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Poetic Address and the Universalisation of Conflict in Christopher Logue's *War Music*

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"Criticism which serves poorly that level of engagement [with the reader] misses something essential" (Waters, *Dialogism*, 98).

William Waters' suggestion, that poetry enacts 'a faltering, between monologue and dialogue, between… third and second person' (*Dialogism* 99), is exemplified by Christopher Logue's *War Music*, a translation of the *Iliad*. Logue's translation does not simply retell its classical source with a predominating third person omniscient voice; rather, it punctuates that voice with various instances of direct second person address to the reader absent in Homer. This essay argues two propositions regarding such address within Logue's poem: A.) that its instances may be categorized into three interrelated situations, governing temporally distinct reader-text relationships: occasional address, epitaphic address, and blurred address; and B.) that these situations of address come into temporal confluence to universalise *War Music*'s conflict. In service of these arguments, an introductory portion of the essay shall be dedicated to clearly defining direct address and its features in light of the critical tradition which surrounds them. Then, the proposed situations of address shall be temporally defined and identified within *War Music*. Finally, the thematic and textual ambiguities which bring these situations of address into confluence shall be examined, and they shall be shown to exist in a universalising temporal pattern which invites the reader to feel their complicity in the poem across all time.

A precise definition must first be provided for direct address in order to identify it as a universalising mechanism of *War Music*. Address in its general form, neither direct nor indirect, has two primary features: an addressee and a target. The addressee is the person or object referred to by the address, identified explicitly by a second person pronoun or a proper name, or implicitly via command or allusion. The target is 'the person meant to hear or read' the address (Waters, *Encyclopedia* 7), who needs not necessarily coincide with the addressee. *E.g.*, should a teacher speak degradingly of Student 1 to Student 2 within earshot of the former, Student 2 is the addressee (identified directly by the grammar of the speech), while Student 1 is the target, who is intended to 'take a hint'. As in this example, when addressee

and target do not correspond, address is indirect. Conversely, address is direct when the addressee and the target of address are indeed one and the same: *i.e.,* when teacher chides Student 1 by directly speaking to Student 1. More specifically, in a poetic context, direct address refers to text which identifies its reader as its addressee, given the reader is necessarily also the target of the text – the person for whom the text is intended after its publication. The *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* further asserts that address involves 'not only the listeners a poem invokes or implies… but the entire communicative context which such a work projects' (Waters 6): therefore, direct address operates not only by targeting the reader and identifying them as addressee, but also by situating them in a specific relation to the address or text at large.

To identify such direct address within poetry poses a difficulty: a poem's communicative context is often underdetermined, and, therefore, unless the poem explicitly deals with its reader, or readership (as do verses which introduce collections or volumes), an addressee in the text denoted by the pronoun 'you' might plausibly refer to anyone; it may be the reader, but it may also be the poet themselves, or a tacit confidante of the poet implied by the poem's dramatic situation. Moreover, as Culler notes, 'the more the poem predicates feelings or experiences of "you," [the addressee,] the more complicated the situation of address becomes' (193-4): a blue-eyed reader already doubting whether to feel alluded to by a text with an ambiguous dramatic situation, will be even more reticent to find themselves in a 'you' which is said, for example, to have green eyes. Thus, only when the addressee is qualified identically to the reader, or when the addressee is completely unqualified – thereby allowing the reader to freely take up the position – may direct address be unreservedly identified (the former case an impossibility and the latter incredibly rare).

This natural poetic ambiguity, which prevents immediate interpretation of poetic address, is intensified by a critical reticence to read direct address at all. John Stuart Mill's

1833 postulation, that a poet succeeds in writing poetry if 'he can express his emotions exactly as he has felt them in solitude' (5), has established a tradition which emphasizes the absence of the target from the text, *i.e.*, the exclusion of the reader from the addressee position. Northrop Frye, for example, echoing Mill in 1957, argues that 'the poet, so to speak, turns his back on his listener' (*Anatomy* 249-50). By these models, the pronoun 'you' should not point outside of the solitary context of poetic utterance and include the reader. Notwithstanding, this essay follows Waters in asserting that 'criticism which serves poorly that level of personal engagement [with the reader] misses something essential' (*Dialogism* 98): for, though rare, direct address, absolute in some cases and ambiguous in others, may be found in, and is in fact central to, *War Music* and its reader-text relationships.

