



Open Library of Humanities



Part of the Ubiquity
Partner Network



Article

How to Cite: Hall, M 2016 Terra Nullius: Colonial Violence in Prynne's *Acrylic Tips*. *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*, 8(1): e5, pp. 1–30, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.16995/biip.8>

Published: 10 June 2016

Peer Review:

This article has been peer reviewed through the double-blind process of *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*, which is a journal published by the Open Library of Humanities.

Copyright:

© 2016 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.

Open Access:

Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry is a peer-reviewed open access journal.

Digital Preservation:

The Open Library of Humanities and all its journals are digitally preserved in the CLOCKSS scholarly archive service.

The Open Library of Humanities is an open access non-profit publisher of scholarly articles and monographs.

ARTICLE

Terra Nullius: Colonial Violence in Prynne's *Acrylic Tips*

Matthew Hall

Deakin University, AU
maffro@hotmail.com

Examining J.H. Prynne's *Acrylic Tips* through a series of analogous readings, this paper identifies the location, characters, and themes of the poem. By examining the poem and the contiguities with *Her Weasel's Wild Returning*, *Acrylic Tips* is positioned against the historical decree of terra nullius over the sovereign land of Australia. The poem is read against and situated in the colonial and linguistic history of Australia. Read as a pastoral elegy, the poem depicts a hierarchy of human dominance over nature, which finds its ends in the colonial shearing shed, as well as the genetic laboratory. These positions are ultimately argued to be socio-political by-products of the colonial dominance of Indigenous culture and nature.

Keywords: Australia; J. H. Prynne; Violence; Indigenous Knowledge; Pastoral; Colonial Poetry

Introduction

In 2002 Barque Press published J.H. Prynne's *Acrylic Tips*, a slender edition with an earthen-red cover. Inside the small book, on the unpaginated third page, there is the dedication, 'For: S.K.', and on the fifth page there is an unattributed epigraph, 'The murderous head made from a motor car number-plate.' Running from the seventh to the sixteenth page, inclusively, are ten pages of six stanzas each, the stanzas composed of quatrains with regular and patterned bilinear indentation. The poem's repetitions, echoic patterns, contingent and overlaying themes of colonisation, Indigenous ritual, domestic violence and genetic engineering constitute and are in turn conditioned by the linguistic pressure the poem creates.

Prynne's poetic works released throughout the 1990s and the early twenty-first century exhibit a marked obduracy which operates through the systematic

incorporation of disparate discourses. The excess of signification stems from an excess of lexical and discursive elements imbuing the poems with a sense of language existing under pressure. *Acrylic Tips* elides the enclosed semantic and semiotic space of *Triodes* (1999) and draws the reader back to Prynne's work in *Her Weasels Wild Returning* (1994). As Rod Mengham writes on *Her Weasels Wild Returning* in his essay 'After Avant-gardism':

With the exception of one or two fragments, it is composed in a language which resolutely and systematically excludes any phrasing that retains the balances and tensions we would normally be able to detect in the manner of a speaking voice. What we get instead is not a discursive free-for-all filling the vacuum – not an intensifying of fracture and dispersal – but, off-puttingly, a weird concerted texture, that works hard to make the separate parts of the whole comply with one another. The language is more bizarre than ever, but it is also more heavily synthesised, more systematically correlated, simply more commensurable.¹

In *Acrylic Tips* poetic language exists under pressure as the concretion of discourses is lineated across the trans migratory space of the poem. Both *Acrylic Tips* and *Her Weasels Wild Returning* contain themes that unify social ritual with song; in *Acrylic Tips* this song extends to Indigenous Australian ritual and songlines patterned on the landscape. From *Her Weasels Wild Returning* concepts of nomadicism and exile carry through to *Acrylic Tips*, where they are read through the traditional Indigenous and colonial milieus of Australian history. Another interesting element that has carried through from *Her Weasels Wild Returning* is the attention given to the politics and lexical complexity of the female pronoun.

Many of the elements discussed in Mengham's review of *Her Weasels Wild Returning* function as contiguous threads running through *Acrylic Tips*. To exemplify the parallels between the texts it will serve to examine a portion of Mengham's analysis of *Her Weasels Wild Returning*, overlaying the larger critical structures onto *Acrylic Tips*. Mengham writes:

In *Weasels*, there is the same basic tension that lies behind the alternatives of settlement and nomadicism, but it is not imprinted from the same pattern of validation, with the same distribution of gains and losses. Settlement is figured in intensely domesticated terms, while the nobility of transit, the enhancement of spirit formally almost guaranteed by the nomadic option, is now jettisoned and replaced by stark alternatives, both equally dispiriting. One is the enforced flight of the refugee, for whom transit represents painful uprooting, for whom wandering is figured as a compulsion to 'escape', for whom being unsettled is seen as nothing more positive than a movement *between* conditions of safety and protection.²

Acrylic Tips presupposes a nature, not explicitly Edenic – as is implied by the poem's first line, 'Assuming banishment for lost time back across nullity'³ – but which speaks to the origins of knowledge possessed by traditional owners of the land. This is made explicit in *Acrylic Tips* by contrasting a Western and culturally imperialistic position inherent in an account of colonisation with an Australian Aboriginal understanding of land use and ritual in the mythopoetic space of the poem. The exploitation of the earth endemic to patriarchal societies is contrasted with the Australian Indigenous perspective, which traditionally understands the land as a living, identificatory embodiment of the people.⁴ The forced adaptations to a technologised pastoral represent a discontinuity from an ecological-based reading and the exposition of nature as feminine. The text expresses a legacy of imperial dominance as it is represented against the Australian landscape and Indigenous culture, a power dynamic that has its nascent structure in an anthropocentric colonialism which entails dominance over, exploitation of and barbarity towards nature.

Though Mengham talks about *Her Weasels Wild Returning* as introducing a 'synoptic language' that may be the only exemplary form of a '*terra nullius*, previously unoccupied, unsettled, unowned' land, it is in *Acrylic Tips* that this position is tested against the application of *terra nullius* upon the occupied land of Australia. In *Acrylic Tips* the contestation of the land and its 40,000-year history of use and ritual is contrasted with the theoretical space of which Mengham writes. This comes to fruition

in *Acrylic Tips* through representations of Australia, where Prynne and Mengham both spent time in 2002. Prynne spent his time at Edith Cowan University, in Perth, Western Australia, and travelled north to the Kimberley region and south to the granite cliffs of Albany.

