

The Etymological Poetry
of W. H. Auden, J. H. Prynne, and Paul Muldoon

Mia Gaudern

Brasenose College

University of Oxford

Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English Studies

Trinity Term 2014

ABSTRACT

The Etymological Poetry of W. H. Auden, J. H. Prynne, and Paul Muldoon

Mia Gaudern

D.Phil.

Brasenose College

Trinity Term 2014

This thesis investigates the roles played by etymology in the work of three late modernist poet-critics: W. H. Auden, J. H. Prynne, and Paul Muldoon. The relationship between poetry and etymology has a long history, but the advent of modern linguistics at the beginning of the twentieth century brought about a change in this relationship. Structuralism developed a more comprehensive condemnation of the etymological fallacy – the view that historical forms and meanings are relevant to current ones – that both isolated etymology as an abstract field of study and undermined its scientific validity. One reaction to this state of affairs has been to re-evaluate etymological discourse itself as poetic or rhetorical. But it is the tension created by what Paula Blank has called ‘the quasi-disciplinarity of etymological desire’ that motivates Auden, Prynne, and Muldoon’s concerns with linguistic historicity.

Etymological poetry encourages, even necessitates, very close reading. While this thesis accepts the challenge to read arguably too closely, it also examines the limits of such an approach and its implications for the relationship between poetry and criticism. The first three chapters consider how Auden, Prynne, and Muldoon invoke etymologies in their own criticism, and how etymology affects the ways their poetry may be said to communicate. The second three develop these analyses into new interpretations of commonly debated aspects of their work: Auden’s landscape poetry, Prynne’s lyricism, and Muldoon’s onomastics. It is argued that the fact of obsolescence is key to the etymological poetic; obsolete forms and meanings make poetry difficult, but in the process they intimate that a truer way of representing the world may be (re)discovered. All three poet-critics confront and absorb the consequences of etymological obscurity. Their preoccupation with the history of words is self-consciously and unavoidably pedantic, and it is this pedantry that plays the most significant role in the poetic power they accord to etymology.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	5
Poetic Etymology and Etymological Poetry	14
Literary Criticism and the Etymological Argument	26
The Etymological Poetry of Auden, Prynne, and Muldoon	40
1. Paul Muldoon the ‘Etymological Junkie’	45
Speculation and Etymology in Muldoon’s Criticism	47
Etymological Digression and Elegy	58
Interpreting Cryptocurrents in <i>Maggot</i> (2010)	73
Passing Judgment on Muldoon’s Bravura	79
2. Reading J. H. Prynne with ‘Mental Ears’	83
Etymological ‘Logic’	85
Hearing <i>The White Stones</i> (1969) with ‘Mental Ears’	89
Morphological Resonance	102
Hearing Prynne’s Etymological Poetic	115
3. The Lexical Exercises of W. H. Auden	120
Losing Faith in Language	124
Coming to Terms with Etymology in ‘Thanksgiving for a Habitat’	132
Exercises in Etymological Translation	141
The Necessity of Etymological Reading	148
4. W. H. Auden’s <i>Paysages Etymologisés</i>	156
The Origins of Language	163
Linguistic Temptations	173
‘Exercises in Viewing Landscapes’	179
The Poetry of Naming	189
5. The Lyric Diction of J. H. Prynne	192
Naming Stars	197
The Lyric Moment	207
<i>Pearls That Were</i> (1999)	216
A Language Rich and Strange	226
6. Paul Muldoon’s Onomastics	229
<i>Nomen est omen</i> and Bestowing Names	232
Literary Names and the Irishness of <i>Nomen est omen</i>	237
Naming Places, Placing Names	253
The Ominousness of Muldoon’s Names	263
Conclusion	266

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- OED* *OED Online*, ed. by J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000–) <<http://www.oed.com/>> (or *OED3*)
- ODEE* *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, ed. by C. T. Onions, G. W. S. Friedrichsen, and R. W. Burchfield (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966)
- IEL* *Indo-European Lexicon: PIE Etyma and IE Reflexes*, ed. by Jonathan Slocum and others (Austin: Linguistics Research Center, University of Texas, 2009–) <<http://www.utexas.edu/cola/centers/lrc/ielex/>>
- TII* Paul Muldoon, *To Ireland, I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)
- TEP* Paul Muldoon, *The End of the Poem: Oxford Lectures in Poetry* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006)

All web addresses, including *OED* and *IEL* entries, were last accessed on 25 September 2014.

Bible quotations are from the 1611 King James Version unless otherwise stated.

The three editions of the *OED* are referred to by the abbreviations *OED1*, *OED2*, and *OED3*.

References to some books by W. H. Auden, J. H. Prynne, and Paul Muldoon are given in footnotes in the first instance in each chapter and subsequently incorporated parenthetically into the text.

The original publication details of reprinted texts are given in the bibliography but not the footnotes.

Introduction

Throughout history, etymologies have been invoked by philosophers, preachers, politicians, and poets – as well as philologists – to give a historical perspective on the language they use. But in the early twentieth century, the relevance of such a perspective on current language was comprehensively challenged, and some would say defeated. This challenge came from two principal sources: the foundation of modern linguistics on Ferdinand de Saussure's concept of synchrony, and the publication of the first edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* (initially called *A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*).¹ While Saussure's influence vitiated etymology as a linguistic discipline, the *OED* made etymological information more accessible than ever before; both, however, shared a newly severe attitude towards the 'etymological fallacy'. No unanimous definition of this fallacy exists, but contemporary linguists usually explain it as 'the view that an earlier meaning of a word, or its original meaning, is the true or correct one' – a view suggested by the Greek *etumos logos*, or 'true speech'.² Calling this a 'fallacy' assumes that a clear-cut decision is there to be made between accepting the etymology of 'etymology' as its 'true' meaning and marking it out as a matter of scholarly curiosity with no relevance to current usage. The assumption is mistaken. Any decision taken about the significance of etymology must negotiate a range of complex possibilities that lie between these two extremes. It is an inescapable fact that, though etymological forms and meanings are obsolete by their very definition, they are also the

¹ Saussure's influential *Cours de linguistique générale* was first published in 1916. He is commonly thought of as 'the father of modern linguistics'; see, e.g., M. P. Sinha, *Modern Linguistics* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2005), pp. 3–4. The first edition of the *OED* was published in instalments between 1884 and 1928. *Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. by J. A. H. Murray, Henry Bradley, W. A. Craigie, and C. T. Onions, 1st edn, 128 fascicles (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1884–1928).

² David Crystal, *How Language Works* (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 229.

determinants of the words that come after them. The current use of ‘etymology’, for example, has become even more entangled in its historical senses by resisting them so decisively. It is this tension, created by relegating obsolete language to a separate sphere of purely academic interest, that characterises twentieth- and twenty-first-century attitudes to etymology.

The notion that the history of a word can be relevant to its current usage, which is proscribed by the modern, exhaustive definition of the etymological fallacy, has been studiously avoided by contemporary etymologists.³ In *Etymology* (1999), for example, Yakov Malkiel traces the history of the field throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and, like his Victorian predecessors, presents it as a ‘strictly identificational discipline’. This is particularly evident in his description of the purpose of etymology today:

Persons eager to satisfy their etymological curiosity consult an etymological dictionary, which tells them not what to do at present or what to expect from the future, but what shape the word at issue once possessed, with what principal meaning it was endowed, and, occasionally, through what intermediate stages of form and denotation it went after shedding its initial and before acquiring its present appearance.

There is no consideration here of why people might be curious about etymology, or what they might do with the information they find in the dictionary. Most importantly for the present study, there is a dearth of discussion in the field about how knowledge of an etymon affects attitudes to and uses of the word(s) descended from it (the technical term for which is ‘reflex’).⁴ Malkiel does, however, offer the following caveat:

³ See, e.g., Philip Durkin, *The Oxford Guide to Etymology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 27–31; Anatoly Liberman, *Word Origins and How We Know Them: Etymology for Everyone* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 7–15.

⁴ The extensive work done on folk etymology is not applicable here, since it focuses on explaining observable language change; the situation in which a language-user recognises the obsolete relationship between etymon and reflex without the aim of reworking the current word is different.

(Only under very special circumstances has etymology in the twentieth century been called upon to act not cognitively, but as an active force – as when certain poets fond of polysemy want the ‘etymological meaning’ to blend with other semantic shades of the word pressed into service.)

This statement marginalises poetry in the name of avoiding a marginalisation of etymology: its dubious tone implies a few maverick poets indulging in wishful thinking that they can make etymology an ‘active force’. The exception Malkiel makes for poetry is not really an exception, but an attempt to defuse possible conflict between a ‘strictly identificational discipline’ and ‘certain poets’ who seem to be working against it.⁵

It is true that while modernist linguistics narrowed the scope of etymology, modernist literature, which came into being slightly earlier, showed a new fascination with the transformative light that obsolete forms and meanings shed on current words. Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and James Joyce were among the earliest modernist writers who made etymology integral to their poetry and poetics. As structuralism gained traction in linguistics and literary theory, however, it was their successors – primarily W. H. Auden, J. H. Prynne, and Paul Muldoon – who felt the impact of the condemnation of the etymological fallacy most keenly. These late modernist poets negotiate the double irrelevance of etymology: first in terms of the obsolescence of its object of study, and second in the terms set out by the current consensus on the pedantry and triviality of an antiquated discipline.⁶ Careful readings of their poetry and poetics will demonstrate that Malkiel’s distinction between abstract ‘etymological curiosity’ and etymology as an ‘active force’ is actually the wishful thinking of a ‘strictly identificational discipline’ – and not the ‘certain poets’ considered here. Auden, Prynne, and Muldoon satisfy their fondness for polysemy and for obscurity with more or less explicit references to dictionary etymologies, encouraging etymological interpretations. They thus demonstrate

⁵ Yakov Malkiel, *Etymology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 2.

⁶ An attitude noted by Malkiel (p. 120).

how metalinguistic ‘curiosity’ spills over into the desire to interpret etymology as an ‘active force’ – just as using etymology as an ‘active force’ relies on readers’ ‘curiosity’ taking them to a dictionary. This is not to say that their poetry denies etymologies are obsolete. Rather, it explores the process of obsolescence and its distinctive relation to the context of poetry (since ‘the language of the age is never the language of poetry’),⁷ as well as the implications of its final result: obsolescence. In other words, it asks what kind of value forms or meanings can have once they are seen as obsolete. As such, the ‘very special circumstances’ of this poetry allow it not only to invoke etymology as an integral part of its language, but also to investigate an area placed off limits by the ruling against the etymological fallacy, where linguistic history is understood to affect the very ordinary circumstances of current language.

Before the relationship between poetry and etymology in the period is examined any further, these initial propositions call for evidence. A brief introduction to the three poets studied in the following may be provided by some of their most explicit etymological moments. These lines are from Auden’s ‘Woods’:

Sylvan meant savage in those primal woods
Piero di Cosimo so loved to draw,⁸

This is Prynne, from ‘Frost and Snow, Falling’:

[...] We run deeper, cancel
the flood, take to the road or what was before
known as champaign.⁹

And this is Muldoon, from ‘Yarrow’:

⁷ Thomas Gray, *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, ed. by Paget Toynbee and Leonard Whibley, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), I, 192.

⁸ W. H. Auden, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Edward Mendelson, rev. edn (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), pp. 558–60.

⁹ J. H. Prynne, *Poems*, 2nd edn (North Fremantle, Western Australia: Fremantle Arts Centre Press; Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 2005), pp. 70–71.

as Salah-ed-din holds the larva (from *larva*, a ghost or mask)
in forceps, maybe, or catticallipers;¹⁰

It is immediately clear that Malkiel's description of etymology as an 'active force' in poetry cannot account for the effect of these lines. In each case the obsolescence of the etymological form or meaning is explicitly stated, and the modern meaning is unquestionably the one in use, but the reader is invited to interpret the latter with knowledge of the former. This device may be referred to as a 'self-inwoven etymology', following William Empson's coinage of the 'self-inwoven simile', which Christopher Ricks later defined as 'a figure which both reconciles and opposes, in that it describes something both as itself and as something external to it'.¹¹ In a self-inwoven etymology, the 'external' term – the meaning of 'savage', the 'champaign', the italicised '*larva*' – is uncannily 'internal', too. The etymological information is a 'supplement', in Jacques Derrida's sense of something that paradoxically 'adds only to replace [...] As substitute, it is not simply added to the positivity of a presence, it produces no relief, its place is assigned in the structure by the mark of an emptiness'.¹² Nevertheless, the etymological supplement has made the current word possible; it therefore has a value that is prior to the complicated relationship between obsolete and current words exposed by the self-inwoven etymology.

The self-inwoven etymology demands the interpretation of an irresolvable ambiguity, focusing on the blind spot inherent in language change itself. If 'sylvan meant savage' either in 'primal woods' or Renaissance paintings, how are these words now related? Does 'champaign' have an equivalent referent 'known' by a different name today? The italicised etymon '*larva*',

¹⁰ Paul Muldoon, *Poems, 1968–1998* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), pp. 346–92 (p. 382).

¹¹ William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, 3rd edn, rev. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1953), pp. 160–61; Christopher Ricks, "'Its Own Resemblance'", in *Approaches to Marvell: The York Tercentenary Lectures*, ed. by C. A. Patrides (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), pp. 108–35 (p. 109).

¹² Jacques Derrida, "'...That Dangerous Supplement...'", in *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), pp. 141–64 (p. 145).

formally identical with its reflex, is insistent that the reader see the blind spot. These interpretative demands court charges of pedantry, triviality, and even pomposity, not only because they refer to elitist knowledge but also because they appear to be exerting control over readers by demonstrating a critical strategy. As such, Auden, Prynne, and Muldoon are still answerable to Malkiel's accusation that they are overly 'fond of polysemy' and wilfully dismissive of the realities of language change. Taking etymologies seriously means being pedantic, a fact that all these poets acknowledge in their work. Their pedantry is counterbalanced in different ways, however, by the effects that inviting obsolescence into their language achieves: in the lines quoted above, etymology contributes to Auden's moralised landscape, Prynne's reconstruction of poetic diction, and Muldoon's elegiac self-examination. All three poets mimic the disinterested etymologising of the dictionary, that key proponent of the 'strictly identificational discipline', but their self-inwoven etymologies demonstrate that such a strict separation of obsolete and current is not tenable, particularly as regards poetic language.

Thanks to scholars including Charlotte Brewer, Lynda Mugglestone, and Dennis Taylor, the literary importance of the *Oxford English Dictionary* in its many incarnations has been recognised as a topic of considerable interest.¹³ Auden, Prynne, and Muldoon all refer to the *OED* repeatedly in their work, and all have taken issue with it at some point. Their responses to the dictionary are characterised by a focus on the pivotal position it has occupied with regard to the changing status of etymology. From Richard Chevenix Trench's proposal to the London Philological Society in 1857 for a new dictionary true to its role as a 'historical monument', to

¹³ See, e.g., Charlotte Brewer, *Treasure-House of the Language: The Living OED* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007); Charlotte Brewer, *Examining the OED* <<http://oed.hertford.ox.ac.uk/main/index.html>>; Lynda Mugglestone, 'The OED and the Victorian Novel', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Victorian Novel*, ed. by Lisa Rodensky (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 147–65; Dennis Taylor, *Hardy's Literary Language and Victorian Philology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

the decision made in the third edition (initiated in 1990) to remove hypothetical reconstructed Proto-Indo-European roots, the *OED* has always influenced and been influenced by attitudes to linguistic history.¹⁴ With each revision its objective historical principles are renewed and updated. In the preface to the third edition, for example, John Simpson notes that in each entry meanings are ‘ordered chronologically, within a semantic framework resembling a family tree’, before explaining that the interpretation of this principle has changed over time:

The First Edition of the Dictionary sometimes imposed a ‘logical’ ordering on the documentary evidence, especially when it was felt that further information, if available, would confirm this interpretation. In the revised material, senses are ordered systematically on the basis of the evidence now available. This has been made possible in large part because a considerably wider body of evidence is now available to the editors. Also, it avoids a tendency to impose formulaic orderings based on proposed semantic hierarchies (e.g. divine; human; animal) which is sometimes apparent in the First Edition of the Dictionary. Needless to say, the mechanics of borrowing and semantic shift do not always work in this formulaic sequence.¹⁵

It is still possible, however, to detect a degree of anxiety about these principles – and about how they might be misconceived – in the text of the dictionary itself.

For example, the earliest attested definition provided for the word ‘etymology’ in *OED3* is:

The facts relating to the origin of a particular word or the historical development of its form and meaning; the origin of a particular word.

¹⁴ Richard Chenevix Trench, *On Some Deficiencies in Our English Dictionaries: Being the Substance of Two Papers Read Before the Philological Society, Nov. 5, and Nov. 19, 1857*, 2nd edn (London: Parker, 1860), p. 6.

¹⁵ J. A. Simpson, ‘Preface to the Third Edition of the OED’, *OED Online*, ed. by J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000–) <<http://public.oed.com/the-oed-today/preface-to-the-third-edition-of-the-oed/>>.

Yet its oldest example of the word's use – from a translation of a Latin encyclopaedia produced in 1398¹⁶ – is also quoted by the *Middle English Dictionary* as evidence for a different definition that is much closer to the etymological sense of 'etymology':

The original form and meaning of a word, which were believed [after Plato, the Stoics, etc.] capable of revealing the true, essential meaning of the word.¹⁷

OED3 has this as sense 2a (labelled '*hist.* and *rare* in later use'), leaving the implication intact that its own scientific etymologies are carried out in the same spirit as the oldest English etymologising. It thus testifies, despite itself, to an anxiety about older meanings having a special authority in the present.¹⁸ Such anxiety is ingrained in the *OED's* conflicting assumptions first that the history of the language is important enough to determine the whole structure of the work, and second that it is possible or desirable to keep the obsolete parts of that history separate from those still current, either in etymological notes or with labels such as 'obsolete', 'historical', and 'archaic'.

Despite its 'historical principles', then, the *OED* is evidently heir to a modern and scientific view of etymology determined to keep those principles in their proper place; as Saussure writes, 'étymologie et valeur synchronique sont deux choses distinctes' ('etymology and synchronic value are two separate things'). Synchrony abstracts current language into an ahistorical 'état de langue' ('language-state'), opposing it to a similarly abstracted diachrony to create two distinct objects of linguistic study. These are depicted by Saussure as the horizontal

¹⁶ The quotation at issue is 'Tyn hatte *stagnum*..and hap þat name of ethymologie of grew'. The etymology of 'stagnum' is mentioned with reference to Isidore of Seville's etymological encyclopaedia and seems to follow his premise that etymology is 'word-truth', incorporating it into an explanation of the properties of tin. John De Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus De Proprietatibus Rerum: A Critical Text*, ed. by M. C. Seymour and others, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975–1987), II (1975), 873.

¹⁷ 'Etimologĭe (n.)', *Middle English Dictionary*, ed. by Hans Kurath and Sherman M. Kuhn (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1956–2001).

¹⁸ The entry for 'etymology' in *OED1* also tried to dissociate it 'from the quest for an "origin"', according to Taylor (p. 229).

and vertical axes of a graph, with each utterance happening at the point they intersect.¹⁹ In reality language use happens across much broader stretches of both diachrony and synchrony: it is informed both by old-fashioned and newly fashioned words and meanings, as well as by how these are used by different people and in different contexts. In the case of poetry the stretch becomes extreme, since – to quote a famous aphorism of Thomas Gray – ‘the language of the age is never the language of poetry’. This throws light on yet another complexity of the *OED*’s ‘historical principles’ – it frequently quotes literary works, which in their diachronic expansiveness must frustrate these principles. The result is that literary language is treated in much the same way as etymology: presented as central to understanding the language as a whole, it is then distinguished by labels such as ‘literary’ or ‘poetic’.²⁰

The *OED* demonstrates that etymology and poetic language both bear complex relationships to ordinary language, and its response to etymology’s place in modern linguistics also reflects a change wrought on the established understanding of poetic diction expressed by Gray. If ‘the language of the age is never the language of poetry’, then it stands to reason that the language of poetry would be newly charged by the strictures on the etymological fallacy. Even ignoring these strictures, for example by emphasising the poetic rather than the scientific value of etymology, must be read as a reaction to them. But Auden, Prynne, and Muldoon all confront them directly, both in their self-inwoven etymologies and in the more comprehensive writing and reading strategies to which they belong. These poets thus attend to what Paula Blank has identified as ‘the quasi-disciplinarity’ and ‘the equivocal nature’ of

¹⁹ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*, ed. by Tullio de Mauro (Paris: Payot, 1972), pp. 136, 117, 115.

²⁰ The treatment of both poetic language and etymology are effects of a conflict with contemporary linguistics. Robert Burchfield, editor of the Second Supplement of the *OED*, admitted as much when he criticised ‘scholars with shovels intent on burying the linguistic past and most of the literary past and present’. Robert Burchfield, Preface to *A Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. by R. W. Burchfield, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972–1986), iv (1986), vii–xiii (p. x).

etymology, ‘the way it purports to explain everything and to explain nothing’.²¹ Such an interpretation means accepting the rigorous modern resistance to the etymological fallacy without denying the appeal etymology has held for writers throughout history and continues to hold today. It also has important consequences for how ‘the language of poetry’ is distinguished by its relation to language that is not ‘of the age’. In readings of what will be defined as ‘etymological poetry’, this thesis explores the relation between etymology and poetry as two discourses outside current language that nevertheless seem strangely integral to it.

Poetic Etymology and Etymological Poetry

The phrase ‘poetic etymology’ has been used to mean at least three different things: an etymological link that sounds like a poetic invention; a verbal association made by a poem (such as a rhyme) that is read as if it hypothesised an underlying etymological connection; and finally, an unscientific interpretation of a word’s history. All three usages are governed by the scientific weight of ‘etymology’ – the adjective ‘poetic’ illustrates, metaphorises, or negates it – despite the fact that the discipline has lost much of its scientific authority since the beginning of the twentieth century. In contrast, this thesis adopts a poetic perspective on the relationship between the two discourses, reversing the established formula to identify an ‘etymological poetry’ in this period. With its decline as a branch of linguistics, and the publication of the *OED*, etymology became a less specialised kind of knowledge. In the process, it acquired a new relevance to poetry, not least because many poets and critics began to use the *OED* as a tool. In some of this etymologically aware poetry, the strict scientific view of the

²¹ Paula Blank, ‘The Proverbial “Lesbian”: Queering Etymology in Contemporary Critical Practice’, *Modern Philology*, 109.1 (2011), 108–34 (pp. 118, 113).

etymological fallacy became central, so that the obsolescence of etymological forms and meanings became just as significant as their resonance. The self-inwoven etymology presents this tension between poetic resonance and the fact of obsolescence in a condensed form; it is thus a microcosm of what will be read in the following as ‘etymological poetry’. Poetry may invoke etymology in a variety of ways, but etymological poetry always recognises and responds to the tension between the two discourses.

The key characteristics of etymological poetry may be defined against the aforementioned senses of the relatively well-worn phrase ‘poetic etymology’. First, the notion that etymological links have poetic qualities goes back at least to Johann Gottfried Herder’s *Treatise on the Origin of Language* (1772), and perhaps all the way to Plato’s *Cratylus* (which dates to the fourth century BC).²² It was memorably expressed by Ralph Waldo Emerson – for whom language is ‘fossil poetry’, so that ‘[e]very word was once a poem’²³ – and adopted by prominent Victorian philologist Richard Chevenix Trench before finding a place in Martin Heidegger’s philosophy of language.²⁴ The poetic potential of the development of a meaning that resembles a subtle metaphor, or the development of a word form that produces a resonant par rhyme, is obvious. In the nineteenth century, the fact that etymologies could be interpreted like poems made them reassuringly familiar. But etymology’s ability to reveal poetic surprises in the linguistic medium itself also chimed with many of the concerns of

²² Herder writes ‘[f]or what was this first language of ours other than a collection of elements of poetry? Imitation it was of sounding, acting, stirring nature! Taken from the interjections of all beings and animated by the interjections of human emotion! The natural language of all beings fashioned by reason into sounds, into images of action, of passion, and of living impact!’ *On the Origin of Language: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Essay on the Origin of Languages: Johann Gottfried Herder, Essay on the Origin of Language*, trans. by John H. Moran and Alexander Gode (New York: Ungar, 1967), p. 135. For the literary quality of the etymologising in Plato’s *Cratylus*, see Susan B. Levin, *The Ancient Quarrel between Philosophy and Poetry Revisited: Plato and the Greek Literary Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

²³ Ralph Waldo Emerson, ‘The Poet’, in *The Annotated Emerson*, ed. by David Mikics (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), pp. 199–222 (pp. 209, 211).

²⁴ Richard Chenevix Trench, *On the Study of Words & English Past and Present* (London: Dent, 1927), pp. 11–12; Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 208.

modernist poetics – specifically with Viktor Shklovsky’s theory that art should ‘increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged’.²⁵ This influential concept of *ostranenie* or ‘defamiliarisation’ led to Roman Jakobson’s later formulation of the ‘poetic function’ as a ‘focus on the message for its own sake’. The poetic qualities of etymology defamiliarise not just the thing perceived but the language in which perceptions are presented, fulfilling Jakobson’s criterion for the ‘poetic function’.²⁶ But what are the consequences of calling etymology ‘poetic’ for poetry itself?

Ezra Pound’s translation of the Old English elegy ‘The Seafarer’ is a case in point. Its etymological approach, in which Old English words are translated into their modern English reflexes, in Pound’s view made it ‘as nearly literal [...] as any translation can be’.²⁷ For example, *nearo nihtwac* (‘hardship of nightwatch’) becomes ‘narrow nightwatch’, in a manoeuvre that stretches the terms ‘literal’, ‘translation’, and even ‘etymology’ beyond their usual frames of reference. Philologists read this as an etymological fallacy (e.g. J. R. R. Tolkien), while many literary critics justify Pound’s strategy on poetic grounds (e.g. Michael Alexander).²⁸ In a study of the use of Old English in twentieth-century poetry, Chris Jones argues that Pound discovered in Old English poetic techniques ‘a strange likeness with the defamiliarization techniques of a modernist aesthetic’ that allowed him to ‘[reinvigorate] the contemporary idiom by recourse to an old idiom’:

²⁵ Victor Shklovsky, ‘Art as Technique’, in *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, ed. and trans. by Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), pp. 3–24 (p. 12).

²⁶ Roman Jakobson, ‘Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics’, in *Style in Language*, ed. by T. A. Sebeok (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960), pp. 350–77 (p. 356).

²⁷ Ezra Pound, *Selected Prose, 1909–1965* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), p. 39.

²⁸ ‘[E]tymological descent is of all guides to a fit choice of words the most untrustworthy’. J. R. R. Tolkien, ‘On Translating Beowulf’, in *The Monsters and the Critics, and Other Essays*, ed. by Christopher Tolkien (London: HarperCollins, 1997), pp. 49–71 (p. 56). “‘Blade’ is better than “glory” for Pound [as a translation of Anglo-Saxon *blæd*], because it is more concrete, less obvious, closer to the sound of the original, and rhymes with ‘layed’ (Pound’s spelling). Such reasons seem good to a poet’. Michael Alexander, *The Poetic Achievement of Ezra Pound* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979), p. 73.

A sense of the otherness of Old English in modern literature often gives way to a sense of its rightness.²⁹

Poetic defamiliarisation eventually resolves itself into a refamiliarisation, finding a 'rightness' in an 'otherness'. But etymological defamiliarisation is of a different order; Old English words (as opposed to the 'poetic practices' Jones investigates) are not merely 'other' but obsolete. Reading Pound's etymologically 'literal' translation strategy as poetic admits a new kind of difficulty into poetry's defamiliarised 'process of perception', since *nearo*/narrow is an irresolvably obsolete relationship.

The reception of Pound's 'Seafarer' raised questions about the poetic role of etymology, and the difficulty it engenders, that its late modernist successors would also face. For some, the answer was that such difficulty was needed. Hugh MacDiarmid's conviction that the revival of obsolete Scots words was a political necessity – as 'a challenge to linguistic imperialism' – meant that there was no sense of pedantry in his argument that 'you've got to go where the words are, the dictionary'.³⁰ In a similar vein, Geoffrey Hill defines poetry as bound to the moral and ethical dimensions of language encoded in etymology:

The poet's gift is to make history and politics and religion speak for themselves through the strata of language.³¹

²⁹ Chris Jones, *Strange Likeness: The Use of Old English in Twentieth-Century Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 66, 7.

³⁰ Nancy Gish and Hugh MacDiarmid, 'An Interview with Hugh MacDiarmid', *Contemporary Literature*, 20.2 (1979), 135–54 (pp. 144–45). Some critics have argued that this view is pedantic, while others have followed MacDiarmid's argument; Alan Riach, for example, writes that '[h]e has been accused of dictionary-dredging for obsolete words in these poems, but if their language comes from a dictionary, it got there from the speech of actual Scottish people. By regenerating that language in his poems, MacDiarmid returned it to a Scottish and international readership in a confirmation of the Scots language and the Scottish national identity of the primary users of this language'. Alan Riach, 'Wole Soyinka and Hugh MacDiarmid: The Violence and Virtues of Nations', in *Scottish Literature and Postcolonial Literature: Comparative Texts and Critical Perspectives*, ed. by Michael Gardiner, Graeme Macdonald, and Niall O'Gallagher (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), pp. 111–23 (p. 123).

³¹ Blake Morrison, 'Under Judgement', Interview with Geoffrey Hill, *New Statesman*, 8 February 1980, pp. 212–14 (p. 214).

It seems Shklovsky's injunction to poetry to make perception 'difficult' has here reached an extreme conclusion. Who are 'history and politics and religion' speaking to, and in what strange, etymologised language? Hill echoes Pound's controversial description of his translation as 'literal' in his uncompromising etymological assertions: '[o]bnoxious means, far back within itself, / easily wounded'; '[y]es, exactly, *martyr* means witness'.³² Despite the knowingness of these 'obnoxious' statements, they are not quite self-inwoven etymologies. The present tense of 'means' explains why Hill's work is not examined here as an example of 'etymological poetry': he is so insistent on the significance of etymology that the fact of obsolescence, though certainly not ignored, is secondary. Matthew Sperling has recently described Hill's 'mythology of language' as exercised less by modern linguistics than by Romantic and post-Romantic 'visionary philology', for which the ruling against the etymological fallacy is an irrelevance.³³

Etymological poetry attends to a conflict of interest between calling etymology poetic and reading etymology in poetry. W. H. Auden responds to this conflict in his criticism, professing that 'the most poetical of all scholastic disciplines' is 'Philology, the study of language in abstraction from its uses'.³⁴ Philology permanently suspends language in a defamiliarised 'process of perception'; but poetry cannot, since it must use language as well as reflect on it. Like Pound, Hill, and MacDiarmid, Auden is insistent about the significance of etymologies, and he has a storied relationship with the dictionary.³⁵ Unlike them, however, he sees etymology's ability to defamiliarise language as in contention – rather than accord – with poetry's need to

³² Geoffrey Hill, *The Triumph of Love* (London: Penguin, 1999), p. 81; Carl Phillips, 'The Art of Poetry No. 80: Geoffrey Hill', Interview with Geoffrey Hill, *Paris Review*, 57 (Spring 2000), 272–99 (p. 281).

³³ Matthew Sperling, *Visionary Philology: Geoffrey Hill and the Study of Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 4, 109–12.

³⁴ W. H. Auden, 'Making, Knowing and Judging', in *The Dyer's Hand; And, Other Essays* (New York: Random House, 1962), pp. 31–60 (p. 35).

³⁵ Brewer, *Treasure-House of the Language*, pp. 192–97.

communicate and to represent the world. He pushes etymological defamiliarisation to its extremes in the 'lexical exercises' of his later poetry, exploring the tension between reflecting on words and using them; in his famous *paysages moralisés*, it is not the poetic quality of etymologies but their obsolescence that becomes a metaphor for divine language and pre-linguistic human existence in nature. While he responds to the same issues as Pound and Hill – the 'poetical' aspect of etymology, the sense that this poetic history is encoded in current language, and the responsibility of poets to confront that history – Auden keeps the fact of obsolescence in tension with them. As such, he considers the consequences of etymological defamiliarisation, asking what the value of this new kind of difficulty is to poetry.

The second meaning of 'poetic etymology' defined above testifies to a rather rare literary critical use of the term that seems to impose an unnecessary difficulty on the most common of poetic features. In *The Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye refers to 'poetic etymology, or the tendency to associate words similar in sound or sense'.³⁶ Even after the advent of what he calls 'real etymology' in the science of linguistics, this poetic etymology 'remains a factor of great importance in criticism'. Similarly, Jakobson used the term 'poetic etymology' to describe the force with which poetry ties words together by their sound, but it never achieved the currency of '*[t]he poetic function projects the principle of equivalence from the axis of selection into the axis of combination*'.³⁷ This usage is easily devalued by the scientific weight of 'etymology' (as in the third meaning of 'poetic etymology' discussed below), the very force of which the metaphor seeks to use to value poetic resonance: poetry's 'verbal coincidences' are so powerful it is as if they were real etymological connections. A more radical version of this argument, which cements the difficulty of interpretation that Frye and

³⁶ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, ed. by Harold Bloom (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 334.

³⁷ Jakobson, pp. 371, 358.

Jakobson only hint at, is that poetic sound patterning is so resonant because it *is* etymological, in the 'real', scientific sense.

Don Paterson makes just such an argument in his 2004 T. S. Eliot Lecture 'The Dark Art of Poetry':

The deeper our understanding of its etymology, the longer and stranger the shadow the word casts, and the more complex the patterns of overlapping shadows become. Its study increases our sensitivity. Again this is an irrelevance to the reader; but they can feel the difference in the vastly improved lock and fit of our words. This natural sense of word-history is one of the main reasons Heaney is one of our most acclaimed poets. I think poets should always hear the evening in 'west', see the little man in the centre of the 'pupil', the beardless youth in 'callow', or the terrible star in 'disaster'.³⁸

For Paterson, etymology lies beneath poetic language; though it is 'an irrelevance to the reader', poets 'should' hear it. It is part of the mysterious 'Dark Art of Poetry', producing a difficulty that need not concern readers but can account for the popularity of Seamus Heaney, who has been called 'the greatest poet of our age'.³⁹ There is a stark contrast between Paterson's understanding of the relation between etymology and poetry and J. H. Prynne's theory of 'mental ears', which demands much more from readers, poets, and critics.⁴⁰ Prynne insists not only that etymologies are audible, but that what is audible in words is their etymology. The difficulties of hearing obsolete meanings and forms, and the specialist knowledge required to do so, are explored in depth in this theory. While Paterson's examples of poetic etymologising exploit a metaphoricity that allows the poet, if not the reader, to 'hear the evening in "west"', Prynne investigates how actually hearing the obsolete meaning of 'evening' in 'west' would necessitate a different kind of hearing altogether, which goes back to

³⁸ Don Paterson, 'The Dark Art of Poetry', *The Poetry Library*, 9 November 2004 <<http://www.poetrylibrary.org.uk/news/poetryscene/?id=20>>.

³⁹ John Sutherland, 'Seamus Heaney Deserves a Lot More than £40,000', *The Guardian*, 19 March 2009 <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2009/mar/19/seamus-heaney-david-cohen-prize>>.

⁴⁰ J. H. Prynne, 'Mental Ears and Poetic Work', *Chicago Review*, 55.1 (2010), 126–57.

the Proto-Indo-European *wes and its connections to Latin *vesper* and Ancient Greek *hēspēros*.⁴¹

Paterson and Prynne disagree about the difficulty etymology represents for poetic resonance, and this disagreement is reflected in their poetry. In the final stanza of Paterson's 'My Love', as an author signs a book for a girl he 'couldn't *help* but' remark on the 'gorgeous candid pallor of her shoulders':⁴² the flattery is unnerving and etymology makes it even more so, since the origins of 'gorgeous' (perhaps from Old French *gorge*, 'throat') and 'candid' (from Latin *candidus*, 'white') are coldly anatomical.⁴³ This knowledge may contribute to the effect of the final lines of the poem, in which the author receives a copy of one of his books bound in the girl's skin, but it is by no means necessary to that effect. While Paterson ensures etymological knowledge is an 'irrelevance' to his reader's ability to make sense of his poems, the syntactical and lexical difficulties employed by Prynne require a very different approach to making sense, which etymological difficulty can illuminate. Consider the first stanza of the sequence *Into the Day*:

Blood fails the ear, trips the bird's
fear of bright blue. Touching that
halcyon cycle we were rested in ease
and respite from dismay: strip to
the noted bark, stop the child.⁴⁴

Hearing this poem is very different from hearing Paterson's; the variety of registers, the hints at allusion (who 'noted' the 'bark?'), and the switch from indicative to imperative are all difficulties matched by that of hearing the etymology of 'halcyon'. 'Blood fails the ear': the link

⁴¹ 'West', *OED*. The *OED* notes that 'the connection is not certain' – which only makes hearing the history of 'west' more difficult. 'West, *adv.*, *adj.*, *n.*¹, and *prep.*', *OED*.

⁴² Don Paterson, *Landing Light* (London: Faber and Faber, 2003), pp. 43–44.

⁴³ 'Gorgeous', *An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*, ed. by Walter W. Skeat, 3rd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898). Both *OED* and *OED* state, however, that beyond Old French *gorgias* the root is uncertain. 'Candid', *OED*.

⁴⁴ Prynne, *Poems*, pp. 201–14 (p. 202).

between the 'halcyon cycle', the myth of Halcyone, the kingfisher, and Charles Olson's 'The Kingfishers' is heard only in an abstract sense.⁴⁵ This abstraction, and the distance 'halcyon' has travelled from its mythological origin, are as much a part of Prynne's poem as the etymology, which therefore becomes simultaneously relevant and irrelevant, audible and inaudible, caught in a 'cycle' of attempted sense-making. Paterson uses etymology as a poetic resource that exists in synchronic language, something the poet 'should' employ; Prynne experiments with etymological patterns as a diachronic source of language that no poet can evade.⁴⁶ Experimenting with these patterns is thus comparable to the way prosody experiments with the natural stress patterns of words. The difference is that etymology is a linguistic source that is compromised by obsolescence, so that the difficulty it produces risks pedantry here as much as it does in Auden's lexical exercises.

The third and most common use of 'poetic etymology' designates an unscientific interpretation of a word's history. It is closely related to the rarer literary critical sense employed by Frye and Jakobson, but the emphasis is different: rather than validating poetic procedures, scientific ones are now in contest with them. The conflict between the poetic justification of an etymology and the knowledge that such an approach is unscientific is most fiercely and winningly fought out in Paul Muldoon's 'speculative' poetry and criticism, but it is

⁴⁵ 'Halcyon' comes from the Ancient Greek word for 'kingfisher'; it was said these birds built nests on the sea during the calm weather at new year (*ODEE*). Halcyone was a princess who tried to drown herself when her husband died at sea, but the gods took pity on the couple and turned them both into kingfishers. Olson's 'The Kingfishers' also invokes this etymology to juxtapose legendary and modern scientific accounts of the bird's nesting behaviour, but while Prynne uses the word 'halcyon' but not 'kingfisher', for Olson the opposite is the case. The etymology is thus made integral to both poems by way of omission. 'The Kingfishers', in Charles Olson, *The Collected Poems of Charles Olson*, ed. by George F. Butterick (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 86–93.

⁴⁶ In an analysis of a slightly later essay by Paterson, called 'The Lyric Principle', Derek Attridge asserts that 'the sonic dimension of words' is examined 'in a purely synchronic manner': the appeal to etymology as a poetic resource in 'The Dark Art of Poetry' need not contradict this argument. Attridge also compares Paterson's 'synchronic' theory with J. H. Prynne's diachronic one, in which words are heard 'not simply as sounds but as dense sedimentations of historical processes'. Derek Attridge, *Moving Words: Forms of English Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 90. See discussion in the Conclusion.

part of a broader trend of poets using etymological discourse to resist the marginalisation of their language and culture (whether Irish, Scots Gaelic, or a dialect of English). For these poets, which include Hugh MacDiarmid, Ted Hughes, Seamus Heaney, and Ciaran Carson, etymologising provides a sense of linguistic belonging that is valuable whether it is scientific or not. As well as countering scientific etymologies that are exclusive because they require specialist knowledge, however, poetic etymologies invariably confirm the ideological premises of the person doing the etymologising, allowing a refamiliarisation that scientific discoveries of obsolete words can never achieve.⁴⁷ Muldoon draws attention to this by emphasising the idiosyncrasy of his etymological interpretations, inviting incredulity and stoking the conflict with what Frye called ‘real etymology’. If poetic etymologies are not put into dialogue with scientific ones, then they avoid the tension that motivates the etymological poetry studied here.

In Ireland and Northern Ireland, this sense of ‘poetic etymology’ is related to the revival of a literary tradition of prescientific etymologising called *dinnseanchas* (‘place-lore’); Heaney, Muldoon, Carson, and many other Northern Irish and Irish poets have adopted it, though they all present its relationship with scientific etymology in different ways. For Heaney, *dinnseanchas* is ‘a form of mythological etymology’ that encodes personal and cultural belonging.⁴⁸ In ‘Anahorish’, for example, he claims the place and the etymology as ‘my “place of clear water”’, before interpreting the word poetically as a ‘soft gradient / of consonant, vowel-meadow’.⁴⁹ These poetic etymologies are in no way less valid than the scientific one,

⁴⁷ For an analysis of this function of poetic etymology in political discourse, see John S. Nelson, ‘Imaginative Etymology’, in *Composing Useful Pasts: History as Contemporary Politics*, ed. by Edmund E. Jacobitti (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2000), pp. 53–77.

⁴⁸ Seamus Heaney, *Preoccupations: Selected Prose, 1968–1978* (London: Faber and Faber, 1980), p. 131.

⁴⁹ Seamus Heaney, *Wintering Out* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), p. 16.

since the validating factor is personal experience of the place itself. In his study of Heaney's 'poetymologies', Henry Hart notes:

He can be as fanciful as Vico, whose sentiments about poetic language he echoes vis-a-vis Joyce, or as meticulously scholarly as William Jones. In each case, however, he presupposes a lost Edenic source, an original unity, from which language has fallen.⁵⁰

The mythological aspect of etymology, and of the *dinnseanchas* tradition in particular, has a levelling effect for Heaney; all etymological investigations, whether poetic or scientific, are part of the search for 'an original unity'. In contrast, Muldoon and Carson write an etymological poetry that perceives more tension between *dinnseanchas* and modern views of etymology.⁵¹ For them, etymologising the names of both places and people is more often associated with pedantry, disputes, and the awkwardness of reconciling the obsolete etymologies of names with their current referential function.

The difference between Heaney and Muldoon's etymologising is best described with reference to Heaney's translation of *Beowulf*. His introduction makes much of one etymology in particular:

I found in the glossary to C. L. Wrenn's edition of the poem the Old English word meaning "to suffer," the word *polian*; and although at first it looked completely strange with its *thorn* symbol instead of the familiar *th*, I gradually realized that it was not strange at all, for it was the word that older and less educated people would have used in the country where I grew up.⁵²

This realisation constituted an 'illumination by philology' that gave Heaney a 'right of way' into the Old English poem. Heaney considers 'the far-flungness of the word' *thole*, a phrase that gives it an etymological integrity despite its dispersal into different languages and cultures:

⁵⁰ Henry Hart, 'Poetymologies in Seamus Heaney's *Wintering Out*', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 35.2 (1989), 204–31 (p. 212).

⁵¹ See Chapter 1 for a brief discussion of the relationship between Muldoon and Carson's etymologising.

⁵² Seamus Heaney, Introduction to *Beowulf*, trans. by Seamus Heaney (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), pp. ix–xxx (p. xxv).

though ‘variously transformed’, it is understood to be the same word that appears in *Beowulf*, a line by John Crowe Ransom (a poet from the American South), and Heaney’s Ulster dialect. Although the words have retained almost the same spelling and meaning, ‘thole’ necessarily has a different role in each of these languages, and Heaney never uses it to translate *þolian* itself.⁵³ Instead, it acts as a reminder of how ‘poetry recirculates the language’s hidden wealth’, in a way that is ‘not only etymologically renovating, but psychologically and phenomenologically so as well’.⁵⁴ The idea that etymology can ‘[renovate]’ anything is anathema to an etymological poetry that confronts obsolescence. Muldoon, for instance, is suspicious of this linguistic recirculation. He returns to the word ‘thole’ in an elegy for Heaney, where it almost has the power of an archaism: ‘I cannot thole the thought of Heaney dead’, he writes.⁵⁵ ‘Thole’ is not part of a poetic recirculation here but a poignant reminder of what it meant to Heaney; it is a different word now that he is dead.

These comparisons of Heaney and Muldoon, Paterson and Prynne, and Hill and Auden demonstrate that poets may invoke etymology without attending to the tensions that modern linguistics has brought to the relation between obsolete and current language. ‘Etymological poetry’, on the other hand, has as its hallmark this tension between a poetic view of etymology – which values its ability to defamiliarise language, the resonance it affords poetic sound patterns, and the sense of belonging it offers – and a scientific view that insists obsolete meanings have no role to play in current language. The conflict between the two views is to some extent unavoidable for all twentieth- and twenty-first-century poetry. It can be identified in most of the poets mentioned above – even when they seem to resolutely ignore it – as well

⁵³ Conor McCarthy, *Seamus Heaney and Medieval Poetry* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2008), pp. 95–96.

⁵⁴ Seamus Heaney, ‘The Drag of the Golden Chain’, *The Times Literary Supplement*, 12 November 1999, pp. 14–16 (p. 16).

⁵⁵ Paul Muldoon, ‘Cuthbert and the Otters’, *The Times Literary Supplement*, 20 December 2013 <<http://www.the-tls.co.uk/tls/public/article1354247.ece>>.

as numerous American poets, especially those associated with Language poetry.⁵⁶ But the work of the three poet-critics considered here stands out as being peculiarly responsive to the tensions produced when the poetic appeal of etymology is confronted by the ruling against the etymological fallacy.

Auden, Prynne, and Muldoon explore the poetic value of etymology while also considering how their explorations change what is meant by 'poetry' and 'etymology'. The result is a respect for the triviality and/or academicism of an etymological perspective – all three are university poets of a sort – that is often contentious, not least because it is found in both their writing and reading of poetry. In addition, the parallels between these three poets are particularly revealing when set against their differences: Auden's divided oeuvre has divided critics, but his popularity is undeniable; Prynne has been at the centre of a marginal(ised) avant-garde movement for decades; and Muldoon is often read as the successor to Heaney, but his playfulness has become controversial (partly because of its etymological aspect). Their comparison is not intended to show a narrative of influence, but rather to investigate how etymological difficulty is manifested in a variety of late modernisms, allowing a reconsideration of the ways poetry and etymology have been assumed to relate to each other.

Literary Criticism and the Etymological Argument

In its emphasis on obsolescence, etymological poetry balances the 'active force' of its etymologising, bringing it closer to a critical metalanguage. This poetry thus questions how easily critical and poetic functions may be separated. When a poem gives an etymology in parentheses, or discusses a dictionary entry, or painstakingly outlines a self-inwoven

⁵⁶ Examples include Charles Olson, Charles Bernstein, Heather McHugh, and Susan Howe.

etymology, how can this knowledge remain abstracted from the poem's use of the etymologised word? Similarly, how is it possible to identify when a poem is using an etymology as an 'active force' without abstracting the word in question from its usage to consider it metalinguistically? Behind these problems lie two further questions: why does etymological metalanguage interrupt this poetry at all, and what changes when the knowledge it offers is assimilated into a reading? While certain poets want etymological meanings to play a role in their poetry, it is equally true that certain critics want them to play a role in the poetry they read and the criticism they write. Auden, Prynne, and Muldoon fit into both categories: they all write criticism that is influenced by etymology. The term 'etymological poetry', then, does more than describe their poetic writing; it also gives a name to the critical construct implied by their reading practices. The one necessarily affects the other. Investigating how etymological arguments function in Auden, Prynne, and Muldoon's literary criticism will help illuminate not only the complex status of etymology in their poetry but also the relationship between poetry and criticism in late modernism.

Etymological arguments have always had a place in literary criticism, from the analysis of the names of gods and goddesses in Democritus' *On Homer* to Derrida's deconstruction of Greek terms such as *pharmakon*.⁵⁷ With the disintegration of philology at the beginning of the twentieth century into the separate disciplines of linguistics and literary criticism, etymology was embraced by the latter more than the former; it is a remarkably typical practice in modern criticism, but one that remains under-theorised. Two common kinds of etymological argument will only be touched upon in what follows, because they do not correspond to the concerns of etymological poetry defined above. The simplest explains what a word meant when the poem

⁵⁷ On etymology in Democritus, see Andrew Ford, *Origins of Criticism: Literary Culture and Poetic Theory in Classical Greece* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 69. Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. by Barbara Johnson (London: Athlone Press, 1981), pp. 71–72.

was written – which can be necessary even for very recent poetry – and may be classified as editorial comment rather than critical reading. A second kind, which originated in debates about poetic diction, analyses the linguistic origins of English words as cultural metaphors: Anglo-Saxon is rough and solid, Latin is learned and decadent (a basic distinction that may be expanded upon: French is institutional, Celtic is mysterious and marginalised, and so on).⁵⁸ This type of etymological reading has been popularised in textbooks; in *The Poetry Handbook*, for example, John Lennard notes that “‘four-letter words’ are of Germanic origin [...] while polite or medical equivalents are Romance’.⁵⁹ Such stereotyping is undeniably problematic (for example, Anglo-Saxon words are often said to be, but rarely were, monosyllabic; Latin entered English at various points in history and was correspondingly assimilated in different ways and with different associations), and has been investigated recently in books such as Chris Jones’ *Strange Likeness* and Laura O’Connor’s *Haunted English*.⁶⁰ The slipperiness of these cultural metaphors is more a question of diction than etymology, however, since the effect is visible enough and ingrained enough not to necessitate discussion of its obsolescence or obscurity. Auden, Prynne, and Muldoon all invoke etymology in this way in their poetry and criticism, but it is not the primary concern of their etymological poetry.

A more complex role for the etymological argument began with William Empson’s *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, a founding text for New Criticism and modern practices of close reading in general. Defining the third type of ambiguity, which ‘occurs when two ideas,

⁵⁸ See John Strachan and Richard Terry, *Poetry*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), pp. 139–40.

⁵⁹ John Lennard, *The Poetry Handbook: A Guide to Reading Poetry for Pleasure and Practical Criticism*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 224.

⁶⁰ Laura O’Connor, *Haunted English: The Celtic Fringe, the British Empire, and de-Anglicization* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

which are connected only by being both relevant in the context, can be given in one word simultaneously', Empson explains etymology's part in it:

The most obvious way to justify [these puns] is by derivation, with an air of learning and command of language. The puns from Milton I have just quoted acquire their dignity in this way; when a reader can see no similarity between the notions concerned, such as a derivation is likely to imply, the pun seems more trivial and to proceed from a less serious apprehension of the word's meaning [...] a pun may be all right if one is induced to give a pseudo-belief, like that in personification, to the derivation; [...].

Etymology grants 'dignity' to the 'ravenous' ravens of John Milton's 'Paradise Regained' because it shows that the ambiguity proceeds from a 'serious apprehension of the word's meaning'.⁶¹ More precisely, it is the *idea* of etymology that does this; Empson again limits the literary effect of etymology when he writes:

If a pun is too completely justified by its derivation, however, it ceases to be an example of the third type, at any rate from the point of view of verbal ingenuity. One must distinguish between puns which draw some excuse from their derivation and the use of technical words outside their own field.⁶²

Less a justification than 'some excuse', the idea of etymology hovers behind Empson's attempt to fix the seriousness of literary ambiguity both here and in *The Structure of Complex Words*.⁶³ One reason a pun can never be 'too completely justified by its derivation', of course, is that the derivation must be obsolete for it to be read as a pun at all. But this is not Empson's reasoning; instead, he draws a line between 'verbal ingenuity' and a philological perspective that describes the relation between an older and a newer usage. In other words, although etymological discourse contributes to the coherence of poetic ambiguity, it can never be allowed to explain it.

⁶¹ 'Paradise Regain'd', in John Milton, *The Complete Works of John Milton*, ed. by Thomas N. Corns and Gordon Campbell, 11 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), II: *The 1671 Poems*, ed. by Laura Lunger Knoppers, p. 27 (Book 2, line 269).

⁶² Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, pp. 104–05.

⁶³ William Empson, *The Structure of Complex Words* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1951).

In 1969, K. K. Ruthven wrote that formalists – Empson included – have ignored the significance of etymology, despite ‘the frequency with which poets depend on etymological information in order to make hidden connections between apparently unrelated ideas and to establish metaphoric consonance in cases where a superficial reader might think the metaphoric thread has been broken’.⁶⁴ This argument is very similar to Empson’s, however, in that it suggests etymology helps a poem cohere without overriding the ‘verbal ingenuity’ of metaphor. Between them, Empson and Ruthven illuminate literary criticism’s ambivalence towards the etymological argument (despite the fact that Ruthven is arguing for an end to this ambivalence), which is paradoxically expected both to clarify a reading and complicate it. Etymology can adumbrate the unity every formalist seeks, but it risks becoming a solution to the poem as riddle unless it is held at bay by some non-philological poetic impulse. It thus supports a particular style of close reading, something Ruthven makes clear in his reference to ‘a superficial reader’.

Etymological reading is one of the closest kinds of reading there is: focusing in on individual words, it teases out their least obvious meanings. While it makes the most of the advantages of close reading, it also suffers the worst of its disadvantages. It stays close to the facts of the poem’s language, but this closeness risks becoming myopic; it sees the poem as a self-contained entity, but cannot avoid assuming a specific cultural and linguistic knowledge; it is a practical criticism, but depends on the acceptance of a generally unspoken theoretical framework; and finally, it sifts out ambiguities, hidden meanings, and multiple interpretations, but consequently jeopardises its ability to reach a conclusion. In the case of etymological reading, these counterarguments may all be understood as enforcing the rule against the

⁶⁴ K. K. Ruthven, ‘The Poet as Etymologist’, *Critical Quarterly*, 11.1 (1969), 9–37 (pp. 10–11).

etymological fallacy. Yet the value of reading etymologically seems to have gone unquestioned in the midst of debates about the value of close reading.

There has always been an association between close reading and pedagogy – part of its appeal is that it (supposedly) demands no more of students than attention to the text at hand – and its sociological implications are complex. Alan Brown, for example, understands the paradoxes close readings find in literary texts ('between form and content, technique and subjectivity, "self" and its self-reflections') as a 'double bind' that cements the power relation of teacher and student.⁶⁵ But what is happening when a teacher writes that awareness of 'the historical meanings of language' is one of the 'fundamentals' of learning literary criticism, which teaches readers 'to distrust [their] own complacency about the extent of [their] knowledge' and may eventually 'return us to the roots of our language and to a whole view of culture'?⁶⁶ What are the sociological implications of etymological reading?

Identifying an etymological usage without a dictionary requires knowledge of other, ideally classical, languages; with a dictionary, anyone can do it, as long as they have the patience. More importantly, reading etymologically means accepting obsolete meanings into one's own, current language and therefore giving up some linguistic control. Etymological arguments do not belong to personal interpretations in the same way as arguments about metaphor or rhyme: like close reading in general, they reconfigure the power relations involved in reading literary texts, but these relations are between language-users and the language itself rather than between expert and novice readers. When these arguments are made in etymological poetry itself, they present a unique challenge to the close reader because they invite a specific kind of closeness – soliciting the reader's personal participation

⁶⁵ Alan Brown, 'On the Subject of Practical Criticism', *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 28.4 (1999), 293–327 (p. 316).

⁶⁶ William Hutchings, 'Enquiry-Based Learning: Definitions and Rationale' (Manchester: Centre for Excellence in Enquiry-Based Learning, University of Manchester, 2007), pp. 33, 5, 31 <http://www.ceebl.manchester.ac.uk/resources/papers/hutchings2007_definingebl.pdf>.

via the impersonal language of the dictionary – whilst insisting that the results of such closeness will be myopic, pedantic, impossible to justify theoretically, and inconclusive (rather than ‘returning us to the roots of our language and to a whole view of culture’). When they are made by poet-critics espousing an etymological poetry in their own readings, the authority such writers usually have in this situation is compromised by their awareness of the problems obsolescence causes for their critical strategy. Taking its cue from such a reconfiguration of power relations, this thesis tests the critical approaches of Auden, Prynne, and Muldoon against their own poetry, asking how Muldoon’s bravura lectures, Prynne’s theory of ‘mental ears’, and Auden’s dogmatic pronouncements affect how their etymological poetry can or should be read.

Whether they appear in poetry or criticism, etymological arguments alter the relationship between writer and reader by referring to a language that neither can strictly be said to ‘use’: etymologies are invoked rather than used. They are only provisionally accepted into the meaning-making processes of reading and writing, but they also bind these processes together because invoking etymologies is both a critical and a poetic act. Etymological poetry makes criticism necessary – it requires the reader to research and interpret information intimated but not contained by the poem – while ensuring that any such reading is more than a personal reaction, having opened itself to the public history of language. In poems that explicitly invoke etymologies, as if providing a commentary on their own diction, poetry and criticism are driven further apart by occupying the same space. Furthermore, the obsolescence of the information readers discover will always prevent its assimilation into a coherent critical explanation of the poem. The interpretive difficulties that result from etymology’s effect on the relationship between poetry and criticism may be compared with the difficulties of interpreting the dense, obscure, and even hermetic allusiveness of late modernist poetry in

general. This poetry of the information age encourages research and perhaps even crossword-style decodings. Auden expects his readers to have a dictionary on hand; Prynne compiles bibliographies for some of his poems; Muldoon titles each of the 233 sections of his long poem 'Madoc: A Mystery' after different philosophers, creating an impossible task for conscientious critics.⁶⁷ Investigating ways of reading and writing etymologically will help clarify the implications of these late modernist relationships between poetry and criticism.

The 'late modernist' label is a useful one for this project, because of its connotations of difficulty – an accusation levelled against Auden, Prynne, and Muldoon, though for very different reasons in each case – and because it refrains from committing to certain contemporary notions of etymology. The poetry studied here resists the view of etymology as evidence for total linguistic flux, for example, which dissolves categories like 'obsolete' and 'current' and promulgates the endlessness of interpretation – an approach that may be labelled 'postmodernist' though it has not been defined as such. It is, however, a common way of reading Muldoon and one that will be challenged by this thesis, which sees obsolescence as a defining concept in his etymologising.⁶⁸ Poststructuralist etymologising, which is more often debated, deconstructs rather than dissolves the powerful structuralist oppositions of obsolete/current and diachronic/synchronic that underpin the definition of the etymological fallacy. If Empson and Ruthven exhibit ambivalence about the etymological argument because it seems capable of overriding appreciation of 'verbal ingenuity', poststructuralism removes this danger by equating the deconstructive etymology with such ingenuity. In other words, for

⁶⁷ Paul Muldoon, *Poems, 1968–1998* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), pp. 202–321.

⁶⁸ See, e.g., Jefferson Holdridge, *The Poetry of Paul Muldoon* (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2008); Ian Gregson, *Contemporary Poetry and Postmodernism: Dialogue and Estrangement* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 38–60; Guinn Batten, "'He Could Barely Tell One from the Other": The Borderline Disorders of Paul Muldoon's Poetry', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 95.1 (1996), 171–204; Steven D. Putzel, 'Fluid Disjunction in Paul Muldoon's "Immram" and "The More a Man Has the More a Man Wants"', *Papers on Language & Literature*, 32.1 (1996), 85–108.

poststructuralist theory there is no such thing as an argument based on etymology: only an argument that invokes the rhetorical power of etymology.

Poststructuralists have used the paradox of the etymological argument – that it may both clarify and complicate a reading – to show that the idea of etymological origins deconstructs itself through the poetic polysemy of its argumentation. The prime example of this manoeuvre is Derrida rejecting the practice of privileging past meanings over current ones, which he calls ‘etymologism’, before rehabilitating etymology as a rhetorical or literary device.⁶⁹ The result is that, rather than justifying puns, an etymology is now itself a kind of pun for theorists such as Jonathon Culler and Derek Attridge. The former writes:

Etymologies show us what puns might be if taken seriously: illustrations of the inherent instability of language and the power of uncoded linguistic relations to produce meaning.⁷⁰

Culler argues that this is the case for all etymological discourse, ‘whether sanctioned or unsanctioned by current philology’, but his choice of the word ‘uncoded’ betrays the stretch that is being made between puns and etymologies. The fact that etymologies can be ‘sanctioned or unsanctioned’, that they are ‘taken seriously’ at all, testifies to a codification that ranges from the complexities of diachronic sound laws (a hidden code for most) to the labelling of meanings as obsolete or current. Even ‘unsanctioned’ folk etymologies rely on these codes, which is what differentiates them from puns – as Empson was at pains to point out.

Although Attridge also argues for the literariness of etymology, he grants a key role to its scientific and codified nature in his chapter on ‘Language as History/History as Language:

⁶⁹ Jacques Derrida, ‘White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy’, trans. by F. C. T. Moore, *New Literary History*, 6.1 (1974), 5–74 (p. 8).

⁷⁰ Jonathon Culler, *On Puns: The Foundation of Letters* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), p. 3.

Saussure and the Romance of Etymology', from *Peculiar Language* (which was published in the same year as Culler's *On Puns*, 1988):

But where etymology uses the tools of the tradition whose hierarchies it deconstructs – the tools of logic, empiricism, scientific method – and is thereby granted by our culture the right to be read in, and against, that tradition, the word-play of literature is all too easily partitioned off as another pathological development of the language to be kept under observation. This is one reason why the deconstructive etymological argument, and poststructuralist theory more generally, has an important role to play in the cultural and political arena, where the notions of “authentic meaning” and “true history,” and the stories in which they are embedded, exercise a powerful ideological function, and where any challenge literature and its readers might mount against these notions is disabled by the prior marginalization of the literary.⁷¹

Attridge works out the consequences of the argument that etymology affords literary wordplay ‘dignity’ (Empson) or demonstrates ‘what puns might be if taken seriously’ (Culler) to reach precisely the opposite conclusion to the one made by Yakov Malkiel discussed at the beginning of this chapter. Reading etymology as a literary act frees its ‘tools of logic, empiricism, and scientific method’ to work against rather than for the marginalisation of literature, supporting its critique of ideology in ordinary language. But such a reading depends on the seriousness of etymology and on literature itself taking it seriously, as if all the power of etymology as a ‘scientific method’ could be transferred into rhetorical power. In the etymological poetry of Auden, Prynne, and Muldoon, this is not the case. Etymology is prevented from becoming fully rhetorical because of its reputation as a scholastic and pedantic discipline, which interferes with the deconstruction of the etymological fallacy behind Attridge and Culler’s theories. This poetry thus calls for a different answer to Attridge’s

⁷¹ Derek Attridge, ‘Language as History/History as Language: Saussure and the Romance of Etymology’, in *Peculiar Language: Literature as Difference from the Renaissance to James Joyce* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 90–126 (p. 126).

questions: '[w]hy is the appeal of etymology so powerful and enduring? What is the status of etymology after Saussure?'⁷²

One answer may be found by examining a particular situation in which 'the appeal of etymology' is often too strong to resist: the heralding of critical terminology. Auden, Prynne, and Muldoon all adopt the common technique of etymologising their critical terms to introduce or support a point about a literary text. This technique blends the neutral, explanatory aspect of etymology – as it is called upon to clarify how the term will be used in the argument – with its capacity for rhetorical flourish, which many critics use to achieve some resonance with the language of the literary text being analysed. For example, Heaney extends a metaphor central to much of his own poetry when he explains the link between 'verse' and the Latin *versus*, meaning 'the turn that a ploughman made at the head of the field'; similarly, Gail McConnell reads Louis MacNeice's 'familiar room' (from 'Prayer Before Birth') as a version of 'the poetic chamber: the stanza', referring to its origin in the Italian word for 'room'.⁷³ It has been noted that '[t]his question of the figurality of figurative terminology forms the nexus of philology and rhetoric',⁷⁴ the point at which the turn to theory – to conceptualising poetry through 'verse' and 'stanza' – returns to philology. It thus corresponds with late modernism's challenging of the relationship between poetry and criticism, and the specific challenge posed by etymological poetry. Auden, Prynne, and Muldoon all confront 'the nexus of philology and rhetoric' in a way that exposes its pedantry, not least because it has become a critical trope to talk about metaphor as 'carrying across', tragedy as a 'goat-song', or indeed tropes as 'turns'. Muldoon's etymologising of 'spondee', discussed in Chapter 1, is a

⁷² Attridge, 'Language as History', p. 107.

⁷³ Heaney, *Preoccupations*, p. 65. Gail McConnell, *Northern Irish Poetry and Theology* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 214.

⁷⁴ Seth Lerer, *Error and the Academic Self: The Scholarly Imagination, Medieval to Modern* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 215.

satirical comment on this critical strategy.⁷⁵ On a more comprehensive scale, the etymology of ‘etymology’ itself provides another explanation of ‘the appeal of etymology’, even after Saussure, that will be examined in more detail in the final three chapters of this thesis. The idea of *etumos logos* or ‘true speech’ is the fulcrum about which philology is read into Auden’s landscapes, Prynne’s lyricism, and Muldoon’s onomastics.

It would be misleading, however, to suggest that the appeal of the etymological argument in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is limited to New Criticism, structuralism, and their descendants. It has also been explored (admittedly less frequently) by another group who argue not for the rhetoricity of etymology but for its reflection of the history that constitutes current culture and the social, political, and ethical responsibilities it therefore commands. In ‘Semantics and the “Etymological Fallacy” Fallacy’ (1998), for example, the linguist Christopher Hutton asserts that ‘whenever we debate, reflect on or argue about the meanings of words we are involved in a form of etymologising’.⁷⁶ This view preserves the spirit of pre-scientific, pre-structuralist etymologising, rejecting the rationale behind the term ‘etymological fallacy’ and its segregation of diachrony and synchrony; Raymond Williams introduces his *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1976) by stating that its ‘emphasis is not only on historical origins and developments but also on the present – present meanings, implications and relationships – as history’.⁷⁷ Similarly, in his study of ‘American rhetorical philology’, Seth Lerer argues that, among a cast of ‘scholarly characters’ that includes US President John Quincy Adams (1825–1829) and Paul De Man, ‘the

⁷⁵ Paul Muldoon, *The End of the Poem: Oxford Lectures in Poetry* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), p. 9.

