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Epilogue

Lyrical and Theatrical Apostrophe, from Performing Actor to Textual Self

Frans-Willem Korsten

The previous chapters are all in dialogue, or in debate, with one of the most important studies to appear recently on the nature of the lyric, Jonathan Culler's *Theory of the Lyric* (2015). In this epilogue I would like to deal with the pivot of these dialogues and debates: the nature of apostrophe as lyric address in terms of its either being read or heard. Rather than reviewing the excellent arguments brought forward in this volume, I would like to take the opportunity to trace the conceptual framework that informs Culler's study and to see whether this may have caused some confusion about the *status* of his definition of apostrophe as the key marker of the lyric. I would also like to discuss the matter of translation, not unimportant in such a volume as the present one, and how this relates to forms of lyric address. When presented with studies on lyric address in ten famous or important medieval and early modern poems in Dutch, one could of course ask what happens with this address, or with address in general, if one takes into account how they involve different historical forms of self. I would like to consider how the different chapters in this book may have something systematic in common in their responses to Culler's study, due the relation between self and collective. This will also lead me to reconsider the origin of apostrophe as a dramatic or theatrical one. I will do so in the light of a historical difference that cannot be stressed enough, between poetry intended to be performed or to be read. Basically put, my question here is: might it be the case that the lyrical subject, as a self, comes to life only once poetry becomes something that instead of having to be performed turns into something to be published, printed and read? Finally I will ask what happens with modes of address when texts are translated, as they are here.

Structuralism and rhetoric

When in 1943 the German physicist Erwin Schrödinger held his famous series of lectures in Dublin that would later be published as *What Is Life? The Physical Aspect of the Living Cell*, he was suggesting to look for the smallest or

most basic unit of biological life, just as in the previous decades physicists had been looking for the smallest or most basic unit in the inorganic world. In this endeavour, Schrödinger, who lived from 1887 to 1961, was clearly a child of his times, which had a similar interest in finding the smallest or most basic units of language. Such was the goal of structuralism, which in its Eastern European variant was represented by the key figures of Roman Jakobson, René Wellek and Jan Mukařovský. In studying the way in which language *functioned*, one of their contentions was that the basic units of language remain the same whether one studies language synchronically or diachronically.

Jonathan Culler wrote a standard introduction to structuralism in the 1970s: *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature* (1975). Translating the logic of linguistic structuralism to the domain of literature, Culler's key tenets were that, structurally speaking, literature has basic building blocks that likewise could be studied both synchronically and diachronically, and that these building blocks determine how literature functions. A telling quote from *Structuralist Poetics* is the one where Culler states that a structuralist approach to literature has the advantage of avoiding 'premature foreclosure – the unseemly rush from word to world – and stays within the literary system for as long as possible.' Or, as he emphasizes, a structuralist approach insists 'that literature is something other than a statement about the world' (Culler, 1975, p. 130). The very uncoupling of word and world necessarily follows from the claim that the basic structure of such a building block as lyric address remains the same synchronically and diachronically.

It may be clear, meanwhile, how Culler was as much a child of his times. The 1970s was not only the heyday of French poststructuralism, and, in the US, of Paul de Man's teaching at Yale, but also of a great interest in what could constitute the aesthetic and political autonomy of literature. In this context, Culler's definition of the lyric should be considered as an attempt to define the most basic forms of address operative in literature – synchronically, diachronically and functionally – within the poetic system. The lyric is distinct here from the other two basic generic modes, narrative and drama. In narrative someone is telling something in addressing an audience or a reader who cannot talk back; in drama the characters address one another; and in lyric the speaking subject is a 'self' addressing something else. Despite this structural definition, the dominance of the three genres obviously goes back to Goethe who in 1819 defined lyric, drama and epic (basically narrative in nature) as 'the three natural forms of poetry'.¹ But then again, it has been argued that

1 Goethe: 'Es gibt nur drei echte Naturformen der Poesie: Die klar erzählende, die enthusiastisch aufgeregte und die persönlich handelnde: Epos, Lyrik und Drama'. In: Goethe, 1981, vol. 2, p. 187.

modern theories on the lyric were 'a project modern literary criticism took from the nineteenth century and made its own' (Jackson & Prins, 2014, p. 2)