In his reading of *Her Weasels Wild Returning* Mengham discusses the poem's gendered language and its representation in landforms:

So what I am suggesting is that the peculiarly powerful abstractness of the language in *Weasels* represents an attempt to deterritorialize both masculine and feminine, not by neutralising their differences, but by at least proposing to equalize them; by demonstrating how the only viable *terra nullius*, previously unoccupied, unsettled, unowned, is one that can be projected in a synoptic language that shows remarkably little interest in either *écriture féminine* or the masculine tradition.⁵

Andrea Brady's brief essay 'No Turning Back: *Acrylic Tips*' examines the forced transmutations of the feminine and the natural as inherently paralleling territorial and geographic division. Brady writes that the feminine is 'associated with the lineated and amputated body, the bound and divided land, is lyric'.⁶ I will propose an alternative reading suggestive of the ongoing ramifications of colonisation and the increasing technological means of dominance both in social structures and cultural formations. This analysis is structured on concepts of social and technological advancement, and is incorporative of pathological models of harm and genetic engineering contrasted with notions of an Indigenous experience of the natural. Where Brady asserts that 'the bound and divided land, is lyric', this examination will focus on the manner in which, for 40,000 plus years, Indigenous Australians have used song as a cultural and spiritual practice establishing a relationship with and building knowledge of the land. For Indigenous Australians, knowledge of land and its traversal is a pathway to spiritual embodiment and replenishment. As Debra Bird Rose argues, Indigenous Australians move not through the landscape, but through a humanised realm saturated with significations, in which stories of

country are told as they are traversed.⁷ At issue in *Acrylic Tips* are postcolonial concepts of territorialisation and contemporary land usage, but also poetic language history as it corresponds to Prynne's definition of poetic thought, 'as brought into being by recognition and contest with the whole cultural system of a language'.⁸ The poetic language used in the poem embeds and articulates patterns of colonial and argotic usage, demonstrative of its etymological antecedents as well as its potential to evolve and adapt to new models of meaning, as constituted by a localised, Australian English.

John Kinsella's 'Oxidia: Go', which was published in *Quid 17*, an issue dedicated to Prynne, provides details about Prynne and Kinsella's trip to Country Peak and Yenyenning, prior to Kinsella's still more detailed account in the 'Mr. Sharpie' chapter of *Fast, Loose Beginnings*.⁹ Other works of Kinsella's to be utilised in this analysis stem from *The Hierarchy of Sheep*. This collection was published in Australia in 2001, by Fremantle Arts Centre Press, and in the United Kingdom by Bloodaxe Books months earlier in 2000. The poem from which the book's title stems, 'The Hierarchy of Sheep – a report from my brother', details in four parts the treatment of rams, ewes, wethers and lambs in the processes of mulesing, shearing and slaughter. There are not only parallels between the situation described in Kinsella's 'The Hierarchy of Sheep – a report from my brother' and *Acrylic Tips*, but such parallels that it is reasonable to contend that if indeed this was a report physically delivered by Stephen Kinsella, then Prynne was present for its retelling. To provide a preliminary view of these parallels as they relate to pastoral violence, it will serve to contrast Kinsella's wordings with Prynne's in their respective poems. Kinsella's 'Ewes' begins:

All cut by a shearer at one time or another-
sewn together with dental floss or wearing their scars
gracefully

Later in the poem, Kinsella writes that 'older ewes', 'all of them full with young, milk veins / up and pumping hard to udders – / somewhere a nick with a blade

has a vein / knotted off with needle and thread, / the myth declaring another will take its place'.¹⁰ These lines are tied into what Prynne relates of an infant that thirsts for an 'abrogated breast', the expectant wait for 'milk / at a lip trickle', with 'needlepoint decision', 'engorgement', 'grapple juices'. The mythic teat regrown after a shearing accident in a 'post-hormone limb crisis' highlights the caustic humour of the shearing shed.¹¹ Apparent in the description of the animals is the problematisation of the feminine as bound and divided, and of the female body as the site of harm.

While these parallels will be explored more fully, it should be noted that very similar cross-readings can be made with John Kinsella's seven-part poem 'The Epistemology of Sheep', and appears to address the same reported events. The dedication to 'S.K.' in the Barque edition, the reader will surmise, is to Stephen Kinsella, who has previously been described by his brother John as an extremely hermetic artist making his living as a shearer.¹² Approaching *Acrylic Tips's* opening line with this dedication in mind, as well as the transhistorical space developed in *Acrylic Tips's* epigraph, from Donald Stuart's *Yandy* – which details the first successful strike held by Indigenous rural labourers – readers may begin to acknowledge and understand a number of the informational axes and discourses upon which the poem communicates.

While there remains little critical attention paid to the poem *Acrylic Tips*, there is an essay by Andrea Brady and an examination of the poem by Jon Clay, in his *Sensation, Contemporary Poetry and Deleuze*. Aside from Brady's reference to Woomera asylum seekers, no mention of Australia is given in any of the critical literature on the poem to date. This is a confounding prospect, for the poem contains implicit structural patterns of landscapes, argot, botanical studies and Indigenous knowledge which are uniquely tied to the Australian continent and Prynne's experiences there. Established in this manner, we can begin to understand the 'synoptic language'¹³ of the poem as weighed against the history of Australia, starting with the land's designation as *terra nullius* by the British to give themselves grounds for colonial settlement of the continent.

'Assuming banishment'

The epigraph of *Acrylic Tips*, from Donald Stuart's *Yandy*, which describes the process of spear-making in Stuart's book, allows the reader to glimpse the technological transformations as they affect material and cultural advancements. The quotation juxtaposes forms, registers and government control of transport and food procurement between cultural epochs. 'The murderous head made from a motor car number-plate'¹⁴ suggests a culture of adaptation and survival, positioned at the margins of society. The vectors of speed signified by the spear and the car, establish changing technology as destabilising rituals and cultural practices. As post-contact Aboriginal culture has undergone change; subjective identity, physical and social environments continue to adapt, and traditions alter based on dynamic and responsive social formations.¹⁵ One could also establish a linkage between the registers of control over movement established in the epigraph, through the car's registration plates, and the car scenes in the poem. The practice of registering one's possession may also relate to early maps where land is not 'named' but numbered or referred to only by coordinates, where Indigenous place names were erased and restated in colonial contexts. Other places, such as Mistake Creek, were given names which signified the traumatic legacy of colonisation.¹⁶ In this case the 'banishment' from the poem's opening line may be indicative of the marginalisation of Indigenous culture within Australian history or may refer back to policies of 'plan[ned] depletion.'¹⁷

Reading the first line of *Acrylic Tips*, 'Assuming banishment for lost time back across nullity',¹⁸ through an informational matrix rooted in Australian history allows the reader to immediately unpack certain themes of the poem. 'Assuming banishment' contains obvious referential allusions to Adam and Eve being banished from the Garden of Eden and to life after the fall. It also implies an ethnographic position of observation and categorisation, a condemnatory set of relations through which Prynne signifies the irony of assumed cultural hierarchies. That the loss of the Edenic is signalled from the outset adds weight to the line 'his right arm / tied to creation'¹⁹ which implies humankind's involvement in manifesting their way of life, and also alludes to assisted animal husbandry. This line may also be indicative of artificial

insemination, linking man directly to the genetic manipulation present in the creation of sheep with culturally desirable, and hence commodifiable characteristics. The phrase '[r]ibs of possession'²⁰ exudes biblical and gendered frameworks and highlight a problematic relationship between the technological and the feminine pronoun within the poem. The emphasis on 'his right arm' as 'tied to creation' details a masculine register of possession which affects our understanding of control, dominance and the division of land within the poem. In such lines, the gendering of the natural within the poem juxtaposes culturally divergent knowledge of the land and its embodiments.

