

Charles Altieri

The Lyrical Impulse (Abstract)

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This statement does not challenge Jonathan Culler's argument that lyric is not dramatic monologue but primarily »an event in the lyric present, a time of enunciation« (Culler 2014, 68; cf. Culler 2015). But it poses an alternative view of lyricism, at least for Modernist poetry. The essay asks, in other words, not what lyric is, but what poets seeking to participate in a genre are *doing* and why. In »The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock«, for example, T.S. Eliot deliberately creates a clash between expectations born of dramatic monologue and those sustained by the staging of a lyric ego whose modes of presence cannot be contained within ironic distance. Similarly, when Yeats and Auden write lullabies, they are not content with individual instances of lullaby but want to capture the essence of lullaby as one aspect of levels of feeling inseparable from *ideas* of genre, not just uses of the genre.

Lyricism also emphasizes, more than do studies of lyric as a genre, that poetry has a distinctive relationship to musicality. The essay develops two extended examples – in the form of a contrast between two poems in the first Imagist anthology *Des Imagistes*, namely H.D.'s (Hilda Doolittle's) »Sitalkas« and Ezra Pound's »Doria« – as an example of what Pound called »patterned music«, which Pound opposed to the »emotional music cultivated by the spirit of Impressionism«. Finally it turns to the contemporary poet Lisa Robertson's »Sunday« as an instance of cultivating the power of indexicals as an alternative to any kind of overt »speaking situation« with its inevitably damaged versions of subjectivity.

References

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