

Heart to Heart: The Power of Lyrical Bonding in Romantic Nationalism

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Abstract. In nineteenth-century nation-building, the textual genres investigated by researchers are usually long-distance, mediated ones, such as journalism and the novel. This article attempts to assess the function of a much more intimate literary genre, the lyrical, in that process. Lyricism was a central poetical element in Romanticism; its emotive, affect-centered mode was seen as specifically “immediate”, non-mediatised and deeply personal (and therefore non-political). How could this register aid the formation of self-defining national communities? The article suggests a special role for female poets and a privileged position of the lyrical in the interplay between print-disseminated literature and oral-performative literature, in shaping the nation as an “emotive community”.

Keywords: lyricism, oral tradition, nation-building, emotive communities

Print as a long-distance medium

Benedict Anderson’s coinage of “Imagined Communities” in his 1983 (2006) book of that title has proved lastingly inspiring. To begin with, it developed Ferdinand Tönnies’s classic distinction between *Gesellschaft* and *Gemeinschaft* by demonstrating that modern, large-scale societies could be experienced as if they were tightly bonded communities. What is more, in drawing attention to the community of readers in modern print capitalism it highlighted how culture, and more particularly literature, could bind its public together into a jointly focused social actor. Variants on that process have been explored by Leela Gandhi, who has explored what she terms “affective communities” (Gandhi 2006) and Ann Rigney, who has developed the idea of the “embodied community” (Rigney 2011).

In the present article I wish to continue these explorations. I take my cue from a private conversation with Miroslav Hroch, who pointed out that the nation-building role of literature and “print capitalism” was performed largely by media that had the long-distance potential to reach readers in different, widely separate places. This is precisely what gives them their power to unite

those people in shared experience who otherwise would be prevented by mere distance from engaging in direct, face-to-face communication. Literature is, in other words, a medium, a relay platform conveying messages from sender to receiver, and it finds its true role as a medium when the intervening spaces between sender and receiver are considerable.

The types of media and genre that accordingly are privileged in Anderson's analysis can be called long-distance ones: journalism and the modern novel, which he loosely aggregates under the appellation "print capitalism". What put the "capitalism" into print? For the Marxist-inspired Anderson, it is more or less an a priori assumption. For him, capitalism is an economic metonymy to signify post-1800, bourgeois modernity; as such his analysis aligns with other modernist analyses of nationalism and nation-building (e.g. Gellner 1983). But for those historians who want to do more than explain cultural developments by reducing them to political/economic determinants, it begs questions. The modernity of print culture accelerates after 1800. While communicative processes and the dissemination of ideas were changed fundamentally after Gutenberg, the role of journalism and of the novel form part of a complex process involving the spread of literacy and the affordability of printed material, which were in turn made possible by technological innovations such as the development of cheap wood-pulp paper and mechanised printing techniques (such as stereotype printing and rotary presses). This amounts to a second printing revolution which coincides with the rise of mass journalism and the rise of the novel as the dominant popular literary genre following Scott and Balzac. The commercialisation of print culture, its entrepreneurial reliance on a paying public rather than on patronage or private wealth, forms part of this process (generally Leerssen 2018).

Be that as it may, the impact of print culture on nation building is indeed strongly linked to the print media that become dominant after 1800, i.e. the novel and journalism. They are distributed in large print runs across a far-flung and numerous reading public. The rise of the celebrity author (Scott, Dumas) testifies to this, as does the emergence of the fervent mass interest with which *romans-feuilleton* were followed from instalment to instalment, such as, notoriously, those of Dickens and Eugène Sue. Indeed, the *roman-feuilleton* is an example of the novel and the periodical operating in tandem.

I should point out that the power of the novel to span wide distances and unite readerships from different settings applies, not only in geographical space but also in historical time. It is not fortuitous that the first mass-appeal novels were those of Walter Scott, set in a more or less distant historical past, and functioning as a medium between past events and present readership. (On Scott and the historical imagination: Pittock 2007, Rigney 1990, Rigney 2012.) The great

nation-building novels of the nineteenth century were very often historical, evoking for the contemporary public the heroic or dramatic events of a past that was at the same time exotic and archaic and immediate and identitarian. The exhortation at the end of Hendrik Conscience's *De leeuw van Vlaenderen* (The lion of Flanders, 1838) is paradigmatic, and could be applied to the agenda of Sienkiewicz, Manzoni, Bornhöhe and all the other Scott adepts across Europe:

