

Jonathan Culler

Lyric Words, not Worlds  
(Abstract)

- Full-length article in: JLT 11/1 (2017), 32–39.

The notion that a lyric poem generates a world seems derived from the analysis of narrative fiction and risks setting the study of lyric poetry on the wrong track. Although lyrics often contain fictional elements – minimally sketched characters and incident – it is best to start from the presumption that they are at bottom not fiction. One can then analyze the tension between what one might call fiction and song, or fictional elements and ritualistic elements, as in Roland Greene’s analysis of lyric sequences. The positing of a fictional world created by a lyric poem and including a fictional speaker or persona risks trivializing lyric poems by relativizing their claims to the situation of a particular individual instead of granting them the authority of poetic form. Even lyrics that do create a fictional speaker often make claims about the world – our world and not a special fictional world – that are authorized by the poet. A superior default model for thinking about lyric, then is the classical concept of lyric as epideictic discourse, closer to oratory than to mimesis. The lyric characteristically strives to be itself an event rather than a representation of an event.

References

- Culler, Jonathan, *Theory of the Lyric*, Cambridge, MA 2015.
- Baudelaire, Charles, *Les Fleurs du Mal*, Paris 1961.
- Brooks, Cleanth, *The Well-Wrought Urn. Studies in the Structure of Poetry*, New York 1947.
- Frye, Northrop, *Anatomy of Criticism. Four Essays*, Princeton, NJ 1957.
- Greene, Roland, *Post-Petrarchism. Origins and Innovations of the Western Lyric Sequence*, Princeton, NJ 1991.
- Hamburger, Käte, *Die Logik der Dichtung* [1957], Stuttgart <sup>2</sup>1968.
- Larkin, Philip, *Collected Poems*, ed. by Anthony Thwaite, London 1988.
- Lewis, C.S., *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*, Oxford 1954.
- MacLeish, Archibald, *Collected Poems, 1917–1982*, Boston 1982.
- Payne, Mark, Ideas in Lyric Communication. Pindar and Celan, *Modern Philology* 105 (2007), 5–20. [Web of Science]
- Ransom, John Crowe, *The World’s Body*, Baton Rouge, LA 1938.
- Yeats, W.B., *The Collected Works of W.B. Yeats*, Vol. 1: *The Poems*, ed. by Richard J. Finneran, New York <sup>2</sup>1997.
- Walton, Kendall, Thoughtwriting – in Poetry and Music, *New Literary History* 42 (2011), 455–476.
- Wimsatt, W.K./Monroe Beardsley, The Intentional Fallacy, in: W.K.W., *The Verbal Icon. Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*, Lexington, KY 1954, 3–20.

2017-03-16  
JLTONline ISSN 1862-8990

**Copyright** © by the author. All rights reserved.

This work may be copied for non-profit educational use if proper credit is given to the author and JLTONline.

For other permission, please contact [JLTONline](#).

**How to cite this item:**

Abstract of: Jonathan Culler, Lyric Words, not Worlds.

In: JLTONline (16.03.2017)

Persistent Identifier: urn:nbn:de:0222-003478

Link: <http://nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:0222-003478>