THE SHAPE OF SONG: A CONFERENCE ON LYRIC POETRY

7 - 8 July 2012
Faculty of English
University of Cambridge
9 West Road
Cambridge CB3 9DP

SCHEDULE

Saturday, 7 July 2012
9:00 – 9:30am
Coffee/Tea, Registration

9:30 – 11:00am
Plenary Lecture by John Wilkinson

11:00 – 11:15am
Break

11:15 – 12:45pm
Panel 1

12:45 – 1:45pm
Lunch

1:45 – 3:15pm
Panel 2

3:15 – 3:30pm
Break

3:30 – 5:00pm
Panel 3

8:30 – 10:00pm
Poetry Reading with Peter Manson and Lisa Robertson

Sunday, 8 July 2012
9:00 – 9:30am
Coffee/Tea

9:30 – 11:00am
Panel 4

11:00 – 11:15am
Break

11:15 – 12:45pm
Panel 5

12:45 – 1:45pm
Lunch

1:45 – 3:15pm
Panel 6

3:15 – 3:45pm
Break

3:45 – 5:15pm
Plenary Lecture by Jonathan Culler

All presentations will be held in the large ground-floor lecture room, GR06/07.
Papers should be 20 minutes in duration, leaving 30 minutes at the end of each panel for discussion.
Lunch will be available in the Faculty foyer.

Conference Committee: Jonathan Culler, Ryan Dobran, Simon Jarvis, Ian Patterson, John Wilkinson
Contact: shapeofsong@gmail.com
OPENING PLENARY LECTURE
9:30 – 11:00am, Sat. 7 July 2012
Respondent: Ian Patterson

JOHN WILKINSON (UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO)
‘LYRIC IN THE EVENT’
A snatch of song may die on the air, but the repeatability of a lyric event depends upon a complex prosodic technology. Lyric is imperilled on one side by evanescence and on the other by a formal construction liable to petrify an event that cannot be recovered. This paper describes lyric event and its perils, referring to poems contesting petrifaction by Herrick, Shakespeare, Shelley, Berryman and O’Hara, and to the counter-example of an event memorialised in stone by Ian Hamilton Finlay.

PANEL 1
11:15 – 12:45pm, Sat. 7 July 2012
Moderator: David Nowell-Smith

ELIZABETH MARIE YOUNG (WELLESLEY COLLEGE)
‘CATULLUS, CALLIMACHUS, CLICHÉ: A CASE FOR LYRIC TRANSLATION’
The European lyric tradition is often traced back to the Greeks. This paper offers a new genealogy of the lyric that shifts the focus away from the supposedly spontaneous cadences of Greek song toward the imitative intricacies of Roman texts. I forge this revised genealogy through a reading of Catullus, the perpetual darling of the Latin lyric tradition. I argue that, even at its most emotive and personal, the Catullan lyric gains much of its power from creative use of imitation and translation. I build this argument around a close reading of one small but celebrated Catullan epigram (c. 70). When we shift away from standard modes of lyric reading to focus on the layers of translation and imitation that inform this poem, it comes to read as a bilingual palimpsest whose layering of sources allows for a vertiginous multiplicity of argument. The paper ends by exploring some of the ways in which a translation-based mode of lyric reading might also enrich our understanding of modern poems. Here, I take as my test case several contemporary American poets who are commonly discussed under the rubric of lyricism but who make sophisticated use of the same kind of translation and imitation-based multiplicity that Catullus debuted back in the first century BCE. This paper is, then, a comparative study grounded in Classical philology that develops a broader theoretical perspective with the hope of offering insights to scholars of lyricism in any age.