You Flemings, who have read these pages, consider, when pondering the glorious deeds related here, what Flanders used to be, what it is now, and even more, what it shall become if you should forget the sacred example of your ancestors!¹

For the nineteenth-century mass readership, emerging as a social cohort and developing a national conscience, the past was colourful, romantic, exotic, and therefore made exciting reading (much as historical plays such as *Henry V* or *Götz von Berlichingen* had drawn audiences to the theatre in previous generations). At the same time, this was their own past, that of the readership collectively as a nation. The excitement was private; the identification national. Later in the century this “internal exoticism across time” gave way to an “internal exoticism across space”, as readers (increasingly urban-based) turned to rustic tales, melodramatic stories set in the idyllic countryside, which was different, colourful, yet thoroughly and authentically “national”.²

This was summed up by Jacob Grimm (1845) as the power of drama to bring the past closer to the reader, and the power of epic to bring the reader closer to the past.³ However, when making that point, Grimm singled out the fact that the lyrical register has no such distance to bridge: arising from the human's very heart, it directly addresses our emotions and will from all times be understood at all times (“die lyrische poesie aus dem menschlichen herzen

¹ In the original: “Gy Vlaming, die dit boek gelezen hebt, overweeg, by de roemryke daden welke hetzelve bevat, wat Vlaenderen eertyds was – wat het nu is – en nog meer wat het worden zal indien gy de heilige voorbeelden uwer Vaders vergeet!” Conscience 1838, 190.

² The rise of the *Dorfgeschichte* in Biedermeier Germany has been explained as “auto-exoticism” or *Binnenexotik*, presenting an idyllic countryside to a newly urbanised readership. Cf. Leerssen 1992 and the sources cited there.

³ Grimm 1845: “die dramatische [Poesie] strebt das vergangne in die empfindungsweise, gleichsam sprache der gegenwart umzusetzen und ist, wo ihr das gelingt, in ihrer wirkung unfehlbar [...] um die epische poesie aber steht es weit anders, in der vergangenheit geboren reicht sie aus dieser bis zu uns herüber, ohne ihre eigne natur fahren zu lassen, wir haben, wenn wir sie genieszen wollen, uns in ganz geschwundene umstände zu versetzen.”

selbst aufsteigend wendet sich unmittelbar an unser gemüt und wird aus allen zeiten zu allen verstanden”, *ibid.*).

Unmittelbar, immediate: indeed, for Grimm, the lyric is almost a mode of telepathic sympathy, hardly a medium at all. Heart-to-heart literature is like face-to-face communication, requiring no intervening carrying platform, spatial and temporal distance being unimportant.

This would suggest that lyricism belongs to the private sphere and to the Community rather than to a public sphere or to Society, and that there is, then, a deep poetic reason why it should have played less of a nation-building role. Is that indeed so?

Lyric between orality and literacy

The three great Aristotelian genres, epic, dramatic, and lyric, were all of them originally performative. Epic was the telling of a tale, as Homer (or Homer’s rhapsodes, or those reciting Homer) hexametrically told the story of Troy or Odysseus; drama enacted the moving, edifying fate of heroic protagonists such as Orestes or Medea; and lyric sang of emotions to the accompaniment of the lyre. All of these could move from orality to literacy, encoding their performative verbal substance into a transcript and thence into print.

The advent of Romanticism heralded, in the realm of the lyrical, a return to performative orality. In the *Lyrical Ballads*, Coleridge and (especially) Wordsworth moved from the lofty diction of established classicism towards a “language really used by men” and started to write their poems in, precisely, ballad metre: the iambic tetrameter long spurned in written literature, the hallmark of folk song.

The principal object...in these Poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate or describe them, [in] language really used by men... Low and rustic life was generally chosen, ...because in that condition of life our elementary feelings co-exist in a state of greater simplicity...in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature. The language, too, of these men is adopted...because... they convey their feelings and notions in simple and unelaborated expressions. (Wordsworth 1800)

Simplicity of diction and incident are thus equated with a liberation from artificiality and a reliance on direct inspiration (“all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”, *ibid.*).

