

Chapter Six:

Lyric in Twentieth-Century Poetry and Criticism

the differences between a lyric, a Shakespeare play, and a novel, for some purposes essential, are not in danger of being forgotten; what needs insisting on is the community.

F.R. Leavis (*Towards Standards* 20)

In this chapter I aim to examine the Romantic heritage of the lyric in the twentieth century. But in contrast to the last chapter I shall not be relying wholly upon the writings of critics, particularly as we near the present. There are two reasons for this: the first is that, if I want to establish that the tropes of lyricism are also the predominant influence on modern poetic practice it will be necessary to examine the poetry. But this should not imply the precedence of the poetry over the parasitic disquisitions of the criticism. Instead what it does indicate is the gradual drying up of the criticism of poetry, in favour of the criticism of poets.

What I mean by this is that in the twentieth century, when would be difficult to say exactly, the standard procedure of the criticism of poetry changed; previously criticism had dealt with the essential nature of poetry, and then moved on to illustrate this with examples of poetry.¹ Increasingly in the twentieth century, however, criticism begins with the poet, as a synecdoche for his/her works, and examines the poetic world that the poet creates in his/her work. This world is then judged on its authenticity *to its own standards*, and it is only then, if at all, that the essential nature of poetry is discussed.² A complication to this simple scheme is provided by the “theoretical turn” that a lot of criticism has taken since the 1970s, where, in many cases, the question of the nature of poetry re-enters in a new guise. However, having noted this new development, let me leave it out of consideration, for the moment.

An excellent example of the twentieth century’s new critical style, to set beside the Victorian criticism we have already considered, is Seamus Heaney’s essay

“Englands of the Mind”. Here Heaney considers the poetry of Ted Hughes, Geoffrey Hill and Philip Larkin, as they embody, respectively, the modern understanding of the cultural traditions of paganism, the Mediaeval period and the modern period. Except that, in a strange slippage, they do not embody these traditions: instead these traditions seem to have become, by the logic of the essay, embodied in the poetry of the respective poets. Although Heaney begins by stating that “we find that their three separate voices are guaranteed by the three separate foundations, which when combined, represent almost the total resources of the English language itself” (151), his subsequent writing is all from the other end: “Hughes’s is a primitive landscape ... Hill’s England, on the other hand, is more hospitable to human habitation ... [Larkin’s] trees and flowers and grasses are neither animistic, nor hallowed by half-remembered druidic lore; they are emblems of mutabilitie” (151-52).

The conclusion I would draw from this is that the wider and more philosophical sense of “the poetic” has given way to a more highly-charged, lyric, definition of poetry, which is more inclined to consider as axiomatic that each poet’s poetic world is *sui generis*, and which no longer tries to impress the poet’s world under the banner of an abstract idea of Poetry. In a sense this is a further extension of lyric ideas; no longer is poetry to be considered autonomous, but rather, each poet’s poetic world is autonomous.

Another matter which must be considered is, to remain paradoxical, the disappearance of the lyric. What I mean by this is that in the nineteenth century there were several competing versions of Romantic poetics available, and my chapter four tried to steer a course through the criticism, picking out the “lyric tradition”, as an illustration of how the various versions were still lyrically guided. In the twentieth century, so prevalent has the shorter poem become, that it is *the* poem, and poetic criticism is highly likely to be lyrical in its tropes. But because the lyric is *the* poem, then its lyric nature is obscured and it comes to seem eminently natural.

It would be interesting to consider briefly, before proceeding, the status of poetry compared to other literary forms in the twentieth century. A critical essay which, like Heaney’s, starts with the work and proceeds from there, is likely to be concerned with poetry, rather than with any other type of literature. There are many articles, for example, dealing with topics such as “The Novels of the 1950s”, which begin with the last term and proceed to the first. It is less common to find articles dealing with “The Poetry of the 1950s” which start with the decade and end up with the poetry;

usually the article will begin and end with the poetry. The epigraph I have taken to head this chapter demonstrates this at the level of the sentence. In this context Leavis is, as usual, more concerned with Literature than Poetry, though of course Poetry is a necessary part of Literature. But the order of his listing of literary forms, no doubt by length, from lyric poetry to the novel, gives the impression that the qualities of the lyric are rubbing off on the novel. It is also worth noting that Leavis's career as a whole followed the trajectory of this sentence, from the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century poetry that was the centre of interest of *Scrutiny* in its first decade, as the example of the true cathexis of literature and society, to the novelistic interests of its more disillusioned and conservative second decade (Mulhern 202, 250-51).

This chapter will first concentrate on the lyric lineage I have been tracing thus far; after this it will examine the various poetic "movements" that are ostensibly antithetical to the idea of the lyric.³ But just as several of the Victorian critics we examined, notably Arnold and J.A.Symonds, who are supposed not to have been lyrically oriented, can be shown to be influenced by lyric ideas, so the various anti-lyrical currents in twentieth-century English poetry can be shown to be inserted into a wider critical context of lyrical evaluation.

Imagism and Free Verse

Imagism, to begin, then, with one particular "school" of poetry and its problematics of form, has often been regarded as a new kind of literary movement because of its championship of Free Verse and because of its decisive rejection of a great deal of the Victorian poetic diction that had characterised the poetry of the 1890s. However it is questionable to what extent this estimation merely reproduces the Imagists' own view of their movement, and, in particular, their perceived need to make a decisive break in order to renew a dying art. F.S.Flint, for example, writing in *The New Age*, in 1910, seems to see the contemporary situation very much in terms of the need for renewal:

Old England is senile, and poetry lacks criticism and ideas; perhaps England may one day cast her skin, like the snake, and poetry acquire freshness again.... Every artist sloughs at least one skin, let him then slough England's senility and sloth, and perhaps recreate England in the process. (Quoted in Coffmann 107)

It would be absurd to deny the novelty of the Imagist project in certain respects: its programme included the first systematic endorsement of non-metrical poetry in England, for example, and was probably the first such literary agenda to be urged

with such vehemence and such a display of theoretical apparatus since the *Lyrical Ballads*. Moreover the Imagists were the first of the many exclusive coteries into which England's literary culture divided before and after the First World War.⁴ On another level, however, much of their poetic can be shown to be indebted to the past, and specifically to the Romantic ideas of the lyric we have been discussing. To proceed with Imagism topic by topic, I shall begin with the theoretical impetus behind the emergence of Imagism, the artistic criticism and philosophical writings of T.E.Hulme.

In his essay "Romanticism and Classicism" Hulme considers this much-considered opposition and comes down firmly on the side of Classicism. This is coupled with a strong criticism of the expansive claims of Romanticism and its aesthetic bias (*Speculations* 126-27, 128, 131). Wearing by Romantic imprecision and sentimentality, Hulme declares, "It is essential to prove that beauty may be in small, dry things" (131).⁵

But, just like Hegel, Hulme transcends Romanticism only to his own satisfaction and he is more indebted to the later nineteenth century than, no doubt, he would have cared to admit. For example he takes the concern he expresses in "Romanticism and Classicism" for "seeing things as they really are" (133) literally from Pater, the arch Romantic, who was in turn quoting Matthew Arnold, the famous Classicist. In another essay, "Bergson's Theory of Art", Hulme criticises the Romantic "revelation of the infinite in the finite" (*Speculations* 148) largely because it lacks any sort of dynamism.⁶ But this was a commonplace of Aesthetic and Symbolist criticism too; thus Arthur Symons, in his *The Romantic Movement in English Poetry* (1899), was already stressing this essentially dynamic quality of illumination in poetry, as a shorthand for the requisite dynamism of a life. He, for example, criticises Coleridge's career in these terms: "There is nothing so hopeless as inert, or inactive virtue" (127).

Hulme's criticism makes few references to poetry, being mainly art criticism. But his "Complete Poetic Works" (five short imagist poems), published in *The New Age* and then reprinted in *Ripostes* by Pound, were widely praised, and the Imagists themselves looked to him as a founder of their movement. They also show one practical application of his theories.

The next phase of Imagism began with Pound's vigorous championship of a small circle of poets. From this period come the famous principles of Imagism, published in the journal *Poetry* in March 1913:

1. Direct treatment of the “thing”, whether subjective or objective.
2. To use absolutely no word that did not contribute to the presentation.
3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in the sequence of the metronome. (Quoted in Coffmann 9)

The first of these points was supplemented by Pound’s later note “A Few Don’ts by an Imagiste [sic]” which makes clear that the doctrine of the Image was not to be understood in static, pictorial terms, but in vital, epiphanic ones, although the Image is also characterised by intensity and brevity; Pound’s piece runs in part:

It [an Image] is the presentation of such a “complex” instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art. It is better to present one Image in a lifetime, than to produce voluminous works. (Quoted in Coffmann 9-10)

It hardly needs noting how familiar these ideas already are, deriving as they do from the complex of lyrical tropes I have been investigating in this thesis.

In fact, compared to the popular conception of the Imagists’ Image as static and pictorial it must be insisted that most formulations are, on the contrary, concerned with the vitality of the Image, the quality that Eliot was later to describe in *Burnt Norton* in the famous simile of the jar:

Only by the form, the pattern
Can words or music reach
The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
moves perpetually in its stillness.

Pound’s later formulations of the idea were of this order, firstly that of “the dramatic lyric” (Coffmann 123) and then of the Image as “Vortex” (Coffmann 132-33). And, to quote another instance, D.H.Lawrence in 1918 was railing against “gem-like lyrics”, and presumably, by implication, against Paterian aesthetics (Steele 199). Lawrence prefers against such lyrics poems of “the immediate present”, but all Romantics rebel oedipally against the previous generation, and there is no sense in which a Paterian aesthetics can be said not to insist on the dynamism of the literary object, as we have seen in chapter four.

The second point in the *Poetry* manifesto is part of the Imagists’ rejection of out-worn poetic diction, but it also shows a commitment to intensity in poetry. In the second Imagist manifesto, published in *Some Imagist Poets* of 1915, this point is expanded to two:

5. To produce poetry that is hard and clear, never blurred nor indefinite.
6. Finally, most of us believe that concentration is of the very essence in poetry. (Quoted in Coffmann 29)

The third point of the original manifesto adumbrates the Imagists' concern with Free Verse and makes the important linkage between poetry and music. It was Pater who, famously, gave the older Romantic idea of art as music a new turn, which the later nineteenth century was to take up. Timothy Steele, in his valuable book *Missing Measures*, has demonstrated at length that the collocation of music and poetry not only has a respectable Romantic pedigree, but at this period became the subject of heightened interest (208-216). But his work also makes clear that Free Verse was championed, not because it lessened the unity of the poem, but because it guaranteed it:

Another principle advanced by the leaders of the modern movement is that in free verse, the poet is concerned with the overall environment of the poem rather than the metrical structure of the individual lines. (98-99)

Later he quotes Pound, Eliot and William Carlos Williams to this effect (171-73), stressing particularly Eliot's famous remarks in his "The Music of Poetry":

It was a revolt against dead form, and a preparation for new form or for the renewal of the old; it was an insistence on the inner unity which is unique to every poem, against the outer unity which is typical. The poem comes before the form, in the sense that the form grows out of the attempt of somebody to say something, just as a system of prosody is only a formulation of the identities in the rhythms of a succession of poets influenced by each other. ("Music" 37)

We might add that the second point of the second Imagist manifesto is a further elaboration of this point:

2. To create new rhythms—as the expression of new moods—and not to copy old rhythms, which merely echo old moods. We do not insist upon "free-verse" as the only method of writing poetry. We fight for it as for a principle of liberty. We believe that the individuality of a poet may often be better expressed in free-verse than in conventional forms. In poetry, a new cadence means a new idea. (Quoted in Coffmann 28)

Nor, it should be emphasised, is the idea of Free Verse new; there were available to the poet of this period the examples of the Authorized Version's rendering of Hebrew poetry into rhythmic prose, of Blake's *Prophetic Books*, of Whitman and of W.E. Henley, and other more recent poets.⁷ We have seen already that many critics of the nineteenth century laid down that poetry must be conventionally metrical to be considered as poetry. On the other hand there were those who denied this common belief: Steele quotes, for example, Emerson, who distinguished between the true poet and the merely metrical poet (197).⁸ What needs to be noted is that the Imagists' Free Verse, far from being "freer" than the poetry listed above, or imagined by Emerson and others, is *more compressed, more intense and more lyrical*. Another sort of

critical foreshadowing of this conception of free verse is the idea that the lyric, especially, is the site of a lyrical “disorder”. For example, at about this time, though from a more traditional critical stance, Walter Raleigh, in his essay “William Blake”, credits poetry with its own, significant, disorder, but only within the limits of the lyric genre:

The purest lyrical utterances do not depend for their beauty on the arrangement of accents and the counting of syllables; translate them into any language and they still run straight into song.... The spontaneity of whole-hearted joy will save it from all essential faults of expression.... the life and soul of lyrical effect is assured to [Blake] by his very carelessness. It seems that he sang his own lyrics to tunes of his own choice.... (263-64)⁹

But what needs stressing above all is that in this period the doctrine of Free Verse did not signify an abandonment of rhythm, but an intensification, so that the rhythm of a poem should no longer be a hackneyed conventional rhythm, but the poet’s own *personal* rhythm—what Amy Lowell described as “organic rhythm” (Coffmann 99).