Tellingly, several contributors in this volume have paid attention to *occasional* poetry, which is distinctly historical in that it is related to a specific moment. It is a genre, moreover, that defies the notion of an 'unseemly rush from word to world', by its insistence on the connection of words to world. Culler's definition of the lyric falters, in this context, because occasional poetry employs a double address: one that remains inside the literary system and one that by definition must step beyond it. A passage from a poem by Elizabeth Wolff that Maaïke Meijer cites in this volume may serve to illustrate this point. Wolff describes the death of her husband to her friend Agatha Deken:

Oh DEKEN! DEKEN! Oh my husband Wolff, dear man!
 So late at night! – I sit down near his bed to read;
 He talks, he dies, he falls into my arms! – I can
 Not write now! – Heavens! Why was no one there with me?

L. 3 and 4 contain a double address. The apostrophe *internal* to the literary text calls upon 'Heavens' and poetically addresses the figure of the dying husband. In the domain of this apostrophe, the speaker is not writing. How could she: her husband has just dropped dead in her arms! At the same time, however, she *is* writing and she *can* write, namely to her best friend Deken, the other object of lyric address in this poem.

This should not lead to the conclusion, however, that Culler's definition of lyric address misses the point. Rather, this is a matter of a shift in focus. Following the logic of structuralism, Culler's definition of the lyric is wilfully and functionally located within the domain of literature and language. Occasional poetry, however, seems to favour a definition of the lyric in *rhetorical* terms, with rhetoric demanding the connection of word to world. The discrepancy between the two foci forces us to assess how the character of the lyric, even in Culler's abstract sense, can be historically anchored time and again. In this context, there might be a structurally and historically speaking *functional* element to the double address, an element related to the apostrophe's dual origin. Even though in recent decades apostrophe has come to be seen as the hallmark of lyric poetry, its historical origin is rhetorico-theatrical, as the following will discuss. This has principal consequences for the status of the self.

Address through time: different sources of selves

This volume gathers a set of poems that are centuries apart in themselves, and centuries removed from the current situation. We move from the thirteenth century to the second half of the eighteenth, and in doing so we are dealing with rather different lyrical genres: mystical love poetry (Hadewijch – Daróczy); elegy (Egidius – Strijbosch); a combination of a love and drinking song ('Aenmerct' – van der Poel); a sonnet (Hooft – Grootes); a laudatory poem (Vondel – Paijmans); a sonnet annex letter (Tesselschade – van Dijk); a consolatory poem (Six van Chandelier – Pieters); a love poem (Poot – Madelein); an occasional poem (Wolff/Bekker – Meijer) and an ode (Bellamy – van der Haven). Clearly, these all imply different modes of address. To modern readers, moreover, they may be difficult to experience or understand, for two reasons. The first is that a substantial number of these poems was not so much meant to be *read* but to be *heard*. Three poems in this volume are actually songs (Daróczy, Strijbosch, van der Poel), and several of the poems were meant to be read out loud or performed or could both be read in silence and read out loud. Secondly, there is the breach of modernity and the redefinition of the self and consequent redefinition of the lyric that came with it. I will deal with the latter first and come back to the difference between performing and reading in the next section.

Charles Taylor, in *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (1989), explored the consequences of so-called 'expressivism' in relation to the identity of the modern self. In defining modern identity, Taylor paid attention to three axes. The first one concerns the value people attribute to, or the respect they have for (human) life, the second one concerns our ideas of what kind of life we think is worth living (one of the dominant questions in the historical avant-garde), the third is a matter of dignity in connection to societal roles. These three axes, in turn, organize the ways in which any self, in terms of identity, relates to the world. Such relations are substantially, at times incomprehensibly different in different cultures and times. In relation to lyrical apostrophe, historical differences concern the favourite themes that are being called upon, or likely and unlikely themes; they concern the nature of the 'calling upon', for instance when the border between poem and prayer is porous; and most importantly, they concern the nature or identity of the speaking self in its relation to the world. In this volume several contributions address this issue of the historical specificity of subjectivity, notably Britt Grootes.