⁷⁶ Christopher Hutton, ‘Semantics and the “Etymological Fallacy” Fallacy’, *Language Sciences*, 20.2 (1998), 189–200 (p. 190).

⁷⁷ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, rev. edn (London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1983), p. 23.

pursuit of etymology is the pursuit of national identity'. Their pursuit starts from the following premise:

The history of words scripts out a history of disciplines – a history that matters, to appropriate [eighteenth-century philologist John Horne] Tooke's phrasing, not just to schoolmen but to the rights and happiness of mankind.⁷⁸

These are arguments against the idea that etymology is pedantic, and they are therefore more relevant to the work of Geoffrey Hill or Seamus Heaney than the poetry considered here. In recent years, however, they have crossed paths with the poststructuralist analysis of the obsolete/current opposition in a way that can provide the best account of 'the appeal of etymology' for Auden, Prynne, and Muldoon.

The sociological imperative to etymologise meets the poststructuralist, rhetoricised view of etymology in queer theory, resulting in a fuller appreciation of what it means to invoke obsolete forms and meanings – and of the pedantry of this endeavour – than either could manage alone. Queer theory confronts deeply embedded attitudes to sexuality in language *as* deeply embedded in language, rather than bringing them out into a rhetorical or ethical light. As Jeffery Masten writes, '[t]here is no reading the queer address without philology'. The etymological argument is thus as self-cancelling as it is self-fulfilling. For example, Masten's analysis of 'sweet' as a form of address between men in the early modern period, discussed further in Chapter 5, is both a rehabilitation of and an act of mourning for the word's history, which 'persist[s] [...] as a diachronic record of practice in the midst of language as a synchronic system'.⁷⁹ Paula Blank's article 'The Proverbial "Lesbian": Queering Etymology in Contemporary Critical Practice' (2011), mentioned at the start of this introduction, is the fullest

⁷⁸ Lerer, p. 183.

⁷⁹ Jeffrey Masten, 'Toward a Queer Address: The Taste of Letters and Early Modern Male Friendship', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 10.3 (2004), 367–84 (pp. 374–75).

expression of this ‘new etymology’ that is also a ‘queer etymology’. It is based on ‘the procedures of Derridean etymology’, but:

Rather than enacting a deferral of origins, a critique of Western notions of (original) “presence,” the new etymology recommits itself to the source material of English.

Blank explains that the ‘source material’ in question does not include the speculative reconstructions of Proto-Indo-European (which themselves seem to conform to the critique of presence): the new etymology goes back ‘only as far as ancient Greek and Latin, the oldest words that we can see, hear, and touch in extant texts’ – that is, the most tangibly, even familiarly obsolete words there are. As a consequence, ‘etymology now lets us have our cake of truth in language and eat it too’.⁸⁰

The etymological poetry discussed here has the same pedantic respect for obsolescence that Blank perceives in the ‘new etymology’. In her analysis, and in the close readings that make up the body of this thesis, the appeal of the etymological argument is felt in its ‘equivocal nature [...] the way it purports to explain everything and to explain nothing’. While many theorists of etymology have negotiated its ‘equivocal nature’, only queer theory has embraced it, though the embrace itself can never be more than equivocal. The purpose of Blank’s article, for instance, is to confront the historical associations of the word ‘lesbian’ with ‘the oral gratification of men, [...] obscenity, prostitution, defilement’. She proposes ‘a more explicit theory of obsolescence, explaining how we know that some meanings of words, as opposed to others, are dead and forever buried’ – but acknowledges that this is probably impossible. The alternative is to embrace the quality of obsolescence itself:

But perhaps the risks we take in further queering “lesbian” may be a source of a further pleasure, of a kind – the feeling of taking control of a language

⁸⁰ Blank, pp. 111–12.

that is ours by surrendering to it as also not ours, the satisfaction of knowing more about where it has been and whom it has been with, and thus, perhaps, what it might yet mean to us.⁸¹

Obsolescence is an important curb to both the 'present [...] as history' (Williams) and the 'deconstructive etymological argument' (Attridge). It frustrates the authority apparently exercised by the etymological argument, whether scientific or poetic; at the same time, however, it allows for a greater intimacy between the would-be linguistic authority and the language. Such an intimacy may be found in the poetry that Auden, Prynne, and Muldoon derive from etymological pedantry.

The Etymological Poetry of Auden, Prynne, and Muldoon

The fact of obsolescence is at the centre of the critical approach taken in this thesis, though it also responds to other incarnations of the etymological argument. Its primary method is a variety of close reading that is both attentive to the 'queer' linguistic intimacy etymological poetry encourages and curious about whether this is an effect of poetic activity or critical metalanguage. It explores the kinds of poetic difficulty produced by etymology when it is presented as academic, obtuse, and even irrelevant, and interrogates the distinction between poetic and scientific etymologising. It tries always to be aware of poets' cues – or lack of them – for its etymological readings. In summary: this study is as much about reading etymologically as it is about etymological writing. The liberating and limiting effects of close reading are an important focus, together with the relationships between poetry and criticism they entail. Etymological reading shows that these relationships can be built on a surrender to

⁸¹ Blank, pp. 113, 133, 134.

the oddness, otherness, and obsolescence of language as well as on the precise poetic control of it.

Etymology's reconfiguration of how poetry and criticism relate is indicative of its wider influence on the relationships language establishes between people, and between people and the world. Etymology disrupts these relationships in different ways: its obscurity breaks the contract that exists between language users, but that same obscurity implies that if only the original meanings of words could be discovered then they would reveal truths about the world itself. That is to say, etymological poetry reconfigures language as a tool of both communication and representation. It is on this basis that the six chapters that make up the body of this thesis are organised. The first three are concerned with communication: they develop reading techniques that are then applied in the second three to investigate how etymology affects the ways this poetry represents the world. The chapters are not ordered chronologically, but in a mirror structure that reflects the extent of each poet's emphasis on etymological obscurity – from Muldoon's manifestly cryptic and ominous etymologies, through Prynne's latent but mysteriously audible etymological lyricism, to the blend of pedantry and dogma in Auden's philology. Working inwards from Muldoon and Prynne to Auden, and then back out again, this structure supports the comparison and contrast of subtler and more extreme uses of etymological obscurity.

Chapter 1 argues that Muldoon's compulsive etymologising is playful in his criticism and scholarly in his poetry. Using this observation, it contemplates the connection that exists between etymology and elegy in poems such as 'Yarrow', 'Hedge School', and 'The Humors of Hakone', where the obsolescence of etymology helps deal with the problem of using personal

loss for poetic gain.⁸² Here and in his criticism, Muldoon's reputation as an 'etymological junkie' – a term used by Sebastian Barker in an interview – is understood to position the reader as the arbiter of his linguistic forensics.⁸³ Chapter 2 investigates Prynne's theory of etymological reading, which he describes as a process of hearing with 'mental ears', in conjunction with his poetry's famous difficulty. An investigation of the Proto-Indo-European roots behind poems in the early collection *The White Stones* is followed by analyses of the etymological effect of Prynne's morphological patterns, such as the splitting of words across line endings and the repetition of roots or affixes.⁸⁴ It is proposed that Prynne's poetic language communicates on the boundary between meaningfulness and meaninglessness, where every word disrupts and is disrupted by its history. Chapter 3 examines a different sort of difficulty in the *recherché* diction of Auden's late poetry, alongside his statement that philology is 'the most poetical of all scholastic disciplines'.⁸⁵ Taking its title from his poem 'A Bad Night (A Lexical Exercise)', this chapter demonstrates that Auden's philologically-inflected diction resists attempts to read it as a method of obstructing or facilitating communication.⁸⁶ Instead, it shows that the historicity of language makes communication possible – with the help of the *OED* – without being able to guarantee its efficacy.

In Chapters 4 to 6, the methods of etymological reading tested in Chapters 1 to 3 are applied to aspects of poetry by Auden, Prynne, and Muldoon that have been subject to considerable critical debate, with the overall aim of describing the influence etymology has on the way their poetic languages represent the world. Chapter 4 reinterprets Auden's *paysages*

⁸² 'Yarrow', in Paul Muldoon, *Poems, 1968–1998* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), pp. 346–92; 'Hedge School', in Paul Muldoon, *Horse Latitudes* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), p. 94; 'The Humors of Hakone', in Paul Muldoon, *Maggot* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), pp. 63–71.

⁸³ Sebastian Barker, 'A Drink with Paul Muldoon', Interview with Paul Muldoon, *The Long Poem Group Newsletter*, 7 (1998), 1–4 (p. 2).

⁸⁴ Prynne, *Poems*, pp. 37–126.

⁸⁵ W. H. Auden, 'Making, Knowing and Judging', in *The Dyer's Hand; And, Other Essays* (New York: Random House, 1962), pp. 31–60 (p. 35).

⁸⁶ Auden, *Collected Poems*, pp. 842–43.

moralisés as '*paysages etymologisés*' to illuminate his concern with 'the relation of man as a history-making person to nature'.⁸⁷ Beginning with his adoption of theories about the invention of language from Gerald Heard and others, a study is made of the anthropological, psychological, sociological, and religious significance of the relation between landscape and linguistic history in Auden's poetry. Chapter 5 considers the role of etymology in claims about lyric poetry's privileged way of representing the world – for example Emerson's famous statement that language is 'fossil poetry' – to explore Prynne's resistance to these claims, and to what he calls the 'lightness ready-made' of traditional lyric diction.⁸⁸ Etymology contributes to a re-reading both of the lyric fragments (including allusions) found throughout Prynne's poetry and of *Pearls That Were*, an anomaly in his oeuvre because of its sustained lyricism.⁸⁹ Finally, Chapter 6 turns to another poetic and etymological superstition: *nomen est omen*. Muldoon demonstrates a commitment to this proverb that is specifically Irish, attending to the political charge behind interpretations and translations of personal and place names, as well as to the implications of charactonymy and prosopopoeia. It is concluded that, in Muldoon's poems, any temptation to interpret names – to see names as omens – is itself ominous.

These readings of Auden, Prynne, and Muldoon define an etymological poetry that establishes dialogue between obsolete and current language while respecting the fact of obsolescence behind the strict structuralist resistance to the etymological fallacy. They attempt to explain the appeal of etymology to three very different late modernist poet-critics who have all been accused of linguistic pedantry and even triviality. Integrating the fact of obsolescence and the pedantry that must be the consequence into their poetic language,

⁸⁷ Auden used this phrase to describe the focus of his 'Bucolics', in the sleeve-note for a recording of them. Quoted in John Fuller, *W.H. Auden: A Commentary* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), p. 443.

⁸⁸ J. H. Prynne, Letter [to Ray Crump] (14th March 1968), in *Certain Prose of 'The English Intelligencer'*, ed. by Neil Pattison, Reitha Pattison, and Luke Roberts (Cambridge: Mountain Press, 2012), pp. 183–85 (p. 184).

⁸⁹ Prynne, *Poems*, pp. 452–74.

these writers build on the historic and complex connections between etymology and poetry to question how readers and writers confront a discourse that, in Blank's words, 'purports to explain everything and to explain nothing'. In the process, they invite etymology to reconfigure understandings of how language establishes relationships between people and between people and the world.

1. Paul Muldoon the 'Etymological Junkie'

Paul Muldoon describes poetic communication as a process of 'speculation' that implicates both reader and writer:

It seems to me that all reading is, to a greater or lesser extent, involved with speculation on what's going on, consciously or unconsciously, in the writer's mind, just as all writing is involved with speculation on what's going on, consciously or unconsciously, in the reader's mind. I use the word "speculation," by the way, with an eye to its farflung roots in *specula*, "watch-tower," and *speculum*, "mirror."¹

Using a word 'with an eye to its farflung roots' does not make those roots wholly relevant, but neither does it make them merely incidental. Nor is Muldoon concerned here, despite the show of philological scholarship, with the precision of his etymologies; he refers to the roots both of the sixteenth-century verb 'speculate' (*specula*) and the fourteenth-century noun 'speculation' (*speculum*).² This is a prime example of what Paula Blank has called the 'quasi-disciplinarity' of etymology, not least in that it uses a familiar critical idiom – of remotivating a word to define it as a term in an argument – while holding back from claiming the authority such an idiom implies.³ Muldoon's etymological aside stages 'speculation' in tentatively redefining it, appearing to take control of the word's interpretation while leaving the reader free to speculate about this performance. Reading his own writing, Muldoon has one eye on the 'farflung roots' of words and the other on how far they may be carried from them.

¹ Paul Muldoon, *The End of the Poem: Oxford Lectures in Poetry* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), p. 360.

² 'Spectacle', *ODEE*. There is a long history of debates about the etymology of 'speculation', sparked by the problem of translating *speculum* in 1 Corinthians 13:12 ('through a glass, darkly') and *speculantes* in 2 Corinthians 3:18. See, for instance, the discussion in Edward W. Tayler, *Donne's Idea of a Woman: Structure and Meaning in The Anniversaries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), pp. 166–67.

³ Paula Blank, 'The Proverbial "Lesbian": Queering Etymology in Contemporary Critical Practice', *Modern Philology*, 109.1 (2011), 108–34 (p. 118).

Muldoon's poetry and criticism are both famous for their 'bravura'.⁴ Virtuoso in the range of references they employ as well as in the leaps they make between disparate ideas, both have been accused of distracting from or overshadowing what truly matters. In his poems, Muldoon makes unlikely connections using rhymes, puns, slips, and etymologies; he uses the same strategies in his lectures, introducing connections as 'resonances', 'near versions', 'cognates', and even 'resisted usages' or 'encrypted words'.⁵ This sort of list has been compiled before, often with the understanding that it is the most untenable connections – the 'resisted usages' Muldoon detects in others' poems, and some would argue relies on in his own – that dominate and define the bravura of his critical and poetic methods.⁶ In contrast, little attention has been accorded to etymology, which stands out in important ways from the other types of association used by Muldoon. Bridging the gaps between self-consciously tenuous slips and old-fashioned philological scholarship, between words' acoustic and semantic resemblances, and between poetic invention and critical discovery, etymology also represents a ubiquitous kind of 'resisted usage'; all words resist their obsolete meanings as they acquire new ones. Openness to these resisted meanings has long been considered part of a poetic sensitivity to language, and critics often make their arguments with reference to an etymological dictionary. Muldoon acknowledges these established roles of etymology in poetry and criticism by reversing them: his criticism plays with etymologies and his poetry expounds them. An analysis of these tendencies will show

⁴ The word has been used by, among others, James McGonigal, 'The End of the Lecture', *The Dark Horse*, 20 (2007), 89–93 (p. 92); Terence Brown, *The Literature of Ireland: Culture and Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 222; Michael Robbins, 'Paul Muldoon's Covert Operations', *Modern Philology*, 109.2 (2011), 266–99 (p. 292); and Laura O'Connor, 'The Bilingual Routes of Paul Muldoon/Pól Ó Maoldúin', *Irish Studies Review*, 19.2 (2011), 135–55 (p. 151).

⁵ These terms are used throughout Paul Muldoon, *To Ireland, I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Muldoon, *The End of the Poem*. Further references to both books are given in the text, abbreviated to 'TII' and 'TEP' respectively.

⁶ See, for example, Helen Vendler, 'Fanciness and Fatality', *The New Republic*, 6 November 2006, pp. 26–33.

how etymology contributes to the relationship between his poetic and critical bravura, framing some speculations about the risks they take with the idea of poetic communication.

Speculation and Etymology in Muldoon's Criticism

Delivered in 1998 and published as *To Ireland, I* in 2000, Muldoon's series of Clarendon Lectures was his first substantial work of criticism. He begins his search for Irish literature's 'encrypted words' by stating that the writers he will discuss all share an 'urge towards the cryptic, the encoded, the runic, the virtually unintelligible' (*TI* 5). It is Muldoon's own urge towards the cryptic, however, that drives the readings here and in his Oxford Professor of Poetry Lectures, which were given between 1999 and 2004 and published under the title *The End of the Poem* (2006). This later work is remarkably direct about the ambivalent position of the poet-critic, and how it affords critical authority without the usual sense of critical responsibility. Muldoon delights in the liberties he can take as 'a very badly brought-up non-academic' and admits, or provocatively insists, that the eccentricity of his cryptographic interpretations depends simply on how 'frisky' he is feeling on any given day (*TEP* 67, 69). The responsibility for the 'virtually unintelligible' nature of the poem is thus shifted from the writer towards the reader. With this shift, the supposed boundaries between writer and reader, poet and critic (and poet-critic), invention and discovery, are challenged: cryptography must somehow be judged as a critical method as well as a literary device.⁷ Muldoon encourages his audience to see this

⁷ Muldoon's use of cryptography to challenge rather than reinforce this distinction differentiates it from other cryptographic approaches, e.g. in John Shoptaw, 'Lyric Cryptography', *Poetics Today*, 21.1 (2000), 221–62; and Alastair Fowler, *Literary Names: Personal Names in English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

method as alarmingly erratic, as if anything could be claimed to be encrypted by the poem. He also hints that the whole institution of close reading runs this risk, precisely because its limits are set by the convention of what counts as a convincing or tenuous reading, rather than any objective measure. William Empson acknowledged the potential limitlessness of the practice of close reading when he wrote that he was 'treating the act of communication as something very extraordinary, so that the next step would be to lose faith in it altogether'.⁸ But Muldoon's model of poetic communication as an extraordinary, 'virtually unintelligible' code additionally implies the very ordinary desire to make it 'intelligible'. Decoding may also be dangerously reductive, as if invoking a secret password could solve the poem like a puzzle.

Though etymology is only one among many kinds of verbal association used by Muldoon, it is the governing discourse of his cryptographic method. Every word is an encryption of its own history, whether or not writers are aware of those histories, and so it is always more than a literary device or a critical strategy. In addition, it entertains the possibility that words recognised to be 'near versions' of each other might represent such an inescapable encryption. Etymologies are capable of making even familiar words virtually unintelligible, expanding their frames of reference in surprising ways. But in literary criticism, and in many other fields, the standard purpose of etymology has been to remotivate terms to make them more intelligible. It thus functions as a mode of definition or even translation, from George Puttenham's 1589 handbook of rhetoric *The Art of English Poesy* to Jacques Derrida's etymologically informed theories of 'gift', 'archive', 'religion', and so on.⁹ The more radical (fundamental and/or extreme) the

⁸ William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, 3rd edn (London: Chatto & Windus, 1953), p. 243.

⁹ George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, ed. by Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007); Jacques Derrida, *Given Time. 1, Counterfeit Money*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf

interpretation etymology affords, the stronger the sense that the word was ‘virtually unintelligible’ before, as in Geoffrey Hill’s argument that ‘the technical perfecting of a poem is an act of atonement, in the radical etymological sense – an act of at-one-ment, a setting at one’.¹⁰ Muldoon follows suit, with some irony about how etymology affects ordinary communication:

the word “spondee,” if you recall, has at its heart the idea of duration,
the duration of the pouring of a drink-offering or libation to the gods
(TEP 9)

The pointed flattery in the phrase ‘if you recall’ suggests that it is reasonable to call an etymology the ‘heart’ of a word even when it is completely foreign to current usage and common knowledge. It also deflates the surprise that such etymologies are usually called upon to produce. This is not to say that Muldoon denies his audience the feeling that there are undiscovered possibilities contained in the history of otherwise familiar words, but he does imply that they have already participated and continue to participate in those histories every time they read, hear, speak, or write a word. A similar effect is achieved in pointed references to his own etymological obsession: ‘(I’m reminded that the term “lay,” in the poem sense, is thought to be related to the Latin word *ludus*)’ (TEP 100). Few people ‘recall’ and are ‘reminded’ of etymologies so regularly as Muldoon, though these terms do gesture towards a certain familiarity with classical languages that divides even his Oxford audience by age and schooling. Much of Muldoon’s etymologising, the ‘spondee’ instance included, is obscure enough to exceed this question of elitism, however, suggesting that recalling and reminding are in fact

(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Jacques Derrida, ‘Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression’, trans. by Eric Prenowitz, *Diacritics*, 25.2 (1995), 9–63; Jacques Derrida, ‘Faith and Knowledge’, trans. by Samuel Weber, in *Acts of Religion*, ed. by Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 40–101.

¹⁰ Geoffrey Hill, ‘Poetry as “Menace” and “Atonement”’, in *Collected Critical Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 3–20 (p. 4).

metaphors for a more complex process of discovery that feels like rediscovery.¹¹ The standard critical rhetoric of etymology is reshaped here by an awareness of the consequences such rhetoric has for communication, both sociologically and, more pressingly, regarding the presence or absence of etymology in current language more generally.

A distinction should be drawn here between the practices of etymologising critical terms and etymologising the diction of a poem. The first re-activates an obsolete meaning, while the second is a more metalinguistic comment on how the author or the poetic context has already effected such a re-activation. In Muldoon's case, this distinction is absent. His etymologising of 'spondee', for example, transforms a redefinition of a technical term into a point about the spondaic metre of W. B. Yeats' 'All Souls Night': 'as it turns out in this poem', the drink-offering is to 'the ghosts of the dead' (*TEP* 9). On a larger scale, it is difficult to tell whether the recurring etymological motif of the door/*Duir* (Irish for 'oak tree')/druid in *To Ireland, I* is being traced through literary texts or developed into a metaphor for the work of criticism. '*Duir*' is first introduced as an encrypted word Robert Graves identified in an Old Irish poem. Muldoon then imagines the writers he will discuss 'lining up just beyond the door'; AE Housman is '[t]he first through that oaken *Duir*' (*TII* 4–6). None of the poems Muldoon refers to with this motif actually use the words 'door' or '*Duir*'; it is fittingly positioned on the edges of the texts themselves, where they enter the critical arena.¹² Another example of this

¹¹ Muldoon's Irish etymologies, for example, will be familiar to a much smaller audience. On a more extreme scale, he admits to a kind of idiosyncratic etymologising that will be unrecognisable even to professional linguists (e.g. *TII* 76, 124). It is also worth noting that many of the words he chooses to etymologise in *The End of the Poem* – 'haggard' (134), 'theroid' (177), 'supercilious' (210), 'shingle' (332) – are themselves not well-used.

¹² The most dramatic example of this comes in an analysis of Gulliver's gloss of 'Glubbubdrib' as 'the Island of Sorcerers or Magicians': 'Swift is sending us a clear signal here that he is engaged by a specifically Irish

slipperiness of Muldoon's etymologies can be found in his discussion of John Hewitt, 'whose poetry is much concerned with [...] the putting down of roots by one group coinciding with the *deracination* or *extirpation* of another' (*TII* 46). While this bears similarities to the subtle pun in Geoffrey Hill's phrase 'the radical etymological sense'¹³ – 'radical' is derived from the Latin *radix*, 'root', and an early English sense was 'the root of a word'¹⁴ – Muldoon's italics are more insistent that the reader recognise the obscure origins of these uncommon words.¹⁵ Etymology is the key that can turn a door into a 'sacred oak tree' and an obsolete etymological root into a 'root', helping Muldoon to prove paradoxically that 'liminality [...] is central to the Irish psyche' through the liminality and centrality of his own critical method (*TII* 8).

As these examples show, Muldoon's etymologies facilitate his adoption of the diction and metaphors of the literary texts he is reading into his critical language (and, in the case of 'spondee', his insertion of his critical language into the poem as if it were encrypted). This technique is always accompanied by the feeling that the congruence is accidental – as if both poet and critic required the same word – and that the etymology is more active than even a reader interested in poetic language would assume. One final example, from an interview Muldoon gave in 2007, shows how simply he can carry out this manoeuvre. Discussing Edward Thomas' short poem 'Thaw', he says:

Delicacy, tact, is what he's so brilliant at. I don't suppose there's another poet who has the tact of Thomas. Even that other little poem I read 'Thaw', where he uses the image of the rooks that are speculating, which is an extraordinary word, speculating, perfect for a range of

etymology, since the "dri" element in Glubbubdrib is a version of draoi, the Irish word from which "druid" derives, itself stemming from the duir, or sacred "oak tree" with which I introduced Amergin in the first of these talks'. (*TII* 128–29).

¹³ Geoffrey Hill, 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"', in *Collected Critical Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 3–20 (p. 4).

¹⁴ 'Radical, *adj.* and *n.*', 4a, *OED*.

¹⁵ From Old French '*racine*', 'root', and Latin '*stirps*', 'stem or stock of a tree'. 'Deracinate', 'Extirpate', *ODEE*.

reasons: *speculum* of the mirror, *speculation* of looking, *speculate* in the land sense, then the pun on speckle of the egg, the speckled landscape, thawing, frozen and unfrozen, it's brilliant ... it's deceptively simple ... these things are brilliant and two a penny almost in Thomas.

The thing many poets learn from him is the willingness just to look, to *speculate* actually [...]¹⁶

Muldoon uses Thomas' word as an afterthought to describe his influence, but the meaning it has here is a radically etymological one; it might be called 'deceptively simple', sidestepping the shock which must greet '*speculum* of the mirror' being the first of the 'range of reasons' that came to mind. This afterthought connects an analysis of Thomas' diction to a conclusion about his powers of observation, and, of course, Muldoon's own powers of observation, since he has himself been speculating about the meaning of 'speculating' again. The serendipity with which 'speculate' makes Muldoon's conclusion for him is prepared by etymology, as it switches from metalinguistic commentary to the redefinition of a term for critical purposes. This flexibility of etymology, as both something that needs to be revealed by the critic and something that is always potentially present as an aid to definition, is essential to the bravura with which Muldoon switches 'speculating' from quotation to critical term.

The technique of adopting words from a text into a critical reading of it is widespread – and contentious. Although Muldoon's etymological version is distinctive, it can be usefully compared with a point in an essay by Christopher Ricks on J. L. Austin's literary allusions, 'Austin's Swink'. For Ricks, Austin's allusive style implicitly contradicts his explicit arguments about literary language as 'not serious' or 'parasitic', since it seems essential to the expression of these arguments. That is, such extraordinary language is

¹⁶ Patrick McGuinness, 'Speculating: Patrick McGuinness Interviews Paul Muldoon', *Irish Studies Review*, 17.1 (2009), 103–10.

odd, coming from an ordinary language philosopher. In his conclusion, Ricks alludes to Austin alluding to Wordsworth, labelling this technique one of 'trailing words'. Austin's point is that words come '*Trailing clouds of etymology*' (following Wordsworth's 'trailing clouds of glory'), that 'no word ever achieves entire forgetfulness of its origins'; Ricks' response is that 'Austin's trailing words do not seek forgetfulness of Wordsworth's'.¹⁷ Like Muldoon, then, Ricks makes a link between the ubiquity of 'trailing etymologies' and a deliberate allusion, but unlike Muldoon he does not exploit this link in his own 'trailing words'.

In a short article on bravura literary criticism, Derek Attridge describes the use of these trailing words as Ricks' 'most effective technique'. It 'creat[es] the illusion of an extraordinarily close relationship' between his own language and that of the texts he writes about, but such effectiveness is its own downfall: 'the more powerful the critic's technique, the less reliable are the critical judgments it is used to make'. Attridge likens Ricks' Oxford Professor of Poetry lectures to those of his predecessor, Paul Muldoon, but argues that Muldoon 'helps open our eyes to the dangers' of bravura criticism by showing that there is no end to its power, so that 'it is in that very power that its limitations lie'.¹⁸ The difference between Ricks' and Muldoon's bravura is more than one of degree, however. Both match the critical power to comment on diction with the power of literary allusion, but only Muldoon implies that they are connected by more than an 'illusion'. There is, in fact, an 'extraordinarily close relationship' between Edward Thomas' 'speculate' and Muldoon's 'speculate', determined by an etymology that has to be revealed as extraordinary before it can seem ordinary. The real danger of this kind of

¹⁷ Christopher Ricks, 'Austin's Swink', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 61.3 (1992), 297–315 (p. 311).

¹⁸ Derek Attridge, 'Conjurers Turn Tricks on Wizards' Coat-Tails', *Times Higher Education*, 23 June 2006 <<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/features/conjurers-turn-tricks-on-wizards-coat-tails/203931.article>>.

critical bravura is not that it will overshadow its object, but rather that it will find itself in a feedback loop of readers speculating about writers speculating about readers and so on, all under the aegis of etymology.

Both of Muldoon's studies in 'speculation' quoted above resist mentioning one particular cognate: 'spectacle'. In their playfulness, their extravagance, and their consciousness of occasion – not to mention the poet's very self-aware performance of his critical but 'non-academic' role – Muldoon's Oxford lectures were spectacles. His performances as a self-proclaimed 'stunt-reader', interpreting 'stunt-writ[ing]' (*TEP* 195), left their audiences variously stunned (James Fenton), delighted (Peter Conrad), and disturbed (Valentine Cunningham).¹⁹ Geoffrey Hartman has suggested that '[t]he spectacle of the critic's mind disoriented, bewildered, caught in some "wild surmise" about the text and struggling to adjust' is one of the attractions of critical writing.²⁰ But it is also a source of tension between the critic as reader and the critic's reader(s), as the skill, drama, and risk of the stunt are reduced to a spectacle in the presence of an audience that is unwilling to participate in a neverending cycle of speculations.

Focusing on the more tenuous etymologies proposed in *To Ireland, I*, Heather O'Donoghue sees Muldoon's 'etymological rigmarole', 'etymological toying', 'minute etymological analysis', and 'onomastic minutiae' as pedantic and even parodic, designed to '[irritate]' and '[infuriate]' those who fail to recognise that his 'implicit project seems to be to occupy a liminal status between the interpretative critic and the creative

¹⁹ James Fenton, 'A Poke in the Eye with a Poem', Review of *Horse Latitudes* by Paul Muldoon, *The Guardian*, 21 October 2006 <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/oct/21/featuresreviews.guardianreview6>>; Peter Conrad, 'The Reason behind Rhyme', Review of *The End of the Poem* by Paul Muldoon, *The Guardian*, 19 November 2006 <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/nov/19/poetry.features>>; Valentine Cunningham is quoted describing Muldoon's lectures as '[b]edlam – an associative madness' in Charles McGrath, 'Word Freak', *The New York Times*, 19 November 2006 <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/19/magazine/19muldoon.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0>.

²⁰ Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Criticism in the Wilderness: The Study of Literature Today* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980), p. 20.

writer'.²¹ This judgment may be compared with that of Peter McDonald, who in an unfavourable review of Muldoon's 2006 collection *Horse Latitudes* wrote that 'the very scale of the intellectual machinery, and its great, hermetically labouring noise, are close to overwhelming'. He also suggested that *The End of The Poem*, which was published in the same year, has the same problem:

To look for an argument in *The End of the Poem* would be to look for the wrong thing, for Muldoon is engaged rather on a complicated series of displays, both of his learning and of himself as a reader and writer.²²

Neither O'Donoghue nor McDonald believe that Muldoon's etymologies constitute arguments in themselves: the process of constructing arguments in this way is too distracting for an audience (of 'serious etymologists' or of serious literary critics).²³ For O'Donoghue, Muldoon's etymological speculations are too playful for literary criticism; for McDonald, their show of scholarliness is too much. This is an ambiguity inherent in the idea of bravura in criticism and it has as much to do with the critical position of the reviewers as it does that of the reviewed. O'Donoghue works primarily in the field of medieval studies, where etymology is a necessary critical tool and therefore tends to be taken more seriously; McDonald is a poet and critic of contemporary poetry. Their differing perspectives also invite consideration, however, of the spectacle of Muldoon's criticism in terms of what have been called 'imaginative' and 'scientific' etymological modes.²⁴

²¹ Heather O'Donoghue, 'The Poet as Critic: Paul Muldoon's *To Ireland, I'*, in *Paul Muldoon Poetry, Prose, Drama: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by Elmer Kennedy-Andrews (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe Ltd, 2006), pp. 199–210.

²² Peter McDonald, Review of Paul Muldoon, *Horse Latitudes*, *Poetry Review*, 97.1 (2007), 88–90 (p. 89).

²³ O'Donoghue, p. 204.

²⁴ John S. Nelson, *Tropes of Politics: Science, Theory, Rhetoric, Action* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), pp. 120–26.

The discipline of etymology has always been fraught with questions about the integrity of its methods. Accusations of pedantry and fancifulness were being made even before comparative philology regularised research techniques in the nineteenth century; since then, such accusations have become more ingrained.²⁵ Muldoon involves himself in these debates by taking issue with dictionary entries that distinguish popular etymologies from professional ones. In a reading of James Joyce's obscure phrase 'no espellor mor so',²⁶ for example, he objects to the *OED*'s entry on 'spalpeen':

According to the *OED*, this word is 'of uncertain origin and meaning' and we are told that 'the etymology given in the quotation of 1780 is fanciful'. That quotation, from Arthur Young, suggests that 'Connaught labourers ... are called spalpeens: *spal* in Irish is a scythe and *peen* a penny; that is, a mower for a penny a day'. The quotation is not fanciful, as it happens, and Joyce's association of himself, in the word 'espellor', with these itinerant day-labourers from the west of Ireland, who worked for almost no return, is at once touching and true. (*TII* 83–84)

A more forceful instance appears in the first lecture of *The End of the Poem*:

The etymological sense of "bless" is given by the *OED* as "mark so as to hallow with blood." Another meaning of the word "bless" is "to wound." Now, while that second meaning of the word is obsolete and comes, supposedly, from a different root, the two meanings are, according to the entry, "often associated, either humorously or in ignorance." I think Yeats associates them, neither humorously nor in ignorance, for the simple reason that the word "wound" appears as the very last word of the poem, though we correct our reading of it immediately to have it rhyme with "bound" and mean something else, the past participle of "wind." (*TEP* 17)

These are awkward moments for audiences that have become accustomed to Muldoon's uninhibited etymologising. He takes on the *OED* in its own terms, countering its abstract, impersonal judgements by demonstrating the literary and emotional validity of popular

²⁵ Numerous examples from the early modern period are given in Hannah Jane Crawford, *Etymology and the Invention of English in Early Modern Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

²⁶ James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, ed. by Robbert-Jan Henkes, Erik Bindervoet, and Finn Fordham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 179.

etymologies it labels as fanciful, humorous, or ignorant. Gently resisting the dictionary's authority to legislate – what 'we are told' is only 'supposedly' true – Muldoon insists that the distinction between popular and professional etymologies can never be as clear-cut as the dictionary's labels suggest.

There is something more complicated happening here than an over-enthusiastic poet-critic insisting that 'if it can be found, then it's there'.²⁷ If this were the case then there would be no need to refer to the *OED* at all. Neither is it a battle between popular and professional etymology, or an attempt to make criticism more rigorously scientific. The fact of whether a connection is etymological seems to be fundamental to many of the arguments made in *The End of the Poem*, to the extent that *not* sharing an etymology can connect two words.²⁸ Where many critics would be content with a rhyme like 'maker' and 'faker' as the beginning of a comparison between the two concepts, Muldoon gives very detailed etymologies to show that they 'shouldn't be confused' before concluding that 'there's a fine enough line' between them (*TEP* 242). Elsewhere in his criticism and also his poetry this odd manoeuvre is more explicit: one word is 'not to be confused – or very much to be confused' with another, so that reasons for distinction become reasons for connection (*TEP* 62).²⁹ Such confusion is determined by etymological connections and disconnections. Etymology thus makes a significant contribution to Muldoon's 'conviction that [...] the tangential is most likely to be on

²⁷ Sean O'Brien, 'Muldoon as Critic', *Poetry Review*, 97.1 (2007), 86–89 (p. 86).

²⁸ See especially *TEP* 142, 238, 242. Jeffrey Masten is another critic who uses this technique. He writes, for example, that '[i]t is not altogether certain that "prop" and "propagate" have a common etymology, but we might notice that Arbaces is "propt" not only by divinity but also by his father's narrative'. Jeffrey Masten, *Textual Intercourse: Collaboration, Authorship, and Sexualities in Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 98.

²⁹ See also 'Errata', Paul Muldoon, *Poems, 1968–1998* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), pp. 329–30; Paul Muldoon, *The Prince of the Quotidian* (Oldcastle: Gallery Press, 1994), pp. 11, 37; and 'The Humors of Hakone', Paul Muldoon, *Maggot* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), pp. 63–71 (discussed below).

target' (*TEP* 298). His responses to the *OED* demonstrate both the tangential and the targeted aspects of his etymologising.

Etymological Digression and Elegy

Etymologies are obsolete, digressive, and tangential, but they are also always potentially present at the heart of a word, and hence give the sense of being 'on target'.

This quality is described by Paula Blank:

The 'etymological moment' in contemporary critical practice is not all play: it is also an expression of our desire to be right, our drive to view language as fact, as presence, as identity, as confirmation of who we were and who we still may be, even as we and all such certainties are then undone by it.³⁰

Muldoon the critic produces both etymological moments and explicitly non-etymological moments, attending to 'our drive to view language as fact' even at its most tangential. His poetry, too, attests to this desire, most notably in its mimicking of '[t]he "etymological moment" in contemporary critical practice'. When a poem comments explicitly on the etymology of its own words it seems to be providing a key to its interpretation, but this bait has to be approached carefully. For instance, among all the confusions and complications of 'Madoc: A Mystery', the line 'Retina. From the Latin *rete*, a net' offers a useful metaphor for the miscellaneous information caught up in the poem: it catches the critic's eye.³¹ In general, though, 'Madoc' warns against the persuasiveness of etymology by showing how it has been linked to colonialist speculation.³²

³⁰ Blank, p. 118.

³¹ 'Madoc: A Mystery', in Muldoon, *Poems, 1968–1998*, pp. 202–321 (p. 271). Further references to this book are given in the text.

³² See Chapter 6 for a discussion of the insidious etymologising in 'Madoc: A Mystery'.

More warnings are given in ‘Ontario’ and ‘The Key’, two anecdotal prose pieces found at the beginning of *Meeting the British* (1987; 149–93) and *Madoc: A Mystery* (1990; 196–321) respectively. They contain the earliest explicit references to etymology in Muldoon’s poetic oeuvre, with the exception of a few *dinnseanchas* poems.³³ Both are narrated by a slightly ridiculous enthusiast of etymology, who is easily read as a caricature of Muldoon’s critical persona (though they were published several years before his first critical prose). Both narrators are trying to catch the attention of people who refuse to be impressed by them. In ‘Ontario’ (151), the conversation takes place at a disco, where the narrator ‘helped a girl in a bin-liner dress to find her contact-lens’:

- A lens, I went on, is really a lentil. A pulse.
- [...]
- Did *you* know that Yonge Street’s the longest street in the world?
- I can’t say that I did.
- Well, it starts a thousand miles to the north, and it ends right here.

So the poem ends. The girl encourages the reader to see the etymology of ‘lens’ as irrelevant to the ‘right here’ and now. But so does the narrator: he exaggerates the relationship – a lens is not ‘really’ a lentil – and hints at his own tediousness in ‘I went on’. Having revealed the formal similarity of lenses and lentils, he changes direction, lighting on a synonym, ‘a pulse’, that has its own resonances (‘disco’ and ‘strobe’ being two immanent ones). Unlike the road, which runs north–south and ‘ends right here’, the narrator’s etymological enthusiasm leads him away from the direct but obsolete relationship of lens–lentil and into other kinds of association.

In ‘The Key’ (197–98), the narrator’s own diction distracts him from his intention to impress his audience with an etymology:

³³ For discussion of these *dinnseanchas* poems, see Chapter 6.

I wanted to say [...] something about the etymology of 'tuxedo', but I found myself savouring the play between 'booth' and 'bathy-', 'quits' and 'mesquite', and began to 'misquote' myself:

*When he sookied a calf down a boreen
it was through Indo-European.*

Critics have of course responded to the lure of possible connections between 'booth' and 'bathy-', 'quits', 'mesquite', and 'misquote'. Michael Allen points out that 'booth' and 'bathy-', as well as 'bothy', are in fact etymologically related 'so that what the speaker "wanted to say" has emerged out of what he found himself savouring'.³⁴ The distinction between an etymology that is mentioned but not given and one that is concealed (as an encrypted word, or 'key', for example) is important here; the latter provides a puzzle for a critic to solve whilst the former hints at the poet's own modest critical ability – 'say [...] something about' has the tone of an academic lecture – which would preclude anyone else's (note that Allen does not give an etymology of 'tuxedo'). This assigns the interpreter of the poem the role of the etymology enthusiast that is being ironised. Though it gives 'The Key' what Clair Wills calls an 'almost slapstick obviousness', etymology interrupts standard interpretative procedures; such obviousness must affect what can be said about this poem.³⁵

While Muldoon shares his fascination with etymology with many of his contemporaries, especially fellow Northern Irish poets Seamus Heaney and Ciaran Carson, his consciousness of an audience for his etymologising is unusual. It is clear from 'Ontario' and 'The Key' that Muldoon does not agree with Heaney that etymology

³⁴ Michael Allen, 'Pax Hibernica/Pax Americana: Rhyme and Reconciliation in Muldoon', in *Paul Muldoon*, ed. by Kendall and McDonald, pp. 62–95 (pp. 63–64).

³⁵ Clair Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1998), p. 142.

discovers identifiable, interpretable objects (like ‘ban-hus’, in ‘Bone Dreams’);³⁶ for the younger poet, the prospect of such a discovery is always complicated by what this would mean for the human relationships that are made in language. Although Carson sometimes takes the same abstract approach as Heaney, he has written characters like Muldoon’s over-enthusiastic etymologist, but in the third person.³⁷ The difference is that Muldoon unabashedly claims his own preoccupation with etymology *as* a preoccupation, narrating both his thought processes and his audience’s reactions and therefore courting accusations of poetic bravura.³⁸

This narration is most candid when Muldoon provides self-commentaries. ‘The Key’ introduces such a self-commentary in its ‘miquot[ing]’ of a poem that first appeared three years later, called ‘Cows’ (344–46; from *The Annals of Chile*, 1994), which contains a digression on the etymology of ‘boreen’. Still later, the first poem of his 2002 collection *Moy Sand and Gravel* ends with a mysterious character telling him about his ‘sense’ that “[...] you’ll like this, I know – the bourne fades into the boreen”.³⁹ In these repeated references to his own preoccupation with etymology, Muldoon considers how knowledge about the historicity of words – for example, ‘boreen’ as both a dialect word in English derived from Irish with clear links to other Indo-European forms *and* a significant link between his poems ‘The Key’, ‘Cows’, and ‘Unapproved Road’ – affects literary interpretation.

³⁶ Seamus Heaney, *North* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), pp. 27–30.

³⁷ In ‘Dresden’, for example, a character called Flynn learns ‘the best of Irish’ while in prison, including ‘the extinct names of insects, flowers, why this place was called / Whatever’; and in the anecdotal conversations of ‘Hamlet’, etymologies appear as ‘interrupt[ions]’ from ‘some wag’. Ciaran Carson, *Collected Poems* (Oldcastle: Gallery Press, 2008), pp. 77–81, 207–10.

³⁸ For example, in ‘Bechbretha’ (162–63), he makes a ‘maiden speech’ at a garden party that prefigures the cryptographic method of his lectures.

³⁹ ‘Unapproved Road’, in Paul Muldoon, *Moy Sand and Gravel* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), pp. 4–7 (p. 7).

In an interview with Muldoon in 1998, Sebastian Barker called him an ‘etymological junkie’ and asked whether ‘too much etymological digression in the course of a poem [...] might not distract at times from [his] exceptional powers of narrative elegance’. Muldoon’s expository etymologies are nearly always digressive, and very often parenthetical. Barker implies that they not only ‘distract’ but also detract from his poems, using the language of addiction to suggest they do harm. Muldoon’s reasoning here and in other interviews is that any foregrounding of poetic artifice – in the ‘versified direct speech’ of ‘The Key’, for example, or the ‘talking horse’ in ‘Gathering Mushrooms’ (105–06) – is ironic, which is understood to defuse its effect. But he worries, in the case of ‘Cows’, whether this is clear:

I’m sure you’re right that once or twice I’ve lingered a little too long over the etymological marrow in the bone. I think of a poem like “Cows” where the speaker makes much of the etymology of the word “boreen”. What I was hoping might come across is that I’m very conscious of this being a *longeur* [*sic*], of it being downright boring, but I’m not sure if I’ve signaled that sufficiently, if I’ve given a reader enough evidence for the ironised tone. In general, though, I believe that one has a responsibility to understand as much as one possibly can about the language one is using, to be as aware as possible of the resonance of every word. That way, there’s some chance that one will be able to determine the effect of these words in this order on the reader. In most cases, that should not be foregrounded or highlighted.⁴⁰

After offering irony as an excuse, Muldoon gives a very serious reason for *not* ‘signal[ling]’ the irony of an etymological digression ‘sufficiently’: behind the pedantry there is a powerful sense of ‘responsibility’ to the reader. His etymologising is more than the compulsive pedantry that ‘The Key’ and ‘Ontario’ – and Barker – imply.

⁴⁰ Sebastian Barker, ‘A Drink with Paul Muldoon’, Interview with Paul Muldoon, *The Long Poem Group Newsletter*, 7 (1998), 1–4 (p. 2).

The difference in 'Cows' is that there is no dismissive audience within the poem to cue a reader's response; the expository etymology is given in parentheses rather than in a narrative. As such, it avoids the arch and even clumsy signalling of these earlier poems. It does, however, make greater demands of its audience, who must decide for themselves how ironic Muldoon's etymologising is. There is a finer and a stronger balance between the philological and narrative concerns in 'Cows', driven by the much-debated problem of finding the words to write about the violence and terror of the Troubles. This is the passage in question:

This must be the same truck whose tail-lights burn
so dimly, as if caked with dirt,
three or four hundred yards along the boreen

(a diminutive form of the Gaelic *bóthar*, 'a road,'
from *bó*, 'a cow,' and *thar*
meaning, in this case, something like 'athwart,'

'boreen' has entered English 'through the air'
despite the protestations of the O.E.D.):
why, though, should one tail-light flash and flare (345)

Two possible interpretations of this digression are that it is 'irrelevant compared to the reality of standing on a road on a dark night and not knowing what's going to happen next' (as Muldoon suggests in an interview)⁴¹ or that it constitutes a parallel to the conflict perhaps being prepared in the real boreen in the linguistic sphere of the word 'boreen'.⁴² The first sees the digression as completely unintegrated, whereas the second would integrate it fully.

⁴¹ John Redmond, 'Interview with Paul Muldoon', *Thumbscrew*, 4 (1996), 2–18 (p. 14).

⁴² Versions of this argument are made by John Redmond, 'Muldoon and Pragmatism', in *Paul Muldoon*, ed. by Kendall and McDonald, pp. 96–109 (pp. 107–08); and Shane Alcobia-Murphy, *Sympathetic Ink: Intertextual Relations in Northern Irish Poetry* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006), pp. 197–98.

Such polarisation obscures the most immediate reason for the digression, which is the choice of the word 'boreen'. At first it seems as if Muldoon is merely pointing out the etymological connection with the title and key image of the poem, but what initially appears to be a parenthetical clause subordinate to a word in the main text, like a dictionary entry dependent on a headword, is then revealed to be subordinate to the following clause, with the repetition of 'boreen' acting as a pivot. The digression thus gathers momentum before it takes issue with the *OED*'s 'protestations' against the full assimilation of the word 'boreen' into English,⁴³ which has happened aurally and orally rather than through a written medium.⁴⁴ Positioning the authoritative historical dictionary of English as reactionary, particularly considering all the political and religious cognates of the word 'protestations', draws the digression into the conflict hinted at throughout the poem. The dictionary is made comparable with Bernardo O'Higgins, the nineteenth-century Chilean independence leader who 'duly / had the terms 'widdershins' / and 'deasil' expunged from the annals of Chile' (in 'Brazil', 327–28), presumably because of their pagan etymologies. The *OED* clings to its etymological principles to the extent that it ignores the present status of the word 'boreen'. 'Boreen' has an Irish-language past and an English-language present, and though the etymological digression it occasions here may appear either pedantic or highly resonant, the unassimilable strangeness of its status as an assimilated loanword surpasses both of these

⁴³ Its entry notes both that it is 'Anglo-Irish' and 'used only when Irish subjects are referred to'. 'Boreen, *n.*', *OED*.

⁴⁴ As the poem says, "'through the air'". Though this phrase is quoted in the poem, it is not clear where it is from; perhaps the quotation marks are simply a way of presenting a counter-authority to the *OED*. There is also the possibility that it translates the Irish phrase *tríd an aer*, used in the context of Irish street bowling, or *bol an bothrair* – a game that takes place on boreens.

interpretations.⁴⁵ In 'Cows', the attempt to describe 'the reality of standing on a road on a dark night and not knowing what's going to happen next' is subject to various digressions, but the decision to call that 'road' a 'boreen' and then to discuss the word's etymology suggests that, if 'there's no getting round this cattle-truck', there is also 'no getting round' the strangeness encoded in linguistic history. The etymological *longueur* thus has a structural function, rather like an epic simile; it redirects the reader without providing an escape route.⁴⁶

Since 'Cows' foregrounds its preoccupation with etymology, Muldoon's reference to it in his interview with Sebastian Barker foregrounds a particularly self-conscious context for his etymologising. The interview was given for the *Long Poems Group Newsletter*, and Barker suggests not 'Cows' but 'Yarrow' (346–92), the long double elegy for Muldoon's mother Brigid and for a former lover named only as 'S—', as an example of a poem with 'too much etymological digression'. Such an accusation must be especially charged when it is levelled against an elegy. In 'Yarrow', however, it seems strange to single out etymological digressions, since the whole poem is constructed from anecdotes occasioned by rather than linked to one another. Some of these anecdotes are about the speaker's childhood and his mother; just as many are about his sexual exploits with the woman called S—, who is a heroin addict; and the biggest proportion describe imagined scenes shared with characters from adventure stories, Irish and Arthurian legends, and Western films. It often happens that several stanzas or even pages separate a word from

⁴⁵ Eric Falci makes the same argument with regards to the neologisms 'emphysemantiphon', 'metaphysicattle', and particularly 'oscaraboscarabinary' in this poem. Eric Falci, *Continuity and Change in Irish Poetry, 1966–2010* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 77–79.

⁴⁶ Isabel Moore similarly suggests that the poem is 'stopped in and by its tracks at the border of its own contingent logic made visible' – but it is argued here that etymology represents a more intractable border even than an exposure of poetic 'logic'. Isabel A. Moore, "'Unapproved Road': Poetic Roadblocks and Animal Traffic in Paul Muldoon", *English Studies in Canada*, 36.1 (2010), 57–80 (p. 78).

its etymology, so it can appear to provide some orientation – and a clearly defined narrative – in the slippage from one anecdote to the next. The first etymology in the poem, for example, is occasioned by the name of a seed merchant, Tohill, from whom Muldoon's mother has borrowed a catalogue (348). But this event is described a good eight pages before the following etymology is given, apparently in the mother's schoolmistressy voice:

[...] Tohill, from *tuathal*,
meaning 'withershins'—with its regrettable overtones
of sun-worship—in our beloved Goidelic; (356)

The reader is asked to appreciate both the pedantry of the dictionary etymology (and of the preoccupation with this particular etymology established in the earlier poem 'Brazil') and the sense that the history of the name 'Tohill' can say something relevant about the work of preserving seeds by keeping them in the dark, away from the sun. The first interpretation sees the etymology as deliberately unintegrated into the poem, whilst the second sees it as integrated, so that '*tuathal*' and 'withershins' are translations of 'Tohill' rather than its obsolete precursors.

Etymology thus becomes involved in an elegiac dilemma: that of lamenting a loss for poetic gain. Barker's distinction between 'etymological digression' and 'narrative elegance' might in this context be read as a form of Samuel Johnson's famous criticism of 'Lycidas' – 'where there is leisure for fiction there is little grief' – except, of course, it is the bravura presentation of a linguistic *fact*, as if direct from a dictionary, that concerns Barker, since it distracts from the narration of grief.⁴⁷ The etymological commentary worked into the text of 'Yarrow', which starts here in the ventriloquised voice of

⁴⁷ Samuel Johnson, *The Lives of the Poets*, ed. by John H. Middendorf, 3 vols (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), I, 176.

Muldoon's mother, resurrects obsolete forms and meanings in a way that interrupts the elegiac narrative to expose the neurosis behind the construction of that narrative. In this particular instance, the mother's pedantic and pious etymologising interrupts a family scene, pulling it into a self-awareness that coincides with her injunction to her son to resist sexual temptation (seeds must be kept in the dark). When the poem returns to this scene five pages later, the speaker expresses a need to 'purge / [himself] of concupiscent thoughts and keep a weather-eye open / for the least occasion of sin' (361). This comes directly after a reminder of the etymology of 'widdersinnes' – the alternative spelling making the pun visible – this time instigated by the word 'wither-band', which is used in a description of the sexual demands of the woman referred to as S— (360). Linking the stories about the two women with this linguistic fact gives the 'etymological digression' some undefinable stake in the poem's 'narrative elegance'. It also reveals the elegy's attempt to second guess its own 'concupiscent thoughts', which stops it achieving the closure expected of what it calls 'a conventional envoy' (391).

Near the beginning of the poem, the speaker wishes that he were able to 'follow' the image of the yarrow plant to some sort of elegiac resolution. The image comes from a mistake Muldoon made as a child, which nearly led to him ordering 'yarrow' seeds instead of 'marrow', perhaps because of his mother's 'loopy version of R.P.' (363). The thought of what might have happened had the mistake not been averted – that 'All would be swept away' by the weed (347) – is by the end of the poem the vision of a blessing, an overflowing 'chrism of milfoil' (391). Such a blessing is, however, unavailable to the elegist in his implicitly unconventional envoy. The yarrow will not let itself be transformed into an image of resolution: its flower bud is 'like something keeping a secret / from itself, something on the tip of its own tongue' (348). These self-inwoven similes may be usefully

compared to the way etymology reveals a ‘secret’ within a word, while showing that the secret has been made obsolete by the very existence of the current word. Like the story about the yarrow, the etymologies in the poem have explanatory (and therefore consolatory) potential that cannot be realised. For example, the etymology of ‘chlamydia’ – ‘from *chlamys*, a cloak or cowl’ – links the sores on S—’s tattoo to a ‘black-cloaked desperado’ (referring back to a recent mention of ‘Zorro’) and to the ‘black, black cloak’ of the priest who comes to administer Brigid Muldoon’s last rites (386). Reading these etymologies as explanatory links, however, requires that neither the obsolete nor the current meanings be privileged. Rather than revealing any secrets, they transform words into uncanny compounds of both kinds of meaning, making it impossible for readers to untangle their self-inwoven quality.

The critic Paula Blank, whose concept of etymology has already been shown to chime with Muldoon’s, adduces ‘the equivocal nature of etymology, the way it purports to explain everything and to explain nothing’.⁴⁸ ‘Yarrow’ exploits etymology’s ‘equivocal nature’ by invoking etymologies as links between disparate ideas, and by using a dictionary-style format that makes each etymologised word both part of the poem’s fabric and an abstract linguistic form, specifically the reflex of an etymon, or a dictionary headword. In addition, the etymologies the speaker chooses – of *nausea* (380), *chlamydia*, etc. – are not felt to be residual meanings that are half-remembered every time the words are used. Such tenacity suggests that the elegist’s preoccupation with etymology is obsessive and even morbid, nourishing the elegy not towards closure but towards its own continuation. To use Muldoon’s own words, perhaps he has ‘lingered a little too long over the etymological marrow in the bone’. Although in the interview he

⁴⁸ Blank, p. 113.

goes on to talk about 'Cows', this recalls the yarrow/marrow mistake, hinting at etymology's part in the elegiac mixture of guilt and responsibility in 'Yarrow'.

Etymologies are both nourishing 'marrow' for the poet and uninterpretable, indigestible 'yarrow'. In a personal elegy that also remembers the nineteenth-century famines and rural poverty in Ireland, as well as their political legacy, this feels like the 'slip' (an oft-repeated word in this poem) that could cost the poet his integrity. The hint is given in the etymologising of the word 'larva', soon after a parallel has been drawn between 'the larva [...] of *Pieris / brassicae* [...] working through kale and cauliflower *et al.*' on the family plot and poets who 'immerse' themselves in war zones in order to write poetry that will last (381). Both poets and the larvae of the cabbage white butterfly are dependent for their survival on their adaptations to derive nourishment from destruction – the cabbage white is so named because its larvae are immune to the toxins produced by plants in the *brassica* family. On the next page, 'larva' is shown to be '(from *larva*, a ghost or mask)' (382). This etymology discovers a combination of nourishment and uncanny morbidity that exists more generally in the poem's etymological discourse: it reinforces the metaphor in a way that makes neither etymon nor reflex either vehicle or tenor. The fact that the form of the word has not changed only contributes to this process by which an etymologised word becomes a strange hybrid of its past and present, their intimacy suggesting that etymology might reveal the secret on the tip of the word's tongue, the 'slip' that could explain everything.

The expository etymologies in 'Yarrow' are so explicit and so authoritative that the interpreter must acknowledge that they simultaneously explain everything and explain nothing. This quality of etymology can mirror the work of elegy, which in Muldoon's case involves a fierce tension between the attempt to come to terms with loss

and the recognition that this attempt somehow disavows the loss. In a short sonnet called 'Hedge School', which Muldoon published in a collection dedicated to the memory of his sister, the etymological elegy reaches its logical conclusion.⁴⁹ The poem is about 'rainy mornings': mornings on which Muldoon's 'great-great-grandmother' acted as lookout for a hedge school illegally educating Catholic children; mornings his daughter spends in her 'all-American Latin class' conjugating '*Guantánamo, amas, amat*'; and the morning he found out his sister's cancer was metastatic – that it was spreading. This morning is just a shade away from mourning at the end of the poem, as the speaker explains how he 'sheltered in a doorway':

and tried to come up with a ruse
for unsealing the *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* back in that corner shop
and tracing the root of *metastasis*.

The compulsion to etymologise is more pronounced here than in 'Yarrow'; it seems deliberately self-accusatory. After the hedge school and the conjugation of 'Guantánamo', it is clear too that the speaker's failing is a serious matter: these final lines display a naivety about the freedoms supposedly granted by education and knowledge that the rest of the poem refutes. Etymology is a metaphor here for the speaker's nostalgic desire to go back to the 'root' of something that has since become fatal as it has changed and developed. When he returns to that root, however, it will be to find that it was fatally volatile from the beginning – a literal translation of 'metastasis' would be 'a change of state' – just as remembering his great-great-grandmother's and his daughter's schooldays means finding images of oppression as well as freedom.⁵⁰ Moreover, 'metaphor' and 'metastasis' obviously come from the same root (the latter is also a

⁴⁹ Paul Muldoon, *Horse Latitudes* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), p. 94.

⁵⁰ 'Metastasis, *n.*', *OED*.

rhetorical term), so that the metaphorising of etymology intensifies the self-accusation; the poem itself behaves metastatically. But the speaker conjures the etymology of ‘*metastasis*’ into the poem without being able to access it himself, just as he can affectionately address his sister as ‘dear Sis’ in the poem but not in reality. In the end, the mere suggestion of an etymology intensifies the elegiac tension between the fact of grief and the possibility of relief.

Both ‘Hedge School’ and ‘Yarrow’ invoke etymologies to suspend words between their past and present forms and meanings, making language strange to itself. In ‘Hedge School’, as in ‘Ontario’ and ‘The Key’, this is part of the narrative; in ‘Yarrow’, however, it is a metalinguistic commentary that pushes the poem’s diction to the edge of its stable, synchronic existence. This is clearest in a description of the mother’s devout belief in the consequences of sin:

With what conviction did she hold
that a single lapse—from *lapsus*, a slip

or stumble—would have a body cast
into the outer dark. Dost thou know Dover? (362)

The etymology here appears to support the mother’s ‘conviction’ in cause and effect, when a simple ‘slip / or stumble’ can become a ‘lapse’, via all the religious connotations of the Latin word. But reading it like this reverses the order specified by the poem: the word ‘lapse’ is succeeded by its obsolete Latin root together with two alternative translations. There are two narratives here, then: the etymological one, which goes ‘from *lapsus*’ to ‘lapse’ and reflects the mother’s ‘conviction’ in consequences, and then the poem’s one, which goes from ‘lapse’ to ‘*lapsus*’, emphasising the primacy of the current word and the obsolescence of the etymon. This etymology does more than sift out the connotations of

the word 'lapse'. It involves the word itself in the intimation of loss that is felt by Muldoon's mother, and by the blinded Gloucester in *King Lear*, who asks to be led to Dover and is then tricked into believing that he stands on the very edge of the cliff.⁵¹ Both characters have a 'conviction' in the proximity of loss; both are convicted by their own feelings of guilt. A similar situation occurs in Muldoon's etymologically informed diction, since the intimacy of reflex and etymon is conditioned by the loss of the older word, which means that it has to be translated. Etymology thus brings the elegy's intimation of loss right into the diction of the poem.

In these etymological elegies, language itself becomes one of 'Muldoon's Remains', to use a term proposed by Matthew Campbell. Campbell finds instances of 'little', 'scanty', 'exiguous' 'remains' everywhere in Muldoon, from a 'wishbone' to a 'soap-sliver' to the multiple uses of the word 'slip' in 'Yarrow'. He writes that they have a particular elegiac function:

Muldoon has allowed the pattern of his elegies to cling on to the remains of the absent, the scant fragments of memory or memento which will not allow forgetfulness, since to do so will bring the poem to an often resisted closure.⁵²

The difference between these physical 'remains of the absent' and the words Muldoon chooses to etymologise is that the latter cannot be remembered: they have to be disinterred. Although the histories of words persist in the current forms of words, they do so as a record of something that no longer means. Muldoon's mother cannot possibly make 'lapse' mean 'stumble' again. As a cryptographic approach, etymological decoding 'will not allow forgetfulness' of meanings that really are already forgotten; it can only

⁵¹ William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. by R. A. Foakes (London: Arden Shakespeare, [2009]), p. 309 (4.1.74).

⁵² Matthew Campbell, 'Muldoon's Remains', in *Paul Muldoon*, ed. by Kendall and McDonald, pp. 170–87 (p. 177).

temporarily resurrect coded meanings that have been made unrecoverable by the code itself. Like his criticism, Muldoon's poetic bravura has this effect because it switches between implying an etymological undercurrent in his diction and providing an expository, metalinguistic commentary on that diction. And like his criticism, his poetry is 'elusive and allusive', to use a favourite phrase of his critics,⁵³ to the extent that it is felt to 'mock its interpreters'.⁵⁴ The threat of bravura in poetry is that it can make interpretation redundant, its self-conscious skill leaving critics with only 'scant fragments' of otherwise resonant words to go on.

Interpreting Cryptocurrents in *Maggot* (2010)

Having given too much direction to his interpreters, Muldoon leaves them to decide whether etymological bravura can be anything more than a spectacle. He admits to this kind of 'manipulation':

I do, quite often, engage in leading people on, gently, into little situations by assuring them that all's well and then [...] leaving them high and dry, in some corner at a terrible party, where I've nipped out through the bathroom window.⁵⁵

How can a critic interpret a preoccupation that is not, as Heaney would have it, a 'pure concentration', but rather a self-conscious whim that knows – and shows – that it is out of place?⁵⁶ These interpretative issues are a recurring theme in reviews of *Maggot* (2010),

⁵³ E.g. in the quotation on the cover of Muldoon, *Poems, 1968–1998* from the *New York Times Book Review's* Notable Books of 2001; Muldoon himself also uses the phrase in *To Ireland, I* (24).

⁵⁴ John Lyon, "'All That': Muldoon and the Vanity of Interpretation", in *Paul Muldoon*, ed. by Kendall and McDonald, pp. 110–24 (p. 114).

⁵⁵ Clair Wills, Nick Jenkins, and John Lanchester, 'An Interview with Paul Muldoon', *Oxford Poetry*, 3.1 (1986) 14–20 (pp. 19–20).

⁵⁶ Heaney writes that 'poetry holds attention for a space, functions not as distraction but as pure concentration, a focus where our power to concentrate is concentrated back on ourselves'.

Muldoon's most recent collection and arguably his most 'terrible party' to date.⁵⁷ Between its disappointing childhood Christmases and gossipy society parties, the book's blurb warns readers that '[i]t's no accident that the centrepiece of *Maggot* is an outlandish meditation on a failed poem that draws on the vocabulary of entomological forensics'. This centrepiece, 'The Humors of Hakone', makes the outlandishly obvious entomology–etymology cryptocurrent 'no accident', but rather a deliberate whim.

Many of *Maggot*'s reviewers, following the poet's lead, have identified the title's archaic meaning of '[a] whimsical, eccentric, strange, or perverse notion or idea' alongside the fact that it is often used in the names of traditional dance tunes.⁵⁸ Muldoon also makes use of 'maggot' as a verb to describe his speculative critical practice, a usage that the *OED* does not record.⁵⁹ Whilst these meanings are separable after the fact, the poems in *Maggot* describe situations that are not easily resolvable into whimsical 'maggots' and forensic 'maggoting'. A powerful interpretative drive is always accompanied by satisfaction in the spectacle: in a poem about a circus, the speaker explains that 'it's not an out-and-out hoax / when the Bearded Lady enters the blade box / to be sawn in half'.⁶⁰ A particularly striking juxtaposition can be found in the two-part structure of a short lyric called 'The Sod Farm' (103), which is about a girl badly burned in

Seamus Heaney, *The Government of the Tongue: The 1986 T. S. Eliot Memorial Lectures and Other Critical Writings* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), p. 108.

⁵⁷ E.g. Lachlan Mackinnon (who questions whether 'a title should need to be looked up'), Review of 'Maggot, By Paul Muldoon', *The Independent*, 19 November 2010 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/maggot-by-paul-muldoon-2137733.html>>; Bill Manhire, 'The Mix-Master and the Dance of Words', *Poetry London*, 58 (Spring 2011) <<http://www.poetrylondon.co.uk/magazines/68/article/the-mix-master-and-the-dance-of-words>>.

