'Blow your gnosis': Imperatives in Contemporary Lyric[1]

RYAN DOBRAN

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What defines lyric? Is it brevity and compression? Is it an inscrutably authorial but nevertheless indeterminate 'I' shifting behind the textual screen? Is it abundant phonological foregrounding that provides a sensuous touch? Does the lyric require a lyre, kithera, lute or musical accompaniment? Must it be sung or at least spoken aloud? Situating how and what lyric is amongst the hypertrophy of poetic forms, communities, writers and readers has produced a number of compelling studies in recent years. Rene Wellek's exasperated remark that the only 'way out' of the critical apory that 'lyric' directs us toward is to 'abandon attempts to define the general nature of the lyric or the lyrical' has been the impetus for renewed theoretical vigor and invention.[2] In the last ten years, there have been novel approaches to lyric theory, including Virginia Jackson's *Dickinson's Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading* (2005) and Mutlu Konak Blasing's *Lyric Poetry: Pain and Pleasure of Words* (2007) as well as special issues in leading journals, various edited collections,

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[2] René Wellek, 'Genre Theory, the Lyric, and *Erlebnis*' in *Festschrift für Richard Alewyn*, ed. by Herbert Singer and Benno von Wiese (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 1967), pp. 392-412; repr. in *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), pp. 40-51 (p. 51).

and individual articles of significant import.[3] But with the recent publication of Jackson and Yopie Prins' *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*, lyric appears (or is intended to look) less like a viable term for saying what a lyric poem is or is not, and more like evidence of the rise of a hegemonic way of thinking about poems and how we should read them. The questions I ask about lyric above would be misplaced (at best) and irrelevant (at worst) to the critic for whom 'lyric is a fiction in which they [i.e. twentieth-century critics] find ways to believe'.[4]

While the conceptual flexibility and manoeuvrability of lyric, as well as its relationship to non-propositional and non-semantic aspects of language suggest that the term refuses stabilization for good reason,[5] there is a way to conceive of lyric as an object of critical practice, one that neither renews 'lyric' as the godhead of a theory of genres, nor imputes lyric to the abstract category of 'reading'. Indeed, there are good reasons to preserve the lyric as a category for describing a certain type of poem, or as the name for a set of features that allows us to compare poems in rigorous and consistent ways. It is also far from a 'dead' term. Lyric provides a theoretical target for American poets and critics working in the aftermath of Language Writing and within the endgame of conceptual poetics; and it provides a phenomenological fulcrum for prominent British poet-critics such as John Wilkinson and Denise Riley.[6] Furthermore, despite justifiable concern over

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[3] For succinct surveys of lyric studies, see Marion Thain, 'Introduction' in *Lyric Poem: Formations and Transformations*, ed. by Marion Thain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 1-9; Walt Hunter, 'Lyric and its Discontents', *Minnesota Review*, 79 (2012), 78-90; as well as Jackson and Prins' own general and chapter introductions to *Lyric Theory Reader*.

[4] *Lyric Theory Reader*, p. 7; further quotations of the editorial material from the anthology will be cited parenthetically.

[5] Further reasons may be adduced: the expansive historical range of poetry now readily available in print invites the prospect of a transhistorical definition of lyric; the perceived dominance of non-metrical or para-metrical versification in Anglo-American poetic communities makes conceptualizing *poetry* itself difficult, much less a subordinate mode thereof; and the proliferation of opinions, commentary, and scholarship about lyric makes the prospect of settlement rather unsettling.

[6] See section 8 in *Lyric Theory Reader* (pp. 451-503) for an overview of 'anti-lyricism', as well as Jennifer Ashton, 'Labor and the Lyric: The Politics of Self-Expression in Contemporary American Poetry', *American Literary History*, 25.1 (2013), 217-230. See John Wilkinson, *The Lyric Touch: Essays on the Poetry of Excess* (Cambridge: Salt, 2007) and Denise Riley, *The Words as Selves: Identification, Solidarity, Irony* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

its vagueness and predominant use in modern criticism, it nevertheless provides us with a model that is pedagogically useful as well as crucial to cross-cultural and historical poetics.[7] This has been the project of critics such as Jonathan Culler and William Waters, who adopt a conventionalist or pragmatic approach to the concept, one that persuasively argues for the importance of *address* as a locus for how and what lyric is.[8]

While we did not originally think of address as the criterion for organizing this special issue of *Thinking Verse* on lyric, address nevertheless provides a useful optic for the essays herein. John Wilkinson builds on his lifelong interest in lyric as both practitioner and critic in 'Repeatable Evanescence' to explore how, in making the event of lyric repeatable, the poet works 'to capture what capture will destroy'. Wilkinson seeks to open lyric to the contingency of address not as a quality to be wrested away but as a social intimacy that binds and unbinds our response. He pursues a wide range of textual specimens from Patti Labelle's 'Lady Marmalade' to lyrics by Robert Herrick, Charles Baudelaire and John Berryman, among others.

