Introduction

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This book is a study of the concept of 'lyric' poetry, in English, from the early modern period to the present. It is a study of one of the most ancient and significant art forms in western culture, as it emerges in its various modern incarnations. As David Lindley notes in our opening chapter, '*The Oxford English Dictionary*'s first recorded uses of "lyric" as an adjective or noun come from the 1580s' (p. 10).

In recent years, literary study has seen something of a return to questions about the aesthetic, in which genre has begun to emerge as one important focus. Indeed, as the most historically and culturally reflexive incarnation of text's rhetorical operation, genre is well placed to reflect the continuing importance of historical methodologies to literary study while at the same time enabling an insistence on the importance of aesthetic and formal considerations of text. Within the recent renewed interest in literary genre more generally there has been a particular focus on the lyric poem. Some explore key features of lyric by anchoring themselves primarily in a particular historical milieu or author, and others take a more aesthetic orientation in relation to a contemporary understanding of lyric. Those studies that are anchored in a particular historical milieu include Heather Dubrow's *The Challenges of Orpheus: Lyric Poetry and Early Modern England* (2008), G. Gabrielle Starr's *Lyric Generations: Poetry and the Novel in the Long Eighteenth Century* (2004), and Virginia Jackson's *Dickinson's Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading* (2005). Of the primarily aesthetically situated type there are two books that stand out over the last five years or so: Susan Stewart's *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (2002); and Mutlu Konuk Blasing's study, *Lyric Poetry: The Pain and Pleasure of Words* (2007). Recent work by Simon Jarvis marks another important recent critical dimension. The issues he poses about the rhetorical operations of poetry are primarily philosophical, and although he doesn't use the term, his work on verse asks questions about the relationship between, for example, music and language, that are entirely relevant to thinking about

the nature of lyric.[1] Offering a complementary focus within this burgeoning field of studies of lyric and the lyrical (and the above are just a few examples of a rapidly growing field), we explore the development of the concept of lyric over a long historical trajectory through eleven separate case studies. Through this approach we aim to take on a broad temporal remit while avoiding the imposition of a generalised grand-narrative of lyric constructed through a particular historical perspective, or any fixed definition of the genre.

As a work of historical poetics, this book is a long way from the 'genre theory' of the 1970s. Drawing on a tradition of genre theory from E. D. Hirsch and Croce, William Elford Rogers' *The Three Genres and the Interpretation of Lyric* states its aim as a delineation of 'lyric' as an interpretive category: one that aids current classification.[2] Yet lyric is as much a historical category of production as of interpretation, and one whose changing conceptualisation has affected the work of poets as well as the way we read their texts. Moreover, in these days of frequent polarisation between 'historical' and 'theoretical' literary methodologies, genre might have a particularly interesting role to play in determining a reconsideration of this binary. As Friedrich Schlegel put it, the study of genre can be nothing short of 'a classification which at the same time would be a history and theory of literature'.[3] It is this simultaneous history and theory of literature that we aim to reflect in our engagement with the concept of lyric.

As Derek Attridge, amongst others, notes, 'the history of English poetry could be written as a history of the gradually increasing importance of its visual dimension – but always as this interacts with its aural dimension'.[4] The term 'lyric poem' has come today to denote a genre of poetry perhaps most commonly circulated primarily in print, and read, whether silently or aloud, from the page. It is the conceptualisation of lyric poetry that has, in addition to an investment in oral forms, a significant and independent life on the page that we trace in this study. While the genre has its origins in a sung form of Classical antiquity, the term had certainly come to acquire, in addition, a textual meaning by the time it was used in Sidney's *An Apology for Poetry* in 1595. So, this is a study whose remit is not defined by 'song' as such, but by the shifting conceptualisation of the lyric poem, which in the period we study must be linked particularly to the development of textual and print cultures. The historical boundaries of the lyric we study coincide with modern printing methods that mark a specifically modern phase in textual history. It is this printed incarnation that over time was to bring a characteristic embodiment of, and particular

possibilities for, the lyric poem in the contemporary world. While seeing this as a central thread to our study, however, we also reflect the importance of manuscript culture and the continuing potential of lyric in its textual embodiment to contain as a palimpsest an aural echo: sometimes actual, sometimes an imagined memory.

