

Writing Against the Lyric: Self-Sabotage and Poetic Survival in

J. H. Prynne and Denise Riley

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Abstract

This is concerning poetry techniques utilized by J.H. Prynne and Denise Riley, who both criticize the norms of lyric coherence, expressivity, and fixed subjecthood in their artists. Through self-defiance, these poets are trying to survive by deliberately breaking the rules of the traditional poems that represent the incomplete and insecure world of modernity. In their interaction with the lyric, both Prynne and Riley destroy the fantasy of single selfhood, welcoming contradiction and multiplicity. The opaque, thick language of Prynne, with its intellectual and philosophical allusions, is artificially challenging and does not welcome easy communication, actively encouraging the reader to participate in the process of understanding. In contrast, Riley pays attention to the dislocation of time, unstable use of the pronouns, and suppressed affectivity, as she aims at revealing the intricacies of grief, loss, and even disintegration of personal identity. Although both poets are stylistically different, they prove that the notion of self-sabotage is not an unsuccessful attempt but an artistic reaction on the restrictions of the lyric tradition, developing new styles of poetry that are not vulnerable to commodification and provide alternative manifestations of subjectivity. This article brings out, through an evaluation of their work, the way that self-sabotage becomes a measure of resistance

and survival to enable Prynne and Riley to push the boundaries of language and redefine poetic success in a postmodern, fragmented environment.

Keywords: Self- sabotage, Lyric poetry, Poetic survival, J.H. Prynne, Denise Riley, Fragmentation, Postmodern poetics.

Introduction

The lyric tradition of poetry, with its insistence on individuality, sincerity and the unity of voice has long been regarded as a direct medium of expression of the deepest emotions of the poet. This school of thought originated with the Greek lyric poets and has persisted into the Renaissance and Romantic periods and has placed greater focus on the poet as a subject who is able to speak out of a position of inner truth (Johnson, 1983; Highet, 2015). This idea of the lyric is based on the premise of a coherent, unified self; voice and meaning are consonant with the existence of a real subject. The conventions of the lyric, its rhyme scheme, its directness in emotion and the notion of an ongoing, stable self, have defined much of Western poetry, giving rise to the assumption that language in poetry can reflect experience and feeling directly (Lentricchia 1990; Blasing, 2009). Nevertheless, the ideality of lyric voice has been under intensive criticism during the last half of the twentieth century as postmodern, feminist, and experimental poetics questioned the existence of such a thing as lyric expressivity.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, the lyric tradition was growing more and more subject to criticism as being too limited to capture the issues of identity and subjectivity. In this expanded context, poets like J.H. Prynne and Denise Riley have set about the business of dismantling the assumptions of the lyric, to bring about forms of self-representation that manifest fragmentation, contradiction and uncertainty (Rowley, 2016; Solomon, 2019). Although these poets preserve the lyric form, they indulge in a self-critical game of language and identity that undermines the conception of an unproblematic and unitary voice. Their writing expresses an apprehension of the sheer existence of articulating the self in intelligent

words, compelling readers to consider the disintegration of individual wholeness and the inability to be genuine in expressing the self through a poem. It is not only an attack on the traditions of lyric expressiveness but also an experiment with the possibility of surviving and flourishing poetry in a world where tradition and unity are being challenged more and more (McCabe, 2018; (Aviram, 2001; Adorno, 2020; Tiffany, 2020).

Against these pressures on the old lyric expressivity, the idea of self-sabotage becomes a valuable poetic device. Self-sabotage in the poetry of both Prynne and Riley may be regarded as something more than failing, as an active, intentional demolition of the alleged integrity of the poetic self. Self-sabotage comes out as an intricate strategy in their work: a means of revealing the restrictions of the lyric form and, in so doing, bargaining for a more radical form of survival. This technique, which is realized in the breaks in syntax, meaning and voice, does not only oppose the expectations of the lyric but also opens new opportunities of poetic structure. In this regard, one can view self-sabotaging as a certain type of resistance to the very mechanisms of expressiveness that would otherwise inhibit the poet by limiting their power to speak (Riley 2017).

