Parsing Time in the Lyric

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Some years ago, at a point when the category of 'lyric' had, as it spasmodically does, become a

source of academic controversy, it became increasingly prevalent to define lyric by way of a

distinctive form of temporality.[1] This started from the basic intuition that poems we call 'lyrics'

tend to be short. Brevity seems a reassuringly neutral criterion, at once minimal and capacious;

yet one can derive from this many of the qualities that have come to be considered characteristic,

even definitive, of the genre. Goethe once wrote that '[t]he pull of a deep intuition demands the

laconic' [*Der Drang einer tiefen Anschauung fordert Lakonismus*].[2] That the history of lyric is replete

with poems that do not fit the criterion of shortness—'lyrics' have at times been said to

encompass anything from *The Prelude* to *Citizen: An American Lyric*—need not discourage the lyric

theorist unduly. Such an objection is anticipated in Edgar Allen Poe's assertion that 'what we call

a long poem is, in fact, merely a succession of brief ones—that is to say, of brief poetical

effects.'[3] Wordsworth's 'spots of time' are characterized, after all, by moments where narrative

progression gives way to the temporal condensation of an epiphany, just as Rankine's 'American

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[1] The phrase 'distinctive lyric temporality' comes from Jonathan Culler, 'Why Lyric?' (PMLA 123:1, 2008),
205). See also Eva Müller-Zettelman, *Lyrik und Metalyrik. Theorie einer Gattung und ihrer Selbstbespigelung
anhand von Beispielen aus der englisch- und deutschsprachigen Dichtkunst* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter,
2000), esp. 79ff. More such studies exist than I could hope to mention here, but particularly significant
contributions include Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins's 'Lyrical Studies' (*Victorian Literature and Culture*
27:2 (1999), 521-530), and their co-edited *Lyric Theory Reader* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press,
2013), Eva Müller-Zettelmann and Margarete Rubik (eds.), *Theory Into Poetry: New Approaches to the Lyric*
(Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), the PMLA special issue, *The New Lyric Studies* (PMLA 123:1, 2008), and
Jonathan Culler's *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015).
[2] Johann von Goethe, 'Des Knaben Wunderhorn', *Weimarer Ausgabe* (1827) vol. 40, 356.
[3] Edgar Allen Poe, 'The Philosophy of Composition,' in *Edgar Allen Poe: Essays and Reviews* ed. Gary
Richard (Washington, D.C.: Library of America, 1984), 13-25 (15).

lyrics' turn on particular instances where the microaggressions she documents expand to encompass and render legible a social totality.[4] 'Laconic' lyric incorporates the condensation of linguistic materials, intensity of emotion, directness of address, resistance to narrative, memorability, and a programmatic desire to speak into eternity.

The purpose of the current essay is not to reopen the recent controversy with its own attempt at a definition, but rather to think through, and *parse*, the different modes of temporality at play in poems we habitually call 'lyric'. It is striking that the definition of lyric that Jonathan Culler gives in his *Theory of the Lyric*—'a Western tradition of short, nonnarrative, highly rhythmic productions, often stanzaic, whose aural dimension is crucial'[5]—at each stage characterizes lyric through temporal qualities.[6] Yet the temporalities to be parsed extend further. In addition to poems' prosodic, syntactic, and stanzaic organization in time, their disruptions of and deviations from narrative time, and the temporalities of address, we will want to attend to the temporal dynamics of citation and allusion, of sonic and rhetorical effects of echo and repetition, or archaism and neologism as backward-looking and forward-looking attitudes towards diction. One can understand a lyric poem as a kind of textual object that interiorizes so many different temporal vectors, yet poems are also experienced in time: whether performed or read and re-read, they unfold in and across time. As W. S. Graham once wrote, 'the eye reads forward as the memory reads back:'[7] each 'now' of the poem's enunciation and re-enunciation is bound up in a structure of anticipation-recollection, each discrete moment characterized by its distension as

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[4] Indeed, Grant Farred, in '*Citizen*, A Lyric Event', argues that what distinguishes *Citizen* is precisely its temporal attentiveness to a lyric event characterised by its 'utopian' (and recurrent, iterative) 'now': "The event of the 'I,' founded (again and again), recognized (again and again), extant in the now, is the lyric's call for the citizen who 'belongs by not belonging." *Diacritics* 45:4 (2017).

[5] Culler, *Theory of the Lyric*, 89.

[6] Ibid. Even Culler's 'inductive approach' implies temporal categories, as it eschews a normative set of requirements that would fit an ahistorical essence, and refigures lyric as a historically embedded tradition that develops, and changes over time.

