

13. Forms & embodiments

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“Strange torn edges” : D. H. Lawrence’s Charismatic Lyric Between Self and Sect

In the Preface to his *Collected Poems* of 1928, D. H. Lawrence asserted the necessity of historical understanding to the proper grasp of his poetry. “Even the best poetry,” he wrote, “when it is at all personal, needs the penumbra of its own time and place and circumstance to make it full and whole. If we knew a little more of Shakespeare’s self and circumstance, how much more complete the sonnets would be for us, how their strange torn edges would be softened and merged into a whole body!” Responsibility for this Osiris-like re-remembering was placed with the reader, whom Lawrence exhorted to “fill in the background of the poems” so that “What was uttered in the cruel spring of 1917 should not be dislocated and heard as if sounding out of the void.” Lawrence’s conceit of an encounter between poem and reader based on a shared awareness of historical trauma (i.e., the First World War) would become more familiar in the second half of the twentieth century – notably in Paul Celan’s elaboration of a poetics that “remembers its dates” as it goes in search of a responsive other. Yet despite or because of such subsequent parallels (themselves the object of significant theorization by Derrida, Grossman, and others), the challenge posed by Lawrence’s poetics for literary-critical methodology remains unresolved. Querying the possible equivalence or lack thereof between Lawrence’s concept of “poetry, when it is at all personal” and “lyric,” my paper aims to develop hints from Lawrence’s Preface, his poems, and contemporary prose texts that complicate any strict priority between lyric utterance and historical narrative. For one thing, Lawrence’s exhortation to attend to context bristles with distinctly lyric allusions. By invoking Shakespeare’s sonnets, Lawrence both hints at the possible bisexual dimension

of his own marriage poems and situates them within a tradition of erotic lyrics that have called forth the exegetical labors of readers seeking to translate cryptic surfaces into narratological sequence. No less striking is Lawrence's tacit adoption of Whitman as model – as signaled by his Whitmanian vocabulary of “merging” and his implied rehearsal of the American poet's fantasy that “Whoso touches this book touches a man.” Lawrence's use of Whitman, I argue, is most significant for being equivocal – in ways that point to the unique and challenging “between-ness” of his work, situated as it is between nineteenth- and twentieth-century traditions, between England and America, and between a prophetic poetry addressing a nascent continental empire and what I will propose is a poetics aiming at the “charismatic” (in Weber's sense) gathering of a select band of followers. Unlike Whitman's American attempt at universalizing “this living hand” of lyric, Lawrence's poetic response to imperial and democratic crisis invokes a more cautious form of redemptive intimacy whose model, I suggest, is the Biblical *noli me tangere*. Neither quite public nor private, neither eternally present nor purely historical, Lawrence's poetics are uniquely constituted by asymmetric information and gradations of intimacy – and as such pose a unique challenge for critics of lyric today.

Klas Molde (Cornell, USA)

Between Enchantment and Embarrassment : Transhistorical Lessons of Modern Lyric

This paper addresses directly the relationship between the theory of lyric and lyric history with reference to developments in French and German poetry over the long nineteenth century. Contrary to widely held anti-lyrical suspicion, the lyric genre does not originate in this era but enters a pivotal period of self-reflection that coincides, broadly speaking, with the perceived disenchantment of the world. For centuries or even millennia, the lyric had relied on strategies of enchantment – animation, invocation, unmotivated praise, apparently artificially imposed (dis)order along with spurious myths, visions, and prophecies – that ensured its transhistorical coherency. What happens to the lyric in a situation where the viability of such operations can no longer be taken for granted? Can it dispense with these mechanisms and still remain itself? Is the lyric compatible with ideals of absolute enlightenment and disenchantment? Questions of this sort are endemic to modern lyric practice. Indeed, when the lyric enters into modern reflexivity, *this* is what it reflects. One may even go so far as to say that, for the lyric, confronting these issues is what modernity *is*. My presentation seeks to unravel the implications of this for a transhistorical theory. I argue that an element of enchantment is in fact inseparable from the intelligibility of the lyric as a genre, something that is fully apparent only with the threat of utter disenchantment. The lyric, I claim, is the genre that regulates the balance between enchantment and disenchantment in an always imbalanced environment. However, this realization should not lead us to orient the study of lyric around remnants of magico-religious speech but to develop a rigorous, expanded concept of enchantment on the basis of poetics, as I attempt in what follows. Using examples of poetry including Hölderlin and Valéry, my talk consequently benefits from modern lyric's heightened self-awareness to shed light on the genre at large which it retroactively transforms.