If the reader allows the word 'nullity' from the poem's opening line its full weight it provides not only a caustic depiction of the Australian landscape but also, from a Western perspective, one of legal and foundational origins. To provide some insight into the sovereign authority of command in the decree of *terra nullius* over Australia, it will serve to examine this notion and its use in colonisation. In 1770 Captain James Cook anchored outside what is presently called Botany Bay, then sailed north, around the Cape York Peninsula, and proclaimed the land he sighted as belonging to the expansive British Empire.²¹ The legal rationale upon which the convention of colony acquisition was founded was one in which claims of ownership could be based on discovery and effective possession.²² As Attwood contends:

Aboriginal hunter-gatherers were adjudged to have no property rights because of the way in which their place in time was constructed by major seventeenth and eighteenth-century philosophical and legal authorities which, in turn, drew upon historical theories regarding human society. In the opinion of Grotius, Pufendorf, Locke and others, hunter-gatherers (or 'savages' in their terms) had no concept of property because they were in the original state of nature. This assessment was founded upon one or more 'historical' sources: the representations of antiquity found in classical history and the representation of the Americas as 'the beginning [of] all the World'.²³

These laws demarcated the stages through which a society should pass, each stage being characterised by particular concepts and institutions regarding law, property, government and commerce. At the lowest stage, that of the hunter-gatherer – in which the occupants of a land lived as part of nature – it was determined that there existed no concept of property, and therefore the lands of the Australian Aborigines were declared to be unoccupied.²⁴ The decree of *terra nullius* over the already occupied land of Australia, whose Indigenous people Cook encountered, was upheld until the Mabo-Wik Judgement of 1992, with the recognition of land rights and the recognition of generational ownership.²⁵ The first line of *Acrylic Tips* and the connotations of 'lost time' evokes the racist declaration of 'primitivisms' observed by the first colonial fleet.²⁶ Reading Mengham's proposition about *terra nullius* in *Her Weasels Wild Returning* through the trans-historical structure of Australian history allows the reader insight into the function of poetic language as determined by a nation's history, and as it functions within *Acrylic Tips*.

The Australian Narrative and the 'Burning child'

In *Acrylic Tips*, the main narrative is positioned around a situation of domestic division and separation. The subject is dealing with the forced removal of a child, and while the poem deals with the breakdown of that relationship, there is also a parallel with the removal of children enforced by the state, constituting Australia's 'Stolen Generation.' The poem engages with issues of domestic division and the pressure of cross-cultural constraints not only thematically but also through linguistic expression, reflecting the cultural history of the nation as well as the family at the poem's centre. The lines bridging the first and second stanzas display the manner in which these cultural matrices are subsumed within the themes of the poem:

the grievance solitary; krook pathways risen up
To wheel and turn about spandrels high over submission
flexed to burnish and chomp get hungry for intimate
newsy entrances. Get plenty get quick.²⁷

To begin to unpack these lines as they accelerate from position to position, 'the grievance solitary' entails the trauma and the brute reality of colonial oppression and the appropriation of Indigenous lands, while also hinting at the Romantic tradition of the isolated poet. As it relates to the father-daughter relationship depicted in the narrative of the poem, the 'grievance solitary' implies the isolation of the father, facing the loss of his daughter, and represents his increasing marginalisation from the family unit. Tracing this line further into the poem's first page links the line to 'take heart / for rapt token incision along a defined track; to cry / and mourn for her as he goes, to bring her home',²⁸ which seems to entail a set of circumstances consequent to the removal of a loved one. Whether this progeny has been removed systematically, as in the case of Australia's 'Stolen Generation', or refers to a specific situation, the results are comparable.²⁹

References to domestic division accumulate within the poem. Where the phrase 'dejected by partner claimants'³⁰ appears, preceding 'out / pat on a moving front, muster to confirm a perimeter', it implies a group of people searching for a lost child, with the colloquial 'muster' indicative of a rural or pastoral property.³¹ 'Their kids besotted'³² supplies news of a joyous reception of discovery, but also the possibility of intoxication. Another of the architectural traces in the poem, is that the children are under 'a felt roof', 'in a snug rafter',³³ which again reiterates the sense that the building belongs to a rural property. As with many rural Australian schoolhouses, homesteads are built complete, and above them a tin roof is constructed overlaying the domicile, providing an expanded living space and protection against seasonal conditions.

The narrative's focus on the domestic continues with the accusatory, 'Why should / she ever flinch',³⁴ which evidences a (potentially violent) pattern of behaviour within the relationship. This is offset by the fragmented utterance, 'Promise so much',³⁵ from the fourth stanza. The line, 'both not replenished even liable or yet / parted,' has the couple together, even if a decision or an amiable separation has not been mediated, asking, 'Shall each cherish / defrayment [. . .] for certain delusive grips'.³⁶ The instances of movement, 'bearing into reverse' and 'turned off', signify

acts of departure.³⁷ An assonantal misreading gives a further semantic connotation to '[s]orrow will you turn remain muzzle gripe, yet sign / off abject partition truly.'³⁸ The grammatical structure of the line, in conjunction with its forced closure, implies a relationship that is defined by a growing distance. '[S]ign / off abject' provides, if not a direct representation of letter writing, surely notice of the communiqué's transmission and its characteristics. The word 'truly' at the line's end and its common association with letter writing provides further evidence of the growing distance between the couple. The pairing of 'truly' and '[s]orrow' illustrates the emphatic, emotional fallout of the division in the poem.

The poem enfolds the temporal narrative of division, showing the couple's close and loving connection, with the departure from these conditions occurring frequently and circuitously. Despite the closeness depicted in lines such as 'her hair touching / his knee' and 'her hair stroking his cheek,'³⁹ there is an implied arms-length separation enforced. Perhaps, then, this is not the male subject's partner, but the forced distance represented in his connection with his daughter. The forced distance is seen in connection with the moral imperative of the paternal figure camped out at the 'wasted floodbank'⁴⁰ near the place of habitation. The male subject is depicted as 'across swum floodway always there;' he is '[r]esting allured,'⁴¹ or 'resting, lured' as a punning misreading allows. The distance between the subject and his daughter contracts in the poem, providing assurances of a division, albeit a bridgeable one. Camping nearby with 'no / furnace', he is 'summoned through open haze'; this calling to attention leads to the representation of the couple's estranged and escalating, violent relationship.⁴² '[R]everte trumpery marauded / whimpers' shows the subject on a 'level mission' chasing the promise of contact with his daughter, '[o]n offer prolix touch to grip', and striving for a resolution with his partner.⁴³ The final stanza of the poem's fifth page indicates the increasing tension of the situation, an exchange of the couple's 'pleading and goading.'⁴⁴ The situation falls into an increasingly spiteful dispute over child custody: 'rented child oration; spending / like water fountains spout to fume and cry off unclaimed.'⁴⁵

The sexual nature of the language leads to a scene of a more domestic sphere. 'Fresh choice' is represented as 'held to the very life',⁴⁶ commenting on the 'clastic'⁴⁷ grip of the female, and also alludes to extortion. The issue of substance abuse is raised in 'soft sweet fury gums',⁴⁸ if one connects alcohol abuse to halitosis. The subject 'now estranged' is implored: 'why not try'.⁴⁹ This evokes a domestic register, wherein the subject deals with a 'novel / terror'.⁵⁰ The phrases 'change the locks now' and 'domain revision' demonstrate a defiant change of heart, a possible reaction to 'browsing hearts'.⁵¹ The impossibility of communication hits a tumultuous peak with 'snap / line out phones, hear nothing. Dark screaming cries / loaned in prohibition their feasted slap-up decline'.⁵² Conditions of and references to alcohol dependency should be highlighted as signifying correlation to an escalation of violence. The mounting pressure parallels intoxication with 'liquor' and the '[o]ral limit', equating the emotive with the experiential landscape and weather patterns, hinted at in 'whether feared'.⁵³ The description of people with animal-like characteristics continue: 'Working venom presumed his torsion self-locked to pay up / on invoice declared',⁵⁴ brings up the notion of child support in a more direct manner. The accusations are '[a]ll lies' and lead to a further accusation of 'untrue blood'.⁵⁵ This line also has a resonance to 'true bone'⁵⁶ and the idea of Indigenous law and lore in controlling and setting the parameters for human relations.⁵⁷ '[I]nfused righteous anger' leads to an '[a]larm pulse' of sirens approaching.⁵⁸ The line 'stand-up ovation deputy lined / body search reckless' has '[o]ne seized', and the question 'will you disperse' points to an escalating scene of domestic violence and police intervention.⁵⁹ The aftermath leads to recollection – 'recall shady woods paired / in sensual fast nutation' – which could be an offering of fond remembrance.⁶⁰ '[S]he now / attached to her prey' and 'gene expression resentment' allude to the continuing tensions over the couple's daughter and invites doubt about a possible resolution.⁶¹