[7] The phrase comes from his long poem 'The Nightfishing' (*New Collected Poems* ed. Matthew Francis. London: Faber, 2004. 117), but he subsequently employed it to describe the experience of reading, as opposed to hearing, a poem, notably in his introductory remarks to the reading he gave on the BBC Programme *The Living Poet* in January 1968.

much as its intension.[8] To parse time in the lyric thus means bearing in mind the poem as *event*, as *activity* of language: *poiesis* indicates not simply an artwork made *of* language, but an artwork that makes *with* language.[9]

It is not merely that such poems make use of a time-bound medium; in employing a repertoire of time-bound strategies and effects they routinely conceptualize and thematize their temporal condition. One might think of the many traditions for which temporality is a programmatic concern: from *carpe diem* or *tempus fugit* to elegy and epitaph, by way of the addresses to absent lovers or inanimate matter, calling their addressees into presence and reanimation, and the epideictic poems whose praise or blame will memorialize its recipient into eternity, with its attendant claims for the immortality of poet and poem. In particular, the examples I draw on in the below will continually invoke trope that has endured from Pindar's odes to today: where lyric's intensification, or thickening, of time, becomes a means of overcoming time.

'A moment's monument' is how Dante Gabriel Rossetti depicted the sonnet, in a poem named after the form itself.[10] It speaks nicely to the paradox that motivates so much lyric poetry (and theory), and its conjoined tropes will furnish a framework for this essay. The sonnet's subsequent unfolding demonstrates the tensions, and anxieties, immanent in such a paradox, where both momentariness and monumentality start to unravel. After the pithy initial formulation, which brings together both the condensation and overcoming of time, comes a proliferation of tropes. The monument is reframed as 'Memorial from the soul's eternity': that

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[8] One might in this context think especially of rhyme. A rhyming word is, after all, only registered retrospectively, but in a rhyming poem each syllable can anticipate the promise of a future rhyme, a promise which may or may not come to fruition. For a fascinating recent study of rhyme, and particularly 'sporadic' rhyme (that is, rhymes that are not assimilated into a scheme or pattern), see Roi Tartakovsky, *Surprised by Sound: Rhyme's Inner Workings* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2021.

[9] While Culler also presents the lyric as 'event', I use the word more in line with Derek Attridge's and John Wilkinson's understanding of the experiential unfolding of a poem in reading. See Attridge, 'The Event of a Poem: Denise Riley's "Lone Star Clattering"', and Wilkinson's response: 'Is this the way to Amarillo? Reading Denise Riley with Derek Attridge'. *English* 71:3 (2022).

[10] The poem is also anthologised as 'Sonnet on the sonnet'. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, *Collected Poetry and Prose* ed. Jerome McGann (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 127.

which brings the extratemporal into time, so the monument now represents time rather than its overcoming. The poem's survival is then figured variously as material inscription ('Carve it in ivory or ebony'), as everlasting fame (or else paying the way to the afterlife), and as the poem's 'flowering', gesturing towards both flux and continuance. Running alongside these tropes, the poem seeks to grasp its paradoxical in-and-out-of-time-ness through thickening, complicating, the prosodic movements of its words. Its rhyming of unstress and secondary stresses ('monu*ment*', 'reve*rent*', 'ori*ent*'; 'eternit*y*' and 'ebo*ny*'; and then 'reti*nue*') plays in the disjunction between lexical and metrical stress, while its accumulations of stresses ('óne déad déathless hóur'; 'lét Tíme sée'; 'dárk whárf's cávernóus bréath'), and the elongation of phrasing across line breaks ('from the soul's eternity / To one dead deathless hour'; 'let Time see / Its flowering crest...'; 'Whether for tribute to the august appeals / Of Life'), play on the incompatibility between metrical isochrony and the elasticity of intonation contours, as two competing ways of registering prosodic time: the phrases' divergence from patterned temporality depends on such patterns for their expressive effects. In such diverse and mutually contradictory ways, Rossetti's poem, like so many other lyrics, ceaselessly reflects on its own time-bound condition.

   To 'parse time' in lyrics thus means reading alongside one another multiple, heterogeneous temporal modes and attitudes, means tracing the ways in which these different timescales, which will often gravitate in contradictory directions and to contradictory effects, are counterpointed, counterbalanced. This concerns not simply the poems' deployment of their timebound medium, but their thematization of time, and indeed their reception in time. It means to put on display lyrics' deployment and thematization of temporality, but also their temporal unfoldings in acts of performance and reading, thereby to attend to those ways in which such poems, continually and variously, set in motion the complex intersection of so many ways of inhabiting, of being subject, and subjected, to time.

Moment

Seeking a simple differentiation of lyric from narrative, Culler proposes: 'if narrative is about what happens next, lyric is about what happens now.'[11] The phrase unlocks an entire tradition of lyric theory and practice. It is perhaps most clearly embodied in what Goethe termed the *Augenblick*, the moment, but literally, the 'blink of an eye', where temporal intension affords 'the possibility that a momentary lived experience could provide a privileged temporal point of access to the absolute';[12] though, as Boris Maslov has observed, this model draws on modes of temporality at work in Pindar's *epinikion* (victory ode), with its focus on the 'apposite, unique moment' of the individual's achievement.[13] The turn away from narrative time into a lyric 'now' is a claim that binds together conceptions of poetic time that otherwise diverge profoundly. It is there in Ezra Pound's description of the image as 'that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time,'[14] but also in D. H. Lawrence's claim that 'free verse is, or should be direct utterance from the instant, whole man', concerned with 'the moment, the immediate present, the Now.'[15] And while Culler's own focus is on the now of enunciation as found in lyric address, this same schema justifies Paul Ricoeur's notion of lyric as a mode beyond narrative in which 'meditative goes right to the fundamental thinking without passing through the act of narrating',[16] and Sharon Cameron's depiction of 'lyric's sense of time' as 'its propensity

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[11] Culler, 'Why Lyric?', 202.