These are well-known assertions, the stuff of introductory undergraduate courses; yet they deserve fresh attention in the light of what I feel is a changing conjuncture of literary genres during the rise of the Habermasian public sphere.⁴ As the public sphere, with its reliance on modernised print culture and long-distance communication, is developing, the Romantics' return to lyricism bespeaks a new valorisation of the private sphere: orality and direct communication, "heart speaking to heart", immediacy of shared feeling.

A return to ballad metre and folk song had been making itself felt even as Wordsworth wrote his celebrated Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*. In 1798, Robert Burns had produced his "Auld Lang Syne" (generally Grant 2021), a homely, simple, straightforward celebration of fellow-feeling that has become one of the most widely-known and popular songs worldwide, even among those to whom the Scottish dialect is foreign:

Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
and never brought to mind?
Should auld acquaintance be forgot,
and days of auld lang syne?

For auld lang syne, my dear,
for auld lang syne,
we'll tak a cup o' kindness yet,
for auld lang syne. (Burns 1788)

The auto-referentiality of this ballad is worth noting. It celebrates fellow-feeling while inspiring it among the participants, turning them into a veritable 'emotive community'. In the wake of Burns, dozens of similar songs emerge, auto-referentially invoking and at the same time stimulating conviviality, indeed, articulating it into being. These "let's raise a cup" songs are so numerous that the trope is a sort of cultural background noise, something hackneyed, platitudinous and stereotypical, overlooked and disregarded. But apparently in all their profusion they must have spoken to the sensibilities and susceptibilities of the Romantic and Biedermeier generations. Even a newly-produced national anthem such as the Dutch "Netherlandic Blood" (Tollens 1816) uses the

⁴ Anderson 1983 refers neither to Tönnies' *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* nor to Habermas' *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit* (1962), but cannot be seen in isolation from either of these. As implied in this article, I contend that Habermas's "structural transformation of the Public Sphere", of which he situates the emergence in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was accelerated and intensified in a national sense around 1800 (Leerssen 2018).

stratagem to turn the population of a newly-created state into a performative, affective community:

<p>Wien Neerlands bloed door d' aadren vloeit van vreemde smetten vrij Wiens hart voor land en koning gloeit, Verheff' den zang als wij: Hij stell' met ons, vereend van zin, Met onbeklemde borst, Het godgevallig feestlied in Voor vaderland en vorst. (Tollens 1816)</p>	<p>Whoever has Netherlandic blood in his veins flowing free from foreign taint, Whose heart glows for his land and king let him raise this song as we do Let him, with us, in common spirit and with unconstrained zest, intone this edifying festive song for fatherland and king. (My translation)</p>
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This is 'lyrical' in that it autoreferentially articulates into being the emotions it describes, and is intended for performance as a song.

But of course the motion of the lyrical had other connotations, for example meditative tenderness rather than boisterous good cheer in the "let's raise a cup" mode, dreamy introspection rather than conviviality. Here, too, a return to ballad metre and the artless, unadorned style of folk song had been under way. In Germany, the *Sturm und Drang* generation around young Goethe had developed a type of lyric, significantly known as *Lied* (and thus with, once again, connotations of a musical setting and performativity as ballad or song), often revolving around threatened female innocence. They were deeply inspired by folk songs and often in intimate osmosis with them. Some *Lieder* are inspired by folk songs, or even reworkings of folk songs. Goethe's touch of genius was to fill the simple diction (few Latinate loanwords, a straightforward speech-like syntax, a gravitation to mono- or at most bi-syllabic words, brief lines without enjambment) with a heavy surplus of emotion and understated significance.

Once again, the example is so famous as to be almost trite, but it deserves attention.

<p>Sah ein Knab' ein Röslein stehn, Röslein auf der Heiden, War so jung und morgenschön, Lief er schnell es nah zu sehn, Sah's mit vielen Freuden. Röslein, Röslein, Röslein roth, Röslein auf der Heiden.</p>	<p>A lad saw a little rose, a little rose on the wild field, Young and pretty as the morning He ran to watch it more closely and gazed at it with delight O little rose, little rose, little rose so red Little rose on the wild field.</p>
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Knabe sprach: ich breche dich,
 Röslein auf der Heiden!
 Röslein sprach: ich steche dich,
 Daß du ewig denkst an mich,
 Und ich will's nicht leiden.
 Röslein, Röslein, Röslein roth,
 Röslein auf der Heiden.

