Fugitive Pieces: F.T. Prince and Sculpture

Abstract

This chapter explores a neglected aspect of mid-twentieth-century poetry: the creative and economic interplay between architecture, language, and form. It takes as a focal point the work of a lesser-known poet, F.T. Prince, making use of underexplored material in his archive. Such poetry calls for closer critical attention to the re-fashioning of material across disciplines. For instance, the 'delightful voids ' and 'long fractures' of Prince's work oscillate *between word and sculptural matter*, creating 'fugitive' pieces that are at once verbally and spatially coercive. It offers a case in which twentieth-century poetry, through the architecture of the page, subtly and insistently reminds readers of the politics and economics of its production as commissioned word and work.

Bringing to light material from the new Prince archive, this chapter examines the author's skilful negotiations of the processes of artistic dissemination and patronage, as well as his intimate relationship with the politics of commission and production across historical time. It reads early modern and twentieth-century buildings – in print and in place – not as neutral structures, but as forms of argument that persuade and coerce, in their inhabitability. It argues for closer attention in current poetic criticism to the materiality of the work, which foregrounds its fraught aesthetic and economic self-interest. Prince's poetry, in reaching back to cinquecento sculpture and artwork, insists that its readers recognise that the artist's skill in physical rendering – in the praise-poem, the commemorative object, the structure built or work painted to 'your' honour – is required in order successfully to negotiate a commissioner's and an audience's, as well as its own agendas.

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> No perfect form could ever bind
> Thou eternal fugitive
> Hovering over all that live […]
> 　　　　R.W. Emerson, 'Ode to Beauty' (1847)

Emerson's fugitive is an inspiring protean power. It animates whilst remaining on the move. 'Quick and skilful', his figure shifts from place to place, eluding the grasp, perpetually mutable.[1] In 'Ode to Beauty' this chameleon is addressed directly, which grants the speaker intimacy – perhaps overfamiliarity – with his elusive 'force'. But his identification with 'Thou' takes shape as a will to possession and attainment: 'lavish lavish promiser', 'Thou inscribest with a bond / In thy momentary play / Would bankrupt Nature to repay.' Ephemerality seems to be a tactic for escape from the artist-figure's accusative vigour: he cannot keep its tongue away from the 'bond', nor from bankruptcy, ownership and mastery.

Such language draws on the notion of one exiled or driven out, and of the wandering that takes place after fleeing a debtor, persecutor, or tyrant. 'Oft in streets or humblest places / I detect far wandered graces', 'Which from Eden wide astray / In lowly homes have lost their way.' Emerson envisages self-exile in terms indicative of permanent vagrancy; a haunted occupation of public space: 'Oft in streets', 'far wandered', 'from Eden […] astray'. It is a lostness which the poem makes perennially 'hover[…]' over all. The fugitive is at once abidingly on the move and a frozen emblem of inspiration made to seem 'eternal':

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[1] Emerson, *Emerson: Collected Poems & Translations*, ed. by Harold Bloom and Paul Kane (New york: Library of America, 1994): 71. Referred to as *Collected*.

> Thee gliding through the sea of form,
> Like the lightning through the storm,
> Somewhat not to be possessed,
> Somewhat not to be caressed,
> No feet so fleet could ever find,
> No perfect form could ever bind.
> Thou eternal fugitive
> Hovering over all that live,
> Quick and skilful to inspire
> Sweet extravagant desire,   (*Collected* 71)

All this talk of binding and finding depends upon the poet being as 'fleet' of foot as his escaping 'Thee'. Taking on the character of what he hails, his movements trace out its eternally vanishing motion. Like the fugitive, the artist-figure's mapping, memorising, preserving impulses (haunting streets, moving between 'homes') affiliate him to lost origins, to remnants and traces.

In these post-Edenic wanderings through public and private space, the artist seeks orientation in architectural design, especially in tracing historical records, antique design models and aesthetic legacies. He is a revenant of Renaissance and early modern Rome in particular: 'I turn the proud portfolios / Which hold the grand designs / Of Salvator, of Guercino, /And Piranesi's lines' (70). Emerson's poet speaks as if he were thumbing through a collection accommodating the key 'designs' of the three early modern artists, as well as their 'lines': he attends at once to material features of buildings and artworks, and to some imagined record of the artists' emerging early plans and sketches.[2] The artistic legacy – preserved in the works and in the archives – is also fugitive. It lodges in the material world of in stone and literature, weathering the maker's disappearance – sometimes in ruins or in the allusive monuments of others. At other times, it is glimpsed in records of lost work and early sketches for future work. But these precarious remnants keep both form and name on the move: their materiality, their vocabularies, and gestures are driven through alterable meanings, re-shapings, and potential erosions.

FUGITIVES AND FOREBEARS: LIVING SOURCES

It may appear incongruous to entitle a chapter on sculpture and F.T. Prince 'Fugitive Pieces'. In one sense, a weighted statue, dome or pillar is anchored to its physical location: cast in stone, it is the opposite of the immaterial, evanescent fugitive, who flees duty, mastery or justice. That seems to be the case even when the artwork shows up in an ekphrastic poem. Emerson gets us closer to what I want to say here – and what Prince's work articulates – about print and marble escapees. The fugitive piece takes shape as matter continually bent into new configuration. But it simultaneously holds firm and endures: it stands witness to the design models of antiquity as these pass into modern material incarnation, and into the mutable forms of the literary text. 'Old histories, pale, stained, yet beautiful / Unfold from yellowing papers, tarnished print / […] / Dry death and living love'.[3] In Prince, as in Emerson, the animate object is asserted in its fragility – 'pale, stained', 'tarnished' – which directs contemporary orientation through a historical world of forms, and also demands engagement with the 'living'. We hear this across media in Prince, from the 'paving stones', 'crumbling walls' and 'Fretted discoloured towers and domes' in *Memoirs of Oxford*, to the sculptor's agonies with marble forms in 'The Old Age of Michelangelo': 'torment', 'Eternal hope and pain, packed close in one man's body' (*CP* 132, 73-79). We hear it again in 'Afterword on Rupert Brooke': in speaking of the 'gain / In potency, when to the frail rustic-heroic / And sincerely unreal memorial bronze' we add the 'Nakedness of the warrior without armour', 'real nudity [...] / [...] death' (*CP* 171).

In *Memoirs of Oxford,* Prince writes of an early encounter with Percy Bysshe Shelley that 'begot a dream in me'.[4] Inspired by the Romantic visionary, the young poet creates a lyric companion, whom he figures in oddly sculptural terms: 'A sweetness like the form and glow / Of human limbs – the body so / Alive and

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quivering' (*CP* 144). Half-human and half-statue, the figure shows Prince balancing – or perhaps offsetting – the creative passion of lyric inspiration with the arduous material labour of sculptural process. It is an analogy that develops out of the adult poet's emphasis on the corporeality of 'making verse', seen as a painstaking re-fashioning of matter:

> Being *incontentabile*
>   Like Foscolo, in making verse;
> Not to be satisfied but lingering
> Cutting, cancelling, rubbing, fingering –
>   And sometimes changing bad for worse;
>
> I might do better to end here,
>   Put down the pen and close my eyes.
> [...]
>
> I'll call up Shelley, give him thanks
>   And praise, tell him in gratitude
> How at about thirteen I won
> Some books at school – his book was one –
>   And how it rapt my solitude.　　　(*CP* 143)

The poet's fastidious exertions take their cue from angular relations with earlier literary figures. First, he envisages himself '[l]ike' Foscolo – the early nineteenth-century Italian writer-revolutionary, and tireless self-editor, whose numerous unfinished works and textual variants have perplexed generations of subsequent editors.[5] Second, he affiliates himself with Shelley, whose use of the five-line stanza in *Peter Bell the Third* guides the form of Prince's *Memoirs*, and on whom his poet here bestows 'praise' and 'gratitude'.[6]

Verse is envisaged by Prince as something actively 'made'. It involves hands-on labour – 'cancelling, rubbing' – and surprisingly physical force: 'I sit and drive a quill / [...] bent over the task' he writes earlier in the sequence (*CP* 125). As though the poet were a sculptor bent before an emerging marble body, and under the influence of historico-artistic models, he resolutely continues to work, 'lingering / Cutting, cancelling, rubbing, fingering' until he perceives, or thinks he does: 'the form and glow / Of human limbs – the body'. But Prince's speaker cannot be certain. The 'limbs' are not a manifestation of body itself, but only its emanations, glow and structure.