[12] Boris Maslov, 'Pindaric Temporality, Goethe's *Augenblick*, and the Invariant Plot of Tiutchev's Lyric,' *Comparative Literature* 64:4 (2012), 356-381 (357).

[13] If this is indicative of a 'presentist chronotope' in Romantic lyric, Maslov suggests it does accord with Pindar's own presentism, as 'the confluence of the human and the divine' (363), even if Pindar holds in abeyance four concepts of time (*hora*, *aion*, *khronos* and *kairos*), where for his later readers time had been reconceived as unitary. Maslov's broader methodological conclusion is salutary for any historically informed poetics of temporality: 'distinct concepts of temporality are more durable and likely to have an impact as constituents of a literary genre … rather than as isolated ideas that are, so to speak, freely afloat in intellectual history' (370).

[14] Ezra Pound, 'A Few Don'ts from an Imagiste', in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* ed. T.S. Eliot (New York: New Directions, 1954), 4.

[15] D. H. Lawrence, 'Poetry of the Present', in *Selected Poems* ed. James Fenton (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2008), 176.

[16] Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative* vol. 3 trans. by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 272-73. For more recent treatments of narrative temporality see Martin Hägglund, *Dying for Time: Proust, Woolf, Nabokov* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012) and Mark Currie, *About Time: Narrative, Fiction and the Philosophy of Time* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010).

to interiorize as ambiguity or outright contradiction those conflicts that other mimetic forms conspicuously exteriorize.'[17]

Yet if 'lyric is about what happens now', then lyrics also deploy, and make available, a multiplicity of 'nows', or else reveal the multiplicity immanent in every 'now'. In part this is already presupposed in the dialectical logic inherent to any utterance of 'now', by which the simply by naming 'now' one transforms it into a 'then';[18] and it is also implicit insofar as any written poem's 'now' is inevitably deferred to a future 'now'--in fact, innumerable future 'nows'--of reading. Yet the multiplicity is also at work within the temporal condensations of lyrics that seek to grasp, to set in motion, a 'now' of enunciation.

To see this, we can take one of the most celebrated depictions of a lyric 'now' (and one of the nine poems Culler uses as archetypal for his *Theory of the Lyric*), Baudelaire's 'À une passante' (To a Woman Passing By). Baudelaire's sonnet stages its departure from a narration of the poet's momentary encounter with the eponymous 'fugitive beauty', into the temporality of vocative address ('fugitive beauté' ... 'Ô toi').[19] Yet within this, we find several different conceptualizations of the moment of 'now'. There is, firstly, the tableau set up in the opening image: 'La rue assourdissant autour de moi hurlait' [*Around me roared the deafening street*], a discrete temporal unit bounded by its coincidence of syntax and verse line, and by the chiastic neatness of its prosody, where the sequence of vowels /y/ - /uʁ/ - /uʁ/ - /yʁ/ (*rue - sour - tour - hur*) coincides with the 2 + 4 | 4 + 2 division of the *alexandrin*. This, like the description of the woman, with its accumulation of adjectives ('Longue, mince, en grand deuil, douleur majestueuse / ... Agile et noble, avec sa jambe de statue'; *Long, slim, mournful, majestic sadness / ... Agile and noble, with her statuesque leg*), would draw the moment out of time, just as the sonnet narrates a moment that is

[17] Sharon Cameron, *Lyric Time: Dickinson and the Limits of Genre* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 23.
[18] This is famously the basis for Hegel's dialectical account of any particular sense-datum in the opening to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.
[19] Culler includes both the original and James McGowan's translation of the poem (slightly modified) in *Theory of the Lyric* (Harvard UP, 2015), 27-28.

all-too-fleeting.[20] If the descriptions would take the encounter out of the past and into an eternal present tense ('La douceur qui fascine, et le plaisir qui tue': *Sweetness that fascinates, pleasure that kills*), then the narrative climax ('Un éclair... puis la nuit!', *A flash... then night!*) would take the moment out of grammatical tense altogether. And it is the shift in tense that most distinguishes the move from narrative time to the time of discourse: the vocative address gestures first to the future ('Ne te verrais-je plus...?'), then to the past subjunctive ('Ô toi que j'eusse aimée'). This is a sonnet which continually seeks to construct a 'now'—of memory, of experience, of address, of bringing-into-presence—but in so doing disperses its nows across different tenses, different modes of address, indeed across different conceptions of what constitutes the 'now'. And it does so by mobilising different dimensions of language as a time-bound medium: its syntax and tense, its prosody and scansion, its tropes of address and the unfolding and unpacking of its images.