This fact shall now be demonstrated via specific examples of direct address in *War Music*. The poem begins with the following:

> Picture the east Aegean sea by night,
> And on a beach aslant its shimmering
> Upwards of 50,000 men
> Asleep like spoons beside their lethal fleet.
>
> Now look along that beach and see… (9).

The Trojan scene is invoked with a series of imperatives: null-subject phrases which may be grammatically 'interpreted as [being in the] 2nd person' (Zanuttini 188), possessing an implicit addressee which they call upon to register the commands they express. This implicit addressee is completely unqualified except for being the subject of the imperatives: any individual who reads them may attend to them. And, given that these imperatives govern those actions of imagination tacit in reading (picturing, looking, seeing), they incline themselves toward the reader as the very instructions by which they should engage with the text. In this way, the text establishes a framework of direct address under which its imagery is

enfolded: first, the reader pictures, then the Aegean appears: the reader is made by the address, which prompts imaginative activity, complicit in the conjuring of the text's world. Moreover, following these initial imperatives, the reader is situated within the narrative itself. The command to 'see' Achilles is inmixed, by way of a distended indirect clause, with the imperatives which impel the hero: 'Run with what seems to break the speed of light / … / Then kneel' (9). Therefore, the thought of the reader, by which the scene is evoked, is brought into proximate relationship with Achilles' action as the verbal forms instructing both are intertwined. Direct address thus invokes the presence of the reader and dictates the temporal relationship between them and the text. The reader is situated at the moment of the narrative, picturing it, and is brought within the narrative, verbally mirroring the action of its personae.

This is not the sole temporal relationship which direct address engenders between reader and text, however. After Achilles' speech to Thetis, a distinct instance ensues:

> Long after midnight when you park, and stand
> Just for a moment in the chromium wash,
> Far off – between the river and the tower belt, say –
> The roofs show black on pomegranate red
> As if they stood in fire.
>
> Lights similar to these were seen
> By those who looked from Troy (14).

Here, the addressee's involvement in contemporary activities (parking, standing) is posited by the address in order to stage the text's simile. This involvement is presented as a hypothetical one, whose details are actively mediated throughout the process of address. 'Say', an imperative, asks the addressee themselves to confirm 'the river and the tower belt' as part of the scene envisioned; further, 'when you park' is an example of a serial simple present

‘where the recurrence of subsituations is unbounded; [and] there may be an indication of frequency’ (Huddleston 123): the parking need not occur in the very moment of reading and may occur in some future the addressee imagines. The scene is therefore fluid in its detail, and subject to the reader’s permission. Owing to this hypothetical nature, direct address’ condition of un-qualification is met, and a lack of having actually experienced these activities does not preclude the reader from identifying themselves in this address; they become the mechanism of the text’s unfolding by taking up the addressee position, confirming with their imagination the imagery upon which it depends. Again, direct address is central to establishing *War Music’s* reader-text relationships, as in the former example, wherein the reader was conscripted by address to conjure the poem’s narrative. Yet, there remains a stark temporal difference between the two instances of addresses. Whereas ‘[p]icture the Aegean’ situates the reader at the moment of the poem’s narrative, within Logue’s Troy, here the reader is situated in a scene contemporary to themselves, based in their own potential or habitual actions, and temporally distant from the narrative. The lights of a cityscape are three thousand years beyond the lights of Troy, though the two are alike.

To fully account for this temporal difference in reader-text relationships, turning briefly away from the text, the labels introduced at the essay’s onset for distinct categories of address should be taken up. The terms ‘occasional’ and ‘epitaphic’ are borrowed from Northrop Frye’s 1982 essay, ‘Approaching the Lyric’. Therein, he uses them to refer to types of lyric poetry. By occasional he means a lyric which, springing from a certain occasion, ‘revolves around that occasion, instead of continuing indefinitely’ (246); *i.e.* a poem which deictically refers to the time and place of the occasion which prompted its writing. By ‘epitaphic’ he oppositely refers to a lyric which confronts the reader, ‘pursuing his normal course through time and space’, with its ‘own context in space and time… now enclosed in a framework of words’ (247). These epitaphic lyrics make explicit the distance in time between

their origination and their reading, and they seek to escape the former by reaching deictically through that temporal distance. The success of these terms in describing lyric poetry is beyond the scope of this essay; however, they seem to aptly describe situations of direct address exemplified above. The first situation of address herein presented is occasional, revolving around the moment which prompts address – the moment in which the Aegean unfolds within the poem – and situating the reader temporally therein beside Achilles; the second is epitaphic, rooting itself in the hypothetical action of the reader, rather than the action which prompts the address: it thereby underscores the temporal separation between address (in the Bronze Age) and reader (in the modern metropole). Thus, the two situations of address stand temporally opposite each other, first pulling the reader into the narrative's moment, and then pushing them back into their own.