⁵⁸ 'Maggot, *n.*¹', 2a, 2c, *OED*.

⁵⁹ "'To be a Professor of Poetry is tantamount to declaring that one is not a poet.'" This acerbic little aperçu by A. Dwight Culler, from the introduction to his 1961 edition of *Poetry and Criticism of Matthew Arnold*, is one upon which I've been maggoting these past four years' (*TEP* 323).

⁶⁰ From 'The Side Project', Muldoon, *Maggot*, pp. 93–102 (p. 97). Further references to this book are given in the text.

a car crash. The first part hypothesises about the accident, while the second expresses a fascination with her burns:

Her gauze-wrapped arms
 now taking in unending variations
 and surprises: temples, grottoes,
 waterfalls, ruins, leafy glades
 with sculpture, and such features
 as would set off the imagination
 on journeys in time as well as space.

The landscape described here is grotesque, in the obsolete etymological sense of the kind of art one might find in (natural or man-made) 'grottoes', though it is also possible to see the speaker's perspective as grotesque, unnatural, or 'ludicrous from incongruity'.⁶¹

Although these two senses may be separated in a dictionary entry, the poem works on the basis that the transferral of meaning, from art found in grottoes to an artistic style to a judgment of what constitutes 'incongruity', is fluid and even circular: while grotesque art often depicts distorted human figures, in 'The Sod Farm' a scarred human body depicts grotesque settings. This fluidity is achieved partly by not using the word 'grotesque' – by making it a 'cryptocurrent' through references to its etymology.⁶²

Encrypting a word through its etymology, however, produces the sense of a natural relationship through the distorting process of encryption. The fact that 'crypt' and 'grotto' are cognates opens 'The Sod Farm' to the kind of criticism Muldoon revels in:

⁶¹ 'Grotesque, *n.* and *adj.*', B3, *OED*.

⁶² In an interview about *Maggot*, Muldoon admitted 'I don't know where the grotesque begins and ends' before explaining that '[i]t first refers, as you know, to paintings seen in grottoes or the basements of ancient buildings in which there were murals that represented animals and human figures that were seen as being somehow distorted or exaggerated'. Etymology is one sort of beginning, but it cannot determine future transferred senses, and it certainly cannot determine what will be 'seen as being somehow distorted or exaggerated'. Ariel Ramchandani, 'The Q&A: Paul Muldoon, Poet', *Intelligent Life*, 6 October 2010 <<http://moreintelligentlife.co.uk/blog/ariel-ramchandani/qa-paul-muldoon-poet-editor>>.

what is encrypted is a consciousness of encryption.⁶³ But it also shows how reliant his cryptographic methods – both critical and poetic – are on a self-consciousness that approaches the grotesque.

In the cryptographic view, poetic texts are distortions of other meanings, which makes them both (grotesque) spectacles and objects of speculation. There is some concern about the ease with which poems appropriate material for these purposes in *Maggot*, most obviously in 'Moryson's Fancy' (21–22). This poem quotes a well-known passage from Fynes Moryson's 1617 *An History of Ireland* about the 'most horrible spectacle' of Irish children eating their mother's corpse. Muldoon perhaps stretches the etymologically informed metaphor of the 'maggot' too far when he describes the children as having 'acted on a whim'. This allows him, however, to shift the spectacle to the 'iffy inevitability' of colonialist interpretation, of 'this most horrible spectacle / of themselves [the children] as a synonym / for savagery'. Similarly, 'Another Porcupine' (106) describes a desire to interpret the grotesque, 'to find a pattern in the blood spatter'. These poems implicate themselves, too, in the deictic of 'this horrible spectacle' and in the repetitive 'patter' between 'pattern' and 'spatter'. But 'patter' does not appear in the poem even if it can be readily intuited; 'grottoes' implies but does not insist on the 'grotesque'. Self-accusations are kept below the surface of these poems.

There are moments in *Maggot*, however, specifically in the longer poems 'The Humors of Hakone' (63–71) and 'Balls' (81–85), at which apparently cryptic connections are enumerated rather than productively 'resisted'. The relationship is still cryptic, still grotesque in the sense that it is fascinated by distortion, but the fact that both terms are explicit, rather than one being implicit in the other, lays out a much more direct

⁶³ 'Crypt', *ODEE*.

challenge to examine this fascination as a mixture of whimsical curiosity and forensic determination. While the etymological cryptocurrent in 'The Sod Farm' 'would set off' the critical 'imagination' if it were prepared to follow 'unending variations / and surprises', the expository etymologies in 'The Humors of Hakone' and 'Balls' stall it. Their exposed etymological cryptocurrents require audiences to pass judgment on forensic and testimonial evidence, like a jury; the decision must be made whether to accept it as relevant or dismiss it as irrelevant.

The forensic scientist in 'The Humors of Hakone' insists that it is 'far too late to know' (64) what happened to a girl whose body has been found 'on the road to Edo' (63), despite his technical expertise. A parallel investigation is being carried out on a 'poem cadaver' (71), through a kind of linguistic forensics:

Who knew 'forensic' derived from forum,
which senator's sword sealed the deal? (63)

Who knew that *humus* might lie beneath 'humane'? (65)

Who knew that *lepis* meant 'fish scale'? (71)

The audience must decide whether or not it is 'far too late' for these etymologies to matter – whether 'who knew' is a genuine challenge or an expression of curiosity. How much, for instance, does the word '*lepis*', or its translation as 'fish scale', or, indeed, its relationship to 'leprosy', have to do with its appearance alongside lines about sanatoria for lepers and koi ponds? None of these etymologies define a necessary relationship between the meanings of etyma and reflexes: the first muddies the distinction between modern connotations of 'forensic' and Roman politics; the second hedges the issue with the word 'might' and a multitude of puns in 'lie beneath'; and the third makes no direct link between '*lepis*' and its reflex 'leper', recalling the delayed etymologising in 'Yarrow'.

Tracing cryptocurrents is not the priority here, despite the forensic scientist's frustration at discovering it is 'too late' to 'examine', 'extrapolate', 'establish', 'determine', 'ascertain', 'deduce', 'retrieve', or 'reconstruct' anything – instead, the reader is drawn into the poem's investment in scant or unrecognisable remains and the kinds of speculative interpretation they demand.

'The Humors of Hakone' involves etymology in the forensic investigations of an expert witness; 'Balls', on the other hand, invokes it in a personal testimony. It is suggested that the performative weight of giving testimony is still connected to the word's etymology:

I swear as a Roman supposedly swore an oath
on his balls and went through some Roman rigmarole
to ward off the behemoth (83)

Here and throughout the poem 'swear', 'oath', 'balls', and 'witness' are used in place of the Latinate 'testes' and 'testimony', except once when the Latin root itself ('*testis*'; 84) is given in italics. There is still plenty of 'Roman rigmarole', however: 'scrotum', 'spermatocele', and 'tumor' appear alongside comparisons with 'an *insalata caprese*' and 'one of those *bocconcini*', and the doctor who tells him the 'teeny-weeny / third ball' is "'Not a tumour, I swear.'" is called 'Vasselli' (82). The speaker's scepticism about the doctor's diagnosis is matched by his scepticism about the etymology of 'testimony'. This is a more modern use of the word 'balls' as an 'oath', but as in the 'Roman rigmarole', he still submits to a kind of impotence in the face of the doctor's professional opinion. The speaker must also be a listener.

Later in the poem he remembers a 'continuity girl', who finally exposes the poem's etymological cryptocurrent as a figure of loss:

It was she I first heard mourn

the loss of a sense of the Latin root and stem
that would help us weigh in on which came first – be it *testis* as ‘witness’
or *testis* as the ‘ball’ on which the oath was sworn. (84)

The innuendo of ‘Latin root and stem’ is a reminder that the continuity girl’s usual task – to ensure a film’s illusion of continuity – is not so innocent and straightforward as her ‘mourn[ing]’ the loss of an etymological ‘sense’ suggests. Her concern with grammar and chronology is thus diverted into spectacle. Like the etymology enthusiasts of ‘Ontario’ and ‘The Key’, she mimics Muldoon’s critical methods, recalling or even ridiculing his puns on the ‘roots’ of words. But if ‘Balls’ is a poem about spectacle, innuendo, and ‘rigmarole’, it still insists on the seriousness of the performative ‘oath’. In the end the speaker swears (again, begrudgingly) to listen to himself:

The oath I’ve sworn is that I won’t condemn
these ball-broodings out of hand, [...] (85)

In Muldoon’s earlier poems etymology is claimed as a preoccupation; *Maggot* makes it a deliberate ‘whim’; in ‘Balls’, it seems to have fallen still further. But ‘these ball-broodings’ respect their etymological cryptocurrent all the more dramatically for not having sacrificed either humour or scepticism.

Passing Judgment on Muldoon’s Bravura

It is no accident that the two major etymological cryptocurrents in *Maggot* confront an audience with two kinds of evidence: forensic and testimonial. Muldoon’s expository etymologies always ask readers to judge whether or not they are relevant to the poem’s diction, but in *Maggot* they are particularly charged. In his criticism and

poetry, the process of invoking etymologies is fraught with the question of whether linguistic forensics or even a quirky taste for cryptic meanings can actually say anything about how poetic language communicates. As Davide Del Bello writes in his book *Forgotten Paths: Etymology and the Allegorical Mindset*:

There is more at stake behind etymology's unsolvable 'esoterism' than a passion for linguistic curiosity or a psychological drive for analogical, universal motivation.⁶⁴

Del Bello's argument is that modern linguistics has restricted the scope of etymology in a way that obscures its significance for the classical, medieval, and Renaissance writers he considers. In Muldoon's case, however, such restrictions are palpable; he plays to the idea of etymology as 'linguistic curiosity', as well as to its interpretative 'drive'. More is certainly 'at stake', though, than these caricatures of the poet and poet-critic as etymologist suggest. Their bravura performances question how current ideas about etymology and its poetic and critical roles affect poetic communication. If a critic clarifies his terminology with an etymology, can a poet do the same with his diction? And if poetry can assume etymological meanings are active, can critics both decode them and then adopt them?

Muldoon's poetic and critical methods are easily compared; many of his critics have read one in the terms of the other. But there is a distinct difference in how etymologies are invoked in his poetry and criticism. The lectures discover encrypted etymologies everywhere, even when they accept that a connection is not etymological, while emphasising the undercurrents of etymology in their own language. For Muldoon the critic, invoking an etymology demonstrates the continuing activity of etymological

⁶⁴ Davide Del Bello, *Forgotten Paths: Etymology and the Allegorical Mindset* (Washington, D.C.: CUA Press, 2007), p. 29.

meanings under the surface of all language. Muldoon the poet, however, writes overly enthusiastic, compulsive, or whimsical characters who seem to be asking too much of their readers even to consider how a metalinguistic comment might have some bearing on the use of a word. Poetic licence and critical reserve have changed places. This contrast defines poetic and critical bravura, since each threatens the other's validity – bravura criticism is thought to overshadow its poetic object, while bravura poetry is so self-consciously performative that nothing is left for criticism to reveal. Etymology's ambiguous position between poetic resource and critical tool puts it at the centre of these debates about the dangers of Muldoon's bravura.

Etymology must also, therefore, be at the centre of any discussion of the value of bravura in Muldoon's poetry and criticism. More than anything, it puts pressure on the audience to arbitrate between the ruling against the etymological fallacy and the apparently irresistible temptation to etymologise. Etymology is a discourse that poets and critics usually employ sparingly, avoiding the excesses of bravura, which always demands an audience judge whether it has gone too far. Muldoon's innovation is in his focus on the activity of etymologising, making it a speech act in its own right rather than a subsidiary of defining, analysing, or describing. Giving etymology this discursive energy allows him to show that it is a contested space, that linguistic 'forensic' work has an enigmatic but necessary relationship with the 'forum'. Etymological speculation then has to be seen as part of a conversation about language; it cannot stand apart in some academic or literary ivory tower. This is not to say that it avoids becoming a spectacle, however, as demonstrated both by the audiences Muldoon writes into his poems and the unrealistic assumptions he shows about an average person's knowledge of etymology in his lectures. But Muldoon's bravura does not reduce poetic communication

to a spectacle: it embraces spectacle as a necessary consequence of the speculative ways poets and critics use language.

2. Reading J. H. Prynne with 'Mental Ears'

Etymology has a long-running association with the difficulty of modernist poetry, from Ezra Pound to Geoffrey Hill.¹ This is perhaps surprising given that the modernist appeal to linguistic origins was often made with the aim of radically simplifying poetic language. Pound and Ernest Fenollosa, for example, saw Chinese writing as a model for a new poetic language because its roots appeared to be 'constantly visible'.² Like this early foray into an apparently alien linguistic system, however, etymological knowledge is arcane or at least elitist. Most damningly, it is irrelevant to the present tense of a man speaking to men – even in Chinese – and thus risks replacing poetic communication with a linguistic spectacle.³ In his essay 'The Metaphysical Poets', T. S. Eliot justified modernist difficulty by accepting spectacle as 'necessary' to the poet's communication of 'his meaning':

The poet must become more and more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning.⁴

Etymological poetry takes comprehensiveness, allusiveness, and indirectness to extremes – as demonstrated by Paul Muldoon. But it is not well placed to 'force'

¹ See, e.g., J. Mark Smith, 'The Energy of Language(s): What Pound Made of Philology', *English Literary History*, 78.4 (2011), 769–800; Matthew Sperling, *Visionary Philology: Geoffrey Hill and the Study of Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). It is notable, however, that this association has only recently come to critical attention, and it is by no means a mainstream observation. For example, Leonard Diepeveen, *The Difficulties of Modernism* (New York: Routledge, 2003), an otherwise thorough critique of modernist difficulty, makes no mention of it.

² Ernest Fenollosa and Ezra Pound, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry: A Critical Edition*, ed. by Haun Saussy, Jonathan Stalling, and Lucas Klein (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), p. 55.

³ Etymologies are obsolete in Chinese as in every other language; many sinologists have pointed out Fenollosa's mistake. See, e.g., George Kennedy, 'Fenollosa, Pound, and the Chinese Characters', *Yale Literary Magazine*, 126.5 (1958), 24–36.

⁴ T. S. Eliot, 'The Metaphysical Poets', in *Selected Essays*, 3rd edn (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), pp. 281–91 (p. 289).

language into the meaning a single language user intends; once invited into a poem, etymology activates a history that has little to do with individual intentions. Instead, it reveals language itself to be an agent that develops and maintains an audible dialogue between obsolete and current meanings. In other words, etymological poetry is difficult because it dislocates language not 'into' but out of the synchronic state in which intention and communication are imagined to take place.

Although there are stark differences between Muldoon and J. H. Prynne, their mutual fascination with etymology as a poetic and a critical strategy is a telling point of comparison, since it contributes to both poets' unique brands of difficulty. Muldoon's speculative etymologising disrupts the communication contract between writer and reader even while it shows that such a contract depends on the writer's 'speculation on what's going on [...] in the reader's mind' and vice-versa.⁵ Poking fun at standard critical procedures, Muldoon demands that his readers use their knowledge of the risks he is willing to take with language to speculate about 'what's going on' in his mind. Next to Prynne, Muldoon appears as a poet of the establishment, but despite his multiple professorships, he continues to present himself as a recusant critic whose arguments are unavoidably inflected by his poetic methods. In contrast, Prynne is a career academic; his critical commentaries are a version of a very traditional practice, yet his poetry is committedly avant-garde. He resists both spectacle and speculation in his etymologising, striving instead for theoretical validity in his criticism and an audible but deeply integrated etymological awareness in his poetry. In an interview given in 1964, however, Prynne acknowledged the pedantry in this approach:

⁵ Paul Muldoon, *The End of the Poem: Oxford Lectures in Poetry* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), p. 360.

My most valuable aids are the etymological dictionaries, and this is perhaps a kind of minor vice. Once a poem gets written and I've located a word which this poem has given to me – I've won out of the English language another word for my small vocabulary of words that really mean and matter to me – back to the etymological dictionary, where does it come from, what does it originally mean, what great hinterland of implications lies behind this perhaps quite ordinary word. That I suppose all sounds hopelessly professional.⁶

While Muldoon's difficulty raises concerns about the power of poetic and critical bravura – its reach and attractiveness – Prynne's seems wilfully and 'hopelessly' hermetic and academic. Etymology consequently represents very different perspectives on the difficulties of poetic communication for these two poets.

Etymological 'Logic'

The first major discussion of Prynne's poetry appeared in 1973, by which time he had published seven collections. Its author, Donald Davie, was a tutor and then colleague of Prynne's at Cambridge. A central role is assigned to etymology in his analysis of Prynne:

The structuring principle of this poetry, which makes it difficult (sometimes too difficult), is the unemphasized but radical demands it makes upon English etymologies, so that to follow the logic we have to remember "trade" as meaning traffic, for instance pedestrian traffic in the streets, also exchange and interchange, as of current coin and current language in human as well as commercial transactions and transfers.⁷

This early explanation of Prynne's famous difficulty now seems overly optimistic about the possibility of 'follow[ing] the logic' of his poems. Indeed, sixteen years later Davie

⁶ Peter Orr, Interview with J. H. Prynne, *The Poet Speaks* 39 (London: British Council, recorded 6 January 1964). With thanks to Piers Pennington for this transcription.

⁷ Donald Davie, *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 115.

himself remarked on ‘Prynne’s non-communicating severity’.⁸ But it is not the case that etymology ceased to be a suitable strategy for reading this poetry; on the contrary, it has become more urgent as the poetry has become more difficult, dislocating language still further out of synchrony and its defined expectations. Davie is thus overly optimistic not only about following Prynne’s logic, but also about resolving etymology into a synchronic ‘logic’.⁹ As the previous chapter has shown, etymology is a volatile and contested discourse that enfolds obsolete and current meanings into uncanny compounds. It is one thing to say that ‘trade’ connotes ‘pedestrian traffic in the streets’, but it is another thing entirely to ‘remember’ that it used to mean ‘traffic’.

The thread of etymological logic that Davie tries to follow leads him to emphasise the dynamics of ‘trade’, but the poem in question, ‘In the Long Run, To Be Stranded’, focuses on its stultifying effect, which in prehistory allowed communities to become static and centralised:

Finally it’s trade the deep changes
work with, so that the lives are heavier,
less to be moved from or blunted. The city
is the language of transfer
to the human account. Here
the phrases shift, the years
are an acquiescence.¹⁰

The etymological contribution to this poem comes from the loss – not the recovery – of the historical meaning of ‘traffic’ in ‘trade’. ‘Finally’, the poem begins, with the object of

⁸ Donald Davie, Review of *A Various Art*, ed. by Andrew Crozier and Tim Longville, *PN Review*, 16.2 (1989), 57–58 (p. 58).

⁹ David Herd notes Davie’s peculiar specification that the etymologies in question are ‘English’, so that ‘what the history of words implies is rootedness’, when in fact the opposite is the case. This is another example of Davie’s attempt to narrow etymology to a ‘logic’. David Herd, ‘Dislocating Country: Post-War English Poetry and The Politics of Movement’, in *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary British and Irish Poetry*, ed. by Peter Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 497–516 (p. 505).

¹⁰ J. H. Prynne, *Poems*, 2nd edn (North Fremantle, Western Australia: Fremantle Arts Centre Press; Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 2005), p. 47. Further references to this book are given in the text.

the first clause, 'trade', placed rather unnaturally before the subject and verb. The beginning is already the end; in the new age of 'exchange and interchange, as of current coin and current language', to use Davie's gloss, words are interchangeable, a 'language of transfer' that is so fluid it stifles all resistance. Passive infinitive forms – 'to be stranded', 'to be moved from', 'to be left' – amplify this effect by recalling the style of dictionary definitions, which take it for granted that words can be exchanged for synonyms. Etymology still resists this 'language of transfer', however; the felt absence of an obsolete meaning of 'trade' in this poem 'almost clogs the tongue', according to Ian Brinton. Brinton's analysis of this poem is a useful foil to Davie's, since he sounds out cognates:

The connection between movement (tread) and the exchange of commodities associated with 'trade' is held in the word's derivation: a path, course of action, borrowed from Middle Dutch or Middle Low German *trade*, track; Old Saxon *trada*, footstep.¹¹

Rather than following an etymological 'logic', Brinton details how 'the phrases shift' in a way that, like the poem itself, produces a simultaneous impression of fluid 'transfer' between visibly and audibly similar forms and a congested, even obstructive, old-fashioned philological interpretation. Although Davie's original approach was too simplistic, it raised an important question about etymology and difficulty that did not disappear with the hope of an etymological 'structuring principle'. Once heard in a poem, how can an etymology still be thought of as obsolete?

Prynne's poetry avoids the 'language of transfer' to the extent that it may be called 'non-communicating'. Davie's suggestion that, as readers of Prynne, 'we have to

¹¹ Ian Brinton, "'His brilliant luminous shade'", in *A Manner of Utterance: The Poetry of J. H. Prynne*, ed. by Ian Brinton (Exeter: Shearsman Books, 2009), pp. 11–22 (p. 20).

remember' past meanings of words is illuminating in this respect. The phrase must be figurative – since 'No one can eat so / many apples, or remember so much ice' ('Charm Against Too Many Apples', 68) in the 'long run' of *The White Stones* (1969; 37–126) – and yet it is easy for readers to believe that they can remember etymologies, once they are made audible. As a scientific discipline etymology uses very complex analyses of word sounds, so that some connections are not audible at all in the present – and some audible ones have no relation to etymology. But this cannot devalue the effect of hearing the history of the language, and it may even enhance it; the difficulty of hearing etymologies can make them more convincing. Such is the value of what Davie calls 'the unemphasized but radical demands' Prynne's poetry 'makes upon English etymologies'. The truth of this is evident in the fact that although Davie picks out the word 'trade' from 'In the Long Run, to be Stranded', the less obvious etymology of 'live' has a much more radical presence in this poem. 'Live' and 'leave' both come from the Proto-Indo-European **leip-* 'to remain, persevere, continue; stick, adhere', and Prynne puts this connection to work without letting it overpower the apparently antithetical modern sense of 'leave', for instance in the 'To Be Stranded' of the title.¹² The interweaving of etymological and modern meanings echoes the title's poignant mixture of progress and stasis, and the whole poem's 'rhythm of / the very slight hopefulness'. A view of etymology as a mode of resistance to expectations about communication accounts for this cautious rhythm better than Davie's busy list of the potential meanings with which Prynne apparently controls 'trade' in the first stanza.

Although the connection between 'live' and 'leave' is undoubtedly unemphasised, once heard it is difficult to ignore; it is as irresistibly part of the poem as

¹² 'Leip-', *IEL*.

any other sound pattern, but interpreting it involves the additional difficulty of engaging with a resonant but undeniably obsolete history. The poem ends with an etymological periphrasis of 'life' – 'That's where it is, now / as the place to be left' – where the challenge is to identify what 'it' is. The audible link between 'life' and 'left', however, is not synonymy, and it is more than a logical difficulty that can be solved with an etymological dictionary; linguistic history is the source material for the poem's consideration of the 'pace' of human lives. Prynne's most recent critical work has introduced a new way of reading etymology in poetry as an element of prosody, acknowledging that etymologies are preserved in the sounds of words and can therefore be understood to be active in poetry. As such, etymology becomes much more than a linguistic resource occasionally called on by poets or critics: it is an integral part of language that poetry cannot do without, like the natural stress patterns of words. When linguistic history is read not as a resource for, but as the source of this poetry, the assertion that it makes 'demands [...] upon English etymologies' seems skewed. This chapter explores the difficulties attendant on the etymological source first of *The White Stones*, the collection that inspired Davie's account of an etymological 'structural principle', and second of the morphological patterns in the more recent collections. It seeks to show that Prynne's etymological poetic is even more unemphasised and radical than Davie supposed.

Hearing *The White Stones* (1969) with 'Mental Ears'

As a critic, Prynne has written several times about the significance of prosody, most recently in the lecture 'Mental Ears and Poetic Work', which explicitly argues for the interaction of poetic and etymological sound patterns. Having analysed the cognates and

etymologies of a series of end-stopped words in William Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey', he states:

These features are by no means instances of adventitious sound symbolism, or association of semantic values with surface features; they are within the structure and history of English as an evolved system, and furthermore they are selected here for a mutually reinforcing, if latent, prominence: in other words, they are *motivated*.

This takes poetic sound patterns beyond 'surface features', putting them in contact with the 'underlying base forms' of the abstract phonological structure that is the concern of 'professional phonologist[s]' and professional etymologists alike. Like surface features such as rhymes, these etymological patterns are 'selected' from language; the difference is that they are selected from an 'evolved system' that has already undergone a process of selection in its evolution. The study of what Prynne calls 'evolutionary phonology' makes the diachronic significance of all word sounds – even abstract ones – audible, providing a new way of understanding 'poetic language in action'. To achieve this, he suggests, both poets and readers must work with 'mental ears', hearing the meanings already encoded in the 'evolved system'.¹³

The terms of these arguments are more linguistic than literary. The same is true of the earlier lectures *Stars, Tigers and the Shapes of Words* (1999), which identify a 'scandal' in literary criticism's apparent unconcern with the linguistic theory of the arbitrariness of the sign. As a result, criticism often assumes poetry communicates by acting '*as if* the form of words is or could be motivated', simultaneously failing to confront arbitrariness and bypassing the actual integration of sound and sense in the

¹³ J. H. Prynne, 'Mental Ears and Poetic Work', *Chicago Review*, 55.1 (2010), 126–57 (pp. 137–38, 133, 132).

‘evolved system’ with which poems interact.¹⁴ *Stars, Tigers and the Shapes of Words* experiments with pushing the assumptions of literary interpretation to their extremes, but ‘mental ears’ integrate those extremes:

“Mental ears” do not relegate us to the dominion of performative sonority, nor do they elevate us into the paramount abstraction of inferred ideas and beliefs: they are an intense hybrid [...].

It should be noted that the ordinary communication of a meaning is not a part of this hybrid. In fact, it is being gradually displaced:

what for so long has seemed the arduous royal road into the domain of poetry (“what does it mean?”) seems less and less an unavoidably necessary precondition for successful reading.

There is encouragement enough here to attempt to read Prynne’s own poetry with ‘mental ears’; he even writes that the theory was developed ‘in order somewhat to reflect on my own writerly practice’.¹⁵ The temptation is particularly strong given that the poetry cannot forgo sound patterns in the same way as it avoids familiar syntactical and grammatical ones.¹⁶ Certainly, if both poet and reader are doing etymological ‘poetic work’, then the point-to-point idea of poetic communication and critical interpretation is irrelevant. But it is rather too easy to say that communication is a non-issue in this special domain of Prynne’s ‘mental ears’. ‘Non-communicating’ is not a viable description of any use of language. Instead, reading Prynne with mental ears demands an awareness of the

¹⁴ J. H. Prynne, *Stars, Tigers and the Shape of Words: The William Matthews Lectures 1992 Delivered at Birkbeck College, London* (London: Birkbeck College, 1993), p. 6.

¹⁵ Prynne, ‘Mental Ears’, pp. 132–33. It is worth noting here that Prynne excluded his first collection, *Force of Circumstance*, from his ‘own writerly practice’ – it has never been reprinted or collected – and its style is so different from his other work as to make it extraneous to the present discussion. J. H. Prynne, *Force of Circumstance, and Other Poems* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962).

¹⁶ Ian Davidson argues that there is a direct link: Prynne’s ‘highly stressed syntactical formations [...] both distort the grammatical relationships while simultaneously creating labyrinthine philological ways back and across to multiple meanings for the individual words themselves’. Ian Davidson, *Radical Spaces of Poetry* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 155.

conditions of communication in an evolved and evolving system, in which every word disrupts and is disrupted by its history.

This is an etymological version of the deconstructionist doctrine Prynne upholds in 'Mental Ears and Poetic Work': that 'the active poetic text is [...] characteristically in dispute with its own ways and means'.¹⁷ It can also be seen as an extension of what Derek Attridge has called the 'deconstructive etymological argument' into the literary text itself. In his 1988 book *Peculiar Language*, Attridge writes that etymology is important to poststructuralist theory because it asks the same questions as literary wordplay but from within the tradition of 'logic, empiricism, scientific method', from which literature is 'all too easily partitioned off'.¹⁸ Prynne's linguistically conscious literary criticism does not allow for such a partition in the first place, positioning the deconstructive potential of etymology as an integral part of the activity of the 'active poetic text'. This does not mean that etymology itself becomes a literary device; it may still be read logically, empirically, and scientifically. Prynne's return to philology is clear in his adoption of the commentary, a form of literary criticism popular among deconstructionists, though his version is more traditionally philological than most. It is also the preferred method of his own critics, but Prynne's book-length word-by-word commentaries on short poems are more extensive than any that have been written on his work.

In contrast to the kind of literary interpretation that seeks meanings beneath the surface of the text – like that demonstrated in *Stars, Tigers and the Shape of Words* –

¹⁷ Prynne, 'Mental Ears', p. 141.

¹⁸ Derek Attridge, *Peculiar Language: Literature as Difference from the Renaissance to James Joyce* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 126.

commentary positions itself on the same level as its text, growing around it.¹⁹ The two methods thus imply very different notions of how poems communicate. In a special issue of *Glossator*, a journal for the ‘practice and theory of the commentary’, devoted to Prynne, Ryan Dobran remarks:

The peculiar labor of the commentary is a mixture of scrupulousness, resourcefulness, tensile speculation, and suspicion. It risks moving too slow, of [*sic*] overstating the obvious, of [*sic*] beginning at the beginning, and returning when necessary.²⁰

There are clear comparisons to be made here with Muldoon’s bravura literary criticism, with its emphasis on speculation and its risks: nothing is taken for granted. But Muldoon’s criticism is openly idiosyncratic and unscrupulous, whereas commentaries on Prynne and indeed by him are held together by an earnest, ‘tensile’ attention to language. They are ‘speculative’ in the provisional sense, politely academic in a way that Muldoon could never be said to be; the risk they take is of being too scrupulous and therefore failing to appreciate the momentum of the poem.²¹

While etymology is clearly an essential tool for commentaries explicating ancient or medieval texts, its role is not so obvious when it is understood as actively disrupting the synchronic states such traditional philology investigates.²² Critical appraisals of

¹⁹ ‘We expect commentaries not to reach below, behind, or beyond but rather to be “lateral” in relation to their texts of reference’. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, *The Powers of Philology: Dynamics of Textual Scholarship* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003), p. 43.

²⁰ Ryan Dobran, Introduction to *On the Poems of J. H. Prynne*, ed. by Ryan Dobran (= *Glossator*, 2 (2010)), pp. 1–10 (p. 9).

²¹ Prynne gestures towards these qualities of his book-length commentaries in their titles and epigraphs. His first is subtitled ‘A Specimen of a Commentary’ and carries the following epigraph: ‘[b]ut it is the maner of some to languish about wordes, and in seeking deeply after nothing, to loose not onely their time, travell, and thanks, but their wits also’. The reference given is ‘Iohn Kinge, *Lectvres upon Ionas, Delivered at Yorke* [London, 1594], p. 11’. J. H. Prynne, *They That Haue Powre to Hurt: A Specimen of a Commentary on Shake-speares Sonnets*, 94 (Cambridge: the author, 2001), p. 1.

²² Prynne’s own commentaries employ a traditional philological method to explicate classic texts; they do, however, hint at the potential for diachronic interpretations in such a method. This, for example, is from the commentary on a sonnet by George Herbert: ‘[e]arly Modern English *for* (conj.) is in transition through the 16th–17th centuries, moving between an earlier pattern of usage as heading a subordinate clause

Prynne's early poetry often take thematic justification for identifying etymologies from the poems' fascination with geology, ice ages, myth, and primitive culture. In their commentary on 'The Glacial Question, Unsolved' (65–67), for example, Thomas Roebuck and Matthew Sperling note that though Prynne 'rejects the naturalizing assumptions which allowed [nineteenth-century] philologists to rely on paradigms drawn from geology', 'something of this turn toward reconstructing and analyzing human history from the deposits it leaves in language remains in [his] thinking'.²³ This reading of Prynne's relationship with the geology–etymology–archaeology metaphor captures the essential problem of etymological investigation: how can present-day 'deposits' in language be approached (by both poets and critics) without assuming that they are simply layers of meaning that can be reconstructed like a geological analysis of a landscape? 'Age by default: in some way this must / be solved' ('The Wound, Day and Night', 64). In other words, how can etymologies be part of an active poetic text? Much of Roebuck and Sperling's etymologising passes by without consideration of this issue.²⁴ However, their histories of 'Norfolk', 'secular', and 'land' put past and present meanings into dialogue, taking into account the disruptive effect of etymology and seeing it as an active discourse in the poem.²⁵

In 'The Glacial Question, Unsolved', the deposits left by glaciers are 'what we hope to call "land"'. Roebuck and Sperling write that this statement comes from 'an ancient primitive human viewer with the knowledge of a twentieth-century geologist',

(often in the form *for that*) and a later pattern of coordinating linkage'. J. H. Prynne, *George Herbert, 'Love [III]': A Discursive Commentary* (Cambridge: Barque Press, 2011), p. 64.

²³ Thomas Roebuck and Matthew Sperling, "'The Glacial Question, Unsolved': A Specimen Commentary on Lines 1–31", in *On the Poems of J. H. Prynne*, ed. by Ryan Dobran (= *Glossator*, 2 (2010)), pp. 39–78 (pp. 58–59).

²⁴ Words etymologised but not considered for how their obsolete meanings function are 'matter', 'ice', 'day', 'shore', 'runs', 'cursive', 'current', and 'include'.

²⁵ Roebuck and Sperling, pp. 54–55, 68–69, 77–78.

with the faultlines in this unusual perspective being drawn through the two different histories of the meaning of 'land' ('[a] part of the earth's surface marked off by natural or political boundaries' vs. '[t]he solid portion of the earth's surface, as opposed to sea, water').²⁶ Prynne's phrasing produces a self-inwoven etymology, like those in Muldoon's 'Yarrow'; the word's history is brought 'to the tip of its own tongue'.²⁷ There are more instances in 'Frost and Snow, Falling' (70–71), again from *The White Stones*. For example:

[...] We run deeper, cancel
the flood, take to the road or what was before
known as champaign.

What is it that 'was before known as champaign', and why did its name change?²⁸ The idiom 'take to the road' might suggest 'take to the field', a campaign that could be military or political; it even raises the possibility of 'champagne', as in 'take to the bottle', and these connotations of luxury also lead back to Campania, the region where Roman aristocrats built their holiday villas. These are all audible etymological connections, but they are made cryptic precisely because all there is to go on is the sound (through the spelling) of 'champaign'. Something that used to be 'known as champaign' is unlikely to be the same as it was when it *was* known as 'champaign' – not least since a change of signifier changes perception of its signified. For example, 'champagne' gives a nostalgic colouring to the medieval countryside (it was as heady as champagne, before the commercial concept of luxury) that does not have anything to do with the medieval use of the word 'champaign'. A logical resolution of diachronic and synchronic perspectives is impossible here, however much the reader needs it to make sense of the line.

²⁶ Roebuck and Sperling, pp. 76–78.

²⁷ 'Yarrow', in Paul Muldoon, *Poems, 1968–1998* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), pp. 346–92 (p. 348).

²⁸ Although the *OED* does not list 'champaign' as obsolete, its form appears historical because it is an unusual borrowing from Central rather than Norman French. 'Champaign, *n.* and *adj.*', *OED*.

Etymological commentary of the kind demonstrated here emphasises perspective in poetic communication. Looking forward to ‘what we hope to call “land”’ and backward to ‘what was before / known as champaign’ are not ways of filling out the strata of language and reconstructing meanings, but of recognising that any synchronic perspective will always be constituted – ambiguously, unsettlingly, but audibly – by diachronic ones. Prynne is defining poetic communication as a complex negotiation of different temporal perspectives made by hearing the history of words encoded in their sounds. Etymological contrasts also play a part: in the phrase ‘being gentle / and of our own kind’, for example, the audible contrast between the Latin and Teutonic words, which otherwise have much the same history (both are ultimately from the same Indo-European root meaning ‘to bear, produce, generate’), invites commentary through what is effectively an etymological tautology.²⁹ Such contrasts are often considered as sound effects, or extensions of cultural metaphors about Roman refinement and Teutonic bluntness. Reading with ‘mental ears’, however, requires an appreciation of how etymological effects do more than this. The etymologies of ‘gentle’ and ‘kind’ explain the divergence in meaning that allows the statement not to be tautologous today (though ‘of our own kind’ is somewhat redundant by itself), while cancelling out that divergence with the obsolete tautology. To reiterate, for Prynne the history of language is not a resource for but a source of poetry; whether this fact is emphasised or unemphasised, the way words are used today has been determined by meanings that are now obsolete.

The difficulty of interpreting Prynne’s emphatically self-inwoven etymologies – and the argument that all language is made up of unemphasised ones – is comparable to

²⁹ ‘Gen-’, *IEL*.

and entangled with difficulties encountered in his poetry's syntax, grammar, and reference. All are in evidence at the very beginning of 'Frost and Snow, Falling':

That is, a quality of man and his becoming,
Beautiful, or the decoration of some light and
Fixed decision, no less fluent than the river
Which guards its name. (70)

The first two words of this poem establish a difficulty of reference: either 'that' is a deictic marker for some unspecified but 'beautiful' referent, or 'that is' is used anaphorically to mean 'in other words', though there are no words before it against which these may be read as 'other'. An etymological usage is difficult in precisely the same way: either an obsolete meaning is revived and therefore cancels out the current word to which it refers, or like an empty anaphor the word is dissevered completely from its obsolete origin. The grammatical challenges of these first few lines are thus reflected by the etymological challenge of 'no less fluent than the river'. 'Fluent' comes from Latin *fluere* to flow, which also gave the Latin word for river, *flumen*.³⁰ 'River' is Anglo-Norman, with less clear origins in Latin *riparia*, riverbank, but it is ultimately derived from an Indo-European word meaning 'to cut' ('rift' is a cognate).³¹ Rivers are obviously 'fluent' – but they also cut through land and demarcate boundaries, and there is no etymological flow from 'fluent' to 'river'. Many river names are ancient, surviving through periods of wholesale linguistic change; 'Severn' and 'Thames', for example, are among the very few remnants of a long extinct British (or perhaps even pre-Celtic) language.³² In 'guard[ing] its name' (if indeed 'it' is the river), the river refuses to be fully 'fluent'. The 'fixed

³⁰ 'Fluent, *adj.* and *n.*', *OED*; 'Bhleu-', *IEL*.

³¹ 'River, *n.* ¹', *OED*; '1. Rei-', *IEL*.

³² Eilert Ekwall, *English River-Names* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928), p. xxxv. For a more recent account, see P. R. Kitson, 'British and European River-Names', *Transactions of the Philological Society*, 94.2 (1995), 73–118.

decision’ – perhaps a human settlement on the riverbank – that is ‘no less fluent’ than the river is therefore also subject to this deconstruction of the concepts of flow and rift.

The etymology of ‘river’ is more audible in its cognate ‘rival’, a word that appears four times in this short poem.³³ ‘Rivals’ lived on opposite banks of a river, cut off from but bound to each other. This neutral meaning of something like ‘stranger’ seems to be more relevant to Prynne’s use of the word: ‘the rival comes, with clay on his shoes’; ‘the rival / ventures his life in deep water’; ‘some generous lightness which we / give to the rival when he comes in’. But this neutrality is difficult to accept, since it has been wholly replaced by the modern sense of competition and antagonism. One must have a motive for crossing rivers and deserts of snow, and the semantic development of ‘rival’ seems to show that aggression is the default interpretation. For example, the poem quotes John of Plano Carpini, the Pope’s ambassador to the Great Khan in 1246–1247 (the relevant river here is the Volga) who would perhaps have put the Holy Roman Empire in grave danger had the letter he carried not been mistranslated, leading the Mongols to believe that the Church had surrendered.³⁴ This indicates how distance charges relationships between people, binding their fates even whilst it separates them. In the poem’s final few lines, this is made clear when, in place of the definite article attached to all the other rivals, a possessive pronoun is used:

[...] The wanderer with his
thick staff: who cares whether he’s an illiterate
scrounger—he is our only rival. Without this
the divine family is a simple mockery [...] (71)

³³ Prynne shares this interest in the mixture of geographical and human history in the word ‘rival’ with W. H. Auden; this is one link among many between the earlier poet’s limestone landscapes and *The White Stones*. See discussion in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

³⁴ Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West, 1221–1410* (Harlow: Pearson/Longman, 2005), pp. 87–90.

The only real rival is a 'wanderer' to whom 'we' have no obligation at all, making it all the more important that he is welcomed, as the 'divine family' were after the flight from Egypt. Without the suggestion of conflict, the human bond implied in 'our only rival' is itself a 'mockery'. Prynne is not simply using the ancient neutral meaning of rival; he invokes it as a necessary but compromised presence in our current understanding of human relationships across distance.

Throughout *The White Stones*, human relationships with history are explored through the effects of ice and water, and through linguistic change. But these are not metaphors: the histories of landscapes and languages are constitutive of the way people relate to and communicate with each other, whether the past and present are perceived as flowing together or separated by an insurmountable rift. Some poems in the collection hope that 'It *may* all flow again' ('The Wound, Day and Night', 64). Others feel the weight of history as oppressive: 'the sediment on which we stand / was *too much*, and unasked for' ('Love in the Air', 55–56); 'the battle of Maldon binds / our feet' ('Song in Sight of the World', 76–77). But there is always an uncanny aspect to any relationship with history, since it is both present and inaccessible:

[...] we live
with sounds in the ear
which we shall never know.
(‘Concerning Quality, Again’, 82–83)

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.
(‘Thoughts on the Esterházy Court Uniform’, 99–100)

In many of these poems, ‘sounds’ are evidence of historical continuity, and they implicate all language users even if they do not provide access to that continuity. This describes the condition of knowledge assumed by the line ‘what was before / known as champaign’. It also reveals how the relationships established between people by language, for example in the word ‘rival’, are reconfigured when language is heard as an evolved and evolving system.

Prynne expressed his concerns about the human consequences of the flows and rifts of linguistic history in a prose piece published two years before *The White Stones*, entitled ‘A Pedantic Note in Two Parts’ (1967). It consists of long quotations from dictionaries, historical and critical works about medieval language and literature, and ancient texts, all fully referenced, set alongside short commentary paragraphs. The entry for ‘winsome’ in the 1966 *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (which he renames the ‘*Oxford Dictionary of Etymological Evasion and Cowardice*’) is the provocation for Prynne’s extremely thorough, and vehement, argument for the vital purposefulness of a root both ‘suppressed’, and:

relegated to a “specialized meaning” imported into the (god help us)
“literary lang.” from the (one presumes) non-literary north.³⁵

This is a sadly restricted fate for ‘[t]he specific rune of our only tolerable condition’:

The English rune wynn (written p) was the name for “bliss”; it was a proper name, reaching right across Germania and back before the division of the Indo-European peoples.

³⁵ ‘Winsome’, *ODEE*.

The first part of this note takes issue with the dictionary's failure to mention the iconic quality of the root, its function as a 'proper name' and a rune. Its last paragraph finally voices the unrealistic expectations of the *ODEE* underlying these emphatic statements:

The proto-Germanic rune *wunjo, "bliss", is now a name no longer audible at our current wave-length: and being a total opponent of names the Oxford Etym. Dict. will do nothing to take us back, to the sounds of our proper selves.³⁶

Etymological dictionaries do not exist to make extinct words 'audible', or to 'take us back' to a time when they were. The nostalgic notion that 'the sounds of our proper selves' can be found somewhere in the history of the language – that they can be extrapolated like the answers to riddles, evidence of our unity with and belonging in language – seals the overstatement.

The second part of Prynne's 'Pedantic Note' is more measured and academic, but it still stresses a human need to access the extinct word:

The runic wynn is thus the fulfilled sign of joy, separation from which is the exile or distance of hope, desire, love; all the projective excursions of motive which converge in longing and (so they say) arrive ultimately in the beautiful recourse of the blessed.³⁷

There are two kinds of pedantry, then, in the two parts of this pedantic note: the '(god help us)' of personal frustration and the '(so they say)' of academic detachment. As mentioned above, all commentary risks pedantry, but the brevity of a 'note' – a form particular to the linguistic discipline of etymology and, according to Yakov Malkiel, responsible for its decline³⁸ – is especially vulnerable because the choice of topic will

³⁶ J. H. Prynne, 'A Pedantic Note in Two Parts', in *Certain Prose of The English Intelligencer*, ed. by Neal Pattison, Reitha Pattison, and Luke Roberts (Cambridge: Mountain Press, 2012), pp. 124–35 (pp. 124, 129).

³⁷ Prynne, 'A Pedantic Note in Two Parts', p. 135.

³⁸ The etymological note was 'associated with the reckless atomization of knowledge' and 'haunted, so rumour had it, by an excessive dosage of subjectivity and haphazardness', creating 'an unpromising state of

always seem disproportionate. Prynne's pedantic note is as much concerned with the straight-faced pedantry required to take etymology seriously as it is with the difficulties of communicating in a language that has lost 'the fulfilled sign of joy'. In some ways this is a small loss, a single root made the focus of an entire essay; seen from a different angle, however, it is emblematic of a fallen language in which every single word is the remnant of now obsolete 'fulfilled sign[s]'.

Morphological Resonance

While the arguments of 'A Pedantic Note' are a long way from Prynne's theory of 'mental ears', which claims that it can grant access to the sounds of linguistic history, they do show both the desire for and the risks of etymological commentary. *The White Stones* invites such commentary by relatively 'unemphasized' means, to use Davie's term, in the process demonstrating how all language is constructed from unemphasised self-inwoven etymologies. Right from *Kitchen Poems* (1968; 9–23) up to *Kazoo Dreamboats* (2011),³⁹ however, Prynne also employs a more emphatic strategy for making etymologies audible. Using various methods, he draws attention to the morphological structures of words, which may also be interpreted as etymological structures (though there is some debate over this). The splitting of roots and affixes across line breaks, for example, gives sounds that may or may not be intelligible in themselves space and time to signify, invoking etymological parts to reconfigure the synchronic whole. On just two pages of *Into the Day* (1972; 201–14), the following divisions are encountered: 're- / plete', 'un- /

affairs' for the discipline at the beginning of the twentieth century. Yakov Malkiel, *Etymology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 55.

³⁹ J. H. Prynne, *Kazoo Dreamboats: Or, on What There Is* (Cambridge: Critical Documents, 2011). Further references to this book are given in the text.

dilute', 'ex- / empt', and 'in- / justice' (206–07). As well as inducing curiosity about the roots of the familiar words 'replete' and 'exempt' (from the Latin for 'fill' and 'take' respectively), the transformational power of the prefixes can literally be heard: their vowels are immediately echoed in the roots that follow them.⁴⁰ This is the most literal interpretation of the 'prosodic breakage' referred to in 'Mental Ears'.⁴¹ Reintroducing etymology through morphological breakage creates a pressure inside words: a resonant relationship is established where only a single entity existed before.⁴²

An earlier example is found in 'Questions for the Time Being' (112–13; from *The White Stones*), which engages with Bourdieu's theory of 'cultural capital' – that the 'self-styled masters of language [...] / [...] own and / control the means of production' – through the controlled experiments of poetic prosody. For instance, the decision to split 'up- / shot' after the description of 'pronouns with their lingual backs to the wall' mixes etymological rightness with affected emphasis, supporting but trivialising the theory that poets 'own and / control the means of production'. The word is only controlled by exploiting its own historical connections with competitive archery; it is certainly not owned.⁴³ More radically, 'con- / dition', a separation that occurs twice in this poem, juxtaposes poetry's 'con' – its pretence that it is not controlling (as Alex Latter argues)⁴⁴ – with an etymology that insists on the heterogeneity of language ('con- together + *dicere*

⁴⁰ 'Replete', 'Exempt', *OED*.

⁴¹ Prynne, 'Mental Ears', p. 140.

⁴² Christopher Ricks makes just such an observation on Geoffrey Hill's use of hyphens: '[t]he hyphen cannot but acknowledge, in the moment when it conceives of two things coming together, that they are nevertheless two not one, just as Hill's need not exactly to spell but to articulate the word "atonement" differently when he means at-one-ment is tacitly an admission that the two, the same and not the same, will always be magnetically held apart and held together by being like-poles'. Christopher Ricks, 'Tenebrae and At-one-ment', in *Geoffrey Hill: Essays on his Work*, ed. by Peter Robinson (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1985), pp. 62–85 (p. 67).

⁴³ 'Upshot, *n.*', *OED*.

⁴⁴ Alex Latter, "'Scheming for the Possible World": J. H. Prynne's *The White Stones* and *The English Intelligencer*', *Intercapillary Space*, 2010 <<http://intercapillaryspace.blogspot.co.uk/2010/04/scheming-for-possible-world-j.html>>.

to declare, tell, say, etc.')

 and therefore the impossibility of one person controlling it.⁴⁵ These instances of prosodic breakage destabilise Bourdieu's rhetoric – and the poem's – by setting poetic control alongside an understanding of language as a 'means of production' with its own history. The difficulty of interpreting the poem's divided words thus reflects a difficulty that Prynne perceives at the heart of poetry itself.

Prynne's technique of splitting words across line breaks is indicative of the influence of Charles Olson, whose critical appeals to etymology are also audible in Prynne's 'Pedantic Note'.⁴⁶ Tom Clark explains that an etymology allowed the 'word-root fanatic Olson to link the troubadour poets with Herodotus, Homer, and himself in the tradition of the investigative storyteller', while Anthony Mellors notes that, in a lecture from the series *A Special View of History*, 'without paying particular attention to the question of synchrony' Olson uses etymology to 'arrive at a synthetic definition' of *polis*.⁴⁷ It is important that in this critical mode, etymology first deconstructs a word and then reconstructs it. In both Prynne and Olson's poetry, however, etymological deconstructions are less easily resolved: 'the too strong grasping of it / [...] loses it', writes Olson in 'The Kingfishers'.⁴⁸ Etymology in use (as opposed to in metalinguistic commentary) resists all synchronic appropriations of language and readers must therefore approach it self-consciously to avoid becoming overly earnest about the logic it seems to represent.

⁴⁵ 'Condition, *n.*', *OED*.

⁴⁶ See, e.g., 'Dylan Thomas, and Now Matthew Mead – As He Himself, "To Edward Thomas"' and 'The Hustings', Charles Olson, *The Collected Poems of Charles Olson* (London: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 525–26, 528–29. Olson himself credits E. E. Cummings with the innovation in *Projective Verse* (New York: Totem Press, 1959), p. 9.

⁴⁷ Tom Clark, *Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet's Life* (New York: Norton, 1991), pp. 297–98; Anthony Mellors, *Late Modernist Poetics: From Pound to Prynne* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 105.

⁴⁸ 'The Kingfishers', Olson, *The Collected Poems*, pp. 86–93 (p. 90).

Etymological poetry prevents any ‘too strong grasping of it’ because by breaking the illusion of synchrony it makes words instances of a dynamic ‘energy’, to use a key term from Olson’s ‘Projective Verse’. For Prynne the physics of the light and sound waves that constitute words’ visual and auditory existence are an important part of this; in *Into The Day*, a collection heavily influenced by ‘The Kingfishers’, he mimics the motion of the wave with dropped lines:

By such resounding
as by spherical
harmonics is truth
in exact flux
come among men. (210)

Oscillating between resonance in its most figurative (i.e. prophetic, profound) and its most literal (sound waves can be mathematically described by ‘spherical / harmonics’) sense, these lines echo – and by implication distort – Gerard Manley Hopkins’ ‘in roundy wells / stones ring’ (‘As kingfishers catch fire’) and the famous first line of ‘The Kingfishers’: ‘What does not change / is the will to change’.⁴⁹ Joseph N. Riddel writes that ‘[t]he sense of change changes, Olson says, even though the old word remains’, acknowledging that the resonant proclamation is to some extent going round in circles: its spherical harmonics are all too evident.⁵⁰ It is significant that all these statements chase a resonance that feels more solid and stable than the one they describe. This is not the ‘resonance’ with which poetry reviewers celebrate the depth and richness of poetic communication – rather, it is a noisiness that draws attention to linguistic change, and the difficulties it creates for communication.

⁴⁹ Gerard Manley Hopkins, *The Poetical Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. by Norman H. Mackenzie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 141.

⁵⁰ Joseph N. Riddel, *The Turning Word: American Literary Modernism and Continental Theory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), p. 149.

Another word that has functioned in a similar way to ‘resonance’ in this question of poetic communication, at least as it concerns deconstruction, is ‘citationality’. In ‘Signature Event Context’ (1977), a response to J. L. Austin’s *How to Do Things With Words* (1962),⁵¹ Jacques Derrida asks:

[...] ultimately, isn’t it true that what Austin excludes as anomaly, exception, “non-serious,” citation (on stage, in a poem, or a soliloquy) is the determined modification of a general citationality – or rather, a general iterability – without which there would not even be a “successful” performative?⁵²

That is, the ‘structural possibility of being weaned from the referent or from the signified (hence from communication and from its context)’ is what makes language itself – and therefore, paradoxically, communication – possible. John Searle, in his reply to Derrida, distinguished ‘citationality’ and ‘iterability’, arguing that the former is inessential to language use (i.e. it is metalinguistic), and the latter is a ‘trivial’ and certainly not paradoxical necessity, since it is presupposed by all communicative acts.⁵³ Derrida gave a more thorough explanation of ‘iterability’ in his reply. All these philosophical debates about literary language, context, and intention, however, revolve around Derrida’s first parenthetical assumption that ‘a general citationality’ is ‘rather, a general iterability’. The assumption is prepared by another parenthesis, earlier in ‘Signature Event Context’:

[...] such iterability – (*iter*, again, probably comes from *itara*, other in Sanskrit, and everything that follows can be read as the working out of the logic that ties repetition to alterity) structures the mark of writing itself, no matter what particular type of writing is involved.⁵⁴

⁵¹ J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

⁵² Jacques Derrida, ‘Signature Event Context’, trans. by Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman, *Glyph: Johns Hopkins Textual Studies*, 1 (1977), 172–97 (p. 191).

⁵³ John R. Searle, ‘Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida’, *Glyph: Johns Hopkins Textual Studies*, 1 (1977), 198–208 (pp. 206–08).

⁵⁴ Derrida, p. 180.

The citation of a '[probable]' Sanskrit cognate makes etymology a part of 'the logic that ties repetition to alterity', since the 'iter' in 'iterability' comes to mean both 'again' and 'other' by the repetition and alterity in the cognates '*iter*' and '*itara*'.

When the historicity of words is made audible, every use of language is revealed to be an evolution of language. Dominic Lash recognises this as a 'theme' of Prynne's 2001 collection *Unanswering Rational Shore* (517–33), explaining that it is established in the epigraph (517), which consists of the title of one of Goya's *Los Desastres de la Guerra* prints, '*lo mismo*' ('the same'), printed twice with a large gap in the middle:

Thus we have already a theme of identity and difference – the epigram repeats itself exactly, and yet, merely by being a repetition, the second '*lo mismo*' cannot be the same as the first.⁵⁵

There is horror in the 'identity and difference' of each of Goya's prints in that each one is both an accumulation of suffering and a record of a specific atrocity; the ethics of scale and specificity are irreconcilable. Resonance, citationality, and the ethical imperative of their structures of 'identity and difference' are all brought into play in Prynne's etymological patterns. This is particularly clear when they are morphologically transparent, because there is a temptation to draw an uncomplicated link between the complete word and the meanings of its morphological elements.⁵⁶ Both *Unanswering Rational Shore* and the earlier *Red D Gypsum* (1998; 433–49) emphasise morphology, sometimes by a density of words with obvious affixes ('underside selvage obscure, peltate divided refound', 436), sometimes by the division of a word across a line break,

⁵⁵ Dominic Lash, 'Metonymy as a Creative Structural Principle in the Work of J. H. Prynne, Derek Bailey and Helmut Lachenmann with a Creative Component' (Brunel University, 2010), p. 54.

⁵⁶ 'Even when the form remains the same, a derived word may diverge in meaning more or less substantially from the sum of its parts'. Linda R. Waugh and Madeleine Newfield, 'Iconicity in the Lexicon and Its Relevance for a Theory of Morphology', in *Syntactic Iconicity and Linguistic Freezes: The Human Dimension*, ed. by Marge E. Landsberg (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1995), pp. 189–222 (p. 207).

and sometimes by the use of unfamiliar words with familiar prefixes ('demerged', 'remontant', 449) or roots ('creatine', 445, 'panurge', 440). But if 'identity and difference' are seen as factors in the histories of these words, they must be more than a recurring 'theme' developed by a poet or discovered by a critic. They go deeper into the recursive nature of language itself.

In his analysis of the prefix 're-' in *Red D Gypsum*, Jay Basu presents a specifically linguistic version of Lash's point. He notes that the reader is encouraged to recognise 're-' even when it has become 'inoperative' (in words like 'relish') and when it 'reappears like a phantom haunting words such as "three", "frequently", "retes", or "trek"'. Finally, he connects the prefix to the experience of reading these poems:

For Prynne, what I am paraphrasing as the concept of 're-' can be seen to work simultaneously as a 'counterpart and complement' to both a metaphysical/essentialist view of meaning as inherent in language and a Wittgensteinian/post-structuralist view of meaning as purely a function of context. For it negotiates both the idea of stable, socially consensual meaning, and the operation of a pluralising, destabilising process of 'complex historical over-writing'. This difficult negotiation, outlined at the end of *Stars, Tigers and the Shape of Words* is analogous to that seen in *Red D Gypsum* between the deferral of meaning through the enactment of 'spontaneous' process, and the inducement to decode meaning through the employment of secondary diagnosis.⁵⁷

This argument pre-empts Prynne's own 'fusion' of similar dualities in 'Mental Ears', and is in accord with the understanding of etymological discourse presented in this chapter. Basu's analysis, however, makes the prefix in question a 'concept' that justifies and 'negotiates' reading strategies, or even simply a reminder that meaning 'is in a constant state of realignment'. The morphological and etymological value of 're-', for example in

⁵⁷ Jay Basu, 'The Red Shift: Trekking J. H. Prynne's *Red D Gypsum*', *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 30.1 (2001), 19–36 (p. 31).

the differences that exist between its operative, inoperative, and ‘phantom’ appearances, is not considered. In other words, Basu’s ‘concept of “re-”’ is not much more than a ‘theme’, though it does gesture towards the difficulties of communication in etymological poetry.

There is a broader investigation to be made of the role of etymological knowledge in reading poetry that explores the composite nature of words. First, derived words are not necessarily processed in terms of their morphemes. When the meanings of individual morphemes are no longer considered active in the meaning of the whole word, it is said to have become ‘lexicalised’. Although this is obviously true of words like ‘relish’, it may also be the case for more transparent morphologies; the process of ‘lexicalisation’ is very uncertain. Although morphology is usually thought of as a synchronic field – something that is clear in the preponderance of studies about how language-users process derived words⁵⁸ – lexicalisation in fact describes the diachronic phenomenon of obsolescence. Morphemes themselves may also be classified as either ‘productive’ or ‘non-productive’ depending on whether they are still being used to create new words, a factor that is again not easily defined. The problems encountered by these linguistic analyses make it even more difficult to say how poetic prosody might affect both etymological residues, which the linguists Linda R. Waugh and Madeleine Newfield call ‘pseudo-morphemes’,⁵⁹ and morphemes that are still ‘productive’. For example, how much does the repetition of the prefixes ‘re-’ and ‘pro-’ determine readers’ understanding of words such as ‘rewind’ and ‘provided’ (non-lexicalised and lexicalised respectively; 440) – as opposed to suggesting a

⁵⁸ See Harald Clahsen, ‘Linguistic Perspectives on Morphological Processing’, in *Advances in the Theory of the Lexicon*, ed. by D. Wunderlich (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2006), pp. 355–88.

⁵⁹ Waugh and Newfield, p. 204. Such pseudo-morphemes ‘are in a transition zone between the purely mediated function of the distinctive features and the wholly semantic morphemes [...]. This means that they may always be reinterpreted as iconic in nature and become signals of form-meaning relations; or they may remain as inert (pure) form, simple phonemes or collocations of phonemes with no status as iconic units’.

theme or conceptualising reading strategies? And how does the Latin root *vertere* stand in relation to its reflexes ‘reversion’, ‘versed’, ‘reverse’, and ‘converse’ on the first two pages of *Red D Gypsum* (435–36), or the Greek root *ergon* to its reflexes ‘allergic’, ‘organic’, and ‘theurgic’ on the first two pages of *Unanswering Rational Shore* (519–20)?

In *Unanswering Rational Shore*, the most prominent prefix is ‘pro-’, and it is always used in its non-productive form. (The *OED* distinguishes between its appearance ‘[c]hiefly as an etymological element’ and ‘[a]s a current English prefix’.)⁶⁰ Its etymological senses of ‘forward’, ‘to the front of’, and ‘before’ are certainly connected to the collection’s images of financial speculation, legal proceedings, and prayer, all of which involve some sort of pre-emptive action. But its resonance is a result of its intervention as an etymological element, or a pseudo-morpheme, rather than its conceptualising a theme:

[...] Expert advice
proclaims otherwise, that’s its job. [...] (522)

Prophetic souls at the garden party convention press
forward to the barrier for a better, look how well
it suits at every chance they get. [...] (530)

The etymological residue of ‘pro-’ is heard even from within thoroughly lexicalised words – it interrupts the more familiar phrase ‘claims otherwise’, and contributes to alliterative patterns. It is deflected, however, by a sarcastic voice that reduces the force and formality of both ‘proclaims’ and ‘prophetic’. This is not to say that etymology is easily dismissed, but that its only presence comes from its interruption of synchrony. Elsewhere, the pseudo-morpheme ‘pro-’ is even more disruptive and disrupted:

[...] the play pro-

⁶⁰ ‘Pro-, prefix¹’, *OED*.

vokes a circle of conjoint refulgence, to craze
the glass it burns and grind its cutting purse. (529)

The density of prefixed words, the division of 'provokes', and the allusions to a famous provocation in *Hamlet* on this page all put emphasis on the etymological composition of this word: 'to call forth'.⁶¹ Its suggestion of verbal power is in danger of being pushed into parody by the modern meaning of 'pro- / vokes', aligning it with the frustration in 'craze' and 'grind', and indeed that of a reader encountering this *Unanswering Rational Shore*. Similarly, the alliteration, assonance, and iambic pentameter of the final line could be read as incantatory, or as overstated as the language of 'The Murder of Gonzago' – a play designed to 'provoke' in both the old and new senses of the word. The 'circle of conjoint refulgence' is a stage lit so brightly that it suggests 'the play' seeks to disturb the 'circle'. Another disruption and another echo of *Hamlet* is heard in 'cutting purse', but it implies a 'cutting edge', too, linking the modern language of promotion to theft – just as by advertising the players to the court, Hamlet creates a situation where Claudius may be caught like a thief in the act, to use Horatio's metaphor.⁶² The identity and difference of 'pro- / vokes' and 'provokes' creates conflict but prevents either getting the upper hand.

Prefixes often remain both visible and audible when morphologies become lexicalised, and Prynne's prosody uses this to produce a complex interweaving of obsolete and current meanings. But visible and audible patterns can be misleading: 'demerged' (449) means 'immersed', not 'separated'.⁶³ Furthermore, actual

⁶¹ 'Provoke, v.', *OED*.

⁶² 'If 'a steal aught the whilst this play is playing, / And scape detected I will pay the theft'. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006), p. 302 (3.2.84–85).

⁶³ A fact pointed out by William Fuller, in an argument that does not, however, insist on Prynne's provoking a readerly mistake: 'Prynne's characteristically fluid use of [the word], within the floating shadows of contexts past and present, leaves the issue undecided, neither one nor the other but both'. William Fuller, 'Restatement of Trysts', *Chicago Review*, 52.2–4 (2004), 241–59 (p. 248).

etymological patterns range from the relatively audible (e.g. ‘specimen’, 525/‘special’, 527) to the almost completely inaudible (‘floor’/‘plan’, 521). Any connections are always partial; this does not make them less significant, but it does mean that their significance is bound up with that of their disconnections. This is particularly important for patterns of etymological roots, as opposed to affixes. ‘Spec-’, for example, makes a number of appearances in *Unanswering Rational Shore*, each time in a different word. But the Latin *specere* is the source of two different strands of meaning in modern English: ‘to look at’ (‘retrospect’, 524, ‘spectrum’, 520, ‘spectral’, 529) and ‘form, kind’ (‘specimen’, 525, ‘special’, 527). Other unrelated meanings of this sound are ‘ham’ (from Dutch or German) and ‘a small spot’ (from Old English *specca*), both of which are called into play in the following lines:⁶⁴

[...] Masquerade on the dipper plate
Clears the specks, ham on the bone. [...] (521)

It is not an etymological connection but the potential for such a connection that produces the pattern for the reader here, which only succeeds in showing how disruptive etymology can be of ordinary reading methods.⁶⁵

In Prynne’s poetry, then, etymology represents more than a rich historical resource. It is the evidence of language’s historicity, the continually evolving patterns from which poetry derives its energy. His latest pamphlet, *Kazoo Dreamboats, or, On What There Is* (2011), takes these patterns at a particularly brisk pace:

[...] too close to close (5)

⁶⁴ ‘Speck¹’, ‘Speck²’, *ODEE*.

⁶⁵ The potential for etymological interpretation is also raised by Prynne’s use of unfamiliar words with recognisable affixes or roots, which become more and more common from *Unanswering Rational Shore* onwards. Examples from *Acrylic Tips* (2002; 535–46) include ‘glabrous’ (537), ‘Careen’ (538), ‘ducted’ (539), ‘demark’ (539), ‘vert’ (540), ‘Resiled’ (540), ‘terebinth’, ‘cilnamen’ (542), and ‘pronation’ (543).