MARIAN THAIN (UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM)
‘SWINBURNE’S LYRIC PERSONAE: SUBJECTIVITY, THEORY, HISTORY’
The division between ‘historical’ and ‘theoretical’ approaches to literary study collapse helpfully under the weight of the term ‘lyric’. At a point when the limitations of New Historicism are readily acknowledged, and when New Formalist initiatives aim to reclaim the text in a manner both aesthetic and historicist, the study of genre has never been more relevant. The recognition of the concept of lyric as both a historical category of production and a theoretical category of interpretation means that to write the history of lyric must also be to reflect on our own methodological assumptions. I am currently leading a cross-historical group of scholars who are, collaboratively, writing a book exploring the formation of the concept of ‘lyric’ from the early modern period to the present. In this paper I propose to explore some of the key issues involved in that project, with particular reference to the threat of historical parochialism to which recent formations of literary study have left us vulnerable, and which have had particularly profound consequences for our understanding of ‘lyric’. This exploration will be focussed around the study of a particular example from Swinburne’s poetry read in relation to commentary from the 1860s to the present to ask questions about our understanding of lyric as a mode of subjectivity.

ANDREW OSBORN (UNIVERSITY OF DALLAS)
‘LYRIC YIELDS: ALLEGORIES OF PUBLISHED INTIMACY’
Despite Blasing’s psychosomatic account of lyric production and Von Hallberg’s similarly recent explanations of why lyric continues to compel its audience, conceptualizations of the genre as distinct from narrative and drama remain so unsettled that even J. S. Mill and Joyce’s fictive Stephen Dedalus continue to merit consideration on the subject. Jeffries’ arguments for the criterion of brevity are historically sound but fail to offer a compelling cultural motive for the genre’s continuity. More attractive are various (conflicting) arguments that center upon
vectors of address and, concomitantly, the presence or absence of a rhetorical scenario. I briefly review the claims of Miller, Culler, Vendler, and Waters; make a case for intimacy as a pervasive common feature of lyric concern; identify the publication of this intimacy as a lyric dilemma; then explore several allegorical acknowledgments of the dilemma. If we heed in “Archaic Torso of Apollo” a vocative/aural analogue to the god’s turned-down, pervasively insistent gaze, we may then discover similarly sublime truncations of address motivating Eliot’s choice of the Dantean epigraph of “Prufrock” and Bishop’s conclusion of “Jeronimo’s House.” Although Orpheus’ retrospective failure to recover Eurydice allegorizes the lyric proscription against addressing the reader directly, Jorie Graham’s “Orpheus & Eurydice” recommends that we associate the lyrist’s backward glance with her own authorial desire to check in with her readers, to assure herself that they follow or understand. Examples from Wordsworth, Hopkins, and Ashbery may also be adduced.

PANEL 2
1:45 – 3:15PM, Sat. 7 July 2012
Moderator: Keston Sutherland

ROBIN PURVES (UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL LANCASHIRE)
‘WORDS AND MUSIC/MUSIC AS WORDS IN THE POEMS OF J.H. PRYNNE’

The paper will begin by addressing, as briefly as is possible, the treatment of music as a topic or theme in selected poems by J.H. Prynne from The White Stones to Kazoo Dreamboats. This is intended to be one way in to attempting a description of the relations between particular musical compositions (from the medieval period to the 16th-century and by modernist composers too) and specific poetic texts by Prynne, and there will be passing commentary on music inspired by Prynne’s writing, in particular Erik Ulman’s “Thoughts on the Esterházy Court Uniform” and “L’Extase de M. Poher”. The commentary may be accompanied by the playing of excerpts from one of these works, if time permits. Broadly speaking, the paper will seek to demonstrate the potential for bringing together the analysis of vocal and musical performance and the analysis of a text’s verbal ‘performance’ on the page, taking certain cues from Prynne’s essay in phonological interpretation, “Mental Ears and Poetic Work” (Chicago Review, 2009).

BEN GLASER (SKIDMORE COLLEGE)
‘LYRIC AS SOUND LIBRARY: THE CIRCULATION OF RHYTHMIC PATTERNS IN MODERN POETRY’

Professor, Nigel Fabb has recently pushed for a definition of poetry as writing in which the line becomes the “unit of composition.” To see poetry as a set of linear operations (language concatenated according to non-semantic rules) rather than speech acts, images, or even musical forms, has profound implications for poetics; it does not, however, lend itself immediately to genre distinctions. Simon Jarvis’s recent work on “melodics” complements Fabb by offering historically situated thinking about genre as precisely a matter of differentiated modes of linear composition. In particular, Jarvis has suggested that long poems like Browning’s Sordello contain moments of lyrical “striation” amid more uniform prosody and that this striation, when isolated, becomes the prosodic core of modern lyric.