'*Incontentabilità* lay in his nature', claims Jean-Pierre Barricelli of Michelangelo: 'Perhaps it was an imperative for creation'.[7] Prince too finds himself more incited by dreams of incompleteness, self-questioning and crumbling edifices, than by those of perfection. Throughout *Memoirs*, the struggle to write finds analogy with architectural and spatial motifs. The poet's work '[w]ith pen and paper' is cast as an attempt to 'unlock // Old passages and messages, / And wrestle till they come out right' (125). But even if the tussler finds his material going from bad to worse, the endlessly reshaped structures in his grasp – which include a statue, a labyrinthine corridor, and sheets of paper – pique and inveigle him. Remaking and cancelling out, wandering through 'passages and messages', he remains painstakingly exacting about these objects, keeping them in a state of provisionality – a fugitive state – that flees the temptation to harden into self-satisfied ease, rest or location.

Steering Prince's writer-figures away from passive idolatry of artistic forebears are frequently such processes of restless re-versioning. His is a creativity driven by self-interrogation. The artist-figure of *Memoirs* balances his youthful longings for spontaneous dream with his mature questing, *incontentabile* spirit:

> That book begot a dream in me –
>   To wonder out alone and bare
> And be a naked man and free
> (And yet one would not want to be
>   Alone, another should be there…)

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[5] See his translation of the *Iliad*; also see *The Graces*.

[6] See Prince's 'Note', dated Oct. 1969, in *Memoirs* (Fulcrum 1970).

[7] Barricelli, 'Michelangelo's Finito: In the Self, the Later Sonnets, and the Last Pietà', in *New Literary History* 24:3 (Summer 1993): 597-616, at 600.

[...]
                              *

You lie nearby, carved as if found
    Washed up in nakedness, dead-white
And lax; yet not released but bound
In marble, and more deeply drowned
    By that almost subaqueous light.

So at last broken, there you lie.
    - No but you breathe and burn and shine,
And from the breaking wave and dying
Flame, and the withered leaf and flying
    Cloud […]   (*CP* 143-44)

The lines successfully summon the figure they most desire: 'another should be there', 'at last [...] there you lie'. Yet the young poet undoes his own act of making with self-correction: ' – No but', 'broken'. Are 'you' a carved marble or a fissured body? Is the bruised figure a found object, or the poet's tortured creation? He both longs for an active and responsive companion, and a cold and unyielding statue. His marble interlocutor teases him out of thought: 'who knows what share / You had in this' he ponders. Haunted by these confounding relations, his imagination contradictorily animates and de-animates the stony apparition. First, he perceives a statue brought to life; next an amorphous spirit, a force of protean nature: 'you breathe and burn and shine'.

As 'you' appears variously 'from the breaking wave' and 'flying /Cloud', the tumultuous addresses echo Shelley's calling in 'Ode to the West Wind': 'Oh! lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!', 'a swift cloud to fly with thee; / A wave to pant beneath thy power'.[8] Prince's poet has been yearning for an encounter with an active, living force, but the figure supplied by his lyric pages is broken and inert (like old, decaying marble) and hints at lifeless vision: 'dead-white'. This, he fears, is no fugitive spirit. While Shelley and Emerson found their galvanising chameleon in another, it is Prince's poet himself who remains itinerantly self-inspiring.

It is a fantasied creation of an 'alive and quivering' companion that, as Prince is aware, risks operating as a defunct projection – a dead cliché comprised out of the urge to resuscitate literary and sculptural history. His lines brush off the episode as an adolescent dream, culpably in thrall to his Romantic forebears, and in danger of forcing 'you' to crystallise into a seemingly finalised sculpted form: 'visions, worlds in brief / [...] point to the unchangeable'. Correcting himself, he tries to remain in touch with the all-too-painful brevity of lyric insight, and ensures the material appears in its alterable and uncertain condition. But of course, the fleeting nature of these fugitive pieces is precisely what allows them to point to the 'eternal', as they did in Emerson. Like Keats's vision of 'Joy whose hand is ever at his lips / Bidding adieu', Prince's vision gestures to the 'unchangeable', ever-present conditions of mutability and flux.[9]

Memoirs is a sequence itself materially comprised of mutable, precarious assertions. The 2012 Carcanet *Collected Poems* shows Prince's substantial textual changes to the version he first published in 1970 with Fulcrum Press. The running order of much of the poem is altered, so that what I have been quoting as section five from Carcanet appeared as section six in Fulcrum.[10] In this section alone I count twenty-seven changes, including punctuation, vocabulary and the removal of divisions – or textual breaks – between stanzas six and seven, and between nine and ten. These are denoted in the Carcanet edition by asterisks. (I am not, however, counting the substitution of the word 'six' for roman numerals in the later section heading). The most frequent alteration is a preference for the semicolon or comma over the long em-dash, such as appeared in 1970 at the start of the penultimate stanza: ' – I catch at visions, worlds in brief', and at the beginning of stanza seven: ' – You lie near by, carved as if found' (Ful 46-47). But it is also added at the ends of lines, and sometimes within the middle, as in: 'The rays go out, grow out – shine here – ' (Ful 46).

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[8] Shelley, 'Ode to the West Wind', *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Donald H. Reiman and Neil Fraistat (New York: Norton, 2002): 300. Referred to as *Poetry and Prose*.
[9] Keats, 'Ode on Melancholy', *The Complete Poems*, ed. John Barnard (London: Penguin, 1988): 348.
[10] Prince, section v in *CP* 143-45; section six in Ful 44-47.

The proclivity for the dash suggests a greater fluidity of thought and language in the 1970 text, and it produces an associative verbal run-on of recalled impressions. The later version slows this down and tempers the flow with increased resistance and stoppage. Its punctuation suggests the urge to pause frequently and to link clauses more firmly, with increased retrospective consideration of the relationships between particulars. It's an impression reinforced by the addition of the asterisks, which organise the memories, directing the eye to mid-sectional shifts between different orders, or stages, of recollection. The Carcanet version also shows a preference for full-stops, commas and dashes rather than exclamation marks (five in the original, three later). The line we heard earlier as ' – No, but you breathe and burn and shine' was more breathlessly exclamatory in 1970, when it terminated: 'breathe and burn and shine!' (Ful 46). A similar effect is heard in another quotation that we encountered in the *CP*: 'That book begot a dream in me – ' (143). In this case, Prince has altered lexicon as well as punctuation from the Fulcrum text, which read: 'That book became a dream to me!' (46). The later version seems to resist the archaic dream, which is 'begot' in him by another's book, not by or through him. But the 1970 version takes more immediate, simple gratification in dream's becoming, and also envisages its own hand in slumber (the book became 'a dream to me' rather than producing 'a dream in me').