The combination of Prynne and Riley would be interesting to explore the idea of self-sabotage as a survival tactic of modern lyric poetry. The interaction of the poet, voice and meaning with the historical assumptions of the lyric is disturbing and restructuring in both the poems. There was a dense, elliptical language in much of his work, which frequently predicts the disjunctures and ruptures of experience that are not yet sufficiently articulated (Davenport et al. 2019; Carter, 2022). However, Riley employs a closer, thoughtful style to challenge the presumptions of voice, presence, and identity, especially in her approach to the subject of grief and personal experience (Riley 2018). Although they differ in their stylistic techniques, the two poets use their writings to put the assertion of the lyric to the stable, expressive self into question and to practice a kind of poetic survival that is based upon contradiction and difficulty.

This review aims to analyze how both J.H. Prynne and Denise Riley use self-sabotage as a method of poetry and claim that their poetry shows not only failure, but a creative reaction to the constraints of the lyric tradition. The review examines how self-sabotage works to critique poetic expressiveness as well as to act as a survival strategy in the face of linguistic and existential ambiguities through an analysis of their poems. The research questions that guide the investigation are the following: What is the way in which Prynne and Riley employ self-sabotage to critique the historical assumptions of the lyric tradition?

Theoretical Framework: Writing Against the Lyric

In recent scholarship, the adjectives' anti-lyric and post-lyric have been applied in reference to poetic tactics aimed at specifically disrupting or abandoning of the conventional demands of the lyric form. The anti-lyric is poetry that denies or criticizes romantic self-expression and emotional unity that is traditionally linked to the lyric. It opposes the clichés of honesty, clarity, and integrity that make the voice of the lyric speaker. The post-lyric, in its turn, indicates a poetic form that transcends the boundaries of the lyric not only as a form of criticism but also as a new way of poetic expression that accepts fragmentation, disjunction, and self-reflexivity (McCabe, 2018). The difference is significant in the way that the writers, such as J. H. Prynne and Denise Riley, apply language to work against the grain of existential lyricism and in which they offer a form of poetic resistance which undermines the assumptions of coherence and transparency.

In the works by both Prynne and Riley, self-sabotage is a critical-poetic technique that is engaged in playing with the destabilization of the self and voice. Instead of establishing a single or fixed identity, their poems perform a carefully created disconnection between language and subjectivity. In this regard, self-sabotage becomes a poetic approach towards revealing the constraints of the lyric form as such. To these poets, language is a weapon of resistance, not to say, but to destroy. They interfere with syntax, meaning, and tone to attract

attention to the inadequacy of language to speak the self. This self-destruction is not simply a failure but a deliberate way of criticizing the existence of the clear, true poetic voice (Davenport et al., 2019; Gerblinger, 2022; Jakubik, 2024; Sandua, 2025). Self-sabotage, in this context, is an attempt to criticize the historical presumptions of the lyric and also a tool to survive in the imperative of language.

Theoretical inspirations of this framework are the works of Theodor Adorno about the lyric and society, and the ideas of the death of the author and deferral (*différance*) and self-subversion in the discourse as developed by Jacques Derrida. The critique of the lyric created by Adorno focuses on its conformity to the ideals of individualism and cohesion in society. According to him, the lyric tends to bolster capitalist beliefs in the self-sufficient and autonomous subject and in the commodification of emotion (Adorno, 1997; DeNoro, 2003; Kaufman, 2005; Gorin, 2021). The work by Prynne and Riley can be regarded as the critique of the conformity of lyricism to societal norms of coherence and authenticity that interferes with the traditional ability of the lyric to self-representation.

The idea of the death of the author introduced by Barthes also makes the poems by Prynne and Riley which could be discussed as anti-lyric. According to Barthes, the conventional conception of the author as the bearer of meaning needs to be pushed aside, and the text itself should begin to speak, regardless of the intentions of the author (Barthes, 1977; Siegle, 1983; Park, 1990; Almujaali, 2023). The poets compromise the integrity of voice and person only to adopt a post-authorial mode which does not adhere to definite meanings and further complicates the equation between the poem and the speaker.

The approach is also informed by Derrida's theory of difference, which examines the intrinsic instability of meaning in language. The idea by Derrida that meaning is never present, but it is always deferred, is similar to the works of Prynne and Riley, who commonly use self-sabotage in their writing to highlight the constraints and inconsistencies of the writing process.