One text which provides a useful summary of much of what we have been discussing is the preface to Ford Madox Hueffer’s *Collected Poems* of 1913. Hueffer as a poet is barely remembered today, but at the time he was very influential; not only had he been publishing poetry in conventional forms and Free Verse since the 1890s, but he was well-known in most of the literary circles of London (he was a sort of honorary Imagist, for example). He begins his Preface with some remarks about poetry. Poetry, in his view, is not governed by generic rules in the same way that prose compositions are (10); instead poetry is the essence of the uncountable:

I just do not know: I do not know anything at all. As far as I am concerned, it just comes. I hear in my head a vague rhythm:
[quotes a musical rhythm in 6/8 time]
and presently a line will present itself:
“Up here, where the air’s very clear,”
or else one will come from nowhere at all:
“When all the little hills are hid in snow,”
and the rest flows out. (11)

But it is not until the last section of the Preface, after an extended disquisition on poetic diction and subject-matter (12-20), that Hueffer returns to poetic renewal. Here his insouciance leads him to give an iconoclastic account of his early reading of poetry (22-23), ending:

the attempt to read Tennyson, Swinburne and Browning and Pope ... gave me and the friends I have just mentioned, a settled dislike for poetry that we have never since quite got over. We seemed to get from them the idea that all poets

must of necessity write affectedly, at great length, with many superfluous words—that poetry, of necessity, was something boring and pretentious. (22)

From this condemnation he excepts Christina Rossetti (though “this still, small, private voice gave the impression of not being verse at all”), Hardy and Meredith (23-24). But the last section of the Preface contrasts the past with the present; “about five years ago”, Hueffer claims, he began to discern a new sort of poetry emerging:

we came upon the poetry of Mr Yeats, of Mr De La Mare, of Mr Flint, of Mr D.H.Lawrence, and upon suggestions of power in Mr Pound’s derivations from the Romance writers. And gradually it has forced itself upon us that there is a new quality, a new power of impressionism that is open to poetry, and that is not so much open to prose. It is a quality that attracted us years ago to the poems of Mr Hardy and Mr George Meredith. (25)

Consideration of Hueffer’s Preface is valuable insofar as it shows the sort of context in which the Imagist movement situated its ideas, particularly those of poetic renewal. But the fact that Hueffer was not a full Imagist, and the fact that several of the poets he mentions were not Imagists either points to the slightly factitious status of “Imagism”, or indeed any exclusively defined poetic movement. What we are really dealing with is a continuum of tropes and ideas about poetry, available at a particular time, which are assembled and deployed in different ways by different people, or groups of people, in different “reading formations”. To consider “poetic movements” can only be a convenience, never a method, although we should note that the most common objections to dealing with poetry in “movements” are from a Romantic perspective, and privilege the individual poet’s own truth over any indebtedness to common ideas and tropes of poetics. But, to give a further example of the way the literary world was very much more complex and, at the same time, less divided than we now can easily discern, D.H.Lawrence had poetry published in *both* Imagist *and* Georgian anthologies. Indeed Imagism, which is popularly supposed to be a hard-edged, non-lyrical movement, I have suggested is almost wholly “lyrical” in its inspiration,¹⁰ but Georgianism, usually dismissed as the rural lyrics of a group of poetic conservatives, when looked at closely, is revealed as something more difficult to account for in terms of well-defined movements and tendencies, as I argue later in this chapter.

To conclude this section, whilst also looking towards modernist poetics, I should like to consider criticism of Pound’s poem *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*. The poem comes several years after Pound’s Imagist days, at the beginning of his modernist period; that is to say, after he had abandoned the Image for more extended poems. At the same time it is a retrospective treatment of Pound’s experience of his poetic environ-

ment before the First World War. What is interesting about the criticism of the poem which preceded the recent renewed, “post-modern” interest in Pound is that it concentrates its attention, not on the body of the poem taken as a whole, or whatever, but on the lyric which concludes the first half of the poem. Although critics are aware that Pound is here, as it were, commenting on the English poetic tradition, yet their readings often seem to grant an importance to this part of the poem, by virtue of its being a lyric (Miller 965).

The newer critical interest in Pound, however, is often no better at reading “contrapuntally”, in line with Pound’s later theories; instead it transfers its interest to the lyric concluding the second half of the poem, “Medallion”, as though it were, by virtue of its position, necessarily the summing up of all the ideas and themes in the poem—a resolution of the doubts and unsatisfied poetic commitment in terms of the work of art, the Image now located in history and society. Vincent Miller, in his essay “Mauberley and His Critics”, which I have used as evidence of the earlier criticism’s bent, favours this interpretation, contrasting it with the earlier lyric:

In its emphasis upon what art worlds are or aren’t, this world differs markedly from the verbally intoxicating, reality-defying one of roses “in magic amber laid” of “Envoi” whose merit, after all, is that it is not a modern poem at all but a beautifully crafted poetic echo. (974)

But what interests me in the present context about *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* is not any *ex post facto* reconstruction of Pound’s intention, however well documented this may be, but the context in which this and other poems were, necessarily, criticised. In the next section, on modernism, I shall be inquiring whether the modernist project is not, as it were, at risk from the very first by the “lyric” readings and responses it elicits. I shall also be inquiring precisely what we can term modernism, from the array of very different works which go under that heading.

Modernism

As I have indicated with respect to *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*, regardless of the new techniques and intentions of the proto-modernist poet the reception of a modernist text was determined by the critical milieu into which it emerged, a milieu, moreover, which gave rise to the “new” poetics of the proto-modernist in the first place. There are many histories of the critical reception of modernism which detail the obtuse contemporary reactions, and document the gradually emerging better understanding of the true intentions of the modernists. Yet we are no longer so cavalier about

the views of Elizabethan critics, or eighteenth-century critics on works of their own periods. This thesis is itself an attempt to understand and locate such “obtuse” lyrical readings as I deal with. Besides this consideration we have to take into account the nature of modernism itself, on the one hand its claims for modernity in technique, on the other its use of the material of high culture from former times. As Terry Eagleton has noted of modernism in a wider sense:

It is a paradox of modernism that its exhilarated sense of fresh technological possibility (Futurism, Constructivism, Surrealism) finds itself constantly displaced into some static, cyclical world in which all dynamic process seems permanently arrested. (317)

One of the important things to note about modernism in poetry is how the sense of cultural dislocation so prevalent in works of the movement was expressed in terms of a collage of discrete poetic fragments, either imagist-type lyrics, or dramatic ones. The value of these is never questioned, except in the sense that if nothing is to have value then these fragments are to have the quality of nothingness to the *n*th degree and be the very embodiment of it—we might remember how Eliot has Gerontion describe his thoughts as “thoughts of a dry brain in a dry season”. But despite this, the value of the fragments is implicit, the threat being only to the links between them: “I can connect/Nothing with nothing”.

Besides noting this tendency and the fact that all the poetic modernists in English had their roots in the Imagist short-poem tradition (Dickie 1-2) we can distinguish, in modernism proper¹¹, various degrees of poetic radicalism. Yeats for example, in his modernist days, remained what he had always been, a Romantic lyricist, whether with individual lyrics, such as “Leda and the Swan” or “Sailing to Byzantium”, or with groups of lyrics arranged as longer poems, such as “Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen” or “Meditations in Time of Civil War”; nor has anyone ever suggested that this is not the case.

Eliot’s professed “Classicism”, together with his later Anglicanism and Royalism, has often obscured the extent to which his *poetic* modernism was much more radical than it might seem. Yet in the critical *furor* that attended the publication of *The Waste Land* the terms of the argument were very traditional. The *TLS* review, for example was typical in its titular dismissal of the poem as “Fragmentary”. John Crowe Ransome’s and Allen Tate’s dispute over the poem hinged on the question of its unity, Ransom *contra*, Tate *pro*. Conrad Aiken, writing in *The New Republic*, had it

both ways, on the one hand maintaining that “the poem is not, in any formal sense coherent” (294) and on the other stating:

I think, therefore, that the poem must be taken,—most invitingly offers itself,—as a series of sharp, discrete, slightly related perceptions and feelings, dramatically and lyrically juxtaposed, (for effect of dissonance) so as to give us an impression of an intensely modern, intensely literary consciousness which perceives itself to be not a unit but a chance correlation or conglomeration of mutually discolorative fragments. (295)

At this point it is necessary for me to break off and explain why I choose to insist on the assertion of unity as a lyrical trope in the period I am covering. For it is not as if any literary criticism before the “post-modern”¹² has valued a lack of unity. Oddly enough the most adventurous sort of criticism in this regard is the Mediaeval criticism, strongly influenced by Biblical exegesis, of allegory and its three, often contrasting, levels. Neo-classical criticism, on the other hand, would have had nothing to do with incoherence; it would be ridiculous to imagine an early eighteenth-century critic praising, say, Pope’s *Essay on Man*, for its lack of unity, even under the influence of the Longinian Sublime. Instead we have to ask, what is the unity of the poem predicated upon? What does the poem close into? In the Mediaeval case the answer is, a scholastic method of exegesis, in the case of Pope’s poem, into what Ian Hunter has described as “the apparatus of neoclassical criticism embodied in the academy and more importantly in the salons” (233).¹³

In the case of Romantic unity, however, no such community exists. Instead the closure of the poem is, by trope, into itself, by virtue of its (self-proclaimed) status as a poem. So much is obvious, but why is such a unity always “lyrical”? Both the critical approaches mentioned previously were, of course, aware that a long work of art requires variety and neither the Mediaeval nor the neo-classical objects to a heterogeneity in the longer work; indeed the Mediaeval, in its insistence on multi-layered readings, positively demands it. Nor, oddly enough, can Romantic criticism avoid the need, in narrative, or exposition (which is what a longer poem will be based on, even if its method is that of the fragmentary), for variations in content and pace. Instead the passages of lesser importance are subordinated and, and this is the crucial point, caught up in a dialectic between the poetic and the prosaic. Eliot, in his essay “The Music of Poetry”, gives a very important and useful exposition of this idea. In this essay he has been discussing the “lyrical” idea of music, of euphony, but goes on:

Dissonance, even cacophony, has its place: just as, in a poem of any length, there must be transitions between passages of greater and less intensity, to give a rhythm of fluctuating emotion essential to the musical structure of the whole; and the passages of less intensity will be, in relation to the level on which the poem operates, prosaic—so that ... it may be said that no poet can write a poem of amplitude unless he is a master of the prosaic. (“Music” 32)

So far, nothing very new, except that whereas an earlier critic might have had “sententiousness” or “sublimity” Eliot has “intensity” as the distinguishing characteristic of those more important passages in a longer poem. What makes this passage one of cardinal importance, however, is the footnote that Eliot appends to it:

This is the complementary doctrine to that of the ‘touchstone’ line or passage of Matthew Arnold: this test of the greatness of a poet is the way he writes his less intense, but structurally vital matter.

This I take to be an explicit formulation of a “lyric” criticism; but not lyric in the sense that it gives sole approbation to shorter poems (though such criticism does exist and cannot in practice be separated from its covert sibling criticism). This “lyric” criticism does not refuse to treat of longer poems, but subjects them to a process of scrutiny so that their shorter, more intense passages can then become the occasion for an exemplary demonstration of their intensity, or whatever name the quality goes under. As Victor Li has pointed out, a great deal of the modern criticism of the long poem is explicitly lyrical in its emphasis (3). And Vincent Sherry, in the course of a critique of the views of M.T Rosenthal and Sally Gull on the modern poetic sequence,¹⁴ diagnoses the lyrical imperatives behind both their work (239-40) and other current theorisations of the (post)modernist long poem (241). In his book *The Track of the Repetend*, Laury Magnus, in the course of his attempt to create a narratology for the modern poem, based on the “repetend”, the occurrence of syntactical and lexical repetition in the poem, criticises the “one particular platitude of modern criticism” (though for him it is *the* platitude), that of the lyric tradition’s latest guise: “the view of the modern poetic text as a purely spatial entity” (28).