In 'Lyric Explanation: Tennyson's Princesses', Ewan Jones looks at the compositional history of the song interludes in Tennyson's poem to suggest that their inclusion does not simply clarify the poem (Tennyson's own wish) but rather complicates it. Jones reveals the various semantic, rhythmical, metrical and structural disjunctions that result from the collision of Tennyson's blank verse narrative and the lyric intensity of the songs interpolated therein. Insofar as these songs address the narrative they were intended to explain, they also provide the

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[7] Such arguments are powerfully made in Jonathan Culler, 'Why Lyric?', *PMLA*, 123.1 (2008), 201-206; Earl Miner, 'Why Lyric?' in *The Renewal of Song: Renovation of Song in Lyric Conception and Practice*, ed. by Earl Miner and Amiya Dev (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2000), pp. 1-21; repr. in *Lyric Theory Reader*, pp. 577-589; and John Henriksen, 'Poem as Song: The Role of the Lyric Audience', *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 21 (2001), 77-100.

[8] See Culler, 'Apostrophe' in *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, literature, deconstruction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1981; repr. 2001), pp. 149-171, and his forthcoming *Theory of Lyric* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2015); Paul Alpers, 'Apostrophe and the Rhetoric of Renaissance Lyric', *Representations*, 122.1 (2013), 1-22; Rachel Cole, 'Rethinking the Value of Lyric Closure: Giorgio Agamben, Wallace Stevens, and the Ethics of Satisfaction', *PMLA*, 126.2 (2011), 383-397; William Waters, *Poetry's Touch: On Lyric Address* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003) and his 'Rilke's Imperatives', *Poetics Today*, 25.4 (2004), 711-730.

points of rest upon which the inertia of the blank verse variously dissipates, enforces and confuses the temporalities of the poem as a whole.

While much recent criticism of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* has concentrated on the sexual politics of its author, John Hicks' fine-grained reading of this text argues that construing Whitman's verse as lyric provides for a powerful way of reading the author's commitment to democratic comradeship. Hicks shows how the author's various uses of futural and indeterminate forms of address seek to provide an intersection of verse practice that would conjoin song and argument, as well as poet and reader, within the space of the lyric.

As an investigation of 'how to do things with the word lyric', Anne Stillman's 'Beckett's Lyrical Ballads' coordinates works by Beckett, Wordsworth and Shakespeare to suggest how lyric operates within forms thought to exist outside its generic limits. For Stillman, lyrical language is both the incarnation of thought and the counter-spirit to thought's representation. The 'lyric voice', as the arbiter of dialogic address, is the 'apparitional creature' that bears witness while existing in negative space, a space that can be directed towards putatively extra-lyrical ends, such as narration and dramaturgical characterisation.

Avery Slater's 'Prepostrophe: Rethinking Modes of Lyric Address in Wisława Szymborska's Poetry of the Non-Human' explores the inversion of apostrophe in poems that address humankind from the point of view of the non-human. Drawing on theoretical work by Jacques Derrida, Claude Levi-Strauss and Barbara Johnson, Slater argues that lyric address configures relationality and non-relationality in ways that do not begin with a negative determination of the non-linguistic 'other', but rather seek to open up the possibilities of thinking the non-human.

Jonathan Culler builds on his industrious and rigorous defence of lyric as a category worth preserving in 'The Language of Lyric'. In a sequence of close readings of canonical lyric poems, Culler argues for the preservation of the category because of its conventionality and its pedagogical efficacy. He builds on his previous work on the figure of apostrophe, but also explores in detailed fashion the English non-progressive simple tense as a condition of the ritual

temporality of the lyric present. The ductility and ambiguity of this tense makes lyric language tangible as an event.

The essays of this special issue contribute to what seems like an urgent need for a thorough and capacious consideration of lyric address. There are three overlapping domains of address that may be sketched: traces of subjectivity within the text related to an intratextual 'I' and/or authorial agency; the ritualistic temporality of enunciation; and the illocutionary context, and lack thereof. I want to begin my own discussion of the imperative in several contemporary lyric poems published recently in the UK by reviewing the limits of these domains. As I hope to show, the imperative clause reveals how poems variously classified as innovative, experimental or late modernist can sensibly and productively be considered lyrics, even as they strain against the conventions of this mode.

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The sight of the first-person pronoun often functions as an immediate cue for the predominance of a lyric subject, an 'I' that foregrounds 'the inauguration of the subject in language as it inaugurates meaningful language at the crux of intention'.[9] But as Mutlu Konak Blasing argues further, this need not commit us to an imaginary conversation between author and reader because the 'referent of the lyric poem is not a preexisting individual entity we can see or imagine but an "I" that must be heard *as choosing words*, intending sounds to make sense and troping the gap between sensation and cognition'.[10] Poetic address need not only be

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[9] Mutlu Konak Blasing, *Lyric Poetry: The Pain and the Pleasure of Words* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007), p. 30. This contrasts with the theory of the lyric subject presented by Paul Allen Miller, for whom the lyric is 'a particular mode of being a subject, in which the self exists not as part of a continuum with the community and its ideological commitments, but is folded back against itself, and only from this space of interiority does it related to "the world" at large'. See *Lyric Texts & Lyric Consciousness: The birth of a genre from archaic Greece to Augustan Rome* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 4. The implication of Blasing's book is that the lyric reveals what being a subject *is* from the ineluctable perspective of our inculcation into the mother tongue, rather than as an optional category of stylized self-presentation.