Mantra Mukim (Warwick, UK)

The Pain of the Lyric : Beckett, Hölderlin and the Inhuman Imperative

Lyric, in its most optimistic definitions, is regarded as a ground for subjectivity. The modes of address and narration that make a lyric are always anchored in a human subject whose personal experience enters language and becomes the ontological force of the poem. Encoded in the personal pronoun “I”, the subject however in its encounter with the lyric, and in its attempt to secure a lyrical place for its experience, also opens itself to the threats of language. The proposed paper will look at intersections between the history of lyric poetry and its theoretical underpinnings by looking at how the twentieth-century writer, Samuel Beckett, both uses the lyric form, its idioms, in his poetry and brings to fore its tense history when he tries to remodel Hölderlin’s lyrical language.

This paper proposes to read Samuel Beckett’s four-line lyric, *Dieppe*, for the way it makes explicit the salient conflicts of lyric language and the throes of freedom, death and conformity that it pushes the subject in. Historically, the lyric has been the site for stabilizing and ushering self-knowledge to the (un)formed subject, as the paper would argue in reading Hegelian definitions of the lyric, but it has also allowed a confrontation between the poetic voice and subject with its own lack, as is the case in Hölderlin’s lyric *The Walk* that serves as the source of Beckett’s *Dieppe*. The proposed paper will try and demonstrate precisely how Beckett’s lyric sidesteps these two traditional aims of lyrical language and rather opens the human to a far more radical knowledge, neither of the subject’s own presence nor its deficiencies but rather its inevitable place within language/world and the pain that characterizes such a place.

One of the ways that this paper would think of pain in relation to language is by remembering the historical moment when the subject enters language. It is a moment when the human subject faces its immediate other in language, something inhuman. The linguistic system, objective and universal, is something that the subject succumbs to in order to communicate meaningfully and the pain that ensues from that moment, although forgotten by the subject, mark his language endlessly. It is this pain that resurfaces in the solitary lyric mode and, in reading Beckett, the paper would try to see exactly how the lyric mode challenge humanism as argues in the work of Mutlu Konuk Blasing. Another understanding of pain that the paper wants to investigate vis-à-vis Beckett’s lyric is one that is accidental, which cannot be accounted for with a history of language acquisition or with any premonition.

Natalia Fernández (Bern, CH)

The Seeing Subject and Intermediality in Spanish Love Lyric (16th and 17th centuries)

The Petrarchan model, as established in *Canzoniere*, considered lyrical love a visual and visible experience that could be represented by means of images. The most relevant consequence was that the lyrical subject became a seeing subject who looked both at himself and at his beloved, from the perspective of memory. Within an aesthetic movement that envisaged modernity, it was precisely in Petrarch's times when the gaze became aware of itself and, specially, of its creative power, both in poetry and in visual arts.

The seeing subject allows us to establish a link between lyrical and visual creation through a common axis: the gaze. These scopic dialectics that support petrarchan and petrarchist lyric can be considered as a record of the ways of seeing or, better, of the patterns of the gaze. It is in this point where we can suggest an intermedial approach, beyond interartistic comparatism.

Taking into account some emblematic examples from Spanish love lyric from 16th and 17th centuries, I will intend to show how the construction of a seeing subject nurtured from the patterns of the gaze in a moment when they were being deeply transformed; a transformation that can also be traced in visual arts and that shows an interesting face of the between-ness of lyric.