On the subject of changeable, fragile assertions, the *OED*'s definition five of the 'fugitive' is helpful: 'Of a literary composition (occas. of a writer): Concerned or dealing with subjects of passing interest; ephemeral, occasional'.[11] Prince's poems are themselves frequently absconders from textual permanence. That is the case in the common or garden sense that many of his poems are published in more than one version: a lyric may appear first in a literary periodical before being incorporated into a collection (which later goes out of print), and is subsequently gathered into a *Collected Poems*, which itself alters form (Anvil and Menard in 1979; Carcanet's first edition in 1993 and second edition in 2012). Prince's work has shown significant variation at one or several of these stages. An example is 'An Epistle to a Patron' which rings numerous changes after its first appearance in *The Criterion*: most notably its 'dedication' is expunged in the later versions. 'His Dog and Pilgrim', which appeared in *Later On* in 1983 shows notable changes in typography and lineation in the *CP*. Sometimes an entire sequence makes substantial revisions to and reorganisations of its verbal, architectural and sculptural matter (*Memoirs in Oxford*). Other works, such as the 1986 pamphlet *Fragment Poetry*, are fugitive in that they go out of print, and are not easily accessible to common readers. (This latter kind of work is sometimes referred to as 'grey' or ephemeral literature, often appearing in a non-standard format, and not controlled by commercial publishers.) 'Fugitive' in this sense makes reference to the subsequent traceablity of the piece, which can cause readers and librarians trouble in acquiring, organising, discussing or making the work publically available.

Such alterations make a wanderer out of textuality itself. They also take for a walk the material to which they attend, and which might often be thought of as distinctly non-fugitive – such as the solidly standing marbles of Michelangelo, the civic sites and spaces of Oxford and Rome, the records, legacies and archived materials of Foscolo, Edmund Burke, Rupert Brooke, Shelley. Although he is fascinated by the seeming permanence of stone and structure, Prince makes relations with materiality oddly flexible, alterable, and on the move. The historicity of building and stone figure, like the paper record, is set in motion. Given verbal form, a text is often reverbalised later, taking on differently-shaped verbal lore. So too, with marble form, which, in a Prince poem comes to seem 'ephemeral, occasional', subject to changes of perspective, erosion, time, and also, through poetical enactment, verbal flux.

ANIMATE STILLNESS: DREAM AND STONE

In critical writing about poems that handle sculptural and architectural pieces there is a tendency to regard the text as parasitic – as viciously silencing the 'original'. For Murray Krieger, the literary work stands in for and freezes the object's 'immediacy', writing over its ability to speak for and assert itself: language presides over a stifling and stilling of agency.[12] Krieger's perception of the ekphrastic work as a second-hand, translated thing expresses concerns about the latecomer's mediating self-interest. They are anxieties echoed by Margaret H. Persin, who writes that 'by taking possession of another form and by nominally declaring

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[11] 'fugitive, adj. and n.' in *OED Online*, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/75264?rskey=RJD9SW&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid accessed 18 Sept. 2014 at 11:41am.
[12] Krieger, *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1992): 5-12.

sovereignty over that art object, the poet attempts to pre-empt its authority'.[13] For both, writing culpably fails to speak the same language as the artworks it encounters, and takes advantage of its belatedness.

Prince's lyric manifestations of sculptural legacy repeatedly probe the ethics of shaping and re-shaping tumescent substance. His marble and textual artefacts not only illustrate the maker's skill and vision, but scrutinise how the aestheticisation of stone contains (in both senses) life and gesture. Animation and petrifaction repeatedly collide and collude.

For this reason Prince's works gravitate to metamorphosing material patterns within the appearance of formal fixity, and to energies discharged in the vivifying struggle. They are drawn to what is 'immovable / Always in the wrong positions', as he puts it in 'Strafford': holding firm and yet 'wavering in the right' (*CP* 109). By way of a sustained example of this steely perturbation, I want to turn now to an early poem, the 'The Old Age of Michelangelo' (*CP* 73-79). Using the first person, Prince's sculptor expresses compunctions about the imaginative labour of infusing matter with life, spirit, and restless desire. The lyric recalls the artist's devotion to the latent properties of stone; a dynamism that offers him the occasion to release his (and its) potential:

> And the dream sleeps in the stone, to be unveiled
> Or half-unveiled, the lurking nakedness;
> Luminous as a grapeskin, the cold marble mass
> Of melted skeins, chains, veils and veins,
> Bosses and hollows, muscular convexities,
> Supple heroic surfaces, tense drums
> And living knots and cords of love:
> - Sleeps in the stone, and is unveiled
> Or half-unveiled, the body's self a veil,
> By the adze and the chisel, and the mind
> Impelled by torment.   (*CP* 73)

Employing the imagery of sleeping within stone, Prince's lines refocus the terms of the ethical debate. They say less about the ingenious mastery of extracting forms from stone than about sculptural insight as a kind of dream-consciousness, or a bringing-back from unconsciousness. '[T]he dream sleeps in the stone' and is roused by the sculptor. Questions about sovereignty and verbal possession take shape in terms of the politics of revelation, and of who does what to whom in this party of figures, sculptors, poets and onlookers. For Prince, agency is plural. The animate, unconscious potential within the material ('lurking', 'to be unveiled') impels the artist's motions of release and expression. Neither Michelangelo nor Prince is *creating* the dream-figure, but rather freeing it from its dormant state. Such art appears to perform a dutiful act of liberation from somnolence.

But how, then, should we interpret the poem's depiction of *dream itself* as at rest? And what do we make of the confession: 'I finish nothing I begin'? As if his poem desired to sleep through its own alarm, letting its figure remain incomplete, Prince's language offers resistance to its own metaphor of awakening. Indeed, it takes pains to prolong slumber through the intensity of its poetical dream-activity. The lines portray the luminous effects of Michelangelo's artistry with spirit and form, which creates 'living knots and cords of love'. But all this 'impelled' and brilliant creation takes place only to 'half-unveil[…]' – or rather, to *keep partially veiled* – an oddly abstract double repose: 'the dream sleeps'.

Veils and acts of (un)veiling appear six times in eleven lines. This too recalls Shelley: 'Poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world', he writes in *A Defence of Poetry*: 'Veil after veil may be undrawn, and the inmost naked beauty of the meaning [of poetry] never exposed'.[14] But while the Romantic poet perceives 'new relations [...] ever developed, the source of an unforeseen and an unconceived delight', Prince foresees ceaseless unravelling and irresolution. The later poem is troubled by knotted and criss-crossed metaphors, in which acts of infinite undrawing bind, ensnare and befuddle. We slide from 'grapeskin' to 'skeins, chains, veils and veins', as Prince both sets loose the figure he sees, and ties it (and himself) up in 'cords of love' and 'living knots'. The tortuous 'muscular convexities' of poetic and stone work neither quite rouse nor capture what is 'lurking' and incomplete. Rather, they gesture toward a

[13] Persin, *Getting the Picture: The Ekphrastic Principle in Twentieth-Century Spanish Poetry* (London: Associated University Presses, 1997): 21.
[14] Shelley, 'A Defence of Poetry', in *Poetry and Prose* (510-35): 517, 528.

condition of being asleep within sleep, veiled within veil. The emergence of human form is a mere stage in eternal process: 'the body's self a veil' (73).