The paternal figure is camped out '[i]n guest space at a wasted floodbank / all for her interval, half fired in tumid elation'.⁶² The polysemy of the image-complex created by the line '[c]rawled to the step mourn arms having none to lift / like bread aloft his worsted homage on first claim' attests to the toll that the fight has taken

on the subject.⁶³ The phrase 'all for her' expresses the reason behind this continued suffering for his '[b]urning child.'⁶⁴ '[F]irst claim' may reference questions of paternity, but when combined with the 'liquor', 'worsted homage' and '[r]ehab feeding oracle' it evokes the possibility that the claim is to sobriety.⁶⁵ The subject's claim to sobriety in the poem is undermined by the line '[i]n brio still toxic / for her abraded dreamer the batch open grasping // Flickered up eyelash address.'⁶⁶ This may represent the child's admonishment of her father's or mother's (the reference is open) drunkenness. The unification present in 'abraded dreamer' might reference both parents, as in an Indigenous cultural situation their daughter would normally take on the 'Dreaming' of the father, though being taught in 'women's business' along the matrilineal, spiritual geo-spatial lines of the country. Extrapolating the violence and tensions associated with alcohol, the line '[a]sk yet did your time / insert coin, a new master traverse'⁶⁷ represents the consequences of the police visit and implies forced confinement, in rehabilitation or prison, and the limitations of telephone communication.

Attempts at communication continue unabated with 'tongue mysterious spat' and its associations with the sustentive, in the representation of the lamb to its mother, provides another caustic remark, in '[r]ehab feeding oracle / emission.'⁶⁸ The private relations and the manipulation of referential accounts still entail acts of violence, which are domestic in nature: 'Who antic runs by front // Lines of credit, at a narrow a hitch a plate broken / and the rest of it swept off' and 'wiping a wrap knuckle'⁶⁹ tell of this portentous violence in the domestic sphere. 'Give out currency'⁷⁰ again acts as a means of quelling the situation through child support payments. However, there is an inherent sadness in '[i]njury too mounted in harm [. . .] turned off wanting the price ever twice over', leaving the father 'battered' (punning on 'battered') 'whose heart / rate at a cub report brought down to hacker's amble.'⁷¹

The precipitous and deteriorating state of the relationship continues to occupy the poem with a looming sadness and irreparable strain. 'Burning child'⁷² opens the poem's final page, and unifies the child with the possibility of fire and regrowth

in the Australian landscape. The position and address of the phrase illustrates the excruciating experiential position of the child in the midst of her parents' fighting. The narrative in the conclusion of the poem allows a measured balance with a 'bright glance' mediating the '[i]mmobile tough / Stance' of the couple.⁷³ The proximity and compassion expressed in 'touch your lips' instils in the line a restrained notion of resolution, even if conjoined with 'lips sewn to silence at air / the stream by day care who does.'⁷⁴ This phrase, while having notable alternative political references in 'lips sewn', provides an emphatic account of the weight placed on the '[b]urning child', where her reluctance to speak accounts for a greater internalised trauma.⁷⁵

The parental authorities, despite the child's attempt to 'dress admonishment', remain 'wired up hostile / and revered.'⁷⁶ Signifying a transformative account in the child's development through the 'carbon season',⁷⁷ the child is the one who begins to provide support and comfort for her parents. '[R]everses nursing'⁷⁸ accounts for this ameliorating relationship. '[S]kull rims / close to fusion' alludes to a biblical reading of 'true bone' and a conscious display of agreement.⁷⁹ '[S]he-child foiled prism dialect' displays the child graduating into a vocable position mediating her parent's relationship across linguistic, cultural and geographic divides.⁸⁰ The male subject's position in the camp becomes a 'venerated lodge' where they may 'lesson [punning on 'lessen'] throat veins' and quell what remains of the cathartic situation.⁸¹ The father has once again taken his '[i]ntimated' place, despite the occasional need to go 'out overland toiled back and descending // In bright glance.'⁸² The father returns '[d]oing / all turns' when 'plain payment [is] due.'⁸³ The possibility of redemption and saving his relationship is intricately tied up in the willingness to communicate, work, travel, and presupposes a balance being proposed.

Guarded Knowledge

Hierarchical structures of control are exemplified in the text through representations of colonial dominance, a practice with an explicit history in Australia and, as the poem recognises, a continuing formative relationship in the evolution of language and societal structures. *Acrylic Tips* works to contest dominant colonial

perspectives and assumptions. Spiritual connections to the land, such as are expressed in Indigenous song-lines and through the multi-dimensional mythopoeia of country, are almost entirely subsumed within the text. The representation of song-lines may be found in the line 'rapt token incision along a defined track'⁸⁴ although this may also refer to a bloodletting, a relinquishment of emotional trauma manifest through physical self-harm. Scarification is an Indigenous rite often linked with initiation ceremonies, or grieving, practiced both in rural and urban societies.⁸⁵ A reading of these cicatrizations as celestial suggests a paradigm which incorporates self-harm as a ritual practice. Therefore, a 'defined track' may signify a songline, a traditional and sacred path through a piece of land given to the processing of ritual grieving. These paths and the relationships they represent unify belief with country, and may also signify a cultural place inherited through familial-geographic mythos.⁸⁶

The promissory action entailed in mourning for loss or 'bring[ing] her home' details a protectionism associated with the father. But these pathways are 'krook'⁸⁷ and therefore this option seems unattainable. The subject is impotent to enact these options and is left to 'wheel and turn about', 'high over submission',⁸⁸ again linking 'krook' with the conditions of intoxication. '[I]ntimate / newsy entrances'⁸⁹ implies something supplemental and officious to what may account for 'news' in a small town. '[H]ungry for intimate / newsy entrances', has the subject awaiting further reports from someone close, delivered by 'the morning bulletin', and ends up 'all savage and reckonable.'⁹⁰ '[B]rowbeaten', 'high over submission' and 'mouthing actions, louder into the swing' all tell of an unfolding story of the consequence of loss, with an attempt to 'raise a clamour to sober digits'; digits here may indicate a phone call, or may link the line to 'his right arm / tied to creation'⁹¹ and the expression of care associated with a missing offspring.