Nor are these two examples unique in their categorization: occasional and epitaphic address are in a constant process of negotiation throughout *War Music*. Immediately following the epitaphic 'when you park' simile, for example, occasional address repositions the reader within the narrative with respect to the Grecian deaths: 'Such fleas… / Such lumps… / Watch Greece begin to die' (14). Conversely, when Patroclus rides out onto the battlefield, epitaphic address interrupts the proximate presentation of the scene. While 'Patroclus went for Troy' the reader is demanded to 'See if you can imagine how it looked', though the scene becomes not the battle expected but instead the epitaphic image of an 'open fan, held flat; its pin / (Which marks the ditch) toward yourself' (237) rooted in contemporary activity. Thus, occasional and epitaphic address present two distinct temporal relationships by which the reader becomes complicit in the *War Music*'s narratorial activity, either enforcing the moment of narrative, or juxtaposing it with their own distant future, the moment of reading.

Between these two there exists a third and final kind of address which intimates both the occasional and epitaphic impulses and the temporal reader-text relationships they generate – blurred address. Blurred address is not absolute in its lack of qualification as are occasional and epitaphic address; in fact, as defined by Johnathan Culler, blurred address involves a pronominal '"you" [or addressee] … figured in ways not so easily identified with a reader' (193-4); its addressee is overqualified, rooted in a deictic context not entirely shared by the reader. Nevertheless, this does not disqualify the reader from feeling addressed by it, especially if there do exist some, if slight, similarities between the address' presentation of the addressee and the reader's situation. Rather, the reader is made to feel both addressed and not. The following examples shall serve to elucidate this definition. The first time Athena appears in the text, to prevent Achilles from attacking Agamemnon, it is said that 'we stay calm, / For we have seen Athena's radiant hand / Collar Achilles' plait' (24); the first-person plural pronoun invokes a 'me and you' together present at the narrative moment. Since only one privy to perception of the divine apparatus (the reader) can see Athena interfere with the narrative in such a way, the verses evokes an occasional relation to the scene. This address is therefore not more than a form of the occasional direct address already examined. However, Athena's next appearance is described as such:

> Some say the daylight sharpens where he stands
> Because Athena guards him:
>
> 'So she does.'
>
> And so we see her now,
> Like an unnamed, intelligent assistant,
> Standing a touch behind him, on the left (75).

Again, the first-person plural pronoun implies the reader's presence and sight, given their privileged knowledge of the poem's divine apparatus. However, due to the over-qualification

of the ‘we’ – *i.e.* the provision to the Grecian multitude (to which ‘we’ could refer) of folklore regarding Athena’s manifestation – it may be the case that the pronoun points rather to the perceptive soldiers at Troy who sense Athena, and that it is a form of unmarked speech which does not seek to involve the reader. The use of an over-qualified ‘we’ constitutes an instance of blurred address, whose effect is the generation of a dual and opposite temporal relationship between the reader and the text. The reader becomes both potentially contemporaneous with the text’s address and temporally distant from it: they are made to feel complicit enough to compete for involvement in intimate perception of Athena; however, they are also routed away from the narrative, towards their contemporary moment of reading, given the possibility of their grammatical and contextual exclusion from the text. Thus, blurred address, while being neither entirely, due to the ambiguity produced by its over-qualification, intimates the mechanisms of both occasional and epitaphic address by which a reader is brought to either the moment of the text or their contemporary moment. And, it further intimates the possible simultaneity of these two moments.

It has thus been demonstrated that the situations of direct address heretofore examined make up an interrelated, tripartite structure within *War Music*: occasional and epitaphic address, and the reader-text relationships they generate, stand opposed to each other, with blurred address aside from each yet in equal relation to both. The first two generate temporally antithetical reader-text relationships, creating together a chronological gulf between the moment of narrative (which occasional address allows the reader to step into) and the moment of reading (which epitaphic address forces the reader to acknowledge). Blurred address, distinctly, intimates and balances both, checking the reader’s awareness of their complicity in each moment. This structure may be diagrammed (Figure 1) as an isosceles triangle with occasional and epitaphic address at the two points of its unique side,

possessive of a chronological dimension: where the moment of the narrative stands at its leftmost point and the moment of reading at its rightmost.

