure from the imagining of the casual slaughter caused, proof of radical ownership of flesh. There is even pleasure in fabricating the remnant of a guilty conscience and in the suave side-stepping of its difficult questions: the king bathes in the morning ('I have bathed in this solitary water'), bathing as a luxuriating in the warm accents of lazy self-justification ('Which of us can forgive himself?') (p. 50) – a presentation of self that also displays an old man fragility, so key to many of the Prince monologues, here a case of *tactical* fragility.

That combination of self-luxuriating indulgence of artificial feeling, by-product of the exercise of power, with the 'sweet steam' of aesthetic constructs beautifully forced into being crops up in the mysterious and brittle 'The Tears of a Muse in America'. Here the I-voice is no tyrant, but is imagining a new male muse gifted enough to serve the new century dominated by American

[8] 'Chaka', *Collected Poems*, 44-51 (p. 47).

capitalism. Prince's persona is a blend of Henry James and Scott Fitzgerald: and conjures a beautiful staggeringly gifted boy much as Wilde does in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. The boy's intelligence in its various manifestations, the I-voice goes on, 'I am luminously possessed of'.[9] The creature is erotically as well as imaginatively available, 'Waits only for my touch: and there I have him' (p. 20), caught in the light of representation (like the 'beam' and 'flash' of the opening lines that fixes in its glow the boy, 'Imprisoning and expressing him' (p. 19)). The power to express another is also a power to make creatures serve your will, to generate a master-slave sensuality of possessiveness. The final line hints at elegy ('this verse no longer weeps' (p. 22)), and yet this is a perverted elegiac illumination of the lost object of desire. The persona relishes the Arnoldian cultural values enshrined in the beautiful thing ('In the great sweetness of which light'… (p. 21)) only insofar as the boy's use-value as already consumed commodity (the real reason perhaps that the muse must initially be wept for) can somehow, through the art of the poem, be transformed into a commodity and survive the death of his own consumption. The luminous act of possession ('I have seen him clear') commodifies the lost love object as muse in the form of elegiac material to be relished again by the reader as consumer.

It helps, then, to remember the political monologues of *Poems* when reading 'Soldiers Bathing', to see if Hill is right to sense a shift towards confessional communing with this poem. It does not present itself as a monologue in quite the overt way 'An Epistle' does. Nor is it overtly/covertly satirical as with 'Chaka'. And yet many of its key terms are those of the 1930s texts. The presence of several keywords characteristic of *Poems* raises questions about the I-voice in the poem. For instance, the soldier – taken as representative of all the bathing soldiers – tastes the

[9] 'The Tears of a Muse in America', *Collected* Poems, pp. 19-22 (p. 19). Cf. Henry James's Preface to *The Ambassadors*: 'I rejoiced in the promise of a hero so mature, who would give me thereby the more to bite into – since it's only into thickened motive and accumulated character, I think, that the painter of life bites more than a little. My poor friend should have accumulated character, certainly; or rather would be quite naturally and handsomely possessed of it, in the sense that he would have, and would always have felt he had, imagination galore, and that this yet wouldn't have wrecked him. It was immeasurable, the opportunity to "do" a man of imagination' (James, p. 77).

'sweetness of his nakedness'.[10] Is this the same 'sweetness' that we have seen generated by power , consumer greed and patronized art in the 1938 collection, the indecorous sweetness associated with bodies become art objects or groomed creatures for the lordly eye, or the sweetness and light of the lustful gaze on the boy muse? Is the nakedness of the bathing soldier to be brought into relation with the bathing Chaka, luxuriating in the peace won after war's tyrannies? Or with the 'pure bare members' of 'An Epistle'? When the officer looks upon the 'band / Of soldiers who belong to me' (p. 55), should one forget the accents of possessiveness, the sensual mastering delights unmasked in *Poems* that register the magnetic attraction of fascist powers over subjects: Chaka's 'my soldiers', the commodity trader poet of 'The Tears of a Muse in America' and his 'there I have him' (p. 20), the command of both the Borgia patron and Da Vinci artist in 'An Epistle'?