It is an ethic of sculptural creation informed by Michelangelo's own extensive and yet-to-be-unravelled body of poetry. Generations of authors have been drawn to his notoriously elaborate metrical forms, motifs and sinuous language – from Wordsworth to Longfellow, Emerson to Santayana, Rilke and Eugenio Montale – each of whom tries his hand at a translation. Generally speaking, however, it is a poetry that has compelled greater attention for its theorisation of sculptural work – and its manifestations of Renaissance concerns about divine and worldly form – than for its verbal skill.[15] Even Wordsworth laments the poetry's tortuous difficulty, in the act of lauding its nobility of mind and divine insight: 'shewing abundantly how conversant his soul was with great things […] so much meaning has been put by Michael Angelo into so little room, and that meaning so excellent in itself that I find the difficult of translating him insurmountable. I attempted at least fifteen of the sonnets but could not anywhere succeed'.[16] A more recent translator, James M. Saslow, observes how 'his penchant for verbal structures [...] yoke disparate concepts or facts in ways that emphasize mutual incompatibility', and notes that the frequent use of dualistic contradiction through antithesis, aphorism, litotes, double and triple negatives and punning verbal conceits exaggerates the complex tropes and grammatical features of Renaissance verse.[17]

Prince neither offers translations, nor faithful ekphrastic re-descriptions. His writing tends to think itself into the circumstances and attitudes of its forebears, rather than attempting verbal re-presentations of discrete artefacts: a Prince poem is more discursive than emulative. In a piece such as 'Words from Edmund Burke' or 'The Tears of a Muse in America' we watch the poem *engage with* its figures (*CP* 26-28; 19-22). Prince's alliance between dream and the liberation of marble form is not driven by the urge to breathe twentieth-century English life into the sixteenth-century Italian poetic structure. The dream-in-stone-motif – and its affiliation with aesthetic incompleteness and non-wakening – derives inspiration more fluidly, from such metaphoricity as is found in (and found unresolved by) Michelangelo's literary work. Four centuries earlier, in a famous quatrain addressed to Giovanni di Carlo Strozzi, he had taken as his focus the politics of aestheticising stone – and *sleep*:

> *Caro m'è 'l sonno, e più l'esser di sasso,*
> *mentre che 'l danno e la vergogna dura;*
> *non veder, non sentir m'è gran ventura;*
> *però non mi destar, deh, parla basso.*

> Sleep is dear to me, and being of stone is dearer,
> as long as injury and shame endure;
> not to see or hear is a great boon to me;
> therefore, do not wake me – pray, speak softly.   (247, in *Poetry* 419)

The lines are 'spoken' by Michelangelo's statue *Notte*, as she lies between sleep and wakefulness before Giuliano de' Medici's tomb in the Florentine chapel. They are also the sculptor's own epigrammatic retort to a poem Strozzi had written in praise of the recumbent figure, and envisage his contemporary speaking from an analogously otiose condition. Michelangelo's twin tombs for the Medici brothers had been constructed under the orders of Pope Clement VII, the illegitimate son of Giuliano, but they slyly travestied the *virtù* and sculptural glorification Clement had desired.[18] Little resembling themselves, the siblings are cast as Renaissance types, whilst the four allegorical figures of Night and Day, Twilight and Dawn articulate Michelangelo's despair over the fall of the Republic and the Medici triumph.[19] The marbles articulate a political resentment the artist could not spell out, which, following his relocation to Rome, would grow strident. (Later he spoke of his former patrons as the oppressors of his homeland, numbering them amongst the reasons he would never return.)

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[15] See Robert Clements, *The Poetry of Michelangelo* (New York UP, 1965); Glauco Cambon, *Michelangelo's Poetry: Fury of Form* (Princeton UP, 1985).

[16] Wordsworth, Letter to Sir George Beaumont, 17 Oct 1805, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: 1787-1805*, ed. E. de Selincourt, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967): 628-29.

[17] Saslow, *The Poetry of Michelangelo: An Annotated Translation* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1991): 41-44. Referred to as *Poetry*.

[18] See Antonio Forcellino, *Michelangelo: A Tormented Life* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009): 178-79.

[19] The 'Victory' group includes an old man resembling Michelangelo bent double under the weight of a frivolous looking younger man, expressive of his sense of political and personal persecution.

Implicitly indicting Florentine political culture and what he sees as his contemporary's culpably submissive position within it, Michelangelo's quatrain envisages not just *Notte*, but Strozzi, wishing to 'sleep[…]' through the 'injustice and shame' of the Medicean autocracy. '[D]o not wake me', 'speak softly', 'not to feel is my good fortune'.[20] It is a poetical riposte that not only satirises the motives underpinning desired somnolence, but indicates the need for political subjects to 'wake', to suffer, and to prize themselves from the 'dearness' of stony quietude.

Below is Varsari's transcription of Strozzi's earlier epigram, written around the time of the unveiling of Michelangelo's tombs in the Medici chapel, circa 1544. Again, the poem interlaces sleep, sculpture and the animations of stone form:

> *La Notte, che tu vedi in sì dolci atti*
> *dormir, fu da un Angelo scolpita*
> *in questo sasso; e, perché dorme, ha vita:*
> *destala, se nol credi, e parleratti.*

> Night, whom you see sleeping in such
> sweet posture, was sculpted by an angel
> in this stone; and, since she sleeps, she has life:
> wake her, if you don't believe it, and she'll speak to you. [21]

In part, Michelangelo's response to these lines is political. Stone, for him, is a worldly element, in which beauty inevitably bears traces of its maker's compromised power. However divinely proportioned, the sculpture is the work of no 'angel' but a commissioned subject, and his creativity is neither private correspondence nor transcendent-divine communion. It is an animation of fraught materiality, made to hold its tongue in its very expression of a tyrant's public power and aesthetic investments. Hence, the mask that appears at *Notte*'s shoulder, through which Michelangelo hints at the linguistic association – in Italian and in Latin – between 'mask' and 'phantasm' (*larva*). The figure oscillates between the revelation of a sleeping self and its nightmarish withholding, and between dramatisation and camouflage. Ghosted by the figures of the political present and past, it also determinedly evades their grasp. Iconographically, marble slumber is disturbed many times over, by literal and figurative nightmare. Caught in this contradictory pose, it hides in full view from the apparitions of an age's troubled personal and political unconscious.

The *Notte* in the Medici chapel, then, is not innocently sleeping. Her 'sweet' form is amongst the legible 'signs' of the torpid corporeality of the state and its influence over its subjects. Whatever resistances to their authority the figure might also convey, it remains a part of what has been set in stone publically to consolidate political triumphs. Given his part in a renovation project designed to articulate Medici power, Michelangelo's pieces are active, political, painful. To hold a peaceful 'posture' may require remaining unroused from a nightmare of active tyrannical beauty; a haunted manifestation from which writer, sculptor or subject long to awake. Contra Strozzi, it is not innocent 'sleep' that one should read as vigorously asserting 'life', but the violence and contradictory nature of forces animating the stilled marble.

Prince's work derives from this legacy a sense of the dynamism and imprisonment of imperfect manifestation. Like Michelangelo, he gravitates to the agonised potential of the work that is 'finished' in being 'unfinished', and which achieves its effect in displaying its trapped, latent potency. This is being locked into nightmare, not confidently brought to perfection. In 'Old Age':

> The power with which I imagine makes these things,
> This prison.
> And while the dream stirs in the stone, wakes in its chains,
> Sometimes I think that I have spent my whole life making tombs,
> And even those are unfinished. And yet, chafing,
> Sadly closed there, in a rich bare case

[20] '[D]espite their reputation of being anti-Medici, like other large Florentine families, the Strozzi did not present a united political front […] within the family a broad political spectrum ranged from avid support of Soderini's government to an indifferent lack of opposition to the Medici', Melissa Meriam Bullard, *Fillipo Strozzi and the Medici: Favour and Finance in Sixteenth-Century Florence and Rome* (Cambridge: CUP, 1980): 46.

[21] Strozzi, from Giorgio Vasari, *La vita di Michelangelo nelle redazioni del 1550 e del 1568*, ed. Paola Barocchi, 5 vols. (Milan: Ricciardi, 1962): 1:63, my translation.