Judeo-Christian beliefs also hold a place within the poem, as is imparted through '[r]ibs of possession', '[m]iracle cheap shots', 'true bone' and 'his right arm / tied to creation.'⁹² It should be noted that, especially in rural environments, Australia maintains aspects of zealous reverence towards Christian moral imperatives as a

fundamental part of its colonial history. The historical links between colonialism and the religious need no further exposition here other than to note that they are implicitly linked with trauma, genocide and cultural depletion, adding further to the poem's political ramifications. This indicts not only the Australian government but religious institutions for assimilation and plans to 'breed out' Aboriginal Australians alongside other drives to 'plan depletion'.⁹³ The history of Australian colonisation is also inherently tied to the histories of Christian missions and missionaries, who were instrumental in the implementation of education, health and welfare services in remote parts of the country, and demanded the renunciation of Aboriginal customs, traditions and languages as a prerequisite for accessing social services.⁹⁴ Thus any discussion of the ecumenical in *Acrylic Tips* necessarily requires an understanding of the role of Christian proselytising in colonisation and in the decimation of Aboriginal traditions.

Acrylic Tips is reliant on the idea of the sustentive and, as in many colonial conquests, the forced exchange of land for basic agrarian products and commodities. As it relates directly to the area of Australia where Prynne visited, John Kinsella's poem 'Sale of the Century', from *The Silo*, is pertinent for exploring this exchange:

Sale of the Century

This town site was 'bought'
 from the Nyoongahs
 for a sack
 of white flour
 and a bent
 shotgun⁹⁵

In *Acrylic Tips*, both the indictment of 'chomp get hungry' and 'don't chew get bloated'⁹⁶ speak to the issue of mass poisoning and the possibility that strychnine was mixed into the flour. 'Copious infarct' speaks to suffering convulsive bouts of engorgement, 'groaning' under 'vows' 'for simple feedstuff.'⁹⁷ The destruction of

land and the poisoning of provisions of life represent one legacy of the colonial history. As discussed by Debra Bird Rose, the duplicity between the beneficent claims of extending civilisation to other lands and the erasure of specific life, customs and law to enact that 'civilisation' typified the promise of Australian colonisation and ultimately reveals its capacity for destruction.⁹⁸ The horrific outcome of this exchange tells of the underlying maleficence of the offering 'all will give and grasp for' from those who '[p]romise so much.'⁹⁹

The officious tone of command circumscribes issues of indigenesness in the fourth stanza of the sixth page of the poem:

Falling citation infringed
to demand resettlement, search each house incident
wakeful, pleading to suck to flourish.¹⁰⁰

While this sentence does establish contiguities with the architectural elements within the poem, it is the idea of enforced dwelling (paralleling the argument linking authority, dwelling and genocide that was a prominent feature of Prynne's 1971 collection *Brass*) that this analysis draws upon. The Indigenous people of Australia who have remained on their traditional land live in government-controlled housing. As Indigenous people have been stripped of the capacity to own their traditional land, their occupation of the land is under the control of the government. The autocratic rule of housing means that searches and infringements for failing to maintain standards of the house (due to mass occupancy and lack of available social housing) continue to be a prevalent problem within Indigenous communities. Communities on traditional land are referred to by the colloquialism 'camp' or 'town camp', indicative of the rustic conditions experienced there, and mixed with the semantic implications of the post-Auschwitz usage of the term. The mixture of authority and dominance embodied by the governmental control leaves Indigenous people, born into and attempting to lead a traditional life, 'pleading to suck to flourish.'¹⁰¹ Analogously, the conclusion to this line has Aboriginal Australians pleading for 'milk / at a lip trickle'

from the 'abrogated breast'¹⁰² of the motherland. Further polysemous layers may be discerned in the line,

Frontal instilled
 terebinth maybe taps up, clinamen infertile lipid
 Sack on split her mother rare spilling grilse for clipper
 rushes minimal. You prefer it.¹⁰³

Speaking to the notion of sheep being mutilated during the shearing process, the 'punitive cleft'¹⁰⁴ provides a gendered representation of the brutality suffered by animals in the shearing shed. '[M]ilkwort,'¹⁰⁵ as Andrea Brady points out, is often used to promote lactation.¹⁰⁶ '[C]ultus' and 'terebinth'¹⁰⁷ provide allusions to biblical dicta and belief. The poem's polysemous language establishes multiple reading frames, in which broken, alluding or latent references find coherence and redefinition. In this sense, the language of the poem implicates the Australian government on account of its handling of Indigenous Affairs, but also touches on some of the more pressing issues of technological and agricultural power relations which influence social conditions within the country.

Commenting on more contemporary times and reinforcing Brady's comments on Woomera, these lines, in conjunction with the damning conclusion, 'You prefer it' alludes to Australia's handling of refugees. The vitriolic rhetoric against 'boat people' continues to be a dominant political sentiment, especially prevalent in politically right wing and rural communities. This theme continues in the last page of *Acrylic Tips* with the lines, 'observing / mass stricken touch your lips sewn to silence at air / the stream by day care who does,'¹⁰⁸ which speaks to the insufferable treatment of refugees and the consequent protest in which a group of female detainees sewed their lips together at the Woomera Immigration Reception and Processing Centre.¹⁰⁹ One should also consider the relation to the domestic that is implied by the gendered symbol of sewn lips, and the relation of the plight and silencing of the voices of refugees to the invisibility of the female in traditional patriarchal societies.¹¹⁰

Pastoral, Past and Present

Acrylic Tips displays many of the conventional strategies of the pastoral elegy, yet as with many of Prynne's other collections, the generic conventions of the elegy are dealt with critically, with an effort to hybridise and contemporise their usage. The poem synchronises divergent cultural traditions of mourning in Western and Indigenous practices, creating a hybrid discourse and poetic space where slippages between and across cultural traditions and milieus comprise relations to sorrow. The narrative of the poem deals with loss, with the connection to land and the process of attaining consolation for loss; aspects associated with traditional, European, elegiac conventions.¹¹¹ The inclusion of ethnographic details such as scarification rituals and references to travel on Indigenous songlines as a form of consolation, recognise the cultural complexity of processes of mourning. Traditionally pastoral elegies contain not only evocations of the natural world as a source of unification and continuance, but also involve questioning the role of initiation, vocation and inheritance.¹¹² *Acrylic Tips* enacts and embodies this elegiac strategy, but does so in a manner which extends across cultural divides. Analogously, this bi-cultural register speaks to and exemplifies the cultural heredity of the daughter in the poem, who, nearing the poem's conclusion, begins to speak for herself, taking the initiative in resolving the ongoing dispute between her parents. This may pertain to another of the elegiac patterns in the poem, a form of consolation which exists as the answer to loss (loss of a culture and possibly loss of progeny): a daughter, the '[b]urning child,' with a 'prism dialect', for whom both cultures are 'bound up' with the aim 'to let nothing fall.'¹¹³

The narrative of the poem contains all of the conventions of a pastoral elegy: experience of loss, outbursts of anger and criticism, appeals, offerings of tribute, and the use of image-complexes which evoke the natural world as a site of renewal. The poem's narrative relates the breakdown of the relationship between a couple, and the male subject's loss of his daughter, pleading 'to cry / and mourn for her as he goes, to bring her home'.¹¹⁴ The most defining aspect of pastoral elegiac conventions within the poem is Prynne's use of the natural as a symbol for fertility and creation. In this definitively Australian context, the association with the natural world and

the processes of renewal and continuance are framed within the function of fire in the regeneration of Australian trees and shrubs.¹¹⁵ The disparity between antecedent traditions of the pastoral elegy and the construction of mourning in *Acrylic Tips* may provide contextual inhibitions for readers but conceptualising the utilisation of Indigenous traditions as well as Prynne's use of Australian flora and fauna establishes contiguity with the elegiac mode.