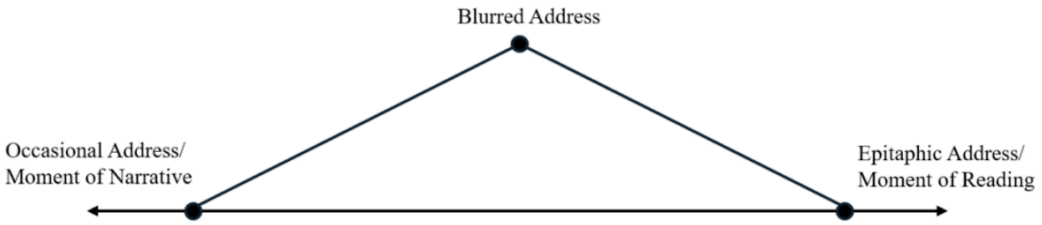

Figure 1

These situations of address, and the moments they govern, however, do not stand fixed in this relationship throughout the entirety of the poem, but instead come into confluence. More specifically, as shall now be shown, they come into confluence through *War Music*'s depictions of conflict in order to temporally universalise it.

When occasional address invites the reader to share in the moment of narrative, it is primarily to stage conflict. As the Greeks are marshalled for their assault on the Skaian gate, the reader is directed to 'hear the high-pitched roar of armour advancing' (83); and as they arm themselves, the reader is told to 'Raise your binoculars' (137) and 'Swing to the Greeks, / see them helping each other on with bronze' (137). Thereby the reader is made complicit in the development of the text's conflict: they provide the visual apparatus with which its 'roar' is proliferated and its bronze shines. This mechanism of complicity, and the concern from which it stems, contrariwise, is not at first shared by the text's epitaphic address. The 'when you stand' simile, detailed above, for example, is without military aspect, and presents instead a scene of halted tranquility. Nevertheless, even such a placid instance adumbrates the development which later occurrences of epitaphic address undergo; for, it forces the reader to liken the Trojan dawn to their experience of a contemporary dusk and thus casts an apocalyptic shadow over the former – its beginning is made to seem its end. As the reader

increasingly interacts with the text's epitaphic address, this shadow grows, and their contemporary moment is made to seem increasingly violent. Calls for the reader to imagine subtly decadent contemporary referents of evening and geese who seasonally 'fly south / To give the stateless rains a miss' (91) quickly become forceful allusions to contemporary history of warfare and recurrent natural destruction: 'now watch – / As aircrews watch tsunamis send / Ripples across the Iwo Jima Deep' (99); or, 'Imagine wolves: an hour ago the pack / Hustled a stag, then tore it to shreds' (230). Epitaphic address becomes suffused with the same conflict-anxiety that occupies the occasional; the reader, situated by it in their own moment, is forced by it to append their twentieth or twenty-first century context of violence to the narrative and discover the two to be alike.

As these types of address increasingly thematically overlap, the moments which they govern become ambiguously interchangeable. Before Achilles returns to the battlefield, readerly participation is incited: 'Now I shall ask you to imagine / Men under discipline of death prepare for war' (290). This address realizes a simultaneously occasional and epitaphic function: the 'men under discipline' which the reader must imagine may be the men at Troy or men in the midst of the contemporary conflicts elicited by the allusion to Iwo Jima above: the reader is situated both within the Trojan scene and in their own historical context under impending death. Similarly, when the text addresses the reader, saying, 'Now I must ask you to forget reality, / And be a momentary bird above those men' (282), which reality, or moment, is to be forgotten, the narrative or the contemporary; and which men are to be observed, those at Troy or those on 'July 4th to July 14th [with] 43,000 tanks engaged' (168)? Both moments have been steeped in a context of conflict, and therefore the situations of address which would separate them unify them. By the ambiguous interplay of occasional and epitaphic address the conflicts presented thereby seem to occupy both of their moments, of narrative and of reading: conflict is thus universalised.

This universalisation is intensified as the grammar and dual properties of blurred address further conflate the occasional and epitaphic. A passage will be quoted at length in service of exemplification.