[10] Blasing, *Lyric Poetry*, p. 31.

concerned with an oratorical configuration, of voice as an analogy for an imaginary conversation or a fictive persona, thus committing us to explaining language as symbolic action within a narrative. Rather, as a reader, entangling myself within the materiality of language is also a performance of myself as an event of sensuous recognition. The sparks between cognition and sensation that punctuate our aesthetic experience of lyric poetry allow us to see how the categories of poetic address are fluid, reciprocating, and social, rather than solid, determined and insular. Lyric address is not so much a completed speech act so much as a laboratory wherein linguistic and paralinguistic markers provide boundary conditions for play; the tense positions of subject and object are elastic enough for the reader to move between them.

As a prominent feature of romantic and post-romantic lyric, the figure of apostrophe has been singled out as a paradigmatic instance of the ritualistic temporality of address. In *The Pursuit of Signs*, Jonathan Culler modifies Quintilian's canonical account to distinguish the figure as that which tropes 'not on the meaning of a word but on the circuit or situation of communication itself'.[11] For Quintilian, apostrophe is an intensification of one's cause by diversion—whether to entreat audience members for support in front of the judge or to invoke an epithet—while for Culler, apostrophe is the means by which the poet animates objects of poetic address.[12] He gives us four levels of reading apostrophe: as that which wills 'a state of affairs' (p. 154), constitutes 'encounters with the world as relations between subjects' (p. 156), establishes an object relation that reciprocally constitutes the poetic voice (p. 157), and, finally, 'as an act of radical interiorization and solipsism' (p. 162). The further we move along this spectrum of reading apostrophe, the closer we get to a conception of address that is homologous with the constitution of the subject.

Culler goes on to show the extent to which apostrophe offers a distinct temporal experience. The lyric apostrophe is the auto-constitution of the subject

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[11] Culler, 'Apostrophe', p. 149. Further quotations are cited parenthetically.

[12] For a more detailed exposition of Quintilian's apostrophe and its implications for lyric, see J. Mark Smith, 'Apostrophe, or the Lyric Art of Turning Away', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 49.4 (2007), 411–437.

by means of the vocative event. Its indirection is the time of poetic discourse, the *now* that contravenes the sequentiality of narrative and allows the speech-utterance to predominate. In a more recent essay on the subject, which continues this line of thinking, lyric is a time of enunciation when and where speech becomes event: 'Apostrophes foreground the act of address, lift it out of ordinary empirical contexts, and thus at some level identify the poetic act as ritualistic, hortatory, a special sort of linguistic event'.[13] Just as for Blasing, lyric materiality allows for a perception of the linguistic embeddedness of subject formation, so does the textual suspension of apostrophe conjoin the time of ritual to vulnerable agency.

Recent work by William Waters on poetic address has broadened much of what Culler's work initiates, particularly as it concerns the context of illocution, both as feature and event of discourse. But one of the chief difficulties for any approach to lyric centered on an oratorical figure of address is context, that complex of cues, social customs, and situational awareness that grounds our conversations and correspondence. While context remains the key to ascribing relevance for pragmatics, the study of the use of language, context is the blind spot in literature. Contextual markers supply the addresser and addressee with parameters of interlocution, but reading is not communication. For Waters, the lack of context in lyric poems is what makes identifying the scant evidence of address so important, and what also accounts 'for a pattern of critical anxiety about *whom* poems are

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[13] Jonathan Culler, 'Lyric, History, and Genre', *New Literary History*, 40.4 (2009), 879-899, repr. in *Lyric Theory Reader*, pp. 63-77 (p. 69). Although Culler's definition of apostrophe has been criticized from the perspective of traditional rhetoric, it has also been defended by Paul Alpers for its usefulness and aptness in 'Apostrophe and the Rhetoric of Renaissance Lyric'. Culler's powerful reading of the figure of apostrophe is at least partially founded upon the scenario of lyric given by Northrop Frye: 'The lyric poet normally pretends to be talking to himself or to someone else: a spirit of nature, a Muse, a personal friend, a lover, a god, a personified abstraction, or a natural object. [...] The poet, so to speak, turns his back on his listeners' (qtd. 'Apostrophe', p. 152). This is informed by J. S. Mill's distinction between eloquence as heard and poetry as overheard, and we can see how the similarity between the indirect address of apostrophe and overhearing binds apostrophe to the lyric. This underscores a divorce commonly made in the genealogy of lyric theory between the solitary reflections of the lyric speaker and social discourse, between casting the lyric as address that auto-constitutes the subject and exophoric address, the talk that hits its target, so to speak.

addressing'.[14] Despite his caution about using the frame of pragmatics for poetics, he argues that it 'also supplies the best means for describing and understanding what sense we make of a poem's very deficiencies of context'.[15] Literary criticism is then tasked with fulfilling a putatively 'lost', original context that informed the lyric's composition. The shadow of an original speech act that created the poem, or at least informed its making supplies the blueprint for the modern definition of lyric, at once providing a rich interpretive fulcrum and perhaps also a hindrance that de-emphasizes writing to prioritize the event of oral and auditory discourse.

There are tensions at the limits of these domains of lyric address, but they are also the points at which reading becomes interesting: when the management of propositional certainty encounters upheavals, when the physiological animation of the text at hand falters, when it seems futile to posit an authorial agency in a text whose militant revocation of agency distorts our conventions for knowing how to be agents. These tensions involve inferring features that do not exist apart from our reading of the text. As a concept, address is tangible within our silent and spoken performances of lyric poems when we encounter apostrophe, first and second-person pronouns as well as the imperative (as I hope to show); and this tangibility is the capacity of address to be at once a constituent feature of the text and part of our embeddedness as readers.