> Of bodily loveliness like solid sleep,
> One sees the soul that turns
> Waking, stretched on her side as if in pain [...]   (*CP* 73-74)

On the one hand, the artist chafes against his ability only partially to unveil what is latently emergent: 'in its chains', 'Sadly closed there', 'unfinished'. On the other hand, his consciousness of resistance and difficulty is a check to pride, and a spur to humility: his recognition of human limitation moves the speaker to moral scruple – both politically and spiritually. The Renaissance sculptor's half-revealed forms cannot lay bare what remains stilled, silent and implicit under the yoke of self-censorship, but his figures render articulate that tongue-tied predicament. Comparably, the impulse to sing of aesthetic labour as generative 'making' – '[t]he power with which I imagine makes these things' – is realigned with the consciousness of mutability and the culpability of aesthetic stultification: 'I have spent my whole life making tombs'.

   In so doing, Prince's lines engage the cinquecento idea of the sculptor as *liberator*. But in harnessing the power of bad as well as good dream, the artist is also conscious of doing potential violence to what he wishes to free. In the moment of observing 'the soul [...] / Waking', he cannot be clear whether this is painfully active liberation, or mere frozen, stony pain. Perhaps surprisingly, Prince casts entrapment and longed-for-release on both sides of the creative dream-space. If traditionally, it is the statue that is bound and seeks deliverance, in Prince, that is also the case for the sculptor-poet. Both emergent figure and artist manifest *intra*personal confinement: in this equilibrium between maker and made, both her soul and his 'stirs' and 'wakes', rattling its corporeal chains. In particular, each is *spiritually* encased in human form, and in need of divine and moral succour. Prince's speaker longs to free self, soul, and his figure from politico-aesthetic fixity, and psychologically captive selfhood, through spiritual and material exertion.

   This association of aesthetic-spiritual salvation with mutual awakening is also encountered in the earlier group of sonnets and madrigals Michelangelo had addressed to his devout fellow-poet, Vittoria Colonna. In one of the 1538-47 madrigals, a 'living figure' slowly emerges from a quarried block. Both corporeality and moral-theological potential have been imprisoned within:

> *Si come per levar, donna, si pone*
> *in pietra alpestra e dura*
> *una viva figura,*
> *che là più cresce u' più la pietra scema;*
> *tal alcun'opre buone,*
> *per l'alma che pur trema,*
> *cela il superchio della propria carne*
> *co' l'inculta sua cruda e dura scorza.*
> *Tu pur dalle mie streme*
> *parti puo' sol levarne,*
> *chi'in me non è di me voler né forza.*

> Just as, through subtracting, lady, one puts
> into hard mountain stone
> a living figure
> that grows as the stone diminishes,
> so too, the few good works
> of the trembling soul
> are hidden by the excess of its own flesh,
> with an uncouth crude hard shell.
> Only you can remove the excess
> from my outer portions,
> because I have no will or strength over myself.[22]

'By sculpture', Michelangelo had insisted, 'I understand an art which operates by taking away superfluous material'.[23] Here, art is an act of *pious* removal from the block: 'the trembling soul' is concealed by 'the

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[22] Michelangelo, Madrigal 152, ca. 1538-44, for Vittoria Colonna, in *Poems* 305, my translation.
[23] Letter to Benedetto Varchi, in *The Letters of Michelangelo*, trans. and ed. E.H. Ramsden (Stanford UP, 1963) 280.

excess of it's own flesh'. Such piety depends on mutual creation: 'only you can remove the excess / from my outer portions'. *I* and *you* prise each other from worldly taint, paring away the 'uncouth' shell. Michelangelo's devout depiction of sculptural subtraction renders as dynamic co-authorship the Neoplatonic adage that the figure produced had pre-existence; the divine idea housed in imperfect material form. The beauty created by the sculptor emerges as a broken, mortal echo of divine creative power: the former aspiring to the greater perfection of the heavenly creator.

Prince's Michelangelo lyric comparably animates a figure that grows as the stone diminishes. Compelled to discern the true (divine) outlines of incipient spirituality, his sculptor conceives 'you' as a 'soul' that, like his own, is waiting and 'trembling' in the hope of future restoration to its perfected condition. The twentieth-century piece listens back on the Renaissance artist's struggles to reconcile dreams of moral-theological betterment with nightmares of sinful corporeality and culpability. In 'Old Age', the good dream requires the *participation* of a 'you', without which 'I' is incapable of spiritually, linguistically and physically freeing itself from the casing of coarser matter: 'half-hewn', 'the fierce substance / And the divine idea' (73-74). These interlocutions reflect the contiguity of artist and emergent figure, speaker and listener, who encourage each other in their thwarted struggle toward perfection. Just as in Michelangelo's poem to Colonna, in which 'only you can remove the excess', Prince's *I* cannot act alone. Afraid that '[t]he power with which I imagine makes these things, / This prison', the sculptor-dreamer gravitates to a figure outside the self, which remains slippery and plural: 'towards you and such as you' (73). Nevertheless he longs to 'grow one with you' – whomever that may be, as the pronoun slides between statue, idea and person, evading his grip. Such expressive uncertainty goes in search of conversational partnership, a sympathetic verbal co-sculptor to take away the superfluous material of the poem, and recover the inspired self. '[D]o I know / Myself, what should I mean?' writes Prince (77-78); and for Michelangelo too: 'I have no will or strength over myself'.

Prince, however, is also painfully aware of his forebear's sense of *unredeemable* materiality, of an eternal vagrancy of form and beauty. Michael Aryton has described this period in Michelangelo's career, as death approaches, as one of ebbing faith in his struggle 'to release his vision from the core of stone', and now, with 'his wisdom and pessimism increased, the definition of his vision became increasingly uncertain. […] uncertainty as to the nature of truth create[s] a condition in which it becomes impossible to know *what material is superfluous*'.[24] Toward the end, *all* matter is superfluity. All figures manifest uncouth physical and spiritual entrapment and cry out for further reduction. Aryton takes as example his Rondanini Pietà; Prince seems also to have in mind the literary work, which is notoriously fragmentary: 'only a dozen of the 302 poems are longer than twenty lines (and of these half are unfinished)' writes Christopher Ryan: 'Michelangelo's poems are in many cases very rough: they are sometimes grammatically imperfect and much more frequently contorted in expression and harsh in sound'.[25]

Perhaps for this reason, Prince's poem posits a prison of artistic creation in which the maker is condemned – against his will – eternally to draw forms out of the material. The modern poet admires the determination to show, in an accomplished piece, the rude and 'unfinished': he is drawn to the temerity of holding up for display one's unredeemable and imperfect nature. But the lines also suggest pity for the artwork compelled to leave itself open and vulnerable. The piece is fascinated by the ethics of a creative bent that depicts its unwillingness to patch over material and spiritual flaws, and to contain them within a structure of aesthetic dominance.

COMPROMISED CONSTRUCTIONS

Such work expresses concerns about the bondage of creative power, which Prince repeatedly articulates in sculptural-architectural form. Material that shows itself to be flawed and suffering, precarious or collapsing would, ideally, be inspired by the maker's painful sense of compromised form. But, as he is aware, it can also be driven by the tyrannical will to retain the ossified vestiges of former power. I want to return momentarily to those lines about cadaverous buildings in *Memoirs of Oxford*, briefly touched on earlier,

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[24] Ayrton, Preface to 'The Sonnets of Michelangelo' (Manchester: Carcanet, 1988): 14-15.

