

David Clippinger: On "When It Ends"

A number of recognizable ideas?signatures of Bronk?are contained in this poem: the possibility of multiple worlds; the inadequacy of the senses, language, and knowledge; and the insufficiency of man-made forms?noted in the poem by the concepts of time, space, and world?to contain the "real." For Bronk, light, as the trace from the outside, confirms the existence of the "real" world and serves as a catalyst for his sustained quest for the unattainable real world. The fact that metonymy poses as a viable "approach" to a "real" world is significant in that a metonym suggests the whole through the discussion of a part. In terms of Bronk's poem, the metonym of light gestures towards the real world without reducing it to the flawed constraints of human form. Metonymy therefore is a viable form because it simultaneously reveals and conceals the real world. Yet those rays of light puncture Bronk's dark vision and prompt his ongoing search for the real.

Consider, for example, Bronk's aptly titled poem "Where It Ends" and how light balances the image of the empty world:

[. . .]

The ambiguous "it" in the title has a number of potential referents: the world, life, or thought, all of which suggest human limitations?the threshold of human possibility. The light, as a transcendental signifier of the "real" world, simultaneously marks the boundary beyond which humans cannot cross while also gesturing towards the infinite. The light is pure "gentleness," pure joy, as opposed to the "hard," "empty," "cruel" world, which the light reveals in all of its inadequacies. The transcendent, in other words, accentuates the inadequacy of the finite world and emphasizes its lack through the perceived absence of the infinite. For Bronk, light reveals infinity as well as the finitude of humanness; it is the intensity of joy and the recognition of the depth of despair. Bronk's stance towards the world parallels that of Giorgio Agamben, who writes that "The root of all pure joy and sadness is that the world is as it is" (90).

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Excerpted Criticism ^[1]

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