One recent extreme version of approaching this tension reduces everything said about lyric to the act of reading itself. Is the lyric (as well as lyric address) a concept extant only within the reading of the text? Would it not be better to think of lyric as an act of reading relative to what I want from 'lyric' at that time, the time of reading? The theory of 'lyric reading', which governs the layout of *The Lyric Theory Reader* noted above, makes such an argument. I would like to make some critical remarks about why I find this approach to be inadequate.

Insofar as we attempt to define lyric as an object of our thinking, Jackson and Prins argue, we perform a 'lyric reading, where *lyric* is part of the interpretive process to be called into question' (p. 6). This immanent criticism makes separating the method from the object not merely theoretically impossible, but rather

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[14] Waters, *Poetry's Touch*, p. 6.

[15] Waters, *Poetry's Touch*, p. 12.

conceives of the object as an instrument of the method. Immanent to the use of 'lyric' is the process of lyricization in twentieth-century critical thought that configures an abstract persona often at odds with the material culture in which and out of which the text was produced, printed and read. Lyricization describes a sort of imperial movement whereby 'lyric' as both object and practice becomes synonymous with poetry itself, to the detriment of recognizing various diverse modes, genres and forms. The theory of 'lyric reading' is historicist because it demands context in the form of material culture, and constructivist because it prohibits a relation of empirical realism between the use of 'lyric' and the text object. Analogous to Jackson and Prins' theory of lyric reading is Stanley Fish's simile between reading a poem and following a recipe.[16]

At times, the critique of lyric amounts to an awareness of its conventionality. That is to say, it amounts to an awareness of what we do when we use 'lyric'. At the end of their section introduction to 'Genre Theory', the editors write:

> Thus, the critical debate about the lyric as a genre comes down to a basic question: how do we know a lyric when we see one? Whether the lyric as we know it was invented in the eighteenth century or is as old as human expression, whether the lyric is 'utterance that is overheard' or is any representation of our essential, lived experience, whether the lyric is historically contingent and ephemeral or is dependent on norms and structures continuous across periods and cultures, you need to have some idea of what you think a lyric poem is in order to know that you are reading (or hearing, or overhearing, or experiencing) one. (p. 14)

Such thinking about the epistemological status of 'lyric' is not confined to genre theory, of course, for the circumscription of a category necessarily involves treading over questions of reference and terminological accuracy. This comment

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[16] Stanley Fish, 'How to Recognize a Poem When You See One', in *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. 322-37; repr. in *Lyric Theory Reader*, pp. 77-85 (p. 80). Their inclusion of this excerpt by Fish, which does not discuss lyric, shows the extent to which the editors equivocate lyric and poem, thus effectively foregrounding the argument of lyricization within the selection and layout of the anthology. Jackson gives a more nuanced account of 'lyric reading' in *Dickinson's Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 68-117.

segues the editorial commentary from Jonathan Culler's contribution ('Lyric, History, Genre') to Stanley Fish's (from *Is There a Text in This Class?*), and reduces Culler's theory of genre as 'a set of norms or structural possibilities that underlie and enable the production and reception of literature' to a model focused solely on identificatory reception.[17] If the inclusion of Fish seems odd (and tendentious), it is not without good reason. It functions as a critical gesture consistent with the aims of the anthology as a whole: that recognizing a lyric (or poem) as such depends not on the various characteristics of the text, but rather on the expectations of 'lyric' (or poetic) that the reader brings to the text. Or in Fish's words quoted by the editors: 'acts of recognition, rather than being triggered by formal characteristics, are their source' (qtd. p. 15). Thus, recognition is the source of formal qualities, just as in lyric reading, the reading is the source of the lyric. In a similar vein, Jackson and Prins conclude that the problem of lyric 'might be reduced to kinds of attention to the problem'. Presumably, this also means that 'lyric' is always loosely relative to the interpretive community in which those questions of interpretation arise: 'As those ways of perceiving [lyric] begin to change, not only our ways of reading but our ways of recognizing a lyric when we see one will change as well' (p. 15). That seems likely, if also truistic, yet it's hard to see the value in a theory of lyric that reduces 'lyric' to fleeting moments of hypothetical consensus.

Despite its name, the phrase 'lyric reading' is not sufficiently specific to lyric.[18] The concept transfers all of the significance of 'lyric' onto 'reading', a term so broad, ill-defined and ready-to-hand that it appears irrefutable; no literate person could say 'no' when asked if they read. As such, lyric becomes vacuous, and more or less exchangeable with any other modifier. One might imagine 'novel reading', 'drama reading', 'verse reading', 'short story reading', and 'epic reading', each of which would deploy similar criticisms of the exemplary status of its respective

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[17] Culler, 'Lyric, History, and Genre'; repr. in *Lyric Theory Reader*, p. 66.