[25] Aryton writes: 'In the Rondanini Pietà is the still centre. The trembling mountains, the turbid seas and the fallen angels of which he speaks in Sonnet LXXVI may seem to surround he spectator; they do not touch the sculpture. It is unfinished and it is finished. Six days later, on February 18th, it was all finished. Michelangelo was dead' (15). See Ryan, ed. and trans., *Michelangelo: The Poems* (London: Dent, 1996): xv-xvi. Ryan is describing Cesare Guasti's 1863 edition of the poems.

before I move on to a longer example. Prince imagines the aged, crumbling edifices of earlier commissions lying on his heart, and they assert a deathly fixity through their historical freight:

> Fretted discoloured towers and domes
> And crumbling walls that rose upright:
> Their mixture of the dry and rich
> And dull, made up a message which
> At times looked heavy – void of light.
>
> And many times the buildings lay
> With a dead weight like paving-stones
> On my sick heart. What did they say,
> Law – duty – God? It seemed a way
> Of death in life, like skull and bones;   (*CP* 132)

Prince's materialist eye anthropomorphises the fretted walls and towers, perceiving them as petrified human forms. Read as 'death in life, like skull and bones' architectural constructions are akin to statues – or corpses. The lines home in on what has been stilled and ossified through its bullying formal eloquence. The public manifestation of solid presence and of sculptural authority ('Law – duty – God', substance, status and statutory power) has not only degenerated under its 'dead weight'. Its tyrannous form is that of weighted sleepiness: living buildings want to lie down and rest. Their message, so long as they remain upright long enough to send one, is one of graveness, deathliness, eroded authority: 'heavy', 'dull', 'void', 'skull'.

Here, as so often in Prince, from 'Old Age' to 'An Epistle', 'Moult sont Prud'hommes les Templiers' to 'Strafford', we perceive an analogy between the fate of built objects and that of living persons (*CP* 73, 13; 88, 107). Both are in danger of metamorphosing into the image that authority (often a patron) wishes to emblematise as itself: 'I have failed, I shall fail / Failing with the aid of all the images you may choose / [...] canons / of a liquid eloquence', 'A whole chivalry of leaves'.[26] Both structure and person risk being rigidified into 'death in life' through passively echoing the aesthetic ideology of past masters, bearing their weight obediently from below: 'I am it would seem an acceptable tube; and therefore / [...] let me be used', 'bridges, / Sewers, aqueducts and citadels of brick' show how 'I submit me / To your judgement', 'unrecognisable to myself, / Moving motionless to death' (28, 16, 71).

In *Statues: Le Second Livre des Fondations*, Michel Serres defines the statue not as an object but a 'bounded randomness', a dynamical system that his text repeatedly works to prize loose from the stagnancy of each of its artefactual moorings.[27] Reading against the commonsensical view of a static entity, Serres's statue is a 'structure of change and movement'. It is a shape-shifting marker for a diverse succession of fears and ideas about meaning and control, knowledge and incomprehension, death and life, engagement and avoidance. In its manifestation as material form, the statue seems to give a face to what is unfathomable, uncertain and historically turbulent – so we might enter into dialogue with it. A figure for indeterminacy, the statue is a disturbing, but also a graspable embodiment of mutability and death. At the same time, it is a burial of the awareness of mortality through this concretisation, a terrified mis-placement of the unknown. In the statue, death is transformed, objectified, aestheticised, made into a focusing cultural lens: it is paradoxically put out of sight. The corpse-made-statue fixes and holds in place, but also masks and conceals: it draws attention to the fixed pose of death, the body advancing toward its end, the continual decaying materiality of corporeal matter – but it also assuages human terror by presenting not the absolutely random or ungraspable, but a datable, placeable historical manifestation of contingency and death.

Prince's poems fear that their artistry may cease to become fugitive. Because living shapes and persons should not harden into representative lyric agents of compulsion and dynamic agony, the work resolutely struggles to keep its crystallisations in balance with flux. Hence, it is structures that are able to remain fluid and modulating that resist deathly fixities and tyrannies. It is a principled metamorphosis visible, in myriad forms, across Prince's career. We see it metaphorically, in writing that collapses, dissolves and merges the distinctions between polarities (often through paradoxes such as the warring self, flowing rigidities, deathly

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[26] Prince, 'Words from Edmund Burke' *CP* 26.
[27] See Serres, *Statues* (Flammarion, 1989): 35-52.

life, or frozen fire): 'The nearly naked bronze, / [...] / Laughing and running', 'always the fierce substance / And the divine idea, a drunkenness / Of high desire and thought', 'an infinite savage sea of love'.[28]

We also encounter the fugitive ethic *stylistically*. Prince's discursive, grammatically argumentative sentence-construction frequently enacts winding and twisting calibrations of certainty. A number of his longer poems have a penchant for syntactical persuasion, as if presenting – or torturing out – philosophical proof: 'Therefore you tyrants, vultures, hypocrites / [...] now beware', we hear in 'Campanella' (*CP* 105). 'Well, but if so, / What of that sign of contradiction', he writes in 'Drypoints of the Hasidim', whilst in 'The Yüan Chên Variations': 'I thus / had reasoned with my will, / but quite in vain' (*CP* 152, 200). Such syntax plays out a complex chain of ideas through associative verbal logic, typically using convoluted conditional clauses ('If I could.... Then I should'), as well as negative definition ('It is not the infringements', 'it is not / The caballing', 'nor the hazards', 'Nor even / My own colloquies [...] / Will seduce me'), and inversions and oxymorons: 'sighs are my sustenance', 'not wanting wantonly'. [29]

We also recognise the dynamic of flight in the motif of exile and pilgrimage that haunts this work. It takes shape not only figuratively (through meandering argumentative clauses), but also through disorientation in physical and spiritual space. In 'Strambotti':

> I am not lodged in such and such a street,
> But live in banishment with dust and stones.[30]

And later:

> I'll take some wax and mould your likeness there,
> Or roughly carve and figure out of wood,
> And in my exile take it everywhere   (*CP* 97)

Archetypes of Genesis and the postlapsarian state, moral journeying, architectural disorientation and exile, crumbling signposts and readable structures, expulsion and vain struggle to return to a (lost) right path emerge repeatedly through his career. Amongst Prince's precursors for the motif are Michelangelo's own poetry which also draws on the quest for betterment as a form of Christian 'pilgrimage through the world', as well as Dante's *Purgatory* and Petrarch's *I trionfi*. We might be mindful of another precedent for spiritual-moral displacement: St. John of the Cross's *The Dark Night of the Soul* in which it is the dark path – away from the tempting lights of the jealous gods – that leads to spiritual salvation (Prince's 1954 *Soldiers Bathing and Other Poems* includes three 'Translations from St. John of the Cross').[31] Ethics in Prince, as in his forebears, is cast as *distance* from virtue. Moral and aesthetic progress (and failures of progress) are measured in terms of pathways, movement, being cast off and cast adrift: artistic labour is seen as akin to wandering along a hard, long, forking earthly road.

This half-self-inflicted, half-imposed fugitive state can also be witnessed, with a number of parallels, in the perpetually redraftable textuality of the Princean lyric:

> The way in is to pause and look again, look back
> And ask [...]   ('Afterword on Rupert Brooke', *CP* 171)

Reminiscent of Robert Frost's famously hesitant lyric beginning – 'Back out of all this now too much for us, / Back in a time [...]' – Prince's lines find their point of commencement in retrospection.[32] Frost was himself echoing Wordsworth's sonnet 'The World is Too Much with Us', re-versioning the work of his Romantic forebear. Literary precedent is the key that reveals '[t]he way in' – a path of lyric refashioning and recasting that Prince and Frost are treading. There is hesitance and resistance in both poets' opening steps. Prince pauses at the threshold, stopping to 'look back'. Frost puns on the double sense of 'back', meaning 'earlier' but also, in phrasal verb form, to 'back out', or to back off (to retreat from 'now', 'all this now too much'). Entry, for both, is re-entry, and the quest a form of re-questioning: 'look again, look back', 'ask'.

