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Abstract

This article reads the poetry of J. H. Prynne of the early- to mid-1970s through an ecocritical lens, arguing that this work responds to the language of a nascent environmentalism framed by the concerns of political ecology. It does so by drawing on Prynne's archival correspondence with the American poet Edward Dorn in the mid-1970s, which demonstrates a private concern with agro-chemicals, colour and cultivation that served as an analogue for shifts in the politics of relating to the extra-human world. It argues that Prynne's *High Pink on Chrome* (1975) is closely attuned to the suppressed human and extra-human costs of high-yield monocrop cultivation. In turn, the article sets these post-war practices in a longer continuum of pastoral suppression, linking such hidden violence with ecocritical and New Historicist arguments about the 'green' politics of William Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey', to which Prynne alluded when writing to Dorn in 1975.

Keywords: Prynne, pastoral, agro-chemicals, Wordsworth, agribusiness, globalisation

The green world

Driving through the flatlands of Essex in autumn 1975, the poet and critic J. H. Prynne wrote to his friend and correspondent the American poet Edward Dorn, 'Hadstock was looking good the other day when we passed through – waves of green void lapping right up to the very door' (Prynne 20 Sept 1975). While perhaps recalling Dorn's stint as a Fulbright fellow at the University of Essex (1965-1970), that September Prynne overwhelmingly had the opening lines 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' in his mind and ear. Essex monoculture ironically replayed, for Prynne, the already heavily pressurised lines from the opening of the poem on the Wye. Wordsworth's conclusion to the first edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), which Prynne remarked in a recent essay that 'I have loved […] deeply, almost since childhood', is date-stamped like a letter, nine years less one day since the Bastille was stormed. (Prynne 2010, 134). In that poem, which is spoken from the picturesque vantage point of 'this green earth' and looks out over the prospect it elusively and selectively describes, the speaker *does* notice that 'these pastoral farms' stretch 'Green to the very door' (Wordsworth [1798] 1992, 119; 116).

This ecologically-attuned Wordsworthian allusion appeared in Prynne's correspondence with Dorn in the same year as the publication of *High Pink on Chrome*. I argue that in this work of the early 1970s, Prynne incorporates and by doing so implicitly critiques the languages of the agro-chemical food-system *and* concurrently evolving environmentalist discourse, in a satirical, materialist pastoral mode. At the same time, Prynne's critique of the food-system as a failure of planetary pastoral care is consistently seen through what he calls 'the rich embankments of the

English poetic tradition' (Prynne 2010, 128). Here, this fluvial and sedimentary metaphor indicates the layered presence of Wordsworth. Drawing on Prynne's archival correspondence with Dorn between 1975-76, I demonstrate that in this period chemical cultivation was a subject of poetic concern in the scaled spheres of domestic gardening and global agribusiness. The labour of Prynnean pastoral is to point out the concealed connections between these arenas. Consumption and production as material practices are then themselves set within the *discursive* fabric of a green-world system of what I argue, building on Kerridge (2007) and Luna (2016), was an emerging ecological planetary consciousness. Responsive to bio-systemic degradation on a global scale, the whole-earth discourse was also susceptible to incorporation within what *High Pink on Chrome* calls the 'thoughtful sphere of that wrong' (Prynne 2015, 263). Secondly, a materialist emphasis on the chemical composition of what appears to be organic, whole and green satirises the colour's overloaded environmental currency, and looks ahead to its affiliation with ethical consumerism, localism and their associated food cultures.

Prynne's perception of 'green void' stretching 'right up to the very door' is tonally characteristic of his exuberant and playful correspondence with Dorn, but it also anticipates an ecocritical pressure point in 'Tintern Abbey'. Marjorie Levinson, a decade later, would point out that 'The cottage plots noted in the poem are "green to the very door" because the common lands had been enclosed some time back and the only arable land remaining to the cottager was his front garden' (Levinson 1986, 30). Levinson's critique is selective, as the poem's interior focus is balanced elsewhere in the *Lyrical Ballads* by a trenchant materialism that looked steadfastly at the fallout from the transition to agrarian capitalism in terms of poverty, vagrancy and ecological devastation. Nevertheless, the New Historicist reading of expropriation gave way in

the 1990s to ecocriticial readings that inferred a proto-ecological stance into precisely the same lines.[i]

Prynne's 'green void' precedes these debates between early ecocriticism and New Historicism. I will return to this point of origin for Romantic ecology to contend that the Vale of Tintern as a textual landmark – a canonical locus and ideological testing-ground – was and remains a vital yet neglected element in Prynne's materialist political ecology. I first, however, contextualise an ecocritical Prynne in terms of the ecological meanings of planetary holism as the discourse developed around the end of the 1960s, and argue that his poetry responds directly to agro-chemical and logistical revolutions in the capitalist green-world system.