They show through this self-undermining discourse that language can never perfectly capture the self, but on the contrary, their poetry becomes the exploration of the gaps, contradictions and deferrals of meaning (Derrida, 1978).

The idea of poetic survival is central to comprehending the opposition that these poets have. Poetry that accepts the ambiguity and discontinuity of self might be regarded as a form of rebellion in a cultural world where commodification and the need to be transparent are becoming more and more dominant. Poetic survival, in this case, means to resist the demands of commercialism and the ideological pressures that call out the need to be clear, coherent and closed. The work by Prynne and Riley criticizes the idea that poetry should be an open medium of self-expression or ideological validation. Rather, they outlived their time in the power of their resistance to commodification, showing the complexity of the language and identity, which cannot be simplified down to simple truth or self-representation (Rosenbaum, 2007; Koirala, 2010; Mancini, 2012; Milne, 2018; McCabe, 2018).

J. H. Prynne: Sabotage through Density and Refusal

J. H. Prynne holds a distinctive and prominent place in postwar British poetry. Prynne is known to be devoted to experimental poetics, and his work defies the limits of language, meaning, and reader anticipation. His poetry cannot be easily categorized and his dense, opaque style makes him a poet of intentional difficulty. Prynne has been at the forefront of challenging the conventions of the lyric form, especially with his extreme move beyond clarity and simplicity, which emerged in the 1960s along with other British avant-garde poets, including those of the Cambridge School (Perril, 2015; O'Hanlon, 2018; Loxley, 2018; Ross, 2022; Mellors, 2024). Instead of following traditional prototypes of lyric expressivity, the work written by Prynne is persistent in undermining the ideal of easy self-expression and interacts with the lyric tradition in such a manner that makes it problematic in terms of voice, subjectivity, and coherence.

The main poetic technique of Prynne is linguistic obscurity and semantic redundancy. His poems have the tendency to be very long and with complicated sentences with multi-layered and non-understandable vocabulary, which serves to give a feeling of resistance to the reader to understand. This opacity is no accident but a specific device serving as a kind of sabotage to the classical promise of the lyric clarity and direct expression of emotions (Blasing, 2009; Walker, 2014; McCabe, 2018; Gronsstad, 2020). This excessive saturation of Prynne language succeeds in keeping the reader in the realm of perpetual uncertainty and does not allow him or her to access an easy and simple meaning. His piece actively participates in the rejection of the open dialogue and makes the reader more active and interrogative. This move is an imperative reaction to the history of the lyric as a historical act of self-disclosure, in which the poet is preferably viewed as providing an exclusive, authoritative truth. Conversely, the poetry of Prynne makes the truth elusive and makes language as volatile as it is, forcing the reader to approach the poem on its own conditions that are not readily consumable.

It is not a merely a difficult procedure that Prynne denies the readerly accessibility: it is a declaration against the commodification of poetic experience. Prynne challenges the reader to the boundaries of his or her own interpretive expectations by rendering his poetry difficult to understand. He repeatedly feels frustrated in his work by the desire to have an immediate understanding or emotional attachment, and even the text itself becomes an obstacle that can be overcome. This rejection of his work as something easily ingestible makes Prynne a poet who is consciously aware of the literary market and its demands on poetry to serve as entertainment or easy emotional release. His created work can be regarded, thus, as an opposition against commodification of the lyric form where poetry has to be sold, consumed, and thrown away (Li, 1993; Koirala, 2010; Davenport et al., 2019; Adorno, 2020). The work by Prynne refutes this reductionist perception of poetry because it makes the process of reading a challenge in itself, thus demanding that poetry should be an event as opposed to a commodity.