Just as the polymetrical (largely Alcaic) choruses of Euripides suggested new metrical forms to Victorian poets, so do the metrical gestures of Browning or Milton open up new modes of linear organization for lyric. My paper will begin by considering Milton’s key prosodic gestures and the history of their reception and reconstitution in lyric, primarily in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth century. I then argue that similar displacements of epic (largely iambic) meter form one core (if not the core) of modern lyric. I find that Pound or Frost’s experiments with classical quantity are of a piece with this effort to rhythmically re-encode the line, but are ultimately less significant than the development of a common currency of prosodic gestures; many of these were once native to epic but come to circulate, in the early-twentieth century, as a virtual library of rhythmic patterns: the audio equipment that enables the production of lyric.

JOHN HALL AND DAVID PRIOR (UNIVERSITY COLLEGE FALMOUTH)
‘TOWARDS SONG: RE-SHAPING SPOKEN LYRIC’

As an interdisciplinary approach to exploring through practice ‘lyric’s relationship to music … and performance’, this collaborative proposal responds to the last sentence in the narrative of the call for papers. David Prior, composer and sound-artist, and John Hall, poet, have begun to explore together the effects of subtle modulations of the sound shape of recordings of spoken poetry, using recent software. They propose to share at least one such experiment in which a poem written and read by John Hall will have been modified, either by pitch adjustment and / or by the accentuation of formants, so as to bring out lyrical or song-like
qualities already latent. They will place the experiment in context, including its emergence from earlier engagements in the work and research of each of them: in Prior’s case often working with speech as a composer; in Hall’s, as a ‘lyric poet’ who has recently returned his attention to work undertaken in the 70s and 80s by Douglas Oliver on the ‘performance’ of poetry (Oliver, Poerty and Narrative in Performance (London: Macmillan, 1989)). They will play excerpts, explain the technical modifications made and comment on their implications for an understanding of the sound world of lyric poetry.

PANEL 3
3:30 – 5:00pm, Sat. 7 July 2012
Moderator: Marion Thain

DREW MILNE (UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE)
‘VOX POP: ROBERT BURNS AND THE BIRTH OF LYRIC AS IDEOLOGY’

Common sense has often appeared to be of the opinion that poetry, and lyric poetry above all, is centrally concerned with the sincere expression of the poet’s feelings. Lyric somehow stands for emotional condensations, above all of love, in forms loosely resembling those of song. This conception of lyric is remarkably persistent in modern culture, despite the extent to which it evidently misrepresents the history of poetry and of lyric. Where did this modern misrepresentation come from? Is it possible to identify the birth of this modern misrepresentation of lyric? This paper explores the extent to which Robert Burns invented and developed a model of lyricism in which the poet is both lover and songsmith, both the subject of lyric affect and the writer of its representation, somehow simultaneously. Through consideration of the genesis of the earliest poems written by Burns and his self-critical notes in his commonplace books, this argument suggests both that Burns is a key figure in thinking through lyric as ideology, and that the critique of lyric’s misrepresentations opens up important questions in the articulation of modern lyricism: not least the grammar of vox pop and sensus communis in the poetic articulation of feeling. Reading Burns reveals the extent to which the ideology of lyric develops both as a procedural parameter in the misrepresentation of ‘creative writing’ and as containment of the recognition of what counts as truthful sincerity. Although the focus will be on Robert Burns and the articulation of lyric as ideology, some brief attempts will be to contrast Burns with subsequent articulations of lyric in the poetry of Emily Dickinson, Mina Loy, Hugh MacDiarmid and Frank O’Hara.

