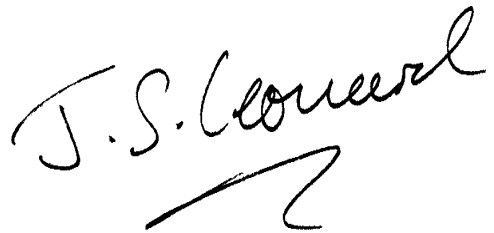

LYRIC AND MODERNITY

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Statement of Sources

The work in this dissertation is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text. The material has not been submitted, in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other university.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J.S. Leonard". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

John Leonard

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my parents,
Arthur and Shirley Leonard, in love and gratitude.

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Abstract

With Romanticism all poetic genres lose their traditional associations and modes of operation and become lyricised, that is, they are judged by their degree of intensity, not by their poetic kind. Poetry and poetics subsequent to this are all, strictly speaking, lyrical, and an index of this is the increasing shortness of poems through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the abandonment of longer forms. This thesis concentrates mainly on criticism and poetry which explicitly endorse the lyric, and uses it to demonstrate the extent to which all poetry and poetics of this period are lyrical. However, as a way of delimiting a convenient field of study it concentrates mainly on British poetry and poetics.

In the *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge's definitions of the literary object are a form of Burkean "proprietary" conservatism. But they also demonstrate a new, dynamic lyrical unity, which Coleridge uses to oppose the societal upheaval caused by early capitalism; and the *Biographia* itself, "the fragments of the winding stair of an old ruined tower", is a demonstration of a lyric, not a generic unity. This lyrical unity Coleridge uses to collapse the Lockean chain of association into Romantic epiphany, with the aid of an apocalyptic temporality borrowed from Biblical Higher Criticism. For one of the conditions of possibility for the emergence of a lyrical poetics is the existence of an eighteenth-century protestant cultural field; protestant hymnody, for example, in the eighteenth century was often a tool for private devotion, not congregational worship. Robert Lowth's *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* show an early abandonment of generic considerations in favour of a poetic which stresses inspiration.

The way in which lyric poetry was published in the eighteenth century implies a set of generic and social conventions which are not the characteristics which Romantic poetics attributed to it. In particular lyrics were used as a leavening, interspersed

with poems of other genres and other works, to provide variety. In the nineteenth century, however, anthologies of poetry became wholly lyrical, and Francis Turner Palgrave's *The Golden Treasury* (1861) set the seal on this generic shift. Anthologies since *The Golden Treasury* have often continued its concern with lyrical unity, lyrical history and for the lyrical intensity and value of the poems included.

Higher Criticism continued to influence later poets and critics; it predisposed them to a transcendent Romanticism (Emerson) and this was frequently reflected in poetic criticism (Poe and J.S.Mill). After 1860 longer forms of poetry were replaced as the typical forms by shorter, lyric ones and, under the influence of Romantic aesthetics and historiography, lyrical criticism began to invent a lyric history for English poetry. Part of this process was the reinterpretation of the works of earlier poets in a lyric light; thus when the poetry of John Clare was criticised the lyric aspects of his work were celebrated at the expense of its other aspects, and his life was reinterpreted so as to make it a lyricised biography. This type of Clare criticism begins in the 1890s and has continued to the present day.

Imagism began the twentieth century with a call to renew poetry, but its poetics are in fact mostly lyrical. This lyricism then carried on into modernism and can be detected in "postmodern" criticism. Twentieth-century poetry and criticism are largely lyrical, and this is true not only of obvious champions of lyricists and the lyric, but of poets and poetic movements which were ostensibly anti-lyrical, such as the Movement.

The lyric is the temporality of modernity, and as such it is hardly surprising that the best illustration of this is in the field of poetry and poetics. But it would be a mistake to celebrate this aspect of poetry; the best antidote to modernity is an impassioned practice of history—to demonstrate its historicity.

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