The lad said, I will pick you,
 Little rose on the wild field!
 The rose said: I will prick you,
 So that you will learn a lesson from me
 And I will not submit.
 O little rose, little rose, little rose so red
 Little rose on the wild field.

Und der wilde Knabe brach
 's Röslein auf der Heiden;
 Röslein wehrte sich und stach,
 Half ihm doch kein Weh und Ach,
 Mußt' es eben leiden.
 Röslein, Röslein, Röslein roth,
 Röslein auf der Heiden.
 (Goethe 1789)

And the rough lad broke and picked
 The little rose on the wild field
 The rose resisted and stung and pricked
 But it was to no avail
 And she was forced to submit
 O little rose, little rose, little rose so red
 Little rose on the wild field.
 (My translation)

The song dates from circa 1770 and was originally published as a folk song in a collection edited by J. G. Herder. Goethe later published it under his own name (1789). We generally know it from Schubert's musical setting, which was composed in 1815. In that musical setting with its repeated saccharine performances over the last centuries, the song has come to sound twee and sentimental. But a return to the actual words leaves no room for doubt: this is an allegory of forceful amorous conquest, even downright rape, and loss of innocence. Goethe evokes his youthful dalliance with Friederike Brion, which left him with mixed feelings. There was lasting tenderness over his beloved's charm, and painful remorse over his own inconstancy and callous termination of the affair (Valk 2012).

Remarkably, these intensely intimate emotions are expressed in a language that is hardly the poet's own, using the commonplaces and phraseology of popular songs, something that is so traditional and folksy as to be almost impersonal. This type of lyric, both personal and impersonal, already foreshadows the dilemma that T. S. Eliot would address in his essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (Eliot 1917; and cf. Albrecht 1985). We encounter a similar grey area between inherited traditional lyric and personal creation in the above-quoted "Auld Lang Syne", firmly linked to the person and poetic power of Robert Burns but entangled textually in a transmission that is rooted in collective/anonymous Scottish oral praxis.

There are specific reasons why this adoption of oral-collective, anonymous and semi-formulaic verse by literati should happen at precisely the dawn of Romanticism (Leerssen 2013). Everywhere, poets were on a quest for the

authentic roots of their nation's literature, and the crossover between orally performed/chanted verse and the idea of a national epic has been well documented with reference to the cases of the Croatian *Hasanaginica*, the Finnish and Estonian *Kalevala* and *Kalevipoeg*, and other instances (Leerssen 2012). Traditions could be retrieved either from ancient manuscripts or from oral performance; philology and folklore were as yet closely related fields, and men like Walter Scott, Claude Fauriel and the Grimm brothers moved in both fields – Scott with his edition of *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (1803), Fauriel with his work, both on Greek Klephtic songs and on the medieval Provençal Troubadours, and the Grimms with their editions of medieval texts and legal sources, and their seminal collections of folk and fairy tales (Maufroy 2022; Gunnell 2022).

Folk literature not only reached the printing press and the urban reader through these scholarly retrievals, but in these decades we also see how print modernity finally penetrates into the most peripheral and deprived rural peripheries and how vernacular verse in hitherto marginalised languages begins to make the jump from orality to print (Generally, of course, Ong 2002; also, Saussy 2016). Gaelic, Breton and Basque verse begins to be distributed, often during agricultural trading fairs and by itinerant hawkers, in broadsheet form (Le Berre 1994; van der Leeuw 2022). In the Basque country, this trend dovetails with the rise of a semi-improvised performative poetic contest called *bertolaritza*. Almanacs in Lithuania being to print pieces, often verse, in Lithuanian, produced by bookseller printers in Vilnius, Königsberg and Memel/Klaipėda (Sniečkutė 2022). In Britain, broadsheets with patriotic ballads in the sea shanty mode were distributed as anti-French patriotic propaganda during the Napoleonic Wars (Köhler 2019). Such ballads are known in English by the name “Come-all-ye”; this phrase asking listeners to gather and listen to the song itself indicates the communal face-to-face setting of the performance.