DOROTHY WANG (WILLIAMS COLLEGE)
‘RACE AND THE AMERICAN LYRIC’

If the lyric became the dominant mode of English poetic expression in the last twentieth century—indeed, as scholars such as Virginia Jackson have shown, has become synonymous with poetry—then it is not surprising that most readers’ and critics’ representative idea of ethnic American poetry also inheres in the form of the first-person lyric. From Gwendolyn Brooks’ telling of black inner-city life in Chicago to Li-Young Lee’s glimpses into the mores of his Chinese family, these poems are often read unproblematically as straight autobiography and ethnographic lenses into an alien culture. Yet the reading of the lyric poems of minority poets, I argue, departs from the reading of those of non-minoritized poets.

In the poetry of, say, Ashbery or even Creeley, the “I” is presumed to be a virtually abstract universal “I” who uses on not only his own subjectivity but larger philosophical issues—an “I” that is relatively socially unmarked and enmeshed in, and created by, a series of aesthetic choices. But the lyric poetry of Brooks or Lee is read as unmediated autobiography, sociological reportage, with little attention paid to their formal properties. How is it that in American poetry criticism today, the lyric, which is widely accepted as the dominant form of poetic expression, can at the same historical moment be read with such divergent criteria for “hyphenated” and racially “unmarked” poets? The question of race and the grounds of the American lyric is especially important given the saliency of race in American culture and discourse.

NED HERCOCK (UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX)
‘LIKE A TONGUE RETURNING TO A LOOSE TOOTH’: MODERNISM & LYRIC’

Rou-cou spoke the dove
from Wallace Stevens’ ‘Song of Fixed Accord’

What is the opposite of lyric? And how do we know? It seems right to think of many definitional modernist texts as ‘anti-lyrical, pure and simple’ (Adorno); of the lyric as ‘precisely the antithesis of modernity’ (de Man) and we could dismiss the binding power of that ‘anti’ as dialectical. Indeed, I will look at two anti-lyrics – Oppen
looking at things and their entity in the defiant/modest poems of Discrete Series and Beckett’s use of iteration and permutation in Watt – to show how lyric poems and their problems inhabit the mechanics of the anti-lyric poetic situation. But the question of how far modernism’s ‘gestures of revolt’ are ‘programmed into the [lyric] system’ (Jameson) cannot be answered without resort to a positivist literary history; without avoiding exactly that which remains difficult about the choice between continuity and rupture. I will instead describe the relation between lyric and anti-lyric in terms of how these texts – on what level and at what stage – thematize their compromised objecthood. This is, I think, inseparable from the ways in which lyric and anti-lyric writings articulate the problems of thematization and of literary inheritance and hints at the anti-positivism they share.

HELEN THAVENTHIRAN (UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE)
“I HEREBY”: SPEECH ACTS AND THE SINGING LINE

“The I, the I is what is deeply mysterious!” Wittgenstein remarked, not of lyric poetry, but with the strength of a truism in this setting. But ordinary language philosophy and meditation on the lyric ‘I’ are not often in harmony: there is, J.L. Austin infamously argued, no place for ‘song’ in categories of philosophically serious first person speech such as the performative. The lines of this argument, although often pursued, have never been very successfully untangled by literary theorists and I will briefly touch, in this paper, on some of the reasons why it might be useful to do so, both for thinking about lyric and for thinking about Austin. But the focus of the paper will be a reading of some particular instances where the pressure of performative utterance occurs, or fails to occur, within the context of a lyric poem. To determine if a phrase is, in Austin’s sense, a speech act, liable to be felicitous and serious, there is a simple, grammatical test: is it possible to add the word ‘hereby’ (‘I hereby promise’; ‘I hereby declare’)? This paper will depart from a consideration of the lyric (im)possibilities of this phrase, ‘I hereby’ — first in a poem in which it does occur, Walt Whitman’s ‘Says’ (from Leaves of Grass), secondly as an ironic absence from a poem that does not support it, Veronica Forrest-Thomson’s ‘Sonnet’ (‘If I say “I love you” we can’t but laugh / Since irony knows what we’ll say.’)