The nature of this world-system receives stringent critique in Prynne's work of the early 1970s. These collections interrogate the holistic assumption that the earth connotes security and shelter rather than insecure exposure, raising the ethical dilemma of what Rob Nixon calls 'Planetary consciousness'. This sense of the planet as a whole to be cared for, while central to the era's nascent environmental movement, also implies

> questions of power and perspective, keeping front and center the often latent, often invisible violence in the view […] Who gets to see, and from where? […] what perspectives—not least those of the poor or women or the colonized—do hegemonic sight conventions of visuality obscure? (Nixon 2011, 15).

Prynne's 'The Ideal Star-Fighter' (*Brass*, 1971) poses just that question of what it sees as the hubristic encapsulation of the whole earth in 1968. In this poem, we 'hear

daily of the backward/glance at the planet', which, simplified by distance, is seen with fuzzy imprecision:

> from the
> distant loop of the hate system the
> whole object is loveable, delicious, ingested
> by heroic absorption!
>
> (Prynne 2015, 166)

Richard Kerridge notes that the 'backward/glance at the planet' is a reference to the *Earthrise* image of the whole earth (AS8-14-2383 in NASA's catalogue), taken by astronauts Frank Borman and William Anders on 24 December 1968. The photograph is a prospect image of the biosphere's 'thin layers of water, land and air' that acted as 'one of the catalysts for the modern environmental movement, compelling us to recognize our fundamental dependence on our planet' (Böhm et al. 2015, 3). As Kerridge writes, Greg Garrard first pointed out the repeated use of this image by environmental causes, as a symbol for both 'the smallness and fragility of the ecosystem that is our common home' and the 'sublime triumph of technology, or the availability of the planet as abundant resource' (2007, 135).[ii] Prynne's move from holism to its critique was rapid. In *The White Stones* (1969) the 'whole order' was 'set in this, the/proper guise, of a song'. However, by 1973 'The Ideal Star-Fighter' already seemed, to Prynne's former teacher Donald Davie, to refuse 'the moral blackmail which the ecologist's propaganda exerts and depends upon' (Prynne 2015, 64; Davie 1973, 180).

Joseph Luna offers a comprehensive overview of the contexts of Cold War holism for 'The Ideal Star-Fighter'. Luna argues that the 'Apollonian imperial perspective of *Earthrise* culminates in the apogee of the historical trajectory of American military-industrial and aeronautical development since the Second World War' (2016, 129). Concurrently, the countercultural credibility of Stuart Brand's *Whole Earth Catalog* and Buckminster Fuller's geodesic domes made it easier to regard the 'whole object' as 'loveable'.

But if *Earthrise* did promote public reflection on the biosystemic nature of 'our common home', for Prynne it was anticipated by the counter-ecological realisation,[iii] in 'Starvation/Dream', that the world is not our home:

> So the dream
> still curls in its horizon of
> total theft, cooled by the misty
> involvement of dew, and at once
> it is clear, finally, that this
> is not our planet: we have come
> to the wrong place.
>
> (Prynne 2015, 114)

Ecological and geopolitical holism coexist with their alienated counter-image, presented as consumable spectacle. Prynne's work since the early 1970s could be seen, indeed, as a sort of occasional verse, which is responsive to geopolitical events. It employs, fragments, recombines and scrutinises the kinds of language in which

those events are couched. These actions of incorporation and critique constitute a poetic methodology that suspends the allusive fragments it puts to work in a dialectical relation. It imports pieces of the material and discursive world within its lyrical and pastoral frames only to examine them with scepticism. Yet, it does not wholly come down on the side of satire or anti-pastoral. Instead, it retains something of the impetus of lyric and pastoral as idealising modes, albeit compromised by exposure to the material conditions of their own making.

The pastoral therefore provides a different bridge for spanning the rupture, in most critical accounts, of Prynne's poetry and politics around the end of the 1960s, the breakdown of the community formed around *The English Intelligencer* (1966-68), and the turn to satire, bathos and 'the moral anthropology of the consumerism of suffering' that Keston Sutherland identifies in the later *White Stones* poems, and more fully in *Brass* (2009, 110). In the lines from 'The Ideal Star-Fighter' quoted above, planetary holism is really an 'ingested, delicious' apple that tempts the viewer to repeat the sin of the first fall, or it is a damaged 'hate system' governed by global capital and tainted by the chemical by-products of industrial processes. 'Ingest' is a register transition that connotes harmful toxins: if you are Snow White you eat the Queen's apple with pleasure because it looks delicious, but you *ingest* the poison it contains.