> Think of a moment when far from the land
> Molested by a mile-a-minute wind
> The ocean starts to roll, then rear, then roar,
> Their sides so steep their smoky crests so high
> 300,000 plunging tons of aircraft carrier
> Dare not sport its beam.
> But Troy, afraid, yet more afraid
> …
> Has no alternative
>
> …
>
> Drop into it.
> Noise so clamorous it sucks.
> You rush your pressed-flower hackles out
> To the perimeter.
> And here it comes:
> The unpremeditated joy as you
> – The Uzi shuddering warm against your hip
> Happy in danger in a dangerous place
> Yourself another self you found at Troy –
> Squeeze nickel through that rush of Greekoid scum! (165-7)

Here, the Greek rally against Hector's troops is presented as a succession of direct address in alternating but intercalated modes: occasional and epitaphic address swing back and forth, dislodging the reader based on the similarity of the moments to which they correspond. First the reader is asked by them to think up a roaring ocean: and the question is posed, is this violent natural scene proper to their own time of naval warfare or is it rather the Aegean

before Troy? To turn the mind away from or towards the moment of narrative seem one and the same. This tension between modes is briefly resolved as the reader is moved to think of explicitly contemporary military imagery (the 'aircraft carrier'), though this only enforces the universal tenor of the conflict at hand in both occasional and epitaphic moments: Troy's armaments exist outside of its time. The sharp, occasional 'drop into it' then dissolves any epitaphic distance from Troy and situates the reader directly within the battle between Greek and Trojan, as the two modes again trade places in their similarity. And, subsequently, blurred address is introduced to bring them into absolute union: the 'you' who rushes out their hackles, is ascribed positions which simultaneously depend on the sensory complicity in conflict of the occasional and on the contemporary military imagination of the epitaphic. For, the over-qualification of the Uzi-wielder's 'you', as a separate individual present in a 20th century conflict (given the type of weapon), must struggle against the grammatical attachment that it shares with the unqualified, implicit 'you' of the imperative 'drop' which targets the reader. As the reader was just commanded to insert themselves, they will find difficulty in relinquishing their narrative centrality. Moreover, the 'you' is said to be, just as the reader, both in Troy's time and the time of Uzis: the objects of destruction epitaphically conjured by the reader, starting with the aircraft carrier, now including the Uzi and nickel bullets, are embedded within this scene, as are the reader's senses. The images of the moment of reading contribute to the elaboration of the moment of narrative, as blurred address allows the reader to accept that they may bring the conflict contemporaneous with them into Troy, for these two times are equal in this aspect: their conflict is shared, belonging to all time.

Taplin has observed the same phenomenon within this passage, which he calls 'time tension' (182): however, he ascribes it only to the 'similarity and dissimilarity' of the contemporary imagery to its classical counterparts, not to the address which conjures the imagery. Similarly, Meihuizen identifies a 'temporal transcendence' (226) in the poem

generated by anachronistic imagery; and Emily Wilson notes the universalising power of Logue's anachronism, which she argues, 'sucks us in… [contributing to] a setting bigger than that of Homer – big enough to accommodate our modern selves' (384). To the notions of these critics this essay would contribute the insight that anachronism in the instances discussed only achieves its effect by way of being staged by occasional, epitaphic, and blurred address. The reader experiences a 'setting bigger than that of Homer' because they have been directly placed in relation to the poem, and they have been asked to 'drop into it' and find that '[e]ver since men began in time' (Logue 281) the same scenes recur outside of it. The text has invited the reader to actively participate in the actions ('when you park, and stand') of those millennia prior, by having the reader themselves mediate and append contemporary images to the narrative and provide the narrative with their senses.

By way of this generation of active, temporally distinct reader-text relationships, *War Music* allows the reader to consider and evaluate the proximity of the narrative's moment (that of Bronze Age Troy) and their own (that of the 20th/21st century). The text, as shown, depends upon the distinct mechanisms of its three situations of address – occasional, epitaphic, and blurred – in individual instances, and brings them into confluence thematically and textually to realize its universalisation. That is to say, as the situations accrue each other's conflict-anxiety and involve the reader in similarly militant scenarios, the moments which they govern seem to converge. And, as they are concatenated on the page, grammatical ambiguities which admix the situations bring the mechanisms and moments of all three together. Thus, the conflict present therein is universalised.

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