



THE MATRIX

A singular but often overlooked voice in 20th-century poetry, N.H. Pritchard's concrete writing eschews discursive meaning in pursuit of the "transreal".

N.H. Pritchard's biography is as recalcitrant and revelatory as his poems. After releasing only two books of poetry in the early 1970s, Pritchard ceased to publish amidst deep frustrations with readers and editors unsympathetic to his uncompromising betrayal of familiar conventions. Pritchard's poetry – indebted as much to the Black Arts Movement, spiritualism and jazz as any poetic tradition – is undoubtedly "difficult" in the typical, derisive-yet-respectful sense of the word. Looking at his poems on the page – which resemble scores, choreographies or cryptograms rather than digestible sequences of stanzas – it is difficult to glean exactly what one is supposed to do as a reader. Repeated phrases bleed over the edge of

the page, or a singular “O” (which Pritchard took to represent his notion of the “transreal”, a concept he refused to define even as he insisted on its fundamental significance to his work) seems to both end the poem before it can be uttered and extend it into an infinite cosmic drone. The voice that sounds in one's head is closer to a static-riddled transmission than a spoken narrative.

Lillian-Yvonne Bertram described the experience of reading Pritchard as “agonisingly slow, a process of reading and sounding out that emphasised the differences between what you see and what you hear, and how you hear what you see. It is also a process that involves the reader in speaking into existence the very elements that are at play – the earth, or an ear, for example.” There is wordplay in Pritchard’s poems, but also play with the very mechanism of how we perceive a thing at all. They are portals into the vast blur between sense and sensation.

The Matrix – Pritchard’s long out of print masterwork, recently reprinted by Ugly Duckling Presse and Primary Information – collects a decade of poetic experimentation spanning 1960-1970. Excerpted below are “VISAGE”, “THE HARKENING” and “TERRACE FIGMENT”. ☉