These productions find themselves at the lower social end of a spectrum which reaches upwards towards a more genteel *Musen Almanach* type of periodical platform. What we see, then, is a continuum: a praxis of oral performativity within the poorly-literate community; folkloristic gatherings of such materials would be sampled in almanacs for the lower or middle classes, or collected published in up-market collections such as David Herd's *Ancient and modern Scottish songs, heroic ballads, etc. collected from memory, tradition and ancient authors* (1776), Herder's *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern*, Arnim/Brentano's *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, Čelakovský's *Slovanské národní písně*, etc., etc., etc. Original ballads/*Lieder* written by romantic literati would appear alongside these anthologies, such as Thomas Moore's hugely popular *Irish Melodies* (1810 ff.); and all of this material would make its way into middle-class parlours, to be

sung to piano accompaniment, or into the repertoire of those choral societies which were also emerging during these decades (Lajosi & Stynen 2015). Print, in this continuum, was only one phase in the two-way mobility between orality and literacy; icebergs floating in a sea of performative praxis, out of which they had crystallised and into which they were melting back. The lyrical, in other words, was never far removed from oral, face-to-face performance. Ballads would be sung rather than read, and even poems are, of all the literary genres, the most easily suited to reading aloud. Even in the present century, poetry readings and slam poetry continue to testify to this.

Lyric between sentiment and politics

The timing of this process, from the 1770s on, can be explained historically, and the historical context also accounts for its formative importance in the emerging poetics of Romanticism. Much as Romantic medievalism can be explained from the renewed availability and accessibility of ancient manuscripts (Leerssen 2018), so too the folk penchant of the Romantics can be explained from the newly-established conduit between oral-collective performance and print distribution. Both were part of a quest for inspiration beyond the clapped-out reservoir of classicism.

Lyricism as it was re-invented by the Romantics would emulate the folk-traditional hallmark of emotional power phrased in restrained language and using folk-sentimental formulas (for example the juxtaposition of internal affect and external setting). It is what Wordsworth attempted in the Lucy poems. Later masters of the form were Josef von Eichendorff, Emily Dickinson and Christina Rossetti. Since the days of Romanticism, this lyricism has become a benchmark of what is considered 'poetry', i.e. poetry is almost by default lyrical because it is intimate, expressing and exploring emotional states. Even when the forms and language stray far from the straightforward ballad/*Lied* mode, this lyrical exploration of subjective emotion is the poem's core business, be it an ode (Keats), an elegy (Hölderlin, Rilke), or free verse (Saint-John Perse). All of art should, indeed, be "the supremely individual expression of a supremely individual emotion",⁵ and in that elevation of the lyrical to a categorical aesthetic imperative lies an important and all-pervasive after effect of Romanticism. It has become unusual to encounter poems that are prosaic or non-lyrical, that deal with the public or the cerebral rather than private or emotional topics. (Examples are Brecht and, at least in some of his poems, Borges.)

⁵ Thus Kloos 1890, 144. In the original: de allerindividueelste expressie van de allerindividueelste emotie.

From that, one would be tempted to conclude that the lyrical and the political are two spheres that are not easily combined, and that Anderson was right to turn his searchlight towards other forms of print culture. It would be counter-intuitive to see great lyricists as champions of their nation: the appreciation of Emily Dickinson is not really a patriotically American one, nor do Rilke or Saint-John Perse figure in the cultural repertoire of the average German or French nationalist. If we look at the lyricism that did become part of the nationalist cultural repertoire, we find it among the ‘all together now!’ songs by B-list authors. In Germany, verses by Arndt, Maßmann, Schenckendorff, Geibel and Dahlmann became popular in their sung form as music with words rather than poems with a melody; the same goes for Irish versifiers such as Thomas Moore and Thomas Davis, whose nationally sentimental effusions became the staple of convivial song nights and parlour music. Ditto in France for Pierre Béranger, Emile Debraux and the *gouettiers* (Darriulat 2010).

What strikes us is that in each of these cases, patriotic lyricism back pedalled on the transition from orality to literacy. While Walter Scott and Balzac, Wordsworth, Dickinson and Rilke were primarily print literature, savoured in solitary silence by individual readers, the verse of the patriotic lyricists falls hopelessly flat when read merely as printed text; it requires performance, and indeed musical performance, to come into its own. Characteristically, such patriotic verse has maintained its presence in print, not as a given author’s “supremely individual expression of a supremely individual emotion”, but on the contrary as part of anthologies and song books, grouped with similar songs for collective performance in convivial company. In Ireland, there was the perennial national classic *The Spirit of the Nation*, collecting patriotic verse for parlour performance with piano accompaniment. In Germany and Denmark, there were the *Commersbuch* songbooks used by student fraternities for their merry gatherings. Indeed, many national anthems in Europe owe their early popularity to this ambience of convivial singing.