The different ideas on what the lyric historically means and implies in terms of subjectivity, and how this relates to modern theories, were

at the centre of a volume edited by Virginia Jackson & Yopie Prins, *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*. In the introduction to the second part of their book they write: 'while the previous section (...) showed the consolidation of lyric as a genre through twentieth-century genre-theory, this section demonstrates how that idea has been projected back into literary history' (Jackson & Prins, 2014, p. 86). Such projection backwards may be a straightforward form of anachronism, but may also be a problem of different forms of self that relate to different *media*.



Let me take one song in this volume to address the issue, the one from the mid-sixteenth century, discussed by Dieuwke van der Poel, that starts with:

Come hear my sad complaint,
You knaves with hearts carefree.
I grieve both day and night
And moan 'Oh, woe is me!'
And surely I may grieve,
For one I saw that day
Has pierced my heart with love.

The historical anchors of the poem are defined by van der Poel as follows. Firstly, thematically speaking the song harks back to the medieval times of roaming knights: 'sometimes indeed as soldiers but more often as romanticized adventurers, lower-class heroes and embodiments of virility: the images range from spirited lads to lusty rogues and sometimes even downright malevolent rapists.' Secondly, these figures from another world came to stand at the centre of poems and songs to a sixteenth-century bourgeois audience. To make the historical gap between the two understandable, van der Poel suggests that Westerns play a similar role to current audiences. The comparison surely helps. Yet, it is of course a translation that does not and perhaps cannot explain how a mid-sixteenth-century audience would use and experience medieval themes that were taken up in contemporary modes of address. In terms of historical differences, a third element is that there was this specific company in which and for which the poem was performed: a company of rhetoricians. Fourthly, the poem or song started to travel to a wider audience, or rather audiences. Fifthly, the melody of the song could be used to propel other texts. In this case, the medieval secular love poem was being changed into a sixteenth-century devotional one. In all cases the poem/song functioned not so much to allow for individual expression, but to facilitate collective bonding.

One could be tempted to consider one of the most distinctive differences between modern lyric and lyric from earlier times to be the opposition between individual self and collective. Yet such an opposition is false, as we will see in the next session. What this example first and foremost suggests is that it is very much the question whether any historical self has a source comparable to the modern one, and whether this self is the *source* of the lyrical text. The individual texts dealt with by van der Poel are not unique expressions, with unique apostrophes, meant to be read. Rather, they are flexible ones, facilitating several modes of address in relation to different situations and audiences, but all in terms of performance. For Taylor, the modern self relates to art in the sense that the hidden nature of the modern self can be brought forward, or can be called upon, by means of expression, and lyric would be the paradigmatic case of such expression. Yet, in earlier forms of lyric any hidden nature is not the subject's source, nor the thing to be called upon. In the case of this text, for instance, there is more reason to consider the melody, rather, as the source of different textual versions throughout decades. It is one that is not hidden at all. Rather it offers different selves a medium to tap into. The very issue of music, as a matter of performance, brings us back to the pivot of address.

Expressivism: confusing prosopopeia with self

Taylor  studied Romanticism as the conceptual cradle of the idea that the modern self has an inner source (in nature) that allows it to appear as authentic and in that context specified this source as an 'inner *voice*'. It concerns a voice, then, that comes out of some 'inner' and that as such runs counter to a voice that is taken from someone else, as when someone is speaking from behind a mask, or takes on someone else's voice. In her response to Taylor's work, Victoria Fareld defined expressivism as an 'embrace', namely of 'something that precedes and exists independently of the expression itself, as well as something that is brought into being in and by the expression itself' (Fareld, 2007, p. 171). One of the things previously existing independently of the expression itself,  *precedes* it, is of course the language used to express something with. It is this previous existence that links any voice, any speaking subject, or any lyrical subject, *intrinsically* to a collective of subjects that is always being addressed implicitly through or by means of any self expressing itself. In this context we have to reconsider the origins of apostrophe in drama and its distinctly rhetorical nature following from those origins.

