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Apostrophe

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Summary

Apostrophe is a rhetorical figure that is most commonly found (and thought of) in lyric poetry. It also occurs in other literary and cultural forms – memoir, prose fiction, song, theatre and cinema.

Derived from the Greek prefix 'apo' (away from) and 'strophe' (turn or twist), the word 'apostrophe' is often confused with a punctuation mark, a single inverted comma used in English to denote a possessive (as in ' the Queen's English' or 'the Cat's whiskers'). In this context, an apostrophe stands in for something absent. Anglo-Saxon, a heavily inflected language and the basis for modern English, had a genitive case where nouns used in a possessive way tended to end in 'es' ('cyninges' was the Anglo-Saxon for 'King's'). This more common sense of the word 'apostrophe' denotes therefore a punctuation mark that stands in for an elided letter 'e' or vowel sound.

In the context of rhetoric and poetry 'apostrophe' has come to denote what occurs when a writer or speaker addresses a person or entity who is dead, absent or inanimate to start with. The figure is described by Cicero and Quintillian. The former described it as a 'figure that expresses grief or indignation.' Quintillian emphasized its capacity to be 'wonderfully stirring' for an audience. For both rhetoricians, apostrophe was something that occurred in a public context, usually a debate or trial, and was part of the arsenal of political rhetoric. Apostrophe has therefore a double valence beyond the common understanding as a punctuation mark that stands in for a missing possessive 'e'. It denotes what occurs when a speaker turns from addressing her audience to addressing another figure or entity, one who may or may not be present, alive or even

animate. And it has also come to denote that very process of addressing the absent, the dead and the inanimate.

The figure occurs in medieval rhetoric and poetry, in Shakespeare's poetry and plays and has come to be identified with Lyric poetry itself, especially through the work and legacy of the literary theorist Paul de Man. For him, a poem *describing* a set of circumstances has less claim to the status of lyric poetry than a poem apostrophizing aspects of those circumstances. In part as a result of de Man's influence, apostrophe has come to be connected with different forms of complicated affect –most notably grief, embarrassment and any number of ways in which human life can be seen or experienced as vulnerable, open to question or imbued with potential. It has also been used to explore complicated legal and ethical terrains where the boundary between the living and the dead, the present and the absent, the animate and the inanimate, can be difficult to draw or ascertain. Two areas of contemporary criticism and thought for which the employment of the figure is most resonant are therefore eco-criticism and 'thing theory' (most notably the work of Jane Bennett). The possibilities of apostrophe continue to be regularly employed in political rhetoric, song, poetry, theatre, fiction and cinema.

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The objects of apostrophe are numberless. Persons, things and other entities apostrophized in poetry include Plato and pleasure (Lord Byron), the 'unworn world' (Patrick Kavanagh), a steamroller (Marianne Moore), Queen Anne (Alexander Pope), the West Wind (Percy Bysshe Shelley), fountains, meadows, hills and groves' (William Wordworth), 'a body swayed to music 'and a 'brightening glance' (W. B. Yeats).[1]

Charles Baudelaire apostrophized both a nineteenth-century train and the sea; Elizabeth Bishop apostrophized 'white, seething marriage.[2] Orgasms and carelessness are two of the many apostrophized entities in *New Addresses*, Kenneth Koch's collection of entirely apostrophaic poems.[3] In 1989 John Updike published 'The Beautiful Bowel Movement', a poem that ends with the apostrophe 'O spiral perfection, not seashell nor/stardust, how can I keep you?'[4]

Apostrophes have been sung to Europe (in Amber Arcade's Brexit-tinged ballad, 'Europe Goodnight'), to Major Tom (towards the end of David Bowie's 'Space Oddity'), to the 'you' addressed by Madonna's desiring speaker in 'Open Your Heart', to Vincent van Gogh (Don McLean in his song 'Vincent'), to Amelia Earheart (Joni Mitchell, in her song 'Amelia'). United States President Trump was apostrophized twice, at least, in 2018.[5] Josie Rourke's film *Mary Queen of Scots* (2019) ends with two apostrophes, one from Queen Elizabeth I (Margot Robbie) to Mary Stuart (Saoirse Ronan), just before the latter's execution and one, also spoken before that event, from Mary to her son James, later to be king of both Scotland and England.

Poetry and rhetoric are commonly assumed to be apostrophe's homes. But 'the poetic' often sparks up where it is least expected and rhetoric is never far away. So apostrophe can turn up in surprising places and has bigger, often more powerful and determining, roles to play in forms – particularly narrative forms with which it is not frequently associated.

Would Frederick Douglass's 1848 *Autobiography* have had the impact it did without the moment where, in his words, he 'poured out [his] soul in an apostrophe to the moving multitude of ships' with their white sails on Cheseapeake Bay?[6] In *Great Expectations* (1861), published over a decade after Douglass's narrative, one of Charles Dickens's minor characters addresses the roast chicken on which he and Pip, that

novel's narrator, are about to dine: ' "Ah poultry, poultry! You little thought," said Mr. Pumblechook, apostrophizing the fowl in the dish, "when you was a young fledgling what was in store for you." '[7] Not only odd in itself, this apostrophe is super-resonant for Pip who, relatively early in the novel, little thinks what is in store for him.

Later nineteenth-century narrative literature also employed apostrophe. In the twentieth chapter of Henry James's *What Maisie Knew* (1897), at a moment when the powers of perception and comprehension of its young heroine are most stretched, the novel's narrator suddenly apostrophizes the reader: 'Oh, decidedly,' he declaims, 'I shall never get you to believe the number of things she saw and the number of things she discovered',[8]. The final section of Hanya Yanagihara's seven-hundred–page *A Little Life* (2015), a novel which may well owe the form of its title to James's 1889 *A London Life*, and a novel which looks back at the James of *The Turn of the Screw* consists of an extended address from one character, Harold, to another, Willem. At this section's outset Willem has been dead for two years. Seven years on and at the novel's very end, he is still being apostrophized by Yanagihara's grieving narrator. If apostrophe cannot be known by its objects – which range from the ephemeral to the monarchical to the miniscule, then neither, it would appear, can it only be known by the media or form in which it appears. It seems only right, then, to consider how it has been described and explained across the centuries.

Johnson and Johnson: Description and Definition Across the Centuries

In his 1785 *Dictionary* Samuel Johnson defined, the figure in the following way:

> In Rhetorick, a diversion of speech to another person than the speech appointed did intend or require; or it is a turning of the speech from one person to another many times abruptly. A figure when we break off the course of our speech and speak to some

new person, present or absent, as to the people or witnesses, when it was before directed to the judges or opponent.[9]

Two centuries later, Barbara Johnson described apostrophe rather than defining it:

> Apostrophe in the sense in which I will be using it … *involves* the direct address of an absent, dead or inanimate being by a first-person speaker: 'O Wild West Wind, thou breath of autumn's being.' Apostrophe is thus both direct and indirect: based etymologically on the notion of turning aside, of digressing from straight speech, it manipulates the I/thou structure of direct address in an indirect, fictionalized way. The absent, dead or inanimate entity addressed is thereby made present, animate and anthropomorphic. Apostrophe is a form of ventriloquism through which the speaker throws voice, life, and human form into the addressee, turning its silence into mute responsiveness.[10]

Although she doesn't provide a definition of this term, Barbara Johnson clearly states what apostrophe *involves*, that is 'the direct address of a dead, absent or inanimate being by a first-person speaker.' Thinking about what a term involves as opposed to defining it entails concentrating on what that term enfolds, entangles and implicates rather than setting limits on where the term can go.

Samuel Johnson's definition can be read as endowing, apostrophe with the attributes of punches in a boxing match; it is something done 'many times *abruptly*' (emphasis mine) – and it is something done in an adversarial context. Of course, Johnson may also mean that, on some occasions, the turn of apostrophe can be carried out more abruptly than at others. 'An apostrophe,' Lawrence Sterne's narrator remarked in *Tristram Shandy*, about twenty years before Johnson's definition, 'is but an insult in disguise'.[11] Almost a century after that definition the OED described apostrophe as taking place in a context where 'the subject *suddenly stops* in his discourse' (my emphasis).[12] For Samuel Johnson, for Sterne, and for the writer of the

OED entry, apostrophe is no stranger to worlds of sharp debate and rhetorical cut-and-thrust. All three also allow some room for the possibility that apostrophe can find itself employed in the contexts of longing, mourning and grief to which the figure has, over the centuries, become attached.