The hierarchies of power and control in relation to nature stem from a top-down relation to the history of colonisation. This is a power structure which is systematically imbricated within a society, involving its treatment not only of Indigenous Affairs and multiculturalism, but also, as expressed in *Acrylic Tips*, the relationship between humans and nature.¹¹⁶ Chief amongst these expressions of anthropocentric dominance is the human and animal trauma of the shearing shed. That much of the poem parallels a report delivered by a shearer, Stephen Kinsella, on the treatment of animals in the process of shearing also reinforces this as a theme. That the shearing shed is the location of much of *Acrylic Tips* sutures the poem's temporal frame and expressions of the technological, such as genetic engineering, to the country's foundations of colonialism and pastoralism. The shed is a microcosmic expression of the whole history of Australia's hegemonic and patriarchal hierarchical power structures, which finds extension in acts of control, selection and outright dominance in genetic engineering.

The continual experience of trauma and brutality displayed in the working conditions of the shed allows no allusions as to the nature of this work and quickly dispels any suggestion that it might be read as romantic: 'Never at one blow to // Divvy up warm pleats'.¹¹⁷ 'Best at blood plastic / same time blent'¹¹⁸ presents a manipulation of genetic material echoed in the captive 'bleat' of the sheep. 'Hand on the guard rail down most volition to slight / and planing sheer brings inert forwards, rifted for / them in the photograph acid'¹¹⁹ establishes a connection with 'flim' two stanzas later, in discussing the treatment of wounded animals after they are 'tailed, castrated, ringed, earmarked and mulesed'.¹²⁰ Prynne's poem describes this brutality suffered by man and animals through 'lamb for kicks' and 'browsing hearts spear

swap,¹²¹ where Kinsella's poem 'The Epistemology of Sheep' details the injured as having 'ribflesh flyblown and the heart exposed – all the world sees'.¹²²

As they relate to labour, technology and the pastoral elegy within the Australian context, some analogous readings may establish linkages between the violence detailed in *Acrylic Tips* and in John Kinsella's 'The Hierarchy of Sheep' and 'The Epistemology of Sheep'. An expression of brutality which relates to *Acrylic Tips* is found in Kinsella's 'The Hierarchy of Sheep':

Furious amongst the ewes, savage to its fellows,
headbutting and cracking the competition –
[. . .]
he watches nervously, fearing a vengeful shearer
as the feelers sense their way out of the sheath
of the ram's penis – cut by the handpiece
the ram is rendered 'useless',
unable to find the ewe's cunt.¹²³

The clipped penis of the ram has further implications in the reading of Prynne's lines, 'his right arm / tied to creation' and 'arms roiled back into / sleeve fluid',¹²⁴ both of which imply assisted insemination and a discourse of technologic dominance to which this analysis will return. These lines also provide the most expressive and intricate experience of trauma as dealt by man upon animal. The account which Prynne provides, as it relates to Kinsella's poem, is taken from the fourth page of *Acrylic Tips*, '[M]ischief gashes' implies not only the possibility that the ram's frenzy has left him injured, but that the 'mischief' is caused by a vengeful shearer. In Prynne's poem the ram is 'propulsed', driven off or chased away; the ram's shorn penis has him already showing signs of an inability to copulate. '[P]ropulsed', in conjunction with '[h]eavy declined, deducted amen', alludes to the possibility that the ram will be shot. The reason for the response to the wounding of the ram has ultimately to do with the correlation between fertility and productivity, and the ram's place in the hierarchy of sheep. The gendered preference of the male over the female within

the hierarchy opens up this register within the poetic, allowing the hierarchy to extend to monetary and labour relations. 'To clip [the] count', reveals the discourse of currency and exchange at work within the poem, as the 'count' relates to the total number of sheep sheared and amount of wool bailed in a day. 'Resiled after shunning' shows an animal withdrawing from the task after failure; '[g]risted' represents a gnashing of the teeth (resonating with 'mastic,' as discussed by Andrea Brady¹²⁵) at an offering of benevolence. '[H]is right arm / tied to creation' puns upon 'tired', showing the strain and stress of the shearer's labour. That the shearer 'reaches out / [for] needlepoint decision,' shows that efforts to mend the wounded ram are attempted. The phrase, 'retrench to dormancy', adds a fatal weight to the proposed suturing of the injured, to the point where '[m]end it not' is commanded. The shearer carries the wounded animal outside, where the ram faces an uneasy slaughter. The line, 'ruinously now surmounted,'¹²⁶ implies a devastating fate awaiting the animal, with the shearer standing over him. That '[a]im' precedes 'nothing heard'¹²⁷ implies that the death is overridden with the noise of the shed, and that the animal's death is displaced from the ongoing labour.

The line, 'ruinously now surmounted', suggests the ram's loss of utility and hence his loss of life. The line also resounds with the lines, 'Again the feedstuff for ruin makes the level / 'acceptable', there is no choice but to / choose this', from *High Pink on Chrome*, where the prospects of harm are weighed in decisions regarding pastoral production.¹²⁸ A similar register in *Bands Around the Throat* contorts the ethic of care into decisions regarding immanent threat and the valuation of human life in the wake of the Chernobyl meltdown, represented with the line, 'the bond of care annulled.'¹²⁹ The dialectic of care and control has resonance throughout Prynne's oeuvre, and its human effect is most notable in *Brass*, where the Holocaust is figured in terms which presuppose that 'freedom from care deflects the care itself'.¹³⁰ All of these associations add to the polysemous account of the line, providing an ethical treatment of the decisions regarding the preservation or predation of another life. In the shearing shed, the poem implies, this slaughter has become habitual, just as animals displaying deformed growth conditions in the laboratory are so easily discarded.

What Prynne reinforces is the cumulative and continual experience of trauma and brutality displayed in the working conditions of the shed. Prynne represents this with the line, 'Sack on split her mother rare spilling grilse for clipper / rushes minimal.'¹³¹ The experience of trauma is both animalistic and anthropocentric in nature. An 'open grasping // Flickered up eyelash address. Open breech' implies an unsealed wound on the abdomen, where '[s]till the insipid / blob of glory distends to circumflex,' and the shearer's myth of the self-healing wound is incited in a 'post-hormone limb crisis.'¹³² As the accumulation of these circumstances mount, the brutality and trauma suffered is '[i]njury too mounted in harm'.¹³³ The 'contracted mammal' references both men and animals, dealing with 'celestial scars' and 'sunken capital.'¹³⁴

In *Acrylic Tips's* final pages Prynne writes: 'By year end will send bitten / for carbon season indifferent new chasm revival tips // Sprung forth digressed, cicatrised.'¹³⁵ Prynne's description of the wounds as 'cicatrised' unifies the wound with a ritualised act in Indigenous initiation ceremony, symbolising a transition rite 'through which the initiate passes from one condition to another'.¹³⁶ 'Cicatrise', by definition, is a wound's healing via scarring, though in unifying this with aspects of Indigenous culture the term is associated with a notion of 'archaeological damage' done to a society, from which the emblematic and associative 'scar' manifests itself in multi-generational problems understanding past trauma.¹³⁷ *Acrylic Tips* proposes that this scarring, undertaken by Indigenous Australians, has manifested as a result of their cultural trauma, brutal treatment, and colonial genocide, which qualify their scars as 'celestial'.¹³⁸ It is this type of internalised, experiential trauma and brutality which leaves shearers suffering the same fate, clinging to past actions, reputations and attitudes which continue the hierarchies of violence, power and control that regulate their lives.