Baudelaire's moment of lyric intensity deviates from narrative time; another celebrated lyric tends in the opposite direction. W. B. Yeats's 'Sailing to Byzantium' starts by inhabiting a tense hinged between 'now' of enunciation and a timeless present ('*That* is no country for old men'), while the oxymoron of '*those* dying generations' nicely complements the blurring of deictic and cyclical time.[21] The shift in tense at the close of the second stanza—'And therefore I have sailed the seas and come / To the holy city of Byzantium'— signals a move into narrative progression, as though to repudiate the gerundive of the title.[22] Any such progression, however, is tempered by the depiction of Byzantium itself as a mythic-historical non-place.

Yet the poem's temporal aporiai are registered most of all in, and as, prosody. For instance, Yeats's prominent use of half-rhyme, and, particularly, of juxtaposing stressed and unstressed rhyming syllables: neglect/intellect; sing/studying; dress/magnificence; come/Byzantium; soul/animal; gather me/eternity; thing/enamelling. In each, the rhyme scheme demands of each

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[20] The sonnet here thus encapsulates Baudelaire's reflections on Constantin Guy as 'the painter of the fleeting moment and of all that it suggests of the eternal', in *Le peintre de la vie moderne*. I am grateful to Matthew Bevis for emphasising this to me.

[21] Edward Larrissy ed., *W. B. Yeats* (Oxford UP, 1997), 94-5.

[22] Here too I am grateful to Matthew Bevis for enlivening me to this contradiction in Yeats's poem.

polysyllable an increased emphasis on its final syllable: either unstress or secondary stress are voiced (whether aloud or subvocally) as primary stress, with vowels lengthened to fit the rising cadences of the rhyme words, or else performance disregards the metrical phrase. And this points to a broader temporal double-bind inherent to scansion. On the one hand, it gestures towards the 'now' of performance, in which the poem sounds as a scanned whole. Yet, in its multiplicity, it requires a proliferation of such performances, as each single performative choice disperses into indecision, each voicing vacillates back into silence.

This is most prominent in the counterpoint between two distinct, incompatible attitudes towards prosodic time: isochrony and intonation (which themselves could be twinned with the Bergsonian opposition of *temps* and *durée*, or a slightly different prosodic pair: rhythm and metre). Something similar is at work in the poem's motivic repetitions of certain rhythmic figures, notably the trochaic inversion (/ x x /). 'Birds in the trees'; 'Caught in that sens-'; 'Monuments of'; 'Soul clap its hands'; 'Nor is there sing-'; 'Come from the hol-'; 'perne in a gyre'; 'sick with desire'; 'Into the art-'; 'Once out of nat-'; 'bodily form'; 'natural thing': cumulatively they do not merely syncopate against a metrical frame, but act as countermeasure in their own right. In one of these figures, this sensual embodiment becomes particularly fraught: in 'unless / Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing', the syncopation of 'Soul clap its hands' arises from the lack of article before 'soul'. Is this a trochaic inversion? On the one hand, the abruptness of 'Soul', without article, demands prosodic emphasis; on the other, the image of 'clap' itself calls for emphasis (and fits a broader assonance of 'tatter', 'hands'…). The process of materialization through which 'soul' becomes able to 'clap its hands and sing' emerges out of conspicuous syntactic-prosodic condensation.

In another poem by Yeats, from around the same time, prosody also serves as a vehicle for the irruption of aporetic temporality in to the fabric of the everyday. The grammarless opening to 'Leda and the Swan', 'A sudden blow', would register the irruption of the divine into a human present, while the line break that follows 'And Agamemnon dead' figures temporal rupture on

the page as both syncopation and as blank space, as the poem's focus veers from the micro-temporality of individual event to the macro-histories of which it is one part: firstly the history of Troy set in motion by the rape of Leda (and already 'present' in Zeus's divine foreknowledge), and secondly the Irish civil war for which Troy here can stand as an allegory.[23] The thickening of time, and collapsing of timescales, is experienced here too at the level of prosody.

In each case, the moment of enunciation becomes a temporal complex rather than a discrete point. And part of this complex involves the poem's re-enunciation, in which it is actualized anew in future performances/readings. The 'now' of enunciation in this regard is also a latent 'now' of reception.[24] Perhaps the most poignant instance of a lyric agonising about its future reception comes in W. S. Graham's elegy 'Dear Bryan Wynter':

> Speaking to you and not
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> Knowing if you are there
>
> Is not too difficult.
>
> My words are used to that.[25]

The poem's direct address in this way speaks not just to an absence separated by death, but also to the absence of the reader, and indeed to the future uncertainty of being read: like Wynter, the reader is both, as Graham's line break has it, spoken to and not. Lyrics, speaking in their moment, also speak out of their moment--perhaps not into eternity but into oblivion.

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[23] ibid., 112.