JOSH ROBINSON (UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE)
‘LYRIC THINKING’

In this paper I will discuss, with close reference to the contemporary lyric, what it means to say that poetry thinks, and offer an account of some of the ways in which we can conceive of and address this thought. Paying particular attention to the recent poetry of John Wilkinson, and to his defence of poetry in his 1986 talk ‘Cadence’, I will consider some of the ways in which attending to the rhythms and tones in which Wilkinson’s lyrics speak and sing might be thought of as essential to the way in lyric thinks, I will thus offer an oblique response to Heidegger’s account of ‘poetic thinking’ —oblique in the sense that the explicit engagement with and critique of Heidegger will remain very much in the background to this paper—and foreground within the way in which lyric poetry thinks the role of its sensuous, material aspects, the very aspects which Heidegger neglects as a result of his attack on the concept of form within the aesthetic tradition. In the light of this reconsideration of lyric and its epistemological and social function, I will make a few necessarily tentative and programmatic suggestions as to the relationship between literary criticism and its literary objects, and enumerate some of the lessons that the study of poetics might do well to learn from the lyric.

RACHEL J. GALVIN (PRINCETON UNIVERSITY)
‘COMPARATIVE POETICS AND THE PROSE POEM: ROOM FOR LYRIC?’

The prose poem stands at the threshold of the lyric. Or: the lyric stands at the threshold of the prose poem. What happens when verse is free of line breaks? Can a prose poem’s paragraphs function like stanzas, and make room for lyric? Following questions posed by Jonathan Culler and Virginia Jackson in discussions of New Lyric Studies, I will propose a methodology that balances comparative poetics with sensitivity to rhetoric, while attending to poetry’s articulation with the social. If we agree the lyric is a construction—conditioned by the expectation that “lyric” exists in the first place—this will change, practically speaking, our reading of prose poems and their lyrical gestures. This paper examines prose poems from Gertrude Stein, John Ashbery, and César Vallejo to make a two-fold proposition: first, that there is a lyric family resemblance between prose poems and verse that contains line breaks; and secondly, that it is paramount to engage in comparative poetics and open the discussion to poetry written in languages other than English, if we wish to determine the qualities that make the
lyric “lyrical.” I will discuss Ashbery’s recurrent use of line breaks in the prose poem “New Spirit”; what I term the éclairs, or moments when the lyric flares up in Stein’s ostensibly prose work Wars I Have Seen; and the fraught publication history of Vallejo’s prose poems, which, I contend, traffic so closely with his late lyrics such that they must be read as part of the same verse project.

PANEL 5
11:15 – 12:45pm, Sun. 8 July 2012
Moderator: Ryan Dobran

DAVID NOWELL-SMITH (UNIVERSITÉ PARIS DIDEROT)
‘RETHINKING VOICE IN LYRIC ADDRESS’

One of the most powerful recent contributions to the theory of lyric has been Jonathan Culler’s model of lyric as ‘event’, where instead of seeing the poem as a dramatic monologue, which document either the world it describes or the subjective feeling it expresses, lyric is grasped as performance and performative: ‘discourse addressed’; ‘a rhetorical transaction’. In this focus on address, the sonorous elements of lyric, and its etymological link to the lyre, lose their privileged status: in ‘Why Lyric?’, lyric’s ‘song’ is conceived as a foregrounding of language where the lyric insists upon its event-character; in ‘Lyric, History, and Genre’, the vocality of the address is transformed into a ‘figure of voice’, in which lyric transpires to be ‘not spoken’ but rather ‘writing that … engenders an image of voice’.

Attending to the vocal aspects of address, my paper asks if lyric can be both ‘event’ and ‘song’. Discussing Robert Frost’s ‘Spring Pools’, Culler notes an implicit apostrophe in the final stanza, which he reads as lyric’s impulse to transform the world through naming; I, by contrast, would highlight the tonal shift that occurs as the poem changes registers. Isolating comparable moments in Keats, Baudelaire, and Celan, I will trace a shift to apostrophe that is registered prosodically, so that the performative and cadential dimensions of the address coincide. In each instance, I will suggest, we encounter the construction of a voice that resists either into a persona or subject, or into a mere ‘image’ or ‘figure’ of itself.