[...] treat to treaty release [...] (16)

[...] because which because is switched causally and not by single
cause (18)⁶⁶

This patterning is too fast and too loud to be called ‘resonance’. It mimics the pedantic academic precision of the scientific and philosophical theories Prynne quotes throughout, such as this from Aristotle: ‘In case only whites are considered, white meaning one thing, none the less there are many whites and not one’ (15). In poetry, these patterns are so easily labelled ‘wordplay’, with all its connotations of triviality. But although they are not as unemphasised and radical as Prynne’s earliest experiments with Indo-European roots, their lack of subtlety in presentation actually makes them more subtle in terms of their evolution, insisting that readers recognise the closeness of repetition and alterity across different parts of speech, different phonetic realisations, different registers, and so on.

The expressiveness of this dense patterning technique is asserted repeatedly throughout *Kazoo Dreamboats*.⁶⁷ And like Prynne’s morphological patterning, it is not limited to true cognates but spills over into etymology as potentiality:

grievance to grief to greats and grateful [...] (22)

‘Grievance’ and ‘grief’ are the only cognates here, but the phonaestheme ‘gr-’ associates all four words, thereby also questioning their relevance to each other. Prynne’s dense prosody puts pressure on the way readers entertain ideas about the coherence of such

⁶⁶ These short quotations and those that follow cannot give an impression of the original formatting of *Kazoo Dreamboats*, which consists of (unjustified) prose with block quotations.

⁶⁷ E.g.: ‘Is mine or mine, or is as does all so, also’ (8); ‘To speak of forgiveness, a cloud may be forgiven yet / not forgive’ (11); ‘The more again no more, its no to be more’ (12); ‘Complete negation of the negation in rate pursuit of imbalance’ (19); ‘This is / tantamount to negation of the negation’ (25); ‘[...] not done to nor yet been, / been for been as for the disjected these to those’ (26).

patterns, the 'play of unity as a mental device' (11). The compression of this writing, the poetic 'device', is explicitly linked with recurring images of nuclear fission and bombs:

[...] Proximity fuses tell you this matrix
 censorship impersonated clock device, each word feels out for the
 next its soft vibration to match by click on this. (16)

In keeping with the theory of 'mental ears', these lines imply that 'you' can become aware of words interacting with each other in an underlying pattern, even while they resist the more usual patterns of syntax. The delicate links in the underlying pattern suggest a potentially explosive energy; the word 'device' subtly anticipates this between its modern, partially euphemistic meaning of 'bomb' and its etymology ('division').⁶⁸

Such intricacies are so distant from the usual experience of language that they are only available via '[p]roximity fuses'. Prynne's preoccupation with sensory perception is extended here to include automated sensing ('the sonar range / spectrally patrolling its bounds', 18–19; 'remote sensing', 25), signalling a new approach to communication:

[...] Did you know you knew instantly
 By compression, voidal top soundings in laid decrement these lines
 Recursive by local necessity towards it across wide compacted
 exposure to anticipate to hear what you cannot know you will (18)

[...] listen out you know you can know what you hear, well
 enough by what you don't, in the echo-particles of a speech plan
 gazetted for duration. (19)

This is the most recent development in Prynne's poetic investigation of what and how things are known through the sound of words. While his earliest poems describe sounds that 'we shall never know', *Kazoo Dreamboats* encourages 'you' to respect both the explosive newness and the continuity of language – since each sound is a resounding,

⁶⁸ 'Device, *n.*', *OED*.

‘recursive by local necessity’, and made up of ‘the echo-particles of a speech plan’. Linguists use the word ‘recursive’ to describe syntax synchronically, but here it is equally applicable to the way prosody emphasises the historicity of words; ‘echo-particles’ refers to an ultrasound imaging technique used for measuring blood flow. Recursion and echoes both result from words’ sensitivity to each other, the way they behave in ‘compression’ and ‘compacted / exposure’, as opposed to their ‘voidal top soundings’ (the possibility that a concept like ‘void’ can be adjectival is in dispute throughout *Kazoo Dreamboats*). The oxymoronic phrase ‘gazetted for duration’ neatly captures this balance of newness and continuity that exists in every use of language, whilst also exemplifying it: ‘gazetted’ is a clear example of verbing, and the etymology of ‘duration’ (from Latin *durare*, ‘to harden’) contributes to the image of echoes rebounding off the surfaces of ‘compacted’ language.⁶⁹ In *Kazoo Dreamboats*, repetition and alterity are both employed thematically and disclosed as a condition of language.

Hearing Prynne’s Etymological Poetic

Davie, Prynne’s first critic, humanised an aspect of language that always reaches beyond human perceptions when he wrote about Prynne’s ‘etymological logic’ and his readers’ ability to ‘remember’ etymologies. Recently, David Caddy has proposed a similar interpretation of the opposite extreme of Prynne’s oeuvre:

The arc of Prynne’s poetry over the past forty years may be said to have broadly moved from a metaphorically based open field lyricism towards a metonymic and etymological challenge to the reader.

⁶⁹ ‘Duration’, *ODEE*.

It is significant that, although they plot Prynne's work differently, Davie and Caddy both reach for the idea of etymology to characterise what is difficult about it. This chapter has shown that etymology contributes to the difficulty of Prynne's poetry throughout his oeuvre, from *The White Stones* to *Kazoo Dreamboats*. It has also argued that etymology is a source of this poetry, like the stress patterns of words or the recursive structures of syntax. It is therefore neither a 'logic' nor a 'challenge': but what, then, is its relationship with its readers? How does an etymological poetry communicate?

In 'Mental Ears', Prynne himself wrote that 'the apparently segregated domains of poetry' are connected to a speech community through 'active human knowledge', which is 'inherently in dispute with itself and its base in reality'. The most accurate descriptions of the experience of reading Prynne reflect this dialectic; Anthony Mellors, for example, writes that '[t]he prospect of meaningfulness is always shadowed by the spectre of meaninglessness'.⁷⁰ In a review of *Unanswering Rational Shore*, Michael Grant gives a similar account:

The impression given is of a missed encounter with an endlessly deferred meaning that is always on the verge of departing, or is on the very edge of arriving, so that one is suspended as a reader in the curious interval between the two.⁷¹

Mellors and Grant both narrativise encounters with Prynne's poetry. To use a distinction Prynne set out in an early essay, they use the experience of 'the internal sensation of difficulty' to respond to the 'resistance' of these texts:

Resistance [...] is in an inescapable sense given, found to exist, and may not be fabricated or willed into being – like difficulty – to meet the continuing demand for palpable texture in human affairs. And this

⁷⁰ Mellors, p. 167.

⁷¹ Michael Grant, "Buxtehude in Kedgere": On J. H. Prynne's *Unanswering Rational Shore*, 22 October 2008 <<http://michaelgrant3.blogspot.co.uk/2008/10/on-jh-prynne.html>>.

priority of givenness over purposiveness seems to be a distinguishing feature of the creative imagination alone of the various capacities of man – this unfathomable ability to give substance to what is needed but not simply wanted, to offer both the difficulty of contrivance and also a profound assurance that this difficulty corresponds to genuine resistance in the larger context of the outside world.⁷²

Prynne's poetry presents various kinds of difficulty that in turn demonstrate various kinds of resistance. For instance, those collections that use narrative rhetoric – such as *Her Weasels Wild Returning* (1994) and *Triodes* (1999) – contrive to frustrate expectations about narrative structure while also revealing the potential in language for endless deferral. The word 'deferral' shows how ingrained the notion of plot must be in any narrative resistance, making it impossible to analyse as a dialogue between meaningfulness and meaninglessness. Etymological resistance, however, is distinctive because it involves a commitment to the meaninglessness of obsolete words. The fact that etymologies are obsolete is in contest with the fact that poetic prosody draws meaning from the historically determined sounds of words. In other words, the perception of etymology's difficulty is in accord with the type of resistance it actually presents to the reader.

The appeal of finding 'deeply buried interrelations of sound and sense' in Prynne's poetry, to quote Basu, is certainly felt by all of his critics.⁷³ But revealing such interrelations, whether they are deeply buried in Proto-Indo-European or lying just under the surface of modern usage, must always also involve analysis of their obsolescence – how they became buried in the first place, and how their exhumation affects their descendants. Derrida proposes that it is only by forgetting metaphors that literal language is made possible: for language to evolve, meanings and forms need to become

⁷² J. H. Prynne, 'Resistance and Difficulty', *Prospect*, 5 (1961), 26–30 (pp. 28, 30).

⁷³ Basu, p. 36.

obsolete. It is this that gives such power to the etymological potential of an interrelation, allowing the historicity of language to escape scientific and impressionistic categories. On the other hand, Derrida also states that words ‘cannot fail to retain’ their histories, and in philosophical or critical texts this is what sanctions commentary on them. But Prynne invokes these histories, making them audible to ‘mental ears’ through prosody, in a way that makes obsolescence an active force. His etymological poetry is not about constructing a challenge *to* communication, but disclosing a challenge *of* communication: that its medium is constantly evolving.

Prynne’s etymological ‘difficulty’ is first discussed in Donald Davie’s *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry*, a book that argues Hardy’s work exerts a significant influence over twentieth-century poetry. Davie detects a linguistically self-conscious lyricism that points to Hardy’s influence in D. H. Lawrence, John Betjeman, W. H. Auden, and Philip Larkin, among others. Prynne is introduced by way of Auden: ‘[i]n Hardy and Auden and Prynne alike the long temporal perspectives of geology induce a quietness which, though it is undermined by apprehension, seems like a liberation’.⁷⁴ These three poets also share a preoccupation with the ‘long temporal perspectives’ of language: geology was a common metaphor for etymology (and vice-versa) throughout the nineteenth-century flowering of the discipline.⁷⁵ But as noted by Dennis Taylor, Hardy was ‘the last poet of the old historical philology’, and his work reflects ‘the great transition from historical to synchronic philology’.⁷⁶ Auden and Prynne, in contrast, belong to a period in which Saussure’s notion of language as ‘system’ has largely replaced metaphors from natural history, at least in the field of linguistics. The link with geology persists in literary views of

⁷⁴ Davie, *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry*, p. 120.

⁷⁵ See Virginia Zimmerman, *Excavating Victorians* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2009), pp. 30–33.

⁷⁶ Dennis Taylor, *Hardy’s Literary Language and Victorian Philology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 4.

etymology – for Geoffrey Hill and Seamus Heaney, as well as for Auden and Prynne – but it is compromised. Prynne himself reconfigures the metaphor in the conclusion of ‘Mental Ears’:

Language is itself an intrinsic fault system, and it is worse than a mistake
not to understand this as best ever we can.⁷⁷

Far from the ‘quietness’ of a philologist surveying linguistic strata laid down over thousands of years, this image interprets the seismic activity of language change and its vital epistemological and ethical consequences: the ‘fault system’ must be confronted. Prynne’s etymological poetry is noisy, and between *The White Stones* and *Kazoo Dreamboats* it only increases in volume. Reading these poems with mental ears, it is possible to hear how language’s historicity guarantees both its integrity and its potential for change.

⁷⁷ Prynne, ‘Mental Ears’, p. 142.

3. The Lexical Exercises of W. H. Auden

In 1927, right at the beginning of his career, W. H. Auden wrote a poem that expressed a profound unease about the power of written language, which he saw as both promising and threatening communication. 'The Letter', ostensibly 'speaking as you', becomes a 'country god' who is 'Always afraid to say more than it meant'.¹ This fear has implications that reach far beyond the reticence of a love letter, into concerns about poetic communication that are present throughout Auden's work. A poem is like a letter in that it is abstracted from the contexts of its creation, though such abstraction is deeper for a poem; it includes both the poem's own voice and its addressee, for example. It is this abstraction that gives 'The Letter' the power of a peripheral 'country god' as well as an increased vulnerability to what J. H. Prynne calls the 'intrinsic fault system' of language.² In Auden's poems, a faultline runs between what is meant and what is said, and it is disturbed by everything from low-level shifts of interpretation to the opening of great chasms between obsolete and current words and meanings. These disturbances are heard most clearly in the strange, and controversial, diction found in his last four collections of poetry, *About the House* (1965), *City Without Walls* (1969), *Epistle to a Godson* (1972), and *Thank You, Fog* (1974). Words such as 'hirple', 'dormition', and 'olamic', for instance, seem to mean more than they say: their obscurity demands an abstract attention to meaning, which must often involve consulting a dictionary, before what is being said can be interpreted. Auden's obscure late diction is read here in conjunction with the philological approach he takes to poetic language in his criticism.

¹ W. H. Auden, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), p. 29. All further references to this book are given in the text.

² J. H. Prynne, 'Mental Ears and Poetic Work', *Chicago Review*, 55.1 (2010), 126–57 (p. 142).

Both are shadowed by the fear implied in 'The Letter' about the effect of philological awareness – which strips words of their synchronic immediacy and recontextualises them in an historically determined and constantly shifting 'fault system' – on poetic communication.

Poetic language has often been seen to heal the rift between the trust that words will communicate and the power they have to suggest something more than, or different from, what is being communicated. In his inaugural Oxford Professor of Poetry lecture 'Making, Knowing and Judging' (1955), Auden himself expresses this hope by quoting Paul Valéry:

The power of verse is derived from an indefinable harmony between what it *says* and what it *is*. Indefinable is essential to the definition. [...] The impossibility of defining the relation, together with the impossibility of denying it, constitutes the essence of the poetic line.³

In a poem written a few years later, Auden rejects such symbolist logic because it turns language into a 'mallarmesque / syllabic fog' ('Encomium Balnei', 700–03). Though the phenomenality of words is important to him, he cannot help but perceive the potential for discord between what a word says and what it is behind 'the essence of the poetic line'. A word '*is*' a sedimentation of histories that shift around beneath what it '*says*'; in the obscure diction of Auden's late works there is less an 'indefinable harmony' between them than an inscrutable polyphony. Readers are encouraged to guess at a strange word's meaning, either impressionistically or on the basis of etymological knowledge, and to go to the dictionary to learn about how it has been used. But what do these reflections and investigations do to the way such words communicate? Auden's

³ W. H. Auden, 'Making, Knowing and Judging', in *The Dyer's Hand; And, Other Essays* (New York: Random House, 1962), pp. 31–60 (p. 35).

philological diction is comparable to the speculations and spectacles of Paul Muldoon, and to Prynne's audible etymological patterns, because it produces an inescapable etymological difficulty in the interpretation of poetic language. The specific challenge of reading Auden's etymological poetry lies in confronting the unstable relationship between what poetic language says and what it is – and what the poet-critic says it is.

Auden quotes Valéry in 'Making, Knowing and Judging' in support of his own definition of poetic communication; he refrains, however, from arguing himself that poetry reconciles what a word says with what it is. Like Muldoon and Prynne, he feels the need to confront the Saussurean doctrines of arbitrariness, synchrony, and the dangers of the etymological fallacy:

Language is prosaic to the degree that "It does not matter what particular word is associated with an idea, provided the association once made is permanent." Language is poetic to the degree that it does matter.⁴

Quoting from George Boole's *An Investigation of the Laws of Thought*, a nineteenth-century book on algebraic logic, Auden manages a more subtle formulation than Saussure's terms would allow.⁵ Prosaic and poetic language are not objectively opposed by arbitrariness and motivation or synchrony and diachrony, but represent a spectrum along which language may be experienced as poetic or prosaic to a 'degree'. This is not as consistent with Valéry's 'indefinable harmony', either in imagery or argument, as Auden's subsequent quotation of him suggests. Instead, the continuity between degrees of mattering and not mattering describes a necessary but paradoxical relation between the poetic experience of exploring how words and ideas have been and could be

⁴ See note 3.

⁵ George Boole, *An Investigation of the Laws of Thought: On Which Are Founded the Mathematical Theories of Logic and Probabilities* (London: Walton and Maberly; Cambridge: Macmillan, 1854).

associated, and the irrelevance of these issues to the prosaic experience of language as a stable ('permanent') vehicle of communication.

The next move Auden makes in this *ars poetica* is to detail how a language might exist outside communication. This time he quotes Stéphane Mallarmé, diverging from him as covertly as he does from Valéry. His interpretation does not 'remake' a singularity from a plurality, as Mallarmé does, but expands words into poems of their own:

The poet is someone, says Mallarmé, who "*de plusieurs vocables refait un mot total*," and the most poetical of all scholastic disciplines is, surely, Philology, the study of language in abstraction from its uses, so that words become, as it were, little lyrics about themselves.⁶

Mallarmé's point is about the transcendental potential of poetry, the way it can function 'comme incantatoire'.⁷ Auden, in contrast, compares it to philology, a much-debated word that here seems to denote the discipline in its most restricted, hypothetical, and pedantic form (the form, incidentally, that led to its rejection by linguistics and much literary criticism). It is not immediately clear how Auden could justify placing philology – the study of the developments of words, through usage – in 'abstraction' from the use of language. But abstraction is not absolute separation; this kind of philology is lexicographical and etymological, in the sense that all 'uses' are evidence of the historical existence of a word, which in abstraction can constitute definitions. In the many and varied interpretations of the work of the philologist, these definitions can be used to identify linguistic laws, rhetorical devices, the meaning of literary texts, historical facts, racial traits, or even an ahistorical, universal human nature.⁸ For Auden, however,

⁶ See note 3.

⁷ Stéphane Mallarmé, 'Crise de Vers', in *Divagations*, ed. by Eugène Fasquelle (Paris: Bibliothèque-Charpentier, 1897), pp. 235–51 (p. 251).

⁸ These purposes of philology are all considered in *On Philology*, ed. by Jan M. Ziolkowski (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990).

philological abstraction does not contribute to any objective argument, but creates ‘little lyrics about [words] themselves’, opening a window into the inherent poetry, and plurality, of language.

Auden’s definitions of the relation between poetry and philology in ‘Making, Knowing and Judging’ have significant consequences for a reading of his obscure late diction. These strange words have a reflexivity that seems wholly uncommunicative: they are ‘little lyrics about themselves’ and little else. On the other hand, they reveal a desire to communicate more precisely and more consciously, with a philological awareness that can sometimes only be achieved by consulting the dictionary. This may also be interpreted as a desire to bring what a word ‘says’ in line with what it is understood to be, at least from an etymological perspective. But there are various kinds of slippage between investigating words and using them: poems always do both, and Auden’s etymological poetry is uniquely conscious of this fact. Its obscurity may be read as obstructing or facilitating communication because it positions itself at the centre of the difficult relationship between linguistic history and linguistic currency. The conclusion must be that language exists beyond the experience of communication, in an abstract, philological sphere that reveals no association is ever permanent – and this matters to how Auden’s poetry communicates.

Losing Faith in Language

However poetical ‘the study of language in abstraction from its uses’ might be, poetry itself must use words even while it suggests their abstraction from use. As a restatement of the infamous phrase ‘poetry makes nothing happen’ (‘In Memory of W. B. Yeats’, 247–50), which critics often take as a definitive signal of departure from his early

politically engaged work, this emphasis on philological abstraction has a controversial effect on Auden's poetry. As early as 1941, American critic Randall Jarrell detected its 'degeneration into abstraction'. Jarrell thought that this 'later poetry' – still some twenty years before the late poetry considered here – exhibited the strengthening of Auden's rhetoric, the weakening of his language, and '[t]he Bureaucratization of Perspective by Incongruity'.⁹ On 'The Age of Anxiety' (1947), he argued '[i]t is the sort of poem that an almost absolutely witty and almost absolutely despairing dictionary would write'.¹⁰ The near-absolutism of Auden's late diction, which combines insouciant wit with a deep despair about language, is difficult to read on its own terms. It seems that Auden's linguistic sensitivity apparently becomes an unhealthy obsession, as more and more frequently the reader encounters wholly unfamiliar words in his poems.

This newly obscure diction appeared at the same time as Auden was insisting that the 'Idle Word' of modern media has caused a 'corruption of language' so that 'nine-tenths of the population do not know what 30 percent of the words they use actually mean'.¹¹ The primness of this viewpoint is provocative, and provocatively at odds with the appearance of 'grahamgreeneish' ('On the Circuit', 729–31), 'nemorivagrant' ('Bestiaries Are Out', 739–40), and 'bransles' ('City Without Walls', 748–51) in the poems of this period, let alone the verbing that takes place in 'Archaeology' (894–97). Neither does it follow through on the assertion that '[l]anguage is poetic to the degree that' it matters 'what word is associated with an idea': for many people, most of the peculiar words in Auden's late poetry are not associated with any idea. Auden's concerns about

⁹ Randall Jarrell, 'Changes of Attitude and Rhetoric in Auden's Poetry', in *The Third Book of Criticism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969), pp. 113–50 (pp. 147, 142).

¹⁰ Randall Jarrell, *Randall Jarrell on W. H. Auden*, ed. by Stephen Burt and Hannah Brooks-Motl (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 62–63.

¹¹ W. H. Auden, 'The True Word Twisted by Misuse and Magic', *The Washington Post*, 3 December 1967, p. B2.

the corruption of language show the relationship between current usage and abstracted, philological '[actual meaning]' to be precarious. Between them exists a gulf that it seems it is the reader's responsibility to bridge, by assimilating etymological and lexicographical research into an understanding of what the poem is communicating, or trying to communicate.

Auden tests his readers most explicitly in the poem 'A Bad Night (A Lexical Exercise)' (842–43):

Far he must hirple,
Clumsied by cold,
Buffeted often
By blouts of hail
Or pirries of rain,
On stolchy paths
Over glunch clouds

It is easy for critics to quote this poem as an example of the excesses of Auden's late diction. But their reactions, whether they censure or excuse the technique, are invariably based on communication: Auden takes his audience for granted (Calvin Bedient); it is a way of obscuring or avoiding more profound meaning (Robin Mayhead, Martin Dodsworth); its unusualness is a new attempt to find apt diction (Denis Donoghue); the contexts of the poems make 'unintelligible' words 'much more communicative' (Charlotte Brewer); or Auden is trying to control the communicative act more precisely (Victoria Arana).¹² To summarise: unfamiliar words are either more or less successful at communicating. Often, both positive and negative views exist side by side; 'it is hard not

¹² Calvin Bedient, Review of 'Epistle to a Godson: And Other Poems By W. H. Auden', *New York Times Book Review*, 24 September 1972, p. BR4; Robin Mayhead, 'The Latest Auden', in *W. H. Auden: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by John Haffenden (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983), pp. 383–88 (p. 385); Martin Dodsworth, 'Dictionary Drunk', *The Guardian*, 12 October 1972; Denis Donoghue, 'Good Grief', in *W. H. Auden*, ed. by Haffenden, pp. 480–84 (p. 483); Charlotte Brewer, *Treasure-House of the Language: The Living OED* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 193–94; Victoria R. Arana, *W. H. Auden's Poetry: Mythos, Theory, and Practice* (Amherst, MA: Cambria Press, 2009), p. 139.

to find this exhilarating', writes Dodsworth, but we must remember that '[c]oncinnity and elegance are not the only virtues'. The view that poetry should communicate and yet somehow be more than communication – valorising what Auden expressed as a threat in 'The Letter' – has been developed more recently by Joseph Epstein:

W. H. Auden was a professional poet, an immensely talented writer, and if there is a line in Anglophone literature out of which he derives, it is, I believe, that of Alexander Pope and Lord Byron, two other professional poets, miraculously gifted, whose facility was perhaps greater than their feeling, who provided more pleasure than wisdom, and whose work will live on for as long as language beautifully handled continues to be admired.¹³

Epstein epitomises the opinion that Auden's late idiosyncratic diction 'became in the end a hindrance to his work', but may be admired in itself for its skilfulness or professionalism.¹⁴ Such an opinion rests on a separation of linguistic skill or experimentalism from 'feeling' and 'wisdom' – and thus on a refusal to acknowledge their admittedly often strained relation in Auden's poetry.

'A Bad Night' has more to contribute to this issue than examples of obscure words. It describes a poet failing to find the 'verve' to address 'Social trifles' and 'The world's wrongs'; instead:

To re-faith himself,
He rummages lines,
Plangent or pungent,
By bards of sentence,
But all to his sample
Ring fribble or fop,
Not one of them worth
A hangman's wages.

¹³ Joseph Epstein, 'Vin Audenaire', *Hudson Review*, 56.1 (2003), 57–72 (p. 72).

¹⁴ James Fenton, 'Auden's Last Bow', *New Statesman*, 27 September 1974, pp. 430–31.

'Lines', 'sample', and even 'sentence' manifest a practical, rather utilitarian image of poetry: the speaker is seeking to restore 'feeling' with 'facility'. But feeling is bound to facility through the historicity of Auden's diction, between the 'bards of sentence' and their 'fribble or fop' creations. The quaint archaism of 'bards' prepares the more serious etymological conflict in 'sentence', the grammatical usage having largely replaced the '[o]bs. exc. *poet.*' sense of '[a]phoristic speech' and the even more antithetical sense of '[t]he thought or meaning expressed, as distinguished from wording' (labelled 'obsolete' by the *OED*).¹⁵ The 'feeling' and 'wisdom' contained in 'sentence' is only accessible by a philological route. A parallel effect is achieved by the line 'Plangent or pungent': its syntax suggests that the two concepts are both interchangeable and independent – contributing to the feeling of desperation – and it invokes etymologies that do the same thing. The reader is drawn into an abstract consideration of the nature of the association between these words and their idea(s) by their formal similarity. Both have expressive meanings that are historically related to sensory ones: a plangent line would be one 'that thrills or affects the emotions' and a pungent one '[f]orcefully or incisively expressed', but this expressiveness is etymologically felt through what is 'loud, reverberating' and 'painful'.¹⁶ The implication is that linguistic expression is connected within itself to physical sensation, that one should look for feeling in language, not a language with which to express feeling.

Even having plumbed these depths of meaning, the 'lines' do not succeed in reviving the speaker's spirits. 'Not one of them worth / A hangman's wages': words are

¹⁵ 'Sentence, *n.*', 6a, 4b, 7a, *OED*.

¹⁶ 'Plangent, *adj.*', 'Pungent, *adj.* and *n.*', *OED*.

not worth the effort required to dispose of them, however ‘fribble or fop’ they are.¹⁷ It is this show of a lack of effort – and the pedantic purposiveness it pretends to conceal – that makes the poem a lexical exercise. It loosens the diction of its own lines having found that neither plangent nor pungent ones will suffice. As a result, linguistic currency and linguistic abstraction are made to occupy the same space. If one recognises and understands the meaning of ‘fribble’, then it has currency; if, which is more likely, one thinks of it as a funny but meaningless noise, then it is an abstraction. In order to appreciate the currency of ‘fribble’, however, the reader must view it abstractly by interpreting it impressionistically, drawing hypothetical etymological links with other words, or looking it up in a dictionary. This peculiar diction is neither irrelevant nor relevant to Auden’s communicative purpose, because the poem is more than the communication of a feeling: it is also an abstract ‘lexical exercise’. Auden employs archaic and obscure words to describe, as well as to represent, a feeling of meaninglessness. These are contradictory roles, but any attempt to pull them apart will falsify the intensity with which they are held together in the lexical exercise that is also a poem about a bad night.

Such a reading reinterprets the New Critical tradition in which philological abstraction – the poet’s attention to the nature of language itself – gave poetry a greater communicative power. William Empson’s assertion that ‘a poetical word is a thing conceived in itself and includes all its meanings’, for instance, bears similarities to Auden’s ‘little lyrics’. For Empson, a poem’s abstraction of language creates ambiguity that contributes to its ‘richness’ and cohesion. In ‘The Language of Paradox’ Cleanth

¹⁷ This decision not to dismiss etymology despite or because of its worthlessness is similar to that made by Muldoon in ‘Balls’, discussed in Chapter 1. Paul Muldoon, *Maggot* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), pp. 81–85.

Brooks also describes this relation: the paradoxes in 'the very nature of the poet's language' allow him to '[triumph] over the apparently contradictory and conflicting elements of experience by unifying them into a new pattern'.¹⁸ But Auden's unfamiliar words challenge the primary assumption of these justifications of poetic abstractions of language: that words always communicate. His words insist on their specificity, their historicity, and their independence from current processes of communication. Empson was aware that his investigations of ambiguity might bring him to the same brink as Auden, who finds that his lines are not 'worth / A hangman's wages', writing 'I am treating the act of communication as something very extraordinary, so that the next step would be to lose faith in it altogether'.¹⁹ Paul de Man also saw this next step in Empson's theory, questioning whether it is possible to speak of communication after the realisation that 'the text's effect is to transform a perfectly well-defined unity into a multiplicity whose actual number must remain undetermined'.²⁰ Etymological abstraction, the poetic quality of using a word with an awareness of all the other ways it has been used, does not aid communication so much as emphasise both its possibility and its difficulty. The unfamiliar words in 'A Bad Night' can *only* be interpreted etymologically, and cannot therefore be drawn back into explanations of a richer, more cohesive and complex form of communication; their communicative potential is undecidable. They remain fragmentary, alienating, and independent from both the reader's immediate understanding and the speaker's need for consolation.

Arana takes a more positive view of Auden's intentions:

¹⁸ Cleanth Brooks, *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (London: Dobson, [1949]), pp. 10, 195.

¹⁹ William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, 3rd edn, rev. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1953), pp. 252, 3, 235, 243.

²⁰ Paul De Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd edn, rev. (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 236.

When Auden used words that he must have known would send his readers scrambling through the *OED*, it was not because he was a lexical pedant or wanted to demonstrate his command of an unusual vocabulary but because he wanted to be sure others really shared the experience he wanted to celebrate, even if it would inconvenience them a little to do so. He was also redefining the poet's role for his era.²¹

Like the other critics mentioned above, Arana puts communication at the centre of Auden's lexical exercises, which for her revolutionised the purpose of poetry with their sense of responsibility towards their readers and their resulting difficulty. In doing so, however, she dismisses the effects of philological abstraction, and of the reflexivity of language that Auden despairs of in 'A Bad Night'. The drive of the poem is not towards communication or even representation, but towards the individual's relationship with language: he reads 'To re-faith himself', to restore 'verve' *for* these processes of communication ('Social trifles') and representation ('The world's wrongs'). In a typically symbolist move, Auden looks to language for inspiration, but the result is lexical pedantry rather than transcendental poetry, exposing both a misplaced trust in language and the complex relationship between abstraction and use explored in 'Making, Knowing and Judging'. In an earlier essay called 'Squares and Oblongs', Auden had described the role of the poet as one in which language is privileged over communication:

'Why do you want to write poetry?' If the young man answers, 'I have important things I want to say,' then he is not a poet. If he answers, 'I like hanging around words listening to what they say,' then maybe he is going to be a poet.²²

The critics who wish Auden had the feeling to match up to his facility grudgingly accept this attitude. Donoghue, for example, wrote that '[i]f Mr. Auden starts with language

²¹ Arana, p. 138.

²² W. H. Auden, 'Squares and Oblongs', in *Prose and Travel Books in Prose and Verse*, ed. by Edward Mendelson, 4 vols (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), II, 339–50 (pp. 343–44).

rather than with big thoughts, good luck to him; one judges by results'.²³ But this is Auden in his sententious critical mode, which cannot be allowed to define his poetic practice; his poems are much more than little philological lyrics, arranged from what words themselves say rather than what people say with words. His simplification hints at the complexity of the language-user's relationship with a language that can appear to exist out of his control, a relationship that lies at the heart of the strange words in *About the House* (1965), *City Without Walls* (1969), *Epistle to a Godson* (1972), and *Thank You, Fog* (1974).

Coming to Terms with Etymology in 'Thanksgiving for a Habitat'

'A Bad Night (A Lexical Exercise)' is an important poem because of its self-consciousness about how unfamiliar words are always both communicative and abstract. In poems that lack this self-consciousness, unfamiliar words are simply obfuscating when they are presented as unequivocally communicative, or trivial when there is too much emphasis on their oddness and not enough on their communicative potential. The apparently explanatory description 'neither truckle nor thrasonical' in 'The Horatians' (771–73) makes it an example of the first type, whilst the second type is exemplified by the wholly abstract use of scientific terms in 'Epithalamium' (760–61). Where unfamiliar words work, it is because their unfamiliarity is acknowledged but not glorified. The immediacy of onomatopoeic words like 'ram-stam' and 'riffing' ('River-Profile', 806–07) and the obvious etymological cognates of 'dormition' ('Old People's Home', 860) afford them an effectiveness that balances their abstract oddness; as such, the question of whether the poet or reader is controlling them as tools of communication is in the end

²³ Donoghue in *W. H. Auden*, ed. by Haffenden, p. 483.

undecidable. Maintaining this delicate balance between forces that are not necessarily opposing requires an acceptance of the role played by etymology in current language – that is, the way obscure and obsolete histories relate to communication.

The possibility of such an acceptance is raised in ‘Thanksgiving for a Habitat’ (687–716), a sequence written between 1958 and 1964 that is as much about how language-users exist in language as it is Auden’s existence in his home in Kirchstetten, Austria – the first he ever owned.²⁴ Its rare words draw attention to the parallel between a language with a history that is inherited by but never fully belongs to its current users, and a home in a foreign country. Like Auden, then, who describes himself as a ‘metic’ (an Ancient Greek term for a ‘resident alien’; from ‘Whitsunday in Kirchstetten’, 743–45),²⁵ the reader of his ‘Thanksgiving for a Habitat’ is made to feel a foreigner in their own language. A thanksgiving of sorts for a linguistic home is made in the third poem, ‘The Cave of Making’ (691–94), which is about Auden’s study; it is also an elegy for his friend Louis MacNeice. It describes the shared language of the two poets:

[...] For Grammar we both inherited
 good mongrel barbarian English
 which never completely succumbed to the Roman rhetoric
 or the Roman gravity, that nonsense
 which stood none. [...]

This is a comical mixture of the remnants of Victorian nationalistic and ethnocentric attitudes to the English language, which Auden would have encountered both at Oxford and during his time as a teacher of English. Various arguments were made for English’s plain-speaking clarity, its mixtures of Germanic and Latinate qualities, its coarseness or elegance, and so on. Auden’s engagement with these arguments is characteristically

²⁴ R. P. T. Davenport-Hines, *Auden* (London: Heinemann, 1995), p. 297.

²⁵ ‘Metic, *n.*’, *OED*.

committed yet noncommittal: accepting what has been ‘inherited’, and using the favourite terms of many of these arguments, he voices both approval and disapproval of English’s mixedness and ‘Roman gravity’, most obviously in the non sequitur ‘that nonsense / which stood none’.

The mongrel nature of English is on display in ‘The Cave of Making’, in ‘videnda’, ‘ubity’, ‘juggins’, ‘rune’ (used as a verb), and ‘dowly’. Though these words are unusual, they do not constitute an overwhelming obscurity, as may be the case in ‘A Bad Night’. They certainly prohibit a fluent reading, like many of Auden’s techniques in this poem – the non sequitur for example, or the rapid switching between historical periods (there are references to an Anglo-Saxon ‘bard’, ‘a Baroque Prince’, ‘rising executives’, and ‘Hindu integers’ within twenty lines) – but they do not make understanding the poem impossible. It is easy enough to distinguish between mongrel dialect (‘dowly’), barbarian slang (‘juggins’), and Latinate prolixity (‘ubity’); echoes of other words (‘dour’, ‘mug’/‘muggins’, and ‘ubiquity’) also help to interpret them. In the case of ‘videnda’ (‘[t]hings worth seeing’),²⁶ the sense is sketched out before the word even appears:

[...] designed to
discourage day-dreams – hence windows averted from plausible
videnda [...]

The fact that Auden almost provides a definition suggests that it is the very existence of the word – its historical actuality as a rarely used element in the English language, together with its aura of schoolroom Latin brought into the grown-up but strangely primitive world of a poet working alone in his study – that motivates his use of it, rather than its sense.

²⁶ ‘Videnda, *n.*’, *OED*.

The *OED* labels both 'videnda' and 'ubity' as rare, and quotes this poem in their entries.²⁷ The use of 'rune' as a verb meaning something like 'to work out, like a riddle' is not even mentioned by the *OED* (the only verb definition is '[t]o compose or perform poetry or songs; to lament').²⁸ 'Juggins' and 'dowly' might easily be supposed to be obsolete by the quotations it gives; the last for 'juggins' is dated 1894, and for 'dowly' 1885.²⁹ Despite this, it would be incorrect to say that the meanings of these words are obscure, since they stand out as prime examples of 'good mongrel barbarian English' and 'Roman gravity, that nonsense / which stood none'. As such, they encourage a 'focus on the message for its own sake', 'promoting the palpability of signs' – which Roman Jakobson defines as the 'poetic function'. Jakobson's term 'message' confirms his belief that the poetic function must be understood as a part of the process of communication, though the phrase 'for its own sake' clearly abstracts words from the 'message'.³⁰ Auden's strange words are more than 'messages': they are also etymological objects that provide the reader with a perspective on the historicity of English, as a reminder that language is always more than one person's 'message', however isolated the poet is in his 'Cave of Making'.

On the other hand, this diction comes dangerously close to what the 'juggins' in the poem calls 'Alienation': using unfamiliar words gratuitously is an instance of poetry distancing itself from the world (i.e., the same ideas could have been, and in the case of 'videnda' are, conveyed in more familiar words). 'The Cave of Making' presents poetry as an 'unpopular art', 'shut off' from the world like the study in which it is written. Distance

²⁷ 'Ubity, *n.*', *OED*.

²⁸ 'Rune, *v.*', *OED*.

²⁹ 'Juggins, *n.*', 'Dowly, *adj. and adv.*', *OED*.

³⁰ Roman Jakobson, 'Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics', in *Style in Language*, ed. by T. A. Sebeok (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960), pp. 350–77 (p. 356).

is also felt in the imagined conversation with MacNeice, who would ‘take a scholar’s interest’ in the nearby historical boundary between ‘Carolingian Bavaria’ and ‘unknowable nomads’. The boundaries set up by poetry correspond to the images of death, ‘*that* frontier’ between ‘Granusion’ and the ‘Country of Unconcern’.³¹

[...] Even a limerick
ought to be something a man of
honour, awaiting death from cancer or a firing-squad,
could read without contempt [...]

There is a conflict here between a poetry that is ‘shut off’ from the world and one that justifies its existence in the world, but the tension is dispelled by Auden’s memories of MacNeice:

[...] with whom I
once collaborated, once at a weird Symposium
exchanged winks as a juggins
went on about Alienation. [...]

The word ‘juggins’ could be said to alienate readers because of its unfamiliarity and its suggestion of a private joke, but only if it is seen as having no purpose other than as a vehicle of communication.³² The reader is encouraged to accept the word in its oddness, to be in on the private joke, rather than to ‘go on about Alienation’ in Auden’s poem – the capitalisation of which sets it up as a much more questionable usage.

Is ‘Alienation’ an uncommunicative, unpoetic strategy or the epitome of poetic abstractness? The boundary between a poetically relevant and a poetically irrelevant

³¹ The allusions here also appeal to a ‘scholar’s interest’: ‘Granusion’ (an earthly paradise, like Eden) is a disputed term from a twelfth-century text called *De Mundi Universitate*, while ‘the Country of Unconcern’ recalls Hamlet’s ‘undiscovered country from whose bourn / No traveller returns’. C. S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 59–60; William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ed. by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006), p. 286 (3.1.78–97).

³² Paul Hendon interprets the use of ‘juggins’ in this way in *The Poetry of W. H. Auden* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 160.

word, which Christopher Ricks puzzled over in his review of *About The House*, is more fluid than either conclusion would suppose.³³ Words like ‘videnda’, ‘ubity’, ‘dowly’, and ‘juggins’ function on the border between relevance and irrelevance, communication and alienation, use and abstraction from use. They require the reader to ‘rune’, to approach the poem like a riddle, expecting verbal tricks but attending to the truth behind them.

Auden writes that his ambition is to be like Goethe:

while knowing Speech can at best, a shadow echoing
 the silent light, bear witness
 to the Truth it is not, he wished it were, as the francophil
 gaggle of pure songsters
 are too vain to. [...]

The symbolists Auden quoted in ‘Making, Knowing and Judging’ are here criticised for loving their language (‘francophil’) more than its capacity to ‘bear witness / to the Truth’. Though poetry is separated from the world, it must not be contemptuous of it; it must not glorify language in the abstract at the expense of its communicative function. ‘The Cave of Making’ refers to itself as an ‘egocentric monologue’, but asks MacNeice to ‘accept it for friendship’s sake’. Though words can be alienating and abstract, their very use always communicates some sort of relationship. Like calling ‘A Bad Night’ a ‘Lexical Exercise’, this admission that the poem is an ‘egocentric monologue’ pulls it between alienation and communication, with its unfamiliar language hovering on the border between the two, inviting an understanding of how it carries both kinds of meaning.

It is perhaps more difficult to accept the unfamiliar words in the poems about the kitchen (VIII. ‘Grub First, then Ethics’, 704–06) and the dining room (X. ‘To-night at Seven-Thirty’, 708–10), which appear to be as deliberately objectionable as the

³³ Christopher Ricks, ‘Winking’, in *W. H. Auden*, ed. by Haffenden, pp. 434–36 (p. 434).

capitalised 'Alienation'. 'Grub First, then Ethics', for example, raises the issue of class consciousness by exploring the roles of the cook as a servant, artist, and redeemer – and its obscure diction is unquestionably elitist. 'Meiny' has its roots in pre-feudal and feudal systems of retainers, 'banausic' is a designation of the Ancient Greek labouring class, and 'neotenes' in a contemporary debate about human evolution that contended with Victorian prejudices.³⁴ These words do not fit easily with the poem's reminder that 'the subject of the verb / to-hunger is never a name'; they give names to specific cultural constructs that obfuscate the primitive language of 'to hunger'. In the poem, they are opaque (unlike the strange words in 'The Cave of Making'), and thus need to be looked up in a dictionary. Auden himself advocated the use of a dictionary as a way of re-establishing a link between abstract and communicative meanings:

however esoteric a poem may be, the fact that all its words have meanings which can be looked up in a dictionary makes it testify to the existence of other people.³⁵

Conversely, this 'fact' also demands that readers testify to the validity of an idiosyncratic and philological diction.³⁶ The question is, of course, why the assumed link – the trust that readers have in the communicative power of language – has to be broken by obscure and even objectionably obscure words in order to be re-established by the dictionary. An answer may be found in how this awkward process reflects Auden's mixed feelings about poetic diction: '[i]t is both the glory and the shame of poetry that its medium is not its private property', he writes.³⁷ The strangeness of the words he chooses to use in these

³⁴ 'Meinie, *n.*', 'Banausic, *adj.*', 'Neotene, *n.* and *adj.*', *OED*; Kirby Farrell, 'Wells and Neoteny', in *H. G. Wells's Perennial Time Machine*, ed. by George Edgar Slusser, Patrick Parrinder, and Danièle Chatelain (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), pp. 65–75.

³⁵ W. H. Auden, 'Writing', in *The Dyer's Hand*, pp. 13–27 (p. 23).

³⁶ Not all of Auden's words are accounted for by the *OED*; see Brewer, p. 188.

³⁷ See note 35.

late poems, the necessity that they be read with a dictionary on hand, may be seen as an attempt to realise and expunge the shame to make the glory of language evident. However, the two are not so easily separated. Auden knew, with Locke, that ‘to require that men should use their words constantly in the same sense and for none but determined and uniform *ideas*, would be to think that all men should have the same notions’ – and that therefore even a dictionary definition is unlikely to fix the poet’s precise ‘notions’ into ‘uniform ideas’ for the reader.³⁸ The attention to etymology required by his use of peculiar words is not a way of fixing meaning, but rather of interrogating how words come to have currency and then to lose it, as well as how they function in current language after such a loss.

Auden’s etymological perspective on poetic communication is most intricately worked out in ‘To-night at Seven-Thirty’, the tenth ‘Thanksgiving for a Habitat’ poem, in which primitive instinct and social convention intersect in ‘the sacral dining area’. For example, unusual onomatopoeic words describe the physical similarity of eating and talking (‘tiddle’, ‘curmurr’, ‘cloop’). The ideal dinner guests are described in the final lines:

[...] men
and women who enjoy the cloop of corks, appreciate
dapatical fare, yet can see in swallowing
a sign-act of reverence,
in speech a work of re-presenting
the true olamic silence.

‘Dapatical’ (‘sumptuous’) is, according to the *OED*, obsolete; ‘olamic’ (‘everlasting’) is rare enough that this line is quoted in its entry.³⁹ The weight of this final line rests on the word ‘olamic’, to explain how speech can represent silence. But no clue to its meaning is

³⁸ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by John W. Yolton (London: Dent, 1977), p. 257.

³⁹ ‘Dapatical, *adj.*’, ‘Olamic, *adj.*’, *OED*.

provided: these words are empty spaces in the poem that allow the analogies Auden sets up between eating and 'reverence', speaking and 'olamic silence', to reverberate. In an introduction written for a book entitled *The Art of Eating*, Auden defined this type of analogy as follows:

Eating [...] is an act of pure taking. Only the absolutely necessary and absolutely self-regarding can stand as a symbol for its opposite, the absolutely voluntary and self-forgetful (i.e. communion, agape).⁴⁰

In 'To-night at Seven-Thirty', the word 'yet' emphasises this distance between the symbol and the symbolised, suggesting that the two do not really cohere. The distance between them is made less distinct, however, by the word 'see': both physical and cognitive senses are in play, and the boundaries between the acts ('swallowing' and 'speech') and the signs ('reverence' and 'olamic silence') are consequently blurred. The poem's final lines set themselves up as a resolution of the 'sign-act' but any such finality is resisted by the unexceptional words 'yet' and 'see', which hedge round the gaps represented by 'dapatical' and 'olamic'. Although these words represent the ineffable relation of the 'self-regarding' to the 'self-forgetful', the fact that they 'can be looked up in a dictionary' forces their communicative function through this ineffability. The obscurely etymological is thus directly linked – more so than the familiar – to a language inherited by everyone but not owned by anyone.

The clearest lesson to be learnt from these encounters with Auden's philological diction is that no reader commands the entirety of a language. This is prior to, and more important than, inferences that Auden is showing off, or trying to communicate something precisely, or avoiding saying something more important. Every reader's

⁴⁰ W. H. Auden, Introduction to M. F. K. Fisher, *The Art of Eating* (London: Papermac, 1991), pp. xi–xviii (pp. xiii–xiv).

experience, whatever may be deduced from it, is of a lost connection with their own language that can only be re-established by etymological investigation. This is exaggerated in poems like the 'Thanksgiving for a Habitat' sequence, 'Epistle to a Godson' (832–35), 'Epithalamium', and 'Moon Landing' (843–44), the conversational style of which contrasts dramatically with their peculiar diction. Such poems demonstrate Auden's belief that verbal art has 'an odd relation to the public' because readers use words all the time and so always expect to understand them.⁴¹ Auden used the metaphor of translation – of which the analogies in 'Tonight at Seven-Thirty' are an example – to insist that communication is never such a transparent process. If all acts of communication are translations from one idiolect into another, language must be seen as relative; writing and reading etymologically are ways of appreciating this relativity and the consequences it has for poetic communication.

Exercises in Etymological Translation

The importance of etymology to communication was stressed by Auden in the foreword he wrote for a 1967 reprint of Owen Barfield's *History in English Words*, a book that argued for how etymology 'reveals the evolution of consciousness'.⁴² Unlike his fellow Inklings, J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis, Barfield was interested in etymology for reasons beyond a properly historicised literary criticism:⁴³ he believed that it disclosed the secrets of human psychology, past and present. Auden knew all three writers, and was particularly influenced by hearing Tolkien recite a passage from *Beowulf* in a

⁴¹ Auden, 'Writing', in *The Dyer's Hand*, p. 15.

⁴² Owen Barfield, *History in English Words*, rev. edn (Edinburgh: Floris Classics, 1985), p. 18.

⁴³ For examples of this use of etymology, see C. S. Lewis, *Studies in Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960); J. R. R. Tolkien, 'On Translating Beowulf', in *The Monsters and the Critics, and Other Essays*, ed. by Christopher Tolkien (London: HarperCollins, 1997), pp. 49–71 (pp. 50–52).

lecture while he was at Oxford.⁴⁴ Barfield's approach, however, had an urgency that was in tune with Auden's own concerns about language in and abstracted from use. This is evident in his foreword:

Understanding what another human being says to us is always a matter of translation. In this book, Mr Barfield is trying to help us to translate correctly, instead of making, as we all too often do, the most elementary errors.

We can only cope with the dangers of language if we recognize that language is by nature magical and therefore highly dangerous.

Formerly, philology could remain a study for specialists: to-day, *History in English Words*, and other books like it, must be made required reading in all schools.

[This book is] of great moral value in the unending battle between civilisation and barbarism.⁴⁵

Both simply useful in the prevention of 'elementary errors' and vaguely vital to the future of civilisation, etymology is caught up in all of Auden's major debates about language. It is not a cure-all; nowhere does he say that etymology can provide a true, original meaning that can purify current usage. But the intensity of his arguments for its contemporary importance is everywhere overshadowed by the ruling against the etymological fallacy, which weighs more heavily on Auden's arguments than on Barfield's.⁴⁶ It is as if Auden knew *History in English Words*, which mixed etymology with anthroposophy (a version of theosophy), was never going to be as significant as he was willing to say it should be – it was first published in 1926, but he had not read it before he was asked to write the

⁴⁴ Humphrey Carpenter, *W.H. Auden: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 55.

⁴⁵ Barfield, *History in English Words*, pp. 8–12.

⁴⁶ Barfield's attitude – that 'if we would consider the *nature* of meaning, and the relation between thought and things, we cannot profitably dispense with etymology' – is set out clearly in a single paragraph in *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), p. 116.

foreword for the reprint in 1966, though he had read and admired Barfield's *Poetic Diction* (1928).⁴⁷

Auden's late poetry was accused, in much the same way as *History in English Words*, of a pedantic commitment to the etymological fallacy.⁴⁸ This is Calvin Bedient, reviewing Auden's *Epistle to a Godson* for *The New York Times* in 1972:

To blame for our present troubles 'Those, old or young, / who will not learn their Mother-Tongue' is to make too much of cultivation itself, as if by putting your hand on a dictionary you could command wisdom, calm the waters.

The result in Auden's style, in any case, is an increasing pedantry.⁴⁹

Though he prefaces his apparent exaggeration of Auden's position with a tactful 'as if', Bedient actually produces a fair characterisation of the overblown arguments made in the foreword to *History in English Words*. In other words, he analyses the 'increasing pedantry' of Auden's poetry through the excessively controlling perspective of the prose writer. But the experience of reading these poems as lexical exercises, as well as restatements of the prosaic argument that etymology books 'must be made required reading in all schools', leads to a different understanding of Auden's poetic pedantry.

Like 'A Bad Night' and 'The Cave of Making', the poem quoted by Bedient admits to its own irrelevance: it is titled 'Doggerel by a Senior Citizen' (851–52). Reading these works means translating a 'lexical exercise', an 'egocentric monologue', and the 'doggerel' of an aged poet ('Senior Citizen' is the first phrase to be translated here) into poetry. It is their pedantry that demands this greater effort of translation; in Auden's late

⁴⁷ W. H. Auden, Unpublished Letter to Owen Barfield (26 May 1966), Oxford, Bodleian Library, Dep. c. 1056.

⁴⁸ One review of *History in English Words* was particularly blunt: 'as derivations intrigue (*sic*) more people than they aggravate (*sic*), this is a harmless sort of easywent culture-sipping', but etymology is a 'pandoran box' that cannot help people to use the language any better. A. P. Rossiter, 'Words for Leisure, Words for Labour', *The New Statesman and Nation*, 13 March 1954, p. 334.

⁴⁹ Bedient, Review of 'Epistle to a Godson: And Other Poems By W. H. Auden'.

poetry, dictionaries and etymologies not only ‘help us translate correctly’, but often they are what makes the translation possible at all. They thus demonstrate how communication is always a possibility but never a prerequisite of language. The struggle to communicate – rather than the desire to ‘command wisdom’ – is the subject of the first three lines of the stanza Bedient quotes:

Though I suspect the term is crap,
If there *is* a Generation Gap,
Who is to blame? Those, old or young
Who will not learn their Mother-Tongue.

Though its diction is determinedly colloquial, this stanza is still a lexical exercise, first because it challenges the idea of appropriate poetic diction, and second because it is concerned with how people communicate in an inherited language that continues to change. Its argument is based on a grudging willingness to entertain a term the speaker ‘suspect[s] [...] is crap’ – an attitude signalled by capitalisation, which also makes ‘Mother-Tongue’ (and many other terms in this poem) seem strangely overstated. Auden is here responding to the same imperative as Prynne, that ‘[l]anguage is itself an intrinsic fault system, and it is worse than a mistake not to understand this as best ever we can’.⁵⁰ The mistake, in Auden’s poem, prompts the question of ‘blame’, a word that in this context invites etymological translation. Through Middle English, Old French, and then Latin to Ancient Greek *blasphemein*, meaning ‘evil-speaking’, ‘blame’ is laid upon ‘those, old or young’ who would speak without an attempt to understand the ‘intrinsic fault system’ of ‘their Mother-Tongue’.⁵¹ The faultline running between ‘blame’ and

⁵⁰ Prynne, p. 142.

⁵¹ ‘Blame’, ‘Blaspheme’, *ODEE*.

‘blaspheme’ places pedantic doggerel alongside a real concern with the difficulty of communicating in a medium that is always developing generation gaps.

Auden’s dogmatic pronouncements on the corruption of language and his own linguistic experiments are reconciled, forcefully but awkwardly, by this imperative to respect everything in language. Such respect is necessary for translation, and therefore communication, to take place. Lexical exercises are thus a way of preparing for and symbolising ‘the true olamic silence’, which, in the later Auden, is a process of translation blessed by God. This is the subject of ‘Whitsunday in Kirchstetten’ (743–45), written in 1962 and set in the church he attended while living in Austria:

Our magic syllables melt away,
our tribal formulae laid bare: since this morning,
it is with a vocabulary
made wholesomely profane, open in lexicons
to our foes to translate, that we endeavor
each in his idiom to express the true *magnalia*
which need no hallowing from us, loaning terms,
exchanging graves and legends. [...]

Auden retells the story of Pentecost, sometimes thought of as the ‘Birthday of the Church’, in which the Holy Ghost causes the Apostles ‘to speak with other tongues’:

And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every
nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude
came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard
them speak in his own tongue. (Acts 2:5–6)

The limited languages of ‘magic syllables’ and ‘tribal formulae’ are, in Auden’s poem, made into a secular (‘profane’) language, ‘open in lexicons’ so that all may understand it, but also open to the individual’s ‘idiom’. This is the right language with which to ‘endeavor [...] to express the true *magnalia*’.

There is certainly a feeling of linguistic resolution in ‘Whitsunday in Kirchstetten’, that language has found its proper place. It is not elevated to stand for a truth it can never fully reveal, since ‘no sacred nonsense can stand Him’ – refusing to recognise the validity of other languages makes ‘nonsense’ of a language, like the Roman ‘nonsense’ in ‘The Cave of Making’. Neither is it reduced to the propagandic power of the individual’s ‘egotistical monologue’ or ‘doggerel’. Instead, the fact that all languages are ‘tribal formulae’ is ‘laid bare’; their cultural specificity and conventionality are both exposed, permitting the relativist recognition that all languages are capable of expressing the ‘*magnalia*’:

[...] The Holy Ghost
 does not abhor a golfer’s jargon,
 A Lower-Austrian accent, the cadences even
 of my own little anglo-american
 musico-literary set [...]

As a loaned term set apart by its italics, the word ‘*magnalia*’ demonstrates this open multilingualism that is resistant to the complete integration of idioms into one sacred language. Throughout history, it has been accorded both religious and secular meanings (though of course this distinction would have been irrelevant at one time). The *OED* gives a particularly secular definition: ‘[g]reat or wonderful things; marvels (esp. of nature)’.⁵² However, it is also used in the Latin Vulgate to designate miracles, and appears in Acts 2:11 to describe what the apostles were talking in tongues *about*. It is the etymology of the word, exchanged and enriched between different tribal formulae, but still demonstrating its specificity as a loanword that can nevertheless be found in an English dictionary, that makes it an appropriate choice for Auden.

⁵² ‘*Magnalia, n.*’, *OED*.

The poem's own multiculturalism and multilingualism – Auden is an Anglican at a Catholic service in Austria, and the use of Latin and German reflects this – represents the issue of translation that is its subject. But this is a problem: the immediate difficulty of reading a poem full of words that demand translation in the everyday sense seems to defeat the optimism of the message. Auden's Christianity lets him envisage the possibility of 'a miracle of instantaneous translation' (his description of the Pentecost in 'Words and the Word') but the reader of his poem is powerless to carry it out, and must refer to a dictionary (or several).⁵³ There is an acknowledgement of this difficulty, however, that shows the poem to be an etymological exercise in imitation of something that is ineffable and instinctive:

[...] There is no Queen's English
in any context for *Geist* or *Esprit*: about
catastrophe or how to behave in one
what do I know, except what everyone knows –
if there when Grace dances, I should dance.

From an etymological point of view, English does contain the words '*Geist*' ('ghost') and '*Esprit*' ('spirit') – but it does not have words 'for' the concepts attached to the foreign words. These obsolete etymological connections hint at a 'wholesomely profane' language, in which translation is infinitely possible. Although the specificity of each language prevents 'instantaneous translation', Auden's exercises in etymological translation help the reader appreciate what it might feel like.

As well as insisting on the difficulties inherent in communication, then, for Auden etymology also offers a glimpse of a divine language without any such difficulties. His pedantic lexical exercises are controlling, but they are also part of a vision of a wholly

⁵³ 'Words and the Word', in W. H. Auden, *Secondary Worlds: The T. S. Eliot Memorial Lectures Delivered at Eliot College in the University of Kent at Canterbury, October 1967* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), pp. 17–44 (p. 139).

relative and open language that can never be controlled by one person. The pleasures of ‘hanging around words listening to what they say’, exploring the etymologies that are words’ ‘little lyrics about themselves’, inevitably expose the abstractness, obscurity, and pedantry that stand between language-users and a medium of communication that is always beyond them.⁵⁴ In an interview given a year before he died, Auden suggested that communication was something that the poem did, not the poet:

If [a poem] fails to communicate, there is something wrong with it. If somebody asks what a poem means, I say it is no good asking me. What a poem means is a dialogue between the words on the page and the particular reader who happens to be reading it. We all have different experiences. The poet is out of the picture altogether.⁵⁵

Auden’s poems become pedantic lexical exercises because they accept language on its own terms. ‘We all have different experiences’ of language, and for Auden the best hope of overcoming the resulting difficulties of communication lies in the dictionary’s historical record of these experiences.

The Necessity of Etymological Reading

In 1941 Randall Jarrell identified a distinctive device of Auden’s poetry in which ‘a surprisingly abstract word is put into a concrete “poetic” context’:

It is the opposite of poetic diction, where the abstract is thought of as the necessary and proper language of poetry; here the effect depends

⁵⁴ This is in contrast to a truly controlling pedantry – one that refuses to see language in the abstract. Auden defined such an approach as follows: ‘[t]here are some poets, Kipling for example, whose relation to language reminds one of a drill sergeant: the words are taught to wash behind their ears, stand properly at attention and execute complicated maneuvers [*sic*], but at the cost of never being allowed to think for themselves’. Auden, ‘Writing’, in *The Dyer’s Hand*, p. 22.

⁵⁵ Brendan Kennelly, ‘Auden on Opera, Detective Writers, Wit, Politics, the Camera, Drugs, Poets and Poetry’, Interview with W. H. Auden, *Swarthmore College Bulletin*, Alumni Issue, May 1972, pp. 2–15 (pp. 3–4) <<http://www.swarthmore.edu/library/auden/transcript.pdf>>.

on the opposite idea, on the fact that the context of the poem (*ground* in relation to the expression's *figure*) is still concrete.⁵⁶

Auden's philological diction works on a similar premise – that the context of the poem is a shared and often conversational rather than heightened language into which surprisingly obscure words are assimilated. As mentioned above, however, Jarrell is very wary of the overuse of such techniques. The obscure diction of Auden's late poetry is noticeably overused; in the end, the emphasis is less on the shared language of the poem than the effort readers have to put in to share it. It is this overuse that allows Auden to explore the relationship between philological abstraction and the critical efforts of readers in the service of poetic communication. Etymology promises that all words are meaningful, no matter how obscure, but it also equates the hope for 'instantaneous translation' with linguistic pedantry in an analogical relation of opposites. Auden's lexical exercises show how perfect communication is 'self-forgetful' through pedantically 'self-regarding' language: they make etymological reading a necessity.

Reading obscure diction is critical work, not only because it means consulting the dictionary, but also because it demands an interpretation of why an obscure word has been chosen instead of a familiar one. These demands strain the idea of poetic communication; like the implications of New Criticism envisaged by Empson and then de Man, etymological reading 'treat[s] the act of communication as something very extraordinary, so that the next step would be to lose faith in it altogether'.⁵⁷ Auden himself is one step away from losing faith in 'A Bad Night (A Lexical Exercise)', but such a reaction would be disproportionate when words are so 'fribble and fop' that they are not even worth excluding from his poems. This poem and others like it pitch their obscure

⁵⁶ Jarrell, 'Changes of Attitude and Rhetoric in Auden's Poetry', pp. 135–36.

⁵⁷ Empson, p. 243.

diction so that the reader, too, is always one step away from losing faith in Auden's language. The nearness of linguistic loss – in the sense of readers losing the will to read words that are perceived to have been lost from the language – is implied by the imperative to read etymologically. This is a version of de Man's argument for 'the necessity of reading':

To stress the by no means self-evident necessity of reading implies at least two things. First of all, it implies that literature is not a transparent message in which it can be taken for granted that the distinction between the message and the means of communication is clearly established. Second, and more problematically, it implies that the grammatical decoding of a text leaves a residue of indetermination that has to be, but cannot be, resolved by grammatical means, however extensively conceived.⁵⁸

For de Man, the necessity of reading is determined by the literary interaction of grammar and rhetoric, a pairing that roughly corresponds to Valéry's 'indefinable harmony between what [a poem] says and what it is'. The difference for de Man is that what a literary text says is a function of 'what it is': the 'residue of indetermination' shows that it always escapes grammar to end in rhetoric. Similarly, obscurity and obsolescence are the 'residue of indetermination' produced by a history of grammar – that is, a history of the faults that together make up the 'fault system' of language – that cannot be resolved by synchronic grammar. Etymological reading insists that this residue can never be assimilated into anything like a prose argument. Auden's obscure diction must be actively (and pedantically) read into the poems as a metalinguistic or rhetorical element.

The styles of etymological reading proposed by Auden, Prynne, and Muldoon in their critical work all reveal aspects of the demands that their etymological poetry places on the reader – to judge tenuous speculations, listen carefully for 'evolutionary

⁵⁸ Paul De Man, *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 12.

phonology', and translate lexical exercises. Responding to these demands means confronting and then participating in the tenuousness, difficulty, and pedantry of their etymological discourse. In other words, the necessity of etymological reading differs from both de Man's and Valéry's theories because, through its rhetorical analysis, it always entertains the idea that an etymology might actually be active in what the poem says – as a 'message' rather than a rhetorical 'means of communication'. The result is that 'the distinction between the message and the means of communication' is neither resolved in an 'indefinable harmony' nor dissolved into a rhetorical question: it remains painfully conspicuous. Either an obscure word is an active force in the poem's meaning, or it is an obsolete and therefore abstract philological entity. But can it become an active force again once it has been looked up in the dictionary? 'The Resistance to Theory', the essay in which de Man describes 'the necessity of reading', concludes with the statement that 'literary theory is not in danger of going under; it cannot help but flourish, and the more it is resisted, the more it flourishes, since the language it speaks is the language of self resistance'.⁵⁹ Etymological reading gives credence to the obsolete, and may easily be dismissed as an instance of the etymological fallacy. But etymological poetry allows this style of reading to 'flourish' because it requires it to know its own pedantry: to resist its own interpretations by a constant awareness of the fact that they are based on obsolete evidence gleaned from a dictionary.

Auden's borderline faith in poetic communication becomes dependent on just such an honestly pedantic approach to obsolete language in use. In 'Making, Knowing and Judging' he described poetry as a 'rite', which may be understood as a linguistic act

⁵⁹ De Man, *The Resistance to Theory*, pp. 19–20.

that aspires to ‘instantaneous translation’.⁶⁰ Later, in a 1972 interview, he explained the significance of the language of ‘rite’:

I’m passionately anti-liturgical reform, and would have The Book of Common Prayer kept in Latin. Rite is the link between the dead and the unborn and needs a timeless language, which in practice means a dead language.⁶¹

In theory, this is exactly the kind of language which does not stress the necessity of reading, etymological or otherwise. ‘[I]n practice’, using a ‘dead language’ raises any number of interpretative difficulties to which Auden immediately referred (‘I’m curious to know what problems they are having in Israel, where they speak what was long an unspoken language’). Such a slippage between theory and practice exists in Auden’s work as a critic and as a poet. In 1955, only a few years before he used the word ‘credibles’ in a poem to mean ‘things that are believed’ (a usage never recorded by the *OED*),⁶² he wrote:

The Poet has always to assume that the history of the language is at an end, that words are as unhistorical as atoms, that the word ‘river’, for example, will never turn into an iamb or come to mean ‘mud’.⁶³

This statement contrasts dramatically with Auden’s poetic consciousness of abstracting language from history while using it *in* history – making the poem both rite and reform. To take his example of ‘river’, the investigation of the relationship of nature and humanity in the development of ‘rival’ from Latin *rivus* (meaning ‘stream’) in ‘In Praise of Limestone’ (540–42), ‘Lakes’ (562–63), ‘Streams’ (567–69), and ‘River Profile’ (806–07) is far more nuanced than his imagined development of the word ‘river’ to mean ‘mud’ (see discussion

⁶⁰ Auden, ‘Making, Knowing and Judging’, in *The Dyer’s Hand*, p. 58.

⁶¹ Michael Newman, ‘The Art of Poetry No. 17: W. H. Auden’, Interview with W. H. Auden, *Paris Review*, 57 (1974), 32–69 (pp. 63–64).