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[28] Prince, 'Youth and Age', *CP* 294, 'Old Age' *CP* 74 and 75.

[29] Prince, conditionals from 'Strambotti' *CP* 95; negative definitions all in 'Words from Edmund Burke', 28; oxymoronic inversions in 'Campanella' 104-05 and 'His Dog and Pilgrim' 218.

[30] Strambotti, *CP* 94.

[31] Prince, *SB* (London: Fortune Press, 1954).

[32] Frost, 'Directive', *The Collected Poems of Robert Frost*, ed. Edward Connery Lathem (London: Vintage, 2013): 377.

Even Prince's title points to the materiality of re-writing, and also raises questions about the appropriateness of re-fashioning aesthetic precedent. His poem – an 'Afterword' – imagines itself as the concluding leaves of an existing book; a narrative about another author. The new text offers itself up textually as a kind of addendum or deliberately paratextual section. It announces itself in the guise of concluding remarks to a main textual event, as if providing a summary or contextualising commentary. Prince's 'Afterword' to Brooke both makes a claim to be a part of that existing, or nearly completed, book, and articulates its sensitivity about coming 'after' the main event of construction. But Prince's lyric depends upon arriving lately, or belatedly, in order to make its hesitant, backward-directed re-commencement.

Textual variability, alterability and mutability manifest repeatedly in Prince, from the titles of poems ('The Yüan Chên Variations', 'For Fugitives') to the frequent talk of remaking, rewriting, erasure and reconstruction within. Even when a speaker is plagued by 'a thousand doubts, a thousand questions', '-Questions of hope, despair, changes of mind ....', alteration is principled pain: 'dignity / Will form and melt tomorrow–and tomorrow' (*CP* 66). Elsewhere, when literary material itself degenerates, as in 'The Book', which has 'worn, 'foxed and wormed and rusty pages', the poet not only accepts the frailty of textual matter but derives inspiration from it (*CP* 61). The book will remain torn and tattered: 'Like an old lantern by whose ray / We hope to find a better light, / [...] / Until we read by touch as well as sight, / And learn to turn the pages' (61). Fugitive pieces may cause difficulties for the artist, who tries to 'wrestle till they come out right', but they also ring living changes, so the work can remain 'Quivering, shifting, soft and bright –', moved by 'the hope of flight' (*CP* 125-26). Prince writes in 'Afterword to Rupert Brooke':

> For it is also true,
> The legend, and not to be discarded even
> If one should now re-model and re-write so much (171).

Such work handles a seemingly lamentable condition (of unfinishedness and perpetual revision) as part of the unconscious drive to escape fixity and the death-in-life of coming to rest as eternal form.

'Prince is imitative, in a broad sense, of Pound's ambition to create a poetic medium in which public and private ethics, together with true and false aesthetics, are made to circle around an unshifting fulcrum which is the power of patronage, which in turn is worldly power' writes Geoffrey Hill: 'That is to say, Prince [...] is concerned with the nature, retention and vulnerability of the public good'.[33] In Prince, the ethics of fugitive power are found in particular tension in the form of the plastic arts. His ekphrastic pieces situate themselves in a troubled space between an individual artist's negotiation of human fantasy, dream, design, eros, rhetorical invention, and the trans-historical conventions governing aesthetic value and virtue. His reaching back into the materiality of past acts of making – of sculpture, architecture and poetry – emphasises how their unsettled claims to perfection are both desirous for reward and also longing to achieve spiritual and public 'good' – in ways that depend upon their own subtly compromised handlings of the aspirations of literary and aesthetic precedent.

Prince's 'An Epistle to a Patron', first published in *The Criterion* in 1936, both re-enacts a 'snake-like figure' of syntactical contortion and compounding, seen in the the power-play of Renaissance rhetoric (more on this in a moment), and also grammatically compounds its own textual record. All subsequent publications preserve Prince's numerous changes of punctuation, which again exhibit his preference for commas and semi-colons over the em-dash. He also removed the architectonic epigraph, which appeared in the 1936 version:

> Letter from Leonardo da Vinci to Ludovico il Moro, c.1483.
> Leon Battista Alberti, De Re Aedificatoria.
> Alberti and Sigismundo Malatesta of Rimini.
> Luciano Luarana and Federigo de Montefeltro of Urbino.
> Michelozzo and Cosimo de Medici.[34]

In the Carcanet edition, the poem begins:

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[33] Hill, 'Il Cortegiano: F.T. Prince's *Poems* (1938)', *PN Review* 147, 29:1 (Sept.-Oct. 2002): 28-31, 29.
[34] See *The Criterion* 15:59 (1936): 261-64, in MS328 Papers of Professor Frank Templeton Prince A834 5/2/ (Hartley Library, Archives & Manuscripts, University of Southampton)

> My lord, hearing lately of your opulence in promises and your house
> Busy with parasites, of your hands full of favours, your statues
> Admirable as music, and no fear of your arms not prospering, I have
> Considered how to serve you and breed from my talents
> These few secrets which I shall make plain
> To your intelligent glory. […]   (*CP* 13)

The varying syllabic count, the highly modulated syntax, and the complicated interrelations of clauses tug against the lines' promise to 'make plain / […] your intelligent glory'. Is this a self-admiringly performative restyling of his forebears idioms, caught up by a dream of inhabiting past styles? Or a wandering, exiled, in the rhetorical stylistics of the past – a nightmare of literary history from which he cannot awake, and in which he must perform such mannered straining?

    Prince's models in the clausal sinuosity of Renaissance courtly, mannered obsequy – 'of … of… of', 'opulence in promises', 'breed from my talents' – are combined with strenuous corporeality. In his Daedalean sentence structure, mannered obsequy is figured as a desperately twisting body, whose empty 'hands' are wrung, and grope after those 'full of favours'. A little later, the supplicant's promise to provide public orientations through the power of courtly architecture – the labyrinths of 'sistering pilasters', beam, ties, lintels and windows – finds analogy with the involutions of persuasive 'argument' (13). As he reveals his poetical ability to arrange the built environment through argument, he architecturally hones his skill in courtly design as argumentation. It is a constructed space that promises to accommodate, pacify, and to exploit the unharmonious 'various tempers' at court. Its stones direct the conduct of advisers and subjects, 'vermilion officers, [....] sages and dancers' – who must live beneath and between the 'serene stone[s]', inhabiting 'the civil structures of a war-like elegance'. Bridges, halls, ceilings, citadels, order the world you move in: 'Firm sets of pure bare members which will rise, hanging together / Like an argument'.

    The poem doesn't, then, speak in place of architecture. It is the walls themselves that articulate vengeful correspondences between stone and person, just as 'granaries [...] smile to bear your filial plunders', and 'the coffers of a ceiling / [...] reflect your diplomatic taciturnities' (13). Built out in political space is a tyrant whose commissioned 'lintels and windows', 'bridges, /Sewers and citadels' render legible his attributes, not always felicitiously. His huge granaries 'smile' their assent in 'bear[ing] your filial plunders', at once stowing from sight and proudly leering at his violent conquests. Yet even if 'all' his rooms testify to his power, they do not necessarily testify to power's ability to bring about assent in subordinates. His closet is an analogy for the ill-omened commanding body: 'suitably shadowed as the heart'.