Food practices were significant for the way Prynnean pastoral negotiated the end of the 1960s, as a materialist analogy for the way political languages, too, can be 'cooked' and packaged for consumption by a predetermined readership. Recent collection *Al-Dente* (2014) – crunchy, 'to the tooth' – suggests this analysis is still pertinent. Reeve and Kerridge observe that Prynne's 'comparison of emotion, morality and poetry to food' cuts with a 'cynical edge; the implication being that what

appears to have spontaneous integrity is actually pre-cooked, packaged, rationed and budgeted for' (1995, 113). Prynne offered some insight into this long-standing interest in his introduction to a reading at the York Street Poets' Commune in Vancouver on 1 August 1971. He prefaced his reading from *Kitchen Poems* (1968) by saying that it was titled because the poems were all composed in other peoples' kitchens, free of distractions like 'the 15-volume *OED*', but also because

> kitchens are a very good place to start getting clear about certain kinds of commodity link-up in the world around, which basically work down to what you eat. And it became very clear to me that the language system that I was then interested in was an *extension* of the food-system, part of the food chain (Prynne 1971).

Such interest would only heighten in the following decade, as *High Pink on Chrome*'s concern with food and the logistics of 'commodity link-up' was set against the post-war 'Green Revolution' in farming practice. An exercise in industrial greenwashing that represented the wholesale embrace of agro-chemicals and genetically-modified, high-yield cereal varieties as ecological and 'green', the phrase 'Green Revolution' was coined by William Gaud in 1968, the same year as *Earthrise*. It was also couched in Cold-War rhetoric. Gaud specified that the phrase should be read in contradistinction to revolutionary Soviet red, deploying this pseudo-environmental category on two fronts: the global incorporation of the food-system, and US military and cultural hegemony.[iv]

When combined with the contemporaneous logistics revolution that allowed increased yields to be transported across the globe, what looked like ecologically

meshed interdependence was really, indeed, a growing interdependency. Jason W. Moore sees this ever-expanding web of exchange as a 'new paradigm' of '*world-ecology*', in which 'Power, production and perception entwine' and 'cannot be disentangled' (Moore 2015, 3). As Jasper Bernes argues, agro-chemical technologies scaled up population growth and their own supply chains in tandem, increasing the integration and reliance of each on the other.[v] If Prynne from the late 1960s was interested in language as an '*extension* of the food-system, part of the food chain', from the 1970s onwards that food-system would become increasingly enmeshed in the related military-industrial and logistical systems, under the agro-chemical umbrella of the Green Revolution.

In 1975, *High Pink on Chrome* attends to the fall-out from this transition, behind which pastoral landscapes shift and change. It develops *Brass*' response to the quasi-scientific hippie-languages of holism and the earth as common home. The registers of agro-chemical pastoral and its idealised counterpart had to be interrogated through the incorporation of their discursive content, and the exposures of the transition to an agrarian green-world system registered in the terms of world-ecology's evolving 'hate system'.

Agro-chemical pastoral

In December 1975, Prynne wrote to Dorn with an anecdote: over dinner he had asked Oxford chemist Rudolph Peters about his discovery during the Second World War of dimercaprol, an antidote to the poisonous gas Lewisite. Quoting a note from Peters on the matter, Prynne describes a confusion about the compound's composition that left it '"far too toxic to use"'. It was therefore '"christened British Anti-Lewisite"' by the Americans, so that '"When they got the right compound, the name had already

stuck!" […] the flavour is very exactly of the season' (Prynne 'ditto December' 1975). The seasonal flavour Prynne alludes to had been set earlier in the year with the publication of *High Pink on Chrome*.

In 1962, Rachel Carson's warning of future ecocide due to increasing pesticide and herbicide use (specifically DDT) in large-scale agribusiness, *Silent Spring*, had registered the process by which chemicals such as Dimercaprol, or 'British Anti-Lewisite', developed for military use during World War Two, were found to be effective at killing unwanted insects as well. Dimercaprol surfaces by name in *High Pink on Chrome*'s final stanzas:

> The float is criminal; access by
> blood spread, dimercaprol 200 mg.
>
> (Prynne 2015, 263)

This reference to BAL, as 'British Anti-Lewisite' came to be known, links the anecdote above to a broader concern among the circle of poets writing in Cambridge at this time with chemicals, colour and contemporary manipulations of the extra-human world.

Andrew Crozier's volume *High Zero* (1976) – a collated response to Prynne's *High Pink on Chrome* and John James' *Striking the Pavilion of Zero* (also published in 1975) – refers to 'Paris green', which, Crozier explained in interview, is 'another arsenical poison like Lewisite used in gardening as a pesticide, and also as a pigment' (Duncan 2006, 114). The close alignment of poison and pigment insists on not obscuring the ties between the pastoral green world, the private garden and the post-

war military-industrial complex. In this vein, Prynne's chromatic materialism is careful to convey how much ('200 mg.') and how ('It seeps under the nail'), while simultaneously leaning on the cultural and painterly resonance of 'Paris green' (Prynne 2015, 263; 262).