In a pivotal study by Stephen Usher the use of apostrophe by orators is traced back to the fourth century BCE in classical Greece. Usher's study was again of relevance to David Sansone, who in *Greek Drama and the Invention of Rhetoric* considered the apostrophe in its effective dramatic use. Here, both dramatically and rhetorically speaking, the apostrophe indicates the turning away from one party addressed to another party, for instance from an actor to the audience, or from one character to another, etc. Apostrophe literally means: 'to turn' (*stréphein*) 'away' or 'aside' (*apo*). This theatrical and rhetorical nature of apostrophe is then both historically and systematically connected to the domain of law. As for the apostrophe's effect, there is a principal link, here, with the system of justice, that has been dealt with in theories of expressivism as well. The basic question is whether law only has to solve legal issues case per case, serving the individual needs of people, or whether any case and verdict always speaks doubly, in turning away from the parties concerned in court to an audience at large.² And obviously, any court case itself is dramatic and theatrical in nature. It involves a distinct set of roles and players: the accused, the judge presiding, a lawyer defending and either an accuser or an officer of prosecution. In some cases there will be a jury. Next, there is the audience present to witness, of which many will have a distinct interest in the case. All these parties will have to be addressed at some point, but since they are all there, within the very same space, all roles and players involved will always hear what is being said, even when they are not addressed explicitly. Apostrophe has its origin in this context and structure.

Quintilian in his *Institutes of Oratory* deals with it, first in the context of a court case, and then together with the figure of parenthesis. In the first case he defines it in a remarkably ambiguous way, as a 'diversion', a 'digression' or a 'calling upon'. The first concerns the rhetorical attack on an adversary, the second an appeal, the third a prosopopoeia (Quintilian, book IX, chapter 2:38). What connects apostrophe with parenthesis for Quintilian, consequently, is that the parenthesis equally implies a different address (book IX, chapter 3:23). Here as well, what is said in-between, between brackets, involves another addressee. It is in turning away, then, to another addressee in the full knowledge that the one addressed previously is still able to hear this all, that the 'extraordinary effect,' or the rhetorical power of apostrophe, comes about.³

2 On this see Adler, 2000. Adler deals especially with those who have favourably considered expressivism in law, such as Elizabeth Anderson, Robert Cooter, Dan Kahan, Larry Lessig & Richard Pildes. On a defence of expressivism in law, see Strudler, 2001.

3 Longinus, in his study on the sublime, also emphasizes how the change of person has a 'vivid effect' (Longinus, 1991, pp. 200-201).

The dynamics in play, consequently, concern two pivotal issues in relation to self and address. *Prosopopeia* is the figure that allows an actor, an orator, a speaker or writer to communicate by speaking as someone or something else. In the cases dealt with in this volume the most pronounced example is the poem by Six van Chandelier (Pieters), where the voice is leant to the dead father. Likewise, when an orator in court suddenly calls out ‘O Porcian and Sempronian laws’, he is clearly calling upon something but not as a self. He takes the voice of another. Secondly the distinction in play in terms of addressed is not one between something or someone being addressed and an audience not being addressed. There is a simultaneous double address. In her evaluation of Taylor’s analysis of the modern self, Seyla Benhabib (2002) argues that two metaphors dominate Taylor’s analysis of identity: horizon and web of interlocution. Taken together they both imply that ‘The answer to the question of who I am always involves reference to “where” I am speaking from and to whom or with whom’ (Benhabib, 2002, p. 145). In the context of this volume on lyric address, one could very well wonder whether this basic structure is specific to the *modern* self in terms of its desire to answer the question: ‘Who am I?’ What the theatrical apostrophe captures is how an address within one world, a world staged within a certain horizon, always concerns a staged voice that relates a self to a collective that may not be addressed explicitly, but is explicitly present, well aware that it is connected to the one speaking by a web of interlocution.

In the context of the role of the witness, I came to define the doubleness of theatrical apostrophe as a form of ‘not-being-there in being-there’ or the simultaneous realization of two modes of address: address of attention and address of expression (Korsten, 2012). In witnessing something, someone is not a witness yet (in the sense of *bearing* witness) but addressing what is happening (the focus of attention) with an eye on subsequent expression. Once bearing witness is in play, this duality reverses. In bearing witness, someone is no longer witnessing something concretely; what was addressed by means of attention is now being expressed. Sequentially, this means that someone must have paid attention first to what happened; and in bearing witness, consequently, performs a double address: one to the matter that is being witnessed, the other to the subjects to whom such matters are testified. This double address is also at stake, I think, in these medieval and early modern poems.