One of the main aspects of the Prynne's poetics is his confrontation with scientific, political and philosophical intertexts, the authority of the individual subject of the lyric is destabilized. Based on a great variety of sources, Marxist theory, scientific studies, and philosophy, the work by Prynne blends the intricate concepts that break the conventional line between the personal and the intellectual. These intertexts act as destabilizing elements in the poem and do not allow any easy or personal interpretation of the text. The poems of Prynne position the individual into a bigger and more impersonal framework of thought and organization rather than foreshadowing the subjectivity of the speaker. Philosophical foundations of his work imply that subjectivity is not absolute and constant but dependent on the external forces, such as political systems and scientific conceptions about the world (Adorno, 1997; Howarth, 2006; Jahn, 2007; Solomon, 2014; Code, 2015). This intellectuality makes it even more complicated that the lyric tradition of singular expression places the poems of Prynne as a continuous negotiation between the personal and the collective, as between individual and ideological.

The concept of self-sabotage in the poetry of Prynne can be explained as a kind of moral protest against the lyric consumption. In making the connection between the poem and the poem reader actively complicated, Prynne is debilitating the traditional purpose of the lyric to provide both self-representation and emotional truth. This self-sabotage can be seen as an ethical act by the fact that it puts the reader into the expectation of what poetry should perform and makes him/her work through the text in a manner that is not going to fulfil the traditional wishes of ends, integrity, or instant comprehension. The poems of Prynne are not easy to figure out, and instead he has provided a place of critical opposition where the reader has to deal with the intricacies of language and thinking. This aversion to, and resistance to, the pressures of lyric consumption highlight the sense of Prynne to a poetics of difficulty that is unmistakably

opposed to commodification and intellectual engagement (Prynne, 2016; Celan, 2018; Mellors, 2024).

Lastly, the poem is preserved through hardship; Prynne makes the poem a continuous event of critique and not a finished product. In this regard, his poetry can be regarded as a kind of survival, not only of the poet but of the very concept of poetry itself. Instead of falling into the norms of readability, the poetry of Prynne demands its own insidiousness, which requires the reader to grapple with the requirements of language, thinking, and meaning. The challenge of his work has not been the failure but the survival in a literary culture that tends to place value on accessibility and immediate satisfaction as opposed to intellectual rigor and critical activity. The elusive and challenging nature of Prynne is an act in itself and continues to challenge the finality of consumption in critical thinking by making his poetry an event (Smith, 1983; Harlan, 1989; Loxley, 2018; Jeyaraj, 2024). This way, Prynne's poetic survival is an ethical gesture that will not be appropriated by the agglomeration of commercialism and mass production.

Denise Riley: Sabotage by Subjectivity and Voice

The work by Denise Riley is a very deep challenge to the lyric 'I', and it deals with the destabilization of selfhood and identity in a manner that disrupts the classic anticipation of the expression of personality through poetry. Where the lyric form has traditionally been linked with a stable and unified self that speaks directly and in a truthful way, the poetry written by Riley breaks and disseminates the unity of the self, showing the fluid and unstable nature of both the language and subjectivity. The voice of the poet in her work is no longer a clear channel of self-expression but an active point of challenge and disruption (Riley, 2017). Riley contends the subjectivity of lyrics in the poem by replacing the confident voice with a disjointed, inquisitive voice and thereby making the poem an open field of reflection on the instability of identity in a world of loss and absence (Sullivan and Morgan, 2019).

Feminist and philosophical enquiries of selfhood depict that Riley is concerned with the interrogation of the assumptions underlying the traditional concept of identity and personal identity. By relying on feminist conceptualization and post-structuralist philosophy, Riley criticizes the type of coherent, autonomous subject that is usually favored in the lyric tradition. Her work poses the question: How will the self, commonly formed as a solid subject in the lyric, be made to be compatible with the fractured and multiple forms in which we know and feel ourselves in a complex and contradictory world? This philosophical work on the self is accompanied by feminist analyses of how women have historically been sidelined or swallowed by the prevailing poetic cultures (McCabe, 2018; Beltran, 2019). In the case of Riley, the process of destabilizing the lyric 'I' is a key way of questioning and at the same time asserting the complexities of the feminine subjectivity. Her poetry does not strive to simplify the self but recognizes the contradictions and tensions, which transform identity not into a fixed quality but into a dynamic and conflictual process.