In 1970, René Wellek called for critics to 'abandon attempts to define the general nature of the lyric or the lyrical'.[5] To begin with a fixed definition of the lyric genre would be to beg the question. Although the significance of its origins in Classical and medieval song forms provides a necessary touchstone for this study, they do not provide a yard stick against which to measure subsequent forms. This book does not aim to present a 'definition' of the lyric poem, but something more like a loose genealogy. It is only in this way that we can begin properly to understand how this concept has shaped the production and reception of literary texts past and present. Each chapter uses sources contemporaneous to the poetry studied in order to give evidence for the meaning and significance of the term at that time, with a particular awareness of whether it refers to a form, a mode, or a genre. Where 'lyric' is a form, it has often been used to denote primarily song forms of poetry; as a 'mode', it has described a particular type (or types) of writing that could be found within a variety of forms and genres; as a genre, lyric represents one overall type of poetry in distinction to others such as 'epic' or 'dramatic'. The genealogy of the concept of 'lyric' that we trace is not a smooth or consistent movement from one type of meaning to another: indeed the term might be used, in different instances, in all three of these ways within the same historical period. Yet this messiness is a part of what makes the concept of lyric so interesting an object of study.

Current orthodoxy regards some ages as more 'lyrical' than others. High points are generally thought to include notable early modern writers, the Romantic period, modernism, and contemporary poetry (now poetry has, in the minds of many, become synonymous with definitions of the lyric). In contrast, the earlier eighteenth century is seen as an age more interested in political commentary than in the personal introspective effusion that came to be associated with lyric. The Victorians too, with the popularity of the novel and poetic forms that turned away from lyric, are more readily associated with other genres. Are these characterisations based primarily on a retro-projected definition of lyric, or are they rooted in contemporaneous experience? To what extent does the conceptualisation of lyric respond to the dominant concerns of the age, waxing and waning in connection with changing political, cultural, or philosophical contexts?

These are questions we will be investigating in order to interrogate current characterisations of the lyric tradition. This book will not only chart the shifting conceptualisation of lyric in a series of contexts, but will discover something of the interconnections between the aesthetics of lyric form and the context of its production in order to read the cultural and intellectual concerns inscribed in the contours and fortunes of the concept.

More specifically, an established critical narrative sees our current understanding of the lyric genre as originating largely in the Romantic period. Most recently, Scott Brewster begins his study of lyric with that claim that our current understanding of the lyric as a textual poetic genre was 'developed in the later eighteenth century, which defined lyric in terms of heightened emotion and authentic sentiment, and presented it as a (usually brief) moment of intensified awareness'.[6] This was the point, argues M. H. Abrams, at which 'lyric' became not just *a* poetic genre, including under its umbrella a variety of poetic forms that might previously have been considered to have separate trajectories, but *the* poetic genre: the pre-eminent form of poetry.[7] Yet was this point in lyric history a revolution or an evolution?[8] If 'lyric' was first recorded as an adjective or noun in the late sixteenth century, what did it mean before the Romantic codification of genre? And what about the investment in this Romantic understanding of lyric in the following centuries? From at least the 1960s the following formulation has been dominant: 'from the late eighteenth century the lyric impulse became diffused over an ever-widening area, till today one could almost say there is no lyric poetry since every poem has a lyrical quality'.[9] More recently, Virginia Jackson has taken up this idea to describe a process of 'the lyricization of poetry itself – the historical transformation of many varied poetic genres into the single abstraction of the post-Romantic lyric'.[10] Jackson has suggested that 'the lyric takes form through the development of reading practices in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that become the practice of literary criticism'.[11]

Jackson's work appears with other position papers (mainly from scholars whose own specialisms lie in post-Romantic literature) in the 2008 *PMLA* issue that put the 'New Lyrical Studies' on the map. Here, in response to challenges to the notion of 'lyric' as a transhistorical category, Jonathan Culler responded with cautious optimism that an essential core of qualities might characterise the genre over time, and with a call for an investigation.[12] This call has begun to be taken up by critics in various forms, but not yet in a longitudinal study.[13] The current book aims to provide an arena for the historical investigation of the concept of lyric spanning more than four centuries, undertaken by scholars qualified to make this

assessment in their particular historical area of expertise. In this way, we provide the first book-length study to respond to these questions.