[18] Of course, the theory of lyric reading is in large part based on Jackson's incisive reconstruction of Emily Dickinson's reception as a writer of 'lyric'. A counter-argument to my statement might refer me to Jackson's argument in *Dickinson's Misery*. However, while Jackson makes a compelling case as to how Dickinson's 'lyrics' are an invention of bibliographical interpretation, that case is also unique. Once abstracted from the terrain of Jackson's rigorous focus, the power of the instance is diluted under the sway of a general concept.

category of writing in order to reveal it as a construction. In this sense, lyric reading is a meta-discursive instrument that atomizes critical practice into preferences.

Just as it mirrors Fish's theory of the poem as a recipe, it also seems to follow the schematic of ideology critique. It appears to insist that lyric is an ideology that must be controlled, as though lyric studies were a policy science. By insisting that the qualities of its text object shape themselves to the abstract but ever-present discursive moment, 'lyric reading' rigidly discounts insight into the text as the product of an ideology that has been forever critiqued in advance. As shorthand for keeping the reader aware of lyric as a convention rather than a specific object, lyric reading becomes a term that, like 'lyric essay' or 'lyric novel', dissipates, rather than strengthens, the definition of 'lyric'. Indeed, this is precisely its aim. It seeks to flatten lyric out, to make it like anything else. As Rei Terada remarks approvingly of similar criticisms: 'If "lyric" is a concept that will help us think, it's because it helps us think about something besides lyric'.[19]

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Yet there is value in refusing to instrumentalize lyric, or make it epiphenomenal to "something besides" itself, which is not (nor ever) to say that categories operate free of non-textual constraints. I look closely at the imperative form in three recent lyric poems, all published within the last five years: *The Glass Bell* (2009) by Ian Patterson, 'Song' (2012) by Justin Katko, and 'Body of Fact' (2014) by Meg Foulkes. I have deliberately chosen texts that make forceful use of the imperative, as well as those that do not readily submit to conventional definitions of 'voice' or 'lyric subject'. This is an exploratory step in a rich topic that would discover in the use of the imperative one thread of a politically robust UK lyric poetry written from the 1970s to the present. Texts such as J.H. Prynne's *Brass* (1971), Tom Raworth's *Writing* (1982), John Wilkinson's *The Speaking Twin*s (1992), Sean Bonney's *Blade Pitch Control Unit* (2005) and Keston Sutherland's *Odes to TL61P*

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[19] Rei Terada, 'After the Critique of Lyric', *PMLA*, 123.1 (2008), 196-200 (p. 196).

(2013) are well equipped with imperatives both violent and fulgurant. As I hope to suggest, the imperative marks this genealogy of modernist lyric in a particularly stark manner.[20] In terms of the domains of lyric address explored above: traces of lyric subjectivity are excoriated as evidence of the deception of private language; the temporality of lyric enunciation becomes difficult to distinguish as a rhetorical effect because the poem's texture is at once discontinuous and piecemeal as well as intractable and austere; and the context of illocution seems both anonymous and artefactual.

I view the lyric imperative in three ways. First, the imperative clause provides a structural hinge on which the sense-movement of the line or stanza pivots. In English, where word order is predominant, the imperative nearly always takes first position. The imperative therefore stands out from conventional SVO syntax, and therefore distinguishes itself from first-person vocatives and third-person descriptions. Second, there is an unmistakable illocutionary force exerted at the reader. Whether the text directs us to forget or listen, the immediacy of imperative makes it the strongest form of address; that is to say, a directive. Thirdly, as its etymology suggests (from Latin *imperativus* 'pertaining to a command'), the imperative clause is an act of self-authorization, and therefore adopts a distinct subject position of command.

The form is ineluctably associated with brandishing authority: sit, eat, go, walk, run, shout, repeat. As the *Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* illustrates, the imperative is not a verb-form in English, but rather a clause type that takes 'the plain form' of the verb, a construction also shared by infinitival and subjunctive clauses.[21] The imperative clause is a directive possessing illocutionary force used by the speaker to request, order, command, entreaty, and instruct (p. 61). It is therefore more accurate to speak of the modality of the imperative rather than the

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[20] For discussion of lyric poems of this period, see Ian Patterson, 'No man is an I: Recent developments in the lyric', in *Lyric Poem: Formations and Transformations*, ed. by Marion Thain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 217-236; and John Wilkinson, 'Off the Grid: Lyric and Politics in Andrea Brady's *Embrace*', *Chicago Review*, 53.1 (2007), 95-115; repr. in *The Lyric Touch*, pp. 120-139.

[21] Rodney Huddleston and Geoffrey K. Pullum, *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 83. Further quotations are cited parenthetically.

mood in order to distinguish categories of meaning from those of inflection. Indeed, the imperative is frequently used as a figure of modality, concerned with 'the speaker's attitude towards the factuality or actualisation of the situation expressed by the rest of the clause' (p. 173). The imperative can also be further distinguished amongst other categories of modality by the term *deontic*. Etymologically, 'deontic' describes a 'binding', so that within this modality, there is the 'matter of imposing obligation or prohibition, granting permission' and so forth (p. 178).[22] In the domain of poetics, we are not subject to immediate follow-up queries as to whether the empirical outcomes of the directive were carried out satisfactorily (although we can be criticized by others for the quality of our interpretations), and we do not typically expect to know the full implications of the directive. Just as the apostrophe is as much about the event of enunciation as what is enunciated, so the imperative is as much about *directing* as the content of the action to which it directs us.