Magnus is right to rail, and his book is one of the most persuasive attempts to imagine and think through a style of criticism that would not be based on a selection from amongst those tropes and assumptions that we have been concerned with. And just as this passage aims at a fairly respectable representation of lyric tropes, so his later criticisms of a critical practice which reads “all part[s] of the text simultaneously” are an attack on “post-modern” habits of reading, which I shall be returning to later.

To return, however, to Eliot; it is the case that not only early criticism of his work, but much more recent criticism, has discussed Eliot in terms of unity and intensity. One such more recent critic is C.M. Bowra, who in his Inaugural Lecture at Oxford in 1946 mentions Eliot towards the conclusion of his argument:

It would, however, be wrong to emphasize the disturbing elements in modern poetry at the expense of everything else in it.... The pioneer task has been done. The language has been revived: truth has been maintained, and sensibility has been restored.... In his latest stage even Eliot seems less concerned with the abject incompleteness of man and has begun to abandon the satisfaction of disgust for a belief in some rare unforeseen moments when life is irradiated by a divine fire:

When the tongues of fire are infolded
 Into the crowned knot of fire
 And the fire and the rose are one. (18)

Mention of *Four Quartets* is apposite, as it is here that Eliot explicitly grants the lyric a place in his poetry, in the formal scheme of the four poems. But just as the lyrical has been implicit in his poetry and in readings of it throughout, the actual status of lyric is higher than the formal lyrics of the *Quartets* might indicate. For the poetic texture of the four poems, apart from the more satirical passages, moves between the poles of lyric and lyric meditation, “its powerful lyrical impetus is always directed away from the present” (Sinfield 88). The extension of the lyric to cover such passages as the last section of “Little Gidding”, quoted by Bowra in his lecture, is provided by Eliot himself in “The Three Voices of Poetry”:

It is obviously the lyric in the sense of a poem ‘directly expressing the poet’s own voice and sentiments’, not in the quite unrelated sense of a short poem intended to be set to music, that is relevant to my first voice—the voice of the poet talking to himself—or to nobody. It is in this sense that the German poet Gottfried Benn ... thinks of the lyric as the poetry of the first voice: he includes, I feel sure, such poems as Rilke’s *Duinese Elegies* and Valéry’s *La Jeune Parque*. Where he speaks of ‘lyric poetry’, then, I should prefer to say ‘meditative verse’.
 (97)

Pound is, of course, a different matter.¹⁵ This is because, unlike that of Yeats and Eliot, his modernism is largely uncompromised by either an overt lyricism (Yeats) or a “Classicism” (Eliot). But what this more thorough-going modernism meant in practice was a significantly different order of critical attention, one focussing on the explication of the difficulties of Pound’s poetry, or the controversial status of, say, his Propertius “translations”, or indeed of any of his poems. Despite the fact that Pound’s work, especially in *The Cantos*, is harder to assimilate to the critical canons of unity and intensity we have noted, this has not prevented the attempt being made. Whilst there are critics who do recognise a novelty in Pound’s poetic, there are many

who are all too ready to regard Pound's work as an anthology of junk and jewels and to concentrate on the jewels.¹⁶ Eda Lou Walton, for example, summed Pound up thus:

Pound is a superb technician, perhaps the most important modern prosodist. He has contributed much to modern poetry by his many studies in rhythm. He has taught Eliot his technique. He has taught MacLeish a great deal about speech in poetry. He is often a very good lyric poet himself. The best passages in the cantos [sic] are those which attain to sheer lyric loveliness. (2)

For Malcolm Cowley the *Pisan Cantos* contain two "almost perfect" and one, presumably, perfect lyric, but, Cowley goes on "there is not enough of it in a disordered book of disordered observations" (19). This emphasis is not absent from British criticism either, though Pound has always received less critical attention in Britain than in America. A good example of such criticism as Pound did receive is, however, an article by John Wain, which, after noting Robert Graves' poor view of *The Cantos*, goes on:

One of the things those 'ancient centres of learning' may profitably do for us is to study the difference between the early, middle and late Cantos. The new ones have fewer lyrical passages and more doodling, and to that extent strike me as a falling-off. But for a riper judgement, balancing the new against the familiar, we shall need more time. (360)

With more academic criticism, the story is the same. It can in fact be readily told in the titles of some of the academic criticism that has surrounded Pound's work: there is for example Daniel Pearlman's *The Barb of Time: On the Unity of Ezra Pound's Cantos*, or Lore Lenburg's *The Coherence of the Pisan Cantos*, or Marianne Korn's *Ezra Pound: Purpose, Form, Meaning*.¹⁷ One critical account which fully exemplifies the lyric understanding of Pound is Eugene Nasser's. His criticism is one which, like the criticism of the modernist long poem we have already looked at, takes the lyrical moments of *The Cantos* as the key to the literal and ideological structure of the poem:

The primary interpretative data ought to be the radiant lyric nodes of *The Cantos* themselves; secondly, and in descending order, ought to be the non-lyrical portions of *The Cantos* ... the tonality—the actually achieved and complex body of attitudes at the centre of Pound's creative imagination in this immense work—is most precisely focussed there, where it is most deeply felt and mostly successfully communicated. (3)¹⁸

Recently, however, Pound has been the subject of much critical attention as the first adumbration in poetry of the Post-modern; this Pound is no longer seen as a major poet, but as a "broken bundle of mirrors".¹⁹ A recent article by Marjorie Perloff, "Postmodernism and the Impasse of the Lyric", is a very useful one to consider in

this context. For Marjorie Perloff, responding to Christopher Clausen's lament over the neglect of poetry, takes issue with the grounds of his complaint. Clausen, she claims, is guilty of a number of critical errors. He uses the words "poetry" and "lyric" interchangeably (44), he ignores every other characteristic mode of twentieth-century poetry but the lyric (45) and he champions the absurdly outdated tradition of the lyric stemming from Palgrave (46-48).

Thus far it is difficult not to sympathise with Perloff's case. As we saw in chapter three, Clausen's book, *The Place of Poetry: Two Centuries of an Art in Crisis*, is a valuable piece of historical work insofar as it, as no other survey, stresses the importance of Palgrave to the history of poetry and criticism. The corollary to this, however, is that Clausen is inclined to stress too much the rhetoric of crisis that is lyric poetry's own. So my own position comes between that of Clausen and that of Perloff: on the one hand, although I believe that the history of twentieth-century poetry *is* overwhelmingly lyrical, there is no sense in which I could share Clausen's *angst* at poetry's supposed neglect. Poetry happens to be lyrical, because of certain features of the constitution of modernity, but this is a matter for recognition and noting, hardly for celebration or lamentation. On the other hand Perloff's list of the non-lyrical attributes of twentieth-century poetry, although neglected by Clausen's "hard-line" lyric criticism, cannot be whole-heartedly endorsed either; "narrative and satire, parody and play" certainly are present still in poetry, but in the present constitution of things are inserted into a hierarchy no less rigorous than that of the eighteenth century, so that the generic qualities that they are judged on are their intensity and lyric afflatus. Whereas the eighteenth-century hierarchy had "epic" as its highest term, although the instances of obvious epic in the century are not conspicuous, so the lyric, in the Romantic hierarchy, occupies the highest, though occluded space and poetry will probably continue to be judged in these, often covert terms, until another paradigm shift, as total as that which occurred at the close of the eighteenth century, takes place.

Perloff, moreover, though she has no difficulties in contesting Clausen's premises, certainly has difficulties in establishing the new criteria for postmodern criticism of poetry. She soon leaves consideration of Pound for a consideration of Louis Zukofsky's 800-page poem *A*; but the conclusions she draws from it seem to lead her, much against the grain of her argument, back towards an older criticism. At one point, for example, she writes:

In the *Paideuma* issue honoring Zukofsky ... Gilbert Sorrentino takes one of the poem's short stanzas:

Red alder berry
Will singly break
But you—how slight—do:
So that even
A lover exists.

and comments:

"But"? What does "but" mean? And is "even" an adjective or an adverb? This "metaphysical" nicety of expression, the lyric turning on the most delicate changes in the meaning of words, is as subtle and exact as Donne's great gold/circle imagery in "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning" and gives Zukofsky's poetry its persistent hold on the mind.

What interests me here ... is that attention is directed, not to questions of Zukofsky's "subjectivity", much less a possible "apocalypse of the imagination" (Bloom's term), but to the niceties of *language*—the poet's puns and word play, his complex allusions and borrowings—what oft was thought, one might say—but ne'er so well expressed. (53)

Although Perloff has earlier discussed the different discourses that find their way into Zukofsky's poetry, other than the lyric (52), it is, I submit, highly typical that Sorrentino should light upon a lyrical passage to single out and comment on and an equally symptomatic critical move that Perloff should pick out this passage. But what Sorrentino appears to be doing in this passage is no more than a reproduction of the New Critical search for telling ambiguity and verbal richness, and Perloff's "linguistic turn" is no more convincing evidence for a new poetic either. Heidegger stated that one of the characteristics of Being was that in Being "Sprache spricht", Northrop Frye wrote of the "babble" and "doodle" aspects of poetry, and, in an earlier phase, Pound wrote of *melopoeia*; Perloff's move, then, has a pedigree, and it is all Romantic.

It is one, moreover, shared by another anti-lyrical account of modernist poetics, Margaret Dickie's *On the Modernist Long Poem*. The difficulty of the same closure into language causes Dickie's conclusion to come several pages before the official conclusion, when she sums up the difference between her "lyric" and her "non-lyric" poetic:

The difficulty, even obscurity, of the modern lyric has been attributed to its nonreferentiality; but the difficulty of the long poem is precisely in its referentiality, not to purify it by removing it from public discourse, but to reattach it to public meaning.... Williams, in observing the falls above Paterson, attempted over and over again to make them refer to language itself: "the roar,/the roar of the present, a speech—/is, of necessity, my sole concern". (156)

The problem with this formulation, apart from Dickie's interpretation of *Paterson*, is

the collapsing of “public meaning” (as though there were one public meaning) into “language itself”. It is important to note that the lyric cannot fail to be a public discourse²⁰; what really needs to be established is *what kind* of public discourse it is.

Before leaving the topic of modernism I should like to discuss one very unfamiliar use of the term, which, however much it may grate against our present understanding, can nevertheless show how the term could be understood and used during the 1920s. This version of modernism is found in Robert Graves’ and Laura Riding’s *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*,²¹ and in it Graves and Riding give the following definition of a modernist poetic:

Modernist poetry seems to be composed chiefly of short poems—*The Wasteland*, one of the longest modernist poems, runs to only 433 lines. Yet this is not because of a belief in the short poem *per se* as against the long poem, but because of a sense that form and subject-matter are structurally identical whatever the length of the poem. Well-controlled irregularity substituted for uncontrollable regularity makes ‘short’ and ‘long’ obsolete critical standards. The very purpose of this ‘irregularity’ is to let the poem find its own natural length in spite of the demands put upon poetry by critics, booksellers, and the general reading public. (83-4)

Although the argument here seems to abolish the category of the shorter poem in favour of the form of the aesthetic whole, yet the logic of the argument, and the argument of the *Survey* as a whole, persuade me that here we are dealing with a development of some notable lyric ideas. The argument of the piece seems to me, in stressing the “natural length” (that is, the unity) of the poems, to be of a similar kind to some of those I have already discussed. And, it should be noted that the poems that Graves and Riding discuss are all short.