⁶² From ‘The History of Truth’ (610), dated ?1958 by Mendelson.

⁶³ W. H. Auden, ‘The Poetic Process’, *Listener*, 53 (23 June 1955), 1109–12 (p. 1110).

in Chapter 4). Auden apparently advocates a poetic language that is dead, but the language of his own poetry is very much alive. The *OED* confirms this: it quotes him 22 times for the first evidence of a word, 117 times for the first evidence of a sense, and 786 times in total.⁶⁴

The theoretical assumption ‘that words are as unhistorical as atoms’ is made in the best interests of poetry. In practice, however, the ritualistic revival of obsolete words reveals as much about language change as it does about the idea of ‘timeless[ness]’. This makes etymological reading necessary and simultaneously saves it from the absolutism of Auden the critic – whose readers:

[...] know all too well how the most erudite
mind behaves in the dark without a
surround it is called on to interpret,

how, discarding rhythm, punctuation, metaphor,
it sinks into a drivelling monologue,
too literal to see a joke or
distinguish a penis from a pencil. (810)

The ‘surround’ of Auden’s late poetry – its conversational ‘ground’, to use Jarrell’s term – calls on the reader to interpret its pedantry in a way that his critical statements never do. These lines from ‘Ode to Terminus’ (809–11), for example, dismiss the literalism of the etymological connection of ‘penis’ and ‘pencil’ while making it essential to seeing the joke: the acknowledged pedantry of the etymological reading is integral to the poem’s interpretation.

Pedantry is by its very definition unnecessary. What does it mean, then, to say that this poetry makes pedantic etymological reading a necessity? Auden, Prynne, and

⁶⁴ *OED Online*, ‘Sources: Oxford English Dictionary’ <<http://www.oed.com/sources>>. The latter two figures have decreased with the revisions of *OED3*.

Muldoon all call upon etymology to help express the conflicts they perceive in poetic communication, which is as much a question of how to read poetry as of how to write it. They invoke obsolete words and meanings without denying their obsolescence, but with a full awareness of the risks they take in defying the strictures against the etymological fallacy. Their etymological poetry is fully committed to the tension it discovers between an abstract idea of poetic language and the responsibility it has to communicate, as well as the responsibility readers have to interpret it. Speculative, difficult, pedantic: these are all words for a poetry that operates outside the boundaries of current language set by the definition of the etymological fallacy. Its encounter with obsolescence is disorienting, even when incorporated into the reading strategies developed by these poet-critics.

Auden described just such a disorienting linguistic experience in an essay on Lewis Carroll's *Alice* books:

one of the most important and powerful characters is not a person but the English language. Alice, who had hitherto supposed that words were passive objects, discovers that they have a life and will of their own. When she tries to remember poems she has learned, new lines come into her head unbidden and, when she thinks she knows what a word means, it turns out to mean something else.⁶⁵

Etymological poetry acknowledges that words have a life, a will, and a story of their own; it motivates ways of reading that also give words this space, recognising the 'residue of indetermination' left by obsolescence in a text. These etymological perspectives change how language mediates relationships between people, but in the process they show it to be more than a medium. When language is treated as a character in its own right, with a

⁶⁵ W. H. Auden, 'Lewis Carroll' in W. H. Auden, *Forewords and Afterwords*, selected by Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), pp. 283–93 (p. 290).

history that affords it a role in the story of how a poem is written and then read, it becomes capable of communicating things outside the experience of any writer or reader.

4. W. H. Auden's *Paysages Etymologisés*

Looking back on the 1930s, a time before Auden began his lexical exercises in earnest, Julian Symons wrote that 'the Auden group' shared 'the belief that a poem is first of all an event in society and only secondarily (although simultaneously) a verbal creation'.¹ The obscure diction of Auden's later poetry, in contrast, appears to emphasise 'verbal creation' over the poem as 'an event in society'. Furthermore, Auden himself describes the poem as a 'verbal object' several times in the interviews and prose works of this period.² The foreword he wrote for the first translations of Joseph Brodsky's poems into English, which appeared in 1973, begins with a statement that is striking in its reversal of Symons' dichotomy:

One demands two things of a poem. Firstly, it must be a well-made verbal object that does honor to the language in which it is written. Secondly, it must say something significant about a reality common to us all, but perceived from a unique perspective.³

There is less of a sense of hierarchy here than in Symons' statement, but it is still suggestive, especially when read alongside poems such as 'A Bad Night (A Lexical Exercise)'.⁴ How are these two 'demands' related? As has been shown, Auden's late lexical exercises are particularly charged and controversial 'events in society' because they explore the relationship between the abstract, philological aspect of poetic

¹ Julian Symons, 'Viewpoint', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 18 April 1980, p. 437.

² See, e.g., W. H. Auden, Preface to *The Tree and the Master: An Anthology of Literature on the Cross of Christ*, ed. by Sister Mary Immaculate, C. S. C (New York: Random House, 1965), pp. xiii–xxvi (p. xiv); Brendan Kennelly, 'Auden on Opera, Detective Writers, Wit, Politics, the Camera, Drugs, Poets and Poetry', Interview with W. H. Auden, *Swarthmore College Bulletin*, Alumni Issue, May 1972, pp. 2–15 (p. 6) <<http://www.swarthmore.edu/library/auden/transcript.pdf>>.

³ W. H. Auden, Foreword to Joseph Brodsky, *Selected Poems* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973), p. 9.

⁴ W. H. Auden, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Edward Mendelson, rev. edn (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), pp. 842–43. All further references to this book are given in the text.

language and the responsibility it has to 'say something significant'. But his demands go further than this. Not only must poetry 'say something significant', it must do so 'about a reality common to us all', and 'from a unique perspective'. Auden's etymological perspective, so intrusive in his late poetry's obscure diction, has a less emphasised but more pervasive influence throughout his oeuvre that is tied to this demand to respond to 'a reality common to us all'. Etymology records the events by which words acquire the power to represent the world. It thus allows Auden to 'say something significant' not only about communication itself, but also about how language represents reality.

A powerful word is as much a 'well-made verbal object', or a 'verbal creation', as a poem, though its making is less visible and certainly much less discussed. The event of 'verbal creation' (and indeed destruction) is a blind spot: the moment a new word gains currency, a transferred meaning appears, or a word becomes obsolete is such a rift in language as to be invisible. Etymologists, therefore, reconstruct – rather than trace – the links between obsolete and current meanings, using patterns that are sometimes recognisable but always unsystematic. *The Oxford Guide to Etymology* makes a distinction between phonological change – which follows certain verifiable laws that constitute an 'historical grammar' – and semantic change, for which:

there is no systematic classification of changes to which we can refer, for the simple reason that no theoretical approach has been found which makes this possible, and the number of variables at play in any semantic change makes it very unlikely that such an approach could ever succeed.⁵

Some etymologists react to this problem by limiting their enquiries to extralinguistic factors; in the preface to his book *Words in Time*, for example, Geoffrey Hughes sets

⁵ Philip Durkin, *The Oxford Guide to Etymology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 260.

aside ‘randomly peculiar’ semantic changes in favour of those which occur ‘in concert with societal changes’.⁶ Whether ‘verbal creation’ is understood to have extralinguistic or intralinguistic causes, however, the moment of change can never be predicted. The act of reconstructing links that are, in point of fact, rifts created by the very existence of etymon and reflex – that is, the act of explaining the process of obsolescence – is doomed from the beginning. This is J. Hillis Miller, using etymology to attempt to find a critical ‘thread’ through the ‘labyrinthine problems of narrative form’:

All etymology is false etymology, in the sense that some bend or discontinuity always breaks up the etymological line.⁷

The impossibility of following the line between etymon and reflex (as opposed to the various possible ways it may be reconstructed) seems ultimately to permit two possible conclusions: either ‘[a]ll etymology is false etymology’ and its only value is therefore rhetorical and literary (as Hillis Miller argues), or obsolete language is unquestionably irrelevant to current language. This is one reason why the proscription of the etymological fallacy is so compelling. But resisting the fallacy without committing to the alternative rhetorical view of etymology – as Auden, Prynne, and Muldoon do – results in speculative, difficult, and pedantic attitudes to the event of ‘verbal creation’.

The invention of a new word, or a new meaning for an old word, always causes ‘some bend or discontinuity in the etymological line’. In this, it resembles the first ‘verbal creation’: the origin of language itself. But how discontinuous an event in human history was the invention of language? The question is raised by two of the most famous theories of ‘verbal creation’, both written in the eighteenth century, one by Jean-Jacques

⁶ Geoffrey Hughes, Preface to *Words in Time: A Social History of English Vocabulary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), [n.p.].

⁷ J. Hillis Miller, *Ariadne’s Thread: Story Lines* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), p. 19.

Rousseau and the other by Gottfried Herder. At the risk of simplifying complex arguments that subsequent interpretation has only made more complex:⁸ Rousseau thought that the first word was developed from pre-articulate sounds out of a desire to communicate 'passions', while Herder believed that curiosity motivated people to name things, causing a decisive break in humanity's relationship with the world.⁹ Argued in different forms ever since, these are examples of what linguist Eric H. Lenneberg calls 'continuity' and 'discontinuity' theories, respectively.¹⁰ Ralph Waldo Emerson presents a discontinuity theory in his essay 'The Poet':

For, though the origin of most of our words is forgotten, each word was at first a stroke of genius, and obtained currency, because for the moment it symbolized the world to the first speaker and to the hearer.¹¹

For Emerson, words only become tools of communication once they have successfully 'symbolized the world' for the people who would use them to communicate. The 'moment' of the invention of a word is not only often forgotten; it is ultimately unimaginable, because it must be distinct from the word's 'currency'. Like the discontinuity in the etymological line, then, this is what makes theories of the origin of language – whether based on communication or representation – so varied and so open to ridicule. Max Müller's famous nicknames for the prevailing hypotheses in 1861 (the 'bow-wow' and 'pooh-pooh' theories) are a case in point.¹² Though speculation on the

⁸ E.g. Jacques Derrida, 'Genesis and Structure of the *Essay on the Origin of Languages*', in *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), pp. 165–268; Paul De Man, 'The Rhetoric of Blindness: Jacques Derrida's Reading of Rousseau', in *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd edn, rev. (London: Methuen, 1983), pp. 102–41.

⁹ *On the Origin of Language: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Essay on the Origin of Languages: Johann Gottfried Herder, Essay on the Origin of Language*, trans. by John H. Moran (New York: Ungar, 1967), p. 11.

¹⁰ Eric H. Lenneberg, *Biological Foundations of Language* (New York: Wiley, 1967), p. 228.

¹¹ Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'The Poet', in *The Annotated Emerson*, ed. by David Mikics (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), pp. 199–222 (p. 211).

¹² F. M. Müller, *The Science of Language: Founded on Lectures Delivered at the Royal Institution in 1861 and 1863*, 2 vols (London: Longmans, Green, 1891), I, 494–512.

topic used to be a kind of intellectual exercise, the Linguistic Society of Paris banned all related debates in 1866; comparative philology turned attention away from overarching theories of the history of language and towards individual instances of language changes. Combined with the effects of Saussure's definition of synchronic linguistics, this meant the origin of language gradually ceased to be a concern for many professional linguists, at least until very recently.¹³ However, the subject remained important to anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, archaeologists, philosophers, theologians – and to Auden.

Discontinuity theories confront the singularity of the 'moment' language was created; they thus correspond to the idea of 'verbal creation' in the etymological poetry considered in this thesis, which takes full account of the discontinuity of its linguistic discoveries. These theories particularly intrigued Auden, who absorbed and adapted them from the works of Charles Darwin, Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Gerald Heard, Bronislaw Malinowski, I. A. Richards, and many others. Claude Levi-Strauss provides a general characterisation of their approach:

Whatever may have been the moment and the circumstances of its appearance in the ascent of animal life, language can only have arisen all at once. Things cannot have begun to signify gradually.¹⁴

It was 'the circumstances of [language's] appearance in the ascent of animal life', set aside by Levi-Strauss, that interested the young Auden, who wrote his own narratives in both prose and verse about the moment language was invented. In that moment, neutral 'circumstances' were necessarily transformed into a setting for a story – for history. In other words, 'verbal creation' is first and foremost an event in the world.

¹³ Christine Kenneally, *The First Word: The Search for the Origins of Language* (London: Penguin, 2008), p. 7.

¹⁴ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), p. 59.

This chapter and the two that follow it ask how Auden, Prynne, and Muldoon's etymological poetry, which is created with an awareness of how language itself is a 'creation', understand such creations as events in the world. Etymology, and the discontinuity it reveals between obsolete and current language, influences their use of conventional literary genres – specifically Auden's landscape poetry, Prynne's lyricism, and Muldoon's name interpretations (including charactonymy, prosopopoeia, and so on). In Auden's case, the question may be framed as such: what relation does 'verbal creation' bear to Creation itself? The relation is obviously different before and after Auden's return to Christianity in 1940. In the following, three separate phases of Auden's idiosyncratic *paysages moralisés* – here reinterpreted as *paysages etymologisés* – are discussed: first, the early poems that set the scene for the invention of language; second, the interpretations of the Incarnation – which stands for another dramatic discontinuity in the history of language – from the early 1940s; and finally, the 'exercises in viewing landscapes' (to use Randall Jarrell's term) that are the 'Bucolics' (written 1952–53; 556–69). Throughout, the focus is on the etymologised settings for Auden's stories about verbal creation: his *paysages etymologisés* are investigated as attempts to understand how the capacity for linguistic representation defines human relationships with the environment.

By way of introduction, an etymological perspective may be discerned in the frontier landscapes of Auden's earliest poems. These poems are 'frontier-conscious' ('Ode', 70) in the most immediate sense; their frontiers are both natural (the mountain pass, the watershed, the moon) and human (border control, the edge of a town, military frontiers). They also, however, perceive consciousness as a frontier – making the woods where primitive hunters first crossed over into a world with language another example of a

border country. This is reflected in the poems' etymological consciousness (and self-consciousness). For example, ancestral symbols persist in 'Family Ghosts', in which 'all emotions to expression come / recovering the archaic imagery' (41). The recovery is etymological, as human tears take the form of the 'lunatic agitation of the sea'. By invoking the etymology of 'lunatic', which links human psychological distress to the moon's pull on the tides, Auden suspends the word on the border between its current and obsolete meanings. If 'lunatic agitation' is said to represent human madness – its only modern meaning – then this is a personification; if it represents the moon's pull on the tides then it is the opposite: a natural metaphor for a human condition. These concepts of metaphor and personification are locked into a synchronic perspective, or two synchronic perspectives – one on the past and one on the present. Auden's use of the word 'lunatic' sits in the middle of such dichotomies. It asks how the word got from one meaning to the other, which was not a process of metaphor: lunacy was the name for a condition caused by the moon.¹⁵ Links between nature and humanity such as this are a recurring theme in Auden's etymologised landscapes.

The representative power of the word 'lunatic' is altered by Auden's invocation of its etymology, which does more than revive a dead metaphor to give vividness to the poem's representation of the sea. The connections between the moon, the sea, and psychological distress are too deeply rooted to be dragged into the present as a metaphor or even turned in on themselves as a personification; they exert an equal pull back into the history of the language. Recognising the etymologically aware use of 'lunatic' requires readers to cross the frontier into history through language, as the first language-users did. In other words, the discontinuity perceived between etymological and modern

¹⁵ 'Lunatic', *OED*.

meanings recalls the original discontinuity of the first linguistic representation. It marks an entry into history not only because language allows for the retelling of the past but because it is historical itself: the things words represent are not fixed. The particular example of 'lunatic' is especially significant in Auden's oeuvre because the moon was a frontier that was crossed in his lifetime. Its transformation is evident in the difference between the early poem 'This Lunar Beauty' (1930; 55), which describes an otherworldly innocence that 'Has no history', and the later 'Moon Landing' (1969; 843–44) in which men are 'making / the usual squalid mess called History'. Auden resists the transformation of his moon into a backdrop for history, however, by preserving it as a personified symbol: 'my Moon still queens the Heavens / as She ebbs and fulls'. But there is still a subtle change here, in that the language of the tides now represents the moon's own 'lunatic agitation'. Its transition from otherworldly timelessness into world history, however much Auden regrets it, makes the moon a fitting example of all the landscapes he humanises and historicises – or rather, shows to be humanised and historicised – by representing them in a language conscious of its own history.

The Origins of Language

Auden's approach to history, and specifically the history of language, was influenced by the philosopher and historian Gerald Heard, whom he met in the early 1930s.¹⁶ Heard's argument that '[h]istory is, *au fond*, the history of man finding himself' is still evident in 'Moon Landing', where the event is secondary to what it says about human

¹⁶ Katherine Bucknell, 'Auden's "Writing" Essay: Editor's Introduction', in W. H. Auden, *The Map of All My Youth: Early Works, Friends and Influences*, ed. by Katherine Bucknell and Nicholas Jenkins (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), pp. 17–34 (pp. 24–32); Humphrey Carpenter, *W. H. Auden: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 135.

motivations, neuroses, and ingenuity: 'from the moment / the first flint was flaked this landing was merely / a matter of time'.¹⁷ Similarly, it is in the spirit of Heard's maxim that Auden races through history in the early poems 'Paysage Moralisé' (119–20), 'Dover' (148–49), 'Spain, 1937',¹⁸ and 'Sonnets from China' (183–95). These titles, however, indicate that place is as much a concern as history here; it is important to ask *where* man finds himself and how these surroundings are consequently represented in language. For instance, 'the moment / the first flint was flaked' in 'Moon Landing' was an historical event that determined the name 'flint', which came from a verb meaning 'to split' ('split' being a cognate) – it was only called 'flint' because it had been flaked.¹⁹

Auden's most detailed poetic description of the effects of linguistic representation on man's relationship with his environment appears in one of the 'Sonnets from China', which draws on Heard, as well as Marx and Engels:

Only a smell had feelings to make known,
 Only an eye could point in a direction,
 The fountain's utterance was itself alone:
 He, though, by naming thought to make connection

Between himself as hunter and his food;
 He felt the interest in his throat and found
 That he could send a servant to chop wood
 Or kiss a girl to rapture with a sound.

They bred like locusts till they hid the green
 And edges of the world: confused and abject,
 A creature to his own creation subject,

He shook with hate for things he'd never seen,
 Pined for a love abstracted from its object,
 And was oppressed as he had never been. (184–85)

¹⁷ Gerald Heard, *The Emergence of Man* (London: Cape, 1931), p. 21.

¹⁸ W. H. Auden, *Another Time* (New York: Random House, 1940), pp. 89–92.

¹⁹ '(S)plei-', *IEL*. It is worth noting that Auden would have been familiar with the idea of Proto-Indo-European reconstructions through *OED2*, which included them in its etymological notes (they were removed in *OED3*).

This poem revolves around the moment language was invented. Before, nature had its own, concrete methods of communicating with smells, gestures, and sounds; in the aftermath of 'naming', man overwhelms nature, losing his bearings in the world when he finds himself in history. The storytelling has a mythological, almost biblical ('bred like locusts') atmosphere, and it draws attention to its own 'abstracted' ways of naming by invoking etymologies. 'Abject', 'subject', and 'object' are a noticeable instance of this, but 'utterance', 'interest', and 'rapture' are also disorienting usages because they rest on an unsteady mixture of obsolete and current meanings. The poem's etymological pivot, however, comes in the juxtaposition of the cognates 'creature' and 'creation', which establishes a tension between man as a created and a creating being. The first sense of 'create' in English was 'to produce where nothing was before', and originally the word was only applicable to God, since man could only make things out of created matter.²⁰ Auden allows this history to seep into his own verbal creation, representing the inventor of language as caught between his place in the world as a creature like any other, and his creative power of abstraction that allows him to position himself as a 'hunter' and other creatures as 'food'. Later, when he was beginning his return to Christianity, Auden put it more boldly: 'the powers / That we create with are not ours' ('New Year Letter', 197–243, p. 239).

But the motivation for the invention of language in this sonnet is not power over the world, or even power over people: these are effects 'found' after the fact. In this, Auden parts ways with the Marxist view that language was invented to aid the division of labour, formulate ideology, and achieve 'mastery over nature'.²¹ Rather, he suggests the

²⁰ 'Create, v.', *OED*. See also the discussion in Owen Barfield, *History in English Words*, rev. edn (Edinburgh: Floris Classics, 1985), p. 207.

²¹ Friedrich Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, ed. and trans. by C. P. Dutt (London: Wellred, 2012), p. 175.

aim was to 'make connection' with nature.²² This is a reversal of Gerald Heard's theory of totemism, in which hunters drew animals on cave walls to acquire magical power over them, and only afterwards did they feel 'a curious kinship had been made between them and their prey'.²³ Auden produced a more faithful reworking of Heard's theory in the early prose piece 'Writing, or the Pattern between People' (1932), written for Naomi Mitchison's book *An Outline for Boys & Girls and Their Parents* (Mitchison was a friend of Heard's and introduced him to Auden).²⁴ Its premise is that the roots of language are in 'personal loneliness, [...] the need for group communication':

To go back to our sketch of the origin of language. Before language we have the people who feel something (the hunting group), the feeling (feeling of unity in the face of hunger or danger, etc.), the object which excites the feeling (the hunted bison), and the noise which expressed the feeling. If the noise was later used to recover the feeling, it would also present to the memory the idea or the image of the animal, or whatever it was excited the feeling. Thus sounds would begin to have sense meaning, to stand for things, as well as having meaning as an expression of feeling.²⁵

Following Heard, Auden here identifies the origin of language in the desire to recover a lost 'feeling of unity'. But the consequences of this explanation are different for Heard's anthropology of religion, which is based on the idea of 'food unity', and for Auden's poetry. Heard understands the naming of the bison as a step away from nature and

²² This is a revision first printed in 1966: in all previously printed versions, these lines read 'The bird meant nothing: that was his projection / Who named it as he hunted it for food'. The revision focuses in on the motivation for language, while the first version moves straight into a world with language, fulfilling the 'projection[s]' anticipated in the first stanza. W. D. Quesenbery, *Auden's Revisions* (2008), p. 155 <http://www.audensociety.org/Audens_Revisions_by_WD_Quesenbery.pdf>; W. H. Auden, *Collected Shorter Poems, 1927–1957* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966), p. 128.

²³ Heard, *The Emergence of Man*, pp. 52–55.

²⁴ W. H. Auden, 'Writing, Or the Pattern Between People', in *An Outline for Boys & Girls and Their Parents*, ed. by Naomi Mitchison ([London]: Victor Gollancz, 1932), pp. 849–68; Paul Eros, "'One of the Most Penetrating Minds in England:" Gerald Heard and the British Intelligentsia of the Interwar Period' (University of Oxford, 2012), p. 1.

²⁵ W. H. Auden, 'Writing', pp. 855–56.

towards society, until food becomes a symbol of social unity rather than a cause of it,²⁶ while Auden focuses on how the animal becomes the central term in the web of 'meaning as feeling' that allows for the creation of language. Developing this theory in 'Sonnets from China', Auden extends the 'feeling of unity' from the relationship between people to the relationship with the animal, though the linguistic ability to reason abstractly turns out to be divisive rather than cohesive in both contexts.

The origin of linguistic representation in the desire to 'make connection' with nature remains relevant throughout Auden's poetry, and it is etymology that allows him to refer to this desire without denying how the power of abstract representation divided people from the world. In 'Our Hunting Fathers' (122), for example, the hunger instinct has been abstracted into a relationship of power – 'quarry', not 'food', is the hunters' object – but there is still a drive to understand the animal's perspective:

Our hunting fathers told the story
Of the sadness of the creatures,
Pitied the limits and the lack
Set in their finished features;
Saw in the lion's intolerant look,
Behind the quarry's dying glare,
Love raging for the personal glory
That reason's gift would add,
The liberal appetite and power,
The rightness of a god.

The connection sought here is not between hunter and food, but between two hunters: a language-user and a non-language-user. It is based on personification, but as in the case of the 'lunatic agitation of the sea', etymology alters the apparent anthropocentrism of this approach, and deepens the ambiguity of the poem's subjects: 'our hunting fathers'

²⁶ 'For this emotional experience, this revivifying of the community sense, they must have begun to value as an end in itself, and the food must have become increasingly an occasion rather than a cause'. Gerald Heard, *Social Substance of Religion: An Essay on the Evolution of Religion* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1931), p. 90.

may be Edwardian trophy-hunters asserting their rational superiority, or they may be the first language-users giving names to their quarry. Attributing 'sadness' to animals because of their 'limits' is anthropocentric and ultimately illogical, but Auden is invoking the etymology of the word, which he would have known through his studies of Anglo-Saxon.²⁷ As such, 'sadness' is required to mean 'satisfaction' here, showing the creatures' limits in a different light – it is another way of saying that nature is 'finished'.²⁸ Language, however, can never be finished, and the history of 'sadness', including its most familiar current meaning, places language-users in time even as it sets the 'creatures' outside of it. The 'lion's intolerant look' is another instance of this: 'intolerant' etymologically means 'not bearing' or 'not enduring', which requires a perception of time that only language-users have. By a kind of pedantic etymological trick, then, the lion is 'intolerant' in the sense it does not have to bear the weight of history as storytellers do.²⁹ These etymologies show Auden using linguistic history to reach out beyond language and history, exploring the kinds of connection language establishes between people and their environment.

Reading 'Our Hunting Fathers' etymologically modifies the idea that its personification is a 'projection of the human appetite for power' (Rainer Emig),³⁰ additionally seeing it as an attempt to 'make connection' with nature through and despite history. This is one of the reasons for the poem's opacity: personification is not used to draw non-human nature into a human framework, but to place human historical

²⁷ See Chris Jones, *Strange Likeness: The Use of Old English in Twentieth-Century Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 70–71.

²⁸ 'Sad, *adj.*, *n.*, and *adv.*', *OED*.

²⁹ A similar usage may be found in the late poem 'The Aliens': 'the Old World of the Plants, all lapped in a tolerant silence' (849–50).

³⁰ Rainer Emig, 'Auden and Ecology', in *The Cambridge Companion to W. H. Auden*, ed. by Stan Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 212–25 (p. 215).

and linguistic experience in relation to non-human nature. The lion is humanised to show that it lacks humanity – and, in the process, the terms of what is ‘human’ begin to slide away, too. Obsolete meanings of ‘sadness’ and ‘intolerance’ describe the lion with a riddling precision; the difficulty of accessing the riddle through the words’ current meanings is only a problem for those whose understanding of the world is subject to a form of representation that is always changing. In other words, these etymological readings are precise if one is prepared to accept that obsolete meanings are unequivocally active here, but that would mean denying the historical consciousness on which the comparison of lion and hunter is based. When etymology is seen as at odds with current meanings, the personification of the animal reflects back on the coherence of the concept of a ‘person’. It is the historicity of the metaphors in ‘sadness’ and ‘intolerance’ – examples of a tendency identified by Eve Sweetser in which words for physical concepts develop into words for mental ones – that structures both the comparison and the contrast of quarry and hunter.³¹ The personification thus reveals the discontinuity in linguistic experience that has at its heart the desire to represent continuity with nature.³²

Telling the story of ‘the sadness of the creatures’ is a way of finding oneself in history, among creatures that have no history. But the poem’s second stanza suggests that the ‘mature ambition’ of such storytelling, however unlikely, is to *lose* oneself in history by obeying the communist imperative ‘to hunger, work illegally, / And be

³¹ Eve Sweetser, *From Etymology to Pragmatics: Metaphorical and Cultural Aspects of Semantic Structure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 32–37.

³² Craig A. Hamilton mentions Sweetser’s research but does not address the relation of obsolete, etymological ‘mappings from the body to the mind’ to such mappings in Auden’s poetry. Instead, his focus on cognitive metaphor theory leads him to read etymologies as evidence of a deeply ingrained, unconscious (but continuous) metaphorical conceptualisation of the world. Craig A. Hamilton, ‘Mapping the Mind and the Body: On W. H. Auden’s Personifications’, *Style*, 36.3 (2002), 408–27.

anonymous'.³³ In its modern sense, 'ambition' is fixated on a point in the future, but its etymology in Latin *ambitio* ('going round to canvass citizens for votes') and then *ambire* ('go round'), pulls it back into history.³⁴ This final line is a reminder that although 'our hunting fathers' appear to have established their place as language-users, they remain bound to the anonymous motivation of 'hunger': 'the subject of the verb / to-hunger is never a name', Auden writes in 'Grub First, Then Ethics' (704–06). Rather than risk becoming a 'creature to his own creation subject', then, the communist returns to the pre-linguistic desire to 'make connection / Between himself as hunter and his food'. The appeal of 'that fine tradition' of telling stories about hunts – which this poem continues, merging the ancestral hunting fathers who first named their quarry with Edwardian trophy-hunters – is not that it reinforces abstract linguistic power over nature, but that it places the language-user back where he first acquired that power, before it became 'abstracted from its object'.

With etymology, Auden refers to the history of linguistic representation in the process of representing an ahistorical, 'intolerant' nature. This is part of a broader concern in his nature poetry with the history of representation. From hunting stories to novels to paintings by Nicolas Poussin, Piero di Cosimo, Pieter Brueghel, and many others, Auden almost invariably views nature through the lens of other artistic creations. The scenes these works set are as vital to their modes of representation – to their status as events in the world – as 'the moment and the circumstances of [language's] appearance' are to linguistic representation. History has to happen somewhere: a story needs a setting. Auden's early experiments with these settings result in very different poems, of

³³ Auden thought he had taken the last two lines from Lenin, but they were actually written by Lenin's wife. See John Fuller, *W. H. Auden: A Commentary* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), p. 151.

³⁴ 'Ambition', *ODEE*.

which 'Paysage Moralisé' (1933) and 'Musée des Beaux-Arts' (1938; 179) are the most distinctive. 'Paysage Moralisé' describes a relationship with nature that is closer than allegory, equating human emotion with facts of the environment: 'The shadow cast across your lives by mountains' is both literal and figurative. 'Musée des Beaux-Arts', however, celebrates the Old Masters for realising the 'human position' of suffering and nature's indifference, 'how everything turns away / Quite leisurely from the disaster'. But are these poles between which all representations of nature must sit – between moralising the landscape and seeing it as completely detached from the human dramas being played out in the foreground? The sadness of the creatures and the lion's intolerant look, when read etymologically, encompass both perspectives.

In a recent reconsideration of Auden's pastoral, Robert Archambeau argues that it does not fit into either of the usual categories, namely the 'sentimental', which seeks to restore a lost connection with nature, or the 'ecopoetic', which stresses the otherness of nature and connects it to 'our own unknowability'. Instead, he writes:

When Auden gives us a landscape, he is less interested in it as a place or an ecosystem or as a physical reality – like Schiller's Greeks, he rushes past its otherness and uses it as a way of describing human psychological states.³⁵

It is a simple matter – too simple, Archambeau might suggest – to lag behind Auden, and read the difference between 'Paysage Moralisé' and 'Musée des Beaux-Arts' as a difference between the sentimental and the ecopoetic. Having provided this very Audenesque dichotomy, Archambeau then resolves it by stating that Auden 'lies outside the spectrum of the sentimental and the ecopoetic'. What puts him 'outside' is the lack of

³⁵ Robert Archambeau, 'W. H. Auden and Ecopoetics', *Boston Review*, 31 October 2013 <<https://www.bostonreview.net/poetry/archambeau-auden>>.

‘an anxious yearning to connect the human and the non-human’. Although there is no mention in Archambeau’s essay of the variety in Auden’s nature poetry, his theory can be made to account for both ‘Paysage Moralisé’ and ‘Musée des Beaux-Arts’ if it is read in a less conclusive way: these poems remain sentimental and ecopoetic respectively, though they lack the emotional baggage associated with these attitudes. In other words, they experiment with conventional ways of using nature to locate the ‘human position’ while holding back from negotiating nature’s otherness, rather than ‘rush[ing] past’ it.

Archambeau characterises Auden’s landscapes as ‘a way of describing human psychological states’, just as the Greeks supposedly used landscapes as ‘a way of discussing human motives and morals’. Following Auden following Heard, it could be said that this etymological poetry perceives the whole of language as using nature to describe human psychological states, motives, and morals. The subtle difference between Auden’s theory and Heard’s means this is not as anthropocentric as it sounds: representations of the world are always necessarily about the experience of the language-user, but they nevertheless remain the central term in those experiences. Although the hunters seek to ‘make connection’ not with creatures but with their ‘food’ and ‘quarry’, it is the creatures that are named as the subject of the story. Nature is *the* way of describing and discussing human concerns. For this reason, Auden does not feel the need, as Archambeau writes, to use sentimental or ecopoetic methods ‘to connect the human and the non-human’. The connection has already been made with the invention of language; it is not a poetic method but a fact of poetry’s medium. Auden’s method, in contrast, is an etymological one that allows him to glimpse the connections language has made between human history and non-human nature without denying their original and ongoing discontinuity.

Linguistic Temptations

The idea of ‘verbal creation’ acquired a new significance for Auden after his return to Christianity in 1940. It has already been noted that he makes use of the historical sense of ‘create’, as a divine act in which something is made out of nothing, together with the modern usage that may apply to the human creation of language, or a poem, for example. In the Christmas oratorio *For the Time Being* (1940; 347–445), Mary uses a different verb to describe the act of divine creation at the Annunciation, with similar etymological results:

My flesh in terror and fire
Rejoices that the Word
Who utters the world out of nothing,
As a pledge of His word to love her
Against her will, and to turn
Her desperate longing for love,
Should ask to wear me,
From now to their wedding day,
For an engagement ring. (360)

‘Utter’, unlike ‘create’, is of Germanic origin; it comes from and is related to ‘out’. The *OED* lists various obsolete and rare senses – ‘[t]o put (goods, wares, etc.) forth or upon the market’; ‘to put into circulation’; ‘to discharge, emit, eject, exhale’ – all of which are used by Auden.³⁶ The more common modern sense is of course ‘to speak’, but etymological and modern senses are both in play here because this speech is also a creation: the verb’s subject is ‘the Word’, its object ‘the world’. While ‘create’ has acquired a human meaning from a divine one, Auden enacts a reverse development for ‘utter’ here. Used with an awareness of their etymologies, both words show a fine line

³⁶ ‘Utter, v.¹’, *OED*. ‘Poets must utter their Collected Works’ (‘Letter to Lord Byron’, 81–113 [103]); ‘self-proclaimed poets who, to wow an / audience, utter some resonant lie’ (‘Ode to Terminus’, 809–11); ‘the flowers who utter imperative odors’ (‘Natural Linguistics’, 848–49).

between verbal representation and verbal creation, between the lower-case 'word' or 'pledge' by which Mary is represented as 'an engagement ring', and the Word. Again, Auden uses etymology to touch on connections made in the history of language without denying the ultimate discontinuity between obsolete and current language, as well as between transferred senses.

The Incarnation is in many ways a counterpart to the invention of language in Auden's post-1940 poetry. If the invention of language brought history into an ahistorical world, then the Word made flesh does the opposite, with just as much upheaval: 'How could the Eternal do a temporal act, / The Infinite become a finite fact? / Nothing can save us that is possible' (353). It marks another discontinuity in the relationship between people and the world, revolutionising representation; and again, the circumstances in which it is experienced are incredibly significant for Auden. In the contemporary settings of *For the Time Being*, they are domestic but disorienting:

[...] It's as if
We had left our house for five minutes to mail a letter,
And during that time the living room had changed places
With the room behind the mirror over the fireplace; (352)

This is an analogy for an uncanny event that shows how the power to analogise has changed, itself becoming uncanny, now that the 'Word is legible' and 'even sin / Is valid as a sign' (374). By sanctifying Creation, the Incarnation changes the meaning of the poem as a verbal creation.

The 'mirror above the fireplace' is not a gateway to another world but a pivot about which this world is transformed. In *The Sea and the Mirror* (401–445), Auden makes the mirror a symbol for Art, which rather than being held up to nature is a point of connection in history between the ahistorical dimensions of 'Nature' and 'Spirit'. And in

a lecture on 'Words and the Word' (1967), Auden described the Christian poet's responsibility as follows:

The poet has to preserve and express by art what primitive peoples knew instinctively, namely, that, for man, nature is a realm of sacramental analogies.³⁷

Auden's new poetic goal was to reinvigorate language with this primitive assurance in the presence of God in nature, following Emerson's theory – which he referred to in the lecture – that 'as we go back in history, language becomes more picturesque, until its infancy, when it is all poetry; or all spiritual facts are represented by natural symbols'.³⁸ But Emerson's idea of etymology is more primitivist and absolute than Auden's: he implies that language unequivocally linked nature and God, even to the extent that it had an 'infancy' – etymologically, and illogically, a period of being 'unable to speak'.³⁹ In other words, it was ahistorical. For Auden, though, going back in history did not mean finding a point when language united 'natural symbols' with 'spiritual facts'. In keeping with his contemporaries, such as Gerald Heard and Owen Barfield, Auden's etymological aim was to reveal not true names but the historicity of language. His stories about the origin of language are more profoundly affected by the ruling against the etymological fallacy, however, and therefore bear more resemblance to Jacques Derrida's notion of 'the structuralist stance' as 'an astonishment [...] by language as the origin of history' than to Emerson's 'picturesque' and ultimately sentimental vision.⁴⁰ For Auden, returning to

³⁷ 'Words and the Word', in W. H. Auden, *Secondary Worlds: The T. S. Eliot Memorial Lectures Delivered at Eliot College in the University of Kent at Canterbury, October 1967* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), pp. 117–44 (p. 131).

³⁸ Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Nature', in *The Annotated Emerson* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), pp. 27–71 (p. 44).

³⁹ 'Infant', *ODEE*.

⁴⁰ Jacques Derrida, 'Force and Signification', in *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 1–35 (p. 2). See discussion in the Conclusion.

etymologies means seeing them as obsolete in the context of current meanings. He thus manages both to 'preserve and express' etymological knowledge.

It is the historicity of language that prevents it representing nature, and therefore God, in any more direct way than analogy; hence the 'yearning for connection' that Archambeau identified in both sentimental and ecopoetic nature poetry. Auden identifies similar methods of avoiding historicity in a lecture given at the Yale Divinity School in 1950, though he interprets them as 'temptations' or failings of faith:

Laziness acknowledges the relation of the present to the past but ignores its relation to the future; impatience acknowledges its relation to the future but ignores its relation to the past; neither the lazy nor the impatient man, that is, accepts the present instant in its full reality and so cannot love his neighbour completely.

In our age it is impatience, perhaps, which is the more characteristic temptation, partly because the historical situation is rather desperate, but mainly because for us the problem of faith is not of lapsing into a childish magical conception of God but of despair, of believing that God has abandoned us.⁴¹

The temporal temptations of laziness and despair are paralleled by the linguistic temptations first of taking analogies for identities,⁴² and second of believing that analogies have no power at all. For Auden, giving in to either of these temptations demonstrates a failure to appreciate the relation between man as a historical being and nature as 'a realm of sacramental analogies'.

The difficulty of accepting both 'the rhetoric of time' and 'the certainty of love' without giving in to laziness or impatience is explored in 'Kairos and Logos' (1941; 305–10), a series of four sestinas that, like *For the Time Being*, consider how the Incarnation

⁴¹ W. H. Auden, 'The Things Which Are Caesar's', in *Prose and Travel Books in Prose and Verse*, ed. by Edward Mendelson, 4 vols (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), III, 196–210 (pp. 209–10).

⁴² 'Man is an analogy-drawing animal; that is his great good fortune. His danger is of treating analogies as identities'. W. H. Auden, 'Making, Knowing and Judging', in *The Dyer's Hand; And, Other Essays* (New York: Random House, 1962), pp. 31–60 (pp. 51–52).

affects understandings of time. Their mythological diction, however, is more similar to that of the sonnet beginning ‘Only a smell had feelings to make known’, quoted above. Its characters, for example, are referred to only by pronouns (‘them’, ‘her’, ‘he’, ‘we’). This emphasises the poem’s own abstract representations of its characters’ abstract representations of the world. In the fairytale-like second sestina, a girl wakes into language – ‘Quite suddenly her dream became a word’ – and leaves her garden, only to pretend that the forest in which she finds herself is no different. In the garden she ‘Could always tell the rose-bush – “Be a forest,”’, and so in the forest she ‘Called the wild roses that she picked “My Garden,” / Made any wind she chose the Naughty One’ (an epithet with a similar effect to the poem’s use of pronouns). It is worth noting that ‘forest’ (unlike ‘woods’) may refer to an area that is protected and cultivated, as if it were a ‘garden’ (etymologically an ‘enclosed’ space).⁴³ But its root is Latin *foris*, meaning ‘outside’ (and also related to ‘foreign’), making it the etymological opposite of ‘garden’.⁴⁴ Exercising her linguistic influence, the child holds on to the analogy as if the forest were merely ‘outside’ the garden but identical to it: this is lazy, in Auden’s terms, because it does not acknowledge the future in which she must take responsibility for her use of language, now that she has left the garden and entered history.

In contrast, the third sestina of ‘Kairos and Logos’ tells the story of a man whose impatience leads him to believe that the meaningfulness of the world is his responsibility, as it ‘Awaited the decision of his eyes’:

He saw his role as father to an earth
Whose speechless, separate, and ambiguous things
Married at his decision. [...]

⁴³ ‘Forest, *n.*’, *OED*; ‘Garden’, ‘Yard¹’, *ODEE*.

⁴⁴ ‘Forest’, *ODEE*.

‘Decision’, a prominent word in this poem, is etymologically a ‘cutting off’: the obsolete meaning is in complete opposition to the man’s intention to ‘[marry]’ the earth’s ‘speechless, separate, and ambiguous things’, instead suggesting that he is actually rejecting some unity that was already there.⁴⁵ Unlike the girl in the second ‘Kairos and Logos’ poem, who lazily equates etymological with current meaning, he impatiently ignores the etymological implications of his linguistic representations of the world. He thus fails to see that ‘The power of decision lay with things’ – that is, the power of the word ‘decision’ is tied to the world it represents. This transferral of the ‘power of decision’ from the man to the ‘things’ recalls the frequently observed pattern of semantic change by which deontic meanings (the human, conscious act of ‘decision’) develop into epistemic ones (to represent reality).⁴⁶ At the end of the poem, the man recognises that he himself is already part of nature but also cut off from it by his ability to represent it, ‘a thing of earth / On whose decision hung the fate of truth’. Both the ‘lazy’ girl and the ‘impatient’ man are required to realise that their responsibility is to the present, negotiating past and future in order to grasp both Logos and Kairos together, ‘the Infinite’ and ‘the finite fact’.⁴⁷

The temptations outlined above may be further paralleled by the views that etymologies provide true meanings (etymologism) – that the forest is merely ‘outside’ the garden rather than discontinuous from it – and that etymology is a fallacy because the past of language has no bearing on the present, which is a decision waiting to be

⁴⁵ ‘Decide’, *ODEE*.

⁴⁶ Sweetser, pp. 56–68.

⁴⁷ Auden acquired these terms from theologian Paul Tillich. Logos is the subject of a ‘static type of thinking in terms of form’ in which ‘time remains insignificant’; Kairos is the ‘fulfilled moment, the moment of time approaching us as fate and decision’, that is the subject of ‘dynamic thinking in terms of creation’. Paul Tillich, *The Interpretation of History*, trans. by N. A. Rasetzki and Elsa L. Talmey (New York: Scribner, 1936), pp. 128–29.

made. But it is all too easy to find these dualities in ‘Kairos and Logos’, and to paraphrase its symbols and abstractions, while disregarding the opacity of this style. Like ‘Our Hunting Fathers’, it feels like a fable, but its message is more about the temptation to represent the world in certain misjudged ways than a lesson in how to avoid doing so. Etymology does not necessarily solve these problems, and it may even compound them by seeming to provide solutions. If it can avoid the opposing traps of etymologism and the total rejection of etymology, however, then it may act as a reminder of the historicity of language, countering both laziness and impatience in Auden’s representations of the world.

‘Exercises in Viewing Landscapes’

Towards the end of the 1940s, Auden adopted a new approach to landscape poetry. These later poems, among them ‘In Praise of Limestone’ (1948; 540–42) and the ‘Bucolics’ (written 1952–53; 556–69), lack the intensity of ‘Kairos and Logos’: they are less abstract, their forms are looser, and their diction is distinctively mixed. As such, several critics have held them up as examples of a deterioration in Auden’s style. Philip Larkin wrote that the ‘Bucolics’ are ‘agreeable and ingenious essays [...] but their poetic pressure is not high – nor, indeed, is it intended to be’.⁴⁸ More contentiously, John Whitehead lauded ‘In Praise of Limestone’ as ‘the first of a new *genre* which later degenerated into the laxer, more whimsical “Bucolics” series’.⁴⁹ Randall Jarrell, in a similar vein, noted that ‘Auden has finally [...] given up morality [...] these exercises in viewing landscapes quasi-morally are learned, masterly, charming, complicatedly

⁴⁸ Philip Larkin, ‘What’s Become of Wystan?’, in *W. H. Auden*, ed. by Haffenden, pp. 414–19 (p. 418).

⁴⁹ John Whitehead, ‘Vin Audenaire’, in *W. H. Auden*, ed. by Haffenden, pp. 440–47 (p. 446).

self-delighting, trivial'.⁵⁰ The accusation is of triviality: these landscapes are verbal creations that do not purport to bear any significant relation to Creation itself. Like the question of Auden's obscure late diction, however, critics have found answers to such disconnectedness that value it on its own terms. Here, the etymologised landscape is understood as Auden's own way of coming to terms with language's discontinuity from the world.

Jarrell's judgment is particularly telling: the 'Bucolics' are 'exercises in viewing landscapes', putting them on a par with Auden's 'lexical exercises'. Just as 'lexical exercises' seem to avoid the problems of communication, these 'exercises in viewing landscapes' apparently make no attempt to confront non-human nature. They describe human perspectives on human environments: people are 'homesick' for limestone landscapes (540); there are 'Lake-folk' (562) and 'plainsm[e]n' (566), while woods are occupied by 'savage[s]' and picknickers (558–59); mountains are a 'fine refuge' (561), islands are lairs and jails (564), and streams are 'nowhere [...] disliked' (568).⁵¹ It is no coincidence that, along with the lexical exercises, 'In Praise of Limestone' and the 'Bucolics' are among Auden's most etymologically aware poetry. They reveal a compromised faith in representation – in the connection language makes between man and his environment – just as the use of obscure diction reveals a compromised faith in communication, both of which come with an acceptance of the historicity of language. Auden is no longer troubled by the temptation to deny history in the face of 'the Infinite become a finite fact'. This is clear in an absurd phrase from 'Winds' (556–58), the first of the 'Bucolics': 'That Pliocene Friday'. Mixing a scientific-historical narrative with the

⁵⁰ Randall Jarrell, 'On Mitigated Triumphs', in *W. H. Auden*, ed. by Haffenden, pp. 396–401 (p. 397).

⁵¹ These are the poems that Archambeau quotes as evidence of Auden's 'Greek' approach to nature, since they stand outside the dualities of sentimentality and ecopoetry, and of course laziness and impatience, that are so prominent in 'Kairos and Logos'.

Christian story of Creation and an etymological reference to the Germanic pantheon (Friday being the 'day of *Frig*', wife of Odin),⁵² this eccentric periphrasis remains firmly rooted in a human perspective on time.⁵³ In other words, the Auden of the late 40s and early 50s has more confidence in his ability to 'preserve and express' in language, despite and through the limitations of its historicity, the fact that 'nature is a realm of sacramental analogies'. This confidence is one of gnomic simplicity:

at all times it is good to praise the shining earth,
dear to us whether we choose our
duty or do something horrible. ('Ischia', 543–45)

And sometimes of conversational ease:

[...] it's as well at times
To be reminded that nothing is lovely,
Not even in poetry, which is not the case. ('Plains', 565–67)

Alongside the broad and rather theoretical acceptance of the relation between verbal creation and Creation – which is reminiscent of Auden's lecturing style – are more personal responses to natural environments. It is in these personal responses that the weight of responsibility is felt, through etymology, to 'preserve and express' the sacramental analogies that nature represents for him.

Auden famously feels his own natural environment is a limestone landscape. When he tries 'to imagine a faultless love / Or the life to come' ('In Praise of Limestone'), or indeed when he looks longingly out of an airport window ('In Transit', 539–40), this is the landscape he sees. 'In Praise of Limestone' describes the human scale of limestone features, their 'short distances and definite places', which may be adapted to

⁵² 'Friday', *ODEE*.

⁵³ This phrase was perhaps inspired by Gerald Heard's chart showing 'the development of human culture and human psychic evolution' through periods labelled 'Miocene and Pliocene', 'Pleistocene', 'Holocene', and so on. *The Social Substance of Religion*, pp. 14–15.

human designs by ‘ingenious but short steps’ (540). And ‘ingenious but short steps’ are all that is required to note etymologies that connect natural to human meanings in Auden’s poem:

Watch, then, the band of rivals as they climb up and down
Their steep stone gennels in twos and threes, at times
Arm in arm, but never, thank God, in step; [...] (541)

‘Gennel’ is a step away from ‘channel’, and has survived in dialect to mean ‘[a] long narrow passage between houses’, so that the human architecture of Ischia blends with its limestone landscape.⁵⁴ ‘Rival’ and ‘river’ are connected via ‘Middle French *rival* [...] and its etymon classical Latin *rīvālis* (originally) person living on the opposite bank of a stream from another, person who is in pursuit of the same object as another < *rīvus* stream’.⁵⁵ In its attempt to preserve ‘rival’, Auden’s ‘band of rivals’ actually denies the modern sense of the word; there is camaraderie rather than antagonism among them – but the modern sense remains as a vague threat. There are numerous hints at the natural origins of human behaviours throughout the ‘Bucolics’. Auden invokes the etymology of ‘rival’ to imply that language has been determined by nature, and so the words used to describe people once described them as elements in nature.⁵⁶ ‘In Transit’ makes a river the direct cause of antagonism, as ‘an ancient / Feud re-opens with the debacle of a river’ (540). The first meaning of ‘debacle’ in English was the breaking up of river ice in spring, which thereby separates rivals – but there is also a debacle in the more usual current sense, given that this all it takes for feuds to gain traction.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ ‘Gennel, *n.*’, *OED*.

⁵⁵ ‘Rival, *n.*² and *adj.*’, *OED*.

⁵⁶ See also ‘River Profile’ (806–07): once the river reaches ‘a size to be named’ it becomes ‘the cause of / dirty in-fighting among rival agencies’.

⁵⁷ ‘Debacle, *n.*’, *OED*.

The end of 'In Praise of Limestone' clearly states what is faintly ominous in Auden's literal etymological use of the word 'rival': that nature controls our behaviour. '[T]his land is not the sweet home that it looks', not because it is ultimately Other, but because it is so immediate and so part of the human myth that it defies both the poet's 'earnest habit of calling / The sun the sun' and the scientist's concern for 'Nature's / Remotest aspects' (542). In the lecture 'The Poet and the City', Auden explained that one of the difficulties for modern poets is that 'there is no longer a nature "out there" to be truly or falsely imitated' because modern science has destroyed the kind of personal faith in the experience of nature that is the subject of 'In Praise of Limestone'.⁵⁸ His etymological diction in this poem is a different challenge to such experience, displacing the need to connect with nature with a need to assert independence from it. This, he writes, is a 'Common Prayer':

Not to be left behind, not, please! to resemble
The beasts who repeat themselves, or a thing like water
Or stone whose conduct can be predicted, (542)

The word 'conduct', like 'rivals' and 'gennels', has human and non-human meanings in its etymology, suggested by the poem in its earlier use of the word 'conduit'. The irony is that 'conduct' is used prosopopoeically here; the meaning of 'human behaviour' is more obvious than that of 'liquid moving through a channel'.⁵⁹ Like 'the lunatic agitation of the sea', the word's progression from its original natural meaning to a human meaning is reversed, pre-empting the description of 'The blessed' who 'will not care what angle they are regarded from, / Having nothing to hide' (542). But this conclusion glosses over the difficulties of experiencing nature as 'a realm of sacramental analogies', and specifically

⁵⁸ 'The Poet and the City', in Auden, *The Dyer's Hand*, pp. 72–89 (p. 78).

⁵⁹ 'Conduct, *n.*¹, III 9, *OED*.

of representing this experience through a language aware of its own historicity. The oddness of the 'band of rivals', 'the debacle of a river', and the 'conduct' of stone constructs a tension between preserving and expressing the ways nature has been used to represent humanity. This tension filters through to the consummation of the analogy: Auden's love of limestone landscapes helps him 'to imagine a faultless love', but etymology keeps him and his readers conscious of the fact that this love is based on an analogy of the faulty with the faultless.

The end of 'In Praise of Limestone' is thus similar to that of 'Amor Loci' (779–80), another poem about Auden's personal 'sacred landscape' that is clearer about the tension in the sacramental analogy: 'How but with some real focus / of desolation / could I, by analogy, / imagine a Love / that [...] / does not abandon?' (780). The 'Bucolics', in contrast, contemplate landscapes that repel Auden as well as those he admires, and often end in a bathetic recourse to a theoretical faith in sacramental analogies, like that quoted above from 'Plains'. But this bathos is only one element in the drama of what Auden called '[t]he relation of man as a history-making person to nature'; etymology is another, standing as it does both for the 'history-making person' and for the relations established with nature through history.⁶⁰ Again, the sacramental aspect of nature is important here. The series originally carried this epigraph, which is listed as a 'Short' in the *Collected Poems*:

Fair is Middle-Earth nor changes, though to Age,
Raging at his uncomeliness
Her wine turn sour, her bread tasteless. (571)

⁶⁰ From the sleeve-note for a recording of 'Bucolics'. Quoted in Fuller, p. 443.

‘Middle-Earth’ – a term with a significant history for Auden, from his Anglo-Saxon studies to his admiration for Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* trilogy⁶¹ – is the bearer of sacraments which man, because he is a ‘history-making person’ and therefore subject to history, cannot always appreciate even with the knowledge that ‘Fair is Middle-Earth nor changes’. But the first ‘Bucolics’ poem, ‘Winds’, suggests poetry may provide an alternative to the history-making activity of verbal creation. It addresses the ‘Goddess of winds and wisdom’ on behalf of the poet:

Let him feel You present,
That every verbal rite
May be fittingly done,
And done in anamnesis
Of what is excellent
Yet a visible creature,
Earth, Sky, a few dear names. (558)

For the Auden of the ‘Bucolics’, poetic representations of nature should be ‘done in anamnesis’, like a Christian sacrament or a Platonic re-awakening of primitive knowledge.⁶² The ‘verbal rite’ is also ‘done in anamnesis’ of linguistic history (as discussed in Chapter 3), so that every word is understood to be a significant repetition of a past usage. This is, of course, how a few names become ‘a few dear names’. By invoking etymology, however, Auden’s poem is able to show that each iteration introduces differences that are significant because they both preserve the discontinuity and express the continuity in the ‘relation of man as a history-making person to nature’.

Preservation and expression are immediately put into conflict with the ritualistic revival of an etymology at the beginning of the second of the ‘Bucolics’, ‘Woods’ (558–60):

⁶¹ Carpenter, p. 115.

⁶² ‘Anamnesis, *n.*’, *OED*; Plato, *Meno and Phaedo*, ed. by D. N. Sedley and Alex Long (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 15 (81c-d).

Sylvan meant savage in those primal woods
 Piero di Cosimo so loved to draw, (558)

As in the case of 'rival', the etymology of 'savage' shows an environment used to define a human condition. Auden gives this information as an interpretation of Piero di Cosimo's painting 'The Forest Fire', but 'sylvan meant savage' for enough other people to lead to the invention of the word 'savage', long before Piero di Cosimo (for whom the connection would have been clearer in Italian *selva*, 'woods', and *selvaggia*, 'savage'). The etymological emphasis makes this more than an unusual way of saying the artist used a traditional symbol, however, because it touches on the fact of obsolescence and, with it, the discontinuity that makes the preserving activity of the 'verbal rite' necessary. Remembering the conjunction of 'sylvan' and 'savage' also means keeping in mind how they have diverged – 'sylvan' meant something else before 'savage' was invented, and it means something different now that 'savage' exists.⁶³ Auden asks readers to remember a time before the word 'savage' existed, but of course this is impossible, not least because he needs to use the word to make such a request. This is an instance of the self-inwoven etymology, which acts as a reminder that although etymologies are preserved and accessible, they cannot be reconciled with their reflexes and therefore have a riddling relationship with them. In Auden's 'Woods', the self-inwoven etymology links nature to the human condition while disclosing the obsolescence of this link, making the poetic 'rite' of recovering the etymology necessary.

Auden shows that the connection people have to 'primal woods' is important because it was the place where culture began, making it possible to look back and call

⁶³ This is a complicated reworking of Horace's famous analogy of language and forest: 'Words with the Leaves of Trees a semblance hold / In this respect, where every year the old / Fall off, and new ones in their places grow'. From a translation by John Oldham (published 1684), in Horace, *Horace in English*, ed. by D.S. Carne-Ross and Kenneth Haynes (London: Penguin, 1996), p. 458.

that life 'savage'. The etymological riddle of the 'verbal rite' looks back on the original riddle of the invention of language from a calmer time, when 'sylvan nature' is not occupied by savages but picknickers and philologists. Riddles are still found in the forest: the woodpecker is 'Pan's green father', who 'raps out / A burst of undecipherable Morse', and 'A fruit in vigor or a dying leaf' does not merely fall but 'Utters its private idiom for descent' (559; the etymological tension in 'utter' here is the same as that described above, in *For the Time Being*). The riddles in these 'Old sounds' – that is, the unresolvable quality of their meaningfulness – can 're-educate an ear grown coarse', suggesting that woods are now a place to escape a new kind of savagery. Even an expert can 'relax' in this atmosphere of known unknowns:

And where should an austere philologist
Relax but in the very world of shade
From which the matter of his field was made. (559)

As well as recalling the etymological connection of 'book' and 'beech', the polysemy of 'matter' and 'field' are reminiscent of the Anglo-Saxon 'bookworm' riddle.⁶⁴ The process of making an abstract word from a concrete name (such as 'savage' from 'sylvan' or 'rival' from 'river') is likened, by the riddling metaphor, to the physical process of making paper and books from wood. In a very literal sense, then, 'A culture is no better than its woods' (560): philology needs wood for books, but it also needs a nature to represent, surroundings from which to create the 'matter' of language.

There are more etymological riddles in the other 'Bucolics', though they are less explicit. In 'Lakes' (562–63), 'Sly Foreign Ministers' are said to have 'physical compassion' when walking together around a lake, thereby encouraging an absent emotional

⁶⁴ See Riddle 45 in *The Old English Riddles of the Exeter Book*, ed. by Craig Williamson (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977), pp. 97, 285–86; 'Book', *ODEE*.

compassion (562; the word's Latin root, *compati*, means 'suffer with').⁶⁵ In a nightmare in 'Plains', the speaker is lost 'Like Tarquin ravished by his post-coital sadness' (567), reprising the etymological sense of 'sadness' ('satisfaction') found in 'Our Hunting Fathers' while reflecting a very human disappointment (and innuendo) in 'what peaks come down to': 'a mere substance' of clay or gravel plains (565). But do these riddles make the 'Bucolics' a series of 'exercises in viewing landscapes' rather than serious pastoral poetry? They are certainly more concerned with human perspectives than with nature's otherness, evading the complications of a 'verbal creation' in Creation in favour of the formalities of a 'verbal rite'. Perhaps the best answer is in the history of the word 'landscape' itself. It originally meant 'a picture representing natural inland scenery', but it is now also used, as in 'limestone landscape', for the scenery itself rather than its representation.⁶⁶ Auden showed he was interested in this difference early on, by naming a poem after a recently coined term in art history: '*paysage moralisé*' and 'landscape' were imported into English three centuries apart but under very similar circumstances.⁶⁷ They describe 'exercises in viewing landscapes' in that they are terms for artistic techniques, but they also imply an object being represented that, in the case of 'landscape', has staked its own claim to the word. It is worth comparing this etymological development with Auden's account of the origin of language in the early essay on 'Writing': the desire to 'make connection' with the world, to represent it in human terms, eventually leads to the invention of a name for something in the world.

⁶⁵ 'Compassion', *OED*.

⁶⁶ 'Landscape, n.', *OED*.

⁶⁷ The *OED* does not include an entry for *paysage moralisé* but it is a common enough term in art criticism. It was coined in 1936 by Erwin Panofsky; Auden renamed the 1933 poem previously known by its first line, 'Hearing of harvest rotting in the valleys', '*Paysage Moralisé*' in 1945. Erwin Panofsky, 'The Early History of Man in Two Cycles of Paintings by Piero di Cosimo', in *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance*, ed. by Benjamin Nelson (London: Harper & Row, 1972), pp. 33–67 (p. 64); Patricia Emison, 'The *Paysage Moralisé*', *Artibus et Historiae*, 16.31 (1995), 125–137 (p. 125).

For 'landscape', the process is not complete – its original meaning is not obsolete, though a discontinuity is already perceptible in its polysemy – and it is thus the best name for the space between nature 'out there' and represented nature occupied by Auden's 'verbal rites'.

The Poetry of Naming

All Auden's landscapes, then, are implicit instances of the frontier country that was the explicit setting for so much of his early poetry. They all recall the circumstances in which they first became the settings for stories, with the invention of language, and then the symbols of 'spiritual facts', with the Incarnation. The etymologies in these landscapes, in their relation to current meanings, echo the discontinuities both events represent in the world. In the late poem 'Aubade' (881–82), set on the boundary between night and day, the speaker is 'Beckoned anew to a World / where wishes alter nothing' both by a personification of the dawn and, etymologically, by the 'beacon' of its light: and it is a sign with obvious religious significance.⁶⁸ 'Aubade', however, is careful to show that a faith in nature as a realm of sacramental analogies need not obscure the discontinuity between nature outside and inside language:

Out there, to the Heart, there are
no dehumanised Objects,
each one has its Proper Name. (881)

The view of 'Out there' and the qualification 'to the Heart' together confirm what landscapes mean to Auden. They do not describe a conflict or a chasm to be bridged between the human and the non-human: the distinction, irrelevant anyway 'to the

⁶⁸ 'Beckon', *ODEE*.

Heart', is between the human and the 'dehumanised'. Instead, they set out the circumstances of a 'verbal rite'. Auden's capitalised nouns are ceremonious and abstract, showing this to be an 'exercise' in viewing 'landscape' in both senses discussed above. This formality recognises that man is 'a linguist who is never at home in Nature's grammar' ('Unpredictable but Providential', 876–77), without denying the relevance of 'the Heart' using its own grammar to represent Nature.

The discontinuity theory of the origin of language influenced Auden's poetry, both as subject matter and in his etymologically aware diction, from the beginning. When he returned to Christianity, the doctrine of the Incarnation contributed to his ideas about the discontinuity between human, historical language and the ahistorical existence of both nature and God, and it also introduced an imperative to interpret nature as 'a realm of sacramental analogies'. The natural conclusion of the discontinuity theory, as Emerson suggested, is that it takes a 'stroke of genius' to make the leap into language by giving names to things that then become current. Auden, along with Emerson and many others, characterises this genius as poetic: in 'Making, Knowing and Judging', he writes that 'Adam plays the role of the Proto-poet' before tracing his own poetic ability to a childish belief that '[a] word like *pyrites*, for example, was for me, not simply an indicative sign; it was the Proper Name of a Sacred Being'.⁶⁹ The poetic aspect of the creation of language is mixed up with the notion of poetic representation as a kind of ritual naming, providing access to Proper Names – what might be called *etumos logos*, 'true speech' or indeed a 'true name'. According to Auden, this is an error, a misjudgement of sacramental analogies caused by laziness; but it is an error that defines poetic representation:

⁶⁹ Auden, 'Making, Knowing and Judging', in *The Dyer's Hand*, p. 34.

In poetry the rite is verbal; it pays homage by naming. I suspect that the predisposition of a mind towards the poetic medium may have its origin in error. A nurse, let us suppose, says to a child, 'Look at the moon!' The child looks and for him this is a sacred encounter. In his mind the word 'moon' is not a name of a sacred object but one of its most important properties and, therefore, numinous. The notion of writing poetry cannot occur to him, of course, until he has realized that names and things are not identical and that there cannot be an intelligible sacred language, but I wonder if, when he has discovered the social nature of language, he would attach such importance to one of its uses, that of naming, if he had not previously made this false identification.⁷⁰

Etymology plays a significant role in Auden's poetic realisation, and ritualisation, of this 'error'. Going back to obsolete meanings of words is a way of repeating the discontinuity language established between people and the world, but it also reveals riddling relationships between cognates, etyma, and reflexes that, because they must remain unresolved, manage to gesture towards some meaning in the world that exists outside of human history – an '[un]intelligible sacred language'. In the end, Auden's *paysages etymologisés* are concerned less with the history of individual words than with the world-changing events that brought history and then divinity into nature: the invention of language and the Incarnation.

⁷⁰ Auden, 'Making, Knowing and Judging', in *The Dyer's Hand*, pp. 57–58.

5. Lyric Diction in J. H. Prynne

Every time an etymology is invoked, the possibility that it is actually a return to an *etumos logos*, or 'true name', must be negotiated – even if the possibility is ignored or dismissed.¹ Professional etymologists, however, are no longer concerned with the *etumos logos*. In *OED2*, for instance, there was no indication that a literal etymological sense of 'etymology' even existed, and though *OED3* lists '[t]he process or practice of tracing the origin of a word so as to explain what is considered to be its true literal meaning' as sense 2a, it adds the following note:

The idea that a word's origin conveys its true meaning (cf. discussion at etymon n.) has become progressively discredited since the 18th cent. with the increased study of etymology as a linguistic science (see sense 5). It is now sometimes referred to as the etymological fallacy.²

This exorcism of the etymology of 'etymology' from etymology is very much the legacy of Saussure, who isolated his own etymological work from his founding precepts of synchronic linguistics.³ But however scientific, abstract, and metalinguistic modern etymology claims to be, it cannot avoid the issue of whether it might be giving credence to obsolete forms and meanings as instances of true names simply by invoking them. Resisting the etymological fallacy means taking full account of obsolescence, so that reconstructing a word's etymology does not recover a historical continuity but resolves a discontinuity. There is an undeniable parallel between this act and the desire to resolve

¹ As Jean Paulhan writes, 'l'étymologie fait sa propre réclame' ('etymology is its own advertisement'). Jean Paulhan, 'Alain, ou la preuve par l'étymologie', in *Oeuvres Complètes*, 5 vols (Paris: Cercle du livre précieux, 1966), III, 261–303 (p. 265).