Ian Patterson's *The Glass Bell* (2009) is a poetic sequence in three parts—Glossalgia, Glossolalia, Glossoplegia—each of which contains fourteen stanzas, each stanza of which contains seven lines, each line of which (to my ear) has roughly six or seven stresses.[23] There is also a 'P.S.' in the same format on the last page. Immediately apparent in these section titles is the variation on conditions of the tongue: pain, excessive movement and paralysis, in that order. Patterson himself has provided some clues as to the compositional method behind this text on his blog *Curiously Strong*.[24] As he explains, 'The text itself derives from a rough acoustic translation of the top line (only) of the two columns of the Derrida source text, starting at the beginning and leaving off somewhere round page 100'. While earlier drafts of the poem followed the linearization of these cross-columnar lines

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[22] Compare the similar view from cognitive linguistics: Hidemitsu Takahashi argues that the imperative has four primary characteristics: hypotheticality, second person subject, non-past and force exertion (or illocutionary force). See *A Cognitive Linguistic Analysis of the English Imperative: With Special Reference to Japanese Imperatives* (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2012), pp. 3-10.

[23] Ian Patterson, *The Glass Bell* (Brighton and London: Barque Press, 2009), n.p.

[24] See Ian Patterson, 'Treading on Glas', *Curiously Strong*, 7 March 2010, <http://ianpatterson.typepad.com/curiously_strong/2010/03/treading-on-glas.html> [accessed 1 July 2014].

more or less successively, they have been jostled before publication. It is not my intention to trace *Glas* through *The Glass Bell* palimpsestically, but rather to focus on the startling shift into the use of the imperative clause in section II, just at the point where pain ('Glossalgia') is released into prattle ('Glossolalia').

While there are but two imperative clauses in 'Glossalgia' ('Sell to a modern circular or sell a man' in line nineteen), the second section abounds in over twenty, depending upon the interpretation of lexical status for head words such as 'Veil' and 'Mean'. Take a look:

> Now enter the ductile beating of an autotext directed down
> another logic tree to ur-names and obsequies for deadpan
> strictures tightening down there in the bite section lip gloss etc.
> Tell us what you would have had it mean, you father. (ll.1-4)

If the first section was desensitized to the reader's presence, the second section here begins with a forceful invitation. While the text is no less turbulent, the imperative directs our attention to the movement of sense within the line in spatial terms. The invitation is performed insofar as the line of text becomes a metonym for the mental embeddedness of which it speaks. Following the text's directive means entering the stress pattern, allowing the phonemes to dance across the mind, or pronounce them aloud, thus miming the command that drives us. The adverb 'Now' intensifies the urgency of the imperative, which does not specify a temporal constraint because of its lack of inflection, but rather assumes the action will be done at some point in the immediate future. There is a vague suspension of temporality in an imperative divorced of its context because it remains impossible to complete. It is typical for the lyric to be conceptualized as a mode of 'self-expression', and expression (literally, 'pressing out') is nowhere as strongly voiced as it is in imperative clauses. However, without the subject 'I' and the indicative verbal tense to present an action that would reveal something of the behavior and mental state of a lyric speaker, it becomes difficult to observe the boundary conditions for contextual speech. This is consistent with the concealment of the

audience from the poet specified by Frye, though here reversed.[25] The matter of concealment is a theme in *The Glass Bell*: 'See through this signed eloquence. Blow your gnosis'.

The first line is resonant with the discourse of imperation. The temporal urgency of the directive, the etymological pun on 'ductile' as both pliable and easily led, the 'beating' as both assault and the verse line stress count, the 'autotext' hinting at the machine-like discourse both in terms of its rapid passage and the text's compositional method, 'directed down' carrying all of the metaphoric spatiality of the imperator directing those lower on the structure—all of these elements conspire in this first verse line of the second section to locate a speaker not spatially (as in 'You enter' or 'I enter'), but tonally behind the screen of authority. What are we to do with the imperative?

> Exclude Columbine as you must. Place a cryptic key at the end
> of every day, reject common mandates by sea or land seeing
> linnets given by a wife to her lover as allegory related arousal.

One of the problems with thinking and speaking about the imperative is losing a sense of the ductility of poetic discourse with respect to intentionality. A frame of imperation can also assume a foreign vantage, a split within the voice of the lyric subject-speaker that would impute authority to an autonomous piece of language, like a classified memo on its way to the shredder. In the above sequence of directives that opens poem two of 'Glossolalia', the first reference to the culture of USA high school gun violence is unmistakable. As a cultural signifier, its weight forces remembrance even as we 'must' exclude it; its mention within a vacuum prompts our cultural memory at the same time as we are asked to remove it. In this text, first position verbal constructions limit the otherwise ludic concatenations prompted by Patterson's deft phonological patterning as well as his

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[25] Frye argues that 'the concealment of the poet's audience from the poet' is the domain of the lyric, while 'the concealment of the author from his audience' is the domain of drama in *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 249. I see no reason why the directionality of the concealment should dictate a generic division, though the articulation of the distinction is characteristically brilliant.

generative method of rewriting.[26] This only serves to underscore their illocutionary force. They break the strings of accumulative lines much like interjections or punctuation, and therefore involve the reader even as the screen of the text prohibits entry.