Prynne was thinking through these scaled links between chemical garden and agro-chemical industry in his correspondence with the Dorn family in California. Writing in 1976 with advice on improving the soil quality in their garden, he counsels that 'you should try to grub out those thistle roots, unless you want to get a man to spray off the whole site with a chemical weedkiller (the whole-food freaks will just love that move)' (Prynne 4 Nov 1976). He then signs off his next letter, in which further installments about improving soil quality are addressed to 'J', Jennifer Dunbar Dorn,

> And back to Nature (ah! that never failed the heart that truly loved her rotting stems), here's a page from my most recent seed catalogue to give you the idea of what I meant earlier by green-crop compost. Naturally I'd not be allowed to send seeds into Chlorofornia, but if you buy a local gardening mag. & write off for a few catalogues you should find something similar. And then, just till, sow, wait […] wait, till yet again, soon shangri-la will be out of business & the deer faint from overeating (Prynne 18 Nov 1976).

The joke about 'Chlorofornia' perhaps alludes to the heavy use of chloroform as a pesticide in the San Joaquin Valley in central California, where it has long been present in the ground water (Brown 1998, 1). The area is characterised by swathes of monoculture and has historically been a testing ground for industrial agriculture and

the artificial maximisation of crop yield: it produces 25% of the USA's table-food on 1% of its surface area (Galloway and Riley 2001, 23). Prynne's connection of large-scale agribusiness with its enclosed metonym, the garden – as both subject to the pressures and influences of the second agrarian revolution – suggests that the artificial treatment of 'nature' was in the domestic air, as well as an issue politically. It is not clear how ironic the casual suggestion that Dorn could 'get a man to spray off the whole site with a chemical weedkiller' is, thereby running the risk of enraging the 'whole-food freaks'. But the detail does orientate the poetic work within the precise context of chemical treatment and the tongue-in-cheek yet more-urgent-than-ever concern with a hypostasised 'Nature', whose 'rotting stems' may reward a constant heart, but which has ceased to be itself.

High Pink on Chrome develops, then, Prynne's interest in plant life and cultivation.[vi] It fuses the idealising representational codes of pastoral landscape with the materialist analysis of labour and commodity circulation proper to georgic, and with the sentiment-eschewing satirical tone of anti-pastoral. Its immediate impetus, however, was an early instance of the Green Revolution's unintended consequences. Its flickering, pink-silver chromatic cover points to the pink-dyed wheat that was imported to Iraq from Mexico in 1971 and eaten by Iraqi farmers in rural areas, who were starving due to two years of harvest failure. Warnings in English and Spanish that the wheat was contaminated with mercury, a 'feedstuff for ruin', were not understood (Prynne 2015, 257). The wheat was dressed with the fungicide to preserve it on the sea journey from Mexico, but the shipment was delayed and arrived after sowing season, so the farmers were left with 'no choice but to/choose this': eat the pink grain or 'actually starve beforehand' (Prynne 2015, 257; 254). Mercury, the messenger god in the age of logistics, failed to deliver the message. In total an

estimated 10,000 people died of mercury poisoning and the chemical compound permeated the region's biodiversity (Skerfving and Copplestone 1976). 'What is discarded?' by this process, *High Pink* asks, as news of the unfolding disaster reaches around the globe and 'we read the papers/with coy amazement and concern' (Prynne 2015, 257).

While disaster is passively consumed, the poem also documents the effects of mercury poisoning on the body in a scientific register:

you must say quickly
intense burning
pain in the chest,
how much to give
LD_{50} a scruple of fair dealing and upright
fashion (shallow breathing); he declines to take
bread into the garden.

(Prynne 2015, 251)

The stanza's fragmentation is a report of pain, an experiential recreation of the body's exposure to deadly chemicals, outlined in a block of technical prose below: 'Thus there is no doubt that some of the toxic effects of these metals is the result of a cell-mediated immunological reaction against the body's own proteins modified antigenically by the metal [mercury]' (Prynne 2015, 251). 'LD_{50}', the amount of an ingested substance that proves fatal to fifty percent of a test sample, is brushed off as a moral 'scruple'. Elsewhere in the volume, pesticides like 'paraquat 2½ pints/per

acre' are employed to help out where 'The chisel plough meets tough going' and with which 'we spray off' (Prynne 2015, 257). The phrasal verb 'spray off', with its connotation of an artificially applied product, seems to be linked with Prynne's tongue-in-cheek advice to Dorn to 'spray off' his garden with weedkiller and bait 'the whole-food freaks'. The phrase's deadlier application points out the false dichotomy and separation of private, individual practice and global, public 'events' that *High Pink on Chrome* sets within a continuum of ethical responsibility, hinged on scale. The supra-naturally abundant crop yields made possible by agro-chemicals are a uniform, monoculture reprise of the pastoral imaginary of abundance and a world freed from want. Such is the efficiency of modern agricultural methods, Prynne joked to Dorn, that they will soon put shangri-la 'out of business', in a telling turn of phrase: the earthly paradise outcompeted on the open market.