² 'Etymology, n.', *OED*.

³ See Derek Attridge, 'Language as History/History as Language: Saussure and the Romance of Etymology', in *Peculiar Language: Literature as Difference from the Renaissance to James Joyce* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 90–126.

the original discontinuity caused by the invention of language as a tool of representation. That is, the hope of the *etumos logos* is a vital if unspoken motivation for precisely the kind of etymology that would deny the notion of true names in favour of a scientific, abstract distinction between obsolete and current language. Dictionaries and linguistic studies put this fact to one side, but etymological poetry confronts it. What is more, the *etumos logos* raises a specific question about the link between poetry and etymology: if all language is ‘fossil poetry’, then what relation does it bear to poetry in the making?⁴

Ralph Waldo Emerson’s definition of language as ‘fossil poetry’ neatly captures the problem of the parallel between poetry and etymology. The *etumos logos* has a rightness that can be labelled ‘poetic’; poetry is profound in a way that suggests it lies at the root of all language. Both discourses are understood to be privileged modes of representation: etymology offers the hope that word and world were commensurate in the past and that echoes of such a perfect language may be heard today; poetry similarly claims – or aims – ‘to see the object as it really is’.⁵ Neither can fulfil their promise, however, because to do so would involve denying that language changes – that etymologies are obsolete and that poetic language is tied to the fortunes of ordinary language. The terms of the ‘fossil poetry’ metaphor soon become difficult to distinguish in the midst of all these parallels. Recalling and reformulating Emerson’s argument, Martin Heidegger proves this by defining poetry as living etymology:

Mortal speech is a calling that [...] bids thing and world to come. The purely bidden in mortal speech is what is spoken in the poem. Poetry proper is never merely a higher mode (*melos*) of everyday language. It

⁴ Ralph Waldo Emerson, ‘The Poet’, in *The Annotated Emerson*, ed. by David Mikics (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), pp. 199–222 (p. 209).

⁵ Matthew Arnold, ‘On Translating Homer’, in *On the Classical Tradition*, ed. by R. H. Super, *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold* I (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960), pp. 97–216 (p. 140).

is rather the reverse: everyday language is a forgotten and therefore used-up poem, from which there hardly resounds a call any longer.⁶

Emerson and Heidegger both use the metaphor of etymology as poetry/poetry as etymology to talk about the power of naming. But what happens when words come under the influence of both poetry *and* etymology? For instance, a short poem by Percy Bysshe Shelley known by its first line, 'One word is too often profaned', explicitly refers to an intention to represent emotions in a truer way, before inflecting a familiar poetic image with an etymological perspective. The word 'too often profaned' is 'love': the speaker 'can give not what men call love', instead asking the hearer to accept 'the desire of the moth for the star / Of the night for the morrow'.⁷ The reinterpretation of the speaker's feelings as a natural, even inevitable event is matched by the etymological reinterpretation of the word 'desire', which was (and is) widely believed to come from Latin *de + siderare*, 'from the stars'.⁸ The etymological poem 'is a calling' not only to the world but also to the fossilised, forgotten, and used-up poem 'from which there hardly resounds a call any longer'. As such, etymological poetry confronts the very fact of language change that prevents either discourse fulfilling its promise of an uncomplicated, unqualified way of representing the world.

According to J. H. Prynne's critical concept of 'mental ears', as discussed in Chapter 2, all poetry is etymological poetry: in the patterning of word sounds, their histories are 'neither invented nor discovered, but disclosed'.⁹ This makes etymology an effect of lyric, in the sense that it relates sense and sound and, crucially, its disclosures

⁶ Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 208.

⁷ *The Golden Treasury: Of the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language*, ed. by Francis Turner Palgrave, new edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 198–99.

⁸ 'Desiderate, v.', *OED*.

⁹ J. H. Prynne, 'Mental Ears and Poetic Work', *Chicago Review*, 55.1 (2010), 126–57 (p. 138).

are a form of address. It is lyric poetry that Heidegger thinks about as the root of all language, and Prynne analyses in his many etymologically informed commentaries. Shelley's poem has long been valued as a prime example of the genre, too, finding a place in Francis T. Palgrave's influential anthology *The Golden Treasury* (first published in 1861 and reprinted many times).¹⁰ Heidegger's concept of 'disclosure' – which is not unlike the 'purely bidden' – is certainly at work in Prynne's etymological theory of lyric, but as Richard Owens perceives, Prynne associates poetry and etymology very differently:

Here we find a bold inversion of the Heideggarian sense of language as fossilized poetry – that is, for Prynne it is precisely the deeply sedimented character of language as it develops across millennia that creates the conditions for poetry. In this formulation there can be no return to the originary ground of language. Nor can we recreate a prelapsarian space for language through the liberation of signifier from signified.¹¹

As a critic, Prynne apparently avoids the potential conflict between fossil poetry and poetry in the making by showing them to be interdependent. In emphatically etymological poetry, however, the 'inversion' can never be as complete as Owens or Prynne himself suggest: the prior poetic value of etymology is inescapable whenever emphasis is put on the linguistic past. Though the depth and density of the sediment precludes 'the originary ground of language' and 'the liberation of signifier from signified', it cannot rule out the possibility of fossil poetry. The hope of finding something of special value in the 'deeply sedimented character of language' is what makes it worth excavating for poets such as Auden, Prynne, and Muldoon. All three treat this hope as a kind of pedantry, while simultaneously understanding it as symptomatic of a serious

¹⁰ See note 7.

¹¹ Richard Owens, 'Incommensurable Magnitudes', Paper delivered at a conference on *Poetry and Revolution*, Birkbeck College, 25–27 May 2012, <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/cprc/events/Richard_Owens_-_Poetry_and_Revolution_conference_paper.pdf>.

desire for truth in language. Auden is the most serious of the three, and Muldoon the most pedantic. Prynne does not have Auden's mystical religious convictions or Muldoon's speculative flexibility; he feels the weight of this hope the most. In 'Love in the Air', for example, he writes that 'the sediment on which we stand / was *too much*, and unasked for'.¹² But 'Nearly too much / is, well, nowhere near enough' (307), to use an oft-quoted phrase from *Down Where Changed* (1979; 293–310), since the *etumos logos* must remain forever out of reach. While the historical weight of language 'creates the conditions' for Prynne's poetry, it can also be an unwieldy burden.

The burden of etymology, and of the hope for an *etumos logos*, has a significant part to play in Prynne's lyricism, and specifically his use of a traditional lyric diction of stars, skies, sweetness, gold, pearls, music, and charm. He invites etymology to weigh on this diction, just as Shelley does in the poem quoted above, but the two poets' intentions are markedly different. For Shelley, etymology lends a feeling of authenticity to the otherwise highly conventional performance of a 'concentrated expression of individual emotion', thus contributing to both the intersubjective and subjective aspects of lyric.¹³

Prynne's aim, however, is to broaden the horizon of this conversation:

It has mostly been my own aspiration, for example, to establish relations not personally with the reader, but with the world and its layers of shifted but recognisable usage; and thereby with the reader's own position within this world.¹⁴

The careful phrasing of this statement is significant: what does it mean to say that relations can be established 'with the world' if there is also the question of 'its layers of

¹² J. H. Prynne, *Poems*, 2nd edn (North Fremantle, Western Australia: Fremantle Arts Centre Press; Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 2005), p. 56. Further references to this book are given in the text.

¹³ This definition of lyric comes from Scott Brewster, *Lyric* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 1.

¹⁴ From J. H. Prynne, Unpublished Letter to Peter Riley (15 September 1985), quoted as an epigraph to Peter Riley, *Reader* (London: the author, 1992), [n.p.].

shifted but recognisable usage'? Such a project has to be 'aspiration[al]', like the search for the *etumos logos*, because it asks too much and therefore not enough. The etymological slant Prynne puts on his lyric diction functions like this addition of 'layers of shifted but recognisable usage', giving an alternative perspective on how the conventionality of lyric – its currency *and* its datedness – affects its representation of the world.¹⁵ From the traditional imagery of his early poetry to the lyric moments that appear even in his most obscure later works, and from his fragmentary quotation of famous and obscure lyrics to the sustained lyricism of *Pearls That Were* (1999; 452–74), Prynne's use of conventional lyric diction is shadowed by etymology. The result is a revolution in poetic representation, as the *etumos logos* occupies a site of resistance to the transcendence of lyric, allowing it to flaunt its conventionality while keeping it tied to the hope of something more.

Naming Stars

Inviting etymology, and therefore the idea of an *etumos logos*, into a poem will necessarily change the function of its names in general. For Auden, invoking etymologies is a way of repeating the discontinuity between human history and the timelessness of nature and God; it is not the true name but the historical separation from anything that could stand as a true name that helps his poetry to 'pay homage by naming'.¹⁶ The ritualised aspect of this homage is also evident in his reverential treatment of abstract nouns like 'love', 'history', 'world', 'hope', and 'time', which are often capitalised in his

¹⁵ It should be noted that Prynne recognises more usages than most, with the help of the *OED*, the *ODEE*, and Julius Pokorny's dictionary of Indo-European; see discussion in Chapter 2. Julius Pokorny, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 2 vols (Bern: Francke, 1959).

¹⁶ W. H. Auden, 'Making, Knowing and Judging', in *The Dyer's Hand; And, Other Essays* (New York: Random House, 1962), pp. 31–60 (p. 57).

later poetry, and in his characteristic way with the definite article: 'To-day the deliberate increase in the chances of death, / The conscious acceptance of guilt in the necessary murder' in 'Spain' is a famous example.¹⁷ Prynne's early poetry echoes Auden in many ways, not least in this attitude to names and their historicity. Such an echo may be heard between Auden's 'Pliocene Friday' and Prynne's phrase 'the Pleistocene is our current sense' ('The Glacial Question, Unsolved', 65–66),¹⁸ as both poets adopt terminology usually reserved for geological periods to describe human history – complicating the idea of a 'current sense'. The Audenesque definite article is also evident in Prynne, for instance in the first stanza of 'Sketch for a Financial Theory of the Self' (19–20):

1. The qualities as they continue are the silk
under the hand; because their celestial
progress, across the sky, is so hopeless & so
to be hoped for. I hope for silk, always, and
the strands are not pure though the name
is so. The name is the sidereal display, it
is what we know we cannot now have.
The last light is the name it carries,
it is this that binds us to our unbroken trust.

Like Auden, Prynne accepts that there is no 'true name', but is nevertheless bound to the idea of it as 'what we *know* we cannot now have'. 'The name' is no more than a 'sidereal display', starlight that can only be seen long after the fact. The riddle here is that the disjunction between the absent Anglo-Saxon noun 'star' and the Latinate adjective 'sidereal', the noun form of which was not borrowed into English, suggests an *etymos logos*. Of course, 'we *know* we cannot now have' the Latin noun *sidus* – and in any case it

¹⁷ W. H. Auden, *Another Time* (New York: Random House, 1940), pp. 89–92. See G. Rostrevor Hamilton, *The Tell-Tale Article: A Critical Approach to Modern Poetry* (London: Heinemann, 1949), pp. 5, 41–50.

¹⁸ 'Winds', in W. H. Auden, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), pp. 556–58.

is no more or less of a 'display' than 'star' – yet it is this certainty that lets it function as a true name in these lines.¹⁹

The *etymos logos* suggested by 'sidereal', which is stable because obsolete, contrasts with the way 'Sketch for a Financial Theory of the Self' proceeds by continually redefining its important terms. Sometimes this feels unnecessary, for example when the implication of the word 'hopeless' is spelled out in 'to be hoped for', and when 'celestial / progress' has its etymological suggestiveness (from Latin *caelum*, 'sky') defused by the addition of 'across the sky'.²⁰ But these redefinitions quickly become confusing: how can it be that 'the stars are names and the / names are *necessarily* false'? The steady pace secured by the repetition of the definite article, the numbering of stanzas, and phrases that take stock of the argument ('So then'; 'That much / is trickery'; 'How could this be clearer?'; 'What follows is') belie this restlessness of the poem's terms, giving shape to an argument to which it cannot commit. Similarly, there is a contrast between subtle, spaced-out sound patterns and denser, more insistent ones. In the first stanza, for instance, 'hand' and 'strands' rhyme mid-line, three lines apart, as if woven into a subtle pattern; in between this rhyme, however, 'progress', 'across', and 'hopeless' run through a single line. This over-structuring impulse reaches a peak in the fifth stanza, with a bold statement of structuralist dogma:

but the *names*,
do you not
see, are just
the tricks we
trust, which
we choose.

¹⁹ 'Sideral', *ODEE*.

²⁰ 'Celestial, *adj.* and *n.*', *OED*.

The argument is undermined by a reminder, in ‘do you not see’, of what can (*‘sidus’*) and cannot (*‘star’*) be seen in the name that is ‘the sidereal display’. Furthermore, the redefinition of *‘names’* here is problematic; how can something be ‘trust[ed]’ once defined as a ‘trick’, however closely they are linked by prosody? The principle of arbitrariness is in fact overstated throughout the poem. From the emphasis of *‘know’*, *‘necessarily’*, and ‘unbroken trust’ to the repeated and tangled use of the copula, the ‘tricks’ presented are not only those of the linguistic sign itself but also those of lyric persuasion.

There are two kinds of trick in ‘Sketch’, then: the name as an arbitrary sign, and the motivated poetic arrangement of signs that instils ‘trust’ in names. Together they set out the poem’s ‘financial theory’ – recalling Saussure’s metaphor of the linguistic sign as a coin:²¹

the absurd trust in value is the pattern of
bond and contract and interest [...]

Again, however, an *etumos logos* interrupts the relation between arbitrariness and the poetic ‘pattern’. The Latin *absurdus*, meaning ‘out-of-tune’ (from *surdus*, ‘deaf’ or ‘mute’), implies that the ‘trust in value’ is deaf to its own accretive ‘pattern of / bond and contract and interest’.²² The etymological use of ‘absurd’ is ironic, too, since deafness to the *etumos logos* is a key principle of the ‘trust in value’. Hearing this etymology means reinterpreting the poetic patterns that shore up the ‘absurd trust in value’: the overstatement now seems to be concealing something. ‘Sidereal’ obscures ‘star’ with *‘sidus’*, for example, and the alliteration of ‘trust’ and ‘trick’ masks the etymological

²¹ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*, ed. by Tullio de Mauro (Paris: Payot, 1972), pp. 159–60.

²² ‘Absurd, *adj.* and *n.*’, ‘Surd, *adj.* and *n.*’, *OED*.

connection of 'trust' and 'truth'. Etymology is a counterweight to the poem's tricks. By introducing the idea of an obsolete true name, its riddles work against the presentation of names as 'the tricks we / trust'. They thus prepare the final stanza's consoling vision of 'the name we will not lose to any possible stranger'.

If there are two kinds of trick in 'Sketch for a Financial Theory of the Self', then there are also two kinds of value: the arbitrary value of the linguistic sign that is deaf to all other values, and the poetic value of a language that is open to all motivated patterning. This poem's meditation on how to represent a star, its dense sound patterning, and its hopeful resolution all give it a value that might be described as 'lyrical'. At this point, the parallel between Prynne and Auden's approaches to naming in poetry become clear. Both feel the persistence of the *etumos logos* through the conventions of lyric poetry; both are like the child in Auden's story who makes the 'error' of believing that 'moon' is 'not a name of a sacred object but one of its most important properties and, therefore, numinous'.²³ Auden states that though this error must be corrected for poetry to be written, it is still an important inspiration.²⁴ Prynne's complex metaphor 'the last light is the name it carries', quoted above, also makes and mitigates this error by presenting 'the name' as both one of the most important properties of a star and, conversely, a burden on it. True names and arbitrary ones are required to interact when 'the stars are names and the / names are *necessarily* false'. For Prynne – at least in his early work – the error of invoking an *etumos logos*, as a guarantee of something that 'we *know* we cannot now have', can reinvest lyric and all its 'tricks' with etymological weight. This weight comes not only from historical depth, but also from the persistence of the idea of the true name

²³ W. H. Auden, 'Making, Knowing and Judging', p. 34.

²⁴ See discussion in Chapter 4.

despite, and because of, the certainty that etymologies are obsolete (therefore justifying synchronic arbitrariness).

Auden and Prynne both choose to address the issue of true names through the lyric convention of looking up at the night sky and wondering about how to represent it; they also both mix the Romantic symbolism of stars and moons with the scientific discourses of the space age (Prynne's response to the first photo of 'Earthrise', in 'The Ideal Star-Fighter', is particularly reminiscent of Auden's 'Moon Landing').²⁵ This, however, is where they diverge. Auden's naming practices are focused on the purpose of the 'verbal rite', on paying homage to nature and God; Prynne's explore the conventions of the rite itself and their transformative properties. As Anthony Mellors writes in an analysis of 'John in the Blooded Phoenix' (122), 'Prynne's writing demands sacred certainty while holding any systematic theology at bay: the phoenix *is* venerated as the icon of Christ but the emphasis is on the veneration rather than the Christianity'.²⁶ In 'Thoughts on the Esterházy Court Uniform' (99–100), too, emphasis is given to the abstract structure of ritual:

Again is the sacred
word, the profane sequence suddenly graced, by
coming back.

The words 'sacred', 'profane', and 'graced' together make the case for the special significance of '*Again*', but this abstraction conceals a different 'coming back' in the etymology of 'sequence'. From the Latin *sequi*, 'to follow', 'sequence' was first

²⁵ Prynne, *Poems*, pp. 165–66; W. H. Auden, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Edward Mendelson, rev. edn (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), pp. 843–44. See Joe Luna, 'The World Is For This: On the Poetry of Jonty Tiplady', *All Over the Grid*, 23 May 2012 <<http://fallopianyoutube.blogspot.co.uk/2012/05/world-is-for-this-on-poetry-of-jonty.html>>.

²⁶ Anthony Mellors, *Late Modernist Poetics: From Pound to Prynne* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 149.

introduced into English to designate ‘a composition [...] said or sung [...] after the Alleluia and before the Gospel’; in Prynne’s poem, it is temporarily brought back to its religious sense.²⁷ The modern word is ‘suddenly graced’ by the invocation of the *etumos logos*: ‘sequence’ is followed back. For Prynne, it is the ritual naming of things enshrined in poetic convention that necessitates this etymological approach. Etymology takes ritual naming to extremes, following conventions that are so distant they offer a whole new perspective on the instantly recognisable conventions of lyric poetry. With this distance, Prynne can ‘[hold] any systematic theology at bay’, as Mellors says, focusing with subtlety but certainty on ‘what we *know* we cannot now have’: the true name.

The vast distance between the poet and the stars he contemplates is a prime example of a lyric topos Prynne explores through etymology. It is a recurring image throughout *Kitchen Poems* (1968; 9–31), *The White Stones* (1969; 37–126), and *Brass* (1971; 149–79), often appearing in conjunction with cognates of Latin *sidus* such as ‘desire’ and ‘consider’. ‘The Western Gate’ (48), for instance, offers an etymological explanation of the lyric ritual of naming stars:

desire for a night sky
during the day too, since
the stars circle the hills &
our motives without reproach

In this very literal etymological use of ‘desire’, the *etumos logos* again suggests something ‘we *know* we cannot now have’, that is, ‘a night sky / during the day’, and a world where ‘our motives’ are always beyond ‘reproach’. The etymology expresses a desire to relinquish responsibility for desire, making explicit a current that runs under many famous lyrics about stars, including Shelley’s ‘One word is too often profaned’,

²⁷ ‘Sequence, *n.*’, II 7a, *OED*.

John Keats' 'Bright star, would I were steadfast as thou art', and William Wordsworth's Lucy poems.²⁸ In Prynne's poem, the *etumos logos* exerts an unassailable power over the modern word 'desire', leading it to an impossible conclusion. A similar effect is achieved in 'A Dream of Retained Colour' (103–04), where this power is enough that 'Starlight is the / new torture, seraphic host, punishment / of the visionary excess' – this time alluding to Milton's etymological use of the star image, which is more like Prynne's than any Romantic poem's.²⁹

The question is whether it is possible to take responsibility for the potential *etumos logos*, rather than relinquishing responsibility to it. This is the subject of 'Star Damage at Home' (108–09), in which a star is imagined 'amongst us and / fallen with hissing fury into the ground', no longer beyond reproach but insisting that 'we desire what we mean / & we must mean that'. In this instance of 'desire', the etymology is present but balanced by the current imperative to 'mean' desire, too. It thus supports Michael Kindellan's reading:

a glimpsed language of mechanical failure – 'a song like a glowing rivet strikes/ out of the circle' – combined with the frequent use of words and phrases associable with human conflict [...] bodes of damage *from* the heavens but inflicted by us upon ourselves.³⁰

Taking full responsibility for meaning involves accepting the parts of language that exist outside the language-user's experience; this is the force of 'what we *know* we cannot

²⁸ *The New Penguin Book of Romantic Poetry*, ed. by Jonathan Wordsworth and Jessica Wordsworth (London: Penguin, 2001), pp. 11–16, 440. 'Lucy' is probably a derivative of Latin *lux*, 'light', and of course recalls the morning star, or 'Lucifer'. 'Lucy', *A Dictionary of First Names*, ed. by Patrick Hanks and Flavia Hodges (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

²⁹ Milton invokes the etymological sense of 'desire' very literally in describing Satan's army's 'desire / to found this nether Empire'. John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. by Barbara Kiefer Lewalski (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), p. 45 (Book II, lines 295–96).

³⁰ Michael Kindellan, 'What Meaning Has in Charge: on Wordsworth, Pound and Prynne', *Études britanniques contemporaines*, 44 (2013) <<http://dx.doi.org/10.4000/ebc.544>>.

now have'. A comparable noun clause, similarly riddle-like in its definitiveness and indeterminacy, appears in 'Star Damage At Home':

[...] I
mean what the name has in its charge,
being not deceived by the dispersal which
sets it down.

'I mean' is ambiguous here, simultaneously taking responsibility for the statement ('I mean this, not that') and relinquishing control over it ('I mean whatever the name means'). The totality of 'what the name has in its charge' will always be beyond any individual use of it, yet still it binds the language-user as much as the arbitrary 'trust in tricks' (here exemplified by the trickery of a contrast between steadfast monosyllables and '[deceptive]', '[dispersed]' Latinate polysyllables). '[W]hat the name has in its charge' bypasses these questions of arbitrariness and motivation, encompassing all eventualities: all at once, the name is a mentalistic, arbitrary sign; a phonetic icon; a historical code; and even a property of the named thing itself. The speaker thus takes responsibility for a 'mean[ing]' that has endless ramifications but itself is unified, coherent, and binding – in other words, treating it as if it were an *etymos logos*. This is the definition of a lyricism that can observe 'The night is beautiful / with stars: we do not consider the end / which is a myth so powerful' (from 'Song in Sight of the World', 76–77). Attention is even diverted from 'the end' and back to the stars by the etymology of 'consider', which according to the *OED* was perhaps 'originally a term of astrology or augury', meaning 'with the stars'.³¹ The naming of the night 'beautiful / with stars' has everything 'in its charge' here, even the terms by which its 'end' is divined.

³¹ 'Consider, v.', *OED*.

The comprehensiveness of poetic language is a key argument in Prynne's 1999 lectures *Stars, Tigers and the Shape of Words*. He writes that though the principle of arbitrariness governs systematic linguistic theory, poetry concerns 'the language process in its largest sense', in which 'anything that *can* count towards meaning *may* do so'. The result is a 'playful over-reading' of 'Twinkle Twinkle Little Star' and 'Tiger, tiger, burning bright' that layers an 'adult', historically aware interpretation over a 'childish' one reliant on sound effects. This layering can shed light on certain phrases that have come under scrutiny so far in this investigation of Prynne's etymological relationship with names:

in the adjustment to childish comprehension of this little conundrum about why stars twinkle, the adult author allows 'wonder *at*' to lie just behind 'wonder *what*', in order that the growing child might become both well-informed about astronomy and *also* reverent towards the idea of a greater and invisible agency, one giving out smaller and visible signs for the guidance of the traveller through life.

In testing the limits of arbitrariness, Prynne's (over-)reading becomes disingenuous, taking responsibility but relinquishing control in the same way as the line it examines: 'how I wonder what you are'. The same duality has already been identified in two similar noun phrases in Prynne's poetry: 'what we *know* we cannot now have', and 'what the name has in its charge'. While 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star' and 'Tiger, tiger burning bright' are both 'riddles whose solution is given in advance', Prynne's early star poems are riddles about the name – the 'solution' – itself.³² They test themselves not against the principle of arbitrariness, but against the implications of the etymologies they invoke, and specifically those of the *etymos logos*.

³² J. H. Prynne, *Stars, Tigers and the Shape of Words: The William Matthews Lectures 1992 Delivered at Birkbeck College, London* (London: Birkbeck College, 1993), pp. 35, 1, 16, 17, 24.

The Lyric Moment

The riddle-like qualities of ‘Twinkle Twinkle Little Star’ and ‘Tiger, tiger, burning bright’ – their self-contained expressions of wonder – also make them exemplary lyrics. They describe a very particular relationship between a subject and the world, one that, as Prynne points out in his lecture ‘English Poetry and Emphatical Language’ (1988), ‘in our age may appear a serious weakness’ since the momentary expression of wonder ‘disrupts connectedness and representational reference, and indeed arbitrarily elevates the composing subject by attaching the power of preferential significance to the act of such disruption’.³³ Seventeen years previously, Prynne certainly held this opinion of what he terms ‘the mere lyric particular’, when he argued that Charles Olson in his epic *Maximus* poems – like Milton and Wordsworth – lets poetry ‘transmute itself beyond that point’.³⁴ In 1988, however, having admitted that he ‘should’ agree with Georg Lukacs’ comparable critique of the lyrical ‘great moment’, Prynne could no longer do so.³⁵ Instead, he remarks that the lyric moment has value as both personal expression and poetic convention. An even more complete justification appears in his 2007 commentary on Wordsworth’s ‘The Solitary Reaper’:

Thus by contrarian argument it may be contended that this kind of lyric poem is at this time specifically not a generalising instrument, but is working along the axis between the individual and the universal, that primal feeling strikes most fully and deeply when unmediated by ‘thick’ interpretation, and that instantly to provide an explanatory context would reduce the moment to a mere symptom or record-keeping; so that a poet even if possessed of explanatory insight might justly choose

³³ J. H. Prynne, ‘English Poetry and Emphatical Language’, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 74 (1988), 135–69 (p. 138).

³⁴ J. H. Prynne, ‘On *Maximus* IV, V, VI’, transcribed by Tom McGauley, *Iron*, 2 (October 1971), [n.p.].

³⁵ Prynne, ‘English Poetry and Emphatical Language’, p. 169. The quotation is from Georg Lukacs, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. by Anna Bostock (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), p. 63.

to hold to the moment and be pierced by it, disarmed from diagnosis of its wounding cause.³⁶

This is not an unequivocal defence of the lyric moment, but a shift in emphasis. Suspicion of 'the mere lyric particular' and its disruptive effect is deflected onto the prospect of disruption caused by 'an explanatory context' that would reduce the moment to 'a mere symptom or record-keeping'. That is to say, the lyric moment can successfully suspend 'its wounding cause' without being reductive, taking ownership of its disruptiveness in a way that justifies and respects the damage done to 'connectedness and representational reference' in the process. The earliest indications of such a lyric achievement in Prynne's poems are in the riddling phrases 'The name [...] / is what we *know* we cannot now have' and 'I / mean what the name has in its charge', both of which draw etymology and the *etymos logos* into the question of lyric responsibility.

The idea of the 'lyric moment' has rather a different definition in Prynne's poetry, however. Critics refer to his 'occasional lyric flourishes' (Steve Clark), 'lyric moments' (Ian Patterson, John Kinsella), and 'lyric gestures' (Ian Patterson), as well as 'sudden moments of lyric respite' (Neil Reeve and Richard Kerridge) – but as Reeve and Kerridge note, these are not 'self-sufficient or privileged moments, around which the world could be concentrically organized'.³⁷ Reeve and Kerridge are too quick, however, to let these moments 'arrive already implicated and mediated by a range of natural, social and economic processes external to them'. The first impression must rather be of

³⁶ J. H. Prynne, *Field Notes: 'The Solitary Reaper' and Others* (Cambridge: the author, 2007), p. 37.

³⁷ Steve Clark, 'Prynne and The Movement', *Jacket*, 24 (2003) <<http://jacketmagazine.com/24/clark-s.html>>; Ian Patterson, 'No Man Is an I: Recent Developments in the Lyric', in *The Lyric Poem: Formations and Transformations*, ed. by Marion Thain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 217–36 (pp. 227, 232); John Kinsella, 'Commentary on the Poem "Rich in Vitamin C" by J. H. Prynne', *Jacket*, 6 (1999) <<http://jacketmagazine.com/06/pryn-kins.html>> [accessed 12 September 2014]; N. H. Reeve and Richard Kerridge, *Nearly Too Much: The Poetry of J. H. Prynne* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996), pp. 69, 37.

recognisably lyrical elements, sometimes quoted, hedged in by contrasting, competing, and often unrecognisable discourses that do not mediate but isolate them.³⁸ This approach to lyric diction is notable throughout Prynne's oeuvre (with the important exception of *Pearls That Were*, discussed below):

[...] The absent
 sun (on the
 trees of the field) now does strike
 so gently
 on the whitened and uneven ice
 sweet day so calm
 the glitter is the war now released,
 I hear the guns for the first time
 (from 'On The Matter of Thermal Packing', 84–86)

Through the window the sky clears
 and in sedate attachment stands the order of battle,
 quiet as a colour chart and bathed
 by threads of hyaline and gold leaf.
 (from 'Treatment in the Field', 216)

What else null else just else if before
 out into the garden with overshoot, the
 moon is bright as snowy day. In broad
 strip neon it ranks as a perfect crime.
 (from *The Oval Window*, 325)

[...] Fresh choice but no leeway to get
 stultified relief throat vibration, held to the very life
 repack the spares grand flat; a brother shadow cultus
 soft sweet fury gums nodding milkwort in river-sway

For trigger defect damnable cladded. [...]
 (from *Acrylic Tips*, 542)

[...] What sense will
 to blink stop at stamen glow
 mine other time heart rushing afford to know, as yet the lark

³⁸ This is even more clearly the case when such moments appear to be tagged on to the end of poems. Wilkinson argues that 'the closing passages of [Prynne's] works [...] allow some horizon which if not transcendent [...] offers a little breathing space'. But the isolation of the 'breathing space' is here interpreted as claustrophobic, bringing lyricism back from the all-encompassing perspective of the 'horizon' it so readily occupies. John Wilkinson, *The Lyric Touch: Essays on the Poetry of Excess* (Cambridge: Salt Publishing, 2007), pp. 28–29.

rustles in ripe grain all the better expectancy, is under time
lays to angle way to day seen on overhead, [...] ³⁹

These lyric moments, signalled by conventional diction ('sweet', 'bathed', 'gold', 'bright', 'soft', 'glow'), go one step further than the avoidance of 'explanatory context'. Surrounded by contexts that threaten to explain them in wholly unlyrical ways, they refuse to be 'implicated and mediated', remaining isolated by their form of expression. An extreme example may be found in the double existence of 'hyaline' in 'Treatment in the Field', a poem about an experiment on the physiology of the ear: it is either a poetic term for 'the smooth sea, the clear sky, or any transparent substance' (following the use of Greek *hualinos* in Revelation 4:6; 15:2), or a biological one for cartilage, cells, or degenerating tissues resembling glass. ⁴⁰ 'Hyaline' is a reminder that Prynne's lyric diction should not be taken for granted: it should be read with the same scrupulousness as scientific diction is in poetry more generally. In just such a scrupulous essay, Michael Whitworth writes that '[a]ll language is marked by change, but the pace of change is not uniform across all aspect of language or across all specialised vocabularies'. ⁴¹ As Whitworth explains, the position of scientific diction in a language changes very quickly; lyric diction, however, appears to be almost static, caught in its history of transcendent 'moments'.

³⁹ From 'Along the Wall', in J. H. Prynne, *Sub Songs* (London: Barque, 2010), p. 21.

⁴⁰ 'Hyaline, *adj.* and *n.*', A, B, *OED*. The word is used, for example, by Rupert Brooke ('The Fish') and Howard Moss ('A Balcony with Birds'), but neither let it stand on its own; Brooke pairs it with 'translucency', Moss with 'transparencies'. Rupert Brooke, *Rupert Brooke: The Collected Poems*, ed. by Edward Marsh (London: Papermac, 1992), pp. 214–15; Howard Moss, *Selected Poems* (New York: Atheneum, 1971), p. 13.

⁴¹ Michael Whitworth, "'Strange Synthetic Perfumes": Investigating Scientific Diction in Twentieth-Century Poetry', in *Science in Modern Poetry: New Directions*, ed. by John Holmes (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), pp. 87–100 (p. 93).

Prynne the 'lyrical experimentalist' is here experimenting with the implications of a form that is short but sweet.⁴² Lyric is restricted or restrictive; it depends on deeply conventional, culturally specific meanings; and its value is somehow trapped in a very distinctive diction. But in Prynne's poetry the momentariness of lyric has less to do with its self-containment or completeness than its incompleteness: the endlessness of 'what the name has in its charge' is echoed in the ambiguous relation of his lyric moments to their would-be explanatory contexts. In his 2013 essay 'No Man Is an I: Recent Developments in the Lyric', Ian Patterson states that Prynne's 'lyric moments, plastic and volatile as they are, remain potential', since the subject is never unified enough to claim its perspective as incontrovertible.⁴³ Taking responsibility for disrupting representation with a lyric moment, however, also means deliberately holding back from such a claim. This does not mean the lyric moment is allowed to dissipate; if anything, it becomes all the more intense in failing to reach its potential. John Kinsella interrogates this contested lyric subjectivity still further when he writes that Prynne believes 'even that in the intimacy of the lyric moment, we have an obligation to recognise what is happening in the greater world'.⁴⁴ One important way Prynne fulfils this obligation is by showing how 'what is happening the greater world' is already implicated in 'the intimacy of the lyric moment' by virtue of the historicity of its language, and especially by its responsibility to the *etymos logos*, which is both the transcendent 'true name' of lyrical ritual naming and the notion that poetry encompasses 'the language process in its largest sense'.⁴⁵ In other

⁴² Rod Mengham and John Kinsella, 'An Introduction to the Poetry of J. H. Prynne', *Jacket*, 7 (1999) <<http://jacketmagazine.com/07/prynne-jk-rm.html>>.

⁴³ Patterson, p. 227.

⁴⁴ Kinsella; see note 36.

⁴⁵ Prynne, *Stars, Tigers*, p. 35.

words, the momentariness of lyric is both compromised and safeguarded when etymology is invited into its hallowed sphere.

The central problem for any interpretation of Prynne's lyricism is in understanding what these moments of clarity are doing in poetry that is otherwise so abstruse. Patrick McGuinness notes, pragmatically, that these are 'moments of visionary beauty, of a yearning or pressurised lyricism which will, despite their estranged and self-estranging contexts, constitute the first-time reader's more familiar point of entry'.⁴⁶ But this familiarity is problematic. In the introduction to the avant-garde poetry anthology *Conductors of Chaos*, which includes poems by Prynne, Iain Sinclair warns that '[i]f it comes too sweetly, someone is trying to sell you something'.⁴⁷ Sinclair himself is of course trying to sell a different idea, that so-called 'difficult' poetry can defend itself and the reader against such empty exchanges. This 'refusal of the facile', in Pierre Bourdieu's analysis, is always the basis of an aesthetics that supposes itself to be 'pure'. However:

The 'pure' gaze is a historical invention linked to the emergence of an autonomous field of artistic production, that is, a field capable of imposing its own norms on both the production and the consumption of its products.⁴⁸

From this perspective, Sinclair's notion of difficult poetry is understood to have sold the reader something already. The imposition comes in the lyrically charged phrase 'too sweetly', which insinuates that a taste for such poetry would be crudely sensual, or even childish. While Sinclair hints at the potentially vulgar interpretation of taste, Bourdieu's aim is unashamedly the 'barbarous reintegration of aesthetic consumption into the world

⁴⁶ Patrick McGuinness, 'Going Electric', *London Review of Books*, 22.17 (2000), 31–32 (p. 31).

⁴⁷ Iain Sinclair, Introduction to *Conductors of Chaos: A Poetry Anthology*, ed. by Iain Sinclair (London: Picador, 1996), pp. xiii–xx (p. xvii).

⁴⁸ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. by Richard Nice (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984), pp. 256, 3.

of ordinary consumption', in which aesthetic taste and sensory taste must be seen as continuous with each other and with economic processes.⁴⁹ Prynne's opinion in this debate is evident from a warning he gives against reading, or writing that encourages reading 'foolishly, for mere sweetness': like Bourdieu, he suggests that sweetness may be a broader concept than Sinclair assumes.⁵⁰ But it is also worth questioning why Sinclair and Prynne both phrase their judgments this way, in the light of the poetic and etymological heritage of 'sweetness'.

The qualifications of 'too sweetly' (Sinclair) and 'mere sweetness' (Prynne) attempt to define the power of the lyric moment created by the use of 'sweet'. This power comes from shortening the word's range to make it a cipher for poetry itself. In a characteristically elaborate manoeuvre, Prynne uses the word as a shorthand for just such a limited poetic perspective in 'As It Were an Attendant' (124–25): 'we converse about stars, starlight & their twinkle, / since sweetly it subsides'. Shortness *is* sweetness, then, but this makes the lingering poetic richness of 'sweetly' ironic, especially given the obvious allusion, the use of the ampersand, and the dense sibilance of these lines.⁵¹ Paradoxically, the word has become a shorthand precisely because of its historical richness – because it has had so much use in poems just like this one, which despite its confusing mixture of discourses includes the recognisable lyric topoi of reflections on the passage of time, a vision of a woman, graveyard meditations, and a prayer for a sleeping child. Prynne's use of 'sweetly' to describe the lyric moment attends to this paradox by which poetic conventions both repress and rely on their histories – this is the

⁴⁹ Bourdieu, p. 6.

⁵⁰ Prynne, *Field Notes*, p. 66.

⁵¹ See also the 'ardent sweet / relief of singularity', in which the lyric 'singularity' of 'sweet' paradoxically draws on the sounds of 'ardent' and 'relief', not to mention 'singularity' itself. From 'As Mouth Blindness', in Prynne, *Sub Songs*, pp. 5–6.

‘the acrid wavering of language, so full / of convenient turns of extinction’ (‘Break It’, 51).

Jeffery Masten’s study of ‘sweet’ as a form of address in Renaissance literature discovers a similar contrast between an epithet that simply signals a heightened lyrical language and a word with a relevant, active history:

What lingers in *sweet*, then – a very old English word, traceable back, through Old English and associated Teutonic uses, to a hypothesized Indo- European root? It is closely related to Greek verbs for “to rejoice” and “to please” and, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, to Latin *suavis* (sweet) and *suadere* (to advise), “properly, to make something pleasant to.” *Sweet* is thus related etymologically to *persuade* and its shortened early modern synonym, *suade*. Both *sweet* and *suade* are related to *suave*, which in early modern English signified “pleasing or agreeable to the senses *or the mind*; sweet.” The *OED* places these associations in the dim, even hypothetical, linguistic past, but the linking of persuasion and sweetness is ubiquitous in English around 1600, even though or perhaps because *persuade* is a comparatively late arrival in English, “not in general use until 16th c.”⁵²

Masten’s aim is to historicise the language of the Renaissance texts he reads, just as Prynne does in his commentary on the phrase ‘sweetly questioning’ in a poem by George Herbert.⁵³ But both critics still acknowledge the inscrutable role the hint of an *etymos logos* – that is, the ‘persuasion’ behind ‘sweetness’ – plays in their analyses. Masten writes that ‘sweet persuasion’ is a common phrase in poetry of the early seventeenth century, but notes in brackets that it is ‘etymologically “redundant”’: the scare quotes are necessary, since it is the redundancy that reinforces the convention by which ‘sweet’ conceals its ulterior motive. Prynne explains that Herbert’s phrase ‘sweetly questioning’ is ‘not as innocent as it looks’, but that it successfully suppresses its persuasiveness and

⁵² Jeffrey Masten, ‘Toward a Queer Address: The Taste of Letters and Early Modern Male Friendship’, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 10.3 (2004), 367–84 (p. 374).

⁵³ J. H. Prynne, *George Herbert, ‘Love [III]’: A Discursive Commentary* (Cambridge: Barque Press, 2011), pp. 26–29.

therefore ‘wins over by [...] decorum as well as candour’.⁵⁴ Both of these etymological arguments exceed their historicist readings to raise the question of how meanings continue to function once perceived as obsolete.

Sweetness is a complex and recurring concept in Prynne’s poems, and though often isolated in ‘the intimacy of the lyric moment’, its etymology also offers a wider view of the persuasiveness of lyric from scientific, economic, political, and sentimental positions. In ‘Rich in Vitamin C’ (190), for instance, the phrase ‘sweet shimmer of reason’ uses the etymology of ‘sweet’ to inveigh on the commodification of nutrition, while dense sound patterning and conventional diction signal that this is lyric reasoning. Importantly, this has a completely different effect from an echo in the first stanza of *Red D Gypsum* (1998; 433–49) that lacks the signal of ‘sweet’: ‘a flawless glucose shimmered sky’ (435) uses ‘glucose’ in much the same way as ‘flawless’, that is, to refer to what is not there. Without the lyric shorthand of ‘sweet’, this line leaves a space where the ‘intimacy of the lyric moment’ should be, so that ‘sweet’ persuades even in its absence.

Words like ‘sweet’ are vital to Prynne’s poetic, though he feels their dangers as keenly as Sinclair. This is clear in a letter he wrote that was published in *The English Intelligencer*:

Looking for that light motion you cheat by taking the terms which give you lightness ready-made, as snow, dream, tears, girl, cool, clouds and all such. These are willing slaves, ingratiatingly willing to float off into any slipway of sound where there’s not too much syntax or intelligence at work to hold them into discretion.

⁵⁴ Prynne, *George Herbert, ‘Love [III]’*, pp. 27–28.

Prynne's examples are so neutral yet so ingrained in conventional poetic diction; their historicity is doubly concealed from view. But there is still the possibility of a poem that comes just sweetly enough, which 'holds [its terms] into discretion' by taking responsibility for everything names such as 'snow, dream, tears, girl, cool, clouds and all such' have in their charge (the odd phrase 'not too much' is perhaps a reference to the enormity of this task). Prynne goes on to say that in such a poem, 'sweet in fact can be reclaimed as a public truth, a public virtue, since sound in its due place is as much true as knowledge'.⁵⁵ It is etymology that puts 'sound in its due place', describing the 'convenient turns of extinction' by which poetic conventions are established and maintained, and therefore taking responsibility for the shortness and sweetness of the lyric moment. Prynne's lyricism is thus less about avoiding poetry that 'comes too sweetly' than presenting a more comprehensive view of poetic sweetness. Difficulty is the necessary result of a poetry that engages with the rich, even sickly, history of its words by prosodic strangeness, not to explain away lyric moments but to understand their distinctive persuasiveness.

***Pearls That Were* (1999)**

The lyric moment has always been dependent on the lingering sweetness of a distinctive diction. The fullest expression of Prynne's etymological reinterpretation of this diction, however, comes not in an isolated moment but in a lyric sequence. *Pearls That Were*, like Ariel's song, marks itself out as a suspension of the larger plot of Prynne's oeuvre because of its sustained lyricism; its pearls of lyric wisdom, quoted from

⁵⁵ J. H. Prynne, Letter [to Ray Crump] (14th March 1968), in *Certain Prose of 'The English Intelligencer'*, ed. by Neil Pattison, Reitha Pattison, and Luke Roberts (Cambridge: Mountain Press, 2012), pp. 183–85 (pp. 184–85).

Romantic and Modernist poetry as well as folksongs, are strung together in variations on the ballad form. Lyric is thus accepted as a medium – making its diction less a vehicle for ‘disrupt[ing] connectedness and representational reference’ than a type of connectedness, in which, for Prynne, highly conventional language gestures through its complex histories to the hope for an *etymos logos*.⁵⁶ For example, the title *Pearls That Were* is one of Prynne’s truncated lyric moments, but in recasting the simple syntax of ‘Those are pearls that were his eyes’ it produces another riddling noun phrase. In Ariel’s ‘sweet air’, the attention-grabbing ‘those are’, the trochaic, monosyllabic rhythm, the rising vowel sounds, and the syntax of each transformation all charm Ferdinand into a trance that Prynne’s selective quotation worries about.⁵⁷ His emphasis falls on ‘were’, drawing attention to what has been sacrificed in – and of – Ariel’s song in celebration of the ‘rich and strange’. The ‘rich and strange’ music replaces Ferdinand’s ‘passion’ and the sea’s ‘fury’, as pearls replace eyes, and as a language transfixed by itself becomes a lyric diction. In Prynne’s version, the Duke’s eyes are seen more vividly for being omitted, but the phrase’s most literal interpretation is that now even the pearls themselves no longer exist. The pearls are dependent on the eyes for their strange resonance; the richness of Shakespeare’s line comes from the etymological and figurative associations of pearls with eyes, eye diseases, and tears. In this interpretation, lyric diction is sustained by what it sacrifices: in the absence of ordinary ‘connectedness and representational reference’, it achieves a different kind of connectedness based on remembering, or mythologising, what was lost for its resonance.

⁵⁶ See note 31.

⁵⁷ Ferdinand struggles to define his own reaction to Ariel’s song: ‘I have followed it / (Or it hath drawn me, rather)’. William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. by Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan, rev. edn (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2011), p. 200 (1.2.388).

Remembering Ariel remembering the Duke, Prynne also remembers T. S. Eliot's 'The Waste Land', another poem famous for quotation and collage, which uses Shakespeare's complete line twice. Eliot emphasises the hypnotic aspect of the line that Prynne resists: the question "'...Do you remember / Nothing?'" is answered 'I remember / Those are pearls that were his eyes'.⁵⁸ The fascination of the 'rich and strange' lyric moment is all that is remembered. Although their methods are different, both Eliot and Prynne use Shakespeare's line to expose the limitations of a genre that, to use a definition proposed in a recent anthology of essays on lyric, 'is striving to be itself an event rather than a representation of an event'.⁵⁹ *Pearls That Were* reverses these priorities, asking what the lyric itself remembers in its ritual naming of certain tropes, and how it continues to represent the world with a diction that all too easily shades into poeticism, which results only in 'trivial deep amazement' (473). This enquiry into lyric representation begins on its first page, with an extended 'lyric moment' of delicate description, dense with Romantic poetic diction and contained within a justified paragraph:

Over the ferny leaf-blades lying close to
the bank and now deeper green from
the dry weather a network of bright
gossamer threads, woven close together
and catching the slant evening sun so as
to shimmer with a soft, trembling

⁵⁸ The other instance similarly emphasises the attention-grabbing effect of the line: a fortune-teller turns over 'the drowned Phoenician Sailor. / (Those are pearls that were his eyes. Look!)'. T. S. Eliot, 'The Wasteland', in *Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), pp. 49–67 (pp. 55, 52; lines 122–25, 47–48).

⁵⁹ The comment is made in a description of David Fairer's chapter, 'Modulation and Expression in the Lyric Ode, 1660–1750'. Jonathan Culler, 'Afterword', in *The Lyric Poem: Formations and Transformations*, ed. by Marion Thain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 237–46 (p. 243).

brilliancy; we both remarked on it...
(453)⁶⁰

The word 'ferny', in particular, seems to employ a very Romantic strategy of generating whimsical-sounding adjectives from nouns (e.g. moony, beamy, plummy). However, as Donald Davie points out, such usages were not exclusively poetic in the eighteenth century, but belonged to a new scientific terminology for precise description (making them the opposite of words like 'hyaline').⁶¹ Prynne clearly does not (and cannot) use 'ferny' in the same way that Wordsworth did, though its derivation is as obvious now as it was then: the word has a slight air of parody, among the tongue-twisting alternation of 'f' and 'l' sounds. Though a scientific innovation, 'ferny' has a poetic history, so that what once looked like precise description is now a vague poeticism.⁶² Similarly, 'blade' is a botanical term for the upper part of a fern leaf, as well as a poetic metaphor – in fact, it is debateable whether it is a metaphor at all, since the word comes from Anglo-Saxon *blæd*, which meant 'leaf', as well as a 'cutting edge'.⁶³ Looking back through 'ferny' to 'fern' and 'leaf-blade' to 'blade' complicates what might otherwise be a parody of Romantic linguistic novelties. The history of this conventional diction pulls lyric back from 'striving itself to be an event rather than a representation of an event', and indeed from

⁶⁰ Kevin Nolan writes that this passage 'closely parodies Jonathan Edwards' celebrated papers of 1723 upon the nature and significance of the Spider. Edwards viewed that creature not as a figure of original sin or even as an emblem of lyric subjectivity (as it was for Pope) but of Divine Providence ("I know I have several times seen, in a very calm and serene day at that time of year, standing behind some opaque body that shall just hide the disk of the sun and keep off his dazzling rays from my eyes, multitudes of little shining webs and glistening strings of a great length, and at such height as that one would think they were tacked to the sky by one end, were it not that they were moving and floating..."). Nolan reaches a similar conclusion to the one proposed here: that 'the spiders become webmasters of a world irreversibly counter-Orphic: not the magic of a woven spell or charm (the provident thaumaturgy of Prospero) but the snakelike fascination of Chillingworth [from Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*]' Kevin Nolan, 'Capital Calves: Undertaking an Overview', *Jacket*, 24 (2003) <<http://jacketmagazine.com/24/nolan.html>>.

⁶¹ Donald Davie, *Purity of Diction in English Verse; And, Articulate Energy* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 37.

⁶² 'The River Duddon', IV ('Take, cradled Nursling of the mountain, take'), in William Wordsworth, *The Poems of William Wordsworth: Collected Reading Texts from the Cornell Wordsworth Series*, ed. by Jared R. Curtis, corrected edn, 3 vols (Penrith: Humanities-Ebooks, 2011), III, 350.

⁶³ 'Blade', *ODEE*.

parodying such an effort, instead revealing how it started on that path from an aspiration to represent the world precisely.

Despite the rapt description of the scene, then, there is no wondering at the 'rich and strange' here, only an understated reaction: 'we both remarked on it'. The stronger judgment of 'remarkable' hovers in the background, however, just as it does in Wordsworth's description of 'The Wanderer': 'he was a Man / Whom no one could have passed without remark'.⁶⁴ Etymologically, the *re-* in 'remark' is an intensive prefix, as in 'to mark something distinctive', but it also suggests 'to mark again', which Prynne the critic might call a 'latent' meaning.⁶⁵ These two ways of reading 'remarked' are negotiated in the line's metre, which finally settles into iambics if one reads 'remark' with its usual stress pattern; on the other hand, emphasising the first syllable, as in 're-mark', fits better with the poem's irregular but generally trochaic metre. 'We' hints at the collaborative nature of representation, perhaps referring to the work done by both poet and reader/critic in the apparent re-marking of almost any romantic poet who remarked on 'ferny', 'gossamer', 'woven', 'slant', 'trembling' things – Samuel Taylor Coleridge ('This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison'), William Wordsworth ('The Thorn'), and Robert Browning ('Two in the Campagna') are three possibilities among many.⁶⁶ Tracking down allusions is less important to this collaborative work, however, than negotiating the relation between the sustained re-marking of a conventional diction and the spontaneity of a remark on a striking scene.

'Remarked' is the first verb in *Pearls That Were*: the precise description that precedes it is peculiarly static, since it is organised around present participles and lacks a

⁶⁴ 'The Wanderer', Book I of 'The Excursion', in Wordsworth, II, 308–36, (p. 321; lines 454–55).

⁶⁵ 'Remark, v.¹', 'Re-mark, v.²', *OED*. See Prynne, *Field Notes*, p. 26.

⁶⁶ Wordsworth and Wordsworth, pp. 257–69, 474–80; Robert Browning, *The Poems*, ed. by John Pettigrew, 2 vols (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981), I, 728–30.

main verb. The prevalence of *-ing* forms throughout the whole collection contributes to its dreamlike atmosphere while also suggesting an idiosyncratic etymological approach that Prynne explains in 'Mental Ears'. Much of his analysis in this essay concerns end-stopped terminations such as *-ed*, which completes an action, and *-t*, which can convert an action into a noun (e.g. give, gift). Morphological and grammatical elements were also a priority for the materialist etymology that was popular just before the discipline became established as a science, at the height of the Romantic search for a 'natural language' for poetry. One of the most radical (and ridiculed) contentions of John Horne Tooke's etymological treatise *Epea Pteroenta, or, The Diversions of Purley* (published 1786–1805), for example, concerned the terminations of verbs:

however artificial they may now appear to us, they were not originally the effect of premeditated and deliberate art, but separate words by length of time corrupted and coalescing with the words of which they are now considered as the Terminations.⁶⁷

The theory that there is no abstraction in language – that all words, including prepositions, can be derived from the names of sensations and so are intrinsically connected to things – takes the *etymos logos* seriously. Such seriousness about the representational power of language is also notable in Prynne's work. Although it is difficult to imagine him deriving *-ing* from *ingle*, 'a hearth, or one man's place or seat', so that the present participle 'signifies separation, particularity, and individual property', as Coleridge does,⁶⁸ it is plausible that he might consider its continuation of the verb into a velar nasal stop (which is not a full stop, as *-ed* is, because the airflow is redirected

⁶⁷ John Horne Tooke, *Diversions of Purley*, ed. by Roy Harris (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1993), p. 331.

⁶⁸ Quoted in James C. McKusick, *Coleridge's Philosophy of Language* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 44. Coleridge's etymologising was heavily influenced by that of John Horne Tooke; see H. J. Jackson, 'Coleridge, Etymology and Etymologic', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 44.1 (1983), 75–88.

through the nose) a motivated element to describe the continuing activity of outdated diction in a contemporary poem. Words like ‘ferny’ and ‘leaf-blade’ are both descriptions and markers of conventional lyric diction; exploring their histories only compounds the ambiguities surrounding the related representational processes of describing (remarking) and naming (re-marking).⁶⁹ The *-ing* forms in *Pearls That Were* echo these ambiguities in the subtle use of the contrast between present participle and gerund, for instance in the complete line ‘soft yielding, blush shining’ (455).

Heavy use of the *-ing* form is also pronounced in Romantic lyric diction. It helps establish the feeling that the lyric suspends time, for example in Lord Byron’s ‘Stanzas for Music’, which describes a similar effect to that of Ariel’s song:

And like music on the waters
Is thy sweet voice to me:
When, as if its sound were causing
The charmed Ocean’s pausing,
The waves lie still and gleaming,
And the lulled winds seem dreaming:⁷⁰

Byron here suggests that lyric can have an Orphic power, but he keeps it at a distance: the claim is not made for lyric in general but for a prosopopoeic ‘sweet voice’, and the link between the ‘sound’ and the sea’s stillness is hypothetical. The careful explanation founders, however, on an ‘Ocean’ that is described as already ‘charmed’, outside of the ‘causing’ and ‘pausing’. The etymology of ‘charm’ in Latin *carmen*, ‘song, verse, oracular response, incantation’ attests to a link between music (or at least rhythmic language) and magic; this *etumos logos* is called up by the ‘sweet voice’ even if its power to calm the

⁶⁹ In ‘Mental Ears’, Prynne points out where he ‘part[s] company with Coleridge’s idealizing fusion of difference into unity’ in a footnote. J. H. Prynne, ‘Mental Ears and Poetic Work’, *Chicago Review*, 55.1 (2010), 126–57 (p. 148).

⁷⁰ Wordsworth and Wordsworth, p. 396.

sea is only hypothetical.⁷¹ It also implicates the present poem: the speaker makes the ocean 'charmed' in his own charmlike repetitive rhyme. Echoing Byron's diction, Prynne reinterprets the effects of such charm in a poem that begins 'Shine ahead, cold star / like music on the water' (459), and ends:

And rise up to vocal induration,
lulled into fresh calm
by motionless, undistracted
insult to charm.

Prynne turns the exaltation of lyric's Orphic power in on itself. Celebrating lyric as if it had the power to subdue nature means exhorting it to 'vocal induration', a hardening of the 'sweet voice' into a 'motionless[ness]' that in Byron's poem is imposed on the sea. This is lyric stripped of its connectedness with the world, like a 'cold star' or 'pearls that were'. All language is kept moving by its relation to 'the world and its layers of shifted but recognisable usage', but the intensity of the desire to represent a world that charms the poet (for instance, a woman's beautiful voice and a perfectly still sea) can lead to the idea that such charm belongs to the poetry itself – that a 'song, verse, oracular response, incantation' can gradually become a magical power over the world. Prynne's 'vocal induration' is therefore lulled not by 'charm' but by its 'insult to charm', the internal rhyme of lulled/insult matching and destabilising the end-rhyme of calm/charm.

The contrast between Byron and Prynne's use of the same diction gives clarity to a reading of these stanzas, which to some degree function as if they were from a Romantic poem. Beneath any such reading, however, runs an undercurrent of syntactical, prosodic, and lexical complexity that denies the grounds for such a comparison. Looking back through Prynne's diction to Byron's is like looking back through

⁷¹ 'Charm', *ODEE*.

a word to its etymology: it is difficult or perhaps impossible to reconcile the fact that these usages are 'recognisable' with the fact that they are 'shifted'.⁷² Any 'motionless, undistracted' pause that might allow for comparison quickly passes:

[...] the waves still
recoiling their crested and turbid confusions
as evenly, as mostly they will.

Immediately after this, *Pearls That Were* returns to the 'turbid confusions' familiar from most of Prynne's poetry, in two poems that mix discourses, registers, and much more obscure allusions than those found in the collection's first six poems (461–62).⁷³ After this departure from 'vocal induration', there are more ballad-shaped poems that this time show a 'fresh-cut vocal submission' to the phraseology of folksongs: 'yonder green hill'; 'wide salt sea'; 'nuts ripen as the season passes' (463–66). These are followed by another two emphatically unlyrical poems (467–68), before a return to the form and style of the collection's beginning for the final six (469–74). This arrangement invites comparison of Prynne's approaches to different kinds of lyricism even while it impedes comparison with the Romantic poets he echoes.

Ballad and folksong have a complex relationship with Romantic poetry, investigated by Prynne in his commentary on Wordsworth's 'The Solitary Reaper', another poem like Byron's about 'a voice so thrilling'.⁷⁴ No claims of Orphic power are made for the solitary reaper's singing, however; the description is kept grounded by the knowledge that the purpose of her song is to help her work. The charm of this music is not magical but rustic – it has a folkloric appeal that potentially makes the observer,

⁷² See note 13.

⁷³ Many of these allusions are to ancient and contemporary Chinese poetry. See Xie Ming, 'Reactualising the Unfigurable: Difficulty and Resistance in Translating J. H. Prynne', *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 41.1 (2012), 180–96.

⁷⁴ Wordsworth and Wordsworth, p. 387.

valuing the song over the work, opportunistic or exploitative. Prynne's versions of folksongs are accompanied by various images of production and sterility ('in demented tribunal / withies flourish and divide'; 'eggs still not sold', 463; 'flowered grasses'; 'pollen fuming / over the lapis', 466), and later in the collection he refers to the typical Romantic image of musicality and industriousness:

Freely bees awaken, rising to many tasks
 in jaunty flight forsaken, turning
 enrolled to occupy their sentimental places
 and polish off their finer tuning. (470)

The bees' music is conventionally a work-song, as they 'Hum about globes of clover and sweet peas': Keats delicately balances the 'hum' between song and work in the word 'about'.⁷⁵ But the 'many tasks' of Prynne's bees are 'forsaken' because they are 'turning [...] / to occupy their sentimental places' as musicians, not workers. Again, lyrical charm, balanced so carefully by Keats as by Byron, is shown by Prynne to have sacrificed its connectedness with the world. There is an economic and political element to this sentimentality, captured in the description of the bees as 'jaunty', a slangy descendant of 'gentle', itself historically a label for the well-born (from French *gentil*) – a class that could devote their time to pursuits like music (and poetry).⁷⁶ Etymology both conceals and reveals this aspect of sentimentality. The bees have become like the 'pearls that were': separated from the work that first gave them their lyrical value. This draws attention to the 'rich and strange' connectedness with the world that lyric risks losing when it elevates itself above representation. When Prynne returns to the 'sentimental places' of conventional lyric diction it is to discover what has been sacrificed to get there – that is,

⁷⁵ 'Endymion', in John Keats, *The Major Works: Including Endymion, and Selected Letters*, ed. by Elizabeth Cook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 60–163 (p. 62; Book I, line 52).

⁷⁶ 'Jaunty', *ODEE*.

the hope of finding a true name in 'the world and its shifted but recognisable usage'. *Pearls That Were* ends with just such a hope that words will continue to move with the world rather than lapsing into a 'motionless, undistracted' sentimentality: 'they'll walk and talk, wisely / flicker some hope remaining' (474).

A Language Rich and Strange

The 'sea-change, / into something rich and strange' is an oft-used metaphor for the way lyric transforms language.⁷⁷ But when lyric becomes so rich that it forgets it is strange, for example when 'sweet' loses its residual persuasiveness to become a poeticism, it threatens to transcend the process of representation entirely. Without their mysterious relation to the Duke's eyes, what is the value of the 'pearls that were'? Prynne regularly deflates his own lyric diction, both in isolated 'lyric moments' and when he entertains lyric as a medium in its own right. In 'A New Tax on the Counter-Earth' (172–73), for instance:

the wish is green in season, hazy like meadow-sweet,
downy & soft waving among the reeds, the
cabinet of Mr Heath. [...]

Even *Pearls That Were* offers itself up as a 'splatter-blot scenic spot' on an otherwise very unconventional oeuvre. But it is precisely this distinctiveness of lyric diction that gives it an integral role in the way Prynne's poetry 'establish[es] relations [...] with the world and its layers of shifted but recognisable usage'.

⁷⁷ Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, p. 200 (1.2.401–02).

Prynne's lyricism indicates a concern with how words acquire such easily ironised conventional poetic value, and how else they might function in the aftermath. As Michael Haslam writes:

It's a mistake, I think, to over-stress the anti-Romantic cynical irony in Prynne. He has as high appreciation as any poet of the value of ideal glow, the sweet of sweet, the light of light, the rich of rich, the gold of gold. It's just that he knows that you can't have sweet gold without currency and commodity transactions and beestings. A mistake too to think that his vocabulary represents some sort of attack on poetic diction. Prynne is 100% pure poetic diction. It's just that poetic diction is exponentially expanded.⁷⁸

For Haslam, as for every other critic of Prynne's lyricism, the central problem here is in assimilating the apparent clarity of lyric diction into a theory of difficult poetry. His argument is particularly attuned, however, to the historicity of this diction. There is a frankness about the discontinuity, for example, between his list of narrowly conventional examples of lyric diction (recalling Prynne's own similar list, quoted above) and the conclusion that 'poetic diction is exponentially expanded'. The richness of a language apparently freed from representation by its conventionality, the 'gold of gold', is not so easily assimilated into 'currency and commodity transactions and beestings' – especially if the bees are meekly 'occupy[ing] their sentimental places'. There is an important parallel here with the attempts outlined at the beginning of this chapter to relate poetry and etymology: they do not flow into each other as seems to be expected, because the valuable 'fossil poetry' of the *etumos logos* is always the motivation behind the poetic exploration of 'the world and its layers of shifted but recognisable usage'.

The pearl is the perfect symbol for the *etumos logos* because its value, like that of lyric, threatens to exceed the processes of exchange on which the system, economic or

⁷⁸ Michael Haslam, "'Fool's Bracelet'", *Quid*, 17 (2006), 56–59 (p. 58).

linguistic, relies. The 'pearl without price' is a traditional symbol with a long history, but the three most immediate contexts for Prynne's use of it are the character of Pearl Prynne, from Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850); Douglas Oliver's long poem *The Infant and the Pearl* (1985); and Barry McSweeney's collection *Pearl* (1995).⁷⁹ McSweeney and Oliver were Prynne's contemporaries (both died in 2000), and their books both refer to Margaret Thatcher – whose first name comes from the French for 'pearl' – and her divisive policies.⁸⁰ Using the symbol of the pearl in these historically, allusively, and etymologically determined ways keeps it in circulation, taking responsibility for the strangeness of its richness as part of 'the world and its layers of shifted but recognisable usage'. By putting the history of conventional lyric diction in the wider context of the history of language, Prynne manages to value both 'the gold of gold' and the system of 'currency and commodity transactions and beestings' that it exceeds. This unique approach to the power of lyric diction is arrived at through a negotiation of the *etymos logos* in etymology.

⁷⁹ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, ed. by Brian Harding (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Douglas Oliver, *The Infant and the Pearl* (London: Silver Hounds, 1985); Barry McSweeney, *Pearl* (Cambridge: Equiptage, 1995).

⁸⁰ 'Margaret', *A Dictionary of First Names*.

6. Paul Muldoon's Onomastics

Recent research in psychology has shown that people are disproportionately likely to choose occupations, places to live, and even spouses with names similar to their own. People named Dennis or Denise are disproportionately likely, for example, to become dentists.¹ These findings are disputed; the correlation is not clear enough to prove scientifically that a person's name affects their major life decisions.² For a poet, however, it is the possibility of a correlation that matters. The single example of a dentist called Dennis is enough to bring to mind the proverb *nomen est omen*: the name is an omen – and presumably enough to set a scientific mind wondering if an empirical study could prove that the phenomenon might be causal, as opposed to coincidental or even prophetic. An omen is not decipherable in the same way as a cause–effect relationship, but neither is it undecipherable in the same way as a coincidence. It produces an irresistible impression of meaningfulness that demands interpretation. This directly contradicts the general understanding of proper names as abstracted from linguistic currency: whatever their origin, once they are given to a person, place, or thing, names no longer represent the world in an interpretable way but refer unequivocally to a discrete part of it.