The introduction and opening chapter of this volume discusses a thirteenth century song by Hadewijch. As Aniko Daróczi duly notes, the poem would have been sung (to the melody of the chanson *S’Amours veut que mes chans remaigne* by the trouvère Blondel le Nesle). In this context Daróczi’s

principal point is that the definition of Hadewijch's texts by scholar Josef van Mierlo as *poems*, should be amended (see note 1 of her chapter). They were songs, as Veerle Fraeters & Frank Willaert also argued in their 2009 edition of the songs. My point is that this implies a double address in the *reversed* sense of the witness. The singer wants to express something, in the sense of lyrically calling upon something, but does so in paying attention to the audience, which she addresses in terms of attention. So how would this affect our reading of the final stanza's opening lines?

So he who hopes for Love's saving grace
 should spare no effort, no cost, no loss.
 He must persevere through trials he'll face
 in arduous labours for Love's high cause.

If we read this only in terms of address through language, there appears to be a lyrical apostrophe à la Culler in play. A lyrical subject calls upon a 'he who hopes for Love', with an audience overhearing it. So, the apostrophe stands, whether a 'you' is explicitly called upon or not. No mistake, Culler's ideas on lyrical apostrophe concern a triangulation. Yet J. Douglas Kneale (1991 and 1995) argued that in his focus on voice, self and address, Culler basically confused apostrophe with *prosopopeia*. Again, this is the rhetorical figure that allows an actor, an orator, a speaker or writer to communicate by speaking as someone or something else. The lyrical 'I', so Douglas Kneale argues, is not an expressing self, it is an 'I' that is a mask. It can only be confused with a self, so I argue, once poetry becomes something to be expressed through writing and print, and consequently something to be read. Then the theatrical dynamic falls away and a self with an inner voice seems to appear, by means of apostrophe.

Whereas Culler appears to be dealing with poetry first and foremost as something to be read – a modern idea of poetry – poetry has mostly been sung by a singer, addressing an audience, and this singer is not the self. Moreover, formally and due to the conflation of language with music, a dynamic of time in the theatrical apostrophe – addressing one party first and then another – is being *fused* in the lyrical apostrophe. This formal fusion has principal implications for self and collective, for two reasons. Music itself is not vectorized in terms of an address. Music sur-rounds all those present, as has been pointed out in the introduction in reference to the work of Heinz Schlaffer, whose quote is worth repeating here: 'Wer den Gesang hört, hat an dessen Macht teil (...)' (Schlaffer, 2012, p. 76): 'Whomever hears the song, takes part in its power.' Still, music must in turn also be

distinguished from the singer, a figure analogous to but also different from the lyrical subject. The singer is a theatrical figure, not a self calling upon something in a text to be read, and it is this musico-theatrical figure that is able to address an audience, changing it from an audience that overhears to an audience addressed as a collective. If the lyrical subject can only speak because language, as the embodiment of the collective, enables it to speak, the lyrical subject *as a singer* is able to address this collective explicitly. As such it is not just calling upon an audience in a lyrical way, calling it to life, but it is calling upon its potential to respond. The theatrical origin of the apostrophe relates to response-ability, that is, which is less an aesthetic than an ethical category.

Untranslatability and lyrical apostrophe

Whatever the precise nature of the poems gathered here, they are all translated, not just in time but also in terms of language. The issue of linguistic translation brings in a specific problematic for the definition of apostrophe and the lyric. Let me uncouple the issue from the *historical* examples presented in this volume by bringing in a contemporary poem/song that can also be seen as an explicit address to an audience.

In 2014, the Dutch spoken-word artist Typhoon (Glenn de Randamie) released a new album entitled *Lobi da Basi*. In the Dutch context the title of the album was a clear sign of its being situated in the context of Randamie's Surinamese background. Although the rest of the album is in Dutch, the title suggests that a Dutch audience, or rather Dutch audiences, should perhaps understand the Dutch language in a new or different light, following a different rhythm, and referring to a diverse and broad idea of Dutchness. The very first song is titled 'We zijn er', which, for the time being, I will translate as 'We are here' (as we shall see, it is almost impossible to translate the phrase adequately). This title is connected to a central theme in this song, which is apparent in lines such as: 'To the underground, chased by dogs, waiting in the water, head below level so that they lose track'; an explicit reference to the way in which slaves who had run away were chased. An implicit reference, a little later is: 'I am going wild, find peace in our history, although, thoughts of pain pop up'.⁴

4 'Naar de ondergrondse, achtervolgd door honden, wachtend in het water. Koppie onder zodat ze het spoor bijster raken' and 'Ik vind rust in onze historie al poppen de pijngedachtes op'. From the song 'We zijn er', *Lobi da basi*, 2014.