High Pink on Chrome's intervention into the traditions of pastoral and anti-pastoral, idealist and materialist versions of rural economy, makes visible the invisible traces of chemical harm. It also troubles pastoral poetry and painting's pictorial logic of landscape composition, but it does not abandon its framing entirely. Instead, as soon as glimpsed such landscapes are shown to be conditional and constructed, imbricated in industrial process:

> The green bottles, the mowers in the field,
> largesse boiled in the pasteurised skillet;
> across the picket lines 'reduced almost
> to a syrup.' And so we go as now
> we know, watching the sheep gaits fade
> up the hillside, across the waterfall.

(Prynne 2015, 249)

A painterly compositional frame and inferred perspective is still detectable here, as the mowers occupy a field in the foreground and the sheep gates recede from the implied subject's point of view, into the hazy middle-distance. But the balanced and harmonious play of near and far is ruptured by the imported text in quote marks, which describes an obscure alchemical process that fragments the canvas. Pasteurisation, the transformation of an animal's nurturing fluid into dairy commodities, entails 'largesse'. It is though one could boil money directly 'in the pasteurised skillet', missing out the interim phase of messy commodities to arrive straight at the pure value-form. After all, the volume states po-facedly elsewhere, 'food is/"money made easy"', but while that food is alive it must be penned and accounted for (Prynne 2015, 256). The 'sheep gaits' are paired by visual rhyme with a human configuration of resistance against control, 'picket lines', implying that the militant radicalism of May '68 or the more recent Miners' Strikes of 1974 can be contained as easily as penning a flock of sheep. The 'green bottles' may contain pesticide, but also recall the song 'Ten Green Bottles', designed to teach children to count.[vii] The sheep they are encouraged to enumerate process across the field of vision in a sleepy mind's eye, docile as consumers, flocking to market.

'green void': colour, choice, value

Prynne's materialist concern with food and colour spilled over into *The Land of St Martin*, a short volume published in 1976. Neil Reeve observes that the legend referred to by the collection's title and epigraph recounts the story of the Green

Children of Woolpit, a village near Bury St Edmunds. Reeve notes that Prynne's epigraph is drawn from a Latin text by William of Newburg and collected in the Breviary of Suffolk for 1618, which tells that

> Sometime 'in the reign of King Stephen' […] two children, brother and sister, appeared one morning in a harvest field, 'with their whole bodies green and dressed in clothing of unusual colour and material'. They wandered about in amazement […] speaking in a strange tongue, apparently able to eat nothing but the pith from the inside of bean pods; 'they lived on this food for some months until they got used to bread. Then gradually their colour changed as the nature of our food affected them and they became like us; they also learned the use of our language' (Reeve 2002, 29).

Reeve suggests that 'green' here connotes the problematic drama of 'primal encounter' (Reeve 2002, 30). But in the context of Prynne's contemporary concern with chemical harm, food and colour, this deliberated redeployment of the Woolpit legend indicates not the civilising of 'the noble savage', but the poisoning of such a romantic 'Other' (Reeve 2002, 30). A culture whose soils and waterways have been contaminated by industrial production for distant consumer markets, or whose migrant labour has been driven by deforestation to the precarious labour markets supporting that production, might appear in this way. Not as spirits from the greenwood, but as a workforce that must be accustomed to a cereal diet just as much as 'the use of our language'. The 'nature of our food' that allows this naturalisation to take place is then a dispensed antidote to their threatening green hue, premised on the equation of what you are with what you eat.

Such crude materialism equates substance with show, but in *High Pink on Chrome* what you see is not what you get. The '^{51}CR label' that 'shews/them and us in your same little boat' – an image of passivity, complicity and shared agro-chemical fate – is a false advert (Prynne 2015, 257). ^{51}CR is a synthetic isotope of Chromium, Greek for simply 'colour' (*chrōma)*, but this chemically synthesised variant is unstable, dangerous and not found in nature, decaying quickly. A variant on 'colour' itself in its purest element that is nonetheless not even that non-colour, the shimmering 'Chrome' of the book's title on which its deadly pink sits, ^{51}CR suggests that readings of colour should presuppose that all is not as it seems.