ZOË SKOULDING (BANGOR UNIVERSITY)
‘MISREMEMBERED LYRIC AND ORPHANED MUSIC’

The means by which modern music has been shaped by the impact of recorded sound, for example through Pierre Schaeffer’s notion of the ‘sound object’, provides some insights into parallel processes in poetry. A twentieth-century interest in sound, which through recording can be isolated from its source, has an equivalent in understandings of poetry that emphasize the materiality of language and its separation from authorial source. Nathaniel Mackey has commented on the shared etymology of ‘orphic’ and ‘orphan’; drawing upon writings on music by Steven Feld and Victor Zuckerkandl respectively, he explores music and poetic language on the one hand in relation to social rupture, as ‘a music that turns on abandonment, absence, loss,’ suggesting that ‘Music is wounded kinship’s last resort,’ and on the other in terms of how sound is ‘orphaned’ from its source since poetic or musical meaning cannot be separated from the physical existence of the signifier. Drawing on poems by Denise Riley and Sean Bonney, I will look at how the use of recording rather than notation as a compositional tool in certain areas of contemporary music has similarities with memory, quotation and misquotation of song lyrics in poetry. While writing has historically occupied a culturally privileged position, response to shared sound is part of everyday life in social spaces. The contrast between the two enables new understandings of lyric subjectivity and its relation to the collective domain.

avery slater (cornell university)
‘PREPOSTROPE: IMPOSSIBLE MODES OF LYRIC ADDRESS’

In Wieszława Szymborska’s poem “Tarsier,” a creature not normally endowed with the powers of speech poetically addresses the reader. The poem’s speaker is neither the human poet nor any human or once-human persona; instead, a tarsier speaks on its species’ behalf.

Positioned within lyric structures, this tarsier can be said to be “apostrophizing” its reader. Poetic apostrophe, already a form of impossible dialogue, is here doubled back on itself, reversing and thus revealing species-fictions, ontological fictions, and other conventional boundaries of subjectivity. If the lyric apostrophe most commonly addresses absent, insentient, or impossible interlocutors, what transpires when apostrophe turns backward, re-addressed to the human from a putatively speechless object (or non-subject)?

Looking at Szymborska’s poetry I will analyze forms of lyric apostrophe which reverse the usual hierarchies of address and reception, subject and object: a form I suggest might be called “prepostrophe”—
(from the Latin for “in the wrong order”; “preposterous”). When the subject of apostrophic utterance belongs to a class of beings usually designated as apostrophe’s nonresponsive object (e.g. a tarsier), how might this “contra naturum” order of address reconfigure, by its rhetorical figure, the boundaries that currently circumscribe those whom language includes and benefits?

PANEL 6
1:45 – 3:15pm, Sun. 8 July 2012
Moderator: Rowan Boyson

SIMON JACKSON (UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE)
‘THE VISUAL MUSIC OF THE MASQUE AND GEORGE HERBERT’S TEMPLE’

The Temple offers particular challenges to those interested in ideas of the shape of song. Remembered by his early biographers as a skilled musician, Herbert is widely celebrated for both his musical verse (many of which are still regularly performed in musical settings as hymns and songs) and for his patterned lyrics; but how might we critically engage with these two strands of Herbert’s lyric technique? How can we bring together the visual and aural characteristics of these lyrics, and their ideas of vision and resonance? ‘O let me rise/As larks, harmoniously’, Herbert writes in ‘Easter Wings’; this paper offers attempt to harmonise the musical and visual elements of Herbert’s lyrics.

It offers an unusual context for The Temple: the music of seventeenth-century masque culture. Despite his modest devotional interests, Herbert can hardly have been ignorant of these extravagant secular entertainments: many members of his family, including his patrons the earls of Pembroke, their wives and children, and even his own brother Henry (bap.1594-1673, sometime Master of the Revels), were involved in their performance and production. This paper finds in the masque’s formally-patterned dances, their songs, and in the visually harmonic proportions of their innovatory perspectival sets a rich analogue for the visual music of Herbert’s patterned poems. It presents the masque as a particularly vivid contemporary expression of the possibilities of interdisciplinary expression, presenting a new perspective on Herbert’s visually- and aurally-rich lyric performance.