Even when not set to music, patriotic lyrics were prone to performative orality. Felicia Hemans’s “Casabianca” (with the celebrated opening line “The boy stood on the burning deck”) became a well-known classic because it was a recitation piece learned by heart by generations of school children; ditto her “The Stately Homes of England”; ditto Guido Gezelle’s defiant “t En zal”, doughtily asserting that Flemish would never be ousted by French. Ditto for the imperialistic *Barrack-Room Ballads* of Rudyard Kipling (undiplomatically muttered aloud by Prime Minister Boris Johnson during a visit to Mandalay; Worley 2017).

Everywhere, then, we notice how the mode of the lyric slides towards orality and performativity. This is remarkable, because it stands at odds with the

print capitalism notion that the nation-building power of literature was exercised mainly through the mediating platform of print. Not so, apparently, for patriotic lyric, which was performed in face-to-face proximity, in ‘embodied communities’ during national festivities or in convivial company.

I think this phenomenon will first of all force us to tone down the black and white opposition between private and public sphere, face-to-face community and media-connected society. In my work on cultural nationalism in Europe I have encountered many instances where the national mobilising platform was not the print capitalism of a full-blown urban modernity, but rather the coteries and associational networks that, without belonging to the ideal-typical sociability of a Habermassian Public Sphere, nevertheless carried a similar function. The salon is one of them; so are the family networks around the Tengströms in Helsinki or Lady Llanover in South Wales. Such networks of friends and relatives, often held together by women in their domestic setting, I call ‘convivial’, and their conviviality played an important role in emerging national consciousness before a professionalisation and masculinisation took over. And much as women are well represented in the lyrical literature of the century, so too their social function unmistakably raises national consciousness in their respective countries – often rural peripheries, provinces on the margins of large empires, with few national institutions and a firmly established local, patriotically committed bourgeoisie. This ambience of conviviality, as an intermediary layer between private-sphere domesticity and public-sphere sociability, helps us to understand the comparable status of women like Lydia Koidula, Lady Charlotte Guest, “Speranza” Wilde and Lady Gregory, Minna Canth and Aino Krohn Kallas, Rosaliá de Castro and Emilia Pardo Bazán, in places as diverse as Estonia, Wales, Finland and Spanish Galicia.

I, You, We: Lyrical diction, lyrical outreach

On what, precisely, does the canonical status of such women as protagonists of their nations rest? To a large extent it is their celebrity as public figures and household names as much as the lasting popularity of their works among later readers. But what in many cases is of paramount importance is the fact that they were among the very early literati using the local vernacular for modern literary purposes. Not only what they wrote, but also the fact that they chose to write in a subaltern language such as Estonian, Finnish or Galician. (Gregory translated Molière into her local Hiberno-English dialect, Guest made the benchmark translation of the medieval Welsh *Mabinogion*.) This gave them a great allure as figures on the sociocultural scene. Their commitment to a subaltern language reinforced the emotional impact of their lyrical verse. Rosalía de

Castro's poems are searingly personal and emotional, and the homely register of Galician enhances that effect; so too for the verse of Lydia Koidula.

The intimacy and indeed the very fact that the lyrical register was felt to be personal, private, rather than political, served to make use of the homely regional language a suitable mode of expression. Conversely, however, the very fact that this choice was made helped to assert the literary potential of the denigrated dialect and to raise its status and allure; thus the private lyricism of these woman poets could have a nation-building effect on the public status of the subaltern language.

In conclusion, it should be pointed out that lyrical poetry or poetry in the folk song mode, though intimate, is not egotistical or solipsistic. Very often the poems owe their lyrical effect to the fact that they are situated between a lyrical subject and what we may call a lyrical addressee, a You addressed in the poem, creating an emotional bond between the two and often uniting them into a We. Burns' *Auld Lang Syne* is about the meeting of two old, long-estranged friends, who now reconnect:

We twa hae paidl'd in the burn,
 frae morning sun till dine;
 But seas between us braid hae roar'd
 sin' auld lang syne.

Chorus

And there's a hand, my trusty fiere!
 and gie's a hand o' thine!
 And we'll tak' a right gude-willie waught,
 for auld lang syne.
 (Burns 1788)

We two have paddled in the stream
 from daybreak to dinner-time
 But between us, wide seas have roared
 since those days of long ago.