At first it is difficult to understand why the authors should have chosen to call their *Survey* one of “modernist” poetry and not simply modern poetry, since although Eliot and Marianne Moore are granted faint praise and Pound included as a whipping-boy, the poets who come away highly praised are e e cummings, Robert Frost, Laura Riding herself and Shakespeare! However, it soon becomes clear that Graves and Riding are using the term modernist to contrast both with “modern” and with the conventional meaning of “modernist”. Their argument is that their modernist poetry is not modern poetry, because this is poetry simply of its time and will soon become dated, nor is their modernist poetry modernist in the Poundian sense, since it does not attempt to assemble the materials for an historical argument; instead their modernist poetry is that which, by virtue of its being true poetry, is always already

outside the progression of history:

It is at first difficult, in fact, to distinguish false modernism, or faith in history, from genuine modernism, or faith in the immediate performances of poems as not necessarily derived from history. (126)

A strong distinction must be drawn between poetry as something developing through civilisation and as something developing organically by itself. (128-129)²²

This account bears a remarkable similarity to the familiar lyric criteria; the poetic tradition in this reading is characterised by its transhistorical nature, the poems that embody it are characterised by intensity and unity, although, in the way that individual examples of paradigms are never wholly true to the paradigm, Graves and Riding seem little concerned that their poetic *exempla* should be lyrical *senso strictu*. Judged by their pamphlet *Anthologies*, which I discussed in chapter three, “lyric” had become a vitiated concept and one of no use to them. They do, however, provide a very useful and complex demonstration of the way in which the poet and the poem tend to be telescoped in this criticism. In their famous defence of the Elizabethan punctuation of Shakespeare’s Sonnet 129, they argue that “with the emended punctuation the line has only one narrow sense, and this not precisely Shakespeare’s” (89) and later they write of the affectivity of a true poem: “[the stricter modernist poet[s]] mind, as it were, puts in a personal appearance; and it is the shock of this contact which the plain reader cannot bear” (108). However, at a later stage they write: “the most striking characteristic of modernist poetry is that it declares the independence of the poem” (114). And the whole of their Section VI (116-25), “The Making of the Poem”, is dedicated to working out this paradox, demonstrating the process by which the poem, although embodying the ahistorical consciousness of the poet, can also be an autonomous subject in itself. In this, it is clear, they are dealing with notions of a similar order to T.S. Eliot’s idea of the “impersonality” of the poet.

Finally Graves and Riding, like many other critics, are keen to stress their own supplementarity:

it is surely criticism which has always stood between poetry and the plain reader, made possible the writing of so much false poetry and, by giving undue prominence to theory, robbed the reader of his power to distinguish between what is false and what is true. (78)

In this feature we can recognise the Palgravian ideal of the superfluous critic. And this is in accord with what we have seen throughout this section: that the putatively

modern ideas of modernism are all reflections and refractions of a common series of tropes of Romantic poetics.

The Poetic World Before the Second World War

So far in this chapter I have been examining Imagism and modernism, two “-isms” which to a certain extent correspond not so much to the facts of poetry production and criticism in their respective epochs, as to some sort of later rationalisation. As we have seen with Graves’ and Ridings’ own use of the term “modernism”, a latitude of usage was possible at the time which a subsequent poetic history would not allow.

In Francis Mulhern’s admirably contextual study, *The Moment of Scrutiny*, the author gives a brief description of the world of poetry criticism and production²³, organised by the respective “schools” associated with various poetry journals. He distinguishes, for example, *The London Mercury*, “home of Georgianism and good fellowship”, Middleton Murry’s *Adelphi*, the “‘Classicist’” *Criterion*, and *The Calendar of Modern Letters*, which, during a brief publication period (March 1925 - July 1927) had, as its “obsessive theme”, “the disruption of cultural life brought about by the spread of scientific thought and the consequent dissolution of religious belief”—contributors to the journal included Lawrence, Blunden, Graves, Tate, Crowe Ransom, Crane and others (16-17).

We have seen already the strange sort of modernism of Graves’ and Ridings’ monograph, and it seem clear that this was the sort of criticism that is congruent with Mulhern’s description of the interests and concerns of *The Calendar of Modern Letters*.²⁴ The ‘Classicism’ of *The Criterion* I have already looked at and Georgianism I will leave to a later section; for the moment I should like to consider Middleton Murry, a writer usually classed as a psychologist of the metaphysical. However in his criticism, in its championship of Lawrence and, in a different way, of Keats, we can find traces, often quite old-fashioned-sounding ones, of the interest in the lyric we have been investigating. In his essay “The Nature of Poetry”, a concern with form is the implicit subtext of an argument ostensibly in search of the essence of poetry. This Murry defines as follows:

There comes a moment when we seem to break through these conditions to that which is beyond them; we seem to make contact, immediate, full, and mysterious contact, with something for which we have no single word.... we

shall call it God, or a deeper reality, or the music of the spheres, or the love that moves the sun and the other stars. I prefer, just at this moment, to call it a rhythm of life. (16)

And when he turns to Shakespeare to discover “the appointed utmost of our knowledge of a writer” (17) he stumbles upon “The Phoenix and the Turtle”, perhaps the most obviously short, self-contained work in Shakespeare’s canon. This he describes in the following way:

For reasons which evade expression in ordinary speech, *The Phoenix and the Turtle* is the most perfect short poem in any language. It is *pure* poetry in the loftiest and most abstract meaning of the words: that is to say, it gives us the highest experience of life which it is possible for poetry to give, and it gives it without intermission. Here for once it seems Shakespeare had direct command over an essential source of inspiration; here he surrendered himself completely to a kind of experience, which elsewhere he conveys to us only through ‘the shadows of things’.... (25)

Not only this but “The Phoenix and the Turtle” also becomes the starting point for a mission of exploration and retrieval of the most easily-detached portions of Shakespeare’s drama, those passages, according to Murry, “which constantly exert the same hyper-dramatic power” (29), and which include “She should have died hereafter” from *Macbeth* and “The cloud-capped towers” from *The Tempest* (26-27).

Another essay of Murry’s provides us with a useful demonstration of the use that can be made of “the lyric” in historical argument. In “English Poetry in the Eighteenth Century”, Murry begins by denying the claims of “the lyric”:

The word ‘lyric’ indeed, as a description of the formal qualities of a poem, is no longer of any use to us. It no longer implies, as it once did, that the poem was written for music; it means [now] hardly more than that the poem is a short one, and that it is not a sonnet. (175)

However this is a typical procedure in this tradition of criticism; it is simply a case of making an initial concession in order later to make a grander statement, as Murry immediately goes on to show:

But lyric as an epithet of essential quality is much more alluring as an object of analysis.... When we have said that a poem has ‘the true lyrical quality,’ we feel that we have said something important about it. We have decided that it is a poem... the truest and most indisputable poetry, the poetry which we could least afford to lose, the poetry which seems to illuminate our human universe with a gleam of a purer existence and fuller knowledge than our own, is lyrical. Lyrical is simply the name by which we distinguish its particular quality and power. (175-76)

This concept of the lyric poem then becomes the principal weapon in Murry’s armory. The question that he is trying to answer is why the eighteenth century produced no poetry. (No single “fact” in literary history is more universally agreed on

by critics than this). And in his argument the lyric poem becomes the unspoken Other of the poetry that was produced in the eighteenth century:

To treat of the history of lyrical poetry in such a period is therefore, in a sense, to treat of a thing which is not. So long as the human mind insists on a complete and conscious mastery of its own destiny, lyrical poetry (considered, as we have tried to consider it, as essence and not as form) can scarcely begin to be. It demands for its own birth an admission of that which is beyond reason; its very roots lie in the unthinkable and unspeakable. (179-180)

And of those poets who did try to think “the unthinkable” and speak the “unspeakable”, thus approaching the essence of “the lyrical”, Collins, Blake, Cowper, and Smart (184-87) were eventually smitten by madness, “they could not trust themselves” (188).

Another example of a lyric criticism from this time is A.E Housman’s lecture *The Name and Nature of Poetry*, given at Cambridge in 1933. This is a bizarre and puzzling lecture, and, at times, it seems as though Housman is speaking tongue-in-cheek.²⁵ Nevertheless the lecture is worth citing because it shows the sort of critical pronouncements which could be made at the time and because several aspects of the lecture seem to reflect the poetics of the 1870s and 80s, the period of Housman’s adolescence and early manhood.

Housman begins by reflecting the older Romantic idea that poetry is not necessarily metrical, or poetic in form:

On the other hand, when Wisdom says in the Proverbs ‘He that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul; all they that hate me, love death’, that is to me poetry, because of the words in which the idea is clothed. (36)

And elsewhere in the text of the lecture he problematizes the nature of poetry beyond the expression of emotion. He refers to it as “a mystery” (33) and writes:

I am convinced that most readers, when they think that they are admiring poetry, are deceived by an inability to analyse their sensations, and that they are really admiring, not the poetry of the passage before them, but something else in it, which they like better than poetry. (34)

Later he grants Shakespeare and Shelley an exalted status above other poets, and, after quoting “Take O take those lips away”, comments provocatively: “That is nonsense; but it is ravishing poetry” (41). And the context would seem to show that here the quality of “nonsense” is again the expression of the very highest value that the tradition can grant poetry: that is, poetry as divine afflatus, which the quotidian world cannot understand and pronounces “nonsense”. After this it is very difficult to decide whether the remaining pronouncements about poetry in the lecture, such as,

that it is akin to the relics of original fen-vegetation to be met with in remote parts of Cambridgeshire (46), or that its power is to be gauged by the physical reaction it evokes (47), as when it causes the beard to bristle during shaving, or that it should be compared with a “touchstone” (quoted out of context from one of Keats’ letters²⁶) (47), are due to the inconsistencies of the tropical repertoire of the tradition that Housman is dealing with, or to a witty use of them, with the intention of shocking and bewildering his audience.

Another very influential critic of this period was Herbert Read. Read, though again “our” literary history has tended to ignore him, was highly influential for many years before and after the Second World War as an editor, poet and critic and above all an art-historian and critic. Indeed the “apocalyptic” school of poetry which he championed was so influential in Australia that McAuley’s and Stewart’s Ern Malley hoax could be said to be a direct response to his critical ideas (Heyward 16-17); the confused Max Harris, in fact, called upon Read to testify to the genuine inspiration of Malley’s poems (156).

Like Murry, Read is basically dealing with some very old-fashioned critical concepts and his *Phases of English Poetry* is a very familiar sort of historical argument, one which relates the spiritual growth of English poetry, whilst expressing a nostalgia for the childlike innocence of undissociated ballad-poetry (130-31).

A more useful work for our purposes, however, is Read’s *Form in Modern Poetry*, an extended disquisition on the question of unity in literary form. The first part of the book is dedicated to the introduction of, and distinction between, the terms “organic form” and “abstract form”, related by Read himself to the concepts of “romantic” and “classical”, as well as to the Coleridgean ideas of “organic form” and “mechanical regularity” (9, see also *True Voice* 16-20). The latter part of the book is concerned to apply these concepts to the form of poetry. Read begins this part of his work:

It might be objected that whilst this theory of poetry may be accepted as a theory of poetic essence, it will not account for poetry in being, which involves, besides essence, embodiment and structure. The question is: how can a poet pass from the metaphor and the lyric poem[,] which is in reality no more than an extended metaphor, to those larger epic conceptions by which we measure the greatness of poetry. (61)

But the next sentence underlines the anxiety that the lyric provenance of his critical ideas causes him: “To discuss the length of poetry might seem at first sight a very

trivial approach to a serious subject". The reason for his anxiety is that, like Graves and Riding, he does not want the lyric to disrupt the ideal aesthetic form of the poem, and impose its dynamics on what should be the expression of the poem's own identity. Read's answer to the question he posed is symptomatic of this:

we might define a lyric as a poem which embodies a single or simple emotional attitude, a poem which expresses directly an uninterrupted mood or inspiration. A long poem ... is one which unites by artifice several or many such emotional moods; though here the artifice might imply a single dominant *idea* which in itself might be an emotional unity. (62)

It is indeed a less sophisticated version of the modernist "lyric" criticism I diagnosed earlier. Read goes on to leave behind the short poem, as superfluous (64-66), but his final formulation, since he has had to leave behind narrative too (72), is no less lyrical than if he had embraced the short poem:

Invention and Imagery—Poetry is an essence distilled by these emotional activities. But it is not an essence which we can dilute with the water of prose, to make it go a long way. There are many varieties of poetic expression, just as there are many voices that sing; but none of them forgoes its proper harmony. (76)

In contrast to Read, I.A. Richards is still a well-known name. Whilst it is true that Richards was more, especially in his later work, a theorist of communication than a literary historian and critic, throughout his career he adhered to the view that poetry was the highest form of communication. Although his work had other ramifications which are undoubtedly, in the context of a study of his work, of more importance, it is useful in the present context to examine the influence of lyrical tropes upon his work. Raymond Williams, for example, diagnoses in his "practical criticism" something similar to what I described earlier as "the superfluity trope" in this tradition:

[Richards] is always very good at the demonstration of a really crude organisation.... But he has not offered enough really convincing examples of the intense realization of a rich or complex organisation, which in general terms he has often described. He often notes the complexity [of a poem], but the discussion that follows is usually a kind of return upon itself, a return to the category 'complexity'.... (*Culture and Society* 250-51)

When we turn to Richards' *Practical Criticism* we find this circularity of argument well figured. The book, famously, presents the results, and the conclusions that Richards drew from them, of his experiment in "comparative ideology", where he presented a group of Cambridge undergraduates with a number of anonymous poems for comment. Throughout the book the assumption is that poetry is the most complex and most important form of discourse, but this is nowhere expressed or

argued. Instead he simply uses his assumptions to extrapolate from his experiments on the reading of poems to reading and comprehension in general, and this was in fact the vector of his career as a whole (Needham 22):

It is natural to inquire how far insensitiveness, poor discrimination, and a feeble capacity to understand poetry imply a corresponding inability to apprehend and make use of the values of ordinary life. (*Practical Criticism* 319)²⁷

And another example of this is the famous concluding sentence of the book: "The lesson of good poetry seems to be that, when we have understood it, in the degree in which we can order ourselves, we need nothing more" (351).