Carl Jung used the terms 'synchronicity' and 'meaningful coincidence' to describe cases like that of Dennis the dentist, in which 'we are inclined to say "That cannot be

¹ Brett W. Pelham, Matthew C. Mirenberg, and John T. Jones, 'Why Susie Sells Seashells by the Seashore: Implicit Egotism and Major Life Decisions', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 82.4 (2002), 469–87.

² See, for example, Uri Simonsohn, 'Spurious? Name Similarity Effects (Implicit Egotism) in Marriage, Job, and Moving Decisions', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 101.1 (2011), 1–24.

mere chance,” without knowing what exactly we are saying’.³ Paul Muldoon demonstrates such an inclination in the course of a lecture on the ‘Moorish’-ness of Marianne Moore’s poetry, given while he was Oxford Professor of Poetry:

Now, I know that this kind of reading may sometimes seem a little fritillarian [...] but what can I do? I’m sitting at a desk I acquired from the gentleman who looks after surplus furniture at Princeton. His name is Sam Formica. On the desk are two books. One is *The Botany of Desire: A Plant’s-Eye View of the World* by Michael Pollan. The other is Archie G. Walls’s *Geometry and Architecture in Islamic Jerusalem*. An Archie Walls who specializes in Islamic architecture, including “the great horseshoe *arch*” and writes of how “in the drawing it can be seen that the zeniths of the *arched* recesses in the *qibla wall* are lower than those in the side *walls*,” a Pollan who specializes in pollination, a Formica who oversees formica? It’s humorous in a parlour-gamish way, in the *Nomen est omen* mode I’m fond of playing with.⁴

Muldoon begins apologetically, helpless to resist, as he labours his onomastic puns and appeals to the audience to understand his predicament. Just as dramatically, he regains control in the final sentence by defining this helplessness as a ‘mode’, a game he plays for his own amusement. But where does this leave his ‘fritillarian’ reading of Moore? Reneging on his first line of defence, Muldoon then produces a more conventional justification of his reading: ‘the relationship between a writer’s name and his or her work is a rather different matter, one of which Moore is aware’. The ‘*Nomen est omen* mode’ is continuous with this argument and distinct from it, though the mention of ‘a writer’s name’ as opposed to a ‘poet’s’ leaves a loophole that carries through the comparison of Marianne Moore, Michael Pollan, and Archibald G. Walls, if not Sam Formica.

As a critic, Muldoon often reads through the lens provided by a poet’s name, but he also observes that proper names affect lives beyond the bounds of poetry. He

³ C. G. Jung, *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1985), p. 14.

⁴ Paul Muldoon, *The End of the Poem: Oxford Lectures in Poetry* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), pp. 249–50.

suggests that names carry a kind of poetic power beyond the poetic context, in an analogy voiced by Auden among many others:

Proper names are poetry in the raw. Like all poetry they are untranslatable.⁵

There is an important comparison to be made here with the linking of etymology and poetry. Etymology is ‘fossil poetry’: proper names are ‘poetry in the raw’. Both metaphors admit poetry aspires to an *etymos logos*, an ultimate true name that is free from the vicissitudes of language and therefore ‘untranslatable’ (another metaphor that has far-reaching implications for etymology that can only be touched on here). The relation of ‘fossil’ and ‘raw’ poetry to poetry in the making, however, complicates this aspiration. In practice, etymology can only present the idea of an *etymos logos* through accepting and analysing language change – and to interpret a proper name as if it were poetry, or even just to argue for its aptness, means translating it back into the language from which it was abstracted. Paradoxically, then, inviting ‘fossil’ and ‘raw’ poetry into poetry in the making means recontextualising it as part of a linguistic currency. So far this double effect of etymological poetry has been considered with respect to two different idealised languages: Prynne uses it to confront conventional lyric diction, while for Auden, it provides a way of apprehending primitive and sacred language. This chapter investigates how proper names, which are idealised by both Auden and Prynne but rarely used in their work, function in Paul Muldoon’s etymological poetry.⁶

⁵ W. H. Auden, *A Certain World: A Commonplace Book* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), p. 267.

⁶ The poetic quality of the proper name provides an important metaphor for both Auden and Prynne, for example in Auden’s lines ‘Out there, to the Heart, there are / no dehumanised Objects, / each one has its Proper Name’ and Prynne’s ‘the name is the sidereal display’, discussed in Chapters 3 and 5 respectively. W. H. Auden, ‘Aubade’, in *Collected Poems*, ed. by Edward Mendelson, rev. edn (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), pp. 881–82; J. H. Prynne, ‘Sketch for a Financial Theory of the Self’, in *Poems*, 2nd edn (North

***Nomen est omen* and Bestowing Names**

Muldoon's poems, many of which have huge casts of real, fictional, and semi-fictional characters, make a feature of name-dropping.⁷ Meanings are drawn out of these proper names by rhymes, puns, and etymologies, so that '*Nomen est omen*' is as familiar a refrain in criticism of Muldoon's work as it is in his own lectures.⁸ In his poetry, however, reading names as if they could provide clues to their bearers' existence is somewhat complicated by the fact that Muldoon is the one bestowing them, since the act of choosing a name is always an expression of *nomen est omen*. Furthermore, interpreting and bestowing names are both etymological acts because they violate the name's purely referential, synchronic state by historicising it and recontextualising it in language. Both are also motivated by the idea of an *etumos logos*, a name that exceeds its referential function to exert influence over the world. But the reasons for the bestowal of a name do not necessarily agree with *nomen est omen* interpretations. Consider 'Anseo' (83–84), a poem that begins with a 'Master [...] calling the roll / At the primary school in Collegelands', to which the pupils replied 'Anseo, meaning here, here and now' in Irish:

The last name on the ledger
Belonged to Joseph Mary Plunkett Ward
And was followed, as often as not,
By silence, knowing looks,
A nod and a wink, the Master's droll
'And where's our little Ward-of-court?'

Fremantle, Western Australia: Fremantle Arts Centre Press; Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 2005), pp. 19–20.

⁷ Examples include 'Madoc: A Mystery' and 'Yarrow', in Paul Muldoon, *Poems, 1968–1998* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001), pp. 202–31, 346–92; and 'At the Sign of the Black Horse, September 1999', in Paul Muldoon, *Moy Sand and Gravel* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), pp. 73–90. All further references to both of these books will be given in the text.

⁸ See, for example, Michael Robbins, 'Paul Muldoon's Covert Operations', *Modern Philology*, 109.2 (2011), 266–99 (pp. 282, 284, 293).

The schoolboy is clearly named after the Irish nationalist Joseph Mary Plunkett, whose Catholic credentials are clear in his name, and who was executed for his part in the 1916 Easter Rising.⁹ But the Master's interpretation goes in a different direction, punning on 'Ward' to imply not a powerful cultural history but abandonment and powerlessness. The naming event and the 'droll' taunt, made in the victim's absence, are both omens of the fate of 'Joe Ward', who by the end of the poem is a Commandant in the IRA whose soldiers answer '*anseo*' to his roll call. '*Anseo*' implies that the name is never in the 'here and now', but caught up in its history and its future. In this, it is a counterpart to the Irish language itself. Following historical suppression, the modern resurgence of Irish – effected in part by schools like Muldoon's in Collegelands – has been and is beleaguered by conflict between those concerned with preservation and those pressing for reform.¹⁰

Neither the name 'Joseph Mary Plunkett Ward' nor the Master's 'droll' pun are implausible: they are not part of the disingenuous '*Nomen est omen* mode' Muldoon the critic is 'fond of playing with', but instead take the 'omen' seriously enough for readers to interpret the child's experience as an explanation of the adult's decisions. Of course, it is Muldoon who names the character, puns on the name, and then invents a destiny for it, making the boy ward of an onomastic poetic justice.¹¹ He has said that if '*Anseo*' works, it is because 'everything in it is absolutely dead-on, the details are really accurate', though it is 'fiction, of course'.¹² The issue of how a poetic context affects proper names can be sensed in the pressure put on the word 'accurate' here, but it is moot for the purposes of

⁹ Plunkett was married in the prison chapel just hours before his execution and had no children, but his death ensured a different sort of legacy that Muldoon invokes by imagining a child named after him. Michael Foy, *The Easter Rising*, rev. edn (Stroud: The History Press, 2011), p. 312.

¹⁰ See Alan Bliss, 'The Standardization of Irish', *The Crane Bag*, 5.2 (1981), 76–82.

¹¹ Further evidence for this argument comes from Clair Wills' observation that the name 'hides an etymological meaning – ward means "son of the poet" (Mhac an Bhaird)'. Clair Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1998), p. 82.

¹² John Haffenden, Interview with Paul Muldoon, in *Viewpoints: Poets in Conversation with John Haffenden* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), pp. 130–42 (p. 136).

this poem, since Muldoon names the character in his capacity as a poet. It is explicit, however, in his poems about his own children's names. Naming a person is the most direct intervention anybody can make in the history of a language; in the words of linguist Jacques Pohl, 'there is perhaps always an etymological motivation' for the bestowal of a name.¹³ As 'Anseo' shows, however, such motivation does not prevent names being reinterpreted. This dual perspective is also present in 'The Birth' (343), a poem about Muldoon's daughter, as the midwives '[warm] to their task', then:

haul into the inestimable

realm of apple-blossoms and chanterelles and damsons and eel-spears
and foxes and the general hubbub
of inkies and jennets and Kickapoos with their lemniscs
or peekaboo-quiffs of Russian sable

and tallow-unctuous vernix, into the realm of the widgeon—
the 'whew' or 'yellow-poll', not the 'zuizin'—

Dorothy Aoife Korelitz Muldoon: [...]

This abecedary takes its cue from Dorothy Muldoon's middle names, which themselves suggest two '[estimable]' realms: that of legendary Irish warrior princess Aoife and that of the Polish shtetl of Korelitz, which is also one of the family names of Muldoon's wife, Jean Hanff Korelitz.¹⁴ In *The Prince of the Quotidian* Muldoon 'can barely refrain / from letting slip' when Medbh McGuckian calls that he has named his daughter "'Aoife...Dorothy Aoife'".¹⁵ These obvious etymological motivations contrast with the 'inestimable realm' of curious, exotic, and fantastical things in the poem's abecedary – a

¹³ Jacques Pohl, *Symboles et langages* (Paris: Sodi, 1968), p. 127.

¹⁴ See 'The Grand Conversation' (*Moy*, 41–42).

¹⁵ Paul Muldoon, *The Prince of the Quotidian* (Oldcastle: Gallery Press, 1994), p. 39.

realm that, given the name ‘Dorothy’, might be compared with Oz.¹⁶ As the list ends, however, it is oriented towards Ireland: ‘whew’ and ‘yellow-poll’ are both names used in Ireland for the Eurasian widgeon, while ‘zuizin’ is a word of Native American origin (perhaps Algonquin, the language spoken by the ‘Kickapoos’) for the American widgeon (where ‘widgeon’ is a less common spelling).¹⁷ The alphabet’s destination, however, as opposed to that of the clause, is not Ireland but the realm of the ‘zuizin’ – that is, America. Aside from Muldoon’s fascination with all aspects of American culture, the significance of ‘zuizin’ is that it shows America to be, like Ireland, a country where native languages have been absorbed into English (‘hubbub’, for example, is a borrowing from Irish).¹⁸ The poem’s form releases the name into this ‘inestimable realm’ of linguistic curiosity in which one creature may have many names,¹⁹ while its discursive structure tries to keep hold of the estimable realms from which Dorothy Aoife Korelitz Muldoon takes her name.

In ‘Cradle Song for Asher’ (*Moy*, 72), written after the birth of Muldoon’s son, poetic form releases the name into the world not through its letters but through rhyme. This is the poem in its entirety:

When they cut your birth cord yesterday
it was I who drifted away.

Now I hear your name (in Hebrew, ‘blest’)
as yet another release of ballast

¹⁶ Given the young Muldoon’s fascination with American pop culture, which he mentions in James S. F. Wilson, ‘The Art of Poetry No. 87: Paul Muldoon’, Interview with Paul Muldoon, *Paris Review*, 169 (Spring 2004), 53–91 (pp. 65–66).

¹⁷ ‘[W]idgeon’ is the spelling of the headword in the *New Oxford American Dictionary*, ed. by Angus Stevenson and Christine A. Lindberg, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); *OED* has ‘widgeon | wigeon’.

¹⁸ ‘Hubbub’, *ODEE*.

¹⁹ The repeated naming of the widgeon is probably also a reference to Heaney’s poem ‘Widgeon’, which was dedicated to Muldoon, and which Muldoon included in an anthology he edited for Faber. Seamus Heaney, ‘Widgeon’, in *The Faber Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry*, ed. by Paul Muldoon (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), p. 270.

and see, beyond your wicker
gondola, camp-fires, cities, whole continents flicker.

Unlike 'The Birth', in which the baby is 'haul[ed]' into a world of language by her name, 'Cradle Song for Asher' describes the child's name setting his father adrift among 'flicker[ing]' views of 'whole continents'. The literary name interpretation invited by the etymology, the allusion to Moses in another 'wicker / gondola', and the half-rhyme is diffused by the speaker's 'drift[ing] away' from such particulars into an 'inestimable realm' – the Jewish diaspora of which he is now part – not unlike that he predicts for his daughter in 'The Birth'. Though the 'release of ballast' happens for the speaker when he hears the name, for the reader it happens with the half-rhyme created by the translated etymology 'blest'. Hearing the name through its etymology opens the way for yet more 'release[s] of ballast': 'in Hebrew' begs the question of what 'Asher' and indeed 'blest' mean in English. The ash tree, considered 'blest' in Old Norse and Celtic mythologies, is the clearest English association with 'Asher'.²⁰ In its etymological meaning of 'mark so as to hallow with blood',²¹ however, 'blest' is also an omen of the suffering of the Jewish people across 'camp-fires, cities, whole continents' that is the subject of the long poem following 'Cradle Song for Asher', titled 'At the Sign of the Black Horse, September 1999' (*Moy*, 73–90).

The 'Black Horse' is an instantly recognisable apocalyptic 'Sign', but it was also the name of a pub that is now the house in which Muldoon and his family live in Princeton, New Jersey.²² In the poem a recurring image of Asher sleeping in his pram anchors the story through a hurricane that dredges up family, local, and Irish and Jewish cultural

²⁰ Rudolf Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1993), pp. 20–21.

²¹ 'Bless', *ODEE*.

²² Wilson, p. 56.

history. These histories all pull at Asher's name: the road becomes a 'millrace on which logs (trees more than logs) / are borne along'; a neighbour is 'amputating a sycamore limb' in close proximity to the mention of a 'bris' or Jewish circumcision rite; 'Uncle Arnie's friend Fanny Brice' wears an 'astrakhan', a cloak made from the skin of stillborn lambs and named after a city in Russia that once had a large Jewish population;²³ Asher's maternal grandfather recites 'the opening phrase ("'*asherey ha'ish 'asher*") of the Book of Psalms'; and a child in a 'peaked cap' that will soon have a yellow felt star pinned on it 'was enquiring of my child-kin the meaning of "*Ashkenaz*". At some remove from Asher's name, though unavoidably audible, is a half-rhyme with 'Auschwitz'. Despite the fact that this poem is about a real naming event – a real child named Asher – it is still open to everything Muldoon's rhyming imagination can do with it. This describes a reality in which Asher's name is bound to these things by its sound and its history; *nomen est omen* is not a literary device here, raw or processed, but a cultural reality. Muldoon's poetry provides a view into onomastic realms that are otherwise 'inestimable', which here means the inestimably ominous. The power of the poetic context to reveal omens in the name appears all the more inescapable when that name belongs to a real person.

Literary Names and the Irishness of *Nomen est omen*

The meaningfulness of names is almost taken for granted in literary contexts. Muldoon has no need to refer to psychological theories of 'name similarity effects' in his discussion of Moore's Moorishness, any more than Anne Barton or Alistair Fowler do in

²³ See also Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, *The Astrakhan Cloak*, trans. by Paul Muldoon (Oldcastle: Gallery Press, 1992).

their books on names in literature.²⁴ All literary names – including the names of authors – offer themselves up for interpretation, even when they are apparently neutral. The linguist Richard Coates allows for such exceptions in his definition of the ‘properhood’ of ‘proper nouns’ as ‘senseless referring’; he writes that names

are not debarred from having senses (better: synchronic etymologies) accessible during other (meta)linguistic activities such as translation, divining personality from given names or charactonyms, punning on names of any kind, inducing new lexical words or toponymic elements from pre-existing place names, and so on.²⁵

Even in the special circumstances of these ‘(meta)linguistic activities’, Coates is wary of affording names ‘senses’ – he prefers the oxymoron ‘synchronic etymologies’, which makes name interpretation a kind of thought experiment. Etymology is understood here as a discourse about obsolete and extraneous information that is granted temporary ‘synchronic’ value, synchrony itself being a theoretical construct designed to keep etymology out. Literary critics have also tended to agree that name interpretation must always be hypothetical. Barton argues that ‘comedia cratylism is endlessly self-questioning’;²⁶ Fowler’s conviction that in Renaissance literature ‘any *nomen* might hide an *omen*’ was opposed by Colin Burrow, who stressed the hypothetical element still further by observing that the complexity of literary conventions makes ‘crack[ing] the literary code’ both impossible and undesirable.²⁷ Both of these discussions show, however, that while literary contexts encourage name interpretation, they cannot *prevent* names from carrying multiple senses, which turn out to be ominously inescapable. This is more obviously the source of the tension and drama in Muldoon’s

²⁴ Anne Barton, *The Names of Comedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); Alastair Fowler, *Literary Names: Personal Names in English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

²⁵ Richard Coates, ‘Properhood’, *Language*, 82.2 (2006), 356–82, p. 378.

²⁶ Barton, p. 14.

²⁷ Fowler, p. 232; Colin Burrow, ‘I, Lowborn Cur’, *London Review of Books*, 22 November 2012, pp. 15–17.

onomastics, as in 'At the Sign of the Black Horse, September 1999', than the question of how hypothetical name interpretation is.

Muldoon's critical approach is different from Barton's, Fowler's, and Burrow's: he identifies multiple contexts that sanction onomastic interpretation, overdetermining his reasoning rather than moderating it. A particularly condensed example can be found in the lecture on Fernando Pessoa, whose name is also employed punningly in the analysis of his poems:

Nomen est omen, as we continue to say in Ireland, and as they would most assuredly have said in the Durban of Pessoa's childhood, or the Portugal of his young manhood.²⁸

Muldoon justifies – or excuses? – his play with names here without reference to any literary function, turning instead to real-life superstitions and biographical context. Earlier in this same lecture, he is also able to link 'Pessoa' and 'person' etymologically (a context unavailable, but hinted at, in the comparison of Moore's poetry with Moorish architecture).²⁹ Although he hedges round his own commitment to the idea that *nomen est omen*, presenting it as an old-fashioned figure of speech and confining it to a country he visits but no longer lives in, Muldoon nevertheless speaks it as an Irishman, outside of Ireland, as part of an academic argument (and then prints it). As Seamus Heaney did before him, Muldoon has identified various literary preoccupations with the 'Irish psyche', but the younger poet often exaggerates the connection: in his 1998 Clarendon lectures he coined the preposterous pun 'Eriny' (meaning a specifically Irish 'irony'), emphasising a particularly provocative construction of Irish literariness.³⁰

²⁸ Muldoon, *The End of the Poem*, p. 235.

²⁹ Muldoon, *The End of the Poem*, p. 223.

³⁰ Paul Muldoon, *To Ireland, I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 6, 8.

There are two important elements to the Irishness of *nomen est omen* ideas in Muldoon's work: first, the political situation of a postcolonial, bilingual society in which names are the first object of a process of 'uncoding, decoding, [that] is going on all the time everywhere';³¹ and second, the literary and folkloric tradition of *dinnseanchas*, or narratives about the etymologies of place-names. Both these practices see names as coded already, so that they cannot function referentially without implying something beyond referentiality.³² Although Muldoon points out that such decoding does not always occur 'with the same implications and the same intentions', he insists that '[w]e're still meeting in the woods and trying to work out if it's a friend or a foe'. This is clearly different from the kinds of literary speculation about names addressed by Coates: there is no question here that names might be neutral. The name is quite literally an omen when it can indicate whether you are 'a friend or a foe'. In '7, Middagh Street' (175–93; from *Meeting the British*, 1987), the famous friends who lived in this Brooklyn Heights house in the 1940s are caricatured by their names:³³ anecdotes about Auden, for example, turn up 'Mr W. H., my "onlie begetter"' (180), 'the tennis-star H. W. Austin', 'Uncle Wizz' (183), 'Wynstan, / dear Wynnie-Pooh' (187), and 'Healfdene' (189). At the end of the poem, Muldoon contrasts this attitude with the complete separation of reference from sense by alluding to Odysseus tricking the Cyclops:

The one-eyed foreman had strayed out of Homer;

³¹ Patrick McGuinness, 'Speculating: Patrick McGuinness Interviews Paul Muldoon', *Irish Studies Review*, 17.1 (2009), 103–10 (p. 105).

³² In the case of *dinnseanchas*, for example, it has been said that 'we must try to imagine a science of geography based on *senchas*, in which there is no clear distinction between the general principles of topography or direction-finding and the intimate knowledge of particular places'. From Charles Bowen, 'A Historical Inventory of the *Dindshenchas*', *Studia Celtica*, 10/11 (1975), 113–37 (p. 115).

³³ These caricatures are by no means Muldoon's inventions, but popular legend; Adam Kirsch describes Auden's life in America as 'almost folkloric'. Adam Kirsch, 'Auden's N.Y. Households, From Slum to Sublime', *New York Observer*, 3 May 1999 <<http://observer.com/1999/05/audens-ny-households-from-slum-to-sublime/>>.

‘MacNeice? That’s a Fenian name.’
As if to say, ‘None of your sort [...]’ (193)

When Odysseus gave his name as ‘Nobody’, the Cyclops recognised only its referential function, and failed to notice that it would normally be interpreted as a common noun. Conversely, the ‘one-eyed foreman’ at Harland and Wolff, a notoriously anti-Catholic Belfast shipyard, is so preoccupied with decoding Louis MacNeice’s name that he cannot separate out any neutral concept of referentiality (and therefore mistakes MacNeice’s background, which was Anglo-Irish).

A much earlier and plainer warning about interpreting names comes in ‘Early Warning’ (80–81; from *Why Brownlee Left*, 1980), in which the Muldoon family try to protect their apple tree from apple-scab while their ‘Protestant neighbour Billy Wetherall’ relaxes ‘between two sturdy Grenadiers’, a disease-resistant variety of apple tree. The barely concealed codedness of these names is enough to make any reader wary. Rather than playing with the idea of nominative determinism, this poem becomes trapped in it, leading to a short-sightedness about names that is comparable to that of the Cyclops and the ‘one-eyed foreman’. A more inconspicuous trap is set in the story of Brownlee, a farmer who was apparently as tethered to his ‘two acres of barley, / One of potatoes’ by his name as ‘his pair of black / Horses, like man and wife’ (‘Why Brownlee Left’, 84). ‘Brownlee’ is not as obviously suggestive as Muldoon’s characters’ names usually are, which perhaps explains how he manages to escape his fate while the poem about him (and the collection named after the poem) cannot, fixated as it is on the details of his farm and ‘Why Brownlee Left’ it all. Muldoon is wholly committed to the superstition of nominative determinism here even whilst he acknowledges its pedantry; Tim Kendall describes this ‘tyranny of names’ as a key theme in these early

collections.³⁴ From the bold simplicity of 'Early Warning' to the classical allusion in '7, Middagh Street', the pressure of 'uncoding, decoding' names in a culture in which meanings are not occluded by referentiality but constitute it is certainly keenly felt. In this sense, it could indeed be said that Irish attitudes to names are more literary than the established conventions of charactonymy and onomastic punning: the name itself is a narrative, rather than an object of literary speculation.

If *Why Brownlee Left* (73–102) focuses on nominative determinism as a trap, the collection that preceded it, *Mules* (1977; 39–71) – which contains characters called Will, Faith, Grace, and Mercy – exhibits a more fluid and conventionally literary naming practice that relies on puns between sense and reference. Heaney judged this technique excessively hermetic and Muldoon seems to have agreed with him,³⁵ though perhaps their real objection is to the contrast between allegory and the higher pressure of a more Irish kind of codedness: 'Brownlee' and 'Wetherall' are different kinds of omens from 'Will' and 'Faith'. But this contrast is not so easily maintained when the allegory's deft, delicately judged puns hint at the dangers of name interpretation confronted in *Why Brownlee Left*. Quoted in isolation, as in Heaney's review, the names 'Will' and 'Faith' are plainly allegorical, but when read as characters in the sonnet 'At Martha's Deli' (63–64) the puns border on the ominous:

So Will had finally broken off with Faith!
There she stood, gnawing a shish-kebab.
It seemed they no longer soaked in one bath-tub
And made that kind of little wave.

³⁴ Tim Kendall, *Paul Muldoon* (Bridgend: Seren, 1996), p. 44.

³⁵ Seamus Heaney, *Preoccupations: Selected Prose, 1968–1978* (London: Faber and Faber, 1980), p. 213; Haffenden, p. 213.

These are obviously allegorical figures, part of a modern morality play based on the biblical story of Martha (etymologically ‘mistress’),³⁶ who was too busy in the kitchen to listen to Jesus when he visited her house (Luke 10.38–42); they also recall the puns on ‘Will’ in Shakespeare’s sonnets. Muldoon’s gossipy, bathetic version only emphasises the distance between the human interaction and its abstract allegorical significance, a distance which then gradually collapses as the poem’s speaker becomes implicated in the story he is telling. Faith asks him to ‘be her friend’, and he is drawn into the allegory: ‘She kissed me hard. I might have been her own Will’. This transferral of the name can be compared to the first line of Shakespeare’s Sonnet 135, ‘Whoever hath her wish, thou hast thy Will’, which binds ‘Will’ both to the speaker and the addressee.³⁷ The intimacy in both ‘her own Will’ and ‘thy Will’ is uncomfortably forced, especially given the poems’ sexual elements. Both sonnets entangle the pun in their narratives about people, so that the name and its semantic equivalent cannot be kept separate, as they could in the case of homonymic play or true allegorical personifications. Muldoon’s playful, consciously literary names ask serious questions about the context that licenses such playfulness and invites readers to see names as omens, even through the apparently safe circumstances of an allegory or pun. The invitation is somehow inescapable; its reach is ominous.

Before it even invites name interpretation, the proverb *nomen est omen* acknowledges the name’s loss of control over itself. The proper noun relinquishes its specificity to become an ambiguous ‘omen’. Muldoon has written:

³⁶ ‘Martha, *n.*’, *OED*.

³⁷ William Shakespeare, *Shakespeare’s Sonnets*, ed. by Katherine Duncan-Jones, rev. edn (London: Methuen Drama, 2010), p. 385.

the name as just the word on its own, doesn't exist, as a signifier [...] but in fact it has connotations that it cannot itself allow for. It exists in other realms.³⁸

This is a complete reconfiguration of the idea that there are certain circumstances under which names become interpretable: for Muldoon, names *only* exist across 'other realms' so that there is no centralised control over how or when they mean. Perhaps his most candid statement of this conviction appears in 'Incantata' (331–41; from *The Annals of Chile*):

I remember you pooh-poohing, as we sat there on the *Enterprise*,
my theory that if your name is Powers
you grow into it or, at least,
are less inclined to tremble before the likes of this bomb-blast
further up the track: I myself was shaking like a leaf (333)

The cliché of growing into one's powers is one of many realms in which the name 'Powers' functions, and the idea that 'you grow into' a name is also sociologically defensible.³⁹ In addition, 'my theory' is stubbornly idiosyncratic, especially as it is claimed after Powers has already mocked it, using a term that is both childish (one thinks of Winnie-the-Pooh's theorising) and technical (the 'pooh-pooh theory' is an unflattering nickname for the idea that language evolved from interjections).⁴⁰ It is necessary at this point to differentiate between names as omens and ominous names. Omens are defined as such by a culture or an individual; something that is ominous, however, impresses itself upon its beholder(s) in an irrefutable way. Muldoon makes an omen out of Powers' name in an

³⁸ From an unpublished interview, quoted in Clair Wills, 'The Lie of the Land: Language, Imperialism and Trade in Paul Muldoon's *Meeting the British*', in *The Chosen Ground: Essays on the Contemporary Criticism*, ed. by Neil Corcoran (Bridgend: Seren, 1992), pp. 123–49 (p. 147).

³⁹ See, e.g., Philip G. Erwin, 'A Review of the Effects of Personal Name Stereotypes', *Representative Research in Social Psychology*, 20 (1995), 41–52.

⁴⁰ F. M. Müller, *The Science of Language: Founded on Lectures Delivered at the Royal Institution in 1861 and 1863*, 2 vols (London: Longmans, Green, 1891), I, 507.

elegy for her – in his poems, recognisable omens nearly always develop into an uninterpretable, undeniable ominousness.

The last poem in *Mules*, ‘Armageddon, Armageddon’ (67–71), is, as the title’s pun on the county name ‘Armagh’ implies, heavy-handed with common omens – failing light, sectarian symbols, dreams, hints, constellations, unnatural deaths, and broken dishes. It ends on a night ‘So dark my light had lingered near its lamp / For fear of it’ (71). There are good reasons to resist the fixity of an omen, however, particularly in the case of names:

Some violence had been done to Grace,
She had left for our next-of-kin. (70)

Grace seems to be the speaker’s sister. As part of an argument for how Muldoon ‘satirize[s] the inflated importance of parochial conflicts’, Tim Kendall writes that because of the ‘symbolism’ of her name, ‘there is *no* suspension of disbelief’ (my emphasis) that would lead the reader to question what kind of ‘violence had been done’ and who was responsible for it.⁴¹ For Kendall, the poem’s satirical mode resolves the challenge of the name, which is to read both the loss of a sister and the loss of grace. But satire is only one of a variety of *nomen est omen* ‘realms’ that are working in parallel here. The capitalisation of ‘Grace’ identifies it as a reference to a person, but it also refers to a fictional character whose name has been chosen by a poet; it may just as easily be a common noun, or an allegorical personification. The real issue is not which of these readings is dominant, but rather whether the name can be all of these things – meaningfully yet coincidentally – and whether any interpretation can deal with the moral consequences of this. Kendall is too convinced by the overstated eschatological urgency of ‘Armageddon, Armageddon’ to allow each individual event to be ominous. In

⁴¹ Kendall, p. 60.

arguing for the poem's 'mock-heroic' conflation of legendary, literary, historical, and even cosmological registers, he does not permit them their separate 'realms', the resistance to conflation that the seriousness of many of the events described insists upon. This calls for a less conclusive criticism, perhaps even a 'fritillarian' one, that is attentive to the difference between *nomen est omen* and ominous names.

Another key name in this poem is 'Macha', the legendary queen after whom Armagh is named, and whose death following the birth of her twins, brought on by a race with a charioteer, is said to have cursed Ulster to sectarianism:

We could always go closer if you wanted,
To where Macha had challenged the charioteer
And Swift the Houyhnhnm,
The open field where her twins were whelped.
Then, the scene of the Armagh Rail Disaster.
Why not brave the Planetarium? (69)

It is difficult not to feel that this gentle encouragement to 'go closer' is inciting a close reading of omens that would disregard the ominousness of such closeness. The Armagh Rail Disaster was a collision. A planetarium puts the stars, usually distant enough not to intrude on human lives, in a place where an audience is trapped into looking up at them. The 'open field' in Ulster, though it seems to provide a remedy to this claustrophobic atmosphere, was the site of Macha's curse and therefore the beginning of sectarian disputes over land boundaries. The Armagh–Armageddon pun seems inevitable. As is the case in classical Greek tragedy – which also has a significant presence in modern Irish poetry⁴² – interpretation is always too limited a response to an omen. Whether the reader recognises the allusions or has to research them, the desire to 'go closer' and

⁴² See, e.g. Tom Paulin, *The Riot Act: A Version of Sophocles' Antigone* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985); Seamus Heaney, *The Cure at Troy: A Version of Sophocles' Philoctetes* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990); Derek Mahon, *The Bacchae: After Euripides* (Oldcastle: Gallery, 1991).

identify the omens in the poem is itself vaguely ominous. Even analysing the pun on Jonathan Swift's name, or the fantastic rhyme of 'Houyhnhnm' and 'Planetarium', could potentially obscure the real threat of their irresistible interpretability, which leads to readings like Kendall's. Elsewhere in 'Armageddon, Armageddon', the historical figures of Larry Durrell, Jeanne Duval, and W. R. Rodgers, as well as the legendary figure of Oisín, offer up their own symbolic possibilities but their immanence to the speaker (who 'know[s] something of how [Oisín] felt', as well as something about the 'sour[ness]' of Duval's breasts; 68) results in a similar effect. The poem's final two named characters, again as absent as 'Grace' and 'Brownlee', are the farmers 'Archer' (who had 'sixty yellow acres') and 'Hunter' ('forty green and grey'), who 'got it into their heads / That they would take the stars in their strides' (70). The speaker's memories of their fields brings the symbolism of their constellations back down to earth. However strong the temptation to see names as symbols becomes, Muldoon leaves a reminder that this is just one realm among many.

The consequences of allegorising to the extent that names become pure symbols, losing all their significance to human interaction, have been much discussed as regards the female representations of the sovereignty of Ireland. In the late seventeenth-century and eighteenth-century *aisling* (or 'dream-vision') genre, a vision of such a woman – usually referred to as a *spéirbhean* ('sky-woman') – appears to the poet to lament Ireland's fate and prophesy a better future.⁴³ Many modern Irish poets have written

⁴³ The *aisling's* specific relationship to these symbols of sovereignty is discussed by Sarah E. McKibben, 'Speaking the Unspeakable: Male Humiliation and Female National Allegory after Kinsale', *Éire-Ireland*, 43.3 (2008), 11–30.

aislingí, and Muldoon is no exception.⁴⁴ His two most direct references to the genre, 'Sky-Woman' (122) and 'Aisling' (126–27), both appear in *Quoof* (1983), a collection that is often seen as the true beginning of his unique style.⁴⁵ The book's earthy, sexualised dream-vision poems, in which the 'Sky-Woman' turns away to 'fumble with / the true Orion's belt', are a case in point. Though the woman in 'Aisling' also contrasts poetic symbolism with a sexual reality, the speaker still follows the convention of wondering who she could be:⁴⁶

Her eyes spoke of a sloe-year,
Her mouth a year of haws.

Was she Aurora, or the goddess Flora,
Artemidora, or Venus bright,
Or Anorexia, who left
A lemon stain on my flannel sheet?

It's all much of a muchness.

An abundance of sloes is said to presage a sorrowful year, and haws a prosperous one (according to traditional Irish proverbs);⁴⁷ without physically speaking, the woman's message is that of a typical *aisling* vision. More than this, though, these hedgerow foods recall the Famine, and by association the hunger strikes at Maze Prison, which were happening at the time this poem was written. These contexts make interpreting the omen of a woman named 'Anorexia' a simple matter, but in the immediate context of the

⁴⁴ See, for example, Seamus Heaney, 'Aisling' and Ciaran Carson, 'The Ballad of HMS Belfast'. Seamus Heaney, *North* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), p. 48; Ciaran Carson, *The Ballad of HMS Belfast: A Compendium of Belfast Poems* (London: Picador/Gallery Press, 1999), pp. 113–16.

⁴⁵ See, e.g., Michael Allen, 'Pax Hibernica/Pax Americana: Rhyme and Reconciliation in Muldoon', in *Paul Muldoon: Critical Essays*, ed. by Tim Kendall and Peter McDonald (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004), pp. 62–95 (p. 71).

⁴⁶ In a discussion of the influence of the *aisling* on Joyce, Muldoon remarks that '[t]hough the possibility of any one of multiple identities seems to be allowed for, it always turns out that the "sky-woman" is a version of "Eriu" or the "Sovranty of Ireland"'. Muldoon, *To Ireland, I*, p. 82.

⁴⁷ Énrí Ó Muirgheasa, *Seanfhocla Uladh*, trans. by William Tempest (Dondalk: Dondalغان Press, 1907), p. 203.

poem this omen is suspended among other possible explanations. ‘Anorexia’ tries to fit in with the sing-song rhymes of Aurora, Flora, and Artemidora, suggesting merely the effect of a mythical-sounding name.⁴⁸ Though mythical originally, they have all become scientific common nouns (*Artemidora* is a genus of moth), and ‘Venus bright’ brings to mind the star before the goddess. It is in this spirit that Muldoon invents the name ‘Anorexia’, working across scientific and mythical discourses in a way that prevents their collapse into the allegory of a traditional *aisling*. Introducing ‘Anorexia’ and indeed ‘Doctor Maw’, with their connotations of distorted appetites, suggests that symbolic figures play a part in cultural distortions. These names comment on both the poetic and the political consequences of prosopopoeia, since the metonymy by which names are given and transferred requires distortion to be effective – for a reader to imagine a poetic vision as a real woman, or a real woman as an eating disorder, misrepresentation is obviously necessary.

The poem’s only answer to the question of the woman’s name completely denies the relevance of that question: ‘It’s all much of a muchness’. This conclusion is shared with many other Muldoon poems that both casually and intensely fail to distinguish one name from another (e.g. ‘Sir— or Sir—’ in ‘The Wishbone’, 159; ‘Susan, or Suzanne’ and, later, ‘Susan, or Susannah’ in ‘Immram’, 94–102; see also ‘Milkweed and Monarch’, 329–30). Accepting that names can slip into each other so easily, and that proper nouns can become common nouns and vice-versa, requires a reader to abandon assumptions about the particularity of the name. The symbolic figure is a prime example of this, since the

⁴⁸ In a recent lecture Muldoon spoke about the convention of the *aisling* poet ‘showing off his magnificent grasp of Classical learning’, as well as the ‘macaronic mishmash of languages’ in an *aisling* by eighteenth-century poet Art McCooey. He suggests that such a poet ‘might enquire’ of the *spéirbhean* ‘Are you Aurora or the goddess Flora, / Artemidora or Venus bright, / Or Helen fair beyond compare / Whom Priam stole from the Grecian sight?’ Paul Muldoon, ‘The Word on the Street: Parnassus and Tin Pan Alley (The Poetry Society Annual Lecture 2012)’, *Poetry Review*, 102.3 (2012), 61–82 (pp. 62–63).

name is meant to function on more than one level: 'Flora' is intended to be read as 'flowers' as well as 'a goddess', 'Artemidora' refers meaningfully to Artemis as well as to the girl named for her, and so on. The function of a symbolic figure, then, is 'much of a muchness' because the origins and destinies of its name are subsumed within the name itself: you cannot tell *nomen* from *omen* because their distortion is ingrained.

All of these poems from the first decade or so of Muldoon's output insist on a meaningful relationship – whether coincidental or etymological – between common nouns and proper nouns, and also on the intricacies of their conversion. While literary and political contexts, as well as Muldoon's provocative choice of names, invite interpretation of this relationship, the conflation of *nomen* and *omen* should be resisted because it means sacrificing an individual to an idea – whether political, religious, or poetic. The result can be a less specific ominousness, as in 'Armageddon, Armageddon', or a kind of grotesque distortion of the idea of a name, as in 'Aisling'. Jacques Derrida, in his essay 'Des Tours de Babel', addresses the paradoxical obligations to interpret and *not* to interpret names as an example of the 'necessary and impossible' quality of translation more generally:

in the very tongue of the original narrative [of Babel] there is a translation, a sort of transfer, that gives immediately (by some confusion) the semantic equivalent of the proper name which, by itself, as a pure proper name, it would not have. As a matter of fact, this intralinguistic translation operates immediately; it is not even an operation in the strict sense. Nevertheless, someone who speaks the language of Genesis could be attentive to the effect of the proper name in effacing the conceptual equivalent (like *pierre* [rock] in *Pierre* [Peter], and these are two absolutely heterogeneous values or functions); one would then be tempted to say first that a proper name, in the proper sense, does not properly belong to the language; it does not belong there, *although and because* its call makes the language possible (what would a language be without the possibility of calling by a proper name?); consequently it can properly inscribe itself in a language only by allowing itself to be translated therein, in other words, *interpreted*

by its semantic equivalent: from this moment it can no longer be taken as proper name.⁴⁹

For Derrida, the possibility of the proper name makes language itself possible. Its very properness, however – in the French sense of property rather than the English one of propriety – prevents it belonging ‘*proprement*’ to a language. While names can be translated into a language, their translation is not a definable event (as, say, ‘*propre*’ to ‘proper’ is): it ‘operates immediately’, so that it is ‘not even an operation in the strict sense’, though speakers ‘could be attentive to [its] effect’. It is important, here, that Derrida does not describe an ambiguity between sense and reference embedded in the name itself: instead, he creates a narrative of confusion, attentiveness, and temptation around the intangible ‘operation’. Like Derrida, Muldoon is preoccupied in his early poetry by loosening the properness of proper names and the experiences of perplexity, attentiveness, and temptation that are the result.⁵⁰

Derrida’s discussion of translation hinges on the naming event, the point at which a word is attached to a single referent and therefore leaves the language. But properness is always a factor of belonging to a language, in the sense that names must come from somewhere. This is most obviously the case when names are re-used – when a person, place, or thing is named after someone, somewhere, or something else. Sometimes the reasons for and effects of such a decision are painfully conspicuous, as in the case of ‘Joseph Mary Plunkett Ward’ in ‘Anseo’. Other poems are more canny about the origins of their names, such as ‘Bran’ (78) and ‘Oscar’ (328–29), which are both about pet dogs. ‘Bran’ alludes to various Irish legends with characters of that name before incidentally

⁴⁹ Jacques Derrida, ‘Des Tours de Babel’, trans. by John F. Graham, in *Acts of Religion*, ed. by Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 109–10.

⁵⁰ By the late 1990s, temptation dominates the experience of name interpretation in Muldoon’s poetry; see, for instance, ‘The Little Black Book’ (444–45), ‘Errata’ (445–46), and ‘The Hug’ (456–57).

mentioning the fact that the dog is an 'oatmeal Labrador'. The doubly-named 'Oscar MacOscair' prompts the response "'Why?' 'Why not?'". Translating names into names is another way of binding sense to reference and inviting interpretation that also suggests the dangers of such interpretation (the prime example in Muldoon's poetry being that of MacNeice in '7, Middagh Street', discussed above).

Clair Wills creates a similar interpretative narrative for 'Chinook' (155–56; from *Meeting the British*, 1987), a poem that sees 'a semantic / quibble' in the name of the Chinook salmon.⁵¹ Wills differentiates between the 'metonymic' or 'social process of naming' of the Chinook salmon, tribe, and wind, and the 'metaphorical' or 'artistic' naming of the military helicopter, which is based on a similarity between the Chinook wind and the movement of air caused by its blades. She concludes that in the end both kinds of naming 'depend on the same processes' and contribute to the 'instability and polysemousness of words' that is the 'subject' of the poem. There is no distinction in Wills' analysis, however, between proper nouns and common ones; her interpretation assumes that the use of 'Chinook' to refer to a trading patois and to a salmon, for example, functions in the same way as 'the meanings of a type of discourse and a fish' attached to 'carp'. While on some basic level this is correct, 'Chinook' implies a different relationship between its meanings from 'carp', a relationship that is defined by the naming event and the structures of belonging and possession it always implies. It is therefore complicated – with ominous consequences for a poem that 'quibble[s]' over claims to the word 'Chinook' – by the status of the proper noun as a property of language that can never belong properly to a language. The etymological motivation for a name always remains ominously present, however flippant the *nomen est omen* 'quibble'.

⁵¹ Wills, 'The Lie of the Land', pp. 126–31.

Naming Places, Placing Names

The ownership of names is an especially significant issue in Ireland, where for centuries both place and personal names have been anglicised either by transliteration or translation. Anglicisation violates the relationship between Irish names and the Irish language, which in the case of place names is particularly distinctive. Expressed through the traditional genre of *dinnseanchas*, or place name lore, this relationship is etymological (though not in any strict scientific sense), literary, and mythological. Though its origins are pre-medieval, it is still used by poets writing in both Irish and English. Examples from Muldoon's early work, including 'Clonfeacle' (12–13; from *New Weather*, 1973) and 'The Right Arm' (107–08; from *Quoof*, 1983), are clearly indebted to the *dinnseanchas* poems that appeared in Seamus Heaney's *Wintering Out* (1972), the year before Muldoon's first collection was published.⁵² Heaney typically uses the *dinnseanchas* tradition to knit sense, reference, and personal experience into one synchronic whole. Even his awareness of how this excludes people without a knowledge of Irish helps broaden and deepen a sense of belonging in the present; in 'Broagh' (meaning 'riverbank'), for instance:

Riverbank, the long rigs
ending in broad docken
and a canopied pad
down to the ford.

The garden mould
bruised easily, the shower
gathering in your heelmark
was the black O

in *Broagh*,

⁵² E.g. 'Anahorish', 'Toome', 'Broagh', and 'A New Song'. Seamus Heaney, *Wintering Out* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972), pp. 16, 26, 27, 33.

its low tattoo
among the windy boortrees
and rhubarb-blades

ended almost
suddenly, like that last
gh the strangers found
difficult to manage.

Dinnseanchas is a stabilising force here that places the name in a very specific ‘realm’: the Ireland of Heaney’s own imagination. In a deconstructionist reading of this poem, Eugene O’Brien observes that ‘Broagh’ is not the ‘originary, Gaelic signifier’ it seems to be, but an English transliteration of ‘bruach’ designed to make the name easier to ‘manage’:

In fact, the ‘gh’ is the phonemic representation of the transformation of the original Gaelic morpheme into the phonetic and graphological register of standard English; it is the mark of the ‘strangers’ on the place, rather than a mode of linguistic resistance. In the foregrounding of this phoneme, the poem is deconstructing its own position with regard to ‘the exclusivity of the pronunciation of “Broagh”’.⁵³

There is another layer to be deconstructed here, however. Transliteration aims at the reproduction of a foreign phonetic register in a domestic graphological register (*not* ‘a transformation [...] into the phonetic [...] register’); the ‘gh’ is difficult to manage because it is an imperfect match for the Gaelic *ch* – it would of course be easier if it were understood to correspond entirely to English rules of pronunciation. Similarly, Heaney’s selection of the ‘O’ and the ‘gh’ for further interpretation – the only parts of ‘Broagh’ that are different from the Gaelic spelling *bruach* – show him applying the principles of *dinnseanchas* to an anglicisation. O’Brien argues that in ‘deconstructing its own position’,

⁵³ Eugene O’Brien, ‘At the Frontier of Language: Literature, Theory, Politics’, *Minerva – An Internet Journal of Philosophy*, 1 (1997) <<http://www.minerva.mic.ul.ie/vol1/paper3.html>>. The quotation at the end of this passage is from Neil Corcoran, *Seamus Heaney* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), p. 90.

the poem 'demonstrates the impossibility of a linguistic decolonization'. This relies on keeping 'Broagh' and *bruach* separate, when in actuality the nature of their etymological connection means Heaney can use *dinnseanchas* to reabsorb the transliteration into a traditionally Irish-language attitude to toponymy, though a full 'linguistic decolonization' is impossible. 'Broagh' is not quite the omen O'Brien would have it be.

Muldoon's *dinnseanchas* poems, in contrast, focus on the processes Heaney conceals, drawing attention to the fact that the 'intralinguistic translation' of Irish place names no longer 'operates immediately' (to use Derrida's terms) even for most Irish people using anglicised place names. Instead, interference from transliteration and translation break up the name into sense and reference. This happens in 'Clonfeacle', in which the speaker 'translate[s] the placename' while walking by a river 'That translates stone to silt' (12). Although the poem begins with the story of Saint Patrick losing a tooth in the meadow it is not really clear that this is the origin of 'Clonfeacle', which translates as 'meadow of the tooth';⁵⁴ Muldoon's poem thus reproduces the structure of 'Broagh', the first word of which is an inconspicuous translation of the name ('Riverbank'). But Muldoon rather pointedly draws attention to this otherwise subtle *dinnseanchas*. Without a knowledge of Irish, a reader would find it impossible to 'translate the placename' as the speaker does, even with the first stanza's clue. The act of translation thus disintegrates the name into a richly meaningful but unspecifiable 'silt' to nourish the poem. Eventually, the implications of the *dinnseanchas* dissipate entirely as the speaker and his companion turn their attention to each other:

I turn my back on the river
And Patrick, their sermons

⁵⁴ P. W. Joyce, *Irish Local Names Explained* (Dublin: McGlashen & Gill, 1870), p. 30.

Ending in the air. (13)

It is emblematic that while Heaney ends such explorations of the name ‘almost suddenly’ in ‘that last / *gh* the strangers found / difficult to manage’ (‘Broagh’) or ‘waist-deep in mist’ (‘Anahorish’), Muldoon here describes the ‘sermons’ that link land and language as ‘ending in the air’. For Heaney, *dinnseanchas* is a grounding, stabilising, even life-affirming force that encompasses anglicisations as easily as Gaelic names; for Muldoon, however, it takes the name apart, separating sense from reference through translation and transliteration to perform ‘yet another release of ballast’, to use the phrase from ‘Cradle Song for Asher’.

The word ‘sermons’ from ‘Clonfeacle’ prefigures Muldoon’s later, more ironic attitude to *dinnseanchas*. ‘Unapproved Road’ (*Moy*, 4–7), for example, records an absurd and pedantic conversation with a ‘Tuareg’ (a North African nomad) in Rotterdam about the etymology of the place name ‘*Scairbh na gCaorach*’. The Tuareg bears strong similarities with certain characters who interrupt Ciaran Carson’s poems with place name etymologies.⁵⁵ Between the Heaneyesque ‘Clonfeacle’ and the pedantry of ‘Unapproved Road’, however, sits the much-discussed poem ‘The Right Arm’, in which *dinnseanchas* promises a release from an ominous name that never comes. The speaker remembers being ‘three-ish’ and reaching into a jar of sweets in his family’s shop in Eglish:

I would give my right arm to have known then
how Eglish was itself wedged between
ecclesia and *église*.

The Eglish sky was its own stained-glass vault
and my right arm was sleeved in glass
that has yet to shatter. (108)

⁵⁵ See, for example, ‘Dresden’ and ‘Hamlet’, in Ciaran Carson, *Collected Poems* (Oldcastle: Gallery Press, 2008), pp. 77–81, 207–10.

Clair Wills has read this as ‘a poem about the way that adults remain both trapped and protected by their early experiences’.⁵⁶ Etymology reveals how thoroughly the church defined Eglish and the childhood spent there, allowing the speaker to contemplate the possibility of this protective glass ‘shatter[ing]’. Such an interpretation requires the reader to accept the poem’s *dinnseanchas*-style elision of the difference between ‘Eglish’, *ecclesia*, and *église* as etymologically related lexical forms, and as meaningfully concurrent ideas. There are several obstacles in these stanzas to an easy acceptance of this *dinnseanchas* perspective, however: first, the awkward spatial metaphor for the etymological relationship, ‘wedged between’; second, the fact that the italicised words suggest a further translation (‘church’) that does not fit into the etymological paradigm; and third, the ghost of another word, ‘English’, which is left out of the equation, though it is clearly also ‘wedged’ into the same phonetic, if not etymological, space. The poem’s hypothetical sacrifice of ‘The Right Arm’ – offered up already in the title’s use of the definitive article – ‘to have known then’ about the place name’s history is therefore more than a question of understanding one’s heritage: it is a painful recognition of the awkward, precarious, and claustrophobic constructions of place that *dinnseanchas* creates. Knowing the etymology of ‘Eglish’ cannot disentangle it from the speaker’s life: the glass still ‘has yet to shatter’.

All modern *dinnseanchas* poetry is made ominous by the colonial history encoded in the relationship of Irish place names with English. In ‘The Right Arm’, for instance, the relationship between ‘Eglish’ and ‘English’ is so much more insistent (presumably it is one reason why he wishes he knew the etymology before) than that between ‘Eglish’, An Eaglais, and their French and Latin etyma. Muldoon revels in the strangeness and the

⁵⁶ Wills, *Reading Paul Muldoon*, p. 102.

opacity of transliterations, frequently playing on etymological elements that are unrecognisable to non-Irish-speakers, as in ‘Clonmoe, or Clonmain’ (‘John Luke: *The Fox*’, *Moy*, 31) and ‘Maghera, [...] or Maghera, or Magherafelt’ (‘At the Sign of the Black Horse, September 1999’, *Moy*, 75). The latter is especially misleading as it appears among images of the Sahara; the reader is more likely to hear ‘Maghreb’ than the Irish *machaire*, meaning ‘plain’. This freewheeling with etymology is very different, however, from *dinnseanchas* in modern poetry in Irish – and in translations of such poetry. In translating the work of his contemporary Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, Muldoon has to make the same decision the English colonists of Ireland did: of retaining the Irish form of a place name, using a transliterated English form, or translating the etymological elements of the Irish name into English. When the origin of a name is key to the material of the poem, he often chooses to translate it, but these incidences also appear alongside Irish forms and transliterations (e.g. ‘Women’s Cliff’ and ‘Coosheen’ in ‘The Fairy Boat’), and sometimes his idiosyncratic transliterations misleadingly present themselves as translations carrying etymological information (e.g. ‘Moonstare’ for ‘Munster’ in ‘Cathleen’).⁵⁷ The fact that these poems are all presented in facing page translations makes Muldoon’s decisions evident even to readers with no knowledge of Irish.

In her Irish poems, there is no need for Ní Dhomhnaill to complicate *dinnseanchas* with the ominous Englishness of transliteration or translation. Nevertheless, the themes of colonisation and its linguistic consequences lie behind her decision to write in Irish, which she has called ‘the corpse that sits up and talks back’;⁵⁸ this theme is necessarily worked out in Muldoon’s individual translations. ‘An Obair’, the English title of which is

⁵⁷ Ní Dhomhnaill, *The Astrakhan Cloak*, pp. 60–63, 38–41.

⁵⁸ Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, *Selected Essays* (Dublin: New Island Books, 2005), p. 10.

‘The Task’, is a prime example. Like Eglish, An Obair is a Norman place; unlike Eglish, it is named in Gaelic rather than Norman French in a way that seems to reflect the native Irish workers’ perspective on its construction:

It’s from the massive Norman earthworks I glimpsed through a curtain of trees
as I drove quickly past,
somewhere near Kilmainham, County Meath,
that the place took its name. Nobber. From the Irish *an obair*, ‘the task’.⁵⁹

At the end of this first stanza, the original Irish poem has only ‘Sin í An Obair’ – ‘That is An Obair’, or translated intralinguistically, ‘That is the task’ – delicately blending the proper noun and the common one, in contrast to Muldoon’s thorough explanation of the transliteration.⁶⁰ Despite this explanation, the rude sense of ‘Nobber’ is difficult to see around; it seems like a deliberate joke about the Irish workers’ Norman overlords revealed by their English descendants’ own transliteration.

The *dinnseanchas* of An Obair sets the scene for the poem’s meditation on suffering in the modern world, from genocides and civil wars to personal experiences of sickness and death. All this suffering happens in one long list, a single sentence that takes up the majority of the next four stanzas in a way that recalls Muldoon’s own list poems, such as ‘The Old Country’, ‘As’ (*Moy*, 33–36), and ‘The Humors of Hakone’.⁶¹ On the return to An Obair in the final stanza, Muldoon chooses again to use the transliteration ‘Nobber’:

to take it all in, to make room in your heart without having your heart burst,
to take in not only this but that Norman motte and bailey

⁵⁹ Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill, *The Fifty Minute Mermaid*, trans. by Paul Muldoon (Oldcastle: Gallery Press, 2007), pp. 20–23.

⁶⁰ Muldoon also tightens up the first sentence by reversing the subject and object of the main clause and splitting it between the beginning and the end of the sentence (a literal translation of the Irish would be ‘The Norman motte and bailey [...] gives the place its name’).

⁶¹ Paul Muldoon, ‘The Old Country’, in *Horse Latitudes* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), pp. 38–46; Paul Muldoon, ‘The Humors of Hakone’, in *Maggot* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), pp. 63–71.

I passed near Kilmainham or thereabouts,
a place called Nobber. That's the task. *An obair*. A task that's far from easy.

This task is also that of a translator: there is a distinct echo here of Walter Benjamin's seminal essay 'The Task of the Translator' and its call for translators 'to recuperate pure language shaped by linguistic development'.⁶² A translation must attempt to find as many ways of taking things in as there are things to be taken in; hence Muldoon's overly meticulous treatment of Ní Dhomhnaill's *dinnseanchas*. In the translation of the place names of Ireland, the meaningfulness discovered by *dinnseanchas* is weighted down still further by the additional meanings created by colonial anglicisations. It is Muldoon's task as Ní Dhomhnaill's translator to take all of this in.

While English transliterations deliberately obliterated the etymologies of Irish place names and the myths and superstitions they carried, precisely the opposite process was happening in another colony: America. In the long and difficult poem 'Madoc: A Mystery' (202–321), Muldoon investigates how Native American names were subjected to something like *dinnseanchas*, in an attempt to discover an ancient British claim to the land (ironically through the Celtic languages that were being suppressed in Ireland and Wales). Etymological speculation and colonial speculation are thus intertwined yet again. Madoc was a medieval Welsh prince who supposedly established a colony in North America that then disappeared; Robert Southey wrote his *Madoc* while expeditions were being made to discover the people descended from and most importantly named after Madoc. Muldoon's poem imagines what might have happened if Southey and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's own colonisation project had gone ahead. The first clue for the detective investigating the images found on the retina of South, a descendant of Edith

⁶² Walter Benjamin, 'The Translator's Task', trans. by Steven Rendall, in *The Translation Studies Reader*, ed. by Lawrence Venuti, 3rd edn (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 75–83 (p. 82).

Southey and the party's Native American guide, is an interpretation of the Roanoke Rood, 'a scorch-marked lump of wood' with the word 'Croatan' burnt into it (205). The Roanoke Rood was seen as evidence of a lost English colony that supposedly left Roanoke island for Croatoan island, joining the local Croatan tribe which was supposedly descended from Madoc's colony. South's origins are a mystery at first:

'Until?' 'Until we discovered his gloss
In sympathetic ink:
C[olridge]RO[bert Southey The S]ATAN[ic School].' (205)

South interprets the word 'Croatan' in a way that is both pseudo-etymological – explaining the origin of the name using its form – and opportunistic, applying Southey's criticism of Byron and Thomas Moore (the circumstances of which are given later, in '[Neurath]'; 298–99) to Coleridge and Southey themselves.

A tension between discovery and invention is present in all etymological work undertaken before the advent of comparative philology, and South's gloss is an extreme version of some of the etymological arguments made for the existence of the descendants of lost colonies – for example, that the "[...] Mohegan, / are the seed of the Celtic chieftain, Eoghan" (207), or that 'the "nock" in Mount Monadnock / is indeed the Gaelic word *cnoc*, a hill' (248), or that '*the name of the Mandans, [is] a corruption or abbreviation, perhaps, of 'Madawgwys', the name applied by the Welsh to the followers of Madawc*' (311). This final example comes from a found text, again raising the issue of discovery and invention.⁶³ South's glosses were discovered written in 'sympathetic ink', which was invented during the Revolutionary War to convey secret messages on normal letters whose invented content was innocuous. His etymologising seems to invent a

⁶³ From George Catlin, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of the North American Indians*, 2 vols (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1841), II, 260.

history for a discovered word, whilst the detective discovers a gloss in what might well be an invented word; in Muldoon's fiction the Roanoke Rood reads 'Croatan' (the name of the tribe) but when the English returned to Roanoke they reported finding the word 'Croatoan' (the name of the island). This confusion occurs twice more in the poem (297, 320), the second time with the additional suggestion that the word might have been 'Crotona', the (Latinised) name of an ancient Greek colony in southern Italy (320). Sifting out the original referents of these names cannot solve the mystery of their formal resemblance to each other, however: they exist only as the objects of an etymological investigation, as the inventions of a discovery. The etymological project of transforming names into omens of colonisation is complete, though the zeal with which names are discovered to be mere forms is ominous.

Names often appear in quotation marks in 'Madoc', contributing to a general sense in the text that they are provisional. The implications of the citation of "'CROATAN'" (320), "'Shoshone'" (315–16), "'Mandan'" (315) and so on are prepared by the appearance of "'France'" (253). Suspending names like this encourages etymological interpretation, which depends on both the differences between words and their transferability; the colonists' claims to land were similarly dependent on the supposed superiority of their race and the traceable relationships between the two races. Names begin to refer only to themselves as these arguments gather pace and confidence:

'I wanted merely to assure you that the name "Evans"
Is akin to both "Eoghan" and "Owen

Gwyneth", the father of Madoc,
And that Madoc himself is, above all, emblematic

Of our desire to go beyond ourselves...' (303)

The citationality of names is effected on several levels here: firstly, this whole section is in quotation marks, though it is impossible to tell who is speaking; secondly, the names themselves are quoted as names rather than with reference to people; and thirdly, these names are genealogically connected to Madoc, who is ‘above all, emblematic’ – a symbol, rather than a character or a person. In an etymological argument, names are not translated, but shown to be translations. Etymologising names indicates an ominous desire to have already gone ‘beyond ourselves’ so that ‘merely’ an assurance of the fact is necessary, in Evans’ case to justify a British claim to America on the premise that it has already been claimed by his ancestors. Muldoon’s explorations of the relationship between property and proper nouns in his postcolonial *dinnseanchas* are never free from this ominous desire.

The Ominousness of Muldoon’s Names

The etymological perspective assumes that the name is already a translation. Like *dinnseanchas* and the codedness of Irish personal names, and unlike the ‘parlour-gamish [...] *nomen est omen* mode’, etymology makes sense and reference indistinguishable; the name is ominous before it is even interpretable as an omen. Even at his most flippant and factitious, Muldoon is exploring the other realms in which names exist – and have existed – rather than speculating about the relationship between pure referentiality and sense. A closer look at the increasingly frequent occasions on which he explores the reach of his own name will provide some final illustrations of this point. ‘Capercaillies’ (198–99), published in the same collection as ‘Madoc’ (*Madoc: A Mystery*, 1990), is often cited as a supreme example of Muldoon’s artificiality: it is an acrostic that conceals the message ‘Is this a New Yorker poem or what’. In it, ‘Saint Joan’ asks “Paul? Was it you put the *pol* in

polygamy / or was it somebody else?'. While the idiom of putting the x in y typically relies on coincidence and self-conscious artificiality for its humour, it nevertheless makes use of an etymological discourse; here, an etymology is invented from the slippage between the English spelling 'Paul', the Irish spelling 'Pól', and the Latin prefix 'poly'. A similar narrativisation of what is technically a pun occurs in 'Incantata', in which another woman, Mary Farl Powers, nicknames Muldoon:

[...] you detected in me a tendency to put
on too much artificiality, both as man and poet,
which is why you called me 'Polyester' or 'Polyurethane'. (334)

Though Powers herself does not imply any stronger connection between 'Paul' and 'Polyester' than a pun, the poem's explanation of her reasoning creates an etymology for the bestowal of the nickname. There is some irony in Muldoon's straight-faced hinting at an artificial etymology to explain a punning criticism of his own artificiality. But how artificial is the connection between 'Paul' and 'Polyester' if the pun is motivated? Speaking about authors punning on their own names in an interview, Muldoon has said 'I think some of these links are very tenuous – absolutely, they are – but that doesn't mean they're not real'.⁶⁴ The acrostic pattern of 'Capercaillies' is tenuous but too conspicuous to be ignored; linking names and common nouns is a particularly tenuous procedure but both 'Saint Joan' and the character of Powers use it to make real criticisms.

Last year Muldoon gave a lecture to the Poetry Society in which he quoted some of his own work and disclosed the presence of his own name behind certain choices of words:

⁶⁴ Dan Eltringham and Kit Toda, 'Paul Muldoon Interview (Part 2)', *literateur.com*, 11 November 2009 <<http://literateur.com/paul-muldoon-interview-part-2/>>.

You'll notice a little play on the name Muldoon there in the word "meltdown".

You notice that little play on the name Muldoon in "maelstrom and muddle?" I'm sure you know I introduce that kind of thing mostly to relieve the tedium.⁶⁵

The *nomen est omen* mode Muldoon is 'fond of playing with' here enters a realm of self-parody. Critics have already pointed out this direction in Muldoon's work: John Kerrigan refers to him as 'Muddledoon';⁶⁶ John Lyon, comparing Muldoon's apparently senseless suggestiveness to that of a spell-check programme, offers '[f]or "Muldoon" read "Microsoft"?'.⁶⁷ But both Kerrigan and Lyon perceive something more than a 'little play' in Muldoon's meltdowns, maelstroms, and muddles (not to mention his mushrooms and mudrooms). By emboldening interpreters, the potential for etymological slippage prevents any interpretative conclusion; possibilities proliferate, meaning the link between 'Paul' and 'poly-' is as relevant as that between 'Muldoon' and 'muddle'. There is something distinctive happening, however, when such slippages occur between names and common nouns, or indeed two names, and it is not because a theoretical boundary between sense and reference has been violated. However tenuous or convincing, whether introduced through sociolinguistic codes, allegory, *dinnseanchas*, or simple phonetic resemblance, Muldoon's etymological interpretations of names confront the idea that they never belong wholly either to their bearers or to language. His approach has significant poetic and political implications that should act as a reminder of the ominous motives behind any temptation to say '*nomen est omen*'.

⁶⁵ Muldoon, 'The Word on the Street', pp. 64, 73.

⁶⁶ John Kerrigan, 'Paul Muldoon's Transits: Muddling Through after *Madoc*', in *Paul Muldoon*, ed. by Kendall and McDonald, pp. 125–49 (p. 135).