Esther Leslie, in *Synthetic Worlds* (2005), further contextualises this chromatic concern, in reference to Situationist 'metallic covers'. These were, Leslie writes, 'attractive, even fetishistic, but their perfect sheen betrayed nothing of what was inside: venomous rhetoric and denunciations of commodity society […] like a colourful, lustrous sugar-coating on a poison pill' (2005, 232). As Leslie observes, *High Pink* reprises such Chromolux materiality. But it does so in order to broker a deadly interface at the materialist boundary of the body, breached by heavy metals, which argues for the imbrication of human and extra-human agro-chemical life. This post-Situationist strategy, of wrapping a bitter pill in sickly-sweet paper, appears to have been designed to stick in the throat. At the time of its publication, *High Pink* was met with hostility and confusion, when it was reviewed at all. Prynne writes again to Dorn in January 1976, gleeful about the reaction it had provoked:

> Meanwhile the Pink Book is being widely disliked, beneath the usual flimsy concealments—which pleases me more than anything and is an immense relief. To shake off even a small crew of smiling passengers, having highjacked them

> to some barren tundra cheaply disguised as where it's at, is one of the High Joys of the Season. As Mr Ford he say to his Sec of Defence, quite in the Oh Henry class (Prynne 5 Jan 1976).

If the book is so alienating in its toxicity, the logic seems to go, it must be doing something right. 'Where we are', the grounding of place shared with Dorn, Charles Olson and *The English Intelligencer* readership in the 1960s, has become a trend, the modishness of 'where it's at'. Meanwhile, although the primary referents of 'Mr Ford', his 'Sec of Defence' and 'Oh Henry' are Gerald Ford, Henry Kissinger and the short story writer and fraudster O. Henry, in the context of colour and industrial production the names seem also to gesture towards the Fordist trap about choosing the colour of your car; any one you like as long as it is black. This then mocks the banality of commodity-selection in the spectacular *post*-Fordist world of apparently endless choice, when juxtaposed with the monochromatic non-choice of poisoned grain or no grain: any colour you like as long as it is pink.

Colour is therefore bound to developing post-Fordist rhetorics of individual choice and the primacy of exchange. Enumeration and exchange are invoked by the 'green bottles' mentioned earlier and by a 'case bought with green stamps', which houses the 'classic certainty' of a clock (Prynne 2015, 253). Green Shield Stamps (1958-1991) was a pioneering British loyalty scheme that allowed shoppers to collect green trading stamps as a reward for consumer loyalty and, once enough had been accrued, to exchange them for 'gift' commodities. The irony of Prynne's usage is to move even further from the linkage of 'green' with environmental stewardship, to a green that is pure fungibility, the token as medium of exchange. Green Shield Stamps was a strategy designed to encourage brand loyalty, or sheep-like obedience, veiled

behind the liberal illusion of consumer choice. These, the text seems to say, are the uses of greenness for an expansionist late capitalism: chemical cultivation and consumer goods. The ecological and political costs of outsourced production and consumer choice, facilitated by global agrarian and logistical transformations, imply crisis in the very possibility of representation. Signifiers themselves have become coloured tokens that mediate equivalence, in place of the substance and quality of the material world which Prynne and the community around *The English Intelligencer* had identified before the shift from substantial to symbolic value in metal coinage, and briefly perceived as offering an alternative anthropology of value. The pastoral subject in the green world enabled by agro-chemical and logistical revolutions is paradigmatically a consumer, not an agricultural labourer.

In turn, this green world is one among many '"consumer republic" dreamworlds', in Reid and Taylor's formulation, in which 'democratic public space' is reconstituted as a '"consumer republic"'. In this series of 'dreamworlds', freedom 'to choose between commodified products and lifestyles is equated with the negative liberties of the market' (Reid and Taylor 2010, 87). As I have argued, Prynne's pastoral satire since *Brass* in 1971 had portrayed such a consumer dream-world, in which the sceptical materialism of 'cash/as a principle of nature' underwrites the developing ecological consciousness of the 1970s (Prynne 2015, 173). *High Pink on Chrome*'s 'dream of/a sharper cold' further develops *Brass*' pastoral satire of contemporary politics as a dream-world, or a 'counter-earth' that is 'green in season, hazy like meadow-sweet' (Prynne 2015, 252; 172).

The ambient temperature and 'hazy' agreeability of this pastoral landscape, transposed in *Brass* onto Heath-government cabinet politics in 1971, is superseded in

High Pink by a starker and faster mode of reverie. The relay has sped up, 'dream after dream ensues',

> As all things pass
> to and fro in the world, from
> one hand to another, belayed.
>
> (Prynne 2015, 252)

This image of global exchangeability greases the hulls and keels of international container shipping, hinted at by the nautical verb 'belayed'. The geopolitical totality of exchange, enabled by global supply chains and instant capital movement, renders consumable objects interchangeable, as with the 'clock bought with green stamps'. Garish pink and green, after all, were the colours of punk reaction against hippie culture in the late-70s, only to be quickly slotted into consumer-space themselves.