A similar evasiveness can be detected in Richards' earlier work *Principles of Literary Criticism*. This work is flawed, as John Needham points out, by the introduction of the idea of poetry as hypnotism, which sits uneasily beside the idea of poetry as complexity (Needham 31).²⁸ But besides this there is a positive avoidance of definition, so that when the short chapter, towards the end of the book, "The Definition of Poetry", does come up with a definition (226-27) this is immediately and apologetically deflated: "The justification for this outbreak of pedantry, as it may appear..." (227). Even the lyric is no sooner given its customary approbation: "A prose composition has to be longer than a lyric to produce an equal definiteness of developed effect" (130) before refuge is taken in undefinition: "But no general prescription that in great poetry there must always be this or that... is more than a piece of ignorant dogmatism" (130).

In Richards then we find a demonstration of the way in which inherited respect for the shorter poem is, either consciously or unconsciously, sublimated and remains unspoken, the more powerful for being unspoken, as the linch-pin of a scheme of linguistic analysis that claims for its main strength rigorous definition and discrimination.

What was perceived as the new criticism of Richards, and, largely dependent on his work, of Leavis (MacCabe 242), enforced a literary pedagogy which has been astonishingly long-lasting and can be said to have formed the basis of the teaching of English in Britain almost to the present day. Indeed, to intrude biographical information, my own literary education at an English public (that is, private) school in the late 1970s was based on what might be called the old historicism, overlaid with Richards, Leavis and subsequent criticism of that stamp.

In the United States the cognate criticism and pedagogy was that of the New Criticism, which also owed a great deal to the work of Richards (Russo 199). It has been widely recognised that several of the habits of the New Criticism have become ingrained in American literary criticism, and have been carried over even into ostensibly antithetical movements, such as that of the “Yale Deconstructionists”. William E. Cain, for example, quotes Louis Rubin on this head: “In ceasing to be New [New Criticism] has not thereby become Old Criticism. Instead it has become simply criticism” (1103). But the New Criticism was once “New”, that is, it represented a sharp break with the older tradition of American critical thought, from Emerson to Santayana; this especially in its earlier “Ruralist” incarnation, when it represented an anti-North Eastern critical regime, based on a different tradition of continental and British thought. On the other hand Ricardian and Leavisite criticism has been able to become if anything even more influential in Britain, because it can plausibly be seen as the lineal descendant of a long line of Romantic critics stretching back to Coleridge, and before him to a Burkean conservatism; it is in fact Raymond Williams' genealogy of critics in *Culture and Society*.²⁹

This tradition of criticism, as I have noted, was primarily a pedagogy, but this did not prevent its influencing the already cognate traditions of poetry-criticism. It is very difficult to convey the monotonous sameness of twentieth-century British poetic criticism. Very difficult because, firstly, anyone who has worked in the area will very likely have made a particular study of one writer and the particularities of any one writer can, seen close up, obscure the wider relations of his or her criticism. Secondly there are always exceptions to every rule, so that it would be very easy to point to a critic who did not share the prevailing climate of criticism; one could, for example, instance Empson, as a critic who considered poetry alongside prose, never granted poetry a preeminent status and never forgot the cultural and historical context of the works he was considering (MacCabe 245). Finally our mindset, whether it is that of the Romantic history of the progress of the human spirit, or the more clear-sighted historicism of historical and cultural contingencies, Edward Said's “secular” criticism, prepares us to read for change. A set of static and unchanging ideas and critical practices is an immense challenge to this world-view. Nevertheless it is my belief that lack of change is equally important in cultural history, and something that cannot be ignored.³⁰

To illustrate this I should like to discuss three works, two from the 1950s, and one from the 1980s, which demonstrate this continuity in the tropes of lyric criticism.

The first is Cecil Day Lewis' *The Lyric Impulse*. Here Day Lewis does avoid the lyrical fallacy (that the lyric is timeless and the natural condition of poetry) for long stretches. In the first chapter, for example, he distinguishes carefully between lyrics (written for music) and lyrical poems (3) and between Elizabethan and modern lyrics (5), and he writes of the links between the drama and the lyric (13). In subsequent chapters he discusses lyrics (poems genuinely written for music), and popular song in a fashion which is a model of historically-minded generic criticism. However, it is in the last chapter, "The Golden Bridle" (130-153), that Day Lewis begins to succumb to the lyric fallacy. The golden bridle in question, that supplied by the Muses to Bellerophon to enable him to ride Pegasus, becomes a metaphor for the quality of inspiration, held in check by the lyric's form. But it soon appears that the form of the lyric is precisely the form of the imagination; in contrast to a narrative poem, "A pure lyric ... can go in any direction it likes—theoretically, at least—with nothing to sustain or guide it but its own essential nature" (132).

To be sure, Day Lewis never explicitly claims that the lyric is the *only* sort of poetry; at one point he has praise for the anti-lyrical tendencies of the Movement (142-43). But as the chapter proceeds the impression grows that the lyric is of overwhelming importance; there is for example a lament throughout for its rareness in modern times (133), a constant emphasis on imagination and inspiration and the suggestion that the love-poem is the lyric *par excellence* (134-35). By the end of the chapter and the book Day Lewis has, without ever making it explicit, elevated the lyric to the highest rank of poetry, by virtue of its unity's being a synecdoche for the perceived human need for wholeness:

In any lyric poem we feel perhaps a touch of irresponsibility.... A touch of irresponsibility? our poet replies: what you are feeling is the touch of joy; and my play is serious. I am playing to delight and console you—myself and you.... Every good work of every artist is there to remind man of his roots, to refresh them, to satisfy—if only for a few years or hours—his perpetual need for wholeness. (152-53)

Robert Graves, who was never inexplicit in any of his pronouncements, in one of the 1954-55 Clark Lectures at Cambridge, gave a lecture on the origins, as he saw it, of poetic metre, "Harp, Anvil, Oar".³¹ Graves is, by the 1950s, no longer the "modernist" critic of *A Survey of Modernist Poetry*; instead he is now well advanced in the mythology of the White Goddess, the Muse, the inspirer of poets, which he had outlined in *The White Goddess* (1948). But the tropes of lyrical criticism persist with little change and at the end of this lecture on poetic metre the question of the proper

form for a poem creeps in:

The Irish and early Welsh bard had made a discovery ... namely, that regular verse, though a wonderful aid to memory, is soporific unless frequent changes occur in the metre; and that though, say, Virgil's *Aeneid* or Homer's *Iliad* may contain numerous poems, the verse which links these poems together, because written in the same metre, robs them of their force. What jeweller would display a pearl ... in a mother-of-pearl setting?... The greater part of every long poem ... is necessarily mother of pearl. (89-90)

So Graves concludes his lecture with a reference to the giant yam of Abulam, "said to be approximately the size and shape of a bull-hippopotamus (discounting head and legs) and perfectly inedible", which

provides ... an emblem of the literary epic, which was still being cultivated in Victorian days. With the passing of this Epic, followed by the formal Elegy, and the Ode ... of what does poetry now consist? It is reduced, at last, to practical poems, namely the lyrical or dramatic highlights of the poet's experiences with the Goddess in her various disguises. (90-91)

While the final text I wish to discuss in this section is the most recent, it also links in with an earlier chapter, chapter three, on the influence of anthologies on the lyric tradition. This is the Introduction to *The Oxford Book of Short Poems*, by P.J.Kavanagh and James Michie, published in 1985. It is an astonishingly atavistic document; reading it one is struck by its similarity to Palgrave's Preface to *The Golden Treasury*, written one hundred and twenty-four years earlier. To begin with, in an anthology dedicated to short poems³², the word "epigram" is mentioned just once in the Introduction, in a depreciatory context (xxxix).³³

The editors then proceed to make four of the same moves as Palgrave did: they suggest that an activation of the previously obscured lyric (or as they term it "short poem") tradition of English verse will uncover previously neglected poems, and they couple this with Palgrave's insistence on inclusiveness:

Most general anthologies tend to pick the same poems. These are usually long, or longish,³⁴ because it is presumed that the poets are best represented at their most ambitious.... we are once more taken down what Seamus Heaney has called 'the motorway of English verse'.... This anthology is an attempt to bring together the best that has been written, among poems below a certain length, from medieval times to the present day. (xxxvii)

Next there is the suggestion that: "for some reason poets, without necessarily being personal, often seem to reveal more of themselves, as writers and as individuals, and more of the flavour of their time, when they are writing briefly" (xxxvii). The

idea that poetry can reveal “the flavour of the time” smacks of Palgravian history (remember how his *Treasury* was organised by historical period) and this is confirmed when, in another Palgravian move, Michie and Kavanagh write an eminently lyrical history of poetry, contrasting the dearth of poetry in the eighteenth century (“Most selections of poems published in the eighteenth century were almost insufferably dull”, “*were*”?) with the richness of poetry of the Elizabethan and Romantic periods (xxxviii).

Michie and Kavanagh’s final Palgravianism is the statement, implicit in the argument of the whole Introduction:

It is not only reassuring; it was significant in a much more important sense: it suggests that there is a consensus, bridging generations and different types of people, as to what constitutes a poem that works. (xxxix)

And the more examples that we find of this sort of assumption the more we are entitled to say that the lyric view of poetry, and history as exemplified here is the very same as Coleridge’s, and as Palgrave’s.

But to prove my thesis that poetic criticism until very recently in Britain was almost all of a piece, and a continuation of Romantic ideology, and perhaps still is, I cannot, obviously, work my way through work after work, writer after writer, compiling an ever greater dossier of Romantic critical practice. This would be a Popperian absurdity, and would need only one counter-example to demolish. Instead I propose to spend the remainder of this chapter investigating the ostensibly *non-lyrical* criticism and poetry of the twentieth century. If I can demonstrate that *this*, largely, is internally compromised, or received as lyrical criticism or poetry, as we found was the case with modernism, then I will consider my case proven.

The Non-Lyrical Poetry and Criticism of the Twentieth Century

I should like to begin this section by referring to the “literary epic ... which was still being cultivated in Victorian days” which Robert Graves so disparaged in his lecture “Harp, Anvil, Oar”. We have seen how a tradition of lyric poems came to be popularised by Palgrave and others and became the standard poetic form of the poets of the 1890s. This was then, quite unconsciously, continued by the Imagists and thence, spread about various poetic movements, if this is a useful way of describing a far-from-tidy situation, became the standard form of poetry for the twentieth century.

Nevertheless there was a group of poets in the early twentieth century who did not want to consider lyrics as the highest form of poetry, and did not want their own lyrical poems to be considered their major works. This is not to suggest the existence of a school of anti-Romantic poets; their poetic was a part of the Romantic movement; it simply was not happy with the increasingly orthodox lyrical tradition. These poets were a disparate group, ranging from poetic, and political, conservatives, such as Robert Bridges, to comparative radicals, such as John Masefield. But they can be united for a brief survey under the heading of the long poem (or as Graves put it “the literary epic”).