It was in those more melancholy terms that Judith Butler spoke about apostrophe at Barbara Johnson's memorial service in 2009, when Butler linked the figure to a 'longing … that was doubtless always there.' It's unlikely that Samuel Johnson would have made this equation with any speed. For him, apostrophe mostly entails fast, fluent, effective (and aggressive) address. He would not have understood it as a route to encountering what Butler calls 'the brutal fact of … collective loss'. Nor would he have embraced the speedy transition Butler makes between the wish to utter an apostrophe (to the departed Barbara Johnson) and the closing of one's throat at the very moment one wishes to speak, the state of being reduced, by grief, to what Butler calls 'the stutter and the stammer'.[13]

Being *both* direct *and* indirect, apostrophe is inevitably fictionalized. If this figure has an anthropomorphizing effect on the things it addresses, then Barbara Johnson's account in turn anthropomorphizes apostrophe, giving it (political) skills. Apostrophe 'manipulates the I/thou structure of address': so, metaphorically at least, it has hands (p. 218). It also has a hobby (or even a profession): it likes to ventriloquize. Johnson's assertion that this figure is 'a form of ventriloquism' encourages us to see the fictional dimension of apostrophe as the work of a skilled ventriloquist whose manual dexterity and vocal skill can 'throw life' into her dummy.

Once Samuel Johnson has defined apostrophe (the noun), he goes on to define the verb 'to apostrophize'. The example he gives is from Pope's criticism of a moment

in Homer's *The Odyssey*: 'there is a peculiarity in Homer's manner of apostrophizing Eumaeus and speaking to him in the second person. It is generally applied only to men of account'.

In *The Odyssey*, Eumaeus is Odysseus's 'loyal slave' (and is not, therefore, a 'man of account' in Pope's terms). Eumaeus faithfully attends Odysseus's pigs – even as they are eaten by the suitors lodged in and around Odysseus's home in pursuit of Penelope. Welcoming his master (who is disguised as an old traveller), Eumaeus is thanked by Odysseus and, before reporting the former's response to this thanks, Homer's narrator apostrophizes him with the words 'And you, Eumaeus, answered.'[14] Pope singles out the employment of this mode of address (which is used persistently in the poem's representation of Eumaeus) to an 'unworthy' object. And he does so on grounds of caste or class: Eumaeus is a slave, so why apostrophize him?

But there is a connection between Pope's dismissive response that inheres in (Samuel) Johnson's emphasis on diversion, suddenness, attack. Johnson stresses that apostrophe can be addressed to a 'to some new person, present or absent, as to the people or witnesses'. For him, apostrophe's power is that it can go down (or up) a demotic register – to 'the people or witnesses' as opposed to 'the judges or an opponent'. What is, for Pope, a potential breach in decorum is – for Johnson – an intrinsic source of apostrophe's power. He recognises, in short, that its objects are numberless. Pope might well question a given object of apostrophe but he cannot contain where it can go, since the capacity to go anywhere, to be turned to a potentially unlimited range of addressees, conferring on them a capacity for response, is integral to how this figure works.

Barbara Johnson noted that apostrophe is 'based etymologically on the notion of turning aside, of digressing from straight speech' (p. 218). That apostrophe involves a *turn*, a turning away (and a turning towards) is evident from one of its synonyms – '*averiso*', a term based on concepts of turning away and also carrying with it a semantic burden of loathing and abhorrence. Echoing Samuel Johnson, Brian Vickers uses this term as a synonym for apostrophe in the course of defining the latter as 'a turning of speech from one topic or person to another, often for emotional emphasis'. [15] Quintillian described apostrophe as a 'wonderfully stirring *diversion* of our address' and a means whereby a speaker could 'run away with his audience.' [16] Samuel Johnson would have been comfortable with these emphases on turning and diversion. He writes that apostrophe *is* 'a turning of the speech from one person to another many times abruptly'. His late namesake was to more gently echo him in the late 1980s when she claimed that the figure is based, via etymology, on the notion of turning.

The context Samuel Johnson assumes for apostrophe is also a *spoken* one and this provides yet another connection between him and his late twentieth-century namesake. As a translator of Jacques Derrida, Barbara Johnson would prioritize writing but she never forgets that lyric writing, especially as it is fuelled by apostrophe, not only involves a channelling of voice but is deeply attached to a primal form of breathing, calling, an appeal to the mother.

To say the very least, 'lyric' is an elusive term but it often evokes words like 'introspective', 'expressive,' 'compact', 'rhythmic' .. 'Lyric' is often understood as a form of writing that, seeking to have a somatic impact and, to *be* a somatic experience, is made with much attention to sound and musical density, and one that enables what Yeats called a 'dialogue of self and soul.'[17] Different kinds of feeling, attitude and affect underlie and motivate these sonic, vocal qualities. For Paul de Man both the

'hermeneutics and the pedagogy of lyric poetry' were marked by a 'combination of funereal monumentality with paranoid fear.'[18] It was perhaps this fear that prompted de Man to remark further that lyric was also marked by 'resistance and nostalgia, at the furthest remove, from the materiality of actual history.' All of these qualities are, for de Man, displayed by apostrophe, a figure which can be said to monumentalize its objects, to render them more (or more durably) material even as it resists their more mundane historical reality or denies the historically embedded fact of their disappearance. Apostrophe has a contradictory relationship to materiality. In seeking to monumentalize its objects it can be understood as seeking to give them a durably material form. Yet in so doing it can be said to deny, on a more basic level, their 'ordinary' historical reality, an ordinariness sometimes most powerfully evidenced by their disappearance.

For Barbara Johnson, apostrophe is 'a trope which, by means of the *silvery voice* of rhetoric, calls up and animates the absent, the lost and the dead' (p. 220. emphasis mine). Having described what apostrophe does, Johnson, without explanation or citation, quotes the opening line of Shelley's 1819 Ode: 'O Wild West Wind, thou breath of autumn's being'. Reading Shelley's poem, she equates apostrophe with 'the giving of voice, the throwing of voice' (p. 221). Using the leverage of the Shelley quotation to create a 'thus' ('Apostrophe is *thus* both direct and indirect'), she gives the quotation the argumentative power of a proof or of a preceding argumentative strain.

Johnson's sudden move to Shelley is a move from 1986 (when her essay was first published) to 1819, to a poem whose object of address is the wind conceived as a spirit, a pervasive global force attached to a season and to a poem intensely invested in exploring the relationship between time and animation. Having addressed the wind as 'thou breath of autumn's being', Shelley's speaker goes on to claim that it can take, from both the forest leaves in autumn and his own declining powers, 'a deep autumnal

tone.' And the poem is also part of a temporal chain: 'If winter comes,' it ends, 'can spring be far behind?' The wind's relationship to time is similar to what Shelley's apostrophe is to the wind and – what he would have the wind be to him – an enlivening force, one whose capacity to enliven is manifest in its ability to give a voice to the silent and to what might not automatically be categorised as 'animate'. Samuel Johnson's dictionary entry allowed for an *implicit* place for this particular fiction: 'We speak to some new person present *or absent'*, he writes, outlining a scenario where in speaking we confer a responsive potential on an absent person (emphasis mine). The address to an absence facilitates the creation of a potential response.

As she moves on to discuss poems by American women poets that concentrate or touch on abortion, Barbara Johnson claims that there is 'a striking and suggestive parallel between the shifting address-structures of poems like Gwendolyn Brooks' "The Mother" and the "different voices" involved in the abortion debate' (p. 227). These voices would include those of women claiming both corporeal autonomy and fundamental agency in relation to reproduction. They would also include the voice attributed to the unborn child as well as the 'voices' of expertise and the judiciary. Reading Baudelaire and Shelley at the start of her essay, the first objects of apostrophe on which Johnson concentrates include the west wind, paradise, and a woman called Agatha, but what is 'at stake' in these apostrophes is not a question of those objects' intrinsic qualities, but rather 'the fate of a lost child – the speaker's own former self' (p. 221).

