

## 1. Classical and Medieval texts

Felix BUDELMANN  
**The Lyric Present in Ancient Greece**

Andrew GALLOWAY  
**Lyric Noise**

Ann KILLIAN  
**“Inner Meditation” : Lyric Reading Practices, Medieval & Modern**

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### **The Lyric Present in Ancient Greece**

The present has long been a cornerstone of writing about lyric. Across place and time, many lyric poems tend towards the present and handle the present in a distinctive yet elusive fashion. This paper will ask whether early Greek lyric employs the present in any way differently from Anglophone lyric of recent periods. The focus will be less on issues of performance and socio-cultural function (Greek lyric as song for festivals, rituals and symposia), despite their evident relevance to the question; rather I will primarily be concerned with questions of form, and will attend in particular to the linguistic qualities of the Greek present tense. Perhaps under the influence of English lyric, translations of Greek lyric tend to opt for the simple present. ‘Eros *hurls* me into the boundless nets of Aphrodite’, even though ‘*is hurling* me’ may well be more accurate if the Greek present was, as many linguists maintain, usually imperfective rather than perfective in aspect. I will suggest that the present of Greek lyric, like that of English lyric, can variously stand outside ordinary time, but does so differently. Issues to be explored include the modes Greek lyric employs to give a semblance of duration to events that properly have little or no duration, as well as the notion that the ‘now’ in Greek lyric is rarely ephemeral or evanescent: the moment of Greek lyric seems to be momentous as much as momentary.

Andrew Galloway (Cornell, USA)

### Lyric Noise

I could have called this paper “lyric language,” since it aims to explore versions of that in short, non-narrative English poetry of later 14<sup>th</sup> century England, focusing on Chaucer’s hyper-self-consciously literary “complaint,” *Anelida and Arcite*, and John of Grimestone’s complexly layered poem on the Passion, “Undo Thy Door.” Linguistic registers, diction, meter, tropes, formulae and musical settings remain important to my focus, but I mean “language” not mainly in a typical linguistic sense but rather as the repertoire of distinctive styles, concepts, vocabularies, methods of presentation, forms of address, and standard texts and authorities, following Antony Black’s way of defining “political language” in the Middle Ages, in turn based on the approach of J. G. A. Pocock. I thus invoke “language” instead of “genre” or “form” in order to follow both literary and non-literary discursive contexts of this period’s overlapping but also sometimes fundamentally different traditions of non-narrative short poetry, in a period before a Petrarchan model (or antitype) dominated lyric. Linguistically and figurally oriented approaches to defining “lyric” generated by a few notable critics focused on later periods (from Frye to Fineman to Culler) supply valuable tools for my pursuit, but need some significant modifications. I argue, for example, that wider, literary and non-literary discursive settings were performatively essential to even the most immediate figural “action” of late-medieval English lyrics, to a greater degree than in more isolable lyrics from the Renaissance on. The concept of “lyric languages” allows a wider view both of the social functions and intrinsic social concepts of medieval lyric, but also of the consequences of interactions between such social concepts. What happens (I ponder) when sometimes jarringly different lyric languages and the various kinds of identity and community they produce interact, both within a given poem and between kinds of poems, when what is “noise” in one is made the “language” of another? My plan is to indicate how late fourteenth-century “lyric languages” show the wider social functions of lyric, performing its complex speech acts not only from but also between the 14<sup>th</sup> century languages constituting and unraveling community, identity, and poetics.

Ann Killian (Yale, USA)

### **“Inner Meditation” : Lyric Reading Practices, Medieval & Modern**

The preeminent scholar of medieval English religious lyrics, Rosemary Woolf, nearly despaired of the term *lyric* to describe the kind of meditative poetry produced in England between the late twelfth and early sixteenth centuries. In her landmark 1968 monograph on the subject, Woolf objected to Romantic and Modernist theories of lyric as a genre of personal expression and subjective experience. Medieval religious poems, by contrast, were intended for use in imaginative meditation upon biblical themes like the Passion of Christ. They functioned as scripts for “Everyman” to speak in prayer.

Woolf practiced a traditionally historicist scholarship in self-conscious opposition to contemporary New Critical modes of lyric reading. It is therefore surprising to find strong resemblances between her work and that of Helen Vendler, whose transhistorical theory of lyric describes poetry as the representation of a speaker’s “inner meditation.” This paper will analyze points of contact and divergence between Woolf and Vendler on lyric meditation. How well does this concept travel across periods? Can Woolf’s historical and Vendler’s theoretical approaches be productively combined? Woolf’s claim that medieval meditative lyrics fulfilled a pragmatic social function can, I argue, contribute to our sense of what cultural work lyrics perform in today’s secular age.