Acrylic Tips is constructed upon and contains conventions of the pastoral elegy, which it utilises to discuss the hybridity of Indigenous and colonial cultures. The elegiac aspects of *Acrylic Tips* and its relation to the pastoral function act as a means to frame Prynne's discourse on the role of technology, bodily harm, colonisation and the sustensive, the dominant subthemes of the poem. The passage from loss to

consolation is extended by the poem's elegiac elements to direct the narrative and to abridge cultural differences. Elegiac expression is fundamental to the discussion of the increasingly technical methods of pastoral production and the ontological problems they entail for cultural understandings of the land. The role of technology and its influence on concepts of corporeality reflect this elegiac expression, but also contain influences of hierarchy and gendered preference which stem from colonial power relations. The colonial process of renaming and appropriating land expresses a dominance explored in Prynne's presentation of the technological, foregrounding a lineage of hierarchical power structures inherent in the culture of contemporary Australia.

Conclusion

The poem *Acrylic Tips* represents a relationship as a means of exploring a number of transformative accounts of Australian history. Through the microcosm of the relationship, Prynne formulates a poetic that can discuss patterns of subjective and systemic violence, from marital strife to the 'plan[ned] depletion'¹³⁹ of Indigenous communities. If reading the poem as written to a single addressee, the poem may offer a release from the pressures of violence in the relationship depicted. More broadly, as a public address, the poem offers a reaction to the long trace of colonisation on the history of Australia. The elegiac aspects of the poem unify the poem's narrative with cultural loss due to colonial violence, shaping and contextualising the themes of the poem under the rubric of colonial relations. *Acrylic Tips* constitutes a rare instance in which Prynne populates the poem with a narrative from those around him, revealing circumstances perhaps more common than criticism would suggest. The poem allows Prynne a means of representing the immutable effects of colonial violence on a people, as well as on its language systems. Prynne's experience and research into Australian history finds output in a poetic language 'which [is] cross-wired into the cultural history of a ramified national identity'.¹⁴⁰ The poem balances the personal details of a tumultuous relationship with the history of Australia's Indigenous and colonial past, synthesising and deriving a poetic language from amongst the pressures of an historical, transformative violence.

To represent the locus and process of lexical development, Prynne creates a language aware of the socio-historical conditions of Australia and expressing the transformative effects of colonial violence on contemporary power relations, language and people. *Acrylic Tips* presents a number of themes that are interrelated and highlight the historical effects of colonisation. The influence of colonial history and power relations defines how technology transforms ritual practices, subsumes Indigenous voices and augments the development of the pastoral. The establishment of colonial power relations has a noticeable effect on ontological conceptions of nature as they relate to both colonial and Indigenous traditions. Written to reflect this history, the conditions of labour and the relation to the sustentative are also problematised. The poem's focus on land usage and labour relations, as well as the violence inherent in these processes, establishes the conditions of colonisation as still prevalent and influential in the Australian context. The utilisation of a model of pastoral elegy aligns the poem's narrative and Prynne's poetic construction to a movement from loss to possible consolation. If consolation is to be found in the broader discourse, as it is in the poem's narrative, the positing of cultural hybridity in which Indigenous and Western values and traditions can be expressed represents the most providential conclusion that a nation founded on colonial violence could hope to attain.

Competing Interests

The author declares that they have no competing interests.

Author Note

The submission of this article for review preceded its final publication in *Violence in the Work of J.H. Prynne* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2015). As such, this essay represents a pertinent but segmented portion of the detailed study of *Acrylic Tips* as it is presented within the book. My sincere thanks to the reviewers and editors for their comments and direction and to Scott Thurston for his support in seeing this publication through.

Notes

- ¹ Rod Mengham, 'After Avant-gardism: *Her Weasels Wild Returning*,' *Assembling Alternatives; Reading Postmodern Poetries Transnationally*, ed. Romana Huk (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2003) 384–88, 384–5.
- ² Mengham, 'After Avant-gardism: *Her Weasels Wild Returning*,' 385–6.
- ³ For ease of reference all quotations from *Acrylic Tips* will be given with page numbers from J. H. Prynne, *Poems*, (Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books, 2005).
- ⁴ A. P. Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1976) 186. See also, Deborah Bird Rose, *Nourishing Terrains* (Canberra: Australian Heritage Commission, 1996) 39. In the subchapter titled 'Centres of Life', Bird Rose writes, 'Daly Pulkara told me that his people are 'born for country'. In many parts of Australia Aboriginal people believe that the spirit (or one spirit) that animates a foetal human is a spirit from the land: an ancestral Dreaming spirit, or a human spirit (baby spirit) resident in a particular locale. Known in English as 'conception Dreaming', these beliefs promote special relationships between an individual person, sites and tracks, and Dreamings. These beliefs also situate people as part of the outpouring of life of the country. That is, country gives forth life, and included in that life are the people of the country.'
- ⁵ Mengham, 'After Avant-gardism: *Her Weasels Wild Returning*,' 387.
- ⁶ Andrea Brady, 'No Turning Back: *Acrylic Tips*,' *Quid*, 17 (2006) 82.
- ⁷ Bird Rose, *Nourishing Terrains*, 39.
- ⁸ J. H. Prynne, "Poetic Thought," *Textual Practice*, Vol. 24 No. 4 (August 2010) 595–606, 598.
- ⁹ John Kinsella, *Fast, Loose Beginnings: A memoir of intoxications* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2006) 120–138.
- ¹⁰ John Kinsella and Coral Hull, *The Hierarchy of Sheep – a report from my brother, Zoo* (Sydney: Paperbark Press, 2000) 125–127, 126.
- ¹¹ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 544, 538, 540, 539, 543 and 545, respectively.
- ¹² John Kinsella, "Introduction," *SALT Magazine*, 1 [n.p.]. [<http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/93590/20130104-0809/saltmagazine/issues/01/index.htm>] (Site archived on 4 January 2013 accessed on 30 March 2013)].
- ¹³ Mengham, 'After Avant-gardism: *Her Weasels Wild Returning*,' 387.
- ¹⁴ Donald Stuart, *Yandy* (Adelaide: Rigby, 1978) 89. [originally published in 1959]
- ¹⁵ Ernest Hunter, *Aboriginal Health and History: Power and Prejudice in Remote Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) 203.
- ¹⁶ Debra Bird Rose, *Reports From A Wild Country: Ethics for Decolonisation* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2004) 49.
- ¹⁷ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 544.
- ¹⁸ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 537.
- ¹⁹ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 540.
- ²⁰ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 537.
- ²¹ Peter Russel, *Recognising Aboriginal Title* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005) 39.
- ²² Bain Attwood, *In The Age of Mabo: History, Aborigines and Australia* (St. Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1996) ix.
- ²³ Attwood, *In The Age of Mabo*, ix.
- ²⁴ Attwood, *In The Age of Mabo*, ix.
- ²⁵ Attwood, *In The Age of Mabo*, xvi.
- ²⁶ Remarking upon acts of 'primitivism' and accounts of encounters with Indigenous Australians can be found in *The Journals of Captain James Cook on his Voyages of Discovery*, Vol. 1, *The Voyage of the*

Endeavor 1768–1771, ed. J.C. Beaglehole (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968): 305–306;
The Endeavor Journal of Joseph Banks: Vol. 2, ed. J.C. Beaglehole (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1962):
 111–12, 123–30.