Johnson then considers a suite of poems that, unlike those by Baudelaire and Shelley, are by women writers: Brooks's 'The Mother', Anne Sexton's 'The Abortion', Lucile Clifton's 'The Lost Baby Poem', Adrienne Rich's 'To a Poet'. In all of these poems, the question of motherhood is foregrounded and the lost child is not

metaphorical (that is, a speaker's former self'). Rather, the addressed entity (and the life lost) is that of an aborted or miscarried child (or children). Such addressees are physical but, because they have, in one sense, 'died' without having 'lived', they have a partly figural status: they are rhetorically endowed with substance without being 'fully' substantive. Yet, at the same time, it's not quite true to say that they are (or have always been) without substance and it is certainly not true to say that they are without the potential for future action that is part of apostrophe's casting of any of its objects. There is a *question*, never resolved, as to whether or not the aborted foetus 'counted as', or 'can be considered as' a person.

If, for Barbara Johnson, this question inhabits and is enacted in the poems she discusses, it also haunts legal discussions about abortion which tend, as she puts it, 'to employ the same terms as those … [used] to describe the figure of apostrophe' (p. 226). It's a question that stirs feelings that include rage (at the thought that societal structures might even make an abortion necessary or even something to contemplate), relief, grief for someone or something who never lived.

The question of how you mourn something or someone that has never lived, an entity who was either configured or anticipated as a child, that had a bodily existence (but whose status as a life was largely linguistic and anticipative) is one that Johnson's discussion of apostrophe enables.. The children (and the creativity) apostrophized and mourned in the work of Brooks, Clifton, Sexton and Rich are, in their combination of bodily existence, fragility, 'reality', life in language and physical death, agonisingly appropriate objects of apostrophe. Their loss and their death-in-life-status animate the poems which address them and those poems pass on, in turn, a transformed aliveness to their readers.

For Barbara Johnson, legal definitions of foetal personhood and an entire debate around abortion are animated by the figure of apostrophe. For both Johnsons (Barbara and Samuel) *turning* is central to apostrophe's capacity to move between different forms of life. And so ultimately are judges and the force of the judiciary. For Samuel Johnson, apostrophe is very much a rhetorical weapon in a public and adversarial arsenal, so it can have a judge or judges as part of its audience. Poems preoccupied with abortion employ apostrophe while legal discussions of this issue employ terms uncannily similar to those used of this figure.

Across two centuries, Samuel Johnson and Barbara Johnson differ in tone and in approach as they define and describe apostrophe. Both emphasize different scales of affect, yet both concur in articulating the sheer scale of apostrophe's reach as it moves between lyric and law.

The Ends of Short Fiction

Barbara Johnson's essay on apostrophe was part of a conversation that took place between her work and Jonathan Culler 's from 1981, when Culler first published on the figure, and 2015, (six years after Johnson's death) when he published *Theory of the Lyric*. There are two areas where Culler differs from Johnson. First, embarrassment is, for Culler, one of the most common reactions to apostrophe.[19] He sees it as an embarrassingly explicit emblem of procedures usually implicit, but better hidden, in lyric poetry as such. Second, in *Theory of the Lyric* he describes the figure as discourse addressed to 'creatures and things unlikely to answer.'[20] Culler also cites Charles Baudelaire's claim that apostrophe is one of the factors 'necessary' to lyric poetry (p. 212). In this, Culler echoes Johnson's claim that, 'lyric poetry itself' is 'summed up in

the figure of apostrophe' a figure she also sees as 'almost synonymous with the lyric voice' (p. 231).

For Culler, apostrophe is the antithesis of narrative. Quite wrongly, he claims that 'novels and other extended forms lack … somatic qualities' and that 'the kinds of pleasure novels etc afford are independent of those attached to lyric' (p. 57). The affective, cultural, linguistic work done by apostrophe is to be found in realms outside of lyric poetry – in political rhetoric, in song, 'extended forms' of narrative, and in theatre.

If apostrophe occurs in the urgent, politically pointed, rhetorically self-conscious narrative of Douglass or in the novelistic bulk of Dickens, James and Yanagihara, it also occurs in the concluding moments of short fiction. One such moment occurs in the final paragraphs of Annie Proux's novella *Brokeback Mountain* (1997):

He stepped back and looked at the ensemble through a few stinging tears.
'Jack, I swear –' he said. Though Jack had never asked him to swear anything and was not himself the swearing kind.[21]

Apostrophe also turns up in the second-last sentence of Edna O'Brien's short story 'Brother' (1991):

I might do for her out of doors. Lure her to the waterfall. There's swans up there and geese. He loves the big geese eggs. I'll get behind her when we're on that promontory and give her a shove. It's very slippery from the moss. I can just picture her going down, yelling then not yelling, being swept away like a newspaper or an empty canister … I'm all he has, I'm all he'll ever have. Roll on, nuptials. Daughter of Death is she.[22]

And one of the most famous apostrophes in literary history occurs at the very end of Herman Melville's *Bartleby, the Scrivener* (1853):

Sometimes from out the folded paper the pale clerk takes a ring: - the finger it was meant for, perhaps mouldered in the grave; a bank-note sent in swiftest charity:- he

whom it would relieve, nor eats nor hungers any more; pardon for those who died despairing; hope for those who died unhoping; good tidings for those who died stifled by unrelieved calamities. On errands of life these letters speed to death.
Ah Bartleby! Ah humanity! [23]

Turning up towards or at the ends of three pieces of short fiction. apostrophe occurs at a moment when a reader is, as Elaine Scarry puts it, 'passing between the work and the world.'[24] In making this passage a reader is super-conscious of how the establishment of the imaginative world of a narrative work is either fading or not yet accomplished So it shouldn't be too surprising that what gets foregrounded at such a moment is apostrophe, a gesture, where the relationship between the utterance and the world is both so fraught and weak yet also bold and so enlivening. Recently it has been claimed that apostrophe is 'essentially non-narrative' and that 'purely apostrophic writing excludes any narrative possibility'[25]. Rather than thinking of apostrophe as anti-narrative, it might be asked if an effective narrative can exist without lyric, often apostrophaic, moments?

In the moment from Proux's *Brokeback Mountain* Ennis, one of the story's two main protagonists, looks at an 'ensemble' he has made in his lonely Wyoming trailer. A reader could be forgiven for thinking that in looking at an 'ensemble' Ennis is looking at the actors in a theatre company or a group of musicians, but his tearful gaze is fixed on a little shrine or makeshift monument he has made to Jack, his dead, probably murdered, lover, and to their thwarted, decades-long passion. This monument consists of two shirts on the same hanger, one enveloped into the other (the inner shirt, blood-stained from a fight years earlier, is an old one of Ennis's; the outer one once belonged to Jack). Above the shirts, firmly thumbtacked onto the wall, is a postcard of Brokeback Mountain, the scene of their first sexual passion decades before.

When Ennis utters the unfinished exclamation, 'Jack, I swear – 'we 'know' he is addressing the dead and absent Jack: so his words qualify as apostrophe in Barbara Johnson's sense; they are indeed a direct address to a dead, absent entity. If, because he is facing his little monument as he speaks, we assume that Ennis is talking to the shirts, the card, the remembered scene of love, then this too can count as apostrophe because he is addressing an 'ensemble' of 'things unlikely to answer', to use Culler's term. An apostrophaic phosphorescence that glows briefly before its story ends, 'Jack, I swear –' carries with it the weight of law, religion, faith, stoicism. This exclamation can also be read as a turn from Emmet's silent focus on his little monument to his addressing the dead and absent Jack. Like a wedding-vow, it evokes eternity, generosity and commitment. Colloquially the phrase 'I swear' has, in common with the phrase 'I love', the near-immediate invocation of a 'you', as in 'I swear *to you'*. Proux's narrator takes pains to point out the strange redundancy of this speech-act of swearing, however defined, both to the history of their relationship (Jack 'had never asked him to swear anything') nor, according to the narrator, was Jack himself 'the swearing kind.' It seems more urgent that the apostrophe, which in this case happens also to be a performative speech act, gets made.