One of the most important aspects of the approach used by Riley is the presence of the temporal dislocation, unstable pronouns, and restraint of feelings that collectively sabotage the conventional flow of lyric expression. In other poems like *Time Lived, Without Its Flow*, Riley breaks the chronological order of time and establishes a time fragmentation that reflects the experience of grief, both at an emotional and psychological level (Riley, 2017). The unsteadiness of the pronouns, especially the oscillation between the pronouns 'I', 'you' and 'we', also makes the feeling of a singular, stable subject shaky. This shift in pronouns enables the poem to move among the various attitudes, concentrating on speaker, listener and subject, erasing the borders of the speaker, listener and subject. By so doing, Riley avoids the tendencies of lyric poetry to emotional directness, instead deciding to use a more restrained affective mode which implies the difficulty of articulation of personal experience through language. This restraint does not imply the absence of emotion but an understanding of the inability of

language to access the fullness of the emotional experience, especially when it comes to loss and grief (Sullivan and Morgan, 2019).

Much of the work of Riley is filled with mourning and loss, as she discusses the failure of expressiveness in the presence of personal tragedy. In such compositions as *Time Lived, Without Its Flow*, Riley does not treat the subject of grief through the catharsis of the lyric voice but rather through an intricate, in many cases painful exploration of the words and language used to express grief as full of gaps and empty spaces. In this case, the act of self-sabotage is manifested by the refusal to utilize the standard poetic voice or the reassuring lines of plot development that usually go hand in hand with grieving. The breakdown of expressive adequacy the inability of language to capture the experience of grief in all its fullness becomes, in the work of Riley, a major subject of his work and a source of poetic strength. Instead of providing closures, her poems emphasize the manner in which language fails in its endeavor to render the emotional reality of loss (Riley, 2017). This self-sabotage process allows Riley to demonstrate the weakness of the lyric, and how hard it proves to speak straight in a world where language itself can easily appear ineffective for the problem of emotional expression.

In this respect, it is possible to interpret self-sabotage in the poetry of Riley as the revelation of the vulnerability of the lyric. By the refusal of the traditional requirements of coherence, clarity, and closure, Riley entices the reader to perceive the poem as an open, incomplete affair, as a phenomenon that does not want to be wrapped up within the traditional requirements of the poetic form or emotional closure. It is not a kind of failure but a radical act of resistance to the prevailing forms of poetic productions. Sabotaging the self-coherence that the lyric is meant to possess, Riley is then able to engage more candidly, straightforwardly with the dynamics of human experience, especially the experience of loss and grief. By doing this, self-sabotage turns into an ethical act, an act that highlights the disadvantages of poetic forms and at the same time challenges them (Richie, 2013).

Finally, poetic survival in Riley is created through the ontological uncertainty and linguistic integrity. It is her failure to represent the self through the established forms of expression that makes her work last. In this straightforward address to the restrictions of expression, Riley opens up room to new modes of writing, where the self does not become an object to be narrated but a process to be studied. Through this, her poems stand against the forces of lyric consumption, providing instead a poetic survival, which addresses the issues of language, identity and loss (Sullivan and Morgan, 2019).

Comparative Analysis: Two Modes of Anti-Lyric Survival

The poetry of J. H. Prynne and Denise Riley are two different but closely interconnected forms of anti-lyric survival that both oppose the conventional assumptions of the lyric tradition, and both also contest the sense of a single, openly definite poetic voice. Although their styles and topics differ, the two poets also indulge in self-sabotage to reveal the weakness of the lyric and to break the traditional boundaries of the lyric. The initial important difference is the stylistic approach, which is that of Prynne: his heavy, complicated language, compared to that of Riley: his bare, minimalistic style. In contrast to the poems by Prynne, which tend to bombard the reader with linguistic incomprehension and semantic overload, the poems of Riley adopt a minimalist, repressed mode, employing silence and disruption to generate yet another form of difficulty. Such opposing tactics represent the reaction of the poets to different requirements of the lyric to unity and self-realization, but both are based on the intention to break the mastery with which the lyric traditionally claimed language and emotion (McCabe, 2018).