In what follows we present no definitive single narrative of lyric formation. Rather, we present evidence drawn from many sources in many different ways to establish a multi-vocal, multi-perspectival history that we hope will raise more questions than it answers. This method responds to the need to avoid a retrospective mapping of a 'lyric' tradition in the image of any one moment in that history. Presenting case studies within a broadly chronological structure, we also aim to avoid a homogenising survey of literary periods. In each chapter a different author engages with what they identify as a key moment of formation or transformation in the idea of lyric poetry. While grounding the argument in a historicised understanding of 'lyric' that will orient the non-period-specialist reader, each author seeks to present an original reflection on it. In this way, a substantial historical and collective endeavour is given a tight focus within each chapter that enables its theme to be worked out in detailed and specific arguments. Each chapter takes, as its central object of study, a small number of poems – sometimes canonical and sometimes little known. Close reading is a key shared methodology and will unite the studies, grounding the analysis in a focus on the works themselves. The chapters take diverse approaches and methodologies, and we have also tried to highlight different issues within the concept of lyric within each chapter (each particularly relevant to the historical period in question) at the same time as attending to a shared remit. Overall, however, these studies collectively offer a sustained interrogation of the concept of lyric that focuses around an exploration of its historical conceptualisation and, at times, the relevance of current definitions of the genre to reading poetry from the past.

David Lindley's opening chapter explores the relationship between early modern 'lyric' poetry and the crucible of song and text in which it was formed. Analysing the experience of song in the period, he highlights distinctions, are crucial (although often overlooked) to our understanding of lyric, between metrical regularity on the page and the musicality of lyrics written to a particular tune. Heather Dubrow continues many of the same concerns while using an analysis of deictics to offer a very different kind of reflection on lyric in the sixteenth century. Interrogating generic assumptions of lyric immediacy, she questions the relevance of twentieth-century definitions of lyric to reading sixteenth-century poems, at the same time as exploring what it might mean to think about 'lyric' in the period. Moving on thematically from lyric's generative connection with song, and moving, historically, into the seventeenth century, Thomas Healy explores what it

means for lyric to exist in both print and manuscript cultures. Focusing on the work of John Donne, he looks at how the instabilities of both textual media create not only fluidity of meaning and interpretation but also interesting challenges for reading poetic subjectivity that have profound consequences for our understanding of what it might mean to read 'lyric' poems in this period. Nigel Smith offers a complementary focus on seventeenth-century poetry through an exploration of lyric's fate and function in a time of intense unrest. Through an original account of the new wave of song study among the musicographers of the seventeenth century, Smith finds a discourse on the idea of lyric within a poetic landscape in which the epic and heroic formed a more recognised focus. In spite of lyric's subordinated position within poetics of the period, he finds it playing an innovative role both in political action and in the understanding of a time of 'deep perplexity'. Considering the eighteenth century, David Fairer traces the conscious translation of lyre music into 'modern' poetry, identifying an understanding of 'lyric' poetry not as a formal genre but as the playing of an instrument in a textual medium. Revealing how poets sought in the modal and expressive features of poetry an equivalent for something derived from the ancient lyrists, Fairer argues that the idea of lyre music was taken up in ways that could 'make the transition to modern lyric poetry and become a defining aspect of it' (p. 94). In the context of an eighteenth-century shift from the satiric modes associated with Pope towards a poetry of the imagination, Marcus Walsh takes as his focus the ode. Identifying this form as central to an attempt to 'reconstitute the high lyric as a leading genre for British poetry' (p. 113), Walsh explores the potential for such poems themselves to offer a commentary on the development of a poetics of affect and imagination, and, more generally, on the difficult status of the modern lyric poet in relation to an inheritance of multiple Greek, Hebraic, and English models.