'Roll on, nuptials' is the second last sentence of Edna O'Brien's 'Brother'. Those words are spoken by Maisie, the story's narrator, who lives with her brother, a middle-aged farmer, in rural Ireland. Mattie (the brother) is about to bring a new bride home and thereby to disrupt the settled, though certainly lonely, agonistic and incestuous bond that has existed for decades between the siblings, If Ennis, addressing a small scene that is a monument to his murdered love, apostrophizes Jack, then O'Brien's Maisie apostrophizes the imminent marriage ceremony, the 'nuptials', themselves an occasion for ritualized speech, which she tauntingly invites to 'roll on'.

Almost as much a director as Proux's Ennis is a designer, O'Brien's protagonist plans to 'lure' her future sister-in-law to a waterfall and 'give her a shove'. Ennis's apostrophe occurs in response to a scene he has set (the monument in his trailer) and a scene he remembers (Brokeback Mountain), and it is addressed to a man he believes was murdered. The apostrophe uttered by O'Brien's narrator occurs only after she has set the scene for the murder of her new sister-in-law (the promontory by the waterfall with its slippery moss) and after she has envisaged the killing: 'I can just picture her going down yelling then not yelling', Maisie claims. One effect of apostrophe is to endow the persons and objects to whom it is addressed with a 'mute responsiveness', a *capacit*y to answer back. If the 'nuptials' are given a chance to speak in the fiction of the apostrophe, then Maisie's envisaged victim, compared to a discarded newspaper and an 'empty canister', is taken from potential speech and sound to utter silence, from 'yelling' to 'not yelling'. In Maisie's fantasy, the non-human world around her is intensely animated, slippery, full of sound, as her human victim is swept into silence. This produces a violent remaking of the bride who, as Maisie's rival, becomes the 'Daughter of Death'. Through personification – and apostrophe – the Bride is stripped of what Avery Gordon calls 'complex personhood'. [26]

'Ah Bartleby! Ah humanity!' constitutes the *very* last words of its story. Unlike the apostrophe that occurs towards the end of *Brokeback Mountain,* this is not a present-tense address to a lost love. Nor is it uttered by a speaker in the text's unbearable present tense as, in despair, O'Brien's narrator fantasizes about her future triumph.

Melville's concluding apostrophe is uttered by his unnamed narrator, a lawyer for whom the titular Bartleby has worked as a copyist. These words are in part an exclamation to a character who (rather like Proux's protagonists and O'Brien's narrator) has occupied an unassimilable form of personhood throughout his story. The

character of Bartleby has been compellingly read as a 'deeply radical figure' in the story, as an autistic presence and as a challenge to the reading process.[27] Attention has been drawn to this character's 'timeless' motionlessness, to his status as a 'man without knowledge of beginning or end' and to his 'powerful powerlessness.'[28] When addressed, Bartleby is not, strictly speaking, 'unlikely to respond', as Culler might put it. But his repeated, and famous, response to most requests made of him —'I would prefer not to' – amounts to a non-response. It is not only Bartleby's absence (like Proux's Jack, he is dead when he is apostrophized at the story's end) but his decreasing animation as the story goes on that, combined with his increasingly intense attachment to inanimate objects (a wall, a bust of Cicero, a banister), make the act of apostrophizing him increasingly appropriate.

If Proux's Ennis constructs a little scene, a theatrical 'ensemble', before uttering his apostrophe to Jack, and if O'Brien's Maisie envisages a murder–scene before uttering hers, Melville's narrator also envisages a scene before he apostrophizes Bartleby (and 'humanity'). This is the 'dead-letter office' where, the lawyer-narrator believes, Bartleby has worked before coming to his chambers. Bartleby's task, the narrator conjectures, was to deal with mail that could not be delivered to an addressee because it had an invalid address and no return address. In the envisaged scene, Bartleby deals with objects that have the status of written communications and written communications that have the status of objects: a ring, a bank-note, a pardon that was never received, good news for those that nonetheless 'died stifled by unrelieved calamities' (p. 34). As dead-letters, these are all objects with addresses; and what is apostrophe if not a form of address? This is so much the case that, as we've seen, *New Addresses* was the title Kenneth Koch gave to his 2000 collection of entirely apostrophaic poems.

Apostrophe involves addressing the absent, dead and inanimate – creatures and things unlikely to respond. Melville's concluding use of the figure is preceded by the envisaging of a scene where letters (sometimes containing objects) sent to the living are made, albeit against the grain of their authors' assumptions or hopes, addresses to the absent, dead or inanimate – those who are, on all fronts, 'unlikely to respond.' The ending of Melville's story retrospectively (and anxiously) incites the reader to believe that Bartleby's extraordinary behaviour throughout – his failure to respond to social cues, his inability to distinguish between the space of labour and the domestic sphere, his affect that sits somewhere between serenity and terror, his constant repetition of his phrase 'I would prefer not to' – stems from time spent encountering 'ordinary' utterances that were turned into apostrophes. By the time the narrator envisages this scene, Bartleby has died of starvation in a New York jail, but the story's concluding words set out to reanimate him.

Needless to say, those words don't succeed in any literal way. Yet their failure re-enacts a key, and contradictory, feature of apostrophe as described by Culler: 'The animicity enforced by the apostrophe,' he writes, 'is independent of any claims made about the actual properties of the object addressed' (p. 240). So if, via apostrophe, I throw animicity onto a person or entity, be that Bartleby or (to go back to Koch's collection) orgasms or carelessness, then those persons and things are none the less animated for being unable to attain their 'living' status outside the terms of the apostrophe. Apostrophe just needs to happen; it doesn't need to be true. The figure of apostrophe pushes us into the imaginative world, and into recognising the truth of our imaginative apperception.[29]

Living in an ambience of direct addresses transformed by circumstance and accident into something like apostrophe, the Bartleby constructed (or fantasized) in the

story's concluding paragraph edges yet closer to key qualities that are central to the apostrophized object or subject: absence, the occupation of an inanimate state or of a condition whose aliveness is open to question. Stuart Murray describes the story's end as a 'philosophical speculation' but it may be more accurate to say that it is an impossible address *to* Bartleby (and indeed, to an entire species, which comes to be equated with him).[30] Critics of even the most evidently apostrophaic poetry often, Culler claims, write about apostrophe as if it were description, thereby reducing the figure's strangeness and (in)vocative power. Murray is doing something similar here as he edges the occurrence of the figure into a 'speculation'. It is, of course possible to read the phrases 'Ah Bartleby! Ah Humanity' as exclamations *about* Melville's character and about humanity, or perhaps an exclamation to Bartleby followed by an exclamation about humanity. But such a reading is far from exhaustive; there is no doubting the room Melville provides for an apostrophe-alert interpretation.. A tendency to turn apostrophe into something more recognisable and less odd, be that description or speculation is, for Culler, indicative of the extent to which the figure is a 'genuine embarrassment', one that is – like Melville's Bartleby – representative of the 'radical, pretentious and mystificatory'.[31]

'Ah Bartleby! Ah humanity!' is, like Ennis's apostrophe to Jack in *Brokeback Mountain*, an act of resistance to the departure of the beloved, and it is the end of the story. This ending's resonance inheres not in its status as failed, frantic explanation but as a will to resist the story's ending even as it ends and to bring Bartleby back to life. The apostrophe in O'Brien's story resists a different kind of ending, one created by the marriage plot. And in all three instances a scene is set. Proux's Ennis and the narrators of both 'Brother' and *Bartleby* only engage in apostrophe *after* they have engaged in a careful *mise en scène*.

The scene-making comes first. Proux uses the highly theatrical word 'ensemble' of Ennis's little shrine to his Jack and their love. O'Brien's narrator carefully establishes the scene of her envisaged crime. The narrator of *Bartleby*, like a good theatre director, gives his actor environment, movement and even some lighting: Bartleby is 'continually handling these dead letters and assorting them for the flames', so the reader holds an image of his melancholy labour in a fiery light (p. 34). For Roland Barthes in *How to Live Together*, there is a link between the Greek word *skene*, meaning a hut or a tent, consequently a meal shared among friends in that tent, and a shelter (a scene) for the actor.[32] So a powerful relationship exists between apostrophe, the scene and world-making – and therefore between apostrophe and performativity.