The poetry by Prynne, with his dense and even inaccessible syntax, enrolls the outside opposition in the shape of intellectual, political, and philosophical intervention. His writing is based on a broad array of intertexts: Marxism, linguistics, and scientific theory, which is frequently rendered in a manner that is deliberately challenging and hard to understand. This

intricacy makes the poetry by Prynne state its opposition to the commercialization of the literary market and the lyric tradition of self-expression (Loxley, 2018). In the case of Prynne, the poem is a place of exterior struggle, and the suppositions of the lyric to the unity of voice, the subjectivity, and the clarity of the emotions are directly interfered with. This high level of intellectuality results in the poem that is not to be read passively but rather demands a direct, active reading process that does not lend itself to simple interpretation (Davenport et al., 2019).

Conversely, the work by Riley is more internal in its unraveling of the lyric. The poems look inward at how the lyric self was destroyed, with great attention paid to the vulnerability of identity and the poignancy of bereavement and loss. Riley destabilizes the pronouns and the time markers in her work and produces a more introspective poetry that focuses on the instability and uncertainty that characterize the relationship of the individual to the language. Her poetry is associated with a certain affective restraint that does not utter the emotional load of loss, at least, not in the traditional sense of the word. Instead of making the lyric letter seem to be a cohesive subject, the work by Riley reveals it as a fragment, incomplete and unable to convey the fullness of the personal experience (Riley, 2017). With this internal derailing, Riley is critiquing the self-expressiveness of the lyric and the sincerity of voice, and here she sketches a portrait of subjectivity that is discontinuous, as time-bound, memory-bound, and loss-bound.

The ethics of refusal in Prynne are different in contrast to ethics of exposure in the poetry by Riley. Prynne does not reject merely the modes of emotional transparency and self-revelation that were standard of the lyric but has made a conscious effort to give up these modes. His work is a philosophical opposition to the traditional lyric, which denies the ready accessibility of meaning and which denies the reader the satisfaction or resolution. Through this, Prynne criticizes the notion that poetry is supposed to be a convenient means of subjective expression or emotional reality. Conversely, the ethics of exposure by Riley is a more exposed version of resistance, which does not make the boundaries of language anonymity. Riley shows

the vulnerability of the lyric self by exploring the subject of mourning and the experience of grief, leaving a gap that allows a more candid approach to the inexpressible. This exposure, though profoundly disturbing, is a kind of protest against the commodification of the emotional experience, the painful disjunctions between language and emotion that are so often the endeavor of the lyric tradition (Sullivan and Morgan, 2019).

Although these differences exist in style and ethos, the two poets have in common their desire to reverse the classical mastery of the lyric of language. The closeness and opaqueness of the words of Prynne and the control and fragmentation of the voice of Riley are both attempts to escape the traditional demands of the lyric on self-articulation and emotional soundness. The lyric in their work does not convey truth or individual revelation, but rather a place of questioning, disturbance, and critical opposition. Both poets are conscious that the lyric, left to itself, may turn into an instrument of self-control--a means by which the inward world of the poet can be made intelligible and manageable. Prynne and Riley have broken the power of the lyric on language and selfhood, thus creating a space in which poetry and the subject can relate more critically and dynamically (McCabe, 2018).

Lastly, the importance of difficulty, silence, and interruption to the survival of the poetry of Prynne and Riley can hardly be overestimated. Both of the poets are self-sabotaging and complicate their work and make it hard to understand it easily, but their challenges are not identical. Prynne is a complex intellectual who is engaging in manipulation of language and intertextual allusion, whilst Riley is more difficult in her emotional and psychological context, that her depiction of grief and loss is marked by silence and absence. In both instances, though, struggle is a survival tactic, which allows the poetry to survive amid poetic and commercial demands of accessibility and outward emotion. By their silences and disruption, Prynne and Riley produce poetry that cannot be commodified, will not be confined in the traditional demands and continues to exist due to its complexity and difficulty (Davenport et al., 2019).