Justin Katko's 'Song' is written to incite. It emerges from a homology of enthusiasm and destruction, and as such, uses the imperative as much for its interjectory potential as for giving orders. Its jagged margins lead us into and out of the text without refrain, and the terminal endings at each line are coarsely wrought. This is verse that shouts: the use of capitalization for words and syllables amplifies the print illocution, so that each letter is a mutation of head word convention, as well as that of abbreviation and acronym. Katko uses this with heavy hands elsewhere in his opera, *The Death of Pringle*, but here the noise is compact and dynamic, pulling us in and out of the transmission, honing in on early Michael McClure and Amiri Baraka. Suffice to say, the imperative plays a major role in directing us through the text. 'Song' begins:

> Harmonised protein skein fired past half-life,
> ELAPSE! Go Poison! Corrupt
> With infection—GO!
> Shatter the corruptible! Nothing wanting IN
> Tact but our warrant! Which is
> Nothing!
> But the shining of the positive corner
> In vibrato!
> Sister! SEE
> INELUCTABLY!
> Somatic sweep!—Lightning flush-through conduct!
> Go Sparking! Spied! At its pink reflection fading—
> LOOK OUT!
> *Your wish*: Name it![27]

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[26] Instances of such patterning may be found throughout this poetic sequence. The lines, 'rest on latex. Lest in nature rest' ('Glossalgia', l.10) and 'dove loss cool as clamour cool over here' ('Glossalgia', l.22) are two strong examples of intralineal syllabic transformation that Patterson uses with great effect to imbue phonological linking with the character of causality.

[27] Justin Katko, 'Song' in *Songs for One Occasion* (Cambridge: Critical Documents, 2012), n.p.

The cheerleading is purposively indeterminate because all of the pressure of the illocution is spent on the action itself. This poem is not spoken so much as broadcasted over a megaphone at a rally for the future of the body—of state and of ideas as well as physiology. The first imperative 'ELAPSE' directs itself at the 'protein skein', the rhyme-compound advancing upon its radioactive potential. This lyric seeks advanced expiration, rather than temporal suspension. In one sense, 'Song' is a ritual of destruction, conceived as the laying to waste of biological and social structures that move against a vitalist history of being. 'Go Poison! | Corrupt | With infection—GO!' vivifies the internal violence necessary for the perception of 'shining of the positive corner'. It is unusual (and refreshing) to see unabashed enthusiasm for action without a *caveat emptor* that prescribes an ironic distance between statement and authority.

Katko is not unaware of the playfulness conceded with hyperbolic excitement (e.g. the genie's advertisement, '*Your wish*: Name it!'), and there is a delight inherent to the wish for sacrifice—that by accelerating decay, the time yet to come might come sooner. The imperative is a fulcrum of this desire. The directives are often preceded by mention of this or that subject, be it the 'skein' or 'Sister', but the screen is the reader's. In this way, the imperative everts the lyric subject by turning the semblance of our evidence of it inside out, allowing us to see the anatomy of address in an intimate and social way. Attempts to determine the source of the deontic vocative, such as the critic might do when confronted with a Romantic apostrophe, are here frustrated. The ritual exhortations can often be found grinning.

> Wolves in our VEINS like magnets migrating!
> And doing—what else!?
> POISON! NOTHING! BUT!

'POISON!' here functions ambivalently as a noun denoting the matter as well as the action of the imperative, thus enforcing the confusion between them. The line seems to accumulate tropic intensity as predator's blood is compared to mass shift in polarity. This hymn to contamination makes the iron in our haemoglobin

ferromagnetic, open to electromagnetic fields that govern our construal of political environments and of our intuitive actions within them.

But there is an admission of lack at the core of the poem that complicates the monochrome screen of parody and self-parody. Concomitant with the use of the imperative clause is also the discourse of the hero, the figure of justice, the protector or defender. After the trope of the genie, whose actions dictate temporary absolute power, the text cools slightly:

> *Your wish*: Name it!
> As mine
> Lacks positively
> Any depth of field,
> Loving not
> Least hilarious the
> Gap!
> Which will always
> Towards fire go advancing—

Not unlike apostrophe, the use of the imperative reveals a concern with creating and configuring objects in the social world, but without contextual detail or a coherent intention readily discernible to the reader. The admission of a lack of depth, where the fiery directives are all surface-level taunts does not strike me as modesty, but rather reveals something important in the use of the imperative: that by directing action, there is the assumption of command, as well as the responsibility to those taking such actions to heart. The verse lingers on its lack of love ('Loving not'), which cannot bind to the subsequent lines. Whereas the apostrophe often signals its indirection by means of an emphatic 'O' to signal a transitional suspension that allows an invocation of the object of desire, the imperative clause (with its front-heavy verb) assumes that we are listening already, and that can also cause discomfort. I would suggest that these imperatives are acts of beneficence as well, insofar as they seek to heighten our awareness of symbolic action. The fantasy of power hits its initial trough in the excerpt above, but the very word 'Gap!' stirs and revivifies this golemic animation, a kind of cybernetic soothsayer at war with the mortal standard of time as a category of being.