David Duff takes as his focus the Romantic expansion of 'lyric' as a generic term that included a rapidly growing number of different poetic forms. Yet, far from presenting a single, unified conceptualisation of lyric, his chapter considers the relationship between different Romantic ideas of lyric, and how they overlap or, sometimes, combine. Focusing both on the idea of lyric as an introspective mode, and the reassertion of a tie between lyric poetry and music, Duff looks in detail at poems by Burns and Shelley in order to argue for the complexity and multiplicity of lyric in this period (from popular song to a return to ancient forms). In my own chapter, I turn away from the centrality of music to lyric in order to think about the importance to Victorian poetry of a constitutively printed rather than

sung conceptualisation of lyric, and what this means for the identity of a genre recognised at the time to be in tension with cultural modernity. Struggling with a conceptualisation of lyric they frequently identify as inherited from the Romantics, mid-Victorian poets such as Browning pathologise the form, yet later Victorian poets, I argue, reclaim the idea of lyric through the very terms of that sickness. Exploring the work of Pound and twentieth-century modernism, Peter Nicholls interrogates the binary that sees modernist lyric as affiliated with the eye in opposition to the ear. While arguing for the continuing significance of sound (and of Swinburne) to Pound's melopoeia, Nicholls also highlights the profound scepticisms around lyric musicality present not only in high modernism but also in the work of the following generations. From Oppen's distrust, to Susan Howe's sense of the limits of lyric, Nicholls considers the ways in which lyric has come to seem to some poets a damaged or compromised form. The final two chapters both address issues of lyric subjectivity and can be seen to work as parallel reflections on two very different traditions of poetry that emerged in the second half of the twentieth century. Neil Roberts' analysis draws together Philip Larkin and Ted Hughes, arguing that 'Both poets combine a conservative-seeming attachment to the idea of lyric with a historically inevitable suspicion of its integrity' (p. 214). Moreover, however opposed the two poets may appear stylistically, he recognises in both the need to seek strategies for the escape of the ego via the construction of the lyric 'I' through language and through something similar to what Blasing describes as the rhythmic pulse that 'makes audible an intending "I"' (p. 195).[14] Finally, Ian Patterson turns to a major strand of contemporary poetry that might be called 'late modernist' (with J. H. Prynne a major focus), and that Patterson defines in opposition to the 'mainstream' of contemporary British poetry explored in the previous chapter. Ultimately, Patterson's analysis shows that however pathologised, broken, irrelevant, or, now in Patterson's terms 'fragmented', lyric has become, it persists as an uncanny echo in contemporary poetry: a force that is never completely rejected. 'Lyric' has become for Patterson too intrinsic to the process of articulating the subject in poetic language. The volume ends with a reflection on the whole, and on the utility of genre categorisations, from a scholar seminal to our critical study of lyric: Jonathan Culler.

This book aims to offer a fresh approach to the study of lyric by taking a long historical remit and employing a multi-authored approach in order to maintain the specificity and expertise throughout. Collaboration of this type amongst scholars of English literature is surprisingly rare. Such

connections do not easily fall under the banner of 'interdisciplinarity',[15] but nor are they fostered by conferences and groupings within university disciplines that are predominantly historically based. Marjorie Perloff has written about the dangers of a current configuration of the discipline in which the '"merely" literary is so suspect'.[16] The casualties of this have sometimes been the formal features of the text itself as an aesthetic object and the larger *literary* trajectories or frames of reference in which those texts might be located. There is a danger of leaving scholars without enough of a sense of the larger trajectory in which they are working; this is the reason why certain questions remain unanswered, and why historical parochialism is a real risk for current scholarship.

It should by now be clear that this book is not an introductory guide or a comprehensive historical survey of lyric poetry. It achieves what can only be achieved through a collective, bringing together many scholars and giving a shape to a long period of literary history. In short, this book attempts to offer a combination of qualities usually polarised between the frequently very specialist academic monograph and the less narrow, but often simplified, overview of the historical survey or guide book. The authors involved in this project reflect a range of additional interests crucial to the topic: as well as being eminent critics, some also bring with them an editor's understanding of the importance of genre (for example David Fairer, Neil Roberts, Nigel Smith, Marcus Walsh), some are published lyric poets themselves (such as Heather Dubrow and Ian Patterson), some bring a particular understanding of the development of print culture (for example Thomas Healy) and of the relationship between literature and music (David Lindley), some bring expertise in Anglo-American literature that is crucial to understanding twentieth-century developments in English poetry (for example Peter Nicholls), and some specialise in genre theory itself (David Duff). The focus of the book on 'English' literature means, for most of its historical range, a focus on poetry within the British Isles. The sheer range and diversity of poetries in English in contemporary literature is a subject for another book, but the later chapters reflect the significance of, particularly, North American poetry to the English lyric. Although this collection cannot attempt to reflect the reach of contemporary global criticism, its historical breadth aims to appeal to any reader interested in poetry and the concept of lyric. Readers who have a particular interest in poetry of any one of the historical periods covered will gain an important context for their study, while the book also provides a necessary framework for thinking about the nature of genre.