Apostrophe and Performativity

These three examples from Proux, O'Brien and Melville have an intense relationship to performative language. First used by J. L. Austin in his *How to Do Things With Words* (1962), the term 'performativity' is a powerful component in the vocabulary of criticism. For Austin, performative language is marked off from 'statements' by virtue of the fact that it acts on and in the world rather than 'reporting' on it. He gives the examples of saying 'I do' in a marriage ceremony, of naming (a ship, a child), of bequeathing in a will and of betting.[33] What all such statements have in common is that they confound any distinction between action and reporting. To make one of these statements *is* to carry out the action. First-person present-indicative uses of the verb 'to swear' (as in 'Jack, I swear') amount, for Austin, to instances of the performative. Colloquially, the verb 'to swear' can be used as a synonym for 'to promise', a verb Austin uses time and again as an example of a performative utterance. Of course, what Ennis means when he says 'Jack, I swear' is richly unclear. He may

mean ‘to promise’; he may be speaking in his own defence against some kind of imagined or remembered accusation from Jack. He may be about to swear something in a more literal, ritualistic sense – ‘to make a solemn declaration or statement with an appeal to God … or to some sacred object, in confirmation of what is said; to take an oath’, as the OED puts it. The little shrine he has created would count as just such a sacred object. Or Ennis may even mean to curse.

If Proux had had Ennis say ‘Jack, I wish – ’ or ‘Jack, I remember –’ either would have counted as an apostrophe but neither would have had the person-oriented force and ambiguity of the text as it stands. Both alternatives would have lacked a quality that is crucial to performativity, which is *address*, in the now-rare sense of adroitness, ability, skill.

The apostrophe in *Brokeback Mountain* is a performative (‘Jack, I swear –‘), one that instantiates address (in the senses of adroitness and skill) in a simple way. In O’Brien’s story the apostrophe is addressed *to* a ritual, performative context, the ‘nuptials’ that enable the correct, effective performance of the marriage vows. The ‘address’ O’Brien’s narrator demonstrates has to work on the level of fantasy in order to resist impending new realities. Like the verb ‘to promise’, the example of the marriage ceremony turns up again and again in Austin’s writing on the performative – so much so that Eve Kosofksy Sedgwick once claimed that a ‘more accurate name’ for *How to Do Things with Words* might have been ‘*How to Say (or Write) ‘I do’ About Twenty Million Times Over Without Winding Up Any More Married Than You Started Out*.’[34] Something like a wedding vow clearly haunts Ennis’s address to Jack. In the Dead Letter office, Bartleby encounters physical manifestations that result from failed performatives. Is the ring taken from the folded paper a wedding ring? Not certainly – but quite possibly. The pardon never received, the nuptials encouraged so as to result

in death, the swearing that is never complete and never requested: these are all (failed) performative contexts.

Yet another example of performative language given by Austin is a pardon, an act of forgiveness. In Melville's story, a written pardon reaches the dead letter office and Bartleby's hands, but not the person for whom it was intended and who, consequently, dies despairing. Like a member of an audience, Bartleby is witness *and* participant. He takes on the shady force of the relationship between apostrophe, performative failure and performative efficacy. The story's end almost makes him the product of this connection between performative failure and apostrophaic misdirection.

Having distinguished performative utterances from 'reporting', Austin claims that describing and reporting 'are no less speech-acts than all those we have been mentioning … as performative' (p. 1246). If a performative utterance acts in the world it has what Austin calls a 'force'. This is something it would share with statements that do not initially seem to belong to the category of the performative. Statements like 'I bet you ten pounds'; 'I hereby give and bequeath' all act on the world but so, for Austin, would statements such as 'You have the capacity to be the next Prime Minister'; 'Climate change is real'; 'We've been friends for years'. All utterance can be said, for Austin, to have an animating power, something akin to what Barbara Johnson describes when she writes of 'the ineradicable tendency of language to animate whatever it addresses' (p. 225). Austin makes the distinction between 'what a certain utterance *means*' and 'the *force*, as we may call it, of the utterance' (p. 1247). Part of the role of apostrophe, a figure which is nothing if not an exercise in utterance as force, is to enact this animating capacity of language. This is one of the reasons why apostrophe can afford to traffic in failure – and why its literal 'failures' matter so little.

Discussions of apostrophe in a poetic context both ally it with performativity yet separate it off from 'doing' in a practical, visible sense. Culler connects it with event and with poems being acts in the real world. Writing about 'O Fons Bandusiae', an ode by Horace, he claims that 'it *performatively* sets out to accomplish what it declares, that this spring will become a famous spring' (p. 218). The examples from Proux, O'Brien, and Melville see apostrophe occurring in three different kinds of performative context: the apostrophe in Proux is a speech-act, a swearing; the apostrophe uttered by O'Brien's narrator is targeted at a performative context, a wedding and Melville's apostrophe is addressed to a figure haunted by failed perfromatives. But there is a more intrinsic relationship between apostrophe and performativity. If I bet you ten pounds on the outcome of a rugby match then, in Austin's terms, I am acting. Similarly, if I 'poetically' address the West Wind, a dead lover or two shirts on a hanger then, in Culler's terms, I am also acting, but my action has three different layers.

First, apostrophe works to give a discursive event (for Culler, a poem) the status of a 'real' event, to accentuate the performative force of the poem, to reinforce and emphasize the poem's status as an occurrence and not solely a representation. In narrative an apostrophe can function either as an event (Douglass's articulation of his desire for freedom as he addresses the white sails on Chesapeake Bay), as an utterance that seeks to compensate for an event that never occurred (the life together that Jack and Ennis never have in *Brokeback Mountain*) or to taunt an imminent event (the marriage of Mattie to his new bride in 'Brother' with a view to undoing, through murder, the event's reality).

Second, in so doing, apostrophe assumes and enforces an aliveness, a potential responsiveness, in the world around me and of which I am part. For Culler, poets, with all their readiness to address 'things that could not hear', anticipated modes of thinking

such as Bruno Latour's actor-network theory and Jane Bennett's's challenge, outlined in *Vibrant Matter*, to the human 'habit of parsing the world into dull matter (it, things) and vibrant life (us, beings).'[35] The endeavour for the poets who preceded Latour and Bennett was, for Culler, to 'give us a world that is perhaps not more intelligible but more in tune with the passionate feelings, benign, hostile and ecstatic, that life has inspired.' (p. 242)

Finally, such addresses to the wind, the lover or the shirts would, by virtue of their partial, but pretty evident, ridiculousness, enact and embody poetic pretension. Part of the function of such addresses is to let readers 'know' that when they encounter them,they are in the land of poetry. It is their apostrophaic form, complete with its tell-tale 'O!'s and its built-in failures, that comes to constitute the person who utters apostrophes as a poet. Ennis, Maisie, and Melville's narrator all have this poet-status conferred on them by their use of apostrophe. And their uses of this figure put poetic aspiration, articulated via apostrophe, at the heart of narrative not in opposition to it.

Of course, some kind of proximity to the performative isn't a *requirement* for apostrophe. Yet apostrophe seems to enact and occupy the distinction – and overlap – between performative utterances and description. Like performative utterances, apostrophe sets out to act. But unlike them its 'failure' is guaranteed and its successes are almost 'cheats'. If I write or sing 'blow western wind', I can do so pretty safe in the notion that the Western Wind will keep on blowing. If, like Madonna, I write or sing 'I see you in the street and you walk on by', then it's more than likely that you will keep on walking. It's the very openness to failure, the ridiculousness, that gives apostrophe its performative and aesthetic charge. This is something akin to the fragility, and the power, of theatre.

Apostrophe at the Theatre

Defined as direct address, whether to a dead, absent or inanimate entity (or to an object unlikely to respond), apostrophe turns up in contexts other than the lyric. It also turns up at moments and in ways that highlight the passage between the work and the world. Enacting both the power and the fragility of that work-world relationship, apostrophe frequently requires a theatrical framing. It often has to be part of a scene, with all the connotations of shelter and world-making (as well as narrative direction) which accompany that word. Apostrophe also sits on the line between performative utterances and 'reports' on the world. Highlighting the potential failures that haunt every performative, apostrophe also underscores the performative charge that crackles through the most 'neutral' descriptive phrase.