Critical Reception and Debates

J. H. Prynne has frequently featured in the debate about the confrontation of difficulty and accessibility in the poetry of the modern era. The dense, intellectually challenging writing style of Prynne has earned him the reputation of an elitist, and the critics believe that his poetry actively turns readers away instead of drawing them in (McCabe, 2018). The Prynne's style has been characterized by critics as a style that is not easily accessible, with many of his new and obscure vocabulary, the dense syntax and intertextual allusions being taken as obstacles to understanding as opposed to a poetic tactic. This view of Prynne as a member of an elite is based on his rejection of simplifying the language or the meaning to the comfort of the reader, a principle that concerns his overall criticism of the lyricism by as a medium of self-expression. Nevertheless, these arguments have led to a discussion about the merits of challenging poetry, as some of the advocates of Prynne believe that his poetry requires the involvement of the mind and takes the limits of what poetry can achieve (Loxley, 2018). In the case of Prynne, difficulty is not exclusive but instead an invitation to enquire about the place of poetry in a world that is becoming more commercialized, simplified to the point of meaning-making.

On the contrary, the works of Denise Riley have received varied sets of criticism, especially in terms of the emotional coldness and lack of accessibility to her poem. The critics tend to refer to the restrained and sparse style of Riley in topics of grief and loss as an asset or drawback. Riley has been read as an emotionally detached writer with a focus on the affective restraint that pervades her poetry. These critics claim that the emphasis that Riley gives on the emotional and psychological depth of grieving, as well as the fact that she did not use many words, could lead to her work being perceived as emotionally closed off (Sullivan & Morgan, 2019). However, some say that it is precisely the fact that Riley is an emotionally stunted person that enables her poetry to find a deeper connection with her audience that offers a naked and uninhibited account of what loss entails. The emotional catharsis and closure elicited by Riley

are absent, and the readers are challenged to experience grief differently as it is not required to respond to the narrative expectations of closure (Riley, 2017). When discussing these debates, it is commonplace to interpret Riley's work in terms of the challenge in it, yet the restrained emotions behind her poetry are actually a part of the ethical position of her work as she provides a place to contemplate and not necessarily a comfort.

Another common misunderstanding of the work of both Prynne and Riley is that they have indulged in self-sabotage, either in language and wordplay or in feeling, which is therefore tantamount to obscurity and/or negation. Often critics have misunderstood these poetic techniques, when Prynne writes in a dense language and when Riley writes in broken emotive speech, as communication breakdowns, when what they represent is actually the critical aim of these poetic techniques. Self-sabotage in this perspective implies the unwillingness to communicate efficiently, which makes the works of the poets inaccessible or nonsense (Davenport et al., 2019). Nevertheless, these interpretations overlook the planned, critical role of self-sabotaging in the writings of both of the authors. The self-sabotaging done by Prynne and Riley is not aimed at making meaning ambiguous at revealing the failure of conventional poetic forms, especially the lyric, to embody the coherent, unified self, as has historically been the case. Instead of being a subversion of communication, their works emphasize the inability to fully, unconditionally represent oneself, and thus their poems are not a failure but a reconstruction of what poetry can be (McCabe, 2018).

These misunderstandings have prompted a further reassessment of value, legibility and survival in modern poetry criticism. Both Prynne and Riley make the reader and critics think over what value is in poetry. Instead of identifying the value of poetry in terms of its accessibility or emotional openness, the modern critic is paying an increasing emphasis on how poetry is able to address complex, difficult, and intellectual problems. This critical thinking change goes beyond the conventional poetic legibility and adopts the idea that poetry is

valuable in its power to resist easy consumption, as well as prompt more complex and uncertain interactions with words and meaning (Loxley, 2018; Rivers, 2024; Hani, 2024; Arcilla Jr, 2024). The heavy intellectualism of Prynne and the emotional stinginess of Riley provide survival in hardship, and demonstrate that poetry can survive, not by being straightforward or unambiguous, but by making the reader work harder and more critically on the text. In this sense, their publications are engaged in a wider discussion regarding the changing nature of the role of poetry in modern society, where the ability to disturb, challenge, and trouble the conventional demands of the lyric are the criteria of permanence and continuity.