[24] As David Wellbery has observed of Goethe's lyric 'now': the poem's 'link to the present moment is not chronological, but phenomenological. Indeed, the lyric event has no other time (neither an entirely fictional one, nor an objective one) than that which relates it to the *Jetztzeit*, or temporal actuality, of the reader.' *The Specular Moment: Goethe's Early Lyric and the Beginnings of Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 14.

[25] W. S. Graham, 'Dear Bryan Wynter', in *New Collected Poems* ed. Matthew Francis (London: Faber, 2004), 258.

Lyrics, as textual objects, internalize so many different temporal dynamics into their speech acts, as though thereby to step out of time; yet they themselves are conditioned by a further set of temporal dynamics as they search for their readerly afterlives. Graham's addresses continually play with this by embedding his future readers into the lyrics themselves, so that the moment of their enunciation would include their dispersal into timescales beyond their knowing. The poem's temporal complex would thus outstrip its existence as textual object; it gives its over to future moments it cannot gauge, even as it attempts to preëmpt such moments into its own 'now' of enunciation.

<p style="text-align:center;">*Monument*</p>

Whereas the lyric 'now' might transport poet and reader into that paradoxical in-and-out-of-time-ness, the monument presents a more circumscribed kind of timelessness. It endures rather than transcends; as a trope for art's eternity it remains subject to decay and defacement. Fittingly, when lyrics do figure their own overcoming of time by way of the monument, they simultaneously address the anxiety of falling into either petrifaction or dissolution. Early in 'Sailing to Byzantium' Yeats laments of 'the young': 'Caught in that sensual music all neglect / Monuments of unageing intellect'; in this opposition lies two apparently contradictory models of poetic speech. The phrase recalls Horace, and the claim to have created in his poetic corpus a 'monument more durable than bronze' [*Exegi monumentum aere perennius / regalique*].[26] Both monuments are redeemed by not being purely physical; rather it is the motility of thought and language that provides a durability greater than bronze, 'intellect' that does not age.

The poem-monument is marked by a further double bind, as it both aspires for and risks 'petrifaction'.[27] When verbal art becomes a monument, what it gains in fixity it loses in

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[26] *The Odes of Horace* trans. by James Michie (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1967), 216-17.

[27] John Wilkinson, 'Repeatable Evanescence', *Thinking Verse* IV.a (2014), 23-49 (28). 'Repeatable Evanescence.' *Thinking Verse* IV.a (www.thinkingverse.org/issue04a/WilkinsonRepeatableEvanescence.pdf, last accessed 9 June 2022.

animation: its time-bound eternity is a living death. Wilkinson sees Shakespeare's 'Sonnet 17' as emblematic of this condition: the verse is 'but a tomb' for its addressee's beauty, and its 'papers yellow'd with their age' have a bodily decay of their own.[28] Shakespeare here resembles Pierre de Ronsard's blurring of the tropes of *carpe diem* with that of the posterity of poetic utterance: in his sonnet 'Quand vous serez bien vielle', the beloved is imagined in old age reading the poems in praise of her beauty in her youth; 'Direz chantant mes vers, en vous émerveillant : / « Ronsard me célébrait du temps que j'étais belle. »' [*You will speak in singing my lines, marvelling to yourself / 'Ronsard praised me in the time when I was beautiful'*].[29] But it's hardly a consolation: the poet by this point will be nothing but a 'phantôme sans os' [*phantom without bones*]—no material trace remains—with the beloved left with nothing but regret for having wasted that beauty while it lasted. In his 'Élégie II, A Philippes Des-Portes, Chartrain', Ronsard repudiates the poet's aspiration to fame in posterity with more overt irony: 'Quant à moy, j'aime mieux trente ans de renommee / Jouyssant du Soleil, que mille ans de renom' [*As for me, I prefer thirty years of fame / Enjoying the sun, to a thousand years of renown*].[30] To these we can add a further complication: when Yeats writes 'gather me / Into the artifice of eternity', it is worth noting the double genitive: 'artifice of eternity' might denote an artifice that lasts into eternity, but might equally suggest that eternity is a product of artifice. Maybe the artwork produces the eternity it will subsequently inhabit; maybe such eternity is the fiction the artwork tells: not merely *artificed* but *artificial*.

In this context, the rhetorical confidence which ends Shakespeare's Sonnet 18, which would seemingly answer that anxieties of its companion piece, is especially impressive. In contrast to the yellowing pages of Sonnet 17, the rhetoric of Sonnet 18 seems to anticipate a less precarious, more public future, perhaps secured by print rather than the vagaries of manuscript circulation (the folio was first published in 1609, and so seventeen years after its estimated date of

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[28] William Shakespeare, *The Riverside Shakespeare.* General and Textual Editor G. Blakemore Evans, with J. J. M. Tobin (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 1847.
[29] Ronsard, *Oeuvres complètes* ed. Gustave Cohen (Paris: Gallimard, 1950), 260.
[30] ibid., 649.

composition). In the couplet 'So long as men may breathe and eyes may see, / So long lives this, and this gives life to thee', lyric eternity is figured as the poem's endless iterability, anticipating by 350 years Paul Valéry's dictum that, unlike pragmatic speech acts, 'The poem … does not die for having lived: it is expressly designed to be born again from its ashes and to become endlessly what it has just been.'[31] The tomb is thus refigured as phoenix.