    It is work that encourages readerly unease about the relationship between animate substance and the impositions of authoritative demands on expression. 'An Epistle' hints that language and building have been sedated, made into columns that serve, mortared over by censoring powers. They are 'stony functionaries' that 'support / [...] proof, of your power' (15). The artificiality of ornamentation expressed in 'halls that cannot be entered without a sensation as of myrrh', and an 'encasement as if of solid blood' 'for your death, which will be mine' hints at formalisation and ossification, as well as the imposition of smothering uniformity over living, human form. This is an art forced to submit, and to self-censor, to be lulled to sleep: 'And so let me forget', 'pressed as I am', 'I aspire to be constrained'.

    'An identification with the body is, of course, employed in architecture to procure effects of transcendence' writes Adrian Stokes: 'The measure of mass, of organization, of gleaming stability, is ourselves. In terms of wall and aperture, of projection and recession, architecture records the sensitiveness of our breathing organism whose life, physical and mental, is a taking in and a putting out'.[35] For Stokes, as for Prince, this close association between the sensitive body and the mass of architectonic form enables one to express, however covertly, a sense of powerful tyrannical and oppressive forces linked with imposed sedation. In 'Jesi', he notes how the 'buildings abound with an evil life [...] Forbidden to grow venerable they sleep', and compel the noises of the town also to be 'woven into a dream of basket firm somnolence'.[36] Not only is their own creative potential stifled and forced to slumber: 'the loiterer' too 'is put under the spell of this long, shallow sleep' (4). Such language expresses the heaviness of being under anaesthetic, or buried, like a 'corpse', against which Stokes asserts energetic, rousing material forces: 'I exhibit stones the

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[35] Stokes, 'Notes to Part II', *Michelangelo: A Study in the Nature of Art*, ed. Adrian Stokes (1955; Abingdon: Routledge, 2001): 98. Referred to as *Michelangelo*.

[36] Stokes, 'Jesi', in *The Quattro Cento* (1932), quoted from *The Quattro Cento and the Stones of Rimini* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002): 4. Referred to as *QCSR*.

opposite of barren', 'Renaissance sculptors made stone to bloom', a 'Gothic riot of figure and vegetation' (7-8).

   Comparable rousing asserts itself through Prince's living – and subtly winding and compounding – imprint of human labour and ingenuity in the syntactical building work. Directed by the shaping forces of planning and construction, rather than by worldly demand, the artist of 'An Epistle' asserts his power to command the sensuous features of light-play over natural and built material:

> I live by effects of light, I live
> To catch it, to break it, as an orator plays off
> Against each other and his theme his casual gems, and so with light,
> Twisted in strings, plucked, crossed or knotted or crumbled
> […]
> Or else spilt and spread like a feast of honey, dripping
> Through delightful voids and creeping along long fractures, brimming
> Carved canals, bowls and lachrymatories with pearls: all this the work
> Of now advancing, now withdrawing faces, whose use I know
> […]   (*CP* 14)

Instead of casting their oratorical 'effects' as stable, strong or eternal, Prince's lines sing of them as vulnerable – crumbling and overflowing, like the fractured stone. Not only language, but 'light' takes on curiously physical properties: '[t]wisted in strings, plucked, crossed or knotted'. But fractured and split matter is not seen as weak. Rather, it takes on on Stokesian animate, organic properties. Architecture is 'the medium not only of synthesis but of a scattering or disruptive force that will lend itself to effects that mirror those of flood-water or of lightning', Stokes writes: 'the Baroque joinery of broken massiveness, the rushing together, the tearing apart' (*Michelangelo* 99). Recording his admiration for the Tempio Malatestiano in Rimini, Stokes praises the 'stones themselves, which are celebrated and dramatized as a content rather than as the means to realize or express a content'.[37] For him, the sculptural plasticity of Renaissance architectonics enacts its 'deep life' – suggestive both of the unconscious, and of its emergence from a landscape. In Prince too, what is 'carved' is malleable, soft and flexible: its strength resides in being a living, growing, moveable feast, a 'riot' of stone. The sensuous and sensual 'dripping', 'brimming' motion of his 'beaten' material is 'split and spread' like a savoured morsel, celebrating and pronouncing its own fallen, fractured condition – the greatness within fissured, biddable, fugitive structures.

   It is a celebration of a form of power quite distinct from the upright, clear victoriousness of heroic authority such as a tyrant would commissiom. Rather than expressing stone's capacity to endure as tensed pillars of power, such work articulates its ability alterably to *take form*. Prince admires feminised constructions (the 'confident vault' is associated with a 'placid flurry of petals') and compromised marble: the 'stony functionaries' are pliably subordinate to the will of others. They 'support / The persuasion […] of your power', and are associated with 'bosom and lips'. Stone is obedient, but its supplication depends on its sensual, alterable nature: it can be made to 'support', 'record', 'extol', 'praise', or to be 'pile[d] and hack[ed]' at another's will:

> I wish for liberty, let me then be tied: and seeing too much
> I aspire to be constrained by your emblems of birth and triumph,
> […]
> To flourish, adapt the stubs of an interminable descent, and place
> The crested key to confident vaults; with a placid flurry of petals.
> And bosom and lips, will stony functionaries support
> The persuasion, so beyond proof, of your power. I will record
> In peculiar scrolls your alien alliances,
> Fit an apartment for your eastern hostage, extol in basalt
> Your father, praise with white festoons the goddess your lady;
> […]
> […] And so let me
> Forget, let me remember, that this is stone, stick, metal, trash
> Which I will pile and hack, my hands will stain and bend

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[37] Stokes, *Stones of Rimini* (1934), in *QCSR* 181.

> (None better knowing how to gain from the slow pains of a marble
> Bruised, breathing strange climates). Being pressed as I am, being broken
> By wealth and poverty, torn between strength and weakness, take me, choose
> To relieve me, to receive of me […]   (*CP* 15)

The speaker's pleas express humility about his 'pressed [...] broken' condition and 'slow pains' of his material. He insists that his torn, fallen nature should be brought under imperious command: 'you' must force him to 'support' the weight of authority and historical precedent. At the same time, he impatiently metes out directives: 'choose / [...] to receive of me', 'I aspire to be constrained', 'let me then be tied'. Such commands bring us back to Shelley, resounding the pleading and proud demands of the speaker of 'Ode to the West Wind': 'Make me thy lyre', 'lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud! / I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!', 'be thou me, impetuous one!' (*Poetry and Prose* 300.) This is echoed in both Prince's lexicon ('pressed as I am, being broken', 'torn', 'take me', 'relieve me [....] receive of me') and his incantatory rhythms: 'And so let me / Forget, let me remember'. What is important is not the content of the demand, but the act of supplication and serpentine argumentation itself: 'and must you not agree', '– and so, / To be so too for me?' The questions take shape as strings of festooned monosyllables that roundly intone, as the end approaches, riddle-like nonsense sounds. We hear an over-chiming insistence that falls obsessively on 'me', 'we', 'be', and 'agree', both in end-rhyme and internal rhyme: 'must you not agree', 'To be so too for me?', 'how should it be / That you employed them less than we?', 'I submit me'.

As in Stokes and Serres, so in Prince, explorations of legacy, tradition, and their fugitive motions, are staged as an encounter with the dead – with various forms of corpses. Prince's work offers forms of dialogue in which the volatility of aesthetic history reaches into how subsequent generations imagine the stillness of matter. His poems are parables about modern responses and responsibilities to humanly created objects, and investigations of a culture's systematic investments in objects. In him, denials and coercions, humanisations of stone, and attempts to fix the inanimate and indeterminate all contain reciprocal shades of life and movement. Such subtle re-depictions of the crises of marble's simultaneous animation and unmovability tell stories about the awakenings of stone and the transformations of pages (as well as their failure to rise up and live). In so doing, Prince's work animates old narratives about matter's powerful historical power to enchant, which keeps viewers in a state of dream or nightmare, from which they might well be desirous – yet not capable – of awakening.