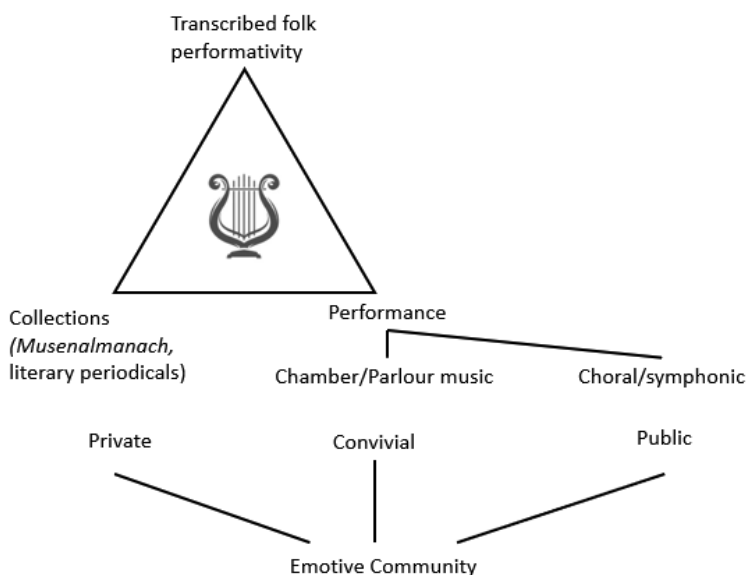
And here's my hand, my trusty friend
 and let you give me yours
 and will take a proper goodwill drink
 for the days of long ago.
 (My translation)

Similarly, in the folk song "The Braes of Balquhiddie", the invitation to come and pick wild mountain thyme, ("Will you go, lassie, go?") culminates in a famous "we'll all go together" chorus:

And we'll all go together / To pick wild mountain thyme
 All around the purple heather / Will you go? Lassie, go?⁶

⁶ Cf. Tannahill 1821. The song has a known author, Robert Tannahill, a figure analogous to Robert Burns, but it has been so drastically re-oralised as to become in effect a folk song. The chorus as quoted here has moved away from Tannahill's original version ("Let us journey together"), and the song is now usually known as "Go, lassie, go", "Wild mountain thyme" or "The blooming heather".

The chorus line is precisely that, a chorus. It is the moment when the main statement of the verse is reiterated and all those present join in to sing communally. Once again, the poem is autoreferential: it does what it describes, and the conviviality means that individual voices are merged chorally.⁷ This transformation from ‘the individuals present’ to ‘a jointly performing collective’, the merging of the individual voice into the choir, has been one of the powerful, if unobtrusive, community-asserting functions of this type of lyric. The idea that we’ll all go together can be weaponised into the opening salvo of the Marseillaise: “Allons enfants de la Patrie”. From tender rustic sentimentality to violent militaristic patriotism: Lyricism can move between all those affects.



Lyricism was, and well into late modernity continues to be, rooted in the oral performativity of spontaneous communal (face-to-face) praxis. From there it can be distributed in mediated, printed form into more widely dispersed sections of modern society, mainly in the form of collective anthologies, but in some cases also in the poems of individually celebrated authors. That medium may reach readers individually in the intimacy of the private sphere, where one might quietly and privately read Christina Rossetti, Rainer Maria Rilke or

⁷ For a good registration of its sentiment bonding effect, see the audience reactions to the fine live performance by Kate Rusby at the 2007 Cambridge Folk Festival, online at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MZkjrgS_IKY. Generally on the collectivising and mobilising effect of merging individual voices into a chorus, Lajosi 2018.

Nuala Ní Dhomhnaill to oneself. But frequently the tendency is for lyricism to be re-oralised, to be recited aloud before appreciative listeners, or to be set to music, Schubert-style, and performed as parlour music. Or indeed to be sung by large groups in a setting of public sociability rather than domestic conviviality, as in the performance of national anthems, or a Laulupidu song festival. Lyricism can thus, in its fluidity between the oral and the literate, navigate the sliding scale from the private by way of the convivial to the public. In all these cases, its particular power is to establish, between lyrical subject, lyrical addressee and lyrical collectivity, an emotive – if not face-to-face, then at least heart-to-heart – community, arising as it does and as Jacob Grimm already realised, straight from the human heart and speaking directly to our own feelings.

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