ABSTRACT

CHRISTOPHER BREAN MURRAY. “To write what nobody peruses”: The Romanticism of F.T. Prince. (Under the direction of Dr. Laura Severin & Dr. Sharon Joffe.)

First published in 1938 by T.S. Eliot, celebrated by W.H. Auden and Stephen Spender, and later regarded by John Ashbery as “one of the best twentieth-century poets,” F.T. Prince today remains virtually unknown in Britain and America. His first book, Poems, was published in England in the wake of the Munich Crisis and was dismissed by critics as anachronistic and essentially out of touch with the needs of the reading public. Raised in South Africa, Prince lived far from Britain during his formative years. He immersed himself in the work of the British Romantic poets, but, upon arriving in England in 1931 to study at Oxford, he acquainted himself with modernism and engaged with the work of Pound, Eliot, and Yeats. Yet, despite his fascination with modernism, I argue in this paper that his work remains deeply informed by the Romantic sensibilities that influenced him in his youth even though his poems also eschew some of the signature characteristics of British Romanticism like radical religious and political views and an explicit exploration of the poet’s feelings. Moreover, Prince’s poems sometimes address the complicated matter of his heritage as an English Catholic poet born in South Africa to a Dutch Jewish father and a Presbyterian Scottish mother, a fact which critics in the 1930’s failed to fully appreciate. Therefore, Prince, whose virtual anonymity is a result of bad timing and misunderstanding, should be reappraised as a poet of extraordinary gifts who did not adhere to modernist orthodoxy but instead wrote poems that exhibit a debt to the tropes of British Romanticism while exploring a complex modern emotional terrain.