Geoffrey Hill's hunch is that 'Soldiers Bathing' has abandoned the dramatic monologue and signals a turn towards personal communicableness as communing to satisfy a pathos-hungry readership. Yet the connections Prince establishes, through his key words, *between* his poems mean that the situation is more complex: and denser in implication than simple self-reference or self-allusion. What the filiations created by the key word network do is to dramatize the I-voice of the lyrical subject; subversively, we are being asked to entertain the possibility of taking a dim view of the languors, sublimities and outrushing emotiveness of 'Soldiers Bathing'. There is enough here, in terms of allusions to dramatic monologues concerned with art and power, to raise heckles, suspicions; to register in this poem, as with the difficult impersonations of the poems of 1938, what Ashbery defined as the typical Prince poem: 'its conventional surface is striated with uncertainties, mined by shifting, opposing forces'.[11] Todd Swift has analyzed the poem as combining the opposing influences of Eliot and Whitman: 'The key tropes and figures of the poem, then, are either very

[10] 'Soldiers Bathing', *Collected Poems*, pp. 55-57 (p. 55).
[11] PN Review Sept-Oct 2002, 32-33 (p. 33)

much derived from Whitman (soldiers being observed, the beauty of the naked male body, good and evil) or Eliot's "Prufrock" (Michelangelo, discussions of art, sea imagery and, ultimately, a shocking comparison of the evening sky to a body).'[12] This implies an uneasy merger of dramatic monologue ('Prufrock') and Song of Myself communing.

If the keywords point backwards to 1938, they are also part of tendencies that continue forward to the postwar work: especially to the dramatic monologues that are there in the *Soldiers Bathing* and *The Doors of Stone* collections. It is perhaps not quite enough to counter Hill's assertion of a shift towards communing that dramatic monologues continue to be written by Prince way beyond 'Soldiers Bathing'. Even so, it matters that 'Soldiers Bathing' is embedded, as it were, within a collected works texture that is still predominantly dramatic. The reference to Michelangelo's cartoon in 'Soldiers Bathing', where the observer 'I' remembers the clambering limbs and turning heads 'eager for the slaughter, / Forgetful of their bodies that are bare' (p. 55), must surely point to the dramatic monologue 'The Old Age of Michelangelo'.[13] There Michelangelo thinks of the 'lurking nakedness' of the dream bodies in the stone as subject to the 'power with which I imagine'.[14] The bare bodies of 'Soldiers Bathing' must enter into the network through the homoerotic 'pure bare flank' of the turning soul in the dramatic monologue (p. 74).[15] And therefore, by mutual logic, the question of the relation of art to power over vulnerable bodies raised in the monologue ('there is always / Some victor and some vanquished' (p. 74)) carries back into 'Soldiers Bathing'. The officer persona of 'Soldiers Bathing' is older in spirit, one feels, than his charges: and Michelangelo's sense of his own old age – which brings the poem so clearly into connection not only with Prince's other poems on the encounter of old age and young flesh ('Tears of a Muse') but also of course with

[12] *The Forties: A Doctorate in Creative and Critical Writing*, p. 81.
[13] Prince writes 'Soldiers' in 1942, but sent a draft of 'The Old Age of Michelangelo' to Eliot as early as 1947.
[14] 'The Old Age of Michelangelo', *Collected Poems*, 73-79 (p. 73).
[15] Cf. Prince's very early poem 'The Swimmers' (1930), which envisions a Whitmanesque scene of young man bathing.

Eliot's 'Gerontion' and late Yeats – turns art into an ugly tussle between 'tall Victory [and] beaten Age' (p. 74), a militarized body and a marginalized geriatric mind. The division Michelangelo suffers, 'a combat with myself […] I do violence to myself' (p. 75), is, from an aesthetic point of view, a division between body and soul. But once we plug the poem into 'Soldiers Bathing' and allow the two poems to interact, it signals something else: the division between an art mind that relishes command and power over its body-objects according to a militarized relish of the vulnerability of flesh and a loving mind that is rapt by visions of his poor soldiers 'hacked' by war's weaponry. The Michelangelo poem moves on from this to admit that the nakedness of the art object is also a symptom of the artist's dream of himself as lover ('I am naked in that sea of love' (p. 76)) – and this helps with 'Soldiers Bathing' too. The tough militarized artist eye is accompanied, in open contradiction, by the lover and both are represented in the art object: soldier and lover 'packed close in one man's body' (p. 76).