Just as does the 'moment' of lyric, so the lyric-monument inscribes its future performances into its own temporal complex. Both tropes grasp lyrics primarily as verbal objects, with their objecthood figured in a certain kind of materiality—voice in the former, inscription in the latter—yet both also depend on outstripping such objecthood. This is particularly the case for those poems which seek to intervene in the world rather than merely speak to it. Shelley's 'Mask of Anarchy', for instance, foretells, but thereby also defers, perhaps indefinitely, the future repetitions of its central refrain:

> And these words *shall then become*
>
> Like Oppression's thundered doom
>
> Ringing through each heart and brain.
>
> Heard *again—again—again—*[32]

The poem's rhetorical climax comes not as apotheosis but as dispersal; its political efficacy is to be grasped neither as moment, nor as a monument, but as a refrain. Where Shakespeare's rhetoric turns on future *reading*, Shelley's does on future *(re-)sounding*.

In this regard, Shelley's poetic futurity is more of the order of 'sensual music' than 'monument'; and ultimately the poetic eternity sketched out in 'Sailing to Byzantium' also relies

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[31] Paul Valéry, 'Poetry and Abstract Thought', in *Paul Valéry: An Anthology* trans. and ed. by James R. Lauter (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), 136-65 (156).
[32] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Poetical Works* ed. Thomas Hutchinson (Oxford UP, 1988 ed.), 344. My emphasis.

on the sensual music disparaged in its first stanza. Once the poet's body stands 'out of nature,' it is no longer subject to decay; it shall be as unageing as those intellectual 'monuments'. And yet, the final tableau, of a poet singing 'Of what is past, or passing, or to come' (200), thereby collapsing all tenses into one, as though to resolve the tensions between different temporalities opened up in the poem itself, sees its eternity through the mythic archetype of the poet's ritual speech act. And this is also at work in the poem's soundworld. Ironically, this becomes most notable in its remorseless repetition of the word 'gold': 'h**amm**ered **gold** and **gold** en**am**elling' offers an assonant chiasmus, while in the 'golden bough' one hears phonemic echoes from both the poet's 'bodily form' and the 'drowsy Emperor', as well as Frazer's study of myth. Visual image becomes sonic leitmotiv. The poem's staged transcendence of the poet's body draws us back to the voiced bodies of the poet's words; attending to this 'sensual music' demands ever greater attunement to the plasticity of rhythmed speech. We start to see that what is being worked out in the poem's melodics is a corollary of its guiding paradox: that the desire to transcend the timebound body ultimately leads to the intensification and pluralization of embodied time.

Turns

These different temporal dynamics—of the animation of the 'now' of enunciation, of the monument that outlives the enunciation, and of the efficacy of a speech act as an event that outstrips the poem-object—reach perhaps their most programmatic form in elegy. Here the address would speak the elegized back into presence, but also embody a monument that can stand in their absence, and bestow them an afterlife through the poem's future re-enunciations. Denise Riley's 'A Part Song' concludes self-reflexively: 'the point of this address is to prod / And

shepherd you back within range / Of my strained ears; extort your reply …'[33] From a rhetorical

trope of turning-away,[34] apostrophe becomes a lyric trope of turning-towards.

Like so many lyrics, 'A Part Song' mixes direct address with tropic indirection. Riley

continues: 'extort your reply / By finding any device to hack through / The thickening shades to

you' (14). The 'turn' of -*strophe* thus coincides with another kind of turn, *tropos*. 'Finding any

device': on the one hand, the poem foregrounds its apostrophizing, intensely conscious that each

lyric apostrophe is the echo of modes of address themselves now defunct; the 'now' apostrophe

engenders is thus inevitably pervaded by anachronism, its intension once again distended. But on

the other, the poem physicalizes its poet's search through the repertoire of tropes and gestures

accrued over millennia of elegiac tradition, interiorizing such turnings as verbal density. When

lyric device 'hacks' through, as though navigating a thick forest, its echo of the 'hack writer'

reminds us of the dangers of overemploying a 'hackneyed' lyric register. And if 'shades'

metonymically names not just the forest but death itself, it also lets the image's tangibility

disperse into an effect of light. Alongside these is a further pun as 'thickening' recalls Pound's

dictum *Dichten=condensare*.[35] This is poetry as the thickening of language, but in an undertone we

hear the poet's attempts to apostrophize the dead back into existence dismissed as a wholly

'thick' obduracy.