⁶⁷ John Lyon, "'All That': Muldoon and the Vanity of Interpretation', in *Paul Muldoon*, ed. by Kendall and McDonald, pp. 110–24 (p. 123).

Conclusion

Etymological poetry accords a special value to obsolescence. But what does it mean to say that the obsolete has a value, or that a poem invokes something called an ‘etymological meaning’? This is a paradox brought about by a modern and particularly blunt interpretation of the etymological fallacy, which defines etymology as a discipline concerned with language that no longer means anything. Some theorists soften the blow by rehabilitating etymology as a rhetorical device; similarly, some poets use it as a resource that, in the context of poetry, is free from the scientific ruling against the etymological fallacy. Both resolve the conflict that has been inherent in the phrase ‘etymological meaning’ ever since ‘meaning’ was construed as a synchronic phenomenon based on the differentiation of terms in a linguistic system. Fredric Jameson explains how such a resolution is achieved:

Saussure’s is in a sense an existential perception: no one denies the fact of the diachronic, that sounds have their own history and that meanings change. Only for the speaker, at any moment in the history of the language, one meaning alone exists, the current one: words have no memory. This view of language is confirmed rather than refuted by the appeal to etymology [...]. For etymology, as it is used in daily life, is to be considered not so much a scientific fact as a rhetorical form, the illicit use of historical causality to support the drawing of logical consequences [...].¹

The view that ‘words have no memory’ is enabling for etymology as a ‘rhetorical form’, which reconstructs the histories of words for reasons that are firmly situated in the present. Even outside of ‘daily life’ – among professional etymologists engaged in what

¹ Fredric Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 6.

Yakov Malkiel insists is a 'strictly identificational discipline'² – the irrelevance of etymology to current language is taken as given, so that 'etymological meaning' remains a metalinguistic concept. Etymological poetry, in contrast, values the tensions inherent in the idea of 'etymological meaning' that these other discourses find ways to resolve.

It may seem strange to argue that poet-critics who see etymology as poetically meaningful are primarily focused on the meaninglessness of obsolete language. By inviting their readers to go to the effort of researching, imagining, or judging etymologies, however, W. H. Auden, J. H. Prynne, and Paul Muldoon are all constantly reminding them that 'words have no memory'. This is what makes etymological poetry distinctive; it is also what makes it controversial. The very fact that meanings become obsolete demonstrates that language is always in contention. Who can say, for example, when the Latin *homo*, 'man', stopped playing a part in what 'homage' means? If Auden means it in his poem 'Homage to Clio' (in 1955),³ or Muldoon means it in a reading of how '[t]he giving over of oneself to a power beyond oneself is, of course, central to the idea of the writer [...] as medium which Auden so readily embraced' (in 2004)⁴ – or, indeed, if any reader now feels tempted to make the link with 'homosexuality' – then what is the significance of its obsolescence? Muldoon extends his argument with reference to Horace, whose name, he says, is 'evoked' by Auden's 'near versions' of it, including "'Homage'". Next to the *OED*-sanctioned etymology of 'homage', this seems incredibly speculative, but the comparison is important because it raises the issue of how to interpret obsolescence. Using more or less sophisticated methods, both readings of 'homage' reconstruct connections that never actually existed. Once 'homage' meant

² Yakov Malkiel, *Etymology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 2.

³ W. H. Auden, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Edward Mendelson, rev. edn (London: Faber and Faber, 1994), pp. 610–13.

⁴ Paul Muldoon, *The End of the Poem: Oxford Lectures in Poetry* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006), p. 360.

‘homage’ the meaning of *homo* was already relegated to its etymology; once ‘Horace’ was given as a name, it was as if it never had a meaning in the language from which it came.⁵ Taking full account of obsolescence by focusing in on this blind spot in the history of language inevitably leads to ways of writing and reading that are speculative, difficult, and pedantic.

In the readings of etymological poetry presented here, etymological speculation is dominant in Muldoon, etymological difficulty in Prynne, and etymological pedantry in Auden, though these features are obviously all related and may be found in the work of all three. They are also found in the readings themselves. This poetry demands interpretation of a kind that participates in the tensions associated with ‘etymological meaning’, so that any attempt to account for them intensifies them still further. As poet-critics, Auden, Prynne, and Muldoon demonstrate the consequences of etymological reading in ways that can be brought to bear on the styles of reading their own poetry has engendered, including the style adopted here. Their justifications for etymological readings are particularly distinctive: Muldoon’s is wilfully idiosyncratic; Prynne’s is technical and theoretical; and Auden’s is based on the longstanding notion that philology is itself a ‘poetical’ discipline. These approaches are matched by the cues, both emphasised and unemphasised, that are given for such readings in their poems. But it is not quite accurate to say that these poets license etymological criticism of their work: rather, they insist that interpreting obsolescence is always a self-conscious, tenuous enterprise. As such, etymological poetry intervenes in the debate about the responsibilities of close reading. It encourages ingenious interpretations built on

⁵ The original meaning of the name is unknown, but it is thought to be from Etruscan, a lost language. ‘Horatius’, *A Dictionary of First Names*, ed. by Patrick Hanks and Flavia Hodges (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

specialist knowledge that often can only be acquired from the dictionary (which does, however, defend the practice from the additional charge of elitism). With a new type of poetry comes a new type of criticism, and a new way of conceptualising the relationship between poetry and criticism.

In 2008, Derek Attridge and Henry Staten published a conversation about the responsibilities of close reading entitled 'Reading for the Obvious', having agreed on 'minimal reading as a critical virtue'.⁶ Such 'minimal reading' sets itself against any appreciation of the poetic – and critical – value of the non-obvious, of which the obsolete may be considered emblematic. Drawing a precise line between the virtue of 'minimal reading' and the 'virtuosity' of etymological reading, however, is not an easy task. For example, Attridge wonders about the status of historical Christian associations in William Blake's 'The Sick Rose', if they are '[o]bvious to Blake but not to us?'. The use of etymology to historicise readings is a long way from the concept of etymological poetry, but Attridge hints that its implications are far-reaching.⁷ The most obvious danger is an intentional fallacy. Deeper than this, though, is the notion that historical associations are perhaps more 'obvious' to critics trained to be conscious of them than to poets for whom they were a linguistic reality. This is the real concern for Attridge here, and wherever he engages with the etymological argument. In *Peculiar Language* (1988) he suggested that the scienticity of etymology made it a powerful critical rhetoric;⁸

⁶ Derek Attridge and Henry Staten, 'Reading for the Obvious: A Conversation', *World Picture*, 2 (Autumn 2008) <http://www.worldpicturejournal.com/WP_2/Attridge_Staten.html>.

⁷ For example, in the parenthesis that follows Attridge notes that such historicised readings sometimes make more invasive demands: '([t]here are, of course, instances where we need not to recover older meanings but obliterate, as we read, current meanings; one word that frequently produces this necessity is *gay*.)'. This demonstrates the specific importance of the etymological argument to queer theory, as discussed in the Introduction.

⁸ Derek Attridge, 'Language as History/History as Language: Saussure and the Romance of Etymology', in *Peculiar Language: Literature as Difference from the Renaissance to James Joyce* (London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 90–126 (p. 126).

recently he has criticised Muldoon for exploiting its power.⁹ More recently still, he has praised Prynne's 'compelling' reworking of a 'highly traditional' view of poetic sound in 'Mental Ears', before rejecting its etymological basis:

Words don't carry their former incarnations with them, and neither poets nor readers can be expected to possess the kind of philological knowledge that Prynne displays in his analysis.¹⁰

Attridge's goal is not to invalidate the etymological argument completely, but to match its undeniable appeal with critical restraint. By identifying the remoteness of Prynne's difficulty and the spectacle of Muldoon's speculations, however, he demonstrates how contested the relationship between etymology and close reading really is.

In his conversation with Attridge, Staten has no qualms about assigning all of this – including 'retrieving what a word might have meant to the author, but not to us' – to the 'realm of the non-obvious'. His critique of the consequences of entertaining such an approach is accordingly more forceful:

The "fissures" in poems that cunning contemporary readers discern occur not at the level of visible craft-mistakes but at the level of the deep historical resonances of words.

Such readers thus fail to attend to 'how poems succeed or fail at being well made'. In etymological poetry, however, 'the deep historical resonances of words' are acknowledged as part of how the poem is made: the etymological poem is a verbal creation that draws attention to language itself as a creation. This is not so different from the observation that rhymes exist in the language before poets arrange them into a poem, apart from the fact that obsolescence makes etymologising appear as a

⁹ Derek Attridge, 'Conjurers Turn Tricks on Wizards' Coat-Tails', *Times Higher Education*, 23 June 2006 <<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/features/conjurers-turn-tricks-on-wizards-coat-tails/203931.article>>.

¹⁰ Derek Attridge, *Moving Words: Forms of English Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 87, 91.

destructive rather than a constructive activity. Etymological criticism discerns “‘fissures’” (neutralised immediately here by scare quotes) that, Staten implies, are read as if they were ‘craft-mistakes’. Auden, Prynne, and Muldoon, however, treat the ‘intrinsic fault system’ of language as a source of poetry, so that the poet’s response to the history of words is interpretable in almost the same way as his response to the sounds of words. The difference, of course, is in the effect of obsolescence. Interpreting the non-obvious value of the obsolete is an obvious demand the etymological poem makes in its basic construction.

Attridge and Staten negotiate an age-old debate about the distinctiveness of poetically crafted language. They argue that the detailed study of a poem’s form (syntax, rhythm, rhyme, etc.) allows, and perhaps necessitates, a reading of its meaning or content that limits itself to the ‘obvious’. The etymological version of this debate compares poetic form with philological abstraction – in which, as Auden writes, ‘words become [...] little lyrics about themselves’¹¹ – so that the very non-obvious quality of obsolescence then weighs on the question of meaning. Prynne, for example, quotes this from Gerald L. Bruns as a ‘comparable starting-point’ to his theory of ‘Mental Ears’:

Poetry is made of language but is not a use of it – that is, poetry is made of words but not of what we use words to produce: meanings, concepts, propositions, descriptions, narratives, expressions of feeling, and so on. [...] Poetry is language in excess of the functions of language.¹²

¹¹ W. H. Auden, ‘Making, Knowing and Judging’, in *The Dyer’s Hand; And, Other Essays* (New York: Random House, 1962), pp. 31–60 (p. 35).

¹² J. H. Prynne, ‘Mental Ears and Poetic Work’, *Chicago Review*, 55.1 (2010), 126–57 (p. 144, n. 5); from Gerald L. Bruns, *The Material of Poetry: Sketches for a Philosophical Poetics* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2005), p. 7. Prynne also quotes the passage of Mallarmé (pp. 144–45, n. 6) that represents just such a comparable starting-point for Auden, which is discussed in Chapter 3.

Philological abstraction has a fascinating relationship with poetic abstraction. Here, Bruns' long list of what poetry leaves behind in language has an elegiac aspect that mirrors the way etymology looks back on obsolete meanings. Angela Leighton writes:

Elegy, after all, is writing bereft of its object, form missing its content. It thus, thematically, corroborates the gap which lies at the heart of all literary writing generally.¹³

Etymological poetry corroborates this gap linguistically, by testing the idea that '[p]oetry is made of language' against the idea that language is made of 'fossil poetry'.¹⁴ Rather than taking poetry further into abstraction, then, for Auden, Prynne, and Muldoon appreciating obsolescence constitutes a new commitment to the uses of language poetic form leaves behind. Muldoon's openness to linguistic superstition and intuition, Prynne's determination to hear etymologies, and Auden's adoption of an obscure diction are all different ways of accepting as much of language as possible. Their etymological virtuosity thus redefines just the kind of critical 'virtue' against which Attridge and Staten would contrast it.

Etymological poetry embraces an abstract view of language as 'an intrinsic fault system' (to use Prynne's phrase) that reconnects to its uses through the very process by which language falls out of use and into philology: obsolescence.¹⁵ The etymological 'rite' Auden conducts to remake his poetic diction, for example, gestures towards a perfect language in which communication is 'instantaneous translation' and the world is

¹³ Angela Leighton, *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of a Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 126.

¹⁴ Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'The Poet', in *The Annotated Emerson*, ed. by David Mikics (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), pp. 199–222 (p. 209).

¹⁵ Prynne, p. 142.

represented as a 'realm of sacramental analogies'.¹⁶ In these verbal rites, the obsolete stands for a perfect, finished language, while the exploration of the process of obsolescence actually expresses hope for a living language that is continually changing. Similarly, Prynne's etymological lyric integrates a traditional diction back into the 'fault system' while recognising the hope it represents for a transcendent poetic language. Muldoon's onomastic etymologising, however, places a less positive value on such reinterpretations; the superstition that *nomen est omen* is not hopeful about the connections etymologies reveal between people and the world, but anxious. It thus comes closest to the danger that is at the centre not just of etymological criticism but of all of these etymological projects: over-interpretation. Etymology interprets language beyond the bounds of linguistic experience. It thus compromises both the aim of accepting as much of language as possible, and the resulting reconsideration of the way language establishes relationships between people (including the poet and the critic) and between people and the world.

Inviting etymology into poetry is speculative, difficult, and pedantic not only because it gives value to the obsolete but also because it appreciates that language is bigger than the poem, the poet, and the critic. This is where the creation of the poem, in the abstractions of poetic form, becomes as much of a blind spot as the creation of language itself. To use Jacques Derrida's terms from 'Force and Signification', 'form' must thus be reinterpreted as a structure 'haunted' by creative 'force':

To grasp the operation of creative imagination at the greatest possible proximity to it, one must turn oneself toward the invisible interior of

¹⁶ 'Words and the Word', in W. H. Auden, *Secondary Worlds: The T. S. Eliot Memorial Lectures Delivered at Eliot College in the University of Kent at Canterbury, October 1967* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968, pp. 117–44 (pp. 139, 131).

poetic freedom. One must be separated from oneself in order to be reunited with the blind origin of the work in its darkness.

In this darkness, it is never certain 'whether engraving preserves or betrays speech' – which is the origin of Auden's fear that a letter might 'say more than it meant'.¹⁷ Writing is 'dangerous and anguishing' in this way because it is '*inaugural*, in the fresh sense of the word'. It begins something inside a language that it will always exceed:

If writing is inaugural it is not so because it creates, but because of a certain absolute freedom of speech, because of the freedom to bring forth the already-there as a sign of the freedom to augur.

Derrida's etymological arguments do not perceive obsolescence as a barrier. Earlier in this essay, for example, he introduces an etymology with '[a]utrement dit' ('[i]n other words'), as if the meanings of Latin *sollus* and *citare* could paraphrase the meaning of '*solliciter*': '*ébranler d'un ébranlement qui a rapport au tout*' ('*shaking [citare]* in a way related to the *whole [sollus]*').¹⁸ Similarly, the 'fresh' (in the French, '*jeune*'), revitalised connection between 'inaugural' and 'augur' stretches the concept of the 'already-there' too far. Where does this leave the writer's freedom to invoke obsolete meanings – the once-there, as a sign of the poet's freedom to reach not only beyond individual uses of language but beyond any individual's linguistic experience? Etymological poetry draws this parallel between the abstract and the obsolete to focus even more closely on the forces at work in what Derrida calls '*l'invisible dedans de la liberté poétique*' ('the invisible interior of poetic freedom').

¹⁷ 'The Letter', in Auden, *Collected Poems*, p. 29.

¹⁸ Jacques Derrida, 'Force and Signification', in *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 1–35 (pp. 7, 9, 11, 12, 5); 'Force et signification', in *L'écriture et la différence* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967), pp. 9–50 (pp. 13, 22, 17). Italics are Derrida's and Bass'.

When read through Derrida's 'Force and Signification', the role of the etymological blind spot in this poetry becomes clear: addressing obsolescence is a way of getting closer to the creative force of which poetic form and philological abstraction are the audible echoes. The name that Derrida gives to this blind spot, this 'invisible interior', is not etymology or obsolescence but '[l]'attitude structuraliste'.¹⁹ Structuralism positions itself, elegiacally, in the moment that force is heard as form. It was structuralism, too, that gave the idea of the etymological fallacy its momentum at the beginning of the twentieth century – which, in turn, gave obsolescence the value that is developed in etymological poetry. Coming to terms with obsolescence is thus a means of coming to terms with synchrony: this investigation has come full circle. It arrives, meanwhile, at what Andrew W. Hass has identified as '[t]he crisis of modernity', in his book *Auden's O: The Loss of One's Sovereignty in the Making of Nothing*. This crisis stems from the fact that modernity (including synchrony, and structuralism in general) imagines itself to start from nothing:

this aggrandizement of the new, this privileged positioning of ourselves in the *just now*, was always bound to reveal its holes. For the new, the purely *just now* of the *cogito*, must start from zero, at least at its most reduced level, and to get there, one must zero out the prevailing forms and norms.

With reference to the role of 'nothing' in Shakespeare's plays and Auden's poetry, as well as its religious and philosophical significance, Hass represents the blank slate of modernity by 'the figure of O'.²⁰ The crisis, which has only been recognised in late

¹⁹ Derrida, 'Force et signification', p. 10. 'The structuralist stance, as well as our own attitudes assumed before or within language, are not only moments of history. They are an astonishment rather, by language as the origin of history. By historicity itself'. Derrida, 'Force and Signification', p. 2.

²⁰ Andrew W. Hass, *Auden's O: The Loss of One's Sovereignty in the Making of Nothing* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), pp. 18, 9.

modernity, 'is that we have never come to terms with the O'.²¹ Exploring the implications of the doctrine proscribing the etymological fallacy by taking full account of the 'O' of linguistic obsolescence, etymological poetry is part of this late modern response to the privileging of the present.

The paradox of finding poetic value in obsolescence – of interpreting etymological meaning through resisting the etymological fallacy – has initiated a new understanding of the relationship between poetry and etymology that acknowledges both its intrinsic limitations and its broader consequences. It has long been appreciated that 'the language of the age is never the language of poetry', but for Auden, Prynne, and Muldoon, the language of poetry is never the language of any coherent synchronic system.²² Instead, it is based on and interacts with a diachronic 'fault system'.²³ Their etymological poetry thus touches on questions of form and force that are integral to both modern poetry and modern criticism. For example, one argument made by Staten in support of 'reading for the obvious' is that 'once you have a hypothesis in your head you can always invent clever ways in which to make the parallel fit' – but a key responsibility of etymological reading, as demonstrated by Muldoon (who is often characterised as a very irresponsible etymological reader), is to recognise that the value of the obsolete is of a kind that will not 'fit'. Such a reading is always self-limiting. The same is true of the etymological poem, since it resists absorbing obsolete language and therefore courts charges of pedantry. It is in these limits, however, that creative freedom and creative force are apprehended.

²¹ Hass, pp. 4, 18. See also p. 20: 'we will continue to use the label "late modernity," less because modernity seems to be in its later stages of existence, advancing toward a state of expiration, and more because modernity is *late* in confronting its own inherent O'.

²² Thomas Gray, *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, ed. by Paget Toynbee and Leonard Whibley, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), I, 192.

²³ J. H. Prynne, 'Mental Ears', p. 142.

The etymological moment is never fully open to interpretation, the reason being that it values the processes by which linguistic values are developed and replaced.

By staging a confrontation with the theoretical limits of the concept of synchrony, the etymological moment reveals the limits of both poetic and critical coherence, where they start to disintegrate into studies in speculation, difficulty, and pedantry in the face of 'the invisible interior of poetic freedom'. This produces a more fundamental paradox from what Paula Blank called the 'equivocal nature' of etymology, 'the way it purports to explain everything and to explain nothing':²⁴ explaining everything means explaining nothing, if discovering a coherent form comes at the expense of appreciating creative force. The etymological perspective thus has significant implications for the place of the 'obvious' and the 'difficult' in the relationship between late modern poetry and criticism. But Auden, Prynne, and Muldoon also demonstrate a less abstract consequence of this perspective by confronting the immediate, practical limits of individual vocabularies. Every word has a history; whether obvious or difficult, speculative or scientific, these histories can never belong to a vocabulary. What are the consequences, then, of according value to an aspect of language that is excluded not only from the dominant concern of modern linguistics but also from the experience of all language-users? There can be no control over such a value and therefore no justification for its interpretation. Like Auden's vision of a Pentecostal language 'open in lexicons' and available to everyone,²⁵ etymological poetry is open to every interpreter prepared to accept a language beyond the limits of his or her own vocabulary.

²⁴ Paula Blank, 'The Proverbial "Lesbian": Queering Etymology in Contemporary Critical Practice', *Modern Philology*, 109.1 (2011), 108–34 (p. 113).

²⁵ 'Whitsunday in Kirchstetten', in Auden, *Collected Poems*, pp. 743–45.

This thesis has defined a late modern 'etymological poetry' and explored some possible critical responses to it. Its final conclusions, however, suggest that there is scope for a much broader conceptualisation of etymology in poetry. If the characteristic feature of an etymological poem or reading is that it recognises the obsolete cannot 'fit', then what does it matter whether cues exist in the poet's work that may be used to argue it does? Poetic language can and should be read in terms of its distinctive relationship with language as a diachronic 'fault system'; the only mistake, following Prynne's warning, would be to believe that either the system or the relationship were stable. All modern poetry and criticism relates to the history of its language in a way that is affected by the idea of etymology as a fallacy, and thus by the ultimately uninterpretable value of the obsolete. Auden, Prynne, and Muldoon respond to this tension more comprehensively than most. But their explicit etymologising raises issues that must be central to any broader investigation of the role of etymology in poetry: the link between the creation of poetry and the creation of language itself; the historicity of conventional poetic diction; the temptation to interpret names; and, finally, the idea that though language is inherited its value cannot be taken for granted.

Perhaps the most important conclusion to be drawn from these readings of the etymological poetry of Auden, Prynne, and Muldoon is that to understand how language establishes relationships between people, and between people and the world, an effort needs to be made to appreciate the value of its obsolete histories. This effort is metalinguistic, since it resists the etymological fallacy, and yet determined to interpret etymology *qua* etymology as an active force in language. It thus reflects the value these three poets accord to obsolescence – as evidence of a language that is both always beyond them and constantly being reclaimed.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Texts

- Auden, W. H., *A Certain World: A Commonplace Book* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971)
- , *Another Time* (New York: Random House, 1940)
- , *Collected Poems*, ed. by Edward Mendelson, rev. edn (London: Faber and Faber, 1994)
- , *Collected Shorter Poems, 1927–1957* (London: Faber and Faber, 1966)
- , Foreword to Joseph Brodsky, *Selected Poems* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973)
- , Introduction to M. F. K. Fisher, *The Art of Eating* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963; repr. London: Papermac, 1991), pp. xi–xviii
- , Preface to *The Tree and the Master: An Anthology of Literature on the Cross of Christ*, ed. by Sister Mary Immaculate, C. S. C (New York: Random House, 1965), pp. xiii–xxvi
- , ‘Squares and Oblongs’, in Charles D. Abbott, ed., *Poets at Work* (New York: Harcourt, Brace 1948) pp. 163–81; reprinted in Mendelson, ed., *Prose and Travel Books*, II: 1939–1948 (2002), 339–50
- , *The Complete Works of W. H. Auden: Prose and Travel Books in Prose and Verse*, ed. by Edward Mendelson, 4 vols (London: Faber and Faber, 1996–2010)
- , *The Dyer’s Hand; And, Other Essays* (New York: Random House, 1962)
- , ‘*The Map of All My Youth*’: *Early Works, Friends and Influences*, ed. by Katherine Bucknell and Nicholas Jenkins (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990)
- , ‘The Poetic Process’, *Listener*, 53 (23 June 1955), 1109–12
- , ‘The Things Which Are Caesar’s’, *Theology*, 53 (1950), 411–17; reprinted in Mendelson, ed., *Prose and Travel Books*, III: 1949–1955 (2008), 196–210
- , ‘The True Word Twisted by Misuse and Magic’, *The Washington Post*, 3 December 1967, p. B2
- , ‘Today’s “Wonder-World” Needs Alice’, *The New York Times Magazine*, 1 July 1962; reprinted as ‘Lewis Carroll’ in W. H. Auden, *Forewords and Afterwords*, selected by Edward Mendelson (London: Faber and Faber, 1973), pp. 283–93
- , ‘Words and the Word’, in *Secondary Worlds: The T. S. Eliot Memorial Lectures Delivered at Eliot College in the University of Kent at Canterbury, October 1967* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968), pp. 117–44

- , 'Writing, Or the Pattern Between People', in Naomi Mitchison, ed., *An Outline for Boys & Girls and Their Parents* ([London]: Victor Gollancz, 1932), pp. 849–68
- , Unpublished Letter to Owen Barfield (26 May 1966), Oxford, Bodleian Library, Dep. c. 1056
- Barker, Sebastian, 'A Drink with Paul Muldoon', Interview with Paul Muldoon, *The Long Poem Group Newsletter*, 7 (1998), 1–4
- Eltringham, Dan, and Kit Toda, 'Paul Muldoon Interview (Part 2)', *literateur.com*, 11 November 2009 <<http://literateur.com/paul-muldoon-interview-part-2/>>
- Haffenden, John, Interview with Paul Muldoon, in *Viewpoints: Poets in Conversation with John Haffenden* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), pp. 130–42
- Kennelly, Brendan, 'Auden on Opera, Detective Writers, Wit, Politics, the Camera, Drugs, Poets and Poetry', Interview with W. H. Auden, *Swarthmore College Bulletin*, Alumni Issue, May 1972, pp. 2–15 <<http://www.swarthmore.edu/library/auden/transcript.pdf>>
- McGuinness, Patrick, 'Speculating: Patrick McGuinness Interviews Paul Muldoon', *Irish Studies Review*, 17.1 (2009), 103–10
- Muldoon, Paul, 'Cuthbert and the Otters', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 20 December 2013 <<http://www.the-tls.co.uk/tls/public/article1354247.ece>>
- , *Horse Latitudes* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007)
- , *Maggot* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011)
- , *Moy Sand and Gravel* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002)
- , *Poems, 1968–1998* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001)
- , *The End of the Poem: Oxford Lectures in Poetry* (London: Faber and Faber, 2006)
- , *The Prince of the Quotidian* (Oldcastle: Gallery Press, 1994)
- , 'The Word on the Street: Parnassus and Tin Pan Alley (The Poetry Society Annual Lecture 2012)', *Poetry Review*, 102.3 (2012), 61–82
- , *To Ireland, I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)
- Newman, Michael, 'The Art of Poetry No. 17: W. H. Auden', Interview with W. H. Auden, *Paris Review*, 57 (1974), 32–69
- Orr, Peter, Interview with J. H. Prynne, *The Poet Speaks* 39 (London: British Council, recorded 6 January 1964)

- Prynne, J. H., 'A Pedantic Note in Two Parts', *The English Intelligencer*, 2nd ser., 4 (1967), 346–51; reprinted in Neal Pattison, Reitha Pattison, and Luke Roberts, eds, *Certain Prose of 'The English Intelligencer'* (Cambridge: Mountain Press, 2012), pp. 124–35
- , 'English Poetry and Emphatical Language', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 74 (1988), 135–69
- , *Field Notes: 'The Solitary Reaper' and Others* (Cambridge: the author, 2007)
- , *Force of Circumstance, and Other Poems* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962)
- , *George Herbert, 'Love [III]': A Discursive Commentary* (Cambridge: Barque Press, 2011)
- , *Kazoo Dreamboats: Or, on What There Is* (Cambridge: Critical Documents, 2011)
- , Letter [to Ray Crump] (14 March 1968), *The English Intelligencer*, 3rd ser., 6 (1968), [n.p.]; reprinted in Neal Pattison, Reitha Pattison, and Luke Roberts, eds, *Certain Prose of 'The English Intelligencer'* (Cambridge: Mountain Press, 2012), pp. 183–85
- , 'Mental Ears and Poetic Work', *Chicago Review*, 55.1 (2010), 126–57
- , 'On Maximus IV, V, VI', Lectures transcribed by Tom McGauley, *Iron*, 2 (October 1971), [n.p.]
- , *Poems*, 2nd edn (North Fremantle, Western Australia: Fremantle Arts Centre Press; Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 2005)
- , 'Resistance and Difficulty', *Prospect*, 5 (1961), 26–30
- , *Stars, Tigers and the Shape of Words: The William Matthews Lectures 1992 Delivered at Birkbeck College, London* (London: Birkbeck College, 1993)
- , *Sub Songs* (London: Barque, 2010)
- , *They That Haue Powre to Hurt: A Specimen of a Commentary on Shake-speares Sonnets*, 94 (Cambridge: the author, 2001)
- , Unpublished Letter to Peter Riley (15 September 1985), quoted as an epigraph to Peter Riley, *Reader* (London: the author, 1992), [n.p.]
- Ramchandani, Ariel, 'The Q&A: Paul Muldoon, Poet', *Intelligent Life*, 6 October 2010 <<http://moreintelligentlife.co.uk/blog/ariel-ramchandani/qa-paul-muldoon-poet-editor>>
- Redmond, John, 'Interview with Paul Muldoon', *Thumbscrew*, 4 (1996), 2–18
- Wills, Clair, Nick Jenkins, and John Lanchester, 'An Interview with Paul Muldoon', *Oxford Poetry*, 3.1 (1986), 14–20

Wilson, James S. F., 'The Art of Poetry No. 87: Paul Muldoon', Interview with Paul Muldoon, *Paris Review*, 169 (Spring 2004), 53–91

Secondary Texts

Alcobia-Murphy, Shane, *Sympathetic Ink: Intertextual Relations in Northern Irish Poetry* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006)

Alexander, Michael, *The Poetic Achievement of Ezra Pound* (London: Faber and Faber, 1979)

Allen, Michael, 'Pax Hibernica/Pax Americana: Rhyme and Reconciliation in Muldoon', in McDonald and Kendall, eds, *Paul Muldoon*, pp. 62–95

Arana, Victoria R., *W. H. Auden's Poetry: Mythos, Theory, and Practice* (Amherst, MA: Cambria Press, 2009)

Archambeau, Robert, 'W. H. Auden and Ecopoetics', *Boston Review*, 31 October 2013 <<https://www.bostonreview.net/poetry/archambeau-auden>>

Arnold, Matthew, *On Translating Homer: Three Lectures Given at Oxford* (London: Longman, Green, Longman, and Roberts, 1861); reprinted in R. H. Super, ed., *On the Classical Tradition, The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold* I (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960), pp. 97–216

Attridge, Derek, 'Conjurers Turn Tricks on Wizards' Coat-Tails', *Times Higher Education*, 23 June 2006 <<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/features/conjurers-turn-tricks-on-wizards-coat-tails/203931.article>>

—, *Moving Words: Forms of English Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013)

—, 'Language as History/History as Language: Saussure and the Romance of Etymology', in Derek Attridge, Geoff Benning, and Robert Young, eds, *Poststructuralism and the Question of History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 183–211; reworked and reprinted in *Peculiar Language: Literature as Difference from the Renaissance to James Joyce* (London: Methuen, 1988; repr. London: Routledge, 2004), pp. 90–126

—, and Henry Staten, 'Reading for the Obvious: A Conversation', *World Picture*, 2 (Autumn 2008) <http://www.worldpicturejournal.com/WP_2/Attridge_Staten.html>

Austin, J. L., *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962)

Barfield, Owen, *History in English Words*, rev. edn (Edinburgh: Floris Classics, 1985)

—, *Saving the Appearances: A Study in Idolatry* (London: Faber and Faber, [1957])

Barton, Anne, *The Names of Comedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990)

- Basu, Jay, 'The Red Shift: Trekking J. H. Prynne's Red D Gypsum', *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 30.1 (2001), 19–36
- Batten, Guinn, "'He Could Barely Tell One from the Other": The Borderline Disorders of Paul Muldoon's Poetry', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 95.1 (1996), 171–204
- Bedient, Calvin, Review of 'Epistle to a Godson: And Other Poems By W. H. Auden', *New York Times Book Review*, 24 September 1972, p. BR4
- Benjamin, Walter, 'The Translator's Task', trans. by Steven Rendall, *TTR: Traduction, Terminologie, Rédaction*, 2 (1997), 151–65; reprinted in Lawrence Venuti, ed., *The Translation Studies Reader*, 3rd edn (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 75–83
- Blank, Paula, 'The Proverbial "Lesbian": Queering Etymology in Contemporary Critical Practice', *Modern Philology*, 109.1 (2011), 108–34
- Bliss, Alan, 'The Standardization of Irish', *The Crane Bag*, 5.2 (1981), 76–82
- Boole, George, *An Investigation of the Laws of Thought: On Which Are Founded the Mathematical Theories of Logic and Probabilities* (London: Walton and Maberly; Cambridge: Macmillan, 1854)
- Bourdieu, Pierre, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. by Richard Nice (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984)
- Bowen, Charles, 'A Historical Inventory of the *Dindshenchas*', *Studia Celtica*, 10/11 (1975), 113–37
- Brewer, Charlotte, *Examining the OED* <<http://oed.hertford.ox.ac.uk/main/index.html>>
- , *Treasure-House of the Language: The Living OED* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007)
- Brewster, Scott, *Lyric* (London: Routledge, 2009)
- Brinton, Ian, "'His brilliant luminous shade'", in Ian Brinton, ed., *A Manner of Utterance: The Poetry of J. H. Prynne* (Exeter: Shearsman Books, 2009)
- Brooke, Rupert, *Rupert Brooke: The Collected Poems*, ed. by Edward Marsh (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1918; repr. London: Papermac, 1992)
- Brooks, Cleanth, *The Well Wrought Urn: Studies in the Structure of Poetry* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World: 1947; repr. London: Dobson, [1949])
- Brown, Alan, 'On the Subject of Practical Criticism', *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 28.4 (1999), 293–327
- Brown, Terence, *The Literature of Ireland: Culture and Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

- Browning, Robert, *The Poems*, ed. by John Pettigrew, 2 vols (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981)
- Burchfield, R. W., Preface to *A Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. by R. W. Burchfield, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972–1986), iv (1986), vii–xiii
- Burrow, Colin, ‘I, Lowborn Cur’, *London Review of Books*, 22 November 2012, pp. 15–17
- Campbell, Matthew, ‘Muldoon’s Remains’, in McDonald and Kendall, eds, *Paul Muldoon*, pp. 170–87
- Carpenter, Humphrey, *W. H. Auden: A Biography* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1981; repr. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992)
- Carson, Ciaran, *Collected Poems* (Oldcastle: Gallery Press, 2008)
- , *The Ballad of HMS Belfast: A Compendium of Belfast Poems* (London: Picador/Gallery Press, 1999)
- Catlin, George, *Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Conditions of the North American Indians*, 2 vols (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1841)
- Clahsen, Harald, ‘Linguistic Perspectives on Morphological Processing’, in D. Wunderlich, ed., *Advances in the Theory of the Lexicon* (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2006), pp. 355–88
- Clark, Steve, ‘Prynne and The Movement’, *Jacket*, 24 (2003) <<http://jacketmagazine.com/24/clark-s.html>>
- Clark, Tom, *Charles Olson: The Allegory of a Poet’s Life* (New York: Norton, 1991)
- Coates, Richard, ‘Properhood’, *Language*, 82.2 (2006), 356–82
- Conrad, Peter, ‘The Reason behind Rhyme’, *The Guardian*, 19 November 2006 <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2006/nov/19/poetry.features>>
- Corcoran, Neil, *Seamus Heaney* (London: Faber and Faber, 1986)
- Crawforth, Hannah Jane, *Etymology and the Invention of English in Early Modern Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013)
- Crystal, David, *How Language Works* (London: Penguin, 2005; repr. 2007)
- Culler, Jonathan, ‘Afterword’, in Marion Thain, ed., *The Lyric Poem: Formations and Transformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 237–46
- , *On Puns: The Foundation of Letters* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988)
- Davenport-Hines, R. P. T., *Auden* (London: Heinemann, 1995)
- Davidson, Ian, *Radical Spaces of Poetry* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010)

- Davie, Donald, *Purity of Diction in English Verse; And, Articulate Energy* (London: Penguin, 1992)
- , Review of Andrew Crozier and Tim Longville, eds, *A Various Art*, *PN Review*, 16.2 (1989), 57–58
- , *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973)
- De Trevisa, John, *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus De Proprietatibus Rerum: A Critical Text*, ed. by M. C. Seymour and others, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975–87)
- Del Bello, Davide, *Forgotten Paths: Etymology and the Allegorical Mindset* (Washington, D.C.: CUA Press, 2007)
- Derrida, Jacques, 'Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression', trans. by Eric Prenowitz, *Diacritics*, 25.2 (1995), 9–63
- Derrida, Jacques, 'Des Tours de Babel', trans. by John F. Graham, in Gil Anidjar, ed., *Acts of Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 102–34
- , *Dissemination*, trans. by Barbara Johnson (London: Athlone Press, 1981)
- , 'Faith and Knowledge', trans. by Samuel Weber, in Gil Anidjar, ed., *Acts of Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2002)
- , 'Force and Signification', in *Writing and Difference*, trans. by Alan Bass (London: Routledge, 1978; repr. 2001), pp. 1–35
- , 'Force et signification', in *L'écriture et la différence* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1967), pp. 9–50
- , 'Genesis and Structure of the *Essay on the Origin of Languages*', in *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976; repr. 1997), pp. 165–268
- , *Given Time. 1, Counterfeit Money*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992)
- , 'Signature Event Context', trans. by Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman, *Glyph: Johns Hopkins Textual Studies*, 1 (1977), 172–97
- , "'...That Dangerous Supplement...'", in *Of Grammatology*, trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976; repr. 1997), pp. 141–64
- , 'White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy', trans. by F. C. T. Moore, *New Literary History*, 6.1 (1974), 5–74
- Diepeveen, Leonard, *The Difficulties of Modernism* (New York: Routledge, 2003)

- Dobran, Ryan, Introduction to Ryan Dobran, ed., *On the Poems of J. H. Prynne* (= *Glossator*, 2 (2010)), pp. 1–10
- Dodsworth, Martin, 'Dictionary Drunk', *The Guardian*, 12 October 1972
- Donoghue, Denis, 'Good Grief', *New York Review of Books*, 19 July 1973, pp. 17–18; reprinted in Haffenden, ed., *W. H. Auden*, pp. 480–84
- Ekwall, Eilert, *English River-Names* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928)
- Eliot, T. S., *Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 1948; repr. 1961)
- , 'The Metaphysical Poets', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 20 October 1921; reprinted in *Selected Essays*, 3rd edn (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), pp. 281–91
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo, 'Nature', in David Mikics, ed., *The Annotated Emerson* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), pp. 27–71
- , 'The Poet', in David Mikics, ed., *The Annotated Emerson* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), pp. 199–222
- Emig, Rainer, 'Auden and Ecology', in Stan Smith, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to W. H. Auden* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 212–25
- Emison, Patricia, 'The Paysage Moralisé', *Artibus et Historiae*, 16.31 (1995), 125–137
- Empson, William, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, 3rd edn, rev. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1953)
- , *The Structure of Complex Words* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1951)
- Engels, Friedrich, *Dialectics of Nature*, ed. and trans. by C. P. Dutt (London: Wellred, 2012)
- Epstein, Joseph, 'Vin Audenaire', *Hudson Review*, 56.1 (2003), 57–72
- Eros, Paul, "'One of the Most Penetrating Minds in England:" Gerald Heard and the British Intelligentsia of the Interwar Period' (University of Oxford, 2012)
- Erwin, Philip G., 'A Review of the Effects of Personal Name Stereotypes', *Representative Research in Social Psychology*, 20 (1995), 41–52
- Falci, Eric, *Continuity and Change in Irish Poetry, 1966–2010* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012)
- Farrell, Kirby, 'Wells and Neoteny', in George Edgar Slusser, Patrick Parrinder, and Danièle Chatelain, eds, *H. G. Wells's Perennial Time Machine* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001), pp. 65–75
- Fenollosa, Ernest, and Ezra Pound, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry: A Critical Edition*, ed. by Haun Saussy, Jonathan Stalling, and Lucas Klein (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008)

- Fenton, James, 'A Poke in the Eye with a Poem', *The Guardian*, 21 October 2006
<<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/19/magazine/19muldoon.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>>
- , 'Auden's Last Bow', *The New Statesman*, 27 September 1974, pp. 430–31
- Ford, Andrew, *Origins of Criticism: Literary Culture and Poetic Theory in Classical Greece* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004)
- Fowler, Alastair, *Literary Names: Personal Names in English Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012)
- Foy, Michael, *The Easter Rising*, rev. edn (Stroud: The History Press, 2011)
- Frye, Northrop, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*, ed. by Harold Bloom (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000)
- Fuller, John, *W.H. Auden: A Commentary* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998)
- Fuller, William, 'Restatement of Trysts', *Chicago Review*, 52.2–4 (2004), 241–59
- Gish, Nancy, and Hugh MacDiarmid, 'An Interview with Hugh MacDiarmid', *Contemporary Literature*, 20.2 (1979), 135–54
- Grant, Michael, "'Buxtehude in Kedgere": On J. H. Prynne's *Unanswering Rational Shore*', 22 October 2008 <<http://michaelgrant3.blogspot.co.uk/2008/10/on-jh-prynne.html>>
- Gray, Thomas, *Correspondence of Thomas Gray*, ed. by Paget Toynbee and Leonard Whibley, 3 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971)
- Gregson, Ian, *Contemporary Poetry and Postmodernism: Dialogue and Estrangement* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996)
- Gumbrecht, Hans Ulrich, *The Powers of Philology: Dynamics of Textual Scholarship* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003)
- Haffenden, John, *W. H. Auden: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983)
- Hamilton, Craig A., 'Mapping the Mind and the Body: On W. H. Auden's Personifications', *Style*, 36.3 (2002), 408–27
- Hamilton, G. Rostrevor, *The Tell-Tale Article: A Critical Approach to Modern Poetry* (London: Heinemann, 1949)
- Henry Hart, 'Poetymologies in Seamus Heaney's *Wintering Out*', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 35.2 (1989), 204–31
- Hartman, Geoffrey H., *Criticism in the Wilderness: The Study of Literature Today* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980)

- Haslam, Michael, "'Fool's Bracelet'", *Quid*, 17 (2006), 56–59
- Hass, Andrew W., *Auden's O: The Loss of One's Sovereignty in the Making of Nothing* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2003)
- Hawthorne, Nathaniel, *The Scarlet Letter*, ed. by Brian Harding (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990)
- Heaney, Seamus, Introduction to *Beowulf*, trans. by Seamus Heaney (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), pp. ix–xxx
- , *North* (London: Faber and Faber, 1975)
- , *Preoccupations: Selected Prose, 1968–1978* (London: Faber and Faber, 1980)
- , *The Cure at Troy: A Version of Sophocles' Philoctetes* (London: Faber and Faber, 1990)
- , 'The Drag of the Golden Chain', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 12 November 1999, pp. 14–16
- , *The Government of the Tongue: The 1986 T. S. Eliot Memorial Lectures and Other Critical Writings* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988)
- , 'Widgeon', in *The Faber Book of Contemporary Irish Poetry*, ed. by Paul Muldoon (London: Faber and Faber, 1986), p. 270
- , *Wintering Out* (London: Faber and Faber, 1972)
- Heard, Gerald, *Social Substance of Religion: An Essay on the Evolution of Religion* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1931)
- , *The Emergence of Man* (London: Cape, 1931)
- Heidegger, Martin, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. by Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971)
- Hendon, Paul, *The Poetry of W. H. Auden* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003)
- Herd, David, 'Dislocating Country: Post-War English Poetry and The Politics of Movement', in Peter Robinson, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Contemporary British and Irish Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 497–516
- Hill, Geoffrey, 'Poetry as "Menace" and "Atonement"', in *Collected Critical Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 3–20
- , *The Triumph of Love* (London: Penguin, 1999)
- Holdridge, Jefferson, *The Poetry of Paul Muldoon* (Dublin: Liffey Press, 2008)
- Hopkins, Gerard Manley, *The Poetical Works of Gerard Manley Hopkins*, ed. by Norman H. Mackenzie (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990)

- Horace, *Horace in English*, ed. by D. S. Carne-Ross and Kenneth Haynes (London: Penguin, 1996)
- Horne Tooke, John, *Diversions of Purley*, ed. by Roy Harris (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1993)
- Hughes, Geoffrey, *Words in Time: A Social History of English Vocabulary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988)
- Hutchings, William, 'Enquiry-Based Learning: Definitions and Rationale' (Manchester: Centre for Excellence in Enquiry-Based Learning, University of Manchester, 2007) <http://www.ceebbl.manchester.ac.uk/resources/papers/hutchings2007_definingebl.pdf>
- Hutton, Christopher, 'Semantics and the "Etymological Fallacy" Fallacy', *Language Sciences*, 20.2 (1998), 189–200
- Jackson, H. J., 'Coleridge, Etymology and Etymologic', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 44.1 (1983), 75–88
- Jackson, Peter, *The Mongols and the West, 1221–1410* (Harlow: Pearson/Longman, 2005)
- Jakobson, Roman, 'Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics', in T. A. Sebeok, ed., *Style in Language* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960), pp. 350–77
- Jameson, Fredric, *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972)
- Jarrell, Randall, 'Changes of Attitude and Rhetoric in Auden's Poetry', in *The Third Book of Criticism* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969), pp. 113–50
- , 'On Mitigated Triumphs', *Yale Review*, 44 (June 1955), 603–08; reprinted in Haffenden, ed., *W. H. Auden*, pp. 396–401
- , *Randall Jarrell on W. H. Auden*, ed. by Stephen Burt and Hannah Brooks-Motl (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005)
- Johnson, Samuel, *The Lives of the Poets*, ed. by John H. Middendorf, 3 vols (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010)
- Jones, Chris, *Strange Likeness: The Use of Old English in Twentieth-Century Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006)
- Joyce, James, *Finnegans Wake*, ed. by Robbert-Jan Henkes, Erik Bindervoet, and Finn Fordham (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012)
- Joyce, P. W., *Irish Local Names Explained* (Dublin: McGlashen & Gill, 1870)
- Jung, C. G., *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle* (London: Ark Paperbacks, 1985)

- Keats, John, *The Major Works: Including Endymion, and Selected Letters*, ed. by Elizabeth Cook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008)
- Kendall, Tim, *Paul Muldoon* (Bridgend: Seren, 1996)
- , and Peter McDonald, eds, *Paul Muldoon: Critical Essays* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004)
- Kenneally, Christine, *The First Word: The Search for the Origins of Language* (London: Penguin, 2008)
- Kennedy, George, 'Fenollosa, Pound, and the Chinese Characters', *Yale Literary Magazine*, 126.5 (1958), 24–36
- Kerrigan, John, 'Paul Muldoon's Transits: Muddling Through after *Madoc*', in Kendall and McDonald, eds, *Paul Muldoon*, pp. 125–49
- Kindellan, Michael, 'What Meaning Has in Charge: on Wordsworth, Pound and Prynne', *Études britanniques contemporaines*, 44 (2013) <<http://dx.doi.org/10.4000/ebc.544>>
- Kinsella, John, 'Commentary on the Poem "Rich in Vitamin C" by J. H. Prynne', *Jacket*, 6 (1999) <<http://jacketmagazine.com/06/pryn-kins.html>>
- Kirsch, Adam, 'Auden's N.Y. Households, From Slum to Sublime', *New York Observer*, 3 May 1999 <<http://observer.com/1999/05/audens-ny-households-from-slum-to-sublime/>>
- Kitson, P. R., 'British and European River-Names', *Transactions of the Philological Society*, 94.2 (1995), 73–118
- Larkin, Philip, 'What's Become of Wystan?', *Spectator*, 15 July 1960, pp. 104–05; reprinted in Haffenden, ed., *W. H. Auden*, pp. 414–19
- Lash, Dominic, 'Metonymy as a Creative Structural Principle in the Work of J. H. Prynne, Derek Bailey and Helmut Lachenmann with a Creative Component' (Brunel University, 2010)
- Latter, Alex, '"Scheming for the Possible World": J. H. Prynne's *The White Stones* and *The English Intelligencer*', *Intercapillary Space*, 2010 <<http://intercapillaryspace.blogspot.co.uk/2010/04/scheming-for-possible-world-j.html>>
- Leighton, Angela, *On Form: Poetry, Aestheticism, and the Legacy of a Word* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007)
- Lennard, John, *The Poetry Handbook: A Guide to Reading Poetry for Pleasure and Practical Criticism*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)
- Lenneberg, Eric H., *Biological Foundations of Language* (New York: Wiley, 1967)
- Lerer, Seth, *Error and the Academic Self: The Scholarly Imagination, Medieval to Modern* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002)

- Levin, Susan B., *The Ancient Quarrel between Philosophy and Poetry Revisited: Plato and the Greek Literary Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000)
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude, *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987)
- Lewis, C. S., *Studies in Words* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960)
- , *The Discarded Image: An Introduction to Medieval and Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1964; repr. 1994)
- Liberman, Anatoly, *Word Origins and How We Know Them: Etymology for Everyone* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005; repr. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009)
- Locke, John, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by John W. Yolton (London: Dent, 1977)
- Lukacs, Georg, *The Theory of the Novel: A Historico-philosophical Essay on the Forms of Great Epic Literature*, trans. by Anna Bostock (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971)
- Luna, Joe, 'The World Is For This: On the Poetry of Jonty Tiplady', *All Over the Grid*, 23 May 2012 <<http://fallopianyoutube.blogspot.co.uk/2012/05/world-is-for-this-on-poetry-of-jonty.html>>
- Lyon, John, "'All That": Muldoon and the Vanity of Interpretation', in Kendall and McDonald, eds, *Paul Muldoon*, pp. 110–24
- Mackinnon, Lachlan, Review of 'Maggot, By Paul Muldoon', *The Independent*, 19 November 2010 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/maggot-by-paul-muldoon-2137733.html>>
- Mahon, Derek, *The Bacchae: After Euripides* (Oldcastle: Gallery, 1991)
- Malkiel, Yakov, *Etymology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993)
- Mallarmé, Stéphane, 'Crise de Vers', in *Divagations*, ed. by Eugène Fasquelle (Paris: Bibliothèque-Charpentier, 1897), pp. 235–51
- Man, Paul de, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*, 2nd edn, rev. (London: Methuen, 1983)
- , *The Resistance to Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986)
- Manhire, Bill, 'The Mix-Master and the Dance of Words', *Poetry London*, 58 (Spring 2011) <<http://www.poetrylondon.co.uk/magazines/68/article/the-mix-master-and-the-dance-of-words>>
- Masten, Jeffrey, 'Toward a Queer Address: The Taste of Letters and Early Modern Male Friendship', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 10.3 (2004), 367–84

- , *Textual Intercourse: Collaboration, Authorship, and Sexualities in Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997)
- Mayhead, Robin, 'The Latest Auden', *Scrutiny*, 18 (June 1952), 315–19; reprinted in Haffenden, ed., *W. H. Auden*, pp. 383–88
- McCarthy, Conor, *Seamus Heaney and Medieval Poetry* (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2008)
- McConnell, Gail, *Northern Irish Poetry and Theology* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014)
- McDonald, Peter, Review of Paul Muldoon, *Horse Latitudes*, *Poetry Review*, 97.1 (2007), 88–90
- McGonigal, James, 'The End of the Lecture', *The Dark Horse*, 20 (2007), 89–93
- McGrath, Charles, 'Word Freak', *The New York Times*, 19 November 2006
<<http://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/19/magazine/19muldoon.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>>
- McGuinness, Patrick, 'Going Electric', *London Review of Books*, 22.17 (2000), 31–32
- McKibben, Sarah E., 'Speaking the Unspeakable: Male Humiliation and Female National Allegory after Kinsale', *Éire-Ireland*, 43.3 (2008), 11–30
- McKusick, James C., *Coleridge's Philosophy of Language* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986)
- McSweeney, Barry, *Pearl* (Cambridge: Equipage, 1995)
- Mellors, Anthony, *Late Modernist Poetics: From Pound to Prynne* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005)
- Mengham, Rod, and John Kinsella, 'An Introduction to the Poetry of J. H. Prynne', *Jacket*, 7 (1999) <<http://jacketmagazine.com/07/prynne-jk-rm.html>>
- Miller, J. Hillis, *Ariadne's Thread: Story Lines* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995)
- Milton, John, *Paradise Lost*, ed. by Barbara Kiefer Lewalski (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007)
- Milton, John, *The Complete Works of John Milton*, ed. by Thomas N. Corns and Gordon Campbell, 11 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), II: *The 1671 Poems*, ed. by Laura Lunger Knoppers
- Ming, Xie, 'Reactualising the Unfigurable: Difficulty and Resistance in Translating J. H. Prynne', *The Cambridge Quarterly*, 41.1 (2012), 180–96
- Moore, Isabel A., "'Unapproved Road": Poetic Roadblocks and Animal Traffic in Paul Muldoon', *English Studies in Canada*, 36.1 (2010), 57–80

- Moran, John H., and Alexander Gode, trans., *On the Origin of Language: Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Essay on the Origin of Languages: Johann Gottfried Herder, Essay on the Origin of Language* (New York: Ungar, 1967)
- Morrison, Blake, 'Under Judgement', Interview with Geoffrey Hill, *The New Statesman*, 8 February 1980, pp. 212–14
- Moss, Howard, *Selected Poems* (New York: Atheneum, 1971)
- Mugglestone, Lynda, 'The OED and the Victorian Novel', in Lisa Rodensky, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of the Victorian Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 147–65
- Müller, F. M., *The Science of Language: Founded on Lectures Delivered at the Royal Institution in 1861 and 1863*, 2 vols (London: Longmans, Green, 1891)
- Nelson, John S., 'Imaginative Etymology', in Edmund E. Jacobitti, ed., *Composing Useful Pasts: History as Contemporary Politics* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000), pp. 53–77
- , *Tropes of Politics: Science, Theory, Rhetoric, Action* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998)
- Ní Dhomhnaill, Nuala, *Selected Essays* (Dublin: New Island Books, 2005)
- , *The Astrakhan Cloak*, trans. by Paul Muldoon (Oldcastle: Gallery Press, 1992)
- , *The Fifty Minute Mermaid*, trans. by Paul Muldoon (Oldcastle: Gallery Press, 2007)
- Nolan, Kevin, 'Capital Calves: Undertaking an Overview', *Jacket*, 24 (2003) <<http://jacketmagazine.com/24/nolan.html>>
- Ó Muirgheasa, Énrí, *Seanfhocla Uladh*, trans. by William Tempest (Dondalk: Dondalgaun Press, 1907)
- O'Brien, Eugene, 'At the Frontier of Language: Literature, Theory, Politics', *Minerva – An Internet Journal of Philosophy*, 1 (1997) <<http://www.minerva.mic.ul.ie/vol1/paper3.html>>
- O'Brien, Sean, 'Muldoon as Critic', *Poetry Review*, 97.1 (2007), 86–89
- O'Connor, Laura, 'The Bilingual Routes of Paul Muldoon/Pól Ó Maoldúin', *Irish Studies Review*, 19.2 (2011), 135–55
- , *Haunted English: The Celtic Fringe, the British Empire, and de-Anglicization* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006)
- O'Donoghue, Heather, 'The Poet as Critic: Paul Muldoon's *To Ireland, I*', in Elmer Kennedy-Andrews, ed., *Paul Muldoon Poetry Prose Drama: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe Ltd, 2006), pp. 199–210
- OED Online*, 'History of the OED' <<http://public.oed.com/history-of-the-oed/>>

—, 'Sources: Oxford English Dictionary' <<http://www.oed.com/sources>>

Oliver, Douglas, *The Infant and the Pearl* (London: Silver Hounds, 1985)

Olson, Charles, *Projective Verse* (New York: Totem Press, 1959)

—, *The Collected Poems of Charles Olson*, ed. by George F. Butterick (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987; repr. 1997)

Owens, Richard, 'Incommensurable Magnitudes', Paper delivered at a conference on *Poetry and Revolution*, Birkbeck College, 25–27 May 2012, <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/cprc/events/Richard_Owens_-_Poetry_and_Revolution_conference_paper.pdf>

Palgrave, Francis Turner, ed., *The Golden Treasury: Of the Best Songs and Lyrical Poems in the English Language*, new edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011)

Panofsky, Erwin, 'The Early History of Man in Two Cycles of Paintings by Piero di Cosimo', in *Studies in Iconology: Humanistic Themes in the Art of the Renaissance*, ed. by Benjamin Nelson (London: Harper & Row, 1972), pp. 33–67

Paterson, Don, *Landing Light* (London: Faber and Faber, 2003)

—, 'The Dark Art of Poetry', *The Poetry Library*, 9 November 2004 <<http://www.poetrylibrary.org.uk/news/poetryscene/?id=20>>

Patterson, Ian, 'No Man Is an I: Recent Developments in the Lyric', in Marion Thain, ed., *The Lyric Poem: Formations and Transformations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 217–36

Paulhan, Jean, 'Alain, ou la preuve par l'étymologie', in *Oeuvres Complètes*, 5 vols (Paris: Cercle du livre précieux, 1966), III, pp. 261–303

Paulin, Tom, *The Riot Act: A Version of Sophocles' Antigone* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985)

Pelham, Brett W., Matthew C. Mirenberg, and John T. Jones, 'Why Susie Sells Seashells by the Seashore: Implicit Egotism and Major Life Decisions', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 82.4 (2002), 469–87

Phillips, Carl, 'The Art of Poetry No. 80: Geoffrey Hill', Interview with Geoffrey Hill, *Paris Review*, 57 (Spring 2000), 272–99

Plato, *Meno and Phaedo*, ed. by D. N. Sedley and Alex Long (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011)

Pohl, Jacques, *Symboles et langages* (Paris: Sodi, 1968)

Pound, Ezra, *Selected Prose, 1909–1965* (London: Faber and Faber, 1973)

Puttenham, George, *The Art of English Poesy*, ed. by Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007)

- Putzel, Steven D., 'Fluid Disjunction in Paul Muldoon's "Imram" and "The More a Man Has the More a Man Wants"', *Papers on Language & Literature*, 32.1 (1996), 85–108
- Quesenberry, W. D., *Auden's Revisions* (2008) <http://www.audensociety.org/Audens_Revisions_by_WD_Quesenberry.pdf>
- Redmond, John, 'Muldoon and Pragmatism', in Kendall and McDonald, eds, *Paul Muldoon*, pp. 96–109
- Reeve, N. H., and Richard Kerridge, *Nearly Too Much: The Poetry of J. H. Prynne* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996)
- Riach, Alan, 'Wole Soyinka and Hugh MacDiarmid: The Violence and Virtues of Nations', in Michael Gardiner, Graeme Macdonald, and Niall O'Gallagher, eds, *Scottish Literature and Postcolonial Literature: Comparative Texts and Critical Perspectives* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), pp. 111–23
- Ricks, Christopher, 'Austin's Swink', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 61.3 (1992), 297–315
- , "'Its Own Resemblance'", in C. A. Patrides, ed., *Approaches to Marvell: The York Tercentenary Lectures* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), pp. 108–35
- , 'Tenebrae and At-one-ment', in Peter Robinson, ed., *Geoffrey Hill: Essays on his Work* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1985), pp. 62–85
- , 'Winking', *The New Statesman*, 4 February 1966, p. 166; reprinted in Haffenden, ed., *W. H. Auden*, pp. 434–36
- Riddel, Joseph N., *The Turning Word: American Literary Modernism and Continental Theory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996)
- Robbins, Michael, 'Paul Muldoon's Covert Operations', *Modern Philology*, 109.2 (2011), 266–99
- Roebuck, Thomas, and Matthew Sperling, "'The Glacial Question, Unsolved": A Specimen Commentary on Lines 1–31', in Ryan Dobran, ed., *On the Poems of J. H. Prynne* (= *Glossator*, 2 (2010)), pp. 39–78
- Rossiter, A. P., 'Words for Leisure, Words for Labour', *The New Statesman and Nation*, 13 March 1954, p. 334
- Ruthven, K. K., 'The Poet as Etymologist', *Critical Quarterly*, 11.1 (1969), 9–37
- Saussure, Ferdinand de, *Cours de linguistique générale*, ed. by Tullio de Mauro (Paris: Payot, 1972)
- Searle, John R., 'Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida', *Glyph: Johns Hopkins Textual Studies*, 1 (1977), 198–208
- Shakespeare, William, *Hamlet*, ed. by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006)

- , *King Lear*, ed. by R. A. Foakes (London: Arden Shakespeare, [2009])
- , *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, ed. by Katherine Duncan-Jones, rev. edn (London: Methuen Drama, 2010)
- , *The Tempest*, ed. by Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan, rev. edn (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2011)
- Shklovsky, Victor, 'Art as Technique', in Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis, eds and trans, *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), pp. 3–24
- Shoptaw, John, 'Lyric Cryptography', *Poetics Today*, 21.1 (2000), 221–62
- Simek, Rudolf, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1993)
- Simonsohn, Uri, 'Spurious? Name Similarity Effects (Implicit Egotism) in Marriage, Job, and Moving Decisions', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 101.1 (2011), 1–24
- Simpson, J. A., Preface to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 3rd edn (2000) <<http://public.oed.com/the-oed-today/preface-to-the-third-edition-of-the-oed/>>
- Sinclair, Iain, Introduction to Iain Sinclair, ed., *Conductors of Chaos: A Poetry Anthology* (London: Picador, 1996), pp. xiii–xx
- Sinha, M. P., *Modern Linguistics* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2005)
- Smith, J. Mark, 'The Energy of Language(s): What Pound Made of Philology', *English Literary History*, 78.4 (2011), 769–800
- Sperling, Matthew, *Visionary Philology: Geoffrey Hill and the Study of Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014)
- Strachan, John, and Richard Terry, *Poetry*, 2nd edn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011)
- Sutherland, John, 'Seamus Heaney Deserves a Lot More than £40,000', *The Guardian*, 19 March 2009 <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2009/mar/19/seamus-heaney-david-cohen-prize>>
- Sweetser, Eve, *From Etymology to Pragmatics: Metaphorical and Cultural Aspects of Semantic Structure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990)
- Symons, Julian, 'Viewpoint', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 18 April 1980, p. 437
- Taylor, Edward W., *Donne's Idea of a Woman: Structure and Meaning in The Anniversaries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013)
- Taylor, Dennis, *Hardy's Literary Language and Victorian Philology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993)

- Tillich, Paul, *The Interpretation of History*, trans. by N. A. Rasetzki and Elsa L. Talmey (New York: Scribner, 1936)
- Tolkien, J. R. R., 'On Translating Beowulf', in *The Monsters and the Critics, and Other Essays*, ed. by Christopher Tolkien (London: Allen & Unwin; repr. London: HarperCollins, 1997), pp. 49–71
- Trench, Richard Chenevix, *On Some Deficiencies in Our English Dictionaries: Being the Substance of Two Papers Read Before the Philological Society, Nov. 5, and Nov. 19, 1857*, 2nd edn (London: Parker, 1860)
- , *On the Study of Words & English Past and Present* (London: Dent, 1927)
- Vendler, Helen, 'Fanciness and Fatality', *The New Republic*, 9 November 2006, pp. 26–33
- Waugh, Linda R., and Madeleine Newfield, 'Iconicity in the Lexicon and Its Relevance for a Theory of Morphology', in Marge E. Landsberg, ed., *Syntactic Iconicity and Linguistic Freezes: The Human Dimension* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1995), pp. 189–222
- Whitehead, John, 'Vin Audenaire', *Essays in Criticism*, 18 (October 1967), 487–95; reprinted in Haffenden, ed., *W. H. Auden*, pp. 440–47
- Whitworth, Michael, "'Strange Synthetic Perfumes": Investigating Scientific Diction in Twentieth-Century Poetry', in John Holmes, ed., *Science in Modern Poetry: New Directions* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), pp. 87–100
- Wilkinson, John, *The Lyric Touch: Essays on the Poetry of Excess* (Cambridge: Salt Publishing, 2007)
- Williams, Raymond, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, rev. edn (London: Fontana Paperbacks, 1983)
- Williamson, Craig, ed., *The Old English Riddles of the Exeter Book* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1977)
- Wills, Clair, *Reading Paul Muldoon* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Bloodaxe, 1998)
- , 'The Lie of the Land: Language, Imperialism and Trade in Paul Muldoon's Meeting the British', in Neil Corcoran, ed., *The Chosen Ground: Essays on the Contemporary Criticism* (Bridgend: Seren, 1992), pp. 123–49
- Wordsworth, Jonathan, and Jessica Wordsworth, eds, *The New Penguin Book of Romantic Poetry* (London: Penguin, 2001)
- Wordsworth, William, *The Poems of William Wordsworth: Collected Reading Texts from the Cornell Wordsworth Series*, ed. by Jared R. Curtis, corrected edn, 3 vols (Penrith: Humanities–Ebooks, 2011)
- Zimmerman, Virginia, *Excavating Victorians* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2009)

Ziolkowski, Jan M., ed., *On Philology* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990)

Reference Works

Hanks, Patrick, and Flavia Hodges, eds, *A Dictionary of First Names* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990; repr. 1996)

Kurath, Hans, and Sherman M. Kuhn, eds, *Middle English Dictionary* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1956–2001) <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/>>

Murray, J. A. H., and others, eds, *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edn, 20 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989)

Murray, J. A. H., Henry Bradley, W. A. Craigie, and C. T. Onions, eds, *Oxford English Dictionary*, 1st edn, 128 fascicles (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1884–1928)

Onions, C. T., G. W. S. Friedrichsen, and R. W. Burchfield, eds, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966)

Pokorny, Julius, *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*, 2 vols (Bern: Francke, 1959)

Simpson, J. A., and E. S. C. Weiner, eds, *OED Online*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000–) <http://www.oed.com/>

Skeat, Walter W., ed., *An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898)

Slocum, Jonathan, and others, eds, *Indo-European Lexicon: PIE Etyma and IE Reflexes* (Austin: Linguistics Research Center, University of Texas, 2009–) <<http://www.utexas.edu/cola/centers/lrc/ielex/>>

Stevenson, Angus, and Christine A. Lindberg, eds, *New Oxford American Dictionary*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010)