Speaking at Barbara Johnson's memorial service, Judith Butler referred to 'death as an apostrophaic predicament'. We address others after the death of a loved one because we wish to address (that is, to apostrophize) the loved departed. 'It was all along,' Butler continues, 'as she and Culler taught us, a *scene* of absence or loss but now we are left to live out in the open the *scene* that underwrites the apostrophe' (emphasis mine). Butler makes a link between the scene and the employment of this figure: the scene takes on the risk that inevitably comes with apostrophe; it functions as its signature, providing it with some narrative context, and guaranteeing it some kind of recognisability and cohesion. Apostrophe can be provoked or, as Butler put it, 'underwritten' by a scene. Since apostrophe is often a key part of the scene's creation in the first place, it is/would be underwritten by something of its own making. When Wordsworth addresses his fountains, meadows, hills and groves, he not only throws aliveness into them, he makes himself part of their immediate environment. Part of the function of his apostrophe is to locate his speaker in a space, and to locate his reader in

a poetic world. Apostrophe not only underwrites the scene; it creates its reach and nature. The fundamental terms of apostrophe (absent/present, alive/dead, animate/inanimate) are always open to what Barbara Johnson called 'another reversal, another transvaluation' (p. 221). This openness often gets vividly expanded in theatrical writing.

The final stretch of Thornton Wilder's play *Our Town* (1938) provides an example of this in the character of Emily. Having died in childbirth, Emily pleads for a chance to make a return visit to her old life, and to go back to her twelfth birthday. Her wish is granted, that birthday moment can be re-enacted and Emily's mother treats her as she did in the past, assuming her daughter is still alive, just turned twelve years old and in need of her mother's care. This prompts Emily – horrified by the success of her own performance – to respond 'with mounting urgency', as the stage directions phrase it. She, a 'dead' girl, apostrophizes her living, present mother who cannot hear her, even though the audience can: 'Oh, Mama, just look at me one minute as though you really saw me … I'm dead.' [36] This amounts to a reversal (and transvaluation) of the terms in which apostrophe gets outlined. The temporal and performance conditions indeed make the living mother someone who is 'unlikely to answer' and they make Emily, one of the dead (though played by a living actor), someone who tries to throw voice and an extra layer of animicity into the living. Apostrophizing her 'living' mother, Emily strives to give her the capacity to recognize the presence, agency and sensibility of the dead.

This apostrophaic convulsion has a strange impact: it prompts a planetary view as Emily moves from apostrophizing beloved things in her world to addressing the entire planet. 'Good-bye to clocks ticking, and Mama's sunflowers. And food and coffee. And new-ironed dresses and hot baths,' she says, before then declaiming: 'Oh,

earth, you're too wonderful for anyone to realize you.' (p. 64) Preempting Jane Bennett by decades, Wilder's Emily not only resists parsing the world into dull matter (things) and vibrant (ie human) life but in her very existence, one that can only function in theatrical ways, she collapses that very distinction: a living (vibrant) actor plays a 'dull' entity, a human identity after death, endowed with the capacity to throw (extra) animicity into the living: it is through apostrophe that all this is enabled. Such a resistance gives Emily the energy and authority to make not only things within the world, but the world itself, the object of her apostrophe.

A similar dynamic occurs in David Bowie's and Enda Walsh's musical *Lazarus* (2016). This features a character called Girl who, in the play's backstory, has been murdered and who, caught between life and death (a ghost of a certain kind) gets 'stuck' in the New York apartment of Thomas Jerome Newton, the play's equally stuck humanoid-alien protagonist. 'I'm a dying man,' he says of himself, 'who can't die'. [37] Girl has physical sensations (she doesn't like the way Newton's apartment smells, she feels pain). Playing the role requires great physical, emotional, and vocal energy. The play's ending requires that Newton stab Girl, 'killing' her a second time. In his grief and delirium he confuses her with the daughter from his own past (and his own planet) from whom he has been long separated. Apostrophizing Girl's bleeding body, he pleads with her to 'One last time, wake up'. The stage directions read: *'The GIRL slowly opens her eyes*.' The ensuing poetic dialogue leans heavily on the verb 'to turn'. Newton fantasizes about 'small words' passed between his daughter, his wife and his son 'as our planet turns'. And, Girl, apostrophized out of her second – and supposedly final – death responds: 'And turning – and walking to you and being held' (p. 60). Emily, in *Our Town*, apostrophizes the planet earth. *Lazarus* identifies the world's turning on its axis with the turning that is central to apostrophe. In Wilder's play the 'dead'

apostrophize the living: Emily pleads with her mother for recognition. In *Lazarus*, one who is already 'dead' (Girl) is apostrophized back into a second theatrical life having been killed a second time, something that affords her the release of the 'real' death that she has been seeking throughout the play, and something that enables the final release of its protagonist.

Our Town and *Lazarus* are relatively recent instances of theatre's capacity to vividly expand ways in which key oppositions that underlie and enable apostrophe (oppositions such as absent/present, dead/alive) can be understood and, more importantly, felt. But this capacity has a long, long history. Reading William Blake's 'The Sick Rose', Culler sees it as informed by 'a highly relevant sequence in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*', where 'untold' love comes to feed on a lady's 'damask' (i.e. rose) cheek, just as Blake's invisible worm destroys the life of the flower addressed in his poem (p. 222). For Culler, Blake's apostrophaic little poem has a Shakespearean, theatrical provenance, though Culler's reading doesn't stop to consider what that might mean.

Nonetheless, the vocabulary of theatre often pervades Culler's treatment of apostrophe. For him, the various objects of Wordsworth's 'Immortality Ode' function as 'concretizations of *stages* in a *drama* of the mind.'[38] Culler's description of an apostrophaic poem as something that can 'invoke objects' and 'people a detemporalized space with forms and forces which have pasts and futures but which are addressed as potential presences' sounds a lot like theatre. 'Fiction,' he writes, 'is about what happens next; lyric is about what happens now' (p. 226). Theatre, the cultural practice on which Culler draws for both examples and vocabulary but which he doesn't stop to consider, lives between those two demands: right on the threshold between 'nowness' and 'nextness'.

Reading Baudelaire's 'Le Cygne' (1857), Culler engages in a similar disavowal and evocation of the theatrical. he makes a case for seeing that poem as a parody of its own procedures. He argues that a pun on a vocative 'O' and the French noun 'l'eau' (water) 'identifies the potential addressee of every apostrophe as the apostrophic "O" itself', thereby making every apostrophe an invocation of an invocation' (p. 236). Central to this reading is the poem's opening line 'Andromaque, je pense à vous'. But Culler doesn't stop to consider that this line's addressee is a character in a 1668 play by Jean Racine.

Apostrophe pulses through *Andromaque*. Its titular heroine is described by another character (Pyrrhus) as apostrophizing her dead husband, even as she gazes into the face of her living son: 'It's Hector,' Pyrrhus reports her saying, 'It is himself, it's you, dear husband, that I embrace' ('C'est Hector … c'est toi, cher Époux, que j'embrasse').[39] Later on, Andromaque's apostrophes become more explosive as she addresses her husband's ashes, the people of Troy and the (absent) son the sight of whom had prompted her earlier reported apostrophe to her dead husband:

O cendres d'un Époux! O Troyens! O mon père!
O mon fils, que tes jours coutent cher à ta mere! (IV, 1, ll. 2049-50).

Like the ending of those stories by Proux, O'Brien and Melville, these eruptions of apostrophe occur at a moment when the relationship between the work and the world is being remade, is fragile**.** Andromaque apostrophises her husband's ashes at the end of Act III, as the play transitions into its intense, violent climaxes. Apostrophe again occurs at an end here (the end of an act) and at a moment when the play looks to its own (apostrophaic) end. *Andromaque's* final speech begins with an apostrophe to the now-dead Pyrrhus: 'Quoi, Pyrrhus, je te rencontre encore?' (V, 5, l. 1629). If 'Le Cygne' can be said to parody apostrophaic procedures, then its starting point is an

apostrophe to a character in a major theatrical text for which apostrophe is a major narrative force and, furthermore, a character for whom apostrophe (addressing the dead as if they were alive, turning from addressing her actual interlocutor to address the ashes of a sacked city, her absent son) is a primary mode of address and self-constitution. This might be expected to to make some difference (or all the difference) to Culler's reading – and it doesn't.

