

THE MUNDUS by N.H. Pritchard — NOIR SAUNA

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N.H. Pritchard's *The Mundus* opens with a liminal expanse. The letter O expressed both in its capital and undercase, spans and falls across four pages, forming a cosmO. It is immediately clear to the reader that the material universe of Pritchard's work is to behave much differently than more conventional forms of syntax. As the cosmO continues across the recto and verso, lines of prosody begin to form from the larger expanse of material.

"in m omen tso ft heg one on cesh // ared"

It is debatable whether this is the first line of Pritchard's "novel with voices" as the previous four pages could (and ostensibly would) be sonically expressed, but for the purposes of the visual field of the work, it makes sense to delineate the shifts, ruptures, and developments of Pritchard's language. Pritchard's collisions force a slower read, the eye and the mouth working at different paces and different registers. It is a clumsily concatenative reading that privileges sound, error, and echo of oneself until the words fall together in our more familiar fields of understanding. Written more prosaically, the line might read: "in moments of the gone once shared," but this misses the simultaneous and synchronous occurrences of Pritchard's work. To see *omen*, to see *one*, to see *so ft*, is to see another world housed in the material, to see parallels and valences of language's constructive (and irruptive) units.

While the book's title may be a convenient approximation of the Latin word for "world," Pritchard himself preferred a more dynamic definition of *mundus* as "the name given a supra-consciousness of unity." However, one cannot overlook the spacial realities of Pritchard's work, or the fact that the manifestation of a unified or totalized consciousness must undergo a process of reification, even if his motion is towards its *beyond*. Where Pritchard's work amazes is in its ability not to treat poetics as a phenomenal representation of experience, but to attend to the noumenal worlds-in-themselves. The conditions of poetics often rely on the sublimation of the object to its immaterial state—i.e. the sun is not merely a celestial ball of gas, but an ontic shadow of warmth, a transfixing agent of inspiration, a short-circuit for longing, etc. Pritchard's process may be closer to desublimation, the immaterial properties of a unified consciousness being constructed into physical abutments of language down to every letter. While it would be inappropriate to lump Pritchard in with the structuralists, there is an arguable grammatology present in *The Mundus*, namely in how the work scrambles the morphemes of English, forcing these small components of speech into initial obtuse images, signifiers without signifieds. It is through these structural elements that Pritchard's (co)realities find their simultaneous expression. The sounding of Pritchard's work is as vocal as it is visual, his lines arranged in such a way as to force the reader into remedial slowness and error.

To read *The Mundus* is to learn how to read all over again. Pritchard's syntactical arrangements initially fight our literacy, they get stuck in between the systems of comprehension and utterance, between retina and the temporal lobe, between the frontal lobe and the larynx. That the body of text fights our body's interpolation seems important, not as a modality of protest or resistance but

in service of its self-imposed “transreality,” or, by Pritchard’s definition, all that is *not* God. In his afterward, Paul Stephens further extrapolates Pritchard’s definition: “Equally a symbol of nothing and everything, the circular form of the transreal precludes precise description.” However, one cannot deconstruct a grammatology without also deconstructing a sense of its subjectivity, as language and author are always engaged in a subject/object dialectic. The speaker(s) of *The Mundus* are not so much a category of this very same codified (or colonized) subjectivity, so much as a *spoken*. Pritchard’s voices break, elide, and meander perhaps as a way of obstructing the locus of subjectivity, extracting the very “supra-consciousness” of the universal. In Pritchard’s own words, “The mode of *The Mundus* resides within a circular atemporal state in which simultaneity [sic] is present sans cease.” The work’s exploded circularity destroys the literacy of solipsism. One does not read *The Mundus* in hopes of finding a window to the self, but perhaps in the inverse, to decentralize, if not completely divorce the self from our agency of reading. This effect is further totalized by Pritchard’s impossibility of direct approach.

We feel protective not to overtly politicize Pritchard’s work as it seems most cogent that his structures are breaking down the organizing systems of our own ontological investigations into *being*. Still, his ties with the Umbra and Black Arts movements in New York would have put him in direct political discourse with the other thinkers and makers of this period. The self is, after all, a political unit—something gendered, racialized, sexualized, and otherwise codified by exterior systems of containment. Thus, the extent to which Pritchard works against the easily objectified (and commodified) phenomena of personal identity seems to simultaneously work against an inheritance of capitalist egocentrism. By rerouting the delivery of the poem from a *speaker* to a *spoken*, the work takes on a collective subalternity, a powerful unity of engagement against the prized singularity of more bourgeois modes of thought. György Lukács states, “reality can only be understood and penetrated as a totality, and only a subject which is itself a totality is capable of this penetration.” Both Pritchard’s cosmOs and his subaltern chorus form both the poem’s world and its subject as a fully interrelated totality. His lack of a political center, a lyrical *I*, invokes this subaltern collective, which may ostensibly be the infinity of Pritchard’s *Mundus*, an intentional ob/literation of the temporal taxonomies of the colonized self, a self interpellated by the organizing ideologies of western “civilization,” a self exploded into a cosmic valence of selves, of voices, of supra-consciousness in rejection of singularity. Stephens is keen to acknowledge Pritchard’s selective use of capitalization for the words NOUS and ONE in his afterward, which reads:

“...t hey so ugh tt he / N O U S w hicht he O N E / ha db id den...”

Stephens translates NOUS to its Greek etymology of “mind” or “intellect,” which accurately speaks to the more intangible aspects of the work. However, he misses the alternative translation of NOUS to its French “we” or “us” which fumbles an opportunity for a multivalenced reading of this line. Both readings locate eminence in the ONE as an agent of instruction, the one doing the bidding. If we read NOUS as a mind, we invoke a collective unconscious being called to serve a unified goal. If read as a more literal *we*, the body politic appears, also in service of an organizing principle of the collective. Either reading seems appropriate to the aims of Pritchard’s work, namely, in its liberation from the imperious overreach of the lyrical *I* for its universe, whether as a supra-consciousness or as a commons.

Further contextualized in this exploded cosmOs is a visible silence, or the hushed command of Pritchard's voices going quiet. Towards the middle of *The Mundus* the mode of the *spoken* shifts from a deconstructed syntax to an atonal whoosh of quietude. The moment in the text we are interested in reads:

[illegible]

We are very grateful for the like-minds at Primary Information for bringing materials such as Pritchard's back into the physical world.