One of the advantages of studying such a group is that whereas the lyric tradition is dispersed about various movements and places and institution of publishing, and can therefore be difficult to discern when looked at minutely, the opponents of the tradition are in no doubt about its existence. One such anti-lyrical argument runs through Lascelles Abercrombie’s book *The Idea of Great Poetry*. This work is in fact a collection of essays and in two of them Abercrombie attacks the idea of “pure poetry”. In the first, for example, he outlines the idea of pure poetry and comments:

there is nothing wrong with it [the argument] except that by *poetry* it means *lyrical poetry*. One may perhaps prefer lyrical poetry to all other kinds; but the didactic heresy is not more arbitrary or illogical than the attempt to confine the scope of poetry within its lyrical effort. (15)

In a later lecture Abercrombie again argues against the fallacy of pure poetry:

There is a heresy, very prevalent nowadays ... it is the doctrine that poetry can only be lyrical; even epics and dramas, this doctrine supposes, can only justify themselves as poetry by their lyrical moments, their suddenly kindled raptures of imagination that detach themselves and escape from a non-lyrical purpose.... (65)³⁵

It is rather quaint to hear someone in the early 1920s, the age of modernism, still discussing “epics and dramas”. And indeed Abercrombie was a poetic conservative, who, incidentally was described by Harold Monro as “almost without lyric impulse” (111)³⁶; but equally he was no fool, and his lectures nowhere mention modernism as the principal enemy that his poetic has to contend with. If Abercrombie felt at the time that the lectures were delivered that an idea of pure poetry which argued for the lyricity of the pure poem was something that needed to be argued against, then it seems reasonable to assume that such a common “heresy” did exist, and did argue in those terms, however much it may have been obscured by later critical accounts.

Two accounts by critics of the 1950s of this disparate group of poets with ambitions for the longer poem can help me along with my argument. John Bayley argues that the long poem was dead by the early twentieth century because it was the novel which had come to deal with the problems of the relationship of “the individual imagination and ... the complications of society” (15). What I have argued and would argue again is that this explanation ignores the contingent nature of literary genre: the reason why the novel had triumphed in the nineteenth century was because of a number of changes in the technology of the production and consumption of literature and the emergence of a mass-market—not because it had more inner vitality to perform certain pre-ordained functions.³⁷ To take a concrete example, we would be foolish to try to assert the superior truthfulness of one of Masefield’s narrative poems, over one of Joseph Conrad’s adventure-stories, or vice versa. But what we can say is that by the early twentieth century, as a result of the changes in literary production mentioned above, the adventure story in prose had come to be the standard form, and the narrative poem the anomaly. Consequently we can say, with the benefit of hindsight, that Masefield’s poems were doomed to receive a smaller readership, and less subsequent critical attention.³⁸

This argument of course ignores the explanation of literary quality as a prerequisite for literary success. However it seems to me that wide recognition of a literary genre is required before literary success can occur. I cannot think of any literary work in the canon which achieved canonical status either at the time or subsequently, which was not written in a genre which was flourishing at the time. No blank-verse dramas since Shakespeare, for example, have ever achieved either popular or academic recognition, despite the efforts of a number of highly-talented authors, notably Tennyson and T.S.Eliot. As to the example I gave above, I personally would sooner read one of Masefield’s narrative poems than one of Scott’s; but Scott was the author who achieved fame with his narrative poems, because at the time the narrative poem was still a flourishing genre.

In another account of the same poets Vivian de Sola Pinto writes of the dissociation of poetry from a wider reading public, first achieved by the Imagists:

They were the first true “modernist group” in the sense that they no longer attempted to communicate with a general public of poetry lovers which had ceased to exist, but concentrated on searching for a means of expressing the modern consciousness for their own satisfaction and that of their friends.
(*Crisis* 151)

This description of the Imagists is in contrast to an earlier one of the “long poem” school, which had failed to hold on to the upper-class readership which had read pre-Romantic long poems with enthusiasm (128). Both of these views are exaggerated; we have seen in earlier chapters how completely poetry had become professionalised in the nineteenth century, and the two communities of readers imagined here need to be much more carefully delineated and described before such generalisations can be made.

The truth is that in the early twentieth century we have a confused period during which the shorter poem is gaining ground and, as it does so, the longer poem is losing ground as a literary form. But these shifts are never clear cut, and I should like to argue this by a consideration of the phenomenon of Georgianism.

The Georgians were dismissed by the modernists as poetic conservatives and have had a bad press ever since, despite the fact that they are a much more complex movement than they used to be given credit for (Rogers xi, Moeyes 456, Underhill 67). Indeed Timothy Rogers has shown that one of the prime critical moves of writers dealing with poets who were associated with the Georgian anthologies is to try to distance their particular subject from the movement, to try to deny the poet’s Georgian links (1-2). A very interesting passage of disparagement of the Georgian movement is to be found in Samuel Hynes’ lecture “The Life and Early Death of Georgianism”. It runs:

The poems that they made ... were familiar-looking poems. One could describe them in various ways: formally they are virtually all in familiar, unadventurous verse forms—mainly in blank verse, a number of sonnets, some rhymed quatrains ... anyone who had read a bit of Palgrave would feel at home in *Georgian Poetry*. One could say that many are located in nature or in myth, but never in history; that many are narrative or dramatic ... and that others are celebrations of sensory experiences in the natural world. (49)

What seems to be wrong here is an over-enthusiastic identification of Georgianism with Palgravianism. For blank verse is not a notable feature of *The Golden Treasury*, and Hynes goes on to contradict himself when he admits that there are only “some rhymed quatrains” and that many of the poems are narrative or dramatic, and are therefore not lyrical.³⁹

When I looked at the five anthologies of Georgian poetry published between 1912 and 1922 I tried to find some way of noting the relative proportions of the different

	Lyric	Narrative	Dramatic
1911-1912			
No. Poems (%)	17 (47)	10 (27)	9 (23)
No. Pages (%)	22 (15)	61 (41)	66 (44)
1913-1915			
No. Poems (%)	40 (74)	8 (13)	6 (11)
No. Pages (%)	93 (40)	32 (13)	106 (46)
1916-1917			
No. Poems (%)	55 (69)	22 (27)	3 (4)
No. Pages (%)	84 (57)	60 (41)	4 (3)
1918-1919			
No. Poems(%)	77 (79)	11 (11)	9 (9)
No. Pages (%)	92 (94)	33 (23)	19 (13)
1919-1920			
No. Poems(%)	74 (76)	22 (22)	2 (2)
No. Pages (%)	90 (59)	61 (39)	2 (1)

Table 2: The composition of the five anthologies of Georgian Poetry

genres of poetry. At first I thought that the numbers of poems in the respective categories would do, but then I saw that this would over-emphasise the lyric, as lyrics are shorter and more can be fitted into any volume. Another way, that of counting the pages devoted to each genre, would over-represent the longer poems, so I compromised with both statistics (see **table two** overleaf).

What is immediately noticeable about this set of statistics is how little lyrical poetry the earliest volume actually contains, only seventeen poems (though this is 47%

of the total number of poems in the volume). When, however, we look at the number of pages devoted to the lyric we find that lyric represents only 15%, in other words lyric is merely an interspersed phenomenon. In the second volume the number of lyrics has doubled and over three quarters of the poems are now lyrics, though lyric still does not have the majority of pages. In this volume narrative poetry has declined as dramatic poetry has increased its representation (in fact mainly made up of two long dramas by Lascelles Abercrombie and Gordon Bottomley). In the third volume narrative again begins to be significant, and the lyric has declined a little; the effect of the war on the volumes was not, initially, to produce a flood of war-lyrics⁴⁰, but a crop of war narratives. After the third volume the lyric is in the unequivocal first position, though it is worth noting that although dramatic poetry almost disappears from the anthologies, narrative is still well-represented.

What then are we to make of this? Certainly the Georgian movement did not begin as a wholesale lyric movement. As I have argued the main location of lyric tropes and techniques in this period is the Imagist movement. But the Georgian movement moved gradually towards a greater representation of the lyric tradition as time went by. Indications of this can be found in Edward Marsh's prefaces to the volumes, which at the beginning of the series are full of neutral remarks about the resurgence of poetry and patriotism but which towards the end begin to figure metaphors such as:

Much admirable modern work seems to me, in its lack of inspiration and its disregard of form, like gravy imitating lava. Its upholders may retort that much of the work which I prefer seems to them, in its lack of inspiration and comparative finish, like tapioca imitating pearls. (*GP 1920-1922*, unnumbered preliminary pages)

And this passage seems, very good-humouredly, to allude to the preeminent lyrical trope of form and self-containedness. This progression of the movement as a whole towards the lyrical is borne out by the dedications of the volumes. The first and third volumes are dedicated to Robert Bridges and Edmund Gosse, respectively⁴¹, whereas the last two were dedicated to Thomas Hardy and Alice Meynell, respectively.

A more detailed study of the Georgian movement would have to explain the tendency of the movement and look at the trajectories of the various poets of the movement, since it was characterised both by conservative poets, like Abercrombie, Drinkwater and Bottomley (poets who were described by Harold Monro as "older" and, also according to him were "allowed to drop out" of the later anthologies (24))

and by poets who later came to lyrical prominence, such as Graves, de la Mare and W.H.Davies. That this dichotomy was felt as such at the time can be shown by, for example, J.C.Squire, a more “conservative” Georgian, who in the Introduction to his *Selections from Modern Poets* writes of the early 1920s as a lyrical age, despite his own worries that the shorter poem is not as philosophically weighty as the longer poem (v-vi).

When we come to consider the “poets of the 1930s” we will find much the same dual process as we found with modernism. That is, firstly the productions of a school of ostensibly anti-lyrical poetry are characterised by much lyric influence. Secondly, when these productions come to be criticised the common criticism applied to them tends to be of a very lyrical stamp. As the “quartet” of 1930s poets is, like the Georgian “school”, an artificial one, I shall say nothing at all about Spender, and very little about Day-Lewis, beyond what I have already said with regard to *The Lyric Impulse*, or about MacNeice; instead I shall mainly be concentrating on Auden.

John Bayley blithely categorises Auden as a lyricist in his *The Romantic Survival* (55); Pinto too, in his *Crisis in English Poetry*, notes with approval “a notable lyrical gift” in Auden (196).⁴² It is important to emphasise that this reaction to the “1930s poets” and to Auden in particular is not confined to a few critics, but is a general one. For example Michael Roberts’ *Faber Book of Modern Verse*, which between 1936 and 1948 ran to fifteen impressions (Saunders 248), concentrated on the lyrical side of the early Auden. This was understandable, as this is the most obvious aspect of Auden’s early work. However, when the second edition came to be produced, Roberts, who began the re-editing, and Anne Ridler, who completed it after Roberts’ death, ignored the anti-Romantic Auden of the longer poems of the 1940s. Anne Ridler wrote in the Introduction:

as we consider the time which has passed since Michael Roberts chose his anthology [sic], we can see that he was right in prophesying an increase of poetry appealing directly to the sub-conscious mind: of the kinds of poetry represented among the youngest in his book, this was the one that developed most rapidly, for good or ill. I do not think that anyone comparing the new edition with the old would feel that the poets of Robert’s own generation had quite fulfilled their promise, except Auden, and even there I found myself very reluctant to sacrifice any of his earlier poetry to make room for his later. (37)

Later, she returns to the theme, again coupling Auden with the question of lyricism:

I doubt whether anyone writing now would speak so emphatically against treating poetry as if it were song.... The lyrical tone is stronger in this second

edition than it was in the first: when it was published, Auden had not reached the zenith of his musical powers, and Eliot had not written the wonderful lyrics in traditional metrics for the fourth movements of his *Quartets*. (37-38)

Lucy McDiarmid, at the opening of her study of Auden's later anti-Romantic poetic, *Auden's Apologies for Poetry*, has the "legend" neatly encapsulated:

"Goody." So said Auden to Christopher Isherwood as the boat-train pulled out of London on 18 January 1939, as he left behind him the idealisms of the thirties, all political and social concerns, and the "magnificent early lyrics," to become an unserious poet, or, worse still, a minor poet, his poems empty, agreeable contrivances. (ix)

The fact behind the legend is that from his departure for the United States in 1939 Auden began to reformulate his early, lyrical style and to evolve a new, non-Romantic, non-lyrical poetic, which consistently undercut the status of the poet and the poem. The theoretical exposition of this poetic was preceded by a series of longer poems, written in the 1940s. The earlier Auden had been grist to everyone's mill, everyone, that is, who could share, tolerate or ignore his politics. But the later Auden was largely ignored, even in the United States, where he was resident, and where longer poems are more usual.⁴³

It is clear that with his change of tack from 1939 onwards, Auden, along with Pound, is one of the few twentieth-century poets to have made a real effort to think through an alternative poetic to the prevailing Romantic/lyric poetic. As I did with Pound I am, in this thesis, going to preserve a strategic agnosticism with regard to Auden's new poetic, as to whether it *was* truly a post-Romantic poetic, or whether it is still inside the paradigm. However what I want to show is the difficulty of this project for Auden, and the varied critical reactions to it.

