

Transcription: Lyricism

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Hi there. Welcome. This is Gary Rogowski for Splinters. And my chat today with you is about an unlikely topic for a woodworker. It is about lyricism. What has lyricism to do with anything that I do? I bring it up because I spoke with a composer, a man named Alex Ebert, on this topic of lyricism on my other podcast on Creativity: Hustlers, Fakers, and Thieves.

And music seems a ready place for lyricism to reside, does it not? Even though not everything played or made by famous writers is lyrical. For instance, you can write lyrics for a song. Some can be bad. Listen to this. 'Little red wagon, little red bike. I ain't no monkey, but I know what I like.' That's Bob Dylan, 'Buckets of Tears.'

Others, other lyrics transport us as poetry is supposed to do.

'I came in from the wilderness, a creature void of form. "Come in," she said, "I'll give you shelter from the storm." Again, Bob Dylan.

But lyricism is not just about songs or songwriting. It is a much broader topic for an artist, even a woodworker in the studio. It is a belief, a surety, a given in one's artistic world that an idea can sing, that a vision can have wings, that a story can take us places, other worlds, different times. And when that story is over, when the viewer leaves, when the reader closes the book, they are set back into their world somehow transformed, uplifted, warmed.

Even a three dimensional object, solid, set down in wood, with legs, holding onto the ground, can still somehow let us feel changed, somehow different by experiencing it. That is lyricism. In furniture, I know it's difficult to see. I grant you that. But some work has that limber sense of grace and style and elegance that lyricism seems to embody.

I think of Emil Jacques Ruhlmann's cabinet with the chariot and driver inlay. It's a fantastic piece. Or Wendell Castle's music stand or Yanagi's butterfly stool. These are all examples, I think, of lyrical work. Can I think of any of my own pieces as lyrical? No. I thought about it for a while. No, some are graceful. Some have a certain grandeur or presence, which I like. I approve of that. But transporting emotions? I think only when I make something small or ordinary, and yet I spend an inordinate amount of time on it, loving it, trying to make it just so, and I give it away to someone. Unexpected, a gift. Then I think the piece might carry some emotion with it. Here is the work that I loved, and I give it to you. I wish I could do this with all my work, but hey, the guy's gotta eat. This commerce thing gets in the way of song,

I think, of poetry, I know. Movies can take us there. I just rewatched an Italian movie. Watch this. Watch this movie, 'Cinema Paradiso'. I remembered nothing about it. I'd seen it once before, long ago. It is a story told in flashback by a famous director, movie director, who has been told that his old friend and mentor from the past has died. And then we go flashback to the beginning story of him being a young boy growing up in Italy right after World War II and his friendship with a projectionist in a movie house.

Only this theater is owned by the priest of the village who sits through each movie that they bring in and has the projectionist cut out the offensive kissing scenes, too scandalous, too lurid, too sexy for his parishioners to watch. Of course, these Sicilians at the movies howl and boo and whistle when they recognize the scene has been torn from their view and the story sort of lurches forward. The offending

clips have been cut out and slips of paper put in the reel to recall the place in the movie.

Part 2 shows the boy as a young man, and now he is also the projectionist. He falls in love with the daughter of a rich man, and she falls eventually for him, but then her family moves her away. And they're supposed to rendezvous one night, and he waits for her, but he believes she doesn't show. He's drafted into the army, moves away, and when he returns, the projectionist tells him to leave and never return to the town. Go find life elsewhere. Go make something of yourself.

And we come to the last part of the movie where the director is returned for the funeral and we watch the old theater that they both used to work in get horned down to make room for a parking lot. And they scan the wrinkled old faces of the citizens of the town and how the march of time has affected each of them. And then the director goes out and manages to track down his old flame, and she tells him that long ago on that night of that rendezvous, she had gone to the theater, but he had already left, and she had left him a note. So he goes back to the theater. Clearly, this is before it got destroyed. And he goes back to the theater to find it. And he also gets a film reel left to him from his old mentor. Well, after the funeral, he goes back to his home, his private screening room, and watches this film left to him by his mentor.

And it's a montage of all the movie kissing scenes that had been cut out and then spliced together. Three seconds long scene, five second one, just a few seconds here and there, one after another showing love or passion, tenderness, lust, time passing and passing each lover by one aching kiss after another. Cary Grant and Rosalind Russell, Olivia de Havilland and Errol Flynn, Greta Garbo, Barrymore, dozens of lovers, dozens and dozens of kisses, and all gone, all departed or grown frail or old by now. And this long scene of kiss after kiss is the ending of this movie. And if you do not cry for your own lost loves or missed ones, then your heart has turned cold in your years on earth.

We wept. It is a monumental, lyrical piece of film, making us all feel something grand. These scenes can turn us all into one, sharing our past, our memories, our love, scene after scene, reminding us of how time has passed us each by. I yearned. I did. I yearned from my past, my youth, my missed chances, my missed kisses. This movie transported me back. And this is lyricism.

Now, my ability to be lyrical is somewhat limited by my medium. I understand that. And yet it has an importance to me that matches that lyricism. It brings together all the aspects of my being and makes me whole. It is difficult to explain, but palpable when I am busy working and things are going well, and I'm building things and I'm content. There is something about that whole process that is in itself, I think, lyrical. Sure. Call it a stretch.

There is a sort of an epic poem. You may have heard of it. It's called *The Odyssey* by Homer and also stolen by the Cohen brothers in their movie 'O Brother Where Art Thou'. This is how it starts. "O Muse, sing in me and through me, tell the story of that man skilled in all the ways of contending, a wanderer, harried for years on end." It's the idea that the muse sings through the artist that is at the basis of lyricism. I am wed to my tools, and through me, I create things.

Here's another quote: "I believe that the first test of a truly great man is his humility. I do not mean by humility, a doubt of his own powers. But really, great men have a curious feeling that the greatness is not in them, but through them. And they see something divine in every other man and are endlessly, foolishly, incredibly merciful." John Ruskin, author, art critic, reformer.

This has been Gary Rogowski for Splinters. Don't have to make sense. Just had to say it.

Anyway, take care of yourselves. It's a jungle out there. Take care of yourselves. Do something for yourself. Go create something. Do something for yourself.

Don't let me forget. Check out the website, northwestwoodworking.com. If you don't know about it, take a look. There's some great stuff there. Our Online Mastery Program, the gallery of student work, information on our new beginning class called Setting Up Shop. Lots of good information there. If you like what you hear on the podcast, support me on kofi.com. Thank you.

And please check out my other podcast called Creativity: Hustlers, Fakers, and Thieves. Lots of great conversations happening there. Take care.

Adios.