The numerous 'turns' of a lyric provide a further means of thinking lyrics as temporal

complex. Insofar as 'turn' can variously be derived from *tropos* (trope), from *strophe* (which

surfaces both as apo-*strophe* and as the *strophe* of the stanza), from *versus* (as verse), and *volta* (that

structuring shift in a sonnet, but more broadly of a conceit's argument), it offers a fitting term

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[33] Denise Riley, 'A Part Song', in *Say Something Back* (London: Picador, 2016), 14.
[34] In classical rhetoric, apostrophe described a strategy of persuasion in which the orator 'turns away' from addressing the judge to address another individual, who may be present in the audience, but equally could be absent altogether, and which might even be an inanimate object or personified concept. In modern lyric it is routinely deployed to the opposite end. See Quintilian *Institutio Oratoria* trans. H.E. Butler (Cambridge, Mass.: Loeb Classical Library, 1920), 41. See also Culler and J. Mark Smith 'Apostrophe, or the Lyric Art of Turning Away.' *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 49:4 (2007), 411-37.
[35] Ezra Pound, *ABC of Reading* (New York: New Directions, 2010), 97.

through which to think of the interaction and counterpoint of these different temporal modes. Sometimes these will combine, for instance where the turn of a *volta* inverts the trope, operates by shift to apostrophic address, or effects a change of tempo. Sometimes they work against one another, where the elaboration of the trope overspills the division of stanzas, or where the prosodic thickening interrupts the unfolding of a conceit.

The workings of these different kinds of turn can allow lyrics to register not just temporal experience, but also aporias of time at the very limits of experience. Think, for instance, of how two identical prosodic figures from Donne's 'A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning' work around questions of the entanglement of body and mind: 'cannot admit / Absence' and 'endure not yet / A breach'.[36] In the former, where the 'Dull sublunary lovers love / (Whose soule is sense) cannot admit / Absence', the caesura after 'Absence' emphasises the rhyme of 'sense' and '-sence', asks us to reconstruct 'ab-sence' in a false etymology as the awayness of 'sense'. One can read the surrounding pauses of enjambment and caesura as a further embodiment of such ab-sense; this is after all a distance that is temporal as well as spatial, the poem projecting forward both to imminent absence and to future presence. Two stanzas later, and after the mini-voltas of 'But' and 'therefore', when Donne writes that he and his beloved's far more 'refined' love will 'endure not yet / A breach, but an expansion', we find a similar thinking of the poem's temporal complex just as it reflects on time. Like 'Absence', 'breach' is followed by a line-break, as mimetic gap for the breach itself; but in the clause that follows, the diaresis 'ex-pan-si-on' would register physical distance in a different kind of 'breach' or 'Absence': the prosodic disjunction between lexical and metrical stress. One could go further to suggest that the counting of the syllable here is analogous to the 'gold to ayery thinnesse beate' of the following line, highlighting the pun on 'beat' as musical-metrical stress as well as goldsmith's hammering; this would underscore the

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[36] John Donne, *Poetical Works* ed. Herbert Grierson (Oxford University Press, 1966 ed.), 45.

rejoinder a soul that is purely 'sense'.[37] As the diaresis points towards the shift from the element into the ethereal, it would corroborate Michel Deguy's suggestion that diaresis is how prosody brings the infinite into rhythmed time.[38] Here the isochronic measuring of time leads not to uniformity but to aporia.

Riley's stanza as a whole demonstrates the expressive force of these different kinds of 'turn' operating in concert:

> She do the bereaved in different voices
>
> For the point of this address is to prod
>
> And shepherd you back within range
>
> Of my strained ears; extort your reply
>
> By finding any device to hack through
>
> The thickening shades to you, you now
>
> Strangely unresponsive son, who were
>
> Such reliably kind and easy company,
>
> Won't you be summoned up once more
>
> By my prancing and writhing in a dozen
>
> Mawkish modes of reedy piping to you
>
> - Still no? Then let me rest, my dear.

With the ironic 'she do the bereaved in different voices', the poem turns away from the present of enunciation, first through its self-deprecation, and second through its double citation: of Eliot,

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[37] It also contains a nod to the arch pick-up line of Donne's Elegy 'On His Mistris Going to Bed', which also plays on the erotics of embodiment and sublimation: 'As souls unbodied, bodies unclothed must be, / To tase full joys' (108).

[38] Michel Deguy, 'L'infini et sa diction ; ou de la diérèse (Étude baudelairienne)' in *Poétique* 40 (1979), 432-440.

and through Eliot, of Charles Dickens.[39] As with archaism, allusion both embeds the lyric within a broader temporal framework (the *longue durée* of an unfolding literary tradition) and also flags up its anachronism, just as it purportedly seeks to bring its addressee into the now of enunciation. Similarly, in the poet's 'reedy piping' we might here not just the poet's self-mockery of their elegy as an insipid attempt to conjuring the dead back to life, but also an impromptu musical performance from a Theocritan idyll, in which a Thrysis or Daphnis fashions a reed into a pipe to accompany his song. Thus the blurring of the poem's registers, wavering between the elevated and the prosaic, becomes yet one further element of the lines' temporal complex.