So the first thing to note about Auden's "paradigm shift" is how widely it was ignored. And this seems to have been anticipated by Auden's own diffidence, for when he came to compose the four long poems of the 1940s he seems to have been very hesitant as to their generic status; as with the earlier collaboration with MacNeice, *Letters from Iceland*, the form of these poems is evasive (Saunders 248). That work had mingled verse and prose, and the main long poem in it *Letter to Lord Byron* was later extracted to take its place in the *Collected Longer Poems*; so with the other longer poems of 1940s the generic category seems unclear: the *New Year Letter* is perhaps the most definite in this regard, and takes up the epistolary genre, but *For the Time Being* is "A Christmas Oratorio", *The Sea and the Mirror* is "A Commentary on

Shakespeare's *The Tempest*", a sort of unperformable play, and *The Age of Anxiety*, although a sort of narrative psycho-drama, is described on the title page as "A Baroque Eclogue" and, again, mingles verse and prose (Saunders 248).

This difficulty with what might be called the bare possibility of the longer poem is not unique to Auden;⁴⁴ when Louis MacNeice wrote his *Autumn Journal*, he too had chosen the name of a generic form not normally associated with poetry. Moreover, despite his strong objections to the lyric in its strictest form (eg Heuser 41-42), he admits in the Note prefacing *Autumn Journal* that: "The *truth* of a lyric is different from the *truths* of science and this poem is something half-way between the lyric and the didactic poem" (7, my italics).

It seems then that, as elsewhere and with Auden, there is a great difficulty in conceiving of a long poem: the long poem has become the exception, the lyric the norm. In 1934, to give one example of this trend, Geoffrey Grigson's journal *New Verse* sent a questionnaire, on poetic habits and beliefs, to all the leading poets and the third question that was asked was "Do you think there can now be a use for narrative poetry?". MacNeice's cryptic reply to this question betrays the "impossibility" of the longer poem: "Yes, Narrative poetry should, logically, supersede the novel" (*New Verse* No.11, 7), which is a view that had sustained Victorian writers of verse novels; however, the prose novel was not superseded.⁴⁵

One indication of the extent of the difficulty of Auden's project of a new poetic, outlined in the four long poems we have mentioned, and the extent to which it runs against the grain of poetic trends, is that when these poems *are* finally discussed, one of the commonest critical tropes is simply to retell the story of the poems, as though this is something that readers who consult these critics will not have done. Examples of this are essays by Jacobs and Coniff, on *The Sea and the Mirror* and Boly, on *The Age of Anxiety*.

What is interesting about Coniff's article "The Modern Lyric and Prospero's Island" in particular is that, in contrast to other modern critics who treat of *The Sea and the Mirror*, Coniff does not endorse Auden's move away from the lyric, instead he writes:

Auden found it necessary to act as though poetry were too pure and simple, too remote from the actual world—in other words, he depended upon an implied belief in the most rigid and basic lyric conventions, even though his earlier poetry had often challenged these conventions, even though the tradition did not really support them. (85)

But Coniff runs into difficulties with his argument; he takes a great deal of trouble to demolish Day Lewis, for what he sees as the anachronism of the lectures that eventually became *The Lyric Impulse* (99).⁴⁶ But Coniff has difficulty pinning down exactly what a really modern lyric might look like or do. Strangely enough he has recourse to Louis Zukofsky's poem *A*, as did Marjorie Perloff, but his final formulation is anything but convincing: "[Zukofsky] developed a self-consciousness about the lyric conventions and all their implications, and used them against themselves, to resist his culture's tendency to estrange poets" (108). That a poem should possess a self-reflexiveness as to its generic conventions and use them ironically was one of the prime requirements of both modernism and New Criticism. Moreover, it is difficult to see how the United States can be said to "estrange" poets; it equally could well be argued that the United States in the twentieth century has been exceptionally hospitable to poets. To note one instance of this, of the American poets featured in *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry*, nearly every one has held, at one time or another, a position in Higher Education, teaching creative writing, English, or some other subject. In any case, to feel estranged is a requisite for a Romantic poet. Finally Coniff nowhere explains precisely how Zukofsky manages to overcome society's estrangement of poetry by being ironic about lyric conventions.

Another account which courts the same danger of falling back into New Critical assumptions is Lucy McDiarmid's mostly very convincing study, *Auden's Apologies for Poetry*. Very convincing except for the occasional strong statement of Auden's position, such as this: "Every poem becomes an apology, undermining its own significance and alluding to the value it cannot contain" (12), which seems to be fundamentally the same idea as that expressed in such an esoteric document as the central credo of Symbolist theory, Mallarmé's famous meditation "Je dis un fleur ... l'absente de tous bouquets".

Finally John Boly's article "Auden as a Literary Evolutionist", runs a different sort of danger. In a commentary on Auden's series of lectures printed as *The Enchafèd Flood*, Boly's observations on Auden's almost structuralist investigation into Romantic iconography, in particular on Wordsworth's dream from Book V of *The Prelude*, include this:

Auden makes the strong claim that he is not conducting a retrospective and external commentary on romanticism, but rather showing how literature as a system has in effect spoken through romantic secessionism so as immanently to comment on itself. (66)

Once again it does not matter for the purposes of my argument whether the opinion that Boly expresses is Auden's or Boly's own interpretation of Auden's opinion; what is significant is the expression of such a misconception of the past. For literature, except in the older sense of "anything written or printed which is not completely ephemeral or functional", is an invention of Romanticism, and to project the present back into the past, without enquiring whether the tools used to do this are themselves part of the present paradigm, can only lead to a view of the past as in all respects homologous to the present, which it certainly was not. My own feeling is that this view, quoted by Boly, is an assumption untheorised by Auden, and theorised in the name of some ahistorical notion of *écriture* by Boly. This is borne out, I think, by Boly's conclusion:

[Auden's] entire argument has led to the conclusion that romanticism ... is destined to be shaped, assimilated, and ultimately superseded through the operation of literature's underlying laws. (74)

The last anti-lyrical movement I want to look at is the Movement, and, even though this only takes us on to the beginning of the 1960s, it is entirely appropriate. For the Movement represents the last self-conscious grouping in the British poetry world to date, and after its demise the feeling in contemporary comment and criticism was very much that things could now get back to their normal state; a state which we might well describe, with Blake Morrison, as informed by "Romantic individualist ideology" (7).

Andrew Crozier has suggested that not only was the end of the Movement the resumption of "business as usual" in poetic circles, but even that the debates which occurred in and about the Movement have set out the terms of argument for poetry down to the present.⁴⁷

Since 1945 the major poetic controversies, through which current poetic concerns have received their most effective public exposure, occurred within the decade bracketed by the publication of the first *New Lines* anthology and the revised edition of *The New Poetry*. By and large our sense of the situation of poetry today is conditioned by the arguments of 1956-66. (220-21)

Furthermore, Crozier suggests that it was the demise of the Movement which gave rise to the triumvirate of modern canonical poets: Hughes, Larkin and Heaney (221).⁴⁸ Larkin, in this canonical grouping, functions as the Movement's urban lyricist, Hughes as an enemy of the Movement's urban imperatives, and representative of the authentic, rural tradition of English poetry, and Seamus Heaney as the younger, Irish, and "political poet".⁴⁹ Nor does it need stressing how "lyrical" these three

poets are. None has written extended poems, and Hughes and Heaney's longer sequences (eg *Crow* and *Station Island*) are sequences of mainly lyrical, though often dramatic, self-sufficient poems. Larkin too, despite his reputation for realism and disillusioned poetry of urban *anomie* ("They fuck you up, your Mum and Dad"), has his lyrical moments, as, for example, in the, in my opinion very contrived, elevation of the title-poem of the *High Windows* collection, or earlier in "The Arundle Tomb". And it should be noted how often these, and other similar, poems are invoked in criticism of Larkin, as the lyrical element which saves the rest of his *oeuvre* from itself.

This brief mention of the Movement as a collective aberration in the normally smooth and individual texture of the British poetry world, a movement which, anti-lyrical though it claimed to be, had the paradoxical effect of producing the late twentieth-century's most regarded lyricist, in the person of Philip Larkin, needs to be supplemented by a further investigation of the Movement itself. As with Modernism, as with the poets of the 1930s, we would then find that the Movement too is compromised by a latent Romanticism within itself. Crozier, for example, as we have seen, sees the debates within the Movement itself as giving rise to our modern view of poetry. And, in his reading, it is precisely the "non-partisan, individualist strategies of Movement poets" that enabled them "to transcend their collective moment in the mid-fifties" (221).

Although it is dangerous to take any figure from within the Movement as representative, yet the case of Donald Davie provides one of the clearest examples of this process, the expression in the Movement's poetic of latent Romantic poetics despite itself. His too is a valuable case since he is the Movement critic most concerned to attack the lyric, and at every stage in his career he has produced anti-lyrical critical works. From *Purity of Diction*, in 1952, to his very latest work the anti-lyrical trajectory is clear, however it is expressed. The quality that Davie opposes to the lyric is first "purity of diction", which is later renamed "syntax" (in *Articulate Energy*). In the 1970s Davie was interested in the idea of influence and particularly of the wholesome influence of Hardy on British poetry, the tone of Hardy's speaking-voice in the poetry, and its quiet disillusionment. Finally he has come into the open in *Czesław Miłosz and the Insufficiency of the Lyric* (1986), though conceding that:

There is evidence indeed that Miłosz in the 1930s began his writing career as a lyricist; in modern times it would be a strange poet who thought to start in any other way. (8)

There is no doubt about the sincerity and the extensiveness of Davie's efforts in this cause. However, they are open to criticism on a number of fronts. In the first place we should note the place that lyric takes in Davie's own poetic work. An examination of his *Collected Poems* of 1970 will confirm this. Davie's most commented on and most discussed poems are all short ones, not his longer works, and this is true for most of the poets of the Movement too. Secondly Davie's search for a sort of Augustan social grouping in which poetry can be discussed (Erskine Hill 122) is belied by the coterie status and provincial orientation of the Movement (Morrison 118-19). In fact, as Morrison argues, what is at stake is less a question of an Augustanism than a Leavisite attempt to undo the dissociation of sensibility (113), coupled with a championing of poetic realism, as against any other mode (163).⁵⁰

To this we can add the observation that any attempt to escape Romantic poetics by an appeal to a *quality* within poetry, such as "purity of diction" or "syntax", is doomed to failure since it needs must be Romantic too. A true Augustanism would have nothing to do with any quality within poetry, but would be a question of the social and critical milieu in which poetry might be produced and judged. It is noticeable that in *Czesław Miłosz* Davie has given up trying to label the anti-lyrical quality, and it is now simply embodied in the poetic practice of Miłosz himself—an eminently Romantic move.

Finally Davie's project for a genealogy of anti-Romantic poetry stemming from Hardy is also open to the charge that in trying to oppose to the foreign influences of modernism a native English tradition, it is merely resurrecting a lyric genealogy (Osterwalder 155). Larkin, for example, in *The Oxford Book of Twentieth Century Verse* (1972) adopted Davie's genealogy in an even more obvious attempt to by-pass modernism and preserve the true descent of the English tradition (Morrison 203-05). A more bastardised version still of Davie's genealogy is Geoffrey Harvey's *The Romantic Tradition in English Poetry*, where Davie is invoked (2) to justify a very familiar genealogy of "Classical Romanticism" (3)—a line of descent from Wordsworth, via Hardy and Betjamen to Larkin, which has as its characteristics "moments of vision" (4-5), "a state of tension" (7-8), "poetic integrity", "subjectivity" and "a plain style" (9).