As in Patterson's *The Glass Bell* and Katko's 'Song', the imperative plays a significant role in Meg Foulkes' 'Body of Fact', the title poem in a five poem A4 pamphlet. There is a way in which the lyric imperative functions as a monologic vehicle, a directive to the audience-as-actor that riles us up, permits us to consider whether the imputed action is at all possible or relevant, but also asks us to consider why a state of affairs should or should not be acted upon. In 'Body of Fact', these issues seem particularly salient if only because the text often forthrightly configures subject positions—of the single mother, the working woman, the figure of the perennially youthful, sexualized object—in a way that Patterson's and Katko's texts do not. But these positions are articulated as part of a code, the sarcastic appraisal of which transmogrifies into exasperated and anxious questions about child-rearing, social welfare and debt. The poem starts off with an imperative:

> Extinguish delicacies built blast quick
> as chromosomes locked lips. Make them dead
> organs, bind hills of beans with anti
> dirt blends that plunk for sanitary where
> there was all frottage. It wasn't so
> filthy perhaps and on battlefields rings seal
> wounds suitable, the curbing crepe tightens
> to the limit of your medic's tautness. No other
> expert could foil haemorrhage, on the day
> you die. So smooth your sex back out
> to washboard, as if tumorous or infantile.[28]

The opening gambit against luxury is a theme to which the poem returns throughout. To anticipate the final page, it seems to issue from a position of requisite welfare ('Benefits scroungers shouldn't have | kids') that refracts through the lens of sexual reproduction encapsulated in the phrase 'chromosomes locked lips'. The poem oscillates between imperatives, statements describing what 'you' has or has not done, and the scarce 'I', which provides some alleviation for the dominant mode of projection. The strongest mode in this poem is the second-

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[28] Meg Foulkes, *Body of Fact* (Cambridge: Shit Valley, 2014), n.p.

person. But we cannot reduce this to the category of a 'you' autonomous from the address. The curse against the vitality of organs is vehement and here it coordinates with themes of agriculture and war. Working through the cumbersome lines, a picture of a restrained body, perhaps wounded or giving birth, begins to connect the tightening of the medical restraints, the battlefields, the haemorrhage and the matter-of-fact prediction, 'on the day | you die'. But not to worry: re-sexualize those organs and get back out there.

'Body of Fact' imperates with great pleasure, at times parodying the self-help industry directed at consoling impoverished motherhood, where cosmetic beauty and fertile organs testify to the dominance of a male gaze. The relation between imperative and sarcasm is not as straightforward as it may seem. The attribution of sarcasm is a compound interpretation involving a kind of performativity whose blatant mimicry of the object of derision cannot be so dry as to deceive. The root of 'sarcasm' (from the Greek *sarkazein*, 'to tear the flesh') speaks to the viciousness of the verbal flaying, and the ventriloquy of the complicitous, consoling life coach is an apt target, particularly because the advice concerns the body:

> For the first time you're the boss. Appreciate perky
> boobs while you still got them. […]
>
> Serious relationships hamper figuring yourself
> out, and not knowing who you are can do damage
> to future relationships. Fall in love with yourself
> then have you ever had that moment
> when you made a heartfelt wish
> and the next thing you know, the wish
> manifested itself? […]
>
>   Take the time
> to look fresh for him when he comes home to you.
> You don't have to look the way you did when you married
> him, he won't mind a little more of you to love. [...]

The imperative in this text achieves a dimension not seen in the previous two, in that 'Body of Fact' is the most conventionally *lyric*—the idiom of the speaking voice is at times unmistakable. But its presence is antagonistic. Or rather, the lyric

subject is the antagonist, ventriloquized as a vacuous feel-good meme generator. In the examples above, the imperatives are blips of advice intended to empower their receiver, and as such, they are particularly noxious, capable of exerting power by their default, clichéd status. Under the pressure of the economy of truisms, the text begins to crack: 'Hair greys, skin dries, lungs black there | will never be a good time to stop'. Or, more analytically: 'You are born a proposition to bear | more life'.

At the end of the poem, the shifting between second-person address and the imperative becomes more urgent, and the tone more and more exasperated, less concerned to strategize an antagonist than to exhort without obviation the anxieties and physical difficulties of poverty.

> You don't have
> the capital to save money. Try again you
> can't buy two to get one free. The happy fliers,
> the turning advertisers' year. Try to be able to buy
> this stuff next Christmas. Can you afford to be
> alive, even if you suffer enough, the inability to be
> preoccupied with something
> else.

The imperative directs action it assumes will have been done before the next point of contact. It is imperfect and conative. As readers, we bear witness to these directives and we are free at any time to ignore them or to make them descriptions of a hypothetical wish whose fulfilment is more or less irrelevant to our response. But it's difficult not to understand the imperative as a direct demand of our attention. The leisure of sitting and reading is my time away from waged labor, and the impetus behind the use of the imperative in 'Body of Fact' is meant to correct this feeling of leisure.

In an article that looks closely at imperatives in Rainer Maria Rilke's *Die Sonette an Orpheus*, William Waters shows to what extent commentators have been embarrassed by Rilke's directives. And the source of this embarrassment is that poetic address cannot be easily naturalized into a universal proposition that sits comfortably within the frame of description. Imperatives seek to direct readers;

not the Reader, but any reader who picks up the text and sounds the words aloud or silently. The imperative asks that we assume a duplicitous position of authorizing the order and following the order. The conative imperatives ('Try again' and 'Try') in the final stanza of 'Body of Fact' evince an awareness that we too would fail in this situation, but the deontic modality ensures that we are bound to consider it.