Meanwhile, as things 'pass/to and fro', the 'dreamworld' at the point of consumption is all that remains of pastoral, or it is all the pastoral idyll ever was: a sealed universe moderated by the reverie of choice. Even more so than in 1968, 'the dream/still curls in its horizon of/total theft'. The totalising quality of the dream-like green world seems to delimit and paradoxically restrict the 'horizon' of possibility for political action. By reducing greenness to pure abstraction or exchange value, Prynne's agro-chemical pastoral lays the futility of choosing between equivalent colour-values alongside the displaced costs of each consumer selection, elsewhere in the (green) world. The invocation of Henry Ford's production line of monochrome motors in the letter to Dorn confirms that the evolving neoliberal, post-Fordist

language of individual choice, as it emerged from 1960s counter-cultural formations, was the target. The movement from *The White Stones* (1969) – via *Brass* (1971) – to *High Pink on Chrome* (1975) maps onto Prynne's sceptical reading of the '68ers' foregrounding of liberational individualism as all too easily channelled into the presentation of market choice between commodities.[viii] This is clear by *High Pink*, which presents the victims of globalising markets as those with 'no choice but to/choose' pink bread laced with mercury. Such analysis is paralleled by the consumer-subject's indulgence in a dreamworld of commodities 'bought with green stamps'. But in its purity as a value-form this green in a perverse way approaches the ideal of pure *chrōma* that [51]CR promises, or the 'green void' in the Vale of Tintern, which Prynne verbally superimposed over Essex farmland in his 1975 letter to Dorn.

Indeed, the model and archetype in Prynne's poetic echo-chamber for the division between enjoyment of the green world, and the suppression of the labour that makes such pleasure possible, is 'Tintern Abbey'. It is perhaps no coincidence that the poem on the Wye rang in the poet's ear with especial force around the publication of *High Pink on Chrome*, for it is tightly associated with Prynne's focus on greenness. The totemic greenness of the 'natural' scene in 'Tintern Abbey' imperfectly screens, in Levinson's New Historicist reading, industry, indigence and dispossession, daubed green by capital. Prynne returned to those opening lines of 'Tintern Abbey', which he had in mind while driving through the Essex countryside in September 1975, in a 2009 article for *Glossator*. His critical prose replicates the sylvan, meandering quality of Wordsworth's opening description of the Wye valley. An impressionistic play of the 'natural' and the cultivated renders Wordsworth's lines even blurrier, and the green hue is now pointedly washed-on:

> what is first wildly green is later how the green runs wild, over-running the order whose boundaries it marks, and the trees and copses which are of this simple green hue are then inclusively part of a more extended green landscape, seen initially from within the leafy shade of a darker tree closer by (Prynne 2009, 81).

Prynne describes the intersection of bounded green space – *a* green, or cottage garden – and the extent of greenness as a quality of the scene, spilling out from its constraints. This slippage of perceptual affect implies that the colour green is a projection, part of the act of reading what is seen. The ambiguous relation between natural and cultivated greenness is confirmed yet complicated still further by the 'view of "these" hedge-rows', which 'runs with the general greenness to connect directly with "these" pastoral farms, made pastoral by the greenness which nourishes their purpose to nourish into cultivation the fruitfulness of natural growth'. Such 'wildness of natural disorder' runs 'up to the very door and threshold of purposeful indwelling' (Prynne 2009, 83).

In Prynne's prose, greenness 'over-runs' the painterly bounds of adjectival qualification to become the whole condition of the landscape. An over-abundance of greenery forms a 'void' of colour that breaches formal containment. This greenwash effect does not primarily suggest, however, the transgression of enclosure, as weeds spoil neat taxonomies of use by 'running wild'. Instead, in the long view of Prynne's engagement with the colour green outlined in this article, it appears more to represent an un-recuperable entanglement not in the harmonious hyper-connectivity of Romantic ecology, but in the bad faith of corporate sustainability and market environmentalism. Prynne's translation of the phrase in the letter to Dorn swaps

'pastoral farms' for the almost marine 'waves of green void', which lap against the edges of non-cultivated land. These waves of pure colour threaten to overwhelm such non-productive space in a blank riot of chemically-aided productivity that is, on the side, deathly to biodiversity. Levinson's criticism is that the first twelve lines of the poem set out to 'green an actualized political prospect and to hypostatize the resultant fiction' (Levinson 1986, 15). Prynne's riff on these same lines, a decade earlier, was attuned to the scaled-up but continuous enclosure of human labour and extra-human biodiversity for monocrop cultivation, in the thick of the Green Revolution.