A final point to make about the Movement is that the famed "anti-Romanticism" of its poetry is not a matter of genre in the sense that I am using it here, but simply of mode. To put this another way it is quite possible for a poet to write a poem which

is subtle, ironic, and self-aware and for it still to be a lyric, in the sense that it is a product of a Romantic poetic—to suggest otherwise is to doubt the intelligence of most of the poets who have written in the last two hundred years. The notorious anti-romantic quality of the Movement's poetry, when scrutinised seems as often as not to be deduced from a handful of poems by Kingsley Amis, notably "Here is Where" and "Against Romanticism" (*Collected Poems* 46 & 35). It seems to me that this last poem is a pretty straight-forward reworking of Robert Graves poem "An English Wood" (*Collected Poems* 1959 29⁵¹). Amis has acknowledged the influence of Graves on his work and to describe "Against Romanticism" as a reworking of one of his poems is not to devalue it, but to point out that an ostensibly anti-Romantic poem can rely for its theme and mood on a poem written by one of the leading Romantic poets of the century.⁵²

In fact the confusion between a mode of writing and a genre of poetry is an understandable one and the distinction is one difficult to make now, since so much of our own thinking is still rooted in Romantic generics. But there is no sense in which a Romantic, lyric utterance can be said to be unironic, unaware of itself, since as a condition for its existence it has to include contraries within it. In this thesis I have been examining how it is that the literary poetry written in Britain in the last two hundred years can mostly be said to fall under the heading of "lyric", and how the majority of criticism certainly can. And I hope I have shown that it is not because it conforms to any particular form or genre—although the extent to which the lyric is argued for is an index of the lyricism of the present *episteme*—but simply because it participates in, and in fact often defines, the mode of subjectivity that is characteristic of modernity.

Notes:

¹ Perhaps T.S.Eliot was the last critic to practise criticism of this sort.

² I am indebted to Prof P.D.Edwards for this point.

³ Vivian de Sola Pinto, in his *Crisis in English Poetry 1880-1940*, terms the lyrical and the anti-lyrical "the voyage within" and "the voyage without", respectively (13-14). But as his title indicates, his account, like Christopher Clausen's, is lyrically inclined.

⁴ Hence I write of Imagism, but, because it was so much less of a single group of poets, of modernism.

⁵ Throughout the essay there is a symptomatic dichotomy between the female moistness and emotion of Romanticism and the dry, stoic, male nature of Classicism.

⁶ It was presumably this problem of metaphysics that lead Hulme, towards the end of his life, to contemplate a philosophical work which would prove the inability of language to signify anything.

⁷ The most influential example of free verse available in the nineteenth and early twentieth century may, however, have been that of Martin Tupper's very popular *Proverbial Philosophy*, the first of many editions of which was published in 1838 (Steele 27).

⁸ The contrast between "verse" and "poetry" has subsequently become so common as to be a critical cliché.

⁹ Arthur Symons has similar things to say in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature*: "There is such a thing as perfecting form that form may be annihilated.... the regular beat of verse is broken in order that words may fly, upon subtler wings" (9). The idea can also be found in the idea of the lyric spirit, rather than the form of the lyric itself. Matthew Arnold sometimes writes of this aspect of the lyric, for example in "On Translating Homer, Last Words" (209-10)

¹⁰ After Pound left the Imagists Amy Lowell became the leading figure of the group and a great deal of Imagist writing, hers in particular, was dedicated to working out the principles of Free Verse and of establishing Imagism's uniqueness. Despite her distinction between the "interiority" of Imagism and the "exteriority" of Symbolism (Coffmann 89-90), the parallels between the two become clearer and clearer (Coffmann 84). C.M.Bowra conflates Imagism's poetics with the Symbolist idea of pure poetry in his account of twentieth-century poetry:

"... the modern conception of purity ... has advanced from where Symbolism stopped and aims at a poetry which is pure in the sense that it gives a special kind of thrill which is regarded as the essential function of poetry and distinguishes it from anything else" (*Experiment* 4).

¹¹ I shall end this section with an interestingly different usage of the term "modernist" from this period.

¹² Which see below.

¹³ Which is not to say of course that either of these critical closures were always consensual and unproblematic.

¹⁴ Rosenthal and Gull's view is that the most successful twentieth century genre of poetry has been the "poetic sequence" (3-4), by which they mean a modernist-type long poem, or series of poems, which demonstrates "a progression of specific qualities and intensities of emotionally and sensuously charged awareness" (6-7).

¹⁵ There are several reasons why it makes sense to talk about Pound's modernism in a thesis dedicated to *British* poetry and criticism. The first is that, as with Eliot, British and American poetry cannot be strictly separated; although Eliot's life-long residence in Britain makes him more "British" than Pound, Pound spent some ten years in Britain, during which his Imagism and the beginnings of his modernism occurred. Apart from this Pound is simply a very convenient person to discuss in this context, as his poetry attracts a useful critical discussion of the long poem versus the lyric, which does not occur to any extent in criticism of British poetry. Criticism in Britain, I would argue, is already so lyricised that (post)modernists like David Jones are virtually ignored.

¹⁶ The metaphor is from a review of *The Pisan Cantos*, by Louis Martz (144).

¹⁷ The details of these books are, respectively:

1. New York: Oxford UP, 1969,
2. Freiburg: U of Freiburg P, 1968,
3. London: Middlesex Poly P, 1983.

¹⁸ As Pound, and American poetry, is not my primary subject here I can remain strategically agnostic as to whether Pound's poetry *does* represent something new and beyond the Romantically lyrical. I remark here only on the affiliations of some of the criticism which accompanies his work. I might also say that the appearance of apparently straight-forward autobiographical passages in some of the very last *Cantos* only creates more problems for criticism, whether traditional or postmodern. Two further critical accounts which can be usefully juxtaposed are by James Longenbach (Pound as Romantic in the Shelleyan tradition) and Norman Wacker (different status of the lyrical in different parts of *The Cantos*).

¹⁹ I do not examine here whether the concept of the Post-modern deserves the critical status it has acquired, or whether it is not in fact, as, for example, Martyn Lee has argued in *Consumer Culture Reborn*, simply a sycophantic reflection of the excesses of late capital-

ism. Certainly, within a Romantic paradigm, the assertion of an epistemological break is always problematic, as I have noted with reference to Imagism.

²⁰ Cf the arguments against the possibility of a private language in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*.

²¹ Although Riding has been described as a modernist, Graves has never been aligned in any critical account with any aspect of the modernist movement.

²² Henry Newbolt uses the term "modernist" in a very similar way in his *A New Study of English Poetry*. Here it is used for the tendency to lyrical rhythmic-freedom-within-rhythmic-constraints of whatever period (37).

²³ The clumsiness of this phrase indicates what a difficult and "unnatural" concept it is to represent.

²⁴ Both Graves and Riding were notably eschatological thinkers, both at this stage and subsequently.

²⁵ We might remember that he wrote several parodies of his own *Shropshire Lad* poems.

²⁶ For the context of this remark of Keats see *Letters* 2: 351.

²⁷ It is easy to see from this critical dictum where Leavis acquired his moral rectitude.

²⁸ Though such an idea can arise with little difficulty from aspects of the lyric tradition; here, for example, is the poet George Darley, writing in 1840:

There is more virtue in rhythm than it has credit for—a virtue productive of secret and remote effects.... Every true poet has a *song in his mind*, the notes of which, little as they precede his thoughts—so little as to seem simultaneous with them—do precede, suggest and inspire many of these, modify and beautify them.... Rhythm, thus, as an enrapturer of the poet, mediately [sic] exalts him as a creator, and augments all his power. (Quoted in Ridler *Selected Poems* 27-28)

And Walter Raleigh's idea of lyric disorder, discussed above, is a similar one. But one of the best demonstrations I have found of this trope, and one which contains a tell-tale paradoxical dialectic, between, in this case, law and lawlessness, is Henry Newbolt's in *A New Study of English Poetry*: "Poetic rhythm is, in short, neither strict mechanical rhythm nor free speech-rhythm: it is speech limited by metric law, or Prosody" (29).

²⁹ And indeed, to the extent that this tradition did embody Coleridgean critical ideas it is useful to think of them in this way.

³⁰ I should say that when I began this thesis I was unprepared for the almost complete lack of change in poetic criticism and practice I found throughout the period I am investigating. I should also stress again that the recognition of a lack of change in cultural practice is no comfort to the Romantic understanding, since this expects change to take place so that the progress of humanity towards an unalienated self-hood can continue.

³¹ The title of the lecture refers to the thesis of Graves that poetic metre has three sources, as personal inspiration (the harp of the Irish bards), as public craftsmanship (the smith's anvil) and as a useful social function (the Anglo-saxon *Scop's* alliterative meter, which, according to Graves, provided a rhythm for rowers in long-ships).

³² The editors explain that their idea has been to gather poems of twelve lines and fewer, to avoid having to feature the sonnet (xxxvii).

³³ The appendix to this thesis illustrates briefly how the epigram comes to be lyricised by the critics who write about it in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is obvious from the contents of their anthology that this is what Kavanagh and Michie are mainly doing by their editorial work.

³⁴ I have argued throughout this thesis that the anthology tradition privileges the shorter poem.

³⁵ In the next few pages of this lecture, "Greatness of Form", Abercrombie tries to attribute the most intense lyric effects to the dramatic, citing *Dr Faustus*, and the lecture ends with his favourite hobby-horse, that the greatness of poetry lies in the essential unity of the long poem.

³⁶ Monro also preferred John Masefield's lyric poems, "which will be permanently embodied among the treasures of the English Language" (60).

³⁷ Still one of the best accounts of these changes is J.W.Saunders massively documented study "Poetry in the Managerial Age", published in 1954. The section on the desuetude of the longer poem is around page 248.

³⁸ At the same time Masefield's poems were more successful than any narrative poem would be in the present day. And this is nicely demonstrated by the observation that every second-hand bookshop in Britain seems to have several copies of Masefield's *Collected Poems*, of whatever edition, on its shelves.

³⁹ One could argue that Hynes is implying lyric narrative and lyrically dramatic poems; but this would seem to undercut his criticism of the Georgians by implying that they could not have been other than they were.

⁴⁰ Although it is noticeable that in general the poetry of the First World War is predominantly lyrical.

⁴¹ The second volume was dedicated to the memory of Rupert Brooke and James Elroy Flecker.

⁴² Pinto uses the epithet "lyrical" often in this work; later he describes the "brilliant lyrical gift" of Dylan Thomas (204).

⁴³ The neglect of the later Auden could have a lot to do with the common belief that in 1939 Auden "ran away" from the Second World War, and the belief on the left that he ran away from his political commitments too. The first half of this "myth" is extremely common to this day in Britain, even amongst people who know nothing about poetry; and a similar myth affects the reputation of Benjamin Britten. Both myths are doubtless partly fuelled by homophobia.

⁴⁴ One reason why Auden might have fought shy of a long, narrative poem, is that such a poem might fall into the mould of *The Prelude*, the archetype of all Romantic long poems, and, bearing in mind Auden's notorious antipathy to Wordsworth, this is not an outcome he could have contemplated.

⁴⁵ The *New Verse* survey is of great interest to those interested in the poetic climate at the time. To note only answers to the third question: besides MacNeice, nineteen poets answered and of these only George Barker was forthrightly anti-lyrical: "I am convinced that an effective and violent narrative poem could at the moment effect more good than any 2,000 individual lyrics" (22). The general tone is generally not hostile to narrative but most of the poets who defend narrative poetry, as it were, betray it in their defence. Dylan Thomas says, for example: "The more subjective the poem, the clearer the narrative line" (8). Laura Riding states: "Every poet is a narrative poem; the usefulness of narrative poems must therefore be judged, now as always, by the excellence of the non-narrative poems they write" (4).

⁴⁶ One of the reasons, I think, that Coniff is so hostile to Day Lewis is that he fails to appreciate that Day Lewis is talking about British poetry, which, from an American view-point, is less experimental and "advanced", and lacks several of the resources open to American poets, such as the model of Whitman's poetic, and the unselfconscious recourse that American poets can have to European traditions of poetry.

⁴⁷ Crozier was writing in 1983, but I see nothing in the subsequent decade which might contradict his thesis.

⁴⁸ Some versions augment this trio with Geoffrey Hill, or use Hill to replace Heaney. Heaney's article "Englands of the Mind", discussed at the beginning of the chapter, has the Hughes, Larkin and Hill version, for obvious reasons.

⁴⁹ This is not, of course, to denigrate either the persons or the work of these poets, but to note how they are often deployed in critical accounts.

⁵⁰ And it should be noted that like Leavis, and Kingsley Amis, Davie has moved steadily to the right in his political pronouncements.

⁵¹ It was Graves practice to rewrite his poetic career by the selective omission of poems from the successive editions of collected poems; this poem is not included in the *Collected Poems 1975*, the final edition of his life-time.

⁵² I would further add that the tone and diction of "Against Romanticism", and many of Amis' other poems, rely on the tone and diction of Graves "disillusioned" works of the 1920s and 30s, for example "Warning to Children" (*Collected Poems 1959* 46), "Song of Contrariety" (58), "Lost Acres" (118), "Nature's Lineaments" (124) &c.