Implications for Contemporary Lyric Theory

J. H. Prynne and Denise Riley also assault established ideas about the lyric success, particularly the idea of success in terms of expression and identification. Traditionally, lyric poetry is taken to be a genre which expresses the inner world of the poet, the subjective feelings and experiences of the poet providing a clear insight into the interiority of the speaker. This assumption has established the meaning of lyric success: a poem becomes successful when it is evident in conveying the emotional state/identity of the poet. Yet, the poetry of Prynne and Riley represents the ideas of such a standard of success, which emphasizes emotional clarity and self-identification, as not the sole and occasionally the most valuable mode of perceiving the lyric. Self-sabotage and difficulty are not part of the failures but important elements of a new form of lyric success, one that cannot be simplified and that accepts the complexities of identity, language and emotional experience. Prynne and Riley redefine the concept of success as the capacity to stimulate critical thinking, intellectualization, and emotional innuendos instead of providing a direct articulation of the personal emotions of the poet (McCabe, 2018; Sengupta, 2022; Paneru, 2024).

The anti-lyric techniques used by Prynne and Riley are also symptomatic of the wider tendencies of the 21st-century poetry, with a number of poets in this century questioning the

lyric as a straightforward depiction of self. Their poetry and other anti-lyric strategies oppose the idea that poetry should be a clear vehicle of personal revelation. As an alternative, these poets celebrate the notion of complexity, disjunction and opposition as the main aspects of their poetic life. Both of the authors (Prynne and Riley) demonstrate their rejection of the historical requirements of unity and coherence of the lyric by the dense, elliptical language of Prynne, and the fragmented emotional expression of Riley. This dismissal of the lyric as a means of unambiguous expression is also an important development in the modern poetics, in which challenging and obscuring the meaning of words and experience are rather welcomed as invitations to explore the contradictions and anomalies of language and experience (Loxley, 2018). The anti-lyric measures which are the methods of Prynne and Riley, therefore, are the symbol of a larger trend of modern poetry that values provocation to thought above the consolation of emotional catharsis.

The legacies of Prynne and Riley have influenced the experimental and feminist poetics, although they go much further than what they did themselves. Their methods of self-sabotage, especially, have become central to the emergence of modern experimental poetry; the disintegration of the lyric 'I' and the nonconformity to the established norms of sense and expression of emotions have become the central theme. In the case of the experimental poets, the work of Prynne and Riley gives them an example of how they can make their work so that the reader is made to question the assumptions he or she has about the work and to think about it critically. Even their poetic protest against the expression of self and the idea of personal disclosure can be applied to the feminist poetics when the destabilization of the lyric self can be interpreted as an attack on the conventional gendered roles in the poems. The emphasis of Riley on grief and loss, emotional vulnerability of the female subject, such as, is a reminder of how feminist poets might employ the concept of self-sabotaging as a form of resistance to the commodification and simplification of the female experience in poetry (Jones, 2013; Sullivan

and Morgan, 2019). Through this, the work of Prynne and Riley offers a roadmap to those poets who would like to challenge the gendered norm of the lyric form to allow more intricate, subtle depictions of identity and feeling to exist.

Finally, the idea of survival in the poetry of Prynne and Riley provides a radical renunciation of poetic resolution. Unlike the traditional perceptions of poetry as something that aims at closure and some ultimate declaration, their work focuses on survival as a continuous threat rather than a solution. Such emphasis on matters of survival undermines the fact that poetry should have a final, conclusive point to be considered meaningful. In the case of Prynne and Riley, the poem is not a complete work but a dynamic action that will go on with the reader interaction with the poem. This model of survival-as-risk emphasizes the contingency of meaning and the need to constantly doubt. Their poems are embracing of unpredictability, contradiction, and fragmentation as essential elements of poetic survival instead of providing well-balanced conclusions and solutions. In this respect, survival is not the struggle against adversity but a continual bargaining with it, as their work is always a place of risk and acute involvement instead of closure (Riley, 2017).

Conclusion

This review examines the writings of J.H. Prynne and Denise Riley in which they intentionally violate the lyric conventions to question the coherence, expressivity and stability of the poetic subject. Through self-sabotaging, the two poets revise the poetic fidelity, and disruption becomes a survival tactic in the realm of modern poetics. Their works address the issues of language, identity, and emotionality and provide a critique of the idealism of the lyric on the unity of the self. The process of self-sabotaging becomes a prerequisite of poetic survival, and helps their poems to challenge commodification and discover contradictions. The review recommends that future studies be conducted regarding the role of self-sabotage in the

theory of lyric and the overall implication of the same to the practice of poetry in the postmodern states.

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