Jonathan Bate opposed Levinson and Jerome McGann's 'so-called "Romantic Ideology"' with 'Romantic ecology', which 'reverences the green earth'. But even as it does so, Bate stressed, it is strenuously not a 'flight from the material world, from history and society – it is in fact an attempt to enable mankind the better to live in the material world by entering into harmony with the environment' (Bate 2013, 40). Perhaps such an accommodation between a praxis of ecological connectivity, and the political quality of a history that was supposed to have ended when Bate was writing, could be made then. But it is clear that for Prynne it could not, precisely because politics determined relations to the extra-human world, in 1798 as in 1975.

In a descriptive sense, then, 'waves of green void' is an apt rendering of Essex monoculture, in which vast fields are uninterrupted by the usual patchwork of boundaries. But it also situates Wordsworth within *High Pink on Chrome*'s focus on colour, chemicals and the food-system, and the whole earth and new ecology movements satirised in *Brass*. At the same time, Prynne seems to anticipate the contested status of these lines for ecocritical and New Historicist accounts of the poem. Even in 1975, greenness appears so over-determined as to become a 'void', in which colour, chemicals and the abstractions of value and exchange constitute a 'hate

system': capitalism, as it ever was, 'in the web of life' (Moore 2015).

High Pink on Chrome's conspicuous, methodical 'intercutting of fragments of lyrical pastoral with agri-chemical terminology' responds to the seriousness of the nascent environmental movement's ethical claims, but it does not spare environmentalist rhetoric if it appears mendacious or in service to corporate interests (Kerridge 2007, 136). To disavow this duality would be, in Kerridge's judgement, 'self-deception: collusion with consumer-capitalism in its placing of poetry of as one of the commodities that promise the finer, more civilised life—and, by extension, with the whole practice of erasure of origin that occurs when we are sold sweat-shop products and tropical hardwoods' (2007, 136). All of this remains the case in the twenty-first century. But, Kerridge observes, 'What has changed since 1971 is that it is now much harder to regard environmentalism as a form of nostalgic Romantic idealism'. On the contrary, it is 'a set of calculations of the most urgent kind that reveal our material interests', including the day-to-day calculation of 'how much this small action or that will add to our "carbon footprint"', and which 'make it harder still to associate environmentalism with lyrical irresponsibility' (Kerridge 2007, 140).

Prynne's poetry has not returned to an openly Romantic idealism in service of such calculations. If anything, it censures even more severely the fond imagination of the efficacy of individual acts of ethical consumption. Prynne's pastoral subject is above all a consumer, separated from but implicated in the work that puts food on the table. Indeed, Prynne's pastoral insists on the double valence of consumption – especially of food but of other commodities as well – as at once the most direct experience of social reproduction *and* the essence of mediation. The Whole Foods industry jokingly referenced by Prynne attempts to circumvent this internal contradiction by the representation of a pure, holistic relationship with foodstuffs that

offers the alluring promise of closer ties to 'the land' and a cosier, chemical-free moral economy. *High Pink on Chrome* is positioned within the chemical revolution that such ethical alternatives would later contest in market terms, a concern mirrored in Prynne's correspondence with Dorn, as I have demonstrated. Indeed, the text's suspicion of colour values and commodity choice interrogates environmentalist shibboleths even as they were being formulated.

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[i] See Paul H. Fry, 'Green to the Very Door? The Natural Wordsworth', *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 35, No. 4, Essays in Honour of Geoffrey H. Hartmann (Winter 1996), 535-551.

[ii] See also Timothy Clark, 'Imaging and Imagining the Whole Earth: The Terrestrial as Norm', in *Ecocriticism on the Edge: the Anthropocene as a Threshold Concept* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

[iii] The poem was included in the May 1968 edition of *The English Intelligencer*, preceding the release of *Earthrise* by seven months.

[iv] William Gaud coined the phrase in an address to The Society for International Development, Washington, DC, 8 March 1968. Full text of the address available at *AgBioWorld* <http://www.agbioworld.org/biotech-info/topics/borlaug/borlaug-green.html> [accessed 15 August 2016].

[v] See the forthcoming article by Jasper Bernes (2018), 'The Belly of the Revolution: Agriculture, Energy, and the Future of Communism', in Brent Ryan Bellamy and Jeff Diamanti (eds.), *Materialism and the Critique of Energy*. Forthcoming as a special issue of *Mediations: Journal of the Marxist Literary Group*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (Spring 2018).

[vi] For ecocritical attention see Solnick 2015 on The *Plant Time Manifold* Transcripts (1972), 169.

[vii] Jacques Brel sang a French variant of the song entitled 'Les Moutons' ('The Sheep'), which also sees the fleecy folk in terms of their total set of commodity-transformations: 'Sorry shepherdess/I don't like sheep/Whether they're pure wool/Or bowler hat'. *Jacques Brel 67* (Paris: Barclay B 8024, 1967).

[vii] See 'Questions for the Time Being', *The White Stones*.

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