- ²⁷ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 537.
²⁸ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 537.
²⁹ Henry Reynolds, *Why Weren't We Told?* (Ringwood, Vic.: Viking, 1999) 70, *passim*.
³⁰ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 538.
³¹ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 538.
³² Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 538.
³³ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 538.
³⁴ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 538.
³⁵ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 538.
³⁶ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 539.
³⁷ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 539.
³⁸ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 539.
³⁹ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 541.
⁴⁰ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 545.
⁴¹ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 541.
⁴² Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 541.
⁴³ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 541.
⁴⁴ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 541.
⁴⁵ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 541.
⁴⁶ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 542.
⁴⁷ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 544.
⁴⁸ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 542.
⁴⁹ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 542.
⁵⁰ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 542.
⁵¹ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 543.
⁵² Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 543.
⁵³ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 544.
⁵⁴ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 544.
⁵⁵ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 544.
⁵⁶ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 537.
⁵⁷ Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines*, 312–316. Elkin argues that the 'true bone' or 'pointing bone' is one associated with the practice of projective magic, and the act of 'pointing' which is often accompanied by 'singing' at the intended victim.
⁵⁸ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 544.
⁵⁹ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 544.
⁶⁰ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 544.
⁶¹ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 544.
⁶² Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 545.
⁶³ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 545.
⁶⁴ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 545, 546.
⁶⁵ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 545, 544, 545, 545.
⁶⁶ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 545.
⁶⁷ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 545.

- ⁶⁸ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 545.
- ⁶⁹ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 545.
- ⁷⁰ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 545.
- ⁷¹ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 545.
- ⁷² Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 546.
- ⁷³ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 546.
- ⁷⁴ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 546.
- ⁷⁵ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 546.
- ⁷⁶ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 546.
- ⁷⁷ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 546.
- ⁷⁸ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 546.
- ⁷⁹ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 546, 537.
- ⁸⁰ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 546.
- ⁸¹ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 546.
- ⁸² Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 546.
- ⁸³ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 546.
- ⁸⁴ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 537.
- ⁸⁵ Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines*, 194–199.
- ⁸⁶ Bird Rose, *Nourishing Terrains*, 42–3.
- ⁸⁷ 'Krook' is Australian argot for 'exhibiting physical sickness', generally from over-consumption; Prynne's line has the added substitution of 'k' for 'c' to satirise the political assumptions made regarding the sicknesses inherent to Australian Indigenous society, as cultural characteristics rather than as symptomatic of colonisation.
- ⁸⁸ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 537.
- ⁸⁹ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 537.
- ⁹⁰ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 537.
- ⁹¹ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 540.
- ⁹² Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 537, 537, 537, 540.
- ⁹³ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 544.
- ⁹⁴ Ernest Hunter, *Aboriginal Health and History*, 43–47.
- ⁹⁵ John Kinsella and Dorothy Hewett, "Sale of the Century," *Wheatlands* (Fremantle, WA: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 2000) 22.
- ⁹⁶ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 537, 537.
- ⁹⁷ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 537, 539, 539, 539.
- ⁹⁸ Bird Rose, *Reports From A Wild Country*, 62.
- ⁹⁹ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 537, 538.
- ¹⁰⁰ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 542.
- ¹⁰¹ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 542.
- ¹⁰² Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 538, 544.
- ¹⁰³ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 542.
- ¹⁰⁴ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 542.
- ¹⁰⁵ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 542.
- ¹⁰⁶ Brady, 'No Turning Back: *Acrylic Tips*,' 82.
- ¹⁰⁷ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 542.
- ¹⁰⁸ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 546.
- ¹⁰⁹ Lauren Ahwan, '50 sew up lips in hunger strike, detainees claim,' 27 June 2002, *The Age*, 30 October 2010, <<http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2002/06/27/1023864626046.html>>.

- ¹¹⁰ Julie Cox and Stella Minahan, 'Unravelling Woomera: lip sewing, morphology and dystopia,' *Journal of Organisational Change Management*, 17.3 (2004) 292–301.
- ¹¹¹ David Kennedy, *Elegy* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2007) 6.
- ¹¹² Paul Alpers, *What is Pastoral* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) 27.
- ¹¹³ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, [all references] 546.
- ¹¹⁴ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 537.
- ¹¹⁵ Notions of harm in the poem are often created in image-complexes structured on Australian flora, which reiterates the connection between nature and expressions of the pastoral elegy. Fire in the Australian environment has a considerable impact on the annual desiccation of trees, shrubs and wild grasses, and due to its annual presence (in its 'carbon season' (546)), it has a determined impact on budding, fruiting and flowering plants, as well as in the germination of seed-bearing capsules. '[S]tolon rising' (545) speaks to this process, and 'browsing hearts' (543) may also, if the phrase is taken as indicative of a plant's rhizomatous spread or development of lignotubers. Examples of this evolutionary adaptation in Australia include the *Pandanus* plant, which has leaf sheathes that protect it from fire. *Melaleucas* also regenerate from epicormic buds along their trunks after being burnt, and *Eucalyptus* trees which re-sprout from lignotubers after a fire. These plant species attest to this phenological propensity and may provide insights into the representation of nature in *Acrylic Tips*.
- ¹¹⁶ Bird Rose, *Reports From a Wild Country*, 35.
- ¹¹⁷ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 538.
- ¹¹⁸ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 539.
- ¹¹⁹ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 540.
- ¹²⁰ Kinsella and Hull, 'The Hierarchy of Sheep,' *Zoo*, 127.
- ¹²¹ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 543, 543.
- ¹²² Kinsella and Hull, 'The Hierarchy of Sheep,' *Zoo*, 125.
- ¹²³ Kinsella and Hull, 'The Hierarchy of Sheep,' *Zoo*, 125.
- ¹²⁴ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 540, 543.
- ¹²⁵ Brady, 'No Turning Back: *Acrylic Tips*,' 82.
- ¹²⁶ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 540.
- ¹²⁷ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 540.
- ¹²⁸ Prynne, 'High Pink on Chrome', *Poems*, 257
- ¹²⁹ Prynne, 'Bands Around the Throat', *Poems*, 349.
- ¹³⁰ Prynne, 'Brass', *Poems*, 173.
- ¹³¹ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 542.
- ¹³² Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 545.
- ¹³³ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 545.
- ¹³⁴ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 543, 542, 543.
- ¹³⁵ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 546.
- ¹³⁶ Elkin, *The Australian Aborigines*, 198.
- ¹³⁷ Judy Atkinson, Jeff Nelson and Caroline Atkinson, 'Trauma, transgenerational transfer and effects on community wellbeing,' in *Working Together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and wellbeing principles and practice*, eds. N. Purdie, P. Dudgeon and R. Walker (Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2010) 135–144. [Available online at <<http://aboriginal.childhealthresearch.org.au/media/54889/chapter10.pdf>>.
- ¹³⁸ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 542.
- ¹³⁹ Prynne, 'Acrylic Tips', *Poems*, 544.
- ¹⁴⁰ J.H. Prynne, "Mental Ears and Poetic Work," *Chicago Review*, 55.1 (2010) 126–57, 127.

How to cite this article: Hall, M 2016 Terra Nullius: Colonial Violence in Prynne's *Acrylic Tips*. *Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry*, 8(1):e5, pp.1–30, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.16995/biip.8>

Published: 10 June 2016

Copyright: © 2016 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>.



Journal of British and Irish Innovative Poetry is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Open Library of Humanities.

OPEN ACCESS The Open Access icon, which is a stylized 'O' with a circular arrow around it.