In the context of this indeed painful colonial history, the title becomes a self-conscious statement. The approximately 350,000 people who since Surinam's independence chose to remain Dutch or came to the Netherlands are not to be ignored or marginalized or wished away as an awkward colonial leftover. They are 'here'.

In terms of the lyric the phrase 'We are here' is an apostrophe calling upon this 'we'. The apostrophe is distinctly Dutch in its address, partly because of the specific Dutch circumstances, but more basically because of Dutch language. The Dutch phrase 'We zijn er' is *untranslatable* in the sense of Barbara Cassin, and Emily Apter in her wake.⁵ The untranslatable, here, is not meant to imply that words or phrases in a specific language are impossible to translate, but refers to how certain words and phrases constantly provoke new attempts at translation because an ultimately adequate translation does not exist. In the case of the Dutch phrase 'We zijn er' the short adverb 'er' is indistinctive, or only becomes meaningful in the context of a sentence. 'We zijn er' can mean: 'We are here' or 'We are there', but it can also mean 'We have arrived', as when for instance slaves on the run could say they had arrived as soon as they were in safety. Most literally, the phrase can even mean: 'We are *er*', when the verb is considered a copula and the 'er' becomes a predicative. This may seem strange or absurd but something similar is the case in a poem by the Dutch poet Lucebert:

Here is I and there is
a name here in
one understands the air
but not man⁶

In this case as well, the phrase in the original 'er is ik en er is' appears to be untranslatable, with our having to choose between 'here' and 'there' and losing the connotations of the Dutch phrase that the 'I' may *be* an 'er'.

This may all seem something *internal* to Dutch language. Yet the very fact of untranslatability suggests something else. The specificity of this address is only understandable to a Dutch audience. That is: the apostrophe,

5 See Cassin's *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies: Dictionnaires des intraduisibles* or the later *Dictionary of Untranslatables: A Philosophical Lexicon*. Not so much the philosophical but the political implications of the issue, specifically in the scholarly and literary domain, were explored in Apter, 2013.

6 Er is ik en er is / daarin een naam / de lucht verstaat men / maar de mens niet'. (Lucebert, 2002, p. 62).

here, addresses a 'we' but the way in which it addresses this 'we' is only understandable to the ones who, in Culler's conceptualization, are supposedly positioned as the ones who 'overhear'. To Culler, the 'self' is central, both as the one who calls the things into being that it addresses and as the one who, simultaneously, calls itself into being. It does so, however, in a specific language, targeting a collective audience that is addressed. The 'self' expressing itself is well aware that others are listening in and that indeed *without those others it would not be able to speak in the first place*. Or, the self implicitly addresses the collective that enables it to speak as a necessary and inevitable *connotation*. It is like when Typhoon states 'When I make music, I have to feel it, it has to resonate'.⁷ In the case of spoken-word artists, this involves both language and music proper. To be able to express things adequately this self is in need of itself as a sensory, sensing and sensible unit and in need of a connection with something else, as the very term 'resonate' suggests. The two combined are, of course, historically and culturally specific.

If in this volume medieval and early modern texts are translated into English, this is effectively a form of prosopopeia. They have come to speak through the figure of another language. At the same time they have made use of theatrical apostrophes, in turning away from the collective to which they were addressed in order to address other collectives. Meanwhile, in reading them, we can see how they are apostrophic in calling upon things, subjects, feelings, as a result of which we might imagine that we hear historical selves speaking.

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⁷ Source: interview of Paul Timmermans with Typhoon of 27 February 2014 on: www.hiphopinjesmoel.com/interviews/liefde-staat-centraal-typhoons-lobi-da-basi/. The original is: 'Als ik muziek maak, moet ik dat voelen, dat moet resoneren'.

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