I take it, then, that keying 'Soldiers Bathing' into the network of dramatic monologues in Prince's work does change the ways one hears its lines. The 'strange delight' the observer feels watching his soldiers bathe (p. 57) is neither simply homoerotic (though it is that – the Michelangelo allusion clinches it); nor is it simply religiose (though it is that too, with the soldering of the connection of soldiers to sacrificial victim Christ figures). To dramatize the poem by connecting it to the 1930s and postwar monologues is to render its surfaces more striated and torn between and at times combining strength and weakness (if we take strength to imply an authentic single-featured voice, and weakness to imply a figure open to irony). The effect is to raise the rhetorical question about the reflective, meditative, and artfully communing voice: is the strange delight possibly a delight over bodies that are *owned*? Saying he wishes to 'kiss the wound in thought' lays the officer persona open to the charge of prurient relish: and the lines on the 'streak of red' in the west, once heard dramatically (suspiciously), resemble nothing if not Faustus's last lines (p. 57). The rhetorical

question is harsh, thinking beyond the lyrical self to its dark opposing power: the 'love' that seems to animate the tender and anxious officer as he enjoys his soldiers at peace is crossed by a more brutal command over aesthetic pleasures, pleasures violent, bloodthirsty yet at a remove from straightforwardly atrocious identifications. The observer persona is aware of the menace of his own warrior vulture identity, and attempts to confess it out of court: 'the terror of that love has set us spinning in this groove / Greased with our blood' (p. 56). The terrible statement here is darkly theological: the persona is speaking of a godhead that is still in command in the war, driving 'us to this fury', and Prince is alluding here to the many voices of the Second World War – Charles Williams, T.S. Eliot, Simone Weil – who were trying to see God's work in wartime, part of the significant (re)turn to Christianity occasioned by the conflict. Yet with a reading sourced in Browning's radical skepticism, coloured by the powerful forms of suspicion the 1938 monologues engendered in his (supposed) readership, 'that love' is also the 'strange delight' of the persona himself, the 'us' not humanity at war but the double-natured divided subjectivity in command of these lines, this voice. The double-featured voice is both appalled by and welcomes the reduction of 'brother-naked man' to blood: the groove is greased by dark desires, and sends the multiple persona spinning like a ball bearing in the war machine. The 'terror' of the loving gaze on the men, predatory and tender, master-tyrannical and sorrowful-pitiful, bloodthirsty and caressing, admits the divisions the mind is heir to once command takes flesh into its aestheticizing care. The Second World War in Italy, the I-voice argues, staged scenes that summon up, to minds trained in European art, Italian Renaissance representations of 'war's sorrow and disgrace' in 'the thing suspended, stripped', soldiers bathing summoning crucifixion scenes (p. 56). But there is this difference: for the speaker, 'night begins / Night of the mind' (p. 56). The twentieth century's discovery of the unconscious has changed art, power and the relations of art and power: 'who nowadays is conscious of our sins?' The difficulty is that this very recognition, of the force of unconscious desires at work in what the will

commands, in art and power, is itself a symptom of unconscious forces. For the question, once we allow the flow of his other monologues to wash over these lines, recalls Chaka's tyrant in self-exculpatory special pleading, the rhetorical question he bathes in, 'Which of us can forgive himself?' It is not my fault, it is the fault of my unconscious – and if so, everyone is at fault. This Freudian get-out clause allows the persona to shift from the painful recognition and admission of guilty bloodthirsty relish of the death of others to the fake communing of a common humanity ('this groove / Greased with *their* blood' surely it should read). It allows the voice to move away from acknowledgement of the complicity of the artist imagination in the general eagerness for the slaughter towards a bogus fiction of a war god. It enables the officer to escape the implications of 'that love' (which should have read 'my love') so as to relish the 'strange delight' in bloodshed: 'Because to love is frightening we prefer / The freedom of our crimes' (p. 56). Properly translated, this should read: 'Because to admit that my aesthetic thrill watching my soldiers bathing is too frightening, I censor it, make it like original sin, original sin as the unconscious, and we (royal we) are now free to prefer the free exercise of my criminal lust for destruction of the men that belong to me'. This may be too harsh a rendering of a poem that is as streaked with tenderness as it is streaked with red: yet it is a reading that we are invited to make once we allow Prince's extraordinary command over the dramatic monologue to ripple through the lines.

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