EWAN JONES (UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE)
‘LYRIC EXPLANATION: TENNYSON’S PRINCESSES’

In the second edition of The Princess, published in 1850, Tennyson supplemented the blank verse narrative with several songs, claiming that he had ‘thought the poem would explain itself, but the public did not see the drift.’ It is hard to overstate the extent to which such a remarkable claim flies in the face of poetic convention. Wordsworth, in his Note to ‘The Thorn’, admitted that—while he would have liked to explain that poem with another poem—prose would have to suffice. If we follow Simon Jarvis’s characterisation of the long poem as ‘a fight to the life between line and design’, how are we to understand the notion that lyric should explain argument to itself?

This paper will argue that Tennyson’s lyric additions do not reveal some submerged content (the ‘lost child’ that scholars frequently suppose), but rather, that they expose the lie that the intervening blank verse could ever be pure narrative—that they uncover, that is to say, the song within that blankness. Insofar as we encounter The Princess today, it is overwhelmingly through those lyrics alone, hewn-off from their original contexts and anthologised for popular editions. By re-considering in close detail the transitions from song to narrative proper, I aim to demonstrate that the incongruity that contemporary critics perceived in Tennyson’s work stemmed not from problems of theme (sloppiness of plotting, narrative inconsistency), but rather an anxiety over auditory, musical jarring: the poem’s true status as ‘a medley’. Those separate transitions reveal a number of specific practices: from the abrupt interruption of song by a borderline prose whose emphatic assertion is felt as ugly, but as music; to the aspiration of that prose to a choral voice and unity, even within its own, disenchanted elements. Finally, I will claim that the motif of ‘loss’ suggests no vague, uprooted elegy, but offers Tennyson a means for naming his concrete historical situation—by singing it.

NEIL PATTISON (UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE)
‘LYRIC ABOLISHMENT 4: DENISE RILEY AND THE RETURN OF THE “EX-POET”’

The paper will be the fourth in a sequence of essays broadly considering the history of what I have called “Lyrical Abolishment”: the tendency within lyric theory and practice, since the period of the generation of Edmund Spenser, to proclaim the end, or the impossibility, or the superfluiy, of lyric vocation in a given
In September 2009 I wrote and presented a paper on the work of Denise Riley and of Andrew Lawson at the Contemporary British and Irish Poetry Conference at the Seamus Heaney Centre, Belfast. The paper was entitled: “Lyric Abolishment 1: The ‘Ex Poet’ and the ‘Solipsist’”, and concerned the writing of the figure of “the ex-poet” in the lyrics of Denise Riley, the ever-present discursive companion of Riley’s ‘poet’, that producer of vain lyric fantasies whose social constructedness and psychology come under intense ironising scrutiny throughout Riley’s poetry. A cruder irony, well-known in relation with her career in writing, charges her reflections on poetic vocation with complex emotional and intellectual energy: the irony bound to the biographical fact that Riley had given up writing poetry in the late 1990s, and had herself become an ‘ex-poet’.

That fact no longer obtains. 2012 saw the publication of Denise Riley’s first new poem for over 15 years in the London Review of Books; along with the publication of an essay explaining, or at least theorising, the silencing of verse in her life’s work. I propose in this paper to read this poem in light of my earlier argument concerning the conflicts between abolishment and vocation in Riley’s work in lyric, extending and revising the terms of that argument, and to explore the consequences for our understanding of lyric vocation in our time which Riley’s return from abolishment to vocation represents.

CLOSING PLENARY LECTURE
3:45 – 5:15pm, Sun. 8 July 2012
Respondent: Simon Jarvis

JONATHAN CULLER, (CORNELL UNIVERSITY)
‘THE LANGUAGE OF LYRIC’

This talk seeks to revive the once central question of the distinctiveness of literary language, specifically the language of lyric, and whether linguistics can assist in the description and analysis of it. Emphasis will fall on aspects of deixis in the English lyric, especially pronominal structures and verb tenses, and in particular a present tense that seems distinctive of lyric.