Notes

1 Simon Jarvis, 'Musical Thinking: Hegel and the Phenomenology of Prosody', *Paragraph* 28.2 (2005), 57–71 (*passim*).
2 William Elford Rogers, *The Three Genres and the Interpretation of Lyric* (Princeton University Press, 1983), p. 56.
3 Friedrich Schlegel, *Dialogue on Poetry and Literary Aphorisms*, trans. Ernst Behler and Roman Struc (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), p. 76.
4 Derek Attridge, *Poetic Rhythm* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 2.
5 René Wellek, 'Genre Theory, the Lyric, and Erlebnis', in *Discriminations: Further Concepts of Criticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), pp. 225–52 (pp. 251–2).
6 Scott Brewster, *Lyric* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 1–2.
7 M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp*, (Oxford University Press, 1963), pp. 84, 96.
8 See David Duff, *Romanticism and the Uses of Genre* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 210; Brewster, *Lyric*, p. 72.
9 C. Day Lewis, *The Lyric Impulse* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1965), p. 13.
10 Virginia Jackson, 'Who Reads Poetry?', *PMLA* 123.1 (2008), 181–7 (p. 183).
11 Virginia Jackson, *Dickinson's Misery* (Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 8.
12 Jonathan Culler, 'Why Lyric?', *PMLA* 123.1 (2008), 201–6 (p. 202).
13 See, for example, Rachel Cole's essay, 'Rethinking the Value of Lyric Closure: Giorgio Agamben, Wallace Stevens, and the Ethics of Satisfaction', *PMLA* 126.2 (2011), 383–97, in which she posits lyric's formal closure as part of its 'transhistorical' nature and asks how we might think about that feature ethically.
14 Mutlu Konuk Blasing, *Lyric Poetry: The Pain and Pleasure of Words* (2007), p. 55.
15 For example, the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council classes the study of English literature across all historical periods as one subject area.
16 Marjorie Perloff, 'Presidential Address 2006: It Must Change', *PMLA* 122.3 (2007), 652–62 (p. 655).

CHAPTER ONE

'Words for music, perhaps'
Early modern songs and lyric

David Lindley

In the sixteenth century most people made their primary contact with poetry or verse when it was accompanied by music. Whether in the ballads sold by itinerant sellers such as Shakespeare's Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale*, or in the metrical Psalms that were the only music permitted in the average parish church, or in the songs heard in the theatre, or in music sung for domestic entertainment, verses came most frequently attached to tunes.

The *Oxford English Dictionary*'s first recorded uses of 'lyric' as an adjective or noun come from the 1580s.[1] It is very evident that the label had very little direct connection with modern, or post-Romantic, definitions of lyric by its individual and personal utterance. Instead, virtually all the uses of the term until well into the seventeenth century made their primary connection to Classical tenets, and especially to metrical distinctions of one literary kind from another. The early modern generic definition was, therefore, much less by subject matter or by forms of address than we expect. Above all, 'lyric' was a category prescribed by metrical form. At the same time, most definitions in the period, either explicitly or implicitly, also gesture towards the etymological connection of 'lyric' to the lyre, and therefore to music. Puttenham's generic categorisation is entirely typical of the period, and therefore instructive:

> As the matter of poesy is diverse, so was the form of their poems and manner of writing, for all of them wrote not in one sort, even as all of them wrote not upon one matter. Neither was every poet alike cunning in all as in some one kinde of poesy, nor uttered with like felicity. But wherein any one most excelled, thereof he tooke a surname, as to be called a Poet *Heroic*, *Lyric*, *Elegiac*, *Epigrammatist* or otherwise. Such therefore as gave themselves to write long histories of the noble gests of kings and great Princes … they called poets *Heroic*, whereof *Homer* was chief and most ancient among the Greeks, *Virgil* among the Latins. Others who more delighted to write songs or ballads of pleasure, to be sung with the voice, and to