Racine's theatrical writing is far from alone in being imbued with the figure. Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (1599) is nothing if not driven by the direct address by first-person speakers of absent, dead, inanimate entities. Characters apostrophize themselves as if they were not there 'Oh poor Orlando,' says – Orlando.[40] The play's songs apostrophize the wind and the sky. 'Hang there, my verse', says the same Orlando, as he places 'a writing' on a tree. Love notes and poems are found hanging from trees, texts that promise to 'tongue' every tree are carved into their bark. Filled with apostrophes, the forest of Arden is made to respond to apostrophe in a way that enacts, actualizes and exceeds the responsive potential of apostrophaic poems.

As Proux's deployment of the phrase 'Jack, I swear –' made clear, the relationship between apostrophe and involuntary exclamation can be a close one. In a theatrical context there are multiple (and often very simple) ways in which utterances intended as direct addresses can become, unwittingly, apostrophes . 'Is it even so? Begin you to grow on me?' asks the character Oliver of his brother Orlando – after the latter has left the scene (1.1. 81). A heeded address to someone present becomes an unwitting apostrophe, after its addressee has gone.. This highlights something that theatre can do with apostrophe that other forms considered so far cannot. Character A can begin to address Character B when the latter is onstage but the latter only has to get up and walk away for that direct address to become an apostrophe. If theatre can

expand common understandings of how the conceptual oppositions on which apostrophe depends can work, then it can inevitably collapse some of the distinctions between death and aliveness with which apostrophe plays. Theatre can make the interplays of reversal and transvaluation that occur in poetry between these categories more vivid, embodied and complex

In a 2014 conversation with the Belgian theatre director Ivo van Hove, the playwright Tony Kushner asserted that the 'point' of illusion in twenty-first century theatre is not to 'create a successful illusion'. 'The point' he goes on 'is the engagement of the audience's imagination'. He went on:

> Illusion is only partly successful in theatre therefore you're forced to confront reality with a kind of double vision. You're straddling between belief and disbelief and you can't understand theatre or life if you're too completely a sceptic and don't believe any of it or if you're too completely gullible and believe everything you're told … Credulity and scepticism have to be set into a kind of a dialectical spin.[41]

The examples from Racine and Shakespeare would indicate that imbuing the written texts of plays with apostrophe amounts almost to a guide, a set of instructions to the audience, to engage their imagination, to set credulity and scepticism in the dialectical spin Kushner outlines.

In *Andromaque*, this is very explicitly outlined through the play's use of the verb 'songer' (to dream, to envisage, to evoke, to think). There is a powerful relationship between this verb and the play's apostrophes. As she asks her servant Céphise to remember the sack of Troy, Andromaque emphasizes not Céphise's powers of recollection but her ability – one she shares with the audience of Racine's play – to consciously, thoughtfully envisage that sacking.

Songe, songe, Céphise à cette nuit cruelle,
Qui fut pour tout un Peuple une Nuit éternelle.
Figure toi Pyrrhus les yeux étincelants,
Enrtrant à la lueur de nos Palais brulants.
(III, 8, ll. 1001-1004)

Later Oresete warns Hermione, Andromaque's rival, to 'songez' (IV 3, l. 1233), after she has outlined her murderous plot against Pyrrhus, a warning repeated when Cleone, Hermione's servant, warningly connects Hermione's inability to imagine and reflect with a state of treacherous self-loss: 'Vous vous perdez, Madame. Et vous devez songer ' (IV, 4, l. 1). Hermione's failure to 'songer' drives the tragedy. And both instances of this verb intimately connect with apostrophe.

If a character/actor constantly addresses absent entities as if they are present, speaks to the dead (Hector, the people of Troy) as if they are alive, or addresses entities unlikely to answer as if they – like the trees in the Forest of Arden – have great responsive capacity, then it is much more possible for an audience to believe in the reality and aliveness of the entities onstage. That engagement of the imagination is central to what apostrophe does. Along with its rhetorical power, its crucial (and often disregarded) role in narrative and its capacity to question and extend what aliveness might be, apostrophe can also pass on,, in turn, a transformed aliveness.

Discussion of the Literature

Apostrophe has preoccupied commentators from Cicero (c. 85 BC) and Quintilian (first century AD) to Jacques Derrida and others in the late 1970s.[42]

The earliest commentators wondered if apostrophe should be used at all and asked themselves what its strategic value might be. Shakespearean apostrophe was, for Sister Miriam Joseph, 'literally a turning of speech from the persons previously addressed to another, sometimes to a thing or an abstraction personified.'[43] In Shakespeare one of the figure's main functions was 'to heighten feeling', something that built on a Ciceronian view that apostrophe's main use was in the expression of grief and indignation.[44]

In 1783 Hugh Blair distinguished between what he termed a 'proper apostrophe', that is 'an address to a real person, but one who is absent or dead' and a less potent use of the figure when it took the form of 'an address to inanimate objects personified.' If Shakespearean apostrophe heightened feeling then, for Blair, apostrophe was 'prompted by passion.'[45]

One synonym for apostrophe is, as Brian Vickers points out, *aversio*.[46] J. Douglas Kneale has written of how Romantic poets forged connections between apostrophe and moments of aversion – a response to something that causes one to turn *away*.[47] This intensified the relationship between apostrophe and affect as opposed to propriety, strategy or passion, all of which might have been understood as causing a speaker to turn *towards* someone or something.

In the Romantic period apostrophe and lyric poetry became intensely intertwined. Paul de Man's work in the 1980s made the occurrence of apostrophe *the* signifier of lyric poetry. Sentiments and situations articulated in one poem by Charles Baudelaire ('Correspondances') were not taken as manifesting the genre of lyric poetry. Yet those same sentiments and situations were understood to manifest lyric poetry with a vengeance when articulated in an apostrophaic vein in 'Obsession' (another Baudelaire poem).

Jonathan Culler, in the 1980s and after, saw apostrophe as 'the characteristic trope of the lyric'. He also emphasized the figure's tendency to provoke embarrassment in those who both used and encountered it. For Culler, that same embarrassment prompted criticism of the lyric to systematically avoid considering apostrophe, an avoidance manifest in a common critical tendency to translate apostrophe into description.[48]

In 'Apostrophe, Animation and Abortion,' a 1986 essay that read poems where a woman speaker addresses an aborted or miscarried child or children, Barbara Johnson pushed the connection between apostrophe and lyric into the arena of sexual and reproductive politics (and legislation).[49] In doing so she explored relationships between apostrophe, language and decisions about what, in political and judicial terms, counted as 'life and non-life.'[50]

These emphases on apostrophe's link with lyric poetry meant that the figure's occurrence in other genres tended to go unexplored. An exception to this is Denis Flannery's work on the relationship between apostrophe, mourning and narrative impact in early twenty-first century fiction that was preoccupied with Henry James.[51]

Animacies, Mel Y. Cheng's 2012 exploration of 'the failing categories of life and non-life' not only has a conceptual debt to the tradition of apostrophe but sees itself as inherently 'a project of address' (p. 236). Cheng identifies Barbara Johnson's work on the figure as a major source of inspiration, thereby signalling the extent to which considering apostrophe has ongoing resonance in fields such as thing theory, critical race studies, queer theory and eco-criticism.

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Notes

[1] Byron apostrophizes Plato and pleasure in *Don Juan,* Canto I; Kavanagh addresses the 'unworn world' in 'Canal Bank Walk'; Pope apostrophizes Queen Anne in *The Rape of the Lock*, Canto IV; Moore apostrophizes a steamroller in 'To a Steamroller'; Shelley apostrophizes the West wind in his 'Ode to the West Wind'; the apostrophe by Wordsworth is to be found in his 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality'; the body and the glance apostrophized Yeats are to be found in his 'Among School Children', all in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, Sixth Edition, edited by Margaret Ferguson, Tim Kendall and Mary Jo Slater (New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company, 2018), p. 910, p. 1520, p. 1389, p. 650, p. 932, p. 841, p. 1254.