And, in Riley's lyric, as we have seen throughout, the poem's temporal complex is generated in particular by the temporal vectors of prosody and syntax, dynamized by the segmentation of speech. The lines are characterized by a peculiar hypotactic extensibility, which accommodates shifts both in its grammatical subject and the subject positions of speaker, addressee, reader; this is then set against the turning-forward/turning-back interplay of the verse itself. Riley's line breaks punctuate grammatically as well as rhythmically; images are suspended over the line, such as where the lexis of 'prod' is complicated by 'shepherd', with its own allusions back to pastoral elegy, or where 'hack through / The thickening shades' shifts 'device' from grammatical object (to be hacked through) to subject (to do the hacking); the line breaks also serve as nodes of prosodic condensation ('strained ears'; 'hack through'; 'you, you now / Strange-'). The push-and-pull of an onward rhythmic-syntactic unfolding is held up by 'thickenings' that are variously metonymic, paranomasic, intertextual, prosodic, syntactic, deictic, and perhaps most of all, hermeneutic. What started out as an attempt at direct address has opened on to heterogenous temporalities, entwined in and syncopating against one another. This is the great achievement of Riley's poem.

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[39] 'He do the police in different voices' was the first title for *The Waste Land*, and a citation from *Our Mutual Friend*, where it describes the character Sloppy's prowess at reading aloud from the newspaper.

Parsing Time

In the above, I have identified three ways in which lyric poems deploy and thematize time: by distending and intensifying the moment of enunciation; by aspiring to constitute a 'monument'; and through the different 'turns' in which tropes and phrases unfold. In each case, lyrics operate as temporal complexes, parsing time in a specific lyric involves tracking multiple and heterogeneous modes of temporality, and most of all, tracking their interplay.

To finish, let us sketch out a tentative taxonomy of the temporalities at issue. There are those (a) immanent in the verbal medium itself, be they grammatical-syntactic or phonological-prosodic; there are those (b) which pertain to the pragmatics of address and deixis, the construction of utterance and interlocution. Such temporalities are dynamized and foregrounded, in particular through the segmentation of language.[40] With rhyme, measure, come expressive possibilities for continuity and rupture, both in the structuring of syntactic or prosodic phrases, and in the syncopations and overflows that emerge when intonation and isochrony are in counterpoint. In addition, there is (c) the interplay of narrative and nonnarrative elements; (d) the poem's rhetorics, especially as it works with, and abstracts away from, the dynamics of enunciation, such as when allusions, archaisms, neologisms point to timescales outside any moment of enunciation; with this comes (e) the dynamic construction of its images and the hermeneutic challenges . To which we might add (f) the ways in which time becomes not just lyric's medium but its object: the oft-evinced vocation to name the world into being, its attempts to square the ephemeral with the eternal; and also those kinds of temporality issuing from the historicity of lyric, both (g) as the genre has crystallized over history—collective repertoires and gestures, intertexts, thematic aspirations and vocations—and (h) in the historical embeddedness of any single lyric, its ideological dispositions, its mythopoetics, and the various ways in which

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[40] While this is primarily the case in verse, it is also operative in prose poems, as Jeremy Noel-Tod makes clear in his magisterial introduction to his *Penguin Book of the Prose Poem* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2018). The phrase 'the dynamization of verse materials' comes from Yuri Tynyanov, *The Problem of Verse Language* trans. and ed. Michael Sosa & Brent Harvey (Ann Arbor: Ardis Publishing, 1981).

poems seek to exceed their historical moment. And finally, these are actualized in an 'event' of reading as (i) the readerly-aural negotiations of this temporal complex in scansion or performance, and (j) the unspooling of a poem's various hermeneutic strands, tracking allusions, unpacking conceits. On the one hand, these poems inscribe their reception into their texture, as they prepare, predict, prefigure their subsequent reiterations; on the other, these different temporalities exist only when released into a future the poems could not preempt. When we parse time in the lyric, we are ourselves part of the temporality to be parsed.

The focus in the recent controversies around lyric as a genre risks overlooking the broader question of how to read lyrics' multidimensional texture. Older, more formalist-oriented work ('the old lyric studies'), has itself been more successful in treating individual elements in isolation than in their interaction: criticism that focused on tropology or image would habitually give little attention to prosody, that focused on prosody would give little attention to deictics, deictics little attention to intertext, intertext to syntax, etc. But in the poems themselves these elements never operate in isolation; lyrics are expressive complexes, whose power comes from their holding so many different levels in abeyance, by remaining resolutely multidimensional. The temporality of lyrics offers a particularly promising means of grasping them in their multidimensionality, and not simply because so many of the features salient to lyric can be thematized in terms of a 'distinctive lyric temporality'.[41] It is in time that images unfold, prosodic echoes resound, deictic utterances interrupt or intensify narrative, in time that lyrics intervene in a historical moment, iterate across history, are revised and revisioned in their afterhistories. Grasping the different temporal vectors at work in a given lyric, sequence, or repertoire, would thus allow us to place in counterpoint different dimensions to its medium, thematic concerns, historical embeddedness, readerly iteration, to attune ourselves as readers to the multidimensional complex that any single lyric is. Parsing these temporalities, we may enlarge our critical sensorium.

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[41] Culler, 'Why Lyric?', 205.