The exuberantly experimental poems of N.H. Pritchard—in particular, the volume titled *The Matrix*—were first published in the early ’70s; shortly thereafter his work ceased appearing in print. As a result, his significant contributions to the African American literary tradition as well as to postmodern poetry have gone unrecognized for decades. This reissue, along with another republished collection titled *EECCHHOOEESS*, bring a neglected poet back into wider view. A member of the Umbra poets, a group of Black writers who congregated in the East Village beginning in 1962, Pritchard manipulated...
typography, typeface, lineation, and repetition to create uncompromising work that today remains provocative both for its formal ingenuity and its obliquely pointed exploration of Black racial consciousness. “Totemic” gives some small indication of his skillful joining of Lewis Carroll-like linguistic play and themes of strife and reckoning:

There
where
the
bare
edges
mellowed
snears bedecked the forest’s call
and the noon was wrecked
and the moon was heckled
and an end foretold a nation’s fall

Looming
there
where
drums beat upon a plain
and fumes of arrows amid the glooming waned
doom spoke silently proclaiming without song
the omen given by gabled quirk of wrong

However belated (Pritchard died in 1996), this recognition via fresh publication restores the author to his proper place in the avant-garde lineage that includes Concrete poetry, typewriting, and Visual Poetry. In addition to that important fact, having these books is an opportunity to experience the sheer pleasure of an elegantly venturesome mind at serious play.

—AM

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John Yau

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