[2] Baudelaire's apostrophe occurs in 'Moesta et Errabunda' in *Oeuvres Complètes:* Préface, Présentation et Notes de Marcel A. Ruff (Paris: Seuil, 1968), p. 80. Bishop's address to marriage is from 'Mr and Mrs Carlyle' in *Edgar Allan Poe and the Jukebox: Uncollected Poems, Drafts and Fragments*, edited and annotated by Alice Quinn (Manchester: Carcanet, 2006), p. 180.

[3] *New Addresses: Poems* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), p. 36, p. 11.

[4] *Selected Poems: A New Selection* edited by Christopher Carduff, Introduction by Brad Laithauser (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2015), p. 146.

[5] President Trump was apostrophized by the comedian Michelle Wolf at the White House Correspondents' Dinner on April 28, 2018 when she announced that she was 'going to make fun of the President in a new way, in way that will really get him', a comment she followed with the apostrophe 'Mr. President, I don't think you're very rich'. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DDbx1uArVOM (accessed July 5, 2019). In June 2018, Senator Chuck Schumer, referring to a policy of separating immigrant children from their parents at the US-Mexico border said 'The president can end this crisis with this flick of a pen by signing a presidential order to end the agonising screams of small children who have been separated from their parents',. The senator then engaged in the following apostrophe: 'Mr President, I'll lend you my pen, any pen.' abcn.ws/2M4Pnsd. Accessed July 5, 2019.

[6] *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself*, edited by William L. Andrews and William S. McFeely (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), p. 46.

[7] *Great Expectations* (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), p. 56.

[8] *What Maisie Knew*, edited with an introduction and notes by Christopher Ricks (London: Penguin, 2010), p. 151.

[9] *A Dictionary of the English Language in Which the Words are Deduced from their Originals and Illustrated in their Different Significations by Examples from the Best Writers, to which are Prefixed a History of the Language and an English Grammar:* The Seventh Edition (London: 1785),

[10] 'Apostrophe, Animation and Abortion' in *The Barbara Johnson Reader: The Surprise of Otherness*, edited by Melissa Feuerstein, Bill Johnson Gonzalez, Lili Porten and Keja Valens, with an Introduction by Judith Butler and an

Afterword by Shoshana Felman (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014) pp. 217-234, p. 218. Emphasis mine. Further references to this article are given in parentheses in the text.

[11] *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*, Gentleman, edited by Melvyn New and Joan New; with an introductory essay by Christopher Ricks; and an introduction and notes by Melvyn New (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 560.

[12] http://0www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/9448?rskey=cSetTe&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid. Accessed February 2, 2019.

[13] *Barbara Johnson Memorial Service* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9L-Md6QLTmE. Accessed February 23, 2019.

[14] *The Odyssey*, translated by Emily Wilson (Norton: New York and London, 2018), p. 334.

[15] Both of these definitons by Quintillian are quoted by Brian Vickers in *In Defence of Rhetoric* (Oxford; Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 316, p. 308.

[16] *Insitutio Oratio*. Translated by H. E. Butler. 4 vols. (London: Heinemann, 1921). 9. 2. 38.

[17] Burt, Stephen. 2016. 'What Is This Thing Called Lyric?' *Modern Philology* 113 (3) (February): 422–440

[18] 'Anthropomorphism and Trope in the Lyric' in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984). Further references are given in parentheses in the text.

[19] *The Pursuit of Signs* (London: Routledge, 1981), p. 150.

[20] *Theory of the Lyric* (Cambridge, Mass and London: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 187. Further references are given in parentheses in the text.

[21] *Brokeback Mountain* (London: Fourth Estate, 1997), pp. 57-8.

[22] *The Love Object: Selected Stories*, Introduction by John Banville (London: Faber and Faber, 2013), p. 293.

[23] *Melville's Short Novels*, edited by Dan McCall (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), p. 34. Further references to the story and to some commentary thereon are given in parentheses in the text, preceded by 'Norton'.

[24] 'A Defense of Poesy (The Treatise of Julia)', in *On Nineteen Eighty-Four: Orwell and Our Future*, edited by Abbot Gleason, Jack Goldsmith and Martha C. Nussbaum (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 56.

[25] Jerusha McCormack, 'Apostrophe, Translatability, and the Origins of Guo's Lyrical Politics' in XXX xxx 2018 and COMPLETE REFERENCE PENDING.

[26] *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination.* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008*),* pp. 4-5.

[27] Stuart Murray, *Representing Autism: Culture, Narrative, Fascination* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), p. 55.

[28] Bartleby's status as a challenging and radical figure is outlined by Johannes Dietrich Bergmann in ' "Bartleby" and *The Lawyer's Story'*, reprinted in McCall's *Melville's Short Novels*, pp. 173-176, p, 175, p. 176. Sianne Ngai uses the phrase 'powerful powerlessness' of Bartleby in *Ugly Feelings* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 2.

[29] Ed Reiss: Personal Communication.

[30] *Representing Autism*, p. 58.

[31] *The Pursuit of Signs*, p. 151.
[32] *How to Live Together: Novelistic Simulations of Some Everyday Spaces: Notes for a Lecture Course and Seminar at the College de France (1976-1977),* Translated by Kate Briggs. Text established, annotated and introduced by Claude Coste. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), p. 51.
[33] 'Performative Utterances' in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism: Third Edition.* General Editor, Vincent B. Leitch, 2018, 1236-1248, p. 1238. All further references to Austin are to this extract and are given in parentheses in the text. Much of this page is taken from Denis Flannery's *Henry James: A Certain Illusion* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 23-24.
[34] 'Shame and Queer Performativity: Henry James's *The Art of the Novel*' in Henry *James's New York Edition: The Construction of Authorship,* edited by David McWhirter (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995), p. 209.
[35] *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), p. viii.
[36] *Our Town and Other Plays,* with a new Introduction by John Lahr (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. 63-64. Further references are given in parentheses in the text.
[37] David Bowie and Enda Walsh, *Lazarus: The Complete Book and Lyrics.* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2016), p. 12. Further references are given in parentheses in the text.
[38] *The Pursuit of Signs*, p. 164. Emphasis mine.
[39] Racine, *Oeuvres Complètes I: Theâtre. Poésie. Édition Présentée, Établie et Annotée par Georges Forestier* (Paris: Editons Gallimard, 1999), II, 5. ll. 656-58. Further references are given in parentheses in the text.
[40] *As You Like It* , edited by Julie Dusinberre (London: Arden, 2004),1.2. 48. Further references are given in parentheses in the text.
[41] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=stvpFanEU30. Accessed February 5, 2019.
[42] Quntillian, discusses apostrophe in *The Orator's Education*, edited and translated by Donald A. Russell, 5 vols (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2001). Bk IV 1. 63-70 and Bk IX, 2. 38-40, 3. 26-8. Jacques Derrida wrote, in an apostrophic vein, on apostrophe, describing it as 'a genre and a tone' in the 'Envois' section of *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond,* translated, with an Introduction and Additional Notes, by Alan Bass (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987), pp. 3-255, p. 4.
[43] *Shakespeare's Use of the Arts of Language* (New York and London: Hafner Publishing Company, 1947; 1966), pp. 246-7.
[44] Cicero, *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, translated by Harry Caplan (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1954) Bk IV.
[45] Hugh Blair *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, Edited by Harold F. Harding. Foreword by David Potter (Carbondale and Edwardsville, 1965), p. 338.
[46] *In Defence of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), p. 492.
[47] *Romantic Aversions: Aftermaths of Classicism in Wordsworth and Coleridge* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), p. 3.
[48] Culler outlines these positions in 'Reading Lyric', *Yale French Studies,* No. 69. *The Lesson of Paul de Man* (1985) 98-106.

[49] Apostrophe, Animation and Abortion' in *The Barbara Johnson Reader: The Surprise of Otherness*, edited by Melissa Feuerstein, Bill Johnson Gonzalez, Lili Porten and Keja Valens, with an Introduction by Judith Butler and an Afterword by Shoshana Felman (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014) pp. 217-234.

[50] The phrase is Mel Y. Cheng's and is used in her *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering and Queer Affect* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), p. 233.

[51] 'The Powers of Apostrophe and the Boundaries of Mourning: Henry James, Alan Hollinghurst, and Toby Litt', *Henry James Review* Volume 26, Number 3, Fall 2005, 293-305.